

**REVELATIONS OF A MODERN MYSTIC**

**THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF**  
**KUN BZANG BDE CHEN GLINGPA**  
**1928-2006**

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**Reginald David Hall  
1939-2000 'Vive Ut Vivas'**

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## ABSTRACT

This study traces the development of Tibetan ‘treasure’ texts and practices in contemporary times via the life-story and scriptural revelations of the Tibetan ‘treasure revealer’ (*gter ston*) Kun bzang bde chen gling pa (1928-2006).<sup>1</sup> It examines how his revelations (*gter ma*) rooted in the historic spirituality of Tibet, continue and adapt into the twenty first century. The study is important in order to understand the ways this Asian religious concept develops and coalesces in North America. With the dramatic advances in communication through digital technology, it examines how *gter ma* texts and practices reach a modern audience. Also discussed are the implications of centuries old debates surrounding Buddhist lineage, transmission and ‘authenticity’ as well as concepts such as liberty, equality and authority. All of which are culture-specific constructions that differ radically when seen from a variety of perspectives. The main conclusion drawn from this research is that as a Western Vajrayāna ‘tradition’ emerges and intersects with older Tibetan forms, both must attempt to find a middle path between their differing applications and interpretations if they are to avoid drifting into an arena of extensive commercialisation, dilution and distortion.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to in the main text as Kunzang Dechen Lingpa and in footnotes as KDL.

# INTRODUCTION

## Further diffusion

Scholarship on the contemporary Tibetan *gter ma* tradition has tended to focus upon its 'revival' within Tibet.<sup>2</sup> In separate studies, Germano and Terrone examine the role of contemporary *gter ston* in Eastern Tibet, the re-appropriation of religious 'authority' and how this revival seems to reinforce a sense of Tibetan identity. However, there is little research or examination of *gter ston* in exile in India and further, those who have taken their teachings to America and other non-Asian countries.<sup>3</sup> Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is evidence of *gter ma* practices taking root in non-Tibetan, non-Buddhist societies and incorporating new material.

Terrone suggests that *gter ma* practice in Tibet functions as a revival of Tibetan identity and reclamation of religious authority,<sup>4</sup> in Western countries, particularly North America; it is received and understood not as an assertion of national identity but rather as part of the search for a 'spiritual' one. There is increasing interest in the contemplative, meditative and most particularly, the perceived 'therapeutic' elements of the Buddhist tradition. In Western societies in the last thirty years 'traditional' Buddhist views and practices have fused with non-Buddhist ideas and techniques. The methods and rituals of psychology are blending in to create hybrid forms and new modes of transmission are developing.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see Hanna (1994), Germano (1998) and Terrone (2009).

<sup>3</sup> The focus of this study is on the reception of KDL's *gter ma* revelations in America since this is where he was primarily active when not residing in India. For an overview of the development of Buddhism (in general) throughout non-Asian countries (such as Canada, South Africa, Brazil and Israel) see Prebish and Baumann (eds.) (2002).

<sup>4</sup> See Terrone (2009:111).

Diemberger, (writing on the continuation of the lineage of the rDo rje phag mo incarnations within modern Tibet) states:

Some Tibetans define the revival of Buddhism in the Post-Mao era as *yang dar*, the ‘further’ [diffusion] of the doctrine...thus history appears as the continuum of the development of Buddhism that encompasses modern and post-modern technologies and forms of sociality.<sup>5</sup>

This later spread or further diffusion has occurred in conjunction with a dramatic advance in digital technology. In just the last ten years, the very nature of transmission of Tibetan Buddhist teachings has changed in unprecedented ways, whereby now even one’s physical presence is not a requirement since there are Tibetan lamas in exile offering teachings via live webcast<sup>6</sup> and one can attend teachings and retreats offered at ‘virtual’ Dharma centres.<sup>7</sup> Kunzang Dechen Lingpa embraced the use of these new forms of transmission and communication and was unusual in that he revealed a significant

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<sup>5</sup> Diemberger (2007: 9). The concept of a ‘third diffusion’ of Tibetan Buddhism originating in the exile community was posited by Tseten (1993) where he writes of the burgeoning international interest in the Tibetan cause which he suggests is based in part on what he sees as the universal relevance of Tibetan Buddhism. Many Tibetan teachers in exile have a large following of Bhutanese and various Himalayan people, so as Ramble (1993:43) suggests ‘this Third Spread is not limited to a first-world public undergoing a spiritual crisis. It is also reaching the Tibetan-speaking people of the Himalayan rim-land’.

<sup>6</sup> In 2006, KDL’S son Rig ‘dzin rdo rje presented his father’s *gcod* teachings and empowerment at the Washington Center for Consciousness Studies, this was broadcast live on the web to students who logged in via remote access. See ER [www.meditatelive.com](http://www.meditatelive.com). Also, the well-known Tibetan scholar and teacher Nam mkha’i Norbu is notable in this respect and frequently offers teachings and ‘worldwide transmissions’ via live webcast, see ER [www.dzogchencommunity.org](http://www.dzogchencommunity.org). This subject will be discussed further in chapter nine.

<sup>7</sup> For example in ‘Second Life’ a virtual world accessible via the internet which enables its users to interact with one another through self-created ‘avatars’. Second Life has a thriving community of Buddhists, and on-going group meditations. There are places one can go in order to meditate, and to learn about Buddhist practices from a variety of Buddhist schools. See ER [www.thebuddhacenter.org](http://www.thebuddhacenter.org) which organises daily meditation practices (including teachings from the Tibetan tradition) at a virtual non-sectarian ‘Second Life’ Dharma centre. See Boellstorff (2008) for an anthropological study of the ‘Second Life’ phenomenon. This activity is by no means limited to Buddhism since almost all spiritual traditions have embraced digital technology and the internet as a mode of trans-national unification. Helland (2001) writes that the Catholic Church under Pope John Paul II recognised early on the value of creating a website for followers. Macwilliams (2001) presents an example of ‘cyber-pilgrimage’ to Croagh Patrick in Ireland, an early Celtic sacred site now associated with the Christian figure St. Patrick, the patron saint of the country.

portion of his revelatory scripture<sup>8</sup> in North American locations, an act which indicates that this revelatory tradition continues to thrive beyond the confines of its Asian heritage. Further, with the advent of Euro-American teachers in the Buddhist tradition now claiming to reveal new *gter ma*<sup>9</sup> an age-old dispute between what is considered 'authentic' and by whom continues well into the present day. These questions of authenticity are examined in light of historical shifts which have occurred along with the development of rNying ma practice both in a Tibetan context and with its emergence in other cultures, specifically for this study, in North America. What are the implications of these new forms of lineage, transmission and authority and what kinds of *gter ma* are emerging in the twenty-first century? These are some of the issues this study hopes to address.

## Biographical Sources

Due the large amount of material, an abridged version of the biography (*rnam thar*) entitled: *Lho brag gter ston Kun bzang bde chen gling pa'i rnam thar skal ldan dad pa'i nor bu zhes bya ba bzhugs so: (The Jewel of the Fortunate Faithful Ones: The Complete Liberation of the Lho brag gter ston Kun bzang bde chen gling pa)*<sup>10</sup> is presented in this study consisting of paraphrased passages interspersed with direct translation. The *rnam thar* is 210 pages (105 folios) and divided into three parts entitled: 1. Childhood 2. The Wandering Beggar and 3. Dharma Activities. I have also included, in each biographical

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<sup>8</sup> Examples of KDL's *gter ma* revealed in North America will be discussed in detail in chapters five and ten of this study.

<sup>9</sup> Many of these Western figures are considered controversial and rather odd, such as sNgags pa chos rgyam, a self-proclaimed teacher of Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism who has introduced his own 'Aro gter' lineage. See ER [www.aroter.org](http://www.aroter.org).

<sup>10</sup> Hereafter referred to in footnotes as JFF.

chapter, my own research of the historical context in which this story takes place in Tibet, India and North America respectively.

The *rnam thar*'s colophon states that it was compiled by gSang sngags bstan dar and Tshe dbangs don sgrub and published in Assam, India in 2008. Both the *rnam thar* and the index (*dkar chag*) of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's collected works were edited by 'Gyur med phun tshog of sMin grol gling monastery, India in 2007-8. The compilation of as well as the translation, into English of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's collected works (*gsung 'bum*) *dGongs gter pad ma gsang thig (The Mind Treasure : The Secret Essence of Pad ma)* is currently under the supervision of mkhan po 'Jigs med bsod nam.<sup>11</sup>

The *rnam thar* is based upon stories the subject related to his students, the recollections of his family and followers as well as a number of documents and recordings archived in the library at his monastery near the village of Rupa, Arunachal Pradesh, India. The first two parts of the *rnam thar*, 'childhood' and 'the wandering beggar' relate the story of his childhood and experiences as a young man and are told in the first person. At the point where he finishes describing the region in Arunachal Pradesh and establishes his main monastic seat and the temple of Zang mdog dpal ri (Zangdokpalri) the account changes to third person narrative descriptions of Kunzang Dechen Ling pa's activities by his son Rig 'dzin rdo rje<sup>12</sup> and senior students who have compiled the text based upon their own recollections.

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<sup>11</sup>A Bhutanese scholar and Lama now based in the USA. Hereafter referred to as Khenpo Sonam in the main text and KS in footnotes.

<sup>12</sup> Hereafter referred to as Rigdzin Dorje in the main text and RD in footnotes.

This study also relies on audio/visual recordings of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa telling his life story during teachings and interviews whilst travelling in America between 2001 and 2005. In one particular instance at the request of his American students he gave a brief synopsis of his life during a teaching in Woodstock New York in 2002 which was recorded and distributed as a CD.<sup>13</sup> A series of interviews conducted with Rigdzin Dorje Rinpoche between 2006 and 2010 provided further information regarding his father's life both in India and in North America. In September of 2009 and 2010 I travelled to Arunachal Pradesh, to interview Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's wife, gSang yum bKra shis sgröl ma<sup>14</sup> who kindly spent several hours (and many pots of tea) telling me details of their life spent in the Pad ma bkod region of Tibet in the late 1950s. Biographical information pertaining to Kunzang Dechen Lingpa in English<sup>15</sup> is limited to one section of a memorial booklet entitled *Kun bzang zla ba'i zil char (The Ever-Excellent Brilliant Aspect of the Moon)*<sup>16</sup> published in Assam in 2007. This provides some of the information detailing his activities in America written by his American patron, Moke Mokotoff. Additionally, David Scharff<sup>17</sup> has provided a detailed account of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *gter ma* revelation in the United States which is recounted in full in chapter five. I also include my own documentation of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's and Rigdzin Dorje's activities in Europe and North America between 2003 and 2006. As well as Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's death ceremonies conducted at his monastery in Arunachal Pradesh, India in 2006. Between 2006 and 2010, I travelled several times within the United States to interview his American students as well as to attend teachings, empowerments and the *Healing Chö* rituals.

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<sup>13</sup> Hereafter the information from this audio recording will be referred to as AV (WT: 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Hereafter referred to as Tashi Dolma in the main text and TD in footnotes.

<sup>15</sup> Also see Farber (2005:60-62) which includes a portrait and a brief biographical description.

<sup>16</sup> See Phuntsok and Tendar (2007).

<sup>17</sup> Interview with David Scharff (INT: 2009).

## Chapter overview

Part one is dedicated to the life story of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa. Chapter one provides historical context by giving a brief overview of the rNying ma school to which Kunzang Dechen Lingpa<sup>18</sup> was affiliated and discusses the central rNying ma figure, Padmasambhava and his relation to the *gter ma* tradition. Additionally, it addresses the definitions and classification of 'apocryphal' Buddhist texts, their position on the periphery of Buddhist scriptural collections, and how opinion concerning the 'authenticity' of the *gter ma* tradition has evolved through to the present day.

Chapter two begins with an overview of the *rnam thar* genre of Tibetan literature and shows how, like the *gter ma* tradition itself, it has evolved to produce new hybrids. The ensuing chapters (2-4) outline the life of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa in chronological order as it is presented in his *rnam thar*. Chapter two covers the early years of his life from his birth in 1928 in Lho brag, Tibet up until ca. 1949 when he meets the renowned rNying ma Lama and scholar bDud 'joms Rin po che<sup>19</sup> and is recognized by him as a *gter ston*.

Chapter three begins with Kunzang Dechen Lingpa embarking on a series of meditation retreats in the Southern Tibetan region of Kong po. After a massive earthquake in 1950, he encounters a prophetic guide who directs him towards the 'hidden land' of Pad ma bkod in South-East Tibet. In Chapter four, in fear of the Chinese invasion, he escapes and settles with his family in India. This chapter details Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's life in exile in India, the *gter ma* he revealed during this time and the establishment of his monasteries in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted here that KDL is a different figure from mKhyen brtse kun bzang 'gro dul rin po che (1897-1946) who was also known as Kun bzang bde chen gling pa. Further, he should not be confused with the Bon po *gter ston*, bDe chen gling pa (1833-1893) subject of a study by Achard (2004).

<sup>19</sup> Hereafter referred to as Dudjom Rinpoche in the main text and DR in footnotes.

Chapters five and six present translations from the *rnam thar* and interviews with Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's family, patrons and students in India, Europe and America. Chapter Five outlines the later years of his life when he travels to the West and discusses examples of *gter ma* he revealed during this time. Chapter Six provides an account of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's death ceremonies in Arunachal Pradesh in 2006, his enshrinement in 2010 and discusses the predictions surrounding his rebirth.

Part two provides an examination of the transmission of Vajrayāna Buddhism to America since the 1960s, its beginnings as a meeting between Tibet's 'establishment' and the American counter-culture, and how the first Tibetan teachers to bring these teachings to the West have shaped its development through to the present day. It aims to chart the legacy of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa in North America until his death in 2006, the continuation of his teachings by his son Rigdzin Dorje and examines the major fault lines shaping the development and practice of new hybrid forms of Vajrayāna Buddhism.

Chapter seven provides an introduction to Buddhism in North America<sup>20</sup> with a more particular examination of the advent of Tibetan Buddhism in 1960s. It discusses how notions of a 'democratic self' have played a significant role in the way that Buddhism has developed and will continue to proceed in the United States. It also introduces some of the main issues influencing the development of Buddhism in America. Chapter eight centres on Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *Khros ma nag mo gcod* practice including its traditional Tibetan background, the ritual, its origins and main proponents. The focus on this

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<sup>20</sup> The inception and development of Buddhism in North America involves many variants of what has been labeled 'immigrant' and 'convert' permutations. As would be expected with such a vast subject an abundance of scholarly works exists. For an overview of the American development of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, South and South East Asian Buddhism in North America, see Prebish and Baumann (2002), Prebish (1999), Prebish and Tanaka (1998), Numrich (1996) and Seager (1999).

particular practice is due to it being the basis for the *Healing Chö* a popular ceremony now conducted by his son and the monks and nuns of his monasteries for six months of each year throughout the United States, Europe and Central America. This chapter is concerned with Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's presentation of *gcod* and its reception in North America and how this practice can be examined as way to highlight different cultural perceptions of fear and 'demons'.

Chapter nine examines Rigdzin Dorje's use of digital technology in the transmission of and preservation of his father's legacy texts. What is gained and what is lost from the current technological advances available to a global audience who are able to participate in real time? In short, this chapter provides a microcosmic illustration of the way digital technology impacts the reception and application of Tibetan Vajrayāna in the twenty-first century. Chapter ten shows how Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's act of revealing *gter ma* in the West draws inspiration from early Buddhist scripture and establishes a new link between its earliest beginnings in Tibet with the present day. It discusses a current study of early innovation in rNying ma scriptural revelation by Cantwell and Mayer who have suggested the use of alternative literary conventions to examine the way *gter ma* scripture is 'created.'<sup>21</sup> The aim this chapter is to show that the work of very recent and current scholarship on the Tibetan *gter ma* tradition can also be used to examine its emergence in the West. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's scriptural revelation entitled *The Vajra Verses* (which continues to be practiced in North America to this day) has added to and enabled the continuation of *gter ma* revelation across temporal, geographical and spiritual boundaries. The conclusion of this study attempts to synthesise understandings of the consequences for this tradition as new literature appears and Tibetan Vajrayāna

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<sup>21</sup> See Mayer (2012).

Buddhism negotiates a path of highly sophisticated and fragmented pursuits of 'happiness'.

Part three presents reference materials pertaining to the life and works of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa, beginning with the reproduction and explanation of an image entitled *Lho brag gter ston Kun bzang bde chen gling pa'i sku phreng rim byon gyi sku brnyan* (*The successive incarnations of the Lhodrak gter ston Kun zang bde chen gling pa*) a wall painting from the temple at Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's monastic seat in Arunachal Pradesh. Also included in this section is an English translation of the main titles of the seven volume *dkar chag* of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *gsung 'bum* entitled *Padma gsang thig*. Following this is a list of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's retreat caves in Tibet. Finally, I have provided a Wylie transcription of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *gter ma* text *The Vajra Verses* presented in chapter ten, the root text which influenced it and of the swift rebirth prayer which features at the end of chapter six.

### **Notes on Conventions**

Tibetan terminology, names and places are rendered according to the Wylie system, capitalising the first root letter in proper names (bDud 'joms) but not so for Tibetan terminology (*rnam thar*). In quoting other authors, the passages are presented as they were originally written and will therefore reflect their own conventions. Names which are repeated frequently, such as Kun bzang bde chen gling pa are rendered phonetically as Kunzang Dechen Lingpa and 'bDud 'joms Rin po che as Dudjom Rinpoche and so on. There is no universally accepted system for the rendering of Tibetan phonetically. In this work I use my own conventions for all instances. In the footnotes (NM) indicates a

newspaper or magazine article and (AV) indicates an audio/visual source. Likewise (INT) represents information gained from an interview and (ER) indicates an electronic resource such as a website or a blog. The references can be found in the corresponding bibliographic section at the end of the study.

**PART ONE: THE JEWEL OF THE FORTUNATE FAITHFUL  
ONES  
THE LIFE OF KUN BZANG BDE CHEN GLING PA  
1928-2006**



Figure 1 Kunzang Dechen Lingpa in New York 2001.

*After surviving 2,500 years and travelling 40,781,035 feet from the Bodhi tree in central India to Times Square in New York City, the concept 'all compounded things are impermanent' still applies. Impermanence is still impermanence, even in Times Square.*

*Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse<sup>22</sup>*

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<sup>22</sup> Khyentse (2007:121).

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE RNYING MA SCHOOL AND THE GTER MA TRADITION

### Padmasambhava and the rNying ma school

A recurrent theme in the history of Buddhism in Tibet is the debate surrounding the ‘authenticity’ of esoteric tantric scriptures and rituals. This stems from the first inception of Buddhism into the country in the eighth century and prevails through to the present day. The rNying ma pa feature prominently in this debate and it may be helpful here to attempt a brief introduction to this school. They trace their origins to Padmasambhava (Padma ‘byung gnas) an Indian tantric master believed to have been born from a lotus<sup>23</sup> in the kingdom of Oḍḍiyāna, a land according to some scholars, located in the Swat valley, now part of Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> He is a figure predominant in the mythology of the establishment of the Buddhist doctrine into Tibet, and further, quintessentially important in the discussion of Tibetan religious and political history as well as in the formation of Tibetan national and spiritual identity. According to traditional Tibetan Buddhist histories, Padmasambhava was one of the Indian tantric adepts invited<sup>25</sup> by the king Khri Srong bde brtsan to Tibet and pacified obstructing spirits<sup>26</sup> opposed to the building of bSam yas, the

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<sup>23</sup> Blondeau (1980) shows that in *gter ma* accounts of Padmasambhava life he is portrayed as being miraculously born from a lotus but that other versions of his life story indicate a womb birth.

<sup>24</sup>Others such as Chandra (1980) argue for its location in South India.

<sup>25</sup> Along with a number of other Indian Masters, including Śāntarakṣita the renowned eighth century Indian Buddhist pandit and abbot of Nālandā University, as well as another eighth century Indian tantric master, Vimalamitra, who traditionally was an important figure, along with Padmasambhava, in the transmission of the *rdzogs chen* tradition into Tibet during this time.

<sup>26</sup> Cantwell and Mayer (2008) and (2012) have found evidence of this mythology already present in tenth century Dun huang documents and suggest that it became a fundamental and central ‘indigenising’ strategy employed by early Tibetan tantrists in the ‘intermediate’ period between the first and second diffusions of Buddhism into Tibet. An equally important point is that those indigenising strategies take the form of myths used to structure rituals and remain in use as part of the integral structure of modern

first Buddhist monastery to be established in the empire. By magically subjugating the indigenous spirits of Tibet, he transformed them into protectors of the Buddhist teachings and guardians of the 'treasures' (*gter ma*). These treasures, comprising religiously significant objects and texts, were concealed by him in the Tibetan landscape and within the mind-streams of his twenty five closest disciples to remain hidden until the appropriate person, a *gter ston*, would retrieve them at a prophesied future date.

The rNying ma pa <sup>27</sup> are considered survivors of the tantrism which flourished during a period of decentralised authority which ensued after the reigns of Khri gtsug lde brtsan in the ninth century. <sup>28</sup> Towards the end of the tenth century, in response to there being no 'authoritative' agency to check an 'unrefined' development of tantric practice, bla ma Ye shes 'od, the former king of mNga ris, issued an edict stating his determination to end what he saw as dubious ritual tantric practice. This potent time in Tibet's religious history led to the translation and spread of Buddhist texts described as the dawning of a Tibetan renaissance<sup>29</sup> and the rise of Tibet as a centre of Buddhist culture.

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rNying ma ritual. Diemberger (2007: Introduction) examines the Padmasambhava legend as it appears in the *dBa'/sBa bzhed*, a detailed account of the foundation of the monastery of bSam yas and the political and religious conflicts relating to the establishment of Buddhism as the dominant religion in Tibet during the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan. The original version of this text is believed to have been written in the ninth century. See also Dalton (2004) on the early development of the Padmasambhava legend.

<sup>27</sup> The term rNying ma is an appellation which came into use as a way of distinguishing the community from gSar ma (new) schools which arose out of the *phyi dar* (later diffusion) of Buddhism in eleventh century Tibet.

<sup>28</sup>This king, also known as Ral pa can, was allegedly murdered at the behest of his brother Glang dar ma who is portrayed in Buddhist historiography as a great persecutor of Buddhism. (Glang dar ma himself was assassinated by an avenging Buddhist monk). This era is represented in Buddhist literature as a time of persecution and attack from non-Buddhists. However the main issue seems to have been the drain on economic resources that the Buddhist monasteries represented. Ral pa can had massively increased the amount of state support for religious institutions, and Glang dar ma, far from persecuting Buddhism, merely reduced this funding to its former proportions. See Karmay (1998).

<sup>29</sup> See Davidson (2005) and Dalton (2011: 95-110).

It is also from this time where we find the earliest evidence of *gter ma* revelation in both the rNying ma and Bon traditions.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, from about the twelfth century onwards, polemics arose in Tibet regarding the ‘inauthentic’ character of the rNying ma traditions and their texts (seen as Tibetan and hybrid in character), which were contrasted with the ‘purely Indian’ content around which the traditions of the new (gSar ma) schools were formed.<sup>31</sup> Such issues proved particularly acute in the case of esoteric tantric scriptures, as the gSar ma schools began to compile a corpus of the Buddhist teachings into the words (bKa') and teachings (bsTan) of the Buddha, many tantric texts of the rNying ma were excluded.<sup>32</sup> In response to this, the rNying ma developed their own alternative collection containing texts of the ‘inner’ tantra classed as Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga.<sup>33</sup> While the vast majority of the texts gathered in *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The *gter ma* tradition is most often associated with the Buddhist rNying ma school and with early *gter ston* such as Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124-1192) see Hirshberg (2012). However, the concept in Tibet is also a central feature of the Bon tradition which possibly has earlier precedents. Kvaerne (1997:99) indicates that an initial explanation of the discovery of Bon treasure texts were that they had been buried due to the persecution of Bon during the imperial period. They were subsequently re-discovered incidentally, by lay people and only gradually did their unearthing acquire numinous overtones. However, no evidence has come to light to suggest that this is the case for rNying ma *gter ma* texts.

<sup>31</sup> See Germano (2002).

<sup>32</sup> As Helmut Eimer writes (2002:7-8), ‘Kanjur and Tanjur are commonly styled the “canons of Tibetan Buddhism” sometimes the expression “primary canon” is used for the Kanjur and “secondary canon” for the Tanjur. In general the term “canon” has several meanings; here we understand it in the specific sense of a “normative text” or a “normative collection of texts” which should not be subject to alteration’. These then are considered a ‘closed canon’. In his paper ‘From bKa’ bstan bcos to bKa’ gyur and bsTan gyur’ Peter Skilling (1997:104) points out that it is problematic to speak of the Kanjur or the Tanjur as a “canon” at all: ‘It is inaccurate to speak of a “canon” or a “edition” of the Kanjur. We may speak of Kanjurs, or an edition of a specific text within a Kanjur...’. In the case of the NGB it is generally considered an ‘open canon’ in that it allows ‘authoritative’ texts to be added via the process of continuous revelation. For a detailed overview of the issues surrounding ‘canonicity’ in the Tibetan textual tradition, see Eimer and Germano (eds.) (2002). Although it should be pointed out that in this discussion there is no examination of the implications of employing a Judeo-Christian conception of ‘authoritative’ religious texts to Tibetan Buddhist textual collections.

<sup>33</sup>The rNying ma school’s nine yāna (vehicles) (*theg pa rim pa dgu*) consist of the three ‘outer’ vehicles of the Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna and Bodhisattvayāna, the three ‘outer’ tantric vehicles of the Kriyā-tantra, Ubhaya-tantra and Yoga-tantra and finally the three ‘inner’ tantric vehicles of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga.

<sup>34</sup> ‘One of the earliest recorded of such collections was compiled by the sons of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (twelfth century) as a merit offering on the occasion of their father’s funeral. Subsequently, numerous further famous editions were compiled, such as those by Ratna gling pa (fifteenth century), sMin gling gter chen (seventeenth century) and so on. Before the Cultural Revolution, most significant rNying ma pa establishments held copies of the collection, yet today only nine versions are known to survive. These nine versions represent three distinctive redactions, whose considerable doxographic and textual

(*The Hundred Thousand Tantras of the Old School*) claim<sup>35</sup> to be translations of non-Tibetan, ‘original’ manuscripts (i.e. Sanskrit texts) they are actually neither purely Indian nor exclusively Tibetan. The collection is an amalgamation of texts presented as *bKa’ ma*: continuously transmitted since composition/origin<sup>36</sup>, *gter ma*<sup>37</sup>: the product of Tibetan treasure transmission processes, and additionally, texts with an unclear transmission status.<sup>38</sup>

### **The rNying ma tradition of *rdzogs chen***

A distinguishing feature of the rNying ma school is their categorisation of the entire Buddhist path into the nine *yāna* (*theg pa rim pa dgu*) culminating in the ‘highest’ teachings of Atiyoga also known as great perfection (*rdzogs chen*). The practice of *rdzogs chen* aims to direct a practitioner towards a state of uncontrived, intrinsic awareness. The accompanying teachings pointing to this state are known as the essential heart (*snying thig*) instructions and it is these sets of instructions, commentaries and accompanying rituals which feature prominently in the collection of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa’s revelatory scripture. *rDzogs chen* teachings are particularly difficult to describe or define since ‘primordial awareness’ transcends form and yet expresses, without any attachment, all

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differences might well reflect geographical factors: the sDe ge xylograph from East Tibet, the four almost identical manuscripts copies that survive in Bhutan and the four broadly similar manuscript copies from South Central Tibet and the Nepalese borderlands. Robert Mayer (2011: Personal communication).

<sup>35</sup> Mayer points out that it is possible that such claims were made later, under pressure from gSar ma pa criteria. (2011: Personal communication).

<sup>36</sup> Teachings classed by the rNying ma as *ring brgyud* which are texts passed down in an unbroken line of succession from teacher to disciple and stemming from its original formulator.

<sup>37</sup> Teachings classed as *nye brgyud* or direct/close transmission.

<sup>38</sup> It should be kept in mind that (in the same way as bKa’ gyur and bsTan gyur), this was not a collection that was broadly read or consulted, but rather formed an important ritual item to be kept in rNying ma temples for its sacred power. Another important collection of texts in the rNying ma tradition is the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, a collection composed specifically of *gter ma* compiled in the nineteenth century by ‘Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas (1813-1899). The *Rin chen gter mdzod* has often been presented as being a collection of all *gter ma* extant up until the time of its compilation. However it excludes important cycles such as the *Mani bka’ bum* among others.

form. The teachings are centred on the experience of a 'natural state' (*gnas lugs*), the methods pointing to such an experience and with the means to retain it during meditative and post-meditative periods.

The history of the doctrine of *rdzogs chen* is indistinct, Buddhists believe it emerged in Tibet at the time of the early diffusion of Buddhism during the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan and it is shared by the two oldest spiritual traditions of Tibet, the Bon and the rNying ma schools. In both Bon and rNying ma lineages, the teachings of *rdzogs chen* are understood as being of foreign extraction and coming from countries vaguely situated West of Tibet: sTag gzig or Zhang chung for the Bon po side of the tradition, and Oḍḍiyāna or North Western India for the rNying ma pa. The rNying ma claim that *rdzogs chen* came to Tibet via the Indian mahāsiddha Śri Sīṃha and his disciple Vimalamitra, further back than this it is believed to have been transmitted by Māñjuśrīmitra who received *rdzogs chen* instruction from the first human promulgator, dGa' rab rdo rje.<sup>39</sup> It was eventually transmitted down to Padmasambhava and Vairocana in ninth century Tibet.

Buddhist historiographical claims aside, scholars cannot satisfactorily determine the history of *rdzogs chen* in Tibet since there appears to be contradictions between what can be deduced from the presence of *rdzogs chen* texts during the Tibetan imperial period and texts which can be reasonably dated as emerging from the beginning of the tenth century onwards. (However most of the works discovered from the tenth or eleventh century and after describe a spiritual history reaching back to the activities of the imperial figures and important masters such as Vairocana, Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava). Some scholars

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<sup>39</sup> The legend of dGa' rab rdo rje can be found in the thirteenth century *rnam thar* of Vairocana, *Vairo 'dra 'bag*. See Karmay (1988:18-37).

have questioned its foreign origin and are of the opinion that it was an indigenous tradition developed in Tibet by Tibetans. In order to try to ascertain from what period *rdzogs chen* constitutes itself as a distinctive and philosophical movement, Karmay examined three Dun huang<sup>40</sup> documents which represent very early articulations of *rdzogs chen* thought:<sup>41</sup>

*Rdzogs chen* constituted itself in the ninth century and preceded all the later major Buddhist schools, although it did not become its own independent school. Its preponderance in the formation of Tibetan Buddhism which began in the eleventh century cannot be disregarded.<sup>42</sup>

Regardless of their unsatisfactory definition or the difficulty in determining their exact origins, it is important to understand both *rdzogs chen* and *gter ma* scripture by employing an alternative perspective to ‘authorship’ and ‘authenticity’. As Mayer and Cantwell have suggested in recent studies of scriptural innovation in the *gter ma* tradition, in approaching ideas of authorship and creation of Tibetan *gter ma* production (which in the case of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa draws heavily on *rdzogs chen* teachings), it may prove more fruitful to apply the methodology used by Talmudic

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<sup>40</sup> In 1907 British explorer Sir Aurel Stein discovered a large cache of manuscripts and paintings hidden in caves along the silk route at Dun huang. Stein brought a large portion of the documents back to Britain (These now form the ‘Stein Collection’ at the British Museum). A French sinologist Paul Pelliot, a few months after Stein, took the remaining manuscripts back to Paris. (These now form the ‘Pelliot Collection’ at the Bibliothèque Nationale). The documents were written in Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Khotanese and other Central Asian languages. It was generally assumed that the Tibetan documents dated from the time of the Tibetan occupation of the region from 786 to 848 C.E. However more current research now believes that a large portion of the Tibetan documents date from Tibet’s ‘age of fragmentation’ in the tenth century. See Takeguchi (2004) and Dalton, Davis and van Schaik (2007). The Dun huang manuscripts are currently being digitised by the International Dunhuang Project. See Karmay (2007) for early examples of *rdzogs chen* texts in this collection and Kapstein and van Schaik (2010) also Dalton and van Schaik (2006).

<sup>41</sup> Karmay (2007) presents IOL 647 and IOL 594 as prototypes of later *rdzogs chen* literature and IOL 689/2, a list of succession of religious masters which includes some associated with the *rdzogs chen* tradition. An early disputation of the Indic origin of *rdzogs chen* texts was put forth by Podrang Zhiwa Ö, a Western Tibetan monk and ruler of the 11th century, and a proponent of the gSar ma transmissions. See Karmay (1980). See also Germano (1994) and (2004).

<sup>42</sup> Karmay (2007:12) compares *rdzogs chen* with the ‘sudden path’, a form of Ch’an (Chinese Buddhist meditative teachings known in Tibet during the eighth and ninth centuries which then declined before the break-up of the Tibetan empire in the mid ninth century) and explores the development of the doctrine contained in Dunhuang texts. As does van Schaik (2008) in relation to one of the earliest reliably dated texts to refer to the term *rdzogs chen*, the Guhyagarbha tantra.

scholars to study the formation and development of Hebraic literature.<sup>43</sup> An approach concerned with the underlying concepts and historical developments of spiritual literature. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter ten of this study which examines how a proto-typical *rdzogs chen* text from Dun Huang (IOL 647) appears to have informed the revelatory scripture of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa. Thereby demonstrating the way in which these very early spiritual concepts and textual traditions continue to be presented and utilised in contemporary articulations of *rdzogs chen gter ma* revelation.

### **The *gter ma* tradition**

'Treasure' texts cover a wide range of subjects<sup>44</sup> however the majority of *gter ma* scripture generally presents religious teachings. They usually consist of a core text accompanied by ritual instructions and commentary. The core text represents the actual teaching and in the case of the rNying ma *gter ma* is generally presented as taught and/or said by Padmasambhava.<sup>45</sup> A literal understanding of *gter ma* is 'hidden treasure', they may also be understood as teachings encoded within the elements and the mind. Padmasambhava<sup>46</sup> is at the heart of this visionary tradition as it is understood within the rNying ma school. He functions as a bridge between teachings transmitted to him (from a primordial Buddha) which he then teaches verbally to his disciples and are then concealed by him as *gter ma* to be revealed at a later serendipitous time.

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<sup>43</sup> See Cantwell and Mayer (2011).

<sup>44</sup> Such as medical texts, place guides, and prophecies.

<sup>45</sup> See Gyatso (1998:157).

<sup>46</sup> Padmasambhava is not the only one, but certainly the most prominent within the rNying ma school.

## Categories of *gter ma*

*Gter ma* can be classed broadly into three 'types': earth treasures (*sa gter*), mind treasures (*dgongs gter*) and pure vision (*dag snang*), distinctions which are generally dependent upon the nature and source of their discovery.<sup>47</sup> *Sa gter* are 'archaeological' discoveries of texts/objects found in temple walls or natural phenomena such as rocks, caves, walls, trees, or lakes (if they come from the water they are *chu gter*). Texts discovered this way are often fragmentary, encoded in symbolic script and written on yellow scrolls of paper known as *shog ser*.<sup>48</sup> At the time of concealment, a prophecy is generally made concerning the circumstances in which the treasure will be re-accessed, this usually includes a description of ritual tools needed and the identities of consorts<sup>49</sup> who may be critical to the successful revelation. The presence of and the act of union with a consort is often of paramount importance to the entire enterprise.<sup>50</sup>

*Dgongs gter* refer to 'mind treasures' teachings revealed by one or more vision-induced transmissions. In the rNying ma tradition these are considered to be teachings directly from Padmasambhava which have been imprinted into the mind-streams of the *gter ston*. Treasures revealed in this way occur in the minds of the revealers who write them down, sometimes in coded scripts, which are then translated into Tibetan. Treasure revealers may see letters appearing in the sky in front of them or receive coded messages from mysterious figures only they can see.

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<sup>47</sup> For a thorough and detailed study of the different categories of *gter ma*, see Thondup (1986).

<sup>48</sup> See Thondup (1986) and Hanna (1994) for photographs of *sa gter* and *shog ser*.

<sup>49</sup> See Jacoby (2009) on the importance of a consort in treasure revelation.

<sup>50</sup> In the case of KDL he recounts in his biography how he fails to follow prophesied instructions concerning a particular consort. The result of this was that he was unable to reveal any *sa gter* in this lifetime. (JFF: 141-144). Details of this can be found in chapter two.

*Dgongs gter* are somewhat different from *dag snang* revelations, which are not texts or teachings specifically concealed by Padmasambhava (or another imperial-era Tibetan figure). *Dag snang* can be understood as ‘mind’ treasures<sup>51</sup> and can indeed be retrieved from Padmasambhava, but can also be collected from other non-human figures. It is believed that highly advanced teachers continuously maintain a heightened understanding of ‘the nature of reality’ which allows them to be in perpetual dialogue with Buddhas and deities. Therefore, they are able to receive manifold visionary teachings, which can be ‘revealed’ as enlightened mind treasures. It is important to note when considering the difference between *dgongs gter* and *dag snang* that from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective there is a degree of fluidity to these concepts which defies rigid definition. One should be aware of this ambiguous distinction, since, as Gyatso points out, the two can ‘collapse in usage’.<sup>52</sup> In the case of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa’s revelations they are often referred to as *dgongs gter*, and yet show the characteristics of *dag snang* in that they are not always teachings which have been specifically hidden by Padmasambhava.

### **The question of ‘authenticity’**

Tibetan ‘treasure’ apologists<sup>53</sup> have often pointed to Indic instances of *gter ma*<sup>54</sup> and cite Indic scriptures in order to justify its ‘authenticity’. An oft quoted verse is from Śāntideva’s *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra (Introduction to the Conduct of a Bodhisattva)*, found

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<sup>51</sup> Pure vision is said to occur while the visionary is in a state of meditative absorption (*mnyams*), dreaming (*rmi lam*) or in the actuality (*dnagos*) of the awakened state.

<sup>52</sup> Gyatso (1992: 98). Halkias (2012) points out that there are important precedents to a semantic and hermeneutic overlap between ‘pure vision’ and ‘pure lands’ that applies as much to *gter ma* dedicated to bDe ba can as they do for Zang mdog dpal ri.

<sup>53</sup> For example, see chapters four and five of *Guru bkra shis chos ‘byung* for scriptural justifications for the *gter ma* phenomenon.

<sup>54</sup> One such example being the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* a genre of Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures believed to have been conferred upon Nāgārjuna (c. 150 - 250 CE) the Indian philosopher and founder of the Mādhyamaka school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, by Nāgaraja, the king of the nāgas, who had been guarding them at the bottom of a lake. See also Masefield (1986) for a discussion of divine revelation in Pali Buddhist literature.

in the dedication chapter is the line: “Bodhisattvas will hear the sound of the Dharma without cessation from birds, trees, lights and the sky...”<sup>55</sup> Karma Chags med (1613-1678), a renowned Tibetan scholar of bKa' brGyud school, (and also revered by the rNying ma) outlines in the introduction to the inner biography of the rNying ma *gter ston* gnam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje (1645-1667) a justification for the authenticity of what he calls *thugs kyi gter* a term which can be considered akin to *dag snang*:

From the *Dharmasamgiti sūtra*, (*The compendium of doctrine sūtra*): It is said “To some bodhisattvas with perfect motivation, even though the Buddha is not present, Dharma appears from the middle of the sky, walls, and trees. To some bodhisattvas whose thoughts are pure, from the domain of one’s own mind, all teachings corresponding to the pith instructions arise.”<sup>56</sup>

Karma Chags med interprets the statement ‘even though the Buddha is not present’ as meaning that since the Buddha’s speech pervades the entire expanse of space realised Bodhisattvas are able to perceive these teachings and then reveal them. Therefore, *dag snang*, as accessed by rare bodhisattvas, can be considered the speech of the Buddha.<sup>57</sup>

Modern Western scholarship suggests that *gter ma* texts include components which emulate older Indic and Chinese visionary traditions. Mayer<sup>58</sup> writes that *dag snang* and *gter ma* can be seen as a Buddhist concepts developed and elaborated upon by Tibetans well into the present day:<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Dan Martin indicates a similar passage found in the thirteenth century *Chos 'byung rgyas pa* (1987:117) although as Martin points out, not in a context which explicitly describes *gter ma*. (2001: 22) This verse is also cited by bDud 'joms Rin po che (1991: 747) in relation to *gter ma*.

<sup>56</sup>See Hall (2007:57) and *gNam chos* (Volume 11: Folio 7). The text states that to Bodhisattvas with pure motivation, the dharma treasures do not arise from material form, or from ‘the domain of one’s own mind’ (i.e. ordinary mind). These teachings arise from an all pervasive space, a primordial treasury, the nature of enlightened mind. Also see Rawlinson (1972:45) who argues that ‘...in the earliest layers of the Saddharmapundarīka sūtra (The lotus sūtra) terms such as Dharma and the ‘sound’, ‘voice’ and ‘word’...of the Buddha had an inner transcendental meaning...the original message of the sūtra was not simply some intellectually comprehensible set of teachings, but rather some ‘inner’ transcendental entity manifesting itself, through the medium of the Buddha, as sound’.

<sup>57</sup> *gNam chos* (Volume 11: folio 13).

<sup>58</sup>See Mayer (1997:70-90).

<sup>59</sup> He also notes that there are Chinese precedents: ‘In China, for example an important text...called the Kuan-ting Ching...was produced by means of the treasure system...seven centuries before the first appearance of *gter ma* in Tibet’. Mayer (1997: 143).

It seems possible that in observing the highly systematic workings of contemporary Tibetan scripture-revealers, we might in fact be observing a unique survival, or at least a close replica, of the workings of the revealers of many of the most famous Indian and Chinese Buddhist scriptures of the last two millennia.<sup>60</sup>

In relation to *dag snang*, Mayer<sup>61</sup> points to the notable study by Harrison<sup>62</sup> which indicates that an entire chapter of the *Pratyutpanna Buddha saṃmukhāvasthita samādhi sūtra* (*The Samādhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present*) is devoted to the defence of pure vision teachings<sup>63</sup> and this shows that similar methods to those described within the Mahāyāna scriptures continue to be used by later Tibetan visionaries.

There are many examples which could be cited to illustrate the debate across the centuries between the opponents and proponents of the *gter ma* tradition. An early critic of the treasure tradition was the Tibetan scholar Chag Lo tsa ba Chos rje dpal (1197-1264) whose criticism of *gter ma* forms part of a general complaint against what he felt were spurious scriptures and practices circulating in Tibet at the time. He wrote, for example, that the teachings of the prominent rNying ma gter ston Gu ru Chos dbang (1212-1270) were not 'authentic'.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See Mayer (1997: 148-9).

<sup>61</sup> See Mayer (1996).

<sup>62</sup> See Harrison (1990).

<sup>63</sup> Mayer (1996:73) writes 'The samādhi after which this sūtra is named...is the main teaching...it describes the deliberate cultivation of a pure vision type of transmission.....Chapter three of this sūtra describes how meditators should systematically cultivate visionary encounters with celestial Buddhas (e.g. Amitāyus) by means of specific contemplations. Thus they can receive teachings directly from celestial Buddhas, and subsequently propagate these as newly revealed scriptures'. Also see (Harrison 1990: xxii; 54-60; 100; 104).

<sup>64</sup> Doctor (2005: 32) cites Chag blo tsa ba 'The many false teachings were then manipulated by one known as Guru Chowang who became possessed when *rdza* spirit entered him after telling him that they were treasure texts. Subsequently, *nāgas*, demons and *gyalgong* spirits gathered around his false teachings which resulted in out breaks of leprosy and psychotic fits. These were then taken as signs of his accomplishment. Such texts that appear from treasures are not authentic'. See also Kapstein (2000:132) for a study of an eighteenth century dGe lugs pa debate, the *Gsung Rab Rnam Dag Chu'i Dri Ma Sel Byed Nor Bu Ke Ta Ka* and its reply the *Nor Bu Ke Ta Ka'i Byi Dor*. These compositions nicely highlight the debate between a scholar who refutes the validity of treasures and one who supports them.

Just as these early polemics set the standard for condemnation of the *gter ma* tradition, so too did early *gter ston* produce a standard model of categorisation and defence. A prime example of this is the *gTer 'byung chen mo*, (*The great history of gter ma*) an account which is possibly one of the earliest theoretical studies of the treasure tradition found in Tibetan Buddhist literature. Gyatso writes that its attributed author, Guru Chos dbang, was therefore instrumental in developing justification of *gter ma* revelation against its critics.<sup>65</sup>

The debate regarding the 'authenticity' of *gter ma* has prevailed well into the twentieth century. Stein wrote of them as 'novel ritual texts which amount to creative works of literature'.<sup>66</sup> Michael Aris famously wrote that some scholars both Western and Tibetan had intentionally ignored the fact that treasure texts were contrived.<sup>67</sup> These attitudes prove problematic since they encourage dismissal of an important facet of Tibetan spirituality and to quote Kapstein '... in a manner that closely recapitulates the polarities of the old Tibetan disputes'.<sup>68</sup> It is more useful then, as much as is possible, to understand the *gter ma* system as 'authentic' in the sense that it is an important and evolving model which is a component of a particular spiritual concept, one which allows for the innovation and adaptation of Tibetan Buddhist teachings whilst simultaneously maintaining its ancient provenance and credentials. The intention of the *gter ma* tradition is to bring forth relevant teachings or objects according to specific needs, times and situations, and the focus of this study will now shift to examine how it reveals itself in our own time.

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<sup>65</sup> See Gyatso (1994).

<sup>66</sup> See Stein (1972:274).

<sup>67</sup> See Aris (1989: 96).

<sup>68</sup> See Kapstein (2000: 135).

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EARLY YEARS (1928-1949)

#### Tibetan Biography

Biography or hagiography (*rnam thar*) is a common literary form found in Tibet from about the twelfth century onwards. Gyatso writes that the genre of Tibetan autobiography virtually explodes in the seventeenth century, most notably with the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography, which, she suggests, became a prototype of many other subsequent narrative life stories.<sup>69</sup> Characteristics common to Tibetan *rnam thar* of spiritual figures are that the main character reaches complete spiritual enlightenment another is that the tale demonstrates an exemplary life. The story often follows a standard pattern, beginning with a conception and birth accompanied by miraculous signs such as flowers falling from the sky, rainbows and so forth. Throughout the narrative accounts of Buddhist *gter ston*, Padmasambhava and various Buddhist figures and deities appear in visions to issue teachings or directives.

