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Longevity and Life Expectancy among Tibetan Lamas from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century

Geoff Childs (Washington University in St. Louis), Rebecca Kippen (Monash University), and Gray Tuttle (Columbia University)

Introduction

he venerable Chatral Sangye Dorje Rinpoche passed away in 2015 at the age of 102. Kusho Tashi Dorje (1919–2017), a lama from highland Nepal, died at the age of 98. Are such long lives normal or anomalous among lamas? Despite some remarkable lifespans and the possibility that contemplative practices buffer the effects of aging,¹ no attempts have been made to document the longevity of Tibetan lamas (i.e., Buddhist clerics who lived in a broad Tibetan cultural sphere of influence encompassing the Tibetan Plateau and Himalayan region). This should come as no surprise considering that studies of Tibetan historical demography are few and far between.² Even basic estimates of Tibet's historical population vary widely, are highly speculative, and are often used to advance political narratives more than demographic understandings.

Using a newly available dataset, this study addresses the following questions. How long have Tibetan lamas lived on average? Has the longevity of Tibetan lamas fluctuated over time? If so, what could be potential reasons? Do Tibetan lamas have longer life expectancy than the general population of Tibetans? How do the life spans of Tibetan lamas compare with elite populations elsewhere? Addressing these questions can contribute to broader understandings of historical demography within and beyond the context of Tibetan societies by estimating maximum longevity of an elite group, by identifying the potential timing of societal-wide mortality declines with an understanding that elite groups are often forerunners, by providing data to link long-term longevity trends with historical and epidemiological events, and by shedding light on mortality differences between social classes.³

¹ Bushell and Theise 2009.

² Schuh 1988; Childs 2003, 2008; Spoorenberg 2019; Ryavek and Bowman 2021.

³ On the importance of estimating maximum longevity among elite groups see Andreev et al. 2007. On elite groups as demographic forerunners for societal-wide mortality declines see Stelter et al. 2021. On linkages between historical events and long-term mortality trends see van Poppel et al. 2013; de la Croix and Licandro 2015. On mortality differences between social classes see Clark et al. 2022; Houston 1992, 1995.

The Dataset and Methods

Élie Roux, Chief Technical Officer at the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC) in Boston, USA, provided the dataset for this study.⁴ Among the 18,700 person records in the BDRC database, Mr. Roux extracted the names and dates of 2,290 individual lamas for whom the birth and death dates are known with certainty. Inclusion in the BDRC database is largely based on textual sources that were mined for personal information on authors, lamas who are mentioned in histories and biographies, and other noteworthy individuals. BDRC's birth and death data is checked for accuracy against other sources. Discrepancies are scrutinized manually and rectified.⁵

Our confidence in the validity of the data is grounded on the Tibetan means for recording birth and death dates. The Tibetan calendar is organized into repeating 60-year cycles into which are nested five (the number of elements) 12-year cycles (the number of animal signs). Finding the equivalent Gregorian calendar year is straightforward with the help of conversion charts albeit the match is not exact because the Tibetan year usually begins in January or February. The fact that the data shows no signs of age heaping (i.e., a disproportionate number of people dying at rounded ages such as 60, 65, and 70) enhances our confidence in its validity.

Most of the 2,290 individuals with known dates lived from the 12th century onward. Many dates before that time are uncertain or unverifiable, so we excluded anyone born prior to 1100. Because men and women generally experience different mortality rates, we also eliminated female religious practitioners. Many lamas have several epithets or alternative spellings for their names, so we double-checked all entries that had the same birth and death dates and deleted duplicate entries. The final birth year considered is 1919, since that is the last year of completed birth cohorts (some lamas born from 1920 may potentially still be alive in 2023, the final year of observation). For the six lamas whose reported longevity was unrealistic, we adjusted their death age down to 104 years. Ages at death for all others were adjusted to account for the fact that a person born in year x who dies in year $x+n$

⁴ BDRC was founded by the visionary scholar Gene Smith (1936-2010). From 1968 to 1985 he was employed at, and for some time directed, the Library of Congress's New Delhi Field Office where he located and reprinted texts possessed by Tibetan exiles and Tibetan-speaking peoples in the trans-Himalayan region (Smith 2001). BDRC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and disseminating Buddhist literature. Their open access website is a portal to the largest collection of Tibetan texts in the world (<https://www.bdrc.io/>).

⁵ Personal communications with Élie Roux, December 2023.

may be either n or $(n-1)$ years-old (in completed years) at the time of death.

The dataset contains a potential notoriety bias, described as, “People with the potentials to become famous but dying young are excluded and, inversely, only those that are old enough to become famous are included.”⁶ It is likely that our dataset excludes lamas who did not live long enough to leave legacies in the forms of written works or trained disciples, or who had little cultural impact. The bias is partially reduced from the seventeenth century onward with the rise of more incarnation lineages.⁷ More members of reincarnation lineages who died relatively young appear in the historical record because of their importance in the continuity of lineages. For example, the eleventh and twelfth Dalai Lamas, Khedrup Gyatso (1838-1855) and Trinle Gyatso (1856-1875), are both included in our original dataset but died in their late teens. Our suspicion that more early deaths are recorded after the expansion of incarnation lineages is confirmed in the data; 52 of the 54 lamas who died before age 20 passed away after 1600. To avoid allowing the expansion of reincarnation lineages to bias longevity and life expectancy estimates, all lamas in the dataset who died before reaching age 20 are excluded from analysis.

After culling for reasons described above, the final dataset consists of 1,911 male lamas with known birth years and death years, who were born between 1100 and 1919, and who survived to their twentieth birthday.

In this study we use two measures that typically yield similar results but differ in method of calculation. Longevity refers to “the average lifespan of individuals of a given cohort.”⁸ We measure longevity by calculating the average age at death for cohorts of lamas based on their years of birth. The other measure, life expectancy, is the average number of additional years a person can expect to live based on age-specific death rates. Life expectancy is calculated using life tables, an important actuarial tool.

How long have Tibetan lamas lived on average?

The average longevity (average age at death) for all lamas in the dataset was 62.4 years. To provide a more nuanced perspective we constructed a life table based on single-year-of-age mortality rates from age 20 years for all 1,911 lamas. This was collapsed to an abridged life table, shown in Table 1, wherein x represents exact age (for example,

⁶ de la Croix and Licandro 2015, 265.

⁷ Tuttle 2016, 2017.

⁸ de la Croix and Licandro 2015, 264.

age 20, 25, 30 years, etc.); ${}_5q_x$ represents the probability that a lama who survives to exact age x will die during the ensuing 5-year age interval (e.g., during ages 20-24 years, 25-29 years, etc.); l_x is the number of persons alive at exact age x , starting with a theoretical cohort of 100,000 lamas aged 20; ${}_5L_x$ is the number of person-years lived during each 5-year age interval; T_x is the number of person-years lived after exact age x and is used to calculate e_x , life expectancy, or the average number of years of life remaining after exact age x .

Table 1. Life Table for All Lamas in the Dataset Born Between 1100 and 1919

Age (x)	population	${}_5q_x$	l_x	${}_5L_x$	T_x	e_x
20	1,911	0.013	100,000	497,114	4,234,736	42.3
25	1,887	0.019	98,718	488,911	3,737,622	37.9
30	1,851	0.028	96,834	477,085	3,248,711	33.5
35	1,800	0.041	94,165	461,151	2,771,626	29.4
40	1,727	0.049	90,345	441,436	2,310,476	25.6
45	1,642	0.076	85,924	415,219	1,869,040	21.8
50	1,518	0.105	79,409	377,947	1,453,821	18.3
55	1,359	0.156	71,088	331,191	1,075,874	15.1
60	1,147	0.222	59,995	266,002	744,683	12.4
65	892	0.275	46,677	200,054	478,681	10.3
70	647	0.392	33,857	136,147	278,627	8.2
75	394	0.484	20,591	77,460	142,479	6.9
80	203	0.571	10,623	36,107	65,019	6.1
85	87	0.540	4,553	15,463	28,912	6.4
90	40	0.488	2,093	7,653	13,449	6.4
95	21	0.488	1,073	3,846	5,795	5.4
100	11	1.000	549	1,949	1,949	3.5

Table 1 shows that the lamas who reached age 20 had a life expectancy of 42.3 more years [e_{20}], or an expected age at death of 62.3 years [$20 + 42.3$]. Those who lived to age 60 [e_{60}] had a life expectancy of another

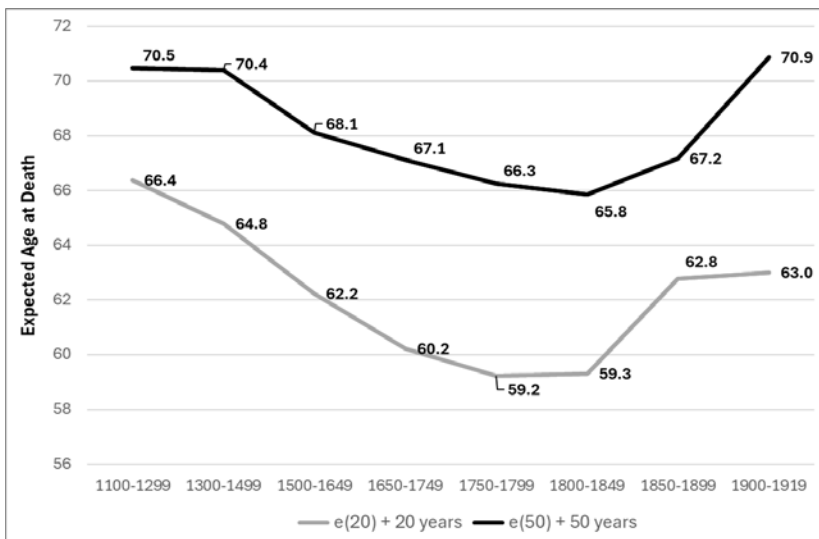
12.4 years and thus would die on average at age 72.4. The l_x column shows the number of lamas from the theoretical starting cohort of 100,000 who would still be alive at the beginning of each age interval. This can easily be converted to a percentage. For example, 60.0% would be expected to survive to age 60 ($l_{60} = 59,995$ out of the original 100,000), less than 50% to age 65 ($l_{65} = 46,677$ out of the original 100,000), and 10.6% to age 80 [$l_{80} = 10,623$ out of the original 100,000].

Bear in mind, this life table aggregates the life spans of all lamas over many centuries and therefore should not be interpreted as an indicator of lama life expectancy today, or at any specific time in history. A more fine-grained analysis below demonstrates that lama life expectancy fluctuated over time. Table 1 is intended to be a crude but useful starting point.

Has the life span of Tibetan lamas fluctuated over time?

To begin addressing this question, we calculated single-year-of-life tables for specific cohorts, with a terminal age of 104 years. Remaining life expectancies at ages 20 and 50 (e_{20} and e_{50}) were converted to expected ages at death (e.g., $e_{20} + 20$) in Figure 1. The population was grouped into birth cohorts of varying lengths so that each cohort contained 200 to 300 lamas. In Figure 1, we start the mortality clock at age 20 because, as discussed above, (potential) lamas who died at young ages may not have been formally recognized as such so our dataset only contains those who survived to age 20.

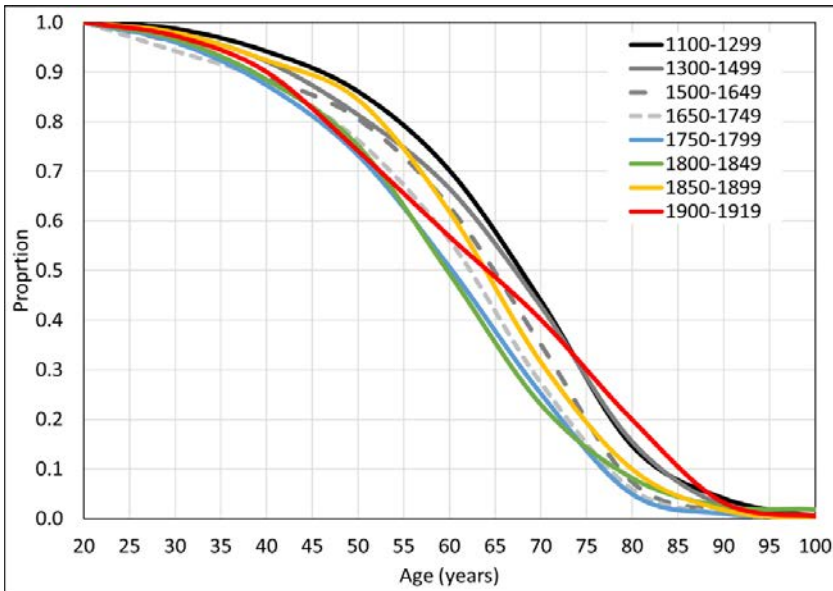
Figure 1. Expected Ages at Death at Ages 20 and 50 by Birth Cohort



Over the course of 800 years, future life expectancy at age 20 declined gradually from an average death age of 66.4 years for lamas born in 1100–1299 ($e_{20} = 46$), to a nadir of 59.2 years for lamas born in 1750–1799 and 1800–1849. Life expectancy then increased to 63.0 years for lamas born in 1900–1919. A similar trend is observed for average life expectancy for those who reached age 50 years, with a long-term decline of the average age of death from 70.5 years for lamas born in 1100–1299 to 65.8 years for lamas born 1800–1849, and an increase thereafter to 70.9 years for lamas born 1900–1919.

Reflecting the life expectancy trends of Figure 1, the survival curves for birth cohorts born 1100–1299 to 1800–1849 (Figure 2) show a gradually shift to the left, indicating lower proportions surviving by age over time. For example, 86% of lamas born 1100–1299 who reached age 20 survived to age 50 years. This declined to 81% for lamas born 1500–1649, and to 75% for lamas born 1800–1849. Cohorts born 1850–1899 experienced a striking increase in survival at younger ages (under 50 years), while those born 1900–1919 had much lower mortality at older ages (50 years and over).

Figure 2: Survival curves of Tibetan lamas from age 20 years by birth cohort

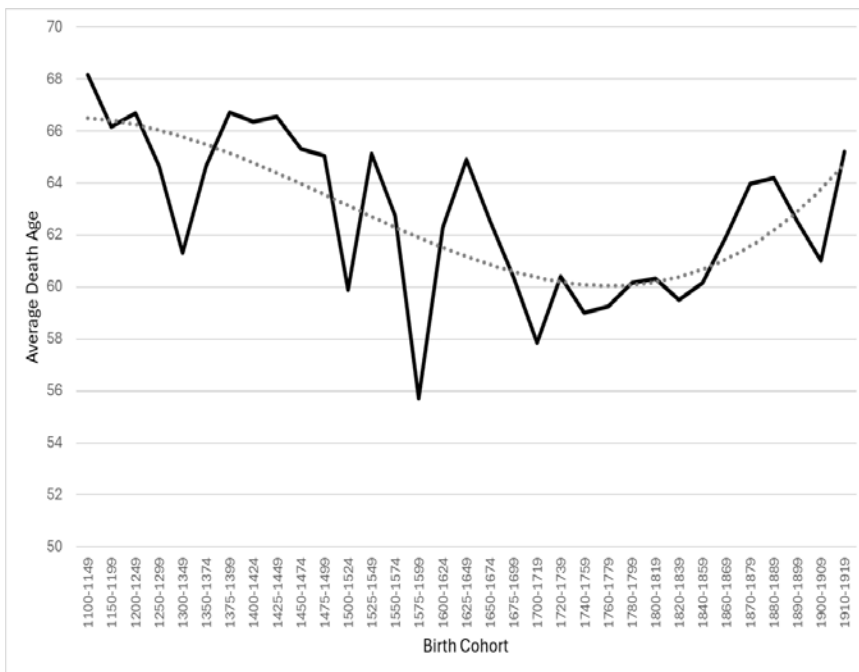


While speculative, the trends in Figure 2 might suggest that exposure to diseases common among larger population centers, specifically China after about 1280 when Tibet and China were equally part of the Yuan Empire and continuing through the Ming and Qing dynasties,

may have been responsible for this decrease in lifespan over time, until finally—with greatly increased exposure after the transfer and residency of Mongol, Manchu, and Chinese troops in Tibet in the 18th century—Tibetans started to build up some immunity to diseases like smallpox in the latter half of the 19th century.

For a slightly different perspective, we compared the longevity of lamas born during specific time periods constructed so that each interval would include an average of 60 lamas. Interval lengths in Figure 3 are 50 years for those born between 1100 and 1349, 25 years for those born between 1350 and 1699, 20 years for those born between 1700 and 1859, and 10 years for those born between 1860 and 1919.

Figure 3. Longevity by Birth Cohort



Those who lived longest and shortest were born in 1100-1149 (68.2 years) and 1575-1599 (55.7 years), a difference of 12.5 years. The figures fluctuate considerably from interval to interval, in part because of the relatively small numbers of individuals per time period. To compensate, we applied a three-order polynomial trendline to the data, which is useful when data fluctuates. The trendline confirms the long-term pattern displayed in Figure 1 whereby the average lifespan declined from the mid-1200s, reached a low point during the 1700s, and began a steady ascent in the early 1800s. The average longevity for lamas

born in the 1700s was 59.4 years, or 3.0 years lower than the average of 62.4 years for the entire sample.

To test if it is possible to link mortality variations with known events, we chose to focus on the time interval from 1600 to 1919 which coincides with the low point and then gradual rise in longevity and life expectancy. The span begins prior to the rise of the Dalai Lamas with the aid of their Mongol allies and runs through the frequent warfare that characterized the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through historical records we know that wars were frequent on the Tibetan plateau with thirty between 1621 and 1951.⁹ There were also devastating earthquakes, disasters caused by heavy snowfall, and famine caused by drought and poor administration.¹⁰ Disease was a serious issue as well. Bubonic plague was prevalent on the Tibetan Plateau long before it struck Europe, smallpox was widespread and well documented during the eighteenth century, and epidemics struck repeatedly including in places frequented by Tibetan lamas and pilgrims such as the Kathmandu Valley.¹¹

A decade-by-decade look at the time interval can help explain the long-term trend seen in Figures 1-3. In Table 2, we calculated Crude Death Rates (CDR) for the lama population. Typically, CDRs are calculated for a single year; the numerator is the number of deaths in a year, the denominator the population at mid-year. In this case, rates were calculated as the annual average number of deaths of lamas aged 20+ years, divided by the average population of lamas over the specified period. As a point of reference, the average CDR per decade was 22.9 deaths/1,000 lamas.

Table 2. Crude Death Rate by Decade, 1600-1919

17 th Century		18 th Century		19 th Century		20 th Century	
Decade	CDR	Decade	CDR	Decade	CDR	Decade	CDR
1600-1609	17.5	1700-1709	16.1	1800-1809	18.5	1900-1909	20.0
1610-1619	19.9	1710-1719	29.6	1810-1819	28.1	1910-1919	15.4
1620-1629	25.9	1720-1729	18.6	1820-1829	15.7		

⁹ Qian 2024. The forthcoming volume edited by Kobayashi and Travers (2025) will no doubt prove useful for shedding further light on the association between political events and demographic trends during these centuries.

¹⁰ On earthquakes see Jackson 2002; Ambraseys and Jackson 2003; Ramble and Drandul 2019. On heavy snowfall see Gyal 2024, and on famine caused by drought and poor administration see Gamble et al. 2022.

¹¹ On epidemics see Lewis and Jampal 1988; McGrath 2021; Yongden 2021.

1630-1639	25.4	1730-1739	34.3	1830-1839	22.2
1640-1649	20.6	1740-1749	26.1	1840-1849	32.6
1650-1659	28.2	1750-1759	23.0	1850-1859	32.5
1660-1669	15.3	1760-1769	19.6	1860-1869	30.5
1670-1679	18.2	1770-1779	15.9	1870-1879	23.7
1680-1689	23.9	1780-1789	27.1	1880-1889	18.8
1690-1699	17.5	1790-1799	34.3	1890-1899	19.5

Decades with high mortality, which we define as 20% above the mean or roughly 28 deaths per 1,000 population, are shaded in Table 2. These are 1650-1659, 1710-1719, 1730-1739, 1790-1799, 1810-1819, and the thirty years spanning 1840-1869. The earliest of these periods were closely associated with internal civil wars, or their aftermath, abetted by Mongols who took the side of one of the warring parties in Tibet, while others periods of increased death rate coincided with wars with external enemies or their aftermath, such as the Gurkha wars lasting from 1788-1792 and the mid-19th century wars to the east, west, and south of Central Tibet.

While we know that wars raged across the Tibetan plateau through the late 1630s to 1642, with Gushri Khan's Mongol army sweeping into Amdo in 1638 and then Kham, and finally defeating the Tsangpa ruler's forces in Central Tibet in 1642, it was not until a decade later that we really see a spike in lama deaths (1650-1659). It may be that the new Ganden Podrang regime under the Dalai Lama had to continue to fight local rebellions, such as the 1659 Shigatse rebellion, as described in 1660, when the Dalai Lama wrote about the brutality with which he hoped Tibetan protector deities would deal with the rebels to finally end their rebellion (Sperling 2001). Earlier efforts at suppression had not succeeded, but they could have contributed to the death count. There was also a three-pronged attack on Bhutan by the Ganden Podrang forces in 1656–1657 that may have killed Bhutanese lamas.¹² Possibly a movement of disease followed these military advances and the settling of Mongols from Dzungaria (on the north edge of the Silk Road) among the Tibetan communities in Amdo, Kham and Central Tibet, bringing a higher death toll than the war had done. Further research is needed to confirm or reject these hypotheses.

The spike in the CDR from 1710-1719 is the easiest to explain, as it coincides with the 1717-8 Dzungar Mongol occupation of Lhasa and

¹² Qian 2024.

the deposing of their rival Lhazang Khan. The Dzungars were specifically invited by Gelukpa monks to help curtail the mixing of these two religious traditions, as had happened since the founding of the Ganden Podrang government under the 5th Dalai Lama. Many lamas of the rival Nyingmapa sect were killed at this time.¹³ For example, in 1717 the Dzungars killed the Fourth Dorje Drak Rigdzin, Pema Trinle and razed his monastery to the ground.¹⁴ In the same year they also killed Lochen Dharmashri Ngawang Chöpel Gyatso (1654-1717) of Mindroling and destroyed his monastery.¹⁵ The descriptions of the Jesuit Ippolito Desideri paints a gruesome picture of the way Nyingma lamas were treated by the Dzungars and their Gelukpa allies in Lhasa and its surroundings at the end of 1717, but continuing for at least three years as he, along with surviving Nyingma lamas, fled east before the destruction.¹⁶

We have no clear explanation for the elevated CDR from 1730-1739. There was a civil war in Central Tibet in 1727 and 1728, which may have impacted mortality into the next decade, although the reign of King Polhané (1728-1747) is generally remembered as prosperous. Central Tibetan forces also waged a war from 1729-1733 on Bhutan, culminating in Bhutan becoming a tributary state to the Ganden Podrang, so it is possible Bhutanese lamas were badly impacted by this invasion. In the absence of other obvious causes (wars, famine, etc.), climatic factors which are rarely studied in relation to Tibetan history deserve consideration as a possible explanation for why 1730-1739 was one of the worst decades for lama mortality. Palden Gyal's work on climate change in Tibet describes the three cold episodes during the Little Ice Age, lasting about fifty years each, which occurred in AD 1500, 1700, and 1800.¹⁷ It is possible that the cold episode starting in the early eighteenth century contributed to higher mortality during 1730-1739. A close examination of biographies and government records might shed light on this.

The period from 1790-1799 was marked by the Gurkha Wars in which Nepalese forces twice invaded Central Tibet, especially targeting Tashilhunpo Monastery in the Tsang region. The first war lasted from 1789 to 1790 and the second from 1791-1792. Whether the rise in the CDR could be wholly explained by these wars is unclear. It is also possible that the massive influx of Qing troops that came to defeat the

¹³ Thokmay 2024.

¹⁴ Samten Chhosphe, "The Fourth Dorje Drak Rigdzin, Pema Trinle," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed June 28, 2024, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Pema-Trinle/9169>.

¹⁵ Townsend 2021.

¹⁶ Pomplun 2010.

¹⁷ Gyal 2024.

Gurkha invaders brought diseases from elsewhere in the empire, as the troops came from all over: more than 1,000 Suolun (present day ethnonym: Ewenki) soldiers from Manchuria, some 5,000 Tibetan soldiers from Kham, 3,000 ethnically Chinese Green Bannermen from Sichuan and another 2,000 from Yunnan. With thousands of soldiers coming from all over the empire and passing through large urban areas on their way to Tibet, it is highly likely that diseases such as smallpox came with them, though again, only further research into records from around this time might show whether this was a lingering impact of such large shifts in military populations.

There were four decades in the 19th century with elevated CDR starting with 1810-1819, so again it is possible that the fifty-year cold episodes starting in the early nineteenth century played a role. Although the snow disaster of 1828 was the most prominent and presumably the most catastrophic one, as demonstrated by the fourteen reports concerning the single event, there were snow disasters of varying magnitudes in western and central Tibet in the years 1824, 1827, 1830, 1848, and a few undated reports of similar cases in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ Although these postdate the elevated mortality rates among lamas from 1810-1819, the possible link to cold episodes should be examined more closely as a possible trigger.

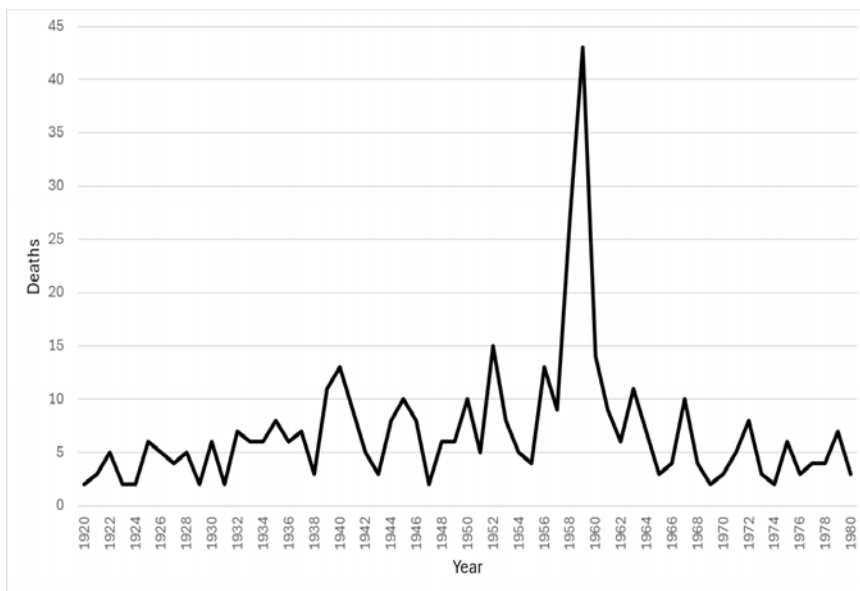
The worst continuous period marked by elevated CDR was the three decades from 1840-1869. Aside from the snow disaster of 1848, these decades were marked by border wars: the 1841-2 Dogra War in the west, culminating in a Tibetan invasion of Ladakh; the 1855-6 Third Gurkha War in the south, which the Tibetans had to fight without the aid of Qing troops (due to the Taiping Rebellion); and the 1865 Nyarong War in the eastern part of Kham. The local warlord from Nyarong had specifically targeted lamas in his campaign, and Central Tibetan troops again had to fight without the aid of Qing troops.¹⁹ Whether the weather or these wars can be blamed for this sustained rise in the CDR is, as yet, unclear.

It is not possible to calculate death rates from 1920 onward because there are lamas born after that year who were still alive in 2023 (the last year of observation) and are therefore not in the dataset. Therefore, Figure 4 shows the annual number of deaths of lamas aged 20+ years from 1920 to 1980 rather than the CDR to highlight the catastrophic late 1950s.

¹⁸ Gyal 2024.

¹⁹ Tsomu 2015; Qian 2024.

Figure 4. Lama Deaths by Year, 1920-1980



In 1951 China asserted control over Tibet through military intervention but allowed the Dalai Lama and his administration in Central Tibet to remain in place for the time being. In 1956 an armed rebellion broke out in Kham and Amdo when China instituted socialist reforms. Monks and some monasteries that participated in the revolt suffered military consequences such as the siege and bombardment of Litang Monastery,²⁰ events that probably contributed to elevating lama mortality in 1956. For the memories of one survivor who witnessed firsthand the destruction of a monastery and most of its population, which could only be published as fiction in the People's Republic of China, see the account by Naktsang Nulo, *My Tibetan Childhood: When Ice Shattered Stone*. The rebellion intensified across Tibet in 1958, as represented in Tsering Dondrub's *The Red Howling Wind*, based on oral interviews of Tibetans who lived through the time.²¹ In March of 1959, rebellion spread to Lhasa, when the Dalai Lama fled for exile in India. Afterwards, China unleashed widespread violence against Tibetans, especially religious institutions and the nobility.

To understand just how high mortality was for lamas in the late 1950s, 27 lamas died in 1958 and 43 in 1959 compared to an average of

²⁰ Goldstein 2014.

²¹ Tshe ring don grub's 2019 *Tempête Rouge* is an unpublished manuscript described and partially translated by Françoise Robin (2020). An English translation of this work is forthcoming (Döndrub 2025).

seven deaths annually from 1920 to 1980 (six when excluding 1958 and 1959). For example, Jikdrel Jangchub Dorje (1935-1959) suffered a fatal wound during a rebellion against his monastery's occupiers,²² and Pema Tsewang Gyatso (1902-1959) died in jail shortly after being arrested by Chinese authorities.²³ The average longevity of lamas who passed away in those years was 55.0 and 53.4 years respectively, well below the mean longevity for all previous time periods. To exacerbate matters Mao implemented the Great Leap Forward in 1958-1961. The deleterious policies led to starvation and a doubling of mortality in provinces like Sichuan and Qinghai where large segments of the Tibetan population lived.²⁴ Maps of famine severity indicate that some Tibetan areas were harshly impacted,²⁵ which may also have contributed to the exceptionally high number of deaths among lamas from 1958 to 1960. Fictional accounts based on memories of these times of famine are the only way that Tibetans in Tibet can report about the brutality that they lived through.²⁶ A few Tibetans who escaped these brutal years were also interviewed by the International Commission of Jurists providing direct testimony of these turbulent times.²⁷

In summary, with the exception of the earliest centuries considered in Figures 1-3, Tibetan lamas had a life expectancy at age 20 of between 39 to 42 years, meaning that they could expect to live on average to roughly 59 to 62 years of age. We were able to correlate some, but not all, of the fluctuations with known events that plausibly increased mortality. Notably, the end of the 1950s was an especially bad time for Tibetan lamas.

How does the life expectancy of Tibetan lamas compare with their laymen counterparts?

To address this question, we focus on the time period 1900-1919 because it is close in time to known mortality parameters among the general Tibetan population. The first half of the twentieth century preceded the onset of demographic transitions in Tibetan societies which did not begin until the 1980s.²⁸ Prior to this time, public health innovations were localized and sporadic.

²² Norbu 1986.

²³ Samten Chhoshphel, "Pema Tsewang Gyatso," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed June 28, 2024, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Pema-Tsewang-Gyatso/5099>.

²⁴ Peng 1987.

²⁵ Garnault 2014, 324, 334.

²⁶ Nulo 2014; Robin 2020.

²⁷ International Commission of Jurists 1960.

²⁸ Childs et al. 2005.

Two studies reached similar conclusions about mortality in Tibetan societies during the mid-1900s. One was based on a 1958 district-level enumeration of government subjects, the other on reverse projections using data from China's 1982 census.²⁹ Tibetan societies in the mid-twentieth century had infant mortality rates ranging from 180-220 deaths per 1,000 live births, and a correspondingly low life expectancy at birth of between 30 and 35 years. These parameters were used to establish that the Tibetan mortality pattern best fit Coale and Demeny's South Level 6 model life table giving a life expectancy at birth for males of 32.5 years.³⁰ Table 3 compares lamas and laymen with respect to future life expectancy at ages 20, 35, and 50.

Table 3. Comparison of future life expectancy and expected age at death at ages 20, 35, and 50 years for Tibetan lamas born 1900–1919 and the male Tibetan population in the mid-twentieth century

	Lamas born 1900-1919		Male Tibetans in mid-twentieth century		
Age (x)	Future life expectancy	Expected age at death	Future life expectancy	Expected age at death	Difference
20	43.0	63.0	37.3	57.3	5.7 years
35	30.4	65.4	27.7	62.7	2.7 years
50	20.9	70.9	17.7	67.7	3.2 years

The comparison in Table 3 reveals that lamas lived longer than laymen which should come as no surprise; they did not participate in arduous agricultural labor and hazardous activities like herding large bovines, they often had wealth connected to their status and institutions, and many lived somewhat separated from the broader population which could buffer them from infectious diseases. Medical training in Tibet was largely family-based until the 17th century, when the Gelukpa tradition started establishing monastic medical colleges. By the 18th century, there were over thirty such colleges, which continued to multiply (adding another 140 or so by the 20th century), especially in Mongol areas. The monks at the monastic colleges would train in memorizing the Four Tantras medical text and learn to collect medical substances. Therefore, it is likely that those resident at or affiliated with monasteries that hosted medical colleges benefited from such knowledge, as well as meditative and yogic practices that were part of the shared

²⁹ Childs 2003, 2008; Spoorenberg 2019.

³⁰ Childs 2003.

training of all monasteries.³¹ On the other hand, many lamas travelled extensively and continually exposed themselves to crowds by giving public teachings and blessings which could increase their risk of contracting infectious diseases. Overall, the data in Table 3 suggests that, with respect to longevity, the benefits of being a lama outweighed the risks.

How does the life expectancy and longevity of Tibetan lamas compare with elite populations elsewhere?

Mortality patterns of certain populations in historical Chinese societies are well understood thanks to some innovative scholarship.³² For example, Lee and Campbell used household registers of a banner in Liaoning to reconstruct mortality among a population of elite peasants. To facilitate the comparison with Lee and Campbell's findings, Table 4 shows the average life expectancy at age 20 (e_{20}) among Tibetan lamas based on life tables calculated for roughly equivalent time periods.

Table 4. Life Expectancy at Age 20:
Tibetan Lamas Compared to Liaoning Elite Peasants

Tibetan Lamas		Liaoning Peasants		
Birth Cohort	e_{20}	Birth Cohort	e_{20}	Difference
1650-1749	40.2	1644-1739	29.9	10.3 years
1750-1849	39.2	1740-1839	29.5	9.7 years
1850-1899	39.3	1840-1899	32.2	7.1 years

The comparison in Table 4 reveals that life expectancy at age 20 for Tibetan lamas was roughly 10 years longer than for Liaoning's elite peasants from 1650-1749, and 7 years longer during the late nineteenth century.

Other scholars used genealogical records to study Chinese historical demography. For example, Zhao calculated life expectancy at age 30 for two lineages of males belonging to the upper or upper middle classes.³³ To facilitate the comparison with Zhao's findings, Table 5

³¹ Stacey Van Vleet, personal communication, July 26, 2024.

³² For example, Lee et al. 1993; Lee and Campbell 1997; Zhao 1997; Campbell and Lee 2020.

³³ Zhao 1997.

shows the average life expectancy at age 30 ($[e_{30}]$) among Tibetan lamas based on life tables calculated for roughly equivalent time periods.

Table 5: Life Expectancy at Age 30:
Tibetan Lamas Compared to Chinese Lineage Members

Birth Cohort	Tibetan Lamas	Wang's Lineage	49 Lineages	Difference
1550-1599	33.8	31.5	29.6	2.3 and 4.2 years
1600-1649		32.8	29.4	1.0 and 4.4 years
1650-1699	32.3	31.2	29.5	1.1 and 2.8 years
1700-1749		29.8	28.8	2.5 and 3.5 years

The evidence in Table 5 supports the conclusion that Tibetan lamas experienced slightly longer lives than upper-class lineage members of Chinese populations from the mid-1500s through the mid-1700s.

Turning to Europe, historians have reconstructed mortality among various sub-populations including monks, scholars, advocates, Popes, members of the nobility, famous people, and artists.³⁴ Table 6 compares life expectancy at age 20 between Tibetan lamas and various elite groups in Europe.³⁵ In this and all subsequent tables each shaded cell indicates a time when Tibetan lamas had longer life expectancies than their counterparts. Unshaded cells represent times when life expectancy was roughly equal or favor the European groups.

The comparison reveals that, prior to the 1800s, Tibetan lamas tended to live longer than British dukes, families of British peers, French dukes and peers, and European rulers. From the 1800s onwards, however, all these elite groups lived roughly as long or longer than Tibetan lamas. The finding may reflect the earlier onset in Europe of medical and public sanitation improvements that had a significant impact in reducing mortality from communicable diseases, especially in cities.³⁶

³⁴ On monks see La Bras and Dinét 1980; Hatcher 1986; Luy 2003; Hatcher et al. 2006; on scholars see Andreev et al. 2007; Stelter et al. 2021; on advocates see Houston 1992, 1995; on Popes see Carrieri and Serraino 2005; on European nobility see Cummins 2017; on famous people see de la Croix and Licandro 2015; on artists see Carrieri and Serraino 2005; van Poppel et al. 2013.

³⁵ The data in Table 6 is drawn from Woods and Williams 1995 and van Poppel et al. 2013.

³⁶ Dyson 2011.

Table 6. Comparison of future expectation of life at age 20 years (e_{20}), Tibetan lamas and selected elite European populations, birth cohorts 1100–1299 to 1900–1919

Birth cohort	Tibetan lamas	English gentry	Milanese patricians	Genevan bourgeoisie	British dukes	Scottish advocates	Families of British peers	French dukes and peers	European rulers
1100-1299	46.4								
1300-49	44.8								
1350-99									
1400-49									
1450-99									
1500-49	42.2	43.0							
1550-99	40.2	44.0		37.0	36.0	33.0	29.3		34.5
1600-49		36.0	43.5	40.3	32.8	38.1	30.0		
1650-99	42.0	37.1			41.8	35.5			
1700-49	39.2	49.0	40.0	40.8	42.7	41.9			
1750-99	39.3	46.0	39.0	41.3	43.0				
1800-49	42.8		44.5	45.0	45.7		41.2		
1850-99	43.0						43.4		
1900-19									

More relevant comparisons can be drawn between Tibetan lamas and populations of European scholars and monks who lived somewhat parallel lives because they were highly vested in learning (monks and scholars) or pursued religious vocations (monks). Table 7 compares life expectancy at age 50 between Tibetan lamas and members of the British Royal Society of scholars.³⁷ British scholars fared considerably better. They lived five to six years longer in the late 1600s and 1700s. The difference increased to nearly 10 years by the early twentieth century.

Table 7. Comparison of future expectation of life at age 50 years (e_{50}), Tibetan lamas and members of the British Royal Society, birth cohorts 1650–1699 to 1900–1919

Birth cohort	Tibetan lamas	British Royal Society members	Difference
1650-99	17.1	22.3	-5.2
1700-49		22.7	-5.6
1750-99	16.3	22.6	-6.3
1800-49	15.8	23.3	-7.5

³⁷ Andreev et al. 2007.

1850-99	17.2	25.6	-8.4
1900-19	20.9	30.4	-9.5

Several studies examined mortality in monastic orders in Canterbury, Durham, Westminster, and Christ Church, England and St-Maur in France.³⁸ Compared to commoners monks were well fed and had access to relatively good medical care, factors that could help increase their lifespans. But they also interacted intensively with the public, which could have increased their exposure to epidemic diseases. Table 8 compares future life expectancy at age 25 by birth cohort.

Table 8. Comparison of future expectation of life at age 25 years (e_{25}), Tibetan lamas and selected orders of monks, birth cohorts 1300–1349 to 1700–1749

Birth cohort	Tibetan lamas	Canterbury monks	Durham monks	Westminster monks	Christ Church monks	St-Maur monks
1300-49	40.1					
1350-99		30.3	32.6	26.1	27.6	
1400-49		26.3	27.6	22.0	24.4	
1450-99				22.5	23.7	
1500-49						
1550-99						35.1
1600-49						35.8
1650-99						36.4
1700-49		36.0				

The comparison reveals that, through the 1300s and 1400s, life expectancy was substantially longer – as much as 18 years – for Tibetan lamas than for English monks. In contrast, life expectancy of Tibetan lamas and France's St-Maur monks were more similar during the late 1500s and 1600s. However, a potential bias is that the European databases included all monks within their respective institutions, whereas the Tibetan database is comprised of lamas who typically had a higher standard of living than rank and file monks. A comparison with other elite clerics is therefore more appropriate. Longevity from age 25 onward among Cardinals of the Catholic Church 1650-1849 was between

³⁸ Hatcher 1986; Hatcher et al. 2006; La Bras and Dinét 1980.

70 and 75, much higher than Tibetan lamas experienced during the same time period.³⁹

Conclusions

The objective of this contribution was to answer several questions concerning the life spans of Tibetan lamas over time and compared to other populations. To summarize the findings, (1) all lamas in the dataset who had already survived to age 20 had an average longevity of 62.4 years and life expectancy of 62.3 years. (2) Longevity and life expectancy fluctuated over time with the low point being in the 1700s. (3) Some time periods witnessed elevated levels of mortality that could plausibly be linked to wars and natural disasters, the most extreme being the late 1950s. (4) Lamas had a life expectancy at age 20 that was close to six years longer than their laymen counterparts, indicating that they were somewhat insulated from the rigors of life in a high-altitude environment. (5) Tibetan lamas lived longer than some subpopulations in Chinese and European societies but shorter than others.

Any first attempt to document mortality patterns in a society that lacks detailed records will have limitations. Notoriety bias may have skewed the sample of lamas towards individuals who lived longer and thereby had a greater chance of making it into the dataset based on literary accomplishments or other marks they left on society. If this is the case, then the longevity and life expectancy estimates would err on the high side. Given such uncertainty, we present the above findings as tentative and in need of verification. Consider them to be benchmarks, provisional assessments in search of further refinement. Although we expect that higher precision can be obtained with larger and more robust datasets, we are confident that the broad trends sketched above, if not the exact details, will pass the test of time.

This study contributes to Inner Asian history and Tibetan history by documenting fluctuating mortality patterns among lamas in association with known historical events. At this point, much is known about the entanglement of Tibetan politics and religion that generated both alliances and contentious relations across the Tibetan Plateau and with neighboring polities. Scholars have documented periodic episodes of open warfare and, to a lesser extent, natural disasters including climatic events. However, to our knowledge, this is the first attempt to link disruptive events with demographic trends. Although this study centers on lamas, scholars working elsewhere have recognized that elite populations are often demographic harbingers for

³⁹ de la Croix and Licandro 2015, 274.

what transpires at a broader societal level.⁴⁰ Prior to 1959 lamas occupied the apex of a political-religious system that supported 'mass monasticism' whereby a high percentage of the population, roughly 12 percent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, lived as celibate monks and nuns.⁴¹ At the very least, the above analysis may reflect long-term mortality patterns within Tibetan monastic populations—a substantial subset of the entire population. Broadening the scope, if lama longevity is a reliable barometer for demographic trends among the general populace, then the above estimates are a good starting point for understanding how political events, epidemics, and natural disasters impacted short and long-term mortality patterns across the Tibetan Plateau. Clearly, additional research is required to gain a more reliable and comprehensive picture of demographic trends throughout Tibetan history. Consider this a starting point.

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⁴⁰ Houston 1995; Andreev et al. 2007; de la Croix and Licandro 2015; Stelter et al. 2021.

⁴¹ Goldstein 1998; Ryavek and Bowman 2021.

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On Non-Valid Cognitions in Tibetan Buddhist and Bon po *tshad ma* Traditions

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Introduction

The philosophical reflection and meditational observation of mind and mental world have occupied some of Buddhism's greatest thinkers throughout its extensive history across vast geographical regions. This dedication to rigorous study and careful observation has produced numerous inspired writings and learned treatises filled with insights into emotional and psychological truths. The intimate and sustained preoccupation with the inner worlds of thoughts and emotions is, in part, inspired by the spiritual quest, the question of suffering and liberation from it and its causes, which are fundamental to the Buddhist religion and its associated worldview.¹

Following this noble tradition of inquiry established by Indian intellectual and religious forefathers, Tibetan scholars such as Phywa/Phya/Cha pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109–1169),² mTshur ston gZhon nu seng ge (c.1150–1210),³ and Sa skya paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan⁴, on the Buddhist side, and 'A zha Blo gros gyal mtshan (1198–1263)⁵ on the Bon po side, reflected and authored works on epistemological issues. Their reflections, particularly on the definitions and

¹ One of Buddhism's most famous works, the *Dhammapada*, begins by emphasizing the crucial importance of the mind in our experience and aspiration for happiness. In his seminal work, the *Catuhśataka* (chapter 12, verse 19), Āryadeva reflects on the differences between various religious traditions of India during his time and concludes that Śākya's teachings are to be appreciated as primarily about the mind, thereby underscoring the importance of the mind. For the English translation of this verse, see Lang 1986: 116–117.

² On the life of Phya pa chos kyi seng ge, see Hugon 2023.

³ On the life of mTshur ston gZhon nu seng ge, see Hugon 2004, pp. vii–viii.

⁴ On the sources of Sapaṇ's life and editions of his works, see Jackson 1987.

⁵ 'A zha blo gros gyal mtshan, was a prominent 12th–13th century Bon master from the g.Yor po region of Lhokha. He received treasure transmissions from major treasure discoverers, such as dPon gsas khyung rgod rtsal and rMa ston shes rab seng ge, and preserved teaching cycles from earlier masters, including gShen chen klu dga' (996–1035). He composed works on cosmology, tantra, and ritual practice. He died at sixty-three with rainbow signs and relics. His main disciples included

classifications of non-valid cognitions, will be documented here. Hence, this study is meant to show the diversity of the views and richness of the tradition on this particular topic.⁶

Tibetan Buddhist *tshad ma*⁷ traditions' studies and writings on mind and mental factors have given rise to the highly influential genre of literature known as *blo rigs* (*Typologies of Mind*), which continues to play an important role in monastic curricula for educating young monks.⁸ Phya pa and Sa paṅ's innovations in this field thus had lasting pedagogical and philosophical implications that resonate to this day.

1. Phya pa and mTshur ston on non-valid cognitions

1.1. The Framework

The scholars whose positions on the non-valid cognitions that were

Tshul khrim rgyal mtshan from Lato, Bru ston 'dul ba rgyal mtshan, and others. This is a summary of his biography by Jean-Luc Achard on the Treasury of Lives. See here: <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Azha-Lodro-Gyeltsen/13092>. Accessed on 20.04.2025.

⁶ Although it is a desideratum to explain in detail the provenance and evolution of the ideas connected with the non-valid cognitions treated in various works referred to in this study from the perspective of historical, philological, and philosophical explanations, yet, my aim here is modestly limited to systematically documenting the differences, on the theme of non-valid cognition, between Phya pa's, Sa paṅ's, and Blo gros rgyal mtshan's traditions, and their reception later on among the Tibetan scholastics.

⁷ The Tibetan term *tshad ma* can be understood either narrowly as referring to the means of valid cognition or as valid cognition itself. In this sense, *tshad ma* is a cognitive episode that is trustworthy, normative, and non-erroneous. Alternatively, *tshad ma* can be understood broadly as a discipline. In this general sense, *tshad ma* encompasses diverse topics, such as logic and argumentation, epistemology, metaphysics, prescriptive rules for public dialectics, and more. The term *tshad ma*, as a discipline, is also connected to Buddhist religious beliefs and goals, such as rebirth, the Four Noble Truths, possibilities for cultivating infinite compassion, arguments for the centrality of insight into selflessness as key to soteriological goals, and related matters. Here it is to be understood in both senses.

⁸ For an introduction to the *blo rigs* and their content, see Rinbochay & Napper 1986: 9-39, which includes a lengthy introductory essay on mind in Tibetan Buddhism. When I started to study Tibetan Buddhism in a monastery, the first three texts that I had to learn were a *Summary* (*bsDus grwa*), a *Typologies of Reasoning* (*rTags rigs*), and a work on *Typologies of Cognition* (*Blo rigs*), all from the curriculum of sGo mang monastic college, a branch of 'Bras spung. The *bsDus grwa* is authored by Ngag dbang bkra shis (1678–1738), while the last two works are penned by the famed 'Jam dbyan bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson 'grus (1648–1721/1722). This genre, namely the *blo rigs*, appears to be a Tibetan phenomenon, without precedent, for instance, in Indic sources.

severely critiqued by Sa paṇ and influenced the dGe lugs tradition belong primarily to the epistemological traditions of rNgog Lo tsā ba Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109),⁹ Phya/phywa pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109–1169),¹⁰ and mTshur ston gzhon nu seng ge (ca. 1150–1210).¹¹ Despite Sapaṇ's intense criticism of their positions on the pertinent topic, the Tibetan epistemological accounts of invalid cognition, many of these positions are faithfully maintained by influential later scholars belonging to what is now known as the dGe lugs tradition¹² and rNying ma scholars, such as Mi pham rgya mtso (1846–1912).¹³

Go rams pa provides the following account of the definitive enumeration (*grangs nges*) and comprehensiveness of Phya pa's seven typologies of cognition: cognition can either apprehend objects unequivocally or not. The latter is doubt (*the tshom*). Those who apprehend objects unequivocally can be either concordant with the object's mode of existence or not. The latter is erroneous cognition (*log shes*). Cognition whose mode is factual either contradicts superimposition or does not. The latter is non-ascertaining perception (*snang la ma nges pa*). Those that contradict superimposition can be engaged with previously cognized objects or not. The former constitutes post-knowledge cognition (*bcad shes*). The latter type can be either reliant on instruments or not. Those that are not reliant are factive assessments (*yid dpyod*). The instruments upon which cognitions rely can be of two

⁹ For an account of different schools of *tshad ma* in Tibet, see van der Kuip 1983, and on the four periodization, see van der Kuip 1989. These four periods are: the Ancient Period, the Pre-Classical Period, the Classical Period, and the Post-Classical Period. On the life of rNgog lo tsā ba, see Kramer 2007.

¹⁰ For a philosophical and historical understanding and introduction to the theory of mind according to Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge, see Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 3–113. The first section is an introductory essay from a philosophical point of view, while the second presents a theory of mind within the context of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist intellectual history. Additionally, see Dreyfus 1997: 373 on Phya pa's typologies.

¹¹ Most likely, the presentation of opponents' positions on non-valid cognitions, such as definitions and divisions, in the *Tshad ma rigs gter* and its' *Rang 'grel* are from the *Shes rab sgron ma*. On the date and authorship of the *Shes rab sgron ma*, see Hugon 2004, pp. viii–xii, and for its relationship with *Tshad ma rigs gter rang 'grel*, see *id.*, pp. xii–xv.

¹² One of the most important early dGe lugs writers on logic and epistemology is dGe 'dun grub pa (1391–1474), who follows the tradition of Phya pa almost verbatim. See dGe 'dun grub pa, the *Tshad ma rigs rgyan* (p. 378). mKhas grub dge legs dpal bzang (1385–1438), an early teacher of the dGe lugs lineage, in his *sDe bdun yid kyi mun sel*, gives a different way of typologizing the non-valid cognition, in terms of conceptual cognition and erroneous non-conceptual cognition. For details, see the *sDe bdun yid kyi mun sel* (p. 102). This might constitute a different Tibetan position on how to typologize the non-valid cognition.

¹³ For example, see Mi pham rGya mtsho's *mKhas 'jug sdom byang* (p.4): *yul can blo yi dbye ba la* || *snang la ma nges yid dpyod dang* || *ma rtogs log rtog the tshom dang* || *mngon sum rjes dpag tshad ma gnyis* || *bcad shes dang ni bdun du dbye* ||.

types: experience or reasoning. The former is perceptual valid cognition (*mngon sum tshad ma*), and the latter is inferential valid cognition (*rjes dpag tshad ma*). This account also accords with Phya pa's comment in his *Yid kyi mun sel*.¹⁴

1.2. The Fivefold Classification System

Early Tibetan epistemologists, like Phya pa and mTshur ston, had established a fivefold classification of non-valid cognition that continues to dominate Tibetan monastic philosophical discourse in the tradition that does not follow Sapan's system. This system recognized five distinct categories of invalid cognition:

1.2.1. Factive Assessment (*yid dpyod*)

According to early Tibetan epistemologists, factive assessment is a cognition that determines its object correctly, although it is neither

¹⁴ Go rams pa's account is as follows, see the *sDe bdun rab gsal* (p. 70): *sngon gyi mkhas pa phya pa sog na re | blo rigs thams cad the tshom | log shes | snang la ma nges pa | bcad shes | yid dpyod | mngon sum | rjes dpag tshad ma dang bdun du 'dus pa yin te | blo de la rang yul mtha' cig tu 'dzin mi nus pa dang | nus pa gnyis las | dang po ni the tshom | gnyis pa la yul gyi gnas tshul dang mi mthun par 'dzin pa dang | mthun par 'dzin pa gnyis las | dang po la log shes | gnyis pa la log phyogs dang 'dzin stang mi 'gal bar 'jug pa dang | 'gal bar 'jug pa gnyis las | dang po ni | snang la ma nges pa | gnyis pa la sngar rtogs zin gyi don la 'jug pa dang | sngar ma rtogs pa la 'jug pa gnyis las | dang po ni | bcad shes | gnyis pa la | rgyu mtshan la ma ltos par 'jug pa dang | rgyu mtshan la ltos nas 'jug pa gnyis las | dang po ni | yid dpyod | gnyis pa la myong stobs kyis 'jug pa dang | rtags stobs kyis 'jug pa gnyis las | dang po ni | mngon sum tshad ma | gnyis pa ni rjes dpag tshad ma'o | |. Additionally, see Phya pa, *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 9a5-8): *spyir don yongs su gcod pa la gnyis te | dngos 'gal las tha dad du ma phyed pa phyogs gcig ma yin par gcod pa dang | tha dad par gnas pa phyogs gcig tu gcod pa'o | | dang po ni | the tshom ste mi rtag par dogs pa nyid na | rtag par yang dogs pas de las tha dad du ma phyed pa'i phyir ro | | gnyis pa la'ang gnyis te | shes bya dang mi mthun par yongs su gcod pa dang mthun par gcod pa'o | | dang po ni | log shes so | | gnyis pa la'ang ldog pa'i zhen pa dang mi 'gal ba dang 'gal ba gnyis las | dang po ni | snang la ma nges pa'o | | gnyis pa la'ang rtogs zin pa la 'jug pa dang | sngar ma rtogs pa la 'jug pa gnyis las | dang po ni | bcad pa'i yul can no | | gnyis pa la'ang rang gi mtshan nyid mthong bas sgro 'dogs la gnod pa dang | ma mthong bas gnod pa gnyis las | dang po ni | mngon sum tshad ma'o | | gnyis pa la'ang rtags kyi rjes su 'brangs pa dang ma 'brangs pa gnyis las | dang po ni rjes dpag yin la | gnyis pa yid dpyod yin te | de ltar na tshad ma ma yin pa'i blo lnga tshad ma'i blo gnyis te blo bdun du grangs nges pa yin no | |. This manner of categorizing cognitions is, according to Phya pa, based on two types of objects: held object (*gzung yul*) and conceived object (*zhen yul*). Alternatively, one can categorize cognition based solely on the different held objects that various cognitions apprehend. See Phya pa, *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 1b5): *dang po'ang gzung yul la ltos nas blo gsum du dbye ba dang | gzung yul dang zhen yul la gnyis ga la ltos nas blo bdun du dbye ba ... | |.***

supported by valid evidence nor does it possess direct epistemic access to its object. This means it constitutes neither inference nor perception—the two classes of recognized valid cognitions. Such cognition is similar to correct presumptions in their epistemic evaluation. According to Phya pa, factive assessment is conceptual cognition (*rtog pa*) that factually determines hidden phenomena that are not cognized and is not supported by the ascertainment of valid reasoning. It comprises three types: that not based on any type of reasoning, that based on unestablished reasoning, and those based on uncertain reasoning.¹⁵

1.2.2. Non-ascertaining Perception (*snang la ma nges pa*)

Non-ascertaining perception is cognition that cannot cancel or undermine the mode of apprehension of cognition contradictory to itself in relation to the same object. In other words, such perceptions do not ascertain or determine their objects; they merely apprehend their objects, or the objects appear to them. According to Phya pa, these are perceptions “in which the specifically characterized phenomena appear and that do not contradict superimposition.” This category comprises three types: non-ascertaining perception due to the lack of an aspect in its object, due to a lack of focused attention, and that which remains undetermined because the causes of error sway it.¹⁶

¹⁵ As Phya pa states in the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 10a7–8): *yid dpyod ni rtog med ma yin te rtog pa yin la | de'ang the tshom ma yin te nges pa yin zhing | de'ang log par nges pa ma yin te shes bya dang mthun par nges pa yin la | de'ang sngar rtogs zin pa ma yin te ma rtogs pa'i lkog gyur sgra mi rtag pa la sogs pa yid dpyod yin la | de'ang phyogs chos dang khyab pa tshad mas nges pa la rten nas nges pa ma yin pas | de la gsum ste | sgra mi rtag pa lta bu rtags dang rtags ltar snang ba gang la'ang ma rten par nges pa rgyu mtshan med pa'i yid dpyod do | mig gi gzung bya lta bu ma grub pa'am | gzhal bya lta bu ma nges pa la brten nas nges pa phyogs chos dang khyab pa dngos po la med pa rtags su bzung nas bsgrub bya bden pa nges pa log pa'i rgyu mtshan can gyi yid dpyod do |*. He defines factive assessment as ‘the defining character of factive assessment is [a conceptual cognition] determining a hitherto not cognized object, without reliance upon a reason ascertained by valid cognition.’ See the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 10b2-3): *yid dpyod kyi mtshan nyid ni | sngar ma rtogs pa'i don bden pa rtags tshad mas nges pa la ma brten par nges pa |*. Additionally see gZhon nu seng ge, *Shes rab sgron ma* (pp.24-25): *des na yid dpyod kyi mtshan nyid ni rtags kyi rgyu mtshan la ma brten par sngar ma rtogs pa'i rkog gyur la don dang mthun par nges pa'o |*. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 247-256 for terminological discussion, category analysis, internal classifications, and translation. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 197-201 for a critical edition related to the passage cited here.

¹⁶ As Phya pa states in the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 9b8–9): *snang la ma nges pa ni gnyis te | yul rnam pa dang mi ldan pas snang yang ma nges pa dang | yul la yid ma gtad pas snang yang ma nges pa'o | | 'khrul pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis zil gyis mnan pas snang yang ma nges pa dang gsum mo | | ,snang la ma nges pa'i mtshan nyid ni | don rang gi mtshan nyid snang ba dang bzlog pa'i sgro 'dogs dang mi 'gal ba... |*. Also, see gZhon nu seng ge, the *Shes rab sgron ma* (pp.21-23): *rang gi mtshan nyid snang pa'i don la sgro 'dogs*

1.2.3. Post-knowledge Cognition (*bcad shes*)

These are those that determine objects previously apprehended by valid cognition. Although they apprehend their objects correctly, they contribute no element of novelty or freshness to the epistemic life of the subject who possesses them. According to Phya pa's tradition, this type of cognition may be both perceptual and conceptual. For Phya pa, post-knowledge cognition encompasses engaged perception, engaged memory, and subsequently arisen ascertainment, which is capable of inducing determination regarding the object cognized.¹⁷

1.2.4. Erroneous Cognition (*log shes*)

Erroneous cognitions are those whose mode of apprehension contradicts the mode of existence of their object. They may be either conceptual or non-conceptual, arising either from contradictory reasoning (*'gal ba'i rtags*) or from faulty faculties (*dbang po skyon can*). Phya pa defines it as 'determining the object erroneously,' comprising two types: erroneous cognition that apprehends superimposition and that which determines wrongly.¹⁸

1.2.5. Doubt (*the tshom*)

dang mi 'gal ba'o ||. See Hugon & Stoltz (2019: 227-237) for terminological discussion, category analysis, internal classifications, and translation. See Hugon & Stoltz (2019: 195-196) for a critical edition related to the passage cited here.

¹⁷ As stated in the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 11a3): *bcad pa'i yul can ni | sngar rtogs pa la zhen pa 'dren nus kyi mngon sum 'jug pa dang | dran pa'i rtog pa 'jug pa dang | rjes su skyes pa'i nges shes rnams yin no* ||. Additionally, see gZhon nu seng ge, the *Shes rab sgron ma* (pp.23-24): *sngar rtogs pa'i byed pa ma nyams pa'i don la sgro 'dogs dang 'gal bar 'jug pa'o* ||. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 239-246 for terminological discussion, category analysis, internal classifications, and translation. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 196-197 for a critical edition related to the passage cited here.

¹⁸ Additionally, Phya pa includes inferential knowledge as erroneous since it apprehends an object (*gzung ba*) that is superimposed, namely the object universal. As stated in the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 11a1-2): *log shes la gnyis te | sgro btags 'dzin pa dang | zhen yul la phyin ci log tu nges pa'o* || *dang po ni | zla ba gnyis la sogs par snang ba'i rtog med 'khrul pa dang | rjes dpag dang | yid dpyod dang | rtog pa bcad pa'i yul can dang | the tshom dang | log par nges pa rnams kyi 'ang don spyi 'dzin pa'i cha nas gzung ba sgro btags la dmigs pa'i log shes yin no* || *zhen yul phyin ci log tu nges pa ni sgra rtag par zhen pa la sogs pa'o* || *log shes kyi mtshan nyid ni | don phyin ci log tu yongs su gcod pa'o* ||. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 257-264 for terminological discussion, category analysis, internal classifications, and translation. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 201-202 for a critical edition related to the passage cited here. Additionally, see gZhon nu seng ge, the *Shes rab sgron ma* (p. 26): *rang yul sgro 'dogs pa zhes bya ba yin* ||.

Doubts may be either dormant or explicit. This type of cognition is characterized by indecisive wavering, whether manifest or implicit. Although Phya pa did not precisely formulate a definition for doubt (*the tshom*), he comments that it is a cognition that is not distinguished from direct contradiction and whose mode of apprehension involves more than one possibility.¹⁹

This early Tibetan systematization represented an attempt to create a comprehensive taxonomy that could account for all possible mental states that failed to qualify as valid cognition (*tshad ma*).²⁰ This approach also reflects a commitment to exhaustive categorization that was characteristic of the scholastic method. The system was designed to provide clear pedagogical tools for understanding the various ways in which cognition could fail to achieve epistemic reliability.

2. Sapaṇ's Critique

2.1. The Fundamental Challenge

Sa paṇ devotes the second chapter of the *Tshad ma rigs gter* and its *Rang 'grel* to an analytical and reflective study of various categories of mind, focusing primarily on mistaken and erroneous minds—the non-valid cognition (*tshad min gyi blo*).²¹

Sapaṇ's systematic account of non-valid cognition—encompassing its definition, various modalities, their bases, and their interrelations—is based on sections from the *Chapter on Inference for Oneself* of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, the *Pramāṇavārttikakārikā*, the *Pramāṇavinīścaya*, and the *Hetubindu*, where invalid reasonings are presented and taught. The analysis of non-conceptual non-valid cognitions, conversely, is based on the presentation of pseudo-perception (*mngon sum ltar snang*) in preceding Indian works. The chapter is also inspired primarily by—

¹⁹ As stated in the *Yid kyi mun sel* (fol. 9a6): *dnegos 'gal las tha dad du ma phyed pa phyogs gcig ma yin par gcod pa dang | ... dang po ni | the tshom ste mi rtag par dogs pa nyid na | rtag par yang dogs pas de las tha dad du ma phyed pa'i phyr ro | |*. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 265-271 for terminological discussion, category analysis, internal classifications, and translation. See Hugon & Stoltz 2019: 201-202 for a critical edition related to the passage cited here. gZhon nu seng ge gives the following definition of doubt in the *Shes rab sgron ma* (p. 26): *yul la rtse gnyis su 'jug pa'am/ mtha' gzhan srid par dogs pa dang bcas pa ste... | |*.

²⁰ For an account of what constitutes *tshad ma* for Sapaṇ's adversaries, see the *Shes rab sgron ma* (p. 69): *bden pa'i don rtogs zhes bya ba yin no | |*. This, according to mTshur ston is in accord with Śaṅkarānanda. Sapaṇ criticized it in the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 233). For Sapaṇ's account, see the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (pp. 234–235).

²¹ Valid and non-deceptive cognition (*tshad ma* and *mi slu ba'i shes pa*) is discussed in the latter half of the eighth, ninth, and tenth chapters of the *Tshad ma rigs gter* and its *Rang 'grel*.

though not through adopting the expressed views, but through critical engagement with them—the works of Tibetan authors whom Sapaṅ criticized without reservation.²²

Sapaṅ's approach to the established framework of non-valid cognitions proposed by Phya pa and mTshur ston was comprehensive in its scope and severity. He argued that the epistemologists whose works elicited his critique are blind to the main categories of non-valid cognition, while adding different categories where none are needed.²³ His criticisms target three classes of non-valid cognitions among the five accepted and espoused by his philosophical adversaries: factive assessment (*yid dpyod*), non-ascertaining perception (*snang la ma nges pa*), and post-knowledge cognition (*bcad shes*). Regarding the remaining two categories of non-valid cognition—doubt (*the tshom*) and erroneous cognition (*log shes*)—Sapaṅ agrees essentially with his opponents, although differences exist in details.

The author begins his critique by questioning the very coherence of the fivefold system. As he states in the root text:

"Most Tibetan scholars accept five categories of non-valid cognition: factive assessment, Non-ascertaining perception, Post-knowledge cognition, Erroneous cognition, and Doubt."²⁴

This seemingly neutral observation sets the stage for his systematic assessment of three of these five categories.

²² For the general accounts of the sources, see Go rams pa, the *sDe bdun rab gsal* (p. 15): *rab byed gnyis pas ni yul can gyi blo la tshad ma dang tshad min gnyis las | dang po ni | rab byed tha ma bzhi'i skabs su 'chad pas | 'dir tshad min gyi blo ni mdo dang | rnam 'grel nges kyi rang don le'u dang | gtan tshigs thigs pa'i gtan tshigs ltar snang ston pa'i skabs rnams dang | gzhan don le'u'i phyogs chos can gyi gtan tshigs dgu 'chad pa'i skabs kyi gtan tshigs ltar snang bdun po rnams kyi gtan tshigs ltar snang gsum la brten pa'i tshad min gyi blo bstan pa dang | mngon sum ltar snang gyi skabs su rtog med mngon sum ltar snang gi rnam gzhas gsungs pa rnams la bod snga rabs pa rnams tshad min gyi blo lngar grangs nges par 'dod pa rnams bkag nas tshad min gyi blo gsum du grangs nges pa'i tshul dang | de dag so so'i mtshan nyid dang | dbye ba la sogs pa bstan no |*

²³ For Sapaṅ, the most important category of non-valid cognition is non-cognizing cognition, which his adversaries failed even to recognize. See Sapaṅ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 84): *bod rnams kyi tshad ma ma yin pa'i gtso bor gyur pa ma rtogs pa'i blo phar dor nas | don med pa la tshad ma ma yin pa'i blo lngar phyed bar zad do |*

²⁴ The *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.1d–2a. The number should be read as the text between line numbers *d* and *a* of the first and second verse from the second chapter of the *Tshad ma rigs gter*. This is based on my critical edition. For details, see Jamtsho 2023. Sapaṅ says that some paṇḍits are supposed to have denied any typologies of non-valid cognition due to the infinite number, see the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 72): *paṇḍita 'ga' zhig mtha' yas pas dbye ba med do zhes zer ro |*

2.2. The Critique of Factive Assessment

Sapaṅ's most sustained criticism targets the category of factive assessment (*yiḍ dpyod*). For Sapaṅ, a non-valid cognition called factive assessment is pure fabrication, resulting from the fertile imagination of those who promote the idea. Neither mind nor mental factors (*sems dang sems byung*) exist that fit the description of factive assessment as accounted for by epistemologists. He generally criticizes this category and examines the particular instances provided by his adversaries, demonstrating their inability to withstand thorough and searching criticism.

His analysis proceeds through a series of logical dilemmas designed to demonstrate the internal contradictions of this category. In the root text of the *Tshad ma rigs gter*, Sapaṅ presents the following analysis:

"If factive assessment relies not at all upon reasons, then it constitutes merely a thesis held without proof, thereby becoming a doubt. If it depends upon reason, that reason must be either valid or one of three invalid types."²⁵

This argument creates a logical trap: if factive assessment operates without reasons, it cannot be distinguished from doubt; if it operates with reasons, those reasons must be either valid (making the cognition valid) or invalid (placing it in one of the established categories of invalid reasoning). Sapaṅ continues:

"If the reasons underlying the two reasoned factive assessments are not subsumed under the three invalid categories, then the number of

²⁵ He begins by examining the fundamental nature of factive assessment, arguing that if it is merely *belief* in a proposition without grounding in perception or reasoned arguments, it cannot be distinguished from doubt, even when its content happens to be veridical, since a mental cognition that lacks support in reasoned thought or unimpaired perception cannot be factually concordant in its epistemic quality—even if it holds something factually true, this constitutes mere belief lacking cognitive penetration of the object. Alternatively, if factive assessment depends on reasoning, that reason must conform to one of the four allowable forms of reasoning in the Buddhist *tshad ma* tradition, meaning any cognition resulting from these various reasons belongs to a different, already established class of cognition than what proponents propose. See *Rigs gter rang 'grel*, (pp.72-73). In a striking misinterpretation, this very verse, which constitutes Sa paṅ's refutation of factive assessment, is cited as evidence supporting this category of non-valid cognition by a recent dGe lugs writer. For details, see Napper & Rinpochoy 1986: 98 and fol. 6a of the Tibetan text included in that publication.

invalid reasons becomes four. If the factive assessment based on reasons is not invalid cognition, then it constitutes a third valid cognition."²⁶

Furthermore, since the definitive enumeration of non-valid cognition according to early scholars comprises five categories, Sa-pan's analysis forces proponents to accept an additional category called 'erroneous factive assessment' (*log pa'i yid dpyod*), which he argues is logically implied by their position's structure, thereby disrupting the established epistemological framework. Sapaṇ extends his analysis to scriptural authorities and resulting cognitive states based on them, arguing that not all scriptures are equally authoritative even when attributed to figures of authority, identifying four types of cognitions arising from hearing scriptures: valid cognition from rationally supportable content, erroneous cognition from logically refutable content, and both doubts and non-cognizing cognition from scripture lacking rational support.²⁷

This analysis demonstrates that factive assessment either collapses into existing categories or creates unwanted proliferation of basic epistemological categories. Sapaṇ's conclusion is unequivocal: after a lengthy examination of this category, he concludes that nothing in reality, experience, or authoritative sources corresponds to or fits this description.²⁸

²⁶ Sapaṇ specifically addresses the two internal categories of factive assessment based on uncertain and unestablished reasons detailed in *Shes rab sgron ma*, pp. 24-25, noting that these faulty reasons produce cognitions that are non-cognizing and indecisive, respectively. See Table 2 for the relationship between these reasons and their corresponding cognitions. He demonstrates that accepting factive assessment leads to serious, illogical consequences including the necessity of admitting a fourth distinctive invalid reasoning, the problematic creation of a third group of valid knowledge disrupting established and accepted dyad classification, inferential knowledge ceasing to be truly valid, the ascertainment being unable to undermine superimposition, and the inability to account for doubt as a separate category of invalid cognition see *Rigs gter rang 'grel*, (p. 73): *gnyis pa ha cang thal ba ni* |.

²⁷ For detailed arguments, analysis, and conclusions reached by Sapaṇ, see the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (pp.73-77): *rang gi lung la drang don nges don gnyis* | *gzhan gyi lung las 'thad mi 'thad gnyis las* | *dper na bden pa bzhi dang bdag med gnyis la sogs pa sgrub byed yod na tshad ma yin te...* | | *khrus dang dka' thub kyi sdiḡ pa 'dag pa la sogs pa gnod byed yod pas log shes* | *sgrub byed gnod byed gnyis ka med pa'i lung las gzhi grub pa rnam the tshom* | *ma grub pa ma rtogs pa nyid de* | |, *tshad ma ma yin pa'i lung las 'jug ldog ni* | *the tshom gyi sgo nas byed par gsungs pas mi 'gal lo* | |.

²⁸ Go rams pa, in his abridged commentary, characterizes Sapaṇ's examination as a 'refutation of the nature of factive assessment' (*yid dpyod rang gi ngo bo dag*), indicating that no genuine mental episode corresponds to how Tibetan authors define factive assessment, see Go rams pa, *Rigs gter gsal byed*, p. 401. For a later

2.3. The Problem of Non-ascertaining Perception

Sapaṇ's critique of non-ascertaining perception reveals a fundamental disagreement about the nature of perceptual cognition itself, between him and his epistemological adversaries. Regarding non-ascertaining perception, Sapaṇ argues that not all of its instances constitute non-valid cognition as his opponents claim. For Sapaṇ, all perceptions (*mngon sum*) of ordinary beings are, by definition, valid cognition that are non-ascertaining and indeterminate in nature and function.

The root text makes this position explicit:

"If non-ascertaining perceptions do not constitute valid cognition, then all perceptions become non-valid cognition, because determination regarding perception has been refuted."²⁹

Sapaṇ takes particular issue with a category of non-ascertaining perception attributed to unclear aspects of the object (*yul gyi rnam pa mi gsal ba*). He notes that his opponents failed to distinguish between unclear objects (*yul mi gsal ba*) and cognitive failure to illuminate (*blos gsal mi nus pa*). He engages in extensive criticism, employing both authoritative scriptural testimonies and reasoned analysis, to demonstrate the inadequacies and illogical consequences of his adversaries' positions. This confusion leads to the inappropriate inclusion of valid perceptual cognitions, that is, the non-ascertaining perception, within the category of invalid cognition.³⁰ For Sapaṇ, any perception (*mngon sum*)

defence of *yid dpyod*, identification of its plausible sources in authoritative Indian sources, see 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's *Blo rig rnam gzhaḡ* (pp.114-116).

²⁹ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.10a-d.

³⁰ The author adds a separate section in the *Rang 'grel* where he refutes a subdivision of non-ascertaining perception due to the lack of vividness of the object. He identifies this as a case of confusing what is not vivid from the aspect of the object (*yul mi gsal ba*) with the subject's inability to illuminate (*blos gsal mi nus pa*). This can be illustrated, for example, by a visual consciousness, based on a correctly functioning visual organ that apprehends a vase, will apprehend the momentary changes of the vase, but the conceptual thought immediately arising may not be able to determine the momentariness of the vase, albeit correctly identifying the vase. This is due not to the unclarity of the object, but rather to the mind's inability to differentiate the series of moments correctly under the influence of attachment to permanence. As stated in the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 79): *de ni yul mi gsal bas ma yin gyi 'dra ba gzhan 'byung la sogs pa 'khrul pa'i rgyu mtshan gyi sgo nas blos gsal bar 'dzin ma nus pas gzhan sel gyi sgo nas nges par bya ba la dgongs so* | |. This position is also advocated by gZhon-nu-seng-ge, the *Shes rab sgron ma* (p. 22).

is by definition a valid and non-mistaken cognition. The ascertainment and determination are not its inherent or innate features.³¹

2.4. Criticism of Post-knowledge Cognition

Sapaṅ's analysis of post-knowledge cognition (*bcad shes*) reveals what he considers a fundamental category error in early Tibetan epistemology. Post-knowledge cognition (*bcad shes*), though it exists, does not require a separate category since it can be integrated into the main class of non-valid cognition—namely, non-cognizing cognition (*ma rtogs pa'i blo*)—which Sapaṅ's opponents, unfortunately, failed to acknowledge and register. Otherwise, this leads unnecessarily to the proliferation of basic categories. The inclusion of some perceptual and non-conceptual cognition under this rubric constitutes a cardinal mistake for a Buddhist epistemologist, according to him, since post-knowledge cognition must by nature be conceptual.

His critique concerns the claim that post-knowledge cognition can be both perceptual and conceptual. Sapaṅ demonstrates the logical impossibility of this position through a detailed analysis of the temporal, modal, and objective characteristics of these cognitive types:

"Perception is non-conceptual and [apprehends] present [objects]; post-knowledge cognition constitutes memory of past [objects]. [Since these are] incompatible in terms of their objects, temporal framework, and mode of apprehension, how can a common locus exist [between them]?"³²

³¹ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 4.5c-d: *mngon sum rtog bral ma 'khrul ba* | | *nyid kyis tshad mar grub pa yin* | |. While delineating this class of non-valid cognition, early Tibetan thinkers, in Sapaṅ's assessment, inappropriately included what is not inherently invalid cognition within this category. For Sapaṅ, valid cognition does not necessarily determine its object, whereas his opponents maintain that valid cognition must determine its object. Both parties agree that there exists a correct perception that does not ascertain its objects, but their agreement ends there. For Sapaṅ, this necessarily constitutes a type of valid cognition, while he characterizes his Tibetan opponents as viewing it otherwise. According to them, any unmissaken perception that fails to ascertain and determine its objects is non-ascertaining and therefore invalid cognition. For Sapaṅ, perception neither ascertains nor determines; it merely apprehends its object within perceptual ken. While perception may induce cognition that ascertains or determines, neither function applies to perception itself directly. For discussions of the philosophical arguments and reasons behind the inclusion of some perceptions among non-valid cognitions in Phya pa's tradition, and the discrimination between perception simpliciter and valid perception, see Dreyfus 1997: 365–396. For a later rebuttal of Sapaṅ's critique, see 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's *Blo rig rnam gzhaḡ* (pp.116-117).

³² See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.12a-d and the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p.80): *mngon sum ni ngo bo rtog bral* | *yul rang mtshan* | *dus da ltar ba* | 'dzin stangs gsal ba ma 'dres pa 'dzin

His systematic comparison showing the incompatibility of perception and post-sknowledge cognition across four dimensions can be tabulated as follows:

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Perception</i>	<i>Post-knowledge cognition</i>
Nature (<i>ngo bo</i>)	Non-conceptual (<i>rtog med</i>)	Conceptual (<i>rtog pa</i>)
Object (<i>yul</i>)	Particulars (<i>gsal ba</i>)	Object universal (<i>don spyi</i>)
Temporal Dimension (<i>dus</i>)	Present (<i>da lta ba</i>)	Past (<i>'das pa</i>)
Mode of Apprehension (<i>'dzin stangs</i>)	Vivid and unmixed (<i>gsal zhing ma 'dres pa</i>)	Unclear and mixed (<i>mi gsal zhing 'dres pa</i>)

Table 1.

3. Sapaṇ's System

3.1. The Threefold Classification

Having critiqued three of the five typologies of non-vlaid cognition propounded by Phya pa and his associates, Sapaṇ proposes a simplified system. The author proceeds by presenting his preferred definition of non-valid cognition and different methods for categorizing and classifying it.³³ For Sapaṇ, all non-valid cognition can be classified as either non-cognizing cognition, erroneous cognition, or doubt. These three categories are studied through their defining properties or characteristics, subdivisions, examples, and relations to various invalid reasonings.

Sapaṇ advocates the following three categories of non-valid cognitions. The second and third categories are equally accepted by his opponents:

pa yin la | bcad shes ni ngo bo rtog pa | yul sgra don | dus 'das pa | 'dzin stangs mi gsal ba 'dres pa 'dzin pas mngon sum yang yin la | bcad shes kyang yin no zhes bya ba'i gzhi mthun mi srid de |. The position that advocates a perceptual post-knowledge cognition is also found in gZhon-nu-seng-ge, the *Shes rab sgron ma* (p.24). For a later rebuttal of Sapaṇ's critique and defence of the Phya pa's tradition, see 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's *Blo rig rnam gzhag* (pp.119-120).

³³ For details, see the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 83).

3.1.1. Non-cognizing Cognition (*ma rtogs pa'i blo*)

Non-cognizing cognition constitutes the most extensive class of non-valid cognition. These cognitions lack epistemic value in the sense of providing additional or new information about phenomena not previously cognized. They are devoid of apprehending their object as 'that' or 'not that' (*de dang de min 'dzin pas stong*).³⁴

Non-cognizing cognition can be divided as follows:

1. Not engaged with the object (*yul la ma zhugs pa*)
2. Engaged yet not finished (*zhugs kyang ma rdzogs pa*)
3. Finished yet not cognized (*rdzogs kyang ma rnyed pa*), which can be further divided as a) Due to a lack of object to be cognized (*rtogs bya'i yul med nas*), b) Due to the cognition being tampered (*rtogs byed kyi blo bslad nas*), and c) Due to not being a feasible object (*shes byed kyi yul ma yin nas*). The last is further divided into i) The remoteness of space (*yul gyi bskal ba*), ii) The remoteness of time (*dus kyi bskal ba*), and iii) The remoteness by nature (*rang bzhin gyi bskal ba*)³⁵

3.1.2. Erroneous Cognition (*log shes*)

Erroneous cognitions are those whose mode of apprehension contradicts the mode of existence of their object. They may be either conceptual or non-conceptual, arising either from contradictory reasoning (*'gal ba'i rtags*) or from faulty faculties (*dbang po skyon can*).³⁶

Erroneous cognition can be divided as follows:

1. Conceptual erroneous cognition (*rtog pa log shes*), which can be further divided as, a) Erroneous conception with regards to the aspect (*rnam pa la log par rtog pa*), for example, mistaking a rope for a snake, b) Erroneous conception concerning time (*dus la log par rtog pa*), for example, thinking of the present blue colour

³⁴ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.19b–c.

³⁵ The not-engaged cognitions are those that have not been able to engage the object in any cognitively viable way. Sapaṅ gives the example of the cognition of someone who knows nothing of logic concerning the three features of correct reasoning, or the cognition of someone who doesn't know the linguistic sciences about the intricacies of Sanskrit grammar. The not-completed analysis refers to that cognition which is still in the process of accessing the object and thus has not yet cognized it. The third group of non-cognizing cognition comprises those that lack an object to be cognized, are unable to cognize due to a fault with the cognition, and do not cognize the object simply because the object is not appropriate. For the details, see Sapaṅ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 85). Additionally, see Go-rams-pa in his *sDe bdun rab gsal* (p. 79–90).

³⁶ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.20b–c.

as the one from yesterday, and c) Erroneous conception concerning the object (*yul la log par rtog pa*), for example, thinking of the two species of trees as instantiating an identical universal.

2. Non-conceptual erroneous cognition (*rtog med log shes*), which is further divided as a) Erroneous sense consciousness (*dbang shes bsblad pa*), for example, a visual consciousness apprehending two moons, and b) Erroneous mental consciousness (*yid shes bsblad pa*), for example, a mental consciousness during a dream state.³⁷

3.1.3. Doubt (*the tshom*): Doubts may be either dormant or explicit. This type of cognition is characterized by indecisive wavering, whether manifest or implicit.³⁸

Doubt can be divided as follows:

1. Explicit doubt (*the tshom mngon 'gyur*), wondering whether liberation will be attained through fire-offering, which is further divided into a) Equally proportioned doubt (*the tshom cha mnyam*), a doubt that wonders whether the sound is permanent or impermanent, b) The doubt which apprehends predominantly (*shas cher 'dzin pa*). This is subdivided as i) Factually concordant doubt (*the tshom don 'gyur*) and ii) Factually not concordant doubt (*the tshom don mi 'gyur*).
2. Dormant doubt (*the tshom bag nyal*).³⁹

3.2. The Primacy of Non-cognizing Cognition

Sapaṅ identifies a cardinal problem associated with early Tibetan epistemological scholars' systematic approach to studying non-valid cognition: their collective failure to understand non-cognizing cognition, which should serve as the primary category.⁴⁰ Sapaṅ's emphasis on this particular typology of non-valid cognition underscores the important principle that all instances of non-valid cognition are non-

³⁷ For details, see Sapaṅ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (pp.85–86). Additionally, see Go-rams-pa, the *sDe bdun rab gsal* (p. 80). For a comparison between Sapaṅ's position and that of early Tibetan theorists, on erroneous cognition, see the *Shes rab sgron ma* (pp.25–26).

³⁸ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.21b–c.

³⁹ For our author, any conceptual cognition that holds some remote propositions (*lkog 'gyur la 'jug pa*) is an instance of doubt if it is not supported by any reasoning whatsoever or if the reason is uncertain, or not induced by perception, even if the content or the object of the cognition is true. The cognition does not necessarily need to be explicitly indecisive to be counted as doubt. See Sapaṅ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p. 86), and Go-rams-pa, the *sDe bdun rab gsal* (pp.80–82) for the details. For a comparison between Sapaṅ's position and that of early Tibetan theorists, on doubt, see the *Shes rab sgron ma* (pp.26).

⁴⁰ See footnote number 18.

valid because they lack the epistemic efficacy and functional ability of valid cognition to cognize their respective objects. The root text expresses this principle succinctly:

“Non-cognizing cognition is devoid of cognizing [the object] as either that or not that.”⁴¹

This definition captures the essential feature of epistemic failure: the inability to make novel cognitive contact with objects. Non-valid cognition, such as post-knowledge cognition, despite having a factually concordant or veridical mode of apprehension (*'dzin stangs don mthun*), is subsumed under non-valid cognition because it lacks any novel epistemic dimension since its object has already been cognized by another cognitive event. It merely remembers (*dran pa*) what has already been cognized by preceding valid cognition. Doubts and erroneous cognitions can also be subsumed under this category. Indeed, this category appears equivalent in extension to the category of non-valid cognition itself. As stated in the *Tshad ma rigs gter*:

“They (i.e., the non-valid cognition) are classified according to their mode of engagement, but if subsumed by nature, they are one.”⁴²

3.3. Integration with Invalid Reasoning

One important contribution Sa paṇ makes in this chapter is establishing an explicit relationship between types of conceptual thought resulting from three invalid reasonings and the three categories of non-valid cognition that he favors. Sa paṇ establishes the following correspondence between conceptual cognition induced by invalid reasoning and types of invalid reasoning:⁴³

⁴¹ See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.19b-c.

⁴² See the *Tshad ma rigs gter* 2.18d-19a. See Sa paṇ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p.84): *ngo bo'i sgo nas bsdu na log rtog dang the tshom gnyis kyang ma rtogs pa nyid yin pas tshad ma ma yin pa'i blo gcig tu 'du ste* |. Likewise, Sa paṇ summarizes his position as follows in the 2.22d-23a: *tshad ma min pa gsum po yang* | | *ma rtogs pa las don gzhan min* | |, “Similarly, the three non-valid cognitions are not different entities from non-realizing cognition.” The translation in the footnotes are mine, unless mentioned otherwise.

⁴³ For the details of this formulation and the textual sources, see Sa paṇ in his *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p.84): *de lta bu'i tshad ma ma yin pa'i blo gsum dang gtan tshigs kyi skyon gsum rigs pa'i gnad gcig ste* | *phyogs la mthu med som nyi dang* | | *mi 'dod 'dod pa'i nges sgrub byed* | | *ces gsungs pa ltar* | *gtan tshigs ma grub pas bsgrub bya la mthu med pa ltar ma rtogs pa la'ang blo gang du'ang 'jug pa'i mthu med do* | | *ma nges pas yin nam ma yin som nyi skyed pa ltar* | *the tshom yang gnas lugs las mtha' gzhan du dogs par byed la 'gal bas gang mi 'dod pa bsgrub pa ltar log rtog gis kyang gang ma yin pa de rtogs par byed do* | |. The same points are reiterated with an even more explicit relation drawn between faulty reasoning and non-valid cognitions, see Sa paṇ, the *Rigs gter rang 'grel* (p.365): *ma grub pas chos can gyi steng du the tshom yang bskyed mi nus so* | | *ma nges pas the tshom tsam bskyed cing* | *'gal bas mi 'dod pa'i nges pa dang* | *yang dag gis 'dod pa'i nges pa bskyed pa yin te* | *m khas pa rnams kyi gtsug gi nor bus* | *phyogs*

<i>Invalid Reasonings</i>	<i>Non-valid Cognitions</i>
Non-established reason (<i>ma grub pa'i rtags</i>)	Non-cognizing cognition (<i>ma rtogs pa'i blo</i>)
Uncertain reason (<i>ma nges pa'i rtags</i>)	Doubt (<i>the tshoms</i>)
Incompatible reason (<i>'gal ba'i rtags</i>)	Erroneous cognition (<i>log shes</i>)

Table 2.

The author does not argue that every instance of non-valid cognition results from invalid reasoning. Post-knowledge cognition determining the impermanence of sound (*sgra mi rtag pa nges pa'i bcad shes*), mere wavering of thought regarding the spiritual efficacy of fire offering, and visual consciousness of two moons due to diseased faculties illustrate different categories of non-valid cognition that are certainly not the products of invalid reasoning or evidence.

4. The Bon po Tradition on Non-valid Cognition

The following presentation of non-valid cognition from the Bon tradition draws upon a comprehensive treatise entitled *Tshad ma'i snying po de kho na nyid kun las btus pa rig pa'i gter mdzod*.⁴⁴ This epistemological treatise was composed at the behest of a certain Rong ston seng ge and represents a significant contribution to the early Bon po's epistemological literature. Given the limited scholarly engagement with this text in contemporary academic discourse, a detailed examination of its structural organization, chapter divisions, and their content remains a desideratum.

Through numerous citations, it becomes evident that Blo gros rgyal mtshan's principal authority regarding non-valid cognition derives from an earlier Bon po treatise, the *rNam 'byed 'phrul gyi lde mig*, traditionally attributed to Bla chen dran pa nam mkha'.⁴⁵ Specifically, Blo gros rgyal mtshan draws upon the third chapter of this work, titled

la mthu med som nyi dang || *mi 'dod 'dod p'ai nges sgrub byed* || *ces gsungs pa ltar ro* ||.

⁴⁴ The relative obscurity of this work within both traditional and modern scholarship underscores the need for systematic investigation of Bon contributions to Indo-Tibetan epistemological discourse. I would like to thank my friend Sonam Palden for introducing me to this work in early 2023.

⁴⁵ The historical provenance and authorial attribution of the *rNam 'byed 'phrul gyi lde mig* remains a subject requiring further scholarly investigation, which falls outside the scope of the present study. For information on his life, see <https://treasuryoflives.org/bo/biographies/view/Drenpa-Namkha/6681>. Accessed on 20.04.2025.

*'Jal byed rgyas par bshad pa.*⁴⁶ Given the *rNam 'byed*'s composition in verse form, which renders precise interpretation challenging without exegetical commentary, this article relies primarily upon Blo gros rgyal mtshan's prose work as the most accessible and early source for understanding the Bon po position on this epistemological topic.

Preliminary analysis suggests that the Bon po epistemological theories substantially align with the epistemological framework developed by Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge, though a comprehensive comparative study remains necessary to establish definitive doctrinal correspondences and potential innovations within the Bon interpretation of non-valid cognition theory. The work itself is divided into eight chapters, as follows:

1. *Chapter One: Establishing the Nature of the Mere Cognition (Blo tsam gyi rang bzhin gtan la dbab pa'i le'u ste dang po'o*; pp.105–121).
2. *Chapter Two: Exposition on the Nature of Valid Cognition in General (Tshad ma spyi'i rang bzhin bstan pa'i le'u ste gnyis pa'o*; pp.121–144).
3. *Chapter Three: Testimony and Scriptural Authority as Valid Cognition (bKa' dang lung tshad ma'i le'u ste gsum pa'o*; pp.144–148).
4. *Chapter Four: Direct Perception as Valid Cognition (mNgon sum tshad ma'i le'u ste bzhi pa'o*; pp.148–156).
5. *Chapter Five: Inference in General (rJes dpag spyi'i le'u ste lnga pa'o*; pp.148–195).
6. *Chapter Six: Inference for Oneself (Rang don rjes su dpag pa'i le'u ste drug pa'o*; pp.195–206).
7. *Chapter Seven: Inference for Others (gZhan don rjes du dpag pa'i le'u ste bdun pa'o*; pp.207–228).
8. *Chapter Eight: Establishing through the Triad of Definiens, Definiendum, and Basis of Definiens (mTshan mtshon gzhi gsum gyis gtan la dbab pa'i le'u ste brgyad pa'o*; pp.228–252).

Regarding the classification of non-valid cognition, Blo gros rgyal mtshan demonstrates substantial concordance with Phya pa's epistemological tradition in terms of definitional criteria, internal subdivisions, and illustrative examples. However, one significant difference emerges: the inclusion of an additional category of non-

⁴⁶ For details, see the *rNam 'byed 'phrul gyi lde mig* for versified and formal definitions of six types of non-valid cognitions from the Bon po's perspective (p. 50): *snang la ma nges 'dra bas slu* || *the tshom de dang gzhan sems dang* || *yid dpyod lkog tu gyur ba dang* || *sngar bcad rjes su zlos rtogs dang* || *'khrul bas log par rtog pa dang* || *bla brdol don du ma nges pa'o* ||. This whole passage is cited, at respective junctures, by Blo gros rgyal mtshan in the *Rig pa'i gter mdzod*.

valid cognition termed *don la ma nges pa* (“indeterminate regarding the object”).

The author begins his account of the topic by defining non-valid cognition, characterized primarily by its erroneous nature.⁴⁷ The classificatory schema comprises six categories, representing a departure from Phya pa’s traditional framework through the incorporation of the aforementioned additional category. All remaining classifications align with established precedent.⁴⁸

The additional category, *don la ma nges pa*, merits particular attention, given its apparent innovation within this tradition. While analogous formulations such as *don nyid la ma nges pa* and *don ma nges pa* appear in other sources, they seem to function as descriptive terminology denoting the general incapacity of cognitive events to ascertain their respective objects, rather than constituting formal designations for discrete cognitive categories.

On the other hand, Blo gros rgyal mtshan provides a technical definition of *don la ma nges pa* as “cognition that imputes without the appearance of the object” (*yul mi snang ba la blo sgro btags su ’jug pa’o*).⁴⁹ This characterization indicates that the object fails to manifest entirely within this cognitive purview; instead, it represents purely imputational and imaginative cognition. The author delineates three subcategories of *don la ma nges pa*, differentiated according to their causal determinants—both internal and external factors. These manifest when: (1) vital wind (*rlung*) enters the life-channel (*srog rtsa*), (2) consciousness operates under the influence of spirits (*gdon*), and (3) awareness becomes suppressed within dream states (*nan rmis*).⁵⁰

5. Conclusion

This study of non-valid cognitions across Tibetan Buddhist and Bon po *tshad ma* traditions reveals a rich tapestry of epistemological innovation across different lineages. The diverse approaches examined—from Phya pa’s comprehensive classification system through Sa pañ’s systematic critique to Blo gros rgyal mtshan’s Bon po framework—

⁴⁷ See Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Rig pa’i gter mdzod* (p.118): *tshad ma ma rtogs pa’i bslu ba’i shes pa’o* | |.

⁴⁸ For Blo gros rgyal mtshan’s account of 1) *snang la ma nges pa*, see pp.118-119, 2) *bcad shes*, see p.119, 3) *yid dpyod*, see pp.119-120, 4) the *tshom*, see p.120, and 5) *log shes*, p. 120 of the *Rig pa’i gter mdzod*. These are mostly identical to Phya pa’s tradition presented earlier.

⁴⁹ See blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Rig pa’i gter mdzod* (p.120).

⁵⁰ See Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Rig pa’i gter mdzod* (pp.120-121): *gnyis pa dbye ba la | srog rtsar rlung zhugs pas ma nges pa dang | gdon gyis brlams pa las byung ba dang non rmis las byung ste sgro btags ’ba’ zhig go* |.

demonstrate the dynamic nature of their epistemological deliberations.

Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge's foundational contribution established the theoretical groundwork that would dominate Tibetan epistemological discourse for generations. His fivefold classification system represented a systematic attempt to create comprehensive taxonomies accounting for all possible mental states failing to qualify as valid cognition. The sophistication of this framework, with its careful attention to definitional precision and exhaustive categorization, reflects the scholastic method's commitment to rigorous analysis.

Sa paṅ's critique represents an important moment in Tibetan Buddhist epistemology. Through systematic analysis, he demonstrated fundamental problems with established classifications while proposing a more parsimonious alternative. His three-category system provided a framework that was both theoretically more coherent and aligned with Indian Buddhist sources. His methodological innovations revealed important principles: parsimony in theoretical construction, logical consistency in analysis, and authoritative grounding in traditional sources.

The Bon po tradition's contribution through Blo gros rgyal mtshan's work and its sources represents a significant voice in this epistemological conversation. While demonstrating substantial alignment with Phya pa's framework, Blo gros rgyal mtshan's contribution lies in his introduction of distinctive categories that address cognitive states not adequately captured by existing frameworks. This reflects the Bon tradition's integration of physiological and spiritual factors in cognitive analysis.

The comparative examination reveals both continuities and innovations within Tibetan epistemological thought. While all traditions grapple with the fundamental challenge of categorizing cognitive states that fail to achieve epistemic reliability, their solutions reflect different methodological priorities and theoretical commitments. These diverse approaches demonstrate the self-critical and dynamic nature of these traditions.

The lasting influence of these epistemological innovations on subsequent traditions testifies to their strength. This study indicates that the question of non-valid cognition served as a testing ground for broader epistemological theories in Tibet. Through detailed analyses of cognitive failure, these scholars developed nuanced frameworks for understanding the nature of mind, knowledge, and epistemic authority.

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Online Resources

<https://treasuryoflives.org>

<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/ikga>



Nyingma Monasteries, Treasure and Territory in Kham: Geomantic Structure of Gonjo County

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Introduction

his study undertakes a geographical reconstruction of the sacred landscape of Gonjo County through an empirical survey of the mountains (*lha ri*) and springs (*chu gu gnas pa*) enumerated in the *Gonjo Xianzhi* (贡觉县志, 2010, *Gonjo County Gazetteer*), followed by an examination of the Buddhist monasteries, primarily of the Nyingma tradition, situated in close proximity to these sites (Figure 1). In many Tibetan areas of China, including Gonjo, the only readily available written sources for monasteries and sacred mountains are the modern Chinese-language county gazetteers and related official government surveys and documentations. While premodern Tibetan texts may allude to some of these sites, they seldom identify their locations with the clarity made possible by the systematic format of the gazetteers. Moreover, modern Tibetan-language publications containing comparable geographic information are difficult to locate in Western academic libraries, where acquisitions tend to favor the Chinese editions, and it is not always clear what may have been issued in Tibetan within China. It is nonetheless possible to reconstruct the probable Tibetan orthographies of place names from the Chinese phonetic transcriptions contained in these gazetteers, and although this method is not without uncertainty, it remains the only practical means for scholars outside Tibet, or even in other regions of China, to recover the historical forms and spatial distribution of such sites given travel to many of these areas may not be permitted, or if so would be too expensive.

Rather than beginning with premodern Tibetan texts or religious chronicles, this analysis proceeds in reverse: it first establishes the spatial system of sacred peaks and water sources as recorded in the gazetteer and visible in the contemporary terrain, and only subsequently will correlate these locations with historical Tibetan texts. But it remains possible that some of these sites are not attested in surviving

textual sources, a circumstance that underscores the value of reconstructing the sacred geography directly from spatial and environmental evidence. This approach allows the geography itself, the pattern of sites, their orientations, and their topographic settings, to define the framework within which historical and doctrinal interpretations can later be situated.

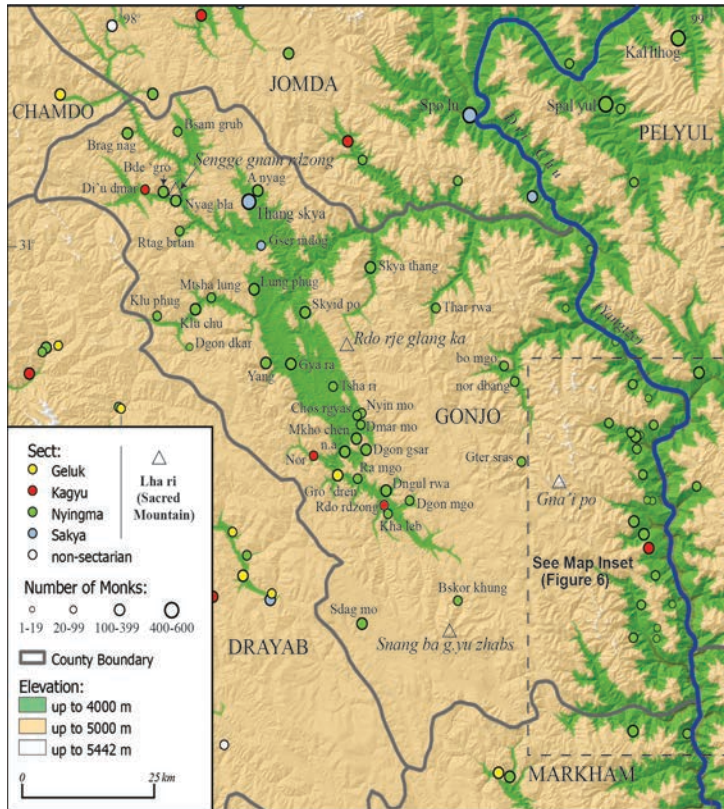


Figure 1. Monasteries (*dgon pa*) and Sacred Mountains (*Lha ri*) of Gonjo

In methodological terms, this project extends the long-standing sub-field of Tibetan studies devoted to sacred geography and mountain cults by introducing the tools of historical GIS and remote sensing. By combining gazetteer data, satellite imagery, and the geographic verification of visible peaks and monasteries, it constructs an independent spatial record of sacred sites prior to textual analysis. Such a procedure both complements and corrects traditional text-driven approaches, which tend to privilege literary or doctrinal representations while overlooking the geographical logic that structures the landscape itself.

By beginning with the physical distribution of sacred mountains, springs, and monasteries, this study foregrounds the spatial coherence of the sacred system as an object of inquiry in its own right, one that can later be correlated with historical sources to trace the evolution of Buddhist, particularly Nyingma, religious geography in eastern Tibet.

Conceptually, the study draws on Mayer's Rethinking Treasure essays (2019, 2022) that have redefined the *gter ma* tradition as a hybrid system linking Indian *nidhi* notions of hidden wealth with indigenous Tibetan cults of territorial deities (*yul lha*, *gzhi bdag*), thereby situating revelation within the physical and ecological environment. In this sense, the Tibetan *gter ma* tradition may be understood as a reworking of the Indian *nidhi* concept of material treasures guarded by landscape deities such as yakṣas and nāgas, transformed into a system of spiritual revelation integrated with Buddhist and indigenous Tibetan cosmologies. This perspective clarifies that sacred geography in Tibet cannot be reduced to textual origins: it is the material and spatial field through which revelation is enacted and perpetuated.

Within this framework, the four principal *lha ri* and four *chu gu gnas pa* recorded in the *Gonjo Xianzhi* delineate a ritual quadrilateral whose configuration corresponds closely to the pattern of nearby Nyingma monasteries. At the center of this sacred field rises *gnai po ri*, the "Primordial Mountain," around which the other peaks, *rdo rje glang ka ri*, *sa dge gnam rdzong*, and *snang ba g.yu zhabs ri*, define the cardinal periphery. The resulting landscape assumes the form of a mandala, with *gnai po ri* as its axial heart. These mountains are not conceived as inert landforms but as the thrones of tutelary deities (*yul lha*) whose vitality animates both the natural environment and the social order within the cosmographic body of Gonjo. Together the mountains, springs, and monasteries compose a coherent sacred ecology in which geomorphology, hydrology, and ritual infrastructure interlock within a single system of vitality.

The analysis that follows reconstructs this system through an integrated use of gazetteer data, satellite imagery, and geographic correlation. Each *lha ri* is presented with its reconstructed Tibetan name, an English translation of the gazetteer description, and geographic coordinates, while the *chu gu gnas pa* are introduced with their reconstructed names and descriptive translations. The locations and Tibetan orthography for the monasteries follow those listed and mapped in the *Gonjo Xianzhi*, whereas the positions and spellings of the *lha ri* and *chu gu gnas pa* were independently reconstructed from the gazetteer descriptions and verified through satellite imagery. Coordinates for the *lha ri* were determined by matching township-level locational data and the physical appearance of the mountains, as described in the *Gonjo Xianzhi* and corresponding county maps, with high-resolution satellite

imagery on Google Earth. In one case, the identification of a Nyingma monastery situated at the mountain's base, also recorded in the gazetteer, provided additional confirmation of its location. For each sacred peak, a representative photograph documents its visible form and situates it within the modern landscape. The accompanying notes explain the basis for the reconstructed Tibetan orthography, derived from the Chinese phonetic renderings and cross-referenced with relevant Tibetan literary and ritual terminology preserved in the gazetteer text. Where uncertainty remains, provisional readings are indicated and will be refined as Tibetan-script sources become available through monastery records, local inscriptions, or future fieldwork.

I. Sacred Mountains (*lha ri*)

1. **Gna'i po ri** (Naibo Shen Shan 乃波神山): "Primordial Mountain." It is regarded as the foremost of the four holy peaks and the central seat of Gonjo's yul lha, protector of herds and pastures. Summit: 30° 38' 51" E, 98° 45' 26" E.



Figure 2. Gna'i po ri. Viewed from the West looking East.

"Located in the summer pasture of Axiang Village, Shadong Township, bordering Awang and Luomai townships, at an elevation of 5,442 meters. The summit of Mount Naibo (乃波神山 Naibo shenshan) remains snow-covered throughout the year; its slopes are steep, and its form solemn and majestic. It is the highest peak within a hundred li (about 50 kilometers) and is regarded as the mountain deity (shanshen

山神) in the hearts of the people from the six townships of the Sanyan (三岩, Tib. Sa-ngan) area. Each year, on the 15th day of the fourth and sixth Tibetan lunar months, the people of Sanyan (三岩) go to the mountain to make ritual offerings (jībài 祭拜), burn juniper incense (wēi sāng 煨桑), and present ceremonial scarves (jìngxian hǎdá 敬献哈达).” Gonjo Xianzhi p. 756.

Note on source for Tibetan Name: The Chinese form Naibo Shenshan (乃波神山) combines a phonetic transcription (Naibo ≈ gna’i po) with a semantic translation (Shenshan = ri). Therefore, it likely corresponds to the Tibetan gna’i po ri — “Primordial Mountain” —however an authoritative textual form of the Tibetan orthography remains to be located.

