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by

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Abstract

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Scholars have long recognized the influence of canonical Indian tantras and their attendant *sādhana*s and *vidhi*s on the formation of new Buddhist traditions in Tibet. The impact of the more popular tantric preliminaries has, however, received far less attention. This dissertation argues that the Tibetan preliminary practices that are so widespread today are historically rooted in the rise of the lay tantric guru. In early medieval India, lay gurus were controversial, so much so that even a well-known collection of devotional practices for relating to such figures—*Fifty Verses on the Guru*—cautions against bowing to them in public. In eleventh- and twelfth-century Tibet, however, influential lay lamas came to serve as respected heads of monastic institutions. Throughout this period, preliminary practices were an important site for innovation, where Indians and Tibetans alike worked out the changing place of the guru within Buddhism. In Tibet, the popularization of preliminary rites such as guru yoga (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*) reflected the elevated status of the lama in the new (*gsar ma*) Buddhist schools. By the thirteenth century, preliminary practice systems (*sngon 'gro*) that were almost entirely focused on the lama—lay or monastic—had become a mainstay of Tibetan Buddhism.

For Sophie

Acknowledgements

At the end of the summer of 2014, just days before starting graduate school at the University of California, Berkeley, the Vermont weekly *Seven Days* published my horoscope as follows:

> When we are launching any big project, our minds hide from us the full truth about how difficult it will be. If we knew beforehand all of the tests we would eventually face, we might never attempt it. Economist Albert O. Hirschman called this the principle of the "hiding hand." It frees us to dive innocently into challenging work that will probably take longer than we thought and compel us to access new resources and creativity. To be clear: What's hidden from us are not only the obstacles but also the unexpected assistance we will get along the way.

Over the last eight years, there have indeed been various obstacles, as well as lucky moments when someone passed along a helpful journal article or provided a timely suggestion that clarified my thinking. On the whole, however, it was not unexpected assistance that carried the day, but the consistent and reliable support of the academic community at the University of California, Berkeley.

Jacob Dalton has been my primary advisor among the professors in the Numata Center for Buddhist Studies and the South and Southeast Asian Studies department. Jake has patiently guided me through the research and writing process, allowing me to feel out the contours of my project, while also indicating potential pitfalls and dead ends. Jake's creative thinking and insight into the nuances of ritual texts has informed this dissertation from the very beginning. In more recent years, Jake has also given me invaluable feedback on my writing. Alexander von Rospatt has been another dedicated advisor throughout this dissertation project. In classroom seminars, Alex shared his delight in Sanskrit philology and knowledge of Indian and Nepali Buddhism. He also introduced me to the *ādikarma* genre and suggested a close focus on the *gurumaṇḍala* rite. Robert Sharf provided wonderful intellectual rigor to my time at Berkeley. Additionally, he was a model for teaching Buddhist history and philosophy in a way that felt exciting and relevant. The professors in the South and Southeast Asian Studies department widened my interests in a variety of fields, especially historiography. Special thanks to Robert Goldman and Sally Sutherland Goldman for the many memorable hours spent reading Sanskrit texts together. Niklaus Largier, from the Comparative Literature and German departments, generously acquainted me to various facets of critical theory and European religious history.

Even before arriving in Berkeley, Catherine Dalton and Ryan Damron were exceedingly patient with my many requests for assistance in navigating the beginning stages of graduate school (and finding housing in the Bay Area!). In what was then called the Group in Buddhist Studies, Max Brandstadt, Meghan Howard, James Marks, Fedde de Vries, and Trent Walker showed me the ropes. In my own South and Southeast Asian Studies department, Hannah Archambault, Alex Ciolac, Kashi Gomez, Priya Kothari, Kellie Powell, Sophia Warshall, and Khenpo Yeshi all brought a sense of camaraderie to day-to-day life in Dwinelle Hall. Donagh Coleman, Nir Feinberg, Petra Lamberson, Bob Miller, Paul Thomas, and Chihying Wu arrived later on, bringing fresh energy to the Buddhist studies scene. Nir has been a cherished friend,

particularly during our extended foray into the study of Chinese language and as a neighbor on Glen Ave. Zack Beer has been a continuous support before, during, and after our years together at Berkeley. He has always been available for a quick question about a Tibetan passage or an end-of-the-week phone call to catch up on life. It is hard to imagine how I would have completed this project without his friendship. The collegiality among my advisors, visiting scholars, and my fellow students—many of whom are not mentioned by name here—all made my time at Berkeley some of the best years of my life.

Additional colleagues and friends at Berkeley have assisted in specific aspects of this dissertation project. Patrick Lyons helped me translate Louis de la Vallée Poussin's work on the *Ādikarmapradīpa* from French into English. James Marks and I read through various Sanskrit texts together in New York City and on zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ryoze Wada kindly translated a short article from Japanese into English for me, and I also received help in reading a few difficult Tibetan passages from my friend Khenpo Yeshi. Fedde de Vries and I worked through the Chinese translation of the *Gurupañcāśikā*. The Director of the Graduate Writing Center Sabrina Z. Soracco provided very helpful advice in her in-person dissertation-writing workshops at Berkeley and guided two dissertation writing groups that I participated in: with Thiti Jamkajornkeiat, Diana Ruíz, and Parkorn Wangpaiboonkit (Summer 2021), and with Zack Beer, Meghan Howard, and Bob Miller (Winter 2022).

Over the years, I have received financial assistance from the Khyentse Foundation, the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Global, and the American Council of Learned Societies. Thank you: Sydney Jay, Andrzej Tymowski, Donald S. Lopez Jr., James Robson, and the participants in the 2022 Khyentse Foundation Buddhist Studies Lecture Series Workshop at Northwestern, especially professors Janet Gyatso and Sarah Jacoby.

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While working on my dissertation in Vermont, Rowan and Willa, my family, my in-laws, and numerous friends have all been good company. Malcolm Smith also kindly read through various Sa skya texts with me in one long weekend at his home in Massachusetts.

More than anyone, my wife Sophie has been a steady voice of encouragement. I have also benefited from her willingness to spend odd hours in a thought cloud with me, discussing preliminary practices and Tibetan Buddhism. It is not particularly fun to be married to someone working on a dissertation, yet she has never failed to provide timely perspective and advice during this period of our life together.

Contents

Introduction

Today's Tibetan Buddhist, whether in Asia, Europe, North America, or elsewhere, will likely spend much of their time performing preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*). Most famously, they will be confronted with the arduous task of completing the "five-times-one-hundred-thousand" (*'bum lnga*), a set of five practices involving 100,000 repetitions each: refuge and *bodhicitta*, prostrations, Vajrasattva's purificatory hundred-syllable mantra, mandala offerings, and guru yoga. Until the practitioner has performed these time-consuming acts, some lamas will even refuse further teachings. And, even then, many practitioners continue to do these rites as a daily practice long after the accumulations have been accomplished. These preliminary rites are often performed by elite monastics at the beginning of a long retreat, by householders who set aside time in the early morning for personal devotions, and in Western dharma centers. In all these varied settings, the *sngon 'gro* practices provide a foundation for contemporary Tibetan Buddhist practice.

This dissertation sets out to explore the beginnings of these popular rites, arguing that the Tibetan Buddhist preliminaries are historically rooted in the rise of the lay guru. Unconstrained by the ritual protocols and rules of conduct that guided day-to-day life in monastic institutions, the lay tantric guru often taught a small community of disciples who lived in or near the guru's household (*gurukula*). The requirements for disciples to make offerings and perform acts of service reflected the guru's status in these groups, as did the injunction to see the guru as a buddha. Not all Buddhists appreciated the standing of such figures. Indian monastics in the tenth century decried lay gurus as lustful, money-hungry proprietors of fake tantras, who nevertheless make claims to enlightenment, declaring "We are Vajrasattvas!" Summarizing the force of such objections, Péter-Dániel Szántó has suggested there was an "all-out doctrinal war against non-monastic officiants" during this period.[1] In the contemporary Dunhuang manuscript Pelliot tibétain 840/3 and the edicts issued by King Ye shes 'od, we find similar invectives against Tibetan *tāntrika*s, who were said to be practicing Buddhism in all the wrong ways. The scrutiny and vitriol aimed at peripheral communities led by lay gurus and Tibetan tantric practitioners suggests such groups were successful enough to be seen as potentially destabilizing by some monastic institutions and ruling bodies.

And yet, even as many lay gurus were vilified, others rose to prominence in eleventh-century Tibet. 'Brom ston pa, Mar pa, and 'Khon dkon mchog rgyal po not only played key roles in the respective emergence of the Bka' gdams pa, Bka' brgyud, and Sa skya lineages, they also established institutions for passing on their teachings. In some cases, lay lamas (*bla ma*) even served as the abbots of monastic orders, inverting a hierarchy based on the monastic code taught by the Buddha himself. The rise of the lay lama in this period of Tibetan history is a complex topic that could be examined through economic, sociological, or soteriological lenses. This current project has a narrower focus, as it examines how preliminary rites for venerating the lama —including the lay lama—were integrated into the curricula of these new schools.

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[1] "The Case of the *Vajra*-Wielding Monk," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 63, no. 3 (2010): 294.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Tibetan authors drew from Indic narratives, ritual genres, and Buddhist scriptures to work out how preliminaries should fit within their own traditions. Differences between Indian precedent and current practice were often rationalized according to a historiography of decline.[2] The lay patriarch Grags pa rgyal mtshan insisted, for instance, that "these days" (*deng sang*) the preliminary stage of practice needed to be tailored to match the capacity of Tibetan disciples who were unable to perform the hardships (*dka' ba*) of Indian practitioners. His nephew, Sa skya Paṇḍita, thus recommended guru yoga and mandala offerings as the appropriate way to venerate a lama and fulfill such preliminaries at Sa skya. Similar preliminary rites were likewise advanced by Bka' gdams pa and Bka' brgyud authors, so that by the end of the end of the twelfth century, practices for seeing the lama as a buddha had been popularized and standardized, most notably in the guru yoga (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*) genre. In this period, within the Bka' brgyud milieu, we see the first categorization of four core rites—prostration, confession, mandala offerings, and guru yoga—as a set of preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) entirely focused on the lama.

The prioritization of the lama as an object of worship in Buddhist preliminary practices reflected an early stage in the formation of Tibetan traditions. It was here, in the sphere of everyday practice, rather than in canonical tantras or scholastic commentaries, that the status of lamas was consolidated in Tibetan institutions. The office went on to gain still greater authority in both the religious and political spheres, as the thirteenth century witnessed the emergence of the *sprul sku* system of reincarnated lamas—some of whom would eventually come to serve as powerful kings of central Tibet. The institutional rise of the lama in the eleventh and twelfth centuries provided a foundation for these long-lasting developments in the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

Beginnings

Through the ages, preliminary practices have framed Indian ritual, from the Vedas to complex tantric rites. In tantric Buddhism, preliminaries have played a particularly key function, as they qualify an aspirant to receive the secret initiations and instructions that allow for progress on the path. Preliminary practice texts tend to be a particularly formulaic genre, and the rites themselves are often meant to be done over and over again, often hundreds of thousands of times. The sheer repetition of the preliminaries speaks to their role in forming the identity of practitioners, both in relation to an object of worship and others who have completed a similar program in the past.

Despite the repetitious nature of the genre, Buddhist authors do in rare instances assert that preliminary practices should be done differently in a given time and place. The preliminary category can thus provide wiggle room for adapting the tantric path to suit current circumstances. Like a television prequel written after the main series, preliminary practices can be added onto

[2] In the preliminary practice genre, we thus see a type of Buddhist "dispensationalism," as specific practices are said to suit the needs of a historical age. In Christian models, there is sometimes a sense of progressive revelation of the divine in human affairs. In a Buddhist context, however, allowances are typically made to address the perceived deficiencies of a current historical moment, which is inexorably moving away from the time of the Buddha himself.

the beginning of the path without radically altering its existing structure.[3] Even novel practices simply indicate that added preparation is needed before engaging in the "liminal" phase where fundamental transformation is said to really happen.[4] Preliminaries might then be understood as comparatively unimportant were it not for the repeated claim that they are necessary for success in later stages of practice. Indeed, the fact that a preliminary practice must be done first can be used to valorize the category itself, *not* what follows. Framed in this way, an innovative type of preliminary practice can be quite significant, as it "intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*" what was there before.[5] In eleventh- and twelfth-century Tibet, for instance, the lama supplanted Indic buddhas and deities as the primary object of worship in new preliminary rites.

Buddhist authors draw from a wide range of doctrinal, narrative, and scriptural sources to explain how innovative preliminary practices are in keeping with tradition. Edward W. Said discusses such "beginnings" in philosophical terms, as the ways in which textual material from the past is creatively adapted. A literary beginning, for Said, is not just as the stylistic choices and words that mark the opening pages of a text, but a theoretical topic or object of contemplation in its own right: a "first step" from which everything else follows.[6] Unlike the idea of an "origin," which implies that a work emerged from a single source (i.e., "X *is the origin of* Y"), and can be passed down in toto, a beginning draws from an archive to express difference. Such a text claims "a status *alongside* other works: it is *another* work, rather than one in a line of descent from X or Y."[7] A beginning thus indicates the concerns and priorities of a specific author as well as a sense of movement in new directions ("The beginning A *leads to* B"). New versions of the Buddhist preliminary practices are not "passed down," so much as actively fashioned to address the exigencies of a current moment.

Indian Tantric Preliminaries

Unlike the sacred origins assigned to the Buddhist tantras, preliminary practices have a marked *beginning*: a human author who indicates a model starting point for the tantric path. In medieval Indian Buddhism, a stage of service to the guru and ritual worship of a deity were two common forms of tantric preliminaries. Vāpilladatta, for instance, gathered together a set of social codes for relating to a lay tantric guru called *Fifty Verses on the Guru* (*Gurupañcāśikā*). In the ritual

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[3] Additions at the end of the Buddhist path can likewise relegate preexisting methods to a "preliminary" status for what has now been revealed as superior. In the Rnying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism, for example, even complex tantric rites and yogic techniques came to be seen as preliminaries for *rdzogs chen* meditation. See: David Germano, "Architecture and Absence in the Secret Tantric History of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*)," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 2000): 255-257.

[4] Arthur van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1969) both analyzed ritual systems in terms of a three-part sequence: preliminary rites, a transitional or liminal stage, and rites of incorporation.

[5] Jacques Derrida defines the "dangerous supplement" as a practice or technology that comes to replace what it initially just supplemented. "Il intervient ou s'insinue *à-la-place-de*." *De La Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 208. Italics in original.

[6] Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press: 1975), xvi.

[7] Ibid., 13. Italics in original.

sphere, the *ādikarma*, *puraścaraṇa*, *puraścaryā*, and *pūrvasevā* genres include different types of foundational or preliminary practices.[8] At times, new rites came to be included in such genres. In the *Light on the Foundational Practices* (*Ādikarmapradīpa*), a compendium of *ādikarma* rites by Anupamavjara, the *gurumaṇḍala* is prioritized over more common ways of performing the mandala offering.

Indian Buddhist authors incorporated well-established social codes into their manuals for venerating lay tantric gurus. Vāpilla's *Fifty Verses on the Guru*, for example, draws upon rules of conduct for students living in a guru's household (*gurukula*) that are also found in *dharmaśāstra* scriptures, such as the *Laws of Manu*.[9] The implementation of the relational practices outlined in this text depend on the corporal presence of the guru. Disciples are instructed to use honorific terms of address, stand up when greeting a superior, and always follow the commands of the guru. Such practices indicate the importance of obedience for a *tāntrika* who aspired to earn the approval of a guru. In this regard, Isabelle Onians notes an important distinction between gaining entrance into the *gurukula* and a monastic institution:

> Entry to the Saṃgha was open to anyone on application, within limits set out openly in the *upasampadā* ceremony, limits which rest on public criteria. But entry into the Tantric Buddhist religion was not freely available to every enthusiast. There was a rigorous assessment procedure for candidates. They were thus totally dependent on the judgement of their teacher, and explicitly so.[10]

According to *Fifty Verses*, service to the guru is a preliminary stage of practice, after which a disciple may receive tantric initiation.

Tantric preliminary rites, on the other hand, were not usually oriented towards the guru, but rather toward *tathāgata* buddhas or deities. The mandala rite (*maṇḍalavidhi*) was a common method for venerating such beings.[11] The welter of different buddhas and deities, who each sat at the center of their own variegated mandalas, contributed to the complexity of tantric systems. In the *Vajrāvalī*, a work written in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, Abhayākaragupta thus created a rubric of fifty rites that could be "applied to all *maṇḍala*s known in Buddhist tantra at

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[8] The prefixes of these compound terms (*ādi-*, *pūrva-*, and *puraś-*) indicate anteriority (i.e., "first," "pre-" or "before"), while the second term means "practice" (*caraṇa*, *caryā*, *karman*) or "worship" (*sevā*). As with many Sanskrit terms, there is a wide semantic range in the latter group of nouns. The term *caraṇa*, for example, can also mean "going" or "movement," such that the term *puraścaraṇa* could be literally rendered "going before" (this sense is captured in the Tibetan term *sngon 'gro*). Gudrun Bühnemann defines *puraścaraṇa* as the "preliminary ritual" for making a mantra effective (*siddha*). "On Puraścaraṇa: Kulārṇavatantra, Chapter 15," in *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism: Studies in Honor of André Padoux*, ed. Teun Goudriaan (SUNY Press, Albany, NY: 1992), 61.

[9] Authors of such compendiums were not the "legislators or creators of these precepts" but rather collectors who organized pre-existing material to emphasize and prohibit certain types of conduct. Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners: The Civilizing Process* (Vol. 1), trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 61.

[10] "Tantric Buddhist Apologetics or Antinomianism as a Norm" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2002), 12-13.

[11] The mandala here was not a material object per se, but a ritual space that has been cleared of obstacles and purified with precious substances. Once the lines of the mandala have been drawn, a buddha or deity is invited into the center of the circle to receive offerings, praises, and other forms of veneration.

his time."[12] Here, he provides general instructions for the preliminary worship (*pūrvasevā*) that can be used for venerating any deity:

> The one who knows the path to omniscience [understands] that without the preliminary worship, there is no accomplishment. Therefore, having sat down, free of all duality, aware of the essential two stages, one imagines the circle of the deity; if one tires, then recite the mantra of that [deity]. Recite hundreds of thousands of mantras of the lord of the mandala or one's own tutelary deity, and ten-thousand mantras for [each of the other] mandala deities. This is called the "preliminary worship."[13]

Abhayākaragupta begins by indicating the importance of completing a preliminary stage of practice, which generates the power necessary for success in the accomplishment rites (Skt. *sādhana*; Tib. *sgrub thabs*) that follow on the tantric path.[14] Without this step, later practice will be "fruitless" (*na siddhi*). Abhaya next states in general terms to "imagine the circle of the deity" (*bhāvayed devatācakraṃ*), and then to recite the mantra that corresponds with that deity, or a tutelary deity (*svādhidevatā*), hundreds of thousands of times. Finally, additional mantras are recited for the other deities in the mandala. The repetitive nature of tantric preliminary practices is on full display in this passage.

From Deity to Guru

The voluminous *Vajrāvalī* does not include a specific rite for worshipping the guru at the center of the mandala, but there are some indications that Abhayākaragupta would have considered this an acceptable practice.[15] In the *Entrance of the Ācārya* (*Ācāryapraveśa*) rite, for instance, he equates the guru and the visualized deity, as the disciple is told to "imagine that the lord of the mandala is the visible manifestation of the guru."[16] The "self-initiation" (*svasyābhiṣeka*), a short

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[12] Yong-Hyun Lee, "Synthesizing a Liturgical Heritage: Abhayākaragupta's *Vajrāvalī* and the Kālacakramaṇḍala," (University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dissertation, 2003), 1. The dates for Abhaya's life are uncertain, although it is likely that he lived "from the latter half of the eleventh century to the early half of the twelfth century." Ibid., 23.

[13] *sarvajñamārgajño na hi siddhir asevayā | tasmān niṣadya nirdvandvaṃ satkramadvayatattvavit || bhāvayed devatācakraṃ khinnas tanmantram ājapet | carkeśasya japel lakṣaṃ lakṣam vā svādhidevatāṃ | cakriṇām ayutaṃ ceti pūrvaseveyam ucyate* || Masahide Mori (ed.), *The Vajrāvalī of Abhayākaragupta: Edition of Sanskrit and Tibetan Versions*, Vol. 1. Institute of Buddhist Studies (Tring, UK, 2009): 68. The Tibetan translation is on p. 69.

[14] From at least the seventh century onward, mantra recitation was done as a preliminary practice that qualified the aspirant to do the main rites associated with a tantric deity. The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, for instance, specifies that such preliminaries (*puraścaraṇa*) are performed by a tantric adept who as taken vows and gone to a remote location. See: Glenn Wallis, *Mediating the Power of Buddhas: Ritual in the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 140-141.

[15] In the *Kriyāsamuccaya*, a later compendium closely modeled on the *Vajrāvalī*, the *gurumaṇḍala* is included at the beginning of the "Preparation of the Disciple" (*śiṣyādhivāsana*), the twentieth rite in Abhaya's compendium.

[16] *pratyakṣībhavaccakreśaṃ ca gurum adhimucya*; Masahide Mori, *The Vajrāvalī of Abhayākaragupta: A Critical Study, Sanskrit Edition of Selected Chapters and Complete Tibetan Version* Vol. 1 (PhD dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1997), 170. Tib. *'khor lo'i dbang phyug ni bla ma mngon gsum du gyur par mos par bya ste* | Ibid. Vol. 2, 395.

rite found towards the very end of the compendium, provides another situation when the deity stands in for the guru:

> If one's tantric commitments are damaged, one ought to receive initiation in precisely the manner explained in the *Entrance of the Ācārya* rite. But if the precious guru is living very far away or living in a place that is inaccessible because of obstacles, such as a road being hard to travel, [one ought to do this self-initiation; but,] not for any other reason. Always, with full resolve, generate an imagined mandala of the tutelary deity which is indivisible from method and insight. From the lord of the *maṇḍala*, one receives the water initiation (and so forth), the secret, the knowledge-wisdom, up to the fourth [initiation]. In the end, [the damages to the tantric commitments] are excused. This is the self-initiation rite.[17]

Abhayākaragupta presents the self-initiation as an expedient "do-it-yourself" method for repairing the tantric vows (*samaya*) when one is unable to meet the guru in person. In this case, the tutelary deity is imagined as a substitute for the guru. The self-initiation was only meant to be done when the guru was inaccessible; not "for any other reason" (*nānyathā*). As a do-it-yourself version of a transactional rite, the self-initiation provided a way of "interiorizing" the presence of the guru in tantric praxis.[18] The peripheral placement of the rite (it is the forty-fourth of fifty rites in the *Vajrāvalī*), and the fact that it is only meant to be done in exceptional circumstances, both suggest that the ritualized worship of the deified guru was not yet a routine practice.[19]

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Indian Buddhists composed similar collections of foundational or "beginner" practices (Skt. *ādikarman*; Tib. *las dang po pa*).[20] Each compendium includes a different mandala rite for venerating a tantric deity or an array of buddhas, but the

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[17] *ṣvasyābhiṣekavidhi | svayam api samayakṣatāv īdṛśam evābhiṣekaṃ yathācāryapraveśavidhau grahaṇam uktaṃ tathā gṛhṇīyāt | kiṃtu yadi sadgurur atidūre durgamārgādyupadravair agamyapradeśe vā prativasati nānyathā | sadā samādānatas tu prajñopāyaikarasasveṣṭadevatāyogena bhāvitamanomayamaṇḍale maṇḍaleśād udakābhiṣekādikaṃ guhyaprajñājñānacaturthaparyantam āśvāsaparyantaṃ ca gṛhṇīteti svasyābhiṣekavidhiḥ ||* Ibid., 237-238. The Tibetan is in Mori (Vol. 2), 431-432. The Sanskrit term "*āśvāsaparyantaṃ*" (Tib. *dbugs 'byung* or *dbyung ba'i mthar thug*) may have a specialized meaning that relates to the breath (Skt. *āśvāsa*; Tib. *dbugs 'byung*), although these terms can also be used to indicate forgiveness or consolation. As this is rite through which the tantric vows are repaired, it is possible that the term indicates the resolution to the ritual process.

[18] Indian Buddhists had developed numerous methods for replacing external ritual actions or objects with internal physiological processes by the time this compendium was written. Such substitutions could dramatically alter the structure of tantric practices, as a single seed syllable (*bīja*) could be visualized in lieu of an intricate, multi-colored mandala. In some cases, "the tantric subject had become the site for the entire ritual performance; the body's interior provided the devotee, the altar, the oblations, and the buddha to be worshipped." Jacob P. Dalton, "The Development of Perfection: The Interiorization of Buddhist Ritual in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (Feb. 2004), 2.

[19] Mori classifies the self-initiation as a "supplemental rite." *The Vajrāvalī of Abhayākaragupta* (2009), 24-25.

[20] These compendiums all contain a similar set of vows and ritual observances (*vidhi*): reciting mantras, offering water to the deity Jambhalā, making clay *caityas*, venerating the buddhas and bodhisattvas, drawing and worshipping a *maṇḍala*, reciting Buddhist scriptures, and making mealtime offerings.

authors do not usually emphasize the particular importance of a given mandala.[21] In one exceptional case, however, the veneration of the guru is prioritized over the deity in a rite called the *gurumaṇḍala*. In the *Light on the Foundational Practices*, by Anupamavajra, the guru is imagined at the center of the mandala in the form of the buddha Vajrasattva. The idea of seeing the guru as a buddha was already a key aspect of tantric doctrine, yet the *gurumaṇḍala* applied this trope in an everyday rite. Before presenting the liturgy itself, Anupamavajra puts forward a series of hypothetical objections made by an opponent who disagrees with worshipping the guru at the center of the mandala. Addressing these concerns, Anupamavajra justifies the placement of the *gurumaṇḍala* rite in the *ādikarma* genre with a series of doctrinal statements and scriptural citations, most of which are taken from *Fifty Verses on the Guru*. The *gurumaṇḍala* rite closely relates to guru yoga and other rites for imagining the lama as a buddha that were popularized in Tibet.

Guru Yoga

Guru yoga (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*) is similar to the *gurumaṇḍala*, insofar as the lama is meant to be imagined as a buddha or a tantric deity. In this rite, however, the disciple receives initiations or blessings by imaginatively drawing three seed syllables (Skt. *bīja*; Tib. *'bru*) or colored lights from the lama into the forehead, throat, and chest.[22] The dearth of guru yoga ritual manuals in Sanskrit or Tibetan translation stands in stark contrast to the prevalence of this genre in original Tibetan compositions.[23] Indeed, despite signs that the *gurumaṇḍala* was beginning to spread in late Indian Buddhism, everyday rites for imagining the guru as a buddha do not appear to have been codified and popularized in India. Moreover, human lamas were also visualized in Tibetan guru yoga rites, especially in the Bka' brgyud school.[24] Tibetan guru yoga consolidated the status of local buddhas who could best embody the new lineages that had flowed from India into Tibet. Guru yoga has been a key aspect of Tibetan religious practice for nearly a millennium, but has yet to be closely studied from an historical perspective.

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[21] After presenting a mandala rite with a golden-colored buddha in the center, Tatakaragupta specifies that: "When the mandala has been constructed with the steps that were just explained, one can—according to one's wishes—also worship any other deity through this very method." (*uktakrameṇa kṛtamaṇḍale evaṃ krameṇaivābhilaṣitānyadevatā api pūjayet | Ādikarmavidhi*, 33v.2).

[22] A early name for this rite, "Drawing in Three Times" (*tshar gsum khug pa*) indicates the centrality of this motif.

[23] Preliminary rites also played a role in Japanese tantric traditions. Even though these materials are not discussed in this dissertation, it is worth noting that here the "four preliminary practices" are "centered around the invocation of a particular buddha, bodhisattva, or other divine being." Robert H. Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," *Journal of International Association of Buddhist Studies* 26, no. 1 (2003), 59. The lack of a Japanese preliminary rite comparable to guru yoga provides further evidence that this genre primarily emerged in Tibet.

[24] As Robert Mayer has observed: "It would seem that in India, with the obvious exception of the Śākyamuni Buddha himself and his attendant entourage, complex and complete tantric *sādhana*s were predominantly addressed to a-historic or trans-historic figures, such as Buddhas from other world systems or pure realms, transcendent cosmic Bodhisattvas, and exotic tantric deities. They were less addressed to human teachers identifiable in current or recent local history." "Early guru yoga, indigenous ritual, and Padmasambhava." Blog post, October 7, 2013. (https://www.academia.edu/14573545.) Accessed on 9/6/22.

Previous Scholarship

The work of Péter-Dániel Szántó and other scholars on the *Fifty Verses of the Guru* (Skt. *Gurupañcāśikā*; Tib. *Bla ma'i lnga bcu pa*) provides a valuable starting point for research into the history of this text in India, and its reception in Tibet.[25] Szánto has also laid out a tentative proposal for understanding the shift between lay and monastic authority in the tantric sphere during the ninth and tenth centuries.[26] Iain Sinclair's work on the emergence of "tantric monasticism" in Nepal, and its Indian precursors, has provided an important foundation for my own research into the eleventh- to twelfth-century period.[27]

Modern scholarship on the *ādikarma* rites began at the end of the nineteenth century, when the eminent Belgian Sanskritist Louis de La Vallée Poussin published a partial translation (in French) and the editio princeps of the *Ādikarmapradīpa.*[28] The monograph discusses the roles of the beginner bodhisattva (*ādikarmikabodhisattva*) and the thematic relationships between the *ādikarma* rites and Buddhist practices found in the *Pañcakrama*, the *Śikṣasamuccaya*, and the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*. Poussin also notes the similarities between the foundational rites and meal-time offerings found in this compendium and Brahmanical householder rites.[29] He does not, however, speak to Anupamavjara's rhetorical emphasis on the *gurumaṇḍala*.[30] Nearly a century later, Glenn Wallis published an introduction to the *ādikarma* genre, along with a partial translation of the *Removal of Wrong Views* (*Kudṛṣtinirghātana*), a compendium written by the adept Advayavajra (1007-1085).[31] Wallis suggests that the very name of this text is meant to

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[25] The *Gurupañcāśikā* was first published by Sylvain Lévi, "Autour D' Aśvaghoṣa," *Journal Asiatique* 214 (Oct.-Dec. 1929): 259-263. See also: Péter-Dániel Szántó, "The Case of the *Vajra*-Wielding Monk" and "A New Manuscript of the *Gurupañcāśikā*," In *Puṣpikā: Proceedings of the International Indology Graduate Research Symposium*, edited by Mirnig, N.—Szántó, P.—Williams, M (September 2009, Oxford). Oxford: Oxbow Publishers, 2013. A fourteenth-century Tibetan commentary by Tsong kha pa (1357-1419) was translated by Gareth Sparham as *The Fulfillment of All Hopes: Guru Devotion in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1999).

[26] Szántó hypothesizes that lay gurus were especially influential in the ninth century, but that by the end of the tenth century the authority to represent tantric Buddhism had been "wrested by the more orthodox and observant monastic community." "The Case of the *Vajra*-Wielding Monk," 290. For additional critiques of lay gurus by monastic authors in this period, see: Onians, "Tantric Buddhist Apologetics," 265-267 and passim.

[27] "The Appearance of Tantric Monasticism in Nepal: A history of the public image and fasting ritual of Newar Buddhism, 980-1380" (PhD diss., Monash University, 2016).

[28] *Ādikarmapradīpa*. de La Vallée Poussin, Louis, (ed.). In *Bouddhisme, Études et Matériaux*. London: Luzac & Co., 1898. Patrick Lyons and I have translated the majority of this text from French into English for this research project. Steven Beyer has translated sections of the *Ādikarmapradīpa* into English: *The Buddhist Experience: Sources and Interpretations* (Encino, CA: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), 55-64.

[29] *Études et Matériaux*, 24, fn. 4. La Vallée Poussin notes the comparable rites found in the *Chandogāhnikapaddhati.*

[30] A review of Poussin's monograph casts the *gurumaṇḍala* as the "latest degeneration of Buddhism into Gurupūjā, i.e., worship of men who went by the name of spiritual guide." *Journal of the Buddhist Text and Anthropological Society*, vol. VI, Part III, ed. Sarat Candra Das, "Review of Books," (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1898): 24-25.

[31] Glenn Wallis, "Advayavajra's Instructions on the *Ādikarma*," *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* (Series 3), vol. 5 (2003): 203– 230. More recently, Klaus-Dieter Mathes published a translation of this text in *A Fine Blend of Mahāmudrā and Madhyamaka: Maitrīpa's Collection of Texts on Non-conceptual Realization* (*Amanasikāra*), (Wein: Verlag Der Österreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften: 2015), 41-49.

correct the erroneous notion that foundational rites are not a necessary stage on the Buddhist path and, more broadly, that the *ādikarma* genre helped bridge the gap between antinomian and institutional forms of Indian Buddhism.

From Guru to Bla ma

The Sanskrit term *guru* was translated into Tibetan as lama (*bla ma*).[32] Both terms convey a sense of authority.[33] The pioneering linguist Turrell V. Wylie, however, suggested that *bla ma* was an anomalous choice because other terms were translated literally by earlier Tibetan translators.[34] According to this view, Tibetans intentionally coined a new term that resonated with their own shamanic background (the term "*bla*" can mean "spirit" or "life principle").[35] Wylie does not, however, offer further evidence for why in this notable case translators would have departed from their normal habit of translating Buddhist terms literally. As the Tibetan

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[32] The two syllables in the Tibetan word each have two primary meanings, and this has led to a diverse range of translations of the term into English. The root term "*bla*" has been understood as an indigenous "life principle," "spirit," or "soul." Alternatively, it is also used as a translation of the Sanskrit terms *urdhva* or *uttara*, both of which mean "above," "superior," or "high." The second syllable "*ma*" can be taken as a postposition marker that generates nouns from adjectival terms. In this case, it indicates possession, such that the "*bla ma*" could mean the one who is endowed with or even controls the life principle. Alternatively, it could mean a "superior one." (Taken as an awkwardly placed negation particle, *ma* has also led to the translation "none higher.") Finally, the translation of *ma* as "mother" leads to neologisms such as "life-mother" or more poetically yet, "all sustaining mother of the universe." The translations that evoke the image of a powerful or sustaining mother are dubious insofar as they do not provide an etymological connection with the term *guru*.

[33] The Sanskrit term *guru* means "heaviness," such that a guru is an important teacher or perhaps even "a heavy" (following colloquial English usage) who is meant to be treated with a degree of respect and awe. The Proto Indo-European root "*g^{w}erə-" is the basis for the Sanskrit term *guru*, the Latin *gravis*, and the Greek term *barus* (i.e., "heavy"). *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 2031. The etymological connection with *gravis* (was typically used in conjunction with the nouns *auctor* and *auctoritas*) also suggests that the title *guru* also conveyed a sense of authority: the term "*gravis auctor*" indicates a person who is "the true authority, the competent judge, the acknowledged master." Jan Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religions* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1965), 238. Michael L. Walter argues that in Old Tibetan the term *bla* is originally a term for authority, understood as "that which is directly above," or even as a "functional metaphor" for the government itself. *Buddhism and Empire: The political and religious culture of early Tibet* (Boston: Brill, 2009), 106-110 and passim. Walter's broader claim that "in Old Tibetan documents [*bla*] never means "soul" or the like." (Ibid., 153 ft. 51.) was disproved by the linguist Nathan W. Hill. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, no. 4 (Oct. 2011): 560.

[34] Wylie suggests that *bla ma* was an anomalous choice for the Sanskrit term guru, because most other terms were translated literally by early Tibetan translators. "Etymology of Tibetan: *BLA-MA*," in *Central Asiatic Journal* 21, no. 2 (1977) 145. The term "*bla ma*" (or "soul-mother," as he translates it) was meant to assimilate the role of the Buddhist *guru* with "the existing shamanic beliefs of the Tibetan people." Ibid., 148. Wylie suggests that the Tibetan term "*slob dpon*" would have been a more accurate way of capturing the meaning of *guru* as "spiritual teacher," although he fails to note that this term was also used to translate the Sanskrit term *ācārya.* In light of key distinctions between the titles of *guru* and *ācārya*, equating these offices in Tibetan would have been a serious error. See Minoru Hara, "Hindu Concepts of Teacher, Sanskrit *Guru* and *Ācārya*," in *Sanskrit and Indian Studies: Essays in Honour of Daniel H. H. Ingalls*, edited by Masatoshi Nagatomi, et al. (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980), 93-118.

[35] Donald S. Lopez Jr. follows Wylie, noting that in selecting the term *bla ma* Tibetan translators "departed from their storied penchant for approximating the meaning of the Sanskrit." Donald S. Lopez Jr. (ed.), *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38, no. 1 (January 1996), 6.

disyllabic term *bla ma* nicely captures the connotations of the Sanskrit term *guru*, it should not be seen as an exceptional case.

Tibetan Preliminary Practices

The rites commonly associated with the Tibetan Buddhist preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*)—prostrations, Vajrasattva confession, mandala offerings, and guru yoga—are often taken to define the genre. Even though this categorization obscures important variations in how preliminaries are done across Tibetan traditions, it remains a useful reference point for discussing the history of the preliminaries. Academic synopses of the *sngon 'gro* practices typically focus on how the genre relates to more advanced initiation rites or meditative practices rather than on the development of the preliminaries themselves.[36] The emergence of the *sngon 'gro* rites has yet to be adequately addressed, although scholars have broached the topic of whether they are an Indian or Tibetan genre. David Gray, for example, presents the rites in innovative terms :

> Tibetan authors in the *gsar ma* schools not only built on the foundations of the textual and practice traditions that they inherited from India but also innovated and created new ritual genres that either filled gaps in the traditions received from India or addressed uniquely Tibetan concerns. One of these genres is preliminary-practice (*sngon 'gro*) texts that describe the practices that novice students are to undertake. This was a real lacuna in the transmission of texts from India. There is, of course, no doubt that Indian Buddhist communities developed systems of preparatory practice for neophytes, and some Indian authors comment generally that initiates should be "well-educated in mantra and *tantra*" (*mantratantrasuśikṣita*; see Gray, 2011a, 456). However, the Tibetan canon contains no translated texts detailing this practice.[37]

In this passage, Gray suggests that while Indian Buddhists had a formal pedagogy for dealing with beginners, Tibetans formalized more specific types of preliminary practices. As there are no "*sngon 'gro*" texts in the Tibetan canon (i.e., works that include the four core rites), Gray thus frames the rites as an "innovative" genre that "addressed uniquely Tibetan concerns." Rolf Scheuermann presents an alternative view, stating that in drawing "on the large stock of established meditational techniques from both *sūtra* and *tantra*, the sets of preliminary practices

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[36] Alex Wilding, for example, discusses the relationship between *sngon 'gro* practices and initiation. "Some Aspects of Initiation," *The Tibet Journal* 3, no. 4 (1978): 34–40. As preliminaries for *mahāmudrā*, see Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, "Guru-Devotion in the bKa' brgyud pa Tradition: The Single Means to Realisation." In *Mahāmudrā and bKa'-brgyud-pa Traditions* (Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, 2006), edited by Matthew Kapstein & Roger Jackson, 211-258 (Andiast: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies GmbH, 2011).

[37] David M. Gray, "Ritual Texts: Tibet: New Tantras (Gsar Ma)." In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, eds. Jonathan A. Silk, Oskar von Hinüber, and Vincent Eltschinger, Handbook of Oriental Studies (Section Two) 29, no. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 673.

do not contain any newly invented methods."[38] The varying views on the emergence of Tibetan preliminary practices, and the degree to which they were innovative or inventive (and what these terms mean in this discussion) suggest the need for a closer examination of the relevant eleventh- to twelfth-century Indian and Tibetan preliminary practice texts.

In my own research, the popularity of the preliminary practice genre in contemporary Tibetan Buddhist literature—combined with the general lack of previous scholarship on this topic—made the idea of finding the "origins" of the *sngon 'gro* particularly exciting.[39] The size of the corpus, however, raised the daunting question of where to even begin.[40] A retrospective gaze brought me past the more well-known Klong chen snying thig commentaries and early stand-alone liturgies such as the *The Chariot for Traveling the Noble Path* (*'Phags lam bgrod pa'i shing rta*) by the Ninth Kar ma pa (1556–1603). In the fourteenth century, Klong chen pa (1308-1364)[41] and Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (1337-1408)[42] presented systematized preliminaries; here they were not meant to be done a certain number of times, but according to time (*dus*) or sign of accomplishment (*rtags*). Even among those Tibetan texts that include the four rites associated with the modern *sngon 'gro*, there is variation regarding how to evaluate the completion of the preliminaries.

At this point, I had also encountered the *ādikarma* corpus, as well as the many other genres of Indian preliminaries. The idea of a hypothetical origin started to seem increasingly simplistic, as did the possibility of being able to identify such a text given the diverse nature of the available sources. (Or, perhaps it was my own young kids repeatedly asking me: "What came first, the chicken or the egg?") In turning away from the goal of finding an ur-*sngon 'gro* text, I instead began a more thematic examination of the differences between Indic and Tibetan preliminary practices. The initial challenge of establishing criteria for selecting texts and creating

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[38] Rolf Scheuermann, "When Sūtra Meets Tantra—Sgam po pa's Four Dharma Doctrine as an Example for his Synthesis of the Bka' gdams- and Mahāmudrā-Systems" (PhD diss., University of Wien, 2015), 66.

[39] After initiating my own research, I did come across a study that touches on the history of the preliminaries: David Norton Need, "The Guru's Maṇḍala: Interpretation, Authority, and Culture," (MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1993). After an examination of the role of the "spiritual friend" (*kalyāṇamitra*) in early Indian Buddhism, the bulk of this study focuses on the roles of the lama and guru yoga in Tibetan traditions. It is a wide-ranging work that applies numerous methodological and theoretical perspectives that focus on the concept of culture (e.g., Mikhail Bakhtin and James Clifford). More recently, Carla Ott has addressed the relationship between Indian and Tibetan Buddhist preliminaries: "Adaptations of the Longchen Nyingtik Preliminary Practices: A historical, comparative, and field study" (MA thesis, Centre for Buddhist Studies at Rangjung Yeshe Institute, Kathmandu University, 2021), 23-39.

[40] As the preliminaries are found in every Tibetan Buddhist school, there is not a key figure or corpus that provides a pre-made starting point for studying the history of the genre. Bon traditions also include preliminary practices. See: John Myrdhin Reynolds, *The Oral Tradition From Zhang-Zhung: An Introduction to the Bonpo Dzogchen Teachings of the Oral Tradition from Zhang-zhung known as the Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 253-343.

[41] Steven D. Goodman, "The Klong chen Snying thig: An Eighteenth-Century Tibetan Revelation" (PhD diss., University of Saskatchewan, 1983) includes a section on the history of the preliminaries in this tradition, beginning with the fourteenth-century figure Klong chen pa.

[42] Katarina Syliva Tureinen, "Vision of Samantabhadra, The Dzokchen Anthology of Rindzin Gödem" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2015), 159-162.

a manageable archive was met by focusing on eleventh- to twelfth-century period texts that prioritized the worship of the guru or lama.[43]

The idea of "beginnings" became increasingly salient in this second phase of research: How did Buddhist authors draw from older works to present new preliminary rites? Why was a certain practice emphasized in some ritual collections but not in others? In Tibet, what was the historical significance of citing the oral teachings given by a lama on the topic of preliminaries? And, how did Indian and Tibetan authors account for innovation, especially when they explicitly indicate the need to tailor the preliminaries to a specific time and place? The Tibetan texts examined in the chapters that follow do not all use the now-common term "*sngon 'gro*," but they do describe a preliminary stage of Buddhist practice that is oriented towards the lama.[44] In providing various "snapshots" that speak to this recurring theme, my aim is not to construct a definitive master narrative, but to demonstrate that this was a consistent way in which Tibetans integrated Buddhist practices into their own traditions in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The hackneyed truism that this is just one of many possible versions of how this topic could be explored is, here, perhaps especially true.

Early Western scholarship on Tibet emphasized the political and religious power of lamas under the rubric of "Lamaism," but did little to account for how rites came to be oriented towards the lama.[45] Later scholarship, however, has provided helpful guidelines for my research, even when it does not specifically address the preliminaries. Dan Martin has done pioneering work on the lay-led Buddhist movements in eleventh- and twelfth-century Tibet.[46] Ronald Davidson's *Tibetan Renaissance* (2005) addresses the beginner rites at Sa skya monastery and the emphasis on hardships in Tibetan biographical literature about the famous *siddha* Nāropa. In *Building a Tradition* (2017), Cécile Ducher discusses the topic of hardships in the early biographies about Nāropa's Tibetan disciple Mar pa chos kyi blo gros (1012-1097). More recently, Kati Fitzgerald published an article on the role of prostrations and the hardship of work for women in the contemporary Bongwa Mayma community.[47] Carl S. Yamamoto (2012) addresses the formation of new traditions around charismatic lamas in a study of the influential figure Lama Zhang (1123-1193). Art historians' analysis of portraiture, *thang ka*s, and footprint paintings from the

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[43] The *ādikarma* genre, and especially the *gurumaṇḍala*, thus provided a useful starting point for understanding the Tibetan preliminary rites (even though *puraścaraṇa* is the Sanskrit equivalent of the Tibetan term *sngon 'gro*).

[44] In chapter three, for instance, bowing to the lama is presented as a "preliminary method of veneration" (*sngon du bsnyen bskur ba'i thabs*) by the twelfth-century Sa skya patriarch Grags pa rgyal mtshan. Tibetan authors also use terms such as "application" rites (*sbyor ba'i cho ga*) and "preliminary rites" (*sngon du 'gro ba'i cho ga*).

[45] Lawerence A. Waddell perfunctorily claims that "Guru Padmasambhava was the founder of Lāmaism," as if a pre-existing religion of this name was brought to Tibet in toto. *Lamaism* (London: W.H. Allen & Co. Ltd, 1895), 24. For some early scholars of Buddhism, the office of the lama did not seem to need to be explained, in part, because of its assumed equivalence with the familiar hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

[46] "The Star King and the Four Children of Pehar: Popular Religious Movements of 11th-12th-Century Tibet" *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung* 49 no. 1-2 (1996): 171-195 and "Lay Religious Movements in 11th- and 12th-Century Tibet: A Survey of Sources," *Kailash* 18 (1996), 23-55.

[47] The Bongwa Mayma live in a rural area of Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province. Kati Fitzgerald, "Preliminary Practices: Bloody Knees, Calloused Palms, and the Transformative Nature of Women's Labor," *Religions* 11, no. 12 (2020): 636. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11120636

twelfth century has also been especially helpful for understanding the elevated status of lamas in Tibet, especially Phag mo gru pa (1110-1170).[48] Various articles and theses have addressed the broad emphasis on guru devotion and guru yoga in Tibetan Buddhism.[49] A close analysis of the preliminary practices builds on the topics addressed in these scholarly works, providing a new perspective on the formation of Tibetan Buddhist traditions around the figure of the lama.

Methodology

The late twentieth-century methodological turn towards bodily practices, lived religion, and ritual decisively shifted Buddhist studies away from the emphasis on meditation and philosophy. The varied practices that inform Buddhists' lives, across numerous cultures and time periods, are now seen as worthy objects of study, even when they do not correlate with canonical scriptures or elite doctrinal viewpoints. Buddhist views, practices, and narratives, moreover, are not seen as *sui generis* categories, but rather to have emerged through the interplay of multiple cultural and religious traditions.[50] Various aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, for example, are understood to have been shaped by the assimilation of indigenous "shamanic" elements.[51] The common emphasis on syncretism as a vehicle for change fails, at times, to account for the ways that Tibetan authors actively used Buddhist sources—doctrines, narratives, and scriptures—to rationalize new ways of doing everyday practices in their own institutions. Indeed, as Tibetan traditions became more independent in the twelfth century, we find explicit remarks that thematize differences between how preliminaries used to be done in India and how they are done "now" (*da*) or "these days"

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[48] Christian Luczanits, "Art-historical Aspects of Dating Tibetan Art," in *Dating Tibetan Art: Essays on the Possibilities and Impossibilities of Chronology from the Lempertz Symposium, Cologne*, ed. I. Kreide-Damani (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag), 25-57; David P. Jackson, *Mirror of the Buddha: Early Portraits from Tibet* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2011); and, Kathryn H. Selig Brown, "Handprints and Footprints in Tibetan Painting" (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2000).

[49] Mark A. Donovan, "Guru Devotion in Tibetan Buddhism" (MA Thesis, University of Calgary, 1986). Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, "Guru-Devotion in the bKa' brgyud pa Tradition" and "*Phyag chen lnga ldan:* Eine Mahāmudrā Praxis der Kagyüpas," in *Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Band 8), ed. Lambert Schmithausen (Hamburg: Universität Hamburg, 2003), 139–162. Renée Ford, "The Role of Devotion (*mos gus*) in Tibetan Heart Essence Traditions: Devotional Affect and Its Relationship to Dzogchen's Foundational Practices" (PhD dissertation, Rice University, 2020).

[50] The view of Buddhism as an independent entity that can be defiled by assimilating rites or practices from other traditions (such as "Hinduism") is now considered highly problematic. Underlying earlier notions lay an assumed connection between personal identity and participation in a discrete "world religion." See: Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[51] In *Civilized Shamans*, the hybrid category of "Shamanic Buddhism" is defined as a style of practice that resulted from a mix of both folk-religion practices ("the employment of spirit-mediums to communicate with local deities") and "shamanic" forms of Vajrayāna Buddhism, "which is certainly related to these folk-religion practices but is not a simple derivative of them." Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 8. The idea of shamanic influence has also shaped scholarly opinion about why Tibetans used the term *bla ma* as a translation for *guru*. (See above: xiii, fn. 34 and 35.)

(*deng sang*) in Tibet.[52] My aim is to go with the grain of Buddhist authors, following their arguments and reasoning for how Indic practices should be done in Tibet.[53]

Tibetan Buddhist texts about preliminary practices can also be usefully analyzed under the rubrics of tradition, ritual, and comparative spiritual exercises. As a theoretical topic, tradition informs our understanding of how and why Buddhist authors such as Anupamavajra, Grags pa rgyal mtshan, and Sa skya Paṇḍita creatively framed specific practices for venerating the guru or lama, while maintaining a sense of fidelity to the past. Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood present tradition as a discourse for negotiating the relationship between past, present, and future, not just as a vehicle for "passing down" practices. Ritual studies provides a second lens for understanding changes in the Tibetan preliminary practices. The anthropologist Roy Rappaport's analysis of institutional hierarchies is particularly useful for assessing practices being reoriented towards the lama. Finally, Pierre Hadot's and Michel Foucault's respective work on the spiritual exercises (*exercices spirituels*) and technologies of self (*technologies de soi*) provides grounds for a comparative perspective with European traditions.

Tradition

Tradition is often seen in simple terms as a vehicle for passing down customs, knowledge, and practices.[54] In everyday language, a "traditional practice" is understood as one that is currently done in the same manner that it was done in the past. Religious traditions and practices have been routinely portrayed as conservative, particularly as a foil for the dynamic rationality of

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[52] Ronald Davidson summarizes: "The twelfth century stands as the watershed in Tibetan religion, for it became the time in which Tibetans confidently established their independent perspective on the architecture of the Buddhist path." *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 427. By the end of the twelfth century, Tibet was no longer a peripheral zone for Buddhist activity. Tibetologists such as Janet Gyatso (1998) and Kevin A. Vose (2009) have recognized distinct forms of biography and philosophy that emerged during this period, but there has been less scholarship on how everyday Buddhist practices also came to be done in distinct ways in Tibet.

[53] A methodological approach that foregrounds the ways that Buddhist sources were used to legitimate changes in the ritual sphere is different than speaking, in more general terms, to the intentionality of Tibetan authors during the *phyi dar* period. In the opening pages of *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, Matthew T. Kapstein discusses the different ways in which the relationship between Indian and Tibetan forms of Buddhism has been accounted for in scholarship on this period. While Tibetan historiography itself tends to maintain the view that Buddhism in Tibet was the final bastion of Indian tradition (and hence the real teachings of the Buddha), early Western scholarship saw it as a degenerate mix of "Hindu tantrism and indigenous Tibetan demonology and superstition." Kapstein also acknowledges a more recent apologetic view that Tibetan Buddhists were creative for a "good reason," as they knew that Buddhism needed to change in order to take root. On this view, Tibetan authors did not "merely replicate their Indian sources but ingeniously adapted them to local conditions." 4.

[54] New Oxford American Dictionary: Latin *traditio*(*n*-), from *tradere*: to 'deliver', 'betray', or 'surrender'; and from *trans*- 'across' with *dare* 'give'. In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams includes "handing down knowledge" and "passing on a doctrine," as well as a corresponding sense of duty to do so. With these definitions in mind, it is easy to see why innovation is threatening to tradition. Yet, Williams also points out an irony within the idea of passing down received tradition: "Considering only how much has as been handed down to us, and how various it actually is, this, in its own way, is both a betrayal and a surrender." (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 319.

modernity.[55] Eric Hobsbawm idea of "invented traditions" complicates this view somewhat, as it explores the idea of a tradition that is not actually as old as it purports to be.[56] Invented traditions are presented by Hobsbawm as a predominantly modern phenomenon, but he notes that traditions from the distant past may have also reinvented themselves in response to radical societal change.[57] The decline of Indian monasteries in the late twelfth century, for example, may have precipitated a "Hobsbawmian crisis" of sorts, insofar as Tibetans' access to previous institutional carriers of Buddhism became increasingly limited.[58] The invented traditions model is also relevant when twelfth-century Tibetan authors elaborated upon Indic sources as a way of establishing an imagined foundation for their own local traditions.[59] Hobsbawm's model does not, however, provide much insight into how "genuine" (i.e., "not-invented") pre-modern Tibetan traditions might have navigated granular changes in their institutions and curriculums during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[60]

The limitations of the invented traditions model can be reconciled by drawing from other theoretical perspectives. The sociologist Edward Shils, for example, suggests that "tradition" is always subject to contestation.[61] A traditional practice can thus change along with beliefs about

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[55] Talal Asad notes the eighteenth-century philosopher Edmund Burke's "ideological opposition" between *tradition* and *reason* (as a distinctive feature of the modern perspective), which was "elaborated by the conservative theorists who followed him, and introduced into sociology by Weber." "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Occasional Papers Series* (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986), 16. Peter Berger's *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), which was strongly influenced by Weber, is also premised on the existence of more-or-less homogenous religious worlds.

[56] An invented tradition is defined as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historical past." Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

[57] "There is probably no time and place with which historians are concerned which has not seen the 'invention' of tradition in this sense. However, we should expect it to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated." Ibid., 4-5.

[58] Indian Buddhism was not eradicated during this period (as was long assumed), and yet the institutional struggles of key monasteries undoubtedly had an impact on Tibetans' access to sources of Buddhist knowledge. See: Arthur McKeown, "From Bodhgayā to Lhasa to Beijing: The Life and Times of Śāriputra (c.1335-1426), Last Abbot of Bodgayā" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010), 5-19 and passim.

[59] In chapter four, for instance, we see how Tibetan biographies about the Indian *siddha* Nāropa expand upon previous narrative material to emphasize the importance of preliminary hardships (*dka' ba*). The stories about Nāropa's hardships are thus set in the "suitable historical past" of India, even as they speak to Tibetan concerns.

[60] Others have critiqued Hobsbawm for not adequately distinguishing "invented" and "genuine" traditions. See: Richard Handler, "Review," *American Anthropologist* 86.4 (1984): 1025-1026.

[61] "There is a certain arbitrariness in the definition of the boundaries of a tradition of religious knowledge and in the decision as to what lies outside them. This problem would not exist if traditions were, as some of their detractors allege, entirely constant and incapable of any change other than complete rejection." Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 97.

why it should be recommended, required, or prohibited.[62] Indeed, the division between a bodily or ritual practice and how it is interpreted has provided ample room for different opinions among Buddhist thinkers.[63] For Tsong kha pa, a fourteenth-century scholar, extending the entire body to the ground and bowing to the lama "with all five limbs" (i.e., head, arms, and legs) is considered debasing.[64] For others, however, this is considered an ideal way of demonstrating devotion to lama and adhering to traditional norms. In chapter two we thus see that a "Bka' gdams pa prostration" (*bka' gdams pa'i phyag*) depends upon throwing the body down and touching the ground with all five limbs.[65] Other bodily positions—the gaze of the eyes, the placement of hands, or the straightness of the back—have been used to evaluate the performance of a given Buddhist practice. Ritual criteria and specificities are even more diverse. These external forms are meant to shape an individual's practice, but following Shils they might also be seen as somewhat arbitrary standards that mark participation within a given institution or tradition.

Variation in how traditional practices are framed demonstrates that they cannot just be evaluated in terms of imitation or repetition, but instead by a more flexible criterion of apt performance. Debate and reasoning should not therefore be seen as symptoms of a "tradition in crises," because while traditions are invested in maintaining received practice, they must also be able to adapt to changing circumstances.[66] Innovation is an ongoing element of traditional discourse, even if religious authors typically make use of authoritative sources from the past.[67] As we will see below, even when Buddhist authors are explicit about the need to do preliminary practices differently in their own time and place, current practice is still framed as "traditional" in light of doctrinal, narrative, and scriptural material.

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[62] "Human actions are the most evanescent of things. They last no longer than the time required for their actual performance; once performed, they cease to exist. The transmissible parts of them are the patterns or images of actions which they imply or present and the beliefs requiring, recommending, regulating, permitting, or prohibiting the reenactment of those patterns." Ibid., 12.

