

**Faculty of Oriental Studies
(Tibetan and Himalayan Studies)**

**A Feast for Scholars: The Life and
Works of Sle lung Bzhad pa'i rdo rje**

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Abstract

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Bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1697-1740), the Fifth Sle lung Rin po che, was a religiously and politically controversial figure and an incredibly prolific author, having written or compiled over 46 volumes worth of mainly religious texts. A high-ranking Dge lugs pa *sprul sku*, Sle lung is seen as having gradually “defected” to the Rnying ma school, although he self-identified as a follower of the “non-sectarian” (*ris med*) perspective. Sle lung also acted as a spiritual advisor to most of the major central Tibetan rulers during the course of his life, most significantly Mi dbang Pho lha nas (r. 1729-1747). But despite numerous features of fascinating interest, Sle lung and his writings have received very little scholarly attention, and this thesis is intended to fill this unfortunate lacuna.

The present study begins with an extended biographical examination of Sle lung's life, and the political and religious unrest in central Tibet at the time in which he was deeply invested. I pay special attention to the controversies that surrounded him, particularly his purported sexual licentiousness and his ecumenical work which was unpopular among his more sectarian Dge lugs pa critics. This opening biography provides critical historical context as I move on to examine two of Sle lung's most important literary works. The first is the sixteen-volume *Gsang ba ye shes chos skor*, a massive cycle of teachings by Sle lung and his students that integrates tantric theories

derived from Sle lung's experience with Gsar ma (specifically Dge lugs pa) teachings. The second work is the *Bstan srung rgya mtsho'i rnam thar*, a unique text in Tibetan literature which consists of an apparently unprecedented compilation of Tibetan Buddhist protector deity (*bstan srung, chos skyong*) origin myths. I will make sense of key features of these two works within the larger context of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the political and personal concerns of Sle lung himself.



Figure 1: Sle lung Bzhad pa'i rdo rje as a Dge lugs pa scholar. "Tantric Sex Partners, Actual And 'Imagined': Tibetan Karmamudra, And The Life And Times Of Lelung Jedrung Zhepai Dorje | A Perfumed Skull". Perfumedskull.com. N.p., 2016. Web. Accessed 30 Aug. 2016.

I have un-fabricated pure vision toward all the accomplished [masters] without bias (*ris med*) such as the Sa skya, Dge lugs, Rnying ma, 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud, Karma Bka' brgyud, etc. My mind has increased respect toward the holders of these [various] teachings and when I think about this, I have pride in my own powerful realizations. I have deeply penetrating single-pointed respect for all the embodiments of objects of refuge, including all the billions of peaceful and wrathful deities such as the *yi dams* and dharma protectors. In this way I have obtained the supreme approach to receive all blessings.

- Sle lung Bzhad
pa'i rdo rje



ཡེ་ཤུང་གློ་བཟང་འཕྱིན་ལས་སམ་པ་རྒྱ་བཞད་པའི་རྗེ།

Figure 2: Sle lung Bzhad pa'i rdo rje as a Rnying ma lay tantric *yogin*. Reproduced from Loden 2013: 60.

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Acknowledgements

One of the most important lessons to be learned from studying Tibetan literature is that all great works are communal efforts. Rather than a single author, books are produced by “textual communities,” like many individual threads making up a single rug. The textual community that helped produce this work, in one way or another, is too large to name everyone individually, but I will try to acknowledge the most important members and I hope those whom I leave out (or forget) do not take offense.

First and foremost, I would like give my sincere thanks to the Eleventh Lelung Tulku, Tenzin Phuntsok Loden. He showed great kindness, good humor, and patience in answering all my questions over the course of several interviews, and his ready willingness to provide whatever material he could to help my research, including gifting me copies of his republished volumes of the Fifth Sle lung’s collected works, was touching. Also, his dedication to finding, preserving, and disseminating the Fifth’s teachings was a great moral inspiration for me. I hope this thesis will contribute to the Lelung preservation project in some small way.

Next I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Ulrike Roesler, whose kindness, affability, and readiness to help me in any way she could made this project that much easier. She struck the perfect balance of keeping me on track while giving me enough space do develop my own ideas. Also, I want to thank my former master’s supervisor Dr. Bryan Cuevas, who first inspired me to research the writings of the Fifth Sle lung, and who maintained a vivid interest in my work and ready assistance to my research even after I was no longer technically his student.

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Despite this thesis being a communal effort, I am of course the weaver who made the rug, so any and all errors rest with me.

Introduction

The Fifth Sle lung *sprul sku* Blo bzang 'phrin las Bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1697-1740) has been called, without qualification or explanation, the "Dge lugs pa Rasputin."¹ Part of the impetus of my research was the desire to understand this comparison and determine whether or not it was accurate.

The first part of the description is, of course, simple enough. Bzhad pa'i rdo rje (who throughout this work is usually simply referred to as "Sle lung") was unquestionably Dge lugs pa. The recognized incarnation of Lho brag Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1326-1401), the primary Bka' gdams pa teacher of Tsong kha pa (1357-1419), the Sle lung *sprul sku* through the years became a fixture of the Dge lugs pa ecclesiastical and political hierarchy in Tibet, and was eventually established as one of the most important *sprul sku* lineages based at 'Bras spungs Monastery. The Fifth Sle lung specifically was an expert in Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka philosophy. For a time, he served as the abbot of Chos 'khor rgyal, a monastery closely associated with the Dalai Lamas. He was a skilled master of the practice of Cakrasaṃvara, one of the main Dge lugs pa *yi dam* deities, and was also erudite in the theoretical systems of the Guhyasamāja and Kālacakra tantras, all highly important practices for the Dge lugs pa school. Yet Sle lung is also regarded as something of a traitor to the "pure" Dge lugs pa tradition.

This brings us to the Rasputin comparison. Grigori Rasputin (1869-1916) has a complex and largely infamous reputation. While there are many facets to this historical personality, simply put there seem to be three basic reasons for which he is most remembered.² First, there was what was seen as the unseemly level of influence he had

¹ Pomplun 2006: 41.

² This is based largely on the preface of Brian Moynahan's biography of Rasputin (Moynahan 1997).

within the court of Tsar Nicholas II. Second, there were the scandalous sexual affairs and drunken debauchery for which Rasputin is known, the so-called “purification by sin” in which he is said to have engaged.³ And finally, as a religious master, Rasputin was also credited with supernatural abilities, which effectively gave him the reputation of a black magician. These three facets of his character and reputation combined to lead to his murder at the hands of a conspiracy of Russian nobility.

Similarly, Sle lung, by all accounts, was (in certain respects) a skilled political animal. He maintained close patron-priest relationships with every major central Tibetan ruler in the first half of the eighteenth century, including Lha bzang Khan (d. 1717), Stag rtse pa Lha rgyal rab brtan, Khang chen nas Dā ching bha dur, and, most significantly, Pho lha nas Bsod nams stobs rgyas (1689-1747), the highly effective ruler of central Tibet for the better part of the early to mid-eighteenth century. Sle lung’s influence on the latter appears to have been a source of concern and criticism (and perhaps envy) among other Dge lugs pa officials, and at least one other Dge lugs pa ecclesiastical official warned Pho lha nas about what he perceived as Sle lung’s harmful influence.

Also, like Rasputin, Sle lung is remembered (likely in an over-sensationalized way) for his licentiousness with respect to sexual activity as well as the consumption of alcohol. In Sle lung’s case, these activities took place while he was technically a fully ordained monk, and were part of tantric consort and feast-offering practices, for which he wrote numerous liturgical and commentarial texts. He is even reputed to have had 108 tantric consorts.⁴ While I know of no specific criticism levelled at Sle lung with regard to the practice of black magic, he does seem to have been something of an

³ Moynahan 1997: 96.

⁴ Of which I have only identified six.

expert in this field. Considered to be physical incarnations of the ferocious demon-taming bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, the Sle lung lineage is particularly associated with the worship, invocation, and control over protector deities (Skt. *dharmapāla*, Tib. *chos skyong* or *bstan srung*), who constitute the fiercest and darkest side of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. The Fifth Sle lung, in particular, was an expert in the practice of such deities, and arguably his most famous literary work, studied in chapter three, is a large compilation of protector deity origin myths, unique in extant Tibetan literature. He is even believed to have become a wrathful protector deity himself after his death which, according to one account, was due to a supernatural assassination by a sectarian Dge lugs pa protector in retribution for Sle lung's purported transgressions. So, from at least a superficial, general standpoint, calling Sle lung the “Dge lugs pa Rasputin” is apt, if somewhat sensationalistic.

Sle lung as a “*Ris med* Figure”

The First Sle lung, Lho brag Grub chen, one of Tsong kha pa's main teachers, in addition to being a Bka' gdams pa master, was also a master of Rnying ma *rdzogs chen*, a fact that later more sectarian Dge lugs pa seem to have found inconvenient. The Fifth Sle lung was the first to systematically attempt to reintegrate Rnying ma, particularly *rdzogs chen* practices, into the transmitted teachings of the Sle lung reincarnation lineage following its establishment within the Dge lugs pa ecclesiastical order. While *rdzogs chen* philosophy is considered spurious enough for the more sectarian strands of the Dge lugs pa, Sle lung also engaged in and promoted other practices for which the Rnying ma school is particularly known (and in some cases, reviled), namely, physical consort yoga, hostile sorcery, and especially the propitiation

of certain protector deities that seem to have been considered illegitimate by Sle lung's Dge lugs pa critics.⁵

For the most part Sle lung, in his autobiographical writings, justifies his practice of Rnying ma teachings by self-identifying with an ecumenical *ris med* (non-sectarian) perspective and outlook. The term *ris med* (which can also be translated as “without bias” or “universalist”) and the concept behind it has a long history in Tibet, and Gene Smith has accurately observed that all the great religious masters of Tibet were *ris med* in outlook, in that they studied under a number of different masters from different schools or lineages and, to a certain extent, synthesized them.⁶ The term *ris med* is most famously applied, however, to the eastern Tibetan “renaissance” movement of the nineteenth century, led by 'Jam dbyangs Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820-1899), Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1892), and Mchog 'gyur Bde chen gling pa (1829-1870). But the so-called “eight great lineages of attainment” (*sgrub brgyud shing rta chen po brgyad*) that this movement upheld as the sum totality of all the different lineages and schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and considered to be equally efficacious and legitimate, was based on a system which had already been expounded in the sixteenth century by 'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer (1518-1584). Shes rab 'od zer's system was in turn influenced by the *Blue Annals* (*Deb ther sngon po*) of 'Gos lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392-1481).⁷ Thus, in one sense, there is nothing unique about Sle lung's *ris med* perspective.⁸ He exists in a continuum of *ris med* thinkers stretching

⁵ Of course, the Dge lugs pa have a long history of black magic as well, but they are generally not considered to be the connoisseurs of it to the degree that the Rnying ma pa are.

⁶ See Smith's succinct explanation of the origins of the *ris med* movement (Smith 2001: 237-247).

⁷ Deroche 2009: 323.

⁸ To my knowledge, Sle lung did not particularly advocate Shes rab 'od zer's eight-fold system, and mainly practiced and promulgated Dge lugs pa and Rnying ma teachings, though he did have strong contact with and sympathy for other schools of Tibetan Buddhism as well, such as the 'Brug pa Bka' rgyud. There is even a strong Bon po thread running through some of his writings. This is discussed in chapters two and three of the present study.

from Shes rab 'od zer (and earlier) to the final flowering of the philosophy with the nineteenth century eastern Tibetan movement.

What is particularly noteworthy with regard to Sle lung's *ris med* outlook, however, is the idea that he, in some sense, defected from the "pure" Dge lugs pa. The *ris med* movement in the nineteenth century (and the non-sectarian philosophy of Shes rab 'od zer, who was originally of the Sa skya pa school) is often read as a reaction against the hegemony of the Dge lugs pa who, beginning in the sixteenth century, prosecuted an often violently sectarian campaign to politically and religiously dominate Tibet. One of the grimmest episodes in the long history of Dge lugs pa dominance of (primarily) central Tibet was the pogrom against the Rnying ma pa carried out by the radically sectarian Dge lugs pa-allied Dzungar Mongols in the eighteenth century, during Sle lung's lifetime. By the nineteenth century, the Dge lugs pa had been successful enough in this campaign of dominance that the *ris med* movement of Mkhyen brtse and Kong sprul is credited with saving a number of lineages and teachings of the other three main schools (or four, counting the Bon po) from an otherwise inevitable extinction. Thus the so-called "non-sectarian" movement was, in some sense, anti-Dge lugs pa, or at least working against Dge lugs pa monolithic hegemony.

This historical view is perhaps overly simplistic, given that there were some Dge lugs pa thinkers who were nominally a part of the eastern *ris med* movement. For instance, Mdo sngags chos kyi rgya mtsho (1903-1957), a Dge lugs pa lama from the Mgo log region, is known for attempting to reconcile the Rnying ma *rdzogs chen* view with the philosophy of Tsong kha pa.⁹ He followed in the footsteps, knowingly or not,

⁹ Pearcey, Adam. "Highlighting Unity: Two Approaches to Non-Sectarianism in Twentieth Century Tibet." Paper presented at the 14th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, June 2016.

of Sle lung, who did the same thing two centuries earlier in his synthesis of the perfection stage according to Tsong kha pa's Guhyasamāja commentary with Klong chen pa's *rdzogs chen* view. Still, figures like Mdo sngags chos kyi rgya mtsho are outliers, exceptions that seem to prove the rule that throughout history the most notable self-identified *ris med* thinkers tended to be from non-Dge lugs pa schools who were resisting Dge lugs pa intellectual (and in some cases military) imperialism. What is remarkable about Sle lung's *ris med* perspective is that it developed while he was firmly embedded within the highest reaches of Dge lugs pa authority. In this sense, Sle lung follows the Fifth Dalai Lama who, while being arguably the single most important figure responsible for the Dge lugs pa political and religious hegemony established in central Tibet beginning in the seventeenth century, was personally drawn to Rnying ma teachings and supported Gter bdag gling pa and others in their efforts to revive and sustain Rnying ma lineages and teachings. Gter bdag gling pa's Smin gling lineage would end up being Sle lung's primary Rnying ma influence a generation later.

Unlike the Fifth Dalai Lama, however, Sle lung seems to have become somewhat alienated from the Dge lugs pa as he moved closer to what Geoffrey Samuel has called the "shamanic" practices of a Rnying ma pa tantric lay lama (while technically an ordained Dge lugs pa monk). In this sense, then, Sle lung heralded and prefigured the nineteenth century *ris med* "shamanic reaction" against Dge lugs pa "synthesis,"¹⁰ but did so by effectively undermining (intentionally or not) the Dge lugs pa sectarian hegemony from within. Samuel has been criticised strongly for the use of

¹⁰ Samuel 1993: 499-524. Samuel's characterization here is somewhat inaccurate, however, given, as Adam Pearcey has pointed out, that the eastern *ris med* movement was actually characterized by a scholastic revival amongst the non-Dge lugs pa schools ("Approaches To Non-Sectarianism." Adam S. Pearcey. N.p., 2016. Web. <https://adamspearcey.com/2016/07/19/approaches-to-non-sectarianism/>, accessed 19 Aug. 2016). Samuel's characterization actually fits Sle lung much better than it does the *ris med* movement about a century later.

the term “shamanic” in the context of Tibetan religion, which he sets in opposition to the so-called “clerical” Buddhism of, primarily, the Dge lugs pa school. But I believe the term shamanic is somewhat heuristically useful for understanding the trajectory of Sle lung’s life and religious career in which he gradually moved away from (but never entirely rejected) the philosophical scholasticism of the large Dge lugs pa monastic colleges in favor of journeys to remote wildernesses marked by “pure vision” (*dag snang*) encounters with teeming daemonic hordes and a panentheistic vision of reality that, as we shall see, intersects with the “universalist” *ris med* perspective. We will return to this question throughout this study.

Structure and Previous Scholarship

This is the first detailed scholarly study of the Fifth Sle lung’s life and his literary works. While scholars have used Sle lung’s writings to gain insight into an array of topics, from *sbas yul* to the events surrounding the life and death of the Sixth Dalai Lama to the mythology of various protector deities, there has been very little study of his life and works in and of themselves (with a few important exceptions, discussed below). Bzhad pa’i rdo rje produced more than forty-six volumes of written material, so given the daunting quantity of his work, the absence of scholarship about him is simultaneously understandable and particularly frustrating. Because of the overwhelming amount of primary source material, this study is in large part meant to be a survey of Sle lung’s life and work. However, I focus special attention on two of Sle lung’s main (and arguably most important) literary works and attempt to understand them within the larger politico-religious context of central Tibet in the first half of the eighteenth century. This thesis is thus divided into three large chapters, each of which could easily be turned into its own thesis-length study.

Chapter one is an examination of the historical context and an extensive biography of the Fifth Sle lung. I also examine, in brief, the lives of the four Sle lungs before Bzhad pa'i rdo rje as a way of understanding his legacy. However, I have opted, due mainly to space constraints, not to discuss the Sle lungs after the Fifth. This thesis is not meant to be about the Sle lung reincarnation lineage in general. Such a history has already been written by the Eleventh and current Sle lung *sprul sku*, Bstan 'dzin phun tshogs blo ldan (b. 1970) in his recent book *A Drop from the Ocean of History: The Lineage of Lelung Pema Zhepai Dorje*,¹¹ which I cite frequently. As indicated by the title of this book, Bzhad pa'i rdo rje is by far the most well-known incarnation of the Sle lung lineage and had the most significant historical, literary, and religious impact. As such, it is he, and not the Sle lung lineage as a whole, who is the focus of this study.

I draw extensively on my own reading and translations from the Fifth Sle lung's autobiographical works, most significantly and extensively his *rtogs brjod*, written in the 1720s, which covers approximately the first half his life. Entitled *A Feast of Joy for the Fortunate Ones*, the title of this work (as well as the sheer volume of material Sle lung wrote) was the inspiration for the main title of this thesis, *A Feast for Scholars*. Chapter one also draws heavily on *A Drop from the Ocean of History*, along with the comparatively few secondary Western sources that discuss Sle lung in any significant detail. This includes a trinity of articles by Franz-Karl Ehrhard on the First Sle lung's *rdzogs chen* teachings, and the Fifth Sle lung's involvement in the search for *sbas yul* ("hidden lands") in the eighteenth century;¹² Ian Baker's translations of Sle lung's autobiographical account of travelling to one such hidden land, the famed and

¹¹ Loden 2013.

¹² Ehrhard 1992, 1999a, and 1999b.

legendary Padma bkod;¹³ Amy Heller’s biographical sketch of him in relation to his authorship of texts related to the protector deity Beg tse;¹⁴ and Per Sørensen and Guntram Hazod’s discussion of Sle lung’s restoration at *Khra ’brug*.¹⁵ While relatively few and far between, these sources and others made chapter one easier to write than it would otherwise have been.

Overall, the first chapter attempts to produce an in-depth historical narrative that describes the political context in which Bzhad pa’i rdo rje lived and worked, and attempts to understand his motivations. By doing so, I often speculatively attribute possible political motives to his religious activities, and those of others in his circle of acquaintances. I also give possible psychological explanations for his work and activity. In doing this I do not intend to be reductive by assuming I fully comprehend the Fifth Sle lung’s mental, psychological, and emotional state. To do so even implicitly would be hubristic in the extreme. At the same time, I wrote this work with the intention of producing something other than a traditional Tibetan Buddhist hagiography, or simply parroting such a work. As such, the theoretical approaches I take throughout this study are employed as heuristic tools, but they are not intended to be absolute knowledge claims, a myopic trap into which reductive scholarship sometimes unwittingly falls.

After laying the historical groundwork in chapter one, chapters two and three discuss Sle lung’s two most important contributions to Tibetan religious literature. Throughout, I examine Sle lung’s work in light of the historical data presented in chapter one. I also use Sle lung’s works as portals into examining broader theoretical concerns related to Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. Chapter two examines the sixteen-volume *Gsang ba ye shes chos skor* he and his students compiled from 1729-1737, which has

¹³ Baker 2004.

¹⁴ Heller 1992.

¹⁵ Sørensen and Hazod 2005.

been helpfully catalogued and surveyed by Peter Schwieger.¹⁶ This massive cycle of teachings is focused on what became Sle lung's main *yi dam* deity, Gsang ba ye shes mkha' 'gro (Guhyajñānaḍākinī), a four-armed Rnying ma *gter ma* form of Vajrayoginī. My research on this cycle focuses mainly on the first volume which contains Sle lung's main commentaries on the practice of Gsang ba ye shes mkha' 'gro, and I pay particular attention on his very *ris med* presentation of the philosophy and practice of the tantric perfection stage (*rdzogs rim*) practices from the perspective of three different systems: the Ārya Guhyasamāja, Kālacakra, and *rdzogs chen* approaches to understanding and practicing the perfection stage.

Next, I turn my attention to some of the supplementary “magical” rituals presented in the Gsang ba ye shes cycle, types of religious activity that have sometimes been dismissed by scholarship as superfluous vernacular accretions. Here I argue that such magical rituals are in fact integral to the tradition and an essential part of tantric soteriology. In a similar vein, the final section of chapter two discusses Sle lung's special pure-vision protector deity, Lha gcig Nyi ma gzhon nu, a goddess he identifies as one of his consorts and a special protector form of Gsang ba ye shes. Here I discuss Sle lung's occasionally graphic sexual yoga practices related to Nyi ma gzhon nu and how they fit into the somewhat vexed question of tantric sexual yoga in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist thought. This Nyi ma gzhon nu section is also intended to be a bridge between chapters two and three, with the latter examining Sle lung's relationship with myriad protector deities in general.

In particular, chapter three focuses on Sle lung's unique, almost encyclopedic compilation of protector deity origin myths, iconography, and nomenclature, the *Biographies of the Ocean of Oath-Bound Protectors*. Numerous scholars over the past

¹⁶ Schwieger 1985.

few decades have used this incomparable work as a source in studies of various Tibetan protector deities, most recently Christopher Bell's Ph.D. dissertation on the deity Pe har, and my master's thesis on Rāhula.¹⁷ My research on the *Biographies of the Ocean of Oath-Bound Protectors* for my master's thesis is, in fact, what initially sparked my interest in Sle lung's life and writings more generally.

Chapter three also particularly explores the role of the Tibetanized form of the Indian god Śiva who became theoretically and culturally important for especially the Rnying ma school, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and thus plays a major role in Sle lung's protector deity *magnum opus*. Chapter three also examines the literary and political legacy of Sle lung's protector deity literature, arguing that *Biographies of the Ocean of Oath-Bound Protectors* makes a significant theological statement by explicitly and implicitly arguing the fully enlightened status of its subjects. I also show how Sle lung's work on protectors had significant political ramifications connected to the rule of Pho lha nas.

I have named the three main chapters or parts of this thesis after the so-called "three roots" of tantric Buddhism, namely the guru/lama, the *yi dam* (meditational deity), and the protector. This is something of a convenient literary flourish or conceit that is not meant to have any theoretical bearing on the actual overarching topic except insofar as this thematic trinity and this tripartite structure often run through Tibetan Buddhist literature, including Sle lung's works. Also, more by (auspicious?) coincidence than intentional plan, the three parts more or less correspond to the three ways I argued above that Sle lung is similar to Rasputin. Chapter one discusses Sle lung's political connections and influence; chapter two, his religious use of sexuality; and chapter three his mastery of malevolent forces.

¹⁷ See Bell 2013 and Bailey 2012.

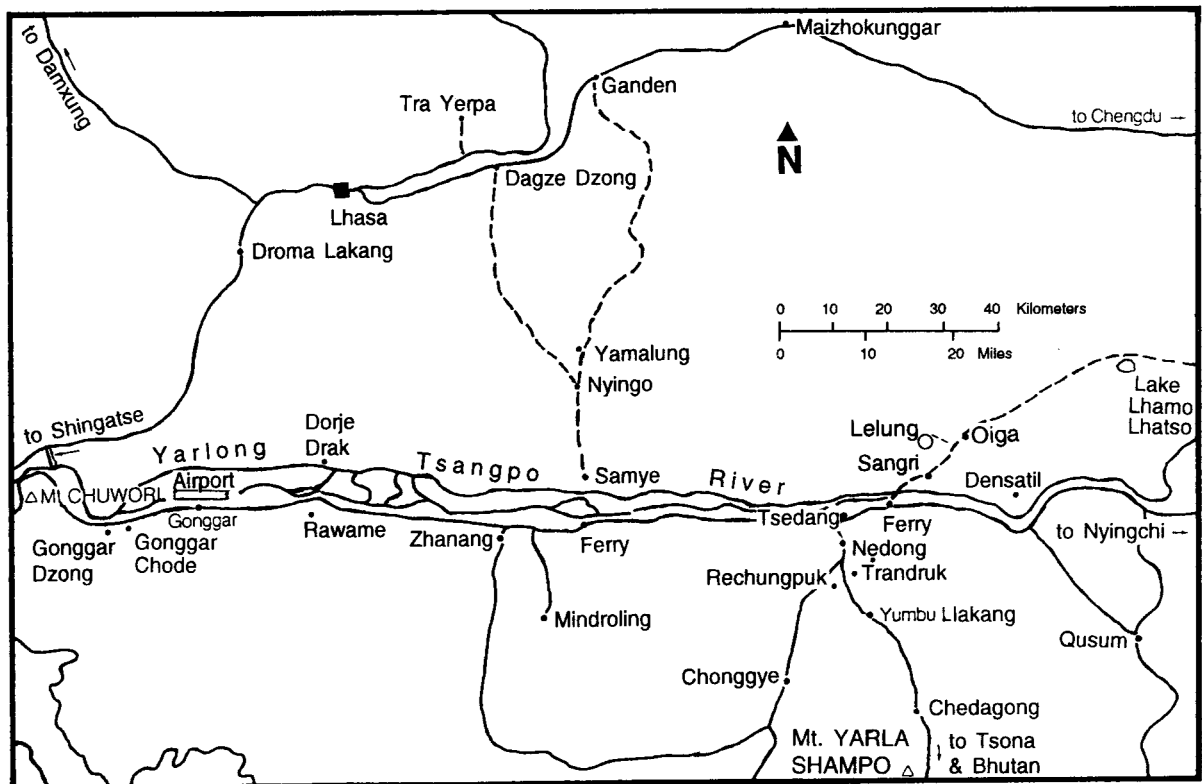


Figure 3: Map of central Tibet including the location of the Sle lung Valley.
Reproduced from Loden 2013: 253.

Chapter 1: The Lama – The Sle lung *sprul sku*

The Mahāsiddha from Lho brag

The man retroactively identified as the first Sle lung Rin po che was Lho brag Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1326-1401), also known as Lho brag Grub chen (Mahāsiddha, "Greatly Accomplished One"). The first part of his title derives from his birthplace in Lho brag county, in the southwestern part of the district of Lho kha which is south-by-southeast of Lhasa, on what later became the border between Tibet and Bhutan. His father, Nam mkha' bzang po, was a Rnying ma master of the Shud phu clan, spiritually if not genetically descended from Shud phu Dpal gyi seng ge, one of the ministers of King Khri Srong lde'u btsan (742-796) who belonged to the same clan.¹⁸

As is the case with most great Tibetan religious teachers, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan is credited with miraculous powers of learning and visionary experiences at a very young age, which would continue throughout his life. By age five, his father had already given him Vajrakīlaya and *rdzogs chen* ("Great Perfection") empowerments, the latter being the most soteriologically and philosophically advanced teachings of the Rnying ma school. At age seven he was given lay vows and Bka' gdams pa *lam rim* ("graduated path") teachings by his uncle, Rgyal sras bzang po (1295-1369). He is said to have received both major lineages of Bka' gdams pa teachings transmitted by 'Brom ston pa (1004/5-1064), the so-called Dgon pa ba (Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan, 1016-1082) to Sne'u zur pa (Ye shes 'bar, 1042-1118) lineage, and the Spyan snga ba (1033/8-1103) to Bya yul ba (Gzhon nu 'od, 1075-1138) line.¹⁹

¹⁸ <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Pelgyi-Sengge/6653>

¹⁹ Loden 2013: 21, 26. See also Jinpa 2013: 47-48, 58, 81, and 86 for profiles of these early Bka' gdams pa masters. The Sle lung *sprul sku* lineage would eventually be recognized as reincarnations of the Bka' gdams pa master Po to ba Rin chen gsal (1027-1105), one of the three main disciples of 'Brom ston pa (Loden 2013: 17). See also Roesler (2011) for a detailed study of this figure.

Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan first visited Lhasa when he was nineteen and while there he is said to have met a "ferocious black-colored man in a black robe" at Ra mo che Temple, whom Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan identified as an emanation of the protector deity Mahākāla. The man is said to have told him to go to Rin chen sgang, where he received full monastic ordination. By his early twenties he had settled in Sgro ba dgon, an important eleventh or twelfth century Bka' gdams pa monastery in Lho brag, on a more or less permanent basis. Here he received a number of teachings and tantric empowerments, perhaps most notably given the later reputation of the Sle lung *sprul sku* lineage, the empowerment of "Vajrapāṇi with five *garudas*." Soon after Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan became the abbot of Sgro ba dgon in 1357 at the age of thirty one, it is said he was receiving teachings from Vajrapāṇi directly.²⁰

Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, in addition to his apparent emphasis on Bka' gdams pa teachings, also seems to have played a pivotal role in the transmission of the early *snying thig rdzogs chen* of the Rnying ma school. Specifically, as Franz-Karl Ehrhard has identified in studying Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's collected works, the master from Lho brag was involved in the early transmission of the extremely important *Mkha' 'gro snying thig gter ma* cycle of Padma Las 'brel rtsal (1291-1316). The *Mkha' 'gro snying thig* was a key influence on the thinking and work of the most important philosophical exegete of the Rnying ma school, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's contemporary, Klong chen Rab 'byams pa (1308-1364). According to Ehrhard, it is probable that Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and his lineage of students were at least indirectly linked to Klong chen pa and his followers.²¹

²⁰ Loden 2013: 22-23.

²¹ Ehrhard 1992: 54.

While there is no evidence that I know of to indicate Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan ever met with Klong chen pa, he did meet and later carry out extensive correspondence with another famous and highly influential contemporary, Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357-1419), the (also retroactively identified) founder of the Dge lugs pa school. It is said Tsong kha pa shared a teacher-student relationship with Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan from a previous life, and Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan received a number of miraculous dreams and prophecies heralding Tsong kha pa's visit to Sgro ba dgon, which he did in 1396 on his way to India for the purposes of study and pilgrimage. Given Sgro ba dgon's history as an important Bka' gdams pa center, and Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's qualifications as a Bka' gdams pa teacher, it is no surprise that Tsong kha pa, who was intent on revitalizing the ethical and reformist trends of the Bka' gdams pa teachings, would have paid him a visit.²²

Still, that Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan had such a close connection to two such monumental (and in some ways opposing, given the later history of enmity between some segments of the Dge lugs pa and Rnying ma traditions²³) figures as Klong chen pa and Tsong kha pa is quite interesting. As Ehrhard puts it:

...we...see in the southern Tibetan province of lHo-brag and in the valley of Bum-thang in Mon at the transition from the 14th to the 15th century the formation of two religio-spiritual movements: the reformation undertaken by Tsong-kha-pa, spreading out over Central Tibet, and the diffusion and further development of the teachings of Klong-chen Rab-'byams-pa in Bhutan. The point at which these two movements crossed - in a way that we can retrace - was a set of instructions on the "practice of Clear Light" and the person of lHo-brag Grub-chen.²⁴

²² For an examination of Tsong kha pa as "reformist" and his emphasis on ethics, see Napper (2001).

²³ This is not to say that Klong chen pa and Tsong kha pa themselves would necessarily have disagreed on anything. In fact, as we shall see, there is every reason to believe that Tsong kha pa accepted the very *rdzogs chen* teachings that Klong chen pa emphasized (through Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan), teachings which would become so controversial for later Dge lugs pa thinkers.

²⁴ Ehrhard 1992: 56.

However, it would be Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's association with Tsong kha pa that would have the greater historical and religious significance, at least until the early eighteenth century when the *Mkha' 'gro snying thig rdzogs chen* teachings of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan were revived by the Fifth Sle lung Rin po che, Bzhad pa'i rdo rje, who is the main focus of this study.

There were a number of significant results from the meeting at Sgro ba dgon, during which time Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and Tsong kha pa exchanged teachings, and their subsequent correspondence. First, it appears that Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was pivotal in convincing Tsong kha pa to suspend his planned trip to India and remain in Tibet, since Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan predicted that should he go, he would be unable to return to Tibet before he died.²⁵ There is also the famous story that, during the exchange of teachings, Tsong kha pa is said to have recognized Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan as Vajrapāṇi himself, while Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan indentified Tsong kha pa as a manifestation of Mañjuśrī, prefiguring this famous and standard identification in Dge lugs pa hagiographies of Tsong kha pa.²⁶

Beyond these pure vision reports, the teachings that Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan reportedly gave Tsong kha pa are of particular interest. What likely drew Tsong kha pa to Sgro ba dgon in the first place was Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's *lam rim* teachings of the so-called Sne'u zur pa and Bya yul ba lineages, which Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan is

²⁵ Loden 2013: 26.

²⁶ See Ary 2015: 15-22. Notably, however, while Ary discusses Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's prophecy implicitly warning Tsong kha pa away from India (p. 33), he does not mention Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's vision of Tsong kha pa as Mañjuśrī. This somewhat problematizes Ary's general argument that the equation of Tsong kha pa with Mañjuśrī was a comparatively late, internally Dge lugs pa, hagiographical development. It should also be noted, however, that Mañjuśrī was not the only deity Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan associated with Tsong kha pa. For instance, in the *Zhus lan sman mchod bdud rtsi phreng ba* (discussed below), Vajrapāṇi is credited with telling Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (here called "Karmavajra") that Tsong kha pa (here called "Matibhadraśrī") is externally blessed by the goddess Sarasvatī (notably one of Mañjuśrī's consorts in the Tibetan tradition) and Guhyajñāneśvarī internally (Thurman 2006: 248). The mention of this latter goddess is particularly interesting (though probably coincidental) given the importance of "Guhyajñānādākinī" to the Fifth Sle lung, discussed in chapter two.

said to have integrated "like two streams of water converging."²⁷ Along with a number of deity empowerments, it seems that these Bka' gdams pa teachings were the bulk of what Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan passed on to Tsong kha pa. In fact, "the greater portion of the *Lam rim* precepts upon which Tsong-kha-pa based the Dge-lugs-pa synthesis passed through Lho-brag Grub-chen."²⁸ However, more interesting given Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's later work, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan also gave *rdzogs chen* teachings to the Dge lugs pa founder in the form of at least three thematically similar treatises. These are the *Zhus lan sman mchog bdud rtsi phreng ba* (*The Garland of the Highest Medicinal Ambrosia Interview*), the *Zhus len rdo rje'i phreng ba* (*The Garland of Vajras Interview*), and the *Zhu len gces phreng* (*The Crucial Garland Interview*).²⁹ These texts were all said to be revealed to Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan by Vajrapāṇi. The second two were written before the first meeting with Tsong kha pa, while the first was said to have been a question-and-answer dialogue between Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and Vajrapāṇi that occurred in Tsong kha pa's presence in 1396.³⁰ Ehrhard points out that Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's *Zhus lan sman mchog bdud rtsi phreng ba* appears to be an adaptation of the *Zhus len bdud rtsi gser phreng* (*Golden Medicine Garland Interview*) from the *Mkha' 'gro snying thig* cycle, where the question-and-answer dialogue format also appears, except the exchange is between Guru Padmasambhava and his primary consort Ye shes mtsho rgyal (8th century).³¹

²⁷ Loden 2013: 26.

²⁸ This is Tshering Dargye's assessment in his introduction to the 1972 edition of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's collected works (LGGB). This edition contains two texts recording the meetings between the two masters, and one written at Tsong kha pa's request, all consecutive in volume one. First is a secret autobiographical account, the *Gsang ba'i rnam thar log rtog mun sel* (pp. 171-194), the second is a short transcript of an interview with Tsong kha pa, the *Rje gtsong kha pa'i zhu len* (pp. 195-198), and the last is another account of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's visionary experiences, the *Bka' bstod lan bstan* (pp. 199-206).

²⁹ Ehrhard 1992: 52-53.

³⁰ Thurman 2006: 235. Thurman here gives a translation of the *Zhus lan sman mchod bdud rtsi phreng ba* (pp. 235-253).

³¹ Ehrhard 1992: 53.

The subject of the *Zhus lan sman mchog bdud rtsi phreng ba* is practical instructions on *rdzogs chen* meditation techniques and the realization of clear light, specifically the different obstacles that may arise during meditation and how to counter them. It also argues against certain mistaken views and techniques in which, we can presume, some *rdzogs chen* practitioners engaged (else the dialogue would not have bothered to address them). To give a few examples to illustrate some of the main themes of the text, Vajrapāṇi instructs that one major pitfall of meditation is a simple mental blankness and "Thinking that there is no good and bad...[and that] virtue has no reward, sin brings no harm."³² Another pitfall it highlights is that of partiality, in which one divides the Buddha's doctrine into high and low, and makes critical judgments for or against certain scriptures or teachings.³³ Vajrapāṇi also, interestingly, specifically advocates leaving the monastery to meditate, since this is given as a place where passions, defilements, attachment, and aversion flourish. Vajrapāṇi also clarifies how passions should be brought onto the path of tantric meditation and is implicitly critical of practicing with a physical consort.³⁴ This last point seems very much in line with Bka' gdams pa ethical critiques of tantra, though as we shall see when we explore these themes in more detail in chapter two, *rdzogs chen* is often generally critical of physical sexual practice.

But perhaps the most interesting aspect of Vajrapāṇi's instruction in the *Zhus lan sman mchod bdud rtsi phreng ba* is the implicit equality made between the *rdzogs chen* view and the *Prāsaṅgika Madhyamakha* philosophy advocated by Tsong kha pa,

³² Thurman 2006: 239. Interestingly, this is the traditional Tibetan criticism of Ch'an Buddhism supposedly mainly advocated (unsuccessfully) in Tibet by Hwashang Moheyen (8th century). *Rdzogs chen* has historically been conflated with Ch'an by critics of *rdzogs chen* (Karmay 2007: 65) and thus this may be what the *Zhus lan sman mchog bdud rtsi phreng ba* is responding to. Though, as van Schaik has shown (2015: 135), Moheyen specifically criticized mental blankness as well, so the characterization of Ch'an as mental blankness is a straw man argument to begin with.

³³ Thurman 2006: 240. Effectively the text argues in favor of a *ris med* ("unbiased" or "non-partisan") view or attitude, a theme which will be highly relevant in our discussion below.

³⁴ Thurman 2006: 245, 247.

which privileges Candrakīrti's (c. 600-650) interpretation of Nāgārjuna (c. 1st/2nd century).³⁵ When Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan asks if *rdzogs chen* is the perfect view, Vajrapāṇi responds: "The Great perfection is an exalted view, and also the elucidation of the view by Masters Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti is without error. It is impossible to generate transcendent insight without relying on them."³⁶ A scribal note appended at the end of the text confirms the idea that *Madhyamaka* and *rdzogs chen* are ultimately different names for the same realization.³⁷ But as Thurman significantly points out, a further (later interpolated) editorial note in the Bkra shis lhun po edition of the text (not available to me) appears to take exception with this "*rdzogs chen* positive" view.³⁸

We can presume this second note was written after the Dge lugs pa had formed a powerful ecclesiastic authority which achieved political ascendancy in Tibet, when the doctrines and philosophies of rival schools were suppressed, often violently, as will be discussed in more detail below. Specifically, the Rnying ma practitioners of *rdzogs chen* would become particular targets for certain Dge lugs pa polemicists. Ironically, though Tsong kha pa appears to have integrated the "two streams" (to borrow the metaphor) of the Bka' gdams pa *lam rim* and the Rnying ma *rdzogs chen* from Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, the latter was forgotten in favor of the former among Tsong kha pa's later followers. It would be within this Dge lugs pa ecclesiastic authority, Tsong kha pa's legacy, that the recognized reincarnations of the Mahāsiddha from Lho brag would play significant parts.

³⁵ Shantarakshita 2010: 21.

³⁶ Thurman 2006: 251.

³⁷ Thurman 2006: 253.

³⁸ Thurman 2006: 287, n.13.

The Early Sle lungs and the Rise of the Dge lugs pa

The Second through Fourth Sle lungs represent a thematic group that set them apart from the first, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, before them, and the Fifth, Bzhad pa'i rdo rje, after them. They were what could best be characterized as thoroughly institutionalized Dge lugs pa prelates. They were involved in the growth of the early Dge lugs pa school as an institutional power, both in terms of their roles as official ecclesiastical hierarchs, and their activities to help spread and support, first and foremost, Dge lugs pa monastic establishments. They maintained a successive teacher-student relationship with the Third and Fourth Dalai Lamas, in an arrangement similar to (if somewhat lesser-known than) the teacher-student mentorship between the later Dalai Lamas and the Panchen Lamas. Also, as far as I know, there is no evidence to indicate they were involved in any significant way with the Rnying ma teachings that are at least half the legacy of the Mahāsiddha from Lho brag. Rather the second, third, and fourth Sle lungs seem to have set the conservative clerical trend that Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's Rnying ma revivalism would end up rebelling against (intentionally or not).

The man recognized as the Second Sle lung was Sngags ram pa Dge 'dun bkra shis (1486-1559), born in Tsang province eighty-five years after the death of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan. In his early life, beginning at the age of eight, he studied at Bkra shis lhun po Monastery, which in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was the newly formed Dge lugs pa school's outpost in the Tsang region which was then the stronghold of the Dge lugs pa's main religious and political rival, the Karma bka' brgyud.³⁹ Dge 'dun rgya mtsho (1475-1542), who was later recognized as the reincarnation of the founder of Bkra shis lhun po, Dge 'dun grub pa (1391-1474), both

³⁹ The rulers of Tsang would remain patrons of the Bka' brgyud for many years, while the main patrons of the Dge lugs pa at the time were based in the Dbus region to the east (Shakabpa 2010: 290, van Schaik 2011: 112).

of whom were later recognized as the first two Dalai Lamas, was also studying there at the same time. The two men apparently were close friends, because when Dge 'dun rgya mtsho was expelled from Bkra shis lhun po because of personal tensions with the abbot, Dge 'dun bkra shis went with him.⁴⁰ It is unclear to me if Dge 'dun bkra shis was recognized as Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's reincarnation during his life, or if this was a connection that was retroactively made during the time of his successor. However, Dge dun bkra shis lived during a period when reincarnate *sprul sku bla mas* became the primary leaders of the Dge lugs pa tradition.⁴¹

Fresh out of Bkra shis lhun po, Dge 'dun rgya mtsho went to construct his own monastery at Chos 'khor rgyal (often known simply as "rgyal") in the Rkong po region in 1509.⁴² Chos 'khor rgyal would later become known as the personal monastery of the Dalai Lamas, and is close to Lha mo bla mtsho, the oracle lake of Dpal ldan lha mo, the primary protector goddess of the Dalai Lamas.⁴³ Dge 'dun bkra shis travelled to Khams to help fundraise for the construction of Chos 'khor rgyal, and donated a large golden statue of Maitreya to the new monastery, along with *maṇḍalas* of the three main meditational (*yi dam*) deities of the Dge lugs pa school.⁴⁴ When Dge 'dun bkra shis died in 1559, his remains were enshrined in the Maitreya temple at Chos 'khor rgyal.⁴⁵

After the death of Dge 'dun rgya mtsho, beginning in 1546, Dge 'dun bkra shis served for a time as the eighth abbot of the largest Dge lugs pa monastery in Khams,

⁴⁰ Loden 2013: 31, Richardson 2003: 556. For the circumstances surrounding this expulsion, see Mullin 2005: 68-69.

⁴¹ This is Georges Dreyfus's assessment, as quoted by Derek Maher in his annotation of Shakabpa (2010: 294).

⁴² Richardson (2003: 556) gives the date of 1506, while Shakabpa (2010: 295) and Mullin (2005: 83) give 1509.

⁴³ See Mullin 2005: 103-104 for a biographical account of Dge 'dun rgya mtsho invoking Dpal ldan lha mo at this lake in order to repel an army attempting to sack Chos 'khor rgyal in 1537. Given that the monastery was saved by the sudden arrival of the forces of a friendly local king, this invocation was apparently successful.

⁴⁴ Guhyasamāja, Cakrasamvara, and Vajrabhairava. Loden 2013: 31-32.

⁴⁵ Loden 2013: 40.

Chab mdo byams pa gling. It was here that he welcomed the young reincarnation of Dge 'dun rgya mtsho, Bsod nams rgya mtsho (1543-1588). He is recorded as transmitting a massive suite of tantric teachings and empowerments to the new incarnation, including the three main Dge lugs pa *yi dams* as well as Kālacakra, and is said to have composed a special practice liturgy of the *Catuṣpīṭha Tantra*.⁴⁶ Apparently Dge 'dun bkra shis's learning and skill as a *vajra* master were so great that he earned the praise of the Gnas chung oracle while he was in trance. The oracle also is said to have told him to have a statue of Padmasambhava constructed at Gnas chung monastery, which he did.⁴⁷ It seems that Dge 'dun bkra shis was long remembered as one of the most important teachers of Bsod nams rgya mtsho. In one of the autobiographical writings of his past lives, the Great Fifth Dalai Lama reports that after Bsod nams rgya mtsho physically died, he performed a meditation on the protector deity Mahākāla during the post-mortem state which was reportedly taught to him by Dge 'dun bkra shis.⁴⁸

The Third Sle lung, Bstan pa rgya mtsho (1560-1625) was born only about a year after the death of Dge 'dun bkra shis, and was recognized as the reincarnation by the age of three. It is said the circumstances of his birth coincided with a prophecy left by his previous incarnation. He was given a large estate near Chos 'khor rgyal, and as a boy toured the important sites of his predecessor such as Chab mdo byams pa gling.

⁴⁶ Probably a liturgy to the deity Yogāmbara and his consort Jñānaḍākinī, who are the main buddha-couple of the *Catuṣpīṭha*. This is probably coincidental to the Jñānaḍākinī goddess that would become so important for Bzhad pa'i rdo rje (see chapter two).

⁴⁷ Loden 2013: 37. This is one of the few seemingly Rnying ma-related activities that I have seen in connection with the early Dge lugs pa Sle lungs, though there may have been no more significance to this than reinforcing the longstanding connection between Pe har, the deity of the Gnas chung oracle, and Padmasambhava, who is believed to have tamed him.

⁴⁸ Loden 2013: 39. That Dge 'dun bkra shis would be remembered for transmitting this particularly profound Mahākāla practice is logical in light of the special reputation of the Sle lungs as masters of protector deities (see chapter three). Dge 'dun bkra shis was in four Mahākāla practice lineages passed down to the Fifth Dalai Lama (<http://www.tbrc.org/#!/rid=P2311>, accessed 4/12/2016). His subsequent incarnation, Bstan pa rgya mtsho, was in the transmission lineages of five other Mahākāla practices (<http://www.tbrc.org/#!/rid=P5465>, accessed 4/12/2016).

The speed and apparent smoothness of this transition indicates that the Sle lung *sprul sku* was, by this point, firmly established as an institution. It is also with Bstan pa rgya mtsho that we have the first evidence of a Sle lung wielding significant political influence.

At a young age he became a spiritual teacher to the governor of Lhasa. In 1578, at eighteen, he accompanied his main teacher, Bsod nams rgya mtsho, as his attendant to the meeting with the Mongolian leader Altan Khan (1507-1582) near Lake Kokonor, in what would likely be the most pivotal event in the history of the Dge lugs pa ascendancy in Tibet. It was here that the Dge lugs pa first won significant Mongol patronage, and Bsod nams rgya mtsho was bestowed the Mongolian title "Dalai" Lama.⁴⁹ Bsod nams rgya mtsho, likely still attended by the young Sle lung, later met with Altan Khan's son as well in 1586. His fame having spread, Bsod nams rgya mtsho was also invited to Beijing by one of the most important Ming Dynasty rulers of China, the so-called Wanli Emperor (r.1572-1580). Bsod nams rgya mtsho was not able to personally travel to Beijing to accept this invitation before he died in 1588.⁵⁰ Bstan pa rgya mtsho, however, was sent in his stead, where he bestowed several empowerments on the entire royal family.⁵¹ In his later life, he is also recorded as being a teacher of not only the next Dalai Lama Yon tan rgya mtsho (1589-1617), but the Fourth Panchen Lama, Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1570-1662), as well.⁵²

After Bstan pa rgya mtsho's death, there is a twenty-one-year delay before the birth of the next recognized Sle lung, Dge 'dun chos rgyal dbang phyug (1646-1696) who was born, appropriately, near Chos 'khor rgyal in 1646. Interestingly, this was just a few years after the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682),

⁴⁹ Shakabpa 2010: 299-304.

⁵⁰ Richardson 2003: 557.

⁵¹ Loden 2013: 45.

⁵² Loden 2013: 46.

backed by Mongol allies, rose to power as the theocratic ruler of Tibet. Thus it seems likely that after the death of Bstan pa rgya mtsho, the Sle lung *sprul sku* was allowed to lie fallow (so to speak) for two decades before being revived under the Dge lugs pa administration of the Great Fifth.⁵³ Chos rgyal dbang phyug was also the first since Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan to receive a significant biographical treatment. The Fifth Panchen Lama Blo bzang ye shes (1663-1737) wrote a fairly detailed biography entitled *Dge 'dun chos rgyal dbang phyug gi rnam par thar pa grub dbang dgyes pa'i rol mtsho* (*A Sea of the Delightful Play of the Lord of Siddhas, the Biography of Dge 'dun chos rgyal dbang phyug*). This records a number of miraculous events, dreams, and visions that Chos rgyal dbang phyug purportedly experienced, some of which will be discussed in chapter three. Here I will simply note the rather significant fact that the Fifth Dalai Lama performed the role of preceptor when Chos rgyal dbang phyug received full monastic ordination at 'Bras spungs Monastery in 1668.⁵⁴

The Great Fifth Sle lung

While the second through fourth Sle lungs were certainly great religious teachers, political figures, and transmitters of the early Dge lugs pa tradition who were involved in several key historical events, they were one among many reincarnate offices in the early Dge lugs pa. None of them left their mark to the degree that the fifth incarnation, Bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1697-1740), did. The same could be said for the incarnations after the Bzhad pa'i rdo rje. This is mainly due to the disparity between the voluminous literary works written by Bzhad pa'i rdo rje and the paucity of writings

⁵³ Adding to this speculation, the Rnying ma history of the Sle lung lineage, particularly in the person of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, may have appealed to the Fifth who was himself a great practitioner of Rnying ma teachings, including *rdzogs chen*, and a patron of the Rnying ma pa.

⁵⁴ Loden 2013: 53. According to the current Sle lung Tulku, the Sle lung see was established in 'Bras spungs beginning with the sixth incarnation, Blo bzang lhun grub 'phrin las rgyal mtshan (1741-1811). Personal communication 23/10/2014.

left by the other incarnations.⁵⁵ While some of this may be due to historical accident (the other Sle lungs could have written more than is now extant), the fact that so much of Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's work is available and little of the others' work was preserved speaks volumes. Furthermore, plenty of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's writings have been preserved which, given his vital role as one of if not *the* main transmitter of *lam rim* teachings to Tsong kha pa, is both fortunate and logical.

However, Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's surviving work dwarfs Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's. While the latter's *gsung 'bum* fills two volumes, Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's fills thirteen, the first volume of which is a massive, stylistically complex autobiography entitled *Rig pa 'dzin pa blo bzang 'phrin las kyi rtogs pa brjod pa skal bzang dga' ston* (*A Feast of Joy for Fortunate Ones, a Biography of the Knowledge Holder Blo bzang 'phrin las*), Blo bzang 'phrin las being one of several other names of Bzhad pa'i rdo rje. In addition to his already massive *gsung 'bum*, Sle lung also wrote and compiled the sixteen-volume *Gsang ba ye shes chos skor*, discussed in the next chapter, and a number of other individual, "stand-alone" works not included in either of these collections. These include two major works on protector deities (discussed in chapter three) and at least one extensive commentary on the practice of Cakrasaṃvara. Thus his extant works exceed thirty volumes, and this does not include other purported works of his that are apparently not extant.⁵⁶

The sheer amount of Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's writings, particularly when compared with his predecessors, is actually somewhat puzzling. What drove the Fifth Sle lung to

⁵⁵ Excepting the important work of the current Lelung Tulku and Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's writings, TBRC only preserves a single text written by a Sle lung other than the Fifth. This is a fairly short *sādhana* focused on the twenty-one Tārās found in the *Sgrub thabs kun btus*, a collection of rituals of the Sa skya school, entitled *Rje btsun ma sgrol ma nyi shu rtsa gcig gi sgrub thabs rjes gnang dang bcas pa*.

⁵⁶ For instance, Shakabpa (2010) cites a biography of Gter bdag gling pa, entitled *Rdo rje 'dzin pa che mchog 'dus pa rtal* [sic] (*gter bdag gling pa'i nyes gnas blo gsal rgya mtsho*) *gyi rnam thar las 'phros pa byung brjod pa gdung ba'i mun sel*, which I have been unable to locate.

produce so much? The answer to this question may be found in a combination of Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's personal charisma, intelligence, and scholastic drive, as well his contact with a number of other influential personalities, and the politically and religiously momentous times in which he lived. Indeed, the Fifth Sle lung lived in one of the most fractious and politically uncertain periods in Tibetan history prior to the twentieth century. All three of these factors – Sle lung's personality, the important figures with whom he associated, and the geo-political/religious struggles that swirled around him and with which he was in some cases intimately involved – feature prominently in his many writings. Much, if not most of his work, involved the composition and transmission of religious liturgical texts, which are fascinating in their own right and in some cases rare or even unique in Tibetan religious literature. However, his biographical writings (most of which were autobiographical) provide a wealth of information that will be our primary focus in this chapter.

All of Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's biographical works are found in his *gsung 'bum* in more or less chronological order. The first and most significant single work is the massive *Rig pa 'dzin pa blo bzang 'phrin las kyi rtogs brjod*, which is the entire first volume of his collected works. Despite its size it only covers Sle lung's life up to 1724. Other autobiographical works dated after 1724 are scattered through the later volumes of the collected works, with little discernable organization other than rough chronological order. There are also several other biographical works focused on some of Sle lung's important personal acquaintances, the most significant of these being the biography of one of his main gurus, Dam chos bzang po (1677-1724) at the beginning of the second volume of Sle lung's *gsung 'bum*.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Henceforth referred to as "BRGB."

The *Rig pa 'dzin pa blo bzang 'phrin las kyi rtogs brjod* is stylistically and structurally similar to many other Dge lugs pa autobiographies of the same period, which seem to be based on the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama. The similarities include highly detailed records of meetings, rituals performed, and gift exchanges; an ornate and even poetic style of writing and language usage; and what I will call "disclaimers of modesty" or even outright self-deprecation that mainly come in an opening declaration of the reasons for writing the autobiography in the first place. Sle lung, following convention, states that he is simply writing because he was requested to, even though he lacks the proper skill, and even questions his status as a reincarnate lama.⁵⁸

Generally speaking, the *Rig pa 'dzin pa blo bzang 'phrin las kyi rtogs brjod* follows the conventions of the so-called "outer biography," which refers to biographical writings that, for the most part, are acceptable to historians of the materialist, "humanist" persuasion, where the emphasis is less on the author's visionary, religious experiences and more on the physical activities in which he engaged: places he travelled, people he met, and teachings or objects given or received. Certain events such as momentous dreams are related, and various religious assumptions are of course firmly in place, but most of what is recorded could be believed to be "real" and "factual" to a materialist scholar.

Sle lung's later, shorter autobiographical writings are more in the category of "inner" or "secret" biography.⁵⁹ Here the emphasis is on recording "pure vision"

⁵⁸ Though Sle lung states that he trusted the great masters who recognized him as such. See the opening section of the autobiography, *Blo bzang 'phrin las* 2009: 1-9. A very similar convention is found in the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography (see Karmay 2014: 17-21). The 2009 edition of *Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's* autobiography was edited, produced, and gifted to me by the current Lelung Tulku. I will here mainly refer to it as opposed to the version found in the BRGB because it has been easier to study in this updated form, which also corrects numerous spelling and grammatical mistakes found in the xylograph edition.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that Sle lung does not make these clear-cut genre distinctions, which are often imposed by Western scholars, between his different autobiographical writings. Although he does seem to make some distinction in that, for instance, his "secret" biographies are often titled as "*dag snang*"

experiences, wherein the author discusses the perception of, and even interactions with, deities. The modern scholar will have difficulty interpreting the events recorded in these accounts literally, though there are a number of interpretive strategies that could be employed, or reductionist motives imputed on the author, to make sense of these accounts from a materialist perspective, ranging from the psychological to the politically Machiavellian. For the most part, in the account of Sle lung's life that follows, I will discuss events from primarily an "outer" biographical perspective. However, I will mention certain "inner" details as well, in this chapter and especially in chapters two and three. As stated in the introduction, my approach will draw on these numerous interpretive strategies, while attempting to maintain phenomenological detachment and ontological neutrality that avoids reductionism.

Early Life

The Fifth Sle lung, who as an infant was given the simple first name of Tshe ring, was born in the fifth month of the twelfth Fire Ox year, which was the summer of 1697. Sle lung's father, Kun dga' rgyal po, and his mother, Rgyas phur chos 'dzoms, were both former monastics at *dgon pas* near Zangs ri mkhar dmar in the region of Lho kha, who had given back their vows.⁶⁰ Sle lung was born in the area of Zangs ri mkhar dmar, where in the twelfth century the famed female master of *gcod* ("cutting") practice, Ma gcig lab sgron, and her students had their main place of spiritual retreat.⁶¹ This was approximately a year and a half after the previous Sle lung, Dge 'dun chos rgyal dbang phyug, had died,⁶² and was a period of uncertainty for the ruling theocratic Dge lugs pa

("pure visions"). On the distinction between outer, inner, and secret biographical Tibetan literature, see Gyatso (1998).

⁶⁰ See Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 10-15.

⁶¹ Edou (1996).

⁶² Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 20.

administration in central Tibet. His birth took place around the same time that the regent of the central Tibetan administration, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705), was gradually revealing the death of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama to other government and religious officials after a sixteen-year courtly facade of pretending the Dalai Lama still lived. The Sixth Dalai Lama, Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho (1683-1706), was formally recognized and took office at about this same time.

The next year, 1698, after the parents and their new child had moved in with Rgyas phur chos 'dzoms's family, the young Tshe ring began to say a number of odd things which led his parents and grandmother to suspect he might be a reincarnate lama. Foremost among these was the child mentioning and gesturing toward the Sle lung valley where previous Sle lungs had a monastic estate.⁶³ In 1699, in his third year, he was officially recognized as the Sle lung *sprul sku*, fulfilling, he claims, the prophecies of multiple dharma protectors at Bsam yas monastery, the Panchen Lama, the Sixth Dalai Lama (he mentions Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho by name), and Smin grol gling gter ston rin po che (probably a reference to the founder of one of the largest Rnying ma monasteries in central Tibet at the time, Gter bdag gling pa (1646-1714)).⁶⁴ The young Sle lung was invited to the monastic residence of his predecessors where he was formally recognized. It is here that he began his education, passing the years of 1700

⁶³ Specifically, he is said to have said "E yung," which was interpreted as a child's distortion of "Sle lung" (Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 20). Sle lung also reports that his mother had a number of portentous dreams before and after his conception and birth. The Sle lung estate, which later became the Fifth Sle lung's main monastery of Rnam grol gling, according to a map in Loden (2013: 253, see Fig. 3), is about five kilometers straight north of Zangs ri mkhar dmar and a few kilometers east of Gdan sa mthil. Zangs ri mkhar dmar is itself on the north bank of the Gtsang po river about sixty kilometers east of Bsam yas. It can be surmised that this estate is the place near Chos 'khor rgyal that Bstan pa rgya mtsho received as a child, since Chos 'khor rgyal is fairly close to Zangs ri mkhar dmar and thus Loden's location of the Sle lung valley.

⁶⁴ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 21. There is also the possibility, however, that this refers to Chos rje gling pa (1622-1720), another very important Rnying ma treasure revealer who would become one of Sle lung's teachers, was based in Smin grol gling, and had the title "Smin gling gter chen rin po che" (Loden 2013: 63).

and 1701 learning to read and write.⁶⁵ It seems that his paternal uncle ("*a khu lags*"), named Chos ldan, to whom he makes many references, was largely responsible for his education and guardianship during his childhood.

In 1702, soon after his fifth birthday, the young Sle lung travelled to Lhasa where he underwent his first initiation, the hair-cutting refuge ceremony which officially made him a Buddhist novice. The ceremony was held at the Potala Palace, presided over by the Sixth Dalai Lama, Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho, now only nineteen years old himself, who just a few months before had had what in modern terms might be called a "meltdown." Publicly embarrassing the regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, he had refused to take full monastic ordination to the point of even threatening to commit suicide. He then even gave up his novice precepts and took up drinking, womanizing, and hunting with a group of laymen friends (some of whom had also renounced monastic vows at the same time) around Lhasa. Amusingly enough, he apparently still presided over official functions, however, as he did with Sle lung's initiation ceremony. Sle lung's autobiography gives a vivid account of the Dalai Lama during the event, where he is described as being dressed in the gaudy clothes of a Tibetan nobleman, wearing a bright blue garment, with long hair and rings on every finger. He was surrounded by a similarly dressed retinue of friends who were holding bows and arrows.⁶⁶ Sle lung reports that Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho joked that he would give the young *sprul sku* the initiation name of "A ne ting ting sgrol ma" ("Nun Tinkling Tārā"),⁶⁷ before seriously giving him the name Blo bzang grub pa'i rgyal

⁶⁵ This period is described in Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 31-45.

⁶⁶ That Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho was able to get away with the violation of decorum seems to illustrate just how little control Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, and other officials like the Fifth Panchen Lama Blo bzang ye shes, had over him.

⁶⁷ "Tinkling" in the sense of a ringing sound.

mtshan. Sle lung reports that following the ceremony the Dalai Lama and his friends immediately went to the park behind the Potala to hunt game.⁶⁸

Another famous account of Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho during this period also comes from Sle lung's autobiography. Two years later in 1704 both Sle lung and Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho happened to be in a village called Tsha rting kha, while the Dalai Lama was travelling back (presumably to Lhasa) from Chos 'khor rgyal after a visit. Sle lung reports that, from a rooftop, he saw him calmly teaching, writing, and singing without being fazed by the chaotic drunken revelry of his retinue (which included another reincarnate lama) happening around him. It is implicit from the account that Sle lung viewed this incident as proving Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho's skill in mindfulness and spiritual realization.⁶⁹

The year or two after his hair-cutting ceremony appears to have been a trying time for the young lama. He reports that an official at the Sle lung estate effectively stole his inheritance, that is, the wealth of the previous Sle lung, Dge 'dun chos rgyal dbang phyug. After his death, his material possessions had passed into the care of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho.⁷⁰ The official from Sle lung apparently swindled these things, and other objects had been simply confiscated and kept by the government authority. The young Fifth Sle lung was effectively left impoverished to the point that he had difficulty acquiring adequate food.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 49-50. See also Shakabpa 2010: 397 and Stoddard (1986). Given that Sle lung himself similarly acquired a reputation for a Mahāsiddha-like disregard for monastic propriety, it is rather serendipitous that Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho was the preceptor of his first initiation, and perhaps made a significant impression on the young *sprul sku*.

⁶⁹ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 57. See also Shakabpa 2010: 408.

⁷⁰ This is mentioned in Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 21, where it is said that after the death of the Fourth Sle lung all the "various outer and inner things of Sle lung were offered to the regent" (*dpal rab khang gsar brgyud de sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtshor sle lung dgon gyi phyi nang gi dngos po che phra tshang ma zhus par de don bzhin gnang*). (Note on transliteration: here and throughout I transliterate the passage as written in the original source without correcting any spelling mistakes or orthographic errors that may be present.)

⁷¹ Loden 2013: 62.

Fortunately, conditions would soon improve. In 1705 it came time for Sle lung, now in his eighth year, to take his novice monastic vows. Since Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho had given his own vows back several years before and thus was technically unable to act as a monastic preceptor, Sle lung instead was brought to the next highest-ranking Dge lugs pa monastic official, the Panchen Lama at Bkra shis lhun po. Taking the novice monastic vows, he received the name Blo bzang 'phrin las from Blo bzang ye shes along with a donation of wealth to improve his living conditions. He also received his first major suite of empowerments and teachings on a number of sutric and tantric scriptures from the Panchen Lama and other teachers as well. In this period, he also engaged in his first meditation retreat.⁷² During this time, Sle lung seems to have received his first major tantric initiations, specifically the three major Dge lugs pa *yi dam* deities of Guhyasamāja, Cakrasaṃvara, and Vajrabhairava. Sle lung reports that during these empowerments, during the initiatory flower-casting, his flower fell within the lotus family section of all three *maṇḍalas*. Thus he was given the secret initiatory name of Padma Bzhad pa'i rdo rje.

Meanwhile, in late 1705 and early 1706, the tensions that had been mounting since Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho's flouting of authority came to a catastrophic head. Since 1642, when the Fifth Dalai Lama and his government came to power with the help of Gushri Khan, the Qoshot Mongols had technically been the rulers of central Tibet. The Dalai Lama and his regent (whom the Mongolians were technically supposed to have control in choosing) were officially the vassals of the Mongolians. In practice, however, the Qoshot princes took little interest in running Tibet, and the Dalai Lama and his administration were the de-facto rulers of their own land. Even after it was revealed that Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho had concealed the Fifth's death and was

⁷² Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 59-63.

covertly running the government himself without official Mongolian and Chinese sanction, the Mongolians and Qing seemed little interested in meddling in Tibet. That is until 1703, when a new Qoshot Mongol prince, Lha bzang Khan (d. 1717), killed his brother to take control of the Tibetan region and began to assert his direct authority in Tibetan politics.

The Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho scandal was exacerbated by a botched assassination attempt on one of the Dalai Lama's closest friends directed by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, of which the Dalai Lama was aware. This essentially led to a split government, with seemingly mutual enmity between the two leaders.⁷³ Lha bzang Khan, backed by Qing support, moved to try to re-establish strong, unified political leadership in Lhasa, and the Khan was not particularly well disposed toward either the Dalai Lama or the regent. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho seems to have been something of a personal rival of the Khan's, in politics and diplomacy (Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho evidently made alliance with the Qoshot's main Mongolian rivals, the Dzungars), and even romantic rivals.⁷⁴ After Lha bzang Khan began interfering in Tibetan politics, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho had him poisoned. This was successful except for the fact that the Khan did not die (although he purportedly remained sick from the poisoning for the rest of his life). Then, in 1705, the regent tried to hatch another plot to assassinate the Khan, this time planning to seize and murder him during the Great Prayer Festival in Lhasa. The plot fell through, but Lha bzang Khan, having been warned, was forced to flee the city. He soon returned with an army at his back and Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho quickly capitulated, choosing self-imposed exile.

