

A Song-poem on the Perfect Tibetan Physician

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In *The Great Divine Drum: Successive Abbots of Labrang Tashi Kyil (Blab rang bkra shis 'khyil gyi gdan rabs lha'i rnga chen)* the prolific monk scholar and poet Balmang Pandita, Dbal mang paN+Di ta, ends the section on the founding of Labrang medical college with a long quotation.¹ It is an excerpt from a *mgur*, song-poem, by Meyi Nyima, Mi'i nyi ma, an esteemed 15th century Tibetan physician and scholar.² The famous Pandita justifies this lengthy citation by his deep admiration for the poem and by his wish to use it for inspiring, in future practitioners of Tibetan medicine, the deeds, learning and conduct celebrated within it. The song brings into relief the consummate Tibetan physician who is infused with wisdom, altruism and high ethical standards. Amongst other things the perfect physician must aspire to be accomplished, learned, experienced, resourceful, compassionate, devout, diligent and impartial in the distribution of medical care. He or she should be selfless in carrying out healing endeavours and be prepared to be an eternal servant to patients as a tireless benefactor of medical knowledge, expertise and care.

Prompted by Balmang Pandita's high appraisal of this poem, its ethical message and implicit critical spirit I have chosen to present an English translation of it here. I intended to translate this *mgur* in its entirety, but with much regret my efforts to locate the original has not borne fruit pre-publication of this essay. I did come across a few other extracts but they are too fragmentary to be included here.³ In translating the current version I have found it difficult to capture the sheer eloquence, lyricism, the compact diction and the fluid cadence of the Tibetan original. However, it is hoped that this rendering will be able to communicate the overall meaning, altruistic tone, imagery and the Tibetan propensity to convey all manners of subject matters including scholarly discourses through poetic utterances.

Prelude

Balmang Pandita's selection of this poetic statement as a conclusion to his brief history of Labrang medical college possesses a motivational function as intended. It also reveals a perennial Tibetan anxiety concerning the conduct and standard of Tibet's medical practitioners. The quality and standard of physicians have been a serious concern for Tibetan scholars and doctors throughout written Tibetan medical history. Me Nyima's song portrays the ideal Tibetan doctor by emphatically enumerating qualities deemed worthy of emulation. What is equally paramount is what remains unstated, an anxiety to counter the flourishing of the antitheses of such fine attributes. Emphasis is placed upon specific characteristics to implicitly censure untoward behaviour in physicians as well as to tackle a perceived deterioration of their erstwhile high standards. To name but a few noteworthy features, the song-poem extols compassion, humility, propriety, diligence, impartiality, scholarship, experience and expertise, a Buddhist enlightened mind and a profound understanding of medical discourses, diagnosis, treatment, pharmacology and the will to propagate it.

¹ This volume is an acclaimed history of Labrang monastery by Dbal mang paN+Di ta 1987.

² *Ibid*: 260-63. A Brief biography of Meyi Nyima can be found in Byams pa 'phrin las 1990: 185-87.

³ Byams pa 'phrin las 1990: 186-87.

These are the very same qualities outlined in *The Four Tantras, Rgyud bzhi*, written works that form the core syllabus of traditional Tibetan medical study.⁴ This corpus is yet another Tibetan national text that bonds Tibet through the medical institutions and practices it engenders.⁵ Unlike *The Four Tantras* which contrasts positive qualities against their opposite forces Me Nyima leaves the latter unmentioned. It is not that he is deliberately overlooking the potential faults of physicians. On the contrary his verse is underpinned by an understanding that such negative elements remain its target although not openly stated. This becomes apparent when we appreciate the song within the context of the Tibetan medical textual tradition. If we take an intertextual approach we can see that it is informed by other intermeshed texts, which are in turn woven of tissues of “quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.”⁶ These medical texts more often than not display artistic merit and critical spirit. As already noted *The Four Tantras* lists the prerequisite qualities of the perfect physician along with their deficiencies in close-packed metrical composition and metaphorical language.⁷ Using vivid similes it singles out the twelve defects that the perfect physician must avoid:- lacking in: 1) lineage - hence traditional knowledge and authority, 2) textual knowledge, 3) direct experience and practice, 4) knowledge of diagnostic techniques, 5) knowledge of pulse and urine analysis, 6) prognostic acumen, 7) methods of treatment, 8) knowledge of dietary and behavioural factors, 9) knowledge of pacification compounds, 10) knowledge of purgation, 11) medical instruments and 12) knowledge of venesection and moxibustion. These shortcomings must be rigorously eschewed in tandem with indifference to patient wellbeing, renegeing on promises, avarice, malice and other negative and injurious actions.

The critical voice inherent within the principal texts of Tibetan medicine which many students commit to memory thus forms an invisible yet a vital tissue of Me Nyima’s song-poem. In fact, Balmang Pandita stresses this textual nexus when he urges that “it is crucial that physicians must endeavour to equip themselves with the qualities stated in *The Medical Tantras*.”⁸ He then immediately cites the poem under review so as to hammer home a critical message of the ethics and the ultimate purpose of the Tibetan physician. Both *The Four Tantras* and Balmang Pandita make clear that failure to acquire the commended attributes would only create a murderer out of an aspirant medical practitioner.⁹ This censorious perspective is expressed by another, probably much earlier, song-poem whose textual currents and tone can be detected in a variety of later medical texts including *The Four Tantras*, Balmang Pandita’s critical remarks and Meyi Nyima’s poem.¹⁰ It is a relatively long poem but to cite a famed excerpt from it:

⁴ Grwa pa mngon shes 1982. The origins of The Four Tantras are traced back to The Elder Yuthok Yonten Gonpo (708 – 833 A.D), but they are said to have been discovered as treasure texts in 1038 by Tapa Ngonshe, Grawa pa mngon shes (1012-1090). For an English translation of the first two of these tantras – the Root Tantra (*rtsa ba’i rgyud*) and the Explanatory Tantra (*bshad pa’i rgyud*) – consult Clark 1995. Also see Rechung Rinpoche Jampal Kunzang (1973: 8-97) for a history of Tibetan medicine and English translations of key sections from *The Four Tantras*. For the early history of the Tibetan medical tantras see Fenner 1996: 458-69.

