

A Bon tantric approach to the senses: the evidence from Khu tsha zla 'od's *Black Pillar* (*Ka ba nag po man ngag rtsa ba'i rgyud*)¹

Robert Mayer

(Ruhr-Universität Bochum and University of Oxford)

The great early g.Yung drung Bon Treasure revealer and polymath, Khu tsha zla 'od, was renowned for the sophistication and subtlety of his vision, and also for his wide-ranging and often innovative syncretic genius. For example, he was such a famous contributor to early Tibetan medicine and astrology that some Tibetan scholars believed he was one and the same person as g.Yu thog pa Yon tan mgon po (1127–1203). He was also one of the very first Tibetans to take up the Dharmakīrtian style of logic, which he introduced creatively into his rDzogs chen commentary *mKhas pa mi bzhi'i 'grel pa*, entangled there with indigenous² concepts such as *bla* (Kapstein 2009). Similarly, he

¹ I would like to thank the Käte Hamburger Kolleg at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum for their very generous sponsorship of my attendance at the 2016 IATS conference in Bergen, Norway, where this paper was originally given.

² The term 'indigenous' is not a simple one. My usage in this particular paper is to indicate distinctive ancestral cultural categories that were present, or were perceived to have been present, before the ascendancy of the largely Indian-derived Buddhism that eventually came to constitute the dominant religious culture. No categorizations of indigenous cultures are absolute, and there is little doubt that numerous 'indigenous' cultural categories in this sense might carry influences from or have originated beyond the boundaries of ethnic Tibet. The key point is that they were either established within local cultures before the ascendancy of Buddhism, or at least were widely perceived as being such, and that they were in that sense distinguishable from Buddhism. One should take note that in the influential *Gling grags*, which is believed to be approximately contemporaneous with Khu tsha, an emphatically Tibeto-centric view is taken of the origins of Bon, and no mention is made of any foreign origins outside of Tibet, for example, in Zhang zhung. Bon is also described in the *Gling grags* as having been present in Tibet for an extremely long time, before even the first Tibetan kings. For all the above reasons, one might, albeit heuristically, use the term 'indigenous', as I have done here. I am not yet certain of Khu tsha's precise views on the origins of Bon, so if it transpires that his views differ significantly from the *Gling grags*, I might have to adjust some of the vocabulary used in this paper accordingly. The forthcoming publication of Per Kvaerne's detailed study of the *Gling grags* will surely prove an important milestone in Tibetan studies.

revealed the root tantras of the Bon *Phur pa* tradition, most notably, the magnificent *Ka ba nag po*,³ which succeeded in integrating numerous indigenous Tibetan elements into an Indian Mahāyoga-style literary and doctrinal template. But was his approach to the senses in his *Ka ba nag po* reproducing Tantric Buddhism, or was he (true to form), reproducing indigenous elements as well? In this paper, I argue that he did both: at a structural doctrinal level, his *Ka ba nag po* reproduced Tantric Buddhist understandings of the senses, while at the more surface level of sensory aesthetics and cultural imagery, his *Ka ba nag po* reproduced numerous indigenous forms as well.

Khu tsha operated in lHo brag probably in the late 12th and early 13th century,⁴ a period when some of the foundational formulations of g.Yung drung Bon lamaism were still being articulated. My working hypotheses regarding Khu tsha's historical predicament as a Bon intellectual are therefore as follows:

Perfecting and refining the ongoing construction of the emergent lamaistic-style g.Yung drung Bon might have appeared the most urgent requirement of the moment, if Bon was to thrive at all in the new Buddhist-determined religious economy based around lamas and gompas. This new religious economy was still in the process to varying degrees of actively displacing the previously prevalent regionally varied religious systems that were often non-literary, and

³ In this article, for reasons of brevity, I will be relying mainly upon the following witness: *Ka ba nag po man ngag rtsa ba'i rgyud*, Vol. 160, pp. 1–125 of *Theg chen g.yung drung bon gyi bka' 'gyur*, Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, Lhasa 1999. (= 3rd edition of Bon Kanjur, in 178 volumes). However, at points where this edition does not make so much sense, I have also shown variant readings from the brTen 'gyur edition of the *Ka ba nag po*: Volume 268, pp. 1–163, *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, 2nd Edition (in 333 volumes), n.d., n.p., ISBN 7-223-00984-5 (sic). From a private collection, courtesy of Dr J-L Achard.