Despite the formulaic nature of much of the genre, *rnam thar* are regarded by many historians, Tibetan and Western alike, as valuable historical resources, insofar as they may incidentally record historical details and personal observations. The production of modern Tibetan religious *rnam thar* suggests a process of 'cross fertilisation' whereby they incorporate conventions characteristic of Western biographies or, conversely, the integration of modern events and places into a traditional format which is then

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<sup>69</sup> See Gyatso (1998: 101). Gyatso's statement is borne out by Schaeffer (2010) whose examination of *rnam thar* contained in the collection of the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center shows a marked increase of *rnam thar* production from the seventeenth century onwards.

interpreted through a Buddhist lens. For example, in chapter five of this study, while Kunzang Dechen Lingpa is visiting New York City in September 2001, he predicts the destruction of the World Trade Center which followed shortly thereafter. This incident is recounted not only to show his miraculous powers of foresight to his American followers, but also as illustrative of the Buddhist tenet of impermanence. *rNam thar* usually include a preface/homage, in which the author, if it is the subject himself, will state that this story is not about a great master but a 'lowly wandering beggar' or a similar kind of humilific statement. If the work has been compiled by a student of the subject, they will often write in the colophon that any errors are entirely their own, intended to show the humility of the subject. At the beginning of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *rnam thar* the narrative voice is his own, describing his life and actions in a simple and modest way. Later in the text the voice of the *rnam thar* shifts to that of his students and the language employed then follows a well-established trope of Tibetan religious *rnam thar*, effusive and laudatory language which turns the narrative into a demonstration of piety.

Tibetan biographies are rather elusive when it comes to determining whether they represent 'history' as it is understood from a Western scholarly perspective. The Tibetan term *rnam thar* literally means 'complete liberation' but it is generally understood as 'biography' or 'life story'. However, the life-story of a *gter ston* or great spiritual master encompasses all the aspects of their liberation and present more of a spiritual 'road map' than a Western style biography. Historical events and the subject's personality are not considered relevant unless they highlight a spiritual process or serve as religious allegory. Often in religious *rnam thar* personal relationships are less important than that of the role of a spiritual authority. One's teacher is considered the primary relationship. In a Western narrative, the protagonist may be searching for their 'true love', in a religious Tibetan

*rnam thar* the ultimate quest is to find a true teacher and guide and to propagate the Buddhist teachings. In Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *rnam thar*, a large portion of the account is dedicated to his search for and final discovery of a teacher. His marriage and the birth of his children are not included.<sup>70</sup> The exact year in which particular events occur, or the precise age of the subject are often unimportant and unknown. In the case of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *rnam thar*, hardly ever does he mention an actual year. Often the years which are presented have been deduced from particular events he describes, such as the massive earthquake which occurred in the summer of 1950 or the year that his teacher Dudjom Rinpoche left for China, which, based on other historical accounts, was in 1954.

Approaching the study of *rnam thar* entirely from a Western biographical viewpoint with its accompanying expectations, is somewhat to miss the point. A recording of an American interviewing Kunzang Dechen Lingpa in California in 2004 highlights the didactic and pedagogical functions of *rnam thar*. The interviewer's questions were related to specific historical events such as fleeing Tibet in the late 1950s and questions about well-known Tibetan lamas such as - 'what was he like?' As the American translator tries to formulate these questions in Tibetan, one can see the reaction from Kunzang Dechen Lingpa is of curiosity as to why these things should be important. Once translated, the interviewer's mundane biographical queries result not in the specific details he clearly wants, but in a series of teachings on compassion and the nature of mind.<sup>71</sup> *Rnam thar* are often replete with all kinds of magical feats and miracles which from a scholarly

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<sup>70</sup> This isn't intended as a diminishment of them, however of primary importance in the life of lama, particularly a *gter ston*, is not family but the propagation of the Buddhist teachings. In her memoirs of the twentieth century Tibetan lama, Chogyam Trungpa, his wife, Diana Mukpo, recalled a conversation early in their marriage: 'I said "I love you more than anyone in the whole world" He replied proudly "I really love you too. I love you second best of anything in the whole world". I said "What do mean second best?" Then he replied "First I love my Guru ...I'll always love the Dharma more than anything else...my first commitment isn't to being a family man, but to propagate the Buddhist teachings. This is the point of my life". 'See Gimian and Mukpo (2006:104).

<sup>71</sup> See AV (Ellor: 2004).

perspective prove difficult to understand as historical fact and so are viewed entirely as symbolic processes. Increasingly, contemporary scholarship is becoming more culturally sensitive when considering these aspects which Achard calls 'trans-historical' events.<sup>72</sup> They are an important feature of *rnam thar*, particularly of religious figures, since there is a 'sacred' component to their composition. They are often arranged into a three-fold division: *phyi* (outer), *nang* (inner) and *gsang ba* (secret). One could see these respectively as the external factual story, the internal psychological story and a 'higher' secret story, which a follower relates to in a 'profound' way. In some cases these are separate texts or, as in the case of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *rnam thar*, these elements are interwoven throughout the narrative.

To take an example from Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's own biography, when describing the valley in which he was prophesied to reveal *sa gter*, the description includes a lake in the shape of a mirror. A person unfamiliar with esoteric Buddhist practices would probably take this at face value, as a descriptive detail. The lake looked like a mirror. A *rdzogs chen* practitioner reading the same account would understand that this description is laden with esoteric Buddhist symbols. An example often used in *rdzogs chen* teachings is that one's own nature is analogous to a mirror which reflects with complete openness but is not affected by the reflections. The knowledge which ensues from recognizing mirror-like clarity (which does not have an intrinsic existence in itself) is understood by the term *rig pa*. Therefore the descriptions in *rnam thar* may also be understood as instructional and inspirational devices invoked to remind the reader of Buddhist concepts and teachings. It should be pointed out that the three categories of outer, inner and secret<sup>73</sup> do not always

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<sup>72</sup> See Achard (2008: 15).

<sup>73</sup> Willis (1995:5-17) understands the concept of *phyi*, *nang* and *gsang* as historical, inspirational and instructional respectively. However it should be noted that there is a distinct blurring of these categories

correspond to the way *rnam thar* are actually arranged and are not always descriptive of the content but rather indicate an esoteric discourse on the way in which the *rnam thar* may be understood. Namely, that the content can be comprehended on multiple levels, dependent upon the spiritual propensities, qualities and accomplishments of the reader. With this in mind, what are the implications of *rnam thar* being compiled or presented to a Western audience?

Since the subject of this study is the *rnam thar* of a contemporary Tibetan religious figure, it is helpful here to briefly examine the different forms that modern *rnam thar* take. In the last twenty years the popularity of Tibetan Buddhism in the West has resulted in increased availability of both historical and contemporary Tibetan biographies and autobiographies in English.<sup>74</sup> Academic studies of *rnam thar* tend to be translations of a Tibetan text for the examination of a particular school, tradition, time period or a collection of teachings. Translations of *rnam thar* of prominent Tibetan religious teachers from the end of the nineteenth century up until the beginning of the twentieth century are relatively widespread.<sup>75</sup> However it is not so common to find academic studies of twentieth century Tibetan figures. Conversely, in the realm of popular literature there are a great number of twentieth century English language biographies of Tibetan Lamas.

Generally these are not translated from a traditional Tibetan *rnam thar* but written by the Western students of a Tibetan teacher.<sup>76</sup> However, like their Tibetan cousins, these

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since *phyi*, *nang* and *gsang* can be seen to incorporate all three distinctions simultaneously, albeit on varying levels of understanding.

<sup>74</sup> Of course there are other examples in numerous other languages. I am choosing to focus on English language translations and compositions.

<sup>75</sup> See Jacoby (2009), Achard (2008) and Rossi (2003) to name a few.

<sup>76</sup> It will be interesting to see if in the future orthodox Buddhist *rnam thar* are composed for Western teachers and reincarnates active in Tibetan Buddhism.

English language *rnam thar* have a hagiographic purpose<sup>77</sup> and are often written (as indeed are traditional Tibetan *rnam thar*) with no references (and sometimes no index) which is unnecessary from a spiritual practitioner's point of view, but nonetheless frustrating from an academic perspective.

One exception to this is Jackson's study of sDe gzhung rin po che<sup>78</sup> which he compiled from diaries, interviews and his own and other student's recollections. It has been meticulously researched and bridges a gap between an academic treatment of the subject and a religious narrative. Although the focus of my study differs from his and the biography presented is translated from its original Tibetan,<sup>79</sup> echoing Jackson's treatment of this genre of Tibetan literature, I aim to provide an academic contextualisation of this Tibetan Buddhist biography. In so doing, not only share the story of an extraordinary inspirational life, but provide insight into the possible future developments of a Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

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<sup>77</sup> To list all such examples would be a rather lengthy undertaking. For a recent example of a biography of a Tibetan figure contemporary with KDL, see Kunzang and Schmidtt (2005).

<sup>78</sup> Jackson (2003) sDe gzhung rin po che (1906-1987) was a distinguished Tibetan teacher of the Sa skya tradition who was invited to the University of Washington in 1960.

<sup>79</sup> See also the translation of the autobiography of the renowned rNying ma Tibetan teacher Dil mgo mkhyen brtse (1910-1991) translated by Palmo (2008).

## Homage Prayer

**The complete liberation of the departed Lho brag gter ston Kunzang Dechen Lingpa  
entitled: Jewel of the Fortunate Faithful Ones**

*Homage to the Guru!*

*The luminous clear palace of primordially pure Dharmadhātu,  
filled with clouds of loving compassion, sends down a constant rain of nectar appropriate to  
those to be edified.*

*I pay homage to the vast harvest upon the ground that is the minds of living beings.*

*With far greater kindness even than all of the Buddhas of the three times,  
protect me throughout my succession of lives, as a mother protects her child.*

*I pay homage to the uninterrupted kindness of the Guru and Consort.*

*Having shown your direct experience and dreams innumerable  
and the components of your body not as a single definable entity,*

*but in a variety of forms,*

*clear away our obstructions and bless us.*

*In so doing I prostrate myself to the Guru and the Consort,*

*who transfer their mind stream to me.*

*The dharma which fulfils the hopes of sentient beings in their respective realms.*

*Unobstructed compassion arises.*

*I pay homage to you who bestow the predestined revelatory teachings  
to those who are qualified.<sup>80</sup>*

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<sup>80</sup> (JFF: 15-16).

*Having said that, as far as I am concerned, this is merely the story of a wicked, unlettered and wandering gypsy...<sup>81</sup>*

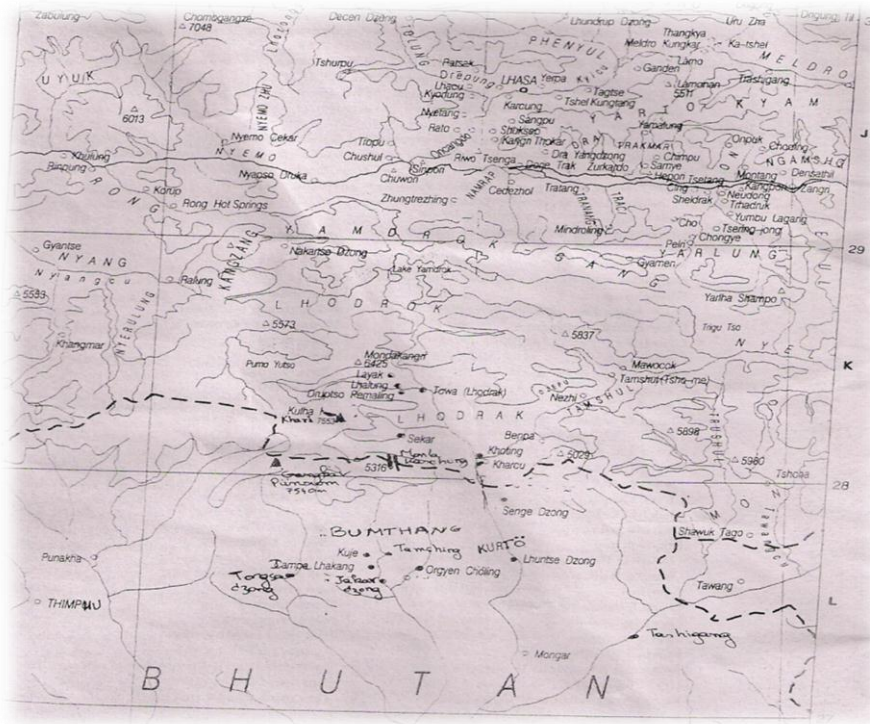


Figure 2. Map of Lhodrak and Bhutan.

### **Southern Tibet (1928-1949)**

Tibet in the 1920s was a land in which there were no major roads or wheeled vehicles, transport was primarily by horse on rough tracks, or by yak skin coracle and/or wooden ferry boats along rivers which were only navigable for short stretches.<sup>82</sup> The country was ruled by the thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876-1933) who had returned to Tibet after two separate periods in exile, the first in 1904 –1909 (to escape the British invasion of 1904), and the second from 1910–1913 (to escape a Chinese invasion). Shortly before he passed

<sup>81</sup> (JFF: 16).

<sup>82</sup> See Richardson (1984:8).

away in 1933, he issued a prophecy which, it is believed, foretold the turbulent events of the 1950s that would drastically change the life of his successor and the people of Tibet.<sup>83</sup> In 1928, the earth snake year, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was born in Lho brag (Lhodrak), a vast area encompassing much of Southern Tibet. A region linked with some important masters, monasteries<sup>84</sup> and sacred sites of Tibetan Buddhism particularly of the rNying ma and bKa' brGyud sects,<sup>85</sup> and from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, functioned as a cultural bridge between Tibet and Eastern Bhutan.<sup>86</sup>

### The lineage of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa is associated with the lineage of Me long rdo rje (1243-1303)



Figure 3. Me long rdo rje.

who spent several years practicing and on retreat in the Lhodrak region. Biographical descriptions indicate that he revealed a *rdzogs chen* instruction of Vimalamitra known as the *Me long snying thig* subsequently rediscovered by dByangs mKhyen brtse dbang po (1820-1892) in the nineteenth century.<sup>87</sup> The lineage of Me long rdo rje can be traced to the imperial period figure Vimalamitra (Dri med

bshes gnyen) who is central particularly, to the history of *rdzogs chen* and concealed *gter ma* known as the *Bi ma'i gsang ba snying thig* (*The Secret Heart Essence of Vimalamitra*).

<sup>83</sup> For a detailed look at this historical period in Tibet, see Goldstein (1991).

<sup>84</sup> See *Guru bkra shis chos 'byung*: chapter six, which is a general survey of rNying ma pa monasteries and their abbatial lineages (and begins with the monasteries of Lho brag).

<sup>85</sup> Most notably Mar pa (1012-1097) the renowned translator and teacher of Tibet's saint-poet Mi la ras pa (c. 1052-c. 1135). The tower which Mar pa is traditionally believed to have instructed Mi la ras pa to build up and pull down repeatedly is a major pilgrimage site located in this area.

<sup>86</sup> See Pommaret (2003: 91-107).

<sup>87</sup> See Nyoshul (2006: 91-93), Dudjom (1991:566-568), Roerich (1996:196-197) and 'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas. (1976. V. 1 p.111a).

When Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was a young infant he was recognized as a reincarnation of Klong gsal snying po<sup>88</sup> (1685-1752) a rNying ma *gter ston* influential in the rebuilding of one of the ancient rNying ma monasteries, Kah thog (originally dating from the twelfth century) in the Eastern Tibetan region of Khams. In the mid-seventeenth century, Klong gsal snying po became the monastery's head lama and brought about a profound transformation of both its administrative and religious programs. An important point to note here is that Klong gsal snying po was considered an incarnation of one of Padmasambhava's original twenty-five disciples, dKon mchog 'byung gnas. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa, by being recognized as an incarnation of Klong gsal snying po is then linked with all of *his* previous incarnations, (which also includes the rNying ma *gter ston* Rat na gling pa). Klong gsal snying po, by being an incarnation of dKon mchog byung gnas thereby provides a 'legitimising' factor to Kunzang Dechen Lingpa being recognised later as a *gter ston*.<sup>89</sup> This detail in the *rnam thar* provides evidence of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's 'dharmic credentials' as an authentic *gter ston* in the rNying ma tradition, an aspect which will be returned to in greater detail in chapter ten of this study.

### **The 'Jewel of the Fortunate Faithful Ones'**

After the homage prayer, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa explains that he was orphaned when he was about five years old and it was only later that he learned of the circumstances surrounding his birth and of the lineage to which he belonged. In about 1943, as a

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<sup>88</sup>(JFF: 23). Ronis (2009:56) states that the main source for biographical information for this figure is found in Gu ru bKra shis Chos 'byung and that the *Klong gsal snying po'i zab gter gsung 'bum gter chen rig 'dzin klong gsal snying po'i zab gter skor* does not contain any substantial biographical writings.

<sup>89</sup> In the index to KDL's *gsung 'bum* there is an image showing Padmasambhava flanked on either side by dKon chog 'byung gnas and KDL.

teenager, he was re-united with an uncle who took him to his paternal home and told him the story of his infant years:

I myself couldn't remember all these stories, about my birth and so forth, but my uncle told me of my father's home near sKu lha mkha' ri.<sup>90</sup> In each of the cardinal directions of this mountain are four miraculously manifested mansions. The great Eastern mansion was the paternal home of my father Kun bzang rang 'grol. That place was known as Brag dkar, the house itself was known by the name Brag dkar khang mo che. On the roof the deities of sKu lha mkha' ri had planted a divine arrow, made by magic not by humans, and it shone of its own accord. There was one room full of magically made iron arrow tips and small protector chapel. The lineage of that house was known to be that of Me long rdo rje. I am not certain exactly how many brothers were among that lineage; it has been said that because of those brothers taking a bride from here and there, I have a mixture of the lineages of Rat na gling pa, rDo rje gling pa and Pad ma gling pa.<sup>91</sup>

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's father Kun bzang Rang sgrol (hereafter, Kunzang Rangdrol) was an elderly tantric yogi who spent the majority of his life in solitary retreat in a cave associated with the 'das log Karma dbang 'dzin in Lhodrak.<sup>92</sup> His mother, Kun bzang chos sgron, was a young pretty field worker from a nearby village called Phra lung who suffered from a diseased eye. The locals of the village suggested that she go up to the mountain retreat and ask the lama for blessings to cure her affliction. When she arrived at the entrance to his cave, upon seeing her, the old yogi perceived her as a wisdom *ḍākinī*

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<sup>90</sup> (JFF: 18). This is one of the highest mountains in this region on the border with Bhutan. sKu lha mkha' ri is a mountain deity considered by Buddhists to be an emanation of King Ge sar. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:204). Aris (1989: 54-5) describes a dream of the sixteenth century *gter ston*, Pad ma gling pa who has an encounter with this deity.

<sup>91</sup> (JFF: 18-19). rDo rje gling pa (1346-1405) is considered one of the great *gter ston* amongst the rNying ma pa and an important *rdzogs chen* master. See Karmay (2000). Ratna gling pa (1403-1478) was also a famous *gter ston*, and known as a compiler of the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, in the fifteenth century. Padma gling pa (1450-1521) was a *gter ston* of the rNying ma school from the region of Bumthang, now in Bhutan, an area extremely close both geographically and religiously to Lhodrak. Studies include: Aris (1989) Tshewang (1995) and Gayley (2007).

<sup>92</sup>(JFF: 20). 'Das log refers to people who return from death and relate visits to pure lands and hell realms. See Pommaret (1998). Epstein (1982: 20-81) provides translations based on four different editions of Karma dbang 'dzin's *rnam thar*. One account relates that she stays in retreat at a hermitage cave called Khra (alt. Phra) phug, located, Epstein says, about thirty miles North East of her birth place of Kun dga' gling in the upper valley of Dge bcu. He states that the accounts place the biography in the mid eighteenth century (1982:81). Cuevas (2008:158) places Karma dbang 'dzin earlier in the seventeenth century and has not identified Khra phu(g) or Phra phu (g) beyond a mention of a monastery by that name mentioned in the *Blue Annals*. An edition of Karma dbang 'dzin's biography is titled: *rnam thar 'das log karma dbang 'dzin gyi rnam thar pa'i lcags kyu*.

and intuited that they would conceive a great lama.<sup>93</sup> Kunzang Dechen Lingpa recalls his conception which he describes:

During that time they engaged in unsurpassable secret blissful union and liberation. At the heart of the great South West mountain abode of Guru Rinpoche, from the centre of the Guru and the Consort's union came a ball of red light about four inches in size, it passed through Kur stod<sup>94</sup> in Bhutan and dissolved at the place of my father and mothers union, then I manifested in my mother's womb.<sup>95</sup>

After staying with Kunzang Rangdrol for one week, the young girl returned to her village



Figure 4. Threshers in Lhodrak 1950.

and nine months later,<sup>96</sup> as she was working in the fields, she went into labour. The *nam thar* states that at the time of his birth, two vultures appeared from the South West circling above his mother three times. A pavilion of rainbow light appeared in the sky and a soft rain of flowers descended around her. She delivered her baby standing up over an irrigation canal, the new-born fell and piece of grass pierced his left eye. This early accident caused him sight problems for the rest of his life.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> (JFF: 20).

<sup>94</sup> Kur stod seems to be a place connected both spiritually and economically with the Lhodrak region. It was visited by several Tibetan masters and *gter ston*. Most notably in relation to KDL, Rat na gling pa, (of whom he is said to be an incarnation) Pad ma gling pa and rDo je Gling pa (who he mentions are connected with the lineage of his father). Aris (1989:21) mentions that ancestors of Pad ma Gling pa took brides from a family in Kur stod who claimed descent from the thirteenth century rNying ma *gter ston* Guru Chos dbang. Also see Pommaret (2003:92) 'Kurtod in present day Lhuntse province of Bhutan.... is situated South of Lhodrak and close to the Lhodrak Khar chu monastery....Many great religious figures and treasure discoverers who lived in Lhodrak visited either Bumthang or Kurtod, where they established temples and lineages which are still remembered today in Bhutan. Among them were Guru Chowang (1212-1270), Ratna Lingpa (1403-1469) and Dorje Lingpa (1346-1405). It seems as if the Southern valleys, were, for the religious figures of Lhodrak a ...field for conversions and teachings'.

<sup>95</sup> (JFF: 20).

<sup>96</sup> (Ibid) The exact date in the *nam thar* is in the snake hour, on the tenth day of the fifth Tibetan month, in the earth snake year.

<sup>97</sup> (JFF: 21-22).

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's birth clearly caused some scandal in the region as his mother was young and unmarried. Speculation and rumour spread about who the father was. Her claim that Kunzang Rangdrol, the old yogi, in solitary retreat, was the father of her child was met with anger and disbelief. All of Kunzang Rangdrol's patrons thought he was too elderly to have had a son and that she had pretended to be ill as a pretext for going to see him and pass off another man's bastard as his. They all unanimously agreed that mother and child should not be allowed to contact him. However, after seeing the infant, a local dGe lugs pa abbot intervened:<sup>98</sup>

In a nearby village at a monastery of dGe lugs pa denomination there was a man known as sKu zhabs slob dpon. When the people of the region invited him to perform a healing ritual he invited mother and me. He said clearly to my mother that I needed red dharma robes (and then he spoke to the crowd): "The yogi Kun bzang Rang sgrol has reached an exulted age. In order to benefit beings he took a secret consort, if you ask the reason why, this son he conceived is *rten 'brel* (an auspicious connection), he must be kept clean and pure and cared for nicely. Let other people say what they will. I give this advice, of what is to be done, to the best of my ability". He recognized me as the great *gter ston* Klong gsal snying po and bestowed on me the name Rig 'dzin klong gsal.

### **Lhodrak Lha khang and early visions**

After the proclamation and recognition of the boy as a reincarnate lama, his father and mother were allowed to remain together to care for their son. In 1931, when Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was about two or three years old he fell ill and the dGe lugs pa monk advised the family to take the child immediately to Pad ma bkod,<sup>99</sup> a region on the Southern borders of Tibet and considered a 'hidden land' sacred to Padmasambhava. Along the way they rested for a few months at Lho brag Lha khang.<sup>100</sup> It was here that Kunzang Dechen Lingpa had his first visionary experiences:

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<sup>98</sup> (JFF: 22).

<sup>99</sup> (JFF: 24-25). For more on Padma bkod see chapter three.

<sup>100</sup> This temple was also known as Mkho mthing lha khang. It was one of twelve structures reputedly built by King Srong btsan sgam po in the eighth century at strategic points upon the empire's topography



Figure 5. Lhodrak lha khang and the peach tree 1950.

When we arrived at Lhodrak lha khang there was a great courtyard with a large peach tree.<sup>101</sup> One night when I was sleeping I had a dream that under that tree, I was in the presence of a lama with a shining body somewhat bigger than a human. As he gave me three peaches to eat he said “Son, let’s go to Zangs mdog dpal ri ”.<sup>102</sup> Then, holding on to his index finger we rose up and in an instant we arrived. He told me to wait at the door of a large temple. I waited a long time and then wondering where that lama had gone, I climbed up a jewelled staircase, and saw him seated upon

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envisioned as a ‘supine demoness’. (It is important to note that the accounts of this story come from later sources). See Gyatso (1987) and Dalton (2011:110-126).

<sup>101</sup> Richardson (1998:321) visiting Lhodrak in 1950 (when the above photo was taken) provides this description: ‘Lha khang rdzong is situated on the confluence of the Kuru chu and Tamzhol rivers. Here.... is the ancient but little known temple of Mkho-thing founded by Srong brtsan Sgam po as one of his 12 (some say 108) temples to bind down the limbs of a female demon menacing his kingdom and to give spiritual protection to his borders. In one chapel of this ancient monastery a peach tree was growing through the roof. In the dark and spacious main chapel was a huge five-fold image of Vairocana. This arrangement had a statue at each of the four corners, looking into the main image at the centre. The statues stood 8-10 feet high on tall pedestals’.

<sup>102</sup> The Glorious Copper-Coloured Mountain, a ‘pure’ land of Padmasambhava. Hereafter referred to as Zangdokpalri.

a throne with all the implements of empowerment, placed in front of him, I was thinking to request blessings from him when I suddenly woke up and was back [in my bed].<sup>103</sup>

On another occasion during these early years at Lhodrak lha khang as his father was repairing a window in their room, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was playing with a plumb line when it hit him in the face and gave him a nose bleed.<sup>104</sup> The incident triggered the following vision:



Figure 6. Vairocana (rNam par snang mdzad) in Lhodrak lha khang temple.

My father was holding a bag full of raisins and, leading me by the hand, he said “Let’s go to see rNam par snang mdzad”<sup>105</sup> we went into the central door of a temple, and there, seated in the Vajra posture, with hands in the gesture of equanimity, holding an alms bowl (seated) on a lotus,

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<sup>103</sup> (JFF Folio: 26)

<sup>104</sup> (JFF: 27).

<sup>105</sup> This statue of Vairocana has a history of being a repository of *gter ma*. Vairocana was believed to have revealed *sa gter* scripture from this temple, a cycle of teachings which also may have links to early Bon *gter ma*, see Karmay (1988:201-2). Thondup (1986: 80) cites *Guru Chos dbang gi gter 'byung chen mo* (folio49a) which describes Guru Chos dbang retrieving *gter ma* from the right hand of this statue. In *Guru Rat na gling pa'i gter 'byung chen mo gsal ba'i sgron me* (folio 61b) Rat na gling pa finds *gter ma* substances within the temple. Hazod and Sørensen (2005:52. F.50) write ‘Mkho mthing lha khang...one of the four border temples in Lho brag...(was) known as (a) sacred *gter ma* site by the rNying ma pa and Bon po.... For sources in Tibetan see *Nyang ral chos 'byung* 353. 13-14 and *Padma bka' thang* 553.8-9. The main image at this lha khang was a huge Vairocana...said to have been erected by Srong bstan sGam po, see *dbus gtsang gnas yig* (225.17-227.2)’.

sun and moon seat (which) was on top of a throne made of precious substances, was a statue of rNam par snang mdzad. After my father had filled the alms bowl with the raisins, it overflowed with nectar. Father said “This is an instant result of your prayers!” as I joined my hands together in prayer it seemed that the sound of “HIG HIG HIG”<sup>106</sup> came from the face of rNam par snang mdzad and I myself went beyond thoughts or projections. Then the vision dissolved and my father and I were back in the room again.<sup>107</sup>

## Parents’ death at Ras Chung phug



Figure 7. Ras Chung phug 1950.

That same year, they left Lhodrak lha khang, and the family moved to a monastery in the Yarlung valley, Ras Chung phug,<sup>108</sup> where Kunzang Dechen Lingpa stayed until the death of both of his parents in about 1934/5. Ras Chung Phug (now in ruins) was located to the South of the central part of the lower Yar valley. It was a famous bKa’ brgyud

temple and owed its name to the meditation cave of one of the principle disciples of Mi la ras pa, Ras chung pa rDo rje grags pa (1083/84-1161) who once resided there.<sup>109</sup> The family stayed until Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was about 5 years old. During this time he learned the Tibetan alphabet<sup>110</sup> from his father and a local official named Tshe ring dbang

<sup>106</sup> This is a sound associated with the ‘*pho ba*’ practice of transferring consciousness.

<sup>107</sup> (JFF: 28).

<sup>108</sup> (JFF: 31). KDL identifies this monastery as rDo rje gling.

<sup>109</sup> In KDL’s time it probably would have looked much as it did when Richardson visited in 1950: Richardson (1998: 319) writes ‘The Bka’ brgyud pa monastery of Ras chung phug clings, at different levels, to the hillsides which separates the Yarlung and ‘Phyong-rgyas valleys. It is built above the meditation cave of Ras chung pa, a close personal disciple of Mi la ras pa. The cave was a rather shallow recess with images of Mi la ras pa and Ras chung pa on the altar and a small *mchod rten* in front’ See Roberts (2007) for an in depth study on the development of Ras chung pa’s hagiographies.

<sup>110</sup> KDL, in oral accounts (WT:2002) states that he was never educated aside from learning the alphabet from his father and that he learned to read and chant by looking over the shoulders of young monks at the various monasteries he stayed at after he was orphaned. Later in his *rnam thar* he states that he was not able to read the letter in which Dudjom Rinpoche identified him as a *gter ston*. However, or despite this,

dus, the person (who would eventually become his guardian after his parents passed away). Kunzang Dechen Lingpa states that during this time his mother became pregnant by the treasurer of the monastery, who he names only as Blo bzang, both his mother and baby sister passed away during his father's illness in about 1934.<sup>111</sup>

I remember one day when I was playing I looked up and saw there was one vulture that turned around three times clockwise and three times anti-clockwise above my father's quarters on the fourth floor, and then flew back towards the (nearby) charnel ground. I went to tell my father, at that time father wasn't sick, but when he heard my story he said to me "It must be Guru Rinpoche and his consort who have come to invite me to go to the pure land." That night he drank all the beer that my mother had brought – usually he wouldn't drink beer. He drank it all and spent the night singing many songs of realization. I don't remember what he was singing but they were very special songs and my mother was crying the entire night. The next morning my father became ill. After that night, my father was ill for about two months. When his time came to die, he was sitting up in his bed with his legs stretched (out). He asked his attendant to bring me to his room and he had a skull cup full of beer, then he asked me to drink. At that time my father touched my forehead with his forehead, and prayed that we, father and son, would meet again in Pad ma bkod, and (he) told me to make offerings of his bones in Pad ma bkod. Then he passed away. My father requested that after his death he wanted his corpse to be thrown in the river but his secretary and attendants didn't think that was appropriate, so they took his remains to the charnel ground. But, even though they put my father's remains there, and there were many vultures present, they had no interest in eating my father's corpse. So they ended up taking (his remains) to the river, as was his wish. First they cut off my father's skull and without even cleaning it they filled it with beer and offered it to me. Then it was also offered to the others and I saw that there was a very clear self-manifested syllable AH on that skull. That skull cup remained in that monastery where my father died. Why did my father want his remains to be thrown in the water? The river they threw my father's remains in was a river that was going towards Pa ma bkod and my father wanted his bones to be in Pad ma bkod.<sup>112</sup>

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an American student, Anonymous (INT: 2010), of his who was present when he revealed *gter ma* stated: 'he wrote everything down in an Indian school child's composition book on ruled paper...the *gter ma* I saw there were written in flawless cursive handwriting...I personally photocopied some of his *gter ma* material when he was visiting Los Angeles, it was all written down without a single edit'.

<sup>111</sup> (JFF: 33).

<sup>112</sup> (JFF:31-38) See Ramble (1982) on Tibetan mortuary practices.

## Lhasa



Figure 8. Lhasa Valley 1936.

After he was orphaned, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was left in the care of his father's friend, Tshering dbang dus, (who he says was an official from Bya Yul, in central Tibet). This period of Kunzang Dechen

Lingpa's life involved a great deal of moving around from

one place to another around the Yar lung region before he and his guardian travelled to the Tibetan capital when Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was about 14 or 15 years old:<sup>113</sup>

I had a very strong feeling that I must benefit the Buddhist doctrine and people had told me that whatever prayers you do in front of the Jo wo statue in Lhasa will always be accomplished. So I undertook a very long and hard journey to Lhasa and I spent quite some time there praying in front of the Jo wo to be able to benefit the doctrine, particularly in the rNying ma pa tradition to such an extent that these teachings would pervade the entire world.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>(JFF: 41).

<sup>114</sup>(JFF: 41-50).



Figure 9. Shugseb Rinpoche.

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa describes himself during this time as a ‘wandering beggar’ who knows little of his background and is unworldly and uneducated. The accounts of these years from about 1935 to the mid – 1940s contain little information about any historical events of the time and little in the way of geographical references. The *rnam thar* at this point outlines a period in which Kunzang Dechen Lingpa wandered around central Tibet visiting sacred Buddhist sites searching for a spiritual teacher but never quite

meeting the right lama or always just missing a likely candidate.<sup>115</sup> For example, he mentions during this time that he visited rNam ‘grol ling monastery located in the sLe lung valley, (approximately 200 km South of Lhasa) in order to visit the tenth sLe lung Rinpoche but was not able meet with the teacher since he was away from the monastery in retreat.<sup>116</sup>

## The Crystal Cave

Eventually, when he was about 17, after wandering around from place to place in Kong po, he decided to visit Tshe ring ljongs the monastery of ‘Jigs med gling pa (1729-1798)<sup>117</sup> located in the Yar lung valley of central Tibet. This visit was significant in Kunzang Dechen Lingpa’s life as it began a chain of events which led him on path to discover his heritage

<sup>115</sup> (JFF: 52-80).

<sup>116</sup> Interestingly, in 2005 KDL met the eleventh sLe lung rin po che (1970- ) in London to discuss that lama’s project to recover and compile all the teachings of his lineage. (Personal Communication Lelung Rinpoche: 2009). The fifth sLe lung rin po che, bZhad pa’i rdo rje was an incarnation of one of Tsong kha pa’s teachers, Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan (1326-1401/2) and associated with the Lhodrak region. Hazod and Sørensen (2005: 85 f.204) write: ‘This figure from Lho brag...was later an important teacher of Tsong Kha pa. (See *Lho brag grub chen rnam thar*)’. The ‘Succession of incarnations’ image, which can be found in part three of this study, shows KDL as an incarnation of Tsong kha pa.

<sup>117</sup> See (Gyatso 1998). ‘Jigs med gling pa was an important rNying ma *gter ston* who revealed the *Klong chen snying thig* cycle of teachings and practice received through a series of visions from the great fourteenth century master, Klong chen pa.

and destiny as a *gter ston*. After paying respects to the remains of 'Jigs med gling pa he met with the lama of the monastery, (whom he does not name) who told him to go Yarlung Shel brag phug (Crystal Cave)<sup>118</sup> to seek a teacher by the name of sPom bla mkhan po:

So then I went to see the mKhan po, I did three prostrations and then told him about my life story, that I had been to Tshering ljongs and actually planned to stay there and receive teachings, but the lama there had told me to come to see him. sPom bla mKhan po agreed to give me instructions so I again did three prostrations and then he gave me the entire teaching on the *Klong chen snying thig* preliminaries.<sup>119</sup>

He settled at sPom bla mKhan po's residence near to Yarlung Shel brag and practised for a month or two. During this time he visited Shug gseb nunnery to meet Shug gseb Rinpoche (Lo chen Chos nyid bzang mo, 1865- 1953)<sup>120</sup> one of the foremost female teachers in Tibet at that time and considered to be an incarnation of the famous Tibetan female teacher Ma gcig Lab sgron:<sup>121</sup>

She was very old at that time... there were about five hundred nuns in that nunnery and about thirty monks. The nuns did all the main tasks, they did everything and the monks were just sitting inside. I stayed there for some time and on the 25th day they did a feast offering, the *Rin chen phreng ba*, which is a long *gcod* practice. I continued to stay there for a while and on the next feast-offering day, the 10th of the next month; they did the *Rig 'dzin Dus pa* feast offering; a practice of the *Klong chen snying thig*.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Shel Brag is an important Tibetan sacred site, particularly for the rNying ma. Considered to be Padmasambhava's first meditation cave in Tibet from where he compelled indigenous 'spirits' to take an oath of allegiance to Buddhism another cave in the same area is where the *gter ston* O rgyan gling pa (fourteenth century) allegedly discovered the *Padma bka' thang* a biography of Padmasambhava. See Dudjom (1999: Vol. 1:775).

<sup>119</sup> (JFF: 83). *sNgon 'gro* are preliminary practices intended to establish the foundation for more advanced Vajrayāna sādhanas. The *Klong chen snying thig* (*The heart-essence of infinite expanse*) is a cycle of teachings representing the innermost teachings of *rdzogs chen* revealed by 'Jigs med gling pa. The *Klong chen snying thig* may also be understood as the 'heart essence' of Klong chen pa, a reference to the central figure in 'Jigs med gling pa's *dag snang* revelations. Klong chen pa (1308-1364) was a master in the rNying ma tradition who systematised the rNying ma teachings and wrote extensively on *rdzogs chen*. He was the author of numerous works, amongst which the *Seven Treasuries* (*mDzod bDun*) are particularly well-known and revered. See Nyoshul (2005).

<sup>120</sup> Lo chen Chos nyid bzang mo (1853 or 1865-1950/1951) was revered as one of the twentieth century's best known female Tibetan teachers and as an exemplary practitioner of *gcod*. See Thondup (1996), Havnevik (1997) and Nyoshul (2005).

<sup>121</sup>This figure will be discussed in greater detail in chapter seven.

<sup>122</sup> (JFF: 87).

After his visit to Shug gseb, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa returned to the residence of sPom bla Mkhan po, but it seems he was still very restless and so did not remain there for long. The *rnam thar* states that he spent another year wandering between various monasteries, staying for a short periods of time, receiving teachings, and then moving on.<sup>123</sup>

## Return to Lhodrak



Figure 10. Pad ma gling lake 1950.

At this point in the early 1940's, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa decided to return to Lhodrak in order to visit a number of pilgrimage sites there. Although he knew where he was born and his parents' names, he did not know very much of his heritage. Whilst staying with a family in the Lho brag region whom he had agreed to read texts for, he was reunited with an uncle and heard the story of his parents and his birth:

While I was doing pilgrimage in Lho brag I went to Mar pa's residence, and to pay respects at the place where Mila ras pa built that nine-storied temple at the command of his teacher. Then I went to visit a lake called Padma gling, which is surrounded by very high glaciers and is sacred to Guru Rin po che. That Padma gling Lake was a place where many treasures of Guru Rinpoche had been hidden and later taken out by various treasure revealers. After that I went to visit the Lho brag Lha lung monastery, a very important rNying ma pa monastery. Then again I went down to a place called sMan thang, the medicinal valley, where there was a large dGe lugs pa monastery. I paid respects there and went on and came upon a family who asked if I was able to read dpe cha [religious texts]. I said I could read a little so they asked me to stay upstairs in their house and read some dpe cha for them. As I was reading upstairs in that family home, the father of the family would come from time to time and ask different questions, such as where did I come from, where I was born, where did I live and so forth. I told him I was born in Lho brag but didn't know exactly where, and then told him the names of my parents. When the father of that family heard that, he said, "Oh, we are actually quite closely related and your uncle is coming here tomorrow." So the next day my uncle arrived and he told me the account of my childhood.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> (JFF: 85).

<sup>124</sup> (JFF: 60).

After this reunion he decided to do solitary retreat in a cave near to where his father had spent time, which he identifies as 'Od gsal lta ba'i rdzong. It was here that Kunzang Dechen Lingpa had his first experience of revealing *gter ma*, however since he was young and inexperienced he did not quite realise what had happened. One morning while staying in this retreat cave he awoke to find a scroll of text in his hand:

I came upon a place where the shape of the mountain was like the trunk of an elephant. This was a good place, a valley full of flowers, and I stayed there for some time in the cave. While I was staying there, I sincerely prayed to Padmasambhava and his consort after which I fell asleep. When I awoke there was a small *dpe cha* in my right hand, which was written neither in *dbu can*, nor in *dbu med*<sup>125</sup>. The paper that it was written on was very old Tibetan paper from before (the past). When I read the *dpe cha*, [the colophon] at the bottom said that it [had been] hidden and written by Ye shes mtsho rgyal. Since I was quite young I had heard about *rdzogs chen* meditation but I had no idea [what it was]. This *dpe cha* that was in my hand as I awoke, it was about four or five pages - was all about the nature of mind and *rdzogs chen*. This is when I came (to understand) the view of *rdzogs chen*. I put it together with my other *dpe cha* and thought to read it later, but the next day when I opened my *dpe cha*, it was gone.<sup>126</sup>

### **sMin grol gling: The place of maturation and liberation**

After the retreat and this experience in the Lhodrak region, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa heard that Zhe chen Rin po che<sup>127</sup> was giving a transmission of the *Rin chen gTer mdzod* at sMin grol gling monastery in central Tibet<sup>128</sup> so he travelled there for the event.<sup>129</sup> During this time he met a *gter ston* named Drag sngags gling pa. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa started

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<sup>125</sup> These are the two principal Tibetan scripts. KDL is indicating here that the text was written in a symbolic *mkha' 'gro'i brda' yig* (ḍākinī script).

<sup>126</sup> (JFF: 87-88).

<sup>127</sup> The sixth Zhe chen rin po che was 'Gyur med kun bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma (1910-1959). In the account of the life the tenth Pad ma gling pa, Pad ma od gsal 'gyur med rdo rje (1930-1955). Nyoshul (2005:377) writes that when this figure was nineteen years old, he received the *Rin chen gTer mDzod* empowerment from Zhe chen Rab jam rin po che at sMin 'grol gling. If the dates are correct then this event occurred somewhere between 1948 /49.

<sup>128</sup> Established in the seventeenth century by gTer bdag gling pa 'Gyur med rdo rje, smin grol gling was one of the major monasteries of the rNying ma school and one of the largest and most important practice and study centers in Central Tibet at that time.

<sup>129</sup> (JFF: 96).

to prostrate to him but the *gter ston* said to him ‘Please don't prostrate to me. I had a vision of Padmasambhava in Zangdokpalri and he told me you are a *gter ston* and that your name is Kun bzang bde chen gling pa.’ Kunzang Dechen Lingpa replied – ‘Don't say that, I am not a *gter ston*, I have nothing to reveal.” To which Drag sngags gling pa replied ‘It is not now that you will reveal them, but later. You will see; you are a true *gter ston*’.<sup>130</sup> Kunzang Dechen Lingpa also met someone at sMin grol gling called Kha rag Yongs ‘dzin Rin po che who advised him ‘You should go to Kong po, where there is a very great rNying ma teacher called bDud ‘joms Rin po che’.<sup>131</sup> Six months later, in about 1948 or 1949, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa heeded these words and travelled to Kong po to find the teacher who was to transform his life.

### Meeting Dudjom Rinpoche



Figure 11. Dudjom Rinpoche.

Dudjom Rinpoche (1904-1987) was an important twentieth century rNying ma *gter ston* and scholar. He was born in 1904 in Pad ma bkod<sup>132</sup> and was recognised at an early age as the incarnation of a famous nineteenth century rNying ma *gter ston*, bDud ‘joms gling pa (1835-1904). Dudjom Rinpoche revealed a large cycle of *gter ma* teachings contained within the *bDud ‘joms gter gsar*<sup>133</sup> (*The New Treasures of Dudjom*) a large collection of *gter ma* revealed by both him and his predecessor Dudjom Lingpa). He was known particularly for his *gter ma* related

<sup>130</sup> (JFF: 99-100).

<sup>131</sup> (JFF: 105).

<sup>132</sup> His main area of activity was in Central Tibet, especially at his seats in the Kong po and sPo bo regions of Southern Tibet.

<sup>133</sup> This is possibly the largest and most comprehensive *gter ma* cycle to be revealed in the twentieth century. Mayer and Cantwell (2011) are currently investigating aspects of ‘innovation’ in this scriptural corpus.

to Vajrakīlaya practice intended to transmute and transcend obstacles and obscurity.<sup>134</sup> Amongst the most widely read of his scholarly works is his history of the rNying ma school which he composed soon after his arrival in India as an exile.<sup>135</sup> Another major achievement of his life was the revision, correction and editing of the *bKa' ma* teachings of the rNying ma. He also helped transfer many texts out of Tibet thus preserving them from destruction after the invasion of Tibet and during the Cultural Revolution.

After leaving Tibet in 1957, Dudjom Rinpoche settled first in Kalimpong, in India, and later in Kathmandu, Nepal. He played a key role amongst the Tibetan refugee community, through his teaching and his writing and by agreeing to the fourteenth Dalai Lama's request that he should become the head of the rNying ma school, (which, unlike the other Tibetan schools, traditionally never had a central unifying figure). In the final decade of his life he devoted much of his time to teaching in the West, where he established centres dedicated to the teachings and practices of the rNying ma tradition.<sup>136</sup> Eventually, he settled with his family<sup>137</sup> in the Dordogne area of France, where he died in 1987.

### **Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's recognition as a *gter ston***

During the time period when Kunzang Dechen Lingpa travelled to meet him, Dudjom Rinpoche was overseeing the restoration of 'border-taming' (mtha' 'dul) temple Bu chu lha khang in Kong po, as well as the building of a nearby temple of Zangdokpalri and its

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<sup>134</sup> Many great masters both in India and Tibet, but especially in Tibet, have practiced Vajrakīlaya (especially in the rNying ma lineage). See Boord (2002) and Cantwell and Mayer (2008) and (2011). It is a practice which also became an important part of KDL's cycle of teachings.