2. **Rdo rje glang ka ri** (Duoji Langka Shen Shan 多吉郎卡神山): “Vajra Elephant Mountain”. Summit: 30° 49’ 20” N, 98° 23’ 28” E.



Figure 3. *Rdo rje glang ka ri*. Viewed from the West Looking East. The long running north-south ridge has a white colored conglomerate base, with a smaller white colored summit area. The modern county-seat town of Gonjo is the light-colored built-up urban area in this image's lower-left area.

“Located at Edi Village in Molu Township, bordering Zeba Township, at an elevation of 4,900 m. The mountain ridge of Dorje Langka extends several tens of kilometers north–south and is regarded as a mountain deity (shanshen 山神) by the people of six townships in Gonjo. In *thangka* paintings, this deity is depicted as a warrior dressed in white, riding a white horse, and holding a willow branch (liǔ zhī 柳枝). Each year, on the 15th day of the first and fifth Tibetan lunar months, the people of Gonjo go to the mountain to make offerings and worship.”

Gonjo Xianzhi p. 756.

Note on source for Tibetan name: The Chinese form Duoji Langka Shenshan (多吉郎卡神山) corresponds to the Tibetan *Rdo rje glang ka*, however an authoritative textual form of the Tibetan orthography remains to be located. While no published source that I know of gives both the title *Rdo rje glang ka ri* ("Vajra-Elephant Mountain") and the horse-mounted form explicitly, the broader typology of Tibetan mountain deities supports the interpretive model: tribal/royal *rgyal po* gods in equestrian form were often overlaid with Sanskritic/tantric motifs (e.g., the elephant/vajra of power). For example, Xie (2001) shows how mountain gods initially functioned as protectors of local kings before becoming iconographically syncretized. Similar transformations are also seen in cases like Nyenchen Tanglha, depicted riding a white horse.

3. **Seng ge gnam rdzong** (Duomei Eqiong Shengge Langzong (多麦恩弥生格郎宗): "Lion Sky-Fortress Mountain". Summit: 31° 04' 42" N, 98° 05' 18".



Figure 4. *Seng ge gnam rdzong*. View to the West, with Nyag bla gonpa visible behind the lower south-east running ridge in the shape of a lion lying with its head facing southeast.

"Also called the Langqing Jingri Sacred Mountain of the Kham region, meaning the Emei Mountain of Tibet and the Zhongka Sacred Mountain. It is located behind Niangla (Tib. Nyag bla) Monastery in Xiangpi Township, at an elevation of 3,900 meters. According to legend, it belongs to the Ox year. The Duomei Eqiong Shengge Langzong Sacred Mountain extends several dozen kilometers to the northwest, and its form resembles a male lion lying with its head facing southeast." Gonjo Xianzhi, p. 756.

Note on source for Tibetan name: The Gonjo Xianzhi provides only Chinese phonetic transcriptions for this mountain: Duomei Eqiong Shengge Liangzong Shenshan (多麦俄琼生格郎宗神山) and the alternate Langqing Jingri Shenshan (郎庆景日神山). These transcriptions correspond approximately to the Tibetan form *Seng ge glang rdzong ri*, which may reflect an earlier or textual variant meaning “Lion-Bull Fortress Mountain.” However, the mountain is locally known as *Seng ge gnam rdzong*, literally “Lion Sky-Fortress.” The shift from *glang* (“bull”) to *gnam* (“sky”) likely represents a regional or semantic adaptation emphasizing the mountain’s celestial aspect. Independent confirmation of this form appears in Emily T. Yeh’s account of a short-lived local environmental association named *mdo smad ahn chung seng ge gnam rdzong rang mos skye khams khor yug srung skyong mthun tshogs* (“Voluntary Association for the Protection of the Natural Environment of Domed Anchung Sengge Namdzong”), whose work centered on a sacred mountain in Gonjo with a twelve-year circumambulation ritual (Yeh 2014). This evidence strongly supports the local attestation of the name *Seng ge gnam rdzong* and its identification with the principal sacred peak described in the *Gonjo Xianzhi*.

4. **Snang ba g.yu zhabs ri** (Nongwa Youzhe Shenshan 弄洼优者神山):
 “Turquoise-Base Mountain of Auspicious Radiance.”
 Summit: 30° 25' 41" N, 98° 33' 16" E.

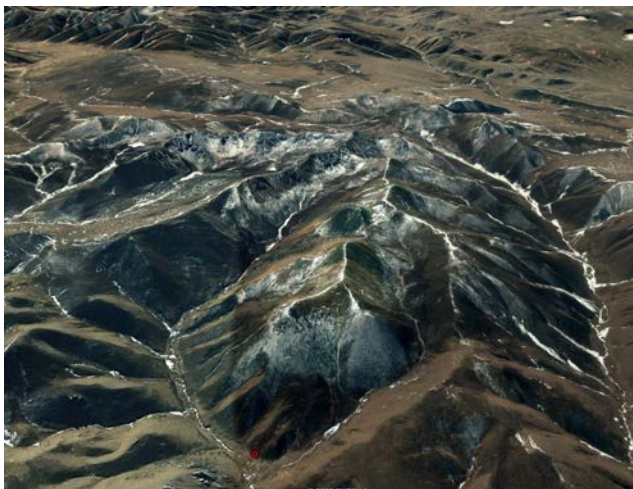


Figure 5. *Snang ba g.yu zhabs ri*. View to the South. Small red circle at northern base of mountain complex is the Nyingma monastery of *bskor khung*, whose name literally denotes a “circumambulatory hollow.” Rows of surrounding mountains correspond to the textual description of guardian *lha ri* arranged around the primary central peak.

“Located at the boundary between Awang Township and Lashou Township’s Zongba Village 位于阿旺乡与拉寿乡宗巴村交界处, elevation 5034 meters. According to legend, it belongs to the Dragon year. Nongwa Youzhe Sacred Mountain 弄洼优者神山 rises steep and majestic, standing in solemn dignity, and serves as the tutelary mountain for the people of nine villages in Awang and for Zongba Village. In front of this mountain there are also four sacred mountains arranged on either side.

Local people say on the right is the Monkey Youzhe Sacred Mountain (猴阿优者神山 *hou a youzhe shenshan*); on the left is the “Merchant” Sacred Mountain (冲本神山 *chongben shenshan*, likely denoting the Tibetan *tshong dpon* for merchant); and on the outermost sides stand the King (国王) and Queen (王后) Sacred Mountains as guardians. The five sacred mountains are tightly connected, forming a scene of great grandeur.” *Gonjo Xianzhi*, pp. 756–757.

Note on Source for Tibetan Names: The name “Nongwa Youzhe” (弄洼优者) recorded in the *Gonjo Xianzhi* represents a Chinese phonetic rendering of a Tibetan mountain deity title not given in Tibetan script; based on phonetic correspondence and the protective configuration described, Youzhe most plausibly reflects Tibetan *g.yu zhabs* (“turquoise-base/foot”). The semantic field of this epithet fits well with Karmay’s analysis of turquoise as the visible token of the *bla* (life-soul) and of mountain and local deities as guardians of territorial and ancestral power (Karmay, 1998a, pp. 318–20; 1998b, pp. 432–450). The first element may correspond to *snang ba* (“illumination, appearance”), though this remains provisional pending confirmation from local liturgical or inscriptional sources. The associated “Monkey Youzhe Sacred Mountain” (猴阿优者神山) likely preserves Tibetan *spre’u* (“monkey”), connected to lineage-guardian motifs; the “Merchant Sacred Mountain” (冲本神山) appears to render *tshong dpon* (“merchant-lord”), indicating a protector linked to regional trade routes; and the “King” and “Queen” correspond to a Tibetan royal-protector dyad, probably *rgyal po* and *btsun mo* types of territorial deities. Taken together, this five-mountain scheme reflects a coherent local sacred-geographic system centered on a turquoise-based main deity flanked by four directional protectors, consistent with well-attested cosmological patterns in eastern Tibet.

II. Sacred Springs (Chu gu gnas pa)

“The Ala (阿拉曲果泉 *Ala Quguo Quan*) and Shamaduilong (沙马堆龙曲果 *Shamaduilong Quguo*) Springs of Luome (罗麦乡) in the Sanyan (三岩)

region, together with the Maxi Spring of Xiongsong (雄松的玛希曲果 *Maxi Quguo*), and the Zhatong Spring of Muxie (木协的扎通曲果 *Zhatong Quguo*) are all revered by local people as divine springs. Historically, in these three townships of Gonjo's (贡觉) Sa-ngan (三岩) region, whenever mountain-worship ceremonies, village gatherings, or communal oath-swearing rituals were held, people would first proceed to these sacred springs to perform libations and purifications." *Gonjo Xianzhi*, p. 757.

Note on source for Tibetan names: The Chinese term 曲果 (*Quguo*) in each name reflects the Tibetan *chu gu*, meaning "spring" or "source of water." These four *chu gu* gnas pa, or sacred spring sites, are distributed across the valleys of San'an in the modern townships of Luome, Xiongsong, and Muxie (Figure 6). The possible Tibetan forms and meanings are as follows:

1. Ala Spring (阿拉曲果, *Ala Quguo*): *A la chu gu*, literally "Spring of A la." The name likely refers to a spring located near, or belonging to, the settlement of A la. The term *A la* also occurs widely in Tibet and the Himalaya, often associated with ancestral or protective deities such as the *A lha* or *A bla* (Ramble 1999). In the absence of direct ritual evidence, the name is best interpreted as a toponymic reference to the village, while the possibility of a secondary association with a tutelary *A lha* spirit remains open.
2. Shamaduilong Spring (沙马堆龙曲果, *Shamaduilong Quguo*): Possibly *Sha ma 'du'i lung chu gu* or *Sa mar to lung chu gu* ("Spring of Shama/Tsamar Village"). The name may derive from a nearby settlement rather than a descriptive phrase. While the element *'du'i lung* could mean "meeting valley" or "gathering of winds," this interpretation remains speculative; the more likely explanation is a toponymic reference to the village or locality known as Shama (or Samar).
3. Maxi Spring (玛希曲果, *Maxi Quguo*): *Ma gshi chu gu* or *Ma bzhi chu gu* (tentative reconstructions). The name most likely refers to a spring near the settlement of Ma xi, but the components *ma gshi* ("mother") and *ma bzhi* ("four mothers") are also familiar from Tibetan ritual and cosmological vocabulary, where "Four Mothers" can designate a group of protective or maternal deities (Sorensen 2007). In the absence of direct ritual or oral evidence from Gonjo, it is safest to treat *Ma xi* primarily as a place-name, while noting a possible secondary resonance with maternal or protective spirits.

4. Zhatong Spring (扎通曲果, Zhatong Quguo): Zha stong chu gu, literally “Spring of Zhatong.” The name most likely refers to a spring near the settlement of Zhatong. The element *stong* (“hundred,” “many”) can also signify abundance or plenitude, which may have encouraged the spring’s ritual esteem as a source of plentiful water. Although *Zha* occurs elsewhere as a clan or lineage name, there is no evidence that such an association applies here.

III. Nyingma Monasteries near the four Sacred Mountains of Gonjo

gNa’i po ri (Primordial Mountain): The nearby Nyingma monastery of *gTer sras* (“Heir of the Treasure”), about six kilometers northwest of the mountain’s summit, suggests a direct link between *gNai po ri* and the region’s treasure-revelation (*gter ma*) traditions (Figure 1). The name implies that the monastery was either founded by a disciple or reincarnation of a local *gter ston*, or that it served as a ritual center preserving the cycle of teachings revealed from the mountain itself, an example of the mountain–monastery revelation pairing characteristic of Kham. *gTer sras Gonpa* reportedly housed about 60 monks around 1950. Further northwest, roughly eighteen kilometers from the summit, lies *Nor dbang Gonpa* (“Wealth Empowerment Monastery”), a Nyingma site that once housed about 80 monks. Its name points to rites of prosperity and empowerment (*nor dbang*), often associated with deities such as Jambhala or Vaiśravaṇa. A third Nyingma monastery, *Bo mgo Gonpa*, situated about twenty-two kilometers northwest of the summit and formerly home to 25 monks, may also belong to the wider sacred field of *gNai po ri*, although its precise relation to the mountain and the origin of its name remain uncertain. None of these three monasteries have known founding dates, but from the terrain itself they appear to have been religious institutions positioned within human access and visual contact with *gNai po ri*, sites from which the mountain could actually be viewed or approached. Beyond the snow-class massif of *gNai po ri*, the terrain descends steeply, and these monasteries are strung along the main valley running northwestward. Considered together, they define both the outer ritual reach and the accessible human threshold of the mountain’s sacred landscape. While such correlations remain tentative, the pattern offers a valuable starting point for further textual and field-based investigation into how *gNai po ri* functioned as a spiritual and territorial center within this part of Gonjo.

rDo rje glang ka ri (Vajra Elephant Mountain): Extending roughly twenty-five kilometers along a north–south axis, *rDo rje glang ka ri*

(Vajra Elephant Mountain) forms one of the most striking ridges in this region and supports a small constellation of Nyingma monasteries and hermitages distributed along its western and southern slopes. Five such sites are recorded (*sKyid po Gonpa*, *Tsha ri Gonpa*, *Nyin mo ri khrod*, *Chos rgyas Gonpa*, and *dMar mo ri khrod*) all affiliated with the Nyingma tradition. Among them, only *sKyid po Gonpa* has a known founding date, established in 1687, and it was by far the largest, housing about 250 monks around 1950. The other monasteries were smaller: *Tsha ri Gonpa* housed roughly 60 monks, *Nyin mo ri khrod* about 80, *Chos rgyas Gonpa* around 50, and *dMar mo ri khrod* about 40, with no known surviving records of their founding periods. From the evidence of their distribution and nomenclature, these sites may have formed a coherent sacred cluster arrayed along the mountain's sun-facing slopes. Their names evoke a spectrum of meditative and tantric associations, peace (*sKyid po*), heat (*Tsha ri*), daylight (*Nyin mo*), flourishing doctrine (*Chos rgyas*), and red or wrathful energy (*dMar mo*). While these interpretations are speculative, the pattern suggests that *rDo rje glang ka ri* may have once served as a Nyingma ritual landscape organized around a hierarchy of monasteries and retreats situated along the ridge's accessible lower slopes, forming the human and symbolic threshold to the higher reaches of the mountain.

Seng ge gnam rdzong (Lion Sky-Fortress): At the base of *rDo rje glang ka ri* lies *Nyag bla Gonpa*, a Nyingma monastery that housed approximately 100 monks around 1950, though its founding date is unknown. Its name literally means 'the Life-Soul of the Nyag Valley (or Notch).' The term *bla* denotes both the vital essence of the land and its tutelary deity, suggesting that the monastery was established as the spiritual counterpart of the mountain itself. Its position marks the nexus between the divine body of the peak and the life-soul of the surrounding valley, exemplifying the integrated cosmology that linked sacred mountains, territorial deities, and monastic institutions throughout Kham.

Three km northwest of *Nyag bla Gonpa* is *bDe 'gro ri khrod*, a Nyingma retreat center whose name literally means "Hermitage of Blissful Beings". It housed roughly 140 monks around 1950, though its date of founding is unknown. The site appears to have served primarily as a place for extended meditation and retreat within the wider sacred landscape of the long ridge that forms *Seng ge gnam rdzong*.

About five kilometers northwest of *Nyag bla Gonpa* lies *Di'u dmar Gonpa*, a rare Kagyu establishment within this predominantly Nyingma landscape. Smaller than the neighboring Nyingma sites, it housed about 40 monks around 1950 and, likewise, has no known date

of founding. The name *Di'u dmar* may signify a “Red Spur” or “Red Peak,” referring to a subsidiary prominence or emanation-peak of *Seng ge gnam rdzong*. The monastery’s placement along the mountain’s long northwest–southeast ridge correspond to a wider pattern in which hermitages and retreat centers were established on major sacred mountains, serving as loci of protective and tantric rituals that complemented the visionary and oracular functions of adjacent Nyingma institutions.

sNang ba g.yu zhabs ri (Turquoise-Base Mountain of Auspicious Radiance): At the northern base of this mountain complex is the Nyingma monastery of *Bskor khung*, whose name literally denotes a “circumambulatory hollow,” and likely functioned as the ritual center for the mountain cult. *Bskor khung gonpa* housed about 50 monks around 1950, though its founding date is unknown. Its position within the sacred basin at the base of the mountain suggests that the monastic community oversaw the village pilgrimages around the mountain circuit, preserving one of the clearest integrations of Bon-derived sacred geography within a Buddhist institutional framework in Gonjo.

The linkage to Bon traditions is indicated by both the deity typology and spatial organization. In Kham, *g.yu zhabs* epithets (“Turquoise-Base”) are strongly associated with indigenous mountain and water deities central to Bon territorial cults, where turquoise embodies the vitality (*bla*) of land and lineage. The presence of the Nyingma monastery of *Bskor khung* (“circumambulatory hollow”) at the northern foot of the peak shows that Buddhist clerical authority was grafted directly onto an older Bon foundation: the monastery’s very name encodes the ritual act of encircling the mountain (*skor ra*), a core Bon practice of territorial renewal and propitiation of mountain lords. Here, the Buddhist institution effectively administered a traditional mountain circuit, integrating Bon-protective rites, appeasing local earth and sky deities, with Nyingma tantric ritual. The result is a syncretic sacred basin in which a pre-Buddhist geomantic system persists under Buddhist guardianship, making *Snang ba g.yu zhabs ri* one of the most explicit examples of Bon-derived sacred geography preserved within a monastery-centered ritual order that reinterprets indigenous cosmology through the idiom of Buddhist territorial protection (Huber 1994, 1998).

IV. Nyingma Temples and Monasteries near the Sacred Springs

The precise locations of the sacred springs (*chu gu gnas pa*) recorded in

the *Gonjo Xianzhi* cannot yet be established from satellite imagery, it is not possible to analyze their associated temples and monasteries in the same spatial detail as those around the sacred mountains (*lha ri*). The springs (*A la chu gu*, *Sha ma 'dui rlung chu gu*, *Ma gshi chu gu*, and *Zha stong chu gu*) may today be covered or rechanneled beneath modern bathhouse or spa structures, a pattern common in places where geothermal springs have been developed for local use. Alternatively, they may lie within wooded valleys where direct field observation or local knowledge would be required to confirm their positions. In this section, therefore, comparison rests not on mapping but on the language of local monastery names in the three townships listed where the springs are located (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Nyingma temples and monasteries in relation to townships (Ch. Xiang) near Sacred Springs (*Chu gu gnas pa*) in the Sa-ngan (Ch. 三岩) region. Refer also to the legend in Figure 1.

The toponyms of monasteries situated near the sacred mountains (*lha ri*) and sacred springs (*chu gu gnas pa*) appear to follow consistent, though still tentative, patterns of meaning within Gonjo's sacred landscape. The western part of the county, dominated by high terrain and containing most of the *lha ri*, includes monasteries such as *Gter sras*, *Nyag bla*, *Di'u dmar*, *Bde 'gro*, *Skyid po*, *Tsha ri*, *Nyin mo*, *Chos rgyas*, *Dmar mo*, and *Bskor khung*, whose names evoke qualities of being and spiritual vitality such as life, happiness, light, and Dharma. Several also feature emblematic animals such as the lion (*seng ge*) and elephant (*glang ka*), which seem to function not as natural species but as heraldic or divine attributes, symbols of voice, power, and stability embodied in the mountain itself. In contrast, the lower valley to the east, in what was historically known as the *Sa-ngan* region along the Dri chu, contains small monastic houses near the spring sites, perhaps better described as *lha khang*, these include *Le*, *Rna ri*, *Chos khri*, and *Rgyal mtshan*. Their names relate to the sensory and material world, based on sound and emblems of victory. The element *rna* means "ear," designating the faculty of hearing and may, in this place, evoke the immediacy of sound and resonance associated with flowing water and ritual recitation. *Rgyal mtshan*, "victory-banner," refers to a visual and tactile emblem raised to mark triumph and auspicious power; its presence in a place-name transforms the site into one of proclamation and vitality. *Khri*, meaning "throne," similarly belongs to the world of crafted material objects, denoting elevation, seat, and display. These terms may work to situate the springs within a field of sensory experience sites, grounding sacred meaning in perceptible form. These contrasts remain interpretive rather than proven, yet they indicate two complementary ways of conceiving sacred space in Gonjo: the mountains as elevated, personified presences and the springs as vital, animate sources of the landscape's generative force.

A further distinction lies in the scale and institutional character of the sites associated with these two sacred zones. Around the *lha ri*, even the smaller monasteries generally housed between 100 and 200 monks, with larger centers such as *Skyid po dgon pa* reaching about 250. These were substantial establishments, sustained by landed estates and organized around year-round ritual cycles that projected their influence across the surrounding valleys. Around the *chu gu gnas pa*, by contrast, the pattern shifts toward smaller centers with less than 100 monks, and also small *dgon pa* or *lha khang* with as few as 5 to 20 monks. This reduction in size reflects both the deeply incised terrain of the Dri chu valley, where narrow alluvial shelves constrain settlement, and the more localized ritual functions of the springs themselves: places of purification, oath-taking, and fertility rites rather than major scholastic or

administrative centers. The *chu gu* monasteries thus articulate a smaller domestic scale of sacred geography, complementing the monumental and territorial orientation of the *lha ri* complexes.

Conclusion: Geomantic Structure and Territorial Mandala

These four sacred springs lie directly below *gNai po ri*, in the remote *Sa-ngan* region, one of the *rong* of Kham, that forms the lower, eastern extension of its sacred field, where the descending waters of the mountain emerge as sources of fertility and vitality. The other three *lha ri* described in the *Gonjo Xianzhi* (*rDo rje glang ka ri*, *Phywa bzhi g.yu zhabs ri*, and *Sa dge glang rdzong ri*) lie farther afield in the higher western agropastoral zone of Gonjo proper, enclosing the northern, western, and southern horizons. Together they delineate the outer circuit of Gonjo's sacred geography, with *gNai po ri* standing as the axial peak that governs the flow of life between mountain, spring, and settlement.

Although none of the *lha ri* or *chu gu gnas pa* identified in the *Gonjo Xianzhi* are known from extant treasure catalogues or Nyingma hagiographies, their spatial organization and symbolic attributes clearly resonate with the wider logic of *gter* geography in eastern Tibet. The alignment of axial peaks, life-soul springs, and monastic foundations in Gonjo reflects the same geomantic grammar that underlies the mapping of canonical *gter gnas* across Kham, where the revelation of treasure is not limited to textual disclosure but extends to the recognition of terrain as an inherently sacred archive. In this sense, the Gonjo landscape embodies a latent treasure field (*gter sa*) in the Nyingma cosmological sense, its mountains and waters arranged as potential sites of revelation within a living territorial mandala. Germano (2005) observes that the treasure tradition was a visionary process that effectively renders Tibetan space itself, its mountains, caves, and regions, a continuing medium of scriptural disclosure and sacred memory. As he further notes, the treasure narratives of the Great Perfection portray revelation as a spatial process, in which scriptures are concealed in specific caches and re-excavated centuries later. This recursive relation of concealment and discovery transforms the Tibetan landscape into a repository of revelation, a terrain where history and sacred geography converge. As Achard (2024) notes, in traditional Nyingma and Bon perspectives, a *treasure sanctuary* (*gter gnas*) itself ensures the prosperity and good fortune of its surrounding region, linking the revelation site directly to the fertility and wellbeing of the land.

Beyond its immediate findings, this reconstruction underscores how little of Gonjo's sacred geography has yet entered the record of Tibetan studies. With the partial exception of a single *lha ri* name appearing in the title of a short-lived local association, and of course the

listings preserved in the *Gonjo Xianzhi* itself, none of the mountains or springs identified here have been documented in any other published research or standard inventories of Tibetan sacred sites. The significance of this absence is not that these places are minor, but that the means to recover them already lie within reach, embedded in the modern county gazetteers, satellite imagery, and the enduring visibility of the landscape itself. Rather than seeking further textual attestations of the few canonical mountains and pilgrimage centers long celebrated in the literature, this study demonstrates that a tentative yet coherent mapping of lesser-known sites is already possible through empirical spatial analysis. The implication is methodological as much as historical: the sacred geography of Tibet cannot be fully reconstituted by textual interpretation alone, but must be read as a living terrain whose patterns persist independently of textual revelation, awaiting rediscovery through the geography itself.

More broadly, the reconstruction presented here also forms part of the larger Tibetan Monastic Ritual Economy Model project and its associated Historical Atlas of Kham, a regional-scale historical GIS reconstruction of monasteries, sacred geography, ritual networks, and monastic settlement systems across eastern Tibet prior to the mid-twentieth century. The gazetteer-derived sacred sites, monastery locations, and reconstructed geographic data used in studies such as the present one will be made openly available through the forthcoming *Historical Atlas of Kham: A Cartographic Companion to the Tibetan Monastic Ritual Economy Model Database. Kham Edition, Version 1*, planned for release later this year through the University of California's eScholarship platform. By integrating local sacred landscapes such as Gonjo into a wider comparative spatial framework, this broader project seeks to provide an open-access geographic foundation for future historical and religious studies of eastern Tibet.

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The Infancy of the Seventh Karma pa, Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506): Renewing the Bond with His Former Disciples

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1. Introduction¹

In this study, an annotated translation of passages from two sources describing the infancy of the Seventh Karma pa, Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506), along with an analysis of their content, symbolism, and historical context within the framework of Vajrayāna Buddhism is presented. The recurrent theme of the text is the renewal of the teacher–student relationship between the young Karma pa and his disciples from his previous life. The text mainly recounts his travels, describing numerous visions, miracles and pointing-out instructions addressed to various individuals or groups of disciples. The sources used are the *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (“Feast of the Wise”) by dPa' bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba (1504–1564/66) and the *Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud gser 'phreng* (“Golden Garland of the Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud”) by Si tu Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699/1700–1774) and his student 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab (1718–ca. 1790), the *rnam thar* of the Seventh Karma pa having been composed by the latter.

Life stories (Tib. *rnam thar*) of Tibetan Buddhist masters exhibit different levels of content, classically divided into outer, inner, and secret life stories.² The genre of *rnam thar* is meant to depict the “complete liberation” of the protagonist, as its Tibetan name suggests. In this respect, the secret life story (Tib. *gsang ba'i rnam thar*) may be the most defining for the genre, since it contains mystical events experienced by the protagonist—miraculous dreams, visions, and supernatural phenomena—all representing realization of the nature of mind.

On the outer level, the passage analyzed here presents the infant Karma pa's travels to meet the disciples of his predecessor at various

¹ I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Tashi Bhutia for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper, which I greatly appreciated.

² This classification is attributed to sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705) (Vostrikov 1994, 186–87).

Karma bka' brgyud sites. However, the situations described at each location can almost entirely be ascribed to the secret level. The infant performs miracles such as recognizing possessions of his predecessor, recalling details about former disciples, and speaking at an early age.³ Furthermore, he shares his pure perception (Tib. *dag snang*) of the world, seeing meditational deities in the sky around him or emanating himself as one.⁴ In all these situations, the recurring theme is the renewal of the Karma pa's bond with his previous disciples. Whatever the infant does, the result is always that the audience gains trust in him. It becomes evident from the text that these are not mere displays of "magic," in the sense of spectacular external phenomena one cannot explain, but manifestations of blessing (Tib. *byin rlabs*)—explicitly or implicitly conveyed—that transform the audience and remove all doubt. To bestow blessing is precisely the function of the lama according to the Buddhist doctrine. It ultimately demonstrates his realization of the nature of mind, which is the purpose of the secret level of *rnam thar*.

At several points, the young Karma pa also imparts short teachings to his students which can be regarded as "pointing-out instructions (into the nature of mind)" (Tib. *sems kyi ngo bo la ngo sprod pa*, often shortened to *ngo sprod*), a distinctive feature of the bKa' brgyud Mahāmudrā tradition.⁵ This term refers to a moment in teacher-student transmission when the lama gives a concise instruction intended to induce immediate recognition of the nature of mind. Such instructions are typically terse and employ aphoristic or list-like phrasing that discourages conceptual elaboration.⁶ Pointing-out instructions may be transmitted in words, through a look or gesture, or even in a moment of silence in the teacher's presence. Their defining feature is not the mode of expression but the purpose—to serve as a direct means for disciples to recognize the nature of mind. The text under consideration also includes examples of this non-verbal form of *ngo sprod*.

The paper draws on two different sources describing the infancy—and indeed the entire life—of the Seventh Karma pa, Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506). The first is a historiographical work of the "Religious History" (Tib. *chos 'byung*) genre called "Feast of the Wise" (Tib. *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*; hereafter CKG), composed by the historian dPa'

³ For a brief introduction into miracles in *rnam thar*, see also Dell 2021c, 10–14.

⁴ For a brief introduction into visionary experiences in *rnam thar*, see also Dell 2021a, 13–16.

⁵ A term closely related to this is *sems ngo 'phrod pa* ("encountering the nature of mind"). This rather refers to the experiential event or result of the pointing-out instruction (sGom sde lha rams pa thub bstan 2005–2016, s.v. *sems ngo 'phrod pa*).

⁶ For a recent and more extensive introduction into *ngo sprod*, with many references—both within and beyond the bKa' brgyud tradition, see Apple 2020, 170–73.

bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba (1504–1564/66).⁷ The second is also historiographical, belonging to the “Golden Garland” (Tib. *gser 'phreng*) genre, often referred to as the “Golden Garland of the Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud” (Tib. *Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud gser 'phreng*; hereafter KSP) or by its ornamental title “Moonstone Water-Crystal Mālā” (Tib. *Nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba*, often shortened to *Zla ba chu shel*). It was written by the polymath Si tu Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699/1700–1774), also known as Si tu Paṇ chen, and his student 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab (1718–ca. 1790).⁸ The part concerned with the Seventh Karma pa's life was written by 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab.⁹

The KSP has become the standard reference for Karma bKa' brgyud scholars concerned with the lives of their lineage's masters. Its language is relatively accessible, and its organization is more chronological than that of the earlier CKG, another foundational Karma bka' brgyud historical work.¹⁰ As for the passages considered in this paper, both sources follow the same storyline and content, but the CKG is generally more detailed. The Seventh Karma pa died in 1506, while dPa' bo was born in 1504. Being almost a contemporary, he likely had access to informants who knew the Seventh Karma pa personally. Nevertheless, he must also have relied on earlier written sources, not all of which might have come down to us; identifying them remains a task for ongoing and future research.¹¹

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents an annotated translation of both texts, Section 3 analyzes their content, and Section 4 offers concluding remarks. An appendix (Section 5) contains an edition of the Tibetan text.

⁷ For an overview of the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, see Dell 2021d. For the life of its author, see Bjerregaard and Dell 2022.

⁸ For an overview of the *Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud gser 'phreng* and references concerning the lives of its authors, see Dell 2023. For the life of 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab, see also Bhutia 2023, 7–9.

⁹ Dell 2023 40; Bhutia 2023, 8.

¹⁰ Rheingans 2017, 69.

¹¹ Tashi Bhutia of the University of Vienna is working on a PhD project entitled “The Life and Contribution of the Seventh Karmapa: Leadership and Scholarship in Tibetan Buddhism,” in which he analyzes the different sources on the Seventh Karma pa's life. He pointed out to me that an extensive *rnam thar* contained in the Seventh Karma pa's *Collected Works* may have served as a major source for both the CKG and the KSP (Chos grags rgya mtsho 2013). He also shared that, unfortunately, this text is incomplete, and the author and date of composition are unknown, and that further close reading and comparison will be required to understand the intertextual relationship among these three texts (personal e-mail October 8, 2025).

2. Translation

In this section, I provide an annotated translation of the opening portion—up to about age two—of the Seventh Karma pa's life story from two sources. The older source, the CKG, is generally more extensive, while the later KSP, is slightly more concise, omitting some passages. However, the two are not contradictory.

The opening of the Seventh Karma pa's life story in the CKG, covering his birth and preceding events, has already been translated elsewhere.¹² Therefore, I do not reproduce it here but summarize it in the analysis section. As for the KSP, to my knowledge, the corresponding part has not been translated previously. Therefore, it is included here.

2-1. Translation from the CKG 2-1-1. Meeting with Chos dpal 'byor

Although [the Karma pa's] parents had promised to [keep the birth] secret, after [someone] announced, "A Dharma master has been born to a male and a female hermit in sPyi nang", [the news] spread in all directions like the wind. All spiritual and worldly leaders, as well as laypeople and monks, [within] a three-day journey gathered [there]. Thus, [the matter] could not [remain] secret.

When Chos dpal 'byor,¹³ holder of the seat of sNye bo da ra steng,¹⁴ heard [this], [he] thought about going to meet [the infant]. In a dream, [he] saw [the infant] seated on [his] mother's lap and offered him [his former] hat. [He] then recounted the story to an elderly lama, [adding,] "I dreamt of the sun and moon shining on the mountain pass of sPyi lha and merging into one." [The elderly lama] replied, "There is no need for doubt! Take the hat, clothes, and boots of the previous master and go!"

¹² This part of the *rnam thar* was translated and analyzed in four separate papers covering the account of the intermediate state between the two incarnations (Dell 2020), visionary experiences prior to the birth (Dell 2021a), the description of the birthplace (Dell 2021b), and the auspicious signs and events at the birth (Dell 2021c).

¹³ For a discussion of this figure's identity, see the analysis section of this paper.

¹⁴ Tib. *snye bo da ra steng*. The first part *snye* probably refers to *snye mo*, a district in Tibet (BDRC, G3CN138). In the CKG, it clearly reads *snye bo da ra steng*. Later in both the KSP and CKG, the place name again appears as *da ra steng* in the region of *snye bo*. However, in the parallel passage in the KSP, the term clearly reads *snye bong ra steng*, which in Tibetan script looks almost identical. The part *bong ra steng* is found in BDRC as a hamlet (BDRC, G1258). Still, for the given reasons, *snye bo da ra steng* seems the more convincing reading. BDRC stands for Buddhist Digital Resource Center (<https://www.bdrc.io/>). In the following text, footnotes, and bibliography, I frequently use the abbreviation BDRC followed by an alphanumerical code identifying the person, location, or work in the BDRC database.

[Chos dpal 'byor] arrived fifteen days after the birth. Seeing him, [the infant] laughed and was delighted. [Equipped] with the clothes and the hat of the previous master, [Chos dpal 'byor] offered the clothes and the hat of the master rTogs ldan pa [to the infant]. [The infant] took the items of the previous master with [his] hands but did not accept anything else. [Chos dpal 'byor then] entreated [him]: “If you are the omniscient mThong ba don ldan,¹⁵ please bless me.” Therefore, [the infant] placed both hands on the crown of [his] head and repeatedly bestowed [his] blessing [upon him], thereby dispelling all doubt.

2-1-2. Reincarnation of the Zhwa dmar pa taken for the Karma pa

Furthermore, in the [water-]monkey year (1452/53), the tulku Chos dpal ye shes¹⁶ [Third Zhwa dmar pa] passed away. Just after the New Year of the [water-]bird year (1453), the previous master mThong ba don ldan had passed away. Likewise, in the [water-]bird year (1453/54), the tulku [Chos dpal ye shes] was reborn in Kre khang dmar¹⁷ [as] the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa.¹⁸

Many miraculous signs appeared, and because [the baby] immediately uttered “Karma pa” after [his] birth—understood as “I am the Karma pa”—[he] was, for a short time, also known as the seventh [incarnation of the] master.

Later, when the actual tulku was born, some doubt arose as to which of the two was the [genuine] tulku, but [the matter] was resolved [through the recognition of the real Karma pa]. Likewise, the tulku of Kre [khang dmar]—this very reincarnation—was thus recognized as the [rightful] holder of the red crown. Afterward, the holder of the seat of Da ra¹⁹ stayed as an attendant and served to the tulku's successor.

2-1-3. Public performance in A rig thang at age two months

When [the Karma pa] reached two months of age, all monks and

¹⁵ Name of the Sixth Karma pa (1416–1453); see BDRC, P1006.

¹⁶ BDRC, P1010: Third Zhwa dmar pa, Chos dpal ye shes (1406–1452).

¹⁷ Here, Kre khang dmar. In BDRC, G667, the birthplace of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa is listed as Kre shod khang dmar or Tre shod khang dmar (the name of a valley).

¹⁸ BDRC, P317: Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524).

¹⁹ I was unable to identify the place called Da ra or the person referred to as the holder of this seat. However, in the previous section, Chos dpal 'byor was described as the “holder of the seat of sNye bo **da ra** steng.” Thus, it is probably the same person.

householders of the rNgod [region] invited [him] to A rig thang.²⁰ [He] sat upon the Dharma throne of the previous master, and when [he] showed [his] face on the great marketplace, [he] accepted gifts one after another with [his] hands.

After bestowing blessings, [he] looked slowly at the crowd and gently wiped [his] face three times with [his] right hand. [He] then dwelled in meditative equipoise and practiced gazes. As [he] remained [in that state], having a radiant body, [everyone present] was awestruck and filled with faith.

*2-1-4. Spreading of the news that
the Karmapa's reincarnation was found*

The holder of the seat²¹ even sent a messenger to deliver the good news to dBus,²² Karma [dgon]²³, and other places.

When the venerable Go shrī pa²⁴ was fulfilling the golden pinnacle of wishes of the deceased [Karma pa], leading [his] encampment to dBus, [he] was overjoyed that the arrival of the good news coincided with the rising sun, the first cuckoo's call this year, and the sound of thunder. Having consulted the venerable 'Jam dbyangs chen po²⁵, [he] confirmed that the names of the [Karma pa's] parents and his birthplace matched [his] dream. [Thus,] the two Go shrī²⁶ resolved the

²⁰ Tib. *a rig thang*. This could also be rendered as "the plain" or "flatlands" of A rig. I could find references only to a place called A rig in the A mdo region. However, in this context, A rig must be located in the rNgod area, which is part of Kong po.

²¹ In the text at hand, Chos dpal 'byor is first referred to as the "holder of the seat of sNye bo **da ra** steng," then as the "holder of the seat of Da ra," and now simply as "the holder of the seat." Given the context, it is likely that these all refer to the same person—Chos dpal 'byor.

²² A large area also denoted as Central Tibet in English.

²³ An important Karma bka' brgyud monastery located in Khams (eastern Tibet) and founded by the First Karma pa, Dus gsum mkhyen pa in 1184 (BDRC, G35).

²⁴ The person referred to as Go shrī pa is the First mTshur phu rgyal tshab, Go shrī dPal 'byor don grub (1427–1489); see BDRC, P1380. He served as the regent of the Karma bka' brgyud lineage between the Sixth and the Seventh Karma pas (Gardner 2011a). He was previously mentioned in the CKG (Dell 2020, 48) and the KSP (translated in this paper) as the one to whom the Sixth Karma pa entrusted his testament and the names of his parents.

²⁵ The person referred to as 'Jam dbyangs chen po is again mTshur phu 'Jam dbyangs chen po, Don grub 'od zer, also known as Go shrī Don grub 'od zer; see BDRC, P1417. He served as abbot of mTshur phu Monastery until 1449. For more information, see Schuh, 2010. He and his dream were mentioned earlier in the CKG text (see Dell 2021b, 87) and also in the KSP, translated in the paper at hand.

²⁶ Both individuals bear "Go shrī" as part of their title, as noted in the preceding footnotes. The First mTshur phu rgyal tshab, **Go shrī** dPal 'byor don grub, was the regent at that time and consulted mTshur phu 'Jam dbyangs chen po, Don grub 'od zer—also known as **Go shrī** Don grub 'od zer—who had a prophetic dream concerning the Karma pa's parents and birthplace.

matter without dispute. [Then, they] sent an attendant to serve tea.²⁷

The good news reached Karma [dgon] during the waxing moon of the third month, and the meeting brought great delight. At that time, Khams²⁸ [was suffering] a severe drought, but from that very night, heavy snow began to fall.

Many [individuals]—among them the lama of 'Brug brag, Tshogs chen bSod rnam rdo rje²⁹—dreamt of great auspicious banners being drawn from a mountain peak before [them]. After [these] banners appeared, [they] were hoisted on the rooftops of a monastery³⁰ in the mountains; conch shells were blown and other [auspicious signs followed]. As a result, everyone's doubts were dispelled.

2-1-5. Utterance in Ber bsnol at age three months

When [the Karma pa] was three months old, in Ber bsnol³¹ in the rNgod [region], bZher bla³² made a provocative request. [He] said: "It seems to people that you are not the Karma pa. The previous masters, among other things, began to speak at this [age of three] months. [They] showed many signs of accomplishment. If you are mThong ba don ldan, [you] need to [show] signs of trust and start speaking."

He replied:

"I [am] the one named Karma [pa].

A person like me is rare.

There are some who have a connection with me.

I have the aspiration not to deceive [those].

Until [my] thirteenth month is completed,
These words [will be] sealed [with] great secrecy.
Then, the signs of my being beyond dispute

²⁷ Tib. *gsol gzims gnyis ja 'dren la btang/*. This sentence is difficult to translate and could have a different meaning altogether. The phrase *gsol gzims gnyis* is especially difficult to analyze. I found *gsol gzims mchod gsum* used to denote an attendant responsible for the domains of nutrition (*gsol*), bedroom (*gzims*), and ritual (*mchod*); see Yísün, 1985, *s.v.* *gsol gzims mchod gsum*. Accordingly, *gsol gzims gnyis* should refer to an attendant responsible for nutrition and bedroom duties.

²⁸ Tib. *mdo khams*. This is a region in eastern Tibet whose name is usually shortened to Khams.

²⁹ I could not find any reference to this person or the related place name.

³⁰ Tib. *gling*. The word can refer to different types of places, such as "continents" or "parks." However, because the term also appears in the name of many monasteries and context indicates a building, it most likely refers to a monastery.

³¹ I could not find any reference to this place, but it can at least be identified as a location in the rNgod region.

³² I could not find any reference to this name, nor to the variant bZher bya in KSP.

Will gradually become clear.”³³

2-1-6. *Visit of the sNye bo region at age five months*

Then, when [he] was invited to the sNye bo region and stayed [there] at Da ra steng, a letter from the Karma Si tu pa³⁴ was presented to the Karma [pa] by the lCags mo dbon po,³⁵ gSer bya bral ba bsod ye,³⁶ and others. [He] took the letter, placed [his] finger on the lines and sequentially looked at [them]. Then, [he] appeared to read with a barely audible voice.

After having uttered “dPal ldan rdo rje” (Glorious Vajra),³⁷ [he] came to the lap of lCags mo dbon po. [He] took the hand of the renunciate,³⁸ and was very delighted. Since [he] mentioned the names of most of [his] former disciples, all developed faith. Remembering past situations, [they] cried and fainted choked up by faith. After that, gSer bya bral ba³⁹ served [the Karma pa] with his body and followed [him] like a shadow.

When [the Karma pa] was staying in sNye bo'i ga gor kha⁴⁰ at the age of five months, someone displayed some kind of rough behavior

³³ In Tibetan, the Karma pa's speech is composed in verse—eight lines of seven syllables each. Accordingly, in English it is rendered in verse-like formatting.

³⁴ In the present scene, the Karma pa is only between three and five months old, meaning that it must take place in 1454. At that time, the Second Si tu, bKra shis nam rgyal (1450–1497) (see BDRC, P820), was only four years old. Nevertheless, he had already been recognized as a tulku by the Sixth Karma pa (Gyatso 2014a). Given that tulkus often possess unusual abilities, it could have been he who wrote the letter or some from his entourage on his behalf, although it might also have been written by his predecessor, the First Si tu, Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1377–1448) (see BDRC, P3572; Gyatso 2014b).

³⁵ I could not find a reference to this personal name. As for the first part (*lcags mo*), it could be a place name. The only reference I found to this place was in Dan Martin's “Tibetan Proper Name Index,” which cites a book chapter mentioning it as an area in eastern Tibet (Tsering 1992). The second part (*dbon po*) means “uncle's nephew” and may indicate that he belonged to a hereditary succession line from uncle to nephew, which was not uncommon in Tibet (Duff 2009, s.v. *khu dbon*).

³⁶ It is not entirely clear whether this is an apposition to the preceding name or a separate name in a list. However, since the two are separated by a *bshad*, they are probably distinct names. In any case, I could not find any reference to this second name.

³⁷ Tib. *dpal ldan rdo rje*. From the context, it seems that the infant Karma pa refers to the Si tu pa when uttering “dPal ldan rdo rje,” after having read Si tu pa's letter, and then goes to the lap of lCags mo dbon po who—having brought the letter—represents the Si tu pa.

³⁸ Tib. *bya bral*. This must refer to of lCags mo dbon po.

³⁹ This name was mentioned a few sentences earlier.

⁴⁰ The first part of this place name already appeared earlier in the text and refers to the sNye bo region. Even though I could not find a reference to the second part, it must be a locality—such as a town, village, or monastery—within that region.

in front of [him], therefore, he said:

“Aham! The illusory expression [of] bliss-emptiness,
In the play [of] manifold wisdoms,
Is seen as true by the immature.
I am free from arising, ceasing, and abiding.”⁴¹

*2-1-7. Meeting with Go shrī Rin po che in sNye bo
at age nine months*

When [the Karma pa] was nine months old, Go shrī Rin po che⁴² came from dBus and met [him] in the new monastery of sNye bo. [The Karma pa’s] body was endowed with brilliant splendor. [He] was delighted and accepted [Go shrī Rin po che’s] gifts one by one.

Holding a conch shell in his hands, [the infant] said: “This is mine!” Considering [this] and other inconceivable miracles, [Go shrī Rin po che] bestowed upon him the name Rang byung kun mkhyen chos kyi rgyal po (Self-Arisen All-Knowing King of the Dharma).

In the great encampment known as “Great Ornament of the World”, [the Karma pa] sat upon a lion throne.

2-1-8. Visiting Nags phu at age eleven months

At the age of eleven months, [he] was invited by [the abbot of] Nags phu [Monastery]⁴³ and recited the alphabet before the people gathered in the market of Nags mda’.⁴⁴

2-1-9. New Year at mDo chen at age one (1455)

When he was staying at mDo chen⁴⁵ for the New Year of the [wood-

⁴¹ In Tibetan, the Karma pa’s speech is composed in verse, consisting of four lines of seven syllables each. Accordingly, in English it is rendered in verse-like formatting.

⁴² Already mentioned earlier in the text: the First mTshur phu rgyal tshab, Go shrī dPal ’byor don grub (1427–1489); see BDRC, P1380.

⁴³ Nags phu is a monastery in the Kong po region founded by the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339); see Roerich 1988, 529. Literally, *phu* means “upper reaches,” and *mda’* means “lower reaches.” Thus, these are probably two places close to each other—a monastery in the mountains and a village in the valley.

⁴⁴ Nags phu and Nags mda’ are probably two places close to each other: a monastery in the mountains and a village in the valley.

⁴⁵ There is a rNying ma monastery called *mDo chen dgon* located in eastern Tibet and founded in 1311 (BDRC, G1KR43). However, it is unclear why the Karma pa would have stayed in a monastery belonging to another lineage. There is also a sub-branch of the ‘Brug pa bKa’ brgyud called *mDo chen bKa’ brgyud*, active in Mang yul Gung thang, whose name originates from a place in that region—*mDo bo che*

lpig (1455), he declared: "I am Vajradhara."⁴⁶ Offering an aspiration prayer for someone, [he] said: "May you be reborn in Tuṣita."⁴⁷

Also, when others asked questions, [he] replied:

"There is no need for doubt. [You] should rely on the words of the bKa' brgyud lamas. Ḍākinīs⁴⁸ and Dharma protectors⁴⁹ will perform enlightened activity and be there. Saraha, Virūpa and Kukkuripa⁵⁰ are abiding in the sky. I adhere to the life stories of these three."

Then, [he] pointed to the sky. [His] mother also saw their faces.

At the upper reaches of mDo chen, [the Karma pa] said [to her]: "[You] should manage to sever [it]."

[His mother] asked: How does one sever [it]?"

[He] replied: "The [dualistic] mind itself is severed from [its] root."

[The mother] asked: "How does one sever [it] from the root?"

He replied: "Through meditation."

[The mother] said: "[I] don't know how to [do that]."

Therefore, pointing to the sky, [he] replied: "[It] is without center or boundary."

2-1-10. Visit of the Long po region

[The Karma pa] was invited to the Long po [region,⁵¹ where] all [those present] attained unwavering faith.

2-1-11. Emanation as Hayagrīva at age two

In the [fire-]mouse year (1456/57),⁵² when [he] was residing in sPug

in Phu lag (Erhard 2008, 27–28). Hence, it is difficult to determine precisely which place is referred to here.

⁴⁶ Tib. *rdo rje 'chang*. Vajradhara is considered the primordial Buddha in the bKa' rgyud tradition and is often used as an epithet for one's own lama (Duff 2009, s.v. *rdo rje 'chang*).

⁴⁷ Tib. *dga' ldan*. According to Buddhist tradition, Tuṣita is the heaven where Buddhas reside before taking birth in the world. According to his account of the intermediate state (*bar do'i rnam thar*), the Seventh Karma pa also dwelled in this realm before his birth (Dell 2020, 50).

⁴⁸ Tib. *mkha' 'gro (ma)*. Skt. *dākinī*. Ḍākinīs are female Buddhas often depicted naked and semi-wrathful. They are associated with wisdom but also with protective activity (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 209).

⁴⁹ Tib. *chos skyong*. Skt. *dharmapāla*. This term can refer either to enlightened beings who appear in wrathful form to protect the Dharma or to local deities who were subdued and converted into Dharma protectors (*ibid.*, 249–50).

⁵⁰ Tib. *sa ra ha birwa pa ku ku ri pa gsum*. Saraha, Virūpa, and Kukkuripa are three of the Eighty-four Mahāsiddhas and are regarded as the Indian forefathers of the bKa' brgyud lineage transmitted to Tibet by Marpa through Nāropā. For further information on the Mahāsiddhas, see Dowman 1985.

⁵¹ Long po is a large area located in Kong po (BDRC, G3491).

⁵² At that time, the Seventh Karma pa was about two years old.

do bo,⁵³ [his] mother witnessed [him] emanating as Hayagrīva⁵⁴ [with] a wheel of weapons.

[She] asked: “Why are you acting like this?”

[The Karma pa] replied: “I have subdued obstructing forces. Don’t tell anyone!”

On the tenth day [of the month, he] declared, “I [am] the Karma pa, the guide of beings,” and [began to] dance. Immediately, [his] body vanished and reappeared in an instant.

2-2. Translation from the KSP

2-2-1. Birth

The Seventh Karma pa, Chos grags rgya mtsho

[This section] concerns the seventh in the line [of incarnations], the master Chos grags rgya mtsho. At the time of dissolving his form body⁵⁵ into the nature of phenomena⁵⁶, the dharma master, Thong ba don ldan,⁵⁷ entrusted his testament, together with thirteen seals, to Go shrī Rin po che⁵⁸ prophesying that [his] reincarnation⁵⁹ would appear in the north, in sPyi lha⁶⁰. Along with [this, he also provided the names of his future] parents.⁶¹

In his account of the intermediate state,⁶² Amoghasiddhi in the north told [him]: “You will be born into the world⁶³ from [your] father, Grags pa dPal grub, and [your] mother, lHa mo skyid.” [This] has been told by the tulku himself afterwards.⁶⁴

⁵³ In the KSP, the spelling of the place name in the parallel passage is slightly different: it reads sPug ngo bo instead of sPug do bo. Such variation can easily occur, as the Tibetan letters *nga* and *da* look very similar. I could not find a reference for either spelling variant.

⁵⁴ Tib. *rta mgrin*. Hayagrīva is a horse-headed, wrathfully depicted enlightened form (Beer 1999, 77, and 246).

⁵⁵ Tib. *gzugs sku*, Skt. *rūpakāya*.

⁵⁶ Tib. *chos dbyings*, Skt. *dharmadhātu*. Ultimately, the entire phrase is simply an elaborate way of saying “at the time of his death.”

⁵⁷ Name of the Sixth Karma pa (1416–1453); see BDRC, P1006.

⁵⁸ Also known as the First mTshur pu rGyal tshab, dPal’ byor Don grub (1427–1489); see BDRC, P1380.

⁵⁹ Tib. *sprul sku*, Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*, Eng. also “emanation body” or “tulku”.

⁶⁰ Possibly the same place referred to in BDRC, G1203. Otherwise, no reference found. Later in the text, this place is also referred to as sPyi mda and sPyi nang.

⁶¹ This information is also provided in the CKG, however phrased differently; see Dell 2020, 48.

⁶² Tib. *bar do’i rnam thar*.

⁶³ Tib. *dzambu’i gling*, Skt. *jambudvīpa*.

⁶⁴ This paragraph also appears almost verbatim in the CKG; see Dell 2020, 51.

Likewise, 'Jam dbyangs chen po [from] mTshur phu⁶⁵ once said, during the seventh month of the bird year (1453), to the many [monks sitting in] rows [having] tea: "According to my dream, now, someone called Pal grup became the father of the tulku."⁶⁶ In the same way, Kun mkhyen Ban sgar ba⁶⁷ prophesied that the tulku would appear directly to the East of mTshur phu.⁶⁸ In accordance with [this prophecy], the site called sPyi mda' [in the] rNgod [area]⁶⁹ was a place of accomplishment, a hidden land⁷⁰ of the *ḍākinīs*.⁷¹

The owner of that place [is] called sPyi lha ("general deity"), since [he] is like the general leader (Tib. *spyi dpon*) of all local deities (Tib. *gzhi bdag*) or the deity (Tib. *lha*) or lord (Tib. *jo bo*) of all.⁷² In the past,

⁶⁵ Probably, mTshur phu 'Jam dbyangs chen po Don grub 'od zer, also known as Go shrī Don grub 'od zer; see BDRC, P1417. He was the abbot of mTshur phu Monastery until 1449. For more information, see Schuh, 2010.

⁶⁶ This paragraph also appears verbatim in the CKG; see Dell 2021a, 17.

⁶⁷ BDRC, P467 (Ban sgar ba 'Jam dpal bzang po). He was a close disciple of the Sixth Karma pa and a teacher of the Seventh Karma pa. For more details, see Gardner 2011b.

⁶⁸ At that time, mTshur phu dgon is the "chief monastery of the Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud pa in Central Tibet located to the north of Lhasa" and the seat of the Karma pas (BDRC, G33). This sentence also appears literally in the CKG; see Dell 2021a, 17.

⁶⁹ Tib. rmgod spyi mda'. rNgod is an area in or near Kong po (BDRC, G4880). sPyi mda' must be more or less the same place as sPyi lha in the rNgod area, the birth-place of the Seventh Karma pa mentioned earlier in this text.

⁷⁰ Tib. *sbas yul*, lit. "hidden land," paradisiacal lands considered safe havens that enemies of the Dharma cannot enter. They are similar to pure lands (*dag zhing*) in their description but, unlike those, are believed to be located on earth (often in the Himalayan region). Hidden lands are especially associated with Padmasambhava, who is said to have left treasure texts (*gter ma*) there, converted the local gods, and sealed the lands for future discovery—usually to be opened by a lama. See Buswell and Lopez 2014, 790. As we learn from the next paragraph, in this case, it was not Padmasambhava who converted the local gods and sealed the land, but the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje.

⁷¹ This sentence also appears almost verbatim in the CKG; see Dell 2021b, 87.

⁷² In the CKG, this local deity is referred to simply as *gzhi bdag spyi lha* in one term (Dell 2021b, 88), while here the *sPyi lha* is explained to be the leader of all the other local deities (*gzhi bdag*) of the area. In general, *gzhi bdag*, lit. "locality owner," designates a class of spirits belonging to the worldly gods (*'jig rten pa'i lha*) and is often mentioned together with *yul lha*, "country gods" (Yisūn 1985, s.v. *'jig rten pa'i lha*). These two categories do not seem to be clearly distinguished in the literature. It appears that *yul lha* is a rather broad term encompassing many ancient local deities (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996, 4), while *gzhi bdag* is somewhat more specific. They also belong to the class of *'khrungs lha*, "birth gods," who "are the deities in whose area of influence one had been born" and who should be worshipped to avoid misfortune in one's life (*ibid.*, 305). The *gzhi bdag* are the "divine rulers of rivers, lakes, or ridges, but most seem to be personifications of mountains" (*ibid.*, 226). Here, *sPyi lha* is both the name of the place where the Seventh Karma pa was born and the name of this local deity, which is plausible insofar as *gzhi bdag* are identified with specific places. On a list of names of different *gzhi bdag* provided by de

while the master Rang byung rDo rje [the Third Karma pa] was residing in bDe chen, the hermitage of mTshur pu, [this deity] took the lay practitioner's vows and promised: "From now on, [I] shall be [your] patron and carry out whatever [you] command."⁷³

Having arrived at that site, [the Third Karma pa] was beseeched to stay. Having gone [there] successively, [he eventually] tamed [the place]. [This is] a secret place of the *ḍākinīs*, a branch of the great Indian sacred sites that are consecrated as the fields where future emanations would appear.

The father [of the Seventh Karma pa], a great being who had attained accomplishment and who belonged to the great sNgong clan, [was] one of the two heroes in [the place of] sPyi nang that has the special quality [of] a supreme place where those to be tamed turn [their experience] into the experience of solely pure perception.⁷⁴

[The Seventh Karma pa] was born in the morning of the fifteenth day of the first lunar month in the male wood-dog year, as the son of [his father,] Grags pa dPal grub, and [his] mother, Jo dar bza' lHa mo skyid, an emanation of the wisdom *ḍākinī*. [His birth was] accompanied by many miraculous signs, such as a five-colored rainbow like a painting in the sky, a rain of flowers, and the sound of thunder.⁷⁵ Immediately [upon birth, he] exclaimed "A la la!" and laughed.

Six self-arisen [signs] appeared clearly on [his] body: many types of flowers on the skin, an image of Vajradhāra on the crown of [his] head, the letter "a" formed by the veins at the heart chakra, a *dharmodaya*⁷⁶ and a wheel at [his] secret place,⁷⁷ and wheels upon [his] feet. [His] urine flowed down as milk, and everything was pervaded by the

Nebesky-Wojkowitz (*ibid.*, 227) appears *sPyi yi brag la mda' brug*. It contains the syllables *spyi* and *mda'* that also occur in the place name *sPyi mda'*. Hence, it may be identified with the *gzhi bdag* mentioned here.

⁷³ More or less, the same information—including the sentences about the place that follow—is also conveyed in the CKG, though phrased somewhat differently and in slightly less detail; see Dell 2021b, 87–88.

⁷⁴ Tib. *dag pa'i snang ba* or short *dag snang*, "pure perception," is the "Vajrayāna principle of regarding the environment as a buddhafield, self and others as deities, sounds as mantras, and thoughts as the display of wisdom" (Rangjung Yeshe Publications 2025, s.v. "Pure Perception").

⁷⁵ The same signs are also mentioned in the CKG, though phrased differently; see Dell 2021c, 15–16.

⁷⁶ Tib. *chos 'byung*, Skt. *dharmodaya*, lit. "source of dharma[s] / [all] phenomena." "Secret mantra terminology. The name of a particular part of the iconography of certain deities. It represents the source from which all dharma[s] arise" (Duff 2009, s.v. *chos 'byung*). It consists of two triangles that are combined to form a star shape similar to the "Star of David."

⁷⁷ Tib. *gsang gnas*, lit. "secret place." This term denotes the area of the genitals as well as the lowest of the five *cakras* (energy centers of the subtle body), which is considered to be located at this level of the body (Duff 2009, s.v. *gsang gnas*).

fragrance of fine perfumes.⁷⁸ Among the many utterings [of the infant] that came up within [the first] week, [his] father heard [him] say many mantras, [his] mother heard [him] say vowels, and other [people] heard [him] say the *maṇi* [mantra].⁷⁹

2-2-2. Meeting with Chos dpal 'byor

In spite of the parents' promise to keep [the Karma pa's birth] secret, his own light of compassion shone like the sun in the sky. Although, there was no one to proclaim [it officially], after [someone] had said, "A Dharma master has been born to a male and a female hermit in sPyi nang", [his] fame spread in all directions [like] the drumming of the summer [rain].⁸⁰ All main spiritual and worldly leaders from various directions spontaneously gathered [there]. [Thus, the matter] could not be kept secret.

When Chos dpal 'byor,⁸¹ holder of the seat of sNye bo da ra steng,⁸² heard [this], [he] thought about going to meet [the infant]. In a dream, [he] saw [the infant] seated on [his] mother's lap and offered him [his former] hat and other things. [He] then asked an elderly lama: "What should [I] do with such a story from rNgod?" [He added:] "I dreamt of the sun and moon shining on the mountain pass of sPyi lha and merging into one." [The elderly lama] replied: "There is no need for doubt! Take the hat, clothes, and boots of the previous master, and go!"

[Chos dpal 'byor] arrived fifteen days after the birth. Seeing him, [the infant] laughed and was delighted. [Equipped] with the hat and the other [items] of the previous master, [Chos dpal 'byor] offered the clothes and the hat of the master rTogs ldan pa [to the infant]. [The infant] took the items of the previous master with [his] hands but did not accept anything else. [Chos dpal 'byor then] entreated [him]: "If you are the omniscient mThong ba don ldan, please bless me." Therefore, [the infant] placed both hands on the crown of [his] head and repeatedly bestowed [his] blessing [upon him], thereby dispelling all

⁷⁸ This passage about what happened after his birth and about his marks is also literally contained in the CKG; see Dell 2021c, 16.

⁷⁹ This sentence is also literally contained in the CKG; however, between the preceding passage and this sentence, one sentence is omitted; see Dell 2021c, 16.

⁸⁰ Tib. *grags pa'i dbyar rngas*. Lit. "through the summer drum of fame," rendered here more freely according to context.

⁸¹ For a discussion of this figure's identity, see the analysis section of this paper.

⁸² Tib. *snye bo da ra steng*. The first part, *snye*, probably refers to *snye mo*, a district in Tibet (BDRC, G3CN138). In both editions of the KSP that were consulted, the term clearly reads *snye bong ra steng*, which in Tibetan letters looks almost the same. However, in the CKG it clearly reads *snye bo da ra steng*, and later in the KSP, the place name again appears as *da ra steng* in the region of *snye bo*. Therefore, I have emended it here. Nevertheless, the part *bong ra steng* is found in BDRC as a hamlet (BDRC, G1258).

doubt.

2-2-3. Public performance in A rig thang at age two months

When [the Karma pa] reached two months of age, all monks and householders of the rNgod [region] invited [him] to A rig thang.⁸³ [He] sat upon the Dharma throne of the previous master, and when [he] showed [his] face on the great marketplace, [he] accepted gifts one after another with [his] hands.

After bestowing blessings, [he] slowly looked at the crowd and gently wiped [his] face three times with [his] right hand. [He] then dwelled in meditative equipoise and practiced gazes. As [he] remained [in that state], having a radiant body, everyone present was filled with unwavering faith and was placed on the path to the three higher realms and to Buddhahood.⁸⁴

2-2-4. Utterance in Ber bsnol at age three months

When [the Karma pa] was three months old, in Ber bsnol⁸⁵ in the rNgod [region], bZher bya⁸⁶ asked a naïve question in front of the [tulku]. [He] said: “It seems to people that you are not the Karma pa. The previous masters, among other things, began to speak at this [age of three] months. [They] showed many signs of accomplishment. If [you] are the reincarnation of mThong ba don ldan, please, [show] signs of trust and start speaking.”

He replied:

“I [am] the one named Karma [pa].

A person like me is rare.

There are some who have a connection with me.

I have the aspiration not to deceive [those].

Until [my] thirteenth month is completed,
These words [will be] sealed [with] great secrecy.
Then, the signs of my being beyond dispute

⁸³ Tib. *a rig thang*. This could also be rendered as the “plain” or “flatlands” of A rig. I could only find references to a place called A rig in the A mdo region. However, here, A rig must be in the rNgod area which is part of Kong po.

⁸⁴ Tib. *mngon mtho dang nges legs*. Here, *mngon mtho* literally means “the truly high” and refers to the three higher realms, while *nges legs* means “definitive goodness” and refers to the “goodness of having attained nirvana” (see Duff 2009, s.v. *nges legs*). Here, it is rendered freely according to the meaning rather than literally.

⁸⁵ I could not find any reference to this place, but at least we know that it is a place in the rNgod region.

⁸⁶ I could not find any reference to this name, neither to the variant bZher bla that is given in CKG.

Will gradually become clear.”⁸⁷

2-2-5. Visit of the sNye bo region at age five months

Then, when [he] was invited by [the] sNye bo [region] and stayed [there] in Da ra steng, a letter from the Karma Si tu pa⁸⁸ was offered to the Karma [pa] by the lCags mo dbon po,⁸⁹ gSer bya bral bsod ye,⁹⁰ and others. [He] took the letter, looked through [it] line by line and appeared to pronounce [it].

After having uttered “dPal ldan rdo rje” (Glorious Vajra),⁹¹ [he] came to the lap of lCags mo dbon po. [He] took the hand of the renunciate,⁹² and expressed his delight in various ways. Furthermore, [he] mentioned the names of most of [his] former disciples and recognized [them]. They all remembered the past times and through the powerful yearning of devotion and through being choked up by faith [they] cried and fainted.

When [the Karma pa] was staying in sNye bo'i ga gor kha⁹³ at the age of five months, someone displayed some kind of rough behavior in front of [him], therefore, he said:

“Aham! The illusory expression [of] bliss-emptiness,
In the play [of] manifold wisdoms,

⁸⁷ In Tibetan, the Karma pa's speech is composed in verse—eight lines of seven syllables each. Accordingly, in English it is rendered in verse-like formatting.

⁸⁸ In the scene at hand, the Karma pa is only between three and five months old, i.e., it must be in 1454. At that time, the Second Si tu, bKra shis nam rgyal (1450–1497) (see BDRC, P820) is only four years old. Nevertheless, he had already been recognized as a tulku by the Sixth Karma pa (Gyatso 2014a). Given the fact that tulkus often have unusual abilities in that respect, it could have been him who wrote the letter, but it could also have been his predecessor, the First Si tu, Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1377–1448) (see BDRC, P3572; Gyatso 2024b).

⁸⁹ I could not find a reference to this personal name. As for the first part (*lcags mo*), it could be a place name. The only reference I found to this place was in Dan Martin's “Tibetan Proper Name Index,” which cites a book chapter mentioning it as an area in eastern Tibet (Tsering 1992). The second part (*dbon po*) means “uncle's nephew” and may indicate that he belonged to a hereditary succession line from uncle to nephew, which was not uncommon in Tibet (Duff 2009, s.v. *khu dbon*).

⁹⁰ It is not entirely clear whether this is an apposition to the preceding name or a separate name in a list. However, since the two are separated by a *bshad*, they are probably distinct names. In any case, I could not find any reference to this second name.

⁹¹ Tib. *dpal ldan rdo rje*. From the context, it seems that the infant Karma pa refers to the Si tu pa when uttering “dPal ldan rdo rje,” after having read Si tu pa's letter, and then goes to the lap of lCags mo dbon po who—having brought the letter—represents the Si tu pa.

⁹² Tib. *bya bral*. This must refer to of lCags mo dbon po.

⁹³ The first part of this place name already appeared earlier in the text and refers to the sNye bo region. Even though I could not find a reference to the second part, it must be a locality—such as a town, village, or monastery—within that region.

Is seen as true by the immature.
I am free from arising, ceasing, and abiding.”⁹⁴

*2-2-6. Meeting with Go shrī Rin po che
in sNye bo at age nine months*

At [the age of] nine months, when Go shrī Rin po che⁹⁵ met [him], [the Karma pa’s] body was blazing with brilliant splendor. Filled with delight, after bestowing [his] blessing, [the infant] accepted [his] gifts one by one. [Among these, he] recognized a conch shell. [The Karma pa] donned the hat of the previous master—[earlier] offered [to him by Chos dpal ‘byor]—and, holding a vajra and bell in [his] hands, performed the gesture of the Lotus Circling.⁹⁶

[Go shrī Rin po che] regarded the [Karma pa’s] identification of the form of [his] protective meditational deity and other bestowals as inconceivable miracles. Accordingly, [he] bestowed upon him the name Rang byung kun mkhyen chos kyi rgyal po (Self-Arisen All-Knowing King of the Dharma).

In the great encampment known as “Great Ornament of the World”, [the Karma pa] sat upon a lion throne.

2-2-7. Visiting Nags phu at age eleven months

At the age of eleven months, [he] was invited by [the abbot of] Nags phu [Monastery]⁹⁷ and recited the alphabet before the people gathered in the market in Nags mda’.⁹⁸

2-2-8. New Year at mDo chen at age one (1455)

When he was staying at mDo chen⁹⁹ for the New Year of the [wood-

⁹⁴ In Tibetan, the Karma pa’s speech is composed in verse, consisting of four lines of seven syllables each. Accordingly, in English it is rendered in verse-like formatting.

⁹⁵ Already mentioned earlier in the text: the First mTshur phu rgyal tshab, Go shrī dPal ‘byor don grub (1427–1489); see BDRC, P1380.

⁹⁶ Tib. *pad kor*. According to Duff, “this is the name of a hand movement used frequently in the higher tantras as a prelude to forming a specific mudra” (Duff 2009, s.v. *pad kor*).

⁹⁷ Nags phu is a monastery in the Kong po region founded by the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339); see Roerich 1988, 529. Literally, *phu* means “upper reaches,” and *mda’* means “lower reaches.” Thus, these are probably two places close to each other—a monastery in the mountains and a village in the valley.

⁹⁸ Nags phu and Nags mda’ are probably two places close to each other: a monastery in the mountains and a village in the valley.

⁹⁹ There is a rNying ma monastery called *mDo chen dgon* located in eastern Tibet and founded in 1311 (BDRC, G1KR43). However, it is unclear why the Karma pa would

]pig (1455),¹⁰⁰ he declared: "I am Vajradhara."¹⁰¹ Offering an aspiration prayer for someone, [he] said: "May you be reborn in Tuṣita."¹⁰²

Also, when others asked questions, [he] replied:

"There is no need for doubt. [You] should rely on the words of the bKa' brgyud lamas. *Ḍākinīs*¹⁰³ and Dharma protectors¹⁰⁴ will perform enlightened activity and be there. Saraha, Virūpa and Kukkuripa¹⁰⁵ are abiding in the sky. I adhere to the life stories of these three."

Then, [he] pointed to the sky. [His] mother also saw their faces.

At the upper reaches of mDo chen, [the Karma pa] said [to her]: "[You] should manage to sever [it]."

[His mother] asked: How does one sever [it]?"

[He] replied: "The [dualistic] mind itself is severed from [its] root."

[The mother] asked: "How does one sever [it] from the root?"

He replied: "Through meditation."

[The mother] said: "[I] don't know how to [do that]."

Therefore, pointing to the sky, [he] replied: "[It] is without center or boundary."

Again, when the mother and son were staying at the courtyard of mDo chen [Monastery], [the Karma pa asked his mother]: "Do [you] see Milarepa abiding [in the sky], singing a song of realization?"

have stayed in a monastery belonging to another lineage. There is also a sub-branch of the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud called *mDo chen bKa' brgyud*, active in Mang yul Gung thang, whose name originates from a place in that region—*mDo bo che* in Phu lag (Erhard 2008, 27–28). Hence, it is difficult to determine precisely which place is referred to here.

¹⁰⁰ He was about one year old at that time.

¹⁰¹ Tib. *rdo rje 'chang*. Vajradhara is considered the primordial Buddha in the bKa' rgyud tradition and often an epithet of one's own lama (Duff 2009, s.v. *rdo rje 'chang*).

¹⁰² Tib. *dga' ldan*. According to Buddhist tradition, Tuṣita is the heaven where Buddhas reside before taking birth in the world. According to his account of the intermediate state (*bar do'i rnam thar*), the Seventh Karma pa also dwelled in this realm before his birth (Dell 2020, 50).

¹⁰³ Tib. *mkha' 'gro (ma)*. Skt. *dākinī*. *Ḍākinīs* are female Buddhas often depicted naked and semi-wrathful. They are associated with wisdom but also with protective activity (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 209).

¹⁰⁴ Tib. *chos skyong*. Skt. *dharmapāla*. This term can refer either to enlightened beings who appear in wrathful form to protect the Dharma or to local deities who were subdued and converted into Dharma protectors (*ibid.*, 249–50).

¹⁰⁵ Tib. *sa ra ha birwa pa ku ku ri pa gsum*. Saraha, Virūpa, and Kukkuripa are three of the Eighty-four Mahāsiddhas and are regarded as the Indian forefathers of the bKa' brgyud lineage transmitted to Tibet by Marpa through Nāropā. For further information on the Mahāsiddhas, see Dowman 1985.

2-2-9. *Visit of the Long po region*

[The Karma pa] was invited to the Long po [region,¹⁰⁶ where] all [those present] attained unwavering faith.

2-2-10. *Emanation as Hayagrīva at age two*

In the [fire-]mouse year (1456/57),¹⁰⁷ when [he] was residing in sPug do bo,¹⁰⁸ [his] mother witnessed [him] emanating as Hayagrīva¹⁰⁹ [with] a wheel of weapons.

[She] asked: “Why are you acting like this?”

[The Karma pa] replied: “I have subdued obstructing forces. Don’t tell anyone!”

On the tenth day [of the month, he] declared, “I [am] the Karma pa, the guide of beings,”¹¹⁰ and [began to] dance. Immediately, [his] body vanished and reappeared in an instant. When mother and son were in the courtyard, [he] prostrated to [his] mother.¹¹¹

3. *Analysis*

Having presented an annotated translation in the previous section, I would like to supplement it with a further analysis of the text in this section. The content of the paragraphs is summarized, and the major events are analyzed against the background of other research or tradition or by relating them to other sources. Finally, possible functions of certain paragraphs are discussed.

¹⁰⁶ Long po is a large area located in Kong po (BDRC, G3491).

¹⁰⁷ At that time, the Seventh Karma pa was about two years old.

¹⁰⁸ In the CKG, the spelling of the place in the parallel passage is slightly different: it reads sPug do bo instead of sPug ngo. Such variation can easily occur, as the Tibetan letters *nga* and *da* look very similar. I could not find a reference for either spelling variants.

¹⁰⁹ Tib. *rta mgrin*. Hayagrīva is a horse-headed, wrathfully depicted enlightened form (Beer 1999, 77, and 246).

¹¹⁰ Lit.: “I, the Karma pa, guide beings.”

¹¹¹ In the CKG, in which this sentence is missing, the passage before it is the last scene before the narrative shifts to age five. Here, it is not entirely clear whether the sentence at hand still belongs to that scene or occurs later in time. Looking at the punctuation in the block print SX1, there is no final particle and no double *shad*. However, in SB1 there is, and afterward a new paragraph begins. Thus, at least according to the interpretation of the SB1 editors, it still belongs to the previous part. I follow this interpretation, since the sentence does not connect naturally to what follows either.

3-1. *Birth*

For this first section, I provided only the translation from the KSP in the paper at hand, as the corresponding part from the CKG was already translated and published elsewhere. Unlike for the subsequent sections, I will not analyze the meaning here. The version in the CKG tends to be more extensive, and an interpretation has already been provided along with its translation. Therefore, there is little additional content to analyze; rather, there are omissions. Nevertheless, a short summary and comparison highlighting the differences will be provided for this part together with references to the CKG translation and analysis which are spread over several papers.

In the first paragraph, we learn about the date of death of the Sixth Karma pa, Thong ba don ldan (1416–1453), who had prophesied the place of birth and the names of his future parents to Go shrī Rin po che, also known as the First mTshur pu rGyal tshab, dPal' byor Don grub (1427–1489), whom he also appointed as his regent at his seat in mTshur phu.¹¹² The latter person is noteworthy, as he will appear again in the account later. This information appears in both the CKG and the KSP.¹¹³

Subsequently, the KSP includes a brief reference to an account of the intermediate state (Tib. *bar do*), in which the Karma pa—between the two lives—meets the buddha Amoghasiddhi, who tells him the names of his future parents. This passage represents only the conclusion of an account presented much more extensively in the CKG. There, he encounters many different buddhas in various pure realms and talks with them.¹¹⁴ This sub-genre, known as *bar do'i rnam thar*, is a particularly interesting topic of research in itself. However, since it has already been discussed in several publications, I will not focus on it here.¹¹⁵

Following the brief extract of the *bar do'i rnam thar* used in the KSP as a reference for the parents' name, the text continues with accounts including similar references: a dream by 'Jam dbyangs chen po from mTshur phu concerning the father's name and a prophecy of Kun mkhyen Ban sgar ba regarding the place of birth. These prophecies preceding the Karma pa's birth are likewise mentioned in the CKG, which then includes additional passages entirely absent from the KSP.

¹¹² His role as regent (Tib. *rgyal tshab*) is mentioned in Gardner 2011a.

¹¹³ For the CKG version, see Dell 2020, 48.

¹¹⁴ For the full account, see *ibid.*, 48–51.

¹¹⁵ These accounts are especially prominent among the Karma pas. The representatives of this sub-genre that have come to my attention and have been translated concern his third (Gamble 2020, 121–27), fourth (Dell 2024a and 2024b), seventh (Dell 2020), and eighth (Verhufen 1992, 75–77) incarnations.

These describe the realization and activities of the parents, the circumstances of the conception—accompanied by meditative visualization—visions experienced by the parents and others, and wondrous events associated with the tulku in the womb, such as hearing him recite mantras or sensing him performing yogic exercises.¹¹⁶

The CKG then shifts its focus to the place of birth, where many people have auspicious dreams and perceive fine fragrances, rainbows, and rains of flowers.¹¹⁷

The next shared elements in both texts include mention of the Seventh Karma pa's birthplace as "a place of accomplishment, a hidden land of the *dākinīs*" and the story in which the Third Karma pa visits this site, tames the local deity *sPyi lha*, and consecrates the area for his future emanations. However, the CKG inserts an entire paragraph describing the place according to Tibetan geomancy (Tib. *sa dpyad*). At the same time, this passage shows similarities to descriptions found in pilgrimage guidebooks (Tib. *gnas yig*).¹¹⁸

The subsequent passage is nearly identical in both sources. It describes the signs accompanying the birth—such as a five-colored rainbow in a perfectly clear sky, the sound of thunder, and a rain of flowers—all of which allude Buddha's birth story. Moreover, six self-arisen signs appeared on the infant's body, and it is reported that the parents and others heard him recite mantras.¹¹⁹

3-2. Meeting with *Chos dpal 'byor*

This section relates that the parents tried to keep the birth of the Karma pa secret, but the word spread that a Dharma master had been born by those hermits in *sPyi nang*, and many spiritual and worldly leaders, as well as laypeople and monks, gathered there. The KSP further mentions that the infant's "own light of compassion shone like the sun in the sky," which made it difficult to conceal him and his extraordinary nature. The comparison between his compassion and the shining of the sun is common in Buddhist literature. It represents the image of ideal compassion that does not discriminate but is directed toward all sentient beings, just as the sun does not discriminate where its rays go.

From the text, we learn indirectly that *Chos dpal 'byor* safeguarded some important belongings of the Sixth Karma pa, notably his hat,

¹¹⁶ For the full translation, see Dell 2021a, 17–22

¹¹⁷ Dell 2021b, 86–87.

¹¹⁸ For a translation and analysis, see Dell 2021b. For an extensive treatment of Tibetan geomancy, see Maurer 2009.

¹¹⁹ For a translation of this part from the CKG, together with an analysis and interpretation, see Dell 2021c.

which in this context refers to the Karma pa's black crown.¹²⁰ He heard about the infant and had a dream in which he offered the hat and other belongings to the child and saw the sun and moon shining over the mountain pass of sPyi lha and merging into one. When he related his dream to an elderly lama, the lama confirmed that there was no doubt and that he should go to sPhyi nang and offer the hat, clothes, and boots of the previous master to the infant.

The union of the sun and moon in Chos dpal 'byor's dream represents the union of wisdom (sun) and compassion (moon), which is very typical in Vajrayāna symbolism.¹²¹ Here, it marks the place of birth of the Karma pa, who has perfected both compassion and wisdom. This dream aligns with other prophetic and auspicious dreams reported earlier in the text—especially in the CKG—from the time before his birth.¹²²

We learn that Chos dpal 'byor arrived in sPyi nang fifteen days after the Karma pa's birth, and we know from the previous section that his birth took place at the fifteenth day of the lunar month, the full moon. Hence, his arrival occurred at the new moon, both of which are very auspicious days in the Tibetan calendar. This underlines the importance of their meeting. The young Karma pa accepted the items of his predecessor but nothing else. Then Chos dpal 'byor asked for a blessing, which removed all doubt. Presenting the predecessor's belongings together with false items is a typical procedure for tulku recognition, which the infant passed brilliantly. The blessing that removed all doubts goes far beyond this external procedure and represents the teacher-student relationship that is of utmost importance in Vajrayāna Buddhism.

This paragraph introduces the figure of Chos dpal 'byor, holder of the seat of sNye bo da ra steng. Later in the text, he is again mentioned as the "holder of the seat of Da ra" in the context of the recognition of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, where it is said that he stayed with him and served him as an attendant. He is also referred to once more simply as "holder of the seat," being the one who sent the news of the Karma pa's incarnation to Central Tibet, to Go shrī pa—identifiable as the First mTshur phu rgyal tshab, Go shrī dpal 'byor don grub (1427–

¹²⁰ The First Karma pa, Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193), is said to have attained enlightenment through dream yoga, after being visited by fifteen wisdom *dākinīs*. According to legend, "[at] the moment of his enlightenment an ornate black crown [...] appeared above the Karma pa's head, woven from the hair of hundred thousand *dākinīs*, symbolizing his knowing of the past, present and future" (Simmer-Brown 2001, 251). This crown is said to be an energy-field, while the black crown worn by the Karma pas at solemn occasions was given only to the Fifth Karma pa, bDe bzhin gshegs pa (1384–1415), by the emperor of China.

¹²¹ For more details, see Beer 1999, 38.

¹²² For those dreams and their interpretation, see Dell 2021a.

1489)¹²³—who served as regent of the Karma bka' brgyud school between the Sixth and the Seventh Karma pas.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, the identity of Chos dpal 'byor remains somewhat obscure. Since he safeguarded important belongings of the Sixth Karma pa, he must have played a significant role within the lineage. However, in the *rnam thar* of the Sixth Karma pa in both the CKG and KSP, his name does not appear at all. The same is true for the *rnam thars* of the Third and Fourth Zhwa dmar pa in the KSP, which I have checked, as he appears to have a connection with the Zhwa dmar pa. Likewise, the lists of teachers and students provided in the BDRC entries for the Sixth and Seventh Karma pas and the Third and Fourth Zhwa dmar pas do not contain a name resembling his. I initially considered whether he might be identified with Go shrī dpal 'byor don grub, as their names both contain “dpal 'byor” and because of his seemingly important role. However, Go shrī dpal 'byor don grub is clearly referred to here as Go shrī Rin po che or Go shrī pa, and from the context it is evident that they are two distinct individuals—especially since Go shrī pa later meets the infant Karma pa for the first time at the age of nine months and performs a recognition procedure with some of his belongings similar to that previously conducted by Chos dpal 'byor.

3-3. Reincarnation of the Zhwa dmar pa taken for the Karma pa

This section appears only in the CKG and is entirely absent from the KSP. This omission may have been 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab's deliberate choice to avoid redundancy, as he composed a separate *rnam thar* of the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa included in the KSP, which spans fifteen folios.¹²⁵

The Karma pas are the heads of the Karma bka' brgyud lineage and usually alternate their incarnations with the Zhwa dmar pas, who traditionally hold the position of the second highest tulku in the lineage. However, the Third Zhwa dmar pa, Chos dpal ye shes (1406–1452), died just a few months before the Sixth Karma pa and was reborn shortly before the Karma pa as the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa, Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524). This section relates that at his birth, too, many miraculous signs appeared and that the infant Zhwa dmar pa uttered the name of his teacher, “Karma pa,” which was mistaken as a claim that

¹²³ BDRC, P1380. The BDRC entry gives the dates as 1427–1489, whereas a modern biography lists them as 1420–1482 (rTsis che legs mthong 2016–2024, vol. 1, 18). This needs further clarification, though it is not crucial in the present context.

¹²⁴ For more details, see Gardner 2011a.

¹²⁵ SX1, v. 11, 298r–313r. For an overview of the table of content of the KSP and the position of this *rnam thar*, see Dell 2023, 54. For a similar discussion in the context of the Sixth Zhwa dmar pa's section in the KSP, see Bhutia 2023, 60–61.

he himself was the Karma pa. This created some confusion about who the true Karma pa was, which was ultimately resolved through the recognition of the Seventh Karma pa by Chos dpal 'byor. The text adds that this other tulku was then recognized as the Zhwa dmar pa, the holder of the read crown. It is also mentioned that the "holder of the seat of Da ra" stayed with the Zhwa dmar pa as his attendant afterward. In the section before, Chos dpal 'byor is referred to as "holder of the seat of sNye bo da ra steng," which can easily be shortened to "holder of the seat of Da ra." Thus, it was probably he who stayed with the Zhwa dmar pa.

3-4. Public performance in A rig thang at age two months

The following scene appears again in both sources in slightly different but generally similar wording. The two-months-old Karma pa was invited to A rig thang in the rNgod region, where he was presented on the marketplace sitting on the throne of his predecessor. After accepting gifts and bestowing blessings, the infant made a certain gesture—wiping his face three times with his right hand—and entered a meditative state, practicing gazes, while his body became radiant. This inspired great faith in everyone present.

As in the recognition episode, the extraordinariness of the Karma pa is again emphasized, and many people were impressed and gained confidence that he was indeed the reincarnation of the Sixth Karma pa. However, in the recognition scene, it is not clearly stated how many people were present—it could have been only a few—whereas here it is explicitly a crowded marketplace. This marks only the beginning of a tour through various places that the infant would undertake in the months to come. His gesture, gazes and shared moment of meditative silence could well be interpreted as a non-verbal example of pointing-out instructions, revealing the nature of mind to his students.

3-5. Spreading of the news that the Karmapa's reincarnation was found

Again, the section appears only in the CKG. This omission may have been 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab's deliberate choice to avoid redundancy, as he composed a separate short *rnam thar* of the First mTshur phu rGyal tshab, dPal 'byor don grub included in the KSP, which spans one folio.¹²⁶

In this section, we learn that Chos dpal 'byor (here referred to as

¹²⁶ SX1, v. 11, 263v–264v. For an overview of the table of content of the KSP and the position of this *rnam thar*, see Dell 2023, 54. For a similar discussion in the context of the Sixth Zhwa dmar pa's section in the KSP, see Bhutia 2023, 60–61.

“the holder of the seat”) sent a messenger announcing the Karma pa’s recognition to Central Tibet (dBus), Karma dgon, and other places.

The person leading the Karma pa’s encampment to Central Tibet, in accordance with the wishes of his deceased teacher, is referred to as Go shrī pa and can be identified as the First mTshur phu rgyal tshab, Go shrī dpal ’byor don grub (1427–1489), as mentioned before. The arrival of the good news to him coincides with the rising sun, the sound of the cuckoo’s first call of the year, and the sound of thunder, which fill him with great joy. The rising sun indicates the start of a new day and, here, symbolizes the rise of the new Karma pa. The cuckoo is considered a “messenger of summer” in Tibetan tradition.¹²⁷ The sound of thunder is a typical sign accompanying great events related to Buddhist masters and already appears in the life story of the Buddha, occurring at his birth, enlightenment and death together with trembling of the earth.¹²⁸

It is related that Go shrī pa consulted ’Jam dbyangs chen po,¹²⁹ who confirmed that the names of the Karma pa’s parents and his birthplace corresponded with those seen in his dream—a reference to his prophetic dream mentioned earlier in the text.¹³⁰

In the next paragraph, it is recounted that the good news arrived at Karma dgon in the Khams region at the waxing moon of the third month. The waxing moon signifies growth and is thus related to the Karma pa’s activity. We also learn that there had been a severe drought throughout the region of Khams, and from that night on it began to snow heavily. Again, the reception of the message is accompanied by a miracle—or at least an auspicious coincidence marking the end of the drought.

It is further related that many people dreamt that great auspicious banners were drawn from the peak of a mountain before them and hoisted on the rooftops of a monastery in the mountains, accompanied by the blowing of conch shells. The dream could symbolize the birth or recognition of the Karmapa through hoisting of auspicious banners on the rooftops of his official seat, mTshur phu Monastery in Central Tibet. The blowing of the conch shell may symbolize the Karma pa’s teaching activity. It is said that these dreams dispelled everyone’s doubts. This indicates the Karma pa’s powerful blessing and the openness of his students and thus represents a renewal of the teacher–student relationship from his previous life.

¹²⁷ Beer 1999, 85.

¹²⁸ See, for instance, in the *Lalitavistara Sūtra* (Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2013, paragraph 7.33) and Kieschnik 2004, 542.

¹²⁹ BDRC, P1417.

¹³⁰ Both in the CKG (see Dell 2021b, 87), as well as in the KSP (translated in the paper at hand).

3-6. Utterance in Ber bsnol at age three months

At the age of three months in Ber bsnol, the infant was accused of not being the Karma pa. Previous Karma pas had already begun speaking at this age and had shown other extraordinary abilities. He was therefore asked to start speaking in order to inspire trust. In reply, the infant began speaking eloquently in verse:

"I [am] the one named Karma [pa].
A person like me is rare.
There are some who have a connection with me.
I have the aspiration not to deceive [those].
Until [my] thirteenth month is completed,
These words [will be] sealed [with] great secrecy.
Then, the signs of my being beyond dispute
Will gradually become clear."

Again, we see the recurring theme of the former students harboring doubts and seeking signs of authenticity, and the Karma pa clearly provides these signs. First, he declares that he is the Karma pa and that someone like him is rare. He grants these words to those who have a connection with him, assuring them that he will not deceive them. Nevertheless, he adds that these words will remain sealed until he reaches the age of thirteen months, at which time it will become evident that he is indeed the Karma pa. It is interesting to consider what he means when he says that these words will be "sealed." He might be planting a kind of mind *terma* (Tib. *dgongs gter*) in the mind of his students—something that generates trust but that they will temporarily forget until the indicated time.¹³¹ It is also noteworthy that the Karma pa wishes to seal this situation, that is, to prevent the spreading of its account. For people who have a connection and openness toward him, this episode can inspire trust in his realization and encourage them to follow his teachings. However, for others lacking such a connection, it might appear more like a "circus attraction" and therefore not be very beneficial.

3-7. Visit of the sNye bo region at age five months

This section is found in both the CKG and the KSP, with slightly different wording but the same meaning. In this scene, the infant is five

¹³¹ For an explanation of *terma* (Tib. *gter ma*), see Buswell and Lopez 2014, 329. Here, I do not apply the term in its more exclusive sense, in which a great master (typically Padmasambhava) places a *terma* in earlier lifetimes, later to be discovered by a *terma* revealer (Tib. *gter ston*) as an extensive teaching or the like. Instead, I apply it to the individual teacher–student relationship, a shorter-term, more informal setting and extent of teaching.

months old and staying at Da ra steng in the sNye bo region, where a letter from the Si tu pa is offered to him.¹³² This must have taken place in 1454, when the Second Si tu, bKra shis rnam rgyal (1450–1497) was four years old.¹³³ Nevertheless, he had already been recognized as a tulku by the Sixth Karma pa.¹³⁴ Given that tulkus are often believed to possess unusual abilities, the letter may have been written by him himself, or perhaps by someone from his entourage on his behalf. It might also have been an older letter from his predecessor, the First Si tu, Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1377–1448).¹³⁵ Both sources report, in slightly different wording, that the infant appeared to read the letter himself (in a barely audible voice), which is extraordinary at his age and again a sign of his exceptional abilities. It is related that the Karma pa recognized his former disciples present at this occasion, was delighted to see them, and even mentioned most of their names. This moved them to tears and deepened their faith. One of them, called gSer bya bral ba, from then on followed him “like a shadow” to serve him. Again, this scene features the recurring theme of the Karma pa renewing the bond with his former students and generating trust and openness in them.

Another event recounted from the sNye bo region describes someone displaying rough behavior in front of the five-months-old Karma pa, whereupon he said in verse:

“Aham! The illusory expression [of] bliss-emptiness,
In the play [of] manifold wisdoms,
Is seen as true by the immature.
I am free from arising, ceasing, and abiding.”

This is clearly a pointing-out instruction, using the situation at hand to guide his students toward the dreamlike nature of reality, in which phenomena come and go but mind remains unchanging.

*3-8. Meeting with Go shrī Rin po che
in sNye bo at age nine months*

This section is present in both sources, however. Contrary to the usual trend in the other sections, it is somewhat more extensive in the KSP and shorter in the CKG, though the content is essentially the same. At the age of nine months, the infant was still in the sNye bo region, as

¹³² In both sources, he is referred to as Karma Si tu pa, with “Karma” preceding his title, which is not the usual way his name is found. From context, however, it seems unlikely that this person should be anyone other than an incarnation of the Ta’i Si tu pa line. The addition of “Karma” likely just emphasizes that he belonged to the Karma bka’ brygud lineage.

¹³³ BDRC, P820.

¹³⁴ Gyatso 2014a.

¹³⁵ BDRC, P3572; Gyatso 2014b.

during the episode at five months. He was then visited by the regent of the Karma bka' brgyud lineage, Go shrī Rin po che—identified as the First mTshur phu rgyal tshab, Go shrī dPal 'byor don grub¹³⁶—who came from Central Tibet, likely from his seat at mTshur phu. Earlier, it was mentioned that he had led the Karma pa's encampment to Central Tibet. The final sentence of this paragraph states that the Karma pa sat on the lion throne of this encampment, indicating that Go shrī Rin po che did not travel alone but with the entire encampment. During the meeting, he saw the Karma pa's body blazing with brilliant splendor—a sign not only of the infant's extraordinariness but also of Go shrī Rin po che's realization. The Karma pa bestowed a blessing upon him, accepted his gifts, and among them recognized a conch shell that had belonged to him in his previous life. Wearing the black hat and holding vajra and bell in his hands, he performed a *mūdra*. Go shrī Rin po che witnessed this and other miracles and granted him the name "Self-Arisen All-Knowing King of the Dharma."

The entire scene once again illustrates the renewal of the teacher-student relationship between Go shrī Rin po che and the Karma pa, paralleling earlier encounters with other close disciples. It especially closely resembles the situation described previously when Chos dpal 'byor met the infant. Both figures had the young Karma pa recognize objects from his previous life. Given that Go shrī Rin po che was the regent of the lineage at that time, his recognition of the Karma pa was certainly the more formal and authoritative one.

3-9. Visiting Nags phu at age eleven months

This section consists of only one sentence and is identical in both sources. At the age of eleven months, the infant was invited to Nags phu Monastery, where he also appeared in public at the market in Nags mda' and recited the alphabet to the people. This is again an unusual ability for his age. Its demonstration helped the people to relate to him as an extraordinary being and develop trust and openness. Nevertheless, compared with previous sections, it is notable that in larger public settings he seemed to restrain his full capabilities, whereas in smaller circles—perhaps with more highly realized audiences—he tended to display more, such as giving pointing-out instructions in fully elaborated speech instead of "just" reciting the alphabet.

3-10. New Year at mDo chen at age one (1455)

This section is again identical in both sources, except that the KSP adds

¹³⁶ BDRC, P1380

one sentence at the end. During the Tibetan New Year of 1455, the one-year-old infant was staying at mDo chen, where he was quite talkative. He said: “I am Vajradhara.” Vajradhara is considered the primordial Buddha in the bKa’ rgyud tradition, and practitioners are often instructed to view their lama as this Buddha form. To another person he said: “May you be reborn in Tuṣita.” According to Buddhist tradition, Tuṣita is the heaven where Buddhas reside before taking birth in the world. According to his account of the intermediate state in the CKG, the Seventh Karma pa also dwelled in this realm before his birth.¹³⁷

In response to some questions, the Karma pa urged his audience to rely on the words of the bKa’ rgyud lamas. He added that Dākinīs and Dharma protectors would perform enlightened activity and that Saraha, Virūpa and Kukkuripa were abiding in the sky, which he then pointed toward. It is said that his mother was also able to see their faces.

Here, the Karma pa emphasized the importance of the transmission lineage in terms of teaching, blessing, and protection. He revealed that he had a vision of three of the Eighty-four Mahāsiddhas, considered the Indian forefathers of the bKa’ rgyud lineage. The statement that his mother was also able to see them implies that the others present were not. To see buddha forms or *yi dams* manifesting before oneself is a sign of pure perception (Tib. *dag snang*) and thus of realization, which in this case applies to both mother and son.

The scene continues with the Karma pa and his mother speaking alone about the vision while outside of mDo chen. The infant asked her to dissolve the vision, but she does not know how. This again becomes a pointing-out instruction in which the young Karma pa tries to give insights into the nature of mind by terse instructive sentences to his mother. To see such a vision is a sign of realization, yet unlike the Karma pa, the mother was unable to dissolve it and make it reappear at will. This would again mean to realize the dream-like nature of reality. Later, back at the monastery, he tried again to lift his mother to this level of pure perception and insight into the nature of the mind by asking whether she could see Milarepa abiding before them while singing a song of realization. The latter scene is mentioned only in the KSP.

3-11. Visit of the Long po region

The Karma pa’s visit to the Long po region is mentioned in only one identical sentence in both sources. He was invited there, and “all [those present] attained unwavering faith.” Although, the description is brief,

¹³⁷ Dell 2020, 50.

it follows the same patterns as the other visits. The young Karma pa saw his disciples from his previous life once again and succeeded in renewing the bond and generating trust and openness in them.

3-12. Emanation as Hayagrīva at age two

This section is again identical in both sources, with the KSP adding one sentence at the end. At the age of two, his mother saw the Karma pa emanating as Hayagrīva, holding a wheel of weapons. When she asked what he was doing, he replied: "I have subdued obstructing forces. Don't tell anyone!"

Hayagrīva is a wrathfully depicted, horse-headed enlightened form.¹³⁸ The only reference to a "wheel of weapons" I could find is connected to the wrathful deity Yamāntaka: "his thirty-four arms circle as an impenetrable wheel of sharp weapons, and combined with his body, speech, and mind as the compassionately wrathful thirty-seven practices of a bodhisattva."¹³⁹ Although the Karma pa chose to emanate as Hayagrīva rather than Yamāntaka, the symbolic meaning of the wheel of weapons is certainly similar. The scene shows that the infant was already performing bodhisattva activity on many levels, even on those invisible to most. It is noteworthy that he asked his mother not to tell anyone about it. This is probably because most people—those without the same level of realization as the mother—would not be able to perceive it. Hearing such an account could create mistrust, confusion, or unrealistic expectations. For this reason, lamas often ask their students to keep such experiences to themselves.

In this section, it is also related that on the tenth day of the month the infant said, "I'm the Karma pa, the guide of beings!" He danced, and his body disappeared and reappeared. The tenth day is an auspicious day for practice in the Tibetan calendar. The scene aligns with earlier stories in which the mother was able to see visions of buddha forms. Again, her ability to see this is a sign of her realization, and even more so of the Karma pa's. In the KSP, it is additionally stated that the Karma pa prostrated to his mother. This indicates that he acknowledged her high level of realization.

4. Conclusion

The core of this article is the annotated translation from the Seventh Karma pa's life story as found in the CKG and the KSP, focusing on the period of his infancy (up to age two). The analytical section aimed

¹³⁸ Beer 1999, 77, and 246.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

to contextualize the events and interpreted them against the background of Vajrayāna thought and symbolism.

The recurring theme of the passage is the renewal of the teacher–student relationship between the young Karma pa and his disciples from his previous life. The text primarily recounts his travel itinerary, describing numerous situations involving visions, miracles, and pointing-out instructions given to various individuals or groups.

Regarding the sources used for this paper, the fact that the earlier CKG is, for the most part, more extensive than the later KSP, and that many sentences in the KSP are literally identical to those in the CKG, suggests that the KSP drew heavily from the CKG. Nevertheless, there are a few sentences in the KSP that are not found in the CKG, which indicates that both authors may have consulted earlier sources. A promising candidate for such an earlier source is a text by an unknown author found in the Seventh Karma pa’s *Collected Works* entitled *Rang byung kun mkhyen mtsho skyes rdo rje mi pham chos kyi rgyal po’i rnam par thar pa*.¹⁴⁰ Analyzing the intertextual relationship among these three texts could be an interesting direction for future research.¹⁴¹

Another aspect for future investigation could be to compare the infancy of the Seventh Karma pa with that of other Karma pas. This comparison could be based on the CKG and KSP but could also include additional sources. Several dimensions of comparison are possible. One could examine the content to see whether similar themes and patterns appear across the life stories of the Karma pas. It would also be interesting to compare, within one source (CKG or KSP), the consistency of the author’s style and way of presentation across the different Karma pas.¹⁴² Such an analysis would help determine whether the respective author remained faithful to earlier sources—by reproducing passages verbatim—or imposed his own style by reworking the material. This approach would involve the dimension of intertextuality and could shed light on the methods employed by the compilers of historiographical works such as the CKG and KSP in producing the

¹⁴⁰ Chos grags rgya mtsho 2013. This was pointed out to me by Tashi Bhutia. See also my more extended remark about this in the introduction section.

¹⁴¹ Generally, for further insights into the Seventh Karma pa’s life and works, I would like to refer the reader to Tashi Bhutia from the University of Vienna and his ongoing PhD project.

¹⁴² The CKG, authored by dPa’ bo gTsug lag ‘phreng ba (1504–1564/66), covers the life stories of the First through the Eighth Karma pa. In the case of the KSP, the life stories of the First to the Fifth Karma pa were composed by Si tu Chos kyi ‘byung gnas (1699/1700–1774), while those of the Sixth to the Twelfth Karma pa were written by ‘Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab (1718–ca. 1790) (Dell 2023, 40; Bhutia 2023, 61, n. 169). For completeness, the modern addendum to the KSP authored by sTobs dga’ g.yul rgyal (1940–1997), which covers the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Karma pa, should also be mentioned (sTobs dga’ g.yul rgyal 1993).

rnam thars of the Karma pas.

In general, a complete translation of the CKG and KSP would be a desideratum for addressing a wide range of future research questions.¹⁴³

5. Appendix: Edition

5-1. Edition of the passage from the CKG

An extensive overview of the extant textual witnesses of the CKG was provided in an earlier publication, and the same sigla are used in the present paper.¹⁴⁴ All witnesses derive from a single set of printing blocks—the lHo brag printing blocks. There are several textual witnesses of the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, of which the most interesting and original is a reproduction of prints from the lHo brag blocks from Rumtek Monastery in two volumes from 1980 (PX1). This reproduction is also available via BDRC, and it serves as the starting point for the edition provided here. Several other prints or reproductions of prints from these same printing blocks exist. However, since they stem from the same printing blocks, they are unlikely to add significant value for the present purpose and have therefore been omitted from the edition. All other textual witnesses available today derive from these same blocks.

In addition to the block print reproduction, only one contemporary edition has been used: rDor je rgyal po's modern edition in book format, published by Mi rigs dpe skrun khang in 1986, in two volumes (PB2). It is too available via BDRC. The added value of rDo rje rgyal po's edition lies in its correction of numerous spelling errors or non-standard orthographies found in the original block print. Whenever differences occur, they are noted in the apparatus. In general, there are no significant textual variations in the section studied here.

[PX1, vol. 2, p. 189, l. 7; PB2, vol. 2, p. 1037, l. 5] *yab yum gyis gsang bar byas kyang spyi nang du bya bral pho mo gnyis las chos kyi rje sku 'khrungs 'dug zer nas phyogs thams cad du¹⁴⁵ rlung ltar khyab/ nyin lam gsum gyi lha dpon mi dpon skya ser thams cad 'dus te gsang ma thub/ snye bo da ra steng gi* [PX1, vol. 2, p. 190] *gdan sa pa chos dpal 'byor gyis thos nas mjal du 'gro bsam pa na rmi lam du yum gyi pang na bzhugs 'dug*

¹⁴³ In this context, it might be noteworthy that David DiValerio from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, has taken on the task of translating the CKG in its entirety, beginning in September 2023. However, he recently noted that it could easily be a ten- to fifteen-year project before publication (DiValerio 2025, timestamp 58:30). I am not aware of a similar project for the KSP.

¹⁴⁴ Dell 2021d, 126–41.

