

*The Legacy of the Eight Teachings: Revelation, Ritual,  
and Enlightened Violence in Classical Tibet*

*A literary history of the bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa revelation of mnga' bdag  
nyang ral nyi ma od zer*

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## Abstract

The *Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings* ( the *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*) has long stood as a foundational scripture for Tibet's eldest Buddhist denomination, the Nyingma (*rnying ma*). From its revelation by Ngadak Nyangrel Nyima Özer (*mnga' bdag myang ral nyi ma 'od zer* 1124-92) in the mid-twelfth century, to its curation as a massive compendium of ritual knowledge for the Nyingma's major temples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *Eight Teachings* has supplied unique doctrines, mytho-historical narratives, and ritual programs that have undergirded the development of the Nyingma denomination. The *bka' brgyad's* wrathful iconography and apotropaic ritualism have provided imaginal and praxical resources for the Nyingma, and the *Eight Teachings* cycle was coordinated with emergent historiographical conceptions to advance a distinctive vision of Buddhist mastery and denominational identity.

This dissertation traces a general history of the *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* from the twelfth through nineteenth centuries, observing how this cycle and its traditions proffered resources for Nyingma practitioners and institutions as they articulated, reformed, and exerted their denominational identity in response to extrinsic pressures. This history of Nyangrel's *bka' brgyad* documents the editorial and ecclesiastical treatment of this cycle in three pivotal historical moments: in the competitive environment of the post-fragmentation period of the twelfth through fourteenth centuries; in the tumult of sixteenth-century Central Tibet on the eve of Ganden (*dga' ldan*) supremacy and the institutionalization of the Nyingma at Mindroling (*smin grol gling*); and in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Eastern Tibet as large Nyingma temples were implicated in the shifting political fortunes of the Degé (*sde dge*) Kingdom. The *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* was afforded ecclesiastical attention in these periods as it

became a key resource to which Nyingmapas looked in their efforts to craft responsive denominational identities and agentive Buddhist subjectivities.

This dissertation also undertakes a literary analysis of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa's* foundational tantric literature, documenting the unique buddhologies, narrative topoi, doxographies, and ritual idioms supplied by the cycle. These features contributed to an overarching imaginaire around which doctrinal, narrative, and ritual engagements were constellated. In tracing the buddhologies and narrative imageries advanced in the *bka' brgyad* scriptural and ritual texts, we may observe how the *Eight Teachings* cycle was leveraged as a resource in the crafting of collective identities and the construction of agentive subjectivities for its adherents. This dissertation seeks to decompartmentalize the domains of doctrine, narrative, and ritual practice to promote a comprehensive picture for religiosity as it is mediated through imaginal worlds and regimes of practice.

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## Introduction

According to tradition, in the year 1150, a long-haired Buddhist yogi from Southern Tibet named Ngadak Nyangrel Nyima Özer traveled to the ancient imperial temple of Khoting (*mkho mthing*).<sup>1</sup> Guided there by a treasure catalogue found inside a broken piece of statuary, Nyangrel entered the dusty shrine hall and proceeded to remove two hidden caskets containing a cache of ancient manuscripts from behind the temple's central icon, a large statue of Buddha Vairocana. These texts, yellowed by four-hundred years of storage, had purportedly been recorded in the hand of the eighth-century translator Vairotsana (*bai ro tsa na*), and had personally belonged to the great Tibetan emperor Tri Song Detsän (*khri srong lde btsan 742-97*) four hundred years before. These manuscripts recorded the esoteric teachings of Padmasambhava (Padma Jungne in Tibetan, *pad+ma 'byung gnas*), a tantric master who had been invited to Tibet to tame autochthonous gods and expedite the religious conversion of Tibet four centuries earlier. They were concealed there with the intent that they would be retrieved by Tri Song Detsän's incarnation for the benefit of future generations. That prophesied incarnation was Nyangrel Nyima Özer himself, and the teachings, an enormous body of texts advancing the lore and ritualism of eight ultra-wrathful tantric deities, was called *The Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings* (the *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, hereafter *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, Kabgyé, or *Eight Teachings*).

This unique compendium of esoteric knowledge would play a crucial role in shaping Tibet's eldest denomination, the Nyingma (Tib. *rnying ma*), over many centuries. The Kabgyé coordinated Indian tantric tradition with Tibetan ritual idioms, articulating a distinctive vision of Buddhist mastery and providing a comprehensive corpus of materials that would inflect Tibetan

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<sup>1</sup> *mnga' bdag nyang* [or *myang*] *ral nyi ma 'od zer* 1124-92, hereafter, Nyangrel. A birth year of 1136 and death in

Buddhism's understanding of its own character and origins. For the Nyingma denomination, it was a resource upon which adepts and ecclesiastical figures would continually draw as they sought to articulate denominational identities in the face of extrinsic pressures. From its inception in the twelfth century up until the present time, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* has supplied some of the most important concepts, idioms, and organizational templates for Tibet's eldest Buddhist denomination. Its impact for the Nyingma cannot be overstated.

What was it that made the Kabgyé so important in these contexts? What did it represent for its practitioners, and how were its distinctive idioms and practice regimes coordinated with broader discourses to bolster agency and author identity for the Nyingmapa? Most broadly, how were agentive subjectivities and responsive religious identities forged in a matrix of Kabgyé doctrine, narrative, and ritual practice? These are the overarching questions of this dissertation, and this study will bring together historical, literary, and theoretical perspectives to gain a picture of how the world of one scriptural corpus resonated with its practitioners.

Specifically, this study will offer a reception history of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, tracing how it was imagined, organized, and deployed at various junctures in Tibetan institutional history. We will also explore Kabgyé literature from both historical and interpretive perspectives, observing how the *Eight Teachings* advanced a distinctive imaginaire centering on wrathful iconography, ritual violence, and unique conceptions about the nature of religious mastery. An ultimate aim of this scholarship is to elucidate how agentive subjectivities and responsive identities were built out of the *Eight Teachings*' doctrinal, narrative, and praxical dimensions, and how the Kabgyé's imaginal world situated itself within broader discourses and historiographical concerns.

This dissertation unfolds in two sections. The first, beginning with **Chapter One**,

provides a general orientation and historical background to Nyangrel Nyima Özer and the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, followed in **Chapter Two** by a reception history, and in **Chapter Three** by a publication history of the *Deshek Dupa*'s major doctrinal and ritual cycles. In this, we will see how this corpus was curated at various historical junctures and ultimately incorporated into the Nyingmapa's canonical structure. These chapters draw attention to three historical moments in which the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was afforded special attention by Tibetan Buddhist ecclesiasts: its inception with Nyangrel Nyima Özer in the twelfth century, its redaction and full institutionalization in Central Tibet during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and its importance in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Eastern Tibet at the major Nyingma temples. In documenting these contexts, we will observe the capacity of this corpus to articulate denominational identities, bolster agency for specific communities, and configure Buddhist subjectivity for its practitioners. In this, we will attend to the ways that history, myth, doctrine, and practice are woven together to yield a matrix of resources from within which practitioners could enact specific religious identities.

**Part Two** will look more closely at select texts from the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* corpus. **Chapter Four** appraises the cycle's influential auto-history, *The Manner of the Arising of the Teachings of the Assembled Sugatas* (the *bde gshegs 'dus pa'i bka' byung tshul*), while **Chapter Five** outlines *The King of Kabgyé Root Tantras* (*bka' brgyad rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po*), and provides an overview of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s other foundational tantras: the two *Subsequent Tantras* (the *phyi ma* and *phyi ma'i phyi ma rgyud*), the explanatory *Differentiated Tantra* ('*byed par rgyud*), and the individuated root tantras of the Kabgyé deities. In this, the underlying myths, doctrines, and iconographic features of the foundational texts of the corpus will be explored, along with an analysis of the distinctive vision of history, doxography, and

buddhology at play in the texts. We will notice the recurrence of specific narrative elements in these scriptures which work towards authorizing the historical and doctrinal conceptions initially advanced by Nyangrel, and which came to stand at the heart of Nyingma tradition. **Chapter Six** analyzes a pair of apotropaic, or harm-averting, ritual texts, representative of the ritual idioms of “taming” (*‘dul ba*), and “liberation” (*sgrol ba*). Through attention to the distinctive imageries articulated in these ritual texts, I will trace a narratological theory of ritual, analyzing ritual participation as a mode of narrative engagement with edifying and transformative outcomes. I also attend to the specific idioms and ritual technologies exhibited in these harm-averting rites, observing their role in communicating an overarching Kabgyé imaginaire. The concluding **Chapter Seven** will more specifically articulate the features of a “Kabgyé imaginaire”, observing the ways that the imaginal world of the Kabgyé as it was advanced in its mythologies, buddhologies, and ritual regimes undergirded a confluence of narrative, doctrine, and practice that gave the *Eight Teachings* special resonance for Tibetan audiences. This concluding chapter is meant to draw my study of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* into conversation with broader issues in the study of Buddhism, and in the study of religion, in the hopes of decompartmentalizing the domains of philosophy, narrative, and ritual.

## Part I: The Kabgyé And Its Traditions

### Chapter One: The Origins and Significance of the Eight Teachings

#### Who was Nyangrel Nyima Özer?

Before delving into the long history and complex textual terrain of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, we should review the life of its revealer in Tibet, Nyangrel Nyima Özer. This will be a mere overview, and we will have to neglect the fascinating literary and contextual issues surrounding Nyangrel's biographical literature. Daniel Hirshberg, in his excellent 2016 monograph, *Remembering the Lotus Born*, attends to Nyangrel's biographical sources in detail, and the reader is directed to his work to learn more.<sup>2</sup>

There are several biographical sources for the life of Nyangrel, chiefly his two full-length biographies, *The Clear Mirror* (*gsal ba'i me long*) and *The Stainless Proclamations* (*dri ma med pa'i bka' rgya can*). Both of these texts purport to record Nyangrel's account of his own life-story to his closest disciples. However, as Hirshberg shows, both biographies were contaminated by insertions, and were especially inflected by later traditions' claims regarding Nyangrel's incarnational identities.<sup>3</sup> There are several additional biographical texts, such as one drawn from a collection of Kabgyé-related biographies, Jamgön Kongtrül's entry in his compendium of Treasure Revealer biographies, as well as Düdjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje's composite account included in his Nyingma history, which is primarily based on Guru Tashi's *Dharma History*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See: Hirshberg 2016, 33-54.

<sup>3</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 34-35.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1 for a catalogue of major biographical sources for the life of Nyangrel Nyima Özer. Principal of these are:

***The Stainless Proclamations***: Chos kyi 'od zer, Myang ston bsod nams seng ge, and Mi 'gyur rdo rje. "Sprul sku mnga' bdag chen po'i skyes rabs nam thar dri ma med pa'i bka' rgya can la ldeb", in Katok: *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 1, 1-163. Gangtok: Lama Sonam Tobgay Kazi, 1978;

But these secondary sources do not supply anything additional to what is found in *The Stainless Proclamations* and *The Clear Mirror*, and they generally summarize the information from *The Clear Mirror*. Of the two main biographies, *The Clear Mirror* was by far the more widely circulated, and *The Stainless Proclamations*, which seems to have been out of circulation for several centuries, is a bit of an outlier in terms of the discrepant information it provides.

Hirshberg convincingly argues that *The Stainless Proclamations* bears signs of being edited into its current state at a relatively late juncture as compared to *The Clear Mirror*, but I believe it also evidences elements of an older stratum of Kabgyé materials.<sup>5</sup> Of course, these positions are not mutually exclusive: as Hirshberg illustrates, these texts were subject to accretions and revisions over time, and so early and later narrative elements may both be present within one text. My treatment of its inclusion in the comprehensive *Deshek Dupa* editions in Chapter Three will make my reasoning clear. For now, let us review the details of Nyangrel's life as gleaned from these sources.

Nyangrel was born to Nyangton Chökyi Korlo (*nyang ston chos kyi 'khor lo*, d. 1142) and Jomo Yeshe Drön (*jo mo ye shes gron*) in the year of the Wood Dragon of the Second Rabchung cycle, or 1124 C.E. Nyangrel and his ancestors hailed from the Nyang (*nyang* or *myang*) clan, which enjoyed prominence in the imperial period, with several members serving in the court of the Tibetan emperors.<sup>6</sup> There is also an eponymous region west of Lhasa, but it

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***The Clear Mirror***: Myang ston rig 'dzin lhun grub 'od zer. “Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i gter ston myang sprul sku nyi ma 'od zer gyi rnam thar gsal ba'i me long”, in Tsamdrak: *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 2, 199-381. Paro: Lama Ngödrup, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 47.

<sup>6</sup> See: Hirshberg 2016, 20. The Nyang (*myang*) were one of the twelve principal clans in pre-imperial Tibet. As Buddhists, they were close disciples and likely patrons of Vimalamitra, but are also said to have sided with the Chinese proponent of subitism at the Samye debate. Two Nyang clansmen, however, remained in the inner court of

seems that, by the twelfth century, the Nyang family was not one of the power players among aristocratic rivals in central Tibet, and Nyangrel's forebears had removed themselves from the action by settling with a small band of disciples in Lhodrak (*lho brag*) to the south of Lhasa, a mountainous region bordering present-day Bhutan.<sup>7</sup> They were known to have been accomplished tantric adepts, and Nyangton would be Nyangrel's master, as was tradition in Early Translation communities.

Nyangrel's childhood appearance was said to have been dominated by sacred bodily marks, and his parents kept him in isolation for the first six years of his life.<sup>8</sup> He is said to have spent much of his youth in strict retreat in the mountains near his family home in Lhodrak, perfecting the tantric practice system of Hayagrīva, which seems to have been a family specialty.<sup>9</sup> Nyangrel also received initiation for the Sri Heruka, Yamāntaka, and Vajrakīlaya tantric cycles at a relatively early age. While Nyangrel's two biographical sources differ in regards to the details concerning his youth, *The Clear Mirror* reports that he had many visions and past-life memories from a young age, and apparently recalled his previous incarnation as the great Tibetan emperor Tri Song Detsän.<sup>10</sup> At some point, Nyangrel sought out the instruction of other gurus, including Chökyi Drakpa (*chos kyi grags pa*) and Chökyi Dorje (*chos kyi rdo rje*),

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King Tride Songtsen, son of Tri Song Detsän. The Tibetan home minister at that time was Nyang Trizang Legdruk (myang khri bzang legs drug), and foreign minister was Nyang Lektsen (myang legs btsan). By the early twelfth century, it seems that the prestige of the clan had diminished, as Nyangrel's father, Nyangton Chökyi Korlo, opted for (or ended up with) a more modest life in a southern valley of Lhodrak, relatively far from the machinations of aristocratic rivalries. Nyangrel's parents were known to be devout tantric practitioners, and Nyangrel himself would end up nearly impoverished with a small band of close disciples performing thaumaturgical rites for a meager livelihood.

<sup>7</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 20

<sup>8</sup> *The Stainless Proclamations*, 87. Also, Hirshberg 2016, 45.

<sup>9</sup> *The Clear Mirror*, 328-330. Also, Hirshberg 2016, 50-53.

<sup>10</sup> *The Clear Mirror*, 335, 346. Also, Hirshberg 2016, 64-65.

who instructed him in Indian tantras with their commentaries. Most consequential for Nyangrel's revelation career, however, were Lama Rashak (*bla ma ra shag*, a.k.a., *bsod nams rdo rje*, c.12th cent) and Tertön Drubtop Ngödrup (*grub thob dngos grub*), both of whom played seminal roles in Nyangrel's treasure revelation activities. While the biographical sources present different accounts of just how these gurus influenced Nyangrel, it is clear that they were both important to Nyangrel's career, supplying the young tertön (*gter ston*, lit. "treasure finder") with treasure certificates, texts, and advice that would facilitate his revelation activities. Once his revelation career was underway, Nyangrel relied on vivid visionary experiences and fortuitous circumstances to extract several scriptural corpora and many thaumaturgical materials from mountain sites and imperial temples in Lhodrak and around Samyé (*bsam yas*, Tibet's eldest imperial Buddhist temple). These biographical sources depict Nyangrel's life as one punctuated with sacred visions, auspicious meetings, and especially focused on harm-averting ritual and meditative practice.

Nyangrel's most important revelations included *The Great Compassionate One* (*thugs rje chen po*), which would be a cornerstone of the Mani Kabum (*mani bka' 'bum*) corpus of Avalokiteśvara lore; the *Secret Dākinī* (*mkha' 'gro gsang ba*) and *Guru Vidyādhara* (*bla ma rig 'dzin*) tantric cycles; the *Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings* (*bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*); the *Copper Island Chronicle* hagiography of Padmasambhava (*bka' thang zangs gling ma*); and a corpus of Great Perfection materials known as *Crown Pith* (*spyi ti*). Nyangrel also authored a pivotal religious history, *The Honey Nectar, Essence of Flowers: A Dharma History* (*chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*), in which a definitive narrative for Tibet's assimilation of Buddhism was advanced.

Nyangrel was apparently poor for much of his career, and relied on the performance of

paid apotropaic rituals to support himself and his community.<sup>11</sup> He was eventually able to summon the resources to build a hermitage at Mawochok (*smra bo lcogs*), a rocky mountainside some distance up-valley from the Khoting temple, where he would spend much of his life in semi-retreat. Nyangrel raised his family there, and entrusted his lineages to his four sons, especially Drogön Namkha Rinchen Pel (*'gro mgon nam mkha' rin chen dpal*, 1164-1246), who became well-known as a master of the apotropaic arts, and master to famous Guru Chökyi Wangchuk (*chos kyi dbang phyug*, 1212-1270). Mawochok would become an important site for the propagation of the *Eight Teachings*, and we know that lamas travelled there as late as the eighteenth century to receive Kabgyé training from Nyangrel's descendents. One of the only Kabgyé manuscripts purporting to have been recovered by Nyangrel was allegedly kept there until it was destroyed by the Chinese in the 1950s.<sup>12</sup>

Nyangrel's importance to Tibetan historiography cannot be overstated. As Hirshberg shows, Nyangrel was not only responsible for how virtually all Tibetans would come to understand the role of Padmasambhava, but was also one of the earliest proponents of the incarnation theory that would lead to institutionalized forms of the practice as we know it today, and as exemplified in the Karmapa and Dalai Lama lineages.<sup>13</sup> In his religious history and revealed hagiography of Padmasambhava, Nyangrel advanced a recursive and divinely sanctioned vision of Tibet's history which would afford Tibet a central place in the history of the

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<sup>11</sup> *The Clear Mirror*, 331. Also, Hirshberg 2016, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Janet Gyatso, "Signs, Memory, and History: A Tantric Buddhist Theory of Scriptural Transmission." *Journal of the Interantional Association of Buddhist Studies* vol. 9, no. 2 (1986), 33, note 44.

<sup>13</sup> See Hirshberg 2016, chpt. 2.

Buddhadharma altogether.<sup>14</sup> According to this, the establishment of a Buddhist empire by Songtsän Gampo in the seventh century was the inception of a latently sacred kingdom by none other than Avalokiteśvara, and the establishment of Buddhist institutions in Tibet revolved around heroic acts of demon-subjugation and temple building. Tri Song Detsän was aided in his own efforts to establish Buddhism by Padmasambhava, and their relationship would germinate multiple traditions of Buddhist teachings and practice, many of which were concealed for timely rediscovery by future generations. Additionally, Tri Song Detsän and the other main disciples of Padmasambhava would reincarnate in Tibet to continue the work of propagating tantric doctrine and dealing with the tempestuous gods of the Tibetan landscape. While this coherent story of Tibet's history in divinely sanctioned and recursive terms has precedent in earlier historiographic sources, it emerges most enduringly in Nyangrel's compositions. Nyangrel's historical and scriptural literature thus brought the imagined Tibetan imperium to the fore, and created a template for sanctioning doctrinal and institutional authority through invoking (and literally retrieving) the presence of the great empire through scripture, memory, and sacred realia.

Nyangrel's oeuvre coheres around a vision of religious mastery that imagines the harm-averting ritual adept as the paradigmatic Buddhist master. In this, Nyangrel was able to emplot himself, his vocation, and his Early Translation community at the center of an emergent Buddhist culture. These attempts at curating a new vision for Tibetan religious history were likely successful because, as Hayden White shows, historical narratives must cohere around already-accepted core story forms. Thus, Nyangrel was able to recruit a familiar complex of mytho-historical narratives, praxical idioms, and buddhological discourses, weaving them into a newly

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<sup>14</sup> Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer. *chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud (Honey Nectar, The Essence Of Flowers: A Dharma History)*. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe bskrun khang, 1988;

Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (revealer). *bka' thang zangs gling ma (The Copper Island Biography)*. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1989.

coherent vision of history and one community's place within it. The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* absolutely participated in this overarching literary world, and would be deployed again and again to revive, assert, and reform the Nyingma denomination over many centuries.

### **What is the Kabgyé?**

The Kabgyé tradition consists of scriptural cycles centering on eight wrathful tutelary deities (*heruka* in Sanskrit, *khrag 'thung* in Tibetan).<sup>15</sup> This tradition is an open one, remaining more or less accepting of proliferation in the form of new revelation scriptures and supplementary ritual texts. New iterations of the *Eight Teachings* have emerged as recently as the early twentieth century (if not more recently), and the Kabgyé framework continues to be manipulated as an overarching rubric for the organization of tantric knowledge. Nonetheless, the Kabgyé always coheres around the basic templates first appearing in Nyangrel's *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, specifically the narratives, ritual mandalas, and harm-averting practices involving the eight herukas.

While heruka imagery developed in India well before Buddhism's spread to Tibet, and was present in Tibet from the time of Tantric Buddhism's initial dispensation in the seventh through ninth centuries, the *Deshek Dupa* seems to have been the first corpus devoted to this particular consortium of eight fierce Buddhist icons. Kabgyé lore holds that the cycle was initially dispensed by *ḍākinī* goddesses to the Eight Vidyādharas (*rig 'dzin brgyad*) in India prior to the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet. However, from a historical perspective, the literary evidence available to us suggests that the *Deshek Dupa* was incubated in Tibet, perhaps before the time of

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<sup>15</sup> Literally meaning “blood drinker”, *khrag 'thung* is a general term for wrathful tantric deities, whose demonic iconography represents the uncompromising quality of Buddhist gnosis and compassion. The Sanskrit term *heruka* is technically untranslatable, but means something like “hey, lord”. Its curious translation by Tibetans as “blood drinker” reflects how these tantric divinities came to be understood as participating in a general aesthetic of horrific iconography and the associations of these tantric systems with charnel ground mythology. See: Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 213.

Nyangrel.

The mandala of eight Kabgyé tutelary deities consists of Chemchok Heruka (Tib. *che mchog*, Skt. *Mahottara*, “Great Sacred One”), Yangdak / Sri Heruka (*yang dak, sri khrag thung*, Skt. *Vishuddha heruka*, “Glorious Heruka”), Shinjé (*gshin rje*, Skt. *Yamāntaka*, “Lord of Death”), Tamdrin (*rta mgrin*, Skt. *Hayagrīva*, “Horse-Headed”), Dorje Phurba (*rdo rje phur ba*, Skt. *Vajrakīla*, “Indestructible Dagger”), Mamo Bötong (*ma mo rbod rtong*, Skt. *Matārah*, “Inciting and Dispatching the Fierce Goddess”), Jigten Chötö (‘*jig rten mchod btsod*, Skt. *Lokastotrapūjā* “Worldly Praise and Offering”), and Möpa Drangak (*dmod pa drag sngags*, Skt. *Vajramāntrabhiru*, “Wrathful Maledictory Mantra”). A ninth figure, Lama Rigzin (*bla ma rig ‘dzin*, Skt. *Guru Vidyādhara*, “Master Awareness-Holder”) fills out the nine directional positions of the mandala. The Kabgyé cycles also entail elements drawn from the *Net of Magical Emanation* (*sgyu ‘phrul ‘drwa ba*, Skt. *Māyājāla*) genre of Mahāyoga tantra, specifically the Five Sugata Family (*bde gshegs rigs lnga*) mandala, and the Peaceful-Wrathful (*zhi khro*) deity complex. But whereas *Magical Emanation* tantras such as the *Secret Nucleus* (*gsang ba’i snying po*, Skt. *Guhyagarbhatantra*) mostly focus on the peaceful deity mandalas to communicate important tantric doctrines, the Kabgyé cycles clearly favor the wrathful mandala as the foundation for a distinctive approach to self-cultivation and ritual practice. The Kabgyé materials are consistently oriented towards the tropes of demon control and harm-aversion, and I suggest that the conflation of the soteriological and apotropaic – that is, the self-cultivational and harm-averting – dimensions of tantric practice is a key legacy of the Kabgyé tradition, particularly in how its ritualism took life in Nyingma institutions.

Several other Kabgyé cycles would be revealed in later centuries, most prominently Guru Chökyi Wangchuk’s (*gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug*, 1212-1270) *Total Perfection of the*

*Secret Eight Teachings* (*bka' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs*), and Rigzin Gödem's (*rig 'dzin rgod ldem*, 1337-1408) *Self-Arisen Fierce Eight Teachings* (*bka' brgyad drag po rang shar*). These two cycles are both smaller than the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, but significant enough to garner attention to the degree that all three cycles – the *Deshek Dupa*, the *Sangwa Yongdzok*, and the *Drakpo Rangshar* – are together considered to represent a full revelation of Kabgyé tantras, sadhanas, and rituals.<sup>16</sup> This list of foundational Kabgyé cycles was expanded in the eighteenth century to include six distinct Kabgyé revelation cycles from other masters said to represent enlightened body (*sku*), speech (*gsungs*), mind (*thugs*), qualities (*yon tan*), action (*phrin las*), and their unity. According to Katok Rigzin Tsewang Norbu (*kah thog rig 'dzin tshe dbang nor bu*, 1698-1755), Nyangrel's *Deshek Dupa* was the “Enlightened Actions” treasure, Chowang's *Sangwa Yongdzok* was the “Enlightened Qualities” treasure; Godem's *Drakpo Rangshar* was the “Enlightened Speech” revelation; Pema Lingpa's *bka' brgyad me long* was the “Enlightened Mind” cycle, Samten Lingpa's *bka' brgyad yang gsang dregs 'dul* cycle was the “Enlightened Body” treasure, and Ögyan Lingpa's *bka' 'dus chos kyi rgya mtsho* was especially comprehensive.<sup>17</sup> Nyangrel's *Deshek Dupa*, however, has proven to be the most influential across Nyingma institutions, providing the basis for many ritual and contemplative programs over eight centuries.

The Kabgyé cycle, as well as the copious supplementary literature that has emerged around it, is generally regarded as revelation literature, or “revealed treasure” (*gter ma*, *terma*). It is said not to have been composed by Nyangrel per se, but rather extracted, discovered, or

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Hirshberg's forthcoming work focuses on the treatment of the Kabgyé between these three masters, and especially Guru Chowang's claims to authority vis-à-vis custodianship and advancement of Nyangrel's Kabgyé tradition.

<sup>17</sup> Kah thog rig 'dzin tshe dbang nor bu, *bka' 'bum*, vol. 2, 400.

otherwise retrieved in accordance with prophecies and karmic destiny. This mode of apocryphal scripture production was somewhat established by Nyangrel's time, and may be interpreted as a strategy to confront the growing prominence of new denominations in a "later spread" (*phyi dar*) of Tantric Buddhism into Tibet in the tenth and eleventh centuries. According to terma tradition, eighth-century missionaries and translator-adepts such as Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra were said to have concealed scriptures for expeditious future recovery, when the cultural and institutional context would be ripe for special teachings. The recovery of scriptures, then, became a way for the eldest Tibetan Buddhist denomination to maintain currency while continuing to sanction their practice regimes in ancient traditions. Much of this approach to apocryphal scripture production is owed to Nyangrel, at least in how he is remembered by Tibetan tradition.<sup>18</sup> In addition to being a prolific revealer of Buddhist terma, Nyangrel was an architect of the distinctive historiography that would come to contextualize the revelation tradition. It was Nyangrel, for example, who codified an elevated view of Padmasambhava as the foundational Buddhist missionary, and set into motion the narrative format for the concealment and revelation procedures for Buddhist terma.<sup>19</sup> Thus, each piece of Kabgyé literature is said to record the teachings of Padmasambhava to Emperor Tri Song Detsän during the Indian saint's missionary visit in the eighth century, later concealed by members of Padmasambhava's inner circle of disciples, to be revealed by a future incarnations of the Tibetan king.

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<sup>18</sup> See: Hirshberg 2016; also: Janet Gyatso, "The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition." *History of Religions*, vol. 33 no. 1(1993): 97-134.

<sup>19</sup> While Nyangrel is regarded as Tibet's "First Tertön King", it is important to understand that treasure revelation in Nyangrel's time did not necessarily conform to later expectations for the procedures of *gter ma* recovery. As Cathy Cantwell, Robert Mayer, and Daniel Hirshberg have pointed out, Nyangrel's revelations entailed the curation of existing traditions, or, as Mayer and Hirshberg call it, "textual tradency". It was only several centuries after Nyangrel that visionary and extractive procedures for the recovery of *gter ma* were standardized in concert with overarching ideas about tantric practice and visionary experience. See: Hirshberg 2016, chpt. 3; and Robert Mayer, "gTer ston and Tradent: Innovation and Conservation in Tibetan Treasure Literature." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 36/37 (2015): 227-243.

While tradition generally regards the Kabgyé cycle as paradigmatic of terma literature, the organizational format of the Kabgyé has also come to typologize all sorts of tantric materials which were transmitted to Tibet in the first spread of Buddhism in the eighth century. As early as the fourteenth century – and perhaps coming from within the Kabgyé itself – we see the notion that any tantric materials associated with the deities collated in the Kabgyé system – deities such as Hayagrīva, Vajrakīla, and Yamāntaka – first entered circulation in India alongside the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* under the custodianship of the Eight Vidyādhāras. As we will see, some sources suggest that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* circulated in a “transmitted” (*bka’ ma*, kama) iteration, and was directly received by Nyangrel from his masters, Lama Rashak and Tertön Druptop Ngödrup. There are several lineal lists associated with such a transmitted *Deshek Dupa* (the “*bka ma bka’ brgyad*”), and I will even suggest that a tantra of unclear origins included in the Nyingma tantric canon may represent a pre-Nyangrel stratum of Kabgyé materials. Thus, the Kabgyé has long referred to a set of revelation cycles, a transmitted tantric tradition, and also to an organizational template for a vast array of tantric materials, which, at some point, came to be known as the “Accomplishment Class” (*sgrub sde*) of Mahāyoga literature. The development of this comprehensive notion of the Kabgyé’s origins and stature will be a central concern of this dissertation.

In terms of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* revelation cycle, while it is clear that Nyangrel Nyima Özer revealed (or perhaps authored, curated, or otherwise recovered) a corpus of scriptures centering on eight wrathful herukas, it is certain that the corpus was subject to accretions and reformulations following Nyangrel’s time. The Kabgyé quickly became an influential body of knowledge. It was edited and disseminated in increasingly complex formats, and would ultimately be published in carefully curated editions for use as a sourcebook for

doctrinal and ritual knowledge in institutional settings. It was also included in the important scriptural anthologies of the Nyingma, and would provide one of the main rubrics for organizing tantric knowledge in the context of the multiple canons of the Nyingma school. The resulting impression is that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was always a coherent corpus with ancient origins, naturally connected to taxonomies of doctrines and practices that developed in India. This is, I think, a somewhat artificial conception, advanced by the editorial efforts of ecclesiasts between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries who devoted their efforts to constructing ever-more coherent pictures of Nyingma identity and models of authority via anthologization and the ritualization of scriptural traditions. The contributions of these institutional figures will be assessed in Chapters Two and Three.

While it may be the case that a core assembly of tantras (*rgyud*), teachings (*lung, man ngag*), self-cultivational practices (*sgrub thabs, las byang*), and harm-averting rituals (*bzlog pa*) had origins in Nyangrel's time, if not before, the massive compendium of ritual protocols and doctrinal knowledge that the Kabgyé corpus has become was the result of centuries of accretions. Rhetoric about the origins of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is tied to broader efforts to articulate the parameters of denominational identities, and a critical analysis of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa's* reception history will provide us with the picture of a constantly developing tradition, morphing in response to its custodians' vested interest in strongly articulating the authority of their own tradition. This is not to suggest that whatever it was that Nyangrel produced, curated, or authored in the twelfth century was not a coherent corpus. As the title suggests, there is no doubt that this was a set of scriptures – a *'dus pa*, or “collection” – that offered an unprecedented collation of tantric materials. However, in appraising the rhetoric of coherence, it is important to note that prevalent attitudes about the Kabgyé's foundational place in the doxographic architecture of its

larger sectarian home is very much configured by ongoing efforts of ecclesiasts to reformulate the contours of the tradition, often in response to specific historical pressures.

### Iconography

The Kabgyé brings together five major tantric systems which circulated in India and early Buddhist Tibet: Yamāntaka (Tib. *gshin rje*), Hayagrīva (*rta mgrin*), Sri Heruka or Vishuddha (*yang dag* or *dpal he ru ka*), Mahottara / Vajra Amrita (*che mchog he ru ka*), and Vajrakīla (*rdo rje phur ba*).<sup>20</sup> These deities are tied to the architecture of Mahāyoga buddhology: in some sources they are mapped to the Five Sugata Families of *Ratna*, *Padma*, *Vajra*, *Buddha*, and *Karma*; while, according to the main tantra of Nyangrel’s revealed Kabgyé, they are typologized as enlightened body (*sku*), speech (*gsung*), mind (*thugs*), quality (*yon tan*), and action (*phrin las*). These five deities, known within the context of the Kabgyé cycle as the five “transcendental ones” (*jig rten las ‘das pa*), were among the main tutelary-deity systems already practiced by Early Translation tantrists, and it seems that traditions associated with each of these icons had come from India during the first dispensation of Tantric Buddhism. Some, such as Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, and Vajrakīlaya, existed in discrete scriptures, while Mahottara is featured as the central deity of the *Guhyagarbha-tantra*.<sup>21</sup> Nyingma doxography has come to claim that these tantric systems all originated with the initial dispensation of the Kabgyé in India, and are essentially categorizable as features of a “transmitted” or “long-lineage” Kabgyé cycle

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<sup>20</sup> I retain the Sanskrit names for the five tantric tutelary deities to reflect the Indian origin of these five characters. The Tibetan names given here are normalized; there are a range of common aliases for each divinity, often appearing within a single text. See figure 1, below.

<sup>21</sup> Dūdjom’s history tells us, for example, that Humkara propagated the system of Sri Heruka, with various of his commentarial texts making it to Tibet. Likewise with Mañjuśrīmitrā’s Yamāntaka cycle, which was upheld by the Kyo clan; and also Padmasambhava and Prabhahasti’s Vajrakīlaya traditions, which we do find in evidence in the Dunhuang collection. Mahottara materials are also present in Dunhuang and are associated with the *zhi-khro* (peaceful-wrathful) complex of Magical Emanation deities. All of these represent pre-twelfth century lineages of the five transcendental herukas at the center of the Kabgyé.

(the *bka' ma brgyad*, or *ring brgyud*), but literary evidence from outside the Kabgyé tradition for this claim is yet to be found.

Adepts in post-imperial Tibet would have specialized in any one such system, but often had training in several (if not all five) meditation and ritual regimes. However, there seems to have been no collation of these systems into one corpus prior to the *Deshek Dupa*, and I suggest that the collation of these five (plus four others, for a total of nine) tantric cycles provided, for the first time, a canon of these ritual-centric scriptures for Early Translation practitioners. This dissertation will appraise the impact of this collation in terms of the Nyingma's denominational self-understanding.

The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* also exhibits ritual formats and narrative idioms reflective of Tibetan ritual culture, especially in the three cycles in the corpus not known to have direct Indian precedents: Mamo Bötong (*ma mo rbod gtong*, Invoking and Commanding the Fierce Goddess), Jigten Chötö (*jig rten mchod bstod*, Worldly Praise and Offering), and Möpa Drangak (*dmod pa drag sngags*, Wrathful Malediction). The texts associated with these so-called “worldly” (*jig rten pa*) deities are interesting for the way they represent a hybrid demonology strongly tied to Tibetan ritual lore. In these texts we find reference to autochthonous divinities (i.e., gods and demons associated with the landscape) only known on the Tibetan plateau, and their attendant ritual texts provide many means for controlling them through rituals redolent of the sacrificial rites that were important to pre-Buddhist religiosity across the Himalaya and Tibet. Such an amalgam of Tantric Buddhist and indigenous elements would certainly have been possible in the fragmentation and localization of religion in the period following the collapse of the Tibetan empire in the ninth century. An analysis of how the Kabgyé incorporated the indigenous Tibetan pantheon, as well as some cautionary remarks about the idea of indigenous syncretism, will

appear in the section on demon taming below, and also in our review of the *King of Root Tantras* in Part Two.

In addition to the nine main herukas of the Kabgyé mandala, there are 406 retinue deities with consorts, plus five sets of sixty messengers and twelve protective gods, along with seven *ma mo* goddesses, making a total of 734 mandala deities. They are typically arranged with Mahottara in the center, Sri Heruka in the east, Yamāntaka in the south, Hayagrīva in the west, and Vajrakīlaya in the north; Mamo Bötong is in the southeast, Lama Rigdzin to the southwest, Jigten Chötö to the northwest, and Möpa Drangak to the northeast. This is how the full *Deshek Dupa* wrathful mandala would be depicted and visualized.



Mahottara (*mche mchog*), the central deity of the Eight Teachings Mandala. Himalayan Art Resources

Altogether, the Kabgyé deities are chiefly representative of the wrathful (*khro bo*) idiom of tantric soteriology.<sup>22</sup> Their iconography is that of destruction, death, wild fearsomeness, and transgressive sexuality, all interpretable as symbolic of the uncompromising quality of compassion and the incisive nature of gnostic wisdom. The idiom of subjugative violence, positioned as the “fierce compassion” of enlightened agents, will be a chief concern of our analysis of the *Eight Teachings* tradition, and we shall explore how this doctrinal and ritual idiom was leveraged in the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*’s reception by Nyingma adepts and ecclesiastical figures. In this, I will suggest that violence was the central feature of the Kabgyé’s imaginal world, operating across several registers to facilitate the Kabgyé’s unique capacity to bolster identities and augment Buddhist subjectivities.

Figure 1

**The nine main Kabgyé Herukas, their Tibetan aliases, and mandalic positions**

Mahottara / Vajra-amrita:

*che mchog / rdo rje bdud rtsi / bdud rtsi yon tan / buddha heruka*  
Enlightened Qualities – Buddha Family – Center

Yamāntaka:

*gshin rje / gjigs byed / ‘jam dpal sku / ratna heruka*  
Enlightened Body – Ratna – South

Hayagrīva:

*rta mgrin / dbang chen / padma gsung / padma heruka*  
Enlightened Speech – Padma – West

Sri Heruka/Vishuddha:

*yang dak he ru ka / dpal khrag ‘thung / yang dag thugs / vajra heruka*  
Enlightened Mind – Vajra – East

<sup>22</sup> Hirshberg (2016) challenges the translation of *khro bo* as “wrath”, opting instead for “fierce”. Hirshberg suggests that the translation of *khro bo* as “wrath” is too closely aligned with “Catholic notions of *ireae caelestes*, ‘divine wrath’... This term connotes a sense of vengeance and emotional content, both of which contradict the nature of these Buddhas according to tradition... ‘wrath’ as the translation of *khro bo* signifies a misapplication of biblical notions of a God defined by emotive experience ... which is incongruent with Buddhist notions... As such, ‘fierce’ is a more appropriate translation” (Hirshberg 2016, 38, note 66).

Vajrakīlaya (Vajrakīla):

*rdo rje phur ba / phur ba 'phrin las / karma heruka*  
Enlightened Action – Karma Family – North

Matārah:

*ma mo bod rtong / ma mo*  
Southeast

Guru Vidyādhara:

*bla ma rig 'dzin*  
Southwest

Lokastotrapuja:

*'jig rten mchod bstod* (alt: *'jig rten mchod rten*) / *dregs pa kun 'dul*  
Northwest

Vajramantrabhīru:

*dmod pa drag sngags / stobs ldan nag po*  
Northeast

## **Mahāyoga**

The doctrinal and contemplative system associated with this iconography is that of Mahāyoga (Tib. *rnal 'byor chen po*), a tantric system emphasizing imaginative meditation, elaborate ritualism, and sexual and violent idioms. As Jacob Dalton and Sam van Schaik point out, the term Mahāyoga underwent significant change in between its origins in eighth century India up through post-fragmentation Tibet, initially referring to what were once the newest and most innovative tantric scriptures, and later superseded according to the nine-vehicle doxography by the classes of Anu and Atiyoga. At some point, a canon of eighteen Mahāyoga scriptures emerged, but the origins of this arrangement are murky, and only became regularized with Longchenpa's fourteenth century iteration.<sup>23</sup> In general, the Mahāyoga category of tantras came to refer to doctrinal and ritual systems emphasizing the bipartite “Generation Stage” (*bskyed rim*) deity visualization practices, and “Perfection” or “Completion Stage” (*rdzogs rim*) yoga

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<sup>23</sup> See: Orna Almogi, “The Eighteen Mahayoga Tantric Cycles: A real Canon or the Mere Notion of One?” *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 30 (2014): 47-110. Almogi suggests that while Tibetans inherited a concept of an eighteen-part tantric canon, it was a slow process of accretion and cross-listing that led to the first such explicitly Mahāyoga eighteen-part canons in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

harnessing the intensity of psycho-sexual bodily experience. Van Schaik’s analysis of tenth-century Mahāyoga commentarial texts at Dunhuang reveals that Mahāyoga was also, at that time, explicitly defined by: the subsumption of the Five Sambhogakaya Buddhas into the “single mode” of Vajrasattva (*rigs lnga tshul gcig du lta*); the “non-fixation” (*mi dmigs*) to concepts, especially notions of purity and impurity; and the yogas of “liberation” (*sgrol ba*) and “union” (*sbyor ba*), referring to effigistic (or perhaps real) sacrificial violence, and real or imagined sexual yoga.<sup>24</sup> Before the tenth century, it seems that Mahāyoga scriptures represented the cutting edge of tantric doctrine and practice, and the term “great perfection” (*rdzogs pa chen po*) may have first appeared in the context of Completion Stage practice as a further transcendental iteration of the Perfection Stage.<sup>25</sup> But in the wake of the appearance of the *Gathering of Intentions Sutra* (*dgongs pa ‘dus pa’i mdo*), the percolation of proto-Mind Series (*sems sde*) literature, and the influx of New Translation (*gsar ma*) tantras after the tenth century, new doxographical schemes supplanted Mahāyoga with scriptures of different emphases, specifically those categorized as Anu and Atiyoga. The subordination of Mahāyoga to increasingly somatic and transcendental contemplative systems was in fact well underway in the ninth century, when Nubchen Sangye Yeshe (*gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes*, 9th cent.) wrote his tantric commentaries promoting the nine-vehicle (*thegs pa dgu*) taxonomy of tantric doctrine. Such formulations (i.e., the nine-vehicle format, and the subsumption of all vehicles to the Great Perfection) are explicitly present in *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* texts, revealing the pervasive influence of Tibetan exegesis such as Nubchen’s in Nyangrel’s time, not to mention the probable Tibetan

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<sup>24</sup> See: Sam van Schaik, “A Definition of Mahāyoga.” *Tantric Studies*, vol. 1., 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Sam van Schaik, “The Early Days of the Great Perfection”, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 27:1 (2004): 165-207.

provenance of at least some aspects of the *Deshek Dupa*'s doctrines and contemplative orientations.

Nyangrel's Kabgyé cycle also pushed the limits of Mahāyoga in what appears to be an adoption of certain elements of the "siddha tantrism" of the Yoginī Tantras, or Mother Tantras (Tib. *ma rgyud*) which were being introduced to Tibet in the later spread (*phyi dar*) of Tantric Buddhism. We specifically see this in the elevation of the dākinī as a tutelary deity, the amplification of violent iconography, and in the imagery of charnel ground asceticism in the Kabgyé tantras. Nyangrel's embrace of these features is not surprising, considering the growing influence of New Translation (*gsar ma*) systems of tantric practice. Whether this incorporation of Yoginī templates was a premeditated attempt by Nyangrel to innovate the Mahāyoga cycles distinctive to Early Translation practitioners, or whether this was a natural development resulting from the dialogue between tantric traditions in South-Central Tibet, we do not know.

### **Meaning**

As a tantric contemplative system, the Kabgyé cycle retains an oral exegetical lineage with deeply esoteric dimensions. Few Tibetans have openly taught the Kabgyé in exile, and its practice in Tibet is generally reserved for adepts privately trained by qualified masters. A glimpse into the quintessential content of such an oral lineage can be seen in Chögyam Trungpa's (*zur mang drung pa chos kyi rgya mtsho*, 1940-87) brief but provocative introduction to the Kabgyé ("Eight Logos" according to his translation) to Western students between 1973 and 1975.<sup>26</sup> In his comments, Trungpa describes the iconography of the eight wrathful herukas in experiential terms, suggesting that the system altogether is concerned with the transmutation of the eight consciousnesses into different varieties of "thatness" (*de nyid*), or primordial reality.

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<sup>26</sup> Chogyam Trungpa. *The Profound Treasury of the Ocean of Dharma*, Boston: Shambhala Publications. vol. 3, 2013, 645-65.

In his presentation, the elements of wrathful iconography represent the ways in which conventionally negative experiences such as aggression, psycho-physical pollution, and death itself, can be recast as expressions of primordial gnosis. Trungpa's interpretation fits his overall pattern of psychologizing esoteric doctrine to resonate with modern audiences. But given the deeply esoteric nature of the *Eight Teachings*' practice tradition, it is hard to know whether he was being innovative or traditional in this particular presentation. Based on some exposure to Kabgyé exegesis in Tibet, I suspect his presentation in this case was rather traditional, reflective of his rarified training as a celebrated incarnate lama.

### **Etymology**

The term "Kabgyé" has been translated in a variety of ways by Tibetan and Western translators. These include Eight Pronouncements, Eight Teachings, Eight Precepts, Eight Practice-Instructions, Eight Transmitted Teachings, Eight Dispensations, Eight Commands, Eight Cosmic Teachings, and Eight Logos, among other translations. At first glance, "Eight Logos" seems the most idiosyncratic of these, although this is the translation by Chögyam Trungpa, who arguably had a superior grasp among English-speaking translators of the tradition in emic terms. The most common translations include Eight Pronouncements, Eight Precepts, or Eight Transmitted Precepts.

The difference in these translations owes to the multivalence of the word *bka'*. As registered by the *bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* Tibetan dictionary, *bka'* is an honorific term for speech, or words, (e.g. *rgyal po'i bka'*: "the King's words/speech"); it is also the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit *vacana*, referring to the teachings of the Buddha ("as distinct from

treatises about them”: *bka' dang bstan bcos gnyis su phye ba'i bka'*).<sup>27</sup> From this point of view, basic renderings of *bka' brgyad* could include Eight Teachings, Eight Precepts, Eight Commands, or Eight Proclamations. However, from the perspective of tantric buddhology, the Buddha’s speech entails a primordial dimension, captured in Trungpa’s use of the term *logos*. Trungpa explains:

In this case, *bka'* is more like a fundamental cosmic structure; it is the ultimate utterance of the universe from the point of view of the sambhogakaya. Therefore, I decided to translate *bka'* using the Christian term *logos*, which comes from Greek and means ‘Word’; or ‘Utterance’. *Bka'* is both sacred word and first word. It is the primeval expression of things. So altogether we have eight types of primeval expression.<sup>28</sup>

In light of the tantric doctrine that all dharmic teachings are directly expressive of the non-linguistic order of the ultimate ground, this phenomenological translation makes sense.

According to the tantric narrative framing the cycle, Primordial Buddha All-Good (*kun tu bzang po*, Skt. *Samantabhadra*) first gives expression to the Kabgyé teachings by emanating the eight Kabgyé mandalas, and this disclosure is the self-expression of the primordial nature itself. The Kabgyé mandalas emanated from the mind-state (*dgongs pa*) of Samantabhadra are the expressive structure, the *logos*, of the primordial reality. At the same time, within the narrative of the root tantra, these mandalas are “taught” by Kuntu Zangpo (although, as we shall see, “teaching” in the visionary realm of the “Symbolic Lineage of Awareness-Holders” (*rig 'dzin brda brgyud*) is not necessarily linguistic); they are teachings that express the very structure of enlightened reality, communicated in mandalic imagery. So, from the perspective of the narrative action of the tantras, the mandalas of the Kabgyé, and the tantric knowledge associated with

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<sup>27</sup> *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, vol. 1, 68: 1) *gsung ste skad cha'i zhe sa/...* 4) *bka' dang bstan bcos gnyis su phye ba'i bka' ste/ brjod bya don ldan gyi chos dang 'brel zhing/ byed las khams gsum gyi nyon mongs spong ba/ 'bras bu zhi ba myang 'das kyi phan yon ston pa/ rang gi bdag rkyen sangs rgyas la brten nas byung ba'i gsung rab/*

<sup>28</sup> Trungpa 2013, vol. 3, 645

them are, indeed, “Eight Teachings”. In sum, *bka’* in this context refers to the teachings of Kuntu Zangpo within the primordial, symbolic, and linguistic dimensions of reality, the architecture of enlightened ontology, and the specific templates for self-cultivational practice (i.e., the eight mandalas). For a word that encompasses both the didactic and structural aspects of the Kabgyé, *logos* (or *logoi* in the plural) would be a good choice. However, for the purposes of this present piece of scholarship, I have elected to use the more conventional Eight Teachings.

A numerology of eight (*brgyad*) appears across Nyangrel’s works, and is generally significant to the mandala-centric iconography of Mahāyoga tradition. The Kabgyé centers on an assembly of eight divinities. We also find repeating eightfold lists of demonic entities involved in the mythology and ritualism of the cycle. The deeds of Padmasambhava in Tibet, as illustrated in Nyangrel’s hagiography, also circulate around eight acts of demon taming. As Daniel Hirshberg observes, the Eight Names of Guru Rinpoche (*gu ru mtshan brgyad*), while not explicitly present in Nyangrel’s work, were probably derived from a visionary experience recorded in Nyangrel’s biography in which a *dākinī* invites him to witness an eight-fold mandala of Padmasambhava’s emanational forms.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the Mahāyana formulation of Eight Great Bodhisattvas was popular throughout the early centuries of Tibetan Buddhism, and commentarial tradition asserts that these eight bodhisattvas represent the purified form of the eight consciousnesses. The same interpretation is given to the Eight Herukas of the Kabgyé mandala, as seen in Trungpa’s remarks above. But the most obvious correlation is with the eight cardinal and subsidiary directions of a mandala, redolent of a micro-macrocosmic homologation between the icons of the contemplative system (the Eight Herukas), the visionary dimension of the physical environment (the Eight Classes of Gods and Spirits), the eight strata of consciousness,

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Hirshberg, “Himalayan Syncretism and the Emergence of Padmasambhava as *rdo rje gro lod*”, University of Virginia Tibet Center lecture, March 15, 2017.

and the apparent natural world with its eight cardinal and subsidiary directions. The numeral eight therefore takes on particular importance as a homological bridge between the orders of reality to be navigated by the kind of adept celebrated in the *Deshek Dupa*.

*Bde gshegs*, a Tibetan contraction of *bde bar gshegs pa*, (lit. “ones having gone blissfully”), translates the Sanskrit *sugata*, a title for buddhas.<sup>30</sup> I retain the Sanskrit here as English does not easily accommodate the various qualitative expressions for enlightened individuals, and readers of this dissertation are likely familiar with the Sanskrit term *sugata*. What remains unknown is why the wrathful herukas of the Kabgyé are called *bde bar gshegs pa* in particular. I have not seen any internal explanation of this within the Kabgyé texts. I suppose the reason has to do with the assertion that the wrathful mandala of Kabgyé is directly expressive of the primordial Buddha’s gnosis, and thus the deities of this mandala are fully enlightened emanational forms, just as were the historical and cosmic Buddhas, who are more regularly designated as *sugata* according to Mahāyana tradition. The appellation *bde bar gshegs pa* is sometimes supplemented in text titles with *bcom ldan ‘das*, “Transcendental Victor”, another epithet for the Buddha.

Another compelling term in the cycle’s title is *‘dus pa*. The meaning of this term – a nominalization of the perfective tense of *‘du ba*, “to gather” – is clear: an assembly. However, as we will see, this term takes on several meanings within the foundational mythology of the cycle, referring to several aspects of the Kabgyé’s dispensation. These references include the collation of scriptures centring on the Eight Herukas in the human realm, and also the redactive teaching activities of enlightened beings dwelling in primordial and visionary dimensions. These uses of *‘dus ba* have distinctive buddhological implications, as will be discussed in Chapter Three. As

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<sup>30</sup> Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 2008 revision: “*su-gata*: *mfn* going well; one who has fared well; *m* A Buddha”

for how to render *'dus pa* in the context of the cycle's title, it may seem ambiguous whether the term refers to an assembly of divinities, or to the assembly of eight teachings. Grammatically speaking, the title could be accurately rendered "The Collected Eight Teachings of the Sugatas", "The Eight Teachings of the Collected Sugatas", or the "Collection of the Sugatas of the Eight Teachings". Given that the Kabgyé mandala is said to entail the full range of divinities upon which one can rely for contemplative accomplishment – those representing enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities; the forty-two peaceful and fifty-eight wrathful deities; as well as divinities for accomplishing worldly aims – the notion of "Sugata-Assembly" seems appropriate to capture the scope of divine entities involved in the Kabgyé doctrines and practices. Therefore, I have resolved to translate *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* as "The Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings".

### Origins

Like any tantric cycle, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* supplies its own origin myth. This is to be found in the first treasure text of the corpus, in a text called the "*The Manner of the Arising of the Teachings of the Assembled Sugatas*" (*bde gshegs 'dus pa bka' byung tshul*, hereafter, "*The Arising*").<sup>31</sup> This text, which has proven quite consequential for the Nyingma denomination's doxographical conceptions, appears in only one recension of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* corpus (the Katok-derived xylograph owned by Dūdjom, and its nine-volume predecessor, as described in Chapter Three). However, we also see it referenced by Ngari Panchen Pema Wangyal (*mnga' ris pan chen padma dbang rgyal*, 1487-1542) in his early sixteenth-century exposition on the Kabgyé's history, and it is listed in Taksham Nuden Dorje's (*stag sham nus ldan rdo rje*, 1655-1708) index for his seventeenth-century edition of the Nyingma tantric canon, for which we only

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<sup>31</sup> *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i bka' byung tshul* (*The Manner of the Arising of the Teachings of the Kabgye Deshek Dupa*), in Katok: *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 1, text 3, 231-272.

have the table of contents. *The Arising* is absent from other Kabgyé editions and canonical anthologies. Nonetheless, its narrative must have gained wide circulation from an early time, as it undergirds the normative account of the Kabgyé's origins, and supplies doxographical conceptions which inform the organization of tantric knowledge according to the Nyingma, particularly in the development of the term Accomplishment Class (*sgrub sde*).

This text opens with an account of the Kabgyé's articulation in primordial, symbolic, and material realities, and its concealment at the Cool Grove (*bsil ba'i tshal*, Skt. *Śītavana*) charnel ground in Northern India, near Rajagriha. It is here that the Eight Vidyādhara (Tib. *rig 'dzin brgyad*, the "Eight Awareness-Holders") would come to receive the cycle.<sup>32</sup> The text describes the gathering of Eight Vidyādhara at Śītavana, where the dākinī queen Mahākarmendrā (Tib. *legs kyi dbang mo*) brings forth jewelled volumes from within a stupa. As Dūdjom Rinpoche summarizes:

Bringing forth the caskets, she entrusted the gold casket containing the tantra of Mahottara to Vimalamitra, the silver casket containing that of Sri Heruka to Humkara, the iron casket containing that of Yamāntaka to Majusrimitra, the copper casket containing that of Hayagrīva to Nagarjuna, the turquoise casket containing that of Vajrakīlaya to Padmasambhava, the stone casket containing that of Fierce Goddess to Dhanasamkrta, the agate casket containing that of Worldly Praise and Offering to Rambuguhya, and the *dzi*-stone casket containing that of Maledictory Incantation to Santigarbha. Each of them became adept in his own subject and attained the accomplishments of the way of mantras. From the casket made of eight kinds of precious gems there emerged the Spoken Teachings comprising the tantra and esoteric instructions of the Deshek Dupa,

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<sup>32</sup> See: Davidson 2003, chpts. 5-7, esp. 194-202 for an overview of the "siddha" ethos of late Indian Tantra. Also See: Martin Boord, *The Deity Vajrakīla: According to the Texts of the Northern Treasure Tradition of Tibet*. Tring, U.K.: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2013, pp.1720-74 for his take on the possible historical basis of this narrative of the cycle's concealment and retrieval from a charnel-ground stupa by eight Vidyādhara. Boord suggests that, given the ubiquity of this narrative across several tantric traditions, including that of Japanese tantrism, there may very well be a historical core reality behind this myth. Boord suggests that the concealment of important tantras inside a charnel-ground stupa may have really occurred, spawning a host of myths regarding the origins of particular Mahāyoga and Anuyoga tantras.

which subsumes all the aforementioned means for attainment at once. This fell to Master Padmasambhava.<sup>33</sup>

So it was that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was received by one human being, Padmasambhava. The individual tantras associated with the Eight Herukas were individually bestowed to the Eight Vidyādhāras, and allegedly propagated in India and Nepal, whence they came to Tibet in the early days of the imperium's adoption of Buddhism.<sup>34</sup> *The Arising* actually lists some two hundred and forty such texts pertaining to the deities of the Kabgyé, many of which can be confirmed to have been tantras and sādhanās that did indeed gain circulation in Tibet during the first dispensation. So we see reflected in *The Arising* the idea that all materials associated with the deities collated by the Kabgyé were initially dispensed at Śītavana as part of a greater Kabgyé, or Accomplishment Class, dispensation. These materials include the individuated tantras and sādhanās of the Kabgyé-affiliated herukas, and also the comprehensive Kabgyé cycles that would become revealed treasure in Tibet.

As for the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s transmission in Tibet, the narrative continues:

At the Secret Cave of Great Bliss of Samye Chimphu, the greatly realised Maha Acharya Padmasambhava introduced the Mandala of Bde-gshegs sgrubs-pa bka'-brgyad to his nine fortunate and beloved spiritual sons. When initiation was conferred on them to ripen their mind-streams, at the time of casting the flower (onto the mandala to seek indications of which meditational deity each individual person was connected with) Lhodrak Namkha Nyingpo's flower fell onto the mandala of Yangak (Enlightened Mind); Nubchen Sangye Yeshe's flower fell onto the mandala of Yamagarbha Yamāntaka (Enlightened Body); Gyalwa Chog Yang's flower fell onto the mandala of Hayagrīva Padma Wangchen (Enlightened Speech); dākinī Yeshe Tshogyal's flower fell onto the mandala of Vajrakīlaya (Enlightened Activity); Drog Palgyi Sengye's flower fell onto the mandala of

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<sup>33</sup> Dūdjom Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*. Trans. Matthew T. Kapstein and Gyurme Dorje. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 1991, pp. 482-83. Dūdjom's account is drawn from the *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa bka' byung tshul*, 238-41.

<sup>34</sup> Dūdjom 1991, 475-481.

Mamo Bötong; Langchen Palgyi Sengye's flower fell onto the mandala of Bregs 'dul; Lochen Vairochana's flower fell onto the mandala of Möpa Drangag; King Trisong Deutsan's flower fell onto the mandala of Che-chog Heruka; and Nyang Tenzin Zangpo's flower fell into the mandala of Lama Rigs 'dus. They accomplished both the common and supreme feats in their lifetimes as each of them had concentrated their personal practice on a particular deity with whom they personally had karmic connection. For this reason, they have been widely known as the nine sons of Tibet, the Land of Snow, destined (to receive) the Eight Practice-Instructions.<sup>35</sup>

Thus it was that, according to the auto-history of the cycle, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was first propagated in Tibet.

Couched within the mytho-historical narrative of *The Arising* is a full catalogue of supplementary Kabgyé materials. According to this, the full Kabgyé cycle consisted of five principal and ten subsidiary tantras (*rgyud*), five teachings (*lung lnga*), and a variety of specific oral instructions (*man ngag*), self-cultivational practices (*sgrub thabs*, “methods of accomplishment”), and rituals (*cho ga*). This list of materials appears rather uniformly across exegetical sources, but, beyond the inclusion of the fifteen tantras and five teachings, the published *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycles do not particularly conform to this index. Whether such a catalogue reflects actual materials circulating in thirteenth or fourteenth-century Central Tibet, or whether it was a literary device to articulate the fullness of the Kabgyé cycle, we cannot, at this point, definitively say. I will suggest, however, that the idea of bibliography was a narrative conceit with important implications for the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* as it situated itself in broader contexts of institutional contestations. My analyses in Chapter Four should make this clear.

*The Arising* concludes to describe the transcription of these teachings by the imperial translator Denma Tsemang (*ldan ma tse mang*), and the concealment of these texts for the benefit

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<sup>35</sup> Khamtrul, “The Eight Practice-Instructions of the Sugatas in the Nyingma Lineage.” *Tibet Journal* vol. 15 no. 2 (1990), 63; Also see: Dūdjom 1991, 534-37.

of future generations. Interestingly, the text does not specify that the cycle was concealed at Khoting temple, but rather implies that the concealment was at the Red Rock hermitage (*brag dmar mgrin*) at Samyé, the very place where Padmasambhava is said to have taught the *Deshek Dupa*.<sup>36</sup> We might also note that Ögyan Lingpa's (*o rgyan gling pa*, 1323-60) fourteenth-century revelation texts also tend to favor the role of this Denma Tsemang (rather than Vairotsana as in later normative *terma* traditions), and Lingpa's *Five Chronicles* revelation (*bka' thang sde lnga*) mirrors *The Arising* verbatim in describing the concealment of a massive *Deshek Dupa* corpus in a cave within the Samyé temple complex.<sup>37</sup> Thus, there seems to be a close connection between *The Arising* and the *Five Chronicles*. We cannot precisely interpret the resemblance at this point; perhaps the *Five Chronicles* follows *The Arising*, or vice versa. Ngari Panchen cites *The Arising*, and its companion bibliography, *The Clear Lamp Index* (*dkar chag gsal ba'i sgron me*) as the sources for his historical exposition on the Kabgyé, replicating its massive index of Kabgyé and Accomplishment Class materials. We can thus see that there was, by the late fifteenth century, a movement to catalogue the Kabgyé and inscribe its origins into the history of Buddhism in Tibet as curated by Early Translation masters in the lineage of Nyangrel.

### **Transmitted or Revealed?**

Altogether, it is hard to determine what exactly emerged from Nyangrel's revelation experience in the late twelfth century under the title *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. Nyangrel's two

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<sup>36</sup> *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa bka' byung tshul*, 260, 270. Jigme Lingpa's *Guide to Glorious Samye Chimphu* reflects the traditions celebration of Samye and its surrounding features as the location for the bestowal and concealment of Padmasambhava's most important contributions. Lingpa primarily draws on Ögyan Lingpa's revealed *padma bka' thang* as a source for this knowledge, which we see replicated in the *rgyal po bka' thang*, as well. See: "The Cuckoo's Call" Trans. Kaleb Yaniger, *lotsawahouse.org*.

<sup>37</sup> O rgyan gling pa (revealer). *bka' thang sde lnga: rgyal po bka' thang yig: ma 'ong rgyal brgyud nor skal ji ltar sbas tshul* ("The Five Chronicles: The Kings' Chronicle: The Manner of the Concealment of the Future Royal Inheritance"). Lhasa: Gangs can khyad nor dpe tshogs, 2010, 166-175.

principal biographical sources, *The Clear Mirror* and *The Stainless Proclamations*, despite claiming to have been composed by Nyangrel’s closest disciples shortly following his death, present different accounts of the recovery of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, and what the corpus entailed upon Nyangrel’s revelation. The *Clear Mirror* gives us what has become the widely-accepted revelation narrative in reporting how Nyangrel extracted the *Eight Teachings* corpus in 130 texts from within (technically, “from behind”, *rgyab nas*) the Vairocana statue at Khoting Temple.<sup>38</sup> *The Stainless Proclamations*, on the other hand, reports that Nyangrel was given the tantras, teachings, oral instructions, practices, and empowerments of the “*Sugatas Tantra*” (presumably the *bde gshegs ‘dus pa rgyud*), and *Eight Teachings of Accomplishment* (*sgrub pa bka’ brgyad*) by his teachers Lama Rashak and Tertön Ngödrup.<sup>39</sup> These two narratives entail very different implications: if Nyangrel had been handed over Kabgyé materials by Rashak and Ngödrup as *The Stainless* suggests, this means that the Kabgyé had already been circulating continuously in Tibet. If, on the other hand, the entire cycle was extracted from Khoting as the *Clear Mirror* states, the Kabgyé lineage would have been interrupted between the imperial period and Nyangrel: a situation posing no particular problem to the revelation-loving Nyingma, but exposing the cycle to criticism from historically-minded critics. Indeed, the question of whether the Kabgyé cycle was of the transmitted (*bka’ ma*) or revealed (*gter ma*) variety has been a vital one for Nyingmapa commentators, and there is evidence of dispute over the provenance of at least certain aspects of the *Eight Teachings*. For example, Gö Lotsawa Zhönnu

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<sup>38</sup> *The Clear Mirror*, 341.6-342: *rnam snang sku rgyab nas gter kha chen po cig gtan drangs/ gter snod la sgrom smug dang sgrom skya gnyis ‘dug pa la/ sgrom smug nang nas bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i rgyud lung ma bu la sogs pa/ chos tshan brgya sum cu’i sod chung drug dang/*

<sup>39</sup> *The Stainless Proclamations*, 92.4: *de nas bla ma ra shag gter ston gyi spyen sdar dam chos bde gshegs pa rgyud lung nyi shu sgrub thabs phro mo dang bcas pa/ sgro chung bzhi thon pa la/ pod chung bdun zhus pas dpe ma dang bcas pa ngang/ de nas bla ma grub thob dngos grub bya ba bka’ gter thams cad kyi bdag po de la/ gsang sngags sgrub pa bka’ brgyad kyi dbang bka’ gdams ngag dang bcas pa zhus/*

Pel (‘gos lo tsa ba gzhon nu dpal 1392-1481) reports peoples’ objections to the inclusion of distinctively Tibetan gods and demons in the “worldly” maṇḍalas of Mamo Bötong, Jigten Chotö, and Möpa Drangak. Gö adjudicates the complaint by suggesting that Padmasambhava had taught expediently for Tibetans, and that “these great gods had also met the Buddha”.<sup>40</sup> This remark in Gö’s *Blue Annals* is significant for what it reveals about the logic of *gter ma* critics and apologists.

In an effort to immerse himself in the Kabgyé tradition, Ngari Panchen combed Central Tibet, Lhodrak, and Upper Mustang for eleven years seeking Kabgyé instruction and lineal histories. In his historical commentary on the Kabgyé tradition, *The Wheel of the Sun and Moon Dispelling the Darkness: A Method of Explanation* (‘chad thabs munsel nyi zla khor lo), Ngari reports his conclusion that an unbroken tradition of the *Deshek Dupa* was maintained continuously from the retinue of Tri Song Detsän, coming to Tertön Ngödrup and then on to Nyangrel, just as *The Stainless* reports.<sup>41</sup> Ngari manages to give several transmission lists for this “Kama Kabgyé” (*bka’ ma bka’ brgyad*), or “Long Lineage” (*ring brgyud*).<sup>42</sup> At the same time, according to Ngari, Nyangrel did reveal a *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* corpus in Lhodrak, where Ngari reports he himself personally saw the yellow scrolls. Thus, Ngari declares that Nyangrel

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<sup>40</sup> George Roerich, trans. *Blue Annals*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, (1949), 1988, 107.

<sup>41</sup> Mnga’ ris pan chen pad+ma dbang rgyal. ‘Chad thabs mun sel nyi zla khor lo (*The Wheel of the Sun and Moon Dispelling the Darkness: A Method of Explanation*) In *Katok: bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i chos skor*, vol. 1, 165-230.

<sup>42</sup> Ngari also describes a widespread tradition of “Mind Class” (*sems sde*) Great Perfection contemplation associated with the Kabgyé called “Kabgyé Zongtrang” (*bka’ brgyad rdzongs ‘phrang*, “The Citadel and Ravine of the Eight Teachings”), which enjoyed wide circulation in his day. This Zongtrang tradition traces itself to Nubchen Sangye Yeshe in the ninth century, and its inclusion in the Kama suggests that it was indeed a transmitted tradition of Great Perfection. Cathy Cantwell suggests that this Kabgyé Zongtrang is most accurately described as a “bka’ ma bka’ brgyad” (personal communication, July 2019), and close study of its history and iterations may shed light on the origins and development of *sems sde* practice, and the coordination of Mahāyoga with Great Perfection / Atiyoga in Tibet.

held both the Kama and terma Kabgyé lineages<sup>43</sup>. However, he also reports that the Kama Kabgyé lineage effectively ended with Nyangrel, as it was thereafter enfolded into the broader revelation tradition.<sup>44</sup> Thus, according to Ngari, all continuing lineages of the Kabgyé should be understood to entail the essence of both the Kama and terma iterations, as Nyangrel “mixed the river of kama and terma” (“*bka’ gter chus ‘dres*”). This understanding of the Kabgyé as a broader cycle spanning transmitted and revealed origins was codified, as reflected in Katok Rigzin Tsewang Norbu’s remarks to the same effect two centuries later.<sup>45</sup> We will also see how this understanding of the Kabgyé’s provenance as both Kama and terma was leveraged as an organizational template in several Nyingma anthologies, including the Collected Nyingma Tantras (*rnying ma rgyud ‘bum, Nyingma Gyubum*), the Treasury of Precious terma (*rin chen gter mdzod, Rinchen Terdzö*), and the Transmitted Precepts of the Nyingma (*rnying ma bka’ ma, Nyingma Kama*). I suggest that this organizational sensibility had origins in the dual Kama-terma identity of the *Deshek Dupa*, and also in Kabgyé lore, which associates the origin of all sorts of Mahāyoga cycles with the dispensation of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* at Śitavana.

### **A Proto-Canon**

The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* provided a unique collation of non-Māyājāla Mahāyoga tantric systems circulating in Early Translation communities, including those of Hayagrīva, Yamāntaka, Yangdak Heruka, and Vajrakilā. This collation was particularly significant given Nyangrel’s historical context, which was one of intensifying competition between increasingly institutionalized and resource-rich religious communities. As I will show in Chapter Two, the loosely affiliated group of local and family-centered Early Translation lineages would have been

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<sup>43</sup> Mnga’ ris pan chen, *‘chad thabs mun sel nyi zla’i khor lo*, 219.1.

<sup>44</sup> Mnga’ ris pan chen, *‘chad thabs mun sel nyi zla’i khor lo*, 220.

<sup>45</sup> Ka thog rigs ‘dzin tshe dbang nor bu, *bka’ ‘bum*, vol. 2, 401.

in need of competitive strategies to authorize its distinctive kind of practice, and to organize itself around a scriptural core. There had been earlier efforts by Early Translation Buddhists to collate various tantric systems into an overarching corpus. These include the development of *The Gathering of Intentions Sutra* (*dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*) in the eighth or ninth century, as well as the *zur bka' sde* compendium of transmitted tantric traditions.<sup>46</sup> But these proto-canon neglected some of the ritual-centric tantras which were important to Early Translation practitioners. Their collation in the *Deshek Dupa* must have fulfilled a need to incorporate distinctive idioms and ritual formats into a broader articulation of religious identity. This identity sought to amplify the wrathful idioms of “taming” (*'dul ba*) and “liberation” (*sgrol ba*), and inculcate a praxis that brought together tantric soteriology and harm-averting ritualism. Perhaps most significantly, the Kabgyé incorporated elements of Tibetan ritual culture, and advanced the image of the harm-averting ritual adept as the paradigmatic Buddhist master: an idiom coordinated with emergent traditions of Padmasambhava lore as curated by Nyangrel Nyima Özer.

In bringing together tantric systems already practiced by masters of the Early Translation community, and by emphasizing harm-averting ritualism with a familiar undergirding mythology, the *Deshek Dupa* proffered a statement about the doctrinal and vocational identity of these tantrists. While it is possible that a transmitted *Deshek Dupa* already did circulate in imperial or early post-imperial Tibet, it was Nyangrel's treatment of the cycle as a revelation corpus that amplified its idioms and set its direction as a foundational element of the Nyingma tradition. Though the revelation does not advertise itself as an anthology or canon per se (although it is, explicitly, a *'dus pa*, or “assemblage”), the appeal to canonicity is evidenced in

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<sup>46</sup> Jacob Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 49.

the Kabgyé scriptures themselves, which devote much attention to the idea of canon, the work of collation, and the mystical foundations of scriptural production. The *Eight Teachings* corpus, in its initial and accreted iterations, supplied a collection of mythic, doctrinal, contemplative, and ritual resources of unprecedented scale and comprehensiveness for a single cycle. It was thereby coordinated with broader historiographic and doctrinal conceits to advance the identity of the Early Translation community as it faced extrinsic pressures.

### **Expansion**

It seems clear that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* corpus ballooned in subsequent centuries, and what now claims to be the complete body of Nyangrel's *Eight Teachings* is a 13-volume collection of historical, doctrinal, contemplative, and ritual materials, circulating in two editions: one provided by Dūdjom Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje and associated with Katok monastery in Eastern Tibet (*kaḥ thog rdo rje gdan*), and the other published out of Tsamdrak (*mtshams brag dgon*), in Bhutan. The Katok edition, which is the basis of ongoing re-publications in China and Nepal, includes 240 texts, totaling over 8,000 folio sides.<sup>47</sup> These massive editions are allegedly based on one curated, perhaps in a nine-volume format, in the seventeenth century by one Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje (*gong ra lo chen gzhan pan rdo rje*, 1595-1654), a multi-dimensional exegete with strong editorial interests and expertise in apotropaic (harm-averting) ritualism.<sup>48</sup>

Previous to Gongra's treatment of the corpus, several lines of transmission and distinctive exegetical and practice traditions had developed. Ngari Panchen specifies the existence of one hundred and fifty-one commentaries by the sixteenth century, and delineates

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<sup>47</sup> **Katok:** *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*. Ngagyur nyingmay sungrab series, v. 75-87. Gangtok: Sonam Topgay Kazi, 1978; **Tsamdrak:** *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*. Paro: Ngodrup, 1980.

<sup>48</sup> The Tsamdrak preface directs the reader to vol. 3, p.65, the colophon of the *zhi khro rtsa ba'i rgyud*, wherein Gongra notes his curation (*bzhengs pa*) of the text. It is not clear to me why the editors at Tsamdrak took this to suggest that Gongra had edited the entire corpus, and perhaps they are drawing on received information regarding the provenance of the thirteen-volume *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions.

several lineages and exegetical traditions to which he had personally been exposed as he received the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* no less than twenty-five times. Ngari also suggests that the seventh-generation genetic descendant of Nyangrel, one Ngadak Kunga Gyaltsen (probably a fourteenth-century figure), played an important role in curating the many instructional and practice materials that had proliferated in the generations immediately following Nyima Özer.<sup>49</sup>

According to Ngari Panchen, Nyangrel was responsible for supplementing the revealed Kabgyé scriptures with some commentarial works and practice materials, while his son (presumably Namkha Pel) composed a commentary, some deity yoga practices, and a curricular manual (*yig cha*). Ngari states that many successors in Nyangrel's lineage also produced such manuals, but it was the seventh lineage holder, Ngadak Kunga Gyaltsen, who created some of the key liturgies and their manuals in the context of his many bestowals of the Kabgyé empowerment (*dbang*).<sup>50</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ngari Panchen closes this account by stating that “These days, in Ü, Tsang, Do-Kham, in Kongpo and so forth, the Kabgyé has especially spread”.<sup>52</sup>

Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje was active about a hundred years after Ngari Panchen, and if Ngari's account is accurate, there would have been many Kabgyé lineal traditions from which to assemble his edition of the cycle. Unfortunately, we have no direct evidence of

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<sup>49</sup> Mnga' ris pan chen, *Chad thabs mun sel nyi zla khor lo*, 205, 20.

<sup>50</sup> Mnga' ris pan chen, *Chad thabs mun sel nyi zla khor lo*, p 204-205

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Hirshberg observes that none of Nyangrel's genetic lineal descendants identified themselves as tertöns, instead restricting their activities to the curation and development of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. Guru Chowang, on the other hand, who claimed for himself the mantle of Nyangrel's incatenated successor, fashioned himself as the next in a line of destined Kabgyé revealers. Hirshberg, “Fidelity, Innovation, and Reincarnation in the Early Revelations of the Eight Instructions”, International Association of Tibetan Studies 40th Anniversary Seminar: July 12, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Mnga' ris pan chen, *Chad thabs mun sel nyi zla khor lo*, 206.

Gongra's product, as his works were destroyed by order of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1655.<sup>53</sup> However, around a century later saw the fifteen foundational tantras of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* grouped together in Taksham Nuden Dorje's seventeenth-century edition of the *Nyingma Gyubum*, wherein the entire fourteenth volume (*pha*) is devoted to the *Deshek Dupa* revelation in precisely the same layout we see in later versions of the *Nyingma Gyubum*, and in Katok and Tsamdrak's *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions. The fifteen tantras are also present in an early Bhutanese edition of the *Gyubum*, from Gangteng (*sgang steng*), which perhaps had origins in the late fifteenth century. Interestingly, the Kabgyé tantras in this edition do not use the nomenclature of the *Eight Teachings (bka' brgyad)*. Rather, all the tantras of our cycle in this edition are categorized as *lcom ldan 'das bde bar gshegs pa 'dus pa* (The Victor-Sugata Assembly).<sup>54</sup> At any rate, we see that the Kabgyé's inclusion in the Nyingma tantric canon, and the collation of its foundational texts, had its origin well before later publication efforts in Eastern Tibet.

Beyond the thirteen-volume corpora, it is clear that there were several recensional lines of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. These recensions will be discussed in Chapter Three. But each edition of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, despite some differences in emphasis and some discrepancy in contents, includes the fifteen main and supplementary tantras associated with the eight wrathful herukas, a standard list of five teachings and essential instructions (*lung* and *man ngag*), and a collection of self-cultivational practices composed by Padmasambhava or by Nyangrel

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<sup>53</sup> Gene Smith, "Banned Books in the Tibetan Speaking Lands" in *21st Century Tibet Issue: Symposium on Contemporary Tibetan Studies, collected papers*. Taipei: Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission, 2004, pp. 186, 190, 192.

