

The Demon Crowned with a Raven Head:
Rāhula's Archaic Form "Ki kang" and his Chinese Origins

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Abstract

Rāhula is one of the most important protector deities in the Rnying ma (Ancient) school of Tibetan Buddhism, with a rich and especially striking iconography and mythological history. This deity is, in part, an adaptation and transformation of the Indian eclipse asura, Rāhu, and as such, previous scholarship on him has tended to focus on his Indian origins. This paper will shift focus and instead examine Rāhula's connection to Chinese-inspired elemental divination (byung rtsis) systems that became popular in Tibet at least as early as the eighth century. In particular, the article will examine the origin myth of "Ki kang," an early alternate name for Rāhula, in what may be the earliest extant myth about him found in the Ancient Tantra Collection (Rnying ma rgyud 'bum). Textual clues in the myth indicate a deep and thorough connection to specifically Chinese systems of astral divination, showing that Ki kang/Rāhula may have been filtered through a specifically Chinese cultural lens before being adopted into Tibetan Buddhism.

Key words: Ki kang, Rāhula, Rāhu, Tibetan Buddhism, Tantra, Mythology, Divination, Demonology

Previous research on the Tibetan protector deity Rāhula, generally regarded as one of the three most important dharma protectors of the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism, has tended to focus on his Indian origins. Scholarship on this deity has especially highlighted his connection to Indian mythology and astrology.¹ This connection is, of course, extremely important in understanding the evolution of this fascinating and extremely complex Tibetan deity from his origins as the *asura* and eclipse-causing phantom planet, Rāhu. However, this paper intends to shift focus away from Indian materials and instead examine Rāhula's understudied connection to *'byung rtsis* (elemental divination), specifically the *sa bdag* (earth lord) deities that play a critical role in this complex system(s) of chronomancy, which seems to have been primarily imported into Tibet from China in the eighth to ninth centuries. I assert that the available evidence suggests that Rāhula's distinctive iconography and expanded cosmological role in Tibet is more likely of Chinese than directly Indian origin.

Like all deities in all religions, but especially in tantric Buddhism, Rāhula has been subject to acute mythological "contagion." That is to say, diachronically speaking, there have been a great number of figures with many different names that evolved through time together and share enough Rāhula "family resemblances" to be considered related to each other. So just as, say, the goddess Śrī dēvī (Tib. Dpal ldan lha mo) is more of a category of deities than a specific figure, I am using "Rāhula" more as an umbrella term for a whole array of different forms and emanations that are iconographically, mythologically, and cosmologically related. One such deity in this "Rāhula family" is named Ki kang. In my investigations into origin myths related to Rāhula, I have found only one relevant text actually in the Rnying ma rgyud 'bum, the Rnying ma school's canonical collection of old tantras said to have been originally translated into Tibetan during the first transmission of Buddhism into Tibet in the eighth century (Mayer 2015). This text, which is mainly concerned with the deity Ki kang, appears in multiple editions of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, titled *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* (The Great Black Nail Tantra, the Essence of Ki kang rog ti, Secret Liberating King, the Demon Crowned with a Raven Head) or more concisely, the *Gzer nag po'i rgyud, The Black Nail Tantra*.²

The Black Nail Tantra and Clarifying Lamp Myths

In the unparalleled pre-modern compilation of Tibetan protector deity mythology, *The Biographies of the Ocean of the Oathbound Protectors* (*Dam can bstan srung rgya mtsho'i rnam thar*), its author/compiler/tradent Sle lung Bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1697–1740) cites only five sources for the multiple Rāhula origin myths he discusses. The first two, which seem to be the main sources for the bulk of the Rāhula chapter, are ritual texts by two Rnying ma masters, the famous treasure discoverer Padma las 'bral rtsal (1291–1315) and Bya khyung pa ngag dbang padma (ca. 15th–16th centuries), an important lineage master of and commenter on the treasure cycles of Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396). A third text cited by Sle lung is a tantra entitled the *Gza' rgod nyi ma khros* (Wild Planet Angry Sun), which so far I have been unable to locate (Bailey 2012, 145–146).



[Figure 1]
Rāhula as depicted in the 1979 Leh edition of *Dam can bstan srung rgya mtsho'i rnam thar*, vol. 2, 319.

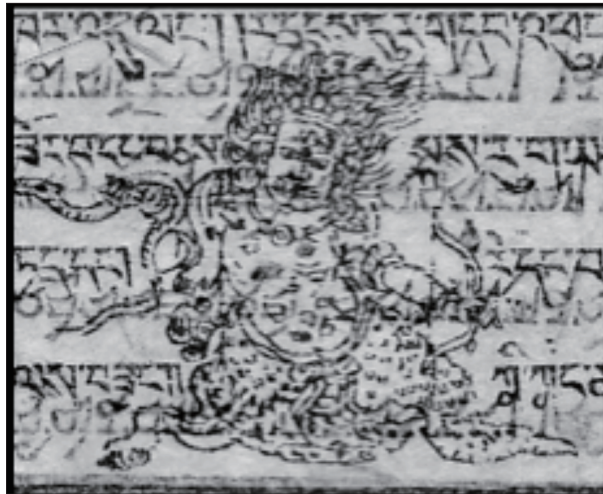
The last two sources mentioned by Sle lung in his Rāhula chapter are, for our current purposes, the most relevant and interesting, as they are the only two that mention the name Ki kang.³ One is *The Black Nail Tantra*, and the other is the *Rin chen gsal sgron* (Precious Clarifying Lamp), a treatise on elemental divination attributed in the Tibetan tradition to a Chinese treasure revealer named Du har nag po, who will be discussed in more detail below. To my knowledge, the full text of the *Clarifying Lamp* is no longer extant, though Sle lung quotes from it extensively (Bailey 2012, 147–161). As for the *Black Nail Tantra*, although Sle lung only mentions it in passing and does not quote from it, presumably due to its similarity to the *Clarifying Lamp*, it still exists as a canonical text, part of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*. To my knowledge it contains the only extant example of a myth focused on a form of Rāhula that is not part of a *gter ma* cycle or commentarial material. Also, as I shall discuss in more detail below, it appears to be the earliest extant myth of Rāhula's origins. I present the first full translation of it here:

Thus have I heard at one time, the supreme body of all the *tathāgatas* the Blessed One Noble Mañjuśrī Kumāra dwelt together with a retinue of bodhisattva heroes in the limitless Ākaniṣṭha in a celestial palace ornamented with a variety of precious stones, with the five desirable qualities in all directions, accomplishing the welfare of beings. With a peaceful mind, for the purpose of pacifying untamed savages, negative forces such as noxious spirits and death spirit violators, the Blessed One in the meditative absorption called “Frightening Malevolent Ones and Subduing All Evil”⁴ instantly entered the body of blood-drinking Bhairava, black like crushed stone, terrifying, with an angry mood. Adorned with various charnel ground ornaments and carrying various vicious weapons, his two feet crushing beings in the Vajra Hell, he manifested from the sphere of space, churning the universe. Transcending levels and limits, in all ways the highest, undiminished, roaming through the charnel grounds, he became chief of a *maṇḍala* of great Vajra Holders, kings, regents, vassal kings, inner, and outer ministers and so forth, each with their own retinue. He had an inconceivable host of disease causers, liars, and evil ones. Furthermore, he had a collection of passionate ladies: queens, queens of queens, female regents, female ministers, and serving women, each with their own retinue, the ladies of the four types of disease of the humors, and inconceivable hosts of causers of the 404 types of diseases. He resided together [with them all].