<sup>135</sup> Dudjom (1991).

<sup>136</sup> After he left Tibet, for India in 1957, Dudjom Rinpoche founded retreat centres in Sikkim, West Bengal and Orissa, Kathmandu, Nepal and later in France and the United States. See Nyoshul (2005).

<sup>137</sup> His eldest son Thinley Norbu, (1932-2012) was also an esteemed rNying ma lama and scholar.

accompanying lay tantric retreat centre bLa ma gling.<sup>138</sup> When Kunzang Dechen Lingpa arrived in Kong po he initially stayed in a local government building, waiting for an opportunity to meet with Dudjom Rinpoche. One night he had a prophetic dream:

Just before daybreak, I dreamt that Rinpoche and two of his daughters came to welcome me in a garden. His two daughters held vases with water in their hands. In that dream, Rinpoche told me that his main protector was Lha chen bshan pa<sup>139</sup> and he took me upstairs to a chapel where he had an image of this protector. When I went to that protector chapel on top of the house and actually saw the image of Lha chen bshan pa, I saw that the floor was filled with blood - an ocean of blood - and within that blood were all kinds of limbs and organs of humans and animals, horses and elephants and so forth. Above it all was a *khyung* (*garuda*). Above the *garuda* was Lha chen bshan pa, four-armed, with his consort - surrounded by a retinue of skeletons. When I had seen it all, Rinpoche said that we should go and visit Zangs mdog dpal ri, the Copper Coloured Mountain pure land. In my dream I went together with Rinpoche to Zangs mdog dpal ri. Rinpoche went up and I stayed there at the gate; then, I woke up.<sup>140</sup>

The next morning he went to Dudjom Rinpoche's residence, and when he arrived the daughters were outside just as in his dream. However, Dudjom Rinpoche was not there. His daughters told Kunzang Dechen Lingpa that he had gone to another part of Kong po where he was building a monastery called Zangs mdog dpal ri. Later on that day, Dudjom Rinpoche returned and he told Kunzang Dechen Lingpa "You should do some Vajrakīlaya practice, you have many obstacles." <sup>141</sup> So Kunzang Dechen Lingpa remained there and began his practice. Since he did not have any funds to support himself, he served as a cook for another lama there called rDo ring rin po che. Once he had gathered the necessary supplies, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa again embarked upon a solitary retreat in the Kong po region, during which time he wrote down some prayers which had arisen in his mind: <sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> The original structure was destroyed in an earthquake in 1930. It was destroyed again during the cultural revolution in the 1960s and subsequently rebuilt in the 1980s by Dudjom Rinpoche's daughter bDe chen g.yu sgron. Nyoshul (2005: 287: fn.42).

<sup>139</sup> This protector is possibly connected with the Gesar epic in which there is a fierce divinity called sDig gcod bshan dmar po from Hor. There is also a *bstan* who protects bSam yas called bSam yas bshan pa dmar po. Ramble (2012: personal communication).

<sup>140</sup> (JFF: 108).

<sup>141</sup> (JFF: 109).

<sup>142</sup>( JFF: 110-112)

*Homage to the Guru!*

*In the supremely beautiful magically manifested realm,*

*the South West palace of lotus light,*

*in the centre of a group of accomplished male and female awareness holders,*

*on a precious eight-faced jewelled sun, moon and lotus throne;*

*You who are the crown of all Buddhas, Pad ma 'byung gnas*

*seated in shining splendour, in inseparable union*

*with the foremost dākinī, Ye shes mtsho rgyal,*

*gazing with eyes of wisdom and with compassionate intent.*

*With the longing cries of an infant calling for its parents,*

*I pray aloud to you, can you hear this vivid prayer?*

*Throughout day and night I think of no other than you,*

*amidst the inescapable fire-pit of cyclic suffering,*

*how can you cast us out, without refuge or protection?*

*At this evil time, here at the very edge of the age of degeneration,*

*if you do not immediately consider us with compassion,*

*will you abandon your previous kind promise?*

*Even if we strive continually towards virtuous deeds,*

*if the qualities of experience and realisation do not arise within our minds,*

*is it because the compassion of the Guru and Consort has diminished?*

*For that reason, may your compassion come quickly to this place.*

*Seated in the midst of a blaze of sunlight upon the filaments of a lotus,*

*on the crowns of our heads,*

*to us children, please grant your blessings.*

*A light body and unobstructed divine voice.*

*Please grant your blessings quickly so that,*

*by your non conceptual mind,*

*our body, speech and mind  
will reach maturation and liberation.  
This prayer from the heart, to the guru and consort  
dissolves into me as molten light.  
Without differentiation, please grant your blessings.  
After saying this, remain in a state of contemplation.*

*Ha re sang nge sing nge ba  
Resting in a clear, empty, non-grasping state.  
Separate from the three: arising, ceasing, and dwelling.  
Also, perfected, the ground, the path and the fruit.  
Vajra body that has no human birth and death.  
The vast expanse of Dharmakāya.  
Without transition or change.  
Transcend obscuration and the object of obscuration,  
Dualistic perception, hope and fear, are primordially exhausted,  
unity of purity and equanimity, Dharmakāya.  
How Wonderful!*

*Confer this upon your children endowed with Samaya<sup>143</sup>, do not show this to Samaya  
breakers, if you do, the protectors will kill you and eat you. Kha Rom Kha hi  
Sa ma ya rgya rgya rgya gu hya brda thim.<sup>144</sup>*

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was unsure whether what he had written was a good indication, or just a sign that he was losing his mind. Therefore, he felt he should ask Dudjom

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<sup>143</sup> In Tibetan, *dam tshig*. A vow or set of vows given to initiates of Vajrayāna Buddhist practices, it also indicates the bond between a guru and disciple. See Van Schaik (2010).

<sup>144</sup> (JFF: 110- 112) 'Sa ma ya rgya rgya rgya' indicates the 'sealing' of the *gter ma* Gu hya – secret. Thim indicates 'absorption'.

Rinpoche about it, he requested a private interview and showed it to him. Dudjom Rinpoche told him to leave the text with him for three days and said he would examine it. After five days passed, Dudjom Rinpoche summoned Kunzang Dechen Lingpa and gave him a letter sealed with his own personal seal. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa, unable to read the script, did not know what the letter contained:

From when I was very young, I really didn't learn much reading and writing and this letter was written in small Tibetan handwriting. Since I didn't know how to read it, I went to see rDo ring Rinpoche to ask him to give me the oral transmission<sup>145</sup> of what [Dudjom] Rinpoche had written. While rDo ring Rinpoche read it to me, he looked up and said, "Well, it seems you are not an ordinary being at all. You are a *gter ston*. Now I feel terrible that I had you cook for me. Please forgive me".<sup>146</sup>

Dudjom Rinpoche's letter explained that Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was a fortunate being whose past prayers had come to fruition. However, he would be presented with many obstacles. He advised him to practise Vajrakīlaya in order to dispel them and create auspicious conditions to reveal *gter ma* and benefit beings in a vast way. However, for the time being, Dudjom Rinpoche advised Kunzang Dechen Lingpa to keep this information to himself.

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<sup>145</sup> Here KDL specifically uses the term 'oral transmission' because it is a letter written by his teacher. In keeping with Vajrayāna concepts which consider one's teacher to represent the Buddha himself, the words contained in this letter are in effect the 'words of the Buddha' and so these words are 'transmitted' to him, the disciple.

<sup>146</sup> (JFF: 113).

# CHAPTER THREE

## LAND OF THE LOTUS ARRAY

### (1950-1959)

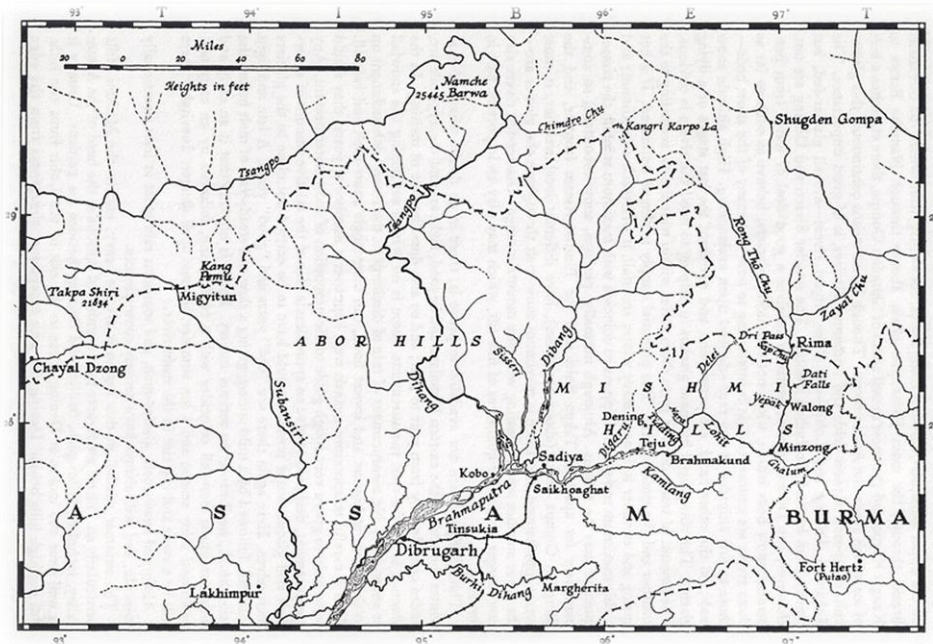


Figure 12. Map showing Lower Kong po and Padma bkod 1955.

### Tibet 1950

From 1950 onwards the focus of the *rnam thar* is on Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's life in Kong po and Padma bkod, where he was publically recognized as a *gter ston*. Since the *rnam thar* as whole contains very little information on these regions or on the political situation in Tibet at the time, it would be helpful here to present a brief historical and geographical background as well as the prevailing political situation during Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's lifetime.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>147</sup> See Shakya (1999) and Goldstein (1989) for detailed accounts of this period.

## Kong po

For centuries, Kong po was regarded by Tibetans of the central region as untamed, home to various barbaric Tibeto-Burmese populations known as *Klo/Lho pa*.<sup>148</sup> Writing on the



Figure 13. Kong po region, near Namcha Barwa.

Bon po pilgrimage site of Kong po Bon ri, Ramble cites early Tibetan descriptions indicating the region's reputation for cannibalism:

One of the feats for which Thang stong rgyal po<sup>149</sup> achieved fame in Kongpo was that he had returned alive from Lo pa country without having been eaten, while the *gZer mig*<sup>150</sup> maintains that they “eat the flesh of their own kind”.<sup>151</sup>

The region's fearsome repute was not limited to Tibetan accounts, writings of various early European visitors found travel in these areas similarly unnerving.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, it is home to significant holy places some of which feature in Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *rnam thar*, sites such as Bu chu lha khang as well as many other important Tibetan pilgrimage sites. Most pertinent and prominent in this part of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's life is the mountain gNam lcag 'Bar wa, (Namcha Barwa) situated at the Eastern extremity of the Himalayan range where the Tsang po river makes an abrupt, almost 360 degree

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<sup>148</sup> They most likely represent an ethnic fusion between Tibetans and groups from the Eastern Himalayas. See Huber and Blackburn (eds.) (2012).

<sup>149</sup> Thang stong rgyal po (1361-1485) was a Buddhist master known for teachings on longevity practices, the creation of Tibetan opera and builder of iron and wood suspension bridges, ferries, temple and stupas. He obtained iron for his *lcag zam* (iron bridges) from locations in Kongpo. See Stearns (2007).

<sup>150</sup> *gZer mig* refers to one the biographies of sTon pa gshen rab founder of the Tibetan Bon school.

<sup>151</sup> See Ramble (1997:144).

<sup>152</sup> Ramble (1997:145) ‘Writing in India in 1712 the Capuchin Father Domenico da Fano reported that the short route from India to South East Tibet was said to be “Very hazardous to life, for the peasants kill men and eat them. Last year in 1711 (certain Bhutanese people) told me that they had gone trading according to their custom, but that one trader had not returned. There was no further word of him and they believed he had been killed and eaten (Petech 1952-56 vol. 1 p.53). Almost 30 years later in 1741 Fr. Costantino da Lora of the Capuchin mission in Lhasa leveled the charge of anthropophagy at Kongpo itself: “The people of this region cannot be subdued, since they are very proud and feed on human flesh.”’

turn and descends to create the deep mysterious gorges of Padma bkod a fabled *sbas yul* (hidden land)<sup>153</sup> in traditional Buddhist history.

## Padma bkod

The land of 'lotus array' has exerted a magnetic pull on generations of Tibetans, it is perceived as a *sbas yul* and a place of refuge during times of persecution and envisioned as the supine goddess rDo rje Phag mo<sup>154</sup> whose 'body' reaches down into what is now the North East Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. With a climate and elevation ranging from the arctic to the sub-tropical, Tibetan and European explorers of the region alike have attested to a difficult and inhospitable terrain.<sup>155</sup> Early examples of Pad ma bkod presented as a secret paradise can be found in the prophetic revelations of the rNying ma *gter ston* 'Ja' tshon snying po<sup>156</sup> (1585-1656). Guide books (*gnas yig*) in this collection

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<sup>153</sup> Dalton (2011:151-152) suggests that from the fourteenth century onwards *sbas yul* were increasingly associated with demons and darkness, but also as places of sanctuary. He cites an early example of a Tibetan text describing *sbas yul* as places of refuge attributed to the *gter ston* rGod kyi ldem 'phru can in *sBas yul spyi'i them byang* (*General inscriptions on hidden lands*).

<sup>154</sup> The ritual pilgrimage to the chakras of Vajravarahi or rDo rje phag mo (the 'Sow-headed' wrathful female) deity follows the Brahmaputra envisioned as her central channel, beginning from her head in Tibet and culminating in her womb located in what is now Arunachal Pradesh. rNying ma *gter ston* 'Ja' tshon snying po (1585-1656) appointed his disciple bDud 'dul rdo rje (1615-72) (See Dudjom 1991:813-818) to convert the tribes of the Brahmaputra gorge to the Buddha's teachings and open the way to the *sbas yul* of Padma bkod. bDud dul rdo rje mapped a *gnas skor* (circumambulatory path) around Pad ma bkod and reputedly passed on his teachings to Stag sham pa nus ldan rdo rje (1655-1708) a famed rNying ma master from Kham who had settled in Spo bo and revealed *gter ma*. It seems that the first textual reference to Pad ma bkod envisioned as the body of rDo rje phag mo appears with Stag sham pa. During Stags sham pa's time Pad ma bkod was an uncharted hunting ground when he apparently perceived the land as the geographic representation of rDo rje phag mo. See (Erhard 1994) for a discussion of Stag sham pa's *gnas yig* of Pad ma bkod in *the gter ma cycles Yi dam dgongs 'dus rta mchog rol pa* and the *rTa mgrin dgongs 'dus*. The incarnation lineage of rDo rje phag mo began in the fifteenth century with Cho kyi sgron me (1422-1455) who became known as bSam lding rDo rje phag mo. See Diemberger (2007).

<sup>155</sup> The Fifth Sle lung rje drung Bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1697-?) visiting Padma bkod in the eighteenth century wrote: There is a constant menace here from poisonous snakes, leeches...long snouted animals with fangs and dangerous wild men. Those without courage, or who are strongly attached to the appearances of this life will have difficulty reaching this land and getting through unharmed'. See *sLe lung rje drung bzhad pa'i rdo je gsung 'bum*. (1984: 8). A description echoed by Frank Kingdon Ward an early twentieth century British botanist who travelled extensively in the area, 'The only thing common to the whole region [is the] perpetual rain, snakes and wild animals, giant stinging nettles and myriads of biting and bloodsucking ticks, hornet, flies and leeches...' Ward (1925).

<sup>156</sup> See Dudjom (1991:809-12) for a short biography of 'Ja' tshon snying po. Also see Sadar-Afkhami (1996) and *sbas yul bkod kyi lam yig dang sku tshab padma bshes gnyen 'gro dul dang skye bdun dkar chags*. In the collection of 'Ja' tshon snying po's *Sbas yul padma bkod kyi lam yig ma 'ongs lung bstan sna*

describe Pad ma bkod as a sacred hidden land conducive to tantric practice: ‘those who enter this realm...’ ‘Ja’ tshon snying po writes, ‘...obtain the ‘Vajra’ body and dissolve into rainbow light upon death’.<sup>157</sup> The Tibetan Vajrayāna ideal in this case is a land where one may obtain enlightenment in a single lifetime. Therefore giant stinging nettles, blood sucking leeches and bellicose locals are viewed as a way of purifying obstacles. Expiring in such a place, rather than being viewed as tragic, would actually be considered advantageous.<sup>158</sup> Pad ma bkod’s reputation as a secret and sacred realm continued to draw the attention of Buddhist spiritual seekers into the eighteenth century with three *gter ston* <sup>159</sup> collectively known in rNying ma religious texts as the three *Vidayādhara*s of the hidden land (*sbas yul rig ‘dzin rnam gsum*). In addition to its magical characteristics, Pad ma bkod also retained its status as an idealised refuge from the many invasions and civil wars which plagued Tibet right up until the present day.

## Jedrung Rinpoche

As the twentieth century dawned, the seventh abbot of Ri bo che monastery in Kham, rJe drung ‘byam pa byungs nas ( Jedrung Rinpoche 1856 - 1922?),<sup>160</sup> together with about two thousand followers <sup>161</sup> fled to Pad ma bkod during the invasion of Chinese forces led by the Qing general Zhao Erfeng (1845-1911). <sup>162</sup> Searching for the mythical refuge of Pad

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*tshogs phyogs gcig tu bsdu pa’i gsung pod*. (Tezu: 1974:1-35). Also see (Erhard 1994) for discussion of this hidden land in the *gter ma* cycle *rDo rje khro lod rtsal gyi sgrub skor*.

<sup>157</sup> See Sadar-Afkhami (1996:2) and ‘Ja’ tshon snying po’s *lam yig* (Vol. 13:4-6).

<sup>158</sup> See Sadar-Afkhami (1996), Diemberger (1997), Macdonald (ed.) (1997) and Childs (1999).

<sup>159</sup> Bka’ brgyud lama the fifth sGam po pa, O rgyan ‘gro dul gling pa (b.1757-?), the Padma bkod *gter ston* Kun bzang ‘od zer gar bang chi med rdo rje who both received initiations and teachings from Rig ‘dzin rdo rje thogs med (1746-97) see Dudjom (1991).

<sup>160</sup> In his capacity as a treasure revealer Jedrung Rinpoche revealed the longevity sādhana *Padma gsang thig* (*The secret essence of pad ma*). This is also the collective name for KDL’s entire *gter ma* cycle. One of Jedrung’s disciples was bKa’ ‘gyur rin po che klong chen ye shes rdo rje, (1898-1975) who was also a rNying ma *gter ston* famous for attempting to open the secret doors to the hidden land of Pad ma bkod.

<sup>161</sup> Reports of Tibetans fleeing from the Chinese towards Pad ma bkod can be found in the accounts of Jacques Bacot, a French explorer who was travelling through Khams between 1909 and 1910. See Bacot (1912).

<sup>162</sup> See Sperling (1976) also Van Spengen (2002).

ma bkod Jedrung Rinpoche settled first in Chimdo, a region on the Tibetan side of the Himalayas. He then moved to Mipi, on the South side of the Himalayan range, where he built a temple called dKar mo gling. There the group experienced significantly thorny relations with the local Mishmi population and many returned to Kham. Jedrung Rinpoche stayed on with his remaining devotees, and it was here that he encountered the young Dudjom Rinpoche who was to become a close disciple.<sup>163</sup> Eventually, Jedrung Rinpoche returned to Kham to help rebuild his home city of Ri bo che after it was sacked by another Chinese incursion. Upon arrival he was arrested on charges of sedition and imprisoned. He is thought to have passed away in 1922 leaving his followers in Pad ma bkod stranded.<sup>164</sup>

## Chinese invasion

Despite the thirteenth Dalai Lama's warnings and attempts at modernisation,<sup>165</sup> Tibet's religious conservatives in the decades leading up to 1950 appeared to thwart an impetus

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<sup>163</sup> Jedrung Rinpoche is credited with identifying the location of the young Dudjom Tulku. See Dongyal (2008:74).

<sup>164</sup>On a British expedition Captains Bailey and Moreshead, mapping the inner gorges of the Brahmaputra, came across the remnants of Jedrung Rinpoche's settlement in 1915 which suggests that Jedrung Rinpoche must have departed at the latest in 1914. Jedrung Rinpoche's daughter became a well-known *'am chi* (doctor of Tibetan medicine). 'Byang chen lha mo, (a.k.a. Dr. Kando Yanga), was born in 1907 in Pad ma bkod. Jedrung Rinpoche, in 1918, was accused of collaborating with the Chinese Manchu regiment Lu'u cun and exiled to a region of the Chang thang. With the consent of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, Jedrung Rinpoche was then transferred to Tak lung monastery where he spent the remainder of his life teaching Tibetan medicine. See Tsering (2005:173-5). Bailey and Moreshead, in an effort to determine whether or not the Tsang po and Brahmaputra was the same river, began their journey in 1913. They are the first known Westerners to have entered Pad ma bkod. See Bailey (1957: 35-7) for his encounter with Tibetans at Mipi and their fractious relations with the Chulikatta Mishmi. In 1924 botanist Frank Kingdon Ward attempted to determine whether the fabled waterfalls existed in the Brahmaputra gorge however, like many travelers in this region before him, he was forced to turn back short of approximately five miles of the 'great bend' of the Brahmaputra. At the time he noted that many Tibetans from Khams and Spo bo were still coming in search of the 'promised land' (1926:110-11). The search for the falls continued well into the twentieth century. Baker's (2004) lively account documents his journey through the region to trace the elusive uncharted five mile stretch of the river.

<sup>165</sup> Goldstein (1989:816-20) writes of the thirteenth Dalai Lama's attempts to create a more efficient military based on a British model. At that time, Tibet's need to substantially upgrade its military would have meant a re-appraisal of the administrative infrastructure of the government. Increases in the numbers of troops would have required additional revenue and since the lion's share of Tibet's resources was earmarked for monastic institutions, religious ceremonies and the aristocracy, this was not well

to update the government and army, and instead sought to maintain Tibet's dominant goals as being the pursuit of Buddhism and a commitment to large scale monasticism. The ensuing years saw Tibet and the newly enthroned fourteenth Dalai Lama embroiled in a delicate and complex diplomatic game between the governments of India, China, America and Great Britain. The political situation in the Eastern region of Kham was becoming increasingly insecure and Tibet's military were poorly trained and un-equipped. Facing them was a battle hardened and well led unit of the People's Liberation Army amassing in their thousands.

Pad ma bkod during this time was largely under the control of Khams pa resistance fighters and relatively free of PLA incursions.<sup>166</sup> This changed after the escape of the fourteenth Dalai Lama in March 1959. By June of that year thousands of Tibetans fled from the wave of Chinese 'reforms' of Tibet where high lamas and monastic officials were arrested and sent to labour camps. Monastic and private estates were confiscated, temples and religious artefacts destroyed and the Tibetan people violently suppressed. After 1959, the PLA rapidly advanced into the South Eastern regions and eventually the Tibetan soldiers and Kham pa resistance were surrendering their weapons.<sup>167</sup> India's North Eastern borders were overrun by thousands of refugees on the brink of starvation.

Whilst giving a teaching in 2002 in Woodstock, New York, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa recalled leaving for Pad ma bkod in the early 1950's. He already felt at the time a degree of foreboding regarding the intentions of the Chinese:

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received. Additionally, after the thirteenth Dalai Lama died, the national assembly, rather than appointing a politically experienced regent instead chose the inexperienced and unfortunate figure of Reting Rinpoche.

<sup>166</sup> See Shakya (1999:204).

<sup>167</sup> See Shakya (1999:207).

Around that time the Chinese army was already invading parts of Eastern Tibet. Since there was talk that the Chinese army was going to invade further, I went from Kong po down to Pad ma bkod. I was actually one of the first lamas to leave [Central] Tibet frightened of the Chinese invasion. I don't know exactly which year it was, but at that time no other lama had gone abroad yet. The reason I went to Pad ma bkod was because it was a very special hidden place blessed by Guru Rinpoche. Recently when I was in Nepal I met an old friend - he was one of [Dudjom] Rinpoche's main sngags pa. He said, to me "That was so wise of you to leave at that time and go to Pad ma bkod before the big problem with the Chinese". He also told me that while trying to escape, he was imprisoned by the Chinese three times.<sup>168</sup>

## The great earthquake

Sometime around 1950, while staying at Dudjom Rinpoche's residence in Kong po, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa had a dream in which he met a man wearing a long brocade robe, who showed him some writing in *dbu can* script. In the writing it said that three days walk from there was a special place sacred to Vajrakīlaya:

Since I was quite young and didn't know any Sanskrit or what was the meaning of 'kīlaya'. I thought I would ask [Dudjom] Rinpoche about it. When I asked him about this dream and what did 'Kīlaya' mean, he said "Well, Kīlaya is the same as *rDo rje phur ba*.<sup>169</sup>

Dudjom Rinpoche advised him to do large accumulations of this practice so Kunzang Dechen Lingpa settled into a small retreat place in the foothills of Namcha Barwa where he had a prophetic and foreboding dream:

One night just before dawn, I dreamt that from the midst of the mountain schist Kong btsun bde mo<sup>170</sup> appeared, she was dressed in the Kong po style and had a black mark drawn from the top of her nose. Steadying her leg up against a boulder (which was about the size of a two or three story house), she was holding on to a great iron chain (which was about the thickness of a forearm) tied

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<sup>168</sup>AV (WT: 2002).

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> One of the *btan ma bcu gnyis* the twelve goddesses bound to an oath of protection by Padmasambhava. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956:181-98). When Thang stong rgyal po first went to Kong po searching for iron, he received the invitation of the earth spirits and the protective deity Kong bstun bde mo. See Stearns (2007:41). An account of Kong btsun bde mo's past lives and history was re-discovered by the *gter ston* 'Ja' tshon snying po (1585-1656). Also see Rtse le rgod tshangs pa sna tshogs rang drol. (1974): *Sanje Dorje Kong btsun de mo'i lo rgyus kyi 'thor bu* (*A Fragmentary Account of Kong btsun bde mo*) in *gSung 'bum: rTse le rgod tshang pa sna tshogs rang drol*. (Vol. 5:299-302). Dalton (2011:152) points out Nebesky-Wojkowitz's (1956) observation that the clothes worn by 'violent' Tibetan protector deities were regularly likened to those seen among Tibet's border people, evident here in KDL's description of Kong btsun bde mo.

around the neck of a large wild donkey. She was trying to pull up this out-of-control donkey which was about to break free and fall down the mountain. She shouted three times

“Rinpoche! I don’t think I can stop this donkey from escaping”!

At that moment I woke up and my mind was very disturbed. I began my morning meditation and when it was finished I went outside to sit on a flat rock to drink my morning tea. Then up came a nomad from the nearby village carrying some yoghurt to give to me. I asked him where he was going that day and he said he was going to visit his wife and their child in another village. I told him the account of my bad dream and warned him not to go to the village that day. But he did not listen. As I was starting my afternoon meditation I felt the earth and my little meditation house shaking intensely. I saw that the tops of my house pillars and the two roof beams were starting to separate. When all the offerings and butter lamps in the front of my altar fell down, myself and my attendant went outside and jumped into a pile of brambles. Due to the compassion of Guru Rinpoche and Ye shes mtsho rgyal we were not pierced by any of the thorns. As we were shaken away from the retreat house the foundations collapsed. Afterwards, the whole region, the entire mountainside had eroded and the land from mountain to river was destroyed. All the trees were uprooted and many animals and birds had been killed. The valleys were full of avalanche snow and the upper waters of the Tsang po river were penned in and rose up.<sup>171</sup>

The botanist Frank Kingdon Ward, who had travelled extensively in the region for more than 20 years, was at the time based close to the epicentre at Rima, in the Lohit Valley. He wrote an account of the earthquake<sup>172</sup> which he noted occurred on the 15 of August 1950:

Incalculable damage was done in the mountains...the immediate result of the earthquake was to pour millions of rock and sand into all the main rivers and their tributaries- thereby displacing millions of cubic feet of water. Nor was that all, for with the rock too often went the forest which was growing on it, thereby impeding and blocking the rivers....any temporary advantage which might have been gained by the slowing of the current was quickly cancelled by sudden waves of flood water.<sup>173</sup>

The effects of the earthquake went on for some time as entire mountains were completely stripped of vegetation and aftershocks continued on for at least a week.<sup>174</sup> At the higher elevations, where Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was located, steep slopes of scree were still moving and at the foot of slopes enormous boulders were piled precariously on top of one another. Up to six weeks after the earthquake hit Ward reported that rock was continuing

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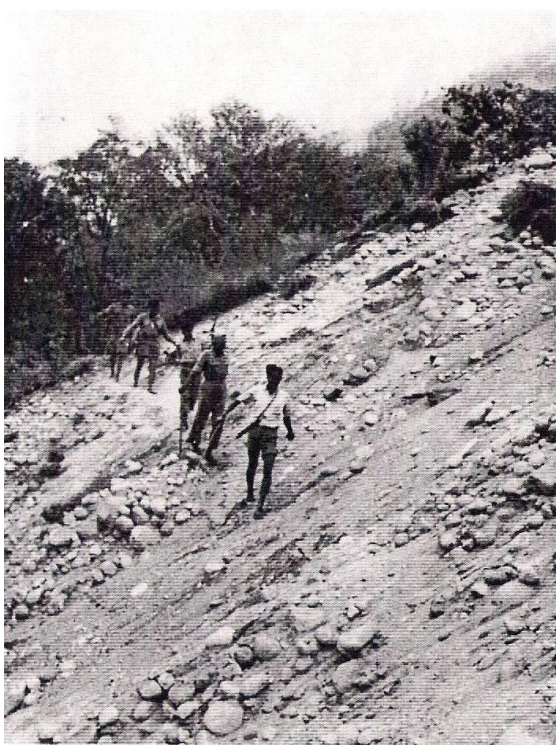
<sup>171</sup>(JFF: 119-121).

<sup>172</sup> Caused by two continental plates converging, the earthquake struck just after 2pm on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1950 and measured 8.6 on the Richter scale. Approximately 1,526 people were killed; although this does not include figures for the Tibetan areas.

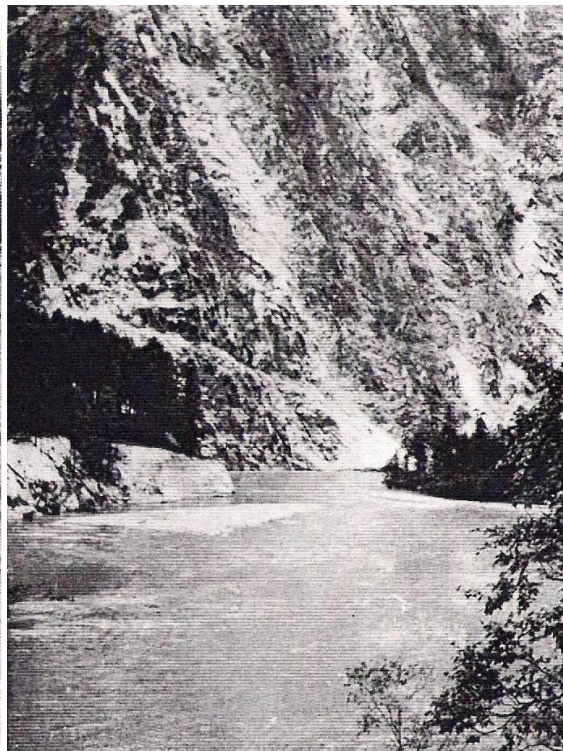
<sup>173</sup> See Ward (1955:293).

<sup>174</sup> (JFF: 121).

to pour down from higher elevations and serious floods were also a regular occurrence.<sup>175</sup> Despite the destruction of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's retreat house the immediate surrounding landscape was free from damage. Eventually, in need of food and water he and his attendant ventured out into a scene of utter devastation. Coming across two nomadic herdsmen from a nearby village and a dog they called 'bearded Phur ba'<sup>176</sup> they sat down to discuss which direction to go together as a group. Since aftershocks were still occurring and rockslides continued to present considerable danger, it was decided to that they would go to an area behind a nearby mountain peak where there was a flat empty plain. The nomads were not keen as they felt it was not a good place for finding water.



*Finding a track across a slip in the Lohit valley*



*Lohit river below Rima being filled up with sand*

Figure 14. Aftermath of the great Assam earthquake 1950.

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<sup>175</sup> See Ward (1955: 299).

<sup>176</sup> (JFF: 122).



*Air photo : N. A. B. Warner*

*Dibang valley: forest stripped from hillsides in Earthquake*

Figure 15. Aerial photo of the devastation caused by the earthquake.

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa, thinking that it would be good to bring along any food they could find with them, returned quickly to his destroyed retreat hut and together with his attendant searched through the rubble to find anything which had survived the quake. Discovering some un-diluted butter and tsampa they gathered it up and then set off together with the nomads and their dog. Walking through the countryside they were deeply saddened by the sight of all the corpses of people and animals they encountered along the way. When they eventually arrived at the empty plain they initially found a small, if uninspiring source of drinking water:

There on top of a large rock was a hole made by the gathering of stagnant rainwater, it was a place where birds came to drink and so it was also covered in bird shit. I said it was fine to drink and we all agreed since there was no other choice. However that nomad dog named Phur ba had run on ahead of us and I could hear the sound of him lapping [up water]. I said to my companions “do you hear the sound of that dog? He’s drinking.” The others said ‘Rinpoche, there is no water here’ So I went in the direction of the dog and saw that under a long flat stone shaped like a table, a spring of fresh water was bubbling up out of the ground, [it was] pushing up out of the ground [displacing]

all the roots and grass. We were so happy. I said to the others 'in a land like this, where there is no water, by the kindness of the Guru, this water has arisen for us. We should stay here.' <sup>177</sup>

The group stayed there for one month while Kunzang Dechen Lingpa performed prayers and dedications as best he could for all of the beings who had been killed by this great natural disaster, after which he returned to the residence of Dudjom Rinpoche where he remained for another two or three years.

### **The prophetic Dob Dob, the Kong po consort and the dice -shaped rock**

During the time that Dudjom Rinpoche had left on a trip to China <sup>178</sup> Kunzang Dechen Lingpa went to the lower Kongpo region. Since he was travelling as a wandering yogi, he and his companion (an un-named Khams pa monk) went from area to area asking for food and shelter. One day as they approached the house of a rich family to beg for provisions:

The main gate opened a little and out came a burly intimidating monk. As we got closer the smell of beer wafted from him. He was one of those monks known as *dob dob*<sup>179</sup> from Lhasa's three main monasteries, Sera, Drepung and Ganden. These were in central Tibet, about fifteen days' journey from Kongpo, so it was impossible that any *dob dob* would be in that area. I thought to myself, 'A *dob dob*? There's no reason for him to be here in this remote place' so I asked him, "Hey, where did you come from?"

"I am none other than Kra ti sngags 'chang<sup>180</sup>" he replied.

"Kra ti sngags 'chang!" I exclaimed, "He passed away a long time ago. He was a contemporary of the great tantric rNying ma *gter ston*, rig 'dzin 'Ja' tshon snying po, also known as the Yogi Hung nag me 'bar. I have some of his relics which I keep with me as blessings".

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<sup>177</sup> (JFF: 121-24).

<sup>178</sup> This was in 1954.

<sup>179</sup> *Dob dob* (In the JFF it is spelled this way. Alternative spellings include *ldab ldob* and also *ldob ldob*) were 'fighting' monks associated with the main dGe lug pa monasteries of Se ra, 'Bras pung and dGa' bdan monasteries. Goldstein (1989:25) suggests that by 1951 ten to fifteen percent of the approximately eighteen thousand monks in these three main seats were *dob dob*. They had a distinctive appearance and could be distinguished by the way they 'kilted' up their robes. Khedrup (with Richardson) (1986:49) describes his experience: '*dob dob*...were known for their physical strength and courage. Young monks who were strong and active....(but) bad at learning became *dob dob*..... their hair was worn rather long, with a big curl trained around the left ear and down to the cheek...they often blackened their faces around the eyes to make themselves look fierce'. See also Goldstein (1964).

<sup>180</sup> Kra ti sngags 'chang also known as Mthu chen kra ti sngags 'chang, the magician of Kong po, was a student of Rig 'dzin thugs mchog rdo rje and associate of 'Jigs med gling pa and 'Ja' tshon snying po. See Rangdrol and Ricard (1994). There is also a reference in Gyatso (1998:175) where 'The crazy man of Kong po' makes a request of 'Jigs med gling pa.

Then the *dob dob* said “You are also one of Guru Padmasambhava’s great *gter ston*, for that reason, from Nga yab gling you were given the name Kunzang Dechen Lingpa. Don’t you remember?”

“I have been called 'the Lho brag gter ston', you may have heard that. However, with the exception of one or two people, [such as] Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche, [I have] not told this name to anyone. You say that I am a *gter ston*, but I have nothing to reveal”

Now that *dob dob* was extremely intoxicated and really stank of beer. From within the folds of his robes he drunkenly took out a big yak horn<sup>181</sup> filled with tobacco snuff.

“Want a drag?” he offered. Then I became very suspicious of this man. I thought, 'it's really weird the way he looks and he reeks of beer. Maybe it is just a manifestation of gods and demons'.

“I am a practitioner of the rNying ma faith” I replied. “I cannot take snuff. Guru Padmasambhava has said that it is an extremely grave offense.”

To this, the *dob dob* countered, “To a great master who has realized the intrinsic nature of reality, there is no good or bad, this is Dri rdo rje ma (Vajra scent goddess) is it not?”

He crooked his thumb, wrapped his index finger around it, poured in the snuff and snorted. Then, forming the letters of the alphabet with his body, he began to sing melodiously. Into the song he integrated the first syllables of the alphabet, Ka Kha Ga Nga - and also integrated my name, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa...

*“In the perfect state of self-liberation, the primordially pure natural condition,  
ever- excellent supreme bliss of luminous emptiness,  
free from beginning or end.  
By perfecting this great path, where ever you dwell,  
You are never apart from Nga yab Ling.”*

When I heard that I got kind of a special experience and felt compelled to respond in kind. So I sang back with the subsequent syllables of the Tibetan alphabet integrating them into my own song..

*“Monk, you talk too much!  
I don’t know from where you came.  
I do not possess fine goods,  
But to benefit sentient beings is paramount, and that is my way of life.”*

“You’re lying” he said “From Nga yab gling Guru Padmasambhava prophesied that you will become a great *gter ston* and, that I should help and protect you as much as I am able”. Now at that time it was autumn, and the *dob dob* went on to say, “...next spring in the fourth month, on the fifteenth day of the waxing moon, you will meet a special sixteen year old girl. She is a *gter ma* consort who is a unified emanation of Ye shes mtsho rgyal and Byang chen ma. In order to practice the swift path, it is essential to make an auspicious connection with her. If that connection is formed, then, behind Namcha Barwa you will come to a valley shaped like a *me long* (Tibetan divination mirror). In the centre of that there is a rock shaped like a die. On the front side is the letter HUNG written with blood from the nose of Vairotsana. To the protector spirits of this place you should make smoke offering, drink offerings and a small red *gtor ma*. Then, if you dig (at the *gter ma* door) with a steel chisel, inside you will find a guide to Pad ma bkod, lots of good advice

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<sup>181</sup> Goldstein (1964) states that *dob dob* from Khams were known to carry a horn of snuff.

and, most importantly, a list<sup>182</sup> of the innumerable treasures you will reveal. Go there, take them and benefit sentient beings!" As soon as he had said this he returned inside and the main gate closed. Then, after a little while, the lady of that house came out carrying a bag of wheat and some beer for us. As for my monk companion, it seemed that this *dob dob* was invisible to him because he asked me "Rinpoche, who were you just talking to?" I thought to myself, "I wonder whether this Krati sngags 'chang is my own dharma protector?"<sup>183</sup>

After this experience Kunzang Dechen Lingpa continued with his itinerant life through the Kong po region until the following summer when he decided to train in the *rtsa rlung* (yogic breathing) and *khrol 'khor*<sup>184</sup> (active yogic 'jumping', performed with legs crossed). He travelled to a meditation cave along the upper waters of the Tsang po to find a monk named dGe slung snags rgya Tshe ring that had perfected the profound practice of rDo rje phag mo (Vajravarahi). Once there he requested the empowerment transmission and instruction for the Vajravarahi practice as well as training in yogic jumping which, by his own account, didn't quite go to plan:

Having struck my testicles with the bottom of my foot, I was in excruciating pain for about three days. I gradually recovered and trained in *rtsa rlung* practice. After which I returned to Lower Kong po. It was on the fifteenth day at about three o' clock when I arrived at the main gate of a wealthy land-owner's house. There I saw a young girl emerge from a store house carrying flour, butter and beer offerings and enter into the kitchen. As I got nearer to the house, the girl came out. "Excuse me?" I asked, "I need a place to stay tonight?" "Yes, you can stay here in our shrine room" the girl replied. After I had rested a little while, she came to me and said "My father has been ill for a very long time, will you perform a long life empowerment and ceremony for him?" Due to that prophecy from before, I was quite taken aback. Realizing that an auspicious connection was forming, I said that I would. So I stayed there for about three days and did the long life ritual. While I was sitting there reciting the rituals, the girl would come around with food and tea for me and my monk companion. Since I had previously received a prediction that I would meet a girl around this time, I thought, 'well, it must be her' so I asked if she practiced Dharma. "I think to myself that by any means I must practice Dharma" she replied. "However, both my parents have grown old and have no son. I am their only helper, so until now I have been left behind." I said "If you wish to practice Dharma, will you come with me?" "If Rinpoche leads, surely I will follow" she said.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> *gTer ston* often have a particular sacred site, a 'hub' where their *gter ma* list or 'address book' can be found. The identification of its location and the right circumstances needed to 'open' the site are crucial in order for a *gter ston* to fulfill their role as a treasure revealer. See ER Harding (2012).

<sup>183</sup> (JFF: 141-5).

<sup>184</sup> These are yogic methods which lead to the control of the internal channels and the vital energy.

<sup>185</sup>(JFF: 146).

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa then consulted with the girl's parents who professed to the



Figure 16. Nam la.

special qualities of their daughter. When she had been born, they told him, it was the depths of winter, and yet peach blossom of all different colours had flowered in the trees. When she was three years old and became sick the parents had requested a divination from Dudjom Rinpoche who had told them the girl was of noble character. The mother then said to Kunzang Dechen Lingpa: 'We have no other child. She is our only helper. There is no way to offer her to you. If you stay here and become her

husband, then this would be acceptable'. His response was to leave, since he was young and didn't want to stay in one place:

At that time I was quite young; of course, it would be fine to become the girl's husband, but I didn't want to stay there permanently. I thought there was no other alternative but to leave her behind. So, I left and decided to travel on around the left side of Namcha Barwa Mountain where there is a pass called Nam la.<sup>186</sup> It was here that I crossed over into Pad ma bkod.<sup>187</sup>

On the way down he came to a beautiful valley where he rested for a day. The next morning, going down a little way to a lower valley; he saw that it was the place that the

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<sup>186</sup> Frank Kingdon Ward and the Earl of Cawdor attempted to cross this pass first in July and again in November 1925 (when the above photo was taken). 'We had hoped to cross this pass into Pad ma bkod...but in view of the unsettled weather, we decided that it would have been too risky an undertaking... The Nam la is used only by a few Lopas, and then not regularly. A party of three had crossed in the summer, but the pass is barely open three months of the year... [locals] are known to have been lost and frozen to death trying to find their way over...' Ward (1926:103-104).

<sup>187</sup>(JFF: 148).

strange monk had prophesied. There was a waterfall that resembled the crook of a walking stick and a round meadow shaped like a mirror.

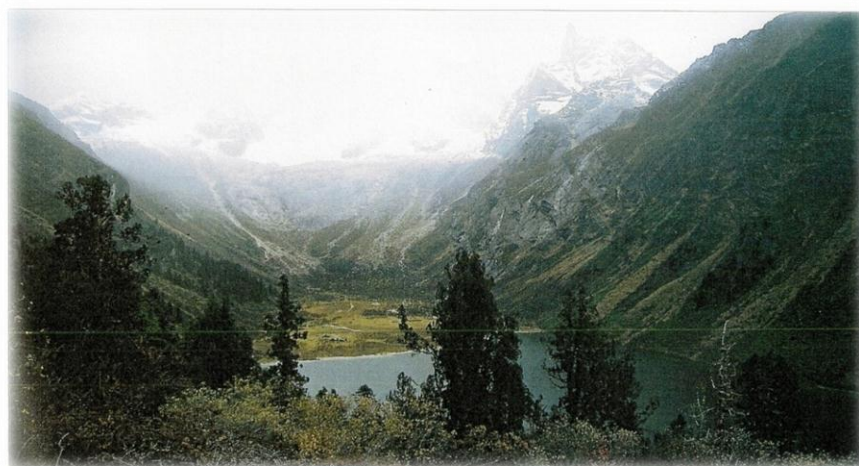


Figure 17. A glacial valley in the region of Nam la.

In the centre of the meadow was a dice shaped rock and on its East side it was marked with a red HUNG. However, because the auspicious circumstance of taking that girl as a consort had been lost, he was not able reveal the treasures contained within it:

There was nothing to be done. What was done was done. Accepting this and making aspiration prayers, I just let it be and left.<sup>188</sup>

Recalling this experience Kunzang Dechen Lingpa in 2002 said:

Later, when I thought about this story, I understood that this strange monk that I met was not actually a monk. He was a manifestation of the protector of those treasures. In order to reveal earth treasures, as taught by Guru Rinpoche, it is essential to convene the auspicious circumstances. It depends entirely on fulfilling the auspicious connections as well as on the merit of the beings. But it wasn't possible for me to reveal earth treasures because of that lost connection. Now Guru Rinpoche had said that actually the essence of all earth treasures was the mind treasures hidden in the minds of the treasure revealers. But in order to reveal those it was essential to have the proper auspicious circumstances. It is extremely difficult to set up the auspicious circumstances, and if I would have been able to fulfil them I could have revealed thirty books of writings- treasure writings from my mind.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> (JFF: 148).