<sup>54</sup> See: Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, "The *sGang steng-b rNying ma'i rGyud 'bum* manuscript from Bhutan." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*. No. 11 (2006) for the complete *sgang steng rgyud 'bum* catalogue, esp. vol. 24 (*ya*), pp. 76-77.

himself. We may regard these as the core materials that emerged from Nyangrel's revelation activities in the twelfth century.

In some sense, the search for the "original" Kabgyé is unimportant in the context of understanding its impact and legacy in Tibet over eight centuries. But tracing its reception and publication history can tell us something about how specific communities curated this scripture in response to historical contexts. In analyzing its inclusion in the great anthologies of the Nyingma tradition, we will see how the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was enfolded into broader taxonomies and deployed to provide ever more coherent templates for tantric doctrine and praxis. The Kabgyé's mytho-historical origin story would be leveraged to suggest divine typologies, and the structure of the corpus would be appropriated to organize all sorts of tantric materials. The idea of the Kabgyé as an organizational rubric for tantric knowledge developed over centuries of editorial treatment, despite the regularizing claims of tradition, which suggest that the Kabgyé was always a corpus representing natural doctrinal orders.

### **Structure and Contents**

As it stands today, the comprehensive thirteen-volume *Deshek Dupa* includes fifteen tantras and some thirty four instructional texts. There are thirty five self-cultivational practice texts, including deity-yoga visualization rituals (*las byang* and *sgrub thabs*), progressive meditations (*sgom rim*), preliminaries (*sngon 'gro*), and mantra recitation practices (*dzab bsnyen*). There is also a vast variety of thaumaturgical and apotropaic rites distributed over 150 individual texts. These rituals include sacrificial fire offerings (*sbyin sreg*), libation appeasements (*gser skyems*), mandala construction (*dkyil 'khor*), incantated entreaties (*bskul ba*), and, most abundantly, effigistic harm-aversion rituals (*bzlog pa* or *gtor bzlog*). These texts are generally arranged by functional genre over the thirteen volumes, suggesting that the editions were curated to be a reference source for ritual and contemplative practice. In general, the tantras

and supporting mytho-historical narratives are found in the initial volumes, followed by volumes devoted to the self-cultivational practice texts centering on the five transcendental herukas and the Peaceful/Wrathful deity complex, with as many as seven final volumes containing the myriad ritual practices which make this corpus so distinctive.

A notable feature of the published *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is its prevalence of harm-averting, or apotropaic, rituals. The Katok corpus includes at least fifty one individual *dokpa* (*bzlog pa* – lit. “repelling”) rites, by far the most prevalent topic in the entire collection. Most of these short rituals are effigistic and violent, involving the entrapment, dismemberment, and ritual murder of various kinds of effigy objects, such as dough cakes (*gtor ma*) or clay figurines. Sometimes the language is rather ambiguous as to whether the ritual procedures entail the killing of effigies, or the murder of actual people (euphemistically called “liberating”, *sgrol ba*). In Mahāyoga tantric tradition, this “liberation” is thought to be the enactment of a kind of uncompromising compassion called “wrathful play” (*khro bo rol pa*) in which forces obstructive to Buddhist wisdom are neutralized. This might refer to the killing of actual “enemies” (*dgra bgegs*), or, in a psychologized interpretation, the elimination of habitual negative emotions (*nyon mongs*). An analysis of several *dokpa* rites will appear in Chapter Six.

Overall, the iconography, semiotics, language, and aesthetics of this corpus are characterized by an imagery of death, destruction, sexuality, and transgression. This being a Buddhist system, this imagery is unequivocally re-appropriated to stand for Buddhist soteriological values of compassion and gnosis. This wrathful idiom was by no means new to Tibetan Buddhists in the twelfth century: wrathful Tantra supplied the basic imaginaire for much of what took place in the shrine halls, retreat caves, and dreamscapes of Early Translation Tantric Buddhists. As the literature of the time would have us imagine, the slopes and valleys of

Central Tibet were home to sorceristic Buddhist adepts who contended with powerful invisible forces through techniques redolent of black magic, unleashing fearsomely powerful geomantic forces to meet the tempestuousness of the geographic and social environment. Nyangrel, at least in how he came to be imagined, was paradigmatic of this vision of mastery, and his spiritual world was one of visionary experience and ritualism of a rather violent timbre.<sup>55</sup> If the current structure of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* corpus can be taken to represent the flavor of the cycle as Nyangrel received it, it offers an unprecedented systemization and amplification of wrathful Tantra and its apotropaic practice regimes. Whether this systemization occurred after Nyangrel's time, or whether Nyangrel's revelation really did entail such a magnificently organized and broad corpus, will be difficult to untangle. But as the *Eight Teachings* would become an essential feature of any Nyingma adept's training in the centuries following Nyangrel's career, it came to contribute much to how Tibetan Buddhists would appraise the soteriological value of violence.

### **Demon Taming**

A 2008 article by Tenzin Samphel on the Kabgyé revelation suggests that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* incorporated the Tibetan indigenous myth and ritual complex to produce something highly resonant with Tibetan culture.<sup>56</sup> Ronald Davidson likewise asserts that terma

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<sup>55</sup> While Nyangrel's Kabgyé revelations are squarely concerned with wrathful ritual practice, we may also note that Nyangrel's oeuvre includes many materials devoted to "pristine" transcendental mysticism. As Germano (2005) suggests, Nyangrel's curation of the "Crown Pith" body of Great Perfection mysticism implied an effort to distinguish between the wrathful tantrism of the Kabgyé, and the more peaceful transcendentalism of Great Perfection mysticism and the cult of Avalokiteśvara. Altogether, we arrive at a picture of Nyangrel's oeuvre entailing distinctive iterations of wrathful ritualism coupled with peaceful soteriology in a marriage of religious violence and transcendental mysticism, contextualized by a vision of sacred and recursive history with Nyangrel and the ritualist-adept at the center. In this regard, Nyangrel truly stands out as the architect of Nyingma religiosity, as these tropes continue to define the Nyingma approach to religious practice and historiography.

<sup>56</sup> Tenzin Samphel, "Les bKa' brgyad - Sources Canoniques et Tradition de Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 15 (2008), 270.

“allowed Tibetans to cloak their own paradigms in the guise of emerging Indic authority”.<sup>57</sup> And, according to Dalton, “Tibetans seem to have been attracted to tantra in part for its effectiveness in controlling spirits and demons”.<sup>58</sup> For Tibetans, this meant incorporating the lore and ritualism with which their society had long been bound, often repackaging Tibetan ritual culture as something with Indian Buddhist origins. We see this trend in materials found at Dunhuang, and I suggest that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* also provided an example of this indigenization, as we see in the corpus several narratives and classificatory schemes for incorporating specifically Tibetan gods into Buddhist narratives and ritual procedures.<sup>59 60</sup>

### **The Nameless Religion**

Like people across pre-modern cultures, Tibetans have long propitiated worldly divinities for fortune and the aversion of harm. Typical vernacular practices include daily offerings of tea or liquor (supposedly a substitute for the blood sacrifice of pre-Buddhist times), presented to the gods of the land. The terminology surrounding these autochthonous entities varies widely across regions and traditions. General terms for the land-gods in Tibet include *yul lha*, “gods of the region”, *sa bdag*, “lords of the earth”, or *gzhi bdag*, “lords of the place”. *Dregs pa* (arrogant spirits), *dgra lha* (enemy gods), and *bdud* (demons) are also terms with specific shades of meaning that are used to describe the landscape gods in a general sense. Translation of these

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<sup>57</sup> Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 216.

<sup>58</sup> Jacob Dalton, “The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet: A Study of IOL Tib J 644 and Pelliot Tibétain 307.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124.4 (2004): p. 760.

<sup>59</sup> Dalton (2004) analyzes one such text, Pelliot 307, which provides an early demon-subjugation narrative featuring a proto-Padmasambhava figure.

<sup>60</sup> Sam van Schaik appraises a modest fragment from a ninth-century Dunhuang text (IOL Tib J 990) as evidence for the negotiation of pre-Buddhist religion with tantric tradition. According to van Schaik, the text prepares to address the question of whether blood sacrifice to the Tibetan gods is compatible with Buddhism. Unfortunately, the answer is not available in the extant fragment of the damaged text. (Sam van Schaik, “Buddhism and Bon I”, *Early Tibet* blog, <https://earlytibet.com/2007/05/23/buddhism-and-bon-i/> accessed July, 2019).

terms into English is difficult, and even the notions of “land-god”, “spirit”, or “demon” do not fully capture the range of dispositions, attributes, and behaviors that are attributed to these entities. Most of these entities are regarded as potentially malevolent, although they may be ritually propitiated to secure favor. Some have been bound by oath (*dam can*) to protect Buddhism. But even the question of whether these entities “truly exist” is a complex one, interpreted differently by Tibetans in various situations.

The place-gods are often associated with mountain peaks, waterways, and prominent landforms, and may be due regular offerings of special foodstuffs or precious items. The offering of billowing juniper smoke (*lha bsang*) is perhaps the most common intercessory ritual with certain pre-Buddhist origins.<sup>61</sup> Not all of the entities are entirely beneficent; intercessory rituals are meant to secure favorable relations with tempestuous or downright dangerous entities inhabiting the landscape. These may be known in general as Dū (*bdud*, “demons”), or, more specifically, as the Mu (*dmu*), Gek (*bgegs*), Srinpo (*srin po*), or the especially-feared Tsän (*bsan*).<sup>62</sup> Origin stories regarding these kinds of entities abound. It is said, for example, that the Tsän are the powerful ghosts of deceased kings, now inhabiting red-rock outcroppings and propitiatable through red substances. Angering a Tsän or stimulating the vampiric Srinpo has disastrous consequences. Like the Tibetan physical environment itself, the world of the gods and demons is a dangerous one in which great care must be taken proceed properly through a socialized terrain of exchange and favor. These ritual traditions, which R.A. Stein has called “the

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<sup>61</sup> R.A. Stein (1972) nicely describes Tibetan indigenous ritualism, and the custom of ancestral mountain worship in particular, in terms of a “cult of verticality”. See: R.A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilisation*. London: Faber and Faber, 1972, 37-45; 191-223.

<sup>62</sup> *Tshig mdzod chen mo*, p.1360: *bdud: sems can la gnod 'tshe dang dge ba la bar chad byed mkhan/* (“ones who bring injury and disrupt virtue in beings”). In tantric exegesis, *bdud* may also be taken to stand for afflictive emotions (*nyon mongs*). In translation, *bdud* translates the Sanskrit *māra*.

Nameless Religion”, continue to be upheld, and often manifest devoid of Buddhist content, although lay practitioners and clerics alike are quick to supply Buddhist interpretations of the ritual action and its mythic underpinnings.<sup>63</sup>

### **Indo-Tibetan Hybridity**

Given the lack of a pre-Buddhist literary record, we must also recognize that whatever appears to represent an indigenous religiosity in Tibetan literature is already filtered through Buddhist tropes and concerns. Whatever literary evidence we might be inclined to interpret as “syncretism” between Indian Buddhism and pre-Buddhist Tibetan beliefs should more properly be understood as evidence for an ongoing dialogue of dynamic and mutually-constituting cultural expressions, not a meeting and mixing of static traditions. Thus, the concept of hybridity may be most useful for understanding the mutually-constituting dialogue between native Tibetan and Indian tantric ritual cultures.<sup>64</sup>

Hybridity, as articulated in post-colonial theory, interprets cultural encounter as a dialogical interface out of which new identities and subjectivities are crafted. Rather than the meeting and synchronization of elements from two discrete and static cultures, hybridity refers to the subtle ways that something new is forged in dialogue between cultures that are themselves fluid and dynamically constituted. Hybridity thus provides a realistic model that lends complexity to the facile concept of syncretism, and acknowledges the dialogical inculcation of

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<sup>63</sup> Stein 1972, 191-229.

<sup>64</sup> Interpretive concepts such as Levi-Strauss’ “bricolage”, or “creolization” as articulated by Ulf Hannerz, Roger Abraham, and others, are also applicable in interpreting the matrix of imageries evidenced in Tibet’s assimilative traditions. However, “hybridity” is particularly nuanced in its recognition of the radically contingent and ever-dialogical nature of cultural interaction, and for its acknowledgment of the dialogical flow of power inculcated in the cross-cultural exchange of signifiers. See: Deborah Kapchan and Pauline Turner Strong, eds. *Theorizing the Hybrid*. Special issue, *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 112, no. 445, 1999.

power relations which imbue cross-cultural innovation and exchange.<sup>65</sup> In the case of the development of a distinctively Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, the mixing of imagery and idioms was subtle, and was in progress over several centuries. This was also a uni-directional transformation, as there is little evidence that Tibetan iterations of Buddhist tantra influenced tantra's development in Northwestern India. Nonetheless, the assimilation of Indian mythology in Tibet was related to an emergent conception of Tibetan cultural subservience to India – an ideological self-colonization that was implied both in the Treasure tradition's claims of Indian provenance, and also in *gsar ma* preoccupations with authenticating tantric tradition in Indian textual exemplars. Thus, while Homi Bhabha's model of hybridity specifically refers to the colonial experience of nineteenth and twentieth-century India, it may also prove useful for interpreting the subtle exchange, innovation, and self-imposed ideological colonization that existed in Tibet's dialogue with Indian religious traditions.

In Tibet, it is difficult – maybe impossible – to deduce which iconographic elements and narrative idioms are strictly Indian, and which are indigenously Tibetan. Tibetans have used their terminology for their own landscape spirits to translate Sanskrit terms for Indian divinities: the *lú*, *srinpo*, *nöjin*, *dü*, and *mamo* are Tibetan words that can refer to demons from Tibetan lore, or to analogous divinities from Indian tradition. Mythologies from revealed tantric cycles such as the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* also emplot Tibetan autochthonous divinities into their own genesis stories, implying total overlap between Tibetan and Indian pantheons. Plus, with no pre-Buddhist literary record of ritual culture in Tibet, we cannot yet adequately trace the transformation of Tibetan ritual culture into the imaginaire of Tibetan Buddhist Tantra. However, despite the opacity of this hybridity's development, it is clear that Tibetan geomantic ritual lore is deeply

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<sup>65</sup> Kapchan and Strong 1999, 240-41.

woven into these materials, and is qualitatively different from the kinds of idioms found in Indian tantric sources.

As Homi Bhabha would suggest, the hybrid outcome unfolds in a “third space” – not just on the side, or in strict reference to, Indian tradition or Tibetan culture – but in a third space which, by virtue of its removal from the strictly Indian or Tibetan orders, may have lent this scripture particular impact.<sup>66</sup> It is possible that the liminality of the third space of hybrid signifiers was something that imbued this tradition with particular power and caché. Indeed, the literary record over centuries shows that the *Kabgyé* was intriguing, resonant, and potent: a resource that Tibetans turned to again and again to articulate distinctive identities. Its appeal may have been rooted in its familiarity, its representation of the gravitas of Indian tantric tradition, and in its mystique as something both familiar and foreign in regards to its admixture of idioms and images. Whether or not the indigenous origins of some of the *Kabgyé*’s iconographic features, myths, and ritual idioms are acknowledged, we can see their inclusion in the literature as a move towards the indigenization of Buddhism on the Tibetan plateau, a natural way for Tibetans to make Buddhist tantrism their own as they enfolded important practices with distinct social and existential implications into an imported religious culture. The dialogical nature of this hybridity certainly warrants deeper study, but is beyond the purview of this dissertation.

### **The Eight Classes of Gods and Demons**

Within the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*’s mythic narratives and ritual texts are included many characters associated with Tibet’s native ritual culture. In the *Kabgyé* materials, these are organized under a general (and highly idiosyncratic rubric) called the “Eight Classes of Gods and Demons” (*lha ma srin sde brgyad*; also known in the sources as “The Eight Arrogant Ones” (*dregs pa sde brgyad*), or the “Eight Emanational Classes” (*sprul pa ’i sde brgyad*)). These eight

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<sup>66</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994, 219.

types of semi-divine and demonic entities are central actors in several of the cycle's narratives, and are implicated in many of the ritual texts from the *Deshek Dupa* corpus. The Eight Classes of Gods and Demons as they appear in the Kabgyé are: the lú (*klu*, aqueous spirits, Skt. *nāga*), za (*gza'*, planetary gods, Skt. *rāhu*), dü (*bdud*, malevolent demons, Skt. *māra*), lha (*lha*, powerful gods, Skt. *deva*), mü, (*dmu*, a landscape spirit, no Skt. equivalent), nöjin (*gnod spyin*, guardian nature spirit, Skt. *yakṣa*), srinpo (*srin po*, cannibal demon, Skt. *rakṣasa*), and gek (*bgegs*, obstructing spirit, Skt. *vighna*). Mamo (*ma mo*, tempestuous female spirits, Skt. *mātrikā*) are also sometimes included in the Eight Classes lists, as are the cosmic gods (*srid pa'i lha*), patrilineal and matrilineal gods (*pho lha* and *mo lha*), “gods of the secret body” (*gsang sku'i lha*), the Cosmic Mamos (*srid pa'i ma mo*), various types of tsän ghosts (*btsan*), and other specifically-named entities.

Eightfold lists of semi-divine beings have precedent in Indian Buddhist scriptures, as in the case of the *Aṣṭagatyah* of the Mahāyāna sutras. According to the *Lotus* and *Flower Garland Sutras*, these are the eight types of semi-divine beings converted by the Buddha to protect Buddhist doctrine.<sup>67</sup> The *Aṣṭagatyah* overlaps somewhat with the Eight Classes (for example, in the case of *deva / lha*, *nāga / klu*, *rakṣasa / gnod spyin*, and *yakṣa / srin po*), but is a qualitatively different list with basis in Puranic and Vedic tradition. In Tibet, the Eight Classes are applied to the gods and demons with which humans have long interceded to secure favor, many of whom are tied to the features of Tibet's montane landscape. While there is naturally some overlap in the concept and nomenclature of autochthonous entities between India, Tibet, and across the Himalaya, it seems clear that the *lha srin sde brgyad* taxonomy was an imposition of an Indian template upon a heterogenous and highly localized field of ritual culture.

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<sup>67</sup> The *Aṣṭagatyah* (*Hachi Bushū* in Japanese) include the *deva*, *nāga*, *rakṣasa*, *gandharva*, *yakṣa*, *garuḍa*, *kiṃnara*, and the *mahoraga*.

In Tibet, these eightfold lists tend to be quite heterogeneous, although the basic template of an eight-fold assembly of worldly or semi-divine landscape-based entities remained consistent over time and across institutions. One often-cited eighteenth-century source is Lama Langdol's (*bla ma klong rdol*, 1719-91) composite list, purporting to represent a common template for the Eight Classes well-known to villagers and clerics alike across the Tibetan plateau. But the Kabgyé provides a much earlier example of such a catalog of entities, and is by no means the very first for Tibetan Buddhism. Of Tibetan literary sources available to us, perhaps the eldest is a liturgy by Nubchen Sangye Yeshe (*gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes*, 9th cent.), whose well-known *Libation Offering to the Eight Classes* (*sde brgyad gser skyems*) outlines six interlocking lists of eight autochthonous entities that may be propitiated to serve the Buddhist practitioner.<sup>68</sup> According to Béla Kelenyi, Nubchen's well-known text, which is still used as a manual for intercessionary ritual, is also variously known as *sde brgyad mchod tshul*, or the *dregs pa sde brgyad la gser skyems gtong ba'i cho ga bdud rtsi'i rlabs 'phreng*.<sup>69</sup> This latter title includes the term *dregs pa* (lit. "Arrogant Ones") to refer to these entities in a general sense, and we thus see *srin po*, *lha*, *bdud*, and *dregs pa* used to refer to autochthonous gods and demons in the literature, and *yul lha* or *gzhi bdag* used in more vernacular settings. Related early texts have been found at Dunhuang, where the list tends to be known as the "Eight Classes of Gods and Nagas" (*lha klu sde bgyad*). According to Samten Karmay, the early Bön tradition has preserved a similar list, as found in a work called the *mkha' klong gsang mdos*, a twelfth-century compendium of exorcism rituals wherein the list appears: *lha*, *bdud*, *dmu*, *bstan*, *rgyal po*, *gshin rje*, *sa bdag* (Earth Lords,

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<sup>68</sup> Gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes. *sde brgyad gser skyems*. Mentioned in Dūdjom 1991 vol. 2, 158-59. Also see: Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Demons and Oracles of Tibet*. Delhi: Book Faith India (1956), 1998, 254-66.

<sup>69</sup> Bela Kelenyi, ed. *Demons and Protectors: Folk religion in Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism*. Budapest: Frenc Hopp Museum, 2003, 29-30. Also see: Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993, 253-317.

which include *klu* and *gnyan*), and *srin po*.<sup>70</sup>

The notion of Eight Classes also made its way into lore surrounding the conversion efforts of Padmasambhava. Nyangrel himself codified this tale in his religious history, recounting Padmasambhava's success in taming the Eight Classes and allowing for the completion of the Samye temple.<sup>71</sup> Following in this mode, the Eight Classes have taken many different iterations in Tibet, a literary history that has been outlined by Françoise Pommaret.<sup>72</sup>

We see, then, that the eightfold typology of demons and divinities ran across the Tantric Buddhist world in a variety of formats, and was in formation in the ninth through twelfth century. During the Age of Fragmentation in particular, as localized communities of lay tantrists practiced Buddhist rites free from the oversight of imperial institutions, local ritual traditions could easily blend with the traditions of Indian Tantra. In the vacuum of institutional authority, localized iterations could be incubated in response to the prevailing culture, and it is quite likely that whatever emerged from this situation would entail a hybridity so thorough as to obscure the origins of its elements. The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* reflects this obfuscation, as it includes these entities in its origin narratives and mandalas as if they had been known to eighth-century Indian Buddhism. This discrepancy – which, as we will see, did not go unnoticed by Tibetan commentators – suggests the Tibetan provenance of the Kabgyé cycle, and reflects the unique indigenization strategy of the *Eight Teachings* tradition.

In sum, we can see that the idea of an eightfold assembly was prevalent across regions

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<sup>70</sup> Samten G. Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in history, myths, rituals and beliefs in Tibet*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998, 450. Also, see: Anne-Marie Blondeau, “The mkha klong gsang mdos: some questions on ritual structure and cosmology.” in Samten G. Karmay and Yasuhiko Nagano, eds. vol. 15, 249-89. *Senri Ethnological Reports, Vol. 15: New Horizons in Bon Studies*, 2000, 249-289.

<sup>71</sup> Samphel 2008, 259.

<sup>72</sup> Françoise Pommaret, ed. *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines: Numéro spécial Lha srin sde brgyad*. No. 2. April 2003.

and traditions in Tibet, and was an early feature of a Tibetanized Tantric Buddhism. The Eight Classes of Gods and Demons evidences a strategy of assimilation whereby aspects of Tibetan ritual culture were fit into doctrinal or ritual templates derived from Indian Buddhist tradition. The Kabgyé exemplifies several such assimilative strategies, and its study contributes much to our research into the ways by which Tibetans made tantra their own.

### **Taming and Indigenization**

As we will see, the Eight Classes of Gods and Demons are implicated in the Kabgyé's mytho-historical narratives, in the cycle's foundational tantras, and in the apotropaic ritualism for which the cycle is best known. The tantric narratives and ritual texts within the *Deshek Dupa* provide many idioms and techniques for the taming and deployment of such entities through geomantic, astrological, propitiatory, and subjugative methods. In this, demon-taming becomes a central theme, and between the narratives provided by the Kabgyé tantras, and the supplementary ritual methods included in the *Deshek Dupa* compendia, the overall orientation of the literature is distinctively that of demon-control and sacralized harm-aversion. This orientation brought the Kabgyé into conversation with Nyangrel's treatment of Padmasambhava lore, and with the general version of Tibet's religious history advanced by Nyangrel's historiography. Indeed, much of what makes the Kabgyé unique hinges on the tropes of harm-aversion and demon-control, and we will see how the Kabgyé elevates malevolent agents, and their associated propitiatory practices, to the center of Tantric Buddhist practice and buddhology. According to my interpretation, the Kabgyé's enfoldment, or conflation, of soteriological and apotropaic dimensions of tantric practice, and the incorporation of Tibet's gods and demons into the narratives and ritual programs of the corpus, served several ends: to sanction the apotropaic ritualism already at the heart of Tibetan culture, to bring the Tibetan environment and the customs of its inhabitants more fully into the Tantric Buddhist fold, and to expand the techniques

by which practitioners might articulate and enact Buddhist identities. These functions of the literature intersect squarely with Nyangrel's overarching attempts to curate a distinctively Tibetan Buddhist history and religious identity.

In a sense, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* enacts its own kind of subjugation as it incorporates, redefines, and domesticates the Tibetan mythos into a Buddhist narrative world. In the enacted narrativity of a complete ritual system, Buddhist subjectivity could be generated out of practices underpinned by the theme of demon-taming, thus producing subjects inscribed by a certain historicity – a historicity that, as I will show, functioned to embolden and authenticate the “Early Translation Elders” (*snga 'gyur rnying ma pa*) in the face of extrinsic pressures.

### **Kabgyé Ritualism**

In its doctrinal, contemplative, and ritual dimensions, we know that the Kabgyé was, and still is, an object of study, meditation, and ritual activity. However, as its designation as “Accomplishment Class” would suggest, we may best think of the Kabgyé as a ritual tradition. Its materials, while including mytho-historical and doctrinal texts, are overwhelmingly oriented towards self-cultivational and apotropaic ritual practice. Of course, the categories of doctrine, contemplation, and ritual are not cleanly divisible, as any success in a tantric meditation would require detailed knowledge of the iconography, mythology, and esoteric doctrines entailed in that system's tantric literature. But in the case of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, the cycle's tantras are skeletal guides for ritualized self-cultivation, and the mytho-historical narratives supplied in the cycle's foundational texts provide a buddhology that sanctions the Kabgyé's distinctive vision for ritual practice in authoritative doctrinal formulations.

As ritual practice is situated within a broader context of narratives, doctrines, and social practices, I use the term “ritualism” to refer to the complex of practice, knowledge and social

relationships configured by the Kabgyé's ritual materials. In this, I embrace the profound, indeed essential, contribution of ritual practice to the subject-constitution, identity-formation, and human meaning-making at the heart of religious life. By ritualism, I connote the web of narratives, signifiers, deeds, and doctrines that surround and give meaning to ritual activity, and which render ritual effective towards personal, communal, and doctrinally-defined goals. If such webs of signification and action are regularized to render ritual performance a significant driver of cultural expression – when ritual, embedded in a broader network of cultural factors, becomes a repeatable technique of communal and individual subjectivity – then, in such cases, we can talk about “ritualism” as a field of discourse and practice contextualizing specific ritual acts. “Kabgyé ritualism”, then, refers not only to the regularized performance of specific rites drawn from the *Eight Teachings* scriptures, but to the overall suite of idioms, aesthetics, narratives, doctrines, and signifiers, and also modes of material exchange, that contextualize Kabgyé practice. My suggestion is that this ritualism provided a fundamental medium for the development of religious culture for a specific community and its institutions, and we see the Nyingmapas curate the *Eight Teachings* corpus again and again in their efforts to define their unique identity.

This Kabgyé ritualism has been a critical aspect in the development of the Nyingma denomination's unique approach to religious practice. Sources tell us of adepts intensively practicing meditation on the Eight Herukas, often on long retreats and sometimes with retinues of close disciples. We also know that Kabgyé rituals were particularly important in highly institutionalized contexts such as at Mindroling (*smin 'grol gling*), Shechen (*zhe chen*), Dzogchen (*rdzogs chen*), and Katok (*kaḥ thog*) monasteries. We even know that the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (*ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho* 1617-1682) requested instruction in the Kabgyé from two Nyingmapa masters, including the Mindrol patriarch Gyurme

Dorje, Terdak Lingpa ('gyur med rdo rje, gter bdag gling pa 1646-1714).<sup>73</sup> From the beginning, Kabgyé rituals were organized into carefully curated collections (*sgrub skor*) for use in multi-day ritual intensives which eventually became known as Great Accomplishment Rites (*sgrub chen, drupchen*). These intensives, performed by groups of initiated lay-practitioners, or in monastic temple settings, involved the full suite of tantric practices, including, in the case of the Kabgyé system, elaborate harm-aversion rituals, including fire sacrifices (*sbyin sreg*), effigistic harm-aversion rituals (*gtor bzlog*), and the invocation and dispatching (*rbod gtong*) of powerful thaumaturgical forces. Of course, tantric ritual intensives had always been an important feature of communal tantric practice, and there is some evidence that Nyangrel's lineal descendents had been organizing textual materials for the performance of regular intensives at Mawochok.<sup>74</sup> But from the late seventeenth century onwards, the "Minling System" (*smin gling lugs*) was purportedly the template for the ritual cycles published at the other Nyingma "Mother Temples".

The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* corpus also became an important resource for ad-hoc rites performed by accomplished masters on behalf of patrons or at the request of other lamas. Jamgön Kongtrül's (*jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas*, 1813–1899) autobiography gives us an unparalleled glimpse into the responsibilities of a luminary master in nineteenth-century Degé, as he reports many occasions on which he conducted Kabgyé rites in retreat, in monastic assemblies, and at the request of royal patrons.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Gu ru bkra'i chos 'byung*, 448. Also see: James D. Gentry, *Substance and Sense: Objects of Power in the Life, Writings, and Legacy of the Tibetan Ritual Master Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan*. Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2014, 479.

<sup>74</sup> Cathy Cantwell "The Ceremony for Imbibing the Siddhis, with particular reference to examples from Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's bKa' bryad bde gshegs 'dus pa." *Revue d'Etudes Tibetaïnes*, no. 50 (2019), 156.

<sup>75</sup> Jamgön Kongtrül, *The Autobiography of Jamgön Kongtrül: A Gem of Many Colors*. Trans. Richard Barron. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2003.

The institutional ritualism made possible by a repository of ritual knowledge like the Kabgyé remains a prominent feature of Tibetan religiosity. Drupchen and similar types of ritual intensives are performed on daily, monthly, or annual bases at every major monastic institution. These ritual intensives are meant to dispel negative influences and to refresh an institution's connection to the soteriological power of a tantric system. These ritual occasions include large congregations of lay practitioners, and provide an occasion for the temple to forge economic connections with the supporting lay community. The drupchen therefore represents ritualism in its fullest sense: it is a nexus of activity in which relations are determined, history is re-enacted, and an underlying imaginaire is activated. Such ritualism is a central feature of institutional religious life for Tibetan Buddhists, providing a nexus for social relations, cultural expression, knowledge production, and economic activity. Any picture of Tibetan religion that neglects this kind of ritualism is incomplete, and the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was formative in the development of this mode of religious life.

### **The Kabgyé Today**

The Kabgyé has, at least since the twelfth century, been a critical feature of Nyingma tradition. Kabgyé training was a core aspect in the education of Nyingma (and some Kagyü) adepts, and the influence of Kabgyé ritualism is apparent in much of what still goes on in Nyingmapa temples. The *Eight Teachings* has also come to provide one of the main organizing rubrics for Nyingmapa buddhology and scriptural anthologies, specifically in the taxonomy of its many deities and their related scriptural cycles. In commenting on the centrality of the Eight Teachings to the organization of Jamgön Kongtrül's *Treasury of terma (rin chen gter mdzod)*, Gyetrul Jigme Rinpoche states:

The main deities that you find in both Kama and terma are the Eight Herukas. The Eight Herukas are the yidams of the Nyingma. They are the

world of the yidam, the vehicle through which one attains the quickest siddhi [accomplishment] in this life. Each terma cycle is revealed on the basis of one of the Eight Herukas. Those eight are classified as body, speech, mind, quality, activity, mamu, worldly offerings and praises, and wrathful mantras. All of the empowerments of the Rinchen Terdzö are connected to the Eight Herukas. The Eight Herukas include all peaceful and wrathful, male and female, deities. All possible deities can be found among these eight herukas. The Eight Teachings are not just found in the world of the yidams, they are also in the world of the gurus. This is because the gurus are the nature of the five wisdoms—something that fits into the guru classification has an aspect of the five wisdoms. When you divide the Eight Herukas, five of them are the wisdom deities, one is half- worldly/half-wisdom, and two are worldly. The abhisheka can either belong to the body part, the speech part, the mind part, the quality part or action part from among the five wisdoms.

A yidam can also be classified into one of the five wisdoms. There isn't any deity that doesn't fit into one of the five wisdoms. And the five wisdoms are part of the Eight Herukas.

The first of the Eight Teachings is Jampal (Manjushri), or body (Skt. kaya, Tib. ku), which is Manjushri in the peaceful aspect and yamāntaka in the wrathful aspect. The second is Pema, or speech (Tib. sung), the lotus family. All the peaceful aspect of the speech family are deities like Guru Rinpoche, Amitabha and so forth. The wrathful aspect is hayagrīva, and so on. The third is Yangdag, mind or heart, and it also has peaceful and wrathful aspects. The fourth is Dutsi (amrita), or quality. And finally there is Vajrakīlaya, or activity.

So these are the categories that any peaceful or wrathful deity will belong to, from the point of view of the yidam's world.<sup>76</sup>

Jigme Rinpoche's statement speaks to the depth to which the Kabgyé has been embedded in the Nyingmapa world. *The Treasury of Precious terma*, the *Nyingma's Transmitted Precepts (rnying ma'i bka' ma)*, and the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients (rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum)* structure the Mahāyoga around a Kabgyé-inflected rubric, and it is understood amongst Nyingmapa exegetes that the Kabgyé revelation was the source for many of the denomination's most important traditions. That said, my experiences questioning contemporary informants about the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* suggests that, beyond taxonomical purposes, and perhaps training in some of the simpler self-cultivational practices drawn from the cycle, few

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<sup>76</sup> Walker Blaine, *The Great River of Blessings*. Walker Blaine, 2011, 103.

lamas maintain detailed knowledge of the *Deshek Dupa* as a system. One prominent Khenpo I talked to at Dzogchen persistently confused it with the *Secret Nucleus*, while another Palyul Khenpo insisted it was part of the *Nyingma Kama*. Likewise, I was surprised to discover that a celebrated young Khenpo from the exile monastic college of Namdroling essentially knew nothing of the Kabgyé beyond the importance assigned to its doctrines by Ju Mipham, whose commentary he had once studied, and directed me to his friends from the ritual academy (*sgrub sgrwa*) to learn more.

### **Study**

As for its study in the contemporary frame, Kabgyé knowledge survives most robustly at the main and affiliated monastic colleges (*shedra*, *bshad grwa*) of Katok, Dzogchen, Palyul, and at Larung Gar. According to sources at Katok, the *shedra* there has always specialized in the study of the *Subsequent Kabgyé Tantra* (*bcom ldan 'das bde bar gshegs pa thams cad 'dus pa phyi ma'i rgyud*). According to Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro of Larung Gar, students there study Mipham's commentary, the *Kabgyé Namshe* (*bka' brgyad kyi spyi don rnam bshad dngos sgrub snying po*), for one whole year. This text, which explains the Kabgyé ritual and practice regimes in a broader Mahāyoga context, is also used at Palyul and its exile scholastic institution at Namdroling, as well as at Dzogchen's Sri Singha *shedra*, to supplement the study of Mahāyoga, which focuses primarily on the *Secret Nucleus* and its commentaries. It seems that the *Namshe's* inclusion in the *shedra* curricula stems from its adoption by Dzogchen, sometime in the late nineteenth century.

Given the stature and size of the many Nyingma colleges in Tibet and in exile, it is perhaps surprising that the study of the Kabgyé is limited to only one or two commentarial texts. But this is not to say that Kabgyé learning has passed out of Nyingma tradition entirely. As one Dzogchen Khenpo advised, it is in the ritual temple (*dgon pa*) where we can best witness the

Kabgyé in action.

### **Ritual Traditions**

In Nyingma temples and monasteries, monks participate in annual *Kabgyé Great Accomplishment* (*bka' brgyad sgrub chen*) ritual intensives, and lamas regularly draw on its extensive selection of ritual texts for ad hoc rites. Annual Kabgyé intensives are held at Dzogchen, Katok, Shechen and Palyul in Kham, the exile Shechen monastery in Nepal, at Mindroling and Namdroling in India, and at the Ngakpa temple of Rigzin Rabsel Ling in Amdo. Smaller temples also perform the annual Kabgyé Drupchen, but the choice of drupchen cycle ultimately depends on factors such as the predilections of the abbot and the lineal associations of the institution's founder. Available resources are also a determining factor: at one formerly-prominent temple in Upper Nyarong, Lumorab (*klu mo rab dgon*), the Kabgyé Drupchen was prioritized until the monastic numbers dwindled and ritual experts became scarce. At the very least, even local monasteries will perform some kind of drupchen to conclude the summer and winter retreat periods, with the Kabgyé ritual intensive sometimes finishing out the liturgical calendar year. In lieu of the Kabgyé, a *zhi khro* (100 Peaceful and Wrathful Deities) intensive is sometimes practiced.

Drupchen can be soteriological or apotropaic in nature, depending on the context and custom of the institution. At Mindroling in Dehra Dun, and at Shechen and Palyul in Tibet, the Kabgyé Drupchen is held annually to commemorate Padmasambhava's life. While prominently including harm-aversion rituals, this intensive is thought to activate the soteriological power of the eight Kabgyé deities on behalf of the entire institution and surrounding community. This kind of ritual intensive provides an essential refreshment of the community's connection to that contemplative system. Apotropaic drupchens, on the other hand, sometimes called *bzlog sgrub* (lit. "repelling accomplishment"), such as those annually practiced at Dzogchen and Katok in

Kham, are generally scheduled at times conducive to the aversion of obstacles, such as at the end of the lunar year. These ten-day intensives are thought to dispel the accumulated negative karma of the previous year and pave the way for the institution's success in the year to come. At Katok, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa bzlog sgrub* is an intimate affair, with ten senior lamas tasked with carrying out a ten-day intensive for the dispelling of obstacles. This Kabgyé intensive is carried out alongside similar drupchens for the *Wrathful Guru (bla ma drag po)* and *Peaceful/Wrathful (zhi khro)* cycles.

Despite the normative distinction between soteriological and apotropaic ritual intensives, harm-averting rites are crucial in both types of intensives. These mainly include sacrificial fire offerings (*sbyin sreg*), libation appeasements (*gser skyem*), and effigistic sacrifices (*bzlog pa* or *gtor bzlog*). The drupchen also concludes with ritual dances ('*cham*) in which mythic narratives centering on the murder and dismemberment of a stock demonic figure called *rudra* are acted out in dramatic fashion. This is all in-line with the *Deshek Dupa's* emphasis on harm-aversion, and we might imagine that the regular performance of these demon-taming rites – whether in commemoration of Guru Rinpoche's acts of subjugation, or as part of an annual purification for a monastic community – recalls the establishment of Buddhist civilization and all that it entailed. The performance of these rituals in public settings maintains the identity of Buddhist institutions, as the drupchen provides an opportunity for the community to experience itself as participating in an ongoing drama of demon subjugation, and thus as an actor in the ongoing perpetuation of Tibetan Buddhism. Such an interpretation of the purpose and efficacy of public ritual deserves careful ethnographic research, and promises to open the door to exploring questions of identity, power relations, and subjectivity in Tibetan Buddhist communities.

### **Contemplation**

As for the contemplative practice of the Kabgyé system, it is the case that adepts-in-

training still complete lengthy retreats dedicated to meditation on one or more of the Kabgyé deities. We know this was the case in the late nineteenth century, as attested by Jamgön Kongtrül's account of several intensive Kabgyé retreats undertaken with close disciples. But it is hard to ascertain the frequency of Kabgyé meditation in current Tibetan Buddhist communities, as the esoterism of this tantric tradition is taken quite seriously. I have been able to glean that practitioners at one small retreat center affiliated with Surmang Dutsi Til (*zur mang bdud rtsi thil*, a predominately Kagyü temple in Nangchen) do practice the full *Eight Teachings* cycle over a four-year period, but I was not allowed to witness this first-hand. Otherwise, I have discovered little about where, and in what context, the full suite of Kabgyé practice is accomplished.

We do know that, of the eight Kabgyé meditational deities, Dorje Phurba (*rdo rje phur ba*, Skt. *Vajrakīlaya*) remains the most popular. Phurba contemplation is not limited to the Kabgyé cycles, as Vajrakīlaya traditions have prevailed across denominations from the time of the first dispensation, and this ultra-wrathful divinity continues to be a main topic of revelation activity in Nyingmapa circles. Yamāntaka (Tib. *gshin rje*) and Hayagrīva (*rta mgrin*) are also frequently practiced in contemporary settings, but these traditions also exist outside of the Kabgyé in both *Kama* and *terma* iterations. I have found it to be the case that informants will reply in the positive when I inquire whether or not the Kabgyé is practiced at their retreat center, only for them to specify that it is actually just Dorje Phurba or Hayagrīva that is practiced, and it is not uncommon for people to use the term Kabgyé to refer to the practice of one of these common cycles, which may or may not be derived from the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* corpus itself. Thus, the term Kabgyé is often used to refer to a type, or family, of tantric practices rather than to the *Deshek Dupa* per se.

Worth mentioning is the apparent absence of Kabgyé instruction in the modern “Western

dispensation” of Tibetan Buddhism. While many esoteric Nyingma and Sarma contemplative traditions have been presented to Euro-American audiences, there is (from what I can tell) a conspicuous absence of the Kabgyé in the contemplative programs of Tibetan meditation communities in North America and Europe. I presume that this might have to do with the intensity of the Kabgyé’s wrathful aesthetic – an idiom easily susceptible to misinterpretation and highly incompatible with prevailing sensibilities concerning religion and ritual in the West. Additionally, ritual in Euro-American Tibetan Buddhism has thus far been muted as compared to its Tibetan iterations. The reception of ritual in the Western dispensation of Tibetan Buddhism deserves scholarly attention, but is unfortunately outside the purview of this dissertation.

In summation, it seems that the Kabgyé, as a corpus, remains a surprisingly obscure body of knowledge considering its reputed importance. In many respects, apart from its use as a rubric for organizing Nyingma scriptures, its practice in annual ritual performances, and its specialized study by the scholastic elite, the value of the Kabgyé is clandestine: it has served as an organizational rubric for Nyingma canonicity, it gives us the prototypical narrative for Treasure revelation, its wrathful aesthetics are paradigmatic of the intensity of tantric practice, and the influence of its ritual formats in the blending of the soteriological with the apotropaic pervades Tibetan religiosity in subliminal ways. In this, the Kabgyé carries a certain rhetorical value: it stands for the esoteric, the dangerous, and the elite. Unlike Nyinthik Dzogchen which, despite its truly mystical character, is increasingly popularized by famous lamas, the Kabgyé is reserved for ritual specialists and serious adepts. Thus, it is hard to definitively ascertain the place of the *Eight Teachings* in the contemporary context, as its reception is tied to rhetoric of esoterism and its arresting, yet undeniably influential, aesthetic. Where the Kabgyé is preserved in its fullness, it is done so mostly in the name of preservation of tradition. In this way, its fate mirrors that of

the *Gathering of Intentions Sutra* (*dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*), which, as Dalton shows, fails to meet normative criteria for “vitality” insofar as its doctrines have fallen into obscurity, and yet it remains responsible for much of how the Nyingma denomination understands itself. As Mindroling Tulku Dakpa reported to me, Padmasambhava himself insisted that, “in this dark age, the Kabgyé must be preserved above all other traditions” (although we might wonder if every doctrinal cycle makes such claims about itself!). But “preservation” here may simply refer to the depiction of its icons on temple walls, the annual execution of ritual intensives, and the propagation of rhetoric about the cycle’s centrality to the Nyingma inheritance. The *Eight Teachings*, as it may have been designed to do, provides a rubric for organizing the icons that lie at the heart of Nyingmapa practice and identity. A look at the artwork adorning the Nyingma’s most important shrine-halls reveals the degree to which the Kabgyé is one of the foundations of Nyingmapa identity. At places like Palyul and Katok, we see the icons of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* represented alongside images of the Dorje Phurba (Vajrakīlaya) and Peaceful/Wrathful (*zhi khro*) mandalas, and along with Yamāntaka and The Wrathful Guru icons. This is evidence for how these particular cycles provide a bedrock for the Nyingma tradition, at least at the level of iconographic identity and an undergirding imaginaire.

It is notable that this heart-center of the Nyingma lineage is so deeply oriented towards wrathful soteriology and ritual violence. Despite the minimizing rhetoric of Buddhist commentators in emphasizing the *compassionate* character of wrathful tantric divinities, I continue to place my attention on its distinctive ritual dimensions and arresting idioms. These have a long history in Tibet, and it is to this history that we now turn.

## Chapter Two: From Revelation to Anthologization: a reception history

Within several generations following its revelation with Nyangrel Nyima Özer, the Kabgyé ascended to a foundational status in the education and priestly activities of Early Translation masters across Central Tibet. There was immediate resonance for this cycle in the religious life of early Nyingmapas, and its importance would be confirmed as Kabgyé ritualism was incorporated into increasingly institutionalized settings from the seventeenth century onwards. In the production of Nyingma canons and anthologies, we see Nyangrel's Kabgyé literature not only included, but also providing a key organizational rubric for all sorts of tantric materials. All of this was undergirded by a distinctive mythology and historiography curated by Nyangrel himself. The impact of this first "Treasure King" cannot be overstated.

To trace a reception history of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, we may look to the hagiographies, autobiographies, historical writings, and learning records of important Nyingma and Kagyü adepts. Manuals (*yig cha*), ritual compendia (*sgrub skor*), anthologies (*mdzod* or *'bum*), and exegetical commentaries (*'grel pa*) also provide evidence for the reception of the Kabgyé and its related traditions. In this, we are also indebted to scholars such as Daniel Hirshberg, Cathy Cantwell, Robert Mayer, David Germano, Matthew Kapstein, James Gentry, Jacob Dalton, Janet Gyatso, Jann Ronis, and Alexander Gardner, among many others, who have examined the life and times of relevant figures and their institutions. Of course, it is important to remember that post-facto accounts such as the nineteenth and twentieth-century hagiographies compiled by Jamgön Kongtrül and Dūdjom Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje often reflect contemporaneous concerns and assumptions. However, we may also consult the highly personal accounts of earlier figures, such as Ngari Panchen Pema Wangyal (*mnga' ris pan chen padma dbang rgyal* 1487-1542), whose sixteenth-century research on the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* portrays the *Eight*

*Teachings* as a vital element of Early Translation practice and exegesis across Central, Southern, and Eastern Tibet.

In conveying a reception history of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, it is essential to contextualize the treatment of this cycle in specific historical realities. In doing so, we can detect patterns of pressure and response that inflected the treatment of this scriptural cycle. Generally, we will observe that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was afforded particular exegetical and editorial attention in times of inter-denominational pressure and political contestation. Such settings included the time of its inception in the post-fragmentation period, when new tantric traditions and neo-conservative voices challenged the authority of Early Translation communities. The tumultuous decades of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when the services of ritual masters were drawn into political contestations across Central Tibet, constituted another such moment. Likewise with the Degé Kingdom during the nineteenth century, when influential ecclesiastical figures tied to large monastic institutions curated new curricula, produced scriptural anthologies, and generated apocryphal scriptures in support of an emboldened vision of Nyingma identity. In each of these settings, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was elevated as a resource for ritual practice, as an architecture for scriptural knowledge, and as the source for a powerful imaginaire that reclaimed aggressive forces in the face of inter-institutional contestations. My analysis hinges on the prospect of historical contestations driving cultural change, and, after Robert Campany, I interpret emergent forms of Buddhism in terms of “repertoires” and “imagined communities” developed in response to contestational dialogue.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> See: Robert Ford Campany, “Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales.” *History of Religions*, vol. 52, no. 2. November, 2012, 99-141.

## Nyangrel: Mystic, Tradent, Architect

Attribution of the Kabgyé revelation cycle to Nyangrel Nyima Özer should not be taken to mean that Nyangrel produced the Kabgyé corpus *ex nihilo*. As Daniel Hirshberg points out, *terma* revelation involved elements of authorship, physical archeology, and textual tradency.<sup>78</sup> As previously mentioned, one of Nyangrel’s two early biographies, *The Stainless Proclamations* (*dri ma med pa’i bka’ rgya can*) states that the *Assembled Sugatas* and its supplementary practices were *given* to Nyangrel by his Guru, Lama Rashak, with the empowerments and teachings supplied by Tertön Ngödrup.<sup>79</sup> This implies that Ngödrup and Rashak already held some type of Kabgyé tradition. This was apparently a well-known story in some Nyingmapa circles, prompting Ngari Panchen to investigate, resulting in his confirmation of several “transmitted Kabgyé” (*bka’ ma bka’ brgyad*) lineages that stretched directly from the retinue of Tri Song Destän, through Ngödrup, and on to Nyangrel, who then enfolded this transmitted Kabgyé into his new revelation tradition. Thus, Nyangrel is said to have “mixed Kama and terma into one stream” (*bka’ gter chu bo cig ‘dres*).<sup>80</sup> The widely-circulated Nyangrel biography, *The Clear Mirror*, gives us the more normative story of the revelation of the *Eight Teachings*. In this account, Nyangrel finds a treasure certificate in a broken piece of statuary given to him by a

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<sup>78</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 139.

<sup>79</sup> *The Stainless Proclamations*, 92.4-5: *de nas bla ma ra shag gter ston gyi spyen sngar dam chos bde gshegs pa/ rgyud lung nyi shu sgrub thabs phra mo dang bcas pa/ sgro chung bzhi thon pa la/ pod chung bdun zhus pas dpe ma dang bcas pa gnang/ de nas bla ma grub thob dngos grub bya ba bka’ gter thams cad kyi bdag po de la gsang sngags sgrub pa bka’ brgyad kyi dbang bka’ gdams ngag dang bcas pa zhus/* I take reference to the “twenty Deshek tantras and teachings” (*bde gshegs pa/ rgyud lung nyi shu*) to refer to the stock grouping of the fifteen tantras and five teachings of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. This reading is consistent with the next sentence which specifically refers to the reception of the Druppa Kabgyé empowerments and oral teachings (*sgrub pa bka’ brgyad kyi dbang bka’ gdams ngag dang bcas pa*).

<sup>80</sup> Mnga’ ris pan chen, *‘chad thabs mun se nyi zla khor lo*, 219; Ka thog rigs ‘dzin tshe dbang nor bu, *bka’ ‘bum* vol. 2, 401.

mysterious merchant, and is led to the Kothing temple in Lhodrak whence he retrieves 130 texts from “behind” (*rgyab nas*) the Vairocana icon there.<sup>81</sup>

Regardless of the Kabgyé’s status as transmitted or revealed, we might regard Nyangrel’s curation of an extensive and comprehensive corpus in the mid-twelfth century as an inception: one that depended on the highly visionary mode in which Nyangrel operated, and which participated in his overarching attempts to re-imagine the legacy of the Tibetan imperium and the identity of the Early Translation religious community. As Hirshberg observes: “Nyangrel employed his talents as an archaeologist, researcher, tradent, author, and tantric adept in his quest to reconstruct the shattered relics of his patrilineal and reincarnate inheritance, not only into cohesive collections of tantric praxis, but into new perspectives on Tibet’s collective past as well.”<sup>82</sup> The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* would be an essential element of Nyangrel’s efforts to architect Nyingma, and Tibetan, religious identity. While Nyangrel’s oeuvre entailed multiple genres and ritual idioms, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* supplied something foundational in its comprehensive presentation of distinctive myths, doctrines, and rituals to undergird a resonant vision of Mahāyoga tantrism.

Innovative as it was, Nyangrel’s creativity was also grounded in specific traditions, and the formats and literary features of the *Eight Teachings* maintain obvious continuity with the

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<sup>81</sup> *The Clear Mirror*, 342.1. Also: Hirshberg 2016, 128-29. While *rgyab nas* technically means “from behind”, lamas consulted on this translation have suggested that this might refer to Nyangrel’s retrieval of the scrolls from within the Vairocana statue, extracted from the back of the icon itself. Religious statues in Tibet are generally consecrated by filling them with sacred texts. From that point of view, it is entirely plausible that a large statue could serve as a repository for texts that had since been forgotten about. See Hirshberg 2016, 135; and Mayer 2015, 228-29 for mention of Cantwell and Mayer’s research demonstrating the provenance of some *bka’ brgyad* texts in Dunhuang *phur ba* materials, thus demonstrating that some early treasures were “compiled from the rediscovered folios of old manuscripts, some contents of which may have originated in the time of Padmasambhava or shortly thereafter.”

<sup>82</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 139.

Mahāyoga traditions inherited from the first spread of Buddhism in Tibet.<sup>83</sup> These included tantric cycles such as those of Hayagrīva and Vajrakīla, *The Gathering of Intentions Sutra* (*dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*), the *Mind Series* (*sems sde*) of the Great Perfection, and also the *Net of Magical Emanation* (*sgyu 'phrul 'drwa ba*, Skt. *Māyājāla*) tantras which were so important to the Early Translation practitioners.<sup>84</sup> In addition to these foundational scriptures, several doctrinal formats distinctive to the Early Translation community are evident in Nyangrel's works. These include the embrace of the nine-vehicle doxographical system, the subordination of Mahāyoga to Atiyoga, and the association of the term Great Perfection (*rdzogs pa chen po*) with the Sanskrit term *mahā ati*. The appearance of these features represents the pervasive influence of previous figures such as Nubchen Sangye Yeshe (*gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes*, 9th cent.) and Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo (*rong zom chos kyi bzang po* 1012-88), and also suggests the Tibetan provenance of many of Nyangrel's doctrinal conceits. Several features of Nyangrel's oeuvre also demonstrate the influence of emergent doctrinal conceptions. We see this in the elevation of the dakini as a tutelary deity, the embrace of the imagery of charnel ground siddhism, as well as in the celebration of the harm-averting ritual adept as the paradigmatic Buddhist master. The inclusion of these conceits suggests both the influence of the *gsar ma* Yoginī tantras, and the coordination of Mahāyoga ritual formats with broader historiographical narratives.

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<sup>83</sup> As mentioned, five of the deities featured in the Kabgyé mandala were already present in early Tibetan Buddhism. These include Sri Heruka (*yang dag khrag 'thung*), who was said to have been central to the practice of Zur patriarch Lharje Zurpoche Shakya Jungne (*zur chen shakya 'byung gnas*, 1002-1062), as well as to Humkara, which was upheld in the Kyo line of transmission. Vajrakīla (*rdo rje phur ba*) is also evidenced in the tenth-century Dunhuang collection, as is Hayagrīva (*rta mgrin*) and Yamāntaka (*gshin rje*). These deities also featured prominently in the Sakya tradition as it was constituted from the second wave of translation activity in the Tibetan Renaissance period. Mahottara (*che mchog*) was also known as the chief wrathful deity of the Peaceful/Wrathful (*zhi khro*) complex featured in the *Secret Nucleus Tantra*. So these five tantric deities clearly circulated in Early Translation masters in the centuries preceding Nyangrel's.

<sup>84</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 98.



Mnga' bdag nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer, 1124-1192. [Treasuryoflives.org](http://Treasuryoflives.org)

### **Rivalry and Pressure in the Post-Fragmentation Period**

When Nyangrel revealed the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* in the mid-twelfth century, Early Translation communities were situated in a sectarian landscape defined by intense rivalries, polemical disputes, and the emergence of new tantric communities. This context of rivalry and innovation explains many of the doctrinal, contemplative, and literary developments advanced by the Early Translation masters between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. If we are to

interpret socio-political pressure as an engine for cultural change, we may correlate developments in religious culture and practice — for example, new doctrines, innovative ritual programs, fresh iconographies, mythologies, and historiographies — to the influence of contextual factors such as inter-denominational contestations and agonistic political circumstances. While first-person accounts do not always report on the conflicts that defined such periods (although sometimes they do), it is often through narrative and religious literature that we may best detect the influence of social contestations in the emergence of new local and denominational cultures. Clues supplied in such literatures include prophecies, syncretic doctrines and iconographies, new histories elevating the role of specific individuals and communities, and programs of practice aimed at bolstering agency and identity. As Robert Campany observes in reference to the dialogue between Daoist and Buddhist traditions in medieval China, new repertoires and imagined communities are stimulated by such contestations.<sup>85</sup> The *Eight Teachings* tradition absolutely entailed new praxical, doctrinal, and narrative repertoires, deployed in the service of an imagined community, the proto-Nyingma denomination. Understood in this way, we can correlate historical events to the shifting doctrinal, praxical, and imaginal landscape out of which the *Kabgyé* emerged.

When the Tibetan Empire collapsed in 842 C.E. following generations of over-expenditure on expansion and Buddhist temple-building, a successional dispute cast the aristocratic clans into a centuries-long conflict.<sup>86</sup> In the subsequent “Age of Fragmentation” (*sil*

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<sup>85</sup> Campany 2012, 106.

<sup>86</sup> While Buddhist tradition attributes Lang Darma’s persecution of Buddhism to demonic influence, a historical perspective suggests that the withdrawal of imperial support for Buddhist institutions was related to economic factors connected to broader trends in commerce and politics across Asia. The fragmentation of the imperial Tibetan state paralleled similar developments in China and across other Silk Road civilizations. See Davidson 2005, 64-72; and Jacob Dalton *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011, 45-48.

*bu'i dus*), noble families vied for influence and resources, and a unified imperial culture gave way to pockets of local development, particularly in regards to religion. In this sense, the Age of Fragmentation was not really a “dark age” as has been suggested, but was actually a time of profound creativity, particularly in terms of religious culture.<sup>87</sup> It was also a time of contestation. When the last Yarlung Emperor, Lang Darma’s (*glang dar ma*, or *khri ‘u dum btsan*, r. 838-41) descendants of the Osung (*‘od srung*) line gained control of the Gugé (*gu ge*) kingdom in the western region of Ngari (*mnga' ris*) in the tenth century, control over Buddhist orthodoxy and orthopraxy was leveraged as part of a new scheme for consolidating moral and political authority.<sup>88</sup> The first of these “neo-conservative” lama-kings was Yeshe Ö (*ye shes ‘od*, 959-1040), whose ordinance against Early Translation tantrists called into question the provenance of core scriptures such as the *Secret Nucleus* (*gsang ba'i snying po*, Skt. *guhnyagarbha-tantra*), and the entire Great Perfection corpus. Yeshe Ö accused the Early Translation chieftain-priests of disseminating spurious practice traditions in the absence of imperial oversight, while criticizing them for taking the injunctions of tantric practice literally, charging them with engaging in transgressive sexuality and the ritualized murder of human beings. Under Yeshe Ö and his royal line in Gugé, such concerns became part of an ongoing polemical tactic to consolidate moral and political authority. This would be continued by successors such as Changchup Ö (*byang chub ‘od*, r. 1037-57), who held a conference of translators in an attempt to regulate translation protocols and establish scriptural orthodoxies, and Zhiwa Ö (*zhi ba ‘od*, d.1111), who continued with Yeshe Ö’s anti-Nyingmapa ordinances.<sup>89</sup> In addition to regulating tantric orthodoxy, Gugé’s

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<sup>87</sup> Dalton 2011, 13.

<sup>88</sup> David Snellgrove “The Rulers of Western Tibet.” In *The Tibetan History Reader*, eds. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer, 166-183. New York: Columbia University Press. 2013, 166-183.

<sup>89</sup> Karmay 1998, 3-15

lama-kings established monasteries and initiated literary exchanges with Indian institutions of Buddhist learning. Yeshe Ö sent the translator Rinchen Zangpo (*rin chen bzang po*, 958-1055) to Kashmir to obtain easily-authenticated tantric corpora, initiating what would become known as the “New Translation” (*gsar ma*) movement at the basis of the Kadampa/Geluk, Kagyü, and Sakya denominations. In the year 1042, Changchup Ö invited the Indian pandita Atisha (982-1054), a highly regarded Mahāyāna scholar who emphasized monastic discipline and exoteric study. Despite only being in Tibet for several years, Atisha was highly influential across Western and Central Tibet, and his main disciple, Dromtön (*'brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas*, 1005-64) would found the Kadam (*bka' gdams*) movement, which would later transform into the Geluk (*dge lugs*) denomination. At the same time, other celebrated Tibetan translators such as Drokmi (*brog mi lo tsA ba shAkya ye shes*, 992-1072,) and Marpa Lotsawa (*dmar pa lo tsA ba*, 1012-97), were returning from India with new tantric traditions and yogic practice regimes. As Ronald Davidson shows, these charismatic (if not downright eccentric) individuals were able to attract the support of prominent nobility, with powerful institutions and vibrant communities quickly arising around them.<sup>90</sup> In this environment of competition and innovation, Tibetan religious institutions took on never-before-seen formats, most notably in the involvement of powerful clans with the leadership of emerging monastic strongholds such as Sakya (*sa skya*) and Sangpu (*gsang phu ne'u thog*).<sup>91</sup> Additionally, as the Eastern Vinaya monasteries of Central Tibet gained in wealth and influence, rivalries erupted around sacred sites, resulting, for example, in the

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<sup>90</sup> See: Davidson 2005, chpt. 4-5.

<sup>91</sup> W. van Spengen, *Tibetan Border Worlds: A Geohistorical Analysis of Trade and Traders*. London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 2000, 23.

razing of Lhasa's two most important shrines, the Ramoché and Jokhang temples, as well as the destruction of several temples around Samyé in 1106.<sup>92</sup>

All told, the celebrity of the New Translation figures, along with the ongoing derision of politically powerful neo-conservatives and the general instability surrounding the rivalries of powerful new institutions, would certainly have corroded the position of the Early Translation community and its chieftain-priests. Nyangrel Nyima Özer was one such figure, and while his biographies do not give us evidence of direct pressure – military or economic – from the New Translation movement, it is more than likely that he would have been familiar with the ongoing rivalries in Central Tibet. Indeed, we can read in Nyangrel's own literature his cognizance of the tensions unfolding around him, generally couched in the trope of prophecy. As Hirshberg notes, "Prophecies [attributed to] eighth-century figures such as Padmasambhava most often describe the era of their authorship or interpolation, rather than that of their alleged prophesizers."<sup>93</sup> In Nyangrel's religious history, *Honey Nectar: The Essence of Flowers* (*chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*), in his *Copper Island Chronicle* (*bka' thang zangs gling ma*) Padmasambhava hagiography, and in the Avalokiteśvara mythology of the *Mani Kabum* (*mani bka' 'bum*), we find prophecies which describe this time as one of "decentralization, lawlessness, anarchy, poverty, violence, and the denigration of Buddhist teachings".<sup>94</sup> Thus, Nyangrel's body of literary work – one which entailed prophecy, revelation, visionary experience, and a concerted effort to define the contours of Early Translation religious practice – is interpretable in light of the post-fragmentation context of sectarian rivalry which left the Early Translation community in

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<sup>92</sup> Carl Shigeo Yamamoto, *Vision and Violence: Lama Zhang and the Politics of Charisma in Twelfth Century Tibet*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 2009, 35.

<sup>93</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 22.

<sup>94</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 23.

need of resources to bolster their nascent identity. In other words, Nyangrel’s body of work entailed both the repertoires and imagined communities that tend to emerge from contestational dialogue.

### **Revelation, History, and Community**

With this context in mind, we can interpret the emergence of the revelation tradition in general, and Nyangrel’s foundational contributions in particular, as an empowering strategy for both authenticating the kinds of practice towards which the Early Translation communities were already oriented, and for the production of new scriptures and modes of practice that could compete with the appeal of what was newly coming from India.<sup>95</sup> While being careful regarding the positing of a monolithic tradition of *terma* – as Hirshberg and Janet Gyatso show, there was a dynamic range of practices and precedents for what only later came to be known as a discrete tradition, or type of religious activity – we can see why Early Translation masters took to new modes of apocryphal scriptural production.<sup>96</sup> *Terma* revelation provided Early Translation adherents with a strategy to authenticate the varieties of doctrine and practice around which their communities were built, while providing a space to innovate tantrism in ways that could compete with new imports.<sup>97</sup> Nyangrel was a foundational figure in this movement, and his legacy is defined by revelations with distinctive historiographical impact: his *Copper Island Chronicle*

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<sup>95</sup> See: Gyatso 1993, 97-134. Gyatso notes that *gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug*’s thirteenth-century *Great History of the Emergence of the Treasures* (*gter ‘byung chen mo*) provides the first polemical defense of a coherent tradition associated with Early Translation revelation activity, indicating that the revelation tradition was in need of defense in the immediate centuries after its initial development. Chöwang’s apologetics included recourse to Indian precedents and exoteric narratives of scripture recovery. This indicates that Nyingmapas in the post-fragmentation period were well aware of the strong emphasis on Indian origins that grounded both the neo-conservative and *gsar ma* claims to authority.

<sup>96</sup> See: Hirshberg 2016, 29-31.

<sup>97</sup> See: Davidson 2005, 210-35. Davidson observes that the Treasure movement was an object-based cult, functioning to bring to life the imperium by the discovery of relics of the imperial court at its height of Buddhist glory. It also provided a “textualization of the emperor’s person” (243).

hagiography of Padmasambhava; the initial texts of what would become the definitive compendium of the Tibetan cult of Avalokiteśvara, the *Mani Kabum*; and his religious history, *Honey Nectar: The Essence of Flowers*: these compositions re-imagined Tibetan history and the provenance of the Early Translation traditions in divinely sanctioned and recursive terms. The *Mani Kabum* provides a founding narrative of the Tibetan Empire as the theogenic activity of Avalokiteśvara, a genesis that is replicated in the ongoing manifestation of this bodhisattva in the person of the Emperor, and, following the fall of the Empire, in incarnations such as Nyangrel himself.<sup>98</sup> As Hirshberg shows, Nyangrel used these historical narratives to announce his own status as the incarnation of Tri Song Detsän, and to validate the religious traditions of his Early Translation community.<sup>99</sup><sup>100</sup> While Nyangrel’s most voluminous revelation, *The Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings*, is not overtly historiographical, it is coordinated with these works in its advancement of a specific vision of Buddhist mastery that reflected emergent conceptions about the nature of Tibet’s religious conversion and the role of its divine

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<sup>98</sup> Kapstein and van Schaik seem to disagree regarding the prevalence of the cult of Avalokiteśvara in the Fragmentation and early Renaissance periods, but it is agreed that it was in the revelation activity of the twelfth century that the *Mani Kabum* took form around the concept of Avalokiteśvara as Tibet’s special theogenic entity. The initial revelations are traditionally attributed to Tertön Ngödrup (one of Nyangrel’s masters), Nyangrel Nyima Özer, and Shakya Ö. Kapstein also offers some interesting observations suggesting that the cult of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet was the result of revived interest in Mahāyāna buddhology coupled with emerging *gsar ma* conceptions about the religious destiny of Tibetans. In this way, the *Mani Kabum* scriptures can be interpreted as a Nyingmapa assimilative response to the New Translation and neo-conservative challenges. See: Matthew T. Kapstein, “Remarks on the *Mani Kabum* and the Cult of Avalokitesvara in Tibet.” In *The Tibetan History Reader*, eds. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis Schaeffer, 89-108. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, 89-108.

<sup>99</sup> Hirshberg observes that Nyangrel did not consider the *zangs gling ma* to be a revealed treasure, although later tradition does. See Hirshberg 2016, 187, note 336.

<sup>100</sup> We should observe that Nyangrel also dealt with Great Perfection materials, and was instrumental in the typology of the Great Perfection in terms of the Transcendent Pith (*a ti*), Ultra Pith (*yang ti*) and Crown Pith (*spyi ti*) doctrines (Hirshberg, “Nyangrel Nyima Ozer” *Treasuryoflives.org*). As Germano shows, Nyangrel made efforts to delineate the transcendental, or “pristine” contemplative idiom from the wrathful, or “horrific/funerary” imaginaire at the basis of the Accomplishment Class tantras. In Germano’s appraisal, the dialectic between pristine and horrific idioms shaped much of the Nyingma’s doctrinal development (personal communication, April 2018). David Germano, “The Funerary Transformation of the Great Perfection” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* no.1 2005

missionaries. Specifically, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, with its lore of Indian origins and firm orientation towards apotropaic myths and rites, replicates Padmasambhava's demon-taming which secured Tibet's Buddhist conversion.<sup>101</sup> Thus, Nyangrel and his community were not only emblematic of, but actually manifested, the imperial court of Tri Song Detsän and the actions of his chief priest. The glories of the pre-fragmentation Tibetan Empire (imagined as they may have been) could be recaptured, owned, and deployed through the ritualized activity of one master and his entourage; a strategy, I suggest, that would have been facilitated by the vast corpus of innovative ritual knowledge that was the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*.

Revelation literature was thus a key component in Nyangrel's efforts to author history and place himself at the center of its recursive patterns. The intersection of divine kingship, revelation, and ritual as curated by Nyangrel's historiography responded to the emergence of the New Translation movement unfolding around pockets of Early Translation adherents. As Kapstein observes:

“*gter* must be understood in terms of the authority of the past, the retrieval of a golden age which ought to be valued over progressive discoveries of the *phyi dar*, which was essentially a strategy for innovation under the rubric of history ... Padmasambhava gained value by being at once ancient and foreign, appealing to both trends in Tibetan Renaissance culture”.<sup>102</sup>

The genius of *terma* lay in its ability to address all challenges: it was at once domestic and foreign, ancient and new, conservative and innovative. The *Kabgyé* exemplified (and, in some regards, initiated) the innovations of *terma*, and is best understood as a catalyst for the

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<sup>101</sup> Dalton (2004) finds piecemeal evidence of Padmasambhava's reputation as a demon-tamer in several fragmentary texts from Dunhuang. Specifically, ITJ644:6 and PT44 tell of a Padmasambhava-like figure's deeds at Yangleshö in Nepal, and PT307, which describes this figure's subjugation of seven demonesses in Tibet. While these fragments indicate that a famous thaumaturge may have come to Tibet from Nepal sometime during the initial spread of Tantric Buddhism, Nyangrel's hagiography remains the first literary source to give us the coherent story of the yogi as a major figure in the transmission of Buddhism on the plateau.

<sup>102</sup> Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2000, 159.

reclamation of agency for its custodians. Recalling that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was (or at least came to be) primarily a compendium of ritual practices, we can interpret its idioms, aesthetics, and techniques as tools for agency, and its arresting character is proportionate to the threats that the Early Translation community would have faced. Wrathful heruka imagery and ritual violence was already embedded in the tantric imagination, but had yet to be systematized in Tibet into something with the gravitas of a canon or total system. The Kabgyé's collation of the tradition's fiercest icons and harm-averting practices would have been emboldening to a community under pressure. As Hirshberg notes, after Yamomoto: "Apparently the situation was quite dire in twelfth century Tibet...there is consensus among sources that it indeed was a time when authoritative religious figures like Lama Shang became military leaders commanding armies of monk-combatants, and mantrins – including Nyangrel himself, according to his biographies – profited from the performance of apotropaic and martial rituals in response to surging demand from a nervous populace threatened by countless dangers".<sup>103</sup> Indeed, we shall see, in its reception history, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s enduring capacity for supplying resources in the Nyingma's ongoing efforts at authoring distinctive denominational identities across seven centuries.

### **Nyangrel's successors**

Just as Nyangrel had inherited his father's tantric lineages, his son, Drogön Namkha Pel (*mnga' bdag 'gro ba mgon po nam mkha' dpal* 1150-1230s), served as Nyangrel's heir. Nyangrel and Namkha Pel propagated the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* during Nyangrel's lifetime, as we see in the account of one Pakshi Sakya Ö's reception of Nyang teachings at Mawochok (*smra bo*

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<sup>103</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 24.

*lcog*).<sup>104</sup> According to Ngari Panchen Wangyal, Nyangrel’s practice instructions and commentaries on the root tantras were recorded as exegetical texts, and Nyangrel’s successors continued this work by drafting practice texts, empowerments, and ritual liturgies to supplement the cycle.<sup>105</sup> Hirshberg notes that none of Nyangrel’s genetic descendants took up the mantle of *terma* revelation, rather occupying themselves with the curation and dissemination of Nyangrel’s *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*.<sup>106</sup> Namkha Pel did become the master of the young Chökyi Wangchuk (*gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug* 1212-1270), the extraordinary adept who would claim to be the rebirth of Nyangrel, and who supplemented Nyangrel’s Kabgyé with his own Kabgyé revelation cycle, *The Total Perfection of the Secret Eight Teachings (bka' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs)*. Guru Chöwang would name his own hermitage the “Temple of the Ground of the Peaceful-Wrathful Kabgyé” (*gnas gzhi zhi khro bka' brgyad lha khang*).<sup>107</sup>

Namkha Pel’s son, Ngadak Löden Sherab (*mnga' bdag blo ldan shes rab*), also upheld the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, overseeing activities at Mawochok. As Hirshberg suggests, Löden Sherab was probably regarded as Namkha Pel’s main student (as would be tradition in Early Translation family lineages), not Chökyi Wangchuk.<sup>108</sup> At any rate, many masters would come to Mawochok over the centuries, and we hear of visits from lamas seeking to practice the Kabgyé there as late as the eighteenth century. According to Ngari Panchen, the seventh-generation genetic descendant of Nyangrel, one Ngadak Kunga Gyaltzen (*mnga' bdag kun dga' rgyal*

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<sup>104</sup> Dūdjom 1991, 661.

<sup>105</sup> Mnga' ris pan chen, *'chad thabs mun sel nyi zla'i khor lo*, 204-206.

<sup>106</sup> Daniel Hirshberg, “Fidelity, Innovation, and Reincarnation in the Early Revelations of the Eight Instructions”, International Association of Tibetan Studies 40th Anniversary Seminar: July 12, 2019.

<sup>107</sup> Gendun Chopel *Gangs can bod kyi gnas bshad lam yig gsar ma las lho kha s khul gyi gnas yig*. Beijing: mi rigs dpe skun khang, 2002, 121-22

<sup>108</sup> See: Hirshberg, 2016, 65-83.

*mtshan*, 15th-16th cent.?), was particularly active in presiding over Kabgyé rituals at Mawochok, and in establishing a curricular manual (*yig cha*) for Kabgyé ritual practice. We do not know the dates for this Kunga Gyaltsen, but it is reasonable to posit that he may have been active in the century just preceding Ngari Panchen's sixteenth-century researches.

Lineage supplications from later generations give us some specific transmission lines. One such lineal list is that of Gyurme Dorje, Terdak Lingpa ('*gyur med rdo rje, gter bdag gling pa*, 1646-1714), who received both the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* and the *Kabgyé Sangwa Yongzok* from his father at a young age. This lineage features many known Nyingmapa and Drikung Kagyü masters.<sup>109</sup> Ngari Panchen also provides nearly a dozen lineage lists representing both the "transmitted" Kabgyé, and the lineal traditions stemming from Nyangrel's revealed iteration. From these documents, we see that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was propagated in genetic, incarnational, and denominational lineages, perhaps, as in the case of the *bka' ma bka' brgyad*, going back to the imperial period.

Broadly, we get the picture that the Kabgyé spread rapidly through Nyingma communities within two centuries following the time of Nyangrel. Hagiographic sources for figures in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries will often mention an adept's basic training in the Kabgyé, alongside tantras such as *The Gathering of Intentions Sutra*, the *Magical Emanation* (*sgyu 'phrul*) tantras, and various Great Perfection doctrines: the emergent "core curriculum" of

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<sup>109</sup> Terdak Lingpa's lineage history of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is as follows:

Nyangrel Nyima Özer (1124-1192/1204), Nam mkha'i dpal (Nyangrel's son, 1164-1236), blo ldan shes rab (Namkha'i Pel's son), mthar phyin bdud 'dul mtshan, mdo sde senge, padma dngos grub, dpa' bo nor bu, kun dga' rgyal mtshan, nyang ston nor bu 'phel, kun tu dga' ba'i od zer, nam mkha'i rnal 'byor, pen chen padma dbang (Ngari Panchen, 1487-1542), rin chen phun tshogs, ye shes mchog gi rol ba rtsal, bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (prob. Sogdokpa, 1552-1624), gzhan phan phrin las mthar phyin rdo rje (Gongra Zhenpen Dorje 1594-1654), gar dbang ngon po phrin las lhun grub (Terdak Lingpa's father), 'gyur med rdo rje (Terdak Lingpa 1646-17140).

From 'gyur med rdo rje. "bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i brgyud 'debs". in '*gyur med rdo rje gsung 'bum*, vol 9, pp. 5-6.

the Nyingmapas.<sup>110</sup> Ngari Panchen tells us that, by his time, “in U, Tsang, Do-Kham, and Kongpo, the Kabgyé had especially spread”.<sup>111</sup>

### Spread within Nyingma and Kagyü

Kumaradza (*rig 'dzin ku ma ra dza* 1266-1343) represents the enlargement of the Kabgyé’s influence, as he is the first lama outside of Nyang’s genetic or reincarnated lineages responsible for extant Kabgyé materials.<sup>112</sup> It is unclear where Kumaradza received his Kabgyé training, although one of his teachers, the fascinating Orgyen Rinchen Pel (*o rgyan pa rin chen dpal* 1229-1309) had trained alongside one of Chöwang’s principal disciples, Madunpa (*ma bdun pa* 1198-1265). Notably, Kumaradza’s famous disciple, Longchen Rabjam (*klong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer* 1308-63), while ultimately revered for his Great Perfection treatises, also received Kabgyé training from his own father as a young practitioner.<sup>113</sup> In addition to his role as the Dzogchen master of Longchenpa, Kumaradza taught the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (*rang byung rdo rje* 1284-1339), as did the aforementioned Orgyen Rinchen Pel, who could trace his lineage to Chöwang. So while we do not specifically know whether Kumaradza or Rinchen Pel taught the Kabgyé to Rangjung Dorje (perhaps not Kumaradza; his relationship with the Karmapa was said to revolve around *snying thig* mysticism), we do know that the Karmapa and his main disciple and compatriot, the first Zhamar Drakpa Sengge (*zhwa dmar*

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<sup>110</sup> Hagiographical entries in Dūdjom’s *chos 'byung* for this period demonstrate that the Kabgyé (usually the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, but sometimes the Chöwang’s *Kabgyé Sangwa Yangzok*) persistently made its way into the education of Nyingma adepts.

<sup>111</sup> Mnga’ ris pan chen, *'chad thabs mun sel nyi zla'i khor lo*, 206.