[63] The *prima facie* distinction between bodily acts and internal belief has been considered highly suspect since Catherine Bell's decisive critique of this model as a way for understanding ritual and the "hidden workings" of a tradition. Indeed, Bell criticizes Shils on this very point: "just as the differentiation of ritual and belief in terms of thought and action is usually taken for granted, so too is the priority this differentiation accords to thought. For example, Edward Shils argues that ritual and belief are intertwined and yet separable, since it is conceivable that one might accept beliefs but not the ritual activities associated with them." *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19. I agree with Bell that internal belief should not be taken as prior or superior to bodily practice. But, this is different than pointing out that religious adherents variously theorize (from the *outside* as it were) the degree to which certain bodily and ritual practices conform with traditional standards.

[64] A tantric disciple should venerate [the lama] in every way, yet do not prostrate with the five limbs and perform other debasing acts, such as washing the [lama's] feet." (*yan lag lngas phyag 'tshal pa dang dam pa min pa'i las rkang pa bkrus ba la sogs pa spang pa ste de dag ma gtogs pa'i bsnyen bkur kun brtul zhugs can gyi slob ma's bya'o*). Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa, *Bla ma lnga bcu pa'i rnam bshad slob ma'i re ba kun skong* in *Gsung 'bum*, pod kha pa (New Delhi: Ngawang Geleg Demo, 1975), 328.5.

[65] *Oral Instructions on the Seven Branches* (*Yan lag bdun pa'i man ngag*), 559.2.

[66] Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 14-16.

[67] Saba Mahmood explains that an orientation towards the past (conveyed through a select corpus of doctrines, practices, and texts) shapes those who participate in a religious tradition, even as there is variation in how this discourse informs current practice. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 115 and passim.

Ritual

Rituals have been long subject to critique from those outside of a given tradition.[68] In the early twentieth century, some scholars of Buddhism considered ritual practice (especially that of a tantric stripe) to be a distortion of early Buddhism and the individualistic path.[69] The liturgical verses for taking refuge in the triple gem—a ubiquitous method for marking Buddhist identity—were even considered suspect from this perspective.[70] In more recent decades, however, ritual has become a prominent and valued method for studying Buddhism.[71] The acceptance of ritual texts as a valid basis for scholarship on Buddhism coincided with the emergence of sophisticated theories for understanding ritual performance—not as an expression of preexisting attitudes or beliefs, but as a method for forming identity.[72] Ritual forms a "Buddhist subject" in terms of emotional states and dispositions, while instantiating the norms and principles of a community.

Ritual shares a number of characteristics with tradition, as the scripted bodily practices, liturgies, and symbols associated with its performance are "encoded by another" and thus passed down from one generation to the next.[73] To perform a rite or everyday practice in a way that is not sanctioned by a community or tradition can, in some cases, risk being ostracized (or worse). However, for one who is properly trained in a ritual idiom—and, here, the role of preliminaries stands out—bodily practices communicate acceptance and subordination (i.e., one's place in a hierarchy) more effectively than verbal allegiance to an institutional order.[74] Ritual accomplishes this task because it is meta-performative: the act itself provides a rationale for what it is supposed to accomplish, and it also brings about that very effect.[75] To bow to the Buddha or a lama signals

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[68] According to Jonathan Z. Smith, the term ritual was first used in English (in the 1570 *Oxford English Dictionary*) as a pejorative: "contayning no manner of Doctrine…but onely certayn ritual Decrees to no purpose." *To Take Place: Towards a Theory of Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 102.

[69] Shayne Clarke's reading of the *Rhinoceros Horn Sūtra*, provides an example of how individualistic assumptions shaped early Buddhist studies. *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 3-10 and passim.

[70] Sukumar Dutt remarked that taking refuge in the triple gem is "obviously inconsistent and contradictory" with the ethos of early Buddhism because before his passing Śākyamuni told his disciples to rely on his teaching (the *dharma*), not on a teacher or monk. *The Buddha and Five After-Centuries* (London: Luzac & Co., 1957), 200.

[71] Recent scholarship has confirmed the centrality of ritual in early Buddhist communities. See: Robert DeCaroli, *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). In *Tibetan Ritual*, José Ignacio Cabezón discusses the increased focus on ritual in Tibetan studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 22-25.

[72] In the influential book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992), for example, Catherine Bell challenged the idea that ritual is "a particularly *thoughtless* action — routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic — and therefore the purely formal, secondary, and mere physical expression of logically prior ideas." 19. Italics in original.

[73] The anthropologist Roy A. Rappaport defines ritual as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers." *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24.

[74] In kneeling before an object of worship, a person is "actually subordinating himself to that order." Ibid., 142.

[75] Ibid., 279.

devotion, as well as the acceptance of a world wherein it makes sense to prostrate in that direction.

Buddhist "Spiritual Exercises"

Buddhist preliminary practices can be compared with the spiritual exercises (*exercices spirituels*) and technologies of self (*technologies de soi*), two categories of practice that have been closely studied by the French philosophers Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault. Hadot and Foucault were both curious to explore the parallels between European and Buddhist practices, but neither of them engaged in a comparative study.[76] Matthew T. Kapstein has discussed the relationship between these genres,[77] as has a more recent volume of essays edited by David V. Fiordalis.[78] This dissertation is not a comparative project, yet it draws from the theoretical perspectives offered by Hadot and Foucault (and others who have used these categories), in order to better understand the historical development of preliminary practices focused on the lama in Tibet.

In European traditions, mnemonic contemplations, examinations of conscience, as well as specific ways of eating, walking, and even sleeping have all been presented as spiritual exercises (*askēsis*).[79] Narrative has served a similar purpose.[80] Novices are quintessentially in need of a programmatic course of spiritual exercises, if only because of their lack of experience or what Michel de Certeau describes as the "outrageous fervor of the beginner."[81] An overabundance of enthusiasm on the part of beginners can even lead to the premature sense of not needing the guidance of a teacher. John of the Cross, a renaissance-period Catholic priest, thus observes in

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[76] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 28-33. In his Dartmouth Lectures, Foucault remarked that Buddhist practices likely differ in their tendency towards a "disindividualization, to a desubjectification, to pushing individuality truly to its limits or beyond its limits, with the aim of an emancipation from the subject." *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Lectures at Dartmouth College, 1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 55. In light of the signature Buddhist argument for selflessness (*anātman*), even foundational and preliminary practices could be interpreted as supporting insight into this reality. Nevertheless, elite philosophical views should not be taken as *prima facie* evidence that Buddhist spiritual exercises operated in a radically different manner than those found in European traditions. Indeed, Buddhist authors routinely assert that taking refuge and other preliminary practices properly form a Buddhist subject.

[77] Matthew T. Kapstein, "Spiritual Exercises and Buddhist Epistemologists in India and Tibet," in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 270-289 & "Stoics and Bodhisattvas: Spiritual Exercise and Faith in Two Philosophical Traditions," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns—Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*, eds. Michael Chase, Stephen R.L. Clark, and Michael McGhee (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 99-115.

[78] *Buddhist Spiritual Exercises: Thinking with Pierre Hadot on Buddhism, Philosophy, and the Path*, ed. David V. Fiordalis (Berkeley: Mangalam Press, 2018.)

[79] The category of spiritual exercises is so inclusive, that some critics have suggested it loses its meaning. Hadot has also been charged with using the category in an inconsistent manner. John Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 402-403.

[80] Moshe Sluhovsky, for instance, focuses on confessional narrative as a spiritual exercise in *Becoming a New Self: Practices of Belief in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[81] Michel de Certeau, *Mystic Fable Vol. One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 35.

Dark Night that when "spiritual directors, confessors, and superiors try to instruct [such tyros], they refuse to listen."[82] In these cases, beginner or preliminary practices are the antidote that is needed for *patientia*, *obedientia*, and *humilitas* to arise. In Buddhist tantra, the preliminary practices are also meant to ensure that a disciple becomes a "suitable vessel" (Skt. *saddharma-bhājanaṃ*; Tib. *snod du rung ba*), in some cases by submitting to the will of the guru.[83]

Spiritual exercises are typically done according to set parameters, such that the identity of a practitioner is shaped by the approach of a given spiritual director or religious community.[84] In most cases, self-cultivation depends on the presence of an *other*, the master who is an "effective agency" (*opérateur*) in the formation of the disciple as a subject.[85] Technologies of self—acts in which an individual effects a certain operation "by their own means" rather than relying on an external object or person—complicate this relational framework.[86] Buddhist rites done in relation to a visualized lama (such as guru yoga) fit into this category.

Summary of Contents

Chapter one, "The *Gurumaṇḍala*," provides an initial example of how innovation occurs in the ritual sphere. It begins with an overview of the social codes for relating to a lay tantric guru in *Fifty Verses on the Guru*. The numerous bodily practices and prescriptions for bowing, making offerings, and seeing the guru as a buddha are meant to be done in the guru's presence, while living in or near the *gurukula*. Yet later, these same social codes were used to introduce ritual practices for venerating the guru. Anupamavajra repeatedly cites *Fifty Verses* to justify the inclusion of the *gurumaṇḍala* in his compendium of *ādikarma* rites, *Light on the Foundational Practices* (*Ādikarmapradīpa*). In part, these citations are meant to allay the concerns of an unnamed opponent who questions the idea of worshipping the guru at the center of the mandala. Anupamavajra's scriptural exegesis thus promotes the *gurumaṇḍala* as an everyday practice, while also framing it as in keeping with Buddhist tradition.

Chapter two, "A Foundation for Tantra," discusses the Tibetan assimilation of Indic ritual genres, such as the foundational practices (Skt. *ādikarman*; Tib. *las dang po pa*) and the seven

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[82] Sluhovsky, *Becoming a New Self*, 55.

[83] Tantric authors routinely thematize the idea that submitting to the guru is a skillful way of progressing on the Buddhist path. As discussed at length by Mahmood, the agency of an individual and the strictures of an authority figure or tradition should not always be read in stark opposition (See: *Politics of Piety* "The Subject of Freedom," 1-39). That said, a system in which harmful treatment can be framed as beneficial for a disciple's spiritual progress is ripe for abuse.

[84] The spiritual exercises were done in distinct ways across European traditions, but there was also borrowing and overlap among various groups. The *Spiritual Exercises* devised by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), for instance, drew on a wide range of Christian devotional material (Devotio Moderna texts, the *Imitation of Christ*, and the *Vita Christi*), but arranged it into a distinct set of prayers, contemplations, and visualizations that were meant to be done in a one-month retreat, under the close supervision of a spiritual director.

[85] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-83* (New York: Picador, 2011), 130.

[86] *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst: 1988), 18.

branches (Skt. *saptāṅga*; Tib. *yan lag bdun*). Early in the eleventh century, a second wave of Buddhist translation activity and institution building was initiated in Tibet. In this milieu, King Ye shes ʻod and other contemporary authors emphasized the need for Tibetans to adequately prepare for tantra. Indic foundational practices were increasingly oriented towards lamas. In some cases, lay lamas were considered the most relatable object of worship for beginners. The lay status of the founder of the Bka' gdams pa order, ʻBrom ston pa (1004-1064), was seen as beneficial in precisely this way. In *Oral Instructions on the Seven Branches*, distinct ways of performing Indic rites are understood to mark participation in the Tibetan Bka' gdams pa school.

Chapter three, "Bowing to the Lay Lama," examines the assimilation of the foundational practices at Sa skya monastery by two lay patriarchs: Bsod nams rtse mo (1142-1182) and Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216). The *ādikarma* practices here are meant for beginners in the Hevajra system of tantric practice, including monastics. Differences between how these two brothers wrote about bowing as a preliminary method of veneration reflected their respective institutional contexts. Writing at the conservative Bka' gdams pa monastery of Gsang phu, Bsod nams rtse mo approvingly cites verse four from *Fifty Verses on the Guru* (which warns against bowing to a lay or novice guru in public). Grags pa rgyal mtshan, who was the longstanding abbot of Sa skya, wrote a commentary in which he argues *Fifty Verses* is contradictory on this very point. Everyone should bow to the lama, regardless of ordination status or seniority. In defense of this position, he cites a variety of Indian tantras and Mahāyāna scriptures. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Elucidation of Fifty Verses* provides a clear example of how scriptural exegesis rationalized a new way of performing an everyday Buddhist practices in a Tibetan institution.

Chapter four, "Visions of the Guru," discusses how Tibetan Bka' brgyud authors frame a preliminary stage of practice in terms of the "hardships" (*dka' ba*) performed by Nāropa and his lay disciple Mar pa chos kyi blo gros (1012-1097). Although there is some Indic precedent for these stories, they appear to have been mostly developed by Tibetan authors. For Nāropa, the hardships were performed in service of his guru Tilopa, whereas in Mar pa's biographies they are fulfilled through searching for Nāropa in India. In both cases, the hardships are considered necessary to receive the "blessings" (*byin rlabs*) of the guru, and yet these texts implicitly acknowledge that Mar pa cannot perform the selfsame tasks as Nāropa. The narrative framing of hardships eventually gave way to ritualized preliminary practices in the Bka' brgyud tradition.

In chapter five, "Guru Yoga," the monk Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182-1251) provides ritualized preliminaries as an alternative to the hardships said to have been performed by earlier Indian Buddhists. Drawing from oral instructions on the "drawing in three times" rite (*tshar gsum khug pa*), Sapaṇ's *Profound Path of Guru Yoga* (*Lam zab mo bla ma'i rnal 'byor*) uses scriptural passages (*lung*), narrative citations (*lo rgyus*), and personal instructions (*gsung pa*) to introduce the guru yoga rite. In autobiographical passages, Sapaṇ relates that he initially had difficulty seeing his own lama, the lay patriarch Grags pa rgyal mtshan, as anything more than his ordinary uncle. A preliminary period of service to the lama and the guru yoga rite are what effect a desired shift in perception, such that he can see his lama as Mañjuśrī. In the *Profound Path*, Sa skya Paṇḍita draws from Indian Buddhist sources, yet argues that mandala offerings and guru yoga are the most effective practices for his own time and place.

Chapter six, "The Bearded Buddha," examines formal sets of preliminary rites (*sngon 'gro*) that gained prominence in Bka' brgyud schools at the end of the twelfth century. In these

rituals, and in contemporary paintings and statues, the lama is imagined as a buddha in human form. In painted *thang ka*s and statutes of Phag mo gru pa (1110-1170), for instance, distinctive facial features—such as his bulbous nose and thin black beard—are blended with famous marks typically used to depict Śākyamuni Buddha. Bka' brgyud preliminary rites follow this trend when calling for the lama to be visualized in human form—as a buddha—rather than as a specific Indic bodhisattva or deity. Early *sngon 'gro* texts in this milieu include prostrations, confession, mandala offerings, and guru yoga rites that are entirely focused on the lama.

The conclusion revisits eleventh- to twelfth-century Buddhist preliminary practices, with an eye towards how this genre has been assimilated in the West. In recent decades, there have been further "beginnings," as the preliminaries have been variously interpreted for a modern audience. Buddhist teachers have promoted the *sngon 'gro* in new ways, arguing that to even begin practicing Tibetan Buddhism Westerners must be suitably prepared according to the standards of modern psychology. Tibetan lamas have also advanced hybrid approaches that dramatically mix cultural forms, in one case laying out versions of refuge and guru yoga that are entirely oriented towards Jesus Christ. In other instances, lamas provide reasons for maintaining the standard of the "five-times-hundred-thousand" (*'bum lnga*) model in which refuge and *bodhicitta*, prostration, confession, mandala offerings, and the guru yoga rite are each done one-hundred-thousand times. Buddhist authors thus continue to use the preliminary practice genre to navigate the shifting contours of continuity and innovation in their own traditions.

Chapter 1: The *Gurumaṇḍala*

Indian Buddhist rites (*vidhi*) might be usefully compared with modern apps, particularly in their shared ability to quantify and regulate behavior. Just as we can now measure our footsteps and spark mindful moments in real time, Buddhists developed standardized rites that were meant to be done at specific junctures throughout the day. These rites were also "encoded by another." Not by a techie in the Bay Area, of course, but by previous generations of Buddhists who had passed them down as preferred methods for accumulating merit, dispelling obstacles, and venerating the buddhas. Rituals were not thought of as a technology to be developed and updated (and no medieval Buddhist would have been heralded for such efforts), but at times they were conducive to innovation. In this chapter, we see how the Indian author Anupamavajra drew upon popular mandala rites and a medieval collection of social codes called *Fifty Verses on the Guru* in his innovative presentation of a rite called the *gurumaṇḍala*.

The *Fifty Verses on the Guru* is a short handbook of social codes for relating to a lay tantric guru, written by a pandit named Vāpilladatta in the ninth or early tenth century. The text is meant for beginners, and the majority of verses prescribe everyday guidance for how to act in the presence of the guru. These social codes highlight the singular authority of the guru, as disciples are expected to use honorific terms of address, stand up in turn, and always follow the commands of the guru. As a preliminary stage of practice that was meant to be taught before the bestowal of tantric initiation, the social codes in *Fifty Verses* usher a disciple into the subculture of the guru.

By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Buddhist authors in the vicinity of Vikramaśīla Monastery were composing extensive collections of ritual practices that were also meant for beginner practitioners (*ādikarmika*). These *ādikarma* compendia typically foreground a mandala rite (*maṇḍalavidhi*) for worshipping tantric deities or *tathāgata* buddhas, but one work—*Light on the Foundational Practices* by Anupamavajra—instead prioritizes the *gurumaṇḍala*, an offering rite in which the guru is imagined as the buddha Vajrasattva.

Anupamvajra provides a series of introductory comments that account for the placement of the *gurumaṇḍala* in *Light on the Foundational Practices*. In these apologetic remarks, he repeatedly invokes the questions of an interlocutor who disagrees with the use of the mandala as an everyday method for worshipping the guru. Anupamavajra responds to each objection with citations from *Fifty Verses on the Guru*—especially its injunctions to make offerings to the guru and regard him as a buddha—but he also inserts additional passages that cast the *gurumaṇḍala* as the most effective application of these widely accepted tantric norms. The series of hypothetical objections, and Anupamavajra's responses, both suggest that the inclusion of the *gurumaṇḍala* in the *ādikarma* genre was innovative and somewhat controversial.

Anupamavajra's exegesis justifies the inclusion of the *gurumaṇḍala* in the *ādikarma* genre by presenting it in keeping with Buddhist tradition. The rite also suggests that the figure of the guru was being co-opted in the monastic sphere in late Indian Buddhism. Anupamavajra was not the only Indian Buddhist to compose a *gurumaṇḍala* liturgy, yet his exegetical remarks provide the best example of how it came to be promoted as a daily practice. The explicit claim that it should be done *first*, before the more common deity mandala rite, also demonstrates how the preliminary category can be used to valorize a specific practice and, in this case, the worship of the guru in the manner of a buddha.

Fifty Verses on the Guru

The *Fifty Verses on the Guru* (*Gurupañcāśikā*) is a short collection of social codes for relating to a lay tantric guru.[1] While there are no certain Indic commentaries, it was translated into Chinese and Tibetan in the eleventh century.[2] Tibetan translators (and later scholars) have at times attributed the work to the famous first-century Sanskrit poet Aśvaghoṣa (Tib. Rta dbyangs), although in the twelfth century Grags pa rgyal mtshan had already correctly identified the author as Bha bi lha.[3] Péter-Dániel Szántó's recent discovery of a second Sanskrit manuscript has confirmed that *Fifty Verses* was written by an Indian pandit named Vāpilladatta, probably in the late-ninth or early-tenth century.[4] A number of the social codes in this work are also found in classical Indian *dharmaśāstra* texts, such as the *Laws of Manu.*[5] Methods for venerating a guru were certainly widespread in India, yet Vāpilla acknowledges tensions associated with this figure in a Buddhist context. In verse four, for instance, he cautions against bowing to a lay or novice guru in public, due to the possibility of generating scorn from onlookers. *Fifty Verses* provides an initial example of how preliminary practice texts were amenable to working out topical issues such as how to relate to a lay tantric guru.

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[1] The same verses also circulated under the title *Veneration of the Guru* (*Gurvārādhana*). The *Ādikarmapradīpa*, for instance, cites this title, as does the *Detailed Commentary of the Veneration of the Guru* (Skt. *Gurvārāhanapañjikā*; Tib. *Bla ma'i bsnyen bkur gyi dka' 'grel*). The author of this commentary is unknown, though the Tibetan translation is attributed to Vanaratna (1384-1468) and 'Gos lotsāwa gzhon nu dpal (1392-1481). Ryan C. Damron indicates that Vanaratna was not the author of this commentary. "Deyadharma—A Gift of the Dharma: The Life and Works of Vanaratna (1384-1468)" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2021), xv.

[2] *Fifty Verses* was translated into Tibetan by Rin chen bzang po (958-1055), and into Chinese by Sūryakīrti (日稱, d. 1078). As one of forty-seven Indian monks to travel and work in China during the Song dynasty (between the years 977 and 1032), Sūryakīrti has been called the "last remaining expert of Sanskrit in Northern Song (960-1127)." Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 103-4. The *Fifty Verses* did not have much of an impact in China, however, especially compared to its reception in Tibet.

[3] Rin chen bzang po and the Bka' gdams pa text *History of the Fifty Verses* (*Bla ma lnga bcu pa'i lo rgyus*) both identify Aśvaghoṣa as the author of the text, although the latter also includes Devoted to his Mother (Skt. *Mātṛceṭa*, Tib. *Ma khol rtan pa*), 'Ba' Ba'i lha chen, and 'Bha bhi la as further possibilities. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs bsgrigs thengs gsum pa* 79 (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009), 467. As exemplified here, Tibetan scholiasts had the unfortunate habit of conflating the identity of Brahmin-born Indian literary figures. (A thirteenth-century medical history by Che rje includes a much longer list of alternative names for Mātṛceta that also includes Rta dbyangs, 'Ba' ba'i lha chen, and 'Bha bhi la.) Thanks to Dan Martin for sending me this list.

[4] Szántó suggests that *Fifty Verses* was composed in the late-ninth or early-tenth century (based on the citation of the text in several tantras from the tenth and eleventh centuries). "A New Manuscript of the *Gurupañcāśikā*," 443.

[5] The *Laws of Manu* (*Mānavadharmaśāstra*) outlines the stages of life for a Brahman, including the period spent living and studying in the house of the guru (*gurukula*). The *Fifty Verses* was written roughly a thousand years later, yet the resonances between the texts speak to long-standing modes of relating to a guru in Indian culture. A variety of the specific injunctions found in chapter two of *Laws of Manu* are also found in the *Fifty Verses*: rising to greet a superior; using honorific terms of address; revering the family members of the guru; not carrying an umbrella, dancing, singing, or playing musical instruments in the guru's presence; not lounging in bed when conversing with the guru; and avoiding those who speak ill of the guru. Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith (translators), *The Laws of Manu*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 17-42. Chapter four includes the proscription against stepping on the shadow of the guru, which is also referred to in *Fifty Verses*. Ibid., 86.

A Preliminary Stage of Practice

Fifty Verses on the Guru's methods and social codes are framed as a preliminary stage of practice that is meant to be done before receiving initiation and fully embarking on the tantric path. The opening folios discuss the proper ways of establishing the guru-disciple relationship (*śiṣyācārya-saṃbandha*), while at the end of the text Vāpilla gives precise instructions for when to teach the text:

> One should give the triple refuge to the pure-minded disciple. This 'service to the guru' is then meant to be memorized. Next, having become a suitable vessel for the true dharma through mantra and so forth, [that disciple] ought to be instructed in and bear in mind the fourteen root downfalls.[6]

The concluding stanzas indicate that after a disciple has taken refuge in the triple gem (*śaraṇatraya*), the service to the guru (*gurvanuvartana*) is meant to be memorized or "kept in the throat" (Skt. *kaṇṭhāgata*; Tib. *kha ton*).[7] Only after this preliminary stage is the disciple meant to receive initiation, becoming a "vessel for the true dharma" (Skt. *saddharmabhājana*; Tib. *dam chos kyi snod*). Finally, the initiate is taught the fourteen principle transgressions (*mūlāpattīś catrudaśa*) that must be avoided by tantric practitioners.[8] *Fifty Verses* itself provides instructions for engaging in the preliminary stage of service to the guru, and it is likely that the text itself was also meant to be memorized and recited out loud. The nature of the bodily practices and social codes suggest further that all this was meant to be done while staying in or nearby the household of a guru (*gurukula*).

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[6] [*śuddhā*]*śayāya śiṣyāya gatāya śaraṇatrayaṃ | dadyāt kaṇṭhagatāṅ kartuṃ imāṃ gurvanuvartanāṃ || tato mantrādidānena kṛtvā saddharmabhājanaṃ | pāṭhayed dhāraṇāyeva mūlāpattīś caturdaśa || Gurupañcaśikā* v. 48-49, ed. Szántó 2013: 448. The second *pāda* of verse forty-eight is a little ambiguous, though the use of the determinative pronoun "this" (*imāṃ*) suggests that it is the *Fifty Verses* itself that is meant to be memorized.

[7] Vāpilla's use of the term *kaṇṭhāgata*—"gone to" or "placed in" (*āgata*) the throat (*kaṇṭha*)— indicates that *Fifty Verses on the Guru* should be memorized and perhaps recited out loud as a liturgical text. In classical Indian texts, the synonymous terms *kaṇṭhastha* (literally, "situated in the throat") and *svādhyāya* are frequently used when speaking about the Vedic hymns, which are recited daily over and over again. The hymn is not just memorized, but in a sense becomes part of the body—a liturgy that is so familiar that one holds it in the throat and can thus recite without even needing to stop and think about it. A later compendium of foundational practices includes *Fifty Verses on the Guru* in a list of texts that are to be recited. (*Ādikarmapradīpa*; ed. Takahashi 1993: 136.) In the fourteenth century, the learned Tibetan commentator Tsong kha pa, also explains that the *Fifty Verses* ought to be memorized and recited, such that "the words are not forgotten and it is recited again and again" (*tshigs mi brjed par yang yang 'don pa*; *Bla ma lnga bcu pa'i rnam bshad*, 367.3.)

[8] The sequential break between the preliminary stage and receiving initiation is especially clear, as the third *pāda* begins with the term "next," or "afterward" (Skt. *tato*; Tib. *de nas*). Tibetan commentaries sometimes gloss this passage as "initiation, and so forth (*dbang la sogs pa*), suggesting that some Sanskrit versions of the text may have read *abhiṣekādi*. In either case, the *-ādi* suffix indicates that after the stage of serving the guru, the disciple receives mantra, initiation, and so forth. In this passage, initiation constitutes the disciple as a "suitable vessel," but as we will see below, the preliminary practices are often meant to serve this exact purpose.

In the Presence of the Guru

Fifty Verses on the Guru provides etiquette and protocol for relating to the guru, his possessions, and his family.[9] The bodily practices all reinforce a strict hierarchy between guru and disciple: one should not step across his shadow, laugh too loudly in his presence, or point one's feet in his direction. If the guru stands, then one should also; do not point your legs at the guru.[10] Do not spit in front of the guru, nor move around aimlessly in his presence. Do not tell long stories or sing. Be modest in his presence (like a new bride) and, if you must speak, do so gently, using honorific terms of address. As discussed in academic literature that draws from foundational works in twentieth-century continental philosophy by Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, these bodily practices form a subject or "self" in relation to the guru.

The bodily practices and matters of etiquette are supplemented by injunctions against transgressing the authority of the guru by teaching his students, spending his money, or performing rites in his stead. Disparaging remarks towards the guru are entirely forbidden, and even minor criticisms ought to be avoided. As the guru is essential for success on the tantric path, one must remain in his good graces and perform acts of service. One then "obtains happiness from the guru" (*guroḥ sukhaṃ samāpnoti*), gains spiritual accomplishments (*siddhi*), and even heaven (*svarga*). A disciple is also meant to follow every command (*ājñā*) of the guru.[11]

The injunctions to restrain one's body and speech in the presence of the guru are joined with instructions to direct one's gaze to the guru in specific ways. A disciple is meant to "see the guru as a buddha,"[12] and thus behave appropriately when the guru is looking (*paśyati śāstari*). The repeated use of terms derived from the verbal root "to see" (√*paś*) suggests physical proximity to the guru (whereas later rites for "imagining" or "visualizing" the guru as a buddha use verbs derived from the roots √*dhyā* and √*bhā*). The disciple is also meant to extend a special mode of seeing to include the guru's belongings (*dravya*), his wife (*aṅganā*), and his community of followers (*loka*).[13] A disciple's glance might be even said to constitute a social world: in

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[9] As noted by Szántó, these references confirm that such gurus were indeed often laymen. "The Case of the *Vajra*-Wielding Monk," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung* 63, no. 3 (2010), 292. Certainly there were also female gurus in India, although they are not mentioned here in *Fifty Verses on the Guru*.

[10] The social codes for relating to a tantric guru were drawn from Brahmanical culture, in which feet are considered especially "low" and polluted. For a disciple to be stand (i.e., "high") while the guru remains sitting (i.e., "low") would also contradict this hierarchical order. The philosophers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson discuss how routinized bodily practices around vertical dichotomies such as high and low reinforces such normative hierarchies. *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1980), 14-21 and passim.

[11] As pointed out by Iain Sinclair, this and similar passages exemplify a "Śaiva-like exaltation of the guru" and thus needed to be rationalized in some Buddhist quarters. "Tantric Monasticism," 214-218, fn. 72. & 227 fn. 130.

[12] "Do not in any way consider there to be a difference between the guru and Vajradhara." (*nānātvaṃ naiva kurvvīta guro vajradharasya ca* || *Gurupañcāśikā* v. 22cd, ed. Szántó 2013: 447.)

[13] "One who is composed should always look upon the wealth of the guru as if it is one's life, his wife as the guru himself, and his community as familiar relatives." (*jīvam iva guror dravyaṃ guruvac ca tadaṅganāṃ* | *bandhuvat tasya lokaṃ ca paśyen nityaṃ samāhitaḥ* || Ibid., v. 26, 447.)

relation to the guru, his intimates, and other students.[14] The prestige of the guru ensures that those objects and persons in proximity to him are also seen as elevated; it would also seem that the disciple promises to eventually gain such distinction through continued participation in the guru's circle.

Offerings to the Guru

Tantric disciples were expected to make significant material offerings to their guru. Numerous Indic and Tibetan narratives indicate the great lengths taken to gather the gold needed for paying initiation fees (*dakṣiṇā*). Tantric *gaṇacakra* rites also provide numerous junctures in which the guru receives material offerings. *Fifty Verses on the Guru* does not get into these specifics, but it declares a number of benefits of making offerings to the tantric guru: dispelling fever, sickness and hardship, atoning for misdeeds, and gaining virtue. As in wider Indian thought (Brahmanical, Jain, and Buddhist) the merit gained through giving is largely determined by the qualities of the recipient. Making offerings is effective in this case because the guru is considered "equal to all the buddhas" (*sarvabuddhasama*):

> The excellent ones are always to be supplicated. Always worship the buddhas, and always give to the guru because he is equal to all the buddhas. For those who desire the undying, whatever object is desirable—or indeed what is the most excellent—that very thing ought to be offered to the guru. In making offerings to [the guru], one makes continual offerings to all the buddhas. From that gift comes the accumulation of merit and supreme awakening.[15]

For the disciple, making offerings to the guru is said to result in the accumulation of merit (*puṇya*) and the highest awakening (*bodhir uttamā*). In emphasizing the benefit of such material offerings, these verses heighten the status of the guru even further (as he is meant to be seen as a recipient equal to all the buddhas). Much like the aforementioned bodily practices, the emphasis on offering the best of everything to the guru confirms his role at the center of the tantric community. Outside of the *gurukula*, however, *Fifty Verses* suggests that demonstrating such devotion to a lay guru might be seen as problematic.

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[14] This is a paraphrase of Michael Warner's statement: "The direction of our glance can constitute our social world." *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 89. Sara Ahmed cites Warner when discussing how facing in the same direction creates a "collective force" in modern society, even when individuals hold different views on that common object or technology. The direction of attention in a medieval Indian *gurukula* differs insofar as the collective is oriented in common towards the face of the guru. In both contexts, however, the "collective takes shape through the repetition of the act of "facing." The direction of one's attention puts one in line with others." Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: orientations, objects, others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 119-120.

[15] *nityaṃ susamaya sādhyo nityaṃ pūjyā tathāgatāḥ | nityaṃ ca gurave deyaṃ sarvvabuddhasamo hy asau || yad yad iṣṭataraṃ kiṃcit viśiṣṭataram eva vā | tad tad dhi gurave deyam tad evākṣayam icchatā || datte smai sarvva-buddhebhyo dattaṃ bhavati śāśvataṃ | taddānāt puṇyasaṃbhāras sambhārād bodhi uttamā || Gurupañcāśikā* v.19-21, ed. Szántó 2013: 447.

Not in Public

The opening verses of *Fifty Verses on the Guru* celebrate the tantric guru in exalted terms. The text begins with an homage to the glorious guru (*śrīguru*) and even the *tathāgata*s who abide in the ten directions are said to venerate such a figure. In verse three, disciples are instructed to bow their heads to the feet of the guru. Yet, in the very next verse, Vāpilla warns that bowing to a lay or novice guru in public might elicit scorn from onlookers:

> For those holding the tantric vows, [the guru who is] a householder or novice monk ought to be mentally venerated—after first placing in front a sacred object of some sort—for the sake of avoiding worldly criticism.[16]

Verse four strikes a cautionary tone. A tantric disciple ought to be circumspect about bowing to a guru who is a householder (*gṛhī*) or novice monk (*navaka*). In this verse, Vāpilla indicates that "worldly opinion" (*loka*) operated with a different sense of who is an appropriate object of veneration.[17] Bowing to a lay or novice guru would have been especially problematic for any monastic disciples of such a guru, as the *vinaya* unequivocally declares that prostrations ought to be made on the basis of ordination status and seniority. For a monk, bowing to a layman is strictly prohibited.[18]

Fifty Verses on the Guru may reflect the growing influence of lay gurus in the monastic sphere. The reference to a wife (*aṅganā*) and material possessions (*dravya*) indicate that the guru is a layman, but when it comes to bowing in public the text acknowledges the possibility that the guru is a layman *or* a novice monk (*gṛhī vā navako*). As it is precisely a senior monk who would have the most to lose by bowing to a lay or novice guru in public, the passage appears to be aimed here at the specific concerns of a monastic audience.[19] As *Fifty Verses* provides an alternative model of Buddhist authority and social codes for a tantric practitioner, it could be described as a "tantric *vinaya*" when its prescriptions were taken up by monks. The social codes laid out in this text were indeed cited by later Indian monastic authors (as we will soon see in detail). *Fifty Verses* also went on to become especially popular in Tibet, and its role for beginners on the tantric path was discussed by Bka' gdams pa and Sa skya authors.

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[16] *saddharmādīn puraskṛtya gṛhī vā navako pi vā | vaṃdyo vratadharair buddhyā lokāvadhyānahānaye* || Ibid., v. 4: 447.

[17] The Sanskrit term *vandanā* (Tib. *phyag 'tshal*) can mean to "worship," "praise," or "bow." Given that the preceding verse uses the same term (√*vand*) while discussing bowing the head to the feet of the guru, we can assume that the idea of performing physical prostrations carries over into verse four.

[18] The *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* states, for instance: "All lay men must show deference to one who has entered into the religious life. All those who are ordained must show deference to one who was ordained earlier." Venerating a lay man, by contrast, is prohibited." Gregory Schopen, "Hierarchy and Housing in a Buddhist Monastic Code: A Translation of the Sanskrit Text of the *Śayanāsanavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*," *Buddhist Literature* 2 (2000): 103.

[19] Vāpilla does not specify that verse four primarily applies to monastics, but rather indicates in general terms that any *tāntrika* ought to first put down a legitimate object of worship, and then mentally venerate the guru.

Sanskrit Ādikarma Compendia

In the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, Indian Buddhists composed lengthy compendia of foundational practices (Skt. *ādikarman*; Tib. *las dang po pa*). These collections of *poṣadha* vows, contemplations, and rites were meant for a popular audience, especially householders.[20] The eleventh-century Sanskrit works are the *Removal of Wrong Views* (*Kuḍṛṣṭinirghātana*) by Advayavajra (1007-1085)[21] and the *Entrance to the Foundational Practices* (*Ādikarmāvatāra*) by Mañjukīrti.[22] Anupamavajra's *Light on the Foundational Practices* (*Ādikarmapradīpa*) was likely written after these texts, in the second half of the eleventh century or, perhaps, in the early twelfth century. The *Foundational Practice Rites* (*Ādikarmavidhi*) was written by Tatakaragupta towards the end of the twelfth century.[23] The majority of these texts were written in the vicinity of Vikramaśīla Monastery, and even though each author frames presents the *ādikarma* rites in somewhat different ways, there is a large degree of overlap among these compendia.

In Sanskrit *ādikarma* compendiums, the sequence of practices begins immediately upon waking up. The practitioner takes refuge in the triple gem, washes, and then engages in a period of meditation and mantra recitation. The ritual practices include liturgies for offering water to Jambhalā and hungry ghosts, making clay stupas (*caitya*), and worshipping the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Meal-time rites include *bali* and *naivedya* offerings, as well as an offering for Hārītī. The mandala rite is typically used to worship a tantric deity or an array of *tathāgata* buddhas, and its performance is said to fulfill the six perfections (*ṣaḍpāramitā*). At the end of the day, the practitioner recites texts and finally goes to sleep. The individual rites (Skt. *vidhi*; Tib.

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[20] The category of "beginner practitioners" (*ādikarmika*) is found in the eighth-century *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, which uses this term to refer to both householders and monastics (*gṛhasthapravrajitādikarmikā*). In the *ādikarma* compendia, the day-long duration of the vows and the use of terms such as "householder bodhisattva" (*gṛhapatibodhisattvaḥ*) suggest they were written with laity in mind. A *gṛhapati* is not just a run-of-the-mill householder but a particularly wealthy and influential Buddhist householder. See: Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path according to* The Inquiry of Ugra (Ugraparipṛcchā) (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 22-24.

[21] Mark Tatz addresses Advayavajra's dates in "The Life of the Siddha-Philosopher Maitrīgupta," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, no. 4 (1987), 698. A translation of his life story was also published in Klaus-Dieter Mathes, *A Fine Blend*, 41-53. Advayavajra likely composed *Removal of Wrong Views* in the mid-eleventh century, while staying at Vikramaśīla monastery (see: 8, fn. 25). If we follow the Sham Sher manuscript, Advayavajra lived at Vikramaśīla and studied with Jñānaśrīmitra from 1051-2, when he was in his mid-forties. Tatz, "The Life," 699.

[22] The *Ādikarmāvatāra* manuscript (Göttingen Xc 14.50) was photographed in Tibet by Rahul Sankrityayan, but as far as I know there is not an extant translation in Tibetan. The recent publication of an edition of this manuscript will surely facilitate research on this compendium: *Dhīḥ: Journal of Rare Buddhist Texts Research* 62 ((Sarnath, Varanasi: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 2022), 89-118. Sinclair dates Mañjukīrti to the mid-eleventh century, as he taught the Nepalese pandit Samataśrī, who flourished in the late-eleventh century. "Tantric Monasticism," 91.

[23] Tatakaragupta was also trained in a Vikramśīla-based curriculum (Ibid., 172). I am not aware of any publications on the *Ādikarmavidhi* (MS NGMPP A 1165/7), although it is included in Śāstri's *A Catalogue of Palm-Leaf & Selected Paper Mss: belonging to the Durbar Library*, Nepal. Vol. II. Baptist Mission Press: Calcutta, 1915., *xv*, and 41. Nagendra Nath Vasu uses the title *Ādikarmarachana* (taken from the colophon) in *Modern Buddhism and its followers in Orissa* (Calcutta: Hare Press, 1911), 7.

cho ga) found in the *ādikarma* compendiums were done by Indian Buddhists well before the eleventh century, yet they gained new relevance by being categorized as "beginner" rites.[24]

Sanskrit *ādikarma* compendiums present a very similar ritual sequence, and yet there are important variations in the extant texts. These range from slight variations in the mantras used in the performance of a given rite to the entirely different buddhas that are worshipped at the center of the mandalas. Tracking variations in the extant compendia, we can see the emergence of ritual practices for worshipping the guru. Advayavajra's and Mañjukīrti's compendiums includes an offering for the guru, but Anupamavajra's *Light on the Foundational Practices* is the only work to emphasize the importance of the *gurumaṇḍala*, a specific rite for venerating the guru in the manner of a buddha. The rhetorical passages used to foreground specific rites or the broader importance of the *ādikarma* rites are also relevant for our understanding of developments within the genre. In the *Removal of Wrong Views* (*Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*), for instance, Advayavajra offers an extended argument that all types of Buddhists should do the *ādikarma* practices, while in *Light on the Foundational Practices* just the *gurumaṇḍala* that is foregrounded with a series of exegetical statements.

Removal of Wrong Views

The very title of Advayavajra's compendium—*Removal of Wrong Views* (Skt. *Kudṛṣṭinirghātana*; Tib. *Lta ba ngan pa sel ba*)—announces a concern with the proper way of understanding of the *ādikarma* rites. A "view" (Skt. *dṛṣti*; Tib. *lta ba*) typically describes a philosophical position, but here Advayavajra's aim is to rectify or "clear away" (Skt. *nirghātana*; Tib. *sel ba*) an ill-founded or "wrong view" (Skt. *kudṛṣṭi*; Tib. *lta ba ngan pa*) regarding the role of foundational practices on the Buddhist path. The lengthy apologetic remarks that begin the text bolster the impression that Advayavarja considered the *ādikarma* practices relevant for all types of Buddhists, including *tāntrika*s. In this case, the "wrong view" may have been that such rites were seen as unnecessary in a transgressive tantric system.[25] Only after Advayavajra introduces the *ādikarma* genre with a

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[24] The extent to which the *ādikarma* rites served as "preliminary" practices for tantric initiation remains unclear. De la Vallée Poussin discusses the vows that lead up to the *upāsaka* initiation in the *Ādikarmapradīpa*: refuge (*śaraṇa*), the ten moral principles (*daśaśikṣāpada*), and the *bodhisattva* vows qualify the disciple to "receive the name of *upāsaka*" (*evaṁ labdhopāsakanāmadheyena*; *Ādikarmapradīpa*, ed. Takahashi 1993: 136). These vows come before the main sequence of rituals, so there is no explicit connection between the *ādikarma* rites and tantric initiation. De la Vallée Poussin interprets the short phrase (*paścād anyat*) as evidence that the *gurumaṇḍala* was done before receiving initiation. (I provide a different reading of this passage on 13, fn. 47). Glenn Wallis initially equates *ādikarma* and *puraścaraṇa* practices as preliminaries that "denote a series of ritualized activities performed at the initial stage of a formalized practice." "Advayavajra's Instructions," 207. As the article progresses (and in part following Advayavajra's insistence that everyone should do such practices), he leans more toward the idea that the *ādikarma* rites are foundational practices or a way to effect a "perpetual grounding in conventional Buddhist practice." Ibid., 209.

[25] *Atīśa's Life Story* reports that the *Removal of Wrong Views* (as well as the *Svapnanirukti* and the *Māyānirukti*) was composed at Vikramaśīla to "atone for a transgression he was accused of by Śāntipa, Maitrīpa [i.e., Advayavajra] having been seen secretly carrying alcohol for a yoginī practice." Ibid., 47. The critique of Advayavajra are not found in earlier materials such as the Nepalese Sanskrit manuscripts or the life story of the *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod*. Mathes thus concludes that the "sources for the expulsion story are probably the Atiśa biographies, of which the earliest are from the middle of the 12th century." Ibid. 24.

series of apologetic statements does he provide the actual liturgical practices in the second half of the text.[26]

Advayavajra begins the *Removal of Wrong Views* by arguing that the *ādikarma* rites are not just meant for beginners, but for every category of Buddhist practitioner: "disciples in need of training" (*śaikṣa*) and those who have reached the end of the path (*aśaikṣa*).[27] Beginners are quintessentially in need of the formation offered by foundational practices, but here even those who are no longer in need of training continuously (*avicchinnam*) engage in the *ādikarma* practices, just as Śākyamuni himself continued to perform activities as an outflow of his enlightenment (*śākyamuner iva praṇidhānavegasāmarthyād*).[28] Bodhisattavas too are said to engage in the foundational practices,[29] as are *tāntrika*s, even those who have taken the madman's vow (*unmattavrata*).[30] These passages emphasize the universality of the genre—Advayavajra even states that "all yogins should do the prescribed *ādikarma* rites"—but they might also be seen as confirming the importance of the *ādikarma* rites for beginners.[31] In rhetorical terms, if even the Buddha could be said to automatically perform such foundational practices, then of course those just setting out on the path also should. Advayavajra's prescriptive tone can, in short, be understood as enforcing a universal obligation to perform the *ādikarma* rites or to indicate that they are primarily meant for *śaikṣa* disciples.

Advayavajra's extended argument for the importance of the *ādikarma* genre also touches on a second topic: the efficacy of the prescribed rites for generating merit. The mandala rite (*maṇḍalavidhi*), in particular, is said to fulfill the six perfections:

> Generosity is [using] cow dung with water; morality is smearing with [cow dung and water]; patience is the removing of tiny bugs [from the ground]; diligence is bringing about the rite; concentration is being one-pointed in a moment of that [ritual action];

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[26] The edition used here is Mitsutoshi Moriguchi (ed.), *Kuḍṛṣtinirghātana*, in 大正大学綜合佛教研究所年報 [= Taishō Daigaku Sōgō Bukkyō Kenkyūjo nenpō = Annual of the Institute for Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism. Taisho University] 10 (March 1988): 255-198.

[27] Literally, "not in need of training."

[28] Ibid., 225.

[29] "The bodhisattva should be one who abides in the perfectly pure foundational practice." (*bodhisattvena suviśuddhādikarmavihāriṇā bhavitavyam*; Ibid., 221.)

[30] *tasmād unmattavratastitānām apy ādikarma pravartata eva*; Ibid, 218. In defense of this position, Advayavajra cites *Hevajratantra* I.6.19ab and II.8.9ab. The latter reads: "First, *poṣadha* must be given; thereupon, the ten training instructions." (*prathamaṃ dīyate poṣadhaṃ tadanu śikṣāpadaṃ daśam*; *Kuḍṛṣṭinirghātana*, 13cd, ed. Moriguchi 1988: 219.) The apologetic remarks abruptly end with this half-verse, though it could be meant as a segue into the *poṣadha* vows that are at the beginning of the following ritual sequence. Sinclair advances the possibility that the *ādikarma* rites (presumably done towards a buddha image or other identifiable reference point) provided a 'branding' function for Buddhist *tāntrika*s. "Tantric Monasticism," 86-87.

[31] *ādikarma yathoddiṣṭaṃ kartavyaṃ sarvayogibhiḥ* | Ibid., v. 7ab, ed. Moriguchi 1988: 223.

> Wisdom is the blazing forth of well-drawn lines. Having made this mandala of the sage, these very six perfections are obtained.[32]

Each step in the construction of the *maṇḍala* is equated with one of the six perfections, and so this passage advances a sympathetic connection between ritual acts and these well-known Mahāyāna Buddhist values. Using precious substances (such as cow dung mixed with water) in the rite is a form of generosity; patience is cultivated by removing small bugs before drawing the lines of the mandala. Once the rite begins, being focused and bringing it to a conclusion fulfills the fourth and fifth *pāramitā*s. The well-drawn lines of the mandala are finally linked with the sixth perfection (*prajñā*). The *ādikarma* compendia all include this verse, and here Advayavajra uses it to celebrate the worship of blue-black Akṣobhya at the center of the mandala. Only the *Light on the Foundational Practices*, a later compendium written by Anupamavajra, uses this verse to indicate the importance of worshipping the guru at the center of the mandala.[33]

Entrance to the Foundational Practices

Mañjukīrti's *Ādikarmāvatāra* contains a mandala rite for venerating the tantric deity (*devatā*), which is followed by a mandala offering for worshipping the guru, buddhas, and bodhisattvas (*gurubuddhādipūjāvidhi*).[34] The sequence of these two rites is significant for, as we will see below, Anupamavajra explicitly switches their order, while also emphasizing that the guru should be venerated first in the *gurumaṇḍala*. Before turning to a detailed analysis of this rite, it is worth briefly noting that in *Entrance to the Foundational Practices* the practitioner uses mantras to generate a cosmic mandala and then the "guru, buddhas, and bodhisattvas are imagined atop Mount Sumeru."[35] Once these figures are venerated together, the brief rite concludes with a short verse in praise of the guru (*guroḥ stutiṃ kuryāt*). The guru is venerated in this *ādikarma* compendium, but not to the extent seen in Anupamavajra's *Light on the Foundational Practices*.

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[32] *dānaṃ gomayam ambunā ca sahitaṃ śīlaṃ ca saṃmārjanaṃ | kṣāntiḥ kṣudrapipīlikāpanayanaṃ vīryaṃ kriyotthāpanam || dhyānaṃ tatkṣaṇam ekacittakaraṇaṃ prajñā surekhojjvalā | etāḥ pāramitāḥ ṣaḍ eva labhate kṛtvā muner maṇḍalam* || Ibid., v. 20, ed. Moriguchi 1988: 213.

[33] *Removal of Wrong Views* prescribes daily offerings to the guru (much like in *Fifty Verses on the Guru*), although it does not explicitly mention the *gurumaṇḍala*: "Each day, one ought to make the *maṇḍala* with water, cow-dung mixture, and flowers. At the three times, one ought to give something to the guru and worship with devotion." (*pratyahaṃ maṇḍalaṃ kṛtvā puṣpagomayavāribhiḥ | triṣkālaṃ gurave kiṃcid dattvā bhaktyā ca vandayet* || Ibid., v. 22, ed. Moriguchi 1988: 211).

[34] After presenting the *devatāpūjā*, Mañjukīrti briefly explains that the rite for venerating the guru and buddhas comes next: "In this regard, on a clean spot, the proper arrangement of the tutelary deity, and so forth, is to be done separately, in accordance with the tantras. Again, in this manner, the offering rite of the guru, buddhas, and bodhisattvas, is to be done in front [of that deity mandala]." (*atra bhūmiśodhanādikaṃ sveṣṭadevatāvinyāsādikañ ca yathāsvaṅ tantānusāreṇa karaṇīyamiti | gurubuddhabodhisattvānāṃ puratāḥ punaritthaṃ pūjāvidhiḥ kartavyaḥ || Ādikarmāvatāra* (*Dhīḥ* 62, 114.) In chapter three, we see that the Tibetan compendium of foundational practices composed by Bsod nams rtse mo presents a similar sequence in which the lama is imagined in front of the Hevajra mandala. (See below: 41, fn. 15.)

[35] *guruṃ buddhān bodhisattvāṅs ca sumerūpari dṛṣṭvā*; Ibid.

Light on the Foundational Practices

Anupamavajra begins the *Light on the Foundational Practices* (*Ādikarmapradīpa*) with a brief preface and series of root verses, which are followed by a sequence of vows and ritual practices similar to those found in earlier *ādikarma* compendiums.[36] The two extant manuscripts have both been published in editions.[37] The opening verses and the commentary (*pradīpa*) were written together,[38] probably towards the end of the eleventh century.[39] In the preface, Anupamavajra indicates a concern for making the *ādikarma* rites more broadly accessible.[40] To this end, he notes that he has gathered all the necessary mantras together "here in one place" (*ekatra*), perhaps for the first time.[41] In particular, Anupamavajra emphasizes the importance of the *gurumaṇḍala*, an offering rite to the guru that ought to be done before the more common deity mandala rite. As far as I know, *Light on the Fundamental Practices* is the only *ādikarma* text from the eleventh- to twelfth-century period that contains explicit instructions to visualize the

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[36] The similarity of the practices in the *Kuḍṛṣrtnirghātana* and *Ādikarmapradīpa* was one of several factors that led Koushun Moriguchi (1996) to suggest that Advayavajra and Anupamavajra were one and the same person. Although I am admittedly unable to follow all of Moriguchi's arguments (in Japanese), various factors suggest the texts were written at different times. (See: fn. 38.)

[37] In *Bouddhisme, études et matériaux* 186-204 (London: Luzac & Co.: 1898), Louis de La Vallée Poussin published an edition of the manuscript held in the Hodgson Collection in London (and a partial translation into French). A second manuscript, held in Tokyo, was edited and published by Hisao Takahashi, "*Ādikarmapradīpa* Bonbun kōtei: Tōkyō Daigaku shahon ni yoru," in _インド学密教学研究 : 宮坂宥勝博士古稀記念論文集_ [Indogaku mikkyōgaku kenkyū: Miyasaka Yūshō Hakushi koki kinen ronbunshū = Indian and Esoteric Buddhist Studies: Essays in Honour of Dr Y. Miyasaka on His Seventieth Birthday] (Kyōto-shi: Hōzōkan, 1993), 129–156. Digital copies of both manuscripts were kindly provided to me by Prof. Alexander von Rospatt. For the translations below I use Takahashi's edition. As far as I know, the *Ādikarmapradīpa* was never translated into Tibetan.

[38] The 1898 review of de la Vallée Poussin's edition and introduction suggests that the *Ādikarmapradīpa* was not written by Anupamavajra, but by a monk named "Śākyabhikṣu." *Journal of the Buddhist Text and Anthropological Society* VI, 24. This is very unlikely, as the colophon states: "This *Light on the Foundational Practices*, the work of the pandit Anupamavajra, is complete." (*samāpto 'yam ādikarmapradīpaḥ || kṛtir iyam ācāryānupavajrasya || Ādikarmapradīpa*, ed. Takahashi 1993: 153). The root verses and colophon both use the "*Ādikarmapradīpa*" title also suggesting a single work. Indeed, Sinclair identifies the scribe who copied the London manuscript as a "Śākyan monk" (*śākyabhikṣu*) and nobleman named Dīparuci. "Tantric Monasticism," 232.

[39] The London manuscript is dated to 318 (i.e., 1197/98) by Sylvain Lévi, *Le Népal: étude historique d'un royaume hindou* II (Paris: Leroux, 1905), 195. *Light on the Foundational Practices* was written at Vikramaśīla monastery upon the order of Dharmākara (a student of Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna), suggesting that it was composed in the late eleventh century. Sinclair, "Tantric Monasticism," 235-236 fn. 169. The citation of the eleventh-century *Kālacakratantra* and the emphasis on the *gurumaṇḍala* rite itself support this dating (see: 12, fn. 43).

[40] The *Ādikarmapradīpa* "was written to be easily understandable for students, not out of rivalry. Thus, may all those whose suffering has been appeased, please forgive me." (*śiṣyāṇāṃ āśubodhārthaṃ likhyate sparddhayā na* [*tu / ataḥ śāntaduḥkhāḥ sa*]*rve kṣantum arhanti māṃ prati*; *Ādikarmapradīpa*, v. 3, ed. Takahashi 1993: 132). Buddhist authors use a variety of conventions to acknowledge the limitations of a text. Here, Anupamavajra requests patience from a scholarly audience.

[41] "The mantras have been collected, gathered together, and written down in one place, are taught [to those students], at the beginning, for the sake of the foundational practices and worship, not anything else." (*tatrādau deśitā ye tu mantrāḥ pūjādikarmasu | āhṛtyaikatra saṃpiṇḍya likhyante te tu nānyathā* | Ibid., v. 3) The meaning of *ādau* in this sentence is a bit unclear to me.

guru in the form of a buddha (*vajrasattvalīla*).[42] The *gurumaṇḍala* is not explicitly mentioned in earlier *ādikarma* texts, and given Anupamavajra's introductory remarks, it is possible that the ritualized worship of the guru at the center of the mandala was still innovative, if not somewhat controversial, at the end of the eleventh century.[43]

Anupamavajra was not the only Indian Buddhist to promote the *gurumaṇḍala* liturgy, and yet he clearly felt the need to justify its placement in his *ādikarma* compendium.[44] Introductory comments that come just before the liturgy itself include a series of contrarian views, some of which might have been held by his contemporaries. For instance, the imagined interlocutor objects with the priority given to the rite and the use of the mandala to worship the guru instead of the Buddha.[45] In introducing the *gurumaṇḍala* rite, Anupamavajra primarily refers to *Fifty Verses on the Guru*—especially the injunctions to make material offerings and see the guru as a buddha. Anupamavajra's exegesis almost implies that these passages were meant to describe the *gurumaṇḍala* itself (yet he also adds commentary that describes the rite more precisely but is not found in *Fifty Verses*). Anupamavajra emphasizes the efficacy of the *gurumaṇḍala* by linking it with the six perfections (citing the verse that in other *ādikarma* compendiums is used to celebrate the deity mandala). The role of the *gurumaṇḍala* in the *ādikarma* genre is thus accounted for by referring to earlier social codes for relating to a guru and more widespread mandala rites.

Equal to all the Buddhas

In the opening lines of his introduction to the *gurumaṇḍala*, Anupamavajra asserts that the rite should be done first, before the deity mandala. Immediately, the imagined interlocutor asks why the *gurumaṇḍala* is prioritized, and he responds that it is because the guru is "equal to all the buddhas" (*sarvabuddhasama*). The subsequent exchange illustrates Anupamavajra's exegetical style, as well as his use of citations from *Fifty Verses on the Guru* (provided here in bold type):

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[42] The twelfth-century *Foundational Practice Rites* (*Ādikarmavidhi*) includes the *gurumaṇḍala* liturgy but does not specify that there is an initial visualization of the guru. The rite is oddly located after the main ritual sequence (as an appendix of sorts). In noting that the *gurumaṇḍala* rite can be done as a daily practice or for honoring the guru before a dharma teaching it seemingly draws on language used in *Light on the Foundational Practices*: "The *gurumaṇḍala* rite is explained for the purpose of the daily observances or for the sake of worship of the guru, when listening to the sacred dharma teachings." (*evaṃ saddharmaśravaṇasamaye guroḥ pūjārthaṃ nityasamādānārthaṃ vā gurumaṇḍalavidhim āha* | *Ādikarmavidhi*, 36r.6-36v.1.)