Also accompanied by his consorts Vetali and Ekajati, he dwelt in union [with them]. Then the Blessed One, Mahābhairava, entered into the state of meditative stabilization called “The Five Lights Collecting All the Five Poisons.” Immediately upon entering that, the consort Vetali generated the word “A ho” with lightning between her eyes. She was aroused by Mahābhairava, who entered into her mind. They cried “Oh bliss!” and dallied together. A shower of seminal fluid entered into the consort’s womb, and their retinue simultaneously experienced the taste of bliss. Light emanated into the realms of the ten directions. With the mind of enlightenment, they bestowed initiation on all sentient beings, establishing them in bliss. All these light rays collected the essence of all the wicked beings in the three realms, the five poisons of wrong views, the ten non-virtues and so forth, and they dissolved into [Bhairava’s] body. Then, from the play of non-duality, [came] the black light of hate, the yellow light of self-pride, the green light of jealousy and so forth. On a swastika base on the peak of Mount Meru the emanated [light] became the blazing *rākṣasa* Yakṣa Jvala and he dwelt at the peak of Mount Meru in a blaze of hate. The red light of lust and the smoky light of delusion emanated into the sea and became the *nāgini* Yakṣa Woman. She dwelt in boiling blood of lust, in the depths of the sea. The consort Vetali, with a smiling appearance, having seen the *nāgini* Vajra Yakṣa Woman, glowing with lust, made a sign with her tongue. [Because of this] the *nāgini* Vajra Yakṣa Woman also felt fiercely lustful. She cried out “Kha! Kha!” with the roar of a thousand thunderclaps. Immediately the three-thousand-fold world systems simultaneously shook, shook intensely. Rattled, rattled intensely. Everything rattled intensely. Roared, roared intensely. Everything roared intensely. Moved, moved intensely. Everything moved intensely. When the edges were high the middle was low. When the middle was high the edges were leveled. All the *devas*, *nāgas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *gandharvas*, *kiṃnaras*, *mahoragas*, *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, *pretas*, *piśācas*, *bhūtas*, *kumbhāṇḍas*, *pūtanas*, *kaṭapūtanas*, *skandas*, *aṣmāras*, *unmādas*, *cayas*, *ostārakas*, *nakṣatras*, and so forth, all the evil ones abiding in these worlds were gathered together and they became angry and astonished. They spoke thus to the Blessed One: “E ma ho! Among the Noble Ones, Noble Yamāntaka, the dual light of space and awareness, by the blessings of the collected five worldly poisons you roared ‘Kikang’ with the force of a thousand thunder claps. The trichiliocosm shook all at once, how wondrous! We beg you to be compassionate and protect us!” Having said that, they dispersed to their own abodes. Then the *rākṣasa*

Yakṣa Jvala in a blaze of hatred on the peak of Mount Meru and the *nāginī* Vajra Yakṣa Woman in a flood of lustful blood from the depths of the sea, coiled around each other without touching and made the sound “King kang!” and five children were generated from their minds. There were four sisters and a brother. The brother Ki kang caused great disturbance and the Ki kang sisters each had four different heads. They ate and mangled all beings in the three realms and ruined the world so the Blessed One Bhairava Yamāntaka threw a discus at the brother and cut his body into eight pieces. The Blessed One sucked phenomenal existence into the interior of his body, which transcended limits, into the vacuity of his precious mind. From the amulet box (*ga'u*) of omniscience emerged a four-spoked precious dharma wheel surrounded by the four great oceans and the seven playful lakes, divided into concentric circles by the seven golden mountain ranges. The Great Ki kang was thrust into the four cardinal and intermediate directions which were thus produced.⁵ His head arose as the southwest and was established [there]. His right hand was established as the southeast. His left hand was established as northwest. His two legs were established as the northeast. His tail was established as the east. His right shoulder was established as the south. His left shoulder was established as the west. His bladder was established as the north. His eyes, fangs, and heart were placed between his legs. His four sisters were placed at the corners of Mount Meru. Like that they were cut and concealed like bits of yeast. From each section of his body arose a [new] Ki kang and again they intensely shook the world. Also, the sisters were concealed like bits of yeast and emerged from the four corners [of Mount Meru]. Again and again they ate and chewed sentient beings of the three realms without distinction and excreted them. Again, the Blessed One Yamāntaka gathered the three realms under his power. He overpowered the triple world. Similarly, he gathered together the darkness of the entire great trichilocosm. At the tip of light rays of his wisdom mind an inconceivably vast array of hooks, nooses, shackles, and bells spread out. Proclaiming “Hum Hum Phat! Hala Hala dzah hum bam hoh! E a ralli hring dza dza!” with the roar of a thousand thunder claps simultaneously, he brought [Ki kang] under control. Brother Ki kang with his sisters were frightened, extremely frightened, completely extremely frightened. They were shaken, intensely shaken, completely intensely shaken; were in terror, in intense terror, in complete intense terror. With palms joined together they spoke with one voice to the Blessed One, “Oh Bhairava, sir! We are the brother and sisters

Ki kang. Because we are good children of poisonous results we chew, swallow, and excrete out all creatures in existence without exception. Those actions of destroying yearly crops, if this is our natural activity, why do you reprimand us, great hero? Also, previously the great hero cut my body into pieces and buried them in the ten directions.⁶ This is very bad! Do you not have compassion? If you the great chief himself are the lord of love and compassion, why do you manifest like this? Why do you roar harmful speech? Why incarnate [like this]? Great hero, we do not seek instructions, but we will become your attendants. Not minor, but ardent attendants.” Thus they begged. In general, they offered up their life-force. Steadfast without hostility, he bestowed vows and initiation and they were established in worldly bliss. They were empowered to eat the life and breath of those who harm the Buddha’s teachings, those who send people to hell,⁷ and those who break their vows. Having bound under oath the eight classes of powerful gods and demons, they were empowered. Moreover, the *rākṣasa*’s ash-colored body⁸ was crowned⁹ with a raven head. Having transformed into the eight classes of gods and demons he entered and roamed through dates and time, and Ki kang and the four enemies (sisters) by moving and shaking became masters over life and breath.¹⁰ Ki kang brother and sisters were jubilant and having circled Mahābhairava three times knelt with their



[Figure 2]
Ki kang as depicted in the the *Vaiḍūrya dkar po*.
From Schuh (2012, 1292).