⁷³ Shakabpa 2010: 396-397, citing Sle lung's biography of Che mchog 'dus pa rstal.

⁷⁴ According to one story they both at one point pursued the woman who would end up becoming Lha bzang Khan's wife (Richardson 1980), and who would end up executing Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho.

Tshe ring bkra shis, Lha bzang's wife, who commanded part of her husband's army, did not allow the regent to escape so easily, however, and almost immediately had him arrested and executed. Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho was soon to follow. In early to mid 1706, pressured by the Qing emperor to handle the embarrassing matter of Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho, Lha bzang Khan declared that, based on his behavior, the Sixth Dalai Lama had been misidentified. Against the protests and even physical resistance of the major Dge lugs pa monastic establishments, who still supported the Dalai Lama despite his unconventional behavior, Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho was taken from the Potala and sent into exile towards China. He died on the road, whether from natural causes or being murdered is unclear. Soon after, Lha bzang Khan forced the recognition of a replacement Sixth Dalai Lama, a student at the Lhasa Lcags po ri medical and astrological college, named Mon pa Pad dkar 'dzin pa, who may have been Lha bzang's son.⁷⁵

In early 1707, after completing his studies with the Panchen Lama, Sle lung travelled on foot to the Lho kha region, to the so-called Mnga' dwags rgyal gsum, which refers to three monastic institutions that were founded by the Second Dalai Lama. These are Mnga' ris grwa tshang, Dwags po grwa tshang, and Chos 'khor rgyal.⁷⁶ All three of these establishments were considered to be officially under the authority of the Dalai Lamas from the time of Dge 'dun rgya mtsho. Mnga' ris grwa tshang and Chos 'khor rgyal would be the main places where Sle lung received the remainder of his religious education (at least his Dge lugs pa education). But before his training at these

⁷⁵ These events are recounted in Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 64-76. See also Petech 1972: 8-18.

⁷⁶ Chos 'khor rgyal is approximately sixty kilometers northeast of Zangs ri mkhar dmar, about twenty-five kilometers north of the Yar lungs Valley and the Gtsangs po River. Mnga' ris grwa tshang is close to the Gtsangs po, on the north bank, less than twenty kilometers west of Zangs ri, but about seventy-five kilometers southwest of Chos 'khor rgyal. Dwags po grwa tshang is itself about seventy-five kilometers west of Mnga' ris grwa tshang, and is about fifty kilometers almost straight south of Lhasa. The closest of these three monasteries to Bkra shis lhun po is Dwags po grwa tshang, but it is about 175 kilometers away, about straight east, making Sle lung's claim that he travelled on foot there fairly impressive (see "Map 35" in Ryavec 2015: 134-135).

institutions could really begin he was invited to take part in the enthronement ceremony of the new Sixth Dalai Lama. Lha bzang Khan seems to have wanted to make the event particularly auspicious by having multiple other important Dge lugs pa prelates-in-training take full monastic ordination at the same time, Sle lung among them.⁷⁷ Unable to refuse, Sle lung went to Lhasa to participate in the ceremony. Given the controversy surrounding the new Dalai Lama, now known by his new name Ye shes rgya mtsho, and what had just happened to Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho, whom Sle lung clearly admired, it is not surprising that he was reluctant to participate in this event.

In fact, by Sle lung's account, the enthronement and mass ordination ceremony, though presided over by the Panchen Lama, was something of a farce. It took place in the second month of 1707, before the famous Jo bo statue in Tibet's oldest Buddhist shrine in Lhasa. According to Sle lung, many of the candidates for monastic ordination were unqualified, and thus in his eyes, the ordination was mere pantomime and did not really "count."⁷⁸ This is rather interesting in light of Sle lung's later conflicts with the monastic authorities over his practice and advocating of sexual tantric practices, discussed in more detail below. While he was technically a fully ordained monk (in the eyes of Dge lugs pa officials), since he clearly did not view his ordination in 1707 as legitimate, it may be that from his perspective his engagement in consort practices was morally unproblematic.⁷⁹

Sle lung appears to have returned to Lho kha soon after the ceremony to pursue his studies away from the capital. He is said to have been invited to study at Se ra Monastery, one of the three main Dge lugs pa monastic colleges flanking Lhasa, where

⁷⁷ In fact, it is likely that Sle lung was the most high-ranking lama in attendance to receive ordination, since Shakabpa (2010: 422) reports that Pad dkar 'dzin pa was given the title of "Precious Abbot" because he was Sle lung's preceptor.

⁷⁸ Loden 2013: 63.

⁷⁹ The travel to Mnga' dwags rgyal gsum and enthronement/mass ordination in Lhasa is discussed in Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 84-93. See also Shakabpa 2010: 409.

previous Sle lungs had apparently studied, but he declined.⁸⁰ Given that another one of the three colleges, 'Bras spungs, had been shelled and sacked just the year before by Lha bzang Khan's troops when the monks there had tried to rescue Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho, it is understandable why Sle lung (and his handlers) would want to retreat to the relative backwater of Lho kha during the new reign of this often wrathful Mongol usurper king. This seems to have been an especially wise decision in light of the repeated, terrible warfare that would rack the Dbus-Gtsang region over the next two decades.

Religious Education

The next year, 1708, was a major one for Sle lung, as he was installed as the abbot of Chos 'khor rgyal Monastery. For the remainder of Lha bzang Khan's fairly short reign in Tibet, until 1717, Sle lung would spend most of his time in and around Mnga' dwags rgyal gsum.⁸¹ That said, during Lha bzang's rule he still continued to travel extensively, making multiple visits to Lhasa and significant first contact with the nearby "border taming" temple of Khra 'brug in the Yar lungs Valley in 1711,⁸² as well as his first visit to what was at the time the heart of the Rnying ma tradition, Smin grol gling monastery, in 1715.

While the abbot of Chos 'khor rgyal he would complete his monastic studies in line with the standard Dge lugs pa curriculum, which focuses mainly on the topics of *pramāṇa* (logic), *Madhyamaka* philosophy, and the *vinaya* (monastic discipline). His autobiography also records that he became well-versed in various commentarial literature important to the Dge lugs pa, most notably Tsong kha pa's famous *Legs bshad*

⁸⁰ Sle lung Tulku, personal communication 23/10/2014.

⁸¹ Sle lung's discussion of these years is found in Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 84-228.

⁸² For more on the significance of the province-taming temples of which Khra 'brug is possibly the oldest, see Sørensen and Hazod (2005), as well as Gyatso (1987) and Miller (1998).

snying po (*Essence of Eloquence*) treatise on the two truths of *Madhyamaka* philosophy, on which Sle lung wrote his own extensive commentary in 1715 while at Mnga' ris grwa tshang.⁸³ His main spiritual master for this education was a Dam chos bzang po, about whom Sle lung would write a biography after his master's death. Sle lung also seems to have remained in Lha bzang Khan's relative good graces throughout the latter's reign, since his biography records at least three occasions on which Sle lung was invited to give dharma teachings and blessings to the Khan and his court in 1708, 1712, and 1714, as well as their famous meeting in 1717 which will be discussed in more detail below.

It was also during his residency at Chos 'khor rgyal that Sle lung began to study under masters from outside the Dge lugs pa school. These comparatively early formative experience with non-Dge lugs pa teachers, which Sle lung may not have had if he had been closer to the heart of Dge lugs pa orthodoxy such as at Se ra, likely influenced his later, deliberately constructed *ris med* (non-sectarian) identity.⁸⁴ Sle lung makes special note of having received a number of teachings from an apparently 'Brug pa dkar brgyud teacher named Tshangs dbyangs 'brug grags, the third Dung dkar *sprul sku*, in 1708.⁸⁵ Far more significantly, Sle lung met the important Rnying ma treasure revealer Chos rje gling pa,⁸⁶ who seems to have been based in Smin grol gling during this time, in Lhasa, probably in 1712 or 1713. This meeting would have a profound

⁸³ Entitled *Drang nges legs bshad snying po'i dgongs don gsal byed* (BRGB vol. 5, pp. 49-152). Given Sle lung's authorship of this text at such a comparatively young age he seems to have been particularly intellectually skilled, and very much at home in the world of traditional Dge lugs pa scholasticism. For more on the *Legs bshad snying po*, see Thurman (1984).

⁸⁴ Sle lung claims a *ris med* identity, using the specific term, throughout his autobiography. See below for further details.

⁸⁵ Sle lung seems to have maintained a fairly strong connection with the 'Brug pa, since one of his main disciples and possible son, Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje (1721-1769), was recognized as an important *sprul sku* in this tradition (this figure will be discussed in more detail in chapter three).

⁸⁶ Chos rje gling pa was technically a Bka' brgyud pa *sprul sku* based at Ras chung phug, a religious center named after one of Mi la ras pa's main disciples, but he seems to have been personally drawn primarily to Rnying ma teachings (Sardar-Afkhami 1996: 5).

impact on the course of Sle lung's life and career, and would effectively cause him to break with Dge lugs pa orthodoxy and devote most of his later work to reviving and sustaining aspects of the Rnying ma tradition. 1712 was also the first recorded year in which Sle lung received *dag snang*, "pure vision" revelations, though they were not written down until 1731. These visions concerned the propitiation of a "ruthless" (*gtum po*) form of Vajrapāṇi.⁸⁷

Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, Sle lung's meeting with and tutelage under Chos rje gling pa around 1713 is not discussed much, if at all, in Sle lung's "outer" biography. However, it is in at least one later autobiographical account, written in the early 1730s. This later text is ostensibly about Sle lung's main consort, Rdo rje skyabs byed (discussed in the next chapter), but contains several key details about Sle lung himself as well.⁸⁸ First, it discusses the *gter ma* prophecy that Chos rje gling pa gave to Sle lung which purportedly records Padmasambhava's prediction of the Fifth Sle lung's birth. The exact wording of the prophecy is given as:

One having the name *bstan pa*, an emanation of Mañjuśrī in the future, on the bank of the moon plain [in] Mdo smad, will sustain the dharma teachings and benefit many beings. Also, the wondrous emanation of the *bodhisattva* [will] arise near the copper valley. In order to release from obstacles [he] relies on peaceful and wrathful Avalokiteśvara.⁸⁹

The apparent vagaries of the details of this prophecy notwithstanding, Chos rje gling pa is said to have personally recognized Sle lung as the *sprul sku* of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, giving the fifth incarnation a Rnying ma blessing. As far as I know, the second

⁸⁷ Two texts based on these visions are found in Sle lung's collected works, entitled *Dag snang gsang bdag gtum po gtso 'khor gsum pa'i sgrub thabs* and *Dag snang mkha' 'gro'i chos skor las gsang bdag gtum po'i sgrub thabs* (BRGB vol. 12, pp. 201-210).

⁸⁸ This is the *Lha gcig rdo rje skyabs byed kyi 'khrungs khang du dam can rgya mtsho'i bsti gnas gsar du bskrun pa'i deb ther rin po che'i 'phreng ba*, found in the ninth volume of Sle lung's collected works (BRGB: vol. 9, pp. 471-483).

⁸⁹ 'jam dbyangs sprul pa bstan pa'i ming can zhig: ma 'ongs mdo smad zla ba thang gi ngogs: chos 'khor skyong zhing 'gro ba'i don mang byed: yang sprul byang chub sems dpa' ngo mtshar can: ngam gshod zangs kyi 'dabs 'byung de yi ni: bgegs las grol phyir spyen gzig zhi drag bsnyen: BRGB: vol. 9, pp. 472.2-3.

through fourth Sle lungs never received official recognition from a Rnying ma lama in such a manner. Chos rje gling pa is also said to have transmitted a black Mañjuśrī practice and treasure blessing pills⁹⁰ to Sle lung. In 1713, when he was sixteen, on the "plain of flowers" near Chos 'khor rgyal, Sle lung reports in his inner autobiographical account that Chos rje gling pa initiated him into the practice of a rare Rnying ma *gter ma* form of Vajrayoginī, Gsang ba ye shes ("Secret Gnosis").⁹¹ This practice purportedly involved sexual yoga with a female consort.

These significant events do not seem to be reported at all in Sle lung's outer autobiography and it is easy to understand why they were left out. That Sle lung engaged in secret sexual yoga as part of the practice of Rnying ma teachings while he was the ostensibly monastic abbot of a major Dge lugs pa monastery, training in the monastic curriculum, would have been viewed as scandalous to say the least. Sle lung's alter ego, as it were, seems to have been kept fairly well hidden since it apparently did not cause a disruption in his monastic position although, as we shall see below, there is some evidence that by the time the outer biography was written in 1724 his Rnying ma activities were well known. In any case, his outer autobiography reports that just two years after his initiation by Chos rje gling pa, in 1715, he was engaged in rigorous study of the *vinaya*.

1715 was a momentous year for Sle lung on two other counts. First, it was in this year that the Sle lung estate, largely defunct and in disrepair, was renovated and transformed into Rnam grol gling, the religious center at which Sle lung would have his main seat for the rest of his life. It is unclear when he left the abbotship at Chos 'khor rgyal and took up main residency at Rnam grol gling, but his autobiography

⁹⁰ Presumably sacred objects that Chos rje gling pa had discovered as part of his *gter ma* revelations.

⁹¹ The subject of the next chapter.

reports that he continued to pay visits to Chos 'khor rgyal years after the reestablishment of his home estate. In 1715, a year after the death of Gter bdag gling pa, he also travelled to Smin grol gling for the first time and met with the Smin gling founder's son, 'Gyur med rgya mtsho (1686-1718).

During this visit he reports that he practiced Rnying ma teachings. It is unclear whether or not these involved sexual yoga, but the next year, 1716, it is reported that Lha bzang Khan commanded him to take full monastic vows, which he did. This is rather puzzling, given that Sle lung had already apparently taken full ordination in 1707. Either this previous ordination was generally understood to be illegitimate, or it was recognized that Sle lung had broken his vows and needed to retake them. In either case, the fact that this required an order from the king himself is rather interesting and demonstrates, perhaps, Sle lung's personal reluctance to accept monastic vows. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the same section of his autobiography records that, right after his ordination, he fell seriously ill, for which he received treatment from the chief government physician, certainly not a good omen.⁹²

The Dzungar Invasion

1717, arguably the single most momentous year of Sle lung's life, began rather benignly, as he undertook a solitary retreat on the Dge lugs pa *lam rim* in the early months. His meditations would soon be disrupted as the invasion of Tibet by Dzungar Mongols began in the middle of that year. Likely as early as 1715, Tshe dbang rab brtan (1697-1727), the ruler of the Dzungar, had set his sights on attacking central Tibet. Ostensibly this was to avenge the death of their ally, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, at the hands of their Qoshot rivals. But more importantly, it seems to have been an attempt to

⁹² Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 215-228.

counter the Qing Empire's growing influence and authority over Tibet and the cultural capital of Tibetan Buddhism, of which Lha bzang Khan's government was an arm. The Dzungars were by this time engaged in a multi-front war with the Qing, which would last through the first half of the eighteenth century before they were finally utterly destroyed by the Manchus. But in 1715, with the result of the long war very much in doubt, Tshe dbang rab brtan aimed to chop off the Chinese arm in Tibet: Lha bzang Khan and his government.⁹³

In 1717, after lulling Lha bzang Khan into a false sense of security with what was effectively a ruse wedding between the Qoshot leader's son and Tshe dbang rab brtan's daughter, the Dzungar leader invaded Tibet with a two-pronged assault. A large force, several thousand men strong, was sent covertly west to invade through Mnga' ris. Meanwhile, a much smaller force was dispatched to A mdo to rescue the boy whom Dge lugs pa officials had subversively recognized as the true reincarnation of Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho. Lha bzang Khan's enthronement of Pad dkar 'dzin pa as the Seventh Dalai Lama seems to have been badly handled and alienated all parties, including the religious authorities in Tibet and even the Qing imperial court. This would prove to be his downfall, as the Dzungars spread propaganda that their invasion was being done to restore the rightful Seventh Dalai Lama to his seat in the Potala. Unfortunately for the Dzungars, by 1717 the Seventh Dalai Lama was under Qing protection, and the attempt to kidnap him to bring him to central Tibet completely failed. Nevertheless, the Dzungar maintained they indeed had the Dalai Lama in their possession in their correspondence with Tibetan sympathizers.⁹⁴

⁹³ Petech 1972: 32-33. Petech also notes how close Dzungar and Qoshot groups were, since Tshe dbang rab brtan was Lha bzang Khan's brother-in-law.

⁹⁴ Petech 1972: 34.

While the 6000-strong western army approached in preparation for war, Lha bzang Khan, oblivious to these developments, travelled to the hot springs in 'Ol kha, where Sle lung met him for the last time.⁹⁵ Sle lung's autobiography records that the king conveyed regret over his disposal of Tshangs dbyang rgya mtsho. According to Sle lung, Lha bzang Khan compared himself to a hell being with impure vision who was not able to recognize the buddha in front of him, but feared his regret and change of heart meant nothing at that late stage.⁹⁶

Following this comes an account that, during the visit, Lha bzang received spiritual instruction from an unnamed lama and is recorded as having asked a detailed question about the nature of the illusory body in tantric completion stage practice. The religious master replied that the illusory body neither exists or does not exist at the highest stage of accomplishment. Lha bzang Khan then jeered at this answer and waved his hands dismissively. Sle lung goes on to defend the teacher's answer by citing the authority of the Second Dalai Lama. This short scene provides some interesting insight into both Sle lung and the Khan. The latter is shown to be religiously interested, but ultimately rather impious and unsophisticated. Sle lung, on the other hand, uses this incident to show off his learning to the reader, while making Lha bzang look foolish. Thus, despite his admission of regret concerning the Sixth Dalai Lama, the Khan is ultimately depicted as a fairly unsympathetic character. Given these details comparing him to a hell being and his dismissal of profound religious instruction, just prior to the account of his downfall and demise, it can be surmised that Sle lung likely thought that the king had dug his own karmic grave, as it were.

⁹⁵ The town of 'Ol kha is located about half-way between Mnga' ris grwa tshang and Chos 'khor rgyal.

⁹⁶ Aris (1989: 159-160) describes Sle lung and the Khan having "long conversations...over several days," but in my reading of this event (Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 240), it is not at all clear that Lha bzang Khan actually spoke these things to Sle lung personally.

Following this meeting with the king, Sle lung appears to have gone to Chos 'khor rgyal for a short visit, and then back to 'Ol kha. Here he met with an official called "Pho lha tha'i ji," which is almost certainly a reference to none other than Pho lha nas Bsod nams stobs rgyas (1689-1747), who in just a few years would become a centrally important figure in Sle lung's life and the Tibetan government. At this time Pho lha nas was effectively Lha bzang Khan's main general, having distinguished himself in a war against Bhutan a few years before. During the meeting in 'Ol kha, which would likely have been their first, Sle lung records that he gave Pho lha tha'i ji, and other officials, long-life empowerments and protection blessings.⁹⁷

Sle lung spent the early summer of that year in relative peace, though his autobiography mentions that he engaged in a number of protector deity propitiation rituals in the months leading up to the Dzungar arrival in central Tibet. He also mentions continuing construction that was being done to Rnam grol gling at this time, including a number of murals that were painted by artists, including Smin gling 'Gyur med rgya mtsho.⁹⁸ Sle lung particularly notes the creation of murals of protectors that encircled the main chapel, mentioning specifically the deities Tshangs pa dkar po, Beg tse, Mahākāla, and the mountain god Thang lha. Then, back in Chos 'khor rgyal, on the tenth day of the sixth month (mid July), events would accelerate. Sle lung reports a momentous dream in which a beautiful woman appeared to him along with a monk who he thought was the protector Pe har. They advised him to perform many offering rituals to *dharmapālas*, in conjunction with rites of expiation and exorcism, aimed at repelling the encroaching Mongol army.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 242.

⁹⁸ Sle lung seems to have still been mainly based at Chos 'khor rgyal at this time.

⁹⁹ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 243-244.

Around this time, the hostile movements of the Dzungar army had become known to Lha bzang Khan and his officials, and Pho lha nas was tasked with mounting defensive forces, which were composed of mainly Tibetan troops backed by some Mongolian soldiers. This army was quickly mobilized and positioned at 'Dam gzhung, less than a hundred kilometers northwest of Lhasa, near the Gnyan chen thang lha mountain range.¹⁰⁰ It was here that they would meet and resist the Dzungar invasion force, which arrived by the tenth of August.¹⁰¹

Sle lung reports that exorcism rituals (*gtor bzlog*) were carried out at Chos 'khor rgyal in accordance with his prophetic dreams, and that he went to Lhasa to make offerings at protective earth-taming temples, though he mentions being delayed by illness. He also reports that he retrieved a special statue of Tshangs pa dkar po from the important earth-taming temple of Khra 'brug.¹⁰² Tshangs pa dkar po, often conflated with the Indian god Brahmā (whose Tibetan name is also "Tshangs pa") appears to have been a special pre-Buddhist clan deity of the Yar lung dynasty during the early Tibetan Empire. He was later adopted as one of the main protectors of the Dga' ldan pho brang government of the Fifth Dalai Lama.¹⁰³ Khra 'brug is one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Tibet, established in the time of Srong btsan sgam po (c. 617-650), and Tshangs pa dkar po was maintained as the main deity there.¹⁰⁴ That this deity, particularly associated with Tibetan imperial power and what we might call (following Georges

¹⁰⁰ Ryavec 2015: 135.

¹⁰¹ Petech 1972: 37.

¹⁰² Sle lung seems to have maintained a close relationship with this deity. His collected works contain several ritual texts dedicated to Tshangs pa dkar po, and in the inner biographical narrative relating his practice of Rnying ma teachings in 1713 discussed above, Sle lung claims this was prophesized by Tshangs pa dkar po himself.

¹⁰³ See Kalsang 2007: 86-90. For more on this deity see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 145-153, though he makes the mistaken conflation with Brahmā. According to Kalsang, who is mainly sourced by Sle lung's DCTS, discussed in chapter three, Tshangs pa dkar po is more associated with the Indian god Indra, since one of his names is "In dra sems dpa'."

¹⁰⁴ Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 275-287.

Dreyfus) "proto-nationalism,"¹⁰⁵ would be especially invoked during the threat of foreign invasion is no surprise. Sle lung notes that the Khra 'brug statue of Tshangs pa dkar po was taken to Chos 'khor rgyal, where it was blessed, the deity invoked, and many offerings made. Sle lung also wrote a liturgical text dedicated to Tshangs pa dkar po and his retinue during this time, the title of which makes clear that the deity was especially connected to the locale of Khra 'brug.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, Sle lung's autobiography reports extensive invocations, offerings, and hostile exorcism practices that were done in front of a painting of Dmag zor rgyal mo which had been sent from 'Bras spungs.¹⁰⁷

Around late August or early September, Lha bzang Khan's defending force met the Dzungars in battle at 'Dam. While Pho lha nas advocated fortifying positions in the hills with guns, more traditional Mongolian commanders overruled him in favor of meeting the Dzungars in hand-to-hand combat on the open plain. Since the Dzungar forces had superior numbers in terms of cavalry units, this was a disaster for the defenders. Also, it seems that Lha bzang Khan's army, made up mostly of Tibetans who held no particular loyalty to him, lacked organization and the will to fight, and were soon forced to retreat. Pho lha nas and his column attempted a counter-attack against the Dzungar encampment, but were quickly repelled when they did not receive reinforcement.¹⁰⁸

On the twenty-ninth day of the eighth month, Sle lung, as part of a delegation that included officers from Stag rtse Castle near the fighting, apparently attempted to

¹⁰⁵ Dreyfus 1994.

¹⁰⁶ *Khra 'brug chos skyong chen po 'i mchod bstod tshangs pa 'i dgyes skong, Offering and Praise for the Dharma Protector of Khra 'brug: (A Ritual for) Pleasing and Summoning Tshangs pa* (BRGB vol. 7, pp. 63-74).

¹⁰⁷ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 247-248.

¹⁰⁸ Petech 1972: 39-41. Shakabpa (2010: 416) states that there was only scattered fighting at this point, with no significant losses on either side, though Sle lung and Petech's dire reportage make it seem somewhat worse than this.

make diplomatic contact with the Dzungars. Sle lung's account of this is rather harrowing. He reports that the delegation was forced to cross the Skyid chu River, which was swampy at that time, in yakhide boats. They were then apparently able to get close to the Dzungar encampment, because Sle lung describes it in vivid terms, saying that there were dismembered pieces and entrails of slaughtered sheep and cows along with dead and rotting horses around the camp, so that an overwhelming hideous stench hung over the place. He describes it as an "encampment of *rākṣasas*."¹⁰⁹ Sle lung's delegation was apparently not able to actually get into the camp, but while nearby they learned that two Tibetan commanders had been shot (and presumably killed), one by the name of O rong ba, a commander from Kong po, whom Petech notes was killed trying to take a hill to the rear of the Dzungar camp. His death is said to have demoralized a significant percentage of Lha bzang Khan's Tibetan troops.¹¹⁰ Sle lung also reports that a third Tibetan general, named Blo bzang dar rgyas, had been captured and was being used as a slave by the Dzungars. Sle lung says this news in particular caused him to become dejected. Furthermore, the Stag rtse officials that he was with were apparently agitated at not having been able to carry out their mission of making contact with the Dzungars.¹¹¹

Soon after, a larger delegation under the direction of the Panchen Lama who had travelled from Bkra shis lhun po and was staying at the Qoshot camp, attempted again to make diplomatic contact with the Dzungars. Sle lung reports that this was early in the ninth Tibetan month, which would be in mid October.¹¹² Officials from the three major monasteries of Se ra, 'Bras spungs, and Dga' ldan, led by the throne-holder of

¹⁰⁹ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 254.

¹¹⁰ Petech 1972: 39-40.

¹¹¹ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 254.

¹¹² This matches Petech who reports that the defenders managed to stall the Dzungars for two months (1972: 41).

the latter and the commander of Stag rtse, were finally able to approach the camp and attempted to negotiate a truce. Sle lung seems to have acted as a kind of attendant in this delegation. He reports that "the Omniscient One" (probably a reference to the Panchen Lama who was not physically with the delegation) tried to impress on the Dzungars the necessity to abide by the rules of warfare.¹¹³ By all accounts the negotiations did not go well, with the talks inconclusive at best and the Dzungars simply ignoring the pleas of the Tibetans at worst, although the Dzungars do seem to have released some Tibetan prisoners they had captured and insisted (rather unbelievably at this point) that they had not come to make war on Lha bzang Khan. Rather, they continued to claim that they were simply bringing Bskal bzang rgya mtsho (the Seventh Dalai Lama) for the benefit of Tibet (even though they did not have him in their custody and he was far out of their reach by this point).¹¹⁴

After these negotiations failed, the Dzungars immediately pressed their attack. Sle lung's account is here somewhat vague, but he appears to have been in the Qoshot camp during a seige, close enough to the fighting that he was shown "how to dress to be bulletproof,"¹¹⁵ either by some kind of armor or perhaps wearing an amulet for magical protection. He reports that the earth shook from the sound of guns (probably artillery fire), and he saw an officer shot in three places. As the Qoshots and Tibetans were forced to retreat back to Lhasa, Sle lung laments that the Dzungars were like an illness and he a doctor who was woefully inadequate in treating it, "like a child trying to cover the sky with his hands."¹¹⁶ Petech gives another evocative Tibetan report which said that the Dzungar advance was like "a cauldron rolling down a slope."¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 255.

¹¹⁴ Shakabpa 2010: 417.

¹¹⁵ "*mtshon srung gi ched du nged kyi gyon pa*" (Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 256).

¹¹⁶ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 257.

¹¹⁷ Petech 1972: 41.

As the invaders steadily encroached on Lhasa, Sle lung seems to have travelled back and forth between a number of places, mainly Lhasa and Stag rtse Castle. During this period, he reports a dream in which he saw the sun, shining down on Tibet, swallowed by the eclipse demon Rāhu, and the northeast (the lands from which the Mongols came) as a lake of swirling poison. He also reports having an audience with the lord of Stag rtse, who inquired how the war was going. Sle lung, knowing full well there was much fighting, said he "spouted some jewels," saying that there was no fighting and everything was peaceful.¹¹⁸

Leaving Stag rtse he headed first to Bsam yas and then probably back to Rnam grol gling. He says that during this time his main teacher, Dam chos bzang po, was at Smin grol gling receiving the full transmission of teachings on the deity Jinasāgara Avalokiteśvara and his consort Guhyajñānaḍākinī from the treasure revelations of Gter bdag gling pa.¹¹⁹ Dam chos bzang po would then quickly return to transmit these to Sle lung, probably before the year was out. Given what happened to Smin grol gling and its inhabitants during the Dzungar occupation of central Tibet, this was either a lucky coincidence or the parties involved had the foresight to preserve the teachings. Sle lung ends his section on this period by discussing a vast number of Dge lugs pa commentarial treatises he received teachings on, mostly those written by the likes of Tsong kha pa and his disciples. It seems that, faced with the destruction he knew was coming, Sle lung was attempting to learn and preserve as much as possible before the sword finally fell.

By late November, the Dzungar invasion force had encircled Lhasa. Pho lha nas's column, holding the southern sector of the city, was the only one to put up

¹¹⁸ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 258.

¹¹⁹ Discussed in more detail in chapter two.

significant resistance. Combining overwhelming force with help from Tibetan traitors inside the city, the Dzungars sacked Lhasa within days. Lha bzang Khan, after briefly barricading himself inside the Potala, attempted to escape on horseback but was run down and killed, his family arrested. Lhasa and its temples were looted, and a number of nobles and officials were tortured to coerce them into giving up their valuables.

The Dzungars went to work immediately establishing their authority, deposing (though letting live) Pad dkar 'dzin pa, and appointing their own Tibetan regent, none other than Lha rgyal rab brtan, the commander of Stag rtse Castle who had led the early diplomatic effort of which Sle lung had been a part. Stag rtse pa (as he was known) was credited (or blamed) for betraying Lha bzang Khan's family to the Dzungars and was rewarded by being officially made the new regent of the Tibetan government. Actual effective power was still (and would remain) in the hands of Tshe ring don grub, the Dzungar general at the head of the invasion and occupation. Not long after taking Lhasa, in one of the darkest moments of Tibetan history, Tshe ring don grub and other Dzungar officials, at an assembly of a number of important religious officials at the Potala, declared the Rnying ma school to be effectively heretical and outlawed. By all accounts the Dzungars were puritanically sectarian Dge lugs pa, and they undertook an anti-Rnying ma pogrom in what they apparently saw as part of the establishment of order in Tibet.¹²⁰

Sle lung apparently received reports that warned him the Dzungars had malevolent intent toward Smin grol gling, and sent a letter to a Dzungar leader (possibly Tshe ring don grub himself) asking him not to harm the Rnying ma institution that was so personally important to him. The Dzungar leader sent a reassuring response, but Sle

¹²⁰ According to Petech (1972: 53) this purge of the Rnying ma pa was directed by a Dge lugs pa lama of Dzungar birth, named Sgo mangs Bla ma Blo bzang phun tshogs who, given his title, was likely based at Sgo mangs College at 'Bras spungs.

lung's effort appears to have been in vain.¹²¹ Smin grol gling and Rdo rje brag, the two major Rnying ma monasteries in central Tibet, were razed, their statues and libraries destroyed, although apparently a number of religious items from Smin grol gling were saved from this destruction and found their way into Sle lung's hands (discussed in more detail below). A number of important Rnying ma lamas were also arrested, including Gter bdag gling pa's brother, Lo chen Dharma śrī, and son, 'Gyur med rgya mtsho. They and other Rnying ma leaders as well as several important officials in Lha bzang Khan's government were taken to Lhasa and executed on the banks of the Skyid chu River. The *sprul sku* of Rdo rje brag was also arrested and executed. Even Khra 'brug did not escape the sectarian destruction and was attacked and looted, and a famous image of Padmasambhava housed there destroyed.¹²²

Sle lung himself had what might be termed a near miss with the Dzungar occupation forces. Soon after the sack of the capital, either just before or at the same time that Lo chen Dharma śrī and others were executed, in late 1717 or early 1718 (before the Tibetan new year), Sle lung was in Lhasa. He was summoned by someone he refers to as *dpon* ("lord" or "chief"), which again may have been Tshe ring don grub, to a rest house in Lhasa called Khrom gzigz khang. What followed is a fascinating exchange in which Sle lung depicts himself as being polite, but somewhat defiant when the Dzungar lord asked him a series of leading questions, about whether or not Padmasambhava should be considered an authentic teacher, and overtly questioning whether Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (who, it should be remembered in this context, was a great patron and practitioner of Rnying ma teachings) had been the true Fifth Dalai Lama. What began as a questioning appears to have turned into something

¹²¹ Loden 2013: 64.

¹²² Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 265-275, Shakabpa 2010: 420-421.

of a lecture as the lord made it clear that he and his countrymen were convinced that Gzims khang gong *sprul sku* (Grag pa rgyal mtshan (1619-1656)) was the true Fifth Dalai Lama.¹²³ The lord also relates the rumor that Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho was in fact the natural son of Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, who had broken his vows of celibacy with the wife of a previous regent. From the context, it seems that the Mongol lord wanted Sle lung to either confirm or deny these accusations. Sle lung presents himself as being rather taken aback by the questions, though we get very little detail as to how exactly he responded, which leads one to believe that he may not have outright denied the accusations to the lord's face (although there is no way to know). However, he does record that he stated that it was due to the Fifth Dalai Lama's compassion that the teachings of the Dge lugs pa School were able to flourish and spread, thus defending him at least to a degree. The Mongol lord replied that he had never been told that before, and then Sle lung was dismissed.¹²⁴

That this Mongol lord specifically summoned Sle lung to answer for the likes of Padmasambhava and the Fifth Dalai Lama, and given Sle lung's previous letter on behalf of Smin grol gling, it is fairly certain that the Dzungars were aware of his Rnying ma sympathies. While Sle lung does not reflect much on the incident with regards to his personal safety, we can easily speculate that the interrogation at Khrom gzigs khang was possibly a loyalty test of sorts to determine if Sle lung was sufficiently "pure Dge lugs pa." While I know of no reports or evidence that the Dzungars purposefully executed Dge lugs pa lamas, they did crack down on the large Dge lugs pa monasteries under their control, enforcing rigorous monastic discipline, ejecting laymen who had

¹²³ On Grag pa rgyal mtshan and the controversy surrounding his life and death see McCune 2007: 46-63. Believed possibly to have been murdered, he is considered by some to have become the dharma protector and demonic spirit Dol rgyal Shugs ldan, who has subsequently become the symbol of the most radical (at times violently so) sectarian elements within the Dge lugs pa.

¹²⁴ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009:273-274. See also Loden 2013: 65-66.

taken up residence at the institutions, as well as "lamas whose virtue and learning were not above doubt."¹²⁵ Had the true extent of Sle lung's pro-Rnying ma leanings been known, especially his practice of Rnying ma sexual yoga, it is possible he could have been stripped of his position as a Dge lugs pa *sprul sku*. It is even conceivable that he could have joined Lo chen Dharma śrī and the others on the banks of the Skyid chu.

In his autobiography Sle lung makes several narrative asides in which he laments the unmitigated disaster that was the Dzungar invasion and occupation of Tibet. Reflecting on the period of the occupation from 1724, Sle lung admits that not even a nugget of happiness from former times remained, that he was overwhelmed with feelings of anger and grief, and that he felt he did not know whom to trust.¹²⁶ But fortunately for him, the Dzungars permitted the existence of Rnam grol gling, and ultimately he and his community seem to have survived the years of occupation basically physically unscathed. Sle lung remained busy in the two years of the Dzungar occupation, receiving the empowerment for the "Lord of the Dance" (Gar gyi dbang phyug) form of Avalokiteśvara from the revelations of Gter bdag gling pa from his guru Dam chos bzang po. He also reports repeatedly performing the protector practice of Lha chen (Śiva Mahādeva), who is the primary dharmapāla of the Gar gyi dbang phyug cycle teachings, and a particularly Rnying ma protector.¹²⁷

The Inter-War Years

During this period Sle lung also made his first pilgrimage to Tsā ri Mountain, which appears to be his first major foray into a subject and practice that would become one of the most significant aspects of his religious career, namely the exploration and

¹²⁵ Petech 1972: 54.

¹²⁶ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 251.

¹²⁷ Discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

involvement in the tradition of creatively constructing sacred geography. He would make repeated trips to various "hidden lands" (*sbas yul*) over the last two decades of his life, in particular to the most famous of all hidden lands Padma bkod in Kong po, and many others which are recorded in effusive detail in his later, inner biographical writings, discussed in more detail below.

The tradition of "hidden lands," paradisiacal semi-divine places that could nevertheless be physically entered by the spiritually adept, is a largely Rnying ma innovation, with these sacred places mainly identified as being prophesized or visited by Padmasambhava and usually considered repositories of hidden *gter ma* teachings or other treasures.¹²⁸ The Rnying ma interest in hidden lands long predates Sle lung, though there was a surge of interest in them among Rnying ma treasure revealers in the seventeenth century, and then again in the eighteenth century, precipitated by the political persecution of the Mongols. In Tibetan literature, particularly the "guidebooks" (*gnas yig*) of hidden lands (of which Sle lung wrote several), the wild borderlands of Tibet are often depicted as the dark and dangerous abodes of demonic hordes, who are usually conflated with the tribal, non-Buddhist inhabitants of these regions. These places are often regarded with ambivalence at best, but for many Rnying ma lamas (including, as we shall see, Sle lung) these areas outside the stifling control of often hostile governmental authorities became places of spiritual refuge and renewal. As Jacob Dalton nicely summarizes:

Simultaneously dark ravines and hidden paradises, the borderlands and their violent inhabitants operate as both poison and cure for Tibet. They constitute both a terrible threat to Buddhism and a wondrous therapy for Tibet's lost spiritual values, offering hope for regeneration in dark times.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ On the largely Rnying ma character of the Tibetan *sbas yul* tradition, see Sardar-Afkami 2001: 34 ff.

¹²⁹ Dalton 2011: 254.

The so-called "opening" of hidden lands in large part involved the ritual propitiation and conversion of local deities to the status of Buddhist dharma protectors, which went hand-in-hand with proselytizing to the indigenous population, who were in many cases apotheosized with their spirit-world counterparts, becoming a Tibetan version of the "noble savage." In many respects the tradition of deifying wild, untamed natural spaces in Tibet continues the early Buddhist ideal of forest renunciation, as well as the Indian tantric literary trope which deifies the indigenous inhabitants of such places, and specifically targeted "tribal" peoples and deities for conversion.¹³⁰ Chos rje gling pa, the major Rnying ma treasure revealer who had first introduced Sle lung to Rnying ma teachings, fled central Tibet in the wake of the Dzungar invasion and journeyed to Padma bkod with his followers, viewing the invasion as a sign of the Buddhist version of the End Times.¹³¹ He spent three years there, apparently winning a number of converts among the indigenous Klo pa people, before dying of rheumatism.¹³²

While not technically the opening of a "hidden land" per-se, Sle lung's visit to Tsā ri in 1719 was, I believe, in the same vein as Chos rje gling pa's visit to Padma bkod a year or so earlier. Escaping the political and military vexation of the "civilized" Dbus-Gtsang region, Sle lung likely sought solace in the liminal, deified natural landscape of Tsā ri, over a hundred kilometers to the southeast of Rnam grol gling. Tsā ri had long been regarded in Tibetan Buddhist tradition as the mind palace of Cakrasaṃvara, since its association with the tantric deity by the founder of the 'Bri gung bka' brgyud school, 'Jig rten mgon po Rin chen dpal (1143-1217).¹³³

¹³⁰ Wedemeyer 2013: 26.

¹³¹ Padma bkod is approximately four-hundred kilometers east of Lhasa, at the point where the Gtsang po River loops south around the end of the Himalayan Mountain chain (Ryavec 2015: 171).

¹³² Sardar-Afkhami 1996: 5-6.

¹³³ Huber 1999: 44, 54.

Interestingly, the same year as his visit to the mountain, though prior to it, Sle lung's autobiography reports that he began performing an extensive *sādhana* ritual to Cakrasaṃvara on the twenty-fifth of every month, thus indicating that perhaps a growing interest in this particular *yi dam* deity at least in part motivated his visit to the holy mountain.¹³⁴ Regardless of his motivations, Sle lung is credited with instituting the still living tradition of popular mass pilgrimage to and circumambulation of Tsā ri, as well as the custom of giving gifts to the local non-Buddhist (or at best nominally Buddhist) indigenous "tribal" groups in exchange for safe passage around the mountain.¹³⁵

In any case, other than some disturbing visions and dreams during the period of the occupation, Sle lung seems to have remained more or less undisturbed by the Mongol authorities and their Tibetan allies. In fact, there is evidence he maintained a close positive relationship with the Dzungar government, since he met with Stag rtse pa, who appears to have been one of his patrons, at least twice during the occupation. After Stag rtse pa was condemned as a Dzungar collaborator and executed by the Qing forces that ousted the Dzungars from central Tibet in 1720, Sle lung reports that he made many offerings and prayers on his behalf.¹³⁶ Around the same time, Sle lung first met with the Seventh Dalai Lama, after the latter was escorted to Lhasa by Qing forces and at last officially enthroned by the Panchen Lama.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 313. A few years later, in 1726, he wrote a commentary on the practice of Cakrasaṃvara (BRGB vol. 2, pp. 139-227).

¹³⁵ Huber 1999: 157. Huber notes that the attribution of these popular traditions to Sle lung may be more legendary than historical, but nonetheless it shows the degree to which Sle lung is still associated with sacred sites like Tsā ri. Huber's attempt to tie Sle lung's interest in the mountain with a similar reverence of the place expressed by the Fifth and Sixth Dalai Lamas is rather tenuous, and he gives incorrect dates for Sle lung's meetings with the Sixth and Seventh Dalai Lamas.

¹³⁶ These years are covered in Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 290-413. That Sle lung maintained his political connections to the regent of the Dzungar occupation government while practicing teachings from Smin grol gling is somewhat ironic.

¹³⁷ Petech 1972: 70.

Within about a year of their successful "liberation" of Tibet (which initiated another, less harsh but still unpopular occupation) the Qing completely restructured what they intended to be the Tibetan vassal government. While the Dalai Lama was still technically the head of state and his religious authority unquestionable, politically he was effectively a figurehead. The position of regent was dissolved and in its place was formed a council or cabinet of ruling ministers, composed of influential provincial governors. The council was divided into two basic factions that from the beginning were personally and politically at odds with each other. On one side were Khang chen nas Bsod nams rgyal po, the governor of Mnga' ris, and his friend, Pho lha nas, both of whom had been instrumental in mounting Tibetan resistance to the Dzungar occupation. These two composed the so-called Gtsang faction of the council. The other ministers were Nga phod pa Rdo rje rgyal po, Lum pa nas Bkra shis rgyal po (both of whom who had led the effort to weed out Dzungar sympathizers after the occupation which had led, in part, to Stag rtse pa's execution), and a religious official named Sbyar ra ba who was effectively overseen (and likely directed) by the Seventh Dalai Lama's father, who was the unofficial sixth member of the council. This group constituted the Dbus faction. The Gtsang and Dbus factions were thus named for where the ministers were from and where they drew their political and military support. When it was first formed this council was under control of the Chinese military garrison in Lhasa. But when the Qing pulled their forces out of Tibet in 1724, the divided council was left on their own to rule, which was a disaster waiting to happen given the personal enmity the two factions apparently held for each other.¹³⁸ Generally speaking, the Gtsang faction was "pro-Chinese," in that they supported the enforcement of Qing policy in Tibet, advocated

¹³⁸ Lum pa nas in particular seems to have had a deep personal hatred of Khang chen nas and Pho lha nas.

Qing involvement, and were displeased by the 1724 withdrawal. The Dbus faction, on the other hand, supported a wholly independent Tibetan government (ruled by the aristocracy of which Nga phod pa and Lum pa nas were a part) and disliked Chinese interference, as they saw it.¹³⁹

One of the early issues the council clashed over was what to do about the Rnying ma "problem" left in the wake of the Dzungar occupation. According to an estimation in Pho lha nas's biography, over 500 Rnying ma sites had been pillaged or outright destroyed by the Mongolians, and Pho lha nas, who had himself studied at Smin grol gling and was highly sympathetic to the Rnying ma, proposed that the government should help rebuild these sites. The proposal was opposed by just about everyone else in the government, including the Dalai Lama, and was outright rejected by the Qing officials who had final say.¹⁴⁰ However, the Rnying ma were allowed to begin rebuilding through their own efforts, which was, as we shall see, a campaign of which Sle lung was a part.

In 1722 Sle lung was invited to Kokonor by a royal Mongol patron, likely a Qoshot prince he had known for some years named Er ti ni sbo shog, but declined to go. In light of the uprising of the Qoshots in the Kokonor region in 1724 and the heavy-handed Manchu response, Sle lung's decision was a wise one. His autobiography also notes, in the years immediately after the occupation, the extensive exchange of teachings with important Dge lugs pa masters, in particular Zhog Don yod mkhas grub (1671-1737) and Phur lcog Ngag dbang byams pa (1682-1762). That Sle lung had such a close mutual teacher/student relationship with the latter is particularly interesting given how they became, a few years later in 1728, rivals when Phur lcog soundly

¹³⁹ Shakabpa 2010: 431-438, Petech 1972: 78-81.

¹⁴⁰ Petech 1972: 83.

criticized Sle lung's lack of monastic discipline, advising Pho lha nas, then having just come to power as the new ruler of Tibet, not to take his counsel.¹⁴¹ Sle lung also gives a comparatively terse (three pages) report of a meeting with the Seventh Dalai Lama. Following this is an extended narrative aside which constitutes one of the most interesting sections of the autobiography, in which Sle lung gives what is effectively a pro-Rnying ma apologetical treatise although, as we shall see, he is also critical of Rnying ma polemicists that criticize the Gsar ma schools as well. What follows is an abbreviated summary of this treatise.¹⁴²

Sle lung's *Ris med* Apology

Sle lung's opening thesis in the treatise is that it is necessary to prevent certain people from ignorantly criticizing other traditions of Buddhism not their own, out of sectarian bias. Since this brings about the heavy negative karma of rejecting true Buddhist teachings, Sle lung states that it is necessary to try to correct these mistaken views. Reading on, however, it becomes clear that Sle lung is writing, at least in part, a personal defence when he says that he received criticism for practicing the meditation and mantra recitation of peaceful and wrathful deities from a *gter ma* revelation, as well as creating images of these deities. This may refer to his practice of the Rnying ma *gter ma* "Lord of the Dance" form of Avalokiteśvara, his consort Guhyajñānaḍākinī, and the protector form of Lha chen, all from Gter bdag gling pa's revelations, first introduced

¹⁴¹ Heller 1992: 289, n. 7, 9. Heller states that Sle lung "was the subject of controversy that reflects the antipathy of some Dge lugs pa scholars toward him." The source for this is a Tibetan informant, and I have been unable to locate a textual source for the polemic against Sle lung that Heller attributes to Phur lcog. Nonetheless, given Sle lung's general reputation for licentiousness that seems to have become well-established by at the latest the early 1730s (supported by Sle lung's own writings that emphasize sexual yogic practice examined in the next chapter), I believe Heller's source. Given Phur lcog's apparent criticism of Sle lung and his implied influence on Pho lha nas, one wonders if Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje's (1717-1786) mention in his biography of the Seventh Dalai Lama that Pho lha nas had been "under the influence of many irreligious people or people whose merit had been destroyed" (Shakabpa 2010: 459) was a veiled reference, in part, to Sle lung.

¹⁴² The full treatise is found in Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 452-463. See also Loden 2013: 95-109.

to him by Chos rje gling pa. Or it could refer to certain deity practices that he engaged in before and during the Dzungar invasion and occupation, such as the form of Vajrapāṇi from Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's revelations, or perhaps certain other protector deity practices.¹⁴³ Whatever the specific Rnying ma practice or deities in question may have been, Sle lung says that certain people objected to these on the grounds that a pure holder of the Dge lugs pa teachings should not engage in Rnying ma practices.

In true Tibetan fashion, Sle lung does not name those he is arguing against, but there are certain clues we can use to make an educated speculation. First of all, the placement of this *ris med* treatise in the autobiography is rather interesting. Given the sectarian persecution by the Dzungar occupation forces, one might expect Sle lung's logical and scriptural defence of the Rnying ma to be inserted into that section of the biography. Instead it is placed in the middle of his records of 1722, immediately after the account of a meeting with the Seventh Dalai Lama in Lhasa. Thus, it may have been the case that Sle lung's Rnying ma practices had become known to the Dge lugs pa authorities in Lhasa and the Dalai Lama's government and that he received the criticism he responds against in his treatise during this particular 1722 visit.¹⁴⁴

Notably, Sle lung's treatise is positioned before an account of his transmission of Vajrapāṇi empowerment and teachings to Zhog Don yod mkhas grub and Phur lcog Ngag dbang byams pa, indicating they probably were not the source of the anti-Rnying ma criticism, and may even have been used by Sle lung to show his loyalty to the Dge

¹⁴³ Sle lung specifically mentions doing ritual offerings to avert epidemics, which indicates the practice in question was likely directed toward a protector deity.

¹⁴⁴ Given the Dalai Lama's objection to Pho lha nas's proposal to help the Rnying ma rebuild, it seems he held no particular love for them, although he is also credited with declaring after the Dzungars had been expelled that all schools of Buddhism were to be treated equally (Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 79). Also, given that Sle lung and the Dalai Lama seemed to have remained on good and close terms at least through the 1720s, I find it unlikely the Dalai Lama was himself a critic of Sle lung at this time.

lugs pa.¹⁴⁵ In any case, let us examine in more detail Sle lung's defence of the Rnying ma and the *ris med* ethic, which is done, in traditional Buddhist scholastic fashion, through reasoning and scriptural authority.

Sle lung's first argument is that the division between the Gsar ma scriptures (used by the Dge lugs pa) and the Rnying ma scriptures is ultimately arbitrary. The usual definition of a Rnying ma scripture is that it was translated before Rin chen bzang po (958-1055) who is regarded as the first Gsar ma translator. However, as Sle lung points out, some scriptures that are considered canonical to the Gsar ma (he specifically singles out the *'Jam dpal rtsa rgyud*, the *Mañjuśrī Root Tantra*) were actually originally translated before Rin chen bzang po's time. In a similar vein, he claims there are certain tantric teachings that are prevalent in new schools based on scriptures translated during the "old" period (before Rin chen bzang po) that are not used in the current Rnying ma school. Secondly, Sle lung argues, many pure vision teachings of the Rnying ma came about *after* Rin chen bzang po. Sle lung then anticipates the objection that these pure vision teachings should be discounted since they are not translated scriptures by pointing out that this then means one cannot count Tsong kha pa's own pure vision revelations said to have been given to him by Mañjuśrī.

Next, Sle lung tackles the idea that Padmasambhava was not an authentic Buddhist teacher, which we saw above seems to have been the view of the Dzungars that in part justified their persecution of the Rnying ma. Sle lung cites the writings of a number of (to his probably intended Dge lugs pa audience) irreproachable Gsar ma scholars, such as Atiśa, Bu ston Rin chen grub, Chos rje Sa skya paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal

¹⁴⁵ According to Heller (1992: 289) Sle lung's liberal use of Rnying ma sources in his writings contributed to the "climate of controversy" around him, but suggests that Phur lcog's criticism was directed more at his perceived lack of moral discipline than his Rnying ma leanings. Of course, to the conservative Dge lugs pa, Rnying ma practice and lack of discipline often go hand-in-hand. However, the Phur lcog of the early 1720s (at least as depicted in Sle lung's autobiography) seems not to have had any problem with Sle lung, an attitude which evidently changed in about five years time.

mtshan, and Tsong kha pa himself, in which they clearly recognized Padmasambhava's legitimacy.

More specifically, Sle lung goes on to defend the veracity of both Padmasambhava and the Rnying ma *rdzogs chen* teachings by citing the authority of none other than the first Sle lung, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan. Bzhad pa'i rdo rje argues that since Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, here called Karma Vajra, was the guru of Tsong kha pa and recognized as a great master in Tsong kha pa's writings, he must be an authentic teacher. Then Sle lung cites Karma Vajra's own pure vision experiences, taken from his collected works, in which Vajrapāṇi gave *rdzogs chen* teachings, as well as detailing a revelatory experience where Karma Vajra purportedly met Padmasambhava himself and received teachings from him. Thus, Sle lung's argument is essentially that Tsong kha pa (indirectly) acknowledged the truth of the authenticity of Padmasambhava and *rdzogs chen* through his teacher, Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan.

While Sle lung's primary intended audience for his treatise seems to be mainly the Dge lugs pa critics of the Rnying ma pa (specifically his personal critics), he also dedicates a number of passages at the end of the essay to arguing for the legitimacy of Tsong kha pa directed against Rnying ma pa critics of the Dge lugs pa. In particular, he cites several *gter ma* prophecies that make reference to Tsong kha pa. While this section of the treatise may have been added to give the appearance of even-handedness, for the benefit of the primarily Dge lugs pa audience, Sle lung equally likely had specific sectarian Rnying ma polemicists in mind as well, although again he does not give specific names.

Further Travels

Perhaps in response to the hostility he was receiving from these unnamed conservative sectarian Dge lugs pa (and possibly Rnying ma pa) critics, Sle lung's autobiography records that he was extensively travelling for much of 1722 and 1723, in large part in the exact opposite direction of Kokonor, in southern Lho brag. He reports visiting and circumambulating a number of holy sites in Lho brag, including Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's old resident monastery of Sgro ba. Probably related to this trip, 1722 was also the year that Sle lung had a visionary experience of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and Vajrapāṇi which was written down in 1729 as a *guru yoga* liturgy focused on the first Sle lung.¹⁴⁶ On this trip he also visited a *sbas yul* called Seng ge ri ("Lion Mountain") in Lho brag and met a Rnying ma student of Rdo rje brag who had gone into extended retreat there following the death of his teacher during the Dzungar persecution in 1718, named Blo bzang lha mchog (1672-1747).¹⁴⁷ While staying at Lion Mountain, Sle lung had a prophetic dream that Blo bzang lha mchog should "open" another *sbas yul* to the northeast of the mountain, called 'Or mo lha sa, which both men believed was the palace of the protector deity Yam shud dmar po.¹⁴⁸

The next year, 1723, Sle lung was involved in the reconstruction and renovation of various sites that had been damaged by the Dzungars. Most notably, with the help of funds from a female local ruler at a place called Rab brtan shar,¹⁴⁹ he helped reconstruct the famous image of Padmasambhava that had been at Khra 'brug Temple, of which only the original head survived when it was hidden by the oracle/medium of Tshangs

¹⁴⁶ *Dag snang gsang bdag bla ma 'i phyi nang gsang gsum gyi rnal 'byor dang rgyun khyer* (BRGB vol. 10, pp. 59-71).

¹⁴⁷ Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 470-480. For Lho bzang lha mchog, see Ehrhard 1999a.

¹⁴⁸ Ehrhard 1999a: 242-243. Lho bzang lha mchog would finally discover Yam shud dmar po's palace at 'Or mo lha sa in 1733. Ehrhard also notes that Sle lung and Lho bzang lha mchog met twice more, once in 1734 when the former told the latter that "the seizing, protecting, and spreading of sacred sites" is the most useful dharma activity and that he "should do as much [of it] as he can."

¹⁴⁹ The exact location of this place is unclear, but we may presume it was relatively close to Khra 'brug.

pa dkar po who resided there. Sle lung evidently financed the manufacturing of a new body for the statue.¹⁵⁰ He also oversaw the installation of images of the 84 Mahāsiddhas at the Rab brtan shar estate. The Lady of this estate, named Dpal 'dzin sgrol ma, was apparently acting as Sle lung's secret consort at this time, which may at least in part explain his special attention to and repeated mention of this estate in his autobiography.¹⁵¹

The last parts of Sle lung's autobiography concern late 1723 to 1724, and he ends his work with two solemn occasions, namely the death of the Dga' ldan throne holder Blo bzang dar rgyas, and Sle lung's most important guru, Dam can bzang po. The last two sections of the biography discuss their deaths and their funerary rituals.¹⁵²

Beyond 1724, the sources for Sle lung's life and activities are more scattered, but there is still a wealth of detail to be gleaned from further, albeit more isolated, autobiographical accounts that he himself wrote that were compiled into his collected works, as well as accounts of him that appear in the biographies of his contemporaries. Using these sources, we can sketch a picture of the last fifteen years of his life.

¹⁵⁰ Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 79. Sørensen and Hazod suggest that Sle lung's efforts to restore Khra 'brug were in defiance of a 1723 order from the Qing imperial court, enforced by Khang chen nas, that suppressed the Rnying ma school by, in part, putting a freeze on all temple and monastery construction or reconstruction by the Rnying ma. However, they note the 1723 date comes from Dung dkar (1991: 83), while Shakabpa gives the date of 1726 for this imperial order. Petech (1972: 106) gives 1726 as well. Sørensen and Hazod also report (2005: 35) that the reconstruction initiated by Sle lung and continued by the Seventh Dalai Lama led to the expansion of the Khra 'brug temple complex.

¹⁵¹ That Sle lung had taken the lady of this estate as his consort is according to a guidebook on Khra 'brug commissioned by the thirteenth Dalai Lama and written around 1920, studied by Sørensen and Hazod. According to them (2005: 78, 80 n. 170), the Lady of Rab brtan shar was likely Dpal 'dzin sgrol ma whom Sle lung mentions several times in his autobiography, the first time in the section recording the events of 1718 (Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 282), though I am unclear if this was the year he first met her. As Sørensen and Hazod point out, Sle lung had been paying practically annual visits to Khra 'brug since 1711. Sle lung's biography of his guru Dam chos bzang po was completed in 1724 at the Rab brtan shar estate, showing that he maintained his connection there after the Khra 'brug restoration.

¹⁵² Blo bzang 'phrin las 2009: 529-554.

Civil War

There is little record of Sle lung's activities in 1725, except for two ritual texts in his collected works that are dated to that year. One of them is an extensive propitiation liturgy focused on the deity Yam shud dmar po, also known as Beg tse.¹⁵³ This is particularly interesting given the later importance of this deity to Sle lung in connection with the Tibetan government, the officials of which Sle lung seems to have remained in close contact with after the state leadership was reformed following the Dzungar withdrawal. A letter to Khang chen nas, dated to 1720, is preserved in Sle lung's collected works.¹⁵⁴ Sle lung seems to have had great respect for the Mnga' ris governor, who between 1720 and 1727 became the most powerful minister on the ruling council in Lhasa, and Sle lung in fact records that he identified him as an emanation of the protector deity Skrag med nyi shar. However, Khang chen nas eventually fell out of Sle lung's favor.¹⁵⁵

This is undoubtedly due to the events of 1726, the year in which the Qing court issued a proclamation to the Tibetan ruling council that effectively continued the Rnying ma suppression policies begun by the Dzungars nine years before, albeit in a much less overtly violent way. The proclamation ordered that all Rnying ma rituals were to be halted, Rnying ma monasteries no longer had the authority to ordain monks, and pushed for Rnying ma practitioners and sites to be converted to the Dge lugs pa school. While the order does not seem to have been favorably received by anyone in the Tibetan government, the only person to actively speak out against it was Pho lha nas, who it should be remembered received the bulk of his religious training at Smin grol gling. Khang chen nas seems to have been displeased by Pho lha nas's objection

¹⁵³ *Gnod sbyin beg tse lcam dral gyi bskang ba mchod bstod kyi rim pa* (BRGB vol. 2, pp. 229-289).

¹⁵⁴ *Mi dbang dA ching bha dur la phul ba'i phrin yig dri za'i rgyud mangs* (BRGB vol. 3, pp. 270-273).

¹⁵⁵ Ehrhard 1999a: 244.

to the order, however, and moved to implement the policies outlined in the proclamation.¹⁵⁶ This was likely done due to Khang chen nas's unwavering loyalty to the Manchus, rather than a prejudicial personal desire to persecute the Rnying ma pa.

That same year, perhaps as a form of protest against the discriminatory policies of his longtime ally and friend, Pho lha nas visited 'Ol kha and met with Mi 'gyur dpal sgron (1699-1769), the daughter of Gter bdag gling pa, who would go on to lead the effort to restore Smin grol gling just a few years later. In his biography, Pho lha nas is recorded as having given her gifts and attended her spiritual teachings.¹⁵⁷ On the same trip, Pho lha nas also visited Sle lung, at least the second time they met, and received empowerments and "life-force entrustments" for a number of protector deities from Sle lung.¹⁵⁸ Sle lung is then recorded as giving Pho lha nas political advice. Furthermore, it was at this meeting that Sle lung later recorded that he first recognized Pho lha nas as an emanation of none other than Yam shud dmar po. He is also said to have told Pho lha nas that Khang chen nas's merit was about to run out due to his anti-Rnying ma stance.¹⁵⁹

Sle lung seems to have been correct in his assessment of Khang chen nas's fortunes, because the next year, 1727, in a scene reminiscent of Julius Cesar's murder, he was brutally stabbed to death during a meeting of the cabinet by the ministers of the Dbus faction. His retainers, wife, and sister-in-law were also killed. What ultimately prompted this extreme measure by the Dbus faction is a bit of a mystery, but it seems clear that some combination of policy disagreements and personal dislike of Khang chen nas was behind it. It is doubtful that Khang chen nas's anti-Rnying ma policy was

¹⁵⁶ Petech 1972: 106-109.

¹⁵⁷ Petech 1972: 109-110.

¹⁵⁸ Life force entrustments are believed to give a practitioner power to command dharma protectors to carry out (usually wrathful) activity. See chapter three for more detail on Sle lung and Pho lha nas's 1726 meeting.

¹⁵⁹ Ehrhard 1999a: 244.

much of a catalyzing factor, but the depth of his loyalty to the Qing likely was. In any case, the Dbus ministers attempted to do away with Pho lha nas in a similar manner, but he was out of Lhasa at the time, and he and his family were able to escape the death squad sent to kill them. Civil war had begun, though it only lasted for about a year. After raising an army in Mnga' ris and Gtsang, Pho lha nas kept on the offensive, after an abortive truce, against the Dbus forces under the command of Lum pa nas, until the summer of 1728 when the exhausted and demoralized Dbus army melted away and Pho lha nas was able to march into Lhasa virtually unopposed.¹⁶⁰

Like Lha bzang Khan before them, the Dbus ministers barricaded themselves in the Potala Palace, along with the Dalai Lama and his father. Petech argues that while it is plausible that the Dalai Lama knew nothing of the plot to kill Khang chen nas, his father most certainly was involved. In any case, several rounds of negotiations followed, with a number of high-ranking lamas acting as mediators between Pho lha nas, the Dalai Lama, and the ministers, Sle lung among them. The Dalai Lama was first allowed to leave the Potala where he met with Pho lha nas at the Dga' ldan khang gsar Palace where Lha bzang Khan had had his throne. There he insisted that he and his father had not had any part in the plan to kill Khang chen nas, and Pho lha nas seems to have at least tentatively accepted this. Through a combination of efforts on the part of the Dalai Lama and Sle lung, who was probably in the position of Pho lha nas's main religious teacher/advisor at this point, the Dbus ministers were persuaded to surrender and Pho lha nas was persuaded to spare their lives, a mercy to which his officers and men strongly, but ineffectually, objected.¹⁶¹ Soon after the surrender, there was another meeting between the Dalai Lama and Pho lha nas, this time at the Potala Palace. During

¹⁶⁰ These events are recounted in great detail in Petech 1972: 113-140.

¹⁶¹ Petech 1972: 143-144. Shakabpa 2010: 447.

this meeting they were formally reconciled in a ritual overseen by Sle lung where he placed images of Padmasambhava and the protector goddess Dpal ldan lha mo on each of their heads.¹⁶² Sle lung remained in Lhasa in the months following the civil war, meeting with Pho lha nas and the Dalai Lama. He is credited during this period with helping the latter recover from an illness with the propitiation of the protector deity Nyi ma gzhon nu from his own pure visions.¹⁶³

Unfortunately, Sle lung's initially successful plea for the lives of the Dbus ministers would soon be undone. Responding to the situation in Tibet, which they feared was due to Dzungar meddling, the Qing court sent an armed contingent along with an investigative team which put the three Dbus ministers on trial. They were eventually found guilty of acting against the orders of the Emperor in killing Khang chen nas and fomenting the civil war (effectively treason), and were brutally executed on the banks of the Skyid chu in November of 1728. Their skins were stuffed and hung in Dar po gling Temple in Lhasa.¹⁶⁴ Several of their associates and family members were also killed. The rest of their relatives were sent to China as prisoners.¹⁶⁵

The fallout did not end there. While the Dalai Lama and his father were apparently reconciled with Pho lha nas and escaped prosecution, they did not wholly escape the suspicion of the Qing. In December, they were exiled to east Tibet, over Pho lha nas's objections. The Dalai Lama would remain exiled until 1735, before being able to return to central Tibet, and he was fortunate not to have suffered a fate similar to his predecessor's, the Sixth Dalai Lama. Pho lha nas himself was made the Qing vassal ruler in Tibet, effectively king, since the governmental model of a cabinet consisting of

¹⁶² Shakabpa 2010: 448. As pointed out by Ehrhard (1999a: 252, n. 17), Sle lung confirms the role he played reconciling the two men (BRGB vol. 8, pp. 336.4ff). This reconciliation is a good example of the common interface between politics and tantric ritual.

¹⁶³ This deity and the 1728 curing of the Dalai Lama are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁴ See chapter three.

¹⁶⁵ Petech 1972: 148-149.

competing provincial governors without a strong central ruler had failed so spectacularly. Also, the Qing were now determined to maintain stricter administrative authority in Tibet by instituting the office of Amban. These were two Qing officials resident in Lhasa who had ministerial powers, an arrangement that would remain in place until the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in the early twentieth century.

Journey to Padma bkod

Prior to his arrival in Lhasa to negotiate the surrender of the Dbus ministers and effect a truce between Pho lha nas and the Dalai Lama, Sle lung had spent most of 1727 and 1728 busy with a series of intense visionary experiences coupled with further exploration of hidden lands in south and east Tibet.¹⁶⁶ While Dbus-Gtsang tore itself apart in yet another war, Sle lung sought succour for Tibet in landscapes both geographical and visionary. In 1727 he records that he had detailed visions of the *dākinī* pure land Mkha' spyod, so important in Cakrasaṃvara cycles and Gsar ma tantra in general, as well as Padmasambhava's pure land of Copper-Colored Mountain.¹⁶⁷ Sle lung would go on to replicate the architecture and design of Padmasambhava's palace from his visions in a Copper-Colored Mountain Temple at Rnam grol gling. This project was sponsored and funded by Pho lha nas, likely while he was in the midst of the war.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ This period is detailed in the texts of volume eight of his collected works, many of which are travelogue-like inner biographical accounts.