¹⁴⁵ *du PB2] tu PX1*

pa la dbu zhwa nag po phul ba rmis¹⁴⁶ pas bla ma sgres po la kha skad 'di 'dra
'dug ces¹⁴⁷ bzlas pas nga'i rmi lam na spyi lha'i la khar nyi zla gnyis shar ba
mal gcig tu¹⁴⁸ 'dus song ba rmis¹⁴⁹ pas the tshom mi dgos drung gong ma'i
dbu zhwa na bza'¹⁵⁰ phyags rnams khyer la song gsungs te¹⁵¹ phyin pas sku
'khrungs nas zhag bco lnga song ba'i thog tu slebs¹⁵²/

khong gzigs pas bzhad cing dgyes par mdzad/ drung gong ma'i na bza'¹⁵³
dang dbu zhwa dang drung rtogs ldan pa'i na bza'¹⁵⁴ dbu zhwa rnams phul
bas drung gong ma'i rnams phyag gis bzhes te gzhan ma bzhes/ khyed thams
cad mkhyen pa mthong ba don ldan yin na nga la byin rlabs mdzad dgos zhus
pas phyag gnyis ka spyi bor bkod de¹⁵⁵ byin rlabs yang yang mdzad pas the
tshom chod/

de yang spre¹⁵⁶ lo la sprul sku chos dpal ye shes gshegs/ bya lo gsar ma thag
drung mthong ba don ldan gshegs/ sprul sku yang bya lo la kre khang dmar
du rje zhwa dmar ba¹⁵⁷ bzhi pa bltams/

ngo mtshar gyi ltas mang du byung zhing 'khrungs 'phral karma pa gsung
bas karma pa yin gsung bar go nas re zhig rje bdun pa yin par yang grags/

phyis sku dngos bltams [PB2, vol. 2, p. 1038] pa na yang zhal rnam pa
gnyis gang gi sprul sku yin the tshom cung zad byung ba 'dis chod/ kre'i sprul
sku yang sprul pa'i sku 'di nyid kyis zhwa dmar cod pan 'dzin par ngos 'dzin
mdzad pa yin no// da ra gdan sa pas de phyin zhabs phyir bzhugs te sku rim
zhabs tog mdzad/

zla ngo gnyis bzhes pa na rngod pa'i lha sde mi sde thams cad kyis a rig
thang du gdan drangs/ drung gong ma'i chos khri la bzhugs nas khrom chen
po la zhal bstan tshe phyag rten rnams phyag gis rim par bzhes/

byin rlabs gnang nas khrom rnams la dal bus gzigs te phyag g.yas kyis
zhal gyi dkyil [PX1, vol. 2, p. 191] 'khor lan gsum dal gyis phyis nas mnyam
bzhag dang lta stangs mdzad de¹⁵⁸ sku gzi brjid dang ldan par bzhugs pas zil
gyis non zhing dad pa thob/

gdan sa pas¹⁵⁹ kyang dbus dang karma sogs su gtam snyan skyel mi btang/

¹⁴⁶ rmis PB2] brmis PX1

¹⁴⁷ ces PB2] zhes PX1

¹⁴⁸ tu PB2] du PX1

¹⁴⁹ rmis PB2] brmis PX1

¹⁵⁰ bza' PB2] za PX1

¹⁵¹ te PB2] ste PX1

¹⁵² slebs PB2] sleb PX1

¹⁵³ bza' PB2] za PX1

¹⁵⁴ bza' PB2] za PX1

¹⁵⁵ de PB2] ste PX1

¹⁵⁶ spre PB2] spe PX1

¹⁵⁷ pa PB2] ba PX1

¹⁵⁸ de PB2] ste PX1

¹⁵⁹ pas PX1] bas PB2

drung go'i shri pas dbu mdzad pa'i sgar pa dbus su dgongs rdzogs kyi gser thog sgrub pa'i tshe gtam snyan sleb pa nyi ma shar ba lo de'i khu byug gi skad thog ma grag pa dang 'brug sgra grag pa rnams dus mtshungs pas shin tu mnyes/

drung 'jam dbyangs chen po la zhus pas yab yum gyi ming 'khrungs pa'i yul rnams rmi lam dang mthun par 'dug gsungs nas go'i shri rnam pa gnyis kyis¹⁶⁰ rtsod med du¹⁶¹ thugs thag bcad/ gsol gzims gnyis ja 'dren la btang/

mjal ba na shin tu mnyes par mdzad karmar gtam snyan zla ba gsum pa'i yar tshes la slebs¹⁶²/ de dus mdo khams su than pa cher byung ba la de'i nub mo nas kha ba chen po bab/

'brug grag bla ma tshogs chen pa bsod rnams rdo rje sogs mang po'i rmi lam du mdun ri'i rtse mo nas bkra shis dar chen 'then nas byung ba dang ri gling gi khang thog thams cad du¹⁶³ dar 'phyar dung 'bud pa sogs rmis¹⁶⁴ pas thams cad kyang the tshom chod/

zla ngo gsum bzhes tshe rngod kyi ber bsnol du bzher blas co 'dri zhus te mi rnams khyed karma pa min pa 'dra zer/ [PB2, vol. 2, p. 1039] drung gong ma rnams kyis zla ba 'di la gsung 'di byon sogs 'dug/ grub rtogs mang du bstan 'dug pa/ rang re mthong ba don ldan yin na yid 'ches pa'i rtags dang gsung 'byon dgos zhus pas/

*nga ni karma'i ming cad te¹⁶⁵//
nga lta'i gang zag dkon pa yin//
nga dang 'brel ba gang yod pa//
nga yis mi bslu'i smon lam yod//
bcu gsum zla ba ma rdzogs par//
tshig 'di gsang chen rgya dang ldan//
de nas kho bo rtsod bral ba'i//
rtags rnams rim gyis gsal bar 'gyur//
zhes gsungs/*

de nas snye [PX1, vol. 2, p. 192] bo'i yul du spyang drangs da ra steng du bzhugs pa'i tshe karma si d+hu ba'i zhu yig lcags mo dbon po/ gser bya bral ba bsod yes sogs kyis¹⁶⁶ phul nas zhu yig phyag gis bzhes yig phreng phyag mdzub kyis mnan zhing rim pas gzigs nas gsung mi go tsam chung ngu 'byon zhing klog pa'i tshul mdzad/

dpal ldan rdo rje gsungs rnas lcags mo'i pang par byon/ bya bral gyi lag

¹⁶⁰ *kyis* PB2 | *gyis* PX1

¹⁶¹ *du* PB2 | *tu* PX1

¹⁶² *slebs* PB2 | *sleb* PX1

¹⁶³ *du* PB2 | *tu* PX1

¹⁶⁴ *rmis* PB2 | *brmis* PX1

¹⁶⁵ *te* PB2 | *ste* PX1

¹⁶⁶ *kyis* PB2 | *kyi* PX1

pa la 'jus shing¹⁶⁷ mnyes mnyes mdzad/ slob ma rnying pa phal cher gyi ming
gsungs pas thams cad dad ches sngon gnas dran pas dad pa'i yus kyis ngu
zhing brgyal/ de phyin gser bya bral bas lus dang grib ma ltar phyag phyi
bsgrubs/

zla ngo lnga bzhes pa snye bo'i ga gor khar bzhugs dus kha cig gis sku
drung der tho co 'dra byas pas zhal nas/
a haM bde stong sgyu ma'i rtsal//
sna tshogs ye shes rol pa la//
byis pa rnams kyis bden par mthong//
nga ni skye 'gag gnas dang bral//
gsungs/

zla ngo dgu bzhes pa na go'i shri rin po che dbus nas phebs te snye bo'i
dgon gsar¹⁶⁸ du mjal ba na sku gzi brjid dang ldan pas mnyes par mdzad cing
phyag rten rnams phyag tu bzhes/

sgar dung phyag tu¹⁶⁹ bsnams te nga'i yin gsung ba sogs ngo mtshar bsam
gyis mi khyab par dgongs te rang byung kun mkhyen chos kyi rgyal por
mtshan gsol/

sgar chen 'dzam gling gi rgyan chen por seng ge'i khri la bzhugs/

zla ngo bcu gcig bzhes pa na nags phu [PB2, vol. 2, p. 1040] bas spyan
drangs nags mdar khrom chen po la A li kA li gsungs/

phag lo gsar nas mdo chen du bzhugs pa na nga rdo rje 'chang yin
gsungs¹⁷⁰/ cig gis sngo yig phul bas dga' ldan du skye bar gyur cig gsungs¹⁷¹/
yang gzhan gyis co 'dri zhus pa na/ the tshom mi dgos bka' rgyud bla ma
rnams kyi zhal la ltos/ mkha' 'gro chos skyong gis 'phrin las sgrub cing yod/
sa ra ha birwa pa ku ku ri pa gsum nam mkhar bzhugs/ [PX1, vol. 2, p. 193]
'di gsum gyi rnams thar 'dzin mi nga yin gsungs¹⁷² nas phyag mdzub nam¹⁷³
mkhar gtad/

yum gyis kyang de rnams kyi zhal mjal/ mdo chen gyi phu na gcod la 'byon
gsungs¹⁷⁴/

gcod ji ltar byed zhus pas sems nyid rtsad nas gcod pa yin gsungs¹⁷⁵/
rtsad nas ji ltar gcod zhus pas sgom gyis gsungs¹⁷⁶/

¹⁶⁷ shing PB2 | cing PX1

¹⁶⁸ gsar PB2 | sar PX1

¹⁶⁹ tu PB2 | du PX1

¹⁷⁰ gsungs PB2 | gsung PX1

¹⁷¹ gsungs PB2 | gsung PX1

¹⁷² gsungs PB2 | gsung PX1

¹⁷³ nam PB2 | na PX1

¹⁷⁴ gsungs PB2 | gsung PX1

¹⁷⁵ gsungs PB2 | gsung PX1

¹⁷⁶ gsungs PB2 | gsung PX1

*mi shes zhus pas nam¹⁷⁷ mkhar phyag mdzub gtad de¹⁷⁸ mtha' dbus med
pa zhig¹⁷⁹ yin gsungs¹⁸⁰/*

long por spyan drangs thams cad mi phyed pa'i dad pa thob/

*byi ba'i lo la spug¹⁸¹ do bor bzhugs dus rta mgrin mtshon cha 'khor lor
sprul pa yum gyis gzigs/*

*'di 'dra mdzad pa ci lags zhus pas bgegs btul pa yin su la'ang ma bshad
gsungs¹⁸²/*

*tshes bcu'i dus shig¹⁸³ nga karma pa ni 'gro ba 'dren gsungs¹⁸⁴ nas gar
mdzad/*

de ma thag sku lus mi snang bar gyur te¹⁸⁵ yang lam gyis byon/

5-2. Edition of the passage from the KSP

An overview of the different textual witnesses of the KSP was likewise provided in an earlier publication, and the same sigla are used here.¹⁸⁶ There is only one set of printing blocks. Accordingly, one of their reprints has been used below (SX1), comprising volumes 11 and 12 of the *Collected Works* of Si tu Chos kyi 'byung gnas. For convenience, one of the modern editions has also been consulted (SB1). In the paragraph at hand, there were no significant orthographic differences, and only one place has been emended to match the spelling found in the CKG. In the edition below, page numbers from both textual witnesses are indicated in brackets whenever a new page begins.

[SX1, vol. 11, f. 266r, l. 6 (p. 625); SB1, vol. 2, p. 123] *karma pa sku
phreng bdun pa chos grags rgya mtsho'i lo rgyus/¹⁸⁷*

*/na rim bdun pa rje chos grags rgya mtsho ni/ de nas chos kyi rje mthong
ba don ldan gzugs sku chos dbyings su bsdu kar/ go'i shri rin po che la zhal
chems bka' rgya bcu gsum dang bcas pa gnang/ byang phyogs spyi lha zhes
bya bar sprul sku 'byon par yab yum dang bcas lung bstan/*

*de nyid kyi bar do'i rnam thar las kyang/¹⁸⁸ byang [SX1, vol. 11, f. 266v]
phyogs su don yod grub pas khyod dzam+bu'i gling du/ pha grags pa dpal*

¹⁷⁷ nam PB2] na PX1

¹⁷⁸ de PB2] ste PX1

¹⁷⁹ zhig PB2] cig PX1

¹⁸⁰ gsungs PB2] gsung PX1

¹⁸¹ spug PX1] sdug PB2

¹⁸² gsungs PB2] gsung PX1

¹⁸³ zhig PB2] cig PX1

¹⁸⁴ gsungs PB2] gsung PX1

¹⁸⁵ te PB2] ste PX1

¹⁸⁶ Dell 2023, 21–29.

¹⁸⁷ Title only inserted in the modern edition SB1, not present in the block print SX1.

¹⁸⁸ kyang/ SB1] kyang SX1

grub dang/ ma lha mo skyid las skye bar 'gyur ro gsungs zhes phyis sprul sku nyid kyis bka' stsal/

mtshur phu 'jam dbyangs chen pos kyang bya lo zla ba bdun pa'i skabs shig ja gral ba mang du yod pa cig la nga yi rmi lam ltar na da res sprul sku'i yab la dpal grub bya ba zhig yong ba 'dug gsungs/ kun mkhyen ban sgar bas kyang/ mtshur phu nas shar phyogs drang por sprul sku 'byon zhes lung bstan pa ltar/ rngod spyi mda' zhes pa/ de yang grub pa'i gnas mkha' 'gro'i sbas yul zhig ste/

de'i gnas kyid bdag po gzhi bdag thams cad kyid spyi dpon nam/ thams cad kyid lha'am/ jo bo lta bu yin pas na spyi lha zhes bya ba/ sngon rje rang byung rdo rje mtshur phu'i dben gnas bde chen na bzhugs pa'i dus dge bsnyen gyi sdom pa zhus shing/ phyin chad yon bdag byed cing ci gsung sgrub ces dam bcas/

gnas der phebs nas bzhugs pa'i zhu ba phul bzhin rim par phebs nas zhabs kyis bcags/ ma 'ongs sprul sku 'byon pa'i zhing du byin gyis brlabs pa'i rgya gar gyi gnas chen rnams kyid yal ga mkha' 'gro ma'i sbas lung/ gdul bya dag pa'i snang ba 'ba' zhig gi spyod yul du gyur pa'i gnas mchog khyad par can spyi nang bya [SB1, vol. 2, p. 124] bar/ yab grub pa thob pa'i skyes bu chen po rus chen sngong la nang tshan dpa' ya ste/

grags pa dpal grub bya ba dang/ yum ye shes kyid mkha' 'gro ma'i sprul pa jo dar bza' lha mo skyid gnyis kyid sras su/ shing pho khyi'i lo hor zla dang po'i tshes bco lnga'i snga dror nam mkha' la kha dog lnga'i 'ja' tshon gyi re khA dang/ me tog gi char dang/ 'brug gi sgra dang/ gzhan yang ngo mtshar ba'i ltas du ma dang bcas sku 'khrungs/ de ma thag zhal nas a la la gsungs shing bzhad/

sku la me tog gi rnam pa mang po dang dbu ltag tu rdo rje 'chang gi sku/ thugs kar rtsa ris kyid a yig gsang gnas su chos 'byung dang 'khor lo/ zhabs la 'khor lo ste sku la rang byon drug gsal por mngon la/ gsang chab 'o mar 'babs shing dri bzang gi ngad kyis thams cad khyab/ zhag bdun na gsung mang du byon pa na yab kyis sngags mang du gsung bar go /yum gyis dbyangs yig gsungs bar¹⁸⁹ go /gzhan rnams kyis [SX1, vol. 11, f. 267r] ma Ni gsung bar go/

yab yum kyis gsang bar dam bcas kyang/ nyid kyid thugs rje'i rang 'od mkha' la nyi ma shar ba lta bu'i sgrogs mkhan med kyang spyi nang du bya bral pho mo gnyis las chos kyid rje sku 'khrungs 'dug zer nas grags pa'i dbyar rngas phyogs kun khyab par gyur nas/ phyogs phyogs kyid lha dpon mi dpon gyi gtsos thams cad rang babs kyis 'dus shing gsang bar rngo ma thogs tel/

snye bo da ra steng¹⁹⁰ gi gdan sa pa chos dpal 'byor gyis thos nas mjal du 'gro bsam pa na rmi lam du yum gyi pang na bzhugs 'dug pa la dbu zhwa sogs phul ba rmis pas/ bla ma bsgres po la rngod nas kha skad 'di 'dra lags par

¹⁸⁹ bar SX1] par SB1

¹⁹⁰ snye bo da ra steng em.] snye bong ra steng SX1, SB1

ci byar 'os zhus pas/ nga'i rmi lam na spyi lha'i la khar nyi zla gnyis shar ba
mal gcig tu 'dus song ba rmis pas/ the tshom mi dgos drung gong ma'i dbu
zhwa na bza' phyags l+h+wam rnams khyer la song gsungs te/

phyin pas sku 'khrungs nas zhag bco lnga song ba'i thog tu sleb/ khong
gzigs pas bzhad cing dgyes par mdzad/ rje gong ma'i dbu zhwa sogs dang
drung rtogs ldan pa'i na bza' dbu zhwa rnams phul bas/ rje gong ma'i rnams
phyag gis bzhes te/ gzhan ma bzhes/ khyed thams [SB1, vol. 2, p. 125] cad
mkhyen pa mthong ba don ldan yin na nga la byin rlabs mdzad dgos zhus pas
phyag gnyis ka spyi bor bkod de byin rlabs yang yang mdzad pas the tshom
chod/

zla ngo gnyis bzhes pa na rngod pa'i lha sde mi sde thams cad kyis a rig
thang du gdan drangs/ drung gong ma'i chos khri la bzhugs nas khrom chen
po la zhal bstan tshe/ phyag rten rnams phyag gis rim par bzhes/

byin rlabs gnang nas khrom rnams la dal bus gzigs te phyag g.yas kyis
zhal dkyil lan gsum dal gyis phyis nas mnyam bzhag dang lta stangs mdzad
de/ sku gzi brjid dang ldan par bzhugs pas/ der 'dus pa thams cad mi phyed
pa'i dad pa thob nas/ mngon mtho dang nges legs kyi lam la bkod dol/

de nas zla ngo gsum bzhes tshe rngod kyi ber bsnol du/ bzher byas sku
mdun du col tshig zhus te/ mi rnams khyed karma pa min pa 'dra/

rje gong ma rnams kyis zla ba 'di la gsung 'di byon pa sogs 'dug /grub
rtags mang du bstan 'dug pa/ nyid mthong ba don ldan gyi sku'i skye ba yin
na yid ches kyi rtags dang [SX1, vol. 11, f. 267v] gsung zhig 'byon par zhus
pas/

nga ni karma'i ming can ste//
nga lta'i gang zag dkon pa yin//
nga dang 'brel pa 'ga' yod pa//
nga yis mi bslu'i smon lam yod//
bcu gsum zla ba ma rdzogs par//
tshig 'di gsang chen rgya dang ldan//
de nas kho bo rtsod bral ba'i//
rtags rnams rim gyis gsal par 'gyur//
zhes gsungs/

[SB1, vol. 2, p. 126] de nas snye bos gdan drangs nas/ da ra steng du
bzhugs pa'i tshe/ karma si tu pa'i zhu yig lcags mo dbon po/ lger bya bral
bsod ye sogs kyis phul nas/ zhu yig phyag gis bzhes nas yig phreng la rim par
gzigs nas gsung tshul mdzad/

dpal ldan rdo rje gsungs nas lcags mo'i pang par byon/ bya bral gyi lag pa
la 'jus nas mnyes pa'i rnam 'gyur du ma mdzad/ gzhan yang sngar gyi slob
ma rnying pa phal cher 'ga'i ming gsungs shing ngos bzung mdzad pas/
thams cad sngon gyi dus dran pas yid mos gus kyi gdung shugs drag pos/ dad
pa'i yus kyis ngus shing brgyal bar gyur to/

/zla ngo lnga bzhes pa snye bo'i ga gor khar bzhugs pa'i dus/ sku mdun
 der kha cig tho co 'dra byas pas/ zhal nas/
 a haM bde stong sgyu ma'i rtsal//
 sna tshogs ye shes rol pa la//
 byis pa rnams kyis bden par mthong//
 nga ni skye 'gag gnas dang bral//
 ces gsungs/

de nas zla ba dgu bzhes pa na/ go'i shri rin po che mjal bar/ sku gzi brjid
 kyi dpal 'bar zhing/ rab tu mnyes par mdzad cing byin rlabs gnang ba dang/
 phyag rten rnams phyag tu rim par bzhes/
 sgar dung ngos bzung mdzad/ rje gong ma'i dbu zhwa phul ba mnabs
 shing/ rdo rje dril bu phyag gis bsname nas/ pad kor dril stabs mdzad/
 thugs dam mgon sku ngos 'dzin kyang gnang ba sogs ngo mtshar bsam
 gyis mi khyab par dgongs te rang byung kun mkhyen chos kyi rgyal por
 mtshan gsol/
 sgar chen 'dzam gling rgyan chen por seng ge'i khrir bzhugs/

zla ngo bcu gcig bzhes pa na/ nags phu bas spyang drangs nags mdar khrom
 tshogs la A li kA li gsungs/

phag lo sar nas mdo chen du bzhugs pa na nga rdo rje 'chang yin gsungs/
 gcig gi sngo¹⁹¹ yig phul bas dga' ldan du skye bar gyur cig [SB1, vol. 2, p.
 127] gsungs/

yang gzhan gyis co 'dri zhus pa na/ the tshom mi [SX1, vol. 11, f. 268r]
 dgos bka' brgyud bla ma rnams kyi zhal la ltos/ mkha' 'gro chos skyong gis
 phrin las bsgrub cing yod/ sa ra ha birba pa ku ku ri pa gsum nam mkhar
 bzhugs/ 'di gsum gyi rnam thar 'dzin mi nga yin gsungs nas phyag mdzub
 nam mkhar gtad/

yum gyis kyang de rnams kyi zhal mjal/ mdo chen phu na gcod la 'byon
 gsungs/ gcod ji ltar byed zhus pas sems nyid rtsad nas gcod pa yin gsungs
 rtsad nas ji ltar gcod zhus pas sgom gyis gsungs/ mi shes zhus pas nam mkhar
 phyag mdzub gtad de mtha' dbus med pa zhig yin gsungs/

yang mdo chen gyi bla ye na yum sras bzhugs dus/ mi la ras pas mgur ma
 'then shing yod e mthong gsungs/

long por spyang drangs/ thams cad mi phyed pa'i dad pa thob/

byi ba'i lo la spug ngo bor bzhugs pa'i dus/ rta mgrin mtshon cha 'khor lor
 sprul pa yum gyis gzigs/
 'di 'dra mdzad pa ci lags zhus pas/ bgegs btul ba yin/ su la'ang ma bshad

¹⁹¹ sngo SX1] sngos SB1

gsungs/

*tshes bcu'i dus cig nga karma pa ni 'gro ba 'dren gsungs nas gar mdzad de/ de ma thag sku lus mi snang bar mdzad ste yang lam gyis byon/ yum sras bla ye na bzhuks dus yum la phyag 'tshal lo//*¹⁹²

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¹⁹² 'tshal lo// SB1] 'tshal SX1

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Mapping Tibet's Amdo Province, ca. 1650–1850*

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At the height of its political power in the eighteenth century, the Qing dynasty (1636/44–1911) controlled a vast swath of Eurasia, including Manchuria, Mongolia, Chinese Turkestan, Tibet, and China (Crossley 1999: 3). The Qing's territory during this period, minus Mongolia, would correspond more or less to the territory of the modern Chinese nation-state (Hostetler 2001: 33–34). The Qing conquest of Mongolia and Xinjiang between 1680–1760 has been characterized by a prominent historian as a “major world historical event” (Perdue 2010: 10). In order for the success of its military campaigns in Eurasia, the Qing needed to secure key frontier areas to serve as a launching point. During the early Qing period, the frontier area of interest was the northeast frontier of modern-day Shanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia provinces (Dai 2009: 108). From the eighteenth century onward, the Qing shifted its attention to the frontier regions of the southwest, included Sichuan and Yunnan provinces (Dai 2009: 36).

From the Qing perspective, these frontier areas represented the borderlands of empire—areas meant to be incorporated into the Chinese cultural world (Tsomo 2009: 57). For instance, Qing officials viewed Yunnan province as being occupied by “barbarians,” variously described as “tyrannical, proud, and untamed” and who could be “civilized by exposure to imperial morality and humanity” (Giersch 2006: 90). In the case of Qing perceptions of Tibet, Tibet and its populations were simultaneously portrayed with both disdain and awe; disdain at the “unruly” people and harsh terrain, and awe at the landscape and different culture (Wang 2011: 21). In contrast, the indigenous peoples of the frontier regions did not see themselves as inhabitants of borderlands in need of civilization, but rather civilizational centers in and of themselves with their own names for the places in which they lived

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(Giersch 2006: 84).

This essay participates in this latter perspective on the Qing's borderlands, following in the footsteps of recent studies of self-representation by inhabitants of frontiers of the Qing empire.¹ I examine texts by seven major Tibetan Buddhist authors from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century that depict the Amdo (a mdo) region of eastern Tibet, which is situated in modern day Qinghai, Sichuan, and Gansu provinces of the PRC. The authors include Tibetans and Tibetanized Mongols, members of the Geluk and Nyingma sects, and monks and yogis. Whereas the Qing dynasty and Lhasa treated Amdo as a frontier region, these Amdo authors conceived of the area as a distinctive geographical entity that was an integral part of a pan-plateau conception of Tibet.

The first substantive articulation of the idea of Amdo occurred in the mid-seventeenth century during the height of Geluk expansion into the region. As central Tibet and the Khoshot Mongols lost their influence in Amdo and the Qing dynasty vied for control of the region in the eighteenth century, powerful local Geluk monastics composed narrative maps that articulated the territorial integrity of the Amdo region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These "mapping monastics" can be considered a local third power—in between the Qing empire and the Ganden Potrang government—who asserted their authority over the region. These local monastic leaders drew their power from the massive network of Geluk monasteries that encompassed central Tibet, Amdo, and Mongolia. In addition, two Nyingma figures also took part in placing Amdo on the map through their autobiographies and songs. This demonstrates how the development of the idea of Amdo during this period was not only an endeavor limited to Geluk monastics. Finally, the mapping of the Amdo region by these authors needs to be considered within the contexts of: (1) the imperial mapping projects of eighteenth-century Eurasia and (2) the Qing and Ganden Potrang governments marking their nascent national borders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively. The maps of these authors provide the foundation for the modern idea of Amdo as one of the three provinces of contemporary Tibet.

The Amdo Region

Amdo is Tibet's northeastern province (Central Tibetan Administration). Roughly the size of France, it is situated mainly in modern day Qinghai province of the PRC and also includes sections of Sichuan and

¹ Examples include C. Patterson Giersch (2006), Wim van Spengen and Lama Jabb (2009), Johan Elverskog (2008), and James Millward (1998).

Gansu provinces. Historically, this region was located at the cross-roads of Tibet, China, Mongolia, Minyak, Tangut, and other empires, making it a critical buffer area between regional powers (Nietupski 2011: 2). Although the Amdo region was part of the Tibetan empire and subsequent Chinese, Mongol, and Manchu led dynasties, the region has never been held under a single ruler, but instead, controlled by fiercely independent local leaders. Historically, this region has also been ethnically diverse. Today, it is home to Tibetans, Mongols, Mongers, Hui, Salar, Han Chinese, and others (Nietupski 2011: 1).

In contemporary times, Tibet's northeastern province is most often referred to as "Amdo." However, historically, the term "Domé" (mdo smad) was more commonly used to refer to the region. "Domé" has been used since Tibetan imperial times (seventh through ninth centuries) (Tuttle 2011: 145 n. 17). The exact territory that corresponds to the term "Domé" (mdo smad) has shifted throughout history (Tuttle 2011: 145-6 n.17-18). In the sources examined in this piece, both the terms "Domé" and "Amdo" are used, although Domé is used with more frequency. In this essay, I use the term that mirrors the articulation of the concept in the source I am examining. Similarly, in accord with the majority of authors examined in this essay, I use the term "Tibet" (bod) to refer to a pan-plateau concept of Tibet and the term "central Tibet" to denote Tibet's historical center of "Ü-Tsang" (dbus gtsang).

The concept of Amdo as "a single cultural territory of this vast scope" arose only with the rise of the Geluk sect in the region beginning in the sixteenth century (Tuttle n.d.). Up until the publication of Desi Sangyé Gyatso's *The Golden Beryl* (1698), a survey of Geluk monasteries across the Tibetan plateau, religious histories (chos 'byung) written in central Tibet only included information about Amdo insofar as it was pertinent to central Tibet (Tuttle 2011:153, 161). Even then, Sangyé Gyatso's work does not use "Amdo" as a geographical organizational principle (Tuttle n.d.). Thus, although sites within Amdo have played key roles in Tibet's history since the imperial period, for much of history the region was a considered a backwater by the civilizational centers of Lhasa and Beijing.

Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century writers from the Amdo region devoted entire works to describing the region, literally writing themselves into Tibetan history and geography (Tuttle n.d.). Descriptions of Amdo reached their most multi-faceted articulation in the nineteenth century. This newfound assertiveness of authors from Amdo coincides with the rise and spread of the Geluk sect in the region assisted by Khoshot Mongol support. The political and religio-cultural rise of the Amdo region was also buttressed by economic and population growth precipitated by the arrival of New World crops such as potatoes and maize, the influx of European silver into the economy,

and the demand for wool in Chinese trading ports beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Ryavec 2015:124). The spread of Geluk monasteries into the grasslands of southwest Amdo from mid-eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries may also have been supported by economic growth in the area (Tuttle 2012: 138-9).

The Geluk Sect's Expansion and the Initial Rise of the Amdo Region

The development of the concept of Amdo is associated with the rise of the Geluk sect in the region. Although the Geluk sect was present there since the fifteenth century, it was the Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso's (1543-1588) visit to Lake Kokonor that precipitated the large-scale spread of the Geluk sect into Amdo (Tuttle 2013: 131-3). Prior to the Third Dalai Lama's visit in 1578, there were fewer than 60 Geluk monasteries in Amdo; over the next two centuries, there were more than 350 Geluk monasteries (Tuttle 2013: 585). The conversion of pre-existent monasteries to the Geluk sect and the establishment of new ones was part of the Geluk sect's ambitions to expand its monastic network beyond central Tibet into Amdo and Mongolia with the co-operation of the Khoshot Mongol in the mid seventeenth to mid eighteenth centuries (Sullivan 2021: 2). This was part of the Fifth Dalai Lama's theocratic government's goal of supporting the flourishing of Buddhism in Tibet, especially through his own Geluk sect (Goldstein 2009: 409). Brenton Sullivan has likened its expansionist program to a "religious empire" (Sullivan 2021: 11, 22).

Kalden Gyatso

Kalden Gyatso (1607-1677), the abbot of Rongwo monastery, played a major role in facilitating the initial spread of the Geluk sect in Amdo. He was of Tibetan descent. His disciples would go on to found monastic colleges across the Amdo region (Sujata 2005: 375). Kalden Gyatso's (1607-1677) *A Short History of the Way the Teachings Spread in Amdo Domé* (*mdo smad a mdo'i phyogs su bstan pa dar tshul gyi lo rgyus mdor bsdud*) (1652) (hereafter referred to as *A Short History*) is the first known Tibetan language work to focus entirely on the Amdo region. He composed this text during the height of Geluk monastic expansion into the region (Tuttle 2012: 135-6). Thus, Kalden Gyatso's impulse to establish the idea of Amdo as a distinct cultural territory that is part of Tibet is tied to the Geluk sect's expansionist ambitions into the area.

The title of Kalden Gyatso's text combines two common terms used to refer to the Amdo region: Domé (*mdo smad*) and Amdo (*a mdo*). In his *Collected Songs*, Kalden Gyatso uses the terms "Domé," "Amdo,"

and “Domé Amdo” interchangeably (Skal Idan 1994: 228, 124, 225). Sometimes, he adds the word “land” (yul) to it such as in the following expressions: “a mdo’i yul,” and “yul mdo smad” (Skal Idan 1994: 127, 228). Kalden Gyatso’s portrayal of Amdo has geographic, linguistic and communal dimensions. There is the sense that Amdo is a “vast region” (yangs pa’i sa yi cha) located in the “north” (Skal Idan 1994: 214, 156, 254-5). The region’s distinctive language is also showcased in his songs when he uses the grammatical structure of “e + verb” to ask questions (Skal Idan 1994: 77). Kalden uses the expression “the people of Dokham” (mdo khams kyi mi) within the context of observing that the people from the region had faith in Buddhism (Skal Idan 1994: 359). Although this is but a single reference, it suggests the idea of the inhabitants of this region as a collective.

Kalden Gyatso conveys a pan-plateau concept of Tibet through the terms “the Country of Tibet” (bod kyi yul), “Snow Ranges [of] Tibet” (bod gangs khrod), or “Tibet, Land of Snows” (bod kha ba can) (Skal Idan 1994: 210, 228, 250). Kalden Gyatso does not use the term “bod” to refer to central Tibet. Instead, he uses the terms Ü-Tsang (dbus gtsang), “the four horns of Ü-Tsang (dbus gtsang ru bzhi) or simply, “the Center” (dbus) (Skal Idan 1994: 51, 115, 123, 127, 145, 254). He divides Tibet into three main regions: “central Tibet” (dbus gtsang), “Upper [Region]: Three Districts of Ngari” (stod mnga ris skor gsum), and “Lower [Region]: the Three Ranges of Dokham” (smad mdo khams sgang gsum) (Sujata 2005: 10-11; Skal Idan 1994: 288-9). Kalden Gyatso does not identify these three ranges, and so it is not clear how Amdo fits into them.² Nevertheless, he gives the impression that Amdo is part of Tibet in a passage where he zooms in to Amdo from a larger geographical frame of reference. He begins from the widest geographical lens, the world (’dzam gling), zooms into the “Land of Snows” (gangs can khrod), and finally to Amdo (Skal Idan 1994: 330).

Sumpa Khenpo

The eighteenth century was a period of religious and cultural efflorescence in Amdo. During this time, the Amdo region, in comparison to central Tibet and Kham, boasted the greatest number of monasteries, produced the greatest volume of Collected Works, and had the largest number of new incarnate lamas (Kim 2018: 35-48). Gönlung monastery was the largest monastery in Tibetan cultural world, with over 7000

² According to Victoria Sujata (2005: 11, n.34), “mdo khams sgang gsum” refers to mdo khams (previously called smad khams), mdo smad (previously called g.yer mo thang), and tsong kha (gyi thang). Gray Tuttle (2011: 140) proposes a different correspondence.

monks (Tuttle 2012: 135). Sumpa Khenpo (1704-1788) was a throneholder of Gönlung (dgon lung) Monastery during this period. As was common for the Geluk monastic leadership of the period and region, he was a Tibetanized Mongol (Kim 2018: 28).

Sumpa Khenpo composed the *Annals of Kokonor* in 1748 (published 1786) at the request of Gushri Khan's descendants (Yang 1969: 5, 7; Sum pa 1982: 55; Tuttle 2011: 162). The word "Kokonor," is the Mongolian word for "blue lake" (Tib. mtsho sngon; Ch. Qinghai). It describes the Mongol administrative polity led by Gushri Khan and his descendants adjacent to Qinghai Lake that governed large areas of Amdo. After the rebellion led by the Khoshot Mongols against the Qing failed in 1723, the Khoshot Mongols lost their power over the region. Within this context, it is not surprising that they would request Sumpa Khenpo to recount the glorious past of their renowned patriarch.

As the title of the work suggests, the dominant concept within the *Annals of Kokonor* is that of "Kokonor." Nevertheless, Sumpa Khenpo does discuss "Dokham" (mdo khams) and "Amdo" (a mdo)—terms that he uses interchangeably. For instance, he describes "Dokham" as one of the regions of Tibet (Sum pa 1982: 2). Elsewhere, he describes the region of Pari (dpa' ris) as being in "Amdo" (Sum pa 1982: 6; Yang 1969: 30). He also uses the term "Amdo" when describing the geography of Tibet and Mongolia (Sum pa 1982: 47).

In *Annals of Kokonor*, Amdo is a part of a pan- plateau concept of Tibet. For instance, in his description of the moment when Gushri Khan is crowned king of Tibet, he notes "Everywhere in Tibet, from Gangs-te-se down to Mdo-khams, the people became patrons of the dGe-lugs pa" (Yang 1969: 40; Sum pa 1982: 16). According to Sumpa Khenpo, "Tibet, Land of Snows" (bod kha ba can) is one of the six great countries (yul chen drug) according to the *Kalacakra Tantra* (Sum pa 1982: 2). Sumpa Khenpo divides Tibet into "Tibet" (bod) and "Greater Tibet" (bod chen) (Sum pa 1982: 2). Within "Tibet" are the highlands of Ngari (mnga' ris skor gsum) and the midlands of central Tibet (dbus gtsang ru bzhi ru lag) (Sum pa 1982: 2). Within "Greater Tibet" are the lowlands of Dokham (mdo khams) (Sum pa 1982: 2). While Sumpa Khenpo includes the Kham region in his narrative map of Tibet's geography, he is not explicit as to whether or not "Southern Kham" (lho khams) is a part of Dokham (Sum pa 1982: 50-51). In his description of Tibet in his *General Description of the World*, he implies that Kham is part of Dokham when he describes it as "the subsequently incorporated [region of] Great Southern Kham [in the] lowlands" (phyi ma zung gi phyogs gtogs kyi lho khams chen po smad) (Sum pa 2012: 23-4).

Sumpa Khenpo's *Annals of Kokonor* is influenced by the genre of

world geography that existed within the context of large-scale mapping projects by the empires of Eurasia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Perdue 2010: 263-4).³ These maps were central to consolidating internal rule while establishing territorial boundaries (Hostetler 2001:74). In particular, the Qing dynasty's two great atlases—by emperors Kangxi and Qianlong—were both compiled in the eighteenth century (Millward 1999: 68, 70-1). Tibetan lamas were involved in these mapping initiatives; the Kangxi emperor sent two Tibetan lamas well versed in geometry and arithmetic to complete land surveys of Tibet (Yongdan 2011: 76). Although official dynastic maps like the Qianlong atlas remained state secrets until the nineteenth century (Millward 1999: 72, 89), Sumpa Khenpo was clearly influenced by the idea of world geography suggesting that mapping was a *zeitgeist* amongst the elite in the eighteenth-century Qing dynasty. Reading the *Annals of Kokonor* in this context, Sumpa Khenpo's mapping of Kokonor and Amdo as part of Tibet can be read as a way of asserting the distinctiveness of this cultural territory and the Khoshot Mongols as the leaders.

Labrang Monastery and the Apex of the Development of the Concept of Amdo

In the nineteenth century, Labrang replaced Kumbum and Gönlung as the main Geluk monastic power in Amdo. At its height, Labrang monastery had many of the trappings of a polity. It controlled a vast swath of territory, levied taxes on the inhabitants of its estates, and was the local political and legal authority (Nietupski 2011: 70-71, 81). Labrang also possessed well-endowed treasuries with multiple revenue streams including donations, religious levies, agriculture, livestock management corvée labor, money lending, sponsorship, and taxes (Nietupski 2011: 82-92). In order to manage its land, resources, and people, the institution created large scale bureaucratic structures for governance (Nietupski 2011: 79).

Belmang Pandita

During this period, the Second Belmang Pandita Konchok Gyeltsen (1764-1853) (dbal mang dkon mchog rgyal mtshan), a throneholder of Labrang monastery, initiated an “unprecedented outpouring of

³ Indeed, Sumpa Khenpo composed Tibet's first world geography, *General Description of the World: a Marvelous and Elegant Discussion* ('dzam gling spyi bshad ngo mtshar gdam snyan) (hereafter referred to as *General Description*).

historical and geographic writing" (Oidtmann 2014: 266-7). Lamenting the lack of histories about "the district of the land of Domé" (yul mdo smad kyi ljong), he encouraged his disciple Drakgönpa to compose one, citing Kelden Gyatso's and Sumpa Khenpo's works as precedents (Oidtmann 2014: 272). With the decline of both the Qing dynasty and Ganden Potrang government in central Tibet and the flourishing of the Amdo region during this period, the leaders of the powerful Labrang monastery wanted to assert the significance of their region. By encouraging works about Amdo, Belmang asserts the territorial, religious, and cultural integrity of the region which is in turn connected to Geluk monastic power through their authorship.

Although Belmang did not compose a work on the Amdo region, his *A Ladder for Guiding the Youth: Lessons Summarizing the History of India, Tibet, and Mongolia* (henceforth referred to as *History*) (completed in 1819-1821) includes a robust discussion about Amdo (Oidtmann 2014: 290). He composed this work as a response to the deterioration of the Mongol banners and the Qing's attempts to assert its supremacy over the Geluk establishment (Oidtmann 2016: 64). His proposed solution was to impose Buddhist – specifically Geluk – law across the Tibetan plateau (Oidtmann 2015: 112). The desire to unify the Tibetan plateau using a Geluk interpretation of Buddhist law is in line with the idea of the Geluk sect as a "religious empire."

Belmang's *History* has a long section devoted to retelling the history of Gushri Khan and his descendants in Amdo. Belmang uses both the terms "Amdo" (a mdo) and "Domé" (mdo smad) to refer to the region. For instance, he describes Gushri's descendant coming to "Domé" and becoming an abbot (mkhan po) of Kumbum and Tashikhyil monasteries (Dbal mang 1990: 76). In another section on the treasure tradition (gter ma), Belmang describes how some people in "Amdo" recount stories of texts falling from the sky (Dbal mang 1990: 201). Still, the references in the text few and far between in comparison to the concept of Kokonor (mtsho sngon or khu khu nor). This is not surprising given the text's strong focus on the history of Gushri Khan and his descendants and Kokonor being the headquarters of his polity. Belmang states, "Since Kökenuur is the vital juncture of China, Tibet, and Mongolia, it is essential to control it" (Oidtmann 2015: 137; Dbal mang 1990: 176). He considers Kokonor to be a region within Amdo. He mentions that under the rule of Gushri Khan's third son King Tsewang Tenzin (aka Gyelpo Junang) (1699-1735), the "entire Amdo was happy" in addition to the other areas under his rule such as the Kham region and so forth (Dbal mang 1990: 74).

Belmang portrays Amdo as part of a pan-plateau concept of "Tibet—its three regions" (bod chol kha gsum) or "Tibet in general" (bod spyi). He identifies the initial unification of "Tibet in general" to the

Tibetan imperial period (7th through 9th centuries) (Dbal mang 1990: 22, 34). Belmang demonstrates admiration for the rule of Buddhist law; he observes that “beings all across the three regions of Tibet” (bod chol kha gsum gyi ‘gro ba) were able to enjoy Buddhism because of King Songsten Gampo’s sixteen Buddhist-based laws (Dbal mang 1990: 28). Belmang identifies the Sakya Mongol period as another one in which Tibet was unified (Dbal mang 1990: 40). He describes how Kublai Khan, after defeating all of Tibet, China, Mongolia, offered “Tibet—its three regions” to his teacher Pakpa (Dbal mang 1990: 60-61). He claims that “Songsten Gampo’s territories are equal to Oirat’s territories and Khalka Jingga’s territories (Dbal mang 1990: 176; Oidtman 2016: 71). The three regions of Tibet include central Tibet—identified as “Tibet” (bod), the “Center” (dbus) or “Ü-Tsang” (dbus gtsang) (Dbal mang 1990: 83, 86, 91); Kham (mdo khams or khams) (Dbal mang 1990: 71, 83, 210); Ngari (Dbal mang 1990: 22, 31, 209-210); and Amdo/Domé.

Drakgönpa

Drakgönpa Könchok Gyeltsen (1800/1-1869) headed Labrang monastery at the height of its power. His *Oceanic Annals* (*Deb ther rgya mtsho*) (1865), composed at the encouragement of Belmang Pandita, is the most detailed and multi-faceted treatment of the Amdo region in early modern Tibetan literature. The *Oceanic Annals* belongs to the annals (deb ther) genre, which was “written by politically powerful figures, seeking to establish claims to regional or at the very least local authority for themselves and/or the traditions with which they were associated” (Tuttle 2011: 166). In addition, Drakgönpa’s text was influenced by the genre of world geography (Tuttle 2011: 153). Drakgönpa’s detailed narrative mapping of the Amdo region represents a political document “seeking to assert at least a literary authority over territory” (Tuttle 2011: 168). Indeed, Gray Tuttle argues that the text can be read as “a tacit challenge to even the authority of the Dalai Lamas” by asserting the power of Labrang monastery and its abbots as heirs to the Mongol princes of the region (Tuttle 2011: 168-9). This claim makes sense when considering Labrang monastery’s power, the Geluk sect’s expansionist ambitions, and the role of maps in incorporating conquered territories and consolidating internal rule by empires of Eurasia.

Drakgönpa uses both the terms “Amdo” and “Domé” to refer to the Amdo region, with the latter used with more frequency. An example of his usage of the term Domé is to describe the birthplace of Tsongkhapa (Brag dgon 1982: 21). Drakgönpa, also sometimes adds the term for “district” or “region” (ljongs) to the word Domé (Brag dgon 1982: 3, 15, 16.). Drakgönpa explains the origin of the toponym

"Amdo": the "A" comes from "mountains behind the snows [of] A [nyé Ma] chen" (a chen gangs rgyab gi ri) and it is combined with the word "confluence" (mdo) (Brag dgon 1982: 2).

Drakönpa provides a detailed narrative mapping of the Amdo region. Mapping out the sacred sites of the Amdo region asserts the significance of the region as a territory. Drakgön also discusses the history of Amdo in detail, giving yet another dimension to the concept of Amdo he is reinforcing. For instance, he recounts the history of Princess Konjo and others who travelled through the region on their way to central Tibet during Tibet's Imperial Period, "creating the initial karmic connection for Buddhism to spread in the Domé region" (Drakgön 1982: 16). He also recounts the story of the Three Wise Men who fled central Tibet due to King Lang Darma's persecution of Buddhism in the mid-ninth century and came to Achung Namdzong and Dentik (Brag dgon 1982: 17-19). It was due to their actions that Tibet was able to retain its Vinaya tradition which was subsequently retransmitted back to central Tibet in the mid tenth century.

Another way that Drakgönpa links Amdo to central Tibet and Tibet's imperial period is through highlighting genealogical connections. He describes how the lineage (mi rgyud) of most of the people in north and south Domé are descended from people placed there at the border of Tibet and China by king Trisong Detsen (Brag dgon 1982: 16). Some of those people are even descendants of ancient and prestigious families such as that of the Sakya/Khön clan, Marpa, Palchen Galo (dpal chen rga lo), Ngok (rngog), and the king of Tsang (Brag dgon 1982: 16-17). Drakönpa also notes that the language spoken by these Tibetans preserves many ancient words (Brag dgon 1982: 16). Not only does this connect many of the Tibetans of Amdo to central Tibetans genealogically, but it also anchors the Tibetans of Amdo to the Tibetan empire.

In the *Oceanic Annals*, Amdo is a part of a pan-plateau concept of Tibet. Drakgönpa refers to this using various terms, including "realm of Tibet" (bod kyi yul kham and bod kham), "country of Tibet" (bod yul), and "Tibet Land of Snows" (bod gangs can) (Brag dgon 1982: 1). The regions (nang gses kyis phye ba) within Tibet are "the three circuits of upper Mnga' ris" (stod mnga' ris skor gsum), "the middle Four Horns of Central Tibet" (bar dbus gtsang ru bzhi), "Six Ranges of Mdo Kham in Middle Kham" (mdo kham sgang drug), and "the Three Ranges" (sgang gsum) (Brag dgon 1982: 1, Tuttle 2011: 139-140). It is not explicit in the *Oceanic Annals* where the Amdo region fits into the framework of the Three Ranges. Gray Tuttle suggests that the latter two ranges, "Range of Yermo" (g.yer mo thang) and "Range of Tsongkha" (tsong kha la gyi thang) may be where Amdo's territory begins (Tuttle 2011: 143). Tuttle notices that Amdo's territory is "tacked on in a rather hodge-podge way" as part of the Three Ranges

to Drakgönpa's schema of Ngari, Ü-Tsang, Dokham, and the Three Ranges (Tuttle 2011: 145). Drakgönpa also uses the framework of "The Three Regions" (chol kha gsum) of Tibet: "central Tibet, the region of the Dharma" (dbus gtsang chos kyi chol kha), "upper Tö, the region of humans" (mdo stod mi'i chol kha), and "lower Tö, the region of horses" (mdo smad rta'i chol kha) (Brag dgon 1982: 2).⁴

Drakgönpa's impulse to articulate the Amdo region occurred within the context of a shifting world order in which "sovereignty was gradually becoming increasingly tied to territorial integrity" (Hostetler 2001: 74). Viewed from this perspective, Drakgönpa asserts the territorial integrity of the region through his narrative mapping of Amdo, contributing to the modern idea of Amdo as one of the three provinces of Tibet. In the nineteenth century both the Qing Dynasty and Lhasa's Ganden Potrang government were attempting to secure their nascent national borders. The Qing dynasty had already incorporated much of the Amdo region as the jurisdiction of Qinghai in 1724 (Dai 2009: 95). The Qing dynasty became increasingly aggressive about securing its southwestern frontier in the 1730s (Dai 2009: 101-2). In the nineteenth century, both the Qing dynasty and the Ganden Potrang government vied to annex sections of Kham, the province directly to the south of Amdo that would ultimately be incorporated into the PRC as parts of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Gansu provinces (Gros 2019: 143; Gardner 2010:104; Tsomo 2014: 221, 231-238). In response to this, Jamgön Kongtrul (1813-1899), a Tibetan Buddhist luminary composed a narrative map entitled "The Twenty-Five Great Sites of Khams" (*mdo khams gnas chen nyer lnga*) (1868). This text used religious symbolism to unite the sacred sites of Kham and represent it as separate from the territory ruled by central Tibet (Gardner 2010: 98, 102, 104). Jamgön Kongtrul was the first author to establish the territorial identity of Kham through indigenous modes of mapmaking (Gardner 2006: xiii). Jamgön Kongtrul's narrative map established the concept of Kham as a religio-cultural territory in the same way that Drakgönpa's *Oceanic Annals* and other works examined in this paper established the territorial integrity of Amdo. Together, these works contribute to securing an indigenous articulation of place that crystalized in the modern concept of Tibet consisting of the three provinces of Amdo, Kham, and central Tibet.

⁴ This latter references is also found in Sumpa Khenpo's work (Sum pa 2012: 25)

Tsenpo Nomonhan

Tibet's second world geography, *Detailed Description of the World* ('Dzam gling rgyas bshad) (1830) (hereafter referred to as *Detailed Description*), gives a robust portrayal of the Amdo region and how it relates to the rest of Tibet. Its author was the Fourth Tsenpo Nomonhan ('Jam dpal chos kyi bstan 'dzin 'phrin las) (1789-1838), a Geluk reincarnate lama who was likely of Mongol descent (Yongdan 2011: 80-1; Tuttle 2011: 163). Although his home monastery was Ganden Damchöling (dga' ldan dam chos gling) in Amdo, he went to Beijing as the Qing emperor's seal-holding lama after completing his monastic training in Lhasa (Yongdan 2011: 81). He spent time at Labrang monastery shortly before composing his *Detailed Description* (Oidtmann 2014: 267).

Tsenpo Nomonhan refers to Tibet as the "country of Tibet" (bod kyi yul) (Wylie 1958: 2, 55). He describes the border between Amdo and China, and did not consider Tibet to be a part of China (Yongdan 2011: 100). Nomonhan divides Tibet into three main regions: "upper three districts of Ngari" (stod mnga' ris skor gsum), "middle [region of] the four horns of central Tibet" (dbus gtsang ru bzhi), and "lower [region of] six ranges of Dokham" (mdo khams sgang drug) (Wylie 1958: 11, 66). In another place in the text, he refers to Dokham as having three ranges (mdo khams sgang gsum) (Wylie 1958: 40, 102). Nomonhan is the only author surveyed in this essay who is explicit about how the concept of Amdo relates to the six ranges of Dokham. In the section on Dokham, he mentions the six ranges (sgang), with the latter three being Markham Range (smar kham sgang), Minyak Range (mi nyag sgang), and Yarmo Range (g.yar mo sgang) (Wylie 1958: 40, 102). He states explicitly that g.yar mo sgang is included within the Amdo region (Wylie 1958: 52-53, 118). Elsewhere in the text, he further delineates the borders of Amdo when he describes how east of the village (sde) of Tongkor (stong skor) in Kham, the "Domé Amdo" region begins (Wylie 1958: 109). The fact that Nomonhan is the only author to describe Amdo's territory in detail in the mid-nineteenth century supports the idea that "Amdo" was an evolving concept that reached its most specific territorial definition in the nineteenth century. Nomonhan also portrays Amdo as an integral part of Tibet's territory.

Nomonhan refers to Amdo using both the terms "Domé" and "Amdo" such as in the case of "the place of Domé Amdo" (mdo smad a mdo'i sa cha) (Wylie 1958: 109). He maps out the Amdo region in detail, including valleys, villages, monasteries, and sacred sites (Wylie 1958: 110-118). He lists the sites in the different regions of the Tibetan plateau in rapid succession, including more elaborate descriptions of important Geluk-affiliated sites such as Labrang, Rongwo, and Kumbum monasteries (Wylie 1958: 110-113). Like Drakgönpa, Nomonhan

traces the Tibetan settlements (*bod sde*) of the Amdo region to the Tang dynasty (Wylie 1958: 117, 52). He also evokes the legend of the Tibetans (*bod yul gyi mi rnam*s) being descended from Avalokiteśvara emanated as a monkey (Wylie 1958: 118, 53). This latter point connects Amdo to the rest of Tibet in a genealogical manner.

Nomonhan also describes the diversity of the people in Amdo. For instance, he describes the diverse ethnicities who inhabit the Amdo region including Tibetans, Chinese, Mongols, Muslims, and Zalars (Wylie 1958: 112-3). At the same time, he portrays a sense of cohesion among the people in Amdo as in the case when he criticizes how “some of our own Amdo [people]” (*rang re a mdo*) do not believe that the 100,000 self-originated images of Mañjuśrī that appeared on the white sandalwood tree that sprouted from Tsongkhapa's umbilical cord at Kumbum monastery are a true miracle, but instead, they believe that these images were etched on the tree with needles” (Wylie 1958: 113, 49). One way that Nomonhan's discussion of Tibetans differs from other authors in this paper is that he seems to bear the influence of European race theory. Throughout the work, he is preoccupied with determining who are of “true” (*dnegos*) Tibetan ethnicity (*bod kyi rigs*). For instance, he claims that the people of Minyak (*mi nyag*), Gyelrong (*gyal rong*), and Mili (*mi li*) are “not true Tibetans” (*bod dnegos min*) (Wylie 1958: 107, 44-45). On the other hand, he determines that populations residing northwest of Ladakh and Ruthok are of Tibetan ethnicity (*bod kyi rigs*) but culturally “Malakse” (Wylie 1958: 62, 8).

Nyingma Contributions to the Development of the Idea of Amdo

Still, Geluk authors were not the only ones who played a role in the development of the idea of Amdo. In this section, I analyze the portrayal of Amdo and Tibet in the works of two non-Geluk authors. One author belonged to the Nyingma sect and the other received his early training in the Nyingma sect but later self-identified as non-sectarian. The Nyingma sect claims a long history in the Amdo region dating to the eighth century figure Padmasambhava. Their teachings and practices were passed down through local family and community lineages until Rigdzin Palden Tashi (1688-1743) (hereafter referred to as RPT) founded the Tantric Community of Rebgong (*reb kong sngags mang*) in the eighteenth century. The Tantric Community of Rebgong's members consist of “*ngakpa*” (*sngags pa*), which refers to non-celibate tantric practitioners. In contrast to Geluk monastics, the Nyingma *ngakpa* are permitted to marry and produce families. Through the founding the Tantric Community of Rebgong, RPT gave the pre-existent *ngakpa* in Rebgong a sense of unity and distinct identity (Dhondup 2011:15).

In comparison to the Geluk monastic networks, Nyingma communities were of lesser means, supporting themselves through farming or offering religious services to local families rather than from the patronage of Mongol princes (Dhondup 2011: 23). RPT was active in areas of Reb kong where the Geluk had weak or no influence (Dhondup 2011: 3, 19). Nevertheless, within the context of the Amdo region, it is important not to overemphasize sectarian division between Nyingma and Geluk sects. As was common for boys from Nyingma families from Rebong, RPT receive monastic scholarly training at Geluk-affiliated monasteries in Amdo and central Tibet, ultimately achieving a *geshé* (dge bshes) degree (Dhondup 2011: 11-12). Similarly, Shabkar received his novice monastic vows from a prominent Geluk teacher, Arik Geshé (Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 1: 56.5-57.2).

Rigdzin Palden Tashi

Rigdzin Palden Tashi (1688-1743) (hereafter referred to as RPT) was an older contemporary of Sumpa Khenpo. He was of Tibetan descent. RPT's *Autobiography* (rang rnam) and *Collection of Vajra Songs* (rdo rje'i gsung mgrur) give us an idea of how he portrayed "Tibet" and "Amdo." RPT conveys a pan-plateau concept of Tibet through terms such as "country of Tibet" (bod yul), "kingdom of Tibet" (bod kyi rgyal khams), and "realm of Tibet" (bod khams) (rig 'dzin 2002c, 199, 210, 271; rig 'dzin 2002a, 14). Sometimes, he uses the metonym of snow mountains as in the cases of "Kingdom of the Land of Snows" (kha ba can gyi rgyal khams), "Tibet, Land of Snows, Medicinal Realm" (bod yul kha ba'i sman ljongs) or "Tibet, Realm of Snows" (bod gangs can ljong) (rig 'dzin 2002a: 2; rig 'dzin 2002c: 272, 257, 260).

RPT divides a pan-plateau Tibet into "Tibet" (bod) and "greater Tibet" or "kingdom of greater Tibet" (bod chen po or chen po bod kyi rgyal khams). He includes central Tibet—referred to as "the center of Tibet" (bod yul dbus) or "Ü-Tsang" (dbus gtsang)—in "Tibet" (rig 'dzin 2002a: 9, 11, 15; rig 'dzin 2002b: 129, 131; rig 'dzin 2002c: 208, 121). He includes Dokham (mdo khams) in "greater Tibet" (rig 'dzin 2002a: 10). He explains that there was a time when his home valley of Rebong—which is a part of lower Dokham (mdo khams smad)—was administered as part of China (rig 'dzin 2002a: 9-10). Nevertheless, citing texts that describe Machen Pomra as the guardian deity of greater Tibet and the twelve Tenma being bound under oath, RPT establishes that the Dokham region (mdo khams) is unambiguously a part of greater Tibet (rig 'dzin 2002a: 10).⁵ Sumpa Khenpo and RPT

⁵ In the source text, there are a couple of anomalies that are worth noting. Quoting an unnamed supplication liturgy (brtan gsol), the passage states

are the only two authors examined in this paper to use the “great/little” schema to categorize regions of Tibet, suggesting that this concept may have been current in the eighteenth century. Roughly a century later, Tsenpo Nomonhan would disagree with characterizing central Tibet (dbus gtsang) as “little Tibet” (bod chung ngu) and Dokham as “great Tibet” (bod chen po) (Wylie 1958: 11, 66). RPT further divides greater Tibet, or Dokham, into “upper Kham” and “lower Dokham,” which corresponds roughly to the concept of the modern-day Tibetan provinces of Kham and Amdo (rig ‘dzin 2002c: 209). RPT spent a decade in Kham and is one of the few authors mentioned in this paper who describe it in any detail (rig ‘dzin 2002a: 9).

The concept of “Domé” (mdo smad) and “lower Dokham” are present in RPT’s *Autobiography* and *Vajra Songs* (rig ‘dzin 2002b: 140, 148; rig ‘dzin 2002c: 209, 210, 266). He connects the Amdo region to Tibet’s historical center by drawing genealogical links between his family genealogy and the mythic father of the Tibetan people, a monkey-bodhisattva who was the emanation of Avalokiteśvara (rig ‘dzin 2002a: 2). RPT recounts that his father’s family are descendants of Dru Nyima (’bru nyi ma), one of the six offspring of the monkey-bodhisattva (rig ‘dzin 2002a: 8). They are a particular branch of that family who migrated to and settled in lower Dokham.

While the concept of the Domé region is present in RPT’s autobiography and songs, he is more often preoccupied with his home valley Rebgong. For instance, he portrays Rebgong as being a place whose history possesses good karmic connections (rten ‘brel bzang) (rig ‘dzin 2002a: 9). He describes the sacred sites of Rebgong and compares the Nine Places of Rebgong to the abodes of deities (rig ‘dzin 2002c: 272-3; rig ‘dzin 2002b: 174). He even compares Rebgong’s rivers and mountains to that of central Tibet (rig ‘dzin 2002a: 10). This more localized focus reflects the fact that RPT’s activities were mostly localized and did not involved inter-regional politics the way his Geluk counterparts did.

that Langkar Peltsek bound the twelve Tenma under oath “for the stability and good of the land of China.” The standard account of this history is that Padmasambhava bound the twelve Tenma under oath for the sake of the stability of Buddhism in Tibet. The original Tibetan for the passage is: de ltar yul phyogs de’i mi rigs phal cher ni bod dang bod chen po gnyis su phyed ba’i chen po bod kyi rgyal khams su gtogs shing/ sngon dus rgyas bzung ba’i rgya yul gyi gras su’ng gtogs so/ /spom ra’i gsol mchod du/ chen po bod kyi rgyal khams skyong ba’i lha zhes dang/brtan gsol du/ rgya yul de ni brtan bzang du/ /bshes gnyen rlangs dkar dpal brtsegs kyis bstan ma bcu gnyis dam la btags/ /zhes mdo khams yongs grags la chen po bod du gtogs shing sa cha rgya yul brtan bzang ni brtan bzang la kha ‘di nyid yin par mngon no/ (rig ‘dzin 2002a:10)

Shabkar

Shabkar was an older contemporary of Drakgönpa and Tsenpo No-monhan. Like RPT, he was of Tibetan descent and began his religious training with the Nyingma *ngakpa* community in the Rebgong Valley. Unlike the Geluk monastics surveyed in this paper, he was not a reincarnate lama nor a throne holder, but rather, an itinerant monk-yogi who travelled across the Tibetan plateau, teaching, meditating, and singing songs of realization (*mgur*). He self-identified as non-sectarian. Amdo and Tibet are central themes in his *Autobiography* (volume 1 completed in 1837 and volume 2 in 1850), demonstrating that the concepts were not merely a preoccupation of Geluk leaders.

Shabkar uses the terms “country of Tibet” (*bod yul*), “realm of Tibet” (*bod khams*), and “kingdom of Tibet” (*rgyal khams*) to convey a pan-plateau sense of Tibet in his autobiography. When he expresses the desire go on pilgrimage to India, the Lion-Faced *Dākinī* appears to him in a vision, advising him to “stay in Tibet” (*bod yul tu bzhugs*) (Zhabs dkar, *Snyigs dus*, Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 1: 689.2-4; Shabkar 2001: 398). While at Tsipri, he prays for “auspiciousness to encompass the realm of Tibet” (*bkra shis pas bod khams khyab gyur cig*) (Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 1: 776.4-5; Shabkar 2001: 449). Finally, he describes Avalokiteśvara as the patron deity of “the country of Tibet, Land of Snows” (*bod kha ba can gyi rgyal khams*) (Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 1: 618.4; Shabkar 2001: 357).

Unlike some of the other authors examined in this article, Shabkar does not divide Tibet into the “Three Regions” (*chol kha gsum*). Instead, he uses the term “districts” (*gzhung*) (Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 1: 233.6; Shabkar 2001: 138). The regions within Tibet include central Tibet, which Shabkar describes as “Ü-Tsang” (*dbus gtsang*), “Ü” (*dbus*), or “the center of Tibet” (*bod yul gyi dbus*) (Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 1: 233.6, 753.1; Shabkar 2001: 138, 434; Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 2: 45.2, 131.4; Amdo/Domé; and Ngari (*mnga' ris*) (Zhabs dkar, 2003a, vol. 2: 267.2). He mentions the Kham region as a place people need to pass through on the way to central Tibet from Amdo (Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 2: 63.5, 301.3, 510.6-11.1; Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 1: 421.5, 323.4; Shabkar 2001: 245, 187).

In his autobiography, Shabkar gives a robust sense of Amdo as a geographic space, with linguistic, community, and historic dimensions. In his autobiography and songs, Shabkar used both “Domé” (*mdo smad*) and “Amdo” (*a mdo*) to describe the Amdo region, using the former term with greater frequency (Pang 2011: 194-5). He used both “Amdo” and “Domé” to refer to Amdo as a place. For instance, he describes his homeland as “Domé” (*rang yul mdo smad*) (Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 1: 849.6, Shabkar 2001: 485). Elsewhere, he describes a

pilgrim returning to Trika in “Amdo” (Zhabs dkar 2003a, vol. 1: 482; Shabkar 2001: 283). When he refers to language or people, he uses the word “Amdo.” For example, Shabkar mentions how the Ninth Dalai Lama referred to him as “Amdo lama” and smiled when he spoke Amdo language (a mdo'i skad) (Shabkar 2001: 225; Zhabs dkar 2003, vol. 1: 388.6-89). Shabkar also uses the term “Amdowa” (a mdo pa) to describe the people of Amdo as a collective. For instance, he sings a song to “Amdowas” (Zhabs dkar 2003, vol. 1: 943.4; Shabkar 2001: 529). Finally, Shabkar gives a robust sense of Amdo as a geographic space. Two-thirds of his autobiography takes place in Amdo. The chapter titles of his autobiography and songs reflect key sacred sites of the Amdo region such as Mount Machen and the Blue Lake. Moreover, Shabkar describes sacred sites and his interactions with them in detail (Pang 2024: 57). From a historical perspective, Shabkar also acknowledges the critical role of the Three Wise Men and the site of Achung Namdzong in Amdo for preserving the eastern Vinaya tradition (Pang 2024: 56).

Conclusion

This article examined how seven authors writing in the Tibetan language on the Qing frontier between the mid-seventeenth through mid-nineteenth centuries portrayed their home region of Amdo. The rise and development of the concept of Amdo was inextricably intertwined with the expansion of the Geluk sect into the region. The Geluk monastics surveyed in this paper portray Amdo as a distinct geographical entity that is an integral part of a pan-plateau concept of Tibet. Writing during a historical moment in which the empires of Eurasia were engaged in mapping activities to consolidate their territorial claims, these monastics' narrative mapping of Amdo represent a local third power asserting their control over a region on the far reaches of central Tibet's and the Qing dynasty's grasp. In turn, these Geluk authors were part of the Geluk sect's expansionist ambitions into Amdo, Mongolia and beyond; indeed, each Geluk author examined in this paper flourished during a key moment of the Geluk expansion into the Amdo region. Nevertheless, non-Geluk authors from Amdo also participated in the development of the concept of Amdo and its relationship to Tibet, which demonstrates that development of the idea of Amdo was not limited to the Geluk sect. The mapping of Amdo occurred within the context of Beijing and Lhasa attempting to secure their nascent national borders in the nineteenth century. The narrative maps of figures from eastern Tibet such as Drakgönpa and Jamgön Kongtrul helped to lay the foundation for the idea of Tibet consisting of the three provinces of Amdo, Kham, and central Tibet.

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Sources for the Study of Ippolito Desideri Part I: His Education and Spiritual Formation

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n August 21, 1714, Ippolito Desideri posted a letter to his friend and fellow Jesuit Francesco Piccolomini.¹ Desideri had been stranded by the monsoon in Agra for three months, but his mood was buoyant. The Visitor José da Silva had just commissioned Desideri to re-open the old mission to Tibet, and the younger Jesuit dreamt of a bountiful harvest.

Goodbye, my dearest Father Piccolomini. I salute you with the utmost affection, and I beg you to pray for me without ceasing. A thousand heartfelt greetings to Father Giovanni Battista Conti, to Father Cotti, to Father Guarini, to Father Turano, to Father Merlini, to Father Corsoni, to Father Crivelli, to Father Isola; in sum to all, for I embrace you all most affectionately and commend myself to you all with my whole heart. May the Lord in His mercy deign to fill Your Reverence and all of these other men with His holy love, with a grand and constant fervor in His holy service, in zeal for the salvation of souls, and with every consolation, that we all receive the grace of meeting again in His Holy Paradise. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!²

It is no wonder that Desideri recalled his fellow Jesuits with such emotion. Some of these men were famous in the Society. Some were coming into their own. Some were his friends. All were products and

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² Petech 1952–1956 [=MITN], 5: 19. “Dal resto, P. Piccolomini mio carissimo, la riverisco con tutto l’affetto, e la supplico a pregar di continuo per me. Mille saluti cordialissimi al P. Gio. Batta. Conti, al P. Cotti, al P. Guarini, al P. Turano, al P. Merlini, al P. Corsoni, al P. Turano [sic], al P. Crivelli, al P. Isola; in somma a tutti, poichè tutti affettuosissimamente abbraccio e a tutti con tutto il cuore mi raccomandi. Il Signore si degni per sua misericordia di riempire V. R. e tutti gl’altri del suo santo amore, d’un grande e costante fervore nel suo santo servizio e nel zelo della salute dell’anime, e d’ogni consolazione, finchè ci dia grazie di rivederci nel Santa Paradiso. Vale, vale, vale.”

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preservers of an already storied Jesuit educational system.³ Giovanni Battista Conti, Ubertino Cotti, and Giacomo Filippo Merlini were administrators at the Society's prestigious Roman College.⁴ Conti was the Master of Studies, Cotti was the Spiritual Director, and Merlini was the Prefect of Missions. Ignazio Guarini, Domenico Maria Turano, and Giuseppe Maria Crivelli were faculty members, teaching mathematics, logic, and rhetoric, respectively. Marc'Antonio Isola was Desideri's fellow student, having been in every class that Desideri took between 1702 and 1712.⁵ Mario Corsoni—the only man mentioned by Desideri who was not associated with the Roman College—taught at the Jesuit College in Florence.⁶ These men were—as the common pun has it—company men. They shared a worldview shaped by their education and spiritual formation as members of the Society of Jesus.

Despite the tremendous progress made in studies of the Ippolito Desideri, these men remain largely unknown. The scholar who wishes to know the provenance of an argument or the meaning of a technical term in Desideri's writings has no obvious place to turn. And yet, abundant information about Desideri's education and spiritual formation can be found in the administrative records of the Roman Province in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu and the Archivio Storico della Pontificia Università Gregoriana. If one looks in these archives, one can find Desideri's rectors, novice masters, spiritual directors, teachers, and fellow students. One can identify the meditations Desideri made, the exhortations he heard, the lectures he endured, and the disputations in which he participated.

1. Early Life and Education

Ippolito Desideri was born in Pistoia, Italy, in 1684, the fourth child of

³ Desideri also mentions correspondence with other Jesuits in a letter to the Jesuit General Michelangelo Tamburini on September 21, 1721, including Giovanni Battista Tolomei (1653–1726) and Francesco Maria Galluzzi (1671–1731). See MITN 5: 84–85. Tolomei, a friend of Leibniz, had recently been Rector of the Roman College. Galluzzi was a confessor at the Roman College between 1709 and 1712. Desideri says that he received letters from Conti, Corsoni, and Galluzzi, but none of these has been found.

⁴ For a list of faculty and administrators at the Roman College when Desideri left Rome, see *Catalogus brevis anno 1712*, 3–6 (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu [=ARSI], codex Romana [=Rom] 98, fols. 49–50v).

⁵ Isola had entered the previous year, but he was placed in Desideri's cohort. Compare *Catalogus brevis anno 1700*, 21 (ARSI Rom 96, fol. 59r); *Catalogus brevis anno 1701*, 19–21 (ARSI Rom 96, fols. 105r–06r).

⁶ *Catalogus brevis anno 1712*, 44 (ARSI Rom 98, fol. 69v).

the doctor Iacopo Desideri and his wife Maria Maddalena Cappellini.⁷ Desideri's early life was unremarkable. He received the sacrament of confirmation when he was nine and enrolled in the Jesuit college of Pistoia when he was ten. The college was small, having only two teachers, Ignazio Xavier Costantino and Giuseppe Maria Angeletti.⁸ The college at Pistoia had a church and a small staff of Jesuits who preached, heard confessions, and ministered to the students and townspeople.⁹ In addition to the standard Latin curriculum, Desideri would have memorized various prayers and litanies, listened to spiritual exhortations, and learned basic Christian doctrine through a catechism very much like the one he would later write in Tibetan.

A boy who hoped to become a Jesuit would have looked forward to several years of study.¹⁰ The five-year course that constituted the "lower studies" of the curriculum was divided into three years of grammar, one year of humanities, and one year of rhetoric. Such classes represented units to be mastered rather than strict periods of time, and it was not uncommon for a boy to take six or seven calendar years to complete his lower studies. Should the boy decide to become a Jesuit, he would have spent two years in the novitiate after completing his primary education before moving on to his "higher studies," which consisted of three years of philosophy and two to four years of theology. Before progressing from the philosophy course to the theology sequence, however, he would have spent three to five years teaching grammar and the humanities at another Jesuit school. The Society sometimes made exceptions: Jesuits destined for careers in academic administration or the overseas missions often took an abbreviated two-year class in theology. Sometimes they merely reviewed it in private lessons. Those destined to a career in theology, however, took two additional years of theology in addition to the long four-year course. An academically inclined Jesuit of the seventeenth or eighteenth century—not unlike a Tibetan *dge bshes* today—might have taken over twenty years to complete his education.

The humanities and philosophy curriculum consisted almost entirely of non-Christian authors. The first grammar class began with Cicero's easiest letters; the second class was dedicated to Cicero's *Ad familiares* and Ovid's easier poems; the highest grammar class studied Cicero's *Ad Atticum*, *Ad Quintum*, *De amicitia*, *De senectute*, and *Paradoxa*. Students also studied Virgil's *Eclogues*, the easier parts of the *Georgics*,

⁷ For details of Desideri's early life, see Rauty 1984: 3-31, Luca 1987, 21-39, Bargiacchi 2003: 4-8, Bargiacchi 2006: 1-8, and Sweet and Zwilling 2010: 14-18. For the larger context, see Panti 1975.

⁸ *Catalogus brevis anno 1700*, 27 (ARSI Rom 96, fol. 27v).

⁹ Grendler 2017: 9.

¹⁰ For a summary of the curriculum, see the fifth volume of Lukács 1965-1986.

Tibullus, and Propertius. Less talented students were taught to compose basic sentences. Better students were expected to master Latin syntax and meter well enough to imitate the better pagan poets by the end of their third year. Greek was taught but not emphasized. Students learned the rudiments of grammar during their first year and could read simple orations by the end of the grammar sequence. As students continued through Cicero's speeches in the humanities course, they added Caesar, Sallust, Livy, Horace, and Plutarch. To my knowledge, no parent protested that boys were taught the first Latin declension with the word "muse" (*musa*), being encouraged from a young age to seek what Greeks would have called their own personal *daimon*.¹¹ Jesuits routinely—and rather nonchalantly—illustrated Christian doctrines by appealing to pagan authors and myths. Indeed, a very non-Christian antiquity provided the chief virtue to be inculcated in Jesuit education—piety—even as the Society opposed "paganism" and heterodoxy of all kinds.¹² Of course, the prevalence of non-Christian authors in the curriculum should not imply that the Jesuits tolerated their vices. Jesuit censors took care to purge smut from Ovid, Catullus, and Martial, even as these authors formed an important part of the curriculum.¹³

Students in the Jesuits' schools took four classes a day, with two in the morning and two in the afternoon. The morning classes and one of the afternoon classes were each an hour long. The last afternoon class lasted an hour and a half. Most classrooms had windows, but no heat. Students were assigned seats based on their rank in class, their social status, and their religious state. Desideri, being from a patrician family, would have been given better seating than students from common families, but he would still have shared a desk. Classes began with a simple prayer, with both the teachers and the students bowing with uncovered heads. Students were expected to remain quiet, although prohibitions against shouting, lewd behavior, and other infractions suggest that this was an elusive ideal.¹⁴ Students doodled, passed notes, wandered the classroom, and skipped classes. Students who broke rules could expect to be whipped by the disciplinarian or—if they were too large to be whipped—to be locked out of class. Bullying was a perennial problem. If Desideri had already expressed an interest in becoming a Jesuit to Costantino or Angeletti, he would have been

¹¹ Grammar classes usually followed Álvarez 1572–1575. Álvarez's textbook was published in almost 400 editions, being used in Catholic, Protestant, and secular institutions well into the late-nineteenth century.

¹² Lukács 1965–1986, 1:136.

¹³ On the use and expurgation of pagan classics in the humanities curriculum, see Codina 1934–1938 3: 119, 151.

¹⁴ For descriptions of student life, compare Fabrini 1946 and Turrini 2006.

separated from the other students and placed in a smaller, protected group.

Jesuit pedagogy was based on memorization, repetition, and competition. Students memorized the chief points of each academic exercise, meditated upon them under the direction of their teachers, repeated and reviewed lessons in a tightly choreographed series of drills, and seasoned the process with frequent—and frequently fiery—exhortations. Every student was expected to memorize something every day, so the first hour of the morning class was devoted to mnemonic exercises. As students “exercised” their memories, older students—called “decurions” because they supervised groups of ten like officers in the Roman cavalry—collected students’ homework. The teacher then graded the students’ assignments as the decurions listened to the students recite passages they had memorized. Only towards the end of the class might students translate some Cicero or solve a Latin puzzle, such as restoring the proper order of deliberately scrambled verses. For their second morning class, students reviewed the material from their first class, began another lesson on Cicero, repeated the lesson in its entirety, and finished with grammatical exercises. Students began their first afternoon class by reciting the grammatical rules they had memorized as the teacher double-checked the decurions’ marks on the morning’s exercises. For the final afternoon class, students studied syntax or poetry on alternating days, with a little Greek thrown in for good measure. On Saturdays, students recited the entire week’s lessons from memory in front of their classmates in their first morning class and corrected themselves in the second class. The two afternoon classes on Saturday were devoted to reciting Christian doctrine, which was also to be memorized.

Anxiety and *agon* in equal measure, almost every Jesuit class ended in a competition of some sort, four times a day, every day, for well over a decade. Nor were contests limited to the classroom. On Saturdays, the different classes of the Jesuit college came together to compete against one another, and students of all classes vied to be chosen to deliver the monthly oration in the great hall. As they progressed through the humanities curriculum, students were encouraged to compose descriptions of cities, ports, battles, and saints; inscriptions upon shields, tombs, statues, and gardens, or with the Rector’s permission, devise a new emblem or “hieroglyph” appropriate to the subject matter they had been studying. The most beautiful lyric, the wittiest epigram, the most ingenious emblem, a prose history in which one could hear the sounds of some ancient battle, would be posted and celebrated. Prizes were given to the best students in each class at the end of the year, great quantities of Cicero were memorized, reputations were gained and lost. We do not know how Desideri fared in these early

contests, nor what he thought of them. Presumably his teachers saw some promise. When Desideri was sixteen, Giambattista Nembrini, the Rector of the Jesuit College in Pistoia, invited Desideri to accompany him to Rome, to see if the young man was cut out to be a Jesuit.

2. *The Novitiate, 1700–1702*

Desideri became a Jesuit novice on April 27, 1700. He was one of eighteen students in his cohort, which included his friend Marc'Antonio Isola.¹⁵ The novitiate was a two-year program of prayer, meditation, and social work undertaken before one took vows as a Jesuit.¹⁶ Apart from a month dedicated to teaching catechism and two more months devoted to hospital work, the novitiate was for all intents and purposes a long meditation retreat. In fact, Desideri began the novitiate just as the Vicar General Michelangelo Tamburini (1648–1730) was reforming it.¹⁷ Tamburini sought the Society's most talented spiritual masters to direct novices in prayer and meditation. Desideri's Rector Rainiero Carsughi (1647–1709) and his Novice Master Benedetto Rogacci (1646–1719) had been handpicked for the task.¹⁸

Desideri's novitiate began with a retreat in Bernini's Sant'Andrea al Quirinale.¹⁹ In retreat, the noise of the Jesuit school gave way to a considered silence.²⁰ Novices were forbidden to talk to one another, meals were taken silently, and meditations were made in darkness. Following their founder Ignatius of Loyola's own practice, the spiritual director usually conversed with each novice only once a day unless he felt the novice was experiencing difficulties. Jesuit meditations usually followed a set form. The Jesuit began by placing himself in God's

¹⁵ *Catalogus brevis anno 1700*, 20–21 (ARSI Rom 96, fols. 11v–12r). Isola, although he entered on February 17, 1700, and listed with the novices of 1699–1700, was placed in Desideri's class of novices. Desideri's friend Ildebrando Grassi, who had entered on January 23, 1699, was a member of the previous cohort, as was Francesco Piccolomini. Since students in higher classes were often put in charge of the students just below them, it is likely that Isola and Piccolomini mentored Desideri early in their studies. Compare *Catalogus brevis anno 1701*, 20–21. (ARSI Rom 96, fols. 58v–59r); *Catalogus brevis anno 1702*, 19–21 (ARSI Rom 96, fols. 105r–06r)

¹⁶ On the program of the novitiate, see Codina 1934–1938, 3: 19–21.

¹⁷ Tamburini was especially concerned to ensure that novices made their meditations exactly as prescribed and that they attended their rectors' exhortations. See Tamburini's comments on becoming Father General, *Epistolae Praepositorum Generalium ad patres et fratres Societatis Iesu* 2: 158–64.

¹⁸ *Catalogus brevis anno 1701*, 18 (ARSI Rom 96, fol. 57v); *Catalogus brevis anno 1702*, 18 (ARSI Rom 96, fol. 104v). On Carsughi and Rogacci, see Haskell 2003: 252–65.

¹⁹ Luca 1987: 33.

²⁰ On the practice of the Exercises in Italy, see Iparraguirre 1946–1973, 3: 233–65.

presence. He set his intention by praying that his every action, mental and physical, be done for God's greater glory. He visualized the subject upon which he was about to meditate, and he prayed for success in the meditation he was about to undertake. After these preliminaries, the Jesuit meditated on three to five "points" for about ten to fifteen minutes each. Meditations ended with a colloquy, in which the meditator opened his heart to God, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, an angel that protected him, or a saint, usually followed by practical resolutions to amend one's life based on what he experienced during the meditation session. A single meditation of this kind typically took between an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes. In the early Society, the spiritual director usually wrote down the points for each meditation, and the person making the exercises meditated on them in private. In Desideri's day, it was common for the director to preach a sermon to initiate the consideration of each point, with the Jesuits meditating as a single group.

Jesuits were especially concerned with the mechanics of meditation, discussing the relative benefits of prostration, kneeling, sitting, standing, and walking according to the type of spiritual exercise. Jesuits favored visualization techniques more than any other religious order except the Franciscans, allowing for meditation with the eyes closed or fixed upon one spot.²¹ Nor were such methods restricted to the meditation session itself. The General Everard Mercurian (1514–1580) instructed Jesuits to visualize Christ crucified in their hearts at all moments in order to preserve their awareness of God's presence even when they were not meditating.²² Alfonso Ruiz (1530–1599) and Jerónimo Domènech (1516–1592) taught Jesuits to treat their spiritual director as angels impelled by compassion to save their souls.²³ Jesuits were also expected to practice the devotions appropriate to their own guardian angels as well as the angels associated with their colleges, their nations, and the Society itself. And here we should remember that by "angels" we do not mean the sentimentalized beings of late modern Protestant Christianity. In traditional Christian theology, angels were terrifying spiritual forces much more akin to *chos skyong*.

Examples of contemporary meditation and retreat literature abound. Among them, we may include Carlo Gregorio Rosignoli's *Verità eterne esposte in lezioni ordinate principalmente per li giorni degli Esercizi spirituali*, Pietro Ansalone's *Esercizi spirituali, o vero sollievo all'esercitante*, Giovanni Pietro Pinamonti's *La religiosa in solitudine*, Carlo Ambrogio Cattaneo's *Esercizi spirituali di S. Ignazio*, and Hortensio

²¹ Calveras and Dalmases 1969: 184–87, 200–03; Iparraguirre 1955: 183.

²² Iparraguirre 1955: 260–63.

²³ Iparraguirre 1955: 170, 180.

Balestrieri's *Esercizi spirituali di Sant'Ignazio per ritiro di dieci giorni*.²⁴ We also have meditation manuals that were either known to Desideri, such as Pinamonti's *L'inferno aperto al Cristiano*, or that were written by men he knew, such as Conti's *Iter animae ad Deum*.²⁵ In all likelihood, Desideri's first meditations were guided by his Novice Master Rogacci, who was famous for the consummate perspicacity he brought to the eight-day retreat that began the novitiate.²⁶ Most spiritual directors required novices to make four meditations a day while on retreat; knowing that the Society allowed variation in the kind, number, order, and length of exercises, Rogacci had novices make only three, to which he added a single meditation on the ninth day. If Rogacci directed Desideri's first eight-day retreat, we have a reasonably accurate account of the exact twenty-five meditations he heard.²⁷

Jesuits continued to meditate twice a day for the remainder of the novitiate, with several additional daily devotions. Novices awoke around 5:00am for Eucharistic adoration and reviewed the points for their morning meditation, which began at 5:30am.²⁸ They concluded their meditation at 6:30am with another spiritual exercise called an examination of conscience, in which the novice reviewed his spiritual state from rising in the morning until finishing the first meditation. Mass started promptly at 7:00am, after which novices returned to their rooms for a short break. At 8:00am, novices either repeated their morning meditation or listened to an exhortation given by the Rector. After breakfast and chores, a Jesuit began an hour of spiritual reading at 10:00am, usually from *Ejercicio de perfección y virtudes cristianas*, a famous ascetical treatise by Alonso Rodriguez (1538–1616).²⁹ Another examination of conscience followed before the noon meal. Novices prayed the Litany of the Saints in the early afternoon, with another examination of conscience following the mid-afternoon lessons at 3:00pm. The community gathered again at 5:00pm to pray the Litanies of the Blessed Virgin and the Litanies of the Holy Name of Jesus, to be followed by a second spiritual reading at 5:15pm and a brief review of the points of a second, half-hour meditation, which began at 6:00pm. Another devotion, usually the Rosary, followed the second meditation around 6:45pm. Supper came at 7:30pm, in which a passage from the New Testament was read, followed by an edifying book of the rector's

²⁴ Rosignoli 1688; Ansalone 1701; Pinamonti 1709; Cattaneo 1711; Balestrieri 1724.

²⁵ Pinamonti 1693; Conti 1709.

²⁶ Rosan 1931: 76–77.

²⁷ Rogacci 1711; For a Latin version, see Rogacci 1716.

²⁸ On the schedule of Jesuit houses, see O'Malley 1993: 358–62. Allowing for some minor regional variations, most novitiates followed similar routines well into the twentieth century. Compare Togni 2002 and Ranum 2011.

²⁹ Rodriguez 1609.

choice, most often a treatise on ascetical and mystical virtues, like Diego Álvarez de Paz's *De inquisitione pacis*.³⁰ In large communities like the Jesuit house in Rome, supper was also accompanied by a sermon, sometimes in Latin, sometimes in the vernacular. Novices also learned of the great men who preceded them on the path, including Jesuits of recent memory, the teachers of their teachers, and local saints. After recreation in the gardens or community room, a novice finished his day with the Litanies of Our Lady at 9:00pm, a second session of Eucharistic adoration, and a fourth examination of conscience.

Several meditations written by Desideri's immediate acquaintances survive, including long cycles written by both Carsughi and Rogacci. Carsughi's *Meditazioni dell'eccellenze della Madonna Santissima* contains sixty meditations.³¹ His collections of meditations on the Gospels, Christ, Mary, and the saints are similar.³² The meditations of Rogacci's *Dell'Uno Necessario* likewise fill three volumes.³³ In contrast to the short sermons preached to guide meditations during retreats—many of which are genuine masterpieces of Italian rhetoric—these modest meditations do not make for especially scintillating reading. They are, however, the most abundant source of the spiritual vocabulary Desideri used to describe Tibetan meditation in the *Notizie istoriche*.

Desideri's circle also produced an abundant hagiographical literature. Merlini authored two important devotional works.³⁴ Gian Francesco Durazzo, the librarian of the Novice House when Desideri lived there, wrote a life of Pinamonti (1632–1703), while Annibale Marchetti, his Rector at the Roman College, wrote a hagiography of Aloysius Gonzaga (1568–1591).³⁵ Desideri's Confessor Francesco Maria Galluzzi wrote of the saintly virtues of Antonio Baldinucci (1665–1719), and Galluzzi's own life was celebrated in turn by Giovanni Battista Memmi (1695–1740).³⁶ Such hagiographies were standard fare, recited at supper in Jesuit houses, and recommended by spiritual directors. Especially saintly Jesuits would be placed on the Society's liturgical calendar so that their deaths might be remembered in the liturgy.³⁷ Unlike the meditations of Carsughi and Rogacci, these last sources are indirect: we do not know which of these Desideri might have known or read, nor can we estimate the probability that he knew or read them with

³⁰ Álvarez de la Paz 1611.

³¹ Carsughi 1705a.

³² Carsughi 1705b; Carsughi 1709a; Carsughi 1709b; Carsughi 1709c.

³³ Rogacci 1704-07. For a Latin edition, see Rogacci 1721.

³⁴ Merlin 1711; Merlini 1715.

³⁵ Durazzo 1709; Marchetti 1687; Galluzzi 1720.

³⁶ Galluzzi 1720; Memmi 1734.

³⁷ Rogacci, Tolomei, and Conti appeared in the menologium shortly after their deaths. Patrignani 1730, 1:95 (1); 1:186 (1); 2:190(1).

any accuracy. They are, however, ample witness to the fervent spirituality and “style” of Desideri’s immediate circle in Rome, and it would be rather difficult to imagine that at least some of these sources would not have influenced him, especially when he describes the “apostolic spirit” of *bodhicitta* and other aspects of Buddhist spirituality in Tsong kha pa’s *Lam rim chen mo*.³⁸

3. *Rhetoric and Oratory, 1702–1703*

Desideri became a scholastic at the Roman College on April 28, 1702. The Roman College was the crown of the Jesuits’ educational empire. Its chief building, which housed a library, classrooms, and rooms for several Jesuits, was the largest building in Rome devoted solely to education.³⁹ When Desideri matriculated, the College’s “lower school” taught grammar, humanities, and rhetoric to approximately 1500 students from all classes of Roman society. Its “upper school” taught philosophy and theology to approximately one thousand, bringing the total enrollment—according to Paul Grendler’s conservative estimate—to about 2500.⁴⁰ The Roman College counted among its professors several of the most famous theologians of the early modern era, not least among them Francisco Toledo (1532–1596), Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), Gabriel Vásquez (1549–1604), Gregorio de Valencia (1550–1603), and Juan de Lugo (1583–1660).⁴¹ The highest theology classes remained exclusive affairs, but the philosophy classes, which were required to pursue advanced degrees in law and medicine, could contain as many as two hundred students.

College life was relatively free and boisterous, at least when compared to the novitiate. Jesuit scholastics were still expected to examine their consciences, to confess their sins, and to do penance, but they were allowed to choose the topics of their daily meditations, and they could take part in the many pageants, performances, and disputations held at the College. Skimming the yearbook, we see that Desideri had to remain in the lower school for one year.⁴² From this we can gather that Desideri, though he had studied Greek and Latin for at least four hours a day for six academic years and practiced speaking it for two more years in the novitiate, was not among the best Latinists in his

³⁸ MITN 6: 199.

³⁹ Villoslada 1954. Compare Grendler 2017: 319–46.

⁴⁰ Grendler 2017: 320. Grendler derives these numbers for the academic years 1696–1697, 1697–1698, 1698–1699, and 1699–1700 from ARSI Rom 66, fol. 284r and ASR, Archivio dell’Università di Roma 195, fols. 23, 104, 185, 384.

⁴¹ Villoslada 1954: 215–16.

⁴² *Catalogus brevis anno 1703*, 17 (ARSI Rom 96, fol. 149r).

class. But neither was he among the worst, who would have had to repeat humanities before progressing to rhetoric. Desideri, in sum, was an average Latinist. He would have been able to compose poems, letters, and speeches of some substance, but such feats were not especially uncommon at the time. Desideri would have also continued basic Greek with Plato and become acquainted with Hesiod, Homer, Pindar, Thucydides, and Demosthenes.

Desideri's Master of Rhetoric during the academic year 1702–1703 was Marc' Antonio Ducci (d. 1711).⁴³ He probably learned the art of oratory through Cipriano Soarez's *De arte rhetorica*, which taught Cicero's *De Oratore*, *Partitiones oratoriae*, and *De inventione*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*.⁴⁴ Although Soarez (1524–1593) emphasized the importance of amplification—repetition with additional details—because he thought it the technique best suited to arouse emotion, he also highlighted links between rhetorical and scholastic forms of dialectic.⁴⁵ Soarez urged students to deploy cumulative definitions, draw logical conclusions, and present contradictories, contraries, and dissimilar cases to heighten the emotional appeal of their discourse and texts. More than anything, he encouraged them to trace consequences to their causes and to make heavy use of similes and examples.

Theatre was also an indispensable part of a Jesuit's training in rhetoric. As any young Jesuit would have learned, "poetry grows cold without theatre" (*friget enim poesis sine theatro*). History—the chief subject of the humanities class—came alive on stage, and the descriptions of ancient cities and lands that students worked so hard to master were put in motion, often with complex machinery designed by the professors of mathematics. Tragedies were staged at the beginning of each academic year, with pious comedies and shorter plays (*ludi priores*) during Carnival.⁴⁶ *Sacrae representationes*, pageants portraying Biblical events, were performed during Christmas, Lent, and Easter. Most plays and pageants included balletic interludes or other dances, and music was performed at almost every important event, including academic assemblies and public disputations.⁴⁷ Students were allowed to sing ecclesiastic music written by Catholics, but—boys being boys—compositions had to be screened for indecency, especially celebrations

⁴³ *Catalogus brevis anno 1703*, 5 (ARSI Rom 96, fol. 143r).

⁴⁴ Soarez 1568. On the use of Soarez at the Collegio Romano, see Moss 1986: 142–43.

⁴⁵ Flynn 1956; Flynn 1957. For more detailed treatment, see Flynn's dissertation, *The 'De Arte Rhetorica' (1568)*, diss. University of Florida (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms No. 16,926).

⁴⁶ Oldani and Yanitelli 1999. On the publication of plays in Jesuit colleges, see Farrell 1938: 121–26, 142–49; McCabe 1983: 1–10.

⁴⁷ For a bibliography of primary sources, see Franchi 2007.

of drunkenness or parodies of Jesuit pedagogy with dirty Latin puns.⁴⁸ Scholastics were still forbidden to attend secular comedies, sporting events, and public executions—unless the condemned man had been charged with heresy.⁴⁹

Plays with historical themes contrasted the transience of earthly kingdoms, lands, and peoples with the twin eternities of heaven and hell. The demands of allegory—to say nothing of the technical problems of presenting the exotic temporalities of heaven, hell, and purgatory—often outstripped the Aristotelian demand for unity of time, place, and action in Jesuit drama. Vincenzo Guiniggi's *Ignatius in Monte Serrato, arma mutans*, the play produced to celebrate the twin canonization of Ignatius and Francis Xavier, depicted the Church, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas as persons who interacted with dancing centaurs and Indians who rode on the backs of dolphins.⁵⁰ The play composed by Ducci and performed for the college that year celebrated the story of Hermenegild, the first son of the Visigoth King Leovigild by the Catholic princess Theodosia.⁵¹ Its theme, typical for the era and the audience, was the relationship of piety and religion. With his wife Ingundis, Hermenegild dies a martyr after they renounce the Arian faith of his father and evil stepmother Goswintha, showing that true piety is found not in the respect due to parents and political authorities, but in religion. As it so happens, several prelates and Cavalieri were present, as well as a good number of cardinals, and both composition and performance were received "with notable applause" (*con plauso*).⁵² Sadly for us, Desideri does not appear in the program.

It is all too easy to neglect this period of Desideri's studies, but it is very hard not to see the influence of Soarez—or something very much like Soarez—on the frequent passages in Desideri's *Notizie storiche* that Luciano Petech found to be "unbearable" (*insopportabile*).⁵³ It is also important not to separate humanities and scholasticism in the Society of Jesus. Latin flourished in the colleges, and many of Desideri's teachers and friends were accomplished poets and pedagogues.⁵⁴ Rogacci's *Euthymia sive De tranquillitate animi* and Carsughi's *Ars bene scribendi* were two of the most important didactic Latin poems of the age.⁵⁵ And, once

⁴⁸ Crook 2009.

⁴⁹ Trends in Rome favored comedies, melodramas, and oratorios. For the years of Desideri's studies, see Franchi 1988–1997, 1: 750–58.

⁵⁰ Oldani and Yanitelli 1999: 22.

⁵¹ Ducci 1705. For an analysis of another Jesuit staging of the martyrdom of Hermenegildus, see Zanolghi 2002: 17–70.

⁵² Villoslada 1954: 290.

⁵³ MITN 5: xxviii. On Desideri's style, see Sweet and Zwilling 2010: 4–6.

⁵⁴ For a contemporary account, see Memmi 1730.

⁵⁵ Rogacci 1690; Carsughi 1709d.

again, several of Desideri's teachers and friends made important contributions to the field. Conti's verse "La morte di S. Francesco Saverio nell'isola di Sanciano" was performed frequently with music.⁵⁶ Marchetti wrote *De vita in terris beata*, a Latin didactic poem that begins by introducing students to the philosophical sects of Greece and Rome. Gianlorenzo Lucchesini (1663–1738), Desideri's professor of ethics, not only produced poetry, prose, and drama but also published a textbook on composition with illustrations from his own works.⁵⁷ Nor was excellence in the vernacular neglected, with Rogacci again making important contributions.⁵⁸ Indeed, several of Desideri's teachers and friends later distinguished themselves as orators. Turano and Corsoni published panegyrics, and Turano appears frequently in contemporary collections of Italian orators.⁵⁹ We also have manuscripts of Guarini's sermons.⁶⁰ Here, too, stock images and themes abound—the menace of Egyptian idolatry, the dangers of heresy, the saintly missionary, the martyr's death—and appear again in Desideri's *Notizie storiche*.

4. Philosophical Formation, 1703–1706

Desideri began philosophy in Fall 1703. Of the eighteen students in his cohort, he was one of nine allowed to enter the philosophy course after one year of rhetoric.⁶¹ The philosophy course took three years, with the first year devoted to dialectics and logic, the second to natural philosophy, and the third to psychology and metaphysics. The course, as with other religious orders such as the Dominicans and Franciscans, was largely devoted to Aristotle, with dialectics based on the *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*; logic upon the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, and the *Prior Analytics*; the natural sciences on Aristotle's *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, *On the Elements*, *Meteorology*, and *On Generation and Corruption*; and the final year of philosophy devoted to *On the Soul* and the *Metaphysics*. Students also took an additional forty-five-minute class during their second year, first on mathematics, then on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Professors taught two hour-long classes each day to give students more time to memorize texts and to practice their

⁵⁶ Conti 1701: 147–64. For other examples of Conti's poetry and prose, see Conti 1696; Conti 1704–1707.

⁵⁷ Lucchesini 1708; Lucchesini 1711a; Lucchesini 1713.

⁵⁸ Rogacci 1694; Rogacci 1711.

⁵⁹ Turano 1713; Corsoni 1722; Corsoni 1723; Turano, et al. 1730–1752, 1: 1–20, 122–34, 182–201, 221–58, 280–304, 324–35; 2: 1–44, 299–324.

⁶⁰ Guarini 1708–1712.

⁶¹ *Catalogus brevis anno 1704*, 5–10 (ARSI Rom 96, fols. 189r–191v).

disputations. Professors devoted the first half of the first class to interpreting the text of Aristotle before moving on to questions to be disputed in the second half of the class. By Desideri's day, the scholasticism of the Roman College had been updated to include modern developments in philosophy and the natural sciences, following the model of the lectures for the three-year philosophy sequence given in 1692-95 by Giovanni Battista Tolomei (1653-1726), which had been a sensation in Rome.⁶² Desideri's professor of mathematics, Antonio Baldigiani (1647-1711), who had taught mathematics at the Roman College since 1666, even conspired with Leibniz in 1689 to have the ban on Copernicanism lifted in Rome.⁶³

The approach to Aristotle remained highly scholastic, however. Ignatius of Loyola found his first classes at the universities of Barcelona and Alcalá de Henares unstructured, but he blossomed with the exercises, drills, and disputations used at the University of Paris. The founder's secretary Juan Alfonso de Polanco (1517-1576) and his successor Diego Laínez (1512-1565) also favored the pedagogical practice of frequent disputation. This procedure required the professors and more talented students to be familiar with the most important commentaries on Aristotle written by Jesuit authors, especially Francisco Toledo (1532-1596), Pedro da Fonseca (1528-1599), and the Conimbricenses, a group of commentators from the Jesuit College in Coimbra.⁶⁴ The class on dialectics introduced students to forms of disputation and the most commonly used scholastic axioms. Students learned the difference between dialectic and demonstration, enthymemes, entailments, and definitions, as well as tips for arguments and the form of arguments, from Aristotle's *Topics*. They learned common fallacies from his *Sophistical Refutations*. The first two months of the logic sequence began with a digest of the whole, with passages often taken from Fonseca or Toledo, followed by a review of arguments and fallacies. The introduction focused on the status of logic as a science, its subject matter, and the general characteristics of universals. During their second year, Jesuits also learned a short history of philosophy, usually based on the outline found in Benet Perera (1536-1600), that

⁶² Tolomei 1698. For historiographical reflections and a review of literature on the alleged opposition between Aristotelianism and modern science, see Sgarbi 2017. On the development of courses in Physics at Roman College, see Baldini 1992: 3-68 and Baldini 2000: 239-79. On Tolomei's role at the Roman College, see Hellyer 2005: 190-95, 219-222.

⁶³ *Catalogus brevis anno 1705*, 6 (ARSI Rom 97, fol. 4v). On Baldigiani's role in the continued controversies over Galileo, see Finocchiaro 2005: 86-104.

⁶⁴ Toledo 1561; Toledo 1572; Toledo 1573; Toledo 1574; Toledo 1575; Fonseca 1564; Fonseca 1577; Fonseca 1589; Fonseca 1591; Fonseca 1604; Conimbricenses 1591; Conimbricenses 1593a; Conimbricenses 1593b; Conimbricenses 1593c; Conimbricenses 1593d; Conimbricenses 1597; Conimbricenses 1598; Conimbricenses 1606.

began with philosophy among the Egyptians, Indians, Hebrews, Thracians, Persians, Libyans, Scythians, Syrians, and the ancient Iberians and Gauls.⁶⁵ The class based on Aristotle's *On Generation and Corruption* emphasized its tenth book, where the Stagyrte treats bundles, mixtures, and aggregates. Not surprisingly, the Jesuits' class on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* stressed books *Zeta* and *Lambda*, which treat the many senses of *ousia* and the prime mover, respectively.

Something of the importance which the Jesuits attached to Aristotle can be seen in the fact that Jesuits taught the philosophy *triennium* on a rotating basis to ensure that everyone at the college could follow, mount, and refute arguments. Several of Desideri's friends and colleagues taught the philosophy *triennium* right along with the greatest Jesuit philosophers like Toledo and Suárez.⁶⁶ Few Jesuits were dispensed from studying Aristotle for the full three years. In fact, Jesuits usually had to complete the full philosophy course before they were allowed to teach grammar or the humanities.

The manuscript evidence of Desideri's training in philosophy is incomplete, but highly suggestive. Desideri took the philosophy *triennium* under Tommaso Silotti (fl. 1700–1730).⁶⁷ His teacher's works on logic were never printed, but several copies are extant, including the lecture notes for Desideri's class in 1703–1704.⁶⁸ If the lectures for Silotti's courses on natural philosophy, psychology, and metaphysics do not survive, we do have several contemporary examples from Desideri's professors and colleagues.⁶⁹ Starting with the works of Aristotle and the standard Jesuit commentaries—Fonseca, Toledo, Perera, and so forth—one may turn to these lectures to pinpoint the philosophical disputations in vogue when Desideri was a student. It goes without saying that these materials show special promise for anyone who would like to understand the arguments found in Desideri's Tibetan

⁶⁵ See, for example, Perera 1576: 112–64, at 116.

⁶⁶ Conti taught the triennium between 1685 and 1688, Turano taught it between 1711 and 1714, and Piccolomini taught it between 1717 to 1720, when Ippolito Desideri was in Tibet. Guarini taught physics in 1707–1708 and metaphysics in 1708–1709. Presumably he was asked to take over the course from Giovanni Amati, who taught logic in 1706–1707, but we do not know why Guarini replaced Amati.

⁶⁷ Luca 1987: 36 mistakenly identifies Desideri's professor as Giacomo Merlini. Compare, however, the list of professors to students at *Catalogus brevis anno 1704*, 6, 10 (ARSI Rom 96, fols. 189v, 191v), *Catalogus brevis anno 1705*, 6, 10 (ARSI Rom 97, fols. 4v, 6v), and *Catalogus brevis anno 1706*, 5, 9 (ARSI Rom 97, fols. 54r, 56r).

⁶⁸ Silotti 1703–1704a; Silotti 1703–1704b, Silotti 1703–1704c; Silotti 1703–1704d. In this last manuscript, there is an inserted table at 79r entitled *Coniugationes, et Exempla modorum omnium, quos Aristoteles in qualibet Figura coniugavit ad discernendos ab inutilibus utiles*.

⁶⁹ Panici 1700–1701a; Panici 1700–1701b; Briccialdi 1704–1705; Briccialdi 1705–1706; Guarani 1706.

writings and the Jesuit's remarks about Tibetan scholasticism. For example, a standard feature of Jesuit classes on logic was the distinction between *logica naturalis* and *logica artificialis*, the Aristotelian analogues to *svārthānumāna* and *parārthānumāna*, respectively.

The philosophy *triennium* is also the source for Desideri's understanding of Tibetan virtue. Desideri's professor of ethics was Giovanni Lorenzo Lucchesini (1663–1738), a fervent enemy of Jansenism, a Catholic sect that had come under suspicion in Rome.⁷⁰ A defining feature of Jansenism was that it denied that non-Christians could be virtuous. Desideri's more radical suggestion that professed atheists might be virtuous is in all likelihood an expansion—even a critique—of his own professor's teaching on the possibility of non-Christian virtue. Be that as it may, Desideri's first Tibetan work, the *Tho rangs*, adopts Lucchesini's method of identifying the signs by which to distinguish true religion from the false religion of pagans, Muslims, and heretics.⁷¹

5. Teaching Assignments, 1706–1710

After completing his philosophy triennium, every Jesuit taught grammar and the humanities in a Jesuit school for three to five years.⁷² Desideri was sent to teach humanities at the Jesuit College in Orvieto for the academic years 1706–1707 and 1707–1708.⁷³ The college at Orvieto was a small affair with two teachers of humanities, one teacher of philosophy, and one teacher of moral theology. Desideri supervised the younger students during his first year but supervised the philosophy students his second year.⁷⁴ In the next academic year, we find Desideri teaching humanities at the Jesuit College in Arezzo.⁷⁵ Desideri returned to the Roman College for the academic year 1709–1710, where

⁷⁰ *Catalogus brevis anno 1705*, 5 (ARSI Rom 97, fol. 54r). The works that are important for Desideri's conception of his mission are Lucchesini 1687; Lucchesini 1705; Lucchesini 1711b.

⁷¹ Lucchesini 1687: 119–20, 551–87, 630–43.

⁷² O'Malley 1993: 200–01.

⁷³ *Catalogus brevis anno 1707*, 71 (ARSI Rom 97, fol. 134v); *Catalogus brevis anno 1708*, 70 (ARSI Rom 97, fol. 184r).