<sup>112</sup> Kumaradza’s composition, the *dpal ldan sgrub pa bka' brgyad kyi bskyed rim gyi man ngag zab mo gnad bsdu*, is registered in the *po ta lar bzhugs pa'i rnying ma'i gsung 'bum dkar chag*, vol. 1, p.15.

<sup>113</sup> Klong chen rab 'byams, “dri med 'od zer gyi rnam thar mthong ba don ldan” in *dri med 'od zer gsung 'bum*. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009, vol. 4, 184.

*grags pa seng ge* 1283-1349), did practice the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* at the temple of Dechen Theng as it was being erected under the direction of Rangjung Dorje.<sup>114</sup> It seems, then, that the *Kabgyé* was seeping into the purview of the early Kagyüpas, and this may have been the origin of a documentable Kagyü interest in the *Eight Teachings*, resulting in a transmissional lineage that would include important Drikung masters.

The Drikung Kagyüs (*'bri gung bka' brgyud pa*) took up the *Kabgyé* when the seventeenth Drikung Denrab, Gyalwang Rinchen Phuntsok (*rgyal dbang rin chen phun tshogs* 1509-57) immersed himself in Nyingma study under Ngari Panchen Wangyel, the Tertön Gyama Migyur Kunga (*rgya ma mi 'gyur kun dga, mi 'gyur las 'phro gling pa*), and Ngari Panchen's brother, Lekden Dorje (*legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje* 1512-1625). Rinchen Phuntsok's grandson, the first Chetsang hierarch of the reformed Drikung, Rigzin Chökyi Drakpa (*rig 'dzin chos skyi grags pa*, 1595-1659) wrote an extensive history of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, and an entire book of Amgon Rinpoche's nineteenth century Drikung anthology (*'bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*) is devoted to *Kabgyé* ritual and meditation.<sup>115</sup> So we see that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* had, by the sixteenth century, exceeded the confines of the Early Translation communities and had become something exportable to institutions of other denominational orientations.

Interestingly, an early nineteenth century lineage list provided by Mipham Chökyi Wangchuk (*mi pham chos kyi dbang phyug* 1775-1837) records the Drikungpas' reception of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* from Ngari Panchen, and then its eventual return to Nyingma circles via Zhigpo Lingpa (*zhig po gling pa gar gyi dbang phyug*, 1524-83), and his student Sogdokpa Lodro

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<sup>114</sup> Alexander Gardner, "The First Zhamarpa, Drakpa Sengge," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed September 27, 2017. <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Zhamarpa-01-Drakpa-Sengge/9634>.

<sup>115</sup> *'bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, pod 107.

Gyaltzen, and then onward to Trinley Lhundrup and his son, Terdak Lingpa.<sup>116</sup> We thus see between the Nyingma and Kagyü a shared interest in the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* that evidenced an ecumenical reality that far preceded the Eastern Tibetan ecumenism made famous by the so-called Rimè (*ris med*) movement. It is absolutely the case that Kagyüpas in the Karma and Drikung schools would engage in treasure revelation and seek out training in the Kabgyé, Great Perfection, and other Mahāyoga systems.

### Northern Treasures

Meanwhile, a third Kabgyé revelation emerged in the late fourteenth century through the Tertön Rigzin Gödem (*rig 'dzin rgod ldem* 1337-1408). Gödem was steeped in the practice of Dorje Phurba (Skt. *vajrakīlaya*), and was familiar with the treasure cycles of Nyangrel and Chöwang. Gödem's Northern Treasure (*byang gter*, Jangter) cycles replicate and supplement the Kabgyé revelations of Nyangrel and Chöwang, contributing the *Kabgyé Drakpo Rangshar* (*bka' brgyad drag por dbyung rang shar*), which continues to be the main Kabgyé corpus utilized by Jangter temples. Taken together, these three cycles, plus cycles later revealed by Pema Lingpa (*pad ma ling pa*, 1450-1521), Samten Lingpa, Nuden Dorje (*stag sham nus ldan rdo rje*, 1755-1808) and Ögyan Lingpa, would come to be considered the principal Kabgyé corpora. But it

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<sup>116</sup> Mi pham chos kyi dbang phyug, *gsung 'bum*, pod 7, 296-99. The lineage list is nearly identical to Terdak Lingpa's and reads as follows (starting with Nyangrel):

Zab gter bstan pa'i spyi mes mnga; bdag nyang [Nyangrel], mkha mnyam 'gro ba'i mgon po nam mkha' dpal [Nyangrel's son], snying po'i don gjigs blo ldan she rab zhabs [Nyangrel's grandson], mthu stobs brtul zhugs mthar phyin bdud 'dul mtshan, sgröl mas rjes bzung mdo sde seng ge dang [13th cent., zhwa lu], mkhas grub zla med padma dngos grub, 'jam dpal grub pa'i dpa' bo nor bu'i mtshan, 'jig rten dbang phyug kun dga' rgyal mtshan dpal, grub pa'i rig 'dzin nyang stong nor bu 'phel, pan bdes kun tu dga' ba'i 'od zer can, 'khrul zhig rje rigs nam mkha'i rnal 'byor pa [15th century bka' brgyud pa], gnas lnga rig pa'i man chen pdma dbang [Ngari panchen wangyal], lha sras rnam rol rin chen phun tshogs zhabs [Rinchen Phuntshok, the Drikung Denrab], gar dbang ye shes mchog gi rol pa rtsal [probably Zhigpo Lingpa], blo gros mchog gi bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan 'dzin [Sogdokpa, Lodro Gyaltzen], gzhan phan phrin las mthar phyin rdo rje 'dzin [probably gonra lochen zhenpen dorje], gar dbang mgon po phrin las lhun grub [father of Terdak Lingpa], rtsod bral gter chen 'gyur med rdo rje [Gyurme Dorje, Terdak Lingpa, founder of Mindroling], rin chen rnam rgyal padma bstan 'dzin, [son of Terdak Lingpa], 'phrin las mnam rgyal padma dbang gi rgyal.

remains the case that Nyangrel's initial cycle, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, has been the most influential.

### **Ngari Panchen: The Wheel of the Sun and Moon Dispelling The Darkness**

We do see some crossover between Nyangrel and Chöwang's "Southern Treasure" (*lhogter*) and Gödem's "Northern Treasure" (*byang gter*) lineages in the fifteenth century, such as in the case of the previously-mentioned Ngari Panchen Pema Wangyal (*mnga' ris pan chen padma dbang rgyal* 1487-1542). Ngari Panchen was born in Mustang to a prominent Kagyupa practitioner, and his younger brother, Lekden Dorje was recognized as the reincarnation of Gödem himself. Ngari Panchen's writings suggest that researching (*rtsad bcad*) the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was a bit of an obsession for the young lama, and his biography states that he received the *Kabgyé* no less than twenty five times, indicating that it had become a robust tradition everywhere by the turn of the sixteenth century. In particular, Ngari Panchen received his training under one Namkhai Naljor (*gnam mkha'i rnal 'byor*), a Kagyü yogi mentioned in both Terdak Lingpa and Chökyi Wangchuk's lineage supplications, and also from his own father, whom he longingly supplicated after eleven years of seeking out *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* texts. Ngari Panchen revealed a *Kabgyé* cycle himself, composed several *Kabgyé* rituals which have been included in various redactions of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle, and wrote a general study and exposition of the *Kabgyé* tradition, called *The Wheel of the Sun and Moon Dispelling the Darkness: A Method of Explanation* (*'chad thabs mun sel nyi zla'i khor lo*). This text outlines the contents and doctrinal architecture of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, and traces the commentarial and practice literature which it spawned. This work is invaluable for its detailed account of the development of *Kabgyé* exegesis and practice in the four centuries following the time of Nyangrel, and constitutes some of our earliest evidence for the robust contribution of the *Kabgyé*

to Early Translation religious life. In this, Ngari Panchen also provides a heartfelt account of his connection with the Kabgyé, reporting on his quest to discover associated ancient texts and images in quite personal terms.

### **The Lingpas and the delineation of Nyingma identity**

According to hagiographic and autobiographical literature, it seems to be the case that the education of Early Translation adepts in the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries involved an eclectic but somewhat standard mix of transmitted tantras; prominently: the *Gathering of Intentions Sutra* (*dgongs pa 'dus pa 'i mdo*), the *Secret Nucleus Tantra* (*gsang ba 'i snying po*, Skt. *Guhyagarbha-tantra*) and related *Magical Emanation* (*sgyu 'phrul*, Skt. *Māyājāla*) tantras, Great Perfection mysticism (*rdzogs pa chen po*, specifically the *snying thig* systems), and ritual-centric Mahāyoga tantras, especially as collated in the *Eight Teachings* cycles. Figures such as Ögyen Lingpa (b.1323), Sangye Lingpa (1340-1396), Dorje Lingpa (1346-1405), Pema Lingpa (b. 1450), Thangton Gyalpo (b. 1385), and Ngari Panchen, to name but a few, exemplified this eclecticism, and their hagiographies suggest that the Kabgyé was a prime subject of study, an object of visionary experience, and something to be practiced in retreat or with a retinue of disciples.<sup>117</sup> It seems that the oeuvre of tertöns in these centuries in many ways mirrored that of Nyangrel – a sensible conclusion considering that Nyangrel, like the subsequent tertöns, claimed to have been recovering the specific cycles given to Tri Song Detsän by Padmasambhava: cycles such as *The Great Compassionate One* (*thugs rje chen po*), the *Wrathful Guru* (*drag po bla ma*), the Peaceful/Wrathful deity complex (*zhi khro*), Vajrakīlaya (*phur ba*), Yamāntaka (*gshin rje*), Hayagrīva (*rta mgrin*), and the *Eight Teachings* (*bka' brgyad*). It is clear that these masters were forwarding the full spectrum of works initially produced or curated by Nyangrel several

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<sup>117</sup> See Tertön hagiographies in Dūdjom 1991, pp. 789-880. Also see: *gu ru kra shis chos 'byung*, chpt. 4, pp. 363-598; and, Jamgön Kongtrül Lodro Thayé's *gter ston rgya rtsa 'i rnam thar* (*Biographies of the Hundred Revealers*).

centuries before. Not many of their revelations fall far outside the fold of Nyangrel's own resume, which attests to the First Tertön King's seminal importance.

### **Apotropaic Ritualists and Nyingma Polymaths: Sogdokpa Lodro Gyaltzen and Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje**

The persistence of wrathful tantra, and an emphasis on ritualism with a violent timbre, is evident in the reputation of figures from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. This was a particularly volatile era in Central Tibet, as noble houses from Tsang (*gtsang*) vied for supremacy in the wake of the collapse of the Phamodrukpa (*phag mo gru pa*) dynasty, all culminating in the fall of Central Tibet to the Ganden Potrang (*dga' ldan pho brang*) and its Mongol armies.<sup>118</sup> Notable examples of famous ritual adepts from this time include Zhigpo Lingpa Gargyi Wangchuk (*zhig po gling pa gar gyi dbang phyug*, 1524-1583), a prolific tertön who revealed a major apotropaic ritual cycle, *The Twenty Five Ways of Averting Armies* (*dmag bzlog nyer lnga*), and his primary student Lodro Gyaltzen, also known as Sogdokpa, the “Mongol Repeller” (*blo gro rgyal mtshan, sog bzlog pa*, 1552-1624).<sup>119</sup> Sogdokpa was so-named for his reputed skill in repelling the Mongol forces backing the ascent of Ganden and the eventual rise of the Dalai Lamas.

As James Gentry has shown, in this time of turmoil on the eve of Ganden supremacy, lamas in general, and treasure-revealing ritual specialists in particular, were beginning to take on new levels of political import. This was evidenced on both sides of the Central Tibetan conflict,

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<sup>118</sup> See Gentry 2014, 47-56. Sogdokpa had initially been allied with the dominant Rinjung (*rin spungs*) family of Tsang, a polity that was later subsumed by the Tsangpa Desi, Karma Tseten, and from whose successors the Ganden Potrang wrested authority in 1642. Before falling to Gushri Khan in 1642, the Tsangpas dominated central Tibet in a campaign that brought destruction to Drepung and Sera monasteries, and enforced their dominance through constant skirmishes with rival Tibetan and Mongolian forces.

<sup>119</sup> According to Gentry, all that survives of this compendium are five texts included in the Rinchen Terdzö. See Gentry, “Representations of Efficacy: The Ritual expulsion of Mongol Armies in Consolidation and Expansion of the gTsang Dynasty.” In *Tibetan Ritual*, edited by Jose Cabezon, 131-163. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

exemplified by the Tsang patronage of Sogdokpa, and also in the elevation of the Mongol-empowered Drepung abbots, the Dalai Lamas, as the *de facto* rulers of a consolidated Central Tibet. Gentry shows that the incorporation of ritualists and incarnated masters was an important feature of a broad trend in this period, as polities consolidated power and carried out colonial exploits in places like Central Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan.<sup>120</sup> Throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the figures of the reincarnate lama and the prophetic treasure revealer both became more integral to political affairs, and increasingly threatened to displace lay aristocrats as the main power brokers in Tibet.<sup>121</sup> So it was that, in this period, prophecy-sanctioned, “object-based”, and violent ritual mastery became a key feature of political power, and expertise in the harm-averting rituals like those mastered by Zhigpo Lingpa and Sogdokpa became valuable commodities in the struggle for political, military, and social dominance.

Providing, as it does, a vast assortment of mythic narratives, doctrines, and practice techniques centering on wrathful, harm-averting ritualism, the *Kabgyé* was a key resource for Nyingma ritual adepts in this period. Sogdokpa, who was one of the few Tibetans to write about ritual practice in overtly theoretical terms, inherited the *Kabgyé* from Zhigpo Lingpa (who himself received it from the Drikung line), and wrote several *Kabgyé* rituals, including initiation rites and daily meditation practices now included in the comprehensive thirteen-volume *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions.<sup>122</sup> And it was Sogdokpa’s student, Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje (*gong*

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<sup>120</sup> Gentry 2014, 49.

<sup>121</sup> Gentry 2014, 52, 87, 432.

<sup>122</sup> Blo gros rgyal mtshan (sog bzlog pa), “dbang chog bsdu pa” in Tsamdrak: *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 9; and “las byang bskyed rdzogs 'bring po” in Katok: *bka brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 7.

*ra lo chen gzhan phan rdo rje* 1595-1654), who is credited with redacting the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* into the format which is now considered to be complete and definitive.<sup>123</sup>

In addition to being a ritualist and active teacher, Gongra had editorial sensibilities, as he allegedly compiled and disseminated an early *Nyingma Gyubum* (*rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*), the *Seventeen Esoteric Instruction Tantras of the Great Perfection* (*man ngag sde rgyud bdu bdun*), and the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*.<sup>124</sup> These editorial activities were carried out at a monastic scriptorium called Ngesang Dorje Ling, a stronghold of the Zhigpo treasure tradition, which would later be annexed by Ganden and converted to the Geluk denomination.<sup>125</sup> Gongra's editorial choices exemplify a specific vision for Nyingma identity in the face of great pressures and on the eve of Mindroling's re-visioning of Nyingma institutions. It was an identity that included transmitted esoterism, transcendental mysticism, and harm-averting wrathful ritualism. Gongra's editorial activities may have indeed set the stage for what would unfold at Mindroling, as highly institutionalized iterations of Nyingma tantrism would have hinged on the anthologization of the Early Translation's many cycles and practice traditions. However, while Gongra's editorial work spanned at least three bodies of Nyingma literature, his personal lineage was one of distinct emphasis on ritual.

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<sup>123</sup> Tsamdrak: *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, preface to vol. 1.

<sup>124</sup> Terdak Lingpa's biography of Gongra tells us that he assembled the Nyingma Gyubum three times: "*rnying ma rgyud 'bum tshar gsum bzhengs pa*" (*'gyur med rdo rje gsung 'bum*, vol. 3, p.90); Gongra's Curation of the seventeen esoteric tantras of the great perfection is registered by Gentry 2014, 467, note 961. And the English-language preface to the Tsamdrak *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor* suggests that Gongra was the initial editor of the parent edition to the thirteen-volume collections. This claim is derived from colophonic information that appears in certain texts included in both the Katok and Tsamdrak editions; however it is not verified in any other sources.

<sup>125</sup> Gentry 2014, 466.

Gongra was an important figure to the Mindrol patriarch Terdak Lingpa, Gyurme Dorje (*gter bdag gling pa*, ‘gyur med rdo rje, 1646-1714).<sup>126</sup> Gyurme Dorje saw himself as the inheritor of Gongra’s (and Sogdokpa and Zhigpo Lingpa’s before him) lineage, as he recounts how his father, Trinley Lhundrup (‘*phrin las lhun sgrub*), received the Kabgyé and Zhigpo Lingpa’s wrathful treasure cycles directly from Gongra.<sup>127</sup> Gongra was also a known, and apparently troubling, figure for the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (*ngag dbang blo gzang rgya mtsho*, 1617-1682). Famous for his embrace of Nyingma tradition (which included some forays into treasure discovery, not to mention close ties to the second and third throne-holders of Dorje Drak), the Great Fifth took serious issue with the likes of Zhigpo Lingpa and Sogdokpa (and by extension, Gongra), as these figures actively resisted Ganden’s Mongol-backed dominance through their ritual interventions. The Dalai Lama branded them the “trio of *snang*, *sog* and *gong*”, banning their works and forcibly taking over Gongra’s own monastery of Ngesang Dorje Ling.<sup>128</sup> The Dalai Lama’s animus towards these masters was no secret: when asked to bestow the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* on the Dalai Lama, Terdak Lingpa felt the need to warn him of the provenance of this lineage. After considering the matter, reception of the Kabgyé must have remained important enough to the Dalai Lama that he acquiesced, in this case, to receiving the rival lineage.<sup>129</sup> And, contra his position on the meddlesome ritual interventions of Sogdokpa and company, the Fifth Dalai Lama also received the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* from

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<sup>126</sup> ‘Gyur med rdo rje, “gzhan phan rdo rje’i rnam thar” in ‘gyur med rdo rje’i gsung ‘bum. vol.3.

<sup>127</sup> Gentry 2014, 479.

<sup>128</sup> Smith 2004, 186, 190, 192.

<sup>129</sup> Gentry 2014, 480. Also, *gu ru bkra shis chos ‘byung*, 448.

Zurchen Chöying Rangdrol in the context of his own campaign to sorceristically impede the Karma Kagyü with violent rites.<sup>130</sup>

In sum, the period between the disintegration of the Phagmodrupa hegemony in the early 1500s and the ascendancy of Ganden in 1642 was one of shifting power and changing roles for Tibetan Buddhist ecclesiasts. Ritual mastery, and the deployment of violent apotropaic ritualism in particular, became a key commodity in an environment of rivalry and reformation. Treasure discovery and its attendant domains of prophecy and ritual became central aspects in the responses that specific polities and communities exhibited in confronting threats from outside.

As Gentry observes:

The theme of communal threat is so prevalent throughout the Treasure prophecies that we might regard this body of literature, and Treasure traditions more broadly, as particularly Tibetan strategies for gaining some purchase over the wild unpredictability of their surrounding material world of humanity and nature. Moreover, the centrality for Treasure traditions of the collective, material well-being of whole territories and populaces means that the Treasure revealer's role overlaps considerably with the domain of governance. The prominent role in Treasure prophecies of violent object-oriented rites and substances in quelling the danger and volatility of the surrounding material world is rooted in the paradigmatic Tibetan Imperial past and its associated literary images of collaborations between royal and sacred power.<sup>131</sup>

As the *Eight Teachings* corpus was originally paradigmatic of the Treasure tradition in its underlying historiography, and as its ritualism was so squarely concerned with “object-oriented violent rites”, we can see how it would have been a key source for the kinds of knowledge that were becoming important to Nyingmapa masters such as Zhigpo Lingpa and Sogdogpa. This background, then, may explain why the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was one of three corpora that

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<sup>130</sup> Dūdjom 1991, 683.

<sup>131</sup> Gentry 2014, 61.

Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje committed his energies to curating. Gongra's sentiments in this regard were not inconsequential: as Gentry observes, "the vast majority of ritual and teaching cycles which then characterized the identity of the Old School had passed through Sogdokpa, Gongra, and his illustrious students."<sup>132</sup>

### **Mindroling**

Of the lineal descendents of Gongra, perhaps none was more illustrious than Gyurme Dorje, Terdak Lingpa (*smin gling gter chen 'gyur med rdo rje, gter bdag gling pa* 1646-1714). Gyurme Dorje, along with his younger brother Lochen Dharmasri (*lo chen dharma shri, ngag dbang chos dpal rgya mtsho*, 1654-1717), was responsible for founding Central Tibet's Ögyen Mindroling (*o rgyan smin grol gling*), arguably the most consequential institution in the history of the Nyingma. The Minling brothers enjoyed good favor with the Fifth Dalai Lama, and were able to rise above the sectarian and clan rivalries that embroiled their own lineal predecessors. Mindroling became one of few Nyingma institutions to participate in the confederation of monasteries subordinated to Ganden's centralized authority. This was a subservience that would elevate Mindroling to the apex of the Nyingma constellation of nascent institutions. In fact, as Dominique Townsend observes, "Mindroling played a key role in the Fifth Dalai Lama's vision of a centralized Tibetan polity...becoming the main center of education for Central Tibetan government officials and other aristocrats from across the Tibetan Buddhist world".<sup>133</sup> It seems, then, that Mindroling and Ganden were mutually-supporting institutions (although Ganden was the bigger sibling, by far), and the revisioning of Nyingma institutional life that unfolded at Mindroling was, in many respects, in the image of Ganden Potrang. Thus, as Dalton and

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<sup>132</sup> Gentry 2014, 477.

<sup>133</sup> Dominique Townsend, *Materials of Buddhist Culture: Aesthetics and Cosmopolitanism at Mindroling Monastery*. Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2012, 5.

Schaeffer suggest, the Minling brothers revised ritual traditions to resemble how the Ganden Potrang, under the leadership of the Fifth Dalai Lama's Regent, Desi Sangye Gyatso (*sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho*, 1677-1705), used public ceremony to cement state power.<sup>134</sup> The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* would be one such ritual tradition to be curated at, and disseminated from, Mindroling.

As Dalton's exploration of the history of the *Gathering of Intentions Sutra*'s initiation literature shows, Lochen Dharmasri undertook the project of revising the initiation protocols to create rites at once complex enough to support the work of myriad specialists, and simple enough to be digestible to the masses.<sup>135</sup> Dharmasri disambiguated the ritual elements into a series of manuals covering topics ranging from mandala construction to ritual dance, providing, along the way, vocational opportunities for many specialists.<sup>136</sup> This professionalization and publicization of esoteric ritual mirrored regular ceremonies carried out at Ganden such as the Great Prayer Festival (*smon lam chen mo*). Dalton suggests that the mass-participation rituals hosted at Mindroling, especially the so-called "Sutra Initiation", defined membership in newly envisioned constellations of institutional relationships.<sup>137</sup> Likewise, Gentry observes that the development of regularized ritual intensives — often performed to mark calendrical transitions, such as the change of the lunar year — were related to the consolidation of power in central institutions.

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<sup>134</sup> See: Jacob Dalton, "Recreating the Rnying ma School: The Mdo dbang Tradition of Smin grol gling." In *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition. Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, edited by Bryan J. Cuevas and Kurtis R. Schaeffer, 91-100. Leiden: Brill, 2006. Also: Kurtis R. Schaeffer "Ritual, Festival, and Authority under the Fifth Dalai Lama." In *Power, Politics and the Reinvention of Tradition in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Tibet: Proceedings of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Xth Seminar, Oxford University, 2003*, eds. Kurtis R. Schaeffer and Bryan J. Cuevas, 187-202. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

<sup>135</sup> Dalton 2016, chpt. 6, "The Mindroling Tradition".

<sup>136</sup> Dalton 2016, 108.

<sup>137</sup> Dalton 2016, 111-113.

That is, the liturgical schedules regularized at central institutions such as Ganden and Mindroling could be adopted by peripheral affiliate temples to express affiliation and political subservience to the center. We will see this (at least rhetorically) in the case of the Eastern Tibetan temples' adoption of the "Mindrol System" (*smin gling lugs*) of Kabgyé ritual.<sup>138</sup>

Gyurme Dorje and Lochen Dharmasri standardized several other cycles, including the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. Gyurme Dorje was responsible for creating what would become a definitive Kabgyé ritual cycle, *The Minling System of the Eight Teachings of Accomplishment* (the *sgrub pa bka' brgyad smin gling lugs*), and Lochen Dharmasri wrote a collection of Kabgyé practice and commentarial texts.<sup>139</sup> Though more modest than their treatment of the *Gathering of Intentions*, the "Minling System" (*smin gling lugs*) would nominally become the template for the annual Kabgyé Great Accomplishment rites (*bka' brgyad sgrub chen*) carried out at the major Nyingma "Mother Monasteries" in Eastern Tibet. Many of the Kabgyé ritual cycles at temples such as Katok, Dzogchen, Palyul, and Shechen claim to be derived from Gyurme Dorje and Lochen Dharmasri's curation of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* rituals, and many texts included in those institutions' Kabgyé ritual manuals are supplemented with commentaries and instructions attributed to Terdak Lingpa. However, it seems that the connection between Kabgyé ritual tradition at the Mother Monasteries and the Minling System was mostly rhetorical; our appraisal of ritual compendia in Chapter Three will reveal heterogeneity between these ritual cycles, and we shall see how the curation of such cycles provided an opportunity to express unique institutional identities.

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<sup>138</sup> Gentry, personal communication, June 2019.

<sup>139</sup> 'Gyur med rdo rje, *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa smin gling lugs*; also, Lo chen d+harma shri, "bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i bsnyen pa'i go don lag len dang bcas pa'i yi ge rin chen sgron me"; "bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i bsnyen pa'i sgo don lag len"; "bde gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud bklag thabs man ngag snang ba"; and "bde 'dus dang sbyar ba'i sman sgrub las tho" in *d+harma shri gsung 'bum*.

The Kabgyé was an early source of inspiration for Gyurme Dorje, as he apparently received the empowerment for Chöwang’s cycle at the age of four, and was confronted by a vision of Guru Rinpoche while receiving the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* from his father at age eleven. This vision transformed the boy into a qualified master of practice and learning.<sup>140</sup> Terdak Lingpa would go on to reveal several Kabgyé texts himself. It also seems that he was inspired by Gongra, his father’s master. Though they did not meet, Gyurme Dorje wrote Gongra’s biography, and Gongra’s editorial work would have contributed to the systematization of Nyingma learning that unfolded at Mindroling.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, if the account of Gongra’s editing of foundational Nyingma corpora is to be believed, from Gongra’s time forward the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* took the form of a voluminous compendium of doctrinal and ritual knowledge, particularly suited for institutional settings. Perhaps we can thus regard the inception of the Kabgyé corpus as a disseminatable textual body – and one particularly suited for institutional settings – as lying with Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje, and its actual dissemination as coming from Mindroling. We know that many masters from Eastern Tibet, in particular, came to Mindroling to gain training in ritual cycles such as the *Minling System*. We might think of Mindroling at its apex as a funnel through which most Nyingma contemplative and ritual traditions passed, and through which they were repackaged to fit institutional goals shared by expanding Nyingmapa institutions to the East. The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was certainly part of this vision.

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<sup>140</sup> Dūdjom 1991, 825-27. Also *rnying ma ba’i grub mtha’ spyi bshad*, 58.

<sup>141</sup> For more on Mindroling’s role in the development of the Nyingma tradition, see: Dalton 2002, 2016; Townsend 2012; Schaeffer 2006; and Cuevas 2003.

## Khampa Institutions and Their Founders

From Central Tibet, the Kabgyé cycle spread east. The Kabgyé Great Accomplishment Rites would be instituted at each of the large Eastern Tibetan temples, and Khampa tertöns would prolifically reveal their own Kabgyé materials. Early exemplars include Karma Chagme (*karma chags med*, 1613-78) and the Degé Tertön Longsel Nyingpo (*klong gsal snying po*, 1625-92), each of whom revealed Kabgyé cycles which became important at Zurmang and Katok, respectively.<sup>142</sup> The Kabgyé was also important to Taksham Nuden Dorje (a.k.a. Samten Lingpa, 1655-1708), who revealed several Kabgyé texts, and, perhaps more influentially, included the fifteen tantras of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* in his Nyingma tantric canon. His arrangement of the foundational tantras would be preserved in later editions of the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients* (the *Nyingma Gyubum*, *rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*), and in the comprehensive *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions utilized in Kham and Bhutan. As these editions claim descent from Gongra's redaction, it may be the case the Taksham was also working from Gongra's edition.

The dynamic Khampa duo of Dzogchen Pema Rigzin (*rdzogs chen padma rig 'dzin* 1625-97) and Rigzin Nyima Drakpa (*rig 'dzin nyi ma grags pa* 1647-1710), both students of Karma Chagme, also received Kabgyé initiations, perhaps from Karma Chagme or from Dundul Dorje (*bdud 'dul rdo rje*, 1615-72). They also travelled together to Lhodrak, where they received training in the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, perhaps at Mawochok from Ngadak Chökyi Wangpo, who

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<sup>142</sup> Karma chags med, “bka' bryad khro bo rol pa'i mdos thabs bzlog thabs rgyas 'bring bsduḡ gsum bsaḡ tan cho ga dang bcas pa'i bca' thabs zin bris gsal bar bkod pa” in *karma chags med gsung 'bum*, Nang chen rdzong: gnas mdo gsang sngags chos 'phel gling gi dpe rnying nyams gso khang, vol. 11, pp. 179-208; Klong gsal snying po, “bka' bryad bde gshegs yongs 'dus chos skor”, in *klong gsal snying po'i zab gter*. Darjeeling: kargyud sungrab nyamso khang, 1997. vol 5.

was likely a descendent of Nyangrel Nyima Özer.<sup>143</sup> This seems to suggest a remarkable continuity in the Kabgyé tradition at Mawochok, stemming back to Nyangrel's son, Namkha Pel, five centuries earlier. Pema Rigzin and Nyima Drakpa also encountered Terdak Lingpa in Lhodrak, initiating a long-term discipleship. So the spectrum of Pema Rigzin and Nyima Drakpa's Kabgyé training was complete, ranging from the hermitage at Mawochok to the scholastic halls of Mindroling, to the instructions of Kagyü lama Karma Chagme. This affirms that the Kabgyé was a widespread body of knowledge in the seventeenth century, spanning several types of institutions and lineages.

Also studying under Terdak Lingpa was Gyalse Sönam Detsän (*rgyal sras bsod nams lde btsan*, 1679-1723), the son of the famous Degé tertön Longsel Nyingpo (*klong gsal snying po*, 1625-92). Longsel Nyingpo is significant in the history of Katok for his role in elevating the study and practice of terma traditions there, a seminal moment in the ecclesiastical history of Degé.<sup>144</sup> Longsel Nyingpo revealed a Kabgyé cycle, *The Total Gathering of the Sugatas of the Eight Teachings* (*bka' brgyad bde gshegs yongs 'dus*), which became a staple feature of Katok liturgical practice, thanks to the curricular revisions of Getse Mahapandita Gyurme Tsewang Chokdrup (*'gyur med tshe dbang mchog grub*, 1761-1829) in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.<sup>145</sup> The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was, in fact, the first major cycle received by the young Getse at Katok, indicating that it had risen to prominence in the traditionally Kama-

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<sup>143</sup> Alexander Gardner, "The First Dzogchen Drubwang, Pema Rigzin", *Treasury of Lives*. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Dzogchen-Drubwang-01-Pema-Rigdzin/9126>, accessed May, 2019. Also see: *Gu ru bkra shis chos byung*, 766-82.

<sup>144</sup> See: Jann Ronis *Celibacy, Revelations, and Reincarnated Lamas: Contestation and Synthesis in the Growth of Monasticism at Katok Monastery from the 17th through 19th Centuries*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 2009, chpt. 1.

<sup>145</sup> Ronis 2009, 211-25.

oriented institution.<sup>146</sup> The Kabgyé's importance at Katok would thereafter persist, both as a topic of study and as a format for group ritual practices.<sup>147</sup>

Pema Rigzin and Nyima Drakpa eventually returned to Kham, where Pema Rigzin established the community that would later, under the direction of his incarnation Gyurme Tekchok Tendzin (*'gyur med theg mchog bstan 'dzin* 1699-1758), become the great Dzogchen Monastery (*rdzogs chen dgon*). Pema Rigzin putatively became known as the first Dzogchen Drupwang, the progenitor of a lineage that would become one of the main incarnation lines in the major Khampa monasteries. Nyima Drakpa would eschew such grand appointments, but his incarnation line became very influential in Degé. Much like Sogdokpa, Nyima Drakpa was renowned as a ritualist and an expert in war magic, skills which he employed as he defended Degé against hostile forces in the late 1700s.<sup>148</sup> A third Khampa, Rabjam Tenpai Gyaltzen (*zhwa lam rab 'byams bstan pa 'i rgyal mtshan*, b. 1650), had traveled with Pema Rigzin and Nyima Drakpa, and returned to the highlands outside of Degé to establish Shechen Tenyi Dargye Ling (*zhe chen bstan gnyis dar rgyas gling*) monastery in 1695.<sup>149</sup> Each of these masters were known to have received and propagated the Kabgyé, and we can thus see the influence of the *Eight Teachings* in the ritual and scholarly dimensions of institutional life at these Nyingma *ma dgon*.

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<sup>146</sup> Ronis 2009, 173; also, Ngawang Palzang, *Wonderous Dance of Illusion: The Autobiography of Khenpo Ngawang Palzang*. Trans. Heidi L. Nevin and J. Jakob Leschly. Boulder: Snow Lion Publications, 2014, 149.

<sup>147</sup> Katok famously maintained a preference for Kama traditions into the nineteenth century, as Mindroling-trained ritual specialists were invited by Getse Mahapandita to Katok in 1791 to train the community in the practice and study of thirteen Kama mandalas (Ronis 2009, 194). It was later, in the nineteenth century, that the third Katok Situ, Chökyi Gyatso, seems to have more fully infused Katok with Kabgyé study and ritual.

<sup>148</sup> *Gu ru bkra shis chos 'byung*, 820-59, esp. 852-55.

<sup>149</sup> Tenpai Gyaltzen's small monastery, called Ügyen Chödzung, was re-established in 1735 across the valley and named Shechen Tenyi Dargye Ling. Ricard 2001, 7.

Following the destruction of Mindroling by the Dzungar Mongols in 1717, other important lamas, including Terdak Lingpa's son and heir, Gyurme Rinchen Nyamgyal (*'gyur med rin chen rnam rgyal* 1694-1758), were hosted at Katok. But once Mindroling had been re-established as the seat of the Minling line, many lamas travelled there from Eastern and Northeastern Tibet to receive training in Mindroling ritual programs. Significant visitors in this period included Shechen Önrul Thubtop Namgyal (*zhe chen dbon sprul mthu stobs rnam rgyal*, 1787-1854), who trained there for several years before returning to Shechen to work with the ritual master Wangchen Bum (*dbang chen 'bum*) to compose a complete set of ritual manuals, which continue to be utilized by Shechen's affiliate temples in Tibet and Nepal.<sup>150</sup> Shechen Önrul was also a primary teacher of the likes of Jamgön Kongtrül, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Patrul Rinpoche, and the second Katok Situ, Chökyi Lodro. His importance, then, in the propagation of the Nyingma lineage cannot be ignored. Back at Mindroling, Rinchen Namgyal trained the Rebkong lama, Pelden Tashi (*dpal ldan bkra shis* 1688-1743) in the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, which Pelden brought back to Rebkong, bestowing its transmissions and initiating the annual practice of the Kabgyé Great Accomplishment there. This Mindrol *Kabgyé Drupchen* is still practiced annually at the *sgnags pa* stronghold of Rigzin Rabpel Ling.

Between Pema Rigzin, Nyima Drakpa, Rabjam Tenpai Gyaltsen, Longsel Nyingpo, and Rinchen Namgyal, a wave of Nyingma expertise of both Kama and terma varieties flowed to the east, and with it came the Kabgyé world of ritual and practice. The Kabgyé has been a key feature of liturgical and contemplative life at Dzogchen, Katok, Palyul, Rabsel Ling, and Shechen ever since. As late as the twentieth century, Eastern Tibetan lamas proudly claimed to uphold the Mindroling Kabgyé tradition, as seen in the autobiography of Khenpo Ngawang

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<sup>150</sup> Matthieu Ricard, Introduction to *zhe chen lugs srol cho ga'i lag len skor*. New Delhi: Shechen Publications, 2001.

Palzang (*ngag dbang dpal bzang*, 1879-1941), who shares stories of his master, the Third Katok Situ Chökyi Gyatso's (*chos kyi rgya mtsho* 1880-1923) favor of Mindrol-style Kabgyé practice and ritual. The list of teachings that Ngawang Palzang received at Katok from Chökyi Gyatso and Önrul Rinpoche prominently features the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, indicating that it was a bit of a speciality at Katok in this time.<sup>151</sup> The third Katok Situ, Chökyi Gyatso, was the founder of the monastic college at Katok, and was the nephew of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (*'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po* 1820-92), who also practiced and commented upon the Kabgyé, mastery of which he is said to have attained in dream-visions at the hermitage of Dzongshö Deshek Dupa.<sup>152</sup> Likewise, Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Thayè (*'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas* 1813-99) regarded the Kabgyé as one of his main practices, and Kongtrül composed several short daily meditation practices centered on the Kabgyé. Interestingly, Kongtrül specifies that he received his Kabgyé training from the Kagyüpa Zurmang Tulku Garpel (*zur mang sprul sku gar dpal*, a.k.a the *gar dbang sprul sku*), who was in the lineage of Karma Chagme.<sup>153</sup> It should also be noted that one of Jamgön Kongtrül's other principal masters was the first Shechen Önrul, who had established the Kabgyé ritualism at Shechen, where Kongtrül, Khyentse, and Patrul had all studied. So Kongtrül, ever the ecumenist, represented the confluence of two lineages of Kabgyé – that of the Kagyüpas and Nyingmapas – in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>151</sup> Palzang 2014, 154; 139-46.

<sup>152</sup> Düdjom 1991, 858.

<sup>153</sup> Kongtrül 2003, 63.

## **Nyingma Identity Confirmed: *ris med*, scholasticism, revelation, and ritual in Degé**

Before detailing the Kabgyé's role in the specific ecclesiastical developments in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Eastern Tibet, it is appropriate to reflect on the socio-political context of this era, particularly in the Degé Kingdom. I suggest that, as was the case in seventeenth century Ü-Tsang, an environment of contestation and pressure in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Kham stimulated important developments in the institutionalization of the Nyingma denomination, and that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was an important element of the articulation of Nyingma institutional identity in this period.

### **Context: contestation and complexity**

The late eighteenth through early twentieth centuries saw a period in which the Nyingma denomination was forced to secure its identity in the face of multiple pressures, this time in Kham's Degé Kingdom. There is no question that the large Nyingma institutions in the region, such as Katok, Palyul, and Dzogchen, became of sufficient size and stature so as to secure their existence as hubs for learning and practice. However, there was also significant turmoil embroiling the polities to which these monasteries were closely tied.<sup>154</sup> The eighteenth century saw periodic involvement from Qing in the military, political, and economic affairs of certain areas of Kham. In addition, the upstart warlord Gönpo Namgyal (*dgon po rnam rgyal* 1799-1865) of Lower Nyarong began expansionist campaigns in the mid 1800s, resulting in the siege and invasion of Degé and a brief conquest of much of Eastern Kham. Degé appealed to both Lhasa and to the Qing for assistance, and Central Tibetan military forces came to Degé's aid in 1865. These forces from Ü-Tsang succeeded in driving back Nyarong, but then took control of Degé themselves for a period of time before a later perfunctory restoration of Degé rule. Later, in

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<sup>154</sup> See Tsomu (2015) and Phuntshok (2017) for a historical overview of political conflicts in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Degé.

1895, Qing soldiers made their way across the highlands, where they absconded with the Degé king, leaving him to die in a Chengdu prison. Qing eventually withdrew, but a successional dispute between the king's sons left one of them, Denjel Rinchen, to seek refuge in Lhasa, while the prevailing prince ceded the kingdom back to Qing, leaving control of Degé with the Chinese until 1918, after which they temporarily withdrew to attend to turmoil in the east.

Degé was at the forefront, then, of a centuries-long struggle between Lhasa and China to define their mutual borders – something of growing importance to Qing as it began to transform its self-concept from an older model of concentric spheres of imperial influence towards a defined nation-state with definite borders.<sup>155</sup> In the midst of this, Degé and its ecclesiastical leaders strove to maintain autonomy not just for the kingdom, but for the region of Kham altogether. They would do this partially through new religious formats and identities (or, as Robert Campany would describe it, “repertoires” and “imagined communities”).<sup>156</sup> Such ecclesiastical developments included the growth and reformation of major monastic institutions, the formation of new scriptural canons, the development of ecumenical approaches to exegesis and practice (*ris med*), an efflorescence of scripture revelation (*gter ma*), the development of public tantric ritual programs (*sgub chen*), the inception of comprehensive curricula for exegetical study of exoteric and esoteric traditions (*bshad grwa*), and the close involvement of certain luminary masters with the Degé court.

The co-occurrence of these ecclesiastical developments with the political contestations embroiling the Degé Kingdom is probably not accidental. It is plausible that major temples – specifically, those of the Nyingma, Kagyü, and Sakya denominations – sought to secure their

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<sup>155</sup> Gardner 2006, 152

<sup>156</sup> This was accomplished, for example, in Chögyur Lingpa and Jamgön Kongtrül's gazetteer of twenty-five sacred places. As Gardner shows, this map neglects everything having to do with Gelukpa institutions, and was thus essentially a sectarian tool for articulating denominational autonomy through narrative geography.

status in the face of tumultuous circumstances by replicating the institutional formats that had so succeeded in undergirding the Central Tibetan Gelukpa hegemony. Such strategies included the reformation of monasticism and formalized scholastics at places like Katok and Dzogchen, the printing of tantric canons which included materials left out of the *gsar ma's bka'* 'gyur canon, and the development of mass-participation rituals along the lines of Mindroling's seventeenth-century replication of Ganden's ritual festivals. All of these developments mirrored the highly institutionalized practice of Buddhism as it was deployed by the Geluk reform tradition and the Dalai Lama's Ganden Potrang. The Nyingma temples replicated these modes of institutionalized Buddhism, while incorporating their own distinctive traditions by including the study and practice of transmitted and revealed tantric corpora.

Debate continues as to what degree the rise of the era's distinct modes of scholasticism, ritualism, and ecumenism is attributable to the extrinsic threats facing the Degé kingdom. Some, such as Alexander Gardner, suggest that things like the emergence of a newly "ecumenical" (*ris med*, lit. "without bias") approach to exegesis and practice was actually an inter-denominational sectarian response to the growing dominance of the Gelukpa across Eastern Tibet. It is true that Ganden's influence in Kham increased through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as it succeeded in converting several major Eastern Tibetan temples to the Geluk denomination. From this point of view, Nyingma temples in Degé could retain their autonomy by mimicking Central Tibet's powerful institutions, while also advancing new approaches that would project a united front. Gardner points out that *ris med* "ecumenism" was expressly neglectful of Gelukpa tradition, and thus constituted a kind of "non-sectarian sectarianism".<sup>157</sup> Eric Haynie supplements this view with the suggestion that the rhetoric of ecumenism could be broadly

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<sup>157</sup> Gardner 2006, 145.

deployed to support various positions, such as in its use as a political trope that bolstered the Degé king's stature.<sup>158</sup> On the other hand, there is little direct evidence that the reformers and powerful figures of Degé's Nyingma institutions were actively transforming their denomination in the template of, and in response to, Ganden. Thubten Phuntsok insists that developments at Katok, Palyul, and Dzogchen in the nineteenth century had nothing to do with the expansion of the Gelukpa, or the military contests between Lhasa and Qing.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, autobiographical writings of the period's luminaries tend to downplay, or outright ignore, these political problems. It is possible that the great lamas who left behind autobiographical records felt such events to be unimportant next to the pedagogical significance of the details of their religious life-stories. An exception, however, is found in Jamgön Kongtrül's autobiography, which details the delicate ecclesiastical role he was forced to play in ministering to all sides of the conflict: alternatively to the Degé royal family, to its enemy, Gönpö Namgyal, and to Lhasa.<sup>160</sup> Kongtrül recounts the destruction of area temples and the intervening rites – often drawn from the Kabgyé – that he and Chögyur Lingpa were asked to conduct. Luckily, Kongtrül evaded the misfortunes that befell some of his compatriots at the hands of Nyarong or Lhasa.

While all this deserves further scholarly attention, it is undeniable that the region at this time saw an unprecedented flowering not just of innovative religious exegesis, but also of scriptural production, revelation, anthologization, and ritualism. I suggest that the pressures surrounding Degé and its religious institutions – pressures ranging from the military encroachments of Nyarong, Lhasa, and Qing, as well as the expansion of the Geluk denomination everywhere – were indeed contextual factors that would have contributed to the

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<sup>158</sup> Eric Haynie, International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, September, 2018.

<sup>159</sup> Personal communication, October, 2017. Also see: Phuntshok 2017.

<sup>160</sup> Gardner 2006, 147.

period's great efflorescence of religious activity. The era witnessed a suite of coherent institutional developments consisting of newly regularized curricular models, the curation of scriptural canons, and the enfoldment of the landscape into sacralized narratives and rites, all stimulated by contestations embroiling the region on the eve of modernity. The work of luminary Nyingma masters – tremendous literary contributions that emphasized contemplation, learning, and ritual – were indeed in a spirit of “ecumenism” which actually bolstered the stature of the Nyingma in particular. The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was, without a doubt, a central feature of this literary, contemplative, ritual, and visionary world.

We may now turn to the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s place in the specific scholastic, ecclesiastical, and ritual developments in Kham's Nyingma temples of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### **Scholasticism, Ritual, and Revelation**

Just as the revision of Nyingma tradition at Mindroling in the late seventeenth century had marked a newly institutionalized approach for the Nyingma, monastic life and education in Kham in the late 1800s took on an increasingly formalized profile. This ostensibly began with the founding of Dzogchen's Sri Singha shedra in 1842 by Gyaltse Shenpen Thaye (*rgyal sras gzhan phan mtha' yas*, b. 1800), followed by the development of Nyingma scholastic institutions at Katok (f. 1906 by Katok Situ Chökyi Gyatso), and Palyul (f. 1922 by Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang). The Sakya monastic college at Dzongsar was established by Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodro in 1918, and the nearby Kagyü temple and college at Palpung had been active for some time, having been founded in 1727 by Situ Panchen for the study of the “five knowledges”. For the Nyingmapas, Khenpo Shenpen Chökyi Nangwa (*gzhan phan chos kyi snang ba*, a.k.a. Khenpo Shenga, 1871-1927) was also an important curricular innovator in his introduction of

Indian philosophical treatises and annotation commentaries.<sup>161</sup> This is not to suggest that this was the first time that exoteric and esoteric exegetical study was available in the Nyingma Mother Monasteries; there had always been scholastic education available at these monastic hubs. However, perhaps with the exception of Palpung, it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that discrete institutional entities (*bshad grwa*, lit. “ explanation division”, or “exegetical college”) were formed for regularized study.

Curricular standards at the monastic colleges centered on the study of Sutric tradition, and also distinctively Nyingma esoteric studies. Transmitted tantras, as opposed to *terma* cycles, were most important in this context, and so, with the exception of the study of the *Kabgyé Subsequent Tantra* (*bka' brgyad phyi ma'i rgyud*) at Katok, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* itself was generally not present as a matter of exegetical study. However, Mipham's commentary on the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, called *The Essence of Accomplishment: The Explanation of the General Meaning of the Eight Teachings* (the *bka' brgyad kyi spyi don rnam bshad dngos sgrub snying po*, *Kabgyé Namshe* for short), would be utilized as a commentary on the practice of Mahāyoga altogether. In general, Mipham's commentary on the *Secret Nucleus Tantra* would come to be treated as the definitive exegesis on Mahāyoga esoteric doctrine, while the *Kabgyé Namshe* would serve as a key commentary on Mahāyoga self-cultivation and ritual.

Underwriting the new emphasis on scholasticism were the editorial efforts of people like Getse Mahapandita and Jamgön Kongtrül. This period, in general, saw the curation of several canons by which the Nyingma articulated their doctrinal authority. These included the xylographic mass-production at Degé of the *Nyingma Gyubum*, Jamgön Kongtrül's editing of the *Nyingma Kama*, and Kongtrül's assembly of the *Rinchen Terdzö* (*The Precious Treasury of*

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<sup>161</sup> Christopher Hiebert, personal communication, November 2017.

*terma*, an anthology of *gter ma* initiations and practice traditions). In each of these anthologies, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is either included, or provides an organizational template for Mahāyoga materials, attesting to its status as a core feature of the Nyingma literary inheritance. As we will see in our exploration of these anthologies in the next chapter, the inclusion of the Kabgyé and the use of its doxographical formats to organize tantric knowledge in the emergent canons of the Nyingma demonstrates how this scriptural system was leveraged to provide a resource for the ongoing authorship of institutional religious identity as carried out through doxography, narrative imagination, and in ritualized practice.

Nineteenth and twentieth century Kham also witnessed a resurgence of treasure revelation by Nyingma, Kagyü, and Sakya masters. Much of this revelation activity focused on Great Perfection mysticism and related contemplative formats, but Kabgyé contemplation and ritual was also strongly present in the resumés of certain Khampa tertöns. Most prominently, Chögyur Lingpa (*mchog gyur gling pa* 1829-70), Dūdjom Lingpa (*bdud 'joms gling pa* 1834-1904), Nyala Pema Dündul (*nyag bla padma bdud 'dul* 1816-72), and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-92) were able to reveal Kabgyé texts, mostly devoted to tantric meditation practices and exorcistic rituals (*bzlog pa*). Khyentse Wangpo revealed his Kabgyé revelations at the hermitage of Dzongshö Deshek Dupa, the location where Jamgön Kongtrül undertook his compilation of the *Rinchen Terdzö*.<sup>162</sup> The eccentric and prolific Chögyur Lingpa became, despite initial hesitation on their side, a close collaborator with Jamgön Kongtrül and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. The trio, known in Degé as the “Three Jewel Masters” (*mkhyen dkon chog sde gsum*) became the central figures in a flurry of institution-building and priestly activities in

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<sup>162</sup> Matthieu Ricard, preface to the Shechen Edition of the *Rinchen Terdzod Chenmo*, [http://rtz.tsadra.org/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://rtz.tsadra.org/index.php/Main_Page)

Degé throughout the decade of the Nyarong war.<sup>163</sup> In Nyarong itself, Pema Dündul was the progenitor of a terma lineage that proved prolific and influential over several generations. This lineage was even adopted by the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso (*thubs ldan rgya mtsho* 1876-1933), and was, at the same time, celebrated by Nyingmapa luminaries in Degé, such as Jamyang Khyentse and Jü Mipham.

Generally speaking, wrathful heruka iconography and ritualism was at the core of much of the revelation activity of these Tertöns. Pema Dündul's chief disciple, Rangrik Dorje, the first Kusum Lingpa, (*rang rig rdo rje sku gsum gling pa*, 1847-1903) particularly stands out for his massive compendium of Kabgyé-based revelation texts, consisting of nearly one hundred texts and taking up at least two volumes of his revelation corpus.<sup>164</sup> Rangrik Dorje gives thorough treatment to each of the Kabgyé deities, supplying meditation and apotropaic ritual practices for each. The influence of this tertön remains to be determined, but this Kusum Lingpa (not to be confused with the twentieth-century tertön Öyan Kusum Lingpa (d. 2009)) was closely associated with Mindroling: having been invited there from his Nyarong home on the basis of a Nechung Oracle prophecy under the auspices of the 13th Dalai Lama, Kusum Lingpa's son married the daughter of the eighth Minling Trichen, and thus Kusum Lingpa's grandson was enthroned as the ninth abbot of Mindroling. Rangrik Dorje also established the monastery of Lumorab (*klu mo rab dgon*) in the Abse valley of Upper Nyarong, and the monastic college there was, for a time, known as "Mindroling-East". The current temple custodian there, an elderly monk, told me that the *Kabgyé Drupchen* based on Rangrik Dorje's revelations was regularly practiced until the monastic numbers dwindled too much to carry out the complicated rituals.

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<sup>163</sup> Alexander Gardner, "Chögyur Lingpa", *Treasury of Lives*.  
[https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Chokgyur-Dechen-Lingpa/TBRC\\_P564](https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Chokgyur-Dechen-Lingpa/TBRC_P564)

<sup>164</sup> Rang rig rdo rje, *gter chos*, vols. 5, 19, 32, 33.

While Chögyur Lingpa, Düdjom Lingpa, Pema Dündul, Khyentse Wangpo, and Rangrik Dorje all revealed Kabgyé materials in this period, Khyentse Wangpo, Jamgön Kongtrül, and Jü Mipham composed manuals and commentaries for Kabgyé contemplative and ritual practice. The aforementioned Third Katok Situ, Chökyi Gyatso, was a close student of Mipham, as was the fourth Shechen Gyaltsap, Padma Namgyal (*padma nam rgyal*, 1871-1926), and so we get the picture of a network of Kabgyé practice and study between Dzogchen, Katok, Palyul, and the Shechen lamas persisting into the early twentieth century. This is not to say that the Kabgyé was, by any means, the *main* object for study across these institutions and lineages. However, the Kabgyé persistently appears to greater or lesser degrees in the resumés of all these ecclesiasts, and from the way it supplied an organizational rubric for Nyingmapa anthologies, to how it participated in the emergent scholastic curricula, and how it was drawn upon as a source for ritual knowledge, the Kabgyé can certainly be declared to be of central importance to the Nyingma tradition altogether in this period.

### **Summary of the Kabgyé's Reception and Salience**

The Kabgyé tradition was disseminated directly from Nyangrel through his sons and incarnations within Nyingma family lineages, fanning out across not only the Nyingma, but also within Kagyü communities through the fifteenth century. Between Lhoter and Jangter sects, most Nyingmapas and certain Kagyü groups would have been exposed to at least one of the three major Kabgyé cycles. Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje, a disciple of the powerful ritualist Sogdokpa, allegedly redacted the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* into a multi-volume format. The lineal transmission of its ritual and contemplative materials was then solidified through Mindroling, as students of Terdak Lingpa and his successors brought the Kabgyé east and north-east, where it took hold at Dzogchen, Katok, Palyul, Shechen, and at Rebkong. In the late seventeenth century,

we know that Kabgyé training was available at the scholastic center of Mindroling, the ancient practice center of Mawochok in Lhodrak, and through Kagyü lineages. At Mindroling, the performance of Kabgyé rituals was regularized in the Great Accomplishment (*sgrub chen*) format, a move made possible by the curation of the corpus by Gongra two generations prior. It is also known that Terdak Lingpa transmitted the *Eight Teachings* to the Fifth Dalai Lama, and so all lineages but the Sakya would have had exposure to Kabgyé traditions. In the east, the Kabgyé became part of the institutional identity at Dzogchen, Palyul, Shechen, and even at the relatively conservative Katok, and we see certain lamas such as Shechen Öntul, Jamgön Kongtrül, and the Third Katok Situ heavily favoring the Kabgyé contemplative and ritual systems. This all set the stage for its publication at Katok as a well-edited print, likely in the early twentieth century.

I have intended to show that periods in which the *Eight Teachings* cycle was afforded particular attention by Nyingma ecclesiastical figures were ones demanding of the reformation and bolstering of Nyingma identity. From the post-fragmentation period into which Nyangrel Nyima Özer was born, to the tumultuous shuffling of political power in seventeenth century Central Tibet, and in the complexity of nineteenth century Degé, we see Nyingma masters turn to the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* as a resource for defining tradition and strengthening agency. This was accomplished by its curation into a canon of contemplatively-oriented tantras distinctive to the Early Translation style of practice and ritual vocation, and the later formatting of the cycle for use in institutional settings that came to define a newly centralized Nyingma lineage. This solidified the Kabgyé's stature as part of the core identity of Nyingmapas as they commented, anthologized, and ritualized their way towards an increasingly coherent institutional response to pressures in Eastern Tibet. Throughout this history, the Kabgyé has been a source of myth-

history, esoteric knowledge, self-cultivational technique, and ritual technology that adepts have drawn upon again and again in their efforts to carry out authentic tantric practice. I do not suggest that the *Eight Teachings* was somehow the most important cycle in all of Nyingma religiosity. Rather, I have intended to point out a pattern of use and accretion wherein this cycle has been turned to in times of contestation and reformation.

To what shall we ascribe this pattern? Let us recall that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was an early collation of materials reflecting the kinds of practices maintained by Early Translation communities through the period of fragmentation. This collation emerged in the context of pressure from neo-conservatives, competition between aristocrat-backed monastic institutions, and tantric communities heralding ever-new contributions to Tibetan Tantra. The Early Translation communities were certainly in a defensive position of having to proffer something to compete with new scriptural imports and to fend off critics. The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* fit this bill. As we will see in Part Two, the very notion of collation (*'dus pa*, to “assemble”) takes on a multivalent significance within the cycle’s literature, and some of the cycle’s root texts emphasize bibliography as a key component in a myth-history that defines the authority of this system and the Early Translation tradition altogether. In addition, the Kabgyé celebrated a mode of ritualism – specifically wrathful, apotropaic, and material – that reflected the vocational predilection of adepts like Nyangrel. While lay ritualists were affiliated with every Buddhist denomination in Tibet, the Nyingmapa were always strongly associated with lay tantric practice, and Nyingma “mantrins” (*sngags pa*) have long been called upon to ritually intercede with harms of all kinds. Additionally, the Kabgyé mythos and praxis implicates a distinctively Tibetan cast of characters: the Eight Classes of Gods and Spirits. Incorporating these entities into the foundational myths and practices of this Mahāyoga cycle was an important step in the

assimilation of tantric Buddhism, and the production of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* participated in Nyangrel's efforts to author Nyingma history and define the parameters of a Buddhist adepthood to include harm-averting ritual practice. Thus, we get in the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* an unparalleled resource authorizing Early Translation practice and advancing a vision for that denomination's identity via recourse to a specific brew of myth, history, doctrine, and mastery. The *Kabgyé* made an immediate impact, and did not take long to stand as a central feature of the core curriculum of the training of Nyingma adepts.

Not all cycles enjoyed such continuous longevity for the Nyingmapa. As Dalton shows, *Gathering of Intentions Sutra* was once valued for its doctrinal formulations, only later to be transformed into a ritual-only offering. The *Kabgyé* also transformed over time, gaining increasingly thick layers of ritual materials. But it never really waned from view, and was always one of the treasures to which Nyingmapas have turned. This is attributable to the way that the *Deshek Dupa* participated in a wider narrative and imaginal world established by Nyangrel Nyima Özer in his architecture of Early Translation practice. The *Kabgyé*, according to its own history, was one of the main inheritances from Padmasambhava, and thus stands out as something with direct ties to a golden age in which this kind of tantrism was at the center of Tibet's conversion. This is a story curated by Nyangrel, and one in which he emplots himself and his community at the center of a recursive sacred history with profound significance for the advancement of Buddhism altogether. Practice of the *Kabgyé* recalls the activities at the heart of this conversion, and, as a revealed treasure (*gter*), implicitly recalls the imaginal presence of empire with its divine lord and priest. Also, in its resonance with indigenous Tibetan ritual culture, the *Kabgyé* marked a contribution to the hybridization of Buddhism in Tibet, and its distinctively wrathful imaginaire served to advance a specific approach to Buddhist practice. One

can only imagine the empowerment that such materials would provide adepts whose very way of life was under attack by conservative voices, whether of the Gugé or Ganden ilk. The *Kabgyé* amplifies the very modes of tantrism decried by ecclesiastical rivals, and so the cycle makes a daring statement about the properties and authenticity of Nyingma religiosity.

I suggest that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s impact was mediated by its distinctive literary qualities. As our analysis of the cycle's foundational narratives, tantras, and rituals in Part Two will demonstrate, unique buddhologies, narrative tropes, and ritual idioms supplied a potent imaginal world with which Nyingmapas could engage, effectuating articulations of identity and configurations of agentive subjectivity that were particularly salient for practitioners in the contexts described above. Before delving into the world of these texts, however, an account of the *Deshek Dupa*'s publication history will complete the picture of the *Kabgyé*'s reception in Tibet.

### Chapter Three: A Publication History

Despite the regularizing claims of tradition, a scriptural cycle such as the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is sure to endure significant change over centuries of life in diverse institutions. While the lore surrounding Buddhist terma revelation suggests that cycles are retrieved in their entirety, always remaining whole and unadulterated, well-known patterns of accretion and editorial agency in Tibetan Buddhism ensure that a major cycle such as the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* would have undergone many transformations. What may have originally been a collection of manuscripts recovered or received by Nyangrel in Lhodrak (something like the fifteen foundational tantras, five teachings, and sundry practices and oral instructions) was subsequently reproduced by hand in the context of temple life within related thirteenth and fourteenth-century Early Translation communities. These manuscribal reproductions likely accreted further devotional, ritual, and self-cultivational materials. By the time Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje curated his edition of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* in the mid-seventeenth century (if he indeed did so), many ritual texts representing sub-traditions from localized settings may have been included. We do not, at this point, have direct literary evidence for what it was that Gongra compiled. But it seems that efforts such as Gongra's reflected an increasingly coherent and comprehensive sense of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s place in Nyingma tradition. By the fourteenth century, and perhaps from the very beginning, the *Kabgyé* was thought of as a rubric for the overall organization of Mahāyoga tradition, and as the source for a wide variety of doctrines and practices deemed related in content and origin. Thus, the *Kabgyé* came to stand as a corpus representing the very origins and logic of Mahāyoga tantrism, and its inclusion in the great Nyingma anthologies reflects this evolving conception of its significance.

In lieu of complete textual evidence, our picture of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s development will be somewhat circumstantial, but does accord with well-known patterns of textual proliferation in Tibetan Buddhism. In proceeding with a publication history, we will commence with a look at what are now widely regarded as the definitive editions of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle. These massive editions, which circulate in Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal, do not necessarily represent the Kabgyé as Nyangrel produced it, but rather reflect what must have been centuries of accretions, rearrangements, and collations, particularly of ritual materials. We will also look at related literature, specifically an assortment of major ritual cycles, and also at the Kabgyé's inclusion in important Nyingma anthologies, to get a general picture for how the Kabgyé was treated as a literary body. Most of this literary evidence will be from the seventeenth century onwards; after all, it is with Mindroling that the corpus was leveraged as part of a newly emergent vision of the Nyingma as a coherent and institutionalized tradition. The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was certainly a key element of this vision.

### **The Kabgyé Dharma Cycles**

What is now widely accepted by Nyingmapas to represent the complete body of Nyangrel's *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is a thirteen-volume collection of historical, doctrinal, contemplative, and ritual materials, totaling over 8,000 folio sides. This survives in two major iterations: a xylograph that was once in the possession of Dūdjom Jikdral Yeshe Dorje (1904-87), and published in Gangtok by Sonam Topgay Kazi in 1978 as part of his Nyingma anthology series (hereafter, "the Katok"), and a manuscript edition from Tsamdrak (*mtshams 'brag*) in Bhutan, also in 13 volumes (the "Tsamdrak").<sup>165</sup> The editors' preface to Tsamdrak claims that

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<sup>165</sup> **Katok:** *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*. Ngagyur nyingmay sungrab series, v. 75-87. Gangtok: Sonam Topgay Kazi, 1978; **Tsamdrak:** *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*. Paro: Ngodrup, 1980.

these share descent from one printed at Katok Dorje Den (or perhaps at nearby Gajé (*dga' rje*)), which was itself derived from the editorial efforts of Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje in the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>166</sup> This claim of descent from Gongra is tenuous, as little internal publication data exist in either collection. This attribution is stated in the colophons of several texts included in the Tsamdrak, and may also have come from Düdjom himself.<sup>167</sup> However, I have yet to find any other primary sources suggesting a connection between Gongra and the curation of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. At any rate, I date the publication of the Katok xylograph to have been sometime in the early twentieth century or late nineteenth century. Accounts from Khenpo Ngawang Palzang, Jamgön Kongtrül, and Getsé Mahapandita all refer to a nine-volume edition with which they worked through the late nineteenth century. Kongtrül mentions that this edition had been published at Degé, and a nine-volume manuscript recently digitized by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center at Chengdu (the “Chengdu”) may indeed represent this nine-volume edition.<sup>168</sup> Thus, it would have been after the time of these masters (or perhaps during the later career of Ngawang Palzang) that the Katok thirteen-volume edition was created. There was a printing house at Katok, which the Third Katok Situ, Chökyi Gyatso, utilized in bolstering the literary holdings of the monastery and monastic college there in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A little before Chökyi Gyatso’s tenure, Jamgön Kongtrül does mention a “newly codified” *Deshek Dupa* for which he and Chögyur Lingpa performed the associated

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<sup>166</sup> Tsamdrak, vol. 1 preface

<sup>167</sup> For example, the colophon to Tsamdrak’s *zhi ba ‘dus pa’i rgyud* highlights the role of Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje in this text’s transmission history. Tsamdrak: *bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i chos skor*, vol. 3, 75.

<sup>168</sup> Kongtrul 2003, p 217, 283. **Chengdu:** *bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa* (TBRC W2PD20239). Analysis of this edition shows that it is closely related to the Katok, and so may represent the nine-volume *bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa* that preceded the thirteen-volume edition.

*sgrub chen* rites in 1867.<sup>169</sup> Whether this refers to the thirteen volume edition, I cannot tell, but, given the Third Katok Situ's editorial initiatives and his evident favor for the Kabgyé, I am inclined to date the publication of the Katok xylograph to be in the very early twentieth century.

It is tempting to presume that the Katok edition was the parent to the Tsamdrak, as many Bhutanese masters were known to have come to Katok to receive training throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But there are some major differences between the contents of the two thirteen-volume editions: The Tsamdrak contains multiple versions of tantras, and some tantras that do not appear at all in the Katok, making for a larger number of foundational tantras in the edition. Also, quite notably, the Tsamdrak does not contain the *Stainless Proclamations* (*dri ma med pa rgya can*) biography of Nyangrel, and also lacks the cycle's auto-history, *The Manner Arising of the Kabgyé Teachings* (the *bka' brgyad bka' byung tshul*). The Tsamdrak also contains significantly fewer supplementary rituals, particularly of the apotropaic variety. In some ways, the Tsamdrak seems to be more coherently organized around genres, and is more comprehensive in its inclusion of variants of the main tantras, and may thus have been an editorial refinement of the Katok edition, curated for ease of use as a comprehensive reference manual in institutional settings. On the other hand, as a manuscript, the Tsamdrak is more prone to spelling errors, which I have especially observed in the ritual texts. This is expected, given that the Tsamdrak is a manuscript. The Tsamdrak does include the *Clear Mirror* biography, suggesting that its editors may have eschewed what was the less-normative revelation narratives found in *The Stainless Proclamations* and *The Arising*. These differences deserve further appraisal, as their analysis may uncover distinct rescensional lines and sub-denominational communities with different notions of what constituted valid revelation activity.

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<sup>169</sup> Kongtrül 2003, 147.

Also from Bhutan is a ten-volume edition which has been digitized under the supervision of Dr. Karma Phuntso for the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme.<sup>170</sup> These manuscripts, of varying quality and orthographic style, were recently discovered and photographed at Phurdruk Gompa (*phur sgrub dgon*) near Thimpu, and are roughly dated to be from between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. This edition bears similarity to the Tsamdrak in the selection and order of texts, although it is much more modest in scale, particularly in terms of the inclusion of ritual materials. It may be the case that the Tsamdrak edition was an expansion of this one, or its recensional family. Whether this ten-volume edition is related to the nine-volume manuscript from Kham would be a very worthwhile question to explore, as it may reveal something about the history of exchange between Degé and Bhutan in the eighteenth century or before.

Another edition of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is a manuscript preserved at the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives in Dharamsala.<sup>171</sup> At four volumes, this one is much more modest than the Katok corpus, and contains fewer supplementary ritual materials. This edition claims to have been delivered to India by one Lama Kunzang, who hailed from the Kyirong (*skyid grong*) region to the southwest of Lhasa. The Kyirong edition lacks many of the ritual, commentarial, and historiographical texts included in both the larger editions, and most of its self-cultivational rituals (*sgrub thabs* and *las byang*) have no analogue in the Katok and Tsamdrak. Also included in the Kyirong (and absent from the others) is a collection of biographies of the six genetic and lineal descendents of Nyangrel, the "Nyang Princes", who served as abbots of Mawochok; a praise text for the region of Lhodrak, and a short biography of

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<sup>170</sup> **Phurdruk:** *bka' brgayd bde gshegs 'dus pa*. London: British Library Endangered Archive Programme, EAP 310/3. <https://eabl.uk/collection/EAP310-3-1> (accessed July 18, 2019).

<sup>171</sup> **Kyirong:** *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*. Dalhousie, H.: Damchoe Sangpo, 1977-78.

Tsele Natsok Rangdrol (*rtse le sna tshogs rang grol*, b.1608), the Kagyü-Nyingma adept hailing from Kongpo. These features suggest that this edition may represent a different recensional lineage than Gongra's – in this case, a lineage centered to the south of Lhasa and involving Kagyü-Nyingma practitioners. If this is true, then the contents of this corpus *may* represent the tradition prior to its regularization by Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje in the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>172</sup>

### **Katok**

As previously mentioned, Gongra took it upon himself to edit several collections at the Ngesang Dorje Ling scriptorium in the mid 1600s, resulting in the production of a proto-*Nyingma Gyubum*, an edition of the *Seventeen Esoteric Instruction Tantras*, and the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*.<sup>173</sup> His curatorial work thus encompassed the “transmitted” (Kama, *bka' ma*) tradition, Great Perfection mysticism, and Mahāyoga revelations, and perhaps gives us a sense for what Gongra and his milieu thought of as the “core-curriculum” of the Early Translation school. The modern introduction to the Tsamdrak edition of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* claims descent from Katok, and from Gongra before, presumably by way of Mindroling. We have to take this claim at face value, since there are no materials within these corpora beyond terse colophonic statements relating the specific editorial history of the collection.

The thirteen-volume edition is certainly more voluminous than the corpus that, one way or another, came to Nyangrel in 1150. The *Clear Mirror* biography puts the number of Kabgyé

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<sup>172</sup> It is worth noting that Tsele Natsok Rangdrol was a student of Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje, and possibly did receive training in the Kabgyé from him. However, the Kyirong edition of the *Deshek Dupa* bears little enough resemblance to the Katok and Tsamdrak that I proceed with the hypothesis that it represents a different recension.

<sup>173</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, the claim that Gongra accomplished all three of these editorial tasks is not found in any single account. Rather, different sources credit him with different editorial accomplishments, and so we do not know if he truly managed such a remarkable undertaking. It is clear, however, that he was a major figure in his day, as according to the concern that he garnered in the mind of the fifth Dalai Lama. We also know that Ngesang Dorje Ling was a significant temple, as it was converted by order of the Dalai Lama following Gongra's death.

texts recovered by Nyangrel at 130, and the cycle's auto-history, *The Arising of the Kabgyé Teachings*, mentions 140 ancillary teachings (*chos kyi cha lag*). In contrast, the thirteen-volume Katok edition contains 236 individual texts, all marked with *gter tsheg*, and including similar (but not uniform) colophonic revelation accounts. They mostly purport to be treasure texts taught by Padmasambhava (generally, *rgya gar gyi mkhan po slob dpon chen po padma 'byung gnas*), requested, translated, and arranged by Vairotsana (*bod kyi lo tsa ba bdag be ro tsa nas bsgur cing zhus te gtan la phab pa*), belonging to Tri Song Detsen (*rgyal po bla phyag dpe*), and concealed as treasure for the benefit of future generations (*phyi rabs don du gter du sbas*). In general, no mention is made of Khoting, Nyangrel, or any role for Padmasambhava's consort, Yeshe Tsögyal, whom later tradition credits with concealing virtually all of Padmasambhava's Treasure Teachings. We may also note the discrepancy in the attribution of translation: the texts' colophons generally state that Vairotsana was the translator/transcriber, while *The Arising* specifies Denma Tsemang. This is the only mention of Denma Tsemang that I have seen in Kabgyé materials, but does conform to other accounts of Padmasambhava's teaching activity, such as those found in Ögyan Lingpa's *Five Chronicles* (*bka' thang sde lnga*) revelations. It seems, then, that the colophons represent normative ideas about Padmasambhava's treasure-concealing career, consistently advancing stock narrative statements to normatively authenticate these revelation scriptures.

Unacknowledged expansion of a cycle with inserted materials following its original dissemination is absolutely consistent with patterns of Tibetan literary production, and many materials could have been added to the cycle by well-intentioned exegetes and adepts over time. These appended texts might have been incorporated and considered to be original components of the corpus by the power of association, by well-meaning editorial slight-of-hand, or even

according to the custom that materials with deeply commensurate content could be considered essentially connected to the original textual body.<sup>174</sup> Given the fact that Gongra and his milieu, like Nyangrel, were professionals in the execution of harm-averting rituals, it would be no surprise if the many apotropaic rites included in the Gongra-based redactions of the cycle were ones that had become associated with the corpus at the hands of ritualists in Gongra's lineage over several centuries. Since his works were destroyed by order of the Fifth Dalai Lama, we can unfortunately retrieve nothing about Gongra's editorial process itself, and we are left to wonder whether, in the manner of contemporary attempts to reconstruct and enlarge the *Nyingma Kama*, he or his entourage scoured central Tibet in search of scattered Kabgyé texts which he then united to constitute a revived *Deshek Dupa*, or whether his edition simply entailed the publication of a coherent body that Gongra had received wholesale from someone like Sogdokpa. I suspect the former to be the case, and it is unfortunate that we have no window into Gongra's adventures in pulling together his edition. However, attending to the accretion of new ritual materials is important, for, as Dalton points out, the addition of new ritual materials often addresses perceived gaps between ancient texts and lived tradition.<sup>175</sup>

At any rate, the Katok blockprint, owned by Dūdjom Rinpoche, was obtained by Sonam Topgay Kazi, who published it in Sikkim in 1978 as part of his Nyingma anthology series. Based on stylistic evidence such as differences in carving style and decorative features, it appears that there were four or five separate bodies of printed texts that were assembled for this complete edition, with specific print and layout styles tending to correlate to specific genres and topics. We might suppose, then, that there were several bodies of Kabgyé block prints – each associated

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<sup>174</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 101-02; Cantwell and Mayer 2010.

<sup>175</sup> Dalton 2016, xv.

with specific doctrinal, ritual, or exegetical purposes – that were newly conglomerated for this overall edition. This conglomeration presumably happened at the Katok printery, perhaps under the direction of the Third Katok Situ, Chökyi Gyatso (1880-1923) or his immediate successors.

This Third Katok Situ, Chökyi Gyatso, was nephew and close student of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, and a disciple of Jamgön Mipham, and made great efforts to bolster academics at Katok by revitalizing the library and printing house there.<sup>176</sup> Katok Situ's principal disciple, Khenpo Ngawang Palzang (*ngag dbang dpal bzang*, a.k.a., Khenpo Ngakchung, 1879-1941), mentions his master's preference for Kabgyé rituals, and how he received many Kabgyé transmissions after first arriving at Katok.<sup>177</sup> In this context, Ngawang Palzang reports that he received the reading transmission of a nine-volume *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. This agrees with Jamgön Kongtrül's account of working with a nine-volume edition, allegedly published out of Degé.<sup>178</sup> There is also mention of a nine-volume Kabgyé in a list of Katok's current library holdings from a 1995 survey.<sup>179</sup>

A newly digitized nine-volume *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* manuscript has recently emerged from Kham, processed for the Buddhist Digital Resource Center out of Chengdu. I have not yet been able to learn about the origin of this manuscript, but an analysis of its contents reveals that it closely resembles the organization and specific contents of the Katok xylograph. Notably, this edition includes the *Stainless Proclamations (dri ma med pa rgya can)* biography

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<sup>176</sup> Jan Ronis, *Katok Monastery* THL Place Dictionary, 2010. <http://places.thlib.org/features/17421/descriptions/239>

<sup>177</sup> Palzang 2014, 149.

<sup>178</sup> Kongtrül 2003, 217, 283.

<sup>179</sup> *Dkar mdzes khul gyi dgon sde so so'i lo rgyus gsal bar bshad pa*, Beijing: krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1995. See: vol. 3, pp. 122-124 for a catalog of Katok's literary holdings.

of Nyangrel, which is otherwise only found in the Katok xylograph. However, the nine-volume manuscript does not include *The Arising* (*bka' byung tshul*) auto-history. The absence of this text from the Chengdu, and also the Tsamdrak, is puzzling, as *The Arising* was clearly an important text in the early Kabgyé tradition, and supplies the vital historical narratives tying this cycle to its origins in India. At any rate, the organization of materials in Chengdu is otherwise quite similar to the Katok's, and I would aver that the Katok xylograph is an expansion of this nine-volume edition. It is, quite possibly, the very redaction referred to by our Eastern Tibetan sources.

The thirteen-volume Katok corpus must therefore have been published at the very end of the nineteenth century, or in the first decades of the twentieth, after the time of Kongtrül and Palzang, and was likely an expansion of the nine-volume version. It is conceivable that this was overseen by an elderly Chökyi Gyatso, or by his successors. It is clear that the massive Katok version was a conglomeration of xylographs, organized to be a comprehensive sourcebook for Kabgyé knowledge. The processes of its accretion of ritual and commentarial materials likely resembled Gongra's similar curation three and a half centuries before.

## Contents

The specific contents of the thirteen-volume Katok edition can be summarized as follows.

Volume 1: Hagiography of Nyangrel Nyima Özer (the *dri ma med pa*), exegetical commentary by Ngari Panchen (*'chad thabs nyi zla mun sel khor lo*), auto-history (*bka' brgyad bka' byung tshul*) and lineage supplication, Root Tantra (*bka' brgyad rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po*) and Subsequent Tantras (*phyi ma rgyud* and *sngags rgyud phyi ma'i phyi ma rgyud*), Amendment Tantra (*ma tshang ba kha skong ba'i rgyud*), mantra manual, and a Kabgyé narrative bibliography (*dkar chag gsal ba'i sgron me*) [9 texts]

Volume 2: Differentiated Tantra (*rgyud rab tu 'byed pa*), Deshek Dupa Tantra (*bde ghegs 'dus pa 'i rgyud*),<sup>180</sup> Peaceful Deity Tantra, and Chemchok Tantra [4 texts]

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<sup>180</sup> This *bde gshegs 'dus pa rgyud* goes by several aliases, as noted in the internal subtitle for this text. Specifically: the *zhi khro 'dus pa'i rgyud*, *'byed par 'byed pa lde 'u par mig gi rgyud*, *bder gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud*, *ngos grub gter gyi rgyud*, or the *dpal kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa bkod pa'i mdo*. I suggest that this text, which is included as a miscellaneous item in major redactions of the Nyingma Gyubum, may represent the transmitted *bka' brgyad* said to have circulated prior to Nyangrel's revelation.