⁴ There is some confusion regarding his dates. According to Kongtrul's *gTer ston brgya rtsa'i rnam thar* (as presented in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, Shechen Edition, Vol. 1, ff. 418–420), he apparently lived during the mid twelfth to early 13th century; although Bon sources often put his birth date earlier, in 1024. Kapstein (2009) argues that Khu tsha already knows the work rNgog Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109), whose logical thinking is evident in his *mKhas pa Mi bzhi'i 'grel pa*; and that this might support the later dates. Conversely, the late Helmut Krasser told me (personal communication, September 16th, 2013) that he thought Khu tsha could have accessed Dharmakīrtian thinking even before rNgog Blo ldan shes rab, so that the earlier Bon dating could not be ruled out. In this paper, I am provisionally going with Kongtrul's statement that Khu tsha's treasure revelation was roughly contemporaneous with Guru Chos dbang's early life (1212–1270), and with g.Yu thog pa (1126–1202) ('*di nyid chos dbang rin po che'i sku tsh'e'i stod g.yu thog pa dang dus mnyam du byon par gsal bas*), an assertion possibly supported by the references to Khu tsha in Chos dbang's biography (Guru Chos dbang n.d., page 136).

had been served by a variety of non-lamaistic religious specialists, and which had in many cases also attracted the ire of Buddhism through their historic acceptances of such practices as tumulus burial and animal sacrifice. And since the new lamaistic-style religious economy differed greatly from what went before by being so predominantly textual, it remained particularly incumbent on the Bon-inclined intelligentsia of Khu tsha's generation to continue to produce viable lamaistic texts. As we know, such textual production was often framed within the g.Yung drung Bon narrative of *gter ma* discovery of ancient texts, that had been buried (for the second time in their very long lives) during the reign of Khri Srong lde'u btsan; but such framing narratives need not distract us too much from a consideration of the pressing historical circumstances that demanded such textual production at that particular time.

From studying the available extant witnesses (and assuming that they predominantly represent Khu tsha's original intentions rather than redaction by later hands),⁵ it seems to me that in producing his *Ka ba nag po*, Khu tsha was guided by two contrasting principles, which he expressed through the lens of a distinctive religious orientation. His first principle was resolutely to assert a separate Bon identity, to guard against Bon's disappearance through assimilation into Buddhism. His second principle was to render his texts profoundly congruent with Buddhist doctrine, not only to guard against the kind of Buddhist persecution which forcefully suppressed the important sacrificial elements of the old Tibetan funerary cults,

⁵ In our studies of canonical rNying ma tantras (Mayer 1996, Cantwell and Mayer 2007, 2012), we have usually understood detailed critical editing as a necessary prerequisite to further literary analysis. In the case of the *Ka ba nag po*, for various reasons, we were unable to do this, and were restricted to making a diplomatic transcription based on the four witnesses available to us. But while our presentation of the text is strictly a diplomatic one, at those junctures where our base text is unsatisfactory, or clearly mistaken, we have been compelled in our translation or glosses also to adopt readings from other sources, including from other editions, from commentarial texts, and from the oral advice of Bon lamas. Hence, although our text edition is strictly diplomatic, as we make clear in our annotations, on some occasions, the accompanying (and sometimes provisional) translation is necessarily based on an eclectic range of sources. Because we could not make a critical edition, we therefore harbour many uncertainties about the provenance of the received texts: to what extent do they actually represent Khu tsha's work, to what extent might they represent the work of others? Finding ourselves (as comparative newcomers to the study of Bon) ill equipped to approach such questions, we relied instead on the advice of academic colleagues more deeply versed in Bon literature. At the time of writing, the consensus among the best known contemporary academic Bon scholars was that they saw no reason to doubt that the *Ka ba nag po*, as received, is substantially the work of Khu tsha himself. I should add, the four different witnesses so far examined do not suggest major redactorial interventions.

but also out of a genuine respect and love for what Bon pos could consider to be the genuine and original Buddhist doctrine, which in their view had first been taught by gShen rab. For all the evidence suggests that like his near contemporary and neighbour the rNying ma master Guru Chos dbang, Khu tsha too had a somewhat polytropic religious orientation, producing Treasures texts for Buddhism as well as for Bon. Just as Chos dbang was a great Buddhist polymath and Treasure Revealer who also participated in Bon (Guru Chos dbang n.d., pp. 83–84), Khu tsha was a great g.Yung drung Bon polymath and Treasure Revealer who also participated in Buddhism (Kongtrul 2007–2008, Vol. 1, pp. 418–420). Yet he was apparently careful not to conflate g.Yung drung Bon with Buddhism, and seems to have made efforts to keep the two traditions separate.

Thus if we look at his *Ka ba nag po*'s presentation of g.Yung drung Bon from the perspective of *religious and social identity*, it can accurately be characterised as presenting an entirely independent religion, in important respects with an even lesser degree of lexical intertextuality with tantric Buddhism than the latter sometimes shared with Śaivism. For the *Ka ba nag po* (as far as we can see) shares no passages of text, no liturgical passages, and comparatively few deities, with the rNying ma *Phur pa* tantras, and in addition, its ritual syntax is quite often variant.⁶ Yet if we look at the *Ka ba nag po*'s g.Yung drung Bon from the perspective of *doctrine and soteriology*, it can only be described as functionally identical to the rNying ma *Phur pa* tantras, and in this respect is probably more consistently and comprehensively parallel to Buddhism than are any of the Śaiva or other Indian traditions. For even if Bon texts like the *Gling grags* might pillory as false perversions Padmasambhava's tantric traditions, among which *Phur pa* was central, Khu tsha's *Ka ba nag po* is, in most matters of doctrine and ritual grammar, extremely similar.⁷

⁶ Indian Vajrayāna could, for example, share parallel or even identical passages of text with Śaivism, in a way that the *Ka ba nag po* never does with the rNying ma *Phur pa* tantras. See the passages demonstrated by Alexis Sanderson to have been incorporated into the Buddhist *Cakrasamvaratantra* from such Śaiva sources as the *Jayadrathayāmala*, *Picunata*, *Tantrasadbhāvatāntra*, and *Siddhayogēśvarīmata* (See Sanderson 1994, 2001). Of course, the *Ka ba nag po* is just one among many Bon tantras, and it would be rash and premature to generalise from its single example.