⁷⁴ Desideri is thus listed as the “Pref[ectus] Congr[egationis] Discip[ulos]” and Pref[ectus] Congr[egationis] Scholasticorum,” respectively. Luca 1987: 36, remarks that Desideri “svolgendo anche compiti di assistenza disciplinare.” This might give the impression that Desideri served as the classroom disciplinarian (*corrector*). As *praefectus*, Desideri would have been expected to ensure that the courtyard remained conducive to study, but the *corrector* was usually another student or someone hired for the task.

⁷⁵ *Catalogus brevis anno 1709*, 33 (ARSI Rom 97, fol. 214v). Luca 1987: 36, mistakenly identifies Desideri's second college teaching assignment as Ancona.

he joined the faculty of the Lower School to teach humanities.⁷⁶

6. Theological Formation, 1710–1712

Desideri began his first year of theology in 1710.⁷⁷ Although members of other religious orders took the Society's theology classes, especially during the first year when they were offered at the Roman Seminary, students were winnowed quickly, especially in Desideri's day, when other religious orders had established their own colleges and universities in Rome. The theology curriculum was also changing. When Tolomei became rector of the Roman College in 1698, he encouraged professors to welcome the latest research in Biblical exegesis and ecclesiastic history.⁷⁸ He reinstated the chair in controversial theology and created a special chair in positive theology that would later be held by Desideri's friend Francesco Piccolomini. The theology course normally consisted of four years of classes based on Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* with supplementary classes on Scripture and moral theology. In the normal four-year course of study, the first professor of theology taught the sections of the *Summa theologiae* on God and theology (I, qq. 1-43), action (I-II, qq. 1-21), grace and the virtues in general (I-II, qq. 55-114), and the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (II-II, qq. 1-46), while the second professor covered the virtues of justice and religion (II-II, qq. 61-122), Christology and sacraments in general (III, qq. 1-65), baptism and the Eucharist (III, qq. 68-83), and penance and marriage (III, qq. 84-90), with supplementary material.

Professors were encouraged to take time to explain the distinctions necessary to understand Aquinas's more challenging theses but hasten through easier material. The discussion of Aquinas's questions was also streamlined so that little of its Aristotelian foundation was repeated from the philosophy sequence. Much of Aquinas's account of creation, for example, was treated in the classes on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, just as the virtues of fortitude, temperance, and prudence were taught in the Ethics class. The theology sequence required students to have copies of the Bible, the *Summa theologiae*, and the acts of the Council of Trent. Theology students were also expected to master various ecclesiastical matters necessary for their priesthood; to this end, an additional hour of study was set aside each day to read important points

⁷⁶ *Catalogus brevis anno 1710*, 6 (ARSI Rom 97, fol. 249v).

⁷⁷ *Catalogus brevis anno 1711*, 9 (ARSI Rom 98, fol. 6r). Desideri also served as the "master of the sleeping quarters" (*praefectus cubiculorum*) in the dormitory of the Society's Roman Seminary, a boarding school for boys from noble families ran by the Society.

⁷⁸ Villoslada 1954: 236-37.

of controversial theology and the important rules related to ecclesiastical discipline. In doing so, the students were enjoined to take detailed notes, a practice Desideri maintained as a missionary in Tibet.

Here, too, the method was highly scholastic. Jesuits studied Aquinas through the Society's most important commentators, with further guidance from the sub-commentaries and disputations of their own professors. The *Ratio studiorum*, the Jesuits' official plan of studies, acknowledged that there might be topics that Aquinas only touched upon, or that he did not touch upon at all, or that his teaching might even be ambiguous. If the Society allowed theologians some latitude in their interpretation of Aquinas, it made haste slowly. Nothing was to be taught that contradicted the consensus of the church fathers or the teachings shared by the major schools of scholastic theology. Nor was anyone to introduce new questions in theology without consulting the Master of Studies. Speculation was encouraged but only within the confines of a well-established set of theological positions or "conclusions."

Desideri only took two years of theology. It was not uncommon for Jesuits who had shown talents for preaching or administration to be dispensed from the normal four-year course so that the Society might be able to make use of their services to greater effect. We may gather from this that he was probably not among the most talented theologians in his cohort; had he been, he would never have been chosen for the missions. Although now largely forgotten, the primary chair in theology for much of Desideri's time at the college was Juan de Ulloa (1639–1723), the author of one of the last major courses in both philosophy and theology in the Society, and one of the more creative scholastic theologians of the eighteenth century.⁷⁹ Apart from Ulloa, who taught Desideri's class on Biblical hermeneutics, none of his theology professors was especially distinguished. His professors of scholastic theology were Giovanni Giacomo Panici (1657–1716) and José Mateo Leris (1661–1733), and his professor of controversial theology was Domenico Antonio Briccialdi (1664–1733).⁸⁰

Because there were two professors of scholastic theology at the Roman College, we may gather that during the academic year 1710–1711, Desideri took the class on God and the nature of theology and the class on Christology and general sacramental theology. In 1711–1712, he would have thus taken the class on virtue, law, and grace and the class on special topics in sacramental theology, that is, baptism, Eucharist,

⁷⁹ Ulloa did not teach the philosophy triennium at the Collegio Romano, but he wrote textbooks on major and minor dialectics, natural philosophy, and psychology. See Ulloa 1771a; Ulloa 1711b; Ulloa 1712a; Ulloa 1712b; Ulloa 1713; and Ulloa 1715.

⁸⁰ *Catalogus brevis anno 1711*, 5 (ARSI Rom 98, fol. 4r); *Catalogus brevis anno 1712*, 5 (ARSI Rom 98, fol. 50r).

penance, and marriage. Desideri would not have taken classes on Thomistic theories of action, the theological virtues, or the virtues of justice and religion, but he would have been required to know these topics nonetheless. He would have learned much from watching the advanced theologians debate these subjects in public disputations, but he would have also reviewed the material and been examined privately.

Ulloa published his textbook on Biblical hermeneutics, and Briccialdi's lectures on controversial theology are preserved in the archives, so we have a reasonably good record of Desideri's entire course of theology.⁸¹ We do not have Panici's lectures on God and the nature of theology or Leris's lectures on Christology and the sacraments, but we do have Panici's class on grace from 1710–1711 and Leris's class on penance from 1711–1712, so we know that Panici occupied the first chair of theology and Leris occupied the second.⁸² We also have Panici's classes on law and justice, on the Incarnation, on the sacraments, on the Eucharist, and on the theological virtues.⁸³ Since professors of theology often recycled the notes of their predecessors before developing their own disputations, we may presume that Panici modeled his first classes on God and theology on Ulloa's and that Leris modeled his classes on Christology and the sacraments on Panici's. We may presume that these earlier classes give us a relatively good approximation of Desideri's later ones, even if the latter were not directly modelled on the former. As with the manuscript evidence on Desideri's philosophical training, these lectures focus almost exclusively on disputations, sometimes monomaniacally. Panici's class on grace, for example, was devoted entirely to disputations that arose from a single question, *Summa theologiae* Ia-IIae, question 109, so that students were fully prepared to distinguish the Jesuit understanding of the relationship of grace and free will from the respective positions of Dominicans and Jansenists.

The abundant material we have about Desideri's theological training is especially helpful for understanding the basic terms he uses to describe Tibetan religion in the third book of the *Notizie istoriche*—faith, grace, meditation, contemplation, love, and of course the word

⁸¹ Ulloa 1717; Briccialdi 1711–1712.

⁸² Panici 1710–1711a; Leris 1711–1712. Panici 1706–1708a and Panici 1706–1708b, Panici's classes on the Incarnation and the sacraments show that he also taught the second chair sequence. I have provisionally dated these to 1706–1708, his first years teaching theology. Panici 1709–1710, his class on divine grace for that academic year, is found in the archives with Ulloa 1709–1710, so we see that Panici had taken over the first chair that year. Ulloa 1709–1710 also anticipates the fourth volume of Ulloa 1719a, which suggests that Ulloa was polishing the material he would later publish in the classroom—a fairly typical procedure among Jesuits.

⁸³ Panici 1710–1711b; Panici 1710–1711c. Compare Panici 1711–1712.

“religion” itself. This cannot be stressed enough. Desideri’s descriptions of Tibetan religion and culture and his speculations about the possible salvation of Buddhists often turn on the precise meaning of a technical scholastic term. In several cases, the meanings attached to these terms had changed considerably since their use by thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century masters like Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, having been subjected to four centuries of refinement, but also authoritative definition or clarification by church council, papal decree, or the Society of Jesus itself. One cannot neglect this later commentarial tradition, its textbooks, or its conclusions when studying Desideri’s writings, much in the same way that one could not neglect the education and training of an early eighteenth-century interpreter of Tsong kha pa.

7. Disputation in the Society of Jesus

It might surprise some Tibetanists to know that Jesuits devoted significant energies to scholastic disputation. The *Ratio studiorum* says:

From the very beginning of logic, the young are to be educated so that nothing should shame them when disputing more than to deviate from rational procedures of argumentation. The teacher should insist upon nothing more severely than that the appropriate laws of disputing be rightly, even rigidly, followed. Thus, he who responds should repeat the whole argument before responding to its individual propositions; then he should review the propositions, saying, “I deny, or I concede the major, the minor, or the consequence.” Occasionally, he should distinguish [the major or the minor]. Only rarely, however, should he impose clarifications or arguments, especially on the reluctant.⁸⁴

The Jesuits’ art of disputation was built on Aristotle’s *Topics* and buttressed by medieval logical exercises like *sophismata*, *obligationes*, and *insolubilia*. In essence, one student, the “opponent” (*opponens*), attacked a thesis or position defended by another, the “respondent” (*respondens*), with both parties obligated to express themselves according to a pre-defined set of rules and categories. Either could press his advantage by “distinguishing” the major or the minor. Rather than accepting any

⁸⁴ Lukács 1965-86, 5: 400: “Sic ab ipso Logicae initio iuvenes instituantur, nihil ut eos magis pudeat in disputando, quam a formae ratione deflexisse; nihil ab illis severius exigit praeceptor, quam disputandi leges ac statas vices. Itaque qui respondet, repetat primum totam argumentationem, nihil ad singulas propositiones respondeo; tum iterum propositiones, addatque; *nego vel concedo maiorem, minorem, consequentiam*; interdum etiam distinguat; raro autem vel declarationes vel rationes, praesertim invitis, obtrudat.”

given enthymeme, the respondent might, in other words, concede the opponent's point in one sense while denying it in another, thereby forcing his opponent to accept his own definition of the term or terms in question.

Professors chose one or two students to debate the class material every day except Saturday, when classes held formal disputations between eight or nine students. On Sundays, a Jesuit in a philosophy class might be asked to defend theses against two or more opponents for one hour; on holidays, a theology student and two philosophy students defended theses for two hours, again against multiple opponents.⁸⁵ Professors might also require the opponent take up a different line of attack, or that respondent defend a contrary position, or that the two maintain the same debate but switch roles—anything that led to more fiery (and thus more frequented) disputations. Professors urged attackers to press forward and roused defenders as objections mounted. If a disputant argued with insufficient precision and passion, the professor himself might enter the debate and argue with such force that “the controversy be brought to a boil” (*quo magis concertatio ferveret*).⁸⁶ Students, for their part, were to bring up nothing useless, obsolete, absurd, or manifestly false, nor were they to multiply arguments or objections frivolously. Students could, however, hold any position that was freely debated among the various schools of Catholic theology, as long as they took care to be “gentle and friendly” (*modeste ac benevole*) when they defended their positions.⁸⁷ (Such modesty was especially desired when students rebutted their professors.) The Society also tried to reconcile opposing positions when at all possible. Gerónimo Nadal (1507–1580) had hoped the theologians of the Society would avoid following into the existing factions of Thomists, Scotists, and nominalists, and in many respects they succeeded.

Formal disputations held outside of individual classes were led by the Master of Studies, who signaled for the disputants to begin and to cease, and for professors to enter the debates. With precise periods of forty-five minutes or an hour—the Master of Studies held the clock—the baroque disputation was, like modern football or basketball, a timed sport.⁸⁸ Professors took their parts two by two, so that the first could answer the second's questions in the traditional scholastic

⁸⁵ Leris's disputations also show us that students in the same cohort debated material they took in different classes. For four of the seven disputations in Leris's class, two of the students were asked to defend theses from Briccialdi's class on controversial theology. Of course, Briccialdi also led his own disputations. See Briccialdi 1716.

⁸⁶ Lukács, 1965–1986, 5: 382.

⁸⁷ Lukács, 1965–1986, 2: 499, 775.

⁸⁸ David Kittelstrom has suggested that the more appropriate comparison might be to speed chess (personal communication October 3, 2025).

manner. The Master was not to provide the solution to disputed questions, but he could stop the disputation to ask a question or on rare occasion take over for one of the disputants, even when they were fellow professors. The Master of Studies could also invite anyone present to join the disputation, including other professors, students, or members of other religious orders if they were visiting. With the permission of the Master of Studies, anyone could also take up the argument. Above all, the Master of Studies was to prevent the disputants from arguing back and forth such that the problem remained less understood than it was before the disputation began.

Monthly disputations were held in the great hall. Students who were to defend theses were selected a week in advance, and the theses were approved by the Master of Studies and posted so that everyone could review the subjects to be debated. Students who defended theses were given fifteen minutes to recall the main points of their arguments before the disputation began. In the monthly disputations, professors presented theses and the students responded. Were the entire philosophy and theology faculty present, three students might debate their professors in the morning, and three might debate their professors after noon. In such debates, the first student would usually respond to the professor's questioning for an hour, with the other students responding to other professors for about forty-five minutes. Formal disputations before lunch were arranged between the different classes: the theologians disputed the metaphysicians, the metaphysicians debated the natural philosophers, and the natural philosophers debated the logicians, with the professor of metaphysics summarizing the debate. After lunch, metaphysicians debated among themselves, as did natural philosophers and logicians, and the natural philosopher confirmed one or two of the disputed questions. The professors of philosophy also organized three or four "solemn disputations" over the course of an academic year, usually on feast days when classes were cancelled. Solemn disputations were festive occasions in which the full ceremonial apparatus of a baroque Jesuit education was called upon to generate enthusiasm for philosophical studies. Such disputations, which might involve the scholastics of other religious orders such as the Dominicans and Franciscans, were highly competitive. When the Jesuits were invited to others' disputations, they made sure only to send their best debaters.

The most important disputations were the highly ritualized "acts" (*acta*) that began and ended each semester. Acts, which were classified as "special" or "general," were public disputations attended by the

Rector, the Master of Studies, and all of the professors.⁸⁹ Special acts usually involved at least one professor and about twenty students taking part in the formal disputation, with the whole event lasting about two and a half hours. Every year the Roman College devoted one special act to the examination of students who had completed the first year of logic. Other special acts were philosophical or theological as the Master of Studies saw fit. General acts, which concluded the philosophy triennium and the theology sequence, lasted four or five hours and were expanded accordingly. In general acts, Jesuits were examined by five faculty members, including the Master of Studies and the student's teacher. The series of daily, weekly, monthly, special acts and solemn disputations came to its climax in the general theological act that ended the academic year. This final act was an all-day affair to which local ecclesiastical and secular dignitaries were invited. The general theological acts included each of the acting professors, the advanced theology students who had already completed the four-year course, and the fourth-year students who would not be continuing with the two-year review.⁹⁰ The *Ratio studiorum* limited the number of theses defended during a single general act to fifty, so the early modern practice was not unlike oral examinations at the Gregorian University today, with students given exactly twelve minutes to answer the questions of their professors in oral exams.

Fewer students participated in the general acts over the seventeenth century, even as they became increasingly extravagant. It was not unusual for half a dozen cardinals to be present at the defense of a particularly well-connected student, and in exceptional instances the entire college of cardinals might turn out, along with assorted prelates, princes, and noblemen.⁹¹ In fact, Desideri probably attended one of the most extravagant acts of the early eighteenth century on August 18, 1703: the defense of the (later) Cardinal and collector Annibale Albani (1682–1751), the nephew of Pope Clement XI (1649–1721).⁹² Following the custom of medieval universities, students who defended their theses paid for the event; students of means designed thesis prints with complex emblems accompanied by poems composed for the occasion by the college's professors and set to music to be performed by its

⁸⁹ For a list and description of various acts at the college, see Villoslada 1954: 263–96. Note especially the complicated festivities in celebration of Pope Clement XI on November 23, 1703 (Villoslada 1954: 290). For another list of the *assertiones theologicae* debated at the Roman College, see Sommervogel 1890–1960, 7: 43–66 [30–41].

⁹⁰ Although Jesuits rarely offered theology degrees, students who had successfully defended their theses during the *acta* could be granted doctorates with the permission of the general. Grendler 2017: 437.

⁹¹ Rice 2004: vii.

⁹² For a description, see Villoslada 1954: 271. For the program, see Crescimbeni 1703.

musicians, and broadsheets with the theses to be defended were distributed to attendees.⁹³ The music for defenses at the beginning of the seventeenth century was usually provided by eight singers in two choirs and four instrumentalists. Albani's defense was celebrated with thirty-two singers in eight choirs and an orchestra of sixty instruments. An academic defense began with an instrumental fanfare. After the audience was seated—with cardinals and associated dignitaries in comfortable armchairs in front, and student and lesser guests on wooden benches behind—an interlude was sung as students distributed the broadsides and librettos. After the first interlude, the student ascended the pulpit to deliver an oration dedicated to his patron, a second choral interlude followed, and the formal disputation began. A third choral interlude followed the disputation before the student delivered a second oration thanking his dedicatee and the audience. Festivities concluded with a jubilant choral finale.

We have records of formal disputations conducted by three of Desideri's theology professors. On December 15, 1710, February 8, 1711, and April 29, 1711, Panici's first theology class debated ten conclusions on divine grace and two conclusions on the nature of true religion with the class on controversial theology. On May 31, 1711, the class held ten debates on predestination; on July 5, 1711, they held ten debates on the technical topic of the sufficient grace given to all human beings—a special point of contention between Jesuits, Dominicans, and Jansenists.⁹⁴ Between November 26, 1711, and May 16, 1712, Leris's second theology class held seven formal disputations on various topics in the theology of penance, not counting the theses defended in the small act celebrated on June 27, 1712.⁹⁵ Since there were only eleven Jesuits in the second theology class and each of these seven formal disputations involved nine or ten students, we may presume that Desideri participated in these debates. There is, in fact, evidence that Desideri was quite good at disputation. In 1711–1712, Desideri served as the Prefect of the Academy of Logic under the supervision of Domenico Maria

⁹³ These "thesis prints" are an art form in themselves. For several beautiful examples, see Rice 2007. As Rice has demonstrated, thesis prints for special acts, which were restricted to students who had completed the first year of logic, were more usually emblematic, whereas the thesis prints for general acts in which students who had completed the full philosophy and/or theology courses, focused on the student's dedicatee and patron. As a result, the thesis prints of logic students often depict the Roman College or Roman Seminary. Were an emblem's subject not strictly allegorical, it was often taken from ancient history; as a result, emblems are as a rule saturated with pagan personages and imagery.

⁹⁴ Panici 1710–1711a: 330–37. As we have seen, Desideri took Panici's class on grace the following year, but we may presume the disputations to have been quite similar.

⁹⁵ Leris 1711–1712: 243r–54r.

Turano, the professor who taught logic that year.⁹⁶ “Academies” were groups of chosen students who devoted an extra hour every day to review their lessons and practice formal disputations under the direction of an older Jesuit. In his capacity as Prefect, Desideri would have worked with Turano and the Master of Studies to coordinate the formal disputations held by the first-year philosophy students as they worked their way through Aristotle’s *Topics*, *Sophistical Refutations*, *Categories*, and *Prior Analytics*.⁹⁷ Given the communal nature of the Society’s acts, we may presume that Turano or Conti invited Desideri to take frequent turns in the disputations. We do not know if Desideri thought of these disputations when he lived in Tibet. He almost certainly had no inkling of the scholastic culture he would find in the Land of the Snows as he wrote to Francesco Piccolomini from Agra.

Desideri made the Spiritual Exercises in September 1711 at the Holy House of Loreto, where—at least on his later telling—he resolved to offer himself to the Jesuit General for the overseas missions.⁹⁸ In all likelihood, Cotti confirmed Desideri’s vocation, and Merlini chose him to become a missionary.⁹⁹ He was ordained as a priest on April 28, 1712, exactly ten years after he matriculated at the Roman College, and on September 12, 1712, he left Rome to embark on the voyage that would eventually bring him to Lhasa. We may presume that Conti, Guarini, Turano, and Crivelli added to the chorus of blessings as Desideri departed. The decision appears to have been made swiftly: Desideri is listed in the Catalogue of the Roman Province for 1712–1713, but the only thing next to his name is a long dash “—”.¹⁰⁰ It is tempting to see this as a cipher, either for the man himself or the emptiness he would encounter in Tsong kha pa’s *Lam rim chen mo*, but we should resist reading too much into this little mark, to say nothing of treating as an emblem of some larger mystery. After all, the scholar of Desideri has several concrete sources of his education and spiritual formation, and these would be far better suited for understanding his Tibetan and Italian writings.

⁹⁶ *Catalogus brevis anno 1711*, 28 (ARSI Rom 98, fol. 14v).

⁹⁷ *Catalogus brevis anno 1712*, 5 (ARSI Rom 98, fol. 50r).

⁹⁸ MITN 5: 122.

⁹⁹ *Catalogus brevis anno 1712*, 47 (ARSI Rom 98, fol. 25r).

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A Study and Translation of Potowa's Middle Way, An Early Tibetan Commentary on Atiśa's *Madhyamakopadeśa*

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Introduction

This article examines and furnishes an English translation, along with a diplomatic Tibetan edition, of the *Explanation of the Special Instructions of the Middle Way, The System of Potowa and His Spiritual Sons* (Dbu ma'i man ngag gi bshad pa, Pu to yab sras kyi lugs) [abbr. *Potowa's Middle Way*] by an anonymous Kadampa (bka' gdams pa) author. *Potowa's Middle Way*, preserved in a brief and partly illegible manuscript, is a short commentary (tig chung) on Atiśa's *Special Instructions on the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakopadeśa*). *Potowa's Middle Way* represents one the earliest extant Tibetan commentaries on the meditation practices of Atiśa's Middle Way (*madhyamaka*) among his eleventh century followers at the contemplative community of Ra-dreng (*rwa sgren*).

Although the commentary in its colophon provides part of the title of the text as "*The System of Potowa and His Spiritual Sons*," the Kadampa master Potowa Rinchen Sal (*po ta ba rin chen gsal*, 1027–1105) is only mentioned twice (*ad* fol. 4b3, 9b3) in the text and he is not the author of the work. Along with multiple mentions of Atiśa (eight times), six Tibetans are mentioned by name in the commentary including Gönpawa (*dgon pa ba dbang phyug rgyal mtshan*, 1016–1083), Ngok sherab (*rngog legs pa'i shes rab*, eleventh century), Dromtön (*'brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas*, 1004–1064), Chengawa Tsuktrim Bar (*spyen snga ba tshul khrims 'bar*, 1038–1103), and Potowa. The probable identity of the anonymous Kadampa author who initially wrote down these oral commentarial instructions on Atiśa's root text is provided below.

As mentioned, *Potowa's Middle Way* is a brief Tibetan explanatory commentary, or *tig chung*,¹ on Atiśa's *Special Instructions on the Middle way* (*Madhyamakopadeśa*). The *Madhyamakopadeśa* is a short text on the practice of Madhyamaka in meditation. The term *upadeśa* "special

¹ Tig according to the *sMon lam tshig mdzod* means: *snying bo bsdus pa ste / (dper na /) man ngag gi yang tig gzhung lugs kyi snying tig sman gyi zin tig ces pa lta bu* ("Essence condensed, for example, like the essential point of instructions, the essence of the system, the essential extract of medicine.")

instructions” in the title of Atiśa’s basic text is a term that has a long history in Indian Buddhism with different connotations over the centuries, the primary understanding being direct instruction on the practice of meditation. The *Madhyamakopadéśa* is therefore special guidance or instructions concerning the practice of Middle Way philosophy. I have already published English translations of Atiśa’s *Special Instructions*, the *Madhyamakopadéśavṛtti*, an Indian Buddhist commentary by Prajñāmukti, and the Tibetan *Collection on the Two Realities* (*bden gnyis kyi ’bum*) by an anonymous Kadampa author (Apple 2018). *Potowa’s Middle Way* compliments these works with additional information on Atiśa’s *Madhyamakopadéśa*. An alternative colophon to Atiśa’s *Madhyamakopadéśa* found among Tibetan Tengyurs (*bstan ’gyur*), previously untranslated, provides a synopsis for the circumstances of Atiśa composing, teaching, and having the *Madhyamakopadéśa* translated into Tibetan:

“*The Special Instructions of the Middle Way*,” composed by the paṇḍita Dīpaṃkara, is complete. The translator, the bhikṣu Tsultrim Gyalwa, translated, revised, and established [this text] at Lha-sa Trulnang. At the great Ra-sa Trulnang Temple, Tsultrim Gyalwa translated, revised, and established [this text] for the learned one called Marme Dzepal [Dīpaṃkaraśrī] [96a7]. At the great Ra-sa Trulnang Temple, Ngok Tsūn Lekpai Sherap of Tibet, having requested it, I translated [it]. The sthavira Dīpaṃkaraśrī said, “[One who] upholds the textual system of the three types of individuals [of the graduated teachings], will not go astray on the path of error.” So Naktso Tsultrim Gyalwa spoke.²

Atiśa wrote and gave a lecture on this version of the *Madhyamakopadéśa* in Lhasa based on the request from his disciple Ngok lekpai sherab (*rngog legs pa’i shes rab*). The work was translated by Atiśa’s long standing disciple Naktso Tsultrim Gyalwa. Atiśa had been in Tibet at least seven years at the time of this teaching.³ Based on Atiśa’s

² dbu ma’i man ngag ces bya ba, mdo ’grel (ki), D3929, 96a6 (also GT3327, 149a) dbu ma’i man ngag ces bya ba paN+Di ta dī paM ka ras mdzad pa rdzogs so // / lo tsA ba dge slong tshul khrims rgyal bas lha sa ’phrul snang du bsgyur cing zhus te gtan la phab pa’o // // ra sa ’phrul snang gtsug lag khang chen du // / mar me mdzad dpal [96a7] zhes bya’i mkhas pa la / tshul khrims rgyal bas lha sa ’phrul snang du bsgyur cing zhus te gtan la phab pa’o // // ra sa ’phrul snang gtsug lag khang chen du // / mar me mdzad dpal zhes bya’i mkhas pa la // bod kyi rngog btsun legs pa’i shes rab kyis // / gsol ba btan nas bdag gis bsgyur ba yin // / gnas brtan mar me mdzad dpal gyis // / gzhang lugs skyes bu gsum ’dzin pa // / gol ba’i lam du mi ’gro zhes // / nag tsho tshul khrims rgyal bas smras // //.

³ According to Las chen kun dga’ rgyal mtshan, Atiśa spent thirteen years in Tibet, including the first three at mNga’ ris, four years in Dbus-gtsang, and six years in sNye-thang (*de ltar na jo bos mnga’ ris su lo gsum / dbus gtsang gzhan du lo bzhi / snye thang du lo drug stel bod du lo bcu gsum ’gro ba’i don mdzad nas /...* (Rnam par thar pa, 97). See also Alaka Chattopadhyaya, *Atiśa and Tibet; life and works of Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna in relation to the history and religion of Tibet* (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past &

biography, and texts attributed to him found in the *Collected Works of the Kadampas* (*bka' gdams gsung 'bum*), we know that he gave a number of teachings on Madhyamaka in India and later in Tibet, both before and after giving this teaching in Lhasa (see Apple 2018; Apple 2019). For the purposes of this article, an important point is that this version of Atiśa's special instructions of Madhyamaka became the written canonical version that is preserved among the currently known five editions of the Tibetan Tengyur. The written canonical version is the version that is commented upon in *Potowa's Middle Way*, just like the version commented upon in the *Kadampa Collection on the Two Realities* (*bden gnyis kyi 'bum*) (Apple 2018: 291-326).

These commentaries were taught and orally disseminated at Radreng (*rwa sgren*) monastery as well as at regional Kadampa monasteries in the Phenyul (*'phan yul*) and Meldro (*mal gro*) regions during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This can be inferred by the fact that the *Madhyamakopadeśa*, in addition to the *Collection on the Two Realities* and *Potowa's Middle Way* taught at Radreng, was incorporated into the works of Kadampa authors like Sharawa Yönten Drak (*sha ra ba yon tan grags*, 1070-1141) and his disciple Chekhawa Yeshe Dorje (*'chad kha ba ye shes rdo rje*, 1101-1175). Sharawa Yönten Drak patterns his analysis of the lack of essence of things according to Atiśa's *Madhyamakopadeśa* in the insight section of his *Stages of the Path* (*Zhang sha ra bas mdzad pa'i lam rim*, 2019, 201-202). Chekhawa Yeshé Dorjé, a disciple of Sharawa, explicitly discusses his receiving the oral transmission of these teachings when he states in the latter portion of his *Great Stages of the Path Treatise* (*lam rim chen mo*),

"When the Geshé Gönpawa gave the special instructions of meditating on non-arising, he said, "This is exactly what the Princely-Lord (*jo bo*) gave me," and he gave the words of *The Special Instructions of the Middle Way* without missing any of them. Having heard the meaning of the two realities in this way, and relying on thinking about them, the attainment of certainty is called "vision" (*lta ba*). When meditating on that, one meditates on the union of skillful means (*thabs*) and wisdom (*shes rab*) relying on the two realities, as previously explained. "It is not like those fully accomplished Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) practitioners who, when entering simultaneously, say that emptiness alone is sufficient. The most profound of those who speak of the Madhyamaka vision is the teacher Candrakīrti; if they deny the Buddha, cause and effect (*hetuphala*), happiness and suffering, etc., know that their understanding is the opposite of what should be known," he said.⁴

Present, 1967), 330-366, and Vetturini, *bKa' gdams pa School*, 89.

⁴ Chekhawa Yeshé Dorjé (*'chad kha ba ye shes rdo rje*, 1101-1175). *Lam rim chen mo*,

These points of emphasis on the *Madhyamakopadeśa* described by Chekhawa Yeshé Dorjé are also found in *Potowa's Middle Way*. *Potowa's Middle Way* mentions instructions on non-arising (*ad* 4a1), the two realities (*ad* 1b4-6, 2a3, 2b4, 9b2), as well as the union of skillful means and wisdom (*ad* 3a4) while advocating the system of Candrakīrti (*ad* 8b6).

However, as I have mentioned in previous publications, several different lineages of this type of instruction and practice on Madhyamaka were brought into Tibet. Along these lines, different versions of Atiśa's Middle Way Instructions (*dbu ma'i man ngag*) circulated in Tibet including *Middle Way Special Instructions for Cultivating All the Qualities in the Scriptures* (*Sde snod kyi chos thams cad sgom pa dbu ma'i man ngag*; translated in Apple 2019, 175-179) and *The Uncommon Instructions of the Princely-Lord [Atiśa]* (*jo bo'i gdam ngag thun mong ma yin pa*; translated below in Appendix 1). These lineages of Atiśa's Middle Way Instructions (*dbu ma'i man*) were commented upon at least up until the 13th century. Kyotön Monlam Tsultrim (*skyo ston smon lam tshul khriims*, 1219-1299), eighth abbot of Nartang Monastery (*snar thang dgon*), wrote several brief texts on this topic including one entitled *Instructions on the Middle Way of Dīpaṅkara* (*mar me mdzad kyi dbu ma'i man ngag*).⁵

Manuscript of Potowa's Middle Way, the *Dbu ma'i man ngag gi bshad pa*, *Pu to yab sras kyi lugs*

The facsimile reproduction of *Potowa's Middle Way* manuscript is found in Volume 19 of the Bka' gdams gsung 'bum published by Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang (2003). As the Dpal brtsegs editors state, "Apart from just saying that this is the completion of the explanation of the Madhyamaka instructions, because there is no colophon, it is not clearly known who the author is."⁶ The manuscript title page in the facsimile has the section marker *phyi rtsa* and the 'Bras spungs *dkar chag* provides the entry number 015617 noting that the script is *dpe tshugs*, a type of *dbu med* Tibetan script, often used for

folio 67a5: dge bshes dgon pa bas skye ba myed pa sgom pa'i man ngag gnam tsa na / nged la jo bos gnam ba 'di nyid yin gsung nas dbu ma'i man ngag gi tshig sgros kyang ma nyams par gnam gsung / de ltar bden ba gnyis kyi don thos shing bsams pa la brten nas / nges pa [67a6] thob pa ni lta ba zhes bya la de nyid sgom pa'i dus na bden pa gnyis la brten nas sngar bstan pa bzhin du thabs dang shes rab zung du 'brel pa nyid du sgom pa yin gyi / rang cag cig car 'jug pa'i lhaq rol lus pa'i rdzogs chen pa dag stong pa nyid cig pus chog zer ba bzhin du men / dbu ma'i lta ba smra ba rnams kyi zab shos slob dpon zla bag rags pa yin te sangs rgyas dang rgyu 'bras dang bde [67a7] sdug la stsogs pa 'gog na / shes bya phyin ci log tur togs pa yin par shes par byis shig ces gsung /

⁵ See K. Phuntsho 2023, vi, on these texts, and pp. 719-728 for Tibetan editions.

⁶ / 'dir 'bras spungs gnas bchu lha khang dpe rtags ang phyi tsa 114 nang bzhugs... mdzad byang myed pas mdzad pa po su yin gsal bshad du ma shes /

handwriting. *'Bras spungs dkar chag* also states that "It is clear that this is said to be the intention of Putowa and his spiritual son."⁷ The manuscript of the *Potowa's Middle Way*, whose content is a brief commentary on Atiśa's *Madhyamakopadeśa*, consists of nine folios (1a-9b3, Roman pp. 318–334), six lines per page written in Tibetan headless cursive script (*dbu med*). The handwriting contains several archaic abbreviations in which some parts of the text are difficult to discern. The manuscript has the following orthographic characteristics:

- Consistent use of *tsheg* before a *shad*;
- Palatalisation of *ma* by *ya btags* before vowels *i* and *e* (e.g. *myed*, *myin*);
- Consistent spelling of *lasogs pa* for *la sogs pa*;
- The use of Arabic numbers for abbreviations, [e.g. 2 for *gnyis*, 1b4]

Sources and Content of *Potowa's Middle Way*

The content of *Potowa's Middle Way* is comprised of teachings received from a lineage upheld by Gönpawa directly descended from Atiśa. Gönpawa Wangchuk Gyaltsen (1016–82) was an important early disciple of Atiśa and Dromtönpa. He initially met Atiśa in Nyantso and later became known for his meditative abilities and insight and was among the younger generation of Atiśa's initial Tibetan disciples who were receptive to Atiśa's distinctive Madhyamaka teachings (Apple 2018; Apple 2025). The colophon to Atiśa's *mahāmudrā* instructions on coemergent union (Apple 2019, 245–50) indicates that Gönpawa was the first Tibetan disciple to receive these advanced teachings. Gönpawa later became an important figure in the monastic community of Radreng. After the passing of Amé Jangchup Rinchen in 1078, Gönpawa became the third abbot of Radreng, roughly from 1078 to 1082. As noted above, the commentary mentions by name other figures at Radreng monastery including Ngok sherab, Dromtön, Chengawa, and Potowa, situating the late eleventh century as a *terminus a quo* for the initial composition of the text (cf. Hugon 2023, 188).

The commentary is composed without the presence of the root text of Atiśa's *Madhyamakopadeśa* embedded in the text, demonstrating the oral nature of the teaching and reception of the text, as the root text was kept as a separate text, either upheld through memorization or

⁷ *'Bras spungs dkar chag* = bsTan 'dzin phun tshogs. *'Bras spungs dgon du bzhugs su gsol ba'i dpe rnying dkar chag*. 2 vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2004, entry 015617, *pu to ba yab sras kyi bzhed pa yin zhes pa gsal* /

copied down in separate work. An oral tradition of these teachings at Radreng is also evident because the Kadampa author of *Potowa's Middle Way* cites the very same verse on the reasoning indicating there is not arising without a cause as does the Kadampa author of the *Collection of Instructions on the Middle Way* (Apple 2018, 309); neither Kadampa author correctly attributes the verse to Dharmakīrti in their citations.

The contents clearly indicate that Gönpawa, Potowa and his spiritual sons, closely followed the Madhyamaka thought of Atiśa and Dromtönpa based on the teachings of Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, and Avadhūtipa. *Potowa's Middle Way* describes the system (*lugs*) of these masters with the crucial phrase “the five who are of the Madhyamaka meditative system” (*sgom lugs dbu ma sras po lnga*, ad 8b5). The term “meditative system” (*sgom lugs*) has previously been associated with the figure of Tsen Khawoche (*btsan kha bo che*, b. 1021) and the tradition of exegesis surrounding the *Ratnagotravibhāga*.⁸ The term as it occurs in *Potowa's Middle Way* is directly related to Atiśa's *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā* which specifies to “Meditate on only the special instructions of the lineage of the Ārya Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, Bhavya, and Śāntideva” (Apple 2018, 332: Tib. Sherburne 2000, 250). These are the Madhyamaka masters that Atiśa and *Potowa's Middle Way* advocate as a “meditative system” (*sgom lugs*). *Potowa's Middle Way*, however, does not actually cite Bhavya and Śāntideva in the work, but appears to be emphasizing the systematic concordance between these masters, including Candrakīrti, and Atiśa's teacher Avadhūtipa.

A great amount of the structure and content of *Potowa's Middle Way* is shared with the Kadampa *Collection of Special Instructions* (Apple 2018, 293-326). *Potowa's Middle Way* outlines the Middle Way of Nāgārjuna (3a1–2), *Potowa's Middle Way* explains that while all four major traditions⁹ of the Buddha teach a Middle Way, the instructions of Atiśa concern the Middle Way between the two extremes of existence and nonexistence based on the framework of the two realities (Apple 2018, 271). *Potowa's Middle Way* outlines the proper observance of cause and effect (ad 3a2-6), the distinction between conventional and

⁸ On *btsan kha bo che* and *sgom lugs* see van der Kuijp (1983, 40-43), Mathes (2008), and Kano (2016, 12, 47-49).

⁹ The four great Buddhist doctrinal systems (*sangs rgyas pa'i gzhuung chen po bzhi bo*) referred to within the text include Vaibhāṣika (*bye brag smra ba*), Sautrāntika (*mdo sde ba*), Cittamātra (*sems tsam pa*), and Madhyamaka (*dbu ma pa*). In later texts such as Konchog Jigme Wangpo's (*dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po*, 1728-91) *Precious Garland of Tenets* (*grub pa'i mtha'i rnam par bzhag pa rin po che'i phreng ba*) these four are known as the “four schools of tenets” (*grub mtha' rnam bzhi*) (Khyen rab dbang phyug, 1996, 1, 60).

ultimate reality (*ad* 3a6-3b2), the four great reasonings among Mādhyamikas and its application in meditation (*ad* 3b2-7a4), along with the nature of mind and the use of reasoning (*ad* 7a5-7b4). A doctrine of importance found in this section of *Potowa's Middle Way* is that clear light awareness, or luminosity, withstands the analysis of reasoning (*ad* 7a5-7b4). Along these lines, the characteristic of non-appearance (*snang ba myed pa*) is described as luminosity, implying that “non-appearance” means the non-appearance of entities within the yogic vision of luminosity. The text discusses the faults of sinking and agitation in meditation (*ad* 7b1-8a1), the vajra-like concentration (*vajropama-samādhi*) (*ad* 8b4-5), Avadhūtipa and Candrakīrti's system of buddhahood (*ad* 8b5-6), and the ambivalent position of Dromtönpa regarding the relation of appearances and buddhahood (9a5–9b1).

In commenting upon Atiśa's *Madhyamakopadeśa* along with citing Atiśa's *Satyadvayāvatāra*, *Potowa's Middle Way* elaborates upon Candrakīrti's system of Madhyamaka where mind, mental factors, and conceptuality are “cut-off” in the state of Buddhahood. The text advocates a faith-based Madhyamaka based on Mahāyāna *sūtras* and *śāstras*, placing emphasis on scriptural authority (*āgama; lung*) and reasoning (*yukti*) that is beyond the scope of logic (*rtog ge'i yul ≈ tark-agocara*) (*ad* 9a2). Along these lines, the Kadampa author will directly cite, or refer to, the Madhyamaka works of Nāgārjuna (five times), Āryadeva, Jñānagarbha (twice), Śāntarakṣita, Bhāviveka, and Candrakīrti (four) as well as cite Atiśa's *Satyadvayāvatāra* (twice) without mentioning any divisions between them. The commentary exhibits an understanding of Madhyamaka thinkers as not being against each other as *Potowa's Middle Way* does not mention any divisions or subdivisions within Madhyamaka traditions. Along these lines, Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* is cited as an “authoritative” text of reasoning demonstrating the importance of continuity of scholarship from the empire period.

As alluded to above, the author will unexpectedly cite Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* as proof for the reasoning that things do not arise without a cause that is found in the first chapter of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. The Kadampa author, like other Indian and Tibetan scholars between the 11th and 13th century, may have considered Dharmakīrti as a Mādhyamika (Steinkellner 1990). Be that as it may, *Potowa's Middle Way* uses Madhyamaka reasonings to perform its mereological analysis of material and nonmaterial entities rather than employing such texts as Dharmakīrti's *Examination of Relations* (*Sam-bandhaparīkṣā*) (Aitken 2023, pp. 283-305) for its analysis.

Authorship and Date of *Potowa's Middle Way*

Potowa's Middle Way is a manuscript copy without a definitive colophon listing the authorship of the text. As mentioned above, the commentary mentions by name other figures at Radreng monastery including Ngok sherab, Dromtön, Chengawa, and Potowa, situating the late eleventh century as a *terminus a quo* for the initial composition of the text. A good candidate for the authorship of our text, someone who was in the presence of Gönpawa in the latter part of his life and who is within the timeframe of the commentarial statement, would be Neuzurpa Yeshe Bar (*sne'u zur ba ye shes 'bar*, 1042–1118). According to the *Blue Annals* (Roerich 1979, p. 311), Neuzurpa Yeshe Bar was the principle disciple of Gönpawa and then later became a disciple of Potowa following the death of Gönpawa. In addition, Neuzurpa Yeshe Bar was also considered the direct successor of Chengawa (*spyen snga ba tshul khrims 'bar*) in several Bka'-gdams-pa circles of transmission (Sørensen et al. 2007, p. 466). As discussed by Roesler (2015,6), the eleventh-century Kadampa environment was a transitional phase from oral teachings to textual written works wherein the instructions of significant masters were written down by their disciples. As in other cases of Potowa, whose disciples recorded his teachings from memory after his passing in 1105, *Potowa's Middle Way* may have been put in writing in the late eleventh century. In any case, a definitive attribution of authorship cannot be made at this time based on the current available evidence.

A Note on the Translation and Diplomatic Edition

In the translation which follows I have placed in bold print text which corresponds with Atiśa's *Madhyamakopadeśa*. I have structured the English translation of the commentary, as well as the Tibetan edition, based on my own division of Atiśa's *Madhyamakopadeśa* corresponding to the content of *Potowa's Middle Way*. The translation and edition have the following sections: introduction, translator's homage, Atiśa's homage, followed by a sequence of five paragraphs. A colophon to Atiśa's *Madhyamakopadeśa* is not mentioned in *Potowa's Middle Way*. The Roman transliteration of Tibetan follows the Wylie System proposed in Wylie (1959). Further symbols used in the transliteration are noted at the end of the article before the Bibliography.

English Translation of *Potowa's Middle Way*

The System of Potowa and his Spiritual Sons

[Introduction]

[1b1] I will compose this nectar of Dharma, having relied on the speech of the spiritual friend (*mitra*), that [speech] of the path which is free from imputation and deprecation, which reaches the prisoners of cyclic existence. This teaching was requested by Geshé Sangpuwa.¹⁰ At the time when Princely-Lord [Atiśa] made empowerments for all on account of Geshé Tönpa,¹¹ he also performed many preliminary rituals. Because Ngok (*rngog*) was needed for the preliminary rite, as well as for his own purpose, he was a suitable vessel [for the teaching]. He emerged supreme [1b2] by merely hearing the sound of emptiness.¹² To all the disciples at his feet, [the Princely-Lord] spoke of the reality of objects and awakening. Because a yogi does not believe in the existence of things, but finds certainty in the pacification of nature, he is reliable because he is disciplined. What Gonpawa¹³ said to me, appears written here, this Dharma of liberation spoken to me in private.

[These teachings are] granted to those who are endowed with capacity, given to all, and to those who are disciplined in conduct, sentient beings [1b3] whose minds are capable of being tamed. Nowadays there does not exist experiential understanding and realization of the nature of contemplation. Since [this teaching] exists on the mountain as a pillar for all, having passed the limit of arising and increasing, [this teaching] has become incalculable. This Dharma-teaching is profound because it relies on individual analysis to ascertain objects and holds the wind-teaching method of mantra.

[Translator's Homage]

[In the Indian language: *Madhyamakopadeśa*.

[In the Tibetan language: *Dbu ma'i man ngag ces bya ba* [Special Instructions on the Middle Way].

I bow down to the Protector of the World.]

¹⁰ *dge bshes gsang phu ba*, also known as Ngok Lekpai Sherap (*rngog legs pa'i shes rab*, eleventh century).

¹¹ *dge bshes ston pa*, also known as Dromtönpa Gyalwai Jungné ('*brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas*, 1004–64).

¹² This passage evokes *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.4: "Even ordinary persons when hearing about emptiness, sheer joy surges again and again within their heart, tears born of such joy fill their eyes, and their hair stands up in their follicles (translation Jinpa, 2021)."

¹³ *dgon pa ba*, also known as Gönpawa Wangchuk Gyaltsen (*dgon pa ba dbang phyug rgyal mtshan*, 1016–82).

These are the discourse of the translator. The purpose is entirely in three aspects, a statement for the sake of the Indian language.¹⁴ [1b4] Now, among the two, the actual meaning and examination, since it is also the two extremes according to the two realities, by cultivating cause and effect and so forth to conventionally exist, first one turns away from non-virtuous actions and avoids the extreme of deprecation.¹⁵ Then, while taking rebirth in cyclic existence in a sequential continuum of cause and effect without [karmic] accumulation, until one ultimately clears away the extreme of superimposition, one should cultivate the selflessness of the person to turn away from a Self. Since the Mind-only (*sems tsam pa* $\approx$ *cittamātra*) and lower [proponents] [1b5] do not even produce the wisdom which eradicates grasping at things as substantially existent, to turn away from all at the end one should cultivate that all things (*chos tham cad* $\approx$ *sarvadharma*) are not at all established. Then, having attained buddhahood, even while residing in equipoise in the stage of non-conceptuality, one's awakened activities will actually benefit all sentient beings.¹⁶ This small text, since it is practical to understand, cultivate, and realize by an easy method, it is **special instructions** (*man ngag* $\approx$ *upadeśa*). That which remains in the mind, whether it is a written text, sound, or general meaning, is an imputation. [1b6] The [translators] homage is harmonious with Indian letters, but it is not congruent with the decree.¹⁷ Moreover, the meaning of the

¹⁴ The Kadam *Collection on the Two Realities* (Apple 2018, 140) mentions the three aspects as follows: "the necessity to know that [the text] was created in India and to show gratitude for its creation, the necessity of [showing] its authenticity (*khungs btsun pa*), and the necessity of the Indian-language title's utility to quickly apprehend the words transcribed as an equivalent to the Tibetan language."

¹⁵ The following sentences may be compared with Āryadeva's *Catuhśataka* (Chapter 8, v. 15): "At first overturn nonvirtue; midway, one should overturn [the notion of] "self"; in the end one should overturn everything. One who understands in this way is wise." See Apple 2018, p. 296, and note 786.

¹⁶ The Kadam *Collection of Special Instructions on the Middle Way* (Apple 2018, 306) states in regards to upper level bodhisattvas sending out emanations that, "Appearances are never at all suitable if substantially established."

¹⁷ "...not congruent with the decree (*bkas bcad dang myi mthun*);" The author is emphasizing that the translators homage ('*gyur phyag*) correctly provides the Sanskrit text but does not follow the imperially decreed stipulation (*bkas bcad*), attributed to the time of Emperor Ralpacan (i.e., *khri gtsug lde btsan*, ca. 806-38), that a translator's homage must match the section of the Tripiṭaka to which the translation corresponds. The First Dalai Lama, dGe 'dun grub pa (1391-1474) (n.d., page 3), briefly discusses this decree in his commentary to the *Abhidharmakośa*, "regarding the Homage of Translation: 'Homage to Mañjuśrī, the youthful!' So it is said. Moreover, this accords with the injunctions (*bkas bcad*) for previous translators: At the beginning of the Sūtra section, pay homage to the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. At the beginning of the Vinaya Piṭaka, pay homage to the Omniscient One. At the beginning of the Abhidharma Piṭaka, pay homage to Mañjuśrī. Thus it was decreed

two realities is the domain of the everlasting buddha,¹⁸ it occurs with the text since the **Protector of the World** is a buddha.

[Atiśa's Homage]

[I bow down to that supreme holy person, whose light rays of speech
opens the lotuses of the hearts of all the deluded like me without exception.]

From the spiritual instructions of the Princely-Lord [Atiśa] himself, firstly, the necessity of making prostrations is in accordance with the previous excellent ones, and the commencement is completely accomplished, and obstacles will not occur.

When Ngok Sherab (i.e., *rngog legs pa'i shes rab*) requested with faith in the Princely-Lord's (*jo bo*) heart, [2a1] without relying on this text, he made offerings to the Three Jewels (*dkon mchog*) and to offer prayers that benefit faith in the Buddha's Dharma; here, whatever we do first, we offer and present offerings to the most precious [Three Jewels]. The supplication is made for the sake of understanding the practices. Generally, there are three ways to praise the Buddha: through cause, result, and activity. Here, it is praised through the aspect of activity. With the actions of a **supreme holy person**, one can also obtain the [2a2] qualities of the result [of awakening]. Among miraculous actions, there are also three, the miraculous action of speech is also praised. Through the miraculous activity¹⁹ of [a Buddha's] body, having shown miracles, he tames [beings]. Through the activity of [his] mind, he blesses those endowed with fortune and explains many meaningful deeds. The teachings of the emanation of Dharma, through universally providing and subsequently showing the activities of speech, is more important than merely disciplining [beings]. Generally, because sound is connected with that **supreme holy being**, [2a3] it is similar²⁰ to how the golden

(*bkas bcad*)"([*'gyur gi phyag*] ni / '*jam dpal gzhon nur gyur pa la phyag 'tshal lo zhes so* / / '*di yang sngon gyi lo tsa' ba rnams kyis bkas bcad dang bstun pa ste* / mdo sde'i thog mar sangs rgyas dang byang sems la phyag 'tshal / '*dul ba'i sde snod kyi thog mar thams cad mkhen pa la phyag 'tshal / mngon pa'i sde snod kyi thog mar 'jam dpal la phyag 'tshal zhes bkas bcad pas so* / /.) The translators of Atiśa's work, Naktso Tsultrim Gyalwa and Atiśa himself, pay homage to the "Protector of the World" (*'jig rten mgon po* ≈ *lokanātha*), which does not fit with the decree.

¹⁸ "domain of the everlasting buddha" (*sangs rgyas rtag cig gi spyod yul*); see Eckel (1992, 109-114, 162-3) on the "permanent Buddha" based on *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* and Tarkajvālā (Chapter 3), and Mathes (2019) for understanding of the everlasting, or permanent, buddha.

¹⁹ '*phrin las* = *karman*, *kārya* (MSA).

²⁰ Interlinear note underneath: *sangs rgyas nyi ma cher ste 'jig rten kyi kham la la na nyi ma chen po shar nub myed pa yod pa yin* ("When the Buddhas are very numerous, in some world realms there will be no rising or setting of the great sun.").

rays of the sun dispel darkness, opens the lotus, and makes the whole world happy, and it is in accordance with the Dharma. The buddha who understands the two realities, objects of knowledge, by the golden **light of his speech** of the twelve limbs of scriptures,²¹ or the three baskets (*tripiṭaka*) and so forth, pervades all fortunate sentient beings without exception and the sky-like expanse. Through clearing away by clearing away the darkness of delusion for the two realities, objects of knowledge, [2a4] [a Buddha] is worshipped as the supreme of the two-legged who produces happiness by **opening the lotus of the heart**. I pay homage with body, speech, and mind to the Buddha, the **supreme holy individual** who possesses the qualities of a tenth-level bodhisattva and whose deeds and speech are such that even the great earth cannot bear the weight of a single juniper seed, and to the elder Princely-Lord whose actions are such that no youth anywhere can accomplish them.

The text states “**I**”, as it is the Princely-Lord [Atiśa] himself that arises the virtuous qualities of one who has exceedingly purified [himself]. The commentary on the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*²² states that “**heart**” [2a5] is explained as mental consciousness.²³ As the mainstream schools assert that mental consciousness resides in the **heart/mind**, since it is the support of the mind, the actually meaning of abiding in the middle is the **heart/mind**. Misknowledge and discernment are mental factors (*caitta*) and since a mental factor has the nature to be produced as a concomitant of the mind it is explained in this section as such. Generally, the five sciences²⁴ eliminate the darkness of **delusion** and arise from a Buddha. For the fortunate, “the Buddha does

²¹ The twelve limbs, or categories, of scripture (S. *dvādaśāṅgapravacana*; T. *gsung rab yan lag bcu gnyis*) (1.) discourses (S. *sūtra*; T. *mdo*), (2.) aphorisms in mixed prose and verse (S. *geya*; T. *dbyangs bsnyad*), (3.) prophecies (S. *vyākaraṇa*; T. *lung bstan*), (4.) verses (S. *gāthā*; T. *tshig bcad*), (5.) utterances/meaningful expressions (S. *udāna*; T. *ched du brjod pa*), (6.) framing stories (S. *nidāna*; T. *gleng gzhi*), (7.) expanded teachings (S. *vaipulya*; T. *shin tu rgy as pa*), (8.) tales of previous lives (S. *jātaka*; T. *skyes rabs*), (9.) marvelous events (S. *adbhutadharma*; T. *rmad du byung*), (10.) narratives (S. *avadāna*; T. *rtogs pa brjod pa*, (11.) fables (S. *itivṛttaka*; T. *de lta bu byung ba*, (12.) instructions (S. *upadeśa*; T. *gtan phab*). See Buswell and Lopez 2014, “twelves.”

²² Note that Atiśa translated the *theg pa bsdu pa'i 'grel pa* into Tibetan.

²³ See Brunnhölzl 2018, volume 2, on heart, mental consciousness in 607, 855, 943 note 58, 1010-12 note 301, 1207-9 note 206. Atiśa's understanding here goes against Tsongkhapa see Brunnhölzl 2018, 1010-11.

²⁴ Also known as five fields of knowledge See Apple 2018, five fields of knowledge, 26, 82, 133, 135, 168–69, 176, 281, 320, 324, 375n395. The five sciences (*pañcavidyāsthāna*): linguistic science (*śabda*), logical science (*hetu*), “inner” science (*adhyātma*), medical science (*cikitsā*), and the science of fine arts and crafts (*śilapakarmasthāna*).

[2a6] not pass into *nirvāṇa*, the Dharma also does not disappear.”²⁵ Thus and in this regard, “never does a buddha not reside.”²⁶ Thus, constantly abiding, the **light rays of his speech** dispel the darkness of **delusion**.

From the common vehicle, when the Blessed One came to *Jambudvīpa*, he enthroned Ajita [*Maitreya*] as regent and taught this Dharma in *Tuṣita*; And when he was conceived in his mother's womb, he taught this, and so forth. [2b1] At the time of being awakened as a Buddha he taught this Dharma to the merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika (*tshong pa ga gon bzang po*). Finally, when [he] passed into *parinirvāṇa* in the grove of Śāla trees, he taught, “Remove suffering, do it for the teacher and individual liberation. Be established in mindfulness.” This is the record of the final testament that [he] taught.

According to the uncommon great vehicle, he taught to many tenth stage bodhisattvas at the time of dwelling in the womb of his mother [2b2] and then in the Dharma viihara of Magadha in the rainy season, taught the great śrāvakas like Śāriputra and so forth immeasurable groups [of teachings] not heard before. All of that eradicates the **delusion** of sentient beings. In all ways above the Blessed One completes those who are to be trained. Since the teachings abide for five hundred years²⁷ after his *nirvāṇa* [the Dharma] clears away the **delusion** of sentient beings. [2b3] Furthermore, since it clears in stages, when one does not rely on outsider views by understanding that [the Dharma] is the supreme refuge of all beings who wander in existence, it clears away gradually. When one understands that all happiness and suffering arises from karma, all views which speak of causelessness and unharmonious causes are cleared away.²⁸ It especially clears away at the time

²⁵ *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* 2.30. Kadampa citation differs from Kangyur (Toh 557, vol. pha, 6a5): *sangs rgyas mya ngan mi 'da' zhing* {Kangyur: *yong mi 'da'*} / / *chos kyang nub par ma gyur te* {*mi 'gyur te*} / / *sems can rnam ni gdul ba'i phyir* {*yongs su smin mdzad phyir*} / / *mya ngan 'das pa'i tshul bstan to* {*yongs su mya ngan 'da' ba ston*} / . Skt. (Bagchi 1967, 9): *na buddhaḥ parinirvāṭi na dharma parihīyate* / *sattvānāṃ paripākāya parinirvāṇaṃ nidarśayet* / / . This verse is also cited by Jñānagarbha and Haribhadra; see Inagaki 1977, 141.

²⁶ *Ratnolkādhāraṇī* (*dkon mchog ta la la'i gzungs*), Jackson 2020, 62: “2.60 [‘Those who have constant mindfulness of the Buddha will always see inconceivable buddhas. Those who always see inconceivable buddhas] *will never have buddhas not residing*.’; Derge Tib. (fol. 64b): [*gang dag sangs rgyas rjes dran mi phyed pa* / / *de dag rtag tu sangs rgyas bsam yas mthong* / / *gang dag sangs rgyas bsam yas rtag mthong ba* / /] *de la nam yang sangs rgyas mi bzhugs min* / / . Skt. [*yeṣu anumṛti buddha abhedyā* / *te sada paśyīya cintiya buddhān* / / *ye sada paśyīya cintiya buddhān* /] *tesa na jātu na tiṣṭhaṭi buddhaḥ* / / (*Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Bendall 1902; for English translations see also Bendall 1922, 4; Goodman 2016, 5).

²⁷ On the timetables of the decline of the Buddha's Dharma see Nattier (1991), particular pages 28-33 on five hundred years.

²⁸ “all views which speak of causelessness and unharmonious causes are cleared

of cultivating the path by realizing all existence as suffering. In this regard, by not being satisfied with one's own liberation, by training in the integration of wisdom and method for the sake of all sentient beings, [2b4] when one attains buddhahood, all that is completely clear. All that is to be known by scriptural tradition (*lung* ≈ *āgama*).

[First Paragraph]

[The special instructions of the Mahāyāna's Middle Way are as follows: Conventionally, all things, from the perspective of the deluded whose vision is narrow, including all presentations of cause and effect and so forth, are real according to how they appear. Ultimately or actually, when the conventional as it appears is closely examined and clarified by the great reasonings, one should thoroughly understand with certainty that even something the size of the tip of a hair that is split a hundred times cannot be grasped.]

In this way, having sought out the speech, from the commencement of the treatise is the introduction (*gleng bslang ba*, *upodghāta*) of the Dharma and the purpose-connection (*dgos 'brel*)²⁹ is taught. The subject matter (*brjod bya*, *abhideya*) is the two realities, the purpose (*dgos pa*, *prayojana*) is to create an understanding of the nature of the two realities. The purpose of the purpose (*dgos pa'i dgos pa*, *prayojanaprayojana*), having cultivated just as arising from this, one attains buddhahood and fulfills the aims of sentient beings, and [2b5] these indicate the relations (*'brel pa*, *sambandha*) that arise along with method.

Because "Great Vehicle" excludes the *śrāvakas*, it is explained that the Great Vehicle (*theg pa chen po* ≈ *mahāyāna*) is endowed with seven greatnesses.³⁰ As the greatness of the profound and extensive are

away" (*rgyu myed dang myi mthun ba rgyur smra ba'i lta ba thams cad gsal ba*); these points relate to "non-causes" (*rgyu med pa*; **ahetu*) for which Bhāviveka and Avalokitavrata offer counterarguments against Lokāyatikas in their commentaries see Del Toso 2023.

²⁹ The Kadampa master employs a fourfold connected purpose (*dgos 'brel bzhi*) in his exegesis. Buddhist and non-Buddhist commentaries often use four requisites stated at the beginning of work, the *anubandhacatuṣṭaya*. In Buddhist exegesis, the set of terms used is called a *purpose connection* (*dgos 'brel*), a term found in Indian and Tibetan commentaries (Schoening 1995, 33). The purpose connection often comprises a set of five terms: *purpose* (*dgos pa*; *prayojana*), *connection* (*'brel pa*; *sambandha*), *text* (*rjod pa*; *abhidhāna*), *subject matter* (*brjod par bya ba*; *abhidheya*), and *purpose of the purpose* (*dgos pa'i dgos pa*; *prayojanaprayojana*). See Apple (2018, 303), Apple (2025, 117) for use of these terms among Kadampa commentaries.

³⁰ The following discussion on seven greatnesses is based on *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* 19.59–60 and *Bhāṣya*. MSA 19.59–60: Tib. *theg pa chen po nyid rnam par dbye ba'i tshigs su bcad pa gnyis te / dmigs pa che ba nyid dang ni / / de bzhin sgrub pa gnyis dag dang / / ye shes brtson 'grus rtsom pa dang / / thabs la mkhas par gyur pa dang / / 59 / /*

yang dag 'grub pa chen po dang / / sangs rgyas phrin las chen po ste / / chen po 'di dang ldan pa'i phyir / / theg chen zhes ni nges pa brjod / / 60 / / ;Skt. / / mahāyānamahatva vibhāge dvau ślokaḥ / / ālambanamahatvaṃ ca pratipatter dvayos tathā / / jñānasya vīryārambhasya upāye kauśalasya ca / / 59 / / udāgamamahatvaṃ ca mahatvaṃ buddhakarmanah / / etan mahatvayogād dhi mahāyānam nirucyate / / 60 / / ("Regarding] the section on the greatness of the Mahāyāna, [there are] two verses: Greatness of object (ālambanamahatvaṃ ca), and likewise of the two kinds of practice (pratipatter dvayos tathā), the greatness of knowledge (jñānasya), the commencement of vigor (vīryārambhasya), skill in means (upāye kauśalasya ca), 59, the greatness of attainment (udāgamamahatvaṃ ca), and the greatness of Buddha-activity (mahatvaṃ buddhakarmanah). It is because of possessing these greatnesses (etan mahatvayogād dhi) that it is called the Mahāyāna (mahāyānam nirucyate).; Bhāṣya: chen po (247b1) nyid rnam pa bdun dang ldan pa'i phyir theg pa chen po zhes nges par brjod de / **dmigs pa chen po nyid** ni mdo'i sde la sogs pa'i chos rgya chen po dpag tu med pa dang ldan pa'i phyir ro / / **sgrub pa chen po nyid** ni / rang gi don dang gzhan gyi don gnyis bsgrub pa'i phyir ro / / **ye shes chen po nyid** ni rtogs pa'i 'dus na gang zag la bdag med pa dang chos la bdag med pa gnyis shes pa'i phyir ro / / **brtson 'grus rtsom pa chen po nyid** ni / bskal pa grangs med pa gsum du rtag tu gus par byas te sbyor ba'i phyir ro / / **thabs la mkhas pa chen po nyid** ni 'khor ba yongs su mi gter zhing kun nas nyon mongs pa med pa'i phyir ro / / **yang dag par 'grub pa chen po nyid** ni / stobs dang mi 'jigs pa dang sangs rgyas kyi chos ma 'dres pa yang dag par 'grub pa'i phyir ro / / **sangs rgyas kyi phrin las chen po nyid** ni / yang dang yang du mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa dang / / mya ngan las 'das pa chen po kun tu ston pa'i phyir ro / / theg pa chen po bsdu pa'i rnam par dbye ba'i tshigs su bcad pa gnyis te / ;Skt. saptavidhamahatvayogān mahāyānam ity ucyate / ālambanamahatvena apramāṇavistīrṇasūtrādidharmayogāt / pratipattimahatvena dvayor pratipatteḥ svārthe parārthe ca / jñānamahatvena dvayor jñānatmapudgalanairātmyasya dharmanairātmyasya ca prativedhakāle / vīryārambhamahatvena trīṇi kalpāsāṅkhyeyāni sātatyasatkṛtyaprayogāt / upāyakaūśalyamahatvena saṃsārāparityāgāsamkleśataḥ / samudāgamamahatvena balaśāradhāveṇīkabuddhadharmasamudāgamāt / **buddhakarmamahatvena** ca punaḥ punar abhisāṅboddhimahāparinirvāṇasaṃdarśanataḥ / ("Due to [its] connection with seven kinds of greatness, it is called the Mahāyāna. Due to the greatness of the object, [there is] connection with immeasurable, vast dharmas such as sūtras, etc. Due to the greatness of accomplishment, [there is] the accomplishment of both one's own and another's purpose. Due to the greatness of knowledge, [there is] understanding of both—at the time of penetrating the selflessness of the person (pudgalanairātmya) and the essencelessness of things. Due to the greatness of the setting out of energy for three incalculable eons, [there is] continuous and revered practice. Due to the greatness of skillful means, [there is] non-abandonment of saṃsāra and non-affliction. Due to the greatness of attainment, [there is] the attainment of powers, confidences, and the unique qualities of the Buddha. And due to the greatness of Buddha activity, [there is] the repeated demonstration of complete perfect awakening (abhisāṅboddhi) and great complete nirvāṇa (mahāparinirvāṇa)." Also, Sthiramati's *Madhyāntavibhāṅgāṭikā* (Pandeya 1999, 150.10-16): saptavidhamā punar mahatvaṃ ālambanapratipattijñānavīryopāyaprāptikarmamahatvaṃ / tatārambhanamahatvaṃ śatasāhasrikādyanantasūtrādiharmālamānād bodhisattvamārgasya pratipattimahatvaṃ ("Therefore, its sevenfold greatness [refers to] greatness in regard to objective support, spiritual practice, direct intuition, vigour, expedients, attainment, and action. Of these, the universality in regard to objective support refers to the Dharma of the endless sūtras, such as the *Śatasāhasrikā* [Prajñāpāramitā], for these form the objective support for the path of the bodhisattva; [and to] greatness in regard to spiritual practice."); see also Brunnhölzl

grouped into two, the extensive is the (1) great object since it is the desire to fulfill the purpose of all sentient beings, not being satisfied with the object for the small and the (2) great achievement for the aim of oneself and others, [2b6] and the (3) greatness of gnosis which cognizes both types of essencelessness since there is not establishment by apprehending [things] as substantially existent. With respect to this, the incredible length of time is the (4) great effort which puts forth for three incalculable eons³¹ [effort] which is necessary for [full Buddhahood]. In this regard, wisdom and compassion are necessary for the (5) skill in means to apprehend cyclic existence. After accomplishing (6) the great achievement of practice, attaining buddhahood, through twelve acts³² of (7) great miraculous activity one becomes a benefactor of sentient beings.

The text states “**middle**” as this clears away Mind-only Proponents (*cittamātra*). [2b7] Due to imputing a person of the Tīrthikas, the outsiders deprecate cause and effect and all Buddhists, even though they do not accept a personal Self as even conventionally real, they do accept that life, death, karma, and its effects, and so forth exist conventionally (*saṃvṛti*), and therefore they are all proponents of the Middle Way (*dbu ma pa*).

In this regard, all four great Buddhist schools each individually assert a middle.³³ The Śrāvaka schools do not impute the Self of a person like the Tīrthikas. [3a1] They do not deprecate apprehending subject

2014, 1133, note 1870; Kano 2008, 351 on Vinītadeva's enumeration; Skilling 2004, 142-43 citing *Abhidharmasamuccaya*.

³¹ As Buswell and Lopez 2014 note, “The bodhisattva path leading to buddhahood is presumed to take not one but three “incalculable eons” (*asaṃkheya kalpa*) to complete, because the store of merit (*puṇya*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and wholesome actions (*kuśala-karma patha*) that must be accumulated by a bodhisattva in the course of his training is infinitely massive. According to Sadakata (1997, 97, 130), *asaṃkheya* “is a number representing 10 to the power of 59. Three *asaṃkheya kalpas*, the time deemed necessary to train to become a buddha, is therefore 3×10^{59} .” On various formulations for calculating the length of time in the bodhisattva path see Drewes 2021, 148-152.

³² The list of twelve deeds of a buddha (Skt. *dvadasābuddhakārya*, Tib. *mdzad pa bcu gnyis*) varies based on different sources but in general (Buswell and Lopez, 2014, p. 1087): 1. the descent from Tuṣita heaven (*dga' ldan gyi gnas nas 'pho ba*), 2. entering the mother's womb (*lhums su zhugs pa*), 3. taking birth (*sku bltams pa*), 4. becoming skilled in various arts (*bzo yi gnas la mkhas pa*), 5. delighting in the company of royal consorts (*btsun mo'i 'khor dgyes rol ba*), 6. developing renunciation (*rab tu byung ba*), 7. practicing austerities (*dka' ba spyad pa*), 8. going to the bodhimāṇḍa (*byang chub snying por gshegs pa*), 9. subjugating Māra (*bdud btul ba*), 10. becoming fully enlightened (*mngon par rdzogs par sangs rgyas pa*), 11. turning the wheel of Dharma (*chos kyi 'khor lo bskor ba*), and 12. passing into *parinirvāṇa* (*mya ngan las 'das pa*).

³³ See Cozort and Preston, *Buddhist Philosophy* (2003, 22-25) for a discussion from a Geluk (*dge lugs*) perspective of how each of the four major Buddhist schools posits a middle way.

and apprehended object like the Mind-only Proponents, saying “Ours is the Middle [Way].” What about the Mind-only Proponents? They do not superimpose the apprehending subject and apprehended object as the mainstream schools. [The Mind-only proponent states,] “We do not deprecate the self-awareness (*rang rig*) which is free from the apprehending subject and apprehended object as the middle. Ours is the Middle [Way].” Here, a conventional self is also not deprecated. As it is ultimate reality, it is totally removed from the extremes of reification and deprecation, it is the middle and as [3a2] there is little difficulty in training and realizing the means of the path it is **special instructions** (*man ngag* ≈ *upadeśa*).

All these teachings of the Ācārya Nāgārjuna and so forth grouped here are only letters and concepts and as the means, trainings, and realizations comprehend the meaning of these, realizing skillful means in the path it is a **special instruction** (*upadeśa*).

That is explained as “**the middle**” and it is said that the meaning of the middle and the two realities is to be free from the two extremes. This is an explanation of what is called the “**Middle Way**,” because, by taking the **conventional** (*saṃvṛti*), it has gone beyond the extreme of deprecation, and stating “**ultimately**” is to avoid the extreme of imputation. The explanation “**all dharmas**” is cause and effect and so forth. **Conventionally, all dharmas** which are grouped into aggregates, elements, and sense spheres, that which is perceived by **those of narrow vision** (*tshul rol mthong ba*),³⁴ all dharmas in that perspective are apprehended as substantially existent as one does not perceive the truth of reality (*dharmatā*).

[3a3] Due to ignorance (*ma rig pa*) being **deluded** about **cause and effect**, one accumulates unwholesome actions, resulting in rebirth in the hells and other lower realms, and so forth, the cause and effect of bad migrations. Furthermore, due to ignorance being deluded, practicing the ten virtues results in the cause and effect of being born as gods and humans in the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*). Immovable actions³⁵

³⁴ The perspective of those with narrow vision (*tshu rol thong ba*, *arvāgdarśana*), the ordinary worldly person before the path of vision. The Sanskrit equivalents for *tshu rol thong ba* are *arvāgdarśana*, *arvāgdrś*, or *aparadarśana*. As noted by Keira (2004, p. 94), Kamalaśīla explains in his *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā* that people of narrow vision (*tshu rol thong ba*) have three types of direct perception—sense cognition (*indriyajñānam*), mental [cognition] (*mānasam*), and reflexive cognition (*ātmasaṃvedana*), but such people do not have *yogipratyakṣa* which directly understands emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Atiśa and the bKa' gdams pa commentators will repeatedly mention that the direct perception and inferences of those with narrow vision cannot understand the two realities nor cognize emptiness. See *Jewels of the Middle Way* (Apple 2018, 122, 130, 135, 140, 155, 169, 199).

³⁵ On immovable actions (Skt. *aniṅjyakarman*, Tib. *mi g.yo ba'i las*) see Buswell and Lopez (2014, 47) who state, in part, according to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, “when

result in the cause and effect of being born in the higher realms (*ūrdhavadhātu*). When ignorance is exhausted, accumulating actions without outflows (*anāsrava*), one obtains the result of the Noble Ones (*ārya*), the cause and effect of the hearers (*śrāvaka*) and solitary buddhas (*pratyekabuddha*). [3a4] By training in the union of skillful means and wisdom, one obtains omniscience itself, the cause and effect of the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna). All presentations of affliction and purification according to the scholar Śāntipa are real/true however they may be designated by those who lack discernment.

Those with narrow vision for as long as apprehending imputations as real/true, [the imputations] are nondeceptively real/true as their apparent objects. The great guru Avadhūtipa³⁶ has said that by disregarding the most subtle karmic action having expectations in emptiness that nowadays there are many yogis, having said these words, who dwell in this place as hell-beings. Geshé Tönpa [3a5] has taught “Fire is empty, the hand is also empty, so in words also emptiness is expressed, and placing the hand in the fire, there is burning, the object to be burned, and the agent that burns”³⁷ Furthermore, the profound dependent arising that is dear to Princely-Lord [Atiśa’s] heart is not suitable to be taught.³⁸ If conventional cause and effect did not at all exist, even unassembled collections of cause and effect, collections not included in cause and effect, would be causeless. Furthermore, what of the teachings regarding the eight doorways dependently arising³⁹

a meditator attains the fundamental state (*maula*) of a *dhyāna* (concentration) in the realm of subtle materiality (*rūpadhātu*) or the immaterial realm (*ārūpyadhātu*), the force of the action is *aniñjya* and will definitely lead to rebirth as a deity in the corresponding heaven in the next life.”; Scheuermann 2015, 274, note 1653.

³⁶ Avadhūtipa instructs Atiśa that, “For as long as self-grasping is not exhausted, the most subtle of subtle karmic actions should be understood to yield a result” (Apple 2018, 28). On this spiritual teacher of Atiśa see Apple (2018, s.v. Avadhūtipa), Apple (2019, 12-14).

³⁷ This analogy is also attributed to Geshé Tönpa in the *Collection of Special Instructions on the Middle Way* (Apple 2018, 305).

³⁸ The meaning of “profound” (*zab mo’i don*, *gambhīrārtha*), as noted by Scherrer-Schaub (1991, 207n355), signifies the “deep” understanding of dharmas that is a nonunderstanding, free of discursive knowledge, and peaceful. See Ruegg 1981, 44 and note 110; Apple 2018, 139, 376, note 404.

³⁹ Eight doorways dependent-arising (*rten ’brel sgo brgyad*) is not clear but the text may be referring to “dependent-arising divided into eight” (*rten ’brel brgyad du dbye ba*) listed according to the Dung dkar tshig mdzod as “(1) The dependent-arising of the arising of consciousness (*viññāna*), (2) the dependent-arising of birth and transmigration, (3) the external dependent-arising of the uninterrupted continuum, (4) the dependent-arising of distinction by container (*bhājana*), (5) the dependent-arising of distinction by livelihood, (6) the dependent-arising of distinction by movement. The first two are the external dependent-arising of the external receptacle. The other four depend on the internal essence, sentient beings. (7) The dependent-arising of distinction by complete purification (*viśuddhi*), (8) The

within accumulations or the six realms of the accumulations of sentient beings. [3a6]

“Sentient beings among the lineages of hell-beings, animals, hungry ghosts, asuras, gods, and men—the Lion of Men designated as conventional.”⁴⁰

And so forth, many discourses include the saying. “All (*kun*)” means everything without exception, “obscuring” (*rdzob*) since it is the ancient language of Zhang zhung, [the conventional] is understood to mean “totally false.”⁴¹ The *Madhyamakāvatāra*⁴² and the *Satyadvayāvatāra*⁴³ explain the meaning [of conventional] as obstructing the perception of the correct/real object. [3b1] The characteristic of the conventional is that the appearance exists, although not substantially, like the hairs seen by one with eye disease or like the false appearance of a vanishing rainbow. The post-meditative cognition of one training on the [bodhisattva] stages perceives only suchness and

dependent-arising of distinction by power (*nthu stobs*). These are related to the meaning of direct perception (*abhijñā*) (*rnam par shes pa byung pa'i rten 'brel / skye ba dang 'chi 'pho ba 'byung ba'i rten 'brel / rgyun mi 'chad pa phyi'i rton 'brel / snod kyis rab tu 'bye ba'i rten 'brel / 'tsho bas rnam par dbye bar rten 'brel / 'gro ba rab tu dbye ba'i rten 'brel te / phyi'i gnyis ni phyi 'jog rten snod kyi brten pa dang / gzhan bzhi po nang bcud sems can la brten pa dang / rnam par dag pas rab tu dbye ba'i rten 'brel / nthu stobs kyis rab tu dbye ba'i rten 'brel te / mngon shes kyi don dang 'brel ba'o /*).

⁴⁰ MABH D3862, 274b (LVP, 1907-1912:175): *dbu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa zhes bya ba (madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya-nāma): sems can dmyal dang dud 'gro yi dags dang / / lha min ris dang mi dang lha yi rnam / / mi yi seng ges kun rdzob btags pa mdzad / / rigs dma' de bzhin mtho ba'i rigs rnam dang / / phyug po'i khyim dang dbul [275a]; Tattvanirdeśasamādhisūtra. ; Prajñākaramati, Bodhicaryāvatārapañjika BCP (Vaidya 1960, 227): saṃvṛti prajñapayī narasiṃhaḥ saṅgatayo bhaṇi sattvagaṇānām / narakagatīśca tathāiva ca pretān āsurakāya narāṃśca marūṃśca / /; Śāntideva, Śikṣāsamuccaya (Bendall 1922, 237 (English); Bendall, Skt. 256: saṃvṛti prajñamayī narasiṃhaḥ śaḍgatayo bhaṇi satvagaṇānāṃ / narakatiraś ca tathāiva ca pretān āsurakāya narāṃś ca marūṃś ca / / . Pitāputrasamāgamana (yab dang sras mjal ba), Toh. 60, 183b: sems can tshogs kyi 'gro drug gang bstan pa / / sems can dmyal dang dud 'gro yi dvags dang / / lha min ris dang mi dang lha yi rnam / / mi yi seng ges kun rdzob btags pa mdzad / / . “Whichever of the six migrations of the multitude of sentient beings was indicated: sentient beings of hell, animals, hungry ghosts, anti-god status, men and the gods –the Lion of Men designated [as] the conventional.”*

⁴¹ This Tibetan etymology of *kun rdzob* related to the language of Zhang zhung is also found in the *Collection of Special Instructions on the Middle Way* (Apple 2018, 303).

⁴² *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.28: “Because delusion obscures intrinsic nature, it is called “all-concealing,” and due to this what is fabricated appears to be real. The Sage said this is conventionally real and that an entity that is fabricated is only conventional.”; Translation in Huntington 1989, 160; Dunne 1996, 541–42; Skt., BCAP, 171 (Li 2014): *mohaḥ svabhāvāvarāṇāḍ dhi saṃvṛtiḥ satyaṃ tayā khyāti yad eva kṛtrimaṃ / jagāda tat saṃvṛtisatyam ity asau munih padārthaṃ kṛtakaṃ ca saṃvṛtiḥ / /*. For earlier Kadampa commentary on this verse in context of Atiśa's SDA see Apple 2018, 193.

⁴³ The SDA does not discuss the etymology of *saṃvṛti*, but an early Kadampa does provide a discussion in commenting on Atiśa's SDA, see Apple 2018, 148.

Candrakīrti also explains [this] as the mere conventional.⁴⁴ Since it is the highest of objects to be achieved it is called ultimate or since it is the cognitive object of the highest wisdom it is called the ultimate or since it is conventional undeceiving when examined by reasoning [3b2] it is explained as the ultimate.⁴⁵ Also explained as “ultimate” or alternatively called “the unproduced.” When explained as the “real” that is otherwise called “the clear light nature.”⁴⁶ Alternatively, regarding the ultimate,

“When the conventional that appears is analytically examined just as it is, nothing whatsoever is found. The unfindable itself is the ultimate...”⁴⁷

That experience of certainty to not exist according to reasoning, since it is undeceiving, *the 3 from the East* have explained as the enumerated ultimate.⁴⁸ [3b3] Or, when another subsequent cognition

⁴⁴ Candrakīrti explains the “mere conventional” (*kun rdzob tsam* ≈ *saṃvṛtimātra*) in MABH ad 6.28, see Apple 2018, 47.

⁴⁵ The Kadampa author provides three interpretations of *paramārtha* based on the MV, Bhāviveka’s *Tarkajvālā*, and Jñānagarbha’s SDV. According to Bhāviveka, the compound *paramārtha* may be understood in three ways: as “(1) an appositional (*karmadhāraya*) compound, (2) a case-determined (*tatpuruṣa*) compound, and (3) a possessive (*bahuvrīhi*) compound” (Keira 2022, 453). Bhāviveka explains these three interpretations in his *Blaze of Reasoning* (*Tarkajvālā*) as follows: “*Paramārtha* means, “the most excellent.” The compound *parama-artha* [can be interpreted in three ways]. (1) It means “the most excellent object” because it is the object and the most excellent (*karmadhāraya* compound) (2) Or, it is the object of the most excellent. That is, because it is the object of the most excellent knowledge that is beyond discrimination (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*), it means the object of the most excellent (*tatpuruṣa* compound) (3) Or, it is “conformable to *paramārtha*” (*paramārthānukūla*). That is, since there is that *paramārtha* in wisdom (*prajñā*) which is conformable to obtaining of *paramārtha*, it means “one which is in conformity with *paramārtha*” (*bahuvrīhi* compound)” (Translation Watanabe 1994, 18–19; citation Bouthillette, 2022, 354–55). See also Saito 1998 for discussion.

⁴⁶ On “the clear light nature” (*rang bzhin ’od gsal ba* ≈ *prakṛtiprabhāsvara*) in Atiśa’s thought see Apple 2017 and Apple 2018, s.v. mind, luminosity of.

⁴⁷ *Satyadvayāvatāra*, vs. 21a–c (Apple 2018, 121, 165; Apple 2019, 130).

⁴⁸ The Kadam commentaries reference “the 3 from the East” (*shar 3 nas*) refers in later Tibetan traditions (post-thirteenth century) to the so-called Three Eastern Svātantrika-Madhyamaka (*rang rgyud shar gsum*) works of Śāntarakṣita’s *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*, Kamalaśīla’s *Madhyamakāloka*, and Jñānagarbha’s *Satyadvaya-vibhaṅga* (Mimaki 1982, 4–5; Eckel 1987, 15; Tauscher 1999, 387n2; Apple 2018). Note that the Kadampa author does not use the term *rang rgyud* (*Svātantrika*), as this Kadampa commentary does not know of any subclassifications of Madhyamaka traditions. The Kadampa author references the “enumerated ultimate” (*rnam grangs kyi don dam* = *paryāya-paramārtha*). As Mimaki (1982, 160–61) points out, the term *paryāya-paramārtha* does not appear in the works of Jñānagarbha, Śāntarakṣita, or Kamalaśīla. However, the equivalent of this term, *don dam pa dang mthun pa* [*i don da pa* (= *paramārthānukūla*[*paramārtha*]), was known to these authors. The counterpart term, *rnam grangs ma yin don dam* (= *aparyāyaparamārtha*), does appear in Śāntarakṣita’s *Satyadvayavibhaṅgapañjikā*. Both *paryāya-paramārtha*

arises after seeing through reasoning, even that, being present in name only, is deceptive in appearance; because it is refuted by higher and higher distinctive awarenesses it is deceptive, it is conventional.⁴⁹ To say “real” is to say that it is the suchness which abides from the very beginning, it is said that,

“The suchness of all things, whether there are buddhas and so forth, this suchness of dharmas resides.”⁵⁰

Thus, since it is not produced by causes and conditions it is not artificial. [3b4] In this regard, when investigating and illuminating in proper order, “ultimate” or “real” is the term applied; the text states “clear,” clarity does not have a cause and since it is known [by reasoning], the substance of what is called conventional is not different when on the side of emptiness known as ultimate.⁵¹

This very **conventional which appears**,⁵² when⁵³ clarified by the

and *aparyāyaparamārtha* appear in the *Madhyamakārthasamgraha* v. 4 attributed to Bhāviveka. Ruegg (2010, 157) and Del Toso (2011) argue that this work is not by the Bhāviveka who wrote the *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* and *Tarkajvālā*, and most likely dates to the eighth-century time period of Jñānagarbha. Along these lines, Del Toso (2011, 354–55) demonstrates that both *paryāya-paramārtha* and *aparyāyaparamārtha* also appear in the eighth-century *Sarvayānālokaviśeṣabhāṣya* attributed to Subhūtiṅghoṣa. See also Macdonald 1988, 94; Tauscher 1988.

⁴⁹ The Madhyamaka tradition of Atiśa and the early Kadampas follow a hierarchical model in which awarenesses are ranked higher and lower based on the understanding that yogic awareness invalidates the awareness of ordinary individuals. This model is also found in Candrakīrti (MA 6.30) and Śāntideva (BCA 9.3–4ab); see Apple 2018, 181, 194.

⁵⁰ Kadampa author citation differs from canonical readings. Cf. *Sālistambasūtra*, *kārikā* 12cd (Schoening 1995, 2: 537, 594): *sangs rgyas byung rung ma byung rung* [12c] / *chos kyi nyid 'di ni gnas pa yin*. See also Reat 1993, 33–34. Similar to MRP (D 275b5–6) citation; compare with Sanskrit quoted in Yaśomitra's *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* (Wogihara 1971, 293): *utpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpādād vā tathāgatānām sthitaiveyam dharṃatā dharmasthititā dharmaniyāmatā tathatā avitathatā ananyatathatā bhūtātā satyātā tattvam aviparītātāvipyastatā*. See Apple 2018, 258 for citation in another Bka' gdams pa manuscript. See also *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (Nanjio 1923, 143); *Prasannapadā* 40 (Ruegg 2002, 77); MA 6.222a–c; Cox 2000; Takasaki 1966b; Macdonald 2015, Vol. 2, Appendix X, pp. 374–375.

⁵¹ See Apple 2018, 302 and note 789 citing from Jñānagarbha's *Satyadvaya-vibhaṅgakārikā*, 17a, “Suchness in conventional reality is considered to be the same as that of the ultimate reality; because of non-difference, this reasoning also accords with what appears” (*saṃvṛtes tathatā yaiva paramārthasya sāmānāyikā / abhedāt so 'pi ni nyāyo yathādarśanam āsthitah* /); Sanskrit in Haribhadra's AAA (Wogihara 1932, 407.25).

⁵² In addition to occurring in *Madhyamakopadeśa* (Section I), the phrase “the conventional that appears” also is found in Atiśa's SDA (vs. 21a) and commentary, see Apple 2018, 165.

⁵³ Interlinear gloss: “Although it is done as four [great reasonings] (*gtan tshigs chen po bzhi*), it is one or two because whatever is asserted between cause and effect is refuted. “Dependent arising is asserted of production and cessation” and because the diamond-splinters and the refutation of arising from the four extremes, state

four great reasonings,⁵⁴ the diamond slivers, the production and cessation of existence and nonexistence, the production and cessation of the four limits, and the reasoning of unity and multiplicity, [3b5] the establishment as substantially existent which does not abide by reasoning, even a mere one hundredth part of the **tip of a hair** is not established since it is empty of intrinsic existence, the comprehension by means of attaining certainty by repeatedly contemplating through study and contemplation is called "vision."⁵⁵ This text is composed through the influence of the three aspects of wisdom.

[Second Paragraph]

[While sitting in a cross-legged position on a comfortable seat, [contemplate] for a while as follows: there are two kinds of entities, material and non-material. In this regard, material entities are collections of minute particles. When these are closely examined and broken up according to their directional parts, not even the most subtle [part] remains, and they are completely without appearance. Non-material is the mind. In regard to this, the past mind has ceased and perished. The mind of the future has not yet arisen or occurred. Even the mind of the present is extremely difficult to examine: it has no color and is devoid of shape, since it is similar to space, it is not established, and since it is free of unity and multiplicity, unproduced, and having a luminous nature and so forth, when it is analyzed and examined with the weapon of reasoning, one realizes that it is not established.]

"if it arises, it arises in this way," are themselves the reason of dependent arising, they belong to the past, future, and present, other than the diamond-splinters. That which belongs to production and cessation is also itself **the reason** of dependent arising. The pervasion is not established in stating "the lack of intrinsic existence because it is a dependent arising" and if it existed with a nature at the time of pervasion "How empty" the tetralemma, production and cessation, and diamond slivers would be said to exist since it is produced. Now, one may ask if it is established "as it is construed to be due to many...").

⁵⁴ Apple 2018, 357, note 176: "Atiśa will state four great reasons (*gtan tshigs chen po bzhi*) in his *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā* (Sherburne 2000, 230–36), including the reason refuting production according to the tetralemma (*mu bzhi skye 'gog gi gtan tshigs, catuskoṭyutpāda- pratīśedhaheṭu*), the diamond-splinters reason (*rdo rje gzeḡs ma'i gtan tshigs, vajra- kaṇaheṭu*), the reason of being neither one nor many (*gcig du bral gyi gtan tshigs, ekāṇekaviyogahetu*), and the reason consisting in dependent-arising (*rten 'brel gyi gtan tshigs, pratītyasamutpādahetu*). Atiśa leaves out the reason refuting the production of existent and nonexistent things (*yod med skye 'gog gi gtan tshigs, *sadasadut- pādapratīśedhaheṭu*) that is discussed by earlier Mādhyamikas like Kamaśīla (Keira 2004, 13)."

⁵⁵ Tib. *lta ba* ≈ *darśana*. Apple 2018, 159. Ruegg (1981, 1n3, 2n6, 3; 2000, 133–36) notes the difference between *dr̥ṣṭi* and *darśana* in the works of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. See also Huntington 2003, 75–77, on Candrakīrti's use of *darśana*.

From this point forward the text is in the context of the wisdom of cultivation (*bhāvanamayī prajñā*). In this way having understood the necessity of cutting through and ascertainment with vision, [3b6] as established in the accounts of scholarly chronicles, that is not enough, it is necessary to practice meditation. Furthermore,⁵⁶ having relied on moral conduct, having relied on mind, since it is necessary for training in wisdom, the mind needs to abide in concentration (*samādhi*) and accordingly meditate with wisdom (*prajñā*).

[4a1] In this regard, presently, remain comfortably on scattered Tibetan grass or give a little grass to a horse, having heard, meditate [4a1] sit with contentment and face outward.

Thinking that one has experienced pointless suffering due to apprehending things as real from beginningless time, meditate on non-arising (*skye ba med pa*) as an antidote to grasping at things as real. Abandon all negative actions, purify moral conduct while being endowed with the accumulation of serenity. Have few desires, reside in solitude, Princely-Lord [Atiśa] will explain below the importance for the view. Cultivate thoroughly a little bit and “Just as it is said that even if one has all kinds of qualities, there is no need to rely on old stories and foolish words, similarly, having turned one’s back on the Dharma, the sheepish say [4a2] there is no need for any of this.”

First, while **sitting on a comfortable seat** meditate on the characteristic of refuge, the greatness of the Three Jewels. Then, meditate with a solid awareness by cultivating, while remaining on a **comfortable seat**, all factors comprised of method such as the cause and effect of karmic actions, the faults of cyclic existence, love and compassion, and so forth. In daily activities⁵⁷ [4a3] should one not sit in the vajra-posture of Vairocana?⁵⁸ One should center the mental intention as well. Straighten up the concentration and so forth according to the *Stages of Meditation* (*Bhāvanākrama*) and make salutations with imaginary

⁵⁶ Interlinear gloss: “here, it is special insight as previously taught. Serenity (*śamatha*) is necessary as a prerequisite to this and since the accumulations are necessary,”

⁵⁷ “daily activities” (*spyod lam*) consist of the four daily activities (*spyod lam rnam bzhi*) of walking (‘chags pa), standing (‘greng ba), sitting (‘dug pa), and sleeping (nyal ba). See Callahan 2019, 646.

⁵⁸ The Kadampa author references the posture of Vairocana rather than the “five-point posture of Amitābha” (*snang mtha’ yi chos lnga ldan*; Apple 2020) found in other early Kadampa authors. The more frequent “seven-point posture of Vairocana” (*rnam snang gi chos bdun*): “(1) legs in the vajra posture (*rkang pa skyil khrung*), (2) hands in the positions of equipoise (*lag pa mnyam bzhag*), (3) spine straight (*sgal tshigs drang por bsrang ba*), (4) neck slightly bent (*mgrin cung zad grug pa*), (5) shoulders spread like the wings of a vulture (*dpung ba rgod gshog ltar brkyangs pa*), (6) gaze resting at the tip of the nose (*mig sna rtser phabs pa*), (7) tongue touching the palate (*lce ya rkan la sbyar ba*)” (Buswell and Lopez 2014:1078).

visualizations to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Even if an actual [physical] arrangement is not present, make offerings without attachment and which arise from offerings of faith. Thinking, "I shall meditate on emptiness," meditate, intending to attain Buddhahood on behalf of all sentient beings who are suffering due to apprehending things as real. [4a4] Since "**for a while**" (*re shig*) is a word that indicates sequence, it means "gradually" or "at first."

To state that functioning **entities** are causally efficacious indicates selflessness and since a Self of a person is not established as an entity, what is its purpose as it is causally inefficacious? In refuting [such a Self], it is necessary to meditate on whether this [Self] is identical with or distinct from the aggregates and so forth.

Regarding **form**, the Vaibhāṣika accept ten types of form including the aggregate of form, elements, and the sense spheres and five types [4a5] among the eight types of conditioned factors in the aspect of the element and sense sphere of dharma. The Vaibhāṣika accept [these fifteen] as form. The Sautrāntika accept four types as form. With respect to that, **material form is entirely subtle particles**⁵⁹ and the most subtle dust mote in a sunbeam has more than three and half hundred thousand subtle particles. A subtle particle is one part of that. Furthermore, the parts of the six or ten **directions** when differentiated, pacified, or broken down, are not established as real. One among two Mantrikas in Khams was asked, "What becomes of everything when seeing the individual parts of subtle particles?" [4a6] Since one of them replied that when perceiving the individual parts of subtle atoms everything becomes space, the appearance as an object of the mind of meditative equipoise is not established. Regarding all forms which are perceived by deluded perception, the yogi explains through the example of a chariot, the example of the ox cart, or the husk of a plant for nearby possibilities [to place] under analysis.⁶⁰

Since the mind consists of the aggregates of the four names (i.e., consciousness, sensation, conception, and formation) which are **immaterial**, the seven consciousness elements,⁶¹ [4b1] first one analyzes by

⁵⁹ Line underneath reads: 'dod na dbang po myed pa la // sgra spyed gra rab dul sngas brgya las ldan la rdzas dgu ste / / dbang po gzhan la rdzas bcu'o ches par ltar ("In the Desire Realm, a minute particle of matter that lacks sensory faculties and sound is composed of eight substances. One that possesses the tactile faculty (body faculty) has nine substances, while those possessing other sensory faculties have ten substances. This is the accepted view". See AK 1.22)

⁶⁰ Candrakīrti employs the example of a chariot in his analysis in his *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Chapter 6. See, for example, Jones 2023.

⁶¹ *rnam par shes pa'i kham bdun: kham bco brgyad las rnam shes kyi phung po'i char gtogs pa bdun te / mig gi rnam par shes pa'i kham nas yid kyi rnam par shes pa'i kham bar drug dang / yid kyi kham bcas bdun no /*. (Seven dhātus of consciousness (vijñāna): Out of the eighteen dhātus, [these] seven belong to the category of the aggregate

way of the three times examining into three the arising of the past, present, and future. Accordingly, as well, the first part of life and later parts of life are three. That [time of life] is analyzed into years, months, and days. The breaths in a day are twenty-one thousand six hundred and even so much as by stopping twenty hundred or three hundred sixty on the mountain of a single cognition. Because both the past and future mind cease, they do not arise. Therefore, there is no establishment by reasoning in the interval of the purified present mind. [4b2] Although [the mind] exists and continues momentarily, it is not established due to the analysis of the three times.

"If the instant has a final moment, we must assume that it has the other two moments as well, namely, the initial and the middle;"⁶²

Thus a nature (*ngo bo*) like this is **difficult to examine under analysis** and is not established. Since it is immaterial, **colors** such as white and so forth does not exist. It is **free from shape** such as length and so forth. Although that is not established as having form, does it immaterially exist? [4b3] As the immaterial is not even established with analytical wisdom in the purview of reasoning, **it is like space**. As this is just how it is in meditation, accordingly, in this way [the text saying] "**two**"⁶³ explained below here is also applicable and is applicable to all of the above.

When this alone is examined by individually investigating, there is no friend more important than this tendency towards liberation. Pu to ba is pleased only with individual analysis. What good is a teacher who, lacking experience and understanding, [4b4] is more foolish than even his student? Meditating on this is pleasing in a delightful manner. The reasoning does not destroy this, nor does it strengthen this, in this way it is an object of meditation. All reasonings may be grouped into two—[the reasoning of] dependent arising of cessation which does not

of consciousness (*vijñānaskandha*), namely: From the *dhātu* of eye-consciousness (*cakṣurvijñānadhātu*) up to the *dhātu* of mind-consciousness (*manovijñānadhātu*) are six, and together with the *dhātu* of mind (*manodhātu*) are seven.

⁶² Ratnāvalī I.69-70abc; English Dunne/McClintock 1997. Tib. *ji ltar skad cig mtha' yod pa / / de bzhin thog ma dbus brtag go / / de ltar skad cig gsum bdag phyir / / 'jig rten skad cig gnas pa min / [1.69] / thog ma dbus dang tha ma yang / / skad cig bzhin du bsam par bya / / thog ma dbus dang tha ma nyid / / [1.70abc]*. Skt. *yathānto 'sti kṣaṇasyaivam ādimadhyam ca kalpyatām / tryātmakatvāt kṣaṇasyaivam na lokasya kṣaṇam sthitiḥ / [69] / ādimadhyāvāsānāni cintyāni kṣaṇavat punaḥ / ādimadhyāvāsānatvaṃ / / 70abc*, "If the instant has a final moment, we must assume that it has the other two moments as well, namely, the initial and the middle; but inasmuch as the instant consists of three moments, the world cannot have the duration of the instant (I.69). Again, beginning, middle, and end must be considered to be like the instant, namely, each one divided into three moments; the condition of being beginning, middle, and end [is not existent by itself nor by another.]; Apple 2018, 316.

⁶³ That is, material and nonmaterial entities.

establish arising in the three times and [the reasoning of] unity and multiplicity of cessation which does not establish an essence for unity or an essence for a multiplicity for both cause and effect. [4b5] The *Madhyamakāloka* mentions all four reasonings.⁶⁴ The *Tarkajvālā*, *Madhyamakāvatāra*, the *Mūlamadhyamaka[kārikā]* of the Ācārya [Nāgārjuna] himself, and all miscellaneous works mention only the diamond slivers [reasoning]. The production and cessation of the four limits is explained from the *Satyadvay[āvatāra]*, *[Madhyamak]āloka*, and the forest of the chapter on the [bodhisattva] Sadāprarudita in the commentary on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* [*Prajñāpāramitā*].

The above **two kinds of entities** [i.e., material and immaterial] are free from unity and multiplicity. When analyzing the aggregate of material form, both material form of the cause and the material form of the effect and [4b6] the four major elements of the cause—earth, water, fire, and air—each one along with the other three are not established as a unity because a single pervading property (*khyab byed* ≈ *vyāpaka*) is not established. Since a pervading property that accumulates for that is also not established, as the cause is unestablished the effect is also unestablished, and all the sense objects and sense faculties are assembled into subtle particles. If asserting a subtle particle as a sense object,

“In the desire realm a subtle particle that does not involve sound and which does not involve any sense faculty includes eight [kinds of] substances.”⁶⁵

[5a1] The four major elements—earth, water, fire, and air—and visible form, odor, taste, and touch are assembled into eight. In the chapter on faculties,

“When the body sense faculty is involved nine substances are included and when other sense faculties are involved ten substances are included.”⁶⁶

By stating thus, because the body exists as a whole, and the ten past sense faculties are assembled, and because the eleventh that have sound are assembled within that, a unity is not established, and because if it is not established, a multiplicity is also not established, therefore the aggregate of material form does not exist. As that does not exist, the ruling condition and the referential condition do not establish a sense faculty and sense object [5a2] and if both of those do not exist the five sense consciousnesses do not occur. Since the non-existent five sense consciousnesses immediately do not arise, the mental consciousness does not occur. When the mental consciousness does not exist, the

⁶⁴ See Keira (2004) on the four reasonings in the *Madhyamakāloka*.

⁶⁵ AK 2.22ab (Sangpo 2012, vol. 1, p. 507): *kāme 'ṣṭadravyako 'śabdaḥ paramāṇur anindriyah* /

⁶⁶ AK 2.22cd, (Sangpo 2012, vol. 1, p. 507): ;Tib. D4089: *chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi tshid le'ur byas pa (abhidharmakośakārikā)*, 4b.

mental factors (*caitta*) which arise concomitant with that [mental consciousness] are not established. In this way, since form, consciousness, and mental factors that arise are not established, the non-associated compositional factors⁶⁷ in the interval of that are not established. As the conditional factors are not established, as the relation does not exist, the unconditioned is also not established.

If it is understood as established, is the unconditioned an object of knowledge or not an object of knowledge? [5a3] If it is an object of knowledge, as knowledge exists successively the object of knowledge also will be successive, and the momentary will not be established. If it is not an object of knowledge, that itself is not established. As space that pervades in the directions will become connected with directional parts, it will not be established. Candrakīrti states that since the unconditioned is not produced by causes and conditions, it is not established because it is not produced by causes and conditions.⁶⁸

Accordingly,

“Whatever object one examines, there is not a unity. [5a4] As there is not a unity, a multiplicity does not exist.”⁶⁹

Thus, an entity in the approach of an authoritative text of reasoning is not established. Alternatively, since material form as above is refuted, the four names (i.e., consciousness, sensation, perception, and formation) are refuted from the [reasoning] of unity and multiplicity. When classified by way of nature, sensations are three—pleasant, painful, and impartial. When classified by means of sense object, the collection of awarenesses will be either six or eighteen. [5a5] The nature of perception (*saṃjñā* ≈ ‘*du shes*) is to apprehend phenomenal marks, there are six types when classified by means of sense objects.⁷⁰ When classified according to realm, perception is three—small,

⁶⁷ Also translated as “conditioned forces dissociated from thought” ([*sems*] *mi ldan pa’i ‘du byed*, [*citta*] *viprayuktasaṃskāra*), see Apple 2018, 142 and 377, note 416 for another Kadam early commentary discussion on this topic.

⁶⁸ Cf. Candrakīrti’s *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa* (Lindtner 1979, 113): *de la re zhig ‘dus ma byas rnam ni rten cin ‘brel par ‘byung ba ma yin pa nyid kyi kyang rang gi ngo bor med la / byas pa ma yin pas kyang rang gi ngo bor med de / ‘dus ma byas ni tshig tsam yin pas mam par dpyad pa gzhus par mi bya’o* / (“Those that are unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) are without intrinsic nature, even by virtue of not being dependently originated. And also, by virtue of not being conditioned, they are without intrinsic nature. The unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) is merely a term; therefore, analysis should not be applied to it.”) Note that the *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa* was translated into Tibetan by Atiśa and Nag tsho lo tsa ba tshul khrims rgyal ba.

⁶⁹ *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 61 (Ichigō 1989, 210). Aitken 2021, p.7.

⁷⁰ This definition appears to be drawn from the *Abhidharmakośa* and *Bhāṣya*: *saṃjñā nimittodgrahaṇātinikā* (1.14cd) // [...] *sa punar bhidyamānaḥ ṣaṭ saṃjñākāyā vedanāvāt* // (Pradhan 1975, 10.15–17). See Sangpo (2012, 372–379) and Kramer (2012, 123–125) for analysis of *saṃjñā* in its Abhidharma context.

extensive, and immeasurable (*tshad med pa*).⁷¹

For formations (*saṃskāra* ≈ 'du byed), there are fourteen or fifty-one formations which concurrently manifest with the mind. Consciousness (*viññāna* ≈ *rnam par shes pa*)⁷² has the characteristic of awareness toward individual sense objects and there are six or eight types [of consciousness]. When classified according to sense object, even a single visual consciousness (*caḥsurviññāna*) will become diverse, so a unity is not established. [5a6] Alternatively, consciousness also, as explained above, may be analyzed into three—sensation, perception, and formations—according to [the reasoning of] unity and multiplicity. Moreover, **material form and the immaterial** when analyzed by means of the created phenomenon, the object created, and the effect, may be produced from an existent, a non-existent, or from both. In this regard, the existent cannot be produced since it is already existent; the nonexistent cannot be produced, since it is nonexistent; since they are incompatible dharmas, there is not existence and nonexistence.⁷³ Since there is no purpose for producing the existent, [5b1] there is no certainty for production when producing from an existent, therefore it is not suitable to produce from an existent. As the nonexistent cannot be produced, since it is nonexistent, it is not suitable to produce because it is empty of all potency and sovereignty. As for production from both, since it is not suitable to accept at the same time incompatible dharmas which are existent and nonexistent for a single thing (*dharma*) their production is not suitable. As the *Catuhśataka* states,

"Pillars and so forth as ornaments of houses are meaningless to those who assert an effect as existent and [5b2] to those who assert an effect as nonexistent."⁷⁴

The non-Buddhist (*tīrthika*) Sāṃkhya proponent accepts an existent as an effect [already present] in the cause, due to the production of something previous indiscernible that is later discernible by a condition. The śrāvaka Vaibhāṣika who accepts the three times as

⁷¹ Cf. Candrakīrti's *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa* (Lindtner 1979, 105): *yang rnam pa gsum du 'gyur te / chung ngu dang / chen por gyur pa dang / tshad med pa'o /* / .