¹⁶⁷ Recorded in the *Mkha' spyod kyi gnas yig* and *Gnas mchog zangs mdog dpal ri'i gnas bshad kyi gtam la 'jug pa'i mtshams sbyor bkags pas yid ches* (BRGB vol. 8, pp. 1-55).

¹⁶⁸ Petech notes that Pho lha nas made significant public relations efforts by sponsoring such religious construction and renovation projects, which helped rally allies to his cause. One of the first actions after escaping the assassination attempt by the Dbus ministers was to fund the restoration of the Boudhanath Stupa in Nepal (Petech 1972: 122). Still, the fact that Pho lha nas funded this important project at Rnam grol gling gives further evidence for the strong patron-priest relationship that had developed between him and Sle lung. Sle lung's account of his construction of the Zangs mdog dpal ri Temple at Rnam grol gling is recorded in the *Gnas chen zangs mdog dpal ri'i gtsug lag khang gi gnas bshad* (BRGB vol. 8, pp. 57-65).

In the spring of 1729, just a few months after the execution of the rebel ministers and the exile of the Dalai Lama, Sle lung departed from Lhasa to undertake a journey to the crown jewel of hidden lands, Padma bkod.¹⁶⁹ Over four hundred kilometers east of Lhasa along the Gtsang po River, Padma bkod combines sheer high-altitude cliff-faces, churning rapids, and subtropical zones into one of the most geographically remote and climatically extreme places in not just Tibet but on the entire planet. Sle lung was following in the footsteps of his one-time guru Chos rje gling pa, who had made the journey twelve years before and had not returned. He was accompanied by a group of *yogins*, a laywoman, her attendant, and two spirit mediums (*sku rten*), one male and one female, used to communicate with the local deities.¹⁷⁰ In and around Padma bkod Sle lung records that he and his team endured massive rock-falls, muddy bogs that threatened to swallow them, and the Padma bkod jungles' infamous giant leeches, to say nothing of the obstacles created by human agents, Klo pa hunters who were acting as the minions of the unsympathetic king of Spo bo, the region bordering Padma bkod to the east.

To Sle lung, the hardship he encountered was worth, if not precisely the point of, the journey. He describes the qualities of the land of Padma bkod thus:

In the borderlands between Tibet and India, in the land of savages, lies Pemako, the supreme of all hidden-lands. This lotus-like realm is described as the body of Dorje Pagmo with five chakras...the cloud and ocean like gathering places of dakas and dakinis. There is constant menace here from poisonous snakes, leeches, flies, clawed and long-snouted animals with fangs, dangerous wildmen, and vicious savages. One can easily succumb to fever and gout, while blisters, abscesses, ulcers, and sores add to the physical obstacles. The land is full of mischievous spirits [that]...constantly display magic and miracles. Those without courage, or those with lingering doubts, too many mental conceptions, or who are strongly attached to the appearances of this life or who...out of ignorance, fall into accepting and rejecting...such people will have difficulty reaching this land and getting through unscathed. When

¹⁶⁹ Sle lung's journey to Padma bkod is recounted in an extensive guidebook to the region entitled *Gnas mchog pad+mo* [sic?] *bkod du bgrod pa'i lam yig dga' byed bden gtam* (BRGB vol. 8, pp. 389-493). This text has been studied and translated in full by Ian Baker (see Shepe Dorje 2001, and Baker 2004).

¹⁷⁰ Baker 2004: 461.

observed in their essential nature, all the mountains, rocks, trees, and rivers [here] appear as magical realms or deities...¹⁷¹

For Sle lung, the difficulties imposed by the geography of Padma bkod provided an incomparable test of the capacity of one's spiritual realization, and he reveled in the "resplendent terror" the place provoked in him, along with spontaneous realization of non-conceptual bliss-emptiness. Indeed, like so much of his later inner biographical writings, especially his accounts of hidden lands, Sle lung's Padma bkod *lam yig* is full of descriptions cultivating tantric "pure vision," what the English poet William Blake called mystical "double vision."¹⁷² The *lam yig* blurs the line between travelogue and tantric *sādhana*, so that the landscape of Padma bkod is charged with a Buddhist panentheistic animism. The valley of Padma bkod itself is deified as the body of Vajrayoginī, and important sacred sites within are regarded as her five *cakras*.¹⁷³ Waves from the Gtsang po River make the sound of *mantras*, yellow sulphur deposits are identified as Vajrayoginī's urine to be smeared on one's body as a blessing substance, a waterfall is identified as the fluid discharge of the goddess in union with her consort, and so on.¹⁷⁴ While in Padma bkod Sle lung gave religious teachings to his companions and people he met along the way, and wrote several practice texts, including one describing a *bcud len* ("extracting the essence practice") describing how a practitioner can subsist on the sky.¹⁷⁵

Sle lung's ultimate goal was the heart *cakra* of Padma bkod, regarded as essentially a pure land that provided the ultimate refuge from war, disease, and famine, where thousand-petalled lotuses bloomed, and spiritual accomplishment was

¹⁷¹ Baker 2004: xiv.

¹⁷² On Blake's "double vision" see Frye 1991: 83-84.

¹⁷³ See Ehrhard (1999b: 234) and Sardar-Afkhami (1996) for the various configurations of the main holy sites in Padma bkod given by different Rnying ma explorers of the region.

¹⁷⁴ Baker 2004: 120, 134, 138.

¹⁷⁵ BRGB vol. 6, pp. 173-176. One wonders if this was prompted by food-shortage problems along the way.

spontaneously bestowed. Sle lung and his party made no effort to conceal their approach and entry into the sacred land. They made ritual offerings to the local deities each morning, including blood and meat of slaughtered animals.¹⁷⁶ When they finally entered the forests of Padma bkod, they did so playing instruments and breaking into spontaneous songs of realization. Making no secret of their presence and activities, they soon ran afoul of the authorities of the kingdom of Spo bo and their allied bands of Klo pa hunters, who ultimately blocked their progress and refused to allow them deeper into Padma bkod. The specific reason given in a letter from the Spo bo ruler was that "Pemako belongs exclusively to the people of Kanam (Powo); it is not a place that the inhabitants of U and Tsang (central Tibet) may enter."¹⁷⁷ Sle lung was warned that if he did not turn back, a contingent of Klo pa warriors would force the matter. Sle lung did indeed turn back before reaching his final goal of the heart of Padma bkod, but he did explore and record other hidden lands in the same region before finally returning to central Tibet.

Beyond the tremendous spiritual significance of Sle lung's ultimately abortive journey to Padma bkod, certain details surrounding it suggest that there may have been other motives for it as well. First of all, the trip was undertaken immediately after Pho lha nas had come to power as the ruler of Tibet, and Sle lung was essentially acting in the capacity of his court priest at this time. Secondly, Sle lung and his party were stopped and turned back at the border of a neighboring kingdom for overtly political reasons (because they came from central Tibet and were seen as invaders). Thus, it is conceivable that Sle lung's party was meant as kind of probing expedition, to test the limits of Pho lha nas's sphere of control, and that Sle lung was sent to gather intelligence

¹⁷⁶ For instance, at the glacier that obstructs Padma bkod's western approach, regarded by Sle lung as the palace of the important Rnying ma protector Rdo rje legs pa, they offered the blood of a black goat (Baker 2004: 461).

¹⁷⁷ Baker 2004: 172.

on the security on the Spo bo border.¹⁷⁸ Whether or not he was actually acting in such a capacity, the Spo bo officials in Padma bkod certainly seemed to consider him a spy.

This possibility is perhaps further supported by the fact that Pho lha nas travelled to visit Sle lung in Rnam grol gling in 1730, soon after Sle lung had returned from his journey, and two significant politico-religious developments came out of this meeting.¹⁷⁹ The first is that Sle lung formally recognized Pho lha nas as the incarnation of Yam shud dmar po/Beg tse,¹⁸⁰ and the second that Sle lung recognized the king as fulfilling the prophecies of Chos rje gling pa of a highly effective ruler who would bring peace to Tibet.

Last Years and Sle lung's Legacy

The 1730s would be the last decade of Sle lung's life. After his return from Padma bkod, the writings in his collected works indicate that he continued travelling to hidden lands and discovering the "palaces" of local deities. He continued to have extensive visionary experiences, as well as health problems, possibly related to the stress of his journey to Padma bkod.¹⁸¹ 1730 was also when he began work in earnest on his massive *Gsang ba ye shes kyi chos skor*, based around the teachings he received from Smin grol gling, discussed in depth in the next chapter. He would continue adding to this collection until at least 1737.

In 1732 he visited the newly reconstructed Smin grol gling, one of possibly several visits in the early 1730s. Given his work since 1720 attempting to revitalize the

¹⁷⁸ I do not here mean to be reductive or to ascribe shady motives to Sle lung. Even if he was acting in this capacity for Pho lha nas, he undoubtedly would have viewed it in pure visionary terms, by helping Yam shud dmar po's earthly incarnation to spiritually tame the borders of his new kingdom.

¹⁷⁹ Sle lung's account of this meeting, discussed in more detail in chapter three, is found in BRGB vol. 9, pp. 279-359.

¹⁸⁰ Discussed in more detail in chapter three.

¹⁸¹ Discussed in the *Lcags pho khyi'i lo 'gal rkyen gyi g.yul las rgyal ba'i lo rgyus sgyu 'phrul rgyan gyi me long* (BRGB vol. 9, pp. 361-469).

Rnying ma tradition, it is understandable why he would wish to be involved in the effort to restore the Rnying ma institution to which he owed so much of his religious education. He is credited with helping to preserve sacred objects, primarily deity statues, from the Dzungar destruction of Smin grol gling, and returned them there, probably during this 1732 visit.¹⁸² Also, interestingly, Sle lung records that he made the trip with a retinue of five women whom, in another text, he identifies as his consorts.¹⁸³

This was probably the same visit which is recorded in the biography of Mi 'gyur dpal sgron, the daughter of Gter bdag gling pa, and the primary force behind the restoration of Smin grol gling. Her biography gives an interesting glimpse of Sle lung's apparent reputation among his contemporaries. While Sle lung and Mi 'gyur dpal sgron had exchanged teachings, her biography depicts him in a rather unflattering light as being prone to drinking and debauchery that she seemed to view as unbecoming of a Buddhist lama. During his visit to Smin grol gling, he is described as holding a drunken orgiastic party in Smin grol gling's temple, and reportedly solicited her to act as one of his (by now many) sexual consorts.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, in one of his visionary encounters with the *dag snang* deity Nyi ma gzhon nu, Sle lung was given a prophecy in 1730 by this goddess that sexually uniting with Mi 'gyur dpal sgron would be of great benefit to sentient beings.¹⁸⁵

Mi 'gyur dpal sgron's biography (*Rje btsun mi 'gyur dpal gyi sgron ma'i rnam thar dad pa'i gdung sel*, henceforth MPNT) depicts her as maintaining strict monastic

¹⁸² Orgyan Tenzin Rinpoche, personal communication 31/10/2014. Sle lung's 1732 visit to Smin grol gling, in which he records a number of visionary experiences, included seeing Vajrayoginī dancing near the monastery, is found in the *Chu pho byi ba'i lo smin grol gling du bskyod pa'i lo rgyus* (BRGB vol. 9, pp. 511-539).

¹⁸³ This is explained in the *Dag snang lha gcig gi dril sgrub rtsa gsum thig le'i lo rgyus* (BRGB vol. 12, pp. 301-305), discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁸⁴ Townsend 2012: 232-233. Sle lung is discussed in Mi 'gyur dpal sgron's biography (MPNT) on pp. 120ff., and 127ff. My thanks to Alison Melnick for locating these passages (electronic communication 2/2/2014).

¹⁸⁵ BRGB vol. 12, p. 304.

discipline (she was by this point an ordained nun), and not only rebuffing Sle lung's offer, but secluding herself in a retreat house in order to stay away from him. In fact, it depicts her as not particularly wanting to receive Sle lung at Smin grol gling at all, but she was pressured to do so by none other than Pho lha nas himself. Townsend argues that her biography does not intend to cast aspersions on Sle lung, as such, but rather to show its protagonist's dedication to maintaining strict discipline and showing the lengths to which she went to steer herself and the community at Smin grol gling away from aspects of the Rnying ma school that had been used as justification for Smin grol gling's destruction in the first place. Namely, these disreputable practices were physically performed sexual *yoga*, use of alcohol as a sacrament, and wrathful black magic rituals. For instance, Mi 'gyur dpal sgron refused to take part in the latter practice, despite being pressured to perform such rituals by wealthy lay patrons. Sle lung is thus depicted by her biography as embodying everything about the Rnying ma school from which Mi 'gyur dpal sgron was evidently trying to distance herself.

Townsend rightly points out that the MPNT may more reflect the biases of its actual author, Khyung po ras pa 'gyur med 'od gsal (b. 1715), than of Mi 'gyur dpal sgron herself.¹⁸⁶ After all, the MPNT was not written until 1782, forty two years after Sle lung's death (and thirteen years after Mi 'gyur dpal sgron's death). It may thus be the case that by this time the memory of Sle lung's person had been distorted into something of a caricature. Still, the MPNT gives an indication of just how Sle lung was and is remembered, even among elements of the Rnying ma school.

As for the Dge lugs pa memory of Sle lung, Khri byang Blo bzang ye shes (1901-1981), in an account he attributes to the biography of the Second Rwa sreng Rin po che Blo bzang ye shes bstan pa rab rgyas (1759-1815), reports:

¹⁸⁶ Townsend 2012: 234.

As he [Rwa sgreng Rin po che] says, previously at Olka Lelung there was one named Jedrung Lozang Trinley also known as Shepay Dorje, a great being renowned to be the Lhodrag Mahasiddha Lekyi Dorje's emanation. He studied at Ngari Tratsang in the early part of his life and became a great scholar. He kept the Lhodrag ear-whispered lineage teachings and Chakrasamvara as his innermost essence practice. He had attained realizations at quite a high level and cultivated pure view and action of the Geden [Dge lugs pa] lineage. At one point he began practicing a secret wisdom teaching in accordance with a Mindrol Ling treasure text and began emphasizing it in his teachings to his many disciples, both lay and ordained. In the name of offering the wisdom consort and offering nectar, he and all the disciples gathered many young women around them and enjoyed drinking intoxicants without restraint, singing and dancing. They started many monks of Sera and Drepung, lamas, tulkus and geshe into consort practice. With such actions as these they threw proper Tantric conduct into disarray, perverting it. The three, Purchog Je Ngawang Jampa, Shogdon Yo Kedrup, and Lelung Jedrung Rinpoche, were all mutually teacher and disciple to each other. Once they had gathered at Miwang Polhawa's place at Gaden Kangsar in Lhasa. Purchogpa and Kedrupa tried to dissuade Jedrung from what he was doing, but acting as if the time for his actions had been prophesied by the dakinis, he would not listen.¹⁸⁷

This report likely reflects the sectarian Dge lugs pa view of Sle lung. There are several very interesting aspects of this account. First, it mentions Phur lcog Ngag dbang byams pa and Zhog Don yod mkhas grub, who we saw above are confirmed by Sle lung's autobiography as probably his two closest Dge lugs pa associates, attempting (unsuccessfully) to control Sle lung's licentious behavior. It may even reflect the period of falling out that Sle lung apparently had with at least Phur lcog. Secondly, the report confirms just how close Sle lung was with Pho lha nas, and noting the apparently regular visits he was making with other religious officials to the king's palace. It should be pointed out, however, that, like the MPNT, the Rwa sgreng Rin po che report was written well after Sle lung's death. Again, it may tell us more about how Sle lung was remembered than necessarily what he actually did.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang 1967: 112-113. It is telling that Sle lung is used as Khri byang Rin po che's primary example of someone mixing the "pure" Dge lugs pa teachings and the (presumably "impure") Rnying ma teachings, and the negative consequences that result.

¹⁸⁸ That is not to say the reporting in these accounts is inaccurate, and given the context of his Nyi ma gzhon nu revelations, examined in more detail in the next chapter, I think it likely they are accurate, at least to a degree.

Regardless of Sle lung's reputation, the final eight years of his life were characterized by a tremendous amount of literary output. Not only did a steady stream of visionary teachings, mostly related to the propitiation of various protector deities, continue every year, but in 1734 he wrote a major collection of the origin myths of protector deities (discussed in detail in chapter three), arguably Sle lung's most unique and well-known contribution to Tibetan literature. Seemingly as a companion piece to this work, around the same time he also compiled a massive *be'u bum* collection of hostile, exorcistic sorcery rituals, mostly invoking various forms of Rdo rje legs pa.¹⁸⁹ This is essentially a grimoire of black magic, seemingly confirming the image of Sle lung as immersing himself in the aspects of the Rnying ma school that many found so repellent.¹⁹⁰ But interestingly, in 1734 Sle lung also wrote an extensive collection of prayers for recalling the ideals of a *bodhisattva*.¹⁹¹

By this point, Sle lung's wanderlust in search for hidden lands appears to have declined somewhat, and given the locations of writing indicated in the colophons of texts written during the mid to late 1730s Sle lung seems to have remained consistently based in Rnam grol gling during this time. In 1737 he wrote a second Cakrasaṃvara practice commentary, even more extensive than his 1726 one.¹⁹² This work indicates

¹⁸⁹ *Dam can mgar ba nag po'i be'u bum* (MNBB), not part of his collected works. See Loden 2013: 198-217 for an outline of this work. Based on my examination, many of the texts in it are taken directly from the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*.

¹⁹⁰ While calling Sle lung's *be'u bum* a "grimoire of black magic" may be a bit sensationalistic, I do not mean to place value judgement on the work by using this term. Like European grimoires, *be'u bum* texts are collections of magic spells. Also, many or most of the rituals found in the *be'u bum* are emically classified as "black" in the tantric Buddhist sense that they deal with destructive magic.

¹⁹¹ *Rgyal ba'i sras kyi rnam par thar par 'jug pa'i smon lam rgya mtsho phyogs kyi sprin chen* (BRGB vol. 7, pp. 219-354).

¹⁹² The 1737 commentary, also not part of his collected works, is entitled *Khor lo sdom pa dril bu phyi nang gi bsnyen pa bya tshul gyi yi ge mkha' 'gro'i gsang mdzod*. See Loden 2013: 193-197 for a list of all the commetarial texts of varying detail and length that Sle lung wrote related to the practice of Cakrasaṃvara, some of which are found in his *gsum 'bum* and some of which are not. Twenty-three in total are listed here, one being a commentary on the entire root tantra, another being a retreat manual on the deity, and others very short texts explaining certain specific issues, such as one text that explains the necessary elements needed to engage in physical sexual *yoga*.

that despite his seemingly full conversion to Rnying ma practices by the 1730s, he was still deeply invested in Gsar ma teachings as well.

Among what we can presume are his final works since they are found in the final volume of his *gsum 'bum* (though they are undated) are ritual texts based, not on his own visions, but on those of the Fifth Dalai Lama, another great Rnying ma-Dge lugs pa syncretist with whom Sle lung likely felt an affinity. Almost all of these are focused on a deity named Bla ma bde chen dbang phyug, an esoteric form of Padmasambhava.¹⁹³ The last dated work by Sle lung is an extensive, complex manual for giving the empowerments of Klong chen pa's *Mkha' 'gro yang thig* (*The Ultimate Essence of the Dākinīs*) *rdzogs chen* practices, written in 1739.¹⁹⁴ This work makes up the majority of the final volume of Sle lung's collected works, and shows the depth of importance the Rnying ma *rdzogs chen* soteriological system had for him by this time.

Sle lung died in 1740 at the age of forty-three. The exact cause and circumstances of his death remain a mystery to me, as I have not found any definitive textual source which describes it. However, I am aware of three contradictory accounts of his death. The first is described in the current Sle lung *sprul sku's* account of all the previous Sle lung incarnations:

...Jedrung Rinpoche manifested the appearance of dissolving his form into the sphere of ultimate reality on the twentieth day of the eighth month of the Iron Monkey year. For a time he dissolved himself directly into Vajrapani's heart in [the] northerly [pure land of] Changlojen.¹⁹⁵

This account follows the standard hagiographical description of a Buddhist *yogin's* mindful, intentional control of the death process.

¹⁹³ These texts are found in BRGB vol. 13, pp. 1-32.

¹⁹⁴ *Rgyud sde thams cad kyi mthar thug 'od gsal rdzogs pa chen po'i man ngag gi yang bcud mkha' 'gro yang tig gi dbang chog mtha' yas 'gro phan* (BRGB vol. 13, pp. 97-467).

¹⁹⁵ Loden 2013: 70.

The conservative, hardline followers of the anti-*ris med* deity Shugs Idan, however, have a very different account of Sle lung's death. Sle lung appears in a list of lamas who were supposedly killed by Shugs Idan for contaminating the pure Dge lugs pa teachings with Rnying ma ones, the very criticism Sle lung, as we have seen, was forced to defend himself against as early as the mid 1720s. Sle lung is also singled out by the Shugs Idan followers for leading people astray by advocating sexual yoga.¹⁹⁶

The final account of Sle lung's death of which I am aware was told to me by a Rnying ma lama. According to him, Sle lung killed himself out of protest for the criticism he received from other, conservative Dge lugs pa lamas.¹⁹⁷ Given the apparent criticism he received, specifically from one of his former students, Phur lcog Ngag dbang byams pa, during his life, and the widespread poor reputation that Sle lung seems to have acquired due to his Mahāsiddha-like disregard for custom and convention, I find this account compelling. Secondly, Sle lung's relatively early death indicates the strong possibility of some kind of either illness or foul play.

While these accounts are seemingly contradictory on their face, the first two may in fact be simply two differing interpretations of the third. But without further confirmation or information, I am at this time forced to plead ignorance in the matter of Sle lung's death.¹⁹⁸ In the following two chapters, we will examine in much more detail two of the main literary and religious contributions Bzhad pa'i rdo rje made in the 1730s, after his return from Padma bkod, not included in his collected works.

¹⁹⁶ The pro-Shugs Idan account will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

¹⁹⁷ Orgyan Tenzin Rinpoche (personal communication 31/10/2014).

¹⁹⁸ It is also perhaps somewhat telling that there appears to be no biographical accounts (of which I am aware) of the Fifth Sle lung, other than his own autobiographical materials, until Loden (2013). This is rather astonishing given his status and the number of disciples he had who were politically powerful and educated. While this is highly speculative, the silence of the biographical record may reflect the controversy that surrounded Sle lung's later life and death. Interestingly, Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's immediate successor, the Sixth Sle lung Lhun grub 'phrin las rgyal mtshan, behaved in a similarly controversial manner (i.e., giving back his monastic vows and engaging in physical sexual yoga, though he lived to the relatively ripe age of 70).

Chapter 2: The Yidam – Secret Gnosis Ḍākinī

The name "Gsang ba ye shes mkha' 'gro (Skt. Guhyajñānaḍākinī)," ("Secret Gnosis *ḍākinī*"), or the more common and simplified "Jñānaḍākinī," like the names "Vajrayoginī" or "Vajraḍākinī," seem to have begun as a general title for female goddesses within Vajrayāna Buddhism, originally applied to minor retinue figures within a larger *maṇḍala*, or as a stereotypical name for a male Buddha's consort. By the end of the first millennium, within certain Indian texts, "Jñānaḍākinī" appears simply as an alternate name for Vajrayoginī.¹⁹⁹ In a few contexts in Indian tantric literature, Jñānaḍākinī appears at the center of her own *maṇḍala*, such as the thirteen-deity *yoginī maṇḍala* in the *Catuspīṭhā* cycle.²⁰⁰

In general terms, the name underscores the association of threatening, liminal goddesses with the principle of gnosis, or divine knowledge, in Vajrayāna Buddhist thought. In Tibetan hagiographical literature the name Guhyajñānaḍākinī/Gsang ba ye shes mkha' 'gro sometimes appears as a title for a female figure with which the male protagonist has a significant encounter. For instance, in the *Padma bka' thang* treasure biography of Padmasambhava said to have been discovered by O rgyan gling pa (b. 1323), during the period of Padmasambhava's early charnel-ground meditations he is swallowed whole by a female guru figure named Gsang ba ye shes, purified and empowered inside her body, and ejected again from her vagina, being effectively reborn as an empowered, awakened being.²⁰¹ A goddess named "Gsang ba ye shes" also plays an important role in the sixth of 'Brom ston pa's (1004/5-1064) birth stories in the "son" section of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*, where 'Brom ston pa's previous incarnation,

¹⁹⁹ See English (2002: 49), and Abhyākaragupta (1949: 79).

²⁰⁰ See Szántó (2012) for an in-depth study of this *tantra* and its associated commentarial and ritual literature.

²⁰¹ Ye shes mtsho rgyal 1985: folio 11b4.

Prince Dkon mchog 'bangs, must go on a quest to find the secret gnosis *ḍākinī* and retrieve her from a place called "Black Mountain Temple" in the land of Oddiyana. Once he finds her, he then brings her back to his palace and takes her as his wife.²⁰²

In another significant Tibetan tantric context, Guhyajñānaḍākinī is the consort of several interrelated forms of Avalokiteśvara known variously as Jinasāgara ("Ocean of Conquerors") or Padmanarteśvara ("Lotus Lord of the Dance").²⁰³ The red-colored Jinasāgara Padmanarteśvara Avalokiteśvara (Tib. Bde gshegs kun 'dus Padma gar dbang Thugs rje chen po, "The Great Compassionate Ocean of Conquerors Lotus Lord of the Dance") and his consort Guhyajñānaḍākinī, in both Gsar ma and Rnying ma lineage lists, is said to have originated (on earth²⁰⁴) with Padmasambhava, though interestingly the practice was apparently believed to have been taught during his time in India rather than Tibet.²⁰⁵ According to Gter bdag gling pa and Lo chen Dharmaśrī in the important and influential Smin ling 'Dod 'jo'i 'bum bzang *sādhana* collection, Tibetans did not receive the practice of Jinasāgara Avalokiteśvara with Guhyajñānaḍākinī directly from Padmasambhava, but it first passed to a semi-historical Indian *yoginī* named Siddhirājñī (Sgrub pa'i rgyal mo, c. 12th century), who is best known for her role as one of Ras chung pa's (1083/4-1161) gurus during his visit to

²⁰² See Roesler 2007: 134-135 for an overview of this story. See Das (1893) for an early translation of the story. For a detailed summary of the birth stories in the *Bu chos* of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*, see Schuh 1981: 5-8.

²⁰³ Additionally, Gsang ba ye shes functions as the consort of Lokeśvara *Guhyasiddhi (Tib. 'Jig rten dbang phyug Gsang sgrub), who seems to be related to the Jinasāgara Padmanarteśvara form, and appears in the *Rin 'byung snar thang brgya rtsa sādhana* collection, as does a stand-alone form of Gsang ba ye shes iconographically identical to the one discussed below (see Willson 2000: p. 70, n. 118 and p. 100, n. 210). However, at this time I am unsure whether or not the solitary Gsang ba ye shes in this collection is historically and textually related to the Rnying ma form which is the main focus of this chapter.

²⁰⁴ The first two teachers of the practice before Padmasambhava are considered to be Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara.

²⁰⁵ Interestingly, there is also a long-standing Nepalese tradition that identifies Jñānaḍākinī as the *mother* of a red form of Avalokiteśvara at the Mhaypi shrine in Kathmandu. For descriptions of this shrine and the rituals that take place there see Szántó (2012: 68-72) and Wright (1877: 143-144). An interesting topic for further anthropological research would be to investigate possible connections between this cult and the relatively recently developed cult of Padma gar dbang in the context of the "Mani Rimdu" festival in the Solu Khumbu region of Nepal studied by Kohn (2001), which is directly linked to the Tibetan Smin gling tradition discussed below.

India. Specifically, she is credited with doubling this Tibetan *yogin's* life after it was prophesized that he would die at the relatively early age of 44. She did this by transmitting to him a special long-life practice of Amitāyus.²⁰⁶ In the *Ras chung pa* narratives, Siddhirājñī is depicted as primarily being an Amitāyus adept, and indeed, five out of the seven texts in the *Bstan 'gyur* attributed to her are focused on Amitāyus.²⁰⁷

The other two texts attributed to Siddhirājñī in the Tibetan canon are *sādhana*s of Hayagrīva and Jinasāgara Avalokiteśvara.²⁰⁸ The Hayagrīva text is not unique, but this "secret," *yogānuttara* form of Avalokiteśvara certainly is, and like Siddhirājñī's Amitāyus cycle, seems to have been one of the main source texts for later forms of this practice in Tibet.²⁰⁹ In this *sādhana*, Guhyajñānaḍākinī appears as the *yum* deity, in union with Avalokiteśvara, described as being red (matching her consort's color), having four arms, two holding a flaying knife and blood-filled skull bowl, and the other two holding a sword and a *khatvāṅga* staff. This *yab-yum* pair of red Jīnasāgara Avalokiteśvara and Guhyajñānaḍākinī would become a particularly important practice within the Karma Bka' brgyud school through *Ras chung pa*.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ For more on the various accounts of *Ras chung pa's* interactions with Siddhirājñī and Siddhirājñī's Amitāyus tradition see Shaw (1994: 117-125) and Roberts (2000).

²⁰⁷ Two of these are *maṇḍala* ritual texts, the *Tshe dang ye shes dpag tu med pa'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga* (Sde dge *Bstan 'gyur* vol. 49, pp. 421-432), and the *Tshe dpag med pa'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga* (pp. 447-463), two regular liturgies, the *Tshe dpag med kyi sgrub thabs* (pp. 433-439) and the *Tshe dang ye shes dpag tu med pa'i sgrub thabs* (pp. 441-447), and one fire offering ritual, the *Tshe dpag tu med pa'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga* (pp. 439-441).

²⁰⁸ The *Rta mgrin gyi sgrub thabs* (pp. 432-433) and the *'Jig rten dbang phyug gsang ba'i sgrub thabs* (pp. 411-412) respectively.

²⁰⁹ One of the unique features of this Avalokiteśvara practice is, in fact, the presence of Guhyajñānaḍākinī as his consort. For the complete lineage of this form of Avalokiteśvara from India to Tibet see volume one of the *'Dod 'jo'i 'bum bzang* page 229 (my thanks to Cathy Cantwell for this reference). See also *The Blue Annals* (Roerich 1979: 1007), which agrees with, but is more extensive than, the *'Dod 'jo'i 'bum bzang* list. Here Siddhirājñī is referred to as "Phag mo of Bhāṅgala." Interestingly, both lists indicate that *Ras chung pa* did not receive the Avalokiteśvara practice directly from Siddhirājñī, but another student of hers, another Indian Mahasiddha, named *Ti phu pa*.

²¹⁰ Watt, Jeff. "Avalokiteshvara (Bodhisattva & Buddhist Deity) - Jinasagara (Ocean of Conquerors) (Himalayan Art)." *Avalokiteshvara (Bodhisattva & Buddhist Deity) - Jinasagara (Ocean of Conquerors) (HimalayanArt)*. N.p., May 1999. Web. 27 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm/790.html>>. The *'Dod 'jo'i 'bum bzang* identifies the second Karma pa as the tenth holder of the lineage.

Approximately five hundred years after Siddhirājñī is said to have transmitted her practices to Ras chung pa, Gter bdag gling pa Padma gar dbang 'Gyur med rdo rje (1646-1714), one of the greatest treasure revealers in the history of the Rnying ma school, made the last of his *gter ma* revelations at the Bde chen ye shes kyi 'khor lo ("Wheel of Great Bliss and Gnosis") cave in 1680 at a place called Sha 'ug stag sgo on the border between Tibet and Bhutan. The name of this treasure cycle was the *Thugs rje chen po bde gshegs kun 'dus yab yum* (TCKD). As the title indicates, the main deity of this cycle is Jīnasāgara Avalokiteśvara along with his consort Guhyajñānaḍākinī.²¹¹

It is said that Gter bdag gling pa did not receive permission to copy out the "mother section" of the revelation until years later, when the whole cycle was compiled in 1713 in the form we have it today under the direction of Gter bdag gling pa's brother Lo chen Dharmaśrī (1654-1717) and son Padma 'gyur med rgya mtsho (1686-1718).²¹² This redaction, of which we have prints made from blocks carved at Rdza rong phu,²¹³ is four volumes long and is intriguing both for its apparent continuities with the Siddhirājñī (or Ras chung pa) Jinasāgara Avalokiteśvara tradition, as well as notable differences. First and foremost, the two main *yab-yum* deities of Gter bdag gling pa's treasure cycle match the Siddhirājñī forms exactly. However, the 1713 redaction of Gter bdag gling pa's original revelations (when he is said to have finally gotten authorization of the *yum* section from the deity herself) introduces a solitary form of the (particularly four-armed) Gsang ba ye shes that, as far as I am aware, does not

²¹¹ Gter bdag gling pa's revelation is by no means the first Rnying ma example of a Avalokiteśvara/Guhyajñānaḍākinī pairing. Ratna gling pa (1403-1479) revealed a cycle of teachings dedicated to Guhyasamāja in the form of Avalokiteśvara (see the TCGD). This still-popular form of Guhyasamāja also has Indian precedent, along with the more common forms of Akṣobhya and Mañjuśrī-Guhyasamāja. In Ratna gling pa's revelations, Guhyasamāja-Avalokiteśvara's consort is named Guhyajñāna (In Tibetan Gsang ba 'dus pa and Gsang ba ye shes respectively) possibly for nomenclatural symmetry. She does not, however, carry the same implements as the Siddhirājñī and Gter bdag gling pa forms. Whether there was a tradition of Rnying ma practice of the Siddhirājñī form of these particularly deities pre-dating Gter bdag gling pa is unknown to me at this time.

²¹² The history of the compilation of the cycle is found in GYCK vol. 1, pp. 1-24.

²¹³ According to the title page of the TCKD.

appear in any practice lineages prior to this.²¹⁴ Her solitary form practices span six texts over thirty pages in the first volume of the TCKD, including a root generation stage *sādhana*. Here, Gsang ba ye shes is depicted with basically the same appearance as in the descriptions of her in union with Avalokiteśvara, but here in the standing, dancing pose common among solitary *ḍākinī* deity forms. While this development is significant, still Gsang ba ye shes plays a relatively small role in the TCKD cycle overall. In fact, the primary protector deity of the cycle, Lha chen dbang phyug chen po (Mahādeva Maheśvara, a Buddhist version of the Hindu deity), has significantly more texts devoted to him in the first volume alone than does Gsang ba ye shes. Having Lha chen as the TCKD's main protector and primary emanation of Avalokiteśvara appears to be a particular (and particularly interesting) innovation of Gter bdag gling pa's treasure cycle, and Mahādeva/Lha chen makes no appearance in Siddhirājñī's original '*Jig rten dbang phyug gsang ba'i sgrub thabs*'. In fact, as far as I am aware, Lha chen does not appear as a centrally important and cosmologically supreme *dharma* protector in a Buddhist practice cycle until the TCKD.²¹⁵

Another aspect of the TCKD worthy of particular note here is a series of no less than seven practices devoted to immortality in the middle of the first volume, and an Amitāyus *sādhana* that appears at the beginning of the second volume. The inclusion of these practices oriented toward gaining long life generally and focused on the deity Amitāyus specifically may be a result of the transmission of both Jīnāsāgara Avalokiteśvara and Amitāyus from the single figure of Siddhirājñī. In other words, the TCKD maintains the connection between these two deities, which by that time had

²¹⁴ The form of Jñānaḍākinī in the *Catuṣpīṭhā* cycle is depicted differently from this Guhyajñānaḍākinī, and there does not appear to be any direct connection between the two.

²¹⁵ This does not include cases where Mahādeva/Maheśvara/Rudra is conflated with Mahākāla. For more on the significance of Lha chen, particularly regarding the TCKD cycle, and the connection with Mahākāla, see chapter three.

already been a long-standing tradition, at least within the Karma Bka' brgyud school. The two deities would also remain connected in later Rnying ma treasure revelations, following Gter bdag gling pa's Sming grol gling tradition.

In any case, the TCKD contains a number of practices devoted to several distinct deities, not to mention a wealth of commentarial literature in the third and fourth volumes which discuss the practice of the main deity from a *rdzogs chen* perspective. Gsang ba ye shes herself as a solitary deity, while appearing as a relatively important deity in the limited context of the TCKD, might have been lost in obscurity were it not for the efforts of Sle lung Bzhad pa'i rdo rje.

Sle lung and the Goddess of Secret Gnosis

Sle lung first received the empowerment of Gsang ba ye shes probably in 1713, the same year that the TCKD cycle's compilation was finally completed.²¹⁶ However, Sle lung apparently did not receive the full suite of Gsang ba ye shes's practices until a few years later, around 1716-1717. In this year, Dam chos bzang po, Sle lung's main teacher at Mnga' ris grwa tshang, where he had received the bulk of his monastic education, travelled to Smin grol gling to request the transmission of the teachings of the First Sle lung, Lho brag grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1326-1401), in order to give the transmissions to Sle lung himself, who had not previously been given these teachings.²¹⁷ As the de-facto center of Rnying ma authority, Gter bdag gling pa and Lo chen Dharmaśrī had, since the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama, worked to preserve as

²¹⁶ As mentioned briefly in chapter one, this is according to a record in Sle lung's *gsung 'bum* which states that he and a consort practiced the generation and completion stages of Gsang ba ye shes near Chos 'khor rgyal during the water snake year (1713-14). See BRGB vol. 9 pp. 273-274. This was apparently around the same time that he was officially recognized as the reincarnation of the previous Sle lungs by Chos rje gling pa. The passage also seems to imply that Chos rje gling pa transmitted the Gsang ba ye shes teachings to him.

²¹⁷ Sle lung Tulku, personal communication 23/10/2014.

many Rnying ma lineages at Smin grol gling as possible,²¹⁸ which apparently included Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's work, with their strong *rdzogs chen* orientation.

While at Smin grol gling, Dam chos bzang po also received transmission of the TCKD teachings, specifically the Gsang ba ye shes "mother" section, and was told of a prophecy, purportedly from Gter bdag gling pa himself, that his student, the Fifth Sle lung, was destined to uphold (and spread) this particular cycle.²¹⁹ According to the introduction of Sle lung's extensive completion stage commentary on the practice of Gsang ba ye shes²²⁰ (discussed in more detail below), Dam chos bzang po received the empowerment and transmission of these practices and texts from 'Gyur med rgya mtsho himself. Dam chos bzang po travelled back to Mnga' ris grwa tshang where he then gave the empowerment and transmission to Sle lung. However, it seems that soon after, Sle lung travelled to Smin grol gling himself in order to receive oral explanation of the practices on which his commentary is based from a master at Smin grol gling named Che mchog rdo rje, also called Che mchog 'dus pa rtsal and Blo gsal rgya mtsho (dates unknown), who is mentioned throughout the colophons in Sle lung's Gsang ba ye shes cycle, and who was likely his main teacher at Smin grol gling.²²¹ According to Sle lung, Che mchog rdo rje received the oral explanation on the Gsang ba ye shes completion stage practices from Mi 'gyur dpal sgron who received them from 'Gyur med rgya mtsho. Che mchog rdo rje also taught Sle lung a number of auxiliary "magical" practices that play an important role in the extensive Gsang ba ye shes cycle Sle lung would go on to compile.

²¹⁸ See Dalton 2002: 204-230.

²¹⁹ Sle lung Tulku, personal communication 23/10/2014, Loden 2013: 63.

²²⁰ GYCK Vol. 1, pp. 324-728.

²²¹ This would likely have been during his trip there in 1715. There is the possibility, given the title of a biographical work attributed to Sle lung by Shakabpa (2010), that Che mchog 'dus pa rtsal is another name for Gter bdag gling pa, since in the title of said text the latter title is connected to the former name, but I have seen no other evidence of this. Furthermore, if Sle lung's first visit to Smin grol gling was in 1715, this would have been the year after Gter bdag gling pa 'Gyur med rdo rje died. Thus it is probable that Che mchog 'dus pa rtsal refers to a different person.

In any case, around the time of 1716/1717, Sle lung was at Smin grol gling intensively practicing Gsang ba ye shes as his meditational deity until, it is said, miraculous signs appeared, such as ceremonial scarves and flowers falling from the sky.²²² This would have likely have been just months before the invading Dzungar Mongols completely destroyed Smin grol gling and executed Lo chen Dharmaśrī and 'Gyur med rgya mtsho. By this time, however, Sle lung was safely back at his newly founded monastery of Rnam grol gling in the relatively remote Sle lung Valley many miles east of Lhasa and away from the Mongolian occupying forces. Prophecy or not, had it not been for the transmission of the Smin grol gling TCKD and specifically the Gsang ba ye shes teachings to Sle lung, they likely would have been lost.²²³ To engage in a bit of speculation, it is quite possible that the Smin grol gling hierarchs saw an opportunity in Sle lung; as a reincarnate bla ma highly important within the Dge lugs establishment yet with a strong Rnying ma history, specifically through the teachings of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, Sle lung was perfectly placed to spread Smin grol gling teachings like the TCKD beyond Rnying ma circles, which is precisely what occurred.

Safely tucked away at Rnam grol gling, twelve years after the destruction of Smin grol gling, Sle lung began the project of compiling the *Gsang ba ye shes kyi chos skor* (GYCK). This sixteen-volume cycle (four times the length of the TCKD) was produced over the course of about nine years, based on the dates found in the colophons of some of the individual texts which span the years of 1729-1737. In the cycle, Sle lung essentially extracts Gsang ba ye shes from her TCKD context and makes her a stand-alone, self-sufficient deity. None of the other main deities in the TCKD, including

²²² Loden 2013: 64.

²²³ There were, however, other major Rnying ma figures around this same time who were invested in the cult of a goddess named Gsang ba ye shes, in various forms. For instance, Rtsa gsum gling pa (1694-1738), a treasure revealer who was a contemporary of Sle lung, also has a number of practices focused on Gsang ba ye shes in his *gter ma* revelations. What relation, if any, this Gsang ba ye shes has with the Smin gling tradition requires further research.

Jīnasāgara Avalokiteśvara, play a significant role in the texts of the GYCK, although, as we shall see, there are a few supplementary texts devoted to Lha chen. While Gsang ba ye shes's ascension to an important deity in her own right begins with 'Gyur med rgya mtsho's redaction of the TCKD, Sle lung establishes her as supreme deity, not only wholly independent from her male consort, but effectively and practically making the male consort irrelevant. In this way, then, Gsang ba ye shes's ascension parallels that of Vajrayoginī in India and Nepal during the turn of the second millennium. In this context, Vajrayoginī began as the consort of the central male deity Heruka within the *Cakrasaṃvara* cycle of Buddhist tantra, before becoming the focus of worship as a solitary deity in her own right (this development in turn parallels Pārvatī's ascension within *Śaiva-Śākta* tantra).²²⁴ In the case of the Smin grol gling Gsang ba ye shes, her ascension from consort to central, solitary deity occurred within only about two generations.²²⁵

This shift in perception of Gsang ba ye shes's overall importance is revealed in the internal histories describing the origins of the TCKD cycle within the TCKD itself and the GYCK. Like many Rnying ma *gter ma* texts, the TCKD includes an account of its own concealment by Padmasambhava and prophesized rediscovery, for the purposes of authentication. This is detailed in the rather perfunctory *Yum gsang ba ye shes kyi lo rgyus*,²²⁶ the twenty-fifth text of the TCKD and the first (after the *dkar chag*) in the GYCK. This text gives a rather basic and standard story, outlining Padmasambhava's mission to Tibet and the teaching of the Buddhist *dharma* to the King Khri strong lde

²²⁴ For more on the phenomenon of the apotheosis of consorts in Buddhist and Śaiva tantra, see Sanderson (2009: 173 ff.) and English (2002: 35-107). Interestingly, however, the exact opposite occurred in the *Catuspīthā* tradition, where Jñānaḍākinī was later supplanted by her male consort, Yogāmbara. According to Szántó (2012: 56) this is the only instance of a female to male reversal in Buddhist tantra.

²²⁵ Sle lung himself considered Gsang ba ye shes to be effectively another form of Vajrayoginī. On the blockprints of Sle lung's autobiography is a miniature line-drawing of Gsang ba ye shes captioned "*Rje btsun rdo rje rnal 'byor ma*."

²²⁶ TCKD vol. 1, pp. 235-238.

bstan and his court, specifically the teachings of Jīnasāgara Avalokiteśvara. Interestingly, this text begins by explaining that, originally, the Buddha Amitābha taught the practice of Avalokiteśvara in order to tame men, the practice of Guhyajñāna-ḍākinī to tame women, and the practice of Hayagrīva as a way of taming particularly wicked people.²²⁷

This three-fold division is intriguing for a few reasons. First, the inclusion of Hayagrīva in this scheme is rather peculiar (in fact, makes no sense) given that there are no texts focused specifically on this deity in the entirety of the TCKD. However, in a later redaction of the *Thugs rje chen po bde gshegs kun 'dus sādhana* found in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, Hayagrīva appears, not as a separate deity, but as the "gnosis hero" (effectively the inner or secret form of the main deity) in the heart of Avalokiteśvara.²²⁸ Of course, the association of Avalokiteśvara with Hayagrīva is longstanding in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, with the latter usually understood to be the main wrathful form of the former. Siddhirājñī herself also wrote a liturgy specifically dedicated to Hayagrīva, the *Rta mgrin gyi sgrub thabs*, in conjunction with the *sādhana* of Jinasāgara Avalokiteśvara, and Hayagrīva is one of the five main deities in the *maṇḍala* of Jinasāgara Avalokiteśvara based on Siddhirājñī's teachings.

Secondly, the *lo rgyus*'s passage from the GYCK on the three-fold scheme of Avalokiteśvara-Guhyajñāna-Hayagrīva explicitly states that the practice of Gsang ba ye shes was intended to be primarily for women, but there is no indication whatsoever that this was actually the case. All of the students of Sle lung mentioned in the colophons of the GYCK were male, and likely only a select few female practitioners including Mi 'gyur dpal sgron and Sle lung's consort Lha gcig Rdo rje skyab byed, ever

²²⁷ TCKD vol. 1, p. 236.

²²⁸ See Kohn 2001: 16-18 for Hayagrīva's scriptural role in a later "Lord of the Dance" Avalokiteśvara text based on the TCKD. See also the *Thugs rje chen po bde gshegs kun 'dus kyi sgrub thabs chog khrigs zab lam gsal ba'i nyin byed* (abbreviated by Kohn as "UB") in RCGM vol. 38, pp. 67-119.

had contact with these practices. Sle lung himself took Gsang ba ye shes as his main meditational deity, and seems to have had little to do with Jīnasāgara Avalokiteśvara (the deity supposedly for men), practically speaking. So we can conclude that the threefold typology of the *lo rgyus* should be taken as a bit of poetic license.²²⁹

A more elaborate story of the origins of the Gsang ba ye shes teachings is found in the GYCK in Sle lung's introduction to an elaborate explanation of the Gsang ba ye shes empowerment ritual, where he gives a comprehensive mythologized lineage history of the teachings. According to this account, there are three different lineage transmissions of the TCKD. In the *dharmakāya* lineage the Buddha Samantabhadra, having declared the perfect teachings to the peaceful and wrathful deities, emanates Avalokiteśvara, who teaches the TCKD to the *vidyādhara*s and *ḍākinī*s. Sle lung explains that this lineage should not be thought of as a succession of individuals but rather a single teacher appearing in successive forms as though he were a lineage.

The second, the lineage of the *vidyādhara*s, is basically a long recounting of Padmasambhava's biography, based on the *Padma bka' thang*. But the third lineage history tells the story of Padmasambhava teaching the TCKD in Tibet, giving more detail to the bare facts asserted in the *Yum gsang ba ye shes kyi lo rgyus*.²³⁰ Sle lung explains that after Padmasambhava had come to Tibet, at one time he was at Brag dmar g.ya' ma lung (near Bsam yas) on the shoulder of Ri bo rin chen brtsegs pa Mountain,

²²⁹ Although it is possible this threefold typology was simply copied from an earlier (*gter ma*?) source. This would make sense given the lack of Hayagrīva practices in the TCKD and GYCK and may reflect an earlier cycle where Hayagrīva was a more significant deity. My thanks to Cathy Cantwell for this suggestion.

²³⁰ The three transmission lineages account thus is somewhat similar to but distinct from the '*Dod 'jo'i 'bum bzang* and *Blue Annals* lineage lists of the Siddhirājñī/Ras chung pa transmission of the Jīnasāgara Avalokiteśvara/Guhyajñāṇaḍākinī practice. Both accounts trace the earthly origin of the practice to Padmasambhava, but, as per the conventions of Rnying ma *gter ma* revelation, has him teach it directly to Tibetans without Indian intermediaries. And while Avalokiteśvara preceeds Padmasambhava in both lists, the "dharmakāya" deity is Amitābha in the Siddhirājñī/Ras chung pa transmission, but Samantabhadra, the primordial Buddha in Rnying ma theology, in the GYCK transmission account, perhaps putting a more Rnying ma stamp on the practice.

preaching the *dharma* to King Khri strong lde btsan, prince Mu khri btsan po, the great translator Vairocana, the *ḍākinī* Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and others. One night a red woman wearing a garland of flowers (presumably Gsang ba ye shes herself) appeared to the king in a dream. She declared that Padmasambhava carried in his mind the essence of all the *tantras*, reading transmissions, and key instructions of Avalokiteśvara, namely the *Thugs rje chen po bde gshegs kun 'dus* collection. She told the king to make offerings to the master and request these teachings. The next day the king requested the relevant teachings and Padmasambhava taught the *yab* section of the TCKD to the king and six other students along with an assembly of 100,000 gnosis *ḍākinīs*. The *yum* section was taught only to the king, Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and Vairocana. Of the two sections, the *yum* section is considered the more profound. Vairocana inscribed this section, and Ye shes mtsho rgyal inscribed the *yab* section. They were then concealed in Sha 'ug stag sgo on the border of Tibet and Bhutan and Rdo rje g.yu'i sgron ma and Rdo rje legs pa were designated as the protector deities of the *gter ma*.²³¹

So what precisely are the contents of the elaborated *yum* section of the TCKD, as represented in the GYCK? I do not have space here to examine in detail the contents of all sixteen volumes. However, it is useful to summarize the contents of the first volume that represents the core of the Gsang ba ye shes teachings and practices. The following fifteen volumes can be understood as elaborate accretions which Sle lung gradually added on during the 1730s, either at his own discretion or at the prompting of his students at Rnam grol gling. Ultimately, Sle lung produced what is essentially a self-contained mini-canon that runs the gamut of Tibetan Buddhist tantric practice, including everything from elaborate, erudite commentaries on completion stage

²³¹ GYCK vol. 2, p. 163.5f., Schwieger 1985: XXII-XXIII.

practices, karmic causality, and even a general introduction to the Buddhist path, to very "mundane" "magical" practices aimed at such things as keeping mice away from crops. The continuity between the "high" tantric completion stage soteriology and the "folksy" magic of a bla ma responsible for maintaining local food production in the GYCK will be my main topic for the rest of this chapter.

But before we turn to that, let us examine in detail the first volume of the GYCK. As suggested above, there is some overlap between the GYCK and the TCKD. Not including the *dkar chag* of the GYCK, its first seven texts are taken directly from the TCKD, and seem to function essentially as root texts of which the other nearly 150 texts in the cycle are either explanations or supplements. These seven root texts are all attributed to 'Gyur med rgya mstho, and correspond to texts 25-31 in the first volume of the TCKD. These include the *lo rgyus* discussed above; a basic evocation or generation stage *sādhana* of Gsang ba ye shes; a ritual for blessing a new Gsang ba ye shes initiate, and an explanation of the first-time self-identification with the deity; a ritual praise and offering to Gsang ba ye shes in order to give rise to *siddhis*, or spiritual attainments; a *homa* or fire ritual offering directed toward Gsang ba ye shes; an explanation of the commitments one is bound by once practice is undertaken; and finally an outline of a four-fold system of completion stage practice.²³² Generally speaking, these are all quite basic and standard elements of Buddhist highest yoga *tantra*, although certain details seem to be particular to this Gsang ba ye shes system.

²³² The full titles of these texts are: *Zab lam bde gshegs kun 'dus las yum gsang ba ye shes kyi lo rgyus* (TCKD vol. 1, pp. 235-238; GYCK, vol. 1 pp. 25-28); *Zab lam bde gshegs kun 'dus las ye shes mkha' 'gro'i sgrub thabs* (TCKD vol. 1, pp. 245-251; GYCK, vol. 1 pp. 29-39); *Zab lam bde gshegs kun 'dus las ye shes mkha' 'gro'i byin rlabs* (TCKD vol. 1, pp. 239-243; GYCK, vol. 1 pp. 40-45); *Zab lam bde gshegs kun 'dus las mkha' 'gro ma'i bstod bskul* (TCKD vol. 1, pp. 253-256; GYCK, vol. 1 pp. 46-49); *Zab lam bde gshegs kun 'dus las mkha' 'gro ma'i me mchod* (TCKD vol. 1, pp. 267-270; GYCK, vol. 1 pp. 50-53); *Zab lam bde gshegs kun 'dus las mkha' 'gro ma'i dam tshig* (TCKD vol. 1, pp. 263-266; GYCK, vol. 1 pp. 54-57); *Zab lam bde gshegs kun 'dus las mkha' 'gro ma'i rnal 'byor rim bzhi* (TCKD vol. 1, pp. 257-262; GYCK, vol. 1 pp. 58-66). I am indebted to Peter Schwieger (1985) for his exhaustive descriptive overview of the GYCK cycle, which made navigating and understanding this massive work manageable.

To get some idea of the basic form of both Gsang ba ye shes herself and the ritual form of her practice as presented in both the GYCK and the TCKD, I here quote at length from the beginning of 'Gyur med rgya mtsho's root *sādhana* (the basic *sgrub thabs* text) of the deity:

I pay homage to the Glorious *ḍākinī* Lady of the Dance. Wishing to accomplish the *ḍākinī* of Secret Gnosis, on the tenth day of any month, in a solitary place such as a charnel ground or a forest grove make a mud-plaster base. Lay out a square *maṇḍala* one cubit wide and sprinkle it with beer and nectar. In the middle of that [draw/paint] red triangle and four svastikas encircled by a varja-fence and mountains of flame and in the middle set out bunches of red flowers. Beside that, set an un-cracked skull cup, fill it with beer and sprinkle with desired materials such as ambrosia and jewels. Cover the mouth [of the bowl] with a red cloth. On the surface of this, [place] a mirror anointed with *sindhura* powder. With a golden stick draw [with the *sindhura*] a *dharmodaya* with svastikas, in the middle of which draw a "HRĪḤ" syllable and on three corners [of the triangle, draw] "OM ĀḤ HŪḤ." Hide it from view by raising a canopy of red cloth. Collect all the ritual materials such as a red *gtor ma*, incense of human fat, butter lamps of fat, perfumed water of nectar, a trumpet and drum of bone and so forth. Sitting facing the west go for refuge and generate the mind of enlightenment. In an instant generate yourself as the *ḍākinī*. Rays of light from the heart center invite the gnosis being from [the land of] Orgyan and [she] is established in the *maṇḍala*. Worship her with the five offerings and ambrosia. Imagine that light from her heart dissolves into yourself, purifying all sins and defilements and at the navel is a shining "HRĪḤ" and "OM ĀḤ HŪḤ." From that, light pervades the three realms and is reabsorbed into the three syllables. Imagine that by the light of the "HRĪḤ" which is blazing like the sun, your own body with the "HRĪḤ" becomes red light. Then, in a single instant, meditate on [these appearances] as being empty. In that state, in the middle of an immeasurable celestial mansion of [interlocking] *dharmodaya* triangles, on top of a lotus, a corpse, and a sun, meditate on a red "HRĪḤ." From that, you unfold as red Vajradākinī, possessing the beauty of a sixteen-year-old [girl] with one face, four hands, three eyes, smiling angrily, feeling passion. She wears a crown of skulls, a garland of flowers, small bells, and bone ornaments. Her loose hair hangs down, her first two hands hold a hooked knife and a skull-cup at her heart, her lower two hands hold a sword and a *khatvāṅga* staff, her body is poised with dignified grandeur, dancing amidst flames, left leg extended, encircled by the four classes of *ḍākinīs*. At her heart, visualize a "HRĪḤ" together with the mantra garland. From that radiates light, and by reciting "E A RA LI DZAH PHAIM" you invite from Orgyan the *ḍākinī* together with her retinue and establish them in the sky. Visualize that from her body limitless bodies [copies of the deity] descend and are absorbed [into] the crown [of the] head [and you become] endowed with joy. Also visualize from her throat the speech mantra "a li ka li"²³³ of white and red color dissolves [into your own] throat and you become endowed with

²³³ This refers to the Sanskrit alphabet *mantra*.

the power of speech. Also visualize that from her heart center rays of light of the self-arisen enlightened mind of the five gnoses dissolve [into your] heart endowed with self-knowledge. Then visualize that, just like water poured into water, you are inseparable from the goddess. Having established a single-pointed very clear yogic meditation on the body of the deity, dissolve it and re-arise as the deity.²³⁴

This *sādhana* practice is the simplest, most rudimentary invocation of Gsang ba ye shes in the cycle, and follows standard generation stage (*bskyed rim*), or in Rnying ma terms, Mahāyoga paradigms, the mastery of which forms the basis of, and constitutes the prerequisite for, myriad practices found throughout the GYCK. To name but a few, these include the completion stage (*rdzogs rim*) subtle-body practices, ritual empowerments granted to new initiates, funeral liturgies, and various "magical" applications for manipulating the external world. In particular, the generation stage technique of "emanation and [re]absorption" of the deity's enlightened mind, usually in the form of lights, constitutes the imaginative paradigm with which the *yogin*

²³⁴ [30] *dpal gar dbang mkha' 'gro ma la phyag 'tshal lo: gsang ba ye shes kyi mkha' 'gro sgrub par 'dod pas: dur khrod dang nags tshal sogs dben pa'i gnas su zla ba gang yang rung ba'i tshes bcu la: sa gzhi skyang nul bya: ma dhala khru gang lham pa chang dang bdud rtsis chag chag gdab: de'i dbus su chos 'byung po gru gsum gyung drung bzhis mtshan pa rdo rje'i ra ba dang me ris bskor ba'i dbus su me tog dmar po'i tshom bu* [31] *bkod: de'i khar thod pa srubs med chang gis bkang ba la a mri ta dang rin po che sogs 'dod pa'i rdzas kyi bran: dar dmar pos zhal bkab: de'i khar me long la sindhu ras byugs: gser gyi thur mas chos 'byung g.yung drung can dbus su hrI: dang zur gsum du om ah hum bri: dar le brgan gyi gur phub nas mi mthong bar bya: dmar gyi gtor ma dang: tshil chen gyi spos: zhun gyi mar me: bdud rtsi'i dri chab: rkang gi dung dang cang te'u sogs dam* [32] *rdzas thams cad tshogs par byas nas: kha nub tu phyogs pas 'dug ste: skyabs su 'gro ba dang byang chub tu sems bskyed la: rang nyid skad cig gis dha ki mar bskyed: thugs ka'i 'od zer gyis o rgyan nas ye shes pa spyang drangs ma ndala la bkod: mchod pa lnga' dang bdud rtsis mchod: thugs ka nas 'od zer byung ba rang la thim pas sdig sgrib thams cad sbyangs lte bar hrI dang om ah hum 'od 'bar bar bsam: de las 'od 'phros khams gsum po yig 'bru gsum la bstim: hrI'i 'od nyi ma ltar 'bar bas rang lus hrI dang bcas 'od dmar bor bsam: de nas skad cig gis stong pa nyid du sgom/ de'i ngang las chos 'byung gru gsum pa'i gzhai yas khang gi dbus su pad+ma dang ro dang nyi ma'i steng du hrI dmar por sgom: de las rang nyid rdo rje mkha' 'gro* [33] *ma sku mdog dmar mo bcu drug lon pa'i lang tsho can zhal gcig phyag bzhi spyang gsum pa gcer bu khro 'dzum chags pa'i nyams rgyas pa: thod pa'i cod pan dang do shal can me tog gi phreng ba dang dril g.yer dang rus pa'i rgyan gyis brgyan pa: skra grol ba thur la 'phyang pa: phyag dang po gnyis kyi gri gug dang thod pa thugs kar 'dzin pa: 'og ma gnyis ral gri dang kha tvA ka 'dzin: sku 'gying bag can g.yon brkyang ba'i skyil krung phyed pa'i gar gyis me'i dbus na dha ki sde bzhis bskor nas bzhugs pa% thugs kar hrIh sngags phreng dang bcas pa bsam: de las 'od zer 'phros e a ra li dzah phaim zhes brjod pas: o rgyan nas mkha' 'gro ma 'khor dang bcas pa spyang* [34] *drangs nam mkhar bkod: de'i sku las sku dpag tu med pa byon spyi bo nas thim lus bde ba dang ldan par bsam: yang mgrin pa nas gsung gsang sngags A li Ka li dkar dmar du byon mgrin pa nas thim ngag nus pa dang ldan par bsam: yang thugs ka nas ye shes lnga'i rang bzhin byang chub sems kyi 'od zer byung snying ga nas thim sems rtogs pa dang ldan par bsam: de nas lha mo yang rang la thim pas chu la chu bzhag pa bzhin dbyer med du bsam: de nas lha sku'i rnal 'byor shin tu gsal ba la rtse gcig tu mnyam par bzhag nas mtha' bskyang bar bya'o:*

accomplishes not only his own communion with the deity and consequent awakening, but also most if not all of the "auxiliary" practices that fill the pages of the GYCK's subsequent volumes. We will have occasion to review some of these practices in detail in what follows, but let us continue the survey of the GYCK's key first volume.

The next two texts in the GYCK *dkar chag* are also attributed to 'Gyur med rgya mtsho, but are not found in the TCKD. In fact, one of these is not even actually in the GYCK.²³⁵ The first of these, the one missing from both cycles, is entitled *Gsang ye'i rgyun khyer snying po*, which can be translated as "The Essential Daily Practice of Secret Gnosis." The second (text ten of the GYCK) is the *Mkha' 'gro gsang ye'i bsnyen yig grub gnyis gter mdzod*, which translates roughly as the "Practice Commentary of the Secret Gnosis *Ḍākinī*, a Treasury of the Two [Types of] *Siddhis*." This appears to be an autocommentary by 'Gyur med rgya mtsho, explaining the proper ritual procedures of the so-called seven-fold ritual service to be carried out during the practice of the *sādhana*.²³⁶ According to the colophon, it was written in 1717 at the request of a Kun bzang klong grol, presumably one of 'Gyur med rgya mtsho's students at Smin grol gling.

The next text in the first volume of the GYCK is by a certain Dge slong Khrid gnyer pa, presumably another student of 'Gyur med rgya mtsho's at Smin grol gling. This is a written account of 'Gyur med rgya mtsho's oral instructions on the four-fold

²³⁵ At least it is not found in Dudjom Rinpoche's blockprint edition with which I am working. However, it is listed as extant in the *dkar chag* of another edition of the cycle, see Loden (2013: 168-192). I do not have access to this edition, but Loden identifies it as being only three folios long, indicating that it is a very simple, streamlined practice likely used for daily recitation by Gsang ba ye shes initiates. Another text, the *Mi rtag pa'i rnam gzhag gnyen po'i lcags chen*, a treatise on impermanence, is listed in the *dkar chag* in volume fifteen of both editions, but is also missing from the actual cycle. Loden explains the text was lost before the woodblocks were carved (Loden 2013: 189). While both the Dudjom and Loden editions appear to be exactly the same length, and the individual texts appear to be identical in both, the way they are broken up into the sixteen cycles is different.

²³⁶ That is the standard ritual sequence of homage, offerings, confession of sins, rejoicing at merit, entreaty to turn the Wheel of Dharma, praying that the teacher does not pass into *nirvāṇa*, and the dedication of merit, which originate from the final chapter of the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (Beyer 1973: 188).

completion stage practices of Gsang ba ye shes. Finally, the last two texts of the first volume, which were authored by Sle lung himself, are by far the longest, together spanning pages 126-728. These are, chronologically and structurally, the first literary contributions Sle lung himself made to the GYCK. The first, just under 200 pages long, is a commentary on the generation stage practice of Gsang ba ye shes, entitled *Cho ga'i rnam bshad snying po'i mchog sbying legs bshad rgya mtsho*, or *Ngag rtsoms bskyed rim gyi rnam bshad snying po'i mchog sbyin legs bshad rgya mtsho* (*An Ocean of Elegant Explanations Giving the Supreme Essence: A Commentary on the Generation Stage*).²³⁷ This is a detailed explication of the Gsang ba ye shes generation stage practice, contained in 'Gyur med rgya mtsho's *sādhana*, partially quoted above. Sle lung's commentary, however, details a far more extensive ritual structure than what is even alluded to in this root text. According to the colophon,²³⁸ this commentary was originally requested by a disciple, 'Jam dbyang dar rgyas, at an unnamed date when Sle lung was staying at the mountain of Yer pa lha ri.²³⁹ Sle lung states he put off writing it, however, until he was requested again by three other students, 'Phrin las zla ba, Nges don tshul khriims, and Khrag 'thung rnam rol, in 1729 at Rnam grol gling. This indicates a gap of about twelve years between when Sle lung himself received the Gsang ba ye shes practices, and when he wrote this commentary. As we shall see, the generation stage practice discussed by Sle lung in this commentary is far more complex and involved than anything described in 'Gyur med rgya mtsho's root texts. It is possible that Sle lung, using standard ritual structures from other, more well-developed deity practices with which he was familiar (including possibly the Cakrasaṃvara practices in

²³⁷ GYCK vol. 1, pp. 126-323.

²³⁸ GYCK vol. 1, p. 321.2 ff.

²³⁹ This mountain, located a few miles northeast of Lhasa, is famous for its retreat caves thought to have been inhabited at one time or another by such luminaries as Padmasambhava and Atiśa (980-1054). See Dowman 1988: 73-79 and Roesler 2004: 14-17.

which he was knowledgeable) had, in the intervening years, elaborated the practice of Gsang ba ye shes beyond what he himself had learned at Smin grol gling as he was introducing the deity to his students at Nam grol gling. By his own admission, Sle lung reports that his commentary is based on the teachings of his main Smin grol gling teacher, Blo gsal rgya mtsho, although Sle lung likely drew from other sources as well.