[43] As noted above, the *gurumaṇḍala* is not found in Abhayākaragupta's comprehensive *Vajrāvali*, but it is included in the later, and closely related, *Kriyāsamuccaya* compendium (see: ix, fn. 15). Following this pattern, the emphasis on the *gurumaṇḍala* in *Light on the Foundational Practices* suggests it was written after *Removal of Wrong Views*.

[44] The *gurumaṇḍala* is not mentioned in other Sanskrit *ādikarma* compendiums, but a number of translated liturgies are found in the Tibetan canon. The *maṇḍalavidhi*s attributed to Ratnākaragupta (D 3764. rgyud, tshu 116b1-117a2) and Niṣkalaṅavajra (D 1933 rgyud, mi 57a7-58a3) are liturgically closest to the *gurumaṇḍala* presented in the *Light on the Foundational Practices*. In these cases, one mandala serves as an abode for the guru, while a second mandala provides a method for making offerings. These two short works also include the terms (*bla ma'i mandala gyi cho ga* and *bla ma'i mandala*), which are otherwise rare in Tibetan texts.

[45] If the *gurumaṇḍala* was widely accepted then it is unclear why Anupamavajra would account for its placement in the genre. For a widely accepted practice, the lengthy question and response format would be somewhat irrelevant.

[Anupamavajra:] One ought to first perform the *gurumaṇḍala*, and following that the other one [i.e., the deity mandala].

[Interlocutor:] Why is it stated that the *gurumaṇḍala* should be done at the beginning?

[Anupamavajra:] As it is said, "**For, [the guru] is equal to all the buddhas."** It is also said, "**The guru is the buddha—that very one is also the dharma and sangha."**

[Interlocutor:] Not so. All of that was spoken by the Buddha to point out that the guru has the distinction of a "great man," but not to explain the making of a mandala."

[Anupamavajra:] Incorrect. The Buddha explains it at length in *Śrīparamādibuddha-kālacakratantra*.

[Interlocutor:] Granted, but this is taught such that when listening to the true dharma one listens to the teaching with devotion.

[Anupamavajra:] No, it's not like that.[46]

Anupamavajra introduces the *gurumaṇḍala* as a practice that should be done before the more common deity mandala rite. The brief comment, "offer the mandala to the guru first" and "following that, the other one" (*paścād anyat*), fulfills the requirement that a preliminary practice be explicitly juxtaposed with another practice.[47] The *gurumaṇḍala* does not replace the deity mandala rite, but it does relegate it to a secondary position.[48] The respective placements of the rites also suggests a more fundamental valuation: the worship of the guru is being emphasized over and above the worship of the deity. Anupamavajra confirms this impression with the

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[46] *guror maṇḍalakam ity ādi | ādau tāvad guror maṇḍalakaṃ kuryāt | paścād anyat | kasmād ādāv eva gurumaṇḍalkopanyāsaḥ | sarvabuddhasamo hy asau || iti vacanāt | gurur buddho bhaved dharmaḥ saṃghaś cāpi sa eva hi || iti vacanāc cāpi || naivam | yad etat sarvam uktaṃ bhagavatā tad guror mahātmātiśayaprātipādanārtham | na punar atra vācakena śabdena maṇḍalakaraṇaṃ pratipāditam || āha pratipāditaṃ bhagavatā vistareṇa Śrīparamādibuddhakālacakratantradau || satyaṃ saddharmaśravaṇakāle satkṛtya dharmaḥ śrotavyaḥ | ity abhiprāyeṇopadiṣṭam || naivam | Ādikarmapradīpa*, ed. Takahashi: 141-142.

[47] De la Vallée Poussin takes this this brief phrase to indicate that the *gurumaṇḍala* must be done before receiving initiation: "Before describing this rite the author insists on its importance. [The *gurumaṇḍala*] is indeed essential because it must precede initiation; it is an indispensable condition." (Avant de décrire cette cérémonie, l'auteur insiste sur son importance: elle est capitale en effet, car elle doit précéder l'initiation, elle en est la condition indispensable; *Bouddhisme,* 221). The *gurumaṇḍala* was offered before teachings and initiation rites (and Poussin refers to this on 206, fn. 4), but it is unclear why he assumes initiation is also referred to in this passage. As the first line of the seventh root verse refers to both mandala rites (*guror maṇḍalakaṃ kṛtvā sveṣṭadevasya maṇḍalam*), the phrase "after that, the other" (*paścād anyat*) clearly distinguishes the order in which they should be done. Indeed, the deity mandala is the very next rite described in the compendium.

[48] In *De La Grammatologie*, Jacques Derrida uses the relationship of orality and writing to introduce the idea of a "dangerous supplement." If speech is the "natural expression of thought," writing emerged as a secondary mode of communication; it is less immediate, diverting "the immediate presence of thought" into "representation and the imagination." As a supplement, writing denotes the presence of speech where there is just absence. In this sense a supplement is dangerous precisely when it "intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*" what it initially just represented. *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 144-145.

statement that the guru is "equal to all the buddhas." Insofar as he is addressing the priority of worshipping the guru over and above the deities and buddhas found in other *ādikarma* compendiums, this phrase may have been meant to convey a strong sense that the guru "includes" or even "embodies" all the buddhas.

Anupamavajra is immediately charged with taking these citations out of context.[49] The hypothetical opponent admits that the guru ought to be seen as equal to all the buddhas and to the triple gem, but this is meant to celebrate his qualities, not account for the use of the *gurumaṇḍala* rite. It is one thing to glorify the guru as a "great man" (*mahātman*) and it is another to worship him at the center of the mandala. Anupamavajra responds that the Buddha taught all of this in the *Extensive Wheel of Time Tantra* (*Śriparamādibuddhakālacakratantra*).[50] The imagined opponent seems to let this attribution pass, but immediately questions whether offering the mandala to the guru was actually meant for a more restricted context. A disciple ought to imagine the guru as a buddha to generate devotion when listening to a teaching, but not as an everyday practice. Anupamavajra immediately rejects this idea (*naivam*) too, arguing that the *gurumaṇḍala* should indeed be done as a daily offering practice.

Immaterial Offerings

Anupamavajra emphasizes the everyday role of the *gurumaṇḍala* rite by again citing *Fifty Verses on the Guru*, beginning with the passage that asserts that the guru is meant to be worshipped "at the three times, with supreme devotion" (*triṣkālaṃ paramayā bhaktyā*):

> [Anupamavajra:] Other passages [prescribe making daily offerings] such as, **"At the three times, with utmost devotion,"** and so on. The meaning of this is explained in the *Fifty Verses on the Guru*: **"One should continually make offerings to the guru and continually worship the *tathāgata*s."** When the thing that one desires in one's heart comes into one's possession, one should joyously offer it at the feet of the respected and revered guru. This is stated in such expressions as, **"Whatever is most desired or whatever is most special should verily be given to the guru."** And it is also said: "When one does not possess any material goods, then one may imagine it all in the mind." One imagines reverently placing the four continents, which are made of manifold jewels, onto the mandala, and then presents it to the guru. Thus: **"From that offering is born the store of merit—and ultimate awakening comes from that store."**

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[49] Reading *mohā-* instead of *māhā-*, de la Vallée Poussin notes that the imagined opponent charges Anupamavajra with using this quote out of context: "In speaking this way, the Buddha was actually characterizing a way that teachers express pride in their position. It was not a way of prescribing the *gurumaṇḍala* rite." (En parlant ainsi, Bhagavat a caractérisé l'excès d'orguil des maîtes; il n'a pas ordonné le rite du *gurumaṇḍala*. *Bouddhisme,* 221.)

[50] The short *gurumaṇḍala* liturgy attributed to *Niṣkalaṅkavajra (extant in Tibetan translation) also draws a connection with the *Paramādibuddhatantra* (*Dang po'i sangs rgyas kyi rgyud chen po*). D 1933 rgyud, mi 57v.6.

> [Interlocutor:] This is also off the mark. Surely, liberation comes from having fulfilled the *two* types of stores? How would it be tenable to achieve liberation with just the one store of merit, and without the store of knowledge?[51]

In *Fifty Verses on the Guru*, as noted above, offerings to the guru serve various purposes, including avoiding sickness and hardships, atoning for misdeeds, and gaining religious merit. It is clear that whatever is "most desired" (*iṣṭatara*) or "most excellent" (*viśiṣṭatara*) should be given to the guru, although the actual nature of the offering is left open-ended. In *Light on the Foundational Practices*, on the other hand, these passages are used to indicate that one ought to offer the *gurumaṇḍala*. Two additional passages are sandwiched between the citations from *Fifty Verses*.[52] The first notes the possibility of making immaterial offerings: "When there are no material goods one can also offer everything mentally." The next passage, which appears to be Anupamavajra's own gloss, describes the *gurumaṇḍala* liturgy: "One imagines reverently placing the four continents, which are made of manifold jewels, onto the mandala, and then presents it to the guru."[53] As we will see below, this is a precise description of the offering liturgy that follows his introductory remarks. The addition of this passage provides the impression that *Fifty Verses* is also describing the *gurumaṇḍala*, even though the rite is never mentioned in that earlier text. Anupamavajra thus transfers earlier claims about the efficacy and value of making offerings to the guru into a specific ritual idiom.

The discussion continues with the imagined opponent pointing out that Anupamavajra has only stated that the *gurumaṇḍala* fulfills the accumulation of merit, and that in itself is not adequate for liberation. Anupamavajra agrees with this much, but continues by asserting a connection between the *gurumaṇḍala* and the six perfections: "The consummation of the two accumulations—merit and knowledge—is just due to fulfilling the six perfections. And these are completely fulfilled through performing the *gurumaṇḍala*."[54] Immediately after this passage, Anupamavajra provides the very same verse used by Advayavajra that equates the construction and performance of the mandala rite with the six perfections. Only here, it is the *gurumaṇḍala* that is celebrated. In a now familiar pattern, Anupamavajra downplays the more common mandala rites for worshipping buddhas or deities in order to promote the *gurumaṇḍala*.

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[51] *anyatrāpi | triṣkālaṃ paramayā bhaktyā || ity ādināabhitam | gurvārādhane coktam | nityaṃ ca gurave deyaṃ nityaṃ pūjyās tathāgatāḥ || asyāyam arthaḥ | vidyamāne vastuni śrīmadgurubhaṭṭārakapādānāṃ svamano 'bhimataṃ vastu hṛṣṭacetasā dadyāt / yad yad iṣṭataraṃ kiṃcit viśiṣṭataram eva vā | tad tad dhi gurave deyam || ityādinā prabandhenoktam | avidyamāne punar manasā sarvaṃ prakalpayet || iti vacanāt | maṇḍalake caturdīpān nānāratnamayān saṃpūjya gurave niryātayet | etena | taddānād puṇyasaṃbhāraḥ saṃbhārād bodhir uttamā || tad apy asaṃgataṃ bhavati | nanu saṃbhāradvayasaṃbhṛtasya muktir bhavati | katham ekenaiva puṇyasaṃbhāreṇa mukto bhavati jñānasaṃbhāreṇa vinā || Ādikarmapradīpa*, ed. Takahashi, 142.

[52] In the *Ādikarmapradīpa*, the title *Gurvārādhana* is used instead of *Gurupañcāśikā*.

[53] This terminology mirrors that found in the *gurumaṇḍala* liturgy itself, particularly the verb "to offer" (*niryāt*), the description of the "four islands" (*catrudīpā*), and the "various jewels" (*nānāratna*) that fill the mandala.

[54] *atrāha | anayoḥ puṇyajñānasaṃbhārayoḥ paripūraṇaṃ ṣaṭpāramitāparipūraṇād eva bhavati | tā maṇḍalakaraṇāt paripūryante |* Ibid., 142-3.

At the Center of the Mandala

The final citation of *Fifty Verses* comes just after Anupamavajra equates the *gurumaṇḍala* with the six perfections. The concluding line of the passage that equates the mandala and six perfections (as cited in both the *Removal of Wrong Views* and the *Light on the Foundational Practices*) is "having made this mandala of the sage (*muner maṇḍalam*), one obtains these very six perfections."[55] Here, Anupamavajra makes a further claim that the relationship between the worship of the guru and Buddha at the center of the mandala is equally beneficial:

> The phrase "having made the mandala of the sage," is being used to designate another [i.e., the guru, not the Buddha]. How so? One also obtains those qualities through making the *gurumaṇḍala.* For, it is said: "**Do not draw any distinction whatsoever between the guru and Vajradhara."**[56]

Anupamavajra might have bene charged with overselling the benefits of the *gurumaṇḍala* rite, especially because the passage just cited describes the "mandala of the Buddha," not the worship of the guru. The very name of the mandala rite might be taken to indicate its rightful occupant, but here it is the guru who is being worshipped. Anupamavajra simply states that the term sage or Buddha (*muni*) can just as well be used to designate the guru.[57] Given the opening statement that the guru is "equal to all the buddhas," it is not surprising that Anupamavajra makes this equivalence or that he considers the same qualities (*guṇa*) are obtained by performing the *gurumaṇḍala*. In defense of this position, he cites *Fifty Verses* one more time: a disciple should not in any way draw a distinction between the guru and the buddha Vajradhara. *Fifty Verses* itself does not lay out a rite for seeing the guru as a buddha, yet Anupamavajra uses this idea to defend the efficacy of the *gurumaṇḍala*.

The *gurumaṇḍala* liturgy mirrors the more common mandala rites. The practitioner draws a circle on the ground, places flowers to represent the Buddhist cosmos, invokes a being with mantras, and makes various offerings. In this case, however, the guru is invited into the mandala with the mantra—"Oṃ! Adamantine guru, come receive the most hospitable offering! Svāhā!"[58] The guru is then imagined at the center of the mandala:

> In the middle [of the *maṇḍala*] imagine an eight-peaked Mount Sumeru: four-sided, made of four jewels, affixed with silver, beryl, crystal, and gold. In the center [of Sumeru], the

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[55] *etāḥ pāramitā[ḥ] ṣaḍ eva labhate kṛtvā muner maṇḍalam* | Ibid., 143.

[56] *kṛtvā muner maṇḍalam ity upalakṣaṇaparam etat* | *guror maṇḍalakam api kṛtvā ete guṇā labhyante* | *kasmāt* | *nānātvaṃ naiva kurvīta guror vajradharasya* || *iti vacanāt* | Ibid. 143. Thanks to Péter-Dániel Szántó for pointing out an error in a draft translation of this passage.

[57] The term *upalakṣaṇa* is used to indicate that the guru is an analogous object of worship. Even though the verse linking the mandala rite and six perfections uses the term, *muni*, this term demonstrates that Anupamavajra considers that the the same qualities are brought about through the worship of the guru. The mandala is again presented as a technology that can be used to venerate a variety of beings with similar results.

[58] *oṃ vajraguru pravarasatkārārghaṃ pratīccha svāhā* | *Ādikarmapradīpa*, ed. Takahashi 1993: 144.

glorious, venerable guru sits in the form of Vajrasattva, adorned with various ornaments, upon a lion-throne inlaid with various jewels, in the heart of a multi-colored, eight-petaled lotus.[59]

The *gurumaṇḍala* rite draws on the iconography found in other mandala rites. The guru is imagined in the form of the buddha Vajrasattva, adorned with bodily ornaments, sitting at the center of the mandala atop Mount Sumeru.

Visualizing the guru in this manner, the practitioner picks up the flower and utters another series of mantras that correspond with the various aspects of the Buddhist cosmos, starting with Mount Sumeru. Once the second mandala has been instantiated it is "imagined to be completely filled with various types of jewels" and then offered to the guru with a dedicatory verse.[60] The terminology used in this liturgical sequence—the "four islands" (*caturdvīpa*), and the "various jewels" (*nānāratna*)—was already foregrounded in the exegetical section to describe making immaterial offerings. Only the *gurumaṇḍala* includes this second visualized mandala for making offerings. The *gurumaṇḍala* liturgy concludes as the disciple utters the words "*Oṃ* I bow to the feet of all the buddhas" and pays homage.[61] The final injunction suggests that imagining the guru in the manner of a buddha provides the imperative to worship or bow (*vandanā*).

In *Light on the Foundational Practices*, the *gurumaṇḍala* marks a "beginning" in the *ādikarma* genre, as it is prioritized over the more common deity mandala rite. The *gurumaṇḍala* is meant to be done first and it is presented as the most effective method for gathering the two accumulations and fulfilling the six perfections. The *gurumaṇḍala* was not "new" in the sense the Anupamavajra simply made it up. Other Indian Buddhists describe the *gurumaṇḍala* in stand-alone ritual manuals, yet Anupamavajra introductory remarks provide additional perspective on how it may have come into the Buddhist mainstream as an everyday practice. An interlocutor questions the need to do the *gurumaṇḍala* first, the placement of the guru at the center of the mandala, the need to perform the rite as a daily practice, and the claims about its meritorious nature. Anupamavajra's responses to these critiques—whether they were actually leveled against him or simply imagined as possible objections to the *gurumaṇḍala*—tell us something of what he saw as innovative in his presentation of the rite in the *ādikarma* genre. The numerous citations from *Fifty Verses on the Guru* demonstrates further how innovation in the ritual sphere could be at least partially justified on the basis of earlier sources.

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[59] *madhye caturaśram aṣṭaśṛṅgopaśobhitam | pūrvadakṣiṇapaścimottarapārśveṣu rūpyavaiḍūryasphaṭikasuvarṇa-parighaṭitatvena catūratnamayaṃ sumeruṃ dhyāyāt | tanmadhye nānāratnakhacitasiṃhāsanopari vikacāṣṭadala-kamalaṃ kamalagarbhe śrīmadgurubhaṭṭārakaṃ vicitrābharaṇabhūṣitaṃ vajrasattvalīlayā sthitaṃ dṛṣṭvā* | Ibid.

[60] "Let there be obeisance to you! Let there be obeisance to you! Let there be obeisance to you! Salutations. Salutations. I, the devoted worshipper, will pay homage to you! Oh lord guru, let there be salutations to you!" (*nā*[*nā*]*ratnaparipūrṇān vibhāvya | namas te 'stu namas te 'stu namas te 'stu namo namaḥ | bhakto 'haṃ tvāṃ namasyāmi gurunātha namo 'stu te || iti paṭhitvā* | Ibid., 145).

[61] *oṃ sarvatathāgatapādavandanāṃ karomi | ity anena vandanāṃ kuryāt || gurumaṇḍalakakaraṇavidhiḥ* | Ibid.

Conclusion

In *Fifty Verses on the Guru*, the social codes for relating to the lay tantric guru are seemingly meant to be done in person and the bodily practices were meant for disciples living in or near the household of a guru. Especially when performed in a group, these codes served as a powerful way of reinforcing the status of the guru. The qualification that one should not bow to a lay guru in public suggests, on the other hand, that this social world was delimited by the boundaries of the *gurukula*. Indeed, the very nature of relational practices and social codes makes them difficult to promote to a wide audience, not because such cultural tropes and bodily habits cannot be internalized, but because implementing them depends on the person of the guru.

In *Light on the Foundational Practices*, Anupamavajra cites various passages from *Fifty Verses on the Guru* in service of the *gurumaṇḍala*. The social codes for relating to the guru in person are, in other words, recast in a ritual idiom. Likewise, although the *gurumaṇḍala* does not fully replace the deity mandala, it usurps its place at the beginning of the ritual sequence in *Light on the Foundational Practices*. Ritual practices allow for a more complex collective to form around the figure of the guru. In the late eleventh century, the emergence of visualization rites or "technologies of self" such as the *gurumaṇḍala* made the guru simultaneously more accessible and remote. In one sense, the person of the guru is replaced with an imagined substitute, and yet rites such as the *gurumaṇḍala* were presumably done by disciples who maintained a relationship to a human teacher. The bifurcation of the guru—who could be related to in person or from a distance as an imagined principle—introduces a specious difference that could be ultimately denied. Preliminary rites for imagining the guru as a buddha could thus potentially serve as an especially powerful method for ascribing qualities to a human teacher.

The *Light on the Foundational Practices* and the *gurumaṇḍala* introduce key themes that became prominent in Tibet. As the work was written in the milieu of Vikramaśīla, it suggests that the figure of the guru was beginning to be incorporated into the monastic sphere towards the end of the eleventh century. Moreover, the role of the *gurumaṇḍala* as an everyday rite for venerating the guru in the manner of a buddha is similar to various preliminary rites in Tibet that were also focused on the deified lama.

Chapter 2: A Foundation for Tantra

For some contemporary observers, the state of Buddhism in Tibet at the end of the tenth century was bleak indeed. According to a short poem found in the Dunhuang corpus, there had been a rampant proliferation of tantric officiants in the many villages of Tibet, yet none was practicing correctly. Thousands of miles away, in the southwest of Tibet, King Ye shes ʻod issued his final and most strident edict (*bka' shog*), criticizing the *tāntrika*s of central Tibet for worshipping demons and performing violent rituals. In his view, a thick cloud of ignorance and false beliefs had led these so-called Buddhists to lose track of the true dharma. Worse yet, they nevertheless had the gall to proclaim their own enlightenment, couched in terms of "accomplishing the deity" or being "equal with the *dharmakāya*." In both rhetorically charged missives—one written between the lines of a repurposed Chinese manuscript, the other issued publicly by a powerful ruler—the situation in Tibet was so precarious that the very survival of Buddhism was at stake.

The author of Pelliot tibétain 840/3 and King Ye shes ʻod both emphasized contemporary decline as a way of promoting their own reformist agendas. The only way out of the current dark age was for tantric practitioners to "straighten up their view" (*lta ba bsrang*) and embrace the core elements of Indian Mahāyāna practice, as had been done during the Tibetan empire.[1] The celebrated Indian pandit Atiśa Dīpaṃkara, who arrived in Tibet in 1042, also emphasized the importance of foundational practices and the gradual path, while downplaying tantra for a local audience. Indeed, throughout the following century, the rhetorical trope that Tibetans as a people were not suitable for tantric practice (even as they were said to be doing it), fueled the adaptation of Indic foundational practices. The *ādikarma* rites, seven branches, and ten virtuous practices were all assimilated into Tibetan traditions during this period.

As new Buddhist traditions took shape in eleventh-century Tibet, foundational practices were often oriented towards the lama, who was often imagined as an Indic buddha or deity (*lha*). 'Brom ston pa, the lay founder of the Bka' gdams pa school, was linked in narratives and ritual texts to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Bka' gdams pa curricula drew from canonical texts, but increasingly turned to the authoritative instructions of lamas for guidance in how daily Buddhist rites should be done. In *Oral Instructions on the Seven Branches* (*yan lag bdun pa'i man ngag*), a twelfth-century text, we see an example of how the seven branch rites were cast in a distinctly Tibetan idiom. "Bka' gdams pa prostrations" (*bka' gdams pa'i phyag*) were meant to emulate paradigmatic figures from the past, such as Atiśa, but also to demonstrate adherence to the standards of contemporary institutional life. No longer was it just views that needed to be "straight," but also bodies. In this text, the upright or correct (*drang*) performance of everyday Buddhist practices was meant to remedy modern ills and also mark ones participation in the Bka' gdams pa tradition.

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[1] "To the *tāntrikas* of Central Tibet, please listen up and straighten your view! (*bod yul bdus kyi sngags pa rnams la brdzangs pa | gnyan po mdzad cing lta ba bsrang bar zho'o*; The Ordinance of *Lha Bla-ma* Ye shes ʻod, ed. Samten Karmay 1998, 13.)

Dark Times

The Dunhuang text Pelliot tibétain 840/3 laments the vast difference between the present state of affairs in Tibet and how Buddhism was practiced during the Tibetan empire.[2] The poem opens with a panegyric to these earlier times, in which the eighth-century king Khri srong lde brtsan "invited Buddhist masters from the land of India" and facilitated dharma practice throughout Tibet.[3] Tantric officiants did not mix up (*ma 'dres*) their respective roles in this golden age and monks too "knew how to act." Everyone understood their place in the religious order and "the era was in accord with the official royal edicts and the Buddhist scriptures." The well-ordered religious system during the Tibetan empire is portrayed as universally beneficial, as "all the subjects of Tibet were also comfortable and happy."[4] In both political and religious terms, the anonymous author of Pelliot tibétain 840/3 invokes the stability of the empire as a foil for the current dark times.

The glory days of the Tibetan empire are then contrasted with the dramatic decline that followed the successive ninth-century reigns of Khri 'u'i dum brtsan (aka Glang dar ma) and 'Od srungs.[5] Buddhism continued to spread after this period, but our author does not see this as good news:

> In general, the precious dharma is spreading and flourishing, but it is said to be doing so in an excessive manner. Everyone who is born human wants to accomplish it, but they do not know the three vows or monastic codes.[6]

The opening phrase "in general" (*spyi na*) is meant to speak to the current situation in Tibet, after the reigns of Glang dar ma and 'Od srungs. To an uninformed onlooker the precious dharma (*dam chos*) may appear to be flourishing, but in comparison to the imperial period it is being practiced in an uncontrolled or "excessive" (*ha cang*) manner. The author notes in a somewhat sarcastic tone that even though everyone wants to accomplish the dharma, they are

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[2] The poem is written in verse, between the pre-existing lines of the *Avataṃsaka* sutra, written in Chinese, and has been amply introduced and translated (in part or in whole) by earlier scholars: Samten Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myth, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998), 89-93; Jacob P. Dalton, The Taming the Demons: *Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 54-55; and Sam van Schaik in a 3/13/2008 blog post, "The Decline of Buddhism II: Did Lang Darma persecute Buddhism?" https://earlytibet.com/2008/03/13/did-lang-darma-persecute-buddhism. (Accessed 9/27/2022.)

[3] *lha sras khri srong lde btsan gyis | dam chos slobs dpon rgya gar yul nas spyan drangs te*; PT 840/3, 2-3.

[4] *bka' lung gzhung dang 'thun pa'i tshe phyi nang gnyis kyi slobs dpon dang | las kyi rdo rje mkhas dang gsum | ma 'dres spyod lam 'di lta bu | mkhas btsun spyod mkhas 'khrug pa myed | bod 'bangs kun kyang bde zhing skyid*; Ibid. 4-5.

[5] "After the divine sons Dar ma and Od srungs, and their descendants…" (*lha sras dar ma man chad dang / 'od srus dbon sras man chad du*; Ibid., 5-6.) As noted by van Schaik in "The Decline of Buddhism II," in Dunhuang manuscripts, the Tibetan phrase *man chad* can simply mean "down from" or "from X down."

[6] *spyi na dam chos dar cing rgyas | ha cang dar cing rgyas ces pas | myir skyes kun kyang 'grub par bzhed | gsum khrims 'dul khrims myi shes par*; PT 840/3, 6-7.

practicing in the wrong way, "without knowing the three vows and the monastic codes."[7] More specifically, we come to see that *tāntrika*s are the ones who are not following ethical guidelines.

After lamenting the excessive spread of morally-suspect forms of Buddhism, Pelliot tibétain 840/3 notes in some detail the various tantric offices that can be purchased on the open market: one can become a "vajra assistant" (*las kyi rdo rje*) in exchange for a donkey; a "guiding master" (*'dren pa'i slobs dpon*) for an ox; a "vajra regent" (*rdo rje rgyal 'tshab*) for a horse; and even a "vajra king" (*rdo rje rgyal po*) for a chiru.[8] Not only can tantric offices and authoritative titles be obtained for a relatively small price, they are held without receiving the corresponding initiation (*dbang dang myi ldan bar*). The integrity of the religious order and tantric offices are both corrupted by such mercantile transactions. Elsewhere in the Pelliot tibétain 840 manuscript, the same author notes other ways in which other tantric protocol are also not being followed by contemporary Tibetans.[9]

As if all this were not bad enough, the poem continues by critiquing contemporary masters (*slob dpon*). Those who are meant to guide their students along on the Buddhist path are themselves confused, "not understanding the supra-mundane purpose" (*'jig rten 'das pa'i don myi rig*). Nevertheless, when compared to the number of students, there are more that consider themselves qualified masters:

> There are a thousand masters for every hundred students, and nobody listens to the divine dharma. In every village there are ten masters, and the number of tantric assistants is uncountable. Everyone thinks: "I have accomplished the deity."[10]

In this penultimate verse, we again read that the religious order is upside-down. Unlike in earlier times, when the *btsan po* had authority over all of his subjects and everyone was happy, there is now an inverted hierarchy, with more teachers than students. Nobody is concerned with the "divine dharma" (*lha chos*), comprised of the Buddha's teachings and scriptures. Instead, everyone is caught up in tantric rites, such that the number of ritual assistants cannot even be counted. The verse concludes with a statement that indicates just how deluded all of these practitioners really are—for, despite their shortcomings, they all think they have "accomplished

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[7] The term "three rules" or "three codes" (*gsum khrims*) is somewhat ambiguous. My translation follows Samten Karmay's suggestion that it refers to the "three vows" (*sdom pa gsum*). *Arrow and Spindle*, 90 ft. 62.

[8] Sam van Schaik's suggested emendation (reading *gtsod* instead of *btson*) makes sense. The term for a Tibetan antelope (*gtsod*), commonly called a chiru (*gcig ru*), fits in the thematic list of animals that can be exchanged for a specific tantric office. "The Decline of Buddhism II."

[9] Pelliot tibétain 840/2, the second text in the same manuscript (written in the same hand), provides additional details about contemporary tantric practitioners' disregard of *samaya*. Three standard elements of tantric tradition—reading transmission (*lung*), initiation (*dbang*), and oral instructions (*man ngag*)—are being disregarded. The author continues by pointing out the especially negative consequences of sharing secrets with those who give transmissions without the requisite tantric initiations or vows, practitioners who rely only on the words of tantric scriptures, and those who do not practice the "divine dharma." (*slop dpon dbang ma bskur ba'i rkun gnas kyis lung phog pa dang | yi ge tsam rnyed pa la rten cing spyod pa dang | lha chos mya sphyod gsum car 'dar ste* | PT 840/2, 13-14.)

[10] *slob ma brgya la slobs dpon stong | lha chos nyan pa'i myi ma chis | grong tsan gcig la slobs dpon bcu | las kyi rdo rje gra[ng]s kyang myed | kun kyang lha ru 'grub snyam ste* | PT 840/3, 10-11.

the deity," an advanced goal of tantric practice. In this case, the lack of a reliable hierarchy again looms large because nobody appears to have the authority to adjudicate between false claims and actual attainment.

Pelliot tibétain 840/3 is a charged missive that employs many rhetorical tropes and flourishes to convince its audience that Buddhism in Tibet, and particularly tantra, is not being properly practiced. The general lack of knowledge regarding the monastic *vinaya* (*'dul khrims myi shes par*) and the three codes (*gsum khrims*) could suggest that lay practitioners were seen as part of the problem, although this could just as equally apply to monastics who did not fully understand the normative rules. Part of the problem, at least according to this author, may have been that there was less of a defined separation between the lay and monastic worlds, a phenomenon of "tantric monasticism" that was on the rise in other parts of South Asia during this period.[11] The text concludes on an ominous note: "In the end, as there are so many groups, how could the *vajra* body not be destroyed?"[12] Here the poem shifts registers, from a general critique of tantric practice to a specific warning about what might happen as a result of the divided Buddhist polity in Tibet.[13] The factionalism associated with the age of fragmentation (*sil bu'i dus*) in Tibetan historiography is presented here as a grave danger, especially compared with the beneficent rule of *btsan po*s during the Tibetan empire.[14]

The Edicts of King Ye shes 'Od

At the end of the tenth century, *Lha bla ma* Ye shes 'Od, the king of southwestern Tibet, issued a series of edicts (*bka' shog*).[15] The final one, a severe critique of the *tāntrika*s of central Tibet,

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[11] Iain Sinclair's lengthy study of this topic is mostly focused on Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal.

[12] *mjug du sde ts[h]an mang po yis | rdo rje phung po bzhig ga re*; Ibid., 11.

[13] The term "*vajra* body" (*do rje phung*) could refer to the integrity of an individual practitioner's tantric physiology, but in this case the term "many groups" (*sde ts[h]an mang po*) confirms that the author is referring to the collective of Buddhist practitioners in Tibet.

[14] Jan Nattier presents seven behaviors that Buddhist authors tend to correlate with the decline (or eventual demise) of their religion. Pelliot tibétain 840/3 alludes to four of these tropes, beginning with a "lack of respect towards various elements of Buddhist tradition." In this Dunhuang text, the *tāntrika*s are disobeying the royal edicts, scriptures, and divine dharma (*lha chos*). An "excessive association with secular society," is another such factor, seen here in the sale of tantric offices on the open market. The blatant disregard for initiation rites demonstrates "carelessness in the transmission of the teachings," a third factor that commonly portends decline. A fourth factor seen in this Dunhuang text and Nattier's list is the "emergence of divisions within the sangha," indicated here in the friction among many tantric groups. *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline*, (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), 120.

[15] The "Great Edict" (*bka' shog chen mo*), issued in 986, is considered by some to mark the beginning of the "later dispensation" (*bstan pa'i phyi dar*) of Buddhism in Tibet. Just two years later, in 988, a "Legal Decree" (*chos rtsigs*) fixed the new system of laws (*khrims*) that pertained to both the religious (*chos*) and political (*rgyal*) spheres. A third directive (*bka' stsal*), issued later the same year, mandated that his subjects follow this new legal code. See Dalton, *Taming of the Demons*, 97-109.

touches on many of the themes found in Pelliot tibétain 840/3.[16] The opening remarks asks the these tantrists to please take what follows seriously and "straighten out their view" (*lta ba bsrang ba*). As in Advayavajra's *Removal of Wrong Views*, the problematic "view" does not concern philosophical reasoning or speculation per se, but rather the performance of transgressive tantric rites without a foundation in Mahāyāna ethics and practice. The consequences of such reckless behavior is cast in terms of karmic retribution and negative rebirths. Much like the author of Pelliot tibétain 840/3, Ye shes 'od's aim was to bring wayward *tāntrika*s into line with mainstream Buddhism.[17] The authority of the *Lha bla ma* himself is invoked to restore deviant tantric practitioners to the true path of Indian Buddhism.[18]

In the final section of the edict to the *tāntrika*s of central Tibet, Ye shes 'od mandates a return to the mainstream practices introduced by earlier bodhisattva kings: adherence to the law of cause and effect, confession, and the practice of the six perfections. Tantric practitioners must forgo their "mistaken *dharma*" (*chos log*) and rely instead on the doctrines of the Mahāyāna as a guiding light:

> Gather the two accumulations and give up grasping to duality! Practice the ten transcendent perfections, beginning with generosity. Carry out all the activities of a bodhisattva. One who acts in *that* way—by perfectly fulfilling the benefit of beings with love and compassion—can be said to be a Mahāyānist.[19]

Ye shes 'od declares that Tibet's *tāntrika*s must actually observe ethical precepts and not just make empty claims that they are being followed. This injunction to be a different kind of Buddhist is directed towards outlier groups.

The 'Ba' 'ji ba is the one group explicitly targeted by King Ye shes 'od in this edict, although we know that there were many such communities that were active during the eleventh century and beyond. In Tibetan sources, Ka ru 'dzin, Sangs rgyas skar rgyal, "Red Ācārya," and

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[16] The fourth edict has been widely discussed in academic work: Karmay, "The Ordinance of *Lha Bla-ma* Ye-Shes-'od" in *The Arrow and the Spindle*, 3-16; Dalton, *Taming of the Demons*, 97-109; and Roberto Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang According to mNga'.ris rgyal.rabs by Gu.ge mkhan.chen Ngag.dbang grags.pa*, (Dharamsala: Tho.ling gtsug.lag.khang lo.gcig.stong 'khor.ba'i rjes dran.mdzad sgo'i go.sgrig tshogs.chung, 1996) 185-240.

[17] As we will see below, Tibetans are routinely described as ignorant or "crooked" in comparison with "upright" (*drang*) Indian Buddhists such as Atiśa. In Tibetan, the verb "to make straight" (*bsrangs*) is closely related to the term for "path" or "road" (*srang*). Here, the goal of "straightening out" (*bsrang*) recalcitrant *tāntrika*s thus suggests a corresponding desire to direct them to the right Buddhist path (*srang*). The etymological connection between the English terms "straight" and "direct" (*de-* 'down' + *regere* 'put straight') can also be applied to the paths or routes that people are directed to follow. Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 16 and passim.

[18] The title "*Lha bla ma*" is ambiguous, especially since it used in conjunction with the term for "king" (*rgyal po*) in the signature to the fourth edict. Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp (2018) and Roberto Vitali (1996) primarily interpret the title of "*bla ma*" in religious terms, although they acknowledge that Ye shes 'od probably continued to exert political influence after taking ordination in 988. Vitali notes that Ye shes 'od must have "retained his royal status" and was thus still "regarded as the religious king of the land." *Kingdoms*, 237.

[19] *tshogs gnyis bsog cing bzung* [*gsung*] *dzin rnam gnyis spong* | *sbyin pa la sogs pha rol phying bcu spyod* | *byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa mtha' dag sgrubs* | *byams dang snying rjes 'gro don rdzogs par gyis* | *de ltar spyod pa theg pa chen po yin* | "The Ordinance of *Lha Bla-ma* Ye shes 'od," 96-100, ed. Samten Karmay 1998, 16.

other lay teachers are typically presented as cautionary foils for monastic Buddhists.[20] For this reason, their activities and teachings are likely subject to varying degrees of misrepresentation.[21] Additional groups that were operative during this period surely never made it into the historical record. The extant sources nevertheless suggest that these groups were an influential presence in the Tibetan landscape. In some cases, Ye shes ʻod enforced his edicts with the threat of punishment. Even prostrations, usually thought of as a religious practice, appear to have been employed as a punishment for someone who had transgressed the normative religious order.[22] The idea that Buddhist practice could be used for rehabilitative purposes, namely to bring recalcitrant *tāntrika*s "back into the fold" of mainstream Buddhism, suggests an important corollary: namely, that mandated practices could also serve as a way of demonstrating that one is on the right path or indeed that one's view is "straight" insofar as it aligns with the vision put forward by Ye shes ʻod and his institutional representatives.

Pelliot tibétain 840/3 and Ye shes ʻod's edicts both call for a thorough revision of how tantra is being practiced in Tibet. The specific complaints made in these texts—regarding a lack of knowledge about monastic decorum, sale of tantric offices on the open market, and premature claims to have "accomplished the deity"—are meant to reflect broader problems, such as the lack of a Buddhist hierarchy and an ethical basis for tantric practice. While these texts present just two perspectives on the situation at the end of the tenth century—and many likely saw the contemporary scene in a more positive light—the idea of a dark age had a powerful influence on the Tibetan historiography and practice in the following centuries.[23] In the near term, King Ye shes ʻod and his descendants addressed the perceived faults in Tibetan practice by sponsoring the translation of Sanskrit texts, enforcing institutional norms, and establishing a complex Buddhist hierarchy. These efforts did not fully stamp out lay movements in Tibet—some of which were

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[20] "Red *Ācārya*" (*atsarya dmar po*), a pandit named named Prajñāgupta (Tib. Shes rab gsang ba), was another unorthodox teachers in Western Tibet during this period, said to be teaching sexual practices and violent sacrifice. Karmay, *Arrow and Spindle*, 6, fn. 29; 30. For more on Sangs rgyas skar rgyal, see below: 25, fn. 25 and 26.

[21] Nearly all information about lay groups originated from monastic institutions: "We have nothing, or very nearly nothing, that could in any sense be described as 'self-representation' by members of the groups in question. Most of the material ranges from the dismissive to the overtly hostile. In the absence of actual sources of self-representation, we must assume a liberal amount of misrepresentation." Dan Martin, "Lay Religious Movements," 24.

[22] "Through bodily prostrations and verbal commands, the king sought not simply to end the heterodox beliefs and practices in question, but to bring the heretics back into the fold, to rehabilitate them as properly ethical and upstanding members of his Buddhist society. In all of these ways, he worked to consolidate religious authority within the monastic establishment—to reduce, if not eliminate, all competing religious ideologies, be they local tantric cults or any number of indigenous traditions." Jacob P. Dalton, "Power and Compassion: Negotiating Buddhist Kingship in Tenth-Century Tibet," in *The Illuminating Mirror: Tibetan Studies in Honour of Per K. Sørensen on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*," edited by Olaf Czaja and Guntram Hazod (Wiesbaden 2015: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag), 8.

[23] The metaphor of a dark age belies the possibility that Buddhism continued to be a defining element of Tibetan culture even after the collapse of the empire. Pelliot tibétain 840/3 itself suggests that tantric Buddhism was popularized in Tibet during the tenth century, even if this is cast in decidedly negative terms. A number of academic studies have argued that the lack of centralized power—both religious and political—provided the opportunity for Tibetans to integrate Buddhism with their own indigenous traditions. On this view, the Age of Fragmentation was actually a creative and formative time, in which lay movements popularized a wide variety of approaches to Buddhist practice in Tibet. See: Kapstein (2000), Davidson (2005), and Dalton (2011).

extremely successful in the following century—but they did provide an influential model for how Buddhism should be practiced in Tibet.

A Foundation for Tantra

In the eleventh-century "later dispensation" (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism in Tibet, the deficiencies of tantric practice were meant to be addressed by a return to Indian roots. Rin chen bzang po (958-1055) was born in the southwest area of Gu ge, and rose to prominence while working under King Ye shes 'od. At the age of seventeen, he was sent to collect authentic Buddhist scriptures and for the next twelve years studied Sanskrit and Buddhism in northern India and Kashmir. Rin chen translated many works into Tibetan during this period, ranging from transgressive tantras to *Fifty Verses on the Guru* (Tib. *Bla ma lnga cu pa*).[24] Upon his return home in 987, legend has it that Rin chen heard word that the charismatic spiritual teacher called Buddha Star King (*Sangs rgyas skar rgyal*) had gained a large following, in part for his ability to levitate above the ground for extended periods of time.[25] Rin chen bzang po traveled to see Star King in person and simply pointed a finger at his raised body. The so-called buddha fell to the ground in a heap.[26] Given Ye shes 'od's disdain for the claims of non-authorized teachers, it is not surprising that Rin chen bzang po was eventually appointed to a prominent position in his assembly. The connection of the "Great Translator" (*lo chen*) with Indian Buddhism was also an important source of social capital for a king who desired to emulate the translation projects established by the *btsan po*s of the Tibetan empire.

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[24] *Fifty Verses* was translated together with the pandit Padmākaravarman. Giuseppe Tucci, *Rin-chen-bzaṅ-po and the Renaissance of Buddhism in Tibet Around the Millennium*, trans. Nancy Kipp Smith and ed. Lokesh Chandra. (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1988), 48. The *Cakrasaṃvara* tantra was also translated together with this figure. See: David B. Gray, "The Visualization of the Secret: Atiśa's Contribution to the Internalization of Tantric Sexual Practices," *Religions* 11, no.3 (2020): 136. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11030136

[25] Drawing from Rin chen bzang po's biography, Vitali dates his encounter with Buddha Star King to 987, after his return from Kashmir. *Kingdoms*, 215-216. Rin chen bzang po's return from Kashmir and Ye shes 'od's issuance of the Great Edict occurred in close proximity. As suggested by Vitali, Rin chen bzang po may have felt drawn to return to Tibet upon hearing of the "Great Edict" in 986: "so coincidental with the new turn of religious events in his land that one cannot avoid thinking that it was it was influenced by them." *Kingdoms*, 186. Alternatively, his return may have also helped shaped the emerging vision put forward in the king's subsequent edicts.

[26] Dan Martin discusses Buddha Star King in "The Star King and the Four Children," 171-195 and "Lay Religious Movements," 30-31. Vitali notes Star King's possible identity as a Bon po, *Kingdoms*, 214-220.

In the *Extended Biography of Ye shes 'Od*, a number of passages speak to the goal of fixing parameters for the selection of Buddhist teachers and the practice of tantra.[27] As in *Fifty Verses on the Guru*, where the qualities of a teacher are meant to be taken into consideration, Ye shes 'od instituted standards for the appointment of tantric masters (*rdo rje slob dpon*), who had to be "endowed with the qualities found in the tantras" and vetted "by other learned teachers" (*mkhas pa bzhan gyis*) who need to "test their knowledge and intellect" (*mkhyen cing yid bsregs par byed pa*).[28] New tantric officiants must therefore be "well-selected" (*legs par brtags*), and not appointed in a "careless, haphazard manner" (*rang dgar*).[29] These and other such mandates were meant to build up a proper Buddhist hierarchy and protect it against the types of abuses described in Pelliot tibétain 840/3. King Ye shes 'od also decreed that *tāntrika*s must follow the *vinaya* in the institutions of southwestern Tibet.[30] Ye shes 'od also took pains to ensure that disciples only engaged in the practice of tantra after proper preparation.[31] Just as teachers were expected to have certain qualifications, students were also meant to take a gradual approach to tantric practice. Monasticism and the mainstream vehicles of Buddhism were thus meant to provide a foundation for tantra. The arrival of *Fifty Verses on the Guru*, which provides basic qualifications for teachers and disciples may have furthered these goals.

New teachers may have been confirmed by something akin to a guild in the monastic institutions of Gu ge and Pu hrang, but it is important to note that as the "*Lha bla ma*" Ye shes 'od, and his decedents (who held the title of *bla chen*), were at the top of this institutional hierarchy.[32] In the early eleventh century, Ye shes 'od's legal decree had already established

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[27] *Lha bla ma ye shes 'od kyi nam thar rgyas pa. Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. pi [= 43], ed. Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2011), 273-355. The biography was written by Gu ge paṇ chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan in the fifteenth century (1415-1486), but there is reason to believe that it draws from much older sources. As noted by Dalton, "its author appears to have had immediate access to a number of ancient scrolls," including a "moon-white scroll" (*dril dkar zla ba*) and a "sky-blue scroll" (*dril sngon*). "Power and Compassion," 102. See: Leonard van der Kuijp, "A Fifteenth Century Biography of Lha bla ma Ye shes 'od (947-1019/24): Part One: Its Prolegomenon and Prophecies*," *Tibet in Dialogue with its Neighbors: History, Culture and Art of Central and Western Tibet, 8th-15th Century*, ed. E. Forte et al., Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 88 (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien/China Tibetology Research Center, 2015), 369-370. David Pritzker also studied this text: in "Canopy of Everlasting Joy: an early source in Tibetan historiography and the history of West Tibet" (PhD Diss., Oxford University, 2017) and "The Rhetoric of Politics in Tibetan Historiography," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 26 (2017): 21-40.

[28] *rgyud sde nas gnang ba'i yon tan rnams dang ldan | Rnam thar gyas pa* 29a.3.

[29] Ibid., 29.b.1-2.

[30] In the new monasteries of Gu ge and Pu hrangs, a "fundamental principle" of the later dispensation was "put into practice, according to which Tantrists had to follow *Vinaya* rules to maintain the purity of the tradition." Vitali, *Kingdoms,* 232.

[31] The students who may be an "appropriate vessel for secret mantra" (*gsang sngags kyi snod*), ought to be examined by the master (*slob dpon gyis legs par rtags*). Those who qualify should be guided through the vehicles one-by-one, and only then "practice genuine tantras as supreme" (*sngags gzhung tshad ma rnams gtso bor byas ste* | Ibid., 29.6.

[32] The term "*lha*" did not always indicate a "deity" or "divine figure" per se, but something closer to a "ruler of men." Michael Walter thus argues that it was used as a corporate concept—one that situates a current ruler in relation to those who have come before, the royal ancestors of Tibet. *Buddhism and Empire*, 110-123.

protocol for the transfer of power when a ruler entered the religious life.[33] Various Buddhist offices were also subject to appointment by the King, suggesting the existence of a complex, interrelated political and religious system during this period.[34] Ye shes ʻod's nephew Lha lde, for instance, appointed Rin chen bzang po, as "head officiant" (*mchod gnas*) and "vajra master" (*rdo rje slob dpon*):

> The Great Lama Lha lde made [Rin chen bzang po] head officiant and vajra master, and having been offered land sites in Pu hrangs, [the latter] built a hundred monasteries from Bzher to Ho bu lang ka for the tradition of worshiping [the triple] gem.[35]

As *bla chen po*, Lha lde established Rin chen to a prominent religious office, from which he oversaw the construction of numerous monasteries. Unlike the haphazard conferral of tantric offices (at least as portrayed in earlier documents), the appointment of teachers served as a way of controlling who could represent authoritative Buddhism. In addition to creating a network of Buddhist teachers, Ye shes ʻod's descendants also invited Indian pandits to teach in Tibet. Atiśa, the celebrated abbot of Vikramaśīla monastery, was met by Ye shes ʻod's grand-nephew, Byang chub ʻod, upon his arrival in Tibet in 1042.

Atiśa's oeuvre provides a valuable example of how Indic doctrines and practices were presented to a Tibetan audience in the mid-eleventh century. *Lamp for the Path to Awakening* (Skt. *Bodhipathapradīpa*; Tib. *Byang chub lam gyi sgron ma*), his most famous work, provides his Tibetan audience with different approaches to the Buddhist path.[36] As a primer for those unlettered in the rich history of Indian Buddhism, Atiśa cites a variety of practice manuals, philosophical texts, and one tantric scripture. The text begins with instructions for how to take refuge and bodhisattva vows in front of a shrine with an image or statue of Śākyamuni Buddha, a stupa, and a scripture. Appropriately and precisely positioning the body and repeating the refuge formula enacts a simple but powerful ritual in which a supplicant is aligned with the Buddhist

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[33] If the king or "father became a monk (*bla chen*), then his son is appointed as the new ruler (*mnga' bdag*)." (*yab bla chen du ston nas | sras mnga' bdag tu bkur ba'i srol stod | Mnga' ris rgyal rabs*, in *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang*, ed. Roberto Vitali, 55.5.)

[34] Ye shes ʻod's legal decrees had already established a complex, intertwined relationship between Buddhist and state authority, in which the king himself was subject to the rule of law. Dalton explored the entwined relationship between political and religious domains in Ye shes ʻod's system by drawing from Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies* and Peter Brown's work on medieval kingship. Dalton points out that in placing himself under the mandates of his own legal system, Ye shes ʻod paradoxically enhanced his own authoritative position (as the one who can deliver such an all-encompassing dictum). "Power and Compassion," 101-118.

[35] *bla chen po lha ldes dbu'i mchod gnas dang | rdo rje slob dpon mdzed nas pu hrangs kyis gnas gzhi phul nas | gnas gzhi dang dkon mchog gi zhabs rtog mdzad pa'i lugs la | pu hrangs kyi zher nas ho bu lang ka'i bar du gtsug lag khang brgya rtsa bzhengs pa'i zhal bzhes mdzad do | Rin chen bzang po rnam thar 'bring po*, 88.2-88.5.

[36] The *Lamp for the Path* has been widely studied in secondary literature. Most recently, it was translated by James B. Apple, *Atiśa Dīpaṃkara: Illuminator of the Awakened Mind* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2019), 181-191.

order.[37] The text continues by laying out a variety of Mahāyāna topics, including the bodhisattva vows and philosophical views on emptiness.

Atiśa was well-versed in tantric material, but he does not discuss this approach to the Buddhist path until the very end the *Lamp for the Path of Awakening*. If one desires to practice secret mantra, he writes, then "one ought to please the guru—accomplishing all of his commands with devotion—offering precious gems for the sake of the *ācārya* initiation."[38] The conditional clause (Skt. *ced*; Tib. *gal te*) suggests that the tantric path was not seen as essential, but rather a final option for those so inclined to take up its rigors. A preliminary stage of practice is presented along the lines of *Fifty Verses on the Guru* and, after receiving initiation, the disciple is granted permission to hear and explain the tantras and perform rites, such as a fire offering (*homa*). The *Lamp for the Path* was requested by Byang chub 'od, and it fit with the reformist zeitgeist of eleventh-century Gu ge by providing a clear foundation for the practice of tantra.

Atiśa composed other texts that were specifically meant for beginners, including a short summary of the *ādikarma* practices.[39] *Light on the Collected Activities* (Skt. *Caryāsaṃgraha-pradīpa*; Tib. *Spyod pa bsdus pa'i sgron ma*) introduces a similar sequence of rites, including performing prostrations and making clay stupas (Skt. *caitya*, Tib. *tsa tsa*).[40] In both of these texts, Atiśa provides an overview of daily Buddhist practices, but not any mantras or liturgies.[41] *Light on the Collected Activities* also refers to other Indic categories, such as the seven branches (Skt. *saptāṅga*; Tib. *yan lag bdun*)[42] and the ten virtuous practices (Skt. *daśakuśalacaryā*; Tib. *spyod chos bcu*).[43] Atiśa concludes that all merit-making practices can be subsumed within the latter framework, which is also referred to as a preliminary stage of practice in other eleventh-century

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[37] "With faith in the three jewels—having placed the right kneecap on the ground, pressed the hands together—one recites refuge three times." (*suśraddhayā triratneyaḥ bhumau saṃsthāpya jānunī | bhūtvā kṛtāñjaliścāpi triścādau śaraṇaṃ vrajet || Bodhipathapradīpa* v. 9, ed. Losang Norbu Shastri, 1984).

[38] *tadācāryabhiṣekārthaṃ mahāratnādidānataḥ | sadguruṃ prīṇayed bhaktayā sarvāñjñādipālanaiḥ ||* Ibid., v. 63.

[39] Atiśa's teachings on the practices of a "beginner bodhisattva" are found in the *Teachings on the Entrance onto the Path of the Beginner Bodhisattva* (Skt. *bodhisattvādikarmikamārgāvatāradeśanā*; Tib. *byang chub sems dpa' las dang po pa'i lam la 'jug pa bstan pa*). D 3952 dbu ma, khi 296a.1-297b.6.

[40] *Caryāsaṃgrahapradīpa* (D 3960) dbu ma, khi 312b3-313a7.

[41] Other *ādikarma* texts in Tibetan translation are similar. Neither **Ādikarmikasambhārakriyākramasaṃgraha* (Tib. *Dang po pa'i tshogs sog bzhugs*) by Srid gsum rnam par dag pa'i rdo rje (*Tribhuvanaviśuddhavajra), (D 3765) rgyud, tshu 117a3-119b4, nor the *Ādikarmikabhūmipariṣkāra* (*Las dang po pa'i sa sbyang ba*) by Guhya Jitāri (D 4494) pho 51b.4-53b.1, include specific liturgies, but instead present an overview of the genre.

[42] The "seven branches" (Skt. *saptāṅga*; Tib. *yan lag bdun*) are a classical genre of Indic Buddhist practice: (1) bowing; (2) making offerings; (3) confession; (4) rejoicing; (5) requesting the turning of the dharma wheel; (6) beseeching teachers to not pass into *parinirvāṇa*; and (7) the dedication of merit.

[43] These ten practices are attributed to Maitreya, as they are found in the *Distinguishing the Middle from Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga*, v. 8cd-10ab): (1) copying texts (*lekhanā*); (2) worship (*pūjā*); (3) generosity (*dāna*); (4) listening (*śravaṇa*); (5) speaking (*vācana*); (6) memorizing (*udgrahaṇa*); (7) teaching (*prakāśanā*); (8) reciting (*svādhyāya*); (9) reflecting (*cintanā*); and (10) cultivation (*bhāvanā*).

Tibetan texts.[44] The absence of the *gurumaṇḍala* and guru yoga (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*), in both *Lamp for the Path* and other contemporary texts meant for beginners, again suggests that these ritual genres had not yet been popularized in the mid-eleventh century.

Atiśa's role as a historiographical subject may have been even more influential than his teaching activity, as he became the standard reference point for marking Tibetan Buddhism's return to its Indic roots. The portrayal of Tibet as a depraved land coincided with the need for monasticism as a civilizing force that could provide institutional stability and protection via apotropaic rites.[45] The demonization of Tibetans only reinforced the need for authoritative, trustworthy guidance from Indian masters:

> Lord Atiśa said: "You Tibetans are not suitable vessels for the teachings of secret mantra! Even if you were serviceable—in Tibet, there is not a qualified tantric guru.[46]

Perfectly capturing the need for reform, Tibet is said to be lacking in qualified teachers and disciples.[47] The passage continues by stating that Vajrayāna gurus in Tibet are not "genuine" or "upright" (*gsha' ma*). Initiations are "ineffective" (*go mi chod*) and "all Tibetans are orphans" (*bod tham cas pha med kyi bu*) who are cut off from authentic Buddhist practice.[48] Bka' gdams pa authors utilized these intersecting tropes to portray Atiśa as a uniquely important "missionary"

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[44] In the *Testament of Ba* (*Dba' bzhed*), for instance, the necessity of the six perfections and ten virtuous practices are a sticking point between the respective adherents of an instantaneous and gradual approach to the Buddhist path. The Chinese advocate Hashang Mahayana declares that the ten virtuous practices are only meant for "vulgar people devoid of karmic relation to virtue, with dull senses and limited intellect." Hildergard Diemberger and Pasang Wangdu, *dBa' bzhed: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet*, (Wien: Verlag Der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 80. Indian representatives of the gradual approach, however, celebrate these practices (Ibid. 85), arguing that some type of preliminaries are necessary for beginners. In the end, the Tibetan king Khri srong lde btsan proclaims that the "the instantaneous entrance" is incorrect, and that the *daśakuśalacaryā* ought to be practiced by the people of Tibet. Ibid. 88. The fact that both camps reference the ten virtuous practices and six perfections suggests that these were a common backdrop of Buddhist practice at least when this version of the *Testament* was composed, if not earlier.

[45] Throughout the eleventh- to twelfth-century later dispensation (*phyi dar*), numerous authors associated the earlier age of fragmentation (*sil bu'i dus*) with corruptions and degenerate tantric rites, which were said to have included human sacrifice: "In this web of associations, the age of fragmentation provided the ultimate proof of what would happen if Tibetans tried to shake loose from their prescribed role: Tibet would be plunged once more into darkness, into lawless chaos, moral corruption, bloody sacrifice, and demons running rampant. In this way, Tibet's age of fragmentation lurked as a warning to all Tibetans of the later dispensation, a demonic presence that underpinned the tradition they were building." Dalton, *Taming of the Demons*, 125.