hands pressed together and spoke these words: "A la la ho! Mahābhairava, having thoughts of affection for us, has commanded us to act in accordance with our own karmic inclinations. How wondrous! We, brother and sisters, will not transgress the activity just as commanded and will perform the activities we have been entrusted without question," thus they said and having vowed they went each to their own abode. Thus it was said.¹¹

Although relatively short, there is a lot to unpack in this story. First, I want to note several interesting points of contrast with the other (likely later) versions of the Rāhula mythos, given in Sle lung's chapter and attributed mainly to the work of Bya khyung pa. First, and rather strikingly, the main deity is never referred to as Rāhu or Rāhula, but simply as Ki kang, a name that does not appear in later versions of the myth. Also, there is no discussion of the episode for which Rāhula, based on the Indian mythology of the eclipse demon Rāhu, is best known, namely the theft of the elixir of immortality from the gods and his nemesis relationship with the sun and the moon whom he endlessly pursues and periodically consumes, thus causing eclipse phenomena. In *The Black Nail Tantra* story, Ki kang's cosmic crimes are limited, rather generically as in similar protector deity origin myths, simply to the unrestrained massacre of living beings. The only element that is similar to Rāhu's mythology is his dismemberment with a discus. There is also no mention by Sle lung of Rāhula's past life as a fallen Buddhist sage, which has been attributed to Bya khyung pa's version of the story. Interestingly there is also very little physical description of Ki kang in *The Black Nail Tantra*, and what little we do get is in relation to his dismemberment. From the dismemberment account, it seems that he is very anthropomorphic with one head, two arms, and two legs. He also apparently has some kind of tail in addition to his legs. Later we are told he is crowned with a raven's head. Besides the raven's head, this physical appearance is actually quite different from his standard iconography, which is described in the other versions of his origin myths in the *Ocean of Oathbound*. In these myths, and in typical paintings of Rāhula, he is shown with multiple heads, eyes covering his body, and a lower body of a snake (without humanoid legs), none of which are present in Ki kang's description in *The Black Nail Tantra*.¹² This perhaps suggests that Ki kang was originally a distinct, perhaps earlier, version of the deity that would later become the more elaborate, less humanoid, Rāhula.

It is also worth mentioning that according to the Bya khyung pa version

of the origin myth, Rāhula was subdued and converted by Vajrapāṇi. The same is true in Las 'brel rtsal's treasure texts on Rāhula (Bailey 2015, 60–61). However, in the *Black Nail* version, the subduing deity is Mañjuśrī's wrathful form, Yamāntaka. Not only that, but in the *Black Nail* version, Yamāntaka is actually responsible for bringing Ki kang into being and effectively functions as his grandfather, a motif not at all present in the Bya khyung pa myth. Despite these differences, however, there is a striking degree of similarity and continuity between the different versions of the Rāhula myth. Rāhula's "sisters," the four animal-faced demonesses who function as his retinue goddesses, with whom he is consistently depicted in art, appear in both the *Black Nail* and Bya khyung pa versions of the myth. Similarly, Rāhula/Ki kang's demonic parents and their locations, the *rākṣasa* who dwells on top of Mount Meru and the *nāginī* who dwells in the ocean at the base of Meru, are virtually the same in the *Black Nail*, Bya khyung pa, and Las 'brel rtsal versions, though the parents' precise names differ.

There are a number of other critically important points to note in the *Black Nail* myth, which we will return to later. For the moment, however, let us turn our attention to Sle lung's final source, the *Precious Clarifying Lamp*. Sle lung's text quotes from the *Clarifying Lamp* before simply mentioning *The Black Nail Tantra* in an offhanded way without quotation. The reason for this is that the myth in the *Clarifying Lamp* is essentially a more detailed version of the same story told in *Black Nail*. The *Clarifying Lamp* version begins with the demonic parents at the poles of Mount Meru, who mate in basically the same way. From their union, Ki kang, here called Ki kang 'phung byed chen po (Ki kang "the great one who brings downfall"), is born. More in line with his typical Indian and Tibetan iconography, he is described as having a lower body of a snake in this version because, we are told, his mother was a *nāginī*. He is also mentioned as holding a sword. In an especially strange detail, we are told that right after he was born, he squeezed his mother's breasts so that four clots of blood came out of them. His mother then summoned a maidservant who buried each of the four clots on each of the four continents surrounding Mount Meru.

The *Clarifying Lamp* then shifts to the standard Indian Rāhu myth, mentioning how Ki kang, now specifically called Rāhula, stole the ambrosia of the gods, taking away their subtle energy and dimming their luster. This crime, not the indiscriminate massacre of living beings, is what provokes Yamāntaka to cut him into eight pieces. As in *Black Nail*, the eight pieces are buried in the

eight directions around Mount Meru, although in the *Clarifying Lamp* version a ninth piece escapes on its own and becomes the planet Ketu, Rāhu's brother phantom planet in Indian astrology, sometimes said to be Rāhu's tail. Similar to *The Black Nail Tantra*, eventually the eight buried pieces resurrect, summon the four animal-faced demonesses, as well as all other classes of gods and demons, to them and they begin roaming the universe stealing the breath of living beings and the essence of crops.

Given the addition of the name Rāhula and the stealing-of-ambrosia mytheme, I suspect that the *Clarifying Lamp* myth is later than the *Black Nail* version of the myth. In fact, there is nothing in the *Black Nail* myth to directly connect Ki kang with the Indian figure of Rāhu, while the *Clarifying Lamp* explicitly makes this connection. The *Black Nail* myth also provides a smooth, single cohesive narrative for Ki kang's origin, while the *Clarifying Lamp* provides what appears to be a bricolage that draws on multiple sources, including details seemingly haphazardly, such as the bizarre detail of the blood clots.¹³

Furthermore, the more significant and much more detailed part of the *Clarifying Lamp* excerpt quoted by Sle lung comes after the origin myth. In fact, this myth is simply a short preface to an extremely comprehensive almanac of Ki kang/Rāhula's daily movements around the world on different days of the month, at different times of the day, and the various cosmological effects that accompany these motions. For instance, one section describes the different types of demons he manifests from different parts of his body at different times. *Clarifying Lamp* thus is primarily concerned with giving a multi-page, very precise, detailed account of what is simply a throwaway line in *The Black Nail Tantra* about how Ki kang "transformed into the eight classes of gods and demons...entered and roamed through dates and time...moving and shaking, became [master] over life and breath." Thus, my suspicion is that the *Clarifying Lamp* may in fact be a commentary on the earlier *Black Nail* myth, or that they both draw on some *ur* source or tradition. But in either case the *Clarifying Lamp* injects elements directly connecting Ki kang to Rāhu's Indian mythology and cosmology, such as the addition of his brother deity Ketu and the stealing of ambrosia mytheme, etc., that are absent in the *Black Nail* version.