- Volume 3: Tantras of Yangdak, Shinje, Tamdrin, Phurba, Mamo Bötong, Jigten Chötö, and Möpa Drangak; commentarial teachings (*lung*) [9 texts]
- Volume 4: Commentarial texts [7 texts]
- Volume 5: Meditation and rituals associated with the 100 peaceful and wrathful Mahāyoga deities, including funerary rites and mandala construction [16 texts]
- Volume 6: Meditations and rituals associated with the 42 peaceful deities; deity yoga manuals [15 texts]
- Volume 7: Deity yoga liturgies of varying lengths [11 texts]
- Volume 8: Initiation rituals and medicinal/alchemy (*bdud rtsi sman sgrub*) rites [10 texts]
- Volume 9: Longevity and funerary rites; apotropaic practices (designated “wrathful play”, *khro bo rol ba*), [11 texts]
- Volume 10: Harm-averting and sorceristic rites: libation offerings (*gser skyems*), summoning (*bskul ba*), cursing (*dmod pa*), repelling (*bzlog pa*), impalement (*gzer ka*), effigy sacrifice (*gtor bzlog*), and “liberation” (*sgrol ba*) [34 texts]
- Volume 11: Offering, praise, and confessional liturgies [14 texts]
- Volume 12: Wrathful meditation liturgies and practices (*khro bo rol pa: las byang, bskyed rim, mchod pa*); essential instructions (*man ngag*), and praise texts (*bstod pa*) [30 texts]
- Volume 13: Repelling rites and summoning rituals involving wrathful garuda (*khyung*) and demons (*srin mo*), and other sorceristic rites [49 texts]

Total texts: 236 Total folio sides: 8,660

The corpus is massive. Not only does it entail distinct tantras for each of the nine deities, including root, supplementary, and commentarial tantras and teachings, it also provides a collation of hundreds of contemplative and ritual materials, leaving no aspect of Mahāyoga tantrism unaddressed. At a glance, one can discern that the overarching emphasis of the corpus is distinctively wrathful. Beyond the eight wrathful herukas and their liturgies, we find dozens of sorceristic rites that involve summoning, cursing, impaling, sacrificing, and repelling of

obstructive forces. In general, these rituals are characterized by the texts' subtitles as "wrathful play" (*khro bo rol pa*), which can be interpreted as the compassionate activity of "destruction" (*drag po'i phrin las* – the "enlightened activity of wrath"). Volumes Nine, Ten, Twelve, and Thirteen entail almost exclusively this kind of material, in 115 separate texts. However, we should also note that the corpus is not exclusively wrathful and thaumaturgical: there is an entire volume devoted to the mandala of Peaceful Deities drawn from the Peaceful/Wrathful (*zhi khro*) deity complex of the *Magical Emanation* tantras.<sup>181</sup> This shows the intended concordance of this cycle with the Mahāyoga esoteric traditions of the first dispensation, specifically those of the *Māyājāla* (*Magical Emanation*) genre. This is significant if we wish to understand Nyangrel's intention to curate a practice-oriented Mahāyoga corpus that, while offering something novel in its scale and its inclusion of distinctively Tibetan elements, also cohered with the prominent texts in this category inherited from India.

Again, we ought to note the discrepancy between the wide scope of this edition and the more modest (yet still voluminous) size that the source texts suggest the initial revelation entailed. *The Clear Mirror* states that Nyangrel retrieved 130 texts in two caskets "from the back of" (*rgyab nas*) the Vairocana statue in the Khoting temple.<sup>182</sup> The *Stainless Proclamations* biography says that Nyangrel was given the "twenty 'bde gshegs pa' tantras and teachings" in seven volumes by Lama Rashak.<sup>183</sup> *The Arising* states that the "branch teachings" consisted of a total of 140 texts. While we cannot know what Nyangrel actually retrieved or produced, an

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<sup>181</sup> Interestingly, some funerary rituals are included in the volumes dealing with the peaceful and wrathful deities, suggesting continuity with (or antecedence of) the *bar do* genre exemplified by Karma Lingpa's 14th-century *bar do thos grol* revelation.

<sup>182</sup> *The Clear Mirror*, 342.1-4

<sup>183</sup> *The Stainless Proclamations*, 92.4-5; Hirshberg 2016,100.

exploration of references to Kabgyé materials over time does yield the picture that the core corpus always entailed the fifteen tantras, five teachings (*lung lnga*), and a selection of contemplative practices and tantric rites pertaining to the main deities of the Kabgyé mandala.<sup>184</sup> What remains to be known is whether the overwhelming abundance of thaumaturgical and apotropaic rites seen in this Katok corpus reflect what Nyangrel revealed so many centuries earlier, were composed by Nyangrel himself, or represent the accreted compositions of Nyangrel's lineal heirs, who devoted themselves to packaging and disseminating Nyangrel's *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* revelation. It is true that Nyangrel was a thaumaturge himself, a ritual professional specializing in demon-taming and harm-aversion. It is also said that his revelation activity included the retrieval of sorceristic ritual implements from the earth.<sup>185</sup> It is thus probable that some of the thaumaturgic and apotropaic texts in this cycle at least represent Nyangrel's general orientation to ritual practice. However, the discrepancy in contents between *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions, as well as the propensity to associate the Kabgyé with broader categories of tantric doctrine and scripture over time, suggests that there has been a long history of accretions of Kabgyé-type practices that may not have been present in the initial revelations. This accretion is entirely consistent with patterns of textual proliferation within revelation tradition. As Hirshberg observes:

...treasure cycles typically acquire many supplementary texts over the course of their transmission, and so expand considerably beyond the original compeniums. In many respects this is of necessity, as the pithy foundations of a cycle may lack much of the ritual and commentarial architecture to support and transmit it: mythologies of the cycle's origins, rites for the initiation of devotees, elaborate deity yoga sadhanas for intensive solitary retreat and regular group practice,

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<sup>184</sup> These core texts of the cycle are listed in the *bka' byung tshul*, Ngari Panchen's '*chad thabs*, in the cycles' internal *dkar chag*, and in Orgyan Lingpa's *bka' thang sde lnga* revelation. There are some discrepancies in these bibliographies, but the central features appear identically across these sources.

<sup>185</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 128.

rituals to effect mundane objectives and enhance soteriological accomplishment, as well as commentarial advice for any of these - all can become integrated and transmitted within a single treasure cycle. In some instances later revealers introduce such supplements from their own finds; others are simply authored but often acquire treasure status through their transmission with and function within the larger cycle...post-recovery creative emendation was part and parcel of treasure recovery for Nyangrel rather than some disingenuous process of fabrication that was considered entirely distinct from it.<sup>186</sup>

## **Tsamdrak**

The Tsamdrak manuscript claims to be derived from the redaction of Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje and the Katok xylograph. Like Katok's, it entails a variety of styles, layouts, and orthography, but this is unsurprising given that it is a manuscript edition, necessarily requiring the work of many different hands. The Tsamdrak collection is smaller than the Katok, at 150 texts over 7,484 folio pages. But the range of materials is similar, with several of the volumes being almost identical between the two editions. However, several major differences will be worth our attention, as described below.

## **Contents**

- Volume 1: Root Tantras (2 variants: *rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po* and *bde bar gshegs pa rtsa ba'i rgyud* in twenty chapters), Subsequent Tantras (*phyi ma'i rgyud* and two variations of the *gsangs kyi rgyud phyi ma'i phyi ma rgyud*), Amendment Tantra (*ma tshang ba kha bskong ba'i rgyud*) and the Differentiated Tantra (here called the '*byed par byed pa lde mig gi rgyud*, in seventeen chapters divided into peaceful and wrathful sections)
- Volume 2: Deshek Dupa "Key" Tantra (*'byed par byed pa lde mig gi rgyud*, a.k.a. *Zhi khro gnyis pa 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud* – a variant of the *bde gshegs 'dus pa rgyud* in sixty-seven chapters), Nyangrel hagiography (the *gsal ba'i me long*), Namkha Pel hagiography, siddha Hagiographies (*grub thob gi rnam thar*).
- Volume 3: Peaceful, Chemchok, Yangdak, Shinje, Tamdrin, Phurba, mamo, Rigzin, and Jigten Chötö Tantras
- Volume 4: Möpa Drangak Tantra, Five Secret Mantra Teachings (*gsang sngags lung lnga*)

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<sup>186</sup> Hirshberg 2016, 102.

- Volume 5: Hundred Peaceful - Wrathful Deity rituals (e.g., *gtor ma*, *dkyil 'khor*, *mchod pa*, *sbyin sregs*)
- Volume 6: Meditation and essential instructions on Peaceful Deities (*sgrub thabs*, *bsgom rim*, *las byang*)
- Volume 7: Deity yogas of varying lengths (*bskyed rdzogs chen mo*, *'bring po*, *chung ngu*; *las byang*)
- Volume 8: Deity yoga practices (*bsgom thabs*, *sgrub thabs*, *bsnyen pa'i bsgrub pa*) and medicinal alchemy (*bdud rtsi sman bsgrub*)
- Volume 9: Empowerment and longevity rituals
- Volume 10: Wrathful rituals and essential instructions (*sbyin sregs*, *bzlog pa*, *gzer ka*, *dmod pa*)
- Volume 11: Apotropaic rites: repelling, effigy sacrifice, impalement, summoning (*gtor bzlog*, *bzlog pa*, *bsreg pa*, *gzer ka*, *bskongs ba*)
- Volume 12: Miscellaneous praise (*bstod pa*) and meditation texts
- Volume 13: Empowerments, protector liturgies
- Total Texts: 150 Folio sides: 7,484

Both the Tsamdrak and Katok editions unfold over 13 volumes, and share a general structure entailing the placement of the foundational tantras, hagiographies, and mytho-historical materials at the beginning of the collection, followed by self-cultivational and apotropaic ritual texts in the final volumes. But the specific order of these materials, as well as the titles and subtitles of some of the root texts, varies widely between the editions. The Tsamdrak includes variants of texts in what seems to be an attempt to collate multiple versions of *Deshek Dupa* tantras in circulation. Included are two versions of the *King of Root Tantras*: the *rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po* in eighteen chapters, and the *bde bar gshegs pa rtsa ba'i rgyud le'u nyi zhu pa* in twenty chapters. There are also two versions of the *Subsequent Tantra*: the *nges par 'byung ba phyi ma'i rgyud* and the *phyi ma'i rgyud le'u bcu dgu pa*, and the *Subsequent-Subsequent*

*Tantra*: the *phyi ma phyi ma'i rgyud le'u nyi shu rtsa lnga pa*, and the *phyi ma'i phyi ma sngags kyi rgyud*. The *Differentiated Tantra* is here called the *'byed par byed pa lde mig gi rgyud*, which is given in two texts, pertaining to the peaceful and wrathful deities, respectively; while a *'byed par byed pa lde mig gi rgyud le'u drug cu rtsa bdun pa* (alias *zhi khro gnyis pa 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*) corresponds to the *Deshek Dupa Key Tantra* of the Katok collection. We see, then, that the Tsamdrak edition collates versions of the five foundational tantras of the cycle with differing lengths and layouts, even retaining duplicated titles between two unrelated texts. Rather than including variants in the manner of Tsamdrak, the Katok edition regularizes the collection, and uses subtitles to suggest other titles by which a text might be known.<sup>187</sup>

The Tsamdrak additionally includes *The Clear Mirror* biography of Nyangrel, and not the less-normative *Stainless Proclamations*. This leads me to conclude either that *The Stainless Proclamations* circulated (or was stored somewhere) in Eastern Tibet alone, or that the editors of Tsamdrak replaced it with the more normative *Clear Mirror*. Also notable is the absence of the cycle's auto-history, *The Arising of the Kabgyé Teachings*, which appears at the beginning of the Katok edition. Similarly missing is the revealed Kabgyé bibliography, *The Clear Lamp, A Table of Contents* (*dkar chag gsal ba'i sgron me*), which is included in Katok's Volume One. These texts both give us a catalogue of all sorts of Mahāyoga materials, typologized in a Kabgyé rubric and couched in the mytho-historical narrative of the cycle's origins in India. It is thus somewhat surprising that these are absent from Tsamdrak (and also from the Chengdu, and the Kyirong edition detailed below).

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<sup>187</sup> For example, the *bsgrub pa bka' brgyad 'dus pa'i rgyud* in Katok is sub-titled with a list of alternate titles by which this or similar text might be known: *zhi khro 'dus pa'i rgyud ces 'ang bshad/ 'byed par 'byed pa lde 'u par mig gi rgyud ces bya ba bzung/ bder gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud/ dngos grub gter gyi rgyud/ dpal kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa bkod pa'i mdo*. This is the text that I refer to as the *Deshek Dupa Tantra* and which, I argue, may have been received by Nyangrel from Lama Rashak.

Returning to the specific features of the Tsamdrak, this edition shows signs of being more coherently edited in terms of the structuring of volumes around specific genres and themes. Both Katok and Tsamdrak organize their materials around types of practice. The Tsamdrak does this more tightly, however, and provides a clean array of materials with obvious connection to the other contents of their respective volumes. As for the supplementary ritual materials, the Tsamdrak does contain apotropaic rites, but nowhere near the extent found in Katok. The entirety of the materials featured in Katok volumes Twelve and Thirteen, for example, are missing from Tsamdrak. On the other hand, Tsamdrak does include a variety of meditational materials (*las byang* and *sgrub thabs*) that are missing from Katok. This gives the impression that the Tsamdrak edition was oriented more towards meditation and classical modes of tantric ritual than it was towards wrathful apotropaic ritualism. Whether this discrepancy between the two editions has to do with differences in recensional lines, or whether the Tsamdrak was curated especially for institutional life in Bhutan, we cannot, at this point, say.

### **Kyirong**

The four-volume edition held by the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives and published by Damchoe Sangpo in 1977, is said to have been reproduced from *dbu can* manuscripts delivered by Kyirong Lama Kunzang. This collection includes the fifteen tantras and teachings common to all editions: the root, subsequent, commentarial, amendment, and individuated tantras of the Kabgyé mandala. It does not include the five instructional texts (*lung lnga*) found in the Katok and Tsamdrak, and referenced in *The Arising*, which is itself also absent. The Kyirong also harbors discrepancies in Volumes Three and Four in the selection of self-cultivational and ritual materials as compared to Katok and Tsamdrak. These manuscripts exhibit alternate spellings (and errors) in the texts' titles and contents, and are largely lacking in colophons. Where colophons do exist, they do not demonstrate the standardized form seen in the

Katok edition. There are some texts in common between Kyirong and the thirteen-volume editions, but twenty-eight of the texts in the fifty-nine text corpus that claim to be Nyangrel terms cannot be corroborated with Katok or Tsamdrak.

Kyirong also includes a selection of texts drawn from Chöwang's *Sangwa Yongzok* cycle, and the edition concludes with a *las byang* practice text authored by Terdak Lingpa, and drawn from his seminal *Minling System (smin gling lugs)* Kabgyé ritual compendium. I suspect that these materials were added to the corpus (obviously after Tedak Lingpa's time in the eighteenth century) in reflection of the influence of Mindroling in determining the contours of Nyingma tradition.

This Kyirong edition includes several biographical texts that are not found in Katok. These include a version of *The Clear Mirror* hagiography of Nyangrel, a collection of abbreviated autobiographies of Nyangrel's genetic lineage of Mawochok abbots, a praise of the region of Lhodrak, and a short biography of Tsele Natsok Rangdröl. However, some of these are actually missing from the specific exemplar to which we have access – they are reported to be included in the edition according to the *them yig*, but are partially or fully missing in the copy we have. These lacunae include a Kabgyé-based biography of the deeds of Padmasambhava, the full-length *Clear Mirror* Nyangrel biography, and, interestingly, a short biography called *Stainless*. Does this *Stainless* (labeled simply *dri med*) refer to the *Stainless Proclamations* hagiography featured in the Katok? We don't know, but the *them yig* suggests that this one is very short at a mere three pages. Perhaps it was a summary of *The Stainless Proclamations*. In this collection, *The Clear Mirror* is certainly the authoritative *rnam thar*, as it is included in its entirety.

I interpret the evidence to indicate that this edition represents an alternative recensional lineage to Gongra's. Like the Katok and Tsamdrak editions, this one entails a preponderance of apotropaic rituals –exorcisms (*bzlog pa*), impalement rituals (*gzer ka*), incineration sacrifices (*sbyin sreg*), and libation offerings (*gser skyems*) – to supplement the main tantric materials. But many of the specific texts found in the Kyirong are not included in the Gongra-based editions, and the scale of these volumes is very much smaller. We do not get the impression that this edition of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was a massive compendium of thaumaturgy as we do with Katok. But the overall emphasis clearly trends toward harm-averting rites and tantric ritual. The presence of spelling errors in text titles and lack of colophons suggests it was not as carefully edited as were the Katok and Tsamdrak, and it seems that this Kyirong edition was a received collection of Kabgyé materials held by a lineage connected to Tsele Natsok Rangdrol, and designed to be a reference for Mahāyoga knowledge and the execution of apotropaic rituals.

### **Contents**

Volume 1: Supplications, biographies, and tantras: the Root, Outer, Amendment, and Key tantras

Volume 2: Peaceful, Chemchok, Yangdak, Shinje, Tamdrin, Phurba, mamo, Rigzin, Jigten Chötö, and Drangak tantras.

Volume 3: Apotropaia: libation offerings, invocations, effigy sacrifice, repelling rites, impalement rituals (*gzer ka*, “spike”)

Volume 4: Essential instructions (*man ngag*) on apotropaic rites, some miscellaneous texts from Chöwang's *Sangwa Yongzok* cycle, a *las byang* text by Terdak Lingpa.

### **Connections**

In comparing these available *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions, we might conclude that Katok and Tsamdrak are related, and the Kyirong may represent a different recensional stream. The main tantras are common to all three collections, and all three have a distinctive wrathful, apotropaic, and thaumaturgical orientation. Despite its smaller size, the Kyirong is focused on such rites, as it lacks many contemplative materials such as *sgrub thabs*, *las byang*, or *sgom rim*,

which appear in the other collections. The Katok gives us an absolutely massive compendium of wrathful ritual magic, with over a hundred and fifteen individual harm-aversion and sorceristic ritual texts, as well as commentaries on the performance of “wrathful play”. The Tsamdrak also has some of these, but not to the same scale, although its careful organization suggests that it was tailored for institutional religious life and traditional scholarship.

As for the relationship between the Katok and Tsamdrak, they are quite similar in the basic design of the thirteen volumes. In both cases, the initial volumes in the collection are devoted to the root tantras and teachings, and the following volumes compile practices, rituals and commentaries dealing with the Peaceful Deities, the Peaceful-Wrathful deity complex, classical tantric practice of the wrathful variety, and harm-averting thaumaturgy. While the specific order of these materials differs between the two editions, and while the Tsamdrak is more coherently edited in this regard, both corpora share this general structure. It does seem that the Tsamdrak intended to collate variants of the foundational tantras, while the Katok regularized them. This suggests different motivations behind the editing of these collections: the editors of Katok seem to have been interested in producing a coherent resource including a comprehensive array of ritual practices, while the Tsamdrak was more “academic” in its commitment to including variants of the constituent texts side-by-side. If it is true that they both derive from the redaction of Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje in the early or mid-seventeenth century, we thus get a sense of the results of Gongra’s editorial efforts. It suggests that Gongra curated a package of tantric, self-cultivational, and apotropaic materials, thematically arranged for ease of reference for people using these materials to supplement exegetical, self-cultivational, and liturgical life. It should be noted that such a collection lent itself to institutionalized settings: it is hard to imagine itinerant individuals easily obtaining or travelling with an 8,000 page package of manuscripts,

not to mention the work involved in duplicating such a collection. Its design serves the use of exegetes and liturgists who could turn to specific volumes to draw texts for ritual use or for reference. As canon-formation was a way to forge and announce denominational identity, this *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* makes a statement about the kinds of practices that were implicated in an evolving Nyingma religiosity. That Gongra curated the *Deshek Dupa* alongside the *Nyingma Gyubum* and a canon of seventeen Great Perfection scriptures, conveys a picture of what Nyingma tradition was, at least for the likes of Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje and his milieu.

### Ritual Cycles

There exist several published *Deshek Dupa* ritual compendia (*sgrub skor*) associated with the Nyingma “mother monasteries”. These include the ones still used at Shechen, Palyul, Katok, and Dzogchen, both in China and at their affiliated temples in Nepal and India.<sup>188</sup> These range in scope from the thirteen-text *Minling System* (*smin gling lugs*), to the 1300-page *Dzogchen Tradition Great Accomplishment Ritual Liturgies* (*rdzogs chen ring lugs sgrub chen ‘don chog*) in 112 texts. These manuals are still used for the execution of annual Great Accomplishment Rites (*sgrub chen*, *drupchen*) ritual intensives, as well as for the performance of ad hoc rites. In general, these compendia are hybrid compositions: ritual instructions, commentaries, and liturgies by masters such as Ngari Panchen, Terdak Lingpa, and Jamgön Kongtrül are interwoven with ritual texts taken directly from Nyangrel’s cycle. Occasionally, the corpus may be filled out with texts drawn from Chöwang, Gödem, or Terdak Lingpa’s revelation cycles. There is some

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<sup>188</sup> **Shechen:** *sgrub chen bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i lag len gsal byed nyin mor byed pa’i ‘od snang*. New Delhi: Shechen Publications, 2001;

**Minling:** *bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa smin gling lugs*. Dehra Dun: Khochen Trulku, 1977.

**Katok:** *bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa*. New Delhi: Jamyang Norbu, 1971.

**Palyul:** *bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa sgrub skor*. Byllakuppe: Penor Rinpoche, 1985.

**Dzogchen:** *snga ‘gyur grub dbang rdzogs chen pai ring lugs ltar bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i sgrub chen ‘don chog*. rdzogs chen, 2007.

overlap with the doctrinal cycles in as much as some of the materials appearing in these ritual compendia are also present in the comprehensive *chos skor* editions. However, there are many ritual materials that appear in no Kabgyé doctrinal cycles, and yet claim to be derived from Nyangrel's Kabgyé revelation.

The specific features of some of these ritual compendia are briefly outlined below.

Tracing the contents of these editions gives us a sense for the development of the Kabgyé ritual tradition in terms of its role in an evolving vision of institutional religion for the Nyingmapa.

### **Mindroling**

The *Minling System of the Assembled Sugatas of the Eight Teachings* (*bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa smin gling lugs*) is the oldest extant ritual compendium for Kabgyé practice in an institutional setting.<sup>189</sup> In this *Minling System*, we see Kabgyé practice reduced to an essential core of self-cultivational and apotropaic ritual procedures. This core program is well-suited to an institutional setting wherein the Kabgyé rites could be carried out in several days as part of an annual liturgical cycle, or on an ad hoc basis. This treatment of the Kabgyé ritual materials conforms to what we know about the seventeenth-century efforts of Gyurme Dorje, and his brother, Lochen Dharmashri, to further institutionalize the Nyingma through the reformatting of tantric ritual protocols for some degree of public participation.<sup>190</sup> While the Minling brothers have been celebrated for their treatment of the *Gathering of Intentions Sutra* and the resurrection of the Kama body of transmitted scriptures, it seems that revelation cycles such as the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* and the *Kabgyé Sangwa Yongzok*, as well as other cycles from Nyangrel and the

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<sup>189</sup> Cantwell (2019) notes that ritual manuals associated with Chokyi Wangchuk and even Nyangrel himself indicate a sort of proto-drupchen format for communal tantric practice within their communities. Cantwell 2019, p. 156.

<sup>190</sup> Dalton 2016, 97-114; also: Dalton in Cuevas and Schaeffer, eds. 2006.

early tertöns, were included in Gyurme Dorje and Lochen Dharmasri's efforts to institutionalize Nyingma practice.

The *Minling System* is attributed to Gyurme Dorje, who edited the compendium around core texts and specific lines extracted from the *Deshek Dupa* terma. Containing only fifteen texts, the compendium represents a ritual program that could be accomplished in a couple of days. But its elements can be taken to represent what was thought to be the essential features of Kabgyé practice, especially as it might be executed in a temple setting. The sequence of rituals begins with lineal supplications and a deity yoga liturgy composed by Gyurme Dorje, followed by a program of fire offerings and a deity yoga practices drawn from Nyangrel's terma. Two medicinal alchemical rituals (*smān sgrub*) come next, one of which was drawn from the *Heart of Vajrasattva* (*do sems thugs*) cycle revealed by Terdak Lingpa himself. But the longest text of the cycle by far is *The Surpassing of the Demons: The Procedure of the Effigy Sacrifice of Wrathful Play* (*khro bo rol pa'i gtor gzlog las rim bdud dpung zil gnon*). This apotropaic rite, a terma text taken from Nyangrel's *Deshek Dupa* cycle with annotations by Gyurme Dorje, involves the dispatching of demons through effigistic sacrifice. The *ma mo*, the *dregs pa* of Jigten Chötö, and the mantras of Möpa Drangak are all featured in this lengthy practice. It is followed by an instructional text on the topic by Gyurme Dorje.

We see, then, that the ritual program of the Minling System revolved around the self-cultivational practice of deity yoga, and the apotropaic rites of effigistic sacrifice (*gtor bzlog*, *tor-dok*). While many Kabgyé rituals existed at the time of Terdak Lingpa, it is notable how the scope of Kabgyé practice could be reduced to this core regime of self-cultivation and harm-aversion. This is consistent with later treatments of the cycle as it was curated to bring together soteriological and apotropaic dimensions of Buddhist practice, and Terdak Lingpa's efforts

would be adopted and replicated by the architects of institutional ritual practice at Nyingma temples throughout Eastern Tibet.

### **Shechen**

While the *Minling System* offers a pithy vision of a comprehensive Kabgyé practice, it seems to be the case that Kabgyé ritual practices at Mindroling also entailed far more complex iterations. Returning from a three year period of intensive study at Mindroling, Shechen Önrul Thutop Namgyal (*zhe chen dbon sprul mthu stobs rnam rgyal*, 1787-1854) composed a manual for the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa Great Accomplishment* (*bka' brgyad sgrub chen*) as he learned it in Central Tibet.<sup>191</sup> This manual, now published as a two-volume book from Shechen Publications, includes an extensive drupchen routine, including deity yoga, mandala construction (*dkyil 'khor*), fire offerings (*spyin sreg*), and various effigy sacrifices (*gtor bzlog*). Also included are medicinal preparation rites, and a ritual dance (*'cham*) program drawn from Chöwang's *Secret Guru* (*bla ma gsang 'dus*) cycle. Volume Two includes year-ending harm-averting rites from Nyangrel's *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, and rituals from Terdak Lingpa's *Lord of Death Overcoming the Arrogant Ones* (*gzhin rje dregs 'joms*) terma cycle. The format of this manual suggests the principal uses for Kabgyé rituals according to Shechen tradition: the drupchen for the forging of soteriological and apotropaic connections to the cycle's principal deities, the alchemical *sman sgrub* ritual for the preparation of blessed substances for special occasions or patrons, and harm-averting tor-dok rites for the end of the year. Unlike the *Minling System*, this manual specifies the timing for these ritual programs: The drupchen and dances are to be performed on the tenth day of the fifth lunar month in commemoration of Guru Rinpoche, while the apotropaic rituals drawn from the *Deshek Dupa* and the Yamāntaka cycles are for the

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<sup>191</sup> Ricard 2001, preface.

dispelling of year-end obstacles, at the end of the eleventh and twelfth Tibetan months, respectively. This timing is still observed both at Shechen and at Mindroling in exile. It is interesting that this Kabgyé ritual program includes rites drawn from other cycles – Chöwang’s ‘*cham* dances and Terdak Lingpa’s *dgu chen* from his *Lord of Death* (*gzhin rje dreg ‘joms*), in particular. This suggests that the Kabgyé was appropriated as the main cycle to be associated with observance of these liturgical occasions at Shechen, but what had become considered a complete regime of ritual practices could not be entirely assembled from Kabgyé materials alone.

### **Katok**

The Katok *sgrub skor* contains seventy-seven ritual texts. Roughly two-thirds of these are drawn from the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* terma cycle itself, and many of the remaining texts were composed or arranged by Terdak Lingpa. The corpus is arranged in a sequence of texts which would be followed in a multi-day drupchen intensive. Given the replication of several types of practices and rituals, it is clear that the compendium also provides options for the extraction of ritual texts for ad hoc observances.

The Katok compendium begins with a series of lineage supplications (*gsol ‘debs*) and invocations of blessings (*byin ‘bebs*), followed by a “middle-length” deity yoga practice (the *skyed rdzogs ‘bring po’i chog sgrigs rin chen phreng ba*, in 86 pages) featuring creation and completion stage practice based on the eight Kabgyé herukas. This is supplemented with a series of mantric recitations for invocation (*‘dzab bskul*), protection (*srung*), and expiation (*bskang*), and also libation offerings to the Eight Classes (*sde brgyad gser skyems*). A list of further purificatory amendments, praises (*bstod pa*), and requests (*bskul ba*) closes the first volume. The second volume focuses almost exclusively on apotropaic rites. These include many kinds of effigistic exorcisms (*gtor bzlog*), rituals for reversing bad signs (*brda than bsgyur ba*), the creation of sorceristic effigies (*zor gtor bskyed*), and the invocation (*spyen ‘dren, rbod*) and

deployment (*bka' sgo, gtong ba*) of powerful thaumaturgical entities. Nearly all of these short texts are taken directly from the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, and can be found in the Katok edition of the corpus.

This ritual cycle, then, is largely oriented towards thaumaturgy and the performance of fierce rituals to avert harm. This is consistent with the use of this cycle at Katok-affiliated temples, where the Kabgyé Drupchen is performed at the end of the year to avert obstacles on behalf of the institution and its surrounding community. Absent from this cycle are the extensive self-cultivational rituals (*sgrub thabs*), medicinal preparation rites (*sman sgrub*), and ritual dances (*'cham*) that we see in the Shechen collection. Unlike the Shechen manual, this ritual cycle seems less oriented towards the soteriology of forging a communal connection to the Eight Herukas than with thaumaturgy and apotropaic ritual interventions. I have been told that, given the esoteric and particularly risky nature of these rituals, only a select group of ten senior Katok lamas is tasked each year with carrying out these rites on behalf of the entire institution and its patrons.

### **Dzogchen**

The contemporary Dzogchen Kabgyé ritual cycle, *The Ritual Liturgies for the Kabgyé Deshek Dupa Great Accomplishment in Accordance with the Tradition of the Early Translation Dzogchen Masters* (*snga 'gyur grub dbang rdzogs chen pa'i ring lugs ltar bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa sgrub chen 'don chog*) reached its current iteration in 2009 under the direction of one Khenpo Chōga (*rdzogs chen mkhan po chos dga'*). This 1300-page corpus purports to be an expansion of a previously-circulating compendium of block prints held at Dzogchen monastery in Kham.<sup>192</sup> As the Dzogchen monastery was entirely destroyed in the mid-twentieth century, we might imagine that this older version of the ritual cycle upon which the contemporary volume is

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<sup>192</sup> Dzogchen, pp. 1-5

built was itself a product of the last twenty or thirty years. The specifics of Kabgyé practice before the tumult of the twentieth century, then, must be gleaned from the autobiographical writings of masters such as Ngawang Palzang, who does mention Kabgyé ritual practice at Dzogchen in the late nineteenth century. But these records generally only report that a master “received” the Kabgyé, or that the monastic community engaged in a Kabgyé ceremony, and, just as in more ancient sources, we are often left to interpret what “reception” and “the Kabgyé” meant in context.

This compendium is marked by a tremendous diversity of materials, relatively few of which are actually drawn from Nyangrel’s *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* terma cycle. Included are prayers, rituals, and deity yoga practices authored or revealed by a diverse cast of tertöns and exegetes. Works by Terdak Lingpa, Ratna Lingpa, Sangye Lingpa, Rinchen Namgyal, Jamyang Khyentse, and the Dzogchen Drupwangs, among many others, are all included. Excerpts from terma cycles entirely unrelated to the Kabgyé revelations include materials from the Khandro and Longchen Nyingthik (*mkha’ ‘gro / klong chen snying thig*) cycles, the *Lama’s Intention* (*bla ma dgongs ‘dus*) revelation of Sangye Lingpa, Jamyang Khyentse’s *Wheel of Lama Samvara* (*bla ma bde mchog ‘khor lo*), the *Collected Inner Heart Essence* (*thugs sgrub yang snying ‘dus pa*) of Ratna Lingpa, and others. In each of these cases, the liturgical texts are not drawn from the *Deshek Dupa* itself, but rather center on the characters and topics somehow associated with the Kabgyé cycle or its mythological context. Many of the rituals in this cycle are focused on ritual intercession with entities such as the mamo, the za(*gza’*), the Tsän (*btsan*), Nöjin (*gnod spyin*) and other types of Dü (*bdud*) demons, often through the rites of the tor-dok or other liturgical practices such as “expiation” (*bskang ba*). Deity yoga is also an important feature of the ritual action, and the *Short Creation And Completion Stage* practice from the *Deshek Dupa*

(the *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i bskyed rdzogs chung ba*), and Terdak Lingpa's *Play of Great Bliss (bde ba chen po rnam rol)* are the primary sādhanās in the cycle.

Ostensibly a program for the Kabgyé Drupchen ceremony to be practiced annually to conclude the year at Dzogchen monastery and its affiliated temples, the one hundred and twelve rituals are arranged in a sequence that includes lineage supplications (*gsol 'debs* and *brgyud 'debs*), confessions (*bshags pa*) and expiations (*bskang ba*), deity yoga (*las byang* and *sgrub thabs*), effigy offerings (*gtor mchod*), harm-reversing effigy sacrifices (*bzlog pa*), libation offerings (*gser skyems*), and entreaties (*bskul ba*). This kind of sequence is repeated for the propitiation of several types of divinities, notably the heruka Hayagrīva, various Tsän demons, an assortment of female divinities (*ma mo* and *lha mo*), za, and nöjin. This drupchen unfolds over ten days, and the above rituals may be supplemented with empowerment rites (*dbang bskur*) and 'cham dances which are not included in the ritual cycle edition. At a glance, the ritual program seems less cohesive than the sequence performed at Shechen and Katok (and their source template in the Minling System), but it is also clear that this Dzogchen program draws on many of the traditions and cycles that sustain the Dzogchen heritage, and would thus resonate in particular ways for members of that institution. Without serious ethnographic work, it is impossible to describe the coherence that a Dzogchen lama would find in this ritual program, but we may presume that the logic behind its arrangement reflects the distinctive sense of heritage undergirding this particular institution.

Just as the Kabgyé came to represent an entire class of tantric materials as it was incorporated into the Nyingma anthologies, these ritual compendia suggest that Kabgyé ritual practice also came to stand for a family of practices, and a distinctive ritual idiom. That is, Kabgyé ritualism came to entail a range of practices drawn from a variety of sources – not all of

them from Kabgyé cycles, and not all of them Mahāyoga, as the inclusion of Nyingthik materials at Dzogchen suggests – and was defined by the inclusion of specific types of gods and demons, and a fierce harm-averting ritualism. These ritual cycles represent a sensibility towards ritual practice in which intercession with the Eight Classes and violent rites for harm-aversion constituted a family of powerful techniques. This expansion of the meaning of the Kabgyé to refer to a distinctive *type* of ritualism attests to the Kabgyé’s influence in the development of the Nyingma imaginaire, and the articulation of a distinctive vision for religious practice.

The ritual cycles of Mindroling, Shechen, Katok, and Dzogchen provide a glimpse into the development of Nyingma ritual in institutional settings. While the *Minling System* defined Kabgyé ritualism around a core of self-cultivational and apotropaic procedures that could be carried out in temple settings, the Shechen cycle evidences a trend towards expanding the Great Accomplishment program to undertake a more broadly-conceived praxis. In supplementing Kabgyé rituals with ones drawn from other cycles and sources, we see how the Kabgyé was appropriated to fulfill a broad, but specific, ritual function. The orientation of all of these ritual cycles is, of course, apotropaic (as we see in full measure at Katok), and the Dzogchen compendium demonstrates how the Kabgyé came to function as something like a “genre” of ritual practice. In the case of Dzogchen, the Kabgyé drupchen manual includes relatively few Kabgyé materials per se, but the very idea of the Kabgyé, along with its taxonomies of characters and rites, provides a template for a broadly-conceived vision of harm-averting ritualism. This is, in part, what I refer to as a “Kabgyé ritualism”: a family of practices participating in wider conceptions of history, buddhology, vocational identity, and social relationships. In the case of the Kabgyé, this family, or type, of ritualism was distinctively oriented towards both self-cultivational and intercessionary relationships with Tibetan gods and demons through the

performance of violent, object-based thaumaturgical rites. A similar broadening of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* to refer to distinct typologies of doctrines will also be seen as we trace the Kabgyé's participation in Nyingma anthologies.

### **Anthologies**

The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* came to be included, both as a corpus and as an organizing template, in the key anthologies at the core of Nyingma tradition. Its main tantras are included outright in the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients (rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum, the Nyingma Gyubum)*, and a selection of its practice texts and empowerment rituals are included in the *Precious Treasury of Terma (rin chen gter mdzod, the Rinchen Terdzö)*. Its influence is also noticeable in the organization of the *Transmitted Teachings of the Ancients (rnying ma bka' ma, Nyingma Kama)*. Interestingly, the Kabgyé root texts can also be found in compendia from other denominations, such as in the modern *Drikung Kagyü Great Treasury of Dharma ('bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo)*.<sup>193</sup> The *Narthing Kangyur (snar thang bka' gyur)* also includes the Kabgyé root tantras of Jigten Chötö and Möpa Drangak in its 100th volume, the final of three volumes recording the Early Translation tradition, according to Narthing's editors.<sup>194</sup> All told, the inclusion of the Kabgyé in these anthologies tells us how anthologists understood the place of the cycle within the literary geography of their own tradition, and therefore serves as important evidence for a denomination's evolving sense of its literary and ritual identity.

For the Nyingma and other denominations, anthologization and canon-formation served as methods for articulating authority, consolidating denominational identity, configuring institutions, and enabling transmissions. In some cases, the curation of canons as a way to

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<sup>193</sup> *'bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*. Lhasa, 2004. esp. vol. 107.

<sup>194</sup> The colophons of these texts attribute their dissemination to Padmasambhava, but, as the Kangyur tends not to recognize terma, no mention is made of the Kabgyé corpus in its transmitted or revealed iterations.

respond to inter-denominational pressures. The development of the multiple canons of the Nyingmapa – the *Nyingma Gyubum*, the *Nyingma Kama*, the *Rinchen Terdzö*, and more specific collations like the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* – are good evidence for a history of pressure and response, and we can look to these anthologies to see how the doctrinal identity of the Nyingmapas was imagined at various junctures in specific historical contexts. In this regard, it is my observation that Nyingma scriptures were often anthologized to articulate ideology and institutional identities in times of sectarian and political contestation.

A brief overview of the development of major Nyingma canons, particularly as they relate to the inclusion of Kabgyé materials, will preface a more detailed exploration of the role of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* in these anthologies.

### **The Collected Tantras:**

As is accepted by literary historians of Tibet, it was in response to the development of the *Kangyur* (*bka' gyur*) by New Translation ecclesiasts in the fourteenth century that Ratna Lingpa is credited with first compiling Nyingma tantras that had been excluded from the Kangyur efforts. While “tantra collections” (*rgyud 'bum*) were curated before Ratna Lingpa’s time, his fourteenth-century compilation is normatively thought of as the progenitor of the *Nyingma Gyubums* in circulation.<sup>195</sup> We know that Jigme Lingpa (1729-98) curated a *Nyingma Gyubum* in a way that would inform later xylographic productions, although it does also seem that Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Doje (1594-1654) may have had a hand in things, as discussed in the previous chapter. Taksham Nüden Dorje (1655-1708) also created a *Gyubum* in the seventeenth century, for which we only have a table of contents. Nüden Dorje’s *Collected Tantras* includes the fifteen foundational *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* tantras, and also *The Arising* auto-history, arranged in a

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<sup>195</sup> An early figure who is credited with assembling something like a Nyingma tantric canon is Drogön Namkha Rinchen Pel, son and heir of Nyangrel Nyima Özer. (Hirshberg, “Namkha Pel” *Treasury of Lives*, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Namkha-Pel/6010> accessed July, 2019).

format that was replicated by the Katok and Tsamdrak doctrinal cycles, and in the “Revealed Treasures” sub-section of the Degé and Tsamdrak *Gyubum*. A Bhutanese recensional line, with potential origins in the fifteenth century, also includes the main *Deshek Dupa* materials, but the nomenclature of *Eight Teachings* (*bka’ brgyad*) is entirely absent. Rather, the cycle is known as the *Assembly of all the Victor Sugatas* (*lcom ldan ‘das bde bar gshegs pa thams cad ‘dus pa*) in Bhutanese versions.

### **The Nyingma Kama:**

Unlike the *Collected Tantras*, which includes transmitted (*bka’ ma*) and revealed (*gter ma*) materials, the *Nyingma Kama* has been an ongoing attempt to anchor Nyingma authority in an unbroken transmission from India. The Kama movement originated in the attempts of the Zur patriarchs to organize the esoteric materials with which their communities were concerned. According to Dalton, it was at Mindroling that this collection was remade to suit the concerns of centralized institutions, as Gyurme Dorje and Lochen Dharmasri brought the Zur and Rong traditions together, while creating ritual formats to perpetuate what they thought to represent the Nyingma inheritance from India.<sup>196</sup> The proto-Kama was revived at Dzogchen and at Katok by Ati Tenpe Gyeltsen (*a ti bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan*, 1759-1792) and Getsé Mahapandita, respectively, as they invited masters from Mindroling to perform initiations for some thirteen tantras thought to comprise the transmitted canon. It was Dzogchen Gyelsé Shenpen Thayé – the founder of Sri Singha monastic college at Dzogchen – who first committed the Kama to xylograph in 1845. This was the basis for Jamgön Kongtrül’s anthology of the *Nyingma Kama*, later expanded in 1982 by Düdjom Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje as the *Extensive Kama* (*bka’ ma rgyas pa*). This has been supplemented more recently through the efforts of Katok to include much Kama-related miscellany as a massive “*Very Extensive Kama*” (*bka’ ma shin tu rgyas pa*), a

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<sup>196</sup> Dalton 2016, 101-113.

version of which is also currently under xylographic production at Palyul. So while the literary materials at the core of the Kama canon were ostensibly traceable to the early days of the proto-Nyingma communities, the form and function of this canon very much evolved over many centuries, and is, in some sense, still a work in progress with shifting rhetorical value for the identity of the Nyingmapas. In this, the Kama was not just the name of a canon; it also represented the concept of unbroken doctrinal and exegetical lineage, an idea which advanced a specific vision for institutional authority.

### **The Rinchen Terdzö:**

While Terdak Lingpa and Lochen Dharmasri are celebrated for their attempts to delineate Kama materials, a century-and-a-half later saw the curation of the many revelation texts that had been at the heart of Nyingma practice for centuries. This was undertaken by Jamgön Kongtrül Lodro Thayé (1813-99), as part of a broader project to anthologize five bodies of literature: *The Treasury of All Knowledge (shes bya kun khyab mdzod)*, *The Treasury of Advice (gdams ngag mdzod)*, *The Treasury of Kagyü Mantra (bka' brgyud sngags mdzod)*, *The Treasury of Extensive Teachings (rgyu chen bka' mdzod)*, and *The Treasury of Precious Terma (rin chen gter mdzod, Rinchen Terdzö)*. This final anthology brought together ritual elements – primarily the initiation rites (*dbang bskur*) – of the major revelation cycles of all tantric vehicles. In this, Kongtrül structured the Mahāyoga section around a Kabgyé-inflected rubric, including practices and empowerments from twelve different Kabgyé revelation cycles that had been in circulation for Tibetans between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries.

In these anthologies, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is either included outright, or used as an organizational rubric for tantric texts thought to be related in content or origin. A specific look at its inclusion in these anthologies will reveal how the Kabgyé came to be thought of as a

foundational feature of the Nyingma literary inheritance, and even as an organizational logic reflective of primordial orders of reality.

### **The Kabgyé in the *Nyingma Gyubum***

A relatively early exemplar of the *Nyingma Gyubum* is Taksham Nüden Dorje's edition, created in Eastern Tibet sometime in the late seventeenth century. The table of contents for this edition is still available, and it includes the fifteen tantras of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* (with the *Differentiated Tantra* broken up into two texts for the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities, respectively, making for a total of 16 tantras, as is also the custom in some *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions), filling the entirety of his fourteenth volume, and arranged just as they are delineated in earlier Kabgyé commentaries and bibliographies. An even earlier example of the Kabgyé's inclusion in the *Collected Tantras* is in the Bhutanese Gangteng (*sgang steng*) edition, which may have its origins in the fifteenth century. In the Degé xylographic edition of the *Gyubum*, the Kabgyé foundational tantras likewise appear together, this time organized under the "Accomplishment Class: Two Revealed Treasures" (*sgrub sde gter byon gnyis*) sub-category. Bhutanese recensions, such as the Tsamdrak (*mtshams brag*) and related Gangteng (*sgang steng*; which may represent a quite early transmission) also contain the same list of *Kabgyé* tantras, although in a slightly different order and grouped as the *Assembly Of All The Victor- Sugatas* (*lcom ldan 'das bde bar gshegs pa thams cad 'dus pa*).<sup>197</sup> The *Manner of Arising of the Kabgyé Teachings* (*bka' byung tshul*) auto-history is not included in these *Gyubum* versions.

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<sup>197</sup> See: Cantwell and Mayer, 2006.

Figure 2:

**Stag sham nus ldan rdo rje rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum dkar chag, vol. Pha (14)<sup>198</sup>**

- Ka: The Manner of the Arising of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* Teachings (*bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa; i bka' yi byung tshul/*)
- Kha: The Root Tantra of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities in Eighteen Chapters from the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* (*bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa las zhi khro 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud le'u bco brgyad*) [this is the same text as the *King of Kabgyé Root Tantras*]
- Ga: The Definite Deliverance Subsequent Tantra in Eleven Chapters (*nges par 'byung ba phyi ma 'i rgyud le'u bcu gcig*)
- Nga: The Subsequent-Subsequent Mantra Tantra; the Tantra Amending Incompletions in Nineteen Chapters (*phyi ma 'i phyi ma sngags kyi rgyud ma tshang ba kha bkang rgyud le'u bcu dgu*)
- Ca: The Finalizing Tantra Amending Incompletions (*ma tshang ba kha bkang ba 'i rgyud rdzogs tshig bcas*)
- Cha: The Differentiating Key Tantra in Ten Chapters (*'byed pa byed pa lde mig gi rgyud le'u bcu pa*)
- Ja: The Differentiating Key Tantra of the Wrathful in Seven Chapters (*'byed lde 'khro bo 'i rgyud le'u bdun*)
- Nya: The Root Tantra of the Peaceful Deities in Twelve Chapters (*zhi ba 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud le'u bcu gnyis pa*)
- Ta: The Root Tantra of Assembled Chemchok in Nine Chapters (*che mchog 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud le'u dgu*)
- Tha: The Root Tantra of Assembled Heruka in Thirteen Chapters (*khrag 'thung 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud le'u bcu gsum*)
- Da: The Root Tantra of Assembled Terrifier Zhinje in Seven Chapters (*gshin rje gshed 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud le'u bdun*)
- Na: The Root Tantra of Assembled Wangchen [rta mgrin] in Thirteen Chapters (*dbang chen 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud le'u bcu gsum*)
- Pa: The Root Tantra of Assembled Trinley [phur ba] in Thirteen Chapters (*phrin las 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud le'u bcu gsum pa*)
- Pha: The Root Tantra of Assembled mamo in Seven Chapters (*ma mo 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud le'u bdun*)
- Ba: The Root Tantra of Rigzin in Four Chapters (*rig pa 'dzin pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud le'u bzhi*)

<sup>198</sup> Stag sham nus ldan rdo rje, *Rgyud 'bum rin po che bzhangs pa 'i deb tho dkar chag ma rig mun sel ye shes klong yang*. In *Stag sham nus ldan rdo rje bka' 'bum*. Kong po: Rdo dung dgon, vol. 4, 43-70

Ma: The Root Tantra of the Accomplishment of Jigten Chötö in Eleven Chapters (*'jig rten mchod bstod bsgrub pa rtsa ba'i rgyud le'u bcu gcig*)

Tsa: The Vajra Root Tantra of Assembled Drangak in Eleven Chapters (*drag sngags 'dus pa rdo rje rtsa ba'i rgyud le'u bcu gcig pa*)

The Degé edition organizes Mahāyoga literature in two categories: the Tantra Class (*rgyud sde*) and the Accomplishment Class (*sgrub sde*). The Tantra Class contains eight transmitted Magical Emanation (*sgyu 'phrul*, Skt. *Māyājāla*) cycles, Eighteen Great Tantras (*tantra chen mo sde bco brgyad*), as well as a set of eighteen explanatory tantras (*bshad pa dang cha mthun gyi rgyud tantra sde bco brgyad*), all thought to have been directly transmitted from India and maintained in unbroken exegetical lineage. The Accomplishment Class refers to non-Māyājāla cycles, and has two subcategories: the Two Revealed Treasures (*gter byon gnyis*), and the Eight Transmitted Cycles (*bka' ma brgyad*). The Revealed Treasures includes the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa's* root tantras, and Sangye Lingpa's *Lama's Intention* (*bla ma dgongs 'dus*) cycle. The Eight Transmitted Cycles (*bka' ma brgyad*) contains transmitted texts grouped under headings of the eight Kabgyé herukas. These include myriad transmitted cycles of deities such as Hayagrīva, Vajrakīlaya, and Yamāntaka, as well as a wide variety of tantric texts centering on other wrathful and apotropaic practices. Some of these texts are extracted from the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* and other Kabgyé cycles, while some of them seem to be first-dispensation texts, cross-listed in the Kangyur and Kama canons.

Figure 3: the Mahāyoga in Degé Nyingma Gyubum<sup>199</sup>

1. Tantra Series (*rgyud sde*)
  1. The eightfold set of root Māyājāla Tantras (*rtsa bar gyur sgyu 'phrul sde brgyad*)
  2. The Eighteen Explanatory Tantras (*bshad pa dang cha mthun gyi rgyud tantra sde bco brgyad*)
  3. The Eighteen Great Tantras (*tantra chen mo sde bco brgyad*)
  4. Miscellaneous
2. Accomplishment Class
  1. The Two Revealed Treasures (*gter byon gnyis*)
    1. The Assembled Highest Intention (*bla ma dgongs 'dus*)
    2. The Kabgyé Deshek Dupa (*bde gshegs 'dus pa*)
    3. Miscellaneous
  2. The Eight Transmitted Cycles (*bka' ma brgyad*)
    1. The Mañjushrī Cycle on Enlightened Form (*'jam dpal sku'i skor*)
    2. The Lotus Tantras on Enlightened Communication (*pad ma gsung gi rgyud*)
    3. The Real Tantras on Enlightened Mind (*yang dag thugs kyi rgyud*)
    4. The Nectar Tantras on Enlightened Qualities (*bdud rtsi yon tan gyi rgyud*)
    5. The Sacred Dagger Cycle on Enlightened Activities (*phrin las phur pa'i skor*)
    6. The Cycle on Invoking the Fierce Ma-mo Deities (*ma mo rbod gtong skor*)
    7. Offerings and Praises to Protect the Teachings (*bstan srung mchod bstod*)
    8. The Cycle on Fierce Mantras (*drag sngags skor*)
    9. Miscellaneous

This Eight Transmitted Cycles (*bka' ma brgyad*) sub-category of the Accomplishment Class is curious: it presents a variety of tantric scriptures as belonging to the taxonomy of deities found in the Kabgyé. But many of these texts, according to their colophonic translation statements, circulated in Tibet before the time of Nyangrel, and don't make any internal claims

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<sup>199</sup> Adapted from: Catalogue Index, in “Catalogue of the Master Edition of the Collected Tantras of the Ancients”, *Tibetan and Himalayan Library* <http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/canons/ngb/catalog.php#cat=ng> Accessed: May 2019.

about belonging to any Kabgyé corpus. Some acts of editorial slight-of-hand are also evident upon closer inspection: some texts from the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle (for example, the tantras of Jigten Chötö and Möpa Drangak) appear in both the Revealed and Transmitted sub-categories. It seems, then, that the structure of the Kabgyé was wielded to organize materials as if they had a common source or inherent connection. The implication is that there was a “long lineage” (*ring brgyud*) of Kabgyé materials that was maintained in unbroken lineages from India, in addition to the “close lineage” (*nye brgyud*) terma cycle of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*.

The origins of this idea are quite old, and lie within the Kabgyé cycle itself. As we have noted, several terma texts from the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle, notably *The Arising* auto-history, and the *Stainless Lamp* internal bibliography, present a catalogue of many Mahāyoga cycles arranged under the rubric of the Kabgyé, and described as part of the original dispensation of Kabgyé materials to the Eight Vidyadhāras in India. The list of tantric texts in these sources – more than two hundred separate tantras centering on Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, Vajrakīlaya, Sri Heruka, Mahottara – are either unattested, or, in some cases, found included in collections such as the *Eighteen Mahāyoga Tantras*, the *Nyingma Kama*, and even the *Kangyur*. At least some of the texts mentioned in these narrative bibliographies were first-dispensation tantras that were in circulation before the Kabgyé revelation. There is no evidence, however, that these cycles were actually collated under a Kabgyé rubric outside of Kabgyé tradition. This seems to be an attempt from within the Kabgyé tradition to organize related materials as if they shared a single origin. It was a doxographical conceit which proved quite influential: later editors would draw upon this in their anthologization efforts to yield the highly cohesive format of the “Accomplishment Class” of Mahāyoga scriptures in Long and Close lineage iterations. This all reflects the deep influence

of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* in how Nyingmapas came to think of the architecture of their doctrinal traditions.

### **The Kabgyé in the *Nyingma Kama***

The *Nyingma Kama* claims to represent the tantric literature that was dispensed to Tibet in the initial spread of Buddhism in the eighth through tenth centuries.<sup>200</sup> In general, the structure of the *Kama* reflects the gradated doxography of the Nine Vehicles (*thegs pa dgu*), a taxonomy pioneered by Nubchen Sangye Yeshe and the other architects of the *Gathering of Intentions Sutra*.<sup>201</sup> This organization of tantric literature and praxis seems not to have had a basis in Indian tradition *per se*, as Mahāyoga texts in India and from the early dispensation of Buddhism in Tibet presented themselves as being the highest approach to tantric practice.<sup>202</sup> Be that as it may, the *Nyingma Kama* is structured around these progressive gradients of literature and practice, with texts representing Mahāyoga positioned between the Caryā category and that of Ati. Within the Mahāyoga section of the *Kama*, we see something like a Kabgyé-inflected rubric for organizing the various materials; this, despite the fact that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* itself, as a revelation scripture, is not included. Specifically, tantric cycles associated with the five principal deities of the Kabgyé – Yamāntaka, Mahottara, Sri Heruka, Vajrakīlaya, and Hayagrīva – are grouped together in an apparently discrete category distinct from the esoteric systems that follow (i.e., the *Secret Nucleus*, and other *Magical Emanation* scriptures.). I suggest the logic of this

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<sup>200</sup> The two circulating versions of the *Nyingma Kama* are Dūdjom Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje's *bka' ma rgyas pa* and the more recently produced *bka' ma shintu rgyas pa*. This "Very Extensive *Kama*" represents a massive inclusion of materials gathered under the auspices of Katok Khenpo Munsel (d. 1993). Many of these materials seem to be only loosely affiliated with the contents of Dūdjom's "Extensive *Kama*", and thus gives the impression of a "grab bag" of tantric miscellany. That said, a more careful interrogation of the history of these canon-making efforts would certainly be worthwhile.

<sup>201</sup> Dalton 2016, 3-5.

<sup>202</sup> See: van Schaik, 2008.

grouping is influenced by the Kabgyé, which, as in the *Gyubum*, collated these very divinities as if they inherently belong together as part of one overarching taxonomy of tutelary deities.

The presence of several texts in the *Nyingma Kama* with *bka' brgyad* in their titles should be noted. Specifically, the *Extensive Kama (bka' ma rgyas pa)* edition includes several texts organized under the term *bka' brgyad rdzongs 'phrang (The Citadel and Ravine of the Eight Teachings)*, which is a Mind Class (*sems sde*) Great Perfection sub-cycle.<sup>203</sup> While these texts are categorized as “Kama”, and thus do not appear in any edition of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* revelation cycle, they seem to have been regularly bestowed to students in the context of receiving the Kabgyé terma cycle, as we see in the case of Khenpo Ngawang Palzang’s reception of transmissions from Katok Situ Chökyi Gyatso, and Je Önrul.<sup>204</sup> It is also mentioned by Ngari Panchen in his fifteenth century account of being trained in what seems to be a sort of Kabgyé-based Perfection Stage (*rdzogs rim*) suite of practices under one of his Kabgyé preceptors. These texts may very well represent a tradition of completion stage or Great Perfection contemplation in a Kabgyé context, and thus reflects the harmonization of Mahāyoga with an overarching transcendentalist view of Ati, or Great Perfection, that characterized the Nine Vehicle approach of the Nyingmapas. It is worth noting that Nyangrel is mentioned in lineage supplications associated with this sub-cycle, and the lineage traces itself to Nupchen Sangye Yeshe and other first-dispensation masters.

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<sup>203</sup> *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*. Chengdu: kaH thog mkhan po 'jam dbyangs, 1999. vol 29, pp. 7-576. This cycle of seven *bka' brgyad rdzong 'phrang* texts is the first of two *sems sde* sub-sections within the *atiyoga* division of the “inner yoga” (*nang rgyud*) section of the Resultant Vajrayana (*'bras bu rdo rje theg pa*) category.

<sup>204</sup> Palzang 2014, 145.

There is also one practice text by Getsé Mahapandita called *The Enlightened Action of the Kabgyé Generation Stage* (*bka' brgyad bka' ma'i bskyed rim gyi 'phrin las chog khrigs*).<sup>205</sup> This is a meditation manual bringing together the five “transcendental” Herukas and including supplementary apotropaic rites involving the visualization of the three “worldly deities”. This is certainly a Kabgyé practice text proper, and we might guess that Dūdjom (or perhaps Jamgön Kongtrül) included it as a pithy practice guide for meditation on the fierce yidams featured in these cycles. The fact that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is a terma cycle does not seem to matter, and the inclusion of this practice text again reflects the sensibility for Nyingmapas that the Kabgyé assemblage represents an older taxonomic order.

Perhaps even more puzzling for our generic sensibilities is the inclusion of Mipham’s *Kabgyé Namshe* in the modern-day *Very Extensive Kama* (*bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*). While inconsistent with our understanding of the *Kama* as an anthology of first-dispensation scriptures, the inclusion of Mipham’s commentary reflects its use in Nyingma scholasticism as one of the main commentaries for Mahāyoga practice. Thus, it is included in the *Kama* anthology of Mahāyoga tantric practice systems, even though the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* itself, as a revelation scripture, is not included. It should be noted, however, that many texts of Tibetan provenance are included in the *Very Extensive Kama*, and so the presence of materials that are not of Indian origin should not be particularly surprising, once we have come to understand the eclectic nature of the *Kama* canon. Rather than regarding this eclecticism as somehow misguided, we might consider how our generic assumptions may not correspond to Tibetan anthologists’ intentions, and we may observe how anthologization supports the articulation of institutional identities and historiographies.

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<sup>205</sup> ‘Gyur med tshe dbang mchog grub, “Bka’ brgyad bka’ ma’i bskyed rim gyi ‘phrin las chog khrigs” in *gyur med tshe dbang mchog grub gsung ‘bum*. Khreng tu: dmangs khrod dpe dkon sdud sgrig khang, 2001. Vol.5, 87-106.

In sum, we see that, although the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is not included in the *Kama* canon per se, it has influenced how materials are organized in the collection: non-Māyājāla deity cycles are grouped together just as they are collated in the *Kabgyé*, and several *Kabgyé* practice texts and a major commentary are included to supplement the practice and exegesis of the wrathful herukas. This attests to the centrality of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* in how such deity systems were contextualized in a broader picture of Nyingma tradition.

### **The *Kabgyé* in the *Rinchen Terdzö***

Jamgön Kongtrül's anthological activities are significant for how they reflect his ecumenical approach to propagating the traditions to which he had been exposed, and the way by which he sought to define a pan-denominational ecclesiastical vision. In appraising the work of Jamgön Kongtrül (and his so-called Rimé-pa colleagues), we cannot ignore the contextual forces which faced these luminary masters. Nineteenth century Degé was caught in a confluence of contestational forces: invasions from neighboring Nyarong, the advances of both Lhasa and Qing, and the attempts of the Degé court to retain autonomy as its neighbors began to redefine their statehood in increasingly concrete geographical terms.<sup>206</sup> Kongtrül's anthologizations can be interpreted as one aspect of a concerted effort to consolidate religious identities (and their cooperative potential) in the face of instabilities of all kinds. It was also, perhaps as much as anything, a reflection of his own polymathic interests.

We see in the *Rinchen Terdzö* a packaging of important revelation materials into a format that could be ritually transmitted and readily instantiated in institutional settings. We read, for example, that Khenpo Ngawang Palzang felt compelled to give the complete *Rinchen Terdzö* empowerments on three occasions, which he understood to be a necessary step in securing the

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<sup>206</sup> Gardner 2006, 152.

future of the denomination.<sup>207</sup> Thus, anthologies such as the *Terdzö* and the *Kama* – both of which were well-formatted for ritual transmissions – were particularly suited to institutional propagation, and can be interpreted to be expressive of an emergent sense of institutional identity. The *Rinchen Terdzö* may have been inspired by *The Excellent Wish-Granting Vase* (*'dod 'jo bum bzang*), Terdak Lingpa and Lochen Dharmasri's compendium of important revelation cycles (which, curiously, does not include the *Kabgyé*), and which had been part of their efforts to consolidate Nyingma institutional identity. Incidentally, The *Kabgyé's* absence from this collection may signal that it was thought to stand on its own as a definitive compendium of its practice cycles, and we may recall that Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje had already curated the *Kabgyé* cycle in the generation preceding Mindroling. At any rate, the ritual transmission of the *Rinchen Terdzö* continues to this day, and is a hallmark of the Nyingma's unique way of continuing its lineages.

As for the *Kabgyé's* inclusion in the *Rinchen Terdzö*, we see Kongtrül expand the scope of *Kabgyé* materials to include practice texts drawn from twelve different *Kabgyé* cycles. This exceeds Tsewang Norbu's earlier effort to organize *Kabgyé* revelations under the five-fold rubric of enlightened body, speech, mind, quality, and action cycles.

Figure 5: The twelve *Kabgyé* cycles included in the *Rinchen Terdzö*:

- 1) bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa (revealed by mnga' bdag nyang ral)
- 2) bka' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs (revealed by gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug)
- 3) bka' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar (revealed by rig 'dzin rgod ldem)
- 4) bka' 'dus chos kyi rgya mtsho (revealed by o rgyan gling pa; renewed by 'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po)
- 5) bka' brgyad yang gsang thugs kyi me long (revealed by pad+ma gling pa)
- 6) bka' brgyad yang gsang dregs 'dul (revealed by bde chen gling pa; renewed by 'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po)

<sup>207</sup> Palzang 2014, 127.

- 7) tshe sgrub gnam leas rdo rje'i bar gcod dregs 'dul gyi bka' brgyad dngos grub snying po (revealed by 'ja' tshon snying po)
- 8) bka' brgyad bde gshegs yongs 'dus (revealed by klong gsal snying po)
- 9) bka' brgyad lus dkyil (revealed by gnam chos mi 'gyur rdo rje)
- 10) bka' 'dus snying po yid bzhin nor bu (revealed by pad+ma bde chen gling pa)
- 11) grub thob thugs thig gi khrag 'thung bde gshegs 'dus pa (revealed by 'jam dbyangs mkhyen \ brtse'i dbang po)
- 12) rdzogs pa chen po bka' 'dus rtsa ba'i snying thig (revealed by mchog gyur gling pa)

In the *Rinchen Terdzö*, these Kabgyé cycles are arranged as the “Practice of the Eight Yidams as a Group”, which is the first sub-category of the “Root of Achievement, the Yidams” section (see figure 6, below). In the case of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, twenty-four texts are included in the collection. For this, Kongtrül generally compiled practice, empowerment, and other ritual texts attributed to Terdak Lingpa, Khyentse Wangpo, and himself. Such ritual texts generally entail segments of terma texts reconfigured and annotated with instructional remarks by the author. Thus, for example, Kongtrül’s empowerment ritual begins with short lines of supplication and praise, followed by instructions for determining the appropriate occasion and arrangement of the ritual materials, and more elaborate instructions for constructing and consecrating the mandala. A terma text is then included for the actual visualization procedures involved in bestowing the empowerment.<sup>208</sup> Thus, the *Rinchen Terdzö* tends to consist of hybrid compositions including instructional material from Nyingma exegetes, and rearranged segments of root texts extracted from Nyangrel’s cycle. In some sense, this anthology may be understood as a ritual cycle, as its main praxical function is to propagate Nyingma tradition in a ritualized format.

<sup>208</sup> “sgrub chen bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i sngags sgrub nar ma'i dbang chog pad+ma shel phug ma bltas chog tu bsdebs pa dngos grub bum bzang” in *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo pod bcu bzhi pa* vol. 14, pp. 781-821. New Delhi: Shechen Publications, 2007-2016.

In the context of the empowerment ritual for the entire *Rinchen Terdzö*, the Kabgyé takes on a more thoroughgoing significance, as the Kabgyé format structures the entirety of *yid dam* category of tantras. Thus, just as in the Kabgyé, all the Mahāyoga deities are arranged as five transcendent deities (representing body, speech, mind, quality and action), plus one semi-transcendental deity (Mamo Bötong), and two worldly deities (Jigten Chötö and Möpa Drangak). In the five transcendent deities, characters from the Kabgyé are included alongside ones that are not, such as Amitāyus, Manjushri, Amitābha, Vajrasattva, Vajrapāni. Thus, we see that the Kabgyé functions not just as a specific cycle, but as representative of the very logic of how ritual practices might be arranged.

Figure 6: General Outline of the Rinchen Terdzö Empowerments (Kabgyé in bold)

- I. Biographies of Padmasambhava and the Tertons
- II. Instructions for Performing the Rinchen Terdzö
- III. Development Stage, Mahāyoga (Ground)
  - A. Tantras (profound) [1-26]
  - B. sādhanās (vast) [27-781]
    - 1. Root sādhanās
      - a) sādhanās Combining the Three Roots [27-49]
      - b) Individual Specific sādhanās
        - (1) Guru (the root of blessings)
          - (a) Outer (Supplication) [50-54]
          - (b) Inner (Peaceful)
            - (i) Dharmakaya [60-61]
            - (ii) Sambhogakaya [62-65]
            - (iii) Nirmanakaya
              - (a) Main Practices [66-194]
              - (b) Auxiliary Practices [195-206]
          - (c) Secret [207-250]
        - (2) Yidam (the root of siddhis)
          - (a) General sādhanās of peaceful and wrathful deities [251-274]
          - (b) Specific practices of the Eight Logos**
            - (i) Five Transcendent Deities**
            - (ii) 1. Manjushri (enlightened body)**
              - (a) Peaceful Manjushri [275-284]**
              - (b) Wrathful Manjushri (Yamāntaka) [285-300]**
            - (iii) 2. Padma Speech (enlightened speech)**
              - (a) Peaceful**

- (i) Amitayus [301-335]
      - (ii) Amitabha [336-341]
      - (iii) Avalokiteshvara [342-408]
    - (b) Wrathful Hayagrīva
      - (i) Red Hayagrīva [409-431]
      - (ii) Black Hayagrīva [432-436]
  - (iv) 3. Samkyak (enlightened mind)
    - (a) Peaceful Vajrasattva [437-438]
    - (b) Wrathful Vajraheruka [439-450]
    - (c) Vajrapani [451-462]
  - (v) 4. Amritaguna (enlightened qualities)
    - (a) Main Practices (men drup) [461-478]
    - (b) Branch Practices (rasayana or ‘chu-len’ practices) [479-482]
  - (vi) 5. Vajrakīlaya (enlightened activity) [483-496]
- (c) One Intermediate Deity
- (i) 6. Mamo Bötong
    - (a) Main Practices [497-499]
    - (b) Branch Practices, on Jñanadakini Simhamuka [500-513]
- (d) Two Worldly Deities
- (i) 7. Jigten Chötö Worldly Offerings and Praises [514-516]
  - (ii) 8. Mōpa Drak-Ngak Wrathful Mantras [517-522]
- (3) Dakini (root of enlightened activity) [523-583]
- (4) Protectors
- (a) Principal Wisdom and Karma Protectors [584-606]
  - (b) Various Teaching Guardians and Goddesses [607-623]
  - (c) Related Bön Teachings [624-626]
2. Auxilliary sādhanās of Activity Rituals
- a) General Rituals [624-635]
  - b) Rituals for Enacting Specific Kinds of Activity
    - (1) Supreme Activity [636-637]
    - (2) Ordinary Activity
      - (a) For Various Activities [638-640]
      - (b) For Specific Individual Activities [641-781]
- IV. Completion Stage, Anuyoga (Path) [782-790]
- V. Atiyoga (Fruition)
- A. Practice Instructions
- 1. Mind Section [no empowerments]
  - 2. Space Section [no empowerments]
  - 3. Oral Instruction Section
    - a) Ati
      - (1) Vimalamitra [793-807]
      - (2) Padmakara [808-849]
      - (3) Vairochana [850 and 851]
      - (4) those three united into one view [852-858]

- b) Chiti [859]
- c) Yangti [860-885] [The teachings on the Very Secret, Uncommon Oral Linage]
- B. Conclusion: the essence of the three virtuous yogas combined into one [886-893]
- VI. Supplementary Volumes

The Kabgyé’s inclusion in various Nyingma anthologies – as a set of coherent revelation cycles, as an organizing rubric for related materials, and as a template for ritual transmission – speaks to the depth to which the *Eight Teachings* stands as a foundation of Nyingma identity. Interestingly, there is diversity in how the Kabgyé is treated in these contexts. Its influence in the *Nyingma Kama* is spectral, providing an organizational sensibility for a variety of materials that were thought to cohere around a common history and orientation towards ritual practice. In the *Gyubum*, the Kabgyé takes a more central role, its main tantras outright included within the Accomplishment Class category, formalizing a distinction long taken to represent what was thought to be a natural consilience between certain materials, and which may have reflected old vocational predilections. The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, as the eldest and most voluminous of early revelation cycles, naturally takes a central place in the *Rinchen Terdzö*, providing a template for the organization of all the empowerment rites therein. In each of these anthological attempts to consolidate Nyingma literary and doctrinal identity, we see the Kabgyé as a foundational element of the Nyingma inheritance. It has come to stand not only for a group of specific scriptures, but also for a very category of tantric practice and experience.

Tradition tends to regularize its current state to suggest that these organizational schemes represent the tradition as it has always been. But, from a historical perspective, we can recognize the ways in which this tradition has morphed to meet the expectations and needs of its custodians. While the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was always significant for how it collated several tantric systems, it is clear that it gained in coherence and scale at the hands of ecclesiastical

editors who leveraged its mytho-historical narratives and formal characteristics to organize Nyingma scriptural tradition. Treatment of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* — as a canon of practices that had long-resonated with Early Translation practice, as a massive resource for ritualism and a statement about Early Translation identity, or as a source of learning and practice that could underpin the greatness of emerging institutions — reflects the concerns of its literary custodians. As sinologist Timothy Wilson observes, anthologization of scripture serves ideological ends and politicized orthodoxies, and is always embedded in a nexus of practices aimed at fixing tradition: “Anthologies are invariably ensnared in a web of other texts”.<sup>209</sup> In a similar vein, Dalton suggests that the accretion of new materials and formats to textual corpora responds to perceived gaps between received and lived tradition.<sup>210</sup> Thus, the reception and publication history of an important corpus such as this must be understood within the context of specific historical forces and ideological objectives. In the case of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, special curatorial attention was afforded to this cycle in moments of inter-institutional pressure and within the context of reformative efforts for the Nyingmapas. Doctrinal, ritual, and commentarial materials were created and curated as part of ongoing efforts to shore up and articulate Nyingma identity, often in the face of contestation from outside forces. While those contestive forces go unaddressed within the volumes and compendia that emerged between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, we can see how the Kabgyé was leveraged to articulate types of doctrines and practices that were known to undergird Nyingma religiosity. The *Minling System*, for example, represented attempts to develop templates for ritual practice that would be digestible to more broadly defined religious communities, and was redolent of an emergent strategy to express

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<sup>209</sup> Thomas A. Wilson, *Genealogy of the Way: The Construction and Uses of the Confucian Tradition in Late Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, 6-8.

<sup>210</sup> Dalton 2016, xv.

centralized power through the regularization of ritual cycles. The Dzogchen ritual cycle greatly expanded this kind of format to render the Kabgyé into a genre of ritualism that included the many cycles and traditions underwriting the heritage of that institution. Likewise, the Kabgyé was leveraged as a template and broad category within Nyingma anthologies as it sought to define the contours of its own tradition vis-à-vis newly- deployed scriptural taxonomies. In this, the Kabgyé came to be imagined as a crucial foundation of the Nyingma tradition: a source for the doctrines, doxographies, and styles of practice distinctive to the Early Translation Elders.

It is to the imaginal world of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* that we will now turn as we explore the foundational texts' literary qualities, narrative themes, and imaginal conceits. This literary exploration will supplement Part One's historical treatment to complete our picture of the Kabgyé tradition as a force for identity, agency, and religious subjectivity.

## Part II: The Treasures

The texts of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle entail nearly every element of Mahāyoga tantrism. From narrative dramas framing the root tantras, to detailed explanations of the requirements of tantric practice; from ritual procedures for cursing and destroying obstructive forces, to meditational guidance in ritual and transcendental self-cultivational practice, the Kabgyé offers a full suite of materials for undertaking Tantric Buddhist practice, especially as envisaged by the architects of the Nyingma tradition. This vision for Tantric practice in Tibet drew on Mahāyoga traditions while incorporating idioms and imageries drawn from Tibet’s ritual culture. The Kabgyé cycle also advanced a distinctive vision for buddhist mastery which enfolded soteriological and apotropaic dimensions of tantric practice. Finally, in proffering a comprehensive program of doctrine, contemplation, and ritual – a program undergirded by a distinctively resonant imaginal world of wrathful soteriology and harm-averting ritualism – the Kabgyé was a force for articulating collective religious identities and configuring agentive subjectivities. The identity-bolstering capacity of the *Eight Teachings* was related to the Kabgyé’s participation in a broader vision of religious history curated by Nyangrel Nyima Özer, and is carried out in the distinctive literary features of its unique texts.

The scale of this corpus is far too vast to allow for treatment of every major text. Rather, I will take a detailed look at several of the foundational texts which communicate the distinctive features of the Kabgyé cycle. These will include the “auto-history” of the cycle as articulated in *The Manner of the Arising of the Kabgyé Deshek Dupa Teachings* (*bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i bka’ byung tshul*, hereafter *The Arising*), the *King of Root Tantras of the Collected Sugatas* (*bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i rtsa ba’i rgyud kyi rgyal po*, hereafter *The King of Root Tantras*), and a

selection of apotropaic ritual texts which appear across Kabgyé practice cycles.<sup>211</sup> In this exploration, we will contextualize these foundational texts alongside other materials from within, and outside of, the Kabgyé cycle. These include the transmitted *Assembled Sugatas Tantra* (*bde gshegs 'dus pa rgyud*), the narrative bibliographies found in the *Clear Lamp Bibliography* (*dkar chag gsal ba'i sgron ma*) and Ögyan Lingpa's *Five Chronicles* (*bka' thang sde lnga*) revelation cycle, as well as the *Secret Nucleus Tantra* (*gsang ba'i snying po rgyud*, Skt. *Guhyagarbha-tantra*).

Our analysis of the foundational Kabgyé texts will focus on the ways in which Early Translation adepts and Nyingma ecclesiastical figures innovated core Mahāyoga narratives for communicating tantric buddhology, and developed ritual templates and idioms to incorporate familiar features of Tibet's indigenous ritual culture. We will also see how the scriptures of the Kabgyé cycle established doxographical sensibilities which would inform the organization of tantric literature for the Nyingmapa. In these texts are found the buddhological, historiographic, ritual, and doxographical bases that allowed for a continual reformulation of esoteric knowledge towards the articulation of distinctive Nyingma identities. We will also appraise the literary qualities of these texts, observing how the histories, tantras, and ritual scriptures advanced a comprehensive imaginal world with which practitioners could engage, and thereby confirm, articulate, and construct identities and agentive subjectivities which found consilliance with emergent understandings of the history of Buddhism in Tibet.

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<sup>211</sup> In general, I have used the texts from the Katok edition of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. The Katok edition, which was supplied to its publisher by Dūdjom Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje in the late 1970s, is widely regarded as authoritative in Nyingma institutions in China and in exile. The xylograph is clearly printed and easy to read. The equally voluminous Tsamdrak edition is perhaps more comprehensive in its inclusion of variant versions of specific texts, but I have generally observed consistency in the texts I have closely read between the Katok and Tsamdrak. As a manuscript, the Tsamdrak also entails more spelling and orthographical errors.



British Library: Endangered Archives Programme, <https://eap.bl.uk/collection/EAP570-1-3>

## Chapter Four: The Arising of the *bka'*

Like any major tantric cycle, the *Kagyé Deshek Dupa* supplies its own origin myth. This is to be found in the *Manner of the Arising of the Teachings of the Eight Teachings of the Collected Sugatas (bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i bka' byung tshul*, hereafter, “*The Arising*”).<sup>212</sup> This is the first treasure text of the thirteen-volume Katok edition, although not the first text; it is preceded by *The Stainless Proclamations* biography of Nyangrel, and Ngari Panchen’s commentary, *The Wheel Dispelling Darkness: The Method of Explanation (‘chad thabs mun sel nyi zla ‘khor lo)*. Notably, *The Arising* is absent from the Tsamdrak edition, and we do not know whether it played a role in Gongra’s initial redaction in the seventeenth century.