⁵ As apparent the influence of *The Four Tantras* transcends Tibet. It - along with other factors such as Tibetan history, Bon and Buddhism and the contemporary diasporic experience - gives Tibetan cultural identity a global dimension.

⁶ Barthes, an instigator of intertextuality concept states that “The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.” [1968] 2001: 1468.

⁷ For a chapter on the ethics of the Tibetan physician in *The Four Tantras* see Grwa pa mngon shes 1982: 95-101. An English translation of this chapter is provided by Clark 1995: 223-34.

⁸ Dbal mang paN+Di ta 1987: 260. All the translations from Tibetan in this essay are by the author.

⁹ Grwa pa mngon shes 1982: 100. Dbal mang paN+Di ta 1987: 264.

¹⁰ Particularly lyrical and eloquent echoes of it can be found in the critical advice and remarks offered by Tsamgman Yeshe Zangpo (18th Century), Gsang sman ye shes bzang po 2007: 74-76, 78-79 and 82-83.

A physician who doesn't fulfil promises is corrupted
A physician who inveigles and hoodwinks is corrupted
A physician who yields to indolence and alcohol is corrupted
A physician who affects learnedness and acts conceited is corrupted
A physician who takes away human life through conjecture is corrupted
A physician who whines out complaints without learning is corrupted

A physician who gives out counsel without experience is deluded
A physician who isn't adept at balancing heat and cold is deluded
A physician who misinterprets the cool and the warm is deluded
A physician who doesn't adhere to proper diet and conduct is deluded
A physician who doesn't know prognosis, bleeding and moxibustion is deluded
A physician who confuses texts with practice is deluded

A physician who loves the poison drink of alcohol is insane
A physician who loves deception and misdeeds is insane
A physician who follows the high and hates the low is insane
A physician who loves women and fornication is insane
A physician who loves nonsensical slandering is insane
A physician who doesn't take to medicine making is insane

A physician is someone who is adept at a broad range of diagnoses
A physician is someone who is adept at interpreting pithy instructions
A physician is someone who identifies semantic contradictions and faults
A physician is someone who finds the exact remedy for an affliction
A physician is someone who can practise with distilled precision
A physician is someone who possesses the sublime enlightened mind¹¹

This frequently referenced song is attributed to Yuthok Chungpo Dorjee, G.yu thog khung po rdo rje, who is none other than the sire of the Elder Yuthok Yonten Gonpo, G.yu thog rnying ma yon tan mgon po (708 – 833 A.D). The latter is considered as the father of Tibetan medicine and is credited for compiling and expanding *The Four Tantras*. He should not be mistaken for the Younger Yuthok Yonten Gonpo, G.yu thog gsar ma yon tan mgon po (1126 – 1202 A.D), who further refined *The Four Tantras* and set it in motion for becoming the most influential medical text in Tibet.¹² This song can be found in the biography of the Elder Yuthok, which is said to have been partly composed by his contemporary physician and disciple Kongpo Degyal, Kong po bde rgyal.¹³ Given this information we can tentatively conclude that it serves as a literary precedent for later statements on the ethical standards of Tibetan medical practitioners. The authoritative and revered status of the Elder Yuthok's biography and its treatment of medicine, morality, history and spirituality in poetic language and imaginative storytelling make such a scenario more likely.

¹¹ Kong po bde rgyal *et al.* 2006: 69-70. For an alternative English rendering of this song see Rechung Rinpoche Jampal Kunzang 1974: 186-87.

¹² Tibetan biographies of both Yuthoks are provided by Jo bo lhun grub bkra shis & Dar mo sman rams pa *et al.* 2006. For an English translation of the Elder Yuthok's biography see Rechung Rinpoche Jampal Kunzang 1973: 141-327.

¹³ A brief introduction of Kongpo Degyal can be found in Jo bo lhun grub bkra shis & Dar mo sman rams pa *et al.* 2006.

Indeed what is being passed down is not just the critical and moral message or historical and religious narratives. One can also perceive many artistic features shared by texts composed generations or even centuries apart. For instance, in common with Meyi Nyima's poem the above song along with a great deal of other verses from the biography of the Elder Yuthok employ the genre of *mgur*. For that reason they share defining characteristics of *mgur* such as simplicity of diction and meter, smooth mix of the vernacular and literary idiom, memorable cadence, unsophisticated yet evocative imagery, fusion of the sacred and profane and a popular appeal. Another common element is the convention of repetition found in both written and oral poetry. A word, or a phrase or an entire line is repeated many times for the creation of overall unity, rhythmic emphasis, rhyming pattern and mnemonic force. Every single line in the above excerpt uses the word 'physician', *sman pa*, and each stanza employs a descriptive word six times as its line ending. Similarly Meyi Nyima's song ends almost every stanza by reiterating the phrase "My name is the Righteous Sage (or I am called the Righteous Sage)", *ming la drang srong...zer*. In both cases the unity, rhythmic power and overall ornamental effect these iterations generate are undeniable. However, an effective repetition does not merely perform an aesthetic purpose. As observed by Coleridge it enables the poet to discharge strong emotion that cannot be "exhausted or satisfied by a single representation of the image or incident exciting it."¹⁴ The passion borne by the aforementioned repetitions is the anxiety for the corruptible standard of Tibetan physicians.

One of the most prominent features of Meyi Nyima's poem is its assertive tone verging on boastfulness. Each stanza enumerates the qualities of the ideal Tibetan physician and then forcefully seals it with the recurring phrase "My name is the Righteous Sage" followed by the given name describing specific qualities. The term "righteous sage", *drang srong*, in its popular sense denotes an accomplished dharmic practitioner who rigorously observes correct forms of behaviour originating from one's mind, body and speech. In Tibetan medical texts this word takes on another layer of connotation when it comes to mean a consummate physician. Then the refrain "My name is the Righteous Sage" is the equivalent of saying "My name is the great physician such and such". Meyi Nyima employs this seemingly self-congratulatory line as a persistent confirmation of identity throughout the song-poem. Consequently the song might be regarded as belonging to the poetic category of self-vaulting expressions that can be found throughout Tibetan literary history and in oral poetry. Songs of self-praise abound in texts ranging from old manuscripts from Dunhuang caves and history books to compositions attributed to lamas, scholars and yogis including the likes of Thonmi Sambhota and Sakya Pandita.¹⁵ They also feature saliently in oral sources such as proverbs, songs, ceremonial recitals and the Gesar epic.