<sup>189</sup> AV (WT: 2002).

Despondent at this missed connection Kunzang Dechen Lingpa travelled on into Padma bkod<sup>190</sup> not knowing that he would never again return to central Tibet or the place of his birth and that his life from that point on would be irrevocably changed.

### **Life in Padma bkod**

He went on to a place he identifies as Lho stod kha eventually arriving at the site of Jedrung Rinpoche's temple dkar mo gling.<sup>191</sup> After publically revealing *sa gter*, a bronze statue of Tshe dpag med (Buddha Amitayus ) from within the rocky face of a mountain, all the people gathered there then trusted that he was truly a *gter ston* and he was offered Jedrung Rinpoche's temple and recognised as one of his incarnations. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa then stayed there until 1959 or 1960. It was during this time that he met and married his wife Tashi Dolma. As stated earlier, the account is not included in the *rnam thar* but his wife recalls:

I was a young girl at the time about 15 or 16, my father had passed away and I was being taken care of by a family in the upper region of Padma bkod. One year Rinpoche was visiting during Lo gsar (New Year) and was asked to perform a ceremony. There was a monk with him who was very knowledgeable and at that time he prophesized that there was a young girl there with no father. He predicted that if Rinpoche married this girl he would have a long life. There were so many girls there and they were having dance one evening since it was Lo gsar. That lama who was visiting with Rinpoche went around and took a strand of hair from each of the girls at the Lo gsar dance. I was not well at the time, so I was not at the dance but helping in the kitchen, then that Lama came into the kitchen and took a strand of my hair too. After that, looking at all the strands he chose one and said 'This is the girl prophesized, the one in the kitchen. This is the girl'. When Rinpoche went to Tulku Chos 'byings, who was looking after me, Tulku said to Rinpoche: 'If only you had come earlier, she is already betrothed to another boy who has offered a mithun for her, he is from a good family'. The next day Rinpoche was to return home which was more than two days away. He gave me a piece of turquoise and a silk scarf and told me to keep them. I was worried that if I tied them around my neck my future mother in law might see so I hid them in a grain basket. After Rinpoche left, two nuns came to see me and said 'Don't say no to Rinpoche, it will be very good if you go with him'. The mother of the other boy was very upset. Rinpoche returned and offered her furs and other valuables in return to break the betrothal. The mother kept making many high demands, insisting on more and more wealth. Eventually Rinpoche and I left suddenly together. The mother shouted and threw ashes from the fire after us, a very bad omen.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> At this point in the *rnam thar* is a list of all the caves in central Tibet which KDL practiced during his life in Central Tibet. Folio 149 of the JFF marks the ends the second chapter entitled 'Wandering beggar' and the beginning of the third chapter entitled 'Dharma activities'.

<sup>191</sup> (JFF: 150-151).

<sup>192</sup> TD (INT: 2009).

## Escape to India

Similarly Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *rnam thar* also does not give much detail of the political situation at the time. In an interview conducted in 2004 in California, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa described the situation immediately preceding his flight to India:

Around that time I dreamt of three large prayer flags fluttering on the top of a mountain. One by one they fell down. I took this as an indication that the Chinese would soon invade both the upper and lower regions of Pad ma bkod. At that time there was a group of Tibetans in Pad ma bkod who had formed a small army of about fifteen hundred men. Letters were sent to India, asking for guns and military equipment. Ten soldiers were assigned to protect me. They had American made guns which had been dropped by parachute. All the other soldiers were sent to the mountain passes to prepare for the Chinese invasion. Some of the soldiers found photos of Mao and Chinese flags up on those mountains and they used them for target practice. The Chinese kept advancing and retreating during that time. Eventually a group of about twenty men left our place towards Tibet to see if they could gather more information about the situation. I did not want them to go but they left anyway. As it turned out these men encountered Chinese forces who got them drunk. Since the Chinese had no knowledge of the size of the resistance in Padma bkod, after hearing how small it was they advanced again. It was at that time, in fear of the Chinese army that I left Pad ma bkod and fled with my family to the holy land of India.<sup>193</sup>

On the banks of the Tsang po Kunzang Dechen Lingpa and his family came to a precarious crossing point, he described as 'an iron chain to place your feet on and an iron chain to hold onto by hand. This was the most suitable place to cross that great river'.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> AV (Ellor: 2004).

<sup>194</sup> (JFF: 152).



Figure 18. A *lrag zam* (iron bridge) across the Tsang po.

Together with many other Tibetans who were also escaping, holding on, little by little they all crossed to the river's far bank. Finally, fearing the Chinese army, they cut the source of the iron chain behind them. Once they arrived in the Indian state now known as Arunachal Pradesh they were directed to a refugee settlement called Changlang<sup>195</sup> set up by the Indian government to deal with the influx of Tibetans escaping over their borders.

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<sup>195</sup> A settlement close to the Assamese border town, Miao.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXILE IN INDIA (1962 -2001)

#### North East India

Once in India, Tibetan refugees, unused to the climate and food, became ill, often fatally. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's family was no exception to these tragic circumstances, their infant daughter died at the refugee camp in Changlang<sup>196</sup> where he and his wife lived for a few years until relocating to Assam. During this time Kunzang Dechen Lingpa tried to get a travel permit to reach the land he called Mon yul, then known to India as N.E.F.A., eventually becoming Arunachal Pradesh in 1972.<sup>197</sup> This region's fluid borders have borne witness to numerous commercial explorative and nationalistic agendas that have ebbed and flowed over the centuries. Its variable character is not just limited to contested and shifting boundaries <sup>198</sup> it also exhibits great diversity climatically, geographically and culturally. An area where indigenous spiritual traditions interact with the Tibetan Buddhist sects, Hindu populations, as well as a variety of local populations labeled 'Bon'.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> TD (INT: 2009).

<sup>197</sup> The North-East Frontier Agency (N.E.F.A.) was one of the political divisions of British India and later the Republic of India until 1972 when it became Arunachal Pradesh. Its isolation was not only for military reasons. The region remained inaccessible in line with the policies of anthropologist Elwin Verrier (1902–1964) working with Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) and the newly formed Indian government to impose a slower process of transformation and assimilation for the tribal regions within India. See Verrier (1960). For the sake of simplicity I will hereafter refer to the region as Arunachal Pradesh (with the exception of when presenting direct translation of KDL's *rnam thar* where he tends to refer to the West Kameng and Tawang regions as Mon yul). For a photographic survey of Arunachal Pradesh from 1859 to 2006 see Tarr and Blackburn (2008).

<sup>198</sup> Current border issues continue with the People's Republic of China whose government-run online mapping service shows Arunachal Pradesh as Chinese territory. On Chinese maps the Sino-Indian border is shifted South to Northern Assam and Arunachal Pradesh is part of China's Southern Tibetan region. See Sperling (2008) for an overview of Chinese justifications for their claims on this region.

<sup>199</sup> Toni Huber points out that many of the populations who practice non Buddhist or else non established/ institutionalised traditions in Arunachal Pradesh, label *themselves* 'Bon' because they have been told that is what they are or else they are labelled as such by local Tibetan Buddhist lamas, foreign researchers and anthropologists. (Personal communication: 2011).



Figure 19. Statue of Merak Lama in Rupa temple, West Kameng

Due to the scarcity of written records, the early history of Arunachal Pradesh is largely speculative.<sup>200</sup> The Monpa and Sherdukpen of the West Kameng region where Kunzang Dechen Lingpa settled believe that

Buddhism was transmitted to the area in the eighth century.<sup>201</sup> Whilst

no evidence has yet been found to substantiate these early claims, there are a few textual references<sup>202</sup> and several monastic sites in Arunachal Pradesh which suggest an influx of Tibetan Buddhism into the region beginning in the fourteenth century with a more sustained inception from the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>203</sup> During this time, at the behest of Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, (1617–1682) the fifth Dalai

<sup>200</sup> A good starting point for the areas pertinent to this discussion would be Aris (1980) Blackburn (2003) and Sperling (2008).

<sup>201</sup> See Aris (1979:79) and Sakar (1980).

<sup>202</sup> For example one of the *bka' shog* (edicts) of Thang stong rgyal po (1361?-1485) describes his visit to the region Kāmata (Kāmarūpa) the present day Indian state of Assam in North Eastern India. (Stearns 2007:5).

<sup>203</sup> This era in Tibetan history was typified by the rejection of older, less centralised traditions, and the promotion, by the dGe lugs pa of a new national religion with one ultimate authority envisioned in the institution of the fifth Dalai Lama. A full translation of an edict dated 1680 issued by the fifth Dalai Lama concerning the founding of Tawang and outlining Tibet's intention to levy taxes and administer the region of Mon yul can be found in Aris (1980). British interest in this borderland region was overwhelmingly commercial, exploring the possibility of trade routes to Tibet and China, especially the major routes connecting Lhasa with the plains of Assam over the Se la, another connecting Rima with Assam via the Lohit River and between Assam and Bhutan. See Sakar and Ray (2005) and Dutta and Bha (2001). Pommaret (2000:30) notes that Tibet and Bhutan carried out substantial trade with Kāmarūpa (Assam) at least from the seventeenth century, if not earlier. Textual evidence of this can be found in British reports, see Marshall (1977) for an annotated bibliography of papers and documents relating to the British exploration to establish trade routes throughout the region. British interest in the region was also fuelled by the desire to solve the question of the course of the Tsang po and by their penchant for collecting exotic flora.

Lama, a figure named Lodro Gyatso (Blo gros rGya mtsho) also known as Merak Lama<sup>204</sup> founded the great monastic complex of rTa dbang (Tawang) and a series of 'satellite' temples<sup>205</sup> along an approximately 180 km stretch of an important trade route<sup>206</sup> via the villages of Bomdila and Rupa and down to the plains of Assam. Currently, the Northern border of Arunachal Pradesh follows the *de facto* McMahon Line delineated in the Simla Accord 1914 which attempted to define the boundary between Tibet and China proper and between Tibet and what was then British India. These negotiations failed when China and Tibet could not agree over the Sino-Tibetan boundaries.<sup>207</sup> The area remained a restricted militarised zone made more so by the Sino-Indian War of 1962 (not mentioned in KDL'S *rnam thar*), during which Chinese forces advanced as far as the Assamese border. Since then the Indian government has maintained a high military presence which means that travel to the area is severely restricted to this day.

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa first visited the region in the early 1980s at the behest of the Monpa and Sherdukpen Buddhist communities which ultimately resulted in his revitalization of historic Tibetan Buddhist temples and traditions in the region. Recent scholarship such as that of Huber<sup>208</sup> who has conducted extensive anthropological research in Arunachal Pradesh, has focused upon how Tibetans relate to India as a religious territory and the constructs placed upon its historically Buddhist sites.

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<sup>204</sup> A name suggesting affinity with Bhutan. See Aris (1986) and Pelgen (2008).

<sup>205</sup> The temples at Rupa and a nearby settlement at Jiagoan are now affiliates of KDL's main seat in Arunachal Pradesh.

<sup>206</sup> Principal goods flowing from Assam included rice, betel nut, silk, and lac. Goods from Bhutan and Tibet included salt, gold, musk and animals such as sheep and ponies. See Sakar and Ray (2005:10). One of the main sites for the exchange of goods was at the terminus of this route in Hajo near to the modern day city of Guwahati, home to significant pilgrimage sites for Buddhist and Hindus. See Huber's chapter 'Nirvana in Assam' (2008: 125-166).

<sup>207</sup> See Lamb (1964) and Huber (2010).

<sup>208</sup> Huber (2008).



Figure 20. View from the road to Tawang between the Assamese border and Rupa.

Centuries-old Buddhist pilgrimage destinations in India have now also become focal points for a fragmented Tibetan Buddhist culture. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's revitalisation of the seventeenth century temple in the West Kameng region of Arunachal Pradesh and the building of his monastic complex illustrate the way in which contemporary Buddhist communities are preserving and reinventing Tibetan Buddhism in this Himalayan borderland. Firstly, by revitalising old religious sites and secondly, by the building of new holy places and sites of pilgrimage which recreate the temples, structures and culture of Tibet.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Harris (1999) writes of the traditional look of contemporary Tibetan architecture and art which harkens back to an 'imagined' reality of Tibet before the events of 1959. Harris analyses the ways in which Tibetans have asserted their sense of communal identity and agency through the built environment and imagery.

## Becoming the Rangapara lama (1959-1980)

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa stayed in at Changlang Tibetan refugee camp for about ten years.

Recalling his feelings at the time he later said:

When the Chinese invasion occurred and I had to leave Tibet with nothing, it's not that I didn't have anything; it was just that I couldn't bring anything with me because whatever you owned, you had to carry it on your back. At that time there were no roads, no cars, no planes and you had to go on foot. The journey to India was very difficult. Therefore we could not bring anything. Going through this journey from Tibet to India was extremely difficult, but I didn't really see it that way. My motivation was always that whatever I did was to merely help spread the Buddhist doctrine, and I didn't regard whatever I had to experience as difficult. At that time I didn't wear dharma robes. I was simply wearing black pants and a white shirt and I told my wife not to let people know that I was a Dharma teacher.<sup>210</sup>

Their only surviving child was born at the Changlang camp in 1966. Rigdzin Dorje was born 'in the caul' a rare circumstance in which a baby is born partially covered by the membranous substance comprising the amniotic sac, even more rarely as, in this instance, the entire sac emerges intact with the infant inside. An excerpt from Rigdzin Dorje's own *rnam thar* reads:

'In the perfectly sacred land of rDo rje phag mo's womb on the fifteenth day of the sixth month of the fire sheep year, a son was born to the great gter ston king Kunzang Dechen Lingpa and to the treasure mother Tashi Dolma...unsoiled by stains of samsara...he was born inside a white shell. His father peeled the shell with his finger nails and out came a fully blossomed youthful moon.<sup>211</sup>

In the mid-1970s when Kunzang Dechen Lingpa moved to Rangapara in Assam he and his family were staying in a guesthouse where Mindroling Rinpoche's wife's parents were also staying:<sup>212</sup>

I asked them what their plans were. They said they were planning to go see Dudjom Rinpoche. As I heard that they were going to see Kyabjé Rinpoche, I wanted to send a request to do some prayers for my daughter who had died. So I sent a letter with a small offering of a few corals and turquoise

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<sup>210</sup> AV (WT: 2002).

<sup>211</sup> 'sKyabs rje gter chen rin po che'i sku gsung thugs kyi sras kyi thu bo gdung sras dam pa rig 'dzin rdo rje rin po che'i rnam thar mdor bsdus dad pa'i sa bon zla gshon yid kyi mlun sel shes bya ba'. *The Youthful Moon: A Seed of Devotion that Illuminates the Darkness of Mind. The life story of His Eminence Dungse Rigdzin Dorje Rinpoche, the body, speech and mind son of the great gter ston.*

<sup>212</sup> Mindroling Rinpoche (1930-2008) served as the head of the rNying ma sect from 2003-2008.

[stones] and an onyx stone. In order to give Pad ma (the father of Mindroling Rinpoche's wife) those things - I opened a box I had with some of my possessions. That box had mainly books inside - no other kind of worldly things - and when they saw that there were only books they became surprised. Pad ma and his wife asked my wife, "how can it be that your husband only has books? He must be a spiritual teacher or something". So my wife said, "Yes it is true, he's a lama, a Dharma teacher but he told me to keep it secret from other people". So those parents continued on to Kalimpong and went to where Dudjom Rinpoche was living at the time and offered him the letter of mine with the few stones of offering for the dedication of my dead daughter.

As soon as Kyabje Rinpoche read that letter he said, "Oh, it's that lama, has he come here? What is he doing? Where is he living?" Those parents told him that I was staying in Assam at a place called Rangapara, and that because I didn't have the proper papers I wasn't able to come to Kalimpong. Kyabje Rinpoche said, "Oh, he's really a great lama". He said to Pad ma, "You should invite him to your home and take care of him. There is no rNying ma lama in Arunachal". When Pad ma came back from Kalimpong from seeing Rinpoche with the letter and so forth, he said, "Why didn't you tell me that you are a teacher? I spoke to Kyabjé Rinpoche and he told me you are a great lama. I felt very embarrassed and said 'I am not a lama!' Then Pad ma said: "Yes you are, Kyabjé Rinpoche said so" and he said he would invite me to Kalimpong just as Kyabjé Rinpoche had suggested.<sup>213</sup>

However Kunzang Dechen Lingpa sensed that his path did not lay in Kalimpong. When he had been staying at the refugee settlement at Changlang he'd had a series of prophetic dreams concerning areas in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh:

Just before daybreak in a dream, in a place called Namogaion<sup>214</sup> in front of a plain in the middle of a grassy meadow [with] flowing water, there was a large rock which resembled a pitched tent. Underneath that was a large cave. The roof of the cave was made entirely of precious substances (and) adorned with many offering substances, the radiance of which was indivisible.<sup>215</sup>

### **Establishing bKra shis chos gling (Tashi Choling)**

After departing from the Changlang Tibetan resettlement camp Kunzang Dechen Lingpa moved to Rangapara (a newer name for the old town of Namogaion), and became involved with the Nepalese Sherpa community there and continued, without luck, to try to obtain a permit to travel within Arunachal Pradesh. Eventually he spoke to his Sherpa following and informed them that he wished to do a meditation retreat. They responded by saying that they would buy some land locally and build a small temple for the community. Above that temple they would build a small retreat house for him:

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<sup>213</sup>AV (WT: 2002).

<sup>214</sup> Old Assamese name for Rangapara, near Tezpur in Assam.

<sup>215</sup> (JFF: 157).

When I went to look around that land I said to the Sherpa community 'You don't you know when, or whether or not you will be able to build a small temple. Since, I at the moment have a little cash I am thinking it would be better to lay the foundation now.' The next day some locals came to me and said 'You can't build a temple here' and stuck a wooden stake in the ground. When I went to look around, on the road, I met a man who called himself the people's secretary; he said to me sharply "You will not be able to build that temple here because it is a public right of way". I was very disappointed, however nearby to that place on the left hand side there was an empty plot. So I asked someone 'Whose land is this?' I was told that it belonged to a tea estate Sahib. So I requested Sherpas Lama Nyima and Tamgrin to enquire from the landowner whether or not he would sell it. He replied that if I gave him ten thousand rupees that would be acceptable. So I gave him the money and the building of the temple commenced. Now this is called Tashi Choling.<sup>216</sup>



Figure 21. The original temple and retreat house at Tashi Choling in Rangapara, Assam.

However, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa still had in his mind that he should somehow try to get to Arunachal Pradesh but consistently met with difficulty due in part to rivalry with other Buddhist sects in the region:

It didn't work out for the visa and the reason why is because at that time there was a lama from Padma bkod, a student of [Dudjom] Rinpoche, who also tried to go to Arunachal Pradesh, and he was quite skilled in mundane matters - like how to get the right papers and so forth. He actually got the permission and then he told those government officials that I also needed the papers to go there. Now what happened is that at the same time there was a dGe lugs lama from Amdo who worked for the Indian government and was extremely partial. He was very dGe lugs pa-minded and he didn't like the rNying ma; he was very jealous. He thought that if the rNying ma lamas would go to that area, the dGe lugs pa wouldn't have a chance, because he had heard that the

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<sup>216</sup> (JFF: 153-154).

rNying ma pa were very skilled in curing ill people, and so on. So he did everything to prevent me from going there. He also managed to cancel the papers of that lama from Pad ma bkod. This is how it happened that I wasn't able to go there.<sup>217</sup>

## Rupa and gSang sngags chos gling (Sangnak Choling)

Early in the 1980's Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was invited to Rupa, a Sherdukpen town in West Kameng about half way along the road between the Assamese border and Tawang. He was invited to perform some religious ceremonies for a local official called Dorje

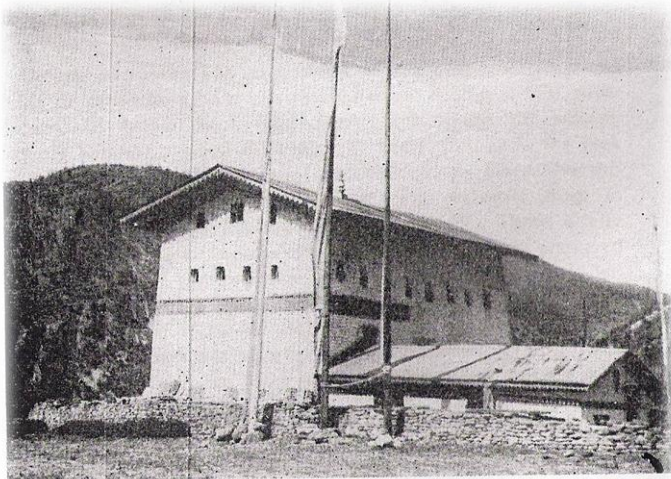


Figure 22. Pema Choling temple in Rupa circa 1978.

Khandu who had fallen ill.<sup>218</sup> After performing a series of rituals over the course of three days Dorje Khandu recovered. At that time, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa met all the important people of Rupa including the main teacher Pad ma rDo rje of Rupa's historic temple Padma chos gling (Pema Choling). After that first

visit, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa took some of the young monks from Rupa back to Rangapara in Assam some of whom remained students of his for the rest of their lives:

Dorje Khandu was an important person in that area and his brother was an important minister called Pema Khandu. It seemed that no matter what kind of treatment he tried, he went to very good hospitals in Bombay, Delhi, and Calcutta and even went to Dharamsala, nothing seemed to help. So his brother told him to invite a rNying ma lama and ask him to perform a divination on what would help his illness. That is why he came to see me in Rangapara. At his request I did a divination, which showed that the only thing that would help him recover was to have a four-day

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<sup>217</sup>AV (WT: 2002).

<sup>218</sup>Dorje Khandu (1955-2011) became a devotee of KDL. In 1982 along with the residents of the town he offered the historic temple in Rupa to KDL. Khandu was instrumental in helping him to establish his monastic seat in the nearby village of Chillipaam, about 3km from the town of Rupa. In the early 1980s Khandu was a district official in the West Kameng region. In 2009 he became Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh. He was killed in a helicopter crash in the region in May 2011 only a few months after attending as guest of honour, the consecration of KDL's Zangdokpalri temple.

*gcod* ritual done on his behalf and then conclude with a wrathful fire ritual. When I asked whether there were any skilful rNying ma pa lamas in Arunachal Pradesh that would be able to do these rituals, Dorje Khandu said that the few rNying ma pa lamas that were staying there were not very skilful and couldn't do those rituals. Therefore he insisted that I should come there to do the rituals needed to cure him from his illness. Since I didn't have a visa or the proper papers to go there, I said, "It is not possible. I don't have the papers." After two weeks he came back with an official car in order to invite me and take me there. So he invited me in the car and said, "Rinpoche, please come with me to Arunachal Pradesh and do all these rituals for me." And I said, "Well I don't have any visa, I don't have the papers." He replied "No need. No need. We have the official car and everything is taken care of." So I got into the car. There was a driver and then there was Dorje Khandro and myself. When we got to the police check, the police didn't even stop the car. They didn't check anything because it was an official car. We just went straight through the check post and I arrived at his place and did the four-day *gcod* ritual and concluded with the wrathful fire ceremony and so forth, and he was cured from his problem.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> AV (WT: 2002).



Figure 23. Pema Choling in 2010.

This incident created a circumstance whereby he was able to travel within the region and would eventually lead to the establishment of his monastic seat. When still living in the settlement at Changlang he also dreamt of the area as a site with some significance for him.



Figure 24. Rupa in 2010.

[In the region] once called sTug pan but these days called Rupa, there is a small mountain. On that mountain there were many young girls waving red silk in their hands, singing spontaneous melodious songs. There was a path leading to the peak of that mountain; looking up all those girls. I thought this was a good sign.<sup>220</sup>

Some months after performing the ceremonies for Dorje Khandu, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was invited again to perform religious ceremonies. During a break in the practice he went to look around for a place for a temple foundation to be built:

The lama from the Rupa temple Pema Dorje appeared and asked “Where are you going?” I said ‘You and Lama Karma sent me all these young monks, but instead of building a monastery in Assam, if we are able to obtain land here, and give them an education. Let’s go look for some land’. Pema Dorje replied “The territory of Rupa is not auspicious land. However I have dreamt that there was a lot of fine tsa tsa’s and a fine vase which I was carrying. [In that dream] there was a small mountain called Ma sang. If you build a monastery or retreat there, it will be auspicious. Let’s go there”. Then, Pema Dorje, Lama Karma, Chophel, Bhapu Pema and Sherpa Nyima and myself all together, in a jeep went up to mTtso ling meadow, which these days is known as Ma sang Gi ri.<sup>221</sup> There was lightning and thunder, a rainbow pitched in the sky and a soft rain of flowers descended. All these amazing auspicious excellent providential signs were collectively experienced. Before, in a dream I had at Changlang, ḍākinīs had foretold the dimensions of the land and the nearby mountains with flowing waters. Since I had seen that in the dream, I was

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<sup>220</sup> (JFF: 152).

<sup>221</sup>The mountain is near to the tiny village of Chillipaam about three kilometres from Rupa. The mountain was considered haunted and locals avoided it. There is now a prevailing belief that KDL tamed the troublesome spirits of the land. To the point that local practitioners labeled as ‘Bon po’ (not necessarily Bon po but certainly representatives of an indigenous non- Buddhist tradition in the area) report that when they communicate with these spirits, the spirits complain about ‘That lama’ who forced them to tell him their names and thereby subjugated their power. Pema Tendar (Personal Communication: 2006).

unremittingly happy.<sup>222</sup> I said to Pema Dorje “It’s very excellent if a temple is established on this land, by any means obtain authorisation to build a small temple here. Asking this, I offered one thousand rupees. After obtaining that authorization, I said that I wished to build a temple arranged like Zangdokpalri. Then we gathered all the materials. Minister Khrimy Sahib established the main dharma centre (Sangnak Choling) in 1988. That year we also started building the Zangdokpalri temple.<sup>223</sup>



Figure 25. Zangdokpalri temple under construction in 2006.

### **Revelation of the dances**

In 1988 a ground breaking ceremony occurred and work began on Kunzang Dechen Lingpa’s monastic seat and Zangdokpalri temple. At this point in the *rnam thar* Kunzang Dechen Lingpa’s recollections end and the narrative voice changes to that of his students. Here the language changes from a simple colloquial style to a much more formal and

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<sup>222</sup> (JFF: 155).

<sup>223</sup> (JFF: 156).

verbose account of his life. The account begins with Kunzang Dechen Lingpa emerging from a six month long retreat in a remote region of Arunachal Pradesh:

'In the region of Mon is the sacred place of Bhagajang<sup>224</sup> which is the self-arisen abode of rDo rje phag mo, in the upper reaches of a village called sMyug ma gdung .The entire area of a place called Zhi mi tsi, is replete with varieties of red and yellow flowers and numerous kinds of wild animals and birds which gambol and play in peace and harmony. In 1996 Kyabje<sup>225</sup> stayed in that place and embarked upon a six months retreat. When he emerged all of us dharma brothers and sisters and sponsors gathered together and requested a longevity empowerment. At that time Kyabje told us it would be very good if we were able to present a descent of blessings ceremonial dance (*byin 'bebs 'cham*).<sup>226</sup>

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa then embarked upon teaching them all a series of dances which had appeared to him as revelatory instructions. One morning all the young monks were instructed to gather. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa told them that he had revealed a series of dances as mind *gter ma* and that he wished to teach them the steps:

First he performed the *byin 'bebs*, descent of blessings ceremonial dance, teaching the dance steps about three times, then, like that all the students trained diligently. Then a longevity empowerment was given. A few days later here at this holy place, he performed rDo rje grol lod rites and also from his profound expansive mind (*gter ma*) bestowed instructions for the Black Hat dance. After that in Rangapara in 1994, Kyabje said "This year, It would be good to be able to enter into a *sgrub chen*<sup>227</sup> and [perform] a longevity empowerment together with the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche ceremonial dance which liberates upon seeing, all for the benefit of sentient beings. In a dream last night Guru Rinpoche showed me the dance steps, I clearly remember" saying this he demonstrated the manner of the Vajra dance to all the gathered pupils. After that, in the depths of some students hearts whirled excellent visions, pure faith and pure perception of the teacher and they had dreams in which they dreamed about yidam and ḍākinī performing the dance. They related this to Kyabje, who immediately revealed the dance of the yidam in accordance with the root text. The ceremonial dance of the ḍākinī was also taught. Then, in order to tame all evil earth spirits, nāga and mountain spirits, the earth-taming dance of the five families of great garuda was performed. Thus these *gter ma* root texts and profound arrangements were kindly granted and bestowed upon us, brothers and sisters all. <sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Richard Blurton, as part of a British Museum project, has recently conducted research on the pilgrimage to Bhagajang. It is a site consisting of a group of high altitude lakes located in the hills above the Se La a pass at thirteen thousand feet which separates Western Arunachal Pradesh from Tawang and the onward route to Tsona in South-Eastern Tibet. The lakes are imagined as the residences of rDo rje Phag mo and dPal ldan Lha mo. There is currently no publication of his work.

<sup>225</sup> From this point on KDL is referred to in the *rnam thar* as Rinpoche or more often the honorific title of Kyabje.

<sup>226</sup> (JFF: 155).

<sup>227</sup> Literally 'great accomplishment' a retreat lasting ten days or longer in which one practices day and night. It culminates in empowerments and dances to which all the public are invited.

<sup>228</sup> (JFF: 157-9). KDL's American patron Moke Mokotoff is in the process of producing a documentary on KDL, the Zangdokpalri temple and of the various revelatory dances. A preview of which can be accessed at [http://www.zangdokpalri.org/media\\_documentary.html](http://www.zangdokpalri.org/media_documentary.html).

Later that year, at another old historic temple and an affiliate to the temple in Rupa, in the nearby village of Jiagoan, named in the *rnam thar* as Ji sngang<sup>229</sup> Kunzang Dechen Lingpa had several monks there who were in retreat. Visiting them he said to his senior student and the head monk of the temple, Tshewang Dhondrup, together with about eight other of his closest disciples:

'It is not possible to accomplish [the building of] Zangdokpalri since the swirling depths of commitment is not present. The benefit for the Dharma and all sentient beings is not coming forth. Now I have cause to go to Zangdokpalri, I am close to departing to the Buddha field (close to dying)'. Tshewang Dhondrup and the other retreatants all offered mandalas and prostrations and with tears flowing from their eyes said "Rinpoche, by any means, remain here with us. Zangdokpalri, the monks' quarters and retreat complex will be built, all will help. We offer our commitment in accordance with your enlightened intention for it to be completed. By offering this vow in your presence Precious Lama who embodies the three jewels together with oath water in your presence we pledge this oath. Then in 2000, from the depths of our hearts, roots, and bones the building of Zangdokpalri commenced."<sup>230</sup>

As the years progressed Kunzang Dechen Lingpa became a well-known and respected lama in the region and was offered a series of temples by communities in the West Kameng and Tawang districts. In 1997 the fourteenth Dalai Lama visited and blessed the site. Other important Tibetan religious figures followed including in 2003 the then head of the rNying ma lineage Penor Rinpoche visited to perform a long life empowerment and gave his blessings to the temple building. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was happy that the work had begun on the Zangdokpalri temple and on the surrounding retreat complex of Sangnak Choling. He described the different aspects of the temple and its environs:

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<sup>229</sup> This refers to a nearby village in East Kameng district approximately ten kilometres from Rupa.

<sup>230</sup>(JFF: 160-61).



Figure 26. Zangdokpalri temple in 2010.

### The outer aspect of Zangdokpalri

This place is like a throne. Surrounding the base of the mountain in the eight directions are the eight petals of a lotus. The sky is an eight spoked parasol that is a joyful, radiant, clear lapis blue. The right and left sides are resplendent with the signs and symbols of method and wisdom. There are rivers of flowing water and *shang shang*<sup>231</sup> [birds] which, upon alighting, encourage a mind of renunciation. In the four directions are the symbols of the four continents. Here also there is small mountain shaped like a heart, a formation which is auspicious.<sup>232</sup>

<sup>231</sup> The *shang shang* is a chimera depicted either with just the head or the whole torso of a human including the arms with the lower body of a winged bird. In rNying ma traditions the *shang shang* symbolizes *phrin las* (enlightened activity).

<sup>232</sup> (JFF: 163). The heart in the *rnam thar* is also likened symbolically to Atiyoga as the 'heart of the profound teachings' (JFF: 163).



Figure 27. View from the front of the Zangdokpalri temple 2010.

### **The inner aspect of Zangdokpalri**

The inner aspect is built according to the specifications of the Copper Coloured Mountain lotus light palace of the master of the three times, Guru Rinpoche. It is beautiful, bright and joyous. Its three progressive storeys represent the natural palace of the three kayas. The outside and inside are adorned with parasols and victory banners, and surrounded by innumerable offering gods and goddesses making graceful outer and inner enticing gestures.<sup>233</sup>

### **The secret aspect of Zangdokpalri**

The topmost level enshrines the Long life Buddha Amitāyus together with a beautiful retinue. In the middle level of this temple pervades the diffuse light of the blessings of The King of Wish Fulfilling Jewels, the Lord of [Kunzang Dechen Lingpa] Rinpoche's revealed teachings together with all hosts of deities. Whoever encounters this level is led to the land of Guru Rinpoche, Nga yab gling and remains there. Whoever connects with five male and female wealth deities in the lower levels will be showered with a rain of health, wealth and happiness and abide in this joyful state.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> (JFF: 164).

<sup>234</sup> (JFF: 164).

The temple work began in earnest and carried on throughout Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's life. The construction led by one of his senior students Tshewang Dhondrup who was not a trained architect or engineer and yet designed the temple in accordance with Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's instructions.



Figure 28. Tshewang Dhondrup on the top level of the temple under construction in 2006

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa continued with his revitalisation of the rNying ma Buddhist tradition in the region, creating a traditional three year retreat centre and overseeing the education of the monks at the site in Arunachal Pradesh and the nuns at Tashi Choling in Assam and the building of his temple Zangdokpalri. However as he grew older his health began to falter.

## Testament and ‘authentication’ as a *gter ston*

Since 2000 Kunzang Dechen Lingpa had suffered from a heart condition and had been regularly going to Guwahati, a large city in Assam for medical treatment. However as his heart condition grew worse he was taken to Norvic hospital in Nepal. During this time an ailing Kunzang Dechen Lingpa thinking that he was about to die, issued a series of words and instructions as well as a prophecy indicating himself as a *gter ston* to his gathered family and close disciples:

From a succession of lives I have had karmic connection to Tashi Dolma. Dungse Rigdzin, please take care of the mother from who you were born, with love and tenderness. For this girl, my attendant, Tsering Paldron, the entire monastery must respect and lovingly take care of her. As for me, when I am dead, I request this body to be cremated by Bya bral Rin po che<sup>235</sup>, the ashes must be scattered around the two temples, and also offer these ashes as an item to go into stupas, statues and tsa tsa. If the ashes are made into precious pills, whosoever mouth they enters their sickness will be cured. If they use this by excellent, middling or lesser connections; the excellent one is they will attain enlightenment in a single lifetime, the middling is they will be born into the three higher realms; the lesser will be released from the three lower realms. In this way, these causal conditions of accomplishment are due to the compassion of the Maha Guru and from the heart’s pure intention. In this way there is no doubt that this will be accomplished. To all you patrons, [and lay] brothers and sisters, as for your wealth and luxuries, these are as illusory as dreams, honour and respect the two monasteries. From the pure realm of Dharmadhātu five kinds of being-taming manifestations will arise.<sup>236</sup> If all the faith and vows remain unblemished; one [manifestation] will take care of the two monasteries. As for me at the time of my death, even though my actual body is not there perform trusting prayers, visions and dreams, have no doubt that we will see each other again and again. As said by Pad ma ‘byung gnas “As long as samsara is not emptied, manifestations will perpetually arise.”<sup>237</sup>

Also in 2000, whilst staying in a hospital in Delhi, India Kunzang Dechen Lingpa had surgery to have a pacemaker fitted, after which he was quite fragile. Concerning his *gter ma* cycle Kunzang Dechen Lingpa gave this prophecy<sup>238</sup>:

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<sup>235</sup>Chatral Rinpoche (1913- ) a famous rNying ma *rdzogs chen* master, yogi and a lineage holder of the *Klong chen snying thig* cycle.

<sup>236</sup> Here KDL is saying that he will take rebirth in the bodies of five separate beings.

<sup>237</sup> (JFF: 164-6).

<sup>238</sup> A prophecy such as this is one of the ways in which a *gter ston* or *gter ma* achieves ‘legitimacy’. See Gyatso (1993:127).

*For the sake of future sentient beings,  
There appeared in Tibet countless manifestations of Lotsawa Konchok Jungnay.*

*One was born to the lineage of Lho brag brag dkar:*

*Marked by a mole on the right cheek,  
tiger stripes upon the left knee and  
a trident in the middle of the forehead.*

*Characterized by the blessings of Ye shes mtsho rgyal and Padmasambhava themselves.*

*From these three: the high, middling and lesser connections;*

*To the highest: innumerable bka' ma and gter ma teachings*

*and pure visions will appear.*

*He will lead those who have fortunate connections.*

*To the middling: from the depths of his own wisdom mind conferrals of enlightened mind*

*gter ma will surely descend.*

*One who does not act foolishly and is content to remain in a lowly place,*

*whoever encounters you will travel along the true path to liberation.*

*A life span of perhaps 83 or 93 years.*

*Then, in my presence, cross over to the land of lotus light.*

Then Kunzang Dechen Lingpa proceeded to bestow all his teachings to his son Dungse Rinpoche and all the main monks and nuns, from his cycle entitled 'dGongs gTer Padma gsang thig'. At the same time he enthroned his only son Rigdzin Dorje as his regent and heir.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **HEADING WEST (2001-2005)**

#### **Travels to America (2001- 2006)**

In 1987 an Assamese student of Dudjom Rinpoche called Tej Hazirika was travelling through Arunachal Pradesh. Stopping by chance in the small town of Rupa he visited the temple there and came across Kunzang Dechen Lingpa and his wife who were living in the temple at the time. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa had a profound effect upon him. Hazirika returned to the United States and related his experiences to his friend Moke Mokotoff. Together they decided to help solicit funds to build a small temple on the site which would eventually become Zangdokpalri. A few years later Hazirika visited again at which time Kunzang Dechen Lingpa expressed his wish to teach and fundraise in America. Arrangements were made but meanwhile his heart condition had worsened and he was hospitalised to have a pacemaker fitted.

Early in 2001, his students report, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was having premonitions that the world was entering into a precarious state and he was increasingly worried that he would pass away without adequately providing for all of the monks and nuns under his care. For these reasons, his family and students state, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa indicated his urgent view that he come to the West. When he first arrived in New York in May 2001 he spent some time recuperating. Recalling that time, in a teaching he gave in 2002, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa also explained that he had only revealed a fraction of the *gter ma* that he had wished to:

Until now I have only been able to reveal two volumes of texts, which are mind treasures. If my students have the proper merit I will be able to reveal another five or six volumes of more treasure writings. The reason I am coming to the West is because I have quite a few monks and nuns, students in those areas in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and the monasteries there are not very well established up till now. They still need a lot of building to be done, more rooms for the monks and nuns and so forth. Also I'd like to establish a school and a medical clinic, as well as a guesthouse. There are lots of things to be done because, if at this point I would pass away, the monks and nuns would be just left there without a proper establishment and then everything would be lost in the end. So I feel very concerned about it.<sup>239</sup>

In 2001 with his heart condition still an issue, Hazirika (identified in the text as Shes rab rDo rje) and Mokotoff (Jam dbyangs rdo rje) with the intention of getting medical treatment, both of them, invited Kunzang Dechen Lingpa to America.<sup>240</sup>

### **September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001**

After recovering from his post-operative state, a New York based Sherpa community organized a month-long teaching schedule for Kunzang Dechen Lingpa. Mokotoff recalls, it was about two weeks before the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>:

We had a few days off between the teaching schedules so I drove Rinpoche around Manhattan to show him the sights. Heading downtown we came near to the World Trade Center. I explained to him that this was one of the most famous buildings in the city and I asked him if he would like to go up to the top and look out over the skyline. He said he didn't want to go up but we drove around it three times before leaving.<sup>241</sup>

After that beginning on August 30<sup>th</sup> at a small Buddhist temple in Manhattan, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa embarked upon a series of teachings where during a teaching one day, he stopped mid-sentence to remark upon the nature of impermanence. The *rnam thar* states:

Then in New York, during the course of one week, while he was giving the commentary on the *rdzogs chen* teaching *Chos dbyings mdzod* for seventy students, he stopped and said these words "Our mundane world is impermanent, like the city of the Gandharvas (*Dri bza'i grong khyer*). For example, regardless of its fame, this World Trade Center could collapse into nothing in an instant." Two days later, the World Trade Center, was struck by planes piloted by terrorists. It was destroyed from its foundations. All the followers and students said "It is as if Rinpoche truly sees the future". Thus, all were in a state of amazement, their faith was greatly increased from strength to strength and Rinpoche became praised and renowned.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup>AV (WT: 2002).

<sup>240</sup>(JFF: 171).

<sup>241</sup>Mokotoff (INT: 2009).

<sup>242</sup>(JFF 171-72).

Rigdzin Dorje recalls that on the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>:

That morning we were having breakfast and the television was on seeing the events unfold, my English wasn't good, and I thought it was film, I said to Rinpoche, 'look there's a film about what you were teaching'. Then someone explained that it was actually happening at that moment and we were so terribly sad. Later that week we arranged to do a '*pho ba* ceremony in Central Park for the benefit of all those beings that passed on that day, many New Yorkers came to that ceremony.<sup>243</sup>

After that Kunzang Dechen Lingpa visited America every year until he passed away in order to raise dearly needed funds for supporting his students at home. He was also consciously creating conditions for his teachings and the Vajrayāna teachings in general to be established and flourish in the West, particularly in America. A significant amount of his *gter ma* revelations were made in America at the behest of Western students. In response to his statement that he had only revealed a small fraction of *dgongs gter*, he was asked by some of his American students to reveal more. In this period of his life, perhaps sensitive to the fact that he was aging and increasingly infirm, he began a prolific period of scriptural revelation, particularly while he was travelling in the United States.

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<sup>243</sup>RD (INT: 2008). In the *rnam thar* (JFF:172) it states : 'Then coming to Central Park, the place where the World Trade Center was destroyed; on behalf of the many people who died there, (Rinpoche) gave deep and profound dedication prayers, after that, he held (them with) loving compassion. A geographical error, made by one of the writers of the *rnam thar* who had never travelled to New York and did not know the World Trade Centre did not collapse in Central Park, nor was it located there.

## Revelation of ‘The Vajra Verses’ and garuda *gter ma*

In 2001, while he was staying in Manhattan, sometime before the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa revealed *rDzogs pa chen po'i rgyud rdo rje'i tshig rkang* (*The Vajra Verses*) a *rdzogs chen* teaching which his son continues to teach in America to this



Figure 29. Topanga Canyon, California.

day.<sup>244</sup>In Woodstock, New York in the same year, at the request of his American translator John Whitney Petit, he revealed an extension of a Mañjuśrī sādhana. Upon his return to America for his second teaching tour in 2002 in San

Diego, California he revealed

and taught a revelation of *sGrol ma dkar mo* (*White Tara*), and in an area near Los Angeles, California he revealed a *gter ma* text entitled *Khyung sgrub na ga tshar gcod bshug so* (*The garuda method to annihilate nāga*) at the behest of one of his American followers David Scharff:

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa came to America for the first time in 2001 to have a new pacemaker fitted and to raise funds for his Zangdokpalri temple. In the fall of 2001 he gave teachings in New York then he went to Woodstock to give more teachings. I attended that long life empowerment in Woodstock and brought a picture of a long life mandala as a gift for Rinpoche. At some point during this time he revealed the Mañjuśrī sādhana at John Whitney Petit's house. Many of Dudjom Rinpoche's old Western students were gathered there at the time to receive his teachings. The following year 2002, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa returned to America, and again to Woodstock and I again attended and received teachings from him. It was at that time that Rinpoche had said that he had more *gter ma* to reveal and he was asked how we could help him to produce the right conditions conducive to their revelation. Rinpoche replied that all *gter mas* are present in the *gter ston's* mind and all that is needed is for an auspicious time, auspicious offerings and request. He

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<sup>244</sup> A translation and examination of this *gter ma* text can be found in chapter ten of this study.

explained that if all those conditions were present then the teachings would spill forth. Now before I came to the teachings I had this thought to ask Rinpoche if he had any teachings on Garuda and I had two Garuda statues that I wanted to offer to him. During a break in the teachings I ran out to my car and grabbed a duffel bag I had containing those statues. Rinpoche was about to eat and have a rest and I asked his son, Dungse Rinpoche (Rigdzin Dorje) if his father had ever revealed any Garuda *gter ma*. He told me 'No, but why don't you request this of him?'

