The View From Nowhere:
The Travels of the Third Karmapa,
Rang byung rdo rje in Stories and Songs

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Statement of Originality

I, the undersigned, Ruth Ellen Gamble, declare that this thesis is my own original work; where the work of others is used, I have acknowledged accordingly throughout.

[Signature]

Ruth Ellen Gamble
Acknowledgements

The production of this thesis has been a long and complicated journey in itself. Therefore, although I will try to be thorough, the following list of acknowledgements will by necessity not include every person who has assisted me to this destination. To list every person who has helped tangentially would duplicate my word count, so I will limit my thanks to those who were more directly involved.

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[The image of Rang byung rdo rje on the following page is used with permission from the Rubin Museum of Art. It is a 19th Century Tibetan Thang kha in the Sgar ‘bri style.]
Abstract

Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), the third Karmapa, was an important figure in the development of Tibetan Buddhism. He is most famous for his commentaries and treatises that systemised the lineages of tantric Buddhism he inherited, works that have been the subject of numerous studies. Until this present study, however, his personal writing, both his biographical liberation-stories (rnam thar) and his songs (mgur/glu) have not been translated in full or studied.

As much of his writing in these two genres was composed while he travelled around first Tibet, then Mongolia and China, travelling is one of these works’ major themes, and therefore the thematic subject of this thesis. The study’s thematic approach to these compositions has allowed it to examine them as both literature and historical sources. A combination that, in turn, has not only provided many more details about his life than earlier studies, but also enabled an investigation of Rang byung rdo rje’s contribution to Tibet’s literary culture, in which the two genres of rnam thar and mgur/glu have played a central role.

As this thesis explains, what becomes evident in this literary and historical examination of Rang byung rdo rje’s writings in these genres is that his influence on Tibetan culture was not limited to his contribution to Tibet’s intellectual history. He also played a pivotal role in the development of two other important elements of Tibetan culture: the sacralisation of Tibet’s environment and the tradition of recognising reincarnated gurus, both of which he helped establish on his travels. Moreover, this investigation shows how intertwined these processes were in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing: how much Rang byung rdo rje’s presentation of the Karmapa reincarnate lineage—the first reincarnate lineage upon which others were modelled—depends on the sacralisation of the Karmapas’ environments to sustain their status across lives; and how much the sacralisation of the Karmapas’ environments depended on both their sanctified presence, and their cultural “landscaping” of these sites through architecture, art and most influentially literature.

In establishing this connection between sacred sites and the development of Tibet’s first reincarnation lineages, this thesis further demonstrates how Rang byung rdo rje’s participation in both these projects depended on his claims to and articulation of otherworldly visions. Through these visions he established a religious, otherworldly, periphery-focused authority upon which he could make claims about identity and territory that stood in opposition to those made on the same region by its this-worldly rulers, the Mongol Empire. It also shows how this alternate vision was aided by Rang byung rdo rje’s promotion of the mahāmudrā tradition, a tradition whose sceptical approach to all phenomena suggested experiences of this and other worlds were equally unreal.
To subdue my ego, I was born the son of a potter but after I die in this life, I will travel to Tusita; my love for wanderers will mean I am present wherever there are students. I have no other thoughts but to help others.

Rang byung rdo rje, the third Karmapa, ca. 1325, age 42, La stod, Southern Tibet.
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INTRODUCTION: POSTCARDS FROM ILLUSORY JOURNEYS

I look out at the places outside, and see their own clarity, their ungraspable nature.
I look in at my mind inside, and see its own awareness, its own luminous nature.
I look out at myriad conditions, and see images painted by rainbows.
I look in at my constructed world, and see self-liberation, a sketch in the water.

Just by looking I see a magician's sleight of hand.

Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), c.1314, age thirty,
Ngang chung Pass, Mtshur phu Monastery.¹

i. The Journey of a Lifetime

Rang byung rdo rje, the third Karmapa, spoke these words as he crossed a mountain pass behind Mtshur phu Monastery, the main seat of his reincarnation lineage. Then, as now, this monastery sat on the banks of the ‘Gro bo lung chu River, in the upper reaches of the glacier-carved Stod lung Valley, about fifty kilometres north-east of Lhasa.

The imagery in this verse marks an intersection between three of his lifelong habits: Buddhist yoga, travel and words. His training in Buddhist yoga is evident in the particularity of its perception. Part description and part vision, it reflects his understanding that appearances are nothing but the clear and luminous nature of mind. This was the vision of reality that he dedicated his life to developing in himself and others, and it was in pursuit of this outcome that he made many of his life choices; choices that included travel and writing. To improve his own yoga practice, he travelled to isolated mountain hermitages. To teach others the discoveries he made in retreat, he travelled to monasteries, towns and finally the biggest cities of his day, Dadu and Xanadu, the twin capitals of the Mongol Empire.² And, as he travelled, he composed, developing an ease and skill with both prose and poetic language that is reflected even in the above, extemporary composition.

Among the surviving results of this compositional habit, the works for which he is most

¹ Song No. 60. Rang byung rdo rje (1983:260) henceforth abbreviated as GN; and Rang byung rdo rje (2006:80) henceforth abbreviated as GB. I have not provided the Tibetan text for these songs, as a complete comparative text of the two surviving versions of these collections of songs is included in appendix four, part B. Appendix four, part A consists of complete translations of the songs cited in this work. This translation and all others within this thesis are the author's own, unless otherwise indicated.

² Dadu was on the same site as the present day city of Beijing. Its name means "great capital" in Chinese (Ch. 大都 Dadu; Tib. Ta’i tu). In Mongolian it was called Khanbalq, meaning "the city of the Khan". "Xanadu" is a Latinised form of the Chinese word 上都 Shangdu, which means "upper capital" (Tib. Shong tu, Shang du and other variants). For convenience and recognition, I will refer to it as "Xanadu" throughout the thesis.
widely remembered are those that tackled the great debates of his age, the fourteenth century, which was a time of much consolidation in the Tibetan Buddhist intellectual tradition. As the presumptive head of a lineage—the Karma Bka’ brgyud sub-branch of the broader Bka’ brgyud tradition—and as a person who had inherited much prestige through the developing paradigm of institutionalised reincarnation, Rang byung rdo rje had been granted a rare authority by his society. He used this authority to make a substantial contribution through his writing. He wrote practice manuals, commentaries on various Indic texts, astrological treatises, medical treatises and most influentially works that systematised the two pillars of the Bka’ brgyud tradition: the yoga practices called “the six dharmas of Nāropā” (Na ro chos drug) and the related teachings on mahāmudrā (phyag rgya chen po). It is these works—written at the right time in Tibetan intellectual history by a person who not only embodied a new order, but also possessed a much-admired exactitude—that have proved to be his most compelling legacy. These are the works that influenced his contemporaries Klong chen rab byams pa (1308–1364), Dol po pa (1292–1361) and Bu ston rin chen grub (1290–1364) in their consolidations of their own traditions; and these are the works that are still studied widely today, seven hundred years after their composition, in Tibetan monasteries and Western universities. Yet these influential works do not describe, and have therefore not encouraged research into their author’s life. In part this lacuna can be explained by Rang byung rdo rje’s impersonal approach to their composition, for this makes it easy to study these works without any sense of their author’s life. Indeed, the only part of them that provides any detail of their author’s life is their colophons. These brief notes do not give an outline of his life or discuss why or how he made his life choices, but in describing his whereabouts when they were composed they do clearly highlight his peregrinations. He wrote his most famous work, the Sublime Inner Meaning near Mtshur phu, but its auto-commentary was composed in an isolated mountain-valley in Southern Tibet. He wrote a commentary on Nāgārjuna’s presentation of buddha-nature at Karma Monastery in Eastern Tibet, and one

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3 This term is often translated as "the great seal", but as I am not sure that this will mean that much more to readers than mahāmudrā, I have chosen to use this Indic term. Throughout this thesis, I will follow the guidelines for diacritics and italics established by the Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies. According to these, the more common Indic Buddhist terms are not italicised, but do retain their diacritic markings in order to more easily establish their etymology.

4 His precise and ordered approach to writing has also been noted by Kapstein (2000:97–98).

5 Kurtis Schaeffer (2013:420–421) also recently reflected on the influence Rang byung rdo rje had on these people. The direct and indirect links between Rang byung rdo rje and these three people will be explored more in chapter three of this present work.

6 They focus on his interest in yoga and occasionally mention his skill with words, but they do not describe his life or its journeys. One of the few scholars to note Rang byung rdo rje’s skill with words has been Kapstein (2000:97–98), who throughout his writing seems to have displayed an impressive sensitivity to the literary as well as the religious and other cultural elements of the works he has analysed.

7 Tib. Zab mo’i nang don.
on the Hevajra-tantra in Dadu.\(^8\)

To find more details about the texts' composer and his many journeys, it is necessary to look beyond his more famous compositions and into his less well-known stories and songs. In these, the main topic is his life, and his many travels are a central theme. He began composing in these genres as a precocious child, and continued to employ both of them until just before his death. His stories track his journeys through his memories, and his songs were composed as he travelled. Thus, they fill in the geographic and narrative gaps before, between and after his more famous compositions. This creates a sense of his life and character.\(^9\) It tells his story, and this reads very much as a traveller's tale.

### ii. Travels in Time and Place

Any study, like the present one, that seeks to follow Rang byung rdo rje on his life's adventures must also be cognisant, however, that the sense of movement within his personal writing is not only the result of his peregrinations, but also several layers of religious and literary thematic enabling. His religious inheritance strengthens the theme of travel throughout the traditional discursive paradigm of “the journey to awakening”. The literary influences, by contrast, are generally linked to the specific genres in which he chose to compose. To understand Rang byung rdo rje’s stories and songs as a travel narrative, it is first necessary to explain how these religious and literary elements work within them.

#### a) Following the Guide

The use of “the journey” as an analogy for religious transformation has a long and influential history in many religious traditions, but perhaps none more so than in the Buddhist tradition, which recognises multiple paths leading in both directions. In this tradition, those benighted beings moving in the wrong direction do not merely find themselves on the singular road to perdition. Instead they are called “wanderers” (Skt. gāmin; Tib. ‘gro ba), who travel through myriad existences, searching for satisfaction but never finding it. Eventually and inevitably, they fall over “cliffs” (yangs sa) into “bad destinations” (Skt. durgati; Tib. ngan ‘gro), such as the animal, hungry ghost and hell realms, from which escape is difficult. Those set on liberation or buddhahood, by contrast, are on “the path” (Skt. mārga; Tib. lam), which in the Mahāyāna Buddhism framework to which Rang byung rdo rje subscribed is divided into five sections (Skt. pañca-mārga; Tib.

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\(^9\)This notion that our conceptualisation of a person, or “dasein”, is created through the passage of time rather than spatially was explored in detail by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* (Mulhall 2013:60–88).
Inga) and ten grounds (Skt. daśa-bhūmi; Tib. sa bcu).10

As the tantric traditions developed, this analogy was extended to reframe the guru (Tib. bla ma)—the role into which Rang byung rdo rje's circumstances propelled him—as the student's guide ('dren pa). And more than any other element of the analogy, this had a thoroughgoing influence on the structure and themes of Rang byung rdo rje's personal writing. In his writing this metaphor evokes images of mountain guides, leading their clients through difficult terrain. And like these guides, the gurus are described as those who steered their students away from potential hazards, but their expertise was more in spiritual than environmental dangers.

This focus on spiritual pitfalls also meant that the guru's mode of guidance was very different. Gurus may have led their students on physical journeys, but the main focus of their endeavour was to change their student's perception, and they employed a raft of religious, social and cultural methods to do this. One of these was writing, and throughout Rang byung rdo rje's compositions he repeatedly made it clear that this transformation in his audience's perception was his main creative purpose. Moreover, he understood this transformation to be not only a mechanical function of his audience imbibing a new way of looking at the world, but also a form of "inspiration" or "blessing" (byin rlabs).11 By this he hoped to encourage his own insights in others, just as they had been inspired in him by his own gurus.

He called the insight he was trying to develop in others the "view" (Skt. drṣṭī; Tib. lta

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10 The maps of the various paths of this and other Buddhist traditions have been discussed in some depth in a series of articles in a book edited by Robert Buswell and Robert Gimello (1992).

11 In mahāmudrā discourse, byin labs (Skt. adhiśṭhāna; often translated as "blessing"), dad pa (Skt. śraddhā; often translated as "faith") and mos gus (Skt. adhimukta; often translated as "devotion") are used to describe a process by which the guru's influence transforms their student's mind; the student approaches the guru with dad pa and mos gus and therefore receives byin labs that transforms their perception. This process is often called guru-yoga (bla ma'i rnal 'byor), and as Jan-Ulrich Sobisch (2011:211-258) points out, it is central to much mahāmudrā practice. In many ways this practice also reflects the process of receiving blessings through devotion that is prevalent in other religions. As the tantric Buddhist tradition generally, and the mahāmudrā tradition more specifically is not a theistic, deist or even dualistic tradition, it is, I believe, problematic to use the terms associated with these other traditions in this context. In the mahāmudrā tradition, rather than the student becoming sanctified by the blessings of the guru, the guru's inspirational presence is supposed to highlight the student's own buddha-nature, and in doing so show them that there is ultimately no distinction between their mind and the guru's mind. If the student approaches the guru in any other way, this is problematic for their practice. For, as Rang byung rdo rje explains it in one of his songs: "When you do not know your own mind is a guru, a so-called 'guru' is not much use" (Song No. 47 GN 69-70; GB 240-241). This process of transformation requires a good deal of trust (my preferred translation of the word dad pa), admiration (my preferred translation of the word mos gus) and commitment on the part of the student, who needs to remain open to the guru despite the existential threat they pose to the student's sense of self (bdag). But to describe this process as "devotion to the guru" seems problematic in that it implies a fixation on the external guru. There is certainly a level of devotion expected toward gurus in Tibetan culture, but that is not what is being described by the terms dad pa and mos gus in the context of mahāmudrā guru-yoga. What is being described here is a much more internal, transformative process. Indeed, as Mi la ras pa reportedly said: "There is the possibility of mistaking trust (dad pa) with desire (for the guru), so (be careful) not to mistake the two, or mistake the correct object of your trust (which is to say do not make it the external guru)" (Tib. dad pa dang 'dad pa gnis nor dogs yod pas. de gnis dang dad pa'i bya bo'i yul ma nor gal che; Chandra Das 2000:617). As this analysis indicates, it seems to me that the translated paradigm of "blessings", "faith" and "devotion" requires much more investigation and the equivalence between these terms and the Tibetan and Sanskrit terms they are supposed to translate cannot be assumed.
And although he studied many variant traditions of it, it was the mahāmudrā view that formed the core of his own transformation program. This was the view with which he sought to align his own and his students’ perspectives; this was the view with which he compared other highly venerated perspectives like the Great Completion (rdzogs chen) and Madhyamaka (Tib. Dbu ma; literally “middle-way”); and this was the view that he believed the six dharmas of Nāropā and other tantric yogas would generate.

Encouraging this view in others through literature was, however, something of a paradoxical act, for as he said it was and is “beyond speech, thought and expression” (smra bsam brjod las ‘das). This problem of describing the indescribable has made it impossible to define mahāmudrā; but it is possible to align it with many different intellectual traditions and therefore approach it in a variety of ways. This flexibility has seen it become the subject of many studies from a variety of perspectives in both traditional and Western scholarship, and would make a thorough study of its presentation a truly immense undertaking. In the present context, suffice to say that Rang byung rdo rje’s presentation of it described yogis coming to the instantaneous or gradual understanding that perceptions are essentially mental events; they arise in dependence on the senses as a stream of impressions and therefore do not constitute a self or anything external. When they realise this, the real self and real others are transformed into the non-dual, equanimous experience of an illusory display. This experience is the realisation of mahāmudrā. But in that I just defined it in words, it is not.

b) Once Upon a Time

The literary aids to the theme of travel are in the main a direct result of the specific nature of the two genres in which he chose to write about his experiences; although it must be said the poetry and life-writing genre choices in thirteenth and fourteenth century Tibet were rather limited. Neither of these genres individually had a specific focus on travel, but

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12 In general, throughout the thesis, I have chosen to describe these presentations as “views” rather than “philosophies”, in that they are employed not so much to explain the world as to seek a way out of it. For a succinct description of this distinction see: Mark Siderits (2011).

13 Song No. 8 (GN 9–14; GB 191–195) Songs of the View, Cultivation, Behaviour and Result.

14 Amongst traditional descriptions of the view, see for example Rang byung rdo rje (2006a: Vol. A, 161–175) and Dwags po bkra bshis rnam rgyal (2005:247–300). Contemporary discussions of the view are included within Roger Jackson (2011b) and Klaus-Dieter Mathes (2008:34–74, 367–410). In light of the many presentations of the mahāmudrā within the Tibetan tradition, it should perhaps be pointed out that the version of it I have presented here is based on Rang byung rdo rje’s writing. Although he does not define it as such, this presentation later led others to suggest he was a proponent of the Gzhan stong view, or the view of “extrinsic emptiness”. About which see: Susan K. Hookhan (1991), Cyrus Stearns (1999), Karl Brunhölzl (2004), Anne Burchardi (2007), Jeffrey Hopkins (2007). Amongst the alternate presentations of mahāmudrā in the Tibetan tradition, the two most divergent from this are perhaps the Sa skya tradition’s presentation and the mahāmudrā presented in the Dge lugs tradition. The Sa skya presentation is different in that it generally confines the idea of mahāmudrā to the four levels of mudrā practised in tantra. See: David Jackson (1990a; 1994). The Dge lugs presentation differs from Rang byung rdo rje’s substantially in that it aligns mahāmudrā’s view with that of the Madhyamaka presentation of reality. For more on this presentation see: Daniel Brown (2006:25–27) and Tenzin Gyatso the 14th Dalai Lama anc Alexander Berzin (1991).
as each of them focused on one of the two main elements of a travel story, when combined they almost create a travelogue. These two elements are movement through time and place: the movement through time is narrative; the movement through place is travel.¹⁵

His life writing provides the narrative. It was composed in the liberation-story or \textit{rnam thar} genre.¹⁶ In this genre, at least during Rang byung rdo rje’s time,¹⁷ a protagonist would describe their physical, yogic and visionary voyage to attain the liberation from suffering that comes with Buddhist awakening, usually by relaying the details of their life. Rang byung rdo rje’s works in this genre were not composed on the road, but they are a record of it, describing in very simple statements how he moved from one place to another, either physically or in visions. These small journeys are then framed within the larger narrative of his voyage to liberation. And, as with many other teleological tales, the temporal causality of events that led to this grand finale—which in liberation-stories is usually represented through the “liberation” of death—creates an intense concentration within the narrative on unfolding time.¹⁸

This basic, structural convergence of time is then further intensified by the inclusion within Rang byung rdo rje’s tale of several other temporal factors. The first of these was his role, in history, or what he describes as “worldly affairs” (\textit{jig rten gyi chos}), through his relationship with the Mongols and their regents. By the time he was born, the Mongols had consolidated their rule in Tibet and administered the region through three levels of government: local administrative units called “myriarchies” (\textit{khri skor}); the Tibet-wide rule of their regents, the head of Sa skya Monastery; and their own, overriding administration. As an itinerant lineage head, Rang byung rdo rje had to engage with all three of these administrative levels. At the local level, he had to contend with the La stod Myriarch (\textit{Khri dpon}), who ruled the region of Southern Tibet in which he was born, and

¹⁵ Alex Purves (2010) discusses these two elements in the travel narratives of ancient Greece. And, more influentially on this thesis, they also underpin Susan Buck-Morss’s (1991:1–45) analysis of Walter Benjamin’s \textit{Arcades Project}.

¹⁶ In her work on this genre, Janet Gyatso (2001:116–122) calls these self-penned liberation-stories “autobiography”, arguing successfully that their existence shows that this was not a tradition unique to the West. But as Yamamoto (2012:139–175) has suggested in his work on Lama Zhang’s self-penned liberation-stories, affixing the term “autobiography” to these works is also problematic in that these works are part of a larger “textual economy” that differs markedly from the Western “textual economy” in which autobiography developed. As this is not the main theme of this thesis, I have sidestepped the issue somewhat here by using the terms “liberation-story” and “self-penned liberation-stories”. I have also chosen to use this term because some of my exploration of Rang byung rdo rje’s writing in this genre and his use of this term is predicated on its etymology.

¹⁷ In more recent years, this term \textit{rnam thar} has also been used in a way that aligns it much more with the Western genre of biography. See for example: Tsering Shakya (2008:67).

¹⁸ This movement through narrative time is most commonly marked by Tibetan continuable expressions like “and then” (\textit{de nas}) and “also” (\textit{yang, gzan yang}), terms that appear on almost every page of Rang byung rdo rje’s compositions in this genre. This topic of teleology and time has been of interest more to those studying history, narrative and time in the Western tradition, rather than the Indian, Tibetan or Chinese traditions. The most influential work on this topic is probably Michel Foucault’s (1984:34–38) appraisal of the contorting effects of teleological history in his examination of the Enlightenment, but this topic has also been examined by other thinkers such as Julie Kristeva (1981).
then the myriarch of Tshal Monastery, who controlled the lands around Mtshur phu. 19 He also experienced a complicated relationship with the various Sa skya rulers, and later in life performed a tentative dance of power with the Mongol Emperor who commanded his presence at court against his wishes. These relationships not only created narrative tensions in his story, they also punctuated it with politics, creating a sense of historical time that is not always evident in other liberation-stories. 20

The second temporal element within his tale is his perception of living within the grand narrative of Tibetan Buddhism. This positioning creates an implicit tension because although in Rang byung rdo rje's time this tale was presented as a singular history, it stood at the intersection of two seemingly non-associable, divergent meta-narratives that were moving in opposite directions: the story of Tibet and the story of Buddhism. The Tibetan tale was one of development; the Tibetans saw themselves as ex-savages who had been edified and possibly awakened through the practice of Buddhism. The trajectory of Buddhist history, on the other hand, was devolution; in this tale the world had degenerated from a perfected, golden age (Skt: krtayuga; Tib. rdzogs pa'i dus) in which beings of light performed fundamentally pure actions, before descending through the proliferation of desires into the dark times (Skt: kaṣāya-yuga; Tib. snyigs ma'i dus) that marked the end of an era (dus mtha'). 21

Somewhat implausibly, the centuries leading up to Rang byung rdo rje's life had seen two variant alignments between these tales occurring in Tibetan cultural discourse, and moreover, in telling his own story, Rang byung rdo rje could even associate himself with both. The first of these was the popular tale of a golden age of empire that was developed and promoted in the main by practitioners of the Rnying ma ("old ones") tradition, but widely embraced across the Plateau. In this tale, the Tibetans had indeed been savages who were edified by Buddhism, but this process than unravelled with the fall of the Tibetan Empire, and the disintegration of Tibet in the "age of fragmentation" (sil bu'i dus).

The second Tibetan Buddhist tale was the individuation of this grand Tibetan narrative into the stories of the siddhas (Tib. sgrub thob). These were the people who taught and imported from India "new tantra" (gsar rgyud) lineages during a new golden age called the

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19 I discuss this system of governance in greater detail in chapter two.
20 It should be noted that the way these two aspects of internal temporality and historical time work together in Rang byung rdo rje's liberation-stories contrasts with what Andrew Quintman (2008:366) noted was an absence of external, historical time in the liberation-stories and songs of Mi la ras pa. Given that Trunggram Gyatral Rinpoche's (2004) study of Sgam po pa's life and work revealed a similar ahistorical setting, but Brenda Li's (2011) recent study of O rgyan pa suggested that this later yogi's story, like Rang byung rdo rje's story, included references to many historical events, this inclusion of historical detail may represent a developing trend within the liberation-story genre. Alternately, it may represent the development of closer links between religious and political leaders following the Mongolian takeover of Tibet.
21 Jan Nattier (1991) has discussed this narrative of decline in detail. The Sanskrit word kṛta and its Tibetan translation rdzogs pa do not technically mean "golden", but in this context something more like English word "perfect". I have translated it in this context as "golden", however, because it reflects the Western concept of a "golden age".
“later transmission” (phyi dar). This individuation was particularly aided by the liberation-story genre, which presented inspirational tales of these beings. Like the tales the “old ones” told of the empire, these stories were also imbued with a nostalgic predisposition, but their specialness was individuated and not directly linked to a specific era or external circumstances.

As Rang byung rdo rje describes it, the people of this later period were not necessarily aided by benevolent rulers, but circumstances had at least contrived to allow them the space to pursue their spiritual goals without the interference he was experiencing from the Mongols and their representatives. Indeed, in contrasting his situation with those that went before—both during the Rnying ma’s golden age of empire, and the new tantras’ golden age of siddhas—Rang byung rdo rje consistently insisted that he really was living in the “dark times” of Buddhist prophecy.

This sense of impending doom was further emphasised in Rang byung rdo rje’s thinking through his practice of and interest in the Buddhist tantra called the Kālacakra (Tib. Dus ’khor rgyud; “Wheel of Time”). The Kālacakra-tantra contains one of the most vivid descriptions of devolution within the Buddhist canons, and seems to have encouraged in Rang byung rdo rje—in light of the devastation wrought by the Mongol invasions—an intense millenarian gaze. Yet this tantra was also, perhaps ironically, the inspiration for his creation of a new calendar, another process that focused his attention on temporality. Calendar making, by its nature, involves the transformation of temporality into measured time, and his involvement in this process influenced the presentation of time in his life-story in two ways. The first of these is that it added another layer of intricacy—this time mathematical—to his relationship to time, which was subsequently reflected in his descriptions of it passing. The second was that as the Kālacakra tradition’s approach to time measurement—like most other approaches to time measurement—focused on the movement of the sun, moon and stars, this caused Rang byung rdo rje to pay close attention to the journeys of these heavenly bodies. This attention was then often juxtaposed with his own journeys; the heavenly bodies became his travel companions, playing cameo roles at several important points in his story.

The other element of Rang byung rdo rje’s tales that intensifies the theme of time within them is his position in a series of reincarnations, a series that is referred to as a body-mālā (sku phreng) in Tibetan. In the Tibetan Buddhist worldview, these body-mālas consist of a series of bodily incarnations—the mālā’s beads—that belong to a continuous mind-stream—the mālā’s string—of a bodhisattva (byang chub sems dpa’). These series of incarnations are said to be different from a normal wanderer’s serial

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22 Two works that look at this link are Newman (1987) and Wallace (2009).
23 Mark Stevenson (In press) also described the connection between reincarnation traditions and time.
incarnations in that they are not merely created by the potentiality of deluded actions (nyon mongṣ pa’i las), but through the conscious direction of the bodhisattva’s mind. This ability to guide consciousness occurs because the bodhisattvas have infused their mind-stream with the intention to help those who wandered from life to life without control, and developed the capacity to stay conscious through death, the in-between state (bar do) and birth. This creates a narrative for the members of the body-mālā that continues beyond the regular restraints on human time: life and death.

Rang byung rdo rje was conceived as the third being in his body-mālā. The first Karmapa—only posthumously recognised as a Karmapa—was Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193), a grand-student of Mi la ras pa’s (c.1052–c.1135) and a student of his student Sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen (1079–1153). This meant that Dus gsum mkhyen pa was present when Sgam po pa transformed the Bka’ brgyud lineage of yoga he had inherited from Mi la ras pa into an established school by combining its teachings with institutionalised monasticism at Sgam po Monastery in Southern Tibet. As one of his most influential spiritual heirs, Dus gsum mkhyen pa embodied this combination, living as both a monk and a yogi. He also followed in Sgam po pa’s footsteps by establishing three of his own monasteries; two in his native Khams in Eastern Tibet named Karma and Kam po gnas nang and another, his main seat, at Mtshur phu in Central Tibet. The second Karmapa was Karma Pakshi (1204–1283), who slowly gained a reputation as an emanation of Dus gsum mkhyen pa in his youth. Karma Pakshi had been born into an aristocratic family and used his family’s wealth to restore the monasteries Dus gsum mkhyen pa had founded. When that money ran out, he continued his maintenance and expansion of these premises by gathering donations, some of which came from Mongol princes. He was renowned as a powerful magician, and was widely believed to have even used his magical powers against the great Mongol emperor, Qubilai Khan, blocking his attempts to have him killed. When Rang byung rdo rje was recognised as Karma Pakshi’s rebirth as a five year old child, he also therefore inherited a nearly two hundred year long personal history.

And this was far from the only way that his inclusion within the body-mālā expanded his personal sense of time. Thanks to the groundwork laid by his two predecessors, his recognition as their reincarnation also included him within a conception of personal time that was virtually infinite. This conception was derived from ideas that had been part of the Buddhist tradition for centuries, but until the lifetimes of Dus gsum mkhyen pa and Karma Pakshi had not been adapted to continuing, trans-life, personal narratives. The first of these ideas was another Buddhist construct of time: the “beginninglessness” (Skt. anādi; Tib. thog ma med pa) of an individual’s previous lives and therefore personal time.

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24 By this I mean the continued recognition from one life to another as opposed to the memory of previous lives, which was much more common.
This construct applied to all beings, but only the aforementioned realised bodhisattvas could access its infinite temporality by developing the capacity to perceive these past lives. Dus gsum mkhyen pa claimed to have this ability, and once broadly accepted this claim granted him and his successors access to beginningless time.

The second skill that he claimed to possess that expanded his perception of time was the ability to produce an ever-increasing number—one thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand—of emanations (rnam ’phrul) that manifested (sprul ba) in any of what Buddhist cosmology suggests are thousands of realms of existence. This combined Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s participation in infinite regress with a sense of spatial infinity. What is more, as time passed at different speeds in these realms, these manifestations’ collective sense of time was further intensified; a day of life passed in the god realm of the Four Great Kings (Rgyal chen bzhi’i zhang khams), for example, is said to equal fifty human years.25

Finally, Dus gsum mkhyen pa began expounding on what might happen next, relaying stories of his forthcoming lives and their emanations, and this suggested he had knowledge of the only part of time to which he had not yet laid claim, the future. By suggesting that he possessed this last level of perception, he was claiming—and was understood by others—to be “one who knows the three times”. This claim was the source of his name; Dus gsum mkhyen pa is really more of a title than a name, and it means “the one who knows the three times”.26

In a reflection of the breadth of this claimed knowledge—and unlike most others who remembered their past lives—when Dus gsum mkhyen pa described his previous existences, they were distributed across the Buddhist cosmological map, on far-flung continents in indeterminate times. His presentations of synchronic emanations by contrast were more indebted to the worldview of the tantras; in these he described emanations that were sent out either to aid particular students in their tantric practice or for his mind-stream to achieve realisation in a particular practice. His future lives were also described in this paradigm: one would be born to perform particular tantric practices in the North-east of India, and one in the South; he also described a short life he would live in Lho brag, in Southern Tibet, that would only aid one student.27

25 There are many such examples throughout Buddhist texts: this one is taken from the text The Words of my Perfect Teacher (Kun bzang bla ma’i zhai lung), by Rdza dpal ’phrul (n.d.:93). The Padmakara Translation Group (1994:64) has translated this work.

26 This term is also used as a synonym for a buddha, and—along with the term “knower of all appearances” (Skt. sarvakārā-jñāna; Tib. rnam pa thams cad mkhyen pa) that is used more often in proñāthāpāramītā (pha rol tu phyin pa) literature—is often said to refer to their “omniscience”. But more often than not, this omniscience is exemplified with reference to knowledge of the protagonist’s own story; remembrance of their past lives, knowledge of synchronic emanations, and knowledge of future lives.

27 All these lives and more are described in: Rgwa Lo tsā ba (2010a and 2010b), Bde chung ba (2010), Gzhon nu byang chub (2010) and Rang byung rdo rje (2006g).
Although none of these future lives matched the one lived by Karma Pakshi, the infinite narrative potential of his multiple-emanating schema ensured that this did not matter and that his successor was free to remember as many more past lives as he wished. So while Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s memories had been of lives lived at the edges of knowledge, Karma Pakshi imbued the trans-life narrative with his own character by remembering the many lives in which he had developed magical abilities: flying, projecting images into the sky and defeating poisoners. He too described several future lives. He declared that in one of these he would set up a new kingdom in the East, and in another he would live at the bodhisattva Maitreya’s feet in Tuṣita Heaven (Dga’ ldan).28 His student O rgyan pa (1230-1309), who later recognised Rang byung rdo rje, also claimed that he told him he was headed for “sunny La stod” where Rang byung rdo rje was born, thus creating the first prophetic link between two Karmapa lives.29

c) Songs on the Spot

While all these layers of temporal movement in the liberation-stories tilt his writing in that genre towards the narrative side of the travel story dyad, his songs, by contrast, focus on the places that he visited. These songs were composed in the simplest genre of Tibetan poetry, the glu, which was also respectfully called mgur. Unlike his treatises, expositions or liberation-stories, which all required planning and were all composed in one place, these songs were composed and performed extemporaneously.30 This made them eminently portable. Many of them were composed either on the road, or in temporary abodes, and in them Rang byung rdo rje used whatever was around—usually the environment—to act as their main subject. One result of this portability and environmental focus is that they often read like poetic postcards from his this-worldly and visionary travels through diaphanous landscapes: postcards from a yogi that simultaneously construct and deconstruct the places he visited.

His construction of these places in his poetic postcards, like his construction of time in his liberation-stories, often relies on ideas that were current in his milieu. These cultural geographies included some maps that were imported from India and others that were indigenously Tibetan; some maps that were spiritual—including a sophisticated network

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28 Rang byung rdo rje (2006h:276-287). These stories of past lives described here have been taken from Rang byung rdo rje’s redaction of Karma Pakshi’s liberation-story. According to Manson (2009:36), this redaction includes descriptions of events and visions from Karma Pakshi’s self-penned liberation-stories, with added commentaries by Rang byung rdo rje.


30 I have deliberately chosen to use this word “extemporaneously” here, rather than the more widely used “spontaneously” to describe the composition of these songs (See: Allen Ginsberg 1984:152–156). The reason I have done this is because in the few instances in which Rang byung rdo rje discusses this type of composition, he does not suggest spontaneity (lhun grub), a term he tends to associate with visions and realisations, not writing.
of sacred sites and other elements of Buddhist cosmology—and some that were secular, like the administrative divisions of the Mongol imperium.

Yet in line with his stated purpose of establishing the mahāmudrā view, he also laced these songs with deconstruction, employing a variety of techniques that he hoped would undermine his audience’s habitually perceived habitats. Perhaps the clearest example of these is his often-employed wordplay on the Tibetan word yul. In colloquial Tibetan, this word suggests a very basic sense of “place”, as country or land, but it was also used to translate the Sanskrit term viṣaya. This Sanskrit word too evoked a general sense of “place”, but also the more technical idea of “objects of the senses”, a meaning that was thereafter attached to yul. For Rang byung rdo rje, this dual meaning presented itself as a chance to play with his audience’s perception of place. By way of example, in one of his songs, he insisted that the mind “runs” to these sensory places, and then he builds on the image of impulsive travel this suggests. It reads in part:

If you do not make an effort in this (yoga), your preconceived awareness will keep babbling, (and) running off to all sorts of places (yul). Cravings for pleasure are masters of deception, demons of ignorance wait to ambush you in ravines, birth, ageing, illness and death are great rivers, and the sunset of the teachings is coming soon.

In another song, he even uses the word abstractly to refer to the “positions” that his students are taking in philosophical arguments. By linking these positions with illusory places, he seeks to demonstrate the uselessness of philosophical posturing in an illusory world. This song reads in part:

And so, students of mine, if you want to find the buddhas’ intention, (know that) all positions (yul) are illusion-like, do not grasp truth, and let go of “reality”. Preconceived feelings are like licking flames, the positions (yul) you desire give no satisfaction...

Destroy these positions (yul) and your sense of them (yul can); (Destroy) this dualism, and rest even in its destruction.

The last two lines of this song refer to the other construction that is enabled by a reference to all objects of the senses as “places”: the consequential establishment of all minds (sems or blo) as “place-possessors”, which could even be construed as a “sense of place” (Skt.}

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31 Regarding this topic, see: Christian Coseru (2012).
32 Song No. 70 (GN 105–107; GB 268–269).
33 A more literal translation of the Tibetan would read, “are fire tongues” (me le ‘dra), but as this is not an idiomatic English usage, and to be “licked by flames” is, I have chosen the latter.
34 Song No. 56 (GN 86–88; GB 253–254).
viṣayin; Tib. yul can). From this perspective—which given Rang byung rdo rje’s rebuke I hesitate to call a “position”—the entirety of the perceived reality of un-awakened beings can be subsumed within this duality of “places” and “senses of place”, otherwise known as “objects” and “subjects”. As these extracts from the songs demonstrate, in Rang byung rdo rje’s assessment, and the broader view of the mahāmudrā tradition, awakening was the destruction of this unnatural dualism; a dualism that delimited a world of truly existent, real places “outside” and a truly existent, real self “inside”.

This deconstruction of place also leads to the deconstruction of travel within the songs. For as Rang byung rdo rje suggests in his first song, if there are no external places, “Mind’s nature... comes from nowhere and has nowhere to go.” But while it may be imagined that these negations in some way limit the travel and place thematic in his writing, actually the inverse is true. For as each journey and place is first constructed and then deconstructed, many of his journeys and the places he visits are described twice: once to construct them and once to deconstruct them.

This sense of (non-)movement towards liberation in the songs, although rather more obtuse than the narrative trajectory of the liberation-stories, is also one of the most obvious places in which the two genres overlap, complementing each other with their variant approaches to travel. But this complementarity, the way they make good travel companions, is also evident in other elements within the stories and songs. The songs’ colophons, for example, position them in time as well as place. Likewise, in the liberation-stories, although Rang byung rdo rje rarely stops his narrative to describe one of his destinations, he does position the events he describes in specific places, and occasionally subjects these places to the visionary scepticism with which they are investigated in the songs. By using his writing in both genres, in other words, it is possible, as this thesis intends to do, to follow his travels in time and place. But his predilection both to play with and deconstruct the ideas of place and time even as he uses them, will make this journey more of an adventure than a commute.

iii. How to Get There

To follow Rang byung rdo rje on this adventure means, in methodological terms, to combine a study of his personal history that includes his travels with the thematic, literary study of travel in his personal writing. This combination allows these texts to be approached as both historical sources and as pieces of literature; a multi-disciplined reading that on the one hand gives due regard to the confluence of interesting times and intellectual influences that marked his lifetime, and the worth of his performative and literary compositions on the other. It will also hopefully show how these two elements of

35 Gyurme Dorje (2013:13).
his life, its chronology and its creativity, inform each other in ways that have hitherto been unexplored.

The historical part of the analysis is particularly aided by the artefactual approach that those who collated and preserved his works adopted; for they took great pains to reproduce the received text, along with its spelling mistakes, inconsistent grammar and other notations. But if this analysis were merely a look at the historicity of these documents, the many layers of literary technique and imagery they contain would be obscured. Looking at the thematic of travel in his personal writing, by contrast, in that it includes both a historical and literary dimension, provides an opportunity to highlight both the historicity and art of the texts.

In using this thematic to combine these literary and historical approaches, the thesis will draw from and diverge from the four previous studies of Rang byung rdo rje’s oeuvre, all of which have focused on his treatises and commentaries, and only included brief histories of his life. The first of these was a master’s thesis by Kurtis Schaeffer entitled The Enlightened Heart of Buddhahood, which is a study of a commentary Rang byung rdo rje composed on the buddha-nature, or tathāgatagarbha (Tib. de bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po). It includes a summary of his life along with a translation of one of his songs that focused on the buddha-nature. The next two studies on his works were books by Karl Brunnholzl. The first of these is a translation and analysis of Rang byung rdo rje’s commentary on a text attributed to Nāgārjuna called In Praise of the Dharmadhātu, a subject closely aligned with the buddha-nature. The second of Brunnholzl’s works and third overall was called Luminous Heart: the Third Karmapa on consciousness, wisdom, and

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36 This state of preservation was most probably encouraged by Rang byung rdo rje’s status as a Karmapa, a status that ensured his works were preserved but also led to his personal story being subsumed within the greater Karmapa narrative and therefore only presented in an abbreviated form. This, as Charles E. Manson (2009:27) noted recently, is a similar situation to that of the second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi. As will be examined shortly, his songs have received even less attention, and were even, like all other songs of the early Karmapas, left out of the most famous of Karma bka’ brgyud mgur glu anthologies, The Ocean of Bka’ brgyud Songs (Bka’ brgyud mgur mthbo, 1972).

37 There have also been several other studies that have mentioned Rang byung rdo rje in the pursuit of other topics. These have included: Schuh, who examined Rang byung rdo rje’s writing on astrology in the context of a study on the Tibetan calendric system (Schuh 1973) and in the context of Mongolian edicts (Schuh 1977); Luciano Petteg (1990:86–88) in his history of the Mongolian Empire in Tibet; Sarah Hookham (1991:136) mentions him in her study of the Gzhon stong tradition; Cyrus Stearns (1999:61–65) in his study on the life and works of Döl po pa’i snying po (1292–1361), who may or may not have taken teachings from Rang byung rdo rje; Kurtis Schaeffer (2000:41–42, 72–75) in his study of the influence of Saraha in Tibet; Klaus-Dieter Mathes (2008:51–74) in his work on the scholar ‘Gos Lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal’s (1392–1481) interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga from the perspective of the mahāmudrā; and Michael Sheehy (2005:69–91) used Rang byung rdo rje’s approach to mind as a basis for a Tibetan Buddhist presentation of psychology.


40 Skt. Dharmadhātustava; Tib. Chos dbyings btsod pa. Rang byung rdo rje and Brunnholzl both align the Nāgārjuna that composed this text with the Nāgārjuna that composed more famous works on Mādhyamika philosophy. A recent study by Zhen Liu (2013:12–29), who has been analysing the Sanskrit text from which the Tibetan translation of this text was composed, however, refutes this alignment, and suggests instead that the Nāgārjuna who composed the Dharmadhātustava was another person.
buddha-nature. It included a translation of the same song on the buddha-nature that Schaeffer had earlier translated, and like his first work a short overview of Rang byung rdo rje's life.\footnote{Karl Brunnhölzl (2007) and (2009). His (2009:201) translation of the song is called \textit{A Song on the Alaya}.} The fourth study was another master's thesis, this time by Manfred Seegers, entitled \textit{Lord of the Teachings}. In the first section of this work, Seegers presented a more detailed survey of Rang byung rdo rje's life than that found in the previous works, but most of this work is still dedicated to Rang byung rdo rje's textual and tantric lineages.\footnote{Full title: "Lord of the Teachings: The Life and Works of the Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje (Manfred Seegers 2009). The section that provides a summary of Rang byung rdo rje's life is found on pages 80–103. This provides a good overview of his life according to traditional sources, but it does not differentiate between the historical layers of story telling about Rang byung rdo rje. Thus, Seegers’ approach to the story is similar to the traditional approaches to Rang byung rdo rje's life. Taking this less complicated approach to the story, however, did allow Seegers to examine the influence Rang byung rdo rje had on Tibetan tantric lineages in more detail. The majority of his study is taken up with the study of these influences (Seegers 2009: 104–185). This means, in other words, that although the title of his work suggests it is dedicated to the life and works of Rang byung rdo rje, there is a distinct emphasis on his "works". Perhaps the reason for this emphasis in Seegers’ writing is that this is indeed an enormous topic and easily overshadows much else about Rang byung rdo rje's life. In the present study, for example, I have repeatedly had to bracket this aspect of his life-story and will direct interested readers to Seegers’ work on this subject.}

These studies have already begun what should be the on-going work of looking at Rang byung rdo rje's influence on the intellectual and scholastic histories of Tibet. Yet contiguous with this project, it also seems a desideratum to look at his influence on its culture, literature, religious institutions—particularly the religious institution of reincarnation—and therefore its politics. This is the area of his life that has to date received much less attention; and this, examined through the perspective of his travels, is the subject of this thesis. It will therefore focus specifically on Rang byung rdo rje’s contribution to Tibet's cultural geography, and in the process will describe how this became intimately linked with his identity as a Karmapa.

The general lack of information about his cultural, social and political life, however, necessitates that this topic be approached in more than one stage. The first of these stages, part one, takes the reader back through textual, social and institutional time by tracing the marks of history on several objects closely associated with Rang byung rdo rje. This then lays the temporal scene for the events of his life, which will unfold in part two.

\textbf{a) Part One: Time Travellers}

In transporting the reader to the place where Rang byung rdo rje's story starts through the medium of three objects, part one, in essence, provides the information needed to make sense of his story. This is necessary because Rang byung rdo rje did not compose his liberation-stories and songs in a vacuum; they were composed in certain ways, using certain words, in certain places, at certain times for certain audiences and purposes. All this specificity of compositional purpose means that when he composed them, there was much left unsaid, much that was assumed, much that was implied, and therefore much
that relied on a shared pool of cultural knowledge to be communicated. It is a situation that in some respects makes reading his personal writing today a bit like walking in during the middle of a conversation; to understand it, it is first imperative to get one’s bearings, to figure out who is speaking, to whom, about what and why. This is not always an easy task. Contextualising conversations can be difficult even within the boundaries of shared cultures and times. To contextualise conversations across the far-flung frontiers between the contemporary reader and Rang byung rdo rje’s thirteenth century Tibetan world requires more than just a cursory explanation, it requires—like most other historical tales—scene setting.

This scene setting is possibly even more important in Rang byung rdo rje’s case than it usually is in the approach to historical literature as, both out of necessity and choice, he was conducting multiple conversations at once. As a religious, political (whether he liked it or not) and cultural figure, he combined the assumed patterns of being and communication associated with all three of these spheres in his writing. These patterns were, in turn, affected by each other: the religious traditions he inherited affected the politics and culture he inherited; the political situation he inherited restricted his religious and cultural endeavours; and the cultural traditions in which he participated framed his responses to religion and politics. This interweaving also means that any examination of these assumed patterns in one element of his life is necessarily a partial examination of these patterns in its other elements.

Another thing that makes trying to catch these threads difficult is their constant movement. Despite the professed conservatism of Rang byung rdo rje and his religious, cultural and political predecessors, they continually and necessarily reformulated their traditions, transforming them as they re-performed them. The perpetual motion of these interrelated sets of assumed knowledge means that a static description of his world would be less than helpful. Setting the scene for Rang byung rdo rje’s entrance onto this religious, political and cultural stage therefore requires the telling of a series of narratives that can move temporally with these changes. It requires, in other words, the telling of a multi-perspectival, manifold prologue that lays a scene rather than an atemporal description of it. This manifold prologue will be explored through an examination of the layers of historicity that coat the texts that preserve his story, the land in which it took place, and the institution that defined his personal identity.

Chapter one begins to lay this scene by analysing the texts that contain his stories and songs. This analysis is conducted genealogically, beginning with the recent history of the texts, and reading their margins for clues about their earlier histories. These histories then, in turn, provide information about how the texts were perceived after and while they were being composed. This chapter then continues to follow the genealogy of the texts
back beyond their compositions, positioning them within developments in the literary histories of the genres in which they were composed: the genres of the liberation-story and the *mgur/glu* songs.

The next chapter is dedicated to an analysis of the layers of cultural mapping that had already accrued on the lands through which Rang byung rdo rje travelled. As such, it examines how the meta-narratives of Tibetan society were inscribed onto the land, ensuring their continuity through the generations and an often-acute sense of place in those who identified with this region. It also explains, however, how these inscriptions were anything but insular, accruing and adapting many ideas from neighbouring countries: particularly India, which acted as a source for many religious maps, but also during Rang byung rdo rje's time inspired the new, political maps of the Mongol imperium.

If this were most life-stories, these two chapters would hopefully provide enough background detail for the reader to follow the coming events of the protagonist's life; his or her tale could then begin simply with the story of their birth. But, as I have already explained in the discussion of Rang byung rdo rje's approach to time, his trans-life identity as a member of the Karmapa body-*mālā* makes finding a beginning for his tale a little more difficult. Chapter three therefore, provides another layer of scene setting for his tale; one that traces the developments in the Karmapa reincarnation tradition that both foreshadow and inform his story.

**b) Part Two: A Travelling Life**

After laying the scene for his story in part one, part two is focused on his travelling life. It does this by separating his story into four journeys that roughly align with the traditional elements of a Tibetan liberation-story: birth, childhood and education, retreat and teaching career, and death.

The tale begins, in chapter four, at the same place as the majority of his liberation-stories, in the moments after the death of the second Karmapa. It then follows as he describes the journey to the next life. This description, the first time in the Tibetan tradition that a journey such as this is narrated, later became the template for many inter-life journeys, and a foundational narrative of the reincarnation tradition. It includes a detour into the body of a recently deceased boy, a sojourn in Tuṣita heaven, and a detailed description of life in his mother's womb. This chapter then describes his childhood and its travels, examining the presentation of him—by both himself and others—as a child prodigy, which led to his recognition as Karma Pakshi's reincarnation by O rgyan pa (1230–1309).

The next chapter, chapter five covers his early years, following him as he leaves O rgyan pa's hermitage because of political upheavals, and makes his way to the Karmapa's seat at
Mtshur phu, where he spends his late childhood and adolescence. Analysing some of the songs that he composed during his stay at Mtshur phu, this chapter discusses how his presence was tolerated but not encouraged by the monastery’s authorities, who were all Karma Pakshi’s relatives. As a result, he spent his time at Mtshur phu in mountain retreat centres at some distance from the main temple, where he developed the identity of a mountain dweller and focused on the privileges of isolated living.

Chapter six opens as he sets off on the longest journey of his young life to Eastern Tibet, and the other monasteries that had been associated with his predecessor Karmapas. It records how at the first of these monasteries, Karma, he followed the pattern he had established at Mtshur phu and went to live in a retreat centre at a distance from the main buildings. But how his attempts to do the same at the second of the Karma bka’ brgyud Monasteries in Khams, Kam po gnas nang was less successful and he was not allowed to stay there. Within the framework of these adventures, this chapter will also examine his representation of the road, of nature and of retreat, paying close attention to the literary and oratory techniques he uses to both evoke and deconstruct his environment. In this respect it will highlight his repeated juxtaposition between towns and monastic centres on the one hand, and mountains and retreat centres on the other. This chapter will also examine the adjustments to cultural maps that he made in pursuit of these goals. In particular, it will describe his participation in the practices of mandalisation and the mapping of Indian holy sites onto Tibetan geography at both Kha ba dkar po in Khams and Tsa ri in Southern Tibet.

The last chapter, chapter seven begins with Rang byung rdo rje in some of the deepest and longest retreats of his life, on the borders of Southern Tibet in his beloved Kong po. It then documents how he spent the rest of his life moving between retreats like this and social responsibility. It follows as he is first compelled to leave Kong po to deal with political problems in Lhasa and surrounds, and later forced to leave for good following a summons to the imperial Mongol court. On this, the longest journey of his life, he travelled from the edges of the Empire to its twin capitals Dadu and Xanadu. But as soon as he arrived in them, he requested leave to return to Tibet. Eventually, after a few years this was given, and he returned to Tibet for a short stay. This allowed him to go into retreat in at Mchims phu near Bsam yas Monastery, before being forced to return to court. Back in Dadu and then Xanadu, he reflected on exile, cities and impermanence, before dying at the age of fifty-six.

This would be the end of the story for most, but just as his beginnings proved ambiguous, so does his end. For, as this last chapter will explore, according to his

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43 Kong po is sometimes also spelt Rkong po, but in Rang byung rdo rje’s compositions it is relatively consistently spelt Kong po, so therefore I have adopted this spelling throughout this work.
biographers, this death was nothing more than a tactical manoeuvre on his behalf; one that enabled him to escape the Emperor's decree that he stay in the capital by death, and return to his beloved mountains in Kong po by being reborn there. As the story ends, it also continues.
Fig 1. Rang byung rdo rje, Portrayed as a Karma bka’ brgyud and Rnying ma Practitioner in a 17th Century Painting of Indeterminate Style.44

44 Used with permission from the Huntington Collection.
PART ONE:

TIME TRAVELLERS
CHAPTER ONE: 
TEXTS

Mountain hermits, yogis like me...
Collect felt-cases for our texts, and yet,
this doesn’t help make our visions true.

Rang byung rdo rje, Hermitage
aged fourteen, ca. 1298.

i. Introduction: The Texts, the Contexts, and the Genres

In Kong po, on the Tibetan Plateau’s southern edge, the earth drops precipitously from snow-capped mountains to deep, green river-valleys. Its inhabitants have colonised the small pockets of flatland that sporadically interrupt this precipitousness and live in small settlements of rammed-earth houses detailed with wood from the local region. Although much has changed since Rang byung rdo rje’s time, this method of habitation has not; these were just the kind of small groups of huts in which he and his students lived seven hundred years ago.

It was in settlements such as these that he led strict yoga retreats, in which every aspect of the yogis’ lives was prescribed: when and how they slept—usually sitting up—their food, and their limited social interactions. These retreats would last for months, years and sometimes a lifetime, as the meditator worked to transform his (or rarely her) perception into that of a yogi. It was these emerging yogis who were, in the main, the intended audience for Rang byung rdo rje’s songs, and it is often within the surrounds of these retreat centres that he delivered them. As their colophons explain, a good majority of them were performed at tantric feasts called gaṇacakra (Tib. tshogs ’khor; “gathering circles”), which they would convene on special days, primarily the eighth, tenth and twenty-fifth of each month.

The liberation-stories and a few of the more socially oriented songs were, by contrast, aimed at the wider audience that could be reached by the technology of writing: a technology that enabled his words to be preserved and carried on paper beyond the verbal repetitions of his students into the far-flung valleys of the Plateau. Yet even these journeys pale in comparison to those they have made in recent centuries as the convergence of wider literacy levels, easier travel and more adaptable printing practices have exponentially increased their capacity for travel. Moreover, it would have taken a very visionary thirteenth century writer indeed to conceive of the possibilities for distribution digitisation has made available for them.

Along with these expanding audience possibilities, however, these new technologies also presented a problem for their new potential readership. For at some point in their first printed and later digital travels, they reached the temporal and geographical borders
of their composer’s cultural zone. At that point, much of the knowledge that had been assumed in their composition was left behind, and subsequent readers have needed to exert an extra effort to fill in these gaps in their knowledge. This is the situation that very much confronts the contemporary reader; to understand the texts these readers first need to trace them back to the site of their composition, and thereafter establish their temporal and cultural milieu. As there are very few details of the texts’ physical history, this primarily meant relying on a close reading of them, their margins, and notes to isolate as many clues as possible about this history. This is the primary goal of this chapter, but as it proceeds, the symbiotic relationship between this task and the primary goal of part one—to lay the scene for Rang byung rdo rje’s tale—will also become evident.

The process of establishing the site of composition of these texts is pursued through a genealogical study, starting with the texts as they are most regularly encountered today, and searching them for clues about their history. Moreover, in order to contextualize their compositions more thoroughly, I will then trace their genealogy back past the point of their composition and examine the literary genres in which they were composed.

ii. Collecting Rang byung rdo rje’s Collected Works

The latest redaction of Rang byung rdo rje’s stories and songs was produced in a manner as far removed from their initial composition as could be conceived: a multimedia, transnational publication of Rang byung rdo rje’s *Collected Works* by A legs gzan dkar Rinpoche. This compilation ran to sixteen volumes: eleven containing Rang byung rdo rje’s own compositions, and five containing commentaries on his best-known works. Gzan dkar Rinpoche compiled the collection as part of a larger project of textual preservation that he began in the early 2000s. To complete this project, he borrowed texts from libraries across the Tibetan areas of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and then arranged for a group of people—who from their list of names mainly seem to be young women—to digitise them at work stations in the Amdo region of Tibet. He then published the collection on paper in Tibet, and as a digitised version, which was later made available on the web site of the Tibetan Buddhist Research Centre (TBRC), of which he is a board member.