Tibetan medical works are not free from this convention either as the following two examples attest. The fame of the Elder Yuthok Yonten Gonpo as an extraordinary doctor even at the tender age of ten spreads far and wide and reaches the ears of the Tibetan Emperor Me Agtsom, Mes Aag Tshom (704-754), the father of Trisong Detsen, Khri srong sde btsan (742-799). The Emperor summons the Elder Yuthok to Samye Monastery and asks him to engage in a debate with other Tibetan medical practitioners. The famed doctor responds by singing a song recounting their encounters as kings and royal physicians in their

¹⁴ Coleridge 1965: 200.

¹⁵ For an interpretation of a conceited song by the famous imperial minister Chungpo Pungsal Zutse, Khung po spung sad zu tse, retrieved from Dunhuang manuscripts see Don grub rgyal 1997 [1985] Vol III:367-73. Thonmi Sambhota's self-congratulatory song can be found in Ngag dbang rgya mtsho 1988: 21 and Sakya Pandita's famous praise for his own intelligence and scholarly achievements in Kapstein 2003: 777.

past lives. He sings praises of his healing powers in previous lives as well as in the present and goes on to assert that he is peerless in his profession:

There's no physician in Tibet who is capable of
Judging a debate between me and someone else
I've reached beyond the ocean of medicine
And will retort with many replies¹⁶ to a question
My medical practice is like a celestial thunderbolt
Wherever it strikes nothing can stand in its way
Thus who could ever be my debating adversary!¹⁷

The Younger Yuthok Yonten Gonpo also shows little humility when he speaks about his erudition, medical experience and magical powers. Just before he passes away dissolving into rainbow light the Younger Yuthok delivers a valedictory *mgur* cataloguing his incredible achievements. It is a lengthy song characterised by irregular meter and a diction that fuses colloquialism and literary language. To cite but three stanzas:

Mental activities of inner three poisons, the disorders of the mind¹⁸
Wind, bile and phlegm of the external, the disorders of the body
The medicine of resourcefulness and compassion cures them all
I'm what you call a physician!

Dharmic teachings of *Kangyur* and *Tengyur* delivered from memory¹⁹
Antagonistic forces of non-believers vanquished by logical reasoning
The victorious banner of the Buddha Dharma raised and unfurled
I'm what you call a scholar!

When travelling to Palkyi Ri, the Glorious Mountain²⁰
Ferocious bandits came to intercept my path
I stupefied them with a single wrathful look
I'm what you call an accomplished yogi!²¹

Meyi Nyima's *mgur* translated below does exhibit egotistical undertones but it is more ambiguous and transcends the aforementioned category of openly self-vaunting poetic statements. Considering the fact that the song-poem is given as an answer to a question about his own identity it necessarily communicates something of himself from the perspective of a subjective person. However, it also voices something that goes beyond the representation of a

¹⁶ "Many replies" is the translation of the phrase *gdugs mang lan* as it is spelled in Kong po bde rgyal *et al.* 2006: 83. In the edition of biographies of the Elder Yuthok and Younger Yuthok based on the old zhol par khang blocks this phrase is spelled *gdugs med lan*, which might be a misspelling of *gtug med lan* (Blo bzang chos grags [publication date not specified]: 86.) If this is the case it should be translated as "unmatchable replies". 86.

¹⁷ Kong po bde rgyal *et al.* 2006: 82-83. For an alternative English rendering of this lines see Rechung Rinpoche Jampal Kunzang 1974: 194.

¹⁸ *Dug gsum*, the three poisons, are desire, hatred and ignorance. These are regarded as the three fundamental causes of suffering.

¹⁹ Kangyur, *bka' 'gyur*, and Tengyur, *bstan 'gyur*, are two vast categories of sacred texts that form the Tibetan Buddhist canon. The former is thought to contain the "translated words of the Buddha" and the latter "translated commentaries."

²⁰ Palkyi Ri, *dpal kyi ri*, or Palri is believed to be a glorious copper coloured mountain where Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) resides.

²¹ Dar mo sman rams pa blo bzang chos grags 2006: 331.

single individual. T. S. Eliot detects three distinct yet overlapping voices in poetry: that of the poet without an audience, that of the poet addressing an audience and that of the poet in an imaginary dramatic character.²² The second and third voices fuse in Meyi Nyima's song-poem. Through it he speaks to an audience which consists mainly of physicians and students of Tibetan medicine. He also assumes the identity of the perfect Tibetan physician and addresses his audience through this character. In another excerpt from his *mgur* Meyi Nyima acknowledges this fact and intimates that he sings such a song not to claim that he possesses such qualities but to reveal his own aspirations and to inspire his followers.²³

This ideal Tibetan physician may not be exactly the same as Eliot's dramatic character who converses in invented verse dialogues, but he or she remains a personage who has been imagined and constructed by generations of Tibetan medical practitioners and scholars. Therefore, there are several voices within Meyi Nyima's poem: his own voice and the voice of the ideal Tibetan doctor which in turn incorporates a multiplicity of other voices found in the interrelated medical texts that inform it. A *rten 'brel* (dependent origination) conception of voice - which tells us no artistic or intellectual voice is either independent or unaffected by other voices - helps us discern that these self-praising elements of Meyi Nyima's song-poem are interwoven with the lofty ideals of compassion and altruism that underlie Tibetan medicine. One can see that Balmang Pandita is swayed by the presence of multiple voices - some stretching over centuries but all concerned with the wellbeing of the other - when he chooses to quote this song at length.²⁴ Attracted by its poetic force he also values it as an effective mode of communication and inculcation.