<sup>212</sup> “bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i bka’ byung tshul (The Manner of the Arising of the Teachings of the Kagye Deshek Dupa)” in Katok: *bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i chos skor*, vol. 1., text 3, pp. 243-84.

It is also not included in the nine-volume manuscript from Eastern Tibet that I take to be the forebear of the thirteen-volume Katok. However, it is listed in the *dkar chag* for Taksham Nuden Dorje's *Gyubum* as the opening text of the fourteenth volume (*pha*), which contains the fifteen foundational Kabgyé tantras. It is also mentioned, alongside the *Clear Lamp Bibliography* (*dkar chag gsal ba'i sgron me*, also a terma text)<sup>213</sup> as one of the main sources for Ngari Panchen Pema Wangyal's early sixteenth century commentary and history of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. It is worth noting, too, that elements of *The Arising* are found verbatim in Ögyan Lingpa's fifteenth-century *Five Chronicles* revelation, although these segments are contextualized a bit differently in his account. Specifically, the *Five Chronicles* lists all the texts (and in the same order) that *The Arising* specifies were disseminated to the Eight Vidyādharas at the Śitavana charnel ground. However, there is no mention of the Eight Vidyādharas in the *Five Chronicles*; these texts are listed as the personal library (*phyag dpe*) of Tri Song Detsän, said to constitute the "future inheritance of the royal lineage" (*ma 'ong rgyal brgyud nor skal*).<sup>214</sup> While we cannot definitively say whether the *Five Chronicles* derived its information from *The Arising*, or whether *The Arising* represents an enrichment of Ögyan Lingpa's material, we can conclude that there was a sense of the Kabgyé providing a rubric for the organization of non-Māyājāla Mahāyoga materials, at least by the fifteenth century.

Despite the opacity of *The Arising*'s origins, its narrative of the Kabgyé's initial dispensation to Eight Vidyādharas in India, and its onward dissemination to Tibet with Padmasambhava, became a normative and well-known account of the origins of both the Kabgyé and the entire Accomplishment Class (*sgrub sde*) of Mahāyoga tantric literature. As I will show,

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<sup>213</sup> "dkar chag gsal ba'i sgron me (The Clear Lamp Bibliography)" in Katok: *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol.1., text 9, pp. 615-60.

<sup>214</sup> Ögyan gling pa, *bka' thang sde lnga: rgyal po bka' thang yig: ma 'ong rgyal brgyud nor skal ji ltar sbas tshul*, pp.167-175.

*The Arising*, and also other texts such as the *Stainless Proclamations* biography, as well as the revealed *Clear Lamp* narrative bibliography, underwrite a broad sense of the Kabgyé's foundational character and origins in Buddhist India.

*The Arising of the Kabgyé Teachings* serves many functions: it articulates a buddhological basis for revelation via the doctrine of “three lineages”; it maintains a doxography of tantric doctrines involving a subordination of Mahāyoga to the Great Perfection vis-à-vis the concept of nine vehicles; and it incorporates a typology of autochthonous spirits (*lha ma srin sde brgyad* – the Eight Classes of Gods and Demons), tempering their demonic value and officially drawing them into the Buddhist cosmos in general, and into the history of this corpus in particular. The text also supplies, couched in the narrative of the cycle's dissemination amongst its first human practitioners, a catalog of tantras and supplementary works associated with the eight Kabgyé divinities. This is an important feature of the foundational narrative, as the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* itself functioned like a canon, bringing together, perhaps for the first time, disparate non-Māyājāla tantric systems popular in Early Translation communities into one textual body. I will suggest that, in the world of this particular cycle, canon itself becomes a mode of communicating dharma; that is, the classification of scriptures and supplementary documents that we see carried in this text also articulates a structure for the contours of Mahāyoga tantric knowledge and experience. The very notion of canon thus registers on several levels, and will prove central to what this Kabgyé system does for its adherents. It will also put into motion a method for organizing tantric knowledge which would come to undergird the development of Nyingma canons, anthologies, and curricular structures.

## Narrative Structure and Descriptive Summary

As published in the Katok edition of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, *The Arising* consists of what seems to have been two separate texts. I have also descriptively divided the text into three narrative movements: Parts I and II (an account of the cycle's origins in India and a description of its dissemination in Tibet, respectively) make up the first proto-text, while Part III appears to have been a separate text, later combined to make the *bka' byung tshul* as it appears in the Katok.

### Part I. Myth-history in India:

- a) A description of the general architecture of the Buddhist teachings, and the percolation of the Kabgyé doctrines through primordial, symbolically-mediated, and human dimensions.
- b) The redaction of the teachings by Bodhisattva Vajradharma and concealment by demons and *dākinīs*.
- c) The teaching of the cycle to eight Indian adepts, and a detailed bibliography of all the materials bestowed to each.
- d) The practice and transit of the Kabgyé with Padmasambhava to Tibet via Nepal.

### II. In Tibet:

- a) The transmission of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* to Tri Song Detsän and an assembly of eight Tibetan students by Padmasambhava.
- b) A record of the supranormal yogic powers that each student attained by practicing his or her part of the cycle.

-An apparent end of a text, marked with *rgya rgya rgya* and a colophon -

### III. Notice of Tibetan *Deshek Dupa* Content:

- a) Narrative of Kabgyé instruction and transcription by Lotsawa Denma Tsemang.
- b) Detailed contents of the *Deshek Dupa*, typologized in a scheme of interlocking fivefold lists.
- c) Continued discourse between Padmasambhava and Tri Song Detsän, including revelation prophecies, and the concealment narrative.

## Descriptive Summary

[p 233-237] The text opens with a description of the general architecture of the Buddhist teachings in terms of the myriad dharmas, vehicles, and piṭakas, which are all subordinated to (lit. “assembled as”, *dus par*) the “unborn *Ati*, the Great Perfection” (*skye ba med pa A ti rdzogs pa chen po*).<sup>215</sup> The text goes on in narrative mode to define the nature of the primordial Buddha, Kuntu Zangpo (*kun tu bzang po*, Skt. *Samantabhadra*, lit. “All Good”), and demonstrate his commensurability with the wrathful male and female herukas.<sup>216</sup> This section, then, serves to define wrathful Mahāyoga as a method encapsulating all dharmas, while ultimately subordinating those dharmas to the transcendental vision of reality communicated in the doctrines of the ultimate vehicle of “*Ati / Great Perfection*”.

The text continues to describe the “Lineage of the Conqueror’s Mind-State” (*rgyal ba ’i dgongs pa brgyud*) in terms of the nature of primordial reality and its auto-articulation (*rang sgra*) by Kuntu Zangpo. The primordial (*skye ba med pa*, lit. “uncreated”) reality, present and auto-expressed within Kuntu Zangpo’s mind state (*dgongs pa*), is “assembled” (*dus pa*) as the myriad teachings and vehicles, comprehended (lit. “listened to”) by the Five Enjoyment-Body Buddhas (*longs spyod rdzogs pa’i sku rigs lnga’i sangs rgyas kyis nyan*), and the wrathful herukas. They take wrathful forms for dealing with “those untamable by peaceful means”, and for “the purpose of annihilating the demons along with enemies”.<sup>217</sup>

[p237-243] The text next describes action within the “Sign Lineage of the Awareness Holders” (*rig ’dzin brda brgyud*), recounting how Bodhisattva Vajradharma (*rdo rje chos*)

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<sup>215</sup> *The Arising*, 235.6-236.1: *sems can la rgyu ma rig pa gcig las med pa’i gnyen por/ chos thams cad skye ba med pa A ti rdzogs pa chen po gcig bur ’dus par bstan pa ’dir ’dus te/*

<sup>216</sup> *The Arising*, 237.1 *khro bo khro mo rnams la bshad do/...*

<sup>217</sup> *The Arising*, 237.3: *zhi bas mi thul ba rnams la khro skur sprul nas/ bdud dang srin po dregs pa can tshar bcaid pa’i don du*

received and recorded these teachings in golden volumes, classifying them as Five Great Tantras (*rgyud lnga chen po*), the Five Teachings (*lung chen po lnga*), and Ten Root Tantras (*rtsa ba rgyud bcu*). These are entrusted to the *ma mo* (Skt. *mātrkā*), *mkha' 'gro* (Skt. *ḍākinī*), and the Eight Classes of Gods and Demons (*lha ma srin sde brgyad*), who separate them out into respective caskets made from precious gems. They argue about where to conceal them, with each class of god or demon arguing for concealment in their own realm. The *ḍākinīs* eventually adjudicate, telling them to hide the corpus in a stupa within the Cool Grove charnel ground (*bsil ba'i tshal*, Skt. *Śitavana* ), which has many good, albeit fearsome, qualities.<sup>218</sup>

[p 243-255] Through their supranormal meditative powers, the Eight Vidyādhara (*rig 'dzin brgyad*), dwelling in their own charnel grounds, become aware of the wonders surrounding the Cool Grove, and decide to converge there. They request the *ḍākinīs*, gods, and demons to reveal the nine caskets and to teach the contents. The Vidyādhara are given their respective caskets, and a list is provided of what is found in each one.<sup>219</sup> They also supplicate for a comprehensive edition – the *Deshek Dupa* – which is accordingly revealed from within the stupa.

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<sup>218</sup> The *Śitavana* cremation ground is mentioned in several early Indian Buddhist sources, including in the *Vinaya* and *Anathapindikāsutra*. In these sources, it is said to have been the haunted location where the Buddha met the prominent disciple Anathapindika. In the *Mahaprajnaparamitāśāstra*, *Śitavana* is mentioned as the open burial ground adjacent to Vulture Peak in Rājagrha.

<sup>219</sup> According to this, Mañjuśrīmitra was bestowed 39 Yamāntaka tantras; Nāgarjuna received 29 Hayagrīva tantras; Humkara was granted 19 tantras associated with Śrī Heruka; the 44 Phurba texts were given to Padmasambhava; Vimalamitra received 10 Mahottara texts; Dhanasamskrita was bestowed all 52 mamō tantras; Rambuḡuhya received 8 Jigten Chötō texts in which were encapsulated “inconceivable” (i.e. not delineated here) varieties of demon-taming practice; and Santigarbha was entrusted with 5 inconceivable anthologies of Mōpa Drangak practices. *The Arising* lists each of these texts (none of which are formally part of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle as it has circulated in Tibet) by name; some are known texts of the first dispensation, appearing in early anthologies or codified in the *Eighteen Mahāyoga Tantras*, the *Nyingma Kama*, or even the *Kangyur*. Other texts have fallen out of circulation, if they existed at all. Notice, too, that the materials associated with Jigten Chötō and Mōpa Drangak are not precisely enumerated. This is probably because, as far as I can tell, these cycles did not circulate as discrete cycles in India such that they were transmitted to Tibet during the imperium.

[p 255-258] Each master accomplishes his own class, and Padmasambhava then wanders around India and up to Nepal, where he opens the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* maṇḍala at Yangleshö with his Nepali consort.<sup>220</sup> Having been invited by Tri Song Detsän to Tibet to “tame the earth” (*sa gzhi ‘thul ba*), Padmasambhava arrives and tames the meddlesome land-spirits, and glorious Samyé was “spontaneously erected”.<sup>221</sup>

[ 258-259] Then, at Samyé Chimpu, Padmasambhava bestows the Kabgyé empowerments to eight disciples, including Tri Song Detsän.<sup>222</sup> Each disciple is able to accomplish his or her cycle and achieve the supranormal powers of a *vidyādhara*. But Tri Song Detsän laments his inability to practice meditation due to the distractions inherent to his office, and requests further instruction. Padmasambhava prophecies that the king will be able to complete his practice in a final rebirth, and that the *Deshek Dupa* and ancillary texts should be concealed for that future time. Then, back at Chimpu, the manuscripts were transcribed into Tibetan over the course of a year by the Tibetan translator, Denma Tsemang.

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<sup>220</sup> This brief mention of Yangleshö belies a complicated constellation of narratives regarding Padmasambhava’s deeds in Nepal. Nyangrel’s revealed hagiography of Padmasambhava, the *zangs gling ma*, does indeed describe Padmasambhava’s practice of Yangdak Heruka and Dorje Phurba at Yangleshö, resulting in the subjugation of several classes of obstructing demonesses and the return of the rains to the drought-stricken Kathmandu valley (*The Lotus Born*, p 52-55). Nyingma lore also holds that it was at the upper Asura cave of Yangleshö that Padmasambhava tamed twelve Tenmo demonesses (the *btstan ma bcu gnyis*) through mastery of Jigten Chötö, binding them by oath to protect Tibet. Interestingly, Dalton has discovered reference to Yangleshö in Dunhuang’s PT44, which describes the tantric master Acharya Padma’s mastery of all tantric yogas there, culminating in the accomplishment of Vajrakīla (Dalton 2004, 762). Dalton dates this text to the late tenth century, indicating that it is an older version of the story than is found in Nyangrel’s revelation of the *gzangs gling ma*, or the *bka’ byung tshul*.

<sup>221</sup> *The Arising*, 256.3: *sa gzhi ma thul bas rtsig tu ma thub nas/ yang le shod kyi brag phug nas slob dpon pamda ‘byung gnas spyang drangs na/ ‘grub par zhal ‘cham nas/ sob dpon spyang drangs nas thugs kyis dgongs nas byon/ bod kyi lha srin gtug pa can thams cad kyang btul/ lha ma srin sde brgyad thams can mnga’ ‘og tu bsdus nas/ dpal bsam yas lhun gwis grub pa bzhengs/*

<sup>222</sup> The eight recipients of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* in Tibet were: Tri Song Detsän (receiving Mahottara as his tutelary deity); Lhodrak Namkha Nyingpo (receiving Śri Heruka); Nubchen Sangye Yeshe (receiving Yamāntaka); Gyalwa Chog Yang (Hayagrīva); Yeshe Tshogyal (Vajrakīlaya); Nyang Tenzin Zangpo (Lama Rigzin); Drog Palgyi Sengye (Mamo Bötong); Langchen Palgyi Sengye (Jigten Chötö); Vairotsana (Möpa Drangak);

[p 259-269] The text makes a break there, with the customary annotation signaling the end of a terma text (*rgya rgya rgya, gter rgya*). But the narrative picks up again with an account of the discourse between Tri Song Detsän and Padmasambhava, again reporting the transmission of the cycle in Tibet and its transcription by Denma Tsemang. A detailed catalog of materials follows, arranged in interlocking sets of five groupings, for a total of 140 “ancillary dharmas” (*chos kyi cha lag*) of the Kabgyé teachings. Herein is included an entire array of tantric methods, not only of the wrathful variety, but representing the structure of Mahāyoga tantric knowledge altogether. What is ostensibly a list of texts here doubles as a structure for Mahāyoga doctrine and esoteric practice.

[p 269-271] The narrative returns to discourse between Padmasambhava and Tri Song Detsän, wherein the king reiterates his concern that he will not be able to practice these precious teachings, and Padmasambhava predicts his accomplishment in his future, and final, lifetime. Padmasambhava declares he will teach the cycle to no one else, and they conceal the text (perhaps there at the Red Rock hermitage near Samyé (*brag dmar mgrin*); the text does not specify), and they command the treasure protectors and entrustment protectresses to guard it until the appointed individual returns for them.

[ 271] A second colophon explains how the prophesied person was Nyangrel Nyima Özer, and how he passed it on to his sons.

### **Analysis**

Several features in this text are worth sustained attention: a) The myth-history of the cycle, which entails a buddhological argument for revelation and wrathful practice; b) a unique demonology which embraces a spectrum of entities not usually associated with the propagation of sacred materials; c) a pair of bibliographies that do much work to advance the mythic underpinnings of the revelation cycle and to structure Mahāyoga tantrism; and d) a prophetic

narrative of concealment that sets the stage for the Kabgyé's revelation and also Nyangrel's status as the reincarnation of Tri Song Detsän.

### **Buddhology and Revelation**

The text opens with an account of Truth's (*chos*) auto-articulation in primordial, symbolically-mediated, and apparent dimensions of reality:

Moreover, the blessings from within the equality, unborn suchness, and the truth-body, Buddha All Good [*Samantabhadra*], is explained as the self-utterance of suchness. [It is] listened to by the Buddhas of the Five Families of the completely perfect Enjoyment Body. Having emanated as wrathful forms for taming those who are untamable through peaceful means, emanating as the wrathful bodies of awareness holders as well as the worldly and transcendental [spirits] for the purpose of annihilating the demons and arrogant ones, it is explained.<sup>223</sup>

This account is distinctively oriented towards the idiom of wrath from the very beginning, connecting the emanational forms of the Primordial Buddha – in this case, “wrathful forms” (*khro sku*) – to the primordial dimension of reality, suchness itself (*chos nyid*). What is supplied from the beginning is a buddhology of enlightened wrath and a soteriological incorporation of all sorts of entities, transcendental and mundane (*'jig rten pa dang/ 'jig rten las 'das pa 'i*). This theme of the connection of soteriological wrath to primordial reality itself will undergird the doctrines, rituals, and meditations of the Kabgyé cycle.

To describe how the naturally expressive nature of unconditioned reality is articulated in ways comprehensible to myriad beings, Mahāyoga tradition generally speaks of the lineages of “Mind, Sign, and Word” (properly: “The Lineage of the Conquerors' Mind-State” [*rgyal ba dgongs pa 'i brgyud*]), the “Symbolic Lineage of the Awareness Holders” [*rig 'dzin brda'i*]

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<sup>223</sup> *The Arising*, 237.1: *De yang chos sku kun tu bzang po dang/ skye med don gyi chos nyid mnyang pa nyid kyi ngang las byin gyis brlabs te/ chos nyid kyi rang sgras bshad/ longs spyod rdzogs pa 'i sku rigs lnga 'i sangs rgyas kyis nyan/ zhi bas mi thul ba rnams la khro skur sprul nas/ bdud dang srin po dregs pa can tshar bead pa 'i don du 'khor 'jig rten pa dang/ 'jig rten las 'das pa dang/ rig 'dzin rnams la sbrul pa 'i sku khro bor sprul nas bshad do/*

*brgyud*], and “The Hearing Lineage of Humans” [*gang zag snyan brgyud*]).<sup>224</sup> The Lineage of the Conquerors’ Mind-State refers to the auto-articulation of truth/reality (*chos*) in the unconditioned primordial substrate (*chos nyid*) by the primordial buddha Kuntu Zangpo (*kun tu bzang po*, Skt. *samantabhadra*, lit. “All Good”).<sup>225</sup> These “teachings”, transcendent of thought or language in their original nature, naturally radiate due to the power of compassion in a symbolic manner, comprehended by divine beings such as the Bodhisattvas and Vidyādhara, and are promulgated through mystic signs.<sup>226</sup> Such signs generally include the visionary appearance of maṇḍalas, or, in some Mahāyoga and Atiyoga lore, the sounds and sights of the natural world, which are said to communicate the primordial reality of the dharmatā (*chos nyid*) to the spiritually advanced. Only adepts of extreme realization, the Awareness Holders (*rig ‘dzin*, Skt. *vidyādhara*), may comprehend this so-called Sign Lineage (*brda brgyud*), and it is through them that the teachings are then made comprehensible to humans in the manner of a “Lineage of Word” (technically, the “Hearing Lineage of Persons: *gang zag snyan brgyud*). It is in this way that the very words and iconography of a Mahāyoga system such as the Kabgyé participate in, and directly express, a deep reality that transcends word or concept. It is this notion of the Three Lineages that allows for scriptural revelation in the first place, as novel expressions of truth can continually and spontaneously arise from the naturally expressive unconditionality of the

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<sup>224</sup> See: Kapstein 2000, 164, for a summary of this doctrine. After Trungpa (2013), I designate these as the lineages of Mind, Sign, and Word.

<sup>225</sup> *Dgongs pa* is often translated as “intention” or “consideration”, or even ideation (as in *Tshig Mdzod Chen Mo* entry 1: “*bsam blo gtong ba*”), but *dgongs pa* is also the honorific for *sems* (TMC, entry 2: “*sems kyi zhe sa*”), and can thus refer to the mind of the Buddha. Thus, the *dgongs pa* of the *rgyal ba dgongs pa’i brgyud* most fully refers to something like the transcendental mind-state of divine entities, which necessarily entails the intentionality to benefit beings, and so “lineage of conqueror’s intention” works, too.

<sup>226</sup> While Mahāyoga systems share this account of the teachings’ dissemination through lineages of Mind, Sign, and Word, each system distinctively identifies the divine entities associated with these lineages. For example, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* identifies the Bodhisattva Vajradharma (an emanation of Vajrapani) as the lineage-holder of Signs, while other Mahāyoga systems identify Vajrasattva, Manjushri, or Vajrapani in that role.

primordial ground- nature. Thus, the tantras in general, and the revealed scriptures in particular, can claim authenticity without a direct line to the historical Buddha.

As for the Three Lineages in the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, *The Arising* summarizes the Lineage of the Conqueror’s Mind: “The blessings from within equality, the unborn dharma, and the dharmakāya All-Good, is the self-utterance of the dharmatā, listened to by the five buddha families of the complete perfect enjoyment body...”<sup>227</sup>, and continues with the Sign and Word lineages, as summarized in my descriptive synopsis above. So it was that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* – a cycle combining eight major Mahāyoga divinities and their contemplative techniques – was auto-articulated by Kuntu Zangpo, redacted through Vajradharma and the *ḍākinīs* in the Sign Lineage, and received by a congregation of human beings, The Eight Vidyādhara, of whom Guru Padmasambhava was a member. The individual tantras of the Eight Herukas were individually bestowed to these eight masters, and allegedly propagated in India and Nepal.<sup>228</sup> But the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* that Nyangrel claimed to have revealed purports to be the special comprehensive edition, brought to Tibet by Padmasambhava himself.

### **Incorporating the Gods and Demons**

One unique feature of the Kabgyé’s foundational narrative is the incorporation of divine, semi-divine, and autochthonous (i.e. landscape-based) entities in the story of the cycle’s propagation. While the inclusion of such characters in Tantric and Mahayāna Buddhist literature in general is expected, *The Arising*’s narrative stands out for the unexpected role that customarily demonic entities take in propagating and preserving Buddhist materials. According to the text, the whole series of the Kabgyé tantras was entrusted to “the mamos accomplished from wisdom

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<sup>227</sup> *The Arising*, 237.3: *De yang chos sku kun tu bzang po dang/ skyed med don gyi chos nyid mnyang pa nyid kyi nang las byin gyis brlabs te/ chos nyid kyi rang sgras bshad/ longs spyod rdzogs pa’i sku rigs lnga’i sangs rgyas kyis nyan.*

<sup>228</sup> See: “The Lineage of Mahāyoga, the Class of Means for Attainment” in Dūdjom 1991, 475-481.

and karma, and the *dākinīs*, along with the retinue gods and demons of the eight classes (*lha ma srin sde brgyad*)”.<sup>229</sup> These characters, according to the story, work together to manufacture special treasure chests for the Kabgyé materials, and are entrusted by Vajradharma with their concealment.

*Dākinīs* (Tib. *mkha’ ‘gro*) and the tempestuous feminine *ma mo* (Skt. *mātrka*) figured prominently in the dreams and visions of Nyangrel Nyima Özer, and came to be regularly affiliated with the concealment and retrieval of treasure in Tibet. As such, they were clearly part of the general religious imagination of adepts in this period. Looking for earlier precedents for the concealment of scriptures, Tibetan terma apologists often noted the role of aqueous *nāga* (Tib. *klu*) spirits in the concealment of Mahayāna scriptures according to Indian Buddhist literature. But in the foundational narrative of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, the Eight Classes of Gods and Demons – an eightfold list of semi-divine, autochthonous, and demonic entities – play a central role, and the involvement of such decidedly maleficent and landscape-based entities is distinctive. According to this particular text, The Eight Classes include: *Lú* (*klu*, Skt. *nāga*, aquatic spirits), *za*(*gza’*, Skt. *rāhu*, planetary gods), *Dü* (*bdud* Skt. *māra*, harmful demons), *Mú* (*rmu / dmu*, malignant spirits, also an ancient Tibetan term connected to lore about the human progenitor-gods), *Nöjin* (*gnod spyin*, Skt. *yakṣa*, guardian demons), *Srinpo* (*srin po*, Skt. *rakṣa*, cannibal demons), *Gek* (*bgegs* (obstructing entities, Skt. *vighna*), and *Tsän* (*btsan*, violent spirits, sometimes associated with deceased kings, no Sanskrit equivalent). In this, the Kabgyé provides an early example of what would become a common template for the organization of semi-divine entities in Tibetan Buddhist contexts, a literary history outlined by Françoise Pommaret and

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<sup>229</sup> *The Arising*, 239.2: *gsang sngags kyi rgyud sde thams cad rig ‘dzin rnams kyis ye shes dang las las grub pa’i ma mo dang kha’ ‘gro ma rnams dang ‘khor lha ma srin sde brgyad dang bcas pa la gtad de bzhag go//*

addressed in the “Demon Taming” subsection, previous.<sup>230</sup> Lists of the “Eight Classes” tend to be highly variable, and even the eightfold lists found at various junctures within the *Deshek Dupa* corpus are not mutually coherent. It seems that the very idea of “Eight Classes” provided a way to enfold entities known to Tibetan ritual culture into a Buddhist scheme, and the foundational myth of the *Eight Teachings* cycle evidences this.

Returning to the narrative: after sealing the texts in treasure chests made from precious stones, a debate unfolds between these entities regarding where the cycle should be concealed:

...desiring to conceal it as treasure, the mamo, khandro, and Gods and Spirits of the Eight Classes conferred: the khandro replied to conceal it in the wish-fulfilling tree; the lú replied to conceal it in the depth of the sea; the za said to conceal it in the space of the sky; the dü demons said in the island of the dark demon land; the lha said in the cupola of the victorious peak of Mount Meru; the mu kings said in the peak of the mu palace in the lower rock cave; the nöjin said in the palace of Vaishravana in the northeast mountain ring, the srinpo said in the nine-storied srin castle in Purang Sri Lanka, the gek said in the great radiant grey-light demon castle in the land of the northeastern gek. The tsän said to conceal it at the threshold of the Samten Rock, at the maroon tsän fortress...<sup>231</sup>

This fascinating exchange gives us a catalog of the Eight Classes (although there seem to be ten listed here), and tells us something about how these entities and their abodes were to be imagined. Ultimately, the ḍākinīs intervene and unilaterally decide to conceal the corpus in the Śitavana charnel ground stupa. Beyond adding color and a bit of humor to the narrative, the inclusion of these entities in the foundational narrative of the cycle tells us something about the imaginal and vocational milieu out of which this text emerged. The world of Nyangrel and his

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<sup>230</sup> For a diachronic overview and summary of the various eightfold categorizations of Tibetan Buddhist divinities, see: Pommaret ed., 2003.

<sup>231</sup> *The Arising*, 240: ...*ma mo dang mkha' 'gro ma dang lha ma srin sde brgyad bka' bsgos pa/ mkha' 'gro ma rnams na re/ dpag bsam gyi shing la sba zer/ klu rnams na re/ rgya mtsho'i gting du sba zer/ gza' rnams na re/ nam mkha'i mthongs su sba zer/ bdud rnams na re/ bdud yul mun ba'i gling du sba zer/ lha rnams na re/ gnya' shing 'dzin gyi byang shar na lchang lo can gyi pho brang na sba zer/ srin po rnams na re/ srin yul lang ka pu rangs su srin mkhar dgu brtsegs la sba zer/ bgegs rnams na re/ byang shar bgegs kyi gling na 'dri mkhar skya bo 'od po che la sba zer/ btsan rnams na re/ bsam gtan brag gi them pa la btsan mkhar smug po lde ma pa la sba zer/ de ltar lha ma srin sde brgyad kyis bka' re stsal nas/*

associates was a uniquely visionary one, and the physical environment was highly imposing. Unseen forces associated with the land would have been a prominent part of any yogin's (and perhaps any Tibetan's) everyday experience, at least at the level of ritual culture, if not in visionary experience. We know that Nyangrel, in particular, performed demon-averting rituals for his livelihood. It makes sense, then, that a tantric system flowing through Nyangrel would include these entities, being, as they were, a fact of life in twelfth-century Tibet. And, as we will see, the Kabgyé cycle altogether is oriented towards apotropaic practice, with the theme of demon control emerging again and again in the narratives, doctrines, and practices that populate this cycle. As one of the arguments of this dissertation suggests, the Kabgyé represented an enfoldment of the soteriological and apotropaic functions of tantric ritual, and so it makes sense that the gods and demons with which such practices dealt were prominently featured in the cycle's auto-history. As we will also see, these Eight Classes of Gods and Demons will also provide the basis for the maṇḍalas and rituals of the "worldly" cycles of Jigten Chötö and Möpa Drangak, and in these sections we will see the strongest evidence for the indigenization of Mahāyoga through a uniquely geomantic take on the "taming and liberating" (*'dul ba* and *sgrol ba*) idioms of wrathful tantrism.

### **Assembling the Dharma**

Key to understanding the significance of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is to acknowledge its character as a collection (a *'dus pa*) of scriptures associated with the tantric systems and ritual protocols already practiced by Early Translation adepts. As we have described, there were traceable traditions involving five of the eight Kabgyé deities over the centuries preceding Nyangrel: Hayagrīva (*rta mgrin*), Śri Heruka (*yang dag*), Mahottara (*che mchog*), Yamāntaka (*gshin rje*), and Vajrakīlaya (*rdo rje phur ba*). Adepts who officiated tantric learning and practice would typically be trained in one or more of these cycles, as we see in the predilection of

Nyangrel and his family for Hayagrīva. However, there seems to have been no coherent canon of such texts or unified curriculum to be inherited by Tibetan Buddhists in the First Dispensation, and it is in the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* that these particular deity-systems are brought together into something coherently united under a single mythology and soteriological idiom. *The Arising* is an essential force in this effort, and the notion of ‘*dus pa* – to “assemble” – plays out in the text on several registers.

In the foundational narrative of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, the notion of collation is essential, carrying buddhological, bibliographic, and historical dimensions. Specifically, the term ‘*dus pa* (the perfective tense of ‘*du ba*: to “assemble”, or “gather”, nominalized as ‘*dus pa*: “assembly” ) is omnipresent in the opening passages of *The Arising*.<sup>232</sup> This text begins by explaining how doctrines, vehicles, and maṇḍalas were “assembled” (‘*dus pa*), “having been generated by the compassionate wisdom of the unborn dharma body, the primordial Buddha Kuntu Zangpo”.<sup>233</sup> Thus were “assembled” (‘*dus pa*) the 84,000 dharmas in response to 84,000 afflictions, further “assembled” into the causal and resultant vehicles, with the three baskets and nine yānas. These are further “assembled” into the wrathful maṇḍala at the heart of the Kabgyé.<sup>234</sup> Technically, it is Buddha All-Good, Kuntu Zangpo, who is the progenitive redactor of these doctrines and pedagogical modes in the Lineage of Mind, transmitting them onward to the members of the Sign and Word lineages. However, ‘*du ba* is a *tha mi dad pa* verb, requiring

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<sup>232</sup> *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, p. 1397: ‘*du ba*: (tha mi dad pa) ‘*dus pa*/ ‘*du ba*/ ‘*dus//* : *tshogs pa*. [intransitive, to assemble].. Note that ‘*du ba* is marked *tha mi dad pa*, i.e., the agent goes unmarked by an agentive case marker, and thus suggests a lower degree of agency.

<sup>233</sup> *The Arising*, 234.1: *dpal kun tu bzang po chos sku skye med dang las mkhyen pa’i thugs rje dang gis skyes nas/*

<sup>234</sup> *The Arising*, 234-235.

no agentive particle (*byed sgra*) to mark the agent, thus suggesting a low degree of agency.<sup>235</sup> In other words, it is more faithful to the Tibetan grammar to render it that the dharmas, vehicles, maṇḍalas, etc. “were assembled” *out of* compassionate wisdom (*mkhyen pa'i thugs rje las*), than it would be to say Buddha All-Good “assembled” them (again, *kun tu bzang po* is not marked with the agentive particle, *gis*, in reference to the assembling).<sup>236</sup> This conforms to the subtle buddhology of the Three Lineages, as the teachings of the Mind and Sign Lineages naturally percolate out of the singular space of dharmakāya (*gnyis su med pa'i dbyings*) by the force of un-produced (*skye med pa'i*, i.e. spontaneous) compassion, which is the natural expressivity, or “self-utterance” (*rang sgra*), of the primordial ground. In this way, “assembling” takes on a curiously intransitive dimension, and does not have to refer to the active condensation of a multiplicity into something singular (as in making “an assembly”), as in the ordinary sense of the word, but instead to a spontaneous extension of a multiplicity of doctrines *out of* the singular primordial truth.

In sum, the various uses of the term – ‘*dus pa* as an assembly of Sugatas, ‘*du ba* as a decidedly intransitive, redactive-yet-proliferative act of articulating complex doctrines, and a ‘*dus pa* as a collation of texts – constitutes a nifty piece of rhetoric that invokes a sense of divinely-sanctioned collation that I think is essential to what this corpus is meant to do: to collect together and sanction several tantric systems with resonance for Early Translation practitioners.

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<sup>235</sup> *tha mi dad pa* means “indivisible”, referring to the indivisibility of an action and the recipient of the action (which often indicates the agent), such as in the case of *mtshong ba* (to perceive). *Tha dad pa* means “divisible”, and suggests that the action and its direct object abide in separation, as in the case of *lta ba* (to look at something). The *tha dad pa* / *tha mi dad pa* distinction has been characterized by Western grammarians as one of transitivity, but, as in the case of *mtshong ba* (see) and *lta ba* (look) the notion of transitivity does not always adhere perfectly to the TDP/TMDP distinction.

<sup>236</sup> To be precise, the text specifies that, “having been born from Kuntu Zangpo’s compassion” (...*thugs rje dang gis skyes nas*), the maṇḍalas etc. “were assembled” (‘*dus pa*). The agentive particle (*gis*) refers to the manner by which they were produced (*skyes*), and having been produced, (*skyes nas*), they became assembled (the intransitive ‘*dus pa*).

As such, I suggest that the revelatory production of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* through Nyangrel was a mode of canon-formation. When we consider the context of competition and pressure surrounding Early Translation communities, it becomes clear why such an attempt to curate a coherent canon of contemplative scriptures – one firmly rooted in the wrathful salvational idiom and the vocation of ritual demon control – was welcome.

### **Bibliographia**

Two catalogs of Kabgyé materials appear within *The Arising's* narrative. In the first, the text details the contents of each of the eight precious chests that were bestowed to the Eight Vidyādharas at Śítavana. The narrative specifies that Mañjuśrīmitra received thirty-nine Yamāntaka tantras, Nāgarjuna received twenty-nine Hayagrīva texts, Hūṃkāra obtained eighteen Yangdak Heruka tantras and commentaries, to Padmasambhava was bestowed forty-four Phurba tantras, Vimalamitra got ten Chemchok tantras, Dhanasaṃskṛta received fifty-two mamo texts, Rambughya's Drekpa casket held eight tantras, and Śāntigarbha was given five Mōpa Drangak texts. *The Arising* enumerates the titles of these two hundred and five texts in full detail. Some of the titles are known scriptures, attested in the *Nyingma Gyubum*, the *Nyingma Kama*, and even in the *Kangyur*. But I have not located the vast majority of the texts mentioned in any available Tibetan collection. This does not mean that they never existed: unattested texts may have circulated in Tibet or India, with less-important cycles disappearing with disuse or proscription. But, given its placement and function within this narrativized myth-history, it is my theory that this catalog of wrathful Mahāyoga materials functioned as an imaginative act of canon formation, meant to underscore the antiquity of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle by associating it with an entire family of literature – a collection that would become known as the *sgrub sde*, or Accomplishment Class – that hypothetically existed in India's ground-zero for siddha tantrism. Beyond simply authenticating a new corpus with an imagined history, this narrative act gives a

sense of coherence, or branding, to a certain type of tantric materials. We are given a family of practices rooted in the imaginaire of sacred wrath, utilizing heavy ritualism involving sexual and violent elements, and favorable to ritual professionalization: all features of the Buddhism that defined Early Translation communities, and which were under scrutiny by rivals in Nyangrel's time.

If *The Arising* was truly a constituent feature of the initial *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* revelation, we might treat it as the eldest instance of a proto-Accomplishment Class taxonomy. Its information is also replicated in *The Clear Lamp Bibliography* (*dkar chag gsal ba'i sgron ma*), which is a terma text also included only in the Katok edition. A third text from the Katok corpus replicates this Kabgyé bibliography yet again: Ngari Panchen's (1487-1542) *Wheel of the Sun and Moon Dispelling the Darkness: A Method of Explanation* (*'chad thabs mun sel nyi zla'i 'khor lo*).<sup>237</sup> This early sixteenth-century Kabgyé history reiterates the idea that the many non-Māyājāla Mahāyoga tantras from India were first bestowed to the Eight Vidyādhara in the context of the dispensation of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* at Śitavana, although its catalog of tantras is somewhat truncated as compared to *The Arising's*. Interestingly, Ngari Panchen uses the plural term "Accomplishment Classes" (*sgrub sde bcu*, and *sgrub sde rnams*) to refer to categories of texts associated with the Kabgyé deities (as in, the "Accomplishment Classes" of Mahottara, Śri Heruka, Yamāntaka, etc., plus Rigzin and the Peaceful Ones, for a total of ten "Accomplishment Classes").<sup>238</sup> This differs slightly from the later anthological use of the term

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<sup>237</sup> Mnga' ris pan chen, *'chad thabs mun sel nyi zla'i 'khor lo*

<sup>238</sup> Mnga' ris pan chen, *'chad thabs mun sel nyi zla'i 'khor lo*, 176: "[these were] translated by the great master Padmasambhava and Vairotsana; they are the tantras of each accomplishment class" (*slob dpon chen po padma sambha wa dang ve ro sa 'gyur te bsgrub sde so so'i rgyud yin no/*); 201.3: "As for the Five Great Tantras of this Deshek Dupa... they are the root of the teachings as the principal essential accomplishment of the ten accomplishment classes. They are like the seed of the subsidiary tantras explained above." (... *bder gshegs 'dus pa 'di la spyi rgyud lnga ni bsgrub sde bcu'i dril bsgrub la gtso bor ston pa'i rtsa ba yin te/ gong du bstan pa'i yan lag gi rgyud thams cad kyi sa bon lta bu yin no/*)

*sgrub sde* in the singular (i.e., “*The Accomplishment Class*”) to refer to the entire collection of tantras not included in the Māyājāla cycles and the canon of eighteen Mahāyoga tantras.

However, Ngari’s text nonetheless exemplifies a way of associating all sorts of materials with the constituent elements of the Kabgyé, a taxonomical sensibility which would undergird later anthologies. Ngari Panchen’s text is the earliest in which I have seen the term *sgrub sde* used in such a way.

Interestingly, the fourteenth-century *Five Chronicles* revelation (*bka' thang sde lnga*) recovered by Ögyan Lingpa provides a nearly identical bibliography of Mahāyoga materials categorized under the Kabgyé rubric. This account appears in an enumeration of the cycles entrusted to Tri Song Detsän in a sub-section of *The King’s Chronicle* (*rgyal po bka' thang*), entitled “The Manner of How the Future Inheritance of the Royal Lineage Was Concealed” (Tib. *ma 'ongs rgyal brgyud nor skal ji ltar sbas tshul*).<sup>239</sup> Interestingly, this section makes no mention of the Kabgyé’s origins in India, or of the Eight Vidyādhara. It does specify that these cycles were taught by Padmasambhava to the emperor and his court at Samyé, where the *Five Chronicles* themselves were revealed. The *Five Chronicles’* list is a bit smaller than *The Arising’s*, but where they overlap, the resemblance is verbatim. So while we cannot know whether *The Arising* or the *Five Chronicles* is elder, we can conclude that the affiliation of all sorts of non-Māyājāla texts with the category of the *Eight Teachings* was underway between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. As *The Arising* is mentioned specifically as a source for Ngari Panchen’s *Method of Explanation*, and is included in Nüden Dorje’s seventeenth-century *Nyingma Gyubum* as the preface to its volume devoted to the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, we know that the *bka' byung tshul* itself was in circulation in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. It

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<sup>239</sup> Ögyan gling pa, *bka' thang sde lnga: rgyal po bka' thang*, 153 – 227.

is hard to say, however, why it is excluded from every *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* edition other than the Katok. It may be the case that its narrative of the *Deshek Dupa*'s concealment at Samyé was too discrepant with the normative story of Nyangrel's revelation at Khoting.

A second bibliographic act transpires towards the end of *The Arising*. It seems this part of the work was once a separate text, as the preceding section comes to a close with the customary marks indicating the end of a terma text (*rgya rgya rgya*: sealed, sealed, sealed).<sup>240</sup> This second section picks up where the first leaves off, replicating several passages from the end of the first section, suggesting it was once separate and alternative to the *bka' byung tshul*. It is now included as a continuation of the narrative, and consists mostly of a description of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* as taught by Padmasambhava to Tri Song Detsän as a list of five interlocking sets of “ancillary, mother, and child teachings” (*cha lag ma bu chos*), for a total of 140 “limbs” (*yan lag*) of teachings. This is essentially a notice of contents (*dkar chag*) embedded into the narrative of the cycle's dispensation in Tibet, formulated as a complex scheme of interlocking sets of five elements, doubling as a taxonomical structure of Mahāyoga practice.<sup>241</sup>

Thus:

- I. The Five Great Tantras (*rgyud chen lnga*), the Five Teachings (*lung lnga*), and Ten Root Tantras (*rtsa ba'i rgyud bcu*), making the fifteen tantras and five teachings found in the complete cycle.<sup>242</sup> These are the core doctrines of the cycle and are

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<sup>240</sup> *The Arising*, 259.3

<sup>241</sup> *The Arising*, 260 -269

<sup>242</sup> According to *The Arising* (pp. 260-61), the **Five Great Tantras** are listed: *The Root Tantras* (*rtsa ba'i rgyud*), *The Subsequent Tantra* (*phyi ma'i rgyud*), *The Subsequent-Subsequent Tantra* (*phyi ma'i phyi ma rgyud*), *The Tantra Amending Incompletions* (*ma tshang ba kha skong ba'i rgyud*), *The Differentiation Key Tantra* (*'byed par byed pa lde mig gi rgyud*). **The Ten Root Tantras** are: *The Root Tantra of the Assembly of Peaceful Deities* (*zhi ba 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*), *The Root Tantra of the Mahottara Assembly* (*che mchog 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*), *The Root Tantra of the Blood Drinker Assembly* [*Sri Heruka*] (*khrag 'thung 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*), *The Root Tantra of the Assembly of the Lord of Death* [*Yamāntaka*] (*gshin rje 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*), *The Root Tantra of the Assembly of the Powerful One* [i.e., *dbang chen, Hayagriva*] (*dbang 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*), *The Root Tantra of the Phurba Assembly* [*Vajrakīlaya*] (*phur ba 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*), *The Root Tantra of the Assembled mamos*, (*ma mo 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*), *The Root Tantra of the Awareness Holders Assembly* (*rig pa 'dzin pa 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*), *The Root Tantra of the Assembly of Haughty Ones* [*'jig rten mchod btsod*] (*dregs pa 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*), *The*

included in every *chos skor* edition, and elucidated in both the internal bibliography and in Ngari Panchen's commentary.

- II. Subsidiary to those are: the *Fivefold General Structure of the Secret Mantra* (*gsang sngags spyi 'chings lnga mdzad*), *The Treasury of Secret Mantra Teachings* (*gsang sngags lung gi bang mdzod*), *The Full Teachings of Secret Mantra* (*gsang sngags bka'i tha ram*), *The Key of the Secret Mantra Teachings* (*gsang sngags lung gi lde mig*) and *The Apex Doctrines of the Secret Mantra Teachings* (*gsang sngags lung gi bka' mgo*). These are actual texts included in the various *chos skor* editions.
- III. Derived from those tantras and teachings (*rgyu dang lung de rnams brtan nas*) are: the *Five Peaceful Means of Accomplishment* (*zhi ba la sgrub thabs lnga*); *The Hundred Sacred Ones* [i.e., the peaceful and wrathful deities] arranged as the *Five Great and Minor Peaceful Ritual Actions* (*dam pa rigs brgya la las chen lnga dang las chung lnga cha lag*); *The Five Means of Accomplishment of the Forty-Two Peaceful Buddhas* (*zhi ba bhu ddha bzhi bcu rtsa gnyis la bsgrub thabs lnga*); *The Five Modes of Accomplishment of the Hundred Buddha Families* (*rigs brgya la bsgrub lugs lnga*); *The Five Modes of Accomplishment of the Single Family of the Great Secret* (*gsang chen rigs gcig don la bsgrub lugs lnga*); and *The Mode of Accomplishment of the Wrathful Assembled Sugatas* (*bde gshegs 'dus pa'i khro bo la yang bsgrub lugs*). These are a taxonomy of the main self-cultivational practices and rituals associated with the primary maṇḍalas of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, inclusive of both peaceful and wrathful sections.
- IV. These are supplemented with: *The Five Accomplishment Systems* (*bsgrub lugs lnga*); *The Supplementary Methods of Accomplishment* (*bsgrub thabs rnams kyi cha lag*), which include *The Five Great Accomplishments of the Great Invocation and Middling Blessings* (*bskul che 'bring bying brlabs kyi bsgrub chen lnga*); *The Five Types of Great Actions* (*las chen rnam pa lnga*); *The Five Great Spikes of Enlightened Activity* (*phrin las kyi gzer chen lnga*); *The Five Extensive and Middling Praise and Invocations* (*bstod bskul la rgyas 'bring lnga*). These are all supplementary tantric rituals, including yogic techniques of the higher vehicles, expiations, offerings, preparation of ritual materials and purifications.

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*Root Tantra of the Assembly of Wrathful Mantra* (*drag sngags 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*). **The Five Teachings** are: *The Teaching of the True Meaning of the Secret Mantra*, (*gsang sngags nges pa don gyi lung*), *The Teaching of the Divine Deeds of Magical Display* (*mdzad pa cho 'phrul lha'i lung*), *The Teaching of Accomplishing Total Enlightened Activity* (*phrin las mthar phyin bsgrub pa'i lung*), *The Teaching of the Distant Melody of Compassion* (*thugs rje dbyangs thag gnas kyi lung*), and the *Teaching of the Illuminating Lamp* (*gsal bar byed pa sgron ma'i lung*).

- V. *The Five Requisite Conditions (dgos ba'i cha rkyen lnga): Five Tantric Schemata (rgyud kyi chings lnga); The Five Fastenings to the Teachings (lung gi sdebs pa); and The Five Ways of Applying the Methods of Accomplishment (bsgrub thabs kyi sbyor lugs lnga).* These are methods for applying teachings to religious practice
- VI. *The Essential Instructions of the Secret Mantra (gsang sngags man ngag): The Five Common Yogas (thun mong gi rnal byor lnga); The Five Particular Completion Stages (khyad par gyi rdzogs rim lnga); The Five Teachings of the Methods of Accomplishment (bsgrub thabs kyi lung lnga); The Five Limbs of Mantra (sngags yan lag lnga), and The Five Points of the Three Bodies (sku gsum gzer lnga).* These are general instructions for different layers of tantric practice.
- VII. A further re-arrangement of the above contents is given as *The Five Great, Middling, Small, and Secret Modes of Accomplishment*. Specifically, *The Five Great Modes: The Five Modes of Accomplishment as the Forty-Two Buddhas; The Five Modes of Accomplishment as the Five Families of Reality; The Five Modes of Accomplishment as the Single Family of the Great Secret; and The Five Modes of Accomplishment as the Generation and Great Completion of the Wrathful, with the Thirty Sections of Teachings Regarding the Peaceful Ones in General. The Five Middling, Small, and Secret* of those are: *The Five Modes of Accomplishment as the Wrathful Mantra of the Assembled Blissful Ones, the Five Near of Those, The Five Great Accomplishments, The Five Great Actions, The Five Great Spikes, The Five Great and Twenty-Five Middling Invocations and Praise, The Fifty Sections of Teachings of the Wrathful, The Five Fastenings of the Secret Mantra, The Five Ordinary Yogas, The Five Stages of Completion, and The Five Teachings of the Generation, Completion, and Great Completions, The Five Limbs of the Secret Mantra, and The Five Spikes of the Three Bodies.*

My above reproduction only enumerates the category headings; the specific contents of each of these fivefold categories are listed in the text, ultimately resulting in a list of 140 specific elements, which are called the “limbs of teaching sections” (*chos tshan gyi yan lag brgya bzhi bcu*). While the fifteen main tantras and five teachings mentioned at the outset are indeed the main textual elements of every *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle, it is unclear whether the rest of the elements of the list all refer to actual texts, or modes of instruction and practice. Some of the entries do correspond to practice texts found in the corpus, and there is a general sense in which the thirteen-volume editions mirror the contours of these categories of practice. However, if this is a table of contents of texts as it purports to be, it bears little specific resemblance to the

contents of the corpora now in circulation. I take this schema to represent the contours of Mahāyoga practice – specifically, the normative practice regimes, teachings, and accomplishments of the Kabgyé – couched as a *dkar chag*, or bibliography. In this case, the bibliographic format has a narrative value, operating to instill a sense of formalization and sanctioning of the Kabgyé materials. It also participates in *The Arising*'s overarching goal of sanctioning wrathful practice in Mahāyoga buddhology. The text goes on to explain that, although this scheme of doctrines and practices covers the maṇḍalas of both peaceful and wrathful deities, “the wrathful alone is the meaning”. Further, the wrathful deities may be understood as Chemchok Heruka, which is none other than the “unfabricated space of the ground of yoga, arranged as the assembly of the single sphere”.<sup>243</sup> Thus, we are reminded that the myriad teachings and practices listed here are reducible to the wrathful iconography, which is itself expressive of the unmediated ground of reality. As in the opening narrative of *The Arising*, the wrathful is here elevated as a primary expression of tantric gnosis. This is one of the main purposes of the *bka' byung tshul* auto-history: to validate the wrathful Kabgyé maṇḍalas, showing them to be inherently tied to, and expressive of, primordial strata of reality. That this buddhological argument is couched in terms of history and bibliography is worth attention. After all, Nyangrel Nyima Özer was a historiographer, and much of his oeuvre is dedicated to authorizing a specific view of sacred Tibetan history.

A related architecture is given in Ngari Panchen's *Method of Explanation*. Explicitly taking *The Arising* and the *Clear Lamp Bibliography* as his sources, Ngari's *Method* celebrates the twenty foundational texts of the revelation cycle (i.e., the Five Great Tantras, the Ten Root

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<sup>243</sup> *The Arising*, 269: *zhi khro gnyis kyang bsdus pas don la khro bo gcig pu la 'dus shing tshang ngo/ khro bo yang bsdus bas zhi khro gnyis ka sku lnga rdzogs bas che mchog he ru kar 'dus so/ che mchog kyang bsdus pas rnal 'byor pa'i kun gzhi ma bcos dbyings kyi dkyil 'khor la 'dus so/ kun gzhi ma bcos dbyings kyi dkyil 'khor ni thig le nyag gcig tu 'dus par bkod do/*

Tantras, and the Five Teachings), and mentions “Three Instructions” (*mang ngag gsum*) which come from the “Indian Vidyādhara” (*rgya gar gyi rig ‘dzin*). Using these Three Instructions as the overarching format, Ngari Panchen enumerates all the elements of an architecture of instruction and method derived from the Kabgyé tantric universe. Like *The Arising’s* list of interlocking five-fold sets (with which many of Ngari’s elements overlap), it is again unclear whether this list of elements refers to specific texts, or modes and traditions of practice. My sense is that it includes both, and, taken together, these texts (*The Arising*, the *Clear Lamp Bibliography*, and Ngari’s *Method of Explanation*) communicate the manner in which the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* provides a comprehensive architecture of Mahāyoga knowledge and practice. This taxonomy is meant to convey the density of materials, outline the kinds of topics that might, and indeed do, appear in the corpus, and to structure the contours of Mahāyoga practice according to this cycle. Such exegesis positions the cycle at the root of tantric knowledge, and sets up an enduring legacy for this corpus to underpin a distinctive approach to religious practice.

## **Conclusion**

I elucidate all of this to bring out the prominence of bibliography and canon in this foundational narrative. This is in support of my position that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, both when regarded as a product of Nyangrel, and in its later reception at places like Mindroling and Katok, gained significance as a canon of materials that supported a specific approach to tantric practice: an approach best characterized as a wrathful ritualism incorporating apotropaic and soteriological dimensions of tantric practice. As a collection, it supplied something supportive for Early Translation communities, conveying the force of lineage, the gravity of scale, and the intensity of its own antinomian imaginaire. The notable features of the foundational narrative as they appear in this auto-history – specifically, the buddhological connection between the Kabgyé

iconography and pristine cognition, the inclusion of Tibetan gods and demons, and the prominence of textual collation as an expression of the very structure of tantric knowledge – set up a corpus that is much more than a heterodox collection of ultra-wrathful esoterica. We are presented with something that could underpin a whole approach to Buddhist practice and salvation. This is very much in-line with Nyangrel’s general architectonics of Buddhist tradition for his emergent Nyingma denomination. The Kabgyé was an essential feature of his project – a project that also included history, hagiography, devotional ritual, and transcendental mysticism. In drawing on *The Arising*’s story, later ecclesiasts could show that the Kabgyé was part of a larger dissemination of related materials in India, cementing the status of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* as a foundation of Nyingma canonical tradition. Thus, the idea of the Accomplishment Class, and the predilections of its experts, were validated as essential features of Nyingma religiosity.

## Chapter Five: The Tantras

The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is squarely associated with the Mahāyoga genre of Buddhist tantra. Mahāyoga developed in India out of the so-called Yogatantra tradition, and is characterized by its emphasis on elaborate self-visualization deity yoga practice (*bskyed rim*, Skt. *utpattikrama* or “Generation Stage”), along with “Completion Stage” yoga (*rdzogs rim*, Skt. *sampannakrama*) harnessing psycho-physiological experience. Classical Mahāyoga also entails a complicated supplementary ritualism, largely oriented towards harm-averting, or apotropaic, interventions. Mahāyoga literature features cosmogonic narratives describing the discourse and intercourse between the primordial buddha All-Good (Tib. *kun tu bzang po*, Skt. *Samantabhadra*), and his consort, Kuntu Zangmo (Skt. *Samantabhadri*). These figures, representative of primordial gnosis in its agentive and receptive dimensions, copulate to produce the various maṇḍalas which are the object of visionary experience, and the main imaginal tools for self-cultivational practice. The unique buddhology expressed in such narratives accounts for the disclosure of non-dual reality (*chos*, or *chos nyid*: “reality itself”) in primordial, symbolically mediated, and material realms. As we shall see in our exploration of the foundational Kabgyé tantras, the *Deshek Dupa* cycle features these definitive elements of Mahāyoga. However, Nyangrel’s *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* also exemplifies unique features related to Nyangrel’s own context and literary intentions. This context included the emergence of the image of the harm-averting ritual adept as the paradigmatic Buddhist master, the anthologization of ritual-centric wrathful tantras, and the influence of new tantric traditions proffered by the New Translation movement.

The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* offered an impactful innovation of the Indian Mahāyoga traditions preserved by the Early Translation community between the ninth and twelfth centuries.

The foremost Mahāyoga tantra of Indian origin was *The Secret Nucleus Tantra* (Tib. *gsang ba'i snying po rgyud*, Skt. *guhya garbha-tantra*). As the premier scripture of the *Magical Emanation* (Tib. *sgyu 'phrul*, Skt. *Māyājāla*) family of Indian Mahāyoga tantras, *The Secret Nucleus* established the normative format for Mahāyoga doctrine and practice for the Early Translation adherents. We will see how the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* took up doctrinal and ritual templates of the *Secret Nucleus*, while advancing a new vision for religious mastery which conflated the soteriological and apotropaic dimensions of tantric practice.

This chapter will review the constituent elements of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa's* foundational texts, followed by a description of the tantric maṇḍala in its conceptual and practical dimensions, and culminating in a descriptive summary of the *King of Kabgyé Root Tantras* and other tantras of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle. This description of the Kabgyé literature will be supplemented with a comparative analysis of the *Secret Nucleus Tantra* in the hopes of highlighting the innovations brought by the *Eight Teachings'* distinctive vision of tantric mastery.

### **The Kabgyé Tantras**

The Kabgyé's foundational literature consists of a series of fifteen tantras providing the basic narratives and ritual formats of the Kabgyé tantric system. These fifteen foundational tantras of the *Eight Teachings* were allegedly present in Nyangrel's Khoting revelation, and their standardization is clear in the earliest commentarial sources. The first five of these texts, collectively known as The Five Great Tantras (*rgyud chen po lnga*), provide the basic doctrinal and ritual formats for the entire cycle. These are followed by ten individuated tantras, called the Ten Root Tantras (*rtsa ba'i rgyud bcu*): one for each of the eight Kabgyé deities, plus one for Guru Vidyādhara (*bla ma rig 'dzin*), and one for the forty-two Peaceful Sugatas.

The Five Great Tantras are as follows, listed with regularized titles:

1. *The King of Root Tantras (rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po)*
2. *The Subsequent Tantra of the Assembly of All Victor Sugatas (bcom ldan 'das bde bar gshsegs pa 'dus pa phyi ma'i rgyud)*
3. *The Subsequent-Subsequent Tantra of the Assembly of All the Victor Sugatas (...phyi ma'i phyi ma rgyud)*
4. *The Tantra Amending Incompletions (ma tshang ba kha skong ba'i rgyud)*
5. *The Differentiation Key Tantra ('byed par byed pa lde mig gi rgyud), alias: The Fully Differentiated Tantra of the Assembled Sugatas (bde bar gshegs pa 'dus pa'i rgyud rab tu 'byed pa)<sup>244</sup>*

As a whole, this sequence of tantras provides a progressively detailed map of narratives, doctrines, and practices associated with the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle. In this, the *King of Root Tantras* provides a set of cosmogonic narratives describing the basic elements of the Kabgyé maṇḍalas, while the *Subsequent* and *Differentiated Tantras* more fully disambiguate doctrines and practices based upon the *Root Tantra*'s initial narratives and formats. These tantras (plus the individuated tantras of the Eight Herukas) cohere in their mythos, buddhology, and practical elements, while gaining levels of detail as the corpus proceeds. From these tantras are derived the contemplative practice texts and ritual liturgies, some of which are attributed to Padmasambhava or Nyangrel, but many of which were known to have been composed by later promulgators of the Kabgyé tradition. Most of the contemplative and ritual text titles announce their association with the revelation by beginning with the stock phrase: “From Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings” (“*bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa las...*”).

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<sup>244</sup> This fifth tantra has aliases that confusingly overlap with another tantra appearing in both the Katok and Tsamdrak *chos skor* editions. To briefly summarize a confusing situation: the fifth of the five foundational tantras is titled *The Totally Differentiated Tantra (bde bar gshegs pa 'dus pa'i rgyud rab tu 'byed ba)* in Katok, and is called the *Differentiation Key Tantra ('byed par lde mig gi rgyud)* in both Tsamdrak and in *The Manner of the Arising of the Kabgyé Teachings* (the *bka' byung tshul*). This should not be confused with another tantra sometimes also called the *Differentiated Key Tantra ('byed pa lde'u bar migs gi rgyud)*. This other “*Key Tantra*” is included in both Katok and Tsamdrak, as well as in the *Nyingma Gyubum*, and appears under many different aliases. This other tantra is not one of the “Five Great Tantras” as described in *The Manner of the Arising of the Kabgyé Teachings*. It is a *Deshek Dupa* tantra which may be the one transmitted to Nyangrel by Rashak and Tertön Ngödrup.

We will examine the *King of Root Tantras* in some detail, and draw some comparisons with related materials, specifically the transmitted *Assembled Sugatas Tantra* (*bde gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud*), and also the *Secret Nucleus Tantra*. First, an initial discussion of maṇḍala, the foundational feature of Mahāyoga tantrism, is in order.

### **Maṇḍala, Contemplation, and Ritual**

As the Kabgyé tantras are primarily concerned with laying out the various maṇḍalas, some discussion of this element of Mahāyoga tantrism will situate the narratives and practices described in the sources. The Tibetan term for maṇḍala is *dkyil 'khor*, literally meaning “center and circle” or “center and retinue”. This term has both iconographic and phenomenological valances, referring at once to ritual iconography, self-cultivational visualization, and the interconnected nature of experiential phenomena according to tantric buddhology. In the iconographic sense, the term refers to a circular diagram with a distinctive central icon and surrounding symbolic elements. From this diagrammatic perspective, the maṇḍala image provides an aerial-view of a palace (*gzhal yas khang*, lit. “measureless house”), which is meant to be visualized in meditation or ritual practice as a complete, three-dimensional environment containing a set of deities and other iconographic elements. In Mahāyoga practice, the adept visualizes his or herself in the form of a tutelary deity (*yi dam*, lit. “mind-bind”), usually in sexual union with a consort, whilst imagining a surrounding environment filled with other deities and architectural elements, all representing different aspects of purified cognition and sacralized perception. These visualized elements are built sequentially in the imagination, which is said to progressively purify karmic constituents such as the propensity for taking different kinds of birth. Depending on the cycle, the visualized “palace” might be in the form of colorful palatial architecture, or, as in the wrathful maṇḍalas of the Kabgyé cycle, as a gruesome burial ground

with features such as blazing skeleton mountains and lakes of blood. Some maṇḍalas consist entirely of transliterated Sanskrit syllables, as is the case in the *Secret Nucleus*, in which forty-two Sanskrit syllables are arranged, and out of which the forty-two peaceful deities emerge.

Generally speaking, in the Kabgyé maṇḍalas, the practitioner first visualizes the environment as a horrific charnel ground with a skeleton-mountain palace at the center. The practitioner is instructed to create (either in the imagination, or, in the case of the ritualized construction of a diagrammatic maṇḍala, in actuality) a seed syllable out of human blood or cremation ash. From this emerges the mental image of the practitioner in the form of the primary deity of that maṇḍala (e.g. Śri Heruka, Yamāntaka, Vajrakīlaya, etc.). The charnel ground palace is subsequently populated with specific subsidiary deities, protector gods, and, in the case of the Kabgyé maṇḍalas, various types of demons. The appearance of each icon is described in the tantras with great detail, although little interpretation of the iconographic features is given in the texts. Such interpretations of the iconographic symbolism are reserved for the oral instructions and written liturgies of the tantric master. In this sense, the tradition is an esoteric one, as only properly prepared adepts can receive the decryptive instructions from a qualified master. Practice liturgies (*las byang* or *sgrub thabs*, “methods of accomplishment”, Skt. *sādhana*.) enliven the visualization with a regularized program of supplications, praise, offerings, *mantra*, *mudrā*, and other ritualized gestures. These techniques engage the practitioner in an imaginative drama in which relationships between symbolic icons are established. In the case of the *Deshek Dupa*, these specific “methods of accomplishment” are generally not explicated within the tantras – although the titles of such texts are occasionally given – and are often left to be composed by the cycle’s masters for the benefit of student adepts.

Training in this kind of visualization is thought to reformat the habituated perceptual-cognitive apparatus of a practitioner. Repeated engagement in the mandalic visualization rehabituates an adept to understand his or her own perceptions to be expressive of sacralized modes of cognition. Doctrinally speaking, the visualization of one's self as a deity, and of the environment as its palace, triggers recognition that all perception is really a function of the natural expressivity of the primordial ground nature, which is the very nature of consciousness: a substrate at once free from positionality or ownership (i.e., it is “empty” (*stong pa nyid*) of essence), but also brilliantly lucid and expressive (i.e., *gsal zhing rig pa*, “clear and knowing”). Ordinary perception is faulty in the bifurcation of internal self and external environment, and this mistaken dualistic perception may be replaced by a gnostic one in which such dualism is immediately overcome through imaginative transposition. Because the visualization is generated from the “nature of mind” (*sems kyi ngo bo*) – i.e., its appearance in the imaginative apparatus consists of vivid insubstantiality – it patently arises as the expressivity of the gnostic ground: emptiness-brilliance. Training in this perceptual mode is thought to reformat the continuous perceptions of the practitioner, thoroughly purifying and transforming experience into a non-dual consciousness in which all thoughts, perceptions, and experiences are understood to be reflections of the emptiness-brilliance of the primordial substrate of consciousness.

Mahāyoga tantrism is primarily characterized by this kind of “deity yoga” practice, with self-visualization of a meditational deity in a mandalic environment, built sequentially along with mantric vocalization and mudric gestures, defining Mahāyoga “Generation Stage” (*bskyed rim*) ritual. Mahāyoga systems also include a subsequent “Completion Stage” (*rdzogs rim*), in which visualization is replaced or supplemented with the manipulation of bodily experiences, often in simulation of sexual bliss, to generate a lucid, blissful mind attuned to primordial gnosis.

Interestingly, any mention of the Completion Stage is missing from the root tantras, although there are plenty of Completion Stage meditation texts included in the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle. Mahāyoga is generally known in the Nyingma tradition for an emphasis on complex Generation Stage practice, while Anuyoga was credited for its focus on the Completion Stage. *Atiyoga*, or The Great Perfection (*rdzogs pa chen po*) is said to surpass these in a transcendental eschewal of contrived practice. While the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is a definitive cycle of the Mahāyoga variety, it subordinates itself to the conceits of the Great Perfection, as seen in *The Arising*'s doxographic themes. Even though the terms *rdzogs pa chen po* or *mahā ati* are absent from the root tantra, the narratives make much of the primacy of the primordial ground and its unmediated gnosis. This will be part of an important buddhological argument validating the arresting iconography and ritualism of the *Eight Teachings*.

In material terms, a maṇḍala is constructed as a symbolic support for Mahāyoga ritual. For initiation (*dbang*) or Great Accomplishment (*sgrub chen*) ceremonies, maṇḍalas will be made from colored sand, or sometimes built in three dimensions as a massive sculptural rendition. Ritual action unfolds around the physical maṇḍala, which is an essential link between the gestures, vocalizations, and imagination of practitioners and the divine realm with which they engage. Major Great Accomplishment ritual intensives will also conclude with 'cham dancing, in which the monastic assembly will physically enact the maṇḍala and its mythic dramas. Wearing colorful masks and brilliant robes, the dancers represent the deities and subsidiary characters of the maṇḍala. With spectacular leaping movements choreographed to pounding drums and blasting horns, they enact the mythic narrative of the maṇḍala's arising and soteriological action. The violent subjugation of a stock demonic character is generally at the center of the drama.

The maṇḍala, as a buddhological concept, also entails cosmological dimensions. While Buddhism explicitly rejects theistic cosmogenesis, the language of divine creation is appropriated in Mahāyoga tantric sources to describe the emanation of mandalic realms by the primordial buddha, Kuntu Zangpo.<sup>245</sup> In these narratives, discourse and intercourse between Kuntu Zangpo and his consort signifies the naturally expressive capacity of the universal substrate to manifest as realms – mandalic domains that are, in nature, pure expressions of the empty and expressively brilliant character of the ground itself. Training in visualization of the maṇḍala, then, reverses perceptual misconceptions, returning the consciousness of the practitioner to a non-dual sensory world directly connected to the gnostic ground. This kind of self-cultivational technology and its undergirding narrative idioms are central to the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* literature, as we will see in our exploration of the cycle’s root tantra.

### **The King of Root Tantras**

The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* root tantra, fully entitled *The King of Root Tantras of the Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings (bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa rtsa ba’i rgyud kyi rgyal po*, hereafter *The King of Root Tantras*), entails eighteen chapters providing mythic narratives and detailed descriptions of the Kabgyé maṇḍalas.<sup>246</sup> Its maṇḍalas include those of the Five Buddha Families (*rigs lnga*), the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities (*zhi khro*), a general

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<sup>245</sup> Germano and others have tied the development of mandalic cosmogenesis in Indian Buddhist tantra to earlier Mahayāna literary precedents, specifically in the Sutric motif of the generation of pure realms from the compassionate intention of Bodhisattvas; e.g., the creation, from a vow of compassion, of Amitabha’s Western Pure Realm.

<sup>246</sup> “bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa rtsa ba’i rgyud kyi rgyal po (the King of Root tantras of the Kagye Deshek Dupa)” in Katok: *bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i chos skor*, vol. 1, text 4, pp. 273-352; Aliases for this *King of Root Tantras* in *Nyingma Gyubum* editions include the *bcom ldan ‘das bde bar gshegs pa thams cad ‘dus pa*, and the *zhi khro ‘dus pa rtsa ba’i rgyud le’u bco brgyad*. Confusingly, these aliases are shared by a different text appearing in the *Gyubum* and *Deshek Dupa* editions – a text I have regularized as the *bde gshegs ‘dus pa rgyud* – but the eighteen-chapter root tantra is mostly known as the *King of Root Tantras*, and is generally treated as the basis for the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* system altogether.

wrathful maṇḍala, and the specific maṇḍalas of the individuated eight Kabgyé herukas. Some of these maṇḍalas, such as those of the Five Buddha Families and the maṇḍala of Peaceful and Wrathful Deities, are derived from the *Magical Emanation* anthology of Indian Mahāyoga scriptures. The *Māyājāla*, and its *Secret Nucleus Tantra* in particular, had long been the main source of esoteric knowledge for Early Translation practitioners. These tantras generally revolve around a foundational mythology describing Kuntu Zangpo's emanation of Vajrasattva (*rdo rje sems pa*) at the center of the maṇḍala of Five Families, and the emanation of myriad maṇḍalas associated with the assembly of One Hundred Peaceful and Wrathful Deities. The maṇḍala of the Five Families, as well as the Peaceful/Wrathful deity complex, are included in the Kabgyé cycle, both as a feature of this root tantra, and in individuated revelation texts included in the corpus. The *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* brings together these maṇḍalas and deities of the *Magical Emanation* with non-Māyājāla deity systems such as Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, and Vajrakīlaya, which had circulated in Tibetan tantric communities from the time of the initial dispensation. The *Kabgyé* thus embraced Māyājāla templates while collating other important tantric deities to yield a new format for tantric practice that met the needs of Early Translation tantrists.

Apart from providing basic iconographical descriptions and specifying the unique mantras associated with these maṇḍalas, there is little praxical instruction beyond listing the names of rituals (*cho ga*), and some titles for “methods for accomplishment” (*sgrub thabs*, Skt. *sādhana*). The emphasis seems to be on the use of cosmogonic narratives – specifically, stories of the emanation of maṇḍalas by primordial buddhas – to communicate Mahāyoga buddhology and provide the basic templates for specific ritual practices, the details of which are filled out in the tantras, teachings, and liturgies that comprise the rest of the cycle.

## Structure

The Root tantra unfolds in eighteen chapters:

- I. ***Introduction:*** Introductory narrative describing the emergence of Kuntu Zangpo and Kuntu Zangmo from the primordial ground. Intercourse and discourse is held between Kuntu Zangmo and Kuntu Zangpo. Their union produces the maṇḍalas of the Five Buddha Families.
- II. ***The Teaching of the Method of Accomplishing the Hundred Sacred Ones:*** Vajrasattva from the Five Families maṇḍala supplicates for a maṇḍala of accomplishing the Hundred Peaceful and Wrathful deities. This maṇḍala, and a basic outline of deity yoga practice according to Mahāyoga tradition, is then described in detail by Kuntu Zangpo.
- III. ***The Accomplishment of the Forty-Two Peaceful Ones:*** Vajrasattva supplicates for a maṇḍala of 42 peaceful deities. Kuntu Zangpo describes the maṇḍala.
- IV. ***The Accomplishment of the Five Families Alone:*** Vajrasattva supplicates for a maṇḍala of the Five Buddha Families. Kuntu Zangpo describes.
- V. ***The Single Family of the Great Secret:*** Vajrasattva supplicates for the maṇḍala of the Single Family of the Great Secret.<sup>247</sup> Kuntu Zangpo describes.
- VI. ***The Accomplishment by the Single Form:*** Vajrasattva supplicates for the maṇḍala of the Five Families by a Single Form (i.e., visualization of individual deities of each the Five Buddha Families). Kuntu Zangpo describes.
- VII. ***The Emanation of Manifest maṇḍala of the Wrathful Ones:*** Kuntu Zangmo enters into union with Chemchok Heruka, and supplicates him to arise in the enjoyment body as Śri Heruka, and to display, teach, and liberate. Śri Heruka then describes the manifestation of an elemental maṇḍala out of seed syllables, and lists the teachings (titles only) for the consummation of different vehicles. Then, from their intercourse are produced subjugating deities, and then the wrathful Kabgyé maṇḍala emerges from her feminine space.
- VIII. ***The Authentic maṇḍala of the Great Wrathful Terrifier:*** Four Herukas of the Kabgyé maṇḍala supplicate Śri Heruka to teach the wrathful maṇḍala of the “great terrifier” (*jigs byed*). Śri Heruka describes a detailed maṇḍala and gives mantras.

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<sup>247</sup> Padmasambhava’s composition of the sādhana of the *Single Family of the Great Secret* is described in Nyangrel’s *zangs gling ma*, in the chapter detailing Padmasambhava’s teaching activity in Tri Song Detsän’s court. Yeshe Tsogyal, *The Lotus Born*. trans. Erik Pema Kunsang. Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2013, 125.

- IX. ***The Authentic Collection of Practices:*** Śri Heruka also describes sub-maṇḍalas and enumerates titles of rituals associated with the wrathful maṇḍala, called the “Assembled Accomplishment Methods”.
- X. ***The Extremely Condensed Accomplishment With Reference To The Accomplishment As The General Wrathful Ones:*** Śri Heruka also describes a condensed accomplishment maṇḍala, called “the Authentic Meaning of Reality”.
- XI. ***The Accomplishment of the Qualities of Chemchok:*** The Four Herukas request the method for accomplishing the **good qualities** (*yon tan*) of all sugatas, and Śri Heruka describes the wrathful deity maṇḍala of **Chemchok**
- XII. ***The Accomplishment of the Authentic Mind:*** Vajra Heruka arises and requests the accomplishment of **mind** (*thugs*), the accomplishment of **Yangdak**, which is given as a Vajra Heruka maṇḍala with many subsidiary deities.<sup>248</sup>
- XIII. ***The Method of Accomplishing the Melodious Body:*** **Zhinje (Yamāntaka)** arises and asks for the accomplishment maṇḍala of the **body** (*sku*). Śri Heruka describes the maṇḍala of Yamāntaka
- XIV. ***The Method of Accomplishing the Lotus Speech:*** **Tamdriṅ (Hayagrīva)** asks for the accomplishment maṇḍala of **Lotus Speech**, and the maṇḍala of Hayagrīva is given.
- XV. ***The Accomplishment of the Enlightened Action Phurba:*** Vajrakumāra (**Vajrakīlaya**) asks for the accomplishment maṇḍala of **enlightened actions** (*‘phrin las*), given as the maṇḍala of Dorje Phurba.
- XVI. ***The Accomplishment of Mamo Bötong:*** Chemchok Heruka arises and requests the accomplishment maṇḍala of the **enlightened actions** of **Mamo Bötong**. Śri Heruka instructs the generation of a Chemchok maṇḍala, and from the union of Chemchok and consort, a maṇḍala of all-female wrathful divinities is emanated.

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<sup>248</sup> In *Māyājāla* tantras, Vajra Heruka is the wrathful version of Vajrasattva, presiding over a wrathful iteration of the Five Family maṇḍala. His use in the narrative here is curious, but may be due to the fact that Śri Heruka is the one doing the teaching; i.e., it would make little narrative sense for Śri Heruka to emerge and ask Śri Heruka for the teachings of Śri Heruka. Thus, Vajra Heruka stands in, and supplicates Śri Heruka for the Enlightened Mind (*thugs*) maṇḍala usually associated with Śri Heruka himself in the Kabgyé system.

XVII. **The Accomplishment of Jigten Chöten.**<sup>249</sup> The Haughty Tamer of All (*dregs pa kun 'dul*, the heruka of the **Jigten Chötö** mandla) requests the method for accomplishing Jigten Choten for the purpose of “taming the inappropriate”. Śri Heruka describes a maṇḍala of demon-taming demons: the demonic *dregs pa* surrounded by a retinue of demons (*bdud*) of the “Eight Classes” (*srin mo lha / sprul pa 'i sde brgyad*).

XVIII. **The Accomplishment of Möpa Drangak:** The Powerful Black Heruka (*stobs ldan nag po*) supplicates the Great Warrior (*dpa' bo chen po*, i.e., Śri Heruka), for the method of **Möpa Drangak**. A maṇḍala populated by various *dü*, *tsän*, *lú*, *za* and divine *lha* is described, and the vital mantra given.

The root tantra entails several notable elements worth sustained attention. These include the distinctive mythic narratives around which the text is built, the character of the maṇḍalas described therein, and the fascinating demonology which achieves full expression in the latter sections of the tantra.

### **The framing narrative: discourse, intercourse and cosmogenesis between Kuntu Zangpo and Zangmo**

According to Mahāyoga tantras, the primordial buddha Kuntu Zangpo is the originary theogenic figure. Kuntu Zangpo is associated with the primordial dimension of reality: a fundamentally unconditioned, yet innately manifest strata, or “ground” (*gzhi*, or *chos nyid*, “reality itself”, Skt. *dharmatā*) undergirding apparent reality and free from the various conceptual polarities imposed by distorted perception. Kuntu Zangpo is nothing other than the agentive character of the ground-nature, the substrate of consciousness, and the narrative opens with a description of the features of his “domain”:

In the palace of the space of beginningless reality – the place of supreme secret body, speech, and mind, the ground that transcends measure and analogue, adorned with the ornament of primordial total purity, the

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<sup>249</sup> Jigten Chötö (*jig rten mchod bstod*, “Worldly Praise and Offering”), and the term Jigten Chörten (*jig rten mchod rten*, lit., “worldly offering-base”) seem to be used interchangeably. Of course, *mchod rten* is the word for reliquary stupa, but stupas seem to be irrelevant to the content of this part of the tantra. Rather, this section supplies a maṇḍala for tantric practices that inculcate autochthonous and personal divinities as a means for subduing obstacles to virtue and enlightenment.

crystallization of the ten directions, neither inner nor outer, the adornment of total purity, the place of primordially self-arisen beginninglessness and endlessness: [here] dwells the Glorious Victor Kuntu Zangpo, the unborn dharma-body, free from elaboration, the dream within the great bindu of the unfabricated ultimate.<sup>250</sup>

The language here is of purity (*dag po*), a term which typically stands for the unfabricated nature of the universal substrate. The reference-point-less character of the ultimate is also emphasized, articulated as a transcendence of imposed spatial and temporal distinctions. This “unborn” (*skye ba med pa*) ground nonetheless gains expression in the agentive potential of the Primordial Buddha, who is described in terms of dreamlike (*mnal*) insubstantiality.