This publishing project was truly extraordinary as it not only involved this multiplatform release, but also a series of complicated negotiations with several politically

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1 Tib. *Rang byung rdo rje’i gsung ‘bum*.
2 Also known as Tudeng Nima Rinpoche.
4 Otherwise known as the Tibetan ethnic areas of Qinghai, Gansu and North-eastern Sichuan.
6 *Rang byung rdo rje’i gsung ‘bum* (2006a). This is the version of the text referred to throughout this thesis.
sensitive libraries within the PRC that made hitherto inaccessible texts available to wider audiences. The downside of these negotiations was that Gzan dkar Rinpoche had to agree not to state officially all of the names of libraries from which he borrowed the texts. This obscured the sources of several volumes within the collection, including volumes Nga and Ca, which contain the liberation-stories and songs. This break in the texts’ history was also further exacerbated by the nature of their reproduction in the Collected Works. For Gzan dkar Rinpoche’s project was limited to the digitisation of the texts’ words, rather than the preservation of any other marks and clues that could have been found on the original manuscript or printed text; marks that could have been preserved, for example, through a good digital photograph of the original texts. In normal circumstances, as Matthew Kapstein has recently pointed out, the elision of these marks and details through the digitisation and printing process would not have been a problem, as scholars wishing to examine the original manuscripts would be able to do this separately. But in the case of Tibetan texts, as the negotiations Gzan dkar Rinpoche had to conduct merely to make copies of the works suggests, this access is much more difficult.

This means that tracing the history of these works involves some degree of supposition on my part, the most substantial of which is to suggest that it is very likely these texts were copied from a source text found at ‘Bras spungs Monastery’s Gnas bcu Temple. This supposition is based on the following facts. First, the recently catalogued contents of this temple are the most sensitive cache of texts to which Gzan dkar Rinpoche had access. Second, this catalogue contains a descriptor of several introductory volumes from Rang byung rdo rje’s Collected Works. And third, these are just the sections of a collected works in which liberation-stories and poetry are usually positioned.

If these volumes of the Collected Works were copied from a text in the Gnas bcu Temple cache, as seems very likely, this says much about their origins. For as Kapstein has recently outlined, this store consisted of the libraries that were confiscated by the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682) after he consolidated his rule of Tibet by defeating the Gtsang-based supporters of the Karma bka’ brgyud tradition in 1642. This dates the source text for the latest, digital redaction of these works to at least the first half of the 1600s, 250 years after Rang byung rdo rje’s death.

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7 Personal communication, August 2010.
8 Kapstein (2012) gave a detailed overview of the problems with the vast majority of contemporary Tibetan printing projects in his talk on the knowledge that can be garnered from studying manuscripts.
9 This volume is listed in Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang (2004:43).
10 Kapstein (2012). In his lecture on this topic, Kapstein noted that these cache of texts found in ‘Bras spungs Monastery’s Gnas bcu Temple were those that the fifth Dalai Lama did not want to include within his own library. Primarily, it seems those texts he did not want to include where those belonging to the Bka’ brgyud tradition. He took those that were Rnying ma texts and those texts from his own tradition to which he did not already have access. There have also been many books dealing with this period of Tibetan history, but for a good overview see Sam van Schaik (2011:114–145) and Matthew Kapstein (2006a:127–174).
iii. Texting and Re-texting: Rang byung rdo rje (Re-)imagined

There are four texts within these Collected Works that claim to be liberation-stories composed by and about Rang byung rdo rje. These are contained in the fourth volume of the collection, volume Nga, which is the last of four volumes dedicated to the liberation-stories he composed or collated about previous members of his tantric lineage. These four texts are subsumed within two composite texts that are listed in the Collected Works’ contents as singular entities. These two are The Liberation-Story of the Illustrious, Great Rang byung rdo rje11 and The Verse Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje.12

Within The Liberation-Story of the Illustrious, Great Rang byung rdo rje, the first two sections are clearly marked as his self-composed liberation-stories. They are called:

(1) The Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje’s Past Lives,13 and
(2) The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State.14

These initial sections are then followed by Rang byung rdo rje’s descriptions of his other, concurrent emanations.15 As these descriptions are presented in a similar way to those of his earlier lives, it appears this segment is a continuation of the text titled The Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje’s Past Lives, and the other text, The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, was inserted at this opportune break in its narrative. This assessment is supported by two other factors: the presence of markers at the beginning and end of the In-Between State text; and the precedents for continuing onto present emanations after listing past lives in the three-time format of the previous two Karmapas’ liberation-stories.

As I argue in more detail in the second appendix, it is my belief that this Liberation-Story of the In-Between State is the same text that Rang byung rdo rje, in part one of the Verse Liberation-Story, describes himself dictating to a person he calls “the learned, sacred monk, Gser khang pa” when he was five years old, and has been described in most recent scholarship as non-extant.16

The last section of the text contains a collection of quotes from Rang byung rdo rje that describe his early visions, arranged within a third person narrative.17 The last of these

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11 Dpal chen Rang byung rdo rje'i rnam thar (Rang byung rdo rje 2006c). The third appendix consists of a translation of this text.
12 Rang byung rdo rje'i rnam thar tshigs bcad ma (Rang byung rdo rje 2006d).
13 Sngar pa'i skye bor rnam thar (Rang byung rdo rje 2006c:353–358).
16 Manson (2009:44–45); Berounsky (2010:27); Berounsky (2011:18); Seegers (2009:39). As I will explain further in chapter four, this text seems to have played a significant part in his recognition as Karma Pakshi’s rebirth.
17 It is perhaps also pertinent here to clarify that given the common Tibetan tendency to drop the subject of many sentences, what I mean here by a switch from the first to third person is not necessarily marked by a change from first to third person pronouns (although this does still happen, particularly when these pronouns are used as the recipient rather than an agent of an action), but by the use of honorific words and phrases, and by the use or not of direct speech markers. As both Snellgrove (1967:74) and Yamamoto (2009:282–283) have commented previously on the slippage that is possible between self-penned and other-penned liberation
quotes is an almost word-for-word match with the opening section of the first of his songs, in which he travels in a dream to search for the siddha Saraha on a sacred mountain in Southern India.\textsuperscript{18} The colophon that follows this section reads:

I, Rang byung rdo rje, "Lord of Yogis", do not remember the past very well, but, for the past three years, the faithful monk of Sākyamuni, Dar (ma) brtson (pa), has ardently requested me again and again to (write this down), so I have written it down. By the goodness of this deed, may all the types of wanderers, without exception, quickly attain the highest awakening. The Liberation-Story of the Dharma Noble Rang byung rdo rje's Previous Lives and the ways he saw things was written down clearly in Mtshur phu's retreat centre, Śrī Khyung rdzong.\textsuperscript{19}

As this colophon explicitly refers only to the Liberation-Story of the Previous Lives and—through the expression "the ways he saw things"—the descriptions of his early visions, it adds further weight to the argument that this text is actually a composite of two texts: the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State inserted into a text describing his past lives, present emanations and recent visions that he co-composed with his students at Khyung rdzong. Moreover, as the last record in either his songs or liberation-stories of him staying at Khyung rdzong for any time was as a seventeen year old, in 1300, it also suggests a very early date for the composition of this text. This suggestion is further corroborated by both the early dates of the visions that are listed in the text's third section and the striking similarities between the contents of the Liberation-Story of the Previous Lives and the sixteenth of his songs, the colophon of which states that it was composed in 1298 at Khyung rdzong.\textsuperscript{20}

The attribution and segregation of the three sections of the other self-composed liberation-story within the Collected Works is much more straightforward. The first two of the three sections of this text, The Verse Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje also claim to be liberation-stories composed by him. They are called:

(3) The Verse Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje: Part One,\textsuperscript{21} and
(4) The Verse Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje: Part Two.\textsuperscript{22}

The dates and sites of composition for these two parts of the text are stated in their respective colophons. Part one was written down, again after repeated requests from

\textsuperscript{18} This dream will be analysed in chapter five.
\textsuperscript{19} Rang byung rdo rje (2006c:373). Tib. rnal 'byor dbang phyug rang byung rdo rje bdag. 'das dang sngo phyi legs par mi dran yang. dad ldan shākyā'i tgyi sbyong dar brtson gyi. nan tan chen pos lo gsum sngon rol nas. yang dang yang du bskul phyir yi ger blo. 'di byas dge bas 'gro drag ma lus kun. bia med byang chub nyur du thog pa shog. chos rje rang byung rdo rje rnam par thar pa 'khrungs rab dang. zhal gyis gzigs tshul 'di rnam. mtshur phu's dben gnas chen po khyung rdzong dpal gyi dgon par gsal bar blo. pa lags so.
\textsuperscript{20} Song No. 16 (GN 23–24; GB 203–204).
students, at Bde chen stengs Hermitage, also in the hills above Mtshur phu, in 1324. Part two was dictated to "the scribe Dkon mchog byung gnas" in the main palace at Dadu, in the second month of the female, earth rabbit year (1339), four months before his death. Following these two sections of the text is a short description of his death, and a colophon explaining that one of his students, a Mongolian lay official requested it.23

The claims to Rang byung rdo rje's authorship in the colophons of The Verse and Past Lives Liberation-Stories are also supported by internal textual evidence. To begin with, the similarity in turns of phrase, metaphors and tone between these works and the songs suggests that whoever wrote one group of works wrote the other, which is to say that the most likely author of all these works was Rang byung rdo rje. The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, by contrast, presents a more complicated case; it has some elements in common with Rang byung rdo rje's other writing and others that are strikingly different. The section that resonates most with his other works is the dialogue between him and the dākinis who plead with him to be reborn. In this exchange, he turns their requests back on them, suggesting that if they were doing their job properly, the inhabitants of Tibet would not need his help. "Are the six (types) of wanderers continually healthy?" he asks, "(Or) are their protectors (too busy) continually enjoying themselves?" 24 The most obvious difference is its more formal tone, but it also contains turns of phrase that I have not found elsewhere in his writing, like the use of the word nyams snang (literally "experiential appearance") to suggest a vision. Although these lexical and syntactical elements suggest an ambiguity about the text's author, it is also devoid of any anachronistic or otherwise dubious statements that would immediately disqualify Rang byung rdo rje as one of its composers.25

Along with the co-operative internal elements of these texts, two of the texts also have a long history of attribution to Rang byung rdo rje, which is evidenced by their being repeatedly extracted from within later versions of his life-story. The second Zhwa dmar pa, Mkha' spyod dbang po (1350–1405) included all of The Verse Liberation-Story attributed to Rang byung rdo rje within his collection of Karma bka' brgyud lineage liberation-stories fifty years after Rang byung rdo rje's death.26 And while the earliest

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23 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:412–414). I have included an analysis of all sections of these greater texts and the previous one in the second appendix, along with an analysis of the other, more influential versions of his life-story.
25 As will become evident in the second appendix, there are extracts from other texts that are attributed to non-extant compositions of Rang byung rdo rje that contain evidence against this attribution.
26 Mkha’ spyod dbang po (1978:123). Its opening statement reads: "This is a clear and easy to understand collation of (the elements) of the illustrious, omniscient, dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje's Liberation-Story. As the noble one himself composed a simplified version (of this tale) to which he is the only witness, I will repeat his genuine version here." (Tib. dpal ldan chos kyi rje thams cad mkhyen pa rang byung rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa ni 'dus shing gsai ba go bde bar rje nyid kyi phyogs gcig tu bsdus pa kho na dpang dang tshad mar
reliable 27 text to contain extensive extracts from the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State is a much later work—Gtsug lag phreng ba's (1503–1565) A Feast for Scholars: A Dharma History, 28 which was composed between 1545 and 1564 29—the anachronistic descriptions of the reincarnation tradition these extracts contain suggest it was already a centuries-old text when it was inserted in this work.

Indeed, the juxtaposition between the quoted and host texts highlights developments in the reincarnation tradition between Rang byung rdo rje's times and the mid-sixteenth century. Moreover, the repeated insertion of Liberation-Story of the In-Between State and extracts from The Verse Liberation-Story into even later redactions of his liberation-story enable comparisons between his initial presentation and even later developments in both this discourse and other elements of his story. The most helpful of the later redactions in this regard have been the versions of his tale included within the following larger works: 30

(1) Tshe dbang rgyal's (15th century) Lho rong Dharma History (composed 1446–1451). 31
(2) 'Gos Lo tsā ba's (1392–1481) Blue Annals (composed 1476–1478). 32
(3) Si tu Pan chen's (1700–1774) A Mālā of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons: A Golden Mālā of the Bka’ brgyud (composed 1775). 33

27 Please see upcoming paragraph on the Red Annals.
29 Samten Chosphel (2010).
30 In the process of investigating all the versions of Rang byung rdo rje's liberation-story, I have also read and analysed one other work that is not on this list: the section of the Red Annals (Deb ther dmor po: Kun dga' rdo rje 1981) that describes his life. I have not included this work as a primary source because, as I explain in more detail in the second appendix, its retelling of Rang byung rdo rje's liberation-story is beset by too many internal inconsistencies of time, person and narrative to determine its exact date or authorship. Thus, it is my contention that this text, which is attributed to Rang byung rdo rje's associate Kun dga' rdo rje (1309–1365) of Tshal, is a much later work, most probably composed in the late fifteenth century. As I cannot be certain of its exact authorship or date, I have been hesitant to present any information I found in it as definitive and have used it only in combination with other works. As my questioning of such a widely used text may prove problematic for some readers, I have outlined the reasons for my doubts regarding its authenticity in the second appendix. The analysis included within it expands on provisional comments without analysis by both Seegers (2009:37–38) and Luciano Petech (1990:2) that there may be problems with the dating of the Karma Bka’ brgyud section of this text.
33 Bka’ brgyud gser phreng rnam thar zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba (Si tu Pan chen 2004). Rang byung rdo rje's liberation-story is on pages 345–402. This retelling follows Gtsug lag phreng ba's retelling closely, but includes longer excerpts from Rang byung rdo rje's own writing. It also contains a list of Si tu Pan chen's (2004:401) sources for the tale, which includes Rang byung rdo rje's three self-penned liberation stories. As Si tu Pan chen composed this work at Dpal spung Monastery in Khams in 1775, this suggests that other presently unavailable copies of the texts were in existence at that time apart from those interred by the fifth Dalai Lama. In this regard, it is worth noting that the present Situ Rinpoche is in the process of digitising Dpal spung's collection and this may lead to further copies of these works becoming known. Jackson (2009:268, note 447) provides the time and place of this composition. He also asserts that although the entirety of this work was co-composed by Si tu Pan chen and his scribe 'Be lo tshad dan kun phyab, the section on the early Karmapas was written by Si tu Pan chen alone. Based on this assertion, I have attributed the section of the text describing Rang byung rdo rje's liberation-story solely to Si tu Pan chen.
iv. A Brief History of Song

The surviving texts of Rang byung rdo rje's songs differ from the texts of his liberation-stories in a number of ways. The most notable of these differences is that there are two slightly different extant versions of them: two separate texts within the recently published Collected Works contain his songs and there is another single text that contains a collection of almost the same songs. The other notable difference between these texts and the liberation-stories is that they have never been extracted from and incorporated within later texts. Yet in the search for evidence about their provenance, this re-productive lack is more than compensated for by the many internal markers of origin their redactors preserved in deference to their performative beginnings, markers that are much more rare in the liberation-stories.

a) Collecting and Framing The Songs of Rang byung rdo rje

Initially, as I described in the introduction to this chapter, most of Rang byung rdo rje's songs were performed by him and subsequently recorded by members of his audience. He wrote only eight (or possibly ten) as discrete texts on paper.

As the last song in the collection was written the year before his death in Xanadu, they must have been collated at some point after his death, but there is no colophon attached to either collation that states as much. Nor are there any notes within the texts that name the anthologies' scribes or collators. What they did leave in the text, however, are various marginal notations that speak to the process' importance to them, and they can therefore be read as historical evidence for it. As Jonathan Gold points out in his study of Sa skya Paññita's (1182–1251) textual project, it is imperative to remember that in the Indian-influenced Tibetan context, the protocols that created these literary frames—whether they were the texts' titles, their introductory homages or their colophons—were not only used to facilitate the more widespread recognition in readers usually associated with such literary frames, but also as "protections against the decline of the dharma".

These markers are clearly evident in the collation of Rang byung rdo rje's songs, but they were undertaken within a slightly different paradigm. Sa skya Paññita's project was developed to ensure that a text had a valid Indic source, and subsequently contained many marginal markers to link works with that provenance. Those sacralising Bka' brgyud texts, by contrast, placed a premium on the songs' oral origins as the guru's personal

34 This includes, strangely, the best known anthology of Karma Bka' brgyud songs, the Ocean of Mgu (Bka' brgyud kyi mgu mtho; n.a. 1972). This text has been translated in full in Nalanda Translation Committee (1999). It does not contain the songs of any of the early Karmapas. This text, to date, has not been the subject of a thorough study of which I am aware.
35 Song numbers 35, 37, 38, 39, 74, 124, 125 and 132 all state that they were written by Rang byung rdo rje. The GB says that song numbers 36 and 58 were written by him but the GN says they were spoken.
instructions (man ngag)—Bka’ brgyud means “the oral lineage”\(^{37}\) — and therefore redactors endeavoured to leave markers of this orality within the works.

The first of these markers are the introductions to the songs, which have all been persevered within the collation. These introductions present each of the songs as a discrete text and can consist of several sections. The most common is a homage to the guru, which, in turn, has two parts: a short salutation transliterated from Sanskrit, and a verse in Tibetan evoking and seeking inspiration\(^{38}\) from the guru, and sometimes the Buddha. The short lines of transliterated Sanskrit come in several forms: the phrases namo-guru, “hail to the guru” and namo-ratna-guru “hail to the precious guru” are the most common, but there are also numerous occurrences of namo-buddhāya-guru, “hail to the buddha-guru”\(^{39}\).

Four of the songs, including the first song of the collection, contain an alternate opening that is not a direct homage. This is either a transliteration of the Sanskrit mantra om sarva svasti siddhi hūṃ, which could be loosely translated as “om, may all auspiciousness be established, hūṃ”, or the related phrase om svasti māṅgalaṃ bhavantu, which could be loosely translated as “om, may there be auspiciousness and good luck”. Within the Bka’ brgyud tradition, beginning a song with this homage is considered a sign that the author has experienced realisation and can therefore speak directly from experience rather than derivatively.\(^{40}\) The positioning of this phrase at the beginning of the compilation, and its repetition at the beginning of several other songs, suggests that the texts’ compilers were making this claim for Rang byung rdo rje, and therefore sanctifying the texts’ contents. This clearly places the text that follows it in a different position than those texts that were revered because of their Indian origins in Sa skya Paṇḍita’s project.

Another marker of the texts’ protection is their colophons. These colophons vary in length, from very short sentences to more lengthy expositions that not only attribute the

\(^{37}\) The name Bka’ brgyud is usually described as a contraction of the term Bka’ babs brgyud bzhi (“the four lineages that descended”), which describe the four oral tantric lineages whose practices were combined to form the six dharmas of Nārāyaṇa (Karma Thinley 1980:23).

\(^{38}\) “Inspiration” and “to inspire” are my translations of the Tibetan word byin rlabs, depending on whether it is used as a noun or a verb. The two syllables of this word are byin, which in this context means “power” or “magnificence”, and rlabs, which means a “wave” or indirectly a “flood”. This means that a more direct etymological translation of the word would be “a flood of magnificence”, and in its verbal, imperative form, it would mean “flood me with magnificence”. I have used “inspiration”, and the related verbal form “to inspire” to translate this term as I believe it is closer to the empowering sense of the Tibetan word than the word that is generally used to translate it, “blessing”, which to my mind is much too restricted and theistic to reflect the Tibetan word. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English (2010), the primary meaning of the term “blessing” is “God’s favour and protection”, and to be blessed is to receive this. The same dictionary defines “inspiration”, by contrast as the “Filling of someone” with the urge or ability to do or feel something, especially to do something creative”. There is also much to support this choice in Graeme MacQueen’s (1981 and 1982) analysis of the role of inspiration, and more particularly “inspired speech” in the formation of the Mahāyāna sutras.

\(^{39}\) One of these three homages is written in front of one hundred and thirty-seven songs.

\(^{40}\) This usage was explained to me in personal communications by Gen. Dbang phyug of the Central University of Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, and Bod Sprul sku of Rumtek monastery in 2008.
song they follow to “the dharma noble, Rang byung rdo rje” (Chos rje Rang byung rdo rje), but also explain the benefits of the songs’ compositions. Along with this dedicatory content, these colophons work in several ways to establish the details of the songs’ initial performance and therefore their orality. The most obvious of these is their repeated use of the word gsungs, an honorific verb meaning “to verbalise”, to indicate after every song that it was indeed “spoken” or “sung” by Rang byung rdo rje (Rang byung rdo rje gsungs so). Yet they also include more subtle elements that help to establish this orality. One of these is a change of voice from the lyrical, personalised style of the songs to a formal, deferential tone. This change highlights the conversational style of the songs and provides respectful witnesses for their performance. The positioning of the songs in the colophons also serves to highlight their orality by creating a setting for them in time and place. One hundred and twenty-four of the songs are accompanied by some sort of colophon, within which ninety-five mention the place of composition and fifty-seven give a specific date for it.

Although the songs are generally fragmentary and not framed within narratives, there are a few exceptions to this rule, and when these sporadic and unrelated framing narratives do occur, they also add to the songs’ sense of orality. These framing narratives were sometimes composed by the transcribers and on two occasions, when he describes songs performed in dreams, by Rang byung rdo rje himself. Moreover, even those songs that are unframed by narratives do generally include an introduction to the performance by Rang byung rdo rje himself. In these he makes direct pleas to the audience to “Hear this!” or “have a seat here, and hear what I have to say”. This approach suggests premodern European drama before the introduction of “the fourth wall” that separates the performer from the audience in contemporary theatre, and again enforces the idea of orality in the songs.

Along with these clear, framing markers of orality, there are also many other indications of the texts’ oral original in the songs themselves. The most evident of these is their idiosyncratic mix of Tibetans’ colloquial and literary lexicons. This mix is unusual in pre-modern, religious Tibetan literature in which texts were usually rendered in the

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41 The Tibetan word gsung can be used to describe all honorific verbal activities, including speaking and singing. The Tshig mdzod chen mo, or Great (Tibetan) Dictionary (1986:3013) defines it as “the honorific form of the verbs to voice and to converse” (ngag dang skad cha’i zhe sa). There are other Tibetan words that are more usually used to indicate honorific singing, like the colloquial expression mgul glu bzhes pa. But the collators of Rang byung rdo rje’s text used gsung to indicate his performance of these songs in compound verbs such as mgur gsung, and rdo rje’ glu gsung.

42 As many of these colophons mention either a place or time, this enables the missing location to be established through a comparison with surrounding songs or Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-stories. This positioning, in turn, makes it easier to guess the composition dates for those songs with no colophons at all, as many of them are sandwiched between those with detailed colophons.

43 The fourth wall refers to the invisible “wall” that convention dictates separates a performance from its audience generally in theatre and cinema, but also sometimes in literature. Speaking directly to the audience breaks through the “fourth wall”. The pre-modern dramatists’ proclivity for direct engagement with the audience is described with reference to Shakespeare in Grady (2000). For more information on the fourth wall, see: Bell (2008:203).
"dharma language" (chos skad) that had been purpose-built for the translation of Buddhism into Tibetan, and subsequently formed the elite half of a virtual diglossia in the Tibetan language.44 Rang byung rdo rje’s use of both registers in these songs therefore not only provides further evidence for his songs’ oral beginnings, but also an unusual example of the language mix through which Buddhist teachers sought to communicate ideas orally during his time.

The single most obvious example of colloquial expressions within the songs is the extremely rare inscription of one very colloquial word, a’u rtsi—which means something akin to the English word “okay”—in song number fifty-nine. The lines in which this word is contained read:

phyi nang gnyis ’dzin chod lags na. It is okay to destroy dualism, inside and out,
khor bar snang yang a’u rtsi. and (still experience) the appearance of samsâra.45

In other songs, Rang byung rdo rje even played with the two registers of language, using them to highlight the egotism he often associated with elite knowledge by playing with the first person pronouns in both registers: nga in the colloquial register and bdag in the literary register. The following quote illustrates one of several instances in which he did this:

blo nga’i skyes bu mi brtan pas.  (With) self-obsessed minds, unstable beings
nga bdag ’khrul pa’i lam du zhugs. start down the mistaken “me, me” road.46

b) Tracking Changes in The Songs of Rang byung rdo rje

The two separate texts that contain collections of his songs in the Collected Works are both in the fifth section of the collection, volume Ca. This is the first volume to contain non-biographical writings, and it consists of many smaller texts, including praises and other pieces of poetry. The texts that contain the songs are included within a subsection of the volume called A Cycle of Letters of Advice.47 The first of them is called The Collected Songs of Rang byung rdo rje.48 It contains ninety-two songs, arranged chronologically. The first song was composed in 1298 when he was fourteen years old and staying in retreat at Khyung rdzong; the last was composed in 1323, when he was thirty-nine years old, and staying at

44 Gold (2007:5) describes this process and its outcome in depth in his work on Sa skya Pandita’s textual project, in which he explains that the vast translation project undertaken by the Tibetans to render Indian-language Buddhist texts into Tibetan resulted in the development of an elite language register that was associated with this project, and remained the main idiom of literary communication until modern times.
45 Song No. 59 [GN 92–94; GB 257–260].
46 Song No. 22 [GN 32–33; GB 208–209].
47 Springsyig zhal gdams kyi skor lo (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a). This volume also contains A Cycle of Invocations (Gsol ’debs skor lo), and A Cycle of Praises (Bstod pa’i skor lo).
48 Rang byung rdo rje’i mug bum (Rang byung rdo rje 2006e). Abbreviated in this thesis to GB.
The second collection in the cycle is the Miscellaneous Songs of Rang byung rdo rje. This text begins chronologically where the previous text ended, but also includes groups of songs that are not in chronological order. There are forty-five songs in this collection.

The other version of the collection is found in a single-volume redaction called A Collection of Rang byung rdo rje’s Spoken Songs. This edition of the text was published thanks in part to the efforts of E. Gene Smith, an associate and friend of Gzan dkar Rinpoche who was also one of the co-founders of the TBRC in 1999. Before founding the TBRC, Smith had been involved in a printing project in India, Nepal and Sikkim in the 1980s that encouraged people from the Tibetan cultural area to reprint texts from their traditions. He then catalogued these texts for the United States Library of Congress, and later began scanning them for the TBRC. The publication of the text called A Collection of Rang byung rdo rje’s Spoken Songs was part of the initial printing project. It is a manuscript written in cursive Tibetan script (abu med) and, according to its bibliographical details, its publisher was a Tibetan collector named “Kunchhyab”, who copied and published it in 1983.

The source text for this published copy came from the private library of Bla ma seng ge of Yol mo (also known as Seng brag sprul sku of Yol mo), in Nepal. As this library was located outside the PRC, but still within the Tibetan cultural area, it proved a rich source for Smith’s publishing program. Although I have not been able to uncover many details about Bla ma seng ge, a comparison between the texts reproduced from his collection and other sources for this wider publishing project does say something about his literary tastes. In contrast to many of the other texts published in this period, those sourced from his library were primarily concerned with the tantric yoga traditions of the Rnying ma and non-Karma Bka’ brgyud lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. They also tend to come from lineages that were not affiliated with larger institutions. This text, for example, is the only one published from his library that is associated with a Tibetan lineal hierarchy like the Karmapas, or a major monastic centre like Mtshur phu. This suggests that although the text of the Spoken Songs was attributed to a major figure and the head of a large, monastic institution, it was not used widely, a suggestion supported by the lack of commentaries on

49 Coincidentally, this compilation was made at the same time as his first liberation-story was written, and the colophon of that text indicates that he and his students were engaged in a process of consolidation during this time. Rang byung rdo rje (2006a:402).
50 Rang byung rdo rje’ gur (sic) thar bu (Rang byung rdo rje 2006f). Abbreviated in this thesis to GT.
51 Rang byung rdo rje’ bsungs mgur rnam (Rang byung rdo rje 1983). Abbreviated in this thesis to GN.
52 Some of the other texts from his collection include: Collected Instructional Texts of the Dkar brgyud pa and rnying ma pa Tradition for the Practices Followed in Western Tibet (1985), whose bibliographical notes say that it was "reproduced from a manuscript collection from the library of Seng brag sprul sku of Yol mo"; and Khrid Material to the Practice of the Sadanayogapa of the Kālacakrā by A wa dhu ti pa Btsun pa Bsod nams (1983), whose bibliographic notes say that it was "reproduced from rare manuscripts from the library of Bla ma Seng ge of Yol mo".
it, or references to it in other works.

Even though this text is older in its present form than the digitised copy sponsored by Gzan dkar Rinpoche, a comparison between the two formats suggests that this manuscript has undergone more redactions than the digitised version. The most obvious evidence for this is that in the digitised version, the songs are split into two sections. These two texts would seem to predate the manuscript copy that was formed by combining the two smaller texts. There is also, generally speaking, less information in the colophons of these manuscripts than of the digitised version, suggesting that some of this information was deemed unnecessary in the compilation and copying of the manuscript.

c) The Testimony of Errors

As far as I have been able to ascertain, there is no record of the processes of these two texts’ redactions before the surviving editions were collated, but their mere existence in two different formats suggests they were copied at least five times: once by the texts’ collators who wrote down what they heard orally, once by the scribe who made the 'Bras spung gnas chu Temple version, once by the scribe who made the copy in Bla ma Seng ge’s library, once by Kunchhyab, whose work was later scanned, and once in the digitisation process. This means there have been at least four occasions in which the contents of the texts were copied from one piece of paper to another before, finally, within the last decade, they were photographed and digitised.

A reading of the texts that focuses on the errors accrued in this process rather than its meaning reveals several things about this history of redaction. It reveals, for example, that there has been a concerted and repeated effort in these various re-scribings and even the texts’ digitisation to preserve the mistakes made in the original transcription of the oral performance. The preservation of these mistakes in the texts indicates that their scribes and digitisers made a conscious effort, at the expense of established, literary conventions, to preserve their markers of orality.

The most common mistakes of this type are misspelt homonyms, which are littered throughout both texts of the songs. The most oft-repeated of these is a confusion between the two homonyms rtogs, meaning “realisation” or “to realise”, and rtog meaning “conceptualisation” or “to conceptualise”. There are also many instances in all three texts in which the wrong, homonym tenses of verbs were transcribed. The most common of these mistakes to permeate all three texts is the inscription of the imperative form of the verb sgrubs, “to establish” or “to attain” instead of its present tense form, s grub. The commonality of these mistaken spellings suggests that these errors were present in the
earlier texts that were a shared source for both the manuscript and digitised texts. The manuscript also contains many similar misspellings of the verb *sgom*, "to cultivate", which is also often written in its imperative form, *sgoms*, rather than its present tense. As this mistake is not repeated in the digitised texts, it must have been accrued in its individual scribal history.