Meyi Nyima's verse song is only a single reminder of the overall poetic nature of the Tibetan medical text. A vast quantity of Tibetan-language works on Tibet's medical tradition displays a variety of poetic qualities but this has attracted little scholarly attention. One noteworthy exception is a volume entitled *Smile Rays of the Herbal Daughters: An Exposition of Tibetan Medical Poetry, Bod kyi gso rig snyan ngag gi rnam gzhas sngos yi bu mo'i 'zum zer* by the Tibetan scholar Mokchung Phurko, Mog chung phur kho.²⁵ Through copious beautiful examples it demonstrates how Tibetan medical writers use a variety of traditional poetic forms and techniques to impart knowledge and instructions. It highlights how Tibetan medical language is a creative mix of plain speech, literary idiom and technical terminology. Indeed, to paraphrase the seasoned American politician Mario Cuomo, the Tibetan medical system instructs in poetry and practises in prose.²⁶ It employs textbooks that are steeped in poetry in that they convey medical information and spiritual and philosophical knowledge through a consciously formulated language that is eloquent, evocative, imagistic, distilled, imaginative and narrative-ridden. In short, a language designed to transmit the content whilst inducing pleasure.

A great proportion of Tibetan medical literature including *The Four Tantras* appears in densely-packed metrical composition. Of course, all things metrical do not mean poetry. However, one cannot deny their poeticity when their use of vivid imagery, metaphorical expression, compact diction, poetic synonym (*mgon brjod*), memorable cadence, at times highly abstract riddle-like language and imaginative storytelling forces itself upon the

²² Eliot 1957: 89-102, The Three Voices of Poetry. In *On Poetry and Poets*.

²³ Byams pa 'phrin las 1990: 186-87.

²⁴ For a short essay revealing the presence of multiple voices within a given literary text see Bennett and Royle 2009: 71-79, Voice. In *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*.

²⁵ Mog chung phur kho 2008.

²⁶ Mario Cuomo: "You campaign in poetry. You govern in prose."

reader's aesthetic sensibility. As apparent in the famous medical handbook *The Eighteen Supplementary Texts of Yuthok (G.yu thog cha lag bco bryad)* even something as mundane as the table of contents is presented in fine poetry.²⁷ It is penned by the poetically minded Great Fifth Dalai Lama. It makes a delightful read as it is in simple regular meter formed of seven-syllabled lines, playful in tone, rhythmically captivating and metaphorically descriptive. The popular category of medical literature known as '*dra dpe* (simile-texts) or '*dra yig* (simile-writings), which contain extensive identification and cataloguing of medicinal plants and minerals, are repertoires of distilled yet illuminating imagery.²⁸ In short, a constellation of poetic gems decks out the entire body of Tibetan medical literature.

With these contextual remarks on the Tibetan medical literature as a poetic product of interconnected texts I present the following translation of Meyi Nyima's song-poem on the perfect Tibetan physician. This ideal being is a physician who possesses a national consciousness – who learns and works “amid the Snow-mountains” and in “the Land of Snow-mountains” - as well as wisdom, compassion and the will to serve all beings. Endowed with such erudition, intellectual rigour, spiritual insight and altruism any physician, either belonging to the Tibetan medical system or otherwise, would make an immense contribution to the wellbeing of humanity and beings beyond.

My name is the Righteous Sage, Meyi Nyima - the Sun of Humans²⁹

I open wide the lotus garden of the healing science and discourses
And make meaningful the mind's eye of those who crave knowledge
And for stimulating a bumper crop of good health and longevity
My name is the Righteous Sage, Meyi Nyima - the Sun of Humans

I show those with severe karmic disease merit amassing and cleansing
And create Invisibility Stick for those with severe demonic disease³⁰
And offer dharmic teachings and instant pain relief to the dying
My name is the Righteous Sage, Meaningful to Behold

I'm righteous in finding and diligently renouncing my own faults
And am honest in finding and diligently rectifying the faults of others
And am of those who uphold the tradition of Great Righteous Sages
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Upholder of the Tradition

I hold Dharma upholders dearer than my life itself
And care for sinners and provide them with happiness
And even endeavour to help those who cause harm to me

²⁷ Yon tan mgon po 1967: 1-2.

²⁸ Striking examples of this category can be found in Mog chung phur kho2008: 44-86, 241-43.

²⁹ This *mgur* does not bear any official name, but I have chosen this first variant of its refrain as a title. See the Appendix for the Tibetan original, in which obvious spelling and grammatical inaccuracies are silently edited.

³⁰ *Sgrib shing*, Invisibility Stick, is a stick or a piece of wood (usually retrieved from a crow's nest) that has been infused with magical powers through the performance of specific tantric rituals and the recital of incantations. It is said that this stick thus makes a patient inflicted by demonic diseases invisible to malevolent spirits.

My name is the Righteous Sage, Loving Companion to all

I heal despairing patients abandoned by others
And am particularly loving to the poor and the helpless
And attend to strangers who suddenly turn up as guests
My name is the Life-Enabler, the Splendour of All Beings³¹

I spurn pride even though the powerful esteem me
And endure hardship for others but have no woe
And do not expect responses of reverence and praise
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Wish-fulfilment of Humans

Right now I rescue human beings from karmic disease
In the future I aspire to rid all beings of the three poisons
Being always endowed with benevolent thought and conduct
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Boundless Altruism

Translated Sutras and Tantras of the science of healing
I've understood, plus many treatises from the four traditions³²
And nearly all the healing discourses amid the Snow-mountains
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Master of the Healing Science

I procure rare medicines through diligence and hardship
And stockpile easy-to-make medicines without indolence
And completely fulfil the expectations of every patient
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Giver of Medicines

I have never had any control over tribes and dominions
And treat hate and love, high and low, rich and poor as equal
And have never sought after a sense of gratitude in others
My name is the Virtue Embracer, the Life Enabler³³

I praise and elevate erudite Life Enablers through reverence
And do not patronise but motivate junior practitioners
And abandon jealousy towards those who are my equals
My name is the Righteous Sage, Bodhisattva Perfect Mind

I cut the netted lasso of the Lord of Death into pieces
And squeeze out the violent poison-arrows of stabbing pain
And rejuvenate the suddenly aged devoid of vitality
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Fearless Life Giver

³¹ Life-Enabler is a literal translation of *'tsho byed*. It is a synonym for a physician or a healer who enables someone to survive and live healthily.