Sa bdag, 'Byung rtsis, and Du har Nag po

This “roaming through dates and time” is characteristic of the *sa bdag*, the so-called “earth lord” spirits in Sino-Tibetan *nag rtsis* or *'byung rtsis* (elemental calculation/divination). Knowledge of the movements of the *sa bdag*, the directions in which they abide at any given time, and the various effects they can have on the world and a particular individual at any given time is a critical component of the chronomancy¹⁴ of *'byung rtsis*. The detailed documentation of the movements of the *sa bdag* in *'byung rtsis* is reminiscent of, if not directly tied to, the observations of planetary motion in more conventional astrology. One of the most detailed sources of information on *sa bdag* and their motion comes from Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (1653–1705) masterwork treatise on *'byung rtsis*, the *Vaiḍūrya dkar po* (White Beryl) which devotes an entire chapter to these spirits.¹⁵ They are less a specific species of spirit as such, and are not particularly associated with the physical earth or soil despite the literal meaning of their name, but rather are a pantheon of deities who have power over the divinatory space of the *'byung rtsis* system. Many of them appear to have Chinese origins (Schuh 2011, 7–12), and others are important Indian deities that appear to have been somewhat iconographically modified. For instance, there is a group of *sa bdag* who reside in and control the magic nine-square geometric divination diagram called the *sme ba*. There is a specific deity assigned to each of these nine squares, one of whom is named Lha chen dbang phyug che (Māhadeva Maheśvara) who carries Śiva's iconic trident (Schuh 2011, 76), but is otherwise iconographically different from Śiva.

The *Vaiḍūrya dkar po* discusses several hundred individual *sa bdag*, a few of which have names and iconography characteristic of what we could call the Rāhula “type.” The most significant of these is Gnam gyi gza' chen lha rgod (The Great Wild Planet God of the Sky), who is depicted with Rāhula's typical, most common iconography: nine heads with a tenth raven head on top, the lower body of a snake, covered in eyes, holding a *makara*-headed banner in one hand and a bow in the other. Gza' chen lha rgod is the leader of a sub-group of five *sa bdag* called the Yang khol *sa bdag*, and immediately following him in the same group is Rāhu himself, also called Bar gyi khyab 'jug, the “Pervader of the Intermediate Space.” Interestingly, Schuh notes that Rāhu himself is not given any iconographic description (Schuh 2011, 131–132). Another group is called the Tshes la rgyu ba'i sa bdag (The earth lords who move on the days of the month).

Ki kang is part of this group, depicted more or less as he is described in the *Clarifying Lamp* myth (though not in the *Black Nail* myth where he has humanoid legs), which is essentially just like Gza' chen lha rgod, except with only one humanoid head, although still with a raven head crowning it (Schuh 2011, 140–146).

One of the sources for the *sa bdag* chapter of the *Vaidūrya dkar po* mentioned in its colophon by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho is the *Precious Clarifying Lamp* (Schuh 2011, 26–27), almost certainly the same text quoted by Sle lung in the *Ocean of Oathbound*. The *Precious Clarifying Lamp* was said to have originally been written by a Chinese 'byung rtsis master named Du har nag po (c. 8th–9th century) based on teachings given to him directly from Mañjuśrī himself. Mañjuśrī is essentially the patron deity of divination and astrology in the Sino-Tibetan tradition, and according to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, all the teachings found in the *Vaidūrya dkar po* ultimately descend from the bodhisattva of wisdom. Du har nag po is listed as being the sixty-second holder of the lineage of 'byung rtsis teachings, which includes a host of other Chinese masters including Confucius (Kongzi) himself (Schuh 2012, 1295). Perhaps underscoring the importance of the figure of Rāhu in the 'byung rtsis tradition, Du har nag po's disciple, and the sixty-third lineage holder, was named Ra hu dmar po che (Dorje 2001, 57).

The *Precious Clarifying Lamp* is said to have been Du har nag po's most important work and was supposedly translated when Du har came to Tibet at the time of Emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan (740–798) (Schuh 2012, 1409–1410). Schuh argues that he more likely lived after the collapse of the Tibetan empire during the so-called dark period, between approximately 850 and 950. In any case, there is a record of Du har nag po's work being translated by Byang chub 'od (959–1040), indicating that Du har nag po certainly lived before the *phyi dar* period (ca. 1040) (Schuh 2013, 340).¹⁶ It is an open question as to whether or not the passage quoted from the *Clarifying Lamp* by Sle lung was in fact actually written by a pre-eleventh century author. But given the evidence I have presented here it certainly stands as a distinct possibility, making it and the *Black Nail* myth, which shares many of the features of the *Clarifying Lamp* myth but in a seemingly even more nascent form, likely the earliest extant Tibetan versions of Ki kang/Rāhula's origin story.



[Figure 3]
Du har nag po, from Schuh (2012, 1409)

Structurally Similar *'Byung rtsis* Myths

Specific structural features of Ki kang/Rāhula's origin myth appear to have connections to other *'byung rtsis*-related myths. Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka's inclusion as the original creator as well as subjugator of Ki kang in the apparently earlier versions of the myth in the *Black Nail* and *Clarifying Lamp* is significant given Mañjuśrī's role as the patron deity of astrology and divination, specifically in the *nag rtsis* lineage. In fact, Yamāntaka's dismemberment of Ki kang and establishment of his pieces in the eight directions is reminiscent of the *'byung rtsis* myth of Mañjuśrī's slaying of the cosmic turtle (*rus sba*), who, like Ki kang, was dispersed, with the world being created from the constituents of its body. Similarly, according to the *'byung rtsis* tradition, the eight directions are associated with the different sections of the cosmic turtle's body (Cornu 1997, 31;53–54).¹⁷ The cosmic turtle features prominently in Sino-Tibetan divination cosmology and iconography, perhaps most famously as part of the Tibetan *srid pa ho* protection amulet (Yoeli-Tlalim 2018). In the *Black Nail* myth, with its eight-part dismemberment and world-creation motifs, a motif absent from Rāhula's later mythology, Ki kang is effectively functioning in the capacity of

the more well-known figure of the cosmic turtle.

Another distinctive mytheme in Rāhula's origin that is consistent in every version of the story cited by Sle lung, are the demonic parents, one of whom lives on Mount Meru and the other who lives in the waters at its base. As far as I am aware this mytheme does not feature at all in Rāhu's Indian mythology, and while I have reviewed a number of tantric Buddhist deity origin myths, this particular mytheme, as far as I know, is almost exclusive to Rāhula's origin. "Almost," because the only other Tibetan myth in which I have seen it, or something approximating it, appears in a ritual text aimed at enhancing a person's "wind horse" (*rlung rta*), or uplifting spiritual energy, entitled *Mdos chog sna tshogs byung ba'i rlung rta bskyed pa'i mdo chog* (Ritual Scripture of Various Thread-cross Methods for Raising the Wind Horse). Kelényi, who calls attention to this text and translates portions of it, does not mention its author but notes that it contains a section directly quoted from the *Vaiḍūrya dkar po* (Kelényi 2002, 76), indicating it was produced after Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's text.