Both the digitised texts and manuscript also contain a very telling mis-transcription of the word *rtsi* as *srig* in the following verse:

```plaintext
bla ma'i gdamms ngag thob nas kyang dben pa tshul bzhin *sgom* pa de shin tu ngo mtshar che lags kyang bsam gan nyams myong bar *srig* la brten nas rdzun du smra ba 'di bdag bzhan bslu bas 'di ma mtshar
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Having received instructions from their gurus they cultivated precisely in solitude, which is so very surprising, so grand, but then, as is also possible, their dhyāna experience became scattered and they (started) telling lies about it. Misleading self and others is not so surprising.

This mis-transcription is further complicated because the word *rtsi* retains its colloquial meaning of “possibility” rather than its literary meaning of “calculation” or “plan”. This doubling of orality through colloquialism and mis-rendering meant that the line did not make sense to either myself or my Tibetan poetry teachers until it was read aloud, when the meaning of this near homonym and colloquialism were instantly recognisable.

Along with the testimony these errors provide for both the orality of the songs and their scribes’ efforts to preserve traces of it, there is also some evidence from scribal errors that support the suppositions I made earlier regarding the histories of the manuscript and the digitised. The proposition that the manuscript copied from a text in Bla ma Seng ge’s library was the end product of a process of at least three personal scribal productions and not a result of a wider publishing project is supported by the fact that this redaction contains just the kinds of haplography and dittography that would be involved in this recopying project. In particular, either Kunchhyab or an earlier scribe was more prone to eye-skips than text repetition; a comparison between this manuscript and the digitised text suggests probably ten instances of eye-skip or haplography, while there are only two instances of text repetition or dittography.

The testimony of the errors within the digitised text is, however, a little less predictable, and the study of these kinds of mistakes in Tibetan texts, virtually non-existent. But several recurrences of certain errors do seem to suggest something about

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53 While the majority of these misspellings are of verbs, there are also frequent misspellings of nouns. A prominent example of this is found in Song No. 102, 10 (GN 148–150; GT 371–373), in which the word *yid* ("mind") is misspelt in both texts as its near homonym yi, a connective grammatical particle.

54 Throughout the translations in this thesis, I have inserted personal pronouns into translations although they are not present in the Tibetan without marking them with parentheses. All other additions to the translations are marked with parentheses.

55 Song No. 102: 10 (GN 148–150; GT 371–373).

56 Sam van Schaik (2007) wrote an informative article about applying textual analysis to Tibetan manuscripts, but as far as I am aware there has been no textual criticism of digitized Tibetan documents.
the history of the text. Namely, in comparing this text to the manuscript, it becomes evident that most typographical errors result from confusion among the Tibetan letters ⁵⁵ / pa, ⁵⁵ / sa and ⁵⁵ / la. As these three letters are not easily confused in the headed version of the dbyu can which is most commonly used for printing, but are easily confused in the cursive form of the Tibetan script that does not have a head, dbyu med, this suggests that the text from which the digitisers worked was a manuscript. This suggestion is further verified by a study of the inventories of Central Tibetan printing houses, the institutions that maintained the sets of blocks from which all pre-modern Tibetan printed texts were made. These do not include any mention of a collection of his songs or Collected Works.⁵⁷

This evidence not only says something about the physical history of these texts, it also adds more weight to the thesis that they were part of the fifth Dalai Lama’s sixteenth century haul for two reasons: first because the majority of these works were also manuscripts; and second because it rules out the possibility that the texts were part of a nineteenth or early twentieth century printing project. This in turn means that although it cannot provide definitive proof of their composition by Rang byung rdo rje, it at least speaks to an extended history for this collation of the songs.

As this evidence cannot establish Rang byung rdo rje’s composition of the songs definitively, it is therefore necessary to change track and analyse whether anything within them contradicts this attribution. The fragmented nature of the songs’ texts means that this investigation must assess each song individually. This analysis suggests only one song whose attribution is questionable: song 121. This song’s attribution is problematic because it contains the line, “This is why I, Karma Pakshi, laugh alone.”⁵⁸ At first glance, this seems to be a clear misattribution of a song by Karma Pakshi to Rang byung rdo rje, but as the following extract from the song suggests, the other versions of its refrain find the author attributing a variety of elevated titles to himself: “Karma Pakshi” could be read as one of these elevated others. It reads in part:

When those who have not realised how to travel liberation’s road do not carry any provisions, any tṣam pa for the next life, it is a great loss, for as soon as you experience mahāmudrā, there is brilliance. This is why I, this great meditator, laugh alone.

When great meditators do not attain awakening on liberation’s

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⁵⁷ The only sets of blocks inscribed with a work composed by Rang byung rdo rje mentioned in these catalogues are those that could print his retelling of the Buddha’s Jātaka Tales (Ngawang Gelek Demo 1970:181). They were included within the inventory of the Zhol printery, which is located at the base of the Potala. The list of printing blocks at Mtshur phu does not include any by the third Karmapa. It does, however, include the blocks for a text called The Liberation-Stories of the Successive Karmapas (Karma pa rim byon gyi rnam thar) (Ngawang Gelek Demo 1970:234). This appears to have been printed as Karma nges don (1973), as its English preface reads in part “made from a print of the Mtshur-phu blocks by Topden Tsering”.

⁵⁸ Song No. 121; 29 (GN 181-182; GB 397-398).
path because they are too engrossed in daily, human doings, it is a great loss, for as soon as you become awakened, there is brilliance. This is why I, this siddha, laugh alone.

When great meditators who are not diverted and perverted by these concerns still do not realise the final journey, it is a great loss, for as soon as the five-bodied Buddha arises, there is brilliance. This is why I, this realised one, laugh alone.

When great meditators spend their lives in settlements, and are (consistently) back-bitten by villagers, it is a great loss, for as soon as they (depart for) mountain solitudes, there is brilliance. This is why I, this mantra-holder, laugh alone.

When great meditators do not realise\(^{59}\) the ultimate, final meaning because they are constantly involved in the eight (worldly) dharmas, it is a great loss, for as soon as worldly knots unravel, there is brilliance. This is why I, this bhikṣu, laugh alone.

When great meditators do not attain buddhahood in one lifetime because they are too busy extracting water from pebbles,\(^{60}\) it is a great loss, for as soon as there is a gnostic\(^{61}\) path to liberation, there is brilliance. This is why I, Karma Pakshi, laugh alone.

v. Watching Horizons: How Genres Develop

Along with the insights that have been provided by looking at internal evidence for their history, it is also possible to find out more about these texts by approaching their contents from the perspective of their literary as opposed to physical genealogies. A text’s literary genealogy is the cultural influences and impulses that led to its creation. These genealogies, in the main, are usually explained by examining the intersections between these texts and literary genres; thus establishing their pre-compositional genealogy in Tibetan literature. This analysis is important from the perspective of the individual histories of these works, but also because it highlights the shaping processes inherent in genre composition and therefore provides a more lucid insight into the processes of composition.

To engage in this process, it is first necessary to adopt a particular approach to the very slippery topic of “genres”. In this approach, all genres of literature are viewed as performative processes rather than definitive entities; processes that arise out of a

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59 Both texts read rtogs pa instead of rtogs pa.

60 This reads rdel, which appears to be a scribal error as rdel, which means “pebbles”.

61 “Gnostic” and “Gnosis” are my translations of the Tibetan word ye shes. I have chosen this term to translate ye shes and the term “wisdom” to translate the term shes rab primarily to indicate a distinction between the two terms. The choice to translate ye shes as “gnosis” is, however, informed by the fact that it is a cognate of the Sanskrit term jñāna” (Doniger, 2013:283), which is its Sanskrit equivalent. And, following Wallace (2001:143), this decision was also made to reflect what Rang byung rdo rje describes as the unmediated nature of this understanding. In making this decision I am in no way seeking to align this Buddhist form of gnosis with that described in Western mystic traditions. Just as the presentations of “wisdom” in the two groups are different, so are their presentations of “gnosis”.

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combination of older forms of expression, innovation, historical events and social necessity, and re-formulate the genre in each performance of it. These performances take their lead from the established patterns, but they redefine them as they continue, exposing the genre conventions to other patterns and new historical and personal conditions. In this way, rather than a strict set of rules governing the structure of a text, genres are instead, in the words of the literary theorist John Frow, “horizon[s] of expectation, against which any text is read, so they themselves are subsumed within a broader-horizon formed by a[n historical] period’s system of genres.”

When Rang byung rdo rje decided to tell his stories and to compose songs that reflected his experiences, he became part of these processes; he created works that reflected the state of the genre as he had inherited it, and broadened the horizons of their expectations as he performed them.

vi. The Stories' Story

In the case of the liberation-story, these horizons and their subsumption within broader horizons have already been quite thoroughly mapped by other scholars, with whose work I can now compare the discrete examples of Rang byung rdo rje's compositions. The term rnam thar is the Tibetan neologism that was created to represent the Sanskrit term vimokṣa. This Sanskrit term was used in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism to refer to a "complete liberation" from the cycle of existential suffering, otherwise known as saṃsāra. As Peter Roberts notes, the first Tibetan use of this term to refer to a story as well as a state is found in early Tibetan interpretations of the famous Śāntideva text the Guide to the Behaviour of Bodhisattvas. In this work, Śāntideva instructs his readers to learn from “the liberation of the illustrious Sambhava”, and as Roberts explains, the Tibetans took this to refer to a text, although there is no record of a text by this name, and it could just have easily referred to an event.

This term was then increasingly applied to the burgeoning number of life-stories of prominent, charismatic teachers that were created during the so-called “era of fragmentation” (sil bu'i dus), after the dissolution of the Tibetan Empire. During this time,

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62 This presentation of genre is generally taken from Frow’s (2006) work, but it is also informed by the analysis of Tibetan genres in the work of Gyatso (2001:116-122) and Yamamoto (2009:282-283).

63 Frow (2006:70). This term “horizon of expectation” has been adapted from Hans-Robert Jauss's (1982) reader-response theory to a more contemporary framework in Frow's work.

64 Vi is an intensifier and mokṣa is a derivative of the root vmuc, which is roughly equivalent with the English word “release” (Whitney 1845:122).

65 Skt. Bodhisattvacaryavatāra; Tib. Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod 'jug. There have been many studies of this text. See for example: Crosby and Skilton (1998) and Brassard (2000). The title Bodhisattvacaryavatāra is a re-translation into Sanskrit of the Tibetan title, in Sanskrit form it is more usually known as the Bodhicaryavatāra.

66 Śāntideva (1960:78) Chapter 5, verse 103. Skt. śīr-sambhava-vimoksā; Tib. dpal 'byung ba yi rnam thar.

67 Roberts (2007:4-6).

there was no central control on the Tibetan Plateau, and this created a situation in which secular and religious figures competed for influence, using a combination of martial and cultural power, including the telling of stories, to achieve their aims.

While the seeds of the genre stem from this period, the next traditionally ascribed stage of Tibetan history, the so-called “later-transmission” (phyi dar), also had a determinative influence on the liberation-stories’ development. This period saw renewed exchanges between Tibetans and Indian Buddhists that led to the introduction of another wave of Buddhist lineages and practices. The traditions associated with this influx were called the “new tantras” (gsar ma’i rgyud, or gsar ma), and in the face of their innovations the older traditions that had been introduced during the imperial period reformulated themselves, becoming known as the Rnying ma (“the old ones”). This proliferation of new traditions and the reformation of the old tradition led, in turn, to even more competition between the followers of the various lineages. And in this climate, in many ways the cultural power of stories about charismatic religious teachers came to have even more power than martial, secular power. All of these developments meant that the liberation-stories of this era, although they survive as literary artefacts, were in their time part of larger projects that sought to establish the charismatic teachers whose stories they told as the preservers of traditions by appealing to their inherent, personal authority.

a) Say that Again
As literary artefacts from a time of competition between various schools, it may be imagined that all the liberation-stories from this period would be essentially polemical, but this is not the case. Instead, the mode of competition that the storytellers of this era adopted was more adaptive than polemical; which is to say that they looked at what other lineages were doing, and took all their good ideas.69

This, it seems, is particularly true of the elements of these tales that were indigenous to Tibet, and therefore part of the shared heritage of all the different lineages. Janet Gyatso highlighted these indigenous and shared elements in her ground-breaking study of self-penned liberation-stories within the Rnying ma tradition.70 In this work, Gyatso describes how the liberation-story genre arose out of a combination of uniquely Tibetan literary precedents and historical conditions, origins that were then reflected in later compositions. The first of these precedents, she argued, was the imperial “pennant for relating (royal) narratives of origin” to establish divinity.71 This precedent, she continued, not only predisposed Tibetan composers to create literary histories of the prominent

69 John Powers (1993:147–160) used the analogy of sports teams stealing winning teams’ strategies to describe the same phenomenon in the context of the production of the Sāṃsthitiśrīmocana-sūtra.
persons of their age, but also paradigmatically allowed for these persons to be given divine or semi-divine status. The liberation-stories of the early Karmapas and several of their contemporaries support this thesis in several ways. Most notably, these works not only reflect this tendency towards “narratives of origin” in their presentation of the earlier lineage members—presentations which are used to establish the protagonists’ authority—but they also explicitly use imagery from the narratives of the Tibetan Empire to do this.

The other element of the indigenous tradition that Gyatso suggests as a particular precursor for the self-penned liberation-story genre is the keeping of historical annals.\footnote{Gyatso (2001:117).} Again, there is much evidence in the writing of Rang byung rdo rje, his predecessors and their contemporaries to support this idea. To be specific, the format of his own liberation-stories, particularly those composed about his own deeds, read like historical annals; they repeatedly establish the time, place and participants in a perfunctory and repetitive manner reminiscent of these annals, before describing the day or month’s activities.\footnote{I have used the expression “perfunctory and repetitive” to differentiate this process from the tradition of beginning Buddhist sūtras with a description of who is present and where they were delivered. Although these introductions to events are similar in that they establish the position and audience for an event, they do not follow the pattern of the sūtras’ introductions, and they are used much more frequently to describe all sorts of events not just teaching events. Thus, they are much more similar to the pattern of establishing time and place used within historical Tibetan annals than the more performative tradition of the Indic sūtras.}

b) How to Become Accomplished

For the practitioners of the new tantras, however, there was also a greater imperative to mix this promotion of and allegiance to Tibetan stories with the stories of their imported, Indic lineages than there had been for those following the old ways. This they did by adapting a number of elements from the tradition of Indian life-storytelling. The most evident of these was not within the stories themselves, but their approach to these texts. In contrast to the tales of the Empire, the tales of their Indian predecessors were viewed not only as inspiration for meditation, but also as objects of this meditation.

The precedent for this idea can be found in the collections of life-stories of the Indian siddhas (Tib. sgrub thob; “the accomplished ones”) and mahāsiddhas (Tib. sgrub chen; “the great accomplished ones”) that were collected in India and translated into Tibetan in the eleventh or twelfth century.\footnote{Dowman (1985:384).} For those who wished to replicate the siddhas’ and mahāsiddhas’ achievements, their stories were approached not only as an inspirational model but also as an object of guru-yoga (bla ma'i rnal 'byor), in which a yogi would seek to realise a state of non-duality between their mind and these siddhas’ minds. By focusing properly on their stories with an adoring mind, the tradition suggested, their followers would be engaged in a form of concentration that could lead them to the same
outcomes as their heroes. This led to their stories, like the texts of other tantric practices, being given the name sādhana (Tib. sgrub thabs). This term means “method of accomplishment” and while it therefore could have been literally applied to the stories of the siddhas as “the accomplished ones”, it was also taken to mean that these stories could transform perceptions. In one of his songs, Rang byung rdo rje clearly describes these stories in this way, suggesting that his students:

Seek to generate a single pointed, pure-vision
in your own pure-mind that adores the Buddha’s
infinite projections, the gurus, through (contemplating)
their illuminating liberation-stories.

As Rang byung rdo rje explains, the main purpose of this adoring concentration was to achieve the non-dual state of union with the guru that was the stated aim of guru-yoga practice, but a by-product of this engagement was the adaptation of the siddhas’ life-stories as blueprints for yogis’ post-mediation lives. This, in turn, influenced the way they told their own stories. The most obvious example of this influence is their adaption of clear breaks in their narrative between episodes in their lives. Like the Indian siddhas, the earlier Tibetan yogis’ liberation-stories clearly divide their lives’ chapters into: family background and birth, the development of a secular or religious career, the encounter with the guru, their practice of the guru’s teaching, realisation, their own teaching career and death. This arc retains echoes of the meta-narrative of liberation that was evident in the indigenous tradition, but it is framed very specifically within the temporal sequence of the siddhas’ stories.

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75 This term is used repeatedly by Dowman (1985:5) to describe the lives of the siddhas in the collection of their life-stories called The Histories of the Eighty-Four Mahāsiddhas (Skt. Caturasitisiddhapravrtti; Tib. Grub thob brgyad cu rtsa bzhis lo rgayus (Abhayadatta 1979).
76 Song No. 100; 8 (GN 144–145; GB 368–369) A Lamp for the Experiential Path.
78 As the liberation-story develops after Rang byung rdo rje’s time, the breaks in narrative to indicate these elements of the story generally become less apparent. In Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s story, for example, these breaks are marked by chapter markers. In Rang byung rdo rje’s stories they are sometimes marked by clear breaks, and other times more subtle changes in the narrative. After Rang byung rdo rje’s time, another division of narrative based on the level of awareness the story contains appears to become more important. This division was primarily evident amongst those who began to write their own liberation-stories, who divided their narratives and sometimes their texts into the levels of the outer (phyi ba’i rang rnam), secret (gsang ba’i rang rnam) and even super-secret (yang gsang ba’i rnam thar) elements of their experience. For more information on this division, see: Gyatso (2001:6–8); Templeman (2008:383, Note 106). Seegers (2009: 80–120) somewhat anachronistically uses this division to analyse Rang byung rdo rje’s work. Despite the slight problems with the literary historicity of this approach, which would preclude its use in this thesis, his analysis does, however, bring insights into Rang byung rdo rje’s influence on later Karma Bka’ brgyud lineages that would not otherwise have been possible.
c) In Another Life

As all these developments occurred before his lifetime, they can all be found in Rang byung rdo rje's liberation-stories, and they can also be found in the liberation-stories of his two predecessor Karmapas. But the existing liberation-story models also presented those who wished to tell the early Karmapas' story—whether that was the Karmapas themselves or others involved in the development of the Karmapa project—with a particular narrative conundrum. The crux of this problem was that unlike all these other liberation-stories that began at birth and ended at death, their story did not.

After Dus gsum mkhyen pa, "knower of the three times", began to tell his story—which later became their story—across multiple lives, it no longer fitted into the liberation-story model. Fortunately for Dus gsum mkhyen pa and the subsequent Karmapa project, the person who decided to tell his tale had a wealth of literary experience and a talent with words that he used to innovate a new yet passably derivative way of telling liberation-stories: Dus gsum mkhyen pa's friend, the translator and scholar Rgwa Lo tsā ba (12th century). Rgwa Lo tsā ba had lived and studied in India for many years, and as the principal innovation he used to tell Dus gsum mkhyen pa's story seems to have been drawn from these travels and studies; for to tell Rang byung rdo rje's multi-life narrative, he included elements from the Indian literary tradition of the "birth-stories" or jātaka.79

A jātaka collection typically consisted of a series of stories about the past-lives of the bodhisattva who would become Śākyamuni Buddha. They were and are some of Buddhism's oldest stories, and can be found in different languages and cultural regions throughout the Buddhist world.80 This has led to great variety in jātaka traditions and seen them perform diverse functions in the cultures that adapted them. The texts of the stories that were translated into Tibetan can best be described as morality tales.81 They consist of episodes from the Buddha-to-be's previous lives—as animals, ghosts, hell beings, gods and humans—in which he/she learns a moral or demonstrates one to someone else. In most other countries and cultural contexts, the tales within this collection were either added to, lengthened, or both, but the Buddha remained their protagonist. In Tibet, by contrast, while those who used this format generally retained its episodic nature

79 This work by Rgwa Lo tsā ba is called Chos rje Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i skyes rabs rin po che ser gling le'u bco bryag pa (Eighteen Chapters (from the) Golden Isle: the precious birth-stories of the dharma noble Dus gsum mkhyen pa). It is included within a recent collection of Dus gsum mkhyen pa's birth and liberation-stories published as part of the celebrations for his nine-hundredth anniversary (Jamgon Kongtrul Labrang, 2010:33-73). This work was also obviously the source work for Rang byung rdo rje's redaction of Dus gsum mkhyen pa's liberation-story, which he says he compiled from "the stories the noble one told to others" (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a:158).
80 For a survey of this genre, see the introduction in Shaw (2006:1-15).
81 The most famous of these texts was a work by Āryaśūra called jātakamālā (Skyes rab gi phreng ba; A Mālā of Birth-Stories), which was translated into Tibetan during the first translation period (Lalou 1953: text 656). This was the original text of forty-one stories to which Rang byung rdo rje added sixty-seven additional tales to create his collection of 108 jātaka, which he called Ston pa'i skyes rabs (The Birth-Stories of the Teacher; Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. Kha).
and various scene-setting devices, they often changed its protagonist, replacing Śākyamuni Buddha with Tibetan spiritual luminaries.

Although it is difficult to say for certain, it is quite possible that Rgwa Lo tsā ba’s retelling of his friend’s story was the first performance of this protagonist switch in Tibetan literature. Reading his work it is easy to see why he chose to present his friend’s reminiscences in this format, for there is much to recommend the birth-story format to the telling of a story about one who “knows the three times”. Like the stories of the Indian jātaka, for instance, Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s stories also recall lives lived long ago, in lands far, far away, in bodies often dissimilar to his own. Indeed, the similarities between Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s tales and the tales of the historical Buddha suggest that these tales not only had an influence on Rgwa Lo tsā ba’s framing of these tales, but also Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s telling of them.

The other practical benefit of this form of storytelling is that once these narrative and literary patterns had been adopted, they could then be adapted to Karma Pakshi’s and Rang byung rdo rje’s past life additions. In Karma Pakshi’s case, these additions were quite fragmented, and therefore do not appear to be part of a larger, strategic approach to

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82 Because of its importance to the reincarnation tradition that developed alongside it, there has been some discussion and perhaps unintended disagreement in the past decade about this development in this genre. Matthew Kapstein (2003:774-776) began this discussion in his aforementioned examination of the influence of the Indian literary tradition in Tibet. In this thoughtful survey, Kapstein included a section on the influence of the jātaka tradition in Tibet, in which he suggested that the Tibetan version of the genre that placed “contemporary Tibetan masters” in the central role helped form “the ideological background for the development of an incarnate hierarchy in Tibet from the late thirteenth century onward” (2003:775). To illustrate the genre, Kapstein used a text called ’Brom ston rgyal ba'i byung gnas kyi skyes rabs (The Birth-Stories of Dromtön Gyalwa Jungned; No author, 1994). This text was “probably redacted,” he said, “in the thirteenth century, though certainly on the basis of materials first composed and compiled during the eleventh and twelfth centuries” (Kapstein 2003:775). But according to Leonard van der Kuijp (2003:24), the sections of this text that can be dated to the eleventh and twelfth centuries were precisely those parts of the text that did not speak of ’Brom ston’s past lives; those that did were added in the mid-13th century. A comparative study of this text with the two birth/liberation-stories of Dus gsum mkhyen pa and Karma Pakshi suggests that van der Kuijp’s analysis is correct, as this text contains many of the same past-life narrative elements—including references to the newly developing, sacralising story of the Empire to which van der Kuijp (2003:24) refers, and memories of lives as Indian elites—as Karma Pakshi’s mid-13th century tale, and these elements are not present in Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s stories. What is more, the suggestion that they were later developments in the genre is also supported by another text in the genre that was composed at the same time as Rgwa Lo tsā ba’s work, and like his work contains more references to Indian jātaka style narratives than these later texts. This is a compilation by Phag mo gru (1110-1170; 2003), a contemporary and friend of Dus gsum mkhyen pa and Rgwa Lo tsā ba, which seems to be based on a previous life story of Phag mo gru as a monkey. Neither Kapstein nor van der Kuijp mention Rgwa Lo tsā ba and Dus gsum khyen pa’s stories in their analysis, but it does seem that a close study of these early birth-stories and their links with the developing reincarnation tradition would be helpful, for without this study it is difficult to say which came first, Phag mo gru’s own birth-stories, or Rgwa Lo tsā ba’s version of Dus gsum khyen pa’s tales. In this regard, it is also interesting to note, as Trunggram Gyatru Rinpoche Sherpa (2004:23) has, that the earliest liberation-stories of Sgam po pa begin with a prophecy about his life, not descriptions of his earlier lives. This, in some ways, could have been a bridging precedent between the stories without any previous lives at their beginnings and Rgwa Lo tsā ba’s telling of Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s tale.

83 Rang byung rdo rje (2006g: 209, 211).

84 Charles Manson has also recently published a text he received from the present Karmapa that contains a list of the second Karmapa’s previous lives, as described by him. This text was apparently put together by the third Karmapa’s student Ye shes rgyal mtshan (2012). Its presentation of his past and present lives is much more
past-life stories. Yet as will be explored in more detail throughout this thesis, Rang byung rdo rje’s approach to this genre was by contrast exceedingly thorough, organised and multi-pronged. The first element of this strategy was to retell the Buddha’s jātaka, adding Tibetan oral stories to the received literary tradition and thus creating an auspicious total of one hundred and eight tales. After working on the classic version of the genre, he then moved on to rework his predecessors’ hybrid birth- and liberation-stories, reframing them to highlight the connections between the three reincarnations. He then placed these stories within a series of liberation-stories of his other Bka’ brgyud lineage forebears, creating a lineage of liberation-stories that ended with his own teacher, the siddha O rgyan pa. Finally, he composed his own birth and liberation-stories in the same format in which Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s had been framed; adding further and even more strategically to the list of remembered existences, and keeping better records of his own life and other concurrent emanations than his predecessors had.

vi. A Genealogy of Mgur/Glu

Like the liberation-stories, the genre of song in which Rang byung rdo rje chose to compose, the mgur/glù, was also greatly influenced by a combination of indigenous and Indic elements. Yet, unlike the liberation-story genre, which developed subsequent to the time of the Tibetan Empire, there is evidence that the mgur/glù’s history stretches back to the imperial era. Since this type of song is still composed today, this gives this genre one of the oldest continuing histories in Tibetan literature. Throughout this long history, there have of course been many changes to the songs affixed with the dual titles mgur and glu. Nevertheless, the songs thus affixed have also retained enough of a core group of defining characteristics to suggest a continuum of association between these descriptors and the literature they describe. These core characteristics are usually described in some variation of the following:

(a) Short lines; glu/mgur usually have between five and nine syllables per line, and most commonly six or seven.

thorough and organised than that found in Karma Pakshi’s own compositions, but as it was at least dated after Karma Pakshi’s death, it still does not suggest a concerted effort in this regard on Karma Pakshi’s part.

86 Rang byung rdo rje (2006g) and Rang byung rdo rje (2006h).
87 Brenda Li (2011:32-37, 89) analyses this work within her PhD thesis on the liberation-stories of O rgyan pa. This collection of liberation-stories by Rang byung rdo rje is also an obvious predecessor to the Golden-Mālā (gsar phreng) genre, in which the lives of the luminaries of various Bka’ brgyud lineages were presented in omnibus editions (See: Smith, 2001:39-53).
88 Unlike the genre conventions outlined by Gyatso (2001:101-123), Rang byung rdo rje does not make a distinction through titles or description between those liberation-stories that he composes about himself and those that he composes about others. He calls them all simply rnam thar, and as he does this, this thesis will follow this convention. In the works Gyatso studied, by contrast, self-penned liberation-stories were called rong rnam, short for rong gi rnam thar, or “their own liberation-story” which were contrasted with rnam thar, written about others.
Rang byung rdo rje's choice to compose in this genre created a link between him and the continuum marked by these characteristics. Tracing the genealogy of his songs means figuring out how they fit into that continuum.

**a) Inheriting an Empire of Song**

The oldest surviving fragments of Tibetan texts were discovered in the caves at Dunhuang, in the early years of last century. In these texts the term *glu* is used to refer to the simplest, indigenous forms of Tibetan poetry. These were often set to music and therefore resonate with the English word "song" as it is used in poetry and music. The term *mgur* is used in a variety of ways that are all associated with speech in the honorific register. The most common of these is *mgur* as a speech marker in the expression *mgur nas*, literally meaning "from the throat". But of more relevance to the present discussion was its use to describe some songs in the honorific register, specifically those in which the royal family is praised. The following extract is from one of these early *mgur*:

(ma yig) chab chab ni pha rol na
yar chab ni pha rol na
myi'i bu ni nyi'i bu ste
lha yi ni sras po zhugs
rje bden ni bkol du dga'
sga bden gyis ni bstad du dga'

On the other bank of the river, the river,
on the other bank of the great Yar (klungs),
lives a man, the son of a man,
but really a child of the gods.
If you are slave to a true king, what joy;
if you are supported by a true saddle, what joy.

This specific use of the term *mgur* to describe this kind of song diverges from its other, more general association with honorific speech acts. Although it was obviously being used to describe some of the same semantic field covered by the term *glu*—which generally refers to rhythmic speech acts—it does not follow the general rules of Tibetan honorific speech and replicate this semantic field completely. Instead it leaves two areas uncovered:

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90 This list in its entirety follows Jackson (1996:371). In the section of his history of the *mgur/glu* entitled "A Summary of their Characteristics" (chos bsdus par ston pa), Don grub rgyal (1997: 485–583) mentions this genre's short syllable counts, relative lack of ornamentation (1997:522) and repetition (1997:531–535), under the heading "the *mgur*’s own ornamentation" (*mgur rang gyi rgyan*). He also, indirectly, mentions their use of environmental imagery in that he defines the *mgur/glu* as songs coming from and representing Tibet through its "air, earth, heart, snow, rivers, and mountains" and so forth (1997:328).

91 Dunhuang is in the PRC's present day province of Gansu. The story and controversy of these texts' discovery and preservation has recently been retold in J. Morgan and C. Walters (2011).

92 This word is also related to the contemporary honorific word for throat in colloquial Tibetan, *mgul*, which in turn is included within the contemporary, colloquial verb *mgul glu bzhes pa*, "to sing". The early *mgur/glu* were evoked, therefore, in the name given to the songs of the sixth Dalai Lama, *mgul glu*. For an analysis of these songs, see Sorenson (1990).

93 Author's own translation. The Tibetan is sourced from Don grub rgyal (1997:360–61).
those songs sung by or about venerated beings who were not part of the royal family like religious figures; and those songs sung by or about the royal family that are combative rather than laudatory. Both of these types of songs were merely called glu.93

The differences in usages of these terms led Ter Ellingson in his seminal study of Tibetan lyrics and music to describe the glu and mgur as two separate genres or sub-genres of poetry, a division that has been followed by most other Western commentators.94 Contemporary Tibetan scholars, by contrast, following the lead of the renowned Tibetan poet and literary historian Don grub rgyal (1953–1985), describe the mgur/glu as one category. In contrast to Ellingson and the other Western commentators, their descriptions (and later arguments) about the applications of the terms glu and mgur have not been presented within the framework of a discourse on various genres or sub-genres, but rather within a particularly Tibetan discussion about the use, or not, of honorific terms.

The first to make a suggestion about this usage in the contemporary context was Don grub rgyal, who proposed that as the two terms glu and mgur did not represent a consistent honorific and general dyad for the same referent, but were both used to describe pieces of poetry with the aforementioned characteristics, then the two terms must have been synonyms during the time of the Empire.95 Pad ma 'bum countered this claim, pointing out that although the term mgur's usage did not cover exactly the same semantic field in the honorific register as the term glu, it was still only used in certain honorific circumstances, namely those in which the royal family were praised.96 This assessment by Pad ma 'bum led him to almost the same position as Ellingson, in that he asserts that the term mgur was used to describe laudatory songs sung for and about the royal family. Nonetheless, there is a distinction between their two approaches. Pad ma 'bum, rather than taking this conclusion to suggest a specific genre of songs, instead sees it as an indication of the specificity of honorific usage in this time, when, as he reads it, only laudatory songs sung for or by the royal family were deemed worthy of this honorific

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93 Ellingson (1979:229–234), and following him Roger Jackson (1996:370–374), Laura Bratstein (2006:126) and this author (Gamble 2010:372) also describe another genre of song from this period that we have called “mchid”. As Padma 'bum (1997:641) has explained, however, this term mchid is used in the Dunhuang manuscripts to refer to the answer section of a call and answer patterned glu rather than a separate discrete genre.

94 Ellingson (1979:229–234), Jackson (1996:370–374), Bratstein (2006:126) and Victoria Sujata (2008:85) have also used these two terms to refer to separate or sub-genres of songs or poetry. They have all also, however, acknowledged overlap between the uses of the two terms. In earlier writings on the subject, I too (Gamble 2010, 2011, 2012, In press a, In press b) approached these two terms as being representative of overlapping genres, or sub-genres. It was not until I reviewed the Tibetan literary criticism thoroughly again for this thesis that I noticed the conversation between the Tibetan authors was about honorific systems and not genres; I had been so schooled in looking at these works as separate genres that it took a long time to see the Tibetan conversation as anything other than this.

95 Don grub rgyal (1997:338).

This was obviously a situation that changed after the demise of the Empire—as Ellingson, Don grub rgyal and Pad ma 'bum all acknowledge—along with much else in Tibetan society. This was the period in which Buddhism came into the ascendancy in Tibetan culture, a development that changed the consensus about which compositions should be designated with the honorific term mgur. The term, which had been reserved for the glorious deeds of the royal family, began to be affixed to the increasingly numerous compositions by Buddhists or about Buddhism, rather than compositions by or about the fractured aristocracy. From this period on, until the modern era, the term mgur was used as a general honorific designator for glu.

This wider usage of the honorific half of the mgur/glu dyad was accompanied by two shifts in the songs’ form. The first of these was a decrease in the use of the emphatic syllable ni, which, as the example given earlier shows, had traditionally been used to create a slight caesura in the fourth syllable of what were usually seven-syllable lines. The removal of the ni from these compositions also made it easier for these songs to follow the other developing convention of the later transmission period, which was that religious poetic compositions should consist of an odd number of syllables and secular compositions should consist of an even number. Without the ni, the secular songs from the imperial period could be sung as six-syllable compositions, and those that were religious could either retain this syllable, or add another.

b) Singing with Siddhas

Along with these shifts in form came a profound and divergent change in the songs’ subject matter. Songs sung by secular people about secular things—the kind of songs that were not usually referred to by honorific designators—became much more reflective of village and town life rather than imperial themes. Meanwhile, those songs sung about religious themes, which is to say the kind of songs that were often designated mgur by

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98 Evidence of this continuing general/honorific usage of these terms is found in the following works, in which the authors refer to their own works as glu, not mgur, and reserve the term mgur, in accordance with general honorific usage, for respected others. Rang byung rdo rje (2006e, 2006f and 1983) in the 13th century; Gtsang myon Heruka (1990) in his retelling of Mi la ras pa’s tale in the 15th century; and Zhabs dpal tshogs drug rang grol (2000) in the 19th century.
99 Tucci (1966:15–16) describes this development.
100 This convention was still developing during Rang byung rdo rje’s time. He generally adhered to it, and all his songs were composed in an odd number of syllables, usually seven. But evidence that this was far from an incontrovertible norm can be found elsewhere in his Collected Works, in the collection of Mi la ras pa’s songs that is often ascribed to him, but was actually composed under his direction. In this text, the number of lines per song is not fixed; the songs often contain six syllables per line, and sometimes even eight syllables per line. Quintman (2006:161–166) discusses this work and its often mistaken attribution to Rang byung rdo rje.
101 Tucci (1966:1–19) describes these songs, and I have recently written an analysis of his approach to them in Gamble (In press b).
others, were profoundly influenced by the ascendency of the new tantras' worldview. This latter development was primarily the result of a convergence of ideas that occurred during the aforementioned “later transmission” period, when the indigenous tradition of Tibetan song singing coincided with an influential imported Indian meme: the singing siddha. Among the siddhas renowned for their songs were some of the most influential Buddhist adepts of the Indian tantric tradition, including Virupa, Kāṇha, Tilopa, Nāropā and most influentially in Rang byung rdo rje’s case, Saraha. The Tibetans repeated and elaborated on this meme with enthusiasm, taking the siddha’s songs as models for indigenous compositions in the mgur/glù genre.

The songs of the siddhas that they took as their model for the new mgur/glù were composed in three Indian genres: the dohā, which is a couplet; the caryāgiti,103 or “practice songs”; and the more influential vajragiti, or “vajra songs”. In the context of Indian literature,104 the term dohā refers to a couplet in a specific meter, which is characterised by thirteen or eleven mātrā—or syllable—lines with a caesura in each line.105 The designator gīti, by contrast, is much more general, referring to a similar semantic range within the Indian tradition as the term mgur/glù does in Tibetan, and the term “song” does in English. When the descriptors caryā and vajra are used with this genre designator, they indicate the context in which the songs were performed rather than stylistic specifics. The “practice songs”, of which there are considerably fewer examples, are those songs that describe the siddhas’ deeds and experiences, while the term “vajra songs” was usually employed to describe songs performed at tantric feast ceremonies. These songs tended to speak more directly of the tantric view, with which the term “vajra” is closely linked.106

The Tibetans replicated all the content of these songs, but not all their forms. They wrote songs about their experiences practising; although they tended to refer to them as nýmas mgur or “songs of experience” rather than spyod pa’i glu or “practice songs”. And just like the Indian siddhas they developed a particular affection for the “vajra song”, which they called rdo rje’i glu107 and performed at feast ceremonies. Rang byung rdo rje’s

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102 This is not to suggest there was no overlap between the two topics, as the religious songs often included village imagery and, as Tucci’s (1996) analysis explains, the village songs often included religious imagery. Indeed, this vast amount of overlap between the two elements is the main reason that they seem to have still been referred to as one genre in Tibetan writing.
103 Gīti is the Apābrahmāṣa equivalent of the Sanskrit and Hindi word gīta, and as most of the songs to which I refer in the section were composed in Apābrahmāṣa, I have retained this spelling.
104 Gamble (In press a) explains how the term dohā came to be used in the Western tradition of Buddhism and Buddhist inspired poetry to refer to Tibetan compositions in the mgur/glù genre.
105 Schomer (1987:61–99) and Jackson (2004), which includes a very impressive translation of three collections of dohā by Indian siddhas. As Kapstein (2006b:48–62) has pointed out, this meter can still be heard in India today every time someone recites the work of Tulsidas (1532–1623) as it was employed in his epic poem Rāmacaritāmānas (Lake of the Deeds of Rāma). It is also the meter in which Kabir’s contributions to the Sikh scripture the Adi Granth were written (Dass 1991:1–23).
107 This term rdo rje’i glu was used instead of the honorific rdo rje’ mgur until about the late fifteenth century. This new term must have come into use sometime before Kar ma’ phrin las pa (1456–1539; 1975) and Brug pa
collection contains many of this kind of song. The main difference between these songs and their Indic influences was that they were set to rhythms and poetic structures familiar to Tibetans—the format of the mgur/glu—rather than the various rāg, or melodies, with which they were associated in India. This adaptation was, it seems, much easier to make for the more generally ascribed “songs” they had inherited from India than it was for the dohā, which was defined by its literary construction rather than its content, a literary construction that did not match any existing in the Tibetan performative tradition. This meant that while the Tibetans used many elements from the dohā— their aphoristic tone, scathing social criticism and dream-like imagery—the foreignness of this genre’s meter and syntax precluded its adaption to the Tibetan cultural milieu. This, in turn, meant that within Tibetan literature, the term dohā (transliterated as do ha) has only been used to describe Indic compositions.108

The choice to not compose dohā in Tibet suggests that—unlike later transmitters of Indic poetic traditions to Tibet—the composers adapting these songs to the Tibetan context were more interested in content than poetic stylings, and usually did not have an education in Indic literary traditions.109 It is also true, however, that given the siddhas’ preference for compositions in popular Indic formats and vernacular languages, even their few Tibetan followers who did know Indic languages were faced with a choice: they could either follow their lineal predecessors’ social and soteriological example or their poetic stylings, but not both. For to compose in Indic formats would have been a scholarly feat incompatible with the vernacular populism and anti-elitism of the siddhas’ compositional tone. Having chosen intent over form, they opted for the most familiar and widely transportable local genre of song available, the mgur/glu, and in this format made their often profound words available to the widest possible audience; even the many illiterate Tibetans, after all, could remember a song.

The influence of these genres and the spirit of the siddhas on the content of the mgur/glu was profound, but this is not to suggest that the process was entirely disruptive, or that there was a fundamental break in the genre’s development. The songs may have been adapted for religious purposes, but they also retained their short syllable counts,

kun legs (1455–1529; 1997) were composing their works, and an auxiliary edition of Mi la ras pa’s songs compiled by Gtsang myon Heruka’s student Lha btsun rin chen mam rgyal (1473–1557; 1985) also uses it. 108 There is one partial exception to this statement. The Indophile Tibetan Tāranāṭha (1996) used the term as a descriptive title to one of his compositions. This work was called The Vajra-Doha of the Exceedingly Direct Lineage Bestowed by the Omniscient Tāranāṭha (Shin tu nye bryug kyi bka’ babs thams cad mkhyen pa tā ra nā thas stsal ba’i rdo rje’i do ha). David Templeman (2008) has completed a study of Tāranāṭha’s life that highlights the influence Indic culture had on him and provides multiple suggestions as to why he would seek to compose a dohā. This piece of writing would also be an interesting study in determining whether or not it follows the Indic meter of dohā. It marks the only pre-modern instance that I have been able to uncover in which a Tibetan refers to his or her own composition as a dohā. But the term was also used to describe a work composed in the modern era by Yon tan mgon po (1899–1959; 2005).

109 Jonathan C. Gold (2007:3) has discussed the haves and have-nots of Indic education, a topic to which I will return in subsequent chapters.
plain language, environmental references and word or phrase repetition. What is more, the Tibetans who composed them seem to have made an effort to map any new themes they introduced onto indigenous precedents. Most obvious is their alignment of the social criticism that is evident in the Indian songs—and particularly the doḥā—with the combativeness of some imperial era mgur. As will become more than evident as Rang byung rdo rje’s story is told, and as is also evident in the Life and Songs of Mi la ras pa, this meant that instead of aping the caste-influenced social critiques of the siddhas, they used the familial, tribal and land-based motifs of the early songs to dissuade their listeners from the dangers of these attachments.

It is not clear who sang the first of these newly themed mgur/glu in Tibet,110 or indeed whether there was a definitive historical moment when this happened, for it is entirely possible that the adaptation of the indigenous forms to the content of the new tantras’ message happened gradually, almost organically. One of the most likely candidates in this process of adaptation was Pha dam pa sängs rgyas, an Indian guru who moved to Ding ri in southern Tibet, just near Rang byung rdo rje’s birthplace.111 Yet, interestingly, given Rang byung rdo rje’s family associations with Pha dam pa sāngs rgyas and his keen interest in the doḥā, gīti and mgur/glu, he does not mention any of Pha dam pa sāngs rgyas’ compositions or his lineage of songs. Instead he follows the more traditional Bka’ brgyud tradition of attributing the introduction of this form of song to Tibet to Mi la ras pa’s teacher Mar pa the translator, who travelled to Nepal and India and studied with siddhas. This suggests this attribution was already common during Rang byung rdo rje’s time, despite the lack of evidence that Mar pa translated any Indian songs and the chronological problems with the mgur/glu attributed to him.112

In contrast to this lack, there is much evidence—perhaps too much “evidence”—given the overwhelming number of songs that are attributed to Mi la ras pa113—for his student Mi la ras pa’s proficiency with and prolificacy in mgur/glu. Mi la ras pa’s association with mgur/glu helped to promote the genre in two ways. The first of these was to establish it as

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110 In another example of the operation of the competition between different lineages in 11th-13th century Tibet, it is also interesting to note that the claim to be the first to sing tantric Buddhism-themed mgur/glu in Tibet was made for Vairocana and Padmasambhava within the Pad ma’i bka’ thang (The Testament of the Lotus-Born), as part of the treasure tradition’s sacralisation of the imperial period. This text was authored/discovered by O rgyan gling pa (1323-1360; 1997), and its inclusion of a mgur/glu effectively backdated the introduction of the religiously-themed composition to the time of the Empire. Ellingson (1979:230-231) studied the topic of mgur/glu before this text had been dated to the 14th century, and began with the premise that it was composed during the time of the Empire. He astutely noted, however, the commonalities between this mgur/glu and the mgur/glu of the fourteenth century and suggested that they were later additions to the “earlier” text.

111 Schaeffer (2005: 103–120) discusses Pha dam pa sāngs rgya’s role in the transmission of Saraha’s songs to Tibet in detail.

112 Schaeffer (2005:59–71) and Kapstein (2003:769–773) discuss the songs attributed to him and the transmission of the doḥā tradition to Tibet.

113 In his study of the development of Mi la ras pa’s biographical tradition, Quintman (2006:45, 68, 86) also makes several references to the development of the tradition of his songs.
the genre for the expression of realisation in Tibet. Yet perhaps more fundamentally, Mi la ras pa’s model suggested not only that realisation should be expressed in mgur/glul but also that yogis should compose songs. This biographical paradigm was then widely copied, first by those within the Bka’ brgyud tradition and later by many other yogis from a variety of schools and lineages.

The tradition that grew up around Mi la ras pa’s life and stories was later shaped into one of the most influential compositions in Tibetan literature, but during Rang byung rdo rje’s life, Mi la ras pa was still more a biographical than a literary example. His model of the heroic yogi/poet who dedicates himself to the pursuit of awakening through the practice of austere yogas in mountain wildernesses pervades Rang byung rdo rje’s writing. Yet Mi la ras pa’s literary influence on Rang byung rdo rje’s compositions is less clear. As Andrew Quintman explains in his analysis of the development of Mi la ras pa’s Life and Songs, the form of the tradition Rang byung rdo rje would have encountered was still amorphous.¹¹⁴ Rang byung rdo rje sponsored the collation of Mi la ras pa’s songs, but unlike the obvious and cited influence Saraha had on his songs, there is little evidence he modelled his compositions on those of Mi la ras pa.¹¹⁵

It was only later, about one hundred and fifty years after Rang byung rdo rje’s death, that Gtsang snyon Heruka created the classic redaction of Mi la ras pa’s tradition. By this stage the composition and performance of mgur/glul had become an institution in Tibet, and developed in some unexpected and seemingly contradictory ways. By way of example, in the works of Gtsang snyon Heruka there is ample evidence of the Sanskritic tradition of poetics known as kāvya in India, and called snyan bsngag—“melodious praise”—in Tibetan. The tradition of kāvya has a strange relationship with the mgur/glul in that they represent very different poetic impulses, but nevertheless came to influence each other’s composition profoundly. While the mgur/glul tradition represented the most basic, plain-speaking elements of the Tibetan literary tradition, kāvya represented its most complicated literary form, incorporating as it did elements of dialectics, metrics, poetics and synonymics. It was a form of poetry that required years of study from its exponents, and as such was tied into the developing field of Tibetan scholasticism and its most renowned exponents, the Sa skya school.¹¹⁶ Rang byung rdo rje had an ambiguous relationship with both this school and this form of poetry. His approach to both combines a cynicism about elite learning with the influences of his own elite education. This expression of ambivalence will be explored throughout the rest of the thesis, but for now,

¹¹⁵ There is only one quote in one of his songs, for example, that he attributes to Mi la ras pa. This quote is found in Song No. 19 (GN 27–28; GB 206–207), but I have not been able to find a source for it in any of the surviving versions of Mi la ras pa’s songs, including the one whose collation Rang byung rdo rje was said to have sponsored.
suffice to leave the reader with the following taste of it:

I am not known as an expert in poetry,
I am not that proud or haughty,
but from an ocean of words, I have
extracted some good, poetic honey.\(^{117}\)

viii. Beyond the Margins
When he composed this verse—and all his other verses—Rang byung rdo rje was engaged in a conversation that began long before his birth and has continued, along with the preservation of his texts, right up to the present day. His contribution to the conversation—his extracts of “good, poetic honey”—were shaped by the history that preceded them, the developments in literary genres and other ideas that formed the cultural discourses into which he was born. But his contributions also, in turn, informed the conversation as it progressed beyond his life. His influence can be seen in the mere fact that people over the centuries went to the effort and expense of preserving his works. It can also be seen in the influence he had on those who composed in these genres after his time.

Nonetheless, this textual and literary history was only one of the many interwoven strands of history and genealogy—ideas working backwards and forwards—with which he was engaged. And although it is the text that creates the initial connection between their contemporary readers and their composers, the distances of time and space mean that merely analysing them does not provide enough context for comprehending them. To understand them better, it is still necessary to look beyond the margins of the text and develop some understanding of the social and personal histories that were as influential in their construction and preservation as the words within them. To do so is the goal of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER TWO: LANDSCAPES

When mountain hermits, yogis like me—

Look up at the centre of the sky,
we remember luminous emptiness,
evidently uncreated, unceasing;

Look down at the middle of the stream,
we remember perpetuity,
evidently silent;

Look over at that mountain,
we remember immutability,
evidently unshakeable.

Rang byung rdo rje, Khyung rdzong,
age approximately fourteen, ca. 1298.1

i. Introduction: Excavating Rang byung rdo rje’s Cultural Landscapes

Perhaps even more than texts, and often in conjunction with them, Tibet’s places—as elsewhere—have preserved memories across time.2 Locations became known for the historical, legendary, or cultural events that happened in them; these events became known by the places in which they happened. In many cases, the setting of the event was incidental. It merely provided the backdrop for the real focus of a story, painting, poem or structure. Other cultural undertakings, by contrast, in literature, art and architecture have taken these sites themselves as their subject, focusing their audience’s gaze on what would otherwise have remained in the background.

The result of this cultural investment in the Tibetan environment is that many places came to be regarded as the sites of multiple, unfolding events that their inhabitants prioritised according to their individual and communal valuations; priorities that changed over time.3 These processes of prioritisation created multi-layered cultural landscapes that have a symbiotic relationship with the physical environment. Environmental

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1 Song No. 7 (GN 9; GB 190–191) Song of Three Analogies and Six Meanings.
2 As Edward Casey (2000:181-214) has noted, this reflects the intimate relationship between memories and place, in which places act as the keepers of memories of events and people long after they have occurred or lived.
3 A team of geologists, for example, may view the high peaks of Rang byung rdo rje’s birthplace as the world’s most dramatic example of plate tectonics, but according to Tibetan and Indian storytelling, they are the abodes of gods. At other times, no matter how well the viewer has been trained to see one way, a place’s association with an event will encourage them to view it in another way. Few would disagree with the physicist Niels Bohr’s reported comment, for example, that even to his scientifically trained mind, Kronberg Castle, which he visited on a walking tour of Denmark, changed from just another old, stone building into something more “as soon as one imagine[d] that Hamlet lived [there]... Suddenly the walls and the ramparts speak a different language. The courtyard becomes an entire world, a dark corner reminds us of the darkness of the human soul” (Gordon Mills 1976:1-2).
knowledge accrued over centuries is passed down through stories, songs or other forms of culture in many cultures, and Tibet is no exception. The physical transformations humans have made to their environment through agriculture and building are often incorporated into these works of culture; and these cultural forms have sometimes encouraged people to transform their physical environment.

In the history of analysing the relationship between culture and the environment, the impact of some forms of culture on the landscape has been much easier for commentators to see than others: the most obvious example of this being architecture. Unlike buildings, which were constructed to provide shelter, constructions made with architectural intent were intended for other purposes too, and this intention was often noted. In Tibet commentators have described the intentional transformation of audience perception through specifically designed buildings for at least a millennium, beginning with buildings from the time of the Empire. Sometimes these building were meant to create a sense of respect for their inhabitants; at other times they were supposed to remind the viewer of other, more sanctified realms; and at yet other times they were supposed to do both.

The links between other cultural forms and the transformation of environmental perceptions is less obvious, and therefore, although many peoples in many times changed their audience’s perceptions of the environment through these means, not all of them did so with specific intent or provided a commentary on the process. Tibetans, for example, had been transforming perceptions of their local environments since they arrived on the Plateau, imbuing them with an often-bewildering variety of site-specific stories, songs and ceremonial traditions. Yet it was not until the centuries leading up to Rang byung rdo rje’s birth that they began to acknowledge this process as it was performed.

The commentary on non-architectural, cultural landscaping occurred as the result of a series of large, re-visioning projects of sacred sites that primarily relied on literature and ceremony rather than architecture. This reliance on literature and ceremony depended upon the tantric Buddhist belief that one’s experience of the environment depends on mind, and they allowed the yogis who were involved in these projects to transform the perception of the environment with limited physical resources. They included the development of networks of pilgrimage sites associated with the life-stories of luminaries like Padmasambhava and Mi la ras pa; along with more specifically located projects that

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4 An interesting study that compares some elements of Tibetan environmental knowledge with the environmental knowledge of Australian Aborigines is Catherine Laudine (2009).
5 See for example the descriptions of the various taming temples that were constructed during the empire in Sørensen, Hazod and Tsering Gyalpo (2007).
7 Quintman (2008:363–410) discusses the development of these pilgrimage networks, and the inscription of the liberation-stories of Padmasambhava and Mi la ras pa onto the environment of Southern Tibet.
transformed the perception of whole regions like the *mandalisation* of Tsar Ri, La phyi and Kailaš. And these last projects in particular included an implicit acceptance of the role that culture played in these regions’ transformation, in that they acknowledged the role of visionaries—who re-presented their visions of these environments in their stories, songs and ceremonies—within this metamorphosis. The visionaries’ descriptions of these sites were often panoramic in scope and baroque in detail, creating an alternate image of the region that placed within it many otherworldly beings and grand architectural structures.

Rang byung rdo rje’s writing on the environment represents the next stage in this developing discourse. He was still engaged with the on-going performance of the aforementioned cultural landscaping projects, but he also sought to adapt them to other places and situations. To perform this adaptation, Rang byung rdo rje had to first engage in an analysis of the sacralisation projects’ component parts, and this in turn meant his writing contains a meta-commentary on many of their oratory and literary techniques that is unusual in Tibetan literature.

In Rang byung rdo rje’s stories, and especially his songs, these acknowledged techniques tend to fall into two categories: the more common heightening of environmental perception through a process he calls “adornment” (*rgyan*) and the deconstruction of the same perceptions through the processes of Buddhist and particularly *mahāmudrā* scepticism. He also very occasionally plays these two techniques against each other, as he does in the following verse from a praise to Bde chen stengs, near Mtshur phu, in which he deconstructs the processes of heightening praise. It reads:

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8 Toni Huber (1990, 1992, 1994, 1999a and 1999b) and Katia Buffetrille (1997, 1998 and 2003) have both written about this process extensively, and it will be re-explored in some detail in part two of this thesis.
9 This process will be explored more; both later in this chapter and in part two of this thesis.
10 This is also true of most other pre-modern literature. Indeed, the process of the conscious transformation of the environment through art took a very long time to develop in Europe. As Simon Schama (1995) has described, this process began in the sixteenth century in Dutch painting, but only reached a critical mass in eighteenth century Romanticism, when images of rural idylls or rugged mountains were repeatedly created as a contrast to the unfolding Industrial Revolution. Yet even then, the Romantics presented the images they created as the unveiling of a location’s “beauty” and “sublimity” rather than the deliberate transformation of it through their works of art. It was not until the twentieth century that the idea of purposely changing people’s perception through representations of the environment developed. The first to pursue this idea unambiguously were groups like the Dadaists, Surrealists and members of their wider network including the influential literary critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 1999a:152–195 and 1999b). He drew from the work of the Surrealists and Dada and was a great influence on the Psychogeographers (Susan Buck-Morss 1991). The Psychogeographers turned his work into a place-focused movement which did and still does try to transform society and people’s individual lives by changing the way they see their environments; reclaiming urban spaces from the cartography of capitalism by using alternate histories or perceptions to make their audience “look again” at the spaces they inhabit (Coverley 2006). The ideas of this movement (the name of which is part satire) have had a general influence on the construction of this chapter specifically and this thesis more generally. Its most influential exponent was the French philosopher Guy Debord (Andrew Hussey 2001). The most well known post-Debord exponents of Psychogeography are Will Self (2007, 2009) Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd (whose works on Psychogeography are too numerous to mention). The ideas of this group also often overlap with others who do not associate themselves with this name specifically. These include earlier writers and thinkers such as: Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin and Ivan Chtcheglov in France, and William Black and Thomas de Quincey in the United Kingdom. Michel de Certeau (2011) also influentially took up some of these ideas in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 

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This will then become the site where reciprocal praise is performed between the sacred site (itself) and the actors who repeatedly praise it; (for) wherever there is praise, there is repetitive reciprocity, wherever there is praise, it is repeated.11

Yet intriguingly, Rang byung rdo rje’s writing also manages to combine these insights into his own creation of environmental imagery with a much more passive approach to the already established senses of place he encounters: his inherited, cultural geography.

This dual approach means that his writing often combines his intense scepticism about his own experiences and perceptions with an unquestioning valorisation of inherited traditions and stories. He treads lightly on the most recent versions of place-based stories, in other words, but does not concentrate his witheringly sceptical gaze on the layers of remembering and forgetting that lie beneath them; the strata of conceptual maps12 that push up against this latest reconstruction of a collective memory. In choosing not to engage with the historical development of these inherited tales, he ignores the way elements of these stories have been recycled and reformed by various generations, as these immaterial substances—memories, names, stories and other cultural forms—are reformulated to fit shifts in collective perception. As a participant in the dominant discourses in his culture, he was also involved in the forgetting of many elements of the collective Tibetan story that was part of the process of its narrative construction.13

In short, Rang byung rdo rje was a philosopher, a poet and a storyteller, but not a historian;14 a state of affairs that becomes abundantly clear if a comparison is made between his version of events and recently researched cultural histories of his received traditions.15 In these cultural histories, scholars paint a portrait of gradual and complex processes of transformation that took centuries to unfold. By contrast, the stories Rang

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12 I realise that there is some amount of historical circularity and anachronism in using a term like “map”, taken from the Latin word for “sheet” (mappa) as a metaphor to describe a pre-cartographical conception of place. Unfortunately, however, I am not aware of another English word that conveys the idea of a conception of one’s position in such a simple way, and am therefore using it to convey this idea in a metaphorical rather than historical sense. This follows Toni Huber (1999a:59) who explained that, “In the last few decades a large Western literature has developed on the concept of ‘map’. Our notion of map has been extended from the paper maps of classical Western cartography, which represent the earth’s surface, to include, among others, cognitive and social maps, the complex electronic maps of computer systems, and mathematical maps for navigating the multiple dimensions of hyperspace. Like many other cultures, Tibetans have used a variety of mapping systems for navigating their ‘world-space’.”