[46] *jo bo'i zhal nas | khyod pod la gsang sngag bstan pa'i snod med | snod yod kyang sngags kyi bla ma mtshan nyi dang ldan pa bod la mi 'dug gsung skad | Dpe chos*, 326. In this case, the twelfth-century author Lce sgom is glossing a short passage provided by his teacher Po to wa (1027-1105).

[47] In a well-known anecdote, even the famous translator Rin chen bzang po was said to have been chastised by Atiśa for ranking tantric deities and worshipping them in different places. In this regard, his face darkens and he remarks "I did need to come!" (*jo bo'i zhal ras nag pa mdzad nas nga yongs dgos par 'dug go gsung*; *Rin chen bzang po rnam thar 'bring po*, 115.3-4.)

[48] *a ti sha'i zhal nas | gsang sngags kyi bla ma gsha' ma med pas | su thod thod kyis dbang rim byas kyang | des dbang rim kyi go mi chod gsung skad | des na jo bo a ti sha'i zhal nas | bod tham cas pha med kyi bu yin gsung ba yang de ka 'dra ba la zer ba yin || Dpe chos*, 327.

who purified "Tibetans' relationship with tantra."[49] Not only did such rhetorical passages invoke the status of the Indian pandit, they also reconfirmed his disciples' and grand-disciples' standing as his legitimate representatives in Tibet.

The Emergence of the Bka' gdams pa Order

The founding of the Bka' gdams pa school is closely associated with the legacy of 'Bro ston pa rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas (1004/5-1064), a figure who rose to prominence under Atiśa and helped establish Rwa sgreng Monastery in 1057.[50] 'Brom ston was born in a nomadic family, and is often characterized in Bka' gdams pa literature as a quintessential Tibetan lay disciple who needs to ask clarifying questions and defer to the authority of the wise Indian pandit Atiśa. Eleventh- and twelfth-century biographical narratives alternatively presented him with an illustrious series of past lives, almost all of which were as an Indian Buddhist master. 'Brom ston pa is thus an early example of a Tibetan lama who was able to represent and embody Indian tradition without ever visiting the Buddhist heartland; as Matthew T. Kapstein aptly put it, such teachers "*found India within themselves*."[51] Moreover, 'Brom ston pa's status as an incarnation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara ensured he was seen as the predestined inheritor of Indian Buddhism in Tibet.[52] 'Brom ston pa's split identity—as ordinary layman and enlightened bodhisattva—allowed him to serve two functions in the Bka' gdams pa imaginary: his foibles and questions made him more relatable, while his elevated status meant that he could serve as a spiritual guide for Tibetans.

Bka' gdams pa institutions emphasized foundational practices, and their curriculums were predominantly grounded in exoteric Buddhist literature, Mahāyāna ethics, and the gradual path (*lam rim*). The six texts (*gzhung drug*) transmitted by 'Brom ston's influential student Po to wa (1027-1105), for instance, included Indian stalwarts such as the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*, the

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[49] Amy Sims Miller, "Jeweled Dialogues: The Role of *The Book* in the Formation of the Kadam Tradition Within Tibet" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2004), 222.

[50] At the beginning of the *phyi dar* period, Klu-mes, Sba, Rag sha, and 'Bring-tsho were the principal clans and they each administered an area of central Tibet that was associated with a specific monastic lineage. Leonard van der Kuijp, "The Monastery of Gsang-phu ne'u-thog and Its Abbatial Succession from ca. 1073 to 1250" *Berliner Indologische Studien*, no. 3 (1987): 109. Atiśa did not establish monastic institutions because his *Mahāsāṁghika* ordination lineage was proscribed in Tibet, but his students established dozens of monasteries in the eleventh century, particularly in the area of 'Phen po and Yar klungs. Ulrike Roesler and Hans-Ulrich Roesler, *Bka' gdams pa Sites of Phempo: A Guide to Some Early Buddhist Monasteries in Central Tibet* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2004). This monastic network transcended earlier political districts and eventually came to be associated with the Bka' gdams pa school. Kevin A. Vose, *Resurrecting Candrakīrti: Disputes in the Tibetan creation of Prāsaṅgika* (Wisdom Publications, Boston: 2009), 47.

[51] "The Indian Literary Identity in Tibet," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia,* edited by Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 775. Italics in original.

[52] The Indic bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was portrayed as having a special connection to the land and people of Tibet. Not only were contemporary figures such as 'Brom ston pa said to be his emanation, this designation was also retroactively applied to much earlier rulers such as Srong btsan sgam po, the first Tibetan *bstan po* associated with Buddhism. The prominent role of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet has been broadly addressed by Sørensen (1994), Kapstein (1999), Sims Miller (2004), van der Kjuip (2005), Roberto Vitali (2006), and others.

Śikṣāsamuccaya, and the *Jātaka* tales.[53] The Bka' gdams pa are also remembered for intensive mind-training (*blo sbyong*) and contemplative practices such as the "four ways of reversing the mind" (*blo ldog rnam bzhi*).[54] Standardized curricula established connections among the various sites associated with the Bka' gdams pa school.

Bka' gdams pa authors also made Buddhist principles relatable for a non-scholastic audience. Po to wa utilized analogies and colloquial language in *Teaching Aphorisms* (*spe chos*), a large collection of similes (Skt. *upamā*, Tib. *dpe*) that spoke to the everyday life of Tibetans, while also referring to various doctrinal topics and historical episodes drawn from Indian Buddhist classics. Presenting these topics in a native idiom was an "effective hermeneutic" for disseminating and popularizing the "overly theoretical corpus of religious teachings and dogma propounded in canonical and extra-canonical scriptures."[55] Bka' gdams pa material provides an important precedent for the eventual formation of new genres of preliminary practices in Tibet.

The Lama as a Buddha

In *Lamp for Teaching Aphorisms*, Po to wa's student Lce sgom shes rab rdo rje (1140/50-1220) unpacks the aphorisms used by his teacher to further illustrate a wide range of core Mahāyāna concepts.[56] Roughly following the series of topics in Atiśa's influential *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, it includes an extensive discussion of the various approaches to the Buddhist paths, the "four ways of reversing the mind," loving-kindness and compassion, the two types of *bodhicitta*, and the six perfections. In places, Lce sgom's twelfth-century perspectives echo earlier reformist rhetoric, yet the commentary is not overly critical about the tantric path.[57] Lce

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[53] As canonical sources for teaching beginners on the Buddhist path (cited, for example, in the Sanskrit *ādikarma* texts discussed in chapter one), these texts became part of the core curriculum at Bka' gdams pa monasteries, such as Gsang phu. Per Sørensen, "The Prolific Ascetic lCe-sgom," *Journal of the Nepal Research Centre* Vol. XI (1999): 179, ft. 5.

[54] Per K. Sørensen, "A XIth Century Ascetic of Buddhist Eclecticism: Kha-rag sgom-chung," in *Tractata Tibetica et Mongolica. Festschrift für Klaus Sagaster zum 65*, ed. Kollmar-Paulenz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag, 2002), 241-253.

[55] Sørensen, "The Prolific Ascetic lCe-sgom," 180. At times, later Tibetan preliminary practice literature also used colloquial language to be accessible for a wider audience.

[56] The full title is *A Lamp Elucidating the Distinctive Topics of Potowa: Jeweled Collection of Teaching Aphorisms*, (*Po to skor ba'i khyad chos don gsal bar byed pa'i sgron me dpe chos rin po che spungs pa*), Pe cin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1991). Sørensen lists eight extant versions of this work, "The Prolific Ascetic lCe-sgom," 177 ft. 3.

[57] In the section called "Characteristics of Mantra" (*sngag kyi mtshan nyid*), Lce sgom presents six advantages and thirteen disadvantages of the tantric path. The tantric approach is not prioritized over the path of perfections.

sgom's commentary supports the idea that the lama ought to be seen as a buddha and worshipped first, but he too does not refer to ritual practices such as the *gurumaṇḍala* or guru yoga.[58]

Lce sgom next draws from the Mahāyāna rubric of the "three bodies" (Skt. *trikāya*; Tib. *sku gsum*) to reinforce the idea of seeing the lama as a buddha. In mainstream Buddhist thought, Śākyamuni was said to have a truth body (*dharmakāya*), an enjoyment body (*saṃbhogakāya*), and an emanation body (*nirmāṇakāya*).[59] In a Mahāyāna context, however, not every buddha looks the same. Enlightened beings take up the appearance of a layman, a woman, or an outcaste as a "skillful means" (*upāya*) for effectively communicating a Buddhist teaching. Lce sgom thus uses the three-bodies schema to equate the nature of lamas with the *dharmakāya*, but also to account for their varying appearances. Most importantly, he develops the idea that buddhas and lamas appear in various ways, depending on the needs of students: even though "the mind of the buddha is without duality, the form bodies appear in different ways based on the student."[60] As the rarified aspects of a buddha are only perceptible to advanced bodhisattvas, beginners (*las dang po pa*) must rely on the emanation body (*sprul pa*), the relatable human teacher.[61]

This formulation supports the idea that a *lay* teacher might be best for some disciples. In later Bka' gdams pa material, such as the famous *Book of Kadam* (*Bka' gdams rin po che'i glegs bam*), the identity of the layman 'Brom ston pa is unpacked along these very lines. Invoking the tenor of historiographical passages cited above, this work characterizes Tibetan disciples as desirous, careless, and so forth.[62] The Indic bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was thus said to have

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[58] For Lce sgom, seeing the lama as a buddha is what necessitates worship: "having established the perception of the buddha, one needs to honor and venerate [the lama]." (*sangs rgyas kyi 'du shes bzhag la bsnyen bkur dang rim gro byed dgos*; Ibid., 337.) Lce sgom continues by citing a humorous passage from the *Guhyasamajā* tantra, in which worshipping one hair-pore of the lama is said to be more meritorious than venerating all the bodhisattvas and buddhas of the ten directions. (*phyogs bcu'i sangs rgyas thams cad dang | byang chub sems dpa'i bsod nams bas | bla ma'i ba spu khung gcig mchog ces so*; Ibid., 335.) Finally, drawing on an example attributed to the Buddha in which Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana are instructed to first prostrate to whomever teaches the dharma, Lce sgom comments that "by us too, whatever veneration and offering is done, first do it to the lama. At the beginning of worship, commence by offering to the lama." (*'o skol gyis kyang | phyag dang mchod pa gang byed kyang | sngon la bla ma la byed pa yin | mchod pa rnams kyi thog mar ni | bla ma mchod pa rab tu brtsam*; Ibid., 335.)

[59] This triad informed theoretical discussions about the relationship between expansive and intangible qualities associated with the *dharma*—knowledge, compassion, and so forth—and how a buddha actually appears. The Buddha's form body (*rūpakāya*) was comprised of the "marks of a great man" (*mahāpuruṣa lakṣana*), a standard set of features that indicate his exalted status. Over time, Buddhists came to identify more "bodies" of a buddha. See: John J. Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

[60] *sangs rgyas kyi thugs gnyis su med pa'i ye shes de nyid gdul bya'i snang ba la gzugs sku sna tshogs su snang nas don mdzad de | Dpe chos*, 336.

[61] Lce sgom thus concludes that "beginners can only be helped through a lama in human form." (*las dang po pa la | gang zag mi'i bla mar sprul nas don mdzad* | Ibid.)

[62] Sims Miller, "Jeweled Dialogues," 87.

taken birth a local nomad, in order to best guide the unruly Tibetan people.[63] Echoing the ideas presented in *Lamp for Teaching Aphorisms*, the *Book of Kadam* declares that "among the many [possible] physical manifestations," 'Brom ston accomplished the "activities that were in accord with those who are to be tamed."[64] Avalokiteśvara seemingly commands an impartial, universal gaze that looks down upon the world to decide how to be of the most benefit. Brom ston pa's incarnation is designed to make Buddhism more appealing to lay Tibetans, who are unable to immediately face the challenges of monastic life. Instead of observing the rigorous vows of the monk, they will first take up the more manageable requirements of the layman, including the *upāsaka* vows (*dge bsnyen*) and prostration practices performed during the fasting rite (*bsnyen gnas*).[65] As some of these laymen will eventually come into the monastic fold, 'Brom ston pa's appearance is seen as perfect to gradually lead Tibetans along the entire Buddhist path. The grand narratives and liturgies that reinforced 'Brom ston's status were mirrored in more everyday Bka' gdams pa ritual practices that also called for seeing the lama as a buddha or deity (*lha*).[66] '

Oral Instructions on the Seven Branches

Oral Instructions on the Seven Branches (*yan lag bdun pa'i man ngag*) provides guidance for the performance of everyday Buddhist practices in a distinctly Tibetan idiom.[67] The seven rites are introduced with the speech (*gsungs pa*) and direct instruction (*man ngag*) of the Bka' gdams pa

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[63] A prophetic passage indicates how 'Brom ston pa's appearance as a layman will be be a conducive factor for attracting other lay Tibetans to the Buddhist path: "[Among Tibetan disciples] some will be lay Buddhists, like 'Brom ston pa. All of these students will take up the lay vows and perform the fasting rite and so forth, saying: "It is easy to maintain and the benefit is great!" (*la la 'brom ston pa 'dra ba'ang dge bsnyen yin | dge bsnyen 'di kun bsrung sla la phan yon che zer nas bsnyen gnas la sogs pa dang | dge bsnyen gyi sdom pa la 'jug pa dang | de dag rim gyis kha drang ba'i phir dang | Bka' gdams rin po che'i glegs bam* Vol. 1, 613.19-614.1.) In Rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas, *Jo bo rje lha gcig dpal ldan a ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1994).

[64] *sku'i bkod pa du ma'i sgo nas gdul bya dang mthun pa'i 'phrin las mdzad*; Ibid., 612.17.

[65] A fasting rite connected with Avalokiteśvara began to be popularized in Tibet in the eleventh century. See: Roberto Vitali, "The Transmission of *bsnyung gnas* in India, the Kathmandu Valley and Tibet (10th-12th centuries)," in *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis: Studies in its Formative Period, 900-1400*, eds. Ronald M. Davidson and Christian K. Wedemeyer (Boston: Brill, 2006), 229-260 & Ivette M. Vargas-O'Brian, "The Life of dGe slong ma dPal mo: The Experience of a Leper, Founder of a Fasting Ritual, a Transmitter of Buddhist Teachings on Suffering and Renunciation in Tibetan Religious History," *Journal of International Association of Buddhist Studies* 24, no. 2 (2001): 157-186

[66] In the *Bka' gdams rin po che'i glegs bam*, the practices of the "Sixteen Spheres" (*Thig le bcu drug*), both Atiśa and 'Brom are imagined at the center of Avalokiteśvara's heart. The ritual was codified by Mkhan chen nyi ma rgyal tshan (1225-1305), but Franz-Karl Ehrhard and others agree that the liturgical material was probably developed earlier, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Franz-Karl Ehrhard, "The Transmission of the *Thig le bcu drug* and the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*," in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, eds. Helmut Eimer and David Germano (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 32-34.

[67] In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs bsgrigs thengs gnyis pa*, par gzhi dang po, 18 (Khreng tu'u: Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007), 555-574.

lama Po to wa and his prominent disciple Dge bshes Shar ba (1070-1141).[68] While King Ye shes' od's fourth edict called on the *tāntrika*s of central Tibet to "straighten up their views" (*lta ba bsrang*), this Bka' gdams pa text makes a close connection between holding ones body upright when making prostrations and being an "honest" or "genuine" (*drang*) Buddhist practitioner.[69] Despite some uncertainty regarding its authorship, *Oral Instructions* exemplifies two themes that became common aspects of Tibetan preliminary practice systems: the rites mark participation within a distinct tradition and they are done while visualizing a deified lama.[70]

Oral Instructions is meant for Bka' gdams pa practitioners, and so it acknowledges the important status of Atiśa and 'Brom ston in this tradition. Atiśa is not presented as a source of authoritative instructions, but as one who was determined to continue doing prostrations, even when facing old-age and physical hardships:

> At the time Atiśa arrived in Tibet, he was more than sixty years old, but he still straightened his body [when] he did prostrations, even though his feet were shaking.[71]

Even at an advanced age, Atiśa held his body straight (*sku srangs*) when performing prostrations. Atiśa is the only Indian figure mentioned in this text and it is only after he had already made the arduous journey across the Himalaya. As we will see below, this manner of performing prostrations serves as a foil for the shortcomings of contemporary Tibetans' who are said to perform "insincere" (*zol ba*) prostrations. Atiśa's manner of bowing, on the other hand,

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[68] Po to wa and Shar ba are cited multiple times in the text, but no later figures are mentioned. At the end of the text, a schema for applying the seven branches as a daily practice is attributed to Shar ba: "having envisioned that very [schema], dge bshes Shar ba said…". (*de nyid la dgongs nas dge bshes shar ba'i zhal nas*; *Yan lag bdun pa'i man ngag*, 572.4.) As the colophon again notes the speech of an unnamed dge bshes, it is possible that Shar ba was the source of instructions (*man ngag*) for the text.

[69] The Tibetan terms *bsrang* and *drang* are not homonyms, yet they carry similar connotations in this text.

[70] The *Oral Instructions* manuscript is found in the *Bka' gdams pa phyogs sgrig* compilation, but the title is also listed in the earlier "'Bras spungs dkar chag," a two-volume list of works that were held in the Sixteen Arhats Temple at 'Bras spungs Monastery (see: Cécile Ducher, "Goldmine of Knowledge: The Collections of the Gnas bcu *lha* Khang in 'Bras spungs Monastery," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 55 (July 2020): 121-139). This extensive index provides titles, authors, handwriting style, and measurements for the thousands of manuscripts that were held in the 'Bras spungs library. As the title page of each text includes a three-part signature, we know that *Oral Instructions* came from an "external" (*phyi*) source (i.e., it was brought to the library from a different location). Each signature includes a letter that indicates the general topic of the text (in this case, *la*) and, finally, a bundle number (432). Although no author is provided for *Oral Instructions* (No. 19081), it is found in the same bundle as various works by Mchims nam mkha' grags (1210-1289), a Bka' gdams pa figure who served as abbot of Snar thang Monastery from 1248-1284. The folio-size of other manuscripts in the la/432 bundle are also the same, and some them were also written in the same hand (e.g., the *Gzhi lam 'bras bu gsal bar byed pa rin po che gser phreng zhes bya ba bzhugs so*). These commonalities do not indicate that Mchims was the author of *Oral Instructions*, but rather that this text arrived at the 'Bras spungs library together with some of his works. None of this conclusively demonstrates when the *Oral Instructions* were taught or transcribed, but it is reasonable to conclude that it emerged in the twelfth-century Bka' gdams pa milieu of Dge bshes Shar ba, perhaps at the monastery of Snar thang, which was founded in 1153 by his disciple, Gtum ston blo gros grag pa (1106-1166). Thanks to Dr. Pascale Hugon for providing me with some leads in navigating these archives.

[71] *jo bo bod du byon tsa na gung lo drug bcu yar rgal yin par 'dug ste sku srangs shing zhabs 'dar phril phril ba'i phyag mdzad gsung* | *Yan lag bdun pa'i man ngag*, 559.3-559.4. Thanks to Khenpo Yeshi for helping me translate the more difficult passages from this text.

suggests that he is a morally upright, and therefore a a trustworthy model to be emulated. To build on this point, a subsequent citation compliments the manner of Tibetans who reverently performed prostrations during the time of Atiśa's famed disciple, Dge bshes 'Brom ston pa:

> In Dge bshes ston pa's time, those with long hair [did prostrations], joining the palms at the crown of the head, and raising shirt sleeves upward in the sky.[72]

In this evocative passage, a long-haired Tibetan (*dbu lcang lo can*) is depicted raising hands in the air, and touching the joined palms at the crown of the head before making a bodily prostration. The passage suggests that performing prostrations in this manner ought is as Tibetan as wearing a shirt with long sleeves (*phu dung*). *Oral Instructions* thus fits with the broader Bka' gdams pa approach of couching Buddhist topics or practices in a colloquial style that includes references to Tibetan lay culture. After indicating the ways prostrations were done by Atiśa and during the "time of 'Brom ston pa" (*dge bshes rton pa'i dus*), *Oral Instructions* then describes how current Bka' gdams pas should perform this devotional rite.

In *Oral Instructions on the Seven Branches*, the act of prostrating while visualizing the lama as a deity is broken down into corporal, vocal, and mental components.[73] The bodily aspect of prostrations is assessed according to a three-part typology: raising the hands to the crown of the head is best; to the eyebrows is middling; and, worst, is to only raise them as high as the chest.[74] Po to wa states that "for us" (*rang cag*)—and here we must assume he meant those in the Bka' gdams pa order—prostrations need to be done by placing the hands "at least [as high as] between the eyebrows."[75] These distinctions may seem picayune, but the stakes are high indeed: performing prostrations in the wrong way risks rebirth in hell or a barbarian (i.e., non-Buddhist) country. The "Bka' gdams pa" manner of doing prostrations is also presented as especially vigorous:

> The Bka' gdams pa prostration is such that it depends upon completely throwing down [the entire body].[76]

In this passage, the *manner* of prostrating is explicitly categorized as "Bka' gdams pa," and the defining factor is that one drops the entire body to the ground. Unlike the more staid

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[72] *dge bshes ston pa'i dus na dbu lcang lo can du bzhugs pa dang thal mo sbyi bor sbyar phu dung gnam du rongs rong pa cig yod pa la* | Ibid., 558.5-559.1.

[73] First, a disciple is instructed to physically touch the ground with all five limbs (arms, legs, and head). Vocally, the practitioner pays homage to the lama and, mentally, one meditates upon the qualities of the three jewels, but more importantly "imagines that the lama as inseparable from the *yidam* deity." (*de nas yid kyi sgo nas dkon mchog gsum gyi yon tan bsgom* | *khyad par du bla ma dang yi dam gyi lha tha mi dad du bsam* | Ibid., 560.1-2.)

[74] *de'ang rab spyi bor 'bring smin mtshams tha mar snying khar sbyar te*; Ibid., 558.5.

[75] *dge bshes pu to ba'i zhal nas rang cag ma thabs kyang smin mtshams tsham du byed dgos gsung so* | Ibid., 559.2-3.

[76] *bka' gdams pa'i phyag 'di ni rdzogs 'phen pa kha na 'dra'o zer*; Ibid., 559.2. In the *Dag yig gsar sgrig*s, "*kha na*" is the main factor, or that upon which something depends (*rag las sa dang ltos dgos sa'i ming ste*; 62).

bodily image—found in Atiśa's *Lamp for the Path* and numerous other Indian ritual liturgies—of taking refuge while placing a knee on the ground (*bhumau saṃsthāpya jānunī*) and folding the palms together (*kṛtāñjali*), the Bka' gdams pa is said to prostrate by completely "throwing down" or "flinging" (*'phen pa*) the body down to the ground. As making such prostrations are classified as an "application" (*sbyor ba*) or "preliminary stage" (*sngon du 'gro ba*) in the overall ritual sequence we also see a certain priority afforded to the worship of the lama.[77]

Oral Instructions concludes its discussion of prostrations by noting a stark difference between earlier practitioners' exemplary performance and current practice. Those in the "time of 'Brom ston pa" did optimal prostrations, their joined palms touching the crown of the head, with long-sleeves raised upward in the sky. Even at an elderly age, with his feet shaking, Atiśa raised his body straight before bowing. At present (*da lta*) or, in a pejorative sense, "these days," even those who touch their heads to the ground do not stand up completely, and their prostrations are not genuine:

> Everyone now does insincere prostrations, bending [their bodies] without standing up, even when they touch the head to the ground. All the young people are busybodies, meaninglessly engaging in various challenging and simple tasks; it would be appropriate for one with purpose to [instead] prostrate. Even all old folks need to do three bodily prostrations at a time, with devotion.[78]

These days, at least according to this author, people are not performing prostrations in an appropriate or upright manner. Even those who provide a semblance of prostration practice do not stand up straight. The majority of young people are not concerned about merit-making practices, as they keep themselves busy with other activities. Insincere prostrations (*phyag gi zol*), in which people do not fully stand up even when they do touch their head to the ground, are contrasted with the "straight" or "upright" manner prescribed throughout the rest of the text. In these passages, specific ways of performing a bodily practice demonstrate commitment to ethical and communal norms.[79] As seen in Pelliot tibétain 840/3 and King Ye shes 'od's edicts, criticism of contemporary practice is made by referring to an earlier period when things were done right. The implication, of course, is that current Bka' gdams pas should be like those prostrating at the time of 'Brom ston pa. In these passages, we again see how historiography is used by a Tibetan author to call for a return to earlier standards of practice.

The *Oral Instructions on the Seven Branches* connects with a few broader trends in the development of Tibetan preliminary practices: one is meant to worship the lama first and the

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[77] *'di yan lag bdun du ni mi gtogs sbyor ba'am sngon du 'gro ba'i cho ga tsam yin gsung* | Ibid., 560.5.

[78] *da lta kun 'go sa la gtugs kyang mi ldang par gum gum byed pa de yang phyag gi zol yin gsung | gzhon pa kun don med par yang lus kyi dka' sla sna tshogs byed na don can gyi lus kyi phyag byed thang | rgan pa kun yang lus kyis phyag gus pa gsum gsum byed dgos gsung* | Ibid., 559.4-560.1. The term *thang* appears to be short for *yin thang*, a synonym for *yin 'os pa*: to be "suitable" or "appropriate."

[79] As discussed by Mahmood: "ethical conduct is not simply a matter of the effect one's behavior produces in the world but depends crucially upon the precise form that behavior takes: both the acquisition and the consummation of ethical virtues devolve upon the proper enactment of prescribed bodily behaviors, gestures, and markers." *Politics of Piety*, 161.

lama is imagined in the manner of a deity, in both prostration rites and in a ritualized offering mandala (that is very similar to the *gurumaṇḍala*).[80] Finally, the text notes in multiple places that such rites ought to be done according to the guidelines set forth by a tradition (*lugs*).[81] In this way they reinforce the specific "Bka' gdams pa" identity of the practitioner; in later texts, we see that the preliminary rites (*sngon 'gro*) also can have a similar branding function.

Conclusion

The end of the tenth century witnessed the dramatic return of Buddhist institutions, particularly in southwestern Tibet. King Ye shes 'od—a powerful ruler who issued edicts to his own subjects and to the wayward *tāntrika*s of central Tibet—was one impetus for this movement. The injunction to "straighten out views" was meant to effect a return to Indian Mahāyāna systems as a foundation for the Buddhist path. The rise of Buddhist institutions would have been a welcome development for the anonymous author of Pelliot tibétain 840, who saw the current period in a negative light, particularly when compared with the stability of the Tibetan empire. In this milieu, Rin chen bzang po was a famous translator whose monastic and scholastic pedigrees fit nicely with Ye shes 'od's desire to sweep away degenerate groups of tantric practitioners.

The rise of the Bka' gdams order in the eleventh century marked the development of a new Buddhist tradition in Tibet that, to a degree, transcended earlier political and monastic divisions. In narratives and ritual practices, the founding figure of this school, the lay lama 'Brom ston pa was identified as the Indic bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. As the Bka' gdams movement grew to include numerous monastic institutions and lineages, the lama continued to be thematically identified as the primary object of worship. Foundational practices played a key role in the self-understanding of this order, both as a way of guarding against premature engagement with tantra and as a way of demonstrating enthusiastic commitment to the principles of Indian Buddhism.

In *Oral Instructions on the Seven Branches*, the performance of bodily prostrations is presented as a way of marking "sincere" or "upright" (*drang*) practice. As just one example of how foundational practices came to be presented in Tibetan idiom, this text thematizes specific ways of performing "Bka' gdams pa prostrations" and making offerings to the deified lama. The parameterization of Buddhist rites strongly suggests that they were used to strengthen identity within a given tradition. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Sa skya and Bka' bgyud authors —two other schools that emerged in the eleventh- to twelfth-century period—also promoted systems of foundational and preliminary practices that were focused on the lama.

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[80] As in the *gurumaṇḍala* rite in *Light on the Foundational Practices*, the practitioner places flowers on the mandala, imagines the lama as inseparable from the deity (*bla ma dang yi dam tha dad med par*), and then offers both material objects (*rdzas*) and an "offering manifested by the mind" (*blos sprul pa'i mchod pa*). Ibid., 560.5-564.4

[81] The author also specifically notes a "Sne zur tradition of confession: (*Sne zur ba'i lugs kyis sdig bshags*) and the benefit of doing such rites according the "tradition of one's lama" (*rang gyi bla ma'i lugs*). Ibid., 570.4-570.5.

Chapter 3: Bowing to the Lay Lama

In the mid-twelfth century, the lay Sa skya patriarchs Bsod nams rtse mo (1142-1182) and Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216) composed a series of texts meant for beginners on the tantric path. Far from the confines of the Indic *gurukula*, we see in these works how institutional context impacted the performance of everyday bowing rites and foundational practices in Tibet. Bsod nams rtse mo wrote beginner texts while studying at Gsang phu, a conservative Bka' gdams pa monastery. Grags pa rgyal mtshan was the longstanding lay abbot of Sa skya Monastery. Here, the tensions between the monastic *vinaya* and social codes for venerating the lay tantric guru needed to be reconciled. Grags pa rgyal mtshan thus spends considerable effort in his commentary to *Fifty Verses on the Guru* arguing that even monks should prostrate to a lay lama.

Bsod nams rtse mo and Grags pa rgyal mtshan both wrote collections of foundational practices that were closely modeled on the Indic *ādikarma* genre. The rites were explicitly meant for practitioners in the Hevajra system, the principal tantric lineage at Sa skya. Bsod nams rtse mo provides instructions for visualizing this mandala at the onset of his collection, *Beginner Activities*, but immediately afterwards he states that one should also visualize the lama. The co-presence of the Hevajra deities and lama appear to be somewhat redundant throughout the following ritual sequence, as Bsod nams rtse mo pauses at various junctures to specify whom should be worshipped first. In each case, it is the lama. In these Tibetan foundational practice compendia, the lama is thus promoted as the primary object of worship in prostrations, offerings, and numerous other rites.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan also prioritizes the veneration of the lama in his commentary to *Fifty Verses on the Guru*. In defense of the view that bowing to the lama ought to be a universal practice, he presents a series of scriptural citations that account for why even buddhas and advanced bodhisattvas might bow to a lay lama. At the end of each passage, he concludes that "it goes without saying" (*lta smos kyang ci dgos*) that ordinary disciples also should bow. Grags pa rgyal mtshan argues here that Vāpilla's warning against bowing to a lay or novice guru in public is "contradictory" (*'gal ba*) because he had already stated that even *tathāgata*s bow to the guru. To further his case for why even monks should also bow to the lama, Grags pa rgyal mtshan also provides theoretical examples for why less esteemed householders and animals might also be worthy of such veneration. Grags pa rgyal mtshan thus uses scriptural exegesis to rationalize the elevated status of the lay lama in Sa skya Monastery's institutional hierarchy.

At Sa skya, the application of beginner practices and bowing as a "preliminary method of veneration" (*sngon du bsnyen bskur ba'i thabs*) again demonstrates that everyday rites can serve as an innovative site for working out broader concerns in Buddhist institutional life. The idea that the lama is a universal object of worship, regardless of ordination status or seniority, is at odds with the monastic codes attributed to the Buddha. In Sa skya foundational practice compendia, however, as well as in the new vision of a hierarchy put forward in *Elucidation of Fifty Verses on the Guru*, the veneration of the lama is prioritized. In promoting this view, Grags pa rgyal mtshan reinterpreted the *vinaya* and also seemingly departed from the view of Bsod nams rtse mo, his older brother. Grags pa rgyal mtshan nevertheless frames bowing to a lay lama as traditional insofar as it accords with the scriptural sources that he brings to bear on this topic.

A Sa skya pa at Gsang phu

The mid-twelfth century was a transitional phase for Tibetan institutions. At the Bka' gdams pa college of Gsang phu sne'u thog and Sa skya Monastery, there was a growing awareness that Indian Buddhist monasteries were under duress.[1] After nearly a century of development, tantric lineages and institutions were also more firmly established in Tibet. As grandsons of the 'Khon clan's first patriarch, 'Khon dkon mchog rgyal po (1034-1102), Bsod nams rtse mo and Grags pa rgyal mtshan both played key roles in upholding their family's Buddhist legacy. After the death of their father, Sa chen kun dga' snying po (1092–1158), Bsod nams rtse mo held the position of abbot at Sa skya for only three years, after which he left to continue his studies at Gsang phu. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, by contrast, was abbot at Sa skya for nearly his entire adult life.[2]

At Gsang phu, Bsod nams rtse mo studied philosophical topics with Phywa pa chos kyi sengs ge (1109-1169) and also worked with visiting Indian pandits. The intellectual climate at this Bka' gdams pa institution, an early center of scholastic activity in Tibet, exemplified the "reformist zeal" associated with the "castigation of the tantric lapses attributed to many Indian and Tibetans."[3] As discussed in the previous chapter, Bka' gdams pas commonly cast Tibetans as deviant tantric practitioners and highlighted the need for Mahāyāna practices as a foundation for tantra. Ronald Davidson considers it likely that Bsod nams rtse mo was exposed to such critiques while studying at Gsang phu during the 1160s, especially since his writings include responses to the objections and questions of an unnamed "person practicing the perfections" (*pha rol tu phyin pa po*). In one, "particularly trenchant" attack, for example, an unnamed opponent is cited asking questions about how the sexual practices, winds, and channels could be a skillful means to Buddhahood, as they are also found in the traditions of non-Buddhist *tīrthika*s.[4] In *General Principles of the Tantric Canon* (*Rgyud sde spyi'i rnam par bzhag pa*), Bsod nams rtse mo emphasizes that framing practices, such as taking refuge in the triple gem and generating

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[1] Bsod nams rtse mo highlights the immediacy of current challenges facing Tibetans: "Now, in Magadha, heretical traditions are proliferating! Here, in Tibet, there are numerous exponents of false teachings. At the borders, evil-doing kings destroyed temples. Alas! We are approaching the destruction of the Buddhist teachings! Give rise to diligence! (*da ni dbus 'gyur tshal du mu stegs rnams 'phel zhing | gangs can khrod 'dir chos ltar bcos pa du ma byung | mtha 'khob sdig spyod rgyal pos gtsug lag khang rnams 'jig | kye hud bstan pa 'jig la khad do btson 'grus skyed | Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo*, 682.5-6.) *Gateway to the Dharma* is in the *Sa skya bka' 'bum* pod nga pa (Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2006), 567-683.

[2] Grags pa rgyal mtshan served as abbot for fifty-seven years, from 1160 until his death in 1216. There is some disagreement about whether he was officially abbot during the time his older brother studied at Gsang phu. For instance, Mkhan po bsod nams rgya mtshos, a later Sa skya scholar, suggests that Bsod nams rtse mo was abbot for twelve years, up to his untimely death at the age of forty. See: Gwanaelle Witt-Dörring, "Slob dpon bsod nams rtse mo and his Saintly Death" (MA Thesis, Centre for Buddhist Studies, Kathmandu University, 2013), 6, fn. 12.

[3] Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 339-340.

[4] Ibid., 363. Lce sgom, a Bka' gdams pa figure discussed in chapter two and a contemporary of Bsod nams rtse mo, also notes (in less strident terms) that one downside of tantra is that it is "extremely difficult to fully differentiate between [Buddhist and] non-Buddhist secret mantra." (*mu stegs pa'i gsang sngags dang yang shin tu dbye dka' ba yin par 'dug | Dpe chos*, 333.)

bodhicitta, are what make tantra legitimately "Buddhist."[5] In this case, preliminary rites helped reduce anxiety about the practice of tantra by foregrounding unquestionably Buddhist elements.

Bsod nams rtse mo may have also been inspired by the Bka' gdams pa emphasis on foundational practices, as he wrote a number of primers for beginners during his time at Gsang phu. Davidson suggests that such texts helped fill out the tantric curriculum he had inherited from his father.[6] In one introductory work, *Gateway to the Dharma* (*Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo*), he discusses how to pay respect to a virtuous mentor (*dge ba'i bshes gsnyen*).[7] A disciple generally circumambulates the teacher (*bskor ba byas*), bows to the lama's feet (*rkang pa la phyag btsal*), and offers a mandala (*mandala byas*) before making a request for teachings or to become a disciple. Bsod nams rtse mo notes here that an elder should not prostrate to the feet of a novice teacher because that would generate "worldly scorn" and "harm the Buddha's teachings."[8] An elder to bow to a novice (or, presumably, a layman) would devalue the time spent maintaining the monastic vows. Bsod rnam rtse mo closes this passage by citing the entirety of verse four from *Fifty Verses* (which advises against bowing to a lay or novice guru in public), but he does not explicitly address the question of bowing to a lay lama in his own milieu. Reading between the lines, we might wonder if this reluctance had anything to do with his own status as a prominent layman living in the monastic college of Gsang phu. Perhaps to maintain propriety, Bsod nams rtse mo thus follows the normative monastic *vinaya* and indicates that an elder monk should not prostrate to a novice or layman. As we will see in more detail below, Bsod nams rtse mo's younger brother Grags pa rgyal mtshan, took issue with the provision against bowing to a lay lama.

Tantric Foundational Practices

While living at Gsang phu, Bsod nams rtse mo also composed an *ādikarma* compendium called *Sequence of Beginner Activities for Traversing the Gradual Path* (*Dang po'i las can gyi bya ba'i rim pa dang lam rim bgrod tshul*) or, more succinctly, *Beginner Activities*.[9] Just as in the Sanskrit

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[5] Davidson indicates that this text was composed while Bsod nams rtse mo lived at Gsang phu. *Tibetan Renaissance*, 342.

[6] "All told, the few available hints in the compositions of Sönam Tsémo point to his increasing involvement with the esoteric corpus, identifying its central themes, surrounding it with the appropriate ritual expressions that had been missing in his father's work, and bringing it into the mainstream of Sakyapa monastic practice." Ibid., 342.

[7] *Gateway to the Dharma* was written in 1167. Ibid., 367-69. The text begins with introductory Buddhist topics, and then transitions into a narrative history of the Buddha's previous incarnations, his life story, and the development of Buddhism in India following his death. The historiographical focus culminates in the colophon, with a plea to remain diligent in the face of numerous challenges facing contemporary Buddhist communities. (See: 39, fn. 1.)

[8] "If one is an elder, do not prostrate to the feet of a novice. If you ask why: because it would bring about worldly criticism and harm the Buddha's teachings." (*gal te bdag ni rgan la | de gsar bur gyur na rkang pa la phyag mi btsal lo | de ci'i phyir zhe na | 'jig rten pa dag smod pa'i phyir te des bstan pa la gnod pa'i phyir ro | Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo*, 580.5.)

[9] In *Sa skya bka' 'bum*, pod ga pa (Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2006), 617-634.

compendia, this text outlines a day-long period of intensive ritual practice.[10] Bsod nams rtse mo may have even composed the text based on instructions he received from a visiting pandit:

> I will strive to compose, according to the guru's instructions, the ritual activities for the sake of beginner who have received the Hevajra initiation.[11]

Bsod nams rtse mo opens by stating that the *ādikarma* practices are meant for beginners (*dang po'i las can*) in the Hevajra system.[12] For Bsod nams rtse mo, the *ādikarma* rites were for lay persons or monastics setting out on the tantric path, but the mention of the Hevajra initiation indicates that this text may have had a more specific audience than some of the Indian *ādikarma* compendiums. The location of the practitioner at the very beginning of the path also suggests that here the *ādikarma* practices may have been a preliminary stage for more advanced practice.

Beginner Activities begins with instructions for visualizing Hevajra at the center of the mandala, his consort Nairātmyā, and then the rest of the deities in his retinue.[13] Just after this multi-faceted mandala complex has been generated, however, the practitioner is immediately instructed to imaginatively invite (*spyan drangs*) the lama, buddhas, and bodhisattvas to the space in front of the mandala.[14] Insofar as the Hevajra mandala and visualized lama (together with the buddhas and bodhisattvas) both serve as objects of worship for the subsequent ritual practices, their roles appear somewhat redundant. In the prostration rite (*phyag 'tshal ba*) that immediately follows, Bsod nams rtse mo is thus compelled to specify that it is the lama is who is worshipped first:

> As for the prostration rite: first, bow to the lama. Touch all the limbs to the ground, and clearly imagine that you touch the feet of the lama.[15]

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[10] In *Beginner Activities*, one is also meant to begin the ritual activities immediately after waking up. After the performance of an ablution practice (*khrus*), the sequence here emphasizes the seven branches, making offerings to various deities (including Jambhalā and Hārītī), and performing other types of meritorious Buddhist rites. In the colophon, Bsod nams rtse mo provides a further Indic patina by using the Sanskrit translation of his name, *Puṇyāgra* ("Supreme Merit").

[11] *kye yi rdo rje 'dir dbang bskur | dang po'i las can la phan phyir | de yi bya ba bla ma yi | gsung bzhin 'bad pas bri bar bya | Las dang po pa'i bya ba*, 618.1-2. At the end of the text, Bsod nams rtse mo reiterates that the ritual practices are meant for "those who have entered the Hevajra path." (*kye yi rdo rje'i lam 'jug dag*; Ibid., 633.5.)

[12] In *Precious Garland*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan also notes that the text was written in order to "safeguard beginners" (*dang po las can rjes su gzung ba'i phyir | Chos spyod*, 504.1.)

[13] *dbus su | oṃ śrī hevajra namaḥ zhes brjod pas bcom ldan 'das skad cig gis dmigs te | Las dang po pa'i bya ba*, 620.5

[14] "The lama, buddhas, and bodhisattvas are invited with a light syllable from his or her heart. Imagine that they remain in the sky, in front of the mandala." (*bla ma dang sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' thams cad spyan drangs te | dkyil 'khor gyi mdun gyi nam mkhar bzhugs par bsam par bya'o | Las dang po pa'i bya ba*, 622.2-3.)

[15] *de nas phag 'tshal ba ni | thog mar bla ma la btsal te | yan lag thams cad sa la gtugs shing dang ba dang bla ma'i zhabs la gtugs par bsam*; Ibid., 622.3

This passage calls for physical prostrations, but the presence of lama is only imagined (*bsam*). Bsod nams rtse mo prioritizes the worship of the lama, only mentioning the mandala deities later in this section. Indeed, the co-presence of the tantric deity and deified lama seemingly forces Bsod nams rtse mo to repeatedly clarify that the lama ought to be worshiped first. The lama is designated as the first recipient of offerings (*dbul ba*), nectar (in the *bdud rtsi myang ba'i cho ga*), and praises (*bstod pa*). In the section on making offerings, Bsod nams rtse mo pauses to explicitly reflect on the sequential relationship between venerating the deity and lama. For those whose tradition (*lugs*) invites the deity and lama together, then one can venerate them at the same time. But, he continues, "if they are invited individually, then one should first make offerings to the lama" (*thog mar bla ma la dbul*).[16] As in Anupamavajra's *Light on the Foundational Practices*, where the *gurumaṇḍala* rite is prioritized over the deity mandala, here too the ritualized worship of the lama is meant to be done first.

In *Beginner Activities*, the juxtaposition of deity and lama speaks to a tension in nascent Tibetan schools that were formed within a specific tantric lineage (in this case Hevajra), but also increasingly oriented towards the office of the lama. In some ritual genres, including preliminary practices, mandala rites centered on the tantric deity eventually gave way to the visualization of the lama in the manner of a deity—a crucial trope for the emergence of guru yoga. Guru yoga or in more literal terms "unifying with the lama" (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*) provided an elegant solution for the somewhat awkward co-presence of the visualized deity and lama, as it simply merges the two objects of veneration. Although it was Sa skya Paṇḍita who popularized this rite in the Sa skya lineage (see chapter five), we do see a hint of this practice here in *Beginner Activities*.[17]

Precious Garland

Grags pa rgyal mtshan, Bsod nams tse mo's younger brother, also composed a compendium of foundational practices closely modeled on the Indic genre: the *Precious Garland of Dharma Practices* (*Chos spyod rin chen phreng ba*).[18] Bsod nams rtse mo may have received instructions on the *ādikarma* rites directly from an Indian pandit, but Grags pa rgyal mtshan takes more of a scholastic approach to the topic: citing texts such as the *Kuḍṛṣtinirghātana* and providing a comprehensive overview of all the different ways of performing mandala offerings. The compendium indicates that the mandala offering can be made to the lama (even though it does

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[16] "Regarding the offering: According to the tradition of inviting the deity and lama together, it is best to make a single offering, as one would to the deity. If they are invited separately, then offer first to the lama." (*de nas dbul ba ni lha dang bla ma tha mi dad du spyan drangs pa'i lugs ltar na dus gcig tu lha la phul ba ltar phul bas chog | so sor spyan drans na thog mar bla ma la dbul te* | Ibid., 623.5-6.)

[17] Guru yoga itself is not found in *Beginner's Activities*, although the idea of "unifying with the lama" is described at the end of the ritual sequence. After the mandala deities are dismissed with the standard mantra *oṃ vajra mu*, the practitioner also dissolves (*bsdus*) the visualization of the lama, buddhas, and bodhisattvas. The moment of dissolution in the ritual sequence mirrors the dismissal of the deities, yet here the "imagined [lama] dissolves into oneself." (*bskyed pa rnams rang la bsdus*; Ibid., 630.6.) The implication of this "subjective turn" will be explored more fully below in chapters five and six, when looking at the rise of the guru yoga genre in Tibet.

[18] In *Sa skya bka 'bum*, pod ta pa (Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2006): 511-546.

not use the term *gurumaṇḍala*).[19] Grags pa rgyal mtshan is particularly thorough in this section, as he ties the various ways of performing the mandala offering to specific Indic figures, such as the pandit Dze tā ri.[20] The depth of knowledge demonstrated on this topic suggests that the mandala rite was already well-established in the Sa skya ritual curriculum.[21]

Grags pa rgyal mtshan next discusses the benefit (*phan yon*) that accrues from performing the mandala rite. He begins with the passage used in the Sanskrit *ādikarma* compendiums that links each step in the mandala rite with one of the six perfections. This verse might have been especially significant for Grags pa rgyal mtshan, who (like his older brother) was concerned with defending the tantric path against proponents of the the path of perfections.[22] Equating the mandala—a key ritual technology in tantric systems—with the six perfections was a way of framing the rite in an acceptable idiom. Grags pa rgyal mtshan also briefly cites Advayavarja's *Kuḍṛṣtinirghātana* in this section, suggesting that copies of this work had circulated as far as Sa skya by the mid-twelfth century.[23] As we will see below, Grags pa rgyal mtshan may have been influenced by Advayavajra's rhetorical style, as he also uses the idea of a buddha performing everyday rites to confirm their importance for ordinary practitioners.[24]

In the colophon of *Precious Garland*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan indicates that the Buddha is the source of the *ādikarma* practices and that he has simply organized the topics found in this compendium:

> Although just the outline is my own words, since that also is based on the words of the Buddha, it is not contemptible. [If] a supreme medicine were to suddenly appear in the hand of a doctor, its [healing] power would arise through the doctor; it would not

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[19] "Imagine that Mount Sumeru, the four continents, and the eight intermediate continents are filled with the seven precious jewels, the eight great treasures, together with the sun and moon and various gems. One ought to offer it to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, the lama, or the dharma—whichever is suitable." (*'di rnams ni ri rab dang | gling bzhi dang | gling phran brgyad dang | rin po che sna bdun dang | gter chen po brgyad dang | nyi ma dang | zla ba dang bcas pa rin po che sna tshogs kyis bkang bar dmigs te | sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa 'am | bla ma'am | chos sam | gang yang rung ba la dbul bar bya'o | Chos spyod*, 519.2-3.)

[20] The number of heaps (*tshom bu*) used in the offering vary from seven to twenty-three. The elaborate style with twenty-three piles is attributed to a lama named Rdo rje gdan pa, and the one with seventeen to master Dze tā ri. The latter figure is surely Guhyajetāri, who is also named as the author of a short *maṇḍalavidhi* in the Tibetan canon and the compiler of the **Ādikarmikabhūmipariṣkāra* (Tib. *Las dang po pa'i sa sbyang ba*), D 4494 pho, 51b.4-53b.1.

[21] Grags pa rgyal mtshan's nephew, Sa skya Paṇḍita, formally categorized the mandala offering to the lama as a "preliminary rite" (*sbyor ba'i cho ga*) in his *Profound Path of Guru Yoga*, stating: "the seven-piled mandala, or others, is offered again and again." (*mandala tshom bu bdun pa la sogs pa yang yang dbul*; *Lam zab mo bla ma'i rnal 'byor bzhugs so*, 192.3.) This text is discussed in detail in chapter five.

[22] Grags pa rgyal mtshan also wrote *Jeweled Tree for the Realization of Tantra* (*Rgyud kyi mngon par rtogs pa rin po che'i ljon shing*) to complete his older brother's work on tantric hermeneutics.

[23] *Chos spyod*, 521.6-522.1

[24] As discussed in chapter one, Advayavajra is adamant that the foundational practices are not just meant for beginners but for every level of practitioner. Even those who have reached end of the path (*aśaikṣa*) are said to perform the *ādikarma* rites, just as Śākyamuni automatically performed activities for others as an outflow of his enlightenment. One can take such statements in prescriptive or apologetic terms. In the latter case, Advayavajra's comments suggests that the foundational practices are particularly important for beginners.

bring harm. In this way, even though I am the one who gathered together the Buddha's instructions, they are untainted by fault—indeed, these are the teachings of the Victorious One![25]

Grags pa rgyal mtshan uses a time-honored Buddhist metaphor to account for his own presentation of the foundational practices. The teachings of the Buddha are akin to a powerful medicine because of their ability to eradicate suffering, but they still need to be administered by a qualified teacher in order to be beneficial. Śākyamuni is no longer alive, so the teacher-cum-doctor is none other than Grags pa rgyal mtshan himself and the foundational practices are the healing medicine.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's role as the compiler of *Precious Garland* raises the question of agency in the composition of Buddhist texts. Even as the "doctor" (*sman pa*), Grags pa rgyal mtshan appears to be concerned about the possibility of presenting the Buddha's teachings in a manner that could be considered contemptible (*smad*), harmful (*gnod*), or wrong (*nyes pa*). The reassurance that he has not added anything substantial to his sources is all the more significant in light of the well-known Tibetan antipathy against being creative when composing a text.[26] In his commentary to *Fifty Verses on the Guru*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan addresses the similar possibility that the Indian pandit Vāpilla "made up" (*rang bzo*) the methods for venerating the guru. In this case, Grags pa rgyal mtshan confirms that these methods were "drawn from the many stainless tantras" taught be the Buddha.[27] Likewise, his own compendium of foundational practices relays the Buddha's teachings in a manner that is "untainted by fault" (*nyes pas mi gos*). Grags pa rgyal mtshan thus concludes that the text itself can be considered as "very word of the Buddha" (*rgyal ba'i bka' nyid*).[28]

The Buddha may be the ostensible source of the foundational practices and social codes for venerating the lama, and yet—precisely because these derivative genres are compiled by a human author—they are amenable to personal choice and, in some instances, contestation. In *Precious Garland*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan focuses on the offering mandala, a rite that is not even mentioned in his older brother's compendium. As we will now see, Grags pa rgyal mtshan

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[25] *mtshams sbyor tsam zhig bdag gi tshig lags kyang | de yang bka' la brten pas smad mi bgyid | sman mchog sman pa'i lag nas byung gyur nas | mthu stobs 'byung 'gyur sman pas gnod mi 'gyur | de bzhin bdag gis bka' rnams bsdebs gyur kyang | nyes pas mi gos rgyal ba'i bka' nyid lags | Chos spyod*, 537.4-5.)

[26] A text or commentary "without personal inventiveness" (*rang bzo med pa*) is, by contrast, more authentic.

[27] "Furthermore, should one ask "Is that explanation made up by [Vāpilla] himself?" [The root text states:] it was taught based on many stainless tantras. If one asks, "But, if it is explained in the tantras, isn't there the fault of repetition?" [As the root text] says "it is a summary," so redundancy is avoided." (*yang shad pa de khyod rang gis rang bzo ma yin nam zhe na | yang dri med rgyud mang las gsungs zhes sbyar ro | 'o na rgyud du gsungs pas chog mod zlos skyon yod do zhe na | mdor bsdus zhes pas zlos skyon spangs pa bstan to | Bla ma bsten pa'i thabs*, 377.5-6.)

[28] As noted by Louis de La Vallée Poussin (1898), there is a connection between these foundational practices and Brahmanical householder rites. Grags pa rgyal mtshan himself may have been unsure of their canonical source, and so he included this passage as an addendum or qualification that confirms they are in line with the teachings of the Buddha. Bsod nams rtse mo, by contrast, appears to have been content to succinctly state at the end of *Beginner Activities* that the practices are presented "according to explanations from the tantras" (*rgyud las gsungs pa bzhin spyod pa*; *Las dang po pa'i bya ba*, 633.4).

emphatically criticizes the provision against bowing to a lay guru in public (made in verse four of *Fifty Verses*), claiming that it renders the root text "contradictory" (*'gal ba*). A statement of this force would be difficult to make about a tantra attributed to Śākyamuni or another buddha.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's Elucidation of the Fifty Verses

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's commentary to *Fifty Verses on the Guru* is primarily focused on bowing as a "preliminary method of veneration" (*sngon du bsnyen bskur ba'i thabs*).[29] He pays the most attention to this issue, all but ignoring the other bodily practices and matters of etiquette.[30] Grags pa rgyal mtshan draws from numerous tantras, Mahāyāna scriptures, and the Śrāvaka canon to support the claim that prostrations to the lama are a universal practice that does not depend on ordination status or seniority.[31] The majority of citations do not directly assert that monks should bow to a lay lama, but all of his arguments support precisely support this idea. In these passages, exalted beings—buddhas, advanced bodhisattvas, and senior monks—are described bowing to a lama or an "ordinary master" (*so so skye bo'i slob dpon*).[32] Each example concludes with the statement "what need to mention?" (*lta smos kyang ci dgos*) the fact that lesser, ordinary beings should also bow to the lama. Indeed, for Grags pa rgyal mtshan, everyone—from beginners to buddhas—ought to prostrate to the lama.

Even Buddhas Prostrate to the Lama

Even in his analysis of *Fifty Verses*' opening homage (*mchod brjod*), Grags pa rgyal mtshan connects the doctrine of cause and effect (*las rgyud 'bras*) with the importance of venerating the lama. Not to prostrate would be akin to holding a materialist position, an abhorrent non-Buddhist

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[29] The full title is *Elucidation of Fifty Verses: Methods for Relying on the Lama* (*Bla ma bsten pa'i thabs shlo ga lnga bcu pa'i gsal byed*), in *Sa skya bka 'bum*, pod cha pa (Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2006): 373-400. A study and translation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's commentary was completed by Ishwor Chandra Vidya Sagar Shrestha, "The Politics of Devotion: Grags pa rGyal mTshan's Theory of Guru Worship," (MA Thesis, Centre for Buddhist Studies at Rangjung Yeshe Institute, Kathmandu University, 2013). In the opening page of this study, Shrestha hypothesizes that Grags pa rgyal mtshan's text was not only meant to govern Buddhist practice within the halls of Sa skya, but also to "establish the legitimacy of [the] Sa skya sect led by lay gurus" to a broader audience.

[30] For Grags pa rgyal mtshan, the bodily practices such as standing up in the lama's presence, and so forth, can all be understood based on the root text itself, so he summarizes these sections of the *Fifty Verses* in just a handful of folios: "After section four on 'The validity of relying on a lama', the words of the text are not explained in detail because one can understand based on the text itself." (*spyi don bzhi pa bla ma bsten pa'i tshad pa dang bcas pa man chad kyi gzhung gi 'bru rnams ni gzhung nyid kyi steng du zhib tu rtogs par bya'o*; *Bla ma bsten pa'i thabs*, 393.2-3.)

[31] Grags pa rgyal mtshan cites tantric scriptures that present buddhas, *tathāgata*s, and tenth-level bodhisattvas bowing to their teacher. Grags pa rgyal mtshan appears to have strategically chosen texts from different classes of tantric scriptures (*Caryā*, *Yoginī*, and **Niruttarayoga*) as a way of making the commentary appear especially comprehensive, especially as it is followed with citations from Mahāyāna and Śrāvaka texts.