Like many Tibetan ritual texts, including *The Black Nail Tantra*, this "mdo chog" includes a myth, in this case a universal creation story. It tells the origins of the deified eight trigrams (*spar kha*), which are also an important and thoroughly Chinese component of 'byung rtsis. Given this origin myth's structural similarity to the story of Ki kang/Rāhula's origins, I quote Kelényi's translation of this section in full:

HŪM! In the sky, then, was Old Father *Khen*,
and on earth Old Mother *Khon*;
since earth between should bind them,
the pillar between sky and earth was created by means of a mountain,
and in this way was born the eldest boy, the *Gin*-mountain.
From around the rocky mountain the wind came into being,
and the eldest girl, the *Zon*-wind, was born, and
from the blazing fire arising through the blowing of the wind
the middle daughter, the *Li*-fire, was born.
Through the fire on the surface of the earth
metal came into being,
and thus the middle son, the *Dva*-metal, was born.
Through the karma of the two eldest
Gin and *Zon*, passion was born:

three times the *Gin*-mountain boy went round
 the Mount Meru by the right side,
 and did not find a wife, and roamed,
 for her part, the eldest daughter, the *Zon*-wind
 went round the sea three times by the left,
 and did not find a husband, and roamed,
 then, in the poisoned country of the *rākṣasas*,
 bearing the name *Ye le dgung sngon*,
 in the dark, swirling expanse of the karma's wind
 brother and sister were joined,
 and from this sordid union their children were born, *Kham* and *Zin* (Kelényi
 2002, 80).

Note the parallels with Rāhula's origin story, specifically Ki kang's origin in the *Black Nail* version. To summarize the key points of striking similarity, *Khen* and *Khon*, the trigrams of sky and earth like Yamāntaka and Vetālī, take the role of the primordial deities who create several others, including *Gin* and *Zon*. *Gin*, like Yakṣa Jvala, lives on the slopes of Mount Meru, and is also implied to be a rākṣasa, again, like Yakṣa Jvala. *Zon*, like Vajra Yakṣa Woman, lives in the sea. Yakṣa Jvala and Vajra Yakṣa Woman, like *Gin* and *Zon*, are also technically brother and sister. Their union produces a male deity with four sisters, and in *Gin* and *Zon*'s case, they produce a male deity with one sister. It is interesting to note especially that *Gin* and *Zon*'s son is named *Kham* in Tibetan. The Chinese word for this trigram is *kan* (坎), which is phonetically similar to gang (剛) from which the Tibetan word kang in Ki kang is likely derived. While there does not appear to be any etymological connection between these two terms in Chinese, the Tibetans may have conflated the names due to phonetic similarity. In which case Ki kang may be an alternate name for the trigram deity Kham (or vice-versa). In any case, in both myths an act of godly incest results in profound cosmic disruption. According to Kelényi the *rlung rta* text continues, describing how, with the interbreeding of *rākṣasas* and *nāgīnīs*, hybrid spirits were produced that caused harm to living beings. That is, until Mañjuśrī intervenes to restore order, albeit in a decidedly gentler fashion than he accomplishes this in *The Black Nail Tantra* (Kelényi 2002, 80–81).

Detailed text-critical work needs to be undertaken to determine the connection (if any) between this trigram origin myth and Rāhula's. Given the

number of obvious mythematic parallels, it seems likely one influenced the other, or that they both emerged from the same narrative tradition. My point here is not to attempt to explain how these myths precisely relate to each other philologically. At this stage I merely want to emphasize that much of Rāhula's Tibetan mythology appears to be specifically drawn from a thoroughly 'byung rtsis tradition, that is to say a Chinese-influenced context rather than being a wholesale, direct adaptation of Indian mythology and cosmology as previous scholarship has implied or assumed.

Chinese Origins

Rāhula's Chinese connection or partial origin is also suggested by the name Ki kang itself. Ki kang appears to be an abbreviated form of the word King kang. In the *Black Nail* myth translated above, "King kang" is the sound made by the demonic parents as their minds intermingle to produce Ki kang and his sisters. Incidentally, "Kingkang is a phonetic transcription of *jingang*, the Chinese translation of *vajra*, pronounced *kinkang* in Middle Chinese" (Tanaka 2018, 133). In the Rnying ma tradition, there is also a form of Yamāntaka named King kang,¹⁸ which is particularly noteworthy given Yamāntaka's connection to Ki kang in the *Clarifying Lamp* and *Black Nail* myths. Furthermore, it is recorded that at the Dbu rtse, the main temple at Bsam yas, Tibet's first Buddhist monastery, on the second floor which was designed in Chinese style, there were said to be two wrathful gate guardians named King and Kang (Sørensen 1994, 378). The Dbu rtse Temple also happens to be renowned as the place of concealment for a number of treasure texts related to divination (Dorje 2001, 57). Thus it is tempting, though premature without further evidence, to connect the "Ki kang" of the *Black Nail* and *Clarifying Lamp* myths to these specifically Chinese gate guardians.

Ki kang/Rāhula's most distinctive iconographic trait, the raven or crow head as his crown, is likely of Chinese provenance or at least influence as well. There is no example of Rāhu possessing a raven head in any of his Indian iconography (Markel 1990). However, there are strong solar associations with crows in Chinese mythology and iconography and other east Asian myths in which crows are specifically associated with eclipse phenomena (Bailey 2015, 46, n. 46), such as the iconographic convention of depicting the sun as a three-legged crow. Rāhu(la) is

of course best known for causing solar eclipses. See Figure 4 for an example of Rāhu's iconographic association with a crow-marked sun in east Asia.

Thus, the *Black Nail* myth, which as we have seen likely predates other versions of the myth, focuses on a deity with a Chinese name, with specifically east Asian iconography (the raven/crow head), and has legs, which is also atypical in his south Asia iconography (Bailey 2015, 37). Furthermore, there is no reference in the *Black Nail* myth to the more overtly Indian names Rāhula, Rāhu, or Khyab 'jug chen po (Mahaviṣṇu). There is little to no reference to Rāhu's Indian mythemes such as stealing the ambrosia of the gods or his association with eclipses. All this would seem to indicate, perhaps, that Ki kang was an independent Chinese deity (though obviously inspired by esoteric Buddhism given that his name is essentially just "Vajra") who was later, perhaps in the *Clarifying Lamp* or a related tradition, conflated with the Indian figure of Rāhu.

Additionally, the sources we have examined, including the *Black Nail Tantra*, the *Clarifying Lamp*, and the *Vaidūrya dkar po*, consistently connect the deities of the Rāhula "type," such as Gza' chen lha rgod and Ki kang, with the *nag rtsis* or *'byung rtsis* tradition attributed to Chinese sources and a lineage of Chinese masters. This Chinese attribution should not be regarded as simply Tibetan legend. According to available historical records, the Chinese were aware of the Indian figure of Rāhu long before the Tibetans. Mak (2015, 7) notes that the nine standard *graha* (planets) of Indian astral science, which includes Rāhu, were known in China from translations of Buddhist sutras at least as early as 230 CE. The earliest evidence for Tibetan contact with Rāhu of which I am aware is the period of the first transmission of Buddhism into Tibet during the eighth century, approximately 500 years later. Scholarship on astrology in China, such as the recent works of Mak and Kotyk, has convincingly argued that there was a surge in development of astrological divination systems and astral magical practices in the Tang Dynasty (618–907). This appears to have been mainly influenced by, and in conjunction with, the growing popularity of tantric Buddhist rituals. As such, the Chinese astrological systems developed during this time were heavily influenced by specifically Indian Buddhist cosmological and related mythological assumptions, but also included an amalgam of astrological knowledge from other cultures as well, such as Persia, Greece, and Egypt. However, these disparate cultural influences were distinctly and specifically adapted to a Chinese cultural milieu.