The information in the colophon of the completion stage commentary is even more interesting.²⁴⁰ Entitled *Rdzogs rim rnal 'byor bzhi'i rnam bshad rdo rje'i gsal byed* (*The Vajra Clarification: A Commentary on the Four Completion Stage Yogas*),²⁴¹ this text was written in 1731, two years after the generation stage commentary. Sle lung reports two key pieces of information about this text in the colophon.²⁴² First, the commentary was not requested by one of Sle lung's regular students at Rnam grol gling, or a *yogin* practitioner, but a government official, Tshe ring dbang gyi rgyal po (1697-1763). This official, one of Pho lha ba Bsod nams stobs rgyas's long time friends, was the most important minister in Pho lha nas's government, and the governor of the Dbus province. In other words, he was the second most powerful man in central Tibet at this time.²⁴³ He was also, like Pho lha nas and Sle lung, a student of Smin grol gling, and had been a direct student of Lo chen Dharmaśrī.²⁴⁴ He also helped Pho lha nas rebuild Smin grol gling and the other major Rnying ma monastic center of Rdo rje 'brag. Thus his apparent interest in the Smin grol gling Gsang ba ye shes practice, just a few years after Pho lha nas had taken power in Tibet and during the time of the restoration of

²⁴⁰ Equally interesting are the details he leaves out, especially the fact that he does not mention whose teachings he is basing his commentary on, unlike in the generation stage commentary.

²⁴¹ GYCK vol. 1, pp. 324-728.

²⁴² GYCK vol. 1, p. 726.1 ff.

²⁴³ Tshe ring dbang rgyal is best known as the author of Pho lha nas's biography, the *Mi dbang rtogs brjod* (the main source for Petech: 1972). For a succinct biography of Tshe ring dbang rgyal, see Beth Newman's introduction to *The Tale of the Incomparable Prince* (Mdo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal: 1996), her translation of this work by Tshe ring dbang rgyal, which is the sole example of a pre-modern Tibetan novel.

²⁴⁴ Smith 2001: 332 n. 833.

Smin grol gling is wholly understandable. It also seems that Tshe ring dbang rgyal was himself a practitioner of Gsang ba ye shes to the extent that Sle lung's highly erudite completion stage commentary was written (at least partially) on his behalf. This record also adds evidence indicating that Sle lung maintained strong and regular religious contact with the Lhasa government.

The second very interesting piece of information in the colophon concerns the establishment of a particular protector deity to guard the teachings set out in Sle lung's commentary. According to Sle lung, immediately after he finished speaking (for the scribe, Rdo rje sa gzhi, to write down), the goddess Lha gcig Nyi ma gzhon nu entered, unbidden, into an unnamed medium, who was apparently present at the time, and spoke through this person.²⁴⁵ The goddess is recorded as saying that she accepted the responsibility of protecting this particular teaching, and those present then praised and made offerings to her. I will examine this particular female deity and her relation to both Sle lung and his understanding of her as Gsang ba ye shes's emanation at the end of this chapter. First, however, let us examine the contents of Sle lung's commentaries.

Sle lung's Dharma Cycle of Secret Gnosis

Space does not allow an exhaustive examination of the generation and completion stage commentaries. However, an overview of these practices, as explained by Sle lung, is useful in part because these texts underscore Sle lung's erudition, education, and skill as a ritual and yogic practitioner and master. These texts also convey just how extensively Sle lung elaborated upon the comparatively simple practices outlined in 'Gyur med rgya mtsho's root texts.

²⁴⁵ Whether or not this medium was Sle lung's main consort, Lha gcig Rdo rje skyabs byed, is not stated, but I would guess that it was most probably she, given that she was a medium for this deity, and also one of Sle lung's main students and thus likely to have been present when he gave this detailed commentary.

Sle lung begins his generation-stage commentary with a seven-fold praise,²⁴⁶ which surprisingly does not include Gsang ba ye shes herself or even Jīnasāgara Avalokiteśvara, who are the focus of the opening verses of praise in most of the texts of the GYCK. Rather, Sle lung begins by first praising Śākyamuni Buddha and his order of *śravaka arhats*. This choice of praising the symbols, in Tibetan doxography, of "Hīnayāna" Buddhism is actually rather odd, given the *yogānuttara* or *mahāyoga* context of the practice under discussion. One would think Padmasambhava a more logical choice for a foundational Buddha figure to be singled out for praise, especially since Sle lung's third object of praise, after the *śravakas*, is the treasure teachings, that is, the *gter ma* texts themselves in general, but more specifically the TCKD. Given the use of the *gter shad* in this section, and the reference to Sha 'ug, this is a direct quote from Gter bdag gling pa's original TCKD discoveries. Sle lung's choice to invoke early Buddhism or *sūtrayāna* teachings during this opening praise section is strange, but not inexplicable, and probably reflects his desire to identify the teachings of the GYCK as mainstream and normatively Buddhist to (possibly) a Dge lugs readership in particular.

Sle lung goes on to praise the *dharma* protectors, both in general and those who have been specifically tasked with guarding the TCKD. The former includes popular protectors like Beg tse, Dmag zor ma, Rnam sras (Vaiśravaṇa), and Lha chen (Mahādeva, aka Śiva), who is given cosmological pride-of-place. The latter protectors are Rdo rje legs pa and Rdo rje g.yu sgron ma.²⁴⁷ Here Sle lung is simply following the conventions of the TCKD. Finally, Sle lung praises Gter bdag gling pa himself, and the actual teachings of the TCKD.

²⁴⁶ GYCK vol. 1, pp. 130-148.2

²⁴⁷ All the dharma protectors mentioned in these two sections are dealt with in detail in Sle lung's *Dam can bstan srung rgya mtsho'i rnam thar* (the "DCTS," see the next chapter).

After this, Sle lung begins to explain the actual ritual and visualization schemata for visualizing and invoking Gsang ba ye shes and her retinue.²⁴⁸ First, he explains the prerequisites for the practice, which includes standard Tibetan preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) for any Vajrayāna meditation, including taking refuge, reciting Vajrasattva's mantra to purify sins and defilements, *maṇḍala* offerings, *guru yoga*, and generating *bodhicitta*. In addition, Sle lung advises the practitioner to offer *gtor ma* to potentially harmful and obstructing spirits, also a standard preliminary before major rituals.²⁴⁹

Next comes the actual self-generation as the deity, in which the *yogin* visualizes that he is simultaneously Gsang ba ye shes, and that she is in the sky in front of him. He then imagines or physically lays out further offerings, specifically to her, is again purified of all sins and defilements by her, and merges his body, speech, and mind with her, thereby attaining the corresponding three bodies of a Buddha, namely the *nirmāṇakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, and *dharmakāya*.²⁵⁰ It should be noted that the self-generation as the deity is initially considered to be simply a facsimile of the “real” goddess who is viewed as being above the practitioner for the initial stage of the ritual. Through this initial process, however, the *yogin* seeks to gradually draw her true essence into himself and thereby become effectively identical with her. At this point it is understood that the *yogin* gains actual control over the entirety of *saṃsāra*, including the desire, form, and formless realms.²⁵¹

The *yogin* then is enjoined to sustain an auto-aretological²⁵² meditative visualization in which he experiences his own body, which encompasses and is

²⁴⁸ For a structural overview of the entire practice, see Schwieger (1985: 137-139).

²⁴⁹ GYCK, vol. 1, pp. 160.2-204.2.

²⁵⁰ This structurally comparatively simple but elaborately described process spans pages 204.2-239.1.

²⁵¹ 242.5-246.5.

²⁵² I am using "aretology" here to mean divine characteristics.

continuous with the "external" world (and everything in it), as simultaneously great emptiness, purity, and bliss.²⁵³ At this stage, Sle lung explains, the recitation of various mantras should be performed. Of particular importance is the root mantra of Gsang ba ye shes, "Om dhu ma gha ye na ma swā hā."²⁵⁴ This mantra is rather strange as a root mantra, which typically contains the name of whichever deity they "belong" to, and I have not seen this name used for Gsang ba ye shes outside the context of this mantra. Kohn speculates that the name "Dhumaghaya" has a non-Sanskrit origin, though he does not elaborate on his reasoning.²⁵⁵

The mantra recitations conclude the main part of the generation stage practice, and in the remainder of the text Sle lung elaborates various concluding rituals that need to be undertaken before the *yogin* is technically finished with the practice. This basically follows the standard seven-fold ritual service structure.²⁵⁶ Lastly, Sle lung provides an explanation of how to behave (and think) during the post-meditation breaks between sessions.²⁵⁷ All in all, the structure and details of this elaborate practice follow the standard conventions of the generation stage in Vajrayāna Buddhist tantric practice, which is followed by and large in all lineages and schools of Tibetan Buddhism.²⁵⁸

The Completion Stage of Secret Gnosis

The same cannot be said, however, of the *rtsa rlung* (channel and wind) completion stage practices in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist tantra, where there is a

²⁵³ 247-248.1.

²⁵⁴ 256.3. It should be noted that one of the latest dated texts in the GYCK, written in 1737, is a detailed commentary by Sle lung on this root mantra (GYCK vol. 16, pp. 98-156).

²⁵⁵ Kohn 2001: 20. "Ghaya" does not appear to be an actual Sanskrit word, or proper case ending. However, the prefix "Dhuma" recalls Dhūmavātī, the widow crone goddess of the ten Mahāvidyās in tantric Hinduism (see Zeiler: 2012). Beyond this epithet, however, there are no apparent links between Gsang ba ye shes and Dhūmavātī, other than them both being tantric goddesses.

²⁵⁶ 261.3-311.2.

²⁵⁷ 311.3-321.2.

²⁵⁸ Besides the formal appearance of different deities, their seed-syllables, and variations in elaborate or unelaborate visualizations of the deity, generation stage practice is very similar from lineage to lineage.

significant range of different yogic techniques and differing structural arrangements of these practices in linear progression, depending on the particular deity cycle. These yogic practices, which utilize various breath control, body manipulation, and visualization procedures, are to be contrasted with simpler *rdzogs rim* practices which often, even usually, do not include *rtsa rlung* practices at all, but simply consist of dissolving a generated deity into emptiness within which the practitioner then "rests," or effortlessly meditates.²⁵⁹ This is said to be the "completion stage without marks," and is usually associated, in the Rnying ma context, with the highest and soteriologically most profound stage of *Ati yoga*. *Rtsa rlung* practices, the purview of *Anu yoga*, are considered to be the "completion stage with marks," and this is the type of completion stage practice Sle lung describes in his commentary. Simply put, the completion stage with marks is the process by which the *yogin*, having mastered self-identification with his chosen deity in the generation stage practice, goes on to manipulate the "drops, winds, and channels" of his subtle body using a variety of psycho-physical techniques.²⁶⁰ The completion stage is usually, though not always, considered a higher, more important level of practice by Indian and Tibetan commentators.²⁶¹ These *rtsa rlung* practices were probably introduced into Tibet during the *phyi dar* period via the late Indian *tantras* centrally important to the Gsar ma schools, and there are different conventions of *rtsa rlung* completion stage practice in several of the major Gsar ma highest yoga tantric systems, most notably the Kālacakra,

²⁵⁹ My thanks to Cathy Cantwell for pointing out this distinction (email communication 8/1/2015).

²⁶⁰ For more on the subtle body practices of Indian tantra, see Samuel 2008: 271-290.

²⁶¹ The one instance where I have seen the generation stage emphasized over and above the completion stage is in the biography of Rwa lo tsā ba Rdo rje grags (b. 1016), where Ra lo, the main Tibetan translator and transmitter of the Vajrabhairava teachings, states: "As for method, there are many types, but there's nothing that surpasses the generation stage. It's the instruction that teaches the inseparability of the basis, path, and fruit. Some say the generation stage is an inferior meditation and that the completion stage meditation is superior. Both are the play of mind, so how could there be superiority or inferiority?" (Ra Yeshé Sengé 2015).

Hevajra, and Guhyasamāja "systems".²⁶² As we shall see, however, the key elements of these practices, which are also replicated in the Gsang ba ye shes system, are all quite similar, though specific details are often differently emphasized or described in varying orders.²⁶³ Perhaps due to their complexity, the completion stage practices were never as completely standardized as their generation stage counterparts. In fact, there are multiple traditions of completion stage practice associated with most major Gsar ma deities.²⁶⁴ And subsequently, Indian and Tibetan commentators elaborated upon these different traditions in different ways. The so-called "Six Yogas of Nāropā" (*Na ro'i chos drug*²⁶⁵) from the Bka' brgyud lineage became one of the best known systemization of Indian completion stage practices in Tibet. There are various lists of what exactly constitutes the six *yogas*, but it is usually given as some variation of: (1) the *yoga* of inner heat (*gtum mo*); (2) the *yoga* of the four blisses (*dga' ba bzhi*) generated with the help of a consort (*las rgya*); (3) the *yoga* of illusory body (*sgyu lus*); (4) the *yoga* of the intermediate state (*bar do*); (5) the *yoga* of clear light (*'od gsal*); (6) the *yoga* of consciousness transference (*'pho ba*) either to a pure land, or into a dead body.²⁶⁶

The root (and actually quite short) completion stage text for Gsang ba ye shes is the *Mkha' 'gro ma'i rnal 'byor rim bzhi* and consists of a four-fold practice of

²⁶² Although, as we shall see, the *rdzogs chen* tantras (also extensively discussed by Sle lung in his completion stage commentry) also make reference to the subtle body, there is not solid evidence, that I am aware, that these practices were known in Tibet during the early translation period.

²⁶³ For an excellent overview of the different traditions of completion stage practice in Tibetan Buddhism, see Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé 2008: 123-190.

²⁶⁴ Jamgön Kongtrul distinguishes different completion stage systems based on different *tantras*: Guhyasamāja, Black and Red Yamari, Kālacakra, Hevajra, Cakrasaṃvara, Catuspīṭhā, Mahāmāyā, Buddhakapāla, and Tara Yoginī. Within some of these, he gives multiple traditions based on different Indian expositors. For instance, there are different systems of completion stage practice within the Cakrasaṃvara tradition based on the traditions of the *mahāsiddhas* Lūpa, Ghaṇṭāpa, and Kṛṣṇācārya. The Guhyasamāja tradition is split into two sub-traditions of the Ārya and Jñānapāda, etc.

²⁶⁵ Literally the "Six Instructions/Teachings (dharma) of Nāropā." Calling them the "six yogas" is a misnomer.

²⁶⁶ See Mullin (2006).

completion stage *yogas*. These are listed as "*dhuti*" *yoga*,²⁶⁷ *gtum mo* (inner heat), *yoga* of bliss, and "auxiliary" *yoga* (*yan lag rnal 'byor*). Of particular interest is the fact that this four-fold system is fairly different from, and explained in much less detail than, the completion stage practices related to Avalokiteśvara described in the TCKD. The completion stage practices related to the main male deity also include a transference of consciousness practice.²⁶⁸ Next to the multiple texts devoted to completion stage practice of the male deity, the abbreviated, four-stage system of Gsang ba ye shes seems to have been an afterthought for the editors of the TCKD. Furthermore, the four-stage system of Gsang ba ye shes (or at least the first three stages) is not really a series of self-contained practices (as are the six dharmas of Nāropā) but one continuous, progressive practice. According to Dge slong Khrid gnyer pa's fairly detailed description of the the *yogas* based on 'Gyur med rgya mtsho's oral instructions,²⁶⁹ the first stage, the "*dhuti*" *yoga*, consists of self-generating as Gsang ba ye shes (at this point mastery of the generation stage is assumed) and pushing all the body's subtle winds into the central channel.²⁷⁰ Accomplishing this is said to give rise to non-conceptual gnosis (*mi rtog pa ye shes*). Once this has been achieved, the *yogin* can then generate inner heat (*gtum mo*), the second stage. Here the practitioner pushes the winds into the navel *cakra*²⁷¹ and maintains the visualization that there is a blazing fire inside his body. Once this is accomplished, he can then use this inner fire to burn away all

²⁶⁷ A shortened term for the "*avadhūti*" or central channel in the Buddhist subtle body system.

²⁶⁸ *Btsan thabs 'pho ba'i man ngag*, TCKD vol. 1, pp. 193-196. It also includes a much more highly elaborated *gtum mo* practice, described in eleven stages (*Gtum mo'i lam rim zab rgya bcu gcig pa*, TCKD vol. 1, pp. 165-174), as well as an *Ati yoga*, or *rdzogs chen* practice (*A ti'i lam rim snying po*, vol. 1, pp. 197-201), which would be the ultimate completion stage, "without marks."

²⁶⁹ GYCK vol. 1, p. 98 ff.

²⁷⁰ In the standard tantric Buddhist subtle body system there are three main channels that run the length of the torso and into the head. The central one is called the *avadhūti* in Sanskrit, hence the abbreviation "*dhuti*." Syphoning the subtle winds into the central channel is a standard practice in most completion stage systems and is said to give rise to a host of meditative attainments and realizations.

²⁷¹ It is usually explained in Buddhist tantra that there are four or five "wheels" spaced along the central channel of the body. See Sle lung's discussion of the subtle body following Klong chen pa, below.

impurities in his subtle channels, giving rise to the bliss-emptiness of the third *yoga*. The final stage is the "branch" practice, which is actually divided into two distinct "branch" practices, a "day" and "night" *yoga*.²⁷² The "night" *yoga* refers, logically, to so-called "dream *yoga*" practice (*rmi lam rnal 'byor*), which is an auxiliary practice in a number of completion stage systems, and effectively involves fully controlled lucid dreaming, but mainly aims to produce a "clear-light illusory body." Practically speaking, the *yogin* is able to generate himself as the deity while dreaming and carry out whatever activities he wishes in the dream.²⁷³ Exactly what distinguishes the "day" *yoga*, on the other hand, is less clear, though Sle lung in his commentary gives a precise, succinct description.²⁷⁴ To practice the "day *yoga*," the practitioner visualizes himself as the goddess, then the central channel, and exhales, clearing away all impure winds.

Then:

With vase breathing, through the force of expelling the winds bound at the navel, propel your consciousness into space. Inhale again and bind the wind. Shout "Hūm!" and visualize that fire suddenly blazes at the navel. Immediately strongly inhale again, drawing [the winds] down from the crown of the head and strongly pushing them into the navel. Imagine drawing *bodhicitta* down, and drawing up the lower wind. Mix the mind with space and rest within [the experience] of blissful heat. When you meditate like that as much as you can, the belly will be expanded by uniting them [the winds/mind, etc., at the navel] (*kha sbyor gyis*).²⁷⁵

²⁷² Thus it is strictly more accurate to say that the Gsang ba ye shes completion stage consists of five *yogas*, not four, specifically three main practices, and two branch practices.

²⁷³ This is usually understood to be practice for maintaining control of the intermediate state after death.

²⁷⁴ "Dream *yoga*" practice is often divided into day and night *yogas*, referring to practices done while one is awake to prepare oneself to have a controlled dream, and then the actually lucid dream practices done at night while one is asleep (my thanks to Walter Arader for pointing this out, email communication 20/1/2015). However, in Sle lung's commentary, the practices during the waking hours related to dream practice are described in the section on night *yoga*, and the Gsang ba ye shes day *yoga* does not appear to have anything directly related to dream practice, though mastery of the three main *yogas* in one continuous practice as described in the day *yoga* section does seem to be a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the night *yoga*.

²⁷⁵ *bum can gyi sbyor* [630] *bas rlung lte bar bcings pa shugs kyis bus nas phyir bzung la shes pa namkhar 'phangs/ slar yang nang du brngubs la kha sbyor du bzung ba hūm zhes phyir 'bud pa dang mnyam du lte ba'i me har gyis 'bar bar bsam/ yang de 'phral tshur drag tu brngubs la lte bar skyur stabs su mnan pa dang mnyam por spyi bo nas byangs sems skya nar gyis babs par bsams la 'og rlung bskum la sems nyid nam mkha' dang bsres te bde drod kyi ngang mdangs bskyang/ de ltar ci nus bsgoms rjes rlung kha sbyor gyis lto ba phyir bkyed/* (GYCK vol. 1, pp. 629.5-630.4).

In other words, it appears that the day *yoga* is, at least in part, a condensed replication the first three *yogas* (moving the winds into the central channel, generating internal heat, and experiencing bliss) in quick succession once the practitioner has gained experience and familiarity with them. Sle lung's further commentary suggests, at least implicitly, that the Gsang ba ye shes completion stage practices were at least indirectly influenced by those belonging to the Ārya Guhyasamāja and Kālacakra traditions.²⁷⁶

Let us examine the particularities of Sle lung's completion stage commentary in the GYCK, the *Rdzogs rim rnal 'byor bzhi'i rnam bshad rdo rje'i gsal byed*. This text was written about two years after its generation stage counterpart, and is more than twice as long, filling an astounding 202 folios, meaning that more than half of the first volume of the GYCK consists of this commentary. The main reason for the length of this text is that Sle lung does not simply give detailed instructions for how to perform each of the four *yogas*, he also delves into and explains in great depth multiple theoretical systems of completion stage practice in tantric Buddhism. In the process, Sle lung references a great deal of Indian and Tibetan commentarial literature. First, Sle lung gives a relatively short preface explaining the importance of completion stage practice in general terms, where the *yogin*, using psycho-physical techniques of sitting postures, breathing techniques, and visualizations, manipulates the "winds" and "drops" in his subtle body channels to actually transform his body into that of a Buddha.²⁷⁷ Sle lung then goes on to explain in detail three different completion stage systems, namely

²⁷⁶ "Ārya" here denotes the Guhyasamāja commentarial tradition purportedly authored by Nāgārjuna and his students, most notably Āryadeva's *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa* commentary. See Wedemeyer (2008).

²⁷⁷ Not simply creatively imagining himself as a Buddha, as in the generation stage, but untying the knots, or *cakras* and moving the subtle winds into the central channel.

the Ārya Guhyasamāja,²⁷⁸ Kālacakra, and *rdzogs chen* perspectives (in that order), over the course of nearly a hundred pages.²⁷⁹

Sle lung's presentation is quite intriguing, and appears to demonstrate an overt attempt to syncretize Dge lugs teachings, as represented in the Guhyasamāja and Kālacakra sections, with Rnying ma teachings in the *rdzogs chen* section.²⁸⁰ By syncretize I do not mean that Sle lung is attempting to amalgamate what he views as three distinct traditions, but rather is attempting to reconcile them in a kind of "separate but equal" rhetoric characteristic of the *ris med* scholars a century or so later. At the same time, Sle lung highlights particular aspects of each system which have a bearing on the Gsang ba ye shes practices he explains in detail in the latter half of the commentary. Here, in the actual practical application of the Gsang ba ye shes *yogas*, there is what amounts to an amalgamation or integration of Gsar ma and Rnying ma elements.

Sle lung's sources for the first part of the commentary are extensive, but fairly standard. Besides a number of short quotes excerpted from root *tantras*, he quotes from several well-known, and by his time, well-established commentaries. The *rdzogs chen* section, as would be expected, largely draws on Klong chen pa's writings in his *Seven Treasuries (Mdzod bdun)* collection,²⁸¹ while the first two sections rely heavily on key

²⁷⁸ Sle lung makes no mention of the Jñānapāda Guhyasamāja tradition.

²⁷⁹ GYCK vol. 1, pp. 334.4-431.2. The "*rdzogs chen* section" is actually titled "the completion stage according to Klong chen pa," so it may be more accurate to call it the "Klong chen pa section." However, as we shall see, Sle lung quotes directly from a number of *rdzogs chen* scriptures, and he is clearly attempting to present a general *rdzogs chen* understanding of the topic.

²⁸⁰ This is similar to Jamgön Kongtrul's synthesis of different systems of completion stage practice in his *Treasury of Knowledge*, although Kongtrul notably discusses only Gsar ma systems. The Guhyasamāja is actually a Rnying ma *tantra*, translated during the imperial period. But while the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* appears in the Rnying ma canon and parts of it are transposed into Rdo rje Phur ba texts that are practiced, Guhyasamāja itself is not directly practiced in Rnying ma lineages (Robert Mayer, personal communication 4/3/2015). See also Dalton and van Schaik (2006: 156 ff.) for Dunhuang Mahāyoga rituals that appear to be based on the Guhyasamāja tradition.

²⁸¹ Three of the seven volumes in this collection have been translated by Richard Barron (see Longchen Rabjam: 1998, 2001, 2007). See also Germano (1992) and Hillis (2002) for studies of other volumes in this collection.

Dge lugs treatises such as Tsong kha pa's classic *Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages* commentary on the five sections of the Ārya Guhyasamāja completion stage system,²⁸² and the famous *Ornament of Stainless Light* Kālacakra commentary by Mkhas grub Nor bzang rgya mtsho (1423-1513).²⁸³ The Kālacakra section also draws on the so-called *Three Bodhisattva Commentaries*,²⁸⁴ and obliquely references Candrakīrti's Guhyasamāja commentary on the five stages, the *Pradīpoddyotananāmaṭīkā-ṣaṭkoṭivvyākhyā*,²⁸⁵ and Nāropā's *Paramārthasaṃgraha* commentary on the Kālacakra *Sekoddeśa* initiation manual.²⁸⁶

The implicit integration of Gsar ma and Rnying ma teachings in the TCKD and GYCK, with Gsar ma completion stage *yogas* blended into the practice of a Rnying ma treasure deity, is made explicit in Sle lung's tiered, threefold explanation of completion stage theory that utilizes a balance of Dge lugs and Rnying ma exegesis. That said, it is fairly clear that Sle lung is privileging the Rnying ma *rdzogs chen* system in his presentation. It is a convention in Tibetan (and Indian) doxographical writing to "start with the philosophical systems that [the] respective authors consider to be lower and then ascend to the highest."²⁸⁷ More than that, Sle lung's presentation of the *rdzogs chen* system is nearly as long as his explanation of the other two systems combined. So while Sle lung clearly wanted to give the Dge lugs patriarchs like Tsong kha pa and Mkhas grub their due, he privileges Klong chen pa.

²⁸² See Tsongkhapa (2013) and Thurman (2010).

²⁸³ See Khedrup Norsang Gyatso (2004).

²⁸⁴ This refers to the core Kālacakra commentary, the *Vimalaprabhā* (*Stainless Light*), the *Laghutantraṭīkā* commentary that interprets the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* from the perspective of the Kālacakra (see Gray 2009), attributed to Vajrapāṇī, and the *Hevajratantrapiṇḍārthaṭīkā* by Vajragarbha which applies the Kālacakra system to the *Hevajra Tantra* (see Sferra 2009).

²⁸⁵ Wedemeyer (forthcoming).

²⁸⁶ See Gnoli (1994), Orofino (2009), and Lecso (2009).

²⁸⁷ Brunnhölzl 2007: 76. A good example of this is the Rnying ma presentation of Buddhism in "nine vehicles," which begins with the most basic "*śravakayāna*" and ends with the highest view of *ati yoga*, or *rdzogs chen*. On the development of the nine vehicles in Rnying ma doxography see Cabezón (2013).

In the same fashion, Sle lung implicitly privileges the Rnying ma *Ati yoga* scriptures over more "mainstream" scriptures and commentaries that he would have been familiar with from his early Dge lugs monastic education. For instance, in the Guhyasamāja section, Sle lung quotes from Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, (to make a point about the defilement of rebirth), the *Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra* attributed to Maitreya, and Dharmakīrti's commentary on Dignāga's *Pramāṇavārttikakārikā* (both of these to make points related to the inherent purity of sentient beings). In the *rdzogs chen* section, Sle lung quotes not only Klong chen pa's exegesis, but from the *Ati yoga* tantras themselves, including the *Reverberation of Sound* (*Sgral thal 'gyur*),²⁸⁸ the *Tantra of the Six Spheres* (*Klong drug pa*),²⁸⁹ and the *Union of the Sun and Moon* (*Nyi zla kha sbyor*).²⁹⁰ Thus, Sle lung is giving pride of place to scriptures many Gsar ma polemicists (especially in Sle lung's time) would have considered spurious, implicitly ranking them above mainstream Mahāyāna scriptures and the work of Tsong kha pa himself. Sle lung even references Klong chen pa's *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle* when discussing emptiness according to the Kālacakra completion stage system.²⁹¹ That said, however, Tsong kha pa's exegesis on Nāgārjuna's and Āryadeva's five-stage Guhyasamāja system and the Kālacakra's suite of six *yogas* and exegesis on "empty forms" seem to influence Sle lung more, practically speaking, in his elucidations of the four *yogas* of Gsang ba ye shes, as he appears to reference these systems more than Klong chen pa's *rdzogs chen* in this section of the commentary.²⁹² In order to

²⁸⁸ One of the 17 *rdzogs chen* root *tantras* of the "man ngag" class.

²⁸⁹ One of the 18 root *tantras* according to Klong chen pa's *Mkha' 'gro snying thig*.

²⁹⁰ Also a *man ngag* root tantra. On the importance of the *man ngag* class within *rdzogs chen* doxography, see Karmay 2007: 207-215 and Longchen Rabjam 1996: 50-88.

²⁹¹ GYCK vol. 1, p. 369.1.

²⁹² As I shall explain in more detail below, Sle lung's explanation of the four *yogas* seems to be structured around the five stages of Guhyasamāja, and the four *yogas* of Gsang ba ye shes actually seem to be a condensed version of the six *yogas* practice in the Guhyasamāja and Kālacakra systems.

understand why this may be, we should at least briefly examine the actual contents of Sle lung's presentation of the three systems.

Sle lung here is primarily focused on explaining the theoretical background behind the attainment of buddhahood through completion stage practices. A major part of this explanation includes descriptions of the anatomical structure of the subtle body with which the *yogin* must work. Thus, for example, according to Sle lung's summary of the Ārya Guhyasamāja tradition:

Regarding the second [i.e., the subtle body]: supported by this coarse body, there are 72,000 channels and ten primary and secondary gross winds, together with the white and red seminal drops... the winds are the vehicle for appearance, increase, and attainment, and in particular, [with regard to] the extremely subtle body, the five [colored] light winds become the vehicle for the mind of clear light. There are coarse, subtle, and very subtle minds. As for the first, this is the sense consciousness. As for the [subtle mind]: this is the eighty inherent thought states.²⁹³ As for these eighty: 33 have the inherent nature of illumination, 40 the nature of increase, and 7 the nature of [near] attainment.²⁹⁴

Sle lung continues, emphasizing the necessity of harnessing these subtle "light winds" in completion stage practices:

It has been said that the mental wind of clear light, if it is not brought onto the path of skillful means, becomes the support for *samsāra*, but brought onto the path, based in/relying on 'suchness' (*de nyid*, *tathatā*) one will accomplish the illusory body and clear light and achieve the body of Vajradhara.²⁹⁵

After a section relating the concept of the *tathāgatagarbha*, the buddha-nature believed to be inherent in all beings, to the tantric concept of the "mental wind of luminosity,"

²⁹³ 33 of these arise from anger, 40 from desire, and 7 from ignorance.

²⁹⁴ *Gnyis ba ni/ lus rags pa 'di la brten pa'i rtsa stong phrag bdun cu rtsa gnyis dang/ rtsa ba dang yan lag gi rlung* [336] *rags pa bcu/ thig le dkar dmar dang bcas pa rnams so/.... snang mched thob gsum gyi bzhon par gyur pa'i rlung dang/ khyad par shin tu phra ba 'od gsal gyi sems kyi bzhon par gyur pa'i rlung 'od zer lnga pa'o/ Gnyis pa sems la yang rags pa phra ba/ shin tu phra ba dang gsum las/ dang po ni/ dbang shes rnams so/... rang bzhin brgyad cu'i rtog pa rnams so/ rang bzhin brgyad cu ni/ snang ba'i rang bzhin so gsum dang/ mched pa'i rang bchin bzhi bcu/ nyer thob kyi rang bzhin bdun rnams yin te/* GYCK vol. 1, pp. 335.5-336.

To clarify, "illumination," "increase," and "(near) attainment," are considered to be three progressive realizations of subtler levels of the mind.

²⁹⁵ *Zhes 'od gsal gyi rlung sems de thabs mkhas kyi lam gyis ma zin pa rnams la 'khor ba'i gzhi rten du 'gyur zhing lam gyis zin pa rnams la de nyid la brten nas sgyu lus dang 'od gsal grub ste rdo rje 'chang gi sku 'grub par gsungs so/* GYCK vol. 1, p. 339.

Sle lung describes the process whereby the *yogin*, through controlled manipulation of his subtle winds, where he draws, holds, and dissolves them into the central channel, realizes "metaphoric clear light" (*dpe'i 'od gsal*) to produce an "impure" illusory body.

During the completion stage, in a series of stages, first there arises realization of the perfection stage from having the winds enter, abide, and dissolve in the central channel. By stages, like during the death process, [the winds] are gathered in the central channel and with the simulated clear light which dissolves into the nucleus (*thig le*) of indestructability, purifying the actual moment of death. Then, emerging into the impure illusory body, [one] purifies the actual *bar do* and then, with the mode of a gnosis being in the old aggregates,²⁹⁶ one abides and purifies the phenomena of the birth state.²⁹⁷

It is from here that the *yogin* then realizes "actual clear light" and attains the final stage in the Guhyasamāja system, the "Stage of Union."

Then abiding in the actual clear light, one purifies the impure illusory body and from the wind which transforms into the vehicle for the actual clear light one accomplishes the pure illusory body, abandons afflictions, abandons the bonds of birth, death, and the intermediate state, one simultaneously attains the path of release and becomes a foe-destroyer.²⁹⁸

Thus, Sle lung's presentation of the Guhyasamāja is mainly a succinct introduction to the purpose and methods of the completion stage, contextualized and couched within standard *tathāgathagarbha* soteriology. Sle lung also provides at least a rudimentary explanation of the anatomy of the subtle body and the stages of the subtle mind, and outlines the creation of the illusory body of clear light. This latter practice seems to heavily inform Sle lung's understanding of the Gsang ba ye shes practices

²⁹⁶ This seems to describe a person who is enlightened but has an illusory body that is, in appearance, the same as their former, coarse body.

²⁹⁷ *Rdzogs rim kyi skabs su sdud rim la brten nas rlung dbu mar zhugs gnas thim gsum byas pa las byung ba'i rdzogs rim gyi rtogs pa dang por skyes nas rim gyis 'chi rim ji lta ba'i rlung dbu mar bsdus te mi shigs pa'i thig le la bstim pa'i dpe'i 'od gsal gyis 'chi srid dngos gnas la sbyangs te/ de las ma dag pa'i sgyu lus su lang te bar do dngos gnas la sbyong ba dang/ des phung po rnying par ye shes sems dpa'i tshul gyis zhugs te skye srid chos [347] gnas la sbyong/ 346.2-447.1.*

²⁹⁸ *De las don gyi 'od gsal du zhugs te ma dag pa'i sgyu lus de nyid kyang sbyangs te don gyi 'od gsal gyi bzhon par gyur pa'i rlung las dag pa'i sgyu lus su grub pa dang/ nyon mongs spangs pa dang/ skye 'chi bar do'i 'ching ba spangs te rnam grol lam thob pa rnams dus mnyam pa'i sgo nas dgra bcom par 'gyur/ 347.1-347.3.*

near the end of his commentary, when he discusses the creation of a clear light illusory body within dreams, and ultimately in the intermediate stage (*bar do*) after death.²⁹⁹

In the Kālacakra section, Sle lung seems largely concerned with highlighting the concept of "empty form" (*stong gzugs*) which is a doctrine unique to Kālacakra. Empty form, simply put, is the idea that the Buddhist concept of "Emptiness" (Skt. *Śūnyatā*) is not a static nothingness, but has distinct qualities to it that can be directly experienced by the *yogin* practitioner. Sle lung contrasts the empty form bodies produced, or realized, in Kālacakra practice with the illusory bodies of the Guhyasamāja:

[In Kālacakra] there is no system for achieving pure and impure illusory bodies in the context of the perfection stage. The cause of the two bodies (*dharmakāya* and *rupakāya*?) is the innate bliss³⁰⁰ which is born relying upon the action and gnosis *mudra* [consort],³⁰¹ [and] the realization of emptiness, [that] is not sufficient. By the power of the stage of withdrawal, having absorbed the winds into the central channel...everything becomes completely empty luminosity. From the manifestations of luminosity is the appearances which are called "empty forms" equal to the number of atoms of Mount Meru in the aspect of [the deity] Kālacakra, luminous bodies that are even more subtle than the finest particles.³⁰²

In this passage, Sle lung refers to the "stage of withdrawal" which is the first *yoga* of the "six-limbed" or six-fold *yoga* practice (Skt. *ṣaḍaṅgayoga*).³⁰³ This is also the *yoga* that (in Kālacakra, but not Guhyasamāja) employs "night" and "day" *yogas*.

²⁹⁹ 631 ff.

³⁰⁰ Skt. *Sahaja*. On this concept in Buddhist tantra see Kvaerne (1975). This relates especially to the "four blisses" which is particularly important in the Hevajra cycle.

³⁰¹ A flesh-and-blood and visualized consort, respectively.

³⁰² *de'i dbang gis rdzogs rim gyi skabs su dag ma dag gi sgyu lus bsgrub pa'i rnam gzhas kyang ma mdzad/ sku gnyis kyi nyer len kyang las dang ye shes kyi phyag rgya tsam la bsten pa'i lhan skyes kyi bde bas stong nyid rtogs pas mi chog par sdud rim gyi stobs kyi rlung dhu tir [350] bstim nas thams cad stong pa 'od gsal gyi skabs su 'od gsal gyi snang cha las shar ba'i stong gzugs zhes pa rdul phra rab las 'das pa'i shin tu phra ba'i 'od lus dus kyi 'khor lo'i rnam par ri rab kyi rdul gyi grangs dang mnyam pa 'char zhing/ 349.4-350.2*

³⁰³ These six, in the standard Kālacakra and Guhyasamāja systems, are (1) withdrawal (*sdud rim*, Skt. *pratyaḥāra*), (2) meditative concentration (*bsam gtan/sor gtan*, Skt. *dhyāna*), (3) breath control (*srog rtso*, Skt. *prāṇāyāma*), (4) retention (*'dzin pa*, Skt. *dhāraṇā*), (5) remembrance (*rjes dran*, Skt. *anusmṛti*), and (6) concentration (*ting nge 'dzin*, Skt. *samādhi*).

However, these two "sub" *yogas* are not related to dream *yoga*, as in the Gsang ba ye shes practice, nor are they "auxiliary." Rather, they are effectively preliminary practices, and refer to dark room and sky-gazing meditation respectively during the stage of withdrawal, where the *yogin* cuts sensory attachment to sense objects, giving rise to the initial visions of "empty forms." These are described by ten metaphorical tropes, namely smoke, a mirage, flickering lights, a butter lamp, blazing, the sun, the moon, *vajras*, "the supreme form," and a seminal drop (*thig le*, Skt. *bindu*).³⁰⁴ Sle lung also directly references the "stage of remembrance" (*rjes dran*, Skt. *anusmṛti*), the fifth stage of this six-fold practice, when discussing the empty form of Kālacakra with consort that appears at the navel during this *yoga*. Further, Sle lung gives abbreviated details of other stages of the six-fold system without directly naming them. For instance, he mentions the 21,600 moments of bliss a *yogin* experiences during the final stage (the *yoga* of "concentration") of the practice, which supposedly halts the impure winds in his body and ultimately transforms the 21,600 components of the *yogin*'s ordinary physical body into a pure body "like mercury eating iron."³⁰⁵

These six *yogas*, which are also found in the Guhyasamāja system (with a slightly different configuration), should not be confused with the six *yogas* of Nāropā,

³⁰⁴ For an analysis of these visionary experiences in Kālacakra and *rdzogs chen* drawing on modern scientific literature, see Hatchell (2014: 118-129). Sle lung only mentions five of these visionary appearances, however, namely: mirage, smoke, heavenly lights, a blazing lamp, and constant light. GYCK vol. 1, p. 472.

³⁰⁵ *ngul chus lcags la za ba bzhin* 350.5-351.1. This alchemical simile is also used in Nāropā's commentary on the explanation of the sixth *yoga* in the eighteenth chapter of the *Guhyasamājatantra*. According to Nāropā's description of the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* in Guhyasamāja, they are virtually identical to their Kālacakra counterparts with a few notable exceptions, such as the lack of the night and day *yogas*, and no discussion of "empty forms." (see Gnoli 1994: 207-219. I am indebted to Lucia Galli for translating these passages from the Italian). Sle lung appears to refer to this Guhyasamāja commentary by Nāropā regarding *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* on 357.2. Sle lung also mentions here that the Cakrasaṃvara tradition is in accord with this same system, and references a Tibetan commentator simply called "Grub thob Oyan pa," who is likely Grub thob O rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1229-1309) (my thanks to Ulrike Roesler for making this identification), though oddly he does not specifically mention the earlier *Laghutantraṭīkā* Cakrasaṃvara commentary by Vajrapāṇī, which gives significant details on the six *yogas* (see Hatchell 2014: 32 ff.).

for while there is some overlap between them, they have nothing directly to do with each other. A major difference between them is that the Nāropā practices can be performed in isolation from each other, while the six-limbed *yoga* in Kālacakra and Guhyasamāja are meant to be practiced one after the other in strict succession and order.³⁰⁶ Sle lung only discusses this system in passing, but the six *yogas* represent the most extensive suite of Buddhist completion stage practices, and they are the standard system discussed in both the Kālacakra and Guhyasamāja explanatory *tantras*.³⁰⁷

To summarize, in these first two sections of the commentary Sle lung is primarily concerned with highlighting certain aspects of the Guhyasamāja and Kālacakra systems that he finds especially important, concepts which he then later goes on to employ or refer to when explaining the Gsang ba ye shes practices. He is primarily calling attention to the doctrine, and *yogic* application, of illusory bodies (in the case of Guhyasamāja) and empty forms (in the case of Kālacakra). Other aspects of these systems are mentioned, of course, but by my reading, these are the two most important subjects in the "Gsar ma section" of his commentary. As such, Sle lung's work is somewhat reminiscent of Yu mo Mi bskyod rdo rje's (11th c.) *Lamp Illuminating Emptiness* (*Stong nyid gsal sgron*) commentary, one of the earliest Tibetan commentaries on Kālacakra, which particularly highlights empty forms, and also shows interest in Guhyasamāja's illusory bodies. While it would be inaccurate to say these two concepts were conflated, from a very early period onward the idea of infinitesimally subtle forms and pure bodies of light were naturally put together in the

³⁰⁶ For detailed descriptions of the six *yogas* in Kālacakra, see Hatchell (2014: 31-41), Wallace (2001: 25-30), and Henning (2009). For more historical and Indological background on the *śaḍaṅgayoga*, and their importance in Hindu traditions, see Grönbold (1996).

³⁰⁷ The "five stages" system became the more well-known system by which the Guhyasamāja completion stage was explained, though Tsongkhapa (2013) describes how the five stages correspond with the six *yogas*.

minds of Tibetan commentators, including Sle lung, even though he explicitly contrasts the two ideas.³⁰⁸

Sle lung's *rdzogs chen* section, however, is quite a bit more ambitious and has a broader topical scope than the preceding sections, and it has less to do with the completion stage as such and more to do with introducing *rdzogs chen* cosmology, and soteriology more generally, as well as filling in more specific details about the subtle body system, as elaborated in the *rdzogs chen* tantras. Rather than simply explaining certain key components of *rtsa rlung* practice, Sle lung here gives what is essentially a condensed introduction to *rdzogs chen* thought, covering topics such as the "ground of liberation,"³⁰⁹ the primordial buddha in *rdzogs chen* cosmology,³¹⁰ and the way sentient beings fall away from the primordial ground of enlightenment and produce habitual tendencies and ultimately the illusion of cyclic existence.³¹¹ None of this directly relates to the performance of completion stage *yogas*, but these more cosmological concepts are deployed by Sle lung as he explains yogic practice in the latter half of the commentary. For instance, Sle lung seems to conflate the *rdzogs chen* concept of the "ground of liberation" with the Guhyasamāja-style "clear light" illusory body. But in general, it appears that Sle lung, in the *rdzogs chen* section, is explaining the overall Rnying ma understanding of Buddhist soteriology, upon which, a year later in 1732, he would further elaborate in a treatise which opens the second volume of the GYCK. This text, the *Rdo rje'i tshig gi zab don 'grel bar byed pa rdo rje'i sgron me*, describes the "basis, path, and fruit" according to Rnying ma thought.³¹² Again, here the "basis" is the ground of liberation which is clear light, the

³⁰⁸ For more on Mi bskyod rdo rje and his commentary see Hatchell (2014: 21-49, and 153-200).

³⁰⁹ 380.4 ff.

³¹⁰ 386.1 ff.

³¹¹ 399 ff. For an excellent summary of these doctrines, see Hatchell (2014: 55-63).

³¹² GYCK vol. 2, pp. 1-149.

experiential knowledge of which leads to liberation and ignorance or non-recognition of which leads to cyclic existence, and then goes on to explain how beings ascend the bodhisattva grounds up to the sixteenth ground.³¹³ This material serves to provide a cosmological and mythic framework within which the more narrowly focused subtle body *yogas* operate.

Eventually, however, Sle lung goes on to elaborate upon specific subtle body anatomy according to *rdzogs chen* root *tantras* and Klong chen pa's explanations:

Regarding the main subtle channel: along the light blue central channel are four or five *cakras* like piled up parasols. On the right is the white *ro ma* (Skt. *rasanā*) channel. On the left is the red *rkyang ma* (Skt. *lalanā*) channel. Within the central [channel] is the channel of gnosis light called "little tube/vein of *ka ti* crystal" ... From the *Reverberation of Sound Tantra*: "[There are the] *rasanā*, *lalanā*, and the all-vibrating central channel (*avadhūti*) with the little tube of *ka ti* crystal; gnosis is abiding in the center." Thus it says. From the perspective of the four *cakra* [system], the *cakra* at the navel has 64 radial channels and is called the "Wheel of Emanation." The *dharmacakra* at the heart has eight radial channels and is called the "Wheel of Manifesting Mindfulness." The *cakra* at the throat center has 16 radial channels and is called the "Taste Unifying Wheel." The *cakra* at the top of the head has 32 radial channels and is called the "Wheel of Great Bliss." In the system of five *cakras*, the bliss-guarding *cakra* of the private parts has 28 radial channels.³¹⁴

Sle lung continues, explaining in further detail the locations within the body of the three main subtle channels, how and where they branch out, and how these generate the various sense consciousnesses:

The branch [channels] of the upper part [of the body] arise from the right channel [at] the top of the heart which splits into many. From the neck upwards,

³¹³ Sle lung's explanations of these topics in both texts are by and large a distillation of Klong chen pa's writings on the same topics, for which see Longchen Rabjam (1996: 203-420). More specifically, Sle lung's exegesis here is likely specifically based on Klong chen pa's *Treasury of the Great Vehicle* (*Theg mchog mdzod*).

³¹⁴ *Gtso bor gyur pa'i rtsa ni/ 'khor lo bzhi'am lnga gdugs brtsegs pa ltar gnas pa'i dbus su kun 'dar ma'am dbu ma mthing skya/ g.yas su ro ma dkar ba/ g.yon du rkyang ma dmar ba/ dbu ma'i nang na ye shes kyi 'od rtsa ka ti shel gyi bu gu can zhes bya ba...thal 'gyur las/ ro ma rkyang ma kun 'dar ma/ ka ti shel gyi bu gu can/ ye shes dbu ma'i nang na gnas/ zhes gsungs so/ 'khor lo bzhi'i dbang du byas na lte ba sprul pa'i 'khor lo rtsa 'dab drug cu rtsa bzhi skyed byed kyi 'khor lo zhes bya'o/ snying ga chos kyi 'khor lo rtsa 'dab brgyad dran pa rnam bkod kyi 'khor lo zhes bya'o/ mgrin pa longs spyod kyi 'khor lo rtsa 'dab bcu drug [416] pa ro 'dus kyi 'khor lo zhes bya'o/ spyi bo bde chen gyi 'khor lo rtsa 'dab sum cu rtsa gnyis pa rtse mo rnam bkod kyi 'khor lo zhes bya'o/ 'khor lo lngar byed na gsang gnas bde skyong gi 'khor lo rtsa 'dab nyi shu rtsa bgyad pa'o/ GYCK vol. 1, pp. 415.1-416.2.*

it splits into three; two go into the nose and act as a support for the olfactory consciousness. One goes to the tongue and serves as a support for the gustatory consciousness. The left channel originates from the top left of the heart. It splits into a network of channels in the neck. The central channel has countless branches that pervade the whole body and serve as the support for the body consciousness. Both the right and left [channels]...in the skull go into both eyes, [forming] the shape like that of a wild ox horn, and serve as the basis of the eye consciousness. As for the right and left channels, in a man it is like it has been explained, in a woman, the right and left are reversed, thus it is said in the *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*. At the upper end of the central channel the three [main channels] connect into one in the cranial aperture and this serves as the basis for mental consciousness. Entering [the central channel] at the ears, they serve as the basis for the auditory consciousness. Inside of the crystal tube, light [in the shape of an] "E" vowel sign penetrates into the heart and radiates light to the crown of the head, and from that, in the conch-shell mansion [i.e., the skull] of the brain [are] the assembly of wrathful deities, vividly clear with bodies of light...³¹⁵

All these details regarding *rdzogs chen* cosmology and subtle body anatomy, however, seem to have little direct practical function once Sle lung begins explaining the actual *yogas* of Gsang ba ye shes, though certain relatively minor details specific to the subtle body system as explained in the *rdzogs chen tantras* are employed by Sle lung during his detailed description of the four *yogas*. But Sle lung largely applies the Guhyasamāja five-stage system to explain how one progresses, as explained in a brief overview of the entire practice. Sle lung here describes the way that the three primary *yogas* (*dhuti*, inner heat, and bliss) purify the channels, the winds, and the mind of

³¹⁵ *yar sna las yal ga dgur gyes pa'i ro ma snying rtse g.yas* [417] *nas 'thon te mgrin pa nas tshur byung ba'i rtse mo gsum du gyes pa las/ gnyis sna la zug ste sna'i rnam shes kyi rten byed/ gcig lce la zug pas lce'i rnam shes kyi rten byed/ rkyang ma snying rtse g.yon nas 'thon te mgrin pa rtsa'i dra ba las 'thon te dbus ma de lus thams cad la zug pa'i yal ga grangs med pas lus kyi rnam shes kyi rten byed/ g.yas g.yon gnyis thod pa'i nang nas tshur byung nas mig gnyis la zug pas dbyibs ba men gyi rwa 'dra ba mig gi rnam shes kyi rten byed/ ro rkyang ni pho la bshad ma thag pa ltar dang/ mo la g.yas g.yon go ldog ste gnas so zhes theg mchog mdzod las gsungs/ dbu ma'i yar sna gsum du gyes pa'i gcig tshangs bug la zug ste yid kyi rnam shes kyi rten* [418] *byed/ gnyis rna ba la zug ste rna ba'i rnam shes kyi rten byed/ shel bug can gyi nang du 'od kyi 'greng bu snying gar zug pa'i gdangs spyi gtsug tu 'phros pa las/ klad pa dung khang na khro bo'i lha tshogs 'od sku'i rnam par gsal ba dang/ GYCK vol. 1, pp. 416.5-418.* There are a number of details here that are specific to the *rdzogs chen* understanding of the subtle body, which are different from how the subtle body is explained in the Kālacakra, such as the reversed colors of the right and left channels, and the addition of the crystal tube in the heart. Also, while the *rdzogs chen* tantras describe a subtle body anatomy in great detail, unlike the *gsar ma* traditions they do not seem to describe detailed *rtsa rlung* exercises of the type found in the Kālacakra and Guhyasamāja traditions, although I am not familiar enough with the *rdzogs chen* tantras to make a definitive distinction. From what I have seen, however, Sle lung does not appear to discuss *rtsa rlung* exercises in the *rdzogs chen* section of his commentary.

enlightenment respectively. In this context the *yogas* seem to be described as if they are simply three steps in the process of moving all the winds of the *yogin*'s body into the central channel whereby the 33 mental states of hatred, 40 of desire, and seven of ignorance are purified into the subtle mental levels of illumination, increase, and near attainment, respectively. Sle lung's explanation correlates with the first three stages of the Ārya Guhyasamāja system, namely the "isolation" of body, speech, and mind.³¹⁶ Following this comes the arising of the impure illusory body, pure illusory body, and finally accomplishment of the Stage of Union.³¹⁷ Thus, the four *yogas* of Gsang ba ye shes are mapped onto the five stages of attainment according to the Ārya Guhyasamāja system. However, near the end of the commentary, after a section on dream *yoga*, Sle lung gives a very detailed explanation of the intermediate state (*bar do*) after death, and his sources in this section are entirely *rdzogs chen* *tantras* such as the *Unimpeded Sound Tantra*.³¹⁸ Here, Sle lung explains how one "joins with the ground" of enlightened awareness which in *rdzogs chen* thought underlies all experience.³¹⁹ It seems implicit, if not directly stated (that I have seen), that Sle lung is conflating this "ground-presencing" that occurs after death with the Guhyasamāja Stage of Union.

How the Kālacakra system fits into Sle lung's practical application of the Gsang ba ye shes *yogas* is less clear, although the three main *yogas* plus the two auxiliary *yogas* can be interpreted as a condensed version of the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga*, with the *dhuti yoga* corresponding primarily to the third *yoga*, breath control, but also seems to include

³¹⁶ See Wedemeyer's (2008) introduction to his translation of Āryadeva's Guhyasamāja commentary, the *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa*, for a succinct explanation of these stages.

³¹⁷ 433.3-439.5. It should also be noted that Sle lung's actual descriptions of the *yogas* is prefaced with explanations of the preliminary practices one must perform and master beforehand, such as proficiency in the generation stage, *guru yoga* to dispel obstacles, and so forth.

³¹⁸ For the *rdzogs chen* tradition's concern with death and the post-mortem state, see Germano (2005).

³¹⁹ *gzhi sbyor chen po'i snang bar* 659.4.

withdrawal and meditative concentration as well.³²⁰ The *gtum mo yoga* and the bliss *yoga* both correspond with the *yoga* of retention in the *ṣaḍaṅgayoga*, as it is usually explained that heat and bliss arise during this stage. If this is the case, then it may be that the two auxiliary *yogas*, the day and night *yogas* (which as we have seen were originally terms from the Kālacakra withdrawal *yoga* and but have a different meaning in the context of the GYCK), correspond to the recollection and concentration *yogas* respectively. This may be the case, because the description of the day *yoga* (quoted above) seems to refer to the empty form of the deity at the navel, which Sle lung (noted above) in the Kālacakra section of his commentary explicitly identifies with the recollection *yoga* in the Kālacakra system.³²¹ This would leave the night *yoga* to correspond with the sixth and final *yoga* of concentration. This makes sense if we interpret the controlled creation of the illusory body in dream *yoga* (which is then perfected after death) as corresponding to the Kālacakra goal, in the concentration *yoga*, of "burning away its physical elements so that the yogi becomes an empty-form..."³²²

Thus Sle lung's explanation of the Gsang ba ye shes *yogas* weaves together Guhyasamāja's illusory body practice with Kālacakra's direct experience of empty forms, placed within the context of *rdzogs chen* cosmogony while employing a simplified version of the Kālacakra *ṣaḍaṅgayoga* coupled with a *rdzogs chen* version of the subtle body. That said, it should be noted that it is problematic to view what I have been referring to as three separate systems as distinct traditions in the first place. In his recent, excellent work on visionary practices and experiences in Kālacakra and *rdzogs chen*, Christopher Hatchell correctly points out that these two "traditions" did

³²⁰ The first two *yogas* may correspond with the Gsang ba ye shes *yogin's* initial abiding in emptiness and imaginative arising in the form of the goddess, complete with the visualization of the inner channels. This is described at 459.4 ff.

³²¹ This does not appear to be a feature of the recollection *yoga* in the Guhyasamāja system, at least according to Nāropā's explanation of it (Gnoli 1994: 217).

³²² Hatchell 2014: 40.

not develop independently of each other in separate cultural vacuums, but rather through "circles of dialogue" and mutual exchange. Further, Hatchell argues that early Rnying ma thinkers in the *phyi dar* period engaged with Gsar ma sources, specifically the growing body of literature on the Kālacakra cycle, and "disassembled them and moved selected themes, practices, and ideas into their own existent traditions."³²³ This is exactly the process at work within the ostensibly "Rnying ma" TCKD and GYCK. In particular, Sle lung, with his strong background in Dge lugs pa understandings of Gsar ma ritual technologies, was engaged in this process. It is perhaps more accurate to understand an "original syncretism" between what I have so far been treating as the separate systems/traditions of Guhyasamāja, Kālacakra, and *rdzogs chen*. But what is essential for my purposes in attempting to understand the importance and context of the GYCK is that by Sle lung's time, and specifically for Sle lung himself, the hard lines of sectarianism had been thoroughly drawn between different schools and traditions of tantric thought. As we have seen, Sle lung explicitly presents Ārya Guhyasamāja, Kālacakra, and *rdzogs chen* as three quite distinct systems. In fact, at one point Sle lung declares that:

[If] a disciple of Guhyasamāja, enters into Kālacakra and if he practices [that] path, then realizations like how it has been explained will not arise because, [the Buddha] having [different] intentions for each disciple, taught separate [systems].³²⁴

Essentially Sle lung argues here that the different *tantras* were taught for disciples of different capacities, so one should not mix and match. Ironically, however, that is exactly what he goes on to do in his own explanation of the Gsang ba ye shes *yogas*, though he effectively creates a new fourth system by selecting and amalgamating parts

³²³ Hatchell 2014: 51.

³²⁴ *gsang 'dus pa'i ched du bya ba'i gdul bya zhig gis dus 'khor la zhugs te/ lam nyams su blangs* [356] *na de nas ji ltar bshad pa ltar gyi rtogs pa rnams mi skye bar 'gyur te/ ched du bya ba'i gdul bya so so la dgongs nas rnam pa tha dad par gsungs pa'i phyir ro/ 355-356.*

of the three other systems. To elaborate upon *tantra*'s literal meaning of "weaving," we could say that Sle lung selected three different types of thread from three different shops in order to make his own rug. In this way, I believe, Sle lung's commentary is consciously and intentionally syncretic.³²⁵

The Magic of Secret Gnosis

The overall length of the entire GYCK and the variety of types of texts found in it is actually rather astonishing. Following the compilation of the first volume, which is the essential core of the cycle, Sle lung and his students appear to have continued adding additional texts over the next six years, covering practically every topic of Tibetan Buddhist exegesis and ritual practice. It is not a stretch to say that the GYCK is effectively constructed as a self-contained "canon," surveying every genre of Tibetan religious literature. The cycle ranges from a host of minor ritual texts, such as relatively short *sādhana*s of other esoteric deities with no direct relation to Gsang ba ye shes,³²⁶ to very long commentaries written about foundational, normative Buddhist topics.³²⁷ Most of the commentarial texts are written by Sle lung himself, while the practice texts are mostly borrowed from other (usually Rnying ma) sources, and sometimes edited or adapted for use under the rubric of Gsang ba ye shes.³²⁸ Thus, Sle lung (and his students) should be regarded not as authors of the Gsang ba ye shes cycle, as such, but

³²⁵ Of course, how much (if any) of this can be called Sle lung's innovation, and how much of it is, for instance, the influence of Smin grol gling scholars (or earlier Rnying ma thinkers), is an open question and deserves further research.

³²⁶ Such as one practice dedicated to Rakta Yamāri: *Hrih dmar gshin rje'i man ngag gi gsal byed yid bzhiñ nor bu*, vol. 12, pp. 371-396.

³²⁷ The entirety of volume thirteen is dedicated to an extensive discourse about karma and its effects, entitled: *Las 'bras kyi rnam gzhag la yid ches pa'i gdam thugs rje'i rol mtsho*.

³²⁸ This usually consists of simply adding an opening verse in praise of Gsang ba ye shes, or sometimes of Jīnasāgara-Padmanarteśvara Avalokiteśvara.

rather as "tradents," who "reconstruct[ed] or compile[d] texts using a traditional stock of pre-existing textual modules."³²⁹

It should also be noted that the various genres of religious literature in the GYCK run the gamut of what Melford Spiro and (in specifically the Tibetan context) Geoffrey Samuel have classified as three levels of Buddhist soteriology. These are namely "nirvanic," "karmic," and "apotropaic" Buddhism, or in Samuel's terms:

1. The Pragmatic Orientation, in terms of health and prosperity in one's present life (see Spiro's 'apotropaic' Buddhism);
2. The Karma Orientation, in relation to future lives (see Spiro's 'kammatic' Buddhism);
3. The Bodhi Orientation, corresponding to personal release from the cycle of rebirth ('nibbanic' Buddhism in Spiro's terms), and also to the altruistic motivation (*bodhicitta*) of the Mahāyāna Buddhist practitioner...³³⁰

Stereotypically, the "Bodhi Orientation" is the purview of the monastic elite (and the dedicated mountain-dwelling *yogin*), whereas the other two soteriological goals are more "populist" practices of the laity, though fortunately Samuel (and to an extent Spiro) knows better than to make such an unsophisticated distinction, and explains that, especially in Tibetan society (as opposed to Theravādin Southeast Asia which Spiro studied) any Buddhist practitioner, regardless of his social standing, or any particular practice can be of any one of these "orientations," or even multiple orientations at the same time. Samuel explains:

The doctrine of *upāyakauśalya*, skillful means of teaching, has been...extensively developed by the Mahāyāna schools, so as to allow for a multiplicity of practices, rituals, and modes of presenting the Dharma (the Buddhist teachings) to coexist in a single society without their being seen as particularly inconsistent or contradictory. They are viewed instead as appropriate to different persons at different stages of practice. [For instance] Tantra provided the ritual 'technology' by which the local deities were dealt with...and thus linked together the Pragmatic and Bodhi orientations.³³¹

³²⁹ Mayer 2015: 235.

³³⁰ Samuel 1993: 172. See also Spiro (1971).

³³¹ Samuel 1993: 173.

Although Samuel's explanation here is somewhat accurate, it is still methodologically naïve. While understanding Buddhist soteriology through the lens of this three-tiered system is heuristically useful in some contexts, in the case of the different genres of texts in the GYCK, it is more helpful to think of the three "orientations" as one continuous soteriology rather than separate divisions. To understand what I am getting at, let us examine several texts that would, superficially at least, seem to represent the "pragmatic orientation," as opposed to the very "Bodhi-oriented" generation and completion stage systems just reviewed.³³² That is to say, magic spells for seemingly very worldly goals.

There are a broad range of texts in the GYCK that describe ritual practices that may be defined as "magic."³³³ Such practices are not exactly unusual in Tibetan

³³² There are, of course, a number of texts in the GYCK also geared toward the "karma orientation," perhaps most explicitly a series of funerary rites found in volume three. One of these is the *Rigs drug gnas 'dren gyi cho ga kham ssum dong sprugs* (pp. 160-222), which, according the colophon, is a ritual drawn from an Avalokiteśvara practice from the Northern Treasures tradition, and is focused on preventing a deceased person from taking further rebirth in any of the six realms of existence. Another text, the *Gnas lung gi rnam bshad mkha' spyod snang ba'i mdzes rgyan* (pp. 397-463), is dedicated toward transferring the deceased to the pure land of the *dākinīs*. Both of these practices appear to be based wholesale on the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, one of the main Buddhist funerary texts in Tibet (see Skorupski 1983), with Gsang ba ye shes, of course, interchanged as the main soteriological deity. There is even a text for benefiting dead animals, *post-mortem*, the *Dud 'gro shi gson la phan pa'i man ngag ngan song dag byed* (pp. 48-68). Already with these texts we see the limitations of Samuel's three-tiered system, because it is unclear whether these practices are to be classified as bodhi or karmic orientation, or some combination thereof, since the goal of the ritual is simultaneously better rebirth *and* ultimate salvation.

³³³ Without getting too much into the long, contentious history of the term "magic" in religion and scholarship, I will use James Frazer's simple definition of magic as "the assumption that things act on one another at a distance because of being linked together by invisible bonds" (Cuevas 2010: 169, see also Frazer 1998: 13-57) and the controlled manipulation of these bonds for worldly ends. I am aware of serious flaws in Frazer's views on magic, especially in how he explains its distinction from religion and science. However, his understanding of magic as "sympathetic bonds" is heuristically useful. Working off of Subbotskii's four types of "magical causation," I would further define magic as the affecting of physical objects through conscious effort of will, usually employing physical supports that are assumed to create, or which already believed to have, a non-physical connection to the object the practitioner wishes to affect (Subbotskii 2010: 5). By "worldly ends" I mean two things: goals that in the Buddhist context would be considered mundane or "*laukika*," and worldly in the sense that the implementation of magic has (or is thought to have) a clear, (relatively) immediate discernable effect on the external world. This is opposed to the religious practices we have examined so far which primarily take place within the mind (or body) of the *yogin*, and any effect on the external world is considered secondary. Frazer also described sub-classes of sympathy, namely the laws of "imitation" and "contagion," as well as the principles of "similarity," "contiguity," and "antipathy" which are used to effect things at a distance. All these principles are clearly illustrated in the magic rituals found in various texts in the GYCK.

Buddhism – they are often found tucked away in the collected works of religious figures, usually alongside rituals aimed at propitiating and invoking worldly protector deities. In the Rnying ma context it is not unusual to see such practices appear in certain treasure cycles, but the TCKD, for instance, contains few if any such rituals, from what I can tell, with the exception of rites focused on gaining the magical attainment of immortality.³³⁴

The GYCK, on the other hand, is full of magic. Volume four, for example, is almost entirely taken up with practices to control weather, with a few others (such as one aimed at subjugating one's enemies by elemental astrology) included as well. The weather texts include rituals aimed at causing rain, stopping rain, dispelling cold, and stopping hail.³³⁵ According to the colophons of these texts, they are all from Rnying ma sources, including some which are apparently oral instructions from Sle lung's teachers at Smin grol gling. Examining the colophons, it is interesting how defensive Sle lung is regarding these practices, or at least seemingly eager to justify his actions in composing these texts. In the case of the *Ser bsrung nyi ma'i dkyil 'khor*, which explains a series of techniques for repelling or dispersing hail storms, Sle lung identifies it as combining practices from two different *gter ma* cycles, one identified as "Bla ma drag po," which is likely a reference to the *Bla ma drag po'i skor* revelations of Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer preserved in the *'Dod 'jo'i 'bum bzang sādhana* collection of the Smin gling brothers,³³⁶ and also the "Dgongs 'dus," which may refer to the *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* treasure cycle (see below).³³⁷ In the colophon to the *Ser bsrung nyi ma'i dkyil*

³³⁴ There is a group of seven immortality practices in the first volume of the TCKD pp. 271-318.

³³⁵ For instance, see *Sgo nas lo dgra'i 'jigs pa bsrung thabs sprin phung rgya mtsho* (*A Sea of Clouds: Methods for Protecting against Enemies of the Harvest*), GYCK vol. 4, pp. 61-123.