⁷² Line underneath: *dbang po drug de re re la' du ma y[o]d / de'i 'khas sems byung du ma yod rtsa /* .

⁷³ Cf. *Sūnyatāsatptati*, v. 4 (Lindtner 1997, 94): *yod phyir yod pa skye min te / / med phyir med pa skye ma yin / / chos mi mthun phyir yod med min / / skye ba med pas gnas 'gag med /* . See also Apple 2018, 307.

⁷⁴ *Catuhśataka* (11.15). The manuscript (Lang 1986, 106) reads: *'bras bu yod par gang 'dod dang / / 'bras bu myed par [5b2] gang 'dod pa / / ka ba lasogs pa khyim don du / / bgyan pa'i don yang myed par 'gyur* {Lang: *khyim gyi don du ka ba la / / sogs pa'i rgyan ni don med 'gyur*}. Skt. (Lang 1986, 106): *stambhādīnām alaṃkāro grhasārthe nirarthakāḥ / satkāryam eva yasteṣaṃ yasyāsatkāryam eva ca /* . This verse is also cited in the Bka' gdams pa *Collection of Special Instructions on the Middle Way* (Apple 2018, 307), but attributed in that work to Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*.

substantially existent, by drawing out a condition in the present as an existent from a future effect, by accepting as an existent an effect to the cause, accept production from an existent. [5b3] Because of being an existent, at the time of the cause, pillars and so forth, there would [already] be the effect, the house. It follows that the exertions for ornaments and so forth for the sake of the house would be meaningless. The Śrāvaka Sautrāntikas accept a non-existent effect to the cause from a scripture that states,

“Monks, these perpetuating aggregates arise from a non-existent, pacification having arisen, they will become nothing at all.”

The Mind Only Proponents (*cittamātra*) accepts a non-existent effect to the cause due to the arising from latencies of the storehouse consciousness, [5b4] the cause, but not the arising from an occurrence at the very time of the cause when [there is already] an existent effect for the cause.

The non-Buddhist (*tīrthika*) Vaiśeṣika proponent assert that since the atoms of a destroyed world remain as distinct entities, and since the world does not exist in them, they believe that the effect does not exist in the cause, and thus they assert that it arises from non-existence. Because of the non-existent effect to the cause, it would be meaningless to make efforts in the cause for the sake of the effect, like sand being nurtured for sesame oil.

When analyzed by way of the creative cause, [5b5] is production from an existent cause or production from a non-existent [cause]? If produced from an existent, there is either production from itself, production from other, or production from both [self and other]. Production from itself would be without purpose and endless due to arising itself from itself. As it would follow that due to the seed itself arising from a seed, a sprout and so forth would not be produced. Since it also contradicts direct perception and consensus, there is not a cause for production from itself.

If produced from other,

“How can it be from other? [5b6] The other is other in dependence on another.”⁷⁵

As it is not established itself, the other in relation to that is not established. [Nevertheless,] let it be as established. If producing an other from other, because it is similar to the other, anything could be

⁷⁵ This verse is an old Tibetan translation of MMK 14.5ab, which reads: / / gzhan ni gzhan la ltos te gzhan / / gzhan myin gzhan du ga la 'gyur /. This version differs from the canonical Tibetan translation, which reads (Toh 3824, vol. tsa, 8b2): / gzhan ni gzhan la brten te gzhan / / gzhan med par gzhan gzhan mi 'gyur / / gang la brten te gang yin pa / / de ni de las gzhan mi 'thad /. Skt. (Katsura and Siderits 2013, 149–50): *anyad anyat pratītyānyan nānyad anyad rte 'nyataḥ / yat pratītya ca yat tasmāt tad anyan nopapadyate*. See also Apple 2018, 419, note 800.

produced from anything, [so, for example,] dense darkness would be produced from fire tongs. As it is said,

"If cause and effect were other, cause and noncause would be equivalent."⁷⁶

Moreover, if there is production from other, [6a1] it is either production from a permanent [other] or production from an impermanent [other]. If there is production from a permanent [other], the effect would be produced instantaneously or gradually. If produced instantaneously all effects would be discernable by direct perception since they would occur at the same time. If it is produced gradually, just as there is another gradualness in the cause, there is also another gradualness in the effect, so permanence is impaired. If produced from an impermanent other, it would either be produced from the past, produced from the future, [6a2] or produced from a present occurrence. In this regard, production is not suitable since there does not exist an intrinsic nature which is free from the vanishing, ceasing past. The future, the not yet arrived, is not suitable for production. A completed cause producing an effect is without purpose and contradicts consensus. Now, if it arises from the present, does it arise from cause and effect being simultaneous, or does it arise from cause and effect being without a cause? If wondering why there is not production simultaneously, like either side of a mountain peak [6a3] or like the Vindhya mountains and the Himalaya mountains,⁷⁷ as anything at all would be free by not examining, the relation of cause and effect is not established. If something previous transformed later then as the previous cause would be the later effect, and since it would be produced from the past, the present is not established. If there were a later cause for a previous effect,

"Since it arises after [the fact, impermanence] cannot be the cause of a thing. Even if is the effect, how can it be conclusive?"⁷⁸

Thus, a completed cause producing an effect has no purpose.

Some mainstream schools (*nikāya*) [6a4] accept production from the present like an arrow moving up and down in the direction of producing the effect at the time of the ceased cause. In this regard, does it arise by being separated by time and place, or does it arise without being

⁷⁶ MMK 20.20cd: *rgyu dang 'bras bu gzhan nyid na / / rgyu dang rgyu min mtshungs par 'gyur / /* (Tib. Tg, tsa 12a4-5); Skt. *prthaktve phalahetvoh syāt tulyo hetur ahetunā* (La Vallée Poussin (1913) 404,1-2).

⁷⁷ See Keira 2004, 176 on the example of two mutually unrelated things not having an epistemic relation (*gamyagamakabhāva*) such as the Vindhya mountains (*ri 'bigs byed*) and the Himalaya mountains (*gangs can*) drawn from the *Madhyamakāloka*.

⁷⁸ Old Tibetan translation of Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttisvavṛtti* I:33cd (Gnoli 1960). English translation adapted from Dreyfus 1997, 63; 476, note 8, canonical Tib. *phyis 'byung phyir na rgyu nyid min / / 'bras bu na yang ga la nges / /*. Skt. *pāścād bhāvān na hetutvaṃ phale 'py ekāntatā kutaḥ / /*.

separated? If it arises separated, then it is not established now. If it arises unseparated, then is it unseparated by all of itself, or is it unseparated by one part? If it is unseparated by all of itself, then all results will arise simultaneously, which is absurd. If it is unseparated by one part [6a5], then in relation to the cause, there is one part that is separated in relation to the cause; and in relation to the result, there are one or two parts that are unseparated. And in relation to the result, there is one part that is separated in relation to the cause; and in relation to the result, there are one or two parts that are unseparated. Therefore, arising from action at present is not established and if it has parts, then **arising is not possible** because it is harmed by unity and by multiplicity. If both arise, then to illustrate the external, from the seed arises the sprout, from the seed element, [6a6] and other [external factors] such as fields and water accumulation. Or the example of the internal, the condition of the cause which produces consciousness from the four conditions, and since it is the other three conditions, what is the production from both? Because the seed and the sprout are different, arising from oneself is not established. If it arises from another, then the fault is the same as before.

From among the two, asserting a cause where there is no cause, and asserting an inferior cause where there is absolutely no cause, [6b1] the refutation of an inferior cause, a cause imputed by positing such things as inherent nature and happiness and suffering, occurs from all the great texts of Madhyamaka. For those who accept a completely non-existent cause, an internal example is the variegated display of the peacock and the external [example] of the filaments and patterns of a lotus flower,⁷⁹ and so forth, if they did not arise from a cause, who created them? If that very example harms [the argument] by resulting in causelessness, then because it resembles causelessness, why does it not apply to ravens and crows as well? [6b2] Why does it not apply to rhododendrons and cows as well? Because it arises in peacocks and lotuses without arising in others, [it] is definitely established as being produced from a cause.

Furthermore, something causeless is refuted, even explained as worthless.

Śāryadeva⁸⁰ states,

⁷⁹ Cf. Eltschinger 2021, 102: “Śāntarakṣita’s *svabhāvavādin*s adduce the following example: “Who creates the diversity of the filaments of the lotus, etc.? Who makes the eyes of the peacock’s tail [so] variegated?” (TS111: *rājīvakasaraḍīnāṇvaicitryamka[h]karotihi / mayūracandrakāḍiroāvicitraḥ kena nirmitaḥ /*.” See also Bka’ gdams pa commentary *Collection of Special Instruction on the Middle Way* (Apple 2018, 309).

⁸⁰ Citation is actually from Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.35; see Apple 2018, 309, and 419, note 801. See following note.

"Because that which is causeless does not depend on anything else, it would be either permanently existent or permanently nonexistent. Things occur intermittently because they are dependent."⁸¹

Thus, causeless production [6b3] is not suitable. §§

Production is not established even when examining with the four limits,

"Many do not produce one, many do not produce many, one does not produce many, and one does not produce one,"⁸²

A single effect does not exist due to many causes. If, for example, one illustrates how consciousness (*rnam par shes pa* ≈ *vijñāna*) arises from the four conditions (*rkyen pa* ≈ *pratyaya*), then, since it is not possible to explain from which causal condition (*rgyu'i rkyen* ≈ *hetu-pratyaya*) it arises, one must accept [it as such]. If you say that [6b4] from many instances of the immediately preceding condition, the dominant condition (*adhipati-pratyaya*), and the objective condition (*ālambana-pratyaya*), a single result, namely consciousness, arises, then: Generally, since the effect necessarily follows the cause, and since different effects do not arise from three different causes, but rather from a single consciousness, the effect does not arise following the cause. Therefore, due to the fallacy of subsequent occurrence, the effect becomes causeless. When [the effect] is causeless, [the effect] will become either permanently existent or [permanently] non-existent. If it is said that consciousness alone arises from the three, [6b5] and that it has the power to produce others, but others do not have that power, then, since consciousness does not produce similar karmic results, in the second moment, there will be changes such as going, coming, and so forth.⁸³ Because many causes produce many effects, immediately after that, [it] is made into the nature of the reasoning that the condition is able to produce consciousness, and the dominant condition, the sense faculty, apprehends the object, and if one says that the referential condition produces something that accords with that, [then...] [6b6] Are those [conditions] and consciousness one or different? If they are one, are the properties one with consciousness? The three properties of cognizing and so forth would be a unity. If they are a unity as

⁸¹ Old Tibetan citation is actually from Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.35. English translation Dunne 2004, 336–37. Skt. (PV3.35, Miyasaka 1971–72, 118): *nityaṃ sattoṃ asattoṃ vā 'hetor anyānapekṣaṇāt / apekṣāto hi bhāvānāṃ kādācitkatvasambhavaḥ / /*. Tib. (Miyasaka 1971–72, 119): *rgyu med gzhan la mi ltos phyir / rtag tu yod pa'am med par 'gyur / dngos po rnams ni res 'ga' zhig / 'byung ba ltos pa las yin no / /*. See Apple 2018, 309. The verse is also preserved in Candraripā's *Ratnamālā*, Toh 3901, vol. a, 67a3–4. Eltschinger 2021, 99, notes 18, 20. Note Thukten Losang Chökyi Nyima (2009) comment on Bka' gdams pa mix up of textual citation.

⁸² Jñānagarbha, *Satyadvayavibhaṅgakārikā* (v. 14, trans. Eckel 1987:80). See Apple 2018, 309.

⁸³ See Eckel 1987, 132–133, note 76 on this point.

consciousness, there would be the fault of producing a unity by a multiplicity. If cognition and so forth are a unity, then consciousness, the observable quality, would become a multiplicity according to the three properties. If they are a multiplicity then even production would not be established because of not accepting a multiplicity.

Furthermore, if cognition and so forth are a unity [7a1] since the observable quality of production with only the three properties does not produce consciousness then the production would be explained as causeless consciousness.⁸⁴ If they are distinct there would be the otherwise fault of production a unity by a unity. Alternatively, if it is distinct, consciousness will arise without a cause, because the function of the cause is newly applied to something else.

What about production by a collection [of causes]?⁸⁵ Each and every cognition and so forth, combining three and three there would be arising from each result, it will arise from a cause that does not exist. [7a2] Each single cause would produce many effects.

What if it is asserted that a single sense faculty produces two effects, namely, consciousness and a similar type?⁸⁶ There would be a causeless effect because of the mistaken concomitance of cause and effect by the occurrence of many effects that do not exist from a single cause.

What if the cause also produces something that is similar in nature to the effect, like consciousness, so that there is a difference?" There would be the fault [7a3] of producing a multiplicity by a multiplicity. Fearing that fault, one cause produces one result.

What of the capability to produce a single consciousness effect by a single cause like a sense-faculty? Is the ability one or different with the sense-faculty? If it is one, does it produce consciousness or produce a concordant type? Because consciousness (*rnam shes*) does not generate its own similar type, there is the fault of becoming like a blind person who goes, and so forth. If similar types are produced, then similar types that lack consciousness will not be produced; and defects such as not being able to speak or move, [7a4] blindness, and so forth, will also occur. If different it contradicts the explanation by Dharmakīrti and even worldly persons do not accept.

What about accepting that it is neither one nor different? As consciousness would be produced by a single sense faculty, the other [sense faculties] would be without purpose. As there would occur the fault of producing consciousness at all times and the fault of not

⁸⁴ Compare with *Collection of Special Instruction on the Middle Way* (Apple 2018, 310).

⁸⁵ Line underneath reads: *tha dad ma yin pa skye de na / tha dad pas mi skye na / tha dad myed pas myi skyed do* ("If it is not different, then how can origination occur? If it does not originate from difference, how can it originate from non-difference?").

⁸⁶ Textual insertion above line: *ris 'thun skye pa'i dbang po des / rnam shes skye pa'i dbang pa 1 gi tha dad / dad pa ltar na /*.

producing at any time, even producing one by one [7a5] is not suitable.

Furthermore, in this regard, other reasonings are not necessary as the nature of the mind is **luminous, the natural state** of the mind, as the *The Higher Teaching* (*rgyud bla ma*) states,

“There is no other state of mind other than the mind of suchness (*dharmatā*), it is declared because the nature is luminous.”⁸⁷

Quiescent from the beginning, unproduced, naturally pure like water when seen, correctly seeing reality is observed as the only sign of proof and this emerges for the analysis given above. Now is the time of necessary analysis, [the luminous awareness] will emerge based on this analysis. Gönpawa⁸⁸ has taught without having time to examine everything, [7a6] here is a little bit. Chengawa⁸⁹ also has a similar meditation as just this. There is not an assemblage not included within these reasonings. However, produced firmly, gathered as free from the two extremes of elaboration which occur above, these [assemblages] gather “without inherent existence.”

[Paragraph Three]

[In this way, when those two are not established as having any nature at all and do not exist, the very wisdom that individually discriminates is not established either. For example, through the condition of fire occurring by rubbing two sticks together, the two sticks are burned up and become nonexistent. Just as the very fire [D96a1] that has burned subsides by itself, likewise when all specific and generally characterized things are established as nonexistent, wisdom itself, without appearance and luminous, is not established with any nature at all. All faults such as laxity and excitement and so forth are eliminated. In this interval of meditation, consciousness does not conceptualize, does not apprehend anything at all. All recollection and mental engagement is eliminated. Consciousness should reside in this way for as long as the enemies or thieves of phenomenal marks and conceptual thought do not arise. When you wish to arise, slowly release from the cross-legged position and stand up. Then, with a mind that sees all things like illusions, do as many virtuous deeds as you are able with body, speech, and mind.]

⁸⁷ Citation is actually MSA 13.19cd: *chos nyid sems las gzhan pa sems gzhan ni / / 'od gsal ma yin rang bzhin la brjod do / /*. Skt. *na dharmatācittamṛte 'nyacetasaḥ prabhāsva-ratvaṃ prakṛtau vidhīyate / /*. (“Apart from the mind of reality (*dharmatācitta*), the natural luminosity (*prabhāsvaratvaṃ prakṛtau*) of any other mind (*anyacetasaḥ*) is not prescribed (*vidhīyate*).”)

⁸⁸ Dgon pa ba dbang phyug rgyal mtshan, 1016–1082.

⁸⁹ Spyan snga ba [Tshul khrims 'bar], 1038–1103.

Accordingly, in the **perspective** of reasoning both material form and the immaterial are objects of knowledge, they are not at all established nor exist in relation to that perspective, yet the very cognition of reasoning is also not established. When discernment depends on the knowable (*shes bya* $\approx$ *jñeya*), it is wisdom (*shes rab* $\approx$ *prajñā*); [7b1] but when the knowable ceases to exist, what kind of wisdom is there to know? For example, even the fire itself dissipates after a tree is burned by fire, likewise the **specific characteristic** of the object of knowledge, like firewood, moving from form up to the manifestation of omniscience and the **general characteristic**, all conditioned things are impermanent, from that, all contaminated things are suffering, all things are selfless, all nirvāṇas [7b2] are peaceful, or the great **general characteristic**, the suchness of things establishes that all exist as non-existent things without pervasion, even **the very wisdom** which is like fire is **not established**. Alternatively, even if one meditates without individual analysis, even a little bit is not enough. Although when the wisdom of reasoning appears, since it is conceptual thought, the light is not clear, but since there is no aversion to it, it is **clear light**. [7b3] Does not appear even in the perspective of +++ explanation of **non-appearance**. The explanation of **luminous** is that it is free from the extremes of elaborations. Furthermore, the characteristic of **non-appearance** is **luminosity**. The cause of **luminosity** is being free from the extremes of elaboration and even the cause of being free from the extremes of elaboration is not at all established. One explains one. Moreover, even emptiness does not appear. Since the *dharmatā* is primordially pure, [7b4] it is unobscured by grasping at entities, [therefore it is] **luminosity**. Free from the extremes of elaboration such as production, cessation, and so forth, no real entity is established in any way. Because the sequence of that was not established, therefore, "**In this interval**" is inserted there.

Laxity and **excitement** are the principal obscurations of meditative serenity. **Phenomenal marks** are the obscuration of special insight. In this regard, talk -according to the stages of meditation- of not apprehending the object of obscuring the mind [7b5] is **laxity**, which is cleared away by meditating on an entity at first such as recollection of the Buddha and so forth.

Now, washing the face and rinsing the feet, as well as other things, should be done according to what is explained in the Vinaya; this is the instruction. If the mind, the sense faculty scattering on the sense object becomes excited, lofty like a reed, [7b6] one should clear away the five faults by meditating from time to time on a characteristic such as meditating on impermanence and so forth. The superior antidote of both **laxity** and **excitement** is only emptiness. Laxity and excitement are not established in emptiness. It is also taught that impermanence clears away both [laxity and excitement]. The object to be examined,

the analyzer,⁹⁰ and the wisdom of individual analysis are not established, nothing whatsoever is **conceptualized**.

Since the cognition of the apprehender [8a1] by means of the object apprehended is not established, **no** phenomenal marks **whatsoever are apprehended**. "Non-conceptual" is explained by stating "**recollection**." Stating "not apprehended" explains "all **mental engagement**." **Recollection**, the object of recollection,⁹¹ the intrinsic nature of mental activity, and the object of mental activity are not fixated upon; clear luminosity in the absence of laxity and excitement, one arrives at the lack of apprehending things as real. [8a2] Non-conceptuality and non-grasping are not concordant with conceptual thought and phenomenal marks. Regarding this, if one thinks, "What is the duration of abiding?" that is called "phenomenal mark" and phenomenal marks are explained as ten.⁹² When arriving with a manner of stealing, that phenomenal mark is an **enemy**. When they arrive in the manner of robbing spirits they are called "**thieves** of conceptual thought" or both are applied to the two. To abide in such a non-conceptual state is to abide without resting on anything. [8a3] There is not even a basis for enemies. It is meditation which clears away harm. It is not just meditating while huddled, but also rising up and doing other virtuous deeds. When harm arises to body and mind, or when one looks at the object from time to time,⁹³ until **arising**, in this way, all phenomena are empty, but since sentient beings do not realize this, one meditates with compassion in one's heart, and dedicates the roots of virtue for the sake of sentient beings, making it have the essence of emptiness and compassion. [8a4] How difficult is it to generate compassion for that which is without intrinsic nature? Therefore, according to Gönpawa it is a great sickness to be tamed. After arising, getting distracted in imputing general boastfulness in thinking that one is a great meditator by understanding **things are like illusions** in the post-meditative state, one should engage in circumambulation with the body, chanting recitations with speech, and so forth. Among all **body** and **speech**, the root of wisdom is the **mind**. One should strive in the four means of gathering disciples⁹⁴ which bring together the six perfections, the virtue of

⁹⁰ *rtog 'khan* [= *mkhan*] See Jäschke (1881:53a), *mkhan* is an affix denoting "1. One who knows a thing thoroughly..." Western Tibet usage in *A Grammar of Purik Tibetan* (p. 461) by Marius Zemp.

⁹¹ Textual insertion above line: *sems kyi bdug pa thams cad ste/ gzugs sems gshes pa* ("all obscurations of the mind, and the separation of form and mind").

⁹² See the Kadam *Collection on the Two Realities* (Apple 2018, 318), "Distinguishing phenomenal marks include the five objects of form and so forth; the three times, persons, and the distinguishing marks of women make ten."

⁹³ Illegible interlinear gloss at top of folio 8a: /***a lo ba'i skabs re byed pa 'di gal che ba yin de myed na phyis zhes pa gras pa bzhin ngan ba* _____*

⁹⁴ The four means of gathering disciples (*bsdu ba'i dngos po, saṃgrahavastu*) are

the cause of giving [8a5] to sentient beings and the accumulation of great awakening, including the two accumulations⁹⁵ and the ten perfections. This is possible if one does not cling to appearances. Since all fixations of mind are determined by whether or not they accord with equanimity, one should refrain from calling out spells like “Prince Vajra.” How to meditate on applying that has been taught.

[Paragraph Four]

[Accordingly, when one practices with devotion, for a long time and uninterruptedly, then those with good fortune will see reality in this very life and all things will be directly realized, effortlessly and spontaneously, like the center of space. Through the attainment [of wisdom] after [meditation], all things are understood to be like illusions and so forth. From the point of time onward when the vajra-like concentration has been realized, [buddhas] will not have any subsequent attainment, as they are settled in meditative equipoise at all times.]

Since suffering is thought not to cease until grasping at objects is exhausted, one must exert effort. [8a6] Like entering a house ablaze everywhere, without expecting cool water, **devotion** is necessary for meditation. **Devotion** does not exist if one does not strike the vital points like a clenched fist on a stone. Like a child desiring barley dough(?), it is necessary to meditate on [things] as unestablished. Make efforts for the antidote in any inabilities. Because one must meditate until buddhahood is attained, it takes **a long time**.⁹⁶ But one can completely devote this lifetime to meditation from now on. Even if one thinks of the sun in the sky as a smokeless fire, [8b1] it is interrupted by bad northerly winds, and later, if the foundation of learning has to be done, it will not be complete. Just as fire is produced from a rubbing stick, how much effort is made by *other actions* after the initial connection is interrupted? If one exerts oneself in meditation just as [the master] did it for the sake of meditation, then, having accumulated merit and wisdom in the path of accumulation and the path of application for one countless kalpa, one will **see the truth [8b2] in this very life**, just like

generosity (*dāna*), kind words (*priyavādita*), beneficial acts (*arthacarya*), and sympathy (*samānārthatā*). *Mahāvūyutpatti*, 924–28.

⁹⁵ The accumulations of merit (*bsod nams kyi tshogs* ≈ *pūṇyasambhārah*) and of wisdom (*ye shes kyi tshogs* ≈ *jñānasambhārah*).

⁹⁶ Line underneath reads: *ngan song 3 la sogs pa bar du ma bcad par bsgom pa na phra pa mer cig na mthong lam skye pa pa de bar du so /* (“Meditating without interruption on the three lower realms, etc., causes the path of vision to arise in an instant.”)

[he did]. From seeing **truth** arise and falsehood be defeated, through the arising of the path of vision, one sees the suchness (*de bzhin nyid* ≈ *tathatā*) of all phenomena. All mantra practitioners call the intermediate state (*antarābhava*) and so forth by that name, as it is equivalent to the measure of accomplishment of the Great Seal (*mahāmudrā*). Explaining the very seeing of truth/reality is called “**all things (dharma)**.” Since all phenomena are understood through emptiness, [8b3] without beginning, end, or middle, like setting out to establish a center and an edge when neither edge nor center can be established, effort through previously directing the mind, and exertion arising from that, are absent. Like casting a great raft into a vast ocean, **spontaneously** accomplishing is made manifest. The explanation of **effortlessness** is from its own particular nature.

The Ācārya Candrakīrti explains that there is not a distinction in realizing suchness during meditative equipoise from the first [bodhisattva] stage up until the tenth [bodhisattva] stage. The *Commentary on the Summary Verses*⁹⁷ [8b4] explains that there is not a distinction in meditative equipoise from the first stage up until buddhahood. “An illusionary object moves an illusionary object” and, for example, stating “a master of illusion” accordingly, through the subsequent knowledge of that [meditative equipoise] all things although appearing as composites, due to not clinging as substantially existent, one directly realizes they are like an **illusion**. Then, having completed the path of training by meditating in association with a firm meditative equipoise and **subsequent meditative attainment** for two countless eons, a vajra directly destroys nearby all things [8b5] while it is indestructible, likewise the **vajra-like meditative concentration**⁹⁸ destroys without exception all grasping at things as real, things which are nearby, while at the time of the excellent expanse of the indestructible, the excellence of wisdom, self-arisen, is like self-arisen light rays of the sun free from clouds. At the level of buddhahood **subsequent attainment** is not asserted according to the Guru Avadhūtipa. Since it is concordant with the five who are of the Madhyamaka meditative system,⁹⁹ [8b6] it is the system of the Ācārya Candrakīrti. Furthermore, if there is non-apprehension of knowable objects, then conceptualization

⁹⁷ This refers to Haribhadra's *Bhagavadratnaguṇasañcayagāthā-nāma-pañjikā* (Bcom ldan 'das yon tan rin po che sdud pa'i tshigs su bcad pa'i dka' 'grel). Tōh. no. 3792. Dergé Tanjur, vol. JA, folios 1v.1-78r.7. Tr. by Jetahaṇdu Śāntibhadra and 'Bru Seng dkar Shākya 'od.

⁹⁸ Tib. *rdo rje lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin* ≈ *vajropamasamādhī*. Compare Apple 2018, 321. Also AKBH on AK 6.44. Ruegg 1989, 167.

⁹⁹ Cf. Atiśa's BMPP: “Meditate on only the special instructions of the lineage of the Ārya Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, Bhavya, and Śāntideva” (Apple 2018, 332); Tib. Sherburne 2000, 250: / 'phags pa klu sgrub 'phags pa'i lha / / zla grags bha bya zhi ba'i lha / / brgyud pa'i man ngag 'ba' zhig bsgom /.

arises. Just as reflections appear on a crystal, the Buddhas, having comprehended all knowable objects, both how they are and how many there are, within the two realities, do not have subsequent conceptualization.¹⁰⁰

"When not subsequently perceiving consciousness, objects of knowledge, or self, then because phenomenal marks do not emerge, one's concentration is firm, one does not get up."¹⁰¹

[9a1] Because of not settling for faults and arising, and because there is no purpose for views, one always settles in equanimity in a state of non-conceptualization. As it is considered that falling asleep or entering a state of drowsiness occurs within a moment,

"In a moment of wisdom it encompasses every object of knowledge."¹⁰²

[Paragraph Five]

[I will not speak here regarding the reasonings and scriptures that make statements such as, "If it is not like that, what is the difference from bodhisattvas?" Through the power of gathering the accumulations and making aspiration prayers for countless eons for the welfare of others, [buddhas] will become just as those who are to be taught wish [them to be]. There are many scriptures and reasonings [on this topic], but I will not elaborate on them here.]

All the masters of the tenth [bodhisattva] stage activities are nonconceptual from a general way of speaking of the measure of the sun among the clouds. [9a2]. Especially from all the discourses of the Buddha,

"Hey! Son of the Victorious One, what is always the object of meditative equipoise for the buddha? Hey! Son of the Victorious One, the object of meditative equipoise for the buddha at all times is the welfare of sentient beings."

It is not possible as an object in the scope of logic but one progresses

¹⁰⁰ Insertion underneath illegible.

¹⁰¹ Jñānagarbha, *Satyadvayavibhāṅgakārikā* (Eckel 1987, 101, v. 39; Tib., Eckel 1987, 187): gang tshe shes dang shes bya dang / / bdag nyid rjes su mi mthong ba / / de ni mtshan ma mi 'byung phyir / / gnas pa brtan phyir mi bzheng so / / . Prajñāmukti citation differs: gang tshe shes dang shes bya dag / / bdag nyid rjes su mi mthong bas / / de tshe mtshan ma mi 'byung phyir / / gnas pa brten phyir mi bzhengs so / / . Jñānagarbha, vs. 39 (Eckel 1987:101). See Apple 2018, 286. Related to Mahāsāṃghika, Nikāya, AKBH (Sangpo).

¹⁰² Jñānagarbha, *Satyadvayavibhāṅgakārikā* (Eckel 1987, 102, v. 2ab; Tib., Eckel 1987, 188); Candrakīrti, MA 11.11 (Poussin 1912, 356): ro mnyam nyid du yang dag thugs su chud par mdzad gyur na / / mkhyen bzang khyod kyis skad cig gis ni shes bya thugs su chud / (Huntington 1989, 190).

through resolute faith. Even though one speaks in detail, it does not reach certainty. For the bodhisattva in meditative equipoise while having postmeditative attainment, reasoning sees all dharmas like the center of space; for the bodhisattva who has both meditation and postmeditation when mastering the postmeditative state [9a3] because the path of training is not created, reasonings that do not attain a result and so forth and existent objects are not elaborated.

If someone asks, “Even without subsequent attainment activity, will the benefit of others cease?” Each moment of the first [bodhisattva] stage is equivalent to the accumulation of one countless eon. Then, so great is the accumulations on each moment up through the seventh [bodhisattva] stage. The first moment of the eighth [bodhisattva] stage accumulates equal to two countless eons on the seventh [bodhisattva] stage and lower [9a4] and likewise for the three [bodhisattva] levels of the result.¹⁰³ All of the above are counted as equivalent to a single moment that arises in the vajra-like meditative concentration.

In this way, by the power of **making aspirational prayers** to arise spontaneously, with neither effort nor toil, to benefit sentient beings and **gathering the accumulations** of merit, like a great wish-fulfilling jewel, the benefit of sentient beings arises just as desired [9a5] while there is the fortune of disciplining in one moment all sentient beings, the stage of buddhahood is attained at that time. Due to not having a subsequent meditative state, in one instant objects of knowledge are known. Therefore, one does not proceed with deep darkness. Everything occurs spontaneously as it is not necessary to put forth effort and

¹⁰³ The phrase “three [bodhisattva] levels of the result” (*’bras bu’i sa gsum ka*) is explained by Atiśa in his *Byang chub sems dpa’i spyod pa la ’jug pa’i bshad pa* (Bodhisattva-cāryāvatārabhāṣya) (2006:) (Mochizuki 1999:56-57, section 2.2) / *da ni lo ga las ’das pa’i sa bcur ’gro ba’i rim pa bshad na dang po ste / rten gyi gang zag gi rigs de ni ji skad bya ba’i rigs yin na / ’bras bu dang mthun pa’i rigs ’di ni sa gnyis pa dri ma med pa la seng ge rnam par ’gyings pa’i ting nge ’dzin gyis rjes thob zag pa dang bcas pa dang / mnyam bzhas zag pa med pa tha mi dad sgrubs pa’i rigs so / / ’o na sa dang po [p.57] byas pa la / spyir na lam bzhi ste / thar pa’i cha dang mthun pa’i lam nges par ’byed pa’i cha dang mthun pa’i lam dang / slob pa phyir mi ldog pa’i lam dang / spyir slob pa phyir mi ldog sa bdun man chad mi slob phyir mi ldog ’bras bu’i sa gsum yin te / (“Now, explaining the stages of going to the ten supramundane *bhūmis*, firstly: What is the nature of the basis, the individual? This nature, which is in accordance with the result, is the second *bhūmi*, the Immaculate. In it, through the *ting nge ’dzin* (Skt. *samādhi*) of a lion in full stride, the subsequent attainment is with outflows (*sāgrava*), and the equipoise is without outflows (*anāgrava*). This is the nature of establishing the non-difference. Then, regarding the accomplishment of the first *bhūmi* [p. 57]: Generally, there are four paths: The path of the qualities that accord with liberation (*mokṣa*), the path of the qualities that accord with definite emergence, the path of the *śaikṣa* (*slob pa*) of non-returning, and generally, the *śaikṣa* of non-returning, the seven *bhūmis* and above, the *aśaikṣa* (*mi slob*) of non-returning, are the three *bhūmis* of the result”).*

strive as previously in the path of training.

When Geshe Tönpa was questioned about the Buddha stage, he explained that whether it is suitable or not suitable for a buddha to have a continuum of wisdom, [9b1] it is suitable that even though [a buddha] does not have a postmeditative attainment, [a buddha] arises without distinction in giving counsel and having subsequent attainment for the benefit of sentient beings.

On this fundamental point, at the time of producing the awakening mind which aspires, all sentient beings are benefitted with purification from being looked after as guests. At the time of hope for one's own refuge, one should understand accordingly. One should also understand accordingly if wishing to perform actions for the benefit of sentient beings. [9b2] Moreover, it is as follows, conventionally all things (*dharma*) exist for those of limited vision (*tshu rol mthong ba*) and so forth and exist according to the **scripture and reasoning** of the two realities (*satyadvaya*). They especially exist according to **scripture and reasoning** up until enlightened activity that is **not elaborated here** in this small text.

This indicates the meaning of the changeless. In meditative yoga, this meaning is more important than life. From the first three syllables and the two realities,¹⁰⁴ [9b3] to whatever peace there is, explaining everything completely up to the activity of the Buddhas, it is said that [this text] remains as a great teaching. Valuing the Guru's teaching, I composed this small summary on the special instructions of the Middle Way that is the system of the master Pu to ba and his spiritual son(s). If one examines this meaning well, analyze again to the end. The *Explanation of the Special instructions of the Middle Way* is completed.

Diplomatic Tibetan Edition of *Potowa's Middle Way*

Pu to yab sras kyi lugs

[Introduction]

[1b1] [318.1] // *myi tra'i gsung las brten byas nas* / / / / *des den sgro*
[btags] skur ['debs] bral ba'i lam / / / / *'khor ba'i brtson ra rnam phyin pa:*
/ chos kyi bdud rtsi 'di rtsom mo / / / / *chos 'di dge bshes gsang phu bas*
zhus nas mdzad de / dge bshes ston pa la kun la jo bos dbang skur mdzad pa'i
*dus na sngon 'gro'i cho ga mang po yang mdzad / rngog la *sngon* 'gro rang*
gyi dgos par ngas pas snod dang 'dan pa / stong pa nyid kyi sgra thos pa

¹⁰⁴ Interlinear gloss: "Asserting the wisdom of postmeditative attainment, a continuum of wisdom is also taught from the texts of Ācārya Asaṅga. Not asserting the wisdom of postmeditative attainment and asserting the continuum of wisdom at the time of meditative equipoise, this is a teaching of Atiśa."

tsam gyis [1b2] lhag lhag yong ba / zhabs 'og *gi* sde bu kun la [...] na dngos po dang sad pa da bzhin du gsung zhi / / dngos po yod pa la yid mi ches par rang bzhin myes pa la nges pa nyed pa rnal 'byor pa zhig po cig la bdan bas yid brtan du rung ba yin / / dgon pa ba'i zhal nas nga la lkog du sgrol pa'i chos de 'di na bris nas snang ba la gsung skad / / snod dang ldan pa de kun la gnang pa dang de kun spyen sdoms pa de blo gtud thub pa'i [1b3] [318.3] sems clan te / / da lta sgoms pa'i nyam myong dang rtogs pa ni myed / thams cad kyi ka ba la ri na yod pas bdug skyed kyi ched du song ba las rtsis myed par song ste / / chos 'di kun so sor rtog pa la brten nas dmigs pa tshob ba bya ba sngags kyi rlung bstan thabs su 'dzin pa bas zab pa yin /

[Translator's Homage]

/ / rgya gar skad du / ma ng+h+ya ma u pa de sha nA ma /
bod skad du / dbu ma'i man ngag ces bya ba /
 'jig rten mgon po la phyag 'tshal lo / /

/ / 'di rnam lo tsa ba'i gtam yin te / dgos pa rnam pa gsum la gtan nas [***] rgya gar skad slad du smos / / [1b4] da don dngos dang brtags pa ba 2 las / / bden gnyis kyis mtha' gnyis yang pas / rgyu 'bras lasogs pa kun rdzob du yod par bsgom pas dang por bsod nams ma yin bya las bzlog pas skur pa'i mtha' yong / de nas rgyu 'bras cig nas cig du brgyud pa'i 'khor bas skye nas sags pa myed pa na / don dam pas sgro btags pa'i mtha' yang bas bar du bdag las bzlog pa gang zag gi bdag myed sgom / / sems tsam man [1b5] dngos por 'dzin pa la drod kyi ye shes kyang mi skye bas tha mar kun las bzlog pa chos thams cad cir yang ma grub *par* bsgom pas sang rgyas thob nas myi rtog pa'i sa la mnyam par bzhag kyang 'phrin las kyis sems can thams cad kyi don 'thung ba de dngos yin / / de gzhung nyung du 'dis go ba dang bsgom du btub pas thabs bla bas rtogs pas man ngag yin / / gzhung ye ger bris pa dang sgra 'am don gyi spyi *gang zhig* blo la gnas pa de btags pa yin / [1b6] [lo tsa] ba'i phyag rgya gar yi ge dang 'thun bkas bcad dang myi mtshun / / yang na bden par 2 kyi don sangs rgyas rtag cig gi spyod yul yin pa 'jig rten 'gon pa sangs rgyas yin bas gzhung dang 'byun /

[Atiśa's Homage]

/ / gang gi gsung gi 'od zer gyis / / bdag sogs rmongs pa ma lus pa'i /
 / snying gi pad+ma kha 'byed pa'i / / dam pa'i skyes mchog de la 'dud / /

/ / jo bo nyid kyi bka' lung las dang por phyag 'tshal ba'i dgos pa sngon gyi ya rabs dang rjes su 'thun pa dang / / brtsam pa mthar phyin pa dang /
 / bar chad myi 'byung ba yin te /

* rngog s[hes] rab zhus pa la / jo bo'i thugs dad pa'i zhugs kyis [2a1] \$
 / / gzhung 'di la myi ltos par dkon mchog la mkhod pa dang / sangs rgyas kyi chos 'dad pa la phan ba'i gsol ba btab ngos te / 'dir byas pa rang cag sngon

la ci byed pa dkon mchog la mchod pa dbul / gsol ba btab nas byed ba la lag len shes par bya ba'i ched yin / / spyir sangs rgyas la rgyu dang 'bras bu dang 'phrin las pa bstod pa gsum yod pa las dir 'phrin las kyi sgo nas 'stod pa yin te / / **dam pa'i skyes bus mchog** byas pas 'bras bu'i [2a2] yon tan yang zin du rung / / 'phrin las la yang gsum yod pa las 'di gsung gi 'phrin las yang bstod pa yin / sku'i 'phrin las la rdzu 'phrul bstan nas 'dul ba dang / / thugs kyi 'phrin las kyis skal pa dang ldan bas byin gyis brlabs shing don mdzad pa mang po bshad / / gsung gi 'phrin las kun sprod pa dang rjes su 'stan pa'i chos sprul gyis chos bstan pas 'dul ba tsam che yin / gang spyir sgra yin yang dam pa'i **skyes bu mchog** des [2a3] 'brel bas / dper na¹⁰⁵ nyi ma'i 'od gser kyis mun pa sel pa dang pad ma kha phye nas 'jig rten thams cad dga' bar byed pa dang chos 'thun ba / / shes bya bden pa gnyis thug su chud pa'i sangs rgyas kyis gsung rab yang lag bcu 2 sam / sde snod gsum lasogs pa'i **gsung gi 'od gser** gyis skal pa dang¹⁰⁶ ldan pa'i sems can ma lus pa ste nam mkha' mthos byab kyi / shes bya bden pa gnyis la rmongs pa'i mun pa bsal nas gsal bar byas pas snying gi **pad ma kha** [2a4] **'byed pas** dga' ba skyed pa'i rkang 2 rnams kyi mchog du gur pa / sa bcu'i byang chub sems dpa' dang yang sa chen po'i de lta bu rgya shug gi tshig gu tsam gyi byad yod pa'i **dam pa'i skyes bu mchog** sangs rgyas de la lus ngag yid gsum dang pas dud pa jo bo bgres ka gang kun du yang gzhon nu sus kyang myi nus pa'i phyag mdzad spyod skad /

bdag ces jo bo nyid kyis bsal ba ches pa'i yon tan nas 'byung ba de bzhin du yin / theg pa bsdu pa'i 'grel pa snying bya ba [2a5] yid kyi nam shes la bshad de / / sde pa shas shig yid kyi rnam shes **snying** la gnas pa 'dod pas yid kyi rten yin bas dbus na gnas pa'i don gyis na **snying** yin te / / ma rig pa dang shes rab sems byung yin la sems byung yid kyi 'khor du skye pa chos nyid yin bas bshad pa de skabs su babs su skad / / spyir rigs pa'i gnas lnga kas **rmongs pa'i** mun pa sel ba yin te / sangs rgyas las 'byung ba yin / skal ba can la / sangs rgyas mya ngan [2a6] yong mi 'das / / chos kyang nu[b] par myi 'gyur te / ces pa dang / de la nam yang sangs rgyas myi bzhugs myin / ces pas dus rtag du bzhugs nas **gsung ba'i 'od gzer gyis rmongs pa'i** mun pa sel ba yod /

/ theg pa thun mong nas bcom ldan *'das* 'dzam bu'i gling du byon ba'i dus na myi pham rgyal tshab du dbang skur nas dga' ldan du chos 'di gsungs bya bthung / yum la bltam dus na 'di gsungs bya ba lasogs rnams dang / [2b1] sangs rgyas nas tshong pa ga gon bzang po la chos 'di gsungs bya ba nas / tha ma shing pa la drung gi tshal du myang ngan las 'das dus na / dug

¹⁰⁵ Line underneath: sangs rgyas nyi ma cher ste 'jig rten kyi kham la la na nyi ma chen po shar nub myed pa yod pa yin ("When the Buddhas are very numerous, in some world realms there will be no rising or setting of the great sun.")

¹⁰⁶ Line underneath: spyir gsang rgyas kyi sems can thams cad kyi don du gsungs/ 'od ser lag pa ska la dang ldan pa rnams la yin (Generally, it was spoken for the benefit of all sentient beings of the Buddha. It is for those who possess golden light, hands, and scales.)

de ra dul bar 'gyur gyis / ston pa so sor thar pa la gyis / gnas dran ba nye
 bar gzhag pa la chos shig go ces zhal chems gsungs pa'i cag cag lo 'byung /
 / theg pa chen po thun mongs ma yin nas / yum gyi lhum na bzhugs
 pa'i dus su sa bcu'i byang chub sems [2b2] dpa' mang po la gsung pa dang /
 ma ga ta dbyar 'byed chos kyi dgon pa der gsungs pa sha ri'i bu lasogs pa
 nyan thos chen po de nyid na 'dug bzhin du ma thos pa la tshogs pa tshad
 myed pa 'byung ste / de thams cad kyi sems can gyis **rmongs pa** sel ba yin
 / / kun du rgyu rab bzong yan chod du bcom ldan 'das rngos kyi gdul bya
 rdzogs / / mya ngan las 'das rje la bstan pa lo lnga brgya phrag bcu ba'i gnas
 pas kyang sems can gyi rmong pa sel / [2b3] ba yin / / de yang rim par sel
 bas skye dgu brid pa 'khyams pa'i dgon dkon mchog yin ba shes nas phyi rol
 ba'i lta la myi rten tsa na rim cig bsal ba yin / bde sdug thams cad las las
 byung bar shes tsa na rgyu myed dang myi mthun ba rgyur smra ba'i lta ba
 thams cad gsal ba yin / / srid pa thams cad sdug bsngal du rtogs nas lam
 sgom tsa na shin du bsal ba yin / / de las rang cig du thar bas myi chog pas
 sems can thams cad kyi ched [2b4] de thabs shes rab zung 'jug du bslabs pas
 sangs rgyas thob pa na gtan bsal ba yin te / / de thams cad lung gis shes
 pa byed pa yin /

[First Paragraph]

[/ theg pa chen po dbu ma'i man ngag ni 'di yin te / kun rdzob tu
 [D95b3] chos thams cad tshu rol mthong ba'i ngor byas nas / rgyu
 'bras la sogs pa rnam par gzhag pa thams cad ji ltar snang ba bzhin
 du bden pa yin la / don dam par ram yang dag par na kun rdzob ji ltar
 snang ba de kho na gtan tshigs chen po rnam kyis gzhigs shing bsal
 na / skra'i rtse mo brgyar [D95b4] gshags pa'i tshad kyang bzung du
 med do zhes nges par khong du chud par bya'o /]

/ de ltar lngag 'tshol nas bstan 'chos brtsam pa las chos kyi gleng bslangs
 ba dang dgos 'brel bstan pa yin te / / brjod bya bden pa gnyis / dgos pa bden
 ba gnyis ji ltar yin ba'i go ba skye ba / dgos pa'i dgos pa 'di nas 'byung ba
 bzhin du bsgoms nas sangs rgyas thob te sems can kyi don byed pa yin la
 [2b5] de rnam thabs dang bcas pa las byung bas 'brel ba bstan pa'o /

/ **theg pa chen po'i** ces pas nyan thos bsal ba las / chen po bdun dang
 ldan pa theg pa chen por bshad de / / zab pa dang sgya che ba gnyis su 'dus
 pas / rgya che ba sems can thams cad kyi don byed 'dod pas nyung ngu chung
 du la dmigs pas myi mchog pas dmyigs pa chen po dang / rang bzhan gyi don
 la bsgrub pa chen po dang / / de rdzas su 'dzin pas myi 'grub pas [2b6] bdag
 myed pa gnyi ga rtogs pa'i ye shes chen po dgos / / de la yun thung dus myi
 rtogs pas bskal pa grangs myed pa gsum du rtsom pa'i brtson 'grus chen po
 dgos / / de la shes rab dang snying rje 'khor ba 'dzin pa'i thabs la mkhas pa
 dgos / rgyu de la blabs pa 'grub pa chen po sangs rgyas thob nas / / 'phrin
 las chen po mdzad pa bcu gnyis kyis sems can gyi don byed po yin /

/ **dbu ma** ces pas sems [2b7] tsam pa bsal ba yin / / mu stegs pa'i gang

zag du sgro 'dogs / phyi rol bas las 'bras la skur pa 'debs pa la / sangs rgyas pas gang zag gi bdag kun rdzob du yang myed la tshe par dang las 'bras lasogs pa kun rdzob du yod par 'dod pa thams cad kyang dbu ma pa yin /

/ de la sangs rgyas pa'i gzhung chen po bzhi bo thams can rang rang gi de dbu mar 'dod de / / nyan thos sde pas mu stegs la bzhin tu gang zag gi dag du sgro mi 'dogs la [3a1] \$/ / sems tsam pa bzhin du gzung 'dzin la skur pa myi sdebs pa nged kyi 'di dbu ma yin zer / / sems tsam pa na re sde pa bzhin du gzung 'dzin du sgro mi 'dogs / dbu ma' ltar gzung 'dzin dang bral ba'i rang rig la skur pa myi 'debs pa nged kyi 'di dbu ma yin zer / / 'dir kun rdzob kyi bdag par la yang skur myi 'debs / don dam pa'i *bden pas* cir yang sgro myi 'dogs las mtha' gnyis dang bral bas dbu ma yin la / / de tshegs chung dus [3a2] *lam thabs slobs rtogs pa de **man ngag** yin / *yi ge ru sdon rgya chen po rtag par bya ba yin ne / slob dpon klu grub lasogs pa pa'i gsungs pa de dag thams cad ye ge rtog pa kha na po 'dir 'dus pa dang / de dag gi don 'dis go bar byas pas* / **dbu ma** ces pa'i bshad pa yin de te / *bden pa 2 dang dbu ma don mtha' 2 dang bral ba / la zer ba yin * / **dbu ma** ces pa'i bshad pa yin te / **kun rdzob du** byas pas skur pa'i mtha' song pa / **don dam par** ces pas sgro 'dog pa'i mtha' yong ba bstan te / **chos thams cad** ces pa bshad pa rgyu 'bras lasogs pa yin te / **kun rdzob du** phung po dang khams dang skye mched kyis bsdu pa'i **chos thams cad tshu rol mthong ba** bya ba chos thams cad kyis rol chos nyid bden pa ma thong ba dngos po la mngon ba zhen pa'i ngor

[3a3] **rgyu dang 'bras bu la rmongs pa'i** ma rig pas myi dge ba'i las la sags pas dmyal lasogs pa skye ba / ngan song gi rgyu 'bras dang / / de khon na rmongs pa'i ma rig pas dge ba bcu spyad pas 'dod khams kyi lha mi skye ba'i rgyu 'bras dang / / myi g.yo ba'i las kyis khams gong mar skye ba'i rgyu 'bras dang / / ma rig pa zad na zag pa myed pa'i las bsags pas 'phags pa'i 'bras bu 'thob pa nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas kyi rgyu 'bras de'i [3a4] thabs shes rab zung 'jug du bslabs pas thams cad mkhyen pa nyid 'thob pa theg pa chen po'i rgyu 'bras ste / kun nas nyon mongs pa dang rnam par byang ba'i rnam pa gzahag pa thams cad mkhas pa san pa ti nas blun mngo ba glang sji la ji tar grags pa bzhin du bden pa /

***tshu rol thong pas** sgra brtag yang bden par 'dzin pa de tshe du de dag gi don pa 'byed la myi slu ba bden pa'o* bla ma +a va 'du ti ba chen po'i zhal nas stong pa nyid la re ltos byas nas las phra mo khyad du bsad pas da lta rnal 'byor ba 'di skad bya ba sems can dmyal ba 'di na 'dug bya ba mang po gsung skad / / dge bshes [3a5] ston pa'i zhal nas me yang stong pa lag pa yang stong pa yin gyis tshig du yang stong pa brjod cing lag pa mer chug dang sreg bya sreg byed yin bas 'tshig gsung ba dang / / yang rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba zab jo bo ba snying khams cher myi rung gsung skad / / kun rdzob rgyu 'bras la ci yang myed pas rgyu 'bras ma tshogs pa byas kyang rgyu 'bras su ma 'dus pa'i bsdu rgyu myed / / yang btshogs khongs su rten 'brel sgo brgyad dam sems can tshogs kyi 'gro [3a6] drug gang bstan pa /

/ sems can dmyal dang dud 'gro yi dag pa dang lha min ris dang mi yi rigs rnam dang / / mi yi seng ges kun rdzob btags pa mdzad¹⁰⁷ /

ces pa lasogs pa rnam grangs mang pos gsungs pa de sdud / / kun bya ba ma lus pa sdzob bya ba rnying skad dam zhang zhung gi skad yin bas kun bsdzun bya ba yong ba yin / / dbu ma 'jug pa dang / bden pa gnyis la 'jug par yang dag pa'i don mthong ba la sgrib pa'i don du bshad / [3b1] kun rdzob kyi mtshan nyid snang ba yod kyang rdzas myed pa rab rib can gyi skra shad lta bu 'am / 'ja tshon lta bu 'al byi 'ol gyi bsdzun snang yin te / sa byong pa'i rjes shes kyis de kho na bzhig gzig pa yin te / / *zla grags kyis* kun rdzob tsam bya ba yang bshad / / bsgrub bya'i don gyi dam pa yin pas don dam pa 'am¹⁰⁸ / ye shes dam pa'i yul yin bas don dam pa 'am / rigs pas brtags na kun rdzob bzhin du mi slu bas [3b2] don dam pa bya bar bshad de / / **don dam par ram** ces pa bshad pa yang na de ma skyes pas sam ces pa'o / / **yang dag par na** ces pa bshad pa yang na de rang bzhin 'od gsal ba ces pa'o / / yang na don dam pa bya ba

/ kun rdzob 'di ltar snang ba 'di / / rigs pas 'rtags na 'ga' myi snyed / / ma snyed pa nyid don dam ste /

ces pa yin te rigs pas myed nges snyam pa de mi slu bas / *shar 3 nas* rnam grangs gyi don dam pa bya bar bshad / [3b3] yang na rigs pas mthong ngam rnam yang phyis rtogs pa gzhan re skyes pa na / de yang mying du 'dug rnam du slu ba dang / gong ma gong ma'i blo khyad kyis gnod pas slu bas kun rdzob yin / yang dag bya ba ye nas gnas pa'i chos nyid do ces pa de yin bas /

chos thams cad kyi chos nyid sangs rgyas lasogs pa das kyang ma byas chos rnam kyis chos nyid 'di ni gnas pa'o /

ces pa rgyu rkyen gyis ma bskyed pas bcom ma ma yin ba'o / / [3b4] de la go rims gzhihs shing gsal na don dam par ram / yang dag par na sgra' ces sbyar ro / bsal zer yang bsal rgyu myed 'dug lugs de *rigs pas* shes par byed pa yin pas / / kun rdzob bya ba'i rdzas [***] shig don dam bya ba'i stong pa

¹⁰⁷ MABH D3862, 274b (LVP, 1907-1912:175): dbu ma la 'jug pa'i bshad pa zhes bya ba (madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya-nāma): sems can dmyal dang dud 'gro yi dags dang / / lha min ris dang mi dang lha yi rnam / / mi yi seng ges kun rdzob btags pa mdzad / / rigs dma' de bzhin mtho ba'i rigs rnam dang / phyug po'i khyim dang dbul [275a]; Tattvairdeśasamādhisūtra. ; Prajñākaramati, Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā BCP (Vaidya 1960, 227): saṃvṛti prajñāpayī naraśiṃhaḥ śaṅgatayo bhaṇi satvagaṇānām / narakagatīśca tathāiva ca pretān āsurakāya narāṇīśca marūṇīśca / /; Śāntideva, Śikṣāsamuccaya (Bendall 1922, 237 (English); Bendall, Skt. 256: saṃvṛti prajñāmayī naraśiṃhaḥ śaṅgatayo bhaṇi satvagaṇānām / narakatiraś ca tathāiva ca pretān āsurakāya narāṇīś ca marūṇīś ca / / . Pitāputrasamāgamana (yab dang sras mjal ba), Toh. 60, 183b: sems can tshogs kyi 'gro drug gang bstan pa / / sems can dmyal dang dud 'gro yi dvags dang / / lha min ris dang mi dang lha yi rnam / / mi yi sengges kun rdzob btags pa mdzad / / . "Whichever of the six migrations of the multitude of sentient beings was indicated: sentient beings of hell, animals, hungry ghosts, anti-god status, men and the gods –the Lion of Men designated [as] the deceptive."

¹⁰⁸ Illegible small phrase above line.

cig logs na tha dad myed /

/ **kun rdzob ji ltar na snang ba** 'di nyid la¹⁰⁹ rdo rje gzezs ma dang /
yod myed skye 'gog dang / mu bzhi skye 'gog dang / gcig dang du bral gyi
gtan tshigs chen po [3b5] **bzhi** gzhigs shing bsal na /

rigs pas myi gnös pa'i rdzas su grub pa sgra'i **rtse mo brgyas gshegs**
pa'i cha tsam yang mi 'grub rang bzhin stong pa yin bas thos bsam gyis
yang dang yang du bsam pas nges pa thob pa'i sgo nas khong du chud pa la
lta ba zer / / gzhung 'di shes rab rnam gsum gyi dbang du byas pa yin /

[Second Paragraph]

/ / stan bde ba la skyil mo krung bcas te 'dug la / 'di ltar re zhig
dngos po gnyis te / gzugs can dang / gzugs can ma yin pa'o / / de la
gzugs can rnams ni rdul phra rab 'dus pa yin la / de yang [D95b5] **phy-**
ogs cha'i dbye bas phy zhing gzhigs na / shin tu phra ba yang lus pa
med cing shin tu snang ba yang med do / / gzugs can ma yin pa ni sems
yin la / de yang 'di ltar 'das pa'i sems ni 'gags shing zhig / ma 'ongs
pa'i sems ni ma skyes shing ma byung / da ltar gyi sems ni [D95b6] 'di
ltar yang shin tu brtag dka' ste / kha dog med cing dbyibs dang bral ba
/ nam mkha' dang 'dra bas ma grub pa'am / yang na gcig dang du ma
dang bral bas sam / yang na ma skyes pas sam / yang na de rang bzhin
gyis 'od gsal ba la sogs pa / rigs pa'i mtshon gyis [D95b7] **dpyad cing**
gzhigs na ma grub par rtogs so]

/ / 'di man chod bsgom pa'i shes rab kyi dbang du byas pa yin te / / de
ltar ltas bas chod pa dang nges ya [3b6] byas pa'i dgos pa shes par byas nas
thang yig 'khan {em. mkhan} gyi lo rgyus ltar bzhag pas mi chog bsgom nyam
su len dgos / / de yang¹¹⁰ tshul 'khrims la brten nas sems la brten nas
shes rab la slob dgos pas / sems ting nge 'dzin du gnas pa cig gis shes rab kyis
'di ltar sgom pa yin /

/ 'di nas da ltar bod kyi zhing rmed 'phro la **stan** la 'dug pa 'am rta la
rtsa chun cig byin *thos* nas bsgoms pas [4a1] \$ / / chog pa ltar 'dug te des
phyi ngo / / thog ma myed pa'i dus nas dngos por 'dzin pas don myed pa'i
sdug bsngal snyams su myong snyam nas dngos por 'dzin pa'i gnyen por skye
ba myed pa sgom pa la / bya ba ngan pa thams cad spangs pa zhi gnas kyi
tshogs dang ldan pa * tshul khrims dag / 'dod pa chung pa / dben pa gnas pa

¹⁰⁹ Interlinear gloss: bzhi byas kyang yin te rgyu dang 'bras dang gang gis bar 'dod kyang
de 'gogs pa 1ig du 2 pa yin la / skye 'gogs pa la rten 'brel zer te rdo rje gzezs ma dang mu
bzhi skye 'gog skye na 'di ltar zhes pa rten 'brel gyi gtan tshigs nyid yin pas der gtogs 'das
pa dang ma 'ong pa dang da ltar rdo rje gzezs ma'i gzhan / skye 'gog par gtogs pa de yang
rten 'brel gyi **gtan tshigs** nyid yin / rten 'brel yin pa'i phyir rang bzhin myed ces pa la
khyab pa ma grub ste de yin yang rang bzhin yod na ci stong zer ba'i khyab skab pa mu na
skye 'gag dang rdo rje gzezs ma ste / ma las skye nas yod de ces rtsod / da gis du ma byas
nas yod dam ces bya ba latsogs pa sgrub pa'o /

¹¹⁰ Interlinear gloss: 'dir lhag mthong sngon du gsungs / 'di'i sngon du zhi gnas dgos de la
tshogs dgos pas

/ yul dang nye rnam yang jo bo man chad lta 'bra 1 gal che * cig gis bsgom pa na ji lta bu la yang en re yongs ste / gna' gtam gog po la dang dgos kyi mdo myed zer ba ltar chos dang rgyab spras nas lug pas 'o cag la 'di kun gyis [4a2] dgos pa myed /

/ dang po skyabs gnas kyi mtshan nyid dkon mchog gsum gyi che ba yang **stan bde ba la** 'dug pa'i bsgom / de nas las dang 'bras bu dang / 'khor ba'i nyes dmyigs dang / byams pa snying rje lasogs pa thabs kyi chas bsdu pa thams cad **stan bde ba la** 'dug pa bsgom pas blo 'thas pa cig gis sgom pa yin te / de la stan na tsha pa ban bde ba yang sems gnas pa yod na gal bche ba yin / spyod lam rnam par snang [4a3] mdzad kyi ltar rdo rje skyil mi krung ngam / sems pa'i lta bu byed dkyil bya ste / 'dus drang por bsrang ba lasogs sgom rin nas 'byung ba ltar byas la / sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems pa' thams cad la yid kyi dmigs yid kyi phyag bya / / dngos su bsham pa myed kyang yongs su bzung ba myed pa dang mos pa'i mchod pa las byung ba'i mchod pa dbul / dngos por 'dzin pas sdug sngal ba'i sems can thams cad kyi ched du sangs rgyas thob par bya'i ched du stong pa [4a4] nyid bsgom snyam du sams la bsgom la / ba shig rin pa ston pa'i sgra yin pas rim gyis sam thog mar bya ba'i don yin /

/ **dngos po** bya ba don byed nus pa la zer bas bdag myed par ston te / gang zag gi bdag dngos por ma grub pas ci'i don byed kyang mi nus / / de' gag dang phung po gcig gam tha dad bya ba lasogs pas sgom dgos /

gzugs can gzugs kyi phung po dang kham dang skye mched kyi gzugs can bcu dang / chos kyi kham [4a5] dang skye mched kyi phyogs cig na 'dus byas brgyad kyi lnga bye brag smra bas gzugs su 'dod / mdo sde bas bzhi gzugs su 'dod / de la **gzugs can rdul phra rab**¹¹¹ lus pa yin la / nyi zer gyi rdul phra shos cig la rdul phra rab 'bum tsha phye dang gsum ltag 'byung / de'i cha gcig yin / de yang phyogs drug *nyi shus nas* gam bcu'i *rgyan nas* cha shas kyi phye zhi gzhi na dngos por grub pa myed de / kham na sngags pa gnyis kyi gcig shes rdul phra rab kha [4a6] o por ltas na cir 'gyur zer 'dri ba la / gcig na re rdul phra rab kha so sor ltas na rnam mkhar 'gyur zer ba ltar yin bas / mnyam bzha gi blo'i yul du snang ba myi 'grub / *khrul pa'i shes pas mthong ba'i gzugs can de thams cad rnal 'byor pas* de ltar shing rta'i dpe bshad pa 'am / sa lang gi shig pa 'am shun pa'i spyang gi dpe lus la dpyad na mu thag nyer /

/ gzugs pa ma yin ba mying bzhi'i phung po rnam par shes pa'i kham bdun yin pas sems yin la / de dus gsum gyis [4b1] [324.1] dpyad pas dang po tshe snga ma dang phyi ma dang da ltar skye ba gsum du dpyad / de ltar 'ang tshe stod tshe smad bar gsum / de' lo zla zhag du dpyad / zhag gcig par

¹¹¹ Line underneath reads: 'dod na dbang po myed pa la // sgra spyed gra rab dul sngas brgya las ldan la rdzas dgu ste / / dbang po gzhan la rdzas bcu'o ches par ltar ("In the Desire Realm, a minute particle of matter that lacks sensory faculties and sound is composed of eight substances. One that possesses the tactile faculty (body faculty) has nine substances, while those possessing other sensory faculties have ten substances. This is the accepted view." See AK 1.22)

dbugs nyi khri tshig stong drug brgya rgyu la / tha na me gol rtogs pa gcig
gi ri la¹¹² skad cig ma¹¹³ brgya nyi shu 'am sum brgya drug bcu 'gag pas /
'das pa dang ma 'ongs pa'i sems gnyis 'gags pa dang ma skyes pa'i phyir myed
tsa na / da ltar gyi sems byang ba de'i bar na [4b2] rigs par grub pa myed de
/ de yod du chug de yang skad cig ma gnas pas dus gsum gyis dpyad pas mi
'grub /

ji ltar skad cig mtha' yod pa / / de bzhin thog mtha' dbus brtag dgos /
ces *pas* dpyad na **brtag dka' ste** 'di lta bu bya ba'i ngo bor myi 'grub
/ / gzugs can ma yin pas dkar po lasogs pa'i **kha dog** myed / / ring po
lasogs pa'i **dbiyibs dang bral ba'o** / de gzugs can du ma grub kyang gzugs
can ma yin bar [4b3] yod do zhe na / gzugs can ma yin pa rigs pa'i ngo bor
tha na so sor rtog pa'i shes rab du yang myi 'grub pas **nam mkha' dang 'dra**
'o / / de ltar bu nyid bsgoms pa yin pas / de ltar gnyis pa ces pa man chad
'dir yang sbyar la 'og ma thams cad la' sbyar / 'di kho na ltar so sor rtog par
brtag pa na thar pa'i bag chags 'di las grung ba myed / pu to ba so sor rtags
kho na la dgyes / / slob dpon nyam myong *dang* go ba myed pa [4b4] cig
gis slob ma de bas kyang rmongs pa cig la yod pas ci yang myi 'ong / de bas
'di shog phyer du bsgom pa dga' / / / \$ rigs pas de ma shigs nas 'di snon
pa ma yin yang na 'di ltar yang sgom bya ba yin / rigs pa thams cad kyang
dus gsum du skye ba mi 'grub par 'gogs pa'i rten 'brel dang / rgyu 'bras
gnyis ka gcig gi ngo bo dang du ma'i ngo bor myi 'grub par 'gog pa'i gcig du
du bral gnyis su 'du ba yin / [4b5] dbu ma snang ba rigs pa bzhi ka gsungs
/ rtog ge la 'bar ba dang / dbu ma la 'jug pa dang / slob dpon nyid kyi dbu
ma rtsa ba dang / chang chung mdzad pa thams cad nas rdo rje gzegs ma kho
na gsungs / mu bzhi skye 'gog bden gnyis dang / snang ba dang / brgyad
stong 'grel gyi rtag tu ngu'i le'u gyi nags byam nas bshad /

gong gi dngos po gnyis po gcig dang du ma dang bral ba / / gzugs kyi
phung po la dpyad na rgyu'i gzugs dang 'bras bu'i [4b6] gzugs gnyis la /
rgyu sa chu me slung 'byung ba chen po bzhi dang / de re re yang gsum gsum
dang bcas pas gcig myi 'grub / khyab byed gcig myi 'grub pa'i phyir / de
bsags pa'i khyab byed du ma yang myi 'grub pas / rgyu ma grub pas 'bras bu
yang myi 'grub pa 'am / / yul dang dbang po thams cad rdul phra rab 'dus
pa yin / rdul yang yul gyi la /

'dod na dbang po myed la dang / / sgra myed phra rab rdul rdzas brgyad/
ces pas [5a1] \$ / / sa chu me rlung 'byung ba bzhi / / gzugs dang dri
ro reg bya brgyad 'dus / / dbang po'i la /

lus dbang ldan la rdzas dgu ste / / dbang po gzhang la rdzas bcu bo /
ces pas lus spyi byas du yod pa dang / dbang po so so'i das bcu 'dus la
/ de nyid sgra yod pa'i bcu gcig 'dus pa yin bas / gcig mi 'grub la ma grub
pas du ma mi 'grub pas gzugs kyi phung po myed / de myed pas bdag po'i
rkyen dang dmigs pa'i skyen dbang po dang yul mi 'grub / [5a2] ste / de

¹¹² Line above reads: zla bas

¹¹³ Illegible line above.

*gnyis myed pa sgo lnga'i rnam shes myi 'byung / sgo lnga'i rnam shes myed pas de ma thag la myi 'byung bas yid kyi rnam shes myi 'byung / yid kyi rnam shes myed par de'i 'khor du skye ba'i sems las byung ba myi 'grub / de *ltar* gzugs dang rnam shes dang sems las byung byung ba ma grub pas / de'i gnas skabs myi ldan ba'i 'du byed mi 'grub / 'dus byas ma 'grub pas ltos pa myed pas 'dus ma byas kyang mi 'grub / grub du chub 'dus ma byas shes bya yin nam / [5a3] ma yin / shes bya yin na shes pa rim can du yod pas shes bya yang rim can du 'gyur bas skad cig mar 'gro 'as myi 'grub / shes bya ma yin na ma grub pa de nyid yin / nam mkhas phyogs la khyab la phyogs cha dang bcas par 'gyur bas myi 'grub bo / zla grags kyi 'dus ma byas bya ba rgyu rkyen gyis ma bskyed pa yin pas / rgyu rkyen gyis ma bskyed pa'i phyir myi 'grub par gsungs / de ltar /*

gang dang gang ma rnam brtags [5a4] pa / / de dang de la gcig nyid myed / / gang la gcig nyid yod myin pa / / de la du ma nyid kyang myed / ces pas rigs pa'i zhung theg pa'i dngos po myi 'grub /

*// \$ yang na gzugs can gong du bkag zin pas / gcig dang du ma dang bral las mying bzhi dgag pa yin te / ngo bo'i sgo nas dbye na tshor ba bde sdug btang snyom pa gsum / yul gyi sgo nas dbyed na rig pa'i tshogs drug las drug gam bco brgyad du 'gyur / / 'du shes [5a5] kyi ngo bo mtshan mar mdzin pa [***] yul gyi sgo nas dbye na drug / kham s kyi dbye na chung ngu dang rgya chen po dang tshad myed pa'i 'du shes gsum /*

*'du byed sems mngon bar 'du byed pa kyi ldan pa'i 'du byed bcu bzhi 'am lnga bcu rtsa gcig / rnam par shes pa so sor yul¹¹⁴ rig pa'i mtshan nyid drug gam brgyad du 'gyur / yul gyis phye na myig gi rnam shes gcig pu yang sna tshogs su 'gyur bas gcig myi 'grub / / [5a6] yang na rnam shes kyang gong du bshad zin pas gcig dang du mas tshor ba dang 'du shes 'du byed gsum dpyad pa'o / / yang na gzugs can *dang* gzugs can ma yin ba de ma skyes pa bskyed bya 'bras bu'i ngos nas dpyad na yod pa 'am myed pa 'am / gnyi ga las skye / de la yod pa yod pa'i phyir sky[e] ma yin / myed pa myed pa'i phyir skye ba ma yin / / chos myi mthun bas yod myed myin / yod zin pa la bskyed pa [5b1] dgos pa myed pas / yod bzhin du skye na skye ba la thug pa myed par 'gyur bas / yod pa las skyer myi rung ngo¹¹⁵ / / myed pa myed pa'i phyir nus pa dang bdag nyid thams cad kyi stong ba'i phyir skyer myi rung / / gnyi ga las skye ba chos gcig la yod pa yang yin myed pa yang yin ba chos myi mthun pa lhag cig du khas blang du myi rung bas skyer myi rung ba'o / / bzhi brgya bar /*

'bras bu yod par gang 'dod dang / / 'bras bu myed par [5b2] gang 'dod pa / / ka ba lasogs pa khyim don du / / brgyan pa'i don yang myed par 'gyur

¹¹⁴ Line underneath: *dbang po drug de re re la' du ma y[o]d / de'i 'khas sems byung du ma yod rtsa*

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Sūnyatāsatptati*, v. 4 (Lindtner 1997, 94): *yod phyir yod pa skye min te / / med phyir med pa skye ma yin / / chos mi mthun phyir yod med min / / skye ba med pas gnas 'gag med /*. See also Apple 2018, 307.

/ ces pas / mu stegs grang pa can pa sngar myi gsal ba cig phyis rkyen gyis gsal bar byas kyi sngar myed pa ma bskyed pas rgyu la 'bras bu yod par 'dod /

nyan thos bye brag du smra ba dus gsum sdzas su 'dod pas 'bras bu ma 'ongs pa'i sa nas yod pa cig da ltar ba'i sar rkyen gyis 'dren pas / rgyu la 'bras *bu* yod par 'dod pas yod pa las [5b3] [326.3] skye bar 'dod de / rgyu ka ba lasogs pa'i dus na 'bras bu khyim yod pa'i phyir de / khyim bya ba'i don du ka ba lasogs pas brgyan pa'i 'bad pa don myed par thal lo / / nyan thos sdo sde ba

dge slong dag nye bar len pa'i phung po 'di dag ni myed pa las byung zhi byung nas yang myed par 'gyur ro /

ces pa'i lung nas rgyu la 'bras bu myed par 'dod /

◇ / sems tsam par rgyu la 'bras bu yod na rgyu'i dus nyid na 'byung ba [5b4] las / mi 'byung bas rgyu kun gzhi'i bag chags las 'byung bas rgyu la 'bras bu myed pa 'dod / / mu stegs bye brag pa 'jig rten zhig pa'i rdul phra rab tha dad du gnas pa la 'jig rten myed pas rgyu la 'bras bu myed par 'dod pas myed pa las skye bar 'dod de / / rgyu la 'bras bu myed pa'i phyir 'bras bu'i ched du rgyu la 'bad pa don myed de bye ma ma til mar 'tshor ba bzhin no / /

/ skyed byed rgyu'i ngos nas dpyad na [5b5] rgyu yod pa las skye 'am / myed pa las skye / yod pa las skye na / rang las skye 'am / gzhan las skye 'am / gnyi ga las skye / rang las skye na de nyid las de nyid skye bas dgos pa myed pa dang / thug pa myed pa dang / sa bon las sa bon nyid skye bas rnyu gu lasogs pa myi skye ba thal bas / mngon sum dang grags pa dang yang 'gal bas rang las skyer myi rgyus ngo / gzhan las skye na /

gzhan ni gzhan la [5b6] ltos te gzhan / gzhan myin gzhan du ga la 'gyur /

/ ces pas / / rang ma grub pas de las ltos pa'i gzhan myi 'grub / / grub du chug / gzhan las gzhan skye na / gzhan du 'dra ba'i phyir thams cad las thams cad skye par 'gyur bas me len las mun pa 'thug po skye bar 'gyur te /

/ rgyu dang 'bras bu gzhan nyid na / / rgyu dang rgyu myin mtshungs par 'gyur/¹¹⁶

ce'o /

/ yang gzhan las skye na / [6a1] \$ / / rtag pa las skye 'am / myi rtag pa las skye / rtag pa las skye na / 'bras bu cig char skyed dam / rim gyis skyid / gcig char skyed na 'bras bu thams cad dus cig du 'byung bas mngon sum gyis bsal / / rim gyis skyed na rgyu la rim gzhan yod pa bzhin du / 'bras bu la yang rim gzhan yod pas rtag pa nyams / / myi rtag pa las skye na / 'das pa las skye 'am / ma 'ongs pa las [6a2] skye 'am / da ltar byung ba las skye / / de la 'das pa 'gags pa zhig 'bral ba rang gi ngo bo myed pas skyer

¹¹⁶ MMK 20.20cd: rgyu dang 'bras bu gzhan nyid na / / rgyu dang rgyu min mtshungs par 'gyur / / (Tib: Tg, tsa 12a4-5); Skt. prthaktvā phalahetvoh syāt tulyo hetur ahetaṇā (La Vallée Poussin (1913) 404,1-2).

myi rung / / ma 'ongs pa ma phyin pa 'skyer myi rung / / 'bras bu skyes zin pa'i rgyu la dgos pa yang myed grags pa dang yang 'gal lo / / da ltar ba las skye na / rgyu 'bras dus mnyam ba las skye 'am / rgyu 'bras med phyir gyur pa las skye / / dus mnyam ba ma skye snyam na / rwa g.yas g.yon [6a3] nam ri 'bigs byed dang gangs can bzhin du gang gis kyang gang la yang pan ma btags pas rgyu 'bras kyi 'brel pa myi 'grub /

/ snga phyir gyur na rgyu snga la 'bras bu 'phyi bas / 'das pa las skye bar 'gyur bas da ltar myi 'grub / / 'bras bu snga la rgyu 'phyi na

/ phyis 'byung phyir na rgyu ma yin / / 'bras bu la yang ga la nges /¹¹⁷ ces pas 'bras bu skyes zin pa'i rgyu la dgos pa myed /

/ sde pa rgyu 'gags la [6a4] [327.4] byogs tsa na 'bras bu skyes ba phyogs pa sprang mda'i mthon dman bzhin du da ltar las skye bar 'dod de / [***] / de' yul dus kyis chod par skye 'am / ma chod pa skye / chod na da ltar ma grub / ma chod na bdag nyid thams cad kyis ma chod dam / phyogs cig gis ma chod / / bdag nyid thams cad kyis ma chod na / 'bras bu thams cad du cig du skye bar 'gyur bas dmigs thang / / phyogs cig gis ma chod [6a5] na / rgyu la yang rgyu la ltas pa'i chod pa cig / 'bras bu la ltas pa'i ma chod pa'i cha gcig dang gnyis / 'bras bu la yang rgyu la ltas pa'i chod pa'i cha cig dang / 'bras bu la ltas pa ma chod pa'i cha cig dang gnyis 'byung bas da ltar las skye ba ma grub pa dang / / cha dang bcas na gcig dang du mas gnod pas **skye pa myed** do / § / gnyi ga la skye bas phyi ma mtshon na sa bon las myu gu skye [6a6] ba'i sa bon *cha nas* dang / zhing sa dang chu 'dud lasogs pa'i gzhan / / nang gi la mtshon pa rkyen bzhi las rnam shes skye ba'i rgyu'i rkyen *ba* dang / rkyen gsum gzhan yin bas gnyi ga las skye zhe na / ◇ / sa bon dang myu gu tha dad yin bas rang las skye ba myi 'grub / gzhan las skye bar 'gyur na de la nyes pa snga ma yod ba'o /

§ / / rgyu myed la rgyu gtan myed dang dman pa rgyur smra ba gnyis las / / dman pa [6b1] rang bzhin dang dge sdug la sogs pa: gzhaq gyis brtags pa'i rgyu dgag pa dbu ma'i gzhung che pa kun nas mang po 'byung / / sgyu gtan myed dang 'dod pa nang gi mtshon na rma bya'i ri mo bkra ba dang/ phyi pad ma'i ge sar dang ri mo la sogs pa rgyu myed las ma byung na sus bya zer ba la /

/ dpe' de nyid kyis gnod pas rgyu myed du 'byung na rgyu myed du 'dra ba'i phyir / kha ta dang bya rog la yang ci'i phyir mi [6b2] 'ong la / ba lu la dang glang ma la yang ci'i phyir mi 'ong / gzhan la ma byung bar rma bya dang pad ma la byung ba'i phyir rgyu las grub pa nges so / /

◇ yang rgyu myed la sun dbyung rin myed par yang bshad /

§ / 'phags pa lhas /¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Old Tibetan translation of Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttisvavṛtti* I:33cd (Gnoli 1960). English translation adapted from Dreyfus 1997, 63; 476, note 8, canonical Tib. *phyis 'byung phyir na rgyu nyid min* / / 'bras bu na yang ga la nges / /. Skt. *paścād bhāvān na hetutoaṃ phale 'py ekāntatā kutah* / /.

¹¹⁸ Citation is actually from Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.35; see Apple 2018, *Jewels of the Middle Way*, note 789.

rgyu myed gzhan la mi ltos phyir / / rtag tu yod pa 'am myed las 'byung
 / / dngos po rnams ni res 'gal zhig / / 'byung la ltos pa las yin no /
 ces gsung pas rgyu myed las skye [6b3] myi rung 'bo / /
 / mu bzhis dpyad kyang skye ba myi bgrub pas / /
 du mas gcig gi dngos ma byed / / du mas du ma'i dngos ma byed dang
 / / gcig gis su mi dngos mi byed / / gcig gis gcig skye las myin /
 / ces pa yin te / rgyu du mas 'bras bu gcig myed de / / rkyen pa bzhi
 las rnam par shes pa skye ba lta bu phyogs su byas mtshon na / / rgyu'i
 rkyen gang nas kyang bshad pa myi 'byung bas len dgos / / de ma thag [6b4]
 pa'i rkyen dang / bdag po'i rkyen dang / dmyigs pa'i rkyen gyi du ma las /
 'bras bu rnams shes gcig skyed do zhe na / / spyir rgyu'i rjes su 'bras bu 'gro
 la nges pa las / rgyu tha dad pa gsum las 'bras bu tha dad myed pa rnam shes
 gcig las ma byung bas / rgyu'i rjes su 'bras bu ma byung bas rjes 'gro 'khrul
 pa'i phyir 'bras bu rgyu myed du 'gyur / rgyu myed na rtag du yod pa 'am
 myed pa 'gyur ro / / yang de gsum gyis [6b5] rnam shes kho na / skyed
 pas nus kyi gzhan myi nus po zhe na / / nam shes las ris 'thun pa ma bskyed
 pa'i phyir na / skad cig gnyis pa la 'gro ba song ba la sogs pa 'gyur'o / /
 rgyu du mas¹¹⁹ 'bras bu du ma skyed pas / de ma thag pa' rkyen gyis rnam
 shes 'byung nus kyi rig pa'i bdag nyid du byas pa dang / bdag po'i rkyen
 dbang pos yul 'dzin pa dang / dmigs pa'i rkyen las de dang 'thun pa skye'
 zhe na [6b6] de rnam dang rnam shes de gcig gam tha dad / cig na chos cag
 nam shes du cig gam / rtogs pa lasogs pa'i chos gsum po cig / / nam shes su
 cig na du mas gcig skyed pa'i skyon du 'gyur ro / / rtogs pa lasogs pas cig
 na / chos gsum po ltar chos can rnam shes kyang du mas 'gyur / du mar
 gyur na skye ba nyid kyang mi 'grub la / du mar myi 'dod pa'i phyir ro /
 / yang rtogs pa lasogs pa [7a1] \$ / / cig na / chos gsum po kho na bskyed
 kyi chos can rnam shes ma skyed pas rnam shes rgyu myed pas skye bar 'gyur
 pa bshad / / tha dad gcig gis gcig bskyed gi nyes pa gzhan du 'gyur ro ◇ / /
 yang na tha dad na rnam shes rgyu myed las 'byung bar 'gyur te / rgyu'i
 byed pa gzhan du¹²⁰ nye bar sbyar bar byas pa'i phyir ro /
 ◇ / 'dus pas skyed do zhe na /¹²¹ rtogs pa lasogs pa re re yang gsum
 gsum 'dus pas skyed pa las [7a2] 'bras bu re re las ma byung rgyu myed las
 'byung bar 'gyur ro / / rgyu gcig gis 'bras bu du ma skyed de /
 dbang po gcig pus 'bras bu rnam shes dang ris 'thun gnyis skyed do zhe
 na¹²² / rgyu la gcig las myed pa'i 'bras bu du ma byung pas rgyu 'bras kyi
 rjes 'gro 'khrul pa'i phyir 'bras bu rgyu myed du 'gyur / / 'bras bu bzhin du
 rgyu yang rnam shes dang ris 'thun pa skyed pas tha dad yod do zhe na / /
 du mas du ma skyed pa'i [7a3] skyon du 'gyur ro / / nyes pa des 'jigs nas

¹¹⁹ Illegible line underneath.

¹²⁰ Textual insertion above line: rtogs pa la tshogs pa 3 pa skyed pas /.

¹²¹ Line underneath reads: tha dad ma yin pa skye de na / tha dad pas mi skye na / tha dad myed pas myi skyed do /.

¹²² Textual insertion above line: ris 'thun skye pa'i dbang po des / rnam shes skye pa'i dbang pa 1 gi tha dad / dad pa ltar na.

rgyu gcig gis 'bras bu gcig skyed de /
 rgyu dbang po lta bu cig gis 'bras bu rnam shes gcig su skyed *nus pa*
 zhe na / / dbang po dang nus pa de gcig gam tha dad / cig na rnam shes
 skyed dam ris 'thun skyed / / rnam shes na rang rang gi ris 'thun ma bskyed
 pa'i phyir 'gro ba long ba lasogs par 'gyur ba'i skyon yod do / / ris 'thun
 skyed na rnam shes myed pa'i ris 'thun myi 'grub la / /*skad dang nyid ma*
 'gro ba [7a4] long ba lasogs pa'i nyes pa nyid kyang 'byung ngo / / tha dad
 na chos kyi grags pas bshad pa dang 'gal la / 'jig rten pa yang myi 'dod do /
 / / gcig pa yang ma yin tha dad pa yang ma yin ba 'dod do zhe na /
 dbang po gcig pus rnam shes skyed par 'gyur bas gzhan la dgos pa myed par
 'gyur / / dus thams cad du rnam shes skyed pa'i nyes pa dang / dus thams
 cad du myi skyed pa'i nyes par yang 'gyur bas / gcig gis gcig skyed [7a5] du
 yang myi rung ngo /
 / / yang na de la rigs pa gzhan myi dgos sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal
 ba *sems kyi chos nyid la bya ste / rgyud bla ma nas
 / chos nyid sems las gzhan pa'i gzhan ni / rang bzhin 'od gsal yin pa
 phyir brjod do
 zhes 'sung *bzod ma nas zhi zhing ma skyes pa / chu rang bzhin gyis
 dag pa lta na / yang dag pa nyid la yang dag par lta ba don 'ba' zhi la dnigs
 pa yin te / gong ma 'ta brtags pa cig la 'di yong / / da lta dpyod dgos pa'i
 dus yin dpyad na 'di'i thog du yong dus yong / dgon pa ba kun la dpyod mi
 [7a6] khom par 'di'i thog du cha gsung / spyā nga yang 'di kho na sgom pa
 'dra / rigs pa de dag du ma 'dus pa'i tshogs bngos na myed de / 'on kyang
 brtan nas skyes pa 'og nas 'byung ba'i spros pa mtha' dag 2 bral ba bsdu /
 rang bzhin myed ces pa sdud /

[Paragraph Three]

[/ de ltar gnyis po ci'i ngo bor yang ma grub cing med tsam na /
 so sor rtogs pa'i shes rab de nyid kyang ma grub ste / dper na shing
 gnyis phan tshun drud pas me byung ba'i rkyen gyis shing gnyis po
 tshig cing med pa'i rjes la / gang gis [D96a1] sreg par byed pa'i me de
 nyid kyang rang zhi ba de bzhin du rang dang spyi'i mtshan nyid kyi
 chos thams cad med par grub tsam na shes rab nyid snang ba med cing
 'od gsal ba ci'i ngo bo yang ma grub pas / [D96a2] bying ba dang rgod
 pa la sogs pa'i skyon du gyur pa thams cad bsal te / bar skabs de shes
 pa cir yang mi rtog / cir yang mi 'dzin / dran pa dang yid la byed pa
 thams cad spangs te / ji srid du mtshan ma'am / rnam par rtog pa'i
 dgra'am / chom rkun ma langs kyi bar du de lta bu la shes pa gnas par
 bya'o / / gang gi tshe ldang bar 'dod na dal bus skyil mo krung bshig
 [D96a3] la langs te / sgyu ma lta bu'i yid kyi lus dang ngag dang yid
 kyi dge ba ci nus kyi bya'o /]

/ de ltar shes bya gzugs can dang gzugs can ma yin pa gnyis rigs pa'i
 ngo: la cir yang ma grub cing myed tsa na ltos pa myed pas rigs pa'i shes la

de nyid kyang mi 'grub ste / shes bya la ltos nas dpyod pa de shes rab yin [7b1] pa las shes bya med par gyur tsa na ci zhig shes pa'i shes rab du 'gyur te / dper na shing mes tshig pa'i shol du me nyid kyang ba lus pa bzhin du / bud shing lta bu'i shes bya'i rang gi mtshan nyid gzugs su rgyu ba nas / rnam pa thams cad mkhyen pa'i mngon du gyi bar dang / spyir'i mtshan nyid bdus byas thams cad myi rtag / de las zag pa dang bcas pa thams cad sdug bsngal / chos thams cad bdag myed / mya ngan las 'das [7b2] pa tham cad zhi ba'am / / spyi'i mtshan nyid chen po chos rnams kyi de bzhin nyid kyis chos thams cad la ma khyab pa myed pa'i chos thams cad yod par grub tsa na me lta bu'i **shes rab de nyid kyang myi 'grub** / yang na so sor rtog pas myed par sgoms kyang chog thug myed du yang mi cha / rigs pa'i shes rab snang na yang rtog pa yin pas 'od myi gsal ba las sdang myed pas '**od gsal lo** / [7b3] snang ba myed pa'i gshad pa [...] ngo bor yang ma snang pa / 'od gsal ba bshad pa spros pa mtha' dag dang bral ba'o / yang na snang ba myed pa'i rgyu mtshan yang '**od gsal ba** / / '**od gsal ba**'i rgyu yang spros pa mtha' dag la bral la / spros pa mtha' dag dang bral ba'i rgyu yang ci'i yongs par ma grub pa ste / / gcig gis gcigs bshad de / tha na stong pa nyid du yang snang ba myed pa / chos nyid gzod [7b4] nas dag pa dngos por 'dzin pas ma bsgribs pas 'od gsal ba / skye 'gags la sogs pa'i [***] spros pa mtha' dag dang bral ba / / dngos po ci yi ngor pa yangs ma grub pa'o / de la go rims ma grub pas bar skabs der ces sbyar ro /

bying ba dang rgod pa gtso cher zhi gnas kyi sgrib pa / **mtshan ma** losogs pa lhag mthong gi sgrib pa yin / de la sems mun [7b5] pa'i rnam par dmigs pa la myi 'dzin par *ces rjes su sgom rim na bkad* gleng de bying na / sangs rgyas rjes su dran pa lasogs pa dang por 'gyur ba'i dngos po bsgoms pas sel te /

da lta gdong bkru pa dang rka pa phyir dbu ba lasogs pa 'dul ba nas bshad pa ltar bya ba man ngag yin / / sems yul la 'phro bas dbang po 'dam bu ltar gzengs mtho ba rgod par gyur na / myi rtag sgoms pa [7b6] lasogs rgyu: mtshan dus dus su bsgom pas nyes pa lnga bsal bar bya / bying ba dang rgod pa gnyi ga'i gnyen por mchog stong pa nyid kho na yin te / stong pa la bying rgod myi 'grub / / myi rtag pas kyang gnyi ga sel ba gsungs / brtag bya'i yul dang / rtog 'khan [= em. mkhan]¹²³ dang so sor rtog pa'i shes rab kyang ma grub pas ci la yang myi rtogs /

gzung bya'i yul nas 'dzin 'khan [8a1] \$\$\$ / / gyi shes pa ma grub pas mtshan ma **cir yang mi 'dzin no** / myi rtog ces pa bshad pa **dran pa dang** ces pa'o / / mi 'dzin ces pa bshad pa **yid ma byed pa thams cad yangs te** ces pa'o / **dran ba** dang dran ba'i yul¹²⁴ dang **yid la byed pa**'i rang gi ngo bo dang yid la byed pa'i yul ma dmyigs pa yin te / bying rgod myed par gsal

¹²³ See Jäschke (1881:53a), *mkhan* is an affix denoting "1. One who knows a thing thoroughly..." Western Tibet usage in *A Grammar of Purik Tibetan* (p. 461) by Marius Zemp.

¹²⁴ Textual insertion above line: *sems kyi bduq pa thams cad ste / gzugs sems gshes pa* ("all obscurations of the mind, and the separation of form and mind").

ba dangs pa dngos por 'dzin pa myed pa cig 'ong pa yin / [8a2] myi rtog pa dang mi 'dzin gyi myi mthun pa rtogs dang mtshan ma'o / / de la yun **ji srid** gnas par bya snyam na mtshan ma ces te / **mtshan ma**¹²⁵ bcu pa¹²⁶ gshad de / rku thabs kyi tshul gyis 'ong bas na mtshan ma'i dgra / / btsan phrogs kyi tshul du 'ong bas na rtog pa'i **chom rkun** ces sbyar ba 'am / gnyi ga la' gnyi ga bya / / myi rtog pa'i ngang de lta bus gnas la de gnas pa myed pa'i gnas [8a3] pa'o / dgra la yang thog du yang ma yin / gnod pa bsal zhing sgom pa yin / ma btus bzhin du sgom pa yang ma yin / langs nas dge ba gzhan byed pa yin / / lus sems la gnod pa byung ba 'am / dmyigs pas dus nas lta na¹²⁷ ma langs kyi bar du de ltar chos thams cad stong pa yin yang sems can rnams kyis ma rtogs pa snying du snying rjes bsgom nas dge rtse sems can gyi ched du sngo ba stong pa snying rje'i snying po can du [8a4] bya ba yin te / rang bzhin myed la snying rje skye ba 'di ga dka' / / de nas dgon pa ba bzhin du dul sus na ba gal che / langs pa'i rjes la sgom chen snyam du yus po che skyi bya bar btags par shor ba bzhin du / rjes la sgyu ma lta bu shes pas lus kyis skor ba ngag gis 'don zlos lasogs pa byed pa / **lus ngag** kun nas blo ba'i rtse ba **yid** yin te / *pha rol du phyin ba bcu tshogs 2* rang gi byang chub chen po'i tshogs dang sems can sbyin pa'i [8a5] [331.5] rgyu'i dge ba pha rol du phyin pa drug du bsdu ba'i dngos po bzhi la 'bad pa yin / / snang yang rjes su ma zhen pa 'di yong du ru ste / yid la byed pa tham cad kyi mnyam bzhas nor ma nor rjes kyis gtan la 'bebs pas / 'gong bya rgyal bu rdo rje zer ba bzhin du mi bya / / de la sbyor ba ji ltar bsgom pa bstan pa yin te /

[Paragraph Four]

[/ de ltar gus pa dang / yun ring ba dang / rgyun ma chad par bsgrubs na skal ba dang ldan pa rnams kyis tshe 'di nyid la bde ba mthong bar 'gyur te / chos thams cad nam mkha'i dkyil lta bur 'bad pa dang [D96a4] rtsol ba med cing rang gi ngang gis lhun gyis grub par mngon sum du byed do / [D96a5] / de'i rjes las thob pas ni chos thams cad sgyu ma la sogs par shes so / / gang gi tshe rdo rje lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin mngon du byas phan chad ni rjes las thob pa yang mi mnga' ste / dus thams cad du mnyam par gzhas pa'o /]

dngos po 'dzin pa ma zad na sdug bsngal mi ldog snyam pas na dkas phul nas / [8a6] [331.6] kun du 'bar pa'i khyim du chud pa chu grang ma dod pa ltar sgom pa la **gus pa** dgos te / rdo la khu tshur ltar gnad du ma song

¹²⁵ Line beneath reads: 'phags pas.

¹²⁶ See *Jewels of the Middle Way*, page 318, "Distinguishing phenomenal marks include the five objects of form and so forth; the three times, persons, and the distinguishing marks of women make ten."

¹²⁷ Illegible interlinear gloss at top of folio 8a: +++'i skabs re byed pa 'di gal che ba yin de myed na phyis zhes pa gras pa bzhin ngan ba [...]

pas **gus pa** myed de / / byis pa rgang pag [= rkang pag?] 'dod pa ltar mi grub par du sgom dgos / ma btub pa nyid gnyen po byas la 'bad / / sangs rgyas ma thob bar du sgom dgos pas **yun ring ba** yin te /¹²⁸ tshe dus 'di ril gyis sgom nus ni da phan chad btub ste lo / ma me mos¹²⁹ me [8b1] yun du ri rab bsams kyang byangs ngan pas bar du bcad cing phyis gzhis slob de byed dgos par song na tsang myi yong bas / gtsub shing la me 'byin pa bzhin du dang por sbyor ba mtshams pa nas *bya ba gzhan gyis* ji drag du 'bad pa yin / [+]_u bsgom phyir mdzad pa kho na bzhin du bsgre mos na / bskal pa grangs pa myed gcig du tshogs lam dang sbyor lam du bsod nams dang ye shes kyi tshogs bsags [+++]₁ rtag tu du lta bu cig gis [8b2] **tshe 'di nyid la bden pa mthong pa yin / bden ba** bya ba de gong brdzun pa mthong ba las / mthong lam skyes pas chos rnams kyi de bzhin nyid mthong ba yin te / / sngags pa kun bar ma do dang zer ba yang de lta bu la zer bas phyag rgya chen po'i dngos grub dang sa tshod mnyam bo yin: / bden pa mthong ba nyid gshad pa **chos thams cad** ces te / dkyil mthas 'jog pa la na mtha' ma grub dkyil ma grub pa ltar chos thams cad [8b3] mtha' dbus myed pa stong phyam gyis rtogs pas / blo sngon du btang ba'i 'bad pa dang / des kun nas bslang ba'i rtsol pa myed pa rgya mtsho chen po la grub po che btang ba bzhin du [...] **lhun kyis grub pa mngon du** byed do / **rtsol ba myed** ci gi bshad pa [...] ces la nas so /

slob dpon zla grags kyi sa dang po nas sa bcu'i bar gyi mnyam gzhas gi chos nyid rtogs pa ma khyad myed par bzhed / / sdud 'grel du [...] mo [8b4] nas sangs rgyas kyi mnyam bzhag la khyad myed par bshad / / sgyu ma'i [...] g.yos sgyu ma'i [...] ces pa dang / dper na sgyu ma'i 'khan po¹³⁰ ces ltar / de'i rjes shes kyi chos thams cad tshogs pa la snang yang rdzas su ma zhen pas **sgyu ma** lta bur dngos su rtogs so / / de nas grangs myed gnyis su mnyam bzhag **rjes thob** zus 'grogs su bsgoms pas slob pa'i lam mthar phyin nas / **rdo rjes** dngos po thams cad par 'joms shi'i tshur dngos gis [8b5] kyang mi gshigs pas bzhin du **rdo rje lta bu**'i ting nge 'dzin gyis dngos por 'dzin *thams* cad ma lus par bcom nas tshur dngos po gang gis kyang mi shigs pa'i yangs pa phun sum tshogs pa'i dus na ye shes phun sum tshogs pa rang 'byung bas / nyi ma sprin dang bral na 'od gzer rang 'byung ba lta bu yin / sangs rgyas kyi sa na **rjes thob** myi bzhed pa bla ma +a va du ti pa'i bzhed pa yin / / gang gi sgom lugs dbu ma sras po lnga dang [8b6] mthun bas / slob dpon zla grags kyi lugs yin / de yang shes bya ma chod pa yod na rtog pa 'byung ba las shes gyi ri la gzugs brnyan tshu 'char ba bzhin du sangs rgyas pas shes bya ji lta ba dang ji snyed pa thams cad bden pa gnyis thugs

¹²⁸ Line underneath reads: ngan song 3 la sogs pa bar du ma bcad par bsgom pa na phra pa mer cig na mthong lam skye pa pa de bar du so / ("Meditating without interruption on the three lower realms, etc., causes the path of vision to arise in an instant.")

¹²⁹ Me ma mur = kukula hell ("burning ashes").

¹³⁰ Insertion underneath: sgyu ma'i rgya ma pas sgyu ma ces pa dang / dper na sgyu ma'i pa'i.

su chud pas rjes thob¹³¹ kyi rtog pa myi 'thad de /
 / gang tshe shes dang she bya dang / / bdag nyid rjes su mi mthong ba
 / /
 / de ni mtshan ma mi 'byung phyir / / gnas pa brtan phyir mi bzhengs
 so /¹³²

[9a1] \$ / nyes pa dang 'byun pas [em.'byung pas] ma nyi bar bzhag pa
 las lta ba'i ched myer pas dus rtag du myi rtog pa'i ngang la mnyam par bzhag
 pa yin te / gnyid log pa 'am 'gog pa la snyoms pa zhugs pa tshod cig du yong
 bar rtsis te /

mkhyen pa'i skad cig gcig pa ni / / shes bya'i dkyil 'khor kun khyab
 phyir /¹³³

[Paragraph Five]

[/ de lta ma yin na byang chub sems dpa' dang khyad par ci yod
 ces bya ba la sogs pa'i rigs pa dang lung 'dir mi brjod do / / gzhan gyi
 don bskal pa grangs med par tshogs bsags pa dang / smon lam btab
 pa'i mthus gdul bya rnams ji ltar 'dod pa bzhin du 'gyur ro / / lung
 dang rigs [D96a6] pa shin tu mang mod kyi / 'dir ma spros so / /]

/ bya ba sa bcu'i dbang phyug kun gyis kyang sprin gseb kyi nyi ma'i
 tshod 'ol spyi cig las myi rtogs pa yin / [9a2] shin du [***] rgyas pa'i mdo
 kun nas /

skye rgyal ba'i sras sangs rgyas dus rtag tu mnyam par bzhag pa'i
 dmyigs pa ci yin / kye rgyal ba'i sras sangs rgyas dus tag tu bzhugs pa'i
 dmyigs pa ni sems can gyi don yin no zhes gsungs so /

/ mos pas 'gro ba las rtog ge'i yul na myi 'dug / zin zin skad byas kyang
 gtan la myi phebs / rjes thob mnga' na *mnyam par bzhag pa ni rigs chos
 thams cad rnam mkha'i dkyil lta bur mthong de' kyang byad rjes thob*
 mnyam bzhag dang rjes thob gnyi ga yod pa'i byang chub [9a3] sems dpa'
 slob [***] pa'i lam pa dang byad myed pa'i phyir 'bras bu ma thob par 'gyur
 ba lasogs pa'i rigs pa dang yul yod pa **ma spros pa** /

/ rjes thob *phrin las* myi mnga' na gzhan don myed par 'gyur ro zhe
 na / sa dang po'i skad cig re re la gong skal pa grang pa myed gcig bsags pa
 dang mnyam pa sogs pa / de nas sa bdun pa'i bar du skad cig re re la de snyed

¹³¹ Insertion underneath illegible.

¹³² Jñānagarbha, *Satyadvayavibhaṅgakārikā* (Eckel 1987, 101, v. 39; Tib., Eckel 1987, 187):
 gang tshe shes dang shes bya dang / / bdag nyid rjes su mi mthong ba / / de ni mtshan
 ma mi 'byung phyir / / gnas pa brtan phyir mi bzheng so / /. Prajñāmukti citation dif-
 fers: gang tshe shes dang shes bya dag / / bdag nyid rjes su mi mthong bas / / de tshe
 mtshan ma mi 'byung phyir / / gnas pa brten phyir mi bzhengs so / /. Jñānagarbha, vs.
 39 (Eckel 1987:101). See Apple 2018, 286.

¹³³ Jñānagarbha, *Satyadvayavibhaṅgakārikā* (Eckel 1987, 102, v. 2ab; Tib., Eckel 1987,
 188); Candrakīrti, MA 11.11 (Poussin 1912, 356): ro mnyam nyid du yang dag thugs
 su chud par mdzad gyur na / / mkhyen bzang khyod kyis skad cig gis ni shes bya thugs
 su chud / (Huntington 1989, 190).

sog / brgyad pa'i skad cig dang po la bdun pa man chad [9a4] [333.4] kyi grangs myed [***] gnyis su bsags pa dang mnyam bsog la / de bzhin du 'bras bu'i sa gsum ka la sog / / rdo rje lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin skyes pa'i skad cig ma de la de gong thams cad dang mnyam ba sog

/ de ltar **tshogs bsags pa** dang / sems can gyi don 'bad rtsol myed par lhun gyis grub par 'byung bar **smon lam btab pa'i mthus** yid bzhin gyi nor bu rin po che chen por ltar sems can gyi don ji ltar 'dod pa bzhin [9a5] 'byung ba sems can *thams cad* skad cig [***] ma gcig la 'dul ba'i skal ba yod kyang sang rgyas kyi sa dus der sleb pa yin / / rjes thob myi mnga' byas pas lan cig shes bya ba mkhyen / de nas nag tings gis ma song / slob pa'i lam bzhin du 'bad rtsol sngon du gtang myi dgos par thams cad lhun grub du 'byung ba yin /

dge bshes ston pa la sangs rgyas kyi sa zhu thug byas pa la / sangs rgyas la ye shes kyi rgyun mi mnga' [9b1] na yang rung / [***] mnga' na' rung / rjes thob myi mnga' yang rung / sems can gyi don la rjes thob mnga' ba dang blon du btang pa dang khyad myed par 'byung ba yin / / de'i gnad kas dang sa smon pa byang chub du sems bskyed pa'i dus na / / sems can thams cad mgron du gnyer nas sbyangs pa'i phan yon yin / rang skyabs su par re ba'i dus na de ltar shes par bya / / rang sems can gyi don bya bar 'dod na yang de ltar shes par gyis [9b2] gsung skad / [***] de yang yin te / kun rdzob du chos thams cad tshu rol mthong ba'i lasogs la / / bden ba gnyis kyi **lung rigs** yod do cog nas / 'phrin las kyi bar du **lung rigs** shin du bas yod de gzhung chung pas 'dir **ma spros pa** yin te /

'dis rtag thub pa'i don du bstan pa yang yin / / rnal 'byor du sgom pa la don 'di tshe las myed / / yi ge 3 yang dang po bden ba gnyis¹³⁴ / [9b3] ji tsam zhi [***] yin pa nas / tha na sangs rgyas kyi 'phrin las kyi bar du thams cad tshang bar bshad pas bstan 'chos chen por bzhugs pa yin gsung / / / bla ma'i gsungs ba gces spras kyis / / dbu ma'i man ngag tig chung byas / / pu to yab sras lugs yin te / / don la brtags na brtag yang thug / / dbu ma'i man ngag gi bshad pa rdzogs so /

Appendix I. An example of Atiśa's Non-Canonical Instructions on the Middle Way

The following work entitled *Jo bo'i gdams pa thun mong ma yin pa* ("The Uncommon Instructions of the Princely-Lord [Atiśa]") is a written non-canonical record of a special teaching that Atiśa gave on Madhyamaka while in Tibet. The special instructions succinctly prescribe the practice of meditation for a Mādhyamika. The work is comparable in content to the canonical version of Atiśa's *Special Instructions on the*

¹³⁴ Interlinear gloss: rjes thob kyi ye shes bzhed pas ye shes rgyun yang bzhed pa slob dpon thogs myed kyi gzhung nas gsungs / rjes thob kyi ye shes myi bzhed pa la mnyam par bzhag pa'i dus na ye shes kyi rgyun bzhed pa +a ti sha'i 'di yin zhes gsungs /.

Middle Way (Madhyamakopadeśa) and its commentaries. The content is parallel to the *Middle Way Special Instructions for Cultivating All the Qualities in the Scriptures* (translated in Apple 2019, 175-79).