One important Chinese astrological manual produced under the influence

of esoteric Buddhism was the *Xiuyao jing*, which is essentially an astrology almanac. Its full title translates as *Treatise on the Auspicious and Inauspicious Times and Days, Good and Bad Nakṣatras and Planets, as Proclaimed by the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī and the Sages*. This text was produced in 759 by Amoghavajra (705–774), one of the most influential masters in the history of tantric or esoteric Buddhism in east Asia, along with one of his disciples. According to Mak this text “became an authoritative manual for all matters related to calendars, astronomy and astrology in the Esoteric Buddhist tradition” (Mak 2019, 25–26). Rāhu is of course one of the planets featured in this text and Rāhu consistently features prominently in astrology manuals of this era as one of the standard nine *grahas* (planets) (Mak 2015 and 2019).



[Figure 4]

Rāhu as depicted in the *Kuyō hiryaku* (Secret Calendar of the Nine Planets), a Japanese astrological ritual guidebook, that was based on Chinese sources (Kotyk 2017, 182). Note the black crow or raven in the sun held in his upper left hand, something not extant in any of Rāhu's Indian iconography of which I am aware, but likely corresponding to Ki kang/Rāhula's Tibetan iconography of the raven head. Also note Rāhu's multiple heads, humanoid legs, and four arms, which is also common in certain forms of Rāhula in Tibetan iconography but not in Indian forms.

Conclusion

The increased development of astrological systems and texts during the Tang era, particularly around the eighth and ninth centuries, corresponds precisely to traditional Tibetan accounts of when the Chinese *nag rtsis* or *'byung rtsis* systems, including their pantheon of *sa bdag* deities like Ki kang, were being disseminated in Tibet. As we have seen, Du har nag po, the attributed author of the *Clarifying Lamp* text with its detailed descriptions of Ki kang/Rāhula's monthly motions, is said to have lived and taught during the reign of Khri srong lde'u btsan, or perhaps a bit later. If accurate, this would likely have been only a few decades after the composition of Amoghavajra's *Xiyao jing*. Therefore, given the available evidence presented here I propose the hypothesis that the deity we now know of as Rāhula in Tibet was a Chinese adaptation of the Indian Rāhu, or a wholly different deity, who was passed into Tibet via the transmission of the *'byung rtsis* systems, perhaps originally simply called "Ki kang" before being explicitly linked with Rāhu.

Future research into the origins of the Tibetan Rāhu(la) and the Sino-Tibetan *'byung rtsis* systems more generally would do well to focus attention on Tang-era astrological texts. The astrological material found in the Dunhuang caches, for example, could be invaluable in this work and perhaps illuminate points of contact between Tibetans and the esoteric Buddhist divination systems developed in China.

Notes

- 1 See primarily Bailey (2012 and 2015), but also others such as Sanders (2011) who discusses the Ki kang origin myth, fully translated in this article, but does not sufficiently contextualize it.
- 2 This text appears in at least the Mstshams brag, Gting skyes, and Sde dge editions of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, under slightly different titles. My translation, however, was done based on a reprint of the story in a modern collection of protector deity myths from the Rnying ma tantras (Bstan 'dzin Rgya tsho 2005), which misattributes the story to another scripture entitled *Las kyi mgon po bya rog dgong can gyi rgyud* NGB (M): 927, mi, 177.5–186.7 (vol. 46).
- 3 There is no mention of the name or term “Ki Kang” at all in the stories about Rāhula taken from *Las 'bral rtsal* and *Bya khyung pa's* texts.
- 4 According to Negi (1993, 4291a), *mi bsgrungs* is the equivalent of the Sanskrit *duṣṭa* meaning “evil” or “wicked.”
- 5 This is my gloss of *de ltar byas pa'i phyogs bzhi mtshams brgyad du ki kang chen po gzir te*. The phrasing of the Tibetan seems to suggest the directions were created in conjunction with the different parts of his body being scattered.
- 6 This appears to be inconsistent with the above detail in which eight parts of Ki kang's body are established in the cardinal and intermediate directions, with no mention of the zenith and the nadir, which would suggest eight rather than ten directions.
- 7 My gloss of *dmyal ba'i grong rten byed pa* could be more literally rendered as “those who are based in hell cities”.
- 8 My tentative interpretation of *rog ti nag po de yang lus srin po*.
- 9 *brtsegs* literally means “stacked” or “piled.”
- 10 Appears to refer to the idea, as we shall see, presented in other texts, that Ki kang manifests as or emanates different types of demons at different times in a monthly cycle.
- 11 *'di skad bdag gis thos pa dus gcig na/ de bzhin gshogs pa thams cad kyi sku mchog bcom ldan 'das 'phags pa 'jam dpal gzhon nu 'og min gyi mtha' dang dbus med pa/ steng 'og phyogs mtshams kun tu 'dod pa'i yon tan lnga dang/ rin po che sna tshogs kyis rnam par spras pa'i gzhal yas khang na/ 'khor gyi byang chub sems dpa' rnam dang/ thabs cig tu bzbugs shing sems can gyi don mdzad pa las/ thugs zhi bas mi thul ba'i gdug pa can dang/ ya ma dam sri la sogs pa log 'dren can rnam dang/ gal byed cham la dbab pa'i ched du/ bcom ldan 'das nyid gdug pa spa bkong mi bsgrungs kun 'dul zhes bya ba'i ting nge 'dzin la snyoms par zbugs nas/ zbugs ma thag tu 'jigs byed kbrag 'thung gi sku/ rdo stang zil bcag pa'i 'phro ltar nag la 'tsher zhing rngom brjid ldan pa/ dur khrod gyi rgyan sna tshogs kyis bkubs shing/ gdug pa'i mtshon cha sna tshogs bsnams pa/ zhabz gnyis na rag (rak) dmyal ba'i bstan pa gzir zhing/ snang srid khong stong na 'phyo ba zbig dbyings las mngon du shar te/ gnas tshad dang dpag pa las 'das shing/ rtse mo kun tu ma chad pa/ dur khrod kyi long long 'phyo ba [308] na/ 'khor gyi gtso bor gyur pa/ rdo rje 'dzin pa chen po dang/ rgyal po dang/ rgyal thebs dang/ rgyal*