So I went in and made prostrations and offered the Garuda statues to Rinpoche who thought I was asking for them to be blessed; so he blessed them and returned them to me. I pushed them back into Rinpoche's hands and requested that he reveal the most wrathful Garuda teachings as a matter of great urgency for this degenerate time in our world. About a week later Rinpoche came to California, where I was living. He stayed in a place near to Los Angeles called Topanga Canyon. It is quite a beautiful rural place. In his room over his bed was a painting of a giant eagle clutching a serpent. On the land where he was staying there was a tree with an eagles' nest under which Rinpoche would go to sit every day. He told me that he took all of these things as auspicious signs and it was during this time that he wrote down, over the course of a few days, his Garuda *gter ma* in a *ḍākinī* script which had appeared in his mind. It was about fifteen hand-written exercise book pages. Dungse Rinpoche transcribed it onto about three or four pages of handwritten *dbu med* script with a colophon. When it was completed they called me and Rinpoche hit me on the head with it and gave it to me as a practice. I then took it to John Whitney Petit to translate and Khenpo Sonam formatted it into a *dpe cha* style. By 2004 it was wholly translated and offered as a full practice. It was practiced for the first time in California in Topanga Canyon near to the spot where it was first revealed.<sup>245</sup>

## America and the United Kingdom 2003-2005

That year in 2002 after a long teaching tour in the United States Kunzang Dechen Lingpa returned to India, at Tashi Choling he revealed another *gter ma* 'bDe chen dkar mo'. After



Figure 30. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa at Wolfson College, Oxford 2005.

that, for one month he stayed in retreat in a cave in Nepal after which his illness intensified. In 2003 he returned to America and while receiving further treatment in a hospital in New York had a dream in which *ḍākinīs* advised him to visit the South West region of America. It was arranged for him

<sup>245</sup> Scharff (INT: 2009). Out of respect for the request in the colophon of this teaching that the contents of this teaching not be shared with anyone uninitiated into this practice I have not included a copy of the handwritten *gter ma* notes here.

to travel to Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico to offer teachings there:

Having been invited there by a Tibetan Dharma Centre in Santa Fe, Rinpoche gave teachings of *gcod* and so on and then continued on to New York [where he] performed *gcod* ceremonies and taught about taming and benefitting sentient beings in whatever way was appropriate. Then again [he] went to Santa Fe and gave a pure advice and teachings on *rdzogs chen*. One New Mexico patron offered Rinpoche some land and when arriving at that place, he performed a Rig byed ma (Kurukullā) fire ritual. For the whole day multiple rainbows shone [in the sky] and crossed over each other. This phenomenon of amazingly dense rainbow light had never occurred there before. Clear joy and faith manifested to all the faithful who gathered there.<sup>246</sup>

For the next three years Kunzang Dechen Lingpa returned to the West for extended teaching tours. In 2005 he visited the United Kingdom giving teachings in London,



Figure 31. *Healing Chö* in Oxford 2005

Brighton and Oxford where he performed the *Healing Chö* ceremony in May of that year at Wolfson College, Oxford. After his UK tour he continued on travelling and teaching in New York, Vermont, Rhode Island and California where he attended a world peace festival,

diagnosed illness and treatments for many of his American followers and visited the Los Angeles Zoo:

When Rinpoche visited a zoo in California [there was] a very bad tempered tigress but when Rinpoche arrived she very calmly came close to him and became sweet-natured and rolled over. The zookeepers were very surprised and full of wonderment and respect.<sup>247</sup>

That year, while he was travelling overseas, the leaves of the Bodhi tree in front of Tashi Choling fell everywhere, and the colour changed. All his monks and nuns collectively saw

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<sup>246</sup> (JFF: 176).

<sup>247</sup> (JFF: 183-184).

different kinds of extraordinary and strange signs. In 2006 in the tenth Tibetan month on the thirteenth day, from America, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa quickly returned to Tashi Choling in Rangapara, Assam<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> (JFF: 185).

## CHAPTER SIX

### PASSING AWAY AT ZANGDOKPALRI (2005-2006)

#### Return to India 2005



Figure 32. Tashi Choling temple, Rangapara, Assam.

Upon his arrival back at Tashi Choling, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa scolded the nuns for not making *gtor ma* correctly saying sharply to them that if they didn't learn to do it they wouldn't be able to continue after he was gone. In October of 2006 at the end of the last *sgrubs chen* that he presided over; over ten thousand people had come to see the sacred dances and receive his teachings. To his close students he spoke of his old age and infirmity and indicated that it was time that he changed into a new body:<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> (JFF: 185).

gSang Yum (Tashi Dolma) had often said to him ‘Now you are elderly and you travel a lot, if you die in a foreign land we would not be able to arrange to bring your hold body back here’. Rinpoche said ‘I will not die in America, or in Nepal or in Assam. I will die in a sacred place where the earth is pure and the mountains are high, in an extraordinary place like Zangdokpalri.’<sup>250</sup>

At that time he spoke with his old friend another rNying ma lama who lived in the nearby town of Bomdila, and expressed his sorrow about feeling that he had not accomplished enough for the sake of sentient beings. Being old and ailing, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa



Figure 33. The gates of Tashi Choling, Rangapara, Assam.

indicated that the time had come for him to change bodies. He also spoke to his senior student Tshewang Dhondrup, the main head of the monastery, regarding the outer and inner construction of the temple, telling him that it could be done slower and in greater detail for three more years. He instructed his student to ensure that he supervised and completed it perfectly and in line with his wishes.<sup>251</sup>At that time several of

students had dreams of five suns arising at the same time and of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa indicating to them

in their dreams that he was ‘close to reaching the third storey of Zangdokpalri’.<sup>252</sup> Also at that time he himself had a prophetic dream regarding his next reincarnation:

Near to the iron gate of Tashi Choling there were two devotees; Bhutanese girls. One opened her belly and said ‘enter here’. Then the second girl opened up her belly and said the same ‘enter here’. Rinpoche remarked to one of the nuns that he had dreamed of an early sign of his next reincarnation.<sup>253</sup>

<sup>250</sup>(JFF: 185-6).

<sup>251</sup> (JFF 187-88).

<sup>252</sup> (JFF: 188) contains accounts of several of KDL’s students having dreams that he was about to pass away.

<sup>253</sup> (JFF: 188).

His visions and dreams continued:

In Rinpoche's vision, in the midst of the sky, the actual body of the demon conqueror Yidam rDo rje gro lod appeared. [Rinpoche] prayed fervently and had great sadness in his heart. He spoke to the Guru Rinpoche [saying] that he was left in this frightful ocean of suffering of samsara and that they should take him immediately to the pure land. He requested to be taken to the lotus light palace of Zangdokpalri he cried and prayed fervently for a long time.<sup>254</sup>

Then Kunzang Dechen Lingpa gave a long life empowerment and teachings, tea and saffron rice were offered to the entire gathering. On that same day there was a huge earthquake. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa gave a talk that day and spoke of why it was so necessary to build Zangdokpalri as it was for the prosperity of the dharma and for the benefit of sentient beings. He advised everyone, from the workers in the monastery to his followers overseas; to all the monks and nuns and practitioners and sponsors that they should all remember to observe their sacred commitments. He warned them not to not fall into distraction but abide together in harmony and be with one mind and one goal, trusting and helping each other and performing together meritorious actions, big and small. Finally, he taught the importance of completing the Zangdokpalri temple as a symbolic representation of the land of the glorious copper coloured mountain.<sup>255</sup> The next day Kunzang Dechen Lingpa, his wife and son and all the monks and nuns went to a meadow near to the temple to have a picnic:

Rinpoche enjoyed watching everyone playing. He asked everyone to sing and dance. Usually he did not like this particular way of singing but that day he seemed to enjoy it, he enjoyed watching every one of his students singing and happy. Then he sat with his son and gave him advice on how to administer and serve the teachings of the Buddha. Later that day Rigdzin Dorje Rinpoche requested permission to go to Rangapara. Rinpoche told him to go but to return very quickly.<sup>256</sup>

The following night at two am, Tshering Paldron, his attendant helped Kunzang Dechen Lingpa to get up to go to the toilet. She noted that his breathing was sharp and raspy, she

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<sup>254</sup> (JFF: 189).

<sup>255</sup> (JFF189-90).

<sup>256</sup> (JFF: 190).

helped him return to his bed and he slept for a little while. At six am his breathing became heavy and gasping and she suggested that he go to see a doctor at the hospital, which he refused to do. When the director of the monastery Tshering Dhondrup came to see him, he saw that his teacher was not well and that his breathing was uncomfortable and suggested going to the doctor but still Kunzang Dechen Lingpa refused. After much insisting and noting that his breathing was become increasingly laboured they rushed him to the military hospital in Rupa. As he left he remarked to his attendant Tshering Paldron, 'Now I am going, you all stay well'.

### Passing away in March 2006



Figure 34. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's body remaining in meditation.

At 1pm on March 28<sup>th</sup> 2006, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa Rinpoche, the great Lhodrak *gter ston*, passed away at the military hospital in Rupa. The Indian doctors attending him were astonished to see that even though their equipment indicated he had passed away; his body still appeared to be breathing:<sup>257</sup>

His body remained in the sacred meditation and he was brought back to the temple with elaborate procession and enshrined within his residence on the land. When his son Rigdzin Dorje arrived to see him, he offered a bell and vajra in his hands and requested [his father] to abide in the sacred meditation. Immediately [Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's] countenance started to glow more than when he was alive and his skin appeared youthful and remained in deep meditation.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> (JFF: 190-193).

<sup>258</sup> (JFF: 193).

## Signs of Liberation

This part of the *rnam thar* is taken up mostly by a section quoting Tibetan texts which give descriptions of the sign of liberation, employed here to indicate that Kunzang Dechen Lingpa passed away in accordance with the proscribed signs and indications, lights, sounds and natural phenomenon:

These are the signs of liberation of Rinpoche into the primordial wisdom of awareness; the inseparable union of the open vast expanse of Samantabhadri and the great radiant clarity of natural luminosity Dharmakāya Samantabhadra. There are three ways how a *rdzogs pa chen po* practitioner liberates: The highest, the middle and lower. This was in the manner of the highest practitioner. The signs of complete liberation were actually seen.<sup>259</sup> From *rDo rje sems dpa' snying gi me long (The Mirror of the Wisdom Mind of Vajrasattva)*<sup>260</sup> it states: Passing into Para nirvana is in two aspects. First that which is complete and perfect awakening and second the manifestation of complete awakening. The complete and perfect awakening is displayed through the complete dissolution of the body without any remains. The manifest complete awakening is displayed through lights and rainbows, relics and earthquake and so forth. Also from the *Sku gdung'bar ba'i rgyud (The Tantra of Blazing Remains)*<sup>261</sup> it states: The person with the highest realization will see this illusory appearance and arrive at the true state of elements and attain the result of the ultimate and the contaminated body will disappear manifesting into its true nature. The outer signs are when one passes into parinirvana there will be relics. Likewise there will be lights and sounds and the earth will quake and rumble.<sup>262</sup>

## Lights and Rainbows

On the day he passed away his family and students saw rainbow circles of sunlight in the area during the day and rainbow circles around the moon at night. On the sixth day after Kunzang Dechen Lingpa died at ten o' clock in the morning a bright light shone from the relic body and penetrated the ceiling:

These kinds of light are described in the tenth chapter of the *Theg mchog mdzod (Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle)* by Klong chen pa.<sup>263</sup> The appearances of these lights are described in three aspects; the light which shines vertically, the light which radiate like the spokes [of a wheel] and the light which shines in circles. If vertical light appears and shoots into the sky it signifies the

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<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> A *rdzogs chen* tantra and part of the textual support for the *Bi ma snying thig*.

<sup>261</sup> This *rdzogs chen* tantra attributed to Vimalamitra is written in the form of a dialogue between the Buddha Vajradhāra and mKha' 'gro ma gSal yid. The third chapter is concerned with the signs accompanying a saintly death. See (Martin: 1994).

<sup>262</sup> (JFF: 193-4).

<sup>263</sup> Part of the collection of *rdzogs chen* teachings gathered in the *mDzod bdun (Seven treasures)* of Klong chen pa. See Germano (1992).

naked realization of primordial purity. This means that the being does not have to go through the state of *bar do*. Remaining within the state of *rig pa*, an attained one arrives into the inner space of spontaneous presence and achieves the attainment of the state of awakening. This was the sign that radiated outwards. From the 'Blazing Remains' it states: If the light shines vertically this will not let the *bar do* occur. In an instant Buddha-hood is attained. Such signs as these were demonstrated.<sup>264</sup>

Two weeks after Kunzang Dechen Lingpa passed away, rainbow lights in concentric circles were seen in the sky. On auspicious days there were circles of rainbows around the sun and the moon.<sup>265</sup>



Figure 35. Circle of rainbow light around the sun one week after Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's death.

### **Sounds of liberation**

Three days after Kunzang Dechen Lingpa passed away, white and red liquids flowed from his nostrils. Instantly a loud thunder clap resounded and shook the whole of Zangdokpalri and the residence that enshrined the relic body. On the sixth day in the afternoon there

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<sup>264</sup> (JFF: 195).

<sup>265</sup> At this point I had arrived along with KDL's American patron Moke Mokotoff and his translator Khenpo Sonam. We all were witness to these lights as well as the loud booming sounds coming from the sky.

was a huge flash of lightning, a thunder bolt which shook the residence and hit the prayer flag pole in front of the residence where Rinpoche was enshrined, after which a rainbow appeared.<sup>266</sup>



Figure 36. View of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's residence from Zangdokpalri temple.

These loud sounds and instances of thunder were taken as an indication that Kunzang Dechen Lingpa had liberated in wrathful form:

In the twentieth chapter of the 'Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle' the omniscient master Klong chen pa said there are two kinds of sounds: The humming and the crashing sound and the peaceful continuous sound like a drum. This peaceful hum or murmuring sound indicates that the peaceful body is absorbed in deep meditation and within seven days stability is gained. The other sound is loud and abrupt, which is the sound of the heroic thunder clap. This indicates the body has liberated in wrathful form. Of those two sounds the loud sound was heard on the third and sixth day. Out of the two forms of Sambhogakaya one peaceful and one wrathful the indicated signs showed that [Kunzang Dechen Lingpa] liberated in wrathful form. Among the five Buddha Families, which is indicated by the four directions and above, the sound arose from above so it belonged to the Buddha family.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> (JFF: 196).

<sup>267</sup> (JFF: 197).

## Appearance of relics

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's body was not cremated, but packed in salt to preserve it until his eventual enshrinement on the third floor of the completed Zangdokpalri temple. The preservation of the body was at the request of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa who had told



Figure 37. Preparing the relic salt.

Rigdzin Dorje and his followers shortly before he passed away:

'When I die you can preserve my body for the benefit of sentient beings because upon seeing hearing, remembering and coming into contact with my body they will have the benefit of liberating into the lotus light pure land. If you cannot do this then you may cremate it, or put it in the river.<sup>268</sup> Because Rinpoche's body was preserved in its life form, until now no relics have appeared, but while burning relic salt in the fire, five coloured lights appeared. We hope that in the future relics will appear from the body.<sup>269</sup>

## Colophon

At this point the *rnam thar* ends with a general explanation and colophon:

All of these signs have appeared before from the beginning of the early Buddhas, the great accomplished masters of India like dGa' rab rdo rje, Shri Sangha and the great twenty-five disciples of Guru Rinpoche down to our root teacher the great *gter ston*. All these miraculous signs of their passing were demonstrated in the same indistinguishable manner. They left their form-body which is conditioned to change, for the benefit of beings that are left behind. The [form-body] is transformed into the youthful vase body endowed with the six extraordinary qualities of primordial basic space and thus attaining the realization of the self-display of the ultimate '*Og min*

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<sup>268</sup> (JFF: 198-203).

<sup>269</sup> (JFF: 205). See Owen (2012) on the philosophical underpinnings of bodily preservation in Tibetan Buddhism.

(Akanishta) Buddha-field<sup>270</sup> of the Guru rDo rje gro lod. *This life and liberation of our precious master, the great treasure revealer king entitled 'The enriching faith and devotion of the fortunate ones' was compiled by gSang sngags bsTan dar and Tshe dbangs Don sgrub and annotated by the beggar Gyur med Phun tshog, the faithful one whose lotus bud has slightly blossomed through the blessings of the precious lord.*<sup>271</sup>

## **Aftermath (2006-2010)**

At the time of my first visit to Arunachal Pradesh and to the temple at Zangdokpalri I was there for personal, not academic reasons. I spent most of the days attending the ceremonies which were being continuously performed both day and night by his devotees and assisted with the translation of the numerous prayers for a swift rebirth which were being sent by prominent rNying lamas in India and America. I did not know at that time that I would be continuing on my studies or that I would come to translate Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *rnam thar* into English. As his son Rigdzin Dorje returned over the course of the next few years I continued to assist and travel with them as they conducted their *Healing Chö* tour across America.

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<sup>270</sup> This is the highest of all Buddha fields, according to Vajrayāna tradition it is where bodhisattvas attain final Buddha-hood. rDo rje gro lod is one of the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche and the most wrathful. He is depicted riding upon a pregnant tigress. This statement here is re-iterating the point that KDL attained the 'highest level' of enlightenment in wrathful form.

<sup>271</sup> (JFF 205-10).

Later in 2006, Rigdzin Dorje and some of the monks and nuns returned to the United States to conduct another six month tour across America, bringing with them a bag of the



Figure 38. Rigdzin Dorje, Pema Tendar and Pema Wangdi at Lake Champlain, Vermont.

salt that had been packed around Rinpoche's body. (The salt would be changed every few days and either dispersed in a river or give to his followers in small pouches). I accompanied them for several weeks during this tour as they travelled along the East

coast. After a Healing Chö offered in Burlington, Vermont, Rigdzin Dorje, with a group of American followers, performed a ceremony on the shores of Lake Champlain and a bag of the salt was cast into the lake. As we moved on to Washington D.C. Rigdzin Dorje gave a series of teachings and empowerment on Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *gcod* teachings which were broadcast live on the internet.

## Consecration 2010

In 2007 I was asked to translate Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *rnam thar* into English and so began a series of trips to Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to interview some of the people central to his life. (Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's body remained enshrined in his residence for the next four years). It was shortly after this that I was interested to not only attempt to provide an account of his life for English readers, but to also understand how spiritual

practices and scriptural legacies such as the ones associated with Kunzang Dechen Lingpa continue to be relevant across time and cultures. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa once remarked in a teaching that the future continuation of the Vajrayāna teachings in a world which is hyper-connected yet increasingly fragmented, was akin to ‘a small butter-lamp in a strong wind’. This observation led me into part two of this study which aims to chart his legacy and the continuation of his teachings in light of issues such as ‘authenticity’, lineage, transmission and authority and the development of new hybrid forms of Vajrayāna Buddhism globally.

At the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011 the Zangdokpalri temple was completed and an elaborate ceremony ensued over the course of one month. My last visit at the time of writing was in September 2010, where I again met with Rigdzin Dorje in Assam to clarify some of the points in the translation of the *rnam thar*. I also travelled to the Zangdokpalri temple in Arunachal Pradesh where I completed my translation of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa’s *rnam thar* in the newly built guesthouse overlooking the completed temple. As Kunzang Dechen Lingpa indicated in his last testament and in conversations with his son and close disciples, he predicted that he would manifest in five different beings. In 2010 I asked Tshewang Dhondrup his devoted and dedicated director of the monastery, if there had been any indications of his teacher’s rebirth. He replied that there had not but that Kunzang Dechen Lingpa had told him that one of his manifestations would come back to the temple. He also told them that it was not necessary to go looking for his reincarnation as he would walk through the temple gates recognise them all and take care of them. They are still awaiting his return.



Figure 39. The young monks of Sangngak Choling.

**Swift rebirth prayer for Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's reincarnation.**

Composed by Thinley Norbu Rinpoche.

*In the formless ultimate space of absolute reality, the enlightened mind  
of the ever-excellent Buddha.*

*In the manifest kayas and pure lands of great bliss,  
and in the perfectly arranged *ḍākinī* realm of *Oḍḍiyāna*.*

*You who sport in eternal delight, Lord Protector, please grant us your protection.*

*You, incomparable Kunzang Dechen Lingpa,  
In order to tame disciples who cling to phenomena as permanent,  
have displayed the dissolution of your composite form body.*

*We, the assembly of child-like disciples, are tormented by suffering.  
Therefore, in order to dispel our torment, we the devoted followers,  
call upon you from the vast space of wisdom and compassion.*

*Swiftly assuming the manifest form of an emanation body,  
please perfectly fulfil the wishes of your disciples, we pray.*

*Thus, as requested by the students of the holy teacher from Assam in a letter by Lama Sonam Tobgyal  
accompanied by a silk scarf, on the auspicious fifteenth day of the second Tibetan lunar month. I,*

*Thinley Norbu immediately offered this prayer.*

*May its purpose be fulfilled exactly as it is wished.<sup>272</sup>*

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<sup>272</sup> Translated by KS and Amelia Hall in 2006.

**PART TWO: A SMALL BUTTER LAMP IN A STRONG  
WIND**

**THE LEGACY OF KUNZANG DECHEN LINGPA**



Figure 40. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa in 2005.

*In the United States a man builds a house to spend his later years in it and sells it before the roof is on...he settles in a place which he soon afterwards leaves to carry his changeable longings elsewhere...Death at length overcomes him, but it is before he is weary of his bootless chase of that complete felicity which is forever on the wing'.<sup>273</sup>*

***De Tocqueville 'Democracy in America'***

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<sup>273</sup> De Tocqueville (1835:13).

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## INTRODUCTION: BUDDHISM IN AMERICA

### **The pursuit of happiness**

The 'American Dream' has been a pervasive and fundamental constituent of identity and culture in the United States throughout its history. It is a vision in which anyone through their own self-reliance may attain the highest stature materially and spiritually, regardless of the circumstances of birth or position. The belief that each and every aspect of life can and should be democratic, that everyone has an inalienable right to happiness and success is the enduring myth of American culture, articulated in one of the nation's most sacred texts, the Declaration of Independence.<sup>274</sup> Despite the fact that the term was not actually coined until the 1930's<sup>275</sup> the idea it enshrines has been a dominant one in American history. Historian Jim Cullen writes that it is an idiom peculiarly American and one every American instantly recognizes, promoted as a shared belief system binding together disparate people who may otherwise be hostile to one another. It is a deeply entrenched assumption which in actuality often serves to obscure (either consciously or unconsciously) real divisions within American society.<sup>276</sup>

How does a pursuit of individual happiness intersect with Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism in the United States? The intention here is to examine how the concept of a 'democratic self' as a dominant force in the ethos of Western spirituality plays a role in the way that Buddhism has and will continue to develop in the United States. The aim is to investigate

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<sup>274</sup> See Bellah (1967) in which he proposes that the 'American way of life' is a form of civil religion with the equivalent of sacred texts such as the Declaration of Independence.

<sup>275</sup> See Adams (1931).

<sup>276</sup> See Cullen (2004:189).

the contestation surrounding manifestations of authority, legitimation, transmission and 'authenticity' as well as examining current manipulations of modern Vajrayāna practices.

Democratisation, adaptation, psychologization, commercialisation, gender and the advancements of digital technology are often identified by scholars of Buddhism in America<sup>277</sup> as the main issues which have influenced and contributed to the new hybrid forms which have emerged over the past forty years. In this study and in the ensuing chapters, these observations are used as touchstones for the examination of how Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's legacy presents itself in an American Buddhist arena. North America has been one of the most dominant non-Asian countries where perceived concepts of Buddhism have entered into popular culture and where attempts are made to reconstitute Buddhism in a modern iteration. It is also where both Asian and Euro-American Buddhists have presented forms of Buddhism adapted to Western sensibilities which in turn reverberate back to Asia and around the world, becoming forces that shape Buddhism globally. In light of this, it seems more fruitful to approach the topic through a lens of hybridity<sup>278</sup> rather than present categorisations which can never accurately define such a multivalent subject. American scholar Charles Prebish has expressed his dissatisfaction with the lack of new terminology in the field of American Buddhist studies and wonders if any new categories will emerge. Begging the question is it worthwhile to produce further categories? Prebish himself acknowledges that the fluidity and rapidity with which developments in this field now move render typologies even more unyielding and obsolete.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> For example, see Prebish (1999).

<sup>278</sup> See McMahan (2008).

<sup>279</sup> See Prebish (2011:252).

Since typologies are always limited there is no desire, in this study, to create additional static terminology particularly in light of something as sinuous, complex and nuanced as the many facets which constitute the practice and development of Tibetan Buddhism in North America. Another reason for not adopting the trend for rigid categorisation followed in some of the more prominent studies on American Buddhism<sup>280</sup> is that Asian Buddhists in these studies tend to be barely visible or feature only in separate works dedicated to 'immigrant' Buddhist communities (as opposed to what are termed 'convert' Buddhists). This perpetuates a belief that these two 'types' inhabit totally separate realms of Buddhism in America. This study seeks to show that such a bifurcated view cannot be sustained since both 'types' of Buddhists in America contribute to and are complicit in the creation of American Buddhism, in attempts to uphold and preserve the tradition, to adapt and innovate, as well as participate in its politicisation and extensive commercialisation.

McMahan refers to the 'hybridity of Buddhist modernism' as 'not simply a process of weeding out what does not conform to implicit norms of the new cultural context' but also involves a 'reconfiguration of both tradition and context through contestation and negotiation as well as enthusiastic embrace'<sup>281</sup> and points out that in many places where Buddhism has become a significant presence it has been introduced and adapted in highly specific ways. The majority of Western Buddhists are unlikely to be familiar with the complex mixture of cultural, political and intellectual factors which have influenced the development of Buddhism since its beginnings in India over two millennia ago. More likely than not they are also unaware that Tibetan Buddhism's current development in

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<sup>280</sup> See Prebish (1999).

<sup>281</sup> See McMahan (2008:151).

the West involves a similarly selective appropriation and adaptation of teachings, practices and texts combined with the absorption and accommodation of indigenous ritual methods just as it did during its inception and development in Tibet.<sup>282</sup>

### **Buddhism's inception into North America**

Buddhism in America is generally seen to begin with Chinese immigrants attracted by the California gold rush in the 1840's which eventually slowed due to the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. They were then followed by a wave of Japanese and Korean immigrants. While at this time Buddhism remained predominantly an Asian immigrant religion, a few Americans were beginning to investigate 'Eastern' religion. Thoreau's Transcendentalist rendering of the Saddharma-pundarīka (Lotus Sutra)<sup>283</sup> and the formation and development of the Theosophical society are widely considered to mark the beginnings of a significant interest and development of Buddhist thought entering into American culture and in the case of the Theosophists, an early articulation of the psychologization of Buddhism.<sup>284</sup> However, by far the most important development in Buddhism since its early manifestation was with the emergence of 'beat' generation writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder influenced by Rinzai and Sōtō Zen and later, by the influx of Tibetan lamas entering America in the 60s and 70s.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> In eighth century Tibet for example, it was the imperial government that was interested in Buddhism for its political ramifications more so initially at least than its philosophy.

<sup>283</sup> This was first translated into French by Eugene Burnouf in 1844. In the same year Thoreau's English rendering of the French translation appeared in the journal *Dial*, edited by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

<sup>284</sup> The 1895 world's fair in Chicago was a watershed moment in the reception of Buddhism in North America. This was however primarily Japanese forms of Buddhism and Tibetan forms were not generally seen until post 1959. Another significant event was the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1894. The Parliament provided the first major public forum from which Buddhists could address the Western public. See Tweed (2000). Also see Pedersen (2001) for the role of the Theosophists in the 'psychologisation' of Buddhism.

<sup>285</sup> See Tonkinson (1996) for examples of the Buddhist influence on the 'beat' writers. Early notable religious figures who brought the Tibetan Buddhist tradition to the West include Geshe Ngawang Wangyal (1901-1983) arriving the US in 1955 to teach at Columbia University in New York. Shortly after, Deshung Rinpoche (1906-1987) arrived in 1960 to work on a research project at the University of Washington. He was followed by the Tarthang Tulku (1934- ) who arrived in 1968.

A significant feature of Tibetan Buddhism's arrival in America was that it coincided with the emergence of a counter-culture characterised by social, political and spiritual upheaval.<sup>286</sup> Tibetan Buddhist leaders, arriving in the 1960s from a very religiously conservative society, found themselves having to adapt their methods of practice in response to the needs and ideas of Westerners who for the most part had rejected the conventions of their own society. In the beginning, the path of Buddhism in America was forged by people fundamentally estranged from conventional American society. Barry Boyce, reflecting on the past thirty years of Buddhism in America in a popular Buddhist magazine, describes Buddhism's beginnings in America:

In September, 1980, Senator Claiborne Pell invited His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, the leader of Tibet's Kagyu lineage, to lunch with senators and representatives in the U.S. Capitol building. In his own country, when it existed as a country, the Karmapa would not have been considered strange or exotic. He *was* the establishment. Neither Suzuki Roshi, Ajahn Chah, Thich Nhat Hanh, nor any of the other teachers responsible for bringing Buddhism to the West would have been considered fringy or freaky in their homelands. But as Buddhism came westward, it took hold not with mainstream Americans for the most part, but with people who rebelled against the culture —the beats and then the hippies.<sup>287</sup>

When Prebish initiated, in the late 1970s, his early analysis of an American form of Buddhism<sup>288</sup> he cited the work of Bellah<sup>289</sup> who had proposed that due to the intensification of secularisation in the 1960s, America was ripe for spiritual traditions such as Buddhism to advance. Bellah concluded that 'biblical' religion was on the wane because it was unable to provide a meaningful pattern of personal and social existence. He interpreted the spiritual crisis of the 1960s as a 'crisis of meaning' with major political and cultural consequences:

'...in many ways, Asian spirituality provided a more thorough contrast to the rejected individualism than did biblical religion. To external achievement it posed inner experience; to the

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<sup>286</sup> See Bellah (1976).

<sup>287</sup> See Boyce (2009).

<sup>288</sup> See Prebish (1979:31).

<sup>289</sup> See Bellah (1976).

exploitation of nature: harmony with nature... a turn away from the whole apparatus of industrial society.'<sup>290</sup>

## The American assimilation of Tibetan Buddhism

The Tibetan 'founding fathers' brought Tibetan Buddhist teachings out of the Himalayas and onto North America's city streets and prominent universities, teaching and influencing many of the notable American scholars of Tibetan language, religion and culture active today. However, it was when a charismatic young Tibetan *sprul sku* (tulku)



Figure 41. Chogyam Trungpa.

Chos rgyam Drung pa (1939 – 1987, hereafter Trungpa) arrived in the West in the mid-1960s, that the face of Tibetan Buddhism began to change significantly.<sup>291</sup> He remains, to this day, a controversial figure but what is clear, is that in terms of a modern development of Tibetan Buddhism, Trungpa's mark has been left indelibly upon the way Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism is practiced and understood in the West, particularly North America.

In spite of this, his innovations of Tibetan Buddhism are largely ignored by scholarly research. While he is generally mentioned in them, most studies of Buddhism in America tend to shy away either from any substantial critical or subjective analysis of his legacy.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Bellah (1976:341).

<sup>291</sup> Trungpa was associated with both bKa' brgyud and rNying ma lineages and was the eleventh Trungpa Rinpoche and supreme abbot of the Sur mang monastery in Eastern Tibet. Escaping Tibet into North East India (along a similar route to the one taken by Kunzang Dechen Lingpa and his family) he initially took up a scholarship at Oxford University, and then established a Buddhist retreat centre in Scotland. In 1967 he was partially paralyzed after crashing his car into a joke shop in Dumfries. He subsequently gave up his monk's vows, married a 16 year old British aristocrat and became a well-known (and to some, infamous), Buddhist teacher, poet and artist.

<sup>292</sup> Whilst there have been several popular and uncritical biographies, such as Gimian and Mukpo (2006) and Midal(ed.)(2005) of Trungpa's life and work there are relatively few scholarly examinations of the Shambhala lineage or of his innovations of Tibetan Buddhism in the West and no major academic studies currently exist. This is probably due in part to the fact that the adherents of the Shambhala tradition in America are a rather secretive when it comes to those not part of the tradition. Details of Trungpa's

Much of his 'dharmic' innovations such as his *gter ma* text the *Sādhana of Mahāmudrā*, a therapeutic practice he developed called *Maitri Space Awareness* and his radical interpretation of the Shambhala myth<sup>293</sup> represent the first examples of traditional Tibetan Vajrayāna concepts being combined with Western psychological method. Not only that, they also provide a template for subsequent developments of hybrid Buddhist psychological practice and arguably represent a kind of American proto - *gter ma*, in that they appear to be the first example of Tibetan Buddhist *gter ma* revealed in the West, adapted to a western setting and audience and to be articulated in a non-Asian language.

As the utopian visions of 1960s counterculture descended into narcissistic 'personal growth' lifestyles of the 1970s <sup>294</sup> Trungpa transformed a motley band of drop outs and hippies into an 'American dream' success story. He built up an entirely new lineage established a publishing house, formed his own army, <sup>295</sup> and founded a Buddhist university and numerous practice centres. He recognised that Americans often used psychological frames of reference in order to understand Buddhist concepts.

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practices are kept strictly within the confines of Shambhala followers. 'Outside' subjective works then tend to be crippled by the fact that without becoming part of the lineage or by progressing along the strictly regulated levels of practice one is generally unable to gain access to much information.

<sup>293</sup> Trungpa revealed the Shambhala *gter ma* text *Golden Sun of the Great East* in Wisconsin in 1977. See Gimian and Mukpo (2006:223). It is a secular approach to meditation, with roots in Buddhism as well as in other traditions, but accessible to individuals of any, or no religion. Shambhala Training is presented in a series of weekend programs, the first five of which are called *The Heart of Warrior-ship* and the latter seven, *The Sacred Path*. Once a practitioner has completed the *Sacred Path* they proceed to *The Warrior Assembly* where one studies Trungpa's Shambhala *gter ma* texts such as the *Golden Sun*. These practices and texts are kept extremely restricted and are not accessible to anyone who has not progressed through all the requisite levels. In 2004 Trungpa's son and heir merged the secular teachings of Shambhala and the Buddhist teachings of its Buddhist organization Vajradhatū to create 'Shambhala Buddhism. See Dawson and Eldershaw (1998).

<sup>294</sup> Lasch (1979) envisioned American society at this time as exhibiting signs consistent with clinical definitions of pathological narcissism. Wolfe (1976) described the 1970s as the 'me decade' characterised by the 'delicious look inward' which, he claimed, stemmed from considerable narcissism and an 'upward roll of a great spiritual wave...achieved through psychedelics, meditation, therapeutic movements and overtly religious movements (Eastern religions). See also Bellah (1976).

<sup>295</sup> The 'Dorje Kasung' functions as security guards, drivers and personal assistants to Shambhala teachers. The training and model of the Dorje Kasung is based on military forms; they wear uniforms, march in formation, shoot cannons and raise flags whilst singing the 'Shambhala Anthem'. They also often act as the fire service for the more rural retreat centres.

The activities of early Tibetan Buddhist teachers such as Trungpa played a part in laying the foundations for the new hybrid forms which resulted from an influx of Tibetan teachers who began to arrive in the West from the 1970s onwards and their interactions with new Western followers. As is discussed in the following chapters, these early Tibetan pioneers and their followers shaped the development of Buddhism in the West and further fuelled debates surrounding the continuing issue of 'authenticity' through the contestation surrounding who has the 'authority' to hold, teach and transmit the Buddhist teachings. Further, despite its short inception and development in the United States, Tibetan Buddhism in all its various forms has now, forty years since its first appearance in America, acquired a visibility and influence far out of proportion to its actual number of adherents in that country. It has become a shorthand symbol for Buddhism in American culture due to extensive media exposure, Buddhist 'mindfulness' techniques being included as methods of clinical psychology, the worldwide fame of Tibet's spiritual<sup>296</sup> leader and finally, Tibet's exceptional role as a spiritual paradise in Western imaginations.<sup>297</sup>

## **Who are Buddhists in America?**

Many Americans profess an affinity with Buddhist ideals, teachers, and practices and yet do not call themselves formally Buddhist. <sup>298</sup> Either way, Buddhists still constitute a rather small percentage of religious groups in North America. Considering also the small

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<sup>296</sup> In 2011, the fourteenth Dalai Lama relinquished his role as the political leader of Tibet breaking with a tradition which began in seventeenth century Tibet in which his role was as both secular and spiritual leader of the country.

<sup>297</sup> For a history of the West's fascination with Tibet as a spiritual paradise, see Dodin and Rather (2001) and the highly entertaining Brauen (2004).

<sup>298</sup> For those wishing to delve further into making sense of the data and methods used to determine such things, see Nattier (1998) and Baumann (1997).

population of Tibetans residing in North America<sup>299</sup> it is hardly surprising that Tibetan Buddhist centres there are populated mostly by Western practitioners and many of the larger and better known American Buddhist communities have few Tibetan followers. In addition to the population figures, many Tibetans in North America are too busy working (and often supporting large families in India) to spend weeks or months doing high level esoteric practices. Dharma retreats at prominent Tibetan temples are not generally aimed at them and are often expensive, a fact decried in some quarters as the appropriation and commercialisation of an ancient spiritual tradition pricing out its own people. While this may be partly the case, an argument can be made that this exemplifies a patronising and condescending perception of Tibetans as poor disenfranchised indigenes (as well as poorer Americans) who can't afford to attend teachings by their own teachers and leaders, ignoring the fact that a significant portion of Tibetans currently residing in North America, like countless immigrants before them work hard and are prosperous.

Tibetan religious practitioners, who wish to pursue an entirely spiritual path, tend to remain in India, only visiting the West with touring groups who come to earn funds to support their activities in Asia. Those Tibetans who emigrate to the West do so primarily with the intention of acquiring wealth, not to pursue a 'dharmic' path. Additionally, most Tibetan Buddhist centres offer work study or volunteer programs where people without means are able to exchange work at the centre in order to attend teachings and retreats. (Many also operate on a sliding scale or a suggested donation policy). In the past Tibetan teachers were responsible for gathering patronage and support, this has not changed, but

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<sup>299</sup> The 2001 United States Census counted 5,147 US residents who reported Tibetan ancestry. An estimate of ca. 7,000 was made in 2001. In 2008 the Office of Tibet in New York informally estimated the Tibetan population in the USA at around 9,000. See Macpherson (2008) and Bhuchung (2001).

the way in which they must seek that sponsorship has changed dramatically, with the old patterns disrupted, sponsorship has developed a trans-national nature<sup>300</sup> and teachers are compelled to 'advertise' themselves in way which they would not have had to do in the past.

Many Tibetan lamas come to the West to present teachings and to raise funds for their large monasteries of monks and nuns in India for whom they are responsible. This naturally raises the question for many Western Buddhists as to whether they are receiving 'authentic' teachings or whether they are just being presented with a 'performance' as a money generating exercise. However it is always a complex situation, once in the West, Tibetan lamas and their organisers are often faced with substantial overhead costs to the point that many Tibetan teachers and/or organisations are lucky if they are able to cover them. All of this creates an atmosphere of negotiation surrounding presenting teachings for the benefit of all, (which after all is the ultimate point), in an accessible way and it being a financially successful enterprise. The main importance in any of these situations, at least from a Buddhist perspective, would be to examine the 'intention' behind the event or set of teachings. Many Tibetan Lamas see no contradiction between providing teachings, which in their opinion 'benefit all sentient beings' and it also, skilfully, generating funds for their monastery or nunnery; certainly does not 'inauthenticate' the experience for any of the participants.

### **Spiritual authority or self-reliance**

As Tibetan Vajrayāna has moved westwards it is clear that the traditional basis of authority proves to be a challenge for Western followers and their democratic values of

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<sup>300</sup> See Sudbury (2007:232).

individuality and self-reliance. This has led to conflict and distrust in regards to *samaya*, the intense relationship required and developed between disciple and teacher. From a Vajrayāna Buddhist perspective, this bond is integral to progressing along a spiritual path. A problem often identified is that Western Buddhists often succumb to a spiritual teacher through an instant conversion experience, whereas the process of fully accepting a guru among Tibetans usually occurs at a more discriminating pace. It is this teacher-student relationship which has become one of the major fault lines in the progression of Vajrayāna Buddhism in America with its cultural values of self-reliance. Within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition the teacher-student relationship is the fundamental basis upon which one progresses along the path to enlightenment.

An interesting example of both sides of the issue is the furore which arose out of a 1998 interview with the renowned rNying ma teacher and scholar 'Phrin las nor bu Rin po che (Thinley Norbu Rinpoche 1931-2012), titled 'Words for the West' which featured in the winter issue of the American Buddhist magazine Tricycle.<sup>301</sup> It was intended on his part to stress the importance of the guru-disciple relationship and how movements among some American Buddhist groups and their teachers towards the diminishing role of the 'guru' and advocating a reliance instead on a more 'democratic' collective wisdom of the 'sangha' was detrimental to one of the key aspects of Vajrayāna Buddhism.<sup>302</sup> What occurred was that many readers construed this article as personal criticism as well as an attack on their culture and democratic values. The next issue of Tricycle's letters page and

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<sup>301</sup> Tricycle: <http://www.tricycle.com/feature/words-West>. Fall issue (1998) Response: Letters to editor. Winter issue (1998).

<sup>302</sup>One example would be Bachelor's 'Buddhism without Beliefs' in which he writes 'The individuation of Dharma practice occurs whenever priority is given to the resolution of a personal existential dilemma over the need to conform to the doctrines of a Buddhist orthodoxy. Individuation is a process of recovering personal authority through freeing ourselves from the constraints of collectively held belief systems. If training with a teacher of a certain school leads to a growing dependency on that tradition and a corresponding loss of personal autonomy, then that allegiance may have to be severed'. Bachelor (1997:111).

the response from one of Thinley Norbu's Tibetan colleagues, highlights how the notion of relying upon a spiritual teacher challenges Western Buddhists and illustrates the sensitivities and misunderstandings which arise from the interaction between Tibetan and non-Tibetan Buddhists, particularly in America. Thinley Norbu was quoted in the interview as saying:

Almost all Western teachers of Buddhism are either nihilists or eternalist and not actual Buddhist lineage holders. Sometimes American Buddhism looks like communism, sometimes like democracy sometimes like socialism and sometimes like nothing, only circling between worldly systems ...many Westerners ask why it is necessary to depend on a guide to enlightenment and to accumulate merit since one's own mind already has Buddha nature. They think that they can recognize their Buddha-nature themselves and do not need to depend upon a guru or a teacher, but this is a misinterpretation. They don't recognize that they are continuously remaining in ignorance; this idea will keep them closed...modern people are afraid of losing their ordinary egos; relying on someone else makes them think they are losing their identity which is just their ordinary ego'...By lineage, I do not mean a skin lineage that belongs to a particular race, but a wisdom lineage that is transmitted from teacher to student and from students to their students over many generations....Westerners are often occupied with the habit of extrovertism, they think spiritual qualities are supposed to be shown obviously and can only appear in particular aspects that fit their preconceptions.<sup>303</sup>

Replies in the 'Letters to the editor' form American Buddhists included:

'Norbu Rinpoche, I am sorry if American Buddhists do not meet your expectations. We are the children of Socrates, Hume, Nietzsche, Freud, Marcuse and many others. Cognitive science, Western and Eastern philosophy, politics and psychology all permeate our cultural existence...perhaps we are too distrustful of those who claim they have all the answers...blind obedience is not an option.'

and:

'The Guru surely doesn't expect Western Buddhists to cut themselves off from their roots denying their scientific materialist conceptions of reality. We are after all not in Tibet and the methods that enlighten the people in the East with their long tradition of Buddhism and Buddhist lore might not prove so successful for the more individualistic West.'<sup>304</sup>

A subsequent response by students of Thinley Norbu stated firstly that the interview was heavily edited and therefore presented in way which was deliberately provocative and

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<sup>303</sup> See Tricycle (NM: Fall: 1998).

<sup>304</sup> See Tricycle (NM: Winter: 1998).

secondly that rather than being merely insulting, its intention was as compassionate, yet frank advice to Western Buddhist practitioners:

The comments by those letters defending the philosophical and political legacies of Western culture [suggested] that Thinley Norbu Rinpoche was opposed to these ideas...but the point was not that he was opposed to these rather that they should not be confused with the essence of Dharma. For instance, the idea of relying on the collective wisdom of the sangha is dangerous since those on the path to enlightenment are still rooted in dualistic thinking and the Western idea of democracy- which relies on collective consensus from partial worldly knowledge and opinion is not the same as the wisdom mind of a teacher holding lineage and realization.<sup>305</sup>

The issue of spiritual 'authority,' as Buddhism is assimilated into the West clearly needs to meaningfully address the concept of 'democratic' dharma. J.W. Coleman writes that 'many groups headed by Western teachers are moving towards an egalitarian ideal embedded particularly in American society' and that many modern Buddhist centres have decided to elect a board of directors and make other democratic reforms.<sup>306</sup> These attempts to disperse authority and de-centralise Buddhist communities are occurring as many Western Buddhists, male and female, argue that the concept of the guru is an inherently corrupt phenomenon and has no place in a post-patriarchal democratic form of Buddhism. What appears to be less of a focus is the realization to which dharma practice is intended to point to, ultimately, the non-existence of any inherent 'self'.

The spread of Tibetan Buddhism in America has been largely as a lay form of practice, due to the fact that, like devotion to a teacher, monasticism does not validate ideals of self-reliance and personal individual achievement, therefore one sees a valorisation of the role of the non-celibate solitary yogi because it supports the underlying ethos of a 'self-reliant' identity. Whilst monasticism does and will continue to appeal to some Western

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<sup>305</sup> See Nyingma.com (ER: 1999).

<sup>306</sup> See Coleman (2001:182).

practitioners, it is unlikely to be as popular as a lay path which does not entail an emphatic rejection of conventional mainstream Western culture.

### **Buddhist democracy**

Unlike in most traditional Asian Buddhist communities, what was primarily the dispensation of ordained communities has now become common practice for Western Buddhist laity. Given this deflection from a traditional Asian monastic model is it accurate to suppose that American Vajrayāna is actually non-hierarchical and more 'democratic'? For Tibetan Buddhist organisations in North America and worldwide, patronage is paramount, as it was undoubtedly in Tibet pre 1959 and in exilic 'Tibet'. The financial principles which shaped Tibetan Buddhism's hierarchy for centuries apply just as easily in the West, and particularly in the United States. The Shambhala tradition, arguably one of the most pervasive and prominent strains of Tibetan Buddhism which has developed in North America (and counts as its followers predominantly Western students) attempts, Amy Lavine writes, to 'merge its Americanized version of Vajrayāna with all other aspects of American life'.<sup>307</sup> Sandra Bell's examination of the Shambhala tradition<sup>308</sup> points out that in the organisation of Shambhala's institutional bodies the religious 'Vajradhatū' and the secular 'Nālandā'<sup>309</sup> Trungpa positioned himself as the ultimate authority over what he deemed a 'natural hierarchy' (or what his followers would term 'poetic democracy' with an emphasis on self-reliance). Midal's treatment of Trungpa's vision is rather too

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<sup>307</sup> See Lavine (1998:103).

<sup>308</sup> See Bell (1998).