³² *Lugs sde bzhi*, the four traditions, refers to four medical works by Loppon Pawo, Slob dpon dpa' bo, known as *Yan lag brgyad pa chen mo* (*The Great Eight Branches*), *Yan lag brgyad pa la 'jug pa* (*Entering the Eight Branches*), *Yan lag brgyal pa'i snying po bdus pa* (*Concise Essence of the Eight Branches*) and *Yan lag bryad pa'i rang 'brel* (*An Exposition of the Eight Branches by the Author Himself*).

³³ Virtue Embracer is a more literal translation of *Dge bsnyen* (Sanskrit: Upasaka), a lay Buddhist devotee who has taken vows to eschew killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct and drinking.

Because I heal patients in their droves
The circle of all their friends and loved ones
Can celebrate joyously and dare not part from them
My name is the Righteous Sage, One without Sorrow

I heal the easily healed through diet, conduct and medicine
And treat their opposite with radical and invasive techniques³⁴
And show those who are neither, the magical wheel and tantric visualisation³⁵
My name is the Righteous Sage with Infinite Methods

I compose so as to illuminate the thought of Medicine Buddha
And have fine writings for opening the mind's eye of followers
And wield a sword for rending the discourses of misconception
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Upholder of the Healing Science

I protect the healthy and enliven them with medicinal essences
And revive those stricken with diseases and physical disturbances
And tend to the next life by showing the moral choice of merit and misdeed
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Eternal Life Enabler

Divinely descended kings of humans praise and esteem me
Many Dharma loving immortal gods elevate me
Many erudite scholars utter adoration and congratulations
My name is the Righteous Sage, The King of Gods³⁶

I'm a saviour to the meek where ever he or she may be
And act as an affectionate parent towards all strangers
And only perform purely altruistic acts of the Three Doors³⁷
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Parent of Beings

Using needles made of gold I pry open the watery eyes
Of those lost in the dark realms of both day and night
And instantly enable them to see a variety of physical forms
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Lamp of Illumination

I pray that all the beings I've seen, heard, recalled and touched
Be free from all obstacles and enriched with every resource
And may they attain the state of the Great Righteous Sage
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Boundless Prayer

As for pus, blood, faeces and urine I'm like a dog and a pig
And am like a slave about all works concerning the patient

³⁴ For brevity *bya log khyug dpyad* is translated here as "radical and invasive techniques". These entail a variety of methods that goes against conventional medical procedures as well as treatments involving surgery, bloodletting and moxibustion.

³⁵ *'khrul 'khor*, magical wheel (Sanskrit: yantra), refers to the treatment of disease through the techniques of *rtsa rlung*, channels and energies/winds. *sngags dmigs*, tantric visualisation denotes the medical application of tantric practices such as rituals, yogic exercises, meditation and the recitation of mantras.

³⁶ *Lha yi rje bo*, the King of Gods or the King of Kings, is another synonym for a medical doctor.

³⁷ *Sgo gsum*, the Three Doors, are body, speech and mind seen as the three key sources of action.

I regard all healing remedies like the wish-fulfilling cow
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Servant of Living Beings

I grasp the reality of absolute truth free from conceptual constructs
And know illusory, conventional co-dependency as a dream
And see the union of means and wisdom as the sole traversed path
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Young Bodhisattava

I have given up alcoholic drinks, the root of a hundred misdeeds
And have forgone a diet of flesh and blood, the antithesis of compassion
And have always cultivated the enlightened mind, the root of virtuous acts³⁸
My name is the Righteous Sage of the Immaculate Conduct³⁹

I've found faith in the pure wheel of the container and contained
And have seen empowerments, sacred vows and codes obtained
As the life vein of the Vajra Vehicle - formed of two stages
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Immortal Essence

I see the one with all the objects of refuge as the sole Lama
And have found all that is worthy of worship in noble living beings
And understand all faiths as the equilibrium of nirvana and samsara
My name is the Righteous Sage, the Keeper of Secret Treasures

I've studied healing discourses and systems for many lifetimes
And have aided beings in the Noble Land and amid the Snow-mountains⁴⁰
And in this manner have vowed to rescue all beings from samsara
My name is the Righteous Sage, known as such and such⁴¹

With joy I teach those who are keen to learn the healing science
And diligently heal all the patients from the Land of Snow-mountains
I reside wherever the greatest altruistic work can be undertaken
My name is the Divine Physician of many realms.⁴²

³⁸ *Byangs sems* (Sanskrit: Bodhicitta) is translated as the enlightened mind here.

³⁹ *Btul zhugs*, moral conduct, entails the renouncing of mundane existence for virtuous actions and spiritual practice.

⁴⁰ *'phags yul*, the Noble Land or the Land of Spiritually Exalted Beings, is a poetic synonym for India.

⁴¹ *De dang de skad zer*, known as such and such, underscores the infinite potential of the perfect physician to be whosoever he/she wishes to be.

⁴² *Rgyal kham lha rje*, the physician of many realms or the world, denotes the itinerant nature of a traditional Tibetan doctor. It emphasises the ability to travel to any place where medical care is needed.