13 This process of communal remembering and forgetting was outlined in Paul Ricoeur’s (2004:93–130) classic work Memory, History, Forgetting, in which he also described the special role of location in those memories the collective does prioritise.

14 Although I recognise, as Ricoeur (2004:133–280) has pointed out in part two of Memory, History, Forgetting historians are also often involved in the process of forgetting, the comparison between the two versions of this story in this case suggests much more forgetting was undertaken in the construction of the traditional story than it was in the construction of the histories of this time.

15 Those who have written culturally focused histories of the time and places that influenced Rang byung rdo rje include: Dalton (2011), Huber (1999a), Kapstein (2006a) and van Schaik (2011).
byung rdo rje inherited about the same period tell of dramatic battles between bright goodness and dark malevolence. These stories condense centuries of subtle cultural transformation into singular, easy to remember, easier to tell, easier to situate narratives. Indeed the extremes of the variant approaches to the Tibetan story up to Rang byung rdo rje’s time are so striking that historians often describe them in three interconnected ways: through the traditional stories Tibetan culture perpetuated about these times; through the aforementioned history of events, as near as this can be ascertained in dependence on the often patchwork preserved records; and the cultural history of the traditional stories that traces their emergence and adaptation over the centuries.16

This situation already creates an intricate and multi-layered cultural geography for the writing of most Tibetans from this period, but in Rang byung rdo rje’s case his multiple lineal allegiances complicate matters even further. Some of the tales he tells or to which he alludes have been held in common by many Tibetans across the ages. These include an ongoing communal memory of agricultural centres and nomadic borderlands, and a landscape inhabited by a multitude of non-human spirits. Yet other narratives of his are more specifically associated with the various lineages of Buddhism with which he was associated—some of which were only reaching their classic form during his time, sometimes with his help.

Through his familial associations with the Rnying ma tradition, for example, and his role as a “treasure revealer” (*gter ston*), he was involved in the development and environmental inscription of two intersecting, reworked tales of the Tibetan Empire: the story of the three dharma-kings, and the tale of the legendary tantrika Padmasambhava’s subjugation of Tibet’s non-human inhabitants. Yet as a monk he also evoked the story of the reintroduction of monasticism to Tibet, and the subsequent rise in power—and in his opinion corruption—of the monasteries. And as a practitioner of the new tantras, particularly the Bka’ brgyud, he also regularly weaves stories about its Indo-Tibetan heritage into his writing. These last two tales, of politicised monasteries and powerful, new tantras, then become the social backdrop for one of the tales most influential on his personal writing: the story of Mi la ras pa, whose flight to the mountains serves as a paradigm for many of Rang byung rdo rje’s environmental perceptions.17

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17 As I mentioned previously, Quintman (2008) talks about this process of landscaping the environment through stories in his innovative work on what he calls Mi la ras pa’s “geographic biography”. The idea of created landscapes is also used widely in the field of cultural geography, where it is used to indicate what Czepcynski (2012) has described as: "a materialized system (that) include[s] verbal, visual and physical
Moreover, along with all these tales that he embraced willingly, there was also a layer of history and consequently geography (this time more political than cultural) that he was less enthused about: the Mongol Empire. In his writing and the writings of others that influenced him, especially his predecessor Karma Pakshi and his guru O rgyan pa, the unfolding history of Mongolian rule intersects and even competes with previous layers of geographically embedded storytelling. Rang byung rdo rje and those around him appeal to the continuing environmental and social authority represented in the older, more otherworldly tales they cherish, while at the same time being compelled to negotiate with the very worldly rule of the Empire.

These various intersecting layers of storytelling create the places that are both the backdrop to and the substance of Rang byung rdo rje’s writing; they are his personal map, combining those political and social factors that directly affect him with the cultural geographies of the life and communal stories he holds dear.

ii. A Land of Mountains and Valleys, Centres and Edges

The oldest environmental images in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing have survived, tied to the land itself, from before recorded history. These are the simple signifiers that mark the most obvious elements of his environment: amongst others they are the mountains (ri), valleys (klungs), plains (thang), rivers (chu), lakes (mtsho), the sky (mkha’), the earth (sa), its rocks (rdo) and trees (shing). The relationships that developed between the Plateau’s human inhabitants and these objects are at once generally human and specific to Tibet. By way of example, although most cultures develop a word for mountain, the mountains—snowy mountains (gangs ri), rocky mountains (brag ri), small mountains (ri rkang), divine mountains (lha ri)—tend to play a more central role in Tibetans’ perception of place than they do for inhabitants of many other regions.

Much of the oldest, human-focused understanding of the environment displayed in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing is derived from agriculture and husbandry. In Tibet, agriculture and settlement have tended to be associated with the alluvial soils of the valleys that are wedged between its rivers and often-formidable mountains. It was in these river-valleys that more complex societies began to develop on the Plateau, as each of them gradually became associated with a Tibetan clan or clans. Along with agriculture the inhabitants of these valleys also engaged in limited husbandry, domesticating animals like the yak that aided agricultural production and provided added protein to their diet. Outside of these valleys, there were also smaller kinship groups that pursued husbandry-

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aspects of human existence and the earth’s surface, and creates an arena for multidimensional and dynamic phenomena in the contemporary world.”

centred existences on the high-altitude plains that could not support agriculture. These groups were necessarily forced to follow their herds as they found new pastures and did not create permanent settlements. There were also many areas of Tibet that did not support human habitation at all. The higher altitudes especially, with their permanent snow and steep gradients, proved impossible for human settlement. Over time, this meant that the river valleys gradually became viewed as “centres” (dbus) of livelihood, while the outlying plains and mountains were referred to as “borderlands” (mtha).  

Instead of peopling these uninhabitable regions with people, the Tibetans instead began to view them as the abodes of “others”: the Plateau’s plethora of non-human denizens. Like the region’s human inhabitants, these spirits were often given a social ranking dependent on the environmental features that marked their abodes. Dangerous geographical features like glaciers, flood-paths and the sites of landslides were associated with malevolent spirits. Those with inspiring aspects like sheer mountain faces or vivid blue waters were perceived to have a special power. And those near centres of power, like the river-valley homes of powerful clans, were also especially venerated. As Sam van Schaik has explained, many of these mountains “were particularly revered, (during early times) with each clan having its own mountain and the clan leaders considering themselves the descendants of the mountain’s divine embodiment.”

The centralised and fluvial focus of these settlements, along with the spectre of dangerous mountains nearby, is readily evident in the earliest surviving examples of Tibetan poetry, the mgur/glù that were preserved in the caves at Dunhuang. In these, as shown by the example in the previous chapter, clan leaders and kings are often positioned next to one river or another, and danger swoops down on their subjects from the gods’ mountain homes.

Rang byung rdo rje’s writing too reuses many of these paradigms. The basic distinction between centres and borderlands is both naturalised and pervasive in his writing; and he also employs fluvial imagery to indicate power. The most distinctive ancient, environmental image in his writing, however, is of clan-associated mountain deities. These include Gnyan chen thang lha (elevation 7162 m) and Jo mo Gangs dkar (elevation 7048 m), two spirits that are primarily located on two eponymous mountains that rise in the Gnyan chen thang lha Mountain Range, northwest of Mtshur phu Monastery. These deities form part of Rang byung rdo rje’s non-human bodyguard, and throughout his story

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20 I have used this word mtha’ to indicate borderlands because this is the word Rang byung rdo rje uses most often in his work to evoke these regions. Other Tibetan words used more commonly to indicate these areas are mtha’ khol and mtha’ khob.
21 A story about Rang byung rdo rje’s interaction with one such spirit will be discussed in chapter six.
22 van Schaik (2011:24).
23 Examples of the mgur/glù can be found in Don grub rgyal (1997a:356-432), and in Tibetan and English translation in Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang (2011:193-343).
repeatedly welcome him to their domains, offering him their protection and support for his activities. Rang byung rdo rje’s relationship to the two other main mountain spirits that feature in his story is, by contrast, more deferential. In order of their appearance in his story, the first of these is Rong btsan Kha ba dkar po (elevation 6740m), who in Rang byung rdo rje’s era lived on the eastern edge of the Plateau in Southern Khams. 24 The other is Yar lha sham po (elevation 6636 m), which sits at the head of the Yar klungs Valley, and according to legend is the ancestor of Tibet’s kings. Rather than the spirits of these mountains coming out to meet him, he travels to pay his respects to both of them, treating them as a source of inspiration, guidance and physical healing.

iii. The Golden Age of Empire

The next oldest layer of Rang byung rdo rje’s cultural geography is the one toward which the threefold approach to Tibetan history—the traditional story, the historian’s story and the cultural history of the story—is most necessary: the tale of the Tibetan Empire (c.618–c.841 CE) that grew out of the river-valley settlements. Rang byung rdo rje presents the stories of the Empire as one of the oldest layers of his history, but as historians have shown over the last few decades, the story he tells of this time had, in the main, been reconstructed during the two centuries that preceded his life.

The history of this period, as historians have pieced it together from relatively sparse written and archaeological sources, suggests that the Tibetan Empire was formed during the seventh century when one of the river-valley clans, the one at the foot of Yar lha sham po in the Yar klungs Valley, slowly began to subsume those around it through a combination of war, politics and marital allegiances. 25 Then, as van Schaik has explained, the leaders of Yar klungs, and in particular a charismatic young king named Khri Srong btsan sgam po (605–650 CE) who possessed “the glamour of a deity… managed to harness the power of Tibet’s warring clans and turn it outwards”. 26 This outward aggression enabled the newly unified Tibetans to push beyond the Plateau: south to the Bay of Bengal, north to the Tarim Basin, west into the area of present-day Afghanistan, and east down onto the fertile lands of China. The process of expansion reached its peak a hundred years after Khri Srong btsan sgam po in 763, during the reign of his descendant Khri Srong lde btsan (r. 754–ca. 799), when a Tibetan army rode into the capital of the Chinese Tang Empire in Chang’an.

To support the expanding Empire, the imperial court also sponsored the importation of new technologies like standardised writing and other systems of administration, which

24 As Eva Dargyay (1985) explains, this local deity also later made an appearance in Ladakh.
26 van Schaik (2011:2).
were then adapted to take advantage of already existent, indigenous systems and traditions. What is more, along with these technologies, the Tibetans also encountered and adopted another cultural system that would profoundly transform their society: Buddhism. From limited beginnings as the new religion of an elite few, Buddhism would prove to have a profound and lasting effect on Tibet; an effect that can be seen clearly in its inscriptions and re-inscriptions on its inhabitants' memories, culture and land. Nonetheless, according to historians, and in contrast to Rang byung rdo rje's understanding, during the time of the Empire the Tibetans only took to this religion slowly, and even then, during the entirety of the imperial period it remained the religion of an elite few.

Relatively few monasteries and temples were constructed during this period, for example, and the region's first monastery Bsam yas ("the inconceivable") was only consecrated in 779 CE during Khri Srong lde btsan's reign, shortly after he made Buddhism the state religion in 762 CE. As these events proved to be near the Empire's high watermark, the new religion had little time following this to pervade the kingdom's society and culture; and only sixty years later the first crack in imperial unity became apparent. This occurred after the death of Khri Srong lde btsan's grandson, Glang dar ma (d.841), when a controversy over succession led to civil war between two claimants, and the virtual disintegration of the already-overstretched central administration.

This is the basic story as historians understand it today, but these events would have only seemed partially recognisable to Rang byung rdo rje. In his stories and songs he evokes a quite different tale. The story of how his story came about begins in the time after the empire, with the introduction of an innovative method to reformulate collective memory called the "treasure" tradition, or gter ma (derived from the word for treasure, gter). This tradition was developed in the main by practitioners associated with the Rnying ma tradition, in an effort at least in part to revitalise their tradition in the face of the spreading influence of the "new-schools" of the later transmission. It involved the finding of texts that were purportedly composed during the time of the Empire, and retold its story in a compelling new way. Treasure texts created a link between contemporary practitioners and Tibet's most venerated era, and in so doing granted their discoverers a renewed, Tibet-centred authority. Yet in promoting the ancient era's authority, their stories also disengaged the earlier time from its historical moorings, and from then on, the

29 van Schaik (2011:35).
31 As Ronald Davidson (2005:211-217) has explained, the idea of these treasure texts seems to have originated from the discovery of manuscripts in the ruins of imperial era temples and monasteries, but was then further adapted as texts began to be unearthed or extracted from other sites across the Plateau.
Empire was less a historical period than a gilded, floating signifier that represented various writers’ highest ideals.

Amongst other reformulations of this time came two that would profoundly affect Rang byung rdo rje’s perception of his landscape, and indeed his perception of self. One of the most influential of these on his writing was the tale of the “three dharma kings” (chos rgyal gsun). In this tale, Khri Srong btsan sgam po (605–650 CE) was cast as the first dharma king. No longer a mere clan-leader-cum-king, he was represented as an emanation of one of Śakyamuni Buddha’s three personal protector bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara (Spyan ras gzigs), whose job it was to prepare Tibet for the coming of Buddhism.33 After this, the story skips to at least one hundred years and several kings before focusing on the aforementioned Khri Srong lde btsan (r. 754–ca.799), the second of the dharma kings. In this tale, he too has been transformed into an emanation of one of Buddha’s personal protector bodhisattvas, Mañjuśrī (’Jam dpal dbyangs).34 As Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, it was his role to establish monasticism and tantra on Tibetan soil.35 The last of the three dharma-kings, Rał pa can (806–836 CE), who has not yet been introduced in this chapter, was the second-to-last king of the united Empire. In life he had been renowned for his dedication to the Buddhist dharma and his support of its monastics; so in this story he is portrayed as an emanation of the last of Śakyamuni Buddha’s personal bodhisattva protectors, Vajrapāni (Phyag na rdo rje).

Although he was the last dharma-king, he was not the last king to be transformed by this story. This was his brother Glang dar ma, the last king of a united Tibet, who in this tale is transformed into a demon; one who first stole the throne, then began to persecute Buddhism, and was eventually assassinated by a great yogi, Dpal kyi rdo rje.36 And after his inevitable demise, the story continues, the land fell into an era of darkness.

This, not history, is the version of the Empire’s story Rang byung rdo rje evokes in his personal writing, and it is this story that helps define his cultural landscape in a number of ways. To begin with, it was one in a series of contemporaneous stories from multiple perspectives that re-shaded Tibet’s collective story into eras of gold and dark, which as I

33 This version of Khri Srong btsan sgam po’s story seems to have initially come to light in the treasure text called the Mang Ika’ bhum, which was initially revealed in the mid-12th century by a treasure revealer called Dngos grub, and then added to by others over the next century (Kapstein 1992:82). Coincidently, the last treasure revealer to add to this story, in the mid-13th century was from La stod, Rang byung rdo rje’s home region.

34 Here I have chosen the most common names for this bodhisattva in Sanskrit and Tibetan, even though they are not direct translations of each other. The direct translation of Mañjuśrī in Tibetan is ’Jam dpal; and the direct translation of ’Jam dpal dbyangs in Sanskrit is Mañjūghoṣa.

35 In the texts of the treasure tradition, the story of Khri Srong lde btsan has most often been told from the perspective of the tantrika he invited to Tibet, and was said to have become his teacher: Padmasambhava (Gyatso 1996:156). His story will be discussed shortly.

36 There have been several works discussing the malevolence of Glang dar ma, or the lack thereof. Zuihō Yamaguchi (1996) suggested that he was actually a Buddhist and has been misrepresented, but van Schaik (2008) has suggested this analysis may be based on a misreading of Dunhuang texts and states that he has not been able to find any conclusive evidence about his religious inclinations.
mentioned in the introduction had been previously part of the greater Buddhist narrative. This development in discourse whose imagery pervades much Tibetan literature saw storytellers describe those parts of their communal story they considered to be high points in golden light and vivid details, and those periods they considered difficult and unproductive in darker shades of shadow and sable. This colour coding was not, however, uniform; multiple authors with multiple agendas tinted their histories in various ways. Those from the Rnying ma tradition, for example, restrict their use of gilt to the time of the Empire and describe most flashes of gold after this as preserved imperial. Those from other traditions and lineages also revered this era, but as will shortly become evident, showed little restraint in the reuse of the golden-light metaphor to describe later moments in which they perceived goodness to be resurgent.

This contagious metaphor then began to affect the culture’s conceptions of place, and the different levels of the cultural map that corresponded with these eras were also shaded in gold and black. On the golden side of the dyad, those sites, beings and tendencies associated with golden ages were inscribed on the landscape in bright colours and gold; both through literary descriptions and physical inscriptions in temples, murals and on other images. This was particularly true of the reworked story of the three dharma kings, which by Rang byung rdo rje’s time was beginning to serve not only as a geographically dispersed mnemonic of the Empire’s past, but also as its continued inspirational existence throughout the land. For Rang byung rdo rje, for example, evoking the presence of the three dharma kings was a powerful way to sanctify a region. His evocation of the three kings is found in various places in his personal writing, but nowhere more clearly than in a poem called *The Lamp that Illuminates the Flower of Poetic Decoration: A Praise to Mtshur phu*. In this work, which is a self-described attempt to solidify Mtshur phu’s position as a sacred site, one of Rang byung rdo rje’s techniques of sacralisation is to highlight its proximity to Lhasa, the Imperial capital. This closeness, he suggests, means that if his audience were to look out from the hill behind Mtshur phu toward Lhasa, with enough inspiration and imagination, they could still:

See the Great King’s (Khri Srong btsan sgam po’s) personal statue of the naturally formed figure of the greatest of gods, the inspirational Avalokiteśvara, the deity of which he was a manifestation; yes (like the statue) he too was the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. See clearly also the naturally formed palace that this King, this manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, presided over. Look again and see that mountain on which Mañjuśrī’s manifestation, the Great King (Khri Srong bde btsan) stayed. Look again and see that naturally formed palace on which Vajrapāṇi’s manifestation, Khri Ral pa can, also gazed.37

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iv. Tales from the Dark Side

Rang byung rdo rje's writing contains many gilded images like this, however; it also provides a striking contrast to them by including, perhaps surprisingly, an abundance of circumstantial dark imagery. A good part of the reason for this was that Rang byung understood himself to be living in a dark age, and was therefore more inclined to evoke tales of others who had previously defeated the "the dark side" (nag phyogs), rather than simply regale his audiences with golden tales of yore. This disposition for darkness also reflected a more widespread focus on these tales in the developing treasure tradition, which along with its golden portraits of dharma kings also developed many dark tales of Tibet's demonic subjugation. Moreover, as these tales of subjugation were inscribed across a good deal more of the Plateau than the golden stories, which were concentrated in Lhasa and surrounds, this meant that he was inclined to evoke them more regularly in his travels.

In the main these dark tales from the treasure tradition were also set during the time of the empire, but their protagonist was not the three dharma kings. It was instead a visitor to Tibet: the Indian tántrika Padmasambhava. According to this tale, Padmasambhava was invited to Tibet by Khri Srong Ide btsan to help subdue the local spirits and enable Buddhism to flourish on the Plateau. This made him the most powerful being amongst the Plateau's spirits, with whom Rang byung rdo rje was deeply engaged.

He was also thought to be responsible for concealing most of the treasure texts that were being unearthed during Rang byung rdo rje’s time, including those that contained the stories about himself.38 Rang byung rdo rje understood himself to have a close relationship with Padmasambhava. Although he does not say so explicitly in his writing, he was renowned as a treasure revealer;39 and he remembered a previous lifetime as one of Padmasambhava’s twenty-five main students, Rgyal mchog dbyangs (8th century).40 Moreover, he also understood himself to be continuing what he calls “Padmasambhava’s activities” by extending the work of subjugation and conversion in areas that the Indian tántrika did not reach.41

a) A History of Subjugation

Yet once again, his understanding of this episode in Tibet’s history and how it came about stands in contrast to the historians’ descriptions of Padmasambhava; based on a thorough

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38 During Rang byung rdo rje’s time, the process of consolidating Padmasambhava’s tale through treasure literature was not complete. Indeed, only one of the four most well-known versions of his life story had been discovered before his time: the Bla ma rgyi ’dzin, which was discovered by Nyang ral nying ma ’od zer (1124–1192), whose past-life memories will be discussed in the next chapter (Gyatso 1996:156; Hirschberg 2013).
41 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:398) describes just such an incident. The story of this subjugation will be examined in chapter six of this work.
analysis of the texts that survive from the time of the Empire, they suggest the Padmasambhava story developed along with the tales of the three dharma kings in the period after the Empire’s fall, not during it. Indeed, Jacob Dalton has recently and convincingly suggested that the story of Padmasambhava’s subjugation of local spirits served as something of an extended analogy for the conversion of the broader Tibetan populace to Buddhism during the post-imperial period.42

This post-imperial period is known in traditional sources as the “era of fragmentation” (sil bu’i dus), and one of the points where the two versions of Tibet’s story converge is in acknowledging that this period saw the singular Plateau-wide Tibetan state crumble piece by piece into a network of interconnected local fiefdoms.43 But the traditional histories suggest that at this point Buddhism ceased to exist on the Plateau and was not reintroduced for another hundred years, and the historians’ description of events is a little less dramatic.

In their estimation what occurred after the fall of the Empire was a dramatic shrinkage in the pool of people creating culture. The first members of the old cultural order to disappear were the imperial administrators, who were no longer employed to write imperial edicts, annals or mgur. Then the Buddhist monks disappeared. Like the administrators, they too had been both supported by the Empire and heavily involved in its cultural production. Their dependency on the state meant that when it collapsed, the monasteries and their contribution to cultural production also ceased to exist in any influential way.44 But contrary to traditional accounts that this was the end of Buddhism in Tibet, there was still a large contingent of lay Buddhist practitioners who promoted and preserved Central Tibet’s religious culture; and this, in turn, saw it become intimately linked with the type of Buddhism they promoted.

At the start of this period, these lay practitioners’ beliefs centred on the variable and fluid temple cults of the now unregulated imperial-era temples. Some of these cults maintained the standard version of lay Mahāyāna Buddhism that had been promoted during the Empire; a time when despite latterly developed narratives, mainstream Mahāyāna practices had been encouraged and the practise of tantras was very restricted.45 Yet without imperial oversight, other cults focused on the hitherto restricted practices of

43 The main difference between traditional and contemporary historians seems to be one of time scale; while traditional historians suggest that the events happened dramatically and suddenly (see Shakabpa and Maher 2010:173–199; Nor brang o rgyan 1991), contemporary historians suggest a more gradual disintegration of the empire (Davidson 2005:61–72; van Schaik 2011:45–50; and Dalton 2011:44–76).
44 Unlike traditional histories, contemporary historians do not suggest monasticism disappeared completely from Central Tibet during this time, merely that its influence and prestige declined sharply. Kapstein (2006a: 86–87) and van Schaik and Galambos (2011:61–75), for example, explain that Chinese visitors recorded seeing Buddhist monks at the courts of small kingdoms on their borders. Still, as there is little surviving evidence of them during this period, their cultural activities must have been severely restricted.
tantra also sprung up, and some of these became oriented toward the fringes of tantric practice. The lack of developmental oversight also allowed for both these forms of Buddhism to be more specifically adapted to the Tibetan cultural environment, which in turn allowed them to be more easily incorporated into local practices by less educated people.46

This process is particularly relevant to the present discussion because it was this exchange between un-regulated Buddhism and local, spirit-centred traditions that created much of the environmental imagery Rang byung rdo rje would use centuries later. To communicate with those whose belief structures were based upon these located spirits, the promoters of Buddhism had to find common narratives between the two paradigms. As it turned out, the most effective of these commonalities were the contest narratives.

These stories—which involved the defeat, pacification and reformulation of older belief systems by up-and-coming new structures—had been part of the greater Indian religious traditions for millennia. The gods of the Vedas had been outshone, outsmarted and outfought by the gods of the Purāṇas (or "Ancient Tales"), and the gods of this era were later pitted against each other.47 This process of contest and conversion was then picked up in Buddhist discourse, in which the antagonists of one form of Buddhism became the straw-people of the next.48

These conversion narratives did not merely focus on persons, however; they were also accompanied by an interdependent environmental transformation. Once a being changed their perception, they then looked on their environment differently, and given the non-existence of intrinsic, external places in the Buddhist worldview, their environment changed, too. A changed perception of the environment could then be used to create feedback for those who visited these places, for if they came to see the environment as an awakened one did, they too would attain insight.

The presence of these awakened environments is regularly described in Mahāyāna Buddhist works through two often-overlapping environmental paradigms: the maṇḍala and the pure-land (Skt. buddha kṣetra; Tib. zhing khangs). In its most basic form the first of these is a diagram with a peripheral circle and square border that creates a focus point at its centre; hence the Tibetan translation of the term, which literally means "centre and periphery" (dkyil 'khor), which blended easily with their already-engrained sense of the world as a place of centres and edges.49 The second, the Buddhist pure-land, is said to have

46 This process is described in detail in Dalton (2011:44–77). What is described here is merely an overview of this process that takes into account Dalton’s description, but focuses mainly on its environmental imagery and inscription.
47 Wendy Doniger (2010:274, 364, 510, 565) describes several of these contests.
48 This process is described in some detail in Amstutz (1998).
49 Although it is a little out-dated and contains some dubious psychology, there is still much to recommend Guiseppi Tucci’s (1961) work on maṇḍalas. There have also been several studies that examined the use of
its source (chos 'byung) in the qualities of a buddha, who is then able to project these qualities out to their surrounding environment, transforming the land. Like mandalas these environments are therefore centred on any of the myriad buddhas of the Mahāyāna pantheon.50

Along with their centripetal tendencies these two ideas shared another commonality that made them both useful to the Tibetan adaptation of the Buddhist narrative: the idea that a realised being can transform the environment in which they live. This, in turn, was believed to bring understanding to the region’s people; first through the deliverance of a peaceful environment, and ultimately by release from suffering, when the inhabitants’ perception of place aligned with that of the regions’ previous, awakened inhabitants.51 These were the peaceful processes of environmental transformation that Rang byung rdo rje describes repeatedly in his writing, as both a reflection on what those that went before him had accomplished and as the aspiration for his own activities.

Yet as the Tibetan spirits had something of a wrathful reputation, this peaceful transformation was re-enforced by a more forceful narrative. This alternate transformative tale was drawn from the Mahāyāna offshoot Vajrayāna, in which the processes of personal and environmental transformation had developed methods both peaceful and not so peaceful. This dual approach began with the general Mahāyāna approach in which the contest was conducted through argument or the display of sheer magnificence,52 but if this did not work, the Vajrayāna allowed its transforming protagonists more leeway. In Buddhist discourse these less orthodox methods are called “skilful means” (Skt. upāyakausālya; Tib. thabs mkhas); in practice, at least in these stories of intersystem contests, they were represented as violent subjugation.

The Indian Vajrayāna contains numerous subjugation narratives, but as several studies have pointed out, the first to grip the Tibetan imagination was the multi-formed myth of Rudra's subjugation.53 This story was set within the confines of traditional Indian cosmology, in which Rudra starts as an aristocratic Buddhist practitioner who does not understand the teachings. He then becomes jealous of his realised servant, which leads him on an era-long, spiralling descent into jealousy, revenge and other negative emotions.

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51 As Quintman (2008:367, note 7) has pointed out, this reflects what Chos kyi dbang phyug said were the “two modes of interaction between people and places: sacred sites that are blessed by individuals and individuals who are blessed by sacred sites.”
52 This process of defeat through sheer magnificence is described in several studies including Powers (2009:172) and Kawamura (1981:31).
53 Dalton (2011:1-44, 159-205), Ronald Davidson (1991), Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer (2007:56–57). As these scholars attest, Rudra is called a number of names in the various retellings of this tale, including Mahēśvara. In this context, however, I am going to follow Dalton and call him Rudra to make the story easier to follow.
until he becomes a demon king in charge of a great host. To vanquish this host, the Buddhas—with the powerful Vajrapāṇi taking the lead—empower a wrathful emanation called a Heruka (Tib. khrag ’thung or “the blood drinkers”). The Heruka ends the war with Rudra by defeating him in battle, plunging his trident into the collapsed Rudra’s chest, swallowing him whole, purifying him with his digestive juices so that his perception changes, and then expelling him through his anus. (The trope of environmental transformation is still present, but the environment in which he is transformed is more bilious than most.) After this Rudra offers up his and his retinue’s palaces and begs to be taught the tantras. At the end of the tale, he has become the protector of Heruka’s tantric maṇḍala. 54

As previous studies have noted, this myth was particularly important to the Tibetan conversion narrative for two reasons: first because it presented an account in which a powerful tantra ka could control restive spirits and transform them into protectors of the dharma; and second because it also suggested that rather than ignoring or destroying powerful local spirits, they could instead be co-opted into the Buddhist pantheon by becoming the protectors of a transformed environment.

b) The Demon Tamer

This myth was therefore first translated into the Tibetan language, and then repeatedly re-imagined in the Plateau’s environment. There is a story of subjugation, for example, amongst the treasure tradition’s tales about the first dharma-king, Khri Srong btsan sgam po, in which the king’s efforts to bring Buddhism to Tibet were aided by his Chinese wife Wencheng’s performance of a geomantic subjugation. This deed, which has also been explored many times by various scholars, 55 involved the pacification of a primeval demoness (srin mo), whose body represented the entire Plateau, and whose nightly demolishing of Buddhist temples suggested she was none too pleased with the introduction of this new tradition into her domain. Yet in the end, she was no match for Wencheng, who used her geomantic skills to determine the sites on which to construct “demon-pinning boundary temples” (mtha’ ‘dul lha khang) that would tame her and enable Buddhism to flourish. The first of these temples was the Jo khang in central Lhasa, which Rang byung rdo rje visited repeatedly; it was constructed on her heart. Other taming temples were built later, 56 across the Plateau on other pieces of her anatomy; including the taming temple at Skyi drong in which Rang byung rdo rje would experience a vision as a

55 This subduing has been the topic of several scholarly studies including: Janet Gyatso (1989), Ana Marko (1990), Miller (1998), and Mills (2007). It will be re-examined in chapter four of this thesis.
56 The various histories of these temples are described in Sørensen, Hazod and Tsering Gyalpo (2007), which focuses on what the authors consider to be the first temple, the Khra’ brug temple in the Yar klungs Valley.
Nevertheless, in the developing narrative of subjugation in Tibet, it was not Rudra or Wencheng who became the most recognisable subjugator: “Tibet’s demon tamer par excellence,” as Dalton expressed it, was Padmasambhava.⁵⁷ Over a period of several centuries, beginning in the era of fragmentation, the character and idea of Padmasambhava infused the Tibetan conversion narrative, and consequently both its literature and landscape. In the developed version of his story, Padmasambhava was a great tāntrika whom Khri Srong lde btsan invited to Tibet to help the Indian scholar Śāntarakṣita (Zhi ba ’tsho) establish Bsam yas. His job was to subdue the area’s non-human population. He then stayed on in Tibet and with the help of his growing band of Tibetan disciples—including Rang byung rdo rje’s previous incarnation Rgyal mchog dbyangs—was able to tame most of the land’s spirits. He fought them until they begged for terms, and then bound them with Buddhist vows.

With recourse to the Dunhuang manuscripts, Dalton has shown a developing trajectory for the character of Padmasambhava that begins with its basis in the Rudra myth in the tenth century, and continues well into the thirteenth century,⁵⁸ during Rang byung rdo rje’s time. But the origins of this character of Padmasambhava are less clear. In their study and translation of the eleventh century composition the Chronicles of the Ba (Clan) (Dba’ bzhad), Pasang Wangdu and Hildergard Diemberger suggested that as the limited references to Padmasambhava in early documents are all associated with “water magic and sheer water technology”, he might have been someone who introduced systems of water management to the region.⁵⁹ Dalton is less sure of this idea, pointing out that however tempting it may be—especially given the river-focused society of pre-imperial and imperial Tibet—the Chronicles of the Ba only represents one version of this oft-repeated tale, so it cannot be established with any certitude.⁶⁰

Certainly, by the time Padmasambhava appears in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing his geographic connections have expanded far beyond Tibet’s river-valleys. His associations with the land are both figurative—through the setting of his spirit-taming escapades in various locations across the Plateau—and physical—through the repeated inscription of his image and mantra onto these environments. Throughout his wanderings Rang byung rdo rje engages with the tamed spirits, including the aforementioned great mountain gods and the various groups of local female spirits that appear at pivotal points of his story, acting as his teachers, guides and companions. He also helps to create images of and shrines to Padmasambhava, asserting his presence in some of the region’s most hostile

⁵⁹ Wangdu and Diemberger (2000:14).
environments, and in so doing evokes his pacifying influence.

v. Late Arrivals

Yet unlike many other treasure revealers, Rang byung rdo rje did not solely or even primarily focus his affection and attention on the embedded tale and examples of the dharma kings and Padmasambhava, which are especially connected to the Rnying ma lineage and tradition. He also evoked and located the protagonists of many other lineage-stories within his life-stories and songs. In particular, as a follower of the monastic, scholastic and tantric lineages that were brought to Tibet during the later-dissemination, he made a point to promote the deeds of those involved in these lineages too. In doing so he followed his predecessor Karma Pakshi and took what he calls an “impartial” (phyogs med) approach to the Buddha’s teachings. This perspective in part seems to have arisen from the coincidence that both spent their early lives studying in the Rnying ma tradition—Karma Pakshi at Kha tog and Rang byung rdo rje with his father. Yet in Rang byung rdo rje’s promotion of impartiality he does not speak of these early connections, but rather presents a more abstract reason for this approach; from the mahāmudrā perspective, he suggests, sectarian identities are a manifestation of the “fixation” and “bias” that block realisation. In song number eight, which he wrote as a young man, he describes this connection like this:

Toward the buddhas’ infinite intention,
do not be hypocritical or haughty,
look at the dharma impartially...

Regarding the buddhas’ vast intention,
do not hold onto pride and prejudice,
un-fixated, watch the view.

Nonetheless, despite reflecting an accord with the mahāmudrā view, this stance also places him at odds with some of his lineal forebears who took a more singular view to the lineages they promoted. As both a monk and a practitioner of old and new tantras, for example, he reveres both the clerical and non-clerical wings of Tibetan Buddhism. And, as an adherent of more than one lineage of tantra, he frequently invokes their variant stories. But not all those whose stories he promotes share his commitment to impartiality, which creates some tensions in his presentation of their tale. Indeed, despite his attempts not to

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61 Karma Pakshi’s non-sectarian approach has been described in two works by Kapstein (2000:97–105 and 2011a:259–315).
62 Karma Pakshi’s stay at Kha thog Monastery is described in his self-penned liberation story (Karma pak shi 1978:90).
63 This follows GB. GN says phyogs med kyi ri khros ’grim 1 ang, which could be translated as: “homeless, wander the mountains.” This makes much less sense and is a repeat of the previous verse but one.
64 Song No. 8 (GN 9–14; GB 191–195) Songs of the View, Cultivation, Behaviour and Result.
engage with them, the tensions between the different types of Buddhism were to become a defining narrative of the next story imbedded in his cultural geography, and therefore also help to create his perception of his society and environment.

a) The Rekindling

In a play on the image of dark and golden times, the reintroduction of monasticism to Central Tibet is often called the “rekindling of the embers”. The traditional tale of this reintroduction, the one to which Rang byung rdo rje subscribes, aligns with the historical accounts in several matters, including its time and place. Both accounts agree, for instance, that the reintroduction began on the eastern edge of the Plateau, where refugee monks had fled after the collapse of the empire and found support amongst its borderland communities.

The monastic push back into central Tibet is said to have begun from there after several ageing refugee monks ordained the emerging scholar Dgongs pa rab gsal (832–915). Dgongs pa rab gsal’s developing reputation helped him to establish a large community of monks, and from amongst this group there were several young monks who set off (or returned) to re-establish a monastic community in Central Tibet. At first, tellingly, their efforts were thwarted by a famine that made it difficult to sell the idea of monasticism, with its attendant supply demands, to the residents of the area. It was not until after the famine passed that they succeeded in their endeavours, symbolically entering the gates of the ruined Bsam yas Monastery early in the tenth century.

At the same time, the traditional story and the histories continue, there was also a resurgence of interest in monasticism in far Western Tibet. As this region’s economy recovered from the Empire’s collapse, its inhabitants began to re-engage with thriving Indian Buddhist communities further down the Himalayan slopes in places like Kashmir, and as they did this, they began to compare the practice of Buddhism in those regions with its practice in Tibet. For a growing number of observers, these comparisons left Tibetan Buddhism wanting; not only had they lost the tradition of supporting monastics, but had also allowed people to engage in some relatively extreme practices.

One such troubled observer was Ye shes ’od (959–1040), a descendent of Tibet’s imperial family and the king of the largest Tibetan kingdom of that period, Gu ge, which controlled much of Western Tibet. Ye shes ’od was principally exercised by practices that deliberately flouted the Buddhist precepts of celibacy and non-violence, and set about reforming Buddhism in his realm. In the process of carrying out this transformation, he

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published an open letter to Buddhist practitioners on the Plateau.\textsuperscript{68} In this work he expressed an opinion that the practice of certain forms of tantra had corrupted Tibetan Buddhism and that this problem needed to be addressed through a stricter moral code.\textsuperscript{69} Ye shes ’od’s letter is especially interesting when juxtaposed with Rang byung rdo rje’s story and songs. To begin with, as a general observation, the divergent foci of their social criticism is notable; for while Rang byung rdo rje’s criticism is usually directed towards those in positions of authority, Ye shes ’od directs his criticism towards those who do not heed it. Moreover, from a more specifically historical perspective, there has obviously been a dramatic shift in the discourse around the various levels of vows between their two lives. Ye shes ’od understands tantric practice to be in direct contradiction to mainstream Buddhist morality, which is sustained by preservation of precepts. Rang byung rdo rje, on the other hand, perceives tantric practice as enhancing rather than detracting from his monastic vows.\textsuperscript{70}

This shift in perspective also allows Rang byung rdo rje to focus on one important commonality between Ye shes ’od’s story and that of Padmasambhava’s tantric subjugation of Tibet’s indigenous spirits: they both advocate the binding of wildness by Buddhist vows.\textsuperscript{71} As Rang byung rdo rje moves into Tibet’s border regions, he first evokes Padmasambhava’s story by taming the local spirits, and then Ye shes ’od’s story by dispensing lay and monastic vows to the region’s human inhabitants.\textsuperscript{72}

In many ways, the combination of these two stories in Rang byung rdo rje’s work reflects directly the successes and failures of Ye shes ’od’s reform project. His proscriptions against ritual sex for monastics and all ritual violence were generally upheld across the plateau,\textsuperscript{73} but his promotion of monasticism at the expense of tantric practices was less successful. Within a century of Ye shes ’od’s letter, monasticism and tantricism had become intrinsically interlinked in the Tibetan cultural sphere,\textsuperscript{74} and certainly in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing they are seen as complementary rather than contradictory

\textsuperscript{68} Karmay (2003:137-142) includes a translation of this letter.
\textsuperscript{69} Karmay (2003:137).
\textsuperscript{70} He describes this belief in a number of works, but perhaps most succinctly in song number 126, in which he says: “If you keep your vows and samaya, you will attain heights and happiness; the gods always protect (those who do), so make an effort to protect the three vows” (Song No. 126; 34, GN 189-190; GT 404-405). In this Rang byung rdo rje follows the lead of the founder of the Bka’ gdams tradition, Atisa Dipamkara Srijñāna (980-1054), who was invited to Tibet by one of Ye she ’od’s descendants, but broke with his hosts by suggesting that tantra practice could be combined with monastic morality.
\textsuperscript{71} Dalton (2011:109) describes this link. Like the story of the contest between non-humans and tāntrikas, this story too was told as a contest; this time between true monks and pedlars of Buddhist perversions. One example of this is the contest that is said to have occurred between Ye shes ’od’s subject, Rin chen bzang po (958-1055) and a group of heretics (van Schaik 2011:53).
\textsuperscript{72} Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:403).
\textsuperscript{73} Dalton (2011:123) describes how these reforms came to be associated with this king and his descendants.
\textsuperscript{74} Samuel (1993) includes an in depth study of the relationship between these two elements of the Tibetan Buddhism tradition.
b) Trade in Tantras

Rang byung rdo rje's belief in the complementarity of clerical and non-clerical practices was only one part of his impartial approach, however. He also practised a variety of tantric lineages from both the old and new transmissions, based on the understanding that ultimately they were leading to the same place: a realisation of mind's nature. Given this outcome, he expressed a conviction that it did not really matter whether one achieved this goal through the practice of the Rnying ma's Great Completion, the Bka' brgyud's mahâmudrâ, or the mainstream Madhyamaka approach of the Mahâyâna. As he explains in one of his most famous poems, An Aspiration to Mahâmudrâ, the Definitive Meaning (Ngès don phyag rgya chen po'i smon lam):

Freedom from mentation is mahâmudrâ;
freedom from extremes is the mahâ-mâdhyamaka (Great Middle-Way);
this (state is also) called the all-inclusive mahâ-atî (Great Completion).
May we be assured that if we know one, we will realise all.76

In part the promotion of this view was a result of his own personal reflection on the various lineages he had inherited. Yet the mere fact that he had access to such a variety of lineages is a reflection of historic circumstances and another profoundly influential element of his cultural geography: the decentralised nature—or perhaps more accurately multi-centralised nature—of post-imperial Tibetan society. This multi-centralisation affected Rang byung rdo rje's perception of his socially constructed environment in a number of ways. Geopolitically, it meant that he understood his country to exist on two levels: as an entity defined by the culturally homogenising reach of the Tibetan Empire on the one hand; and as a network of the interconnected mini-states and fiefdoms that had arisen during the "age of fragmentation" on the other. This geopolitics was then combined in his social imagination by the alignment between various fiefdoms and religious lineages that had grown up through the processes of the later transmission.

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75 A substantial cause for the integration between the practices of non-clerical tantras and monasticism that occurred between Ye shes 'od's lifetime and Rang byung rdo rje's birth was the increasing influence of Indian traditions on the Plateau. India was the land from which all Buddhist authority derived, both clerical and non-clerical, and in the centuries since Buddhism had been introduced to Tibet from there, tantra had become mainstream. This meant that the people who were brought to Tibet to help re-establish monasticism in the late ninth and early tenth centuries also tended to be tantric practitioners. This even included people like the aforementioned Atiśa Dipamkara Srijñāna (980-1054), who was invited to Tibet by Ye shes 'od's family to help re-establish mainstream Mahâyâna Buddhism, but despite requests still refused to denounce all tantric practices, and instead promoted a restrained and figurative practice of them. Atiśa (n.d.: folios 11a-12b) set out this approach in his most famous work The Lamp for the Path to Awakening (Byang chub lam gyi sgron ma). His actions, and the actions of others like him in Tibet meant that a creative tension between these two tendencies rather than the supremacy of one at the expense of the other was created, and this is the legacy of this period that is evident in Rang byung rdo rje's work.

In concord with historians of this period, he understood the later transmission to have been carried out by disparate groups with various levels of resources and success, who had enjoyed access to a variety of teachers in India and then imported their teachings (or the teachers themselves) into Tibet. So while Ye shes ‘od and his descendants dedicated their considerable resources to the importation of orthodoxy, for example, not everyone with the means to engage in this exchange was likewise canonically inclined. Other travellers who did not have the resources of state enjoyed by those sent or invited by kings were still able to make the return journey, thanks in large part to the generally greater availability of gold in Tibet.\(^{77}\)

Moreover, on returning to Tibet endowed with these new spiritual technologies, these adventurers often used their status to their advantage; several of them even established centres of religion and scholarship that rivalled the monasteries in influence and would be described with golden accolades in later versions of their tales. Perhaps the best known from amongst these adventurers were the two who would have the greatest influence on Rang byung rdo rje’s tale: the translators ’Brog mi Lo tsā ba (992?-1072?), who became the teacher of the first Sa skya head ’Khon Dkon mchog rgyal po (1034-1102); and Mar pa Chos kyi blo 'gros (1012?-1097), the Tibetan founder of Rang byung rdo rje’s own lineage in Tibet.\(^{78}\)

vi. Centres and Edges

Yet from Rang byung rdo rje’s perspective, while he generally embraced the establishment of these traditions in Tibet—and especially the Bka’ brgyud, whose introduction he describes as the coming of “a precious net of jewelled light that appeared as a threaded mālā”\(^{79}\)—he was less impressed with the way these lineages slowly merged with the existing power bases to create religious fiefdoms. In his repeatedly expressed opinion, these centres of not only religious but also commercial and political power were not conducive to either religious practice or morality.

a) The View from the Middle

Ironically perhaps, given the role they came to play in the Buddhist world and notably in Tibet, one of the earliest Buddhist presentations of a life lived on the periphery is conveyed in the Indic word chosen to describe a Buddhist monastery: vihāra (Tib. dgon pa) means an “isolated” or “secluded” place.\(^{80}\) As this word suggests, the initial role of a Buddhist monastic institution was to remove its inhabitants from society, but although

\(^{77}\) van Schaik (2011:57).

\(^{78}\) This process is described in great detail in Davidson (2005).

\(^{79}\) Song No. 41 (GN 56-58: GB 229-231).

\(^{80}\) C. Tadgell (1990) describes the use of this term.
this was the ideal, it was rarely instituted.\textsuperscript{81} Even in the earliest phases of Buddhism in India, monasteries were often positioned near towns and trade routes. Initially they were established in these places to ensure the survival of their mendicant monks, but later they became centres of society and commerce themselves.\textsuperscript{82} Given that Tibet was much more sparsely populated than India, and its environment more capricious, the eremitic ideal had even less chance of succeeding on the Plateau. What was more, unlike most of their counterpart monastic centres in India, Tibet's monasteries, rather than remaining social and economic centres, also became political centres from which monastics and associated clans ruled their surrounds.\textsuperscript{83}

The processes by which this transformation from religious to political centre occurred were unique for each monastery, but scholars of this period have suggested a standard pattern. Its first stage was the development of connections between various and multiplying monasteries across the Plateau, as they became linked through trans-local lineal and scholarly affiliations. This saw them become, as Ronald Davidson has explained, "a network of physical foci for ...social and mercantile interaction".\textsuperscript{84} The next element in this process was that, perhaps unexpectedly, these growing networks of power merged rather than competed with the clans' already established centres of influence. As Wim van Spengen has explained, instead of fighting the monasteries, the clans "exploited the newly acquired wealth of the monasteries by securing clan members a place in the spiritual hierarchy".\textsuperscript{85}

The process of integration between the ruling clans and monasteries shaped the political and economic structures of Rang byung rdo rje's world. It was the process, for example, by which the old, aristocratic 'Khon family integrated its influence with the monastery it established at Sa skya. It was also the process that led to the establishment by the Rngog clan of Gsang phu ne'u thog Monastery,\textsuperscript{86} which slowly became the renowned centre of scholarship that attracted both the young first and third Karmapas as students. And it was the process that transformed the temple-monastery complex at Tshal into the headquarters of the Gar clan, who would in turn become Rang byung rdo rje's local overlords.

\textbf{b) Mi la ras pa and the Mountains}

Yet although many writers of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries stated a growing

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\textsuperscript{81} Wijayaratana (1990:18-31) and Powers (2009:152) discuss this process.
\textsuperscript{82} Etienne Lamotte (1988:519).
\textsuperscript{83} A phenomenon that is reflected perhaps most clearly by the fact that when the Mongols invaded Tibet in the mid-thirteenth century, they negotiated the country's surrender through its monasteries, not its secular authorities.
\textsuperscript{84} Davidson (2005:87).
\textsuperscript{85} van Spengen (2000:23).
\textsuperscript{86} Kun dga' rdo rje (1981:62).
confidence in these configurations between secular and religious power, others began to express a growing sense of unease with this centralised form of Buddhism. This unease eventually manifested in an emerging discourse that insisted a true practitioner should leave the comforts and temptations of the centre and test themselves in the borderlands. This concentration on the periphery, which pervades Rang byung rdo rje’s songs, had been part of Indian tantric Buddhism’s cultural geography for centuries, with the deeds of the siddhas often positioned at the edge of things: in forests and swamps, on remote islands and in charnel grounds. But in Tibetan literature, music and art the whole idea of a life lived on the edge was most commonly described through the story of one person: Mi la ras pa.

It is difficult to overstate the influence of Mi la ras pa’s life and example on Tibetan culture generally, especially on its cultural geography, and on Rang byung rdo rje’s life more specifically. Simply put, Mi la ras pa’s story moved the cultural action from river-plains “into the mountains”, and his mgur/glù changed the perspective on these commanding landforms. While the songs of earlier periods are set at the base of mountains looking up, and as such tend to focus on mountains with commanding aspects like Yar lha sham po and Kailas, Mi la ras pa’s look down on villages from amongst their rocky caves. Moreover, his work in turn led to a proliferation of other literatures that were based in, rather than looking up at, the mountains, and helped effect the transformation of more of Tibet’s mountainous environments into sacred sites.

While this change in perspective can be noted in many mgur/glù and other genres like liberation-stories from Mi la ras pa’s time on, it has the most profound effect on those people like Rang byung rdo rje who sought to emulate him directly. For people like this, becoming like Mi la ras pa was a life goal that therefore shaped their life-stories. Moreover, as Quintman has noted, this emulation was not merely biographic, but geographic; Mi la ras pa’s life-story was inscribed on the South-western Tibetan environment, and those wishing to emulate him often located themselves in the same sites in which his life-story

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87 Amongst others, Sa skya Pandita, for example, was a great exponent of the levels of elite learning that these centres were able to produce. See: Gold (2007).
88 These settings are apparent in the siddhas’ songs and life-stories. The songs have been translated in Roger Jackson (2004) and Per Kværne (1986). The life-stories have been translated in Dowman (1985). As these works suggest, however, this was not the only lifestyle open to yogis. Mar pa and many other householder yogis practiced in their homes, and in the stories of the mahāsiddhas a variety of practice methods, or sādhana (Tib. sgrub thob) are described. This was, however, the only yogic lifestyle Rang byung thought could be maintained in the dark ages in which he lived.
89 This refrain of “into the mountains” (ri la khrod or ri la ’gro) is found repeatedly in most of the redactions of Mi la ras pa’s liberation-story.
90 This assessment is based on a reading of Don grub rgyal (1997a:356–432), and Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang (2011: 193–343). There is no mention in either of these collections of mgur/glù of anyone looking down from the mountains. The closest image is to animals used as metaphors for clan leaders that sweep down from the mountains, but even these are written from the lower perspective.
91 Again, this perspective is evident in even the early versions of Mi la ras pa’s tale. For an overview of these see Quintman (2006).
was set. Further, the positioning of this geographic biography in some of Tibet’s harshest terrain also created a strong impetus for those travelling in Mi la ras pa’s spatial footsteps to replicate his behaviour; for unless they adapted Mi la ras pa’s extremely low-impact lifestyle, they would not survive. This approach consisted of practices like inner heat (Skt. \( \text{candāli} \); Tib. \( \text{gtum mo} \)), which limited the amount of clothing and fuel they needed, and the “extraction of the essence” (bcud len), by which they could find sustenance from any vegetation, and reportedly even rocks.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these rigours, the numbers of those seeking this lifestyle continued to grow throughout the twelfth century, and by Rang byung rdo rje’s time the mountain-dwelling yogi can be identified as a discrete social group. Yet there were also many ties between this and other social groups, particularly monks. In Rang byung rdo rje’s lineage, the precedent for combining monastic vows with mountain retreats had been developed by Mi la ras pa’s most influential student: Sgam po po pa. As I mentioned in the introduction, Sgam po po pa—a teacher of the first Karmapa, Dus gsum mkhyen pa—was instrumental in combining the yoga traditions he had inherited from his teacher Mi la ras pa with a monasticism derived from the Bka’ gdams. Rang byung rdo rje followed his example closely, living in the mountains but maintaining vows himself and encouraging his followers to be monastics. In his instructions he repeatedly suggests that monastic vows are an indispensable aid to meditation and morality. The only problem with them is that in dark days like his, they are difficult to maintain while living in monasteries.

In his promotion of monasticism and the life of a mountain hermit, or more literally “one who lives amongst the mountains” (ri khrod pa), Rang byung rdo rje was also part of a greater social movement that built on the change of perspective, the re-imagining of mountains, wrought by Mi la ras pa. This re-imagining grew out of the establishment during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries of yogi colonies in a variety of mountainous sites. As these colonies accrued layers of cultural capital, the sites in which hermits practised were transformed into some of the most sacred places in the Tibetan cultural sphere. Some of these sites had already been considered sacred in pre-Buddhist times, and some of them were coevally being co-opted into the geography of Padmasambhava’s story, but most of their sacredness was tied to the stories and visions of Mi la ras pa and the Mi la ras pa-inspired yogis who took up residence in them. Thus, although their legends also included images and stories from other periods, they are most closely associated with the worldview of the tantras these yogis promoted.

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92 Quintman (2008).
93 For an overview of these practices see Powers (2007:405–433).
94 Toni Huber’s (1999a) study of Tsa ri describes this process. This study and the developments on this mountain will be discussed in more depth in part two.
The most famous of these sites were three mountains in Southern and Western Tibet: Tsa ri in Kong po, La phyi in La stod, and Kailaś (Gangs dkar ti se) in Mnga’ ris. After yogis began inhabiting them, the three mountains came to be perceived as the three maṇḍalas of the widely venerated tantric deity Cakrasamvara (Tib. ’Khor lo bde mchog) in union with his consort Vajrārāhi (Tib. Rdo rje phag mo), who combined was also the central deity of Rang byung rdo rje’s yoga practice: Tsa ri was considered to be the deity’s mind maṇḍala, La phyi its speech maṇḍala and Kailaś its body maṇḍala. 95

Moreover, as the tantra of the two deities abiding at these sites also contained a subjugation myth, they too, like most Tibetan sacred sites, became associated with the vanquishing of an “other”. The story of how Cakrasamvara and Vajrārāhi subdued their non-Buddhist rivals Bhairava (’Jigs byed) and Kāli (Dus btshan ma) is closely associated with Rudra’s subjugation story; Bhairava and Rudra are even both said to be forms of the Indian god Śiva.96 But the positioning of this subjugation story within the Cakrasamvara/Vajrārāhi tantra’s cosmography led to an evolution in the story’s setting, both in specificity and multiplicity. The developments in these tendencies came about through the retelling of the tale in the Cakrasamvara-tantra that described a final battle between the two couples conducted at twenty-four sacred sites on the Indian subcontinent: the twenty-four pīṭha. The word pīṭha had been used in India to describe both the base of Śiva iingam/Śakti yoni temples and the even earlier sites of goddess worship,97 but the enumeration of “twenty-four” specifically named sites was an innovation of the Buddhist tantras.98 These were the names of the places, the story says, in which the twenty-four emanations of Cakrasamvara/Vajrārāhi danced on the heads of twenty-four emanations of Bhairava/Kāli.

Although the tantras named these places, they did not locate them all, and this led various Indian commentators to suggest a variety of sites across the subcontinent for the less famous of them.99 This lack of fixedness also meant that they could be repositioned in Tibet, and therefore as the three previously mentioned mountains developed reputations as the abodes of Cakrasamvara/Vajrārāhi they also came to be associated with several pīṭha. Tsa ri was linked to the Indian sites of Kānci/Cāritra and Devīkoṭṭa, La phyi to Godāvari and Kailaś to Himavat.

95 McDonald (1990:242). As Toni Huber (1999a:41) has pointed out, the idea that these places are the abodes of deities, rather than the embodiment of them, is reflected in the Tibetan word that was used to describe these sacred sites, gnas, which is used as both a noun in this case and is also a verb that means “to abide”. This too will be discussed in more detail in part two.
96 Davidson (1991) describes the link between these deities in detail, as does Dalton (2011:23–76).
97 Diana L. Eck (2012:257–300) has conducted a comprehensive and wide-ranging study of these sites in her discussion of India’s sacred geography.
98 Tsunehiko Sugiki (2009) gives a comprehensive survey of the places in which these sites were mapped in the Buddhist tantras and their commentaries.
These re-imaginings were accompanied by an influx of pilgrims to these regions, and with this influx came inevitable problems: some theoretical and others that were more political. The theoretical critiques of pilgrimage to these sites were set out as part of a wider "new tantra" orthodoxy by Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182-1251) and his followers. They opposed the relocation of the pīṭha, and even the idea that pilgrimage could be of any benefit to those without high levels of realisation in their tantric practice. The political problems that beset these regions were also part of larger projects, but this time with little or no logical underpinning; for despite their spiritual and geographical elevation, some of the sites became embroiled in the disputes of the late twelfth century. As La phyi and Kailāś had initially been colonised in the main by adherents of the 'Bri gung bka’ brgyud, for example, and the main seat of this lineage was aligned with Qubilai Khan’s enemies in the Chagatai Khanate, access to them was restricted. Despite his deep personal connections with Cakrasamvara/Vajravārāhi, for example, Rang byung rdo rje made no attempt to visit either place. And the only site that he was allowed to stay for extended periods, Tsa ri, had been invaded during the 1290 rebellion when the Mongol and Sa skya troops killed many of its yogis. Nevertheless, as will become clear, Rang byung rdo rje still encountered difficulties from the terrain and from other humans and as he set about establishing retreat centres there.

vii. The Other Empire

As Rang byung rdo rje saw it, the problems in Tsa ri were one of the multiple manifestations of the darkness that had engulfed the Plateau. This darkness had descended, he suggested, for a number of reasons. One of these, as he repeated in his songs, was that the bringers of light, the awakened beings whose presence glorified those around them, had left:

The buddhas of previous generations
(shone) their limitless light of compassion,
yet we still wander in dark ignorance,
left behind in the midst of dread.

He was also gravely concerned that the ordinary beings of the region were not fulfilling their enlightening roles, which he defines for them in the following way:

To equalise high and low,
to leave behind dark evil (and)
to volunteer for bright goodness.

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100 For a concise survey of these debates see Ngawang Zangpo (2001:25-31).
101 Huber (1999a:69).
102 Song No. 70 (GN 105-107; GB 268-269).
103 Song No. 88 (GN 127-128; GB 291).
Overall, though, he placed the majority of blame for what he perceived to be the degenerate state of morality in his homeland on two intertwined influences. The first of these was the monastic centres, which he suggested had been thoroughly corrupted. This led him to invert the Buddhist rekindling’s cultural geography, by describing the monastic institutions as dark and the Plateau’s peripheral areas as the source of bright goodness. By combining this inversion with Mi la ras pa’s veneration of mountain retreats, he suggested repeatedly that these isolated places served as holdouts from past golden ages, in which he and other like-minded yogis could stave off degeneration. Of one hermitage, for example, he wrote:

"Realised beings" who proclaim their own goodness, uncomprehending, confused “spiritual friends”,
full-bellied “great meditators”, and everyone who loves distraction may arrive here, but they will not stay.
In this way, this siddha-nurturing site is secluded from these dark times. E Ma Ho!105

Yet although most of his scorn was directed toward those in charge of the monastic centres of power, he did not suggest they acted alone. He equally heaped scorn for the dire state of his homeland on another influential group: the Mongols. According to Rang byung rdo rje, their rule had been responsible for much of the corruption that had caused lay people to abandon their good work and realised beings to depart.106