⁷ A key part of g.Yung drung Bon narrative is that the Bon preserve in pristine purity, Buddhist teachings that had become perverted in the forms propagated in Tibet as *Chos*. In this respect, one can indeed perhaps discern in the finely made text of the *Ka ba nag po* an attempt to avoid the kind of textual obscurities and poor or crude language present in some Indian tantric materials, and also in some rNying ma *Phur pa* tantras. Likewise, there is perhaps discernible a concern to minimise the incidence of moral ambiguities in the articulation of the *Ka ba nag*

Elsewhere (Cantwell and Mayer 2013), and in contrast to those scholars who have seen g.Yung drung Bon as merely a slavish copy of Buddhism, I have mentioned how Khu tsha reproduces in his *Ka ba nag po* a considerable quantity of indigenous Tibetan ritual symbolism. My current hypothesis is that he saw this as his contribution to a larger generational project of his times, namely, the preservation and propagation of a separate g.Yung drung Bon religious identity, through the production of written Bon sacred texts that were specifically suitable for lamaistic uses. I have mentioned, for example, that one of the ways he achieved this was by maintaining within the *Ka ba nag po* a vast pantheon of non-Indic deities that were generally understood (perhaps in many cases accurately) to have been worshipped in Tibet before the arrival of Buddhism; and yet, in the spirit of tantric pure vision, he could imply these deities to be already fully enlightened in the nirvāṇic Buddhist sense, with no need of further converting or taming. Nevertheless, to emphasise the profound congruence of his system with Buddhist soteriology (as, presumably in his eyes, originally taught by gShen rab), he has at the very centre of his maṇḍala a distinctly Indic type of tantric *yi dam* or *iṣṭadevatā*, albeit adorned with some culturally indigenous embellishments. He was then able to construe his vast pantheons of non-Indic deities as enlightened emanations of this central deity.

In this article, addressed to our volume theme of Tibetan religion and the senses, I will by contrast need to emphasise the non-indigenous, on how Khu tsha promoted a soteriology that was absolutely orthodox in terms of Buddhist doctrine. He had to do this with regard to the senses, because a specific way of understanding them was so fundamental to Buddhist doctrine that it was not in any way negotiable. This was so fundamental that if Khu tsha had introduced any significant changes, he would have incurred the hazard of rendering his views doctrinally non-congruent with Buddhism, which was something he apparently did not want to do.

A central idea within most forms of Buddhism is that the world as experienced through our senses, is delusory, and has no real existence. Not even the senses themselves, nor the person who experiences them, have any real existence. A major purpose of the Buddhadharmā is to bring sentient beings to a direct realisation of

po's various doctrines. Yet it would be premature to come to any such conclusions until several more of Khu tsha's *Phur pa* works have been studied, so I have avoided such speculations here, even though I find the topic highly intriguing. Note however that the morally ambiguous *sgröl ba* or 'liberative killing' rituals remain important to the Bon *Phur pa* tradition, just as they are for the rNying ma.

this truth, which is understood as a necessary precondition for any final release from suffering.

I do not yet see much evidence that any such idea, nor its concomitant soteriologies, were independently produced within indigenous Tibetan religions on any wide scale. On the contrary, most evidence suggests that pre-Buddhist Tibetan religions tended towards a more naturalistic understanding of reality and were not primarily focused on a soteriology seeking to dissolve the world as experienced. Insofar as ideas similar to such Buddhist ones were already known in Tibet prior to the eighth century, they might well have been the result of early Buddhist influences from India, China, and Nepal. So by concurring with Buddhism in his doctrinal approach to the senses, Khu tsha was making a statement, privileging a transcendent g.Yung drung Bon over the naturalistic interpretations of the senses more often found in many indigenous Tibetan traditions.

The understanding that our sense perceptions are ultimately delusory pervades most of Buddhism and is foundational to its distinctive *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* cosmology. So long as you believe that this world, as revealed by your sensory data, is real, you are trapped in the endless suffering of *samsāra*; it is only when you finally realise the phenomena revealed by your sensory data are illusory that you can be liberated into the supreme happiness of *nirvāṇa*. We first encounter such ideas about the world of the senses in the most basic strata of Buddhism, within such core doctrines as *pratītya-samutpāda*, or dependent origination, and the twelve *nidānas* or links connected with it. The fifth of these links is the *ṣaḍāyatana*, or six sense bases: eye and vision, ear and hearing, nose and olfaction, tongue and taste, skin and touch, and mind and thought. All twelve of these links or *nidānas*, including of course the six sense bases, are said to stem from *avidyā*, or ignorance. They do not indicate reality.