Tibetan	English
[296] <i>na mo gu ru / mkhas pa chen po dpal mar me mdzad ye shes kyis sde snod kyi chos thams cad kyi don bdsus te sgom pa ni dbu ma'i man ngag 'di yin te / thog mar 'khor</i>	[296] Homage to the Guru! The great scholar, glorious <i>Mar me mdzad ye shes</i> (Dīpaṃkaraśrīñāna), having gathered the meaning of all the doctrinal teachings, practiced them. This is the essential instruction of the Middle Way (<i>madhyamaka</i>). First, regarding the phenomena of cyclic existence (<i>saṃsāra</i>)
[297] <i>'das kyi chos kun rdzob tub den pas stong pa'i rten 'bral rgyu 'bras mi bslu ba sgyu ma lta bu dang / don dam spros bral nam mkha'i dkyil ltar stong pa nyid du thos bsam gis thag chod par byas la /</i> <i>sgom pa'i dus su sbyor dngos rjes gsum gyis nyams sub lang ste / dang po ni stan bde ba la ting nge 'dzing gyi spyod lam gyis 'dug la / lha dang bla ma la gsol bag dab / lus sems gtan la phab la /</i> <i>bdag gis 'khor ba thog med nas da lta'i bar du / srid rtse nas mnar med du 'khyams te skye shi'i 'dor len thug med cig byas te</i>	and transcendence (<i>nirvāṇa</i>), ascertain through study and contemplation that all conventional truths (<i>saṃvṛtisatya</i>) are empty (<i>śūnyatā</i>) of inherent existence, that dependent arising (<i>pratītyasamutpāda</i>), cause and effect are unfailing, and [all phenomena] are like illusions (<i>māyā</i>). Ultimately all things are ascertained as unelaborated emptiness like the center of space. When practicing meditation (<i>bhāvanā</i>), cultivate experience through the three [aspects]: the preliminary practices, the main practice, and the concluding practice. First, sit comfortably in a posture conducive to meditative absorption (<i>samādhi</i>), supplicate the gods and spiritual teachers, settle the body, and reflect thus: "From beginningless time until now, I have wandered in cyclic existence (<i>saṃsāra</i>) from Peak of

/ gnas 'dir ma skyes bya ba med / groggs 'di dang ma 'groggs bya ba med / zas 'di ma zos bya ba med / sdug bsngal 'di ma myong bya ba med / da yang 'khor ba 'di ma bzlog na mtha' med du 'khyam dgos / de'i rgyu rnam rtog yin te srid pa'i sa bon rnam shes te zhes gsungs / rnam rtog thams cad bden par 'dzin pa la 'byung / de yang phyi rol pa nas nang pa dbu ma rigs grub kyi bar gyi 'dod pa thams cad rtogs pas btags pa yin te / slob dpon klu sgrub zhabs kyi lam las ni / / phyi rol gyur la zhi ba'i thabs med do zhes gsungs / mdo las kyang byang chub sems dpa'i lam mdor bsdus pa ni gnyis te / thabs dang shes rab bo zhes gsungs / thabs med na nyan thos su lhung / shes rab med na 'khor bar 'khyams pas de gnyis ka tshang dgos / de yang thog mar thabs sgom pa gal che la / thabs kyi gtso bo byang chub kyi sems yin te / byang chub sems med rgyal 'byung 'jig rten yod med ces so / /	Existence to Avīci Hell undertak- ing endless rebirths and deaths. There is no place where I have not been born. There is no companion I have not associated with. There is no food I have not eaten. There is no suffering I have not experi- enced. If I do not reverse this cycle of existence (<i>saṃsāra</i>) now, I will have to wander endlessly." Its cause is conceptual thought (<i>vikalpa</i>); the seed of existence is consciousness (<i>vijñāna</i>," as it is said. All conceptual thoughts (<i>vikalpa</i>) arise from grasping at things as truly existent. Moreover, all assertions, from outsider [non-Buddhists] up through Buddhist Mādhyamikas who establish through reasoning, are imputations by thought. It is taught that, "There is no means of finding peace for those outside the system of the Ācārya Nāgār- juna."¹³⁵ In the <i>sūtras</i> also, it is said, "The path of a <i>bodhisattva</i> is con- densed into two [aspects]: method (<i>upāya</i>) and wisdom (<i>prajñā</i>)." Without method, one falls into the <i>śrāvaka</i> path; without wisdom, one wanders in cyclic existence; There- fore, one must be endowed with both method and wisdom. Moreo- ver, at the beginning it is very im- portant to meditate on method, and the primary method is the awakening mind. It is said that,
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¹³⁵ Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*, 6.79ab.

<i>thog mar skyabs 'gro lang sum byas la / byams snying rje byang chub kyi sems sgom ste / sems can thams chad kyi bdag gi ma byas de gang gi ltor ma nyal ba'i sems can re yang med ces so / / ma byas drin gyis phan btags gnod pa las skyabs pa'i drin can yin pas / 'di rnams bde ba dang ldan par gyur cig snyam pa'i by- ams pa sgom / sdug bsngal dang bral bar gyur cig snyam pa'i snying rje sgom / de'i ched du sangs rgyas thob par bya snyam pa'i sgom pa'i sems dang / de'i ched du tshogs bsags shing sgrib pa sbyangs / de'i thabs su dbu ma bsgom snyam du sgom pa 'di yan chad</i>	"Without the awakening mind, Victorious Ones will not occur in this world."¹³⁶ First, take refuge (<i>śaraṇa</i>) and generate aspiration [three times], then cultivate loving-kindness (<i>maitrī</i>), compassion (<i>karuṇā</i>), and the resolution for awakening (<i>bo-dhicitta</i>), thinking: "There is no sentient being (<i>sattva</i>) among all sentient beings (<i>sattva</i>) who has not been my mother, where have I not slept in their womb." Since [all beings] have shown kindness by benefiting [me] with their kindness and protecting [me] from harm, cultivate loving-kindness (<i>maitrī</i>) with the thought, "May these beings have happiness." Cultivate compassion (<i>karuṇā</i>) with the thought, "May they be free from suffering." For that purpose, generate the thought of practicing meditation (<i>bhāvanā</i>) with the intention, "May I attain buddhahood for their sake." For that purpose, accumulate merit and purify obscurations. Cultivate [the view of] the Middle Way (<i>madhyamaka</i>) as a method for that purpose.
[p.298] <i>thabs sgom pa yin / shes rab sgom pa ni shes bya la rigs pas dpyad nas bsgoms te / dngos po ni gnyis te gzugs can dang gzugs can ma yin pa'o zhes pas / jo bo'i gsungs gis gcig dang du bral kho na sgom pa la bde gsung / gzugs can snang ba</i>	It is the practice of skillful means. Practicing wisdom involves contemplating phenomena by investigating them with reason. Since it is said that, "There are two kinds of entities, material and non-material," Prince-Lord Atiśa taught, "It is easy to meditate on

¹³⁶ Ratnagaṇasamcayagāthā 5. 5c.

*thams cad shes rab kyis phyed bas
mtshar rdul phran la thug la / de
yang phyogs cha'i phyed na stong
thal gyis 'gro la de thams cad
mtshon pa yin te / gzugs kyid de
bzhi nyer shes na chos thams cad
kyid mdo dang rgyas pa shes par
'gyur ro zhes gsungs /*

*gzugs can ma yin pa sems
yin te / nang du sems la bltas na
'das pa 'gags / ma 'ongs pa ma
skyes / da ltar ba ma grub ste mdo
las 'das pa ni zad pa'i mtshan
nyid do / / ma 'ongs pa ni ma thob
pa'o / / da ltar gyid sems ni 'di ltar
brtag dka' ste gsungs pa ni brtags
kyang mi rnyed pa ste / shes rab
kyis ni phung po'i gting mi rnyed
ces gsungs / dbyibs su ma grub /
kha dog ma grub / ngo bor grub /
gnas med pas te /*

*'od bsrung sems ni sangs
rgyas kyis kyang ma gzigs mi
gzigs gzigs par mi 'gyur ro zhes
gsungs / de ltar sems la sems kyis
bltas pas ma rnyed pa'i ngang la
lhan gyis 'jog par gda' /*

*de skad du sems ni kun du
btsal na mi rnyed do zhes gsungs
/ bral bzhi yul cir yang ma grub
pas yul can sems mi 'grub ste /*

only the reasoning of being free from one and the many.¹³⁷ When all appearances that are form (*gzugs can snang ba thams cad*) are divided by wisdom, they ultimately come down to particles (*rdul phran*). And even those, when divided into directional parts, become empty. All of that is a representation. It is said, "If one truly understands the suchness of form, one will understand the essence and elaboration of all dharmas."

The non-material is the mind. Within the mind, the past has disappeared. The future has not yet come to exist, and the present is not established. A sūtra states that the past has the characteristic of being extinguished. The future is not attained. The mind of the present is difficult to examine. Even analysis cannot be found. Wisdom does not find a foothold among the aggregates. Form is not established. Color is not established. There is no identifiable essence. Things are baseless.

"Kāśyapa, the mind has not been seen, is not seen, and will not be seen by the Buddha."¹³⁸

In this way, one posits the condition of not finding when seeing the mind with the mind.

As it is said,

"When thoroughly examining the mind it cannot be found, since anything at all is not established, the subjective mind is not

¹³⁷ Among the four reasons taught by Atiśa, this refers to the reason of being neither one nor many (*gcig du bral gyi gtan tshigs, ekāṇekaviyogahetu*).

¹³⁸ *Kāśyapaparivarta* §98 (Vorobyova–Desyatovskaya 2002, 35).

<i>mdo las shing gnyis drud pa las ni me 'byung ste / / 'byung po de yis de nyid sreg pa ltar / / de bzhin shes rab dbang po skyes nas kyang / / skyes pa de yis de nyid sreg par byed ces gsungs so /</i> <i>/ shing zad na me mi 'byung ba ltar dpyad bya'i yul dang dpyod byed blo gnyis zhi ba'i ngang la gnas pa de chos nyid kyis 'byung ste</i> <i>/ dpyad bya rnam par dpyad byas na / / rnam dpyod la ni rten yod min / / rten med phyir na mi 'byung ste / / de yang mya ngan 'das par brjod ces so / /</i> <i>de lta bas na spros pa bcad pas mi rtog pa rang babs su skye ba yin gsung / de'i don rtog med kyi ngang la gsal le sing nge 'jog pa'i tshe rnam rtog byung na bshig cing bshig cing sgoms / goms nas thun je ring je ring du bsgom pa man ngag yin gsungs /</i>	established either.” As it is said in the <i>sūtra</i>: “Just as when rubbing two sticks together, fire arises, and then the very fire is incinerated, likewise, although insight is produced from the faculties, that very insight which is produced is incinerated.”¹³⁹ When the wood is exhausted, fire does not arise. Likewise, when the object of investigation and the investigating intellect both abide in a state of quiescence, that arises from the nature of reality (<i>chos nyid</i>). When the object to be investigated has been investigated, there exists no objective support for the investigating mind. Because there does not exist an objective support, the mind does arise, and that is called <i>nirvāṇa</i>.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, it is said that by cutting off elaboration, non-conceptualization arises spontaneously. The meaning of that is, when one places [the mind] in a clear and distinct state of non-conceptuality, if conceptual thoughts arise, one should repeatedly break them down and meditate. It is said that the instruction (<i>man-ngag</i>) is to meditate in sessions that become progressively longer as one becomes accustomed [to the practice].
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¹³⁹ *Kāśyapaparivarta* ('od srung gi le'u, Toh 87, *dkon brtsegs*, vol. *cha*, 133a.7–133b.1). Staël-Holstein 1977 [1926], 102, §69.

¹⁴⁰ *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.111, Williams (1998, 15) translation.

<i>brtan pa [p.299] thob nas de las ldog gin yang sbyong bar gda' / rkyen gyis bying rgod du gyur na de'i rgyu spang / rang shugs kyis byed na bsgrim / rgod na glod par gda' /</i> <i>mnyam bzhag las langs nas rjes thob tu 'khor 'das thams cad bden stong sgyu ma lta bur shes par byas la mi dge ba phra ba nas spongs / dge ba phra ba nas sgrub pa gal che /</i> <i>mnyam rjes gnyis kyang dang po re 'jog tu sgoms / goms nas zung 'jug tu bsgom dgos te / mi'i rkang pa dang bya'i gshog pa dang 'dra ba yin gsungs /</i> <i>de ltar drag stong rig stong snang stong la bsblabs pas / skal pa dang ldan pa rnams kyis tshe 'di la bden pa mthong bar 'gyur / 'di la mthong yang phyi ma la nges par mthong bar bzhi brgya pa las bshad gsungs /</i> <i>ting nge 'dzin rgyal po las /</i>	Once stability is attained, it is also necessary to train in reversing from that state [of stability]. If affected by sinking and excitement due to circumstances, abandon their cause. If it arises from one's own momentum, restrain it. If excitement arises, relax. Having arisen from meditative equipoise (<i>mnyam bzhag</i>), in the post-meditation period (<i>rjes thob</i>), recognize all of cyclic existence (<i>saṃsāra</i>) and <i>nirvāṇa</i> as being like an illusion, empty of inherent existence (<i>śūnyatā</i>). Abandon even subtle unwholesome actions (<i>akuśala</i>). Performing even subtle wholesome actions (<i>kuśala</i>) is crucial. Initially, meditate on meditative equipoise (<i>mnyam bzhag</i>) and subsequent attainment (<i>rjes thob</i>) separately. Having become accustomed to this, one must meditate on their union (<i>zung 'jug</i>), for it is said to be like a person's legs and a bird's wings. By training in this way in apparent emptiness (<i>drag stong</i>), awareness emptiness (<i>rig stong</i>), and appearance emptiness (<i>snang stong</i>), those with good fortune will see reality in this lifetime. Even if not perceiving this, one will definitely perceive it in future lifetimes as explained from [Āryadeva's] <i>Four Hundred Verses</i> (<i>Catūṣātaka</i>). From the <i>King of Samādhi Sūtra</i>: When one understands the basic nature of things, then after a long time, one will become the chief of bipeds.
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<i>chos kyi rang bzhin zhi gang gang shes pa / / ring po mi thogs skad gnyis gtso bor 'gyur zhes gsungs so</i> <i>/ / jo bo'i gdam ngag thun mong ma yin pa rdzogs so // //</i>	The uncommon instructions of the Princely-Lord [Atiśa] are completed.
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Symbols used in the Transliteration

I	reversed <i>gi-gu</i>
M	<i>anusvāra</i>
s +ho	<i>sa</i> with subscribed <i>ha</i> plus <i>na-ro</i> vowel sign.
\$	page initial sign head <i>mgo-yig</i>
:	<i>tsheg</i> written with two dots
abc	insertions: letter, word, or phrase written below the line
abc	letters crossed-out by copyist
[abc]xxx	scribal notation written above the line
[#a#]	page and line number
[abc]	supplements; letter illegible or disappeared, but supplied by editor
[...]	illegible letters; number unknown
[---]	illegible letters; number known
[+++]	illegible letters above line; number unknown
[***]	blank space; letters unknown
◇	Scribal notation
§	<i>sbrul shad</i> (Stroke placed at a new section within the Tibetan text)

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The Formation and Fragmentation of the Pakmodrupa Tradition: Authority, Conflict, and Politicization in the Kagyu Lineage

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Introduction

The Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism is traditionally categorized into two main branches: the "Dagpo Kagyu," which traces its lineage back to Gampopa and the Indian Mahāsid-dha Naropa, and the "Shangpa Kagyu," which descends from Niguma. Within the Dagpo Kagyu, Gampopa (Sgam po pa, 1079–1153) established a cohesive monastic community that later diversified into various sub-schools. Following Gampopa, his prominent disciples spread the Kagyu teachings, leading to the emergence of the "Four Great" lineages: Karma (Karma Kamtsang), Barom, Tsalpa, and Pakdru (Pakmodrupa), along with several "eight minor" Kagyu subsects (che bzhi chung brgyad), all ultimately linked to the disciples of Pakmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo. The Pakdru Kagyu (phag mo gru pa bka' brgyud), named after Gampopa's disciple Pakmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo (1110–1170), became a significant tradition within the Dagpo Kagyu. Known in Tibetan as Lang Pakmodrupa, this lineage eventually gave rise to a powerful political entity, the Pakmodrupa dynasty (1354–1434), with its origins rooted in the life of Pakmodrupa in the 12th century and the subsequent schism after his death.

This paper explores the development of the Pakdru Kagyu tradition, emphasizing issues of authority and conflict in its early history. It highlights Pakmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo's role as a charismatic founder, including his legendary demonstrations of occult knowledge, and examines the division between his two main successors, Jigten Sumgön and Taklung Thangpa. Special focus is placed on the disputed handling of Pakmodrupa's relics (his stupa) and how this conflict led to the establishment of distinct institutions: the Drikung ('bri gung) and Taklung (stag lung) Kagyu sub-schools. The paper outlines how Jigten Sumgön's Drikung Kagyu gained spiritual and secular prominence in east-central Tibet, reaching its peak before the dominance of the Sakya school under Mongol influence. Throughout the discussion, the construction of religious authority is emphasized, illustrating how hagiographic texts (rnam thar) and ritual objects (monastic stupas, relic-

vessels) were used to validate lineage claims.

The sources for this study include Tibetan hagiographies of Pakmodrupa, Jigten Sumgön, Taklung Thangpa and *The Blue Annals* (Deb ther sngon po), a major Tibetan chronological religious history composed by Go Lotsāwa Zhonnu Pel, records the full lineage of the Dagpo Kagyu sects. as well as secondary English-language scholarship (e.g., David Jackson, Matthew Kapstein, Dan Martin). Tibetan terms and names are presented in Wylie transliteration, with relevant Tibetan quotations included for clarity. The analysis is contextualized within the sectarian politics of Tibet, demonstrating how religious influence was closely linked to worldly power, making symbols of sanctity sources of contention among followers and patrons. The Pakmodrupa case thus provides valuable insights into the politics of reincarnate-lineage formation, the significance of relic veneration, and the narrative construction of charismatic authority within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

The Pakdru Kagyu and Its Founder

Pakmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo (1110–1170), a disciple of Gampopa, is revered as the founder of a significant branch of the Kagyu tradition. He was a Tibetan monk from the Neudong region who initially studied under Sakya masters, including Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, before moving to southern Tibet in the 1150s to learn from Gampopa. Gampopa recognized his spiritual achievements and, as the story goes, praised his commitment by presenting him with a bowl of tea/millet and imparting the complete Mahāmudrā teachings. Pakmodrupa was known for his strict adherence to the Vinaya, even participating in alms rounds, which contributed to his reputation for purity. In 1158, he established a modest hermitage at Pakmodru in Neudong, which eventually developed into a monastery named Densatil,¹ the name literally means the "Main Seat" or "Core Seat," symbolizing its status as the central seat of the lineage. This monastery became the center of the Pakmodrupa (Pakdru) Kagyu school, which is recognized as one of the "four great" Dagpo Kagyu lineages in Tibet.² While hagiography presents Pakmodrupa's journey as a smooth progression, his initial studies with Sakya masters, his later shift to Gampopa, and the combination of strict Vinaya with comprehensive Mahāmudrā teachings—suggest a more complex and strategic religious environment. His Sakya

¹ Jean-Luc Estournel, "Densatil Monastery: The Commemorative Stupas of the Lang/Pakmodrupa Dynasty," *Project Himalayan Art*, Rubin Museum of Art, 2023, <http://rubinmuseum.org/projecthimalayanart/essays/densatil-monastery>.

² Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*, ed. Kurtis Schaeffer (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), pp. 41–46.

training did not contradict his Kagyu identity; rather, it provided him with a wider range of resources to draw upon later. This anticipates a pragmatic and situational use of multiple scholastic and lineage resources.

The story about the tea/millet bowl and the focus on alms rounds serve as rhetorical tools for establishing legitimacy: they frame tantric charisma within a context of public purity, making holiness understandable to lay supporters and local elites. Similarly, the conversion of a simple hermitage at Pakmodru into Densatil transforms geography into memory—subsequent monumentalization (such as stupas and relic worship) enhances the founder's authority and solidifies patronage networks. Lastly, categorizing Pakmodrupa's school as one of the "four great" Dagpo Kagyu lineages is a retrospective classification that oversimplifies the more complicated twelfth-century context; Pakmodrupa's lineage, therefore, should be seen not simply as one branch within a stable school, but as a charismatic and institutional nexus from which several later Kagyu traditions constructed their authority.

Charismatic Authority of Pakmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo

In Tibetan historiography, Pakmodrupa is depicted not just as a scholar but as an exceptional siddha. His biography (*rnam thar*) and subsequent compilations are filled with miracle stories that emphasize his charisma. For instance, The biography records that Pakmodrupa used miracles to heal the sick and possessed the ability to know what was happening in other places. In biographical texts of the early Pakmodrupa Kagyu school, Pakmodrupa's religious authority rested not only on the profundity of his teachings but more fundamentally on his prescience of local calamities and absolute mastery over his physical form. According to his hagiography, Pakmodrupa once employed the doctrine of dependent origination (*rten 'brel*) to manifest supernatural powers and gauge the spiritual attainment of his disciple Taklung Thangpa.³ The texts frame dependent origination not merely as a philosophical understanding, but also concretely as a technique capable of intervening in physical ailments. Within their historical context, such narratives serve to entrench the guru's central status as a subduer of both natural and transcendent forces.

³ Pelchen Chokyi Yeshe, and Pakmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo. "Phag mo gru pa'i rnam thar gzi brjid 'bar ba'i sgron me." 'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo, edited by Ra se dkon mchog rgya mtsho and 'Bri gung a mgon rin po che, vol. 15, [*'Bri gung mthil dgon*], 2004, p. 20. Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC), purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW00IW501203_3FE5C1, p. 51.

Concurrently, the texts establish an unbreakable causal link between illness and sectarian discipline. When recording the deaths of several monks who contracted smallpox ('brum nad) while traveling abroad, Pakmodrupa explicitly states that the root of this tragedy lay not in flawed meditative realization, but in their transgression against the guru's commands (bla ma'i bka' las 'das pa).⁴ This hagiographical rhetoric, which frames loss of life as a direct consequence of disobedience, effectively constructed an uncompromising culture of Guru Authority among the early devotees: to stray from the guru's protection and spiritual blessings is to incur dual obstacles to worldly survival and spiritual liberation. Such narratives of foresight, predictions of calamities, and interpretations of omens were common themes that legitimized Pakmodrupa's authority and the sacred lineage he represented.

In addition to these miraculous events, Pakmodrupa's life is characterized by profound devotion. Buddhist bibliographies indicate that he constructed stupas, regularly performed Dharma rituals, and ultimately achieved realization. On a literal level, he was acknowledged as a disciple of esteemed teachers and a strict follower of the Vinaya.⁵ However, the legends serve a symbolic function: by portraying him as a powerful "siddha king" with clairvoyant abilities, the Pakdru Kagyu tradition gained prestige and momentum. His charisma drew many followers, out of the eight hundred monks, five hundred held canopies.⁶ Yet, among them, Pakmodrupa stated that his successor would not be someone with an honorary umbrella, but "an upasaka who had attained the tenth level of a bodhisattva," meaning a fully realized lay yogin.⁷ This cryptic remark hinted at his choice of Jigten Sumgön (a layman) as his heir, dismissing the notion that his lineage would be passed to a purely monastic figure of rank. Such themes – a saint among saints and a highly qualified successor – firmly established the Pakmodrupa tradition on a foundation of mystical authority.

Disciples and the Stupa Dispute

Pakmodrupa's primary disciples in Ü were Jigten Sumgön (Jig rten gsum mgon, 1143–1217) and Taklung Thangpa Tashi Pel (Stag lung

⁴ *Ib.*, pp. 56–57.

⁵ Dan Martin, "Pakmodrupa Dorje Gyelpo," Treasury of Lives, accessed July 01, 2026, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Pakmodrupa-Dorje-Gyelpo/2539>.

⁶ 'Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*, 2 vols. (Chengdu: Sichuan Minzu Press, 1984), vol. 2, p. 662.

⁷ Gyalwang Rinchen Püntso, and Won Sherab Jungne. sPyan snga 'bri gung gling pa dang 'bri gung skyob pa 'jig rten mgon po'i rnam thar. Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC), purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW8LS37368. Accessed 1 July 2026. [BDRC bdr:MW8LS37368], p. 21.

thang pa bkra shis dpal, 1142–1210). Both hailed from the Kham region of eastern Tibet and began their studies with Pakmodrupa later in life. Unlike other lesser disciples who established smaller Kagyu lineages, these two are particularly highlighted in the tradition. Pakmodrupa recognized Taklung Thangpa as the reincarnation of the Kadampa master Jeyülwa Zhönu Ö (1075–1138) and encouraged him to create monasteries;⁸ he founded Taklung Monastery in northeast Lhasa in 1180. Jigten Sumgön, on the other hand, received the complete Kagyu teachings and was acknowledged as the main heir. After Pakmodrupa's passing in 1170, it is said that Jigten Sumgön received a final blessing from his master in a vision. He then donated all his belongings to build a grand memorial stupa at Densatil in honor of his guru, which housed Pakmodrupa's relics, especially his cremated heart, and became known as the Tashi Wobar ("Radiating Light of Auspiciousness") stupa.⁹ Pakmodrupa's acknowledgment of Taklung Thangpa as a Kadampa reincarnation appears more as a strategic effort at ecumenism rather than a genuine doctrinal integration. It represents a purposeful blending of Kadampa's moral authority with the esteemed yogic reputation of Kagyu to validate new institutions such as Taklung Monastery. In contrast, the narrative surrounding Jigten Sumgön, along with the heart-relic and the early Tashi Wobar stupa at Densatil, illustrates the politics of relics—transforming succession claims into a tangible pilgrimage site that could draw in both financial support and labor.

The fate of Pakmodrupa's relics and the stupa led to a conflict between Jigten Sumgön and Taklung Thangpa. After Pakmodrupa's cremation, Jigten Sumgön quickly took steps to protect his teacher's remains. According to Jean-Luc Estournel's reconstruction history of Densatil states that the first of the great stupas was constructed in 1170 to hold "the heart of Pakmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo," which astonishingly remained whole after cremation.¹⁰ Jigten Sumgön placed this relic and other sacred items inside the stupa, thereby embedding his guru's blessing in the new monastery. However, by this time, Taklung Thangpa had already left Densatil to establish Taklung Monastery in 1180.¹¹ Some later accounts suggest that Taklung Thangpa felt sad over losing control of Pakmodrupa's relics to Jigten Sumgön. Although the

⁸ Taglung Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. sTag lung thang pa bkra shis dpal gyi rnam thar. sGom lha gser khang. Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC), purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW1PD44712. Accessed 2 July 2026. [BDRC bdr:MW1PD44712], p. 10b.

⁹ 'Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 2, pp. 663, 707, 712.

¹⁰ Jean-Luc Estournel, "Densatil Monastery: The Commemorative Stupas of the Lang/Pakmodrupa Dynasty," *Project Himalayan Art*, Rubin Museum of Art, 2023, <http://rubinmuseum.org/projecthimalayanart/essays/densatil-monastery>.

¹¹ 'Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 2, pp. 704, 712, 724.

textual evidence is limited, the tradition recalls a "stupa dispute," indicating a disagreement over the rightful ownership of the master's remains and the authority they represented.

Regardless of the specific details, the result was a distinct division. Jigten Sumgön, as the guardian of the stupa at Densatil, went on to create his own branch (Drikung Kagyu) from that base, while Taklung Thangpa established a separate Taklung Kagyu centered around his new monastery in the north.¹² The Blue Annals commentary notes that by the early 13th century, there was "apparent tension between the Taklung and Drikung branches" of the Kagyu lineage.¹³ Although both schools continued to claim Pakmodrupa's legacy, they did so independently. Symbolically, the monks of Drikung held the physical remains of Pakmodrupa (later returned it to Densatil) and the lineage throne, while Taklung developed its own ritual center and followers.

In summary, the charismatic authority of Pakmodrupa Dorje Gyalpo was transmitted through two sets of hagiographies (those of Jigten Sumgön and Taklung Thangpa) and was ritualized through the fate of relics and stupas. The conflict over these relics was not just personal but also institutional: controlling Pakmodrupa's stupa meant inheriting his legacy. This reallocation of sacred objects signified the politicization of succession. While tradition identifies these two as the main disciples of Pakmodrupa in Ü, their narratives also illustrate how authority was transmitted across different regions and contexts. Both individuals originated from Kham but established their influence in Ü, indicating that charisma and support could be relocated through networks rather than being tied to one's birthplace. Pakmodrupa's acknowledgment of Taklung Thangpa as a Kadampa reincarnation serves as a strategic link between the moral authority of the Kadampa and the yogic prestige of the Kagyu, positioning new foundations like Taklung not as innovations but as restorations. The narrative surrounding Jigten Sumgön and the Densatil reliquary also implies that the possession of relics—particularly the cremated heart—was an assertion of succession: the stupa embodied memory, drew pilgrimage economies, and supported institutional development. Lastly, the focus on two "primary" heirs may reflect later historical accounts that streamlined a more diverse group of disciples into a more straightforward lineage.

¹² *Ib.*, pp. 704, 724.

¹³ *Ib.*, pp. 672–673.

Institutional Differentiation: Drikung versus Taklung Kagyu

The division among the disciples led to the formation of two distinct Kagyu sub-traditions. Jigten Sumgön and his followers became known as the Drikung Kagyu ('Bri gung bka' brgyud), named after Drikung Thil Monastery located to the east of Lhasa, while Taklung Thangpa's lineage was referred to as the Taklung Kagyu (Stag lung bka' brgyud). Both are classified as part of the "eight minor" Kagyu lineages that trace their origins back to Pakmodrupa. The Drikung Kagyu was established in 1179 when Jigten Sumgön, after a brief tenure as abbot of Densatil (1177–1179), left to found Drikung Thil Monastery in Ü (central Tibet). The Taklung Kagyu traces its beginnings to Taklung Thangpa's founding of Taklung Monastery in 1180.¹⁴ By the late 12th to early 13th centuries, two distinct institutions had emerged, each focused on a powerful teacher-disciple lineage.

Although both branches shared a common foundation in the teachings of Gampopa and Pakmodrupa, the Drikung and Taklung traditions developed their own unique identities. The Drikung Kagyu, led by Jigten Sumgön, placed a strong emphasis on rigorous retreats and the ongoing practice of Guru Yoga, as Jigten Sumgön himself engaged in nearly continuous solitary meditation.¹⁵ In contrast, Taklung Thangpa's school also valued meditative practice and monastic discipline,¹⁶ reflecting Pakmodrupa's Kadampa roots. Both traditions honored Pakmodrupa as their patriarch, yet each cultivated its own line of reincarnate lamas over the centuries, such as the Drikung Chetsangs and Drikung Chungtsangs, compared to the later Taklung Shabdrung Rinpoches in the Taklung lineage.

Whether or not these prophecies originated from Pakmodrupa, the existence of two lineages allowed each to perceive itself as fulfilling the guru's intentions. However, in practice, the reality was one of separate networks of patrons and disciples. Notably, even after the split, the Taklung Thangpa followers continued to support Densatil, with Taklung Thangpa returning at least three times with significant offerings (including scripture collections and wealth) to the Pakmodrupa seat.¹⁷ This indicates that while the division was significant, it was not entirely hostile. Over time, however, the two branches seldom

¹⁴ *Ib.*, pp. 672, 724.

¹⁵ Khenpo Könchog Gyaltsen, trans., *The Great Kagyu Masters: The Golden Lineage Treasury*, ed. Victoria Huckenpahler, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2006), p. 237.

¹⁶ Dan Martin, "Taklungtangpa Tashi Pel," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed July 02, 2026, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Taklungtangpa-Tashi-Pel/4368>.

¹⁷ 'Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 2, p. 728.

reunited, leading to divergent paths for each.

The Rise of the Drikung Kagyu and Sakya Hegemony

In the 13th century, the Drikung Kagyu became an important spiritual and political entity in Tibet.¹⁸ The Drikung Thil monastery emerged as a central hub, rivaling the Sakya school, and drew followers from both local nobility and foreign supporters. Under the guidance of subsequent Drikung leaders, the school gained military and political influence through alliances with Mongol groups, leading to the 1290 campaign when another Mongol group and allied forces attacked Drikung. Some historians identify a Mongol prince named Duwa as the Chagatai supporter behind the sTod Hor faction that backed Drikung's resistance.¹⁹ However, claims that the Drikung were the first Tibetan monks invited to the Mongol court, prior to the rise of Sakya authority, lack evidence; it was actually Sakya Paṇḍita who was called by Prince Köden in 1244, establishing a relationship that supported Sakya-Mongol rule thereafter.²⁰ Instead of merely portraying a sectarian conflict between "Drikung and Sakya," this episode illustrates the dynamics of monastic influence amid the fragmentation of imperial power. Drikung sought support from patrons in the steppes and border regions to counter the Sakya-Yuan alliance, not due to any ideological connection with a Mongol lineage, but to restore balance among estates, pilgrim traffic, and local militias. This strategy turned out to be quite risky: as Yuan court politics became more stable around Sakya supporters, Drikung's secular authority became a liability, leading to the attack in 1290. The key issue is not which school reached the Mongol court first, but rather which groups each school could rally when the Mongol empire was divided (Kaidu versus Khubilai).

The emergence of the Drikung Kagyu caused concern among their competitors. The alliance between the Mongols and the Sakya school began when Köden called for Sakya Paṇḍita in the mid-1240s, leading to their meeting in Liangzhou in 1247. Under Qubilai, this partnership was formalized with the promotion of Phags pa and the establishment of a central bureau for Buddhist and Tibetan matters, which centralized authority in the hands of the Sakya.²¹ The threat posed by Drikung

¹⁸ Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yüan-Sa-skyä Period of Tibetan History* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990), pp. 11, 30–31, 54–55.

¹⁹ *Ib.*, p. 30.

²⁰ Sun Penghao and Chen Qingying, "The 1983 Copy of Köten's 1244 Letter to Sa skyä Paṇḍita," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 64 (2022): 614–616.

²¹ Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yüan-Sa-skyä Period of Tibetan History* (Rome: IsMEO, 1990), pp. 34–35.

intensified in the late 1280s, reaching a peak in 1290 when Mongol forces, led by Prince Temür Buqa and Sakya Ponchen Ag-len, attacked and destroyed Drikung Thil, resulting in a reported massacre of monks.²² Some historians suggest that the sTod Hor troops involved in this campaign were sent by Duwa of the Chagatai ulus, hinting at Drikung's connections to a competing Mongol faction.²³ Claims that Drikung monks were the first Tibetans to reach the Mongol court are disputed by historical records, which indicate that Sakya Paṇḍita was summoned by Prince Köden in 1244 and met him in 1247, with the partnership later solidified by Qubilai's support of Phags pa.²⁴ Monasteries like Densatil (the seat of the Pakmodru) and Drikung served not only as spiritual hubs but also as centers of institutional and economic influence in central Tibet.²⁵ When viewed in context, the conflict from 1285 to 1290 was more about a failed attempt at negotiation within a divided Mongol society than a religious battle. Drikung's connections on the steppe aimed to redirect land and pilgrimage routes away from Sakya influences; however, as Qubilai's coalition became stronger, these connections turned into weaknesses, leading to the sack in 1290. Importantly, the defeat did not eliminate authority but rather transformed it—destruction, reconstruction, and the narratives of martyrdom turned defeat into a form of symbolic power.

Before the Sakya dominance became established, the Drikung Kagyu had already merged religious influence with tangible secular power through a sort of "temple-state" system. Drikung Thil served as a central hub where officials (sgom-pa) managed local governance, labor, and taxes, while lands provided by noble patrons supported the monastery's financial foundation.²⁶ During the same time, the Taklung Kagyu expanded in two directions—around Lhasa (Taklung) and eastward into Kham, particularly with the establishment of Riwoche in 1276,²⁷ but its institutional presence was still less significant than that of Drikung. By the mid-thirteenth century, the Drikung school had become one of the most powerful religious forces in Ü, exercising influence through its estates, patronage networks, and administrative institutions.²⁸ This development was interrupted by Mongol political dynamics and the strengthening of a Sakya-Yuan alliance. The Mongol

²² *Ib.*, p. 30.

²³ *Ib.*, p. 30.

²⁴ *Ib.*, p. 8.

²⁵ *Ib.*, pp. 55–56.

²⁶ Sperling, Elliot, "Some Notes on the Early 'Bri-gung-pa sgom-pa." *Journal of the Tibet Society* 7 (1987), pp. 33–36.

²⁷ Henss, Michael. *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet*, vol. 1. Munich: Prestel, 2014, p287.

²⁸ Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yüan-Sa-skyä Period of Tibetan History* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990), pp. 35–45.

attack on Drikung Thil in 1290, in collaboration with Sakya, significantly diminished Drikung's secular authority, although the school maintained its religious influence; thereafter, Sakya's dominance continued until the mid-fourteenth century when its political power declined.²⁹ In summary, Drikung's prominence before Sakya was based on a strategic combination of charisma, land holdings, and administrative functions; the transition to Sakya control was more a result of shifting imperial relationships and the redistribution of property and patronage than of any doctrinal advantage. Drikung's pre-Sakya authority appears more like a negotiated corporate structure than a straightforward theocracy, with abbots acting as managers, estates generating income, and charisma serving as the binding force. The decisive factor was not religious doctrine but rather the ability to broker deals: Sakya's closer integration with Yuan institutions redirected resources such as property, labor, and pilgrimage, preserving Drikung's religious reputation while diminishing its worldly power.

Politically, the era of Pakmodrupa and his successors came to an end. It wasn't until 1354 that a Kagyu lama, Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltsen, overthrew the Sakya rulers and established the Pakmodrupa dynasty, ironically reviving the name of Lang Pakmodrupa.³⁰ Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltsen (1302–1364), a member of the Lang aristocratic lineage, received his education at Sakya monastery and under prominent masters of the Pakdru Kagyu at Densatil, rather than the Drikung Kagyu school. Although he preserved spiritual connections with the Drikung tradition, his political rise was primarily facilitated by backing from Pakmodru regional groups. Following his appointment as the Pakmodru myriarch in 1322 and the subsequent conferment of the Yuan dynasty title of Situ, he progressively consolidated both monastic and secular power in Central Tibet, thereby establishing the foundation for Pakmodru dominance.³¹ Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes Changchub Gyaltsen's pragmatic engagement with multiple Kagyu networks. However, his career also exemplifies the fluid and dynamic nature of sectarian identity in fourteenth-century Tibet. Concurrently, his receipt of Yuan imperial titles marks a transition for the Kagyu from authority grounded primarily in personal charisma toward a hybrid model of imperial-monastic sovereignty.

²⁹ Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yüan-Sa-skyä Period of Tibetan History* (Rome: IsMEO, 1990), pp. 11, 30–31, 54–56, 136–139.

³⁰ *Ib.*, pp. 115–118.

³¹ Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yüan-Sa-skyä Period of Tibetan History* (Rome: IsMEO, 1990), pp. 90–91.

Constructing Authority: Texts, Ritual, and Relics

During these changes, the remaining sources highlight how authority was established both through texts and symbols. Textually, each lineage promoted biographies of its masters. The biographies of Pakmodrupa, Jigten Sumgön, and Taklung Thangpa (along with their notable disciples) were crafted to validate their spiritual credentials. These biographies often emphasize miraculous occurrences and prophetic visions. For instance, Phagmodrupa repeatedly foretells Jigten Sumgön's future meditative attainment, while later episodes describe visionary signs such as the transformation of his body-maṇḍala into Heruka and the appearance of Heruka shooting an arrow into his heart, thereby revealing the meaning of secret mantra.³² Similarly, Taklung Thangpa's early life features visions of Pakmodrupa's portrait emanating warmth, interpreted as a karmic sign.³³ In later works, such as the 15th-century Blue Annals, the authors explicitly highlight lineage and prophecy. Go Lotsawa, for example, presents Taklung Thangpa as the founder of the Taklung Kagyu and claims that several of Taklung Thangpa's followers had visions equating him with Pakmodrupa.³⁴ These narratives elevate Taklung Thangpa's significance and intentionally connect him to Pakmodrupa's legacy.

However, the necessity for such retrospective framing indicates that a genuine division existed that needed justification in writing. The act of documenting these lives, accompanied by stylized Tibetan praise-poems and carefully selected anecdotes, is itself a demonstration of authority. In the Pakmodrupa tradition, Pakmodrupa's supposed instructions, such as "the successor is to be a tenth-bhūmi upasaka." The texts of Drikung Kagyu and Taklung Kagyu offer differing interpretations, with the aim of contesting the succession and orthodoxy of Densatil Monastery.

Symbolically, relics and ritual objects played a similar role. The stupas at Densatil serve as the most concrete evidence. Eighteen stupas were later reported at Densatil, containing the relics of successive abbots from the Pakmodrupa lineage. These stupas became significant pilgrimage sites, elaborately adorned. The Project Himalayan Art essay notes that Densatil's fame is based on "the eighteen stupas...housing the relics of a long lineage of abbots of the Lang/Pakmodrupa

³² Khenpo Könchog Gyaltsen, trans., *The Great Kagyu Masters: The Golden Lineage Treasury*, ed. Victoria Huckenpahler, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2006), pp. 236, 239–240, 253.

³³ *Ib.*, pp. 88–89.

³⁴ 'Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 2, pp. 728–729.

dynasty," particularly the eight large, jeweled stupas.³⁵ The first of these, constructed immediately after Pakmodrupa's death, housed his heart. This Tashi Wobar stupa contained Pakmodrupa's preserved heart and other relics from his cremation.³⁶ Through such consecration, the guru was made physically present; pilgrims who circumambulate these shrines reaffirm the strength of the Pakmodrupa lineage. The fact that Jigten Sumgön first relocated this stupa and its sacred relics from Densatil to Drikung Thil, only to later be compelled to move it back to Densatil Monastery, further show the stupa's significance.

In ritual practices, both Drikung and Taklung Kagyu preserved Pakmodrupa's memory. Ceremonies at Taklung and Drikung would invoke his prayers and relics, maintaining the teachings of the Kagyu path he imparted. Donations of wealth and gold to these monasteries, such as Taklung Thangpa's contributions at Densatil, also served as ritual affirmations of lineage connections.³⁷ Even the physical arrangement of monasteries was influenced by the memory of Pakmodrupa, with chapels, shrines, and reliquaries dedicated in his honor.

Thus, textual and material culture worked together. The hagiographies claim the intangible mantle of spiritual realization, while the stupas and relics provide tangible evidence of it. Control over these symbols equated to control over guru-status. The dispute over stupas between Jigten Sumgön and Taklung Thangpa can be understood in this context: each recognized that possessing Pakmodrupa's relics would establish them as his true successor. Ultimately, Drikung Kagyu retained the relics and became the more politically assertive faction, while Taklung Kagyu developed its own sanctuaries and academic reputation. Both, however, grounded their authority in the memory of Pakmodrupa as a powerful master.

Conclusion

The history of the Pakdru Kagyu, from its establishment by Dorje Gyalpo to its division under his successors, illustrates the connection between religious legitimacy and conflict in medieval Tibetan Buddhism. Dorje Gyalpo's charismatic presence attracted followers due to his reputed miraculous insights and strict discipline. Following his death, the sacred status he held became a point of contention. Jigten Sumgön and Taklung Thangpa, who were once fellow disciples, disagreed over the rightful ownership of their master's relics and stupa,

³⁵ Jean-Luc Estournel, "Densatil Monastery: The Commemorative Stupas of the Lang/Pakmodrupa Dynasty," *Project Himalayan Art*, Rubin Museum of Art, 2023, <http://rubinmuseum.org/projecthimalayanart/essays/densatil-monastery>.

³⁶ 'Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 2, p. 663.

³⁷ *Ib.*, p. 728.

highlighting deeper succession issues. This disagreement led to the formation of two distinct Kagyu orders (Drikung and Taklung), each with its own line of abbots and power structures. The Drikung Kagyu gained significant influence in Tibet until their power was diminished by Sakya-Mongol dominance, while the Taklung Kagyu preserved its academic reputation.

Authority was conveyed through texts and symbols, with lineage histories creating a sense of continuity with figures like Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa, while also fabricating favorable narratives for Pakmodrupa and his descendants. It has been shown that prophecy is a recurrent strategy of legitimation in Tibetan religious literature, especially in the treasure tradition, where retrospective predictions and recognition narratives help authorize both texts and their transmitters.³⁸ Additionally, ritual objects such as stupas containing *sharīra* served not just as monuments but as active sources of legitimacy. The decline of the Drikung Kagyu following a failed rebellion highlights how even powerful lama traditions can falter when political circumstances shift. Nevertheless, the legacy of their founder persisted, represented in the relic stupas and the name "Pakmodrupa," which was later revived by the anti-Sakya ruler Tai Situ in the 14th century.

In summary, the rise and division of the Pakmodrupa tradition exemplifies the intricate relationship between charisma, inheritance, and political context in Tibetan religious history. It demonstrates how claims to spiritual authority—rooted in both legendary narratives and physical relics—can be utilized to advance competing agendas. The split between Jigten Sumgön and Taklung Thangpa illustrates that schisms within a religious lineage often depend on material considerations as well as doctrinal or personal factors. In the case of the Drikung and Taklung Kagyu, the fate of a single stupa became symbolic of the entire tradition's trajectory, influencing Tibetan Buddhism for centuries.

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³⁸ Janet Gyatso, "The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition," *History of Religions* 33.2 (1993): 97–134.

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Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen in the Context of The Fifth Dalai Lama's rNying ma Writings

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he¹ Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682), is well-known as a key figure in Tibetan political history and his role as a patron of the rNying ma pas has not escaped the attention of Tibetologists. He is also known to be a prolific writer. However, out of his large autobiography, of *The Secret Visions*, and his catalog of teachings received, his other writings have not so far attracted much interest. The focus of this article is a short treatise² devoted to the little-known 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen cycle in the context of his abundant rNying ma writings, which will be described based on the 2009 28-vol. book-format edition.

This cycle is enigmatic in many ways. The original *gter ma* corpus seems to be lost (or, at least, has not yet resurfaced), and the Fifth Dalai Lama's practice manual (1673)³—which is so far⁴ the only significant remaining text of this cycle—does not explicitly ascribe it to any specific section of rDzogs chen. It mentions *sPyi ti* in passing, but 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen cannot finally be ascribed to *sPyi ti* in any meaningful sense.⁵

The research that led to the writing of this paper originally stems from the FCHNT project's investigation of the Northern Treasures (Byang gter). The name of the founding master of the Northern Treasures, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–ca. 1401), appears in the lineages of 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen, not as the discoverer of the *gter ma* (which

¹ Professor Bryan Cuevas reviewed a draft of this paper, and I am very grateful for his suggestions. I have included some of his reflections in the footnotes.

² 'Jam dpal rdzogs pa chen po'i 'phrin las dang smin byed kyi chog sgrigs snang stong 'od Inga'i rgya can, or: *The Thousand Illuminations Sealed with the Five Lights, A Sādhana and A Presentation of the Empowerment Ritual for Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen*. Henceforth: *The Thousand Illuminations*, in DL5 2009, vol. 26, pp. 354–386.

³ The text is dated in its colophon to a year *chu glang*.

⁴ See below references to a corpus of fourteen texts that are about to be released in the forthcoming 68-vol. compilation of the Northern Treasures (Byang gter).

⁵ This article originally included an investigation about the hypothesis that 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen could be regarded as a *sPyi ti* cycle. However, since, at this stage, this thread did not lead anywhere, all the materials it contained about the Fifth Dalai Lama's understanding of the *sPyi ti* category of rDzogs chen have been separated and made into another article.

probably dates back to the early 13th century), but as a link in the lineage. The lineage after him is a standard Byang gter one. The FCHNT team's initial concern was identifying the master from whom Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is said to have received this transmission, but, so far, to no avail.

This ascribed association of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem with 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen is further connected with another issue, which will not be discussed here: that of the authenticity of a commentary on the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem in the 2015 *Compilation of the Northern Treasures*,⁶ which I earlier hypothesized to be connected to 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen, although without any proof, since there is no explicit statement in that sense in CNT 2015. However, in the last days of May 2026, the situation changed altogether when our colleague Alexandra Sukhanova forwarded to the FCHNT team a pdf table of contents (called *dKar chag lha brag thugs gter chos kyi me long*) of a forthcoming larger (68 vol.) compilation of the Northern Treasures. To my great surprise, I found out that vol. *tha* (10) of this edition will contain 14 texts explicitly connected to 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen in the section devoted to rGod ldem's works and revelations, including the 'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo—which confirms far beyond all expectations my hypothesis about the connection between the commentary on the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* ascribed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and the 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen cycle.⁷

⁶ 'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo, in *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 14, pp. 271-362. The text ascribed to rGod ldem is in fact a summary of a writing attributed to Padmasambhava, the 'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod pa'i 'grel pa rin po che nyi zla 'bar ba'i sgron ma, in bDud 'joms rin po che's *rNying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 22, pp. 195-493. This text itself was perhaps a section of / incorporated in 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen, but the Fifth Dalai Lama's catalog is too allusive to be sure. For a discussion of the content and the authenticity of this text, see Arguillère (2026), in Valentine (ed.), *Northern Treasures History*, vol. 2, chp. 19. However, the publication documented in the following note has rendered part of this analysis moot.

⁷ Here is the relevant portion of the *dKar chag lha brag thugs gter chos kyi me long* (p. 21), with numbers added in brackets for easier reference: gter ston gsar (sic) ban phyogs med kyi 'jam dpal rdzogs chen skor la | <1> 'jam dpal brgyud pa'i lo rgyus: ldeb 171\ <2> 'jam dpal gyi chos kyi byon khungs bstan pa'o | ldeb | 175\ <3> 'jam dpal brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs | ldeb | 183\ <4> 'jam dpal rgyud kyi chog khrid dang bcas pa | ldeb | 185\ <5> zab mo lta ba klong yangs cha lag 'jam dbyangs blo'i mun sel gyi sgrub thabs yab yum spyir bsgrub pa sgos su bsgrub pa bla rdo srog 'khor rnams | zab rgya can lags so | ldeb | 197\ <6> 'jam dpal khri drug stong gi lo rgyus nye bar bsdu pa'o: ldeb | 202\ <7> 'jam dpal sgrub thabs byin rlabs can : ldeb | 203\ <8> 'jam dpal mtshan brjod kyi 'don thabs sogs : ldeb | 205\ <9> 'phags pa 'jam dpal gyi sa bcad bzhugs | ldeb | 211\ <10> nges pa drug gi sgo nas khog dbub pa'i rgyas bshad do | l rdo rje rtse mo nam mkha' dang mnyam pa'i rgyud mtshan yang dag par brjod pa'i don | ldeb | 220\ <11> 'di ni bka' 'brel mdo sde nas btus pa'i blo gter gyi gtam rgyud lnga bcu rtse gnyis | ldeb | 256\ <12> 'phags pa 'jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo | ldeb | 297\ <13> 'jam dpal gsang 'grel | ldeb | 387\ <14> 'phags pa 'jam dpal gyi ngo sprod byin rlabs can | ldeb | 436\ bcas pod 'dir...

In any case, the Fifth Dalai Lama's interest in this cycle is clearly connected to his Byang gter affiliations, since the main authority he mentions in this context is *Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal* (ca. 1550–1603), who was a pivotal figure in the development of the Northern Treasures tradition during the 16th century.

After a brief overview of the Fifth Dalai Lama's writings, with a focus on his rNying ma compositions, this article will explore a hypothesis regarding the status of *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen*: that it is implicitly presented by the Fifth Dalai Lama as a *rdzogs chen* complement to the Mahāyoga cycle *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* (*'Jam dpal tshe bdag*).

The Fifth Dalai Lama's text, *The Thousand Illuminations*, will then be described⁸ in its two aspects—*sādhana* and empowerment ritual—with a focus on the *rdzogs chen* instructions and on the elements that, when combined with the indications found in the same author's *Record of Teaching Received*, may provide insight into his understanding of the nature of *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen*.

The conclusion suggests avenues for further research and is followed, as an appendix, by a catalog of *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen* from the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received*.

1. *The Thousand Illuminations in the context of the Fifth Dalai Lama's Writings*

The 2009 edition⁹ of the Fifth Dalai Lama's writings is roughly structured as follows:

— Vol. 1-4: *The Record of Teachings Received*;¹⁰

#12 is the commentary ascribed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, which is referred to in the previous note. Although some of these titles bear *gter ma* marks, they do not obviously correspond to anything in the Fifth Dalai Lama's catalog of *Sar ban* Phyogs med's *gter ma* presented below. The status of this entire body of work will remain enigmatic until we have access to the texts. However, this substantiates the idea of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's significant involvement in *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen*.

⁸ The description may help for a future identification of the tantra underlying *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen*, which could not be definitively achieved in this article.

⁹ Henceforth DL5 2009.

¹⁰ *Zab pa dang rgya che ba'i dam pa'i chos kyi thob yig gaṅgā'i chu rgyun*. See Ehrhard 2013, "Flow of the River Gangā: The Gsan-yig of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma and Its Literary Sources." A large portion of this text is devoted to rNying ma teachings, which it often describes and documents in great detail, including remarks about their origin and the history of their transmission. This *Record of Teachings Received* is especially valuable because it describes the state of available rNying ma literature in central Tibet before the 1717–18 Dzungar invasion, which may have caused significant losses to the corpus. Indeed, many texts it mentions seem not to be described as available from the 18th century onward.

- Vol. 5-7: The autobiography;¹¹
- Vol. 8-10: His “outer, ordinary” biography by *sDe srid* Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705);
- Vol. 11-12: Twelve biographies of masters by the Fifth Dalai Lama;
- Vol. 13-14: ritual/practice texts, mostly for *gsar ma* traditions.¹²
- Vol. 15-17: purely dGe lugs¹³ writings: *Lam rim*, *Madh-yamakāvatāra*, etc.
- Vol. 18: Prayers and ritual praise to various lamas, etc. The corpus is not tightly connected to any specific denomination.
- Vol. 19: Historical and political writings.
- Vol. 20-21: Accounts of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s achievements, including in the restoration of ancient buildings, etc.
- Vol. 22: Same topic; letters (partly in verse).
- Vol. 23: Rules and regulations for various monastic institutions; a commentary on the *sNyan ngag me long*.
- Vol. 24: Prayers and auspicious verses.
- Vol. 25-28: rNying ma writings. Of these, Vol. 26 is an all-Yamāntaka volume and the main source for this presentation.
- It should be noted that the *Secret Visions* (*gSang ba rgya can*) are

¹¹ Although they may provide more information about why the Fifth Dalai Lama was interested in *’Jam dpal rdzogs chen*, this source and other biographical materials were not used in the present research. However, the first part, translated by Samten G. Karmay (2014) does not provide any relevant piece of information.

¹² For some reason, another piece about *gter ma* literature—a short text about *rTa mgrin gsang sgrub*—is included in Vol. 13 (pp. 342-345). This is the second oldest (12th century) rNying ma Hayagrīva cycle documented in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* (e.g., RT 1976 [–1980], vol. 40, pp. 87-150), also known as *rTa mgrin skyer sgang lugs*, with a lineage running through early Shangs pa masters. For more information on its lineage, see *gSan yig*, in DL5 2009, vol. 4, pp. 93-96. Some of its aspects are discussed below, especially regarding the authenticity of its *rdzogs rim* instructions.

¹³ It is presumed that the scholastic writings are in an orthodox dGe lugs vein because no debate of which we’d be aware has been raised on this point thus far. However, further research is needed. The characterization of *ye shes*, e.g., in the *Madh-yamakāvatāra* commentary (vol. 15, pp. 158–358) should be prioritized—especially in the final section, which discusses the Buddhas’ knowledge of emptiness and omniscience (pp. 346–348). The rNying ma and dGe lugs doctrines on this topic seem to be logically incompatible (except if sūtra-level philosophy is treated without regard for its consistency with tantric/rDzogs chen views—which, after all, is what the Bon pos do, contrary to recent rNying ma scholastics following the authority of ’Ju Mi pham, who has a strong concern for the unity of the whole Mahāyāna view, including tantrism and rDzogs chen). Preliminary survey of this passage gave me the impression that the author may be circumventing the controversial issues rather than addressing them directly. Indeed, he seems to refrain from explicitly proposing the necessity of a cognizing instance that should be added to the ultimate nature of things for it to be known, which is the standard dGe lugs view and is incompatible with any feasible interpretation of rDzogs chen.

not included in this edition (and are still awkwardly awaiting a “workable” one).¹⁴

The core topic of Vol. 26, which contains the *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen*-related writing, is *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* (*'Jam dpal tshe bdag*), a vast *gter chos* for Yamāntaka practice.¹⁵ Its main *gter ston*, rGya Zhang khrom rDo rje 'od 'bar,¹⁶ was active in the eleventh century. This corpus has been made accessible through ten volumes included in the 2015 *Compilation of the Northern Treasures* (*Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*). This vast Mahāyoga cycle is somewhat exceptional in rNying ma religious literature because this *gter ma*, although ancient, was more or less regarded as the ultimate, most perfect form of the Yamāntaka practice. It was merely marginally built upon by later generations and not replaced by later revelations that would have been viewed as more advanced. This practice is rarely discussed, yet it remains strongly present in the Northern Treasures (*Byang gter*) sub-branch of the rNying ma school,¹⁷ in 'Ju Mi pham's writings (and, hence, with Dil go mkhyen brtse Rab gsal zla ba¹⁸), and among the 'Bri gung pas. It is basically pure Mahāyoga, without much elaborate completion phase (*rdzogs rim*) instructions, not to mention rDzogs chen.

2. *Sar ban Phyogs med, the Discoverer of Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen, and Visionary rDzogs chen*

Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen (*'Jam dpal rdzogs chen*) is a 12th- or perhaps

¹⁴ See Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1972, *rNam thar gsang ba rgya can*, reproduction of a 533-page *dbu med* manuscript. See also Samten Karmay 1988 (1998) and 1999. While the *rNam thar gsang ba rgya can* may contain relevant materials, it has been omitted from the present inquiry.

¹⁵ See Arguillère 2024, “Yamāntaka Among the Ancients.”

¹⁶ See Esler 2022, “Yamāntaka's Wrathful Magic.”

¹⁷ Including a *yang gter* by 'Khor gdong *gTer chen* Nus ldan rdo rje (1802–1864), in the holy place of rDo rje shugs 'chang, near De ba grong in the Tre hor area of Khams (oral information by bSrung lo, a descendent of 'Khor gdong *gTer chen*, attached to the 'Khor gdong monastery, August 2024. According to bSrung lo, the rediscovered version of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* is identical to the 11th century version and the discovery merely refreshed the blessings without adding to the content. However, this shows how important this practice still is for Byang gter lamas, since 'Khor gdong *gTer chen*'s revelations are practiced only in a purely Byang gter context).

¹⁸ See Dilgo Khyentse 2008, *Brilliant Moon*, p. 33, recounting a vision of the young Dil go mkhyen rtse: “I briefly met Padmasambhava and Mipham Rinpoche, and below Mipham's throne was an empty seat with a square carpet where he told me to seat. I remember that as soon as I sat down, he said, ‘This is your *yidam* deity,’ giving me a five-inch golden statue of the longevity lord Yamāntaka, which he put on the table in front of me.” “Longevity lord” is an alternate translation of *Tshe bdag*, which is most likely incorrect since a large part the content of the cycle aims at shortening the lifespan of (evil) others rather than extending one's own.

rather 13th-century *gter ma*, said to have been revealed by Sar *ban* Phyogs med (d.u.). We know virtually nothing about this *gter ston*. The passage about him in Guru bKra shis' Chos 'byung (1990: pp. 481-482) is completely uninformative except for his Bhutanese origins¹⁹ and the place where the *gter ma* was found.²⁰ The name of Guru Chos dbang (1212-1270) also appears in the context of 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen, but not in a way that clarifies respective status of the two layers (Chos dbang/Sar *ban* Phyogs med) of the revelation. However, the relevant passage in the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received*²¹ may suggest that Guru Chos dbang's *gter chos* is merely a part of the final collection, as if Sar *ban* Phyogs med had built upon it. This is also the meaning of a passage of *The Thousand Illuminations* that states that Guru Chos dbang and Sar *ban* Phyogs med successively revealed 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen,²² with a phrasing that can only be understood in the sense that Sar *ban* Phyogs med came *after* Guru Chos dbang. Taking all this into consideration, we can speculate that Sar *ban* Phyogs med lived in the thirteenth century, although he could not have been much younger than Guru Chos dbang himself, for six generations of masters are named between Sar *ban* Phyogs med and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337-ca. 1401).

A name that sounds as his (*bdag sar ban*) curiously appears in the colophon (p. 843) of the *Man ngag snying gi dgongs pa rgyal ba'i bka' zhes bya ba'i rgyud* (in *mTshams brag rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, vol. 13, pp. 795-

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 481: *gter ston 'di 'khrungs yul mon spa gro ba yin* |.

²⁰ *Loc. cit.*: ...*stag tshang seng ge bkra shis dpal phug gis gro ba g.yu khra can du gter du sbas*.

²¹ DL5 2009, vol. 2, p 447: *gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug gis gter srungs la bka' bsgos dam bsgrags te gnyan ston dzam bha la spyen 'dren du btang ba'i lho brag mkho mthing lha khang gi sgo srungs kyang ris gshin rje dmar po'i thugs ka nas spyen drangs pa bse sgrom smug po'i nang nas byon pa'i 'jam dpal rdzogs pa chen po 'jam dpal rgyud kyi yang snying gi skor la* | *'phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod pa'i rgyud kyi yang snying* | *slob dpon pad mas btsad* (sic) *po dang jo mo shel bza' sgron gnyis la gtang pa'i 'jam dpal rgyud kyi ngo sprod rtags la go ba brda chos lag len du bstan pa* | *'jam dpal rgyud kyi ngo sprod lag len du bstan pa* | *rdo rje 'chang gis 'jam dpal bshes gnyen la gdams pa* | *'jam dpal rgyud kyi gsang 'grel don gsal bar byed pa'i sgron ma gu rus btsad* (sic) *po dang jo mo shel bza' gnyis la gdams pa* | *gnyis med chos kyi sku thig le nyag gcig tu gtan la dbab pa'i man ngag* | *slob dpon la jo mo shel bza' sgron gyis zhus pa'i tshig don bcu bzhis 'khor 'das kyi rtsa ba bstan pa ste chos sde drug po 'di'i brgyud pa ni* | ... Some of the items in the list are found in the description of Sar *ban* Phyogs med's 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen (see appendix at the end of this article) and some titles are similar to those of texts included in the forthcoming 68-vol. edition of the Northern Treasures.

²² DL5, vol. 26, p. 376: ...*slob dpon chen pos gter du gtams pa rim bzhi mnga' bdag gi skye ba bco lnga pa gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug zhabs dang* | *mtshan ldan she sa'i rnam 'phrul sar ban ston pa phyogs med gter mdzod zhal phyed ba las phyi ma'o* |. The logic is that this cycle was taught to King Khri strong lde'u btsan and to one of his wives called She sa (or Shel gza', or She bza') sgron, and that the two *gter stons* who revealed it were their respective rebirths.

843). In the passage, *Sar ban* is mentioned alongside one *dBang dar*. This name also appears in the lineage prayers of *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen*²³ after *Sar ban* Phyogs med's disciple (probably his son) *Sar ban* Nyi ma'i snying po. Thus, it is probable that the *Sar ban* of this colophon is in fact Nyi ma'i snying po—in any case, a figure related to *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen* too.

In the catalogue of the *sDe dge rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, the *Man ngag snying gi dgongs* is presented the last in the list of the *yang gsang bla med* section of *rDzogs chen man ngag sde*,²⁴ although it does not belong to the list of the *Seventeen Tantras* (*rgyud bcu bdun*). The structure of the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud* is less obvious (or explicit) than that of the *sDe dge* edition. However, the context of volume 13 lies somewhere in-between the *gSang ba'i skor* of the *man ngag sde* and the *Yang ti*. The tantra itself describes the always already perfect Buddha nature as abiding in all beings' heart as the peaceful deities (chp. 1-3). However, this is immediately followed by an explanation about how this internal, invisible presence of the innate enlightenment is experienced in the *post mortem* state, first in the form of the wrathful deities (chp. 4), then as the peaceful deities (chp. 5). Then comes (in this order) an explanation of the *bar do* of possibility (*srid pa'i bar do*, chp. 6), the visions in the *bar do* (chp. 7), how one will wander in *samsāra* if one does not recognize them properly (chp. 8). Chapter 9 is the most ambiguous since, as often in this literature, it can be understood as alluding to the luminous visions of *thod rgal*, but more likely applies to ordinary perceptions when they are recognized for what they truly are. In any case, there is no hint of either the specific technical vocabulary of the *snying thig* (four or six lamps, uncommon channels, eyes and body postures, gradual unfolding of the four visions...). Chapters 10 and 11 are about *samādhi* and dream regarded as two specific *bar do* states; chapter 12 reverts to the *bar do* of *Dharmatā*; chapter 13 summarizes the resorption of the elements at the time of death, and then chapter 14 discusses the *srid pa'i bar do* again. It is quite possible that chapters 12-14 are additions to a previously existing text, since they do not fit very obviously in the otherwise coherent structure of the tantra. Then comes the colophon (pp. 842-843), which clearly appears as an addition by "*bdag Sar ban*" Nyi ma'i snying po. Altogether, this tantra feels very typical of what David Germano (2005) calls the "funerary transformation of the Great Perfection," or the funerary stage of its historical development: here, all is about recognizing the perceptions of this life as being luminous displays of our already enlightened nature in disguise in order to be ready for their unshaded revelation after death.

²³ E.g., DL5 2009, vol. 26, p. 356.

²⁴ See *sDe dge rnying ma rgyud 'bum gyi dkar chag chen mo* 2018, p. 97.

In comparison with this text, *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen* as presented by the Fifth Dalai Lama contains actual instructions for visionary practice in this life, although simpler than what is known in the *sNying thig* context. As a conclusion, *Sar ban* Phyogs med must have belonged to a milieu of practitioners of visionary *rDzogs chen*, but, it seems, outside the known *sNying thig* lineages.

3. The Table of Contents of *Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen & Provisional Conclusions*

The root *gter ma* texts of *Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen* are not yet available. However, they are entirely listed in the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received* (and in a more succinct but consistent way in *gTer bdag gling pa's*²⁵ and that of later *rNying ma* masters, without any significant variation). The only truly accessible vestige of this cycle, except for the forthcoming corpus in the new 68-vol. *Byang gter* compilation, is the above-mentioned text for its practice by the Fifth Dalai Lama (DL5 2009: vol. 26, pp. 386-395; also included in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*²⁶), except for a short aspiration prayer (*smon lam*) by 'Ju Mi pham,²⁷ a few quite insignificant pages in *mChog gyur gling pa's gter chos*,²⁸ another aspiration prayer by *rDo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma*,²⁹ a tiny *sādhana* by *rTogs ldan Śākya śrī* (1854–1919),³⁰ or a larger but redundant commentary by *Khang gsar bsTan pa'i dbang phyug* (1938–2014)³¹—very late and rather uninformative materials whose only merit is to show that the fame of *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen* never completely faded. Otherwise, these texts merely repeat the Fifth Dalai Lama's *The Thousand Illuminations* and his *Record of Teachings Received*. It is the latter that contains the most explicit general statements about *Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen*.³² This includes prophecies about the *gter ston*

²⁵ *gTer bdag gling pa* 1998, *Zab pa dang rgya che ba'i dam pa'i chos kyi thob yig rin chen 'byung gnas*. The relevant passage is in vol. 1, ff. 235a-236b.

²⁶ In *Rin chen gter mdzod* 1976 [–1980]: vol. 25, pp. 249-307.

²⁷ *Mi pham* 1984–93, vol. 5, pp. 75-77, followed by the lineage prayer (pp. 79-83) in which the name of the *gter ston* is clearly *Sa ban* Phyogs med (p. 80), with the exact same lineage after him, including *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* (p. 81), as in the Fifth Dalai Lama's *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen*-related texts. The connection of this prayer with the peaceful and wrathful *Mañjuśrī* rituals that fill this volume is, however, unclear.

²⁸ *Zab mo rdzogs chen sde gsum gyi cha lag 'jam dpal rdzogs pa chen po*, in *mChog gyur gling pa* 1982-1986, vol 21, pp. 7-34.

²⁹ *'Jam dpal rdzogs pa chen po'i smon lam mi shigs na da'i rol mo*, in *gSung 'bum* 2000, vol. 3 pp. 79-82.

³⁰ *rTogs ldan Śākyaśrī* 1998, *gSung 'bum*, pp. 393-394.

³¹ *Khang gsar bsTan pa'i dbang phyug* 2005, *'Jam dpal rdzogs pa chen po'i smon lam gyi zin bris kun grol thig le nyag gcig*, in *gSung 'bum bstan pa'i dbang phyug (glog klad par ma)*, vol. 4, pp. 202-253.

³² DL5 2009: vol. 3, pp. 130-134.

Sar *ban* Phyogs med that specify the place where the *gter ma* was found.³³ The Fifth Dalai Lama provides a catalog of the corpus, which includes 47 items (reproduced in the appendix below).

We can provisionally conclude, at this preliminary stage, that:

1. The lineage is said to stem from Mañjuśrīmitra—Padmasambhava does not play a very central role;
2. The basic scripture is said to be the *'Jam dpal sgyu 'phrul drwa ba*—but this indication is rather vague, as it is not clear to what actually available tantras, or parts of tantras, this may correspond;
3. However, more specifically, a version in 11 chapters of the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgīti* was included in the corpus;
4. A commentary of this text ascribed to Padmasambhava is included in it, or at least alluded to;³⁴
5. The practice as presented by the Fifth Dalai Lama is, as we will see, quite complete in terms of visionary rDzogs chen, and the author does not fear to mention *khregs chod* and *thog rgal* in this context.³⁵

After his catalog of the whole cycle, The Fifth Dalai Lama presents the transmission lineage³⁶ that, as already mentioned, has the curious

³³ *Op. cit.*, p. 130: 'gos kyi phag ris kyi mthing brgal ba'i 'og : grub pa thob pa'i stag tshang seng ge phug : gnas kyi ming ni bkra shis dpal phug tu : grub thob gsum gyis gdams pa bcud phyung ba'i : snying du gdams pa'i ngo sprod rnam bzhi dang : ma tshang med pa ma bu bcas nas sbas ; etc. As seen above, some elements belonging to this cycle are mentioned under other headings, especially in the account of Gu ru Chos dbang's revelations by the Fifth Dalai (2009, vol. 3, pp. 446-447), etc.

³⁴ #19 in the catalog reproduced in the Appendix below, *'Jam dpal mtshan brjod kyi don 'grel o rgyan padma 'byung gnas kyis gsang sngags kyi bskyed rdzogs gsum dang mthun par mdzad pa* |, is either the commentary ascribed to Padmasambhava or a ritual text based on it. The commentary in question seems to be: Padmasambhava (attributed to —), *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod pa'i 'grel pa rin po che nyi zla 'bar ba'i sgron ma*, in *rNying ma bka' ma* (bDud 'joms rin po che's edition), vol. 22, pp. 195-493.

³⁵ *The Thousand Illuminations*, p. 357: *khregs chod thod rgal ye shes zang thal sogs | | tshul bzhin lam du longs par byin gyis rlobs |*.

³⁶ *Chos sku kun tu bzang po | longs sku 'jam dpal rigs lnga | sprul sku śākya thub pa | rdo rje dāki | rin chen dāki | padma dāki | karma dāki | de bzhin dāki | o rgyan dāki | 'jam dpal dbyangs | rdo rje 'chang | 'jam dpal bshes gnyen | śrī sīṅha | o rgyan chen po | rje khri srong lde btsan | jo mo she bza' sgron | gter ston chen po sar ban phyogs med | lung zin sar ban nyi ma'i snying po | sngags 'chang dbang dar | mgar ston rin chen 'bum | ri pa sangs rgyas dpal | rgya ban bla ma | bla ma sba ston dpal | rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem phru | sngags 'chang rdo rje mgon po | mtshan ldan ngag dbang grags pa | drin can sangs rgyas dpal bzang | thugs sras nam mkha' rgyal mtshan | dran mchog dpal ldan blo gros | chos rgyal bkra shis stobs rgyal | rig 'dzin ngag gi dbang po | klong chen rab 'byams gsum pa sha gzugs pa bkra shis rnam rgyal | sngags 'chang karma gsang sngags pa | rig 'dzin 'phrin*

feature of including Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. He then tells a story about what happened when *Byang bdag* bKra shis stobs rgyal went to receive the teaching from the lineage holder *Dran mchog* dPal ldan blo gros (unidentified, d.u.), with volumes mysteriously disappearing and re-appearing. He then mentions texts composed by *Byang bdag* bKra shis stobs rgyal himself to supplement this corpus—which seem to be lost.

4. Does 'Jam dpal rDzogs chen belong to
the sPyi ti section of rDzogs chen?

'Jam dpal rdzogs chen is difficult to ascribe to any of the classical sections of rDzogs chen, *Sems sde*, *Klong sde*, *Man ngag sde* and their further subdivisions. In the *Rin chen gter mdzod* it is curiously not placed with rDzogs chen cycles, but in the Mahāyoga section, at the beginning of the 'Jam dpal sku sub-section, with the peaceful aspects of Mañjuśrī.³⁷

In the above-quoted passage of his *Record of Teachings Received*, the Fifth Dalai Lama describes the practice without ascribing it to any specific section of rDzogs chen. However, one allusion to the sPyi ti section of *Man ngag sde* is found in *The Thousand Illuminations*—but it is not unambiguous. Indeed, the passage merely states that the tantra(s) that form its basis (which, interestingly, is or are not listed) *can* be interpreted in three ways, one of which is according to the sPyi ti system.³⁸ This admittedly does not constitute a complete and explicit ascription

las lhun grub | zur thams cad mkhyen pa chos dbyings rang grol | des bdag za hor bande la'o |.

³⁷ In *Rin chen gter mdzod* 1976 [–1980]: vol. 25, pp. 249–307.

³⁸ DL5 2009, v. 26, p. 375: 'Jam dpal rgyud kyi rgyal po 'di la bshad thabs gsum du mdzad de yang bka'i 'grel pa la brten nas rgya che ba spyi ti ltar bshad | rgyud la brten nas don 'grel | ngo sprod la brten nas gsang 'grel mdzad |. The following sentence seems to mean that 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen includes these three levels of interpretation of the unidentified 'Jam dpal rgyud kyi rgyal po. Although we cannot speculate about texts to which we thus far have no access, some elements in this statement are reminiscent of titles mentioned in the above-quoted table of contents of the forthcoming 68-volume compilation of the Byang gter: #10 is called a *rgyas bshad*; #11 is a *bka' 'brel*; #12 is the *don 'grel* and #13 is a *gsang 'grel*. The above-quoted formulas of the Fifth Dalai Lama are repeated in Mi pham's 'Jam dpal ye shes sems dpa'i smin byed dbang gi rim pa ye she rdo rje'i rgyun 'bebs (in Mi pham 1984–1993, vol. 5, pp. 87–131) without any further explanation. On the next page, we read that these various aspects have been gradually revealed by Gu ru Chos dbang, Sar ban Phyogs med and Sangs rgyas gling pa, and (p. 97) that Mi pham's empowerment ritual combines them all. However, Mi pham does not seem to be more specific than the Fifth Dalai Lama about which specific tantra they are both alluding to under the name 'Jam dpal rgyud kyi rgyal po (p. 95). It should be noted that, a few lines earlier, the Fifth Dalai Lama alludes—but in the vaguest form—to rDo rje gling pa (1346–1405) as an alternate source for a rDzogs chen system connected to Mañjuśrī. However, there does not seem to be any significant Mañjuśrī-connected rDzogs chen cycle among rDo rje gling pa's revelations in the 32-vol. edition (2009) of his tradition that is available to us.

of this cycle to the *sPyi ti* system. Since this hypothesis did not bring any fruits regarding the Fifth Dalai Lama's understanding of '*Jam dpal rdzogs chen*', all the research materials about the Fifth Dalai Lama's ideas on *sPyi ti* were made into a separate paper and I will not discuss this puzzling issue any further here.

5. Why Should There be any Connection between '*Jam dpal rdzogs chen*' and '*Jam dpal tshe bdag*'?

The idea of a connection between '*Jam dpal tshe bdag*' and '*Jam dpal rdzogs chen*' is suggested by the fact that the Fifth Dalai Lama, or his editors, present *Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen* in the context of an all-*Mañjuśrī Master of Life* volume of his writings. 'Ju Mi pham³⁹ also introduces—without any explanation—the lineage of *Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen* (borrowed from the Fifth Dalai Lama's practice manual for that cycle, with the necessary complements for the later period) in the context of *Mañjuśrī Master of Life*.

A more fundamental reason is that the empowerment for *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* is complete in terms of the 2nd to 4th empowerments, that is, those that would allow for *rdzogs rim* and *rdzogs chen* practices. So, it is somewhat awkward that the 10 volumes of '*Jam dpal tshe bdag*'⁴⁰ are completely devoid of such practices. Available instructions contain only development phase and ritual prescriptions (mostly destructive magic). It would feel natural, from a Tibetan well-informed perspective, to expect to find *rdzogs rim* and *rdzogs chen* practices in that context and, if they cannot be found through any natural or supernatural means,⁴¹ to inject them from other tantric cycles. This is why the location of the Fifth Dalai Lama's manual for '*Jam dpal rdzogs chen*' in a volume otherwise entirely devoted to '*Jam dpal tshe bdag*' can be interpreted as a hint that the author viewed the former as the innermost practice for the latter.⁴²

³⁹ In the "all-*Mañjuśrī*" volume 5 of the 1984–93 *gSung 'bum* in 27 volumes (henceforth Mi pham 1984–93).

⁴⁰ Referring to CNT 2015. It should be noted that gTer bdag gling pa's own Yamāntaka cycle *Dregs pa 'joms byed* (in gTer bdag gling pa 1998, f. 1a-131b) also seems to be devoid of an elaborate *rdzogs rim*. This cycle is deeply connected to '*Jam dpal tshe bdag*' and the oldest layers of the rNying ma Yamāntaka literature and bears witness to the way in which these materials were understood in the Fifth Dalai lama's closest circle.

⁴¹ Any form of revelation, *gter ma* or *dag snang*.

⁴² For a complete overview of the Fifth Dalai Lama's understanding of '*Jam dpal tshe bdag*', it would be necessary to investigate the large section of his *Record of Teachings Received* (2009: vol. 3, pp. 1-79) that is devoted to the many branches of rGya Zhang khrom's revelations. A preliminary survey of this source showed that allusions to elaborate *rdzogs rim* are found in the context of the sub-cycle *Yang bzlog nag po me'i spu gri* (on this sub-cycle, see Amanda Brown 2026). The Fifth Dalai Lama's catalog

However, such an idea is not something well-known or generally admitted in the rNying ma tradition. Since 'Jam dpal tshe bdag is regarded as pure Mahāyoga, the absence of any completion stage (*rdzogs rim*) or great perfection (*rdzogs chen*) in such a context is no surprise for Tibetan scholars, despite the features of the empowerment ritual that would allow for them.

What is more, we have an explanation for the awkward presence of a 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen lineage prayer in the context of 'Ju Mi pham's writings about 'Jam dpal tshe bdag: the original peaceful Mañjuśrī practice from *The Iron Scorpion* (lCags sdig) that used to be performed at the beginning of one's engagement into *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* (or some of its sections, such as *Yang zlog me'i spru gri*) has, for centuries, been replaced by a practice borrowed from *Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen*.⁴³ 'Ju Mi

of this sub-cycle mentions, in the context of the empowerments, a *rdzogs rim rdo rje'i rnal 'byor gyi smin byed thod rgal rdzogs chen snang ba bzhi'i dbang* (2009: vol. 3, p. 33), and further (*op. cit.*, pp. 40-41), compositions about *rdzogs rim* by various authors, especially 'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659). Other mentioned figures are mNga' ris paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal (under his secret name Padma rgyal po ye shes rol pa rtsal) as a *gter ston* having revealed a cycle called 'Jam dpal don gyi gsang tig, which seems not to be available even in the forthcoming 68-vol. Byang gter compilation, which includes more materials from mNga' ris paṇ chen than CNT 2015. Here is the passage of the Fifth Dalai Lama's gSan yig: rig 'dzin chos kyi grags pas zla gsang 'dus pa'i rgyud la brten nas shing sprel rtse pa gzhis kar mdzad pa'i rtsa gsum 'khor lo bzhi la brten pa'i rdzogs rim | des mdzad pa'i rdzogs rim sbas don rnam gsum rim lnga btsan thabs su nyams su blang ba | des mdzad pa'i thun mong gi rdzogs rim dbang bzhi'i rnal 'byor | des mdzad pa'i thun mong ma yin pa'i rdzogs rim rdo rje bzhi'i rnal 'byor zhes bya ba rnam snang bzhi sgrom snying mdzod nas padma rgyal po ye shes rol pa rtsal gyis spyang drangs pa'i 'jam dpal don gyi gsang tig gi man ngag yang tig gces sgron gyi dgongs 'grel | des mdzad pa'i rdo rje bzhi'i rnal 'byor gyi nyams len rgyun khyer 'go na nang par snga bar ldang ba dang sbyang mo drug gi sngags kyi mtha' can | rdo rje bzhi'i rnal 'byor gyi sher dbang du chos kun 'dus tshul paṇ chen rin po che'i gter gzhung bcos med | ... I have not been able to find these texts in the Yamāntaka volumes of the *Byan gter phyogs sgrigs* (CNT 2015). However, they are found in vol. 11 of the 1999 edition of 'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa's complete works (see bibliography for reference). These texts should be the next corpus to be investigated for a deeper understanding of the Fifth Dalai Lama's implicit assumptions about what could be a completion phase in the context of 'Jam dpal tshe bdag. A preliminary investigation of 'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa's writings on the *rdzogs rim* of 'Jam dpal tshe bdag led me to two provisional conclusions: first, they do include elaborate visionary rDzogs chen, with all the traditional key points of *thod rgal*. Second, they do not seem to contain any allusion to 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen or Sar ban Phyogs med.

⁴³ This point is explained in, e.g., the Fifth Dalai Lama's 'Jam dpal zhi ba'i 'phrin las sangs rgyas mngon sum lag bcangs (2009, vol. 26, pp. 386-395), pp. 387-388. The explanation is too long and convoluted to be reproduced in a footnote, but its meaning is unequivocal. This is entirely about an inclusion of the peaceful Mañjuśrī sādhanā from 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen in 'Jam dpal yang bzlog nag po me'i spu gri chen, or a synthesis of this with the lCags sdig / lCags 'dra cycles, as a preliminary practice before the wrathful deity in the context of *Yang zlog me'i spru gri*, not at all about the inclusion of the properly rDzogs chen aspects of 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen as a conclusion practice for Yamāntaka. Be that as it may, we have just seen that *Yang zlog me'i spru*

pham's intention in the quoted text may thus merely be to provide the lineage for that preliminary peaceful *Mañjuśrī* practice.

In conclusion, there is a number of converging hints leading to the conclusion that *Mañjuśrī's Dzogchen* may have been intended, at least by the Fifth Dalai Lama, as the innermost, final practice of *Mañjuśrī Master of Life*—but we must acknowledge that this idea is nowhere formally asserted. The strong interest of the Fifth Dalai Lama in *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* is sufficiently explained through this cycle's strong coloration of destructive magic / war magic, which obviously the new monarch of Tibet felt he needed to consolidate his power through the destruction of his visible and invisible enemies. This appears to be the main motivation of the Fifth Dalai Lama's fondness for this cycle. There is, in the present state of research, no compelling reason to imagine that he also interpreted it as a shortcut to full enlightenment, which, by Tibetan standards, may then imply the need for well-developed *rdzogs rim* and *rdzogs chen* instructions in this cycle.

7. *An example of visionary rDzogs chen found in the completion phase of a purely Mahāyoga cycle of the same type as 'Jam dpal tshe bdag*

The idea of visionary *rDzogs chen* inserted in the completion phase of cycles that are officially purely Mahāyoga is not something unheard of, even in the early period when the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* cycle was revealed by rGya Zhang khrom.⁴⁴ For instance, the oldest Hayagrīva cycle documented in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, *rTa mgrin yang gsang khros pa* (nowadays practiced mainly by some dGe lugs pa in Se ra byes), belongs to more or less the same period and presents some of the same type of features. It was also of great interest to the Fifth Dalai Lama.⁴⁵

gri is precisely the sub-cycle of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* to which *'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa*—whatever his sources—appended a completion stage (*rdzogs rim*).

⁴⁴ At a later stage, it appears from Klong chen pa's (1304–1364) large commentary on the *gSang ba snying po* (Klong chen pa 2009) that the inclusion of complete visionary *rDzogs chen* instructions in a purely Mahāyoga context became classical. However, in the absence of explicit statements, it is not absolutely clear how the general idea would apply to each specific cycle (in the same way as the inclusion of a tantra in the *pha rgyud* category of the *gsar ma* traditions does not ipso facto explain concretely whether, and how, the “five stages” (*pañcakrama*, *rim lnga*) of the *Guhyasamāja* system can be implemented in this context).

⁴⁵ On this cycle, cf. *gSan yig* in Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009, vol. 3, pp. 275–289, with further details on pp. 403–405 in the context of Nyang ral's revelation. Incidentally: Hayagrīva and Vajravārāhī are the deities for practices of the 2nd and 3rd empowerments of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* (1313). It cannot be ruled out that *rTa mgrin yang gsang khros pa* may in some way be the substratum in which this cycle was to take root, by combination with the richer *Bi ma snying thig*.

This *gter ma* cycle was revealed by three *gter ston*,⁴⁶ one of which died, the other caught leprosy, and the third became insane.⁴⁷ Then, after two generations,⁴⁸ the Siddha Dar 'phyar ba Rin chen bzang po (d.u., 12th c.) had a pure vision (*dag snang*) in which he received the full transmission and some complementary instructions. A continuous lineage of actual practice could then begin.

In the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, the *rdzogs rim* instructions for *rTa mgrin yang gsang khros pa*⁴⁹ include the gradual development of luminous visions, with some (if not all) typical *thod rgal* terminology, although its

⁴⁶ Fifth Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* 2009, vol. 3, p. 275: ...*zhes pa'i gter ston gsum tshogs ni rkyang po grags pa dbang phyug | sum pa byang chub tshul khrims | 'bre shes rab bla ma gsum gyis yer pa se ba lung nas rta mgrin padma dbang chen yang gsang khros pa khrag 'thung lha dgu'i rgyud grub thabs man ngag rnam spyang drangs nas...*

⁴⁷ *Loc. cit.*: ...*gter rdur gyis rkyang po mdze byung | sum pa 'das | 'bre smyon pas...* Same story in Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Padma dbang chen yang gsang khros pa'i lo rgyus rig 'dzin zhal lung* (in 2009, vol. 27, pp. 128-136), pp. 133-134. See Cuevas 2021, "Four Syllables for Slaying and Repelling," pp. 295-297 (esp. n.51).

⁴⁸ The chronology is unclear. The Fifth Dalai Lama (*loc. cit.*) mentions one 'Bru tshang gi gNyang ston who was the only person to receive the transmission from one or more of the *gter stons*, but then does not proceed to describe the connection between him and Grub thob Dar 'phyar ba (or Dar phyar ru ba, many variant spellings). Dar 'phyar ba is said to have received the transmission from a yogin, Zhang tshe Zla grags, who was an emanation of Padmasambhava: *ring zhig na grub pa'i dbang phyug dar phyar ru ba gtang jo mo nags rgyal na bzhugs pa'i dus slob dpon chen po padma 'byung gnas zhang tshe zla grags bya ba'i sngags pa zhig tu sprul nas dbang lung rnam rdzogs par gnang...* However, further in the text (p. 284), the Fifth Dalai Lama presents a lineage with two generations of lamas between the three original *gter stons* and Dar 'phyar ba: *'brug tshar gyi zhang ston gzi brjid 'bar | [an interspersed note adds: gsang mtshan dri med zla shar |] rta nag gi bla ma rgya | dpal ldan grub thob dar phyar ru ba | chos rgyal bo dong rin cen (sic) | ...* This Bo dong Rin chen is Bo dong Rin chen rtse mo (bdr: P2375) or, perhaps more probably Bo dong brTson 'grus rdo rje (bdr: P3097), if they are really two different persons (as Bo dong Rin chen rtse mo's fact sheet on BDRC puts it: "The Fifth Dalai Lama notes: *brtson 'grus rdo rje yin nam dpyad*." Be that as it may, this enables us to date Dar 'phyar ba vaguely to the 12th century. The same text (*loc. cit.*) also presents a lineage stemming from Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124-1192), with one figure, She ma 'Od 'byung, between him and Dar phyar ba. On this basis, it can be speculated that Dar phyar ba was active in the second half of the 12th century and maybe in the first years of the 13th, and that the original revelation of the *gter ma* occurred sometime between late 11th and early 12th century—so, slightly later than the revelation of *'jam dpal tshe bdag* by rGya Zhang khrom. For whatever it may be worth, since this text is full of anachronisms, this is further confirmed by the mention of these three Hayagrīva practitioners (the *gter stons*) in *Rwa lo tsā ba's* biography, which attributes their tragic fate to *Rwa lo tsā ba's* wrathful magic (see Cuevas 2015, pp. 231-233; all my gratitude to Pr. Bryan Cuevas for reminding me of this passage).

⁴⁹ See, e.g., in *Rin chen gter mdzod* 1976 [-1980]: vol. 39, pp. 429-449, *Padma dbang chen yang gsang khros pa'i rdzogs rim ye shes gsang lam zab mo*. Although the text does not have a proper colophon and strangely does not bear the *gter ma* marks, it presents itself as a section of the original *gter ma*. It is mentioned as such in the Fifth Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* (2009, vol. 3, pp. 283-284).

fundamental tantra, as found in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*,⁵⁰ does not seem to allude to any yogic completion phase, not to mention rDzogs chen visionary practice, at all. It seems that some later dGe lugs authors regarded the presence of these elements in this and similar contexts as later additions (by the *gter stons*?), precisely because of their absence in the root tantras.^{51 52} However, this argument is paradoxical, because in the case of *rTa mgrin yang gsang khros pa* at least, the antiquity of the root tantra, which seems to have appeared with the *gter ma*, is not any better attested than those of the other elements: all were most probably revealed at the same time. In any case, the Fifth Dalai Lama was well-versed in this system⁵³ and his own writings bear witness to his awareness of the presence of a rDzogs chen system of gradual development of luminous vision in this supposedly pure Mahāyoga context.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ *Padma dbang chen yang gsang khros pa'i rgyud*, in *mTshams brag rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, vol. 31, pp. 395-431.

⁵¹ The main authority for *rTa mgrin yang gsang khros pa* in the dGe lugs tradition seems to be the Mongolian lama Brag ri Dam tshig rdo rje (1751-1855). His extensive writings on this Hayagrīva cycle (Brag ri dam tshig rdo rje, 1979-1980, *Padma dbang chen rta mgrin yang gsang khros pa'i chos skor*, vol. 1-3, Delhi: Chopel Legdan) do not seem to include detailed *rdzogs rim* instructions. However, he refrains from explicitly commenting on this point. This is not the case of Thu'u kwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802), who appears to be the main dGe lugs authority on *rTa mgrin gsang sgrub*, the other large rNying ma Hayagrīva cycle that also survived in a dGe lugs environment. His writings on *rTa mgrin gsang sgrub* are found in Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 1969-1971, *gSung 'bum (zhol par ma)*, New Delhi: Ngawang Gelek Demo, 10 volumes), vol. 6 & 7. In a passage of this large collection, Thu'u kwan explicitly opposes the authority of the Fifth Dalai Lama and expresses doubts about the authenticity of the *rdzogs rim* / *rdzogs chen* aspect of this cycle, with an argument that may be intended for *rTa mgrin yang gsang khros pa* too: he says that since these instructions are not alluded to in the root tantra, they must have been added by later authors.

⁵² Comment by Bryan Cuevas on a draft version of this article, 2025/12/08: "This is particularly interesting given that Tsong kha pa employed precisely this strategy for Vajrabhairava, introducing elements absent from the root tantra. Later dGe lugs pa scholars defended his innovations as valid scriptural interpretation while questioning similar practices in other traditions. To be fair of course, earlier Sa skya masters had employed similar approaches, suggesting this was an accepted method of tantric development."

⁵³ A series of seven writing about this cycle are included in vol. 27 of his *Complete Writings* (2009: pp. 128-247). According to the dGe lugs tradition of *rTa mgrin yang gsang*, the Fifth Dalai Lama had a *dag snang* revelation of it, which may not have added to the textual content but created a short lineage (this is attested by practice texts used in the FPMT and oral explanations from dGe lugs lamas, but I have not yet found a clear, direct source in, e.g., the *gSang ba rgya can*).

⁵⁴ There are admittedly no detailed instructions on *rdzogs rim* in the above-mentioned series of seven texts in vol. 27. However, for instance, there is a summary of the stages of this path at the end of the lineage prayers in the *Padma yang gsang khros pa'i las byang gyer sgom 'jigs med rdo rje'i sgra dbyangs* (in vol. 27, pp. 137-181), p. 140,

The Fifth Dalai Lama's vision remains to be understood, especially in terms of the interface of dGe lugs and rNying ma views and practices. Somewhat like the much later *Ris med* masters, he seems to keep each teaching in the spirit of the tradition to which it belongs, without any attempt to any form of synthesis.

However, his writings have not yet been investigated with the aim to try and understand his actual philosophical views on the ultimate nature of phenomena—whether they lean more to the rNying ma or to the dGe lugs side, or whether, as can be suspected, he is pure dGe lugs pa in dGe lugs contexts as he is a pure rNying ma pa in rNying ma contexts. Indeed, his rNying ma writings do not show any dGe lugs coloration at all: rNying ma terminology, doctrines, ritual systems are fully assumed in works on rNying ma topics. In any case, as a conclusion, what we may safely say is that the Fifth Dalai Lama is much more enthusiastic than later dGe lugs specialists of rNying ma tantric cycles about their *rdzogs rim* and *rdzogs chen* aspects. This may have inspired in him the desire to complete *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* with such aspects.

6. The Fifth Dalai Lama's Practice Manual for Mañjuśrī's Dzogchen

The Thousand Illuminations is in any case a significant rDzogs chen text among the writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama. A thorough study of his rDzogs chen works should of course also consider his short practice manual for the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*⁵⁵ and important rDzogs chen sections in some tantric practice texts.⁵⁶ In fact, except for a couple of pages translated below (section 21 of the main part of the *sādhana*), this is a practice text for peaceful Mañjuśrī which merely has a rDzogs chen flavor, in the sense that it uses rDzogs chen terminology and presents the stages in the practice from a very high point of view that, in a way, denies what is being ritually performed through dissolving it in statements of a high rDzogs chen view.

Let us now summarize *The Thousand Illuminations* and present in more detail the passage that is most relevant to rDzogs chen.

in which the allusions to both elaborate *gtum mo* instructions and rDzogs chen visionary practices are transparent.

⁵⁵ *rdzogs chen mkha' 'gro snying thig gi khrid yig mchan gsal 'bum phrag snang bzhi'i 'od zer*, in DL5 2009, vol. 28, pp. 46-57.

⁵⁶ For instance, the *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba dbyings grol gyi bskyed rdzogs rdzogs pa chen po'i khrid yig rig 'dzin zhal lung* (in DL5 2009, vol. 27, pp. 29-104), on Legs ldan rdo rje's cycle *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba dbyings grol*, has a significant rDzogs chen section (pp. 48-85) which is certainly the most detailed systematic presentation of the highest rDzogs chen precepts in the Fifth Dalai Lama's writings.

Introduction

The text begins with verses of homage (pp. 354-355), addressed first to Zur chen Chos dbying Rang grol (1604–1657⁵⁷), then to the teaching itself, then to Padmasambhava, then the treasure discoverer, Sar *ban* Phyogs med, then the 16th century Byang gter master *Byang bdag* bKras shis stobs rgyal, the main source of inspiration of the Fifth Dalai Lama for this cycle. This is followed by the announcement of the topics to be treated: it contains two large sections—the *sādhana* (pp. 355-373) and the empowerment ritual (pp. 373-385). They are followed by a short conclusion (pp. 385-386).

The Preliminary Part of the Sādhana (pp. 355-360)

The *sādhana* has three parts: a preliminary part with 15 subdivisions (pp. 355–360); the main part with 21 subdivisions (pp. 360-366); and the conclusion of the *sādhana* with 16 subdivisions (pp. 366-373).

In the first, preliminary part, we find: 1. refuge and 2. bodhicitta, on p. 355; they are followed by 3. a lineage prayer (p. 356-357). The lineage does not pass through Padmasambhava, but is introduced in Tibet by Mañjuśrīmitra, who transmitted it to King Khri strong lde'u btsan, who gave it to a secret spouse called She sa sGron gcig. The treasure revealer, Sar *ban* Phyogs med, is said to have been her reincarnation. Then the lineage runs through completely unknown figures up to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and then an all-Byang gter lineage. This lineage prayer concludes, as usual, with a description of the stages of this path for which blessings are requested from the lineage masters. It is noteworthy that *khregs chod* and *thod rgal* are named (p. 357). This should imply that this cycle belongs to the *man ngag sde* and perhaps to its highest subdivisions. Then comes 4. the “reading of the tantra” (*rgyud bklaḡ pa*, pp. 357-358). Despite this misleading title, this is the beginning of the visualization: from emptiness, one instantaneously arises as Mañjuśrī seated on a lotus, a sun and a moon in the most usual form, the color of molten gold, with a letter *hūṃ* in his heart that radiates to invoke the blessings of all enlightened beings and then gathers back; then in front of oneself appears the refuge tree with Śākyamuni as the central figure, etc. One then recites the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, “short or developed,” and then innumerable rays of light radiate from Śākyamuni's body and teach everywhere “the tantra of Mañjuśrī” to infinite

⁵⁷ Note by Bryan Cuevas (2025/12/07) on a draft version of this article, correcting the date 1669 found on BDRC, etc.: “According to the Fifth Dalai Lama's biography of Zur chen, he died in the fire-bird year (1657) at the age of fifty-three. It is therefore unclear why BRDC and some other sources give this incorrect date of 1669 (...).”

beings.

This is followed by 5. the accumulations (of merits, p. 358), which is a rDzogs chen version of the “seven-branch” prayer commonly found at the beginning of most sādhanas. Then comes 6. “the infinite accumulations of primordial wisdom” (pp. 358-359), a rDzogs chen complement to this “seven-branch” prayer for the accumulation of primordial wisdom (*ye shes kyi tshogs*). Here, the principle is to recognize that everything is the five primordial wisdoms. This is rDzogs chen merely in the sense of a verbal expression of rDzogs chen view, not in the sense of specific rDzogs chen practices.

After that, there is 7. the “taking of the accomplishments” (*dnagos grub blang ba*, p. 359)—four verses followed by a mantra. Then comes 8. “terrifying the obstructors” (p. 359). This displays the uncommon feature that one visualizes oneself only as a letter *hūṃ* and not as a wrathful deity.⁵⁸ This is followed by 9. the opening of the symbolic door (p. 359); 10. the symbolic prostrations; 11. the commitment; 12. (p. 360) the descent of the blessings; 13. the offerings of the expressivity of *rig pa*; 14. the blessing of the offerings and the *gtor ma*; 15. the confession in the [ultimate] sphere.

This concludes the preliminary part of the sādhana.

The Main Part of the Sādhana (pp. 360-366)

The main part of the sādhana (pp. 360-366) has 21 subdivisions: 1. the generation of the deity (p. 360); 2. bestowing the empowerments (p. 361); 3. wearing the armor (p. 361); 4. inviting primordial wisdom (pp. 361-362); 5. the prayer for the deities to abide (p. 362); 6. the prostrations (p. 362); 7. the offering of the dance [of the] mudrā, or of mudrās and dance (*phyag rgya gar mchod pa*, p. 362); 8. the song and the dance (p. 362); 9. the outer offerings (p. 362); 10. the inner offerings (p. 362); 11. the offering of the complete purity of the five poisons (pp. 362-363). Section 12 curiously has the same title, “offering of the complete purity of the three poisons” (p. 363); 13. the offering of the medicine (nectar, p. 363); 14. the offering of the *gtor ma* (p. 363); 15. the offering of *rakta* (p. 363); 16. the offering of the secret oppression (p. 363); 17. the union (*sbyor ba*, p. 363); 18. the offering of liberation (pp. 363-364); 19. the praise (p. 364); 20. the confession (pp. 364-365); 21. the completion phase (pp. 365-366).

⁵⁸ Note the phrase *rang gter las*, which seems to mean that the Fifth Dalai Lama had himself a slightly different « re-revelation » of this cycle, which remains to be documented.

The 21st Section of the Main Part of the Sādhana: Slightly Uncommon Visionary rDzogs chen?

The 21st section is remarkable, because it presents abbreviated *thod rgal* instructions—or of something that is akin to *thod rgal*, with partly common terminology. As this is the only pure rDzogs chen passage, it is worth editing and translating for the reader to realize that *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen* is not rDzogs chen merely in terms of a very profound view, but also in terms of the technicalities of the practice. However, this text, which is presented by the Fifth Dalai Lama as a quotation—probably from the *gter chos*, despite the absence of the typical *gter ma* punctuation—would deserve a very precise, word to word, analysis. Indeed, it is easily understandable on the basis of a precise knowledge of the *thod rgal* instructions, and yet, it presents specific, unusual features. For example, it names two of the three most common *thod rgal* body postures, but not the third, although it may be alluding to it under the name “the posture that is without adoption and rejection”. What is much less common, it associates each posture with one given stage of the visionary development. In a way that is consistent but not common, the eye postures or gazes change according to the stage one has reached in the visionary development: one gazes upper and upper.

Furthermore, in standard *thod rgal* instructions, the breathing instructions are one and the same for the entire visionary development process, while here, terms that normally allude to types of retentions that are not found in *thod rgal* occur.

In the same way, it seems to have a stage before what is normally the first vision (*chos nyid mngon sum*), then it uses the name of the second (*nyams snang gong 'phel*) for a more advanced stage of the practice, but the standard names of the third (*rig pa tshad phebs*) and the fourth (*chos nyid zad pa*) do not appear. Incidentally, it is not obvious that the description of the stages of this development are the usual ones: the allusion to various geometrical shapes (*thig le dang thig phran*, etc.), which normally occur quite early in the process, seem to be placed at a point in which one may suppose the practitioner is reaching the full measure of Intelligence (*rig pa tshad phebs*). What is more, there are no allusions to deities, the visions of which, in standard *thod rgal*, gradually become central when one advances further in the visionary development.

Overall, the text is fully intelligible on the basis of a sufficient knowledge of standard *thod rgal*, but if one reads it honestly, without presupposing that this *has to* allude to things known in mainstream tradition, its intriguing singularities are obvious and may hint either to an archaic state of the matter or to an alternate tradition, different from that of the mainstream Heart Essences (*snying thig*).

Unfortunately, as we have seen, the Fifth Dalai Lama does not provide us sufficient information to go any further, since he does not even name the text that he quotes.

Translation & Edition of the 21st Section

Twenty-first [point], as for the completion phase:

"This primordially pure essence of the mind, unthinkable and inexpressible,
Unlimitedly and vividly clear, is the actual Buddhahood.
If one continuously abides in it, this is complete without need to
Implement what is conventionally called "meditation" or "practice".⁵⁹

Why so? Because in our own Intelligence (*rig pa*), pure insofar as it is the Dharmakāya,
Since there is neither birth nor death, there is neither action nor complete ripening [of the actions' karmic fruits].
As [this] does not exist, there is nothing such as "development" and "completion" [stages].⁶⁰

In it, there are not even the names of delusion and liberation.
The King of Unity abides in the sense of their inexistence.
If you meditate [just] one session of [this] brilliance (*dangs*), saṃsāra collapses.⁶¹

The Enlightened Mind of all the Sugatas,
[This] perfect essence endowed with [its] masses of light,
As for its being, is one, [but] as for its pervasion, is all-pervading.
As for its abode, it always rests in the middle of the heart.⁶²

Clear [and] empty, it shines throughout the ten directions and the three times.
Since [all] this is its own luminosity, if it is recognized [as such],
It is liberated as the kāyas, the primordial wisdoms, and the pure lands of the Conquerors,

⁵⁹ *Nyer gnyis pa rdzogs rim ni | bsam brjod bral ba'i sems nyid ka dag la | | ma 'gags wal ler gsal ba sangs rgyas dngos | | de la rgyun du gnas na tha snyad kyi | | sgom dang sgrub pa bya rgyud med par rdzogs |*.

⁶⁰ *Ci phyir rang rig chos skur dag pa la | | skye shi med pas las dang rnam smin med | | de med bskyed dang rdzogs pa'ang ci yang med |*.

⁶¹ *'Khrul dang grol ba'i ming yang de la med | med pa'i don la mnyam pa'i rgyal po bzhaq | | dangs pa'i thun gcig bsgoms na 'khor ba 'jig |*.

⁶² *bDe bar gshegs pa kun gyi byang chub sems | | yang dag snying po 'od kyi phung po can | | yin ni gcig yin khyab ni kun la khyab | | gnas ni rtag tu snying gi dbus na'o |*.

Devoid of the defects of impure karmic vision.⁶³

If one's own luminosity is not recognized, then our body and karmic traces,
And the outer dimension of perceptions, the shell of delusion, are generated.
One will then not encounter the primordial wisdom that [inherently] abides within oneself.⁶⁴

This being so, as for [your body, rest in the posture of] the squatting sage;
As for breathing, let it rest [= be slow]; and regarding the eyes, let them be half closed [looking downwards].
The direct perception of primordial wisdom(s) will liberate [you].⁶⁵

Then, with the posture that is without adoption and rejection,
Bind the wind of radiance and look straight in front.
The perception of primordial wisdom [during the] direct perception of Reality (*chos nyid mngon sum*)
Is the actual Buddha[hood], free from adventitious impurities.⁶⁶

As for the eyes, align them on the right and the left of the maṇḍala and on the space between the eyebrows.⁶⁷
[366] The proliferation of experiences and visions (*nyams snang gong 'phel*) will interrupt ordinary mental constructions.
Through being continuously aligned on this genuine primordial wisdom of clear light,
Development and completion [stages] will be spontaneously perfected.
This is [your] very last existence [in saṃsāra].⁶⁸

Then, through the posture of the lion proudly rearing,

⁶³ *gSal stong phyogs bcu dus gsum kun tu gsal | | de nyid rang 'od yin phyir ngo shes na | | sku dang ye shes rgyal ba'i zhing du grol | | ma dag las kyi snang ba'i skyon dang bral | .*

⁶⁴ *Rang 'od ma shes lus dang bag chags kyi | | snang ba'i go phyi 'khrul pa rgya bskyed nas | | rang gnas ye shes rang dang mjal mi 'gyur | .*

⁶⁵ *De phyir lus ni drang srong tsog pu dang | | rlung ni nga ba mig ni zim bur lta | | mngon sum ye shes mthong bas grol bar gyur | .*

⁶⁶ *Da bas blang dor med pa'i 'dug stangs kyi | | dangs ma'i rlung bcings thad ka'i mig gis blta | | chos nyid mngon sum ye shes mthong ba ni | | glo bur dri bral rang rig sangs rgyas dngos | .*

⁶⁷ This may allude to an instruction found in *thod rgal* context about what to do in the case of an unbalanced predominance of some colors or forms.