Kuntu Zangpo’s conjugal counterpart is the female primordial buddha, Kuntu Zangmo. According to tantric doctrine, masculine imagery symbolizes agentive compassion (*thabs*, Skt. *upāya*, “method”), while the feminine signifies wisdom (*shes pa*, Skt. *prajñā*). The union of masculine and feminine, which expresses the inseparability of unfabricated compassion and wisdom (*thabs shes*) in the ground-nature, is depicted in the sexual union of male and female divinities (*yab yum*, “lord and lady”). This conjugal imagery is pervasive in tantric iconography, particularly in Mahāyoga sources. This imagery also suggests the soteriology of bliss associated with tantric practice. Many tantric practices, specifically Completion Stage practices harnessing sexual response, aim to utilize blissful corporal experience to stimulate gnosis. While detailed exposition of sexual yogic practice (*sbyor ba*, “union”) is not provided in this Kabgyé root tantra (as it is, for example, in the *Secret Nucleus*), the incorporation of sexuality in Mahāyoga tantrism would be expected and understood, and is clearly operative in the framing narrative of the tantra.

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<sup>250</sup> *The King of Root Tantras* 274.2-275.3: ‘di skad bdag gis thos pa’i dus gcig na/ ‘og min gyi gnas chos kyi dbyings kyi pho brang/ sku gsung thugs gsang ba mchog gi gnas/ ye nas rnam par dag pa’i rgyan gyis brgyan pa/ dpe dang tshad las ‘das pa’i sa/ phyi nang med par phyogs bcur ‘grigs pa/ rnam par dag bas klu bas pa/ thog ma dang tha ma med par ye nas rang byung gi gnas na/ bcom ldan ‘das dpal kun tu bzang po/ chos kyi sku skye ba med pa spros pa dang bral ba/ don dam pa ma bcos pa’i thig le chen po’i ngang la mnal te bzhuvs so/

Kuntu Zangpo and Zangmo are both present from the (beginningless) beginning, and exegesis holds these two primordial buddhas to be equally primary, although the narrative suggests something different, as Kuntu Zangmo is relegated to a supportive, albeit necessary, role. In this root tantra, Kuntu Zangmo's role is to stimulate Kuntu Zangpo into agency. Kuntu Zangmo sings out to Kuntu Zangpo, repeatedly requesting him to "teach" (*ston pa*).

Emaho. From the panoramic space of the total purity of emptiness, the imperceivable arising of equanimous compassion; from the pure dharma body of ultimate wisdom, teach the sky-compassion of uninterrupted methods. Ho.<sup>251</sup>

To this request, Kuntu Zangpo initially remains silent, implying the immovability of the "vajra state" of unconditioned gnosis. We might note that his silence is also redolent of the historical Buddha's reticence to teach following his enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. Kuntu Zangmo supplicates three times, and Kuntu Zangpo finally responds with a declaration of his creatorship and mandalic sovereignty:

'EMAHO. [I am] lord of the [Buddha] family, the family of families, self-arisen, the creator of all the maṇḍalas. I am the lord himself of all the Buddhas'<sup>252</sup>

This theogenic language is striking in the context of the decidedly non-theistic orientation of Buddhism. However, tantric rhetoric often gains impact in reworking the doctrinal formulations of orthodox Buddhism, and theogenesis here communicates the naturally expressive character of the primordial ground. According to tantric doctrine, the unconditioned (*skye med*, "unborn") ground does not constitute a void space; rather, it is endowed with an expressive gnosis quality:

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<sup>251</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 276.1-2: *e ma ho/ stong nyid rnam par dag pa'i klong yangs nas/ snyoms pa'i thugs rje 'byung bar mi dmigs kyang/ shes rab don dam chos sku dag pa las/ ma 'gags thabs kyi snying rje nam mkha' ston/*

<sup>252</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 277.3-4: *nga ni rang byung ba'i/ rigs kyi rigs te rigs kyi btso/ dkyil 'khor kun gyi byed pa po/ sangs rgyas kun gyi bdag nyid yin/*

it is *gsal zhing rig pa* – “lucid and aware”. This naturally expressive lucidity is inherently compassionate and manifests as the enlightened activity (*phrin las*) of “teaching” (*bston pa*), broadly defined. According to Mahāyoga buddhology, the unfabricated compassion of the ground-nature spontaneously manifests maṇḍalas in visionary realms, and the articulation of verbalized teachings in the coarser reality of the “hearing lineage” (*snyan brgyud*) of human beings. Those of extreme realization capable of perceiving subtle visionary realities, such as the “awareness holders” (*rig ‘dzin*, Skt. *vidyādhara*) or bodhisattvas (*byang chub sems dpa’*), can apprehend maṇḍalas emanated out of the primordial ground by Kuntu Zangpo. These symbolic “teachings” must then be redacted into language in the form of the Buddhist teachings to be comprehended by humans. *The Arising* has told us how this was accomplished by the Eight Vidyādharas who first received the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* via the guidance of charnel ground *dākinīs*, the Eight Classes of Gods and Demons, and the bodhisattva Vajradharma at Śitavana. As the narrative action of this *King of Root Tantras* takes place in the atemporal space of the primordial ground, Kuntu Zangpo’s “teaching” will consist entirely of the emanation of maṇḍalas in an auto-disclosure of symbolic forms. Kuntu Zangpo clarifies this special kind of symbolic pedagogy in the text:

Emaho. The assembly [i.e., the maṇḍala] that is the sign<sup>253</sup> of the spoken word of all the Buddhas: by being elaborated it is the self-character of the entreaty; by being assembled, it is the meaning that is the sign of reality.<sup>254</sup>

Translation of this passage into English proves awkward, but Kuntu Zangpo essentially explicates that the maṇḍala (in the case of the *Kabgyé*, the assemblage of wrathful maṇḍalas) is

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<sup>253</sup> *phyag rgya*: skt. *mudrā*, here in the sense of sign, or symbolic iteration; i.e., the assembly (*tshogs*), or maṇḍala, is the “sign” or symbolic iteration, of the teachings.

<sup>254</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 277.6: *e ma ho/ sangs rgyas thams cad kyi/ yi ge gsung gi phyag rgya’i tshogs/ spros pas gsung bskul rang rgyud dag/ bsdus pas chos kyi phyag rgya’i don/*

nothing other than the variegated revelation of singular ultimate reality, spontaneously generated out of compassion in response to Kuntu Zangmo's entreaty (*bskul ba*), which is itself contained within the auto-expressive activity of the ground nature. It is a self-contained dialog, reflecting the doctrine that everything arises from, and within, the primordial ground.

It is at this point that Kuntu Zangpo and Zangmo enter into sexual union, and maṇḍalas emerge from their copulation: "from the space of the Sugatas of inseparable lord and lady was emanated the maṇḍala of Ocean of Victors along with a divine mansion..."<sup>255</sup> It will be from their union – symbolic of the inseparability of gnosis and compassion in the ground nature – that all the maṇḍalas of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* will manifest. This gynogenesis is suggestive of the soteriology of bliss that marks Mahāyoga tantrism, as well as the productive capacity of wisdom according to tantric buddhology. Wisdom is thematized as the female consort, Kuntu Zangmo, and so the production of maṇḍalas in her "feminine space" (*yum kyi mkha' klong*) represents the disclosure of phenomena out of the noumenal space of the unconditioned ground.

The narrative elements of discourse, intercourse, and mandalic production are repeated several times in the tantra. The initial drama described above results in the production of Five Sugata Family (*bde gshegs rigs lnga*) and Peaceful/Wrathful (*zhi khro*) maṇḍalas, and another episode of song and union between wrathful versions of Kuntu Zangpo and Kuntu Zangmo will produce the series of wrathful Eight Heruka maṇḍalas:

Having become the sky-faced wrathful woman, the queen of secrets, [Kuntu Zangmo] supplicated with this secret song:

'By the power of the totally non-existent emptiness yoga, from the space of reality, are built the close samayas, the expanse of total liberation, the ocean of gnosis, built from the space of reality, un-abiding and unseen.'

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<sup>255</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 278.2-3: *yab yum gnyis su med pa'i bde bar gshegs pa'i mkha' nas/ 'khor rgyal ba rgya mtsho gzhal yas khang dang bcas pa sprul lo!*

[Then], Glorious Kuntu Zangpo, from within emptiness itself, having arisen as the manifest body of Chemchok Heruka, and seeing the sky-face of the lady of secrets, engaged in various dharmic enjoyments [i.e., entered into union].

Then, with this song of the great play of the lady, [Kuntu Zangmo] supplicated:

‘Deity of the space of the ultimate completion of two accumulations! You, great, glorious, good Chemchok Heruka of the great play of Sambhogakāya: by the method of play from the space of great bliss, arise!’...

By the appearance of magical display [the Heruka] then pervaded everything.

Then, through the union of lord and lady, a supplication with this song of magical arising was let loose:

‘Ho! Body of the total play of gnosis illusion, the place of arising of many emanations of the compassionate mastery of great wisdom and method, body of the deeds of the Sugatas, arise!’

This being sung, [Chemchok] arose as the body of the blazing terrifier, the wrathful Glorious Heruka [Śri Heruka].

Then Kuntu Zangmo, along with the retinue, issued this supplication from her throat:

‘E ma! From the sun-like sacred wish-fulfilling body, a treasury of loving Chemchok blessings, the body of yawning cloud banks of splendor, teach the display of the play of unobstructed Chemchok. E ma! From the sacred wish-fulfilling speech like the sky, make shine the intimate blessings of Chemchok. Teach the inexhaustible ocean of extensive limbs [of teachings]. With the lion’s roar, teach the ocean of secrets. E ma ho! From the sun-like essence of wisdom, grant the Chemchok gnosis blessings, the non-conceptual mind free from elaborations. Teach the display of ascertaining liberation itself, liberation by the method shackling the ocean of suffering, the samsaras of laziness, stupidity, and ignorance. For the benefit of those blinded by the darkness of obscurity, reveal! By the one who plays the ocean of samsara, there is liberation. Like giving medicine in accordance with the disease, arise as the body with the power to tame, and liberate beings.’

Then the great terrifier, Glorious Heruka, within the great all-pervading dharmatā, from the primordial ground of all, the primordial transcendent space, the nature of the five wisdoms, the emergent magical display; For the erection of the five kinds of totally pure arisings [in] the Lady's space [gave the wrathful maṇḍala]...<sup>256</sup>

Kuntu Zangpo and Zangmo here entreat each other in song (*glu 'dis bskul lo*), and a session of mutual praise prefaces their union. Once they join, maṇḍalas are sequentially produced in what is at once an act of eroticism, world-making, and symbolic pedagogy.

As I have tried to suggest, these narratives are illustrative of buddhological doctrines specific to Mahāyoga tantrism. The expressivity of the primordial ground, the originary nature of compassion, the non-linguistic character of gnosis, and the utility of bliss are all conveyed in the narrative of Kuntu Zangpo and Zangmo's interaction. But what are the advantages of narrativizing tantric doctrine, as we see in these Mahāyoga tantric scriptures? Matthew Kapstein has posed this question in regards to tantric mythology, concluding that myth is a meta-historical discourse that accomplishes philosophical goals. He states: "We cannot desist from being tellers of tales: so long as philosophy remains anchored in our common experience it will have need of

<sup>256</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 299.6 – 302.3: *gsang ba'i yum khro mo gnam zhal mar gyur nas/ gsang ba'i glu 'di blangs te bskul lo/ ho/ yod med stongs pa shin tu rnal 'byor mthus/ chos kyi dbyings las dam tshig nye bar bzhengs/ ye shes rgya mtsho rnam par grol ba'i klong/ mi gnas mi dmigs chos kyi dbyings nas bzhengs/ zhes bskul bas/ dpal kun tu zang po stong pa'i nyid kyi ngang las/ che mchog he ru ka'i sku mngon par phyung nas/ gsang ba'i yum gnam zhal ma la gzigs te/ rol pa'i chos sna tshogs mdzad do/ de nas yum gyi rol pa chen po'i glu 'dis gsol ba btab po/ tshogs chen gnyis rdzogs don dam dbyings kyi lha/ longs spyod rdzogs mdzad rol pa chen po yi/ che mchog he ru ka bzang dpal chen khyod/ thabs kyi rol pas dbe chen dbyings nas bzhengs/ zhes bskul bas/ cho 'phrul chen po'i rnam pas kun la khyab par mdzad do/ de nas yab yum gyis yab la cho 'phrul 'byung ba'i glu 'dis gsol ba btab bo/ ho ye shes sgyu ma rnam par rol pa'i sku/ thabs dang shes rab che la mnga' brnyes pa'i / thugs rje sprul pa mnga po 'byung ba'i gnas/ bde gshegs bde bar gshegs mdzad sku/ /bzhengs shig/ ces bskul bas/ dpal chen po drag po 'jigs byed 'bar ba'i skur bzhengs so/ de nas yum kun tu bzang mo 'khor nang bcas pa de dag/ mgrin gcig tu glu 'dis bskul te gsol ba btab po/ E ma yid bzhin sku mchog nyi ma lta bu las/ byams pa'i byin brlabs che mchog gar mdzod cig/ gzi byin sprin phung rol pas bsgyings pa'i sku thogs med che mchog rol ba'i cho 'phrul ston/ E ma/ yid bzhin gsung mchog nam mkha' lta bu las snyen pa'i byin brlabs che mchog brjid mdzod cig/ yan lag rgya mtsho mi 'dzad bkod pa'i gsung/ seng ge'i sgra yis gsang pa'i rgya mtsho ston/ E ma ho/ ye shes snying po nyi ma lta bu las/ ye shes byin brlabs che mchog de mdzod cig/ thig le spros bral rnam par mi rtog thugs/ rnam grol de nyid nges ba'i cho 'phrul ston/ mi she blun rmongs 'dam bying 'khor ba rnams/ sdug bsngal rgya mtshor bcings pa thabs kyiis khrol/ ma rig mun pas ldongs pa don gyis phye/ 'khor ba'i rgya mtsho rol pa'i rang gis sgrol/ nad dang mthun pa'i sman gtong ji bzhin du/ gdul bya'i dbang du sku bzhengs 'gro ba sgrol/ zhes bskul lo/ de nas 'jigs byed chen po dpal he ru kas cho nyid dpal ba chen po'i ngang/ kun gzhi ye nas 'das pa'i dbyings gdod ma/ skye ba'i cho 'phrul ye shes lnga'i rang bzhin/ yum gyi mkha' klong rnam par dag pa 'byung ba rnam pa lnga brtsegs pa ni/*

plentiful tales, and some of these tales will be myths.”<sup>257</sup> I must agree. I suggest that tantric narratives in the *Eight Teachings* function to a) tackle the philosophical difficulty of accounting for the appearance of variegated phenomena out of a profoundly unconditioned substrate, while b) aestheticizing doctrine in the service of the corpus’ broader goal of building a soteriological imaginaire. In Mahāyoga mythology, the trans-linguistic, non-conceptual originary ground is given voice in its personification as primordial buddhas. A strata beyond the scope of language, ideation, and differentiation is dramatized as a domain in which expressivity, compassion, and the arising of emotion is possible. In these narratives, primordial entities – characters so originary that their status as entities is questionable – are humanized. In dramatizing the expressivity of the ground, emotions, including the conventionally “negative” ones around which tantric discourse circulates, are sanctioned. As we will see, maṇḍalas full of deeply violent, transgressive, and sexual imagery will be born from the union of Kuntu Zangpo and Kuntu Zangmo, and so this narrative tells us that, despite the arresting content of the Kabgyé imagery, these iconographic elements are inherently rooted in the compassionate expressivity of the primordial ground itself. The story sanctions wrathful practice, contextualizes threatening imagery, and solidly embraces the humanity and distinctive vision of adepthood that would define the Early Translation community. In addition, the aestheticization of profound buddhology – the expression of deep philosophical positions in narratives entailing lyricism, imagery, and dramatic action – serves a broader goal of defining an imaginal world by which adherents may confirm collective identities and author agentive subjectivities. As I will suggest in Chapter Seven’s exploration of the “Kabgyé imaginaire”, tantric mythologies advance an imaginal world that communicates doctrinal positions while providing the setting for ritualized practices aimed at facilitating

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<sup>257</sup> Matthew T. Kapstein “Samantabhadra and Rudra: Innate Enlightenment and Radical Evil in Tibetan Rnying-ma-pa Buddhism.” In *Discourse and Practice*, eds. Frank Reynolds and David Tracy, 51-82. Albany: SUNY, 1992, 82.

subjective transformations and confirmations of identity. The evocative narratives that frame the foundational texts of this corpus are vital features of the broad capacity for this cycle to direct the subject-constituting potential of a complete practice system.

### **The Peaceful and Wrathful maṇḍalas**

The first maṇḍala produced from the “space of inseparable union” (*yab yum gnyis su med pa'i mkha' nas*) is that of the “Five Sugata Families” (*bde gshegs rigs lnga*). The Five Families are a collection of Sambhogakāya Buddhas important in what became known in Tibetan doxography as the “inner tantras” of Yoga, Mahāyoga, and Anuyoga. These five peaceful icons symbolize the five aggregates of the putative self (*phung po*, Skt. *skandha*), five types of emotional experience in their purified (gnosical) manifestation, as well as the five physical elements, primary colors, and cardinal directions. Thus, the Five Sugata Family maṇḍala provides a homological model for Buddhist psychology, ritual iconography, and cosmology. As Ronald Davidson observes, the iconography of the Yogatantra system centered on a “royal idiom” in which coronation and splendid authority provided the general ethos of tantric iconography and ritual. Such imagery is indeed present in this Five Families maṇḍala, as the iconographic description emphasizes the gentle magnificence of these divinities: “These [Sugatas] are soft in body, pliant, embracing, vibrating in the mode of youth; shining, glittering, massive and dignified.”<sup>258</sup>

Following the emanation and some interpretative explication of the Five Families maṇḍala, the chief Sambhogakāya Buddha, Vajrasattva, emerges and supplicates Kuntu Zangpo to emanate a maṇḍala of the Hundred Peaceful and Wrathful (*zhi khro*) deities:

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<sup>258</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 281.5-6: *de dag thams cad kyang sku mnyen pa dang scug pa dang/ 'khril pa dang/ ldem pa dang/ gzhon tshul can dang/ gsal ba dang/ 'tsher ba dang/ lhun stug pa dang/ brjid chags pa dang/*

“E ma ho! Victor, great purity, lord of the families, the family of families, creator of the maṇḍala: I supplicate you to teach the method of the Hundred Peaceful and Wrathful ones of the Assembled Sugatas.”<sup>259</sup>

In response, Kuntu Zangmo emanates a series of maṇḍalas based on the iconography of the Peaceful/Wrathful deity complex, with particular emphasis on the Forty-Two Peaceful, and also further iterations of the Five Families maṇḍala. Kuntu Zangpo also supplies a rare instance of didacticism, as he outlines the basic procedures for tantric practice. This description of proper practice includes instruction in the “Three Samadhis”, (*ting nge ‘dzin rnam pa gsum*), a sequence of contemplations on the unity of emptiness and compassion which generally preludes Mahāyoga deity yoga.

In response to a series of entreaties by Vajrasattva, Kuntu Zangpo and Zangmo sequentially emanate maṇḍalas of the Forty Two Peaceful Deities, the Five Buddha Families, the Single Family of the Great Secret, and individuated maṇḍalas of the Five Buddhas. This initial series of maṇḍala emanations centers on peaceful iconography drawn from the Yoga and Mahāyoga systems in general, and the Māyājāla genre in particular. In including the Five Families, Vajrasattva, and the Peaceful/Wrathful deity complex, the tantra represents the contours of the tantric traditions inherited from India. The inclusion of these systems in this *Assembly of the Sugatas* signals an effort to collate important iterations of tantric practice distinctive to the Early Translation communities. But it is in the next series of emanations – the emanation of wrathful maṇḍalas of the Eight Herukas – that the Kabgyé is truly distinguished, making a bold statement about the possibilities of tantrism in inculcating the idiom of enlightened wrath and the ritual practice of harm-averting violence.

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<sup>259</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 283.1-2: *E ma ho/ bcom ldan gas (sic)/ dag che/ rigs kyi rigs te rigs kyi gtso/ dkyil ‘khor kun gyi byed pa po/ bde bar gshegs pa kun ‘dus pa’i/ zhi ba dam pa rigs brgya yi/ bsgrub thabs bdag la bshad dug sol/ zhes gsol pa/*

As described previously, the disclosure of the wrathful maṇḍalas unfolds on the heels of discourse and intercourse between wrathful versions of Kuntu Zangpo and Kuntu Zangmo. In this, Kuntu Zangpo reveals himself as Chemchok Heruka, and union with the “wrathful sky-faced” Kuntu Zangmo produces a general heruka maṇḍala:

By the radiance of taking great pleasure in the sky-faced wrathful lady, by gazing and making the offering of pleasure in the body of the Lady, from the space of the Lady and from light rays of bodhisattvas, from the proliferation of inconceivable wrathful emanations in the ten directions, Lord Chemchok, liberated the worldly haughty demons, the twenty-one great gods, and so forth. Having subjugated and annihilated them, the eightfold assembly again took position in the eight directions: Vajra Heruka appeared in the East out of enlightened mind; to the South appeared Zhinje of enlightened body; from enlightened speech, in the West, was emanated Tamdrin; in the North was the emanation of enlightened action, Youthful Dorje [Vajrakīlaya]; in the Southeast was the splendid and powerful Śrī Heruka; in the Northwest was the all-taming Jigpa Drekpa [Jigten Chötö]; emerging in the Northeast was Mighty Black One [Möpa Drangak]; in the Southwest, Rigzin Vajradharma, all with their retinues and consorts. The assembly of wrathful ones, along with nine palaces, became clarified as the emanation from the space of union of Lord and Lady.<sup>260</sup>

The sexual and gynogenic imagery here is striking, as the text specifies that the radiance of sexual bliss (“taking pleasure in the sky-faced lady”) powers the emanation of wrathful enlightened forms, and the “liberation” of the worldly demons (*dregs pa*) and gods (*lha*). The term “liberation” in this context is multivalent: while *sgrol ba* could refer to the stimulation of sentient beings into enlightenment, in the context of Mahāyoga ritualism, *sgrol ba* is also a euphemism for the violent dispatch of enemies. Indeed, *sgrol ba* (“liberation”) and *sbyor ba*

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<sup>260</sup> *The King of Root Tantras, 306-307.1: yab che mchog gis yum khro mo gnas zhal ma la dgyes pa chen po'i mdangs kyis gzigs te/ yum gyi sku la dgyes pa'i mchod pa phul bas/ yum gyi mkha' las byang chub kyis sems kyis 'od zer las sprul pa'i khro bo bsam gyis mi khyab pa phyogs bcu thams cad du 'phros pas/ 'jig rten gyi dregs pa can/ lha chen po nyi shu rtsa gcig la stsogs pa thams cad bsgral te/ bdul zhing tsar bcad nas/ slar phyogs brgyad du 'dus pa las/ shar du thugs las sprul pa ba dzra he ru ka zhes bya ba dang/ lhor sku las sprul pa gzhi rje'i gshed po zhes bya ba dang/ nub tu gsung gis sprul pa dpal rta mgrin dang/ byang du phrin las kyis sprul pa rdo rje gzhon nu dang/ shar lhor brjid pa'i stobs chen dpal he ru ka dang/ nub byang du 'jigs pa'i dregs pa kun 'dul ba dang/ byang shar du gyad kyis stobs chen sprul pa stobs ldan nag po dang/ lho nub rig 'dzin rdo rje chos la stsogs pa so so'i 'khor tshogs yum dang bcas pa 'dus te/ khams gsum 'jigs par//byed pa'i khro bo'i tshogs/ pho brang dgu dang bcas pa/ yab yum gyi mkha' las sprul te gsal bar gyur to/*

(“union”) are both markers of Mahāyoga practice, and both idioms are strongly present in this passage.

From this maṇḍala, the herukas Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, Śri Heruka, and Vajrakīlaya urge Chemchok to “Tame the realm of samsara with the compassionate wrath of a Buddha!”<sup>261</sup> Chemchok responds: “Listen, Herukas of the Four Families: by their arrogance, the prideful Rudras have not been tamed by pacification. The wrathful buddha-compassion is the sacred all-terrifier!”<sup>262</sup> An extensive general wrathful maṇḍala called the Maṇḍala of the Great Terrifier is then laid out by Chemchok, followed by a listing of maṇḍalas and rituals (titles only) for wrathful practice, called the “Authentic Collection of Accomplishments”. As in *The Arising*, we are given, within the narrative action, a bibliography of practices and texts supportive of Kabgyé-style practice, and we may recall how the notion of collation (*dus pa*) is an essential aspect of the mythos undergirding the Kabgyé cycle.

Following Chemchok’s disclosure of the General Wrathful maṇḍala of the Great Terrifier, a series of entreaties by each of the eight Kabgyé herukas to Śri Heruka results in the emanation of the specific maṇḍalas of the Kabgyé assemblage. First, the maṇḍala of Chemchok is disclosed as the accomplishment of enlightened qualities (*yon tan*). Then, the Vajra Heruka maṇḍala is given as the accomplishment of authentic mind (*yang dag thugs*); Zhinje supplicates for the Yamāntaka maṇḍala of melodious body (*jam dpal sku*); Tamdrin requests the accomplishment maṇḍala of lotus speech (*pad ma’i gsung*), and Vajrakumāra (“youthful vajra”, a name for Vajrakīlaya) requests the maṇḍala for accomplishing enlightened action (*phrin las*). These five maṇḍalas are described by Śri Heruka in iconographic detail, and the imagery is overwhelmingly

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<sup>261</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 307.4: *sang rgyas thugs rje khros pa yis/ ’khor ba’i gnas na ji ltar gdul/*

<sup>262</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 307.5-6: *nyon cig rigs bzhi he ru ka/ dregs pas khengs pa’i ru tra rnams/ zhi bas thul bar ma gyur nas/ sangs rgyas thugs rje khros pa ni/ thams cad ’jigs pa’i mchog yin te/*

bloody. The maṇḍala palaces are built upon skeleton mountains, the seed syllables drawn in blood or human ash. The maṇḍala is populated with demonic entities bearing weapons and instruments of torture, trampling enemies and brandishing human skins. The central icons, in union with wrathful dākinīs, display terrifying countenances and wield instruments of destruction.

According to the Buddhist take on tantrism, the wrathful soteriological idiom communicates the incisive character of gnosis and the uncompromising nature of compassion. The essential technology in this kind of self-cultivational practice is the reclamation of conventionally negative states to undo delusion itself. In psychologized exegesis, this has to do with the distillation of the intensity of emotions to power gnosis and overcome the “demons” of ego fixation. Such exegetical glosses, however, are not supplied in the Kabgyé root tantra, and the imagery and rhetoric in the root tantra is exclusively that of “taming” (*‘dul ba*): “This is the life essence of the lineage of blood drinking gods. The repositories of fury [in] the forms of menacing, blazing wrath; for the sake of doing this, for the sake of taming enemies, the savage ones shall accomplish [this]”.<sup>263</sup> We thus see the Kabgyé enfold the soteriological and apotropaic functions of tantric practice, contextualizing tantric mastery in terms of a demon-control that sees demonic figures assigned to the center of the tantric mandala. This is featured most prominently in the Kabgyé tantras of the three “Worldly Ones” (*‘jig rten pa*): Mamo Bötong, Jigten Chötö, and Möpa Drangak, all of which are notable for their inclusion of a specifically Tibetan demonology. The Eight Classes of Gods and Demons populate the maṇḍala of Jigten Chötö and Möpa Drangak, and the imagery of the Mamo Bötong maṇḍala of many demonesses reflects a complex dialogue between Indian tradition and Tibetan ritual culture.

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<sup>263</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 263.6-264.1: *khrag ‘thung lha rgyud srog snying yin/ zhe sdang can gyi snod dag gis/ ‘bar ba gtum khro rngam pa’i gzugs/ drag shul can gyis spyad pa’i phir/ dgra bgegs ‘dul phyir bsgrub par bya/*

## **Demons Taming Demons: The three worldly ones**

The sections on the three “worldly” (*jig rten pa'i*) deity maṇḍalas – Mamo Bötong, Jigten Chötö, and Möpa Drangak – provide us with the most interesting case of assimilation between Mahāyoga tantrism, the idioms of Yogīni siddhism, and Tibetan indigenous ritual culture. This becomes evident in the incorporation of Tibetan indigenous gods and demons in the heruka maṇḍalas of these deities, and in the blending of the soteriological and apotropaic dimensions of religious practice.

### **Mamo Bötong**

The maṇḍala of Mamo Bötong (*ma mo rbod gtong*, lit. “Summoning and Dispatching the Fierce Goddess”) features an assemblage of wrathful demonesses, with the three-faced “Eternal Queen” (*rtag pa'i rgyal mo*) at the center. She has four legs and six hands, each grasping skulls and other implements of violence. In the four directions are animal-faced ḍākinīs, such as the lion-faced Sengé Dongma (*seng ge gdong ma*), the cow-faced Banlang Dongma (*ban glang gdong ma*), and the bird-faced Dorje Chu Dong (*rdo rje mchu gdong*), along with a host of other female demonic characters.<sup>264 265</sup>

In both Indian and Tibetan traditions, the iconography of the ḍākinī carries multivalent significance.<sup>266</sup> From her Puranic origins as a flesh-eating demoness in the retinue of Kālī, and as a nature spirit in non-Brahmanical ritual culture, up to her apotheosis in late tantric traditions as

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<sup>264</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 338.5-340.

<sup>265</sup> Similar animal-faced ḍākinīs are also featured in the *Secret Nucleus* maṇḍala as the supporting wrathful retinue of the Five Sugatas. In that context, there are eight animal-faced *piśācī*, who are the retainers of the eight *matārah* goddesses. According to Chöying Thubten Dorje’s (*chos dbying thub bstan rdo rje* 1785-1848) commentary, the eight *matārah* represent the eight sense consciousnesses, and the eight *piśācī* represent the sense objects. These divinities were once terrifying demonesses, tamed by Mahottara (*che mchog*) and incorporated into the *Guhyagarbha* wrathful maṇḍala. These kinds of animal-headed protectresses are an Indian convention, but taken up in Tibetan iterations, especially in the context of protective deities.

<sup>266</sup> See Judith Simmer-Brown, *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism*. Boston & London: Shambala, 2002, chapter 2, for a concise overview of the development of ḍākinī iconography in Indian and Tibetan tradition.

the expression of gnosical illumination, the ḍākinī figure has come to signify many different aspects of tantric ritual culture and soteriology. In general, Buddhist and Shaivite iterations of Indian tantrism depict the ḍākinī as an animal-headed female retinue deity, as seen in the *Secret Nucleus*'s Five Sugatas maṇḍala. Perhaps under the influence of Kaula Shaivism, Yoginī (Tib. *ma rgyud*, “Mother Tantra”) traditions elevated the ḍākinī to a central maṇḍala position, to be visualized in more anthropomorphic forms and taken as a tutelary deity in the manner of Generation Stage deity yoga. Nonetheless, despite her apotheosis in traditions such as the Chakrasamvara Tantra (*'khor lo bde mchog*) and in Vajrayoginī (*rdo rje rnal 'byor ma*) traditions, the ḍākinī continued to represent maleficence, particularly in early Buddhist Tibet, where she was enfolded into indigenous conceptions of landscape demonesses. Thus, a bipartite concept of the ḍākinī is preserved in Tibet, where she may be classified in “worldly” (*'jig rten pa'i*), or “transcendent” (*'jig rten las das pa'i*) terms.

The category of the worldly ḍākinī, sometimes known as the “flesh-eating ḍākinī” (*sha za mkha' 'gro*), includes the category of mamo, which is typically listed as one of the Eight Classes of autochthonous gods and demons. The mamo, like the flesh-eating Srinmo demonesses, seem to have some association with the landscape, as evidenced in lore of Padmasambhava's subjugation of the “supine demoness” as he geomantically secured Tibet's Buddhist conversion. Dalton suggests that elements of this lore may represent an incorporation of Nepali and North Indian mythology of seven *Mātrka* goddesses.<sup>267</sup> In Tibet, the mamo are thought to be highly tempestuous, responsible for plague, warfare, and various related calamities. They are depicted with matted hair and dark skin, waving bags of pestilence (*nad rkyal*), eating corpses, wearing animal or human skins, and wielding implements of torture. However, these mamo, like other

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<sup>267</sup> Dalton 2004, 766.

autochthonous entities, are not entirely anti-social. They can be inscribed into relationships of reciprocal favor through ritual intercessions, and the story of Padmasambhava very much hinged on his thaumaturgical ability to bind such gods and demons “by oath” (*dam tshig*), thus converting them from dangerous enemies to willful protectors of Buddhism. The worldly *ḍākinī* also played a major role in the career of Nyangrel Nyima Özer, as his biographies tell of his visionary encounters with fierce female spirits who directed him in his pursuit of revelation. There ultimately came to be some overlap in Tibetan tradition between the worldly and divine status of these demonesses, as some *mamo*, such as Palden Lhamo (*dpal ldan lha mo*, “Splendid Goddess”) and Ekajati (*e ka dza ti*, the *mamo*-queen protectress of the Great Perfection tradition) were elevated to the status of transcendent protectors, or even tutelary deities (*vid dam*). The Kabgyé maṇḍala of Mamo Bötong may have been a seminal expression of this divinization of the demoness.

The transcendent *ḍākinī* (*mkha’ gro*, *khandro*, lit. “sky goer”) is associated with the *Yoginī* systems brought to Tibet in the second spread of tantra in the eleventh century. Iconographically, a tutelary *ḍākinī* such as *Vajrayoginī* is at once wrathful and seductive, depicted as voluptuously naked, dancing, while wielding the blade and drinking blood from a human skull. Deity yoga focused on such a *ḍākinī* is meant to induce recognition of the empty luminescence of pristine cognition, which is the result of the transmutation of desire into gnosis. The sexualized imagery also communicates the soteriology of bliss that is implicated in the “Higher Tantra” (*bla med rgyud*) approach to tantric self-cultivation.

The iconography of Mamo Bötong is generally centered on the worldly *ḍākinī* in her most fearsome aspect (the flesh-eating *mamo*), but also entails some elements of the transcendental *ḍākinī*. This combination of idioms speaks to the unique enfoldment of apotropaic and

soteriological technologies that these Kabgyé maṇḍalas exhibit. As we will see in all three of the Kabgyé “worldly” maṇḍalas, demon-taming and Generation Stage self-cultivation are combined to yield a practice system in which harm-averting thaumaturgy is synonymous with fully qualified religious practice. In the maṇḍala of Mamo Bötong, the terms *mkha’ gro* and *ma mo* seem to be used interchangeably, and while the imagery of these principal ḍākinīs is indeed wrathful, the emphasis is also on a distinctive luminescence: “The illumination and clear light of Vairocana blazes. Friendly light blazes and light fluctuates. The brightness that blazes is endowed with authentic glory.”<sup>268</sup> This luminescent imagery reflects the *śakti* doctrine of Indian religion, by which the goddess-consort represents the generative power of the principal Indian gods. The principal figures in this Mamo Bötong maṇḍala – the Eternal Queen and her four animal-faced ḍākinīs – communicate the *śakti* principle, while the many subsidiary mamo are decidedly fierce, and of strange and threatening appearance: each wears animal or human-skin raiment, beating drums, wielding bags of pestilence. Some wear garlands of skulls, hold notched magical sticks, and thrust tridents or clubs. These subsidiary demonesses are beholden to the Eternal Queen; forging a self-cultivational connection with her results in mastery over them. According to the text, the purpose of practicing this maṇḍala is to “accomplish enlightened actions” (*phrin las bsgrub*), specifically the “summoning and dispatching” (*rbod gtong*) of the goddess/demoness to “tame obstructing enemies” (*dgra bgegs ‘dul ba*). Thus, taken together, the khandros and mamos of this maṇḍala are essential features of a special kind of practice that accomplishes demon-taming through the gnosis realization activated in meditation upon the cosmic feminine in demonic form.

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<sup>268</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 338.6-339.1: *rnam snang gsal dang ‘od gsal ‘bar/ gnyen gsal ‘bar dang yang gsal g.yos/ bkrag gsal ‘bar zhes bya ba ni/ ming gi mtha’ dang yang dag ldan/*

Mamo Bötong is known as a “semi-transcendent” maṇḍala, entailing both soteriological and worldly objectives. This is as opposed to Jigten Chötö and Möpa Drangak, which are “worldly” in as much as they focus exclusively on taming, liberating, and destructive rites aimed at worldly enemies. The Mamo Bötong maṇḍala bridges these two dimensions of religious practice, which is evident in the different kinds of imagery – the blissfully luminescent and the terrifying – which are present in the narrative. There is necessarily some ambiguity here concerning the roles of the khandro and mamo, and the terminology becomes blended as both terms are used interchangeably in this root tantra and also in *The Arising* narrative, where the Eight Classes (of which mamo are one member) are elevated as facilitators of visionary experience.

### **The Demon Tamers: Jigten Chötö and Möpa Drangak**

The incorporation of indigenous gods and demons is most explicit in the maṇḍalas of Jigten Chötö and Möpa Drangak. These final chapters of the *King of Root Tantras* are short, and provide no instruction in tantric or thaumaturgical practice beyond giving the iconography of the respective maṇḍalas and the powerful mantras to be used in deity yoga practice. However, the inclusion of the Eight Classes of Gods and Demons, the ultra-violent imagery, and a unique nomenclature in these chapters signal that these maṇḍalas are especially rich with distinctive significance for the Kabgyé cycle. These sub-cycles provide the basis for many of the apotropaic rituals which came to be included in the comprehensive *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions. And, as we will see in our comparison of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* with the *Secret Nucleus Tantra*, these sections innovate the Mahāyoga themes of “taming” (*‘dul ba*) and “liberation” (*sgrol ba*) to offer a unique (and uniquely Tibetan) take on the union of apotropaic and soteriological practice.

The Jigten Chötö (*‘jig rten mchod bstod*, “Worldly Praise and Offering”) maṇḍala – here called, for some reason, Jigten Chöten (*‘jigs rten mchod rten*, “Worldly Offering-Support”) –

consists of a central heruka called Glorious Demon All-Tamer (*dpal dregs pa kun 'dul*), surrounded by representatives of the Eight Classes of Gods and Demons (*lha ma srin sde brgyad*, or *dregs pa sde brgyad*). Within the framing narrative, the disclosure of this maṇḍala results from the supplication of Demon All-Tamer to Śri Heruka for a method for taming the “inappropriately toxic” (*ma rung gdung pa*): “E Ma! Great glorious expert in methods, for the purpose of taming the inappropriately toxic, teach the method of Jigten Chöten. Thus the great warrior supplicated.”<sup>269</sup> In response, Śri Heruka describes a maṇḍala of entirely wrathful imagery, incorporating a full range of Tibetan deities:

In the abode of cruel demon gods, having swept it clean, sprinkle various kinds of blood. With various kinds of blood write the form of an □□□...[Generate] a blazing charnel-ground palace; a four-spoked wheel is the courtyard with four doors, surrounded by poisonous beasts. Having generated this very terrifying scene, [visualize] Great Glorious Demon All-Tamer with three heads and six hands. The faces are dark brown, red-brown, and blue-black. In the first [hands] are a vajra and skull cup of blood; the middle likewise [grasp] the eight gods; and the lower two hands likewise hold the heads of eight nāgas. The feet trample the heart of the arrogant demons (*dregs pa*). The great consort, Tamer of the Three Worlds, holds a vajra and a skull cup of blood. Meditate [on them] as the antidote that tames the arrogant demons.

The retinue of that horrible tamer arises as the types of drekpa: the dark blue Mahādeva with a crooked blade and with the skull cup filled with the blood of the three roots, along with the consort Umādeva; the black Lord of Death, the king of existence, bearing a club, a skull, and a cudgel. The Black Murderess is in his arms. Encircled by the retinue of existence, the dark-black Lord Of All Demons, [grasping] a corpse on a plank; and the black Demoness Remati holding a bag of pestilence and rotten blood. The Chief of Vampires, Black Lightning Rosary, with lightning and the light of phenomena raging, embraces the Blood-eyed Vampiress, holding red-black bloody phurba and skull. The Nöjin Blazing Fire, with dark black body, holding a jewel and blade, a black mamo as his consort, in her two hands a razor and shewolf. The great cosmo-demon Rāhu, smoke-colored and brandishing a bow and arrow and a snake lasso, with a lightning storm demoness, pink lightning and hailstones falling. The black Serpent Demon with nine heads, the bottom-half a smoke-colored snake and holding up a bag of pestilence, [with the consort] called the Black She-Serpent, a female

<sup>269</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 343.3: *E ma dpal chen thabs la mkhas/ 'jig rten mchod brten bsgrub pa 'i thabs/ ma rungs gdug pa 'dul ba 'i phyir/ dpa' bo chen pos bshad du gsol/*

form with the body of a serpent-demon. The Chief of all the Gods of Existence, with a flag and crystal sword, the lord of the beings, the great divine god, lord of beings, white, holding a white sword, the body-color white, the Chief of Demons, holding a flag and sword. The King of the Cosmic mamos, white, holding a wheel and mirror, [the consort] Ngakpung Ekajati, blue-black and grasping a turquoise wolf. Palden Nagmo, on horseback, [black] colored and holding a bag of pestilence. The dark red Vajra Demon Tamer, with blood and a measure of white mustard seeds descending. The lord of the vitality-eating red tsän, brandishing a leather shield, spear arrow and bow. And the cosmic red-ghost tsän, eating beef and wielding a noose; the Black Heathen holding a skull cup of blood of the three roots; the King of the Black Obstructors, holding in his hand a skull; the lord of all the mú demons: blue black with a leather shield with bow and arrow; chief of all the brahmin gods, holding a sun and razor knife; the king of the Father Lineage Gods, lord of all, white in color, holding a razor knife and a noose; the chief of the Secret Body Gods, holding a dorje and lance; the protector Mahakala, black with hand implements and hooked knife. The thirty drekpa generals, each one with their various costumes. 200,000 with the two retinues of emanations and inconceivable re-emanations; Meditate on the body as brilliant and blazing, and recite this essence...<sup>270</sup>

<sup>270</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 343.4: *gdug rtsub lha 'dre gnas pa'i sar/ dkyil 'khor byi dor byas nas ni/ khrag sna tshogs pa'i chag chag gdab/ sna tshogs khrag gis E dbyibs bri/...dur khrod 'bar ba'i gzhal yas khang/ 'khor lo rtsibs bzhi bar khyams dang/ sgo bzhir bcas pa gsal ba la/ gdug pa'i gcan gzan 'dabs chags 'khor/ shin tu 'jigs pa bskyed nas ni/ dpal chen dregs pa kun 'dul ni/ dbu gsum phyag kyang drug pa ste/ kham nag smug nag mthing nag zhal/ dang po rdo rje dung khrag dang/ lha brgyad de bzhin klu brgyad kyi mgo bo de bzhin phyag gnyis pa'i 'og ma dag gis 'dzin pa 'o/ dregs pa'i snying ka zhabs kyis brjis/ yum chen khams gsum spyi 'dul ma/ rdo rje dung khrag thogs pa ni/ dregs pa 'dul ba'i gnyen por bsgom/ ma rungs 'dul byed de yi 'khor/ dregs pa'i sde rnams bskyed par bya/ mthing nag ma ha de ba ni/ gri gug dang ni rtsi tata 'dzin/ rtse gsum thod pa khrag bcas pa'i/ yum de ba'i yum dang bcas/ gzhin rje nag po srog gi bdag/ be con thod pa'i dbyug pa 'chang/ gsod byed nag mo'i lag pa na/ srid pa'i 'khor lo bskor ba dang/ mthing nag bdud rnams kun gyi bdag/ khram shing dang ni ti ra 'o/ bdud mo nag mo re ma ti/ khrag bam dang ni nad rgyal thogs/ nag po glog phreng srin gyi gtso/ thog dang srid pa 'khrugs pa'i 'od/ 'dzin dang srin mo khrag mig ma/ dmar nag khrag phur thod pa 'chang/ gnod sbyin me dbal mthing nag sku/ rin po che dang mtshod 'dzin pa/ ma mo nag mo de yi yum/ sbu gri spyang mo phyag gnyi sna 'o/ gza' bdud chen po ra hu la/ dud kha mda' gzhu sbrul zhags bsnams/ gnas sman thog gi bu yug ma/ dmar skya thog dang ser ba 'bebs/ klu bdud nag po mgo dgu bo/ dud kha sbrul zhabs nad rkyal thogs/ klu mo nag mo zhes bya ba/ mo gzugs klu bdud cha lugs can/ srid pa'i lha rnams kun gyi gtso/ sku dar mdung dang zhel gyi gri/ gnam gyi lha chen skyes bu'i bdag/ dkar po ldan dkar ral gri 'dzin/ sku mdog dkar po spyi yi bdud/ dar mdung ral gri phyag char 'chang/ ma mo srid pa'i rgyal po ni/ me long tsakra 'dzin pa dkar/ sngags spung E ka tsa ti ma/ mthing nag g.yu spyang tsi tata 'dzin/ dpal ldan nag mo mgyogs byed ma/ tshon dru dang nad rgyal thogs/ dmar nag rdo rje bdud 'dul ni/ khrag dang yungs dkar thun 'bebs pa 'o/ srog zan dmar po btsan gyi rje/ bs mdung mda' dang gzhu yang mtshon/ srid pa'i btsan 'gong dmar po ni/ sha glang zas kyi zhags pa bsnams/ mu stegs ka la nag po ni/ rtse gsum thod pa khrag can 'dzin/ mthing nag bgegs kyi rgyal po ni/ ka TaAM thod pa lag tu 'chang/ rmu bdud yongs kyi rje bo ni/ mthing nag shag glang mda' dang gzhu/ tshangs pa lha rnams kun gyi gtso/ spu gri nyi ma; i zer thogs pa 'o/ pho rgyud rgyal po yongs kyi bdag/ mdog dkar zhags pa spu gri 'dzin/ gsang ba sku lha'i gtso bo dkar/ rdo rje dang ni ru mtshon 'chang/ mgon po ma hA ka la ni/ mthing nag bing dang gri gug thogs/ dregs pa'i sde dpon sum cu po/ sna tshogs gos gon re re'ang/ 'bum phrag gnyis gnyis 'khor dang bcas/ sprul pa yang sprul bsam mi khyab/ gsal 'tsher 'bar ba'i skur sgom te/ snying po 'di yang bzlas par bya/*

The central figure of the maṇḍala, Glorious Demon All-Tamer (*dpal dregs pa kun 'dul*), is at once a demon (*dregs pa*), and a divine demon-tamer himself. He and his consort trample and strangle other drekpa demons, and are surrounded by an incredible retinue of demonic characters, also called drekpa, representing the Eight Classes of autochthonous gods and spirits, as well as other types of Tibetan divinities. These additional entities include the Gods of Existence (*srid pa'i lha rnams*), the paternal lineal gods (*pho lha*), and the Gods of the Secret Body (*gsang ba'i sku lha*). The drekpa are distinguished by terrifying demonic imagery, while the lha are depicted with the martial equestrian iconography distinctive to Tibetan mythology.

The term *dregs pa* comes from the intransitive verb “to be prideful” or “arrogant” (*rgyags pa'am khengs pa*), but is also commonly used to refer to tempestuous spirits of the land, as in the *dregs pa sde brgyad*.<sup>271</sup> In the case of this Jigten Chötö mandala, drekpa refers both to the mandalized divinities as well as the demonic brethren that they tame.

The mandalization of drekpa, and their elevation to the status of tutelary deities, reflects the special tantric soterio-apatropaic technology of inhabiting the demonic so as to tame it. In a psychologized interpretation, this can reflect the tantric embrace of purified aggression to uproot the negativity of ego-fixation, but it also serves as an actual technology for controlling an unseen world with real influence. As in the Mamo Bötong maṇḍala, the approach is to deeply identify with the principal maṇḍala deity and thus gain control over its mandalic retinue. As the maṇḍala here consists of the various gods and demons of Tibet, and the central character of the maṇḍala is himself a powerful drekpa, the practice of Jigten Chötö signifies the reclamation of dangerous forces to advance the apotropaic goals of Buddhist practice. Adepts in this practice could thereby bring together Buddhist soteriological techniques and Tibetan ritual culture in a comprehensive

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<sup>271</sup> *Bod rgya tshigs mdzod chen mo*, p.1335: 1. [tha mi dad pa] *rgyags pa'am khengs pa* [haughtiness or arrogance]... 2. *nga rgyal* [pride].

approach to religious practice which entailed the ideals of Buddhist salvation, and the ongoing and necessary work of interceding with unseen entities. This vision of religious practice marks one strategy for the indigenization of Tibetan Buddhism; it was a strategy for bringing together vocational predilections of a certain class of Tibetans, it enfolded the Tibetan landscape and society more fully into a Buddhist cosmos, and it provided a familiar idiom for a practice of Tantric Buddhism. It is entirely imaginable that such incorporations of ritual culture with its harm-averting emphasis would have been incubated in the Age of Fragmentation, and Nyangrel's recovery of these practice systems may have crystallized the ongoing blending of soteriological and apotropaic idioms in Tibetan religion.

To fully incorporate the goals of apotropaic ritual culture, and to fully elevate the ritualist as the paragon of Buddhist adeptness, a system for Buddhist thaumaturgy (sorcery) would also have to be included. This is supplied in the final, and most arrestingly wrathful, section of the King of Root Tantras, the maṇḍala of Mōpa Drangak, “Wrathful Malediction” (*dmod pa drag sngags*, lit. “fierce mantra curse”). This short chapter gives a simple yet horrifying maṇḍala, generated in response to the supplication of a heruka called the Powerful Black One (*stobs ldan nag po*).

This Drangak maṇḍala is generated on top of a “demon-murder mountain” (*srog chags bsad pa ri 'dre'i sa*), on a bloody surface adorned with a blazing triangle and a vampire throne (*srin po khris pa*). The Powerful Black One, with three terrifying faces and six arms, tramples the demons (*bdud*) and obstructors (*bgegs*), brandishing the hearts of the Eight Gods and Eight Nāgas, (*lha brgyad klu brgyad tsi tta bsnams*), and trampling the mother and father Drekpa. The Black One's consort, the Lady of Five Elements (*'byung ba lnga yi bdag mo*), pins down the earth and holds up the sky with her hands (*mkha' 'degs sa gzhi gnon pa'i phyag*). She radiates

the five elements from her face (*zhal nas 'byung ba lnga 'char*). They are surrounded by a retinue of various gods and demons: the Black Lord of Death (*gshin rje nag po*) with skull and knife; the Black Blazing Fire Demon (*bdud nag me 'bar*), the Torture-Rack Demons (*khram shing bdud*), murderous vampires and vampiresses (*yum dang srin po gsod byed*) with swords and severed heads, the human-skin wielding Nöjin of Total Goodness (*gnod spyin gang ba bzang po*), the white Mahādevas with crystal swords, the Black Liberator (*thar pa nag po*) dispensing tormas (*mchod gtor gtor ma 'chang*), black Tsän spirits (*mthing nag btsan*), the Black Heathen (*mu stegs nag po*), the god of the comet Ketu (*du ba mjug ring gza '*), the War God of the Black Torture Rack (*nag po khram shing dgra lha*), and further retinues of Tsän, Lú, Drekpa, and Srinpo.<sup>272</sup>

No interpretation of this horrific iconography or ritual instruction beyond the vital mantra is supplied in this short chapter. We are only told that this is for the accomplishment of the *dmod pa drag sngags*: “cursing with fierce mantras”. This is clearly in the idiom of black magic: the violence of the imagery is absolute, and there is no doubt that the practice of this maṇḍala is associated with extreme modes of enemy-subjugation. Again, as a deity-yoga maṇḍala, the thaumaturgy communicated in Möpa Drangak overlaps with tantric technique: by identifying with the image of the Powerful Black One, and by harmonizing perception to his mandalic world – in this case a maṇḍala of bloody demons and powerful gods – these evil forces come under one’s own power, and mantric curses may be deployed to tame the “inappropriately toxic”. The powerful forces that may be tamed in this manner are represented by both demonic and godly imagery: the terrifying and bloody dü stand alongside the radiant and kingly lha. Forces of the land, the body, patrilineage, and the power of evil itself can be harnessed to accomplish the goals

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<sup>272</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 347.3 – 349.5.

of this practice. But we may wonder whether taming and liberation in this context can mean anything other than cursing and murder. The efficacy of the practice of Möpa Drangak is taken quite seriously by adepts exposed to this cycle, and stories persist in Nyingma communities of rival lamas and dangerous heretics who were felled by the wrathful malediction of the Powerful Black One.



Jigten Chötö. Himalayan Art Resources

## The Assembled Sugatas Tantra

The *King of Kabgyé Root Tantras* stands as the foundational tantra of the Kabgyé revelation system as organized in the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions and in Nyingma anthologies. However, it is not the only, and perhaps not even the eldest, foundational tantra of the Kabgyé tradition. Nyangrel's *Stainless Proclamations* biography mentions Nyangrel's reception of *Deshek Dupa* materials (the text says *bde gshegs pa rgyud rlung nyi shu*: the “twenty Sugata tantras and teachings”) from his teachers, Lama Rashak and Tertön Ngödrup.<sup>273</sup> This story stands in contrast to the normative revelation narrative in which the Kabgyé was said to have been recovered from the Vairocana icon within the halls of Khoting temple, in Lhodrak. Some have assumed that the *Sugatas Tantra* bestowed to Nyangrel by Lama Rashak and Tertön Ngödrup referred to the *King of Root Tantras* of the Kabgyé revelation, and have puzzled over this discrepant story of the Kabgyé's origin. However, an *Assembled Sugatas Tantra* (*bde gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud*, or *bde bar gshegs pa rgyud*; also known as the *'byed bar 'byed pa lde mig gi rgyud*, or the *zhi khro 'dus pa'i rgyud*), included as a piece of miscellany in the *Nyingma Gyubum* and in the thirteen-volume *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions, may be this very text.<sup>274 275</sup> Like the *King of Root Tantras*, this tantra includes the maṇḍalas of the Five Families in peaceful form, the Peaceful-Wrathful deity complex, and a wrathful maṇḍala consisting of the Eight Herukas (plus the ninth character, Lama Rigzin). However, this tantra is quite different from the *King of Root*

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<sup>273</sup> *The Stainless Proclamations*, 92.4.

<sup>274</sup> Nyingma Gyubum inclusion: Mtshams brag vol. 23, no. 6; Sde dge vol. 15, no. 9; dpal brtsegs: vol. 18, no. 12.

<sup>275</sup> As it appears in the Katok Kabgyé *chos skor*, this text subtitles itself with several aliases, presumably alternate titles by which this tantra circulated: the *zhi khro 'dus pa'i rgyud* (*The Tantra of the Assembly of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*), the *'byed par 'byed pa lde 'u par mig gi rgyud* (*The Tantra of the Key Differentiating the Differentiated*), the *bde gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud* (*The Tantra of the Assembled Sugatas*), the *dnegos grub gter gyi rgyud* (*The Tantra of the True Accomplishment Treasure* [or, perhaps this refers to the text belonging to the revelations of Tertön Ngödrup?], and the *dpal kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa bkod pa'i mdo* (*The Sutra of the Architecture of Kuntu Zangpo's Mind*)

*Tantras* in several regards, and I suggest that it could very well have been in development and circulation in the centuries preceding Nyangrel. Specifically, this *Assembled Sugatas Tantra* is somewhat more technical than the *King of Root Tantras*: for each maṇḍala, an extensive list of mantras and visualization descriptions are provided for both the main and subsidiary maṇḍala constituents. This is most unlike the *King of Root Tantras*, which generally does not provide mantras or much ritual instruction beyond the general maṇḍala visualization and one vital mantra for each central deity. Second, the Kabgyé herukas in the *Assembled Sugatas Tantra* are explicitly mapped onto the Five Sugata Families in a manner quite redolent of the *Secret Nucleus*. The *King of Root Tantras*, in contrast, affiliates the herukas with enlightened Body, Speech, Mind, Quality, and Action, rather than the Five Families (although tradition tends to loosely equate these five-fold dimensions of enlightened nature, along with several other pentads according to Mahayoga doctrine). Third, the framing narratives of the *Assembled Sugatas Tantra* – which, like those of the *King of Root Tantras* and also the *Secret Nucleus*, revolve around the discourse and intercourse between Kuntu Zangpo and Kuntu Zangmo – are, in my opinion, significantly less lyrical and thano-erotically evocative than are the *King of Root Tantras*. However, perhaps the most telling difference between these foundational Kabgyé tantras is exemplified in the maṇḍala of Jigten Chötö. Whereas the *King of Root Tantras*' section on Worldly Praise and Offering entails the subjugation and mandalization of the Eight Classes of Gods and Spirits, the *Assembled Sugatas Tantra*'s Jigten Chötö maṇḍala consists of an arrangement of twenty-four gods of both Indian and Tibetan provenance. Among those included are *Isvara Mahadeva*, *Yama*, *Rāhula*, *Nāgaraja*, and *Māra*, alongside distinctively Tibetan gods such as *lha rab sham po* (likely *yar lha sham po* – the progenitive mountain god of the Tibetan imperial lineage), the *srid pa'i ma mo e ka dza ti* (a demoness queen, later known as protectress

of the Ati teachings), *dpal ldan nag po*, *brag ä srog zan dmar po* ( red-rock Tsän spirits, thought to be the ghosts of deceased kings), *btsan 'khong yab shud dmar po* (another Tsän ghost), *bgegs rgyal byin ya ga* (an obstructive spirit), and *rgyal po chen po pe dkar* (one of the local gods bound by guru Rinpoche at Samyé, later made into the famous guardian spirit Pehar). With the inclusion of these Indian and Tibetan entities, this list is distinctively hybridic. The classification and terminology of the Eight Classes is totally absent, and we might note the affiliation of several of the Tibetan gods mentioned with lore surrounding the imperial ritual cult and early Buddhist period. In sum, this Jigten Chötö maṇḍala in the *Assembled Sugatas Tantra* does not bear the degree of “Tibetanization” that we see in the *King of Root Tantras*, specifically in its inclusion of explicitly Indian gods and the absence of the Eight Classes typology. I also take its overall resemblance to Māyājāla tantric templates and its unique hybridity – especially the inclusion of Tibetan gods aligned with the imperium – to suggest that it may have developed in the imperial or immediately post-imperial era in Central Tibet. If this is true, it really may have been transmitted to Nyangrel by his teachers, and perhaps the fifteen foundational tantras of the revealed *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle – and the *King of Root Tantras*, in particular – were a reformulation of the unique approach to Mahāyoga first exemplified in this *Assembled Sugatas Tantra*. Indeed, Ngari Panchen’s sixteenth-century Kabgyé history confirms that there was a transmitted tradition of Kabgyé practice, received by Nyangrel, and then enfolded into Nyangrel’s version as he “mixed of the rivers of Kama and terma” (*bka' gter chu 'dres*).

This *Assembled Sugatas Tantra* is included in the comprehensive editions of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, but appears under several different titles along with a confusing list of aliases. In the Katok edition, it is listed as the *Tantra of the Assembled Kabgyé Accomplishment* (*bsgrub pa bka' brgyad 'dus pa'i rgyud*); in the Tsamdrak it is called the *Thoroughly Differentiated Key*

*Tantra in Sixty-Seven Chapter* ('byed par byed pa lde mig gi rgyud le'u drug cu rtsa bdun pa; not to be confused with the *Differentiated Key Tantra*, which also goes by the title *byed pa 'byed par lde mig gi rgyud* in the *Tsamdrak chos skor*). Other aliases and subtitles include the *Tantra of the Assembled Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* (*zhi khro 'dus pa'i rgyud*), the *Deshek Dupa Tantra* (*bder gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud*), *The Treasure of Accomplishment Tantra* (*dnegos grub gter gyi rgyud*), and even the *Sutra of the Architecture of Kuntu Zangpo's Mind* (*dpal kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa bkod pa'i mdo*). While the *Differentiated Key Tantra* ('byed pa lde mig gi rgyud) is listed as one of the five foundational tantras of the cycle according to the cycle's auto-history and received doxographical lore, it is not clear whether it refers to this text, or to the *Differentiated Tantra* (*byed par 'byed pa rgyud*) in two sections, which is also sometimes called simply *The Key Tantra* (*lde mig gi rgyud*). Still more confusing is the fact that the *King of Root Tantras* is sometimes listed as the *Assembled Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* (*zhi khro 'dus pa*) or the *Deshek Dupa* (*bde gshegs 'dus pa*), which are known aliases of this *Assembled Sugatas Tantra*. We see, then, that there has been bibliographic confusion in the anthologization of Kabgyé materials, at least at the level of text titles. Luckily, the texts are distinguishable by their number of chapters (e.g., the *King of Root Tantras* always has eighteen chapters, the *Differentiated Tantra* has seventeen, regardless of how they are titled). But the overlapping titles suggests a multiplicity of recensions that anthologists had to deal with in creating the *Deshek Dupa* editions, and in assembling Nyingma canons. At any rate, this *Assembled Sugatas Tantra* is clearly important enough to be included in the comprehensive editions of the *Deshek Dupa*, as well as in the *Nyingma Gyubum*, and its many aliases suggest both that it was circulated, and also of ambiguous connection to, the rest of the Kabgyé cycle. As my cursory analysis suggests, it is a

candidate for the “transmitted” iteration of the Kabgyé, and may have been the very foundation of Nyangrel’s Kabgyé revelation itself.

### **Comparison with the Guhyagarbha**

The tantras of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* are at once mimetic and innovative in how they proffered a Mahāyoga mythological world, supplemented with distinctively Tibetan ritual idioms. In general, the Kabgyé mirrors the structure of the *Magical Emanation* tantras, and especially *The Secret Nucleus Tantra* (*gsang ba'i snying po rgyud*, Skt. *Guhyagarbha-tantra*) in the inclusion of the Five Sugata Families, the Peaceful/Wrathful deity complex, and the wrathful maṇḍala of taming and liberation. These features represent the selection of Mahāyoga divinities, practices, and narrative idioms to be included in a comprehensive architecture of myth, doctrine, and practice for the “Inner Tantras”. It is no surprise that the format of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* (both the *King of Root Tantras*, and the above-mentioned *Assembled Sugatas Tantra*) replicates that of the *Secret Nucleus*. After all, the *Guhyagarbha* had long been upheld by Nyingmapas as the preeminent Mahāyoga tantra, coming to stand at the center of the 18-fold Mahāyoga canon (at least as it was curated by the Zur system), and at the heart of the eight *Magical Emanation* tantras according to the *Nyingma Gyubum*.

The *Guhyagarbha* has twenty-two chapters covering a full range of tantric topics, including the buddhology of pristine cognition and mandalic emanation, the techniques of generation and completion stage practice, theoretical and applied perspectives on meditative self-cultivation and ritual, and protocols for tantric initiation, harm averting rituals, and so forth. Unlike the *King of Root Tantras*, the *Guhyagarbha* is quite didactic, and the majority of this content is communicated in the chapters associated with peaceful mandala of the Five Sugata Families, or in the mandalas of the Peaceful-Wrathful deity complex. However, beginning with the fifteenth chapter, the *Guhyagarbha* also provides narratives, doctrines, and ritual techniques

oriented towards the edification of the “hard to tame” through the wrathful mandala of taming and liberation. The chapter’s tantric narrative describes the taming of various obstructive entities, including the elemental *bhuta* spirits (Tib. *’byung po*), and also the great gods of the *Mahesvara* class: the *dbang phyug rgyal po*, or *dregs pa* in Tibetan translation. Just as in the Kabgyé, the central icon of the *Secret Nucleus* is the heruka of the Buddha Family, Mahottara. He is surrounded by the herukas of Vajra, Ratna, Padma, and Karma. According to the narrative, the union of Kuntu Zangpo and Zangmo generates the wrathful mandala, within which the five herukas and countless wrathful enlightened beings arise to subdue obstructive demons, who are beaten, torn apart and consumed in an act of abject violence. They are eventually expelled out (defecated) into the heruka maṇḍala as fully tamed entities, bound by oath to serve the herukas.<sup>276</sup> The obstructive spirits are mandalized, or socialized under the authority of the Buddhist herukas, as they are violently transformed into controllable members of the heruka retinue. Their subjugation also hinges on an act of sexual violence: the five herukas steal these gods’ śakti consorts, seducing them, and impregnating them such that they give birth to hosts of *dākinīs* born into the perimeter of the heruka mandala.<sup>277</sup> Altogether, this kind of subjugation

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<sup>276</sup> *Gsang ba’i snying po*, 15:18: “Mahesvara and the others, the collection of vile ones: their hearts and sense organs were ripped out, all their entrails were disemboweled, and all their limbs amputated, their flesh was eaten, their blood was drunk, and all their bones were chewed up” (*dbang phyug chen po sog/s/ gdug pa chen po’i tshogs de dag gi snying dang dbang po kun phyung/ nang khrol kun drangs/ yan lag kun bcad gtubs nas sha kun zos/ khrag kun ’thungs/ rus pa kun ’chos so/*); 15:30: “Mahesvara and the others were expelled from the bowels of the great wrathful Victor.” (...*dbang phyug chen po la sog/s pa thams cad/ ’com ldan ’das khro bo chen po de dag gi bsnam nas btom to/*); 15:33: “Then they shook greatly with terror and, totally subdued, roared: “Make us your subjects! Make us your subjects!”... and swearing to become subjects, they took their seats in the mandala.” (*de nas de dag shin tu ’dar zhing byed pa rab tu zhum pa’i nga ros/ ’bangs su mchi/ ’bangs su mchi/...ces ’bangs su mchi bar mna’ bor nas/ dkyil ’khor gyi gdan du bzhag go/*).

<sup>277</sup> *Gsang ba’i snying po*, 15:20: “Then they gathered together the highest queens of all the spirits, the consort of the great arrogant demon king and so forth, the female spirits without exception.].the spirit queens became agitated with desire and they entered into union with the body of the glorious heruka.” (*de nas ’byung mo ma lus pa’i rgyal po’i yang rgyal po dregs pa chen po la sog/s pa’i chung ma’i byung po thams cad kyi rje mo’i yang rje mol...bsdus so/... ’byung po’i rgyal mo rnams shin tu chags pa’i yid g.yos nas/ ...dpal khrag ’thung chen po rdo rje’i sku la ’khril lo/*;

hinges on socialized conceptions of mandalic authority, as well as gendered ideas from Indian tradition, and it inculcates violence as the basic activity of enlightened agents.

We see in this narrative several elements in common with the Kabgyé tantric narrative: the maṇḍala-producing intercourse of Kuntu Zangpo and Zangmo in wrathful form, the subjugation of worldly gods, and their ultimate mandalization as divine forces under the power of the Heruka Buddhas. But there are also notable differences between the framing narratives in these two cycles: The Kabgyé does not explicate the buddhology of demonhood (as in the *Guhyagarbha*'s account of how the misinterpretation of wrathful deity yoga practice and the ascent from hell in past lives results in rebirth as a demon), and the Kabgyé *King of Root Tantras* replaces Rudra and the twenty-eight *Īśvara* with the Eight Classes of Gods and Spirits. The *Secret Nucleus* specifically refers to twenty-eight obstructive entities, with their king, the *dregs pa rgyal po*, and their stolen consorts. The twenty-eight drekpa retainers, according to the *Guhyagarbha*, are twenty-eight gods of non-Buddhist Indian religion: these include famous gods such as *Brahma*, *Mahesvara (Shiva)*, *Satakratu (Indra)*, *Visnu*, *Kartikeya*, *Narayāna*, *Surya*, *Candra*, *Danda*, *Mahakala*, *Nandikesvara*, *Balabhadra*, *Kamadewa*, *Vasuraksita*, *Pavena*, *Agni*, *Mahavaraha*, *Yāma*, *Ganapati*, *Varuna*, *Mahavisada*, and also malign figures from Hindu mythology such as *Māra*, *Rakṣa*, and other gods and demons all representing staple figures from non-Buddhist Indian traditions. This demon-taming narrative essentially signifies the dominance of Buddhism over the Indian religious landscape. The wrathful maṇḍalas of the *Kabgyé Deshek*

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15:25: “Then, with pleasure, they cried “Ha”, and from the clouds of their generative fluids emerged the hosts of [eight matarah]. The hosts of matarah, with their respective hand emblems and wonder dispersed, and then, starting in the East, took their places on the blazing spokes of the wheel with their terrifying forms and hand emblems.” (*de nas dgyes te ha zhes brjod pas/ byang chub sems kyi sprin las/ dkar mo'i tshogs dang/ rkun mo'i tshogs dang/ rmongs mo;i tshogs dang/ thal byed mo'i tshogs dang/...ma tshogs ma'i tshogs rnam rang gi lag cha dang/ ngo mtshar dang bcas nas 'thon to/ 'thon nas kyang 'bar ba chen po 'khor lo'i rtsibs mchan shar phyogs nas 'bor bar 'jigs pa'i gzugs rang gi lag cha dang bcas nas 'khod do/*)

*Dupa* – and in particular the maṇḍalas of Mamo Bötong, Jigten Chötö, and Möpa Drangak – also communicate the subjugation and transformation of negative forces, but here the “prideful ones” (*dregs pa*) are not the gods of Indian religion, but are the autochthonous gods of Tibet: The Eight Classes of Gods and Spirits. The Kabgyé narrative thus resonates with the geomantic harm-averting ritualism that was at the heart of Buddhism’s origin-story in Tibet. The Kabgyé narrative of taming and liberation of the *drekpa* adopts the basic Mahāyoga template given in the *Secret Nucleus*, but hybridizes it to represent uniquely Tibetan ritual conceptions, rendering the cycle into a resource supportive of an emergent understanding of the historical and soteriological function of demon-taming.

In both of these Mahāyoga cycles, the ritual/contemplative technology is to inhabit the demonic so as to tame it. And in both cases, the story, set in the primordial reality, proffers a mythological narrative that defined the parameters of religious practice in a way that was constructive of collective identities. Whether in the case of the *Guhyagarbha*’s narrative of the subjugation of the twenty-eight great gods, or the Kabgyé’s subordination of the “Eight Classes of Prideful Demons” to the divine heruka maṇḍala (*dregs pa* in both cases), these mythic narratives suggest distinctive visions for the place of Buddhist tantra and its thaumaturgical practices.

### **Subsequent, Individuated, and Differentiated Tantras**

As mentioned, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle includes fifteen foundational tantras: The *King of Kabgyé Deshek Dupa Root Tantras* (*bka’ brgyad bde ghsegs ‘dus pa rtsa ba’i rgyud kyi rgyal po*), the *Subsequent Tantra of the Assembly of All Victor Sugatas* (*bcom ldan ‘das bde bar gshegs pa thams cad ‘dus pa phyi ma’i rgyud*), the *Subsequent- Subsequent Tantra of the Mantra[yana] Tantras of the Assembled Victor Sugatas* (*bcom ldan ‘das bde gshegs ‘dus pa’i*

*sngags rgyud phyi ma phyi ma 'i rgyud*), the *Tantra of Amending Incompletions* (*ma tshang ba kha skong ba 'i rgyud*), the *Differentiated Key Tantra of the Assembly of Sugatas* (*bde bar gshegs pa 'dus pa 'i rgyud rab tu 'byed pa lde mig gi rgyud*), the *Root Tantra of the Assembled Peaceful Ones* (*zhi ba 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud*), the *Root Tantra of Assembly of the Great Sacred One (Mahottara)* (*che mchog 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud*), the *Root Tantra of the Assembly of Glorious Blood Drinker (Śri Heruka)* (*dpal khrag 'thung 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud*), the *Root Tantra of the Assembly of the Victor, Glorious Lord of Death, the Destroyer (Yamāntaka)* (*bcom ldan 'das dpal gshin rje gshed 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud*), the *Root Tantra of the Assembly of Glorious Victor, Great Power (Hayagrīva)* (*dpal bcom ldan 'das dbang chen 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud*), the *Root Tantra of the Dagger, the Assembly of Enlightened Actions of All the Sugatas (Vajrakīlaya)* (*bde bar gshegs pa thams cad kyi phrin las 'dus pa phur ba rtsa ba 'i rgyud*), the *Root Tantra of the Assembly of the Fierce Goddess* (*ma mo 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud*), the *Root Tantra of the Assembly of the Awareness Holder* (*rig pa 'dzin pa 'dus pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud*), the *Root Tantra of the Accomplishment of Worldly Praise and Offering* (*'jig rten mchod btsod sgrub pa rtsa ba 'i rgyud*), and the *Root Tantra of the Adamantine Assembly of Wrathful Mantra* (*drag sngags 'dus pa rdo rje rtsa ba 'i rgyud*).

As this dissertation limits itself to the reception history and appraisal of the role of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* in the development of the Nyingma denomination altogether, we will not look closely at the contents of each of these tantras. However, a cursory look at the basic themes and formats of these texts will enrich our picture of what the full *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle was in its received iterations.

## The Subsequent Tantras

The *Subsequent Tantra of the Assembly of All Victor Sugatas* (the *bcom ldan 'das bde bar gshegs pa thams cad 'dus pa phyi ma'i rgyud*), and the *Subsequent- Subsequent Tantra of the Mantra[yana] Tantras of the Assembled Victor Sugatas* (the *bcom ldan 'das bde gshegs 'dus pa'i sngags rgyud phyi ma phyi ma'i rgyud*) provide terse supplementary statements and instructions for the practice of Kabgyé self-cultivation, couched in the narrative format of discourse between the central wrathful deity Glorious All Good Heruka (*dpal kun tu bzang he ru ka*) and the male and female maṇḍala retinue (the *khro bo* and *khro mo*, the *rig 'dzin pho mo*, and the *slob dpon* and *slob ma*).<sup>278</sup> The *Subsequent Tantra* uniquely includes reference to both male and female members of this retinue, and there seems to be coded references to sexual practice (*sbyor ba*) throughout this abridged tantra. In the case of the *Subsequent Tantras*, the contents include an exposition on the characteristics of the tantric preceptor (*slob dpon / slob ma*), a cursory outline of the bestowal of initiation rites (*dbang bskur*), and pithy remarks about topics such as the Five Gnoses (*ye shes lnga*), and the goals of tantric practice. These brief statements, called the “seals” (*phyag rgya*) of the respective herukas, are enigmatic on their own, but have traditionally provided the basis for more complex exegesis, as is the case at Katok, where students study this *Subsequent Tantra* as part of the Mahāyoga curriculum.<sup>279</sup> The inclusion of terminology with erotic overtones (specifically, the use of the term *phag rgya*, which can refer to the tantric sexual consort), and the inclusion of coupled maṇḍala deities, Vidyādhara, and preceptors, may imply a layer of erotic meaning, and there is a sense that this text is oriented toward experiences

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<sup>278</sup> “bcom ldan 'das bde bar gshegs pa thams cad 'dus pa phyi ma'i rgyud (The Subsequent Tantra of the Assembly of All Victor Sugatas)” in Katok: *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 1, text 5, pp. 353-374; “bcom ldan 'das bde gshegs 'dus pa'i sngags rgyud phyi ma phyi ma'i rgyud (The Subsequent- Subsequent Tantra of the Mantra Tantras of the Assembled Victor Sugatas)” in Katok: vol. 1 text 6, pp. 379-424.

<sup>279</sup> I was told this by the presiding Khenpo at Katok's monastic college in August, 2017.

associated with Completion Stage practice; an area of Mahāyoga praxis that is somewhat missing from the *King of Root Tantras*, but is supplied in commentarial literature.

The *Subsequent-Subsequent Tantra* is likewise terse, and consists mainly in the listing of essential mantras (*snying po 'i sngags*) of the Kabgyé deities and retinue. Also supplied are some didactic remarks about the nature of the Sanskrit syllables and their inherent sonic connection to gnosis.

### **The Key Tantras**

Unlike the brief comments supplied in the *Subsequent Tantras*, the *Differentiated Tantra*, or *Key Tantra* (*rgyud rab tu 'byed pa*, also known as the *'byed par byed pa lde mig gi rgyud*) provides detailed explanations of many features of Kabgyé practice.<sup>280</sup> The *Differentiated Tantra* is thematically organized around different elements of tantric practice, including “accomplishment methods” (*sgrub thabs*, or *bsgrub*), and explanations (*bstan pa*), on topics such as enlightened activity (*phrin las*) and action (*las*), particularly those of wrathful variety (*khro bo*). The Katok edition has the *rab tu 'byed pa* as a single text; however, anthologists have elsewhere managed to divide the seventeen chapters of this text into two discrete texts: the first dealing with practices for the peaceful deities in ten chapters (the *'byed par byed pa lde mig gi rgyud le'u bcu pa*), and the second focused on the wrathful in seven chapters (the *'byed lde 'khro bo 'i rgyud le'u bdun*). We see this bifurcation of the *Differentiated Tantra* mentioned by Ngari Panchen, and represented in Nüden Dorje's *Nyingma Gyubum*, as well as in the Degé and Tsamdrak *Gyubum* editions. Unfortunately, the nomenclature is a bit confusing, as the titles *'byed pa rgyud* and *lde mig gi rgyud* are also sometimes applied to the *Assembled Sugatas Tantra*, and so there is no total coherence across editions regarding the order of the fifteen

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<sup>280</sup> “rgyud rab tu 'byed pa (The Differentiated Tantra)” in Katok: vol. 2, text 1, pp. 1-278.

foundational tantras in regards to these specific materials. However, in general, it seems we can speak of a *Differentiated Tantra* in seventeen thematic chapters, most often divided into peaceful and wrathful parts, each supplying explanations and practices for the relevant Kabgyé deities.