In Mahāyāna's hugely influential *Perfection of Wisdom* literature, we find much the same devaluation of the senses, although formulated a little differently through a greater emphasis on *śūnyatā* or emptiness: again and again, the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras tell us, there is no eye, nothing is seen, there is no hearing, nothing is heard, and so on through all the six senses.

This outlook, that all phenomena are empty, was highly influential for the Madhyamaka school, established by the two visits of Śāntarakṣita to Tibet in the eighth century as the dominant philosophical tradition there. His famous *Madhyamakālamkāra* deployed Buddhism's 'neither one nor many' logical argumentation to deny any ultimate reality for an external world revealed by the senses—and despite the deprecation of Śāntarakṣita in Bon narratives

such as the *Gling grags*, the *Ka ba nag po* seems specifically to cite this argument. Tibetan tantrism also accepts elements from the Yogācāra school, but they too attacked the reality of sense data through an idealism of non-duality of subject and object. Similarly, the *tathāgatagarbha* or buddha nature strand in Mahāyāna understood the six sense bases as part of the incidental defilements of ignorance and passions that temporarily obstructed our true innate enlightened nature. Even more directly important for Khu tsha's formulation of the *Ka ba nag po*, contemporaneous Buddhist tantric literature attacked the reality of ordinary sense data as delusory, defining enlightenment as precisely the transcendence of ordinary appearances, through a purified perception of mundane body, speech, and mind, as buddha body, speech, and mind. Thus, the Buddhist doctrines available to Khu tsha overwhelmingly denied the ultimate reality of ordinary sense perceptions, leaving him little option other than to concur.

In the rest of this paper, I will first present a highly condensed review of Khu tsha's doctrinal understanding of the senses in the *Ka ba nag po*, using some of his own words. After that, I will give examples of how he nevertheless at the more surface level of sensory aesthetics and cultural imagery reproduced numerous indigenous categories as well.

Chapter One of the *Ka ba nag po* (page 5) describes the interlocutor of the tantra, Thugs rje byams ma, ('Loving Compassion'), who bears some resemblance to the Buddhist Tārā, rising from her seat, prostrating to the main deity, and making beautiful sensory offerings of flowers, dance, music, and great delight,⁸ to mKha' 'gying, ('Majestically Poised (in) Space'), the expounder of the tantra, who bears some resemblance to a version of the Buddhist deity Vajrakīla. Then, praising him, she requests him to teach. His response implies that true reality is ineffable and lies beyond the senses (6.7). So, although sense offerings are made by the interlocutor, the main deity explains that reality goes beyond all senses, and this sets the tone: the senses are to be used to transcend the realm of the senses.

E ma ho! The stainless completely pure *bodhicitta*,
 [Is] unchanging, the essence *g.Yung drung* enlightened body,
 [Which is] assured in freedom from effort and striving.
 It cannot be established as single, nor is it divisible into a
 duality;
 It has no partiality and it falls into no extremes;

⁸ [5 l.3] *de nas 'khor de rnams kyi* [l.4] *nang nas// yum lha mo thugs rje byams ma zhes bya bas/ rang gi stan las langs te skor ba dang // lha phyag dang/ me tog dang* [l.5] *gar dang rol mo dang // dgyes pa rol pa chen po'i mchod pa phul nas*

In essence it is unaccomplished, and it transcends everything whatsoever.

It has no colour, no shape, and no characteristics.

It is beyond the range of letters and words.⁹

In Chapter Two, Thugs rje byams ma asks him how, if the true nature [of things] is to be fully pure and unfabricated in this way, does erring into ignorance come about?

In reply, he explains how everything we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think—our entire world of experience—arose through an erring away from primordial wisdom into ignorance. The world of the senses only ever arose because of a falling away from the primordial perfection which is the natural state of things. The senses pertain to the deluded and terrible perceptions of *saṃsāra*. Unfortunately, ignorance just arises, spontaneously. Minds become defiled by it and are seized by darkness and the *māras*, eventually manifesting as the six kinds of fallen sentient beings circling miserably around the three worlds of *saṃsāra*.

The *Ka ba nag po* explains:

(12 l.4-5) “The twelve-fold [cycle of] dependent origination [based on] ignorance goes round...

A stream of perverse cognitions

Adopt the viewpoints of erroneous and obscured karmas of attachment to *saṃsāra*....

(13 l.1-2) The projections of afflicted minds proliferate,

As the delusions of extreme ignorance.

This is like having eaten [the hallucinogenic plant] *datura*,

Or believing the fluffy [white] wool[-like clouds] of the sky [or] a [white] conch shell to be yellow, [through suffering from jaundice];

[One] sees something with one’s eyes, yet does not understand [what one is really seeing];

[And so] becomes tormented by great sufferings.”¹⁰

In Chapter Three, we learn how the Bon *Phur pa* deity mKha’ ’gying gazes down on all suffering beings with wisdom and compassion.