⁶⁸ *Mig ni dkyil 'khor g.yas [366] g.yon mdzod spur gtun | | nyams snang gong 'phel tha mal rnam rtog 'gags | | 'od gsal don gyi ye shes de nyid dang | | rgyun du bstun pas bskyed rdzogs lhun gyis grub | | | srid pa tha mar gyur pa nyid yin no | .*

The upper and lower primordial wisdom winds of Mañjuśrī
 Being conjoined and the eyes gazing above the space between the
 eyebrows,
 The three kāyas and the five primordial wisdoms, perfect without
 having been generated,
 [will appear in the form of] drops and droplets [forming something
 like] a tent of brocade,
 Like gauze, a checkerboard, a cloth with dense motives, spokes.
 Perceptions being completely purified, the visions of primordial
 wisdom will proliferate (*ye shes snang ba 'phel*).⁶⁹

The continuum of primordial wisdom [in which] ordinary names
 are exhausted⁷⁰ will be uninterrupted.
 One who knows (*shes*) this becomes birthless.⁷¹

Then, the meaning of the key points of the ten essential truths (*don*),
 The hidden explanation, [will have become] the heart treasure of
 the predestined one
 [Who now experiences] the purest part of the quintessence of all
 [spiritual] fruits.⁷²

So as to explain correctly the Meaning of this:
 If one masters the key points of the body, Intelligence encounters
 its objective field.
 If one masters the key points of speech, one realizes the unspeakable
 mode of being.
 If one masters the key points of the mind, [all] movements are
 stopped on the spot.
 Whatever one perceives, [even] bad views and thoughts are liberated
 as the Dharmakāya."—Practice accordingly.⁷³

⁶⁹ *De nas seng ge rab tu 'gying ba yi | 'dug stangs steng 'og 'jam dpal ye shes rlung | kha
 sbyar mig ni mdzod spu'i steng thad blta | ma bskyed rdzogs pa sku gsum ye shes lnga |
 thig le thig phran za 'og gur khyim dang | re lde mig mangs dar tshags rtibs shar dang |
 snang ba rnam dag ye shes snang ba 'phel |*

⁷⁰ It could be speculated that the phrase *ye shes snang ba 'phel* above corresponds to
 something analogous to what the sNying thig traditions name *rig pa tshad phebs*,
 and that *ming zad* here alludes to what they call *chos nyid zad pa*.

⁷¹ *Tha mal ming zad ye shes rgyun chad med | 'di nyid shes na skye ba med par 'gyur |*

⁷² *De nas snying po'i don bcu'i gnad kyi don | sbas pa'i ti ga (sic) skal ldan snying gi nor |
 'bras bu kun gyi yang bcud dangs ma yin |*

⁷³ *De yi dgongs pa yang dag bstan pa ni | lus gnad gcun pas reg (sic for rig) pa yul dang
 mjal | ngag gnad gcun pas brjod med gnas lugs rtogs | yid gnad gcun pas 'gyu ba rang
 sar zad | gang mthong lta ba ngan bsam chos skur grol | zhes nyams su blang ngo |*

The Conclusion of the Sādhana (pp. 366-373)

It contains sixteen parts: 1. the offerings to the protectors (pp. 366-367); 2. the blessing of the *tshogs* (p. 367); 3. the invitation (of the deities to the *tshogs*, same page); 4. the offering (pp. 367-368); 5. the confession (p. 368); 6. the obtention (*stob pa*, same page); 7. the request (to accept the offerings, *zhu ba*, same page); 8. the answer to this request (*zhu lan*, pp. 368-369); 9. sending the remainders (p. 369); 10. the *chad mtho* (obscure term—pp. 369-371); 11. the protection of the teachings (*bstan skyong*, p. 371); 12. the dance of the horse (*rta bro*, pp. 371-372); 13. the purification of the extreme of eternity (p. 372); 14. the purification of the extreme of annihilation (p. 372); 15. the dedication (of merits, pp. 372-373); 16. the aspiration prayers (p. 373); 17. the auspicious verses (p. 373).

The Fifth Dalai Lama then proposes a more elaborate conclusion for the ritual from Longchenpa's (1306–1364) *mKha' 'gro yang tig*, or from a tantra revealed by Ratna Lingpa (1403–1478).

The Empowerment Ritual (pp. 373-385)

This section is not explicitly subdivided. The description of the rite is pretty linear. A short history of the lineage is found on pp. 375-376. It is remarkable because it presents this cycle as having been passed down through various lines and not only by *gTer ston Sar ban* Phyogs med. For example, *rDo rje gling pa* is named (p. 375) as another channel through which it was transmitted. It is in this part of the text that the cycle possibly seems be characterized as belonging to the *sPyi ti* section of *rDzogs chen*, but, as mentioned above, the text is ambiguous.⁷⁴ On p. 376, the discovery of the *gter ma* is ascribed to both *Gu ru Chos dbang* (as King *Khri srong lde'u btsan's* rebirth) and *Sar ban* Phyogs med (as the reincarnation of his secret spouse *She sa sgron gcig* or *She sa sgron me*).

After these preliminary explanations, the actual empowerment rite

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 375: ... '*Jam dpal rgyud kyi rgyal po 'di nyid la bshad thabs gsum du mdzad de yang bka' 'grel pa la brten nas rgya che ba spyi ti ltar bshad | rgyud la brten nas don 'grel | ngo sprod la brten nas gsang 'grel mdzad | de dag kyang dbang po'i rim pa gsum gyi bkri tshul du snying por bsdu te gnang bas | ...* The sentence is very long and somewhat convoluted, but the global meaning is that Padmasambhava commented the tantra (the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*?) at three different levels, only one of which corresponds to a section of *rDzogs chen* (*sPyi ti*) that is known in doxographies, while the two other ones are obscure. If I understand well, they are all supposed to be gathered or synthesized in '*Jam dpal rdzogs chen*', but this is unclear. As mentioned above, the three levels may correspond to three texts that are included in the forthcoming 68-volume edition of the Northern Treasures corpus. The situation will probably become clearer when this edition is available.

begins on p. 377 with the maṇḍala offering and the request, then the permission for the disciples to enter the maṇḍala, then (p. 378) refuge and bodhicitta, with the visualization of the master as being Vairocana. Then (pp. 378-379) come all the elements of the vase empowerment, said (p. 379) to follow the system of *Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal*. Then comes a *gtor ma* empowerment (pp. 379-381). Although the text mentioned four empowerments above, this long *gtor ma* empowerment is directly followed by a word empowerment (*tshig dbang*, p. 381-382), concluded by the phrase *zhes dbang bskur ro*, “thus has the empowerment been conferred.” This seems to mean that the empowerment ritual is now complete. However, it is followed by the direct introduction (*ngo sprod*, p. 382-383). Then we reach the conclusion (pp. 383-384), with the maṇḍala offering as a token of gratitude to the master, the offering of one’s body, speech, and mind, and then auspicious verses (pp. 384-385). A tantra is then quoted (p. 385) under the title *sGyu ’phrul drwa ba’i bcud kyi snying po*. This could be one of the versions of the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, but the quoted passage remains to be located.

The Conclusion (pp. 385-386)

In the final lines of the text, we find the names or titles of various lamas who either made the request for the composition of this text—such as *Rig ’dzin Padma ’phrin las*⁷⁵—or to whom it is dedicated for some reason (*bKa’ ’gyur ba*, *gTer bdag gling pa*...). The Fifth Dalai Lama then proceeds to present (p. 386) the sources from which he borrowed. The text concludes with a date of composition, in a year *chu glang* that has to be 1673.

Conclusion: Future Tasks for Researchers

I expect that the present article may have stimulated the curiosity of researchers about this rare rDzogs chen cycle and its articulations with other corpora. What remains ahead of us would first be to find the original *gtor ma* corpus of *Mañjuśrī’s rDzogs chen*, if any copy of it remains somewhere. As mentioned above, the forthcoming 68-vol. edition of the Northern Treasures, with its 14 texts on *’Jam dpal rdzogs chen*,

⁷⁵ Incidentally, it is interesting for Byang gter studies that, in this text, there is a distinction between the *bKra bzang rig ’dzin chen po*, called *Thugs mchog ’od ’bar*, and *Rig ’dzin Padma ’phrin las*. This *Thugs mchog ’od ’bar* is *Se ston Thugs mchog ’od ’bar* (P9480), whose birth BDRC places in the 16th century, with the indication that he was the master of *sMan lung pa Blo gros mchog gi rdo rje* (1595–1671), who seems (Tenpa Tsering Batsang, oral communication, 2025/10/14) to have been *Rig ’dzin Padma ’phrin las’* main master for Byang gter.

will significantly extend the available documentation.

It should also be researched how other figures than Sar *ban* Phyogs med contributed to this cycle—especially Guru Chos dbang, who seems to have revealed a first layer of it, upon which Sar *ban* Phyogs med would have built the collection as described by the Fifth Dalai Lama. Then *Byang bdag* bKra shis stobs rgyal's writings should be looked for. Not only do they play a pivotal role in this specific cycle, but they are also often alluded to in many rNying ma contexts, and few of them are available. On such a more solid basis, the issue of the connection of *Mañjuśrī's rDzogs chen* with *sPyi ti* could then be reexamined.

Further research may also explore the idea that *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen* may be a proto-*Yang ti nag po*, in the sense of a *Mañjuśrī*-connected form of visionary rDzogs chen. In the same vein, incidentally, one could be well inspired to explore the hypothesis of a «*sNying thig* Hayagrīva-and-Vajravārāhī-associated rDzogs chen»: could the above-discussed *rTa mgrin yang gsang khros pa* cycle be one of the matrices of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*? In any case, further research is needed on the presence of visionary rDzogs chen in early literature supposedly belonging to pure Mahāyoga contexts: after all, Klong chen pa's injection of complete sNying thig-style rDzogs chen instructions in the *Phyogs bcu'i mun sel* (his extensive commentary on the *gSang ba snying po*) may not reflect only his own focus on visionary rDzogs chen, but rather be the continuation of a tradition witnessed in much earlier sources.

Another thread to be pulled would be to try to understand better (from his biography and other writings) the reasons why the Fifth Dalai Lama devoted efforts to this specific cycle, which seems quite obscure and definitely already was in his time, if we consider the rarity of its mentions in biographies. The most likely hypothesis is that this is connected to his fondness for Byang gter and his respect for *Byang bdag* bKra shis stobs rgyal, a figure whose historical importance is not fully understood yet.

The thread of the *rdzogs rim* of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* in 'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa's writings and revelations should also be pulled further.

Research should also be undertaken to figure out what was the Fifth Dalai Lama's personal understanding of rDzogs chen, especially in relation to his more dGe lugs / scholastic writings. Did he merely add contradictory views side by side, being a dGe lugs pa in dGe lugs contexts, and a rNying ma pa in rNying ma ones? Or did he have in mind any form of philosophical synthesis?

It should then be explored in what way this specific approach was perceived in later Tibetan tradition, both on the dGe lugs side (posterity of his rNying ma-style writings in dGe lugs monasteries, as with

the Hayagrīva compilations of Brag ri Dam tshig rdo rje and Thu'u kwan in the 18th century) and on the rNying ma side (especially in the Byang gter / rDo rje brag tradition that counts the Fifth Dalai Lama as one of their lineage masters, but also on the sMin grol gling side, since gTer bdag gling pa is often mentioned in lineage prayers as the heir of the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Secret Visions*).



Bibliography

The appendix below does not have a bibliography, because it is essentially of bibliographical nature. All the collections and individual texts referred to in the appendix are described in this bibliography.

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⁷⁶ This collection—a large section of CNT—includes works and revelations of many authors. See Arguillère 2024 for a description. The compilation of this cycle in the forthcoming 68-vol. Byang gter collection will be even richer.

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*Appendix: The Fifth Dalai Lama’s catalog of ‘Jam dpal rdzogs chen*⁷⁸

The following list of text titles is of course problematic, since the corpus is so far unavailable and since the interpretation of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s text in terms of a series of discrete items is not absolutely self-obvious. It also does not match, even partly, with the above-quoted list of texts in the table of contents of the forthcoming 68-vol. edition of the Byang gter. However, this is so far the best we have.

⁷⁸ *gSan yig*, in DL5 2009, vol. 3, pp. 131-133.

1. *Thog mar 'od lnga'i dkyil 'khor dang dpal gtor zur bzhi la brten nas dbang gi chog bsgrigs dang zur 'debs kyi nang bzhin rigs lnga'i dbang |*
2. *gTor dbang |*
3. *Rang byung rang ngo shes pa'i dbang gi smin byed rig 'dzin brgyud pa'i phyag len ma nyams pa legs par nos nas |*

Lung la |

4. *Slob dpon 'jam dpal bshes gnyen gyi sku che ba'i yon tan dang | 'jam dpal sgyu 'phrul drwa ba'i bka' brgyud 'di rnams ji ltar babs pa'i brgyud pa'i lo rgyus nam mkha' la gshegs so mthar tshang pa |*
5. *'Jam dpal gyi chos kyi 'byung khungs khog 'bubs gzhi lam 'bras bu bshad pa'i 'bras las mtshan brjod kyi lo rgyus dang*
6. *Slob dpon padma'i rnam thar gter ston tshul 'chos kyi 'jug sgo slob dpon dgos tshul grub mtha' dang bcas pa gu rus mdzad pas mthar chad pa |*
7. *'Jam dpal gyi mchod pa'i las byang dbang chog bkra shis simon lam gtor ma gtong ba sogs sbas byang gi mtha' tshang ba |*
8. *'Jam dpal dbang gi zur 'debs kyi dbang dang ngo sprod bya rgod phung ri padma spungs ri shel ri spungs ri gsum gyi 'phros don las man shel gyi lo rgyus dang bcas pa thugs su chud pa'o mthar tshang pa |*
9. *mTshan yang dag par brjod pa'i don rgyud rdo rje rtse mo nam mkha' lta bu'i rgyud le'u bcu gcig pa |*
10. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod thabs chings rnam pa drug gis bstan pa rdzogs byang gi mtha' can |*
11. *mTshan yang dag par brjod pa gnyis med |*
12. *gSang sngags yon tan che tshul gsum gyi sgo nas 'don thabs rdzogs byang mthar tshang ba |*
13. *bsKyed rim gang zag dbang po rab 'bring mtha' ma'i 'don thabs phan yon dang bcas pa |*
14. *'Jam dpal rgyud kyi sa bcad don gsal bar byed pa'i sgron ma rdzogs byang gi mthar tshang ba |*
15. *De'i 'phros las sku gsum gyi mtshan nyid bstan pa |*
16. *A skye med rang byung byang chub sems su la zla ba |*
17. *'Byung ba phung po nyon mongs dbang po rnams rnam pa nyi shur snang ba don rtogs pa'i dus na rigs lngar 'char tshul te yig sna phra mo gsum |*
18. *'Jam dpal khri drug stong gi le'u sum brgya go dgu'i 'og na bstod pa glur blangs kyi le'u yod tshul gyi don bsdu btags grol gyi gzungs dang bcas pa |*
19. *'Jam dpal mtshan brjod kyi don 'grel o rgyan padma 'byung gnas kyis gsang sngags kyi bskyed rdzogs gsum dang mthun par mdzad pa |*
20. *Glo rdeg gtam rgyud sa bcad kyi sdom tshig mjug tu yig sna phra mo*

- rgyud gzhan gyis kha 'dzin mi dgos par bstan pa |
21. bKa' 'grol blo rdeg gi gtam rgyud lnga bcu rtsa gnyis pa mdo sde nas bsdus pa spas byang gi mthar tshad pa |
 22. mjug tu brgyud pa 'og ma rnams la gnang tshul dang ngo sprod thob pa'i gang zag gis zhes sogs chos la thos bsam sgom gsum byas pa'i phan yon tshigs su bcad pa'i yig sna phra mo |
 23. Khams gsum gyi grong khyer chen po na gnas pa'i srid pa gsum gyi sems can thams cad la 'phags pa 'jam dpal gyi ngo bos khyab pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis ngo sprod kyi gdams pa mjug tu gcig shes pas kun grol bar byed pa sangs rgyas kun gyi dgongs pa yang dag mthar thug pa'i che brjod dang bcas pa |
 24. Shin tu zab pa 'khrid yig gsang 'grel la nang gses kyi 'don thabs lnga |
 25. sNying po hūm gi sgrub pa sku gsum lam du 'khyer nus pa |
 26. mTshan dpe'i bshad pa |
 27. Nyan thos kyis brgya |
 28. Byang sems kyis bcu |
 29. Thabs lam sngags kyis bcu gnyis |
 30. Grol ma de bzhin gshegs pa'i sa lnga rnams bshad pa |
 31. rTsa rlung thig le'i gdams pa |
 32. Phyogs bcu'i 'jig rten du 'jam dpal gyi chos 'dis sems can rnams grol ba'i khyad par 'phags lugs |
 33. Khams gsum gyi sems can bshad pa |
 34. dGe 'dun gsum bshad pa |
 35. sPyan lnga bshad pa |
 36. Lam gyi yan lag brgyad rig tshul |
 37. Zhi ba'i lha tshogs kyi ngo sprod bcu gsum pa |
 38. Zhi ba'i lha'i dag sbyor |
 39. Khro bo'i lha tshogs bzhugs tshul |
 40. sKu gsum du grol tshul |
 41. sNod bcud gyi chags 'jig dang phung po gzhih 'brel du ngo sprod pa |
 42. A ti'i lta [ba] bsgom pa spyod pa 'bras bu bzhi nges tshig dang bcas pa bstan pa |
 43. gZhi 'khor 'das kyi rtsa ba bstan pa |
 44. She bza' sgron gyis gu ru la zhus pa'i tshig rkang bcu bzhi pa |
 45. 'Phags pa 'jam dpal rgyud kyi yang snying |
 46. De'i ngo sprod lta sgom spyod pa'i zhu lan gu rus she bza' sgron la gnang ba |
 47. gSang 'grel dngos la thog ma bar dang mthar dge ba sogs tshig rkang bzhi pa gu rus mnga' bdag la gnang zhing jo mo la yang gnang ba'i 'jam dpal gyi gsang 'grel don gsal bar byed pa'i sgron ma rdzogs byang gi mthar tshang ba |.



From Large and Complex Manuscript Collections to Searchable eTexts: the Case of PaganTibet

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Abstract

his article presents a comprehensive workflow for creating searchable eTexts from complex manuscript collections, using the PaganTibet corpus - made up of over 100,000 manuscript pages - as a case study. The corpus presents multiple challenges including its size, diverse handwritten styles (umé), and extensive use of abbreviations. We outline a collaborative approach integrating careful planning, multiple rounds of quality control, AI-enhanced Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) technology, and iterative error analysis. Comparing HTR model performance on challenging test sets, we demonstrate that models trained on carefully curated, diverse training data significantly outperform those trained on larger but more homogeneous datasets. Moreover, our analysis shows that while conventional evaluation metrics such as Character Error Rates (CERs) are useful benchmarks, they do not always reflect the practical performance of HTR models.¹

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, large collections of Tibetan manuscripts have come to light in remote parts of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands, which Tibetan media in China reported to date from the Tibetan imperial period. The publications of facsimiles based on these manuscript caches

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found in private houses are now generally referred to as the “Leu collections”² after Ngawang Gyatso’s 2005 article on a local tradition of lay priests called *leu* (*le’u*) in the Minshan mountain range (on the border of Gansu and Sichuan, China).³ As Berounský & Ramble (2026) discuss, these Leu collections present a mixture of texts, some referring to Buddhist and Yungdrung Bön religious practices, myths and rituals. Many, however, appear to describe autochthonous traditions prior to the advent of Buddhism and the varieties of indigenous Bön, which we, following Ramble (1998), refer to as “Pagan”.⁴ Apart from the well-known Dunhuang⁵ and Gathang⁶ texts, there are no written records of pre-Buddhist times. The topics of the rituals and the codicological features in the Leu texts are also found in some of the Dunhuang and Gathang texts, as well as in another recently discovered collection of ritual texts of the Baima who live in Pingwu, Songpan (Tib. *Zung chu*), Jiuzhaigou (Tib. *Gzi rtsa sde dgu*) in Sichuan, and in the counties of Wenxian and Zhouqu (Tib. *’Brug chu*) in Gansu, China.⁷ In addition to this, one of the “portals”⁸ of Yungdrung Bön texts is a repository of similar Pagan myths and rituals known as Black Water (*chab nag*), which are also found in compendia of ritual texts used by Bönpo village lamas in Mustang and Dolpo (Nepal).

The newly discovered Leu collections, containing at least 35,000 folios, combined with the relevant Baima, Dunhuang, Gathang and Black Water texts, comprise a growing corpus that to date contains >100,000 pages. These collections, which we will henceforth refer to as the “PaganTibet corpus” offer great potential for historical, anthropological, religious as well as philological and linguistic research for the time period. Berounský & Ramble (2026), however, list a number of reasons why researchers have not tapped into this rich resource yet, including the lack of searchable transcriptions (i.e. eTexts), the idiosyncratic and wide variety of forms of the *umé* (*dbu med*) scripts in which they are written, the highly irregular orthography and abundant use of contracted forms as well as unusual symbols, together with the lack of dictionaries and other resources for the specialist terms and unfamiliar narrative types and structures.

² The published facsimiles are generally referred to as “Leu 2011-30”, “Leu 2013-60”, “Leu 2016-10”, and “Leu 2024-100” following the year of publication and the number of volumes in the collections. Further publications are currently still in preparation.

³ See Ngawang Gyatso (2005).

⁴ Ramble (1998:124) provides further justification for the use of the term “Pagan”.

⁵ See <https://idp.bl.uk/about/projects/tibetan-manuscripts/>.

⁶ See *dGa’ thang ’bum pa nas bon gyi gna’ dpe* (2007).

⁷ See La Xian (2022).

⁸ For an overview of the eclectic nature of the Bön religions, see, among others, Snellgrove (1967:13); Karmay (1998 [1975]:119) and Kværne (1995:19).

In this article, we first introduce a comprehensive, AI-enhanced workflow for creating searchable eTexts for challenging collections like the written⁹ PaganTibet corpus that can form a blueprint for other large manuscript projects (Section 2.1). We then discuss specific issues of data collection and curation (Section 2.2) as well as codicological and palaeographical challenges (Section 2.3). Following this, we present the results of our Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) models in Section 3, with an in-depth error analysis of a selection of Leu texts comparing the PaganTibet models to other available options. In Section 4 we summarise our findings with lessons learnt and concrete suggestions for future research.

2. Challenges for Large and Complex Text Collections

In this section we address the major challenges that large amounts of difficult text collections present, drawing on our experience of working with the PaganTibet corpus. We first deal with the size, suggesting a collaborative workflow, before diving into specific issues with data collection and curation as well as palaeographical and codicological challenges.

2.1 Issues with Large Collections

The most obvious challenge of dealing with large amounts of manuscripts lies in the practical difficulties of transcribing the texts, either directly or from images. Even highly skilled and experienced philologists need time to manually transcribe dozens, if not hundreds or thousands of folios, which is impossible, especially within a time-sensitive project. Meelen et al. (2024) explain why well-known automated solutions, in particular Optical Character Recognition (OCR), are not suitable for Tibetan umé due to the handwritten text, which presents ligatures as well as connecting and overlapping characters (unlike, for example, typed Latin or Tibetan Unicode scripts, that feature white space between characters). Instead, Griffiths (2024) presents a method for digitising Tibetan umé line by line using an HTR model.¹⁰ HTR models are deep neural networks (i.e. “AI systems”) that learn how to transcribe handwritten text by training on examples of images paired with

⁹ In addition to written texts, within the PaganTibet project we also deal with audio-visual data in the form of ritual videos and interviews with Leu and Baima priests. These audio-visual collections are part of the broader PaganTibet corpus, but this article only deals with the written component. For workflows and tools on how to transcribe audio-visual data, see Chirkova et al. (2025).

¹⁰ HTR models can also be trained to automatically transcribe handwritten uchen (*dbu can*), see Werner & Viehbeck (2025), and printed uchen, see Erhard (2025).

their correct transcriptions called “Ground Truth”. Through this training, HTR models learn statistical patterns of computer vision (i.e. dark/light/coloured pixels) that enable them to map visual features (i.e. handwritten letters/words/lines) to corresponding text sequences. Once the models are trained, they can process new ‘unseen’ batches of images at scale to reduce the time spent on creating transcriptions. HTR models only work if the text regions and baselines can be identified automatically as well. In order to recognise where the relevant material is, so-called “Layout Recognition” or “Layout Analysis” models have to be applied or trained first so that they can inform the HTR model where to ‘look’ for text to transcribe (see Fig. 1).

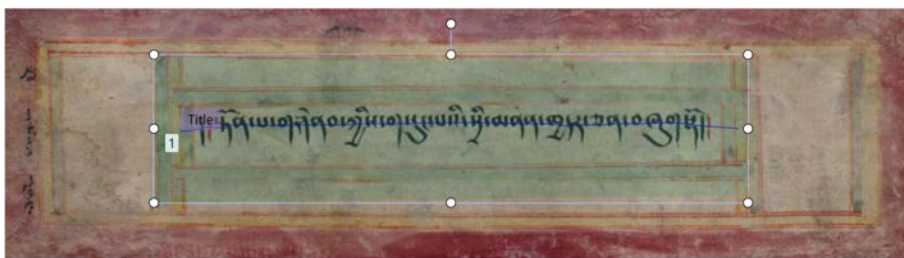


Fig. 1 — Transkribus model prediction with a text region (in green) and baselines (in blue). Folio taken from <https://kalpa-bon.com/texts/sri/sri-mnan-khyad-par-can>.

However, large manuscript collections - especially disparate collections - present challenges that extend beyond the technical aspects of utilising both HTR and Layout Analysis models. The scale of the PaganTibet corpus creates several interconnected issues.

First, producing sufficient Ground Truth (i.e. accurate transcriptions used to train HTR models, also called “Gold Standard” or simply referred to as “training data”) becomes a major bottleneck. Manual transcription and the necessary checking of even a small percentage of the PaganTibet corpus requires substantial resources and time. This is particularly challenging when the texts demand specialist expertise, where the pool of capable transcribers is limited. Moreover, ensuring the manuscripts used for Ground Truth best captures the diversity of scripts and breadth of complex features within the corpus presents an additional challenge. Second, maintaining consistency across such a large corpus is difficult. Due to the aims of the project, the eTexts produced by HTR will be diplomatic, i.e. as faithful as possible to the manuscripts, to facilitate in-depth philological, linguistics and comparative

research.¹¹ As such, the workflow necessitates the ongoing identification and documentation of complex cases, such as abbreviated forms and instances affected by Unicode limitations (discussed in Section 2.3), and the development of consistent conventions for their representation. Third, the PaganTibet corpus exhibits substantial internal variation. Different script hands, states of preservation, and image quality mean that an HTR model may perform well on some materials while failing on others. Consistent monitoring of model performance through qualitative analysis is therefore essential for ensuring the model is as robust as possible.

To address these challenges, we implemented a collaborative workflow. This workflow integrates three key partners: the internal PaganTibet team, partner organisations specialising in digital preservation and language technology (BDRC and Esukhia), and specialist annotators at the Triten Norbutse Institute (TNI), Kathmandu. The internal team handles image selection, model training, and final quality control. Partner organisations provide platform development, data management, and open access repository services. The annotation team is divided into two groups: one conducting manual transcription to create initial Ground Truth, and another correcting automated HTR output.¹²

The workflow uses a tiered quality control system with three levels of review. This proved essential, with the final review stage identifying as many as 10-15% of errors remaining. However, even after this triple-check process, small errors were found in the training data. During model training, Transkribus displays the model's predictions alongside the Ground Truth, and in some cases the model's output was correct while the Ground Truth still contained errors (see Fig. 2). Locating and correcting these errors meant that approximately 10% of the training data underwent a fourth review and correction round. This highlights the importance of continuously checking training data quality, as even rigorous multi-stage review processes cannot catch all errors. We will return to this issue when discussing the results in Section 3 below.

¹¹ HTR models can, to an extent, be trained to produce normalised eTexts, but it depends on the extent of abbreviations, spelling variations etc. and the amount of Ground Truth available - see the Transkribus website for more on this: <https://help.transkribus.org/data-preparation>.

Normalised versions of the transcriptions, which standardise spelling variations, expand abbreviations etc. to create consistent, searchable texts, are currently in development. For more information, see Griffiths & Meelen (2025b) and Meelen & Griffiths (2026).

¹² For a detailed discussion of workflow implementation, training procedures, and platform usability testing, see Meelen & Griffiths (2025b).

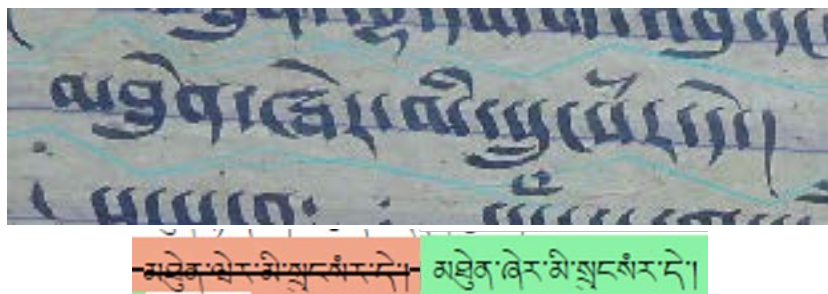


Fig. 2 — The ‘incorrect’ model prediction (in red) alongside the ‘correct’ Ground Truth (in green). The model has accurately transcribed ཞེ (wer), which appears as ཞེ (zher) in the Ground Truth.

Beyond quality control, the workflow's efficiency depended on appropriate technological infrastructure. The use of PechaTools,¹³ a platform developed by Esukhia specifically for Tibetan transcription and related tasks in digital humanities, facilitated coordination through integrated features including task assignment, error highlighting (allowing reviewers to mark mistakes in red for annotators to learn from), and a built-in dictionary of diplomatic rendering conventions. Regular updates to transcription manuals and training materials¹⁴ addressed recurring issues with complex cases.

To test the robustness of our workflow and training materials, we conducted an inter-annotator agreement (IAA) pilot analysis on a small sample of 185 lines drawn randomly from different texts across the corpus to compare how annotators transcribed these lines. Results showed strong agreement overall, and will be discussed in more detail in Section 3 below. The IAA and review stages were also useful for identifying recurring transcription errors and inconsistencies, for example the use of the *anunāsika* ས (U+0F84), which is not part of our transcription standards, instead of the *anusvāra* ས (U+0F7E). To address these issues, we developed a postprocessing script that applies rule-based corrections to our transcriptions.¹⁵ Corrected transcriptions were then incorporated back into the Ground Truth before model retraining, creating an iterative feedback loop that progressively reduces errors and improves future models.

Ground Truth data (triple-checked transcriptions) was exported from PechaTools and uploaded to Transkribus, a web-based platform for training and applying HTR models, for model training.¹⁶ We chose Transkribus for several reasons: it is user-friendly with a web-based

¹³ Also known as ‘BuddhistAItools’, see <http://buddhistai.tools/>.

¹⁴ See the HTR manual (Meelen & Griffiths 2025a) and the HTR Cheatsheet (Griffiths & Meelen 2025a).

¹⁵ See <https://github.com/pagantibet/htr>.

¹⁶ See <https://app.transkribus.org/>.

interface that requires no technical setup or server access, and it already hosts publicly available Tibetan umé models that provided a useful starting point for our work.¹⁷ However, there are limitations: models trained on Transkribus are publicly available but can only be used within Transkribus itself. It is also a paid platform. While 50 free credits are provided monthly (sufficient to process approximately 40 images), processing larger batches requires paid subscriptions.

2.2 *Issues with Data Collection and Curation*

2.2.1 *Issues collating existing collections*

Corpora are often created from a range of different existing collections of images. Both private collections and published facsimiles can pose some problems when creating a coherent corpus. As Berounský & Ramble (2026) point out, some of the published facsimiles of the Leu collections contain images of texts that are printed upside down or in the wrong order, i.e. starting with the end of the text working back to the title page later on. In other cases, longer texts are interspersed with single folios of other texts. This issue arises for the Leu 2011-30 collection in particular. Although the later Leu 2013-60 and Leu 2016-10 collections are well-organised, there are no content catalogues for any of them.¹⁸

When it comes to private collections, a major issue with uncatalogued and undocumented sets of images is the risk of duplicates. Digital cameras often have similar file-naming conventions and when SD cards are changed and/or images are copied to multiple devices, identical images are often stored multiple times in different folders and/or photographs of different manuscript pages end up with identical names. When the file names are identical, these can be easily filtered by searching for and deleting duplicates, as well as renaming those that depict/contain different content. Sometimes, however, file names differ but the image is exactly the same. In those cases identical images can only be identified through software that compares and flags duplicate images. The most challenging cases arise when photographers have taken multiple pictures of the same page, for example because their first attempt was out of focus. If the lower-quality images are not immediately deleted and end up in the final collections, they can only

¹⁷ The first publicly available Tibetan models on Transkribus were trained by the TibSchol project at the Austrian Academy of Sciences: *The Dawn of Tibetan Scholarship* (11th–13thc.) (H2020-Cog-101001002), <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101001002/reporting>. For more on these models, see Griffiths (2024).

¹⁸ See Griffiths & Meelen (2025b) for a workflow on creating content catalogues semi-automatically, including a pilot case study on identifying Pagan texts.

be found when going through the entire collection, image by image. This works for small collections, but is much harder when thousands of images need to be checked.

2.2.2 Image Quality and Technical Considerations

The quality and technical specifications of manuscript images directly impact HTR performance. High-quality images not only produce better recognition results but also eliminate the need for preprocessing stages.¹⁹ While collating batches of images for transcription, we encountered several challenges that drew attention to the importance of careful digitisation.

Image quality issues such as poor focus or inconsistent lighting substantially degrade HTR performance. Blurred text makes it difficult for models to distinguish individual characters, particularly when dealing with handwritten scripts. While some preprocessing techniques can improve contrast or sharpness, these cannot fully compensate for poor quality at capture. Similarly, when manuscript pages are photographed stacked on top of each other, underlying pages may be visible. This creates visual interference that can confuse Layout Analysis (i.e. marking up where text appears on an image; see Fig. 3) and HTR models, which may attempt to recognise text from other layers.²⁰ Images taken at angles rather than directly overhead can also distort text, particularly near page edges. Although Transkribus has optional advanced parameters, such as binarisation (turning an image into black and white to help the AI focus on key aspects of the image) and dewarping (correcting distortions to produce a flatter image), which cut out some preprocessing, these settings cannot fully remedy quality issues.

¹⁹ Preprocessing enhances images to allow further processing - this can include deskewing, reducing image noise, and increasing image size and resolution. One example of a preprocessing script developed for Tibetan language texts is Divergent Discourses Custom Image Preprocessing (Sabbagh et al. 2004), developed by the *Divergent Discourses* project <https://research.uni-leipzig.de/diverge/>. For more on the background and development of this preprocessing script, see Sabbagh (2025).

²⁰ A custom layout analysis model was trained on Transkribus to navigate issues such as stacked manuscript pages. The model was trained on 15,006 images (130,869 lines). It is publicly available: 'Tibetan Manuscript 3' (Transkribus model ID: 229409).

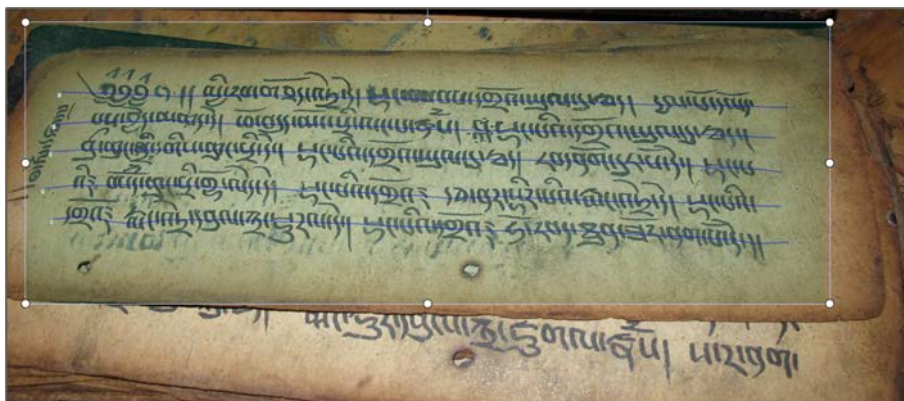


Fig. 3 — An example of stacked manuscript pages. A custom layout analysis model was developed which learnt to ignore the underlying pages, marking only the text region (large green box) and baselines (blue lines) of the top page. © Ngawang Gyatso.

Image metadata presents another technical consideration. Digital images contain EXIF metadata that includes orientation information. This created an unexpected challenge when images photographed at a 90-degree angle were manually rotated, but the underlying EXIF orientation data remained unchanged. When these images were uploaded to PechaTools, the platform automatically read the metadata and displayed them at the incorrect angle. Images could not be rotated within the PechaTools interface. Resolving this required developing a Python script to strip the EXIF orientation data from all affected images.²¹ While implementing this solution was straightforward, identifying the problem and processing thousands of images added considerable time to the workflow. Clear digitisation protocols were subsequently established for data collectors and curators to ensure that new images captured met consistent image quality standards to reduce downstream processing time and improve final HTR accuracy.

The composition of manuscript photographs introduces an additional set of considerations. In our case, many images contain two folios per photograph, which reduces processing costs given that platforms such as Transkribus typically charge per image. This approach, however, necessitates an extra workflow stage in which images must be cropped before or after HTR processing. More broadly, our experience demonstrates that decisions made at the point of capture, such as camera angle, image composition, and metadata handling, have cumulative effects across the entire HTR pipeline. For projects working with large or heterogeneous manuscript collections, the establishment of clear digitisation standards and guidelines is essential not only for

²¹ See <https://github.com/pagantibet/htr>.

optimising final HTR accuracy but also for ensuring workflow efficiency and long-term sustainability.

2.3 Palaeographical and Codicological Challenges

Alongside the technical and logistical challenges discussed above, the PaganTibet corpus presents substantial palaeographical and codicological challenges. For example, the corpus encompasses a wide range of umé, reflecting different styles, time periods, and scribal hands. We find considerable variation in grapheme formation, proportions, and spacing - even within a single page, where two or more scripts are used (see Fig. 4).

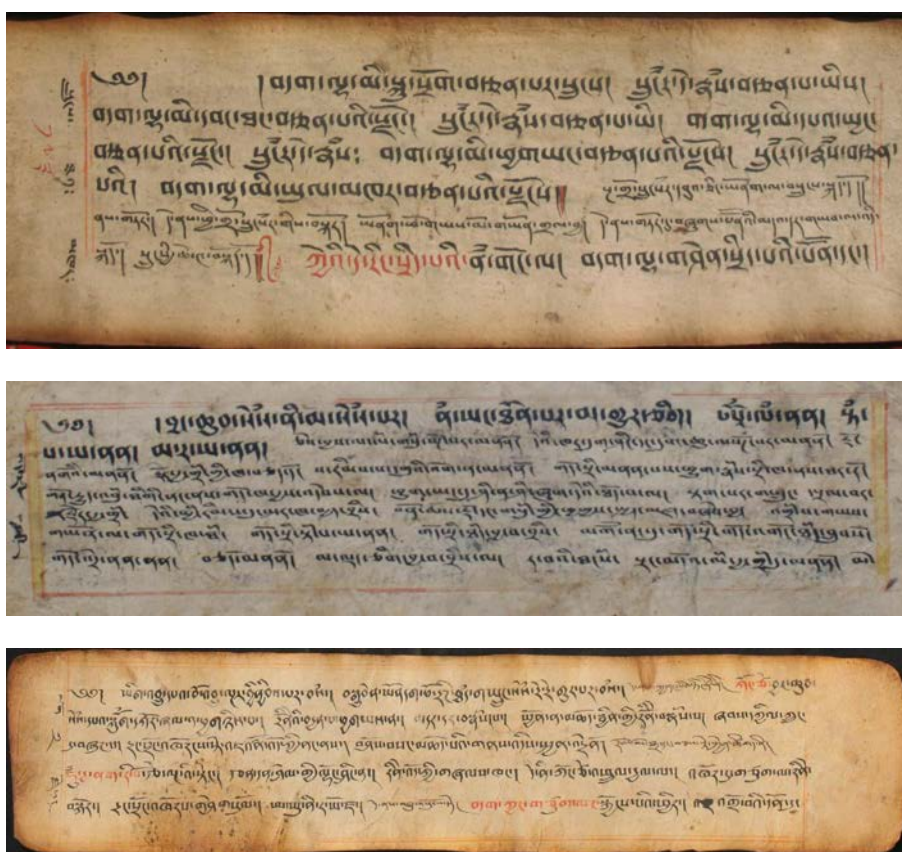


Fig. 4 — Examples of folios with multiple scripts used. Taken from <https://kalpa-bon.com>.²²

²² From top to bottom: image 00205_0011r in <https://kalpa-bon.com/texts/leu/bya-rdang-srung-mkhar>; image 00071_0004r in <https://kalpa-bon.com>

This diversity is further illustrated in Fig. 5 through examples of ཤེང་ (*sheng*) from different manuscripts in the corpus. Although the variations may appear small, they pose a significant challenge for HTR models, which have to learn to recognise the same grapheme across multiple realisations. Insufficient representation of this diversity in training data leads to reduced accuracy on manuscripts whose script differs from the dominant forms within the Ground Truth. For this reason, it can be beneficial to train separate HTR models on each hand or script. This approach was taken by the TibSchol project, which produced dedicated models for Drutsa (Transkribus model ID: 54525) and Betsug (Transkribus model ID: 54935).

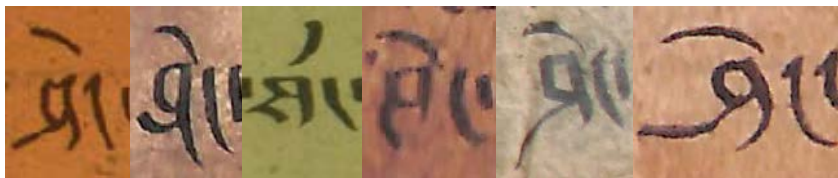


Fig. 5 — Examples of ཤེང་ (*sheng*) found in manuscripts within the PaganTibet corpus.

Given the scale of the project and the fact that we continue to collect new materials, the full extent of script variation remains unknown. We therefore opted to train a single generalised model capable of handling the full breadth of umé varieties. This approach provides greater flexibility for processing new manuscripts, but places considerably higher demands on the Ground Truth. The general model needs to be trained on significantly more data and exposed to a wide and balanced sample of styles to ensure reliable performance across our diverse manuscripts.

This palaeographical variability is further compounded by the extensive use of abbreviations, which constitute a prominent and challenging feature of our manuscripts. Types of abbreviation vary from simple consonant stacking, such as གཉིས་ -> གཉིས་སྟེ (gnyiste, gnyis ste), to more complex forms, such as ཐྱིང་ -> ཐུགས་དམ་བཟང་ (th+yaM dang, thugs dam bskang) and ཐུན་ལྷ་འདྲ་དཀར་ (sh+yen+hador, gshen lha 'od dkar), all of which need to be captured as precisely as possible in our diplomatic transcriptions. The PechaTools platform supported this process through an integrated dictionary of rendering conventions, although

not all abbreviations were initially listed.²³ The frequency of abbreviations naturally varies, with some appearing repeatedly throughout the corpus, such as ཐམ (thaMd, thams cad), རིམ (rine, rin chen), and རེ (rdo+e, rdo rje), while others occur only occasionally, such as ཇིར (c+tir, ci ltar), གཤེར་མེས་ (gsereMs, gser skyems), and རྒྱུ (rgyu+o+on+yi, rgyu 'byor yon gyi). This uneven distribution means that common abbreviations are well-represented in our Ground Truth while infrequent abbreviations remain challenging for models to recognise, especially as there are fewer examples of these abbreviations written in different umé styles (see Fig. 6, for example), posing additional recognition challenges.



Fig. 6 — Examples of ཇིར (c+tir), the abbreviated form of ཇིར་མེས་ (ci ltar), and how it varies across manuscripts.

We also find a range of symbols, some decorative and others used to represent particular words or concepts (see Fig. 7), which present several difficulties. Most have no Unicode equivalent, requiring conventions that approximate the symbol's visual form while remaining meaning-neutral. These conventions must also be simple to reproduce and to find on a Tibetan keyboard for consistent representation across transcriptions. Moreover, like abbreviations, their frequency varies, with some appearing more regularly than others. We continue to encounter new symbols as we process more manuscripts, making it difficult to anticipate the full range of forms that HTR models should be able to recognise. To address these issues, we introduced the symbol × (U+0F1D)²⁴ in our transcription conventions to mark decorative elements and instances where graphemes or symbols are unclear and/or have no current transcription convention. Although useful for noting sticking points that we can easily find and address (see below for a discussion on tags), this does not fully solve the issue. When an HTR model encounters unknown symbols in new manuscripts, it will attempt to transcribe them based on visually-similar patterns from the

²³ We will extend this abbreviation dictionary as part of the next stage of the project's workflow. For more see Griffiths & Meelen (2025b).

²⁴ This symbol is easily accessible to annotators as it is found on the Tibetan Monlam keyboard (Shift+6). This keyboard is free to download and can be installed from: <https://monlamtech.github.io/Monlam-App-Store/>.

Ground Truth rather than recognising them with an × (i.e. as unknown), therefore requiring manual correction. The most effective strategy for improving model performance on such symbols is to focus on the training data, making sure it captures as wide a range of examples as possible, helping the model to learn diverse visual patterns and reduce misrecognition.

Symbol (MSS)	Symbol (Unicode)	Meaning
		symbols with no definite meaning, usually found at the beginning of a new section
	§	<i>gnyan</i>
		<i>mkhar</i>

Fig. 7 — Examples of symbols found in manuscripts from Leu 2011-30, alongside their transcription convention and meaning.

We also use ‘textual tags’ in Transkribus to mark up decorative features (see Fig. 8), alongside unclear text, additions, deletions, and text written in other scripts e.g. Zhangzhung Marchung (*zhang zhung smar chung*). These tags provide structured metadata that can be exported for analysis and aid in the systematic documentation and examination of scribal practices and codicological features. Tags can be enhanced with attributes, additional metadata that give information about the content of the tag, for example a description of a decorative feature, its colour, and so forth. Tags also help flag data that should be excluded from model training. In our case, we omit lines that contain ‘unclear’ tags used to mark up cases where text cannot be read due to damage,

poor image quality etc. Filtering out what our transcribers could not confidently transcribe reduces potential errors being introduced during training.

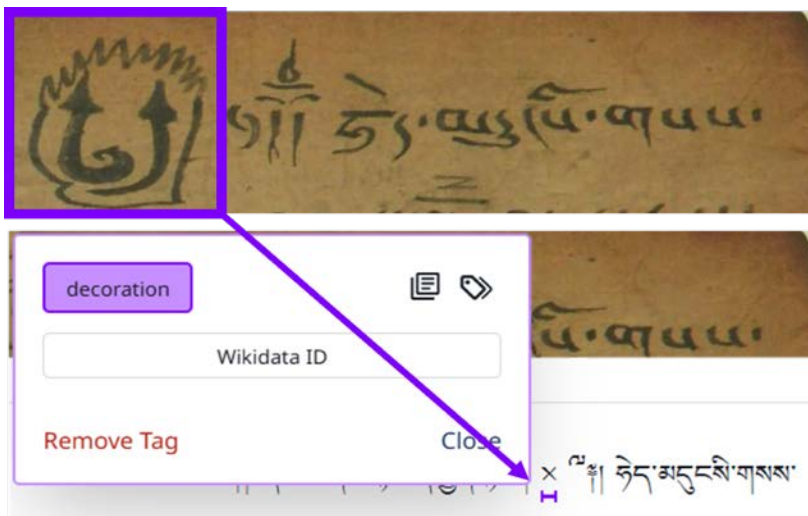


Fig. 8 — An example of a decorative feature tagged in Transkribus. Each tag is represented with a different colour. Folio taken from Leu 2011-30, vol 22, p.34.

Taken together, the issues outlined above show that our corpus poses challenges on multiple levels: its scale, the mixture of existing and newly collected materials, and the considerable palaeographical and codicological variation found within it. While we were able to anticipate and address some aspects of this complexity at the outset by developing a collaborative workflow and preparing training materials and manuals, an ongoing challenge has been the unpredictability inherent in working with a large and mostly unexplored corpus. Many challenges only presented themselves once the work was underway, requiring iterative adaptations to our approach, workflows and documentation. In the next section, we look at how our Layout Analysis and HTR models performed under these conditions.

3. Results and In-depth Error Analysis

The Layout Analysis and HTR models discussed in Section 2.1 above are trained to yield the best possible results when it comes to processing new materials. Because automatically transcribing difficult manuscripts is a challenging task (even for humans!), the results these models produce are unlikely to be 100% accurate. While small text corpora can accommodate minor errors because they are more amenable

to manual checking and correction before publication, this poses greater challenges for large electronic corpora. For some HTR projects, a lower baseline accuracy can be mitigated with LLM-based post-processing to normalise transcriptions and/or filter out noise. However, this approach is not viable for our corpus as it risks compromising diplomatic accuracy, which is crucial for in-depth philological and linguistic research. Instead, we focused on maintaining rigorous baseline standards and applying only targeted, rule-based corrections during post-processing. Consequently, we took the decision to exclude approximately 20,000 pages of transcriptions that were only double-checked, as they fell short of our Ground Truth requirements.

Whenever new models are trained, it is therefore important to be able to estimate how accurately they will recognise the text regions and lines and transcribe new images. In order to predict this accuracy, when training a model, a subset of images are kept 'hidden' (a so-called left-out test set)²⁵ so that once training is completed, the model's results can be compared with the Ground Truth and the differences can be calculated. The resulting evaluation metric for Layout Analysis models trained in Transkribus is called Loss on Validation Set with lower values indicating better performance.²⁶ We trained a custom Layout Analysis model, first on 7,212 pages, yielding a Loss of 4.8%. We then added new batches of images which had a rather different layout (i.e. both smaller and bigger pages, cropped in different ways, with added text in the margins and with more or fewer lines on one page). These new batches were more difficult to process, but the final custom Layout Analysis model ("Tibetan Manuscript 3", Transkribus model ID: 229409) trained on 15,006 images (130,869 lines) still yielded a Loss of 5.43%. This is higher than the previous model, but because of the wider variety of input, this last model is better at generalising, which means it is likely to yield better results for new, more varied data, which is what the majority of the PaganTibet corpus consists of.

For HTR models, the usual evaluation metric is called the Character Error Rate (CER), which gives an indication of how many characters are incorrectly transcribed per page; again, the lower the CER the better. CER can also be used to calculate differences between individual annotators who input or correct transcriptions. To test our general workflow, we measured this so-called 'Inter-Annotator Agreement' (IAA) on a subset of our data transcribed and corrected by the TNI monks, who were responsible for the first two rounds of correction (i.e.

²⁵ Note that the Transkribus platform refers to this as the 'validation' set, but it is crucially still left out of the training set so that it can be used for evaluation, error analysis and calculating Character Error Rates (CERs).

²⁶ According to Transkribus, a loss below 10% generally indicates reliable baseline detection. The same rule generally applies to CER, used to evaluate HTR models.

before the expert internal team members conducted a third and possibly fourth round of correction). The mean CER between annotators was 3.3% (median 2.0%), with 74.6% of lines showing a CER $\leq$ 5% - 30.3% achieving a CER of 0% - indicating high consistency overall in transcription practice. A small number of lines (5.4%), however, had a CER $\geq$ 10%, which prompted a more in-depth analysis of the disagreement between annotators. Common inconsistencies included whitespace handling (~60% of all disagreements) and character stacking issues; these also impacted the CER of our HTR models, addressed in more detail below.²⁷ In this section we discuss the results of the HTR models we trained and conduct an in-depth error analysis to measure the automatically calculated metrics, but also to see how well the models we trained perform on new parts of the corpus that exhibit new text topics and forms of umé script and how they compare to other existing models for transcribing Tibetan umé.

3.1 Automatic Evaluation Metrics for HTR Models

When comparing the accuracies of models, it is important to understand how much data they were given to train on, i.e. how big is the Ground Truth? This can be measured in pages or words, which are often used for HTR models developed for European languages that often have clearer word boundaries and images that show only one page. When working with Tibetan collections, however, due to the pothi format, one image often contains two or even three pages and there are no white spaces in the script to indicate word boundaries. For this and other reasons, calculating the number of lines a model was trained on can be a good alternative. In this section we will therefore report the number of lines the models were trained on, as well as an approximation of the number of pages.

We systematically compared the results of the seven different umé models we trained to check our progress at every iteration.²⁸ We then compared this to the other models that are publicly available for Tibetan umé HTR at the time of writing: two developed within the ERC-funded TibSchol project in Vienna, which are available on Transkribus, and another two developed by the BDRC, available through their

²⁷ See Griffiths & Meelen (forthcoming) for a more detailed discussion of the IAA analysis.

²⁸ The seven HTR models were trained between July 2024 and June 2026. These are publicly available on Transkribus: PaganTibet Ume 1 (ID: 131553), PaganTibet Ume 2 (193821), PaganTibet Ume 3 (328353), PaganTibet Ume 4 (428273), and PaganTibet Ume 5 (443525), PaganTibet Ume 6 (511497), and PaganTibet Ume 7 (579189).

custom-made app. Both the BDRC and TibSchol produced script-specific models for both Drutsa (*'bru tsha*) and Betsug (*dpe tshugs*) varieties. Since the texts in the PaganTibet corpus contain more Drutsa(-like) umé, we compared these to get the best possible results. Table 1 shows an overview of the Character Error Rates (CERs) reported for each of the PaganTibet (PT) HTR models for umé and the specific Drutsa umé models from the BDRC and TibSchol, alongside the number of lines and estimated number of pages they were trained on.

	CER	Training lines	Training pages (est.)
BDRC Drutsa	3.7 ²⁹	24,000 ³⁰	2,400
TibSchol Drutsa	1.4	3,803	422
PT-Ume1	6.99	2,338	400
PT-Ume2	5.56	3,952	900
PT-Ume3	6.26	5,064	1,200
PT-Ume4	4.57	8,630	1,800
PT-Ume5	4.87	10,238	2,100
PT-Ume6	4.54	12,687	2,500
PT-Ume7	3.71	16,361	3,200

Table 1 — Character Error Rates, number of lines and (estimated) pages to train the models.

Both the BDRC and TibSchol models have lower CERs than any of the PaganTibet models. Superficially, for the BDRC model this is entirely expected since it is based on a significantly larger set of training data

²⁹ This is the CER reported for the Drutsa model used for the BDRC custom OCR app (Elie Roux, p.c.) in October 2025. The app provides an offline, user-friendly interface and is publicly available (<https://github.com/buda-base/tibetan-ocr-app>). This specific BDRC Drutsa training data is also publicly available online on HuggingFace <https://huggingface.co/datasets/openpecha/OCR-Drutsa>. The BDRC are working on updating their models.

³⁰ The reported lines are actually >32,000, but only a subset of those were used for training. In addition, this number includes both lines and 'line fragments', i.e. part of lines, which is why the estimated number of pages for the BDRC model is about 10% of this number. Other models have line fragments too, but only for title pages (Elie Roux, p.c.).

(24,000 lines or 2,400 pages outnumber the majority of the other models). Based on CERs, the TibSchol Drutsa model clearly outperforms all others with a CER of 1.4%, based on just 3,803 lines (422 pages). In size, it is most comparable to the PT-Ume2 model when looking at the lines (which is the most accurate measure for comparing size), but the PT-Ume2’s CER is much higher at 5.56%. Apart from the size of the training set, it is also important to pay attention to the form and content. Both the BDRC and TibSchol models produce transcriptions in Wylie, while the PaganTibet models produce Tibetan Unicode. Due to differences in the display protocols of Tibetan Unicode stacks for different web browsers, apps and operating systems (Windows vs Mac) when it comes to non-standard stacks, special symbols, double vowels, etc. the error rates can end up being higher as it is not always easy to spot errors during data preparation or when manually correcting training data. Fig. 9 shows a range of examples of abbreviated forms with non-standard Tibetan Unicode stacks and how they are displayed on different operating systems. Double vowels in particular are almost impossible to see on Macs, making detailed error correction of diplomatic transcriptions that contain a high number of non-standard forms more challenging.

	Windows	Mac
		
		
		
		

Fig. 9 — Examples of how Windows and Mac operating systems differ when it comes to displaying Tibetan Unicode stacks that are non-standard (e.g. double vowels).

However, because of the collaborative nature of the PaganTibet workflow, using Wylie was not an option and all data used for training in-

put and model output was only done in Tibetan Unicode. Some resulting stacking issues are shown in Fig. 10. A large amount of the training data for the BDRC model was also originally in Tibetan Unicode, but then converted into Wylie after which CERs were calculated. Although good converters from Tibetan Unicode stacks to Wylie and vice versa are available (both online and built into the BDRC OCR app) issues can still arise.

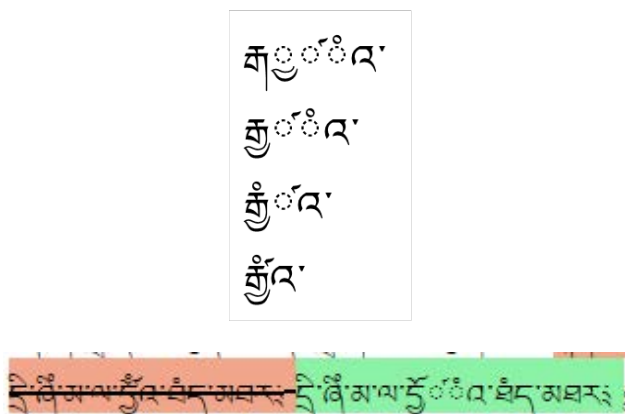


Fig. 10 — An example of stacking differences and how this can cause errors in HTR training and evaluation. Here, the model correctly reads the manuscript (red) but renders it differently from the Ground Truth (green).

Another reason why the Wylie-trained models achieve lower CERs is because of the more limited range of output options available. Fig. 11 shows the range of characters that are possible for the TibSchol Drutsa model compared to those for the most advanced PaganTibet model, PT-Ume5. With over twice as many options to choose from, it is not surprising that the TibSchol model's CER is much lower as the chance for the model to go wrong is much reduced. Looking at the detailed symbol lists in the training data also helps to identify errors and inconsistencies in the training data. In the TibSchol model, for example, three different types of apostrophes were used to transcribe the *achung* (འ), while in the PT-Ume5 model, both the capital (X), lower case (x) as well as the Tibetan Unicode × (U+0F1D) were used to transcribe blurry/illegible or otherwise unknown syllables. In subsequent training rounds these issues were corrected in the Ground Truth to improve the CERs and, potentially, the overall results when transcribing new data.

' * + . 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9 : <ctc> <space> @ D I M
N O S T ^ a b c d e g h i j k l m n o p r s t
u w x y z | ß ´ ¨ ¯ ¸ º »

[illegible]

A final important reason why the CERs are generally slightly higher for the PaganTibet HTR models is related to the content of the source materials. Both the BDRC and TibSchol models are trained on Buddhist texts that are generally written in a rather standardised form of Tibetan, unlike the PaganTibet corpus (see Berounský & Ramble 2026). There are some abbreviations in these Buddhist texts too, but they are few in number and occur frequently in exactly the same form. This means that it is easier for the model to recognise them and transcribe them correctly. In addition, most HTR models are trained using Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) or similar architectures, which means they can take the preceding and following context of predicted characters into account as well. As a consequence, corpora with coherent topics and generally more-standardised language like those in the Buddhist training data of the BDRC and TibSchol models are easier to transcribe (both for humans and for HTR models) because words can be predicted from the context too, even if the glyphs in the manuscripts are unclear, blurry or abbreviated in any way. The unpredictable content, alongside the non-standard forms of the Tibetan language and scripts as described in Section 2.3 above, explain why higher CERs can be expected for the PaganTibet corpus since the CER calculation is done on more challenging test data.

Overall, measuring CERs can help to evaluate the accuracy of HTR models and they can serve as useful comparanda when developing new models, especially when the new data is expected to be similar in

form and content to the data the models were trained on. The accuracy of models and especially their capacity to generalise beyond the specific data they were trained on, can only truly be compared when evaluations are done on the same test sets. This should be borne in mind when developing general 'benchmarks' that are subsequently used for testing and comparing models. If these benchmarks contain mainly one type (genre, script style, image quality, etc.) of data, have different transcription conventions (e.g. for expanding abbreviations or not) or still contain errors, then models trained on a different type of data are likely to yield lower CERs. But these quantitative comparisons based on CERs do not always guarantee better results for more specific corpora in need of transcription or in general, however, which is why qualitative evaluations and in-depth error analyses of the output are important too.³¹ To illustrate this, in the next section we therefore present the results of the same models on some of the more challenging texts in the PaganTibet corpus we found so far.

3.2 Results and In-depth Error Analysis

A well-known issue for any type of computational model is 'overfitting'. When a model is overfitting, it generally means that the accuracy rates (CERs in the case of HTR modelling) are good, but that the model is 'fitted' too much on the data it trained on. As a result, it is unable to generalise and yield good results on new data that differs from the input. It is therefore useful to test any model's ability to generalise and go beyond the type of images found in the training data. Furthermore, since our main challenge is to create searchable eTexts for the PaganTibet collections and these collections are too big to transcribe or even correct manually, it is of the utmost importance to choose the right HTR model to transcribe the hundreds of thousands of pages in the best possible way.

In addition to the general quantitative CER analysis discussed in the previous section, we therefore also conducted several rounds of qualitative analysis - one of which we present here. To make this optimally useful, we deliberately chose test images from two separate Leu collections that differ significantly from the existing training data. The first set of five images (shown in Fig. 12) forms the start of a *bya rdang* ritual text found in the Leu 2016-10 collection. These images are challenging because they are not consistently cropped (the title page in particular is in a completely different format) and some pictures are out of focus and/or partially damaged.

³¹ See Meelen & Griffiths (2025b:10-12) for a case study on texts on Vampire subjugation (*sri gnon*) rituals.

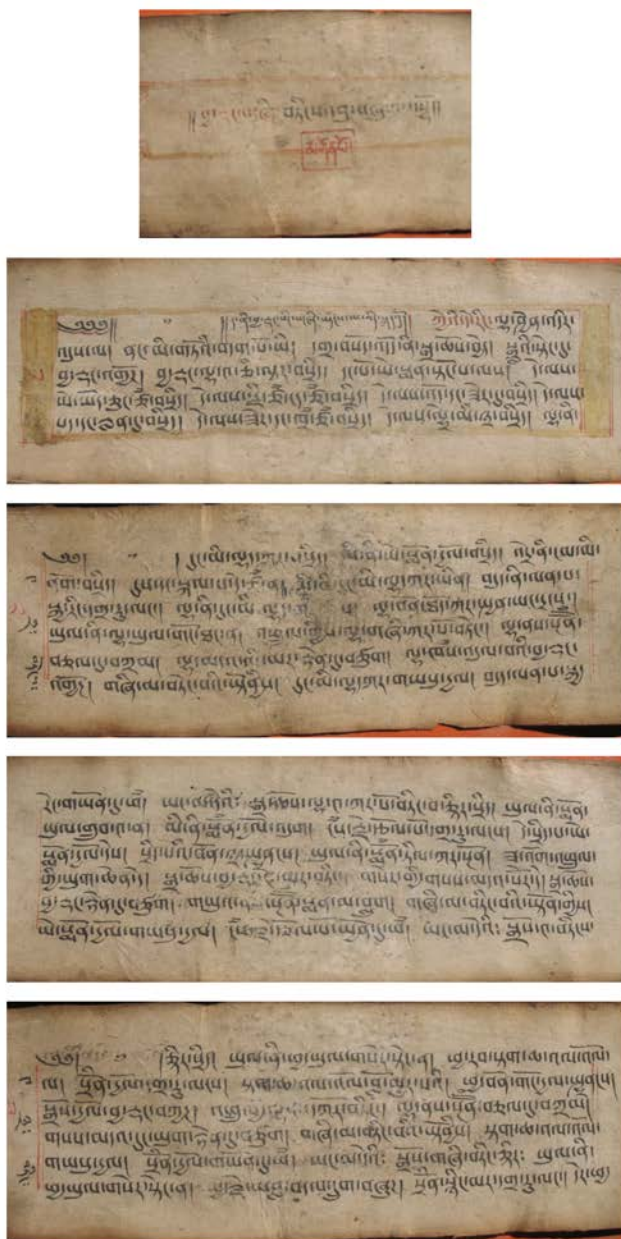


Fig. 12 — First five pages of the *Leu bya rdang* text in the Kalpa Bön collection (referred to as *Leu-Kalpa1-5* for the in-depth error analysis), *Leu 2016-10*, vol. 2, pp. 27-31.

The second set of five images (shown in Fig. 13) forms the start of a fox

fumigation (*wa bsang*) ritual described in Berounský (2019). Just like other images in the Leu 2011-30 collection, the content, script, non-standard abbreviations and symbols pose significant challenges.

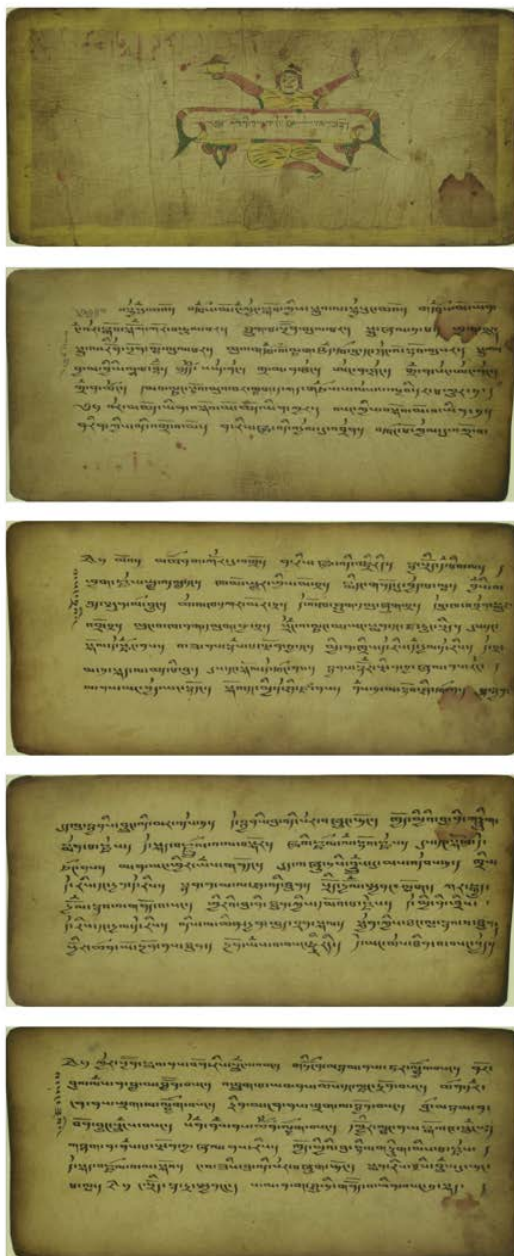


Fig. 13 — First five pages of the “Long-nosed Fox” in the Leu collection (referred to as Leu-vol26_1-5 in the error analysis), Leu 2011-30, vol. 26, pp. 1-5. © Gansu wen hua chu ban she.

The results of detailed error analyses for these ten test pages are shown in Fig. 14 and exact percentages of differences from manually triple-checked, Gold Standard transcriptions, counting all characters (including punctuation and spaces) that have been erroneously inserted, substituted or deleted are given in Table 2.

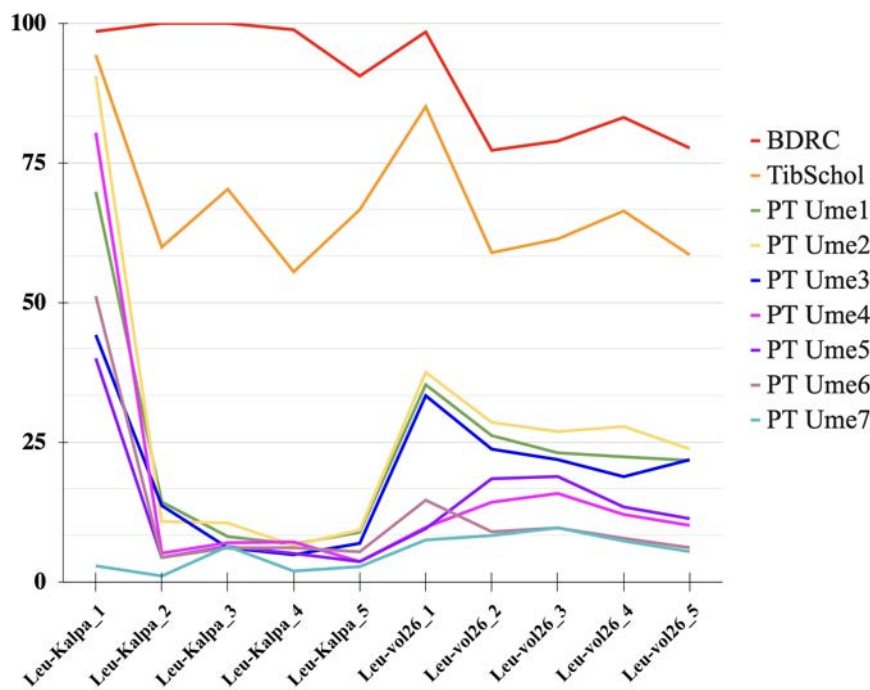


Fig. 14 — Percentage differences (errors) for each of the ten test pages comparing the BDRC, TibSchol and PaganTibet (PT) models.

Test Pages	BDRC	Tib Schol	PT Ume1	PT Ume2	PT Ume3	PT Ume4	PT Ume5	PT Ume6	PT Ume7
Leu-Kalpa_1	98.53	94.29	69.81	90.57	44.19	80.39	40	51.16	2.86
Leu-Kalpa_2	100	59.92	14.29	10.8	13.65	5.13	4.36	4.36	1.04
Leu-Kalpa_3	100	70.3	8.1	10.53	6.09	6.99	6.29	6.09	6.34

<i>Leu-Kalpa_4</i>	98.84	55.5	6.74	6.51	4.85	7.13	5.08	6.12	1.93
<i>Leu-Kalpa_5</i>	90.54	66.62	8.89	9.29	6.89	3.62	3.62	5.38	2.72
<i>Leu-vol26_1</i>	98.44	85.07	35.29	37.5	33.33	9.76	9.52	14.63	7.5
<i>Leu-vol26_2</i>	77.26	58.93	26.18	28.55	23.75	14.26	18.46	8.98	8.29
<i>Leu-vol26_3</i>	78.9	61.37	23.1	26.88	21.88	15.82	18.85	9.66	9.67
<i>Leu-vol26_4</i>	83.14	66.38	22.38	27.82	18.82	12.05	13.4	7.8	7.3
<i>Leu-vol26_5</i>	77.66	58.54	21.74	23.78	21.86	10.11	11.31	6.13	5.42
Average % errors	90.33	67.69	23.65	27.22	19.53	16.53	13.09	12.03	5.31
<i>Model CER</i>	3.7	1.4	6.99	5.56	6.26	4.57	4.87	4.54	3.71
<i># of lines in training data</i>	24,000	3,803	2,338	3,952	5,064	8,630	10,238	12,687	16,361

Table 2 — Percentage differences (errors) for each of the ten test pages comparing the BDRC, TibSchol and PaganTibet (PT) models with CER and number of lines in training data for reference.

One immediate observation we can make is that lower CERs do not correspond to better results on these challenging test pages from the PaganTibet corpus. In fact, we observe almost the opposite pattern with the BDRC and TibSchol models producing over 90% and 67% errors on average respectively, while all PaganTibet models (even the earlier ones with higher CERs trained on fewer lines of data) range between 5-28% errors on average. The deliberate choice of varied input allows us to analyse results in more detail: blurry vs non-blurry, different text colours, title vs full page, etc. as shown in the title pages of both test sets. The TibSchol model clearly struggles with the blurry title page of the Kalpa Leu text (>94% errors), where some PaganTibet models perform much better (PT Ume7 only has 2.86%). Other PaganTibet models also struggle with the blurry title page, which is no doubt due to the fact that there were no or very few blurry pages in

the training data. Once a model trains on blurry or damaged images, it ‘learns’ how to deal with these and performs better in future cases. Larger numbers of lines in the training data also help with this as blurry and damaged pages typically require better input from the context and context is easier learnt from larger sets of training data.

Another clear result is the effects of different hands, writing styles and/or umé varieties. All the pages from the second set (volume 26 of the 30-volume Leu collection) are written in a very different style from the umé found in the training data of most models. For both the BDRC and TibSchol models, where error rates are over 60% across the test set, this makes little difference, but the first three (much smaller) PaganTibet umé models clearly struggle more with Leu-vol26. PT Ume4 and Ume5 are significantly better at transcribing more varied and more challenging input, while PT Ume1, 2 and 3 did not have as much challenging data in the training set, which is why error rates for these are higher. PT Ume4 and Ume5 are also trained on more data and both are better at generalising, i.e. they still get good results (lower error rates) on pages that are completely unfamiliar in terms of script styles/handwriting etc. It is not until we start adding a small amount of training lines similar to the Leu30 collection for PT Ume6 and Ume7 that error rates for those test pages go down. Finally, when comparing individual pages, we see that some PT models appear to perform worse than earlier versions on the same page, such as images 3 and 4 in the Kalpa Leu *bya rdang* text and image 1 from Leu-26. This is likely due to a combination of page-specific challenges - particularly damaged sections where performance is more dependent on chance - and the natural variance introduced by training dynamics, which means successive iterations will not uniformly improve on every test case even when overall CER improves.

When it comes to comparing three different models (TibSchol, BDRC and PT) directly we notice that although the CER of the PT Ume5 model is slightly higher than that of PT Ume4, it still outperforms Ume4 on average, suggesting that it is better at dealing with different and more challenging new data. Fig. 15 shows an example of a direct comparison for one of the Leu vol-26 pages with the specific errors in the output highlighted in red (deletions) and green (additions). This allows us to see what specific errors each model makes. For example, *yig mgo* and other punctuation and ornamental features were clearly not part of the TibSchol or BDRC training data as both models produce various errors with these while the PT Ume7 model transcribes these correctly most of the time. Something all models struggle with are symbols such as those described in Section 2.3 above, here transcribed as “X” in line 4. The reasons for TibSchol's worse performance on this page (and the rest of this test set) are mainly related to

the fact that it lacks varied input as it was trained on much more coherent Buddhist texts that do not exhibit the orthographic peculiarities we find in the Leu collections. This more homogeneous input makes it harder for the model to generalise to other hands, genres, linguistic and orthographical features and different types of umé. The BDRC model faces similar issues as it was partly trained on the same input, but despite the much larger number of lines in the training data, the model performs much worse on the PaganTibet test pages. One important reason for this lies in the fact that the input was of a mixed nature (both Wylie and Tibetan Unicode stacks), which was automatically converted to create a model that outputs Wylie, but is then automatically converted back to Tibetan Unicode. As is clear from Fig. 15 below, this conversion does not always go right, with fragments of Wylie left in between the Tibetan unicode stacks.

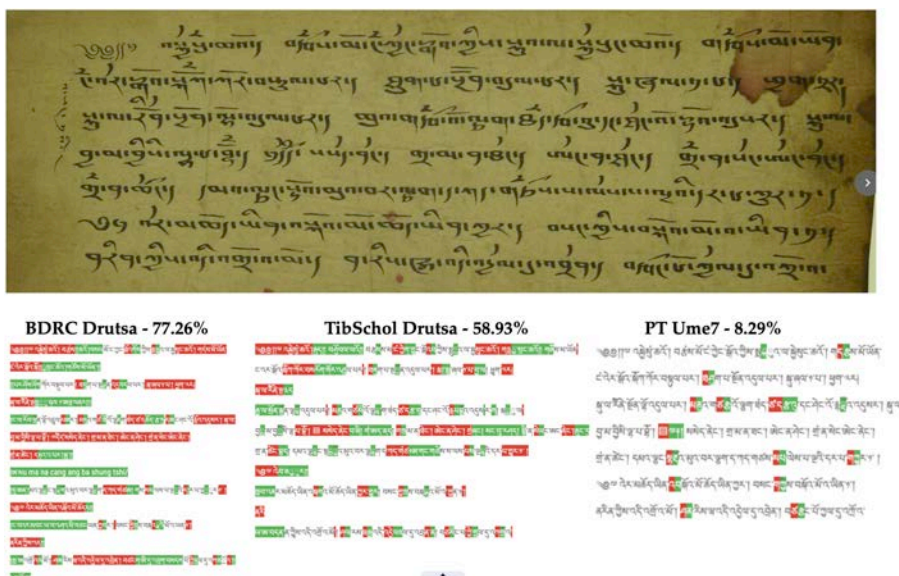


Fig. 15 — Visualisation of differences (deletions in red and additions in green) between the HTR models' output and the Gold Standard to give an impression of overall errors for p. 2 of the Leu-vol26 where TibSchol had 58.93%, BDRC 77.26% and Ume7 8.29% errors.

Another major difference between the BDRC training data (comprising 24,000 lines) and that of PaganTibet (comprising at most 16,361 lines for PT Ume7), is the rounds of manual correction of the original training data. The PaganTibet workflow described in Section 2.1 above consisted of at least three rounds of manual correction (with a fourth and final check for a subset of images), while the BDRC likely utilised fewer rounds of checks. Although this tripled the time spent on the

preparation of Ground Truth, it was deemed necessary due to the difficult nature of the material and even after three rounds of manual correction, more errors were found and corrected in the validation set (a small amount of ‘unseen’ data given to the model during training to compare the model’s predictions alongside the Ground Truth) of PT Ume4, Ume5 and Ume 6 before the next models were trained. These multiple checks by experts are extremely time-consuming,³² but the results show that with challenging, non-standard collections, multiple checks are the only way forward to gain reasonable results. Even if internally calculated CERs are low and therefore look promising, HTR models that yield far over 50% error rates on test data that is representative of the rest of the corpus are not useful since they would require an enormous amount of time to do further rounds of correction after the automatic transcriptions are done.

There are some overall lessons learnt from both the quantitative and the in-depth qualitative analyses presented here. First, CERs can be useful benchmarks when training new models for datasets that are homogeneous and coherent in both form and content: the TibSchol model with the lowest CER of 1.4% is likely to perform well on other manuscript images of a similar nature, both in terms of script type as well as genre, especially when Wylie transcriptions are required. Furthermore, performance generally improves when more training data is added, as shown by the incrementally lower averages of errors on the challenging test set cases for the various PT Ume models. But more data is not necessarily better for either CERs or for the challenging test cases as the largest HTR model from the BDRC shows both a higher CER than TibSchol and a much higher error rate on the PaganTibet test set. This confirms the results also found by Meelen & Griffiths (2025b) comparing yet a different type of umé pages as a test set. It shows that careful selection of ideally varied training data, combined with triple-checking (at least) of every line by expert annotators who are well-trained and follow a consistent set of protocols for diplomatic transcriptions³³ is of the utmost importance when dealing with large, varied corpora containing texts of various genres with non-standard linguistic and orthographical features. Finally, HTR postprocessing can help to filter out frequent errors to prepare corpora for subsequent stages of training and downstream NLP tasks, such as turning diplomatic transcriptions to normalised eTexts and adding (linguistic) annotation.

³² It took a team of ten annotators who worked part-time over a year to double-check 30,000 pages and another team of experts several months to triple-check just over 3,000 of those.

³³ Such as those outlined in the PaganTibet HTR manual (Meelen & Griffiths 2025a) and cheatsheet (Griffiths & Meelen 2025a).

4. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to illustrate how to get from manuscript to eText, using the PaganTibet corpus as a case study in large-scale text processing. Its sheer size, the heterogeneity of manuscripts, and the considerable variation in script, alongside other challenges such as abbreviations and symbols, call for a carefully structured, collaborative approach. As our workflow demonstrates, drawing on combined expertise can successfully navigate many of these challenges. Ultimately, our methods and models demonstrate that creating searchable eTexts for a large and largely unexplored corpus is feasible, but that carefully planning workflows and taking into account the potential challenges described in Section 2 is essential.

Our results show that while conventional evaluation metrics such as CERs are informative, they do not always reflect the practical performance of HTR models. In the case of the PaganTibet corpus, models trained specifically on diverse and representative input, even those with slightly higher CERs consistently outperformed models trained on larger but more homogeneous datasets when applied to novel and complex materials. Conducting in-depth qualitative analyses proves equally useful, as it flags sticking points such as the angle of the '*greng bu*' in the Leu vol. 26 sample, which we then incorporated into future rounds of training. It also highlights Unicode symbols that have found their way into our Ground Truth, but that should not be there, e.g. different types of X symbols. With the latter, we can update our HTR postprocessing script to search and replace these symbols to further enhance existing transcriptions. These two steps enabled us to create a 7th model, which surpassed the earlier iterations and has become our primary solution for generating automatic diplomatic transcriptions of the remaining corpus. For further processing, in addition to diplomatic transcriptions that reflect all non-standard spellings and symbols, we will create normalised versions of the eTexts (see Griffiths & Meelen 2025b and Meelen & Griffiths 2026). In these normalised eTexts, abbreviations are expanded and the orthography is standardised to make the transcriptions easily searchable and ready for additional annotation (e.g. to show linguistic and content features).

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Giacomella Orofino, ed. and trans., *The Dawn of Physical Yoga. Dispelling the Hindrances to Immortality.* (*Amṛtasamkaṭanibarhaṇa, Tib. 'Chi med kyi 'phrang sel), Napoli (Università di Napoli l'Orientale, Dipartimento Asia, Africa e Mediterraneo), 2025. 209 pp. [Series Minor CIV]. ISBN 9788-88-6719-314-1. Available as a Creative Commons open access PDF: <http://www.fedoabooks.unina.it/index.php/fedoapress/catalog/book/755> .

Reviewed by John Newman
(New College of Florida – pre-2023 version)

As I write this I am wearing prAna® (“Clothing For Positive Change”) “yoga pants.” I am not a yogi—the pants are just super comfortable. I live in a medium-sized midwestern American city. There are two yoga studios within a twenty minute walk of my home. There are more than a dozen yoga studios within a twenty minute drive. By one count there were 25,280 yoga studios in the United States as of May 5, 2025. A Google “AI Overview” says “there are approximately 48,500 yoga studios worldwide, with the highest numbers found in the United States, India, and Europe.” Where did this come from?!

Of course the readers of this journal know that the Sanskrit word *yoga* has a long history and a vast range of meanings. I gave up trying to count the many senses of *yoga* given in the second edition of Monier Monier-Williams’ *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Among the plethora of concepts Monier-Williams adduces for “*yoga*” we find “abstract meditation,” but—intriguingly—nothing that really corresponds to the physical activities occurring in my local yoga studios. For that we must turn to the Sanskrit compound *haṭhayoga*. In High Victorian fashion Sir Monier somewhat misleadingly defines this as “a kind of forced Yoga or abstract meditation (forcing the mind to withdraw from external objects; treated of in the Haṭha-pradīpikā by Svātmārāma and performed with much self-torture, such as standing on one leg, holding up the arms, inhaling smoke with the head inverted &c.)” I find it remarkable that the term *haṭhayoga* is given in the great *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch* of Otto Böhtlingk and Rudolph Roth, and derivatively by Monier-Williams, citing only relatively late Sanskrit works such as the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. (On this text, which “has been translated hundreds of times into many different languages,” see now the impressive project which has manifested online at <https://hathapradipika.online> [accessed 26 Feb 2026] for a new digital

critical edition and translation of what is described as “the most important premodern text on physical yoga,” “composed by Svātmārāma in about 1400 CE.”)

The lexicography cited above suggests that as a term for Indic “self-torture” *haṭhayoga* is a relatively late entry into the Sanskrit lexicon. It also raises the questions of when and how this “self-torture” developed in India, and how it has transmogrified into “the global yoga market.” Google tells me that this is “a multi-billion-dollar industry with various reports placing its current value between approximately USD \$100 billion and over \$370 billion,” which includes the global “yoga apparel market” (cf. my pants), the “yoga equipment market,” the “yoga tourism market,” and the yoga studios in my neighborhood. Again, what is the origin of our [post-]modern “global yoga market”?

The book under review offers new information on and important new insights into the origins and development of “physical yoga” in India and its transmission to Tibet. The author, Giacomella Orofino, is Professor of Tibetan Language and Literature and Indo-Tibetan Civilizations and Religions at the University of Naples “L’Orientale.” Professor Orofino requires no introduction for scholars of Vajrayāna Buddhism in India and Tibet. Her previous contributions to the study of the Kālacakra *tantra*, Ma gcig Lab sgron, Tibetan medicine, and Indo-Tibetan alchemy are especially noteworthy. For a CV including a list of her many and varied publications see: [https://unior.academia.edu/GIACOMELLAOROFINO/Curriculum Vitae](https://unior.academia.edu/GIACOMELLAOROFINO/CurriculumVitae).)

Orofino’s latest book, *The Dawn of Physical Yoga* [henceforth “*Dawn*”], builds upon her previous research and extends it in fascinating new directions. The core of *Dawn* (Parts II & III; pp. 59–184) is a critical edition and translation of the Tibetan text ‘*Chi med kyi ‘phrang sel*. Orofino provides a Sanskrit title **Amṛtasamkaṭānibarhaṇa* [henceforth “*ASN”]. This is presumably a translation of the Tibetan title. This work is ascribed to (an) Amoghavajra (*Dawn* p. 184). The colophon to this text describes it, in Orofino’s translation, as “the writings composed by Yogeśvara Amoghavajra on the thirty-six physical yoga practices (‘*khruḥ ‘khor*) for [dispelling] the hindrances of the Attainment of Immortality as transmitted by the great master ‘*Bir wa pa* (Virūpa)” (*Dawn* p. 132; bracketed insertion original). The first part of this colophon reads: *slob dpon chen po ‘bir wa pas mdzad pa’i ‘chi med grub pa*° (*Dawn* p. 184). Thus Orofino interprets ‘*bir wa pas mdzad pa* as “transmitted by...(Virūpa).” I have the impression that *mdzad pa* in Tibetan translations of Sanskrit text colophons often represents *kṛta* in the sense of “composed,” as in *śāstrakṛt*, “composed a treatise.” However, as we will see there is good reason to follow Orofino’s

understanding of this *mdzad pa* as having a sense of “transmitted by.” Likewise, the context supports taking *‘bir wa pa* (< **bi rwā pa?*) as a somewhat malformed representation of Sanskrit *virūpa* or, perhaps more likely still, as a not-too-bad transliteration of an Indic vernacular version of this name, *biruā*. See *biruā* and *v/biruāpādāḥ* in a Prakrit song found at Kværne 2010[1977]: 82 & 84.

The “Attainment of Immortality” (*‘chi med grub pa*) in the *ASN colophon refers to a broad *tradition of yoga* known as “*amṛtasiddhi*,” a tradition of yoga that is taught in a multitude of texts. Among these is found a particular text extant in Sanskrit that is titled merely “*Amṛtasiddhi*.” Thus it is crucial to distinguish (1) *the generic category of practices called “amṛtasiddhi”* and (2) *the specific text titled “Amṛtasiddhi.”* If this distinction is not kept in mind chaos follows, because *many* of the works in this corpus contain *amṛtasiddhi* / *‘chi med grub pa* in their titles (cf. Dorji 2025: 64).

As its colophon indicates, the *ASN is a work that elaborates upon thirty-six *yantras* (> *‘khrul ‘khor*), which it connects with the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition ascribed—in one way or another—to Virūpa. The Sanskrit of a text actually titled simply “*Amṛtasiddhi*” [henceforth AS] has been marvelously edited and studied by James Mallinson and Péter-Dániel Szántó (2021). Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 3) describe the AS as “the first text to teach a system of yoga whose primary method is physical.” Based upon internal evidence, they consider the AS to have been composed by a master named “Mādhavacandra probably no later than the second half of the 11th century CE, most likely in the Deccan region of India” (*ibid.*). Their argument for ascribing the AS to Mādhavacandra / Avadhūtacandra rather than to Virūpa is convincing. However, AS 1.1a pays homage to “the glorious lord [*nātha*] Virūpa,” (*śrīmadvirūpanāthāya*) (cf. Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 107n94), and in the concluding section of the text AS 36.3d refers to “the lineage of the glorious [*siddha*] called Virūpa” (*śrīvirūpākhyasantatiḥ*) (cf. *ibid.* pp. 103, 150). One assumes that Mādhavacandra / Avadhūtacandra saw the *siddha* Virūpa as the true “author” of the “*amṛtasiddhi*” as a system of *yoga*, whereas Mādhavacandra’s own composition titled *Amṛtasiddhi* is a mere verbal incarnation of this *upadeśa* (> Tib. *man ngag* / *gdams ngag*). The same sort of ascription of the *amṛtasiddhi* as a system of yoga to Virūpa is widespread in Indic and Tibetan sources found in Tibetan. Thus it is clear that the tradition understands this *system of yoga*, at least, to have come down from the semi-mythical *siddha* Virūpa, and so the *ASN colophon apparently reflects this traditional understanding of the term *amṛtasiddhi* / *‘chi med grub pa*.

“Virūpa” / “Biruā” is a *siddha* nickname. It might harken back to a story found in the *Avadānaśataka*, which includes these lines: *yasmād*

ayaṃ jātamātra evaṃ vikṛtarūpaḥ | tasmād bhavatu dāraḥ kasya virūpa iti nāma || (GRETEL eText, Klaus Wille input); “Since he was so deformed at birth, let the boy be named ‘Virūpa’.” This name literally means “deformed,” “monstrous,” or just plain “Ugly.” In a different sense it could mean “multiform,” “manifold,” “diverse.” Virūpa is sometimes equated with “Virūpākṣa.” That name literally means “having diverse eyes,” and it is found among the many epithets of Śiva, referring in this case to Śiva’s three eyes.

It may be the case that Buddhist texts typically—although not exclusively—prefer the name *virūpa* whereas Śaiva texts prefer *virūpākṣa*, but I have not seen this question addressed in detail. Mallinson (2019: 2) says “[t]he *Amṛtasiddhi*...attributes its teachings to a renowned Vajrayāna *siddha* called Virūpākṣa (or sometimes Virūpa)...” However, Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 107n94) note: “In Buddhist literature the form Virūpa is much more common than Virūpākṣa.” Also, Mallinson and Szántó’s critical edition of the AS (1.1a, 36.3d) in fact adopted the form *virūpa*^o against “the Southern group” of manuscripts that adduce the reading *virūpākṣa*^o. This shift from *virūpa* to *virūpākṣa* in the manuscript tradition seems to represent Śaiva efforts to superficially ‘Śaiva-ize’ this Buddhist text.

The *siddha* “Virūpa”/“Virūpākṣa” is an historically elusive and protean figure or figures who appear(s) in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist legends and text colophons. Elizabeth English (2002: 8–10, 12–15, 23, 422n206) has studied *sādhana*s ascribed to Virūpa which focus upon the decapitated (*chinnamastā/chinnamuṇḍā*) form of Vajrayoginī. As we will see, this form of Vajrayoginī is closely connected with the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition. For more recent studies of Virūpa/Virupākṣa see Mallinson 2019: 2–7; Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 3nn1–3; Dorji 2025: 66–69; see *Dawn* pp. 15n1, 16n6 for discussion; see also *Haṭhapradīpikā* 1.5cd for Virūpākṣa immediately after Gorakṣa in its Śaiva lineage. See Westin Harris (2025: 6–7 *et seq.*) for a recent discussion of the problem of singular versus multiple Virūpas/Birūās/Virūpākṣas, citing earlier studies.

Mallinson (2019: 5 & nn25, 28; 2024: 9n14) draws attention to a distinction between an apparently Vajrayāna so-called “*vajrolī/vajraolī*” lineage and a Śaiva Nāth tradition “*amarolī/amaraoḷī*” lineage. He notes (2024: 9n14): “In the c. 1280 CE *Līlācaritra* Gorakṣa is said to be of the *amarolī* and to defeat Virūpa, who is of the *vajrolī*, in a battle of supernatural powers.” This refers to Mallinson’s earlier discussion (2019: 5): “In the *Līlācaritra*, Cakradhara tells his disciples how Virūpākṣa broke in two the Bhīmeśvara *śivaliṅga* at Drākṣārāma in modern-day Telangana. Gorakṣa converted Virūpākṣa from *vajraolī*, i.e., the [Buddhist] Vajra lineage, to *amaraoḷī*, the [Śaiva] Amara lineage, and gave him the name Adaṇḍīnātha” (bracketed insertions original).

This legend calls to mind the famous myths of Vajrapāṇi's or Heruka's subjugation of Maheśvara, myths designed to inclusivistically incorporate, subordinate, and sublimate Śaiva elements in Buddhist *tantras*. In this case, however, we might interpret the *Līlācaritra* story as a Śaiva attempt to explain the incorporation of Buddhist ideas and practices into Śaiva tradition. The Śaiva adoption of the Buddhist *Amṛtasiddhi*, noted below, supports this interpretation.

As is typical of *siddhas*, Virūpa takes delight in confounding historically-minded etic scholars. Like so many *siddhas*, he seems to vanish into thin air when we try to establish biographical facts about him. English (2002: 10) says: "Virūpa...may have lived as early as the eighth century...or as late as the eleventh century..." However, some period more toward the middle of this range seems more likely to me. After a careful study of the evidence Mallinson (2024: 6) notes: "...the historical trail left in India by Virūpākṣa goes cold, but he has left enough clues for a tentative identification of the region in which his teachings were transmitted from Vajrayāna Buddhism to Nāth Śaivism. ...Tibetan hagiographies point to south India and the Deccan as being central to his activities and almost all Indian material and textual sources associated with him are from the Konkan and Deccan." Further study may shed additional light on the mysterious Virūpa. All of that being said, it may be at least possible that the Virūpa considered to be the fountainhead of the teachings of the *amṛtasiddhi* is identical to the Virūpa who is considered the Indic conduit of the Sa skya lam 'bras teachings and some of the teachings of the Shang pa bKa' brgyud pa tradition. See *Dawn* p. 18n9 for references to recent studies and discussion; add Sobisch 2008, index p. 243 s.v. "Virūpa," especially pp. 2–3, 30–32, 76–80 for further relevant information.

It is no exaggeration to say that our understanding of the history and characteristics of *haṭhayoga* has grown by leaps and bounds over the last twenty years. The bibliography of "Studies" in *Dawn* (pp. 188–197) demonstrates this, with recent studies by, e.g., Jason Birch, Gudrun Bühnemann, David G. White, and, as already mentioned, Mallinson and Szántó especially noteworthy.

Orofino significantly adds to this progress with the four introductory chapters that constitute Part I of *Dawn* (pp. 13–56). Chapter 1 introduces the *amṛtasiddhi* and its associated literature (pp. 15–16); as mentioned, it treats the thorny problem of the quasi-mythical founder of the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition, Virūpa (pp. 16–18); and it surveys our knowledge of later masters in the Buddhist stream of the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition: Eṇadeva, Amoghavajra, and Vanaratna (pp. 17–28).

The last-named master, Vanaratna (ca. 1384–1468), born somewhere in the vicinity of present-day Chattogram, Bangladesh, is noteworthy

for having translated Tibetan *'chi med grub pa* (i.e., *amṛtasiddhi*) teachings into Sanskrit, as revealed by the discoveries of Harunaga Isaacson and Martin Delhey (surveyed in *Dawn* pp. 26–27). Delhey (2021: 396) reports that three of these translations from Tibetan have “*amarasiddhiyantra*” embedded in their titles. He suggests that “Vanaratna has, of course, received the text names in Tibetan and has, in terms of historical truth, chosen the wrong back-translation to Sanskrit.” From Vanaratna’s employment of “*amara*” instead of “*amṛta*” in these titles Delhey infers that “[o]bviously, Vanaratna never encountered a copy of the Buddhist Sanskrit text called *Amṛtasiddhi* or other texts belonging to the same text cycle” (*ibid.* p. 389). This may be the case. If confirmed it might suggest that the Buddhist *amṛtasiddhi* tradition was effectively extinct in the regions of South Asia Vanaratna had visited prior to his time in Tibet. It hardly needs saying that Vanaratna’s Tibetan to Sanskrit translations warrant detailed investigation.

Particularly important for the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and particularly difficult to identify, is Amoghavajra, the named author of the *ASN. It may be worth noting that—according to Abhayākara Gupta’s *Vajrāvalī* (Mori ed. p. 426)—during the Vajrayāna “name initiation” (*nāmābhiṣeka*; *ming gi dbang*) the name “Amoghavajra” is first among the names given to male Vajrayāna initiands being inducted into the *kula* of the *jina/tathāgata* Amoghasiddhi. This means that we can assume that there were multiple individuals given this initiate name. (For a possible example of this see the famous 8th century master Amoghavajra who promoted Mantrayāna in China.) This in turn means that disambiguating the individuals bearing this name presents severe difficulties. O’Rofino surveys the extremely complex evidence found in text colophons and Tibetan chronicles, and suggests that the author of the *ASN is an Amoghavajra who was “a *yogin* from the eastern regions of India” for whom “undeniable evidence attests to his significant activity in Tibet during the second half of the 11th century, where he was also known as Don yod Rdo rje [*< amoghavajra*] or Rdo rje ldan pa chung ba (Vajrāsana the Younger)” (*Dawn* p. 23; bracketed insertion added). Thus, if this identification can be securely established, this Amoghavajra would be an Indian who played a major role in the transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet during the 11th–12th centuries, a remarkable period in the history of Buddhism as a whole. O’Rofino refers to the large mass of texts ascribed in one way or another to an Amoghavajra / Don yod rdo rje in the Tibetan *Tangyurs* (especially the ‘Peking branch’ of these collections), and she observes that “a systematic study of this material would greatly enhance our understanding” of both these texts and the *amṛtasiddhi* corpus as a

whole. See likewise Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 16. Tsering Dorji (2025) has recently surveyed most of these works, but detailed study of them is needed. We hope that Orofino will be able to fulfill her expressed wish to continue her research in this field.

Chapter 2 of *Dawn* provides a succinct but comprehensive overview of “*Haṭhayoga* in Vajrayāna” (*Dawn* pp. 29–37). For me this chapter was among *Dawn*’s most interesting sections. Orofino observes: “The yoga method known as *haṭhayoga*, literally ‘the yoga by means of force,’ emerged in Indian Sanskrit literature during the latter centuries of the first millennium CE.” For another study of the evolution of the term *haṭhayoga* see Mallinson 2020 (absent from *Dawn*’s bibliography).

Scholars of my generation were raised on the unquestioned belief that *haṭhayoga* is primordial in India, exemplified by the so-called ‘Mahāyogī’ seal from Mohenjo-Daro. Even though that particular scholarly myth has been deconstructed to the point of absolute uncertainty, it comes as a bit of a shock to learn that *haṭhayoga*—at least as a formal, systematized tradition of “physical yoga”—does not seem to appear in the historical record until around the 11th century CE. Of course ascetic practices involving what Monier-Williams characterized as “self-torture”—including special postures and breathing exercises—are found *much* earlier in South Asian literature and art. However, it seems that Indians did not produce formal, systematized textual codifications of these practices until around 1000 CE. Given the classical Indic proclivity for exhaustive (and, sometimes, exhausting) enumeration and categorization—cf., e.g., Buddhist *abhidharma*, the *vedāṅgas*, *dharmaśāstra*, *arthaśāstra*, *kāmaśāstra*, and so forth—this seems very odd to me. I look to experts in the history of *haṭhayoga* to explain this.

Orofino notes Jason Birch’s observation that, in Orofino’s words, “the first texts to describe this [physical *haṭhayoga*] method were the Buddhist *tantras*, while it was absent in Śaiva *tantras* until such late works as the *Rudrayāmalottaratantra*” (*Dawn* p. 29). If future study confirms this understanding of events, it provides us with yet another case of Buddhist influence upon the Śaiva tradition, and yet another nail in the coffin of the certainly erroneous position that Vajrayāna as “the Tantric (or magic) form of Buddhism [is] pure Śaivism in disguise” (Louis de la Vallée Poussin 1937: 184). It is established that certain Buddhist *tantras* that came to be classified as *yoganiruttaratantra* or *yoginītantra* incorporate elements of Śaiva texts to the point that Alexis Sanderson (1994, 1995, 2009) could colorfully describe this textual appropriation as “pious plagiarism.” However, it is becoming ever more clear that borrowing went both ways.

Until recently some scholars thought the *Amṛtasiddhi* itself was a Nāth/Śaiva text that had been appropriated by Buddhists (Schaeffer

2002: 518, 524–525; Baker 2018: 343; see especially Mallinson 2020a: 409–410). The opposite is in fact certainly the case: see *Dawn* pp. 15–16 & n3, referencing Mallinson and Szántó's findings. The initial misidentification of the *Amṛtasiddhi* as a Nāth/Śaiva text is instructive; it exemplifies certain widespread etic suppositions about both traditions. The Śaiva/Nāth traditions' adoption of the *amṛtasiddhi* appears to be an important case in which "we can identify several elements from the Buddhist *tantras* that were adopted in subsequent Indic non-Buddhist literature on *haṭhayoga*" (*Dawn* p. 41). Orofino, citing the research of Birch, notes "the adaptation of *Amṛtasiddhi* verses within Śaiva *haṭhayoga* texts spanning from the 12th to the 15th century, where they were incorporated without explicit attribution" (*Dawn* p. 54, citing Mallinson 2020a: 412–421). Moreover, there is evidence that "specifically Buddhist doctrines...are either unwittingly included, misunderstood (and sometimes presented in corrupt forms as a result) or deliberately changed or omitted" in later, Śaiva-inflected manuscript transmissions of the AS (Mallinson 2020a: 416). On the face of it this would seem to suggest that just as some Bauddhas 'piously plagiarized' Śaiva *tantras* during an earlier phase of the development of *tantra* in India, some Śaivas returned the favor later. Another instance of this sort of thing is the late northeastern Indian Śākta appropriation of Buddhist Tārā traditions. Also, it has long been known that, much earlier, the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali displays considerable Buddhist influence (see Wujastyk 2018 for a review of earlier research and significant new findings).

An important avenue for future research will be additional detailed investigation of such borrowings, with a special focus upon the nature of these borrowings. Are elements imported from an external source relatively superficial and fully assimilable, or are they deeper and more structural such that they fundamentally modify the tradition that adopts them? This will necessarily take us far beyond the basic philology of establishing facts about texts, into the higher and more subjective philology of interpretation and understanding.

Chapter 2 of *Dawn* traces the history of the term *haṭhayoga* beginning with what appears to be its earliest currently known clear attestation as a term for a yogic technique. (For a survey of the term's appearance in a wide variety of Buddhist texts see Mallinson 2020: 2–9; n.b.: the sense of the adverbial phrase [*na*] *haṭhayogena* in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* seems to be unrelated to the practice of *yoga* as such.) This is found in the *Samājottara* at *Guhyasamāja* 18.162d. As Orofino notes, in the *Guhyasamāja* *haṭhayoga* is only briefly mentioned. There is no elaboration on the specific practices to be employed in this *yoga*, and it is only offered as a kind of 'fallback technique' to be used when the practitioner fails to achieve gnostic vision (*darśana*) and awakening

(*bodhi*) via the standard practice of the *Guhyasamāja*'s version of the *śaḍaṅgayoga*. *Haṭhayoga*, it is said, will give rise to the achievement of gnosis (*jñānasiddhi*) for one who fails to attain it via the standard method (*Dawn* pp. 29–31). It would be worthwhile to explore both the Indic and the vast Tibetan *Guhyasamāja* exegetical literature bearing on the term *haṭhayoga* in *Guhyasamāja* 18.161–163; I suspect this would shed additional light upon the history of its usage in the later Vajrayāna tradition. For example, Āryadeva's (10th cent.?) *Sūta* (Skt. ed. p. 473) contains a reference to a *haṭhayogasamādhi* in which an adept takes on the form of Paramāśva and employs this *samādhi* to subjugate persons who are exceedingly deficient in *vīrya*; in this case the term "*haṭhayoga*" seems unrelated to its usage to designate 'physical yoga.' Regarding the *śaḍaṅgayoga* itself, I would draw the reader's attention to *Dawn* p. 30n46. Here Orofino displays her intimate familiarity with this extremely complicated *yoga*, providing an excellent succinct overview of it drawing upon her own and others' earlier studies.

Chapter 2 continues with a detailed explanation of the use of *haṭhayoga* in the *Kālacakra*, utilizing the *Śrī Kālacakra*, its commentary in the *Vimalaprabhā*, and these texts' exegesis by Indian *Kālacakra* masters, prominently including Nāropā (*Dawn* pp. 31–36). Once again Orofino exhibits her mastery of these difficult, extremely complex texts, which are larded with obscure technical terms that are typically either poorly defined within or simply absent from current lexicons.