Along with this direct criticism, his personal writing also reflected his more passive resistance to the Mongols’ imposed perception of his homeland, which ignored its previously accrued layers of cultural landscaping. The Mongol-imposed maps of Tibet were developed to ensure that it could be controlled and that resources—including its powerful yogis—could be extracted from it; for them it was merely another region of their vast Empire. Their vision added another layer of human geography to Rang byung rdo rje’s maps, but it was a political rather than cultural geography, and not a vision he endorsed.

The central organising principle of Rang byung rdo rje’s world was Buddhism, not politics; he saw his world through Buddhist cosmology and ontology and understood its history through the narrative of religious, not political, lineages. The only kings he honoured were those that had been sanctified by association with Buddhas, and there is no indication in his works that he viewed the Mongols in that way.107 For him profane

104 This translates the Tibetan term dge gshes (and its long form dge ba’i gshes gnyen), which seems to be used within this work to refer to monk-teachers.
105 Song No. 101; 9 (GN 146–148; GT 369–371).
106 Song No. 114; 22 (GN 173–175; GT 391–392).
107 This marks yet another point of departure from later redactions of his life-story, in which the Mongol Emperors are presented as Buddhas. Interestingly, however, this presentation is made in two different ways in
politics were merely a subplot to the main narrative of Buddhism. What contemporary readers would call “political history”, Rang byung rdo rje called “worldly affairs” (*jig rten gyi chos*), which were at best a distraction from yoga and meditation, and at worst their destroyers. Their repeated presence in his life was proof that he lived in dark times, and the political maps that it imprinted on his environment are more often than not represented as foreboding shadows.

Yet despite his expressed intention to keep as far away from politics and the secular world as he could, factors beyond his control combined to ensure that this was not always possible. Some of these factors were inherited, and others were geographical. The inherited factors were passed down to him from the two men who perhaps more than any others determined the course of his life: his predecessor in the Karmapa body-*mālā*, Karma Pakshi, and his main guru, O rgyan pa. From Karma Pakshi he inherited a troubled relationship with the Mongol court, and his close connection with O rgyan pa drew him into an even more complicated political network of allegiances. Nonetheless, even without these connections, his life would still have been profoundly affected by political events merely because of its location. For the land into which he was born, La stod, just happened to straddle the zones of influence of two of the Mongol world’s most powerful leaders: Qubilai Khan (1215-1294), based in Beijing, and his arch enemy Qaidu (1230-1301), based in Central Asia.

**a) Karma Pakshi and Qubilai Khan: An Uncertain Regard**

Karma Pakshi’s troublesome relationship with the Mongol court—and therefore Rang byung rdo rje’s complicated relationship with the Mongol court—began when he accepted an invitation to the court of Qubilai sometime in the early 1250s.

At that time, Qubilai was ruling the lands to the northeast of Tibet at the behest of his elder brother, the then Great Khan Möngke (1209–1259). Möngke had taken the throne in 1252 following the death of his uncle Güyük (1206–1248). In doing so he had also wrested it forever from the line of Güyük’s father Ögedei (1189–1241), a son of the Empire’s founder Chinggis (1162–1227), and granted it to the line of his own father Tolui (1192–1232), another son of Chinggis. To shore up his reign in the face of resistance from the Ögedei branch of the family, Möngke appointed his brothers to ruling positions across the Empire: Qubilai he placed in charge of Northern China; Hülegü (1218–1265) in the Persia sphere of the Empire called the Il-Khanate; and in accordance with Mongolian custom, his

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the later Kar ma bk’a’ brgyud tradition. In some accounts, the Mongol Emperors, like the emperors of later Chinese dynasties, are said to be emanations of Mañjuśrī (Berger 2003:184). Yet other accounts link the last of the Emperors, Toghan Temür to both the next Buddha of the age Maitreya and the reincarnation lineage said to be a manifestation of this bodhisattva/Buddha, the Tai Situ body-*mālā* (Karma gzhan pan rgya mtsho, 2008:90–98).
youngest brother Ariq Böke (1219–1266) stayed in his capital at Karakoram on the Mongolian steppe to act as his regent when he was away fighting. This meant the only large area of the vast Mongol Empire not directly under Tolui control was the Kipchak Khanate, or Golden Horde to the north-west of Mongolia, which was ruled by their uncle Batu (1207–1255) and his descendants.

By this stage, Tibet had already been the victim of several Mongol raids, including a particularly devastating one in 1240, but these had substantially subsided after Köten (d. 1253?), another of Ögedei’s sons, had struck up a religious relationship with the esteemed Tibetan guru Sa skya Paññita during Gıyūg’s reign. In 1251, however, the situation changed again when the great pandita died and Möngke took the throne. Within a year of his accession, he had sent armies to re-invade Tibet and established direct rule there.¹⁰⁸

Despite an approach substantially different from Köten’s, Möngke did retain a respect for Tibet’s religiosity that inclined him to approach rule in the region differently from in his other domains.¹⁰⁹ This alternate approach saw him assign patronage of the most powerful monasteries on the Plateau—the majority of which where Bka’ brgyud—to himself or his brothers: ‘Bri gung mthil north of Lhasa he assigned to himself; Tshal just southeast of Lhasa to Qubilai; the smaller Phag mo gru, G.ya’ bzang and Thang po che monasteries, all in central Tibet, to Hülegü; and Stag lung Monastery also north of Lhasa to Ariq Böke.

At that stage, Sa skya retained its links with Köten’s camp, but after a few years its patronage passed over to Qubilai, when he took into his camp Sa skya Paññita’s two young nephews ‘Phags pa (1235–1280) and Phyag na rdo rje (1239–1267), who had initially accompanied their uncle to Köten’s court.¹¹⁰ This not only severed the official links between the Ögedei family and Tibet; it also granted Qubilai more influence on the Plateau than any of the other brothers.

It was around this time that he first contacted Karma Pakshi, who had developed something of a reputation as a person with just the kind of supernatural powers that interested the Mongols. Moreover, as Karma Pakshi’s main seat of Mtshur phu was also under the protection of Tshal Monastery, it had therefore come under Qubilai’s control, and he would have understood the summoning of this “magician” to be within his rights.

As Charles E. Manson’s analysis of his fragmentary liberation-stories suggests, at this stage Karma Pakshi was already fifty years old,¹¹¹ and while undertaking his life’s work he

¹⁰⁹ Kapstein (2006a:113–114) describes this Mongolian perspective on Tibetans by quoting from Rnying ma visitors to the Mongol court.
¹¹¹ Karma Pakshi had been born far from Mtshur phu, into an aristocratic family in Khams, and attained his initial education at the Rnying ma Ka thog Monastery in southern Sde dge. Then, after being recognised as an emanation of Dus gsum mkhyen pa by his teacher Spom brag pa (1170–1249), who was Dus gsum mkhyen
had not developed a very positive impression of the Mongols. To begin with, he had been forced to flee “marauding Mongols in East Tibet” and he also had to live with the “the communal memories of the invasion of 1240 in Central Tibet”. Yet, Karma Pakshi might also have realised the opportunity and protection offered by Qubilai’s overture, or he might have been placed under great pressure to go by the prince’s envoy. It is difficult to know exactly why he decided to travel to the court, for as Manson reports, his self-penned liberation-story “simply states that he was at Mtshur phu when an envoy (gser yig pa) was sent by Qubilai Qan (Khan) requiring the lama’s presence at court [and] after initial prevarication (’gro ’am mi ’gro the tsom za ba las), [he] decided to accept the invitation”.

Most reports suggest that Karma Pakshi met Qubilai in the borderlands between Tibet and China at some time between 1250 and 1255. They also suggest that he stayed with Qubilai in his entourage for a considerable time, perhaps even several years. Then, without full explanation to Qubilai or the readers of his liberation-stories, Karma Pakshi left, returned to Central Tibet, refused to revisit Qubilai, and instead, in 1256, accepted an invitation from his brother Möngke to attend his court at Karakoram. As Manson has attested, his silence on the subject in his liberation-stories was “perhaps diplomatic” as he was “always reticent in mentioning his troubled interactions with Qubilai”. But as Michelle Sorenson has also pointed out, this “was not an unreasonable move on Karma Pakshi’s part; Qubilai at this point had no obvious claim to the throne, making Möngke (Möngke) a far more appealing donor”.

In Karma Pakshi’s reporting of the story, Möngke was not only a more appealing donor, but also a more able and malleable student. As Manson explains Karma Pakshi’s position, by contrast with his diplomatic silence about Qubilai, he was enthusiastic about Möngke’s abilities in the practice of Buddhist yoga, and his acceptance of many of his ideas about both Buddhist tenets and government policy. For his part, Karma Pakshi also seems to have made at least a “magically” positive impression on the Great Khan’s court, for it was most probably during his stay there that he became known as a “Pak shi”; a Tibetan rendering of the Mongolian term bakshi, which means something like the English term “wizard”. His positive reception at the court is further evidenced by Möngke’s dispensation to him to stay for three years, and to leave of his own accord. The honours

pa’s grand-student, he began to take responsibility for the monasteries the latter had founded at Karma and Kam po gnas nang in Khams and Mtshur phu in Central Tibet.
112 Manson (2009:37).
113 Manson (2009:37).
114 Richardson (1998:340) nominated an area near the present day town of Dartsedo as the most likely place for its occurrence.
115 Manson (2009:37).
and endowments he received during this stay also raised his standing in Tibet, but this very nearly became a short-lived eminence.

Möngke died while on a military campaign near the present-day city of Chongching shortly after Karma Pakshi left court in 1259. Following his death, his brothers Qubilai and Ariq Böke waged a war to succeed him. It ended four years later with Qubilai in the ascendency, and Karma Pakshi in trouble. According to later accounts, Qubilai accused Karma Pakshi of siding with Ariq Böke, tortured him repeatedly, tried to have him killed several times, and then, when none of this worked, subjected him to what the Tibetan commentators describe as the horror of exile at an ocean beach. After this mental torture, he then brought him back to endure more physical torture.120

In retellings of this story, especially those constructed by later Karma bka’ brgyud writers, the battles between the two men become quite fantastic, with Karma Pakshi raising up ephemeral armies to fight back Qubilai’s battle-hardened soldiers.121 Yet as Manson reports, in Karma Pakshi’s own accounts of these altercations, he only refers to one episode of torture, and does so without elaborating on the experience.122 Eventually, however, according to all reports, after all Qubilai’s attempts to kill Karma Pakshi failed, the two effected a reconciliation of sorts. There were no more battles or torture sessions, but Karma Pakshi again refused an invitation to attend Qubilai’s court, this time centred on his two new capitals of Dadu and Xanadu. And Qubilai for his part did not grant Karma Pakshi or Mtshur phu any more freedom in his reforms of Tibet’s administrative system. It was not until Rang byung rdo rje made his journey to these capitals some sixty years later that the rift between the Mongol court and the Karmapas was completely mended; and until that point, Rang byung rdo rje experienced the political repercussions of his predecessor’s decisions. He also continued to demonstrate some of Karma Pakshi’s defiance in the face of overwhelming temporal authority.

b) Tibet on the Mongols’ Map

After these events, Qubilai began to invest both ’Phags pa and Phyag na rdo rje with much greater regard. ’Phags pa in particular developed a close relationship with Qubilai, and the two men later officially institutionalised the patron-recipient relationship (mchod yon) that their respective uncles Sa skya Paṇḍita and Köten had foreshadowed. This relationship was so significant that after being installed as Great Khan, Qubilai appointed ’Phags pa as his “imperial preceptor” (Ch. 帝師, di shi; transliterated in Tibetan as ti shrf).

120 ’Gos Lo tsā ba (1974:37a).
121 Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:915).
122 Manson (2009:40).
with direct control over Tibet. When Phags pa returned to Tibet in 1265, he combined this role with his standing position as the abbot of Sa skya Monastery (gdan sa chen po) and became by far the most powerful person on the Plateau. In 1267 he used this power to appoint a loyal attendant named Sakya bzang po (13th Century) as administrator, or "Great Lord" (dpon chen) of Sa skya. This instigated the triumvirate—imperial preceptor, abbot and Great Lord—that was to rule Tibet, at least in name, for the duration of the Yuan Dynasty.

After installing Phags pa in these roles and conducting a census of Tibet in 1268 that facilitated a more thorough taxation system for the region, Qubilai also changed its political administration. Instigating a process of reform that was completed by 1270, he abolished the system of assigned patronage. This change was in part made necessary by the system's moribund state after the deaths of Köten, Mönge and latterly Ariq Böke, but it also reflected another of Qubilai's power plays, this time effectively staking out his claim on all of Central Tibet through administration rather than armed combat. The system with which he replaced the assignments split Central Tibet into thirteen administrative "myriarchies" (khri skor).

Although the designation of the myriarchies was something of a moveable feast, traditionally there are said to have been six each in the twin regions of Central Tibet, Gtsang and Dbus, and one that crossed the border between them. This ostensibly divided Tibet along clan lines, but several monasteries, notably Bsam yas, Mchims phu, Kha rag, Brug pa and Thang po che, were also given the privileged position of reporting directly to the Khan and therefore bypassing their local myriarchs (khri dpon). Most likely in a reflection of Karma Pakshi's troubled relationship with Qubilai, Mtshur phu was not granted this privilege, and remained under the control of the Tshal Myriarch for the rest of

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123 He was later given the even more exalted title of "National Preceptor" (Tib. kau shri; Ch. 国师, guo shi).
126 Petech (1980).
128 This is the generally repeated enumeration. Occasionally more than thirteen myriarchies are listed (Petech 1980:35).
129 Petech (1980:234), Powers and Templeman (2012:332), Kapstein (2006a:115). The word "khri skor" literally means "a circle of ten thousand" in Tibetan, and is a reflection of the tendency in other parts of the Mongolian Empire to divide administrative units into groups of 10,000 households. In Tibet, however, the entire population was many less than 130,000 households, and some of these "myriarchies" contained as few as one hundred and fifty households. Indeed, the entire number of households in the region has been estimated at 40,000, which—with numbers added for nomads and others not connected to a household—suggests that the population of Central Tibet at this time was about 300,000. This also means that the translation of the term khri dpon as "myriarch" is a literal rather than historically accurate translation.
130 Petech (1990:52–61) has divided these myriarchies into the following major groups: In Gtsang: 1, 2 and 3. The three realms of Mnga’ris skor gsum; Gu ge, Pu rang and Mang yul, in far Western Tibet; 4 and 5. North and South La stod, in Southern Tibet; 6a. Chu mig Monastery near the town of Snar thang or its local rival; 6b. Zha lu Monastery in Nyang chu Valley. In Dbus: 7. ‘Bri gung Monastery; 8. Tshal Monastery; 9. Phag mo gru Monastery; 10. G.ya’bzang Monastery, which was granted independence from Phag mo gru by Qubilai; 11. Rgya ma, at Rgya ma rin chen sgang, east of Lhasa; 12. Stag lung Monastery, west of Lhasa, on the border between Dbus and Gtsang; 13. Ya’brog, centred on Lake Ya’brog mtscho.
the Mongol Empire's rule Tibetan rule.

It was also around the time of these reforms, in 1271, that Qubilai conquered the Southern Song Dynasty in China and established a Chinese Mongol dynasty that he called the Great Yuan Empire (Ch. 大元帝國; Da Yuan DiGuo). Tibet, along with several other neighbouring states, was included within this realm, and consequently the Tibetans, including Rang byung rdo rje, were connected directly through administrative networks with all of China, Korea, and parts of Mongolia. Moreover, as Qubilai was also considered to be the highest Khan of the entire Mongol Empire, they shared a ruler with people as far away as Poland. Yet conversely, it also meant that some of the greater geopolitical intrigues from this wider world were brought into Tibet, and especially into Rang byung rdo rje's neighbourhood.

In the main, these tensions were a continuation of those that had been created between the Ögedei and Tolui sides of the extended imperial family after Möngke took the throne. In the decades leading up to Rang byung rdo rje's birth, the Ögedei forces congealed around a descendant of this line called Qaidu, who used the newly established Chagatai Khanate just to the west of the Great Yuan Empire as a base from which to attack Qubilai. Qaidu had himself elected an alternate Great Khan at an assembly (or kurultai) inside the Chagatai in 1266, and thereafter worked to undermine Qubilai and his allies' rule in a number of geopolitical arenas, one of which was Tibet.131

In Tibetan sources, Qaidu's Chagatai are referred to as the "upper Mongols" (stod hor), while Qubilai and his supporters are called the "lower Mongols" (smad hor).132 Despite Qubilai's nominal paramountcy in Tibet, the upper Mongols repeatedly used the links they had developed with disaffected Tibetan groups to resist this hegemony. These links were based on the old system of patronage that had been established by Möngke and nominally abolished by Qubilai. Rather than ridding themselves of these allegiances and accepting Qubilai's rule, several non-Sa skya centres of Tibetan power, namely 'Bri gung and Phags mo gru Monasteries, had vented their frustration at Mongol/Sa skya rule by switching their allegiances to the Chagatai.

These webs of fealty and the intersecting geographies of their spheres of influence meant that despite Qubilai's claims to the contrary, the situation in Tibet was still fraught, and this tension subsequently both encouraged and was encouraged by other destabilising influences. The most potent of these were the repeated famines throughout Qubilai's and 'Phags pa's reign; famines that would continue to occur throughout Rang byung rdo rje's

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132 As Everding (2002:112) and Elliot Sperling (1990:153–156) have pointed out, this term stod hor was used to refer to both the Mongols of the Chagatai Khanate and those of Hülegü's Il-Khanate, which was centred on the Iranian Plateau. As they also point out, however, given Hülegü's death and the region's conversion to Islam in 1295, it is unlikely that the Il-Khanate Mongols interfered in Tibetan affairs in any substantial way during this period.
life because of war or war footing-induced degradations to the environment and the economy. They were exacerbated by the continual threat of desolation that came with the high-stakes geopolitical game being carried out across the Plateau, but particularly in some regions of concentrated friction. One of the regions most affected by these tensions was the myriarchy of South La stod in southern Tibet, in which Rang byung rdo rje was about to be born.

c) In 0 rgyan pa's Neighbourhood

South La stod was particularly affected by this conflict because it was traditionally associated with the 'Bri gung Monastery and therefore their Chagatai backers. 'Phags pa initially tried to neutralise this threat by negotiating a deal to swap control of South La stod with another more marginal region, but when this failed, he invaded the area and established the vassal state of Mang yul gung thang. Yet even then, the region's issues were not settled, and would continue to be precarious until the next outbreak of outright war between the upper and lower Mongols following the 'Bri gung uprising in 1290.

By that time Rang byung rdo rje was six years old, and he had experienced this general geographic destabilisation more intensely than most because of his entry a few years earlier into the orbit of his guru and mentor 0 rgyan pa (1229/1230-1309). O rgyan pa had gained his name by travelling to the valley known in Tibetan as O rgyan (Skt. Uddiyâna), the legendary home of Padmasambhava, which is usually associated with the Swat Valley in present-day Pakistan. He then continued onto the Indian plains and experienced first hand the holy land about which most other Tibetans had only read. Once back in Tibet, he too, like his teacher Karma Pakshi, had developed complicated relationships with the Mongols and their Sa skya regents.

One of the most problematic of these relationships was with a rising star of the Sa skya firmament, Kun dga’ bzang po (12??–1280/81). Kun dga’ bzang po had helped 'Phags pa in the Mang yul gung thang adventure, and was later installed as Great Lord of Sa skya. But at some later point he fell out with 'Phags pa and his brother Phyag na rdo rje, and was even implicated in the latter’s death. Even this falling out was not enough, however, to force his dismissal from the position of Great Lord, and he gained even more power in the region after 'Phags pa’s return to Qubilai’s court in 1267. Encouraged by the generally fraught environment on the Plateau, Kun dga’ bzang po ruled during this period with a combination of paranoia and brute force. These less than admirable traits came to the fore, and brought him back to South La stod when, sometime around 1275 he marshalled an army in reaction to rumours that the monks of 0 rgyan pa’s

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seat, Sbud skra Hermitage, were saying he had killed Phyag na rdo rje. He marched this army down to Sbud skra,\textsuperscript{135} and they razed it, killing some of its resident monks and yogis.

O rgyan pa was not there at the time, but in response to Kun dga’ bzang po’s overreaction, and perhaps out of concern for what else might happen to people under his protection, he responded to this destruction by becoming firm friends with ’Phags pa. It was an alliance founded on a common enemy and apparent mutual respect that became even stronger when, after ’Phags pa’s return from Qubilai’s court in 1275/6, he not only removed Kun dga’ bzang po from his post (although he was still able to intrigue behind the scenes), but also introduced O rgyan pa to the Mongolian prince A’uruyči (Rgyal po A rog), Qubilai’s seventh son and ’Phags pa’s escort, who paid for Sbud skra Hermitage to be rebuilt. This created a link between O rgyan pa and Qubilai that led to the Tibetan’s visit to the Mongol capitals when Rang byung rdo rje was a young man.\textsuperscript{136}

O rgyan pa’s positive and negative relationships with these powerful Sa skyas also created a link between them and one of his teachers, Karma Pakshi. After his unfortunate interactions with Qubilai, Karma Pakshi had by all accounts spent most of his time improving his monasteries and meditating.\textsuperscript{137} Yet despite this removal from the political sphere, Karma Pakshi must have kept abreast of many of the political manoeuvrings on the plateau, for in the early 1280s, just a couple of years before his death, he decided to entrust his black hat, the most powerful symbol of his Karmapa identity, to the siddha from La stod and therefore grant him the power to sanction his successor.\textsuperscript{138} This decision was a politically meticulous move. O rgyan pa had not only survived but also thrived through difficult political times with both his reputation and political links intact. To explain this in cultural geographic terms, suffice to say that he was held to be as knowledgeable about the political divisions that had been overlaid on his world as he was of the spiritual and religious maps that he held more dearly. This would make him very qualified to introduce many of the complexities of this multi-layered worldview to the young Rang byung rdo rje when he came into his care a few years later. He was in this way a keeper of mind maps as well as black hats.

O rgyan pa was also involved in the promotion of the alternate, new type of religious succession, of which Karma Pakshi was the most successful example. At this early stage,

\textsuperscript{135} This hermitage was located on a hill near the present-day town of Gnya’ lam.

\textsuperscript{136} Li (2011:291–297). It also led to O rgyan pa receiving an invitation to the “Dharma Council of Chu mig” (chu mig chos ’khor). This was a meeting billed as a congregation of all the leading religious leaders of the time, but as Petech (1990:24) has explained, “In all likelihood... had political consequences, such as the final recognition of Mongol (which is to say, Qubilai’s) paramountcy”.

\textsuperscript{137} Karma Pakshi (1978:22–23). Although, there are also records of a meeting between him and ’Phags pa, which probably took place in the late 1270s, perhaps at Mshur phu (Manson, 2009:43).

\textsuperscript{138} This assertion is made in O rgyan pa’s liberation-story (Bsod nams ’od zer 1997:247–249). This story was written by his student Bsod nams ’od zer (13th–14th century), sometime shortly after his teacher’s death and therefore during Rang byung rdo rje’s life.
the new form of succession looked to be free from the intrigues and internecine family conflicts that had disrupted and ended so many lives in the succession conflicts and infighting of the Mongols, Sa skya and other hierarchies. In Tibetan stories of the Karmapas' lives, the development of this new succession is known as the establishment of a "body-mālā" (sku phreng); in contemporary sources it is usually referred to as the institution of reincarnation, and it is the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: KARMAPAS

This is just one piece of a conceptual mālā, (but) humans, non-humans, elemental spirits, all of you gathered here, please enjoy it.

Rang byung rdo rje, age 29,
Turquoise Lake, Tsa ri, Southern Tibet.

i. Introduction: The Karmapa Project

The phenomenon of the recognised, reincarnate teacher installed on the ceremonial throne of his (or rarely her) deceased predecessor has become a defining characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism; so much so that first the Manchu court, and subsequently nineteenth century European scholars, used this institution as the religion of Tibet’s delimiting attribute, calling it “the religion of the lamas” (Ch. 喇嘛教 lama jiao; Lamaism). By the time Manchu and European commentators began to write about it, reincarnation had proved such a contagious idea that it had spread throughout every lineage and region of Tibet, and then outside, to other lands where Tibetan Buddhism was practised, most notably Mongolia, but even recently to the West. As with most other traditions that spread mimetically, this one also includes a myth of origins, the birth of the second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi, who, it is said, embodied the fully-formed tradition at his (and its) conception.

In this way, the success of the reincarnation meme has come to overshadow the vast, detailed and lengthy cultural project that was involved in its creation. This has, in turn, led most Tibetan and quite a few Western commentators to view reincarnation with what Michel Foucault has called a “reflexive hypothesis”, the anachronistic reflection, back onto a tradition’s entire cultural and intellectual history of the fully formed and developed institution it was to become. This has seen commentators read back into the histories of the early Karmapas, including Rang byung rdo rje’s life, ideas that did not develop until much later in the tradition.

As Foucault has explained, this tendency usually clears away all traces of a historical phenomenon’s development. In the case of the Karmapa reincarnation lineage, given its

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1 Song No. 49 (GN 71–72; GB 241–243).
2 Donald Lopez (1999:15–45) included a chapter on the development of this name for the tradition in his influential book Prisoners of Shangri-la.
3 There have been several studies of the sprul sku phenomenon over the years. Two of the most helpful of these for this study have been Benjamin Bogin’s (2005) study of Yol mo bstan ‘dzin nor bu (1598–1644), whose work particularly looks at being a sprul sku as a matter of identity, and Elijah Ary’s (2012:398–427) reflections on his education as a sprul sku.
4 Michel Foucault (2002:25). Daniel Hirschberg (2012:2) also reflected on a similar process in his study of the liberation-story of Nyang ral nyi ma ‘od zer (1124–1192), a process that he described by a phrase so evocative
venerability, and the multifarious other traditions that were braided into this body-mālā's string, this would have been quite a dramatic cleansing. Yet fortunately for the archaeology of this particular cultural institution, the conservatism of its creators partially thwarted their cleansing. Indeed, these writers were so concerned with preserving the words of their lineal predecessors that they often reframed them within later representations of the tradition, providing a direct contrast between the tradition's historical strata. Moreover, as this conservative tendency is not only evident in the writing of the traditions' later formulators, but also in the writings of its latterly ascribed "founders", the early Karmapas, there is also much evidence of the various influences that were braided together to create this particular body-mālā.

In their case—and particularly in the case of Rang byung rdo rje, who is perhaps more than anyone else responsible for the early arrangement of the tradition—this conservative tendency was a clear manifestation of the Tibetan cultural proscription against innovation, or "self-creation" (rang bzo). This was considered anathema in their religious and intellectual culture as it represented a degradation of what was perceived to be a pure tradition that had descended from the Buddha. Therefore, to avoid any suggestion that the developing Karmapa body-mālā was an invention, Rang byung rdo rje and others involved in the project present an array of precedents for their actions. This practice is especially noteworthy because several recent scholarly works have put much store in providing evidence against the traditional presentation that the Karmapas originated the Tibetan tradition of reincarnation, citing previous incidents of past-life memories and previously recognised rebirths and manifestations. The evidence provided here further supports these claims against the Karmapas' origination of the central ideas, but further suggests two things. First, the Karmapas themselves never made this claim; and second, their "innovation" was not so much the remembrance of past lives, or their broader recognition as the rebirths of deceased masters—which both have clear precedents—but the weaving together of these ideas with other elements to create a symbiotic relationship between the tradition of reincarnation and the institution of the Karmapas.

As this chapter will explore, the main precedent they, and particularly Rang byung rdo rje, present for their body-mālā is the idea of lineage. Lineage had been a mainstay of the Buddhist tradition since its inception, when the Buddha insisted that monastic vows be passed down through a line of fully ordained monastics. After him it was reformulated several times within the more expansive traditions of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, in

it deserves repeating; he said, "the blaze of resolved synchrony... obscures the diachronic process of development itself."
which it became associated not just with the transmission of vows but also the transmission of wisdom. All he and the other early Karmapas were doing, Rang byung rdo rje suggests, was presenting a lineage not just through the transmission of vows and insight, but the (re-)embodiment of them. Yet this re-embodied lineage alone did not provide sufficient authority to sustain the Karmapa reincarnation tradition. Those involved in the Karmapa project needed to combine this idea with several other traditions. They also used the idea of manifestation or emanation, for example, to present a trans-life narrative; the idea of rebirth to suggest an alternative to familial inheritance; the supporting construct of recognition to provide a social mechanism for this rebirth; and the integration of all these ideas into an on-going institution that would continue past any of their individual lives.

ii. Lining up

In Tibetan Buddhist discourse, lineages can be found all over the place. They cross through literature, lives and institutions, often intersecting and imitating each other as they perform a variety of functions. Amongst other tasks, they maintain traditions, provide identities, establish authority and connect people across time and space. At their core, however, they can all be identified by the same basic characteristics: they are knowledge traditions, passed down from one generation to the next and preserved by a combination of benediction and some form of commitment, usually vows. This benediction and commitment is typically conveyed to the next generation through a ceremony that both sacralises the transfer and ensures the lineage’s continuity. Moreover, in the performance of this ceremony, a link is created between the newest inductees into the lineage and its source: one of the Buddha’s myriad forms.

By the time Buddhism reached Tibet, there were so many types of lineages that they—along with their associated practices, traditions, institutions and texts—had been categorised into three main groups, with many people acting as a conduit for various lineages from all three categories at once. These three groups were and are known as the three vehicles of Buddhist practice (Skt. triyāna; Tib. theg pa gsum):7 the so-called “lesser vehicle” or Hinayāna (Tib. theg dman); the “greater vehicle” or Mahāyāna (Tib. theg chen); and the Vajrayāna (Tib. rdo rje theg pa). Rang byung rdo rje was a possessor and conduit of lineages from all three of these classes: as a “faithful monk of Śākyamuni” he held the oldest type of Buddhist lineage, Hinayāna vows; but he was also a Mahāyāna practitioner and therefore engaged with its presentation of lineage; and he was a conduit for many tantric lineages, which belong to the Vajrayāna. Rang byung rdo rje and his predecessors

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7 Although there are also other enumerations of the three vehicles, this one is the one usually employed to divide lineages.
adapted aspects from all three of these presentations of lineage.

a) We are Family

Something of the long history of the Buddhist relationship to lineage is conveyed by the variety of terms used to describe it in Buddhist languages. In Tibetan there are at least three words used to evoke spiritual lineages, and in Sanskrit there are at least five. The semantic fields from which these words were chosen are also telling, as the majority of them, and all the earliest of them, invoke one metaphor to describe Buddhist lineages: familial or clan succession. The earliest terms to be used in this way are gotra and kula, which mean “family” or “clan”, and where used to infer an alternate, Buddhist family or lineage. Both terms were also sometimes used as synonyms or near-synonyms for the Indic term varna, which has associations with colour but is used more broadly to refer to the idealised fourfold caste categorisation of Indian society: the brahman (Tib. bram ze'i rigs), kṣatriya (Tib. rgyal rigs), vaiśya (Tib. rje rigs) and śūdra (Tib. dmangs rigs).

The use of these terms by the Buddhists was a deliberate appropriation and recasting of pre-existent Indian social categories. Although there is little evidence to suggest the Buddha and his followers wanted to abandon the caste system, there is ample evidence that they approached the subject of caste from a variety of perspectives, one of which—and the one that echoes most clearly through Rang byung rdo rje’s writing—was to ethicise it. In this ethicising discourse, the Buddha and his followers suggested that one would reach the highest levels of a society, become a “true brahman”, through a particular behaviour rather than birth; the behaviour of maintaining the vows one had received in a direct, unbroken line from the Buddha. In this way, the Buddhist community presented itself as a moral and spiritual familial lineage, which was also an alternative to the traditional Indian hereditary lineages. This became the model of spiritual inheritance on which monks would “inheri” a monastery from earlier members of their “spiritual lineage”. It is also why during Rang byung rdo rje’s time, and even today, ordained monks and nuns in the Tibetan tradition will associate themselves directly with Buddha’s familial lineage, by calling themselves Śākya monks and nuns.

b) Extended Families and Overextended Analogies

The direct and personal connection with the historical Buddha through monastic lineages was, however, somewhat complicated by later developments in Indian Buddhist thought.

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12 As Rang byung rdo rje does repeatedly. See for example: Rang byung rdo rje (2006c:373) and GN:408.
In particular, the Mahāyāna conception of lineage was presented quite differently from this earliest, monastic model. This more conceptually developed idea of lineage placed it within an ontology that perceived all beings’ true nature to be the buddha-nature, which was either covered by delusion in non-awakened beings or manifesting in the awakened state of a Buddha. Or, as Rang byung rdo rje explains this state in one of his songs:

Mind’s nature, this precious gem, is sheathed by subjects/objects, and its Buddha virtues are invisible, (but) through purification, the Buddha’s complete virtues will arise.

The suggestion here, in accordance with the broader Mahāyāna tradition, is that all beings can attain buddhahood; and this means they belong to the buddha-lineage (Skt. buddha-gotra or tathāgatha-gotra; Tib. sang rgyas kyi rigs or bde bzhin gzhegs pa’i rigs). Like the earlier analogous use of gotra and kula to represent an alternate family or caste, buddha-nature discourse played with word associations to suggest a more inclusive approach to caste, family and lineage. But in this instance the word play was not only aimed at the brahmans, it was also aimed at orthodox monks who derived status from their position in the Buddha’s alternate-family lineage. This new presentation undermined their exclusive position by suggesting that they were not the only members of the Buddha’s family, and ultimately were no different from any other being. In this way it presented a connection with the Buddha that was both more and less intimate than that of the earlier tradition. It was more intimate because it suggested the Buddha was not merely someone with whom an individual was connected through a lineage of vow giving and keeping, but was each individual’s true nature. Yet it was also less intimate because this connection was not unique; all beings were connected to the Buddha in this way, and this meant no one person could assert a special identity through this connection. This lack of an identifiable connection was also evident in the one word used to translate both monastic and buddha lineages into Tibetan: rigs. Although this word came to be used to describe different social castes and classes, it carried a much broader meaning than a

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13 These developments and this ontology have been studied in great detail in John Makransky (1997).
14 Song No. 81 (GN 119–121; GB 283–284) Twelve Verses.
15 Ruegg (1976:341). This is of course quite a severe simplification of the complex categorisations of gotra that Ruegg discusses in his article, but his examination of all the different classes of beings that are also said to possess the buddha-gotra is far beyond the parameters of this study.
16 Minoru Hara (1994:55) further develops this idea to suggest that along with the terms gotra and kula, garbha and dhātu also invoke a familial or caste metaphor. This he does by aligning garbha with one of its meanings, “womb”, and dhātu with one of its more obscure meanings, “blood-relationship”. “These words expressive of family lineage (gotra and kula),” he says, “and that of blood-relationship (dhātu) are basically not foreign to the philosophical context of the tathāgata-garbha doctrine.”
17 As Powers and Templeman (2012:545) explain, for example, the term rgyal rigs, or “ruling class” was “the traditional designation for members of the aristocratic elite of Tibet during the hegemony of the Dga’ ldan pho brang... below them were members of the traditional aristocracy (rje rigs).” As will be evident in Rang byung rdo rje’s (2006d:397) liberation-story, the term rigs ngan or “bad lineage” can be used to indicate either low-
familial lineage, also implying a category or type, and even the knowledge of categories and types.  

**c) The Threads that Bind**

The presentation of lineage within the Vajrayāna was something of a middle way between the inclusiveness of the Mahāyāna and the exclusiveness of the monastic lineages. The Vajrayāna was an offshoot of the Mahāyāna, so its adherents all accepted the existence of an omnipresent buddha-nature, but they added another much more esoteric interpretation to their presentation of lineage.

Like the monastic lineages, the Vajrayāna lineages were also initially modelled on familial lines, but these familial lineages were not the brahman's religious lineages; they were the kṣatriya caste’s royal lineages and a different word was used to describe them: *vamśa*. According to Ronald Davidson, this shift from the brahman to kṣatriya family model was part of the developing “imperial metaphor” in late-first-millennium Indian tantra, which saw these traditions’ presentations of relative truth take on much of the language and imagery of a royal court. As Davidson explains, this presentation was supposed to make these practices appealing to embattled Indian rulers, enabling them to visualise themselves as lords at the centre of a maṇḍala, and in the process granting Indian Buddhists an important role in difficult times. In the end, this did not work, and Buddhism was all but wiped out in India, but it did make the tradition appealing to people from neighbouring areas that were also strife-filled, like Tibet. This appeal contributed to the tradition’s aforementioned commodification, which saw it traded for gold, and transported back to Tibet where it became a source of power and wealth.

Trade in the tantras was also encouraged by the tradition’s middle-way approach to inclusivity. For the fundamental worldviews of the various Vajrayāna lineages were similar enough that one practitioner could work with more than one of them, and unlike the Vinaya lineages, there was no practical proscription against accruing more than one of them. Indeed, practising multiple lineages was believed to maximise an individual’s

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18 The *Mahāvyutpatti* (Csoma de Kőrös 1910: no pagination) lexicon provides one exception to this when it says that the term *evatīghora* should be translated as *rus* 'di ltu bya zhes bya: “I was known as one of that bone-essence”. Here the compilers have opted for a term in the Tibetan context—as will shortly be explained—suggests the specific genetic transferal from father to son.

19 Davidson (2002a:93) states that Vajrayāna lineages, like other Buddhist lineages were seen as an "immediate analogy" for "ancestral lineage[s]".

20 Davidson (2002a:140). *Vamśa* is also of course the name of a Pāli literary genre that describes the religious genealogies of the Buddha, his teachings in countries other than India, and even stūpas and relics. See: Oskar von Hinüber (2000:87).


realisation and teaching potential; and therefore most tantric teachers, including Rang byung rdo rje, held multiple lineages.

Along with this more pragmatic difference in its style of transmission, a variant soteriological presentation of lineage also developed in the Vajrayāna. In many ways, this new approach to lineage was an extension of the Vajrayāna’s new approach to gurus that I noted in chapter one; for just as the gurus ceased to be merely catalysts for the continuation of lineage and became objects of meditation, so did the act of transmission itself—the lineage itself. In these lineages, the teacher was not merely expected to pass on vows and benedictions to students, but more importantly to transmit insight.

This shift in focus is even evident in the word that was chosen to describe the Vajrayāna’s texts and traditions. Rather than choosing a word that evoked a familial metaphor, the Vajrayāna adherents chose the word tantra, which simply implies continuity. In Sanskrit, its earliest datable usage is in the Rg Veda where it refers to the threads of a loom. Since then, it has been used both metaphorically and literally to refer to the continuity of knowledge: either through people, or in a text.23 The Tibetans picked up on this theme when they translated the term as rgyud, which also suggests the idea of a thread, but more generally an uninterrupted flow from one place to another.24 This idea of flow from person to person is also evoked in the other Indic word that was used to indicate transmission in the Indian Vajrayāna: paramparā,25 which means “one to another”.26 The Tibetans chose to translate this term with a homonym of rgyud, brgyud. The two words are related, but have a slightly different meaning. Brgyud is the noun form of a verb that means, “to connect between one place and another”, and is also often used in colloquial Tibetan as a post-position meaning “through”.27 As a noun, it acts as an equivalent for paramparā, and this is the sense in which it is used in the word Bka’ brgyud, which therefore means “the lineage or transmission of oral instruction”.

Yet, as a result of the multiple lineages that were transmitted through the Bka’ brgyud’s founders, in this term as in many other usages of the word brgyud, what is really being cited is a plurality of lineages, rather than a singular transmission. “Bka’ brgyud” is a contraction of the phrase “the four oral lineages that descended (from Tilopa)” (Bka’ babs

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24 The Tshig mdzod chen mo, or Great (Tibetan) Dictionary (1986:573) lists five alternate meanings for rgyud: 1) a flow from one place to the other without interruption; 2) a thread; 3) a region or zone; 4) genetic lineage, which it calls rigs rus; and 5) the secret mantra and its texts. This last usage also meant that the term was sometimes used to translate vamsa into Tibetan, but there does not seem to be complete consistency on the matter, as it is also sometimes rendered as rigs. The Mahāyuttapatti lexicon, for example (Csoma de Körös 1910: no pagination), instructs translators to use the Tibetan term nyi ma’i rigs to translate the Sanskrit term sūrya-vamsa. The suggestion of flow led to the term’s being used to describe the mental continuum that begins confused and ends up an awakened buddha, although this is more often referred to as rgyun.
It represents the collection of tantras—the texts themselves and the yogic practices they described—that Marpa brought back from India, which was then augmented by the lineage's later generations. This meant that notwithstanding the tendency to reify lineages—either in art, literature or institutions—through the people that possessed them, the term was something of a floating signifier. The Bka' brgyud lineages that Marpa brought back from Tibet were not exactly the same group of lineages that Rang byung rdo rje taught his students, and these are not exactly the same group of lineages that later Karmapas taught their students. Moreover, this transmission is not the same thing as the "lineages" of people that Bka' brgyud practitioners came to evoke in their visualisations and prayers; these people are not the actual transmission but the beings in which this transmission is housed.\(^\text{29}\)

**d) All of the Above**

Rang byung rdo rje drew from the imagery, language and institutions of all three types of transmission in his development of the Karmapa project, which he sought to integrate within the paradigm of lineages.\(^\text{30}\) At one level this integration was quite straightforward. As a monk, a practitioner of the Mahāyāna, and a devotee of many tantras on the one hand, and a member of the Karmapa body-ṃālā on the other, Rang byung rdo rje blended in his person the reincarnation lineage with the lineages of all three vehicles. But this was not his only integration strategy. Building on the precedents set by the previous two Karmapas, he also used many elements of the three vehicles' lineage presentations in his description of a reincarnation lineage.

Perhaps one of the most obvious of these elements is the adaptation of the benediction and commitment rituals associated with the passing of lineage, particularly those in the monastic tradition. In Rang byung rdo rje's case this is mainly achieved through his *Liberation-Story of the In-Between State*, in which, as will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, he is empowered to be reborn as a Karmapa by the female guardians of Tibet. This initial ceremony is then repeated on earth in a much more simple form when Orgyan pa returns Karma Pakshi's black hat to him.

Rang byung rdo rje also included many of the metaphors of lineage in his work on the

\(^\text{28}\) Roberts (2011:3).

\(^\text{29}\) Another thing that reified images of lineage also tend to miss is that, as Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa (2008:58–94) has noted, these traditions were not merely a diachronic but also a synchronic process; their participants existed within not only genealogies of lineage holders, but also concurrent social networks of lineage holders. These networks passed through monastic institutions, but as they incorporated familial and purely friendly relationships, they did not necessarily define them as social networks they were also co-authoritative; at once accepting and promoting the exchange of ideas and at the same time granting individual practitioners of a particular lineage a web of authorising witnesses for transmission and practice.

\(^\text{30}\) It could also be said that Karma Pakshi too had a hand in developing these ideas. But in his case, he was not so much systemising a reincarnation lineage as presenting himself as one embodiment of it.
Karmapa project. It was he, for example, who began the process of restringing the tantras’ thread into a body-mālā. This image—which only really began to make sense when there had been three embodiments in the Karmapa reincarnation series—is still in formation in Rang byung rdo rje’s personal writing, but it is present nonetheless. The main difference between his and later casting of this metaphor, however, is that he focuses more on the thread than its beads; on the continuity of consciousness rather than its bodily manifestations. This continuum, this thread, is presented as the inspired continuity of the earlier Karmapas, signified through both the name Karmapa and the object that was gifted to him: the black hat. As Rang byung rdo rje himself explained it: “their (the two earlier Karmapas’) inspiration abides in my mind-stream, so these days I am known by the name Karmapa. I am the third to hold the black-hat crown”.

This image is interesting in that it demonstrates the centrality of the lineage model to the developing Karmapa institution, but also—in that it needs to be attended by other imagery and ideas, such as the black hat and the name Karmapa—its fragility. It shows, in other words, that although lineage could serve as a central precedent and metaphor for the developing reincarnation tradition, it was not enough to sustain it alone. To survive and to increase its strength, the thread of lineage needed to be intertwined with other imagery and ideas.

iii. The Magic of Manifestation

One of the strongest of these supporting threads was of course the multifaceted idea of manifestation. In Rang byung rdo rje and his contemporaries’ writing, this idea was usually described with recourse to two interrelated Tibetan syllables: sprul and 'phrul. R.A. Stein wrote extensively about these syllables in a 1973 article and concluded that: (a) both can be used in verbs, nouns and adjectives; (b) sprul is the causative or intentional form of 'phrul; and (c) they both indicate “(being equipped with) magical powers, the supernatural, and transformation”.

Their relationship with transformation and magic has seen the syllables used in a variety of contexts throughout Tibetan history. As Berounský has recently and insightfully reported, the syllable 'phrul, for instance, is frequently used within the imperial Dunhuang documents to describe the supernatural power of kings. Given this association both with the supernatural and with rulers, it is not therefore surprising to learn that these related syllables were used in several of the neologisms created to facilitate the translation of Buddhist texts into Tibetan during the first, imperially decreed, wave of translations.

32 R.A Stein (1973:417). The original quote reads: ‘sprul... C’est une forme causative de ‘phrul, surtout nom ou adjectif: ‘(muni de) capacités ou vertus magiques, surnaturelles, trans-formatoires’.”
33 Berounský (2010:13).
Amongst a whole group of such words, the three that are of particular relevance to the development of the reincarnation tradition are: sprul sku, sprul ba and rnam (par) 'phrul.

The term sprul sku, was first used within a Buddhist context to translate the Sanskrit term nirmāṇakāya, or "created body". This was the name given to the physical body of a buddha, the aspect of a buddha that ordinary humans and animals encounter. It was conceived as one part of a tripartite Mahāyāna presentation of the buddha's ontology, in which the nirmāṇakāya was combined with a "truth body" (Skt. dhammakāya; Tib. chos sku) that represented the nature of the buddha's awakened mind, and an "enjoyment body" (Skt. sambhogakāya; Tib. longs sku), which was a subtle form used by buddhas and high level bodhisattvas to teach realised beings. This tripartite schema significantly affected the development of Tibetan Buddhism, influencing many of its yoga practices, much of its art and crafts and even—as we shall see later in this thesis—its sense of place.

Yet, as with their adaptation of many other imported Buddhist schemas, the Tibetans also synchronised this system with their own indigenous ideas. By adopting the intentional form of the syllable that had been associated with the magical power of kings to indicate the "created body" of a buddha, the Tibetans had indicated a clear link between this new schema and the power structures that had gone before it. They also, as Berounský has suggested, facilitated the opposite semantic connection; that buddhas, or highly realised beings, had the power of kings, a conceptual connection that was to grow in prominence as the centuries passed.

This growing semantic connection was aided in part because the use of the term sprul sku did not stay static. Initially, this term only designate the created body of powerful awakened others: namely the buddhas of the Mahāyāna sūtras. In the yogas of the new tantras, however, the three bodies of the Buddha were viewed not only as the divisions of these buddhas' ontology, but also the means by which a practitioner might attain awakening. In this context, the tantric practitioner's teacher introduced them to—depending on the tradition—the potential for or actual essence of the Buddha's three
bodies within their own being, and encouraged them to engage in its cultivation through yogic practices. These practices involved two stages: the "generation stage" (Skt. utpattikrama; Tib. bskyed rim) and the "completion stage" (Skt. sampannakrama; Tib. rdzogs rim). In the highest levels of the generation stage of these practices, the practitioners would visualise themselves as a buddha’s enjoyment body, before beginning to use this visualisation as the basis for manipulating the flows of subtle energy within their bodies in the completion stage. The purpose of these practices was ultimately to realise the nature of their own minds, their own truth body, and in so doing transform their physical body into the resultant body of tantric practice, a sprul sku. Through this shift, the sprul sku was no longer only present outside their being, as a regal buddha to be venerated, but within them as their own potential, or actual essence.39

And the proliferation of sprul sku did not stop there, for those practising tantra also followed a convention that one should view one’s teacher as the end goal of one’s practice: the three bodies of a buddha. In essence they were to be seen as the dharma body, in meditation the enjoyment body and in life the creation body or sprul sku. During the two centuries between the introduction of the new tantras and Rang byung rdo rje’s life, this seems to have been the predominant and private use of the term, in that each individual would reflect on the word within the context of their personal meditation.40 It is certainly the way the term is used in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing. In these works he uses sprul sku specifically to describe his own teacher 0 rgyan pa, so much so that in his songs it almost operates as a synonym for this yogi’s name. In line with this usage, which can easily be read as part of his personal yoga practice, but in contrast to later presentations of the reincarnation tradition, he never refers to himself or the earlier Karmapas as sprul sku.

Along with this more pervasive, private usage, however, Berounský has also recently

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39 These developments are represented in the Tibetan tradition through two variant classification systems. In the Rnying ma presentation, there are said to be nine classes of tantra, with the highest being the "great completion". José Cabézon (2013) has recently published a book that comprehensively examines Rol’s ban de shes rab’s presentation of these nine classes of tantra. In the Gsar ma traditions, these tantras are divided into four classes. Thomas Yarnell (2013) has recently translated a major portion of one of the most influential descriptions of these categories, the Graduated Path of Tantra (Snyags rim chen mo), by the fifteenth century, Dge lugs pa founder Tsong kha pa. Rang byung rdo rje’s (2006a Vol. Ja:308–360) most famous text, Profound Inner Meaning, describes the practices of the highest class according to the Gsar ma tradition. 

40 Leonard van der Kuijp (2005:28) suggests that this term was always used in Tibetan writing to refer to reincarnate teachers, and thus uses its inclusion within a work by Khro phu lo tṣā ba byams pa dpal (1173–1225) in which he refers to the Indian masters Mitrayogi and Vikhyatadeva as sprul sku as an example of a Tibetan recognising two Indian teachers as "reincarnates". Berounský (2010:16, Note 12) notes that the text to which van der Kuijp refers in the article is called Khro phu Lo tṣā ba’i rnam thar yab sras mjal ba (The Meeting of Father and Son: the liberation-story of Khro phu Lo tṣā ba), with the passages in question being found on folios 6b, 7b and 12a. In all of the incidences of this word on these pages, the term sprul sku could easily be read as a complimentary description of these two siddhas as gurus or buddhas as opposed to a description of them as reincarnates. In fact, there is much that contradicts van der Kuijp’s reading, including the fact that they are not referred to as the sprul sku of anyone else, merely as sprul sku.
shown evidence for a different and more public usage for the term sprul sku at one particular monastery, Bya yul. Here it was used to describe tantric practitioners who had become renowned for their magical abilities. In these instances, the appellation worked on dual levels. For those in the know about tantric practice, it operated as part of the tantric ontological schematic, suggesting that these beings had attained the result of practice. Yet its etymological association with magic also made it an appealing appellation for those who did not possess this more esoteric interpretation of the term. In this more general usage, to paraphrase Berounský, these were not just magically created bodies, but bodies that could create magic.41

These two related usages of sprul sku, both of which were derived from new-tantra practices, meant that during Rang byung rdo rje's time, rather than the designator of a recognised reincarnation that it was to become, this term was generally used as a mark of a specific type of respect: the respect granted to those who were believed to possess supernatural powers. The people referred to by using this designator were described, in other words, as a sprul sku, rather than the sprul sku of another person. This usage was a development from the term’s initial application as a designator for a buddha’s created body, and it was through it that more people came to be called sprul sku. Then, as those designated sprul sku became more likely to be recognised reincarnates, this seems to have brought about an alignment of the two semantic fields;42 an alignment that was perhaps aided by the fact that the term sprul sku contained a syllable—sprul—that expressed the idea of manifestation.

Two other, related terms also did much to aid this transition: sprul ba, and rnam (par) ’phrul, both of which refer to emanated or conjured forms. These two terms are often used somewhat interchangeably, but Karma Pakshi and Rang byung rdo rje go to some lengths to differentiate the two terms in their writing. They use sprul ba as a general term to indicate the manifestations created by everyone from buddhas, through bodhisattvas to magicians, and rnam ’phrul in a more technical sense to refer to the often-multiple emanations sent forth by high-level bodhisattvas or buddhas. In this way, they use this latter term in association with the Indic word it was invented to reflect, vikurvāṇa.43

From the two of these words, sprul ba, in particular, facilitated the development of the reincarnation tradition in a number of ways. One of these was the link this word created between the superhuman kings of the Empire and the supernaturally powerful buddhas and high-level bodhisattvas. It was sprul ba that Rang byung rdo rje used in his description

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41 Berounský (2010:19) gives an example of a yogi renowned for his magic skills whose name was Sprul sku Yang dgon pa (1213–1258).
42 The description of O rgyan pa’s meeting with Rg os gtsang pa’s re-birth described in Note 129 exemplifies this shift.
43 As Berounský (2010:13) pointed out, this is a Buddhist Hybrid term meaning the same thing as the more correct Sanskrit form vikurvāṇa.
of the three dharma kings, Khri Srong btsan sgam po, Khri Srong lde btsan and Khri RaI pa
can that I quoted in the previous chapter, for example. In Rang byung rdo rje’s worldview,
they were the sprul ba or emanations of the protector bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara,
Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi. The portrayal of the kings as emanations developed during the
treasure traditions’ centuries-long sacralisation of the Empire.44 This tradition’s use of the
terms sprul/’phurul reverted what had been the initial lending of power to the buddhas and
bodhisattvas from the kings; for in the treasure presentation, it is the kings who gain
power through their association with the protector bodhisattvas as their sprul ba.

Then, like the other tales of the Empire, this cocktail of worldly and otherworldly
power, magic and etymology proved irresistible to the wider Tibetan community. Even
those who had little or nothing to do with the treasure tradition were attracted to its
symbology, which linked all those who were associated with the three protector
bodhisattvas to the dharma kings. As Leonard van der Kuijp explains, during the time of
the later transmission, this led to the three-protector-bodhisattva motif’s increasingly
frequent “appear(ance)… in Bka’ gdams, Sa skya and Bka’ brgyud literature, where it
designate(d) important masters belong(ing) to these schools.”45 And, in conjunction with
these appearances, this period also saw the beginnings of what would become stellar and
on-going solo careers in Tibetan Buddhism for two of this trio: Mañjuśrī and
Avalokiteśvara.

Although he was to emanate in a variety of lineages and areas in Tibet over the
centuries, the most intense site of Mañjuśrī manifestations on the Plateau was Sa skya. For
the members of the Sa skya tradition, Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, became a
potent symbol of the justifiable pride they took in their learning. The association between
learning and this bodhisattva even encouraged them to closely associate several of their
most learned scions—including those we met in the last chapter, Sa skya Paṇḍita and
’Phags pa—with the bodhisattva.46

The rise of the Avalokiteśvara cult in Tibet was, by contrast, less localised and arguably
more successful. After Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījiñāna’s (980–1054) introduction of tantric
practices that focused on this bodhisattva’s sambhogakāya form in the early eleventh
century, Tibetans of all lineages enthusiastically took up the practice of his six-syllable
mantra and proliferated his image. In particular, as van der Kuijp also explains, the direct

44 In his article on the origins of the reincarnation tradition, van der Kuijp (2005:24) also mentions a letter that
he says is attributed to Buddhaguhya (8th century) in which the author suggests that Khri Srong btsan sgam
po was a “reincarnation” of Avalokiteśvara. As he does not indicate a reference for this work, or which Tibetan
term is being used to indicate this linkage—aligning several words in this study under the umbrella of
“reincarnation” including sprul sku and sprul ba—it is difficult to analyse this connection. It also seems strange
to talk about the “reincarnation” of a bodhisattva who is generally represented in its sambhogakāya form; the
words “manifestation” or “emanation” seem more appropriate in this case.
45 van de Kuijp (2005:24).
followers of Atiśa, the followers of the Bka’ gdam tradition, “were quick to universalize him as the patron-Bodhisattva of the entire Tibetan cultural area”. Other yogic practices associated with Avalokiteśvara were also introduced to Tibet a short time later by Mi la ras pa’s student Ras chung pa, and thus became a central element of Bka’ brgyud practice. Then, about a century later, Avalokiteśvara was also given a starring role in the treasure literature where, in the aforementioned reconfiguration of imperial history, it was suggested that he had been the guiding force behind Buddhism’s arrival in Tibet. The non-sectarian acceptance of this bodhisattva also made him particularly appealing to those yogis, like the early Karmapas, who trained in the practices of a variety of lineages. This was one of the reasons why the early Karmapas became closely associated with Avalokiteśvara practice, and Karma Pakshi is often credited with introducing to Tibet the group chanting of Avalokiteśvara’s six-syllable mantra.

Yet this bodhisattva’s cult did not only manifest through the reproduction and invocation of his sambhogakāya form; it was also demonstrated through his continuing manifestations in Tibet. Following the initial link created between Avalokiteśvara and Khri Srong gtsan sgam po, then the repetition of the three-protector bodhisattva manifestation motif, Avalokiteśvara began to be recognised in individual manifestations.

At first these manifestations were linked closely to either the treasure or Bka’ gdam traditions, with several teachers in both traditions becoming associated with the bodhisattva. People within the treasure tradition usually developed the association through their claims to be a rebirth of Khri Srong gtsan sgam po, and people within the Bka’ gdam order more directly through their veneration of the bodhisattva. Moreover, the link between Avalokiteśvara and Khri Srong gtsan sgam po gradually led first, as Matthew Kapstein has explained, “to... the notion that worldly affairs might best be placed in the hands of essentially spiritual leaders” and second to the idea that those spiritual leaders who had worldly power just might be emanations of Avalokiteśvara.

One group of people who become associated with Avalokiteśvara’s worldly power—150 years and four incarnations after Rang byung rdo rje’s death—was the Karmapas.

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47 Throughout the thesis I have retained the American spelling of terms in quotes although the thesis has been written in Australian/British English.
48 van de Kuijp (2005:21).
50 For an overview of this narrative and its introduction through the treasure tradition, see Kapstein (1992:79–93).
51 Manson (2009:42).
53 This was the cultural discourse that reached its apotheosis—in both senses of the word—in the much-studied writings of the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682), who promoted himself and many earlier prominent Tibetans as manifestations of Avalokiteśvara. One group of people that he left out of this list who were often latterly referred to as manifestations of Avalokiteśvara was the Karmapas. This omission is perhaps understandable given that during the same time that he was constructing this list he was also at war with the supporters of the then tenth Karmapa, Chos dbying rdo rje (1604–1674).
This association happened slowly, but by the early sixteenth century, when the seventh Karmapa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506) assumed an advisory role to the Rin spungs rulers of Gtsang, he was widely understood to be Avalokiteśvara’s manifestation. This narrative only became widespread during this later period, but there are some precursors for it in the writings of or about the early Karmapas. According to Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s storytellers, for example, he claimed that one of his concurrent manifestations had practised and attained the state of Avalokiteśvara, such that some saw him as this deity and others knew he was. And in Karma Pakshi’s fragmentary, self-penned liberation-story he says at one point that he is “a manifestation of master Avalokiteśvara, skipping over parts of the path, doing deeds for wanderers”.

Rang byung rdo rje further promoted the link between his predecessors and Avalokiteśvara in various ways, addressing a prayer to Karma Pakshi, for example, in the following terms:

On this kingdom’s great plains, in solitude
lives Avalokiteśvara himself,
the Karmapa; I invoke you.

Yet although he was direct in his promotion of the earlier Karmapas as Avalokiteśvara, unlike later Karmapas, Rang byung rdo rje stopped short of making the same suggestions directly about himself. The closest he comes to making this connection is by situating the Karmapas, himself included, within a complex network of manifestations that includes Avalokiteśvara. He does this in his commentary to Karma Pakshi’s previous comment about being a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara. It reads in part:

Generally there are three manifestations, of (Avalokiteśvara’s) body, speech and mind. The manifestation of mind is Saraha; the manifestation of the body is Padma(sambhava); the manifestation of the speech is the Indian, Pha dam pa sangs rgyas (d.1117). It is as if these three are the same essence. Dus gsum mkhyen pa is Saraha’s manifestation.

This explanation aligns Saraha (as mind), Padmasambhava (as body), and Pha dam pa sang rgyas (as speech) and, through Saraha, connects Dus gsum mkhyen pa—and therefore subsequent Karmapas—with all of these beings and Avalokiteśvara. In the complexity of these connections, it also illustrates that already, at an early stage in the development of the manifestation discourse in Tibet, the virtual, complex interconnected manifestation webs that would come to characterise the reincarnation lineages in

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54 In this regard, see Lama Kunsang et al. (2012:109-151).
57 Song No. 53 (GN 79-81; GB 247-249).
centuries to come were being woven together. As will become more evident in the following chapters, although these identifications with Padmasambhava and Pha dam pa sangs rgyas are not pursued in Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-stories and songs, the identification with Saraha is. Indeed, Rang byung rdo rje’s connection with this Indian mahāsiddha, although its nature is never explicitly stated, is a recurring motif throughout his personal writing.59