⁹ [6 l.7] *e ma ho/ 'dri med rnam dag byang chub sems/ mi 'gyur thig le g.yung drung skul/ bya* [7 l.1] *brtsal rtsol grub bral ba'i rdeng / gcig tu ma nges gnyis ma phye/ ris su ma chad mthar ma lung / [1.2] ngo bor ma grub ci las 'das/ kha dog dbyibs dang mtshan ma med/ tshig dang yi ge'i spyod yul 'das/*

¹⁰ [12 l.4] *ma rig rten 'brel bcu gnyis 'khor/... phyin ci log gi shis pa'i* (brTen 'gyur: 'du shes) *rgyun/ [1.5] 'gol sgrib 'khor* (brTen 'gyur: 'khor chags) *las la ltas/... [13 l.1] nyon mongs yid kyi sprul pa 'gyed/ shin du ma rig rmongs [1.2] pa ste/ dper na dha du thang phrom zos/ nam mkha'i bal 'dab dung ser 'dzin/ dmig gis dmigs bzhin ma rtogs pa/ sdug bsngal chen po rnam kyis gdung/*

Thus, the enlightened one looks with compassion on those who have fallen away from reality into the realms of *samsāra* (and the senses) and employs skillful methods to rescue them.

In Chapter Four, we begin to learn about the skillful methods he deploys to rescue beings from the deluded sense perceptions of our every-day conventional reality that constitutes *samsāra*. mKha' 'gying begins to reveal ways of using the deluded senses themselves to escape from the world of the deluded senses. Deluded suffering realms of the senses, described as body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities, are to be returned to their primordial enlightened state by tantric meditations and rituals. Meditation and rituals on the central *Phur pa* deity are given for this purpose. The first stage is the recreation of the phenomenal outer world, not as it ordinarily appears to our delusory senses, but in its true primordial nature as a divine palace of enlightened wisdom and compassion.

In Chapter Five, the process reaches its culmination, with a description of the enlightened deity, in whose divine form the fortunate are henceforth to imagine themselves, for in reality this has been their true nature since beginningless time. It is at this point that Khu tsha brings the *Ka ba nag po* as close as it ever gets to full-on intertextuality with Buddhism, since in generating the visualisation of this main deity, he employs the key rNying ma Buddhist terminology of the *ting 'dzin gsum*, or Three Contemplations. The *ting 'dzin gsum* are extremely well known in rNying ma. They are employed throughout its Mahāyoga genre, where their presence is understood as an authoritative seal of doctrinal orthodoxy. The three contemplations serve as a three-stage method of envisaging the emanation of the meditational deity out of the formless absolute nature known as the *dharmakāya*, through its inconceivable radiant expression as the blissful *samboghakāya*, down to its embodiment in form as the more accessible *nirmāṇakāya* deity, upon which latter even the confused mind of an ordinary meditator is able to focus. Just as there could be no more convincing evidence of Khu tsha's resolve to conform with basic Buddhist doctrine than his mention of the twelve links of dependent origination or *pratītyasamutpāda*; or of his commitment to conform to Madhyamaka philosophy through his citation of Buddhism's 'neither one nor many' reasoning that had been so influential for Śāntarakṣita; so also there can be no more convincing evidence of his resolve to conform to rNying ma Vajrayāna doctrines than his adoption of the *ting 'dzin gsum*.

We have just seen how Chapters One to Five of the *Ka ba nag po* serve to lay out its Buddhist-congruent doctrinal structures. By contrast, Chapters Six to Twelve introduce a series of deity groupings that were in all likelihood envisaged as indigenous. Many of them

invoke a powerful aesthetic which seems to reference indigenous Tibetan beliefs. Often family genealogies are supplied for these deities, specifying parents and grandparents and great grandparents, as well as siblings and spouses and children. Such genealogies are rarer in Indic Vajrayāna sources. Nevertheless, we also find occasional reference to categories, such as *rākṣasas* and *yakṣas*, that first originated in Indic cultures, but which of course subsequently also proliferated right across Asia, including the Far East.

The first of these indigenous deities are the Seven Fierce Hawks (*dbal gyi khra bdun*) of Chapter Six. Their enlightened nature is described in orthodox tantric Buddhist doctrinal terms: *From out of the emptiness that is nothing whatsoever, The natural quality of the sky[like nature] and expanse [of the mind], with its spatial field, Becomes established as the body, speech, and mind of the Hawk Divinity.*¹¹ Yet a distinctly indigenous aesthetic is still preserved, one that gives a nod towards a more naturalistic imagery: after living six months together in their bird's nest on a mountain peak, a *khyung* and hawk couple manage to produce some eggs, which they lovingly guard for the incubation period of three months, after which their little chicks are hatched. These become the Seven Hawk deities. They in turn produce further hawk emanations, which in turn produce yet further hawk emanations, until they are countless. All are in nature the expression of the enlightened compassion and activity of the buddhas.