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ཀོང་པོ་བདེ་ལྷན་སོགས། ༢༠༠༥། རྩི་བཅུན་གཡུ་ཐོག་ཡོན་ཏན་མགོན་པོ་རྗེ་མའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་བ་བཀའ་རྒྱ་མ་གཟི་བཟུང་རིན་པོ་ཆའི་གཏེར་མཛོད་ཅེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།། (*Glorious Treasury of Jewels: The Secret Biography of the Supreme Elder Yuthok Yonten Gonpo*) རྩི་བཅུན་གྲུབ་བཟླ་ཤེས་དང་དར་མོ་སྐྱེན་རམས་པ་སོགས་ཀྱིས་བརྒྱམས་པའི་རྩལ་ལྷན་གསར་རྗེ་གི་རྣམ་པར་བཞུགས་སོ།། (*Biographies of the Elder and Younger Yuthoks*) ། ལས། པེ་ཅིན། མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱེན་ཁང་། ཤོག་ངོས་ན་ན་ན་༢༠༡༣།

གྲུ་པ་མངོན་ཤེས། ༡༩༩༩། རྩུང་བཞི། (*The Four Tantras*) ། ལྷ་ས། བོད་རྫོང་མི་དམངས་དཔེ་སྐྱེན་ཁང་།

དར་མོ་སྐྱེན་རམས་པ་སྐོ་བཟང་ཚོས་གྲགས། ༢༠༠༥། རྩུས་གསུམ་གྱི་རྒྱལ་བ་སྐྱེས་བཅས་ཀྱི་མཁྱེན་བཟུང་གི་སྐྱེ་གཞུགས་མཁས་པ་དང་གྲུབ་པའི་པ་རོལ་ཏུ་སོན་པ་རིགས་བརྒྱའི་བྱེད་བདག་གཡུ་ཐོག་གསར་མ་ཡོན་ཏན་མགོན་པོའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།། (*Biography of Vajrahara the Younger Yuthok Yonten Gonpo, Who Embodies the Wisdom and Compassion of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Three Times and Transcends Learning and Realisation*) ། རྩི་བཅུན་གྲུབ་བཟླ་ཤེས་དང་དར་མོ་སྐྱེན་རམས་པ་སོགས་ཀྱིས་

བཅུམས་པའི་ ཉམ་མཁའ་གསལ་རྒྱུ་གི་རྣམ་ཐར་བཞུགས་སོ།། (*Biographies of the Elder and Younger Yuthoks*) ། ལས། བེ་ཅིན། མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་། ཤོག་ངོས་ ༣༠༥ རན་ ༣༣༤།

ངག་དབང་རྒྱ་མཚོ། ༡༩༤༤། ཉམ་མཁའ་གྱི་དེབ་ཐེར་དབྱིད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་མོའི་སྐུ་དབྱངས། (*Tibetan Annals: Song of the Spring Queen*) བེ་ཅིན། མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་།

རྩོ་བོ་སྐྱུན་གྲུབ་བཟུ་ཤེས་དང་དར་མོ་སྐྱུན་རམས་པ་སོགས་ཀྱིས་བཅུམས་པའི་ ཉམ་མཁའ་གསལ་རྒྱུ་གི་རྣམ་ཐར་བཞུགས་སོ།། (*Biographies of the Elder and Younger Yuthoks*) ། ལས། མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་།

དོན་འགྲུབ་རྒྱལ། ༡༩༧༧། ༡༩༧༧། བོད་ཀྱི་མགུར་སྐུ་བྱང་འཕེལ་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་དང་ལྷན་ཆོས་བསྐྱེད་པར་སློན་པ་རིག་པའི་
ཁྱེད་རྣམ་པར་ཅེན་པའི་སྐྱེད་ཚལ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།། དཔལ་དོན་འགྲུབ་རྒྱལ་གྱི་གསུང་འབུམ། བོད་གསུམ་པ། དབྱང་
ཚོམ་ཕྱོགས་བསྐྱིགས། (*A Concise History of the Birth and Evolution of Tibetan Mgur and its
Characteristics. In The Collected Works of Dhondup Gyal: Volume 3, Critical Essays*) བེ་ཅིན།
མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་། ཤོག་ངོས་ ༣༧༩ རན་ ༤༠༧།

དཔལ་མང་པ་རྗེ་ཉ། ༡༩༤༧། ཉམ་མཁའ་གྱི་ཤེས་འབྱེད་ཀྱི་གདན་རབས་སྣའི་རྩ་ཆེན། (*The Great Divine Drum:
Successive Abbots of Labrang Tashi Kyi*) ། ཀན་སུའུ་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་།

བྱམས་པ་འཕྲིན་ལས། ༡༩༧༠། ཉམ་མཁའ་ཉི་མ་མཐོང་བ་དོན་ལྡན། (*Meyi Nyima Thongwa Donten*) ། ཉམ་མཁའ་གྱི་སྐྱུན་
པ་རིམ་བྱོན་གྱི་རྣམ་ཐར་ཕྱོགས་བསྐྱིགས། (*Collected Biographies of Successive Tibetan
Physicians*) ། ལས། བེ་ཅིན། མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་། ཤོག་ངོས་ ༡༤༥ རན་ ༡༤༧།

སློབ་བཟང་ཚོས་གསལ། [publication date not specified] ཉམ་མཁའ་གསལ་རྒྱུ་གི་རྣམ་ཐར། (*Biographies of
the Elder and Younger Yuthoks*) ། ལས། ཞོལ་པར་ཁང་།

མོག་རྒྱུང་ལུང་ལོ། ༢༠༠༤། ཉམ་མཁའ་གྱི་གསོ་རིག་སྐྱུན་དག་གི་རྣམ་གཞག་ཐོ་ཡི་བྱ་མོའི་འཇུག་ཟེར། (*Smile Rays of the
Herbal Daughters: An Exposition of Tibetan Medical Poetry*) ། བེ་ཅིན། མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་།

གཙང་སྐྱུན་ཡེ་ཤེས་བཟང་པོ། ༢༠༠༧། ཉམ་མཁའ་སྐྱུན་པའི་སྐྱུན་ཡིག་ཕྱོགས་བསྐྱིགས། (*Collected Medical Writings
of the Tsang Physician*) ། བེ་ཅིན། མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་།

ཡོན་ཏན་མགོན་པོ། ༡༩༦༧། ཉམ་མཁའ་ཆ་ལག་བཅོ་བརྒྱད། (*The Eighteen Supplementary Texts of
Yuthok*) ། Varanasi: Mongolian Lama Guru.