[32] Grags pa rgyal mtshan unfortunately does not specify what he means by "ordinary master" (*so so'i skye bo'i slob dpon*), and it is an uncommon term for describing a Buddhist teacher. It may specify that a teacher is not considered an *arya* or advanced bodhisattva but, given the context of *Fifty Verses*, it could also mean "layman." (It might also indicate the presence of a flesh-and-blood lama, in contrast to the *dharmakāya*.) The three terms *bla ma*, *slob dpon tha mal pa*, and *so so skye bo'i slob dpon* are used interchangeably throughout the commentary.

view that denies the workings of karma. In this sense, Buddhist identity itself is dependent on prostrating to the lama:

> The one who has faith in karmic cause and effect avoids even the smallest misdeed. The Cārvāka (and others who repudiate karmic causality) do not perform prostrations, and so forth. If one wonders, "Does this master adhere to the authentic worldly view of cause and effect?" one knows through the opening homage. To this point, it is through [the statement] "prostrating at the lotus feet of the lama" that [the author] who has faith in cause and effect shows that if there is an extraordinary cause, there is an extraordinary result. This demonstrates an understanding of the authentic worldly view.[33]

Not to venerate the lama in the opening homage would be to contravene the doctrine of cause and effect. A knowledgeable author thus begins by prostrating to the lotus feet of the lama. The student ought to do so too, Grags pa rgyal mtshan continues, for that very act results in the "attainment of the state of glorious Vajrasattva."[34] As the lama is the extraordinary cause of awakening, an extraordinary result also comes about through prostrating in that direction. In this opening passage, venerating the lama is linked to a fundamental aspect of Buddhist doctrine and because progress on the path depends on the lama's tutelage, it makes perfect sense to prostrate.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan next turns to verses three through five of *Fifty Verses*. All three of these verses describe prostration practice, beginning with the statement from the root text that "having approached, the *tathāgata*s abiding in the world realms of the ten directions prostrate to the vajra master who has received the supreme initiation at the three times."[35] As bowing is a standard way of indicating hierarchy, the idea that buddhas—beings at the very pinnacle of the Buddhist order—also prostrate needs to be explained. Grags pa rgyal mtshan thus presents a series of tantric scriptures that account for why buddhas and bodhisattvas would prostrate to a human teacher, even an ordinary master or lama.[36] First, he cites the *Vajra Uṣṇīṣa*, a well-known Action Tantra (Skt. *kriyātantra*; Tib. *bya ba'i rgyud*) that includes a brief explanation for why Śākyamuni Buddha prostrates to the previous buddha of this eon, Dīpaṃkara:

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[33] *de la dang po ni las rgyud 'bras la yid ches pa ste | nyes pa rdul phra rab tsam la yang 'dzem mo | rgyang 'phen pa la sogs pa ni las rgyud 'bras la skur pa 'debs pa yin la | des phyag 'tshal ba la sogs pa mi 'dod do | slob dpon 'di lo ga pa'i yang dag pa'i lta ba rgyud 'bras la yid ches pa cis shes she na | mchod brjod byas pas shes pa yin te | 'dir bla ma'i zhabs kyi padma la phyag btsal bas rgyu khyad par can yod pas na 'bras bu khyad par can yod par bstan pa las rgyu 'bras la yid ches pas 'jig rten pa'i yang dag pa'i lta ba rtogs par bstan pa'o | Lnga bcu pa'i gsal byed*, 376.4-6.

[34] *dpal ldan rdo rje sems dpa'i gnas thob pa'i rgyur gyur pa yin*; Ibid., 377.4-5.

[35] *abhiṣekāgralabdho hi vajrācārya tathāgataiḥ | daśadiklokadhātusthais trikālam etya vandyate*; *Gurupañcāśikā* v. 2, ed. Szántó 2013: 446. The motif of the *tathāgata*s bowing to the guru who has received initiation is reminiscent of the enlightenment narrative in the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha*. After gathering at the *bodhimaṇḍa* and guiding the soon-to-be Buddha Sarvārthasiddhi through the ritual processes that result in his awakening, the *tathāgata*s of the ten directions venerate him. *Two Esoteric Sutras: The Adamantine Pinnacle Sutra & The Susiddhikara Sutra*, trans. by Rolf W. Giebel (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2001), 24.

[36] The repeated use terms for "ordinary" (*so so'i skye bo* and *tha mal pa*) may reinforce Grags pa rgyal mtshan's argument that ordination status and seniority should not determine whether the lama is a valid object of worship.

> Vajra master Dīpaṃkara is the master of all the buddhas in this excellent eon. At an earlier time, Śākyamuni was King Bestowing Grace in the City Endowed with Qualities, and the Buddha Dīpaṃkara was the bodhisattva, Beautiful Moon. Śākyamuni gave rise to bodhicitta so [Dīpaṃkara] was also his "*bodhicitta* preceptor." Later, when Dīpaṃkara became a buddha, he was the master of Śākyamuni and others. In this fortunate eon, buddhas, such as Śākyamuni, that dwell in the worlds of the ten directions always prostrate to Dīpaṃkara, for the sake of returning his kindness.[37]

In a previous life, Śākyamuni met Dīpaṃkara when he was the bodhisattva Beautiful Moon (*zla mdzes*). Dīpaṃkara is the paradigmatic Buddhist master of this eon, and even after Śākyamuni accomplished buddhahood he still prostrates to return his kindnesses. The takeaway comes at the end of this passage, when Grags pa rgyal mstan provides his own conclusion: "Accordingly, what need to mention that those future students who are common, ordinary beings prostrate to the master?"[38] Grags pa rgyal mtshan uses this rhetorical refrain throughout the text, concluding after each passage that lesser disciples should of course prostrate to the lama.[39]

Grags pa rgyal mtshan next draws from the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* (*sGyu ma bde mchog*) to provide another way of understanding verse three of *Fifty Verses*. Even though the root text reads "*tathāgatas* prostrate," Grags pa rgyal mtshan states that this actually means "bodhisattvas prostrate" because the word *tathāgatas* is a metonym (the five *tathāgatas* sit on the crown atop a bodhisattva's head).[40] The tenth-level bodhisattvas who prostrate have of course given rise to the mindset of benefiting all beings. As Buddhist masters work for the benefit of others by granting initiations and teaching the dharma, they lighten this task (*khur phri*) and, out of gratitude for this assistance, the bodhisattvas prostrate. Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides a familial metaphor to illustrate this point:

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[37] *rdo rje slob dpon mar me mdzad de bskal pa bzang po 'di la sangs rgyas rnams kyi slob dpon yin te | de yang shākya thub pa grong kyer yon tan ldan par rgyal po dpal byin du gyur pa'i tshe | de bzhin gshegs pa mar me mdzad byang chub sems dpa' zla mdzes su gyur pa la sākya thub kyis sems bskyed byas pa'i sems bskyed pa'i 'ang slop dpon yin la | phyis mar me mdzad sangs rgyas pa'i tshe yang shākya thub la sogs pa rnams kyi ston par gyur pa'o | mar me mdzad de la bskal pa bzang po 'di la sangs rgyas pa'i de bzhin gshegs pa shākya thub la sogs pa'i gnas phyogs bcu'i 'jig rten gyi khams na bzhugs pa rnams kyis slop dpon mar me mdzad la drin lan bsab ba'i phyir dus gsum du phyag 'tshal ba'o*; *Lnga bcu pa'i gsal byed,* 379.3-6.

[38] *de bzhin du ma 'ongs pa'i so so skye bo tha mal pa'i slob mas slob dpon la phyag 'tshal ba smos ci dgos*; Ibid., 379.6-380.1

[39] The conclusion that Śākyamuni prostrates to Dīpaṃkara is conjoined with the conclusion that ordinary students also prostrate to the lama. In two succeeding sentences the final word is "prostration" (*phyag 'tshal ba*), setting up a type of "twin-*alaṃkāra*" (*yamaka alaṃkāra*), wherein the same word is used twice in close succession as a way of emphasizing the interplay between the two statements. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's rhetorical style could be considered as an inverted "philosophical-*alaṃkāra*" (*arthāntaranyāsa alaṃkāra*). Normally, is such an argument, a general rule is followed with a specific example, but here we see the opposite pattern. The limit case establishes the validity of a more general statement, leading to the conclusion that of course ordinary students also prostrate to the master.

[40] *de bzhin gshegs pas phyag 'tshal ba ni byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyis phyag 'tshal ba'o | byang chub sems dpas phyag byas pas de bzhin gshegs pas phyag byas par cir 'gro zhe na | byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyi dbu la de bzhin gshegs pa lnga bzhugs pas byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyis phyag byas pa'i dus su de rnams kyis kyang byas par 'gro ba'o*; *Lnga bcu pa'i gsal byed,* 380.3-4.

> For example, consider a person who has many children, but they are individually raised by various family members. At a later time, since the mother and father entrusted [their kids] to those caretakers, the parents will thank them, saying things like "You helped by raising our kids and lightening our workload!"[41]

Just as tired parents appreciate help with their kids, tenth-level bodhisattvas are grateful for the work that the ordinary master (*slob dpon tha mal pa*) does to benefit beings. Grags pa rgyal mtshan again closes his argument with the refrain "what need to mention that an ordinary disciple would prostrate to a master."[42] The use of the phrase "what need to mention" (*lta smos kyang ci dgos*) at the end of each passage indicates that Grags pa rgyal mtshan is building a broader argument for why everyone should bow to the lama.

A third tantric perspective is drawn from the *Guhyasamāja* and *Vajrapañjara* tantras. In these texts, the phrase "*tathāgatas* prostrate to the vajra master who has received the supreme initiation," indicates that the lama has completely received the four empowerments (*dbang bzhi yongs su rdzogs pa*). Grags pa rgyal mtshan then asks the reader to imagine a surprising situation in which a student received initiation from a teacher and then with tremendous diligence "gains enlightenment before the master" (*slob ma sngon du sangs rgyas*). Even as a buddha, the student still prostrates as a way of recognizing the teacher's kindness:

> First, having obtained initiation from their own master, [and] through practicing with tremendous diligence, a student gained enlightenment before [the master]. The student nevertheless directly prostrates, at the three times, in order to repay the kindness of the lama who did not obtain buddhahood, due to having less diligence. The *tathāgata*s of the past prostrated to the masters of the past. It will be just like that in the future, and it is like that now.[43]

Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides another rationale for why *tathāgatas* might bow to a master who is an ordinary being, even a very lazy one (*so so skye bo le lo che ba*). The master is the one who initially bestowed initiation on this fortunate disciple, and just because the student accomplished enlightenment before the master does not mean that the lama should be forgotten. As in the case of Śākyamuni bowing to Dīpaṃkara, the student prostrates in order to repay the kindness of the master. Just to make sure the reader does not think this only applies to teachers and students of the past, it is stated that it is like this in the past, present, and future. Prostrations are thus presented as a universal way of expressing gratitude across the three times. This citation again concludes with the statement declaring that if the *tathāgatas* bow to an ordinary master (*so*

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[41] *dper na mi gcig la bu mang po yod pa la kho'i nye du rnams kyis bu re re gsos te | phyis cher tshar tsa na pha ma de la gtad pas pha mas mi rnams la gtang rag khyed kyis nged kyi bu gso ba'i grogs byas te khur 'phri'o zhes gtang rag gtong ba lta bu'o*; Ibid., 381.2-3.

[42] *slob ma tha mal pas slob dpon la phyag 'tshal ba lta smos kyang ci dgos zhes pa'i don to*; Ibid., 381.3-4.

[43] *dang po rang gi slop dpon las dbang thob nas brtson 'grus drag pos bsgrub pa byas pas slop ma sngon du sangs rgyas | brtson 'grus chung bas bla ma sangs rgyas ma thob pa la drin lan bsab pa'i phyir dus gsum du dngos su phyag 'tshal te | 'das pa'i slob dpon rnams la 'das pa'i de bzhin gshegs pa rnams kyis phyag 'tshal ba la | ma 'ongs pa dang da lta ba'ang de dang dra'o*; Ibid., 381.5-382.1.

so skye bo'i slob dpon), why mention the imperative that ordinary students (*tha mal pa'i slob ma*) also prostrate.

Ultimately, the various reasons why buddhas, *tathāgatas*, and tenth-level bodhisattvas prostrate to the Buddhist master or lama, are meant to strengthen the argument that ordinary students should also prostrate to a master. All three passages first cite scripture to establish the validity of a limit case—the buddhas and so forth prostrating to the master—and then use that as a basis for concluding that ordinary students prostrating to a teacher is self-evident. Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not get into the specifics of just who these ordinary disciples might be, but in a second series of arguments, he includes examples of a monk prostrating to a layman.

Hidden Qualities

Up to this point, Grags pa rgyal mtshan has exclusively drawn from tantric scriptures. Now, he provides a second series of citations that confirm the lama is an appropriate object of worship regardless of ordination status or seniority. The passages from Mahāyāna and Śrāvaka scriptures suggest that any being might have hidden qualities that make them worthy recipients of a bow. From a Mahāyāna perspective, appearances can be deceiving, so even an ordinary-looking lama could just as well be an advanced bodhisattva. Grags pa rgyal mtshan refutes counterarguments that pertain to a "Śrāvaka" way of looking at the surface level of things, as in some cases even arhats are said to bow to bodhisattvas who are householders. The Buddha himself was previously incarnated as a Rabbit and the King of Geese, so animals are also potentially worthy of veneration. Grags pa rgyal mtshan uses Buddhist literature from all three vechiles to present the reader with a singular conclusion: any lama—even a layperson—is a suitable recipient of prostrations, even from monks.[44]

Grags pa rgyal mtshan draws from Mahāyāna sutras that reject the idea that monastic seniority should govern the directionality of prostration practice. In these citations, doctrinal claims are used in conjunction with narrative explanations, such that an initial statement such as "A bodhisattva of the Great Vehicle prostrates to everyone" is followed with an account of the senior student Maudgalyāyana declaring to the Buddha, "Oh Bhagavan, I shall prostrate to all bodhisattvas, beginning with those who have just given rise to *bodhicitta*!" In this case, a senior practitioner sets a precedent for using *bodhicitta* as the criterium for prostrating. In a similar example from the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, a great bodhisattva is depicted "prostrating with his entire body" to a novice (*sar bu*).[45] The awakening mind (*bodhicitta*) is the ultimate factor in both of these

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[44] Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not explicitly discuss his own social context at Sa skya. The repeated statements that we cannot rely on ordination status or seniority alone in order to make an accurate judgement about the status of the lama, combined with the citations that describe monks bowing to layman and the negative evaluation of *Fifty Verses* itself all support the impression that the acceptability of monks bowing to a lay lama is the precise conclusion we are meant to reach.

[45] *dang po ni 'phags pa lhag pa'i bsam pa bskul ba'i mdo las byang chub sems dpa'i theg pa'i gang zag thams cad la phyag bya'i zhes gsungs pa dang | bu mo 'od bzang gis zhus pa'i theg pa chen po'i mdo las kyang | btsun pa mong gal gyi bu chen pos gsol pa | bcom ldan 'das bdag sems dang po bskyed pa'i byang chub sems dpa' las brtsams te byang chub sems dpa' 'di thams cad la phyag bgyi'o zhes gsungs so | sdong po bkod pa las dra byi la'i sprin byang chub sems dpa' chen po yin yang | 'phags pa nor bzang gsar bu la lus thams cad bab pa'i phyag byas pa lta bu ste* | Ibid., 385.2-4.

examples, taking precedence over other considerations such as monastic seniority. Anyone who has given rise to *bodhicitta* is considered a worthy object of prostration, no matter their age or ordination status. As a standard for determining the directionality of prostrations, Grags pa rgyal mtshan suggests in these passages that the office of the lama might be held in the same regard as the mind of awakening: "If a senior bodhisattva prostrates to one who has just given rise to the mind of awakening, then why wouldn't he prostrate to the lama? Indeed, he does."[46] In a move that is now familiar, Grags pa rgyal mtshan builds on a citation by using a rhetorical question to advance his desired conclusion: if a great bodhisattva would physically prostrate to a novice (who has given rise to *bodhicitta*), then of course he would do the same towards the lama.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan next asserts, somewhat audaciously, that the Śrāvaka canon does not actually bar monks from bowing to householders. Even though he acknowledges that the monastic *vinaya* itself states that only the Buddha and elder monastics are acceptable objects (*yul*) of prostrations, he asserts that the *Ornament of the Buddha's Thought* (*Munimatālaṃkāra*), expresses the true intention of the *vinaya*:

> The Buddha said: "Arhat monks must prostrate to those buddhas and bodhisattvas who are not ordained, and who maintain the appearance of householders, perceiving them as a buddha."[47]

From the perspective of the *Ornament of the Buddha's Thought* (a Mahāyāna text), arhats are meant to worship householders, perceiving them as the Buddha (*ston pa 'du shes pa*).[48] As in *Fifty Verses on the Guru*, the imaginative or mental faculty of mind is used to facilitate what would otherwise be proscribed. In *Fifty Verses*, one is meant to place down a religious text or statue and then "mentally" (*buddhyā*) worship. In *Ornament of the Buddha's Thought*, no object is needed, just a shift in perception. Grags pa rgyal mtshan uses this passage to argue that even monks are in fact allowed to prostrate to lay householders.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan uses Mahāyāna citations and *Ornament of the Buddha's Thought* to include novice monks and householders as acceptable objects of prostration. At the close of the section, he draws the various threads together, imagining that an interlocutor asks: "Why is it the case that a fully ordained monk prostrates to all householders who have merely given rise to *bodhicitta*?" The answer here is that some of them "abide on the *bhūmis*," while others have "received a prophecy of their future enlightenment."[49] In short, we do not know the depths of a teacher based on their external appearance, ordination status, or level of seniority. Even animals,

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[46] *sems bskyed pa ma thag la'ang byang chub sems dpa' rgan pos phyag 'tshal ba yin na bla ma la ci'i phyir mi 'tshal te phyag 'tshal ba nyid yin pa dang*; Ibid., 385.4-5.

[47] *bcom ldan 'das byang chub sems dpa' bsnyen par ma rdzogs pa dang khyim pa'i cha lugs 'dzin pa la yang ston par 'du shes pas dge slong dgra bcom pa rnams kyis phyag bya'o zhes thub pa dgongs pa'i rgyan las gsungs so*; Ibid., 386.3-4. The *Munimatālaṃkāra* was written by the eleventh-century abbot of Vikramaśīla, Abhayākaragupta.

[48] The term "teacher" (Skt. *śāstṛ*; Tib. *ston pa*) is a common epithet for the Buddha.

[49] *ci byang chub tu sems bskyed pa tsam kyis khyim pa kun la yang rab tu byung bas phyag byas pa yin nam zhe na | yin par brjod par bya | gang dag sa la bzhugs pa dang | lung bstan pa yin par thos pa*; *Lnga bcu pa'i gsal byed*, 387.1-2.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan continues, are sometimes worthy of veneration. In previous incarnations, the future Buddha Śākyamuni was the Rabbit and the Kings of Geese (*ri bong dang ngang pa'i rgyal po*). Insofar as it would make sense to prostrate to a bodhisattva, even in the form of a rabbit or goose, he again concludes "why even mention the need to also [prostrate] to those in human form?"[50] Closing the subsection in this trademark style, Grags pa rgyal mtshan offers a final rhetorical question that is meant to prove his broader point: any layman could be potentially worthy of worship. In the second series of arguments, Grags pa rgyal mtshan again starts with a limit case, the surprising idea of bowing to an ordinary-looking layman or an animal, and then widens it in scope. Again, he concludes, any teacher might be deserving of prostrations because of a hidden quality (i.e., *bodhicitta*, abiding on a *bhūmi*, or receiving a prophecy).

At Sa skya Monastery

Grags pa rgyal mtshan never directly says that monks should bow to a lay lama at Sa skya or that the monastic hierarchy will no longer work in his institution. Nevertheless, he is very straightforward that the provision made in verse four of *Fifty Verses*—that a monastic should only make mental obeisances to the lay guru—renders Vāpilla's root text contradictory.[51] Indeed, all of the previous passages have been brought to bear on this precise point. Furthermore, in glossing verse four from *Fifty Verses*, he supplies the terms "monk or fully ordained one" (*dge slong nga'am rab tu byung ba*), even though they are only implied in the root text. Grags pa rgyal mtshan disagrees with Vāpilla, even as he sidesteps the Indian pandit's tacit indication that the reason for this caution is that the lay guru was controversial in medieval India. The commentarial format instead allows him to address this idea through scriptural exegesis.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan also appears to have departed from the views of Bsod nams tse mo in his interpretation of *Fifty Verses on the Guru*. In fact, while his older brother cites verse four of *Fifty Verses* in support of a normative hierarchy, Grags pa rgyal mtshan suggests the opposite view: it is perfectly fine for a monastic to bow to a layman or novice. We do not have a full picture of Bsod nams rtse mo's stance (and it may have been informed by his location at Gsang phu), so cannot assume too much of a discrepancy between the two brothers. The colophon of *Elucidation of Fifty Verses* provides another piece of evidence that Grags pa rgyal mtshan interpreted verse four in the way he saw fit.

> From 'Brog and Mal gyo, [teachings on *Fifty Verses*] came down in succession, and as only a bit was written in the presence of the All-Pervasive Glory, the Lord of Sa skya, the Supreme Son Bsod nams—it was expanded upon by me. May there be enlightenment![52]

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[50] *gang dag ri bong dang ngang pa'i rgyal po la sogs dud 'gror gyur pa la yang phyag bya yin na mi la sogs pa rnams la lta smos kyang ci dgos zhes gsungs so*; Ibid., 387.2-3.

[51] *slob dpon 'di nyid kyi gzhung dang yang 'gal bar 'gyur*; Ibid., 387.3

[52] *'brog dang mal gyo dag las rim 'ongs zhing | grags pas kun khyab rje btsun sa skya pa'i | sras mchog bsod nams zhal sngas cung zad bsdebs | rgyas par bdag gis bgyis pas sang rgyas shog*; Ibid., 393.5-6.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes that he expanded upon (*rgyas par bdag gis bgyis*) what he received from his brother, and the forefathers in the Sa skya lineage, the lo tsā was 'Brog mi and Mal gyo.[53] Insofar as he departs from Bsod nams rtse mo's use of *Fifty Verses* and the root text itself, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's copious arguments for why even monastics should prostate to a lay teacher are best read in light of his own longstanding position as the lay abbot. Nevertheless, the work may have also been meant for a Tibetan audience outside of his lineage or even as a polemical response to visiting Indian pandits.[54] Although it may have been necessary to ensure that the monks at Sa skya did not feel compunction bowing to a lay lama, it is also significant that Grags pa rgyal mtshan's arguments and exegesis broadly elevate the status of the lama (no matter who is occupying it). In other words, as ordination status and seniority are not meant to inform the directionality of prostration practice, the *office* of the lama is thereby strengthened. Insofar as the veneration of the lama takes precedence over rules found in the monastic *vinaya*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's commentary provides an excellent example of the way Indic genres and practices were adapted in a new institutional context in Tibet, and yet still framed as traditional.

Conclusion

The resurgence of institutional Buddhism in eleventh- and twelfth-century Tibet sometimes gave rise to apparent paradoxes: tantra was popularized, even as it continued to employ a rhetoric of secrecy; meditation practices that emphasized immediacy were embedded within complex ritual systems; and, as we have seen here, the abbots of Buddhist monasteries were sometimes laymen. At Sa skya Monastery, everyday Buddhist rites were increasingly oriented towards the lama. In Bsod nams rtse mo's *Beginner Activities*, prostration practices and other foundational rites were meant to be done towards the lama first. And in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's commentary to *Fifty Verses*, we see that for the lama stands in for a senior monk at the top of the Buddhist hierarchy. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's tenure marked the end of the era of lay abbots at Sa skya, as institutional authority was soon ceded back to monks.[55] As we will see below, in chapter five, even though lay abbots became less prominent, the protocols that developed during in the twelfth-century period had a lasting impact on later ritual curricula.

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[53] As Mal gyo was a grand-disciple of Rin chen bzang po, it is certainly possible that he received teachings on the *Fifty Verses* from him.

[54] The Tibetan historian Tāranātha records that the visiting Indian monk Vibhutīcandra, for instance, refused to prostrate to Grags pa rgyal mtshan. Cyrus Sterns considers this anecdote suspect, but even its presence in the historical record suggests that it may have been an issue. "The Life and Tibetan Legacy of the Indian *Mahāpaṇḍita* Vibhūticandra," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 133-134.

[55] "With the death of Sachen's fourth and last surviving son, the age of lay teachers at the head of prestigious monasteries filled with monks had mostly passed. From that time forward, the fully ordained monk became the standard against which other forms of spirituality were measured." Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 352.

Chapter 4: Visions of the Guru

In the twelfth century, Bka' brgyud authors framed preliminary a preliminary stage of practice through biography, emphasizing the different ways that the Indian *siddha* Nāropa (11th c.) and his Tibetan disciple, Mar pa chos kyi blo gros (1012-1097), performed hardships (*dka' ba*) in service to the guru. A comparative analysis of three biographical texts written in this milieu—*Stories of the Twelve Hardships of Glorious Nāropa*, the *Biography of Mar pa the Translator*, and the *Life Story of Lord Mar pa*—suggests that the figure of Nāropa provided the basis for an innovative Tibetan tradition of depicting hardships as a preliminary stage of practice.

In *Stories of the Twelve Hardships of Glorious Nāropa*, the presence of the guru Tilopa is integral to the narrative, as he issues the commands that must be followed by his disciple Nāropa, even when they force him to transgress social codes and endure physical pain. These preliminary trials allow Nāropa to gain tremendous insight when Tilopa surprisingly strikes him in the face with a leather sandal at the end of the narrative. The performance of transgressive acts as a stage of preliminary practice is not a common theme in Indian literature, suggesting that the enumeration of Nāropa's twelve distinct hardships was primarily developed by Tibetan authors.

In the *Biography of Mar pa the Translator* and the *Life Story of Lord Mar pa*, two of the earliest biographies about Mar pa, the preliminary stage of practice is fulfilled in a different way. Here, it is the search for the absent guru that constitutes the necessary period of hardships. On Mar pa's final journey to India, he learns that his guru Nāropa is no longer staying in his monastery. Mar pa continues searching for Nāropa, but is unable to find him at first. Instead, he experiences a series of tantalizing visions in which Nāropa appears like a deity in the sky, delivers enigmatic instructions, and then again disappears. In these visions, Nāropa's poetic instructions call attention to the provisional nature of Mar pa's search, reminding him that he has not yet met his goal. Mar pa's biographies thematize the relationship between the search for the guru—as a preliminary stage of hardship—and eventually receiving the guru's blessing (*byin rlabs*) at the end of the narrative.

Nāropa and and Mar pa fulfill their hardships in different ways, although there is a similar structural relationship between a preliminary stage of practice and receiving the blessings of the guru. For the Tibetan authors of these biographies, it appears that the category of hardships was more important than any specific way of doing them. This impression is borne out in narratives about subsequent members of Mar pa's Bka' brgyud lineage, Rngog chos rdor (1023-1090) and Mi la ras pa (1028-1111), who in later material are also each described performing preliminary hardships in different ways. Rngog chos rdor, in contrast to the well known stories about Mi la ras pa, completes his preliminary stage of practice preliminaries by "relinquishing his fortune" (*spong thag*) three times. In this final case, the preliminaries are fulfilled through a repeated set of ritualized offerings to Mar pa, after which Rngog chos rdor receives advanced oral instructions. The thematic framing of preliminary hardships in Nāropa's and Mar pa's biographical corpus, thus allowed later members of the Bka' brgyud lineage to participate in this lineage by performing ritualized forms of preliminary practices.

From Woodsman to Pandit

The figure of Nāropa (956-1040) provides the most important example of how preliminary hardships played a new role in Tibetan literature.[1] In *Stories of the Eighty-Four Siddhas* (Skt.**Caturaśītisiddhapravṛtti*; Tib. *Grub thob brgyad cu rtsa bzhi'i lo rgyus*), which was composed in Sanskrit and translated into Tibetan in the twelfth century, Nāropa is portrayed as a humble woodsman, who after a long journey finally encounters Tilopa walking down the road.[2] Nāropa optimistically addresses him as "guru," but instead of responding Tilopa severely beats his wannabe disciple. Surprisingly, this only increases Nāropa's faith. Nāropa continues to follow Tilopa around for twelve years but, even after this long period of service (*bsnyen bkur*), he does not receive any assurances from his irascible guru.[3] This focus on performing a twelve-year period of service to the guru *before* receiving initiation is somewhat unusual, as most of the tantric adepts in this collection of stories are first initiated into the cult of a tantric deity, and then engage in a period of isolated practice that allows them to achieve their desired result (the exact amount of time varies from seven days to sixteen years, but twelve years is far and away the most common).[4] For Nāropa, however, the twelve-year period of practice is front-loaded onto the beginning of his path, when he is still traveling around with Tilopa. Only after Nāropa steals delicious food from a wedding party and offers it to Tilopa does he receive initiation into the Vajravārāhī tantric system. The preliminary stage of service appears to have served Nāropa well, however, for at this point he gains accomplishment (*siddhi*) after just six months of practice. The unusual placement of the twelve-year period of practice in *Stories of the Eighty-Four Siddhas* is one factor that likely inspired later Tibetan authors to focus on Nāropa's preliminary hardships.

For Tibetan authors who elaborated upon Nāropa's life story, he is no longer presented as a woodsman, but rather a famous Indian pandit who sets out to find a tantric guru after realizing the limitations of his book knowledge. The change in Nāropa's profession, from a woodsman to a celebrated Indian pandit, is the first significant difference between Indian and Tibetan versions of his life story. Furthermore, in the Tibetan versions of Nāropa's life, the transgressive act of

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[1] Nāropa and his guru, Tilopa, both lived in the late-tenth and eleventh centuries. For information about Nāropa, including his name and dates, see Francesco Sferra, "*The Sekoddeśaṭika by Nāropā:* (*Paramārthasaṃgraha*): *Critical Edition of the Sanskrit Text by Francesco Sferra. Critical Edition of the Tibetan Translation by Stefania Merzagora* (Rome: XCIX Instituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2006), 13, fn. 1-2.

[2] The twelfth-century translator of these Indian stories, Smon grub shes rab, specifies that he has translated the oral sayings (*zhal nas gsungs*) of an Indian guru named *Abhayadattaśrī (*Mi 'jigs pa dpal*). (*grub thob brgya bcu rtsa bzhi'i lo rgyus rgya rgar tsa ma pa rna'i bla ma chen po mi 'jigs pa dpal gyi zhal nas gsungs pa ltar | dge slong smon 'grub shes rab gyis legs par bsgyur ba rdzogs so | Grub thob brgyad cu rtsa bzhi'i lo rgyus*, 391). The Tibetan manuscript is published in *Buddha's Lions: The Lives of the The Eighty-Four Siddhas*, trans. James B. Robinson (Berkeley, California: Dharma Publishing, 1979).

[3] "Even though he served [Tilopa] for twelve years without despairing, bringing [food] to the guru in that way, [Tilopa] did not speak even one ordinary word that was not in anger." (*bla ma la drangs kyin de ltar lo bcu gnyis su skyo ba med par bsnyen bkur byas kyang | khro ba ma yin pa tha mal pa'i tshig cig kyang gsung ba med* | Ibid., 318.)

[4] At the end of *Buddha's Lions*, James B. Robinson provides a comprehensive chart that summarizes the details of each narrative in the volume. The data includes the name, location, occupation, guru, tantric system, and number of years it took to gain accomplishment for each *siddha* (although there is not information for each figure in every category). Among eighty-four adepts, fifty-five have a time listed for how long it took to gain accomplishment. Over half (twenty-nine in total), are said to have practiced for twelve years *after* receiving initiation. Ibid., 284-288.

stealing wedding food is situated in a much longer series of twelve distinct hardships (Skt. *duṣkara*; Tib. *dka' ba*), each of which follows upon the command of Tilopa.[5] The twelve hardships are not Herculean feats of strength or acts that parallel the "twelve great deeds" (*mdzad pa bcu gnyis*) performed by Śākyamuni. Instead, they are fulfilled by a willingness to transgress social codes and endure physical pain in the name of the guru. In this narrative, the trials are seen as worthwhile because they are said to make Nāropa for receptive to the unconventional teaching methods of his guru. In the end, when Tilopa surprisingly slaps him in the face with a leather sandal Nāropa gains enlightenment. The agency of the guru brings about Nāropa's accomplishment here, not a long course of ritual practice in relation to a tantric deity. The Tibetan versions of Nāropa's life story thus emphasize two key themes: the set of preliminary hardships and the role of the guru.

Stories of the Twelve Hardships of Glorious Nāropa

An early version of Nāropa's hardships— *Stories of the Twelve Hardships of Glorious Nāropa* (*Dpal nā ro pa'i dka' ba bcu gnyis kyi lo rgyus*)—was most likely written in the twelfth century by an author with strong ties to the Bka' brgyud-affiliated Rngog clan.[6] This story of Nāropa's search of his tantric guru, Tilopa, draws from the famous tale of Sadāprarudita's journey to find his guru in the *Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines* (a text that was translated into Tibetan numerous times from the ninth through eleventh centuries).[7] The opening sections of these two narratives are very similar, as both protagonists hear an inexplicable voice from the sky, make an eastward journey, and have anxiety regarding how long it will take to find the guru. In drawing from a canonical narrative, the Tibetan author of *Stories of Nāropa* portrays Nāropa in familiar, relatable terms. As he is implicitly tied to a well-known Buddhist figure, Nāropa's literary persona is also enhanced through such intertextuality, befitting his newfound status as an august pandit. As elements from Sadāprarudita's narrative also crop up in Mar pa's biographies, it is worthwhile to introduce the basic plot points of this influential story.

In the *Perfection of Wisdom*, a mysterious voice in the sky tells Sadāprarudita ("Always Crying") that in order to receive the perfection of wisdom teachings he must "Go east!" and find the master Dharmodgata. Sadāprarudita sets out with tremendous energy, but soon realizes that he forgot to ask just how far east he has to go to find his guru. Overcome, he collapses in tears (hence his name) and, not knowing what else to do, pays homage to the perfection of wisdom for seven days. A deity then appears in the sky and tells him that if he continues walking east for five hundred leagues he will find Dharmodgata in a town called Gandhavati. For the rest of the

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[5] Across various Indian traditions, a *duṣkara* is a religious practice that is intensely difficult. In Buddhist Mahāyāna texts, hardships are also defined as a "*difficult task*, said of the feats of religious performance accomplished by a Bodhisattva." Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit: Grammar and Dictionary* (Vol. 2).

[6] In *Lho brag mar pa lo tsā'i gsung 'bum* 5, 225-231 (Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2011). The dating and authorship for this text will be discussed in more detail below, after introducing Mar pa's biographies that were written by members of the Rngog clan.

[7] Sadāprarudita's story, the thirtieth and thirty-first chapters of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, was translated into Tibetan in the mid-ninth century, and then three more times in the eleventh century. *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, Trans. Edward Conze (Berkeley, California: Four Seasons Foundation, 1975), xii.

journey, Sadāprarudita's movement eastward continues to be interspersed with moments of doubt and tears. These crises are resolved in a logically consistent manner; as Steven Beyer puts it, there is an "escalating series of revelations" including dreams (in the earliest version of the narrative), visions of a deity or a voice from the sky, a vision of a Buddha, and, at the end of the narrative, the accomplishment of a meditative state in which he sees all the buddhas in the ten directions.[8] Overall, the narrative has a linear structure that charts Sadāprarudita's progress as he journeys to find his guru Dharmodgata. We will revisit some of the elements of this paradigmatic Buddhist adventure narrative below, but it is the opening scene that provides a direct precedent for Nāropa's journey to find his own guru.

At the beginning of *Stories of Nāropa*, our protagonist Nāropa is in a Kashmiri charnel ground (*kha che'i dur khrod*), a common site for tantric practice.[9] After reciting the seven-syllable mantra of Cakrasaṃvara a hundred thousand times, the earth shakes and Nāropa receives a prophecy: "Hey You! The one called Lord Tailopa lives in the east of India. He is a suitable [guru for you]."[10] As Nāropa is initially in Kashmir, the instruction to head east fits with Tilopa's location in Bengal. The source of the voice is not indicated in *Stories of Nāropa*, but other versions of Nāropa's life specify that it comes "from the sky" (*nam mkha' nas*), just like at the beginning of the Sadāprarudita narrative.[11] Nāropa dutifully sets out east but he immediately feels remorse (*'gyod pa*), thinking that "the eastern direction of India is a very large region, and I did not ask where Tailopa lives!"[12] Again, the use of such tropes from a well known Buddhist adventure narrative suggests that the author of *Stories of Nāropa* was concerned with introducing the hardships in a way that would be familiar to a contemporary Tibetan audience.

Nāropa continues walking eastward and eventually comes across a monastery. In this institutional setting his fame as a pandit precedes him, and so the monks request that he teach. Nāropa and the monks walk to a river to perform ablutions, but instead encounter a man dressed entirely in black, snapping fish in two and roasting them alive (*nya ma shi ba*) on a fire. Tilopa's shifting bloodshot eyes (*spyan dmar lcig lcig pa*) are so engrossed in the task at hand that he does not even notice the approaching monks. The monks are furious at the behavior of this outcast, however, as it contradicts the most basic ethical standards of their monastery. Just as the monks rush forward to chase him off, Tilopa looks up and says matter of factly: "You don't like what I am doing?" The monks' reply—"How would we be happy, when someone is killing and frying fish in our monastery?"—betrays their status as foils in this tantric narrative. Tilopa appears to be mercilessly burning fish alive on the fire, but the true nature of his activities is revealed when he says, "Well then, be gone!" and the fish fly up and disappear into the sky. The

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[8] Stephan Beyer, "Notes on the Vision Quest in Early Mahāyāna," in Lewis Lancaster (ed.), *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems: Studies in Honor of Edward Conze* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 330.

[9] Nāropa almost certainly lived in Bengal. The idea of situating him in Kashmir was likely motivated by the close connection of Bka' rgyud figures with pandits from this area. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 146.

[10] *khyod rgya gar shar phyogs na jo bo tai lo pa bya ba bzhugs pas de'i rigs yin no zhes lung bstan no | Dka' ba bcu gnyis*, 225.

[11] Herbert Guenther, *The Life and Teaching of Nāropa* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986), 36.

[12] *rgya gar shar phyogs de yul khams che bar yod par 'dug pa la tai lo pa ga na bzhugs kyang ma dris snyam nas byon pas | Dka' ba bcu gnyis*, 225.

consciousnesses of the fish have been liberated through the tantric *pho ba* rite. This moment in the story provides a classic example of the idea that "one who has attained accomplishment" (*grub pa thob pa*) can transgress ordinary conventions in order to benefit other beings, the fish and the monks. The fish are liberated and monks who were initially stuck in conventional ways of thinking have a moment of insight. After seeing this powerful display, they pay homage to Tilopa and ask forgiveness, saying: "You are an accomplished tantric adept! Please bear with us!"[13] The trope of appearances not being what they seem is often found in tantric narratives, and it plays a key role here and throughout the *Stories of Nāropa*.

After witnessing this episode, Nāropa is relieved to have finally found his destined guru and he immediately requests to become Tilopa's disciple. In lieu of a response, Tilopa walks to the rooftop of the monastery and asks, "Who can jump from here to the ground?" Nāropa's hardships now begin, as after thinking to himself "The lama is talking to me!" he follows his guru and jumps off the roof. Nāropa's bones are broken from head to foot, and only after lying on the ground in agony for some time does Tilopa amble up and casually ask, perhaps with a dark sense of humor, "What happened?" Even when Nāropa tells him that he is about to die, Tilopa is entirely unconcerned; he snaps his fingers (*se gol gtogs pa*) and his disciple's health is fully restored. Jumping off the roof of the monastery is the first of Nāropa's twelve hardships and it is consistent across all the Tibetan versions of the narrative, presumably because it comes so soon after he meets Tilopa.[14]

In *Stories of Nāropa*, the twelve hardships include two prominent themes: enduring physical pain in service of the guru and violating social codes. For Nāropa, they result from the following situations: (1) jumping from a monastery's rooftop; (2) allowing his body to serve as a bridge for Tilopa to walk across a leech-infested river; (3) rubbing the breasts of two newlywed brides in front of the grooms;[15] (4) not eating or drinking; (5) jumping into a roaring fire; (6) begging for food twice in the same day from the same place; (7) being struck with a stone; (8) pulling a minister's wife down from her palanquin and embracing her; (9) doing the same thing to a king's wife; (10) striking the queen's wife (*rgyal po btsun mo*) with a projectile; (11)

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[13] *rnal 'byor pa de na re khyed mi dga' 'am zer | de rab byung gi gnas su nya gson bsreg byed pa ga na dga' byas pas | 'o na song gsung pas nya de rnams nam mkha' la 'phyur nas song | der rab byung rnams kyis phyag byas rnaal 'byor pa grub pa thob pa zhig 'dug pas bzod par bzhes zer nas bzod par gsol ba byas* so | Ibid., 225-226.

[14] *bla mas nga la gsungs par byung snyam nas mchongs pas | stod kyi rus pa mar smad du zug smad kyi rus pa chag pa yar stod du zug na tsha la bzod pa'i thabs med pa byung nas | kun gzhi bag ma 'phos tsam yod tsa na | rnal 'byor pa de byung nas ci nyes zer | bla mas 'di na mar sus mchongs nus gsungs nas | bdag gyis mchongs pas da bdag 'gum pa la thug smras pas | ci yang mi nyes gsungs te phyag 'jus se gol gtogs pas | snga ma bzhin sos pas 'ci ba slongs pa'i dngos grub mnga' bar 'dug pas tail lor shes so* | Ibid., 226.

[15] Nāropa's hardships are overtly misogynistic, as nearly half of them include violence towards women. Particularly telling in this regard is the assumption that the various forms of sexual assault are only considered transgressions because they infringe on a husband's authority, not on the women's bodies. More broadly, even though there were renowned female tantric practitioners and gurus in India and Tibet, Buddhist tantric literature itself is extremely male-oriented. In these examples, we see that *Stories of Nāropa* is no exception. For an incisive critique of attempts to rewrite Indian tantric Buddhism as a gynocentric tradition, see Onians, "Tantric Buddhist Apologetics," 183-190.

improper use of a tantric consort; and, finally, (12) getting hit in the face with Tilopa's sandal.[16] In some cases, Nāropa simply proves his devotion by enduring physical pain. Alternatively, as a result of contravening social conventions, he is often beaten. When Nāropa is punished for violating social norms, the two main themes thus coalesce in one narrative episode.

The moral of each hardship is that Nāropa should trust the commands of his guru. The commands appear to result in unnecessary suffering for Nāropa and others, but they must all be followed nevertheless. Moreover, Tilopa heals Nāropa at the end of each hardship, even if his body is burned or infested with parasites. There is no obvious pattern or sequential logic to the twelve hardships, although Nāropa's response to the latest indignity sometimes gives the impression that the physical hardships are becoming increasingly severe. In the tenth story, for instance, the king goes so far as to cut off Nāropa's hands and feet. "*This time*," Nāropa thinks to himself, his body surely "cannot be healed." Tilopa nonetheless snaps his fingers and Nāropa's body is restored.[17] These moments of doubt and renewed faith reinforce Nāropa's connection to his guru.

Tilopa's Commands

Tilopa and Nāropa are depicted throughout the narrative traveling as a pair from place to place: crossing rivers, making fires, begging for food, and performing tantric rites. Tilopa's physical presence is significant here because he initiates each hardship with a specific command, or even a casual suggestion in the midst of such everyday activities. The commands thus emerge in a haphazard manner, unpredictably renewing the focus on Nāropa's status as a disciple. The paradigmatic structure of the commands begins with the second person vocative "You!" (*khyed*), and ends with a verb in the imperative stem (*skul tshig*).[18] The casual, if not somewhat brusque, second-person pronoun *khyed* is a common imperative used at the beginning of commands in Tibetan literature.[19] The impact of such everyday interpellations differ, however, according to who is speaking.[20] For Nāropa, the imperative "call" signals that he is still bound to Tilopa and

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[16] The hardships are mostly consistent across the many versions of Nāropa's life story, although some discrepancies and additional narratives are listed below. Even with some differences, the main themes are always following the commands of the guru and violating social codes.

[17] *der rgyal pos rkang pa'i mkhrig ma gnyis lag pa'i mkhrig ma gnyis bregs par gda'| da res kyi 'di mi sos snyam tsa na | tai lo pa byon mkhrig ma mcad pa de kun sbyar se gol gtogs pas | snga ma bzhin du sos | Dka' ba bcu gnyis*, 230.

[18] The passive voice (or suggestion) is functionally equivalent to the more formal commands, and might even be said to heighten the guru's authority by demonstrating how little it takes for Nāropa to follow his lead. Tilopa, for example, initiates the fifth hardship by simply asking: "Are you able to enter into the midst of this [fire]?" (*khyod kyis 'di'i nang du zhugs nus sam gsungs* | Ibid., 228.)

[19] For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between grammar and status in a different Tibetan biography, see John Pickens, "Mar pa's commands in the *Milarepa Life Story*" *Bulletin of SOAS* 82, no. 2 (2019), 303–314.

[20] Louis Althusser notes, for instance, that being addressed "Hey, you there!" by a police officer suggests that one is a suspect (i.e., a specific type of subject). *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses*, translated by G.M Goshgarian (New York: Verso, 2014), 264.

the course of action initiated by his commands. The semantic structure of the commands thus confirms his participation in the specific ideology of a tantric guru-disciple relationship.

The identity of both guru and disciple is shaped by the logic of the command. Nāropa's initial request to become a disciple or, more literally, "one who has been accepted" (*rjes su gzung ba*) by the guru, is met with silence. Tilopa "does not say a word," but instead walks to the top of the monastery's roof and asks who can jump off of it. Instead of formally accepting Nāropa's request and prescribing a predictable course of practice, Tilopa acts as a guru by setting in motion the first of his hardships. It is only following the guru's commands that maintains Nāropa's tentative status as a disciple here, and throughout the narrative. The completion of each hardship also bolsters Tilopa's authority and status as a guru. After the first eleven hardships have been accomplished, Nāropa again asks Tilopa to accept him as a disciple using the same formulaic verse (*bag rjes su gsung bar zhu*). In this case, his request is also met with silence, and then with another final hardship. Only here is the guru who appears unduly harsh revealed to be beneficent.

A Slap in the Face

Nāropa's final hardship is framed in somewhat different terms, as Nāropa takes the initiative by asking for instruction from Tilopa. Nevertheless, Tilopa initiates yet another moment of social disgrace and physical pain:

> For the first twelve years, the hardships took different forms. Up to this point, [Nāropa] did not request any teachings. Now, having thought "I need to request one complete teaching," he offered a mandala, circumambulated three times, and prostrated three times. Cupping his flower-filled hands together in homage, he beseeched [Tilopa] to accept him as a follower. [Tilopa], however, did not explain the dharma. He did not say anything at all. Assuming an intense gaze, he struck [Nāropa] with his leather sandal. Nāropa fell completely unconscious. Upon awakening from his faint, the entire meaning of the path had been realized in his mind.[21]

After twelve long years of following Tilopa and performing hardships, Nāropa realizes that he has yet to formally request a Buddhist teaching from his guru.[22] Nāropa performs a standard sequence of preliminary ritual acts (seen for instance in *Fifty Verses on the Guru*) and then humbly asks for instruction. Just as when Nāropa initially asked to be a disciple, Tilopa does not say a word. Instead he reaches down with "focused eyes" (*spyan phar cer tshur cer*) to

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[21] *dang po lo bcu gnyis lon dka' ba'i khyad par mi 'gra ba bcu gnyis spyad | de gong yan chod du chos zhus pa ni med | da yongs chos gcig zhu dgos snyam nas | maṇḍala gcig phul | bskor ba gsum byas | phyag gsum byas | me tog spa ra gang phyag tu phul nas bdag rjes su gzung bar zhu 'tshal byas pas | chos bzhad kyang mi gsung mi bshad kyang mi gsung | spyan phar cer tshur cer mdzad nas cag lham brgyab pa dang nā ro pa lings kyis brgyal | brgyal sangs tsa na theg pa mtha' dag gi don thugs su chud | Dka' ba bcu gnyis*, 231.

[22]There is a bit of an inconsistency insofar as it notes that Nāropa has been already performing hardships for twelve years, and yet up to this point in the narrative there have only been eleven hardships. Perhaps it is assumed that the search for the guru also took one year.

unstrap his leather sandal (*cag lham*).[23] The final hardship for Nāropa is being struck in the face with Tilopa's footwear, after which he completely loses consciousness. In this case, however, there is no need to be healed by his guru. Upon waking up, Nāropa has internalized the meaning of the entirety of the Buddhist path. The final narrative thus confirms the positive outcome of the path of hardships and the efficacy of following the guru's commands.

Nāropa has been long celebrated as an ideal disciple for his unflagging commitment to following the commands of Tilopa. In Tibetan historiography, the slap with a leather sandal is one of the most famous interactions between an Indian guru and disciple. The final hardship demonstrates the ability of a tantric guru to use unconventional means, and the slap in the face includes both the thematic elements that are prevalent throughout the text. Nāropa undergoes physical hardship and a social code is transgressed. The rudeness of the final act is self-evident, of course, and yet it is worth reiterating that feet have a particularly negative connotation in an Indian cultural milieu. For this very reason bowing to the feet of the guru demonstrates extreme subservience (i.e., demonstrating that the feet of the guru are being considered higher than the disciple's own head). In striking Nāropa in the face with his sandal, Tilopa effects a reversal or auto-performance of this everyday devotional act. As a decisive transgressive gesture that stuns Nāropa into enlightenment, the final hardship reveals the telos of the long course of service to the guru. The earlier indignities can be also be clearly seen as "preliminary" insofar as they adequately prepared Nāropa to benefit from this final hardship.

Preliminary Hardships

In *Stories of Nāropa*, the lack of an explanatory framework leaves one wondering at first how the hardships could ever benefit Nāropa. In the *Perfection of Wisdom*, Sadāprarudita's quest to find the perfection of wisdom is clearly ordered and there is an obvious sense of progress in his movement eastward. The repetitive structure of Nāropa's hardships, by contrast, gives the impression that he is caught up in a Sisyphean task. Getting slapped in the face with a sandal is not *prima facie* different from the earlier hardships—it still contravenes a social code and brings about physical pain—but, it has a much different outcome. The very arbitrariness suggests that hardships can exceed themselves through repetition. Or, perhaps it is simply that the final slap was initiated by the guru. In either case, the logic of the narrative suggests that the first eleven hardships contribute to Nāropa's readiness, providing the basis for the last one to work.[24] In *Stories of Nāropa*, the narrative structure itself implies this relationship between two types of

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[23] The term *phar cer tshur cer* is an archaic term (*snying*), that indicates a specific gaze or manner of looking. Given that this is the climax of the entire narrative, the reader is meant to imagine that Tilopa adopted a particularly "focused" or "intent" (*bsgrims*) expression in his eyes. See: *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* 1708: (*snying*): *mig phar tshur bsgrims te lta tshul*.

[24] The final hardship provides a sense of narrative closure, while also revealing what the earlier hardships had all been leading towards. Not only does the slap effect a breakthrough for Nāropa, it also indicates that he will not have to suffer any more hardships. As a felicitous and necessary contrast to the earlier hardships, it thus provides closure for the narrative. Steven Collins argues that in systemic and narrative thought the concept of nirvana provides a similar "ending" or sense of closure for the Buddhist path and life stories. *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 121-124 and passim.

practice: as the final slap in the face would not have been effective without the first eleven hardships, the latter are grouped together as a preliminary stage of practice.

In the *Stories of Glorious Nāropa's Twelve Hardships*, there is only one explanatory passage inserted into the narrative, right before the account of the sixth hardship.[25] The author pauses, as if anticipating a question that may have arisen in light of the first five hardships:

> In all of these instance, one might think "Did Nāropa give rise to a lack of devotion in regard to this [set of hardships]?" Nāropa did not give rise to a lack of faith, for [after each hardship] he became faithful again, having thought "My lama is like a buddha, so I accumulate merit each time I have a connection with him in this manner." Through that [*des*], the two obscurations are purified and blessings enter.[26]

This brief citation rationalizes Nāropa's hardships by invoking time-honored Buddhist virtues: faith (*dad pa*) in the guru, the accumulation of merit (*tshogs bsags*), and purification of the two obscurations (*sgrib pa gnyis dag*). As in *Stories of the Eighty-Four Siddha*, the hardships are said to increase Nāropa's faith in his guru. Here, the concept of faith is used on two registers, as it indicates both a long-term disposition and moment-to-moment state of mind. At particular junctures, Nāropa may have had his doubts (perhaps when his arms and legs were severed by an angry king!), but he still does not lose his long-term faith in the guru. After each hardship, he resolutely recalls his fortunate connection with his guru, who is "just like a buddha" (*bla ma buddha dang 'dra ba*).[27] The instrumental correlative "through that" (*des*) at the end of the passage is somewhat ambiguous, as it could refer to the idea of seeing the guru as a buddha, the merit gained in performing each hardship, or Nāropa's continued faith. The most straightforward reading is that the hardships are the factor that purifies his obscurations and allows "blessings to enter" (*byin brlabs zhugs pa*). In this case, the blessing or metaphorical "consecration" (Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*; Tib. *byin rlabs*) is the slap in the face. The one doctrinal statement in *Stories of Nāropa* thus supports the idea that the first eleven hardships were preliminaries that provided the basis for the final hardship.

An "Invented Tradition"?

Nāropa's hardships are hyperbolic, yet it is still worth pausing to consider the possibility that transgressing social codes and enduring physical pain may have been part of a preliminary stage of service to the guru. Isabelle Onians has suggested that certain initiation rites in Indian tantric Buddhism could be understood as "ritual by ordeal." The "name consecration" (*nāmābhiṣeka*)

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[25] The exegetical passage comes immediately before the transgressive act of stealing food, the only hardship that is also found in the Nāropa narrative found in *Stories of Eighty-Four Siddha*. (Robinson, *Buddha's Lions*, 94.) To a degree, this location suggests that this story was the building-block for a Tibetan author.

[26] *'di kun gyis dus thams cad du nā ro pa 'di la mi dad pa zhig skye'am snyam pa la | nā ro pa mi dad pa ma skyes nga bla ma buddha dang 'dra ba 'di lta bu dang 'grogs su yod pa nga re tshogs bsags snyam nas slar dad par gyur te | des sgrib pa gnyis dag cing byin brlabs zhugs pa'o | Dka' ba bcu gnyis*, 228.

[27] The text uses the Sanskrit transliteration *buddha* instead of the Tibetan term *sangs rgyas*.

and sexual initiations, for example, mark a transitional moment—when a young man gains entrance to an elite ritual community. For previously celibate monks, "the candidate had to be tested perhaps, to confirm that he would be tough enough for the difficult way that is Tantric Buddhism."[28] Nāropa's hardships might to be similarly read as a provisional period that shows the importance of being able to withstand the challenges associated with following the guru's commands, even when they transgress normal ethical boundaries.[29] Whatever historical basis they may have had, Nāropa's hardships were expressed in a variety of creative ways in Tibet.

There are significant differences between the Indian and Tibetan versions of Nāropa's life. In the *Stories of Eighty-Four Siddhas*, Nāropa is a humble woodsman. The single transgressive act (the theft of wedding food) is "preliminary" insofar as it demonstrates to Tilopa that Nāropa is finally ready to receive the Vajravārāhī initiation. This transgression does appear in later collections, and there are other connections among the various versions of the story. The twelve years in which Nāropa dutifully travels with Tilopa, for instance, clearly correspond with the enumeration of hardships in Tibetan renditions. These parallels do not fully explain, however, why Tibetan authors chose to focus so much on Nāropa's hardships in service to the guru.

The *Stories of Eighty-Four Siddhas* may have been one inspiration for the elaboration of Nāropa's hardships.[30] Another possibility is that the additional eleven anecdotes were already part of an oral tradition of narrating Nāropa's story.[31] Along these lines, it is plausible that Indian versions of Nāropa's story provided a framework that Tibetan authors filled out, using available anecdotes as a model for additional hardships.[32] The appeal to oral tradition is possible, although it can lead to conclusions that lack corroborating evidence.

The performance of hardships is Nāropa's main raison d'être in Tibetan literature, even though he is also considered a key lineage figure and adept in various yogic techniques (e.g., the eponymous *na ro'i chos drug*). In light of his Tibetan biographies, there is a seeming discrepancy

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[28] Onians, "Tantric Buddhist Apologetics," 318.

[29] As the hardships mark the opening stages of a guru-disciple relationship, the "preliminaries" are meant to steel the student for the liminal phase that follows. In Nāropa's Tibetan biographies the truly liminal phase is an abrupt slap in the face, but in the normative tantric path it would include formal initiation rites. Arnold van Gennep's work is relevant here, as broadly speaking initiation rituals have an initial phase in which a neophyte is challenged and ultimately prepared for the main ritual sequence. *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 11 and passim.

[30] The cowherd Gorakṣa has his hands and feet cut off, for example, a severe tribulation that also befalls Nāropa when he trespasses the authority of a king. Nāropa's fifth hardship, jumping into a roaring fire, also relates to a common trope in stories about Indian *siddha*s. Līlapa declares, for example, that "Even if I were to jump into a fire, I would not burn." The *siddha*-king Ḍombipa similarly emerges unscathed from a fire after burning for an entire week. (*Buddha's Lions*, 26, 35, and 50-53.) Buddhist *siddha*s, like Rāma's wife Sītā or modern-day fire walkers, do not get burned by fire. Nāropa does, however, and badly so. The fact that he again needs to be healed by Tilopa reconfirms his status as a neophyte in the tantric world.

[31] Mar pa could be the source of these stories, despite uncertainties about his personal encounters with Nāropa. As early as the twelfth century, Tibetan scholars questioned the veracity of this relationship. Ronald Davidson translates a passage from a letter written by Grags pa rgyal mtshan in which he relates a secondhand account that Mar pa never met Nāropa. *Tibetan Renaissance*, 144-145. Even if he never met Nāropa in person, however, Mar pa could have certainly heard such tales from his disciples who were still alive when he arrived in India.

[32] "Adding what follows" or "filling in the blanks" are both common ways that Buddhist narratives accrue additional material in the shift to a written format. Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, 56.

between Nāropa's prominent position in tantric lineages that flowed into Tibet and the lack of detail regarding his "yogic training" or the "nature of the transmission" he received from Tilopa:

> Curiously, most of the hagiographies do not emphasize the yogic training he is said to have received from Telopa, for most have little to say about the yogic content or about the nature of transmission between Telopa and Nāropā. Instead, the hagiographers become invested in the narrative of guru devotion.[33]

Tibetan narratives that focus on Nāropa's preliminary hardships do account for the nature of the transmission from Tilopa, but it is simply provided in terms of his faith in his lama, which continues unabated even in the face of such hardships. The emphasis on Nāropa's hardships fits with the broader emphasis on beginner practices and guru devotion in this period.