<sup>309</sup> In 1992 these two organizations were consolidated by Trungpa's son and heir Ösel Mukpo (known as the Sakyong), into Shambhala International. This now has three subsidiaries Vajradhatū which involves the implementation and administration of their Buddhist practices and centres worldwide. Shambhala which oversees the secular training offered to those of other spiritual traditions or those who do not adhere to a particular spiritual tradition, and Nālandā which administers to training in education, arts and business and a health care component which incorporates addiction programs, palliative care and therapeutic practices such as the 'Maitri Space Awareness' project. For a more in depth description of these three 'gates' of Shambhala International, see Prebish (1999:161-2).

uncritical to be taken as a subjective examination however his assertion that Chogyam Trungpa's encouragement of his students to 'develop critical faculties' and his reported statement that 'any form of submission or domination undertaken in the name of spirituality'<sup>310</sup> as dangerous' is in spite of the fact that Trungpa's conception of 'poetic democracy' or 'natural hierarchy' never entailed a diminishment of the guru as its ultimate authority, spiritual or otherwise.<sup>311</sup> Further, in many Western strains of Buddhism, particularly ones which follow a Tibetan tradition, is a tendency to define their 'Buddhist identity' by what level of practice one is engaged in. An unintentional or unscripted natural hierarchy has developed based on upon how 'high' or esoteric this practice is considered. Therefore someone completing foundational practices are viewed as lower down in the hierarchy than one who has completed them and moved on to more 'secret' higher levels of teachings.<sup>312</sup> This aspect of secrecy has a resonance which also encourages hierarchical attitudes.<sup>313</sup> In light of these arguments there is no doubt that Tibetan Buddhism in the West is deeply hierarchical for a number of reasons.

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<sup>310</sup> See Midal (2005:83).

<sup>311</sup> See Bell (1998:64) who suggests that Trungpa deployed a Chinese religio-political metaphor of 'the emperor in possession of a heavenly mandate' by creating his own royal court and affirmed his power over the Shambhala institutions. Reserving the power to make senior appointments and maintain an inner circle of elite students who adopted managerial functions, it developed into an administrative bureaucracy. It also, Bell suggests, enabled him to pave the way for a successor by shifting the charismatic authority from his person to his 'office'. In Trungpa's hierarchy adherents who were judged acceptable to fill the higher ranks were appointed based on their personal abilities and spiritual practices, moving up through the ranks and stages of practices Trungpa created as part of the Shambhala tradition. As the movement became increasingly financially stable; acquiring property and establishing its various organisations, in publishing, education and business it had to comply with the laws and structures of wider American society. The consequence of this being that disciples with experience in legal procedures and business administration were able to rise through the ranks of the organisation and gain increased prominence as members of its board of directors, administrators of its finances and managers of its religious and educational projects

<sup>312</sup> In the Shambhala tradition this has become institutionalised, it is highly unlikely that any members of its 'top management' will not have advanced through the various stages of its secular and Buddhist levels. These levels consist of attendance at a series of practice retreats which are offered at all Shambhala centres with the more lengthy residential retreats at one of their large residential centres in US, Canada and France.

<sup>313</sup> It should be noted that this is considered to be a grave error in terms of Vajrayāna practice. One's practice should be kept private and to engage in false pride of your 'dharmic accomplishments' has serious spiritual consequences, additionally to consider the foundational practices as somehow 'lower' is also a mistaken view.

## Teachers in the West

In light of this, how will the Vajrayāna tradition in North America continue? From a 'traditional' perspective it is essential that an 'authentic' lama continue to embody the doctrines and practices that constitute the religious philosophy. Lavine questions the ability of American reincarnates in teaching an older generation of Buddhist practitioners while simultaneously attracting new followers.<sup>314</sup> Interestingly, it seems that the ones who struggle more with the concept are Westerners. There is a prevailing prejudice on the part of many Western Buddhists that an 'authentic' teacher is a smiling peaceful Tibetan man in maroon robes. A Brooklyn housewife with blood red nails or a middle class Spanish boy for example<sup>315</sup> don't quite fit in with an undifferentiated and idealised view of what a Buddhist teacher should look like or how they should behave. If it is challenging enough to Western sensibilities to cultivate an attitude of faith towards Tibetan teachers and their reincarnations of those teachers, it seems even more of a challenge when they look less like the Dalai Lama and more like the neighbours.

This is in spite of the fact that there are historical precedents in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition for the recognition of foreign tulkus. An examination of Tibetan history for example shows that Mongol patronage was instrumental in establishing the political dominance of the dGe lugs pa sect in Tibet in the seventeenth century and that the system of succession by reincarnation<sup>316</sup> was a way to establish religious authority, it is a system

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<sup>314</sup> Lavine uses as an example the first female Western tulku Akhon Lhamo in the rNying ma dPa yul tradition. (1999:105).

<sup>315</sup> See McKenzie (1995).

<sup>316</sup> The twelfth century Tibetan Zhwa na, an offshoot of the bKa' brgyud pa sect, are credited with instigating the system of succession by reincarnation. A system adopted later by the other Tibetan

still employed now within the Tibetan government in exile and with various Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Many Western reincarnations are subject to scepticism since they do not perpetuate conventional ideas of a reincarnate lama and challenge pre-conceived notions of reincarnation. However, if one believes in the process of reincarnation then there seems no reason why an accomplished spiritual practitioner should not reincarnate anywhere.

### **Feminine authority**

Whether the choice of the place to be born is enlightened vision on the part of the tulku themselves or political expediency as manipulated by a regent and/or selection committee, Tibetans, apparently, have no difficulty in accepting this system as a legitimate line of succession. This though is an important issue in the development of American Vajrayāna, not just that there are increasingly more Western teachers, but that there are also increasingly more female teachers playing a greater role in the development of Tibetan Buddhism in the West.

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Buddhist schools. Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110-?) is traditionally believed to be the first Tibetan Lama to originate a continuous line of reincarnations lasting to the present day. See Richardson (1998).



Figure 42. Western Lama Tsultrim Allione performing a Buddhist ceremony in Colorado, 2011

Another criticism levelled at Buddhist traditions from a Western perspective is that it is deemed a rather patriarchal spiritual tradition. However it is problematic to suppose that early Buddhism was explicitly misogynistic and involved in the suppression of women.<sup>317</sup> In Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism, female deities appear as consorts of the main yidam of a meditation mandala. Buddhas such as Vajrayoginī, Tara and Simhamukha, appear as the central figures of tantric sādhana in their own right. Vajrayāna Buddhism also recognizes many female practitioners, lay and ordained as achieving full enlightenment. In this tradition, sexual relations with a consort are seen as a spiritual practice intended to allow

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<sup>317</sup> One could point to examples of early Buddhist literature to examine the role of women in early South Asian Buddhism. For example, the *Therīgāthā* a collection of verses contained in the Pali canon is one of the earliest known examples of women's spiritual literature. Consisting of over seventy poems it contains a number of stanzas asserting that women are the equal of men in terms of spiritual attainment. Whilst there are many angles to address in such a discussion, for instance the role of ordained women, both Western and Asian, within Buddhist traditions; this discussion primarily focuses on issues pertaining to the lay community of practitioners within North America. See Makeley (2005) and Chodron (2000).

practitioners to attain realisation and attain enlightenment.<sup>318</sup> Tibetan texts provide instructions for visualisation of a sexual nature and for the most part are written from a male perspective.<sup>319</sup> From a 'traditional' standpoint Vajrayāna male and female symbolism is neither about sexual relationships nor the role of men and women within society. Tibetan lama Dzongzar Khyentse states:

It is about working with phenomena to bring about the extraordinary realization of emptiness and compassion in order to liberate all beings from samsara. Tibetan Buddhist traditions can often appear chauvinistic. Western perspectives on sexual relationships emphasise 'equality' which in the West stands for two aspects reaching equal footing, in Vajrayāna Buddhism equality is going beyond duality all together. If duality remains, then by definition there can be no equality. I think social equality between men and women is less important than realizing the equality between samsara and nirvana which, after all, is the only true way to engender a genuine understanding of equality. Thus the understanding of equality in Vajrayāna Buddhism is on a very profound level.<sup>320</sup>

However it is these aspects of sexual equality or inequality and of perceived sexual misconduct which has led to some to question the role of spiritual authority and hierarchy within the tradition. Alleged sexual misconduct of teachers with their students is an issue felt keenly by North American Buddhists and it has certainly haunted Tibetan Buddhism almost from its inception in the West.<sup>321</sup> In general, Vajrayāna Buddhism is viewed as slow in giving spiritual authority and transmission to women, due in part to a

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<sup>318</sup> This is true whether the practitioner is male or female. For example, see Jacoby's (2009) study of the *gter ston* Se ra mkha' 'gro for an analysis of sexuality and consort practice in rNying ma *gter ma* revelation. Young (2004) examines in detail this aspect of Tantric Buddhism in both Indian and Tibetan tantrism. However the study is problematic in that it appears to try to apply modern feminist discourse into a philosophical system which aims to go beyond dualistic concepts.

<sup>319</sup> Interestingly KDL is unusual in this respect, in some of the extended *gter ma* texts for example in his elaboration of a Vajrakīlaya empowerment text he provides explicit instructions of visualisation of union with a *ḍākinī*, in it he also provides a corresponding visualization for female practitioners with a *ḍāka*.

<sup>320</sup> (Personal Communication: 2011).

<sup>321</sup> Chogyam Trungpa was notorious for his excesses as was his Western Vajra regent Tenzin Ösel Dorje with both female and male students. June Campbell, (2006) claims that she was subjected to an abusive sexual relationship with her Tibetan teacher which she was told was tantric spiritual practice. One Western female teacher accused of sexual misconduct is the aforementioned Akhon Lhamo who allegedly engaged in several affairs with students in the 1980s. See (Sherrill 2000). Tibetan Buddhism isn't the only tradition plagued by sex scandals. Other Buddhist communities have also had issues along similar lines, see (Bell 2002).

tulku system controlled and perpetuated by an Asian male establishment.<sup>322</sup> Despite this assertion the Tibetan tradition does have female tulku lineages <sup>323</sup> for example contemporary female tulkus such as mKha' 'gro Rinpoche and Jetsun Akhon Lhamo. In a historical first in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, in April 2011, the Institute for Buddhist Dialectical Studies in Dharamsala, India conferred a new title of 'Geshe-ma' degree (the equivalent of a doctorate in Buddhist philosophy) to Kelsang Wangmo, a German nun.<sup>324</sup> In May 2012, the Department of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala, India made the decision to allow Tibetan Buddhist nuns to receive 'Geshe ma' degrees.<sup>325</sup>

What all of this indicates is that in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, women are slowly gaining greater spiritual authority. With the recent decision to award Buddhist philosophy degrees to nuns it seems that this 'women's liberation' is beginning to trickle down to female Tibetan Buddhists who are often considered and treated as inferior to their male counterparts in Asia. This though is also a debatable issue, since Western criticism of Asian Buddhism's 'repressive' attitudes towards women can be seen as hypocritical by those who view the West's blatant sexual objectification of women as equally oppressive and chauvinistic. Despite these contentious matters, it does appear that women are playing a more overt role in the dissemination of Tibetan Vajrayāna, not just as teachers but as translators and scholars. This may well prove to be a way to

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<sup>322</sup> The idea of the tulku system being corrupt is not limited to Western critics. In 2009, Gesar Mukpo, son of Chogyam Trungpa and Diana Mukpo made a documentary film 'Tulku', detailing the personal experiences of five young Westerners identified in childhood as being re incarnations of Tibetan spiritual teachers. At the age of three, Mukpo was identified as the reincarnation of a famous Tibetan Buddhist lama. See <http://films.nfb.ca/tulku/>. None of the Western tulkus profiled by Mukpo were female and none of the criticism addresses the fact that reincarnations of Tibetan spiritual teachers are overwhelmingly male.

<sup>323</sup>Such as the bSam lding rDo rje phag mo. See Diemberger (2007).

<sup>324</sup> See: <http://ibd-buddhist.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/geshe-kelsang-wangmo-graduation-day.html>.

<sup>325</sup>See [www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=31441&article=Geshema+degree+becomes+a+reality&t=1&c=1](http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=31441&article=Geshema+degree+becomes+a+reality&t=1&c=1).

ameliorate the divisiveness which has coloured perceptions and practice of the tradition globally.

## **Adaptation**

In areas of America, away from large metropolitan centres, information about Buddhist practice and philosophy was until recently rather scarce. Before the advent of 'cyber-sanghas' and Buddhist webcasts, Prebish quotes one early American practitioner stating that there was '...nothing lonelier than a Buddhist in Alabama'.<sup>326</sup> At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Tibetan Buddhist teachings are readily accessible worldwide at any time and by anyone (with the exception, sadly, of Tibetans living in Tibet). Another point to note is the ways in which notions of 'Tibetan-ness' have permeated Western culture and that rather than it being a one way appropriation of a culture it is rather more complex since it has also served Tibetan purposes as well.

The Chinese invasion of Tibet in the 1950s led to encounters between foreigners and Tibetans on a scale not seen before. These early encounters led to Westerners, in particular, to construct idealised and uncritical notions of Tibet. These perceptions manifest not just in the obvious silliness of new age appropriations, but also as a way to further the political agenda of the Tibetan government in exile, whose cause is benefited by the image of their country as a pristine spiritual paradise, as Dodin and Rather write:

This current positive Western image...builds up the land itself into a metaphor of good, as the last refuge of spirituality, amidst a materialistic and radically demythologized world that seems to have been deprived of its magic...Tibet support groups and the government in exile have made extensive use of such uncritical and un-differentiated images of Tibet.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> See Prebish (1999:213).

<sup>327</sup> See Dodin and Rather (2001:409).

The transmission of Buddhism to the United States, a country with such economic, cultural and technological dominance complicates the process considerably, as does America's secularised, highly pluralistic society in which Buddhist and other religious groups vie for 'consumers'. Now, with the advent of digital technology, the debate around how to guard against gross commercialisation and how to negotiate the preservation of core Buddhist concepts is no longer limited to the West. It is clear that countries such as India and China are emerging as dominant economic global powers in the world. The hybrid forms of Buddhism which have developed in the West are feeding back into Buddhism in Asia, <sup>328</sup> a process aided by swift retrieval of information and the blurred boundaries of an electronic frontier. Due to rapid interaction between Asian and Western cultures, they are constantly informing each other.

The high degree of assimilation of Western culture interacting with Tibetan Buddhist traditions inevitably raises the question of 'authenticity'. Arguments in favour of Buddhist texts and practices translated into English and framed into references that Westerners can understand state that this does not necessarily dilute the core teachings of Buddhism. Although Buddhism and Tibetan culture are inextricably entwined, and whilst there is a great impetus and need to preserve the valuable traditions, culture and language of Tibet itself, this does not mean that the Vajrayāna Buddhist teachings which have been transmitted to America need to remain culturally Tibetan. Whilst there will always be those for whom a traditional Tibetan form is more resonant, it is apparent that a modern and more secular form of Buddhism appeals greatly to mainstream America. Secular and psychological methods based on Buddhist teachings exemplify this leap from 'traditionalist' to 'modern' Buddhism. These are not without their problems, as we have

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<sup>328</sup> See Metcalf (2002:349).

seen with the issue of spiritual authority, the path is littered with misinterpretations, and mistaken intentions. However if there is one development which typifies the reshaping of Buddhism in America it is the way in which psychology has blended in with dharma practice.

### **Buddhism as therapy, therapy as Buddhism**

The Theosophists are one of the dominant groups that tend to be presented when considering the origins in Western imaginations of Tibet as a storehouse of esoteric knowledge as well as a precursor to the psychologization of Buddhism. The Theosophical movement influenced some of the early Western scholars of Tibetan Buddhism such as Alexandra David-Neel and W.Y. Evans-Wentz as well as in the psycho-analytical ideas of Carl Jung. It has also been seen to play a significant role in current Western presentations of Tibetan Buddhism as well as paving the way for new age appropriations of the tradition.<sup>329</sup> A watershed moment in the history of collaboration between Tibetan Buddhism and psychology was when Carl Jung wrote the introduction to Evans-Wentz's 'The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation...' first published in 1954.<sup>330</sup>

Paul Pedersen suggests this publication 'strengthened Western interest in Buddhism and well as providing Asian elites with a framework for its later articulations'.<sup>331</sup> A significant aspect of this exchange was Buddhism's increased psychologization in both Western and Eastern contexts. Pedersen writes that Jung shared many of the same ideas as the Theosophists such as an emphasis on Eastern religions, which he felt provided insights into the workings of the psyche. This interest was passed along in the development of

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<sup>329</sup> See Pedersen (2001) for example believes that the activities of the Theosophists indicate a precursor to the iterations of Tibetan teachers appearing in the West in the late 60's and early 70's.

<sup>330</sup> See Evans-Wentz (1954).

<sup>331</sup> See Pedersen (2001:158).

contemporary psychology and had two consequences. First, those Buddhist concepts became understood through the lens of Western psychological ideas and secondly that meditation practices could be seen as techniques for the accomplishment of mental health.<sup>332</sup>

Chogyam Trungpa was, as mentioned earlier, one of those initial Tibetan teachers in the West who noticed early on how the use of psychological terms in the explanation of Buddhist concepts could 'hook' his Western followers. In his introduction to the 1975 book, *'Glimpses of the Abhidharma'* he wrote:

Many modern psychologists have found that the discoveries and explanations of the Abhidharma coincide with their own recent discoveries and new ideas; as though the Abhidharma, which was taught 2,500 years ago, had been redeveloped in the modern idiom.<sup>333</sup>

More recently, some traditional Buddhist practitioners have expressed concern that adaptations involving Western psychology diminishes Buddhism's ultimate goal, enlightenment. One of the main things to consider when examining Buddhism and psychology 'traditions' is the assumption that they respond to similar human needs and that they uncover and reshape dynamics inherent in the human mind. The ultimate intention of Buddhism is to liberate from illusory ideas of the self which cause beings to suffer by clinging to attachments. The difficulty with a 'cross pollination' of Buddhism and therapy is that of their fundamental aims. Therapy as a form of boosting the 'ego' is diametrically opposed to the concept of enlightenment. For example the Tibetan Buddhist practice of *gcod*, which will be examined in the next chapter, is centred on the concept of the self and the mind's concept of the body being 'cut' away, each aspect of this process graphically visualised. The body is transformed into a 'feast' and offered up in order to

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<sup>332</sup> (*Ibid*: 160).

<sup>333</sup> See Trungpa (1975:2).

satisfy the personification of everything that makes one so miserable. This practice is the very antithesis of therapeutic pursuits which aim to make one-self 'feel better' since the entire conception of a 'self' is an illusion. The problem lies between two fundamental conceptions: one which conceives of oneself as the autonomous agent of one's actions and as the crucial hub of self-transformation. The other conceives of psychological processes as an impersonal play of cause and effect and denies the ultimate reality of any agent or subject, the core illusion that keeps one caught in a cycle of behavioural patterns, i.e. cyclical existence. The latter conception aims to understand and identify how cognitive and emotional processes arise in order to address the former. Buddhist traditions distinguish these two distinct discourses via the concept of 'conventional' and 'ultimate' truth.

However despite these differing aspirations, the vocabulary and approach of these two traditions show considerable overlap and there exists a clear continuity of these notions in some of the modern articulations of Tibetan Buddhism in the present day. As is discussed later in this study, one of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's most well received and well known practices in the west was his version of Tibetan *gcod*. His presentation of this in the west was to make it more accessible to a Western audience and the intention behind it was to help with mental afflictions. In so doing he was not departing drastically from 'traditional' implementation of the *gcod* practice and yet at the same time he was recognising that Western psychological language and concepts would resonate more with a Western audience.

Clinical psychologists have incorporated Buddhist practices into several different formalised psychotherapies. Most prominent are Buddhist 'mindfulness' treatments such

as those of Jon Kabat-Zinn<sup>334</sup> which explicitly incorporate Buddhist meditation techniques and Hatha yoga into psychological treatment of depression and anxiety. Other articulations include the work of Mark Williams whose research is concerned with the application of experimental cognitive psychology to understanding the processes which exacerbate the risk of suicidal behaviour in depression. He is also one of the developers of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for prevention of relapse and recurrence in depression.<sup>335</sup>In the other direction, Buddhist teachers have likewise incorporated psychological method and 'step programs' techniques with traditional Buddhist practices. Trungpa's *Maitri Space Awareness* <sup>336</sup> developed in the early 1970s at a psychology conference at the newly formed Naropa Institute <sup>337</sup> was an experimental project which has subsequently become a standard and required component of the educational system at Naropa. Another example is Tsultrim Allione's *Feeding Your Demons* <sup>338</sup> which draws its influence from the Tibetan *gcod* practice, a five step therapeutic process for transforming negative emotions, relationships, fear and physical illness.<sup>339</sup> Concepts of mindfulness, healing and the idea of overcoming obstacles in a Western conception are generally envisioned as gentle healing processes. Such conceptions in Tibetan Buddhist traditions can often involve quite gory and sexual visualised action.<sup>340</sup> The question here is not just the intentions or application of these teachings but also in the *reception* of these

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<sup>334</sup> Kabat-Zinn began teaching his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center.

<sup>335</sup> See Williams, J Mark. (1984/1992).

<sup>336</sup> See Jacerme (2005).

<sup>337</sup> See Leif (2005:278).

<sup>338</sup> See Allione (2008).

<sup>339</sup> Participants work in pairs and after identifying a particular obstacle they wish to address, take turns recognising those 'demons', giving them form and feeding them until they are satisfied. There are also more intensive levels of practice which can be attended and a course where licensed healing professionals learn to apply this work to their professional therapeutic settings. Allione states her motivation to develop the practice was to make Macig Labdron's *gcod* teachings more accessible in a Western context. See Allione (2008:9).

<sup>340</sup> As Dalton's (2011) recent study shows violence has always played a multivalent role in Tibetan Buddhism.

teachings as well. Are the goals generally a desire for ultimate enlightenment or rather a quest for individual happiness and mental health?

### **The culture of neuroticism**

The psychological self is individualistic concept in the West not particularly prevalent within traditional Buddhist societies. Even in spiritual practice there is an overwhelming emphasis in the West for Buddhism to address emotional issues. This suggests that the motivation may be a desire for external validation, a search for a spiritual identity and overall mental health and happiness in all its material worldly forms. The danger being, at least from a Buddhist perspective, is that mental health and individual happiness become substitutes for the Buddhist notion of enlightenment. Harvard psychologist, Jack Engler posits a list of what he deems 'unhealthy' motivations for spiritual practice which include avoidance of intimacy and accountability as well as fear of responsibility. In a quest for spiritual perfection Engler suggests that 'narcissism dynamics' are intertwined with much of Western Buddhist spiritual practice. Seen from this perspective, Western perceptions of enlightenment '...embody a core narcissistic ideal: a state of personal perfection from which all faults and defilements have been expelled'<sup>341</sup> and one becomes self-reliant and immune to suffering.

Lasch's envisioning of American life in the 1970s described that era as characterised by a hunger for the momentary illusion of personal well-being he also noted that mental health had become the modern equivalent of 'salvation'.<sup>342</sup> His afterword to the 1990 edition of *The Culture of Narcissism* makes some important points about the nature of spirituality, the preponderance of new age religions and the dominance of psychotherapy

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<sup>341</sup> See Engler (2006:21-25).

<sup>342</sup> See Lasch: 1979(1990): 13).

in the West. He suggests that ‘...the forms of spirituality associated with the new age movement are rooted in social conditions that make it increasingly difficult for people to accept the reality of sorrow, loss, aging and death... New age spirituality is a prominent feature of the current cultural landscape and has its root in feelings of displacement, heightened vulnerability to suffering and in the contradiction between the promise that one can ‘have it all’ and the reality of one’s limitations’<sup>343</sup> in short, what a Buddhist would call impermanence. Just as Lasch envisioned America in the 1970s as collectively suffering from clinical narcissism, current Western hyper-modern societies could be envisioned as exhibiting signs of a new form of mental imbalance, which has in recent years become known as Borderline Personality Disorder, an ‘umbrella’ term which receives its nomenclature from the fact that those who are afflicted are seen to be on the borderline between neuroses and psychoses.<sup>344</sup> Mark Unno writes:

The emergence of borderline personality disorder in the current state of the global economy and culture is no accident. Affective manipulation through highly sophisticated media which commoditises culture wholesale; promises everything but delivers nothing, leaves the individual defined as a consumer. These are the prominent features of a global economy undergoing intense commercialisation. While it might not be right to label society as such with a psychopathology, and the majority of the population does not exhibit the extreme characteristics of borderline personality disorder; there is a striking correspondence between global cultural trends and the prominence of borderline personality.<sup>345</sup>

Among the tendencies Unno notes as characteristic of this disorder it that sufferers are prone to depression, highly intellectual and manipulative. Treatment for this condition is difficult since an overtly sympathetic approach not only fails to improve the condition but often aggravates the disorder greatly with the danger of becoming entangled in a patient’s self-created and illusory drama. For this reason, Unno suggests, religious communities play an important role in mediating the religious life of an individual and that of such a

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<sup>343</sup> See Lasch (1990:245-317).

<sup>344</sup> See Unno (2006:155) Neurotic forms of borderline personality disorder are defined as those in need of clinical care but are sufficiently integrated to function in their day to day lives.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*

society. The difficulty lies in the fact that 'Buddhist communities in the United States are caught in the cultural interstices between spirituality and an increasingly commercialised society'.<sup>346</sup>

### **Tibetan agency in the assimilation and commercialisation of Tibetan Buddhism**

It should be noted that Tibetans themselves are not passive subjects and while it may be an uncomfortable truth for some to admit, they are complicit not just in the commercialisation of Tibetan culture but with the identity it presents to the world. Toni Huber has highlighted the fact that there are publications coming from Tibetan exile communities which exclaim the fundamental identity of Tibetans as an essentially peaceful and non-violent people and that environmental and feminist issues are innate aspects of Tibetan culture.<sup>347</sup> Huber states that Tibetan exiles have created a modern liberal image of themselves which is largely the creation of a Tibetan political and intellectual elite in exile drawing upon Western liberal ideas and conceptions of Tibet as an imagined spiritual 'Shang ri la'.<sup>348</sup> In Europe and America, Buddhism has been adapted, interpreted and transformed by Tibetans and non-Tibetans alike to suit Western ideologies and cultural practices.

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<sup>346</sup> See Unno (2006:157).

<sup>347</sup> Huber (2001:357) suggests that this should be understood as 'the product of trans-national politics emerging in the 1980s within a Tibetan exile community and not in communities of ethnic Tibetans living within the current boundaries of Chinese authority'.

<sup>348</sup> Huber (2001:358) writes that in many ways the 'Tibetan exile elite sidestep critical historiography and even rewrite history'. He points to Jamyang Norbu's descriptions of the Tibetan government in exile portraying the popular Tibetan resistance movement in the 1950s as non-violent. In fact during the Lhasa uprising in March 1959 the thousands of ordinary Tibetans gathered outside the Norbulingka were expressing not just anger at the Chinese, but also towards the Tibetan political elite. One Tibetan official was beaten to death and his body dragged through the street of Lhasa. See Norbu (1994) and Shakya (1999:192).

Some of the more popular representations of Tibetan Buddhism to the general public are versions of Tibetan rituals such as the burial of treasure vases<sup>349</sup> and ritual dance (*'cham*) which have their roots in often violent imperial or indigenous pre-Buddhist Tibetan conceptions. Mona Schrempf, in her examination of traditional Tibetan *'cham* and its presentation in the West, notes that with the advent of the Tibetan diaspora, 'Tibetan religious and secular performance traditions have increasingly been staged in and modified according to a range of new setting that are very different from [their] pre-modern context'. She suggests that these kinds of articulations of Tibetan religious traditions are not just intended to 'demonstrate cultural authenticity' on the part of the Tibetans they also exist and function in a 'global performance marketplace' for the display and consumption of a 'world culture' audience concerned with ideas of peace and healing. When taken out of context and left somewhat unexplained the interpretation and reception of them is left to be defined by Western understandings of Tibetan religious practice.<sup>350</sup>

The practice of *gcod* in its traditional form is a radical cutting away of the ego from its root and involves a graphic and uncompromisingly gruesome process of visualisation which generally does not represent what most Americans find so appealing about Tibetan Buddhism. Yet *gcod* is extremely popular in the West and has been somewhat repackaged as a tool for physical and mental healing. Bearing in mind the complexity of the issues outlined above, the focus now turns to how Kunzang Dechen Lingpa and later

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<sup>349</sup> Mills (2012) The argument of this paper is that despite being couched in the language and appearance of a 'peace ceremony' the burial of Tibetan 'treasure vases' are organised according to traditional Tibetan understandings of righteous kingly sovereignty which date back to the early imperial period of Tibetan history. Looking at the ways in which Tibetans have been seen to present aspects of their own culture to the West, Mills asserts that the discourse of 'world peace' has been widely adopted on the modern international stage by various proponents of the Tibetan cause.

<sup>350</sup> See Schrempf (1995: 91-92).

his son, Rigdzin Dorje have had to tread this new modern Buddhist path, beginning with their presentation of the practice of *gcod* to a global and more secular audience and their attempts to address the needs of modern Buddhist practitioners.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ***GCOD* IN AMERICA: NATURALLY DISSOLVING THE WAR ON TERROR**

#### **The *ḍākinī*'s laugh**



Kunzang Dechen Lingpa became most renowned in North America for his *Healing Chö* a two day ceremony based upon his revealed treasure: *Bdag 'dzin god thabs mkha' 'dro'i gad rgyangs bzhugs so* (*The ḍākinī's laugh' a skilful method of severing self-grasping*)<sup>351</sup>

Figure 43. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa performing *gcod*.

This practice is a Tibetan Buddhist meditative technique intended to cut attachment to ego and is performed to facilitate clarification of mind and the understanding of reality. The teaching centres upon ignorance and attachment as epitomising the roots of human suffering. These can be eradicated simultaneously with the destruction of our tendency towards obstructive illusory situations of life which are personified by various 'demons'.<sup>352</sup> The practice presented by Kunzang Dechen Lingpa as the *Healing Chö* does not radically change the essential nature of the practice, it remains in its traditional form, however it is

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<sup>351</sup> The *gcod* practices centered on the wrathful *ḍākinī* Khros ma nag mo can be found in the Volume three of KDL'S gsung 'bum entitled *Od 'khyil phreng rgyan*. See Kollmar-Paulenz (1993) for a review of Khros ma nag mo, an overview of the various texts of the *gcod* tradition and the Tibetan concepts of 'demons'.

<sup>352</sup> Since there are many works widely available on *gcod* in all the religious traditions of Tibet, for example see Gyatso (1985), Edou (1996) and Harding (2003), its origins and ritual methods are only briefly summarized in this chapter before moving on to examine how reception of the practice in the West highlight different cultural perceptions of fear and the 'nature' of 'demons' as well as how it tends to be understood in its modern context by Western psychological terms.

nonetheless ‘repackaged’ into a ‘language of healing’ to appeal to a Western audience, more familiar with the language of therapy and healing than with the complex and often violently intense practices of Tibetan Vajrayāna.

### **The origins of Tibetan *gcod***

The Buddhist *gcod* tradition first emerged in Tibet in the late eleventh century when Tibetans had access to large amounts of ritual and philosophical material as a result of the cultural negotiations between Indian and Tibetan cultures.<sup>353</sup> This was an era in which Tibetans were developing a new sense of identity and the country was at least for a time, an ‘open field’ in terms of ‘established’ Buddhist doctrine.<sup>354</sup> The origins of *gcod* are vague, it appears to be an amalgamation of Indian Buddhist concepts and Vajrayāna contemplative methods integrated with aspects of indigenous pre-Buddhist practices and forged during the Tibetan ‘renaissance’ period in the tenth or eleventh century.<sup>355</sup> Traditional Buddhist sources<sup>356</sup> explain that *gcod* arose as a subsidiary lineage of the *Zhi byed* (pacification of suffering) tradition brought to Tibet by the Indian adept Dam pa sangs rgyas,<sup>357</sup> an influential Indian Yogi in the late eleventh century. *Zhi byed* is a fluid concept with no ‘core’ teaching associated with it and probably became extinct as a distinct system because it remained outside Tibet’s religious institutions. Its role as the

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<sup>353</sup> See Davidson (2005).

<sup>354</sup> Davidson (2005:224) writes that despite indications that esoteric Indian Buddhism was strongly detrimental to the religious aspirations of women, it appears that this was not the case in eleventh century Tibet. In the early stages of the *gsar ma* period Tibetan women seem to have enjoyed a freer religious climate. Davidson suggests that by the end of the twelfth century with the emergence of a strong neo conservative stance Tibet became increasingly a focus of international interest and, held up as a paragon of Buddhist practice, the old Indian prejudices returned. Tibet then became more orthodox and less open to the innovations of female practitioners such as Ma gcig lab sgron. See also Dalton (2011:126-159).

<sup>355</sup> Early systematisers of *gcod* include the Third Karmapa Rang ‘byung rDo rje (1284–1339) within the literary and practice lineages of the bKa’ brgyud and rNying ma traditions. Also see De Rossi-Filibeck. (1981).

<sup>356</sup> See Roerich (1949: 980-1005).

<sup>357</sup> See Martin (2006).

practice of itinerant yogis meant that it was never codified into a school or lineage. According to Buddhist historiography Dam pa sangs rgyas transmitted his teachings to his Tibetan disciples, sKyo ston bsod nams and Ma gcig Lab sgron. These instructions later formed the basis of the *pha* (father) and *ma* (mother) lineages. Despite the fact that there is, as yet, no textual evidence to show that Ma gcig Lab sgron<sup>358</sup> received these instructions from Dam pa sangs rgyas she is nevertheless recognized as the major codifier of the *gcod* tradition.<sup>359</sup> Buddhist scholars cite textual antecedents of the *gcod* teachings as the Prajñāpāramitā sutra and the works of Āryadeva<sup>360</sup> combined with Dam pa sang rgyas's *zhi byed* pacification teachings. Scholars have debated its origins and 'authenticity' as a 'purely' Buddhist practice almost from its inception. Early criticism of Dam pa sang rgyas and Ma cig Lab sgron includes that of Chag lo Cho rje dpal (1197-1264) the prominent gSar ma conservative and an early critic of the *gter ma* tradition who wrote:

This Indian called the little black Dampa's teaching (is) a mixture of some perverted teachings and some great perfection ideas. Based on these he composed unlimited perverse Dharma under the title of 'zhiche' of the three red cycles and the tīrtika white 'zhiche', which is placed in a single textual tradition with dissimilar materials that are Buddhist.<sup>361</sup>

Like the *Zhi byed* of Dam pa sang rgyas, Ma gcig Lab Sgron's *gcod* was never a 'tradition' in its own right and was adapted and adopted by the different lineages which emerged from the gSar ma period in Tibet.

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<sup>358</sup> One of Tibet's most famous female practitioners, Ma gcig lab sgron (1055 – 1149) began studying with Dam pa sangs rgyas at the end of the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth century. Ultimately she ended up in Zang ri in Lho kha. See Edou (1996) and Harding (2003).

<sup>359</sup> The current system of *gcod* was developed and popularized by Ma gcig lab sgron in the eleventh century. The texts and specific instructions attributed to her are delineated into three main traditions: The sūtra tradition, the tantra tradition and the synthesis of the sūtra and tantra tradition generally referred to as the *gcod* of Mahāmudrā which unifies the views of emptiness with tantric techniques to take the indivisible nature of mind as the basis for meditation. See Edou (1996:42-50).

<sup>360</sup> Contemporary research relating to Āryadeva's attributed works suggests that they were written during a later period in Buddhist history (late ninth or early tenth century). See Wedemeyer (2007).

<sup>361</sup> See Davidson (2005:223) on the *Snags log sun 'byin gyi skor* (*Disputing perverse mantric texts*) a challenge to texts presenting themselves as authentic scriptures of the 'mantrayāna'.

The forms of *gcod* in the rNying ma school, specifically the practice revealed by Kunzang Dechen Lingpa, draws influence from the *mKha' 'gro'i gad rgyangs* (*The sound of ḍākinī laughter*) a liturgy by 'Jigs med gling pa (1730-1798) who received this practice as part of the *Klong chen snying thig* cycle of teachings from the visionary Tibetan master Klong chen Rab 'byams pa (1308-1363).<sup>362</sup> Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was also influenced by the visionary experiences of bDud 'joms gling pa (1835-1904) the *gter ston* considered to be the emanation of one of the twenty-five disciples of Guru Rinpoche and the previous incarnation of Dudjom Rinpoche.

'Traditional' forms of *gcod* are intentionally performed and practised in places which induce fear in human beings such as haunted, solitary places, cemeteries and charnel grounds. By provoking and invoking the experience of fear a *gcod* practitioner is able to cut notions of fixity and reactivity and accomplish the complete severance of self-grasping and attachment to a physical body. The *gcodpa/ma* chants a distinctive melody interspersed with the rhythmic use of drum and bell (indicating one abides in the state of non-duality of emptiness and appearance) and, blowing a thighbone trumpet, summons a variety of spirits inviting them to a ritual banquet.<sup>363</sup> All types of beings are attracted by the sounds of the practice and the intention is to feed one's own body to them as way of cutting through the concept of a distinct and inherent 'self'. In a meditative state the *gcod pa/ma*, using transference of consciousness methods, expels their consciousness from their body and visualises their mind-stream as five pure lights leaving the body through

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<sup>362</sup> See Gyatso (1998).

<sup>363</sup> See Dorje and Ellingson (1979) for an explanation of the melody and instruments used in the practice.

an aperture at the top of the head. This consciousness arises in the form of a *ḍākinī* which in Kunzang Dechen Ling pa's *gcod* is Khros ma nag mo.<sup>364</sup>

The wrathful *ḍākinī* dismembers and then prepares<sup>365</sup> the practitioner's body as a



Figure 44. Kros ma nag mo

banquet for an assembly of enlightened and unenlightened beings to feast upon. Khros ma nag mo severs the cranium and then chops the body into pieces, placing the flesh, blood and bones inside the cranium which then becomes a cauldron resting upon the top of a tripod of human skulls. With a low fire, the flesh, bones and blood transform into nectar and it increases in size to proportions which completely satisfy all the desires of the enlightened and non-enlightened guests.

The ritual is divided into feasts depending upon the character of the guests and traditionally performed at the time of day associated with them; the 'Black Feast' of pre-dawn is for obstacle makers and disease bearing beings, the 'White Feast' of morning for the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the 'Mixed Feast' at noon for all sentient beings and the 'Red Feast' of the evening for the protectors.<sup>366</sup> The offerings suffice no matter how many guests come or how large their appetite is and will transform into whatever the guests

<sup>364</sup> The *gcod* practice of Khros ma nag mo in Buddhist history is linked back to Padmasambhava who revealed the teaching of the black *ḍākinī* to his chief consort Ye shes mtsho rgyal. This was 're-discovered' by an incarnation of one of Padmasambhava's 25 disciples who reincarnated as bDud 'dul rdo rje and then later as the meditation master and *gter ston* bDud 'joms glingpa (1835-1904) the previous incarnation of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's teacher, Dudjom Rinpoche. Different lineages visualise different *ḍākinī* in the *gcod* practice; for example in the bKa' brgyud tradition practitioners visualise Vajrayoginī. The dGe lugs pa school greatly emphasise the secrecy of this practice and it is rare to find published texts. In this tradition the *ḍākinī* emanates from rDo rje phag mo and is described only as a 'green action *ḍākinī*' see Zong/Molk (2006:81). In the modern Bon tradition, practitioners are transformed into 'Kal zang Ma'.

<sup>365</sup> The *ḍākinī* uses a *khri gug* (hooked knife) which symbolizes the cutting of conventional wisdom by the ultimate insight into emptiness.

<sup>366</sup> The rite may be protracted with separate offerings to each group of guests, or significantly abridged if done as part of a daily practice.

desire. The intention is to cut through hindrances and obscurations, 'demons' of ignorance, anger and, in particular, the dualism of perceiving the self as inherently meaningful. However the *gcod* practice does also have a secondary, social function, as a healing practice employed to deal with physical maladies and obstacles. It is this secondary function which also informed Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's presentation of *Healing Chö* to Western audiences. Before looking at this in greater detail, it would be helpful here to understand what happens when *gcod* develops in a place which culturally has a very different concept of what can be understood by the term 'demon'.

### **Perception of demons and fear**

The title of this chapter was intended to highlight a Western attitude towards fear, disease, suffering and addiction. One 'battles' with cancer or inner demons. Along with the hopes enshrined in a dream of fulfilment through self-reliance is the idea that fear is something to wage a war upon. This is entirely different than the Buddhist concept inherent in the *gcod* practice. The Buddhist approach teaches that ultimately the demon is an illusion to be liberated. It represents your own deluded sense of self. Unlike the heroes of Western cultures, Tibet's great hero saint Milarepa did not battle with or slay dragons or monsters, he recognised them as coming from within his own mind:

Those spirits which interact with humans are only perceived as harmful spirits and *yaksas* from an unenlightened mind. Ultimately it all comes down to your perception, from your mind, whether we are considering inner demons or outer demons'.<sup>367</sup>

Kollmar-Paulenz writes of the European concept of demons and its roots in early Christianity in which they are considered an opposite force to 'good' which differs greatly

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<sup>367</sup> See Patrul (1998:304). Here Milarepa refers to the demons as conjurations of his own mind. The fact that he has conjured them up indicates that they are his own inner obstructions. Though they are manifestations, they need to be confronted as if they existed. Milarepa states that demonic obstacles are not 'evil' since they can be used as opportunities for spiritual growth. See Berghasch and Jillson (2001:379).

from the Buddhist concept which insists upon the non-existence of demons and gods, considering them to be imaginations of our mind, without substance or self.<sup>368</sup> Buddhist philosophical traditions view ‘demons’ as one’s perceptions of self and phenomena as intrinsically ‘real’. Since awareness habitually reacts according to its conceptual and fabricated images of reality, an unenlightened mind is regarded as the source of all kinds of misapprehensions which in turn give rise to a range of afflictions and obstacles. A practice such as *gcod*, grounded in this philosophical basis, seeks to undercut the habits of misperception which give rise to these experiences. Many of the deities and demons traditionally summoned to the ritual feast of *gcod* are indigenous Tibetan deities and spirits. The spirits populating the Tibetan environment are considered ‘real’ in the sense that they interact with humans and yet they convey a deeper symbolic meaning as well. There is then a paradoxical belief in a demonic reality simultaneously as there is an assertion of its nonexistence.

In the practice of *gcod* that which is to be cut is *rang gces ‘dzin* (self-cherishing) and/or *bdag ‘dzin* (self-grasping). In traditional accounts Ma chig is asked by one of her disciples Gangs pa rmug sang to explain the four *māras* <sup>369</sup> she identifies the *bdud bzhi* (four demons) as *thogs bcas* (outer demons) which arise in reliance upon an outside object, or those which can be physically perceived *thogs med* (inner demons), which arise in reliance upon investigations of the inner mind (these do not appear as a sense objects but are positive or negative concepts arising in the mind). In other words they represent

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<sup>368</sup>Kolmar-Paulenz (2005:21) refers to Augustine’s ‘*De divinatio daemonu*’, wherein demons were considered as ‘real’ as human beings (even if not visible to the human eye).

<sup>369</sup> Harding writes that these are reminiscent of the four classical *māras* of Mahāyāna Buddhism. See Harding (2003:16). Kolmar-Paulenz (2005:112) writes that in the *sādhana* entitled *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa zab mo gcod kyi man ngag gi gzung bka’ tshoms chen mo*. (Possibly written by Ma chig herself) there is a systematic analysis of the metaphorical meaning of the *bdud bzhi* that plays a central role in the theoretical foundation of the *gcod* tradition.

mental grasping at good or bad conditions. The third kind are *dga' brod*, (demons of joy or exultation) which represent mental attachment to fame, power or experiences of meditative bliss (delighting in such experiences causes obstacles to arise). The final demon is *snyem byed* (the demon of inflation) which comes from retaining the idea of dualistic conceptions of subject and object. This represents mind holding on an idea of a self where there is no self.<sup>370</sup>

Important to note here is that it is the *perception* of demons that leads to the liberation from them. They are both 'real' and 'not real' simultaneously. Their 'reality' comes from the power of the mind to fix them with an identity. So we perceive phenomena as real but they have no intrinsic existence, and we could say that in general what we experience are our own projections. This applies to what we can perceive as 'demons', entities or agents outside, or inner voices or powers. Yet another angle is the description of our own defilements as demons that need to be destroyed - especially *bdag 'dzin*, the self-grasping mind which needs to be annihilated. The Buddhist metaphors for this annihilation can often be extremely violent, as seen in the examples of traditional Tibetan dances or the burial of treasure vases. These rituals are often rooted in the language and action of violent suppression of demons. The *gcod* tradition turns this 'violence' upon one's own conception of self.

Prominent Buddhist teachers in the West, Tibetan and non-Tibetan alike, often have to consider the market for books, venues for teaching and interaction with the media and/or at the very least reception by the general public. The language employed to describe popular Buddhist rituals or 'performances' is non-violent, sexual vocabulary is watered

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<sup>370</sup> See Harding (2003:117-130).

down or eliminated and emphasis is placed on generic peaceful terms. Descriptions and advertisements for such events are often written in a kind of new age jargon which employ recognisable 'cultural tags'. To the point that the word 'Tibetan' produces the same resonance with the audience as the words 'healing', 'peaceful' and 'mystical'. These kinds of iterations transformed and translated into a pre-existing idiom for use in Western settings are not solely the creation of Westerners, the audience or the organisers and promoters of such events. It may be an unpopular point, but this kind of 'marketing' is also active in some quarters of Tibetan communities in exile since it can be utilised for political as well as commercial purposes.<sup>371</sup>

The often violent or sexual metaphors employed in Tibetan rituals just aren't presentable to the majority of non-Buddhist Western audiences because they produce an entirely different frame of reference. In the presentation to the West, Tibetan demons and the violent subjugation or annihilation of them, become psychological states or impersonal spiritual energies presented in a sanitised and gentle way. However it is important to understand this from a Tibetan spiritual teacher's perspective, part of the circumspect language employed to present these teachings to a Western general public such as Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *Healing Chö*, is in line with the Tibetan concept of *phyi* that is an 'outer' aspect which can be understood by anyone and is not harmful. There is also a pragmatic consideration to bear in mind, many Westerners might not wish to pay for or engage in a weekend of healing which entailed someone visualising cutting them up as a banquet for a series of 'demonic' beings.

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<sup>371</sup> See Huber (2001).

Western interpretations and often Tibetans own explanation of the *gcod* practice have been framed in a language of ‘healing’, ‘releasing’ and ‘letting go’ rather than ‘cutting’ or ‘annihilating’. This has also been helped along by the fact that in recent years, *gcod* has become romanticised by travellers from Western countries who encountered Tibetans



Figure 45. Participants of the *Healing Chö*.

practicing it in India in the 1960s and 70s. The melodic nature of the practice was often what initially attracted Westerners not perhaps fully understanding the ultimate aim of the ritual.<sup>372</sup> Thus a practice based upon the premise of complete self-annihilation is becoming increasingly popular in North America a country which has an entirely different religious and philosophical framework.