### **Individuated Root Tantras**

The individuated root tantras number ten: the root tantras of the Eight Herukas, plus the *Root Tantra of the Assembled Peaceful Ones* and the *Root Tantra of the Unsurpassed Awareness Holder (bla ma rig 'dzin)*. Little scholarly attention has been paid to these materials, with the exception of Guy Grizman's forthcoming research on the root tantra of *bla ma rig 'dzin*.<sup>281</sup>

In general, these tantras supply technical information required to practice the full suite of rituals and self-cultivational programs associated with each heruka. Common elements include extensive instruction in different types of maṇḍalas, visualization and mantric recitation manuals, exposition on tantric conduct and the maintenance of *samaya* vows, and discourses on tantric buddhology, particularly in reference to the concept of the sacred purity of phenomena (*rnam par dag pa*). These tantras, then, richly supply the esoteric knowledge affiliated with the practices and iconography offered in the foundational tantras. In appraising the relationship between these highly doctrinal tantras and the praxical orientation of the *King of Root* and *Subsequent* tantras, we may conclude that the corpus is designed to supply adepts with the resources needed to carry out tantric practice via the *Root* and *Subsequent* tantras, and exegetes the knowledge to instruct and comment on these ritual technologies by way of the *Differentiated* and individuated *Root Tantras*.

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<sup>281</sup> Guy Grizman has presented some fascinating research from his forthcoming doctoral dissertation on a unique funerary text found within the *rig 'dzin 'dus pa* tantra. International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, St. Petersburg State University, September, 2018.

## Conclusion

Altogether, the Kabgyé cycle makes a strong statement about the nature of tantric practice: subjugative thaumaturgy is sanctified in this literature as essential Buddhist self-cultivation, with the mandalization of the Tibetan gods and demons recasting apotropaic and thaumaturgical practice into soteriological terms. In this, the gods and demons themselves are elevated to divine status, and the rhetoric of these worldly maṇḍalas is one of “demons taming demons”. In terms of Nyangrel’s oeuvre and the subsequent Treasure tradition, this demon-taming motif is contextualized by the vision of adepthood advanced in Padmasambhava literature and in a religious history that celebrated the foundations of the Early Translation tradition. The Kabgyé materials also participated in a broader architectonics of Tibetan religion which tended towards a ritual-centric orientation. The Kabgyé cycle functioned like a sourcebook for a ritualism that brought together apotropaic and soteriological functions of religious practice, undergirded by the wrathful idiom of Mahāyoga tantrism. If we are to proceed with the premise that ritual practice, especially in its narrative foundations, is configurative of social and personal identities – that is, if we are to acknowledge the subject-constituting and identity-confirming potential of ritualism and its undergirding imaginaire – we can see how the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* would be of central importance to the development of a Buddhist civilization on the Tibetan plateau. Its advancement had real vocational implications for the ritualist-adepts who specialized in it, and it managed to articulate a daring vision for Buddhist soteriology that proved attractive to a broader religious culture not wishing to discard thaumaturgy and harm-aversion as central aspects of practice.

We will now turn to a more detailed exploration of Kabgyé ritual practice, examining some prominent apotropaic ritual texts from the main *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* ritual compendia, attending to their imagery, idioms, and ritual technologies to gain a sense for how the Kabgyé’s

practice regimes underwrote the articulation of institutional identities and the construction of agentive subjectivities for its adherents.

## Chapter Six: Taming and Liberating the Enemy Obstructors

We have thus far traced a cursory reception and publication history of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, and have looked at some of the prevailing themes, idioms, and concepts articulated in the cycle's foundational materials. We have seen how these tantric materials communicated a distinctive buddhology, a myth-history, and a ritual orientation that undergirded an emergent sense of Nyingma identity, particularly as it was channeled through the literary output of Nyangrel Nyima Özer and his lineal descendants. We have also observed how the Kabgyé was leveraged in the efforts of Nyingma institutions and ecclesiastical figures as they reformed the Early Translation Ancient School in response to various kinds of extrinsic pressures. In general, as this reformative process unfolded, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* took on an increasingly ritual-centric profile as it was incorporated into institutionalized iterations of Tibetan Buddhism. The ever-enlarging Kabgyé cycle came to be regarded as a main source for the apotropaic rites at the heart of the tantric ritualist vocation, and for more comprehensive ritual programs that were at the basis of liturgical life in the Nyingma's major temples. It is to this ritualism that we will now turn, examining some of the important ritual texts common to the Kabgyé ritual cycles at the main Nyingma temples. In this, we will interrogate how the *Eight Teachings* and its imaginaire of wrathful soteriology underwrote practice regimes which were contributive to emergent identities for members of the Early Translation Ancient School.

Broadly, we have seen how the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* inculcated a special vision of religious mastery that conjoined the apotropaic and soteriological dimensions of tantric practice. The Kabgyé advanced the portrait of the harm-averting ritual master as the paradigmatic Tibetan Buddhist adept: an image that was coordinated with Nyangrel's treatment of Padmasambhava lore, and with his efforts to define the contours of Tibetan Buddhist history. The *Eight Teachings*

is distinctive for its emphasis on demon taming, contextualizing ritualized harm-aversion within esoteric Buddhist soteriology and within a broader historiographical narrative that prioritized the geomantic thaumaturgy which was the vocation of so many Early Translation priestly figures. Examples of this approach include the incorporation of Tibet's autochthonous gods and demons into the center of the tantric maṇḍala, the conjunction of soteriological and apotropaic objectives in ritual practice, and the centrality of indigenous characters in the lore surrounding the activities of historical people like Nyangrel Nyima Özer, and mythologized ones such as Padmasambhava and the Eight Vidyādharas.

The rituals which stood at the center of the Kabgyé revelation cycle, and the ones which were accreted to the corpus over centuries of circulation, were important resources which undergirded the Kabgyé's overarching contribution to Nyingma religiosity. They provided a regime of practice – of kinetic engagements, of performed narratives, of agentive experiences – that enacted the mythologies, buddhologies, and unique idioms upon which the Kabgyé hinged. Practice of these ritual programs was a way to carry out a specific vision of religious practice, contributing to distinctive collective identities and unique subjectivities. Just as the Kabgyé came to represent taxonomies of tantric scripture (and, according to tantric doctrine, the very structure of reality itself), its activation in ritual practice tied together its doctrinal, narrative, and praxical dimensions to yield a venue for full participation in the unique imaginal world of this cycle. Participation in a Kabgyé rite – whether one's role is that of the officiant lama, the ritual technician, a temple patron, or as a member of the attending public – was a matter of being inscribed into an imaginal world within which one could be cast as a participant in ongoing histories, recursive dramas, and social relationships. The confluence of tantric Buddhist doctrine, mythological narrative, and ritual practice is thus activated in the Kabgyé's ritualism, and we

might understand the ritual regimes which became so deeply associated with the Kabgyé tradition as a primary arena for the articulation of Nyingma identity and the achievement of Tibetan Buddhist subjectivities.

But of what did these practice regimes consist? Just how did ritual practices involving the murder of effigies, the offering of fire, smoke, and food, the performance of material sacrifices, and the creation, consumption, and deployment of magical substances facilitate the experience, or mediate the very subjectivity, of participants in concert with the Kabgyé's doctrinal, mythological, and soteriological commitments? That will be the overarching interpretive concern as I highlight several ritual texts which have been particularly prominent in the institutional ritualism of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* tradition.

My interpretation of these materials will hinge on a narratological analysis of ritual text. That is, we will look not just at the procedural logic articulated in the prescriptive ritual texts, but also at these texts' literary dimensions – their imagescapes and semiologies, their explicit narratives and tacit meta-narratives, their rhetorical patterns and multivocal idioms – to interrogate how these texts might act on reader/participants, and how their practice facilitated participation in the overarching imaginal world of the Kabgyé. This narratological analysis, and some reflections on the performative and “subjunctive” function of ritual, will appear following an introduction to communal tantric practice, and a summary of selected Kabgyé ritual texts.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> The “subjunctive” function of ritual is articulated by Adam B. Seligman, Peter Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon (Seligman et. al., 2008). I will also draw on Christian Wedemeyer's semiology of tantric antinomianism (Wedemeyer 2012), James Gentry's appraisal of materiality in Tibetan apotropaic ritualism (Gentry 2014), and Vera Nünning, Jan Rupp, and Marie-Laure Ryan's narratological analyses of ritual (Nünning et. al., 2013).

## **The Great Accomplishment: Institutionalizing the Tantric Community**

To properly situate our exploration of Kabgyé ritual, a discussion of these texts' participation in comprehensive ritual programs, and a brief account of the origins of this kind of ritualism, is in order. This account will touch on the development of Buddhist tantra in its communal dimensions, and briefly describe the transition to institutionalized iterations of such practice in Tibet. It will then outline the character and function of the Kabgyé Great Accomplishment (*bka' brgyad sgrub chen*, Kabgyé Drupchen) ritual intensive as it is traditionally carried out at the Nyingma's important temples.

### **Origins: The gathering circle**

Buddhist tantrism has always entailed a communal dimension. From tantra's initial development in the fragmented socio-political climate of sixth and seventh-century Northern India, to its apotheosis in the grand doctrinal systemizations which made their way to Tibet several centuries later, ritual practices undertaken by the esoteric community have always been central to Diamond Vehicle religiosity. If Ronald Davidson is correct in his argument that Indian Esoteric Buddhism developed through two general idioms – the “royal”, followed and supplemented by the “siddha” – we can see how Tantric Buddhism continued to revolve around sacralized social models.<sup>283</sup>

As Davidson's argument goes, Tantric Buddhism first developed around an iconography of rulership, the esoteric master and mandalic cosmos modeled after king and kingdom. Psycho-physical control over a ritualized socio-cosmic simulacrum (the maṇḍala) was redolent of a king's sovereignty over the concentric dimensions of his social domain. This was a powerful image, according to Davidson, in a highly fragmented and contentious political context, which he

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<sup>283</sup> The following summarizes Ronald Davidson's general argument in Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

calls the “sāmanta feudalism” of the seventh century.<sup>284</sup> Tantrism in this phase was “royal” in more than just its imagery and mythology: its very practice may have been reserved for sovereigns in their court temples. This royal iteration persisted in the Tibetan adoption of Tantric Buddhism, as the Tibetan emperors were known to have supported the translation and practice of the *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhitāntra*, a system paradigmatic of the royal mandalic idiom.<sup>285</sup>

By the early eighth century, Buddhist tantra developed in dialogue with Shaivite tantric and local ritual traditions, resulting in a “siddha” idiom centered on antinomian imagery, if not actual practice.<sup>286</sup> Siddha tantrism drew on the horrific imagery of the charnel ground, and sought self-cultivation through the pursuit of transgressive deeds inscribed within a soteriology of bliss. While the solitary ascetic immediately comes to mind – and individual yogic practice is indeed one element of siddhic tantrism – this religiosity maintained important communal dimensions. The main sacraments of siddhism unfolded as close disciples convened around the “vajra master” (*vajrācārya*), receiving initiation into the mandalic domain through bliss-inducing copulation and the ingestion of the master’s sexual fluids.<sup>287</sup> The retinue engaged in deity yoga, imagining themselves and their shared space in a semiotically refracted sacralized perception. Further sacraments included collective thaumaturgy and the sharing of the tantric feast (*gaṇacakra*, Tib. *tshogs kyi ‘khor lo*, “The Gathering Circle”), in which substances such as taboo meats and human fluids were supposedly ingested, demonstrating the community’s reclamation

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<sup>284</sup> Davidson 2003, chpt. 4, 113-168.

<sup>285</sup> David Germano “The Seven Descents and the Early History of Rnying ma Transmissions.” In *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Helmut Eimer and David Germano, 225-64. Leiden: Brill, 2002, 230.

<sup>286</sup> Davidson asserts that the earliest Buddhist siddha material comes into evidence around the 720-730’s, “give or take a decade”. Davidson 2003, 203. See Davidson 2003, chpt. 5, 169-235 for overview of the development of siddha tantrism.

<sup>287</sup> Davidson 2003, 197-99.

of, and power over, social norms.<sup>288</sup> This was the idealized picture of tantric practice according to the siddha literature that became systematized, particularly in the Unexcelled Yoga Tantra (*anuttarayogatantra*) cycles bestowed to Tibet in the second dispensation of Buddhism, beginning in the late tenth century. It is also the case that a certain degree of antinomianism, particularly in the incorporation of sexual iconography and ritual violence, was present in the Yoga and Mahāyoga traditions that entered Tibet in the initial dispensation of tantra there, but the siddha ethos and its charnel ground setting were likely rooted in later traditions. As suggested earlier in this dissertation, the influence of the erotic and antinomian imagery characteristic of the “Mother Tantra” (*ma rgyud*, Skt. *yoginī*) type of Unexcelled Yoga materials seems to have inflected Nyangrel’s revelations, as seen in the elevation of the dakīnī as a tutelary deity, and in the amplification of violence that underwrites the Kabgyé’s distinctive representation of tantric practice.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to know how literally antinomian modes of tantric practice were followed. One prevalent approach to interpreting these idioms argues that transgression and communal esoterism were essentially literary devices to establish productive tensions in practitioners of these traditions. Of course, antinomianism was a particularly salient idiom in a highly ordered and changing society such as medieval India’s. The very idea of norm-violation, even in strictly literary expression, would certainly be powerful, and efficacious for advancing the possibility of new agentive subjectivities within a highly structured social context. Western scholarship and traditional commentarial voices have both advocated for this kind of symbolic interpretation of tantric transgression.<sup>289</sup> But such symbolic interpretations fall short of

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<sup>288</sup> Davidson 2003, 318-27.

<sup>289</sup> Christian K. Wedemeyer, *Making sense of Tantric Buddhism*. New York: Columbia, 2013, 109-10.

fully accounting for the many antinomian propositions articulated in tantric sources, not to mention the visibility of transgressive traditions still practiced today.

Christian Wedemeyer's take on connotative semiotics offers a refined hermeneutic strategy for understanding the function of antinomian tantric language. Adapting Roland Barthe's semiology, Wedemeyer suggests that the presence of antinomian injunctions, idioms, and iconography operated to "connote" a field of signifiers and relationships within which the adept could be re-cast. In this, the injunction to consume taboo substances in the context of ritual practice demonstrates the transcendence of conventional categories of purity and pollution, signifying the attainment of an enlightened state.<sup>290</sup> Such injunctions and imageries recall the background of normative significations vis-à-vis the suggestion of their violation, positioning the adept in a new relationship with the normative field. Thus, an injunction to "eat shit" cannot be said to be exclusively literal, nor deliberately encrypted. Alternatively, there is the possibility that the siddha tradition was indeed practiced much as it was described. One has only to look at the *Kāpālika* communities such as the *Aghorī* in present day India and Nepal to see that deeply antinomian practices are still carried out, as adepts harness the power of transgressive sexuality and consumption in pursuit of gnostic soteriological objectives.<sup>291</sup>

The imaginal world of siddha tantrism lies at the heart of many of the cycles that were transmitted in Tibet. These were generally classified as "Unexcelled Yogatantra" (*Anuttarayogatantra*) according to the New Translation model. The content of these scriptures

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<sup>290</sup> Wedemeyer 2013, 122. For Wedemeyer's use of Barthe's connotative semiotics, see 117-132.

<sup>291</sup> Andy Lawrence's documentary films *The Lover and the Beloved: A Journey Into Tantra* (2011), and *The One And The Many* (2012) offer an unprecedented glimpse into the ritual life of contemporary *Nāth* and *Aghorī* ascetics. Footage includes stunning documentation of an *Aghorī* guru performing *sādhana* at the *Tārāpīth* cremation ground in West Bengal, including the consumption of human flesh from a funeral pyre. Davidson also connects the historical practices of the *Kaula*, *Kāpālika*, *Nāth*, and especially the *Pāśupata* traditions to the development of Buddhist "siddha tantrism". See Davidson 2003, 177-86.

was not uncontroversial, as we know that the translation of such materials was restricted by imperial decree, and that these traditions were criticized by later conservatives bent on leveraging moral authority. But it is definitely the siddha ethos with its “blood drinker” (*khrag 'thung*, Skt. *heruka*) and burial-ground iconography that informs much of Nyangrel’s work, especially as reflected in his Kabgyé cycle.

Siddha tantrism strongly retains the idiom of esoteric communality in its undergirding mythologies, buddhologies, and ritual programs. As we have seen, the Kabgyé’s tantric mythologies describe the spontaneous production of divine consortia out of the enlightened mind-state (*dgongs pa*) of the primordial Buddha, Kuntu Zangpo. This cosmogenesis is rooted in a conception of sociality, perhaps in retention of the “royal idiom’s” mandalic vision. The foundational mythology of the cycle also describes how eight masters of siddhic practice, the Eight Vidyādhara, convened to receive the Kabgyé teachings and related Mahāyoga cycles in a veritable potlatch of collective revelation. Their convocation at Śítavana (and the mimetic gathering of Padmasambhava’s eight disciples at Samyé) simulates the maṇḍala of eight herukas at the core of the cycle. In this, the very structure of reality is social, and the homological assembly of tantric practitioners such as the Eight Vidyādhara, or a *vajrācārya*’s circle of tantric initiates, is decisively mimetic of the cosmogenesis described in tantric scriptures. Simply put, these kinds of consortia are understood in terms of maṇḍala, a concept which at once suggests the structure of reality, the arrangement of divine figures, and the format for esoteric society. Thus, from the cosmogonic mythology at the basis of tantric scriptures, to the ritual prescriptions of esoteric practice, the tantric community is embedded in the fabric of Indo-Tibetan esoterism.

During the initial dispensation of these tantras in Tibet, and especially in the period of fragmentation, the tantric community could persist in intimate formats, as the siddha lineages

were upheld by chieftain-priests at the center of small communities in lieu of imperial oversight. What we cannot know is whether these groups of initiates undertook the tantric sacraments in explicit terms, or whether the transgressive dictates had already been rendered palatable through symbolization and encoded language. The polemics of Yeshe Ö and his descendents express alarm regarding the abhorrent behavior of Early Translation practitioners, although we still don't know whether his remarks truly indicate that such communities were taking tantric injunctions literally.<sup>292</sup> But over time, in the general trajectory of Buddhism's institutional development, a certain incompatibility between this picture of siddhic sacramental practice and the increasingly institutionalized and public nature of religion in Tibet had to be negotiated. The esoterism of Buddhist Tantra – both in its transgressive injunctions and in the ideal of its intimate community of highly trained initiates – had to be adapted to fit institutions that sought to grow and command public resources. We thus see the inevitable transformation of tantric practice into the highly symbolized and encrypted semiosis still evident in the religion today. The course of this transformation certainly deserves detailed research, but let us simply observe that it was the case that the institutionalization of Buddhist tantra from the tenth century onward in Tibet required significant adaptations. We see this, for example, in the format of the widely-bestowed initiation ritual (*dbang skur*), in which copulation with the master's consort and ingestion of their sexual fluids is replaced by the showing of pictures (*tsak li*) and the consumption of blessed liquor (*bdud rtsi*, Skt. *amṛta*), medicine (*sgrub sman*), or ritually purified water. In some cases, the entire initiatory procedure is reduced to the passing-around of an abstract representation of a deity or maṇḍala. Likewise, the tantric feast came to entail the sharing of painted barley cakes and tasty snacks rather than the consumption of human flesh, feces, and urine. Presumably, most

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<sup>292</sup> Karmay 1998, 3-15; Dalton 2011, 97-109.

participants in any such initiation or feasting rite do not know the original character of these procedures. If it is true that these rites were explicitly observed in Indian contexts, it is certainly the case that, over time, tantric practice was sanitized in Tibet to render it palatable for larger, more public audiences (and, importantly, for monastics). This is not to suggest that India only practiced tantric rites explicitly, and Tibetans only symbolically; in both India and Tibet there have been a range of strategies for engaging tantric antinomianism. However, the sanitization of tantric ritual was certainly a strategy that enabled tantric ritualism to be carried out in a wider set of contexts.

The communal dimension of tantric practice is preserved in the “Great Accomplishment” (*sgrub chen*, drupchen) ritual intensive, which is a bedrock of temple life in Tibet. Like the convening of initiates around the *vajrācārya* to partake in tantric sacraments, the drupchen sees the broader community – monastics and laity together – gather around a presiding lama for the collective practice of staple tantric rituals: deity yoga, maṇḍala construction, initiation, harm-averting rituals, and feast. Just as the convocation of siddhas was meant to constitute a mandalic retinue through which self-cultivational goals could be realized via the entire suite of tantric practices, so, too, does the drupchen entail a comprehensive gathering of the religious society in pursuit of the activation of esoteric forces. These ritual intensives have also come to include the ritualization of the patron-priest, or community-temple, economy, as the ritual action opens and closes with elaborate offerings to the presiding lama on behalf of the community of patrons, and the formal presentation of representatives of affiliated (or even rival) institutions. In Tibetan settings, the Great Accomplishment convocation can be as much a ritualized expression of governance as it is a strictly religious occasion.

Despite its overtly civic dimension, drupchen is generally considered to be of enormous soteriological value. The effects of self-cultivational practice are said to be magnified in group settings, especially in the presence of the perfected master. Once the space, anchored by a colorful sand maṇḍala or three-dimensional architectural rendering, is ritually secured and consecrated, and the visualized presence of the tutelary deity invoked, participants must continually recite the deity's mantra (and, ideally, maintain visualization) ceaselessly for up to two weeks. This is done in shifts so that the continuity is never broken when practitioners must, naturally, sleep. To conclude the intensive, the initiation ritual (*dbang*) is bestowed, protective and apotropaic rites such as fire offering (*sbyin sregs*), libation appeasements (*gser skyems*), and effigistic exorcism rites (*gtor bzlog*) are executed, and the group feast (*tshogs*) is enjoyed. All of this is observed by the mass of participants, although many come from the local lay community only to attend the closing rites. The concluding hours or even days of a major drupchen are devoted to an extrapolation of the tantric feast to include choreographed exchanges of currency, foodstuffs, and blessed materials between monastic representatives and the laity. In many cases, the intensive concludes with the spectacle of 'cham dances, in which monks wear elaborate costumes to enact mythic narratives of demon-subjugation.

All told, the drupchen represents the full scope of tantric practice and its traditional observance in the esoteric community. In drupchen, the maṇḍala of a deity is created to invoke the presence of enlightened forces, yogic and imaginative practice is carried out to effectuate communion with those forces, lineal continuity is ensured through the bestowal of initiation, and the array of "enlightened actions" (*phrin las bzhi*), or four modes of agentive compassion, are activated through supplementary rituals.

The execution of drupchen in institutional settings unfolds via entirely symbolic media. The ritual implements of the presiding master, the sacrificial offerings arranged upon the altar, the substances touched and ingested by the participants, the choreography and spatial arrangements: all of these constitute a semiotically thick environment that communicates full participation in tantric tradition. This ritualism is configurative of religious subjectivity, and of collective identity. We see in the Great Accomplishment ritual intensive an expression of social relations (between student and master, between ranks of students, between institutions, and between temple and community), a recapitulation of specific religious identities, and an engagement with an ongoing denominational history. In the case of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa Great Accomplishment*, the preponderance of wrathful imagery and violently apotropaic rites recalls the demon-taming at the heart of Tibet's conversion to Buddhism. In carrying out the Kabgyé Drupchen, an institution confirms its connection to the enlightened forces behind Nyingma religiosity, defining itself by way of a specific imaginaire (wrathful), and mode of praxis (apotropaic), and thus refreshing the memory of the founder's (Padmasambhava's) deeds. In the sections below, we will interpret some of the central harm-averting rites drawn from the Kabgyé ritual tradition to more closely understand just how this practice provides practitioners opportunities to articulate identity and author subjectivity.

### **Apotropaia in the *Kabgyé Drupchen***

While the drupchen is generally considered to be a potent format for soteriology, the Kabgyé Drupchen is especially associated with apotropaic goals. In general, the Kabgyé Drupchen is scheduled to commemorate the life and deeds of Padmasambhava, Tibetan Buddhism's paradigmatic demon tamer, or at the end of the lunar year to avert obstacles for the new year. While the deity yoga focusing on the maṇḍala of Kabgyé deities is observed, the harm-

averting rites of effigistic sacrifice and exorcism take on particular importance in these occasions. In general, these exorcising rites of subjugation (*bzlog pa*, dokpa, lit. “repelling”) utilize dough effigies, or torma (*gtor ma*), and are rooted in the tantric idioms of “taming” (*dul ba*) and “liberation” (*sgrol ba*), a multivalent signifier that is taken to mean both the murder of a sacrificial victim, and the liberation of consciousness into primordial gnosis. It is often suggested that the use of sacrificial torma has replaced the blood sacrifice common to Tibetan ritual culture before Tibet’s domestication by Buddhism. This idea is plausible, given that communities in remote Himalayan regions continue to offer the blood of goats, chickens, or bovines, even in celebration of the conclusion of ostensibly Buddhist ritual festivals.<sup>293</sup>

Within Kabgyé ritualism, there are several basic technologies for effigistic harm aversion. We will look closely at two texts which represent the principal formats for such tor-dok (*gtor bzlog*, lit. “scattering and repelling”) rites, representing the “taming” and “liberation” idioms of Mahāyoga ritual, respectively. In the first, the eight Kabgyé herukas and the harms to be averted are represented with tormas and sculptures. The contact between material representations of divine and harmful forces within one maṇḍala, and the application of the meditational power and commanding utterances of the ritual practitioner, is thought to neutralize the agents of disorder, harm, and inauspiciousness. This type of exorcism reflects the idiom of “taming through mandalization” which is so vividly communicated in the *King of Root Tantra*’s narratives. In the other type of ritual which we will examine, the officiating lama or ritual specialist, through the power of meditation, gesture, and utterance, calls the sacrificial victim into an effigy torma, “liberates” the victim’s consciousness through *mantra*, *mudrā*, and the application of special instruments and substances, and destroys the torma by cutting, crushing, and distributing the

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<sup>293</sup> For example, see: Charles Ramble, “How Buddhist are Buddhist communities? The construction of tradition in two lamaist villages.” *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* vol. 21, no. 2 (1990), 189.

remains in a prescribed manner. This is a “liberation” ritual in the full sense, as sacrificial murder is the main idiom around which the ritual action is organized. In either case, the divine power of the eight herukas is made manifest through material representations of the Kabgyé maṇḍala, and the ritual action unfolds through a matrix of materialization, meditative absorption, gesture, utterance, and the manipulation of substances.

The desired outcome of these rituals is for specific types of harm to be averted, although it is understood that this is a temporary solution to an ever-present threat posed by “enemy obstructors” (*dgra bgegs*). Such enemies include heretical people, military foes, people possessed by demons, the gods and spirits of the landscape, or other kinds of powerfully malevolent unseen forces. These threats must be continually and repeatedly dealt with through ritual means, and such harm-aversion is clearly a central aspect of an overarching vision for religious practice in Tibetan tradition. This vision is, of course, grounded in lore about Tibet’s original demon-tamer, Padmasambhava, who set the stage for the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet through his subjugation of obstructing autochthonous entities. Despite rhetoric which suggests that harm-averting ritualism is supplementary to more formally soteriological goals, the prevalence of this kind of ritual practice in Tibetan Buddhist tradition – and, particularly, in the Nyingma imagination – evidences the centrality of harm-aversion in the complex of practices which define Tibetan Buddhism. It is an absolutely central feature of Tibetan religious identity, and the ritualism of the Kabgyé provides a rich set of engagements to re-enact such deeds in recapitulation of the *Mahāsiddha*’s legacy.

Just as the Kabgyé mythology coordinates characters from Indian and Tibetan traditions, the dokpa format is quite hybridic. While the thaumaturgy of cursing through meditative trance (*ting nge ‘dzin*), gesture (*mudrā*), and utterance (*māntra*) was certainly part of the repertoire of

tantric siddhas in India, these Kabgyé ritual texts combine these techniques with distinctively Tibetan thaumaturgical concepts. For example, the sorcery of life-force manipulation and the interaction with personal protective gods are important elements of some Kabgyé liberation rites. This reflects Tibetan vernacular tradition's great concern with the protection and maintenance of one's personal life force, called the *lá* (*bla*, or *bla srog*). The *lá* can be lost or stolen, resulting in sickness, insanity, or death. Unseen autochthonous forces, such as the aquatic *lú* (*klu*) or the vengeful *tsänpo* (*btsan po*) are sometimes said to be responsible for the theft of the *lá*. The life-force can also be stolen through sorcery and other kinds of intercessionary ritual means. The manipulation of the life-force is an operative feature of liberation rituals: a typical text enjoins the ritual master to “snatch the life force” (*bla srog 'gug ba*) and “abduct the victim's protective gods” (*'go ba 'i lha dang phral ba*). The victim is then “cast into insane unconsciousness” (*dran med smyo ru 'jug pa*) – i.e. is “liberated into the *dharmadhātu*”.<sup>294</sup> I suggest, then, that the dokpa demonstrates ritual technologies drawn from Indian siddhism, but also reflects Tibetan ritual culture (and its underlying anxieties), especially in the procedures concerned with manipulation of the *lá*.

### **The Drupchen Manuals**

The Kabgyé ritual cycles used at the principal Nyingma monasteries, both in Tibet and in exile, continue to serve as sourcebooks for annual ritual intensives, and also for ad hoc rites. As described, most of the Nyingma mother temples claim to uphold the drupchen tradition derived from Mindroling. While this claim is totally plausible, and we do have evidence of intellectual exchange between Mindroling and places like Katok, Dzogchen, and Shechen from the early eighteenth century onwards, it is interesting to notice the discrepancies between ritual cycles as

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<sup>294</sup> “Gtor ma la brten nas bzlog pa'i bsgral las don brgyad ma” in Katok: *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 10, pp. 45-63. Quoted text pp. 46-47.

they are collated in the various compendia. A comparison between the Minling System and the ritual cycles of Eastern Tibet's Mother Temples reveals a consistent structure to the ritual program, but a fairly wide discrepancy in actual materials. There is relatively little overlap between actual texts included in the ritual compendia, and we see each temple's edition include many non-Nyangrel, or even non-Kabgyé, materials to supplement the texts drawn from Nyangrel's terma corpus. I take this to reflect efforts at each temple to define unique ecclesiastical identities, as it is well known that each monastery proudly upholds its own unique traditions of emphasis. This observation bolsters my argument that ritual practice is an important vehicle for the articulation of institutional identities.

However, some texts do appear across multiple cycles, and stand at the heart of the ritual program. I have selected two of these for translation and analysis, with the goal of elucidating the role of ritual, as reflected in text, in undergirding identities and authoring agentive subjectivities. I will read these texts as special kinds of narratives, replete with imagery, idiomatic patterns, plots, and imaginal worlds that conscript participant/readers to provide a venue for working out agency, identity, and subjectivity. I will say more about this approach to the interpretation of ritual texts later. First, an overview of the texts, their ritual technologies, and the unique idioms entailed therein will anchor the discussion.

### **'dul ba: The Exorcism of the Nine Types of Victory Banner: The Manual for the Impalement Effigy Exorcism**

One effigy exorcism (tor-dok, *gtor bzlog*) ritual that appears across virtually every recension of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, as well as being included in at least two ritual compendia, is called *The Exorcism of the Nine Types of Victory Banner: The Manual for the Impalement*

*Effigy Exorcism* (*gtor bzlog gzer kha'i lhan thabs rgyal mtshan rnam pa dgu'i bzlog*).<sup>295</sup> This text is included in the Kyirong, Katok, and Tsamdrak editions of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, and is thus a candidate for having been part of an early Kabgyé ritual tradition, or perhaps even part of Nyangrel's original revelation itself. Interestingly, this particular text is not included in the seminal Minling System (*smin gling lugs*) compendium, which subsequent temples claim to rely on as the basis for their own ritual cycles. However, the *Nine Types of Victory Banner* does appear in the Katok *sgrub skor* as part of the sequence for their annual Great Accomplishment ritual intensive.<sup>296</sup>

Much like the root tantras of the Kabgyé cycle, the *Nine Types of Victory Banner* incorporates the array of Kabgyé deities, invoking the power of the Eight Herukas through mandalic imagery. But unlike a tantric deity-yoga in which visualization, meditation, gesture, and utterance are used to transform the mind of the practitioner towards soteriological goals, this exorcism uses ritual techniques to subdue agents of harm. In particular, as we will see in the distinctive imagery communicated in the liturgy, the harms of socio-natural disorder (*'dzings pa*) are the ones to be averted through this tor-dok practice.

The text opens with a description of a mandalic arrangement of deity tormas (*rten gtor*), representing the nine principal Kabgyé deities, arranged in the cardinal and subsidiary directions. While liberation rituals typically use torma to represent the sacrificial victim, or “enemy obstructor” (*dgra bgegs*), tormas may also be used to symbolize (or, more precisely, *manifest*) maṇḍala deities themselves. These elaborately decorated tormas are not destroyed or scattered in the manner of a sacrificial exorcism torma. Rather, the deity tormas materially anchor the power

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<sup>295</sup> “Gtor bzlog gzer kha'i lhan thabs rgyal mtshan rnam pa dgu'i bzlog” in Katok: *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 10, text 17, pp. 313-322; Tsamdrak: vol. 10, text 15, pp. 431-440. Kyirong: vol. 3, text 3, pp. 39-45.

<sup>296</sup> Katok: *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa (sgrub skor)*, vol. 2, text 14, pp. 301-310.

of the herukas, making present the transformative potential of the deities. In *The Nine Victory Banners*, miniature sculptures representing various types of harmful forces adorn the deity tormas. It will be through the proximity of these representations of “enemy obstructors” to the materialized divine forces in the deity tormas that harm-aversion will be effectuated.

On top of the Chemchok torma in the center, arrange the form of a great garuda with a red flag in its beak. On top of the Yangdak torma in the east, arrange a peacock eating a human corpse. Atop the Zhinje torma in the south, place a tigress eating a human corpse. On top of the Tamdrin torma in the western quarter, arrange the form of a lone red man, ablaze with confidence. Atop the Phurba torma in the north, arrange a three-headed iron wolf. On the mamu torma in the southeast, place ten stag antlers. In the southwest, on the Rigzin torma, arrange a mane of unkempt women’s hair. In the northwest, on the Drekpa torma, arrange a lion eating the enemy’s heart. On the Drangak torma in the northeast, position a black man with the face of a carnivorous animal. On a glorious command torma, place a crow riding an owl.<sup>297</sup>

The text then goes on to prescribe a liturgy which communicates a typology of threats to be neutralized:

With a clear state of meditation, say these words:

‘Hum: On top of the Chemchok heruka,  
 by means of the great garuda, blue black, blazing, winged:  
 with your countenance, avert evil signs of faced.  
 With your wings, avert evil signs of the winged.  
 With your talons, avert evil signs of the taloned.  
 With your beak, avert evil signs of the beaked.  
 With your horns, avert evil signs of the horned.  
 Avert! Transform!’

Avert with the torma.

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<sup>297</sup> Mtshams brag, vol. 10, 432.1 – 433.3: *dbus kyi che mchog gig tor ma’i steng du/ khyung chen ling kha mchur thogs pa’i gzugs dgod/ shar du yang dag gtor ma’i steng du/ rma bya mi ro za ba’i gzugs dgod/ lhor gzhin rje’i gtor ma’i steng du/ stag mo mi ro za ba’i gzugs dgod/ nub du rta mgrin gtor ma’i steng du/ mi reng dmar po sbar mo gdengs pa dgod/ byang du phur 433 pa’i gtor ma’i steng du/ lcags kyi spyang mo mgo gsum pa dgod/ shar lhor ma mo’i gtor ma’i steng du/ sha pho ru bcu pa dgod/ lho nub du rig ‘dzin gyi gtor ma’i steng du/ bud med ral ‘dzings kyi gzugs dgod/ nub byang du dregs pa’i gtor ma’i steng du/ seng ge dgra snying za ba dgod/ byang shar du drag sngags kyi gtor ma’i steng du/ mi nag gcan zan gyi gdong pa can gcig dgod la/*

‘Hum: atop the Yangdak torma in the east,  
by means of the peacock eating a corpse:  
avert evil signs of the wandering peacock.  
Avert the bad signs of the strife of gods and demons,  
and the mixing of the poison by the mother.  
Whatever food has been poisoned:  
Avert! Transform!’

Avert with the torma.

‘Hum: On the mammo torma in the southeast,  
by raising a call to the stag,  
avert the disturbances of sickness and disease.  
Avert the bad signs of the disorder of antlered stags.  
Avert the disorder of the ritual drum.  
Avert the bad signs of the disorder of the blazing black lady,  
the hundred vixens of the charnel ground:  
Avert! Transform!’

Avert with torma.

‘Hum: in the south, on the Zhinje torma,  
by means of the tigress eating a corpse,  
avert the enemies that pounce like tigers.  
The evil signs at the root of discordance,  
all those summoned to the front,  
the spread of former enemies,  
the mind of the future enemies,  
those bound in the mouth of the demoness,  
those who are carried like a mouse by a weasel:  
Avert! Transform!’

Avert by torma.

‘Hum: on the Rigzin torma in the southwest,  
by the woman’s unkempt mane,  
avert the bad signs of the naked black woman.  
The ones who prepare the ten poisons and nine sicknesses,  
the arising demons of the thousand quarrels,  
the ones who have stirred the poisoned channels,  
the women who scorn husbands:  
Avert! Transform!’

Avert by torma.

‘Hum: on the torma of Tamdrin to the north,

by the blazing confidence of the lone red man:  
avert the eye of death that looks upon the living.  
The ones who call out from the grave,  
the ones who rise up and disturb the aged fathers,  
the ones who disturb mothers and sons,  
the ones who disturb little children,  
the evils of the dangerous signs of accidents and harm:  
Avert! Transform!'

Avert by means of torma.

'Hum: on the torma of Choten to the northwest,  
by the lion eating the enemy's heart,  
avert the evil signs of the descent of the mob upon great men.  
Avert the bad signs of the descent of the lion river.  
The evil signs of the disfavor of the king and minister, and strife between the  
venerable:  
Avert! Transform!'

Avert by means of torma.

'Hum: on the torma of the Trinlay in the north,  
by the three-headed iron wolf,  
avert those who cast the malign torma of the phurba.  
The evil ones who incite and dispatch the blood torma,  
who shoot the arrow of the white mustard torma,  
the adorners of the mantric torma of the mantrin,  
the evil mantras of the sons of the heretics,  
and the eight sorceresses who do evil:  
Avert! Transform!'

Avert by torma.

'Hum: on the torma of Drangak in the east,  
by the wolf-faced black man:  
avert the crying out of the black man.  
The jackal carrying a human corpse,  
the cry of the wolf,  
the sorcery of demons,  
and the arising of vampires and ghostly demons:  
Avert! Transform!'

Avert with torma.

'Bhyo: on the glorious command torma,  
by the crow mounting an owl:

avert the bad signs of the conflict of the vulture's talon.  
 The wildness of the nighttime owl,  
 the midnight friends of the crow,  
 feathered ones mounting one another,  
 the hundred and eleven bad signs:  
 Avert, Transform!<sup>298</sup>  
 Avert with Torma. Bhyo.<sup>298</sup>

This recitation connects specific kinds of harm to the symbolism of the figurines displayed in the maṇḍala. To what degree these imageries were salient to practitioner-readers in their own contexts, we cannot know. We do not know exactly what the imagery of fiendish birds, wailing corpses, women with unkempt hair, black men, or pouncing tigers specifically meant to twelfth-century Tibetans (or, for that matter, eighth-century Indians). Comparative textual analysis can reveal the development of specific images, iconographies, and idioms over time. Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, for example, trace Bönpo iterations of “the winged and the

<sup>298</sup> Mtshams brag, p 433.3 – 436.6: *de nas ting nge 'dzin gsar zhing 'di skad do/ hum dbus kyi dpal chen gtor ma'i steng/ che mchog dbu la khyung chen ni/ mthing nag se'i gshog pa 434 gdong pas sdong can ltas ngan bzlog/ gshog pas gshog chags ltas ngan dang/ sder mos sder chen ltas ngan dang/ mchus mchu can ltas ngan dang/ rwa yis rwo can ltas ngan rnams bzlog go bsgyur ro gtor mas bzlog/ hum shar gyi yang dag gtor ma'i steng/ rma bya mi ro za ba yis/ rma bya yang pa'i ltas ngan bzlog/ mi'i dug gtong g.yos pa dang/ lha 'dre 'khrugs pa'i ltas ngan dang/ gang zos dug du song ba rnams/ bzlog go bsgyur ro gtor mas bzlog/ shar lho ma mo'i gtor ma'i steng/ sha pho du 'bod btsugs pa yis/ nad kha rim kha g.yos pa bzlog/ sha pho ru 'dzings ltas ngan bzlog/ nya bo rnga 'dzings ltas ngan bzlog/ nag mo sbar 'dzings ltas ngan dang dur khrod wa mo brgyas pa rnams/ bzlog go bsgyur ro gtor mas bzlog/ lho gzhin rje'i gtor ma'i steng/ stag mo mi ro za ba yi/ dgra bgegs stag ltar 'phyo ba bzlog/ sre mo byi ro khyer ba dang/ 'dre mo'i kha nas sdom khyer dang/ snga dgra dar ba'i phyi dgra sems/ mdun nas 'gugs pa thams cad dang/ mi mthun 435 sbyor rtsa ba ltas ngan rnams/ bzlog go bsgyur ro gtor mas bzlog/ lho nub rig 'dzin gtor ma'i steng/ bud med 'thab cing 'dzings pa yis/ nag mo sder 'dzings ltas ngan bzlog/ ngan dgu gdug bcu bshom pa dang/ rgya 'dre rbod btong 'dre langs dang/ g.yos tshad dug du song pa dang/ khyol bud med 'khu ba rnams/ bzlog go bsgyur ro gtor mas bzlog/ hum nub kyi lta mgrin gtor ma'i steng/ mi reng dmar po sbar gdengs kyi/ gshin mig gson la lta ba bzlog/ dur nas 'o dod 'bod pa dang/ pha khu'i rgan sri langs pa dang/ ma bu byur sri thams cad dang/ byis pa'i chung sri la sogs pa/ rkyen ngan gnod 'tshe slas ngan rnams/ bzlog go bsgyur ro gtor mas bzlog/ hum nub byang mchod rten gtor ma'i steng/ seng ge dgra snying za ba yis/ mi chen dmangs phab ltas ngan bzlog/ seng ge klungs phab ltas ngan dang/ che btsun nang 'khrugs ltas ngan dang/ rje blan bka' chad ltas ngan rnams/ bzlog go bsgyur ro gtor mas bzlog/ hum byang 436 phrin las gtor ma'i steng/ lcags kyi spyang mo btsugs pa yis/ phur pa'i dpal zor 'phen pa bzlog/ khrag zor sbod gtong ngan pa dang/ yungs dkar zor mda' 'phen pa dang/ sngags kyi sngags zor rbud pa dang/ mu stegs spar bu ngan sngags dang/ phra man ma'i nye 'khyed rnams/ bzlog go bsgyur ro gtor mas bzlog/ hum byang shar drag sngags gtor ma'i steng/ mi dang spyang gdong brtsugs pa yis/ mi nag 'o dod 'bod pa dang/ bcan zan mi ro khyer ba dang/ spyang gi 'o dod 'bod pa dang/ bdud pas khram la bteb pa dang/ btsan 'gong za 'dre langs pa dang/ bzlog go bsgyur ro/ bhyo dpal gyi sdong gtor ma'i steng/ bya rog 'ug pa zhon pa yis/ bya rgod sder 'dzings ltas gnan bzlog/ 'ug pa spo la rgod pa dang/ bya rogs brang 'brad bskur ba dang/ 'dab 'chags gcig lag cig zhon dang/ ltas ngan brgyad cu rtsa gcig rnams/ bzlog go bsgyur ro gtor mas bzlog/ bhyo*

fanged” in the iconography of Bönpo and Nyingmapa protective and tutelary deities.<sup>299</sup>

However, the specific images present in this text’s imagescape may evade our immediate interpretive abilities. But, for any reader, these surreal images are certainly evocative of the uncanny, the threatening, the wild, the strange, and the disordered. A structural appraisal of this imagery suggests that things like social and natural disorder; the mixing of food, poison, species, and physiognomies; and unstable transformations of social and natural phenomena, are the threats to be averted through this ritual practice. The fiendish birds associated with the Chemchok torma (“evil signs of the winged, evil signs of the taloned, ... of the beaked, ... of the horned”); the poison and strife averted with the Yangdak torma (“the bad signs of the strife of gods and demons...the mixing of poison by the mother...whatever food has been poisoned”); the demonism and animal aggression of the mamu quarter (“the disturbance of sickness and disease, the bad signs of the chaos of antlered stags....the chaos of the ritual drum...the vixens of the charnel ground”); the threat of enemies and aggressors to be pacified by Zhinje (“the spread of former enemies, the mind of future enemies, those bound in the mouth of the demoness...carried like a mouse by a weasel”); the sickness and toxic femininity referenced in the Rigzin stanza (“the ones who prepare the ten poisons and nine sickness...the women who scorn husbands”); the terrors of the undead averted by Tamdrin (“the ones who call out from the grave...who rise up and disturb aged fathers and uncles... mothers and sons...who disturb little children”); the disruptions of hierarchy in Jigten Chötö (“the evil signs of the descent of the mob upon great men...the disfavor of the king and minister, and strife between the venerable”), the black magic associated with Dorje Phurba and Möpa Drangak (“those who cast the malign torma...the blood torma...the evil mantras of the heretics...the eight sorceresses who do evil...the sorcery of demons

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<sup>299</sup> Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, “The Winged and the Fanged.” In *From Bhakti to Bon: Festschrift for Per Kvaerne*, eds. Hannah Havnevik and Charles Ramble, 153-170. Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Religion in Human Culture, 2014.

and the arising of vampires and ghostly demons”), and the libidinous fiendishness of wild birds symbolized in the command torma (“the crow mounting the owl...the midnight friend of the owl...feathered ones mounting one another”): these are significations of natural and social disorders, expressed in idioms that may have been particularly resonant for contemporaneous readers.

These harms are neutralized by the materialization of these images into a sacred maṇḍala. This technique is resonant with the narratives of demon-subjugation in the tantras themselves, wherein demonic agents are conscripted into the heruka maṇḍala, and thereby tamed. As we have seen, this subjugation-through-mandalization was an important element of Yoga and Mahāyoga tantric mythologies, such as that of the *Guhyagarbha*’s fifteenth chapter. The idiom of taming through mandalization is operative in this tor-dok rite, expressed in the physical conjunction of the deity torma with the representations of harmful agents. The exorcism hinges on the effigistic materialization of the taming and subjugated agents, as well as the meditative trance (*ting nge ‘dzin*) and commanding vocalizations of the ritual practitioner, which activate the transformative power of the deities anchored in the torma representation.

The matrix of simulacric materiality, meditative absorption, and utterance, works to effectuate the apotropaic outcome. In this, we may observe the dual objective / subjective nature of ritual materials themselves. As James Gentry observes, the materials used in “object-based” rituals – specifically, the tormas and substances involved in apotropaic rites such as the dokpa exorcism, or those deployed in ritual initiation – exhibit a dual nature: ritual materials are at once objects to be manipulated, and are agentive subjects capable of acting upon “real” phenomena.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> James Gentry (2013) has advanced a sophisticated exploration of “object-power discourse” in Tibetan tantric tradition, with specific reference to Sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan’s literary works. See Gentry 2014, 2-13 for an overview of Gentry’s approach, especially his use of Bruno Latour’s conception of agency as a subject/object

The mediational nature of these object-subjects allows for the non-material transformative force of a ritual master, and of enlightened forces themselves, to effectuate change in the material domain. This logic recognizes the qualitative gap between material and enlightened domains, and thus a mediational process is required that utilizes technologies and materials which can operate in both registers. Harm-averting rituals, then, must involve the subjectification of objects, and the objectification of subjects, to allow for mediation between unseen enlightened forces and the apparent world. Thus, the deity *torma* does not merely “represent” the *Kabgyé heruka*. Rather, the transformative force of the wrathful deity is *manifest* in the presence of the *rten gtor*. The *torma* is at once a physical object, and also an agent capable of acting in prescribed, and perhaps even unpredictable, ways (and thus the great care taken in treating these materials during the ritual action). In this, the agency of ritual materials also relies on the activation afforded through a ritual master’s meditation, gestures, and utterances. Thus, multiple layers of subjective agencies are at play in the dialogue of objectivity and subjectivity upon which the *dokpa* rite hinges. As we will see in our interpretation below, Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory, especially as it is interpreted by Gentry, will be a good method for analyzing the web of agencies that account for a ritual’s transformative power.

No further instruction for kinetic ritual action is specified in the *Nine Victory Banners*. Unlike liberation rites in which the *torma* is destroyed, this *tor-dok* does not call for the dismemberment of the *tormas* and the murder of a sacrificial victim. Rather, it seems to be the case that the mere materialization and mutual proximity of unseen forces in the deity *tormas* and in the adorning figurines manifests a transformative contact between the forces of good and evil.

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distribution (p. 19). Also see: Gentry 2014, Part II: Objects in Theory and Practice, pp. 201-415, esp. Gentry’s appropriation of Winnicott’s concept of transitional objects, pp. 295-99.

The final section of *The Nine Victory Banners* connects the disorders evoked in the liturgy to various kinds of gods and demons. This is a continuation of the liturgy, as the practitioner commands various kinds of demonic and threatening forces, which are here specified to be the “magical display” (*cho 'phrul*) of the classes of gods and demons, to be averted by means of the great glorious tormas (*dpal chen gtor mas bzlog*).

As for the aversion of bad signs:

The black men with fearful appearance,  
the retinue of lepers encircling:  
these are the magical display of the deeds of the Lord of Death.

Moreover,  
The black woman riding a mule, with a picture of the crossed vajra,  
The soaring red-beaked crows and so forth,  
which are the magical display of the mamos and dakinis:  
Avert with the great glorious tormas!

Moreover,  
The black men, the black dog, the black wolf and so forth,  
which are the magical display of the demons and heretics:  
Avert with the great glorious tormas!

Moreover,  
The white man, the white horse, the lion and so forth,  
which are the magical display of the White Lhas:  
Avert with the great glorious tormas!

Moreover,  
The woman transforming into a black bird and so forth,  
who is the magical display of the Demoness Queen:  
Avert with the great glorious tormas!

Moreover,  
The hideous girls riding carnivorous beasts,  
the retinue of the black wrathful goddesses,  
which are the magical display of the blood-drinking vampiresses:  
Avert with the great glorious tormas!

Moreover,  
The white birds, dogs, and little children,  
The temple's venerable images and instruments,

which are the magical display of the Dharma-Protector Kings:  
Avert with the great glorious tormā!

Moreover,  
The armored red youths  
and the red horses, dogs, and birds  
who are the magical display of the red Tsan:  
Avert with the great glorious tormā!

Moreover,  
The feathered pigeons,  
and the great darkness and clouds in dreams  
which is the magical display of the black Mu:  
Avert with the great glorious tormā!

Moreover,  
The black wolf running at the edge of the forest,  
the wrathful youth  
who is the magical display of Vajrasadhu,  
Avert with the great glorious tormā!

Moreover,  
Men adorned with animal skins,  
And the incineration of the body:  
this is the magical display of the Nōjin Lord of Death.  
Avert with the great glorious tormā!

Moreover,  
The brandishing of the black flag, the black bon, and the black vase,  
the retinue consisting of black men, mothers and fathers,  
which are the magical displays of the enchanting Ghost Demons:  
Avert with the great glorious tormā!

Moreover,  
The tortoise, the snake, the nasty creepers,  
and the children, puppies, and envious elders and so forth:  
these are the magical displays of the Naga Earth Lords.  
Avert with the great glorious tormā!

Moreover,  
The thousand donkeys, vultures, horses, wolves, and dogs,  
the foreigners, beggars, and familiar ones,  
these are the mother and father samaya-breaking demons.  
Avert with the great glorious tormā!

Moreover,

The frost and hail that descends from above,  
 the bursting catapults and arrows  
 armies throwing spears and so forth:  
 these are the magical display of the general who incites and dispatches sorcery:  
 Avert with the great glorious torma!

Moreover,  
 The transformation of the enemy of the magical display of the eight kinds [of gods and  
 demons],  
 the hundred and eleven bad signs,  
 the eight kinds of untimely death  
 the fifty vases of bad dispositions  
 the exorcism of the three hundred and sixty non-human spirits,  
 Avert with the great glorious torma!

Awful calamities befalling we yogins, fellow practitioners,  
 breakages in general, and the breakage of the door;  
 the bad signs, evil prophecies and divinations and so forth,  
 Avert! Avert by the great red torma!

Transform! Transform the bad signs of the enemy.<sup>301</sup>

We see in this section a comprehensive list of bad signs, terrors, and harmful threats that may be averted through the power of the torma exorcism. This list includes not only patently malevolent actors, such as demons and vampiresses, but also animals, protector spirits, landscape gods,

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<sup>301</sup> Katok, vol. 10, p 318.3-321: ... *ltas ngan bzlog pa ni/ mi nag 'jigs pa'i cha byad can/ mdze pa'i 'khor gyis bskor ba ni/ las kyi gzhin rje'i cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ nag mo dri'u zhon khram bam can/ bdud bya nag po lding ba sogs/ ma mo mkha' 'gro'i cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ mi nag khyi nag sbyang nag sogs/ bdud dang mu stegs cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ mi dkar rta dkar seng ge sogs/ dkar po lha yi cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ bud med bya nag sgra gur sogs/ ma bdud rgya mo'i cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ bud med mi sdug gcan gzan zhon/ nag mo khros bas bskor ba ni/ khrag 'thung srin mo'i cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ bya khyi dkar po bu chung dang/ lha khang 'bag sing btsun pa sogs/ cho skyong rgyal po'i cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ mi dmar skyes phran zhub can dang/ rta khyi dmar po bya dmar sogs/ dmar po btsan gyi cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ 'dab chags phu ron 'phur ba dang/ mun pa dag po 'thib pa rmis/ nag po dmu yi cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ spyang ki nag po nyer zhing rgyug/ [illeg.] skyes phran khro ba ni/ rdo rje legs pa/i cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ mi lus gcan gzan lpags pa gyon/ lus la me stag 'phro ba ni/ gnod sbyin gzhin rje'i cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ ban nag bon nag dar nag 'phyur/ mi dang pho mos bskor ba ni/ the'u brang 'gong po'i cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ sbal sbrul sdom sdig 'bu srin dang/ rgan sgon khyi phrug byis ba sogs/ sa bdag sklu yi cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ khyi sbyang rta rgod bong stong dang/ mon pa sprang po bsgom pa sogs/ dam sri pho mo'i cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ thog bab sad ser kha ba dang/ sgyogs dang mda' dang shwa rdol dang/ dmag dpung mchon rtse tshur 'phong sogs/ rbod gtong spyi yi cho 'phrul yin/ de yang dpal chen gtor mas bzlog/ sde brgyad cho 'phrul dgra la bsgyur/ ltas ngan brgya cu rtsa gcig dang/ dus min 'tshib rnam brgyad dang/ gzhis ngan bum pa bco lnga dang/ ye 'grogs sum brgya drug cu bzlog/ rnal 'byor bdag cag 'khor bcas kyi/ spyi chag sgo chag ltas ngan dang/ mo ngan pru ngan la sogs pa/ bzlog go dmar chen gtor mas bzlog/ bsgyur ro ltas ngan dgra la bsgyur/*

foreigners, soldiers, and even naughty children. While some of these actors are not inherently harmful, it is clear that they are somehow associated with inauspicious or dangerous phenomena according to the imaginaire undergirding this text. This list of bad signs and their agents also demonstrates the hybridity which characterizes Kabgyé mythology in general: classical Buddhist divinities such as nāgas, dākinīs, and dharma protectors are listed alongside characters distinctive to Tibet, such as *rdo rje legs pa* (a protective deity, formerly a god of gamblers and war, conscripted by Padmasambhava at Samyé), the Red Tsān and Black Mú, as well as the White Lha, who are the ancestral deities of the Tibetan emperors. The Eight Classes are themselves mentioned, and we might regard this list as a comprehensive account of all the unseen actors that can bestow harm, disorder, and inauspiciousness in the world of men. Notably, the *Nine Victory Banners*' list of dangerous agents is somewhat similar to the list of *dregs pa* demons to be tamed according to the *Deshek Dupa Tantra* (*bde gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud*), which I have suggested may represent the older, "transmitted" Kabgyé tradition. Additionally, its template of taming-through-mandalization resonates with the orientation of the taming maṇḍalas of the *Māyājāla* tantras, as in the fifteenth chapter of the *Secret Nucleus*. The idea that the *Nine Victory Banners* represents the ritualism of the transmitted *Deshek Dupa* is a tantalizing possibility, bolstered by the fact that the *Nine Victory Banners* is included in the Kyirong edition of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, which I regard as representative of an older layer of Kabgyé tradition. From this perspective, the *Nine Victory Banners* may be an early Kabgyé tor-dok ritual text, perhaps known to Nyangrel himself.



Diagram for a Shinje *rten gtor*.

### The Imaginal World of *The Nine Victory Banners*

Regardless of whether or not we can understand the precise valence of the text's images for Tibetan readers, the text is remarkable for the density of its arresting imagery. It provides a striking imagescape through which is communicated a world of disorder and threats which must be confronted. While it is certain that Tibetans then, as now, were committed to the reality of

entities like the Tsän, the Lú, and the Lha, we do not know whether they regularly encountered corpse-eating peacocks, zombies, black men, dreadlocked women, wrathful youths, lion-headed people, poison-mixing hags, charnel ground vixens, and the like. However, such a rich imaginal world acts to conscript a “reader” (or, in this case, a ritual practitioner) into a reality in which specific kinds of agencies can, and must, be claimed. In other words, a text such as this provides a “lifeworld” within which to experience oneself as an actor. This is a narrative environment in which reader/practitioners are called on to participate in a continual drama of harm-aversion, and in the triumph of enlightened forces. For Tibetans, and, specifically, for the Nyingmapa, control of the gods and demons constitutes a particularly resonant and recursive drama, as the lore of demon-control remains at the heart of the Tibetan Buddhism’s story of its initial, and ongoing, success in the Land of Snows. Thus, participation in an imaginal world of threats and powerful divine forces naturally invokes the deeds that stand at the basis of the religion’s self-understanding. This is not to suggest that practitioners would have regarded the kinds of threats communicated in this ritual text as somehow imaginary. Rather, the text – and the execution of the ritual it prescribes – equips practitioners with an opportunity to experience and express agency in countering obstacles. This is afforded through the establishment of an imaginal world with its own agents, hierarchies, and outcomes that the practitioner, through a kinetic, vocal, and imaginative set of engagements, can participate in, and manipulate, to achieve a self-experience of agency. In other words, I remain open to the possibility that the demons, ghosts, and fiendish animals described in the *Nine Victory Banners* operated as a connotative field, establishing an imaginal world within which a narrative identity of the agentive practitioner could be configured. As this ritual “plot” and “setting” advance the idiom of demon control and the superiority of divine Buddhist forces, execution of the ritual recruits the practitioner into specific, yet broadly-

defined, identities; by replicating the deeds of Tibet's original demon-tamer, practice of the tor-dok confirms a vision of religiosity entailing an ongoing sacred history, the role of a specific community, and the celebration of a certain kind of ritual mastery undergirding the distinct identity of the Nyingma.

From this point of view, I conclude that it is productive to understand a ritual text such as this in terms of a special kind of narrativity – one that is potently activated in the kinetics of ritual practice – which drives agency and configures subjectivity for its practitioners. This narratological interpretation will be bolstered by an analysis of the “subjunctive” character of ritual practice, to be explicated following our exploration of another exorcistic ritual text drawn from the Kabgyé cycle.

### ***sgrol ba: The Eight Modes of Liberation***

In contrast to *The Nine Types of Victory Banner*, which appears in the Kyirong, Katok, and Tsamdrak editions of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, *The Eight Modes of Liberative Action Based on Torma* (*gtor ma la brten nas bsgral las don brgyad ma*) only appears in the Katok and Tsamdrak.<sup>302</sup> As suggested earlier, the Katok and Tsamdrak editions are the comprehensive recensions allegedly derived from Gongra Lochen Zhenpen Dorje's seventeenth-century editorial efforts. It's absence from Kyirong thus raises the question of whether it was part of the elder Kabgyé ritual tradition. The *Eight Modes of Liberative Action* does appear in several ritual cycles, including Katok's, and it is illuminating for its comprehensive format in regards to the technique of liberation (*sgrol ba*) ritual.

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<sup>302</sup> “Gtor ma la brten nas bzlog pa'i bsgral las don brgyad ma” in Katok: *bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 10, text 6, p 45-63; Tsamdrak: vol. 10, text 24, p 531-547.

This text begins with a preview of the rite’s conclusion, prescribing “the methods of pressing, incinerating, or flinging – whatever is suitable.”<sup>303</sup> This presumably refers to the fate of the effigy *torma*, through which the enemy obstructor (*dgra bgegs*) will be neutralized. It also foregrounds the patently violent character of this *sgrol ba* rite.

The text then summarizes a general eightfold procedure for liberation rites in general:

First, summon the enemy’s life force. Second, snatch its power and potency. Third, take away their protector gods. Fourth, bring the consciousness down into the form [of the effigy *torma*]. Fifth, impel it into the effigy without dissipating. Sixth, [the enemy] falls into insane unconsciousness. Seventh, demolish it into dust. Eighth, feed the heap [of demolished *torma*] to the mouth [of the heruka deity].<sup>304</sup>

These procedures reflect both the tantric technique of liberation, which was a central element of Indian Mahāyoga praxis, and also distinctively Tibetan ideas, such as the thaumaturgy of life-force manipulation, and intercession with personal protective spirits.<sup>305</sup> This summary is then followed by another list of the eight procedures required to activate the outcome of liberation.

These procedures are:

The invocation of the deity, the setting up of the place of the offering, the enlightened action of entrustment, the binding of the designated victim, meditative absorption, [arranging and deploying] the implements of violence,

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<sup>303</sup> Katok, vol. 10, 46.2: *bnan bsgreg 'phang gsum gang yang rung/*

<sup>304</sup> Katok, 46.4-47.3: *dang po bla srog 'gug pa dang/ gnyis pa mthu dang rju 'phrul 'phrog pa dang/ gsum pa 'go ba'i lha dang phral ba dang/ bzhi pa rnam shes gzugs la dbab pa dang/ lnga pa 'chor med byang du gzhugs pa dang/ drug pa dran med smyo ru 'jug pa dang/ bdun pa gtun du brdung shing rdul du brlag pa dang/ brgayd pa phung po zhal du bstabs pa'o/*

<sup>305</sup> This text mentions the personal protector gods (*'go ba'i lha*), a category which includes entities such as the mother and father lineal gods (*pho* and *mo lha*), as well as the gods of the body (*sku lha*). According to Tibetan lore, these entities abide on a person’s body, helping govern one’s fortunes in relationship with other related unseen entities. As is the case with the personal life force (*bla srog*), the personal gods can be abducted or interfered with, leading to physical and mental ailments. *The King of Root Tantras*’ section on Jigten Chötö includes reference to these specific entities in the context of the subjugation of worldly deities.

[executing] the mudras of preparation, and the cursing of the victim with the mouth.<sup>306</sup>

The bulk of the text is then devoted to a liturgy that describes the execution of these eight procedures under the auspices of each of the eight Kabgyé deities, beginning with Chemchok:

First:

‘Hum. From the maṇḍala of the dark red triangle, the deities of Chemchok of good qualities arises.

When enemies to the friends of the teachings spread,  
manifest the divine body from unfabricated space.’

Second:

‘I the yogin repel the allies [of the enemy].

In this place, by means of fierce actions,  
the enemy obstructors of black mind are quickly liberated by fierce actions.’

Third:

‘Hum. [I invoke] the assembly of deities of Chemchok of good qualities.

When the time has come for fierce enlightened actions, the enemy obstructors that trouble the mind are summoned here in a single instant.’

Fourth:

‘The one with the hook captures them by the heart.

The one with the noose ties up their limbs.

The one with the shackles binds their senses.

The one with the bell pushes them from behind.

All the envoys, do this work!

Om Badzra.....Dza Dza<sup>307</sup>

Fifth:

From the mind of the great glorious one, the deities and protectors proliferate immeasurably. They grasp everything by the heart and fasten the noose around the neck. Having applied the wind of mantra, the enemies are helplessly summoned to the front. They are locked in the prison of the three realms of samsara. Consider that their existence is subdued, and they are not able to think.

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<sup>306</sup> Katok, 47: *bskul ba; i lha dang/ gdab pa'i yul dang/ bcol ba'i phirn las dang/ gdags pa'i 'phyang dang/ bsgom pa'i ting 'dzin dang/ drag po'i rdzas dang/ bca' ba'i phyag rgya dang/ zhal gyi dmod pa'o/*

<sup>307</sup> At the request of the lamas who have assisted me in this research, I do not include the mantras as they are written in the ritual texts. While I have been encouraged by prominent lamas to undertake this project from a historical perspective, several have expressed the opinion that my work should not stimulate unqualified people to attempt the Kabgyé practices and rituals. Thus, I am committed to omitting critical elements of the liturgy, such as the cursing mantras.

Sixth:

At the iron throne, by the hook of actions, they will be stopped.

Seventh:

Summon the [enemy] by making the finger like a hook.

Eighth:

‘Ho. The retinue of the assembly of the great glorious deities,  
the wrathful males and females,  
emanating and emanating,  
the envoys and actions, along with the command protectors;  
the enemy that destroys the teachings, this vow pervertor,  
is tamed in this place, in one instant.’

Samaya Seal Seal Seal.<sup>308</sup>

The text goes on in similar manner under the auspices of each of the Kabgyé maṇḍala deities: Yangdak Heruka, Jampal (Yamāntaka), Padma Sung (Hayagrīva), Phurba Trinlay (Vajrakīla), Mamo Bötong, Jigten Chötö, and Möpa Drangak. The template of eight procedures is much the same under each heruka, with some differences in terms of special substances and ritual implements to be applied to the effigy, specific cursing mantras to be recited, and unique mudras and curses. For example, the section for Mamo Bötong reads:

First:

‘Hum. From the maṇḍala of the dark red triangle,  
the deities of Mamo Bötong [arise].  
When enemies to the friends of the teachings spread,  
manifest the divine body from unfabricated space.’

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<sup>308</sup> Katok, 48.4- 50.3: *hum smug nag gru gsum dkyil 'khor nas/ che mchog yon tan lha tshogs rnams bstan pa gyan la dgra dar na/ mi mngon dbyings nas sku bzhengs la/ nyis pa ni/ rnal 'byor bdag gis ra mdar bzlog/ gnas ;dir drag po'i las la ywa. Yid la brnag pa'i [Tsamdrak: nag po] dgra bgegs rnams/ drak po'i las kyis myur du sgrol/ gsum pa ni/ hum che mchog yon tan lha tshogs rnams/ drag po'i phrin las dus la bab/ yid la brnag pa'i dgra bgegs rnams/ skad cig gcig la 'dir khug cig/ bzhi pa ni/ lcags kyu can gyis snying nas zungs/ zhags pa can gyis yan lag chings/ lcags sgrog can gyis dbang po sdom/ dril bu can gyis rgyab nas phul/ pho nya kun gyis las mdzod cig/ Om badzra.....phat/ Om badzra....ya/ ma ha yaksha....phat/ dgra bgeg...dza dza/ lnga pa ni/ dpal chen po'i thugs ka nas/ lha dang bsrungs ma'i tshogs grangs med pa 'phros te/ de rnams kyis gang la bya ba'i snying ka nas bzung ste/ ske nas zhags pas bcings/ rlung gi mantra la steng du bzhag nas/ rang dbang med par mdun du bkug ste/ srid gsum 'khor ba'i btsen khang du bcug la/ srid cing 'gul mi nus par bsam mo/ drug pa ni/ gri lcags la byas pa'i lcags kyus bgag go/ bdun pa ni/ lag pa'i mrdzub mo lcags kyu ltar byas la dgug pa'o/ brgayd pa ni/ ho/ dpal chen po'i lha tshogs 'khor dang bcas pa/ khro bo dang khro mo/ sprul pa dang yang sprul/ pho nya dang las byed/ bka' srung dang bcas pa rnams kyis bstan pa 'jig pa'i dgra bo dam yams 'di/ skad cig nying la gnas 'dir khug cig/ sa ma ya/ rgya rgya rgya/*

Second:

‘I the yogin repel the allies [of the enemy].  
In this place, by means of fierce actions,  
the enemy obstructors of black mind are quickly liberated by fierce actions.’

Third:

‘Hum. [I invoke] the Assembly of deities of mamo with samaya.  
At the time of the fierce enlightened actions,  
immediately paralyze the enemy obstructors of bad mind.’

Fourth:

Scatter the pestilence of the mamo into dust  
‘Om.....hum’.

Recite thus.

Fifth:

By a poisonous rain, imagine the sense consciousness of the enemy falls into insanity

Sixth:

Demon poison, goat poison, the blood of an insane person, the extracts of datura:  
measure these out on top of the effigy.

Seventh:

Make the mudra of offering, with the fingers on end.

Eighth:

‘Ho. The assembly of the deities of the mamos of existence,  
wisdom and wrathful male and females who accomplish actions,  
emanations and emanations,  
envoys, actions, and command protectors:  
to this enemy obstructor who destroys the teachings and violates vows,  
make rain a shower of black blood and insanity’

Curse thus.

Samaya Sealed Sealed Sealed.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Katok, 57.6 - 59.3: *dang po ni/ hum/ dmar nag gru gsum dkyil 'khor nas/ ma mo rbod gtong lha tshogs rnam/ bstan pa gnyan la dgra dar na/ mi mngon dbyings nas sku bzhengs la/ gnyis pa ni/ rnal 'byor bdag gi ra mdar bzlog/ gnas 'dir drag po'i las la ya/ yid la brnag pa'i dgra bgegs rnam/ drag po'i las kyis myur du sgröl/ gsum pa ni/ hum/ ma mo'i lha tshogs thugs dam can/ drag po'i phirn las dus la bab/ yid la brnag po'i dgra bgegs rnam/ rengs par khug la smyor chug cig/ bzhi pa ni/ ma mo'i dpal yams thal bar rdol/ Om.... phat/ Om badzra....ki la ya/ ma ha yaksha ....phat/ dgra bgegs....phat/ ces bzlas so/ lnga pa ni/ dgra bo la dug gi char pas dbang po rnam shes smyo zhing 'bog par bsam mo/ drug pa ni/ btsan dug/ ra dug/ smyon khrag/ thad phrom pa'i khu ba rnam ling ga'i steng du brtig go/ bdun pa ni/ lag pa; i sor mo rnam gzings te/ 'khrig ma gnyas sprad nas 'khor lo bskor ba ltar bya'o/ brgyad pa ni/ ho/ srid pa ma mo'i lha tshogs/ ye shes dang las la grub pa'i khro bo dang khro mo/ sprul pa dang*

Both this *Eight Modes of Liberation* and the *Nine Victory Banners* hinge on a conjunction of materialized agents with the meditation and efficacious utterance of the ritualist. However, the *Eight Modes of Liberation* is a far more kinetic rite. As in the *Nine Victory Banners*, the substantiated presence of operative agents in the effigy torma is a necessary feature of the rite. However, here the effigy is reserved for the sacrificial victim (the agent of harm), and the summoning of the enemy's vital essence into the form of the torma effigy is an essential moment in the procedure, along with the anointing of the torma with special substances (such as various kinds of poison, special food substances, and even blood), the performance of hand gestures and cursing vocalizations by the ritual practitioner, and the ultimate destruction of the effigy. These are all kinetic engagements that are essential for the effective execution of the liberation ritual. Whereas the *Nine Victory Banners* tor-dok relies on mandalization to tame harmful forces, this *Eight Modes of Liberative Action* is patently destructive: its goal is the annihilation of the consciousness of the enemy. The force of the Kabgyé herukas, invoked and wielded through the meditative visualization of the practitioner, is an operative feature of this subjugation, and results in a level of violence not seen in the *Nine Types of Victory Banner*.

Interestingly, the specific harms to be mitigated are rather different between the two texts. *The Nine Victory Banners* offers a thickly expressed imagescape to communicate the threat of various kinds of socio-natural disorder (*'dzings pa*). These disordered forces are invoked through surreal and terrifying imagery, communicated in a field of signifiers that resonates on specific cultural and structural registers. The target of the *Eight Modes of Liberation*, on the other hand, is clearly specified: "the enemies to the friends of the teachings...the enemy obstructors who trouble the mind...the enemy obstructor who destroys the teachings, the vow

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*yang sprul/ pho nya las byed bka' srung dang bcas pa rnams kyi/ bstan pa'i 'jig pa'i dgra bgegs dam yams 'di la/ smyo 'bogs khrag nad kyi char 'babs par gyur cig/ ches dmod bar bya 'o/*

corruptors....”. In short, heretics and enemies to Buddhism (*mu stegs pa*) are the ones to be “liberated” in the manner of the *Eight Modes*, and their fate is the decisive annihilation of their consciousness: “...break apart their senses, destroy their body and mind into insanity”.

The differing conceptions of dangerous agents and their fates as communicated in these texts may reflect specific contexts within which these texts were incubated. However, disorder, heresy, and threats from the enemies of orthodoxy would be concerning to any tradition in any context, and we do see evidence of antagonism between Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities expressed in the ritualism of Indian Mahāyoga sources, such as in the *Secret Nucleus*’s fifteenth chapter, in which the gods of Indian religion are subdued by the heruka maṇḍala. More germane to our exploration of the texts, and to our goal of interrogating Kabgyé ritualism’s role in authoring identity for its practitioners, is the question of how these images of harm and its aversion were deployed in articulating imaginal worlds within the Kabgyé practitioner could interact. For this, I advance a narratological interpretation of these ritual texts.

### **The Narrativity of Ritual**

Texts such as these may be narratologically interpreted to determine how they contributed to the articulation of identity and the configuration of agentive subjectivities for their practitioners. That is, we may interpret these ritual texts in terms of narrative features that act upon “readers” (or, in the case of ritual, “practitioners”) as they engage these texts in the practice of ritual harm-aversion. Imaginal worlds, resonant idioms, plots, narrators, characters, and situatedness in meta-narrative discursive contexts are all entailed in these ritual texts, and we might regard the practice of these rituals as a potent, kineticized, mode of “reading”. Just as the reading of a literary narrative entails the transposition of the reader into the imaginal world of the narrative, and results in the transformation of the reader’s very subjectivity as she encounters the

story's actors in an inhabitation of new dramas, participation in a ritual involves submission to the imaginal world of the ritual, and an experience of oneself cast within the intersubjective dramas, semiotic fields, and narrative engagements offered therein. It is possible, then, to interpret the ritual imagescapes of these texts as narrative settings within which reader/practitioners may situate themselves to configure subjective agencies and collective identities.

Despite clear structural similarities between the functions of narrative and ritual, relatively little work has been done to explore their continuities, and the mutual contribution of their specialized disciplines of study.<sup>310</sup> While studies in narratology and ritual theory have yielded complex and seemingly unrelated definitions of both narrative and ritual, Vera Nünning, Jan Rupp, and Gregor Ahn et. al. have attended to obvious similarities in the form, function, and outcomes of narrative literature and ritual practice. Nünning et. al.'s approach is generally structuralist, but also sees concillience between "context-oriented post-classical narratology" and post-structuralist ritual theory, specifically in attention to the ways that narratives and rituals both communicate ideologies and negotiate positions of power.<sup>311</sup> Thus, narratology and the study of ritual can richly converse from a variety of methodological perspectives which seek to understand the production of subjectivity through imaginal engagements.

According to Nünning et. al., the basic agreement between narrative and ritual lies in the subject-constituting capacity of engagement with semiotically-mediated and context-dependent subjunctive spaces. In other words, both reading and ritual participation involve a transposition

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<sup>310</sup> Vera Nünning, Jan Rupp, and Gregor Ahn's 2014 edited volume *Ritual And Narrative: Theoretical Explorations and Historical Case Studies* traces some promising areas of conscillience between narrative and ritual theory. Especially see: Nünning and Rupp, "Ritual and Narrative: An Introduction"; Marie-Laure Ryan, chpt. 1: "Ritual Studies and Narratology: What Can They Do For Each Other"; and Vera and Ansgar Nünning, chpt. 2: "On the Narrativity of Rituals: Interfaces between Narratives and Rituals and Their Potential for Ritual Studies".

<sup>311</sup> Nünning et. al. 2014, 18.

of a reader/practitioner into an imaginal world – an alternative, or “subjunctive” space – constructed out of coherent symbols made intelligible through their situatedness in interlocking discursive contexts. Engagement in narrative, or in ritual, results in the redefined subjectivity of reader/participants. Nünning and Rupp write: “Both narratives and rituals create specific worlds; worlds which provide meaning as well as order...there is a performative quality to both rituals and narratives in the sense that they picture possible alternatives to the narratives’ or rituals’ referential context, and thereby develop a transformative potential”.<sup>312</sup> As Marie-Laure Ryan observes: “the practice of ritual and the creation of imaginary worlds through storytelling are universal human activities and essential factors in what Roy Rappaport calls ‘the making of humanity’”.<sup>313</sup> Indeed, Nünning understands both narrative and ritual in terms of the broader category of “world-making”.<sup>314</sup> In particular, the worlds of a narrative or a ritual are “set off from the everyday world”, and constitute settings which are not static, and which therefore imply transformation for participants.<sup>315</sup> In other words, narratives and rituals both communicate possibilities for change by establishing an alternative imaginal world, and emplotting events in a sequence suggesting some kind of development. Engagement with these alternative, imagined spaces and dramas configures the possibility for new kinds of agency. Ryan notes: “both narrative and ritual represent ways of dealing with what is perhaps the most important source of anguish, namely the randomness of fate. But they do so in very different ways: ritual by trying to

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<sup>312</sup> Nünning et. al. 2014, 15.

<sup>313</sup> Ryan in Nünning et. al. 2014, 31.

<sup>314</sup> Nünning et. al. 2014, 9.

<sup>315</sup> Nünning et. al. 2014, 9.

eliminate this randomness from life, narrative by turning it into a plot”.<sup>316</sup> In the case of the Kabgyé’s harm-averting ritualism, the mitigation of random fate is definitely a key objective: by executing the dokpa rites of taming and liberation, the practitioner claims agency over the world’s unwanted forces, yielding an experience of himself as an effective subject in the image of the traditions’ vision for mastery.