Along with this complex and indirect alignment with Avalokiteśvara and Saraha, the early Karmapas’ liberation-stories also contain an entirely different manifestation claim: that they are all manifestations of a bodhisattva named Simha. According to the Sutra of this Fortunate Aeon, 60 Simha will be the sixth “supreme created body” (Skt. paramanirmāṇa-kāya; Tib. mchog gi sprul sku) of this age, after the fourth buddha Śākyamuni—who has already lived—and the fifth buddha Maitreya—who is yet to come.61 This claim was first made for Dus gsum mkhyen pa by his friend Lama Zhang, who after listening to Dus gsum mkhyen pa describe a vision of his final awakening, told those listening that he was describing the final life of Simha.62

This kind of compliment seems to have been in vogue during these lamas’ times, as several other outstanding figures of the age—particularly those associated with the Bka’ gdamgs lineage and its founder Atiśa—had also been associated by important friends with earlier figures from Buddhist history, in a discursive move that enhanced their charisma and authority.63 Yet Lama Zhang’s compliment to Dus gsum mkhyen pa also draws on a more specific model: the closely linked identities of their common lineal predecessor Sgam po pa and the bodhisattva Candraprabha Kumāra (Zla ’od zhon nu). Candraprabha Kumāra was the high-level bodhisattva who requested the King of Samadhi Sūtra (Skt. Samādhījñāsūtra; Tib. Ting nge’dzin gyi grual po’i mdo) from the Buddha, and was therefore entrusted with this teaching after it was given.64 This link not only improved Sgam po pa’s prestige and authority by placing him in the presence of the Buddha

59 It should also be noted that although the direct connection with Padmasambhava and Pha dam pa sangs rgyas is not pursued in Rang byung rdo rje’s personal writing, he does encounter these beings regularly in visions.
60 In Sanskrit this text is called Āryabhadrakalpikasūtra and in Tibetan Phags pa bskal pa bzang po’i mdo. Within the Lhasa edition of the Bka’ gyur the list of future buddhas is given on folio 154b, line 1.
61 This does not mean that the early Karmapas were described contemporaneously as “supreme created bodies” (mchog gi sprul sku), or even mere “created bodies” (sprul sku). It was merely suggested that they would achieve this state in the future, when they became the sixth buddha.
63 Among others that were linked with Indian teachers at this time: Rong zom chos kyi bzang po (1012–1088) was reportedly linked by Atiśa with the Indian scholar Kṣaṇapāda (’Gos Lo tsā ba, 1974:27a; Roerich 1988:160; Gzhon phan chos kyi nang ba 2001:25) or Paṇḍita Smṛtiņānakirti (Kapstein 2003:774 note 79); a cohort of Dus gsum mkhyen pa named ’jig rten dgon po, the yogi who started the ‘Bri khung bka’ bgyud tradition, was said to have been recognised as a manifestation of Nāgarjuna by Atiśa (Könchog Gyaltsen 1986:38), and the man who recognised Karma Pakshi as Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s emanation, Spom brag pa, was also said to be an emanation of the bodhisattva Jñānānāti (Ye shes blo gros) (’Gos Lo tsā ba, 1974:35a; Roerich 1988:480).
Śākyamuni; it also, according to his tradition—and much to Sa skya Paṇḍita’s displeasure—invested in him the authority to use this sūtra as a basis for the controversial sūtra mahāmudrā teaching tradition. The argument of the lineage was that if the Buddha had entrusted this teaching to their guru, who could really argue with the way that he taught it? As it had for his teacher, Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s association with a future buddha would have also helped establish his authority to continue these teachings, and in this regard it is interesting that it was Lama Zhang—a fierce promoter of Śāgam po pa’s manifestation status and sūtra mahāmudrā—who suggested the association.

Unlike other beings of the era, however, who were drawn into these webs of manifestation through friendly compliments and other promotional schemes, the Karmapas also had to deal with another level of complexity that their contemporaries did not: their relationships with each other. Karma Pakshi was the first to express this relationship, and he did so by eschewing the general term “manifestation” or sprul ba in favour of the more technical term rnam ’phrul or “emanation”. His use of this term worked on a number of different levels. To begin with, calling himself Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s rnam ’phrul—or even, as he expressed it, his “partial rnam ’phrul” (rnam ’phrul cha gcig)—enabled him to negotiate better the complexities of deference to this not-quite-other, as prescribed by the Tibetan social order. As a “partial emanation” of Dus gsum mkhyen pa, he could at once venerate his source, who was also his lineal predecessor, and simultaneously lay claims to this venerability.

What is more, and perhaps more importantly, Karma Pakshi’s use of this more technical term rnam ’phrul also helped to differentiate him from the burgeoning number of other manifestations that were popping up all over the Tibetan Plateau during this period. For Karma Pakshi, this differentiation was necessary because he was not merely seeking to enhance his own prestige by associating himself with Dus gsum mkhyen pa, but also claiming his inheritance. At this stage, this inheritance was perhaps more cultural than material, as its monasteries were either run down or in ruins, but he was still making an innovative claim in Tibetan society. There is little doubt that Karma Pakshi’s ascension to this position was primarily solidified first by his own charisma and presence and second by the years and the wealth—both his family’s and his sponsors’—that he dedicated to the

65 See Roger Jackson (1982), Leonard van de Kuijpp (1986), Micheal Broido (1987) and David Jackson (1990) for an unfolding discussion about elements of this controversy.
66 For more on Lama Zhang’s relationship to this teaching, see the previously noted articles and Yamamoto (2012:64,102,111).
67 Karma Pakshi (1975:11, line 3) and Manson (2009:25 note 1).
68 This negotiation between present and past embodiments in reincarnation lineages seems to be a perpetual source of discomfort for recognised Tibetan reincarnates. The present Dalai Lama, for example, frequently makes jokes about it, and in his Simon lam teachings of 2002, the seventeenth Karmapa Ṛgyan ’phrin las rdo rje looked surprised when the audience started laughing at his statement that he had “not had the honour of meeting the sixteenth Karmapa, but he had heard good things about him”.

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monasteries' rebuilding. Nevertheless, the supporting narrative that he was an emanation of the monasteries' founder appears to have been a great aid both to his own prestige and the community's sense of continuity.

During his lifetime, the idea of a Karmapa reincarnate must have also become part of the collective identity of these monasteries, for if it had not, his family members who inherited his monasteries would have felt no need to take in the young Rang byung rdo rje and provide him with an education. On the other side of the ledger, however, the reincarnation tradition was also obviously a long way from its final form, for Karma Pakshi's relatives showed no desire to transfer their directorship of these monasteries to Rang byung rdo rje, and neither did Rang byung rdo rje ask for it. He was allowed to stay in a hermitage near the main buildings, but he was not installed as its abbot or owner. This compromise is also a reflection of the higher stakes that were involved in the transfer of assets from Karma Pakshi to Rang byung rdo rje than there had been in Karma Pakshi's procurement of them. Thanks in large part to Karma Pakshi's hard work, Mtshur phu and the other monasteries associated with the Karmapas were now relatively wealthy institutions, and as Rang byung rdo rje had been born the son of an itinerant potter—a part of his narrative that will be explored in the next chapter—his social standing was also much lower than Karma Pakshi's had been.

One of the results of this social disjuncture was that along with its developing use of a variety of institutional props—an innovation that will be explored shortly—the Karmapa project also needed to fortify its narrative in a way that would reflect its society's ideas of social standing and inheritance. In this context, the narrative of emanations and manifestations alone would not suffice. Their multiplicity and inconsistency made them much too ephemeral a means for determining who would control the burgeoning Karmapa inheritance and its attendant, ever-elevating social standing.

Until Rang byung rdo rje's lifetime, in Tibetan culture, inheritance was considered part of a wider authorial web that insisted material wealth and social position were transferred patrilineally, based on the idea that male relatives had the same "bone-essence" (*rus*). In order for the Karmapa project to reflect this social norm, it needed a way to suggest it in a

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69 Charlene Makley (2007:29-76) includes a fascinating overview of this practice in her anthropological study of patriarchy in contemporary Amdo. Geoffrey Samuel (1993:150) and Martin Mills (2003:53) also mention this practice. In this context it also is interesting to note the overwhelming maleness of the connections between lives and in the patriarchal transfer of land that accompanied them. There were a few lineages of reincarnate women in Tibet, but beings rarely seem to change genders across lives. In this regard, the first two Karmapas' memories of past lives lived as women are exceptional. Dus gsum mkhyen pa remembered living one life as a princess (Rgwa Lo tsā ba 2010a:36). Yet even in this description, there is still much evidence of patriarchal structures. In giving his reason for choosing that rebirth, for example, he suggests that he decided to be born as the daughter of a particular king rather than his son because he could see that as a son, he would have had to rule the kingdom (and therefore not be able to practice Buddhism as well). Tib. *bur skyes na rgyal sa dzin dgos pa'i 'zigs*. Karma Pakshi's memory that he manifested as a wine-selling woman in India (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. Nga, 281) is less of a neat fit within these paradigms, but has a few precedents in the stories of the mahāsiddhas.
religious context, especially if a lowborn person like Rang byung rdo rje was to be accepted as Karma Pakshi’s spiritual—and eventually material—heir. The sprul ba and rnam ’phrul may have had etymological and symbolic links with the kings, but they did not engender the same sense of bodily reproduction as the royal lineages. Indeed in many ways, their fluidity and pervasiveness made this concept as unreliable, as a stand-alone concept, as lineage.

Fortunately, there was another Buddhist paradigm that while closely associated with manifestations and emanations in the ontology of realised beings was also in many other ways much more similar to the idea of clan reproduction: rebirth. While clans passed on inherited wealth to the next embodiment that possessed the bone-essence, reincarnation lineages would pass on possessions to the next embodiment that possessed another kind of essence, the same enlightened mind-stream. This paradigm had always played a central role in the presentation of the Karmapas’ past, present and future lives; most of their past lives, for instance, were spoken of in the context of “past births”. Yet in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing, in the description of this lowborn person who became teacher to the emperor, it becomes the primary mode through which his personal continuum is articulated.

iv. The Rebirth of Rebirth

Like the related traditions of manifestations, emanations and created bodies, the imported Buddhist idea of rebirth already had precedents in the pre-Buddhist belief schema in Tibet. But since the introduction of Buddhism, what were the relatively unstructured ideas of rebirth in Tibet have generally been replaced with the Indic rebirth model. In this model, as I mentioned briefly in the introduction, all un-awakened beings cycle powerlessly through birth after birth, a process called samsāra (khor ba). The only way out of the cycle is to develop the wisdom that sees through it. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, this wisdom is usually presented as insight into the reality of emptiness (Skt. śūnyatā; Tib. stong pa nyid) that enables, accompanies or is enabled by a compassion (Skt. karuṇā; Tib. snying rje) for all samsāra’s denizens. This compassion, in turn, compels the insightful person to work for their own and others’ liberation (Skt. mokṣa; Tib. thar pa), a motivation that is called the “mind of awakening” or bodhicitta (byang chub sems). The person who possesses this intention is called a bodhisattva (byang chub sems dpa’). Thus directed by their intention to awaken, bodhisattvas begin to develop some of the qualities of a buddha; including the ability to send out emanations and direct their rebirths, concepts that are

71 There is a good overview of this system in Wendy Doniger (2010:164–198).
closely interlinked but not quite the same phenomenon.

It was the idea of directed rebirth, rather than the idea of emanations, that provided the conceptual model for the jātaka genre. As described in chapter one, the use of the jātaka genre and its partial incorporation within the liberation-story’s framework was one of the primary ways that the discourse of an individual’s past lives was introduced into Tibet. This meant that developments in the jātaka in Tibet were intertwined with developments in the idea of rebirth. In the birth and liberation-stories of the early Karmapas, for example, it is possible to track developments in the ideas of rebirth from the eleventh to fourteenth century based on how they told their birth-tales. Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s stories were much like the fables of the Indian jātaka tradition, while Karma Pakshi’s tales were more socially elevated and ambitious, recalling many lives lived as elites connected to the history of his lineage, in which he developed an array of supernatural powers. By the time Rang byung rdo rje began adding his tales, the cultural tides had turned again and, as will become evident throughout the next chapters, he felt less need to advertise his magical abilities, and more need to advertise his wide-ranging scholarship. This meant that his memories tended to recall the training and study he had completed in past lives.

In these presentations, the Karmapas very much reflected the wider cultural discourses of their times, particularly those of the Bka’ brgyud and Bka’ gdamgs schools with which they were most closely connected. During Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s time, for instance, in a narrative that was also obviously highly influenced by the Indian jātaka tradition, his lineal cohort Phag mo gru pa (1110–1170) wrote several tales of a past life as a monkey.72 Just before and during the time Karma Pakshi was telling his story of more elite past lives, there was a textual tradition developing around the past lives of Atiśa’s premier Tibetan student ’Brom ston pa (1005–1064), in which he too was associated with great deeds in elite past lives.73 And by the time Rang byung rdo rje was engaged in the scholarly process of transforming the mass of inherited traditions he had received into a customised institution, his contemporaries were also remembering many past lives as scholars.74

These developments were also influenced greatly by a simultaneous shift in the idea of rebirth that was happening outside of the liberation-story genre, and outside of the Bka’ brgyud and Bka’ gdamgs cohort that tended to use it: the Rnying ma treasure revealers were developing their own ideas of rebirth.

The premise of treasure revelation was that Padmasambhava and his students had concealed treasure during the golden age of Empire so that they could be retrieved in

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72 Phag mo gru pa (2003).
73 Kapstein (2003:775) includes a survey of this text.
74 Rang byung rdo rje’s contemporary Dol po pa, for example, explicitly aligns himself with Avalokiteśvara and through him Khri Srong btsan sgam po, and also ’Jig rten dgon po and through him Nāgārjuna (Kapstein 2000:106–107).
darker times. Implicit within this narrative was a link between the people of the two eras. In the Tibetan cultural context, this link was most naturally explained by past life connections, and this encouraged twelfth century treasure-revealers to claim that they were rebirths of Padmasambhava’s students. This was obviously a successful narrative for those wishing to develop a clear link with the Empire, but it was also highly influential in perhaps unconsidered ways.

One of the most significant of these was the way it showed how remembered lives could create a link among diachronic “holders of tantric lineages” (rgyud ’dzin) that would synchronise them, bringing the golden age of the past personally alive in darker times. As Rang byung rdo rje considered himself part of the treasure-text project, this model influenced his presentation of previous lives both directly and indirectly. Its most direct influence can be seen in his claim to have been Padmasambhava’s student Rgyal mchog dbyangs (8th century) in a previous life.75 Indirectly, Rang byung rdo rje was also influenced by further developments in the treasure-tradition’s presentation of past-lives, particularly the trend toward concatenation, which Rang byung rdo rje followed in his writing.76

As Daniel Hirschberg has shown in his recent study of the influential treasure revealer Nyang ral nyi ma ‘od zer (1136–1204), the idea of concatenate rebirths was most probably developed by Nyang ral in a narrative that linked his present life through a string of previous existences back to the time of the Empire.77 Beginning with none other than the dharma king, Khri Srong lde gtsen, he claimed to have lived a series of seventeen lives, “in real historical time”, predominantly in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Zahor, Khotan and Tibet. In these lives, Nyang ral suggests, he had been practising the yogas that Padmasambhava had taught Khri Srong sde gtsan, and as he had achieved their fruition in his present life; he was now a sprul sku. But in using this term, he was not evoking the sense it developed later as “reincarnation”, but its earlier sense of a Buddha’s nirmāṇakāya, replete—just as the legend suggests Śākyamuni had been—with the marks and signs of an awakened buddha.78 As a nirmāṇakāya, Nyang ral went on to explain, he was living his final life with no need to be reborn again.

There are no clear references to Nyang ral’s description of concatenate lives in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing, and it is not clear whether it was Nyang ral’s presentation of concatenate lives that led Rang byung rdo rje to fill in many of the gaps in the Karmapas’

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75 Rang byung rdo rje’s claim to be Rgyal mchog dbyangs is noted in Rang byung rdo rje (2006c:357) and (2006d:377). Karma Pakshi’s claim to have some connection with Padmasambhava too, through a memory of a past life as his grand-student, the little-known Sang rgyas ye shes rin chen (8th century), the student of Padmasambhava’s well-known student Gnubs Sangs rgyas ye shes (8th century; Rang byung rdo rje 2006h:280 and Ye shes rgyal mthshan 2012:8a).
77 Daniel Hirschberg (2012).
collective past life memories. Still it easy to speculate that once such a presentation had been made, all other discourses of past lives would have been affected by it.

Along with the possible influence Nyang ral’s presentation of rebirths might have had on Rang byung rdo rje, there were also other narrative similarities between Nyang ral’s personal reincarnation lineage-story and that of the Karmapas. These developments occurred fifty years after Nyang ral’s death, when another man, a student of his son named Guru Chos dbang (1212–1270), claimed to be a manifestation, or sprul ba, of Nyang ral, and used this status to “successfully further... his position as an heir to (Nyang ral’s) spiritual inheritance”. According to Hirschberg, this claim was made sometime in the 1230s, around the same time—according to Manson—that Karma Pakshi was being recognised as Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s manifestation, and being presented with his spiritual inheritance. The coincidence of these two events is even more striking when it is considered that they occurred at opposite ends of the Plateau; at that stage Karma Pakshi was still in northern Kham, while Nyang ral and Guru Chos dbang were both based in Lho ‘brag, in south-central Tibet.

The coincidence between these two claims to reincarnate status begs the question why the Karmapas’ tradition thrived and Nyang ral’s did not. One possible reason is that the flexible narrative structure Dus gsum mkhyen pa established in his presentation of past, present and future lives was more easily adaptable than Nyang ral’s story that he was living his last life. Indeed, this claim made it very difficult for Guru Chos dbang to claim his succession without directly contradicting his predecessor.

Perhaps a more important reason for the Karmapas’ success, however, and one that a comparison between the two stories highlights is the role that recognition played in the Karmapa’s story. Spom brag pa, Karma Pakshi’s teacher and an important religious figure, recognised him as Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s emanation when he was a teacher; and the role O rgyan pa played in Rang byung rdo rje’s acceptance as the third Karmapa cannot be overestimated. Guru Chos dbang by contrast presented himself as Nyang ral’s manifestation, and waited to do so until after his main teacher, and Nyang ral’s son, had died.

c) Re-cognition
The process of recognition is a major pillar of the Karmapa project. It was first used in the

79 Hirschberg (2012:60–61,70) explains how lineal descendants of Guru Chos dbang conflated the two terms, a conflation that seems to have been widespread from about the end of the fourteenth century.
80 Manson (2009:30).
81 Hirschberg (2012:70) and Manson (2009:30).
82 As Hirschberg (2012:61–67) explains, Guru Chos dbang circumvented this contradiction somewhat by claiming to be Nyang ral’s manifestation or sprul sku rather than his rebirth.
forging of a link between Karma Pakshi and Dus gsum mkhyen pa, and has played a significant role in the project’s success ever since. Recognition builds on the social precedents of lineage, in which various lineage holders symbiotically affirm the status of other lineage holders through empowerment. The main difference between the two processes being that in the case of the recognition of reincarnates, the co-authorities must recognize each others’ superior abilities through their own superior insights; a co-authorisation that is not necessary for empowerment. It was these insights and the discourses about these insights that developed the network of emanations, manifestations and rebirths that now play such an authoritative role in Tibetan culture.

The developing, interlocking edifice of recognition in many ways reflected the discourses of lineage, in which one socially recognised lineage-holder bestowed the same authority on another. And, as an extension on the discourse of lineage, with its associated familial metaphors, it also created a narrative that would allow for possessions to be passed from one rebirth to the next. As social networks came to recognise certain beings as the rebirth of others, an imperative to return the dead person’s belongings to their next incarnation rather than their families developed with it.

As I have already suggested, this transfer of property was much easier to link with concatenate rebirths than with fickle emanations; and therefore, as far as I am aware, no emanations or manifestations before the development of the Karmapa body-mālā inherited property from those whose manifestations or emanations they claimed to be. Even within the Karmapa body-mālā, whose subsequent members were widely accepted to be the reincarnations of their predecessors, the unquestioned transfer of property from one body-bead to another took centuries and the accumulation of many precedents to be established. Most of these precedents for property transferal were developed within the Karmapa project itself; O rgyan pa’s re-gifting of the black hat to Rang byung rdo rje being perhaps the most important precedent in Rang byung rdo rje’s story. Yet there were also earlier precedents for this transferal from outside the Karmapa tradition.

The Bka’ gdam master Bya yul pa the Great (also known as Gzhon nu ‘od; 1075–1138), from Bya yul Monastery carried out the earliest recognition of a recently deceased Tibetan teacher of which a record has survived. According to Berounský, who has presented a thorough investigation of this teacher and his approach to rebirth, Bya yul the Great developed a reputation as something of a miracle worker, which led to his recognition as a

84 And, it must be said, in the past two decades, a few of its failures. This is because the whole idea of recognition depends on the consensus of all the lineage’s people of influence, which then radiates out into the wider community; if there is any disagreement among the lineage elites, even if a few people disagree with the majority of the lineage about the recognition, as a few elites did about the last recognition of the seventeenth Karmapa, the reincarnation institution runs into problems. Although there has not been any scholarly assessment of the recent troubles in the lineage, there have been several good, if generally one-sided, journalistic investigations into it. See: Mick Brown (2008) and Lea Terhune (2004); and for a less cohesive description of events from the other side of the divide, Anil Maheshwari (2000).
sprul sku, a title that incorporated the aforementioned play between etymology and tantric ontology. Although the term probably had little to do with the idea of rebirth or reincarnation at this time, Bya yul did coincidently involve himself in the development of the reincarnation tradition by recognising a young student, Dgyer sgom the Great (also Dgyer gzhon nu grags pa; 1090–1171), as the rebirth of his own teacher. What is more, in a striking prelude to Rang byung rdo rje’s recognition, he also gave him his personal hat as a sign of the respect implicit in this recognition.

Despite this striking coincidence, there is no direct link between the activities of Bya yul the Great and Rang byung rdo rje’s recognition as Karma Pakshi’s rebirth. As Berounský reports, this cluster of miracle working, manifestations and recognition was quite isolated, and seems to have only affected those with a direct connection to Bya yul. Several centuries later, however, a confluence of events occurred much closer to Rang byung rdo rje’s home-to-be that did provide a perhaps less striking but more practical precedent for this process.

This series of fortunate events for the Karmapa project began when, shortly before his death, Karma Pakshi received a visit from a well-known, well-travelled and respected yogi named O rgyan pa. According to O rgyan pa’s liberation-story, Karma Pakshi was so impressed with the younger man that he not only granted him tantric empowerments, but also gave him his famous black hat, which was later taken as a sign that they would meet again in the Karmapa’s next life.

This quasi-prediction not only created a link between the Karmapas and one of the most politically well-positioned outsiders in the Mongol world, it also linked them with the only previous recognition of a direct rebirth that had led to the transfer of a spiritual position. That process has begun when O rgyan pa’s teacher Rgod tshang pa mgon po rdo rje (1189–1258) made a prediction before his death that he would be reborn as a tantric practitioner in central Tibet. O rgyan pa later recognised one Kun dga’ bzang po (Kun dga’ ‘od zer; 1258–1316) of Snye mdo Monastery as this rebirth, and on the basis of O rgyan pa’s recognition Kun dga’ bzang po was treated as a guru at Snye mdo Monastery. His

85 Berounský (2010:17).
86 Las chen kun dga’ rgyal mtshan (2003: 247). Berounský (2010:17, note 18) also notes that another man from the same monastery, one Tshul khrims mgon po (1291–1363/1365), was also called a sprul ba, but that this description was given to him after Rang byung rdo rje’s recognition as the third Karmapa. But he does not specify the being of which Tshul khrims mgon po was supposed to be a sprul ba.
88 This part of the story, the entrustment of the black hat to O rgyan pa, is described in the version of the initial meeting between O rgyan pa and Rang byung rdo rje found in O rgyan pa’s liberation-story. According to Li (2011:12–18, 70) this work was composed by O rgyan pa’s student Bsod nams’od zer (14th century) shortly after his death in the mid-14th century. The detail of the black-hat’s gifting is not mentioned in Rang byung rdo rje’s version of Karma Pakshi’s liberation story, or Karma Pakshi’s self-penned liberation-story.
89 The description of O rgyan pa’s recognition of this young man is also written in Bsod nams’od zer’s liberation-story of his teacher. The use of the three terms sprul ba’i sku, sku’i skye ba and sprul ba in this story is very interesting, and shows how even at this stage, shortly after Rang byung rdo rje’s death, they were
story also serves as a striking precedent for Rang byung rdo rje’s tale, because like Rang byung rdo rje, Kun dga’ bzang po was not given possession of the still familial-owned main monastery at Snye mdo, but was allowed to live (and build extensions to) smaller hermitages near it.90

O rgyan pa’s role in Rang byung rdo rje’s recognition as a Karmapa was not restricted to the presentation of precedents, however. Along with the protection and education O rgyan pa provided the young Rang byung rdo rje, he also gave him the two symbols that would prove indispensable to his claim to be Karma Pakshi’s spiritual heir: a black hat and the name Karmapa. These two items were part of the last strand of the Karmapa project’s mālā thread that needs to be examined here: the institution of the Karmapas that has supported all its rebirths in the many years since its inception.

vi. The Karmapa Institution

The Karmapa institution consisted of all the cultural, material, religious and knowledge traditions that had already been accumulated by the Karmapas. It has a symbiotic relationship with the narratives of lineage, manifestation, rebirth and recognition that created the possibility for a reincarnation to assume the role of Karmapa vacated by an almost-other at their death; the narrative justified and created the necessity for the role of the Karmapa to be filled, and the institution provided the cultural and material infrastructure for the performance of this role.

The combination of institution and narratives that enabled the transference of identity from Karma Pakshi to Rang byung rdo rje, for example, contained several elements.91 One of the most successful of these was the collection and creation of holy objects that served as a focus of worship in between the lives of the Karmapas. Dus gsum mkhyen pa started this process with the construction at Mtshur phu of the ‘Bras spung Stūpa, which was based on the famous Śrī Dhānyakāṭaka Stūpa at Amarāvati in India.92 His liberation-stories

beginning to align. In the passages that describe O rgyan pa’s recognition of Kun dga’ bzang po, for example, the three terms are used in such a way that if they are read as synonyms, the passage makes sense, and if they are not read as synonyms, the passage also makes sense but elicits a slightly more complex and evocative meaning. If they are read as synonyms, the passage would simply suggest that O rgyan pa travelled to Snye mdo Monastery, where he met the young sprul ba’i sku or sku’i skye ba of his teacher. But the passage could also be read to suggest that as O rgyan pa’s teacher Rgod tshang pa was a sprul ba’i sku, so was his rebirth sku’i skye ba. As both these readings are a possibility, perhaps rather than suggesting either one of them is correct, I would rather suggest that this passage provides much evidence for the way the term sprul sku came to refer not only to one’s teacher, but reincarnates generally (Bsdon nams ‘od zer, 1997:202–203).

90 Interestingly, this cluster of recognised reincarnations connected to O rgyan pa was not limited to these two young men, but also included a woman; as reported by van de Kuijp (2005:29), the rebirth of Rgod tshang pa’s consort ’Gro ba bzang mo (d. 1259) was found in the person of Kun ldan ras ma (ca.1260-1339).

91 Turrell Wylie (1983:584–585) also describes this transition in his article about the Mongolian recognition of Rang byung rdo rje as a reincarnation. As I will outline further in a note to chapter seven, he ignores the abundance of cultural production that went into establishing the Karmapa reincarnation tradition, and suggests that the reincarnation tradition was established by the edicts of the Mongol court.

92 Some of this stūpa is now in the British Museum in London. Rang byung rdo rje includes a description of it in his poem The Lamp that Illuminates the Flower of Poetic Decoration: A Praise To Mtshur phu (Mtshur phu’i bstod
also record that he had an image of Avalokiteśvara in the form of Khasarpani constructed and consecrated for the same monastery.\(^{93}\)

Karma Pakshi’s contributions to Mtshur phu and other monasteries were substantially more ambitious. He began his restoration and refurbishing career at Kam po gnas nang, where he not only had the buildings repaired, but also installed in its assembly hall a central image of Avalokiteśvara as Mahākaruṇā. He then moved on to Karma Monastery, where after repairing the buildings he commissioned an image of Maitreya for the main hall.\(^{94}\) But it was at Mtshur phu that he really outdid himself, dedicating much of the wealth he had accrued from his sojourns at the courts of Mongol princes and emperors to the construction of a ten-span-high image of Avalokiteśvara and a building in which to house it.\(^{95}\) As Manson reports, this project was so important to Karma Pakshi that: “his autobiography devotes a whole section *Lha chen po ’dzam gling rgyan bzhengs pa’i rnam thar* (*The Liberation-Story of the Construction of the Great Deity that Ornaments the World*) on the subject of (this) huge statue.”\(^{96}\)

Moreover, the structures put in place to sustain the Karmapa project were not only physical. The lineage also employed conceptual supports, amongst which their name “Karmapa” is perhaps the most famous.\(^{97}\) This name was most probably—as both Richardson and Manson have suggested—prosaically derived from Karma Pakshi’s association with Karma Monastery. In Tibetan, when a nominalising particle (*pa*) is added to a place name, it indicates that the thing being described is “of that place”; the Karma-pa is, in other words a “person of Karma (Monastery)”. It also seems to have taken quite a while to take hold. In Rang byung rdo rje’s writing, for example, Dus gsum mkhyen pa is not referred to directly as “the Karmapa”. He only uses the term to refer to Karma Pakshi\(^{98}\) and on one occasion, more obtusely, himself: “I am,” he said, “the one known these days as the Karmapa”\(^{99}\).

\(^{93}\) Rgwa Lo tsā ba (2010b:74). A description of this statue is also included within *A Praise to Mtshur phu* (Rang byung rdo rje, 2006a Vol. Ca:39).

\(^{94}\) Manson (2009:35).

\(^{95}\) This statue survived until the twentieth century when it was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. The seventeenth Karmapa later rebuilt it in accordance with the memories of elderly monks (Lama Kunsang et al, 2012:243).

\(^{96}\) Manson (2009:35).

\(^{97}\) In recent years the use of this name has been a focus for the disputants in the Karmapa succession. A particularly contemporary battle between the two camps seems to have been carried out, for example, in the positioning of their associated websites that can be found in a Google search; in the years that I have been researching the Karmapas, this order has changed at least ten times.

\(^{98}\) Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:377); Tib: *bdag nyid chen po dpal karmapa pa*.

\(^{99}\) Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:377); Tib: *deng sang Karma pa’i mtshan sgrogs*. The simplicity and adaptability of this name allowed various interpretations in later commentaries. Despite the fact that the two could not have met, for example, it has been suggested that the Kashmiri scholar Śākyāśīrbhadra (1127–1225) who visited Tibet at the turn of the twelfth century during the interregnum between the first two Karmapas, gave Dus gsum mkhyen pa the name Karmapa because he was an emanation of the Buddha’s activities. This story is
The other major symbol of the Karmapas is the black hat, and in this regard it is notable that when Rang byung rdo rje called himself “the one known these days as the Karmapa”, he defined this as “the third to hold the black-hat crown”. As David Jackson has shown recently in an article tracing the black hats use in visual and literary arts back to Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s time, it was always associated with the early Karmapas. All of the early painted images of Dus gsum mkhyen pa, for example, including some that may have been painted during his lifetime, show him wearing a black hat. And although the black hat Karma Pakshi and Rang byung rdo rje are shown wearing is a different design from Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s hat—even when they are all in the same image—they too are usually shown wearing their own version of it. This suggests that although Karma Pakshi did not inherit the physical black hat from Dus gsum mkhyen pa, it was such a renowned symbol of his predecessor that his wearing of it became a part of his performance of the Karmapa’s role. It also explains why his lending the hat to O rgyan pa and the latter’s returning it to Rang byung rdo rje carried such symbolic force.

v. Preparations for the Journey

This, then, was the state of affairs as Karma Pakshi reached the end of his long and influential life at Mtsur phu Monastery in 1283. He had spent many years building on the work of his predecessor, and around him had developed a narrative that would allow for the fruits of this labour to be passed to his successor, who would add to the story and its associate institutions greatly.

This successor would not just inherit the fruits of Karma Pakshi’s endeavours, however; he would also be born into the unfolding meta-narrative of Tibet, in which the very environment was fairly brimming with the already-lived history of the Tibetan people. On the Plateau, the traces of these stories infused the landscape. What is more, the long-lived survivors from this time, the “gods and spirits” (Iha 'dre) were still there, and

told by Brown (2008:23), and I have also heard it (and even translated it) in several teachings by Karma bka’ brgyud lineage teachers. The impossibility of this story becomes evident once Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s dates are compared with the dates of Śākyasrihādra’s journey to Tibet. Dus gsum mkhyen pa died in 1193 and Śākyasrihādra arrived in Tibet in 1204, the year Karma Pakshi was born (Gardner 2011b).

100 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:377); Tib: zhwa nag cod pan 'dzin pa gsum par gyur.
103 While this motif of the Karmapa body-mālā does appear to have venerable antecedents, another element of the tradition that does not appear in the earlier texts is the prophetic letter in which each Karmapa, according to later traditions, is said to describe their future rebirth. As I have already discussed, Dus gsum mkhyen pa made prophecies about being reborn, but they were not written in a letter and anyway did not accord with Karma Pakshi’s birth. Rang byung rdo rje suggests that he was born in La stod in accordance with “the Karmapa’s (that is to say Karma Pakshi’s) prophecy” (2006c:379), but he does not suggest that this prophecy was written down in a letter or otherwise. The early records of Rang byung do rje’s illness and death in Xanadu are the first to clearly record a prophecy of rebirth by a dying Karmapa that is followed by the recognition of a child in accordance with this prophecy, but again, there is no record that this was written down in a letter; it was spoken in response to a question from a Mongolian student.
Tibetans, be they highly educated monks or local farmers, engaged with them on a daily basis. For many of these monks, nuns and other practitioners of the new yogas, the land was also marked with the deeds of other heroes, of Milarepa and his like, who had further infused the land with their inspiration, creating a continuity between Tibet and the holy land of India.

Along with these inspirational indigenous and imported visions, there was also another reality with which the Tibetans of this time lived less comfortably: the Mongol Empire. On the one hand this meant living with a level of tax, administration and martial demands that made forming a life out of this sometimes-hostile environment difficult. On the other hand it meant that Tibetans were connected—even on the high plains of this often-forgotten corner of the empire—with a world that stretched far beyond many of their imaginations across the Eurasian continent. It was at this intersection of the spatially vast Mongol Empire and the temporally long tale of Tibet and its Karmapas that Rang byung rdo rje was about to be born.
PART TWO:

A TRAVELLING LIFE
Chapter Four:  
From Death to Childhood

The time when I was young is like a dream, but I will speak a little of the parts that are clear. It is already like someone else’s story, and (telling) it will make it another’s story.

Rang byung rdo rje,  
The Verse Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje, Part One.¹

i. Introduction: Making Memories

Both of Rang byung rdo rje’s versions of his life-story begin with a death scene. An ailing Karma Pakshi, on his deathbed at Mtshur phu, was searching for a new body; one episode of the greater Karmapa story was ending, and another was about to begin. Unlike most life-stories, both in the Tibetan literary tradition and elsewhere, this story did not therefore rely on the neat beginning offered by birth, in which a date, a location, and maybe a family profile create a narrative of personhood. In this story, rather than a series of facts establishing existence, Rang byung rdo rje’s becoming was told as a travel story. This was a journey from one life to the next that began with an end, and ended when a link with the previous life was established.

It is also the most influential travel story that Rang byung rdo rje told; it defined his identity and served as a foundation for later developments in the reincarnation tradition. It was so important that it was written down twice: first in the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State and second in the Verse Liberation-Story. The relationship between these two tales is complex. The story of how the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State was created is told within the Verse Liberation-Story, but the two texts also often suggest that Rang byung rdo rje took alternate routes in his journey between lives, divergences that created several narrative knots for later storytellers.

At least in part, these departures can be put down to the tales’ exploratory nature. For, unlike other journeys from one life to the next that would latterly be recalled, recognised and/or retold in the centuries to come, Rang byung rdo rje’s tale often moved through unmarked narrative territory. Parts of the path had clear precedents, but before he told this tale, no one had narrated the entire journey from illness, through death, the in-between state, conception, the womb, birth, childhood and recognition.² The biographical tropes that were to serve as signposts for the rest of his life’s journey had not been set up

² As Berounsky (2010:8) has noted, this remains only one of two complete tales of a journey between lives in Tibetan literature. He writes: “Only one other representative of similar genre is known to me. It is a description of the reincarnation of the Fifth Dalai Lama into the Sixth... and again in this much later text the need for proofs of the veridicality of the new Dalai Lama becomes apparent.”
in this netherworld; between lives he was a narrative explorer who would therefore inevitably take a few wrong turns.

What this means for those reading this part of his story is that—as with much of his other personal writing—two approaches to the material present themselves. The first is a relatively straightforward reading of his journey between lives. This is the story that he presented as truth and—as far as is possible to attest—was widely although not pervasively believed by its contemporary audience. The other is the story of the story; the way that this story was put together, the influence social and cultural factors had on its composition, the elements of previous discourses that were adapted in its creation, and how these were stitched together with the particulars of his own situation.

Reading these two stories at once is made much less difficult through Rang byung rdo rje’s tendency—which follows the storytelling conventions of his culture and time—to leave the seams of narrative construction showing. In compositional practice, this means that the story itself, although innovative in its overarching narrative, reads as something of a collage; a collage that uses allusions to earlier, authoritative narratives and to cosmological maps to establish its own prestige. The stories to which it alludes include the birth-stories of the Buddha, the liberation-stories of the previous two Karmapas and the liberation-stories of other earlier Bka’ brgyud luminaries. The chosen narratives are then set within cultural and religious maps that include elements from earlier Buddhist traditions like the Abhidharma, later traditions like the Vajrayāna, and, importantly, the landscapes of Padmasambhava’s tales of subjugation. This collection of ideas set Rang byung rdo rje’s other-worldly, in-between story firmly within the collective (hi)stories of India and Tibet; the twin temporal narratives that melded his cultural space, the backdrop to his story.

Yet despite the backing he received from these allusions, his hesitant introductions to both the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State and the death-to-rebirth section of his Verse Liberation-Story—including the verse that begins this chapter—suggest an awareness that he was pushing cultural boundaries. This awareness is reflected in the list he makes of the possible problems with his compositions. It begins with concerns about his unsteady memories of past events and continues on to express his concerns about how the texts will be received. “Kye ma!” he says, “These days it is very hard to please (people)”.4

As he explains it, the main reason he was worried about the texts’ reception was the nascent state of the reincarnation tradition and the stories’ consequent lack of precedent. What he does not mention—but which also evidently posed a clear threat to their positive

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reception—was that this new tradition and therefore the texts that promoted it were a direct challenge to the social order. Their central narrative not only described how the second Karmapa became the third, but presented reasons why the son of a low-caste, itinerant potter should be elevated to a position of high authority. This was a hard sell, and if this attempted transformation had been expressed directly, it might not have been accepted. But Rang byung rdo rje’s narrative was more sophisticated than that. Rather than merely presenting a case for change, it appealed to an authority higher than the hierarchies of the human world, and presented him as an already magisterial presence in a more prestigious environment: the world of the spirits. The inhabitants of this world included the indigenous spirits of Tibet who had converted to Buddhism, and other, imported, non-human Buddhist deities; and in his story all of them recognised his authority. On the basis of this otherworldly authority, he ended at least one list of doubts by stating his confidence in the future if not present reception of his work. It is for those in the future, he suggested, that he was composing this work. “I am not writing my liberation-story so I might shout it at others now,” he said, “I am just writing a little of what I think will inspire them.”

In order for Rang byung rdo rje’s story to survive to be read today, it must have resonated with its audience. Yet in listing his doubts, he equivocated even on this, his stated reason for composition. Echoing his reductive description of the inscription of sanctity onto the environment—“wherever there is praise, it is repeated”—he expressed similar doubts about how he would be sanctified. In this process, he suggested, his transcription of “situational deeds, what is in the front of my mind, and some illusory dreams” will be transformed into “somebody else’s story”, a possession that can be used in various ways.

Throughout his self-penned liberation-stories he repeatedly reflected on this transformation, how his story would become another’s useful object. At the beginning of his tale, when he first raises the idea, it seems to be yet another example of his distrust of words, a gentle reminder to his audience that in reading his tale they are engaged with a constructed, impermanent object. But towards the end of his tale-telling, as he seeks to frame his own tale within the greater narrative of the not-quite-other Karmapas, he foreshadows yet another transformation of his story into others’ tale. “Are these the future

5 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:375).
7 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:400).
8 In some ways this approach to “the text” prefigures post-modern approaches to text like that of Stanley Fish (1980). Unlike Fish, however, Rang byung rdo rje does not take this observation anywhere. As with many of his other deconstructive moments (to be discussed throughout the rest of this thesis), he merely makes the observation and moves onto the next. He most certainly does not, like Fish, use this idea to examine the nature of constructed truth and interpretive communities, as this would have meant questioning the construction of his lineage.
deeds of Rang byung?” he asks: “...if so they have not arrived yet, so there is no great purpose in setting them all down in writing.”

As he guessed, the “future deeds” of later Karmapas did transform his tale. As later Karmapas and other storytellers added layers to the Karmapa project, his story become an extension of their story, and was adjusted to fit their new discourses. This is not to suggest, however, that these later redactors of his story performed a wholesale conversion of his tale. By that stage, Rang byung rdo rje’s words, like his person, had become sanctified, and they would have found such an approach disrespectful. Instead, what a close reading of the various versions of his tale suggests is that later writers have elided some problematic aspects of Rang byung rdo rje’s own narration, extrapolated on others, and commented others away.

ii. Becoming Human

As the tale moves from death to birth, for example, there are several sections that later redactors felt the need to adjust. The first problem they had to deal with was a temporal divergence between Rang byung rdo rje’s narrative and those of Karma Pakshi’s life and death. Next, there were divergences between Rang byung rdo rje’s own narratives of events as he left his body and entered the in-between state. There were also problems with his graphic description of his mother’s womb, as it suggested a lower level of realisation than that which had been latterly ascribed to him. Indeed, the only sequence that later redactors did not feel the need to adjust was the one that occurred between death and his entrance into the womb, his journey through the in-between state. In this episode, he met Tibet’s landmark dākinīs who pleaded with him to take rebirth back in their realm.

a) Divergent Death Dates

The initial, temporal divergence between Rang byung rdo rje’s two liberation-stories and most versions of the second Karmapa’s tale is about the date on which the Karmapa consciousness left Karma Pakshi’s body. Most of the stories of Karma Pakshi’s life suggest he died “on the third day of the ninth month of the female, water sheep year (1283)”, and later storytellers take up Rang byung rdo rje’s journey toward birth from that date. In Rang byung rdo rje’s versions of the tale, by contrast, the moment of transference is described more ambiguously, and insinuates another date. The Verse Liberation-Story says:

10 Manson (2009:44) gives an overview of these dates. These dates can also be found individually in: Tshe dbang rgyal (1994:238), Kun dga’ rdo rje (1981:94), ‘Gos Lo tsā ba (1974:37a) and Roerich (1988:487). I thank Charles Manson for sending me these references.
In the first month of the sheep year, I had a visionary experience, in which I saw the yogi Mi la ras pa, in the centre of La stod’s Dpal (mo dpal) thang Plain. In his hand he held a skull full of amṛta, and he said: “Emanate and in the future perform activities”... (Following this advice), I was conceived in the place called Rtsha phu, Mid la’s (Mi la ras pa’s) birth place, in front of Gangs zhur mo (“Snowy Pig Snout”) Ridge.

Similarly, the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State says:

In the first month of the sheep year, I felt a little uncomfortable in my elements. At that time, I was the one known famously as the Karmapa, and this was a sign that I should depart for another pure land (i.e., die).

Although it is possible to read both these quotes to suggest that Karma Pakshi died in the first month of the sheep year, the language chosen in both is indeterminate. They could be read to indicate that he died at this point, or they could be read to suggest that he was establishing an alternate emanation in Tibet in preparation for his death. Either way, the generation of a new emanation at this time allowed for the year before Rang byung rdo rje’s birth-date that the Tibetan embryological tradition required to create a new being. But for later redactors, the ambiguity of these expressions and the contradiction between this date and the more widely accepted death dates for Karma Pakshi proved too problematic, and this became the only part of his self-told tale that they completely expunged. As will become evident, this elision, and the acceptance of a later death-date for Karma Pakshi, left them with such a short interregnum that a new, complicated, probably apocryphal narrative had to be inserted.

b) Alternate Routes

The next divergence does not occur between Rang byung rdo rje’s tales and those of other redactors, but between his two tales themselves. They take two alternate routes to the Buddhist heavenly realm called Tuṣita (Dga’ ldan), where the Karmapa consciousness would stay for most of the interval between lives.

This destination is important to the story for a number of reasons, most of which are derivative. To begin with, as the home of all future buddhas, Tuṣita is the starting point for the most well-known inter-life journey in the Buddhist tradition: the birth-story of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. According to this tale, which is outlined in detail in the Sūtra of this Fortunate Aeon, the Buddha Śākyamuni and all other past and future buddhas

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11 Dpal thang Plain is the place in Tibet where Padmasambhava subdued the twelve landmark dökinīs, who will be introduced shortly. It is a high plain lying between Shi sha spang Mountain and Pal khu Lake (Diemberger 2007:344. note 28). Mar pa (Nalanda 1982:74) and Mi la ras pa’s (Roberts 2007:180) liberation-stories also set events there.
14 Berounský (2010:30 and 2011:7) and Seegers (2009:53, 80 note 226, 83 note 241, 112–113) have also noted this link.
prepare for their final lives as “supreme created body”\textsuperscript{15} by training in this paradise with the buddha who appeared before them. As the third buddha of this fortunate age, for instance, Śākyamuni trained in Tuṣita for aeons with the buddha who preceded him, Kāśyapa (‘Od srung chen po) and after Kāśyapa descended to earth, the buddha-to-be Maitreya began to train with Śākyamuni, until the latter departed for earth.

Using this precedent in the Karmapas’ story was not only important because it offered a rare precedent for an inter-life travel narrative, but also because the already-drawn links between the early Karmapas and the sixth buddha of the aeon, Simha, necessitated that at least one of their emanations would be living in Tuṣita, training with Maitreya. Karma Pakshi was the first to mention this emanation, whom he called Blo gros rin chen.\textsuperscript{16} Unlike the Karmapa consciousness’s other more-temporary human emanations, Blo gros rin chen is said to abide steadfastly at Maitreya’s side for aeons.\textsuperscript{17} As the setting for both the Buddha’s authoritative pre-birth tale and another emanation of the Karmapa consciousness, Tuṣita was therefore a logical choice for the interim consciousness to visit.

The two texts agree on this point, but they do not agree on how the consciousness got there. The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State suggests the most direct route. It reads:

I performed inconceivable magic (chos ’phrul bsam gyis mi khyab pa byung). I flew into the sky in a rainbow body, travelling upwards to the god realms. There I was greeted with a variety of divine music performed by the gods. Many (other) inconceivable things (also) appeared to me, including innumerable divine parasols. In addition, (I watched as) bodhisattvas like Maitreya performed the deeds of awakening. Together (he and his entourage) cultivated immeasurable compassion for beings, training without respite in a state where nothing is generated and nothing stops.\textsuperscript{18}

In a tone characteristic of the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, the technicalities of this description are somewhat vague, and therefore do not fit neatly with other descriptions of the transference of consciousness in Tibetan Buddhist literature. Within the Bka’ brgyud tradition, these more technical descriptions are usually found in works dedicated to their core practice of “the six dharmas of Nāropā” (Na rochos drug), one of which is described as the transference of consciousness at death (’chi ’pho). By Rang byung rdo rje’s time, this practice was usually called ’pho ba (Skt. samkrānti), and involved the transference of a dying practitioner’s consciousness to a Buddhist heaven in dependence on a stabilised deity mediation.\textsuperscript{19} At face value, despite the lack of detail, this seems to be what Rang byung rdo rje is referring to in his description of these events. In keeping with his claims elsewhere in his liberation-stories, this suggests that because he

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\textsuperscript{15} This refers to the paramanirmāṇa-kāya (Tib. mchog gi sprul sku), which was described in the last chapter.
\textsuperscript{17} Rang byung rdo rje (2006c:366–367).
\textsuperscript{18} Rang byung rdo rje (2006c:358).
\textsuperscript{19} Roberts (2011:9).
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could control his rebirth he had achieved a high level of yogic attainment, but not full awakening.

In contrast to this direct route, the Verse Liberation Story takes a detour.\textsuperscript{20} It reads:

In order (that others may) understand karma’s infallibility, (my) in-between consciousness showed the way to enter (a corpse) in Stod lung ’phar tshang, but there was no un-ripened karma (in that situation). (My intention) in showing (this method) was to delight people, so I spoke of it to the great O rgyan pa. Then the thought came that I should be born in lands free from extremes, and the visions of the in-between state arose.\textsuperscript{21}

Stod lung ’phar tshang is a village down the valley from Mtshur phu Monastery, and the episode of his tale outlined above is retold in all subsequent versions of Rang byung rdo rje’s tale. In most of these, however, it is described in considerably more detail. The next briefest description of it from the Red Annals, for example, elaborates on it by saying:

(After Karma Pakshi had died) and his body was about to be burnt, he looked out on all his suffering students in the lands of Mtshur phu and seemed to fall into a swoon of intense compassion. When he regained his senses, he noticed the faultless corpse of a three-year-old child in Stod lung ’phar tshang, and decided to “enter the residence” that was this corpse. After (his consciousness) had entered the corpse, he (opened his] eyes and looked to and fro. But the supposedly dead eyes moving about disturbed the (dead child’s) mother, so she threw things at them and stabbed them with a needle. The (Karmapa consciousness) did not think he would be able to help beings if he had no eyes, so he left to look for another body. Apart from an insect being carried by a bird in a house to the north, he could not find another (corpse), so he deemed it necessary to compel his consciousness up to Tuṣita.\textsuperscript{22}

In a pattern that is also often repeated between the Verse Liberation-Story and later redactions of his tale, Rang byung rdo rje’s passing reference to this event is expanded here to include more details. Yet unlike many other such instances in which later redactors expand on briefly told tales, this retelling does not seek to reframe or change its narrative. This, along with the fact that the expanded story is repeatedly retold despite contradicting the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, suggests that it was a well-told tale, made memorable by its specific setting.

The inclusion of the two narratives within the tale also highlights another outstanding feature of this corpse-entering episode: how late an example of this particular practice it was.\textsuperscript{23} As Peter Roberts has noted, the practice that is called “entrance into a dwelling or

\textsuperscript{20} As I point out in the second appendix, this assertion contrasts with Manson (2009:44–45), Seegers (2009:39, 48, 72, 79–81) and Berounský (2011:25) who all suggest that the “missing” Liberation-Story of the In-Between State is the source of the “entering the residence” story.


\textsuperscript{22} Kun dga’ rdo rje (1981:95). This translation and all others from supplementary Tibetan sources are the author’s own unless otherwise indicated.

\textsuperscript{23} Berounský (2011:10–13) gives a list of seven stories that include an “entrance into another body” account. Four of these occur before Dar ma mdo sde’s era, and another one occurs within a fictional story. The only one
town” (Tib. *grong 'jug*; Skt. *purapraveśa*)—or less prosaically the “entrance into another’s body” (Tib. *phar gzugs 'jug*; Skt. *parakāyapraveśana*)—is usually associated with either the Bka’ brgyud lineage’s Indian forebears or Mar pa’s family. Indeed, the most widely known story of this practice, taken from later versions of Mar pa’s liberation-story, suggests that knowledge of it disappeared from Tibet when the only person to whom Ma pa had taught it, his son Dar ma mdo sde, died, transferred his consciousness into a pigeon and flew off to India. There he re-transferred his consciousness into the deceased body of a sixteen-year old boy who was about to be cremated, and later became the renowned siddha Tiphupa (“the pigeon one”), who was one of Ras chung pa’s teachers. Following the dramatic departure of this knowledge, later Bka’ brgyud practitioners are said to have only practised what Roberts calls “the less-dramatic companion practice of transference... (to) a pure-realm”, the kind of *'pho ba* the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State intimates.

Like the inclusion of the previous, more general tale of *'pho ba*, the inclusion of this contradictory and more technical tale within Rang byung rdo rje’s initial narrative and subsequent retellings also suggests a few points. First, and perhaps primarily, it again suggests a narrative in transition; one that is using previously established discourses to assert its own authority. This is not only evident in the idea expressed through the story that the *grong 'jug* was performed “to delight people”, but also with the reversed allusions it makes to Dar ma mdo sde’s story. Whereas Dar ma mdo sde took over a pigeon’s body and flew to India, the only animal corpse to which the Karmapa consciousness has access is a dead insect being carried by a bird, which is to say it is a body that cannot be controlled. Whereas Dar ma mdo sde was able to find a child’s body after inhabiting a bird’s body, the Karmapa consciousness is unable to find a bird’s body after inhabiting a child’s body. Moreover, while Tiphupa’s family delighted in his return, the Tibetan family in this tale do not take kindly to the reanimation of their dead son’s corpse, acting towards him as if he was a zombie, or “risen corpse” (*ro langs*). By reversing the tale in this way, Rang byung rdo rje is at once drawing on its authority and showing the problems that may

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24 Roberts (2011:9).
25 This story is widely known thanks to its inclusion in Gtsang snyon Heruka’s (222–225) version of Mar pa’s liberation-story. It was even the subject of a very early piece of research within the field of Tibetan studies by Mary Shih-yü Yü (1949: 34–41). But as Roberts (1970: 125–126) has shown, the link between Dar ma mdo sde and Tiphupa is not found in early versions of Mar pa’s story. Further analysis of this tradition is hard to establish, as Mar pa’s liberation-story tradition has not been the subject of a full length study to date. In this regard, it is also interesting to note that Rang byung rdo rje’s collection of Bka’ brgyud lineage liberation-stories does not include Mar pa’s story.
26 Tanya Zivkovic (2012:24) and Charles Ramble (1982:346) have both discussed the zombie phenomenon in Tibetan culture. Both point out that there is a consensus that the bodies of realised beings cannot become zombies, and this negative assessment of rising dead is perhaps another reason this mode of consciousness transferal did not become very popular in Tibetan discourse.
arise from this kind of consciousness transfer. His message, in brief, seems to be: I tried the old way, but it did not work, so I had to try something different.

c) Re-routing
In contrast to Rang byung rdo rje’s willingness to take narrative adventures, the re-tellers of his tale were much less brave. From their perspective, the contradictions in the tale and some of this episode’s ontological implications stood in opposition to their perception of the Karmapas, and therefore needed to be adjusted.

These adjustments began in their re-presentation of the very first moment of consciousness transference, which is described in the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State. According to the redactors’ understanding, changes needed to be made to Rang byung rdo rje’s description of this moment because the Karmapa consciousness was overqualified for a mere transference of consciousness. As in many other adjustments to the tale, it was Gtsug lag phreng ba who proved to be the most innovative in his response to the dilemma.

His first move in this regard was to read “inconceivable magic” as an adjective rather than a noun, and therefore suggest the term referred to a special kind of transference called the “inconceivable transference of bodhisattvas (rgyal sras bsam gyis mi khyab pa’i ’chi ’pho)”. This in turn enabled him to re-present Rang byung rdo rje’s claims to yogic ability as an allusion to the Karmapas’ large network of emanations and manifestation. He wrote:

Generally, the transference of bodhisattvas is inconceivable as it is difficult to fathom the performance of illuminators (i.e., buddhas). The permanent bodies of the blissful, pure selves who have travelled beyond are established on the tenth ground, at the end of the (mental continuum of a sentient being). (This means) they have the power to be wherever they intend to be. The bodhisattva Blo gros rin chen, (for example), lives in Tuṣita all the time in a body established there by the mahāsiddha (the Karmapa consciousness) himself. (But) he also has authentic relationships that draw him back to earth.27

Thus, the first problem was solved by way of commentary.

Toward the next dilemma, Gtsug lag phreng ba and later redactors then took another approach. This problematic piece of narrative was Rang byung rdo rje’s insistence that his in-between consciousness had lost consciousness before entering the boy’s corpse.28 To many this may seem an inconsequential matter, but to those seeking to establish the Karmapas’ status as either buddhas or almost-buddhas it was intensely problematic. For according to both Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Abhidharma* and Rang byung rdo rje’s own

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Sublime Inner Meaning, one of the clearest marks of a realised being is their ability to remain conscious throughout the in-between state. Therefore, if they wanted to claim the Karmapa body-mālā as a buddha or almost-buddha, the tellers of his story had to keep him conscious throughout this journey. In this instance, the problem was easily fixed by adding an “as if” to their narrative. “It was,” they all said, “as if he fainted.” Later moments of unconsciousness would not prove so easily remedied.

The other major problem they faced in retelling this tale was not a matter of aligning the Karmapa’s tales with their paradigm, but rather aligning the two tales with each other. The first author to combine the two narratives in one was either the composer of this section of the Red Annals or Gtsug lag phreng ba in his Feast for Scholars, and both used the same gymnastic method of integration. Gtsug lag phreng ba’s version of this amalgamation reads:

After he passed beyond suffering (i.e., died) he instantly established bodies in Tuṣīta and other god realms. As soon as he created these appearances he was offered unlimited clouds of offerings, and this seems to have distracted him a little, (for) eight (earthly) days passed (without him noticing). Then, when this (heavenly) moment had passed, he gazed on his son-like disciples with great compassion and (re-entered) his corpse. (Shortly after this) it was purified (i.e., cremated). (Leaving it behind) he saw a land full of lamentations, and it was as if he became insensate with compassion. This encouraged him to think that to help wanderers, he needed to “enter a residence” (grong jug).

In order to fit with the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State’s narrative, this passage has the consciousness travel directly up to Tuṣīta where it is welcomed there by the gods. But then to fit with the Verse Liberation-Story’s narrative, it has the consciousness travel back to its recently abandoned body, re-enter it, see that it is about to be burnt, and leave it again. The long stay away from the deceased body is explained by citing the alternate temporalities of these two realms: what seemed like an instant in the god realms equals eight days passing on earth. In the context of a story that already involves much leaving and re-entering of bodies, it is perhaps unfair to suggest that Gtsug lag phreng ba’s solution to this narrative conundrum is inelegant. Within the paradigms set by Tibetan literary precedents and antecedents then, suffice to say that it is unusual and perhaps even

29 Robert Kritzer (2000:10) discusses Vasubandhu’s description of these various capacities in the in-between state. The second section of the Sublime Inner Meaning (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. Ja 308–360) gives an overview of a body’s development in the womb that includes this assertion.


31 Kun dga’ rdo rje (1961:94–95). The uncertain date of this composition makes it difficult to say for sure who came up with the combined narrative first, although as I describe in the second appendix, it is most probable that the Red Annals were composed first. The Lho rong Dharma History (1994:238) does not mention either story.

What this imperative to synchronise all versions of the tale does clearly indicate, however, is its importance to the later tradition.

In many ways this journey provides the continuity of presence between emanations that had been missing from even the previous descriptions of concatenate lives. Thus it almost represents a narrative substitute for the generational transference of life and essence, from parent to child. In the next section of the journey, this gifting of life takes centre stage, but as part of Rang byung rdo rje’s appeal to otherworldly authority, it is not his parents who pass on the life-force to him but a sky full of divine women: the landmark dākinis.

d) The Landmark Dākinis’ Heavenly Show

The Verse Liberation-Story describes this incident succinctly, saying simply that:

In the (in-between state) I saw the landmark (dākinis) who admonished me to be kind and to be born in Jambudvīpa. Through the in-between appearances they also granted me the empowerment of the sixty-four Cakrasamvara maṇḍalas. Then they sang verses of auspiciousness.

In the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, by contrast, most of the text is dedicated to the interaction between this group of divine women and the Karmapa consciousness. The main point of the narrative is to place the impetus for the Karmapa’s rebirth on these divine beings rather than his human mother and father, but in their first words, the “protector, landmark dākinis” (zung skyong ‘gro ma) turn the parental tables on the Karmapa consciousness, demanding he becomes a parent. “Take a human rebirth with time and chances,” they say to him, “protect the Buddha’s teachings, parent the six (types) of wanderers, the time has come, Samaya!”