### **The Healing Chö**

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa’s *Healing Chö* is now continued by Rigdzin Dorje and is intended for the general populace rather than for those more deeply immersed in a traditional Tibetan Vajrayāna tradition. It is also explicitly a way to generate funds for the building of the Zangdokpalri temple and for the continued support of the more than two hundred or so monks and nuns living at the two monastic centres in India. *The Healing Chö* as it is presented in the West is generally performed in a local hall, dharma centre, or one of

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<sup>372</sup> At the beginning of his book, when he heard *gcod* being practiced for the first time, Edou describes ‘...the slow rhythm of a haunting melody...I was held spellbound by this moving song, so different from any ritual chant I had heard before’. Edou (1996:1).

myriad North American alternative therapeutic/spiritual centres. Participants bring a pillow and blanket and lie down, men on their right sides, women on their left while keeping in mind the obstacles they wish to be removed 'from their karma'. They remain this way throughout the entire ceremony.

Divided into four sessions over two days, after the final session the presiding lama may, give a brief teaching and explanation of the practice, but usually without ever explicitly detailing the intense visualisations which accompany the practice.<sup>373</sup> The preparatory information for participants describes it as a secular non-violent process and stresses that it should not be thought of as an exorcism. Emphasis is placed upon it as a ritual intended to heal mental and physical sickness, remove karmic obstacles to spiritual growth and address human suffering:

During the multiple-session Healing Chö ceremony, there will be no teachings to listen to, no instructions to follow or techniques to learn. Just bring your favourite pillow, a blanket or mat, lie down and relax. The Chö consists of four musically compelling rituals (with breaks in between)<sup>374</sup> led by Rinpoche and the monks and nuns of Zangdokpalri. The sacred sound and mantra initiate favourable conditions necessary to pacify the causes of discord and illness...The good news is that there is really nothing to know and it really doesn't matter if you understand it or not.<sup>375</sup>

Participants are told that the monks and nuns are visualising a very complicated process during the ceremony and, in its most basic form it is understood as a 'releasing' of the ego:

Rather than breaking something that exists, it implies a release of something that is an illusion into something that is vast and open without any duality so one is in a natural state. What we are going to try to do during the ceremony is just release this grasp. We're not cutting anything, it is not something violent or extreme but when these thoughts come up and we grasp them, we are dragged by them, they never really end. ...the easiest thing to do is just rest - take a nap! Let Rinpoche and the monks and nuns perform their healing ceremony for you. In a sense, Rinpoche is able to meditate for you, to clear away a lot of karmic stuff.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> The presiding lama and the monks and the nuns visualise themselves as Khros ma nag mo but the audience are the ones for whom they are performing the ritual and who are transformed into the banquet.

<sup>374</sup> See Schrepf (1995:97) who notes how Tibetan '*cham*' are edited down or truncated to fit in with Western audiences' 'performance duration' expectations.

<sup>375</sup> See [www.zangdokpalri.org](http://www.zangdokpalri.org) for a full copy of the preparatory information.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid. When I attended one of the Healing Chö weekends led by RD in 2008 it was profiled in a local newspaper which described the ritual: 'It is likened to psychological vitamins and emphasized as something entirely secular and generic...the organization stresses that the ceremony is not an exorcism of

The conception of the ritual as promoting healing has become the predominant form of *gcod* in America. This kind of presentation to the general population of tantric Buddhist teachings isn't inconsistent with Tibetan historical traditions. In the *Deb ther smon po* (*Blue Annals*), a fifteenth century Tibetan history compiled by Gos blo tsa ba gzon nu dpal (1392-1481), there are examples of how adepts of *gcod* cure tuberculosis, leprosy and restore sight and hearing to the blind and the deaf instantly.<sup>377</sup> A gentler initial presentation of *gcod* allows it to be more accessible to Westerners who might not quite be ready for the more radical aspects of the practice. The concept of *gang la gang 'dul* which in Tibetan translates as 'whatever activity is necessary or required to tame beings' is part of the intention behind the *Healing Chö*, for it to be a skilful and appropriate ritual for a general audience.

It must be noted however that these kinds of Buddhist weekend retreats can often appeal to a mania for 'self-improvement' not intended to eradicate the belief in a self, but to valorise and cherish it. In this context *gcod* is in danger of becoming misunderstood as a perfection of ego or a pursuit of happiness, while its intention is as a method of *destroying* the notion of ego and goes beyond the concept of happiness or unhappiness. The conflict is between this ultimate 'intention' of *gcod* and its misinterpretation as a tool for self-fulfilment. This is not a contestation between 'traditional' and 'modern' but in the understanding of it as a Buddhist ritual and not a 'performance'. The risk of trivialisation arises when *gcod* is disassociated from its role as a transformative spiritual practice and instead becomes a form of therapeutic entertainment.

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demons but one designed to soothe and placate them and points out that in a traditional Tibetan sense most people would come and receive blessings this way, practices such as this were always the domain of lamas and ordained and lay people would not have much knowledge of it.' NM (Shapiro: 2008).

<sup>377</sup> See Roerich (1949: 992-997).

## CHAPTER NINE

### GLOBAL VAJRAYĀNA: RELATIVE, VIRTUAL AND ULTIMATE REALITY

#### Online transmission

As various religious groups convene in virtual gatherings, log into web casts and chat rooms, digital technology now plays a globally central role in the practice and dissemination of religious traditions. One might reasonably consider whether ritual and spirituality are *changed* in a virtual environment. What is gained and what is lost from the digital technological advances available to a global audience who are able to participate in real time. Is physical presence required for an 'authentic' experience? Does the 'virtual' constitute an additional reality<sup>378</sup> and do experiences in this reality form a part of religious experience? McLuhan's concept of the 'global village'<sup>379</sup> is frequently used as a metaphor for the internet, a research and communication instrument which will inevitably make traditional libraries and archives obsolete and transform the nature of scholarly activity to become more interdisciplinary and collaborative. However it is also arguably accelerating commoditized spirituality and morphing into a global bazaar.

Rigdzin Dorje, since the death of his father continues the legacy presiding over the monastic seat in Arunachal Pradesh and the nunnery in Assam and travelling to the United States to present Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's teachings. The *Healing Chö* being one of the most popularly received. During his time teaching in the West and primarily in North America he has conducted traditional empowerments simultaneously broadcast

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<sup>378</sup> See O'Leary (2001).

<sup>379</sup> See McLuhan (1962) and (1964).

over the web. In November of 2008 Rigdzin Dorje gave teachings and empowerments of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *rDo rje gro lod*<sup>380</sup> *gter ma* text at The Washington Center for Consciousness Studies<sup>381</sup> a centre which presents an eclectic array of spiritual practices focusing on a combination of meditation and psychological practices. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa visited this centre in 2005 and Rigdzin Dorje has frequently over subsequent years presented teachings and empowerments there. The organisation offers a subscription service which provides members with the ability to connect remotely via web transmission, there are no spiritual requirements necessary and no previous knowledge of any of the practices are required. Attending Rigdzin Dorje's teachings were a mixture of experienced practitioners, members of the 'heart consciousness' community as well as those who had seen posters or advertising in local press and were curious.

This event and subsequent ones prompted dismay on behalf of some of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's Western followers who felt that making such empowerments and teachings public and the decision on the part of the founders of this organisation to allow the distribution of the texts, (some of which were considered 'secret') was careless and disrespectful. It is interesting to note that the anger was directed towards the centre itself and the arrangers of the teachings, not towards Rigdzin Dorje himself who allowed the event to occur. This seems to highlight a tendency of paternalistic attitudes towards Tibetans being used or taken advantage of and that digital technology is responsible for the erosion or perversion of the teachings instead of looking realistically at the intentions and perceptions of all its participants.

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<sup>380</sup> These practices can be found in Volume 2 of KDL's *gsung 'bum*: '*Nor bu'i phreng ba*'.

<sup>381</sup> See <http://www.meditatelive.com/archives/video/meditation> for various examples of the kinds of eclectic spiritual practices offered at this center. Subscribers are able to log in or attend in person; they can also download previous teachings, meditation sessions and empowerments.

Rigdzin Dorje, a highly skilled, knowledge-holder of his father's teachings who is also familiar with the West can recognise the potential value of technology as a tool to propagate the teachings and to generate funds to support the large group of nuns and monks who depend upon him. As Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's son and spiritual heir he knows very well what is appropriate to present to a general audience. Yet criticisms directed at the centre's organisers, irrespective of their intentions, somehow reduce him to a passive subject and cast him as a victim unable to stop the relentless plundering and commercialisation of 'traditional' Buddhist teachings. This also relates to a tendency in the West to imagine that these teachings must remain Tibetan to be 'authentic', any attempts to present them via modern technology, in another language or incorporating them into an alternative cultural context is to distort them.

Certainly this is a similar process to that of the inception and development of Buddhism in Tibet which insisted upon texts and practices to show an Indian provenance to be 'authentic' and any indigenous cross-fertilisation considered a perversion. Like many other Tibetan lamas who teach in the West, Rigdzin Dorje becomes caught in the crossfire between those who want to receive the teachings in a way they can understand and relate to and those who want to keep Tibetan Buddhism 'traditional' and resist its adaptation to a modern context. Tibetans themselves are rarely considered here, neither those motivated by altruistic intention, nor the commercial opportunist or in fact those who, by necessity, represent a mixture of the two.

One objection or argument could be said that the lack of physicality presents a problem. Sitting in front of a computer one is removed from the process and there is a disruption to the 'intention' of being present to receive the teachings, an important aspect of anyone

seriously contemplating receiving the blessings of the teachings or an oral empowerment. There are doubts raised about the efficacy of such online experiences whereby some essential and sensory components, which cannot translate or transmute via a computer terminal, are lost. (However, one could argue that physical presence is no guarantor of 'intention' or for that matter attention). The broadcasting of teachings over the web is now commonplace, many Tibetan and non-Tibetan Lamas and teachers conduct teachings via webcast. These may not generally differ much than the large scale teachings, blessings and empowerments that Tibetan lamas traditionally gave in Tibet, in exile in India and elsewhere. Many important and renowned teachers in Tibet would often teach to very large crowds of people.

## Virtual reality

Another aspect of digital technological advances warranting further study is the



Figure 46. Virtual meditation in 'Second Life'.

existence of virtual worlds such as 'Second Life' hosting Buddhist centres where one can attend teachings, perform prostrations and meditate<sup>382</sup> This virtual reality or 'metaverse'<sup>383</sup> is an alternate universe without geographic features in an ordinary sense but possessing its own

kind of topography and 'sacred' landscape. There is an attempt to sanctify it as an arena

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<sup>382</sup> Scholarship of this is still in the early stages but see Bollerstoff (2008) and Jones (2006). To experience a Buddhist teaching in Second Life, conducted via [www.thebuddhacenter.org](http://www.thebuddhacenter.org) there are many examples on file sharing sites which present recordings of the gatherings for example:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCtZ0KD-Tik&feature=relmfu>/accessed 16/07/2012. Or else one may visit the centre virtually via [www.seconddlife.com](http://www.seconddlife.com).

<sup>383</sup> The term metaverse was coined in Neal Stephenson's (1992) science fiction novel 'Snow Crash' where humans, as avatars, interact with each other and software agents, in a three-dimensional virtual reality-based successor to the Internet.

in which spirituality can manifest. It may be, as one scholar of the phenomenon suggests, that virtual reality presents new philosophical and psychological questions of how we define reality and blurs the boundaries of corporeality and transcendence.<sup>384</sup> A Buddhist response to such a 'reality' would presumably be to suggest that everything comes down to perceptions of self and that not recognizing an inherent non-dual nature, the same distractions, suffering and delusion exist in virtual environments as anywhere else. As long as you are deluded by duality and fixated on a concept of 'self and other' it is irrelevant whether you are here or there.

### **Archives and digital libraries**

Perhaps a less controversial aspect of digital technology in the propagation of twenty first century Vajrayāna is the way in which it is used as a tool for the preservation of information. Rigdzin Dorje and his senior students have embraced new technology as a useful tool which not only helps them and their followers by offering downloadable teachings, texts and recordings from their website but has also aided them greatly in the organisation and preservation of his texts and *rnam thar*. With the development of computer animation, visualisations intended to accompany practices can be produced with moving graphics. Buddhist mantras turn endlessly on computer screen savers and with the ability to print mantras so minutely and so abundantly, one is able to quickly print the enormous amounts of mantras required to fill statues and stupas.

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<sup>384</sup> See Jones (2006:15).



Figure 47. Minute reproduction of the Mañjuśrī mantra printed to fill statues and stupas.

Tibetologist David Germano describes what he calls a ‘quiet revolution’ of new digital library technologies and humanities computing which, he believes, indicate a major transformation in the areas of collaboration, interdisciplinary approaches, active student reading, internationalisation, public outreach and publication.<sup>385</sup> Using the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library (THDL)<sup>386</sup> as an example, Germano describes the way in which technological development enables a radical convergence of religious/Buddhist studies with the broader field of area studies of a particular region. The THDL began as an initiative within the University of Virginia to create digital catalogues of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* using SGML mark-up language.<sup>387</sup> This allows for extensive, nonlinear and complex analysis and explorations of the corpus via multi-layered browsing and searching. It also, as Germano discovered, allows for easy incorporation of non-textual

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<sup>385</sup> See Germano (2007).

<sup>386</sup> See ER ([www.thlib.org](http://www.thlib.org)).

<sup>387</sup> By describing the contents and context of data files, the ‘quality’ of the original data is greatly increased. For example, a webpage may include metadata specifying what language it's written in, what tools were used to create it, and where to go for more on the subject.

items and the ability to link to other types of resources, in short it allows for a multi-dimensional approach to a collection of Tibetan texts, Germano writes:

The digital nature of the catalogue allows for flexible means of access rather than a more simple linear sequence of pages and the modest finding aid of a basic print index...humanities computing has developed into a proto-laboratory in which computer scientists, librarians, archivists, publishers, photographers, film makers and humanities scholars have formed a network with new and innovative intellectual approaches, partnerships, publications, teachings and public access to resources.<sup>388</sup>

It is a fast and vast way of searching for a particular word, concept, person, geographical reference and so on. A text which has been 'marked up' in a such a way can at the click of a button bring up all instances of whatever you are looking for as well as links to other works, doing in minutes what could before take a lonely scholar an entire lifetime to find. The initial project at the University of Virginia developed into an entire Himalayan thematic research collection including models of monasteries, maps, gazetteers and dictionaries and continues to grow.

Another example in the field of Tibetan Studies which has allowed scholars globally to consult a vast collection are the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center<sup>389</sup> and visual archives such as the University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum online 'Tibet Album', a photographic collection of pre 1959-Tibet.<sup>390</sup> In the composition of the present study, these types of resources supplied the maps and photos and texts to contextualise Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's life story and legacy. The photographs and maps illustrating Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's first childhood memories outlined in Chapter one and the photograph of the mountain pass of Nam la he traversed when entering Pad ma bkod came from this resource. These are testament to the fact that such archives provide

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<sup>388</sup>See Germano (2007:335).

<sup>389</sup> See ER ([www.tbrc.org](http://www.tbrc.org)).

<sup>390</sup> See ER ([www.tibet.prm.ox.ac.uk](http://www.tibet.prm.ox.ac.uk)).



nature. A report on the use of information technology in humanities research produced by the British Library in 1993 made this rather hopeful statement:

The improved access to data held at scattered remote sites and the mechanical ability to manipulate large quantities of data will swiftly offer the scholar the time and assistance to become more of a thinker than a searcher'.<sup>392</sup>

The hope expressed in this report was that this kind of hyper-power to research and cross reference would enhance scholastic academic study but, one could argue twenty years after this report was written, it may have produced quite the opposite effect.

Jose Cabézon points out, in regards to the field of Buddhist studies, that nearly all Buddhist scriptural collections in all the major Buddhist languages, Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Korean and Tibetan are either already available in digital form or are in the process of being input and exist as searchable text.<sup>393</sup> What are the implications when such works are further translated into numerous languages and then archived in the collections of universities and translation committees? Mayer addresses this issue in relation to the development of a critically edited English translation of the University of Virginia's version of the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* being made available online as a searchable text which he states 'entails placing a new intellectual structuring on to the texts which follows a Western academic gaze'. This is a project which Mayer suggests not only will transform what is considered a Tibetan ritual item into a 'global textual resource', but further brings up questions of 'ownership' shifting from Tibetan religious orders to a secular American University. The implications of this, he states, are still unresolved.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> See British Library (NM:1993:27).

<sup>393</sup> See Cabézon (2007:290).

<sup>394</sup> See Mayer (2006:97:98, f.3).

The internet is a powerful communication tool which allows a user to click on a word or phrase which then leads (via a link) to other documents or pages with similar words or concepts that can go on like this infinitely. It seems initially miraculous and marvellous until one considers that information, texts and ideas can be cut and pasted to suit individual agendas and produces a surfeit of fragmentation and a paucity of synthesis.

Another point to consider is that aside from meditation, most Western Buddhists would consider reading Buddhist books one of their primary activities, whereas in most traditional Asian Buddhist cultures many texts are a support for oral recitation and viewed as sacred objects. The religious literature of Buddhism has been written primarily as an aid to oral and personal instruction by an 'authorised' teacher and requires them to 'transmit' the knowledge from teacher to student. These are not books to be 'read' in the sense that a western practitioner might understand. McMahan writes that the translation of these texts into Western languages is not just a linguistic translation it brings up the nature of translation itself. He points to the Sanskrit term *mokṣa* which can be translated into English as 'freedom' or 'liberty'. A Buddhist interpretation of *mokṣa* indicates liberation from rebirth in samsara or liberation from suffering. 'Liberty', to many North Americans, can elicit completely different interpretations and we then are brought back into the territory of distortion and cultural misapprehension.<sup>395</sup>

### **Future potentialities**

The Tibetan language was first written during the early seventh century when the Tibetan monarch Srong-btsan sgam-po, 569–649?/605–649?) ordered a standard script to be devised. Traditional Buddhist accounts state that Thönmi Sambhota invented a Tibetan alphabet and grammar for a new literary language based on Sanskrit. Although

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<sup>395</sup> See McMahan (2008:17).

the veracity of this account cannot be proved there is no doubt that in the seventh and eight centuries the growth of Tibetan literacy contributed to enduring changes in the Tibetan world. Kapstein writes that it facilitated the redaction and regularisation of indigenous Tibetan laws and traditions and was one of the elements crucial in the transformation of the cultural history of early medieval Tibet:

The process whereby the principality of Yarlung grew to become the kingdom of Tibet, continued to expand to include territories and peoples beyond the confines of the Tibetan world... [it]required and created a literate imperial administration...it is scarcely conceivable that this occurred without the accompaniment of significant ideological transformations. The advent of literacy and literate practices were thus both the consequences and conditions for great changes in many aspects of the culture of Tibet. Literacy contributed to the emergence of and empowerment of new classes involved in a new literary culture....scribes and clerks as well as members of older more dominant classes...the written word was a new and powerful technology in Tibet...the newly literate empire both increasingly favoured writing as a vehicle for the organization not only of established knowledge but also of diplomacy, intelligence and the assimilation and diffusion of new knowledge within a heterogeneously composed literate community.<sup>396</sup>

If writing and the formation of the Tibetan alphabet was a catalyst for the assimilation and diffusion of new knowledge and marked a shift in consciousness in medieval Tibet and in the diffusion of Buddhism, then arguably, electronic media in the twenty-first century similarly marks a transformation of how we receive information. Therefore it should also, if history is any guide, have profound consequences for religious belief and practice. Through electronic media, sight, sound, voice, image and music is shared and received instantaneously; temporality and communality is changed by speech shared in real time, yet retains aspects of print culture. Books, radio and television are a one way channel from broadcaster to audience whereas computer networks provide a vast electronic speaker's corner. This new medium is a hybrid and ephemeral form of communication, one which is talking and writing and reading simultaneously and flows instantly with writer, broadcaster and audience interacting with one another.

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<sup>396</sup> See Kapstein (2000:54-5).

If the emergence of a Tibetan alphabet had a profound impact on the inception of Buddhism into Tibet, one may reasonably anticipate that the digital revolution of the information age will be accompanied by similarly massive upheavals in a global, social sphere. In the way religion is practiced and the way that knowledge is transmitted, particularly in the organisation of established knowledge such as online archives and for the diffusion of knowledge via webcast. It's not just Buddhism in America that will develop in light of these aspects, Buddhism as a whole will change. A process of cultural invention and adaptation is already underway as ancient traditions are translated and transformed into contemporary expressions. New forms have already emerged via a process of innovation by Tibetans and non-Tibetans alike. Old symbols will be replaced by functional equivalents in the idioms of digital technological culture.

How will Tibetan Buddhism in particular adapt, mutate and ultimately survive and prosper in this new communicative environment? As we move from text-based transmissions into an era where graphic user interface becomes the standard and spirituality becomes more visual and aural, will its ethos also be transformed by its appearance in virtual reality? As old and new forms of spirituality jostle for attention in a cultural and spiritual marketplace, using digital technologies to reach their audiences, what kinds of novel iterations of Tibetan Buddhist practices will emerge and, more specifically to this study, will new types of *gter ma* emerge in this arena?

## CHAPTER TEN

### *GTER MA IN THE WEST*

#### **gTer ma creation and ‘authentication’**

The importance and ‘authenticity’ of *gter ma* rests upon the concepts of lineage, transmission and authority. *gTer ma* establishes and reiterates the mythology of earlier Tibetan history, it also produces new *sādhana*, yogic techniques, liturgies, rituals, methods for the manufacture of religious art, dance and architecture, and statements of philosophy and doctrine. However this ‘new’ material mostly represents an elaboration of well-established doctrinal material.<sup>397</sup> It may be more appropriate to take a diachronic approach when considering *gter ma* texts as well as understanding that this type of literature is the product of a ‘collective authorship’ spanning several centuries. A current study of ‘innovation’ in rNying ma scriptural revelation by Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell proposes adopting an alternative set of terms to understand the ‘creation’ of Tibetan revelatory texts. As stated in the introduction to this study, they suggest that the approach employed by scholars of medieval Hebraic literature might prove to be useful as a way to study the development of *gter ma* literature. Talmudic scholars use terms such as ‘tradents’ to indicate contributions by those responsible for preserving and handing on an oral tradition and ‘re-anthologise’ existing themes over long periods of time.

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<sup>397</sup> Since the focus of this study is concerned with *gter ma* of the rNying ma tradition, this discussion is upon the way that it articulates Buddhist doctrine and how rNying ma *gter ston* act as direct conduits through which the figure of Padmasambhava conveys Buddhist instructions and teachings to future generations. Although *gter ma* may function in a similar way in the Bon tradition, the content is different to that of the rNying ma pa.

*gTer ston* represent an unbroken chain of transmission and draw upon existing materials of, what Mayer calls, 'proven Dharmic worth' to use as building blocks with which to construct a new *gter ma* scripture.<sup>398</sup> These texts can be substantially modified by other hands in subsequent re-publications, even while still retaining their original authorial (or revelatory) attribution. Mayer writes:

Some Hebraists call such fundamental categories 'lemmata'. Longer passages, such as a paragraph or chapter comprising composites of such lemmata, are also legitimately reproducible either approximately or verbatim, according to Tibetan norms. Some Hebraists would call such reproducible composites that are not yet a complete work 'microforms'. Finally, a complete work, such as the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, or a commentary upon it, is called a 'macroform'. The way such literary constructions are put together resembles an 'anthological' model: tradents select existing lemmata and microforms and re-anthologise them to make new wholes.<sup>399</sup>

Although *gter ston* can be considered innovators in the sense that they introduce new ritual forms, liturgical cycles and even lineages to address the needs of a particular time and place, the core content of *gter ma* texts are generally conservative. The essential teachings they contain originate from an unbroken train of transmission from master to disciple.<sup>400</sup> Far from displaying creativity or innovation, *gter ma* texts generally present material that conforms to previous generations of texts. Therefore *gter ston* retrieve scriptural content and incorporate well established teachings, deity practices, liturgies and meditative instructions; 'mining, extracting and creatively re-working and combining texts from different visionary revelations'.<sup>401</sup> They are able to do so due to their capacity of memory, a dormant database which is recalled and accessed during the

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<sup>398</sup> See Mayer (ER : 2010).

<sup>399</sup> This information formed part of a lecture given on Tibetan scriptural innovation given by Dr. Rob Mayer at Oxford University in 2011. The A.H.R.C. study is at the time of writing in process and therefore no academic publications are yet presented. See also Mayer (ER:2010) and Cantwell and Mayer (2011).

<sup>400</sup> Interesting are the parallels which can be drawn with the study of the origins of early Islamic texts which have also been at the centre of a debate as to whether later texts truly represent the 'word of Muhammad'. Berg (2000:1-2) writes that the core of the debate surrounding later developments in this tradition centres on '...the value scholars assign to the *isnād* (chain of transmitters) which is intended to demonstrate the authenticity and indicate the provenance of the tradition (*Hadīth*). *Isnād* is seen either as a reasonably reliable guarantee of the historicity of its adjoining text or as a complete fabrication designed to insinuate later authority'.

<sup>401</sup> See Cantwell (2011).

act of revelation.<sup>402</sup> Kunzang Dechen Lingpa as a *gter ston* was able to draw upon a vast collection of Buddhist teachings and tap into a stream of transmission to produce an appropriate teaching for the appropriate time and place. In the examination of the *gter ma* he revealed in North America one can see he was drawing inspiration from very early *rdzogs chen* texts which have been reproduced and elaborated upon in a number of collections of texts such as the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* and the *Rin chen gter mdzod*.

It is reasonable to assume that someone of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's learning would have memorised large portions of these texts and was able to summon up their contents in the course of *gter ma* revelation. For example, his *gter ma* text titled *Khyung sgrub na ga tshar gcod* (*The garuda practice to annihilate nāga*) revealed in California at the request of one of his American students shares similarities with *khyung* texts contained in the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*.<sup>403</sup> Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's entire *gter ma* corpus elaborates upon materials associated with his teacher and with his previous incarnations. Since he was considered the reincarnation of Jedrung Rinpoche, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa titles his collection of *gter ma Padma gsang thig* (*The secret essence of pad ma*) also the title of Jedrung Rinpoche's revelatory cache.<sup>404</sup> As Jedrung Rinpoche's

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<sup>402</sup> See Gyatso (1986) for an examination of signs and memory in the transmission of rNying ma Buddhist revelatory material.

<sup>403</sup>References to *khyung* (garuda) are found throughout Tibetan literature, with particular prominence in the *rdzogs chen* traditions of the rNying ma and Bon traditions. Hillis (2002) who has studied *khyung* texts contained in the NGB asserts that they generally belong to one of two major doxographical categories either Atiyoga or Mahāyoga. In the Atiyoga works in particular, the image of the *Khyung* is part of a larger network of associated images related to space and is most frequently compared to a practitioner of *rdzogs chen*. In respect for the request in the colophon I have not included a translation of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *Khyung* text in this discussion. The translation of this colophon was taken from Rigdzin Dorje's handwritten copy which he transcribed from KDL'S *ḍākinī* script: From the profound oceanic essence/This scroll is essentially clear/I have entrusted [it] to ones who are karmically connected/It should be kept very secret from the uninitiated/Recognizing all sentient beings as our parents, arouse Bodhicitta/ This is protected by the nine circles of female protectors/ samaya rgya,rgya, rgya/From Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's heart expanse of the sky treasury.

<sup>404</sup>(Tezu: 1974).

incarnation he had the 'authority' to access this revelatory cache as well re-anthologise and develop the pre-existing material.<sup>405</sup>

Often a *gter ston's* texts or *rnam thar* will feature a *lung bstan* (prophecy) issued from Padmasambhava predicting the subject's divine birth and describing signs which indicate a *gter ston's* special 'powers'. As seen in chapter four of this study, before he passed away Kunzang Dechen Lingpa related a prophecy from Padmasambhava indicating that he was an incarnation of one of his original disciples. Gyatso writes that *lung bstan* are a form of 'legitimising device' utilized to show that the [*gter ma*] cycle was not 'authored' by the discoverer but rather 'formulated by Padmasambhava in the past, proving that the discoverer is in fact the person who was designated by Padmasambhava for the revelation of this treasure'.<sup>406</sup> *gTer ma* are also 'legitimised' through the spiritual powers of the *gter ston*, evident in the biographical and sometimes autobiographical details of the individual discoverers' visionary *gter ma* adventures.<sup>407</sup> Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *rnam thar* shows during his time in Pad ma bkod a central factor in his recognition as Jedrung Rinpoche is the public revelation of *sa gter* an act which proves his special powers in the minds of Jedrung's followers and the subsequent identification of him as an incarnation of Jedrung Rinpoche.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>405</sup>Cantwell (2011) suggests that Dudjom Rinpoche similarly developed the corpus of his own predecessor, Dudjom Lingpa.

<sup>406</sup> See Gyatso (1996:159).

<sup>407</sup> See Gyatso (1996:147-50).

<sup>408</sup> This then allows (along with the previous recognition of Klong gsal snying po) a crucial link with the figure of Padmasambhava. KDL is then understood to be Padmasambhava's disciple Lang gro kon chog 'byung gnas. The image of KDL's successive incarnations (outlined in Part three of this study) which adorns the wall of his Zangdokpalri temple in Arunachal Pradesh serves as a visual reminder of his importance and of the unbroken chain of transmission which leads ultimately back to primordial Buddhas.

## The role of a *gter ston*

From a Tibetan Buddhist perspective a *gter ston*'s role is to act as an intercessor on behalf of sentient beings, creating a direct link with past Buddhist figures of importance. They aren't probably too concerned with 'legitimising strategies' but rather with the purpose of *gter ma* as a means to maintain Buddhist doctrine and to ensure that the blessings and instructions of that doctrine do not fade.<sup>409</sup> Additionally, of prime concern to a *gter ston* are the concomitant and conducive circumstances required in order for *gter ma* to emerge.<sup>410</sup> Without the necessary conditions, *gter ma* cannot issue forth, as is evident in Kunzang Dechen Lingpa being unable to retrieve his '*gter ma* list' due to the absence of the consort at the site in Pad ma bkod. Further, although *gter ma* can generally be understood as conservative in terms of its *content*, the method by which new texts, practices and rituals emerge can be considered 'innovation' in the sense that they introduce new material and rearrange material in a new way. They transcend temporal, cultural and geographic boundaries and become a way for other cultures to benefit from the direct stream of transmission via the contemporary *gter ston* in their midst; simply doing what they are meant to, revealing teachings for a particular circumstance with its success dependent upon all the necessary auspicious conditions coming together for its revelation.

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<sup>409</sup> These purposes are outlined by Thondup (1986:62).

<sup>410</sup> In an eye-witness account of the contemporary revelation of *sa gter*, Span Hanna writes that before the Bon po *gter ston ma* Khandro Khachi Wangmo revealed earth treasures from a rock in the Kong po region of Tibet it was stressed to the group travelling with her the importance of making a positive atmosphere: 'Anything disrupting the harmony of the group would give rise to conditions inauspicious for the revelation of *gter ma*'. Hanna (1994:2).

## Influences on Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *The Vajra Verses*

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *gter ma* text *rDzogs pa chen po'i rgyud rdo rje'i tshig rkang* (*The vajra verses of the rdzogs chen tradition*) draws upon an early proto-typical *rdzogs chen* text, versions of which are found in several sources identified by Karmay<sup>411</sup> and, it can be reasonably assumed, would have been easily 'retrievable' to someone of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's learning and stature. The text is known as the *Rig pa'i khu byug* (*The cuckoo of awareness*) or the *rDo rje tshig drug* (*The six vajra verses*). It was written, according to the rNying ma tradition, by the Indian mahāsiddha Vairocana in the eighth century<sup>412</sup> and survives through to the present day as a text in the collection of Dun Huang materials now contained in the British Museum. Known in the British Library collection as IOL 647 it is a six line *rtsa ba* (root text) with accompanying '*grel ba* (commentary). In Karmay's opinion the root text and the commentary represent proto-types of the development of later literature of the *rdzogs chen* tradition. As well as embodying the principal tenets of *rdzogs chen* thought<sup>413</sup> they also serve as a basic structure upon which later texts are built, expanded and elaborated; so that the lines of the root text and the commentary are sometimes incorporated verbatim, expanded, re-contextualised or woven into disparate sections of a particular text.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> See Karmay (2007: 41-59).

<sup>412</sup> See Karmay (2007:17-41) for an examination of various accounts of Vairocana from both rNying ma and Bon sources. The text itself makes no such distinction as root text and commentary so this is a later categorisation of the text. It also nowhere in the text states that it was written by Vairocana. Also see Palmo (2004).

<sup>413</sup> See Karmay (2007:41).

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid* (2007:47) Karmay gives examples of texts showing different kinds of incorporation and elaboration.

## The root text: (IOL 647) rDo rje tshig drug (The six vajra verses)

*SVASTI! Homage to the great bliss of the indestructible body, speech and mind of the most holy,  
Kuntu bzang po the one who is most glorious!*

*All the varieties of phenomenal existence as a whole do not in reality differ from one another*

*Individually also they are beyond conceptualisation*

*Although as 'suchness' there is no mental discursiveness [with regard to them]*

*Kun tu bzang po shines forth in all forms*

*Abandon all the malady of striving, for one has already acquired it all.*

*One leaves it as it is with spontaneity.<sup>415</sup>*

It is not my intention here to fully enter into the debate surrounding the attempts to trace the historical origins of *rdzogs chen* thought. Karmay and van Schaik's analysis of texts such as IOL 647 is primarily to determine its provenance and to highlight the difficulties which arise from trying to determine the derivation of *rdzogs chen* in Tibet. Van Schaik writes that manuscripts such as IOL 647 really tell us very little about the 'authenticity' of the *rdzogs chen* tradition since there is nothing in these manuscripts to confirm an Indic source and nothing to demonstrably link them to the Tibetan imperial period. What is evident however is that texts such as this allow for an understanding of how *rdzogs*

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<sup>415</sup> See Karmay (2007:50). Other translations of IOL 647 include Liljenberg (2010) and Norbu (1986). The six stanzas in the Dunhuang version are followed by a short commentary which identifies the text by three titles: *Rig pa 'khu byug*, *Rig bye snang ba' i rgyan* and *rDo rje tshig drug*. Another redaction of the same text appears in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. A later commentary is the *Khu byug lta ba spyod pa'i' khor lo* found in the *Bairo rgyud 'bum*, Vol. 5, no. 10 (Ta). Another known commentary is the *bsTan pa yangs kyi snying po*, in the *Bairo rgyud 'bum*, Vol. 1. Neither of these is as old as the commentary appended to the Dunhuang text. See Karmay (2007: 50-51).

*chen* was practiced in this early period of Tibet's history and how its early texts inform the practice of contemporary *rdzogs chen* practice.<sup>416</sup>

### **The Vajra Verses**

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *The Vajra Verses* begins with a homage to Kun tu bzang po (the primordial Buddha considered the ultimate source of *rdzogs chen* teachings in both the rNying ma and Bon traditions). It then proceeds through six verses: 1. Absence of origination; 2. Dwelling in the Dharmadhātu; 3. Freedom from coming and going; 4. Demonstration of unceasing manifestations; 5. Correcting of errors and 6. The result free of hope for anything else. The final verse is a concluding summary and commentary which provides instructions on how to implement the practice and the signs associated with its ultimate accomplishment. The concepts formed in IOL 647, a text which a rNying ma lama such as Kunzang Dechen Lingpa would have been familiar, are woven into this *gter ma* text. While it would be convenient to be able to show that each verse corresponds to each line of the early text this is not the case here. As Karmay has shown, later works do not always represent the root text verbatim but can present an intertextualisation and adaptation of the ideas contained in the original. From a traditional perspective this text presents essential core concepts of *rdzogs chen* thought; *gzhi*, (the base), *lam*, (the path) and '*bras bu* (the fruit). *gzhi*, our own primordial state which we need to recognize, *lam*, the means to develop this knowledge through various practice methods and '*bras bu*, the return to a primordial awareness which was previously unrecognised.

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<sup>416</sup> Van Schaik, (ER: 2007) writes of IOL 647; 'Recent investigations into identifying handwriting styles in the Dunhuang manuscripts strongly suggest that [this] *rdzogs chen* manuscript should be dated no early than the tenth century'.

***Padma gsang ba'i thig las:***

***rdzogs pa chen po'i rgyud rdo rje'i tshig rkang bzhugs so***  
***From the Secret Essence of the Lotus: The Vajra Verses of the rdzogs chen tradition***

[Homage]

*The primordial pure expanse of Dharmatā which is free from elaboration;*

*the self- originating, self- arising perfect Buddhafield.*

*Kun tu bzang po, intrinsic pristine awareness,*

*indestructible body, entirely free from change,*

*embraces the wisdom mother; appearance and emptiness.*

*They delight eternally in primordial wisdom of bliss and emptiness.*

*The naturally pure five aggregates are the forms of the five Buddha families,*

*embraced by the natural purity of the five elements, the five great mothers.*

*Surrounded by a retinue of their own expressive energy,<sup>417</sup>*

*which is none other than themselves.*

*To each respective limitless assembly*

*via the indestructible sound of all inherently perfected phenomena,*

*this infallible Vajra Tantra is expounded.*

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<sup>417</sup> *rTsal* here represents one of the three kinds of energy associated with *rdzogs chen* practice. Norbu (1989:27) writes that the explanation of 'energy' in *rdzogs chen* is fundamental to understanding *gzhi*. The naturally expressive or dynamic energy, *rstal*, manifests as energy of the primordial state, if one recognizes it as a projection of one's own original qualities as opposed to being external to oneself, one can manifest pure vision. But it is the cause of both pure and impure vision depending upon one's view.

[Verse one]

*A Ho Ye! This nature of my awareness,  
is non - dual with this space.*

*There is no proof of whether it originates or not  
since it is primordially exhausted.*

*Endowed with a self-originated spontaneous essence,  
It is not established by cause,  
cannot be affected by any flaw and  
is free from any distortion by others.*

*It is not characterised by any colour.*

*Like the realm of space it is free from harm or benefit.*

*The four outer elements arise from space,  
likewise, the four inner elements are created by mind.*

*All phenomena of everything that appears and exists, samsara and nirvana,  
arises from recognition and ignorance.*

*There is no origination through dependence on other causes and conditions,  
no fabrication by anything good or bad.*

*The First Verse on the Absence of Origination*

*Samaya, Seal, Seal, Seal.<sup>418</sup>*

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<sup>418</sup> *rgya rgya rgya* or seal, seal, seal; at the end of each verse is a device intended to conceal the teachings outside ordinary space and time until they are revealed at the appropriate time and place of discovery.

[Verse two]

*That self-arising intrinsic pristine awareness;*

*I will explain where it abides...*

*It is taught two ways: pure and impure.*

*First, the pure, where does it abide?*

*In space without top or bottom,*

*an expanse primordially beyond directions, boundaries, periphery or centre,*

*beyond harm or benefit, birth and death.*

*Inseparable clarity and emptiness, free from agent or action,*

*unceasing natural expressive energy of space,*

*it arises as the display of all phenomena of apparent existence.*

*That inner space is the nature of mind*

*If one understands 'natural state' and its arising,*

*that is called 'intrinsic pristine awareness'.*

*Not seen as big or small or with centre or periphery,*

*with no inherent characteristics of birth and death,*

*it is the indestructible essence, the ever youthful vase body*

*whose seal of great spontaneous perfection is unbroken.*

*The life channel of the changeless Vajra is steadfast,*

*Pleasant and unpleasant feelings of happiness and suffering,*

*all appearances, however they occur,*

*are not disturbed by self-grasping even as they arise.*

*They appear as magical illusions from a naturally manifest energy of awareness.*

*Even as they appear, do not chase after appearances with self-grasping,*

*These appearances are ornaments of emptiness, Dharmakāya,*

*The outer elements of space and the inner constituents,*

*neither are separate nor different.*

*Wherever space pervades, awareness pervades,*

*Wherever awareness pervades, Dharmakāya pervades,*

*Where ever Dharmakāya pervades, compassion pervades,*

*abiding, without duality, in the state of Dharmadhātu.*

*The second verse on abiding in the Dharmadhātu.*

*Samaya, Seal, Seal, Seal.*

[Verse three]

*The retinue, the radiance of awareness is non-dual with me.*

*Its source of arising, the place where it abides,*

*even the location of its coming and going, are none other than me.*

*All activities of coming, going and remaining*

*arise from the natural experience of Dharmadhātu,*

*but these are the causes of grasping, clinging and delusion.*

*They are of an unimpeded nature;  
they arise from the expanse and dissolve into the expanse.  
Free from either coming or going, aside from Dharmadhātu, there is no other.*

*How wonderful!*

*The third verse on freedom from coming and going.*

*Samaya, Seal, Seal, Seal.*

[Verse four]

*Like this, recognising mind,*

*Rely on the three isolations.*

*Fix the great nails of three types of resting.*

*In dependence on the three kinds of postures,*

*gaze unwaveringly with the three gazes.*

*Then, within the natural state of translucent luminous visions,*

*in the expanse of Buddhafields, palaces, bindus,*

*subtle bindus and five coloured rainbow lights*

*limitless images of deities appear.*

*Everything whatsoever that arises, whether good or bad,*

*arises from awareness's own natural radiance.*

*Not an atom arises from anything else.*

*All dreams, visible and invisible*

*are naturally released without self-grasping.*

*Clearly, vividly and without distraction,  
always stabilise, establish one's place.*

*All apparent existence, samsara and nirvana,  
are the manifestation of the inherent energy of inherent pristine awareness.*

*For instance, this celestial space  
is clear and brilliant like a mirror.*

*In it appear all the self-arising, unceasing manifestations  
of myriad forms of the four elements.*

*If examined and investigated;*

*even though they arise, they emerge from space.*

*Even though they dissolve, they dissolve only within space.*

*In the same way, all the natural radiance of awareness  
arises from the state of awareness and dissolves into the essence of awareness.*

*They are non-dual within the Dharmadhātu.*

*therefore through non - dual self- liberated Dharmakāya  
contemplation becomes perfected.*

*The fourth verse of the unceasing manifestations.*

*Samaya, Seal, Seal, Seal.*

[Verse five]

*Therefore, to remove the obstacles to meditation,*

*sit in the Vajra posture on a comfortable seat.*

*One should feel the root guru, who has shown the path*

*is the essence of all sources of refuge.*

*With palms together, for the sake of all sentient beings of the six realms*

*who are crying from the torment of suffering and death,*

*In order to gain liberation to free them from unendurable suffering,*

*again and again supplicate the development of realisation.*

*At the end, dissolve the guru indivisibly into yourself.*

*Your three doors, in the nature of the three Vajras,*

*are blessed in the great indivisibility.*

*Again and again rest in the state of the view.*

*If plagued by dullness and torpor,*

*bathe your body with pure vase water to eliminate them,*

*then apply a nice scent.*

*The vital point is offering supplications as above.*

*The method of transforming negative conditions into allies*

*whatever happiness or suffering occurs, don't alter it.*

*Leaving it in its own state, it becomes of equal taste.*

*There is no deity on which to mediate, since it is the nature of your mind.*

*There is no demon to chase away since it is the nature of your mind.*

*Applying the terms 'god' and 'demon',  
'Hope for happiness' and 'fear of suffering', binds us.*

*This is a great error.*

*This is not even close to the path of great perfection.  
All phenomena of this apparent existence, samsara and nirvana  
have been created by this single nature of mind.  
Therefore, cause the essential point of emptiness to descend!*

*The fifth verse on correcting errors.*

*Samaya, Seal, Seal Seal.*

[Verse six]

*If the means of ripening the result are to be explained  
with the melodious sound of the unutterable Vajra;  
know that all phenomena of samsara and nirvana arise from you  
and that there is not a single thing which does not arise from you.*

*Everything is already perfected in you,*

*Thus it is known as perfection.*

*In the expanse of the primordial wisdom of awareness,  
when all phenomena have been exhausted in their own place,  
there are no other phenomenal activities to be performed.*

*All relative things, without exception,  
are subsumed in the expanse of ultimate emptiness.*

*Therefore, this dharma, the pinnacle of all the vehicles,  
is given the label 'great.'*

*For instance, in the womb of the expanse of space,  
immeasurable vessels and essences of apparent existence appear.*

*Space and the awareness of emptiness are one in essence,  
perfected in the great vast expanse of non - duality.*

*Therefore, examine whether there is changeability.*

*If not, it is the true Vajra king.*

*The result free of being accomplished through any outer effort,  
the lord of all apparent existence, samara and nirvana.*

*How wonderful!*

*The sixth verse on the result free of hope or anything else.*

*Samaya, Seal, Seal, Seal.*

[Conclusion]

*Supreme fortunate heart children;*

*Having abandoned preoccupation with the activities of this life,  
it is crucial to stay in isolated places without people.*

*Moreover, in an attractive place,*

*a pleasing location suffused with blessing,*

*A retreat house, a tent a cave or rock overhang.*

*First clean. Then draw under your seat  
a crossed Vajra or a swastika  
and place a carpet upon that.*

*Having washed your body and put on clean clothes,  
with fervent faith and unshakeable devotion,  
Go for refuge to the guru and the deity.*

*With the intention to benefit sentient beings of the three realms,  
cultivate uncontrived Bodhicitta.*

*After relaxing on that comfortable seat,  
engage in the main practice, meditative contemplation.  
In the three summer months stay near glaciers.  
In the three winter months stay near the forest.*

*Or, if you stay in a place that is slightly warm, it is excellent.  
In the spring and autumn if you stay in a place that is neither hot nor cold,  
contemplation will increase.*

*Moderate food and drink so as not to be full or hungry.  
While you have realised the view, abandon pretensions.  
When one is intoxicated by realisation,  
It will appear as if one is intoxicated from drinking chang.*

*At that time, behaving in whatever way that arises,  
The behaviour of a Heruka will certainly be demonstrated, naturally and spontaneously.*

*Whoever is connected will definitely be set upon the path to liberation  
and will attain power over one's life.*

*When the time of passing descends,  
through stable contemplation you will be able to keep your bodily posture.*

*The best will definitely liberate this contaminated illusory body  
into the immaculate rainbow body.*

*The medium practitioner, from their remains  
will produce relics, deity images and so on.*

*Thundering sounds, earthquakes and dazzling rainbows;*

*Those are the signs of liberation in the bardo.*

*The lesser practitioner will certainly produce compassionate emanations,  
taming beings in accordance with their needs.*

*These Vajra verses of advice,  
which connect to the principle of the Dharmatā  
are bestowed as a drink of nectar that revives the dead,  
to those suitable ones tormented by thirst.*

*The seventh concluding summary or oral instruction of advice.*

*Samaya, Seal, Seal, Seal.*

[Colophon]

*Katham Iti- Revealed by Kunzang Dechen Lingpa, in the city of New York in the powerful land of America. May it become a cause for samsara to be stirred from its depths!*

*Sarwa Mangalam! May all be Auspicious!*<sup>419</sup>

As the colophon states the *gter ma* was revealed in New York City in 2001, it was witnessed by Rigdzin Dorje who states that he watched his father write it down in one sitting.<sup>420</sup> It is not possible to fully understand or know his motivation for revealing this particular teaching, but the timing of his revelation seems significant since it coincided with his prediction and teaching that even something as important as the World Trade Center, (a set of buildings one of his American patrons had so proudly shown off to him), could collapse into dust at any moment. From the perspective of his disciples there was a clear significance to these occurrences. They also felt that due to his increasing infirmity it was imperative that he reveal more *gter ma*.<sup>421</sup> As a *gter ston* part of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's role was to be an agent of innovation and conduit of the Buddhist doctrine. For his disciples he was understood to be able to see, predict and understand chains of events and act accordingly to benefit all beings.