From this interpretive perspective, narrative and ritual can be understood to share common features such as plot, temporal sequencing, character, narration, and interaction with meta-narrative context. In the case of the harm-averting rites explored above, the “plot” of these rituals is communicated in the procedural sequence of the rite: a series of prescribed actions set within a manifest storyscape (in this case, a materialized environment constructed out of effigies, implements, images, and substances), which results in a described change of state over time for the actors. The sequencing of prescribed actions is an emplotment in as much as the sequence unfolds over time, implies development, involves the interaction and agency of imagined actors, and communicates a specific outcome.<sup>317</sup> There is a beginning, middle, and, importantly, an end: in the case of the dokpa ritual, the outcome of averted harm is described and assured. In our case, the iterated result is the neutralization of harmful forces: “I the yogin repel the allies [of the enemy]. In this place, by means of fierce actions, the enemy obstructors are quickly liberated by fierce actions”. The dokpa ritual thus tells a story, complete with resolution, rather than merely providing a recipe through which the desired outcome is hoped for, but not iteratively performed.

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<sup>316</sup> Ryan in Nünning et. al. 2014, 32.

<sup>317</sup> Paul Ricoeur used the term “emplotment” to refer to the configuration of events into a sequence, yielding an intelligible whole (Paul Ricoeur *Time and Narrative, volume 1*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984, 65). As McKinnon observes, “A narrative is, above all, a form of discourse with a beginning, middle, and end. While we can call this structure the ‘plot’ of the narrative, Ricoeur is much more interested in the activity of making plots, or, as he calls it, ‘emplotment’, which is his translation of Aristotle’s *muthos*; consonant with much of contemporary sociology, his emphasis is less on structure than on *structuration* (Ricoeur [1984] 1985: 48), in Andrew Mckinnon, “Ritual narrative, and Time.” *Journal of Classical Sociology*. Vol 18, no. 3 (2018), 221.

Like a narrative, the entirety of the “story” — with its beginning, middle, end, development, and outcome — is wholly available. Engagement with the whole thing is invited, and possibilities for transformation are intimated.

Of course, ritual practice is more kinetic than is reading, and the ritualized activity is supplemented with the imaginative engagement of the practitioner as inculcated through visualization, meditation, and utterance. As Nünning observes: “The degree of transformation that many rituals involve is frequently the product of multi-sensory experience, involving both mind and body”.<sup>318</sup> Thus, participation in ritual is akin to a kineticized mode of reading; it is a participatory engagement that collapses the distance between the reader and the narrativized action, resulting in the transformation of the reader/practitioner. Whereas the literary reader encounters the narrative from a distance, and must, to some degree, “read herself into” the narrative in order to elicit a transformative effect, in the case of ritual, participation is quite direct. The ritual practitioner is cast as a character, included in the plot, and manifested as the implied recipient of the injunctions of the “narrator”. By “narrator”, I refer to the injunctive voice that, like a third-person omniscient narrator, stands outside of the plot and facilitates the reader’s engagement. In these rituals, carrying out injunctions aligns the practitioner with the authority secured in the narrator’s omniscient absence. Ritual texts thus breach the distance between the reader and the narrative, incorporating the reader as the primary actor, and allowing for a dual affiliation with the narrative setting as a character, and also with the holistic perspective of a reader. In the case of both narrative and ritual, the text gains efficacy as the reader participates in the story, and emerges transformed through imaginatively (and, in the case of ritual, kinetically) engaging in its dramas.

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<sup>318</sup> Nünning et. al. 2014, 10.

Just as meaning is driven in the intersection of a literary plot with the meta-narratives and hermeneutic contexts brought to bear by the reader, these ritual texts are situated within the broader textscape of the *Deshek Dupa* corpus, which carries its own situatedness in the historiographical and doctrino-praxical horizons of Nyingma Buddhist tradition. Specifically, these rituals interact with contextual narratives of Buddhist demon-control, the history of Buddhism in India and Tibet, the position of the Early Translation community, and an overarching vision for the nature of tantric practice and ritual mastery. The meaning to be gained in these rituals is a function not only of the kineticized narrative that the ritual text communicates, but also in the concentric contexts within which these rituals are nested.

Much like reading a text, participation in this ritual is characterized by an opportunity to “read oneself into” the action, inhabiting an alternative imaginal world in which one can effectively participate in the mitigation of threats and harms. The agency afforded in such engagement in this ritualism bleeds over into the subjectivity of its practitioners. Just as one emerges from engagement with a narrative work potentially bolstered, transformed, or otherwise affected by the sustained association of oneself with the narrative drama, participation in these rituals can likewise effectuate transformations (or confirmations) of personal and collective identities. In the case of the apotropaic ritualism of the Kabgyé, the resultant identity is explicitly agentive: in performing the dokpa rites of taming and liberation, the practitioner confirms the potential for mastery over antithetical forces, demonstrating his participation in a specific vision of religious accomplishment and confirming his belonging within a specific religious community. Careful ethnography of Kabgyé ritualism as it is practiced in Tibetan temples would provide more detailed evidence for this narratological interpretation of ritual. While such research is beyond the purview of this dissertation, we may recall the tradition’s rhetoric

regarding the special power of the drupchen, wherein it is said that the soteriological and protective power of tantric ritual is magnified in the context of ritualized group practice. This sentiment confirms our understanding of ritual practice as a catalyst for subjectivity and identity, specifically in regards to the articulation of denominational identities. As Ryan states: “Both rituals and narrative make us human by building community. Ritual coordinates activity into a collaborative event, while narrative requires joint attention to the words of a storyteller”.<sup>319</sup>

Whether we are referring to the elaborate setting of the drupchen intensive, or to the execution of a tor-dok liberation rite, the ritual establishes an alternative space within which new identities and agencies – ones that are commensurate with overarching ideas about the Nyingma denomination and the vocation of the religious adept – can be worked out. The narratological interpretation of these rituals is resonant with the so-called “subjunctive” character of religious practice. The subjunctive interpretation of ritual has been advanced by Adam Seligman, Robert Weller, Michael Puett, and Bennett Simon.<sup>320</sup> In contrast to theories of ritual which depict ritual as a way to activate ideal or transcendently-sanctioned orders of reality, Seligman et al. observe that rituals unfold within worlds that are inherently *disconnected* from reality. Much like the imaginative world of a child’s playtime, or even the social world of standard etiquette, the ritualscape provides an “as if” world: a domain that represents what the world might be, or could be, but is definitively not.

...we emphasize the incongruity between the world of enacted ritual and the participants' experience of lived reality, and we thus focus on the work that ritual accomplishes...ritual creates a shared, illusory world. Participants practicing ritual act as if the world produced in ritual were in fact a real one.

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<sup>319</sup> Ryan in Nünning et. al. 2014, 31.

<sup>320</sup> Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simonson. *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, chpt. 1 “Ritual and the Subjunctive”, 17-43.

And they do so fully conscious that such a subjunctive world exists in endless tension with an alternate world of daily experience.”<sup>321</sup>

It is in this alternative space that participants can experience themselves in terms of new agencies, bolstered identities, and in new relationships. The subjunctive theory of ritual does not contradict the post-Geertzian understanding that sees ritual as a space for the configuration and expression of power relations. However, Seligman et. al. seek to repudiate Geertz’s exclusive commitment to ritual as a “model of / model for” reality, arguing against understanding ritual as an engagement that harmonizes orders.<sup>322</sup> Rather, ritual establishes a different reality altogether in which the self-experience of the practitioner drives transformations and confirmations of agency, relations, and historicized identities. This approach seems indebted to the Pragmatism of Charles Peirce and William James, which locates truth in the experience of efficacious agency.<sup>323</sup> From such a perspective, agency-defining engagements are more constitutive of subjectivity than are mere subscriptions to ontological conceptions. And while Seligman et. al. cite parallels with child’s play, ritual is not strictly imaginary. It is an essential force for configuring identity, agency, and sociality, produced out of inhabitation of alternative domains that stand in productive tension with conventional ones.

This is not to suggest that the narratological and subjunctive interpretations of ritual are the only ways to understand these rites and their textuality. It is undeniable that ritual performances such as the Great Accomplishment ritual intensive or the conferral of initiation are occasions which articulate myriad social relationships and activate ideal social models. I tend to

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<sup>321</sup> Seligman et. al. 2008, 25-26.

<sup>322</sup> Seligman et. al. 2008, 20; c.f: Geertz 1993, chpt. 4 “Religion as a Cultural System” p 87-125. Also, Seligman et. al. suggest that the commitment to theorizing ritual as a force for harmonization is highly indebted to Protestant conceptions of religiosity and its reformulation of the role of ritual (p.31).

<sup>323</sup> For the application of pragmatist perspectives to ritual, see: Michael L. Raposa “Ritual inquiry: The pragmatic logic of religious practice” in Schilbrack, ed. *Thinking Through Rituals*, 2004. 115-130.

be generally sympathetic to Geertzian interpretations which understand ritual as a force for articulating ideal modes of social reality via potent semioses associated with coherent symbol systems. In addition, attention to the materiality of ritual requisites is glaringly absent from my narratological method. This is a serious deficiency, and one which is rectified by James Gentry's exploration of "object-power discourse" in Tibetan ritualism. Gentry's aim is to interrogate how ritual masters such as Sogdokpa understood the efficacy of ritual objects in explicit and implicit terms. Gentry does well in drawing on contemporary theoretical resources to think about the efficacy of ritual substances and objects, looking to Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory and his notion of agency as a force distributed between subject and object.<sup>324</sup> This approach seeks to locate efficacy in the joint influence of acting subjects and non-human objects, trace the flow of power between entities, and account for "how objects, persons, actions, and meanings are related".<sup>325</sup> Gentry also looks to D.W. Winnicott's theory of transitional objects to understand how ritual objects mediate subjective and objective domains in a way configurative of agency.<sup>326</sup> This approach parallels our narratological one in regards to the subjunctive character of religious engagement:

Transitional objects - whether these operate in the areas of childhood experience, religious rites, or artistic creation and appreciation - partake of a subjunctive *as if* modality, which involves playing with the permeable boundaries between self and other, subject and object often rigidly presupposed in the indicative *as is* modality of the quotidian world. The Personal and social implications of immersion in this *as if* modality are manifold. Just as the temporary suspension of disbelief during the frame of make-believe opens up a potential space for shared illusory experiences, the *as if* modality likewise creates possibilities for individuals to commune around their shared participation in worlds and worldviews that call into

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<sup>324</sup> Gentry 2014, 11-29.

<sup>325</sup> Gentry 2014, 517.

<sup>326</sup> Gentry 2014, 296-299.

question the boundaries between self and world, and more fundamentally, reality and illusion. The temporary erasure, bracketing, or blurring of such boundaries allows for participants to renegotiate, or recalibrate the terms of these divisions in the ongoing human struggle to strike just the right balance between individual agency, group identity and the world of things. By providing a third space to test out these balancing acts, the liminal zones of play and the quasi-subjective transitional objects that populate those regions become formative elements in the sense of personhood and communal identity that emerges.<sup>327</sup>

Gentry's remarks precisely parallel my own in regards to the narratological dimension of ritual text. Indeed, a full treatment of ritual as an agency-defining and subject-constituting force requires attention to both the literary and material elements of ritual practice. After all, the kinetic engagement with *objects* is what differentiates ritual from something like reading. My previous assertion that ritual practice is a "kineticized mode of reading" was not meant to divert attention from the material dimensions of ritual practice. Rather, I have restricted my attention to the textual and literary features of our ritual texts to develop a supplementary resource for understanding ritual practice and experience. The rich imagescapes of these ritual texts (and the recognition of my own inability to interpret them as medieval Tibetan readers would have done) are what have led me to seek interpretive techniques to understand how these texts and their practices acted on practitioners, especially in the context of the overall Buddhist world proffered by the Kabgyé cycle. Future efforts to more deeply define the agency-bolstering, subject-constituting, and identity-confirming potential of tantric ritual will do well to apply narratological insights to ritual textuality, and something like Latour's Actor Network Theory and Gentry's appropriation of Winnicott's concept of transitional objects to the material dimensions of ritualism.

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<sup>327</sup> Gentry 2014, 297.

In summation, I am generally attracted to interpretive approaches that understand meaning-making in terms of agency-defining practice. Rather than locating meaning in subscription to conceptions of ideal orders, approaches rooted in existentialism, phenomenology, and pragmatism look to agentive engagements – those of ritual practice, as well as those of daily life – by which subjects define themselves intersubjectively and in light of self-experience.<sup>328</sup> From this perspective, we can attend to the ways in which these rituals offered opportunities for subjects to define themselves in concilliance with broader ontological conceptions and historicized identities. Our narratological interpretation of these texts, and an embrace of the subjunctive theory of ritual practice, accomplishes this interrogation of Kabgyé ritualism as one element of a broader complex of engagements aimed at subject-constitution and identity-articulation.

This is not to suggest that the harms to be mitigated through apotropaic rites were not regarded as “real”. And, we would be justified in harboring suspicions about interpretive approaches that totally privilege the perspective of the scholar over the reality-claims of the practitioner. It is also not to suggest that these ritual practices were indeed not “models of, and models for” social life, as Geertz would have it. But in attending to the engagements afforded by the presentation of rich imaginal worlds, implicit meta-narratives, and opportunities for agentive action, we can detect the appeal of these practices and their textuality in the broader context of the Kabgyé’s place within Nyingma religiosity.

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<sup>328</sup> Michael D. Jackson’s “existential anthropology” pursues an ethnographic practice that is rooted in attention to agency-constituting engagements with lived realities: “At the core of phenomenology, existentialism, critical theory, and pragmatism lies the methodological question as to how thought may be anchored in, rather than abstracted from, human lifeworlds, and how it may begin in media res, with the processes rather than the products of intersubjective life...In fact, the truth of any *human* subject can never be entirely encompassed by the discursive subjects with which we conventionally identify and construe ourselves and others...” Michael D. Jackson, *Lifeworlds: Essays In Existential Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, 236.

Applying the subjunctive interpretation of ritual to the tor-dok rites from the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, we see how the phantasmagoric world of Tibetan demons and wrathful divine forces offers a rich setting to enact agency, confirm identity, and advance self-cultivational goals. From this perspective, we can afford to be less concerned with determining the “reality” of the kinds of agents described in these texts than we might be with the kind of “imaginaire” that these texts invoke, and in which they invite participation. We might take interest in how these ritual texts, much like the tantras and foundational myths of the cycle, supplied a coherent imaginal world in which certain kinds of activities and relationships – including violent ones – are justified in efforts to secure the agency of Buddhist subjects. This is essential practice for participation in a tradition that hinged on the confluence of harm-aversion and Buddhist soteriology. In characterizing the overarching influence of the Kabgyé cycle, we might look to the ways that it conjoined narrative, doctrine, and practice to open up a set of engagements by which people could author collective identities, experience subjective agencies, and participate in coherent lifeworlds.

The confluence of narrative, doctrine, and practice – a confluence which can be articulated over the breadth of an entire cycle, or present in any single text – is undergirded by a coherent “imaginaire”. In the case of the Kabgyé, it is the imaginaire of sacred violence and the reclaimed demonic that provides the basic material for the expression of religiosity that the Kabgyé cycle historically facilitated. It is to this imaginaire, and its power in undergirding a full suite of tantric religiosity, that we finally turn as we wrap up our exploration of the world of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*.

## Chapter Seven: From Imaginaire to Lifeworld

To conclude our exploration of the Kabgyé tradition, we now turn to a more robust interpretation of the “Kabgyé imaginaire”: the coherent field of iconographic, narrative, and ritual imageries contextualized by, and in the service of, overarching discourses of identity and religious subjectivity that are carried out in the Kabgyé’s unique confluence of narrative, doctrine, and ritual practice. Some space will be devoted to describing the operations of the imaginaire in a general sense, followed by an exploration of the Kabgyé’s specific iteration. To contextualize this interpretation, let us first revisit the main arguments I have articulated out of my textual and historical research.

In the foregoing, I have suggested that the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* was a vital element of the Nyingmapa’s distinctive iteration of Tantric Buddhism. The Kabgyé supplied a collation of materials that were important to Early Translation Buddhists as they worked to articulate denominational identities in contexts of contestation. It gained resonance by hybridizing elements of Indian tantric tradition with Tibet’s indigenous ritual culture, and in how it enfolded the soteriological and apotropaic dimensions of tantric practice. It also participated in a broader vision for the history and status of Buddhism in Tibet, which entailed an elevation of the Early Translation community, and the celebration of the harm-averting ritual adept as the paradigmatic Buddhist master. Additionally, in its ritual-centric focus, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* provided the basic material for an ongoing development of practice regimes that were important in the institutionalization of Nyingma religiosity. These programs were connected to the efforts of Nyingma institutions and masters to carry out a specific vision for Nyingma identity, often in response to inter-institutional and socio-political pressures.

Between its mythologies, buddhologies, and ritual programs, the Kabgyé entailed a coherence which rendered it particularly relevant for Nyingmapas as they sought resources out of which to articulate unique, responsive, and agentic identities. As we have seen, the mytho-historical narratives of the Kabgyé's origin in primordial, visionary, and worldly domains; its embrace of the idioms of "taming and liberation" in both the cosmogonic mythologies and ritual protocols; and its incorporation of the soteriological and apotropaic dimensions of tantric practice in a distinctive vision for Buddhist mastery: these elements gain articulation across every aspect of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa's* textual terrain, and have come to inform the development of Nyingma tradition in its historiography, its doctrinal development, its institutional practice, and in its organization of religious knowledge. In sum, the impact of the Kabgyé in the history of the Nyingma denomination cannot be overstated.

The connective tissue of the Kabgyé's narrative, doctrinal, and praxical world is its distinctive imaginaire.

### **"The Imaginaire" Defined**

I use "imaginaire" much in the sense that Stephen Collins has used it in reference to the imaginal worlds emerging from, and informing, South Asian engagements with Pali literature. For Collins, the "Pali imaginaire" refers to the narratives, images, metaphors, and ideas that were communicated in scriptural texts, and which had material implications in terms of establishing the parameters of discourse, experience, and material exchange for South Asian Buddhists.

The world 'imaginaire' can have various meanings, broad and narrow, and sometimes seems to be used to mean more or less the same thing as 'culture'. My usage is in particular influenced by the work of the historian Jacques Le Goff, where it has the slightly more precise sense of a non-material, imaginative world constituted by texts, especially works of art and literature. Such worlds are by definition not the same as the material world, but in so far as the material world is thought and experienced in part through them, they are not imaginary in the sense of being false,

entirely made up. This usage has Durkheimian ancestry: Hubert and Mauss spoke of *la sphère imaginaire de la religion*, insisting that this sphere exists: ‘Religious ideas exist, because they are believed; they exist objectively, as social facts.’<sup>329</sup>

Collins also goes to some length to defend his use of “imaginaire” (preserved in French, unitalicized), as opposed to terms such as “the social imaginary” or “the imaginary”:

It seems to me preferable to retain the French, as the word cannot really be translated. Both the French *imaginaire* and English ‘imaginary’ as adjectives mean fictive, unreal ... Used as a noun, *imaginaire* can refer to objects of the imagination, the ensemble of what is imagined, without implying falsity; it can also refer to specific imaginal worlds, and so can be used in this sense in the plural. English ‘imagination’ primarily refers to a faculty or activity of the mind; while it can also refer to the objects of that faculty, the domain of the imagined, it is not usually used of specific imagined worlds, and cannot be used thus in the plural ... Some writers have begun to use ‘imaginary’ as an English noun in this sense, but this is incomprehensible unless one already knows what it is translating. I prefer to use the word as an unitalicized Anglicization like ‘Renaissance’ or ‘genre’. Burke (1990) uses ‘social imagination’, which does contain a helpful implicit reference to related notions such as social memory (Fentress and Wickham 1992).<sup>330</sup>

Collins, after Jim Egge, also emphasizes the *imaginaire*’s textual basis, and, especially, its coherence: “we might take it to mean precisely those things about which the whole body of Pali texts, or at least most of them, do, in fact, agree.”<sup>331</sup> In the case of South Asians’ engagement with Pali literature, iterations of a “Pali *imaginaire*” were useful for lending coherence to a vast and, in some regards, idiosyncratic body of literature.<sup>332</sup> The sense of coherence established by an *imaginaire* is also pertinent to our exploration of the “Kabgyé *imaginaire*’s” capacity to

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<sup>329</sup> Steven Collins, *Nirvana: concept, imagery, narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>330</sup> Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 73-74.

<sup>331</sup> Collins 2010, 5.

<sup>332</sup> Sonam Kachru, personal communication, September, 2019.

undergird the confluence of doctrine, narrative, and practice out of which Nyingma identities were configured.

Despite the material implications of the imaginaire's capacity to undergird discourse and social relations, Collins emphasizes its "subjunctive" locus (to use our terminology):

The world of an imaginaire inside any text is necessarily *ou-topia*, 'No-place', in relation to the real places of the material-historical world in which it exists as an artefact; but this imaginary No-place nonetheless exists, in a different sense, in the historical world, and one can write histories of it.<sup>333</sup>

This observation is significant for our analysis of Kabgyé textuality, specifically in regards to our narratological interpretations, which suggest that the subjunctivity of liturgical settings provides a potent site for subject-constitution and identity-confirmation via narrative engagements. As I will suggest, it is through the unique topoi and imagescapes communicated in narrative, doctrinal, and ritual texts that the Kabgyé imaginaire is given voice, and it is out of the nexus of these loci that specific religious subjectivities, agencies, and identities are forged.

I might add to Collins' rather circumlocutionary definition by loosely equating the imaginaire with Foucault's *épistémè*: "the condition of discourse's possibility".<sup>334</sup> Foucault's *épistémè* refers to the most general bases for specific discourses, as he seeks to describe broad epistemological fields that govern the possibilities of knowledge, power, and society over the course of human history. Unlike the *épistémè*, specific imaginaires are rooted in *particular* communities and their artistic and literary productions. However, like the *épistémè*, an

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<sup>333</sup> Collins 2010, 8.

<sup>334</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge, 2002, p xxiii-xxiv: "What I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *épistémè* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the space of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an 'archaeology'."

imaginaire underwrites discourses of knowledge and power, establishing a horizon of the accepted and the possible. The imaginaire is thus a hermeneutical arena: it sets the horizon of what is accepted and possible, mediated in iconographies, narrative tropes, doctrinal expressions, visionary experiences, dreams, artwork, and ritual imagescapes. It is the complex of meaningful images activated in mythology, doctrine, ritual, and historical lore that provides a medium for subject-constituting engagements. As Collins puts it: “it is the ensemble of what is imagined without implying falsity”.<sup>335</sup> The imaginaire is the catalyst for the articulation of agentive identities through pervasive images and narrative tropes that may be activated in ritualization.

Of course, the fields of images that underwrite subject-producing practices are not *sui generis*. Images – especially as they are constellated and contextualized into imaginaires – are inseparable from the knowledge and power regimes out of which they are produced, and which they, in turn, inflect. In other words, the imaginaire is always embedded in the social. The sociological term “the imaginary” (as in “the social imaginary”) reflects the mediation of social expectations via collated referential conceptions. As Manfred Steger and Paul James write:

Imaginaries are patterned convocations of the social whole. These deep-seated modes of understanding provide largely pre-reflexive parameters within which people imagine their social existence— expressed, for example, in conceptions of “the global,” “the national,” “the moral order of our time. Ontologies are patterned ways-of-being-in-the-world that are lived and experienced as the grounding conditions of the social—for example, linear time, territorial space, and individualized embodiment.<sup>336</sup>

My use of imaginaire incorporates both the “social imaginary” and the “ontological” as defined by Steger and James. The imaginaire convokes imageries in a way that establishes “pre-reflexive parameters”, resulting in “patterned ways of being-in-the-world that are lived and

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<sup>335</sup> Collins 1998, 73.

<sup>336</sup> Manfred B. Steger and Paul James. “Levels of Subjective Globalization: Ideologies, Imaginaries, Ontologies.” *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 12 (2013): 17-40, 23.

experienced as grounding conditions of the social”. Terms from hermeneutics and phenomenology such as *habitus*, or “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*) are also analogous to my use of *imaginaire*. However, in using *imaginaire* rather than other well-known interpretive terms, I wish to direct attention to the role of imagery, and also the imagination, in underwriting subjectivity-constituting and identity-confirming engagements.

An *imaginaire* is not strictly doctrinal in the sense of being announced as something to subscribe to. Rather, it is communicated in historiographic and cosmological narratives, in ritual imagescapes and protocols, in lore about the visionary exploits of an adept, and even in doxographies of doctrine and text. It arises intertextually and in the context of surrounding mythologies and ritual cultures. It is signified in denotations, but, more so, in connotation. In the case of the *Kabgyé*, the undergirding *imaginaire* is built from unique narratives, histories, ritual idioms, and doxographies of knowledge, and consists of arresting imageries of sexuality, violence, and subjugation. Indigenous characters from Tibetan lore are implicated in this imaginal structure, conscripted as both signifiers of disorder, and as agents of its forceful management. Thus, the texts communicate an overarching imaginal world of threat and response, while interacting with a broader context of Tibetan mythos; this is a world that calls for intervention and agency, and suggests avenues for a Buddhist mastery resonant with uniquely Tibetan expectations. Such agency can be achieved in the kinetic engagements of ritual practice, through which practitioners may enact ideal identities, and react to potential lifeworlds as communicated in underlying narratives and imagescapes.

The *imaginaire* is broader than the imaginal world of any particular text. We have seen how the *Kabgyé* tantras, auto-histories, and ritual texts proffer imaginal settings with which a reader/practitioner may immediately engage. The imaginal worlds of each of these texts are at

once unique, but also intertextually connected. We see that the specific characters, imageries, metaphors, and topoi present in any one text may be different from those of another from within the cycle. At the same time, they are united under an overarching, often implicit, imaginal world: one with a broad ethos, a specific mythos, and a replicable logos. I call this broader imaginal world connecting the imagescapes of each text, the imaginaire. In the case of the Kabgyé, the imaginaire entails conceptions about the utility of violence, the meaning of demonic imagery, the nature of unseen agents, and the qualifications of Buddhist mastery. Sometimes these conceptions are made explicit in the doctrines, historical narratives, and tantric rituals of the cycle. Sometimes they are merely implied. But the Kabgyé gains force as its situation within broader narratives and discourses – which are, themselves, embedded in overarching conceptions about Buddhist history and the nature of religious practice – are activated in engagements with deep mythological and praxical dimensions.

My general approach is indebted to Geertzian symbolic anthropology, especially as I attend to the ways that imageries, metaphors, and narrative topoi (a “system of symbols” as Geertz would have it) underwrite the doctrines and practices out of which people build intelligible worlds and possibilities for subjectivity. However, I do not suggest that the operations of the Kabgyé imaginaire unfold in a manner entirely divorced from the dynamics of social power. In the context of the Kabgyé, Nyangrel Nyima Özer and the custodians of Nyingma tradition advanced specific doctrinal, praxical, and historiographical conceptions in a competitive context within which institutions and individuals vied for influence. Within the denomination itself, ritualization of the Kabgyé cycle was in support of an institutionalized Buddhism that inculcated roles and relations of power within institutions, between institutions, and also between institutions and their supporting communities. Even within the immediate inner

circle of a tantric master, the bestowal and propagation of a tantric cycle involves a recapitulation of steeply hierarchical relationships sanctioned in the narratives and iconography of the tantric practice tradition. Plus, from an emic Tibetan perspective, the Kabgyé offers many means for regulating relations with non-human subjects, and the apotropaic ritualism at the heart of the cycle can be understood as a technique for the reclamation of power and a forging of reciprocal economies with agents considered by Tibetans to be entirely real. Thus, the Kabgyé tradition's distinctive doctrinal and praxical features were incorporated into broader discourses of identity that were inseparable from the negotiation of power on institutional, regional, local, communal, and autochthonous levels.

In terms of Tibetan Buddhist literature altogether, the tantric wrathful imaginaire was not monolithic, and certainly not owned by the Kabgyé tradition. There have been many iterations across specific doctrinal, self-cultivational, and ritual traditions centering on the iconography of fierce buddhas, re-assigned demons, and violent ritual prescriptions. These iterations flourished in India and Tibet, embedded in Hindu and Buddhist tantric lineages. As mentioned, the siddha-inflected tantrism of the New Translation movement amplified some of the horrific aspects of tantric iconography and practice beyond what was evidenced in the Indian Yoga and Mahāyoga materials long-propagated by the Early Translation practitioners. Sorcery and war magic were practiced by ritual masters from all denominations, and unique lore about protective divinities and tempestuous spirits persists everywhere in Tibet, incubated in highly local contexts. Within all this, the Kabgyé has long been a primary vehicle for religiosity in the Early Translation communities, as it amplified, systematized, and deployed this kind of imaginaire in a coherent (and massive) complex of doctrine, narrative, and ritual. In this, the Kabgyé imaginaire has drawn upon, and assimilated, broader imaginaires: that of wrathful Indian tantra, that of the

Mahāyoga tradition and its doctrino-ritual complex, that of Tibetan ritual culture with its geomantic orientation, as well as numerous other imaginal worlds, both trans-civilizational and local. Nyangrel (or whoever else was responsible for the development of the *Kabgyé*) curated these into a unique, and uniquely potent, vehicle for subjectivity, agency, and identity. Despite the *imgainaire*'s capacity to communicate coherence, it is impossible to cleanly delineate the boundaries of the mutually constitutive and embedded contexts underlying a scriptural work of such stature. Nonetheless, there is a way in which the *Kabgyé* collated these influences into something coherent which could serve practitioners in their attempts to forge religious identities. Without such coherence, a cycle like the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* could not have risen to such prominence as a prime resource for the articulation of denominational identities and religious subjectivities.

### **The *Kabgyé* Imaginaire**

More specifically described, the “*Kabgyé* imaginaire” is built out of the iconography of ultra-wrathful Buddhist divinities, Tibetan gods and demons to be tamed and liberated, a myth-history connecting the cycle to imagined origins in cremation ground gatherings of legendary tantric masters, an immense bibliography of scriptures with patently violent titles and contents, narratives of evocative discourse and intercourse between primordial buddhas in demonic forms, ritual imagescapes communicating surreal expressions of social and natural disorder, and protocols for the violent destruction of chaotic forces through sorcery, effigy, and propitiatory ritual magic. As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, the *Kabgyé* imaginaire coalesces most strongly around the picture of the harm-averting ritual adept as the paradigmatic Tantric Buddhist master. These themes are consistently advanced throughout the *Kabgyé*'s narrative, doctrinal, and ritual materials. It is a comprehensive world undergirded by historiographical

models, epistemological structures, and narratives of origins, and which could be activated in subjectivity-constituting ritual practices.

While this set of narrative and imaginal elements takes diverse expression across the *Deshek Dupa*'s textual terrain, its unifying theme is violence. The management of disordered forces is the core concern of the Kabgyé's mythology, iconography, and ritual formats. The imagery associated with the Kabgyé's thaumaturgical program is always subjugative, and sometimes overtly violent. Other important topoi within the Kabgyé imaginaire such as eroticism, bibliographia, and the overarching value of pristine gnosis are sublimated to the management of violence and the soteriological significance of "wrath" (*khro bo*, or *drag po*) as communicated in the narratives, iconographies, and ritual protocols of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. Of course, the degree of violence articulated in the Kabgyé tradition was presumably beyond that of most peoples' lived experience. While we cannot know for sure how dangerous life actually was in the highlands of Tibet, the terrifying demonism of the Kabgyé icons and their murderous ritual violence may have had little to do with people's daily experience.<sup>337</sup> We must entertain the possibility, then, that these terrifying imagescapes (and their crystallization into a coherent imaginaire), resonated by force of their very *difference*. Again, I turn to both the subjunctive theory of ritual, and Wedemeyer's use of connotative semiotics, to interpret the function of violent imageries in the context of the Kabgyé. Recall the subjunctive theory of ritual which suggests that ritual practices unfold in a domain entirely *disconnected* from lived reality. Our

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<sup>337</sup> As a counterpoint, it is worth considering the dangerous character of life on the Tibetan plateau. Alpine weather, geological instability, wild animals, animal butchery, roving bandits, warlords, vengeful villagers, and many other such dangers have long confronted inhabitants of the Himalayas and Tibetan highlands. It is possible that violence in one form or another was a regular feature of life in twelfth-century Lhodrak, and that the expression of violence in religious iconography and narrative literature was in no way taken to be antinomian. From this perspective, the Kabgyé's preoccupation with violent imagery would have been consonant with people's expectations, and resonant with their experiences. Nonetheless, the imageries present in the Kabgyé's tantras and ritual texts communicate a phantasmagoric world of demonic and overtly threatening imagery. The Kabgyé, in its scale and coherence, amplified fierce idioms in what was certainly a strategy for advancing a distinctive vision for Buddhist mastery.

narratological interpretation of ritual hinged on this understanding of the subjunctive character of narrative worlds and ritual imagescapes. It is in this subjunctive, or “as-if” setting – one bridged to the real world via the dual objective/subjective nature of the ritual object (“transitional objects” as Winnicott has it) – that new agencies can be experienced, and new identities confirmed. And recall the connotative semiological interpretation of tantric antinomianism, which suggests that imageries of sexuality, violence, and taboo consumption in tantric literature were meant to connote a semiotic field by way of which a practitioner could establish a set of self-significations in the service of new subjective modes. I think these perspectives help us to understand the presence of violence in the Kabgyé imaginaire, and I suggest that we can detect how images of violence *operated* as we appraise the role of these imageries as they coalesced into imaginaires that undergirded the nexus of Kabgyé narrative, doctrine, and practice.

### **Religious Subjectivity in the Confluence of Narrative, Doctrine, and Ritual Practice**

Religiosity – the productive or transformative, sustained engagement with religious ideas, practices, and modes of expression – is tempered in the confluence of doctrine, narrative, and ritual practice. These venues for religious engagement mutually support each other to yield a comprehensive arena for the articulation of identity and the construction of subjectivity.

Religious doctrines proffer conceptions about absolute orders and human potential, along with attendant ontological, epistemological, and ethical formulations. Narratives activate such conceptions in the advancement of imaginal worlds, often presented in historical terms, into which subjects can read themselves to underwrite new identities and agencies. Ritualized practices realize relationships and agencies sanctioned in high-order doctrinal commitments and communicated in narrative conceits. Taken together, these engagements constitute a comprehensive lifeworld by which people understand the universe and by which they may author

subjectivity with enhanced agency and confirmed identity. To gain the coherence necessary for this nexus of doctrine, narrative, and practice to be coordinated in the service of subjectivity, the nexus must be adhered through overarching topoi, idioms, imageries, and metaphors. The adhesive element required in such world-making and identity-authoring pursuits is the imaginaire.

The imaginaire is not just a collation of recurrent imageries. The imaginaire is an epistemic field built from related narratives and imageries as they are constellated and contextualized by broader concerns, including historiographical conceptions, discourses of power, and metaphysical presuppositions. Thus, the Kabgyé imaginaire is not just a collection of wrathful buddha images and violent imagescapes. The Kabgyé imaginaire is a broader ground of connected imageries and narratives destined to communicate what the world is, who we are, and what we could become. The imaginaire also facilitates, through ritualization, soteriological and social transformations in conformity with such conceptions. Buddhological doctrines, *a priori* conceptions about social and natural orders, historiographical conceits, and paradigms of religious mastery are all inculcated in the imaginaire; they are given voice through the iconographic, visionary, and narrative imageries out of which the Kabgyé cosmos is articulated. Specifically, the Kabgyé imaginaire communicates a world of threat and response, and imagines mastery in terms of the capability to navigate between the domains of order and disorder to dispatch harms. It also suggests that violence, sexuality, and other resources of lived experience, are commensurate with the ground of pristine gnosis.

### **Coherence and Discontinuity**

While my description of the Kabgyé imaginaire has focused on its capacity to coherently underwrite doctrinal, narrative, and ritual engagements, it is also important to keep in mind the inevitable *discontinuities* evident in the history of any religious tradition. Consultation of the

literary-historical record typically reveals blatant discrepancies between doctrinal dictates and the actual character of practices as they were carried out by adherents. Such discontinuities are actually highly productive. As religious traditions seek to maintain relevance in ever-shifting social and discursive contexts, ruptures between normative expectations and the actualities of practice may drive a tradition towards responsive innovation. While religion is often understood to function like an overarching model for intelligible experience (a *logos*, a system of symbols, or a structure of intelligibility), it is also the case that individuals often find meaning in the disruption of doctrinal or sectarian identities. Indeed, autobiographical literature often reveals that the discontinuous, the unexpected, and the unwanted are the catalysts for transformation and the sites of self-cultivation. All of this is to acknowledge that, despite the coherence activated in the constellation of a specific imaginaire, incoherence, discontinuity, and rupture may be as catalytic to religious subjectivity as are the forces of coherence and normalization. Nonetheless, there is no question that the Kabgyé persisted as a resource for the articulation of Nyingma identity through supplying a consistent set of imaginal opportunities built around specific notions of history, tantric doctrine, and conceptions for mastery. Let us therefore look more specifically at Kabgyé doctrines, narratives, and ritualism in the context of the Kabgyé imaginaire to appraise how this nexus of factors fostered religious subjectivity, or, as Kant might put it, the “conditions of possibility” (*Bedingungen der Möglichkeit*). The aim here is not to fully document the myriad doctrinal propositions, narrative conceits, and varieties of ritual practice included in the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*. Rather, I wish to elucidate the interwoven quality of doctrine, narrative, and ritual practice, and to show how the confluence of these aspects undergirds the articulation of identity and the construction of agentive subjectivities for tantric practitioners.

## Doctrinal Currents

While this dissertation has not attended to the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s exegetical traditions in any detail (a project which would be immensely profitable for understanding the Tibetan reception of Mahāyoga), we may document some of the doctrinal undercurrents articulated in texts such as *The King of Root Tantras*, *The Arising* auto-history, and in the Kabgyé's ritual liturgies. Some analyses of the Kabgyé's specific buddhological formulations and rhetorical positions have already been traced in Chapter Four. Here, I endeavor to document some of the more general orientations of the core tantric materials towards articulating the character and operations of the Kabgyé imaginaire. Specifically, we will see how conceptions regarding the utility of violence, the value of apotropaic mastery, and the soteriology of bliss are articulated in the Kabgyé cycle. These doctrinal orientations define the contours of the Kabgyé world, and provide a foundation from which Kabgyé narratives and ritual practices gain transformative impact.

Simply put, religious doctrines function to communicate a vision for what the world is, and what is possible for human beings within it. Ontology, epistemology, ethics, and self-cultivational models are all advanced through doctrinal formulations, which may be overtly stated as philosophical propositions, or tacitly communicated through narratives and ritual texts. The Kabgyé root tantras, the cycle's historical and supplementary materials, and the various ritual texts that fill out the *Deshek Dupa* corpus all entail "doctrinal" dimensions in as much as they communicate – sometimes explicitly, sometimes tacitly – propositions about the nature of the world and peoples' capacity for transformation within it. The articulation of ontological, epistemological, and ethical formulations is an essential feature of religion in any context, and the Kabgyé literature constitutes a specific iteration of such formulations to distinguish itself as a unique, and legitimate, Mahāyoga Tantric Buddhist tradition.

Tantric scriptures in general proffer a world in which violence and sexuality are primary actants: they are natural forces which can disrupt socio-natural orders, or which can be wielded to achieve soteriological mastery. Mahāyoga is partially defined by the inclusion of sexual congress (“union”, *sbyor ba*), and sacrificial violence (“liberation”, *sgrol ba*), in its narratives and ritual programs. The Kabgyé entails both of these elements in its framing narratives, although its rituals are almost exclusively concerned with subjugative violence and the aversion of demonic harms. The Kabgyé was one iteration of tantra’s agentic reclamation of the demonic and the violent, and its coordination with other literary topoi – for example, the emergent vision of the harm-averting ritual adept as the paradigmatic Buddhist master – resulted in a set of interlocking imaginaires which would inform not just Nyingma tradition, but, to some degree, the intellectual topography of Tibetan Buddhism altogether. In this, the wrathful tantrism of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* positions violence at the center of a constellation of Mahāyoga concepts, tying violence to the nature of reality in both its gnosis and manifest dimensions, and positioning its management as a primary activity for self-cultivational actors. In this doctrinal terrain, violence stands for a broader tantric attitude towards the utility of all conventionally “negative” impulses: desire, aggression, pride, envy, and ignorance.

Within the Kabgyé materials, much effort is devoted to demonstrating the commensurability of violence with the buddhology of pristine cognition. We have seen how the origin-narrative of the cycle’s articulation through the “three lineages” of “Mind”, “Sign”, and “Word” functions to sanction the wrathful iconography of the Kabgyé mandalas, and to justify the revelation of new scriptures by associating these elements with the deepest strata of reality. Specifically, the story of the Kabgyé’s auto-percolation from primordial reality (*chos nyid*, Skt. *dharmatā*) via the Lineage of the Conqueror’s Mind-State (*rgyal ba’i dgongs pa brgyud*),

through the Lineage of Mystic Signs (*rig 'dzin brda brgyud*), and into the Aural Lineage of Humans (*gang zag snyan brgyud*), functions to explain how, and why, a new cycle – and one explicitly embracive of destructive impulses – might appear in the world. Likewise, the introductory narratives for each of the cycle's root tantras always return to the buddhological connection between the iconography of the wrathful mandala and the primordial substrate of pristine cognition. And while the ritual violence evident in Kabgyé ritual texts suggests little affiliation with normative Buddhist goals, terminological cues are regularly supplied to link apotropaic ritual practice with the general parameters of Buddhist praxis. Thus, tantric doctrinal commitments are evidenced within every kind of Kabgyé text, even though, as paradigmatic of the ritual-centric Accomplishment Class of Mahāyoga, very limited overt doctrinal didacticism is present in these sources. When explicitly doctrinal statements do appear in the tantras' framing narratives – for example, in the articulation of the connection between wrathful imagery and pristine cognition – we see an enduring concern that the cycle justify its existence vis-à-vis philosophical commitments consistent with orthodox tantric buddhology.

Alongside attention to violence as a primary element of both mundane and enlightened realities, the Kabgyé defines human potential around violence's management. The Kabgyé logos circulates around a dialectic of danger and order, and the most important characters within the Kabgyé imaginal world are those who can traverse, and facilitate transition between, threatening forces and ordered realities. This apotropaic logos is “doctrinal” in as much as the Kabgyé communicates a “model of” (and, in its ritual orientation, a “model for”) reality in which the world consists of forces that are at once dangerous, and also powerfully conducive to the reclamation of mastery. This dialectical reality of harm and order is unequivocally communicated in the imagery of the Kabgyé mandalas, which are populated by mundane gods

and demons, as well as re-assigned demon-buddhas at the center. These gods and demons – the Drekpa of the Eight Classes, and so forth – are at once the entities to be subdued by the Kabgyé master, and also the entities who, once socialized into the apotropaic mandala, facilitate the master’s control over apparent reality. Thus, the transversal of the registers of danger and order, and the double-affiliation of a tantric master with the domain of enlightened agency and the worldly society of autochthonous entities, yields ultimate authority in a distinctive vision for human potential that hinges on the reclamation of tempestuous (and sometimes patently “dark”) forces. If doctrine functions to articulate the ontological contours of the world, and to communicate the self-cultivational potential of human beings, we can see how the Kabgyé scriptures articulate a cosmos in which violence and its embracive management are fundamental tropes. According to this, power is to be gained in the reclamation of threatening forces, a reclamation that hinges on the recognition of the true value of violence as a natural, spontaneous, and even compassionate expression of primordial gnosis. This embrace of dangerous, transitional, and conventionally unmanageable phenomena is at the doctrinal core of tantra altogether, and the Kabgyé’s unique buddhology, demonology, and vision for apotropaic mastery advances the *vajrayana*’s broad commitment to immediate soteriology.

In addition to its distinctive orientation to violence and its management, the Kabgyé also communicates the tantric soteriology of bliss, emblemized in overtly sexual idioms and erotically evocative narrative episodes. The introductions to the Kabgyé tantras describe the discourse and intercourse between Kuntu Zangpo and Kuntu Zangmo, and the subsequent gynogenesis of the Kabgyé mandalas. Sexual tension and liberative proliferation are evoked in these passages, such as this from the *King of Root Tantras*:

By the radiance of taking great pleasure in the sky-faced wrathful lady,  
gazing and making the offering of pleasure in the body of the lady, from

light rays of bodhisattvas [emerging] from the space of the lady, by inconceivable wrathful emanations proliferating in all ten directions, Lord Chemchok annihilated, liberated, and tamed all the worldly arrogant ones, the twenty-one great gods and so forth.<sup>338</sup>

According to Mahāyoga exegesis in general, these narratives of intercourse and mandalic genesis are interpretable as descriptions of the primordial ground's (*gzhi*) auto-expressive nature, and of the ontological substrate's qualitative dimensions. Like violence, bliss is implicated both as a primary quality of phenomena, and as a basis for self-cultivation. The recurring generation of the Kabgyé mandalas out of the copulation of primordial Buddhas articulates the capacity of the primordial ground (*chos nyid*, "reality itself") to continually manifest myriad phenomena which can be experienced in either gnosis or deluded ways (or, from a deeply tantric perspective, as at once gnosis *and* deluded).

We have no further need to unpack the subtle aspects of this kind of buddhology here. Rather, I hope it is clear that basic tantric doctrines are given voice through the Kabgyé's textual materials, even in lieu of overtly philosophical didacticism. These doctrinal ideas will inform the Kabgyé imaginaire as it underwrites possibilities for subjectivity and identity in narrative and ritual engagements. We now return to Kabgyé narrativity to see how the Kabgyé's undergirding doctrines are given voice and incorporated into the *Deshek Dupa*'s imaginal world.

### **Narrativity**

The Kabgyé narrative world provides the imaginal settings and mytho-historical frames within which the ontological, epistemological, and ethical formulations of the Kabgyé's tantric doctrines are communicated. Narratives activate doctrinal conceptions in the advancement of imaginal worlds, often presented in historical terms, into which subjects can implicate

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<sup>338</sup> *The King of Root Tantras*, 306: *yab chem chog gis yum khro mo gnam zhal ma la dgyes pa chen po'i mdangs gyis gzigs te/yum gyi sku la dgyes pa'i mchod pa phul bas/yum gyi mkha' las byang chub kyi sems kyi 'od zer las sprul pa'i khro bo bsam gyis mi khyab pa phyogs bcu thams cad du 'phros pas/ 'jig rten gyi dregs pa can/ lha chen po nyi shu rtsa gcig la tsogs pa thams cad bsgal te bdul zhing tshar bcaad/*

themselves to underwrite new identities and agencies. That is, the framing mythological narratives of the Kabgyé tantras and ritual texts open an alternative imaginal space within which readers may confirm specific ontological realities, and participate in ongoing identity-constituting dramas.<sup>339</sup> The Kabgyé mythologies' setting in Kuntu Zangpo's primordial domain, and in the visionary mandalic realm of the "Sign lineage" (*brda brgyud*), are quintessential subjunctive spaces: they are settings that stand apart from, but also undergird, mundane reality. Also, in resonating on both synchronic and diachronic registers, these narratives at once communicate the character of ontological reality, while instantiating a temporal narrative with which readers can participate. Thus, the tantric narratives edify readers on multiple levels: they operate subjunctively, they communicate ontological commitments, and they inscribe readers into ongoing narrative dramas which can be enacted in ritualized practice.

We have seen Kabgyé narrativity unfold in three textual venues: in the mytho-historical expositions contextualizing the Kabgyé cycles (i.e., *The Arising* auto-history along with the *Clear Lamp* narrative bibliography)<sup>340</sup>, in the framing mythologies (the *gleng gzhi*, or

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<sup>339</sup> By "readers" I generally refer to adherents who engage the tantric narrative world, either as readers of texts, as hearers in ritualized settings, or as adherents otherwise immersed in the narrative and iconographic imagescapes of these tantras. Engagement with tantric sources would rarely be casual. Access to these texts is generally regulated by initiatory protocols, the standards for engagement dictated by pedagogical tradition. One might find oneself studying these tantras in the context of reception of the esoteric self-cultivational tradition, in the context of scholasticism, in the context of communal ritual practice (e.g., during mass initiation rituals (*dbang skur*) wherein lineal histories are read aloud), or simply in the immersion in the broader Kabgyé imaginaire wherein iconographies and narrative episodes are depicted on temple walls, through 'cham dance performances, or by way of other aesthetic productions that constitute life in and around Tibetan Buddhist temples.

<sup>340</sup> Supplementary historical literature should also be considered part of an overall Kabgyé narrativity. Lore about the provenance of the Kabgyé, and the career of Nyangrel and his lineal descendants, figure prominently in any emic historical interpretation of the cycle. The lineal biographies and historical exegeses included in most *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* editions should also be considered important narrative features of the broader *Kabgyé* tradition. However, for the sake of simplicity, I restrict my appraisal here to "auto-historical" literature: i.e., historical narratives about the Kabgyé's origins from within the Kabgyé cycle. Biographical and supplementary historical literature incorporates layers of intertextuality, rhetoric and polemics, and intersects with other discursive contexts. It is through these materials that the Kabgyé is bridged with broader historiographical and denominational identities. Detailed analysis of the role of such supplementary historical literature is certainly worthwhile, but beyond the purview of this present study. Again, I direct the reader to Daniel Hirshberg's scholarship on Nyangrel's biographical literature for a deeper exploration of these issues.

“introductions”) of the tantras (specifically, those found within the *King of Root Tantras* and its chapters); and in the micro-narratives of different ritual texts, as explored in Chapter Six.<sup>341</sup>

These narrative venues overlap in the inclusion of specific characters, common narrative settings, and shared idioms. Thus, they are coordinated in a coherent narrativity that gives expression to the Kabgyé imaginaire. Each of these narrative venues also entails synchronic and diachronic dimensions. That is, the narratives can be interpreted synchronically as articulations of doctrinal principles, or diachronically as historical stories about the origin and trajectory of things. Both the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of these narratives are important, as they work together to effectuate self-understanding in both absolute-ontological, and temporally-contextualized terms. I will suggest that both kinds of self-conceptions – ontological and historical – are crucially implicated in the capacity of the doctrine-narrative-ritual complex to constitute identity and anchor religious subjectivity.

### **Synchronic Narrativity**

In general, the synchronic aspect of Mahāyoga mythology functions to communicate fundamental tantric ideas, particularly the commensurability of manifest phenomena with the noumenal substrate, or ground (*kun gzhi*). That is, the narratives of mandala-producing intercourse between primordial buddhas, and the tale of tantra’s auto-emanation and redaction through the lineages of Mind, Sign, and Word, communicate how myriad phenomena can manifest out of an unconditioned, but qualitatively endowed, substrate. These cosmogonic mythologies also validate the emergence of new teachings and religious iconographies in accounting for the disclosure of phenomena, and gnosis, out of the auto-expressive compassion

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<sup>341</sup> Each ritual liturgy advances its own micro-narrative, proffering an imaginal setting populated with specific kinds of agents, and calling for specific kinds of interventions. However, as constituent elements of the Kabgyé imaginaire, it is important to observe how the imaginal worlds of these discrete ritual texts cohere in a broader meta-narrative, or aggregate imagescape. In other words, there is a broader Kabgyé ritual narrativity that assumes a given range of characters, forces, agencies, and goals.

of the primordial Buddha. As explored in the above discussion of the Kabgyé's doctrinalism, tantric soteriology hinges on the commensurability of all phenomena with the substrate of pristine gnosis. In Mahāyoga tantras, this logos is given voice in portrayals of the discourse and intercourse between primordial agents, and the cosmogonic proliferation of visionary and material worlds. Whereas "Tantra Class" scriptures such as the *Secret Nucleus* tend to explicitly decode tantric mythologies by providing basic doctrinal interpretations of the narrative action, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s root tantras generally forego much propositional doctrinalism as they quickly proceed between narrative episodes wherein the generation of mandalas is described. The Kabgyé's root tantras stick to a narrative format, providing little interpretive guidance regarding the doctrinal meaning of the framing mythologies.

We may speculate as to why mythological narratives are employed to communicate the philosophical commitments at the basis of tantra. That is, why are complex philosophical issues explored through narrative media, rather than as overtly philosophical propositions and formal arguments? For one, tantra's core philosophical concern – the commensurability of variegated manifest phenomena with a unitary substratic reality – is difficult to propositionally articulate. Early/Theravada, Mahayana, and Tantric traditions have all made efforts to argue distinctive solutions to this buddhological problem. It may be that these concepts are more effectively communicated through stories in which philosophical principles are personified as actants, and the potential of subjects to realize soteriological conclusions is inculcated. However, I suggest that it is also crucial to understand how tantric buddhology is meant to undergird, or reflect, transformational *experience*. Tantra is, first and foremost, a mode of praxis, and its doctrinal commitments are best given voice in a narrativity that can readily intersect with practice regimes at the heart of the tantric project. In other words, as tantra is fully oriented to effectuating transformational experience – it is, quite explicitly, a "method" (*thabs*, Skt. *upāya*) – its constituent elements must be coordinated in the service of subjectivity-generating practices. As I have been arguing, this coordination happens by way of a coherent imaginaire, given voice in iconographies, mythologies, and liturgical narratives. In this, doctrine is aestheticized to communicate ontological principles and suggest directions for cultivation. By communicating

foundational doctrines through resonant imageries and idioms, a setting is provided for actionable praxis through which soteriological principles may be realized. Rituals depend on the imaginal vocabularies of narratives communicating essential doctrinal formulations. The framing narratives thus bridge the doctrinal and the praxical by establishing a subjunctive imaginal space. The elements of this space – the images, idioms, and narrative action – must resonate with readers and provide an overarching arena within which subject-constituting practices can unfold. The narrativization of profound buddhology dealing with the trans-conceptual substrate of reality thus opens an access point by which a narrative setting, through ritualization, may become a lifeworld: an arena with which subjects engage to constitute a field of intelligible intersubjective engagements. However, for this complex of doctrine, narrative, and praxis to prove truly catalytic, it must also resonate diachronically, projecting historicized trajectories into which adherents can read themselves, and gain identity in the recapitulation of recurrent dramas.

### **Narrative Diachrony**

The Kabgyé's framing narratives describe the origin of visionary realms – the Kabgyé mandalas – out of the auto-expressive compassion of the primordial ground. Despite the obvious synchronic, or phenomenological, register of these myths, there is no reason to believe that these cosmogonic stories were not also interpreted as actual accounts of the origin of things. While we do not know how “belief” figured in the devotional lives of medieval Tantric Buddhists, Mahāyoga mythologies explicitly functioned as stories about the origins of phenomena in visionary and manifest dimensions. Whether or not they were interpreted literally, their self-presentation as historical accounts is critical to tantric mythology's capacity to catalyze specific religious identities. As temporalized narratives, these cosmogonic mythologies project an open-ended trajectory: one which implicates a reader, and which informs the activation of identity through ritualized practices derived from the foundational narratives' idioms and events. The mytho-historical narratives of the Kabgyé's origins in primordial, visionary, and manifest realities establish a narrative trajectory into which the Kabgyé practitioner is inscribed by virtue of immersion in the Kabgyé imaginal world with its regimes of practice. As the Kabgyé

mandalas, according to these framing narratives, derive from the activity of theogenic figures, practices situated in the Kabgyé's mandalic imaginal realm become venues for the articulation of specific identities in confirmation of broader understandings of the sacred origins and nature of things. For the Kabgyé practitioner, the cosmogonic deeds told in the tantric narratives put into motion forces that continually resound, and the demon-control articulated in its ritualism is replicated in practice programs circulating around Kabgyé idioms and figures. Kabgyé rites replicate the originary deeds of cosmic figures, and the Kabgyé narratives, in their diachronic dimension, open a venue for the affiliative confirmation of specific identities. Thus, the "mytho-historical" character of the Kabgyé's framing narratives undergirds the identity-confirming potential of the doctrine-narrative-ritual complex. The capacity of Kabgyé narrativity to communicate ontological conceptions while inscribing adherents in ongoing dramas expressing the history and vision for a specific kind of mastery is an essential force in the overall constitution of agency, identity, and religious subjectivity at the heart of Nyingma religiosity. Narrativity provides the medium for the activation of doctrinal commitments and the execution of practices out of which a Kabgyé practitioner defines himself. However, it is ultimately through ritual practice that a subject is cast into the unique lifeworld articulated in the overarching narrativity of this tradition.

### **Kabgyé Ritualism: from mythology to lifeworld**

The efficacy of ritualized practice is best understood as a function of its interface with undergirding doctrines and the imaginal settings of mytho-historical narratives. Religious doctrines articulate ontological, epistemological, and ethical conceptions, while mythologies deploy imaginal settings and diachronic plots informing the activation of new identities. Ritualized practices then realize the agencies and relationships sanctioned in high-order doctrinal commitments and communicated in narrative settings. It is thus through the confluence of

doctrine, narrative, and ritual that transformed subjectivities may emerge. In the case of the Kabgyé, framing mythologies and liturgical narratives lay out the imaginal field within which tantric ideas about the value of violence and other negativities, and the potential of certain kinds of mastery, are communicated, and within which actionable practices may be carried out. In concert with undergirding doctrines and an overarching narrativity, the execution of self-cultivational and supplementary ritual forges transformed subjectivities as practitioners experience themselves as participants in sacred recursive dramas sanctioned in sacred ontologies and cultivational visions, and contextualized by broader historiographical conceptions.

Ritualized modes of self-cultivation, such as *sgrub thabs* or *las byang* (Skt. *sādhana*), are expressly transformative, as a practitioner employs imaginative techniques to inhabit a visualized, or subjunctive, sacred domain whereby transformation of the perceptuo-cognitive apparatus is effectuated. The cultivational domain – the mandala of the Kabgyé heruka – is at once imagined, and “real”, as the framing narratives have described the proliferation of such visionary realms from the compassionate activity of primordial agents. Supplementary ritual programs, such as the apotropaic rites for which the *Deshek Dupa* is known, are also catalytic of agency, identity, and religious subjectivity in as much as these practice programs draw on narrative templates, idioms, and constellated images to effectuate the self-experience of practitioners as actants in ongoing dramas tied to the origins of Buddhism and the Nyingma community. The execution of the Kabgyé Drupchen, for example, re-enacts the demon-taming exploits of Tibet’s original tantric master, Padmasambhava, who, himself, gained his abilities through the practice of the Kabgyé mandalas, which are themselves expressive of the compassion of Kuntu Zangpo. Kabgyé ritualism, then, is embedded in, and made intelligible by, interlocking narrative frames. The execution of these rites recalls the conditions for Buddhism’s

establishment in the world, and in the Land of Snow, while confirming the authority of the community in custody of this lore and ritual technology.

Self-cultivational and apotropaic ritual practices gain transformative potential in the activation of ontologies and identities communicated in the narrative and doctrinal materials, and expressed through the Kabgyé imaginaire. As the imagination is the operative tool in this type of praxis, the imaginaire is the critical element behind the intelligibility of these ritual practices and their settings. The Kabgyé imaginaire facilitates the transformative capacity of ritualized practice in activating the ontologies and identities communicated in foundational stories.

Of course, ritual is also a site for the negotiation of relations, both in its inculcation of knowledge regimes, and in its regulative kinetic dimensions (for example, in its spatial arrangements and the choreography of bodies). Thus, ritual is always nested in discursive and social contexts, and its practice amounts to far more than the mere execution of prescribed actions in isolated settings. As ritual practice, despite its subjunctive character, is situated within broader social and discursive contexts, I use the term “ritualism” to refer to ritual’s contextualization in a web of forces and conceptions that surround and give meaning to ritualized activity, and which render ritual effective towards personal, communal, and doctrinally-defined goals. When such webs of signification and action are regularized to render ritual performance a significant driver of subjectivity – when ritual, embedded in a broader network of cultural factors, becomes a repeatable technique of communal and individual identity – we can talk about “ritualism” as a field of discourse and practice contextualizing specific ritual acts. “Kabgyé ritualism” refers not only to the regularized performance of specific rites, but to the overall suite of protocols, narrativities, institutional and historiographical packaging, and also modes of material exchange, which contextualize Kabgyé practice. Kabgyé ritualism is made intelligible,

and is connected to the domains of doctrine and myth, through the Kabgyé imaginaire: the coherent field of images and narrative topoi which act as the medium for ritual's transformative potential. It is a potential catalyzed in the nexus of ideas about reality, stories about cosmic origins, and in protocols for enacting transformed agencies.

All of this is to recognize the mutually-constitutive relationship between the domains of doctrine, narrative, and ritualized practice, and the situated character of this nexus within broader fields of discourse and social practice. My contention is that this confluence of forces is cohered through a specific imaginal world which deploys regularized sets of idioms, imageries, and hermeneutical conditions to undergird the effectuation of specific subjectivities, agencies, and identities. In the case of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*, I have attempted to account for the enduring relevance of this scripture in terms of its capacity to supply an imaginaire that continually resonated for Nyingma adherents. It is through the Kabgyé imaginaire, and its activation in ritual practices, that a collection of ideas, stories, and rites becomes a lifeworld: a field of engagement in which ontologies, agentive possibilities, hermeneutical expectations, and conditions for exchange are mediated by constellated images, imaginal worlds, and narrative topoi.<sup>342</sup> The Kabgyé lifeworld is one in which Buddhists experience themselves as participants in an ongoing story of Buddhism's maintenance in an inhospitable natural and social environment, as subjects capable of self-cultivational accomplishment through the reclamation of demonic forces, as members of a community tied to the very origins and structure of esoteric knowledge, and as agents capable of managing disorder in expression of a distinctive vision of religious mastery.

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<sup>342</sup> While Husserlian phenomenology initially advanced the term *lebenswelt* to refer to “the realm of original self-evidences...the world of straightforward intersubjective experience”, sociological appropriations of the term, such as by Schütz and Habermas, attend to the broad fields of shared meaning that also configure the inhabitation of personal and collective lifeworlds. I venture further in my appropriation of the term to include the semiotic or imaginal fields - collective and individual - that contribute to the configuration of immediate experience. See Husserl 1970, 127–128, 133; Habermas 1987, vol. 2, 113-153; also, Schütz 1973.

The Kabgyé lifeworld is intersubjective, as it hinges on the interface with agents of all kinds – most often, dangerous ones – and claims subjectivity in the dialogue between the forces of danger and order. Of course, this particular lifeworld is situated within other *habiti*, both in harmony and in competition. It is thus crucial to understand the ways in which ideas about reality, stories about the origins of things, and regimes of praxis are intertwined, and rendered intelligible by a coherent imaginal world with great power in determining the conditions of transformation, identity, and being.

## Final Reflections

My exploration of the Kabgyé tradition has been stimulated by an insight gained early on in my research. As I initially set out to learn what the Kabgyé “meant” in terms of its unique doctrines and ritual programs, I quickly came to detect that more important perspectives might circulate around the question of what the Kabgyé “meant to Nyingmapas” in specific contexts. That is, as a historian of Tibetan Buddhism, and as a religionist, my attention has been drawn to how the Kabgyé contributed to the efforts of its individual practitioners, and those of the institutions responsible for its custody, to articulate responsive identities and forge agentive Buddhist subjectivities in specific historical contexts. As my research unfolded, particularly in Tibetan settings, I was encouraged in this direction by observing the Kabgyé’s great rhetorical and imagological value: a value which seemed to stand in contrast to the apparent obscurity of the *Eight Teachings* as a self-cultivational tantric system. The ubiquity of Kabgyé iconography on temple walls, the centrality of Kabgyé templates in organizing scriptural materials, the influence of Kabgyé mytho-historical narratives, and the rhetoric about the importance of the Kabgyé’s divinities seemed to contrast with the relative invisibility of Kabgyé practice and study in Nyingma settings, both in Tibet and in exile. Perhaps this obscurity is attributable to the Kabgyé’s deep esoterism and, even by Tibetan standards, arresting content; or, perhaps it is related to the complexity of its practice protocols, now superseded by abbreviated ritual formats currently popular with Nyingmapa adherents. However, the prevalence of Kabgyé imagery, rhetoric, and narratives signals the *Eight Teachings*’ deep legacy and its pervasive influence over how the Nyingmapas have come to imagine themselves. This is confirmed in the Kabgyé’s reception and publication history, as we see adepts and institutions turn to the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* again and again in their efforts to articulate collective identities, and to reform their

tradition in times of inter-institutional pressures. In examining the contents of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* corpora, and in observing its use in temple life, I have observed that the Kabgyé is best-regarded as a ritual tradition: one of great value in securing Nyingma communities and practitioners. The *Eight Teachings* proffered a format for the kind of ritual intercession continually mandated by the omnipresent threat of tempestuous entities and contestive social forces on the Tibetan plateau. The recurring subjugation of these threats is a vital element of Tibetan Buddhist religiosity, particularly for the lay-ritualist Nyingmapas, and one which has been under-appreciated in scholarly descriptions of Tibetan Buddhism. As I have attempted to show in my interpretation of Kabgyé literature, it was a cycle that forwarded a conception of religious mastery hinging on idioms of harm-aversion, demon-control, and thaumaturgical prowess. Such idioms were particularly empowering for the Nyingmapa, the Tibetan denomination most known for its embrace of non-monastic ritual professionalism. The Kabgyé's coordination with Nyingma historiography makes clear how this cycle undergirded a specific denominational identity, and provided a venue for the articulation of Buddhist identities commensurate with a vision for tantric mastery long resonant for Tibetans. In sum, the Kabgyé is best-described as a vital resource for Nyingmapas as they authored their distinctive denominational identity and effectuated tantric subjectivities in a shifting cultural terrain. In addition to providing ritual programs for self-cultivation and the management of socio-natural dangers, the Kabgyé supplied imaginal resources out of which Nyingmapas could author themselves. I have thus directed my attention to the Kabgyé imaginaire, attempting to describe the Kabgyé's imaginal world as an overarching matrix for the development of subjectivity-generating and identity-confirming religiosities. Indeed, the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* is especially rich in how it signifies the origins of sacred knowledge, how it signifies a distinctive kind of

religious experience and mode of mastery, and how it signifies the domestication of Buddhism and the achievement possible by a Buddhist master capable of navigating a terrain of violence and its management. The Kabgyé advanced a daring vision for the embrace of demonic forces; it sanctified violence and other negativities in a distinctive Mahāyoga buddhology; it undergirded the identity of Tibetan Buddhism's founding figures and their apotropaic deeds; it incorporated the gods, demons, and magical lore of Tibetan tradition; and it was paradigmatic of a type of tantric literature entailing mythologies, narratives, and ritual regimes uniquely resonant for Tibetans. The importance of the *Eight Teachings* far exceeds the impact of its specific doctrinal propositions and its doxographic position within a diverse array of sub-traditions. The Kabgyé's influence lies in how it has contributed to the very definition of the Nyingma – and the Tibetan Buddhist – world, offering an arena within which identities, subjectivities and agencies may continually be worked out.

My study of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* cycle marks an initial attempt to introduce this essential tradition to Buddhist scholarship. My intention has been to offer an informative background, trace a general history, and carry out a preliminary literary analysis of this tantric cycle, while observing its contextualization in the social history and the buddhological imagination of Tibetans in specific historical frames. This initial – and admittedly superficial – exploration of the *Eight Teachings* opens many further directions for scholarship focusing on this tradition, on the development of the Nyingma denomination in general, and on the matrix of imaginal engagements out of which Tibetan Buddhists authored their identities. Some avenues for further exploration include a more thorough reading of the core tantric materials and of the commentarial tradition to elucidate the Kabgyé's unique take on Mahāyoga tantrism. Charting continuities and divergences with transmitted tantric systems may reveal much about the

attempts of Tibetans to make tantric Buddhism their own in the post-fragmentation period. A careful documentation of the Kabgyé's doctrinal architecture might also shed light on the dialogue of ideas and doxographical conceptions in a critical period for the development of Tibetan Buddhism. In addition, my reception and publication history of the *Deshek Dupa* has been cursory, meant to illuminate some general patterns in the history of this cycle in classical Tibet. A more careful documentation of the Kabgyé's transit through specific lineages, and its treatment at the hands of specific luminaries, is necessary to truly determine the influence of this cycle within the broader suite of Nyingma sub-traditions. My work has also neglected the other major Kabgyé cycles, such as those of Guru Chowang and Rigzin Godem. Daniel Hirshberg is currently researching the literary and rhetorical connection between the three principal Kabgyé cycles, and his work promises to contribute much to our understanding of how the Kabgyé inflected the development of the Nyingma tradition as it was curated by these founding figures. The development of Nyingma institutions in Eastern Tibet is also an especially rich arena for exploring issues of institutional authority and the expectations for religious mastery in a contentious socio-political context. While recent and forthcoming work is advancing our knowledge about the history of specific institutions in this period, attention to the treatment of particular cycles and ritual traditions would be an excellent way to document emergent ideas about the role of Buddhist institutions and masters, and the purpose of religious practice in the context of Tibet's pre-modern period. Jacob Dalton's documentation of the exegetical and ritual treatment of *The Gathering of Intentions Sutra* is a good example of such an approach to describing Tibetan religious history through the life-story of a particular scriptural corpus. Likewise, in the realm of textual study, a more careful documentation of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s publication and circulation in Eastern Tibet, U-Tsang, and Bhutan may reveal networks

of influence between regions and institutions. Cathy Cantwell's current project documenting iterations of the Kabgyé's *phur ba 'dus pa* tantra is one example of a text-critical approach to these materials that will yield historical insight about the evolution of this tradition. In addition to textual study, ethnographic documentation of Kabgyé practice would be of enormous benefit in advancing some of the lines of inquiry initiated in this dissertation. Specifically, a complete documentation of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa Drupchen* as it is currently carried out at Nyingma temples would do much to refine my insights about ritual practice as a crucible for the articulation of identity, agency, and subjectivity. My research is lacking in this regard, and I still aspire to carefully document the execution of the Kabgyé Drupchen at Katok, Dzogchen, Shechen, or Rebkong in the hopes of refining my interpretive model of tantric ritualism. Finally, a more robust interpretation of the concept of the imaginaire and of its Kabgyé's iteration is certainly in order. Making use of phenomenological and sociological perspectives, such as those of Schütz and Habermas, promises a rich exploration of the complex of influences behind the inhabitation of religious lifeworlds. Plus, a sustained engagement with the narratology of Paul Ricoeur may add nuance to my theorization of the subject-constituting force of religious narrativity.

In conclusion, my scholarship seeks to decompartmentalize the constituent factors of religiosity, showing how doctrinal propositions, narrative imagination, and the kinetics of ritualized practice intersect to direct the transformation of subjectivity for adherents. The nexus of doctrine, narrative, and praxis resonates with contextual discourses and social forms, gaining intelligibility through situation within overarching knowledge regimes, networks of power, modes of exchange, and interpretive *habiti*. Such a holistic approach to understanding the meaning-making and world-constituting capacity of religion is essential to properly appreciate

the role of images, stories, rituals, and collective identities that propel the subjectivity of adherents. While there is much to gain by elucidating Tibetan Buddhism's scintillating philosophical doctrines, by tracing its narrative traditions, and by documenting its many self-cultivational and intercessionary ritual techniques, I aver that it is in an intersectional, comprehensive, and historically contextualized perspective that we can best understand how Buddhism was a force for articulating identity, agency, and subjectivity for the people of Tibet. Philosophical ideas, iconographies, mythoi, praxes, socio-cultural expectations for authority, expressions of power, conditions of material exchange, conceptions of history, the concerns of *realpolitik*, expectations for mastery, natural environmental conditions, and many other such discourses and contextual forces converge in the execution of religious engagements which circulate through imaginaires with tremendous impact in determining the horizon of the accepted and the possible. The study of the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa* provides us with a splendid venue for exploring Tibetan Buddhist religiosity in this intersectional perspective, supplying as it did a wealth of imaginal resources and actionable practices for advancing Buddhist experience in the context of many intersecting influences. While my research has but scratched the surface of the vast trove of knowledge and lore that lies within the *Kabgyé Deshek Dupa*'s thirteen volumes, I hope that this work may inspire further explorations into the Kabgyé's many doctrinal, narrative, and ritual dimensions, as well as encouraging an embrace of broader interpretive perspectives honoring the powerfully interconnected suite of factors that configure the imagination and effectuate self-experience within religious lifeworlds.

## Appendix 1: Tibetan biographical sources for Nyangrel Nyima Özer

(In order of significance)

Chos kyi 'od zer, Myang ston bsod nams seng ge, and Mi 'gyur rdo rje. “Sprul sku mnga' bdag chen po'i skyes rabs nram thar dri ma med pa'i bka' rgya can la ldeb (The Stainless Proclamations)”, in *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 1, 1-163. Gangtok: Lama Sonam Tobgay Kazi, 1978.

Myang ston rig 'dzin lhun grub 'od zer. “Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i gter ston myang sprul sku nyi ma 'od zer gyi nram thar gsal ba'i me long (The Clear Mirror)”, in *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor*, vol. 2, 199-381. Paro: Lama Ngödrup, 1979.

Gu ru bkra shis, *Bstan-pa'i snying-po gsang-chen snga-'gyur nges-don zab-mo'i chos-kyi byung-ba gsal-bar byed-pa'i legs-bshad mkhas-pa dga'-byed ngo-mtshar gtam-gyi rol-mtsho*. Ed. Rdo-rje-rgyal-po. Beijing: Krung-go'i bod-kyi shes-rig dpe-skrun-khang. 1990, 379-83

So ston and Dpon yes. “Sras mnga' bdag chos rje 'gro ba'i dgon po'i nram thar yid bzhin nor bu'i phreng ba” in *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs bsdus pa'i chos skor*. Dalhousie: Damchoe Sangpo, 1977, vol. 1, pp. 13-85.

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(Relevant)

'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas. “Gter ston brgya rtsa (The Hundred Treasure Revealers)”, in *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo* vol.1, 291-759. Paro: Ngödrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976.

Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas. “Zab mo'i gter dang gter ston grub thob ji ltar byon pa'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus bskod pa rin chen baidürya'i phreng ba.” In *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 1, 291-645. Paro: Ngödrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976-80.

*Mnga' bdag bla ma brgyud pa'i nram thar: The Biographies of the Early Masters in the Transmission Lineage of the Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa Teachings Revealed by Mnga' bdag myang ral nyi ma 'od zer*. Mandi: Sherab Gyaltzen Lama, 1985.

*Mnga' bdag bla ma'i nram thar*, Rewalsar: Zigar Drukpa Kagyud Institute, 1985.

## **Appendix 2: Principal and subsidiary *bka' brgyad* revelation cycles, as listed in the *rin chen gter mdzod***

- 1) *The Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings (bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa)*, revealed by Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer, 1124-92.
- 2) *The Consummation of the Secret Eight Teachings (bka' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs)*, revealed by Gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug, 1212-1270.
- 3) *The Self-Emergent, Self-Arising Fierce Eight Teachings (bka' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar)*, revealed by Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem, 1337-1409.
- 4) *The Assembled Teachings of the Ocean of Dharma (bka' 'dus chos kyi rgya mtsho)*, revealed by O rgyan gling pa, 1323-1360; renewed by 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, 1820-1892.
- 5) *The Secret-Most Eight Teachings, the Mirror of Mind (bka' brgyad yang gsang thugs kyi me long)*, revealed by Pad+ma gling pa, 1450-1521.
- 6) *The Demon-Taming Secret-Most Eight Teachings (bka' brgyad yang gsang dregs 'dul)*, revealed by Bsam gtan gling pa, stag sham nus ldan rdo rje, 1655-1708; renewed by 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, 1820-1892.
- 7) *The Essence of Attainment: The Eight Teachings of Taming Vajra-Obstacle-Demons (rdo rje'i bar gcod dregs 'dul gyi bka' brgyad dngos grub snying po)*, revealed by 'Ja' tshon snying po, 1585-1656.
- 8) *The Complete Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings (bka' brgyad bde gshegs yongs 'dus)*, revealed by Klong gsal snying po, 1625-1692.
- 9) *The Body-Mandala of the Eight Teachings (bka' brgyad lus dkyil)*, revealed by Gnam chos mi 'gyur rdo rje, 1645-1667.
- 10) *The Jewel-Mind Essence of the Assembled Teachings (bka' 'dus snying po yid bzhin nor bu)* Pad+ma gling pa, 1663-1713.
- 11) *The Sugata-Assembly of the Blood-Drinker, the Heart-Essence of Accomplishment (grub thob thugs thig gi khrag 'thung bde gshegs 'dus pa)*, revealed by 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po 1820-1892.
- 12) *The Seminal Essence of the Root of the Assembled Teachings of the Great Perfection (rdzogs pa chen po bka' 'dus rtsa ba'i snying thig)*, revealed by Mchog gyur gling pa, 1829-1870.

### **Appendix 3: *bka' brgyad* ritual compendia for the Nyingma Mother Temples\***

**Smin grol gling:** *The Minling System of the Sugata-Assembly of Eight Teachings (Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa smin gling lugs):*

'Gyur med rdo rje (gter bdag gling pa), ed. *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa smin gling lugs*. Dehra Dun: Khochhen trulku, 1977. TBRC W1KG5152

**Dpal yul:** *The Ritual Cycle of the Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings (bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i sgrub skor)*

*bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i sgrub skor*, 2 vol. Bylakuppe: Pema norbu rinpoche, 1985. TBRC W22246

**Ka thog rdo rje ldan:** *The Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings (bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa)*

*bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* [Katok ritual cycle], 2 vol. New Delhi: jamyang norbu, 1971. TBRC W00KG09391

**Zhe chen:** *The Sunlight Illuminating the Practice of the Sugata-Assembly of the Eight Teachings Great Accomplishment (sgrub chen bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i lag len gsal byed nyin mor byed pa'i 'od snang*

*Sgrub chen bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i lag len gsal byed nyin mor byed pa'i 'od snang* [Shechen ritual cycle]. New Delhi: Shechen Publications, 2001.

**Rdzogs chen dgon:** *The Great Accomplishment Liturgies of the SUGata-Assembly of the Eight Techings in the Long Traditions of the Early Translation Dzogchen Masters (snga 'gyur grub dbang rdzogs chen pa'i ring lugs ltar bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i sgrub chen 'don chog)*

Rdzogs chen, 2007.

- Excludes the liturgical tradition of rdo rje brag, which maintains rig 'dzin rgod ldem's byang gter tradition.

## Appendix 4: Eight Herukas Image Gallery



Mahottara (*che mchog*)



Yamāntaka (*gshin rje*)



Hayagrīva (*rta mgrin*)



Sri Heruka (*yang dag khrag 'thung*)



*Vajrakīla (rdo rje phur ba)*



*Ma mo rbod gtong*



*'Jig rten mchod bstod*



*dmod pa drag sngags*

All Images: Himalayan Art Resource, Painting Set: The Eight Herukas. From Shechen Archives

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