Chapter Seven introduces the Five Fierce Wolf deities (*dbal gyi gcan spyang lnga*), associated with the five families, five directions, five colours, and five wisdoms. Again, their Buddhistically enlightened nature is emphasized, along with an indigenous naturalistic aesthetic: long long ago, the divine wolves were emanated from the non-dual enlightened state, but not into some abstract *sambhogakāya* heaven or Indian-style tantric charnel ground as Buddhist deities might be, but rather onto a mountain peak with fresh water springs on its slopes. There they mated with the Hawk Deities of the previous chapter, who laid eggs that hatched as chimeras with wolf bodies and hawk wings (*khra spyang*). As Charles Ramble (2014) has shown us, chimeric deities of this sort are a very prominent and characteristic trope in indigenous Tibetan religion; and as Dan Martin (*Tibeto-Logic* blog, March 10, 2014) has described, bird-canine conflation in particular are a well-known motif in Tibetan folklore. Yet in the *Ka ba nag po*, even these Wolf-Hawk chimeras are enlightened in the Buddhistic sense: *'The greatness of their enlightened qualities is inconceivable. They are endowed with might*

¹¹ [25 1.6] // *ji yang med pa'i stong pa las/ mkha' klong dbyings kyi rang bzhin gyis/ khra [1.7] gsas sku gsung thugs su grub/*

and a great number of magic powers. They subdue the wrong views of the demons of the five defilements, no need to mention the enemies and obstacles. Their enlightened action tames each of those who are karmically destined to be tamed."¹²

Chapter Eight introduces the Earth Mistresses, or *Sa bdag mo*, who arise from various lakes. In this way they resembling the troublesome Himalayan local goddesses of similar designation (*Sa bdag ma* or *bSe mo*) that were tamed by Padmasambhava in the Dunhuang *Phur pa* text PT44.¹³ These goddesses went on to play a prominent role in subsequent rNying ma mythology, not least as prime objects of taming. The *Sa bdag ma* or *bSe mo* of the rNying ma narratives often share with their Bon counterparts in the *Ka ba nag po* the attribute of being born from various kinds of oceans. The story of Padmasambhava taming some *Sa bdag ma* at Yang le shod became a popular charter myth or *rabs* for the rNying ma *Phur pa* tradition. The narrative was quite likely used in exactly that way by Buddhists in Khu tsha's own direct environment.¹⁴ Of course, from Buddhism's absolute viewpoint, such unruly deities in need of taming are at the same time primordially pure, so that from the point of view of tantric pure vision, they can nevertheless be regarded as emanations of the buddhas. Buddhist sources (such as the *'Bum nag*) can thus sometimes describe them as worldly (Cantwell and Mayer 2008, page 46, note 25), and at other times (for example in many ritual texts), as transcendent.¹⁵ Here, the *Ka ba nag po*'s *Sa bdag mo* are in no need of taming, because they are portrayed as originally enlightened

¹² (29 L.7) *che ba'i yon tan bsam mi khyab / mthu dpung stobs dang ldan par 'gyur / nyon mongs bdud lnga log rtogs 'dul / dgra dang bgegs la smos ci dgos / 'phrin las rang skal 'dul bar byed /*

¹³ See Cantwell and Mayer 2008, 41–67.

¹⁴ We first encounter a complete version of this important rNying ma *rabs* in the probably early 11th century Dunhuang text PT44. More directly, there is also a reference to the narrative in Guru Chos dbang's *gTer 'byung chen mo* (p. 86); the same text at another juncture also mentions Khu tsha himself (p. 136). Khu tsha and Chos dbang's families knew of each other and lived in the same region of Southern Tibet.

¹⁵ Charles Ramble has made the interesting observation that in Nepal, as well as signifying deities, the terms *bSe* and *Saiñ* can also refer to ethnic groups. He writes: "*bSe* is a very interesting term. It does appear as part of the name of some gods (most notably *A bse*), but I'm not sure if I've seen it as a separate category. *Se/bSe* is the name of an ethnic group, and the Newars still refer to the Tamangs who live around their settlements in Kathmandu as *Saiñ*; it's used in certain contexts not just of the Tamangs but others in that language group, such as the Gurungs and Thakalis (who speak *Se-skad*, and lived in a place called *Se-rib*), so Padmasambhava's conquests in Pharping could possibly be a reference to the conversion of some indigenous population." Personal communication, 21st December, 2018.

emanations. They are in fact the daughters of an emanation of the central *Phur pa* deity, an Earth Master or *Sa bdag* called Tsang tsang, who is fully enlightened. Thus it is from Tsang tsang that all the forms of *saṃsāra* arose, and his wife the Earth Mistress Pervasive Emptiness is an emanation of the enlightened goddess Thugs rje byams ma.¹⁶

Indigenous-seeming groupings of deities can show elements of Indic terminology: for example, among the hosts of Black Thu lum¹⁷ Ladies (*thu lum nag mo*) of Chapter Eleven, who are a type of *bdud* deity, we find the more Indic Thu lum with the Head of an Action Rākṣasī (*Thu lum las kyi srin mo gdong*), amongst colleagues with distinctively Tibetan ethnonyms, such as Thu lum with a Mon Sparking head (*Thu lum mon gyi tshwa tshwa gdong*).