³³⁶ 'Gyur med rdo rje and Dharma śrī. *Sgrub thabs 'dod 'jo'i 'bum bzang*. TBRC W18. 2 vols. Gangtok, Sikkim: Sherab Gyaltzen, 1977. My thanks to Cathy Cantwell for making this identification.

³³⁷ Or it may come from the second volume in the treasure collection of Bdud 'dul rdo rje (1615-1672) which contains a series of texts designated "dgongs 'dus," including a text devoted to Lama Drag po (my thanks to Cathy Cantwell for this information). I have not had the opportunity to compare these to the GYCK texts, however, so at this time I am uncertain of Sle lung's source. The *Ser bsrung nyi ma'i dkyil*

'*khor*, Sle lung argues that the application of these methods under the (essentially new) rubric of Gsang ba ye shes practice is appropriate for accomplished practitioners.³³⁸ In other words, according to Sle lung, even though a different deity was invoked in the practice's original context, any deity can be used to accomplish the same goals – in this case, stopping hail. Sle lung here seems to be either anticipating or responding to criticism of inappropriately mixing different teachings.

Also, the fact that Sle lung puts this weather magic, which seems to be mainly geared toward protecting crops,³³⁹ in volume four, right after the funerary-ritual-heavy volume three, shows how great a concern for him securing crop yields and food production really was. At his first monastery, Mnga' ris grwa tshang, unlike at the great monastic institutions in and around Lhasa, monks were responsible for growing their own food.³⁴⁰ Presumably the same was the case at the provincial Rnam grol gling. Notably no such crop protection practices are found in the TCKD, compiled as it was in the more centrally located and likely far more food-secure Smin grol gling.³⁴¹

In any case, as interesting as the weather-control practices of the fourth volume are, the text in the GYCK that best illustrates the style and breadth of techniques and goals of Tibetan magic more generally is the *Las tshogs ci 'dod rgyan shar*, *An Ornament of a Wish-Fulfilling Collection of Activities*.³⁴² This text is an adaptation of

'*khor* also appears to be nearly identical with the *Rta mgrin gsang sgrub kyi sgo nas ser ba srung ba'i gdam pa me long 'khrug pa'i gur khang*, part of a larger Hayagrīva cycle composed by the Dge lugs master Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717-1786), and discussed in Rdo rje don grub's article on modern magical hail prevention techniques in Amdo (see Rdo rje don grub 2012). It is likely that Lcang skya drew from the same sources as Sle lung.

³³⁸ Vol. 4, p. 197.

³³⁹ This is explicit in one text, where a ritual is given to ward off "enemies of the harvest," which are vermin such as birds and mice which might eat crops, frost, drought, and hail.

³⁴⁰ Sle lung Tulku, personal communication 9/9/2014.

³⁴¹ Although the colophon to the *Sea of Clouds*, for instance, credits the practices to oral instructions given by Che mchog rdo rje (mentioned above as Lelung's primary Gsang ba ye shes teacher at Smin grol gling), so these practices were certainly known at Smin grol gling. However, there is no mention of a patron requesting these crop-protection practices in the colophon, so it appears that Sle lung's concern with integrating them into the larger GYCK was his own (or possibly the concern of his students).

³⁴² Vol. 12, pp. 1-71.

the *Yon tan gyi rgyud bstan pa'i srog shing* from the third volume of the thirteen-volume *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* treasure cycle of Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396).³⁴³ Sle lung's main alteration to his redaction of the text is an introduction declaring that anyone who has obtained accomplishment in the practice of Gsang ba ye shes may implement the following spells. The rest of the manuscript is a series of 92 very short spells, most less than a page long, covering a host of goals including all four types of Buddhist tantric magic: pacification (*zhi*), augmentation (*rgyas*), overpowering (*dbang*), and destroying (*drag*). To get a sense of the wide range but also repetitive structure of the text, let us examine a few specific spells.

The opening spell in the collection is seemingly rather unremarkable, and sounds like a short description of a standard *sādhana* practice:

First, to achieve [long] life: at dawn, before you say anything, meditate on yourself as Amitāyus. As you meditate [visualize] gathering the essence of life and recite "*Om badzra dzanya na ā yu she tshe brum swa hā*" one-pointedly. Then you will obtain the accomplishment of long-life.³⁴⁴

Similarly, another spell, for becoming attractive to others depends mainly on what appears to be standard *guru yoga* practice.³⁴⁵

...if you wish to be attractive to others: having thoroughly cultivated *bodhicitta* (the mind of enlightenment), meditate on yourself as the Lake-Born Vajra (Padmasambhava). From within [a state of] non-grasping, chant single-pointedly the recitation of the Guru, abandoning hope and fear. If you radiate out whatever you have as cloudbanks of offerings [to the *guru*], you will come to be attractive and liked by others.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Sangs rgyas gling pa. "Yon tan gyi rgyud bstan pa'i srog shing." In *Bla ma dgongs 'dus*. TBRC W18978. 3: 807 - 892. Gangtok: Sonam Topgay Kazi, 1972.

³⁴⁴ *dang po tshe sgrub pa ni tho* [3] *rengs ngag ma shor ba'i gong du rang nyid tshe dpag med du bsgoms la tshe bcud bsdu ba'i dmigs pa dang bcad Om badzra dzanya na ā yu she tshe brum swa hā zhes rtse gcig tu bzlas na tshe'i dngos grub thob par 'gyuro* GYCK vol. 12, pp. 2.5-3.3.

³⁴⁵ *Guru yoga* is, incidentally, is a key preliminary step in any advanced tantric meditation practice, as Sle lung makes clear in his generation and completion stage commentaries.

³⁴⁶ *gzhan gyi yid du 'ong bar 'dod na byang chub kyi sems legs par bsgoms nas rang nyid gu ru mtsho skyes rdo rjer bsgoms la 'dzin med kyi ngang nas gu ru'i dza pra rtse gcig tu bzlas la re dogs spangs te ci 'byor mchod sprin* [7] *du spros na gzhan gyi yid du 'ong zhing byams par 'gyuro* pp. 6.4-7.4.

These two "spells" rely on practices usually associated with the "Bodhi" orientation but are clearly geared toward "pragmatic" goals. Even some of the "darker" spells that may at first appear to be beyond the pale of mainstream Buddhist practice employ standard tantric *kāpālika*-style techniques of self-identifying with wrathful deities by wearing charnel-ground accouterments:

...if you wish to have great power and strength: meditate on yourself as Mahābala, and at the end of the root *mantra*³⁴⁷ recite "*Ma ha bā la pu shtim ku ru swā hā*" single-pointedly and smear your body with the bone marrow of an elephant,³⁴⁸ dress in a fur cloak of a carnivorous animal, and if you avoid fire and the sun, you will increase your physical strength.³⁴⁹

This spell generally follows the conventions of a standard *sādhana*, namely self-identification with a particular deity, except that here the goal is not to attain enlightenment, but to achieve physical power. Mahābala, who is particularly associated with strength, is thus an appropriate choice as meditation deity. The application of elephant bone marrow and carnivorous animal skin in particular likely intends to create a sympathetic "contagious" bond, not just with the wrathful *heruka* deity generally by imitating his charnel-ground accouterments as in standard tantric practice, but with the physical essence of powerful animals, endowing one with comparable strength.

Still other "bodhi" orientation practices are integrated, indeed foundationally key, to carrying out the seemingly very worldly goals of these spells. For instance, one of the most commonly repeated imagination techniques which are central to these spells is the so-called "emanation and reabsorption" or "summoning and dissolution"

³⁴⁷ Here and throughout the *Collection of Activities* the root *mantra* is implicitly understood to be Gsang ba ye shes's *mantra* (probably *Om dhu ma gha ye na ma swā hā*), though in the original context of the *Bla ma dgongs 'dus pa*, it refers to a different *mantra*. Essentially it simply refers to the whatever the main *mantra* of the *yogin*'s personal meditation deity is.

³⁴⁸ This detail indicates this spell likely originally came from an Indian tantra.

³⁴⁹ *mthu rtsal che bar 'dod na rang nyid stobs po cher bsgoms la rtsa sngags kyi mthar ma ha bā la pu shtim ku ru swā hā zhes rtse gcig tu bzla zhing glang po che'i rkang mar gyis lus la byugs gcan gzan gyi pags pa'i gos gyon zhing me dang nyi ma spangs na lus stobs rgyas bar 'gyuro* p. 7.

visualization.³⁵⁰ This visualization is commonly found in generation and completion stage practices (see, for instance, the Gsang ba ye shes *sādhana* passage above) where the *yogin* practitioner must emanate rays of light which invoke the blessings of myriad deities which he then draws in and dissolves into himself in order to consecrate his own body. In the case of the spells in *Collection of Activities*, the *yogin*, along with *mantra* recitation, uses this visualization to empower a material support upon which he acts and/or uses in some way. For instance:

...if you wish to increase wealth: on a day of the constellation *rgyal* (Skt. *puṣya*),³⁵¹ make a golden tablet encrusted with nine turquoise "eyes," into which summon the essence of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* and let it dissolve. After the root *mantra*, [recite] "*Ba su pushtim ku ru ye swā hā.*" Having earnestly accomplished [the *mantra*] thus, roll [the tablet] up with red cloth. Without letting it fall into anyone's hands, if you bind [the tablet] on your body, wealth will increase.³⁵²

Again we see the principle of contagion operating, as close physical proximity to the empowered tablet is believed to draw wealth to a person. Regarding the summoning and dissolution visualization, however, in most spells the object of the meditation is quite a bit more specific than the entirety of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. For instance, the object summoned and dissolved may be the mind or soul of a specific person one either wishes to repel or destroy:

...if you wish to kill: draw an appropriate *liṅga* effigy for the enemies and obstructers and summon and dissolve [them] into it forcefully. Clearly [generate] yourself as the Mighty One³⁵³ and pelt [the effigy] with empowered mustard seeds. Forcefully recite "*om ha ya ghri wa hūm phaṭ!*" Enemies, obstructers, doers of harm, and *māras*, [your] life-force is completely destroyed! *nri hri tsitta mā ra ya myogs rbad dzah dzah srog la a mu ka hu ra thum mā ra ya rbad phaṭ dzah.*" From your own heart, imagine innumerable emanated messengers come forth and liberate enemies and obstructers [by killing], and

³⁵⁰ These techniques or "technologies" are part of most tantric magic practice, including the weather spells mentioned above.

³⁵¹ One of the 26 or 27 "lunar mansions" or asterisms which the moon rotates through monthly, like a lunar zodiac. See Cornu 1997:130-141.

³⁵² *longs spyod 'phel bar 'dod na skar ma rgyal gyi nyin mo gser gyi byang bu mig dgu g.yu 'phra can bcos par 'khor 'das kyi bcud thams cad bsdus te thim par bsams nas rtsa sngags kyi gsham du ba su pushtim ku ru ye swā hā zhes nan tan du bsgrubs nas dar dmar gyis bsgril mi lag ma 'grims bar lus la bcangs pas longs spyod 'phel bar 'gyur ro p. 4.*

³⁵³ Hayagrīva.

finally incinerating them. If that [is done] you will accomplish the action of killing.³⁵⁴

In other cases, the person to be summoned is someone the *yogin* wishes to attract:

If you wish to captivate a woman, make an effigy made of dough imbued with [her] name and family name [and mixed with her] urine, put it inside a copper bowl, and forcefully summon and dissolve [her into the effigy]. After the root *mantra*, say the name of this woman [and] “*nri angku sha sarwa hrim hrim dung dung*. The mental consciousness of [such and such] a woman, *pā sham ku ru hūm*,” and then remain silent for three days. Pelt [the effigy] with the fruit of the thorn apple... white mustard seeds, and the blood of a partridge. Then mix the effigy with your own urine... and bury it on the path on which that woman walks and because of that [she] will be unable to control herself.³⁵⁵

To summarize my point, the very same techniques the *yogin* practitioner uses to accomplish Buddhahood are used to, for instance, make a woman fall in love or to increase wealth. In fact, we could say that the imagined light rays that are emanated and reabsorbed are used by the *yogin* to form sympathetic magical bonds at every level of tantric practice, beginning in the initial generation stage where he creates a link with the deity. This could be used as evidence in support of Samuel’s point that the “technologies” of “bodhi” Buddhism were employed for “pragmatic” ends. However, the attainment of magical powers exhaustively documented in the *Collection of Activities* have been normatively built into tantric Buddhism since its inception.

Thus the effulgence of a huge range of magic practices in the GYCK generally and the *Collection of Activities* specifically should come as no surprise since there are

³⁵⁴ *bsad par 'dod na dgra bgegs kyi linga mtshan nyid tshang ba bris dgug bstim drag tu bgyis rang nyid dbang chen du gsal bas thun rdzas kyis brabs la om ha ya ghri wa hūm phaṭ dgra bgegs gnod byed mā ra ya srog dum tshal pa rbad nri hri tsitta mā ra ya myogs rbad dzah dzah srog la a mu ka hu ra thum mā ra ya rbad phaṭ dzah zhes drag por bzlas la rang gi thugs ka nas [10] sprul pa'i pho nya bsam gyis mi khyab pa spros nas dgra bgegs rnams bsgal bar bsams la mthar bsreg pas mjug bsdu des ni bsad pa'i las 'grub par 'gyur ro pp. 9.2-10.2.*

³⁵⁵ *bud med dbang du bsdu bar 'dod na bag zan la bsgrub bya'i linga ming rus zag rdzas dang ldan pa bcos zangs gzhong gi [13] nang du bkod par dgug bstim drag tu bgyis la rtsa sngags kyi gsham du bu mo ming 'di zhes bya ba nri angku sha sarwa hrim hrim dung dung bu mo ming 'di zhes bya'i yid kyi rnam par shes pa pā sham ku ru hūm zhes smra ba bcad de zhag gsum du bsgrubs la skabs mtshamsu thang khrom pa'i 'bras bu yungs kar gong mo'i khrag rnams kyis thun brabs de nas linga rang gi dri chus sbangs te zbig pa dang bu mo des 'gro nges pa'i lam du mnan pas rang dbang med par khugs par 'gyur ro pp. 12.2-13.5.*

a vast proliferation of such spells throughout Tibetan Buddhist religious literature, despite the subject's relative lack of attention by Western scholars.³⁵⁶ Such practices are common in Mahāyāna and tantric scriptures from India, and in Indian tantric texts generally.³⁵⁷ In fact, many Buddhist tantric root scriptures are (at least on a surface reading) essentially just grimoires of spells for accomplishing worldly magic. To take a relatively random example that illustrates this point, let us briefly examine the contents of the *Bhagavānnīlāmbaradhara vajrapāṇitantra* (*The Tantra of the Blue-Clad Lord Vajrapāṇi*, hereafter the "BNVP"). This text, technically classified as a *caryā tantra*, has been tentatively dated to the seventh or eighth century CE.³⁵⁸ Beyond an overwhelming similarity between the general ingredients and procedures used in the BNVP and some of the magic texts of the GYCK,³⁵⁹ some of the spells in the BNVP are virtually identical to ones that appear in the *Collection of Activities*. For instance:

Braid together three white cords
And make twenty-one knots.
Accomplish it and make the offering of accomplishment,
Then tie it around the neck of a victor.
It is certain to reverse all obstacles.³⁶⁰

Compare with a spell meant to ward off defilement from the *Collection of Activities*.

Forty-first, if you wish protection from corruptions and defilements twist three black cords [into one] and make twenty-one knots, after the root mantra "*Kro dha kā li sarwa pā pam mam du sa ma ya bi na so shuddhe shuddhe ma hā shuddhe phaT swā hā*" thus plant 100 [of these mantras] in each knot. Fumigate it with bdellium incense smoke and then to whoever's body it is tied he will be protected from all corruptions and defilements.³⁶¹

³⁵⁶ With some notable exceptions such as Cuevas (2010) and Berounsky (2015).

³⁵⁷ For instance, see Sanderson (2015) for a discussion of a Śākta tantric text that utilizes magical techniques to control the weather, not unlike those employed in the GYCK.

³⁵⁸ See BNVP (vii).

³⁵⁹ For instance, drawing magic circles on birch bark with ink made of poison and blood, and the burning of empowered substances, particularly mustard seeds, in a fire made from burning thorny wood, all of which are also mentioned in the BNVP and employed in the GYCK hail-repelling text mentioned above.

³⁶⁰ BNVP: 29. For more examples of the prevalence of worldly magic ritual in tantric Buddhist scriptures see the *Cakrasaṃvara* (Gray 2007) and *Mahāvajrabhairava Tantras* (Siklos 1996).

³⁶¹ *zhe gcig pa nyams grib bsrung bar 'dod na srad bu nag po gsum sgril la mdud pa nyer gcig btab par rtsa sngags kyi gsham du kro dha kā li sarba pā pam mam du sa ma ya [33] bi na so shuddhe shuddhe ma hā shuddhe phaT swā hā zhes mdud pa re la brgya phrag re btab nas gu gul gyi dud pas bdugs te gang gi lus la btags pas nyams grib thams cad bsrung bar 'gyur ro pp. 32.4-33.2.*

It should be remembered that there is significant overlap between the ritual structures and goals of the "lower" *kriyā* and *caryā* tantric classes and the "higher" classes of *mahāyoga* and *yogānuttara*. The latter were developed in the later Indian and Tibetan tradition to emphasize more "gnostic"(intellectualized/visualized)-type generation and completion stage practices, in many cases eschewing the more "worldly" physically-enacted ritual magic of the "lower" classes. However, the "'lower *tantras*' were culturally significant traditions at the time that Buddhism first became established in Tibet," and they "contributed towards and influenced the development of later tantrism, to a degree rather greater than is commonly analyzed by most modern scholars."³⁶²

Another interesting aspect of the *Collection of Activities* that should be noted is that approximately one-third of its spells are "medical" in nature, in that they seem geared specifically toward curing physical disease, such as paralysis, eye ailments, sore throat, and toothache (spells 71-74) as well as warding off possession by a variety of harmful spirits (spells 75-90), which in Indo-Tibetan culture generally are considered one of the main sources of disease.

Here we see possible influence from the *Rgyud bzhi*, or the *Four Medical Tantras*, which are perhaps the most important scriptural source for Tibetan medicine. Or, probably more likely, the rituals from the GYCK and the *Rgyud bzhi* drew from a common Indo-Tibetan cultural stock of ritual elements. Many of the spell ingredients listed in the *Collection of Activities* are used, for similar if not precisely the same curative effects, in the *Rgyud bzhi*. Myrobalan ("the king of medicines"), white sandalwood, cloves, nutmeg, bamboo juice, saffron, and even bat flesh are just some of

³⁶² Mayer 2007: 20-21.

the spell ingredients mentioned that have important medical properties according to the *Rgyud bzhi*.³⁶³

The *Rgyud bzhi* was in turn almost certainly influenced by a long, well-developed tradition of "medical magic" in Indian religion, which textually begins with the *Atharva Veda* and its commentarial literature. The *Atharva Veda* is considered to be the fourth of the four foundational texts of Vedic Hinduism, and almost entirely consists of short explanations of magical procedures which employ the Vedic praise hymns to various deities in order to accomplish worldly goals, often to cure disease (including warding off harmful spirits).³⁶⁴ In fact, despite obvious differences, it is still striking how structurally similar the *Atharva Vedic* magic spells are to those in the *Collection of Activities*. While the spells in the GYCK show far more reliance on meditative visualization practice than their Vedic counterparts, in both texts the spells are (in most cases at least) dependent on three interlocking elements: *mantra* (recitation), *karman* (action), and *dravya* (material or substance).³⁶⁵ The Tibetan equivalents of these elements would be "*sngags*," "*las*," and "*thun*." In both the early Indian texts and the much later Tibetan ones, the practitioner is enjoined to empower a material object (*thun/dravya*) with a religiously powerful recitation (*sngags/mantra*), and then do something with the empowered object (*las/karman*), such as tying it on his body or a body of another to accord protection or attract wealth, etc.

Furthermore, commentarial literature to the *Atharva Veda* identifies ten different types of hymns in the root text, divided based on their different purposes.

³⁶³ See Clifford (1984), especially chapters nine and eleven which discuss the demonology and pharmacology of the *Rgyud bzhi*. See also Gyurme Dorje 1992: 63, 71, and 79.

³⁶⁴ It is interesting to note that, like the *Collection of Activities* and the other magic texts of the GYCK, the worldly magic rituals of the *vedas* come as part of a kind of appendix to the main practices (such as the core hymns of the *Rg Veda*). For a study that analyzes the continuity between early Vedic and later Mahāyāna magic practices, see Schmithausen (1997).

³⁶⁵ For a discussion of these three elements in the context of the *Atharva Veda* and its related literature, see Bahulkar 1994: 40-49.

These are: 1) *Bhaiṣajyāni* – curing disease and possession 2) *Āyushyāni* – for health and long life 3) *Sāmmānasyāni* – for creating harmony 4) *Paṣṭikāni* – to bring about happiness and protect prosperity 5) *Strīkarmāṇi* – for engendering love/attracting women 6) *Rājākarmāṇi* – related to royal ceremonies 7) *Ābhicārikāṇi* – curses to destroy or exorcise enemies and demons 8) *Kṛtyaparihāranāni* – for repelling curses or evil influences 9) *Prayaścittāni* – for cleansing sins and defilements 10) *Ādhyātmikāni* – cosmological and theogonic hymns.³⁶⁶ Eight of these ten types, (not including the *Rājākarmāṇi* and *Ādhyātmikāni* types) cover the goals of all the spells in the *Collection of Activities*. All this underscores just how old the repertoire of "pre-existing textual modules" is that Sle lung was drawing on when compiling the GYCK.³⁶⁷

In his article "Black Magic in Tibetan Buddhism," Peter Schwieger argues that magic is systematically part of the doctrine of Buddhism, and not a "subcultural phenomenon" which is integrated *ex post facto*.³⁶⁸ Given the prevalence of magic rituals in Indian society as attested in the *Atharva Veda* and its related literature, Buddhist practices arose within a religious and social matrix where magic rituals were a regular part of religious practice. Not only that, but such magical practices are instrumental to the philosophical and soteriological vision of Buddhism. Schwieger goes on to explain that the *yogin*'s attainment of magical abilities in which he is able to assert his will over the external universe via imaginative-visualization is the natural outgrowth of the experiential collapse of subject-object dualism that the *yogin* experiences when he

³⁶⁶ See Modak 1993: 27. This ten-fold classification scheme is drawn from later commentarial literature on the *Atharva Veda*.

³⁶⁷ I am not necessarily arguing for any direct continuity between the Vedic hymns and the magic spells found in tantric Buddhist texts, including the BNVP and GYCK (though, I think it is very possible there is such continuity). However, the categories found in the Vedic literature are theoretically useful for understanding the later Tibetan materials.

³⁶⁸ See Schwieger (2010).

dissolves the defiled world of ordinary experience and re-emanates it as an enlightened *maṇḍala* during his meditation on the deity.

Sle lung himself directly equates the performance of magic with the realization of liberating gnosis. In one of the magical texts in volume four of the GYCK Sle lung, in his opening commentary, states:

All animate and inanimate phenomena lack true existence. Furthermore, they amount to nothing more than interdependent origination. If you realize that, essentially, magic ["*'phrul*"] is the union of appearance and emptiness, you will accomplish the ordinary and supreme siddhis without too much effort.³⁶⁹

More technically speaking, the implementation of magical powers is an integral part of the "Stage of Great Attainment" in the Ārya Guhyasamāja tradition.³⁷⁰ This implementation of magical powers is actually one of the primary purposes of the pure illusory body, which is believed to be created in the final stages of Guhyasamāja practice, for the purpose of benefitting others (as opposed to the "gnosis body" the realization of which benefits oneself).³⁷¹ In other words, theoretically speaking, in tantric practice magical powers are one of the primary ways the *yogin* implements the *bodhisattva* ethic of aiding other sentient beings. In Rnying ma practice there are two levels of ritual, *stod las* (primary action), and *smad las* (secondary action). Despite their names, both are considered to be equally important, with the first meant to liberate oneself and associated with gnosis, and the second to be done on behalf of others, associated with compassion.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ *snang srid chos kun bden* [213] *par ma grub pas/ kun kyang rten cing 'brel pa tsam du zad/ snang stong zung 'jug gnad kyi 'phrul shes na/ mchog thun dngos grub 'grub par dka' tshegs med* GYCK vol. 4, pp. 212.5-213.2.

³⁷⁰ Kongtrul 2008: 77.

³⁷¹ Interestingly, the production of an illusory body and the attainment of various magical powers such as flight and passing through solid objects are explained by the Buddha to be one of the primary "fruits of the homeless life" achieved after intensive meditation practice, on the way to final *nirvāṇa*, as far back as the second *sutta* of the Pali Canon (see DN).

³⁷² Cathy Cantwell, electronic communication 7/1/2015. Interestingly, in Greek Neo-Platonist thought, magical ritual when paired with or as part of philosophical or spiritual development was held in a very similarly high regard, in a structurally similar way. In Iamblichean Neo-Platonism, particularly, "theurgic" virtue (the performance of cultic and magic ritual) was the highest of all virtues because it "is

The *Collection of Activities (las tshogs)*, which we might call "miscellaneous" activities, could be classified as a kind of optional subset under the rubric of *smad las* rites. In fact, it seems clear that these spells were in many, if not all, cases intended to be done on behalf of another person, likely a lay patron. The wording in most of the spells is vague enough that one could read them as being applicable either to oneself or another person. In other words, one could make a wealth-increasing tablet that the *yogin* could wear himself, or he could give it to another person to wear. Several of the spells, however, make it explicitly clear in their wording that they are meant to be done specifically on behalf of another person. For example, spell nine reads:

...if you wish to perform actions for protection clearly generate yourself as your meditation deity, and generate the ten wrathful ones³⁷³ at the ten places of the body, such as the crown of the head.³⁷⁴ Meditate that at the heart center is the appropriate seed syllable of *whoever is to be protected*, [emphasis added] in the aspect of "*hrīh*" or "*hūm*." Imagine that from the assembly of ten wrathful deities rays of light radiate out churning and a sphere [made from] a fence of *vajras*, mountains of flames, and swords surround you in stages and make you completely invincible, following the root mantra, "*hūm bcu sbrel bar ma ma raksham*,"³⁷⁵ recite thus single-pointedly, and with that you will be the greatest protector.³⁷⁶

Samuel's three-tiered system may in some cases be useful in understanding Tibetan religion, but it is not useful for understanding the broad range of practices in the GYCK (or any other tantric cycle, for that matter) because, in these contexts at least, the karmic and pragmatic goals are actually integral to the "bodhi orientation." Thus,

capable of having power within the cosmos without being determined by it." Therefore "for instance, Proclus, without interrupting the contemplation of the divine, but rather, continuing to contemplate the divine in symbols and ritual action...help[ed] his fellow men by saving Attica from drought through a theurgic ritual to cause rain" (Helmig & Vargas 2014: 263).

³⁷³ Probably the ten main wrathful deities in the Vajrakīla *maṇḍala*: Humkāra, Vijaya, Nīladaṇḍa, Yamāntaka, Ārya Acala, Hayagrīva, Aparājita, Amṛtakuṇḍalī, Trailokyavijaya, and Mahābala.

³⁷⁴ The other nine places are the throat, the heart, the solar plexus above the navel, at the navel, at the "secret center" or the genitals, the right and left shoulders, and the right and left thighs.

³⁷⁵ *Hūm!* Bound together with the ten, protect me!

³⁷⁶ *pa srung ba'i las byed par 'dod na rang nyid yi dam du gsal ba'i spyi bo la sogs pa'i gnas bcur khro bo bcu bskyed snying gar rang gzhan bsrung bya gang yin gyi srog yig hrīh 'am hūm gi rnam par bsgoms la khro bcu'i [8] lha tshogs las 'phros pa'i 'od zer las rdo ra me ri pang mtshon cha'i gur khang rnam kyis rim par dkrigs te gang gis kyang mi tshugs par bsams la rtso sngags kyi gsham du hūm bcu sbrel bar ma ma raksham zhes rtse gcig tu bzlas pas bsrung ba'i mchog tu 'gyur ro pp. 7.4 - 8.3.*

Sle lung's weather magic, for instance, should certainly be understood within its proper social historical context – food production, for instance, was likely a very real, pragmatic concern of his. But these practices should not be understood as the accretion of provincial village superstition, but a key, tried-and-true part of normative Buddhist soteriology.

Yet another further complication to the distinction between the "pragmatic" and "bodhi" practices is the fact that Buddhist commentators have sometimes interpreted apparently worldly magic rituals from a more rarified philosophical and soteriological perspective. For instance, Cantwell and Mayer, in their study of the *'Phags pa Thabs kyi zhags pa padma 'phreng gi don bsdus pa* (*A Noble Noose of Methods, the Lotus Garland Synopsis*, henceforth *TZ*), an important Rnying ma Mahāyoga tantra, identify the tendency of one of its commentaries to "interiorize" seemingly mundane and pragmatic rituals.

Towards the end of *TZ*, for example, we find a series of short chapters on the four rites in which *homa* and *phur pa* rituals are used to achieve the apparently this-worldly goals of destroying, captivating, enriching, and pacifying. But according to *TZComm*'s exegesis, these four rites are not simply concerned with the outer performance of burnt offerings rites and liberating troublesome beings through striking an effigy with a *phur pa* and so on, but with the transformative power of the ritual in the path to enlightenment. Each *phur pa* comes to embody an aspect of understanding so that it can infuse the object of the rite with the realisation it exemplifies: for example, the wrathful *phur pa* is, "a single phur pa of [the nature of] mind," and the pacifying *phur pa* is "the elemental nature's faultless essential pure awareness, the samādhi *phur pa*, so it pacifies everything through its natural qualities." At the end of each of the chapters on the four rites, the ritual description is concluded with a verse further glossing the meanings in unambiguously soteriological terms...³⁷⁷

This is not to say that the four rites of the *TZ* (or any other tantric Buddhist scripture) were not meant to be practiced, at least in some sense, literally, but simply that these

³⁷⁷ Cantwell and Mayer 2012: 5.

practices were encoded with doctrinal and cosmological significance that characterizes most tantric iconography and ritual technology. However, I have seen no evidence that the magical practices in the GYCK were "interiorized" in a way similar to the *TZ* and its commentary.

However, it is interesting to note that the last spell of the *Collection of Activities* is said to accomplish any goal, thus apparently making the previous 91 spells and their sometimes highly elaborate operations obsolete. This ultimate spell, it turns out, is essentially just a very normative, and relatively simple, standard generation and completion stage meditation practice:

Ninety-second, if you wish all your wishes to be fulfilled, in the morning, expel stale air, visualize your self-awareness as a *Bhrum* syllable from which [shines] the radiance and splendid majesty of a wish-fulfilling jewel, dissolving all the assemblies of deities of the three roots. Hold the vase-breath. Again radiate light rays and pervade all phenomena [with them] think that whatever you wish is accomplished. Establish [yourself] in the sphere of non-conceptual emptiness and you will accomplish whatever you wish.³⁷⁸

It is important to point out here that the spell does not make any declaration about the nature of the wishes one might fulfill with this practice. I believe it can be interpreted so broadly as to include the goal of attaining enlightenment. If so, here we have a single practice in which the bodhi, karma, and pragmatic orientations are completely collapsed, their distinctions rendered meaningless.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ go gnyis pa ci bsam 'grub par 'dod na tho rengs rlung ro dbyung la rang rig bhrum las yid bzhin gyi nor bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bkrags mdangs dang gzi brjid phun sum tshogs par bskyed la rtse gsum gyi lha tshogs thams cad bstim bum can bzung slar yang 'od zer 'phros te snang srid thams cad khyab ci bsam yid bzhin du 'grub par bsams la mi dmigs pa'i ngang la bzhag pas ci bsam yid bzhin du 'grub par 'gyur ro p. 70.

³⁷⁹ If we understand this final spell as indeed "ultimate" in the sense of being specifically intended to subsume the previous 91 spells, it then becomes possible to read the entire *Collection of Spells* text as a kind of skillful means to lead the practitioner to simply engage in emptiness meditation. In that sense, then, similar to the *TZComm*'s interpretation, apparently "pragmatic" ritual gives rise to, or is ultimately inseparable from, soteriological "bodhi" practice. This is a highly speculative interpretation, however.

The Youthful Sun

What is, of course, at stake here is whether or not the tripartite theoretical system of pragmatic, karmic, and bodhi "orientations" has any heuristic value in understanding Tibetan Buddhism generally and Sle lung's GYCK in particular. My discussion so far has primarily argued that it does not, in fact, have heuristic value and is rather an obstacle to understanding how various practices of apparently different types in fact operate as part of a systematic whole. However, in certain respects, Samuel's system is sound and helpful in interpreting the data, but mainly insofar as it simply replicates emic Buddhist categories.

This is particularly true *vis-à-vis* the longstanding Buddhist ontological distinction between enlightened (Skt. *lokottara*, Tib. *'jig rten las 'das pa*) and worldly (Skt. *laukika*, Tib. *'jig rten pa*). Again, in practice, especially in the tantric perspective, this theoretically hard and fast distinction is actually extremely blurry, and in certain contexts breaks down completely (see the discussion of Sle lung's *Dam can bstan srung rgya mtsho 'i rnam thar* in the next chapter). But in other contexts the distinction seems to hold. For instance, generally speaking in Buddhist practice texts, activities that are generally regarded as worldly and mundane (the killing of enemies, the generation of material wealth, etc.) are usually delegated to worldly deities, or at least forms of enlightened deities that have taken on a particular worldly form specific for the task at hand. In other words, while tantric Buddhism, to a certain extent at least, collapsed the categories of "pragmatic" and "karmic" with "bodhi" by, for example, identifying magical powers as the primary practical effect of the practitioner's compassionate intentions, there is still often a reluctance to call upon enlightened meditational deities to carry out certain activities that are generally regarded as worldly.

"The idea that the Buddha should directly intervene in mundane affairs is in tension with his transcendence of worldly life, or samsara. His transcendent status demands that he delegate practical concerns to lesser spirits..."³⁸⁰ Despite the fact that tantric deities like Cakrasaṃvara and Vajrabhairava, in their original root tantras, appear to have been invoked³⁸¹ largely for the sake of worldly powers, as their cults developed in Tibet and their status as fully enlightened buddhas was solidified, more worldly concerns, and much of the actual execution of the four types of tantric magic, were ritually placed under the authority of at least formally cosmologically lesser deities.³⁸² The same holds true for Gsang ba ye shes in the context of the worldly activity rituals in the GYCK. Consistently, while the practitioner is enjoined to first generate himself as Gsang ba ye shes as the necessary first step of the ritual, the tantric buddha does not in fact *directly* bring a certain magical effect about herself through pure visualization of phonemes and photemes, though such visualization is a necessary component. Rather, her power is filtered through a specific ritual sequence that may or may not (but often does) include the invocation, propitiation, and commandment of one or more of what we might call spirit familiars. Thus, to perhaps preserve Samuel's categories, we might define the "pragmatic orientation" as religious activity that requires or depends upon some sort of mediating agent, be it a physical object or place that absorbs and holds the blessing of a spiritual master, or a cosmologically less remote

³⁸⁰ Shaw 2006: 116. While Shaw is specifically discussing early Buddhism here, I believe the general principle is also applicable to tantric Buddhism, at least nominally.

³⁸¹ At least as far as we can tell from the picture these kinds of texts give us of an idealized practice which Wallis (2002: 1) aptly compares to a "doctored photograph."

³⁸² Since practical concerns are usually delegated to the members of the dharma protector (*chos skyong*) section of the pantheon, it should come as no surprise that many (auto)biographies of important Tibetan religious figures, including Sle lung's, abound with accounts of the ritual propitiation of these deities. In the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography, for instance, a significant percentage of the ritual activity Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho is recorded to have taken part in seems to have been directed toward these technically more worldly deities. For instance, mention of the ritual propitiation of just the protector Dpal ldan lha mo dmag zor ma occurs close to forty times in the first volume of the autobiography (see the index of Karmay 2014).

"middle man" deity or spirit. This is in contradistinction to what we might understand as the boundarylessness of the "bodhi" oriented practices, represented in the generation and completion stage practices examined above. Here, the point of the practice is to create an unbounded pantheistic vision in which there is no intermediary, in which the distinction between deity and practitioner, the outer and inner worlds, are (ideally at least) dissolved, rather than bounded in a physical ritual object or worldly spirit. We have already seen some of this "bounding" in the context of *The Collection of Activities*, discussed above.³⁸³ But to get a better look at the exact mechanics of how Gsang ba ye shes's power is channeled and converted into "pragmatic" worldly magic, let us examine a more detailed ritual text.

Mentioned above, the *Lo dgra'i 'jigs pa bsrung thabs sprin phung rgya mtsho* (*A Sea of Clouds: Methods for Protecting against Enemies of the Harvest*)³⁸⁴ is an extensive text that gives multiple techniques for overcoming problems that might damage crops, from frost to invasive vermin. One of the techniques is a ritual procedure for producing a "*klu* pill" which is magically empowered and then securely stored to attract timely rainfall. Interestingly, this ritual begins with one self-generating as a fully peaceful, white form of Gsang ba ye shes, which I have not seen used elsewhere.

Generate yourself as Secret Gnosis, very peaceful, smiling, and radiating white light. Engage in recitation or instantaneously [generate] yourself as white Vajradakini, brandishing a hooked-knife in the air with the right hand, and holding a blood-filled skull bowl at the heart with the left. In the crook of the left arm she holds a *khaṭvāṅga* staff. She is naked, adorned with the five symbolic ornaments. With one leg stretched out she treads on the chest of a corpse, abiding in the midst of a host of blazing gnosis flames, very peaceful, and smiling. From her body, white light radiates.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ While all the spells imply the initial invocation of Gsang ba ye shes through the recitation of her root mantra, several of the spells call for the practitioner to also invoke a specific mediating deity for the execution of that particular spell. For instance, several of the spells indicate this deity to be Hayagrīva. In another it is Mahābala, etc.

³⁸⁴ GYCK vol. 4, pp. 61-123.

³⁸⁵ *rang nyid gsang ba ye shes shin tu zhi zhing 'dzum pa 'od zer dkar po 'phro bar bskyed de bzlas pa la 'jug pa'am/ rang nyid skad cig gis rdo rje mkha' 'gro ma dkar mo g.yas gri gug nam mkha' la 'phyar zhing g.yon thod khrag thugs kar 'dzin pa/ mchan khung g.yon na kha Tam ka bsten pa/ gcer mo phyag*

Next, after repeatedly meditating on what is effectively the generation stage of this white form of the main deity, the practitioner invokes and generates an extremely wrathful black *nāga* king in a palace surrounded by the eight main *nāga* kings and a host of *klu*, *gnyan*, and *sa bdag* spirits.

From a state of emptiness [visualize] a beautiful *klu* palace.³⁸⁶ In the midst of [this] beautiful, marvelous palace realm, upon a lotus and moon is a pill of accomplishment substance. The letter "phu" [inside the pill] radiates and reabsorbs black light. [It transforms into] a black *nāga*-demon with one face and two arms. [He has] a terrifying appearance [with] nine heaving hooded cobra heads. He holds a scorpion in its right hand and a toad in his left. His sun and moon eyes flash with violent lightening, and fog issues from him. [With] the sound of thunder, *tsha tsha*, he emanates spiders, scorpions. Adorned with snakes and residing atop Mount Meru, his bejewelled snake tail, coiled three times, churns the ocean. The eight great emanated *nāgas* are in the eight directions. The seven-headed are smiling peacefully, with hoods. The upper part of their bodies have the attire of a god, with palms joined together. Their snake tails with precious ornaments coil to the right. They are seated on the cushion of the anthers of a lotus blossom, in the center of an oceanic retinue of *sa bdag*, *klu*, and *gnyan*. The principle deity and retinue become clear like a rainbow. At the heart of the main deity is a moon on which stands a "phu" [syllable]...³⁸⁷

Then the practitioner, as the peaceful Gsang ba ye shes, effectively pacifies the wrathful *nāga*, exhorting him to remember his previous pledges and urging him (and his retinue) to cause timely rainfall. This exhortation is in conjunction with a visualization (accompanied by mantra recitation) in which light rays from oneself (as Gsang ba ye shes) enter the heart of the *nāga*, who emanates light rays that then spread out into the

rgya lngas brgyan pa/ g.yon brkyang bas ro gdan gyi snying ga mnan pa ye shes kyi me dpung 'bar ba'i dbus na bzhugs pa shin tu zhi zhing 'dzum pa sku las 'od zer dkar po (GYCK vol. 4. pp. 67.2-68.1).

³⁸⁶ Cathy Cantwell has suggested that the *klu* palace is also meant to be a physically constructed mandala/shrine, in which the physical black pill is placed.

³⁸⁷ *stong pa'i ngang las yid 'ong klu'i pho brang/ bkod mdzes phun sum tshogs pa'i zhing gi dbus/ sgrub rdzas ril bu pad+ma zla ba'i steng/ phu yig nag po'i 'od kyi 'phro 'du las/ klu bdud nag po zhal gcig phyag gnyis pa/ 'jigs gzugs sbrul mgo dgu yi gdengs ka 'phyo/ phyag g.yas sdig pa g.yon pa sbal pa 'dzin/ nyi zla'i spyen 'khrug glog 'khyug na bun 'thul/ 'brug gi sgra sgrog sdom sdig tsha tsha [69] 'phro/ rin chen sbrul brgyan ri rab steng na bzhugs/ sbrul mjug lan gsum dkris nas rgya mtshor 'khyil/ phyogs mtshams brgyad du sprul pa'i klu chen brgyad/ zhi 'dzum sbrul mgo bdun gyi gdengs ka can/ sku stod lha yi chas can thal mo sbyar/ rin chen rgyan ldan sbrul mjug g.yas su 'khyil/ ge sar bzhad pa'i pad+ma'i stan la 'khod/ sa bdag klu gnyan 'khor tshogs rgya mtsho'i dbus/ gtso 'khor 'ja' tshon lta bur gsal bar gyur/ gtso bo'i thugs kar zla steng phu.... (pp. 68.3-69.4).*

universe and cause the desired activity. Thus the "pragmatic" activity is brought about by literally filtering the power of the Buddha (here in the form of Gsang ba ye shes) through a worldly spirit. At the end of the practice, the *nāga* lord and his retinue are dissolved into a specially prepared pill, another intermediary force, that is meant to perpetually and passively attract rainfall.

Generally speaking, there are many cases in Indo-Tibetan tantric Buddhism where a particular meditational deity is explicitly associated with a certain dharma protector or protectors (or vice versa). For instance, Dpal ldan lha mo is consistently understood as an emanation of Tārā and/or Sarasvatī. Mahākāla is sometime regarded as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, and so on. Thus the dharma protectors are considered to be the forms which the more remote buddha/bodhisattva deities take on in order to act in the world.³⁸⁸ This effectively provides a doctrinal "loophole" that allows devotees to do an end run around the tricky metaphysical and cosmological conundrum of how a world-transcending deity can have power in the world.

As we will see in a moment, Sle lung, in a *dag snang* practice, also associates Dpal ldan lha mo dmag zor ma with Gsang ba ye shes. But more importantly, he appears to have made use of a new deity specifically to act as Gsang ba ye shes's worldly intercessor in the form of Lha gcig Nyi ma gzhon nu (Singular Deity, Youthful Sun).³⁸⁹

³⁸⁸ The Tibetan paradigm (which is only operative in certain contexts) of wrathful protectors being the more worldly (and thus "samsarically active," so to speak) forms of metaphysically enlightened deities is somewhat in line with two of the eight principles Obeyesekere observed of worldly deities in the Buddhist deity cults of Śrī Lankā. Namely: 1) Wherever the Buddhist virtues of compassion and benevolence increase in the character of a god, there is a concomitant decrease in his punitiveness, however righteous it may be. 2) The more benevolent and compassionate the god, the more remote he becomes in relation to the worshipper (Obeyesekere 1984: 64). While the wrathful nature of a deity, in the Tibetan context, is usually explained as being a manifestation of their compassion, rather than in spite of it, it is generally true (with major important exceptions, particularly in the case of wrathful *yi dams* such as Vajrabhairava) that more worldly deities tend to be more wrathful, and peaceful deities tend to be regarded as more transcendent.

³⁸⁹ According to the current Lelung Tulku, the Fifth Sle lung's revelation of Nyi ma gzhon nu was original with him (personal communication 7/2014), and I have found no historical or textual evidence that the cult of this deity existed before Sle lung's first dated text about her in 1728.

If the cult of Nyi ma gzhon nu did exist before Sle lung, it is likely she was a local goddess somewhere in the environs of Sle lung's activities.³⁹⁰ According to an account in Sle lung's *gsung 'bum*, there was an extensive festival in honor of Nyi ma gzhon nu in 1730 (during which Sle lung met with Pho lha nas), but it is unclear whether this was due to local custom, or whether this was instituted by Sle lung himself. In any case, if the cult of Nyi ma gzhon nu pre-dates Sle lung himself, given the dearth of textual evidence it is probable that she was a highly localized and marginalized deity outside the purview of any established religious authority. As has been already mentioned, Rdo rje skyabs byed, Sle lung's main consort (whom we will examine in more detail below) was a *sku rten*, or medium for Nyi ma gzhon nu in oracular possession. Again, it is unclear to me whether there was already an oracle tradition related to Nyi ma gzhon nu prior to Sle lung, or if he was the first to institute it, but in either case it still exists to this day.³⁹¹ If the oracle tradition and/or cultic worship of Nyi ma gzhon nus did exist somewhere in Lho kha prior to Sle lung, what we have is a Tibetan example of a relatively common Indian phenomenon, where a local village goddess (*grāmadevatā*) gains enough of a following that she is incorporated into mainstream brahmanical religion and is henceforth identified as a form of a cosmologically supreme "high" goddess,³⁹² in this case Gsang ba ye shes.

Interestingly, this deity does not appear to play any significant role in the GYCK, despite being whom Sle lung would consistently identify in his own revelations

³⁹⁰ Possibly either Rnam grol gling, Padma bkod, or elsewhere in the Lho kha region. Interestingly, the timing of Sle lung's travel to Padma bkod coincides with the first recorded revelations he had of Nyi ma gzhon nu.

³⁹¹ See Bell (2013: 331-332) for an ethnographic account (taken in 2011) of a Lhasa resident who went to an oracle of Nyi ma gzhon nu to help get over an illness in his chest which was determined to be a possessing spirit of a deceased relative. The oracle at that time was described as a woman in her thirties hailing from the Lho kha region, based on her dialect.

³⁹² See Padma 2013: 106.

as the main protector form of Gsang ba ye shes.³⁹³ It could be that Sle lung, as effectively the tradent of the GYCK who in most cases simply compiled pre-existing texts and practices, or reconstructed in writing pre-existing oral teachings, was reluctant to include his own revelations of what was possibly a brand new deity-form. The same holds true for the *Oath-Bound Protectors* (abbreviated "DCTS") text discussed in the next chapter, in which Nyi ma gzhon nu also does not appear.³⁹⁴ Sle lung likely felt that his role in compiling the GYCK and the DCTS was as a transmitter of already established traditions of practices and deity cults. To include Nyi ma gzhon nu in these compilations would represent a too-radical personal innovation. Thus the Nyi ma gzhon nu revelations, both the "inner" or "secret" biographical accounts of visionary epiphanies of her and the ritual texts that were the fruits of these experiences, were "saved" for Sle lung's *gsung 'bum*.

There are a total of sixteen texts in the *gsung 'bum* that mention Nyi ma gzhon nu in the title or colophon. Of these, about half are dated, most having been written in 1730. The earliest dated is the very short *Dag snang mkha' 'gro'i thugs bcud las khyung btsun gung rgyal sgrub skor*, written in 1729.³⁹⁵ This text does not appear to be directly related to Nyi ma gzhon nu, although she is mentioned in the colophon. Interestingly, most of the dated Nyi ma gzhon nu texts in Sle lung's *gsung 'bum* correspond with the dates of the early texts of the GYCK, although this may simply be coincidence.

There exists an even earlier dated Nyi ma gzhon nu text, however, preserved in the *Gnas chung rdo rje sgra dbyangs gling gi 'don chog*, a mid-twentieth century liturgical compilation produced at the request of the Gnas chung oracle.³⁹⁶ One text in

³⁹³ In fact, the only mention of Nyi ma gzhon nu that I have found in the GYCK is in the colophon of the completion stage commentary, discussed above.

³⁹⁴ Not even mentioned in passing, at least as far as I have seen.

³⁹⁵ BRGB: vol. 10, pp. 107-109.

³⁹⁶ Bell 2013: 107. See also pp. 334-341 for a detailed outline of this collection, and Lobzang Tondan (1983) for the full collection.

this collection is the simply titled *Lha gcig nyi ma gzhon nu'i bskang* (*The Fulfillment Offering of the Singular Deity Nyi ma gzhon nu*). This is an eight-page liturgy which was composed by Sle lung while he was in Lhasa, during which time he met with both the Seventh Dalai Lama and Pho lha nas, almost exactly two months after the end of the 1727-28 civil war.³⁹⁷ The text is said to have been composed in honor of Nyi ma gzhon nu's role in curing the Dalai Lama of an illness he was suffering at the time. Given Sle lung's purported central role as the key diplomatic mediator between Pho lha nas, the Dalai Lama, and the rebel ministers in the last days of the civil war (see chapter one), it makes sense that he would have remained in close contact with the Dalai Lama and given ritual deference in the invocation of the restorative powers of protector deities, in the months following the conflict. Due to Sle lung's influence, Nyi ma gzhon nu would later be enshrined at Gnas chung among the pantheon of protectors of the Tibetan state, and she is currently regarded as the special protector of the land around Gnas chung Monastery.³⁹⁸

In appearance, Nyi ma gzhon nu (as befits the solar character of her name) is, like Gsang ba ye shes, bright red. She is dressed in silk brocade, adorned with jewels, and holds a mirror and arrow in her upraised right hand and a skull-bowl filled with blood at her heart with her left hand. She has what might be termed a Tibetan "royal appearance," common among local Tibetan protectors with no direct Indian antecedent.³⁹⁹ Thus she appears to be modeled on protectresses like the *tshe ring ma* sisters and the twelve *brtan ma* goddesses.⁴⁰⁰ But unlike these goddesses she is never (that I am aware) depicted riding an animal mount, but rather is usually shown or

³⁹⁷ According to Pho lha nas's biography, the rebel ministers surrendered on the twenty-eighth day of the fifth month (Petech 1972: 144), and the *Lha gcig nyi ma gzhon nu'i bskang* was composed on the thirtieth day of the seventh month.

³⁹⁸ Bell 2013: 183.

³⁹⁹ That is to say, they appear in similar dress to depictions of Tibetan monarchs or aristocratic laypeople.

⁴⁰⁰ See Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 177-202.

described sitting on a cushion or standing. The deity closest to her appearance that I know of is the more peaceful standing form of A phyi chos kyi sgrol ma, the special protectress of the 'Bri gung Bka' rgyud school.⁴⁰¹ Indeed, there are a number of interesting parallels between A phyi and Nyi ma gzhon nu including, as we shall see, practices in which these single goddess figures who are mainly regarded as protectors are also (within certain ritual contexts) worshipped as a combination of guru, *yi dam*, and protector. There is also the intriguing possibility that both goddesses were based on historical people; A phyi is believed to be the deified form of the great-grandmother of the founder of the 'Bri gung bka' rgyud. In the case of Nyi ma gzhon nu, it is said that she was a consort of Sle lung's who was able to transform herself into a deity through her skill in yogic practices.⁴⁰² I suspect this story is referring to Lha gcig Rdo rje skyabs byed who, in the texts I have examined, appears to have been Sle lung's main consort by the late 1720s - early 1730s when he was writing his texts dedicated to Nyi ma gzhon nu.

But before we delve into Nyi ma gzhon nu's origins, a number of other issues require discussion. First, it should be noted that Nyi ma gzhon nu's main red form is not her only form. There are at least two ritual texts in Sle lung's *gsung 'bum* focused on what we might call specialized forms of the goddess. One is a wealth-attracting ritual, the other a healing ritual. The latter, entitled *Dag snang chu tshan byin rlabs kyi cho ga* (*The Pure Vision Ritual of the Hot Springs Blessings*),⁴⁰³ is said to have been revealed to Sle lung by Nyi ma gzhon nu at the healing hot springs in the eastern part of 'Ol kha, with no specific date given. This ritual has some interesting overlap with the GYCK rain-making ritual discussed above, in that the focus is once again on a

⁴⁰¹ Like Nyi ma gzhon nu, the standing form of A phyi is dressed in silk brocade, and holds a mirror and skull-bowl. The main difference is that she is white as opposed to red. See Muldowney 2011: 38-39, 41.

⁴⁰² Bradburn 1995: 299.

⁴⁰³ BRGB: vol. 12, pp. 279-282.

central *nāga* with retinue, except in this context Nyi ma gzhon nu herself takes on the role of *nāga* queen. Here she is visualized as a beautiful *klu mo*, smiling, blue in color, holding a vase of ambrosia.⁴⁰⁴ Unlike in the Gsang ba ye shes rainmaking text, the main deity directly participates in the worldly sphere. Her power does not need to be filtered through a worldly spirit, for she takes on the form of a worldly deity herself and bestows the ritual's healing blessings directly.

If the *Dag snang chu tshan byin rlabs kyi cho ga* and *Lha gcig nyi ma gzhon nu'i bskang* had been the only kind of practices Sle lung composed dedicated to Nyi ma gzhon nu, we would be forced to simply classify her as one among many various, comparatively minor worldly deities with whom Sle lung ritually and visionarily interacted during his religious career. But what appears to be the central accomplishment practice of Nyi ma gzhon nu, the *Lha gcig gi dril sgrub rtsa gsum thig le'i bsnyen yig snang ba'i sgo 'byed* (*Opening the Door of Illumination, The Practice Commentary of the Condensed Essence Practice of the Three Roots of the Singular Deity*),⁴⁰⁵ completely contradicts the view of Nyi ma gzhon nu as a "mere protector." This text, written in 1731 after or around the same time the main Gsang ba ye shes exegetical texts in the GYCK were written, elaborates a vision of Nyi ma gzhon nu as the condensed essence of the entire Rnying ma pantheon.⁴⁰⁶ Living up to her title of "Lha gcig," the ostensibly worldly protector deity is transformed into the embodiment of all other deities and viewed simultaneously as guru, *yi dam*, and protector. In the

⁴⁰⁴ *klu mo mdzes 'dzum mdog sngo bsangs/ sgeg cing chags nyams lhag par rgyas/ phyag gnyis bdud rtsi'i bum pa nas/* (p. 281.1). While the description does not specify a snake-tail here, I think we may presume such a feature since *klu* are almost always depicted with the lower bodies of serpents in the Buddhist context.

⁴⁰⁵ BRGB: vol. 12, pp. 141-161.

⁴⁰⁶ The text seems to have been written in conjunction with the Gsang ba ye shes practices examined above, as Sle lung assumes the reader's familiarity with his Gsang ba ye shes generation stage commentary (p. 243.2-3). In fact, the context makes it clear that the principles, stages, and procedures of Gsang ba ye shes's generation stage are to be followed, just with Nyi ma gzhon nu swapped in as the primary deity.

complementary *lo rgyus* of this practice,⁴⁰⁷ which describes the visionary experience in which it was revealed, Nyi ma gzhon nu herself is recorded as declaring that the practice "first gives the blessings of guru yoga. Then, the mantra completely accomplishes the *yi dam*. And lastly it accomplishes the *dākinī*."⁴⁰⁸

As Muldowney has noted, A *phyi chos kyi sgrol ma*, mainly understood as a dharma protector, can also ritually function as *yi dam* and guru, taking (comparatively minor) different iconographical forms for each aspect.⁴⁰⁹ In Nyi ma gzhon nu's case, especially in the context of the *Rtsa gsum thig le* practice, there is only one form of the main deity, but her form is filled with the presence of a host of other protectors, as well as the *yi dam* Gsang ba ye shes and her retinue. The practice includes a second-tier guru accomplishment visualization that involves a much more elaborately nested body mandala (*kāyamaṇḍala*). In some generation stage practices of certain deities, the *kāyamaṇḍala* is a network of smaller, secondary deities that are generated at certain important points of the physical and subtle body, most commonly in the heart and other *cakra* centers.⁴¹⁰ Occasionally, these deities are also visualized with other deities inside them. For instance, a deity visualized within one's heart can, in some rituals, have a deity in turn at his or her heart. But the *kāyamaṇḍala* described as inhabiting the body of Nyi ma gzhon nu in the *Rtsa gsum thig le* is the most intricate of these I have ever encountered, and is somewhat reminiscent of the Bka' gdams pa *thig le bcu drug* (Mandala of the Sixteen Spheres).

⁴⁰⁷ *Dag snang lha gcig gi dril sgrub rtsa gsum thig le'i lo rgyus* (*The History of the Pure Vision [of] the Condensed Essence Practice of the Singular Deity*), BRGB vol. 12, pp. 301-305.

⁴⁰⁸ *bla ma'i sgrub pa dang por byin/ yi dam sgrub sngags de la tshang/ mkha' 'gro'i sgrub pa phyi ma* (vol. 12, p. 303.4-5).

⁴⁰⁹ Muldowney 2011: 1.

⁴¹⁰ See, for example, the description of the Vajrayoginī *kāyamaṇḍala* in English 2002: 271-279. Notably, the practice of Gsang ba ye shes's generation stage described by Sle lung in the GYCK does not include a *kāyamaṇḍala*.

In the unique *thig le bcu drug*, one is instructed to visualize sixteen "levels" of deities (or deified teachers), each nested in the heart of the previous one, "zooming in" as one progressively refines one's visualization. The various figures include Avalokiteśvara, Tārā, Acala, Mañjuśrī, and the Bka' gdams pa master 'Brom ston pa. Effectively, it allows the practitioner to eschew the worship of each individual deity in separate practices and meditate on an entire, condensed pantheon, literally in one sitting. The *Rtsa gsum thig le* practice contains only seven levels (which, as we shall see, are in two distinct phases of three and four levels) instead of sixteen, but is even more complex because multiple deities have to be generated at multiple locations in a particular geometric alignment at each level, creating a multi-level mandala that contains far more than sixteen deities in total.

Before diving into these almost bafflingly complex layers, the text begins with a description of necessary preliminary practices, notably including protector *gtor ma* offerings for the three *ging* (more on them in a moment), the seven wild *btsan* brothers, and the twelve *brtan ma* goddesses. Then, out of emptiness is generated an elaborate but straightforward visualization of the main outermost deity, Nyi ma gzhon nu herself.⁴¹¹ She is described as a beautiful, bright red sixteen-year-old girl with two arms and three eyes in a seated "royal ease" position. Feeling extreme passion, she sweats and her breath comes in gasps. She holds an arrow and a mirror decorated with red ribbons in her right hand and a skull-bowl filled with the vermillion blood of all *dākinīs*

⁴¹¹ It should be noted that for this practice one visualizes oneself as Nyi ma gzhon nu. Thus, all the subsequent deities mentioned inside her are intended to be viewed within the practitioner's own body. I would also like to note that, for limitations of space, I am only noting the placement of the main deities with some iconographic and environment description. I am leaving out certain key details of the practice, such as the generation of rings of mantra syllables, and so forth.

in her left. She wears Chinese silk garments, including a multi-colored cloak decorated with counter-clockwise *svastikas*.⁴¹² The description continues:

On her left side she wears a multi-colored uncut piece of cloth, and she wears Mongolian shoes ornamented with jewels.⁴¹³ At her throat is a golden endless knot studded with small turquoise stones. She wears a flashing pearl necklace, and on her jewelled lattice-work apron, small gold and silver ritual bells. At her heart is a crystal mirror with a swirling five-colored banner, clearly reflecting the physical appearances of all three realms. She sits in the posture of the right leg bent and the left leg extended, she is decorated at the head by a golden eight-spoked wheel inset with turquoise stones. She wears a crown ornamented with precious octagonal beryls, radiating the light of 100,000 suns, and she wears a headdress of large, divine lotuses. Her earrings are of gold, turquoise, and pearl. She is bedecked with precious ornaments such as bracelets and rings. Her tresses of shiny black hair flow loosely down on each shoulder. She sits on a precious throne inlaid with jewels, on a satin cushion on top of which is the body of a *rākṣasa*. Her outer appearance is that of a sixteen year-old girl.⁴¹⁴

It is at this point that Sle lung "zooms in" to Nyi ma gzhon nu's inner form since her body is described as being like an "empty crystal vessel" inside of which is a swirling ocean of blood. Sle lung continues:

In the center of this [ocean of blood], inside a rainbow dome moved by a turbulent cyclone, is Dpal ldan dmag zor gyi rgyal mo (Glorious Queen of the Army-Repelling Magical Bombs), her body dark blue, in the form of a *rākṣasī*, with one face and two arms. Her right hand brandishes a *vajra*-adorned club, her left hand holds a blood-filled skull-bowl at her heart, and she is emaciated. She has long breasts [literally "milk bags"] dangling down, and three bulbous red eyes. From within her reddish-yellow eyebrows, whiskers, and hair which stand on end, sparks [come forth]. She wears a crown of dry skulls.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² Interestingly this is a Bon po symbol, and as we shall see, not the only instance of possible Bon po influence in the *Rtsa gsum thig le*.

⁴¹³ It is worth noting that Nyi ma gzhon nu's accouterments (Chinese silk, Mongolian shoes) seem to denote an intentionally cosmopolitan character.

⁴¹⁴ *kha dog sna tshogs kyi yug gyon dang hor lham nor bu'i phra rgyan can gsol ba/ mgul par gser gyi pa tra g.yu'i phra tshoms can tsi par dang bcas pa las phyang 'phrul du g.yo ba'i mu tig bzang po'i dra ba dra phyed gser dngul gyi dril bu g.yer kha'i sgra sgrog pa/ thugs kar dwangs shel gyi me long kha dog sna lnga'i dar cha phang phung du g.yo bar srid gsum gyi bkod ba thams cad gsal ler ston pa/ zhabs g.yas bskum g.yon brkyang skyil krung gi tshul [245] du bzhugs pa'i dbu la gser gyi skong ra 'khor lo rtsibs brgyad kyi rnam pa g.yu'i phra tshoms kyi spud pa'i lte bar rin po che bai durya zur brgyad pa nyi ma 'bum gyi 'od zer can gyis mtshan pa gtsug g.yu'i rnam par spras shing lha'i me tog pad+ma chen po'i thod bcings dang do shal/ gser g.yu mu tig gi snyan rgyan/ phyag gdub sor gdub sogs rin po che'i rgyan gyis spras pa/ dbu skra gnag snum lan bu rgyab tu bsnyil ba'i zar bu sku dpung phan tshun du g.yo ba/rin po che'i khri nor bu'i phras spras pa za 'og gi 'bol nang tshangs can srin po'i bgas pas g.yogs pa'i steng na bzhugs ba sku lus kyi phyi nas bltas na bcu drug lon pa'i na tshod can/ (pp. 244.5-245.3).*

⁴¹⁵ ... dbus su rlung nag 'tshub ma g.yo ba'i 'ja' gur gyi nang du dpal ldan dmag zor gyi rgyal mo sku mdog mthing nag srin mo'i gzugs can zhal gcig phyag gnyis ma/ g.yas rdo rjes mtshan pa'i be con 'phyar zhing g.yon thod khrag thugs kar 'dzin pa skem zhing rid pa/ 'o rkyal ring du 'phyang ba/ spyen gsum

The rest of the description of Dmag zor rgyal mo follows the standard iconography, from the sun at her navel to the human-flesh bag of diseases, along with her usual retinue deities, including her flanking *makara*-headed and lion-headed attendants. Sle lung's vision here is particularly interesting because it links Nyi ma gzhon nu, a "new" deity (textually speaking), with definitively the most well-established female dharma protector in Tibet, who is especially important to the Dge lugs pa establishment since she is often considered the closest personal protector of the Dalai Lamas. By establishing Dpal ldan lha mo as Nyi ma gzhon nu's inner, wrathful form, Sle lung legitimizes the latter and moves her into the mainstream of the Tibetan Buddhist protector pantheon. Sle lung also describes Dmag zor rgyal mo as being surrounded by the five *tshe ring ma* sisters and the *brtan ma* goddesses. Thus inside, and effectively subsumed by, Nyi ma gzhon nu are all the other major Tibetan dharma protectresses.

Next, Sle lung moves into the third level or sphere, which resides within the infinite space at Dmag zor rgyal mo's heart. Here, in an ocean of holy water, the practitioner is instructed to visualize Padmasambhava's pure land, the Copper-Colored Mountain, on which is a four-sided palace resting on a ruby lotus.

In the center of the palace is a small, multi-storied mansion with golden roofs. Inside the lower story is the *dākinī* of Secret Gnosis, arising as it is explained in her creation phase practice, encircled by the four classes of *dākinīs*, each emanation emanating further emanations. Her heart emanation, three [places?] emanations, etc., swirl about like particles of light.⁴¹⁶

dmar la zlum pa/ smin ma sma ra dbu skra kham ser gyen du gzings pa'i gseb nas me stag 'phro ba/ thod skam gyi dbu rgyan/ (p. 245.4-6).

⁴¹⁶ *pho brang dbus kyi lte ba khang bu brtsegs ma rin po che'i rgya phubs dang bcas bas mtshan ba'i 'og khang gi nang du gsang ba ye shes kyi mkha' 'gro bskyed rim gyi rnam bshad las ji ltar 'byung ba ltar mkha' 'gro sde bzhis bskor ba re re la yang sprul ba yang sprul/ nying sprul/ sum sprul la sogs ba nu zer gyi rdul ltar 'tshub pa/* (247.1-247.2).

It is at this point that *Sle lung* appears to suddenly shift focus, "zooming" back out to the first, outer level to add in more details, adding descriptions of *Nyi ma gzhon nu*'s retinue, who up until this point has been visualized by herself (on the outer level, not counting of course the deities inside her body). Effectively, this first part of the *sādhana* focuses on the nature of *Nyi ma gzhon nu* herself, describing her outer form, then her inner identity as *Dmag zor rgyal mo*, and her secret, ultimate identity as *Gsang ba ye shes* herself. This effectively makes *Nyi ma gzhon nu* simultaneously a *yi dam* and a protector deity which, as already noted, is a common categorizational blurring in Tibetan Buddhism, especially among protector deities who gain a strong enough cultic following and are cosmologically "upgraded" to enlightened (or bodhi) status. In any case, once *Nyi ma gzhon nu*'s outer, inner, and secret forms are established, her outer worldly retinue is described.⁴¹⁷ This is made up of several groups divided into different classes of spirit-deity. On the ground around her are three classes of "*ging*."