Appendix

གསོ་རིག་གཞུང་ལུགས་པད་ཚལ་ལེགས་པར་འབྱེད།
ཤེས་འདོད་རྣམས་ཀྱི་སློ་མིག་དོན་ལྡན་བྱེད།
ནད་མེད་ཚེ་རིང་ལོ་རྟོག་རྒྱས་བྱེད་པའི།
མིང་ལ་དང་སྲོང་མིའི་ཉེ་མ་ཟེར།

ལས་ནད་ཚེ་ལ་ཚོགས་སོག་སློབ་སྦྱོང་བསྟན།
གདོན་དུ་ཚེ་ལ་སློབ་ཤིང་ཡས་སུ་ཆེ།
འཚེ་ངེས་རྣམས་ལའང་ཚོས་བཤད་འཕམ་རྒྱག་གཅོག།
མིང་ལ་དང་སྲོང་མཚོང་བ་དོན་ལྡན་ཟེར།

རང་སློན་རྟོགས་ནས་ཅི་རུས་སྲོང་བས་དང་།
གཞན་སློན་རྟོགས་ནས་ཅི་རུས་འཚོས་བས་སྲོང་།
དང་སྲོང་ཚེན་པོའི་རིང་ལུགས་འཛིན་པའི་རིགས།
མིང་ལ་དང་སྲོང་རྒྱད་འཛིན་བྱ་བ་ཡིན།

བསྟན་འཛིན་རྣམས་ལ་སྲོག་ལས་གཅེས་པར་འཛིན།
སྲིག་ལྡན་དྲིན་གྱིས་བསྐྱངས་ནས་བདེ་ལ་འགོད།
རང་ལ་གནོད་བྱེད་ལ་ཡང་ཅི་ཕན་བྱེད།
མིང་ལ་དང་སྲོང་ཀུན་གྱི་བཤེས་གཉེན་ཟེར།

གཞན་གྱིས་བཏང་བའི་ཡི་ཚད་ནད་པ་གསོ།
དབུལ་པོངས་སྐྱབས་མེད་རྣམས་ལ་སྟག་པར་བྱམས།
མ་འདྲིས་སློ་བུར་མགོན་ལ་ཕེབས་པ་སློང་།
མིང་ལ་འཚོ་བྱེད་སླེ་དགའི་དབལ་ཞེས་ཟེར།

ཚེན་པོས་བཀུར་ཡང་ཁེངས་པ་རྣམ་པར་སྦྱངས།
གཞན་གྱི་དོན་དུ་སྟག་ཀྱང་སློ་བ་མེད།
བསྟེན་བཀུར་བཟུགས་པའི་ལན་ལ་རེ་བ་དོར།
མིང་ལ་དང་སྲོང་མིའི་དབག་བསམ་ཟེར།

ད་ལྟ་མི་རྣམས་འབྲས་བུའི་ནད་ལས་སློབས།
སྲོང་ནས་འགོ་ཀུན་དུག་གསུམ་འདོན་པར་སློན།
རྟོག་ཏུ་ཀུན་ལ་ཕན་འདོགས་བསམ་སློབ་ཅན།
མིང་ལ་དང་སྲོང་གཞན་ཕན་མཐའ་ཡས་ཟེར།

གསོ་རིག་མདོ་དང་རྒྱད་སྟེ་འགྱུར་བ་དང་།
ལུགས་སྟེ་བཞི་ཡི་བསྟན་བཅོས་དུ་མ་དང་།
གངས་རིའི་ཁྲི་ཀྱི་གསོ་དབྱུང་པལ་ཆེར་གོ།

མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་གསོ་རིག་རབ་འབྱམས་ཟེར།།

རྗེད་དཀའི་སྐྱེན་རྣམས་འབད་ཚོལ་ཚོགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱབ།།
སྐྱབ་སྐྱའི་སྐྱེན་རྣམས་ལེ་ལོ་སྤངས་ནས་བསགས།།
གསོ་བྱ་ཀུན་གྱི་རེ་བ་ཡིད་བཞིན་སྲོང་།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་སྐྱེན་བྱིན་བྱ་བ་ཡིན།།

སྤྱོགས་རིས་མངའ་ཐང་བདག་ཏུ་བཟུང་བ་མེད།།
བྱམས་སྤང་མཐོ་དམའ་འབྱོར་རྒྱད་མཉམ་པར་བཟུང་།།
འོར་ཆེ་ཚམ་ཡང་དོན་དུ་གཉེར་བ་མེད།།
མིང་ལ་དགོ་བསྐྱེན་འཚོ་བྱེད་བྱ་བ་ཡིན།།

འཚོ་བྱེད་མཁས་རྣམས་བཀུར་སྐྱིས་བསྟོད་ཅིང་བཟླགས།།
གཞོན་པ་རྣམས་ལ་མ་བརྟེན་སྲོལ་བ་བསྐྱེད།།
རང་དང་མཉམ་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ཕྲག་དོག་སྤང་།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་སེམས་དཔའ་ལེགས་སེམས་ཟེར།།

འཆི་བདག་ཞགས་པའི་དྲ་བ་དུམ་བུར་གཙོད།།
ཟུག་གཟེར་དུག་མདའ་དྲག་པོ་གཅུར་གྱིས་འདོན།།
ཟུངས་ཟད་སློལ་བུར་གས་པ་དར་མར་བསྐྱར།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་མི་འཇིགས་སོག་སྐྱིན་ཟེར།།

ནད་པའི་ཚོགས་རྣམས་གསོས་པར་བྱས་པ་ཡིས།།
དེ་ཡི་གཉེན་དང་མཇའ་བཤེས་འཁོར་རྣམས་ཀུན།།
འབྲལ་བར་མི་ཤོད་དེ་ལ་དགའ་སྟོན་བྱེད།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་མུ་ངན་མེད་ཅེས་ཟེར།།

གསོ་སྐྱབ་རྣམས་ཟེས་སྟོད་སྐྱེན་གྱིས་གསོ།།
དེ་ལས་ལོག་རྣམས་བྱ་ལོག་ལྷུག་དཔྱད་བཟླགས།།
གཉིས་ཀ་མིན་ལ་འཁྲུལ་འཁོར་ལྷགས་དམིགས་བཟླན།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་ཐབས་ཚུལ་དཔག་མེད་ཟེར།།