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<sup>419</sup> Two separate English translations exist of this text translated by Malcolm Smith and KS in 2006 and 2008 respectively.

<sup>420</sup>(Rigdzin Dorje 2009: Personal communication).

<sup>421</sup> One of KDL'S American students, David Scharff describing his request for the Garuda *gter ma* said: 'When I was requesting *gter ma* from Rinpoche, there was real sense of urgency to the situation. There are Tibetan Buddhist prayers, such as those requesting the swift rebirth of a great master, which implore the guru to 'immediately' take re-birth for the sake of all suffering sentient beings; this was the tone of my request. We all felt at the time that it was of great importance that we create the right conditions for Rinpoche to reveal *gter ma*'. (David Scharff:Personal Communication)

## The development of *gter ma* in the West

*Gter ston* are the agents of innovation, they are able to transcend convention and are crucial links to the earlier figures of Imperial Tibet. Terrone's study of the re-emergence of *gter ma* revelation in Eastern Tibet aims to demonstrate that these contemporary visionary revelations are an effective means of re-establishing ritual authority, codifying new identities, and encourage the continuation of ancient Tibetan religious narratives. His examination of *gter ston* active in present day Eastern Tibet shows the continuity between present-day *gter ston* and those of the eleventh century. In short, he shows that the essential ideals underlying the tradition are the same, namely, the retrieval of supposedly ancient manuscripts in a ritual context which can 'authenticate' contemporary religious practices and spiritual traditions.<sup>422</sup>

David Germano's examination of the resumption of *gter ma* in Eastern Tibet and Jill Sudbury's study of the Tibetan revival of the Bodong pa tradition both emphasise the role texts and reincarnation play in the renewal of an idealised heroic past into the present day. The *gter ma* revelations of modern rNying ma *gter ston* mKhan po 'Jigs phun (Khenpo Jikphun) in Eastern Tibet and the strategies this figure employed revolve around the identification of present figures with strings of reincarnations stretching back to an eighth century Tibetan empire. Germano describes an incident whereby this *gter ston* revealed *gter ma* at the Wutai mountains, a site sacred in Chinese Buddhism. In doing this Sudbury suggests the *gter ston* 'blurred political boundaries and located a 'legitimising' Tibetan presence in the heart of the Chinese landscape'.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> See Terrone (2009).

<sup>423</sup> See Sudbury (2007:231). Germano (1998:177: fn. 108) also notes that that the rNying ma *gter ston* Kusum Lingpa (1934-2009) was reported to have identified protective spirits of Mount Shasta in California. Originally a sacred site in the mythology of the Kalmath Native American population it has subsequently become a sacred landmark for a variety of 'new age' spiritual traditions.

During Khenpo Jikphun's visit to America, Germano describes how the *gter ston* made 'attempts to integrate America and Americans in to the *gter* cult through references to a vibrant mix of prophecies [and] karmic connections'.<sup>424</sup> Despite this there was no evidence of this integration apparent in the content of any of his *gter ma* texts. Germano concludes by stating that the current *gter ma* tradition in Eastern Tibet does not yet seem to involve the innovation of new materials or show evidence of any cultural transformation:

We may be nearing the outer parameters of Padmasambhava's capacity to project forward from eighth century Tibet....Despite Khenpo Jikphun's openness and efforts to weave modern America into *gter's* web like reality during his sole trip to the U.S. ; proving that *gter* can span countries as well as centuries, one will look to no avail for any trace of Chinese, Western or even Tibetan modernity within the traditional loose leaf rectangular confines of his great perfection based revelations...In the last analysis the modern other may be too foreign for the traditional *gter ston* to digest in a Buddhist format ...Only the future will tell if younger *gter ston* will be able to prove more adventurous in retrieving the enticing yet elusive intersection of Buddhism and modernity.<sup>425</sup>

A point to address here is that actually Tibetans have already pushed the *gter ma* tradition forward into modernity. Trungpa's aforementioned *Maitri Space Awareness* teachings and Shambhala *gter ma* draw upon the vast spiritual scriptural corpus of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, but they also incorporate aspects of Japanese Zen practice and Western psychology. As controversial as Trungpa and his teachings may be, they represent some of the first examples of *gter ma* interacting with modernity and Western traditions. Trungpa's Shambhala texts and his development of practices such as *Maitri Space Awareness* are considered *gter ma* by his followers and recognized as such by one of Trungpa's own teachers (and from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective an unimpeachable authority) Dil mgo mkhyen brtse (c. 1910 –1991). Senior students and members of his

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<sup>424</sup> See Germano (1998:93).

<sup>425</sup> See Germano (1998:94).

Nālānda Translation Committee<sup>426</sup> described broaching the subject of *gter ma* revelation with Trungpa in the late 1970s:

In 1978, during a Nalanda Translation committee session Trungpa was asked whether the Shambhala texts he was presenting were terma...he replied, "Yes, sort of." When we asked whether we should include the terma mark to indicate terma in our translations, his response was, "Not yet, maybe later." In fact, this did not come to pass until after his death, when Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche instructed us to include this in our future publications of these texts, and he confirmed with no hesitation that they were indeed authentic terma.<sup>427</sup>

Kunzang Dechen Lingpa certainly was treading a more conservative path than Trungpa, but the act of a 'legitimate' *gter ston*, at least within the confines of the rNying ma tradition, revealing *gter ma* on American soil may indicate the beginnings of the treasure tradition acquiring an 'authentic' place in Western Buddhism as well. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's presentation of his *Healing Chö*, *The Vajra Verses* and *Garuda gter ma* indicate the extension of those parameters beyond the confines of Asian antecedents and indicate that integration with the West has already begun. Just as Khenpo Jikphun's revelations helped 'legitimise' a Tibetan presence in a sacred Chinese setting, similarly Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's revelations plant the *gter ma* tradition in the heart of North America.

### **Padmasambhava as an agent of asserting national and spiritual identity**

*gTer ma* in Eastern Tibet and *gter ma* in the West can be seen as responding to a fragmented society and function as a way for Vajrayāna teachings to maintain an unbroken chain of transmission, via a fluid and adaptable method. Padmasambhava and other imperial Tibetan figures are not just a critical link in the transmission of treasure

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<sup>426</sup> In addition to the translation of historic Buddhist and Tibetan scripture, this translation committee is also responsible for the production, translation and dissemination of all Shambhala texts, practice manuals and commentaries. See: ER [www.nalandatranslation.org](http://www.nalandatranslation.org).

<sup>427</sup> See Nalanda Translation Committee Newsletter. NM (2006-7:1). See also Harding (2012) for a brief description of Chogyam Trungpa's early years in Tibet as a *gter ston*.

teachings, they are also part of the 'authoritative' pantheon that confers 'legitimacy' on the discoverer's revelation. *gTer ston* and their revealed treasures represent *nye brgyud* (close transmission) in the sense that this allows them to be much closer to the original expounder of the teachings upon which their revelatory scripture is based. Drawing upon that previous material provides a distinct link to imperial figures of the past as well as ensuring that the teachings are constantly updated and refreshed, like new software.

This connection to the past has, in the opinion of scholars such as Terrone and Germano, played a major role in the widespread revitalisation of the *gter ma* tradition in Eastern Tibet and plays an integral part in the understanding of national pride and associations with an idealised Tibetan past. But how does this relate to its continuation in the West? It is possible that one way *gter ma*'s associations with Padmasambhava may be continued in the West is by means of prophecy. The discovery of Buddhist *sa gter* in the West is unlikely<sup>428</sup> but *lung bstan* attributed to Padmasambhava which have been adopted by Tibetans and non-Tibetan alike may prove to be a 'legitimising' channel for the continuation of *dgongs gter* and *dag snang*. An often quoted forecast reported and represented as a prophecy of Padmasambhava employed by many Western Buddhists is a supposed prediction of Buddhism's arrival in the West which reads:

When the iron bird flies and horses run on wheels, the Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the face of the world, and the Dharma will come to the land of the red man.

Any scholar of the Tibetan textual tradition will look to little avail to find a reliable source for this prophecy, van Schaik presents a valid case for the fact that the 'red man' referred

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<sup>428</sup> Although interestingly enough there is actually a historical precedent for the retrieval of 'treasure' in other Western traditions; Joseph P. Smith the founder of the Church of Latter Day Saints was directed by an 'angelic' being to unearth a set of revelatory golden tablets inscribed with the teachings which now form the doctrine contained in the Book of Mormon. The golden tablets did not survive as Smith stated that they disappeared once he had noted their contents. See Vogel (1994). See also Lindow (1982) for an account of objects buried for unknown reasons in Sweden during the mid-eighteenth century.

to is much more likely to refer to Tibetans than for instance, Native Americans <sup>429</sup> which is a popular Western interpretation. Many Buddhists are unaware or possibly uninterested in a verifiable source for this prophecy and it has now become an integral part of the mythology of Tibetan Buddhism's arrival in the West. In fact what we may be seeing is another form of 'indigenizing' strategy taking place in the formation of modern rNying ma ritual. It seems, therefore, that Padmasambhava has proved remarkably resilient in continuing to be the arbiter of Tibetan strains of Buddhism, particularly the rNying ma lineage and its treasure tradition.

### **The future of *gter ma* in the West**

The application of the act of revealing *gter ma* and the establishment of the *gter ma* practices in the West will depend upon how they are implemented, understood and received. Essential to their survival is the idea of *nye brgyud* and the incorporation of early materials which ensures and maintains essential core truths. Yet to emerge is any particularly credible 'legitimate' Western *gter ston*. Despite the fact that Western tulkus are increasingly more common it may be some time before they begin to reveal widely accepted articulations of *gter ma*. The issues of 'authority' are still being worked out on Western soil and as much as there may be a resistance, it is hard not to imagine that with the recognition of Euro-American reincarnations of Tibetan teachers some will eventually reveal *gter ma* in the West at the behest of their followers. However, since the criteria of 'authentic' and 'legitimate' *gter ma*, as it is understood in the rNying ma lineage, rests upon unbroken transmission from master to student there will need to be some

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<sup>429</sup> Van Schaik (2007) points to several examples of 'red man' and 'red faced' being applied to Tibetans: *Dri ma med pa'i 'od kyis zhus pa* [The Enquiry of Vimalaprabhā]. Q.835. and *Gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes. Bsam gtan mig sgron / Rnal 'byor mig gi bsam gtan* [A Lamp for the Eyes of Contemplation]. Leh, Ladakh: S. W. Tashigangpa, 1974. *Bsod nams rtse mo. Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo* [An Introduction to the Dharma]. In *Sa skya bka' 'bum*, vol.I.

resolution in the matter of 'spiritual authority' as Buddhism intersects with modernity and other cultures which have adopted and adapted its spiritual practices.

Admittedly the establishment of Western Buddhist 'authority' and the first inklings of Western *gter ma* have had problematic beginnings. Trungpa's choice (however unfortunate it turned out to be) of an American disciple as his 'Vajra regent' was intended in part to show that the Buddhist tradition was not culturally Tibetan and that the West needed to recognise its own as potential leaders, as well as perhaps its own failings. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa revealing *gter ma* in the West, since he was such a well-regarded teacher with impeccable 'dharmic' credentials, added a layer of 'legitimacy' to the idea that these teachings can continue in the West. He was able to establish a visceral link to Tibet's past and bring products of that link into a present hyper-modern society, implying that *gter ma* is not culturally, temporally or geographically bound.

The main point is to consider here is that any modern expressions of *gter ma* will most likely continue to fuel debates surrounding whether it is 'authentic' or not. In any new Buddhist texts which may emerge in the West and any new *gter ma* revealed, especially that of non-Tibetans, their acceptance as 'authoritative' texts it will depend upon who is presenting the information, how it is 'transmitted' and the lineage from whence it came. In addition it will also require a deep understanding and synthesised reception of the material.

## CONCLUSION

*'Ready to go from Kongpo to Central Tibet or other undecided destinations'*

*I, the yogi, do not need a family home.  
All the yogi's good places are my family home.  
Since the aims are instantly realised,  
Anywhere I go I like, heading out at ease.*

*Dudjom Rinpoche 1956<sup>430</sup>*

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<sup>430</sup> Dongyal (2008:110).

Something this study has not covered in much detail is an examination of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's legacy in India and how his teachings have been translated and practiced in Hindi and Nepali. There is also only brief mention of how he revitalised and re-established a Tibetan Buddhist presence in Arunachal Pradesh, negotiating the delicate relationship between local indigenous religions and other Tibetan Buddhist sects active in the region. The continued exodus of Tibetans exiled from their homeland, coupled with the influx of patronage from abroad has further seen the rebuilding and reinvention of Tibetan religious sites and communities worldwide. Clearly the scope of this dynamic goes far beyond India and the Himalayan borderlands and all of this warrants a much larger examination than could feasibly be presented here.

The aim of this thesis was to chart the journey of Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhist *gter ma* teachings through to the present day. In so doing, to trace their trajectory via the life story of one extraordinary Tibetan lama, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa; to examine *gter ma* revelation in contemporary times in the same way a scholar might study earlier Tibetan religious developments. It somehow seems easier with the space of several centuries between the subject and the scholar since it is often difficult to assess developments that take place in our own contemporary world. However it is important to note that neither the developments themselves, nor our research questions, are fundamentally different from any study of Buddhism in ancient/traditional Tibet. The intention was to show shown that certain issues are woven through this trajectory like a common thread, the contestation surrounding authority, lineage and transmission and the question of 'authenticity'. The debate surrounding new adaptations and interpretations of *gter ma* revelation and who has the 'authority' to present them have remained fairly constant

whether it be an examination of a dispute between medieval Tibetans or played out in the pages of contemporary academic and Buddhist journals.

If historical precedents in Asia are any guide then it is likely that new and different cultural forms of Buddhism will emerge and therefore will be accompanied by new Buddhist literature. Whatever forms these texts take, be they biographies, *sādhana* or commentaries they must meaningfully address the collision and integration with modernity and the issue of spiritual 'authority'. The concept of 'teacher-less' teachings and the idea that an experienced guide is unnecessary particularly when it involves Vajrayāna practice fills many with trepidation. Not just due to the danger of fragmentation and dilution, but a worry that the lunatics have taken over the asylum. In terms of the way the Vajrayāna tradition is practiced, the deep spiritual transformation and psychological and philosophical processes involved do not lend themselves to be 'figured out' on one's own. In the same way that psychotherapy in the West is regulated and requires training, practice hours and sessions with mentors and supervisors, so too does the practice of Vajrayāna.

Buddhism in America is unlikely to become a state religion or become institutionalised politically as it did in Tibet since the whole nature of spirituality is changing. Whether presented as a public ceremony, a psychological tool or in its solitary form, the philosophical premise of Tibetan practices such as *gcod* which posit that there is no absolute essence to self is counter-intuitive to current dominant modes of thinking that asserts the duality of subject and object. Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *Healing Chö* is one way of preserving the original aims of *gcod* for those conducting the ritual whilst attempting to address the hopes and needs of Western participants, but at the cost of not explaining to

them what the ritual is actually represents. Just as it developed in twelfth century Tibet as a result of negotiation between interacting cultures, so it will continue to transform as it weaves its way into modern global spirituality. As a practice it aims to deconstruct the source of binary habits and in doing so naturally dissolve them. Spiritual practices such as *gcod* embody a simple yet powerful insight, that fear and terror can be transformative. Perhaps a little more understanding and openness from all sides would help to prevent the loss of its original aims and prevent its trivialisation.

Most Tibetan spiritual 'authorities' understand and recognise that Buddhism isn't bound by culture. This is not the same as the erosion of Tibet's cultural heritage, which is to say, this is not meant to ignore the fact that the continued suppression of Tibetans and the corrosion of their history within the People's Republic of China is unimportant. However, preserving Tibetan culture it is not the same as the preservation of Buddhist teachings and philosophy. The path of dharma is not cultural, yet in their eagerness to dispense with aspects of a perceived Asian culture and developing a separate form, Western Buddhists also may not fully recognise that they are holding strongly to their own culture.

As Buddhist elements permeate into the cultural and spiritual identity of the West there will remain a percentage of the population who will adhere to older Asian models of Buddhism, and as it becomes main-stream, a side effect will be that Buddhist practices may become more commercialised. With that comes a danger of profit taking precedent and that the most 'successful' teachers are those who are 'market savvy' without a deep and synthesised understanding of Buddhist teachings and practices. On the other hand, what some may decry as appropriation or extraneous adaptation may well prove to be the kind of change required to replace outmoded, parochial and sectarian spiritual

traditions. Globalisation aided by digital technology creates conditions for rapid innovation and reiterations, as well as intransigent re-traditionalisation and contestation over 'authenticity'. If Tibetan esoteric traditions are opened up, as they increasingly are in unprecedented ways and manipulated without the proper or correct guidance, then they are unquestionably being exposed to potential distortion and misinterpretation. However it is surely not impossible to preserve their integrity and essential elements whilst still preventing their ultimate corruption. Whether Vajrayāna Buddhism and the *gter ma* tradition become the victims of a borderline neurotic and fragmented free market economy or develop into a productive maturation of wisdom and compassion is up to all of its participants.

## **Part Three: Reference Materials**



Fig. 49. The successive Incarnations of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa.

*Lho brag gter ston Kunbzang bde chen gling pa'i sku phreng rim*

*byon gyi sku brnyan'*

### **The Successive Incarnations of Kun zang bde chen gling pa**

This image replicates a wall painting at Kunzang Lingpa's main temple in Arunachal Pradesh, India. It shows his succession of incarnations and features particularly important figures from traditional Tibetan Buddhist history. There are aspects of these characters which naturally invite scepticism from a Western academic perspective; for example, life-spans which far exceed the life expectancy of an average human, chronologies which defy logic and deeds which can be challenged by historical textual evidence. However, viewed as a sacred image, each figure depicted has religious significance for the followers of Kunzang Lingpa. For them, these are spiritual masters, it isn't surprising that these figures live for over two hundred years or that they performed miraculous deeds. It matters not that their activities (perhaps politically or economically motivated), have been converted into religious allegory. Each one of these characters can and do warrant in-depth analysis. To delve into all the research surrounding these individuals would be tangential and far beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, in the spirit of how this image is intended to be understood and received, I have provided brief descriptions from a traditional Buddhist perspective.

## A key to the successive incarnations of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa

### Primordial Buddha

**1. Bde gsheg rin chen** : Ratnaśikhin- Jeweled Crown. Identified as the last or final Buddha of the first of the incalculable or immeasurable eons.<sup>431</sup>

### Mahasiddhas

**2. Grub chen sa ra ha pa** : Saraha or Sarahapāda. He is associated with the Mahāmudrā tradition. Saraha taught the most pure and formless precepts of the highest tantra (Anuttarayoga- tantra). There is no substantial biographical data concerning him, but he has been placed as living between the eighth and ninth century CE.<sup>432</sup>

**3. Grub chen ku ku ri pa** : Kukkuripa. Epithet: The Dog Lover. Well known in the Tibetan tradition is the story of how he gained spiritual insight by caring for a stray dog. Kukkuripa was also known for his tantric songs of realisation and three of his verses appear in the Charyapada, a collection of songs from eighth to twelfth century India.<sup>433</sup>

### Indian Scholars

**4. 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen** : Jampel Shenyen.

Also known as Mañjuśrīmitra, an Indian Buddhist scholar and student of *rdzogs chen* master dGa' rab rdo rje. The division of the *rdzogs chen* teachings into three series of *sems sde* (mind class), *klong sde* (expanse class) and *man ngag sde* (pith instructions class) is attributed to him. 'Jam dpal bShes gnyen is also said to have transmitted the *rdzogs chen*

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<sup>431</sup> Thanks to Dr. Martin Boord for this information (Personal Communication: 2009).

<sup>432</sup> See Schaeffer (2005).

<sup>433</sup> Ibid (199-203)

teachings to Sri Singha, a shadowy figure who in turn is thought to have been the teacher of Vimalamitra.

**5. Dri med bShes gnyen:** Drimed Shenyen also known as **Vimalamitra**. A master in the *rdzogs chen* tradition who received the transmission from Sri Singha. He is regarded as one of the three main fore-fathers of the *rdzogs chen* teachings. In various accounts is associated with both Kings Khri srong lDe btsan and Ral pa can in the eighth and ninth century respectively.<sup>434</sup>

#### **sNga dar (early diffusion) figures**

**6. Lang gro dKon mchog 'byung gnas:** Konchog Jungney of Langdro. An eighth century minister at the court of Khri srong lde bstan, he later became one of Padmasambhava's close disciples. Rat na gling pa (1403-1471) and Klong gsal snying po (1625-1692) are considered to be among his reincarnations.

**7. Mnga' bdag khri ral can:** King Ral pa can. (ninth century C.E.). A figure considered important to the history of Tibetan Buddhism. One of the three Dharma Kings (*chos rgyal*) who supported the importation of Buddhism to Tibet. In traditional histories he was assassinated by anti- Buddhist ministers.

#### **Phyir dar (later diffusion) figures**

**8. Kar ma dus gsum mkhyen pa :** Düsum Khyenpa (1110 – 1193). He was the first head of the Karma bKa' brgyud school. Among his main disciples was Kha dam pa bde shog, founder of the Ka thok rNying ma lineage.

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<sup>434</sup> See Germano (2002:241-248).

**9. Rgyal ba Tsong kha pa:** Tsongkhapa (1357–1419). A famous teacher of Tibetan Buddhism whose activities led to the formation of the dGe lugs pa school. He was believed to have received teachings from masters of all Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Based on Tsongkhapa’s teaching, the two distinguishing characteristics of the dGe lugs tradition are the union of sūtra and tantra, and the emphasis on Vinaya ‘moral code’.

### ***gTer ston***

**10. Klong gsal snying po:** Longsal Nyingpo (1625-1692). A famous *gter ston* of Ka thok Monastery, whose *gter ma* teachings are known by his name. He was responsible for restoring Kah thok Monastery in seventeenth century Tibet. As an infant, Kunzang Lingpa was recognized as his reincarnation.<sup>435</sup>

**11. Chos rgyal rat na gling pa:** Ratna Lingpa (1403-1478). A prominent rNying ma *gter ston* and compiler of the *rNying ma’i rGyud bum* in the fifteenth century.

**12. Rje drung ‘byung gnas** (1856-1922). Jedrung Trinlé Jampa Jungnay a reincarnation of Lang gro dKon mchog ‘byung gnas and was one of bDud ‘joms Rinpoche’s root teachers.<sup>436</sup>

### **How are all these figures connected?**

Saraha and Kukkuripa<sup>437</sup> were *mahāsiddhas* (great attainers) who lived in India between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. These masters of the Mahāmudrā tradition, considered the

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<sup>435</sup> See Ronis (2009).

<sup>436</sup> Nyoshul (2006: 446-44). See also bDud ‘joms (1991: 734, 868)

highest tantric path to Buddha-hood (equated with the rNying ma *rdzogs chen*), are well known to Tibetan Buddhists. These two figures can be seen as the spiritual heritage of a *rdzogs chen* master such as Kunzang Dechen Lingpa and so it is quite understandable to have representations of the them in this context.

Klong gsal snying po is a major connector in this image. Vimalamitra and Mañjuśrīmitra are pre-eminent figures in the line of transmission for the *rdzogs chen* teachings. Vimalamitra is the spiritual fountainhead of the Me long rdo rje lineage of which Klong gsal snying po is connected. He also provides the link with Dus gsum mkhyen pa, one of this figure's disciples, Kah thog pa dam pa bde gshegs (1122-1192) founded the rNying ma Kah thok monastery in sDe dge, Khams, in 1159. The original monastery fell into disrepair and was rebuilt on the same site in 1656 by Klong gsal snying po.<sup>438</sup>

Kunzang Lingpa, by being recognized as an incarnation of Klong gsal snying po is then linked with the all **his** previous incarnations, who include Rat na gling pa and dKon chog byung gnas. Jedrung 'byams pa'i byung gnas was one of the root teachers of Dudjom Rinpoche, who writes that he was an emanation of dKon mchog 'byung gnas and associated with the sMin grol gling lineage of Atiyoga.<sup>439</sup>As detailed in chapter three, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa was recognized as his incarnation in Pad ma bkod in the mid 1950's. The 'odd ones out' in this image are Ral pa can and Tsong kha pa, the only figures which do not show obvious links with any of the others.

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<sup>437</sup>Saraha and Kukkuripa are pre-eminent figures of the eighty four *mahāsiddhas* found in the Tibetan text *Grub thob brgyad bcu tsa bzhi'i lo rgyus*, (*The legends of the eighty four Mahāsiddhas*).

<sup>438</sup> bDud 'joms (1991:688-691)

<sup>439</sup> Ibid (734, 868 )

## Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's collected works

At the time of writing Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *gsung 'bum* the *Pad ma gsang thig* is in the process of being compiled and organised by his senior students in India and North America. The current copy of the index of each volume in my possession is a draft and not the final version. Therefore titles and page numbers are not provided here since they are constantly changing. The material presented here is limited and intended only to give a general indication of the contents of each volume and where texts relevant to this study are located within them. An English translation of the index is anticipated in a separate publication as soon as the final Tibetan version is complete.

**General index:** *'dGongs gter pad ma gsang thig glegs bam bzhugs byang ze'u 'bru'i do shal bzhugs so'*

The list of books, entitled 'The Garland of Anthers'

This is a general collection where one can find all of the daily practices and rituals found throughout the following volumes.

**Volume one:** *'dGongs gter pad ma gsang thig gi glegs bam bzhugs byang dkar chag kun gsal nyi zla'i od phreng zhes bya ba bzhugs so'*

The Mind Treasure Secret Essence of Pad ma,  
entitled 'The Brilliant Garland of Sun and Moon-light'

This volume begins with a homage to Padmasambhava, dKon mchog 'byung gnas and his twentieth century incarnation, Kunzang Dechen Lingpa. It contains the *rnam thar* and prediction of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's future reincarnations. It also contains the preliminary and daily practices compiled by Kunzang Dechen Lingpa for his students and songs composed by Kunzang Dechen Lingpa including: *bSlab bya nor bu'i bang mdzod* (*A precious treasury of advice*). The colophon to this reads: *Ah rir bca' bzhugs sher rab rdo rje dang 'jam dbyang rdo rje gnyis nas bskul ba ster kun rmongs kun bzang bde che gling pas*

*bris te phul/dge'o/bkra shis shog. (This was offered by the confused and ignorant Kunzang Dechen Lingpa upon the request of Sherab Dorje (Tej Hazirika) and Jamyang Dorje (Moke Mokotoff) who both live in America). Also included is: Kun bzang bde chen gling pa'i rgyangs 'bod gnyug ma'i thol glu bzhugs. (Calling to Kunzang Dechen Lingpa from afar: The spontaneous song of the authentic state). The colophon reads: Shes pa'ang dad pa'i snod dang 'dan pa btsun ma bde chen dpal mo'i ngor kun bzang bde chen gling pa rang gis lta ba ma rtogs rtogs tshul gyis 'ur langs nas sbyar ba/dge'o. (Kunzang Dechen Lingpa babbling, without having realized the view, composed this in the manner of realisation. Written for the faithful nun Dechen Palmo).*

**Volume two:** *'dGongs gter pad ma gsang thig glegs bam gnyis pa'i dkar chag nor bu'i phreng ba bzhugs so'.*

The second volume of the Mind Treasure: Secret Essence of Pad ma  
entitled "The Garland of Jewels"

This volume contains *gter ma* practices and texts relating to rDo rje gro lod (the wrathful manifestation of Padmasambhava) including *Dag snang mkha' 'gro'i gsang mdzod zab don ye shes snying po las; bla ma drag sgrub gri reg gcod rgyun gyi snying po bzhugs so (The essential daily practice from the pure vision secret treasury of the ḍākinīs: The practice of the wrathful guru entitled "The Slashing Razor")*. It also includes the *khyung* (garuda) practices including Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's *gter ma Khyung na ga tshir gcod sgrub (Garuda method to annihilate nāga)* as well as the empowerment text for this practice *Khyung sgrub smin dbang* as well as *'Khyung sgrub shal gab (The hidden face garuda practice)* and *Khyung sgrub brgyud 'debs (The Garuda lineage supplication practice)*. Contained in this volume are Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's rDo rje phur ba (Vajrakīlaya) *gter ma: Dag snang phur ba'i brgyud 'debs (Pure vision kīlaya lineage supplication); Dag snang*

*phur ba'i las byang rdo rje snying po (Pure vision liturgy: The Vajra Heart Essence); Phur ba'i bskang ba nyams dga'i thol glu (Kīlaya rite of expiation: The spontaneous song of delight) and Phur ba'i gnad yig gab byang (Kīlaya secret manual of instructions on essential aspects).*

**Volume three:** *'dGongs gter pad ma gsang thig glegs bam gsum pa'i dkar chag 'od 'khyil phreng rgyan bzhugs so'*

The third volume of the Mind Treasure: Secret Essence of Pad ma  
entitled 'The Ornament Garland of Swirling Light'

This volume contains the *gcod gter ma* and practices and texts relating to Khros ma nag mo including: *Bdag 'dzin god thabs mkha' 'gro'i gad rgyangs bzhugs so (The ḍākinī's laugh, a skilful method of severing self-grasping)* and empowerment for the practice, *Ma cig khros ma nag mo gsang ba gri gug rgya can las: Khos ma'i dbang chog rgyas pa ye shes rang 'debs bzhugs so (From the one mother, the wrathful black one, holder of the curved knife: An extensive empowerment entitled 'Primordial Descending Wisdom').*

**Volume four:** *'dGongs gter pad ma gsang thig glegs bam bzhi pa'i dkar chag rdo rje'i phreng ba bzhugs so'*

The fourth volume of the Mind Treasure: Secret Essence of Pad ma  
entitled 'The Garland of Vajras'

This volume contains *gter ma* texts and practices relating to sGrol ma dkar po (white Tara) and mKha' 'gro (ḍākinī). Included in this volume are: *Pad thig sGrol dkar sgrub thabs (The lotus essence method of white Tara); sGrol dkar tshe 'grubs (Long life practice of white Tara), Sgrol dkar bla bslu (White Tara life-force ransom ritual) and rje bstun sgrol ma'i lo rgyus' (The annals of Tara).* Mkha' gro texts contained in this volume include: *Pad*

*thig mkha' 'gro tshogs glu* (Lotus essence *dākinī* ritual feast song) and *Pad thig mkha' 'gro'i bsun zlog'* (Lotus essence *dākinī's* averting disturbances).

**Volume five: 'dgongs gter pad ma gsang thig glegs bam lnga pa'i dkar chag dad pa'i nor phreng bzhugs so'**

The Fifth Volume of the Mind Treasure: Secret Essence of Pad ma  
entitled: 'The Precious Faith Garland'

This volume along with volume six are describes as being about various practices and contains instructions on *sngon 'gro*, the preliminary practices.

**Volume six: 'dGongs gter pad ma gsang thig glegs bam drug pa'i dkar chag skal ldan dga' ba'i od khyim bzhugs so'**

The Sixth Volume of the Mind Treasure: Secret Essence of the Lotus  
entitled 'Light Spheres of Joyful Fortune Ones'

This volume contains instructions and writings relating to how to construct mandalas and how to practise various tantric rituals.

**Volume seven: 'dGongs gter pad ma gsang thig glegs bam bdun pa'i dkar chag nor bu'i tshom bu bzhugs so'**

The Seventh Volume of the Mind Treasure: Secret Essence of Pad ma  
entitled 'The Heap of Jewels'.

This volume contains commentaries and practical instructions on how to perform blessings and empowerments. It also includes assorted writings of Kunzang Dechen Lingpa and also general spiritual training texts written by other Tibetan figures, both contemporary and historical.

## The list of caves in which

### Kunzang Dechen Lingpa practiced during his time in Tibet <sup>440</sup>

#### **Lho brag mkhar chu phug ring (Lhodrak Kharchu 'long cave').**

A cave associated with Padmasambhava and one of the places where he concealed *gter ma*. Nam 'mkha'i snying po one of Padmasambhava's original twenty five disciples meditated there having ridden there on a sun beam.<sup>441</sup>

#### **Brag dkar lung phu yab rgan zhing gshegs kyi sgrub phug (Departed father's remote cave of Drakar).**

This place is associated with Kunzang Dechen Lingpa's father Kunzang Rangdrol and the 'das 'log Karma dbang 'dzin near a village called Khra (alt. Phra) in Lhodrak.

#### **Khra phu dben pa'i sgrub phug (Remote cave in Khra region).**

Solitary meditation cave of Khra phu. A remote cave in the Lhodrak region, near his parents' home.

#### **Brag gi yang rdzong gu ru'i sgrub phug (Guru's rock at Yang dzong).**

Another site associated with Padmasambhava. Nub chen Sangs rgyas ye shes an eighth century disciple of Padmasambhava, meditated here and is believed to have inserted a *kīlaya* into the wall of the cave.<sup>442</sup>

#### **Kong po bdud ri ha shang phu rgyal po dri med kun ldan gyi sgrub phug (Retreat cave of King Dri med kun ldan at bdud ri ha shang).**

Dudri Hashang was a mountain in the Kong po region considered to be the abode of demons. An account of King Drimed Kunden can be found in *Jigs rten dban phyug dri med kun ldan gyi lo rgyus'* a *gter ma* version of a Jātaka story. Ha shang is a Chinese term analogous to the Tibtean term *mkhan po* and indicates a religious scholar.

#### **dMag dpon lung phu'i brag skyibs (Rock overhang of dMag dpon lung).**

No information yet found on the location or details of this place.

#### **sPang sna chu 'khor phu'i brag skyibs (Rock overhang of sPang sna chu 'khor ).**

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<sup>440</sup> (JFF: 149).

<sup>441</sup> See Dargyay (1977:33).

<sup>442</sup> See Roerich (1996:104-5).

No information yet found on the location or details of this place.

**rTa thob kha'i brag skyibs (Rock overhang of rTa thob kha).**

No information yet found on the location or details of this place.

## APPENDIX

### Transcription of *The Vajra Verses*

#### Verse one

chos nyid spros bral ka dag dbyings/rang byung rang shar phun tshogs zhing/rig pa ye shes kun tu bzang/'pho 'gyur yongs bral rdo rje'i sku/snang stong shes rab yum dang 'khril/bde stong ye shes rtag tu ril/phung lnga gnas dag rigs lnga'i skur/'byung lnga gnas dga' yum lnga 'khril/rang las mi gzhan rang rtsal 'khrur/rang rang tshoms bu bsam yas la/chos kun rang rdzogs rdo rje sgras/ bslu med rdo rje'i rgyud 'di gsungs/a ho ye nga yi rig pa'i rang bzhin 'di/nam mkha' 'di dang gnyis su med/'di nas 'byung dang ma 'byung ba'i/khung bskyl ye zad med pa yin/rang byung lhun 'grub ngo bo can/rgyu ni gang las ma grub cing/skyon ni gang gis bcos pa med/gzhan gyis lhad 'dzug bya thabs bral/kha dog gang gis mtshon pa min/nam mkha'i khams ltar phun gnod bral/phyi 'byung bzhi po mkha' las 'byung/nang 'byung bzhi yang sems las grub/snang srid 'khor 'das chos rnam kun/rig dang ma rig las 'byung zhing/gzhan gyi rgyu rkyen la btren nas/'byung ba nam yang yod ma yin/

#### Verse two

rang byung rig pa'i ye shes de/gang du gnas pa bdag gis bshad/dag dang ma dag gnyis su bstan/dang po dag par gar gnas na/kha gting med pa'i nam mkha' la/phyogs mtshams mtha' dbus ye bral klong/ phan gtod med cing skye 'chi bral/gsal stong dbyer med bya byed bral/nam mkha'i rang rtsal ma 'gag par/snang srid chos kun rol par shar/rang gi nam mkha' sems nyid de/'byung rkyen gnas lugs shes rtsa na/rig pa ye shes de la zer/che chung mkha' dbus mi dmigs shing/skye 'chi'i mtshan ma ho la med/gshon nu bum sku rdo rje'i snying/lhun 'grub chen po'i rgya ma ral/'gyur med rdo rje'i srog rtsa brtan/bde sdug 'byung tshor bzang ngan gyi/snang bar ji ltar shar ba kun/'byung yang bdag 'dzin lhad ma shugs/rig pa'i rtsal las sgyu mar snang/snang yang 'dzin pas rdze mi 'brangs/stong nyid chos sku'i rgyan du snang/phyi 'byung nam mkha' nang 'byung khams/so sor ma yi tha mi dad/nam mkha' gar khyab rig pas khyab/rig pa gar khyab chos skus khyab/chos sku gar khyab thugs rjes khyab/chos dbyings dang du gnyis med gnas/

Chos kyi dbyings su gnas pa'i le'u ste gnyis pa'o/

Samaya rgya rgya rgya.

#### Verse three

nga dang gnyis med rig mdangs 'khor/'byung ba'i khungs dang gnas pa'i yul/'gro 'ong gnas kyang zhan du med/'gro 'ong sdod pa'i bya byed kun/chos dbyings 'char sgo'i rang bzhin las/ah'thas dngos 'dzin 'khrul la'i rgyu/zang thal can gyi rang bzhin tu/dbyings las 'byung zhing dbyings la thim/'gro 'ong gnyis med chos dbyings las/gzhan du ma yin e ma ho/

'Gro 'ong bral ba'i le'u ste gsum pa'o

Sa ma ya rgya rgya rgya

#### Verse four

de ltar sems ngo shes byas nas/dben pa gsum mo la bsten te/sdod pa gsum gyi gzer chen  
'thob/bzhugs stangs rnam gsum la btren nas/gzigs stangs gsum gyi g.yo med stos/zang  
thal 'od stang rang bzhin ngang/zhing dang gzhal yas thig le dang/thig phran 'ja' zer 'od  
lnga'i klong/lha yi snang brnyan dpag med 'char/bzang ngan gang shar thams cad kun/rig  
pa'i rang mdangs kho na las/gzhan nas 'byung ba rdul tsam med/rmi lam snang dang mi  
snang kun/bdag 'dzin med par rang bzhin glod/gsal le hrig ge ma yengs par/rtag tu sdod  
tshugs brtan pa bya/snang srid 'khor 'das thams cad kun/rig pa rang rtsal 'char sgo  
yin/dper na nam mkha'i dbyings 'di nyid/gsal zhing dwangs ba me long 'dra/de nang  
'byung bzhi sna tshogs gzugs/'char sgo ma 'gag rang shar kun/de nyid brtag shing dpyad  
pa na/'byung yang nam mkha' las 'char yang/thim yang nam mkha' kho nar thim/de  
bzhin rig pa'i mdangs cha kun/rig pa'i dang byung rig klong thim/chos kyi dbyings la  
gnyis su med/gnyis med rang grol chos sku yis/dgongs pa klong du gyur pa yin/  
'Char sgo ma 'gag par bstan pa'i le'u bzhi pa'o  
Sa ma ya rgya rgya rgya

#### Verse five

de ltar sgom pa'i gegs sel ni/gdan [stan] steng rdo rje skyel krung bca/lam ston rtsa ba'i  
bla ma nyid/skyabs gnas kun gyi ngo bor mos/thal sbyar 'chi 'khrug gdung 'bod kyi/rigs  
drug sems can kun don du/sdug bsngal bzod med gnas thar med/rtags bskyed gsol 'debs  
yang yang bya/mthar ni rang la gnyis med stims/sgo gsum rdo rje gsum rang bzhin/gnyis  
med chen por byin brlabs te/yang yang sta ba'i ngang la shog/bying rmigs 'thibs na rang  
lus ni/bum chu dag gis gtsang bar bkru/bzang po'i dri yis byug pa bya/gong bzhin gsol ba  
'debs pa gnad/rkyen ngan grogs su shar ba'i thabs/bde sdug gang byung rjes ma  
bcos/rang sar bzhag pas ro snyoms 'gro/lha yang sgom med rang sems nyid/'dre yang  
bskrad med rang sems nyid/lha dan 'dre zhes bya dang/bde sdug gnyis la re dgos  
bcing/'di ni gol sa shin ti che/rdzogs chen lam la nye ba min/snang srid 'khor 'das chos  
rnams kun/sems nyid gcig gis bkod pa las/de phyir stong nyid gnad la phob/  
Gol sa bcos pa'i le'u ste lnga pa'o/  
Sa ma ya rgya rgya rgya

#### Verse six

brdzod med rdo rje'i sgra dbyangs kyis/'bras bu smin tshul bshad pa na/'khor 'das chos  
kun rang las byung/rang las ma byung chos shig med/thams cad rang la rdzogs zin  
pas/de phyir rdzogs shes bya bar 'bod/rig pa ye shes klong nyid du/chos kun rang sar zad  
zin na/bya ba'i chos ces logs su med/kun rdzob chos can ma lus pa/don dam stong nyid  
dbyings la 'dus/de phyir theg pa'i rtse mo'i chos/chon po shes pa'i ming du thogs/dper na  
nam mkha'i dbyings rum du/snang srid sdod bcud grangs med chags nam mkha' rig  
stong ngo bo gcig/gnyis med klong yangs chen por rdzogs/de phyir 'pho 'gyur e 'dug  
stos/med na rdo rje'i rgyal po dngos/'bras bu gzhan nas rtsol sgrub bral/'khor 'das kun  
rje e ma ho/  
'Bras bu gzhan re bral ba'i le'u ste drug pa'o  
Sa ma ya rgya rgya rgya

## Conclusion

skal ldan snying gi bu mchog rnam/tshe 'di'i bya ba blos btang nas/mi med dben sa btren ba gtsas/de yang sa gzhi yid du 'ong/byin chags nyams dga' gnas nyid du/sgrub khang ras gur brag skyibs sogs/gtsang bar byas rdzes gdan khri'i 'og/rdo rje rgya gram gyung drung sogs/ri mor bris te bting pa'i steng/lus bkru gos gtsang gyun byas nas/'gyur med dad gus drag po yis/bla ma lha la skyabs 'gro dang/khams gsum 'gro la phan sems kyis/bcos ma min pa'i sems bskyed de/bde ba'i stan la bag phab nas/dngos gzhi ting 'dzin sgom la zhugs/dbyar zla gsum du gnangs 'gram dang/dgun zla gsum du nags 'dabs sam/cing zad dro sar sdod na legs/dpyid ston min grang min gyi/gnas su bsdad na ting 'dzin 'phrel/zas btung rgyas ltogs ran pa bya/lta ba ma rtogs mtho co spongs/nam zhig rtogs pas myos pa'i tshe/myos chang btung ltar snang ba gyur/de dus gang shar spyod pa 'am/he ru ka yi spyod pa ni/rang bzhin shugs 'byung ston par nges/'brel tshan thar lam nges par drongs/tshe la rang dbang thob pa yin/'das pa'i dus la bab pa'i tshe/ting 'dzin brtan pas lus tshogs thub/rab la zag bcas sgru ma'i lus/zag med 'ja' skur nges par grol/'bring la gdung la ring bsrel dang/lha sku la sogs gang yang 'khrungs/sgra dang sa g.yos 'ja' 'od 'khrugs/de ni bar dor grol ba'i rtags/tha ma thigs rje sprul pa'i sku/gang la gang 'dul nges par 'byung/chos nyid don la bar 'dzin gyi/bslab bya rdo rje'i tshig rkang 'di/skom pas gdung ba'i rigs can la/'chi gsol 'bdud rtsi skyem su sbyin/

Bslab bya'i zhal gdams dang bcas 'jug bsdu ba'i le'u ste bdun pa'o

Sa ma ya rgya rgya rgya.

## Colophon

khatham ithi

Stobs chen a ri'i rgyal khab kyi grong khyer chen po ni'u g.yog tu kho bo kun bzang bde chen gling pas gtan la phab pa 'khor ba dong nas sprugs par rgyur gyur cig hra sarwa mangalam

## Transcription of IOL 647

sna tshogs rang bzhin mi gnyis kyang/cha shas nyid du spros dang bral /ji bzhin pa zhes mi rtog kyang/rnam bar snang mdzad kun tu bzang/zin bas rtsol ba'i nad spangs te

## Transcription of swift rebirth prayer

rnam med chos dbyings kun tu zang po'i thugs/rnam bcas bde ba chen po'i sku dang shing/o rgyan mkha' 'gro'i gling gi bkod pa la/rtag tu dgyes par rol pa'i mgon pos skyongs/mtshungs med kun bzang bde chen gling pa gang/ bdul bya rtag 'dzin can rnam 'dul ba'i slad/bzhugs sku'i bkod pa bsdud pa'i tshul bstan par/rjes 'jug bu slob tshogs rnam du khas gdungs/de phyir dad pa'i gdung ba sel ba la/ye shes thugs rje dbyings nas

bskul lags na/sprul pa'i zlos gar myur du bsgyur ba nas/gdul bya'i re ba yongs su skong bar gsol.

*Reg dang bcas bskul ma byang ba bshon phrin las nor bu nas hor bla gnyis pa'i tshes chen bco lnga nyin de 'phral gsol ba btab pa bshon don dang ldan par gyur rig.*

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