Deriving from Sanskrit, *kiṃkara* (servant, attendant), *ging* are celestial male messengers, often with a slightly wrathful appearance. In *rNying ma* imagery, they are male spiritual warriors of *Guru Rinpoche* and act as his messengers, heralding his imminent arrival.⁴¹⁸

In the context of the *Rtsa gsum thig le*, the word simply seems to denote a secondary protector deity (though practically speaking no less important), effectively a servant of the main deity, *Nyi ma gzhon nu*.

Although deriving from the Indic *kiṃkara*, the *ging* as they appear in *Sle lung*'s text are divided into three Tibetanized sub-categories: *lha*, *btsan*, and *bdud ging*. According to *Sle lung*, on the right side of *Nyi ma gzhon nu* is a group of *lha ging*, which includes major deities like "Ging chen" *Tshangs pa chen po* and *Ge sar*, with both of whom *Sle lung* had a close affinity.⁴¹⁹ These deities are white in color on white

⁴¹⁷ This is found on pp. 247-248.

⁴¹⁸ Cantwell 2015: 89.

⁴¹⁹ *Tshangs pa chen po* is here almost certainly *Tshangs pa dkar po*, discussed in the first chapter.

horses and have white crystal armor, with spears and lassos and tiger- and leopard-skin quivers. On her left side are the red-colored *btsan ging*, who include Yam shud dmar po and Rdo rje legs pa, as well as the "seven blazing *btsan* brothers."⁴²⁰ They wear red copper armor and carry red spears, tiger- and leopard-skin quivers, and shields covered in hair, mounted on red horses. Riding out in front of Nyi ma gzhon nu as her vanguard are the black *bdud ging*. They carry the same implements as the other *ging*, but wear black iron armor. For whatever reason Sle lung seems to emphasize this group of *ging* the most in that he enumerates the most named deities in this group: Skrag med nyi shar, Nag po 'dzum med, Zur rang skyes, Khyab pa lag ring, Snyon kha nag po, Zla ba'i gdong can, and Re lde 'gong g.yag. We will examine some of these *lha*, *btsan*, and *bdud* deities in more detail in the next chapter, but I will simply note here that Khyab pa lag ring is the deity who effectively plays an important antagonistic role in Bon po mythology.⁴²¹

While the *ging* swirl and churn on the ground, bellowing war cries, in the sky above Nyi ma gzhon nu are four types of goddesses corresponding to the four types of magical activity (pacification, enhancement, overpowering, and destroying), each with the corresponding color of white, yellow, red, or black. The white goddesses of pacification carry vases of ambrosia that cleanse all defilement. The yellow goddesses of enhancement carry such implements as long-life vases, scriptures, swords, mirrors, butter-lamps, trays of jewels, and mongooses, bestowing vitality and wealth. The red goddesses of power carry hooks and lassos, and the black goddesses of wrath hold peacock plumage and stalks of *kusha* grass. They are all dressed similarly to Nyi ma gzhon nu herself and ride appropriately colored horses.

⁴²⁰ Yam shud dmar po was a politically significant deity whom Sle lung identified with Pho lha nas, and Rdo rje legs pa, you will recall, was one of the main protectors associated with Gsang ba ye shes through the TCKD cycle, of which he was identified as one of the main treasure protectors.

⁴²¹ See Karmay 2005: xix.

This concludes what might be called the *yi dam*-protector phase of the practice. Now that the protector and the *yi dam* (who are essentially one and the same) have been established, the visualization shifts to what we might classify as the guru phase of the practice, which is actually the most elaborate. The guru practice, if it was not clear before, reveals the expected explicitly and completely Rnying ma character of the *Rtsa gsum thig le*. In the sky above Nyi ma gzhon nu and her retinue, we are told, sits Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava, in his most commonly depicted form, wearing a monk's robe, holding a *vajra* at his heart and a *khatvāṅga* staff, sixteen years old and wrathful. Immediately the vision moves in to the inner level at Padmasambhava's heart, where Padma Skull-Garland (an epithet for Padmasambhava), arises in *sambhogakāya* form, blue, with a *vajra* and bell, embracing Ye shes mtsho rgyal who is white with a flaying knife and a skull bowl. This form is iconographically identical to the O rgyan rdo rje 'chang form of Padmasambhava.

The vision moves in to the third (what we could call the "secret") level:

On the crown of his hollow body is white Buddha Skull-Garland holding a wheel and a bell, in union with the consort white Mandarava,⁴²² holding a wheel and skull bowl. At the throat is a red Guru Padma Skull-Garland,⁴²³ holding a lotus and bell. He embraces a red Shākya Devī⁴²⁴ who holds a lotus and skull. At the heart center is a blue Vajra Skull-Garland holding a *vajra* and bell in union with a blue Yeshe mtsho rgyal holding a *vajra* and skull. At the navel is a yellow Ratna Skull-Garland holding a jewel and a bell, in union with a yellow Kālasiddhi⁴²⁵ holding a jewel and skull. At his secret center is a green Karma Skull-Garland holding a crossed *vajra* and a bell, embracing the green Bkra shis khye 'dren⁴²⁶ who holds a crossed *vajra* and a skull. The fathers have long hair with a top knot, are decorated with bone and jewel ornaments and sit in the *vajra* posture. The mothers are naked with loose

⁴²² Padmasambhava's main Indian consort, considered the body emanation of Vajravārahī. The following consorts are, in order, the corresponding speech, mind, qualities, and activity emanations.

⁴²³ Confusingly there are two separate deities named Padma Skull-Garland, the one on the "inner" level, and the one at his throat on the "secret" level with the same name. The overlap here, along with the fact that other forms of Padmasambhava as well as Ye shes mtsho rgyal are also doubled, indicates that Sle lung is attempting to integrate separate traditional groupings of deities, and they do not seem to overlap seamlessly.

⁴²⁴ Padmasambhava's first Nepali consort.

⁴²⁵ The second Nepali consort.

⁴²⁶ The Bhutanese consort.

hair, prominent nipples, with spread vaginas, wearing the five symbolic ornaments and sitting in the lotus posture.⁴²⁷

At this point, the visualization becomes especially complicated and detailed, and in the interest of space I will simply summarize the remainder of the "guru phase." Vajra Skull-Garland, *Sle lung* describes, in turn has Guru Drag po, one of Padmasambhava's most common wrathful forms, in his four-petaled navel *cakra*, and within a four-spoked wheel. While the text does not specify the exact location of the petals, I would guess that the petals are in the intermediate directions. The four wheel spokes are, the text specifies, in the cardinal directions. In any case, Guru Drag po is standing in a charnel ground, dark red, holding a nine-pronged *vajra* in one hand and a *phur ba* and scorpion in the other. He is in union with a terrifyingly wrathful dark-blue Vajrayoginī. This couple is surrounded by *vajra*, *padma*, *ratna*, and *karma ḍākinīs* dancing on the surrounding petals. Standing on the wheel-spokes are four male wrathful deities. To the east is blue-black Vajrapāṇi holding a *vajra* and bell. To the south is yellow Yamāntaka with a skull-club and a wheel. To the west is dark red Hayagrīva, holding a club and a noose. And finally to the north is dark maroon "Me sbal" (probably a misspelling of "me dbal," meaning "flaming fire"), wielding a fire hammer and an iron chain.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ *de'i sku lus sbubs stong gi spyi bor buddha thod 'phreng rtsal dkar po 'khor lo dang dril bu 'dzin pa yum manda ra ba dkar mo 'khor lo dang thod pa 'dzin pa dang mnyam par sbyor ba/ mgrin par pad+ma thod 'phreng rtsal dmar po pad+ma dang dril bu 'dzin pa/ sha+kya de wa dmar mo pad+ma dang thod pa 'dzin par 'khyug pa/ snying gar rdo rje thod 'phreng rtsal sngon po rdo rje dang dril bu 'dzin pa ye shes mtsho rgyal sngon mo rdo rje dang thod pa 'dzin pa dong mnyam par sbyor ba/ lte bar rat+na thod 'phreng rtsal ser po rin po che dang dril bu 'dzin pa kā la siddha ser mo rin po che dang thod pa 'dzin pa dang mnyam par sbyor ba/ gsang gnas su karma thod 'phreng rtsal ljang gu rgya gram dang dril bu 'dzin pa bkra shis khye 'dren ljang mo rgya gram dang thod pa 'dzin pas 'khyud pa/ yab rnams dbu skra ral pa'i thor tshugs can rus pa dang rin po ches brgyan pa rdo rje'i skyil krung dang/ yum rnams gcer mo skra grol num 'bur shing bha ga rgyas pa phyag rgya lngas brgyan pa [250] pad+ma 'dug stangs can no/ (pp. 249.3-250.1).*

⁴²⁸ I was unable to find any information on this deity. Perhaps it is a Tibetan abbreviation for a well-known deity with which I am simply unfamiliar. Leaving this one aside, the other three male deities seem to have been chosen in this orientation because their symbolic associations with certain directions. Vajrapāṇi and Hayagrīva are the main wrathful deities of the *vajra* and *padma* families, associated with the east and west respectively, while Yama (Yamāntaka) has a long association with the south in India and Tibet.

After establishing this the vision shifts again to Padma Skull-Garland (presumably the blue one embracing the Ye shes mtsho rgyal, *not* the red one embracing Śākya Devī). Sle lung elaborates that surrounding him in the eight directions are the eight main forms of Padmasambhava (*nirmāṇakāya* forms that he took during certain times of his earthly life). These are blue-black Padma 'byung gnas to the east, holding a *vajra* and making a threatening gesture, in union with white Ye shes mtsho rgyal; red-tinged white "Padma sambha" to the southeast with a monkish appearance holding a skull-bowl of jewels and making a gesture of generosity; white Blo ldan mchog sred to the south, playing a *damaru* drum and holding a bowl; Padma rgyal po with a red hat to the southwest, with a *damaru*, iron chain, and a mirror inscribed with the syllables *Oṃ ma ṇi pad me hūṃ*; yellow Nyi ma 'od zer to the west, dressed as a *yogin*, with a *khaṭvāṅga* and a noose of sunlight; yellow Śākya seng ge to the northwest, dressed as a monastic, one hand in the earth-witnessing gesture, the other holding a begging bowl full of ambrosia; blue-black Seng sgrog to the north, very wrathful, holding a *vajra* and making a threatening gesture; and finally to the north-east is the dark maroon (Rdo rje) Gro lod, dancing on the back of a tiger, holding a *vajra* and *phur ba*.⁴²⁹

Now that Padmasambhava's outer body has been endowed with an elaborate *kāyamaṇḍala* of different forms of himself (with the exception of the consorts and the retinue deities of Guru Drag po, who is ultimately the central deity of the *maṇḍala*) Sle lung, just as he did for Nyi ma gzhon nu, returns to the outermost level to describe the retinue of the externally peaceful, solitary Padmasambhava. Here he is surrounded in the eight directions by the eight main Indian *vidhyādhara*s, according to the Rnying ma tradition. Sle lung (correctly) reports that each of these masters is associated with a particular deity in the Rnying ma *bka' brgyad* system. The four in the cardinal

⁴²⁹ pp. 250.1-252.3

directions in the order of east, south, west, and north, are Hūṃkara (associated with Yang dag Heruka), Mañjuśrīmitra (associated with Yamāntaka), Nāgārjuna (associated with Hayagrīva), and *Prabhahasti (associated with Vajrakīlaya). In the intermediate directions in order of southeast, southwest, northwest, and northeast, are Dhanasamkr̥ta (associated with the Ma mo rbod gtong practice in the *bka' brgyad*), *Vimalamitra (associated with Che mchog Heruka), Rombughyacandra (associated with the 'Jig rten mchod bstod), and Śāntigarbha (associated with the Dmod pa drag sngags). Around this inner ring is the ring of the Tibetan *vidhyādhara*s following the same deity associations and directional configuration. These are, in order, Nam mkha'i snying po, Gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes, Rgyal ba mchog dbyangs, Ye shes mtsho rgyal, 'Broḡ mi Dpal gyi ye shes, Jñānakumāra of Ngag,⁴³⁰ Rlang dpal gyi seng ge, and Vairocana. All of these Tibetan masters date from the eighth or ninth century and are considered to be direct disciples of Guru Padmasambhava.

This concludes the guru generation phase of the *Rtsa gsum thig le*, and the rest of the practice is instructions related to worship of the deities that have been thus established, primarily through the standard generation stage modes of visualized emanating and reabsorbing lights, along with mantra recitation practice. This is followed by a careful, stage-by-stage dissolution of all the deities, with a heavy emphasis on Nyi ma gzhon nu's retinue *ging* deities as the primary medium by which enlightened activity is accomplished:

Finally, in the concluding practice, perform the condensed offering and praise, together with the confession of faults. From one's own heart light rays emanate and strike the *lha ging*. From them emanate rays of white light which purify the desire realm and then that dissolves into the retinue of the *lha ging*. They are absorbed into their chief,⁴³¹ who condenses into a white sphere and that dissolves into oneself. The *karma*, afflictions, negativities, and

⁴³⁰ Jñānakumāra is here given as the counterpart of Vimalamitra as being expert in the practice of Che mchog Heruka, though in other lists of the eight Tibetan *vidhyādhara*s the Che mchog master is given as King Khri strong lde btsan.

⁴³¹ Their leader, though which deity this is specifically is not named.

obscurations which arise in the desire realm are purified and [one] accomplishes the *vajra* body...⁴³²

This process repeats with the *btsan ging* purifying the form realm with red light, which dissolves into the practitioner to establish *vajra* speech. And finally, the *bdud ging* purify the formless realm with blue light, then dissolve into oneself to establish *vajra* mind. In a kind of side note at the end of the practice instructions, Sle lung specifically emphasizes the importance of the three classes of *ging*, saying that they counteract the three *gdon* ("malevolent influence") which are the three poisons of ignorance, desire, and anger.⁴³³

After the dissolution of the *gings*, the guru *maṇḍala* is dissolved into the practitioner in the form of a red drop of light, at which point the blessings of the guru are established. After this, the goddesses of the four activities dissolve into Dmag zor ma, who dissolves into a blue drop of light, establishing the blessings of all the oath-bound *ḍākinīs* (here effectively acting as protectors). Then the palace of Gsang ba ye shes, along with several mantra garlands at her heart, dissolves into the practitioner and one establishes the power of all peaceful and wrathful *yi dam*. Interestingly, there is no specific instruction for dissolving Nyi ma gzhon nu herself, presumably because the practitioner is envisioning him or herself as the goddess into which all the other deities dissolve. Thus, the practice has the effect of condensing the entire Rnying ma pantheon,

⁴³² *thun bsdu ba na mchod bstod mdor bsdus nongs bshags dang bcas bgyis pa'i mthar/ rang gi thugs ka nas 'od zer 'phros lha ging la phog/ de las 'od zer dkar po 'phros 'dod khams 'od zer dkar por sbyangs te zhu ba lha ging gi 'khor la thim/ de gtso bo la/ de thig le dkar por 'dril te rang la thim pas 'dod khams su skye 'gyur gyi las nyon sdig sgrib dag sku rdo rje 'grub par* (p. 258.2-4).

⁴³³ While I argued above that the "bodhi" versus "pragmatic" distinction can be made in regard to worldly versus enlightened deities in certain contexts, in the context of the *Rtsa gsum thig le* the conventional "rule" is, yet again, undermined. The *ging*, which are the most "worldly" deities of any in the practice, are actually the indispensable medium by which the "bodhi" soteriological vision of the dissolution of *samsara* and the achievement of enlightenment is attained. According to Cathy Cantwell, there is a long history in Rnying ma *gter ma* cycles of the *ging* acting as enlightened protectors (or understood as part of the enlightened emanational display of the central deity). However, *lha*, *btsan*, and *bdud* are usually classified as mundane spirits, so in this context I think the *ging* should be understood as apparently or formally worldly in appearance if not in essence.

from the meticulously listed forms of Padmasambhava to the various protector goddesses, into Nyi ma gzhon nu. Essentially, the *Rtsa gsum thig le* is the ritualized imagining of this "singular deity" as the distilled essence of all others.⁴³⁴

Divine Desire

The degree to which Nyi ma gzhon nu is apotheosized, almost henotheistically, in the *Rtsa gsum thig le* is rather startling if, as seems likely, she was a "brand new" deity (despite her iconographic similarity to older, cultically significant female protectors). However, to understand Nyi ma gzhon nu's importance to Sle lung, it is necessary to examine the real human woman of whom Nyi ma gzhon nu is effectively a deification in Sle lung's consciously, systematically cultivated pure vision, or "cosmo-vision." Lha gcig rdo rje skyabs byed, as Sle lung names her in his historical accounts (thus immediately connecting her to "Lha gcig" Nyi ma gzhon nu), was born into a "capable Bon family" in the hermitage of the "Spyan g.yas dgon" in the iron tiger year (1710-11).⁴³⁵ The fact that this oracle of Nyi ma gzhon nu had a Bon po background immediately explains certain Bon-related elements of the goddess's iconography in the *Rtsa gsum thig le*, noted above, including the counter-clockwise *svastikas* on her robe and her *ging* retinue, including the Bon po Māra, Khyab pa lag ring.

According to Sle lung, he first met her in the fire horse year (1726-27), which, not surprisingly, is just two years before Nyi ma gzhon nu appears in the textual record

⁴³⁴ In the next chapter we will examine another instance of a marginal, local deity, the Bhutanese protector A bse, rhetorically apotheosized as the essence of the Buddhist pantheon.

⁴³⁵ My main textual source for Rdo rje skyab byed's biographical details comes from Sle lung's account of her in his *gsung 'bum*, the *Lha gcig rdo rje skyabs byed kyi 'khrungs khang du dam can rgya mtsho'i bsti gnas gsar du bskrun pa'i deb ther rin po che'i 'phreng ba* (*The Precious Garland Chronicle which Establishes the Birth House of Lha gcig Rdo rje skyabs byed as a New Abode for the Ocean of Oath-Bound*) BRGB: vol. 9 pp. 471-483. Her biographical details begin on p. 474.6.

in 1728.⁴³⁶ Sle lung emphasizes in no uncertain terms that Rdo rje skyabs byed and his auspicious connections with her are the fulfillment of the prophecies of Chos rje gling pa, saying that the prophecies are clear enough that "even stupid cow-herders can understand it."⁴³⁷ Chos rje gling pa's prophecies, Sle lung argues in the same line, correctly prophesied the rise of Pho lha nas and, before that, the Qing Emperor Shunzhi (1638-1661) (the first Qing ruler of China) and their political and military successes.⁴³⁸ Sle lung places his consort third only to these two extraordinarily important political rulers, whom the prophecy identifies as a "queen" who is an emanation of the goddess Cundā.⁴³⁹ The prophecy (or at least Sle lung's interpretation of it) continues, saying that the union of this incarnate goddess and Sle lung himself will lead to widespread happiness among the people of China, Tibet, and Mongolia.

Regardless of Sle lung's claim to the veracity of Chos rje gling pa's prophecy, it is likely safe to say from Sle lung's rhetoric here that he was quite smitten with Rdo rje skyabs byed, or at the very least she aroused a strong emotional reaction in him. Louise Child in her interesting if at times convoluted and overly abstract study of Tibetan Buddhism and altered states of consciousness makes some compelling arguments addressing the importance of such emotions to tantric soteriology, one of which is an extension of Durkheim's theory of collective consciousness in experiences of the sacred into the context of Vajrayāna Buddhism. She argues:

⁴³⁶ Also note that Rdo rje skyabs rje would have been sixteen years old at the time of her first meeting with Sle lung, the ideal age for a tantric consort.

⁴³⁷ *'khel ba blun po ba glang rdzi yan chad kyi mngon sum gyi spyod yul du gyur pa yin* (p. 475.2).

⁴³⁸ The reference to the Shunzhi Emperor in Chos rje gling pa's prophecy is significant regarding the dating of Chos rje gling pa's birth. While his birth date is often given as 1682, Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002: 2331 gives his birthdate as *rab 'byung* earlier, in 1622. Given the Shunzhi emperor died in 1661, twenty-one years before 1682, if Chos rje gling pa was in fact born in 1682 it would be rather absurd to attribute to him prophecies about events pre-dating his birth. Thus the 1622 birthdate is more likely to be the accurate one. This means he would have died at the advanced, but not impossibly so, age of 98 in 1720. Still, it does seem rather incredible that an over ninety-year-old man could have made the arduous journey from central Tibet to Padma bkod (discussed in the previous chapter), although his advanced age would explain his fatal affliction of rheumatism.

⁴³⁹ For a profile of this deity see Niyogi (1977).

Generated by human proximity during social, and especially ritual, life, emotional energy creates and sustains the bonds upon which social order and moral life depends. However, it also has a paradoxical quality, because, when amplified by contagion, this energy is difficult to contain, whether its path is positive or destructive. I suggested that tantric Buddhist ritual addresses this problem...by personifying emotional energy into deities...⁴⁴⁰

Since its inception, Buddhism has wrestled with the problem of desire and the suffering that can and does arise from the naïve expression or suppression of it. In fact, the individual's psychological "digestion" of desire has remained at the heart of Buddhist soteriology. The branch of Buddhism that offered the most creative approach for handling desire and other powerful emotions, particularly anger, is of course the Vajrayāna, where emotions are effectively deified and given deliberately focused conscious attention in the form of ritual worship. In some root tantras this is literally spelled out, as in this quote from the canonically important *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga-dākinījālasaṃvara Tantra*, which relates each of the nine "modes" of Indian *rasa* (emotional) theory to a different buddha in the tantric pantheon:

With song, cymbals, and dance, with gestures and with the sentiments – namely eroticism, heroism, compassion, humor, ferocity, terror, disgust, wonder, and tranquility – one's aim will be achieved. By being endowed with the sentiments of eroticism, etc., dancing with the various gestures and by uniting oneself with all, one will achieve all *āveśa* states. Eroticism [*śṛṅgāra*] corresponds to Vajrasattva, heroism [*vīra*] to the Hero Tathāgata, compassion [*karuṇa*] to Vajradhāra, humor [*hāsyā*] to the supreme Lokeśvara, ferocity [*raudra*] to Vajrasūrya, terror [*bhayānaka*] to Vajrarudra, disgust [*bibhatsa*] to Śākyamuni, wonder [*adbhuta*] to Arali, and tranquility [*śānta*] always corresponds to Buddha, since it pacifies all suffering.⁴⁴¹

It should be noted here that Smith gives this quote in the context of a larger survey of possession states (*āveśa*) in Indian tantric traditions, in which empowerment of a deity is considered to be a form of possession or trance. The confluence between these Indian exegetical theories of possession and apotheosized emotion almost perfectly overlaps

⁴⁴⁰ Child 2007: 105.

⁴⁴¹ Smith 2006: 333-334, who is in turn quoting an unpublished translation by David Gray.

the apparent possession experiences of Rdo rje skyabs byed (recorded in the Gsang ba ye shes completion stage commentary colophon discussed above) and Sle lung's ritualized deification of sexual desire in the form of his Nyi ma gzhon nu revelations.⁴⁴² Given this, I contend that Nyi ma gzhon nu was envisioned by Sle lung as the creative, transformative manifestation of sexual desire due not only to her association with his main consort, but also because of the way she is described in the *Rtsa gsum thig le*: as sweating and gasping with passion. While there are a number of other tantric Buddhist deifications of desire, from Kurukullā in India and Tibet to Aizen Myōō in Japan,⁴⁴³ what is particularly interesting about Nyi ma gzhon nu is that we have historical documentation that at least suggests the deity was specifically modeled on a flesh-and-blood person (or persons). Sle lung actually makes an explicit connection between the generation of lust, Kurukullā, and Nyi ma gzhon nu at the end of the *Rtsa gsum thig le*. Near the end of the practice, during the dissolution phase, the practitioner is instructed to emanate Kurukullā, from whom light emanates back to the practitioner and enters the vagina of Nyi ma gzhon nu.⁴⁴⁴ This is then supposed to generate strong arousal in which the *yogin* meditatively abides.⁴⁴⁵

If one needs further evidence of a connection between Nyi ma gzhon nu and specifically Sle lung's personal experience of desire, there is also Sle lung's account of how the *Rtsa gsum thig le* was revealed to him in the first place. As recorded in the *Dag snang lha gcig gi dril sgrub rtsa gsum thig le'i lo rgyus* (*The History of the Pure Vision of the Condensed Essence of the Three Roots of the Singular Deity*),⁴⁴⁶ in 1730 at Rnam

⁴⁴² For more on the possession states of (particularly female) Tibetan oracles and the role of emotion in their experiences, see Diemberger (2005) and Child (2007: 2-3).

⁴⁴³ For Kurukullā see Shaw 2006: 432-447, and for Aizen Myōō see Goepper (1993).

⁴⁴⁴ Keep in mind that the *yogin* is self-visualizing as Nyi ma gzhon nu, so it is one's own visualized vagina, even if the practitioner is male.

⁴⁴⁵ BRGB vol. 12, p. 257.4-5.

⁴⁴⁶ BRGB vol. 12, pp. 301-305.

grol gling, Sle lung was "sporting" with four of his consorts, one of whom was Rdo rje skyabs byed. The other three are named as Rdo rje kun bzang, Kun dga' siddhi, and Dga' ba 'khyil pa. Sle lung goes on to say that a burning desire arose in him toward Kun dga' siddhi, who is here identified as an emanation of the Indian Buddhist *yoginī* Sukhasiddhi. The two of them engaged in sexual congress and then the next morning in what we might call the "afterglow," Sle lung had a vision of Nyi ma gzhon nu.⁴⁴⁷ It is unclear whether or not Kun dga' siddhi (or any of the other women) shared Sle lung's vision, but what is interesting here is that it does not appear that Rdo rje skyabs byed herself, the goddess's oracle, is present for the experience, but rather that another consort is. Thus, while we might interpret Nyi ma gzhon nu as, to a certain extent, the deification of Rdo rje skyabs byed (recall the Bon po connection discussed above), it seems that she was the transmutation of the "emotional energy" of Sle lung's romantic trysts (with multiple women) more generally.⁴⁴⁸

As David Gordon White has argued, the later history of Tantric religion in India, both Hindu and Buddhist, is marked by a shift away from physically enacted ritualized sexual practices and the literal consumption of sexual fluids to a more "gnoseologized" version that places more emphasis on visualization, in particular light and syllabic forms,⁴⁴⁹ in other words, the kind of practices we have examined in the context of the Gsang ba ye shes generation and completion stage. This trend continued in the Tibetan context particularly among the more monastic lineages. The shift from "hard-core" to "soft-core" tantra (to use White's terminology) in the Tibetan context is in part often justified and given precedent by Atiśa's (982-1054) argument in his celebrated

⁴⁴⁷ *de nub 'dus pa rnams tshom bu gcig tu mnal ba* [303] *na tho rengs kyi dus su snang ba thams cad bde cham me ba'i ngang la lha gcig nyi ma gzhon nu dang mjal* (pp. 302.6-303.1).

⁴⁴⁸ It should also be noted that for part of the time that Nyi ma gzhon nu speaks to Sle lung in this visionary encounter, she has explicitly taken on the form of Ye shes mtsho rgyal, which has interesting implications given the idea that the Sle lung reincarnate lamas are manifestations of Padmasambhava.

⁴⁴⁹ See White 2003: 258-272.

Bodhipathapradīpa (*Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*) that monastics, in order not to break their vows, do not need to (and should not) take the secret and gnosis empowerments during tantric initiation, which involve ritualized sex and the consumption of sexual fluids. Atiśa goes on to say that since monastics do not need to take these empowerments, neither do lay people.⁴⁵⁰ In a similar vein, the first Dalai Lama, in an exegesis on Kālacakra practice, classified sexual union with a physical consort (*karmamudrā*) as an inferior mode of practice compared to visualized union with a visualized consort (*jñānamudrā*).⁴⁵¹ In a related scriptural context, with an even stronger conservative tone, Vajrapāṇi in the *Zhus lan sman mchod bdud rtsi phreng ba*⁴⁵² warns of the probable dangers of practicing with a physical consort, and the deification of lust is discussed in ironically critical terms. While Vajrapāṇi says that a pure woman who is spiritually committed is theoretically appropriate to use as a consort, since they are so rare it is strongly implied that use of a physical consort is not even worth the attempt:

The Esoteric Lord said, "The consort who can elicit the impact of the path is more rare than gold. Obsession with an inferior woman makes you into a sex-fiend! Purifying your perception (in regard to such a woman) makes your heart suffer. Your accumulated stores of merit and wisdom are offered to the sex-fiend. Your perverted lust is made into a divine quality. If you can, you will unite even with a dog. Faith is generated from your mouth, but abandoned from your heart. Your avarice and envy become enormous...it drags you down like an iron hook. Any impact that increases the Dharma is not brought forth, and you are led by the nose of lust and suffering. You practice with the hope of liberation through desire, but it only becomes a cause of increasing your passions. You hope it will be a basis of expanding your scope, but you get carried off in a bag of loss and defilement. A consort who keeps no spiritual commitment is a demoness!"⁴⁵³

⁴⁵⁰ Tsemo 2012: 13. This is, of course, advice Sle lung went against in his sexual practices, especially given that technically he had taken monastic ordination. Hence, the reason his "activity" was considered so problematic among some of his contemporaries (see chapter one).

⁴⁵¹ Mullin 1991: 252. This is in line with earlier Kālacakra commentarial tradition and *rdzogs chen* where "a kind of intellectualized sexuality...takes precedence over esoteric sexual behavior" (Hatchell 2014: 145).

⁴⁵² See the discussion of this text in the first chapter.

⁴⁵³ Thurman 2006: 247.

Thus, in the often morally conservative, institutionalized, monastic settings of Tibetan Buddhism, the tantic maxim of "bringing desire (and other negative emotions) onto the path" is largely rhetorical and symbolic, where deities simply passively represent various emotional poisons.⁴⁵⁴ However, in the early, pre-institutionalized history of tantra a number of texts and rituals (such as the passage from the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālasaṃvara Tantra* given above) advocate the actual generation of particularly strong "negative" emotions in order that the practitioner can "ride the wave" of lust (or other emotion) to enlightenment. The best explication of this kind of practice that I have seen comes from the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra* of Kaśmīrī Śaivism,⁴⁵⁵ verse 101, which instructs the practitioner to stabilize the mind within the strong emotions of desire, anger, greed, delusion, intoxication, or envy.

The text here enumerates the six core emotions that in all mainstream Brāhmanical texts are described as negative, being the greatest obstacles on the spiritual path. Here, these emotions are not merely allowed to arise, but a meditative practice is also implied: 'If one makes one's mind stable in'... In the words of the commentator Śivopādhyāya on *Vijñānabhairava* 101, this would mean 'establishing the one-pointed intellect which is one's own consciousness.' It thus appears that the power, intrinsic in these 'negative' emotions, may serve as an *entry point into pure Consciousness*...⁴⁵⁶ [emphasis added].

⁴⁵⁴ Of course, this generalization is not really applicable in Rnying ma contexts, for instance, where married, tantric lay lamas were the norm, a norm that Sle lung obviously gravitated toward. However, as the examples of the *Zhus lan sman mchod bdud rtsi phreng ba* and the biography of Mi 'gyur dpal sgron examined in the previous chapter make clear, there were reformist trends in the Rnying school as well that also objected to and rejected physical sexual practices.

⁴⁵⁵ Given the likelihood that *Vijñānabhairava* arose in the same geographical and cultural context as the *Kālacakra Tantra*, and the theoretical and practical overlap between their doctrines and practices (see Hatchell 2014: 17), it is not at all anachronistic to cite this Śaiva text in the context of a discussion of Tibetan Buddhist tantra.

⁴⁵⁶ Bäumer 2015: 103. The *Zhus lan sman mchod bdud rtsi phreng ba* takes a rather interesting "middle way" approach between the outright abandonment of emotion (stereotypically associated with the *sūtric* path) and the wholesale embracing of it (stereotypical of the tantric path). Rather, Vajrapāṇi instructs that one should at first abandon desire (and presumably other negative emotions) as much as possible, and then later when they arise it is easier to recognize them as illusions and allow them to fade away on their own. This is a significant departure from the intentional, ritual generation of strong passions in the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālasaṃvara Tantra*.

To relate this idea back to the literal deification of emotions which we see in the context of Sle lung's Nyi ma gzhon nu practices, powerful emotions specifically *as deities* provide a powerful technique for realizing emptiness. As Child puts it:

One of the most striking features of tantric Buddhism is that, despite its emphasis on enlightenment as a question of individual practice and responsibility, it fosters a large number of deities who evoke devotional worship. However, there is some logic underlying this apparent contradiction, for, although Buddhist devotion is intensely passionate, it is also regarded as inherently empty of existence. In other words, it is conceived, ultimately, as a form of 'skillful means,' which, in recognizing and identifying with a range of states of consciousness, enables the adept to perceive their transitory and insubstantial nature. This twofold process encourages emotional experience, while at the same time, works to destroy confusion...⁴⁵⁷

It is within this kind of doctrinal and psychological understanding of what are often called "emotional poisons" in Buddhism that we should understand Sle lung's visionary revelation of Nyi ma gzhon nu within the experience of sexual bliss, attested in the *Rtsa gsum thig le'i lo rgyus*. It is also how we should understand a far more explicit and graphic text he wrote, also in 1730, entitled the *Lha gcig nyi ma gzhon nus dag snang du stsal ba'i thabs kyi lam mchog nyi zla'i bcud len dang brgyad 'debs* (*The Supreme Path of Skillful Means given through the Pure Vision of Lha gcig nyi ma gzhon nu: The Sun and Moon bcud len and the Eight Supplements*).⁴⁵⁸ As the title indicates, this is a *bcud len* or "extracting the essence practice," which are usually techniques by which the *yogin* can empower or consume substances, besides normal food, that will sustain him. These can range from light and air to plants and minerals. In Sle lung's text, the substance of consumption are the fluids produced from sexual congress. The colophon declares that "anyone who wants to reach liberation through sexual intercourse should engage in this practice."⁴⁵⁹ Again Nyi ma gzhon nu is central to the practice, and the

⁴⁵⁷ Child 2007: 107.

⁴⁵⁸ BRGB vol. 12, pp. 363-370.

⁴⁵⁹ *gang zhig rgyo yi chog las/ byang chub 'dod rnams 'dir ltos shig/* p. 370.5. This is the translation by Oliphant (2015: 169).

practitioner (who is assumed to be male) is instructed to visualize the consort as Nyi ma gzhon nu during the sexual act.

Oliphant has examined this text within a broader study of *bcud len* practices, and his summary of it is worth quoting at length here:

The first two folios (f. 364-365) contain supplications to these masters, starting from Guru Samanthabadra [sic], down to Ye shes mtsho rgyal and Nyi ma gzhon nus. The instructions on the practice methods start on f. 366. The author describes (f. 367, lines 3-4) his visions of the goddess, ‘her beauty generates strong desire for her. Lying down, she shows her lotus, described as a source of desire... She invites the practitioner to a blissful time together, saying she is a yogini who practices secret sexual yoga, eliminating all the obstacles and harm of the three realms. . .’

There are three subdivisions to this ritual: the preparation *sbyor ba*, the actual practice *ngos gzhi*, and the final *siddhis*.

In the preparation stage, one prepares a comfortable bed and the consort’s required qualities are described in detail. She should be a very attractive young adolescent, with a clean body and genitals that emanate a good smell and remain warm all the time. Her skin should be very soft and delicate, her complexion fair. Her voice is beautiful, she talks aimlessly and just by hearing her sweet voice she can turn any mind towards her. She is fundamentally modest and not hypocritical in regard to sexual activities and she is not jealous, having a very kind heart. Once we have her, we should visualize her as the goddess Lha gcig nyi ma gzhon nus.

The main section, rife with explicit details on how to engage with the consort, starts on f. 368, line 1. Details on how to tease her with salacious words and jokes to excite sexual desire, including where to touch her and how to suck on her nipples are given...

Specific [although cryptic] instructions are given (f. 369). The male practitioner is instructed to thrust sideways, upwards and downwards, sometimes ‘in the manner an arrow is released from a bow’, or ‘how a lion does it to a lioness’. After that, to rub his genitals on the face, in the way one applies oil. Anthropomorphic literary elements appear and one is told to ‘extend your body like a lion, engage like a fish, do it like a tortoise’. One generates and keeps that blissful, inexpressible experience.

Sperm should not be lost. If lost and one is not familiar with the techniques to retrieve it or how to reverse and spread it (within the body), then the ejaculation is visualized as an offering.

After ejaculation, one does not exit immediately but stays inside and feels the female blissfulness without exiting. With the tongue, the male sucks the mixture and inserts the ring finger and tastes it. This is the supreme *bcud len* mixture and it helps to remove any kind of obscuration.

(f. 369, line 4) The third section is on the ending of the practice. Once sexual intercourse is completed, there should not be immediate separation but embracing, and one should apply to the female’s navel, the lower part of her body and her mouth and genitals, specified herbs such as musk and cumin, mixed with sesame oil. Additionally, fat collected from vulture, sparrow,

duck, and donkey can be boiled and blended and applied to male and female genitals. This helps to make them very warm and to gain ultimate blissfulness during sexual intercourse, and makes them very strong.

(f. 370, line 1) Further advice is given on other medical conditions. Mixing donkey fat with ginger and *pi pi ling* (long pepper) and cloves into oil and applying it to the back and stomach helps one recover from any cold diseases. After rising and separating from the consort one should eat delicious food with her, avoiding tiring activities or aggressive behavior and emotions like sadness and anger that might diminish the blissful experience generated.⁴⁶⁰

It should be stressed that, generally speaking, nothing in this practice is particularly innovative or "new" to Sle lung, except perhaps the use of the specific goddess Nyi ma gzhon nu and a few other specific details. All the elements, from the particular correct attributes of the consort, the consumption of fluids, and the "pure view" of the act itself all have a long history in Indo-Tibetan tantra. What I am trying to stress here is that despite the reformist tendencies of masters such as Atiśa and those following in his footsteps, which tended to emphasize visualization procedures, there remained a strong undercurrent of the more physicalized, "hard-core" practices of the early Indian tantric movements. Thus while Sle lung was writing his detailed Gsang ba ye shes practice commentaries which discuss very rarified and mainly symbolic practices that, while at times vaguely allude to a consort, are of the "soft-core" "gnoseologized" type, he was also engaging in and teaching practices of the "hard-core" type where the practitioner, rather than just simply passively embodying emotions in symbolic form, seeks to explicitly generate them as a means of realization which, if White is correct in his analysis, was the original purview of tantra before its institutionalization in India (and by extension Tibet).

Sle lung's implementation of both "hard-core" and "soft-core" tantra is somewhat akin to the rituals of the *kriyā* and *caryā* tantra-type as preserved in the

⁴⁶⁰ Oliphant 2015: 167-169. It is also worth mentioning that Oliphant examines another *bcud len* practice by Sle lung written probably in 1729 when he was in Padma bkod, which relies on very innocuous, relatively simple visualizations and breathing practices.

"magical" practices of the *Collection of Activities* existing comfortably alongside the soteriological practices of Gsang ba ye shes's generation and completion stage. This distinction, between a more rarified, visualized, "gnoseologized," form of practice (i.e., the generation and completion stages), versus a more "hands on" and emotionally-charged approach which necessarily employs physical objects including consorts and their bodily discharge (i.e., magical spells and *bcud len*), is a more compelling classification scheme than the ultimately somewhat facile bodhi/pragmatic distinction.⁴⁶¹ In other words, it is easier and perhaps more fruitful to distinguish method rather than intent in Tibetan religion.

That does not mean the bodhi/pragmatic split is completely heuristically useless, even if the terms themselves are ham-handed. Just as in Sle lung's presentation of the more auxiliary magical spells, the sexually graphic practices related to Nyi ma gzhon nu are implicitly (and logically) ranked within a more "worldly" sphere. Despite the *bcud len* practice's soteriological claims, and the fact that I have not seen anything in Sle lung's commentary ranking *karmamudrā* practice as a technically inferior mode as is traditional in Tibetan Buddhism, it is significant that Sle lung does not envision the *karmamudrā* consort as Gsang ba ye shes in her primary *yi dam* form, but rather in her, at least theoretically and typologically, "lower" more worldly dharma protector form as Nyi ma gzhon nu. If tantric deities are the personifications of emotion and its transmutation, then the coarser emotions tend to be related and relegated to the deities

⁴⁶¹ We might thus distinguish visualized practice versus material practice, or a different configuration: intellectualized ritual versus emotionally-charged ritual. It should be clear that these different methods usually work in tandem. In generation and completion stage practices there is usually plenty of physically enacted ritual, including consort practice. However, I would argue that these practices do not depend as heavily on actual material objects the way that the magic spells discussed above do. One particular ritual will ideally, or in actual logistical practice, emphasize one method (mental or material) over the other. For example, while *'chams* dances have an intellectualized component, they are more physically and emotionally charged (for the performers and the audience) than an almost completely interiorized, mentally imagined generation or completion stage practice (though of course there are important physical and emotional components here as well).

of the dharma protector class. As Sle lung makes clear in the *Rtsa gsum thig le*, it is the worldly *ging* protectors who do the actual work of purifying samsara. They are the actual soldiers in the trenches, so to speak, though they would lack cohesion and direction if they did not have the transcendent Buddhas "behind" as the monarchs of the *maṇḍala*.

In the next chapter we will turn our attention to arguably Sle lung's greatest literary contribution, a text which deals exclusively with dharma protectors, and further examine the vexed issue of worldly versus transcendent deities. Also, as we shall see, although Nyi ma gzhon nu was the apotheosis of lust, in most cases dharma protectors are the creative embodiment of the other great emotional poison of Buddhism – hatred.

Chapter 3: The *Chos skyong* - The Ocean of Oath-Bound Protectors

The Sle lung incarnation lineage is closely associated with the activity of demon subjugation, and for that reason its members are considered especially knowledgeable about protector deities and endowed with special power over them. As it was explained to me by the current Sle lung *sprul sku*, this is the case because the Sle lungs are considered to be emanations of Vajrapāṇi and Padmasambhava, both of whom are particularly associated with demon taming. Vajrapāṇi already appears in the Buddhist canon in the Pāli *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* as Vajirapāṇi, a wrathful *yakṣa* strongman of the Buddha, who intimidates an arrogant, heretical *brahmin* into submission.⁴⁶² Thus Vajrapāṇi is the original dharma protector, and while he has changed as a character throughout the history of Buddhist canonical literature, in tantric literature being apotheosized into a centrally important, fully enlightened buddha, he is still best known as a subjugator of haughty ones (*dregs pa*), the arrogant, hostile spirits that threaten the Buddhist dharma. Padmasambhava is the semi-historical, though largely legendary, eighth-century Indian saint most commonly and popularly worshipped in the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism, well-known for his subjugation and the conversion to Buddhism of the autochthonous spirits of Tibet.⁴⁶³

As discussed in chapter one, Tsong kha pa was the first major religious and historical figure to make the association with Vajrapāṇi, identifying his teacher, the first Sle lung, Grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, as a manifestation of this deity. Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan purportedly had a series of visionary encounters with the wrathful Buddha and as was noted, a significant portion of his collected works are pure vision

⁴⁶² DNLA: 372-407. See also the entry for “Vajirapāṇi” in Malalasekera (1960: vol. 1, p. 808).

⁴⁶³ Accounts of which are described in great detail in a number of hagiographies of this saint. See, for instance, O rgyan gling pa's (b. 1323) *Padma bka' thang* (Yeshé Tsogyel 2007), and Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's (1136-1204) *Bka' thang zangs gling ma* (Yeshé Tsogyel 2004).

teachings on Vajrapāṇi. The association persisted, with all the following Sle lung incarnations similarly identified. For instance, the second Sle lung Dge 'dun bkra shis was declared by the Third Dalai Lama in his biography to be "Vajrapāṇi in person, the Lord of Secrets and the compiler of all Tantras."⁴⁶⁴ The Third Sle lung, Bstan pa rgya mtsho, during his visit to Mongolia with the Third Dalai Lama in 1584, is said to have taken on the form of Vajrapāṇi to subdue hostile local deities. During Bstan pa rgya mtsho's visit to Beijing, when the Chinese Emperor invited him to the Forbidden City, it is said that syllables of Vajrapāṇi's *mantra* appeared in incense smoke.⁴⁶⁵ The Fourth Dalai Lama is also said to have praised Bstan pa rgya mtsho as "a vajra holder able to summon dharma protectors as his servants."⁴⁶⁶

A prophecy attributed to Padmasambhava that heralded the birth of the fourth incarnation, Chos rgyal dbang phyug, in part reads: "He will summon to his service all rahulas⁴⁶⁷ and wrathful spirits. Everyone who makes a connection with him will go to Vajrapani's Pure land of Changlojen."⁴⁶⁸ When he was born, Chos rgyal dbang phyug supposedly had marks like a tiger skin on the lower part of his body, reminiscent of Vajrapāṇi's tiger skin skirt.⁴⁶⁹ Then in 1661, Chos rgyal dbang phyug, during an illness, had a dream in which he arose in the form of Padmasambhava and subjugated the eight classes of gods and demons (*lha 'dre brgyad sde*) and the twelve *brtan ma* goddesses.⁴⁷⁰ When he awoke, he had the realization that he was also a manifestation of

⁴⁶⁴ Loden 2013: 34.

⁴⁶⁵ Loden 2013: 44-45.

⁴⁶⁶ Loden 2013: 46.

⁴⁶⁷ Generally hostile, planetary (*gza'*) spirits. See Bailey (2015).

⁴⁶⁸ Loden 2013: 49.

⁴⁶⁹ Loden 2013: 50.

⁴⁷⁰ Loden 2013: 52. The *brtan ma* goddesses are one of the main groups of deities that Padmasambhava is said to have tamed upon entering into Tibet.

Padmasambhava. From that point on, the Sle lungs were considered manifestations of both figures.⁴⁷¹

While Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's association with Vajrapāṇi (and, by extension, dharma protectors in general) makes obvious sense given his writings dedicated to that deity, as well as other protectors, there are no extant works by the next three Sle lungs to indicate that they were particular experts on this subject, though the legends of their demon subjugation activities do.⁴⁷² Far above and beyond this, however, the life and career of Bzhad pa'i rdo rje, the Fifth Sle lung, was deeply involved in the production, codification, and dissemination of ritual and mythological literature directed toward protector deities. A significant percentage of his massive textual output was dedicated to this section of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon.

In Sle lung's thirteen-volume collected works there are approximately 257 individual ritual texts dedicated to invoking and propitiating various dharma protectors, either individually or in groups.⁴⁷³ Protector propitiation texts, including all the various textual sub-genres such as *sādhana*s (*sgrub thabs*), thread-cross rituals (*mdos*), burnt offerings (*sbyin sreg*), libation offerings (*gser skyems*), and so on, and their related commentaries, constitute the most numerous single genre within the *gsung 'bum*. Additionally, Sle lung compiled a *be'u bum* containing an additional 112 ritual texts of

⁴⁷¹ The notion that a human figure can be the “emanation” of one, let alone multiple deities (or previous historical figures), while exceedingly common in Tibetan culture, may to a modern Western audience seem strange and even ridiculous. However, as Dominique Townsend has argued “[the] practice [of recognizing a person as an emanation or reincarnation] ...is to imbue a man or woman with the characteristics, charisma, power, and sometimes the material wealth of a great person from the past” (Townsend 2012: 94). Or a deity, as the case may be. In other words, men who were recognized as the Sle lung *sprul sku* by their communities were considered (by themselves and others) to be the inheritors of the imagined legacy of Vajrapāṇi and Padmasambhava. By “imagined” I do not intend to be reductive. All legacies are necessarily imagined. Thus the *sprul sku* is considered to conform to the archetype of a particular deity or deities.

⁴⁷² Although, as was noted in chapter one, Dge 'dun bkra shis and Bstan pa rgya mtsho were in the lineage of several Mahākāla practices transmitted to the Fifth Dalai Lama.

⁴⁷³ Unsurprisingly, Lha gcig Nyi ma gzhon nu has the most space dedicated to her in the *Gsung 'bum* of any single protector, her texts totalling an impressive 221.5 folios. Tsangs pa dkar po comes in second with 94 folios.

this type (most addressed to various forms of Rdo rje legs pa, in particular Mgar ba nag po⁴⁷⁴) and the GYCK contains several dharma protector propitiation texts as well.

The protectors addressed in these ritual texts run the traditional Buddhist cosmological and ontological gamut from Vajrapāṇi, considered to be the combination of the power of all the buddhas, down to the most obscure local deities. The lengths of the texts also vary widely, the longest being 76.5 folios, and the shortest less than a single folio (of which there are many). Many of these texts are classified as pure vision (*dag snang*) teachings, and Sle lung purportedly received a number of them directly from the deity in question. We know Sle lung's protector propitiation texts were incorporated into the ritual liturgies of a number of monasteries and temples including Mnga' ris grwa tshang,⁴⁷⁵ Khra 'brug, Dar po gling in Lhasa, Gnas chung, and of course, his home monastery of Rnam grol gling. Sle lung also seems to be one of the earliest Tibetan figures to propitiate the legendary epic figure of King Ge sar as a dharma protector.⁴⁷⁶

Additionally, Sle lung granted protector teachings and empowerments and performed their rituals for the sake of a plethora of students and donors, including some of the most important Tibetan religious and political figures of his day, from Pho lha nas to the Seventh Dalai Lama.⁴⁷⁷ Even further, Sle lung's autobiographical accounts of his travels through hidden lands (*sbas yul*) such as Padma bkod and Spro lung in the

⁴⁷⁴ *Dam can mgar ba nag po'i be'u bum* (MNBB). Mgar ba nag po is the "blacksmith" form of Rdo rje legs pa (see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 154-159).

⁴⁷⁵ The earliest datable protector deity ritual he wrote was composed in 1714 at the request of this monastery's abbot. The text is dedicated to the deity Dmag dpon rgyal mtshan (see BRGB vol. 7 pp. 361-362).

⁴⁷⁶ Interestingly, Sle lung's propitiation of Ge sar prefigures the popularity of that deity among the nineteenth century eastern Tibetan *ris med* scholars who, as Forgues (2011: 282-283) points out, were, like Sle lung, all *rdzogs chen* adepts sympathetic to Bon.

⁴⁷⁷ See Mi dbang Pho las nas's biography for an account of some of the protector teachings and "life-force entrustments" bestowed upon him by Sle lung, including a special form of Rdo rje legs pa called Thig le rtsal, the twelve Bstan ma goddesses, and Pe har (Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981: 496). See the previous chapter for a discussion of Sle lung's purported healing of the seventh Dalai Lama through propitiation of the protector Nyi ma gzhon nus.

late 1720s contain numerous descriptions of encounters with local gods that would count as protector-class deities, and his ritual propitiation of them.⁴⁷⁸ Without downplaying his other major literary contributions, it would not be a stretch to say that Sle lung's charismatic career as a religious savant was primarily directed toward ritual technologies for controlling, directing, and employing a huge pantheon of dharma protectors.

Given the times in which the fifth Sle lung lived, it is not difficult to understand why so much of his energies were directed toward protector deities. He experienced not one but two wars that devastated central Tibet – first the Dzungar invasion and occupation from 1717-1720, and then the bloody civil war between competing factions within the Lhasa government in 1727-1728. The inter-war period saw the invasion, occupation, and withdrawal of Qing forces and increased Chinese meddling in Tibetan affairs. These events were particularly troubling, especially for Sle lung, because of the anti-Rnying ma persecutions by the Dzungars, who destroyed many Rnying ma institutions and temples and killed a number of important Rnying ma lamas, as well as anti-Rnying ma policies instituted by the Qing and at least tacitly supported by certain members of the Lhasa government.⁴⁷⁹ A look at the (comparatively very few) dated protector rituals in Sle lung's *gsung 'bum* shows that a high percentage of them are concentrated in and around the years of 1717, 1720, 1727, and 1728, indicating that he either felt it necessary to write them himself during these troubled periods, or that he

⁴⁷⁸ For instance, the *Spro lung bdang phyug gling gi gnas sgo gsar du phye ba'i lo rgyus rab snyan sgra dbyangs* (BRGB vol. 8, pp. 519-546) is largely concerned with descriptions of the protector deities that live in this particular *sbas yul*. In one passage describing two possible entrances to Spro lung, Sle lung states “the pass is guarded by Gshin rje Bhe wa satva. It is also guarded by the moon-faced demon. The narrow defile is guarded by the wild *btsan* who has the head of a goat, six demons born together, and Jag pa me len.” (*la ni gshin rje bhe wa satvas bsrung/ bdud zla ba'i gdong gis kyang bsrung/ 'phrang ni bstan rgod ra'i mgo bo can dang/ bdud po zur skyes drug dang/ jag pa me len rnams kyis bsrung*, p. 522.5.4-522.6.3). The next page contains instructions for propitiating (and presumably placating) these deities.

⁴⁷⁹ Discussed at more length in the first chapter.

was especially requested to do so by patrons. As we have seen, Sle lung also wrote ritual texts for the main deity at the province-taming (*ru mnon*) temple of Khra 'brug beginning in 1717 and, after it was destroyed by the Dzungars, was responsible for its renovation and re-consecration in 1723.

However, Sle lung's work with protector deities is mainly known not for his breadth of ritual literature or his temple renovations. His best known contribution to Tibetan literature and religion is as the tradent of the famous *Dam can bstan srung rgya mtsho'i rnam par thar pa cha shas tsam brjod pa sngon med legs bshad*, *The Unprecedented Explanation of a Mere Portion of the Liberation Stories of the Ocean of Oath-Bound Dharma Protectors* (henceforth referred to as DCTS). The DCTS is a unique text in Tibetan literature, perhaps representing the only one of its kind, at least in pre-modern times. While it has been known to Western scholars for decades, and several studies have mined certain sections of the text for information, these studies have all used the DCTS as a source for a broader examination of individual deities.⁴⁸⁰ However, despite this I believe the text has been under-researched. Most of the text, including its key opening section on Mahādeva/Śiva, has received little attention from scholars, and the text itself, as a piece of literature and Sle lung's reason for writing it has, to my knowledge, not been examined at all.

What makes the DCTS "unprecedented?" First, for a text exclusively on protector deities, it is uniquely massive. Kunzang Topgey's edition of the text, a reproduction published in 1976 of a manuscript from the Pha jo lding 'Og min gnyis pa monastery in Bhutan, is 333 folios long.⁴⁸¹ By comparison, for example, Klong rdol

⁴⁸⁰ See the section outline below for a list of works which use the DCTS as a significant source.

⁴⁸¹ Presently there are a total of four and a half different versions of the DCTS available to me. The first is this 1976 version published in Thimphu, Bhutan. Two years later, a two-volume *dbu med* version was published by Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay at Kyichu Monastery in Paro, Bhutan. A year after that an illustrated version, also in two volumes, was published by T.S. Tashigang in Leh, Ladakh. This was the first edition published in modern book format, although the text is hand-written, not typed, in *dbu can*.

Ngag dbang blo bzang's (1719-1794) *Bstan srung dam can rgya mtsho'i ming gi grangs*, another text that exclusively details a broad range of the Tibetan pantheon of dharma protectors, being effectively an exhaustive list of them, is a mere 16 folios. Furthermore, Klong rdol's text is simply that, a list. The DCTS, however, is an extensive anthology of multiple dharma protector origin myths, extracted from their original scriptural and ritual context.⁴⁸² I am familiar with two other Tibetan works that are comparable in size, scope, and style, both of which post-date Sle lung and seem to have been modeled on his work. The first, which has been translated (unfortunately quite poorly) into English, is Ladrang Kalsang's *The Guardian Deities of Tibet*, which uses the DCTS extensively as a direct source. The particular protectors discussed by Kalsang are virtually the same as those discussed by Sle lung, and most of the stories cited by Kalsang are found in the DCTS.⁴⁸³ The other work was published by Gser rta monastery in Kham in 2005, entitled *Snga 'gyur rgyud 'bum las btus pa'i gtam rgyud phyogs bsgrigs (A Collection of Legends Compiled from the Tantric Canon of the Old Translation School)*.⁴⁸⁴ While the pantheon of protectors examined in this text is largely the same as in the DCTS, as the title says, the sources used are exclusively Rnying ma

The latest version was published in 2003 in Beijing by the Mi rigs dpe skrun khang. Finally, I have access to an incomplete version from Gene Smith's green books, one volume of which is a transliteration of the first half of the text (the Mahādeva through Vaiśravaṇa chapters), from a manuscript that was owned by Khri byang Rin po che Rdo rje 'chang (1900-1981). While I have not done an extensive comparison of all the extant versions, from the sections I have compared they all appear to have the same content, with only minor orthographic differences. For instance, the Beijing edition introduces a number of spelling errors and confuses grammatical particles (often switching genitive with agentive particles, and vice-versa). However, because the text is the most clearly printed in the Beijing and Leh versions, I have primarily consulted these two, with the Leh version being superior due to its relative lack of errors, although the clarity of the printing and organization of the Beijing edition is better. For the sake of simplicity, I have chosen to cite only the Leh edition.

⁴⁸² The DCTS is also full of verses of praise toward various deities, as well as *sādhana*-style iconographical descriptions.

⁴⁸³ See Ladrang Kalsang (2007). Sle lung's text is still significantly more extensive than Kalsang's, however, and there are important differences. Most notably, for our present discussion, Kalsang makes no mention of Maheśvara.

⁴⁸⁴ See Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (2005).

canonical scriptures. *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* texts, however, represent only a part of Sle lung's sources.⁴⁸⁵

Sle lung also mentions as one of his main sources for the DCTS a text attributed to Klong chen Rab 'byams pa (1308-1364), entitled *Ngo mtshar bka' srung rgya mtsho'i lo rgyus* (*Histories of the Ocean of Marvelous Dharma Protectors*). Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to locate this text to see how it compares to Sle lung's.⁴⁸⁶ The title implies it is more extensive and detailed than Klong rdol's text, and if it were truly authored by Klong chen pa, it would represent a very early precursor to Sle lung's text. The fact that Sle lung does mention it suggests that the genre was not necessarily new in Sle lung's time, and it may be simply historical accident that the DCTS is the only such text from pre-modern times still extant.⁴⁸⁷

Written in 1734, only six years before Sle lung's death, the DCTS can be interpreted as the capstone of his career as a dharma protector specialist and can best be described as a comprehensive theogony of Tibet's pantheon of protector deities. Theogonic texts are quite common in Tibetan literature, often part of ritual cycles.⁴⁸⁸ Sle lung himself wrote one, based on a visionary experience, in which he describes the birth of King Ge sar and his fourteen elder brothers from the goddess 'Bum 'od kyi me

⁴⁸⁵ The *Rnying ma* sources referred to are also often different in the two texts. For instance, in *A Collection of Legends*, most of the accounts of Rudra's subjugation at the beginning are drawn from scriptures focused on Vajrakīla. While he makes reference to Kīla literature, Sle lung, as far as I have seen, does not actually cite any Kīla texts directly.

⁴⁸⁶ Amy Heller also mentions that she was unable to locate this text (Heller 1992: 288, 319 n. 3).

⁴⁸⁷ *Histories (lo rgyus)* of protectors, or *smrang* ("proclamation of origins") as they are known in Bon po texts, are actually relatively common in Tibetan literature, but they tend to be quite short, part of larger cycles of texts, and focus exclusively on one protector at a time, or simply give lists of protectors without much description. The DCTS is the only extensive compilation of such *lo rgyus/smrang* of which I am aware.

⁴⁸⁸ For an example, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996: 300-302), which summarizes a theogonic account of the origins of the *sri* class of spirit, written by Padma gar bdang rtsal in a Northern Treasure text focused on Vajrakīla (*Byang gter phur pa'i sri mnan yi dam drag po gang la'ang sbyar du rung ba'i lag len 'don 'gregs dkyus gcig tu bsdebs pa 'bar ba'i brjid gnon thog brtsegs*) located in volume 84, pp. 505-559 of the *Rin chen gter mdzod*.

tse, as a preface to two ritual texts focusing on Ge sar.⁴⁸⁹ Sle lung's student, Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje (1721-1769), also wrote a text which arranges the major protectors of the Tibetan pantheon into a comprehensive theogonic family tree, and explains the origins of the local protector A bse/Jag pa me len.⁴⁹⁰ But like Hesiod's *Theogony*, the DCTS appears to have been written, not to be used in a ritual context, but rather for the purpose of education and edification.⁴⁹¹ Unlike Hesiod, as well as other Tibetan theogonic texts, however, the DCTS is not a single, self-contained narrative, but rather a patchwork of thematically related narratives, quoted (or summarized) from an array of works, interlaced with Sle lung's own commentary. In this sense, then, it is somewhat similar to a modern scholarly annotated bibliography, and at times reads like one. At the same time, the string of origin myths can also be compared, at least loosely, to a kind of *dharmapāla jātakamālā* (due to the emphasis on stories about the past lives of many of the dharma protectors), or a collection of biographical/hagiographical (*rnam thar*) narratives such as the *Caturāsisiddhapravṛtti* (*Lives of the 84 Mahāsiddhas*).⁴⁹²

The main feature of DCTS that sets it apart from a ritualized theogony, a pre-modern annotated bibliography, or a simple collection of hagiographies, however, is that Sle lung makes a sustained directly, though somewhat subtly, stated polemical argument throughout the text. In the introduction of the DCTS, after a standard invocation of the root lama and the deity Nyi ma gzhon nu,⁴⁹³ Sle lung states his purpose for writing:

At present here in Tibet, according to all the authentic precious *tantras* by Buddha Vajradhara, are oath-bound protectors which are said to be equal in enlightened intention with [Vajradhara] himself. As to the extraordinary

⁴⁸⁹ *Dag snang ge sar gyi gtam rgyud le'u* (BRGB vol. 12, pp. 1-9). My thanks to George FitzHerbert for doing the bulk of the translation of this text, and bringing the theogonic account to my attention. This theogonical account will be discussed in more detail below.

⁴⁹⁰ Discussed below.

⁴⁹¹ See West 1966: 1-16.

⁴⁹² For a translation of this text, see Abhayadatta (1979).

⁴⁹³ Whose own history, interestingly, is not discussed in the text.

oath-bound protectors who are described in those [scriptures] they are lauded by some and denigrated by some, are understood to be all equal, or high and low, and some people accumulate the severe sin of utterly abandoning the dharma. Moreover, due to having a conviction of what is or is not a great excellent superior protector, [some people] come to forsake all good qualities of scripture and learning of the *tantras*. Abandoning that, they come to abandon the three jewels. Therefore, this will become a very heavy mass of ripened karma. Because of that, I write this in order to give the eye of intelligence which produces clarity regarding the oath-bound protectors, by means of these words.⁴⁹⁴

It is worth examining this passage in some detail, because it is more significant than it may first appear. The first thing that is immediately noticable about this statement of purpose is how closely it coincides with the purpose of his *ris med*-oriented apologetic treatise defending the Rnying ma school in general that appears in his autobiography (examined in chapter one). The DCTS thus appears to be the application of these general, theoretical arguments from the autobiography, applied specifically to dharma protectors.

Particularly interesting is that Sle lung effectively states in this passage that rejecting dharma protectors, or at least some dharma protectors in favor of others, leads to, or is tantamount to, rejecting the entirety of the Buddha's teachings. He also suggests that the discrimination inherent in the traditional Buddhist binary between trans-mundane and mundane protectors is ultimately illusory, a significant theme throughout the DCTS. Since this is such an extremely common binary distinction made in Tibetan Buddhist writings on dharma protectors, Sle lung's stance here is somewhat radical.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁴ *de la deng sang gangs ri'i phrod 'dir rgyal ba rdo rje 'chang gis rang dang dgons pa mnyam par gsungs pa'i dam can ston pa'i rgyud sde rin po che rnams tshad mar 'dzin bzhin du de nas gsungs pa'i dam can khyad par rnams la/ la lar bstod cing/ la lar smad pa dang/ mnyam pa rnams la'ang mchog dman gyi khyad par chen por 'dzin pa dang/ 'ga' zhi gitan nas spong ba'i chos spong gi sdig pa tshabs po che gsog par byed do/ ji ltar zhe na dam can khyad par 'phags chen dam pa yin pa la dam pa yin par 'du shes nas spangs pas de'i rgyud kyi lung rtogs kyi yon tan thams cad spang par 'gyur/ de spangs pas dkon mchog gsum spang bar gyur zhing/ de'i dbang gis rnam smin gyi phung po shin tu lci bar 'gyur ro/ de'i phyir yi ge 'di dag la brten nas dam can rnams la dang ba bskyed pa'i blo gros kyi mig khyin pa yin pas blta bar byos [4] shig (DCTS vol. 1, pp. 3.8-4.1).*

⁴⁹⁵ For a discussion of the traditional difference between these two "levels" of protectors, see Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang (1967: 5-6) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996: 3-5). Also, for his part, Klong rdol in *Bstan srung dam can rgya mtsho'i ming gi grangs* makes a fairly clear distinction at the very beginning

While it could easily be argued that, from this passage alone, Sle lung was not necessarily suggesting there was no such thing as an unenlightened protector, Sle lung's consistent hermeneutical and didactic strategy throughout the DCTS is aimed at proving that every protector he discusses is ultimately fully enlightened. Thus, practically speaking, for Sle lung there is no such thing as a purely "worldly" protector. Even if it appears to be worldly it is actually a buddha in disguise. It is a common argument that certain protectors which appear to be worldly are actually the skillful means by which buddhas tame beings. Sle lung makes this argument repeatedly throughout the DCTS. However, it is clear from his tone that he is specifically arguing against detractors of certain protectors, and his main goal in the DCTS is to prove that the protectors he is discussing are fully enlightened, thus suggesting that he is responding to (probably Dge lugs pa) critics of certain (primarily Rnying ma) protectors.⁴⁹⁶ I will also argue that Sle lung's understanding of dharma protectors is part of a larger vision of pan-enlightenment or pan(en)theism characteristic of a *ris med* school of thought or attitude that seems to have been prevalent at Smin grol gling.⁴⁹⁷

The Significance of "*Rnam thar*"

First, let us examine Sle lung's strategies for defending the enlightened status of the protectors he is discussing. One of the most important of these, I would argue, is

of the text differentiating between protectors who are beyond the world, and those who are ordinary beings (BSMG 1.2.3-1.5.1). For a particularly interesting extended discussion of the *laukika/lokottara* (worldly/transcendent) distinction in Buddhism (which corresponds to the *'jig rten pa/'jig rten las 'das pa* distinction in Tibetan) see Ruegg (2008).

⁴⁹⁶ There are, of course, many protectors that are discussed in the DCTS that are highly regarded within the Dge lugs pa school, as well. But many, such as Rāhula and Rdo rje legs pa, are particularly Rnying ma deities.