Chapter Twelve is devoted to more *bdud* deities, who are not in this text assimilated to the Indian *māras*, as we sometimes find in Buddhist texts. Rather, the *bdud* too are activity emanations of the enlightened deity. Some seem to explicitly reference indigenous categories such as *bse* or *mi rgod*, for example Black Female Sé Gloomy Locks (*Nag mo bse'i ral 'thib ma*), or Black Female Disaster Dūd who Rides the Three-legged Sé Horse (*Nag mo phung bdud bse rta rkang gsum zhon*), or Black Female with a Bear's Head who Rides a Yeti (*Nag mo dred gdongs mi rgod zhon*). Others yield us no certain signs either way, such as Disastrous Nine-Faced Dūd Son (*Phung byed kha dgu bdud kyi bu*), or Northern Dūd Mad Crazy Master of Inflicting Anthrax/Ulcer disorders (*Byang bdud bsnyo 'bog lhog bkal bdag*). Yet others must of course reference an Indic understanding of the *Phur*

¹⁶ [3-1.3] *dbal bon yab kyi sprul pa [4] las/ sa bdag tsang tsang 'khor ba byung / thugs rje byams ma'i cho 'phrul las/ sa bdag stong khyab yum chen byung/ de gnyis rol pa'i sras mo lnga/*

'From the emanations of the father dBal bon, The Earth Master Tsang Tsang Cyclic existence arose. From the miraculous display of Thugs rje byams ma, The Earth Mistress the great mother sTong khyab (Pervasive Emptiness) arose. From the frolicking of these two, [arose] five daughters.'

¹⁷ *Thu lum* is a term that has no precise English equivalent. Dan Martin has shown it to be a loanword of Turkic origins. In general, it refers to anything rolled up, especially a metal ingot. However in this particular context, it might also refer more specifically to the Buddhist literary trope of a blazing red-hot iron or metal ball which the denizens of hell are compelled to eat as food, a hellish counterpart to the Indian ritual food ball known as *pindaḥ*. The *Tshig mdzod chen mo* and some other dictionaries perhaps incorrectly give the meaning of *thu lum* as hammer (*tho ba*). Perhaps more accurately, the Negi Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionary Vol. 5, page 2020, gives *pindaḥ* as primary meaning of *thu lum*. A more accurate and nuanced understanding than the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* can be found in Dan Martin's *TibVocab*. Thanks to Dan Martin and Lama Jabb for clarifying these issues.

pa, such as Bloodless Dumb Male who Strikes with a Molten Metal Phurpa (*Khrag med lkugs pa khro chu'i phur pa 'debs*), although here we must also take note that the term *phur pa* might well have had indigenous ritual meanings that predated the various imported Buddhist meanings attached to the terms *kīla* or *kīlaka* etc. (Grimaud et Grimaud 2017). It remains to be seen how many of the scores of indigenous-sounding deity names in the *Ka ba nag po* represent pre-existent deity names used in previous indigenous Tibetan ritual, and how many might have been developed within the discourse of g.Yung drung Bon to fit an indigenous-seeming niche: at the moment, we have little indication either way.

There are several further classes of indigenous deities, such as the innumerable *sMan gcig ma* or Unique Enchantresses, with names such as Unique Enchantress of the Combined Great Highland Pastures (*'Brog chen 'dus pa'i sman cig ma*), or Snowy Cliffs [and] Meadows Unique Enchantress (*g.Ya' spang gangs kyi sman cig ma*). In addition there are individual deities who are probably indigenous, such as Celestial Ancestress Heavenly Queen (*gNam phyi gung gyal*), who occurs also in the *gNag rabs* text from the *dGa' thang Bum pa* collection (Bellezza 2014, p. 174; *gNag rabs* IIa (3.6–4.1)). But I have no time to enumerate any further deity classes or individual deities here.

The main point about all these deities, and the reason for their inclusion in the *Ka ba nag po*, is that they are to be visualised in ritual. Visualisations are primarily understood as mental objects, to be perceived by the mental faculty. But since the deities must also be accurately painted in *thangkas*, it follows that both mind and sight are in any case engaged in their contemplation. And it is this visualisation which constitutes the main engagement of the senses in the famous Bon rituals for which the *Ka ba nag po* serves as the textual source. For like any other tantric system of its kind, however magnificent and complex might be the sensory engagements with paintings, statues, musical instruments, hand gestures, ritual clothing, dance, incense, tasteable sacred substances, and the like, it is visualisation that remains a preeminent method of practice.

In addition to the indigenous deities for visualisation, and their naturalistic environments, *Khu tsha* occasionally invokes other more contextual indigenous imagery too. For example, in Chapter Four, he uses the imagery of the Tibetan landscape term *rdza*, which indicates a particular kind of rock formation.¹⁸ Likewise, in Chapter Twenty Five, the longevity ritual, he prescribes the making of a *'brang rgyas*,

¹⁸ [19.5] *gdan la khro bo khro mo rdza ltar lhag /*, “The male and female wrathful ones upon [their] thrones are densely ranked like a series of imposing rocky mountain peaks”.

an indigenous form of food offering to be both seen and tasted,¹⁹ as the main material basis of the rite (for an analysis and translation of this chapter, see Cantwell and Mayer 2015).