For his part, the Karmapa consciousness begins the ensuing call-and-answer narrative with disbelief; not only is he disinclined to acquiesce to the proposition, but doubts the dākinis’ very existence. He says:

I thought (their appearance) was a faulty vision, and started trying to destroy the conceptualisation, but these celestial wanderers did not want to wander off. (Eventually) I replied to them:

You came here, but from where did you come? You are here, but when will you leave?

33 The stories of the ’das log are in some ways comparable here, but they develop much later and are usually presented as journeys into the bar do and back, not as part of the death process. They also often, but not exclusively, portray women’s journeys. See: Epstein (1982) and Cuevas (2008:21–54, 71–105).
35 Rang byung rdo rje (2006c:359). The expression at the end of this line, “Samaya” is Sanskrit transliterated into Tibetan script, and therefore I have not translated it.
But the landmark dākinīs are not that easily dissuaded. Instead of disappearing, they present their credentials as Tibet’s environmental representatives. Their tone is as combative and disrespectful as the Karmapa consciousness has been to them. They say:

We come from the depths of the human world,
we are the landmark dākinīs who protect the environment.
We do not need to scold you (for ourselves) human,
we scold you on behalf of the six (types) of wanderers!

Following this exhortation they introduce themselves individually, and as they do, they offer the Karmapa consciousness their “life-forces" (srog snying). The idea of “life-force", usually handed down from parents to children, is found throughout indigenous Tibetan traditions and is linked to the similar concept of bla, which refers to an individual’s own “subtle life essence”.38 Yet unlike many other non-Tibetan ideas of life-giving principles, in the Tibetan imagination, this substance is located both within the body and outside it, in environmental features like lakes, mountains or trees.39 This in turn links it to the non-human inhabitants of these environs and creates strong identifications—often presented as an extension of family lineages—between the individual, external sites and the deities that inhabit them.

This interconnected perception of the environment and the body means that in offering their life-force to the Karmapa consciousness the landmark dākinīs were not only offering him the force of all the internal and external places they represented, but creating a link between his body-to-be and these places, a link that he would depend on throughout his life in times of ill-health.

The first five dākinīs to offer their life-forces, “the five exceptional, principle landmark protectors” (zhing skyong gi gtsos mo chen mo Inga) are associated solely with his body.40 They are:

1. Descending Vajra, (Moving) Upwards (Rdo rje thog 'bebs ma) at the secret (place, i.e., his genitals);
2. Blazing Splendour Vajra (Rdo rje dpal 'bar ma) at the top of his head;
3. Very Strong Vajra (Rdo rje stobs mo che) at his extremities (legs);

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38 Barbara Gerke (2007:195) has described the role of bla in Tibetan culture and medicine in detail.
40 In this section here I am merely giving an overview of the identity of the landmark dākinīs. Chart four in the first appendix contains details about all twenty-five of them.
4. Powerful Victory Vajra (Rdo rje mthu rgyal ma), at his hands;
5. Roaring Conch Vajra (Rdo rje dung sgra ma), at his mouth.

Although each of these is said to represent an individual being, they can also obviously be read as a symbol of talents that the Karmapa consciousness’ person-to-be will possess. In an analogy that is repeated in his songs,41 for example, the first dākini, a normally “Descending Vajra” that in this instance is “(Moving) Upwards” from the genitals suggests the new Karmapa will have control over his sexuality and could therefore practise celibacy. The “Roaring Conch Vajra” at his mouth suggests eloquence. And the “Blazing Splendour Vajra” at the top of his head suggests charisma. Yet along with qualities that would seem necessary for a good monk and a good teacher, this group of dākinis are also said to endow him with an intense physicality that would at first seem less crucial for such a life: very strong legs and powerful hands. This description does, however, fit with the Indian Buddhist iconographic tradition of ascribing strength to monks,42 and more pragmatically would have been useful for his many journeys.

The other twenty of the twenty-five landmark dākinis are, by contrast, all positioned outside in the specifically Tibetan environment. They not only represent various classes of autochthonous Tibetan spirits, but also various layers of Rang byung rdo rje’s cultural history.

The group associated with the oldest historical layer of Tibet’s cultural geography is the “female protectors of the four doors” (sgo bzhi srung ba’i gtso mo bzhi). The image of four females guarding the cardinal gates of a maṇḍala is a common tantric trope,43 but it is not these four protectors that Rang byung rdo rje describes here. Instead he evokes a more obscure list of directional guards, only one of which I have been able to find described in a Tibetan text, and that within the Bon tradition.44 This deity is called the “Great Conch-Vajra of the Tāgshi (Tajik) Door” (Tag sha dung gi rdo rje sgo mo che), a name that suggests she was a protector of a westward pass out of Tibet into the land of the Tajiks, and therefore one of four protectors of border passes in the cardinal directions.45

The largest group within the twenty-five is, by contrast, more easily identified. It is the “twelve locality spirits” of Tibet (bstan ma bcu gnyis) who were tamed and made protectors of Buddhism by Padmasambhava on La stod’s Dpal (mo Phal) thang Plain, near to where Rang byung rdo rje would soon be born. As they present their credentials to Rang byung rdo rje in this story, this group of twelve is divided into three groups of four,

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41 Song No. 28 (GN 39–40; GB 215–216) Song that Determines the Secret Mantra Vajrayāna Exactly.
42 Powers (2009:24–65) is a thorough study of these masculinity discourses within the Indian Buddhist tradition.
43 See for example Yamaguchi (2002:25).
44 Bstan ’dzin rnam dag (2010:888) describes a gate called Dag sha dung gi sgo (“Dag-sha Conch Gate”). This gate is also mentioned in Martin (1999: 291, Note 33).
45 This idea reserves further support through the name of another gate, Gha gha rdo rje ral gri ma, from which Gha gha is sometimes used as an alternate name for the Tangut Kingdom, or Western Xia.
each representing a different class of indigenous spirit. The groups are:

a) The four “tamed demonesses” (bdud ’dul) who are associated with: the two mountains Jo mo Glang ma (Mt. Everest) and Phags ri (on the present day border with Bhutan); and the two lakes Yar ’brog mtsho and Gnam mtsho.

b) The four “tamed harmful spirits” (gdon ’dul) who are associated, respectively, with the three mountains Jo mo Gangs dkar, Ga rag and A myes rma chen and the lake Dwang ra g.yu mtsho.

And c) a group Rang byung rdo rje calls “the four mind-changers” (yid ’gyur), but are more usually known as the four sman mo spirits. As a group these four spirits are often associated with Mtsho sngon (Kokonor Lake; Qing Hai) in A mdo. But individually they are also sometimes associated with four mountainsides, one each near Se ra Monastery, Jo nang Monastery, the Nyal valley and Mt. Gnams lcags ’bar ba.

The last four of the twenty-five landmark dākinīs to come see Rang byung rdo rje were four out of five of the group usually known as the “five sisters of long-life” (tshe ring ma mched Inga), but here called the “four dharma protectors” (chos srung bzhi). All four/five of this group are associated with a mountain called Gangs mthon thing rgyal mo (Gauri Sankar) on the border of Tibet and Nepal. Although they too were reportedly tamed by Padmasambhava, they are most often associated with Mi la ras pa, who acted as their human consort.46 Their presence here therefore suggests another temporal layer of this cultural map that alludes to the later transmission and the new tantras. As the map in figure 4.1 shows, the geographic spread of these deities across the Plateau is also quite impressive.

All of the above spirits are all also both female and, in Rang byung rdo rje’s estimation, realised. His understanding that these are women with high spiritual authority is conveyed through the term he uses to describe them: dākinī (mkha’ ’gro; “traveller in space/sky”), which suggests that he considers them all to be powerful, otherworldly practitioners of tantra. The relationship he begins with the dākinīs on this occasion continues throughout his life. Despite his mutually respectful relationships with local male spirits, it is the dākinīs he meets in the various places to which he travels who act as his teachers and confidantes. These cross-gender relationships stand in stark contrast to his interactions in the human world. The humans he interacts with closely are almost always males; there are hardly any women in his story. This is one more regard in which Rang byung rdo rje’s experiences in the spiritual realm offer an alternate hierarchy to those

prevalent in the human realm.

This reversal of gendered relationships—and a glimpse into the processes of cultural map making—is evident in the next section of the text too, when a lone male makes an appearance. This being is Ber nag can (Black-coat), an emanation of the tantric deity Mahākāla (Mgon po nag chen) who is the personal protector of the Karmapas. But in this narrative, unlike in his other appearances throughout the text, he does not appear at the behest of the Karmapa, but rather to support the landmark dākinīs. What is more, he appears in tandem with another group of four women, who like him abide in shadows: the female protectors of the four “hidden lands” (sbras yul). The text reads:

(Then the dākinīs all said), “If we cannot convince you (to take rebirth), we will call up our many companions (to do it). Who will we call you may ask? We will call the dharma protector Ber nag can, and the four female, great, principal protectors of the four hidden lands. If we cannot convince you, they will by filling this world (with their presence) from the space of the dancing deities to the underground world of the nāgas.” This is what they said, and as I listened (to them speak) it happened. (Then they said), “Well then, our companions have arrived. Here are the four great women: (at the top) Vajra-satri; below her the virtuous Vajra Li, protector of children (Rdo rje bu skyong li btsun); below her, Vajra Waterfall, the singular sman mo (Rdo rje phu chu sman gcig ma); and below her Vajra Small Turquoise (Rdo rje g.yu chung ma). These are the four protectors of hidden lands, and with them is the dharma protector, Ber nag can. From the shadows, they (all) praise bodies that do not pass into nirvāṇa.”

The introduction of shadows and darkness into what had been a colourful vision foreshadows the stark change in atmosphere that occurs shortly after this when Rang byung rdo rje enters his mother’s womb. Moreover, this change in shade is not the only way that this introduction foreshadows his entrance into the womb; as will be discussed in more detail shortly, the name of the last protector of a hidden land, “Small Turquoise” or G.yu chung ma, is also his mother’s name. In this way, the lowest of the hidden lands is aligned with her, and more specifically her womb, towards which he is gradually progressing.

Along with this literary reading of the hidden-land protectors’ appearance, it should also be noted in parenthesis, however, that there might have been a historical reason for their presence in the tale. As both Geoff Childs and Abdol-Hamid Sardar-Afkhami have pointed out in their surveys of the hidden-land phenomenon, during Rang byung rdo rje’s time the idea was nascent, but particularly associated with the Kingdom of Mang yul gung thang, into which Rang byung rdo rje was about to be born. Thus, if the young Rang

47 This seems to be an archaic meaning for the Tibetan word khul, which makes little sense unless it means “convince” in this context. Tib. nged khyis khyed te ma khul na. rogs kyang mang du sbran no skad. rogs ci i tar sbron bgyis pas.
Figure 4.1 The Landmark Đākīnīs in Place.\textsuperscript{50}

Figure 4.2 The Region in which Rang byung rdo rje was Born.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} Background image taken from Google Earth. Place names added by the author.

\textsuperscript{51} Background image taken from Google Earth. Place names added by the author.
byung rdo rje had mentioned this meme in his recollection of the in-between state, it might have had a special resonance with his audience, suggesting that this low-caste child was conscious of other worlds of which adult elites were only slowly becoming aware.

This thesis is strengthened by two pieces of supporting evidence. First, the group of four female protectors described here are not mentioned again in later hidden-land literature, which suggests they were an elaboration on a nascent tradition. And second, the developing tradition of hidden-land literature in Mang yul gung thang placed a specific emphasis on familial lineage and gender, in which the lands were only supposed to be used by descendants of the royal family, who if not male should at least be virgins. This means that Rang byung rdo rje’s presentation, like much else within his narrative, completely reversed the otherwise described social order, in this case by anointing his low-caste mother as one of the hidden-lands’ protectors.

Another element of the story that inverts the perceived social order is the way that he speaks to these otherworldly beings. A casualness of expression pervades the conversation, and is most evident when he addresses all the beings in the vision after the hidden-lands’ protectors and Ber nag can arrive. Still unconvinced by their appearance and about their argument, Rang byung rdo rje replies to them abruptly:

Hearing (your words is like) being pierced by a chisel,
it is a rock, a missile hurled at my meditation.
Why don’t I see you disintegrating, cracking and fading away?
Are the six (types) of wanderers all happy and healthy?
(Of course not), so why do you all, their protectors, look so joyful?53

Eventually, after four more exchanges like this, he finally concedes that they are both real and right, and he will follow their advice by becoming human again. But before he agrees to this, he manages to convince them to find parents of the best “caste” or “type” (rigs), and grant him an “inconceivable celestial empowerment” into the “manḍala of the sixty-two deities of Cakrasamvara”. They do both, once again subverting the social order by describing the potter and his wife as high caste, and designating their son the holder of a highly prized spiritual lineage.

After granting the empowerment, the dākinīs then offer him “verses of auspiciousness” (bkra shis tshigs su bcad pa), which in the story represent their granting him qualities, but in literary terms enable the usually self-deprecating Rang byung rdo rje to speak of his own good qualities. The song is very long, but here are two verses to give a sense of it:

On the tongue, lotus, honey and

the words of poetry are pleasant;
whatever auspiciousness this lotus tongue has,
may this sacred providence prosper in you, right here, right now!

...Magic hands write letters, and various threads
create all that is needed and desired; [365]
whatever auspicious these magic hands have,
may it, this sacred providence prosper here in you, right now!55

e) Environmental Conception

After all these preparations and encouragement for Rang byung rdo rje to be born, right
towards its end, the narrative of the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State describes his
conception. In keeping with the tone set by the vision of the landmark dākinīs, this episode
too is described as an otherworldly event, this time using a combination environmental
and tantric imagery as an analogy for actual conception. It reads:

Precious rainbow roads of various colours (led to) the place where the human
body with free time and chances would be formed. (The dākinīs said:) “It is in Mang
yul, in providential Gung thang. The mother is the noble, providential G.yu chung
ma, who is said to live in front of a sacred site called Gangs zhur mo (Snowy Pig
Snout) Ridge. The father’s house of clear bindu is on the providential Om Plain, in
Rtsa phu rin chen ("the precious upper-valley of nāḍī") in front of Mehe ba gangs
(Snowy Tusks) Ridge. This is the (lower) river valley where the three upper valleys
meet; this is the birthplace of Mid la (Mi la ras pa), Rtsa rlung phu ("prāṇa and nāḍī
upper.") Valley. (It is between two mountains:) to the south is a lustrously clear
dark red mountain, and to the north is a glimmering white mountain. These are the
un-desired bodily frames."56

On one level, this passage describes a descent from the in-between state, which is loosely
aligned with Tuṣita, to the generally experienced geography of the area in which Rang
byung rdo rje was about to be born, in Southern Tibet (see figure 4.2). But in making this
journey, it also alludes to several other narratives to establish its and his authority.

The most easily distinguishable of these is the link that it draws between Rang byung
rdo rje and Mi la ras pa, by giving them the same birthplace. This link is further
strengthened in the Verse Liberation-Story by the suggestion that it was Mi la ras pa who
summoned him to the region while standing in “the centre of La stod’s Dpal thang
Plain”,57 which is on the other side of Bya lung Mountain from Rang byung rdo rje’s
birthplace in the Skyid grong Valley.

The much more prominent allusion in this passage, however, is in the links it makes

56 Rang byung rdo rje (2006c:365–366). The translation of the last line follows Gtse lag phreng ba
(2003:922–923), which reads: lho ri dmar smug mdangs gsal ba. byang ri dkar po'i mdog ldan na. In Rang
byung rdo rje (2006c:366) these two lines read: lho ri smug la dmar ba'i mdangs chags pa. byang ri dkar la
dmar ba'i mdangs dang ldan pa. There are mistakes in both these lines that mix the colours into two shades of
pink.
between his birthplace’s geography and the subtle-energy system—the nexus between mind and body that yogis’ practices manipulate—that develops in the womb. This subtle-energy system—another cultural map that Rang byung rdo rje assumes his audience understands—is found in both systems of tantric yoga and the Tibetan medical system. The variant permutations of these systems contain some differences, but they also all share the common elements to which he refers in this passage. These include the description of the subtle energy system based on a complex of channels, called nāḍī in Sanskrit and rtsa in Tibetan, through which travels subtle energy called prāṇa in Sanskrit and rlung in Tibetan. The most important, central channel (Skt. avadhūti; Tib. dbu ma) sits near or in58 the spinal column, passing through centres of energy called “wheels” (Skt. cakra; Tib. 'khor lo), but usually remaining empty. Two other channels flank it: the lalana (rkyang ma), which is white and through which subtle-energy travels downwards; and the rasanā; (ro ma), which is red and through which subtle-energy travels upwards. As Frances Garrett has noted:

The upper tips of these two channels connect at the nostrils, and it is through these channels that ordinary respiration travels. The bottom ends of these two channels approach the lower tip of the central channel, but ordinarily they do not touch the central channel. It is the aim of many advanced tantric practices to cause the ends of the right and left channels to touch the central channel so that the respiration may enter the central channel during the course of contemplative practice.59

The last element of the subtle body is usually called bindu in Sanskrit and thig le in Tibetan. These are red and white reproductive substances, which cause conception when the male white substance—associated with sperm and always called thig le—merges with the red, female substance, which is also sometimes referred to as “blood” (khrag). Each being possesses both white and red bindu, having received the white bindu from their father and the red bindu from their mother at conception. Following conception, these two elements then migrate in opposite directions within the body—white upwards and red downwards—readying themselves to act as a basis for new life if the opportunity arises. As Garret has also noted, these substances are sometimes aligned with the bla, or the life-force that the landmark dākinis offered the Karmapa consciousness.60

This link between foetal development and the layout of these channels, winds and life-forces means that tāntrikas often pay particular attention to the processes of conception as it helps them map the channels of their own bodies. Rang byung rdo rje included a chapter on foetal development in his most famous work, the Sublime Inner Meaning.61 for example, and also composed a song to aid his student’s memorisation of the process. An

58 As Garrett (2008:64) explains, the position of this channel varies according to the tradition.
59 Garrett (2008:64).
extract from the song's first section suggests how complicated and essential to yoga practice was this knowledge, and therefore how his description of the section of his journey between lives was being framed within already-developed concepts. It reads:

In the beginning, when we form this body,
the white and red, the entities of sun and moon,
prāṇa and the in-between consciousness,
conjoin with conditional ignorance and
form the body of five manifest elements.
This is the first thing (to remember), the way of the vajra.

As the first four weeks pass,
every day, two hundred nāḍī develop,
and within twelve months62
there are 72 000, and for
every hundred there are twenty extra.
There is (also) one that has thirty-two.
This is the second thing (to remember), the way of the nāḍī.

It begins from the prāṇa of space, from which
comes five times five, which makes twenty-five;
Then 21 600, from which
six hundred and seventy-five support
completely pure wisdom.
This is the third thing (to remember), the way of the prāṇa.

Semen and blood, white and red gnosis,
separate into two and the final (reality)
arises, entering from above and below.
The consciousness of wanderers
is that which remains in the centre.
This is the fourth thing (to remember), the way of the bindu.

The root, the ground-of-all consciousness,
the aggregates, the elements, the constituents,
the seeds, the roots of all are the
one hundred and ten aware preconceptions
that are conjoined with sahaja (innate wisdom).
This is the fifth thing (to remember), the way of the mind.

The collation of all these five ways of being
pervades all, it does not miss an atom.
Those who want to enter into and
travel on the Vajrayāna
need to practise in these (ways).63

While this description is relatively straightforward, his allusions to this process by way of environmental imagery of this section of the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State are more obtuse. At the centre of this analogy, his parents are transformed from beings into

62 360 days.
63 Song No. 45 (GN 63–67; GB 235–238) Song of the Vajrayāna.
geographical sites. His mother, the “noble, providential G.yu chung ma”—who as I have already mentioned is aligned here with the protector of the lowest hidden-land—is positioned “in front of the sacred site, Gangs zhur mo”, which is the actual name of a jagged mountain ridge, rising to one side of the Rtsha phu Valley, that runs off one side of the main Skyid grong Valley. The father, represented as a house made of “clear bindu”, sits “on a plain in the providential land of Om (Om lung)” in front of the “Snow Tusks” on the other side of Rtsha phu Valley.

After aligning the parents with this geography, he then changes the name of Rtsha phu Valley (Rtso phu), which literally means “upper valley of nādi”, to Rtso rlung phu Valley, or “upper valley of nādi and prāṇa” to suggest more explicitly the development of a subtle-body. What is more, this place is described as “the river valley where three upper-valleys meet”, which could also be read as an analogy for the place in the subtle body where the three channels, and therefore the red and white elements meet.

As Berounský has previously pointed out, the text then represents the red and white bindu more directly by framing this whole event between a maroon-coloured mountain to the south and a white-coloured mountain to the north. But in order to make sure no one reading or hearing this story could mistake this as an analogy for an ordinary conception, the two mountains are then described as “undesired”. This suggests that unlike most beings, who are drawn into the processes of birth by their attraction to copulating parents, Rang byung rdo rje joined his consciousness with these elements without a desirous impulse. At this stage of the journey, at least, he presents himself as being in control, describing the last stage of this journey to the womb thus:

As they explained this (the process of conception), (the ḍākinīs) created a rainbow of nine colours that became intensely (bright). Then they all left on the rainbow as I watched. I travelled (alone) on (the rainbow in the opposite direction) to a crystal palace with a sky-door, four bright white sides, and a dark base. (As I descended), rainbows (moved) freely on all sides.

This description of a crystal palace with a sky-door and four bright white sides evokes an image very similar to that of his father’s bindu house, but as he enters it through the sky-door, the tone and colour of his story change dramatically.

f) The Problems with Wombs

Unlike his very colourful, controlled sojourn in the in-between state, Rang byung rdo rje’s

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64 This refers to a Tibetan place name as opposed to the Indic syllable om.
66 Berounský (2010:28) reads the Tibetan phrase used here, ma dgod 'dod lus kyi sgrom bu to mean that the body was "unneeded" or "redundant". This makes less sense to me than the suggestion it was not desired, as the desiring of form is a fundamental aspect of becoming in the Buddhist tradition.
description of life in the womb is much less appealing and much less controlled. In the *Liberation-Story of the In-Between State* he described his entrance into this space like this:

As soon as I entered the house waves of passionate blood were aroused and I watched (the dākinīs) flee... Then it all went dark and I fainted. As I gradually came around, all was dark and I (felt) a heavy weight. I was whirling in a small space. Even as I remember it now, I feel I am spinning in a small space. When my perception became clear, sometimes it was as if I was tossed by waves, sometimes squashed by mountains, sometimes burnt by heat, sometimes frozen by cold. I was confused. There was no air. This is the suffering of the afflictions, and even now when I think of it the wind rises in my heart.

Just in case his audience has any doubts, he repeats the story a bit more succinctly in the *Verse Liberation-Story*, saying:

(Then) I travelled down a path of a myriad, intermingled rainbows to somewhere near Snye nam. There was a crystal palace, which had a jewelled staircase, I thought, “I should stay there”, and it appeared I would, but—Kye ma!—the darkness of the womb is a dark family lineage, and abiding karma is (a cause of) great suffering for wanderers. Powerless, I lost consciousness and dwelt in afflictions.

In choosing to describe the womb in this way, Rang byung rdo rje was adhering to another well-used narrative. Similar descriptions of an in-between consciousness entering what they perceive to be a house, only to suffer in a womb, can be found in Indian texts of the *Abhidharma* tradition, and perhaps more influentially in this case, in Sgam po pa’s work *An Ornament for Precious Liberation (Thar pa rin po che’i rgyan)*.

In concurring with these descriptions of the womb, Rang byung rdo rje again demonstrated his predilection for precedent, but from the perspective of later storytellers he had picked the wrong precedent. The first problem they had with his description was that once again, in both retellings of this tale, he described himself losing awareness, and this time the context did not allow the elision of this momentary lapse through the addition of the phrase “as if”. The second associated and more difficult problem they had with this passage was its very un-Buddha-like experience of suffering and uncleanness.

To resolve both issues at once, later writers created a commentary that changed the meaning of the section by suggesting it was an example of his “skilful means” (Skt.

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68 This description is foreshadowed in the *Verse Liberation-Story* by his doubts about his contemporary wombs, stating that, “the wombs of these dark times are so very defiled” (Rang byung rdo rje; 2006c:362).
70 See figure 4.2.
72 Robert Kritzer (2000:10) discusses Vasubandhu’s description of these various capacities in the in-between state.
73 Sgam po pa (2000:74–80) translated in Gyaltsen (1998:103–106). These and other descriptions of the womb are usually included within a list of all possible sufferings that a human can experience. They approach this space from the point of view of its inhabitant, the foetus, rather than the mother. Indeed, as Kritzer (2004) has pointed out in relation to the *Abhidharma* literature, their approach to women’s bodies is misogynist.
upāyakauśalya; Tib. thabs mkhas). This framing commentary said Rang byung rdo rje had only described the womb in this way to assist those less realised than him, who would experience wombs like this. In his reality by contrast, they suggested, his sojourn in the womb was exactly the same as Śākyamuni Buddha’s womb stay, which had been described in the Lalitasvara Sūtra.\textsuperscript{74} Rather than suffering, like the Buddha he had been living blissfully in a crystal palace. Gsug lag phreng ba, for example, explained away Rang byung rdo rje’s description in the following way:

Thus it says in the Liberation Story of the In-Between State, but to a few of his purer students he said that his mother’s womb appeared to him naturally as a blissful crystal palace and that he had (merely said otherwise) to aid many beings.\textsuperscript{75}

This was not, however, the only uterine controversy with which these storytellers had to contend. The other major aspect of this episode they had to rework was the short timespan between Karma Pakshi’s generally accepted death date and Rang byung rdo rje’s birth. As I mentioned earlier, this does not arise as a problem in Rang byung rdo rje’s own narrative, as he described himself leaving Karma Pakshi’s body one full year before his own birth, with plenty of time to pass through the various stages of the in-between state and gestation. But as the reincarnation tradition developed after his death, and the discourse of reincarnation shifted more from emanation to rebirth, the ambiguities of this episode became less acceptable.

Solving this narrative puzzle, it seems, was the most difficult of all the later adaptations of the tale, and eventually required the creation of an alternate description of his time in utero. Such a description was purportedly given by Rang byung rdo rje to 0 rgyan pa at their first meeting, but none of the early liberation-stories of either participant include it.\textsuperscript{76} The earliest version is in Gsug lag phreng ba’s retelling,\textsuperscript{77} in which, in response to a question from 0 rgyan pa regarding the shortness of his stay in the womb, Rang byung rdo rje says the following:

This is how (I did it). For the first four months, a part of my ground-of-all entered into (the foetus), which meant that I projected the form through “the fivefold manifestation of awakening” (mgon byang lnga), (associated) with the period of “the causal vajra-holder” (rgyu rdo rje ’dzin pa). Later, the entirety of my ground-of-all-consciousness entered (the foetus) and I actualised the state of co-emergence (sahaja). At this point, I was encouraged by the song of the landmark dākinīs to make apparent “the resultant vajra-holder” (’bras bu rdo rje ’dzin pa), which is the

\textsuperscript{74} Powers (2009:29) discusses this from the point of view of discourses on Indian masculinities. Phyllis Granoff (2001:92 note 38) discusses this image from the point of view of artistic representations of the Buddha’s life.

\textsuperscript{75} Gsug lag phreng ba (2003:918).

\textsuperscript{76} Descriptions of meetings between these two people that do not contain this conversation can be found in: Rang byung rdo rje (2006c:368), Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:380) and Bsod nams ’od zer (1976:248–249).

\textsuperscript{77} This discussion is not included in the Red Annals, and as I explain in appendix two, this is one of the reasons I would place the composition of this inserted section of the text before the composition of A Feast for Scholars.
complete construction of the three beings (i.e., the three bodies of a buddha). According to the description, this is notably different from his other narratives of the in-between state and the womb in two distinct ways. First, there is a profound shift in literary tone: while the other descriptions of the journey are generally descriptive and sometimes allegorical, this passage is almost entirely technical. Moreover, in this technicality it is also imprecise, which is very unlike Rang byung rdo rje.

As other scholars have noted, Rang byung rdo rje’s approach to the ground-of-all consciousness (Skt. ālayavijñāna; Tib kun gzhi rnam shes), the most basic level of consciousness, was a pivotal element of his presentation of Buddhism, and in this presentation he goes to great lengths to assert its non-duality. In one of his songs, he explains it this way:

The ground-of-all is the base of both samsāra and nirvāṇa—when you do not realise it, you are in samsāra, when you realise it, it is the Tathāgata’s mind. This is an expression of the ground-of-all’s nature.

Given his presentation of the ground-of-all consciousness as basic and pervading, it is therefore passing strange that here he is speaking about its “parts.”

Moreover, this unexplained technical imprecision is not the only way that this description departs from his usual modes of expression. It is also unusual in that the terms used in the passage to describe his birth are those that describe the birth of a fully-awakened buddha, a personal status he explicitly rejects in other places, even casting doubt on his capacity to attain awakening in time to manifest as the future buddha Śīnuha.

The first of these self-elevating terms is the “fivefold manifestation of awakening” (mngon byang Inga , a short form of mngon par rdzogs par byang chub Inga; Skt. pañca-abhisambodhi) to describe the process of foetal development. This was the process used by the buddha Vairocana to create a buddha-body in the Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra, and in this text, in turn, it is said to follow “the manner of (bodily development) outlined in the Tattva-samgraha Tantra”. In drawing this parallel the passage indicates that the foetus was the in-utero—or in-crystal palace—body of a fully-awakened buddha. A similar assertion is made later in the passage when he says that his in-utero body was “the resultant vajra-holder” (bras bu rdo rje ’dzin pa). This term is a synonym for the

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78 Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:918).
79 As Brunnhölzl (2009) and Schaeffer (1995) have discussed, this approach to the ground-of-all consciousness was not shared by all Tibetan lineages or even all those within the Karma bk’a’ brgyud tradition.
80 Song No. 63 (GN 97–98; GB 262–263) Song that Determines the Ground-of-All. This song has also been translated by Karl Brunnhölzl (2009:201), Kurtis Schaeffer (1995:174) and Klaus-Dieter Mathes (2008:74).
rupakaya (gzugs sku) of a buddha—the combined sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya—when it is achieved through tantric practices. The association with the Buddha is then made even more explicit later in the narrative when O rgyan pa’s entourage, the audience for this section of narrative, exclaims: “In India only Śākyamuni and in Tibet only you are known to have relied upon a stainless womb”.

iii. Birth-Stories

Whether it was a crystal palace or a confining, confusing jail, both versions of the story at least agree that the womb was only a temporary stop on Rang byung rdo rje’s journey between lives, and sooner or later he got out. Yet while they agree on this simple fact, some of the details of his birth are again disputed. The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State ends just before his birth, but the Verse Liberation-Story describes it in some detail (for its style), stating that:

In the first month of the monkey year (1283), on the eighth day, as the moon waxed, near the sacred, exalted one’s (rje btsun dam pa gyi) place, I was born in accordance with apparent prophecy. I do not remember the pain of birth, but my faculties were not impaired and my mind did not waver. When I saw the moon, it made me happy. I could speak, but did not, remaining (as silent as) a jewel.

This passage at least fixes his birth date; he was born on the eighth day of the first Tibetan month—early spring—in the year 1283, but all the other details of this passage have been interpreted variously. His place of birth has been moved; his reaction to the moon has changed; and his decision not to speak is contradicted. What is more, although not directly mentioned in this passage, the lowly social status of his parents has also been gradually reversed over the centuries.

a) Place(s) of Birth

Rang byung rdo rje’s various places of birth are perhaps the most curious of these changes, and arise again from ambiguity in his phrasing. The ambiguity begins during his variant journeys to birth in his two self-penned liberation-stories. Following their

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83 As these claims so directly contradict Rang byung rdo rje’s statements and are not found in the early versions of the story, the question then becomes, from where was this, the largest un-sourced section of later narratives, derived? One answer to this may be found in the list of non-extant texts at the beginning of A legs gdan dkar’s Collected Works (in Rang byung rdo rje 2006a Vol. Ka:42). In it there is a text descriptively titled The Liberation-Story that Details What the Precious One Rang byung rdo rje Said in Bu tra, La tò to Guru Ō rgyan pa When He Was Six Years Old (Rin po che rang byung rdo rje dgung lo drug bzhes pa'i dus su La stod Pu tmar bla ma U rgyan pa'i drung du gsung pa'i rnam thar). A curious thing about this text, however, is that neither Gtusg lag phreng ba (2003:946) nor Si tu Pan chen (2004:401) include a text with this name in their lists of sources for Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story. This suggests that it might at one stage have been lifted from another work, or that someone else may have noticed this was the only section of his later narrative without any earlier source and decided it must therefore be attributable to a non-extant text; the specificity of its title giving credence to this last suggestion.

84 Gtusg lag phreng ba (2003:927).

combined narrative, the first place mentioned in either of them is Snye nam (modern day Gnya' lam), which the Verse Liberation-Story says his mother’s womb was “just near”. Later, this same text goes on to say that he was encouraged to take rebirth by a vision of “the yogi Mid la (Mi la ras pa) (standing) in the centre of La stod’s Dpal thang Plain” (see Figure 4.2), which lies to the north-east of Snye nam and is nearer to Rtsha phu Valley.

As has already been established, both this text and the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State describe in detail how he was then conceived in the Rtsha phu Valley, the birthplace of Mi la ras pa, at the base of Gangs zhur mo Range. But the expression that the Verse Liberation-Story uses to describe this conception (skye ba'i tshul bzung; literally, “hold the method of birth”) describes both conception and birth, or just conception, leaving the place of his birth somewhat ambiguous. The next time a place is mentioned in the Verse Liberation-Story the phrasing is also equivocal. Describing his place of birth it reads: “near where the Rje btsun dam pa lived”. The first key word here is rje btsun, a title meaning “venerable one” that is often used to describe Mi la ras pa. The second key word, dam pa, which means “sacred”, could be used here as a descriptor of Mi la ras pa. The sentence could mean “near to where the sacred Rje btsun lived”, which is to say in the Rtsha phu Valley.

This word dam pa is also, however, a key part of the name of another revered teacher famous in this region, the Indian siddha Pha dam pa sangs rgyas (d.1117), who lived for a long time on the other side of the Dpal thang Plain, two hundred and eight kilometres (according to Google Maps) from the Rtsha phu Valley, at Ding ri glang skor. Rang byung rdo rje’s father was a practitioner of the tradition Pha dam pa sangs rgyas established in Tibet, the “Pacification” (Zhi byed) lineage, and one of Rang byung rdo rje’s early visions is set at his temple. This combination of events led later commentators to read the line as suggesting he was born “near to where the venerable (Pha) dam pa (sangs rgyas) lived”.

Although it is not definitive, there may be a clue to solving this impasse in the re-packaged version of the Verse Liberation-Story found in Mkha’ spyod dbang po’s Collected Works. There, the sentence reads, “I was born in that place, near where the Rje btsun bla ma resided”. This one word change omits any mention of Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, and therefore suggests that he was born in Rtsha phu, near Mi la ras pa’s home. If this rendering represents an earlier version of the text, it also suggests that one of two things

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89 This system and its founder are discussed in detail in David Molk (2008).
91 See for example: Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:924) and Si tu Pan chen (2004:356). But as Si tu Pan chen was from Kham, and he refers to Rang byung rdo rje’s place of birth from that distance as “somewhere near Ding ri”, perhaps his geographical vagueness is understandable.
happened to the version contained within Rang byung rdo rje’s Collected Works: either this passage was changed to fit an oral tradition that held Rang byung rdo rje’s birth place to be near Ding ri glang skor, or this one-word change in the text led to a change in his perceived birth place. Either way, what it does highlight is that as itinerant workers Rang byung rdo rje’s parents were never particularly associated with any one place.

b) Of Mothers and Moons

Along with a possible relocation of his birthplace, the later versions of the tale also add another, lunar-centred, narrative to this birth-story. As Gtseg lag phreng ba tells the tale, for example:

His mother and father travelled to near Ding ri glang skor, where they stayed at his maternal aunt’s house. (It was there) on the eighth night of the first month of the male, wood, monkey year (1284) that he was born on the building’s roof, without harming his mother.

As soon as he was born, he squatted, wiped his face with his hands and looking at the moon said, “It is the eighth day of the month”.

His maternal aunt was unable to bear this. She said, “It is very wrong for a child to speak as soon as it is born!” His parents told him this happened as they (quickly) left (the aunt’s house). From this time on, he understood that the beings of dark times are naturally stupid, and even though he could speak, walk and do other things, he should pretend he could not.93

Like the story of the corpse entry, in the main these additions elaborate on the tensions already present in Rang byung rdo rje’s tale rather than reformulating them. In particular, they emphasise his already-described dual existence as a child and a realised being. They also emphasise his reaction to the moon, changing it from a mere delight in the experience to the ability to judge the day of the month merely by looking at it. As the moon also plays an important role in the story of his death, this might also be done for dramatic effect rather than the need to fit into any latterly developed paradigms.

The only exception to this cohesion is the one slight adjustment that is made to help fit the story more easily into later notions of his status: the elision of Rang byung rdo rje’s comment that he did “not remember the pain of birth, but (his) faculties were not impaired, and (his) mind did not waver”.94 Rather than include what could be a suggestion that he had another moment of unconsciousness in his journey, the later redactors substitute the claim that his mother was “not harmed” by the birth. This is yet another example of Rang byung rdo rje’s own assertion of moderate realisation (as defined in the Abhidharma tradition) being usurped by further alignments between his and the historical Buddha’s birth story; just as the Buddha’s mother did not suffer when her child was born,

93 Gtseg lag phreng ba (2003:924).
94 This comment is made in Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:379). It is not included in Gtseg lag phreng ba (2003:924).
so Rang byung rdo rje's mother too had a pain-free birth. 

**c) A Potter’s Life**

The other major change that was made to Rang byung rdo rje’s birth-story over the years was the social elevation of his birth parents. Although he does not mention their social position in his liberation-stories, he does talk about it in one of his songs, saying: "To subdue my ego, I was born the son of a potter." 

Potters certainly did not have a high status in Tibetan society, and from all early accounts Rang byung rdo rje's parents also seem to have been landless, itinerant workers, which would have added to their difficult situation. Their lowly position is also mentioned in O rgyan pa's liberation-story, the Lho rong Dharma History and the Red Annals, but from Gtsug lag phreng ba's version of his story penned in the early sixteenth century his parents receive a social upgrade. From that point onwards, in all later redactions, his father is described as a tantric practitioner, a tântrika (sngags pa), rather than identified by his livelihood. By this stage, as the liberation-stories of later Karmapas attest, the recognition of a child as the Karmapa automatically bestowed a high social status on his family, and the idea that they would have been anything other than exalted does not fit later paradigmatic developments in the reincarnation tradition.

**iv. Childhood Dreams and Other Omens**

After his birth, the next stage of Rang byung rdo rje's story is dedicated to the establishment of his spiritual qualities in spite of his infancy. This was a difficult task at this stage of the reincarnation tradition’s development, as the narrative precursors for it were even scarcer than those for the journey between lives. Not even the members of the Karmapa body-mâlā had left detailed records of their early childhoods. Dus gsum mkhyen pa's stories follow the general siddha life-story pattern and skip from place and family of birth to embarkation on the spiritual path. Pre-adulthood is more important in Karma Pakshi's story, but most of the episodes describe his adolescence, after he meets his

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95 It should be noted, however, that this change of perspective from the reporting of Rang byung rdo rje’s experiences to those of his mother does not provide any detail of her experience, but rather very directly follows the tropes associated with the birthing of realised beings in the Buddhist tradition. These are explored in some depth in a recent study by Reiko Ohnuma (2012:66-85) of the various images of mothers within Indian Buddhist discourse.

96 Song No. 117: 25 (GN 176-177; GT 393-394).

97 The role of potters in culturally similar communities in Ladakh is described in Saraswati (1967:69-76).

98 Bsdod nams 'od zer (1976:248) says a potter, his wife and child come to visit O rgyan pa. Tshe dbang rgyal (1994:238) says his father "was a bodhisattva from the market caste" (khrom pa'i rigs). Kun dga' rdo rje (1981:96) says his father pursued a "modest livelihood". This last description is yet another reason why I would place the composition of this insertion into the Red Annals before the composition of Gtsug lag phreng ba's A Feast for Scholars.


100 This high status is taken for granted, for example, in the liberation-stories of the Karmapas recorded in 'Jam dbyangs tshul khrims (1997).

teacher and primary conduit for recognition, Spom brag pa (1170?-1249).\(^{102}\) What is more, the other major life-story model for Rang byung rdo rje was not helpful either; the tale of the Buddha's early life was so different from his own that there was virtually no common ground between the two experiences.

Instead, Rang byung rdo rje's story pieces together fragmentary allusions to the stories of other gifted children with his own "dreamlike" memories. His ability to read and write at an early age and his propensity to experience visions, for example, are described along with more personal qualities like his astute social observations, his skill in composition, and his ability to remember past lives.\(^{103}\)

While it is relatively easy to segment this tale into its elements—noting those parts that reflect earlier traditions, those that are specific to Rang byung rdo rje's own story, and the links that shape these elements into a narrative—there is another less tangible element to his tale that nonetheless profoundly affects it. This is the simple fact that in order for this potter's son to convince his diverse audience he was the reincarnation of a revered, rich, powerful, aristocratic miracle worker—one who had stood up to Qubilai Khan—he must have been a very impressive child. Notwithstanding the support he received from his father, and the coincidences of visions and spirit interventions that mark each stage of his developing career, his story only makes sense if he was extraordinary.\(^{104}\) Indeed, while these conditions might have helped his cause, they also rely on his extraordinariness to make sense. The beneficent visions he received were the result of his own visionary imagination, and his lowborn father's claims would not have been believed were his child

\(^{102}\) Tshe dbang rgyal (1994:235). This skip in narrative is also described in Manson (2009:31).

\(^{103}\) There is an interesting comparison to be made between these requirements as described in Rang byung rdo rje's story and the requirements of young recognised reincarnates today. The present situation has been described in some detail and with great empathy by Elijah Ary (2012), who is both a recognised reincarnate himself and a Western, university-trained scholar. He describes of this discourse as presented today reads: "All these actions (telling stories, encouraging emulation, and discouraging behavior deemed unbecoming of a master's reincarnation) help reinforce young Tulkus' identification with their predecessors. They are literally expected to behave just like these great masters of yore. But this also implies that as children, they are expected and continually encouraged to emulate and equal someone who is already a learned, "mature", and wise adult" (Ary 2012:421).

\(^{104}\) As Benjamin Bogin (2013) has recently pointed out, perhaps one of the easiest ways to understand this phenomenon of extraordinary children in the Tibetan tradition is through the idea of child prodigies, which is to say that perhaps these elements of the reincarnate discourse in Tibetan society are a reflection of the more widely noted child-prodigy phenomenon. While this idea needs to be developed more, it does seem particularly pertinent in this case, which is notable in that it was not constructed within the bounds of a developed tradition like the one Ary (2012) describes. Of particular interest in this regard are the correlations between the descriptions of Rang byung rdo rje as a young man and the research into the evolutionary underpinnings of the child-prodigy phenomena by Larry R. Vandervert (2009). This research suggests that child prodigies have developed a specific capacity for memory that enables them to recall systems very easily, which therefore explains why they often flourish in fields such as mathematics, music and language. Vandervert (2009:18) links this development to what he calls the "accumulation of rule-based knowledge" that occurred with the development of agriculture that led, in turn, to an "expansion of the cerebellum". This is particularly pertinent to the descriptions of Rang byung rdo rje as a young child, as many of the extraordinary details in his storytelling and visions reflect his understanding of knowledge systems. Moreover, he and other Tibetan reincarnates are often praised for their extraordinary memorisation skills.
not perceptibly exceptional.\textsuperscript{105}

\textbf{a) Seeing Things}

In his liberation-stories, one of the key indicators of Rang byung rdo rje's specialness was his visions, which according to his own recollection he began experiencing and describing at a very early age. Like most memories of this early period, these visions emphasise the split between his humble outward life and his intensely vivid inner life. At one point, for instance, he writes:

This is the way I stayed until I was five years old. Outside I behaved and lived like a child, but inside I knew all appearances were dreamlike, and even my dreams arose as pure visions. One night in particular, in a dream, (I saw) my own body sitting cross-legged in a crystal palace on a throne with a back curtain, from which shone out a five-coloured light. (Another time, I flew) like a bird into the centre of the sky. (In these visions) I could go everywhere. (At another time), multitudes of demigods came to make offerings and supplications to me.\textsuperscript{106}

Amidst this consistently rich, spiritual life, two specific visions he experienced and articulated as a child helped build his reputation more than the rest. The first happened on a visit to the main temple at Ding ri glang skor when he was four.\textsuperscript{107} As he recalls this event:

Another time, when we (Rang byung rdo rje and his parents) went to make general offerings at (Ding ri) glang skor, it appeared as if rainbow colours came out of (Pha) dam pa's statue, and this light dissolved into me. After that, my father taught me the Pacifying (lineage of yoga; Zhi byed) from the Sō tradition, and the five special transmissions of the tantras.\textsuperscript{108}

Although it may seem to be a straightforward remembrance of a childhood vision, this description again gave Rang byung rdo rje a way to describe indirectly some of his own qualities. It suggests, for instance, that not only did he experience the vision, but he was able to articulate it so clearly that it encouraged his father to teach him, at some stage before the age of four, a complicated philosophical and meditational system based on the Prajñāpāramitā, or "perfection of wisdom" tradition.\textsuperscript{109} It also suggests that he was able to listen and understand these teachings.

The other special vision he had during this early period occurred when he accompanied

\textsuperscript{105} What is also intriguing about the coincidence of this story is its dependence on the match between Rang byung rdo rje's talents and the expectations of his community. He was not only a gifted child, but he was gifted in ways that were both cherished within his society and not specifically associated with any one social group. In other words, he had a talent for Buddhist practice and communication, which benefited all, rather than for example governmental systems, which were skills practiced only by and for prescribed classes in society.


\textsuperscript{107} In the text it says that he was five years old, but as Tibetans describe new-borns as being one year old, I have deducted this year from his age.


\textsuperscript{109} Again, this system and its founder are discussed in detail in David Molk (2008).
his parents on pilgrimage to Byams sgrin Temple, at the other end of the Skyid grong Valley from Rtsha phu. This temple, which was reportedly built during the time of the Empire as a “taming temple”, contained a venerated statue of the buddha Avalokiteśvara, the Ārya-vati-zangpo ('Phags pa ba ti bzang po) that was said to have manifested from a sandalwood tree near the border of India and Nepal. The story of the young Rang byung rdo rje’s interaction with this statue is described in his own words very simply, as follows:

When I visited the Ārya in Skyid grong, I was inspired by Avalokiteśvara and developed a vast happiness at the thought of helping others. This is the sacred compassion that holds all dear.

This vision too helped to establish his reputation as a special child.

b) “Hear These Words of Mine!”

Along with these visions, another element of his early childhood tale that helped establish his credentials was his academic acumen and erudition. His and all other versions of his tale describe his ability to read and write without being taught and his ability to understand texts after hearing them described or read once. Many of these descriptions had already been used in earlier liberation stories, including that of his predecessor, Karma Pakshi. But two of these literary episodes are peculiar to his story, both involving the composition of songs. The most well-known of these songs is not found in his self-penned texts, but is repeated within most later redactions of his story, along with a description of its performance. Gtsug lag phreng ba’s version of this episode reads thus:

One day, when he was performing equanimity as a three-year-old, he asked for some black felt to be made into a hat. Then he put on this small, black hat, and seated on a throne of stones began introducing the other children to the three bodies. But before he did this, he recited (the following song):

This play of appearances is illusory; 
a trick of the eye, like a rainbow.
It appears true but is empty. I realise this, (and) 
have compassion for you children who do not.

According to Gtsug lag phreng ba, this performance was witnessed by others and became

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110 Discussed in Peter Aufschnaiter’s (1976:175-189) pre-1959 survey of the area. The cult and history of this statue are also described in depth in Franz-Karl Ehrhard’s (2004) study of texts relating to it.

111 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:379-380). In subsequent retellings of this tale, the coincidence of one who had come to be perceived as Avalokiteśvara receiving a vision of the same deity provides the redactors with too good an opportunity to pass by. In their retellings, the links between the young child and the statue are therefore developed, and rather than experiencing inspiration in its presence, he sees the statue as a direct manifestation of the deity, and therefore a reflection of his own, true being (Gtsug lag phreng ba 2003:926 and Si tu Pañ chen 2004:358).


113 Schaeffer (2009:7) remarks on the general importance of learning reading and writing at a young age by saying: “Like reading, scribal work could be taken as a sign of intellectual mastery gained over the course of lifetimes.”

part of the discourse that helped establish his reputation. Yet it is not included within his collection of mgur, which by contrast includes another song he is said to have composed a little later, aged five. It reads:

Kye Ma! From samsāra’s ocean the stormy waves of inevitable grasping (roll in).
May the sun, the samādhi of great gnosis, dry them all up.

In unworthy times like these, there are no great beings still alive, and those who wish to help are very rare.
In these times, may you gaze on us compassionately.

These are dark (times) for the Buddha’s teachings:
dhārmikas behave like Mongols,
mountain folk come down to town,
yogis do farm work, (and so-called) spiritual friends trick people.

Kye ma! These are unworthy times, and in these dark times, all great beings must hear these words of mine!
As the Bhagavān’s teachings say:
“How can arousing experience be anything but excellent?”

Looking at subsidiary perspectives may still be looking, but if you are looking, why not look at the sūtra-piṭaka?
Offering obsequies at banquets may still be making an offering, but if you make an offering, why not make it to the three jewels?
Teaching your entourage useless things may still be teaching, but if you are teaching, why not teach the sacred gurus’ words?
Then at least the wealth and fame you achieve in this life will help you arouse experiences in the future!

In short, if you leave behind all visions of this world, you are well on your way. Those who practise dharma from the heart do whatever they do without concern (for praise).
In whichever times (they live), through their exquisite love and compassion for all wanderers without exception, they work to set them on the paths of the three vehicles.

This is clearly a very sophisticated song for a five- or four-year-old to have composed. Even if, as is likely, the person who scribed it enhanced its phrasing, it still includes several image constructions and a level of social criticism that would be, to say the least, unusual for one this young.

Yet, intriguingly, the song includes several elements in common with Rang byung rdo

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rje's adolescent compositions and the narrative of the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, thus suggesting his authorship, or more likely co-authorship. In common with his adolescent compositions, for example, this song includes social criticism that is based upon the misplacement of social groups—"mountain folk com(ing) down to town"—and the repetitive use of "if... then" (verb + na) phrasing.\(^\text{117}\) In common with the *Liberation-Story of the In-Between State*, it includes both the suggestion that, "there are no great beings still alive", and that true authority is derived from the world of spirituality rather than the corrupted social order. With these commonalities, it is therefore easier to conceive how a young, gifted child could come up with a song that held some of these sentiments, but was perhaps improved upon by whomever it was that felt impressed enough to write it down.

**c) The Story of the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State**

The other key piece of evidence for Rang byung rdo rje's specialness is of course the *Liberation-Story of the In-Between State* itself. Indeed, this story continued to be considered so important to his reputation that not only was most of it included in all subsequent editions of his *Collected Works* and many later redactions of his liberation-story, but also the story of its composition was also included in his self-penned liberation-story and all later versions of it. In the *Verse Liberation-Story*, the shortest version of this episode, it is described thus:

The virtuous scholar Gser khang pa respectfully asked me some questions, and from my reply came the speech that is renowned as *The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State*.\(^\text{118}\)

In his retelling, Gtsug lag phreng ba adds a lot more flesh to this skeletal narrative by saying the following:

Then one day, when his father felt hungry and thirsty, he said: "Right now we should travel to that village over there." This they did, and (when they got there) his parents both set about enjoying themselves. (After a while), his father became drunk and was having such a good time, he started telling (people): "The Karmapa Rinpoche has arrived". This news buzzed around the market, (and people began to make offerings to him), until he received a pile of offerings that looked like a mountain. Everybody (there) wanted to receive his blessing and hear the dharma. In particular, there was one named Gser khang pa who was a great bodhisattva, a guru, and the spiritual friend of all in La stod. At that time, he was presiding (over the village) and asked (Rang byung rdo rje) detailed questions. He replied by telling the *Liberation-Story of the In-Between State*, which (this teacher) wrote down. (After completing his scribing of it), he bowed at (Rang byung rdo rje's)

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\(^{117}\) Songs 2, 6, 11 contain verses with this pattern.

\(^{118}\) Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:380).
What both these stories have in common is the suggestion that before his meeting with O rgyan pa, he and his family were already publicly claiming he was Karma Pakshi’s reincarnation, and that a local scholar named Gser khang pa\textsuperscript{120} accepted this recognition. This in turn suggests that like that of Karma Pakshi before him,\textsuperscript{121} Rang byung rdo rje’s recognition as the Karmapa developed over time rather than arousing at a single point. Again, later storytellers changed this narrative of slow-building recognition so that his tale would be more aligned with later developments, in this case the traditions of official recognition and enthronement that have become the mainstays of reincarnates’ authority. This reformulation of the tale means that many of the other steps towards his widely-held acceptance as the Karmapa are overshadowed by his meeting with the one person later tradition holds responsible for his installation as the new Karmapa: O rgyan pa.

v. Recognition

Perhaps part of the reason that the meeting with O rgyan pa became the moment on which later storytellers focused is that it undoubtedly changed Rang byung rdo rje’s life. In earlier versions of the tale, by contrast, the meeting between these two is described not as a ceremony but, more poignantly, as the reunion between long lost friends and the moment in which Rang byung rdo rje finds a protective, spiritual father.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, by the time the young boy met the older siddha, O rgyan pa had already helped recognise two other young people: Kun dga’ bzang po (1258–1316) of Snye mdo Monastery, whom he recognised as the reincarnation of his revered teacher Rgod tshang pa (1189–1258); and Kun ldan ras ma; ca.1260–1339, whom he recognised as the reincarnation of Rgod tshang pa’s consort ’Gro ba bzang mo (d. 1259). In line with the recognition of Rang byung rdo rje, these identifications had also come on the back of growing local consensuses about these two young people in Snye mdo, to which O rgyan pa then added his authority.\textsuperscript{122} Unlike Rang byung rdo rje, however, they did not return to their predecessors’ retreat centres, or lay claims to any other element of their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[120] Manson (2009:45, note 84) following Sørensen and Hazod (2007:105, note 131) has suggested Gser khang pa was another name for the scholar known as Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan (1223–1292) who was the “8th holder of the abbatial throne of Tshal (and) Gung-thang”. Although this is possible, it seems unlikely to me for a number of reasons. First, it beg the question why the abbot of Tshal was presiding over a village in La stod. Second, as the 8th Tsal Myriarch—who was no friend of O rgyan pa—was under arrest in Dadu (Beijing) at this time, it is even less likely that its abbot would be staying in La stod (Vitali 2012:48–49). What is more, there is also a viable alternate for this role. This is a monk, fleetingly mentioned in the Blue Annals, whose name is “the great scholar/abbot” (Mkhan chen) Gser khang pa. This scholar is said to have granted ordination to Dpal ldan seng ge ba, who in turn is said to have been born in La stod and met O rgyan pa as a child (’Gos Lo tsā ba 1974:15a; Roerich 1988:786). This means that this other Gser khang pa was a local abbot from Rang byung rdo rje’s home region active during his lifetime, and this seems a much more likely candidate to be the monk that he meets in a village in La stod.
\item[121] Manson (2009:30–32).
\end{footnotes}
cultural heritage. Moreover, as they were only second-generation recognitions, their identification could be downplayed as a one-off that would not threaten the social order.

O rgyan pa’s recognition of the young Rang byung rdo rje, by contrast, connected his authoritative word to the first third-generation reincarnation in Tibet, and therefore created at least a spiritual if not proprietorial link between a potter’s son and a spiritual lineage that controlled several large monasteries. To create the link, O rgyan pa and the other people supporting Rang byung rdo rje’s claim needed to make use of all the Karmapa institution’s facets then in place, starting with the two that were the most easily transferable: the Karmapa name and the black hat.

a) Matching prophecies

The meeting between Karma Pakshi and O rgyan pa, contained within O rgyan pa’s liberation-story, provides an essential prelude to the re-connection between Rang byung rdo rje and these elements of the tradition. In condensed form it was recorded as follows:

From there (O rgyan pa) travelled to the upper pastures of Mtshur phu. In the upper part (of the valley) he (saw) an unimaginable number of monks standing in a line, performing a (traditional welcome for him) with music. The crowd of lay people trying to receive (the Karmapa’s) blessing was so large that the whole area was congested and the path was blocked. No one could control the (crowds). Then, from out of this group, emerged fifty men from Khams, who said (to O rgyan pa), “Today we will be the precious Mahāsiddha’s body guard”. Then they used their sticks to create a path for O rgyan pa (through the crowd), (leading him to) a large yak-hair tent... (This was the Karmapa’s tent, and O rgyan pa and his students went inside to meet him.)

(When they came into his presence) the great, precious Karmapa said, “Ah! Siddha O rgyan pa! You were supposed to get here three days ago, and you only arrive now? The food (we had for you) has gone bad!”

The precious mahāsiddha replied (jokingly), “The reason I did not arrive sooner is that I am a practitioner of the ‘Brug pa (bka’ brgyud)’s reverse training (zlog sgom).”

The precious Karmapa replied, “When you practise reverse training, you are putting shit in your mouth! It is molasses in your arse!”, and many other such gibberish things...

Then Mahāsiddha Rinpoche’s attendants saw the wondrous statues, stūpas and texts in Karmapa Rinpoche’s abode, and (their reaction caused) Karmapa Rinpoche to say, “The Mahāsiddha O rgyan pa’s students’ mouths have frozen! What are you staring at? If you want to stare at something, stare at your guru’s face!”

(After saying this) he took the black, silk hat he was wearing on his own head, placed it on the precious Mahāsiddha’s head, and told him he would grant him the empowerment of Avalokiteśvara Jinasāgara. Then he filled up a bowl with barley, stirred it with an iron (rod), and placed the bowl on (O rgyan pa’s) head too, while handing him the iron rod.

(O rgyan pa asked, again jokingly), “Does someone in your lineage wear a black hat?”

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123 This practice is described by ’Jam mgon kong sprul in his outline of the various tantric systems (’Jam mgon kong sprul n.d.: Vol. smad, 275–464), which has been translated in Harding (2007:229).
(Karma Pakshi replied), "The snowy-one (the white-haired Karmapa himself) is unstable, and in dependence on this sense-sphere (skyê mched; in this case his body) the lineage of black-hat holders will be cut. But then from sunny La stod, a black-hatted one will return."

(Later), when he introduced (O rgyan pa) to the three bodies (of the Buddha) he stared (out into space) in amazement. Then he said, "We two have been each other's masters so many times. (In the future), you will have to guide me. Your disciple (the next Karmapa) will be in the sunny South. For the sake of wanderers, you will have to lead him through Jinasâgara, the six syllables that are its essence, and the introduction to the three bodies."...

When he said, "You will have to guide me", O rgyan pa thought to himself, "For what reason?"

This narrative contains many of the elements that helped make the transition from the second to third Karmapa a success. It is set, for example, at the established seat of the Karmapas, Mtshur phu, and mentions both the famous, continuous name that could be passed on from reincarnation to reincarnation, and its symbol, the black hat. By entrusting the black hat to O rgyan pa and asking him to be his future teacher, Karma Pakshi also establishes him as the regent for the Karmapa body-mâlâ between incarnations; although, again, despite later re-evaluations of this relationship, at this stage the role was only informally designated. Moreover, notably in this narrative this transference of authority is conducted through an empowerment into the deity most associated with the second Karmapa, Avalokiteśvara Jinasâgara, and the transformation of O rgyan pa into this deity through the symbol of barley-stirring, which suggests the joining of mind-streams.

Along with these elements of the already-established Karmapa institution, it is also the first indication of a prophecy being made by a dying Karmapa that was then fulfilled by the next. Although O rgyan pa appears unaware of it, in this passage he is clearly being told that the next Karmapa would be his student, a child who would arrive "from sunny La stod". And while it seems necessary to point out that the text containing this prophecy was composed after the recognition of Rang byung rdo rje, its narrative import in the development of the Karmapa project was nevertheless profound. From this point onward, prophecies would be demanded from dying Karmapas, and their rebirths would need to fit with their sometimes-obscure pronouncements.