pbran dang/ nang blon dang/ phyi blon la sogs pa re re'i 'khor na yang/ nad gtong ba dang
 kbram 'debs mi bsgrungs pa'i tshogs bsam gyis mi khyab pa dag dang/ gzhan yang 'dod pa'i
 gtso mo'i tshogs/ rgyal mo dang/ rgyal mo'i rgyal mo dang/ rgyal thebs mo dang/ blon mo
 dang/ bran mo dang/ g.yog mo'i tshogs re re'i 'khor na yang/ 'du ba rnam bzhi nad kyi bdag
 mo dang/ bzhi brya rtsa bzhi'i nad gtong ba'i tshogs bsam gyis mi khyab pa dang/ thabs cig
 tu bzhus so/ yum bai tA li dang/ e ka dza Tis kyang mdun gyis bltas nas/ sku la rnam par
 'khril te gnas so/ de nas bcom ldan 'das 'jigs byed chen pos/ 'od zer sna lnga dug lnga kun sdud
 ces bya ba'i ting nge 'dzin la snyoms par zhus te/ zhus ma thag tu yum bai tA lis a ho zbes
 smin mtshams glog 'gyu ba'i brda gcig mdzad pas/ 'jigs byed chen pos kyang bskul ba de thugs
 su chud nas/ a ho su kha zbes bya ba byang chub sems kyi char yum gyi mkha' la mngon par
 babs nas rol pa mdzads pas 'khor rnams dang dgyes pa'i ro dus gcig tu bstar te/ 'od zer phyogs
 bcu'i 'jig rten gyi khams su spros pas/ sems can thams cad la byang chub sems kyi dbang bskur
 nas bde ba la bkod de/ 'od zer de dag gis khams gsum gyi gdug pa can dang/ phyin ci log gi dug
 lnga dang/ mi dge ba bcu la sogs pa'i bcud thams cad bsdu nas/ nyid kyi sku la thim par
 mdzad do/ de nas gnyis su med pa'i rol pa las zhe sdang gi 'od zer nag po dang/ nga rgyal kyi
 [309] 'od zer ser po dang/ pbrag dog gi 'od zer ljang gu la sogs pa/ ri rab kyi rtse la g.yung
 drung gi gnas su 'phro ba las srin po yag sha (yaksha) dzwa la 'bar bar gyur te/ ri rab kyi rtse
 na zhe sdang gi me 'bar zhing gnas so/ 'dod chags kyi 'od zer dmar po dang/ gti mug gi 'od zer
 dud ka rgya mtsho'i gting du 'phros pa las/ 'bras bu klu mo yak sha (yaksha) mor gyur te/ rgya
 mtsho'i gting na 'dod chags kyi khrag mtsho khol zhing gnas pa las/ yum bai ta lls 'dzum pa'i
 mdangs kyi/ klu mo rdo rje yag sha (yaksha) mo la gzigs nas/ 'dod chags kyi zil ba dang bcas
 pa'i ljags kyi brda zhid mdzad pas/ klu mo rdo rje yak sha (yaksha) mo yang yid g.yo ba'i 'dod
 chags drag po skyes te/ khi khi zbes bya ba'i 'dod chags kyi skad drag po 'brug stong dus gcig tu
 ldir ba tsam byung ngo/ byung ma thag tu ri rab kyi rtse la gnas pa'i srin po yag sha (yaksha)
 'bar ba yang/ yid g.yo ba'i 'dod chags drag po rab tu skyes nas/ kha kha zbes bya ba'i sgra skad
 chen po 'brug stong dus gcig ldir ba tsam byung ngo/ byung ma thag tu 'jig rten gyi khams
 stong gsum dus gcig tu g.yos/ rab tu g.yos/ kun tu rab tu g.yos/ chem/ rab tu chem/ kun tu rab
 tu chem/ 'ur/ rab tu 'ur/ kun du rab tu 'ur/ ldeg rab tu ldeg kun tu rabtu ldeg shig rab tu shig
 kun tu rab tu shig mtha' mtho na ni dbus dma'/ dbus mtho ni mtha' dma' bar gyur to/ 'jig rten
 gyi khams na gnas pa'i lha dang/ klu dang/ lha ma yin dang/ nam mkha' ldng dang/ dri za
 dang/ mi 'am ci dang/ lto 'phye chen po dang/ gnod sbyin dang/ srin po dang/ yi dwags
 dang/ sha za dang/ [310] 'byung po dang/ grul bum dang/ srul po dang/ lus srul po dang/
 skem byed dang/ brjed byed dang/ smyo byed dang/ grib gnon dang/ gnon po dang/ nam gru
 la sogs pa'i mi bsgrungs pa'i tshogs thams cad sdangs shing ngo mtshar du gyur te/ bcom ldan
 'das la 'di skad ces gsol to/ e ma ho/ 'phags pa'i nang nas 'phags pa gshin rje'i gsbed/ dbyings
 dang ye shes gnyis med 'od zer gyis/ snang srid dug lnga bsdu pa'i byin rlabs ni/ ki kang sgra
 skad 'brug stong ldir tsam na/ stong gsum dus gcig g.yos pa ngo mtshar che/ bdag cag rnams la
 thugs rje bskyab tu gsol/ zbes glengs nas/ rang rang gi gnas su dengs so// de nas srin po yag
 sha (yaksha) dzwa la ri rab kyi rtse la zhe sdang gi me 'bar ba dang/ klu mo rdo rje yag sha
 (yaksha) mo rgya mtsho'i gting nas 'dod chags khrag mtshor 'khyil ba gnyis lus ma phrad par