སྐྱེན་སྐྱའི་དགོངས་པ་གསལ་བྱེད་ཚོམ་པ་དང་།།
རྗེས་འཇུག་སློལ་མིག་འབྱེད་པའི་ལེགས་བཤད་དང་།།
ལོག་རྟོག་ཚོད་པ་གཙོད་པའི་རལ་གྱི་འཛིན།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་གསོ་རིག་བསྐྱེན་འཛིན་ཟེར།།

ནད་མེད་བསྐྱང་དང་ཐབས་ཀྱི་བཅུད་ལེན་འཚོ།།
ནད་ཅན་འདུ་བ་འཁྲུགས་པ་བདེ་བར་འཚོ།།
དགོ་སྤྱིག་སྤང་དོར་བསྐྱེན་ནས་བྱི་མ་འཚོ།།

མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་རྟལ་ཏུ་འཚོ་བྱེད་ཟེར།།

སྒྲ་རིགས་མིའི་རྒྱལ་པོས་བསྐྱབས་ཤིང་བཀུར།།
བསྐྱབས་ལ་རབ་དགའི་འཚོ་མེད་དུ་མས་བསྐྱོད།།
མཁས་པ་དུ་མས་ཡི་རངས་ལེགས་སོ་བྱིན།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་ལྷ་ཡི་རྗེ་བོ་ཟེར།།

གང་ན་སུ་ཞིག་ཉམས་ཐག་དེ་ཡི་སྐྱབས།།
མ་འདྲིས་ཀུན་ལ་ཡིད་གཏུགས་པ་མ་བཞིན།།
སྒྲོ་གསུམ་སྐྱོད་པ་གཞན་པན་ཉག་གཅིག་བསྐྱབ།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་འགྲོ་བའི་པ་མ་ཟེར།།

ཉེན་མཚན་སྲུང་པའི་སྤྱིང་དུ་འཐོམ་པ་རྣམས།།
གསེར་གྱི་མུར་མས་རྒྱ་བྱར་མིག་སྤྱེ་ནས།།
སྒྲ་ཚོགས་གཟུགས་ཅན་འཕྲལ་དུ་མཐོང་བྱེད་པ།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་གསལ་བྱེད་སྒྲིན་མེ་ཟེར།།

མཐོང་ཐོས་དྲན་དང་རིག་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་ཀུན།།
འགལ་སྐྱེན་ཀུན་བལ་མཐུན་སྐྱེན་མ་ལུས་འཛོམ།།
དྲང་སྲོང་ཚེན་པོའི་གོ་འཕང་འཐོབ་པར་སྒྲོན།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་སྒྲོན་ལམ་མཐའ་ཡས་ཟེར།།

རྟལ་ཁྲག་རྩ་རྒྱ་སོགས་ལ་བྱི་པག་བཞིན།།
ནད་པའི་བྱ་ཀུན་ལ་བརྩ་གཡོག་བཞིན།།
གསོ་བྱའི་གཉེན་པོ་ཀུན་ལ་འདོད་འཇོ་བཞིན།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་འགྲོ་བའི་ཁོ་ལ་བོ་ཟེར།།

དོན་དམ་གནས་ལུགས་སྒྲོས་དང་བལ་བར་རིག།།
ཀུན་རྗེ་བྱེད་འབྲེལ་མི་ལམ་ལྷ་བྱར་ཤེས།།
ཐབས་ཤེས་བྱུང་འཇུག་བསྐྱོད་གཅིག་ལམ་དུ་མཐོང་།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་རྒྱལ་སྐྱེས་གཞན་ལུ་ཟེར།།

ཉེས་བརྒྱའི་རྩ་བ་ཆང་གི་བུང་བ་དོར།།
སྤྱིང་རྗེའི་འགལ་རྒྱ་ཤ་ཁྲག་བཟའ་བུང་སྤང་།།
དགེ་ལེགས་རྩ་བ་ཀུན་ཏུ་བྱང་སེམས་བཟུང་།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་དྲི་མེད་བརྟལ་ཞུགས་ཟེར།།

སྒྲོད་བརྒྱུད་དག་པའི་འཁོར་ལོར་ཡིད་ཆེས་རྟེན།།
དབང་དང་དམ་ཚིག་ཐོབ་དང་བསྐྱུང་བྱའི་རིགས།།
རིམ་གཉིས་དོ་རྗེ་ཐེག་པའི་སྲོག་རྩར་མཐོང་།།

མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་འཆི་མེད་སྟེང་པོ་ཟེར།།

སྐྱབས་གནས་འདུས་པ་སྐྱ་མ་གཅིག་པོར་མཐོང་།།
མཚོན་འོས་འདུས་པ་ཇོ་བོ་སེམས་ཅན་རྟེན།།
ཚོས་ལུགས་ཐམས་ཅད་འཁོར་འདས་མཉམ་པར་གོ།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་གསང་བའི་མཛོད་འཛིན་ཟེར།།

ཚེ་རབས་དུ་མར་གསོ་དཔུང་གཞུང་ལུགས་བསྐྱབས།།
འཕགས་ལུལ་གངས་རིའི་ཁྲོད་དུ་འགོ་ཕན་བྱས།།
ཚུལ་འདིས་འགོ་བ་འདྲེན་པར་ཡི་དམ་བཅས།།
མིང་ལ་དྲང་སྲོང་དེ་དང་དེ་སྐད་ཟེར།།

གསོ་རིག་ཤེས་འདོད་ཀུན་ལ་སློབ་བས་སློབ།།
གངས་ཅན་ནད་པའི་ཚོགས་ཀུན་འབད་པས་གསོ།།
གཞན་ཕན་གང་དུ་ཆེ་སར་ཁོ་བོ་གནས།།
མིང་ལ་རྒྱལ་ཁམས་ལྷ་རྩེ་ཟེར་བ་ཡིན།།