In Tibet, stories about Nāropa's hardships circulated together or were individually cited in various literary genres, including narrative histories (*lo rgyus*), collected works (*gsung 'bum*), and ritual commentaries.[34] One longer narrative collection is explicitly meant for an audience of students engaged in a preliminary stage of practice.[35] This version of Nāropa's hardships includes a humorous tale that begins with Tilopa asking his dutiful disciple to bring him an elephant and bottle of liquor:

> [Tilopa:] "Bring me a full bottle of liquor and a large elephant!" [Nāropa] brought these two things and [Tilopa] poured the liquor into the elephant, [after which] it approached and stomped on top of Nāropa. All of his muscles and bones were pulverized into mush. Just as he thought "Now, I am going to die," Tilopa blessed him and he was healed.[36]

In this story, Nāropa's hardship bears a thematic resemblance to the Indian genre of *jātaka*s, which have a long history of being told in various teaching environments. Nāropa's twelve hardships remained mostly consistent, even as the genre allowed for the inclusion of new anecdotes such as the one about being stomped on by an elephant. Over time, however, Tibetan accounts of Nāropa's hardships became increasingly multifaceted, far outpacing whatever Indian tales spurred their initial composition.

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[33] Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 48. See 381-82, fn. 23 for two much later works that fill in such content.

[34] Davidson provides a translation of a biography written in verse (Ibid., 46-47) and a list of different versions of Nāropa's hardships (Ibid., 381, fn. 21). Nāropa's hardships also garnered the attention of commentators outside the Bka' bgyud school. In the *Profound Path of Guru Yoga*, Sa skya Paṇḍita states that: "Nāropa performed austere hardships on behalf of his master for twelve years" (*jo bo na ro ta pas | lo bcu gnyis su bla ma'i phyogs su dka' ba spyad | Lam zab mo;* 194.5.) We will explore Sapaṇ's text in the next chapter.

[35] The title of *Stories that Give Rise to Faith in Cause and Effect For the Stage of Preliminary Practices of the Five Precious Practices of the Victorious Ones* (*Dam chos thub pa lnga'i sngon 'gro'i skabs kyi gtam rgyud rgyu 'bras la yid ched bskyed byed*) suggests that, like the *jātaka*s these tales were told to inspire practitioners during the preliminary practices for the *Precious Teachings on the Five Capabilities* (*Dam chos thup pa lnga*), which was initially promoted by Lo ras pa dbang phyug brtsun 'grus (1187-1250), a figure we will return to in chapter six.

[36] *chang bum pa gang dang glang po che gcig khrid shog gsungs | de gnyis khyer phyin pas | chang glang po che la blug nas | nā ro pa'i steng du 'khrab tu bcug ste | sha rus thams cad skyo mar song | da res srog dang bral snyam tsa na | byin rlabs mzad pas gsos* so | *Dam chos thup pa lnga*, 139.2-139.3.

Nāropa's twelve hardships held an especially privileged position for authors in the Bka' brgyud school is because of their role in constituting the prototypical guru-disciple relationship. In some twelfth-century sources, Tilopa is presented as a self-styled *ādiguru*, exclaiming at one point, "I do not have a human guru!" (*nga la mi'i bla ma med*).[37] In this case, Nāropa represents the original tantric disciple. Eric Hobsbawm's idea of an "invented tradition" is applicable here, insofar as Tibetan authors emphasized the foundational importance of a prominent figure from the past in order to promote the importance of contemporary preliminary practices. As standard preliminary practices became increasingly central to Bka' brgyud schools, Nāropa's role as a reference point for these traditions also became more important. Even an early version such as *Stories of Nāropa*, ought to be be best understood in light of these distinctly Tibetan goals and concerns. Nāropa's hardships also served as a template for many of the life stories written about key figures in the Bka' brgyud school, beginning, as we will discuss in the second half of this chapter, with Mar pa.[38]

Journeys to India

The Tibetans traveling to India during the eleventh century were mostly promising neophytes, eager to find tantric gurus or prove their acumen as translators. In a literal sense, these journeys were indeed hard. Alone or in small groups, young Tibetans navigated the high mountain passes of the Himalayas as well as the unfamiliar customs and languages of Bengal, northern India and Kashmir. Many of those who attempted the arduous journey died en route, or as a result of the hot climate, diseases, or poisonous snakes they encountered upon arrival in the southern plains. Even to set out on the journey required the difficult-to-win patronage of a local aristocrat or clan leader.[39] Financial pressures also sometimes forced return journeys to Tibet. Mar pa chos kyi blo gros (1012-1097) returned home to Lho brag multiple times in order to amass the gold that was necessary for making offerings and requesting tantric initiations. In the two earliest biographies about Mar pa, it is the dual challenges of finding Nāropa and securing gold that are characterized as "hardships" (*dka' ba*).

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[37] In a biography attributed to Mar pa, Tilopa represents a pristine origin for a variety of tantric lineages (although, in one verse, it is stated that he received oral instructions from three *siddha* and one ḍākinī). See: *The Life of the Mahāsiddha Tilopa*, Trans. Fabrizio Torricelli and Āchārya Sangye T. Naga, Ed. Vyvyan Cayley (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2003), 45 and 68, ft. 30.

[38] The hardships of Mar pa's student, the yogi Mi la ras pa (1028–1111), are even more well known. Mi la ras pa is forced in turn to build stone towers by hand and then tear them down. Alternatively, Mar pa's student Rngog chos rdor fulfills the preliminary stage of practice by making vast material offerings to his lama. As ritualized preliminary practices became widespread in the Bka' brgyud school, accounts of Nāropa's hardships also grew increasingly sophisticated. In the sixteenth century, for example, Lha'i btsun pa rin chen (1473-1557) penned a much longer work in which Nāropa performs the standard twelve hardships and also has twelve "minor" visionary experiences that occur during his initial search for the guru. *Mkhas grub mnyam med dpal nā ro pa'i rnam par thar pa dri med legs bshad bde chen 'brug sgra.* See: Guenther, *Life of Nāropa*, 24-36 and 43-86.

[39] For instance, Rngog Blo ldan shes rab's (1059-1109) request for funds was initially turned down by the son of Byang chub 'od, Rtse lde (1057-1088). Only after gaining the support of the future ruler, Bdang lde, was he able to leave for Kashmir in 1076 with five other translators. Ralf Kramer, *The Great Tibetan Translator: Life and Works of rNgog Blo ldan shes rab*, (München: Indus-Verlag, 2017): 37-38.

Two early biographies of Mar pa chos kyi blo gros—*Biography of Mar pa the Translator* and *Life Story of Lord Mar pa*—were respectively written in the twelfth century in Tibet, by Ngam rdzong ston pa (12th c.)[40] and Rngog mdo sde (1078–1154).[41] Cécile Ducher's analysis of Mar pa's entire biographical corpus includes extensive work on these two foundational texts.[42] These versions of Mar pa's life story draw from earlier biographical material, such as oral accounts and autobiographical songs. Rngog mdo sde, the author of *Lord Mar pa*, used sources provided by his father, and Mar pa's direct student, Rngog chos rdor (1023-1090).[43] The Rngog clan was an important source of this literary movement to promote Mar pa's life, as two additional biographies from *Mar pa's Collected Works* (*Mar pa'i gsung 'bum*) are attributed to members of the Rngog clan.[44] Framing the search for the guru as a "hardship" was an important element that was developed in these biographies.[45]

As a narrative trope, wandering in India and receiving tantric teachings is not uniquely Tibetan. The autobiographical writings of Buddhajñānapāda (ca. 750-820), for example, also describe traveling from place to place, serving gurus, and engaging in tantric practice.[46] The sequence of these encounters fits with even earlier Indic narratives (such as Sudhana's in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sutra* or Sadāprarudita's movement eastward) as the specific location of each guru is named and described in some detail. In contrast, the respective journeys of Mar pa and his younger contemporary Khyung po rnal 'byor (c. 1050-1140) do not follow a unidirectional route or even a set itinerary. The unpredictability of the search is part of what makes it hard. The accounts of Tibetan protagonists traveling in India were not just "literal accounts of physical and geographical voyages," but also explorations of the "inner dimensions," including visionary and dream experiences.[47] As this was particularly true for authors associated with the Bka' brgyud

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[40] Ngam rdzong ston pa byang chub rgyal po. *Sgra bsgyur mar pa lo tsa wa'i rnam par thar pa* (*nga*)," in *Dka' brgyud gser phreng* by Mon rtse pa, 83-103 (Leh: Sonam W. Tashigang, 1970). In the translations that follow, I refer to Cécile Ducher's diplomatic in *Building a Tradition*, (Müchen: Indus Verlag, 2017), 242-256.

[41] *Rje mar pa'i rnam thar*, in *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo* 5, 167-188 (Lhasa: 'Bri gung mthil dgon, 2004).

[42] *Building a Tradition*, 46-63.

[43] Ducher is circumspect about definitively attributing authorship of *Lord Mar pa* to Rngog Mdo sde, but is confident that this biography was written by a member of the Rngog clan. Ibid., 60.

[44] Ibid., 59. (The *Lho rong chos 'byung* confirms that there was a "Rngog tradition" [*Rngog lugs*] of presenting Mar pa's life story. Ibid., 55.)

[45] Ducher considers that *Mar pa the Translator* "represents the very beginning of the tradition of describing Mar-pa's search for Nāropā in detail." *Building a Tradition*, 63. The fact that hardships play such a key role, even in the earliest extant biographies, raises the possibility that authors in this milieu were drawing on stories of Nāropa's hardships, but redefining the genre in terms of a Tibetan protagonists' search for the guru in India.

[46] Catherine Dalton, "Enacting Perfection: Buddhajñānapāda's Vision of a Tantric Buddhist World" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2019), 358-361.

[47] Kapstein has demonstrated in broad terms how Tibetans' reshaped their Buddhist identities in relation to the setting and literary conventions of a hitherto foreign land. India was thus transformed from "an exotic and remote land," into a place where Tibetans "found *their own* imaginal universe." "Indian Literary Identity in Tibet," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 2001), 775. Emphasis in original.

school, it is not surprising that oneiric and visionary themes also play a role in Tibetan biographies from this period.

Bka' brgyud biographical narratives are distinguished by the haphazard search for the guru who is absent or hard to locate. Khyung po rnal 'byor arrives in India, and immediately asks about the whereabouts of the lady (*lcam mo*) Niguma. His interlocutors tell him that "those of pure vision might meet her anywhere but that one of the impure vision could search everywhere for her without success."[48] This pithy formula complicates the ontological status of any of Khyung po's subsequent encounters with his guru, at the same time it emphasizes the importance of his "readiness" as a disciple. Khyung po rnal 'byor eventually meets Niguma in a charnel ground, and here she immediately raises the possibility that he is supplicating a cannibalistic witch. The uncertain location and ethical standing of the guru contributes to the thematic focus on the subjective states of Tibetan protagonists, as Nigurma suggests further that fear might be a more logical response than the devotion Khyung po professes. For Mar pa, as we will see in more detail below, Nāropa appears and disappears at whim, alternatively manifesting as a vision in the sky or leaving tantalizing footprints to follow. These visions of Nāropa leave Mar pa feeling bereft, even as they increase his yearning for the guru. In both of Mar pa's biographies, the uncertain location of Nāropa and the correlating confusion Mar pa experiences looking for him are literary devices that help define the search itself as a "hardship."

Mar pa's First Dilemma

In the *Life Story of Mar pa the Translator*, Mar pa's uncertainty about how to relate to a guru quickly comes to the surface during his first time in India. In their initial meeting, Nāropa asks his new disciple whether he would like to receive the Hevajra initiation from the deity or from himself, the guru:

> At that time, the glorious Nāropa granted his request for an initiation. Nāropa manifested the nine deities of Hevajra in the sky, and asked: "Do you request the initiation from me or from the deities?" Mar pa thought that directly obtaining initiation from the deities would be truly amazing and so he said, "I request initiation from the deity and, regarding the special instructions, may the lama himself please fix them in my heart." The lama, having dissolved the deities into his heart, said "The root of blessings is the guru. As you selected the deities over the guru, the religious lineage of your family will not continue!"[49]

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[48] Matthew T. Kapstein, "The Illusion of Spiritual Progress: Remarks on Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Soteriology," in *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, eds. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. & Robert M. Gimello (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 195.

[49] *de'i dus su dpal na ro pas dbang bskur mdzad | dgyes rdor lha dgu mdun gyi nam mkha' la sprul nas | na ro pa na re dbang skur nga la zhu'am lha la zhu zhes gsung pas | mar pas lha la dbang skur dngos su thob pa ngo mthsar che snyam nas | dbang skur ni lha la zhu | gdams ngag ni bla ma nyid la rang gis thugs la gdags 'tshal zhes zhus pas | bla mas lha de rnams thugs kar tim nas byin rlabs kyi rtsa ba bla ma yin pa la | khyed kyis bla ma las lha 'dam pa | mi chos kyi rgyud pa phan mi thogs pa yong gsung ngo | Mar pa lo tsa wa'i rnam par*, ed. Ducher, 244.

After hesitating for a moment, Mar pa imagines a have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too scenario in which he will receive the initiation from the Hevajra deities and the explanatory instructions (*gdams ngag*) from the guru. Upon answering, however, Mar pa is chastised for not choosing to receive initiation from the guru. Nāropa then demonstrates the ontological precedence of the guru by "dissolving the Hevajra deities back into his heart" (*bla mas lha de rnams thugs kar tim*).[50] In addition to being the fons et origo of the deities, the guru is also described as the "source of blessings" (*byin rlabs kyi rtsa ba*). As in the Tibetan versions of Nāropa's life story (where instead of gaining accomplishment through the practice of Vajravārāhī he does so through a slap in the face from the guru), we see a turn towards the guru as the preferred source of blessing (*byin rlabs*).[51] Nāropa also warns Marpa that he should not count on passing his teachings to his own sons or relatives, but rather focus on building a lineage that is rooted in the master-student relationship.[52] These interrelated themes exemplify the ascendent status of the lama, particularly in the Bka' brgyud school.

Searching for the Guru

In the *Biography of Mar pa the Translator* and the *Life Story of Lord Mar pa*, Mar pa makes three trips to India. On his first journey, Mar pa meets Nāropa and other tantric gurus, from whom he receives initiations, instructions, and manuscripts to bring back to Tibet. Mar pa makes the ill-fated choice to receive initiation from the Hevajra deities on this first stint. On the return journey to Tibet, however, he faces a dramatic setback when he meets his former traveling companion, Gnyos lo tsā ba. Gnyos is jealous of Mar pa's manuscripts and so as they are traversing the Ganges river he throws them all into the water.[53] Mar pa resolutely declares that there is still hope because his gurus, including Nāropa, are still alive. After securing more gold in Tibet, he retakes the arduous journey back towards India. Along the way, a group of Nepalese pandits tell him that finding Nāropa again will be extremely difficult: "Now, his movements are pure and there is nobody who can even see him. As his body has become rainbow-like, you will

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[50] Although the Tibetan verb for "dissolve" (*thim*) is usually considered intransitive (*tha mi dad pa*) it takes an active sense in this context. Nāropa, so to speak, "draws" the deities back into himself.

[51] Mar pa's "choice" between the mandala and the guru was certainly not altogether new in Buddhist literature. For a similar anecdote in the life story of Buddhajñānapāda, see: Dalton, "Enacting Perfection," 9, fn. 45.

[52] Marpa is also told that his familial lineage will not "continue" (*phan*) or "be of benefit" (*phan mi mthogs*) because he chose the deity over the guru. A literal reading of the final term, *phan mi mthogs yong* can mean "will not extend further in time" rather than simply "not be of benefit." Both translations make sense in this context. The passage provides another indication of the growing importance of the lama in Tibet. In Tibet, many family lineages were passed down from father to son or uncle to nephew, while non-family lineages were determined by institutional succession or lama-disciple relationships. In promoting the idea that familial Buddhist lineages should be subordinate to guru lineages, the twelfth-century author, Ngam rdzong ston touches on an issue of great importance in the Bka' brgyud school. The text was, of course, written with the benefit of hindsight, as it was known that Mar pa's eldest son had died early and that none of the other sons had carried on his lineage.

[53] In *Mar pa the Translator* this episode occurs once Mar pa and Gnyos have reached Tibet. In this case, the manuscripts are thrown into Lake Rnub bal cha. *Building a Tradition*, 262. Davidson provides a healthy measure of doubt about this narrative, as he notes that the Gnyos records suggest an amiable relationship with Mar pa. *Tibetan Renaissance*, 143.

not find him!"[54] Mar pa asks his companions to nevertheless consult their dreams, and see if they can make any prognostications about whether he will once again meet his guru in person. The pandits all predict that Mar pa will indeed eventually meet Nāropa, and so he sets out on the search with renewed hope.

Upon arriving at Nāropa's monastery in India, Mar pa learns that his guru has already "entered the practice" (*spyod pa la gshegs pa*) of a wandering tantric ascetic.[55] Mar pa is again unsure of whether he will see his Nāropa again, and in this case the absence of guru initiates the period of his search that is explicitly characterized as a hardship. The *Biography of Mar pa the Translator* uses the term "hardships" (*dka' ba*) and thematizes the connection between the search for the guru and obtaining blessings. The *Life Story of Lord Mar pa* provides a much longer and more detailed account of Mar pa's search (*btsal*) for the guru qua hardships.[56] In this version, Mar pa has a long series of visions of Nāropa throughout which he is reminded that the search itself is a provisional, if not illusory endeavor. As Mar pa's confusion is compounded by the appearance of the guru in unpredictable visions, the contingency of the guru's presence in these preliminary encounters is an additional factor that makes the search itself a hardship.[57]

The visions experienced by Mar pa in *Lord Mar pa* offer the clearest parallel with the preliminary hardships undertaken by Nāropa. The oneiric logic of the text, combined with the extraordinary nature of Nāropa's appearance—who rides a lion and dissolves into the sky—also indicates that we are beyond normal modes of serving a guru. (Mar pa is not bringing Nāropa tea or sweeping his anteroom!) No lexical markers in the text indicate that these are visions per se, although there is a clear semantic emphasis on the ontological uncertainty of these encounters. The short instructions that Nāropa imparts during these visions heighten Mar pa's sense of unreality. Mar pa is asked to consider his encounters with Nāropa as the "confusion of a dream" (*rmi lam 'khrul*), "delusion" (*rmongs pa*) "illusion" (*sgyud ma*), and as a "mirage" (*smog rgyud*). Mar pa's visions of Nāropa during this sequence only serve to heighten his existential confusion. The divide between Mar pa's visionary encounters of Nāropa and the final "in-person" encounter suggest that that the earlier episodes can be best understood as a preliminary stage in the search.

The first vision occurs just as he arrives at his guru's monastery. Mar pa sees Nāropa riding away in the sky on a lion, flanked by two consorts. Mar pa supplicates his guru, but

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[54] Mar pa is thus warned from the onset that he is unlikely to find his guru again. Naturally enough, the search for the guru is predicated on this absence, described rather poetically in this passage as a rainbow-like body. (*da ni 'gro ba dag pas mthong ba tsam min pa | sku lus 'ja' tshon ltar song nas mi rnyed yong | Rje mar pa*, 175.4.)

[55] In Mar pa's biographies, Nāropa only enters the practice (*vratacaryā*) towards the end of his life (i.e., not as a beginner). Christian K. Wedemeyer notes that *vratacaryā* is "a highly specific term of art" that, among other conditions is reserved for "elite ritual contexts." *Making* Sense *of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, & Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 136.

[56] The *Life of Mar pa* spans folios 167.4-188.2. The second section, "The qualities that arose from completing the practice of hardships" (*dka' ba'i spyod pa mthar dbyung ba'i yon tan*), runs from 171.3-184.1 and thus constitutes well over half of the entire text.

[57] Sara Ahmed's understanding of an "encounter" speaks to the impact of Nāropa's uncertain location in of these biographical texts. As Nāropa's visionary forms increasingly blur any distinction between imagination and reality the tension between these modalities propels Mar pa forward in his search for the person of the guru. *The Promise of Happiness*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 28-33 and passim.

instead of turning back to meet his disciple, Nāropa utters parting words that reinforce Mar pa's sense of uncertainty:

> "I, Nāropa, am non-dual unity, supported by two consorts,
> who are the manifest symbols of methods and wisdom.
> I ride a lion, dance on the sun and moon, and reply in song:
> Are you not seduced by the confusion of a dream?"[58]

The phrase "non-dual unity" (*gnyis med zung 'jug*), the presence of two consorts, riding a lion, and dancing on the sun and moon are unmiStagable references to the lifestyle of a *siddha*. The imagery included in the prose description of Mar pa's vision and the lyrics of the verse thus present Nāropa as an accomplished tantric adept. Nāropa entices Mar pa with these words, but then immediately departs, as if in a dream that slips away even as it is momentarily remembered.

The next day, Mar pa again has a vision of Nāropa in the sky, but he still remains out of reach. Mar pa runs forward, but "never reaches him, and "even though he sees him, he cannot make him stay."[59] The second vision of the guru is equally tantalizing, and the inability to reach Nāropa suggests that a certain amount of frustration is already building up for Mar pa. Later in the sequence of visions, Nāropa appears to be seen (*bltas pa*), but when Mar pa gets closer, he realizes that "everything is like an illusion" (*thams cad sgyud ma'i rnam pa ltar*). The haphazard, dreamlike narrative is repeatedly reinforced by the actual content of Nāropa's brief instructions.

As the search continues, Nāropa's instructions begin to thematize the relationship between a "trace" or "imprint" (*rjes*) and the actual presence of the guru. Nāropa is seen "flying in the sky like a bird" (*bya 'phur ba bzhin gshegs nas*), and he once again calls out to Mar pa, reminding him that all traces of his presence are just like the "path of a bird" (*bya lam ji bzhin du*). One may think that the path of a bird is real, but it is just a trick of the eye. Nāropa's phenomenological presence in these visions is again linked to the content of the verses, as he asserts that he should not be apprehended as real in such visions. Just as the visual trace of a bird's flight against the blue sky disappears as soon as it arises, Nāropa himself "dissolves into the sky" (*nam mkha' la dengs*) upon delivering this instruction. The repetitive visions leave Mar pa feeling completely exhausted and confused, wondering to himself how he even ended up in this situation and, in which direction he should continue the search.[60]

In *Lord Mar pa*, there are seven distinct visions where Nāropa appears in the sky or in an illusory form. Mar pa appears to be about to find his guru, but he always remains just out of reach. The narrative focus on Mar pa's search for the guru is reinforced by the instructions he receives from Nāropa. As a sequence, the visionary encounters do not provide an obvious sense of progress, although in each case they do remind Mar pa of the possibility of eventually seeing his guru in person. The visions intensify the tension between absence and presence that fuels Mar

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[58] *nga na ro gnyis med zung 'jug ste | phyag rgya gnyis kyi mtha' rten nas | thabs dang shes rab brda' ston cing | seng ge zhon nas nyi zla'i | steng nas gar byed glu lan pa | rmi lam 'khrul pas ma slus sam | ces gsung ngo | Rje mar pa*, 177. 4.

[59] *yang rgyugs pas kyang ma slebs | mthong yang bzhugs su ma bzheng* | Ibid., 178.1.

[60] *de nas yang bsams da ni 'dir 'ong ces pa'i nges pa med kyang phyogs gar btsal na snyam* | Ibid., 178.6.

pa's sense of confusion during his search. As in the stories about Nāropa, Mar pa's visions are also guru-focused hardships. In both cases, the hardships provide challenges to overcome, at the same time they remind the disciple that they are still in the midst of their journey. The sequence of Mar pa's visions builds on itself through repetition, and in this way too it plays a similar role to the hardships in *Stories of Nāropa.* The role of the guru is similar in both narratives, despite their respective presence and absence.

Nāropa's instructions in each vision also offer a point of comparison with the commands of Tilopa. Tilopa's commands are delivered in person, and they act as the direct impetus for each of Nāropa's hardships. In *Lord Mar pa*, Nāropa's visionary instructions do not serve this exact purpose, but they do repeatedly lead Mar pa along, reminding him that he has yet to accomplish his goal. The final line of the first short verse—Are you not deceived by the confused appearances of a dream?" (*rmi lam 'khrul pas ma slus sam*)—indicates that Mar pa should reflect on the ontological conditions of his search itself. The subsequent instructions also suggest that Mar pa should question the ontological basis of his visions. Just as Tilopa's commands signal Nāropa's continued status as a disciple by situating him into the series of preliminary hardships, Nāropa's instructions insert a reflexive element into the sequence of visions. Eventually, Mar pa is so confused that he cannot remember how he even got where he is (*'dir 'ong ces*) or where he should continue his search (*nges pa med kyang phyogs gar btsal*). Mar pa is reminded throughout the narrative of his own "subjective state" vis-à-vis the search and the fact that the visions are provisional or preliminary markers of his desired encounter with Nāropa.

Meeting Nāropa Again

In *Mar pa the Translator*, Mar pa eventually encounters a *yoginī*, who gestures with her hand towards a crystal rock, in which he sees his guru's footprints (*bla ma gshegs pa'i zhabs rjes mthong*). Nāropa's footprints indicate his earlier presence and, in this case, they also suggest his imminent arrival.[61] As another trace (*rjes*), the footprints convey a likeness of Nāropā's footprint, "so intact that the slightest hair looked like fine silk thread."[62] The footprint captures Nāropa's corporal presence in exact terms, amplifying the ambiguity between his absence and presence. The narrative here invokes a trope from *Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines*, as each time Sadāprarudita remains at a specific site he supplicates for seven days and then receives a vision that confirms his progress. Mar pa also remains at the site of the footprints for a week, offering the mandala and supplicating his guru, until he finally "arrives in person" (*dngos su byon*):[63]

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[61] The adjectival term *gshegs pa*, used here to describe the footprints, famously connotes both departure and arrival. The most well known example of this polysemy is seen in one of the most famous epithets for a buddha: *tathāgata*s (Tib. *de bzhin gshegs pa*) are "thus-gone" or "thus-come" ones.

[62] *bud med de bcang mi zer bar zhal gyi brda' ston | der de'i phyogs su mtshungs ma bcas ste phyin pas shel gyi pha 'ong la na ro pa'i zhabs kyi rjes spu shad snal ris tshun chad ma nyams par 'dug pa mthong | Mar pa lo tsa wa'i rnam par*, ed. Ducher, 265.

[63] The phrase *zhal dngos su byon* could certainly mean "he arrived in person," but *zhal* also suggests a type of visionary encounter. As noted by Ducher, "seeing the face" or having a "direct vision" (*zhal gzigs*) is a classic way of expressing an encounter with a lama or tantric deity who is not physically present. *Building a Tradition*, 216.

> [Mar pa] remained there for seven days, offering mandalas while supplicating with compassionate devotion. After a week, glorious Nāropa arrived in person, bearing an auspicious human skin, a skull-cup, and a *khatvāṅga*. His body was naked, his matted hair held firm at the top of his head. He came completely adorned with the six bone ornaments.[64]

Naropa's appearance befits one who is "engaged in the practice," which is to say wearing bone ornaments and carrying other emblems of tantric practice. The biographies are clear that now Nāropa finally arrives in person, and yet one cannot help but recall at this juncture all the previous encounters, when he was apprehended in the manner of a visionary deity. Even when Mar pa finally sees his Nāropa in the flesh, the narrative sequence ensures that the ontological status of the guru remains somewhat ambivalent.

In the earlier visions, Nāropa appeared to Mar pa and gave him instructions. After Mar pa finds the footprint, however, he becomes an agent by performing ritual practices that seemingly invoke the presence of Nāropa. The sudden appearance of Nāropa is similar to that of the deity who is summoned into a ritual space. The trajectory of the narrative is reversed in this juncture, because instead of searching haplessly Mar pa (in a sense) generates his own encounter through performing ritual practices. As noted above, in *Stories of Nāropa* there is a similar reversal when Tilopa picks up his own shoe and strikes Nāropa. Mar pa's ritual performance and Tilopa's auto-performance of a hardship, effect a reversal of a pattern that had been established throughout the text. Mar pa is overjoyed to finally see his guru again and crying tears of devotion he embraces Nāropa, "pressing heart against heart, forehead against forehead."[65] The narrative imagery mirrors the structure of the guru yoga rite (which Mar pa soon performs in *Lord Mar pa*), as the contact at specific points of the body suggests the unification of teacher and student. Mar pa exults in the presence of the guru when they finally meet again, but he cannot help but draw attention to how difficult the search has been.

Mar pa's Hardships

In both *Mar pa the Translator* and *Biography of Lord Mar pa*, the difficulties of the search for the guru are presented as a necessary "hardship" (*dka' ba*) or preliminary stage of practice that readies Mar pa to meet the guru in person. The search qua hardship occurs in the same interval between the moment Mar pa learns Nāropa has "entered the practice" and when he meets him again in person. Mar pa's search for the absent guru is characterized differently, yet both narratives emphasize the importance of the series of visionary encounters that occur before he finally meets Nāropa. Just as the *yoginī* directs Mar pa's attention to a nearby footprint, these

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[64] *der de'i mdun du mandal 'bul zhing rtse du gus pa dang bcas ste gsol ba gtab pas zhag bdun nas dpal na ro pa zhal dngos su byon ste | de yang mi lpags kyi gyang gzhi bsnams pa | thod pa dang kha tam kha bsnams pa | sku cer bu ral pa'i thor bu tshugs spyi bor bzed pa | rus pa'i brgyan drug gis brgyan pa tshangs kyi byon no | Mar pa lo tsa wa'i rnam par*, ed. Ducher, 248.

[65] *der rab tu dga' ches ste ngus mos btab nas sku la 'khyud | dpral ba dang dpral ba btugs | zhal la zhal gyis btugs na* | Ibid., 248.

visions "point the way" for Mar pa to eventually encounter his guru in person. The preliminary visions lead in other words to the inevitable encounter with the guru.

In *Mar pa the Translator*, once Mar pa has found Nāropa, he immediately tells "the story of the foregoing hardships" and calls him out for a "lack of compassion."[66] The clear implication is that if Nāropa cared at all he would have arrived in person much sooner. Mar pa recounts the difficulties of the search, as well as the numerous hardships involved in collecting the gold that he has used for his offering.[67] At this culminating moment, Nāropa reveals that all the previous visions and hardships endured during his search for the guru have actually been for Mar pa's benefit. The hardships have purified Mar pa, such that that he is how able to receive the blessings of the guru:

> "My blessing is given because of the complete purification of your body, speech, and mind!"[68]

The hardships in search of the guru have refined Mar pa's body, speech, and mind. As in *Stories of Nāropa*, there is an explicit connection here between a preliminary stage of hardships and receiving a consecration or blessing (*byin gyis rlabs*) from the guru.

At the end of *Lord Mar pa*, as Mar pa is parting from Nāropa for the last time, he requests a set of printed footprints on cloth. As a tangible symbol of the guru's presence, the cloth is also conveniently portable, such that Mar pa can bring it back with him to Tibet. Later, scholars such as 'Jig rten mgon po rin chen dpal (1143-1217) refer to this request as the beginning of a new tradition of using footprints as a basis for ritual practice and visualization of the lama (although mention is also made of the Buddha's footprints).[69] In other ways too, the thematic elements of Mar pa's search for the guru, especially in *Lord Mar pa*, anticipate the more widespread ritual practices of visualizing the deified lama, even in his absence. The phenomenological continuity of Mar pa's visions during his search for Nāropa is significant in this regard. In the more standardized forms of preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) that began to be promoted in the early thirteenth century in Tibetan Bka' brgyud traditions, we see a similar emphasis on visualizing the lama (see chapters six). In these ritual practices, we see a systematic turn towards ritualized methods for envisioning the lama.

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[66] *dka' las byas pa la sogs pa'i lo rgyus syned | rje thugs rje re chung zhus pas |* Ibid.

[67] In Ducher's evocative translation, Mar pa "recalled with dread how many hardships he had undergone to get them," meaning the gold pieces he had just offered. *Building a Tradition*, 265.

[68] *sku'i dkyil 'khor | gsung gi dkyil 'khor | thugs kyi dkyil 'khor gyis rgyud yongs su sbyangs pa des nga'i byin gyis slabs zhes gsungs so | Mar pa lo tsa wa'i rnam par*, ed. Ducher, 248. Ducher offers a more literal translation: "It is through this complete purification of your continuum by the mandala of body, the mandala of speech, and the mandala of mind that I now give you my spiritual influence!" (Ibid., 265.)

[69] After his death, and before he was represented in anthropomorphic form, Śākyamuni was often synecdochically depicted in Indian art by a pair of ornate footprints. Myriad Indian images depict pilgrims and devotees worshipping images of the Buddha's feet, which served as a multifaceted marker of his absence and presence. The practice of creating and venerating footprints continued in Tibet as a stand-in or substitute for the presence of the lama. As Kathryn H. Selig Brown explains, "footprints are multivalent symbols in Tibetan culture that signify, among other things, original contact, presence, blessings, and respect and devotion to the teacher." "Early Tibetan Footprint Thang kas, 12-14th Century," *The Tibet Journal* 27, no. 1 (Spring & Summer 2002), 71-72.

A Bka' bgyud Tradition of Preliminary Hardships

As Nāropa and Mar pa are depicted performing hardships in different ways. Nāropa follows the commands of the guru and engages in transgressive acts, while Mar pa's period of hardships is in relation to an absent guru. Nāropa nevertheless appears in a series of visions that call attention to the illusory status of his disciple's search. The phenomenological continuity of these visions is significant. All the visions are *of* Nāropa, which is suggestive of the focus on visualizing the lama in later forms of ritual practice, such as guru yoga, and preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) that were almost entirely focused on the lama. Mar pa's visions of Nāropa are passive in the sense that they appear to him in the course of his wanderings in the search of the guru. Just before he encounters his guru for the final time, however, Mar pa performs mandala offerings and supplicates Nāropa at the site of his footprints. Nāropa arrives in person, and after recounting stories about his hardships, the two embrace, touching heart to heart and forehead to forehead. Nāropa then instructs his disciple to perform guru yoga (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor bya gsung*). In addition to the rites performed at Nāropa's footprints, the reference to guru yoga also suggests a turn toward a more active eidetic mode, in which the guru or lama is envisioned as an object of worship.[70]

The final paragraph of *Stories of Nāropa* provides further confirmation for the emergence of both a literary tradition of representing Nāropa's hardships, as well as an emphasis on performing preliminary practices in twelfth-century Bka' brgyud traditions:

> At the completion of the twelve hardships, oral instructions were granted [to Nāropa]. Mar pa spent twelve years in the presence of Nāropa, and he performed similar hardships; and after repeatedly offering a mandala of gold many times, was granted these instructions. Mar pa passed them on to Rngog chos rdor, after he had offered his entire fortune three times.[71]

Nāropa completed his twelve hardships, and afterwards he received the set of advanced oral instructions (*gdams ngag*). Mar pa spent twelve years in the presence of Nāropa and also completed hardships "like that" (*de dang 'gra ba*). The latter statement is ambiguous, as it may indicate that he performed transgressive acts like Nāropa or simply that he completed a similar stage of hardships (e.g., in the search for the guru). Mar pa also "repeatedly offering mandalas of gold," a detail that we also see in his biographies.[72] The immediate proximity of hardships and mandala offerings links the two forms of preliminary practice. Mar pa and Nāropa are both portrayed performing hardships for twelve years, but Mar pa's Tibetan disciple Ngog chos rdor

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[70] Eric Matthew Greene offers a historical overview of the terms *vision* and *visualization*, and how they have been used in reference to Buddhist practices. "Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 144-173.

[71] *dka' ba bcu gnyis kyi mthar gdams ngag tsho gnang nā ro pa'i spyan sngar bla ma mar pas lo bcu gnyis bzhugs | dka' ba yang de dang 'dra bar mdzad gser gyi maṇḍala yang nas yang du phul ba'i mthar | gdams pa 'di tsho gnang | bla ma mar pa la rngog chos rdor gyis spong thag lan gsum gyi mthar gdams pa 'di tsho gnang | Dka' ba bcu gnyis kyi lo rgyus*, 231.

[72] In *Lord Mar pa*, we also read that after meeting Nāropa in person he "offered a mandala of gold."

receives the oral instructions "after offering his entire fortune to Mar pa three times."[73] The details of these offerings are laid out in detail in Rngog's *Short Biography*.[74] In each case, Rngog receives further instruction in various tantric traditions. For Ngog chos rdor these munificent offerings satisfy the requirement for a preliminary practice, as afterward he too receives the oral instructions. The author of *Stories of Nāropa* was clearly aware of Rngog chos rdor's thrice-offered *spong thag* to Mar pa, and this is another detail that suggests it was written by someone in the Rngog clan.[75] The repeated use of the term "completion" or "at the end of" (*mthar*) the respective ways of performing the preliminary practices strengthens the impression that they belong to the same genre. In the final example, we see a new way of fulfilling a preliminary stage of practice that does not include hardships, but rather ritualized material offerings.

The hardships played a crucial role in constituting early Bka' bgyud lineages, both in terms of specific master-disciple relationships and as a tradition that could be represented and participated in by subsequent generations of practitioners. The transition to a ritualized form of preliminary practice was gradual. Mar pa's principal students, Rngog chos rdor and Mi la ras pa, are also described performing such hardships in service to the lama, not preliminary rites. Over time, the focus on individualized modes of performing fulfilling the preliminary hardships gave way to standardized systems of ritual practice. One possible reason for this shift was the increasing size of Buddhist institutions, especially in the thirteenth century. The increasing popularity of guru yoga and other formal preliminary practices will be discussed in the next two chapters, and it is here that we begin to see the various ways that ritualized preliminary practices for worshipping the lama were extended to a widespread audience. The thematic narrative framing of hardships in early biographical works continued to have an impact, however, as it allowed later members of the Bka' brgyud school to imaginatively participate in a tradition that began with Nāropa, even when they were performing ritualized forms of preliminaries.

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[73] *bla ma mar pa la rngog chos rdor gyis spong thag lan gsum gyi mthar gyi mthar gdams pa 'di tsho gnang* | Ibid.

[74] In *A Short Biography of Rngog chos sku rdo rje* (*Rngog chos sku rdo rje'i rnam thar mdor bsdus*), in *Rngog slob brgyud dang bcas pa'i gsung 'bum* 1, by Rngog chos sku rdo rje, 9-13 (Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2011), we find more details about the three times he "offered his fortune" (*spong thag*) to Mar pa. In the first, he receives oral instructions after presenting "a hundred black yak-hair yurts, together with furniture, and one third of his own wealth" to Mar pa. (*de yang spong dag dang po la gnag brgya sbra gur nang chas dang bcas pa rang gi nor rdzas sum cha gcig phul* | Ibid., 10.) The second offering includes a "heaped-up pile of [representations of] the precious triple gem, including ten volumes of dharma scriptures; moreover, he brought whatever material possessions he had to Lho brag, and offered them to the lama." (*spong dag gnyis pa la dam chos dkon mchog brtsegs pa gtsor byas pa'i chos glegs bam po ti bcu dang | gshan yang dngos po gang yod lho brag tu khyer te bla mar phul* | Ibid.) Finally, on a third occasion, Rngog "carried possessions, with a hundred two-year-old ewes in front, to Lho and offered them." (*spong dag gsum pa la lug tsher mo brgya'i sna drangs pa'i dngos po rnams lhor bsnams te phul* | Ibid.)

[75] *Instructions on the Intermediate State* (*Bar do'i khrid*) begins with the same list of names, and then continues by including the hardships of later figures such as Mi la ras pa and Ras chung pa (*Bar do'i khrid*, 409-410.) The fact that this text uses the same generic language, but includes more names suggests that those with the shorter lists were written earlier. As the list in *Stories of Nāropa* also ends with Rngog chos rdor, it may have also been written in the generation following "father lama," by someone closely associated with the Rngog clan. In *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo* (*Rje mar pa'i bka' 'bum*), ka (Lhasa: 'Bri gung mthil dgon, 2004): 409-418

Conclusion

An early vignette of Nāropa is found in *Stories of Eighty-Four Siddhas*, a collection of short Indic narratives that was translated into Tibetan in the twelfth century. In keeping with the thematic focus on outcastes and ne'er-do-wells, Nāropa is said to have been born into a family of alcohol-sellers, although he eventually leaves this line of work to become a woodsman. After a long search, Nāropa finds his guru Tilopa, but for twelve years receives only harsh words. On the one occasion Tilopa affectionately expresses gratitude for alms-food, Nāropa is so excited that he repeatedly acquires food from the same wedding party, and eventually steals the whole pot when nobody is looking. Tilopa is pleased by this transgression, and so he grants the Vajravārāhī initiation to his devoted disciple. Nāropa gains accomplishment six months later. The timing of Nāropa's twelve-year period of service to Tilopa (before receiving initiation), the irascible guru, and the anecdote about stealing wedding food all provided a framework for Tibetan narratives.

In *Stories of Nāropa*, when Nāropa first encounters his guru Tilopa he is not meditating or expounding on a philosophical treatise, but sitting by a fire snapping fish in two and frying them alive. Narratives about tantric adepts often describe such flouting of social codes and ritual practices, and the story of Tilopa catching fish is quintessentially juxtaposed with the seemingly mundane virtues and norms of institutional monastic life. Tilopa's intense focus and bloodshot eyes give him the appearance of a ravenous pescetarian, but we soon learn that he is liberating the fish through a tantric rite called *pho ba*. After witnessing this incredible feat, Nāropa becomes his disciple and completes the hardships that constitute the bulk of the text.

For Nāropa, however, transgressive acts are not a sign of accomplishment but a preliminary stage of practice. Breaking social codes and enduring physical pain are what "ready" Nāropa for the final slap in the face, which results in his full understanding of the Buddhist path.

The Tibetan literary focus on Nāropa's twelve hardships coincided with the attribution of hardships to Mar pa in his two earliest biographies. In these works, it is the search for an absent guru that characterizes the necessary period of hardships. At first, Nāropa only appears as an object of Mar pa's visions, giving instructions to his wandering disciple, but always remaining just out of reach. At the end of the search, when Mar pa finally meets Nāropa for the final time, he narrates the "story of his hardships" to his guru. Only then does he learn that they have played an essential role in preparing him to receive the blessings of the guru. Although Tilopa delivers a more forceful insight in the *Stories of Nāropa*, we see a similar logic in the relationship between hardships and blessings here in the early biographies of Mar pa.

In the *Stories of Nāropa*, the *Biography of Mar pa the Translator*, and the *Life Story of Lord Mar pa*—the emergence of a tradition of preliminary hardships is not constituted by the repeated performance of the same actions across generations of Buddhist practitioners, but rather by a focus on the category of hardships. To literally mimic Nāropa or Mar pa would be difficult indeed. Later preliminaries are described in very different ways, as they include Rngog chos rdor's trio of offerings to Mar pa and Mi la ras pa's construction of stone towers. The Bka' brgyud corpus thus focuses on the genre of hardships, rather than their specific content, allowing for multiple ways of performing preliminary practices by future practitioners.

Chapter 5: Guru Yoga

As discussed in the introduction, Abhayākaragupta's self-initiation (*svasyābhiṣeka*) was done to restore tantric vows, but only as an expedient means, when the guru was unavailable. In twelfth-century Tibet, however, new genres of do-it-yourself initiation invoked the presence of the lama as a daily practice. Unlike rites in which the guru served as the passive object of veneration—as in mandala offerings or prostrations—here the practitioner imagined receiving initiations or blessings (Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*; Tib. *byin rlabs*) from the visualized lama. The most notable example of this ritual genre was called "guru yoga" (Tib. *bla ma'i rnal 'byor*). In some presentations, such as Sa skya Paṇḍita's (1182-1251) *Profound Path of Guru Yoga*, the method and goal of the rite dovetail with the idea of seeing the lama as a buddha.

To understand the development of the guru yoga genre, we need to look first at an earlier rite called "drawing in three times" (*tshar gsum khug pa*). Brief introductions to this rite are found in both the Bka' brgyud and Sa skya traditions. One set of instructions is attributed to Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216). In the *tshar gsum khug pa* rite a white *oṃ*, red *āḥ*, and blue *hūṃ* emanate from the forehead, throat, and heart of the visualized lama. These three syllables are then imaginatively "drawn in" (*khug pa*) to the corresponding places in the body of the practitioner, who thereby receives the complete set of tantric initiations. This initiatory process itself is a preliminary practice of sorts, as the practitioner is then told to rest in meditation.

Later Sa skya material provides a particularly clear picture of how the *tshar gsum khug pa* rite was reframed and popularized as guru yoga. In the *Profound Path of Guru Yoga* (*Lam zab mo bla ma'i rnal 'byor*), Grags pa rgyal mtshan's nephew and disciple Sa skya Paṇḍita uses autobiographical reflections, scriptural citations (*lung*), narrative examples (*lo rgyus*), and direct quotations (*gsung pa*) to contextualize the guru yoga rite in a longer path. In his autobiographical remarks, Sapaṇ himself describes having trouble seeing Grags pa rgyal mtshan as anything more than his ordinary uncle. When he first asks to receive the guru yoga rite, such that he can better see him as a buddha, he is initially rebuffed. Grags pa rgyal mtshan also comes down hard on the idea of performing hardships as a preliminary stage of practice. "These days" (*deng sang*), he insists, students cannot measure up to that standard. Instead of performing hardships, mandala offerings and institutional service to the lama are seen as adequate ways of preparing to receive the guru yoga rite at Sa skya. For Sapaṇ, serving Grags pa rgyal mtshan for one month is sufficient to receive the blessing for the guru yoga rite, which effects the perception of his uncle as Mañjuśrī.

When Sa skya Paṇḍita returns to a more prescriptive mode, he indicates that the guru yoga rite should be done as a daily practice, imagining the lama as Hevajra or Cakrasaṃvara. The guru yoga rite was not meant to be done to fulfill a secondary purpose, such as confession, but as an end unto itself—a method for transforming ones perception of the lama. The way in which oral instructions, narratives, and scriptural citations contribute to the development of the *tshar gsum khug pa* corpus, and the eventual transition to guru yoga, offers an excellent example of how a ritual practice can be reframed in a few generations, even within the same tradition.

Drawing in Three Times

The "drawing in three times" (*tshar gsum khug pa*) rite, an early version of guru yoga, can be understood within a broader turn towards do-it-yourself styles of Buddhist ritual practice. As discussed in the introduction, the eleventh-century scholar Abhayākaragupta included a self-initiation (*svābhiṣeka*) rite as an appendix in his *Vajrāvalī* compendium. Abhaya does not go into detail about how the initiations are imaginatively received in this rite, but he is explicit that the disciple performs it on their own and that the visualized deity is meant to seen as a manifestation of the absent guru. Abhaya also composed a "self-consecration" (*svādhiṣṭhāna*) rite in which each part of the seed syllable *hūṃ* is equated with one of the five *tathāgata*s.[1] As these buddhas are present from the onset of the rite, the "blessing" or "consecration" (*adhiṣṭhāna*) is actualized within the practitioner's own body instead of by beings who are invited into ritual sphere.[2] In both of these technologies of self, the reflexive prefix *sva-* indicates that the "self" serves as a substitute for an absent other, whether it is the guru or the *tathāgata* buddhas. In the drawing in three times rite, the synecdochical title is derived from the main ritual sequence, as the three visualized seed syllables (*oṃ*, *āḥ*, and *hūṃ*) are "drawn in" (Skt. *kṛṣta*; Tib. *khug pa*) from the forehead, throat, and heart of the lama into the corresponding places on the body of the practitioner.[3] Here, the practitioner imagines receiving the full complement of tantric initiations.

In the Sa skya tradition, the earliest mention of the *tshar gsum khug pa* rite is in a short text called *Oral Instructions on the Drawing in Three Times Initiation* (*Tshar gsum khug pa dbang gi gdams ngag*) or *Guru Yoga Syllables* (*Bla ma'i rnal 'byor gyi yi ge*).[4] The rite is

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[1] In *Oral Instructions on the Stages of Self Empowerment* (Skt. *Svādhiṣṭhānakramopadeśa*; Tib. *Rang byin gyis brlab pa'i rim pa'i man ngag*) Abhaya presents an internalized version of a consecration rite. Instead of calling upon the five *tathāgata*s to bestow consecration, each part of the seed-syllable *hūṃ* is equated with these buddhas. (D 1500) rgyud, zha 250a.7-251b.1. This short text has been introduced and translated into Japanese. Naoji Okuyama, "Indo kokimikkyo niokeru jikoshinkaron (Self Consecration of Late Tantric Buddhism in India)," in *Indogaku Mikkyogaku Kenkyū: Miyasaka Yūsho Hakushi Koki Kinen Ronshū (Studies in Indology and Buddhist Studies: Felicitacion Volume to Dr. Yūsho Miyasaka*), (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1993), 809-826. I am grateful to Ryoze Wada for translating this article into English for me.

[2] "The practitioners actualize within their own bodies the supernatural phenomena that are [typically] bestowed upon them through the grace of divine beings, such as buddhas and bodhisattvas." (*honrai butsu bosatsu nado no shintekisonzai yori onchō to shite sazukerarerubeki chōshizenteki jitai o shugyōsha jishin ga wagami no ue ni genjō seshimeru.*) Okuyama, "Indo kokimikkyo niokeru jikoshinkaron," 810.

[3] Tibetan *tshar gsum khug pa* liturgies are not typically presented as translations so much as explanations of how the rite ought to be practiced. A few Bka' brgyud texts attribute this rite to the tantric *siddha* Tilopa, however, and thus include a Sanskrit version of the title. One such work, *Advice on the 'Drawing in Three Times' Initiation* (*Tshar gsum khug pa dbang gi gdams pa*), by the 'Brug pa patriarch Gtsang pa rgya ras (1161-1211) thus provides *sakṛt-tri-dhvany-abhiṣeko-padeśa*. The tentative translation "*Instructions on the Initiation of Three Sounds Simultaneously*" is quite different than "drawing in three times," as it includes the technical term "*dhvani*" (sound, echo), but it is possible that this idea could relate to the prominence of the three "sounds" or "syllables" (*oṃ*, *āḥ, hūṃ*) in the rite. An admittedly speculative option is to directly connect this rite with the self-initiation (*svābhiṣeka*). In this case, the extant transliteration would need to be emended *sakṛt* (=*svakṛt*), rendering the title *Instructions on the Self-Initiation Vïa the Three Sounds*. Given the structure of the *tshar gsum khug pa* rite, this title actually makes the most sense.

[4] The brief set of instructions is attributed to 'Khon Sa skya. I am not sure if this refers to attributed to the patriarch Sa chen kun dga' snying po (1092–1158) or his father 'Khon dkon mchog rgyal po (1034-1102). *Bla ma'i rnal 'byor gyi yi ge*, in *Sa skya'i lam 'bras* (*glog klad par ma*) 10 (Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2008), 347–49.

presented in three succinct steps: abandoning attachment to objects (*dngos po la zhen pa spang ba*), receiving initiation and accomplishments (*dbang dang dngos grub blang ba*), and meditating on reality (*de kho na nyid bsgom pa*). The sequence begins by "visualizing the lama, in union, in space" (*bar snang du bla ma yab yum bsgom*) and imaginatively offering one's own wealth and body, part by part. The practitioner next imaginatively draws in the three syllables (*oṃ*, *āḥ*, and *hūṃ*) from the lama into their own body. As in the *svābhiṣeka*, the student imaginatively receives the complete set of tantric initiations, only here the source is the visualized lama instead of a deity. At the end of the practice, the visualized "lama and consort dissolve into oneself" (*bla ma yab yum de bdag la bstims*) and the student relaxes the mind, meditating on reality.[5] Although the rite was eventually promoted more widely under the title of guru yoga, the final line of this set of oral instructions indicates that here it was still considered "secret" (*gsang*).

In *Oral Instructions for the Initiation for the 'Drawing in Three Times' Blessing*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides a narrative introduction that accounts for the transmission of the *tshar gsum khug pa* rite from India to Tibet.[6] The Indian teacher Gayadhara is said to have bestowed the rite on his Tibetan student 'Brog mi, just after they established a master-disciple relationship:

> Gayadhara came to Tibet and met 'Brog mi. When they were staying together, investigating the master-disciple relationship, it is said that 'Brog mi first had faith upon receiving this [*tshar gsum khug pa* rite].[7]

A provisional period of "mutual investigation between a teacher and a student" (Skt. (*śiṣyācāryasaṃbandha parīkṣaṇa*; Tib. *dpon slob 'brel brtag*) is also mentioned in *Fifty Verses on the Guru.*[8] For 'Brog mi, it appears that the master-disciple relationship was consummated with the performance of the drawing in the three times rite, which is what first gave him faith (*thugs ches pa*) in his new teacher.[9]

In addition to laying out the main ritual sequence, Grags pa rgyal mtshan also notes that its performance ensures that the tantric vows (*rig 'dzin kyi sdom pa*) will not be damaged (*'chor*

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[5] In the skeletal version of the *tshar gsum khug pa* rite, we are left wondering who exactly should perform the rite and for what purpose. The only clue comes towards the end of the text, in the form of a rhetorical question: "If one does this yoga in four sessions [per day], how could one not obtain Mahāmudrā in this life?"(*thun bzhi'i rnal 'byor du byas na tshe 'di la phyag rgya chen po mi thob re zhes* | Ibid., 348.3.) This short statement embeds guru yoga within a longer Buddhist path that culminates with an advanced meditation practice.

[6] *Oral Instructions on the Initiation for the* '*Drawing in Three Times' Blessing* (*Byin rlabs tshar gsum khug pa dbang gi gdams ngag*) in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* 6 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1992-1993), 377-382.

[7] *ga ya ddha ra bod du byon dus rje 'brog mi dang mjal | dpon slob 'brel brtag cing bzhugs pa na | thog mar 'di gnang bas 'brog mi thugs ches pa yin gsungs so | Byin rlabs tshar gsum khug pa*, 377.3-4.

[8] In *Luminous Lives*, the account of the initial encounter between Gayadhara and 'Brog mi explicitly mentions the *Gurupañcāśikā*. Cyrus Sterns, *Luminous Lives: The Story of the Early Masters of the Lam 'Bras Tradition in Tibet* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 90.

[9] In the Sa skya Bka' 'bum, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's presentation of the *tshar gsum khug pa* rite comes immediately after his commentary to *Fifty Verses on the Guru*.

med). The *tshar gsum khug pa* thus serves a purpose similar to Abhaya's self-initiation rite.[10] At the end of the text, Grags pa rgyal mtshan also provides the lineage of masters who have passed down the rite, beginning with the primordial buddha Vajradhara (*rdo rje 'chang*), a *ḍākinī*, and the human adept, Virūpa. From Virūpa, the rite was passed down until it reached Gayadhara, 'Brog mi, and finally Sa chen. The one-to-one transmission lineage again suggests that the *tshar gsum khug pa* was not initially meant for a popular audience. The text concludes with some final words of advice, in which Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes that the rites which have just been taught are a "profound teaching" (*zab chos*) and therefore "should not be taught to one who does not have experience" (*nyams mnyong med pa la mi bstan*).[11] Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not indicate what prerequisites might satisfy this requirement, but in any case it is clear that the rite was not meant for beginners. And yet, even as it seems that the rite was not meant to be widely taught, the fact the instructions were being written down at all suggests that could not have been meant to be kept too secret.[12] The promotion of the drawing in three times rite supports the hypothesis that rites for visualizing the lama were becoming increasingly widespread during this twelfth-century period. The *tshar gsum khug pa* rite, however, never became a household name in Tibet. however. Sa skya Paṇḍita instead chose to emphasize the title *bla ma'i rnal 'byor* at the same time he took clear steps to make the rite more accessible to a broader audience.

The Profound Path of Guru Yoga

The topical sequence in Sa skya Paṇḍita's (1182-1251) *Profound Path of Guru Yoga* (*Lam zab mo bla ma'i rnal 'byor*) follows the same structure as the "drawing in three times" rite: the disciple makes offerings, receives tantric initiations in the form of colored syllables, and then meditates upon reality.[13] Even so, Sapaṇ chooses to call the rite "guru yoga" (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*), and does not use the term "*tshar gsum khug pa*" even once in his lengthier treatise.[14] Unlike earlier earlier texts explored in this chapter, which are transcribed oral teachings, the *Profound Path* is a pedagogical manual that presents guru yoga within a robust theoretical

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[10] Grags pa rgyal mtshan also presents brief instructions on the Vajrasattva practice in this text (*rdo rje sems dpa'i bsgom bzlas kyi man ngag*). Ibid., 381.6-381.3.

[11] Ibid., 382.3.

[12] "The *upāsaka* Grags pa rgyal mtshan [taught these topics] at Btsong kha Monastery for a disciple named Dbang phyug 'od zer. [The text] was written according to the instructions of the lama." (*dge bsnyen grags pa rgyal mtshan gyis dbang phyug 'od zer gyi ngor btsong kha dgon par bla ma'i gsung bzhin bris pa'o* | Ibid., 382.3-4.)

[13] Sa skya Paṇḍita, *Lam zab mo bla ma'i rnal 'byor gyi byin rlabs nyams len bzhugs so*, in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* 1, 189-207 (Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2006). The title of this text relates to a passage cited by Sa skya Paṇḍita in the text itself: "Also from the *Path and Fruit*: the 'lama as the profound path' is considered a very secret system." (*lam 'bras las kyang* | *lam zab bla ma zhes* | *shin tu gsang ba'i tshul gyis gsungs* | *Lam zab mo*, 191.2.)