⁴⁹⁷ This pan-enlightened vision also seems to have a strong history in Rnying ma *dzogs chen pa* thought at least as far back as Klong chen pa, who in his *Phyogs bcu mun sel* commentary on the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, makes it clear that Rudra (and his retinue), though he appears to be the paradigm of evil and a worldly spirit subject to immense suffering in *samsara*, is in fact an enlightened emanation (see Dorje 1987: 1087). Sle lung in the DCTS appears to consistently apply this same logic to a number of other, specific protector deities.

the editorial decision to label these narratives “*rnam thar*.” Originally, and most famously, *rnam thar* is a term applied to the life stories of particular saints and religious adepts, describing how they attained, or at least progressed on the path to, enlightenment. The best-known example is the *rnam thar* of Mi la ras pa, although there are a number of others which have been published in Western languages, including the hagiographies of Na ro pa, Mar pa, Ra lo tsā ba, Zhabs dkar, and the 84 Mahāsiddhas, to name a few.⁴⁹⁸

But in the DCTS the subjects of the narratives are not lineage masters or historical figures at all (at least in the Western understanding of a “historical” person), the subjects of most *rnam thar*, but deities. This in and of itself is noteworthy, but not especially “unprecedented,” as claimed in the full title of the DCTS. The distinction between human and deity within Buddhist thought generally has always been tenuous at best, and there are other examples of biographies (specifically titled “*rnam thar*”) of deities, though they are comparatively rare. But even these usually follow a traditional *rnam thar* formula. For instance, Dza ya Paṇḍita (1599-1662) wrote a *rnam thar* of Avalokiteśvara as part of his *thob yig*, or records of teachings received. In it, the Buddha of Compassion-to-be is depicted as travelling to various masters, receiving their teachings, and practicing them in order to, step-by-step, gain full enlightenment.⁴⁹⁹ The narrative is very reminiscent of Sudhana’s extensive journey (both physically and spiritually conceived) toward enlightenment in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ See Tsangnyön Heruka (1982, 2010), Lha btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal (1963), Ra Yeshe Sengé (2015), Zhabs dkar Tshogs drug rang grol (2001), and Abhayadatta (1979).

⁴⁹⁹ Sangseraima Ujeed, personal communication.

⁵⁰⁰ In fact, there is reason to understand the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* as the basis for the Tibetan genre of *rnam thar* given the etymology of the term, which originally comes from a Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit *vimokṣa* in a reference to the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* from Śāntideva’s *Bodhisattvacharyāvatāra* (Roberts 2010: 181-182).

But the subjects of DCTS are protector deities who are (in)famous in Tibetan religion for their fearsome qualities. As one might expect, the narratives in the DCTS collection reflect the violence inherent in the appearance and ritual practices of these deities, and are structured very differently from the typical *rnam thar* narrative. It should be noted that the sources from which Sle lung is quoting in the DCTS were not originally categorized as *rnam thar*. Most of the stories he cites are extracted from *tantras* (many of which are Rnying ma *gter ma* texts), *sādhana*, and other various offering and appeasement ritual texts, written or “discovered” by various authors down the centuries. For instance, one of the earlier authors whose texts Sle lung repeatedly cites is Nyang ral nyi ma ’od zer (1136-1204), the first of the so-called *gter ston* “kings.” A number of other treasure revealers, as well as high-profile Dge lugs pa figures such as the Third Dalai Lama and the Fourth Panchen Lama, are quoted as well. Usually the origin stories of the deities in question found in these ritual texts are designated as “*lo rgyus*” (“histories”), never as *rnam thar*; it is Sle lung himself who applies this particular genre label to these narratives, an editorial decision which was far from arbitrary.

It should also be pointed out here that *rnam thar* was not the only genre label used by Tibetans for a biographical account, even for one discussing how someone attained enlightenment. *Chos ’byung*, roughly translatable as “dharma history,” for instance, contain accounts of how the Buddha Shakyamuni and other figures attained liberation. The famous collection of life stories of the eighty-four *Mahāsiddhas* is simultaneously designated as both *lo rgyus* and *rnam thar*.⁵⁰¹ But are there any special distinguishing features which connect most or all *rnam thar* through a kind of family

⁵⁰¹ *’Phags yul grub chen brgyad cu rta bzhi’i byin rlabs skor las lo rgyus rnam par thar pa rnams*. For a translation of this text, see Abhayadatta (1979).

resemblance, which might at times be found in other Tibetan literary genres, but which tend to set them apart from the biographical/hagiographical accounts in other genres?

Janice Willis has argued that *rnam thar* are special in that they were written as supplements to, or even as, tantric practice manuals and act as “vehicles for providing detailed practical instructions to persons seeking to put the particular teachings of a given *siddha* into practice,” and are consequently quite different from Western biographical/hagiographical traditions.⁵⁰² I would argue that this is a misunderstanding of the *rnam thar* genre, however, though it may be applicable to certain *rnam thar* (such as the eighteenth century *rnam thar* of Chos kyi rdo rje which Willis was examining in her article). While many *rnam thar* contain allusions to specific yogic practices, they tend not to discuss them in specific terms. For instance, in the *Mgur 'bum* of Mi la ras pa (1052-1135) which is the Gtsang smyon Heruka's (1452-1507) companion piece to his retelling of Mi la ras pa's *rnam thar*, the forty-first chapter is itself a small self-contained *rnam thar* of Mi la ras pa's primary disciple, Sgam po pa (1079-1153). At one point in the narrative Sgam po pa, during an intense practice retreat, experiences a series of visions, which Mi la ras pa explains are signs indicating the state of Sgam po pa's changing subtle body. For each of the visions, Mi la ras pa recommends a special practice to help ward off potential problems or hindrances. But what these particular practices are is not described in any practical detail. For instance, at one point Sgam po pa has a vision of receiving the nectar of immortality from a group of gods, which he is not able to drink because, according to Mi la ras pa, his central channel is still closed. Mi la ras pa explains certain exercises which will open his central channel, but the reader is not provided with any further information,⁵⁰³ certainly not enough to replicate

⁵⁰² Willis 1985: 311.

⁵⁰³ Chang 1999: 478.

these exercises. In fact, throughout the entirety of Gtsang smyon's *Mi la rnam thar* and *Gur 'bum*, while there are countless scenes depicting *Mi la ras pa* meditating, there are rarely any explanations of what he is meditating *on*, and meditational deities such as *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Hevajra* are barely mentioned, let alone the complex visualizations involved in these practices described in any detail.

Similarly, in the *rnam thar* of *Rwa lo rdo rje grags* (b. 1016), attributed to *Rwa ye shes seng ge* (twelfth century), but probably compiled as late as the sixteenth or seventeenth century, the protagonist often boasts about the detailed practice instructions he has mastered, such as in this song of realization:

This Lord of Death, Yama, what a complete joke!
As soon as the messengers of this enemy, the Lord of Death, arrive,
I have the full oral instructions on the *Tāraṇa* (Liberating) Skeleton Rite.
So now all the death lords have no power over me!

This Black Serpentine Demon, what a complete joke!
As soon as the Serpentine Demon attacks,
I have the full oral instructions on the Rite of the Skull Embrace.
So the legions of serpentine demons don't scare me!

This Haunting Spirit of the Night, what a complete joke!
As soon as the Haunting Spirit's seductive deceptions appear,
I have the full Nectar Drop Protection.
So now there's no fear of any harm caused by the haunting spirits!⁵⁰⁴

Here, the point is to show how great *Rwa lo* (and perhaps by extension his lineage) is, not to give the reader any idea about how to practice the "Rite of Skull Embrace."⁵⁰⁵

That said, however, Willis is basically correct when she argues that *rnam thar* "serve

⁵⁰⁴ Ra Yeshe Sengé 2015: 79-80.

⁵⁰⁵ Some may object that so-called "inner" or "secret" *rnam thar* are more likely to impart esoteric instructions rather than the general "outer" *rnam thar*. But as far as I am aware, secret *rnam thar* primarily describe the visionary experiences of their subjects, and are not meant as practice manuals for achieving such experiences oneself. Certainly that is the case with *Sle lung*'s later more visionary autobiographical accounts.

both as inspirational and instructional models for practitioners of the Path.”⁵⁰⁶ While *rnam thar* may not impart specific practice instructions as a rule, and while the general reader is not, in any practical sense, meant to replicate the miracles of Padmasambhava, Mi la ras pa, or Rwa lo, the *rnam thar* of these figures generally describe the ideal Buddhist life which *theoretically* could and should be followed, and indeed that they (and by extension their lineage) have practices that are soteriologically efficacious, even if those practices are only tantalizingly hinted at.

Charles Ramble has helpfully assembled an outline of a stereotypical *rnam thar*, arguing that “[a] hypothetical instance of such a narrative could typically be reduced to the following sequence of literary formulae,” which he lists as:

- Miraculous signs before the birth of the subject, such as unseasonably good weather, as well as portentous dreams on the part of the mother.
- Extraordinary neonatal gestures, precocious learning abilities, and a strong attraction to religious figures and institutions.
- A highly charged meeting with the “root lama,” who may well have had a prophetic dream about the disciple’s advent.
- Stock tribulations through which cumbersome karmic traces are patiently sloughed off.
- Missionary activities in the course of which the hero converts savages in inhospitable regions, causing them to give up hunting and animal sacrifice; he receives honor and reverence from local potentates.
- The hero’s passing away, attended by various miraculous phenomena; these include unusual transformations of the body as well as instances of pathetic fallacy, such as clouds of rainbow light and rain of flowers.⁵⁰⁷

The protector deity *rnam thar* in Sle lung’s collection invert this stereotypical structure on almost every point, to the degree that these narratives, and their protagonists, seem to be functioning as binary opposites (in the Lèvi-Straussian sense) of the classic, more common, *rnam thar* of the buddha/yogin/lineage master. However, equalizing the origin myths of protector deities with the hagiographical accounts of

⁵⁰⁶ Willis 1985: 304.

⁵⁰⁷ Ramble 2010: 299-300. While there are some problems with these generalizations, it is by and large applicable to most, and the most well known, *rnam thar*. Sle lung’s own autobiography contains some of these tropes.

enlightened beings was, I believe, part of Sle lung's strategy to (in his mind) clarify the ontological status of these protectors, equalizing them with buddhas.

The Contents of the *Ocean of Oath-Bound Protectors*

Let us examine some of the specifics of Sle lung's rhetoric in the DCTS. In what follows I will focus on one deity discussed at length in the text, examining sections of his "chapter," relating it to other deities and their "chapters" where applicable. To say that the DCTS has chapters is a bit misleading, since Sle lung wrote the text originally with no distinct section breaks or headings. And it is difficult to say exactly how many deities Sle lung discusses in the text, since it is written as a single continuous narrative, and the descriptions of the different deities (and their many sub-forms and emanations) are deeply nested within each other, creating a recursive labyrinthine effect that is often difficult to follow. However, Sle lung discusses at least forty major deities, and they range in rough order from cosmologically superior trans-local Indic deities, such as Śiva and Mahākāla, to more localized Tibetan deities, although they are presented in kathenotheistic succession, with each deity in turn praised as, in some sense, supreme.

As an organizational structure, the best we get are phrases stating "Regarding [deity A]" followed by a series of quotations from various texts about that deity interspersed with Sle lung's running commentary, which lasts until we reach another phrase stating "Regarding [deity B]." In theory this is fairly straightforward, but the overall narrative becomes much muddier when deity B turns out to be a minor form, or emanation of, deity A, in which case Sle lung might spend pages discussing deity B (to the point where it seems clear he is in a new "chapter") only to suddenly stop and begin discussing deity A again. In some cases, he may go through deities B, C, D, E, and F,

etc., before finally returning again to deity A. In other cases, deity A will continue to be mentioned in passing in the “chapters” discussing deities B, C, D, and so forth.

Nevertheless, the editors of the Leh and Beijing editions of the DCTS divided the text into distinct chapters with clear-cut tables of contents. But the two editions diverge significantly from each other, as the editors chose to divide up the text, in some cases, quite differently. The number forty is largely arbitrary, but is based on the chapter division imposed by the editors of the 1979 Leh edition of the text. This edition’s table of contents is problematic for a number of reasons, in part because it occasionally gives minor deities, like *Sa yi lha mo*, their own chapter, while leaving major deities like *Rdo rje legs pa* lost in large sections of text (mis)attributed to some other deity. An eighteen-deity schema imposed in the 2003 Beijing edition, while solving some of the problems of the 1979 edition, introduces similar problems of its own. Both editions underscore the difficulty of attempting to organize *Sle lung*’s text. However, the basic outline of the major sections in the text runs as such.⁵⁰⁸

- (1) *Dbang phyug chen po* (*Maheśvara*)
- (2) Various forms of *Mgon po* (*Mahākāla*) including the raven-headed, four-armed, six-armed, four-faced, and "eunuch" forms.⁵⁰⁹
- (3) An extended section on goddesses, beginning with various forms of *Dpal ldan lha mo* (*Śrī Devī*) including *Rje mo Re ma ti*, *Rang byung rgyal mo*, *Dus mtshan ma* (*Kālarātri*), and *Dmag zor rgyal mo*. This section continues with discussions of more local goddesses including the five *tshe ring ma* sisters⁵¹⁰ and the *bstan ma* goddesses.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁸ Sections which have had significant portions translated in Western scholarly studies are noted. Furthermore, these protectors, and other more minor ones, are discussed in Kalsang (2007) with some notable exceptions like *Dbang phyug chen po* and *Rāhula*.

⁵⁰⁹ Della Santina (2003: 173-203).

⁵¹⁰ Benard (1994: 11) and Della Santina (2003: 131-172).

⁵¹¹ Della Santina (2003: 131-172).

- (4) Dharmarāja and his consort Dus mtshan lha mo 'od chen 'bar ma
(Kalārātri). Since the focus is mainly on Dus mtshan lha mo, it is,
alternatively, reasonable to count this as part of the extended section on
goddesses.⁵¹²
- (5) Rnam thos sras (Vaiśravaṇa)
- (6) Khyab 'jug chen po (Rāhula)⁵¹³
- (7) Pe har⁵¹⁴
- (8) Beg tse/Yam shud dmar po⁵¹⁵
- (9) Gegs kyi rgyal po Bi na ya ga (Ganeśa)⁵¹⁶
- (10) Tsi'u dmar po⁵¹⁷
- (11) Rdo rje legs pa

This is a list, in order of their appearance in the DCTS, of the major trans-local Indic deities (except for the *tshe ring ma* and *bstan ma* goddesses who are probably Tibetan in origin) discussed by Sle lung. It does not include a host of more distinctly local Tibetan deities⁵¹⁸ which are also discussed primarily in the second half of the text (following the Vaiśravaṇa section), such as the mountain deities 'O de gung rgyal,⁵¹⁹ Jag pa me len,⁵²⁰ Yar lha sham po,⁵²¹ Thang lha,⁵²² and others such as Lha chen Tshangs

⁵¹² The Leh edition names this chapter after Dharmarāja, but he is only discussed secondarily.

⁵¹³ Bailey (2012: 115-135).

⁵¹⁴ Bell (2013: 30-77).

⁵¹⁵ Heller (1992: 287-329).

⁵¹⁶ Krishan (1999: 159-161).

⁵¹⁷ Bell (2006).

⁵¹⁸ While deities such as Rdo rje legs pa and Beg tse likely have a Tibetan origin, they are not as heavily associated with specific geographic locales as these other deities who are in many cases believed to be personifications, for instance, of particular mountains or mountain ranges.

⁵¹⁹ "A personification of a mountain of the same name in central Tibet" (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 208). For general information on this deity not related to the DCTS, see Kohn 2001: 286, n. 19.

⁵²⁰ A Bhutanese war god and 'Brug pa and 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud protector. See Bellezza 2005: 97. Discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

⁵²¹ See Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 204, 221 and Sørensen & Hazod 2000: 214-221.

⁵²² See Bellezza 2005: 173.

pa,⁵²³ Jo bo rdzong btsan,⁵²⁴ and Jo bo rgyal mtshan,⁵²⁵ not to mention the dizzying array of retinue deities, sometimes named, sometimes not, discussed in relation to each of the main deities.

Here I wish to focus particularly on the hitherto little-studied Dbang phyug chen po (Maheśvara) chapter,⁵²⁶ because it is the first and is, as will become clear, in many ways the most important in the context of the DCTS specifically and the Rnying ma school's literature on protectors generally. Maheśvara's *rnam thar* (in various versions) acts as a template for many of the other protector stories quoted by Sle lung in the DCTS. Sle lung's editorial decision to put Maheśvara first is likely based on the general importance this deity has in Vajrayāna and particularly Rnying ma myth, the strong Rnying ma cult of this deity which seems to have become particularly popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the specific importance Maheśvara had in the TCKD cycle so important to Sle lung's GYCK of Gsang ba ye shes.

These reasons aside, however, the fact that the first section of the DCTS focuses on Maheśvara/Mahādeva/Rudra⁵²⁷ seems at first glance to be highly irregular and even downright strange. Historically, Mahākāla has always been given pride of place in Tibet's pantheon of protector deities.⁵²⁸ Klong rdol's BSMG begins with Mahākāla. Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje's (1717-1786) arrangement and tabulation of the Tibetan

⁵²³ See Sørensen & Hazod 2000.

⁵²⁴ For general information see Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 573-574, 585.

⁵²⁵ The local protector of the area around Sle lung's home monastery of Rnam grol gling. The longest sustained narrative that I have identified in the DCTS is related to Jo bo rgyal mtshan, and is the sixth of 'Brom ston pa's birth stories from the "son teachings" (*Bu chos*) of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*. Despite minor orthographical differences, Sle lung's version of this story appears to be identical to the one found in the Zhol edition of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* published in Lokesh Chandra (1982). For more on the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* see Miller (2004) and Jinpa (2008). Sle lung's reproduction of this entire narrative in the DCTS is rather strange given that the protector in question only appears, in his past life, as a minor demonic guard with whom 'Brom ston pa's previous incarnation interacts only very briefly.

⁵²⁶ DCTS vol. 1, pp. 4-66. Bizarrely, the editors of the Leh edition split this section into two chapters, naming the second half after the earth goddess Sa yi lha mo. However, Sa yi lha mo is only discussed very briefly (DCTS vol. 1, p. 30.10) within the context of a larger discussion of Dbang phyug chen po. Thus, most of the so-called Sa yi lha mo chapter actually has nothing to do with this particular goddess.

⁵²⁷ Following Sle lung's own usage, I will use these names interchangeably depending on context.

⁵²⁸ Although, admittedly, Mahākāla is least important in Rnying ma contexts.

Buddhist pantheon for the Qing court via the media of statuary, block-print drawings, and paintings, consistently place Mahākāla first among the protector deities.⁵²⁹ Nebesky-Wojkowitz's classic *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, despite numerous drawbacks,⁵³⁰ is still the most comprehensive Western study of Tibetan protector deities to date, referencing over 200 primary sources. In it the discussion of Māhakāla and his supposed 75 forms takes up one of the longest chapters in the book.⁵³¹ A TBRC search for Mgon po (Mahākāla) results in 112 separate works, not counting dozens of sub-forms. In short, for every school of Tibetan Buddhism Māhakāla is a protector of primary, if not central, importance.

The Tibetan form of Śiva, on the other hand, does not appear to be mentioned at all in the BSMG. He only appears once or twice in Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje's pantheons, and only as part of a comprehensively incorporated Hindu pantheon, placed well behind Māhakāla in the queue, as it were. Even more significantly, in the entirety of the massive *Rin 'byung brgya rtsa*, *Snar thang brgya rtsa*, and *Rdor 'phreng* (Skt. *Vajrāvalī*) collections of deity *sādhana*s, Maheśvara is only mentioned once as something other than a worldly deity being trampled upon. In the *Rin 'byung brgya rtsa* he appears as a minor retinue deity of Mahāsiddha Śāntigupta's form of Four-armed Mahākāla.⁵³² Also, in another collection of *sādhana*s, the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, Rudra appears as a retinue deity of Kālacakra.⁵³³ But these are minor exceptions. Śiva and his various forms are barely mentioned in Nebesky-Wojkowitz; a TBRC search of Dbang

⁵²⁹ See Clark (1965) and Lohia (1994). For more information on Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje and his activities at the Manchu court, see Berger (2003) and Illich (2006).

⁵³⁰ For instance, there is no effort on Nebesky-Wojkowitz's part to discuss the historical development of the cults of the various deities he profiles.

⁵³¹ Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 38-67.

⁵³² Willson and Brauen (2000: 341).

⁵³³ Abhyākaragupta 1949: 89. For more on various iconographic appearances of Śiva in Buddhist contexts, see the entry for "Maheśvara" in Chandra (1999-2005) vol. 7, pp. 2027-2038.

phyug chen po/Lha chen results in 58 separate texts, but most of these are from the same handful of authors, one of whom is Sle lung himself.

The obvious question, then, is why did Sle lung choose to make this, in other (notably Gsar ma) contexts, apparently relatively insignificant deity the first protector discussed in his *dharmapāla magnum opus*? Not only that, but he describes Maheśvara in stunningly exultant terms, quoting, or himself commenting, that this deity “is the ancestor of the three realms of the world, the god who bestows all power and perfects all attainments,” the “supreme deity,” and “the ultimate, primary spiritual father of all the male and female classes of dharma protectors.”⁵³⁴ Later, Sle lung describes Śiva as “the essence and the sovereign master of all the lamas, meditational deities, buddhas, bodhisattvas, dākas and dākinīs, and dharma protectors.”⁵³⁵ Mahākāla, the usual overlord of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon of protector deities, is not only relegated to second place, but is consistently described as being Śiva’s son.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁴ The full quote reads: “From the *Praise of the Red Isvara, Guardian of Great Compassion* in the revealed treasures of Sha ’ug: ‘Avalokiteśvara emanated the Great God Śiva, who is the ancestor of the three realms of the world, the god who bestows all power and perfects all attainments. Praise to you, Great Sorcerer, attendant of the Buddha.’ And: ‘From the *maṇḍala* of Powerful Great Bliss, Great Glorious Blood-drinker (Heruka) Excellent Glorious Horse (Hayagrīva), from the creative energy of Avalokiteśvara, great Gu lang, supreme deity, Lord Srī with matted hair.’ The manifestation of the most holy Avalokiteśvara and Hayagrīva, he is the forefather of all the worlds, and it is said he is the sovereign over the three realms. How he came to be will be explained below, in order to [describe] the ultimate, primary spiritual father of all the male and female classes of dharma protectors.” (*sha ’ug gter byon thugs rje chen po’i bka’ srung legs ldan dmar po’i bstod pa las/ spyen ras gzigs sprul dbang phyug lha chen po/ ’jig rten mes po khams gsum kun gyi bdag/ dngos grub mchog ster yon tan rdzogs pa’i lha/ rgyal ba’i bka’ sdod mthu chen khyod la bstod/ ces dang/ bde chen dbang gi dkyil ’khor nas/ dpal chen khrag ’thung rta mchog dpal/ thugs rje chen po’i rol pa las/ gu lang chen po lha yi lha/ dbang phyug shrī ral pa can/ zhes ’phags mchog spyen ras gzigs dang rta mgrin gyi rnam sprul/ ’jig rten thams cad kyi mes po/ khams gsum thams cad kyi bdag por gsungs shing/ ’og tu ’chad par ’gyur pa bzhin/ pho rgyud mo rgyud thams cad kyi rtsa ba’i yab rje dam par gyur pa’i phyir ro*) DCTS vol. 1, p. 4.8-4.18. Here Śiva is called “Gu lang,” who appears in several texts discussed by Nebesky Wojkowitz (1996: 282) as *Mu stegs gu lang nag po*, the leader of the *mu stegs pa*, or non-Buddhists, who “is depicted as a dark-blue god dressed in a human skin, whose attributes are a *kha ti* and a trident; his mount is a buffalo.”

⁵³⁵ “Now then, regarding the Excellent Śiva, it is established that he is the essence and the sovereign master of all the lamas, meditational deities, buddhas, bodhisattvas, dākas and dākinīs, and dharma protectors.” (*de bas na legs ldan chen po ’di ni bla ma yi dam sangs rgyas byang sems dpa’ bo mkha’ ’gro/ chos skyong srung ma thams cad kyi bdag nyid...*) DCTS vol. 1, pp. 6.9-11.

⁵³⁶ DCTS vol. 1, pp. 67.11-13.

“The Progenitor of all Dharma Protectors”

As I noted, one reason for all of this is that Śiva has in fact been centrally important to Vajrayāna myth and ritual since its inception. Buddhism has historically had a complex relationship to the deity variously called Śiva, Maheśvara, Mahādeva, and Rudra (or, in Tibetan: Legs ldan, Dbang phyug chen po, Lha chen, and Ru tra). Historically, tantric Buddhism owes much of its ritual technologies and charnel-ground imagery to Śaivism, and Buddhist wrathful and semi-wrathful deities are, for the most part, based on similar Śaiva forms. This debt is implicitly acknowledged in the Buddhist canonical myths of Maheśvara's subjugation which first appear in the *yoga* tantras, such as the *Mahāvairocana Tantra*, which are elaborated and expanded upon in ever greater graphic detail in the Mahāyoga tantras of the Tibetan Rnying ma tradition and, to a lesser extent, the Gsar ma *yoginī* tantras.⁵³⁷

On one level, the Rudra subjugation myth is a continuation of the long tradition within Buddhism of “transtheism,”⁵³⁸ a centrally important but rarely discussed aspect of Buddhist theology and soteriology, as well as the “demon devotee” trope of Indian cultic myth in general.⁵³⁹ Buddhist authors have developed and elaborated upon this transtheistic and “demon devotee” trend since the earliest Buddhist texts and sculpture, in which the Buddha and his successful followers (arhats, bodhisattvas, etc.) are consistently and invariably depicted as having automatic power over all other super-human beings of the world, from the lowliest charnel ground spirit to the most powerful of gods, transforming them into servants of the Buddha's teachings and his followers, i.e., dharma protectors.⁵⁴⁰ In early Pāli Buddhism, the cosmologically highest dharma

⁵³⁷ See Sanderson (1994, 2009) for Śaivite influence on Buddhist tantra.

⁵³⁸ See Zimmer 1989: 182, who uses the term “transtheistic” in relation to Jainism, though it applies equally well to Buddhism.

⁵³⁹ See Mayer (1996: 115) for this Indological interpretation of the myth.

⁵⁴⁰ See DeCaroli (2004) for more on the importance of worldly deities in early Indian Buddhism. With regards to the spirit beings depicted at early Buddhist *stūpa* sites, DeCaroli comments: “by assembling

protectors are Indra and Brahma of Vedic and Brahmanical Hinduism. In later tantric Buddhism, Śiva/Bhairava of the Śaivite Kāpālika sects takes the place of the cosmologically most powerful worldly deity.

However, Maheśvara in Buddhist tantric myth is depicted in far more starkly negative terms than any other conquered god in Buddhist lore before him, the great Buddhist adversary Māra included. As scholars have noted and studied for years,⁵⁴¹ the subjugation of Rudra/Maheśvara myth is the foundational myth (or working off of Mayer, using Malinowski's terminology, the "charter myth") of Vajrayāna,⁵⁴² in that it explains and justifies the origins of highest yoga tantric ritual technologies which employ (at least theoretically) techniques of extreme impurity, usually relating to sex and violence, for these were the only means by which the buddhas were able to overcome the awful depredations of Rudra and his minions, and save sentient beings and the entire universe from them. There are numerous versions of this myth, told and re-told in a number of canonical scriptures. In an excellent overview of the subject, Ronald Davidson charts the growth and elaboration of this myth,⁵⁴³ beginning with Vajrapāṇi's comparatively tame disciplining of Śiva in the *yoga tantra* the *Sarvatathāgata-Tattvasaṃgraha Sūtra*. In later scriptures (dating from around the eighth to tenth centuries) the story becomes longer, more detailed, and graphic in its descriptions of sex and violence, the most elaborate being the version in chapters twenty to thirty-one of the *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* (*The Compendium of Intentions Sūtra*).

Especially in the later versions of the myth, Maheśvara/Rudra is described in such overwhelmingly negative terms that he is easily comparable to Satan in the

these spirit-deities...only to represent them in positions of secondary importance, the saṃgha was making a bold statement that challenged the very foundations of spirit-deity worship in India" (76).

⁵⁴¹ For various studies of the Rudra subjugation myth see Davidson (1991), Iyanaga (1985), Kapstein (2000), Mayer (1998), Stein (1995), and Dalton (2011).

⁵⁴² See Mayer (1998).

⁵⁴³ Davidson (1991).

Christian tradition. He is the tantric Māra, worse than Māra if only because of the graphic descriptions of his extreme impurity. The *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*⁵⁴⁴ version of Rudra's life story (that is, *rnam thar*), which is summarized by Sle lung in the DCTS,⁵⁴⁵ is effectively a mirror image of the traditional life story of the Buddha, so that it becomes reasonable to assume the authors of this scripture were intentionally depicting Rudra as the anti-Buddha. Since this version of the myth has recently been translated in full⁵⁴⁶ (as have several other versions of the myth) it will only be briefly summarized here.

The man who would be Rudra began as Thar pa nag po, a failed monk who misunderstands Atiyoga (*rdzogs chen*) teachings and commits a series of grave sins (mostly involving serial murder and orgies with prostitutes). When Thar pa nag po dies, instead of going through countless rebirths purifying afflictions, like the Buddha in the *Lalitavistara*,⁵⁴⁷ he goes through countless rebirths in impure states, building up afflictions. In his last rebirth, instead of being born in a good family in a land with many auspicious, favorable qualities, he is reborn in the land of extremely sinful flesh-eating demons. Rudra's mother is not a chaste queen, as in the case of the Buddha, but a prostitute. While the bodhisattva who is to become the Buddha is conceived immaculately, Rudra, according to some versions,⁵⁴⁸ is conceived after his mother has sex with three different kinds of demons.

The mothers of both the bodhisattva and Rudra die soon after they give birth, but in the bodhisattva's story his mother immediately ascends to heaven, and her death

⁵⁴⁴ In the Mtshams brag edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, vol. 16, pp. 2-617.

⁵⁴⁵ vol. 1, pp. 48.7-58.10.

⁵⁴⁶ See Dalton (2011).

⁵⁴⁷ The Buddha's Mahāyana biographical sūtra, popular in Tibet, which seems to provide the structural literary template which is inverted in the *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*. See LVS.

⁵⁴⁸ Specifically, the retelling in the fifth and sixth cantos of O rgyan gling pa's *Padma bka' thang*. See Kapstein (2000) for an analysis of this version of the myth.

is not the direct result of the birth itself, which was painless and perfectly pure. Rudra's mother dies in childbirth and is buried, in some versions before Rudra is actually completely born. Instead of being welcomed with great celebration by the whole community, as was the infant bodhisattva, Rudra is abandoned by the community in the charnel grounds with his mother's corpse. Instead of being born at the base of a beautiful fig tree blooming out of season and covered with jewels and all kinds of auspicious things, Rudra is born at the base of a poisonous tree called "*nal byi*" (which Dalton translates literally as "Incestuous Rape"⁵⁴⁹) full of animals representing the three afflictions of desire, hatred, and stupidity. Rudra then survives by eating his mother's corpse. Like the bodhisattva, Rudra has many strange physical characteristics that mark him as special. But whereas these are ideal Indic standards of beauty in the bodhisattva's case, which make him attractive to whoever sees him, Rudra is a horrendous mutant with multiple heads, wings, scaly flesh, and claws, is smeared with all kinds of repulsive substances and "[w]hoever saw him, their eyes would roll back in terror and they would faint."⁵⁵⁰ As soon as he is born, the bodhisattva has a kind of automatic control over all the gods and spirits in the world who willingly and lovingly bow down and serve him. Rudra gains an automatic control over the most wretched spirits by violating purity taboos, such as eating corpses and wearing their skins. Later he conquers all other gods and spirits through sheer ferocious brute force. Whereas the bodhisattva is unstained by afflictive emotions and easily goes into calm meditation, Rudra is explosively angry and insatiably lustful, and "under the force of his meditations, he saw any man as someone to be killed and viewed any woman's vagina

⁵⁴⁹ Dalton 2011: 163.

⁵⁵⁰ Dalton 2011: 164.

as something to have.”⁵⁵¹ The Buddha sets about bringing benefit to beings, Rudra immediately brings harm to beings. And so forth, and so on.

And yet, once he and his male retinue deities are tamed and purified of their extremely sinful karma by the wrathful forms of the buddhas (by being brutally killed, mutilated, and, in one version, eaten, spat out, and re-eaten⁵⁵²) and his female retinue are made the consorts of the buddhas, Rudra is set on the path of a bodhisattva. Of particular importance in the *Dgongs 'dus pa'i mdo* version of the story is the status with which Rudra is left at the end of the narrative after his subjugation, namely, he is empowered by the buddhas as the supreme dharma protector. He and his retinue, in the style of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s prophecy concerning Devadatta,⁵⁵³ are prophesied to become fully awakened buddhas in the future, but in the meantime they swear to become dharma protectors, guarding those who uphold the Buddha's teachings. In the *Padma bka' thang* version of the myth by O rgyan gling pa, after his subjugation and subsequent conversion to Buddhism, Rudra becomes Mahākāla,⁵⁵⁴ one of whose sub-forms is called “Legs ldan nag po,” or “Black Śiva.” Mahākāla is also a common epithet for Śiva within Śaiva traditions themselves, and Buddhist depictions of Mahākāla are virtually identical to Śaiva depictions of Śiva in his Bhairava, or “terrifying” form.

But while much could be said about the “Buddhification” of Bhairava as Mahākāla, he is only occasionally identified within the Buddhist tradition as being Śiva himself (in some Tibetan accounts Mahākāla is Śiva's son⁵⁵⁵ instead or, more commonly, no explicit connection with the Śaiva deity is made at all). My concern here

⁵⁵¹ Dalton 2011: 164.

⁵⁵² For the summary of this version of the story, which appears in the fifteenth chapter of the *Rgyud gsang ba'i snying po* (*Guhyagarbha Tantra*) see DCTS vol. 1, pp. 16.6-23.14, and Davidson 1991: 203. For a full translation of this chapter of the canonical tantra, see Dorje 1987: 1064-1074. See also Garson 2004: 345-349. The scripture is found in vol. 20, pp. 152-218, of the Mtshams brag edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*.

⁵⁵³ See Kurihara (2010) for a discussion of Devadatta's rehabilitation in the *Lotus Sūtra*.

⁵⁵⁴ See Yeshé Tsogyel 2007: 46.

⁵⁵⁵ For example, as mentioned above, in the DCTS.

is with the deity that Buddhists, and specifically Tibetan Buddhists, explicitly identified as the *tirthaka* deity Śiva (or Maheśvara, Mahādeva, etc.).

In the tantric Buddhist subjugation myths, this *tirthaka* deity who had been the foremost enemy of dharma, becomes the original and foremost dharma protector. It should be noted at this point, if it was not already clear, that the most elaborate versions of the Rudra subjugation myth are all found in Rnying ma scriptures. In fact, as Mayer has clearly shown,⁵⁵⁶ the subjugation of Rudra has had an enduring importance within Rnying ma myth and ritual in a way that the subjugation of Maheśvara has not in Gsar ma scriptures.⁵⁵⁷ In fact, the only Gsar ma tantric cycle in which Maheśvara plays a significant role is the Cakrasaṃvara, but only in later (Tibetan) exegetical works, not in the root tantras themselves.⁵⁵⁸ Davidson cites the example of Sa skya Grags pa rgyal mtshan's (1167-1216) codification of the Cakrasaṃvara Maheśvara subjugation narrative which is actually little more than an elaborate description of the spirit denizens of Maheśvara's *maṇḍala* and where they dwell, who are then conquered and occupied by Heruka and his retinue of deities. This version of the myth reads less like a narrative per se, than like a *sādhana* visualization. Sle lung cites a somewhat similar narrative from the Cakrasaṃvara cycle, attributed to Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290-1364).⁵⁵⁹ Here, neither Maheśvara nor Heruka are developed as characters at all or engage in dialogue, as in the *yoga* tantra versions and Rnying ma *Mahāyoga* scriptures, nor is there much exposition to explain the context of what is going on. Thus the elaborate Rudra/Maheśvara subjugation myths as they developed in the later tantras (post *yoga* tantra) were primarily a Rnying ma innovation, probably during the so-called "dark

⁵⁵⁶ Mayer (1998).

⁵⁵⁷ Rnying ma scriptures tend to use the name "Rudra," the "Howler" of the Vedas, and in Hinduism one of Śiva's forms, (see Srinivasan 1983) whereas Gsar ma texts use "Maheśvara," "the Great Overlord," one of Śiva's titles, or "Bhairava," the main wrathful form of Śiva in tantric Śaivism.

⁵⁵⁸ See Davidson 1991: 204, and Mayer 1998: 280.

⁵⁵⁹ DCTS vol. 1, pp. 14.4-16.5. I have not been able to locate this text by Bu ston.

period” of Tibet’s history after the collapse of the Tibetan empire in the ninth century. Rudra/Maheśvara, as a character, is literarily developed and subsequently integrated into Rnying ma liturgy and ritual in a way that he never was in the Gsar ma tantras which were translated into Tibetan in the *phyi dar* period a hundred years or so after the likely composition of the key Rnying ma tantras such as the *Dgongs ’dus pa’i mdo* and the *Guhyagarbha*. In general, the Gsar ma root tantras themselves are much more rudimentary than their Rnying ma counterparts, without much coherent narrative and in many cases appear to be scrambled compilations of disparate ritual instructions. Although, of course, the Gsar ma tantric deities and related ritual elements are based on Śaivite paradigms, as far as I am aware no Gsar ma root tantra contains a version of the Maheśvara subjugation myth. Gsar ma versions of this myth only appear in commentarial literature or oral traditions related to various Gsar ma tantric cycles, in particular Cakrasaṃvara, Vajrabhairava, and Kālacakra.

In origin myths of the Cakrasaṃvara and Vajrabhairava cycles, Maheśvara appears merely as one-dimensional stock foe to be subdued, and has no practical importance after his subjugation. For instance, in a Vajrabhairava version of the myth which, according to Tāranātha (1575–1634), comes from the Rwa lineage of Vajrabhairava, Maheśvara is not even the primary opponent of the Buddhist hero of the story (rather it is Śiva’s son Kārttikēya), and Vajrabhairava is not consciously mimicking his form (as the subduing deity does in the Rnying ma and Cakrasaṃvara versions of the myth).⁵⁶⁰ In the Kālacakra eschatology mythos Śiva, along with all the Hindu gods, is prophesized to join the Buddhist side against the Muslim forces in the final end-times battle, but this is the only Gsar ma myth of which I am aware in which

⁵⁶⁰ See Tāranātha’s collected works, vol. 10, pp. 41.6–43.2. My thanks to Bryan Cuevas for informing me of this source.

Śiva takes on the role of a *dharmapāla*. There are instances in certain Gsar ma texts in which Śiva appears as a fully enlightened meditational deity, most notably in Virūpa's and Avadhūtacandra's *Amṛtasiddhi* practices.⁵⁶¹ But these appear to be simply cases of direct borrowings from Śaiva practices transferred wholesale to Tibet.⁵⁶² And while there are a few scattered instances of Śiva or an overtly Śaivite deity appearing in Gsar ma contexts, these are all exceptions that prove the rule; generally speaking, in Gsar ma sources, Śiva has no practical importance as a source of power or object of worship in his own right.

The conclusion that Rudra plays a central role to Rnying ma soteriology, myth, and ritual, as opposed to Maheśvara's somewhat peripheral role in Gsar ma literature, is borne out by examining Sle lung's sources. In the entirety of the Maheśvara chapter in DCTS, I have been able to specifically identify ten separate Rnying ma canonical scriptures (root tantras) cited by Sle lung.⁵⁶³ Besides the *Gsang ba snying po'i rgyud* and the *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, he also quotes (more briefly) from the *Kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo*,⁵⁶⁴ *Mkha' 'gro rgya mtsho'i rgyud rgyas pa*,⁵⁶⁵ *Mchod bstod sgrub pa rtsa*

⁵⁶¹ Schaeffer 2002.

⁵⁶² According to a recent, as yet unpublished article by James Mallinson, the *Amṛtasiddhi* was originally a Buddhist text that was later adapted by Śaiva tradents. See Mallinson, James. "The Amṛtasiddhi: Haṭhayoga's Tantric Buddhist Source Text | James Mallinson - Academia.Edu." *Academia.edu*. N.p., 2016. Web. 22 Aug. 2016. This would mean that the *Amṛtasiddhi* as preserved in the Tibetan canon were Śaiva adaptations of a Buddhist practice reintegrated into a Buddhist context, maintaining Śaiva elements.

⁵⁶³ Note, however, that there are other titles cited which I have yet to identify, namely the *Legs ldan stag zhon gyi rgyud gsang ba snying gi 'khor lo nag po*, a text referred to as *Phyag rdor stod 'grel*, and two very general titles of ritual texts, the *Lha chen gyi sgrub skor* and *Ras gzigs kyi cho ga zhib mo*.

⁵⁶⁴ *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* (Mtshams brag edition) vol. 15, pp. 321.6-672.4.

⁵⁶⁵ Which is likely either the *Mkha' 'gro sde lnga las rgya mtsho'i rgyud* or the *Mkha' 'gro ma las rgya mtsho phyi ma'i rgyud*, or both. These tantras are side by side in vol. 33 of the Mtshams brag edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, spanning folios 818.5-875.6. Throughout the DCTS, at least in the sections I have examined, almost all of the Rnying ma tantras cited by Sle lung are in the Mtshams brag edition, but are sometimes not in any other edition, leading me to believe that he was consulting an edition at least very close in content to the Mtshams brag when he compiled the DCTS (alternatively he could simply have been consulting the texts in isolation, or based on oral transmission). When citing scriptures from the Bka' 'gyur, I cite the Snar thang edition (N), since Sle lung wrote the introduction to this edition, which was compiled in 1734 (the same year as the DCTS), and thus was also likely the edition he was referencing.

ba'i rgyud,⁵⁶⁶ *Dpal mgon po nag po dur khrod mngon par rol ba mtshon cha 'khor lo'i rgyud*,⁵⁶⁷ *Gri gug brtsegs pa'i rgyud*,⁵⁶⁸ *Nag po chen po gcer bu'i rgyud*,⁵⁶⁹ *Dpal nag po chen po me lce phreng ba'i rgyud*,⁵⁷⁰ and the *Gsang spu gri*.⁵⁷¹ On the other hand, I have been able to identify only two specific Gsar ma *yoginī* root tantras quoted from in the chapter – the *Dpal mkha' 'gro rgya mtsho rnal 'byor ma yi rgyud chen mo*,⁵⁷² and the *Dpal rdo rje nag po chen po khros pa'i mgon po gsang ba dngos grub 'byung ba zhes bya ba'i rgyud*.⁵⁷³ But the passages Sle lung quotes from these scriptures make no actual reference to Maheśvara/Śiva. In the case of the former, the quoted text is simply a general discussion of *pīṭha* sites, which Sle lung then explains were Śaivite sites taken over and purified by Heruka.⁵⁷⁴

The many Rnying ma sources in the DCTS on Lha chen, and the dearth of Gsar ma sources, reflects the history of Mahādeva/Lha chen as an important protector deity particularly (and perhaps exclusively) within the Rnying ma tradition, as one would expect given Rudra's expanded role and developed character in Rnying ma canonical myth. I have not found any Tibetan texts devoted to Lha chen prior to the eleventh century, so it may be that the practice does not predate this. A very early golden libation (*gser skyems*) liturgy attributed to Gnubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes (c. 9th-10th century), which includes a fairly extensive list of dharma protectors, makes no mention

⁵⁶⁶ Mtshams brag vol. 24, pp. 882.7-940.1.

⁵⁶⁷ One of the few exceptions to the rule that all the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* scriptures Sle lung mentions are in the Mtshams brag edition. This one is only found in the Sde dge edition, vol. 24, pp. 97b.7 -131b.7.

⁵⁶⁸ The *Man ngag rtseg pa gri gug gi rgyud*, in Mtshams brag vol. 46, pp. 142.7-162.2.

⁵⁶⁹ *Nag po chen po gzugs can gcer bu'i rgyud*. Mtshams brag vol. 46, pp. 162.2-177.4.

⁵⁷⁰ Mtshams brag vol. 46, pp. 38.4-64.5.

⁵⁷¹ *Dpal mgon po gsang ba spu gri phyi ma'i rgyud*. Mtshams brag vol. 43, pp. 618.1-621.2.

⁵⁷² N vol. 15, pp. 89-153.

⁵⁷³ N vol. 82, pp. 876-967.

⁵⁷⁴ DCTS vol. 1, pp. 43.19-20.

of Mahādeva, Rudra, Maheśvara, or any other overtly Śaivite deity form (though Mahākāla is mentioned).⁵⁷⁵

However, Mahādeva appears in several fairly advanced ritual and iconographical forms as the "lord of the *lha*" in Rnying ma treasure literature perhaps early as the thirteenth century, possibly with a cycle attributed to Guru Chos dbang (1212-1270).⁵⁷⁶ In the following centuries, ritual texts to overtly Śaivite protectors, with names like Lha chen, Dbang phyug chen po, Rudra, Thar pa nag po, and Mu stegs pa gu lang nag po, would appear in the treasure cycles of such Rnying ma luminaries as Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (1337-1408)⁵⁷⁷ and Padma gling pa (1450-1521),⁵⁷⁸ and from this period on Lha chen would consistently appear at the head of the thirty generals of the worldly *dregs pa* deities in Rnying ma *Bka' brgyad* literature.

But the seventeenth century in particular appears to have been a kind of high water mark, so to speak, of Rnying ma Śaivism, with important Lha chen ritual cycles appearing in that century in the treasure revelations of Bdud 'dul rdo rje (1615-1672), Gnam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje (1645-1667), and, most significantly, Gter bdag gling pa's TCKD. The Lha chen revelations of Mi 'gyur rdo rje and Gter bdag gling pa, specifically the origin myth of Lha chen found in both cycles, made twenty-four years apart in eastern Tibet and south-central Tibet respectively, are interesting to compare considering their apparent continuity and also striking differences. The origin myth in Mi 'gyur rdo rje's *Gnam chos* cycle, said to have been received in a vision from Lha

⁵⁷⁵ My thanks to Cathy Cantwell for providing me with her unpublished translation of this text. It appears in volumes one and two of O rgyan rtsa gsum gling pa's (1694-1738) *Gter chos*. Indra, not Śiva, is designated as the lord of the gods in this text.

⁵⁷⁶ The text in which, according to Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996: 269), Maheśvara is mentioned is the *Bka' brgyad kyi mngon par dregs pa'i dbu phyogs*, which according to Henk Blezer is part of Guru Chos dbang's *Bka' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs* cycle (email communication 3/3/2014). I have not been able to independently verify this, however, and it remains unsubstantiated.

⁵⁷⁷ See Boord (2013: 42).

⁵⁷⁸ Mu stegs gu lang nag po (or Black Infidel Maheśvara) is the third of Padma gling pa's "three black cycles" (Harding 2003: 142-144).

chen himself in 1656, is a strange, at times comical retelling of the *Dgongs 'dus pa'i mdo* myth of Thar pa nag po's fall from grace, his mutation into a worldly god of terrifying power, and his subsequent subjugation. In Mi 'gyur rdo rje's version, an unnamed lapsed monk suffers a series of unfortunate rebirths based less on his own malice and more on his own bad luck:

Innumerable incalculable eons ago, was born a man. That man became a monk. One time a dog scratched the face of a woman and that monk considered punishing the dog, but thought that would be inappropriate. With the angry lips (angry visage) of a dog, he killed the dog [with his anger?]. From that wish, his mind fell. That monk jumped into the water. After that he was born as a madman who also jumped into the water. He was born like that 500 times and did that bad behavior. After that, he was born as a madman. With a single stroke he conquered the madness. A lama who called him "Dog Lama" bestowed empowerment upon him. He was born as a dog 500 times. After that, he was born as a man. He requested empowerment from a lama and his actions were like the actions of a noxious spirit. He was born as a noxious spirit 500 times. Again, he was born as a man and requested empowerment and was called "Lama of the Obstructor Spirits." He was born 500 times as an obstructor spirit. Then he was born as a man again and requested empowerment and made prayers. He was born as a rich man. One hundred horses of that rich man were stolen by a bandit. Seven horse thieves carried them away. He was attacked by enemies who stole all his possessions. Then he became a beggar. He was begging in the region of the enemies and they separated him from whatever [he had] and then set him loose. He begged in the areas of thieves and they beat him. He went begging in the area of the bandits and they buried him in a pit. Then he prayed. In the birth after that he arose as a toxic god-demon who obstructed vows. After that he was born as a pernicious god-demon who was the lord of the charnel grounds. He was killed by the blue protector (Mahākāla?). He was reborn as Dbang phyug chen po.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁹ [126] *Shrī lo ki shwar na ma: dbang phyug chen po'i skyes rgyud ni: sngon bskal pa grangs med dpag tu med pa'i gong rol du: mig cig tu skyes so: mi de dge slong byas pa la: lan gcig khyi zhig gis bud med cig gi kha la 'drad pa la dge slong gis de'i lan mo byas: bsam blo btad nas mi rung lhung ba phog bsams nas khyi'i mchu brags pas khyi shi'o: de nas yang bas mas nas lhung ba yin par shes te: [127] dge slong nyid chu la mchongs so: de'i rgyab res mi smyon pa gcig tu skyes te de yang chur mchongs: bya ba spyod pa mi gshes thams cad de 'dra ba lnga brgyar skyes: de nas yang mi smyon pa gcig tu skyes pa la: gcod pa gcig gis smyo btul: bla ma gcig gis dbang bskur bas khyi bla ma zer bas: khyi'i skye ba lnga brgya blang: de rgyab mi gcig la skyes: bla ma la dbang zhus nas bla ma'i bya ba gnod sbyin gyi bya ba [128] 'dra ba zer: gnod sbyin gyi skye ba lnga brgya blang: yang mir skyes bla ma la dbang zhus bgegs kyi bla ma zer: bgegs kyi skye ba lnga brgya blang: de nas yang mir skyes bla ma la dbang zhus smon lam btab: mi phyug po gcig la skyes: mi phyugs po de'i rta brgya jag pas ded: rta bdun rgun mas khyer: dgras brgyab ste spyad cha thams cad khyer ro: de nas kho sprang nas song: dgra sar sprang bas ci yod phrol te btang: rkun ma sar sprang bas rkun mas brdud ste btad: jag pa sar sprad bas dong du sbas: der smon lam btab: ka de'i skye ba rgyab ma la dam la thogs pa'i lha 'dre gdug pa can gcig tu byung: de 'dra ba lnga brgyar skyes so: de'i rgyab res lha 'dre gdug pa can dur khrod kyi bdag po zhig tu skyes: der mgon sngon gyis bsad: de'i skye brgyab ma la dbang phyug chen por skyes: (Gnam chos vol. 5, pp. 126-128).*

Dbang phyug chen po is then subdued, not by a wrathful *Bka' brgyad* Heruka deity, but by Vajrapāṇi, recalling the simpler *yoga tantra* versions of the myth. After his subjugation and conversion, Dbang phyug chen po becomes a buddha named Thal ljang ngag dbang who, upon Avalokiteśvara's prompting, recreates his previous worldly form:

Avalokiteśvara said to Vajrapāṇi: "It is unsuitable if there is no appearance of a bad Maheśvara." Then buddha Thal ljang ngag dbang, having heard that, from the *vajra* in his right hand, filled [the space] within a *vajra* fence with light, which became Maheśvara.⁵⁸⁰

There is then a brief reference to Padmasambhava subduing, presumably, this emanated Maheśvara, but Mi 'gyur rdo rje does not elaborate on this part of the story any further. Gter bdag gling pa's TCKD cycle, however, contains a *lo rgyus* of Lha chen that seems to pick up right where Mi 'gyur rdo rje leaves off, telling the story of Padmasambhava's subjugation of Lha chen while in India, without any mention of Lha chen's previous lives or his cosmic battle with wrathful Buddhist deities. In this story, 500 non-Buddhist teachers, angry at having been defeated in debate by Padmasmbhava, recite mantras in order to summon Lha chen and send him to attack the Buddhist master. But when Lha chen attacks, Padmasambhava easily subdues him (quite peacefully) with a display of power. Lha chen immediately surrenders, is bound under oath, and then sent to slaughter the 500 non-Buddhists in a massive conflagration.⁵⁸¹

Regardless of the differences (or possible continuity) between Mi 'gyur rdo rje's and Gter bdag gling pa's Lha chen origin stories, the iconographical form of the deity in both cycles is virtually the same. Prior to the seventeenth century, Lha chen is commonly depicted as being either white or blue (or black), with iconographical

⁵⁸⁰ *spyen ras gzigs kyis phyag rdor la gsungs pa: ma legs par snang dbang phyug med na mi rungs gsungs pas: de sangs rgyas thal ljang ngag dbang gis gsan nas: phyag g.yas rdo rje 'dzin pa'i rdo rje'i rwa bar ma nas 'od zer sbos te: dbang phyug chen por gyur: (Gnam chos vol. 5, p. 131).*

⁵⁸¹ TCKD vol. 2, pp. 321-324.

similarities to his common non-Buddhist, peaceful and wrathful Indian descriptions. By the seventeenth century onward, however, Tibetan Rnying ma sources consistently depict him as being red colored, naked, ithyphallic, wearing a garland of lotuses, and wielding a hook and noose. Umā Devī is also usually seen with him, pressing amorously against his left side. That is, Lha chen appears as a standard magnetizing deity. This is the form of Lha chen found in both Gter bdag gling pa's and Mi 'gyur rdo rje's cycles, as well as Bdud 'dul rdo rje's revelations. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Sle lung and Bdud 'joms gling pa (1835-1904) (both of whom had numerous visions of and ritual texts devoted to Lha chen) both used this red, magnetizing form of Lha chen.⁵⁸²

Still, despite the fact that Lha chen seems to have been propitiated in Rnying ma sources from early in the *phyi dar* period, ritual texts focused on him are still comparatively uncommon. In the entirety of this massive *Rin chen gter mdzod* (hereafter RCGM) collection I have identified only seven texts dedicated to Lha chen Dbang phyug chen po, and three of them, including the longest at 45 pages, are extracted from the TCKD: the *Zab lam bde gshegs kun 'dus las bka' srung lha chen gyi lo rgyus*,⁵⁸³ *Lha chen gyi rjes gnang thun mong ma yin pa*,⁵⁸⁴ and *Lha chen gyi me mchod khams gsum dbang byed*.⁵⁸⁵ Another, the *Lha chen dbang phyug chen po'i sgrub thabs rjes gnang bcas pa las 'brel rtsal gyi gter ma'i lugs bzhin brjod pa'i le tshan*,⁵⁸⁶ is from

⁵⁸² Bdud 'joms gling pa's autobiography records several visionary encounters with Lha chen, appearing in this red magnetizing form, as well as discussion of his practice and propitiation (see Traktung Dudjom Lingpa 2011). This particular red Lha chen is so intriguing because it appears to be a particularly Tibetan innovation, and seems to be a conflation of Śiva with another Indian god, Kāmadeva, who in Indian mythology is one of the deities Śiva is best known for conquering. In this respect, the Tibetan Lha chen appears to have undergone a transformation similar to that of another important Rnying ma protector, Rāhula. Rāhula, which means "the conqueror of Rāhu," also has the Tibetan name "Khyab 'jug chen po," which translates the Sanskrit "Mahāviṣṇu." Viṣṇu famously conquers Rāhu, the eclipse *asura*, in Indian mythology as early as the Mahābhārata. Therefore, the Rnying ma Rāhula is essentially Viṣṇu, but his iconographical form is closer to and clearly based on Rāhu (see Bailey 2015).

⁵⁸³ RCGM vol. 83, pp. 1-45, which is a collation of all the Lha chen texts (slightly rearranged) from volume one of the TCKD, pp. 319-406.

⁵⁸⁴ RCGM vol. 83, pp. 47-57. TCKD vol. 2, pp. 77-89.

⁵⁸⁵ RCGM vol. 83, pp. 59-68. TCKD vol. 2, pp. 141-150.

⁵⁸⁶ RCGM, vol. 94, pp. 327-339.

the *Sgrub thabs 'dod 'jo bum bzang*,⁵⁸⁷ a *sādhana* collection written and compiled by Gter bdag gling pa and his younger brother, Lo chen Dharma śrī, though it is attributed to an earlier treasure revealer, Pad ma las 'bral rtsal (1291-1315).

Admittedly, as we have seen, there are other extant Rnying ma texts dedicated to Śiva worship which, as far as I can tell, do not appear in the RCGM. Thus, Gter bdag gling pa's cycle is not unique in the importance it places on Śiva, but it certainly seems to be the foremost, at least in the modern received Rnying ma tradition. And as far as Sle lung was concerned, Gter bdag gling pa's cycle is of primary significance for his Dbang phyug chen po chapter in the DCTS. I believe Śiva and Umā's particular importance in the TCKD, and not only because of the central role Rudra/Maheśvara plays in Vajrayāna myth or Rnying ma mythological literature more generally, explains why Sle lung chose to place Śiva at the head of his pantheon of protector deities. After all, he bookends the chapter on Śiva with references to texts in the TCKD cycle, one being a praise to Maheśvara, and the other the *lo rgyus* which describes Padmasambhava's binding the deity under oath.⁵⁸⁸ And like the TCKD, Sle lung makes it clear that Śiva is, in reality, Avalokiteśvara, as we have seen making several references to Maheśvara as Avalokiteśvara's emanation in the first few pages of the chapter.⁵⁸⁹ Notably, the fact that Kalsang (2007) and Klong rdol Ngag dbang blo bzang entirely ignore Dbang phyug chen po in their texts reveals a Gsar ma, probably specifically a Dge lugs pa, bias, a bias which was probably present in Sle lung's time as well, and which he may have been specifically responding against by placing Dbang phyug chen po at the head of his pantheon.

⁵⁸⁷ Vol. 2, pp. 363-376.

⁵⁸⁸ TCKD, vol. 1, pp. 341-344 and pp. 319-325, respectively.

⁵⁸⁹ He cites, for one, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, which is the main biographical sūtra of Avalokiteśvara and the origin of the famous *om ma ni padme hūṃ* mantra. In this text, Śiva is listed, along with a number of other Hindu deities, as having been emanated by the bodhisattva of compassion. See Studholme (2002) for a study of this scripture, which has been critically reviewed by Mette (2004).

Before closing our discussion of Lha chen, I would like to briefly examine the typology of Rnying ma ritual invocation of Lha chen, which appears to be based in part on Indian, non-Buddhist traditions of Śiva-liṅgaṃ worship. In the Tibetan Lha chen ritual texts I have examined, the primary *sku brten* of Lha chen that a practitioner is instructed to construct prior to the invocation of the deity is a *gtor ma* in the shape of a standard Śiva-liṅgaṃ. However, as is the case with most Buddhist protector deity ritual, the primary goal is not self-identification with the deity, or devotionism for its own sake but, on some level at least, trans-theistically coercing the deity to carry out the *yogin*'s will. For instance, a pure vision revelation written by Sle lung instructs:

...in a copper bowl mix together various grains and wholesome barley meal with the three sweets (honey, sugar, and molasses) place a very large erect red *liṅgaṃ* surrounded by three layers of precious jewels, ornamented by a red ritual arrow, together with outer and inner offerings. Abiding in the generation stage of an appropriate(?) meditation deity such as Hayagrīva or Guhyajñāṇāḍākinī bless the offering substances. Purify the *liṅgaṃ*. From within emptiness, amidst raging red light, [appearing in] the primary form of the Excellent Great Chief, Ancestor of the World, his (feet) rooted in the *nāga* realm and his legs flexing in the human realm, his head reaching the *brahma* realm. The light rays radiating from his luster are difficult to fathom..."Om Mahādeva Akarsha Yadza" thus recite offering incense and music...exhort with light rays from one's own heart, and imagine [him] performing the four activities without obstruction.⁵⁹⁰

In any case, it seems that Lha chen, while a mythologically and doctrinally powerful figure in early Rnying ma scripture in the form of Rudra, and ritually important within subjugation and confessional rites,⁵⁹¹ did not become an important cultic figure in his own right within Rying ma practice until sometime later. This cultic

⁵⁹⁰ *zangs gzhang du 'bru sna bzang po'i phy'e mngar gsum gyis sbrus par ling+ga dmar po shin tu che ba gyen du 'greng zhing/ mtha' nor bu rin po che sum brtsegs kyis bskor ba mda' dar dmar pos brgyan pa phyi nang gi nyer spyod dang bcas pa bshams/ rta mgrin gsang ye sogs skabs babs kyi yi dam gyi bskyed rim la gnas pas/ mchod rdzas brlabs/ lin+ga bsang sbyangs/ stong pa'i ngang las 'od zer dmar po 'khrug pa'i dbus su legs ldan tshogs rje chen po srid mes kyi rnam pa can rtsa ba klu yul du zug cing/ rkeng pa [149] mi yul du ldem pa/ mgo po tshangs pa'i yul du slebs pa/ gzi brjid dpag par dka' ba las 'od zer 'phros/...Om ma hā de wa a karsha ya dza% zhes spos rol bya/...rang gi thugs ka'i 'od zer gyis bskul bas/ las bzhi thogs med du mdzad par bsams la/ (Dag snang lha chen gyi sgrub skor las tshogs rdzogs rim gcig chog srog sdud chen po BRGB vol. 10, pp. 148-149). A similar ritual is described in Mi 'gyur rdo rje's Lha chen cycle with an illustration of the *liṅgaṃ gtor ma*.*

⁵⁹¹ See Mayer (1998) for this longstanding importance of Rudra in Rnying ma ritual and liturgy.

import was firmly established by at least the seventeenth century and further solidified, with the help of Sle lung, in the eighteenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century his importance was so established that the Rnying ma explorers of Padma bkod had come to identify Lha chen dbang phyung chen po as the protector of the heart *cakra* of that sacred land.⁵⁹²

This completes a 180-degree turn within Buddhist, specifically Tibetan thought and attitudes regarding Śiva, in which he was at first thoroughly demonized as the pre-eminent antithesis of Buddhist ethics, rhetorically brought into the Buddhist fold, and finally completely re-apotheosized as an actively worshipped and cosmologically supreme *dharmapāla*. The shifting, enantiodromic Buddhist attitudes toward this deity, as well as his apparent conflation with Kāmadeva, are an interesting example of the Buddhist attitudes of non-duality (be it from a Prajñāpāramitā, tantric, or *rdzogs chen* perspective) being played out within the realms of mythology, ritual, and iconography.

The Structure of a Protector Biography

In addition to the TCKD connection, or any other considerations he may have had, Sle lung's decision to place Śiva first in the DCTS reflects, whether it was Sle lung's intention or not, the overwhelming importance of the Rudra subjugation myth in not simply Vajrayāna myth and ritual, but also as an apparent literary template for later protector deity subjugation and conversion narratives. Not only did the Rudra myth itself proliferate throughout Rnying ma scripture and ritual, it also created a standard by which later (twelfth century and onward) Rnying ma authors, in particular, conceptualized the subjugation of hostile forces. In other words, the origin myths in the DCTS drawn from a variety of Rnying ma scriptures for deities such as Pe har, Tsi'u

⁵⁹² Sardar-Afkhami 1996: 9.

dmar po, Khyab 'jug chen po, and Rdo rje legs pa all have the same basic structure as the Rudra narrative. For instance, here is one story about the origin of Rdo rje legs pa:

During the time of the teachings of the previous buddha, 'Od srung (Skt. Dīpaṃkara), Rdo rje legs pa was born into a family of *vaiśyas*, and was named Shrī tā la. In the presence of Dīpaṃkara, he took the lay vows. He engendered the aspiration for enlightenment. One day, he committed a crime, stealing a neighbor's goat and went to a charnel ground. He ate goat meat and dressed himself in goat skin and corpse garments. He lived there while killing men and having sex with many kinds of women. Because of this, he became indistinguishable from the charnel ground demons. Then [one day], he ate the poisoned flesh of a deer, which caused his death.⁵⁹³

This is an almost exact reenactment of Thar pa nag po's fall. And, as in the Rudra narrative, Shrītāla is reborn as a horrible monster which runs amok until he is violently subdued by a wrathful buddha, in this case Hayagrīva. The structure is repeated in the origin myths of other deities as well. In another version of Rdo rje legs pa's origin,⁵⁹⁴ he is a Buddhist yogin, Pu ta pa, practicing assiduously in the charnel ground of Sītavana ("Cool Grove"), when an evil king, fearing his power, sends his ministers to burn him alive. Before he dies, Pu ta pa casts a curse, vowing to be reborn as a *yakṣa*, which he does, gathering a number of other powerful demons under his power and committing a holocaust against living beings in the four great continents until he is subdued by Vajrapāṇi.

The pattern repeats with Khyab 'jug chen po (Rāhula) who was a yogin falsely accused of having an affair with a queen and burned at the stake. His death curse turned him into a monster in his next birth.⁵⁹⁵ Pe har was a king-turned-monk named Zla 'od

⁵⁹³ *sngon sangs rgyas 'od srung kyi bstan pa'i dus su rdor legs 'di nyid rje'u'i rigs la shrī tā la zhes bya bar 'khrungs/ 'od srung kyi spyang sngar dge bsnyen gyi sdom pa blangs shing byang chub tu sems bskyed/ de'i tshe'i skabs shig khyim mtshes kyi ra rkus pas/ nongs te dur khrod du byon/ ra sha zos/ ra lpags dang ro gos gon/ pho byung bsgral/ mo rigs thams cad la sbyor ba byed kyin bzhugs pas dur khrod kyi mi ma yin rnams dang gnyis su med par gyur/ de'i tshe sha ba dug zos pas shi ba'i sha zhig gsol bas rkyen byas te sku gshegs* (DCTS vol. 2, pp. 183.2-183.9).

⁵⁹⁴ DCTS vol. 2, pp. 188.6 - 190.7. Taken from the *Dge bsnyen dgra gsang nag po'i rgyud*, *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* (Mtshams brag ed.) vol. 44, pp. 788.4-814.7.