In this way, we can see that while Khu tsha accepts Buddhist philosophical and doctrinal understandings of the senses, he is simultaneously keen to direct them onto sense objects that have in many cases a calculatedly indigenous aspect. Thus, a wholly Buddhist-congruent soteriological structure is comprehensively draped in a richly textured indigenous clothing, so that while losing themselves in the contemplation of often indigenous Tibetan forms, practitioners can nevertheless achieve fully Buddhist realisations. Once again, we are strongly reminded of our previous observation (Cantwell and Mayer 2013): in the terms of the schema developed by the Hebraist Peter Schäfer, while many of the lemmata from which the *Ka ba nag po* is constructed have a calculatedly indigenous appearance, its choice of component microforms, and the overall conception of the macroform as a whole, are predominantly Buddhist.

Bibliography

Bellezza, John Vincent

“Straddling the Millennial Divide — A case study of persistence and change in the Tibetan ritual tradition based on the *Gnag rabs* of Gathang Bumpa and Eternal Bon documents, circa 900-1100 CE”, *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 29, Avril 2014, pp. 155–243.

Cantwell, Cathy and Robert Mayer

- *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: two texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection* (Denkschriften der phil.-hist. Klasse 349; Beiträge zur Kultur und Geistesgeschichte Asiens 52.), Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007.
- *Early Tibetan Documents on Phur pa from Dunhuang*, Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008.
- *A Noble Noose of Methods, the Lotus Garland Synopsis: A Mahāyoga Tantra and its Commentary*, Wien, Verlag der

¹⁹ *’Brang rgyas* occur in Buddhist rituals too, with *tshes yi ’brang rgyas* as one of the main types, but it seems likely the *’brang rgyas* was originally an indigenous form, rather than an Indic one. I am not aware of any Indic precedent, and Sa skya Paṇḍita in his *sDom gsum rab dbye* specified the *’brang rgyas* as a ritual item for which he could find no Indic example. See Martin 2001: 63, note 31.

Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012.

- “Neither the same nor different: The Bon Ka ba Nag po in relation to contemporaneous rNying ma Phur pa texts”. In *Scribes, Texts, and Rituals in Early Tibet and Dunhuang*, edited by Brandon Dotson, Maho Iwao, and Tsuguhito Takeuchi, Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2013, pp. 87–100.
- “Longevity Rituals in the Bon Phur pa tradition: Chapter 25 of the Black Pillar”. In *Tibetan & Himalayan Healing: an anthology for Anthony Aris*, edited by Charles Ramble and Ulrike Roesler, Vajra Books, Kathmandu, 2015, pp. 105–118.

Grimuad, Nicole, et Patrick Grimaud.

Les dagues rituelles de l'Himalaya, Suilly-la-Tour, Éditions Findakly, 2017.

Gu ru Chos dbang (13th century)

n.d. *gTer 'byung chen mo*, in *Gu ru chos dbang gi rnam dang zhal gdams*, *Rin chen gter mdzod chen po'i rgyab chos* vols. 8–9, pp. 75–193, Ugyen Tempa'i Gyaltsen, Paro, 1979, TBRC Work Number 23802.

Ka ba nag po man ngag rtsa ba'i rgyud,

Vol. 160, pages 1–125 of *Theg chen g.yung drung bon gyi bka' 'gyur*, Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, Lhasa 1999. (= 3rd edition of Bon Kanjur, in 178 volumes). And other editions???

Volume 268, pp.1–163, *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, 2nd Edition (in 333 volumes), n.d., n.p., ISBN 7-223-00984-5 (sic). From a private collection, courtesy of Dr J-L Achard. (This is identical to the version found in vol. 268, pp. 165–345, of Tanbai Nyima, ed., *Bonpo Tenjur*, 380 Volumes, Lhasa, 1998.)

Kapstein, Matthew T.

“The commentaries of the four clever men: a doctrinal and philosophical corpus in the Bon po rDzogs chen tradition”. In *Bon The Everlasting Religion of Tibet. Tibetan Studies in Honour of Professor David L. Snellgrove*, edited by Samten Karmay and Donatella Rossi, Special issue of *East and West* 59.1–4, 2009, pp. 107–30.

Kong sprul, Blo gros mtha' yas,

(ed) *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, New Delhi, Shechen Publications, 2007–2008.

Martin, Daniel,

- *Unearthing Bon Treasures*, Leiden, Brill, 2001.
- *Tibeto-Logic blog, posting of March 10, 2014.*

Mayer, Robert,

A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis, Oxford, Kiscadale Publications, 1996 (printed version of 1996 PhD thesis from Rijks Universiteit, Leiden).

Ramble, Charles,

“Real and imaginary Tibetan chimeras and their special powers”, *Mongolo-Tibetica Pragensia* 14, vol. 7, no. 2, Special Issue, “*Indigenous Elements in Tibetan Religions*”, edited by Daniel Berounský, Charles University, Prague, 2014, pp. 13–33.

Sanderson, A.

- “Vajrayāna: Origin and Function”. In *Buddhism into the Year 2000: International Conference Proceedings*, Dhammakaya Foundation, Los Angeles, CA, 1994, pp. 87–102
- “History through Textual Criticism in the Study of Śaivism, the Pañcarātra and the Buddhist Yoginītantras”. In *Les Sources et le temps*, edited by F. Grimal, École française d’Extrême Orient, Pondicherry, India, 2001, pp. 1–47