[14] The *bla ma'i rnal 'byor* title itself was not without precedent, as the earliest written instructions also this term to describe the *tshar gsum khuga pa* rite. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, interestingly, makes no mention of guru yoga in his *Blessing for the 'Drawing in Three Times' Initiation*. As a scholar and textualist, Sa skya Paṇḍita may have been concerned with penning a work under a title with ostensibly Indian origins, but little written precedent. As the earliest Tibetan evidence for the rite suggests that the *tshar gsum khug pa* was primarily taught as a set of oral instructions, it is possible that a Sanskrit text never even existed. (Such issues might have also applied to guru yoga.)

framework.[15] The allusions to secrecy and a restricted audience in the *tshar gsum khug pa* corpus are nowhere to be found. Sa skya Paṇḍita instead uses numerous scriptural passages (*lung*), narrative citations (*lo rgyus*), and personal instructions (*gsung pa*) that he received from Grags pa rgyal mtshan, his own uncle and teacher, to present guru yoga as a standard practice at Sa skya.[16]

Sa skya Paṇḍita first establishes the importance of the lama on the tantric path and then narrows in on the importance of fulfilling a preliminary stage of practice that allows one to see the lama as a buddha. Sapaṇ uses autobiographical narratives to illustrate these very points. When he was young, he did not receive the guru yoga rite right away because he could only see Grags pa rgyal mtshan as his ordinary uncle. After a month-long period of preliminary service, however, he was able to receive the consecration (*byin rlabs*) for the guru yoga rite. The initial performance of the guru yoga rite completes the desired shift in perception, and Sapaṇ is now able to see his familiar uncle as the none other than the buddha Mañjuśrī. Sa skya Paṇḍita explains how he came to personally receive the rite as a scion of the ‘Khon family, but the bulk of his remarks appear to be aimed at promoting guru yoga to a wider audience. The change in genre—from oral instructions to path literature—coincides with this shift. No longer a “secret” or to be kept from those “without experience,” he outlines step-by-step instructions for beginners to enter onto this profound path.

Seeing the Lama as a Buddha

In the opening section of the *Profound Path*, Sa skya Paṇḍita cites numerous Indian Buddhist scriptures. Drawing from Buddhist narratives from the past, he provides a series of examples that demonstrate the need to see the teacher as a buddha. The first example is straightforward: a *ṛṣi* named Jyotīrasa (*skar ma la dga ‘ba*) met Śākyamuni, but instead of seeing him as the Buddha he mistakenly perceived him as “a non-Buddhist sage.”[17] The second example alludes to a longer story about the famous Indian pandit Asaṅga, who was overcome with compassion upon seeing a dog with an infested cut. Unbeknownst to Asaṅga, the dog is actually a manifestation of the Buddha Maitreya. Asaṅga wants to help the dog, but also to not hurt the numerous maggots that are writhing around in its cut; so he decides to gently remove them with his tongue. After completing this task, he picks up the Maitreya-cum-dog and sits back on his teaching throne. Sa skya Paṇḍita picks up the story here:

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[15] The scant evidence for earlier guru yoga manuals has led to at least one claim that the “first Tibetan to compose a guru yoga work was Sa skya Paṇḍita.” Gray, “Ritual Texts: Tibet,” 673. While this is a difficult claim to prove, Sapaṇ’s work is certainly an early example of the genre. Moreover, he provides a degree of exegetical and narrative framing that is not seen in contemporary texts by Sa skya or Bka’ brgyud authors. Gray also suggests a connection between the composition of the text and Sapaṇ’s assumption of power within the Sa skya school.

[16] Sapaṇ composed this text in his thirties, some time after the death of his uncle in 1216. In this case, it fit with a broader emphasis on pedagogy during this period: “Many of the short works he wrote during the next two decades [i.e., after the death of his uncle] are primers intended chiefly for the guidance of his students.” Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltshen, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes: Essential Distinctions among the Individual Liberation, Great Vehicle, and Tantric Systems*, trans. by Jared Douglas Rhoton (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), 14. Incidentally, this timeline fits with Sapaṇ’s reflective statement, made in the *Profound Path* itself: “When I was young…” (*kho bo yang gzhon pa’i dus su* | *Lam zab mo*, 195.2.)

[17] *sngon drang srong skar ma la dga’ bas* | *sangs rgyas mu stegs kyi drang srong du mthong* | Ibid., 193.2.

> The Paṇḍit Asaṅga, having placed the protector Maitreya on his head, taught. Nobody at all could see [Maitreya] except for an old woman who, through a modicum of pure vision, saw a dog.[18]

A buddha is present, but no one except for Asanga has the ability to fully see Maitreya. If the other students in attendance were a bit more like the old woman (*rgan mo*), they too would be able to at least see the dog. The old woman, it seems, could also see things more clearly, as it is stated that she only has a modicum (*cung*) of pure vision. Indeed, seeing a Buddha in this case depends in large part on the capacity of the one who is looking. (In a different formulation of this theme, devotion (*mos pa*) or pure vision (*dag snang*) is a quality that even allows benefit to be derived from a completely ordinary object, such as a dog's tooth.)[19] In this case, the object of perception—the Buddha Maitreya—is special, but still nobody has the eyes to properly see him.

After these opening anecdotes, Sa skya Paṇḍita provides more examples of disciples needing to see the guru or lama as a buddha. As discussed in the previous chapter, tantric narratives often describe a Buddhist master engaged in mundane tasks or activities that would be considered transgressive or unethical from a mainstream perspective: bartending, farming, hunting, and so forth. Padmasambhava (*Slop dpon mtsho skye*) and Buddhajñānapāda (*Sangs rgyas ye shes zhabs*), for example, encountered their gurus herding pigs, serving beer, and tilling fields.[20] Sapaṇ also cites the story of Nāropa, meeting Tilopa by the river, "acting like a crazy man, killing and frying fish."[21] The contrast between the expectations of the student and their immediate perception initiates the master-disciple relationship according to a "phenomenology of surprise" that creates an impetus for questions, teachings, and further guidance. The task of seeing the guru as a buddha is considered more difficult because normal ways of assessing a teacher's status are intentionally undermined. As we will see below, Sapaṇ has difficulty seeing Grags pa rgyal mtshan as a buddha, only here it is not because his uncle is acting in a surprising or transgressive manner, but rather that as a family member he is just too familiar.

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[18] *slob dpon thogs med kyis | mgon po byams pa spyi bor bzhag nas bstan pas | sus kyang ma mthong | rgan mo zhig cung snang ba dag pas | khyi mor mthong |* Ibid., 193.2-3.

[19] In many Tibetan narratives, devotion allows a faithful Buddhist to accrue great benefit from an ordinary object. In an oft-repeated story, an old woman's son goes on pilgrimage—promising to bring his mother back a sacred relic of the Buddha. But, he forgets. Reaching the outskirts of town on the return journey home, he suddenly remembers his promise. Not wanting to disappoint his mother, he sees a dog's tooth on the ground and decides to present it to his mother as if it was from the Buddha. The old woman delightedly places the tooth on her shrine. As she begins to prostrate, the tooth emits light, much to the son's surprise! Even though the object is not a sacred relic it brings commensurate benefit for the one who sees it as such. This theme continues to inform Tibetan literature, as seen in Pad ma tshe brtan's (b. 1969) short story "Orgyan's Teeth" (*O rgyan gyi so*). In *Enticement: Stories of Tibet*, trans. Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani and Michael Monhart, et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 5-18.

[20] An account is seen in Buddhajñānapāda's life stories. See Dalton, "Enacting Perfection," 8-9 and 35-37.

[21] *nya gson po sreg pa la sogs pa mi 'tsham par byed pa'i smyon pa lta bur mthong | Lam zab mo*, 193.4.

Preliminary Hardships in Service of the Guru

One implication of seeing the guru as a buddha is a willingness to follow his commands, and Sa skya Paṇḍita's next group of citations describes the need for preliminary hardships in service to the guru. In each of Sapaṇ's examples hardships are done for a specific period of time. Nāropa, as we have seen above, was said to have undertaken a twelve-year period of austerities, while Maitrīpa (aka Advayavajra) undertook the "superior conduct" (Skt. *adhyācāra*; Tib. *lhag par spyod pa*) for one year.[22] As discussed in chapter four, in performing such hardships a disciple may be told to transgress mainstream Buddhist ethics and demonstrate a willingness to perform actions that are ordinarily proscribed. The guru may even adopt abusive behavior as a way of testing the student's resolve. Sapaṇ relates here that Padmasambhava endured hardships for one year, during which he was "hit by his lama" and "humiliated in the midst of a crowd."[23] The aim of the preliminary hardships, at least in the schematic presentation offered by Sa skya Paṇḍita, is to allow the student to receive the blessings of the guru or lama. Padmasambhava suffered abuse at the hands of his teacher, but "afterwards, he received the blessing of his master."[24] The consecration or "blessings" (Skt., *adhiṣṭhāna*, Tib. *byin rlabs*) of the guru, which are often literally delivered via liquid substances in initiation rites, are what fill up the disciple who has adequately performed hardships.[25] The preliminaries, metaphorically speaking, shape the disciple into a "suitable vessel" (*snod rung*), who is receptive to such blessings. The possibility of eventually receiving the guru's blessings thus provides a rationale for why it is important to endure the hardships associated with the preliminary stage of practice. Sa skya Paṇḍita notes at the end of this section that although has many such "stories of hardship" (*dka' ba spyad pa'i gtam rgyud*), he did not write them all down out of fear of being prolix.[26]

Not Just Your Uncle

The *Profound Path* next moves from the introductory scriptural citations and narrative examples to an extended autobiographical account. The trajectory of Sa skya Paṇḍita's text thus shifts registers, from canonical citations to the personal instructions received from Grags pa rgyal mtshan. In this way, the text also narrows in on Sapaṇ as someone who embodies traditional

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[22] The prefix *adhi-* usually means "higher" or "above," but here could also be translated as "trans-" insofar as normal ethical conduct (*ācāra*) is transgressed.

[23] *slob dpon mtsho skyes kyis kyang | lo gcig gi bar du | bla mas lus kyi brdung gtag gis tshogs gyi dbus su yang sma phab pa | Lam zab mo*, 194.5-6.

[24] *phyis bla ma'i byin rlabs zhugs* | Ibid., 194.6. The use of the preposition "after" (*phyis*), confirms the sequential relationship between hardships and receiving blessings. Sapaṇ then notes that the preliminary stage of hardships is meant to accomplish two tasks: "one acts in a way that pleases the lama, and then blessings enter." (*de lta bu'i bla ma mnyes par byed pa la byin rlabs 'jug* | Ibid.)

[25] For more on the etymology and meanings associated with *adhiṣṭhāna*, *byin rlabs*, and the Chinese 加持 (Ch. jiā chí), see Kaleb Yaniger, "Blessings in the Nyingma Shedra System: Three Modes to Interpret the Lineage of Realization" (MA thesis, Centre for Buddhist Studies, Kathmandu University, 2016), 16-24.

[26] *de la sogs pa'i dka' ba spyad pa'i gtam rgyud yi ge mangs kyis dogs nas ma bris | Lam zab mo*, 194.6.

perspectives by desiring to follow his lama's instructions and see him as a buddha. But, here, the lama is not engaged in surprising or transgressive behavior, so there is different problem: his uncle is seen as too ordinary. Because of this, when Sa skya Paṇḍita first asks for the guru yoga rite, he is denied:

> When I was young, I also requested the lama's consecration [for the guru yoga rite]. [Grags pa rgyal mtshan] said: "You have not generated the perception of a buddha. You perceive your paternal uncle and are unable to undergo hardship for the lama, with body or wealth." He did not bestow it.[27]

Guru yoga, as presented in this passage, is only meant for who already has at least some capacity for performing hardships and seeing the lama as a buddha. Sa skya Paṇḍita is rebuffed because he only sees Grags pa rgyal mtshan as his paternal uncle (*khu bo*). We might also recall here that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was a lay practitioner. The problem of seeing the lama as too ordinary presents a different challenge than those disciples who encounter a tantric adept engaging in unethical behavior. In those examples, a disciple must overcome their initial shock and accept counterintuitive behavior and hardships as a path towards insight. Sa skya Paṇḍita instead needs a ritualized method to generate the desired shift in perception, but he cannot receive the guru yoga rite right away because he is unable to complete a stage of preliminary hardships in service of the lama.

Indeed, Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides his nephew with a rather discouraging appraisal of modern practitioners and the possibility of fulfilling hardships as they were done in the past:

> "These days, what is the use of being beaten and struck by the lama? [The disciple] holds a grudge if [the lama] speaks one critical word. Or, if one is given a single meal late, one is also angry. Even becoming upset in regard to high and low seats—what is the point in discussing practicing hardships for an entire year?"[28]

One can almost imagine the precocious Sa skya Paṇḍita reading incredible accounts of Indian practitioners enduring great hardships in service to their gurus, and then asking his own lama about such a practice. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's reasons for why it is no longer appropriate to to undertake hardships may indeed have had a personal touch for Sapaṇ, as they all pertain to a person with a certain degree of institutional privilege: receiving personal instruction from a lama, beings served meals, and potentially sitting in a high seat.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's words are also framed with the term "these days" (*deng sang*), which provides a broader impression that things have changed, and modern practitioners are no longer able to live up to the high bar set by the disciples of old. For this reasons, there is simply

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[27] *kho bo yang gzhon pa'i dus su bla ma'i byin rlabs zhus pas | khyod gyis sangs rgyas gyi 'du shes mi skye | khu bo'i 'du shes skye | lus longs spyod kyis bla ma'i phyogs su dga' thub mi nus | gsungs nas ma gnang |* Ibid., 195.2-3.

[28] *deng sang bla mas brdung gtag ci dgos | tshigs ma legs pa cig brjod na khon du 'dzin | za ma cig ster 'phyis na'ang | ko long sdom 'dug | sa mthon dman la yang kho | lo'i bar gyi dka' ba spyod pa lta smos pa ci dgos |* Ibid., 194.6-195.1.

no use in expecting anyone to perform hardships for a year. Instead of aspiring to such heights, one should adopt a more realistic perspective based on current circumstances. The concluding sigh—"what's the point?" or "what need mention?" (*lta smos pa ci dgos*)—which (as seen in chapter three) was used throughout Grags pa rgyal mtshan's commentary to *Fifty Verses on the Guru*, strongly suggests that Sa skya Paṇḍita is indeed citing the words of his uncle.[29] The passage is also in keeping with Grags pa rgyal mtshan's the rhetorical style, as limit cases are presented in support of a more general conclusion. We are first presented with examples of minor inconveniences that cannot be endured. If we agree with this assessment of modern practitioners, then we will naturally conclude that subjecting a student to extreme hardship over the course of an entire year would not be a good idea.[30]

In the *Profound Path*, the practitioner is instead meant to fulfill the more realistic goal. Sa skya Paṇḍita is told at the end of this passage that a month-long period of preliminary service to the lama would be more in keeping with the times:

> "It is difficult for the blessings of guru yoga to enter, if [the disciple] is unable to serve the lama for the duration of a month as an attendant."[31]

Sa skya Paṇḍita again takes up a first-person voice to relay how he was able to fulfill this task:

> Later, a frightful sign of death arose. My constitution was also unwell. At that time, the precious dharma lord was a bit ill. I attended to him uninterruptedly, day and night, without any concern for food and sleep. It was as if some of my negative deeds were purified through that [service to the lama].[32]

Sa skya Paṇḍita shares that he was having omens of his impending death, and his body was also unwell. Coincidently, or so it seems at first, Grags pa rgyal mtshan also falls ill at this time. Sapaṇ then forgets his own problems and unstintingly cares for his uncle for a month. The period of service to Grags pa rgyal mtshan clears away some of the misdeeds (*sdig pa*) that are implicated in his inability to see the lama as a buddha.

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[29] At the end of the text, Sapaṇ notes that the direct quotations (*gsung pa*) were adapted from instruction he personally received, presumably from his uncle (*rang nyid la ji ltar gdams pa'i tshul mdo tsam bris pa'o* | Ibid., 207.1.)

[30] *The Life of Milarepa* includes a similar passage, as Mar pa tells his Mi la ras pa how to teach his own disciples: "When a fortunate disciple appears, even if he lacks material offerings, accept him by offering the oral instructions and in doing so spread the teachings. Attempting to break him down as Tilopa did to Nāropa, or as I did to you, will be of no benefit to those of less capacity, so set aside that style of teaching the dharma." Tsangnyön Heruka, *The Life of Milarepa*, trans. Andrew Quintman (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 106.

[31] *zla ba skyol ba'i bla ma'i zhabs tog mi nus pa bla ma'i rnal 'byor gyi byin rlabs 'jug par dka' gsung*; Ibid., 195.1-2.

[32] *phyis 'chi ltas 'jigs pa zhig byung | khams kyang ma bde de'i skabs su | chos rje rin po che la sku khams ma bde ba 'ga' byung | der nyin mtshan rgyun mi 'chad par gnyid dang | kha zas kyi 'du shes ma byas par zhabs tog byas | des sdig pa cung zad dag pa 'dra* | Ibid., 195.3-4.

After this period of service, Grags pa rgyal mtshan thus decides that it is the appropriate time to bestow the guru yoga rite. And when he does, Sa skya Paṇḍita perceives his teacher as the buddha Mañjuśrī:

> Then, as a result of bestowing the guru yoga rite, the perception of the lama as a buddha arose. Seeing [Grags pa rgyal mtshan] as Mañjuśrī, the essence of all the buddhas, an extraordinary devotion was born.[33]

The ability to see the teacher as a buddha gives rise extraordinary devotion, and the omens of death immediately dissipated. Sa skya Paṇḍita feels well again, and also experiences a series of insights that befit a Buddhist Indophile:

> Subsequently, I then had a clear comprehension about all the essential points of grammar, epistemology, poetics, composition, composition, secret mantra, the perfections, *abhidharma*, *vinaya*, scripture and reasoning, and so forth. I obtained the confidence of fearlessness in regard to the entire world and beings. Loving kindness also arose towards gods, spirits, and men. All the kings of India, and other proud beings who asked me to teach dharma, immediately gained quick comprehension. Inside, a modicum of correct understanding also arose.[34]

Receiving the guru yoga rite does more than effect the perception of his uncle Grags pa rgyal mtshan as the buddha Mañjuśrī. It also affords a clear understanding of a wide variety of scholastic topics. Insight into all the principal aspects of Sanskrit scholastic culture arise in a flash, as well as a feeling of goodwill towards all beings and an enhanced capacity to teach others, even proud kings. In gaining sudden mastery of the topics and qualities necessary for teaching in his day, Sa skya Paṇḍita himself also becomes akin to a buddha.[35]

At the end of his autobiographical narrative, Sa skya Paṇḍita shares his realization that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was merely feigning illness:

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[33] *de nas bla ma'i rnal 'byor 'di gnang bas | bla ma la sangs rgyas kyi 'du shes skyes | sangs rgyas thams cad kyi ngo bo | 'phags pa 'jam dpal du mthong | mos gus thun mong ma yin pa skye | de nyid kyis 'chi ltas las grol | kham shin tu bde | Lam zab mo*, 195.4-5.

[34] *de nas sgra | tshad ma | snyan ngag sdeb sbyor | tshig gi rgyan | gsang sngags pha rol tu phyin pa | mngon pa | 'dul ba la sogs pa | lung dang rigs pa'i gnas thams cad phyin ci ma log par gzod go | sde snod thams cad la mi 'jigs pa'i spobs pa thob | lha 'dre mi gsum yang byams par byung | rgya gar gi rgyal po la sogs pa nga rgyal can thams cad | nged la chos zhu zer nas gtsigs byed pa'ang gzod byung | nang du'ang yang dag pa'i rtogs pa cung zad skyes |* Ibid., 195.5-196.1.

[35] Sa skya Paṇḍita's list of insights is not exactly the same as qualities attributed to the enlightened buddha, although they include a similar combination of analytical knowledge (*pratisamvid*) and measureless qualities (*apramāna*s). The ability to teach others, including Indian kings, offers another point of comparison. Sa skya Paṇḍita does not explicitly make such a claim here, but this passage is a strongly-worded account of his own realization.

> At that time, in order to arrange conducive circumstances for benefitting me [Grags pa rgyal mtshan] pretended to be unwell. It was not a real sickness. If others also act in that manner, have no doubt that there will be unmistaken, auspicious circumstances.[36]

Sa skya Paṇḍita does fully explain how he came to the realization that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was only pretending to be sick (*bsnyung ba'i tshul bstan pa*), but he does suggest this pedagogical strategy could be successfully emulated by other teachers. Sapaṇ's autobiographical narrative resonates with canonical examples of the Buddha issuing white lies or playacting for the benefit of the student.[37] Much like the citations provided earlier in the text, his own lama was able to create conducive circumstances (*rten 'brel*) by acting in an unconventional manner. The story also fits with a broader Tibetan trope of the lama pretending to need care or material offerings, when really it is all said to be meant for the benefit of the student.[38] Grags pa rgyal mtshan's actions thus accord with the unorthodox behavior of past lamas and Sa skya Paṇḍita acts as a model student who fulfills a period of service to the lama.

Nevertheless, there are a number of differences between the canonical citations and Sa skya Paṇḍita's presentation of guru yoga. The colloquial term "these days" plays an important rhetorical role in the structure of the *Profound Path*, marking a shift from past to present, from India to Tibet, and from the citation of scripture to the quotation of the lama's direct speech. As an indexical phrase, it first appears to negatively evaluate the present in relationship to the past. Indeed, across religious traditions many authors have pejoratively used terms for the "present age" as a way of arguing for a return to past glories. In this case, however, Sa skya Paṇḍita does not suggest that contemporary Tibetans should up their game and actually try to live up to the imagined standard of earlier hardships. At Sa skya Monastery, serving the lama and ritual practices are presented as adequate ways to fulfill this necessary stage of preliminary practice. Indeed, Sapaṇ's own exalted insights speak to the power of the guru yoga rite. Sapaṇ's negative rhetoric—that emphasizes the differences between past and present, India and Tibet, and guru and disciple—might thus been seen as a way of bolstering the need for guru yoga as a rite that can bridge these very gaps. Far from rejecting the need for a preliminary stage of practice and seeing the lama as a buddha, the turn marked by "these days" confirms their continued importance in a new institutional context.

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[36] *de'i tshe | kho bo la phan par bya ba'i don du rten 'brel 'grig pa'i phyir | bsnyung ba'i tshul bstan pa yin gyi | bsnyung ba dngos ma yin par 'dug | gzhan gyis kyang de ltar byas na | rten 'brel phyin ci ma log pa 'grig par 'gyur ba la the tshom mi za | Lam zab*, 196.1-2.

[37] The trope of the the Buddha lying in order to benefit students is perhaps most famously used in the *Lotus Sutra*.

[38] In the life stories of Mi la ras pa, for instance, the lama Mar pa is repeatedly said to be *acting* angry to ensure that his disciple continues performing the preliminary hardships that will ensure his success in meditation practice. In many cases, the narrative adopts thespian tropes. Mar pa has soliloquies and asides with his wife Bdag med ma, in which he explains how all of his actions are ultimately for Mi la ras pa's benefit. At the end of Mi la's time as a student, Mar pa reveals the reasons for each of the actions. See: *The Life of Milarepa*, 84.

Preliminary Practices

Sa skya Paṇḍita suggests other lamas could guide students in similar manner to Grags pa rgyal mtshan (which is to say, by playacting), but he does not prescribe a month-long period of service to the lama as a standard course of preliminary practice at Sa skya. In the *Profound Path of Guru Yoga*, the preliminaries instead begin with a period of making mandala offering to the lama, who is visualized together with an array of other lineage masters, deities, buddhas, and dharma scriptures.[39] One recites prayers, while imagining that the mandala offering encompasses everything that is excellent in the world and beyond. As in Anupamavajra's presentation of the *gurumaṇḍala* in *Light on the Foundational Practices*, the mandala is not a one-time offering, made before a teaching event or initiation ceremony; instead, the "seven-heaped mandala" is meant to be offered "again and again," in four sessions per day.[40]

In the *Profound Path of Guru Yoga*, Sa skya Paṇḍita does not go into detail about the various ways of performing mandala offerings, but he does in a text called *Three Offering Mandalas: Outer, Inner, and Secret* (*Phyi nang gsang gsum gyi mandala 'bul chog bzhug*).[41] The detailed overview of the various methods for offering the mandala in this text is reminiscent of his uncle's lengthy account in *Precious Garland* (see chapter three). Each manner of offering the mandala (i.e., outer, inner, and secret) is introduced with a scriptural citation. In the first case, for the outer offering, Sa skya Paṇḍita cites a verse from the *Guhyasamājatantra*:

> The knowledgeable ones, desirous of success, offer this realm, completely filled with the seven precious jewels, for the sake of accomplishment.[42]

Sapaṇ then explains how to perform the offering rite by delimiting an area of earth, anointing it with perfumed water, and imagining that it is a golden foundation for the subsequent offering. Sa skya Paṇḍita does not provide such details about how to perform the mandala offering here in the *Profound Path*, but he does emphasize its role as a preliminary rite.

Between sessions of offering the mandala (*thun mtshams su*), disciples are also instructed to make their body, speech, and mind useful by performing manual labor, praising the lama, and mentally considering him as a buddha in the flesh:

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[39] In the three stages of ritual practice (*cho ga gsum*), the mandala offering is a "preliminary" or "application" (*sbyor ba*) rite. It is then followed by the "main part" (*dngos gzhi*) and "conclusion actions" (*rjes mdzad pa*).

[40] Sa skya Paṇḍita includes the term, "etcetera" (*la sogs pa*) here, so we can assume that any number of piles on the mandala offering would be suitable (*mandala tshom bu bdun pa la sogs pa yang yang dbul*; *Lam zab*, 192.3). The mandala is offered in "four sessions: early and late morning, afternoon, and evening (*de ltar snga dro phyi dro srod tho rangs thun bzhi la 'bad de bya* | Ibid., 192.5)

[41] In *Sa skya bka' 'bum* 16, 153-156 (Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007).

[42] *rin chen bdun gyis yongs bkang ba'i | zhing 'di rnam par mkhas pas ni || ye shes 'dod pas dngos grub 'dod / nyin re shes rab can gyis dbul*; Ibid., 153. The Sanskrit verse yields a slightly different translation: "The clear-sighted one, knowledgeable, desirous of accomplishment, having filled this [mandala] with seven jewels, ought to offer it every day for the sake of accomplishing the ocean of generosity." (*saptaratnair idaṃ kṛtvā paripūrṇaṃ vicakṣaṇaḥ | dadyāt pratidinaṃ prājño dānābdhisiddhikāṅkṣyā | Guhyasamāja* 8.22.)

> Between sessions, for the sake of making one's body useful, needed stones and dirt are collected for the lama. Do farm work and commerce; gather water and wood. It is excellent if work makes one perspire and fatigued. For the sake of making one's voice purposeful: praise and supplicate the lama, express all of the lama's qualities, and proclaim the lama's glory in every direction, saying, "the lama is truly a buddha." If one goes to an isolated place, it is said to be excellent if you supplicate by calling out loud. For the sake of making the mind purposeful: [reflect on the fact that] "this lama is really a buddha."[43]

As in the famous Tibetan story of Mi la ras pa, who served his teacher Mar pa by collecting stones and building towers and a fortress, the student is told here to do manual labor for the lama. The idea of seeing the lama as a buddha is not a secret or even restricted at all in this text, as disciples are encouraged to proclaim the lama's qualities far and wide. Even in an isolated place, the lama's qualities should be vocalized. Finally, one is meant to think "the lama is truly a buddha" as way of training the mind. As disciples perform the mandala offering in four sessions a day, these passages suggest that they also work and travel from place to place. As all of these varied activities are examples of what could be done between sessions of offering the mandala, this passage suggests a somewhat lengthy phase of preliminary practice.

Unlike Buddhist narratives about hardships, which describe an individual master-disciple relationship that unfolds outside of an institutional context, the presentation of the preliminary practices here in the *Profound Path* suggests a communal atmosphere centered on the person of the lama. The physical labor is done to satisfy the "needs of the lama" (*bla ma la dgos pa*). The collected (*len pa*) stones and dirt do not call to mind the daily subsistence of an individual, but rather the needs of a growing institution. Sa skya Paṇḍita's own narrative of serving Grags pa rgyal mtshan for one month also unfolds in an institutional context.[44] For most students, such preliminary practices—serving the lama and repeatedly offering the mandala—are what need to be done before receiving the blessing for the guru yoga rite. The standardized versions of the preliminary practices do not depend on a relationship with a tantric guru who issues commands uniquely suited to an individual student's capacity and temperament, but they are also said to ensure that the body, speech, and mind "become serviceable" and that the "door of blessings is open."[45] Much like hardships, the preliminary rites form the Buddhist subject in relation to the master, such that they are ready to receive the blessings associated with the guru yoga rite.

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[43] *thun mtshams su lus don yod par bya ba'i phyir | bla ma la dgos pa'i sa rdo len pa dang | zhing las tshong las chu shing bsgrub pa la sogs pa | lus dub pa rngul thon pa'i bya ba byas na bzang gsung | ngag don yod par bya ba'i phyir | bla ma la bstod cing gsol ba gdab pa dang | bla ma'i yon ton thams cad brjod pa dang | bla ma sangs rgyas dngos yin | zhes phyogs kun tu snyan pa bsgrag | dben par song zhing skad gsang mthon pos gsol ba btab pa na bzang gsungs | sems don yod par bya ba'i phyir | bla ma 'di sangs rgyas dngos yin | Lam zab mo,* 192.5-193.2.

[44] Indeed, the term used by Sa skya Paṇḍita for "serving" or "attending" to the lama during this period (*bla ma'i zhabs tog*) resonates with the modern colloquial term for a lama's attendant, *zhabs phyi*.

[45] *de ltar don yod pa'i sgo nas | sdig pa sbyang | bsod nams bsags te | lus ngag yid gsum gser sbyangs pa ltar las su rung bar gyur pa dang byin rlabs kyi sgo dbye ba dngos la gsum | Lam zab mo*, 196.2-3.

Guru Yoga

In the *Profound Path*, after Sa skya Paṇḍita has concluded his own autobiographical remarks, he provides a more generalized account of how to pass down the guru yoga rite to a disciple.[46] The lama first bestows a consecration (*byin rlabs*). The ritual sequence begins with the lama being equated with the buddha in doctrinal terms:

> [The lama] provides an introduction, saying: "The mind of the master is the truth body, beyond concepts. The inseparability of the [lama] and the deity is the enjoyment body, and the emanation body is all of the enlightened activities. The very nature of [the lama's] body is the inseparable essence of all these [bodies]."[47]

At the very beginning of the consecration sequence, the lama is equated to a buddha in terms of the three bodies (Skt. *trikāya*; Tib. *sku gsum*). The use of a doctrinal verse to "point out" or "introduce" (*ngo sprad*) the nature of the lama as a buddha provides a much different model than the one described in the earlier citations.[48] The student is not meant to be shocked or even surprised by the unorthodox behavior of the guru but is rather told to see the lama as a buddha and tantric deity (*yi dam lha*) in a specific ritual context. Unlike in Mar pa's biographical search for the guru, where visions along the way eventually lead to Nāropa, here a disciple first receives instructions in person and then practices guru yoga as a way of repeatedly envisioning the lama as a buddha. The presence of the lama during this face-to-face encounter provides a paradigm for generating the imagined presence of the lama as a deity as a daily practice. The pointing out instruction is the first way the ritual sequence shapes the disciple's perception of the lama.

Immediately after the pointing out instruction comes the main visualization sequence of the guru yoga rite. As in the *tshar gsum khug pa* rite, the student imagines a white *oṃ*, red *āḥ*, and blue *hūṃ* at the forehead, throat and heart of the lama. These syllables are a second way the physical presence of the lama is mediated in the ritual encounter. As a visual representation of the qualities of the lama, the syllables impart the tantric initiations to the student. The white *oṃ* on the lama's forehead emits a multitude of white syllables that permeate the students body, transforming it into brilliant white light that purifies bodily defilements (*dri ma*). The student thus "imagines receiving the vase empowerment" (*bum pa'i dbang thob snyam du sgom*). The ritual sequence continues in a similar fashion with the other two syllables. At the end, rainbow light emanates from the body, speech, and mind of the lama and pervade the body, speech, and mind of the student. During this consecration rite, the body of the lama serves as a basis for a visualized element that transmits the tantric initiations to the student. As we will see, this

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[46] The *Profound Path* appears to have been written for lamas, i.e., the one bestowing the blessing for the guru yoga rite. It is not a liturgy that is recited by the student, but a set of instructions for how to guide others.

[47] *bla ma'i thugs rnam par mi rtog pa chos sku | sku yi dam lha dang dbyer med pa longs sku | mdzad pa 'phrin las thams cad sprul sku | de rnams ngo bo dbyer med pa ngo bo nyid kyi sku yin no | zhes ngo sprad | Lam zab mo*, 200.6-201.1.

[48] The term "introduce" (*ngo sprod*) is highly significant in Tibetan Buddhist traditions, and it is most commonly used to describe instructions for recognizing the nature of mind.

visualization technique—done first in the presence of the lama—also provides a template for the everyday ritual practice that is meant to be done in his absence.

The final section of the ritual sequence entails letting the the mind rest in reality. The instructions are written for both the lama and student:

> The student sits in a cross-legged posture, places the hands in meditative equipoise, and straightens the spine. Gaze in an astonished, yet serious manner, between the eyebrows of the master. The mind does not grasp at anything whatsoever. Rest by allowing [concepts] to naturally vanish, like smoke disappearing in the sky. Then, the lama relaxes the vajra and bell with the body. [The student] recites the heart mantra of the deity and the *Āli* mantra of Nairātmyā. Mentally, [the student] gives rise to faith that the lama and deity are inseparable and [the lama] prays, "may correct knowledge arise and increase in the mind-stream of the student." The lama also places the mind in non-conceptual equipoise.[49]

The student has already ascertained that the teacher is a buddha, and now sits in a mediative posture and rests the mind on reality. For a moment, there is a fixed posture and gaze. The mind rests. When the lama loosens the grasp of the ritual instruments, the student also lets go of the meditation. In addition to providing ritual cues, the lama's presence also provides a model for meditating on reality. Perhaps, as lama and disciple sit in meditation together, there is also meant to be a mental transmission. The main ritual sequence culminates in this scripted interaction between the teacher and student.

The final section of the *Profound Path* outlines the training that should be done by the student after receiving the guru yoga rite. Mainstream ethical categories, such as avoiding the ten non-virtues, are adjusted to emphasize that it is primarily improper actions towards the lama that should be avoided. The instructions here are predicated on an impossibility of the lama to do harm. No matter the actions of the lama, it is up to the student to maintain the perception of the lama-as-buddha.[50] Additionally, instead of offering the mandala, the student now must do the guru yoga rite four times per day. The guru yoga rite is not meant to be done in the presence of the lama, but as a visualization practice:

> Imagine the lama as inseparable from [a deity] such as Hevajra or Cakrasaṃvara, surrounded by lineage masters, and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. If one makes effort

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[49] *slob ma'i lus skyil krung | lag pa mnyam gzhag | sgal tshigs drang por bsrang | bla ma'i smin mtshams su mig mi 'dzums pa'i tshul gyis had de blta | sems gang la yang 'dzin pa med par | nam mkha la du ba yal ba ltar rang yal du gzhag | de nas bla mas lus kyis rdo rje dril bu dgrol | ngag tu yid dam lha'i snying po dang | rje btsun rdo rje bdag med ma'i ā li'i sngags bzlas | sems kyis bla ma dang dkon mchog gsum la dbyer mi phyed pa'i dad pa byas la | slob ma'i rgyud la yang dag pa'i ye shes skye ba dang | 'phel zhing mi nyams par mdzad du gsol | zhes gsol ba btab la | bla mas kyang rnam par mi rtog pa'i ting nge 'dzin la mnyam par gzhag* | *Lam zab mo*, 201.6-202.3.

[50] The foremost consideration is "not to find fault in the body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities of the lama." (*dang po ni bla ma'i sku gsung thugs yon tan phrin las la skyon du mi gzung* | Ibid., 203.2.) Even if the lama acts in a way that is "against common convention" (*'jig rten pa dang 'gal ba sna tshogs mdzad* | Ibid., 203.4), one should not be mistaken about his status as a buddha. Perceiving the lama's wrongdoing is actually a result of "perverse way of seeing due to the obscurations of one's own wrongdoing" (*nga rang gi las ngan gyi sgrib pas snang ba phyin ci log yin*; Ibid., 203.5), and instead one ought to "think that through this [the lama] is certainly acting to benefit myself and all beings" (*tshul 'dis bdag dang sems can thams cad la phan pa'i rten 'brel mdzad nges snyam du bsam* | Ibid.)

practicing guru yoga in four sessions a day, one will attaining full awakening in this very life.[51]

The consecration for the guru yoga rite is meant to engender the vision of the lama as a buddha, and this mode of seeing is then applied as a daily practice. Sa skya Paṇḍita does not indicate a preference for one particular deity, but the passage indicates that Hevajra and Cakrasaṃvara were common options in his tradition. Guru yoga and the visualized lama-as-deity are not expedient means for when the lama is otherwise unavailable (as in Abhayākaragupta's self-initiation rite), but everyday ritual technologies. The guru yoga practice, in other words, is specifically designed for invoking the imagined presence of the lama in the manner of a buddha.

In the *Profound Path of Guru Yoga*, the presentation of guru yoga as an everyday rite highlights the importance of seeing the lama as a buddha, as both a method and goal. Sapaṇ's vision of Grags pa rgyal mtshan as Mañjuśrī is effected by the guru yoga rite, but in order to even receive this practice he had to first clear away some of the obscurations that were keeping him from seeing him as anything more than his familiar uncle. The careful framing of the rite suggests that it was seen as an important method for promoting this vision at Sa skya Monastery.

Conclusion

In the *Profound Path of Guru Yoga*, the shift towards visualizing the lama as a buddha within a standardized course of ritual practices that culminate in guru yoga appears to be one way of domesticating tantra in an institutional context. The profound path of the lama is no longer "extremely secret," as indicated in Sapaṇ's citation from the *Path and Fruit.* Sa skya Paṇḍita instead presents guru yoga in a manner that suggests it was meant to be widely practiced. At Sa skya, the guru was not expected to occupy a peripheral space or issue idiosyncratic commands that force a student to perform arduous hardships. Sapaṇ instead provides general instructions for serving the lama and performing preliminary rites. The thirty-day period of service to the lama performed by Sapaṇ himself might then be best seen as the exception that proves the rule. A lama cannot feign illness for thirty days every time a monk or lay practitioner at Sa skya needs to receive the guru yoga rite. Others, it would seem, are meant to fulfill the preliminary stage of practice by repeatedly offer the seven-heaped mandala and indirectly serving the lama by carrying out institutional tasks. The statement that "these days" students cannot live up to the example set by past disciples might also be taken as a tacit acknowledgement that the lama also cannot teach in the manner depicted in the scriptural citations. Personalized instruction is more difficult in larger institution, and the scope of Sa skya activity was rapidly expanding in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Much as modern-day technologies generate a sense of familiarity with famous figures worldwide, visualization practices such as guru yoga allowed for greater access to prominent lamas in Tibet.

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[51] *bla ma dgyes pa'i rdo rje'am | 'khor lo bde mchog la sogs pa dang dbyer mi phyed pa la | bla ma brgyud pa dang | sangs rgyas dang | byang chub sems dpa' thams cad kyis bskor bar bsgoms pa la | bla ma'i rnal 'byor thun bzhi la sogs pa 'bad na | tshe 'di nyid la 'tshang ryga bar 'gyur* | Ibid., 205.3-5.

Chapter 6: The Bearded Buddha

In this final chapter, we turn to Bka' brgyud preliminary practices that are oriented toward the lama. The veneration of the lama was emphasized in the institutions established by the disciples of Sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen (1079-1153) and Phag mo gru pa (1110-1170). Phag mo gru pa, in particular, offers a valuable case study: not only for how communities formed around the person of the lama, but also because his followers equated him to a buddha in biographies and painted *thang ka*s. As Bka' brgyud institutions grew in size and number in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the individualized hardships described in the biographies of Nāropa and Mar pa were supplanted by a standardized sets of preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) entirely focused on the lama. In these Bka' brgyud preliminary rites, which now included guru yoga, the lama was often not imagined as an Indic deity, so much as a local buddha in human form.

Phag mo gru pa was portrayed in the manner of a buddha in paintings and lifelike statues (*'dra sku*), some of which circulated during his lifetime. In these works, recognizable facial characteristics—his bulbous nose and thin black beard—are mixed with motifs commonly used to depict Śākyamuni Buddha: he sits cross-legged on a lotus-throne, has a diamond-shaped *ūrṇā*, and displays the earth-touching mudra (*bhūmisparśa*). In the ornate hand-painted *thang ka*s produced in the institutions founded by his disciples Stag lung thang pa (1142-1210) and 'Jig rten mgon po (1143-1217), the impression of Phag mo gru pa as a buddha-like figure was enhanced further with columns of past-life images. The uppermost register of such paintings also began to routinely include a lineage of Indian and Tibetan Bka' brgyud gurus and lamas.

The apotheosis of Phag mo gru pa corresponded with instructions for visualizing the lama in contemporary Bka' brygud preliminary practices. The stand-alone *sngon 'gro* texts attributed to figures such as Lama Zhang brtson 'grus grags pa (1123-1193) and a great-grand disciple of Phag mo gru pa named Lo ras pa dbang phyug (1187- 1250) include the four preliminary rites commonly associated with the genre today: bowing, confession, mandala offerings, and guru yoga. In the *Instruction Manual for the Preliminary Practices*, Lo ras pa acknowledges that "formerly" (*sngar nas*) such practices were done in various ways, but that now they should be done for a specific amount of time (*dus*) or until a practitioner receives a sign of accomplishment (*rtags*). In *Mahāmudrā Preliminaries*, Lama Zhang of the Dwags po school indicates that the visualized lama "gathers into one" (*gcig tu bsdu*) all other objects of worship, including the triple gem, earlier lineage lamas, and the tantric deities. Lama Zhang makes a number of statements in this text that celebrate the importance of the lama in his tradition.

The likenesses of Phag mo gru pa and other lamas in twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Bka' brgyud iconography provided a template for the development of guru yoga in Tibet. Over the following centuries, complex visualization practices were centered on deified lamas such as Padmasambhava, the Kar ma pas, and Tsong kha pa. In communities across Tibet, guru yoga and the other preliminary practices became commonplace methods for venerating such exalted figures, along with the more local lamas within a given institution or school. To be a Buddhist, in Tibet, increasingly meant properly orienting oneself, through ritual practices, toward a lama instead of towards the Buddha himself.

As a young man, Phag mo gru pa travelled from Khams to central Tibet and became a monk. For much of his youth he studied with Bka' gdams pa teachers, and afterward, for twelve years, he lived at Sa skya Monastery, learning the Lam 'bras system with the lay lama Sa chen kun dga' snying po. Phag mo gru pa may have received the guru yoga (aka the *tshar gsum khug pa*) rite here at Sa skya, although it is also possible that he learned it later, when studying with Sgam po pa, a prominent figure in Mar pa's lineage.[1] Phag mo gru pa spent a comparatively short time with Sgam po pa, but the *mahāmudrā* instructions that he received became a key facet of his own teachings. Phag mo gru pa's different phases of training illustrate the overlap among the new Buddhist schools in the twelfth century. Eventually, after so much moving, he settled at a place called Gdan sa mthil, where he lived for the final twelve years of his life, from 1158 to 1170.[2]

Unlike Sapaṇ's autobiographical narratives found in the *Profound Path of Guru Yoga*, which are set within the walls of Sa skya Monastery, stories about Phag mo gru pa's disciples speak to the formation of a new community around the figure of a charismatic lama. The *Blue Annals* (*Deb ther sngon po*) reports, for instance, that as a young man Stag lung thang pa bkra shis dpal (1142-1210) was living in southeastern Tibet, in the area of Snyel.[3] A messenger arrived one day, bearing letters and gifts for his co-religionist Lama Rmog cog. Among these items was a "realistic image" (*sku 'bag*) of Phag mo gru pa. For Lama Rmog cog, who had already met this famous scholar and meditator in person, Phag mo gru pa was immediately recognizable due to his prominent nose, wide grin, and thin black beard.[4] Rmog cog had surely already told Stag lung about Phag mo gru pa; now, he called him to make an offering to the newly-arrived image:

> [Lama Rmog] said [to Stag lung]: "Won't you come here to also worship [this image]?" Having gathered materials for a butter lamp, [Stag lung] went to make an offering. As soon as he saw [the image of Phag mo gru pa] there emerged the definite intention [to meet him in person]. Soon after, he went to central Tibet.[5]

The *Blue Annals* passage does not account for whether the realistic image of Phag mo gru pa was a statue or painting. In either case, the image of the lama elicited a visceral response from Stag lung, such that he "immediately" (*cig ma*) gives rise to "a determined resolve" (*snyam pa'i zhe bcad*) to go and meet the lama in person. The lama does not act from afar here, but rather the

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[1] See: Tony Duff, *Gampopa's Mahamudra: The Five-Part Mahamudra Practice Taught to Phagmo Drupa by Gampopa* (Kathmandu: Padma Karpo Translation Committe, 2008), 3-4.

[2] An overview of the life of Phag mo grup pa is provided by 'Gos Lo tsa ba, *Blue Annals* (2 vols.), trans. George N. Roerich (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 552-563. Phag mo gru pa's life has only been briefly presented in academic works. See: Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 333.

[3] *de nas snyel der bzhugs tsa na bla ma rmog la phag mo gru pa'i sku 'bag cig bskur byung ba la*; *Deb ther sngon po* 2 (Chengdu: Si Khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1984), 719.

[4] Lama Rmog met Phag mo gru pa on his way to see Sgam po pa. Ibid., 737.

[5] *khyod rang yang mchod pa la e 'ong zer bas mar me'i rgyu gzung nas mchod pa la byon pas | 'di'i rtsar cig ma byon na snyam pa'i zhe bcad 'khrungs | de nas dbus su 'byon* | Ibid., 719.

image itself invites closer contact.[6] In moving across great distances, arriving by messenger, it produces in its very proximity to Stag lung thang pa a reciprocal desire for movement. According to this history, the image of Phag mo dru pa initiated a life-changing journey for, after traveling the roughly one-hundred miles between Snyel and Gdan sa mthil, Stag lung lived with Phag mo gru pa for the last seven years of the lama's life.

In addition to Stag lung, other disciples who settled around Phag mo gru pa's meditation hut at Gdan sa mthil also arrived from great distances. 'Jig rten mgon po (1143-1217) and Gling ras pa (1128-1188) were said to have been drawn to meet the lama simply upon hearing his name while traveling in central Tibet. For the disciples that gathered around Phag mo gru pa, and other lamas from this period, the lack of a pre-existing clan-based, regional, or institutional identity increased the importance of the bond created by a shared master-disciple relationship.[7] The singular focus on the lama, however, made such groups vulnerable to succession issues.

In institutional terms, Phag mo gru pa's death in 1170 was irresolvable, as none of his followers was able to hold a comparable influence on the community.[8] The lama's presence was symbolically extended, however, through the construction of two lifelike statues (*'dra sku*) made soon after his death:

> The precious image of Phag mo gru pa that exists in his willow-twig hut was erected by his disciples after his passing away by combining much of his cremation ashes with clay, in which medicinal substances, precious substances, and silk had also been mixed. It possessed a very strong blessing.[9]

Just as the relics of Buddha Śākyamuni were collected and deposited in stupas across India, the disciples of Phag mo gru pa placed the remains of their revered lama in two statues: one that was situated in his willow-twig hut (*'jag spyil*) and the other at his teaching seat (*chos khri*). An anecdote in the *Blue Annals* confirms that the representations of Phag mo gru pa were meant to be a very realistic. As the sculptor Mar pa lha snying was almost finished with the first statue, a nun who passed by emphatically stated that "My lama was just like that—now, don't

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[6] The circulation of images recalls Walter Benjamin's famous statement that "technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself." "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 220. Of course, here it was not fine art that is being reproduced, but the visage of a charismatic lama.

[7] Carl Yamamoto discusses the ways charisma functioned in the formation of communities around the figure of the lama in this period: "For Lama Zhang and many of his Bka' brgyud pa contemporaries—such as the First Karma pa Dus gsum mkhyen pa and the First Phag mo gru pa Rdo rje gyal po—it was charisma that attracted disciples and patrons. As such, it acted as an important organizing and binding principle within their religious communities." *Vision and Violence: Lama Zhang and the Politics of Charisma in Twelfth-Century Tibet* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 89.

[8] Dan Martin describes events that unfolded after Phag mo gru pa's death, especially relating to his sizable library. For the first six years, nobody served as abbot, "even though Lama Zhang pronounced a blessing at the head of the assembly, which seems to indicate that he was being considered for the position but then turned it down." From 1177-1179, 'Jig rten mgon po did serve as abbot, but due to a lack of resources he moved to the area 'Bri gung. "The Book-Moving Incident of 1209," in *Edition, éditions: l'écrit au Tibet, évolution et devenir*, eds. Anne Chayet, Christina Scherrer-Schaub, Françoise Robin, & Jean-Luc Achard (München: Indus Verlag, 2010), 205.

[9] David P. Jackson, *Mirror of the Buddha: Early Portraits from Tibet*. New York: Rubin Museum of Art (2011).

change it!"[10] The story about Stag lung indicates that the circulation of realistic images played a role in the formation of a community around Phag mo gru pa. The multiplication of such images continued to promote his legacy in the decades after his death.

Images of Phag mo gru pa

A statue held at the Cleveland Museum of Art exemplifies the detail that was used to depict Phag mo gru pa (see **Image 1** on page 115).[11] The combination of Phag mo gru pa's realistic features —such as his large nose and thin black beard—with standard modes of depicting Śākyamuni gives the impression that his facial characteristics are also "marks" (Skt. *lakṣaṇa*; Tib. *mtshan*) of a buddha-like figure. One Tibetan artist emphasized the trope of the "bearded buddha" by adding facial hair to each of the past-life images in a painting of Phag mo gru pa (see **Image 3** on page 118), as if the the beard itself could be seen as a confirmation of Phag mo gru pa's exalted status in previous lifetimes. The emphasis on personal traits, which now appear to be equally important as visual tropes for depicting the Buddha, offer a striking example of a turn towards the historical and local, a trend that is also seen in Bka' rgyud guru yoga rites.[12]

The twelfth-century painting "Phag mo gru pa and Vairocana" provides an exceptional example of Phag mo gru pa's elevated status (see **Image 2** on page 116).[13] Earlier Tibetan paintings typically focused on Indic bodhisattvas, *tathāgata* buddhas, and tantric deities as the

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[10] *nga'i bla ma de 'di kho na 'dra | da bcas bcos ma byed zer*; *Deb ther sngon po*, 671.

[11] Rendered in a fine-grained copper alloy, the lama's visage is particularly precise: his broad smile and slightly protruding bottom lip reveal a thin set of distinct lower teeth. Phag mo gru pa's large bulbous nose, beard and mustache are all distinctive features (especially facial hair, which is rare in Tibetan portraiture). Phag mo gru pa sits alone on a lotus-throne that is inset with decorative designs, gold, silver, and gems. The throne is another significant indication of his status, as the lotus-motif was usually reserved for a buddha. Phag mo gru pa's right hand is extended over the right shin, with the third finger touching the lotus seat in the earth-touching mudra (*bhūmisparśa*). The left hand is resting loosely on his lap. Phag mo gru pa has downward-cast eyes, elongated ears, and a small diamond-shaped *ūrṇā* between his eyebrows. He sits sits *en face*, another innovative mode of depicting a lama in the manner of the Buddha. David P. Jackson, *Painting Traditions of the Drigung Kagyu School* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2015), 83.

[12] Contemporary Chinese Buddhists were also experimenting with different ways of representing the master in the manner of a buddha. Building on work by T. Griffith Foulk and Robert H. Sharf, Kevin Buckelew examines the theme of *likeness* in Chan ritual. Buckelew's conclusion—that a "complex combination of likeness and unlikeness to the Buddha's example" offers a particularly evocative way of presenting the human master as a buddha-like figure—also appears here in the iconography surrounding Phag mo gru pa. "Ritual Authority and the Problem of Likeness in Chan Buddhism," *History of Religions* 62, no. 1 (Aug. 2022), 9. https://doi.org/10.1086/720627.

[13] Christian Luczanits titles this painting "Vairocana with a Kagyu lineage on top and Phagmodrupa in the crown" and tentatively dates it to the second half of the twelfth century. "Dating Tibetan Art," 34-36. The small image of a disciple to the bottom left of the throne suggests to Luczanits that the painting was completed in second half of the twelfth century, soon after Phag mo gru pa's death or even in the final decades of his life. The painting of Vairocana and Phag mo gru pa has also been published in Steven M. Kossak and Jane Casey Singer, *Sacred Visions*, 17-18; and J.C. Singer and P. Denwood eds. *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style* (London: Laurence King, 1997); J.C. Singer, "Painting in Central Tibet, ca. 950-1400," *Artibus Asiae* 54, no. 1/2 (1994), 87-136. The image is also found at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

main image. In this case too, Vairocana is the central figure.[14] The location of Phag mo gru pa above the buddha Vairocana is the surprising element in this painting, and although it is difficult to pinpoint the precise hierarchical relationship between these two figures, it certainly suggests a sense of indigenous authority.[15] Christian Luczanits asserts, for instance, that the placement of Phag mo gru pa is an "extreme religious-political statement" because it considers a contemporary teacher as even higher than a buddha.[16] In light of Indic statements that prioritize the worship of the guru, the idea itself is not particularly shocking.[17] As an artistic statement, however, the image of the Tibetan lama above the head of an Indic buddha is novel.[18] The fact that Phag mo gru pa is fully ensconced in Vairocana's crown and nimbus, also suggests that they might be seen as one ontological unit (see **Detail 1** on page 117). On this reading, Phag mo gru pa might not be represented as superior to Vairocana, so much as the painting attempts to depict their entwined relationship.

The "Phag mo gru pa and Vairocana" painting includes a short sequence of Bka' brgyud gurus on the uppermost register: beginning on the left with the primordial buddha Vajradhara (Tib. Rdo rje 'chang), Tilopa, and Nāropa, and continuing on the right with Mar pa, Mi la ras pa, and Sgam po pa, Phag mo gru pa's own lama. The seven Indian gurus and Tibetan lamas at the top of the painting are numerically mirrored by the tantric deities on the lowermost register. The elevated presence of the human figures (which serve as a substitute for the tantric deities often seen in earlier painted works) demonstrates the centrality of lamas in twelfth-century Bka' brgyud lineages (which, as noted above, did not have a corresponding clan- or family-based history). Phag mo gru pa himself must be seen as the current representative of this guru lineage. The image of a devoted supplicant in the bottom corner of Vairocana's throne (see **Detail 2** on page 117) who is looking upwards towards Phag mo gru pa with hands clasped at his chest in *añjalimudrā* highlights the place of the lama in the painting's vertical hierarchy. Phag mo gru pa

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[14] Vairocana is light-yellow and bedecked with the numerous ornaments: a tiered crown, large ornate earrings, radiant jeweled necklaces, tasseled armlets, and a series of looping silver bracelets. He is sitting cross-legged on a multi-colored lotus throne, displaying the *dharmacakra* teaching mudra, while also holding a tiny vajra with two of his right-hand fingers. (Vairocana's hands are held at the level of his heart. The right palm faces inward and the left palm faces out. The thumb and index finger of the right hand form a circle that grasps a tiny vajra, while a second circle is formed by the thumb and index finger of the left hand. The two circles are joined to form the mudra.) The palms of his hands and soles of his feet are solid red, and each is marked by auspicious golden wheels. He is flanked by two standing bodhisattvas and, one register above, the other four *tathāgata* buddhas are gazing at him with downward-cast eyes. In all of these respects, this painting is consistent with other Tibetan images depicting Indic figures.

[15] As noted by Christian Luczanits, Phag mo gru pa's placement suggests that the lama "spiritually superior manifestation." "Dating Tibetan Art," 34.

[16] On the basis of this painting, Luczanits concludes that the idea that the lama is equal to a buddha may have originated in this late twelfth-century Tibetan milieu. Ibid.

[17] In Indian tantra, the elevation of the guru over and above buddhas and bodhisattvas was a well-established trope, seen for instance in the passage from the *Guhyasamajā*: "The merit in worshipping one hair-pore of the lama is better than worshipping the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions!" (See 32, fn. 58.)

[18] Kathryn H. Selig Brown notes that although "it is not uncommon for a Buddhist deity to bear a spiritual superior in his crown, it is unusual for a human to be seated there. This privileged placement suggests that the person who commissioned this painting wanted to equate his teacher visually with a buddha." "Handprints and Footprints in Tibetan Painting," 89.

thus draws the image together on both the horizontal and vertical planes, marking the culmination of a temporal lineage of Indian and Tibetan gurus as well as the synchronic iconography of devotion expressed in this twelfth-century painting.

Beginning in the thirteenth century, Phag mo gru pa was depicted with images of his past lives and an upper register of Bka' brgyud lineage gurus. These works continued to integrate Phag mo gru pa's personal facial attributes, such as his black beard, with various *shar ris* conventions for depicting a buddha: his hands and feet are colored red and marked with auspicious symbols, he sits on an ornate throne, displays a teaching mudra, and his head is encircled by multi-layered luminous nimbi.[19] Phag mo gru pa portraits often include two side-columns of past-life images, providing another connection with Buddha Śākyamuni. In **Image 3** (see page 118), Phag mo gru pa is surrounded by biographical images from his current life (bottom register) and past lives (side columns). In this ornate painting, Phag mo gru pa's distinctive facial hair is imagined to have transcended his current lifetime, as the protagonist in each past-life image also has a thin beard. As Phag mo gru pa's past-life representations all include this characteristic or "mark," they thematically begin with a hirsute monkey, at the top of the left-side column (see **Detail 3** on page 117).

Phag mo gru pa's biographies included many of the same tropes used in Indian *jātaka* tales.[20] In *Phag mo gru pa Collected Works*'s the first story details his past lives as the Indian monk Glory of the Dharma (*Dge slong chos kyi dpal*), and his subsequent rebirth as the Monkey

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[19] The *shar ris* style is characterized by the use of borders of inlaid jewels, defined head nimbuses of the main figures, decorative arches that commonly feature animals, and triangular (not tear-shaped) jewel settings in some crowns. Jackson, *Mirror of the Buddha*, 2.