⁵⁹⁵ DCTS vol. 2, pp. 2.3 - 6.23. Sle lung's references are not as clear in this section of the text, but the only specific source he refers to is the *Gza' nad bso thabs kyi 'phyong gi man ngag* by Bya khyung pa

gzhon nu, who fell in love with a brahmin woman and had sex with her in a temple, and killed his abbot with black magic after being caught.⁵⁹⁶ Tsi'u dmar po, too, was a fully ordained monk who began a serial murder and rape spree before being executed for his crimes. He, too, casts a death curse which turns him into a monster in his next life.⁵⁹⁷

Just as in the Rudra myth, the dharma protector-to-be begins as a Buddhist, and then has a catastrophic fall from grace. Sometimes this is beyond his control, as in the case of Khyab 'jug chen po and the Pu ta pa version of Rdo rje legs pa's origin. But all of them end up, in some sense, failures as dharma practitioners, whether because they cast curses or commit multiple murders and hedonistic sex acts (or, in Tsi'u dmar po's case, both). And yet they are also endowed with great power due to their former status as practitioners of Buddhism. If Rudra is the paradigmatic anti-Buddha, then these other protector *rnam thar* represent miniature reenactments of Rudra's life.

This type of myth, which we might call the "subjugation narrative," if Sle lung's sources are indicative of a broader pattern in Tibetan Buddhist literature, appears to be a largely Rnying ma phenomenon, as we would expect given the Rnying ma emphasis on the Rudra subjugation myth. While, as befits his dual identity of a Dge lugs pa and Rnying ma lama, Sle lung tries to strike a balance between, and to reconcile, Rnying ma and Gsar ma sources throughout the DCTS, the majority of his sources appear to be Rnying ma,⁵⁹⁸ and the Gsar ma myths quoted in the DCTS that I have examined do not follow the standard pattern of the subjugation narrative. In the Mahākāla chapter, for

ngag dbang padma (fifteenth/sixteenth century), which I have so far been unable to locate (see Bailey 2012: 119-120).

⁵⁹⁶ DCTS vol. 2, p. 36.6 ff.

⁵⁹⁷ DCTS vol. 2, pp. 115.16-116.

⁵⁹⁸ There are likely personal factors that explain this disparity, however. While Sle lung was technically a Dge lugs *sprul sku* and generally had a syncretic attitude, certainly by this point in his life he was, practically speaking, largely Rnying ma in his personal practice and philosophical outlook. He states in the colophon of the DCTS that he wrote the text after doing a *tshogs* feast ritual before images of Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal (DCTS vol 2, 310.21-24). Also, the anti-Rnying ma polemics, and at times downright persecution of the Rnying ma, in the previous decade and a half may have prompted him to concentrate particularly on valorizing Rnying ma protectors in the DCTS.

example, this protector's origin story simply states that he was born the son of Maheśvara and Umā who violently subdues all *māras* in existence.⁵⁹⁹ Another account, describing the origins of crow-faced Mahākāla, is closer to some of the Rnying ma myths mentioned above – a yogin-practitioner who is highly accomplished in Cakrasaṃvara practice arouses the ire of a non-Buddhist king, who has him blinded. The monk vows to destroy the king, but also wishes to become an emanation of Cakrasaṃvara. The reborn monk eventually does kill the king's sons and his retinue, and then is subdued by Cakrasaṃvara.⁶⁰⁰ Here, the protector is simply carrying out karmic justice against specific targets, and does not run wild massacring people indiscriminately as Rāhula and Rdo rje legs pa are described as doing before their subjugation. Also, in the case of crow-faced Mahākāla, the yogin specifically wishes to be a Buddhist protector, something absent from the Rnying ma accounts. Obviously many more Rnying ma and Gsar ma myths need to be examined before hard and fast distinctions are made between their protector mythologies. However, my preliminary findings based on the DCTS are that the Rnying ma accounts seem to emphasize much more the theme of reformed absolute evil, in the vein of the Rudra subjugation myth.

That Sle lung calls these myths of reformed evil *rnam thar* goes to the heart of his purpose in the DCTS, and hearkens back to his statements in the introduction to the text that suggest that there should be no distinctions made between high and low protectors. For Sle lung, all protectors, even those who commit the most horrendously evil acts as humans and then later as demons before their subjugation, are ultimately inseparable from fully enlightened beings. Rudra is actually Avalokiteśvara, and thus only appears to be a worldly deity being subdued as part of the divine pedagogical

⁵⁹⁹ DCTS vol.1, pp. 70-72. In other words, Mahākāla begins life as a Buddhist protector already, not as a kind of mini-*māra* himself who requires conversion.

⁶⁰⁰ DCTS vol. 1, pp. 72-74.

displays of the buddhas. After relating the myth of an extended battle between Vajrahūmkara and Maheśvara (taken from an unnamed *yoga tantra*),⁶⁰¹ in which Maheśvara actually manages to hold his own, at least for a while, Sle lung declares:

If [Mahādeva] was not an authentic, perfect buddha, but an ordinary, mundane god, how would he have been capable of breaking the *vajra* noose and *vajra* shackles which arose from the manifestations of the *tathāgatas*? Both the one tamed and the tamer had equal intentions, establishing manifestations and performing like that in order to teach... [14.3] As for the view that he is a mundane god, this is a fool's opinion.⁶⁰²

Following the Maheśvara chapter, for each major deity Sle lung discusses, he usually begins by identifying the protector as being inseparable from or identical with a “higher,” fully enlightened buddha. Rāhula is just a form of Vajrapāṇi, Rdo rje legs pa is actually a manifestation of Padma Heruka (Hayagrīva), and so forth. And any evidence to the contrary, that the protector in question is an ordinary being is, according to Sle lung, an illusory display. Sle lung repeats this argument continuously throughout the text, but one of his most interesting discussions of this subject comes in the Rdo rje legs pa chapter, where he lists the different forms of this deity:

From the *Ten Chapter Tantra of Rdo rje legs pa*,⁶⁰³ “Hūṃ! At the time he was born among the gods of the desire realm, he was Kun dga' bo (The All-Joyful), king of the wealth gods. The time had come to take up sandalwood, bdellium incense, gold, and the five precious jewels. [When] he was the son from the family of Thag bzang the *asura*, he was a lord of death with a rat's head who made weapons. He took the hearts of cats as offerings. The time of Mgar ba nag po (Black Ironsmith) had come. In the human realm, as the son of King Singha, he assumed the birth of the hero Stag 'dul (Tiger Tamer). He took tiger hearts as offerings. The time of Rgya stag khra ba (Speckled Indian Tiger) had come. When he took on the body of an animal, he was born as a wolf.

⁶⁰¹ DCTS vol. 1, pp. 7-14.

⁶⁰² *yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas min par 'jig rten gyi lha rang ga wa zhiḡ yin na de ba zhīn gshegs pa'i rnam 'phrul las byung ba rdo rje zhag pa gcod pa dang/ rdo rje lcags sgrog gcod pa sogs ji ltar byed nus/ gdul bya dang 'dul byed gnyis ka dgongs pa mnyam pa'i rnam sprul gyi bkod pa ston par bzhed nas de ltar mdzad pa yin no/ [14.3] 'jig rten gyi lha rang ga bar 'dzin pa ni blun po'i lugs so* (DCTS vol. 1, pp. 13.16-14.3). Here Sle lung seems to be specifically responding to detractors of Dbang phyug chen po.

⁶⁰³ *Rdor legs pa'i rgyud le'u bcu*. Likely a reference to the *Dam can rdo rje legs pa mgar ba nag po'i sgrub skor las mgar ba nag po rdo rje legs pa'i rgyud le'u bcu*, the ninth text in the MNBB (text “*ta*”), also found in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* (vol. 61, pp. 327-342). According to the colophon in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* edition (but absent in the MNBB), this was a treasure text extracted from a temple in Mkho mthing in Lho brag by Kun skyong gling pa (1396-1477).

Having killed a flock of goats, he feasted on their flesh and blood. He took goat hearts as offerings. The time of Lcags spyang sngon po (Blue Iron Wolf) had come. When, by the ripening of karma, he was born in the hells, he was born as Lcags sdigs mgo bo dgu pa (Nine-headed Iron Scorpion)... [191] when he received the body of a hungry ghost, his father was the *dmu btsan* Rol pa and his mother was the demon planet Smin dkar (White Eyebrows). This ghostly *btsan* dwelt in U yug crag, and came from a maroon-colored castle (*bla mkhar*, “soul” or “elevated” castle). Thus it says. *However, those were not a succession of ordinary births and deaths and independently existing beings; rather they are demonstrated in accordance with the perceptions of karmically distinct trainees.* [emphasis added] For instance, a manifestation of the one called the goddess Tsandi ka (Skt. Caṇḍikā⁶⁰⁴), who had a red-colored body and held a knife and skull, a form of Dud sol ma (Skt. Dhūmāvātī)⁶⁰⁵ who, it is explained, previously served as the wife of *Dha sha grī wa* (Skt. Daśagrīva),⁶⁰⁶ having passed away, even though it seems she does not exist, she displays the mode of departing (dying) in response to the dispositions of those to be tamed. [Rdo rje legs pa’s] manifestation of a series of births is like that. One should understand it like that.⁶⁰⁷

Sle lung never explains why the deities choose to manifest in these ways, other than to “tame beings to be tamed.” But he assures the reader that even the most apparently worldly deities are, in fact, manifestations of enlightenment, “envision[ing] the cosmos as a fractal structure in which each phenomenon is ‘formally’ similar to all others and to the totality.”⁶⁰⁸ Sle lung’s perspective throughout the DCTS is thus

⁶⁰⁴ A form of the Hindu goddess Durga.

⁶⁰⁵ One of the ten *Mahāvidyā* goddesses.

⁶⁰⁶ One of the names of Rāvaṇa, the demon king of Laṅkā, best known as the main antagonist of the Indian epic the *Ramāyāna*, who sometimes appears in Buddhist texts as a Buddhist ruler. He appears in the *Dgongs pa ’dus pa’i mdo* as the principal recipient of the tantra’s teachings. (See Dalton 2011: 260 n. 28).

⁶⁰⁷ *Rdor legs kyi rgyud le’u bcu pa las/ hūm/ ’dod kham lha ru skyes pa’i tshe/ ’dzam la’i* [Beijing edition reads: *dzam lha*] *rgyal po kun dga’ bo/ tsandan gu gul dkar po gser/ rin chen lnga zhes dus la bab/ lha min thags bzang rigs kyi sras/ gsod byed byil gdong mtshon cha brdung/ byi la’i snying gi mchod pa bzhes/ mgar ba nag po’i dus la babs/ mi yul singa rgyal po’i sras/ dpa’ bo stag ’dul skye ba blangs/ stag snying mchod pa ’di bzhes la/ rgya stag khra bo’i dus la bab/ dud ’gro’i lus blangs spyang kir skyes/ ra khyu bsad nas sha khrag gsol/ ra snying mchod pa ’di bzhes la/ lcags spyang sngon mo’i dus la bab/ dmyal bar skye dus rnam smin gyis/ lcags sdig mgo bo dgu par skyes/ ... [191] yi dwags lus ni/ blangs pa’i tshe/ yab ni dmu btsan rol pa dang/ yum ni bdud bza’ smin dkar bu/ btsan ’gong ’u yug brag la gnas/ bla mkhar smug po’i gnas nas byon/ zhes gsungs pas de dag kyang ’gro ba rang ga ba’i skye shis ’phos par lha bu’i skye rgyud dang/ ’gro ba rang tshan pa min pas gdul bya’i snang ngor de dang der bstan pa yin no/ dper na lha mo tsandi ka zhes pa’i rnam ’gyur sku mdog po gri thod thogs pa ’di dud sol ma’i sku sngon ma srin po dha sha grī wa’i chung ma mdzad mkhan de yin par bshad pas/ da lta tshe ’phos nas med pa lta bur snang na’ang gdul bya’i snang ngor gshegs pa’i tshul bstan pa las rnam ’gyur snga phyi gnyis ka yang da bzhugs pa bzhin du ’di’i skye rgyud kyi rnam ’gyur rnam kyang de ltar shes par bya’o (DCTS vol. 2, pp. 190.13-191.11).*

⁶⁰⁸ Rambelli 2013: 35. Rambelli is discussing Japanese esoteric Buddhism, but this statement is applicable, I believe, to Sle lung’s apparent understanding of reality as revealed in the DCTS.

decidedly *ris med* in orientation. The term *ris med* has usually been translated by scholars as “nonsectarian,” “ecumenical,” “nonpartisan,” or “eclectic”, referring primarily to the nineteenth century *ris med* movement in eastern Tibet.⁶⁰⁹ However, prior to this, “*ris med*” was, in some contexts, used as a technical term stemming from Rnying ma *rdzogs chen* philosophy which means “boundaryless-ness” or “nondiscrimination.” This philosophy was greatly promoted by Gter bdag gling pa at Smin gro gling, and likely inspired Sle lung’s outlook when he studied there in 1717.⁶¹⁰ In fact, Sle lung declares in the beginning of his autobiography that:

I have un-fabricated pure vision toward all the accomplished [masters] without bias (*ris med*) such as the Sa skya, Dge lugs, Rnying ma, ’Brug pa Bka’ brgyud, Karma Bka’ brgyud, etc. My mind has increased respect toward the holders of these [various] teachings and when I think about this, I have pride in my own powerful realizations. I have deeply penetrating single-pointed respect for all the embodiments of objects of refuge, including all the billions of peaceful and wrathful deities such as the *yi dams* and dharma protectors. In this way I have obtained the supreme approach to receive all blessings.⁶¹¹

Thus the DCTS can be read as much more than a simple collection of origin myths. It is, in fact, a fairly complex theological and philosophical treatise on at least three distinct levels. First, Sle lung is expressing a *ris med* ethic of non-sectarianism by mixing Rnying ma and Gsar ma narratives together, placing them on equal footing, as it were, and attempting to reconcile them. Second, Sle lung’s rejection of the traditional dichotomy between worldly and transcendent protectors expresses a *ris med* worldview in the sense of “nondiscrimination.” And finally, his emphasis on the (primarily, if not

⁶⁰⁹ See Smith (2001: 227-272) and Samuel (2003).

⁶¹⁰ See Townsend (2012) also for a discussion of the “cosmopolitan” *ris med* sensibility promoted at Smin gro gling.

⁶¹¹ *Da lta ni sa dge rnying ’brug po kar sogs mdor na ris med kyi grub mtha’ la dag snang bcos min dang/ de dag gi bstan ’dzin rnams la mos gus sogs gong ’phel du gyur pa ’di nyid blo nang bkug gis bltas dus rang gi rtogs pa drag pa zhig tu rom zhing/ yi dam chos skyong sogs rab ’byams zhi khro mtha’ dag kyang skyabs gnas kun ’dus gcig tu nges pa’i mos gus gting tshugs pa ’di byin rlabs ’jug pa’i sgo dam par thob ste mchi* (Blo bzang ’phrin las 2009: 7).

exclusively, *Rnying ma*) narratives of the apotheosis of absolute evil expresses the Atiyoga philosophy of radical non-dualism, in which the *rnam thar* of Rudra and his related spirit villains paradigmatically and allegorically express existential truths according to *rdzogs chen* thought, including original enlightenment, primordial ignorance, and the necessity of liberation through Vajrayāna practices.⁶¹² Why were protector deities so important to *Sle lung*? Perhaps because he understood them, and their biographies, to be archetypal expressions of the human experience. It could also be said that deities like Rudra are “metaphors” for sentient beings in general. But to use “metaphor” is a misnomer because it seems obvious *Sle lung* and Tibetan Buddhists in general understood Rudra and other protector deities to be, on some level at least, literal beings.

The Legacy of the *Ocean of Oath-Bound* and the Politics of Protectors

One of the most interesting aspects of the DCTS is its theogonic themes. A “theogony,” named after the famous work by the Greek poet Hesiod, is a composition that gives a systematic account of the origin and genealogical descent of a particular pantheon of deities. Various collections of Tibetan scriptures, in particular the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* and the Bon po canon, abound with various theogonic origin myths. However, Bon po scriptures, such as the first six chapters of the *Mdzod phug*, the Bon po version of the *abhidharma*, give narratives of the origin of the world and the concomitant birth of the Bon pantheon in detail unlike anything found in Buddhist scriptures.⁶¹³ The closest Buddhist parallels are found in the Mahāyoga tantras of the *Rnying ma* canon. These narratives, however, rather than being comprehensive, multi-

⁶¹² For more on the connection between *rdzogs chen* philosophy and the Rudra myth, see Kapstein 2000: 176 and Mayer 1998: 284-286.

⁶¹³ Karmay 1998: 127-132.

generational theogonies of an entire pantheon, are instead disconnected origin myths of individual deities, usually deities classified as protectors.⁶¹⁴ These myths are also technically theogonies, but very abbreviated compared to their Bon po counterparts, with the Rnying ma texts usually only describing one generation of descent – the protector in question and his demonic parents. One possible explanation for this is that Bon po theogonies are structurally based on ancient pre-Buddhist Tibetan clan lineages, while Buddhist deity origin stories are based on *jātaka* tales.⁶¹⁵

While the Bon po theogonies are many, varied, and contradictory, there appears to be more of an effort in Bon po scriptures to produce what Bruce Lincoln has termed an "explicit pantheon." Lincoln defines an "explicit" pantheon as one in which an author imposes a systematic order on "a previously loose, even amorphous collection of gods." An "implicit" pantheon, by contrast, is "less a fixed system...than a repertoire or anthology that remains always-evolving."⁶¹⁶ Usually, a certain culture's pantheon shifts from being implicit to explicit when a particular author, either indigenous or exogenous to the tradition, writes a treatise in which he purposely organizes and sets out (at least what he personally views as) a canonical or at least semi-canonical vision of how the pantheon exists, including precise theogonic details. A perfect example of such a shift is Snorri Sturluson's (1179-1241) thirteenth century *Prose Edda*, which was the first comprehensive attempt to organize, or make explicit, the Norse pantheon.⁶¹⁷

I would argue that the disconnected, or at best loosely connected, deity origin myths found in the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* as well as countless Rnying ma *gter ma*

⁶¹⁴ See, for instance, the *Bdud bya rog mgo brtsegs gsang ba sgrol byed kyi rgyal po ki kang rog ta'i mdo snying gzer nag po'i rgyud chen po* in the *Mtshams brag* edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* (vol. 46, pp. 276-361) which explains the origin of the fearsome deity "Ki kang," later known as Rāhula. See also Bailey 2015: 62-63, n. 90.

⁶¹⁵ My thanks to Ulrike Roesler for this observation.

⁶¹⁶ Lincoln 2012: 18.

⁶¹⁷ For a recent comprehensive study of Sturluson and his work, see Wanner (2008).

cycles constitute an implicit pantheon. What is probably the earliest extant Tibetan Buddhist work that at least begins to attempt to bring systematic order to the Rnying ma pantheon, and the Tibetan Buddhist protector pantheon more generally, is Sle lung's DCTS. Sle lung, in his running commentary, does make the occasional attempt to clarify theogonical descent among the various protectors he discusses. The clearest of these comes in the opening section of the text where he, as we saw above, unequivocally declares that the deity Śiva Mahādeva, whom he identifies as the progenitor or literal "god"-father of all other protector deities, is an emanation of Avalokiteśvara.⁶¹⁸ This clear-cut identification of Avalokiteśvara-Śiva as essentially the universal creator god is taken directly from the TCKD cycle. Beyond that, however, for every deity after Śiva, Sle lung does not systematically synthesize a cohesive theogony, but rather presents a host of varying accounts from numerous textual sources, most of which appear to have been originally composed in relative isolation from each other, and thus contradict each other. For instance, in a section on Rdo rje legs pa, Sle lung gives at least three completely different origin stories, in which three different, unrelated pairs of demonic parents are identified.⁶¹⁹ As we have seen, throughout the DCTS, Sle lung consistently explains away these contradictory accounts by simply rhetorically falling back on the Buddhist doctrine of skillful means which, in part, holds that enlightened deities can appear in a variety of forms based on what is most helpful for their intended audience. Thus, from Sle lung's perspective, the variant origin myths are all equally true, and part of the buddhas' pedagogical display.

While it may be hard to argue that Sle lung's bricolage text constitutes an "explicit" pantheon as such, there is at least an attempt to impose some structure on an

⁶¹⁸ While the DCTS is mainly structured kathenotheistically, there is an argument to be made that Sle lung's pantheon is actually henotheistic in that it posits Śiva (as a form of Avalokiteśvara) as temporally prior and cosmologically superior to the later deities.

⁶¹⁹ DCTS vol. 2, pp. 180.25ff.

otherwise completely nebulous collection of mythological accounts. While there is no real comprehensive theogony in the DCTS, Sle lung makes numerous textual references to support the view that different deities are in some way genealogically related to each other. Many such references are contradictory, but some, such as the idea that Mahākāla is the son of Śiva, appear to be fairly standard and definitive.

The DCTS is not Sle lung's only theogonic text. In 1729, five years before the production of his masterwork on protector deity mythology, Sle lung also produced a *dag snang* ("pure vision") text that describes a definitive (without competing accounts), two-generation theogony of King Ge sar. The story in this text was said to have been told to Sle lung by a deity in a vision during a festival celebrating Ge sar's marriage to the goddess Rdo rje g.yu sgron ma, one of the twelve *brtan ma* goddesses. In this theogony, Ge sar is said to be the youngest of fifteen children, all local worldly deities, produced through the copulation of the god Gnyan chen ger mtsho and the goddess 'Bum 'od kyi me tse.⁶²⁰ Incidentally, it is said in the text that this was a union that was prophesied and encouraged by a Bon po sage, thus perhaps revealing Sle lung's pro-Bon syncretic inclinations.⁶²¹ In any case, at least a few members of this pantheon of fifteen deities are mentioned in the later DCTS, but not in any detail, and Sle lung seems to have been loath to cite his own visionary experiences in the more scholastically rigorous compilation text, which would also explain the absence of his personal protector Nyi ma gzhon nus.

The extent of the later influence of the DCTS is hard to gauge, but it does seem to have been quite influential at least within Sle lung's immediate circle of disciples. Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje (1721-1769) who was one of Sle lung's students, and is

⁶²⁰ This account is apparently unique and not found in the more well-known literature on Ge sar's life and origins (George FitzHerbert, personal communication).

⁶²¹ Given that Rdo rje skyabs byed was from a Bon po family (discussed in the previous chapter), it seems Sle lung may have had a consistent connection to Bon po practitioners in the latter part of his life.

sometimes identified as Sle lung's son,⁶²² wrote a text a decade after the DCTS entitled *A bse'i byung khungs lo rgyus mdo tsam brjod pa*, or simply *A bse'i lo rgyus* (*The History of A bse*, henceforth ABLG). This text is a tiny fraction of the length of Sle lung's DCTS and primarily discusses only one protector, A bse, who according to some sources is one of the three main protector deities of Bon, and the primordial lord of the *btsan* spirits.⁶²³ Interestingly enough, A bse is named as one of the older brothers of Ge sar in Sle lung's pure vision text.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the ABLG is the identification of A bse, a Bon po deity, as the latest product of a distinctly Buddhist theogony which, unlike in Sle lung's DCTS, is laid out in precise, definitive detail in the first few pages of the text.⁶²⁴ Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje, also known as G.yung mgon rdo rje, a possibly Bon-influenced name,⁶²⁵ appears to have been consciously syncretizing the Buddhist and Bon po pantheons along the same lines that Sle lung did in his Ge sar pure vision account, but in much more explicit detail. And while his theogony appears to rely on Sle lung's DCTS as its main or perhaps only source (though it is not cited directly),⁶²⁶ Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje produces a single, self-contained, internally consistent account of the genealogical descent of five generations of protector deities, producing

⁶²² For instance, in Heller (1992). According to the current Sle lung Tulku (personal communication), he was Bzhad pa'i rdo rje's "heart son," (meaning his primary disciple), not his biological son.

⁶²³ Karmay 2005: 48, n. 3. See also chapter nine of Heller (1992) for her analysis of both the DCTS and *The History of A bse*, in particular relation to the deity Beg tse. The *btsan* are a particular Tibetan class of middle world (as opposed to underworld or heavenly) war deities who are usually depicted as hostile armored cavalymen.

⁶²⁴ ABLG pp. 1-7.

⁶²⁵ The term "*g.yung drung*," meaning "*svastika*," generally refers to the holy symbol of Bon, and has the same symbolic power that the term *rdo rje* ("*vajra*") does in a Buddhist context. In fact, since it contains both terms, the name G.yung mgon rdo rje may have been constructed to be intentionally syncretic.

⁶²⁶ The main way in which we can tell this is that both men identify Śiva and his consort Umā as the emanations of Avalokiteśvara and his consort Guhyajñānāḍākinī. It should also be noted that, while A bse is mentioned briefly in the DCTS, he is not discussed in any significant way, and Sle lung does not refer to Bon po sources at all (Heller 1992: 330). I have not independently verified this, but I have yet to identify a Bon text in the DCTS.

a fully "explicit" pantheon.⁶²⁷ Thus, while most of the deities in question are Buddhist, the literary structure of the account itself appears to have been more influenced by the better developed, more extensive multi-generational Bon po theogonies, like those found in the *Mdzod phug*.⁶²⁸

The explicit theogony given in the ABLG runs basically as such: Avalokiteśvara and his consort Gsang ba ye shes exist as the primordial couple, who emanate as Śiva and his consort Umā Devī respectively, to create the universe. Born to them are the siblings Mahākāla and Śrī Devī. Mahākāla takes the form of *Nāgarākṣa and copulates with a *nāga* woman named Sbal mgo khrag mig ma ("Frog-head Blood-eye"). This coupling produces Rāhula, who in the form of Yakṣa 'bar byed ("Blazing Yakṣa") mates with Gnod byin zangs kyi ral pa can ("The Yakṣa with Copper Dreadlocks"). This pairing produces the brother and sister pair of Beg tse and Gdong dmar ma ("Red-faced Woman"), whose incestuous coupling at last produces A bse.⁶²⁹ Beg tse, Gdong dmar ma, and A bse are all born from eggs, a motif commonly found in Bon po creation and theogonic myths.⁶³⁰ Once he is hatched from his red copper egg, the text launches

⁶²⁷ Heller (1992: 288) argues (correctly) that the pantheon of the ABLG is particularly ('Brug pa) bka' brgyud pa and Bhutanese in orientation. We will see below how and why this is the case.

⁶²⁸ However, while these authors are noteworthy for their ecumenical or "*ris med*" attitudes, it is important to note that neither Sle lung or Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje actually ever cite Bon sources (as far as I know), and only refer to the Bon po deity superficially by using the name "A bse." Furthermore, as far as I am aware, neither man studied Bon in any significant way. Their ecumenicist ethics appear to have been mainly Buddhist in orientation. Sle lung was primarily known for his Dge lugs/Rnying ma syncretism. G.yung mgon rdo rje was technically a 'Brug pa bka' brgyud *sprul sku*, but was also heavily influenced by Rnying ma and Dge lugs pa teachings, being the student of Sle lung (among others), and having studied at 'Bras spungs monastery (Ardussi 1977: 468, 496 n. 211). Nevertheless, the literary structure of the ABLG appears to have been influenced by Bon theogonical literature, making it likely that G.yung mgon rdo rje did at least have some working knowledge or exposure to Bon po scriptures (as is likely Sle lung did, too).

⁶²⁹ The account in the original text is not quite so simple as related here, since the author gives multiple names for each deity and makes several asides to mention his scriptural sources (all of which are used in Sle lung's text as well), and beginning with *Nāgarākṣa/Klu mo sbal mgo khrag mig, there are detailed descriptions of the pure lands within which the deities reside, as well as their physical appearance. However, compared to Sle lung's text, the ABLG account is extremely simple, well organized, and streamlined.

⁶³⁰ Karmay 1998: 248-249.

into an extended description of A bse himself and his massive retinue of different sub-classes of *btsan* and hybrid *btsan* spirits.

...from inside [the egg] came a mind emanation of Glorious Hayagrīva,⁶³¹ the terrifying red rock *btsan*, his hair blazing orange and ruffled, his moustache and eyebrows curled like iron hooks.... His blood-shot eyes blaze like fire. From his nose issues a cyclonic dust storm, his tongue flashes like red lightning, his thorn-like body hairs spewing shooting stars and fire like that at the end of an eon. He wears a cloak of red silk and copper equipment, three rings on his neck and a copper shield on his back. Having mounted on a courageous, very fast blood-red horse, a wild *btsan* horse...he moves like lightning. Merely seeing him robs one's life-force. Endowed with courage and the radiance of 100,000 suns he overwhelms the triple world. In his hands he holds a red spear and a *btsan* noose and a human heart. In certain cases he casts a noose of *btsan* intestines with his right hand, and with his left he holds an owl of evil omens. He is bedecked with a bundle of a thousand black snakes and wears iron boots. Thus it is explained. He does not manifest only in a single aspect, but his mode of appearance differs depending on those to be trained. Thus, regarding that wild, savage *btsan*, blazing like fire, he is called Red A bse Who Removes the Hearts of Evil Ones or the Red Life Eater. He himself is the king of the enemy gods (*dgra lha*). At the very moment of his birth, from his body there emanated magnetizing *bstan ging*, with red *btsan* equipment, holding razors and red nooses, mounted on red horses. From his speech emanated murderous dark-red *gshin rje ging*, holding copper blades and hearts and lungs, mounted on maroon horses. From his mind emanated killer black *bdud ging* holding black swords and demon nooses, riding on black horses. [These are] the three [types of] butchers he emanated. From those, in the eastern direction, were *dri za btsan*, 100 white men on 100 white horses. In the southern direction were *gshin rje btsan*, 100 blue men on 100 blue horses. In the western direction were the powerful *klu btsan*, 100 red men on 100 red horses. To the north were the *gnod shyin btsan*, 60 yellow men on 60 yellow horses [making a] *btsan* entourage of 360 [in total].⁶³²

⁶³¹ Notice, again, like the protectors discussed in the DCTS, the immediate identification of A bse with a higher, enlightened power.

⁶³² The full passage reads: *de gnyis brdol zhing bcag pa'i nang nas dpal rta mgrin gyi thugs las sprul pa'i brag btsan dmar po 'jigs su rung ba/dbu skra dmar ser 'bar zhing 'khrug pa/sma ra smin ma lcags kyu 'khyil ba lta bu 'od kyi pa tra tshom bu 'khyil ba/ spyan rtsa dmar po me ltar 'bar ba/ shangs nas rlung nag 'tshub ma g.yo ba/ ljags glog dmar ltar 'khyug cing/ ba spu tsher ma lta bu las bskal pa'i me dpung 'khrug cing skar mda' 'phro ba/ dar dmar gyi 'jol ber dang bse chas gyon pa/ 'khor gsum ske la btags shing bse phub khur ba/ btsan gyi rta rgod mi zan cang shes mdog dmar rdzu phrul myur mgyogs kyi rtsal dang ldan pa la zhon nas glog ltar rgyug pa'i tshul can/ mthong ba tsam gyis srog 'phrog pa/ dpa' rtsal dang ldan zhing nyi ma 'bum gyi gzi brjid dang ldan pa srid gsum gyis bzod par dka' ba/ lag na mdung dmar dang btsan zhags mi snying thogs pa zhig btsas/ 'ga' zhig tu g.yas btsan gyi rgyu zhags 'phen pa/ g.yon ltas ngan 'ug bya 'dzin pa/ sbrul nag stong gi chun pos/ brgyan cing lcags lham yu thung [8] gyon pa zhes bshad/ gdul bya 'i snang tshul tha dad pa'i mthong lugs gcig ste mtha' gcig tu zhen par mi bya 'o/ de ltar btsan rgod gtum po me ltar 'bar ba de ni gdug pa snying 'byin ma a bse dmar po 'am/ srog zan dmar po zhes kyang bya ste dgra lha 'i rgyal po 'di nyid yin no/ sku bltams pa 'i skad cig de nyid la sku las sprul pa'i btsan ging 'gugs byed dmar po btsan chas can spu gri dang zhags dmar thogs nas rta dmar la zhon pa/ gsung las sprul pa'i srog gcod gshin rje 'i ging dmar nag zangs gri dang glo snying thogs pa rta smug la zhon pa/ thugs sprul sgröl byed bdud ging nag po ral gri dang bdud zhags thogs pa rta nag la zhon pa ste gshan pa gsum sprul/ de las shar phyogs dri za 'i btsan mi dkar rta dkar brgya/*

The description of the retinue continues with different groupings of *btsan* who dwell in different environmental regions, such as mountains or bodies of water, and have correspondingly different appearances, horse mounts, etc.

These [the directional *btsan* mentioned above] are also known as the four classes of retinue *btsan*. From these, eight classes of emanated retinue *btsan* arose: *lha btsan*, white lords of murder; *klu btsan*, who produce twisted, multicolored lightning; *gza' btsan*, a [9] dark maroon multitude. *Srin po btsan*, nine with blue mouths; seven pale wind⁶³³ *dmu btsan*, many hundreds of air *btsan*, masters of obstacles who carry knives as a method to inflict pain, with horses and equipment and reins their own color. From those radiate emanated air *btsan*, masters of obstacles, gray, with the eyes of mountain pigs, mounted on white-red horses, making the sound of thunder from their mouths and brandishing ritual daggers of meteorite iron, bringing down frost and hail from the mountain tops. The multi-colored earth *btsan* are a shiny maroon color on dark-yellow mounts with white feet, wielding staffs made from *klu* trees, causing painful illnesses. Water *btsan* are blue with the bodies of calves and the heads of otters, holding black snakes, wearing clothing made from mother-of-pearl and mounted on blue water horses. They cause leprosy. Red fire *btsan*, the masters of burns, have the heads of goats, mounted on fire horses, wielding copper blades. They cause drought, blight, and putrefaction. Flying golden-hued wind *btsan* are mounted on red-yellow horses, hold sacks of wind and cause blizzards and storms. These are the *btsan* of the five elements. Furthermore, there are white cliff *btsan*, weak crag *btsan*, gray clay *btsan*, thieving conch *btsan*, trembling stone *btsan*, dust *btsan* with blue clothes, varieties of forest *btsan*, *btsan* of the meadows, constellations and so forth, and despair *btsan*, *btsan* of many thousands of clefts, etc. They came forth like the stars in the sky and the dirt of the earth, [10] and thus they pervade the entire world.⁶³⁴

lho phyogs gshin rje'i btsan mi sngon rta sngon brgya/ nub phyogs klu dbang gi btsan mi dmar rta dmar brgya/ byang phyogs gnod sbyin gyi btsan mi ser rta ser drug cu ste btsan 'khor sum brgya drug cu'am/ ABLG 7.3-8.15.

⁶³³ This is one of several possible meanings for “*ya ba*,” and the one that most fits the elemental nature of the other deities in this context. My thanks to Cathy Cantwell for this suggestion.

⁶³⁴ *btsan 'khor sde bzhir yang grags/ de dag las sprul pa'i btsan 'khor sde brgyad du byung ste/ lha btsan bsad rje dkar po/ klu btsan rol po glog 'khyu khra bo/ gza' btsan [9] khrom po smug nag/ srin btsan dgu po kha sngon/ dmu btsan ya ba skya bdun/ gnam btsan thogs rje nam skyol gri bo gzer thabs rnams rang mdog gi rta dang chas gos srab can brgya phrag re/ de dag las 'phros pa'i sprul pa'i gnam btsan thogs rje skya ri phag pa'i mig can rta dkar phrum dmar zhon nas zhal nas 'brug sgra sgrog cing gnam lcags kyi phur pa thogs te ri rtse 'grims nas sad ser 'bebs pa/ sa btsan khra bo legs ldan nag po bra nag rting dkar la zhon pa klu shing gi ber ka thogs te gzer nad gtong ba/ chu btsan sngon po be'u'i lus la sram gyi mgo can sbrul nag bzung ste nya lcibs kyi gos gyon pa chu rta sngon po la zhon nas mdze nad gtong ba/ me btsan dmar po tshig rje'i ra'i mgo can chibs su me rta zhon pa zangs kyi spu gri thogs nas than pa dang btsa' ser 'dren pa/ rlung btsan 'phyo ba gser mdog rta ngang pa chibs pa rlung gi rkyal pa bzung zhing bu yug dang 'tshub ma gtong ba ste 'byung ba lnga'i btsan rnams dang/ gzhan yang g.yang btsan dkar po/ brag btsan sma bo/ se btsan skya rol/ dung btsan rkun bu/ rdo btsan yor po/ g.ya' btsan gos sngon/ nags btsan rmun bu/ spang btsan snar ma sogs mung btsan sul mang stong gi btsan sogs gnam*

While it might seem that this pantheistic effusion deviates from being precisely "theogonical," it should be noted that Hesiod's *Theogony* contains similarly long lists of comparatively minor deities that are said to pervade the natural world. For instance, there is the list of nymph daughters of Nereus and Doris that govern various aspects and qualities of the sea.⁶³⁵ The Tibetan vision in the ABLG is quite a bit darker, however, as the teeming hordes of *btsan* in A bse's retinue, once produced, go on to slaughter beings in the world in every imaginable way until they are subjugated by Hayagrīva, Avalokiteśvara's wrathful form, of whom A bse is a mind emanation.

It should be noted that this final section of the theogony proper which extensively details the likeness and retinue of A bse also appears, in a much abbreviated form, in the DCTS, although the deity is identified by the name "A gse," which, according to Heller, is the Buddhist spelling of the normally Bon po "A bse."⁶³⁶ Sle lung attributes the description of A gse and his retinue to the canonical *Btsan gyi rgyal po srog zan dmar po ri dmar 'joms pa'i rgyud* (*Tantra of Subduing the Red Mountain, the Red Life-Eating Lord of the Btsan*).⁶³⁷ Interestingly, this description is given by Sle lung during a discussion of the deity Jag pa me len (also named Rdo rje dgra 'dul).⁶³⁸ Indeed, later in the ABLG, Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje states that in Tibet, the protector under discussion is known as "Jag pa me len," and then implies he is the patron protector of Bhutan.⁶³⁹

gyi skar ma dang sa'i dreg pa bzhin du byung [10] *bas 'jig rten gyi khams thams cad khyab bo*/ ABLG 8.15-10.1

⁶³⁵ Hesiod 1953: 60.

⁶³⁶ Heller 1992: 309.

⁶³⁷ Found in the Mtshams brag edition of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* vol. 44, pp. 1016.1-1061.6. The description in question appears on pages 1016-1017. The ABLG appears to elaborate on this rather simple canonical passage, though whether the elaboration is based on another source(s) or Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje's own epiphany, I do not know.

⁶³⁸ DCTS vol. 2, p. 127.

⁶³⁹ ABLG p. 17. Why Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje chose to use the name "A bse," a particularly Bon po name, instead of "A gse" or "Jag pa me len," when he is entirely relying on Buddhist scriptural sources, hints at (though does not satisfactorily explain) a syncretic intent on the author's part.

The theogonic account, the description of A bse and his legions, and finally the account of his subjugation and empowerment by Hayagrīva, only makes up approximately the first half of the ABLG. The rest of the text can be described as a theological treatise arguing for A bse's cosmological supremacy, similar in structure to what Sle lung does for every major protector in the DCTS. Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje marshals a number of arguments for the deity's exalted status, in particular a number of logical jumps related to A bse's ontological status vis-à-vis soteriologically "higher" deities. For instance, he quotes a scriptural passage that indicates A bse is a form of Hayagrīva. Thus, since Hayagrīva is in turn a form of Avalokiteśvara, and according to other scriptures Avalokiteśvara is the ultimate source of all the thousand buddhas of this fortunate eon, A bse can and should be regarded as the essence of all these buddhas.⁶⁴⁰ Thus, on one level, the ABLG operates as a theological argument and declaration meant to solidify beyond question an apparently dangerous worldly deity within the Buddhist fold, almost certainly influenced by Sle lung's *ris med* rhetoric regarding the universal enlightenment of all protectors.

The ABLG raises a host of other interesting cosmological, demonological, psychological, and buddhological questions. Here I will restrict my discussion to an examination of the ABLG's literary structure in relation to the DCTS, and then, the potential "real world" political ramifications of both texts. First, let us look at how Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje effectively whittles down the basic theogonic information at least vaguely alluded to over the course of hundreds of pages in Sle lung's DCTS, to just a few pages in the ABLG. The simple answer is that Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje makes a series of apparently (though not necessarily) arbitrary editorial decisions to cut out certain versions of myths in favor of others. In this way, he mirrors Sle lung's own

⁶⁴⁰ ABLG 18.8ff.

editorial work, but goes even further, stripping away variant accounts until only one version is left.

To see how this works without belaboring the point, let us examine one particular deity in the theogony: Rāhula. In the DCTS, Sle lung mentions a number of sources that give many different names for Rāhula's parents, but the primary name given for Rāhula's father is "Rakṣa glog gi phreng ba." Incidentally this deity is also mentioned as the brother of A bse in Sle lung's Ge sar pure vision text. However, Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje does not use the name "Rakṣa glog gi phreng ba" for Rāhula's father, but a secondary name mentioned by Sle lung, 'Jam dpal *Nāgarākṣa, and identifies this deity as A bse's great-grandfather.

The question is, why did Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje choose to use this particular name instead of Rakṣa glog gi phreng ba? My contention is that this editorial choice was deliberate in order to emphasize the connection between Rāhula's father and Mañjuśrī, indicated by the "'Jam dpal" part of 'Jam dpal *Nāgarākṣa. Recall that Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje also identifies 'Jam dpal *Nāgarākṣa as a form of Mahākāla, effectively making Mahākāla the father of Rāhula.

By relying on a few scriptural references, also mentioned by Sle lung in his chapter on Mahākāla, he asserts that Mahākāla is the same as "Gshin rje" or Yama.⁶⁴¹ Thus, in order to construct his clean and well-ordered pantheon, Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje is forced to make several logical jumps. First, that Mahākāla equals Yama. Second, Yama equals Yamāntaka, who is the wrathful form of Mañjuśrī. Therefore, Mahākāla is a form of Mañjuśrī. All of this is alluded to in the DCTS, but then explicitly explained in the ABLG. Separately, Rāhula's father is *also* identified as a form of Mañjuśrī. Thus,

⁶⁴¹ There is a longstanding (logical) connection between Yama (Death) and Kāla (Time) in Indian mythology (see Bhattacharji 1970: 52).

Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje's logic goes, Mahākāla (who is the same as Mañjuśrī) is implicitly Rāhula's father. This effectively creates a line of descent between two important protector deities that was not previously attested, or at least made explicit, in any scriptural sources cited by either Sle lung or Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje, as far as I am aware.

This is one example of how Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje, rather than being satisfied by the conflicting accounts in the DCTS, weaves together disparate textual strands in order to construct a well-ordered theogony, and an explicit pantheon. As far as I know, the theogony in the ABLG has had little to no lasting impact on Tibetan understandings of the protector deity pantheon generally, either Buddhist or Bon po. Nevertheless, Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje and Sle lung before him appear to be the closest Tibetan Buddhist parallels to Snorri Sturluson, the creator of the systematized theogony of the Norse *Edda*.

Kevin Wanner, in his recent study of Snorri Sturluson, has argued that the Icelandic author's work was in large part politically motivated, and was meant as tribute to the Norwegian court which at that time politically and economically dominated Iceland.⁶⁴² I believe that, on one level at least, the authors of the DCTS and the ABLG had similar motivations, and further that the construction of the pantheons in both works was influenced by political factors. In the case of the DCTS, as we have seen, Sle lung was closely connected to the government of Pho lha nas Bsod nams stobs rgyas, with whom he established a patron-priest relationship, notably, as we saw in chapter one, having met with Pho lha nas himself repeatedly, and even acting as his spiritual preceptor, transmitting protector deity practices to him.

⁶⁴² See Wanner (2008), in particular chapter four, "Snorri Abroad: Icelandic Exploitation of Cultural Capital."

Sle lung wrote the DCTS in 1734 during a streak of political and military successes by Pho lha nas, including two invasions of Bhutan during the 1729-1735 civil war in that country, resulting in arguably the only successful Tibetan military intervention in Bhutan since the days of the Yar lung Empire.⁶⁴³ There is evidence that Pho lha nas himself may have even personally travelled to Bhutan to help negotiate what was in effect a Bhutanese capitulation to the authority of the Qing Empire in 1733-1734,⁶⁴⁴ leading to amiable diplomatic relations between Tibet and Bhutan for the first time in over a century. This military and diplomatic success was completed within just a few years of Pho lha nas's rise to power with his victory in the 1727-1728 civil war in central Tibet in which he defeated the infamous Dbus ministers.

Given Pho lha nas's martial prowess, it is no surprise that Sle lung came to formally recognize the ruler as an incarnation of Yam shud dmar po/Beg tse. Sle lung makes this clear in an account of his 1730 meeting with Pho lha nas.⁶⁴⁵ This would have been about a year after Pho lha nas came to power, but Sle lung claims he received a *ḍākinī* prophecy making this identification around the time of their earlier meeting in 1726, before the civil war. The claim is repeated in Pho lha nas's own biography written in 1733.⁶⁴⁶ Beg tse, as the lord of the *btsan*, is the war god *par-excellence* in the Tibetan pantheon, and strongly associated with the Dalai Lamas.⁶⁴⁷ Thus, effectively replacing the institution of the Dalai Lama as the de-facto ruler of central Tibet during the Seventh Dalai Lama's exile from 1730 to 1735, it is not surprising that Pho lha nas would embrace Sle lung's recognition of him as Beg tse's emanation. It is also interesting to

⁶⁴³ Ardussi 1997: 69. Ardussi notes that this success earned Pho lha nas special promotion and recognition from the Manchu emperor.

⁶⁴⁴ Ardussi 1977: 455.

⁶⁴⁵ BRGB vol. 9, p. 283.3.

⁶⁴⁶ MBTJ p. 79. See also Lin 2011: 88-90 for a more detailed discussion of Sle lung's identification of Pho lha nas with Yam shud dmar po/Beg tse.

⁶⁴⁷ Heller 2003: 90.

note that at the beginning of his discussion of Beg tse in the DCTS Sle lung declares that Beg tse is the inner (or esoteric) form of Śiva.⁶⁴⁸ This suggests that there may have been an implicit connection between Śiva and Pho lha nas in the literary culture of the time as well. Nancy Lin has found further evidence for this in the *dkar chag* of the Snar thang *Bstan 'gyur*, the production of which Pho lha nas sponsored. Here, Pho lha nas and his rule are described in mytho-poetic terms utilizing *purāṇic* Śaivite imagery.⁶⁴⁹ If Sle lung was indeed part of the effort to construct Pho lha nas as the earthly representative of Śiva within the Tibetan religious *imaginaire*, then for that reason the DCTS and its constructed theogony (of which Śiva is posited as effectively the foundational deity) could perhaps, on one level, be interpreted as mythic and literary tribute to and a pure visionary account of the court of Pho lha nas and his dominion over Tibet.

Supporting this speculation, Sle lung, in the 1730 account of his meeting with Pho lha nas, goes on to make the more expansive claim that since Beg tse has the same essence as all other dharma protectors (another *ris med* rhetorical flourish), Pho lha nas is ultimately an emanation of them all:

Furthermore, it is established in many learned sources that this Yam shud dmar po himself has the same life-force (*srog*) as many haughty spirits such as Rdo rje legs pa, Vaiśravaṇa, Tshangs pa dung thod can, Pe har, Skrag med nyi shar, Snyon kha, Thang lha, Gzi can, and Yama Dharmarāja and because of that this Lord of Men ["Mi dbang" Pho lha nas] himself is the embodiment of the assembly of the ocean of oath-bound protectors...⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ DCTS vol. 2, p. 78.13-14.

⁶⁴⁹ Lin 2011: 82. The enemies Pho lha nas conquered are, for instance, connected to Kāmadeva, whom Śiva is known for destroying in Indian *purāṇic* literature. Interestingly, in a similar vein, in his writings, Chos rje gling pa refers to the Dzungars as "the manifestation of Kāmadeva" (Sardar-Afkhami 1996: 6). This hints at a wider literary trope used at the time to make sense of the traumatic events of the early eighteenth century in central Tibet.

⁶⁵⁰ *De yang yam shud dmar po 'di nyid/ rdo rje legs pa/ rnam thos sras/ tshangs pa dung thod can/ pe har/ skrag med nyi shar/ snyon kha/ thang lha/ gzi can/ gshin rje chos kyi rgyal [287] po sogs dregs pa du ma dang srog gcig pa 'i nges khungs mang zhing rig pas kyang 'grub pas de 'i phyir na mi dbang 'di nyid dam can rgya mtsho 'dus pa 'i spyi gzugs zhig go* BRGB vol. 9, 286.6-287.1.

All the named deities mentioned here by Sle lung are discussed, many at great length, in the DCTS.⁶⁵¹ Given Sle lung's apparent perspective on Pho lha nas here, it is difficult *not* to interpret the DCTS as a mythic tribute to the Tibetan ruler.

Regardless of Sle lung's all-inclusive (*ris med*) claim regarding Pho lha nas's status as the embodiment of the entire (male) protector pantheon, Pho lha nas appears to have had a consistent connection with Yam shud dmar po/Beg tse in particular. This is important to keep in mind as we analyze the possible political dimensions of the ABLG. As we have seen, Beg tse is identified as the father of A bse in the ABLG, a familial connection that is also made in the DCTS. And we have also seen that the ABLG identifies A bse with Jag pa me len, whom Kun dga' mi gyur rdo rje identifies as a special patron protector of Bhutan. Indeed, Jag pa me len has historically had a significant popular cult in Bhutan. In the fourteenth century the seventh abbot of Rwa lung monastery, the primary seat of the 'Brug pa bka' rgyud (which became the state religion of Bhutan), is said to have subdued the deity in Thimphu. From that point on Bde chen phu monastery has been considered the main base of 'Brug pa protector deities in Bhutan, one of the foremost among whom is Jag pa me len (A bse).⁶⁵² Thus both the DCTS and ABLG genealogically subordinate the premier state protector of Bhutan to the premier state protector of Tibet, thus mythically communicating the political reality of Bhutan's subordination to Tibet after the negotiated settlement of 1735.⁶⁵³

Nevertheless, Beg tse's status as Jag pa me len's father also, and perhaps more importantly, communicates a friendly (indeed familial) relationship between the two

⁶⁵¹ With the possible exception of Skrag med nyi shar, whose name I have seen in passing in the DCTS, but of whom I am not aware of any significant discussion.

⁶⁵² Aris 1979: 176. See also Pommaré 1996: 44.

⁶⁵³ Tibetan chroniclers employed paternalistic metaphorical language when discussing their dealings with Bhutan. For instance, during a border skirmish in 1669, Tibetan forces burnt down a Bhutanese outpost, and this was described in terms of a father punishing his son (Ardussi 1977: 322).

states. The warming of relations between Tibet and Bhutan after 1735 was in large part thanks to Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje's efforts as the Tibetan government's and the Tibetan 'Brug pa bka' rgyud establishment's religious diplomat to Bhutan.⁶⁵⁴ 1744, the year the ABLG was written and the year the Tibetan-allied Shes rab dbang phyug (1695-1765) was enthroned as regent of Bhutan, also saw two Bhutanese 'Brug pa lamas enrolled in the Blo gsal gling College at 'Bras spung.⁶⁵⁵ This was a highly unusual demonstration of religious exchange between the Dge lugs pa and 'Brug pa whose past (often violent) competition went hand-in-hand with the geopolitical struggles between Tibet and Bhutan.

Thus, the ABLG may be more than a theological treatise bringing a popular worldly deity fully within the Buddhist fold. It may have been written to simultaneously act as a mythic metaphorical political declaration of Bhutan's admission (and submission) within the sphere of Tibetan power.

Drag shul dbang po: The Deified Bzhad pa'i rdo rje

There is one last important aspect to discuss in relation to the Fifth Sle lung's career and legacy as a grand master of dharma protectors: that he was deified as a dharma protector himself after his death. Stobs ldan drag shul dbang po ("The Mighty Furious Lord") appears in three texts in Sle lung's collected works. Two of them, the *Stobs ldan drag shul dbang po'i srog gtad*⁶⁵⁶ and the *Drag sgrub 'phrul gyi lding khang gi lhan thabs*,⁶⁵⁷ are from pure visions that Sle lung himself received in 1730 which he then wrote down. Thus, Drag shul dbang po appears to have begun as a "new" deity from Sle lung's own revelation, similar to Nyi ma gzhon nu. The third text, one of the

⁶⁵⁴ Ardussi 1997: 71-73.

⁶⁵⁵ Ardussi 1977: 471.

⁶⁵⁶ BRGB vol. 10, pp. 427-431.

⁶⁵⁷ BRGB vol. 12, pp. 123-130.

longest protector deity invocation and offering texts in the entire collected works, is entitled *Skyabs gsum kun 'dus gcig chog dgra lha'i rgyal po stobs ldan drag shul dbang po gtso 'khor gyi thugs dam bskang ba'i rim pa log 'dren bdud dpung 'joms byed rno myur drag po thog mda'i chad bal* (*The Quick Thunderbolt that Destroys the Evil Hosts of Māra, Fulfilling the Sacred Bond with the Embodiment of All the Three Refuges, the King of the Enemy Gods, the Mighty Furious Lord and his Retinue*).⁶⁵⁸

This extensive text is the invocation and propitiation of Drag shul dbang po along with his truly massive retinue which appears to be a comprehensive listing of the entire pantheon of protectors. Most if not all the major deities from the DCTS are invoked, including Beg tse, Vaiśravaṇa, and Rāhula, as well as Nyi ma gzhon nu. Furthermore, the text was written in 1755, fifteen years after Sle lung's death, and the colophon indicates that Kun dga' mi 'gyur rdo rje (here named G.yung mgon rdo rje) was the author. The text also explicitly states that this deity, the Mighty Furious Lord, "previously arose in the form of Bzhad pa rdo rje."⁶⁵⁹ The current Sle lung *sprul sku* confirms that Bzhad pa'i rdo rje manifested as Drag shul dbang po, presumably after the death of his human form.⁶⁶⁰

There is a long-standing Tibetan tradition that powerful religious practitioners often become dharma protectors after death. The anti-*ris med* deity Shugs ldan is a good example of this, believed by his followers to be the spirit of the wrongfully persecuted, true Fifth Dalai Lama, Grag pa rgyal mtshan. A *phyi chos kyi sgrol ma*, discussed in the previous chapter, is another example of this phenomenon.⁶⁶¹ This belief is also reflected in the mythology of much older Indic deities, as we saw in our examination

⁶⁵⁸ BRGB vol. 10, pp. 433-500.

⁶⁵⁹ BRGB vol. 10, p. 446.3.

⁶⁶⁰ Loden 2013: 67-68.

⁶⁶¹ See also Berounsky (2008) for a study of an historical figure in A mdo who was *post-mortem* deified as a local oracle deity.

of the *rnam thar* of the major protectors discussed in the DCTS. These beings, in their previous lives, were regarded as powerful practitioners of Buddhism. The tradition of special cosmological significance and special worship given to people who have died in some inauspicious, violent way is also common in vernacular Indian religion, where people who have died violently are often deified in death.⁶⁶² While in the Tibetan tradition one does not necessarily need to die badly to be considered and worshipped as a dharma protector, given the rumors around Sle lung's death (discussed in chapter one), and the comparatively early age at which he died, it makes sense that his followers would remember him this way. The deification is also a cosmological solidification of the Fifth Sle lung's personal legacy as a master of dharma protectors, beyond his general, trans-personal association with the demon-tamers Vajrapāṇi and Padmasambhava.

Sle lung's connection with Drag shul dbang po is in fact confirmed in Khri byang rin po che's *Music Delighting an Ocean of Protectors*, in which the author claims that Shugs ldan, in targeting Sle lung but before killing Sle lung himself, attacked Drag shul dbang po, damaging his home temple of Dar po gling in Lhasa, and grievously wounded the deity's medium.⁶⁶³ Interestingly, this indicates that there was already a well-established practice of Drag shul dbang po as an oracle deity even before Sle lung's death, seemingly an anachronism. I have not been able to independently confirm this, however there is independent confirmation of an established connection between Sle lung (either before or after his death) and Dar po gling Temple. The murals at Dar po gling included a painting of Bzhad pa'i rdo rje, as well as one of Drag shul dbang po, along with a painting of Lum pa nas, one of the ministers on the losing side of the

⁶⁶² See Blackburn (1985).

⁶⁶³ Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang 1967: 117.

1727-1728 civil war.⁶⁶⁴ According to one account, after the execution of Lum pa nas, Nga phod pa, and Sbyar ra ba, their stuffed skins were hung inside Dar po gling temple.⁶⁶⁵ This indicates that Sle lung, deified as Drag shul dbang po, was in some way considered responsible for the executed ministers. I suspect the ministers themselves were deified to a degree (given their traumatic deaths), and were placed under the authority of Drag shul dbang po, who in tantric fashion was identified as both their destroyer and redeemer. This would make sense in light of the fact that Sle lung negotiated the ministers' surrender, and successfully convinced Pho lha nas to spare their lives, though they were later killed by the Qing.

Drag shul dbang po was also enshrined at Khra 'brug by 1753 at the latest. This is appropriate given Sle lung's strong connection to the temple, and his efforts in restoring it after the Dzungar occupation. In a liturgical text from Khra 'brug, Drag shul dbang po appears in the retinue of Hayagrīva, alongside Tshang pa dkar po. Drag shul dbang po is here described as "dark red in colour and in the form of a *srin po*, to the right raising a golden razor, to the left a bronze wheel; the legs stretching and bending in a dancing posture."⁶⁶⁶ He is also regarded in this text as the son of Bdud gyi rgyal po, the central deity of the so-called Five Sovereign Spirits, considered the five main forms of Pe har, which are the first group of deities propitiated after Hayagrīva in this Khra 'brug text.⁶⁶⁷ Fittingly, Nyi ma gzhon nu, the deification of Sle lung's consort(s), also appears in this text as the consort of Drag shul dbang po.

⁶⁶⁴ See Alexander 2005: 177, 179.

⁶⁶⁵ Richardson 1998: 315.

⁶⁶⁶ Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 165.

⁶⁶⁷ Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 163. On the Five Sovereign Spirits, which are among the many protectors Sle lung wrote propitiation texts for, see Bell 2013: 3.

Conclusion

Now that we have surveyed the Fifth Sle lung's life and major literary works, let us return to the question I posed in the introduction: is the comparison of Sle lung to Rasputin fair? I argued before that it was, and that the received reputation of both men have significant parallels; in particular, they both were known for having significant political influence in the court of their kings, they both were notorious for their sexual licence, and they both had reputations for wielding power over dark forces. However, I would add here that it should be remembered that both men were likely subject to sensationalistic character assassination (in addition to their real or purported literal assassination⁶⁶⁸). Also, it is important to understand that the details of the political and religious controversies that surrounded Sle lung are glossed over and de-contextualized when he is compared to Rasputin. As was suggested in Sle lung's own defence of his *ris med* outlook in his autobiography and Khri byang Blo bzang ye shes's critique of him, the consistent conservative Dge lugs pa critique of Sle lung seems to be focused not so much on his political influence on Pho lha nas or other rulers, his deep involvement with and believed control over the malevolent forces of the protector pantheon, or even his sexual promiscuity (though this last does seem to have been a significant issue). Rather, from the perspective of his critics, Sle lung's true sin seems to have been his tendency for "mixing" teaching lineages. For the hard-core sectarian strands of the Dge lugs pa, Sle lung is a primary example for why it is necessary to have a protector like Shugs ldan in order to defend the "pure" teachings.⁶⁶⁹

To a certain extent the critique of Sle lung's mixing of teachings is fair, even though it rests on faulty assumptions. As we saw, particularly in chapter two in relation

⁶⁶⁸ Of course there is only rumor and speculation of this in Sle lung's case.

⁶⁶⁹ See Khri byang Blo bzang ye shes's profile of Sle lung quoted at the end of chapter one.

to the GYCK, Sle lung literally did combine teachings of different provenance in order to compile the Gsang ba ye shes cycle. This seems to be especially true of the magic texts from volumes four and twelve of the GYCK, which were removed wholesale from their original context in older *gter ma* cycles, and Gsang ba ye shes was introduced or inserted as the new primary deity. As we saw, Sle lung defended this by arguing that accomplished practitioners with pure vision can use techniques and methods from other cycles interchangeably.⁶⁷⁰

Similarly, in his commentary on the completion stage of Gsang ba ye shes practice, Sle lung presents the three different systems of Guhyasamāja, Kālacakra, and *rdzogs chen*. While he declares that each of these different systems were explained separately and thus should be practiced separately, when actually describing the practical methods of the completion stage he draws on a conceptual repertoire that includes these different systems, leading him to effectively, in many cases, conflate concepts, such as equating the “clear light” (*’od gsal*) of the Guhyasamāja system with the “illumination of the ground” (*gzhi’i snang ba*) of *rdzogs chen*. Where useful in explaining the practice, he calls upon elements of the six *yogas* system of the Kālacakra system, Tsong kha pa’s explanation of the five stages of the Guhyasamāja system, or Klong chen pa’s explanation of the subtle body as laid out in the *rdzogs chen tantras*.⁶⁷¹ Therefore, Sle lung is effectively, if not intentionally, blending these systems in his exposition. For this reason, Sle lung’s *ris med* theurgy is significantly different from the normative presentation of the *ris med* thought of the eastern Tibetan scholars a century later:

Ri-me is not a way of uniting different schools and lineages by emphasizing their similarities. It is basically an appreciation of their differences and an acknowledgment of the importance of variety to benefit practitioners with

⁶⁷⁰ See my discussion of the magic practices in the GYCK in the middle of chapter two.

⁶⁷¹ See the extended discussion of Sle lung’s completion stage commentary in chapter two.

different needs. Therefore, the Ri-me teachers always take great care that the teachings and practices of the different schools and lineages, and their unique styles, do not become confused with one another.⁶⁷²

Sle lung, on the other hand, in the GYCK and elsewhere, does seem to have emphasized the fundamental similarity of the different systems/schools/lineages.

There are several reasons why the sectarian criticism of Sle lung for this “mixing” is fundamentally flawed, however. First of all, with the GYCK cycle specifically, the main deity of the cycle, Guhyajñānaḍākinī, is originally drawn from a lineage (acknowledged in both later Gsar ma and Rnying ma sources) that originally includes Padmasambhava, founder of the Rnying ma “school,” as well as Ras chung pa, who as Mi la ras pa’s disciple is regarded as an important Gsar ma *yogi*.⁶⁷³ Thus, Guhyajñānaḍākinī seems to have first become known and first practiced within tantric liturgies early during the second spread of Buddhism in Tibet before the distinction between “Rnying ma” and “Gsar ma” was as rigidly conceptualized as it was by some in Sle lung’s time.

Secondly, the basic assumption that there is such a thing as a “pure,” un-mixed lineage, Dge lugs pa or otherwise, is extremely problematic. Sle lung basically makes this point in his defense of Rnying ma practice from his main autobiography, discussed in chapter one. Recall that here, Sle lung argues (convincingly) that the categories of “Gsar ma” and “Rnying ma” are ultimately arbitrary. The *Guhyasamāja Tantra* was originally an “old” translation, but the deity is only practiced in Gsar ma lineages. Tsong kha pa himself had pure vision revelations identical to certain Rnying ma revelatory methods. And practices and beliefs that constituted different lineages and systems by Sle lung’s time, such as “Kālacakra” and “*rdzogs chen*” (broadly

⁶⁷² Ringu Tulku 2006: 3.

⁶⁷³ See the discussion of this at the beginning of chapter two.

conceived), likely originally arose from the same cultural sphere and foundational religious assumptions. And as was discussed in chapter one, Tsong kha pa himself, in a deliberately *ris med* rhetorical flourish, directly stated that the *rdzogs chen* view does not in any way conflict with standard Madhyamaka. Similarly, as I discussed in particular association with the magic practices in the GYCK in chapter two, the basic structure of many of these rituals Sle lung was drawing on have been broadly pervasive in Tibetan and Indian culture (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) for thousands of years. Thus there is an “original syncretism” to these supposedly separate systems, and so to criticize Sle lung for blending or confusing them is ultimately facile.

Further Research

This study is meant to be a beginning, not an end. As I alluded to in the introduction, due to space and time constraints, this thesis could only survey Sle lung’s life and works, which cannot be adequately studied in isolation from each other. Nothing I discussed, be it Sle lung’s personal history, to the GYCK and the DCTS, has received the complete attention it deserved here. There is an argument to be made that the structure of this thesis significantly limited my ability to examine each of its sub-topics in significant enough detail. However, due to paucity of scholarship on Sle lung the historical figure, my intention was to provide a broad basis, an overarching narrative within which future research can operate. Moving forward, scholarly attention on Sle lung Bzhad pa’i rdo rje needs to focus more deeply on several issues.

First, there needs to be more attention paid to the women whom Sle lung identifies as his consorts. I briefly examined Rdo rje skyabs byed and her significance in Sle lung’s life, including a brief discussion of the biographical narrative Sle lung devotes to her in his collected works. A text which I was previously under the

impression was not extant came to light when work on this study was being completed; I have not personally examined this text, and what I know of it is second-hand. Entitled *Mkha' 'gro rgya mtsho'i rtogs brjod* (*The Biographies of the Ocean of Dakinis*, a title reminiscent of and perhaps intentionally thematically related to the DCTS) this text, now in the possession of the current Sle lung *sprul sku*, contains biographies of the many women who were Sle lung's consorts over the course of his life. This text should be given top priority for future research on Sle lung's life.

Secondly, while I discussed it at some length, Sle lung's relationship with Pho lha nas needs to be examined in further detail in order to understand how deeply he was actually involved in the politics of the ruler's court. While many of the details we examined here offer tantalizing suggestions that Sle lung was indeed a key player in the government of Pho lha nas, he also appears to have spent many of the years following Pho lha nas's rise to power away from the capital. Despite apparent regular communication with Pho lha nas and his ministers, was Sle lung's political influence really very strong? I argued in chapter three that Sle lung gave Pho lha nas a spiritual legitimacy by associating him with and giving him symbolic power over a vast network of Tibet's autochthonous daimons, but how much, if at all, did Sle lung's influence (spiritual or otherwise) further extend? I suspect a more detailed study and translation of Sle lung's long, intricate 1730 account of meeting Pho lha nas at Rnam grol gling soon after his return from Padma bkod⁶⁷⁴ would help answer some of these questions.

Finally, I argued throughout this work that the Fifth Sle lung, in a number of ways, prefigured the work of the nineteenth century *ris med* thinkers. I pointed out that he is quite distinct from some of the best known figures of the eastern Tibetan *ris med*

⁶⁷⁴ *Mi dbang bsod nams stobs rgyas rnam grol gling du byon pa'i lo rgyus ngo mtshar 'bum snang* (BRGB vol. 9, pp. 279-359).

movement, in that he began his career deeply imbedded within the Dge lugs pa authority he would eventually go on to resist. But I believe a closer examination of what role Sle lung's syncretic work may have had in influencing *pro-ris med* Dge lugs pa figures such as Mdo sngags chos kyi rgya mtsho (1903-1957) would be an interesting avenue of investigation.

Given Sle lung's "front line" view of one of the most politically and religiously pivotal periods in Tibetan history, and his prodigious, innovative literary output, far more scholarly work needs to be done on this prolific and fascinating character.

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