One of these peculiar terms is *parapuram*, found in *Śrī Kālacakra* 4.197b. Orofino renders this as "the supreme citadel," an interpretation of the Tibetan translation *mchog gi grong khyer*. Monier-Williams, following Schmidt's *Nachträge* to Böhtlingk and Roth, renders *parapurapraveśa* as "entering an enemy's city (as a supernatural art)." In this definition *parapura* is supposed to refer to an enemy's (*para*) fortified town (*pura*). As the Tibetan translation *mchog gi grong khyer* suggests, in the *Kālacakra* usage *parapura* has a somewhat different sense. I think the *Kālacakra* usage is not identical to the [in]famous mundane *siddhi* of *parapurapraveśa*[na] (Tib. *grong 'jug*), a.k.a., *parakāyapraveśa*, "which involves transferring the vital principle from one's own body into another[s] corpse to reanimate it" (*Dawn* p. 33n56, also p. 35; cf. also *Tāntrikābhīdhānakośa* 3.474; White 2009: 12, 120, 165–166). In AS 29.1ab the mundane common *siddhi* (*sāmānyasiddhi*) of *parapurapraveśana* appears following the mundane *siddhis* of "*kāyavyūha*, etc.": *kāyavyūhādikaṃ yac ca parapurapraveśanam* |. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. p. 1324.2 defines *kāyavyūha* as "the supernatural power of assuming several bodies simultaneously"; (cf. Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 145n225 for a different understanding of *kāyavyūha*). In the AS system these *siddhis* are "the sign[s] of perfected Breath" (*siddhavāyulakṣaṇam*) (*ibid.*).

In *Śrī Kālacakra* 4.197 [= *Śrī Kālacakra* 2.121], on the other hand, I do not see any explicit evidence that the *tantra* is describing the 'necro-possession' *parapurapraveśa* / *grong 'jug* practice. Rather, it appears to be describing a *haṭhayoga* technique that forces the *prāṇa* and *apāna* winds in the body to pierce the crown of the skull. This induces a sort of metaphorical 'space travel' (*khecaratvam*; *mkha' la spyod pa nyid*) so that *yogis* attain union with the Mother of the Universe (*viśvamātā*), whose nature is the five supranormal powers. This interpretation seems to be supported by Nāropā's juxtaposition of *Śrī Kālacakra* 5.114 to follow stanza 4.197. *Śrī Kālacakra* 5.114 describes attainment of the transcendent, the fourth state which is the unmoving bliss of *nirvāṇa*, the imperishable *sahaja*. (Cf. *parapadagamanaṃ* and *vrajati parapadaṃ* elsewhere in the *Śrī Kālacakra*.) Similarly, Raviśrījñāna's gloss on *Śrī Kālacakra* 4.197d equates *Viśvamātā* with *mahāmudrā*, which in *Kālacakra* usage typically refers to gnostic vision of the "emptiness image" (*śūnyatābimbam*). Thus I suspect that here *parapura* is being used metaphorically. This invocation of the "supreme citadel" indeed most likely alludes to the mundane *parapurapraveśana* practice, but it 'elevates' it to refer to the attainment of the supramundane, supreme *siddhi* of *mahāmudrā*.

In any case the employment of a *haṭhayoga* technique for this is indeed remarkable. Similar to the *Guhyasamāja* tradition, the *Kālacakra* reserves its version of *haṭhayoga* as a 'fallback' technique to force the vital breath into the central channel to induce the attainment of salvific gnosis. Orofino observes: "The earliest form of *haṭhayoga*, as described in the *Kālacakratantra*, is essentially a practice of breath control without involving postural physical exercises. As previously mentioned, it is considered a supplementary technique of the six-fold yoga (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*) to be employed when there is a failure to effectively control the *prāṇa*. Thus, it should be understood as part of the *utpannakrama* process in the Buddhist *tantras*." She goes on to detail this *yoga*'s use in "the ritualized sexual union envisaged in the Buddhist [*yoga*] *niruttaratantra* practices, which can be sublimated through the visualization of the deity" (*Dawn* 33–34). Here once again the author gives a succinct and remarkably lucid description of the theory and practice of crucial advanced Vajrayāna yogic techniques.

Orofino notes that "[t]he Sanskrit term *haṭhayoga* is translated into Tibetan as either *stobs kyi rnal 'byor* or *btsan thabs kyi rnal 'byor...*," and she illustrates the choices made in various Tibetan translations of Indic works (*Dawn* 31n50). As a mere aside, I would point out that the term *btsan thabs sbyor ba'i cho ga* (< *haṭhayogavidhānā*) is found in the eighth chapter of the *Ḍākārṇavatāntra* (see Mallinson 2020: 6n36). This appears within a context that suggests it is related to physical *haṭhayoga* as it is employed in Vajrayāna *niṣpanna-* / *utpanna-krama yoga*. Further

investigation may shed light upon this text's place within the sequence of developments of the *haṭhayoga* tradition.

Chapter 3 (*Dawn* pp. 39–45) is titled “The Central Doctrine of the *Amṛtasiddhi*.” As promised, Orofino provides “a synopsis of [the *Amṛtasiddhi*’s] central doctrine,” and she refers readers to “the comprehensive translation of the text by Mallinson and Szántó (2021).” I would recommend that those who want to begin exploring this literature start with this section of *Dawn* in conjunction with Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 7–23. Orofino, once again, presents a very clear and concise but thorough overview of the basic theory and practices of this form of *yoga*.

That said, one major issue I did not fully understand from Mallinson and Szántó’s and *Dawn*’s treatments of the *Amṛtasiddhi* is the precise sense of *amṛta* in this title. Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 7) note: “The title of the text means ‘the attainment of’ *amṛta*. The most common referent of *a-mṛta*, whose literal meaning is ‘not dead’ or ‘immortal’, is a liquid that bestows immortality, but, as is explained in the closing section of the text, in the *Amṛtasiddhi* *amṛta* refers to semen, liberation or life. Thus the text’s title may mean ‘The Attainment of [Mastery over] Semen’, ‘The Attainment of Liberation’ or ‘The Attainment of Immortality’.” (But in place of “Immortality” here read “Life”—see next.) The Sanskrit of AS 36.6 referenced here reads: *śukrasya amṛtaṃ vācyaṃ mokṣasya jīvitasya ca | trayāṇāṃ kathitā siddhir amṛtasiddhir ihocyate |*. Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 150) translate this as “Immortality (*amṛtaṃ*) is a word for semen, liberation and life. The perfection (*siddhiḥ*) of the three is taught here as the Perfection of Immortality (*amṛtasiddhiḥ*).” Note that the third member in the triad—*jīvita*—indeed means “life” or “living” in general, but it also means “duration of life” (Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v.). That being the case, we might gloss *jīvitasya...siddhiḥ* in AS 36.6 as “attainment/perfection of the duration of life.” In *Dawn* (p. 42) Orofino notes that the “*Amṛtasiddhi*, akin to the *ṣaḍāṅgayoga* practice of Buddhist *tantras*, teaches that in order to realize innate wisdom, the *bindu*, which corresponds to the lunar *amṛta*, must be raised along the central channel and must not be emitted. If it descends and is emitted, one will age, die, and be destined for the endless cycle of transmigration. Conversely, if it is not emitted, the *yogin* achieves immortality.”

My question is, what does “immortality” signify here? In basic Buddhist teachings it is said that *nirvāṇa* is *amṛta* (Pali *amata*), but this most certainly refers to a *lokottara* state of transcendence in which the ordinary human body has been cast away: even Śākyamuni Buddha cast away—or at least ‘displayed casting away’—his physical body on the occasion of his *parinirvāṇa*. In the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition, on the other

hand, I have the impression that ‘immortality’ may have a more this-world, physical sense, perhaps in harmony with the second stanza of Biruā’s song, which says: *sahaje thira karī bāruṇī bāndha | je ajarāmara hoi dīrha kāndha |* |; “Making it naturally (*sahaje*) firm, produce liquor, so that having become free from old age and death, the body becomes incorruptible” (adapted from Kværne 2010[1977]: 81–86). A possibly related statement is found in a *dohā* of Saraha: *jīvantaha jo ṇaii jarai so ajarāmara hoi |* (67ab); “Anyone alive who does not age would be free from old age and death” (Mathes & Szántó 2024: 152, 274, 357). Thus, it is not clear to me whether the immortality sought in the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition is an exclusively, or even primarily, mental, gnostic state of transcendence, or is instead a literal physical immortalization via transmutation of the ordinary human body. The concluding portion of the AS titled “Inquiry into *Nirvāṇa*” (*nirvāṇaviveka*; AS 34) suggests the *amṛtasiddhi* adept achieves a ‘body of gnosis’ (*jñānakāya*, *jñānadeha*), but I am unsure how this relates to the ‘inner alchemy’ of physical manipulation of breath and semen that is the central focus of the text. We will return to this issue at the end of this review.

As just noted, Orofino refers to the achievement of immortality via the yogic practice of ‘raising the lunar *amṛta* within the central channel of the subtle body, and avoidance of allowing it to descend.’ In determining the relationships between the *Amṛtasiddhi* and the Kālacakra corpus, it is significant that AS 4.11c (*adhaś candrāmṛtaṃ yāti*) is identical to *Sekoddeśa* 86a, as noted by Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 115n152). Also, not explicitly noted by Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 122), the entire hemistich of AS 7.26ab (*adhaś candrāmṛtaṃ yāti maraṇaṃ sarvadehinām |*) is almost identical to *Sekoddeśa* 86ab, with the only difference being that the latter reads *marane* in *pāda* b. The *Sekoddeśa* is an excerpt from the Kālacakra *mūlatantra* titled *Paramādibuddha*. Based upon textual correspondence and additional ideas that are found in both the AS and the Kālacakra literature, Orofino argues that the AS refers to the Kālacakra (*Dawn* p. 40 & n70). I agree that this is very likely. If further study confirms the position that the AS draws upon the Kālacakra, it supports a theory that the AS originated some time after around the turn of the millennium—perhaps around the middle of the 11th century—during or shortly after the initial diffusion of the Kālacakra *tantra* literature (cf. Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 3 & n2).

Another possible linkage between the Kālacakra and the AS is their perhaps common employment of the [Mañjuśrī] *Nāmasaṃgīti*. The *Nāmasaṃgīti* is a foundational text for the Kālacakra. In its “Inquiry into *Nirvāṇa*” AS 35.1cd *avyayo niṣkalo vyāpī śivaḥ sarvagato vibhuḥ |* seems to draw upon *Nāmasaṃgīti* 95–98; cf. especially *Nāmasaṃgīti* 97c *niṣkalaḥ sarvago vyāpī*, with the lemmas *śiva* and *vibhu*—and some of the other descriptors of *nirvāṇa* found in AS 35—also appearing in the

Nāmasaṃgīti. Of course most of these terms are common tropes throughout Indic panegyric, and the *Nāmasaṃgīti* itself is the common property of the entire Vajrayāna tradition, but further study may reveal significant intertextualities.

Other interesting parallels between the Kālacakra and the AS are their employment of Sāṃkhya terminology and their use of the macrocosm/microcosm homology (see also *Dawn* p. 41). In its treatment of *Śrī Kālacakra* 1.2b (*bāhye dehe pare ca prakṛtiṣu puruṣaṃ pañcaviṃśātmakaṃ ca*) *Vimalaprabhā* 1.6.2b quotes a modified version of *Sāṃkhyakārikā* 3 (cf. Newman 1987: 385, 402–405). Like the Kālacakra, the AS adopts Sāṃkhya terminology and ideas but significantly modifies them. If, as seems possible, the AS draws upon the Kālacakra in other respects, its adaptation of Sāṃkhya ideas might have been inspired by the Kālacakra. I have the impression that the two texts' usage of Sāṃkhya terms and concepts are rather different, but this calls for further study. Likewise, as exemplified by the *Śrī Kālacakra* 1.2b *pāda* just cited, the Kālacakra is based upon a model in which the external world (*bāhya*) is reflected in the body (*deha*), which serve as a basis for purification/transformation in order to achieve the transcendent (*para*), a supramundane blissful gnostic cognition of the universe. We find a somewhat similar model in the AS. See Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 8), “[t]he body is a microcosm of the universe”; Orofino (*Dawn* p. 39), “the body is a microcosm, perfectly symmetrical with the macrocosm.” Of course this kind of idea is widespread in pre-modern South Asian thought, but further study may reveal some sort of genetic relationship between the Kālacakra and the AS use of this principle. The same applies to the Kālacakra and the AS employment of alchemical terminology and ideas. See Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 50n48, and esp. Mallinson 2025b; I think there is much more to be said about this. Likewise, the *Vimalaprabhā* employs the terms *piṅgalā*, *iḍā*, and *avadhūtī* for the three main right, left, and central *nāḍīs* correlated with Sun, Moon, and Rāhu (cf., e.g., Newman 1987: 242; *Vimalaprabhā* 2.2.43); this probably predates the AS usage of *iḍā* as the left channel associated with Moon (cf. Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 112n120).

Orofino, similar to Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 125n166), further suggests that there are parallels between the AS 9 treatment of the widespread Indic doctrines of *prakṛti*, the three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*), and the three *doṣas* (here *vāta*, *pitta*, and *kapha*), and ideas found in the Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition (*Dawn* p. 41). I agree that the AS doctrine of “mental *prakṛtis*” (*cittaparakṛtayas*) as being like waves on the ocean (AS 9.5) shows affinities with Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition ideas (*āryīyamataṃ*; ‘*phags lugs*). However, the AS says that all one’s good and bad actions performed in prior lifetimes reside within one’s body in the form of *prakṛti* (AS 9.2), such that there are “bodily *prakṛtis*”

(*śārīrī/dehe prakṛtayaḥ*). These “bodily *prakṛtis*” consist of apparently strictly physical *vāta*, *pitta*, and *kapha* that ‘perform their functions paying no heed to mind’ (AS 9.7). This appears to present a kind of ‘bodily karmic DNA’ doctrine, which to my knowledge is rather extraordinary in Buddhist literature.

Also, the AS teaching of “bodily *prakṛtis*” seems to be at odds with the fundamentally strictly mentalistic trajectory of the Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition treatment of its version of *prakṛtis*. In the Ārya tradition texts *Pañcakrama* 2 and *Sūta* 4 the 80/160 *prakṛtis* seem to be something like mental ‘paradigms’ or ‘prototypes’ that are latent forms of emotional states and primarily mental experiences. As I vaguely understand this, they seem to represent special kinds of stable, prototypical *vāsanās* (‘propensities’) or *bījas* (‘seeds’) that give rise to and condition much of human experience. For a table presenting the eighty *prakṛtis* of the Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition see Wedemeyer 2007: 775–778. This set of eighty is doubled to one hundred sixty to account for the two stages of the eighty *prakṛtis*’ gradual, phased dissolution when approaching the death state of luminosity (*prabhāsvara*) and their inverted phased reemergence after exiting it. In Candrakīrti’s *Pradīpoddyotana ad Guhyasamāja* 7.14 (Ch ed. p. 65) we are told: *rūpādīviṣayān bāhyābhiniveśaparihāreṇa mṛdvādimātrasthitarāgādiṣaṣṭyuttaraśataprakṛtisvabhāvānubhavana jāntīyād iti* |; “One should know [mind (*cittam*)] via completely rejecting attachment to visible form and so forth [—i.e., the five *kāmaguṇas*—] as being external and [by instead] experiencing [them as] having the nature of the one hundred sixty *prakṛtis* of the states of attraction and so forth, that have the [three] degrees of slight and so forth [i.e., slight, middling, and excessive].” Likewise, *Pradīpoddyotana ad Guhyasamāja* 12.55 (Ch ed. p. 114) says: *kāyavākcittalakṣaṇaiḥ kāyādisvabhāvaiḥ gaṅgāvālukāsamesu kāyavākcittalakṣaṇeṣu lokadhātuṣu sarvasattvānāṃ nāṭakavaṇ nāṇāprakāreṇa spandamānaṃ cittākhyam ṣaṣṭyuttaraśataprakṛtīnāṃ kāraṇabhūtaṃ sa vetti* |; “[The practitioner] knows the mind of all sentient beings via the characteristics of their bodies, voices, and minds—the nature of their bodies and so forth—in world systems as numerous as the sands of the Gaṅgā, characterized by [their] bodies, voices, and minds. [He knows that mind] gyrating (*spandamānam*) in various forms like a dramatic dancer, as the cause of the one hundred sixty *prakṛtis*.”

When I examine the list of eighty *prakṛtis* and their treatments in Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition exegesis, I see nothing physical. A very helpful Tibetan investigation of the exceedingly complex, difficult, and still rather obscure subject of the *prakṛtis* in the Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition corpus is found in rJe Tsong kha pa’s *Rim lnga gsal sgron* in a section titled “*rGyud kyi don snang ba gsum dang rang bzhin rnams bstan*

pa” (ed. pp. 213–225); this has been accurately translated into English by Gavin Kilty (2013: 341–358), but some of the technical terminology in this translation calls for refinement. I suspect further study will reveal interesting differences—and parallels—between the Ārya tradition and the AS treatment of *prakṛtis* that will shed light on both traditions.

A possibly fundamental difference between the two traditions is the emphasis in the AS upon exercises physically cultivating the human body whereas—according to the Ārya master Candrakīrti, at least—in the practice of the Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition the attainment of buddhahood involves “separation from one’s ordinary body” (*prākṛtadehāpagama*): “The [five] *buddhas* are the [five] aggregates of the body, [sensation, ideation, activity, and awareness]. Their achievement (*siddhi*) is acquisition of the body of gnosis (*jñānadeha*) that consists of munificence [—i.e., the Dharma teaching of the *rūpakāyas*—] and profundity [—i.e., the gnoses of the *dharmakāya*—] via separation from one’s ordinary body (*prākṛtadeha*)”; *buddhā rūpādayaskandhāḥ teṣāṃ siddhiḥ prākṛtadehāpagamena audāryagāmbhīryātmakajñānadehaparigrahaḥ* | (*Pradīpodyotana* ad *Guhyasamāja* 11.44 [Ch ed.] p. 105).

Likewise, the AS 8.9 & 10.11 apparent denigration and rejection of practice “via the *yoga* of self-empowerment” (*svādhiṣṭhānena yogena*)—the first instance appearing in its section titled “inquiry into mind” (*cittaviveka*)—might easily be read as a criticism or even repudiation of the Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition doctrines of the *svādhiṣṭhānakrama* and *cittaviveka* found in Nāgārjuna’s *Pañcakrama*, Āryadeva’s *Sūtaka*, and so forth. (For the *Sūtaka* on *cittaviveka* and *svādhiṣṭhānakrama* see, e.g., Wedemeyer 2007: 393–413, 427–439.) For a somewhat different interpretation of this issue see Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 18–19n43–44). They contrast the ideas found in the Ārya tradition and those found in the *Svādhiṣṭhānaprabheda* ascribed to Āryadeva. (I use the title given in the first stanza of the Sanskrit of this text.) However, I consider the doctrines found in the *Svādhiṣṭhānaprabheda* to be in agreement with Āryadeva’s *Sūtaka* 6. In *Sūtaka* 6 the *svādhiṣṭhānakramopadeśa* (*bdag la byin gyis brlab pa’i rim pa’i man ngag*) is a soteriological method that involves seeing the phenomenal reality of life and death within samsara as like a dream, so that one can discard one’s beginningless clinging to the intrinsic existence of one’s ordinary identity and body. Thus, I would argue that the question of the relationships between the AS and the Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition calls for further study. I agree with the suggestion of Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 19) that “the school of the *Svādhiṣṭhānakramaprabheda* was an important interlocutor for [the AS] author,” but with the major proviso that this school includes the doctrines of the Guhyasamāja

Ārya tradition as whole. (After I had written the preceding I became aware that Faye Lois Duncan has covered much of the same ground and has arrived at very similar findings in her 2023 MA thesis; I refer those interested in further discussion of the relationship between the AS and the Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition to her study.)

On this issue a statement made by Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 18) needs modification. They say: “The *Amṛtasiddhi* [cf. AS 19.15a, 20.7b, 25.1c, 30.1c]...maps onto [its] four stages [of practice] a tetrad consisting of three voids, *śūnya*, *atiśūnya* and *mahāśūnya*, and *prabhāsvara*, ‘the shining light’. This tetrad is found only in the *Svādhiṣṭhānakramaprabheda*, in which the three voids evolve from *prabhāsvara*: *prabhāsvara* > *mahāśūnya* > *atiśūnya* > *śūnya*.” Regarding the first void, in fact AS 19.15a reads *śūnyatānupraveśo* ‘pi, a minor but perhaps significant difference. More important is the fact that a model of three voids followed by *prabhāsvara* is fundamental to the entire Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition system. See, e.g., *Pañcakrama* 2.4: *śūnyam ca atiśūnyam ca mahāśūnyam tṛtīyakam | caturtham sarvaśūnyam ca phalahetuprabhedataḥ |* . See also, e.g., *Sūtaka* 4 (Wedemeyer ed. p. 402): *vajrayāne tu paryāyam āha | ...śūnyam atiśūnyam mahāśūnyam iti |* ...; *ibid.* p. 404: *evam sarvabuddhopadeśam śūnyatrayalakṣaṇam pratipādyā |* ...; *ibid.* p. 418: *...śubhāśubhaprakṛtayaḥ śūnyatrayasamudbhavā vāyuvāhanavaśāt kṣaṇe kṣaṇe cotpadya viśayān anubhūtya punaḥ punaḥ prabhāsvaram praviśanti |* . Thorough discussion of this would require more space than is warranted here, but the last quotation notes “wholesome and unwholesome *prakṛtis* arise from the three voids due to the force of being conveyed by the [body’s] *vāyu(s)*; originating moment to moment they experience objects, and over and over enter into luminosity.” As I read the AS, its soteriology includes adoption and radical revision of basic structures found in the Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition. Further comparative analysis of both systems is needed. (N.b.: The Kālacakra employs a different set of three emptinesses followed by a fourth [i.e., *śūnyatā*, *mahāśūnyatā*, *paramārthaśūnyatā*, *śūnyatā sarvākārā*; cf. Newman 1987: 285–286]; this appears to be an adaptation of the Prajñāpāramitā sixteen emptinesses.)

These arcane, complex, difficult, and unresolved philological-historical issues aside, we can wholeheartedly agree with Orofino’s statement that “[b]y analyzing the teachings of the *Amṛtasiddhi*, we can identify several elements from the Buddhist *tantras* that were adopted in subsequent Indic non-Buddhist literature on *haṭhayoga*” (*Dawn* p. 41). Orofino goes on to give a fascinating discussion of the idea of *bindu* as “seminal fluid.” In other Vajrayāna texts this is most often connected with the ‘subtle body’ (*sūkṣmaśarīra*/*sūkṣmadeha*; *phra ba’i lus*/*phra mo’i lus*) composed of *nāḍīs* and *cakras* through which flow

vāyus ("winds") and *bindu(s)* ("drop(s)"), but it is very noteworthy that "[t]he *Amṛtasiddhi* makes no mention of Kuṇḍalinī, lotuses, or wheels [i.e., *cakras*]" (Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 11). The AS presentation of 'the subtle body' seems to be *much* simpler than the intricate models that are prevalent in Vajrayāna systems such as the Hevajra and Cakrasaṃvara *tantras*. I suspect this difference has important ramifications that call for further study.

As mentioned above, another key doctrine of the AS is "the correspondence between the macrocosm and microcosm," especially the employment of "the triad of Sun, Moon, and Rāhu within the human physical body" (*Dawn* p. 41). As Orofino notes, these AS doctrines are highly reminiscent of parallel ideas found in the Kālacakra *tantra*.

Here *Dawn* (pp. 42–43n72; see also p. 50) offers us a long note examining scholarly literature treating parallels between Indic ideas and practices that are the focal point of *Dawn* and similar ideas and practices found in China. It has long been recognized that there are remarkable similarities between doctrines found, on the one hand, in the Indic Vajrayāna *tantras* that came to be classified as *yoganiruttaratantra*—especially the teachings pertaining to so-called 'sexual *yoga*' with a *karmamudrā* in these *tantras*' *utpanna-* / *niṣpanna-kramas*—and, on the other hand, "[t]he practices of retaining semen and reversing its flow [that are] integral to Chinese alchemy and the tradition of sexual cultivation for achieving longevity in China, dating back to the 5th century BCE." Orofino surveys a good portion of both the earlier and the more recent research on this exceedingly obscure and fascinating subject, and she concludes—correctly, in my opinion—that further progress in tracing the history of these parallels "requires large-scale, multidisciplinary projects with a global scope, grounded in comparative multilingual textual-historical analyses to address the complex exchange of ideas and practices between India, Tibet, and China." The correspondences between Sinic and Indic ideas and practices related to 'sexual *yoga*' are often so striking that one tends to assume that cross-cultural transmission rather than independent parallel development has occurred. However, the devil is in the details, and it is established that over a period of many centuries people and ideas traveled in both directions. Thus, as Orofino argues, further study is needed (cf. likewise Mallinson 2018: 199).

The remainder of *Dawn* Chapter 3 treats details in the AS, noting its seventh chapter dealing with *bindu*. This seems to reference the four *ānandas* of Vajrayāna *utpannakrama yoga* found especially in the *yoginītantras* such as the Hevajra and Cakrasaṃvara, but the AS presentation of the *ānandas* differs in significant ways (cf. Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 17–18, 118). The conclusion of *Dawn* Chapter 3 details the

three *mudrās* taught in AS 11–13. Among the three it is noteworthy that in AS 11 the term *mahāmudrā* seems to be used to designate a sitting posture and a strenuous physical exercise designed to “[s]top the movement of the Moon and Sun, and perform restraint of the breath (*prāṇayantraṇam*)” (AS 11.5 translated by Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 128). Although the *mahāmudrā* is called “the greatest of seals,” the AS treatment of it mostly centers upon physical exercise rather than the mystico-philosophical metaphysical discourse this term most often attracts in Indo-Tibetan Vajrayāna literature. (But see AS 31.3 and Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 148n233, and esp. p. 173, for *Amṛtasiddhi* corpus references to *mahāmudrā* in the sense of “the *summum bonum* [as] in much of tantric Buddhism.”) As we will see when we examine the *ASN below, the emphasis placed upon physical exercises instead of or in addition to ‘meditative’ contemplation is a dominant pattern in the AS and its associated texts.

Chapter 4 of *Dawn* (pp. 47–56) is titled “Dispelling the Hindrances to Immortality.” Thus it provides an overview and discussion of key points in the *ASN, an invaluable introduction to the edition and translation of *ASN that constitute Parts II & III of *Dawn*. Orofino observes: “The **Amṛtasamkāṣṭanibarhaṇa* is a yoga manual organized into thirty-six chapters, each consisting of three sections: a preliminary, a main, and a concluding one. In its colophon, the yoga trainings described in the text are defined as ‘*khrul ’khor*, which translates the Sanskrit polysemous word *yantra*” (*Dawn* p. 47). The pertinent portion of the colophon reads: ...‘*chi med grub pa’i ’phrang sum cu rtsa drug gi ’khrul ’khor*, which Orofino translates as “...the thirty-six yoga practices (*khrul ’khor*) for [dispelling] the hindrances [*’phrang*] of the Attainment of Immortality” (*Dawn* p. 132). She goes on to discuss the appearance of *yantraṇam* and *yantra* in AS and what seems to be the typical translation of *yantra* into Tibetan, *khrul ’khor*, with a variant form *’phrul ’khor*. The latter spelling appears to be favored in some Tibetan traditions; see, e.g., Norbu 2008. Because *khrul* has a naturally negative sense involving ‘error,’ I wonder if a preference for the form *’phrul ’khor* is significant, evoking a more positive sense of ‘divine power,’ similar to Sanskrit *divya*, *ṛddhi*, *nirmāṇa*, and *prātihārya*, which are often translated by Tibetan terms containing *’phrul* (compare Baker 2018: 344–345 & n.28). Orofino notes: “[*Yantra*’s] Tibetan rendering, *khrul ’khor*, means, as in Sanskrit, machine or device, and in certain contexts of yoga literature, it means physical training” (*Dawn* p. 47). For a graphic example of *yantra* / *khrul ’khor* in the sense of “machine” see the war machines, merry-go-round, and other mechanical devices taught in the *svarodayayantravidhīniyamamahoddeśa* in *Śrī Kālacakra* 1.128–149 and *Vimalaprabhā* 1.10.128–149 (cf. Newman 1987: 543–547); for the usage

of *yantra* in the sense of “magical device” or “diagram” see, e.g., Kuranishi 2013.

The semantic shift from *yantra*/*'khrul 'khor* in the sense of “[mechanical] device” or “apparatus” to “physical training” seems to imply that the human body is a kind of complex ‘machine’ that can be manipulated for a special kind of ‘work,’ with ‘breath’ (especially *prāṇa* and *apāna*) being the principal form of energy that drives this ‘machine’ (see *Dawn* pp. 47–48). The idea that the human body is a *yantra*—i.e., *dehayantra*—is well-attested in late Sanskrit works (see Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 129n171). Much earlier we find the same idea expressed as *kāyayantam* in Pali, and in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* we read: “This body, alas, is a contraption, bones held together with tendons!” (*yantrabhūto batāyaṃ kāyo 'sthisnāyuvinibaddhaḥ*; § 2.9 of GRETEL eText). We also find the equivalent term *śarīrayantram* in the *Bhadrāpālīpariprcchā-sūtra*, which is quoted in Guhyasamāja exegesis in Āryadeva's *Sūta* (Wedemeyer 2007: 397). We find the remarkable statement that “the body machine is devoid of self” (*dehayantro nirātmakaḥ*) in Kambala's so-called “*Navāśloki*” *Prajñāpāramitā-piṇḍārtha* [5]9d (Tucci ed. 1956, *Minor Buddhist Texts* I, p. 217 > GRETEL eText, Klaus Wille input 2020-07-31). Moreover, a search of “The Buddhist Canons Research Database” for the collocation *lus kyi 'khrul 'khor* produced “41 instances in 30 texts” ranging from Mahāyāna *sūtras* and *tantras* through a wide variety of *sūtra* and *tantra* exegesis. Thus the idea of the human body as a ‘device’ (*yantra*; *'khrul 'khor*) has a long and varied history in Buddhism, a history that would reward detailed systematic exploration.

As mentioned, in each of its thirty-six chapters the *ASN begins by defining a specific error/hindrance, and then it describes the error's countermeasures in a practice consisting of three stages (*rim pa < *krama?*): 1) a preliminary stage (*dang po sngon 'gro'i rim pa ni |*), 2) a main stage (*gnyis pa dngos gzhi'i rim pa ni |*), and 3) a concluding stage (*gsum pa rjes kyi rim pa ni |*). These *pādas* are repeated in a pattern that obtains throughout the text. The *pāda* “*sngon 'gro dngos gzhi rjes gsum mo |*” appears at the end of the introductory stanza of each of the thirty-six chapters, and the three *pādas* given above appear at the head of each of the three sections of every chapter. This structure strikes me as being peculiar for an Indic text, being more reminiscent of the numbered *sa bcad* structure employed in classical Tibetan scholastic works. See likewise Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 16): “...some [AS corpus works found in *Tangyurs*] may not even have had an Indic original behind them. This is suggested for example by the enumerative style, which is extremely rare in South Asian writing but prevalent in Tibetan.” I wonder if Amoghavajra adopted this organizing principle under Tibetan influence. Also, the colophon of *ASN makes no mention of

any sort of translator or translation activity (*Dawn* pp. 132, 184). These facts support Orofino's proposal that "...Amoghavajra, the author of [*ASN], was an Indian *yogin* who, during his travels in Tibet, wrote these instructions directly in Tibetan for a Tibetan audience, at a time when Buddhism was declining in India and was received with great fervor in the Land of Snow" (*Dawn* p. 56). If this understanding is borne out, the *ASN is a true 'gray text' in the proper sense of that term, a text composed in Tibet by an Indian in Tibetan, perhaps in collaboration with one or more Tibetans. A somewhat analogous earlier parallel may be Atiśa's *Byang chub lam gyi sgron ma*, a work composed in Tibet for Tibetans, although in that instance it is believed that the text was composed in Sanskrit and translated. In any case, the *ASN exemplifies the remarkably intimate relationships between Indic and Tibetan Buddhists during the 11th–13th centuries. It is well known that during that period Tibetans studied in South Asia and South Asians taught and worked as translators in Tibet. Less studied is the fact that some South Asians learned Tibetan such that they could autonomously translate Sanskrit works into Tibetan, and perhaps even compose original works in Tibetan. Also, it is at least possible that some late Sanskrit works were composed by Tibetans. It is clear that the boundary between "Indian Buddhism" and "Tibetan Buddhism" was highly permeable and often bridged at this time.

Each of the three stages of each of the thirty-six chapters of the *ASN prescribes an *āsana*. Chapter 4 of *Dawn* (pp. 48–50) demonstrates that some of the names and properties of *āsanas* described in *ASN were transmitted over the course of hundreds of years in medieval/premodern *haṭhayoga* literature. Many of these names and properties even persist in the contemporary globalized explosion of the body cultivation 'yoga life-style' noted at the beginning of this review. For example, Orofino notes that *āsanas* similar or identical to those found in *ASN appear in "the modern Yoga Challenge® System" (*Dawn* p. 85n127, 100n139, 112n151, 113n152, 115n155, 116n156, 118n158, 124n164, 132n172). Undoubtedly this list of examples could be greatly augmented, and it would be interesting to trace further the continuities—or at least commonalities—between the *ASN and the current 'secularized' transcultural yoga phenomenon.

As a small contribution to further study of the history of *āsanas*, in an appendix to this review I provide an edition and translation of the Sanskrit text of *Śrī Kālacakra* 3.19cd and *Vimalaprabhā* 3.1.19cd, which is titled *aṣṭavidhāsanabhedananiyamah*, "the precept on differentiation of eight types of *āsanas*." In the *Kālacakra* these *āsanas* are prescribed as the postures to be adopted when performing nine types of magic rites. Although they are not presented embedded in dynamic *haṭhayoga* practices, some of the *Kālacakra* *āsanas* share names and/or features

found in the *āsanas* of *haṭhayoga* texts. Because the *Śrī Kālacakra* and the *Vimalaprabhā* achieved completion *ca.* 1025–1040, this *tantra*'s depiction of these *āsanas* might serve as a kind of benchmark in the development of *āsana* systems in general and *āsanas* in the *haṭhayoga* tradition in particular. Further study is needed to determine the relationships that exist between the *āsanas* given in this section of the *Kālacakra tantra* and those found in other works.

Chapter 4 of *Dawn* continues (pp. 51–53) by highlighting and summarizing the key features of *ASN. *ASN begins with “Homage to Vajrayoginī.” This suggests to me that—if this homage is authorial—Amoghavajra announces at the very outset that his work especially pertains to the *yoginītantra*/*prajñātantra* subtradition of Vajrayāna praxis. This supposition appears to be supported by the AS as well, which begins by paying homage to Chinnamastā, the decapitated form of the buddha goddess Yoginī (AS 0.1c; Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 107; cf. also p. 15). Chinnamastā (or Chinnamuṇḍā? < *dbu bcad* [*ma*]) is also honored at the beginning of the **Amṛtasiddhimūla*, a work existing only in Tibetan which is closely related to the AS (Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 155, 165). Orofino begins her overview of the *ASN by pointing out that “the analysis of the thirty-six hindrances impeding the practice of the *Amṛtasiddhi* clearly reveals that the **Amṛtaṣaṅkaṭanibarhaṇa* is rooted in an unmistakably Buddhist Vajrayāna context” (*Dawn* p. 51).

This brings to the forefront what I found most fascinating in *ASN and its treatment in *Dawn*. Orofino notes: “The first two chapters [of *ASN] specifically address obstacles to the practice of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, meditation techniques that have been highly significant and widely practiced across Buddhist schools since ancient times.” A passage in *ASN 1 reads, in Orofino’s translation: “When eradicating the errors that hinder the practice of the cultivation of tranquility (*śamatha*), there are three stages: the preliminary, the main and the concluding” (*Dawn* p. 59). The preliminary stage begins with the practitioner placing their feet in *padmāsana* (or, perhaps more precisely, **padmaparyāṅka*? < *pad ma’i dkyil krung*). This *āsana* apparently corresponds to the *āsana* named *pariyāṅka* in the *Śrī Kālacakra* and the *Vimalaprabhā* (see Appendix below), and it is interesting to note that in the *sTang stabs kyi bkod pa* (< **Gativyūha*) ascribed to Buddhajñānapāda we find *lus ni rab tu zhi ba’i tshul dang ldan* || *padma’i ‘dug stang yin par mkhas pas bshad* || (*Dawn* p. 60n103), which I would translate as: “The learned explain that the body possessing a very peaceful mode is the *padmāsana* (*padma’i ‘dug stang*).” Thus, the *sTang stabs kyi bkod pa* (*zhi ba’i tshul*), the *Kālacakra* (*śānti*[*karman*]), and the *ASN (*śamatha*) all connect this *āsana* with a ‘peaceful’ affect and/or ‘peaceful’ activity. However, in the *ASN, after sitting in *padmāsana*/**padmaparyāṅka* we are instructed to “...cross the hands behind the back. Bind the arm

muscles, then vigorously pull the *apāna* upward and slightly push the *prāṇa* downward. After placing the forehead on the floor, perform the practice with great force" (after *Dawn* pp. 60–61). Rather than serving as a bodily posture for physically static, quiet contemplation—as it is most commonly depicted in Buddhist texts and art—or as a posture for the performance of a magic rite of pacification as is prescribed in the *Kālacakra*, in the *ASN we are told to adopt the **padmāsana* / **padmaparyāṅka* and then forcefully manipulate the vital energies in the body (*stobs bskyed rab tu bsgom par bya*) as part of a complex sequence of physical practices designed to 'eradicate the errors that hinder the practice of the cultivation of *śamatha*' (...*zhi gnas 'phrang gi ni* | | *skyon rnam rab tu sel ba'i tshe*...).

We find this pattern repeated throughout the thirty-six sections of *ASN. The *ASN follows and expands upon the versified list of thirty-six types of external and internal hindrances (*phyi nang gnyis kyi phrang sum cu rtsa drug*) given in the **Amṛtasiddhivṛtti* / 'Chi med grub pa'i 'grel pa [henceforth *ASV] of Amoghavajra (Q5058 92v1–93r2; dPe bsdur ma ed. vol. 48, pp. 231–232); this text, according to its colophon, was composed in Tibet (Q 98v4) (see *Dawn* p. 52). To list just a few other errors or faults to be eradicated via the forceful *yoga* prescribed in the *ASN: As noted, (2) errors pertaining to the cultivation of *vipāśyanā*; (3) errors arising from abstention from desirable sense objects ('*dod yon < *kāmaguṇa*); (4) strong attachment to material goods (*zang zing mchog tu 'dzin pa < *āmiṣaparāṃrṣṭi*) [JN: cf. the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* treatment of this]; (5) errors pertaining to wishing to act to help others (*gzhan don 'jug 'dod*); (6) errors pertaining to understanding the causality of consciousness (*rgyu 'bras shes pa'i rig pa*), i.e., misapprehending insensate matter as if it possesses life (see *Dawn* p. 71n121); (7) errors pertaining to causality appearing to be vain (*rgyu 'bras stong par snang ba*), which entails a nihilistic view (cf. *Dawn* p. 73n122; I take *stong pa* in the sense of *hīna* or *tuccha* here; cf. *gsob*); (8) errors pertaining to the actions of listening to and critically thinking about [the Dharma] (*thos dang bsam pa'i las byed*); (9) errors pertaining to despising all Dharma teachings / *dharma*s (*chos rnam kun la smad pa*); (10) errors pertaining to promoting Dharma teachings / *dharma*s (*chos rnam rje su 'dzin pa*); (11) errors pertaining to having contempt for all sentient beings (*sems can kun la brnyas pa*); (12) the error of considering scriptural authority and rational proof to be principal (*lung rigs gtso bor 'dod pa*) (< **āgamayuktiṣradhānasammata*?); (13) errors pertaining to practice via view, behavior, and meditative cultivation (*lta spyod sgom pas grub pa*). The *ASN continues through all thirty-six types of errors (*skyon < *doṣa*?) or hindrances (*phrang < *saṃkaṭa*; literally, "narrow passage," figuratively "strait" in the sense of "peril"), prescribing postures and sequences of practices centering upon manipulation of winds in the

body, entailing some variable degree of force in 'pressing the upper wind (*steng rlung*, prob. < *ūrdhvavāyu*) downward and drawing the lower wind ('*og rlung*, prob. < *adhovāyu*) upward.'

What is most striking to me in the *ASV/*ASN series of 'errors' or 'hindrances' and their 'treatments' given in *ASN is that, as Orofino explains, they cover forms of attachment and aversion and purportedly erroneous attitudes and philosophical beliefs ranging from those held in common by all Buddhist practitioners through obstacles to developing a correct understanding of reality in a specifically Mahāyāna sense. In *ASV these thirty-six 'errors'/'hindrances' are as mentioned divided into two categories—external (*phyi*) and internal (*nang*). In addition to those listed above, among the 'internal hindrances' we find: (no. 18) "[attachment to] bliss, clarity, and non-conceptuality" (*nang [gi 'phrang ni] bde gsal mi rtog [pa la zhen pa] dang |*); (no. 21) "[attachment to] nonduality being established as real" (*bden pas bsgrub pa'i gnyis med [rang la zhen pa] dang*); and (no. 32) "conceit at having achieved reality" (*de [kho na] nyid bsgrub pa'i rlom sems dang |*) (after *ASV dPe bsdur ma ed. p. 232; bracketed material is *mchan bu* inserted in the *pādas* of the stanzas). Thus it is clear that the hindrances, and the *hathayoga* techniques designed to counteract them, pertain to mental states judged to be deleterious to the attainment of the mental purification and realization sought in Vajrayāna practice.

Here Orofino raises an important issue, an issue that permeates much of the Buddhist tradition as a whole. She says: The *ASN "reflect[s] philosophical and religious developments taking place among the *mahāsiddhas* of the Vajrayāna tradition around the 11th century. While preserving continuity with earlier Buddhist paradigms, these *yogins* were also protagonists of a strong social and religious critique, embodying a radical and anti-intellectual perspective that stands in contrast to earlier Buddhist monastic traditions" (*Dawn* p. 51). Again, "Chapter 12 [of *ASN] describes the errors of placing excessive importance on scriptural authority (Skt. *āgama*, Tib. *lung*) and logical reasoning (Skt. *yukti*, Tib. *rigs [pa]*), representing a critique of dogmatism and intellectualism. In addition, the text contains a list of errors that indicate a sharp condemnation of conceptual thought. One such error is 'conceptually abandoning what is right or not right' (Ch. 14), which underscores the necessity of transcending binary distinctions to perceive the true nature of phenomena beyond dualistic categorizations" (*Dawn* p. 52).

It hardly needs saying that this is a perennial topic in Buddhist dogmatics. The classic exemplar of this problem is of course the legendary controversy or 'debate' between Kamalaśīla and his Tibetan disciples versus Hoshang Moheyan and his Tibetan disciples that is

said to have occurred in Tibet at the end of the 8th century (see Seyfort Ruegg 2013 for an overview). In that dispute both factions—like all Mahāyāna Buddhists—agreed that buddhahood has as an essential property nondual, nonconceptual gnosis. However, the two sides—in their rhetoric, at least—starkly disagreed about the role played by the intellect, thought, and discriminative judgements about what is good and bad, in the path leading to the realization of nonconceptual, nondual gnosis (*avikalpa-/nirvikalpa-, advaya-, jñāna*). In his three *Bhāvanākramas* Kamalaśīla argues that there is no way to attain nonconceptual, nondual gnosis without sequentially (*kramaṇa; rim gyis*) developing three forms of wisdom (*prajñā*) through the three phases of study, intellectual analysis, and meditative cultivation. Moheyan, on the other hand, is recorded as having said ‘White clouds, dark clouds, both obscure the sun,’ suggesting that simply negating the mental activity of thought is the totality of the path, and that realization arises immediately or spontaneously upon the meditative stoppage of thought (Ch. *dun*, Tib. *ston min/mun*; cf., e.g., Seyfort Ruegg 2013: 114). In effect, one could generalize and say that *all* Mahāyāna Buddhist thinkers agree that the intellect and rationality are *not sufficient* for the attainment of nirvana and/or awakening, but they differ—sometimes radically—as to whether the intellect and rationality are *necessary* for such attainments.

From its earliest phases the Buddhist tradition presents cases of individuals who achieved realization without engaging in much study or intellectual analysis of Buddhist doctrine—at least during the lifetime in which they attained realization. One thinks of the famous story in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayavibhaṅga* (Lhasa ed. ff. 98–99) of the monk Panthaka (Tib. *lam pa*; cf. Pali [*cūla*] *panthako* in the *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā* ad *Dhammapada* 25, H.C. Norman ed., PTS (1909) Vol. I, Part II, pp. 239–255). In the version of this tale as it is given in the Tibetan of the *Vinayavibhaṅga*, initially Panthaka is so perfectly stupid that he is unable to retain a single word of Dharma. To deal with this the Buddha tells Panthaka to clean the other monks’ shoes and sandals, and he is given the words “I cast away the dirt; I cast away the dust” (*rdul spang ngo dri ma spang ngo*) to recite while cleaning the Sangha’s footwear. After some time Panthaka comes to realize that the Buddha had the underlying intention (*dgongs te bka’ stsal*) of using ‘dirt’ and ‘dust’ in reference to desire, hatred, and ignorance. By enthusiastically, energetically cleaning shoes, Panthaka develops better and better mental focus (f. 99a5: *gong nas gong du yid la byed pa’i khyad par thob nas*), such that he understands the reality of samsara in all its details, casts away all his mental afflictions, and becomes an arhat endowed with all knowledge and psychic powers. As I read this narrative there is no indication that Panthaka studied scripture or

engaged in formal study of any kind.

Another famous example of a non-scholastic type attaining enlightenment is the sociopathic mass-murderer Aṅgulimāla. In the Mahāyāna *Aṅgulimālīya* incarnation of this ancient tale Aṅgulimāla undergoes an apparently almost instantaneous transformation from monstrous serial killer to foremost awakened Dharma teacher. Aṅgulimāla does not spend any time studying scripture. Yet he outshines and humbles Śāriputra and other arhats in dialectic, and he contradicts Mañjuśrī, in effect calling him a fool. Aṅgulimāla forcefully expounds the Buddha's ultimate teaching, *tathāgatagarbha*, and declares that the teaching of *nairātmya* is merely provisional. When the Buddha commands Aṅgulimāla to take the five precepts, Aṅgulimāla responds by proclaiming that he will *never* give up killing, lying, drinking alcohol, having sex, and stealing. He boasts to the Buddha that he will instead *always* kill, lie, drink alcohol, have sex, and steal, giving metaphorical interpretations of killing and so forth that are reminiscent of the precepts found in *Śrī Guhyasamāja tantra* 16.61 and *Śrī Hevajra tantra* 2.3.31 (Newman 1992).

One could adduce any number of other examples of Buddhist luminaries who achieved success without much in the way of study or any sort of formal intellectual activity. In a specifically Vajrayāna context one thinks of the many overtly anti-intellectual passages ascribed to Buddhist *siddhas*, like that of the probably apocryphal **Mahāmudropadeśa* ascribed to Tilopā, in which Tilopā says to Nāropā: "You will not see the luminosity *mahāmudrā* via the Dharmas spoken in *mantra* and *pāramitā*, the *vinayapiṭaka*, and so forth, or even by your own beliefs and philosophical views" (cf. Torricelli 2025: 222–223; Rheingans & Schott 2025: 24–28, 34). Likewise, the hagiographic stories of Vajrayāna adepts often celebrate a non- or even anti-intellectual orientation in their heroes. For example, there is the wonderful tale of the miserably impoverished peasant **Koṭali* (Tog tse pa < *kuddāla*) who—instructed by the *mahāpaṇḍita* / *siddha* Ratnākaraśānti—hoed his rocky field all the way to *siddhi*, becoming the Vajrayāna author Kuddālapāda. And of course there is rJe btsun Mila, who performed hard, back-breaking labor for Marpa to purify his sins of magic murder. Neither of these individuals is said to have spent much time pondering the intellectual mysteries of the Buddhist *śāstras*.

Nevertheless, it is not generally the case that the historically documented Indian masters of the Vajrayāna were anti-intellectual or without qualification opposed to the study of *āgama* and the employment of critical reasoning. Although all Vajrayāna masters would most likely at least pay lip service to a rejection of dogmatism and intellectualism—if we define the latter as mere intellectual understanding of Dharma as an end in itself—the Indic literature of

the Vajrayāna is filled with exceedingly—oftentimes mind-numbingly—complex intellectual constructs. In its apologetic and polemical portions Vajrayāna literature very often at least flirts with dogmatism, including instances of intellectually sophisticated, aggressive, and quite dogmatic assertions of anti-dogmatic ‘naturalness’ and ‘spontaneity,’ and a monopolistic claim to have unique ‘unmediated’ access to ‘nonduality’ and ‘the Real.’ Thousands of palm leaves are inscribed with elaborate descriptions of the ineffable, and detailed prescriptions of excruciatingly complex techniques to attain it.

This raises the question of whether the occasionally encountered language expressing ‘anti-intellectualism,’ ‘anti-ritualism’—and ‘antinomianism’ in general—is itself real, or is instead rather merely a kind of rhetorical stance affected by Buddhist intellectuals critiquing fellow members of a Buddhist elite intellectual in-crowd. Thus I wonder if we can really find pure examples of “two opposing tendencies among Buddhist practitioners—the gradualist, intellectual analytical procedure of the scholar on the one hand and the simultaneist, innateist realization of the yogi on the other” (Jackson 1994: 142). While it is certainly the case that leading figures in Indian Vajrayāna sometimes exhibit an emphasis upon one or the other of these ends of a spectrum, most of them display at least some amount of education, and none of them are considered to have been ‘dry’ scholars who neglected practice. This fact applies to Vajrayāna masters ranging from Saraha to Ratnākaraśānti.

Wandering back to the issue at hand: In the AS categorization of candidates for achievement in the practice of *amṛtasiddhi* (AS 15–18), by implication “weak persons” (AS 15) have little learning. “Middling persons” “have average learning” (AS 16.1d *samāgamāḥ*); “excellent persons” are “learned” (AS 17.2a *sākṣarāḥ*); “outstanding persons” are “well-versed in all learned treatises” (AS 18.2a *sarvaśāstrakṛtābhyāsāḥ*) (translations after Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 136–138). In this hierarchy of practitioners it appears to be assumed—and in the case of “outstanding persons” it is explicitly stated—that persons qualified to engage in *amṛtasiddhi* practice have a considerable amount of “practice [of Dharma] performed in previous lifetimes” (AS 18.4a *janmāntarakṛtābhyāsāḥ*; cf. also 17.3ab *punyakarmāṇo yoginaḥ siddhamārgataḥ*: “people with good karma, yogis on the *siddha* path”). This suggests to me that the instructions of the AS tradition are not anti-intellectual without qualification, but rather reject a ‘dry’ sort of intellectualism that is satisfied with mere intellectual understanding that lacks personal gnostic experience.

This appears to be supported by the 12th hindrance in *ASN: errors pertaining to esteem for knowledge of scripture and rational proofs as

if they are foremost (*lung rigs gtso bor 'dod pa yi | skyon rnams < *āgamayuktiṣṭhānasammatadosāḥ?*). In the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Dutt ed. pp. 197–198) ten *dharma*s are enumerated which a bodhisattva is supposed to esteem as being principal (*pradhānasammata*; *gtso bor 'dod pa*); *āgama* and *yukti* are not among them. Of course this does not entail that a bodhisattva is to turn their back on learning and critical reflection on the Dharma, but we may assume that excessive esteem for these necessary but not sufficient practices is a hindrance throughout the Mahāyāna path. I suspect this attitude was presupposed by the authors of the *AS* and the **ASN*. In any case, both works are difficult, technical texts that display considerable familiarity with large swaths of the 11th century tradition of Sanskrit learning.

Another issue regarding the 'target audience' of the *amṛtasiddhi* corpus is the question of 'sexual yoga' versus 'celibacy.' Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 3–4) state that the *AS* "was composed within a Vajrayāna milieu, but it is unorthodox insofar as its yoga method is for individual celibate male *yogins* and is deemed to be superior to the practices of ritual sex taught in mainstream Vajrayāna tradition." Again, in more detail: "The *Amṛtasiddhi* contrasts its celibate yoga method with the sexual yoga of mainstream Vajrayāna, in which the male participant is usually said to experience orgasm and ejaculation. A minority of schools, the best known of which is the Kālacakra, teach sexual yoga in which semen is not released. The *Amṛtasiddhi* rejects sexual intercourse altogether. Its teachings are not closely related to those of the Vajrayāna traditions which advocate sexual ritual in which semen is not shed" (Mallinson & Szántó 2021: 17). More recently Mallinson (2025: 214) says: "...the *Amṛtasiddhi*'s teachings are for celibate male ascetics." Although Orofino (*Dawn* p. 42 *et passim*) notes the *AS* prohibition of the emission of *bindu* ('seminal fluid') during practice, I did not see the proposal that the *amṛtasiddhi* system of practice is restricted to "individual celibate male *yogins*" addressed in *Dawn*.

It is perhaps worthwhile to point out that among the thirty-six errors or hindrances defined and treated in **ASN*, none of them seem to focus upon sexual desire in particular. As mentioned above, **ASN* 3 provides a remedy for 'errors pertaining to abstention from desirable sense objects' (*'dod yon bkag pa yi skyon rnams*) (*Dawn* pp. 64–66), but this seems to refer to a generic ascetic practice of turning one's back on attachment to sensory pleasure. If the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition presupposes an uncompromising, strict regime of 'celibacy' in the sense of categorical avoidance of sexual activity in any way, shape, or form, the absence of a mention of this in **ASN* seems odd to me.

It is clear that the *AS* advocates retention of semen and the practice of *brahmacharya*. In its "Inquiry into the Signs of the Unperfected Body," *AS* 32.4ab says: *asiddhaṃ tad vijānīyād vapur abrahmacāriṇām |*, which

Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 148) translate as: “One should recognize as unperfected the bodies of those who do not observe celibacy...” The immediately prior stanza AS 32.3 goes so far as to strikingly say: “Even a Buddha is unperfected [and] considered a man in *saṃsāra* as long as the lord that is seed (*bījendraḥ*), which has the form of Brahmā, leaks from the body” (*ibid*; bracketed additions original).

While it clearly seems to be the case that the AS and the *ASN strongly emphasize retention of semen—at least during the practice—AS 19.6ab reads *grhastho vāvadhūto vā yogābhyāse sadā rataḥ* ।. Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 139) translate this as “Whether he is a householder [*grhastha*] or an ascetic [*avadhūta*], he should be constantly devoted to the practice of yoga...” (bracketed Sanskrit added to translation). The immediately preceding stanza, AS 19.5, makes it clear that the ‘householder’ is a *yogin* who “should practise the path of yoga” (*abhyased yogamārgam tu*). Furthermore, AS 19.7 says: *agnisevābalāsevā pathasevā ca sarvadā | prathamābhyāsakāle tu saṃtyājyā yoginā sadā* ।।; “When first practising, the yogi should always and in all circumstances shun the use of fire, indulgence in women [*abalāsevā*] and travel” (*ibid.*; bracketed Sanskrit added). Given that the AS has just explicitly allowed ‘householders’ access to its practices, the restriction against “indulgence in women” *during the period one begins the practice* (*prathamābhyāsakāle*) seems to at least leave the door open to a householder yogi ‘indulging in women’ at some point *after* the initial phase of his practice: lumping ‘indulging in women’ together with ‘using fire’ (*agnisevā*, presumably referring to the practice of *homa*) and ‘travel’ makes it sound to me as if these restrictions are temporary. If the AS categorically forbids its practitioners to engage in sexual activity, the specification ‘*during the period one begins the practice*’ seems very odd to me. That is, if sexual activity is categorically forbidden, why does the AS not explicitly state this, and instead prohibit it only during the initial period of practice?

Also, if the practitioner of the AS is forbidden to engage in any sort of sexual activity during and after they have entered “the path of yoga” taught in the AS, it is difficult to see how this system would fit into the overall *yoganiruttaratantra*/*yoginītantra*/*prajñātantra* Vajrayāna traditions in which it is certainly embedded. If such a restriction is the case, the AS yogi would be unable to take the actual physical forms of the *guhya* and *prajñāñāna* initiations. This leads into complexities that we simply cannot explore in much detail here. I would note, however, that if the AS in fact ‘deems itself to be superior to the mainstream Vajrayāna tradition, which contains practices of ritual sex,’ the AS would be unorthodox indeed, and it would be difficult to harmonize it with the ‘mainstream’ of 10th–12th century Indic Vajrayāna Buddhism. Some important Vajrayāna exegetes of this

period—e.g., Vāgīśvarakīrti and Abhayākaragupta—go so far as to posit arguments to the effect that a *bhikṣu* can maintain the *śrāvakasaṃvara* vow of ‘celibacy’ even while taking the *guhya* and *prajñājñāna* initiations—and, presumably, subsequently while performing *utpannakrama* practices with a *karmamudrā* as well—without this necessarily entailing damage to their *bhikṣu* vows (*bhikṣusamvarakṣati*). It seems that questions regarding the definition of *brahmacarya* and what constituted a *brahmacārin* were being debated during the period the AS appeared. Is it at least possible that in the AS soteriology a *brahmacārin* is a yogi who retains semen (cf. AS 34.2a *ūrdhvoaretā yadā yogī...*) without necessarily abstaining from sexual activity? I have no solution to offer on this issue, and only raise it in the hope that it will lead to clarification in the future.

Returning, finally, to the concluding portion of *Dawn*’s introduction, Orofino observes: “The **Amṛtasamkaṭānibarhaṇa*, along with the other texts in the *Amṛtasiddhi*’s corpus by Amoghavajra preserved in the Tibetan canon, represents a significant moment in the evolution of the *Amṛtasiddhi* teachings from the second half of the 11th century onward. After its emergence in the Deccan region of India within a Buddhist tantric milieu, these teachings likely diverged along two distinct trajectories.

The Buddhist trajectory crossed the Himalayas and, thanks to Eṇadeva (alias Kāla Virūpa) and Amoghavajra, entered Tibet, where it continued to develop.

The Śaiva trajectory, on the other hand, is reflected in the adaptation of *Amṛtasiddhi* verses within Śaiva *haṭhayoga* texts spanning from the 12th to the 15th century...

Ultimately, this split in two distinct trajectories, the Buddhist and the Śaiva, mirrors the broader historical shifts in Buddhism itself: while it declined and eventually disappeared in India, it continued to flourish and evolve in Tibet” (*Dawn* pp. 53–54).

The final three pages of the Introduction to *Dawn* (pp. 54–56) will be of special interest to Tibetologists. Here Orofino provides a preliminary sketch of the history of the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition in Tibet. She observes that these teachings “were transmitted as highly esoteric doctrines, primarily within the Shangs pa Bka’ brgyud school” (*ibid.* p. 54). Specific moments in this stream of transmission include the twelfth–thirteenth century masters Sang rgyas gnyan ston Chos kyi shes rab (1175–1255) and his disciple Sangs rgyas ston pa brTson ‘grus seng ge (1207–1278), Tāranātha (1575–1634), and ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul bLo gros mtha’ yas (1813–1899/1900). (A broader survey of the virtually universal diffusion of *‘khrul ‘khor* / *‘phrul ‘khor* practices throughout Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism and Bon is given in Baker 2018.)

On the last pages of the Introduction to *Dawn* Orofino quotes Richard Barron's English translation of an intriguing passage from 'Jam mgon Kong sprul's massive *gDams ngag mdzod*. In a section of that work titled in this translation "Unerring Immortality," 'Jam mgon Kong sprul says:

"By performing the thirty-two physical exercises [*'khrul 'khor sum bcu rtsa gnyis*] that ensure immortality [*'chi med grub pa < amṛtasiddhi*], one utilizes one's body on the path to liberation [*lus thar pa'i lam du gzung*]. Given that one's own mind is primordially unborn, its immortality [*'chi med < amṛta*] is ensured as a supreme state of natural freedom. The physical body as the natural consequence of karma, being an assemblage of inanimate matter [*rnam smin phung po bem po'i tshogs pa*] is devoid of any basis for assigning birth or death. In actual fact, even the body occurs simply as a manifestation of mind [*don du lus kyang sems snang tsam las byung*], so if one gains the indwelling confidence of realizing mind to be [birthless and] deathless, the manifestation of the body is that of Mahāmudrā in the form of the deity [*lus snang lha sku phyag rgya chen po*], as determined within basic space, without the error that is due to perceptions based on confusion. It is said that one can gain the kāya of primordial unity [*zung 'jug gi sku < yuganaddhakāya*] in this lifetime by receiving just a few of these instructions, and that merely hearing them will allow one to awaken to buddhahood in the intermediate state after death as the sambhogakāya of the victorious ones..." (trans. Barron 2013: 71, bracketed Tibetan and English emendation added; trans. also quoted in *Dawn* pp. 55–56).

འཆི་མེད་གྲུབ་པའི་འཁྲུལ་འཁོར་སྐྱུ་འབྱུང་ཆ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་ལྷན་ཐར་པའི་ལམ་དུ་གཟུང་། རང་སེམས་གདོད་མ་ནས་
མ་སྦྱོར་པས་འཆི་མེད་རང་གྲོལ་ཆེན་པོར་གྱུབ། རྣམ་སྦྱིན་ཕུང་པོ་བཅས་པོའི་ཆོགས་པ་སྦྱོ་འཆིའི་གདགས་གཞིས་སྦྱང་།
དོན་དུ་ལྷན་ཀྱང་སེམས་སྦྱང་ཙམ་ལས་བྱུང་ཞིང་སེམས་སྦྱོ་འཆི་མེད་པར་རྟོགས་པའི་གདོད་ཐོབ་པ་ན་ལྷན་སྦྱང་ལྷ་སྦྱོ་
ཕུག་ཆུ་ཆེན་པོ་འཁྲུལ་སྦྱང་གིས་འཁྲུགས་པ་མེད་པའི་དབྱིངས་སུ་བསྐྱམས་པ་སྟེ། གདགས་ངག་སྦྱ་རེས་ཀྱང་ཆོ་འདྲི་
ལ་བྱང་འཇུག་གི་སྦྱ་བརྟེས་ཤིང་། ཐོས་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་ཀྱང་བར་དོ་རྒྱལ་བ་འོངས་སྐྱར་འཆང་རྒྱ་བ་སོགས་གསུངས་ཏེ།
... *gDam ngag mdzod* vol. 18, p. 53 of eText; BUDA citation: 'Jam mgon
kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas, editor. *gDams ngag mdzod*. Shechen
publications, 1999. *Buddhist Digital Resource Center*
(BDRC), purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW23605 [BDRC bdr:MW23605].

I defer to those with expertise in 'Jam mgon Kong sprul's thought, of which I have none. But as I read this passage it appears to de-emphasize the physical yoga practices manipulating "the karmically-produced body that is a mass of matter" (*rnam smin phung po bem po'i tshogs pa*) that are so fundamental to the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition. Instead, "since one's own mind is primordially unborn, it is established as the

immortal great automatic liberation" (*rang sems gdod ma nas ma skyes pas 'chi med rang grol chen por grub*). Here "the body in fact occurs simply as an appearance of mind" (*don du lus kyang sems snang tsam las byung*), and *mahāmudrā* is interpreted in line with perhaps typical Vajrayāna understandings of that term pertaining to the practitioner appearing as the divine *sambhogakāya* embodiment of the buddha deity integrated (*yuganaddha*) with the buddha deity's *dharmakāya*. This way of interpreting the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition's theory and practice seems to be absent from or at best only vaguely hinted at in the AS itself. See also Baker (2018: 357 ff.) for a discussion of a notable "clear absence of Trulkhör practices" in certain early strata of the Nyingma tradition, and their [re-]emergence and development later. Baker (*ibid.* p. 364) also reports a contemporary Dzogchen master's opinion that "the 'illusory body movements' of Tsalung Trulkhör [*rtsa rlung 'khrul 'khor*], when practised from a Dzogchen perspective, are considered to be direct expressions of enlightenment (*samyaksambodhi*) rather than specific means for attaining it." Likewise (*ibid.* p. 369): "From a Dzogchen point of view, the forceful actions of Tsalung Trulkhör are thus only useful in so far as they support the direct and ultimately effortless experience and perception of the self-effacing effulgence at the heart of every moment." Again, (*ibid.* p. 374): "For while Vajrayāna as whole brings body, mind, and respiration into a renewed functional unity, Dzogchen ultimately maintains the supremacy of an integral awareness transcendent of the physical body."

This raises a crucial question for future research on the Buddhist Virūpa/Birūa *amṛtasiddhi* tradition: What role does the ordinary human body play in the path to buddhahood? As *Dawn* amply illustrates, in the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition manipulation of energies within the physical body is the fundamental practice. If we track Buddhist self-cultivation from its earliest forms through to the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition, how did Indian Buddhism arrive there?

As a general rule basic normative Buddhist ascetic soteriology treats the ordinary human body as a mere field of suffering, a filthy lump of foam (*phenapiṇḍopamaṃ rūpam*) arising from one's own contaminated karma and the fluids of one's parents' sexual intercourse. It is a skeleton covered with flesh, a fragile leaky sack of skin filled with repulsive effluents. It is the physical basis for contaminated sensation that perpetuates the miseries of samsara. Of course even the earliest forms of Buddhism involve sitting postures for the practice of meditation and some basic techniques attending to the breath and/or body sensations, but these seem to be mere adjuncts in support of mental stabilization practices leading to *śamatha* and contemplative exercises conducive to mindfulness, insight, and salvific gnosis.

With the appearance of the Vajrayāna in the second half of the first millennium we see a dramatic shift toward an emphasis upon the body and a different evaluation of its usefulness in soteriology. We see this shift in the Guhyasamāja Ārya tradition's doctrine of the purification and transformation of the body's 'wind' (*vāyu*) into the 'illusory body' (*māyādeha*) as a means to accomplish the *saṃbhogakāya*. Emphasis upon the body becomes especially obvious in the more complex Vajrayāna developments elaborating the 'subtle body,' advanced forms of *prāṇāyama*, manipulation of 'semen,' and the 'sexual yoga' practices producing physical and mental *mahāsukha*—"great bliss"—that are found in the '*yoganiruttaratantras*.'

In an extraordinary fashion the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition appears to follow this track even further, but diverges from it in interesting ways. It apparently eschews—or at least greatly de-emphasizes—the extremely complex visualization practices found in virtually all other Buddhist tantric systems. It seems to replace these strenuous mental exercises with relatively simple—but no less strenuous!—techniques of body exercise. (See similarly Duncan 2023: 40.) There is evidence that the employment of *haṭhayoga* in advanced Vajrayāna soteriology was controversial. See, e.g., the *Phyag rgya bzhi'i rgya cher 'grel pa rin po che'i snying po zhes bya ba* (Derge 2259; rGyud 'grel WI) ascribed to Bhi ta karma (< *bhītakarma*?; = *Karopa?) f. 239b4 ff. As already mentioned, I agree with Orofino and other scholars that further investigation of the relationships between the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition and the broader Vajrayāna tradition will very likely shed considerable light upon both.

In this endeavor scholars can do no better than adopt the model Orofino employs in *Dawn*. Orofino's fine textual scholarship is enhanced by her engagement with the living tradition. In the Acknowledgements to *Dawn* (p. 11) she notes her debt to living masters of the *amṛtasiddhi* tradition. In her 29 September 2025 presentation of an overview of *Dawn* hosted by the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Orofino reiterated her debt to her Tibetan and Himalayan teachers, and explained that this tradition is not very well known to etic scholars because in the past it had been kept secret.

Such restrictions appear to have been relaxed in the face of contemporary conditions: Tibetan and Himalayan masters of these practices are now making them accessible to the world at large. In her Acknowledgements to *Dawn* (p. 12) Orofino notes her debt to her master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche (Chos rgyal Nam mkha'i nor bu rin po che; 1938–2018). Beginning in the early 1970s, he was among the first Tibetan masters to make this tradition more widely known, with his teaching of the practices to non-Tibetans and his book *Yantra Yoga: The Yoga of Movement* (1st ed. 1988), subsequently re-issued

under the title *Yantra Yoga: The Tibetan Yoga of Movement* (Norbu 2008). This is a translation and study of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche's own work in Tibetan, the 'Phrul 'khor nyi zla kha sbyor gyi dgongs 'grel dri ma med pa nor bu'i me long. As an aside, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu (2008: 3; cf. p. 1) attributes the Tibetan origin of his tradition to the Tibetan *snga dar* master Bai ro tsa na (< *vairocana*). This would place its transmission into Tibet in the 8th–9th century, two centuries earlier than the AS or any other known Indic tradition of this sort of *yoga*. Similarly, some Bon pos claim that "Trul khor was taught in Bön prior to the eighth century as an oral teaching" (Baker 2018: 348n41). Investigation of such traditional beliefs might have implications for both the Indic and the Tibetan history of this type of *yoga*.

Regarding the contemporary global diffusion of 'khrul 'khor/'phrul 'khor, my 31 Oct 2025 Google search for "Trul Khor" conjured up a variety of YouTube videos that appear to portray a diverse array of both traditional and (more-or-less) Tibetan-derived practices. A mere glance at websites and 'social media' accounts suggests "Tibetan Yoga"/"Trul Khor" is 'having a moment' in the global spiritual economy. For example, for USD \$247 Dr. Ale Chaoul offers online instruction in an apparently Bon po tradition of "Magical Movements" called *trul khor* (< 'phrul 'khor). This course provides a graded series of lessons including "The A-tri Ngondro Magical Movement," "The A-tri Extending the Bow to Shoot and [sic] Arrow Magical Movement," "The A-tri Little Boy Jumping Strongly Magical Movement," and so forth. Dr. Chaoul describes this as "Tibetan Yoga for Health & Well-Being" (<https://wisdomexperience.org/tibetan-yoga/> [accessed 29 Oct 2025]). Thus it appears that a globalization and perhaps secularization of Indo-Tibetan 'khrul 'khor/'phrul 'khor practice is taking place, lagging behind but paralleling the globalization, secularization, and monetization of Indic *haṭhayoga*. This suggests to me an urgent need to support traditional forms of these practices, and to document them before they disappear.

It is a general rule that in the study of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal and historical texts we can save much time and avoid many gross errors by listening to the people who actually *live* these texts. In the case of the physical practices of the *amṛtasiddhi*, the living tradition is almost certainly simply indispensable for full and accurate understanding. In support of this assertion I recommend that anyone interested in these practices watch minutes 39:45–45:50 of the 2002 film "The Yogis of Tibet." In this documentary a traditionally-trained young Drikung Kagyu master Chenga Rinpoche (sPyan snga rin po che; born 1974), demonstrates his 'khrul 'khor practice. Before starting the demonstration Chenga Rinpoche earnestly requests that the audience not attempt to imitate him—in effect, 'Please do not try this

at home.' When one sees the strenuous force (*btsan thabs < haṭha*) with which this practice is performed that is very good advice indeed. Similarly, Snow Lion Publications' 2008 copyright page of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's work on '*phrul 'khor* says: "Before following any advice or practice suggested in this book, it is recommended that you consult your doctor as to the suitability, especially if you are pregnant, or suffer from any health problems or special conditions. The publishers, the author, and the photographers cannot accept any responsibility for any injuries or damage incurred as a result of following the exercises in the book, or of using any of the therapeutic techniques described or mentioned here."

But what I took away from Chenga Rinpoche's demonstration of '*khṛul 'khor* is that even to gain an intellectual understanding of the Indo-Tibetan traditions of '*khṛul 'khor*, mere philological-historical scholarship will only scratch the surface. Of course the findings of 'anthropological' study of a living tradition such as this have to be checked against the tradition's texts, but I would argue that without the former the latter will often remain mere words.

Giacomella Orofino concludes the Introduction to *The Dawn of Physical Yoga* as follows: "From the end of the 11th century onward, Buddhist tantric physical yoga teachings spread across all Tibetan schools becoming an essential part of Tibetan Buddhist esoteric practice. These developments highlight the complexity of the fabric of Tibetan religion, where diverse *mahāsiddha* traditions were woven into its Vajrayāna doctrines, having a profound effect on shaping both its theoretical and practical dimensions" (*Dawn* p. 56).

We hope that the fine golden light of *The Dawn of Physical Yoga* heralds a full sunrise of additional studies further illuminating this fascinating, previously little known dimension of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist life.

* * * * *

Appendix: Eight Āsanas for Nine Rites of Magic in the Kālacakra Tantra

The following text is an edited transcript of the 1994 Sarnath *editio princeps* of *Vimalaprabhā* 3.1.19cd (pp. 2.17.25–18.8); this *editio princeps* also includes an uncritical edition of *Śrī Kālacakra* 3.19. I checked this edition's text of *Śrī Kālacakra* 3.19cd against the palm-leaf *Śrī Kālacakra* MS in the British Library, accession no. Or 16981, f. 43v5–6, which presents no significant v.l. This is particularly relevant to the problematic reading *utkaṭam* in *pāda* c, a reading also found in Raghu Vira and Lokesh Chandra's 1966 *editio princeps* and Biswanath

Banerjee's 1985 edition of the Sanskrit text of the *Śrī Kālacakra*, with no v.l. given. I modify the Sarnath edition of the *Vimalaprabhā* text after the following palm-leaf manuscripts: 1) MS "B" – Asiatic Society of Bengal, Kolkata MS no. G 10766 ff. 99v6–100r2; 2) MS "Ch" – Lokesh Chandra, *Sanskrit Manuscripts from Tibet* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 2010. Śata-piṭaka Series vol. 629) p. 59, img. 1, lines 2–5; *abhiṣekapaṭala* f. 8v2–5. I ignore *sandhi* variants I consider insignificant. For the *daityāsanam* see also Newman 1998: 361. I have not seen this term in Sanskrit lexicons. This *āsana* seems to allude to the *sujūd* phase of the Islamic obligatory prayer called *aṣ-ṣalāh* or *namāz*. This is remarkable given the period of origin of these Kālacakra texts, and the association of this *āsana* with the magic rite of killing is noteworthy. For the overall context of this passage and more information on the magic rites as they are depicted in the Kālacakra see *Śrī Kālacakra* 3.8–22 and *Vimalaprabhā* 3.1.8–22.

Śrī Kālacakra 3.19cd:

paryāṅkaḥ śāntikādaḥ kramapariracitaṃ vajradaitotyakṣaṃ ca
paryāṅkārdhaṃ dvibhedam gudagatacaraṇam cāsanam karmabhedaiḥ |

Vimalaprabhā 3.1.19cd [*tantra* lemmas given in bold]: *idāntūṃ śāntyādikarmasādhanaṃ āsanāṇy ucyante paryāṅka ityādinā | iha śāntikādaḥ krameṇāsanāni bhavanti | tatra śāntau paryāṅka iti | vāmajānūpari dakṣiṇapādo gataḥ uttāna¹ iti paryāṅkaḥ | puṣṭau vajrāsanam | savyaḥ pādo² vāmorumūrdhni [ed. p. 18] vāmo 'pi savyorumūrdhni tiryaguttāneneti vajrāsanam | daityam iti daityāsanam mārāṇe aṅkakārakūrmapādaḥ iti [B 100r1] daityāsanam | utkaṭam³ ceti uccāṭane vidveṣe cotkaṭam bhavati | bhūmyām dvau pādaḥ samau⁴ gulphau sphiccakamūlalaṅghau⁵ ūrdhvaṃ gataṃ jānūdvayam ūrudvayam cety utkaṭam | paryāṅkārdham dvibhedam iti | iha vāṣye vāmapādaḥ paryāṅkavad dakṣiṇa utkaṭavat kiñcid dakṣiṇe namra iti | ākrṣṭau dvitīyo bhedaḥ | dakṣiṇaḥ⁶ paryāṅkavad vāma utkaṭavat kiñcid vāme namra iti paryāṅkārdham dvibhedam | gudagatacaraṇam iti | iha mohane vāmacaraṇam gudagataṃ caraṇopari guḍo niṣaṇṇaḥ dakṣiṇam utkaṭavad iti | stambhane dakṣiṇam gudagataṃ caraṇopari guḍo niṣaṇṇo vāmam utkaṭavat iti | aṣṭavidhāsanabhedananiyamah⁷ |. v.l.: 1) ed. gata uttānaka. 2) ed. savyapādo. 3) Ch utkūṭam; **note**: Ch reads utkūṭa° or utkūṭa° throughout the following text; utkūṭa may in fact be the proper term for this āsana. 4) B pādasamau > pādaḥsamau p.c. 5) ed. phiccaka°; B °mūlā°. 6) Ch & B dakṣiṇa° > B dakṣiṇaḥ p.c. 7) ed. & Ch |ity aṣṭavidhāsanabhedananiyamah |; I follow B °bhedana°.*

[Tentative translation:] Now “cross-legged” *et cetera* [in *Śrī Kālacakra* 3.19cd] states the āsanās for the performance of the rites of pacification

and so forth. On this, the *āsanas* occur according to their sequence in [the magic rites of] pacification and so forth. [The *tantra*] says “cross-legged [*paryāṅka*] for pacification.” “Cross-legged” is the right foot facing upward situated above the left knee. The *vajrāsana* is for prosperity. The *vajrāsana* is the right foot on top of the left thigh, and the left on top of the right thigh, [with both] straight and facing upward. [The *tantra*] says, “demonic,” referring to the demonic *āsana*. The demonic *āsana* is for killing; [one’s limbs are] like the feet of a fighting tortoise (*aṅkakāṛakūrma*). [The *tantra*] says, “and squatting.” [See text note 3 for the readings *utkaṭam* / *utkuṭam* / *utkūṭam*; see also *Dawn* p. 62n111; TSD s.v. *tsog pu* < *utkuṭam*.] The squat is for [the magic rites for] ruination and creating enmity. The squat is both feet together on the ground; both knees and both thighs are placed above the ankles and the basal juncture of the buttocks. [The *tantra* says] “There are two types of the half cross-legged [*āsana*].” On this, for [the magic rite of] domination the left leg is as in the cross-legged [*āsana*]; the right is similar to the squat, with the right somewhat bent. The second type [of the half cross-legged *āsana*] is for [the magic rite of] attraction: the right leg is like the cross-legged [*āsana*]; the left is like the squat, with the left somewhat bent—these are “the two types of the half cross-legged [*āsana*].” [The *tantra*] says “foot placed at the anus.” Regarding this, for [the magic rite of] stupification the left foot is placed at the anus; i.e., the anus is placed upon the [left] foot and the right [leg] is like the squat. For [the magic rite of] paralysis the right is placed at the anus; i.e., the anus is placed upon the [right] foot and the left [leg] is like the squat. This is the precept on differentiation of the eight types of *āsanas*.

The preceding can be tabulated as follows, tentatively correlating the Kālacakra *āsanas* with *āsanas* mentioned in *ASN and in the **Gativyūha* ascribed to Buddhajñānapāda. In some cases the correspondences are not exact:

9 magic rites	8 <i>āsanas</i>	*ASN section	* <i>Gativyūha</i> [D 1864]
<i>śānti</i>	<i>paryāṅka</i>	= <i>padmāsana</i> 1.1 et seq. 52 mentions	68b4–5 * <i>padmāsana</i> & * <i>sattvaparyāṅka</i>
<i>puṣṭi</i>	<i>vajrāsanaṃ</i>	2.2, 3.1, 26.1, 36.2	cf. 68b3–4 * <i>vajrāsana</i>
<i>māraṇa</i>	<i>daityāsanaṃ</i>		
<i>uccāṭana</i> & <i>vidveṣa</i>	<i>utkaṭam</i> (v.l. <i>utkuṭam</i>)	2.1, 5.1, 5.3, 11.3, 13.2, 28.3	cf. 68b7 * <i>utkuṭa</i>
<i>vaśya</i>	<i>paryāṅkārdham</i>		cf. 68b5–6 * <i>vīrāsana</i>

<i>ākṛṣṭi</i>	“		cf. 68b7–69b1 * <i>lalitāsana</i>
<i>mohana</i>	<i>gudagatam</i>	cf. 27.1	
<i>stambhana</i>	“		

* * * * *

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*ASN **Amṛtasaṃkaṭanibarhaṇa*. Ed. & trans. in *Dawn*.

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Compte-rendu

Thupten Tenzin, translated by Pema Thinley and Mathew Akester, *Escape from Tibet: The Experiential Life Story*, New Delhi (privately published), 2024. xv+300 pp., incl. 43 ills.¹

Pema Choedon

E*scape from Tibet: The Experiential (sic) Life Story* is an autobiography by Thupten Tenzin who fled Tibet in 1959 while he was a monk in the Namgyal Monastery in the Potala Palace, now a retired photographer and filmmaker who has lived in Norway since 1964. His ability of storytelling never fails to grip the reader's attention, whether it is his everyday life in the village where he was born, his becoming a monk in the prestigious Namgyal Monastery, his description of life in the Potala, his perilous flight from Tibet to India, or his perseverance in learning, taking him to different places in India and eventually to Norway where he settled, worked as a professional photographer, and, together with his wife Lobsang Pelmo, raised their children.

The book has so much to offer, including detailed information of the lifestyle of the monks and the celebrations of special occasions before the uprising in March 1959 against the Chinese rule. His description, so rich in detail of life in Tibet as a village boy – not to mention the dramatic unfolding of the last days in the Potala palace, besieged by the Chinese army– as well as of the early years in exile, sets it apart from most other autobiographies written by diasporic Tibetans. It is an important book, not only for scholars, whether historians or social anthropologists, but for anyone who is interested in Tibet and Tibetans – all readers will benefit from the author's detailed observation throughout his life of people and places, in Tibet as well as in exile.

The book is divided into six major chapters, each being further divided into subsections. The first chapter is about his childhood in a village near Lhasa. The second chapter is about his life in the Potala Palace from he was a little boy until he becomes a monk in Namgyal Monastery, while the third chapter describes his perilous escape from Tibet and his early life in exile. In the fourth chapter he recounts his continued life in exile, this time in Europe – from UK to Switzerland, before finally settling in Norway in 1964. The fifth chapter covers his

¹ First published in Tibetan by Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 2011, with the title *mThong thos myong tshor lo rgyus*, vol. 28 in "Oral History Series", xvi+534 pp., incl. 54 ills.

traveling to Nepal in 1973 where he filmed the activities of the Tibetan guerillas who, from their base in Mustang, continued to mount raids against the Chinese in Tibet. The final chapter is about his life in Norway and the Tibetan community there, as well as an account of the Norwegian supporters of Tibet.

The book accordingly begins with his early childhood in a small village in Mar in Tölung, where was born in 1938. Although his account is based on his memories as a little boy, the interdependence between nomads, farmers, and other people in the village does give a credible picture of a stable community. It also provides descriptions of some social practices I have not heard of before. For example, he writes that the evening before Losar, when everyone having given lump of *tsampa* which was then rubbed on the body and thrown into a container to ward off evil, surprisingly, the otherwise peaceful Tibetans at that moment would not only light firecrackers but also fired their muskets in the air (p. 12).

In 1947 the author joined the renowned Namgyal Monastery at the age of 9 after his mother died. His historical information is not about lofty political decisions and intrigues – on the contrary it is about the preparing of meals and tea for the Dalai Lama's quarters and monk officials – the mundane life of the palace kitchen and Potala dairy (*dzomo-ra*). He writes that the *dzomo-ra*, including their animals, was moved from the palace to the monasteries near Lhasa as the Dalai Lama moved (p. 29). Nowhere else can one find information such as that the palace kitchen owned 30 milch *dzomo*, two sturdy bulls, two horses and a mule to carry water for cooking, and two stable hands (p. 24). The preparation of the Dalai Lama's food was done with utmost care and was kept separately. Since they did not possess a watch, the cook counted out loud instead. Moreover, the room where the Dalai Lama's yogurt was curdled was called *solwa-khang*, and no women were allowed to enter it (pp. 28-29). This must involve the concept of *drip*, 'pollution', and when associated with women, it is their menstruation that pollutes people, place or thing.

Another interesting passage is the description of the Shölpa Lekung, the police station and prison in Lhasa, at the foot of the Potala Palace (p. 26). As a little boy, he was allowed to watch the interrogation of thieves and other culprits by officials. The prisoners were not interrogated verbally but were whipped until they confessed. The author describes the prisoners; some being shackled while others were put in chains in the prison courtyard. To defecate, bringing their own chamber pot, they had to climb a ladder passed down by the guards. They were also made to recite prayers together with the monks who were imprisoned after the revolt in Sera monastery in 1947. However harsh their conditions were, there were also special days when

prisoners – except for the most dangerous ones – were sent out in pairs, unguarded but shackled, to the Lingkor and Barkhor streets in Lhasa to beg for alms. By evening, they all returned (pp. 26-27).

Thupten Tenzin's eye-witnessed description of the procession accompanying the Dalai Lama on his visit to the great monasteries of Sera and Drepung, with the excited people, organized according to their rank, waiting to get the Dalai Lama's blessing, makes one feel one is almost in the middle of the crowd. He writes that after the procession, marching tunes, composed in great secrecy, were played by the different army regiments, competing with each other while returning to their camps (pp. 31-32). On that day, roads were cleaned and marked out with lines of whitewashed stones, with people wearing their finest clothes, officials and monks dressed according to their rank, and "horses fitted with golden saddles bearing the Dalai Lama's personal effects, including the golden seal box, draped with covers of ancient Mongolian brocade" (pp. 29-30). Another important fact one learns from his book is that a female oracle, the "Tenma", is one of the main protectors of Drepung Monastery. He writes that Drepung monks used to say, "The Tenma knows it all!". Although her oracle was of high rank, she was, however, was not allowed to stay in the Lingkor (p. 36). Although a detail, it can be of interest to the social anthropologist or the historian.

Another fascinating fact that drew my attention is how everyone in the Potala participated in maintaining the security of the palace. Everyone, from top to bottom, was checked and allotted a place in the hierarchy. At the bottom rung were sweepers and door keepers, who were supervised by housekeepers, who in turn took their orders from the palace bursary. At around 7 or 8 in the morning these housekeepers made an inspection tour of the palace, carrying lanterns and ensuring that the staff were doing their jobs (p. 50). The door of the monastic quarters was locked from the inside at 7 in the evening and keys passed on to the head monk inside, so that the inspector did not need to enter the monks' quarters. In the morning, they beat a small drum three times calling, "Is the keeper of the monks' quarters at the post?", which was then affirmed by the second call, "Be on watch for fire and theft", followed by a third call at the backdoors. Finally, after the inspection they beat the drum again by the entrance of the kitchen and called, "Be on the watch for danger of fire and theft in the palace from the top to the bottom" (p. 50). Such inspections probably contributed to the Potala palace remaining unharmed through the centuries.

In the description of *dob-dob*, who are normally believed to have been widely feared, they become normal and likable people who respected their elders, who cared about their distinctive dress, and

gave great importance in maintaining their long hair. Thupten Tenzin writes that they "kept long beards and their dob-dob hairpieces must have been at least 20 centimeters long. Each had a red protection cord tied around his right arm. A proper dob-dob cultivated and combed his hair piece with great care and attention" (pp. 32-33).

The author's following statement suggests that trust between the Tibetan officials from Lhasa and the local chiefs at the beginning of the Chinese infiltration could have maintained Tibetan independence. He states, "During his [Ngapo's] time in Kham, Lhalu had maintained good relations with the local chiefs, and if the army and the local people had joined forces to secure the territory they might have succeeded, since the Chinese were not able to carry enough arms and supplies to support their large army" (p. 57). However, one senses that even after the Chinese had entered Lhasa, the monks in general had no understanding of the seriousness of the situation until it was too late. Even with the large Chinese garrison stationed in Lhasa, the author indicates that there was no sense of emergency in the Namgyal monastery.

The yearly rituals, picnics, and games continued as usual, as for example the kite-flying in Lhasa in the eighth month of the lunar calendar. The kites were brought from India, and it seems to have been the game of boys and young monks. The author writes that although kites were brought from India, the strings become Tibetan, when boys "...crush broken glass and porcelain and mix it with glue, which was boiled to produce a paste called nak". Applying this paste to the kite string could make one a winner by cutting the string of a rival's kite (p. 92). However, "Those who did not wish to duel could attach a long tail which meant it could not be attacked" (ibid.).

Chap. 3 (pp. 97-177) begins with a dramatic account of the March 1959 uprising. The author not only witnessed the Tibetan uprising in Lhasa but also, while still in the Potala Palace participated in armed resistance to the Chinese army until the situation became completely hopeless. He is surely among the last Tibetans still alive to bear witness of this momentous and tragic event in Tibet's history. The monks and lay people who took up arms to protect the Potala Palace soon realized that their situation was hopeless when the Chinese army started shelling the palace. The dire situation he and the others in the palace faced shows how poorly prepared the Tibetans were in the case of an armed conflict with the Chinese (pp.101-110).

The author's flight from Lhasa was unprepared, amongst the sound of artillery, gunfire, and the nauseating smell of gunpowder. He, a monk, fled his monastery, not in his red robes but in military dress, with a British carbine, 200 bullets, and some Tibetan money (p. 112). He describes a moment during his flight from Lhasa which makes

reader feel the pain of the Tibetans. Having got a piece of dry yak meat, he writes, "No matter how much I chewed on it, my mouth was dry, and it felt like trying to swallow a lump of wood". The last thing he sees of Lhasa was the cloud of smoke billowing from the Ramoche area (p. 114).

Many know that the Dalai Lama and the Lhasa government consulted the Nechung oracle before fleeing Tibet, but ordinary monks, too, consulted an oracle about whether to stay back in Tibet or to flee in the footsteps of the Dalai Lama. This shows the importance of oracles in Tibetan society at the time. Thupten Tenzin writes that his uncle, who was a monk in the Namgyal monastery, together with other monks, decided to consult a *tsen* spirit, its oracle being a woman. The spirit told them to leave as soon as possible to catch up with the Dalai Lama (p. 119).

We learn from his autobiography how the Tibetan guerrillas, the Chushi Gangdruk, not just fought against the Chinese, but also provided a safe passage for Tibetans on their way to exile. For instance, Alo Dawa, who was the commander of the guerillas' camp at Samyé, escorted a Tibetan minister, Kungo Taring, all the way to the Indian border. The Chushi Gangdruk base in Lhoka was a meeting point for many people fleeing from Lhasa (pp. 122-126). The book provides another interesting fact, which historians have generally missed, viz., that among those escaping to exile there were also some Chinese who had sided with the Tibetans. He even writes that a Chinese who fled from the Chinese army camp at Nortö Lingka reached the Tibetan headquarters at Drapchi, eventually joining the Chushi Gangdruk and getting a Tibetan name, Lobsang Tashi (p. 131).

After crossing the Indian border, Tibetans in exile faced harsh conditions in the beginning. Having arrived at Tawang on the Indian side of the Tibetan border, seeing Chinese who had fled along with them successfully begging for *tsampa*, the author writes, "Considering *tsampa* was rarer than gold by that point, I was impressed by their begging skills" (p. 141). He also writes that the Tibetan silver *tamka* was still in use as currency in Tawang (p. 143). Although Tawang was part of India, the Tibetan refugees seemed not have felt as strangers because it was the birthplace of the sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso (1638-1706) (p. 143). He gives a detailed account of his stay at Tawang, and his subsequent journey to where he was admitted to a Tibetan school in India (pp. 138-166). These are interesting personal details not just fascinating for the general reader, but also for historians and scholars interested in the early period of the Tibetan diasporic community.

Realizing what a drawback it was not have learned a foreign language growing up in Tibet, Thupten Tenzin not only learned Hindi,

but also English (p. 153). Soon he was chosen by Mrs. Rinchen Dolma, popularly known as Ama Taring, who came from one of the aristocratic families in Lhasa, to be sent to England (p. 161). His account shows how Tibetans in exile, although scattered, with the help of their leaders were able to use their limited resources in improving their situation in exile. After having studied in the Tibetan Mussoorie school, the Tibetan Education Department sent him to England in February 1963 as an assistant to Kungo Drupok Wöser Ngawang to escort 22 Tibetan children who had been accepted to live and go to school in the Pestalozzi Village in Sussex (pp. 171-174), originally built for displaced European children after the Second World War. At the airport they were received by the headmaster, Spencer Chapman, who had stayed in Lhasa for six months in 1936-37, along with many journalists from television and the press – a contrast to the reception of refugees today (p.174).

In 1964 Kungo Pala sent Thupten Tenzin to Norway as a Tibetan teacher for 44 boys who were pupils at a specially established school there (p. 179). As it turned out, Norway became his new home, and the author sheds his personal light on the history of Tibetans in Norway. The history of the Tibetans in Norway, known popularly as the “Gjøvik Boys”, thus named after the small town of Gjøvik where the school was located, some 100 kms north of Oslo, is largely unknown. He introduces the reader to people in Norway who had worked since 1963 to establish this school, such as the famous radio host Lauritz Johnson, then known throughout Norway (and fondly remembered by the boys) as “Uncle Lauritz”. The author later became a photographer with the help of Mr. Johnson and other Norwegian families. In meeting the boys, Thupten Tenzin told them, “...the most important thing was to keep good relations among themselves, have high regard for Tibetan culture, and that if we were together there is nothing we could not achieve” (p. 181). His words also reflect how Tibetans and non-Tibetans feared the loss of Tibetan culture and religion. The author’s autobiography shows it was the hard-working Tibetans and their leaders under the Dalai Lama, with the help of many non-Tibetans, that made the Tibetan exile a success story, to the extent that the social anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf referred to it as *The Renaissance of Tibetan Civilization* (1990)².

In Chap. 5, the autobiography contains an extremely interesting account of the Tibetan guerilla fighters based in Mustang in northern Nepal on the border to Tibet, especially of commanders such as Gyado Wangdu. His account of his travel to Mustang in 1973 to make a film

² von Fürer-Haimendorf, Christoph, *The Renaissance of Tibetan Civilization*, Oracle, Arizona, Synergetic Press, 1990.

on Tibetan guerillas fighters, sheds light on the personal life of these fighters at the time, and their desperate attempt to continue the armed resistance. There was a moment when the author and one of the fighters, Drayab Gyapön, were waiting for the former's camera and other equipment, and the former said, "What is waiting 17 days? ... We Mustang guerillas have waited for so many years for independence" (p. 211). These words reflect the anguish – and at the same time the resilience – of the last Tibetan guerrilla fighters. Even when the USA ceased providing aid, they maintained their mission by starting carpet factories, handicraft centres, shops, hotels, and transport operations (p. 219). One reads about the daily lives in the camps of these fighters (pp. 227-231). I think it is his experience of having himself fought against Chinese together with his contact with the guerilla fighters in Tibet while escaping, that must have inspired him to make a documentary film about the guerillas in Nepal.

All in all, this is a rich book full of important and fascinating information about life in Tibet before 1959 and life in exile during the subsequent years. It is perhaps rare to have such a detailed autobiography with the names of a great many of those whom he has met in the course of his life. By writing his autobiography, Thupten Tenzin has shown aspects of Tibetan history that might otherwise have been consigned to oblivion. As indicated above, *Escape from Tibet, The Experiential Life Story* has been published privately. However, this is a book that deserves to be widely read. One must therefore hope that it will be reprinted by a well-established publisher who recognizes its unique value and importance.



Yudru Tsomu, *Chieftains, Lamas, and Warriors: A History of Kham, 1904-1961*, Lanham, Boulder, New York, London (Lexington Books), 2025. xxi + 417 pp. + 3 maps. ISBN: 978-1-66695-899-7.

Reviewed by Per Kværne
(University of Oslo)

udru Tsomu, whose book, *Blind Warrior of Nyarong: The Rise of Gönpö Namgyel in Kham* (Lexington Books, 2014), placed her in the forefront of scholars writing on the history of Kham, has since then expanded her range of study, resulting in the volume under review. Being herself a Khampa by birth and a respected researcher in China as well as internationally, the author is highly qualified for the task of writing this book, aiming, as she writes in the Introduction, to offer “a deeper understanding of the evolution of social and political changes in Kham by providing...an analysis and contextual history of the region” (p. 1).

Chieftains, Lamas, and Warriors is a detailed study of a period in the modern history of Kham, characterised by its transformation from being a complex and conflict-ridden region at the end of the Manchu Empire, through several decades following the demise of the Chinese imperial government characterised by sporadic but nevertheless at times fierce warfare, first between Chinese provincial military units and the Tibetan government in Lhasa, and later by the confusion and upheavals of the 1920's and 1930's involving local chieftains, lamas, and warriors (hence the title of the book) on the one hand, and, on the other, Chinese warlords in the neighbouring provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan as well as the Republican Kuomintang government. Throughout this middle period, all these stakeholders vied with each other for political control and economic benefit in Kham, a period which finally came to an end with the gradual tightening of control by the Chinese Communists in the years following 1949, with Kham, despite the revolt of large sectors of the population starting in 1956, becoming inexorably and totally integrated into the Communist state.

In dealing with these almost sixty dramatic years of Kham history, the author adopts a chronological approach, as reflected in the chapter headings: 1. Qing “New Policy” Reforms and Local Rebellions; 2. Political Turmoil and the First Boundary Dispute between Sichuan (Kham) and Central Tibet (1911-1913); 3. The Second Boundary Dispute and the Eastward Advance of Tibetan Troops (1914-1918); 4. Internal Conflicts; 5. Kham: The Struggle for Hegemony; 6. Lamas, Warlords, and Nationalists; 7. Kham under Warlord Rule (1935-1949) and the Establishment of Xikang Province; 8. The Communist Ascendancy; 9. Red Star over Kham: Democratic Reforms (1956-1961); 10. Red Star

over Kham: Occurrence and Suppression of Revolts.

Throughout the volume, the presentation endeavours to be strictly fact-based, making use of a wide range of sources, especially documents in Chinese, of which many, although existing in published form, are probably not easily available outside China, and even in China are not likely to be widely known beyond the circle of Chinese historians of Sino-Tibetan relations. Occasionally Tsomu also refers to unpublished archival sources, such as the Kardzé Prefectural Archives and the Sichuan Provincial Archives (pp. 315-317). A cursory glance at the Bibliography illustrates the preponderance of Chinese sources: the list of sources in Chinese covers 24 pages, while that of sources in other languages (except Tibetan) covers 12. The list of Tibetan sources, covering only 3,5 pages, is surprisingly short, suggesting that more extensive use of sources in the Tibetan language is likely to add to relevant information in the future.

This having been said, the breadth of the Chinese sources which the author has assembled makes *Chieftains, Lamas, and Warriors* a uniquely in-depth study of this crucial period in the modern history of Kham, with relevance for the entire Tibetan Plateau. I am not aware of any study of the history of Kham that comes anywhere near the meticulous and detailed research of Tsomu. The reader might lose her or his way in a maze of detail were it not that at intervals the author provides useful (in fact, necessary) overviews and summaries. This, in turn, may encourage the reader to reflect on the long perspectives of the history of Kham throughout the period dealt with and beyond, although Tsomu does not explicitly invite the reader to do so. Reading the book suggests patterns in Chinese policy since (at least) the beginning of the 20th century that appear to be constant. Thus, already in 1904 (as Tsomu points out), Chinese officials had plans for economic development of Kham "as part of the expansionist bureaucracy", including mining operations and agricultural land reclamation involving Chinese settlers, ushering in "a period of incorporation and intense reform". The situation was rendered more dramatic by the plans being implemented in a way that caused anxiety among local Tibetans "that the mountain gods would be disturbed" (p. 32); the opposition was increased by the Chinese "explicit disdain for and humiliating treatment of chieftains, headmen, and commoners" and, above all, by punitive action against monasteries, resulting in armed resistance by Tibetans (p. 33). The author describes these events in detail, at the same time pointing out that overall, the Chinese policies were "influenced by the globalizing norms of territoriality and sovereignty in the early twentieth century" (p. 39). One might therefore say that the upheavals in Kham in the early 20th century ultimately stemmed from Tibet's encounter with the modern world (although at the time, Tibetans would

not, of course, have seen it in that light), a pattern that was repeated and intensified with the introduction and gradual imposition of “democratic reforms” in the 1950’s – which, one could argue, inevitably led to fundamental transformations of society in Kham, as all over the Tibetan Plateau, up to the present.

Returning to Tsomu’s book, she carefully illustrates how the same policy, aiming at development and assimilation, was repeated from 1906 to 1911 during the campaigns of the Chinese military commander Zhao Erfeng, who was “charged with the task of incorporating Kham into the political and cultural spheres of China” (p. 38). Although his efforts were by no means successful, similar policies continued to be a driving force in Kham politics and power struggles in the 1920s and 1930s. Such policies were, however, rendered largely ineffectual by being “fragmented by warlordism” (p. 129). Only after the coming into power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949, dealt with in Chap. 8 of the study, was there a gradual but eventually radical change in this situation.

Tsomu’s account, contained in Chaps. 3-7, of this middle period in the modern history of Kham – between the demise of Imperial China and the ascendancy of the Communist Party – is remarkable in scope and detail. A discussion of contemporary events in Amdo, the region to the north of Kham – events no less dramatic and complex than those in Kham – is, however, studiously avoided, leaving unanswered the question of whether events in the two regions were not only similar, but interrelated. Be that as it may, the author’s account is written in the same detailed way as the first chapters, with the same intensive use of sources, mainly in Chinese, but supplemented by sources provided by Western missionaries and officials. It is worth noting, as Tsomu does, that in the intermittent war between the Lhasa government and Chinese forces in Kham, “not all the ruling elites and people sided with the Lhasa government... Some of them... chose to assist the Chinese in safeguarding their independence from the Lhasa government” (p. 79), regarding the Chinese as less of a threat to their traditional *de facto* independence than the Lhasa government, with its centralised structure and the dominance of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism (pp. 78-79). This is not without significance in the light of the fact, pointed out by Carol McGranahan in 2001 and quoted by Tsomu, that “the unified history of Tibet presented in popular literature and diaspora representations denies local identity and regional history in favour of what is assumed to be a greater Tibetan national history” (p. 3). This “unified history” can hardly be maintained in the light of research such as presented in *Chieftains, Lamas, and Warriors*.

Of particular interest is the discussion of the reactions of local Tibetans to the Great March, which passed through the eastern parts of

Kham in 1935 and 1936. Chinese units that entered Kham during the Great March were not widely opposed by local Tibetans. In the 1940's, some members of the Tibetan elite had already been working for a Communist Revolution in Kham, generally under the (mistaken, as it later turned out) assumption that Kham might obtain an autonomous status, not unlike that of the Soviet republics, a model which in fact reflected the CCP doctrine at the time (pp. 269-270). Likewise, in the years immediately following 1949, there was substantial support among Tibetan elites in Kham for CCP rule. However, "their identity was transformed from autonomous hereditary rulers to government cadres", with the approach of the CCP being "political persuasion work" (p. 280).

The increasing Chinese control, no matter how 'soft' at the outset, was nevertheless doomed to fail in ensuring a peaceful incorporation of Kham into the People's Republic of China (PRC). Tsomu points to two crucial factors. The first is a lack of understanding among the Chinese of local culture, such as "the importance of guns in Khampa culture" (p. 301); the second, and perhaps the most serious flaw, was pressure – perceived by Tibetans as attacks – on monasteries, beginning with their economic foundations. Monasteries were, as is well known, of fundamental importance in Khampa society, and violent reactions to any attempt to undermine their position were only to be expected.

The final two chapters deal with the so-called "democratic reforms". The author follows the same method in these chapters as in the preceding ones, and there is no doubt that she offers her readers a wealth of new information. However, when referring to the uprising (or, if one prefers, the series of uprisings) in Kham in 1956 and the following years, her account is less complete than one might have wished, although the reason for this is not difficult to understand, given the limitations, whether explicit or not, imposed by the authorities on historical research in the PRC. It is also worth noting that no mention at all is made to the similar widespread and violent uprising in Amdo in 1958. This – as already hinted at – is a pity, because a comparative study of the two uprisings would probably have provided deeper insight into their causes.

The chapters on "democratic reforms" seem to rely on a cut-and-paste procedure in which the sources are limited to published documents from the PRC. This is of course not to say that these documents are without relevance – they are indeed interesting and important – but they only present one side of the picture. In this sense, the author's approach may be said to be strictly 'archival'. Thus, the Khampa insurgents are designated "fighters", "rebels", and "rebel fighters". When dealing with them, the Chinese armed forces are said on one occasion in 1958 to have "wiped out 450 fighters" (p. 339), to have

"annihilated 500 rebels" in the same year (ibid.), and so on. A frequent term is "put out of commission" (e.g. p. 337, referring to "300 rebels"); it is unclear whether this means they were killed or that they simply surrendered. Examples among several similar ones are the following: "...during two weeks of cleanup operations, they [the Chinese army] quelled 2,200 rebels, which relieved over 4,000 nomadic households from revolts" (p. 340), and "By the end of 1959, over 100 battles for suppressing revolts took place in Sershül; these activities neutralized over 4,200 rebels" (ibid.).

In this final part of the book, the standard Chinese propagandistic-bureaucratic jargon of the time is, as the reader cannot fail to notice, quoted – which is fine – but without any critical comments on its limitations or reference to other narratives, such as those of Tibetans who fled Tibet, having been involved in the upheavals in that period. Such sources are accessible in numerous scholarly publications, e.g. the works of Carol McGrahanan which are listed in the Bibliography, as well as other sources which cannot be lightly dismissed.

It therefore comes almost as a surprise that at the very end of her book, Tsomu sheds the 'archivist' approach by concluding that, "In sum, the rebellion in Kham was not confined to a particular area or class. It was led by traditional chieftains who drew support from their followers. The popular nature of the revolt meant that the Communists were faced with united opposition from the Tibetan people" (p. 343). This describes the historical situation very well, and she points out that "According to Chinese sources, the last group of rebels in Kardzé was not purged until 1971, and it was not until 1973 that the last rebel leaders in Lithang were killed" – twelve years after the expiry of the period of history defining the scope of the book (p. 344).

In spite of the limitations indicated above, *Chieftains, Lamas, and Warriors* is, above all, a uniquely well-documented study of the modern history of Kham. The book represents a watershed in terms of broad and in-depth use of Chinese-language material, which, for historical reasons, probably constitutes the largest body of relevant sources. Future research, perhaps uncovering or using other sources, may, in some respects, contribute towards a more nuanced story. That being said, it must be emphasized that the book is an admirable piece of historical research and will remain a fundamental work of reference.