king kang gi sgras bskul te yid kyis bshos pa las/ bu ming sring lnga mtshe mar skyes so/ bu mo spun bzhi ming po dang lnga'o/ ming po ki kang phung byed chen po dang/ sring mo ki kang mgo brnyen ma bzhir gyur nas/ srid pa gsum gyi sems can thams cad za zhing 'cha' ste/ 'jig rtenphung pa la thug par gyur pa las/ bcom ldan 'das 'jigs byed gshin rje'i gsbed pos 'khor lo gcig ming po la brgyab pas lus dum bu brgyad du gtubs te/ bcom ldan 'das kyi sku dpag pa las 'das pa'i khong stong du snang srid bcug nas thugs rin po che'i khong seng/ kun rig gi ga'u nas rin po che gser gyi 'khor lo rtsibs bzhi pa gcig bton pa'i mtha' rgya mtsho chen po bzhi dang/ rol mtsho bdun gyis ni [311] bskor/ gser gyi ri bdun gyis 'khor bar bcad/ de ltar byas pa'i phyogs bzhi mtshams brgyad du/ ki kang chen po gzir te/ mgo lho nub byung ste dgod/ shar lho (lhor) lag pa g.yas pa dgod/ byang nub tu lag pa g.yon pa dgod/ byang shar du rkang pa gnyis dgod/ shar du mjug ma dgod/ lho ru dpung ba g.yas dgod/ nub tu dpung ba g.yon dgod/ byang du chu so dgod/ rkang pa gnyis kyi bar du mig dang mche ba snying gsum dgod/ ri rab kyi grwa mtshams su sring mo bzhi dgod do/ de ltar bkram zhing sbas pa las sba ru ma btub ste/ lus de dum bu re re las/ ki kang re re byung ste/ shin tu yang 'jig rten g.yos so/ sring mo yang sba ru ma btub ste/ grwa bzhi nas langs nas/ srid pa gsum gyi sems can la shin tu yang dus dang rnam pa med par za zhing 'cha' ba dang/ sbyor ba ngan pa gtong ba las/ yang bcom ldan 'das gshin rje'i gsbed pos khams gsum dbang du bsdu/ srid gsum zil gyis mnan/ stong gsum gyi stong chen po'i 'jig rten gyi khams thams cad mun nag bzhin du gtibs te/ thugs ye shes kyi nyi zer gyi rtse la/ lcags kyu'i tshogs dang/ zhags pa'i tshogs dang/ lcags srog gi tshogs dang/ sril bu'i tshogs bsam gyis mi khyab par spros te/ hum hum phaT/ ha la ha la dzah hum bam hoh e a ralli hring dza dza/ zhes 'brug stong dus gcig ldir ba tsam gyi sgra bsgrags nas dbang du bsdu pas/ ki kang ming po dang/ sring mo bcas pa/ bred/ rab tu bred/ kun tu rab tu bred/ 'dar/ rab tu 'dar/ kun tu rab tu 'dar/ sngangs/ rab tu sngangs/ kun tu rab tu sngangs nas/ bcom ldan 'das la mgrin [312] gcig tu thal mo sbyar te 'di skad ces gsol to/ e m ho 'jigs byed chen po lags// bdag cag ki kang ming sring rnams// pha la gdug pa'i bu lags pas/ snang srid srog chags ma lus kun// su phrad khyur mid 'cha' ba dang/ /sbyor ba ngan pa gtong ba dang/ /lo tog 'joms pa'i las 'di dag/ /bdag cag rnams kyi rang las na/ /dpa' bo chen po ci la bkyon/ /sngar yang dpa' bo chen po yis/ /bdag gi lus gtubs phyogs bcur sbas/ /di yang shin tu ma legs so// thugs rje 'breng yang mi mnga' 'am/ /gtso bo chen po khyod nyid ni/ /thugs rje byams pa'i mnga' bdag na/ /di lta'i cho 'phrul ci la ston/ /gtug pa'i gsung sgra ci la sgrogs/ /thugs kyi sprul pa ci la 'gyed/ /dpa' bo chen po bdag cag la/ /bka' bab mi 'tshal 'bangs su mchi/ /'bangs la nan tan ma chung zbig/ ces gsol to/ /spyi sdom srog snying 'di mdongs gsol du phul lo// mi g.yo zhing mi 'khu bar byas te/ dam bstsal zhing dbang bskur nas/ 'jig rten bde ba la bkod de/ zas su ni sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa 'jig pa dang/ dmyal ba'i grong rten byed pa dang/ dam las zlog pa'i srog dang dbugs la dbang bskur te/ dbang lha ma srin sde brgyad dam la btags nas dbang bskur ro/ /rog ti nag po de yang lus srin po la/ mgo bya rog gis brtsegs pa de/ lha ma srin sde brgyad du gyur nas dus tshod dang tshed grangs la 'jug cing rgyu ba dang/ ki kang dang gshed bzhis bskiyod 'gul gyis/ srog dang dbugs la dbang byed par gyur pas/ ki kang ming sring rnams rjes su yi rangs te/ 'jigs byed chen po la g.yas phyogs nas [313] lan gsum bskor ba byas nas/ pus btsugs thal mo spyar nas 'di skad ces gsol to/ /a la la ho/ 'jigs byed chen pos bdag

cag rnam la thugs brtse bar dgongs nas/ bdag cag rang rang gi spyod pa las dang mthun par bka' stsal pa ngo mtshar che'o/ bdag cag ming sring ji ltar bka' stsal pa las mi 'da' zhing/ gnyer du gtad pa'i las rnam gdon mi za bar bgyid do zhes gsol zhing dam bcas nas/ rang rang gi gnas ga la ba der dong ngo/ /zhes gsungs so// Bstan 'dzin Rgya tsho (2005, 307–313). This corresponds to the first chapter of *The Black Nail Tantra* NGB (M) 931: mi, 276.3–361.2 (vol. 46), 276–289.

- 12 There are a number of iconographic variants of the “Rāhula” type, however, some with legs instead of a snake’s body. For instance, “Heruka Blood Eye” (Tib. Khrag mig), also known as the Supreme Gza’ in a *sādhana* collection by Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659), has a consort who sits in his lap and rides on a serpent, indicating he has human legs. See Bailey (2015, 51) and also “Khrag mig ma” in Chandra (1999–2005, 6:1677).
- 13 The four blood clots may be a reference to, or connected with, Ki kang/Rāhula’s four sisters.
- 14 Chronomancy here meaning techniques for determining the auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of hours, days, months, and years, in this context based specifically on the knowledge of the purported locations and motions of certain deities.
- 15 On the function, history, and the full significance of the *sa bdag*, specifically in the context of Sangs rgyas rgya tsho’s text, see Schuh (2011). See also Dorje (2001).
- 16 Adding to the confusion, however, I have found a reference to a Da hu ra nag po, also noted to be a Chinese treasure revealer with an important text with *Clarifying Lamp* in the title (*Sku rgyud snang gsal sgron me*), who is dated as late as the twelfth century. See Jamgön Kongtrul (2012, 900). However, given the different spelling of his name, the different text title, and the much later date, despite the striking similarities I am inclined to believe this was a different person. I am not aware of any Chinese source that mentions Du har nag po, though finding one should be a focus of further research.
- 17 What is particularly interesting about this Sino-Tibetan cosmic turtle myth and its apparent intersection with the Ki kang/Rāhula origin story is that it seems to take inspiration from the Hindu myth in which the universe is created by the *devas* and *asuras* working together to churn the milky cosmic ocean with Mount Meru resting on the back of a giant turtle, who is an emanation of Viṣṇu. This also happens to be the same myth in which Rāhu’s theft of the elixir of immortality features prominently. The common Tibetan name for Rāhu(la) is Khyab ’jug, which is also the Tibetan name for Viṣṇu. Ki kang essentially standing in for the cosmic turtle in the *Black Nail* myth appears to be further Buddhist appropriation and adaptation of Viṣṇu’s mythology. For more discussion on this appropriation, see Bailey (2015, 59–63). On the transmission of the Chinese iconographic figure of the divination turtle to Tibet, see Poupard (2018). It should also be noted that the eight-fold dismemberment of Ki kang is distinctly different from the typical Indian myth of Rāhu’s beheading, where he is cut into only two pieces – head and tail (Bailey 2012, 18).

- ¹⁸ This deity was, for instance, invoked in the wrathful magic practices of the (in)famous Mongol-repelling sorcerer, Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624) (Gentry 2017, 350).