[20] Just as the outermost narrative frame is occupied by the narrator Śākyamuni in these stories, the first biography in *Phag mo gru pa's Collected Works* begins with Phag mo gru pa meditating at a cave in Stod lung, making offerings on the anniversary of his lama Sgam po pa's death. The visionary appearance of lamas from the past (*rin po che gong ma rnams*) seemingly validates the subsequent "phenomenal recollection" (*dran pa'i snang*) of his own past lives that inform the bulk of the story. The story itself begins "at one time" (*dus skabs shig na*), a phrase that echoes the conventional way of beginning Indian *jātaka* tales. Also, like in many *jātaka*s, the story is presented as autobiography, beginning with the first-person (*kho bo*) statement: "A long time ago, I was born as the Indian monk named Glory of the Dharma." (*kho bo yun rin po 'das pa'i sngon rol na | rgya gar gyi yul du dge slong chos kyi dpal zhes bya bar skyes te*; Ibid., 248.) Additional *jātaka*-inspired tropes are used in this short tale: Phag mo gru pa identifies his own teacher Sgam po pa (and other contemporaries) with figures from this past narrative; and, he also use of the term for a "prediction" or "prophecy" (Skt. *vyākarāna*; Tib. *lung bstan*) to draw connections between past and present.

Bodhisattva (*Spre'u byang chub sems dpa'*).[21] In other biographies, Phag mo gru pa is given a more august series of past lives.[22] The life story written by his disciple 'Jig rten mgon po elevated Phag mo gru pa's status further, as he is described as a buddha.[23]

The conventions used to portray Phag mo gru pa as a buddha in ornate paintings and biographies, although unremarkable from the perspective of later Tibetan works, were avant-garde in their own time. The foregoing case study has been a digression from the broader focus on preliminary practices focused on the lama, yet these materials provide a useful entry point for understanding contemporary Bka' brgyud ritual practices focused on the lama.

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[21] These consecutive rebirths are recounted together in *Great Past Lives of Glorious Phag mo gru pa* (*Dpal Phag mo gru pa'i skyes rabs chen mo*). In *Phag mo gru pa rdo rje rgyal po'i gsung 'bum* (Lhasa: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997), 246-264. *Great Past Lives* begins with Phag mo gru pa's past lives as the Indian monk Glory of the Dharma and the "Monkey Bodhisattva," a rebirth that provides another comparison with the *jātaka* tales in which the Buddha was born as a monkey or ape. (In the famous *Mahākapi jātaka*, for instance, the buddha was born as a monkey who sacrifices himself so that the rest of his troop can escape.) In this case, there was a monk who lived in a forest filled with many monkeys, who were endowed with diligence and faith, and also enjoyed meditating in the forest. Glory of the Dharma was so taken (*yid chags*) with the beauty of the forest and the easygoing lifestyle of its inhabitants that, for a moment, he considers that if he was reborn there he could also eat fruit and meditate with the other monkeys; he thinks, "What would be wrong with that?" (*shing tog za zhing bsgoms na ci ma rung snyam pa'i blo zhig byung*; Ibid., 248.2-248.3.) Predictably, this is exactly what happens, and in this version of the story the monk's subsequent rebirth as a monkey is portrayed in an unfavorable light. Nevertheless, Phag mo gru pa explains that as he was born as a monkey with great knowledge and compassion, he was able to guide all the other monkeys. (*sngon gyi bag chags kyis spre'u de yang shes rab dang snying rje che ba | spre'u gzhan thams cad 'dren nus pa zhig tu gyur te*; Ibid., 254.) Most importantly, the Monkey Bodhisattva teaches the other monkeys the importance of venerating a stupa in their forest called "Pacification of Torment" (*Gdung ba sel ba*). In this way, he teaches them how to enter onto the path of virtue. The monkeys take refuge vows, give rise to *bodhicitta*, and practice the dharma. As seen in stories about 'Brom ston who, as the powerful bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, incarnated as a Tibetan nomad in order to be relatable to other Tibetans, the mimetic logic of "like benefitting like" is also said to inform Phag mo gru pa's incarnation as a monkey because it allows him to best guide other monkeys along the Buddhist path.

[22] Phag mo gru pa's biographies include many other accounts of his previous lives set in India, but they also include prominent Tibetan figures. In some instances, the smaller biographical images align with the enumerated lists found in various biographies, but there does not appear to be an exact correspondence. In *Opening the Door to the Secret Treasury* (*Gsang ba'i mdzod sgo dbye ba*), for example, Phag mo dru pa is described an incarnation of four prominent royals from across Asia, including the famous Tibetan king Srong btsan sgam po (6th-7th c.), and eight Indian adepts. In one past-life genealogy, he is connected to the more recent figure Spyan snga tshul khrims 'bar (1033/8-1103). As discussed in regard to 'Brom ston pa's biographies, even those Tibetans who never travelled to India are often portrayed as the embodiment of past Indian masters—a paradigm captured by Kapstein in pithy terms as "*finding India within*." Stories about Phag mo gru pa might be seen as extending this model, as they offer a more robust example of a Tibetan lama who is meant to both embody prominent figures from the past, but also actively promote Buddhism in India and beyond. In the *Array of Twelve Bodies* (*Sku lus kyi bkod pa bcu gnyis*), Phag mo gru pa simultaneously manifests twelve bodies—each of which appear across India, Sri Lanka, Tibet, and China—in order to benefit beings by discovering texts, performing feast offerings, and taming demons. In *Rdo rje rgyal po'i gsung 'bum* (Kathmandu: Khenpo Shedrup Tenzin and Lama Thinley Namgyal, 2003), 187-244.

[23] In the opening folios of *The Liberation of Glorious Phag mo gru pa, the Oceanic Treasury of Inexhaustible Jewels* (*Dpal phag mo gru pa'i rnam par thar pa rin po che mi zad pa rgya mtsho'i gter zhes bya ba*), Phag mo gru pa is presented as buddha in the opening eulogy (*sangs rgyas shing tshogs gnyis rdozgs pa'i 'bras bus*; 150.3-151.4). In this version of his past lives, Glorious Dharma is identified as an omniscient bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa'i mngon par shes pa*) who, with his great foresight, sees that the monkeys who are disrespecting the stupa in the jungle will be reborn in hell. In this case, the combination of omniscient powers and altruism leads Glorious Dharma to "take up, in his next life, the body of a monkey" (*spre'u'i lus su bsams bzhin du srid pa nye bar blangs*; Ibid. 179.2-179.3.) Both biographies focus on the benefit accomplished by the Monkey Bodhisattva, but the version composed by 'Jig rten mgon po presents Phag mo gru pa's intention in more pristine terms.

The Absent Lama

Phag mo gru pa's *Requesting Footprints* (*Zhabs rjes zhu ba*) provides instructions for using painted images of a lama's footprints as a support for ritual practice.[24] Merit-making practices, such as the seven branch liturgy (*yan lag bdun*) and offerings (*mchod pa*), could be done at the footprint. Footprint paintings could also be used for confession and repairing broken vows in lieu of the lama.[25] In this capacity, the lama's footprints fulfilled a similar purpose as Abhaya's self-initiation rite. Footprint paintings sometimes included a painted image of the human lama[26] or served as a support for visualizing the lama.[27] The most surprising power attributed to the footprints is to effectively convey Buddhist teachings![28] As *Requesting Footprints* makes a strong case for the connection between painted images and ritual practice, it suggests that other types of *thang kas* were also used in conjunction with liturgical practices.

In Phag mo gru pa's short guru yoga liturgy, *Verses on Guru Yoga* (*Bla ma'i rnal 'byor tshigs bcad ma*)[29] the lama is initially meant to be visualized in the "form of the Buddha" (*sangs rgyas rol pa rnam par bzhugs*), surrounded by bodhisattvas and other lamas in the lineage.[30] In light of the numerous *thang ka*s and statues in which Phag mo gru pa is portrayed with tropes used to depict Śākyamuni, it is probable that the lama is also imagined here in human form, sitting in the manner of the Buddha. After this initial visualization, the rite gets a little more complex, as the lama and other figures dissolve into the practitioner (*bdag nyid la thim*). The lama then reappears in the heart of the supplicant:

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[24] Phag mo gru pa, *Rin po che mtha' rtsa bas mdzad pa'i zhabs rjes zhu ba'o*, in *'Brug lugs chos mdzod chen mo* 37, ed. Tshogs gnyis sprul sku, 391-402 (Kathmandu: Drukpa Kagyu Heritage Project, 2000).

[25] One method is to "recite the hundred-syllable mantra many times." (*yi ge brgya pa mang du bzlas*; Ibid., 396.6.)

[26] Selig Brown "Handprints and Footprints," 208.

[27] Phag mo gru pa notes: "At the footprint, one visualizes the lama." (*zhabs rjes de bla mar bsam*; *Zhabs rjes zhu*, 395.3.)

[28] As Phag mo gru pa explains, the footprints are especially meant to be used for receiving reading transmissions that have not yet been received: "regarding [footprints], there are many functions, but the main purpose is to receive a reading transmissions (*chos lung*) that one has not previously obtained." (*'di la dgos pa mang du yod kyang gtso bor gyur pa'i dgos pa ni | bla ma'i chos lung ma thob par byed pa'i dgos pa yin gsung* | Ibid., 392.3-4.) In this case, a stand-in for the lama is required. A monk or lay Buddhist is preferable, but in the end anyone who is willing to take refuge and bathe can provide the desired reading transmission in lieu of the lama.

[29] Phag mo gru pa, *Bla ma rnal 'byor tshigs bcad ma dpal phag mo gru pas mdzad pa*, in *'Brug lugs chos mdzod chen mo* 37, ed. Tshogs gnyis sprul sku (Kathmandu: Drukpa Kagyu Heritage Project, 2000), 273–77.

[30] "From the naturally pure mandala of the conquerors, invite the root lama, lord of the Buddha's teachings, in the sky—together with the buddhas, bodhisattvas of the three times, and the lineage assembly. Imagine that [the lama] sits on a lion throne, lotus, sun, and moon, in the form of the Buddha." (*rang bzhin rnam dag rgyal ba'i dkyil 'khor nas | rtsa ba'i bla ma mcom ldan bstan pa'i gtso | dus gsum sangs rgyas byang chup sems dpa' dang | brgyud pa'i tshogs bcas mkha' la spyan drangs te | seng ge pad ma nyi ma zla ba la | sangs rgyas rol pa rnam par bzhugs par bsgom | Bla ma'i rnal 'byor*, 274.3-275.1.)

> In your heart, on top of a fully-opened lotus, on a seat arranged with sun and moon, sits the wish-fulfilling jewel, the sublime lama. As Mahāvairocana, the [lama] emanates blazing light.[31]

Now the lama is imagined as Mahāvairocana. Here we see a possible connection with "Phag mo gru pa and Vairocana" (**Image 2** on page 116), in which Phag mo gru pa is ensconced in the top-knot of Vairocana. The liturgy continues along the lines of the *tshar gsum khug pa* rite discussed in chapter five (albeit, in more elliptical terms), as light rays emerge from the body, speech, and mind of the lama and dissolving into the supplicant's forehead, throat, and chest.[32] Phag mo gru pa's summary treatment of the rite leaves much uncertain, but it is possible that guru yoga played a role in granting *mahāmudrā* meditation instructions.

Rites such as guru yoga and lama worship (Skt. *gurupūjā*; Tib. *bla ma'i mchod pa*) were said to be efficacious even after the lama had passed away.[33] In this capacity, these rites were similar to those that developed in the centuries after the death of the Buddha. The Indic "Recollection the Buddha" (*buddhānusmṛti*) rite, "entailed not merely a reminiscence of the Buddha, but an imaginative evocation of his presence by means of structured meditative procedures."[34] In the Mahāyāna turn, however, Śākyamuni was replaced by cosmic buddhas (e.g., Amitāyus), each with their own special powers and buddha-fields. The reorientation of the *buddhānusmṛti* practice coincided with the central status of these later buddhas in the Mahāyāna cults of first-millennium India. The focus on the lama in the guru yoga rite and other ritual genres, suggests that there was a similar shift in Tibetan traditions.

Rites for venerating the absent lama were conducive to the formation of traditions, as in providing access to past figures, they helped bridge the gap between past and present. The legacy of Phag mo gru pa was primarily celebrated in the Bka' brgyud institutions that were established by his disciples in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The paintings and statues in which Phag mo gru pa is portrayed as a buddha in human form are suggestive of the instructions

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[31] *thugs kyi dkyil 'khor chu skyes rnam rgyas shing | nyi ma zla bar rol pa'i gdan steng du | yid bzhin nor bu bla ma dam pa ni rnam par snang mdzad 'od zer rab 'bar ba | Bla ma'i rnal 'byor*, 275.4-276.1

[32] Ibid., 276.1-2.

[33] In *Lama Worship: The Source of All Qualities* (*Bla ma mchod pa'i cho ga yon tan kun 'byung*), a prominent disciple of Phag mo gru pa emphasizes the efficacy of worshipping the absent lama—which, even after death, is considered just as efficacious if he was there in person. Gling ras pa padma rdo rje. *Bla ma mchod pa'i cho ga yon tan kun 'byung gi dbang chos phyogs bsgrigs bklag chog* (Thimphu: Chime Namgyal, 1984), 1-93. In this liturgical sequence, which is akin to a tantric *sādhana* insofar as a ritual space is circumscribed with mantras, the deity is invited, and the practitioner makes offerings. Only here it is the guru-qua-deity who is called upon to receive such honors: "Oh protector! Please come here! We are fortunate disciples! Having accepted our offering of drinking water, please sit in this very place!" (*mgon po 'dir ni byon pa legs | bdag cag bsod nams skal bar ldan | bdag gi mchod yon bzhes nas kyang | 'di nyid du ni bzhugs su gsol*; Ibid., 14.3.) After inviting the guru who is "united with the deity" (*lha yi rnal 'byor*) into the ritual space, the practitioner presents numerous offerings and praises to the guru. In his commentary to this rite, Gling ras pa confirms that the guru may not be physically present: "if the lama is present, that is best. Offer whatever is pleasing. Even if he has died or is living elsewhere it is just the same as if he is actually present in person." (*dngos su bzhugs na bla ma mchog | gang dang gang la mnyes pas mchod | 'das sam gzhan na bzhugs gyur kyang | dngos su bzhugs dang kyad med par* | Ibid., 12.1-12.2.)

[34] Paul M. Harrison, "*Buddhānusmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (September 1978): 37.

for visualizing the lama in Bka' brgyud guru yoga rites and other preliminary practices discussed in the second half of the chapter.

Bka' brgyud Preliminary Rites

Bka' brgyud preliminary rites (*sngon 'gro*) that call for imagining the lama as a buddha in human form suggest a more confident view of the indigenous lama, whose status as a ritualized object of worship no longer needed to be validated by the co-presence of an Indic deity. The *Instruction Manual for the Preliminary Practices*, by a great-grand disciple of Phag mo gru pa named Lo ras pa dbang phyug (1187-1250),[35] and the *Mahāmudrā Preliminaries*, which is attributed to Lama Zhang (1123-1193),[36] both present a set of preliminary contemplations and ritual practices. These ritual texts include the rites commonly associated with the *sngon 'gro* today: bowing, confession, mandala offerings, and guru yoga.[37] In these rites, the lama is likened to Śākyamuni Buddha or imagined as Rdo rje 'chang, the "primordial buddha" (Skt. *ādibuddha*; Tib. *dang po'i sangs rgyas*) at the head of many Bka' brgyud lineages. The visualized lama is also said to "gather into one" (*gcig tu bsdu ba*) all other representations of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. Lama Zhang repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the lama in his tradition, and he specifically argues that when doing confession practice the lama is more suitable than the Indic buddha Vajrasattva. This focus correlated with the special role of the lama in bestowing the meditation instructions that were meant to follow upon their completion in Bka' brgyud traditions.[38]

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[35] *Rje dbu ri pas mdzad pa'i sngon 'gro'i khrid yig*, in *Gsung 'bum grags pa dbang phyug*, ka ca (Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin, 2002), 165-192. Lo ras pa, aka Lord Dbu ri pa, was a disciple of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud patriarch Gtsang pa rgya ras ye shes rdo rje (1161-1211), who was, in turn, a student of Gling ras pa. Lo ras pa spent much of his time traveling around Tibet and mountainous areas, completing meditation retreats. Later, he established hermitages and, in 1234, a larger monastery in Dbu ri (hence the name "Dbu ri pa").

[36] The preliminary practices are addressed at the beginning of the ninth volume of *Lama Zhang's Collected Works*. The *Clear Mirror for the Mahāmudrā Preliminaries Instruction System* (*Phyag rgya chen po'i sngon 'gro'i khrid lugs gsal ba'i me long*) in *Bla ma zhang brtson 'grus grags pa'i gsung 'bum* 9 (Kathmandu: Gam-po-pa library, 2004), 1-28. And: *Oral Instructions of the Peerless One called Precious Zhang on the Preliminaries and Main Practice of the Great Goddess Mahāmudrā* (*Phyag rgya chen po sgom ma mo chen mo'i sngon 'gro dngos gzhi zhang rin po che zhes 'gran gyi do med de'i mang ngag*), Ibid., 29-72.

[37] Rolf Scheuermann considers the latter text (and another similar version attributed to Lama Zhang) as "the earliest meditation manuals currently available that present sets of four preliminary practices for *mahāmudrā*." "When Sūtra Meets Tantra—Sgam po pa's Four Dharma Doctrine as an Example for his Synthesis of the Bka' gdams- and Mahāmudrā-Systems," (PhD diss., University of Wien, 2015), 67.

[38] Urich T. Kragh suggests that Sgam po used preliminary rites, such as guru yoga, to prepare disciples for receiving *mahāmudrā* instructions from the lama: "[Sgam po pa] did not reserve Mahāmudā for the most advanced stage of tantric practice, but he taught it openly to all his students. As the students did not approach the Mahāmudrā experience through the tantric techniques, he taught them instead to gain an experience thereof by meditating on the teacher and his blessing." "Culture and Subculture: A Study of the Mahāmudrā Teachings of Sgam po pa" (MA thesis, University of Copenhagen, 1998), 69-70. Scheuermann makes a similar point about the relationship between preliminary practices and *mahāmudrā* meditation in Sgam po pa's milieu: "When Sūtra Meets Tantra," 65-68.

"Gathering into One"

In Indic and Tibetan foundational and preliminary practices, the instructions for visualizing the tantric deity and lama sometimes indicate dual objects of worship, even within the same rite. As discussed in chapter three, the co-presence of deity and lama leads the lay Sa skya patriarch Bsod nams rtse mo to repeatedly parse who should be worshipped first. Elsewhere, injunctions to see the lama *as* a singular Indic figure (e.g., Avalokiteśvara, Hevajra, Cakrasaṃvara, or Vajrasattva) indicate a phenomenological unity between two different entities. In Bka' brgyud liturgies, however, the visualized lama encompasses an all-inclusive range of figures: buddhas, tantric deities, earlier lineage lamas, and other objects of worship.[39]

Lo ras pa's *Instruction Manual* begins with contemplations on impermanence (*mi rtag pa*), the faults of samsara (*'khor ba'i nyes dmigs*) and the precious qualities of human life (*mi lus rin chen*), all topics commonly associated with the "ordinary preliminaries" (*thun mong gi sngon 'gro*) in later Tibetan systems. For Lo ras pa too, these contemplations are meant to be done at the beginning of the path (*lam sna da res zin par byed pa*), before engaging in the ritualized preliminaries, which begin with guru yoga. In Lo ras pa's preliminary manual, the lama is imagined as object of worship for all the practices:

> Think that in the sky, one fathom in front of oneself, the lama sits on a throne made of the four precious jewels, on top of a multi-colored lotus, moon, and sun seat. The lama is very pleased and radiates love in every direction, towards oneself, and all beings. Moreover, the lineage lamas, lamas of the ten directions, the Buddha and bodhisattvas, the unsurpassed triple gem, and so forth—and, also, all the collections of *yi dam* deities—arrive in an instant. Imagine that [they all] dissolve into the body, speech, and mind of the lama.[40]

The visualization instructions do not specify that the lama ought to be imagined in the form of an Indic deity or buddha. Instead, all objects of Buddhist worship (including the *yi dam* deities) are subsumed (*thim*) within the visualized form of the lama. In this section, the "earlier time of the Buddha" (*sngon thub pa chen po sangs rgyas pa'i dus*) and that of the contemporary

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[39] As the lama figuratively embodies a multiplicity of beings, the instructions engender a sense of ontological depth, from which deities and so forth can emerge from and dissolve back into the lama. As discussed in chapter four, the ontological priority of the lama is seen in the anecdote about Nāropa manifesting the deities of the Hevajra mandala.

[40] *rang gi mdun gyi nam mkha' 'dom gang tsam du | rin po che sna bzhi las grub pa'i khri'i steng na | sna tshogs padma dang nyi dang nyi ma zla ba'i steng la | bla ma rang dang sems can thams cad la phyogs du ma'i sgo nas thugs brtse zhing | shin tu dgyes pa'i tshul gyis bzhugs par bsam | gshan yang brgyud pa'i bla ma dang phyogs bcu'i bal ma dang sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das byang chub sems dpa' rnams dang | bla med dkon mchog gsum la sogs pa yi dam gyi lha tshogs thams chad kyang skad cig gis byon nas | bla ma'i sku gsung thugs la thim par bsgom pa'am | Ngon 'gro'i khrid yig*, 174.2-175.1.

lama are drawn together insofar as both figures are said to emit light rays and bestow blessings on innumerable beings.[41]

In Lama Zhang's *Mahāmudrā Preliminaries* the section on supplication to the lama is comprised of four subtopics: imagining the object of supplication (*gsol ba gdab pa'i yul bsgom*), "gathering into one" (*gcig tu bsdu ba*), supplication (*gsol ba gdab pa*), and having unbroken devotion (*mos gus rgyun chad med*). The instructions for visualizing the lama "gather into one" the entire range of virtuous representations of body, speech, and mind:

> Illustrated pictures, poured casts, and carven statues—in short, anything that serves as a bodily support—is gathered into the body [of the lama]. Regarding the support of speech, everything—from a single letter and up—is gathered into the speech [of the lama]. For the mental support: everything from forming a single *tsa tsa* and up is included within the [lama's] mind. In sum, the entire extent of virtuous dharma practices are gathered into that lama. Give rise to the strong mindset that that lama is the condensed essence of all the buddhas.[42]

The passage begins by mentioning different objects that can serve as a representation of the Buddha's body (*sku'i rten*). In this case, however, the visualized lama is understood to encompasses these images. Likewise, just as a single written letter and a *tsa tsa* reliquary serve as supports for the buddha's speech and mind, these representations are also gathered into the visualization of the lama-qua-buddha.[43]

Preliminary Practices, Dwags po Style

Mahāmudra Preliminaries emphasizes that the lama embodies the Bka' brgyud lineage, and morover that venerating the lama is especially significant in the Dwags po bka' brgyud tradition. The instructions for these practices indicate that "one's own root lama" (*ngo bo rtsa ba'i bla ma*) is visualized in the form of Rdo rje 'chang, the primordial buddha at the beginning of most Bka' brgyud lineages. The ontological connection between the root lama and Rdo rje 'chang is then extended to include the Bka' brgyud lamas:

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[41] "Just as previously, at the time of the Great Conqueror Śākyamuni, the buddhas of the ten directions granted initiation through light rays, here also the lama—who is the buddhas of the three times—emits innumerable light rays of blessings from his body, speech, and mind." (*sngon thub pa then po sangs rgyas pa'i dus na phyogs bcu'i sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das rnams kyis 'od zer gyi dbang bskur ba bzhin du | 'dir yang bla ma dus gsum sangs rgyas rnams kyis sku gsung thugs nas byin rlabs kyi 'od zer dpag tu med pa byong nas* | Ibid., 176.5-177.1.)

[42] *de la gcig tu bsdu ba'i gdams pa ni | sku'i rten ris su bris pa | lugs su blug pa | 'bur du dod pa | mdor na sku'i rten du gyur tshad sku la bsdu | gsung gi rten yi ge na gcig yan chod kyi bar rten du gyur tshad rnams gsung la bsdu | thugs gyi rten tsha tsha rdog po gcig yan cho kyi bar thugs kyi rten du gyur tshad thug la bsdu | mdor na chos dge ba la spyod pa'i rigs su gyur tshad bla ma de la bsdu | bla ma de sangs rgyas kun 'dus pa'i ngo bo yin snyam pa'i yid 'byung drag po bskyed do | Phyag rgya chen po'i sngon 'gro*, 23.4-24.1.

[43] The passage effects yet another correspondence between the buddha and lama, as common representations of the Buddha's body (*sku*) speech (*gsung*), and mind (*thugs*)—namely statues and the like, written syllables, and *tsa tsa* stupas—are said to be "gathered into" or encompassed by the visualized lama.

> This very one [Rdo rje ‘chang] is the essence of all the buddhas of the three times but give rise to the strong thought that, as such, the lama is in particular the essence of the Bka’ brgyud lamas.[44]

As the primordial buddha, Rdo rje ‘chang holds universal relevance: he is the “essence of the buddhas of the three times” (*dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams gyi ngo bo*), and yet this exalted figure really falls within the specific purview of the Bka’ brgyud lineage. The oft-repeated equivalence between the guru and “the buddhas of the three times” gives rise here to a more parochial or branded formulation, in which the root lama-as-Rdo rje ‘chang is described in terms of the lamas in a specific lineage.

The *Mahāmudra Preliminaries* offers a brand of preliminary practices that is particular to the Dwags po school. A special reverence for the lama is explicitly mentioned in the sections on supplicating, offering the mandala, and confessing. The introduction to the mandala offering rite states, for instance, that “generally, the lama is very exalted, but in the Dwags po bka’ bryud tradition it is especially so.”[45] Later, a more general (*phyir*) way of understanding supplication (*gsol ba ‘debs pa*) is contrasted with how it is done in the Dwags po bka’ brgyud teachings” (*dwag po bka’ brgyud kyi chos*).[46] These passages indicate how the performance of a rite in a specified “tradition” (*lugs*) or “system of teachings” (*chos*) can be established in contrast with how things are done elsewhere.

The section on confession (which follows after refuge and *bodhicitta*) provides another example of how the Dwags po bka’ brgyud set themselves apart from other Buddhist traditions:

> Other traditions of the general vehicle meditate on Vajrasattva, recite the heart mantra, and so forth. In this great vehicle tradition, confession is made to the lama as a support. Acting in that way—if one asks: “What qualities of the *tathāgata* are present?” It is said: “The buddhas of the three times, the dharma, sangha, and so forth are entirely complete in the lama. Relying upon the lama [all these sources of refuge] arise.”[47]

The passage classifies the Dwags po manner of performing confession—with the lama as the support—as a “great vehicle tradition” (*theg pa chen po’i lugs*), in contrast with a the

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[44] *de nyid kyang dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad gyi ngo bo | khyad par gyis kyang bka’ brgyud kyi bla ma rnams kyi ngo bo de dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas dngos yin snyam pa’i yid ‘byung drag po bskyed la | Phyag rgya chen po’i sngon ‘gro*, 12.4-12.5.

[45] *spyir du’ang bla ma khyad par ‘phags pa yin cing | khyad par gyis kyang dwags po bka’ brgyud kyi lugs la bla ma khyad par ‘phags pa yin cing* | Ibid., 16.2-16.3.

[46] “Generally, in tantra, the only point of supplication is to generate blessings. In the teachings of the Dwags po bka’ brgyud, however, supplication has a greater significance.” (*spyir rgyud la byin rlabs ‘jug par byed pa la gsol ba ‘debs pa kho na gnad yin shing | khyad par gyis dwag po bka’ brgyud kyi chos la gsol ba ‘debs pa kho na gnad che ba yin te* | Ibid., 21.5-22.1.)

[47] *theg pa thun mong ba gzhan gyi lugs kyis rdo rje sems dpa’ bsgom zhing snying po bzlas pa la sogs pa byed de | ‘dir theg pa chen po’i lugs kyis rten bla ma la bshags par byed de | de ltar du byed pa’i de bzhin gshegs pa’i yon tan gang yod zhe na | dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams chad dang | chos dang | dge bdun la sogs pa bla ma la tshang zhing | bla ma brten nas ‘byung bar gsungs te* | Ibid., 9.3-9.5.

"general" or "ordinary" vehicle (*theg pa thun mong*) that relies on Vajrasattva. This distinction between "great" and "ordinary" is commonly seen in Indian Mahāyāna texts, yet here the Dwags po approach is elevated in relation to other contemporary approaches to confession practice. In this case, relying on the lama instead of Vajrasattva as a support for confession practice, raises a question: "What qualities of the *tathāgata* are present?" (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i yon tan gang yod*). The "quality" or "capacity" (*yon tan*) of the *tathāgata*, in this case, is the ability to serve as a reliable object of confession. Wondering aloud whether the lama can suffice, the author cites a thematic passage that compares the lama to the triple gem. As the lama encompasses the triple gem, the lama (*bla ma la brten nas*) is also a suitable support for confession practice.

The question of whether the guru or lama could serve as a substitute for the deity in ritual practice has been explored throughout this dissertation. In the apologetic remarks the introduce the *gurumaṇḍala*, for instance, Anupamavajra rhetorically asks why the rite should be done at the beginning. In answering his own question, he states that it is because the guru is "equal to all the buddhas" (*sarvabuddhasama*) and that "the guru is the buddha—that very one is also the dharma and sangha" (*gurur buddho bhaved dharmaḥ saṃghaś cāpi sa eva hi*). The guru in this rite is meant to be imagined as the buddha Vajrasattva. Here in *Mahāmudrā Preliminaries*, however, Vajrasattva is the buddha being supplanted by the lama in the ritual sphere. Lama Zhang also equates the lama and "all the buddhas of the three times" (*dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams chad*), and states the the lama is the embodiment of the three jewels. Intriguingly, similar passages are cited for opposite effect. For Anupamavajra, the equivalence between guru and buddha allows Vajrasattva to serve as an index for the presence of the guru in the *gurumaṇḍala.* For Lama Zhang, however, an Indic buddha is no longer needed. The same doctrinal statements, in short, are used to rationalize different changes in the ritual sphere.

According to Time or Sign

In addition to the title, Lo ras pa's *Instruction Manual on the Preliminary Practices* contains ample internal evidence that the combination of contemplations (on impermanence, and so forth) and ritual practices focused on the visualized lama were meant to be done as cohesive set of preliminary practices. Lo ras pa provides time (*dus*) or sign (*rtags*) as the two rubrics for completing this stage of practice.[48] A practitioner begins by contemplating impermanence for two or three days (*zhag gnyis gsum tsam*), and then moves through each topic and rite in sequential order. The best practitioner spends three months on the entire course of practices, while for those of lesser capacity, one month is considered sufficient.[49] Lo ras pa next states that

[48] Lama Zhang also indicates that the the preliminaries should be done for two weeks, before receiving meditation instructions. This is designated as the "preliminary practice" but as it is very important, devote yourself to it for half a month! (*'dir sngon 'gro zhes su btags pa yin | gal che shos dag 'di yin pas | zla ba phyed kyi bar du mos gus la 'bung shig gsung so | Phyag rgya chen po sgom ma mo chen mo'i sngon 'gro*, 57.1-2.)

[49] *de nas dus bsnyen rab zla ba gsum la sogs pa | 'bring zla gnyis tha ma yang zla ba re re tsam nas nyams su len dgos so | Ngon 'gro'i khrid yig*, 189.5.

rather than performing the preliminary practices according to time, one can also do them until seeing a sign of accomplishment.[50]

The emphasis on accomplishing or completing a specific course of ritualized preliminary practices presents a new paradigm, one that soon became a standard way of thinking about this genre in Tibetan traditions. Conveniently, for the historian, Lo ras pa himself signals that the emphasis on doing these practices for a set period of time is not how it was done in the past:

> Formerly, it was sufficient to just do such virtuous practices for however much time made sense.[51]

Lo ras pa suggests that formerly (*sngar nas*) merit-making practices were not done according to a specific timeframe. Lo ras pa might also be suggesting that in earlier times there was also not a set of specific practices, and rather people simply did " such virtuous practices" (*dge sbyor byas pa lta bur*) in a less systematic way. In this case, however, Lo ras pa explicitly states that that these rites need (*dgos*) to be done before moving on to more advanced practice. In addition to providing a set period of time (and the various signs of accomplishment), the final folio indicates that additional teachings should not be given until the preliminaries are completed.[52]

New Bka' brgyud Institutions

Beginning at the end of the twelfth century, there was an expansion of Bka' brgyud institutions in central Tibet. Stag lung thang pa and 'Jig rten mgon po respectively established Stag lung Monastery (1178) and 'Bri gung mthil Monastery (1179). The founding of the 'Brug pa lineage is alternatively attributed to Gling ras pa or Gtsang pa rgya ras (1161-1211).[53] The latter founded Rwa lung Monastery (1180) and 'Brug Monastery (1205). These institutions were all located in

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[50] The sign of successful contemplation on the faults of samsara, for instance, is disillusionment with the ways of the world and a mind that will not be misled in the company of wrongdoers. Additional signs are for devotion (*mus gus*), purification of obscurations (*sgrib pa dag*), and the accumulation of merit (*tshogs gsog pa'i rtags*).

[51] *sngar nas dge sbyor byas pa lta bur yun ci rigs tsam la 'ong bya'o* | Ibid., 189.5-190.1.

[52] At the end of the text, Lo ras pa states that "without accomplishing the preliminaries, do not teach or show the analogies. Having accomplished [the preliminaries], it ought to be taught." (*sngon 'gro ma thob pa la dpe ma bstan no | thob nas bstan par bya'o*; *Ngon 'gro'i khrid yig*, 192.1.) The term *dpe* may mean "analogies" (*dpe*), a la Po to wa's collection of aphorisms, or perhaps even "text." (i.e., *dpe* [*cha*]). At first glance, Roger Jackson did not have a definitive sense of what the term *dpe* refers to in this passage. Personal communication Nov. 12th, 2020. What is clear is that the completion of the preliminary practices clearly grants access to a secondary stage of instruction.

[53] The definition of a "founder" is in this milieu is vexed. See: Dan Martin, "Gling-ras-pa and the Founding of the 'Brug-pa School," *The Tibet Society Bulletin* 13 (1979): 55–69. Willa Blythe Miller also addresses the issue of who is remembered as the founder of a tradition: "The Vagrant Poet and the Reluctant Scholar: A Study of the Balance of Iconoclasm and Civility in the Biographical Accounts of Two Founders of the 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud Lineages," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28, no. 2 (2005), 369–410; and "'Brug pa'i lo rgyus zur tsam: An Analysis of a Thirteenth Century Tibetan Buddhist Lineage History," *The Tibet Journal* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 2006): 17-42.

central Tibet, but well outside of Lha sa.[54] Numerous other institutions were also established by Phag mo gru pa's disciples, including those of the "eight minor Bka' brgyud traditions" (*bka' brgyud chung brgyad*). These traditions (*lugs*) were often named after a founding lama.[55]

In this period, Lo ras pa dbang phyug, the grand-disciple of Phag mo gru pa's student Gling ras pa, established a series of small hermitages called Chu mig dkar po, Shing skam, and Lcags spyil. The main site of his activity was, however, in southern Tibet, in the area of Dbu ri. The *Blue Annals* notes that over a thousand monastic disciples were said to have gathered here over the course of six years. And, in 1241, Lo ras pa established Dkar po chos lung, a site that was capacious enough to accommodate ten-thousand monks in one event.[56] In *Instructions on the Preliminaries*, Lo ras pa (who here goes by the name "Glorious Dbu ri ba") indicates that he composed this text for his disciples, who appear to have come from far afield.[57] Lo ras pa also composed a lengthy collection of narrative material that was also explicitly meant to be taught to those engaging in a preliminary stage of practice.[58] We might draw a tentative (but very likely) conclusion here between the formalization of preliminary rites (according to time or sign) and

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[54] Davidson characterizes the Bka' bgyud pa as "de facto missionaries," insofar as they spread across various rural environments. *Tibetan Renaissance*, 333. Indeed, the various Bka' brgyud monasteries that were founded at the turn of the thirteenth century are scattered across various provinces of Tibet: Stag lung to the north of Lha sa, 'Bri gung mthil to the northeast, and Rwa lung and 'Druk to the southwest.

[55] The eight minor traditions that stemmed from Phag mo gru pa were each associated with one of his prominent disciples. In addition to the three discussed in this chapter, there were the Khro phu, established by Khro phu rgyal tsha (1118-1195) at the eponymous monastery in 1212. Smar pa shes rab ye shes (1135-1203) is associated with the Smar tshang Bka' brgyud. He founded Sho Monastery in 1167. Yel pa ye shes brtsegs (1134-1194) founded Shar yel phug monastery in Khams in 1171. The teachings of Zwa ra ba skal ldan ye shes senge (d. 1207) were systemized by a disciple (Gya bzang chos rje, 1169-1233) in the formation of yet another eponymous tradition (the Gya' bzang bka' brgyud) and monastery (1206). Finally, Gyer sgom tshul khrims senge (1144-1204) founded the Shug gseb Monastery in 1181 in the area of Sne phu. Certainly, given the fame and influence of Phag mo gru pa, numerous other institutions and teaching traditions were established by his numerous disciples. The eight minor schools are simply one such grouping.

[56] Later in life he also founded the famous monastery in modern-day Bhutan, called Thar pa gling. *Blue Annals*, 675.

[57] Lo ras pa indicates in the colophon that the text was composed "for the sake of the disciples of the Glorious Dbu ri ba (*dpal dbu ri bas rjes 'jug gi don du bkod pa'o*), who may have arrived from "India, Tibet, or Hor" (*rgya bod hor gsum gyis*; *Ngon 'gro'i khrid yig*, 191.5). According to the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, the term *hor* was used to designate the Uighur during the pre-Yuan period. Afterward, during the Yuan Dynasty it referred to Mongols. Zhang Yisun (ed.) *Bod rGya tshig mdzod chen mo* 1-2 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1996): 3071.

[58] Lo ras pa also composed a collection of narratives, meant to be taught as a preliminary stage for those embarking on the *Dam chos thub pa lnga*, a special system of practice in the 'Brug pa lineage. The *Mirror that Instructs on Cause and Effect: Preliminaries for the Precious Five Capabilities* (*Dam chos thub pa lng'i sngon 'gro rgyu 'bras ston pa'i me long*) is a collection of narratives that were meant to be taught as preliminaries. This text is another indication that more formal paths were being established in the Bka' brgyud school during this period.

the need to develop a standardized curriculum in growing institutions.[59] Indeed, while many of the Tibetan guru yoga and preliminary practice texts are transcribed oral teachings (sometimes to a single disciple), this collection is a formal handbook or manual (*khrid yig*) that appears to have been written for a widespread audience.

Conclusion

An image of the historical Buddha, a famous bodhisattva from the past, or a tantric deity may inspire devotion. These beings can also be invited into a ritual space, encountered in a dream, or even seen in a vision. But, they do not have a street address. The realistic images of Phag mo gru pa the circulated during his lifetime, on the other hand, had the potential to inspire closer contact. Gling ras pa, Stag lung thang pa, and ‘Jig rten mgon po, among many other disciples, are all said to have first heard the name of Phag mo gru pa or encountered his image before traveling to meet him in person. These stories do not describe a familiar institutional context or the passing down of a rite from uncle to nephew (as in the case of Sapaṇ’s personal narratives), but instead speak to the formation of a community around a charismatic lama. Even after Phag mo gru pa’s death in 1170, students such as Stag lung thang pa and ‘Jig rten mgon po stayed at Gdan sa mthil, caring for the sizable collection of manuscripts and the two lifelike statues (*‘dra sku*) of the lama that served as objects of worship. These symbolic representations marked the beginning of a tradition around the figure of Phag mo gru pa.

The twelfth-century “Phag mo gru pa and Vairocana” surprisingly depicts the Tibetan lama on the crown of the Indic buddha. In later statues and painted *thang kha*s of Phag mo gru pa is depicted with recognizable facial traits that are blended with imagery typically used to depict the Buddha. The past-life biographical illustrations that are stacked in columns along the left and right borders of some works also inform the view of Phag mo gru pa as a Buddha-like figure. These identities range from a compassionate monkey who is skilled in teaching his simian companions, to the famous king who introduced Buddhism into Tibet. In some of these paintings, the upper register also includes a lineage of Indian and Tibetan gurus in lieu of tantric deities. The position of these gurus and lamas strengthens the impression that Phag mo gru pa, as the central figure, is the current representative of a distinct Bka’ brgyud lineage.

The apotheosis of a Tibetan lama in human form paved the way for the new systems of preliminary practices (*sngon ‘gro*) that were popularize in the Bka’ brgyud monasteries that spread across Tibet at the turn of the thirteenth century. Guru yoga was prioritized as a preliminary in this milieu. Unlike in Sa skya Paṇḍita’s *Profound Path of Guru Yoga*, where the lama is meant to be imagined as a deity such as Cakrasaṃvara or Hevajra, in these rites the lama

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[59] Jan-Ulrich Sobisch made this very point: “In a more restricted tantrism—one therefore likely associated with a considerably smaller number of students to be guided—the preliminary instructions for the main practice may originally have been individually tailored to the particular student.” (In einem stärker restriktiven und daher mit einer wohl erheblich geringeren Anzahl von zu unterweisenden schülern verbundenen Tantrisumus mögen ursprünglich die Anweisungen zur Vorbereitung auf die eigentliche Praxis wohl eher individuell auf die jeweiligen Schüler abgestimmt worden sein; Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, “*Phyag chen lnga ldan:* Eine Mahāmudrā Praxis der Kagyüpas,” in *Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Band 8), ed. Lambert Schmithausen (Hamburg: Universität Hamburg, 2003), 152. (My translation.) Scheuermann refers to this passage: “When Sūtra Meets Tantra,” 67, as does Carla Ott, “Adaptations of the Longchen Nyingtik Preliminary Practices,” 28 fn. 68.

is often imagined in human form. The visualized lama not only "gathers into one" (*gcig tu bsdu ba*) numerous other venerable beings, but also, in some cases, displaces Indic figures, such as Vajrasattva. In *Mahāmudrā Preliminaries* this approach is considered specific to the Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition. The preliminary rites composed by Phag mo gru pa's great-grand disciple, Lo ras pa are also focused on the lama, who is imagined as akin to a buddha. The displacement of the tantric deity—in both paintings and the ritual sphere—correlated with the rise of the lama as an all-encompassing symbol for the new Bka' brgyud traditions of Tibet.

Conclusion

This dissertation project began with a very open-ended curiosity about the history of the Tibetan Buddhist *sngon 'gro* practices. Even though the preliminaries are done in various ways across traditions—with different types of visualizations and practices added here or there—there is remarkable consistency in this Tibetan genre. Prostration rites, Vajrasattva's hundred-syllable mantra, mandala offerings, and guru yoga provide a widespread foundation for Tibetan Buddhist practice. Indeed, the gathering together of these core *sngon 'gro* rites in twelfth-century Bka' brgyud collections confirms that they have been passed down as a set for nearly a millennium.

And yet, in the preceding chapters we have explored innovative preliminary practices. The narrative and ritual texts describing practices focused on the guru or lama were mostly written in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It makes sense that this period was one in which new forms of preliminary practice emerged in Tibet. Tibetans were not only translating Sanskrit texts into their own language, but also refining practice curriculums to suit their own institutional needs. Moreover, Buddhism did not arrive in Tibet in a neat package, with every issue already worked out. Tibetans, in particular, inherited many of the tantric controversies surrounding sexual practices and transgressive rites. Among these issues was the status of the lay guru.

The preliminaries had already been a site for addressing the status of the guru in Indian Buddhism. In *Fifty Verses on the Guru* and *Light on the Foundational Practices*, the guru—as a layman or as a visualized object of worship—was controversial. Even while offering numerous methods for venerating a lay guru, Vāpilla himself advises against bowing in public. Writing roughly two centuries later, Anupamavajra argues that the *gurumaṇḍala*, an offering rite in which the guru is imagined as a Vajrasattva, ought to be done as a daily practice. Here, earlier social codes are used to frame the veneration of the guru in an innovative ritual idiom. Venerating the guru as a buddha in a daily rite appears to have been contested.[1] While it is unclear whether the *gurumaṇḍala* was already integrated in the curriculum at Vikramaśīla, or if it was mostly meant for a lay audience, the extant *ādikarma* compendia suggest that Indian rites for imagining the guru as a buddha were starting to spread towards the end of the eleventh century.

Our understanding of lay lamas in eleventh-century Tibet is hampered by the fact that extant sources are usually monastic in origin. Figures such as Ka ru 'dzin, Sangs rgyas skar rgyal, and "Red Ācārya," to name just a few, were often criticized in a similar manner to lay gurus in India. Nonetheless, other lay-led groups did enter the Buddhist mainstream. It is indeed striking that the celebrated founders of the Bka' gdams pa, Sa skya, and Bka' brgyud pa movements were all lay lamas, as were "doubtlessly the greater part of their followers, supporters, and patrons."[2] These lay movements established their own institutions and the figure of the lama was incorporated into ritual practices. Eleventh- and twelfth-century writings on

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[1] Anupamavajra's responses to the objections of an imagined interlocutor would be odd if the *gurumaṇḍala* had already been a popular rite. It is impossible to make definitive conclusions based on the absence of evidence, yet the lack of a *gurumaṇḍala* rite in the earlier *ādikarma* compendia by Advayavajra and Mañjukīrti—and, for that matter, in the works of Atiśa Dīpaṃkara—supports the idea that the rite was not widespread in the eleventh century.

[2] Martin, "Lay Religious Movements," 23-24.

preliminary practices provide a rich source for tracking the shifting role of the lama in these new Tibetan traditions.

The Tibetan Buddhist traditions established by lay lamas routinized the veneration of the lama as a buddha in narratives and ritual performance. In Bka' gdams narratives, for instance, a connection was forged between the lay figure 'Brom ston pa and the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. In bowing rites, the lama was routinely meant to be seen as a deity. In Bka' brgyud materials, Mar pa's hardships while searching for his guru in India gave way to a ritualized stage of preliminary practice. At Sa skya Monastery, Sapaṇ's difficulties in seeing his lay lama Grags pa rgyal mtshan as anything more than his uncle were resolved through a preliminary stage of service and the guru yoga rite. The methods for venerating the lay lama in Tibet's new schools were equally suited for monastic figures, and many of the ritual manuals written later in the twelfth century indicate a shift in this direction.

Tibetan authors often present ritualized preliminaries as a suitable alternative to the individualized hardships (Skt. *duṣkara*; Tib. *dka' ba*) done by earlier tantric practitioners. The nature of hardships make it nearly impossible to establish a precise historical basis for such a genre. We will never know the full extent to which Nāropa went to serve his guru or how many stone towers were built and rebuilt by Mi la ras pa. The consistent references to such arduous tasks in Indian and Tibetan literature nevertheless suggests that they did in some cases play a role in tantric pedagogy; moreover, in a rhetorical vein, the nature of hardships has been routinely used to reinforce the need for more ordinary ways of serving the lama and preliminary rites. From Sapaṇ's suggestion that it is excellent to wear oneself out and perspire doing work for the lama, to the self-understanding of modern Buddhist women in Bongwa Mayma communities, the difficulty of preliminary practices is part of what makes them valuable in the eyes of Tibetan Buddhists.[3]

Outside of Tibet

In the fifteenth century, the Indian pandit Vanaratna (1384-1468) travelled to Tibet three times and received a variety of Buddhist teachings (Skt. *upadeśa*; Tib. *man ngag*), some of which were then translated into Sanskrit for an Indian audience.[4] Vanaratna's instructions on the Bka' brgyud preliminary practices may have been one of the first times the *sngon 'gro* was exported outside of Tibet.[5] But, it certainly was not the last. The global reception of Tibetan Buddhism in the twentieth century led to a strong interest in the *sngon 'gro* genre, especially in the wake of the translation of two lengthy commentaries: the *Torch of Certainty* (*Nges don sgron me*) and the

[3] For a rich discussion of the relationship between labor and preliminaries, see: Fitzgerald, "Preliminary Practices."

[4] Damron dates these translations to the years 1453-1455. "A Gift of the Dharma," 186.

[5] Sonam Spitz, "A Critical Edition of the *Śalākapañcakam* Found in the Vanaratna Codex with Tibetan Parallels and Translation" (MA thesis, Universität Hamburg, 2015), 27-28, 38-39 (Sanskrit), and 107-108 (English).

Words of My Perfect Teacher (*Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*).[6] More recently, the latter text was also translated into Hindi with a Sanskrit title, in a sense "canonizing" the work as a primary exemplar of the Tibetan *sngon 'gro* genre.[7] Following these texts, modern Buddhists are often instructed to complete the "five-times-hundred-thousand" (*'bum lnga*) recitations, which appears to have been a comparatively late development in Tibetan praxis.

In a contemporary Western milieu, Buddhist practice has been largely split between a return to the traditional and a valorization of the modern.[8] For some Tibetan lamas, Buddhists of any cultural background should complete a rigorous course of ritualized preliminary practices, and the *'bum lnga* (or a similar rubric) is the golden standard for upholding traditional style of practice. Buddhist teachers have also adjusted and tailored preliminary practices for a Western audience. Along these lines, the lama Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche asserts that the external form of the preliminary practices is less important than the degree to which they effectively prepare the disciple. Citing differences in how early figures in his lineage (such as Nāropa and Mar pa) performed preliminaries, he argues that if modern Buddhists "freeze" the preliminaries as rites that only conform to "cultural traditions" they might miss the intention of the practices.[9] In this case, the preliminary category is seen to allow for some flexibility due to the exigencies of the contemporary moment. Much like in eleventh- to twelfth-century Tibet, preliminary practices here can serve as a site for reframing Buddhist tradition.

New Preliminaries

Tibetan lamas and Western Buddhists have also presented preliminary practices to a modern audience in new forms. For the Buddhist teacher and psychologist Rob Preece, the *sngon 'gro* rites alone may not be adequate preparation for tantric practice.[10] Preece does not offer different practices, but rather emphasizes that the *sngon 'gro* should be done in conjunction with training that ensures one is psychologically stable. In passing, he does note that challenging tasks such as raising children or caring for elderly parents could serve as an alternative style of preliminary

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[6] *Phyag chen sngon 'gro bzhi sbyor dang dngos gzhi'i khrid rim mdor bsdus nges don sgron me* was written by 'Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899). The full title of Dpal sprul rin po che's (1808-1887) commentary is *Rdzogs pa chen po klong chen snying tig gi sngon 'gro'i khrid yig kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*. These works respectively draw from earlier *sngon 'gro* liturgies: the *The Chariot for Traveling the Noble Path* (*'Phags lam bgrod pa'i shing rta*) by Dbang phyug rdo rje (1556–1603) and the Klong chen snying thig liturgies codified by 'Jigs med gling pa (1730-1798).

[7] *Guru Samantabhadra Mukhāgama: Loṅchena hṛdayabindu-pūrvayoga vyākhyāna*, trans. Pema Tenzin (Vārāṇasī: Kendrīya Ucca Tibbatī Śikshā Saṃsthāna), 2009.

[8] Ann Gleig, *American Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 5 and passim.

[9] *Mind Beyond Death* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008), 255-262.

[10] "For many of us there is also the hazard of thinking that because we are doing the preliminaries this is *all* we need to do to prepare ourselves psychologically for the practice of tantra. From my own experience, this is not so. The preliminary practices may fulfill what is traditionally required as a preparation for tantric practice, but this alone is not enough." *Preparing for Tantra: Creating the Psychological Ground for Practice* (Boston: Snow Lion, 2013), 4.

practice.[11] In principle, these suggestions fit with Dzogchen Ponlop's observation that the preparedness of the disciple is more important than the external form of the preliminaries. Even in the twelfth century, emotional dispositions and the specificities of a given institutional context were brought to bear on the utility of a given course of Buddhist preliminary practice.[12]

The preliminary category also accommodates innovation in models designed to make Buddhist practices relevant to a broader audience. In the Tergar meditation community, for instance, the goal of providing wider access to meditation practices for people across religious faiths initially gave rise to the Joy of Living curriculum.[13] According to the founder of Tergar, Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche (b. 1975), these practices are currently being condensed into a "pre-Joy of Living" format that is meant to be even more suitable for modern practitioners.[14] Tsoknyi Rinpoche (b. 1966) presents the *Fully Being* course in similar terms as "an independent approach to embodied spirituality and as a preparation and enhancement for the traditional."[15] In this case, new preliminaries are meant to provide a suitable entry point for Tibetan Buddhist practice.

In addition to presenting Tibetan practices to modern practitioners from a variety of cultural backgrounds, modern lamas have on occasion advanced specific hybrid approaches that dramatically mix religious forms. In the book *Silent Mind, Holy Mind*, for instance, Lama Yeshe (1935-1984) lays out versions of refuge and guru yoga that are entirely oriented towards Jesus Christ.[16] In this practice, the supplicant visualizes Jesus in lieu of a Buddhist lama, and then goes through a standard guru yoga sequence: white light emerges from the crown of Jesus and dissolves into the supplicant; red light radiates outwards from Jesus' throat; and, blue light comes from his heart, purifying the mind. While this substitution might be seen as rather surprising from a more conservative perspective, it also demonstrates a strong conviction that the ritual mechanisms of refuge and guru yoga are of great value, regardless of the object of worship.

Looking Forward

In light of variations in how the preliminary practices are presented to a modern audience, and the material examined in this dissertation, we have encountered numerous instances in which Buddhist authorities allow for flexibility in how the preliminary practices are done. Innovations in this sphere are likely most prevalent when Buddhism is being adapted across cultures, as new beginnings are laid out to suit the needs of a different time and place. The patterned nature of

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[11] By broadening our understanding of "what preliminary practice actually means," such tasks could be seen as an "alternative form of preliminary practice." Ibid., 11-12.

[12] Grags pa rgyal mtshan and Sa skya Paṇḍita thus acknowledge that "these days" for one who gets upset at a late meal or not getting the highest throne, the idea of performing hardships for a year is not realistic.

[13] Established in 2009, the Tergar mission statement states that its curriculum is meant to be "accessible to people of all cultures and faiths." About the Tergar Meditation Community". Tergar.org. Retrieved Nov. 5th, 2022.

[14] "Mingyur Rinpoche's Vision for Tergar International," 2:00. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3R0gVvnMWE. Accessed on December 14th, 2022.

[15] As cited in Ott, "Adaptations of the Longchen Nyingtik Preliminary Practices," 90.

[16] Thubten Yeshe, *Silent Mind, Holy Mind*, ed. Jonathan Landaw (England: Wisdom Culture, 1978), 33-36.

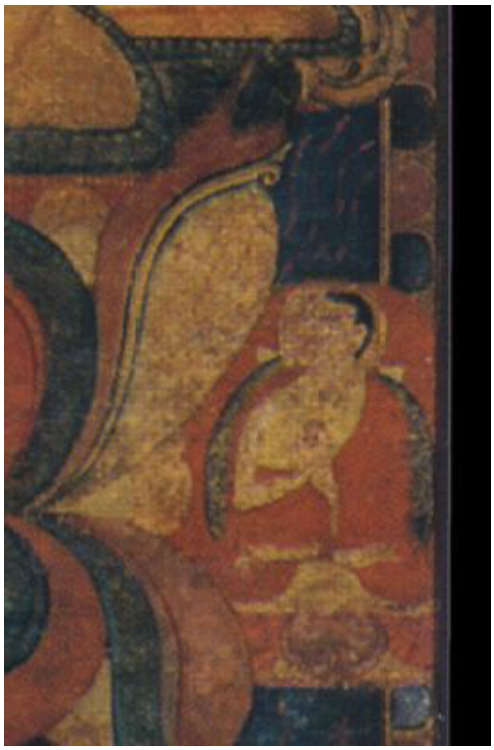
such developments confirms Edward Said's insight that "changes that occur from one cultural period to the next can be studied as shifts in the notion of what a beginning is or ought to be."[17] Throughout the above chapters, we observed a shift toward prioritizing the veneration of the guru and lama in eleventh- and twelfth-century Indian and Tibetan preliminary practices. If history is a guide, the category of preliminary practices will continue to be an area where the unavoidable tensions between adaptation and preservation are worked out by Buddhists. All ritual forms are subject to such tensions. But preliminaries are especially so, as they play a crucial role in framing Buddhist tradition.

[17] *Beginnings*, xvi.

Image 1
Portrait of Phag mo gru pa rdo rje rgyal po (1110–1170), 1200s. Central Tibet. Gilt bronze with gold, silver, copper, turquoise, lapis, and coral inlay; overall: 13.5 x 12 x 8.5 cm (5 5/16 x 4 3/4 x 3 3/8 in.); base: 8 x 19 x 14 cm (3 1/8 x 7 1/2 x 5 1/2 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund, 1993.160 (https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1993.160.)

Image 2
"Phag mo gru pa and Vairocana" (c. 1150–1200). Central Tibet. Gum tempera, ink, and gold on cloth; overall: 111 x 73 cm (43 11/16 x 28 3/4 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund 1989.104 (https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1989.104.)

"Phag mo gru pa and Vairocana"
Detail 1
Phag mo gru pa in Vairocana's topknot



"Phag mo gru pa and Vairocana"
Detail 2
Disciple sitting below throne

"Phag mo gru pa and Previous Lives"
Detail 3
Monkey Bodhisattva and Glory of the Dharma

Image 3
"Phag mo gru pa and Previous Lives, and Episodes from his Life"
13th century (ca. 1270)
Pigments on cloth
26 × 14 3/4 × 1/4 in.
Rubin Museum of Art
C2005.16.38 (HAR 65461)
(https://collection.rubinmuseum.org/objects/1140/phakmo-drupa-dorje-gyelpo-11101170-with-his-previous-inca.)

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