b) Meeting O rgyan pa

Although the Verse Liberation-Story contains a brief description of the initial meeting

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124 The expression here is strange, it reads gya ba gangs pa'i gyu ba byas. As near as I can gather, this is written in Kham pa dialect and suggests Karma Pakshi is calling himself "the snowy one" on account of his age.
125 Bsod nams 'od zer (1976:197-200).
126 As I mentioned in the last chapter, this includes the idea that the Karmapas leave letters to aid the search for their new embodiment (see Brown 2008:1222-144, Kunyang, Pema and Aubèlè 2012:41), but the leaving of a letter is not included within Rang byung rdo rje's liberation-stories until much later versions. The earliest version to mention something similar is the Red Annals (Kun dga' rdo rje 1981:106), which says that Rang byung rdo rje's own statements about his next life were written down in Xanadu.
between the young Rang byung rdo rje and O rgyan pa, again the most comprehensive and conversational retelling of this encounter is found in O rgyan pa’s liberation-story. Picking up on some of the imagery that was introduced in their previous-life meeting, it reads:

One morning (O rgyan pa) got up very early and said, “Last night I dreamt I met the precious Karmapa.”

Later (that morning) a monk named Srung se arrived from Mo phug with an attendant. When he met (O rgyan pa) he said, “We arrived last night from Mu khug at the same time as a potter, his wife and their son. They think their boy is the Karmapa, and (want to ask you) if he really is. They are staying in a hut at the base of the monastery.”

The great Mahāsiddha replied, “It could be, but for now we should keep this possibility to ourselves.”

An attendant was sent to invite them (to the monastery), and (as he left) the precious Mahāsiddha said, “Make a high throne: if it is the Karmapa, he will not fear sitting on it.”

So (his attendants) made up a high throne, and brought everyone together. When the community had gathered, they burnt incense and greeted (each other). This meant that when the boy arrived, he only came into (O rgyan pa’s) presence gradually (moving through the crowd). When (O rgyan pa) finally saw him, he said, “I wonder, are you the Karmapa?”

The boy replied, “I am the one renowned as the Karmapa.” Then he raised his right hand, (hooked) his small sleeve (on the throne) and pulled himself up by it, (climbing) onto the arranged throne. (Once up there) he said, “I taught you the dharma, now you need to teach me. Oh, and in my past life, didn’t I give you some things? Didn’t I give you my hat?”

The Mahāsiddha replied, “(What you say) is true. It is in my room.” (Then, to his attendants, he said), “Someone go and get it.” An attendant went and retrieved it, and when the precious Karmapa (who was a child) placed his previous life’s (large) hat on his (small) head, everybody laughed.

This story includes the placement of the black hat back on a Karmapa’s head, and grants him the name Karmapa. It also describes O rgyan pa’s agreement to fulfil the promise he had made to Karma Pakshi. In describing him climbing onto a teaching throne as a test of his fortitude, it both evokes old images of royal power and sets a precedent for the later tradition of enthronement. What is more, by allowing the audience to giggle at the incongruence of the child-as-guru, it neutralises the possibly problematic image of a child-as-guru. All this means that it is a story that incorporates almost all the elements of the Karmapa institution, and diffuses a potential source of derision for good measure.

vi. Round Trip

It also shows that despite its central focus on the embodied mālā of Karmapas, the
Karmapa story was and is dependent on a much wider cast; and amongst this wider cast, particularly in Rang byung rdo rje’s section of the tale, O rgyan pa has a starring role. As Rang byung rdo rje goes on to reflect in his Verse Liberation-Story, after recognising him as the rebirth of his deceased teacher, “This great being then nurtured (him) like (he) was his beloved son.”

The reference to family here is telling because Rang byung rdo rje’s recognition by O rgyan pa is also the last mention of any of his biological family in his own liberation-stories. Unlike many other families associated with recognised reincarnates, his drops off the historical radar at this point; his parents do not visit him again, his nephews do not come to stay at his monasteries, and no distant cousin is recognised as his rebirth.

Instead, Rang byung rdo rje enters into O rgyan pa’s world; a world that had been extended through his travels to the holy land of India, and through his political connections to great swathes of the Mongolian Empire. Yet in common with the view of reality proposed in Rang byung rdo rje’s Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, in O rgyan pa’s world, true authority was also derived from insight and enforced by otherworldly beings, rather than state or clan authorities and their armies. Neither he nor Rang byung rdo rje found this worldview easy to maintain, however, and only a few years after Rang byung rdo rje moved into O rgyan pa’s hermitage, another very this-worldly crisis led both of them to leave their sanctuary. What Rang byung rdo rje would learn from this encounter was that although temporal authority could be disparaged, it could not be ignored, and the future history of the reincarnation tradition might even depend on his negotiations with it.

Moreover, there was one area of authority that crossed over spiritual and temporal boundaries and was therefore approached respectfully from both sides of this otherwise divided authority: familial lineages. To truly establish his position as the re-embodied Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje, a potter’s biological son and now O rgyan pa’s spiritual son, would soon need to negotiate directly with the established, familial power of Karma Pakshi’s descendants, who were running his monasteries. This was going to be difficult, because among many other reasons—and as the story of O rgyan pa’s previous visit to Mtshur phu showed—those protecting Karma Pakshi’s interests included many displaced people from his homeland in Khams, who professed a strong clan rather than merely religious allegiance to their unorthodox relative.

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Chapter Five:
From La stod to Mtshur phu

There is no greater comfort, in body or mind,
than these isolated mountain retreats;
cultivate the solitude of mountain abodes.

But then again, there is absolutely nothing to cultivate,
these are all half-true mutterings;
cultivate the state of no-cultivation.

Rang byung rdo rje, aged between 12 and 16,
Khyung rdzong Hermitage, Mtshur phu.¹

i. Introduction: Life in the Garuḍa Fortress

Khyung rdzong Hermitage, the Garuḍa Fortress Hermitage, was and still is a cluster of small, stone and rammed-earth buildings on the mountainside above Mtshur phu Monastery. The views from its small windows up and down the Stod lung Valley are impressive: there are snowy mountains in all directions and a river cascades through alpine meadows in the valley below. Yet despite this appealing vista, the environment in which the buildings sit is forbidding. The modest buildings sit amongst grassy stumps that grow out of precarious dirt pools between large boulders, which regularly cluster into cliffs. Were it not for the human colony of yogis in their crude huts clinging tenaciously to the edge of these rocky cliffs, this site would have remained the sole domain of the Argali goats that clamber around it.

It was in these dwellings in the land of goats that Rang byung rdo rje spent most of his adolescence studying and practising yoga. He had arrived at the more pacific Mtshur phu Monastery as a six year old, after leaving behind his home at O rgyan pa’s hermitage in South La stod as tensions in that area grew following the ‘Bri gung Monastery uprising of 1290. His songs from his stay at Khyung rdzong suggest that at first he thought he would only be apart from his guru for a short time, but O rgyan pa’s summons to Qubilai’s court the following year extended their separation, and Rang byung rdo rje never saw his father figure and adored guru in person again.

The isolation he experienced at Khyung rdzong was not caused merely by O rgyan pa’s physical absence, however; it was also intensified by his precarious status at Mtshur phu. In Rang byung rdo rje’s estimation, both its human and non-human inhabitants had invited him to Mtshur phu, but there were also a few human locals that did not welcome his arrival. The most inhospitable of these were Karma Pakshi’s family who had been running the monastery since the previous Karmapa’s demise. Eventually a compromise

¹ Song No. 49 (GN 71-72; GB 241-243).
between Rang byung rdo rje’s supporters and Karma Pakshi’s family was reached: they remained in charge of the monastery, and Rang byung rdo rje stayed on the hill above it at Khyung rdzong.

This was not an entirely satisfactory situation for either group, but despite this setback, with the help of his teachers Rang byung rdo rje managed to turn this period of exile into an opportunity to study and conduct retreats. The main foci of both these endeavours were the twin pillars of the Bka’ brgyud lineage: Nāropa’s six dharmas and mahāmudrā. In his stories and songs, his developing proficiency in these practices is marked by a series of visions he experienced. The most common presences in these visions were the two protector deities Ber nag can ("Black-coat") and Re ma ti, who were closely associated with both Mtshur phu and the Karmapa body-mālā. Moreover, during this period he also experienced a vision of the Indian mahāsiddha Saraha, a vision that contained a poetic exchange that became the first work to be included in his collection of songs.

Following this initial encounter, Saraha continued to appear, and is mentioned in the other nineteen songs Rang byung rdo rje composed during his stay at Khyung rdzong. These songs—dated between the years 1296 and 1300 when he was between twelve and sixteen years old—are a mix of short, half-formed ideas and more developed, longer compositions. Their major themes reflect the young Rang byung rdo rje’s integration of the ideas and yogas he had been studying and practising on a daily basis.

One of the most dynamic themes—one that displays Saraha’s influence clearly—is the fundamental strangeness or irony of composing songs about the “inexpressible” mahāmudrā. In such works, Rang byung rdo rje approaches this disjuncture with a sense of play similar to that displayed by Saraha and his other mahāmudrā heroes, but he adds his own wordplays and metaphoric associations to this literary inheritance. Yet in stark contrast with this ironic playfulness, his writing from this period also contains another more earnest theme: loneliness. In the main, this theme is expressed through the traditional Tibetan Buddhist proclamations of “remembering the guru” (bla ma dran). But during this period, Rang byung rdo rje also composed a new form of lament, specific to reincarnate children, that would later become more common: songs in which he expressed his doubts about fulfilling the expectations of his gurus and followers.

The other major theme in his writing from this period, which arose despite or perhaps because of his loneliness-inspired self-doubts, is his reminiscence about past lives. Memories of these lives are contained within one of his songs, and the Liberation-Story of Past Lives, which was also composed while he stayed at Khyung rdzong. These

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2 These are songs 1–20 (GN 1–29; GB 185–208).

3 As I mentioned in chapter one, this liberation-story was composed during his stay at Khyung rdzong, but given that it contains more detail about his past lives than the song that deals with the same topic, I would suggest it was composed after this initial performance of these memories.
compositions, along with his long teenage retreats, helped to counter his unresolved situation at Mtshur phu by developing a multi-life name for himself, not just at the monastery Karma Pakshi restored, but further abroad. His reputation was then further solidified by several short journeys he made at the end of his adolescence. First he travelled to the Snye Valley, where he took full ordination at Dge ‘dun sgangs Monastery, then he conducted a short retreat at a nearby sacred mountain, and later he journeyed on to the famous Gsang phu ne’u thog Monastery to continue his studies. By the end of these short trips, he had completed a journey to knowledge and identity that had begun when he moved into O rgyan pa’s Sbud skra Hermitage in La stod as a five year old.

ii. Leaving La stod, Leaving Home

By all accounts, and particularly his own, the young Rang byung rdo rje was very happy at Sbud kra before this journey began, and more importantly had developed a “strong attachment” to his “father guru”, O rgyan pa. At Sbud kra, O rgyan pa, with the assistance of others, had helped strengthen the links between Rang byung rdo rje and his predecessor Karma Pakshi. When he was given his primary ordination, for example, perhaps at O rgyan pa’s direction, the vow-giver, Kun ldan shes rab (d.u.) of Khro phu Monastery, gave him the name that had been Karma Pakshi’s secret tantric name: Rang byung rdo rje.4 O rgyan pa also set about fulfilling his promise to Karma Pakshi by first introducing and then training the young monk in the practice of Jinasagara.5 Unfortunately for both O rgyan pa and Rang byung rdo rje, however, the politics of their time and region were much too fraught to sustain their idyll.

The events of this period are only mentioned obliquely in Rang byung rdo rje’s own liberation-stories; he refers to it as assumed knowledge on which he does not particularly want to dwell. This means that it is only when his story is compared with the histories from this period and the detailed record of events in O rgyan pa’s liberation-story that certain elements of his tale make sense. It is only by looking at the politics of his era, for example, that the overly long list of wrathful tantric yogas he studied with O rgyan pa are contextualised; for they were an otherworldly, embattling arsenal.6 And it is only in the context of the battles that raged around him that it makes sense for Rang byung rdo rje to leave O rgyan pa’s side at such a tender age and travel to the more pacific but generally uninviting Mtshur phu.

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5 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:381).
6 These included one practice associated with Padmasambhava that was called the “Complete Demon-Taming Tantra” (‘Byung po ‘dul byed rgyu kun rdzogs; Rang byung rdo rje 2006d:381).
a) The Politics of Reincarnation

In the later versions of Rang byung rdo rje’s tale, his return to Mtshur phu at an early age is portrayed as inevitable. It is what Karmapas do: they return to Mtshur phu, where they are enthroned and begin their education. Yet for the young Rang byung rdo rje, the only person who had provided anything like a precedent for this return was Karma Pakshi, and he had only arrived there in his thirties to restore what was essentially a ruin.7 His return was not the return of a religious king as the later Karmapas returns would be, or part of a rehabilitation project like the return of his predecessor, it was the flight of a refugee. His journey to Mtshur phu would become a precedent for others to follow, but it happened more as a result of his precarious position as O rgyan pa’s ward than his status as a Karmapa.

As noted at the end of chapter two, the political troubles that would plague Tibet during Rang byung rdo rje’s childhood began before his birth. At the time of his birth, the opposing forces of the Chagatai Khanate and their ‘Bri gung allies on the one side and Qubilai Khan and his Sa skya allies on the other already were vying for supremacy on the Plateau, and especially in La stod. Despite a general reluctance to talk about such things in his liberation-stories, Rang byung rdo rje did reflect on his precarious situation in one of his later songs, saying in part that:

I was born amongst quarrelsome beings,  
in these dark time’s for the Buddha’s teachings, here in the North  
(of Jambudvipa) at the foot of a snow mountain, (and was thus)  
repaied for my concern with preconceived achievement.9

Despite his laying the blame on his own bad karma, and O rgyan pa’s liberation-story’s laying the blame on the era’s political players, with hindsight it also appears that a large part of the problem was simply O rgyan pa’s attitude to worldly rulers: generally speaking, he disdained them. This disdain continued despite his earlier, bruising encounter with Kun dga’ bzang po, and manifested in acts like his chiding ‘Phags pa for spending time at the Mongol court,10 his whipping of Qubilai’s emissary Thogmi Temūr, and his rejection of the summons to court that Thogmi Temūr and four other emissaries had delivered to him.11 Nor was he any more friendly with the other side, as he repeatedly refused to cooperate with anyone from the ‘Bri gung/Chagatai alliance.12

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7 Manson (2009:35).
8 This follows the GB, which reads zhol, meaning “below” or “lower part”. The GN reads gzhol, which means “to exercise” or “to maintain” and therefore makes less sense.
9 Song No. 90 (GN 129–130: GB 292–293). The last phrase of the verse follows the GB, which reads zhen pas lan, “to be repaid by/for concern with”. The GN reads zhan pas len, which means “taken by the feeble”. This also makes sense, but much less so in the present context.
11 Bsd nams ’od zer (1997:225) and Vitali (2012:46 Note 37, 47).
12 Li (2011:95–96).
This even-handed disdain led to a situation, after the 'Bri gung rose in outright rebellion in 1290, in which neither side trusted him. The rebellion began when 'Bri gung partisans burnt down Bya yul Monastery, but with the help of the Chagatai Khanate—which was at that stage co-ruled by Qaidu and Du'a—it quickly spread beyond that site. While 'Bri gung and their allies fought in Central Tibet, Qaidu and Du'a dispatched a large force headed by “Prince Rin chen” (Rin chen rgyal sras) first to Western Tibet and then on to La stod. Indeed according to O rgyan pa’s liberation story, there were so many troops that he was forced to surrender immediately on their arrival, but even then he refused to give them aid or men to fight against Sa skya and Qubilai.

O rgyan pa may have been equally disdainful of both conflicting sides, but this was not a war that allowed any kind of neutrality, especially disdainful neutrality, and O rgyan pa’s stance therefore worked against him in both the short and medium term. In the short term, as members of his own family took both sides, he was accused by all players of treason and treachery. As Brenda Li reports in her study of O rgyan pa’s liberation-story tradition, things began to go bad when his niece (or grand-niece), whom O rgyan pa described as a “wicked woman”, “betrayed him and collaborated with Rin chen”. At the same time, other members of his family formed a militia to fight against Rin chen, and therefore viewed O rgyan pa’s surrender to him as treachery. One of the militia groups was centred on a clan called the Tsha mda’ ba, who were related to O rgyan pa by marriage. The precariousness of his and therefore Rang byung rdo rje’s situation is expressed through a vignette that appears in Si tu Pañ chen’s retelling of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story, but not in earlier works. It reads:

One night, (Rang byung rdo rje) had a clear visionary (dream) when they had set off for Kha khyu Pass. Above him he saw twenty-one small-shields. The next morning, he asked his guru if this was a good (omen).

(O rgyan pa replied) that if this had been (his vision), they should wait (to see if the shield bearers were) Tsha mda’ ba (or not). He also said, “We will gather troops”, but they only (managed to find) thirteen small-shield (bearers). (This suggested that Rang byung rdo rje’s vision had not been of their troops). Then, when these gathered chiefs and their attendants were about to leave, everyone saw (other) shield-bearers on the pass. Their presence meant that (O rgyan pa’s soldiers) did not dare to cross the pass, and stayed where they were.

13 ‘Gos Lo tsa ba (1974:Vol. Ca, 27b), Roerich (1988:303), Petech (2003:350) and Li (2011:96). Bya yul Monastery was coincidentally the monastery whose previous abbot had been the first to recognise a local monk as the reincarnation of his teacher and gifted him a hat as a symbol of this recognition.

14 Li (2011:86).

15 Li (2011:96). The story relayed here by Li comes from one of the liberation-stories of O rgyan pa that she analysed for her PhD dissertation. As she describes it, this liberation-story about O rgyan pa written by Chu mig pa rin rgyal, “consists of several key episodes about U rgyan pa’s visit to Yar klungs, his tactics in dealing with the Stod Hor and (Smad) Hor, his grudges with the Tsha mda’ clan and his niece (or grand-niece?)” (dbon mo), interpolated by some minor scenes mostly not found in other biographies.” She acquired this text, which is called Gsung sgruos rnam thar chung ba bzugs, from the Palseg Institute (Li 2011:57).

16 Li (2011:96).

17 These were the twenty-one shield bearers that had been in Rang byung rdo rje’s vision.
Instead, they sent a messenger to the (shield bearers on the hill), to see if they were Tsha mda’ ba. (O rgyan pa) then said that (if they received a signal that) they were (Tsha mda’ ba), all those who could flee should flee. If not, and the messenger (merely) waved down at them, they should proceed upward (toward the pass).

When the messenger arrived at the pass, he waved, and they all proceeded up toward it. After that, they were able to cross the pass secretly. Nevertheless, (following this incident, O rgyan pa) told (Rang byung rdo rje) not to tell others about his clairvoyance as it could create obstacles. The guru made him promise this.\textsuperscript{18}

Things did not seem to get any better for them after the rebellion was put down by Qubilai Khan’s grandson, Temür Boqa, and the Great Lord of Sa skya, Ag len, who chased down the abbot of ‘Bri gung all the way to Kong po on Tibet’s southern border, and replaced Chagatai rule in La stod with their own.\textsuperscript{19} From their perspective, O rgyan pa’s surrender to the Chagatai had been a betrayal, and they set about punishing him and his entourage. Finally, as Li describes it, O rgyan pa had to travel, “naked to the barracks of Temür Boqa, where he succeeded in defending himself and gaining the trust of the latter. And even then the Sa skya authority remained hostile towards him”.\textsuperscript{20} As Roberto Vitali has reported, this difficult position might have been part of the reason why he chose finally to accept the next emissary from Qubilai and travel to Dadu (Beijing).\textsuperscript{21}

From O rgyan pa’s point of view there was a silver lining to all this upheaval, however, and it was one that might even have aided his protégé’s return to Mtshur phu. An old antagonist of his named Dga’ dbe dpal, the eighth Tshal Myriarch (khri dpon), was arrested and sent to Dadu. Dga’ dbe dpal, a friend of the Sa skya Great Lord Kun dga’ bzang po,\textsuperscript{22} who razed Sbud skra, had been creating problems for O rgyan pa for a long time. Lately, he had also conspired with the emissary O rgyan pa had whipped, Thogmi Temür, to castigate and humiliate O rgyan pa in front of a large crowd in Lhasa.\textsuperscript{23} This antagonism might have encouraged Dga’ dbe dpal to block Rang byung rdo rje’s journey to Mtshur phu, which was still under the control of Tshal Monastery, but his arrest and deportation removed this obstacle.

b) The Invitation

Perhaps diplomatically or perhaps dismissively, Rang byung rdo rje’s tale does not

\textsuperscript{18} Si tu Pan chen (2004:360-261). Unlike many of the other stories that are added to Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-stories, this explanation for its earlier non-inclusion is easier to believe, especially as the story does not present Rang byung rdo rje as an otherworldly buddha as many of these other inserted episodes do. In the Tibetan context, mere clairvoyance is considered a lower level realisation, and as indicated here can be an obstacle to further realisations and achievements.

\textsuperscript{19} Li (2011:96) and Vitali (2012:48-49).

\textsuperscript{20} Vitali (2012:48-49).

\textsuperscript{21} Vitali (2012:48-49).

\textsuperscript{22} Vitali (2012:50).

\textsuperscript{23} Vitali (2012:48-49).
mention these machinations. Instead, like many of the episodes in his liberation-stories, his remembrance of his stay with O rgyan pa and his journey to Mtshur phu focused on his visions and kindly teachers. From this perspective, his decision to return to Mtshur phu is not described as a political necessity, but rather as the result of a series of invitations and instructions he received from those who would become his teachers at Mtshur phu and from the region's guardian deities. These gurus and deities, Rang byung rdo rje insisted, were the real authorities in both the Stod lung Valley and his life, not the various levels of the Mongol Imperium—the local rulers, the Tibet-wide Sa skya rule, and the Khan's empire-wide rule—with whom he was forced to deal.

In contrast to the machinations of his local worldly rulers, the mechanics of his otherworldly invitation to Mtshur phu, like the invitation process that led to his birth, are described in some detail in his liberation-story. The episode begins when a Mtshur phu-based yogi named Bla ma Gnyan ras ("the cotton-clad guru from Gnyan") experiences a vision of Avalokiteśvara, who insists he visit Karma Pakshi's reincarnation in La stod.24 This creates a good relationship between the young man and at least some Mtshur phu residents, but there is no need for him to leave O rgyan pa's side and travel to Mtshur phu at that time. Then, after the 'Bri gung uprising, Rang byung rdo rje himself experiences a vision that indicates it is time for him to travel to Mtshur phu. In this vision the two protector deities, Ber nag can and the nāga king (klu'i rgyal po) known as "the Lord of Mantra, Mkha' nag" tell him forcefully to leave for Mtshur phu.25

The appearance of these two particular protectors is not a coincidence. They both represent a form of authorisation and therefore protection for his coming journey. The appearance of Ber nag can—the personal protector of the Karmapas and Mtshur phu—authorises his arrival at his destination. The appearance of the nāga king Mkha' nag authorises his journey there. This more tangential authorisation is granted through this kings' close association with the one element that causes Rang byung rdo rje more trouble than any other in his travels: water. The domain of the nāga includes all aqueous features, but in Rang byung rdo rje's journeys it is usually rivers that cause him consternation, blocking his journey or even threatening his and others' lives. Rivers had played a significant role in early Tibetan society, and the control of them either directly or through the nāga is still represented as a source of power in Rang byung rdo rje's writing. They are the only significant natural feature in the Tibetan environment that had not—and still has not—been sanctified. Unlike Indian cultural geography, in which the divinity of rivers

24 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:381–382), Kun dga’ rdo rje (1981:98), Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:928) and Si tu Pān chen (2004:360). Little is known about Gnyan ras, except that he was a student of Par phu ba blo gros seng ge (12th century)(Martin 2008). But his name suggests that he might have come from the same family as the more famous Ras chung pa. Ras chung pa's family name Gnyan is discussed in Roberts (2007:85), where the author suggests that he was sometimes referred to by the name Gnyan chung ras pa.
25 Mkha’ nag is seventh of eight nāga kings that are often seated around Vajrapāni in iconography.
plays a central role and the rivers are figuratively and literally the bringers of life. Tibetan rivers, fast flowing and temperamental, are represented as life takers, not life givers.

Rang byung rdo rje’s problematic interactions with rivers would continue throughout his life, but in this his first lengthy journey he understands himself to have been granted passage by their ruler, and therefore encounters no problems with them. The only spirits he does encounter are some pesky local deities, whom he is able to deftly dispatch using a Vajrapāṇi yoga that O rgyan pa had taught him. Vajrapāṇi, the original Buddhist protector, who often stands beside Śākyamuni Buddha, is said to control all elemental spirits.

c) A Triumphant Return...

According to later accounts, but not Rang byung rdo rje’s own memories, the first thing he did on his return to the Mtshur phu area was to pay a visit to the mother of the corpse he had briefly inhabited, and gift her a crossbreed cow-yak or mdzo. While he was there, these storytellers say, he asked her why she poked him in the eye with a needle. “It was not a needle,” she replied, “it was just dirt.” The implication being that the senses of those entering corpses are much more acute than ordinary beings’ senses.

After this visit, he continued up the Stod lung Valley until he came to Mtshur phu Monastery. The descriptions of his initial welcome there are positive. Gnyas ras, the stories agree, not only greeted the young boy warmly, but experienced a vision of the young monk as Saraha, surrounded by all the earlier teachers of the Karma bka’ brgyud lineage. This vision re-established a link between the Karmapas and this Indian mahāsiddha that had been first established by Karma Pakshi and, as will be explained shortly, would become a central theme in Rang byung rdo rje’s early years at Mtshur phu.

Following this initial vision, another teacher at Mtshur phu, Dar ma, who lived in the attached retreat centre called Bkra shis gsar ma (“New Providence”), enjoyed a similar vision. In this vision the entire Karma bka’ brgyud lineage, including the Indian siddhas Tilopa and Nāropā, demonstrated their support for the boy. In Rang byung rdo rje’s report of this event, he suggests that it might have been this vision that “caused (Dar ma’s) intense admiration (for him)”.  

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26 Dianne Eck (2012:131-188) provides a detailed and descriptive overview of this process of sacralisation.  
30 Rang byung rdo rje (2006h:276-277). This link was described in chapter three.  
Yet while these two teachers welcomed him warmly, all reports suggest that other Mtshur phu residents were less than happy at his arrival. Rang byung rdo rje’s own description of this displeasure is both oblique and diplomatic. He merely recalls the need to display a miracle for the edification of the crowd, and how in response to that need, “Sngags bdag ma (Mantra Lady), offered me a cool, pure spring, according to my wishes. And at that time, much foliage (also) sprouted from a dry branch that I planted (next to it).”

Using much less diplomatic language, Gtsug lag phreng ba describes the interaction between this group and the young Karmapa in the following manner:

Yet still, (after Gnyas ras and Dar ma’s visions) there were a few unfortunate, arrogant, faithless beings at Mtshur phu. (So, to dispel their doubts), he went to a dry rocky place and said, “If I am Karma Pakshi, let a spring arise in this place.” As he spoke, a spring arose. (And again, he held) a half-burnt, twisted stick and said, “If I am the (re-)birth of Karma Pakshi, let this too be (re-born).” And as he spoke, so it happened. Then these two became known as the “siddha spring”, and the “siddha tree”.

This story is interesting for several reasons: first, because again a local deity acts as an alternate authority to the human world and comes to his defence (this time Snags bdag ma, perhaps a consort of the näga-king, Lord of Mantra, Mkha’ nāg); second, because it is his interaction with the environment, his display over nature, that serves as a catalyst for a change of heart in the “unfortunate, arrogant, faithless beings”, again evoking the tales of Padmasambhava’s subjugation; and third, because in Gtsug lag phreng ba’s retelling, he causes this miraculous display through the power of his truthful utterances. This not only evokes the story of the Buddha’s awakening, in which he asks the earth to be his witness; it is also the first of several times in his retelling of Rang byung rdo rje’s story that Gtsug lag phreng ba uses this motif as a way to illustrate the Karmapa’s control over the environment.

Yet in the same way that Padmasambhava’s tales of subjugation were allegories for the actual conversion of Tibet to Buddhism, Gtsug lag phreng ba’s tale of Rang byung rdo rje’s instant subjugation of Mtshur phu can be read as another allegory for what was in reality a slow takeover of Mtshur phu by not one, but several Karmapas. Following this episode, Rang byung rdo rje was allowed to stay at Mtshur phu, but at Khyung rdzong, up on the ridge rather than in the main buildings of the monastery, which would remain under the control of Karma Pakshi’s family throughout Rang byung rdo rje’s entire life, and the life of

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33 Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:928).
34 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:382). Alternately, this name may also suggest that this deity is an emanation of Tāra named Ekajatā/ Ekajatā. This is the reading Roerich and Dge ‘dun chos ’phel (1988:489) gave it in their translation of the Blue Annals.
the next, fourth Karmapa. Indeed it would not be until the fifth Karmapa, Bde bzhi gsheds pa (1384–1415) arrived back from the Ming emperor’s court in 1407 that another Karmapa would become abbot of Mtshur phu.35

iii. Remodelling Mtshur phu

Despite the obvious problems in Rang byung rdo rje’s integration into Mtshur phu, as before these local politics are not described explicitly in his self-penned liberation-story. Instead, like the larger politics of the Mongolian Empire that played out in La stod, they seep into it from the background, while the story stays focused on his visionary and religious life. This seepage only becomes evident when the stories of his visionary, religious life are read through the prism of local politics. With knowledge of his precarious situation in mind, for example, the descriptions of his repeated visions of the region’s protector deities and the tantric deities of his yoga practices, who repeatedly offer him support, can be read in a different way. From this perspective, the visions follow the pattern that he had established in the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, in that it is non-human authorities that offer him support in the face of human opposition.

After his arrival at Mtshur phu, the relationships that became most important to him in this regard were those he established with the two protectors of the monastery and its environment: Ber nag can and his consort Re ma ti.36 In the visions he experienced of Ber nag can at Mtshur phu, this black-coated protector appeared very differently than in the supportive role he played to the dākinīs in the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State. At Mtshur phu he showed a much more wrathful demeanour and carried terrifying implements: a white trident in one hand and a skull of blood in the other.37 Re ma ti too held a skull full of blood in these visions, and also presented herself as an enormous dark presence, but the names that Rang byung rdo rje gives some of her manifestations dampen this horror somewhat: she was “the goddess of the four seasons” (dus bzhi lha mo) 38 and the “goddess conch-protector” (lha mo dung skyongs ma).39

The other notable thing about these visions is their connection to the natural environment, as these two deities arise from the environment and dissolve back into it. Thus connected to his surroundings, and dedicated to their protection, they deliver a clear

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35 The list of Mtshur phu’s abbots is found in the Blue Annals (Gos Lo tsā ba 1974:51b and Roerich 1988:519). The Red Annals (Kun dga’ rdo rje 1981:107) also describes this turn of events, saying: “When the dharma noble was staying at Mtshur phu, the (familial) lineage of Karma Pakshi still acted as its abbots.”

36 This deity is also known as Re ma ti and Dpal ldan lha mo (Skt. Śrīmati Devi, “Glorious Goddess”). The sole other protector to make an appearance in his visions during this time is Vaiśravaṇa (Rnam thos sras), and this is only after Rang byung rdo rje evokes his pure land during a ceremony (Rang byung rdo rje 2006d:383).


As with the maps shown in the last chapter, the basis for this map was taken from Google Earth and it was then modified to reflect those areas of most importance to this section of Rang byung rdo rje’s tale.
message to Rang byung rdo rje: he is welcome to stay at Mtshur phu, but this welcome is predicated on his support of uncorrupted Buddhism.\textsuperscript{41} They are a visionary manifestation of the site’s sanctity, in other words, and they warn him that if he becomes corrupt, they will chase him out. It is only after he displays a continuing morality and humility over time that they begin to act more personally as his protectors. This process evokes the tales of both Padmasambhava and Ye shes 'od, but is also variant from them. In this case, rather than explaining how Rang byung rdo rje bound a locality and its inhabitants to Buddhist morality, his relationship with the environment is described as more symbiotic. He sanctifies the environment, and through these visions of its protectors the environment demands moral sanctity from him.

This relationship is therefore quite different from those he has with the protector dākinīs he met in the in-between state and the other dākinīs and local deities that he will encounter in later travels. The main reason for this difference is the ontological distinction that is made between the two types of protectors. As “worldly protectors” (jig rten gyi srung ma) the other deities are powerful, but as they are not fully awakened buddhas, they are not what the Buddhist tradition calls “places (or sites) of refuge” (skyabs yul). These two, Ber nag can and Re ma ti, are by contrast said to be emanations of Mahākāla, a wrathful form of Avalokiteśvara,\textsuperscript{42} and therefore “transcendent protectors” (jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma) who could offer him refuge. As such, they are presented not only as Mtshur phu’s external protectors, but as Rang byung rdo rje’s highest potential, his buddha-nature, which was the ultimate “protection” from his internal delusions. This relationship between them also meant that as Rang byung rdo rje clarified his Buddha-nature by aligning himself with Avalokiteśvara in his tantric yoga practice, the more visions of Avalokiteśvara’s wrathful forms, Ber nag can and Re ma ti, he would have expected to see. Conversely, their appearances also suggested that Rang byung rdo rje’s yoga abilities were developing quickly and intensely despite his youth.

These transformations in the young monk were not, however, merely restricted to his personal being. Given the links these visionary beings had with his environment, there were also environmental repercussions for his developing abilities. Both his personal growth and its environmental effects are presented as reasons for Mtshur phu’s growing sacredness; or to reflect the liberation-stories’ description of this process more accurately, the change in people’s perception of this always-sacred site because of the Karmapas’ ability to see and describe its sacredness. This sacredness had first been perceived and described by Dus gsum mkhyen pa when he founded the monastery, and during Karma

\textsuperscript{41} Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:383).

\textsuperscript{42} Rob Lithrothe (1999:124) describes this multiply manifesting deity. This being, who is said to arise in various forms, is sometimes presented as a buddha manifesting as a bodhisattva, and sometimes as a bodhisattva manifesting as a buddha. At other times s/he is simply presented as a buddha.
Pakshi’s life Mtshur phu and its surroundings had been inscribed with more and more layers of sacredness. So much so that by the time Rang byung rdo rje arrived there, it was in the process of being transformed from an ordinary sacred site (or gnas) into what in Tibet’s sacred geography is known as a “great sacred site” (or gnas chen), which is usually aligned with the mandala of a Buddhist deity.

This process of transforming an already sacred site into a mandala has been noted across Buddhist Asia, and often described as a site’s “mandalisation”. It usually involves the alignment of the region’s features with the elements of a mandala: a geographic feature or building representing its centre inhabited by a deity (in this case the apotheosised Karmapas) and surrounding protectors often located in the cardinal directions.43

The final form of the Mtshur phu mandala only appeared centuries after Rang byung rdo rje’s death.44 His contribution to this process was therefore significant, but not definitive. He did build a hermitage near Mtshur phu at Bde chen stengs,45 but unlike the contributions of early and some later Karmapas, his legacy was not based on building projects but on his writing. Through his writing in a number of genres he helped transform his audience’s perception of the site.

As noted in chapter two, Rang byung rdo rje was one of the few people who consciously commented on the power of praises to transform the way people perceive an environment, and with this motivation composed several poems in praise of Mtshur phu that present it as the sacralised abode of deities, with its main temple as its central palace.46 He also aided the transformation of his audiences’ perception of the site through expanding both his own reputation and his links to the place. The most direct way he did

43 The term “mandalisation” (also “mandalization”) was first used by Allan Grappard (1982:195–221) to describe the alignment of geography with mandala in Japan. In Tibetan studies it has subsequently been employed by quite a few authors, but the most influential of these are probably McDonald (1985, 1990), Huber (1990, 1994, 1999a:39–68 and 1999b) and Buffetrille (1997, 1998 and 2003). In the Tibetan context, this term is often used alongside another term “Buddhication” (McDonald 1990; Buffetrille 1998:20–24), which refers to the transformation of a site from a local, regional or otherwise non-Buddhist site into a Buddhist site. As Mtshur phu was founded as a monastery, this does not apply in this case, but it does apply in the case of Kha bka’ dkar po, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

44 Eventually, Mtshur phu was presented in a schematic diagram that aligned the three major Karma bka’ brgyud monasteries of Mtshur phu, Karma and Kam po gnas nang with respectively the mind, speech and body mandalas of the Karmapas (Rin chen dpal bzang 1995:15). This transformation was dependent on the further alignment between the Karmapas and Avalokiteśvara, which is not referred to explicitly in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing. In his writings, there is also a basic tension between these cultural investments in Mtshur phu and his lack of authority there.


46 There are two praises to Mtshur phu contained in the “praise cycle” (gsol ‘debs skor) in volume Ca of his Collected Works, for example: a) The Lamp that Illuminates the Flower of Poetic Decoration: A Praise To Mtshur phu (Mtshur phu’i bstod pa dam pa gnas kyi tshul gsal bar byed pa snyan ngag rgyan gyi me tog ba’i sgron me; Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. Ca, 32–40); and b) A Short Praise to Mtshur phu (Mtshur phu’i bstod pa thung ba; Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. Ca, 53–55). This praise cycle also contains a praise to Bde chen stengs (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. Ca, 40–43). The only other place to which he composes a praise is Kha bka’ dkar po. The praise to Kha bka’ dkar po is part of his project to transform the perception of this mountain, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
this was through first experiencing and then describing multiple visions there. Rang byung rdo rje does not directly acknowledge the transformative effect these sited visions had on their locations, but the way subsequent generations used his stories to sanctify Mtshur phu shows that they too had a profound effect on its mandalisation.47

Included within the group of his stories that aided Mtshur phu’s transformation is his recollections of a series of events he experienced at an early age that clearly demonstrate his perceived relationship with Mtshur phu’s environment. These events began in 1294 when Rang byung rdo rje was ten years old. At their core was the dawning of what later commentators called “impartial gnosis”,48 and what Rang byung rdo rje himself called “the conviction that... all apparent phenomena are the mind’s magic trick”.49 This more abstract realisation was accompanied by a series of physical changes, both within his subtle body and in the environment, and visions.50 The changes to his subtle energy body are described in later versions of his liberation-story as the unravelling of knots in his channels; an unravelling that led not only to his realisation of “impartial gnosis”, but also a series of increasingly intense visions of Ber nag can, Re ma ti and other tantric deities.51 Moreover, the repercussions of this transformation were not confined to his person. It was also accompanied by a not-so-personal series of earthquakes that shook the region for over a year. The earthquakes were seen to mirror his internal subtle-body transformations with external re-alignments to his sacred site.52 By Rang byung rdo rje’s continued presence, this story suggests, Mtshur phu’s sacredness was being upgraded and there were numerous internal and external signs of its transformation.

Along with the otherworldly transformations they describe, these stories would also eventually have a profound effect on the this-worldly power structures of the valley. The shift in perception was due in large part to the basic Tibetan understanding of a sacred site. As Toni Huber has pointed out, the Tibetan word for sacred site, gnas, is a nominalised form of the verb “to abide” rather than a simple noun. This reflects how the site’s sacredness is not defined intrinsically but rather by the presence of a special being.53

Before Mtshur phu rose to prominence, these sacred sites were generally understood to be the homes of either transcendent or local non-human deities, long-dead deified ancestors like the early kings, monastic and tantric lineal forebears, or on some rare occasions one particularly sanctified being. According to Rang byung rdo rje’s own

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47 This can be seen in the section of Rin chen dpal bzang’s (1995:4–40) catalogue of Mtshur phu’s material artefacts that looks at Rang byung rdo rje’s influence.
53 Huber (1994:23–60 and 1999a:13–14) analyses the verbal basis of this term.
sacralising description, for example, Mtshur phu, had derived its special status from the variety of beings who had visited it. These obviously included the previous two Karmapas, Sgam po pa, Ber nag can and Re ma ti, but also according to one of his praises even:

Śākyamuni Buddha (who) travelled to this site as he strode through the three thousand (world systems) after manifesting buddhahood, and while he was (t)here an ocean of bhagavān bodhisattvas journeyed (to meet him). Imagine how their footsteps sanctified (this place)\textsuperscript{54}

Increasingly, though, as Karmapa body-mālā beads were threaded into a lineage, Mtshur phu became the first place in Tibet to be sacralised through the continuing presence of a human reincarnate lineage.

This development situated the phenomenon of rebirth in an environmental setting for the first time, entailing repercussions both for this particular sacred site and for the concept of sacred sites more generally. For Mtshur phu it represented the beginning of the removal of Karma Pakshi’s clan from inherited rule. Gradually, although it was only achieved over the lifetimes of a few Karmapas, people came to understand the valley as the Karmapas’ abode or gnas, not an inheritance to be passed down through clan lines. Then, as the model of reincarnated inheritance was gradually repeated across the Plateau, not only did more places likewise become associated with other body-mālās, but the beings themselves who partook of the body-mālās came to be viewed as portable sacred sites; their bodies were sacred, their perceptions were sacred and therefore all that they perceived was believed to have been inspired at least a little by their sacred perception.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{iv. Meeting Saraha}

The other literary tool that Rang byung rdo rje used to transform his audience’s perception of Mtshur phu and other environments was his songs, which incorporated some of the same transformative elements as the praises and stories. Like the praises they

\textsuperscript{54} Rang byung rdo rje (2006a: Vol. Ca, 33).

\textsuperscript{55} This idea will be explored more in the coming chapters and the conclusion. The most famous fixed example of this phenomenon is most probably the Potala in Lhasa, which was named after Avalokiteśvara’s pure-land home of Potalaka and helped create the idea that the Dalai Lama was an emanation of Avalokiteśvara. This association in turn linked him to Strong btsan sgam po, the first Tibetan royal manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, and therefore to the time of the Tibetan Empire. The effect of this identification was to galvanise the Tibetan polity and help solidify its unification after Tibet’s disastrous civil war of the early 17\textsuperscript{th} century. See: Bishop (1999:367–386) and Khun Larsen and Ar mund Sinding-Larsen (2001:73–75). This sacralisation of environments can also easily be seen by anyone attending ceremonies and religious teachings of highly respected lamas today. As these people move from place to place, Tibetans will treat and understand each of these places as sacred sites. They also colloquially refer to these gurus as gnas or sacred sites themselves; the rationale being that anywhere they “abide”, using the word gnas as a verb, becomes an “abode”, using the word gnas as a noun. Huber (1999a:14) describes this phenomenon briefly by saying: “In the case of persons and their bodies, they are né (gnas) by virtue of either being considered human incarnations of deities (e.g., the Dalai Lama) or having a deity temporarily in residence during specific ritual operations, such as advanced forms of Tantric meditation or yoga.” As far as I am aware, however, there has not been an in-depth study of how this phenomenon works in the contemporary environment.
evoked the environment in ways that transformed the audience’s perception of them. And, as mentioned in the introduction, like the liberation-stories they were set in a specific place, therefore inscribing the event of their performance on a site. Rang byung rdo rje began composing and performing these songs in earnest when he was twelve years old, several years after the series of earthquakes and visions had ended, and continued to compose them regularly for the rest of his stay at Khyung rdzong. Twenty of the songs he composed in this period have been preserved in his collected songs, but there is a suggestion in his liberation-story that he composed more.

The first of this group is the most well known of them. It achieved its reputation through its link to an important event in Rang byung rdo rje’s visionary life that is also described in his liberation-stories. The event was a visionary dream that he experienced as a twelve year old while visiting Dar ma at the Bkra shis gsar ma Hermitage, in which he met the legendary mahāsiddha Saraha and was granted “a sign” (brda’) by him. The song is a poetic record of this exchange.

Following on from Gnyas ras’s vision of him as Saraha, mentioned above, it marks the start of a developing role for Saraha in Rang byung rdo rje’s life. He had been introduced to this Indian mahāsiddha by O rgyan pa, as a child, but he only began studying his songs in depth at Khyung rdzong with Gnyas ras. The songs by and stories about this legendary being obviously caught his imagination, as several of his own songs from this period either quote him or—like this first song—describe a vision of him.

This influence is evident despite or perhaps as a result of the contradictions in the mahāsiddha’s composite character. For, even more than Padmasambhava and Mi la ras pa—the other two figures that occupy a similarly heroic position in Rang byung rdo rje’s religio-cultural imagination—the Saraha Rang byung rdo rje was introduced to by O rgyan pa and Gnyas ras was a cultural creation rather than an historic figure. Indeed, so many and at such various times were the deeds attributed to him that like Nāgārjuna he is sometimes ascribed an exceptionally long life in traditional stories to facilitate these accomplishments.

56 As I mentioned in the second footnote of this chapter, these are songs 1–20 (GN 2–29; GB 186–208).
57 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:383), for example, includes his description of another vision in which he exchanged verses with Re ma ti.
58 This song’s dream performance is mentioned at the end of the survey of visions that follows the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State (Rang byung rdo rje, 2006c:373) and in the Verse Liberation-Story (Rang byung rdo rje, 2006d:373). It is also mentioned in Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:929) and Si tu Pañ chen (2004:362). It has also been previously translated and analysed in Kurtis Schaeffer (2005:41–42).
59 Song No.1 (GN 2–4; GB 186–187).
62 Despite the wealth of material attributed to him, Saraha has proved an especially elusive figure for historians to pin down: his dates, place of birth, and the works attributed to him have all varied widely; so
The most common source of these traditional stories, and most probably Rang byung rdo rje’s source for them, was the *Histories of the Eighty-Four Siddhas* (Skt. *Caturaśṭitisiddhapravṛtti*; Tib. *Grub thob brgyad cu rtsa bzhid lo rgyus*), which despite its claim to Indian origins was, as Kurtis Schaeffer has suggested, most likely composed in Tibet on the basis of Indian oral traditions. As Schaeffer has also noted, even within this highly esteemed group, Saraha was particularly revered in Tibet, his status achieved at least in part through the attribution to him of several poetry anthologies in all three of the genres associated with the Siddhas. The most famous of these collections was the *Song-Treasury of Dohā* (Skt. *Dohākoṣagīti*; Tib. *Do ḥa mdzod kyi glu*), which is also sometimes called the *People’s Dohās* (*Dmangs do ḡa*). He is also controversially—even within the Tibetan tradition—credited with two other collections of dohās: the *Caryāgīti Known as a Song-Treasury of Dohā* (Skt. *Dohākoṣanamacāryagīti*; Tob. *Do ḡa mdzod ces bya ba spyod pa’i glu*), which is also known as the *King’s Dohās* (*Rgyal po’i do ḡa*); and the *Inexhaustible Treasure of* Advice Songs (Skt. *Dohākoṣa-upadeśagīti*; Tob. *Mi zad pa’i gter gyi* Mdzod *dm’an ngag gi glu*) or the *Queen’s Dohās* (*Btsun mo’i do ḡa*). Those songs attributed to him from outside of the dohā genre were less influential but have still been preserved. They include several collections of *vajra-gīti* and four of the songs within the most well-known collection of caryāgīti, the *Treasury of Caryāgīti* (Skt. *Caryāgītikoṣa*; Tob. *Spyod ba’i glu*).

much so that to quote Kurtis Schaeffer (2005:5), who wrote a book on his legend, the search for him has tended to obscure the “creativity that his image inspired in a number of religious and cultural arenas”.

63 This speculation that Rang byung rdo rje had access to this group of stories is based on the fact that Karma Pakshi’s (1978:102) liberation-story is the first record of their mention in the Tibetan tradition. Schaeffer (2005: 13–15) discusses this probable composition process. The Tibetan text can be found in Abhayadatta (1979). This is a multi-lingual redaction: it begins with the Tibetan text, and then includes a Hindi language translation of this text, with extracts from Abhāpramāṇa songs inserted within it. James Robinson (1979) and Keith Dowman (1985) have also translated these collections of stories into English. Robinson (1996) is an analysis of the collection.

64 Schaeffer (2005: 15).

65 There are several different versions of this text preserved in Abhāpramāṇa. These include: H. C. Bhayani (1997), Shahidullah (1928) and Sarahapada (1957). Roger Jackson (2004:53–115) includes a transliteration of the source language text along with his translation of this collection. The composition of this text and its transmission to Tibet have also been analysed in Schaeffer (2005:59–70). It is also included within the Tibetan *Bstan ’gyur* (Sa ra ha 1982–1985a).

66 Despite this controversy, both these texts are included within the *Bstan ’gyur*. See: Sa ra ha (1982–1985b) and (1982–1985c). The controversy surrounding them has been explained in Schaeffer (2005:71–78). What is noteworthy in the context of the present study is that those traditional scholars who advocate for these two works’ attribution to Saraha often cite Rang byung rdo rje’s composition of commentaries on them as proof of their validity: arguing that if an omniscient being like Rang byung rdo rje composed commentaries on these works, they must be legitimate (Schaeffer 2005:75). It is not clear, however, whether these commentaries to which they refer are the short outlines of the two texts included within his recently collated *Collected Works* (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. a, 177–180 and 180–185) or whether there were other non-extant but longer commentaries composed by him. In any case, these outlines also stand in stark contrast to the two more lengthy commentaries he composed on the *Song-Treasury of Dohā*. These are called: *The Condensed Meaning of the Song-Treasury of Dohā* (Do ha mdzod kyi bsod don bcad; Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. a, 185–191) and the more extensive *A Stainless Lamp* (Dri ma med pa’i sgron me; Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. a, 193–264). Thrangu Rinpoche, Michele Martin and Peter O’Hear (2006) contains a translation of the *King’s Dohās* and Roger Jackson (2011:162–184) is an English translation of the *Queen’s Doahas*.

67 Lara Braatstein (2006 and 2010) includes a comprehensive study of Saraha’s compositions in this genre and translations of some of them.
Although Rang byung rdo rje most probably had access to most of these collections, the works that appear to have had the greatest influence on him, and the only ones on which he chose to write commentaries, were the dohā collections. He composed an in-depth commentary on the *Song-Treasury of Dohā*, and outlines of the other two collections.69

This combination of complicated life-story and influential poetic output meant that unlike Padmasambhava and Mi la ras pa, Saraha’s influence on Rang byung rdo rje was more literary and ontological than it was biographical and environmental. Although Mi las ras pa, for example, also famously and influentially composed many *mgur/glu*, the metaphors, structures and irony in Rang byung rdo rje’s work have much more in common with Saraha’s compositions than those of his compatriot. And it is on Saraha’s juxtaposition between expectations and reality, along with his focus on societal groups—yogis, tāntrikas, monks and patrons—that he models his fierce social criticism.70 But perhaps more important even than this literary influence is the impact Saraha had on Rang byung rdo rje’s “view” (Tib. *lta ba*) or ontology. Because he was one of the founders of the *mahāmudrā* tradition, Saraha’s presentation of reality influenced all those who subscribed to it, but even within this context Rang byung rdo rje expresses a special affection for and affinity with this predecessor’s view. It informed not only his personal writing, but also many of his more philosophical compositions.71 It is Saraha’s view of *mahāmudrā*, for example, to which he compares the treasure tradition’s view and the broader *Madhyamaka* or “Middle-way” ontology in his well known work, *An Aspiration to Mahāmudra, the Definitive Meaning*.72

What is more, along with the deep respect that Rang byung rdo rje pays to Saraha and particularly his *Song-Treasury of Dohā*, there are also some hints within his personal

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68 The songs attributed to Saraha in this collection are the 22nd, the 32nd, the 38th and the 39th. As Per Kverne (1986:3) has noted, the collection was probably compiled by one Munidatta in the process of writing a commentary on them, in Sanskrit. Munidatta’s Sanskrit commentary, along with the Apabhraṃśa songs, has been published several times: including redactions by Nilratan Sen (1977) and Sukumar Sen (1944–1948). A transliteration of the songs from Apabhraṃśa is included within Kverne (1986), which also includes a transliteration of the Tibetan translation of them and an English translation. The Tibetan translation of Munidatta’s commentary, which also includes a translation of the songs, can also be found in the *Bstan ’gyur* (Munidatta, 1982–1985).

69 See footnote 63.

70 There were few songs of this type in the versions of Mi la ras pa’s collected songs that were extant during Rang byung rdo rje’s lifetime. The most notable instance is the song he sings to his student Se ban (Quintman 2006: 349–352). But they became more predominant as the tradition developed. Even in comparison to the developed tradition, however, there are many more of this kind of critique in the anthologies attributed to Saraha.

71 There are a few details in Rang byung rdo rje’s stories and songs that are interesting in this regard. The first is that he composed a commentary on Saraha’s *Song-Treasury of Dohā* (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. a, 264) during the same stay at Karma in 1327 when he composed his commentary on Nāgārjuna’s *Dharmadhatustava*, both of which were influential on his presentation of the view (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. la, 125). The second is that, as will be discussed shortly, he understood himself to be the grand-student of Saraha and the student of Nāgārjuna in his previous life as Nāgābodhi.

writing that he identified himself with the mahāsiddha. As noted in chapter three, for instance, in his commentary on Karma Pakshi’s liberation-story, Rang byung rdo rje suggested at one point that Dus gsum mkhyen pa was Saraha’s manifestation.\(^\text{73}\) And in one of his songs, he even directs his students to imagine him as Saraha.\(^\text{74}\) In accordance with his usual self-deprecating style, however, his respect for the mahāsiddha precludes this association from the official list of past lives he gave his followers, in which he instead suggested that he was merely Saraha’s grand-student, Nāgābodhi; the “best student” of Saraha’s student Nāgārjuna.\(^\text{75}\)

If not direct connections then at least strong links between Saraha and the Karmapas can also be found in the writings of his two predecessors. Karma Pakshi describes experiencing a vision of Saraha surrounded by the rest of the eighty-four mahāsiddhas as he travelled to the Mongolian court.\(^\text{76}\) And Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s liberation-stories include his recounting of a dream in which he met with Saraha. In this dream, he reports, Saraha emerged from a ball of light and gave him this piece of advice:

That which is free from four extremes is the view;  
that which is not distracted is cultivation;  
that which neither stops nor sets up is the behaviour;  
that which neither abandons nor achieves is the result.\(^\text{77}\)

This enumeration of the four elements of mahāmudrā practice—the view (ita ba), cultivation (sgom pa), behaviour (spyod pa) and result (bras bu)—also becomes a repeated theme in Rang byung rdo rje’s poetry. But in his visionary dream of Saraha, the songs he exchanged with the mahāsiddha are much more focused on the first of these four: the view.

It is also much more developed than Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s dream song. Indeed, from the perspective of its literary format, Rang byung rdo rje’s dream of Saraha as relayed in the first song of his collected songs is more a continuation of the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State than a model for his other mgur/glú.\(^\text{78}\) Like the Liberation-Story of the In-

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\(^{73}\) He does this in the commentary he embeds in the retelling of Karma Pakshi’s liberation-story (Rang byung rdo rje, 2006h:276–277).

\(^{74}\) Song No. 120; 28 (GN 179–181; GT 396–397). This song is included within the fourth appendix.

\(^{75}\) This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The song in which he makes this claim is Song No. 16 (GN 23–24; GB 203–204). It is also interesting to note in this context that later the Tibetan polymath and teacher Taranātha (1575–1634) also claimed a past-life link with Nāgābodhi as one of his students (Templeman 2008:245).

\(^{76}\) Schaeffer (2005:41) describes the dream Karma Pakshi has of Saraha and the other eighty-four mahāsiddhas. As Schaeffer points out, this is coincidentally the first mention of this grouping of the siddhas in Tibetan literature. This suggests that their stories had currency before Rang byung rdo rje’s time. Karma Pakshi’s own recounting of this dream can be found in his liberation-story (Karma Pakshi 1978:102).

\(^{77}\) Rgwa Lo tsā ba (2010a:55) and Gzhon nu byang chub (2010:104).

\(^{78}\) There are of course precedents for the call and response format in early Tibetan mgur/glú. As I mentioned in chapter two, footnote 96, Padma ’bum (1997:641) has explained that it was the response section of these call and response songs that Ellingson (1979:229–234) took for another genre, which he called mchid. This call and response format is also found within the tradition of Mi la ras pa’s writing. The aforementioned song
Between State it involves his travelling to another realm, engaging in a call and response conversation with a non-human, and uses its environmental setting in a symbolic way. In what is a reflection of their function, the main difference between the two conversations' settings is directional: while the symbolic environment is described at the end of the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State and therefore marks its destination, in this song the environmental imagery is introduced at the beginning. It reads:

One night while I, the yogi Rang byung rdo rje, was staying at Bkra shis gsar ma Hermitage, I dreamt that along with two companions, I travelled to Śrī Dakṣina Parvata Mountain. We were looking for (Saraha), the guru, the Great Brahman. My two friends went to search on the southern side of the mountain. I stayed alone, in a pleasant, wide, open meadow (spang thang) on the eastern side. I had just made myself comfortable, sitting alone, when masses of (snowy), flower-rain (me tog gi char) began to fall. I responded to this by making cairns out of them, and sat in steady contemplation in their midst.79

The site of the action, Śrī Dakṣina Parvata, is a geographically specific location in South India—known today as Nāgārjunikonda, a hilly river island in central Andhra Pradesh—which has traditionally been associated with both Saraha and more prominently his “student” Nāgārjuna.80 Rang byung rdo rje’s location of his dream in such a specific site lends it an authority within Tibetan discourse, and it would have been considered extraordinary for a twelve year old to know of such a place. Yet this authority is somewhat undermined from the perspective of a contemporary reader by Rang byung rdo rje’s Tibetan-inspired description of this “mountainous” Indian environment. His use of the word spang thang, for example, evokes a Tibetan grassy plain or alpine meadow, not a hill protruding from a sub-tropical river; and his incorporation of Tibetan “flower-rain” (me tog gi char), which is used to describe an auspicious snowy-rain in Tibet, does not fit neatly with images of the Indian plains. His intended audience was clearly not anyone who had travelled to Nāgārjunikonda.

Nevertheless, for his audience, Nāgārjunikonda was a particularly providential place to encounter Saraha; a sacred site for what would be a very sacred exchange. This exchange begins when “a small, sweet voice came down from the sky”, whispering to Rang byung rdo rje:

Child of the lineage, hear this!
The guru, the Great Brahman (Saraha),
is your mind’s nature—
it is a grave mistake to look (for him) elsewhere.

translated by Quintman (2006:349–352), for example, is in this format. From this perspective then, it could be argued that rather than the first mgur/glu of his collection resembling his first liberation-story, elements of this liberation-story are very much like a mgur/glu.

79 Song No.1 (GN 2–4; GB 186–187). This song has been translated previously by Kurtis Schaeffer (2005:41–42).
80 For a survey of this site’s archaeology, see: Rama K. Rama (1995).
After hearing this, Rang byung rdo rje then replies:

E Ma Ho! The guru, the Great Brahman, is my mind's nature, and in this mandala where variety has one taste, there are no seekers and sought; my two friends still search, while to me, sitting here alone, the Great Brahman reveals a sign (brda'). Ah! How wonderful!

Because it aligns Rang byung rdo rje with Saraha by way of his mind's nature, this initial exchange could be read as another example of the close links that were being established between Saraha and the Karmapa, but it is described in such an oblique manner that the connection is somewhat weakened. Saraha essentially says that not just Rang byung rdo rje's nature of mind, but anyone's nature of mind, is equivalent to both an inherent guru and himself.

The claim Rang byung rdo rje makes here goes much farther than a vague association with Saraha, however, even if at first it may not seem as important. The claim is that the Great Brahmin has showed him a "sign" (brda'). Within the mahāmudrā tradition, the showing and comprehension of a sign is an advanced form of lineage transmission that is usually performed by a living guru through a practice called "pointing out the nature of mind" (sems nyid kyi ngo sprod). This practice had precedents in Saraha's Indian tradition of mahāmudrā, but became particularly associated in Tibet with Sgam po pa, whose performance of such an introduction outside the context of tantric empowerments created controversy. Rang byung rdo rje's assertion here takes Sgam po pa's innovation a step further. He has not only suggested that he received pointing out instructions and understood them immediately as a twelve-year-old, but that Saraha himself granted him this transmission. In a single dream he has understood the essence of mahāmudrā and become Saraha's lineal heir.

The rest of the exchange continues more conventionally, with Saraha's disembodied voice taking Rang byung rdo rje through a presentation of the mahāmudrā view. It reads:

E Ma Ho! This is the guru, the Great Brahman; I am your mind's nature, and in this mandala where variety has one taste, there are no cultivators, nor things to cultivate.

Hey child! This dohā is beyond speech, thought, expression, so cultivate its advice!

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81 All three of the Tibetans from the Bka' brgyud tradition with whom I read this verse independently impressed on me the significance of Saraha's granting a sign to Rang byung rdo rje.
82 See the aforementioned texts by Roger Jackson (1982), Leonard van de Kuijp (1986), Michael Broida (1987) and David Jackson (1990) for an unfolding discussion about the controversy surrounding this practice.
Hey child! Mahāmudrā is the essence of all past, present, future buddhas, so stay uncomplicated!83

Hey child! In effortless naturalness, a state free of extremes, self-aware gnosis is realised; its purpose is (to help) wanderers, so don’t be distracted, stay balanced!

E Ma Ho! Mind’s nature is simplicity, it comes from nowhere and has nowhere to go, just like a crazy person.84

Hey child! Like a river dissolving into the sea, it has no creation and no cessation, so stay in mahāmudrā!

This is what he said. And the (flower) cairns I had made, the rocks, the stone mountain all became the Great Brahmin. My mind-stream was naturalness: no creation, no cessation, no abiding, no edge, and no falling to one side. Ah! So vivid! So relaxed! In this state there was no distinction between waking and sleeping, and it is this joy that I remember as I sing this song.85

As in the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, this song has Rang byung rdo rje remembering an experience so vividly that he carries it into the present. There it was the darkness of the womb, but here it is a much more vibrant state: “So vivid! So relaxed!” he says, “It is this joy that I remember as I sing this song.” This time-shift intensifies the description, suggesting the experience has stayed with him. And, given that this abiding experience was a direct transmission of mind’s nature from Saraha, its occurrence helps strengthen his claim to possess a special kind of lineage. It is this transmission that Rang byung rdo rje reflects on yet again in his Verse Liberation-Story when he describes the same dream in this way: “Saraha showed me that my own mind was the sacred guru and the meaning of his dohā came clearly to my mind.”86

The framing of this transmission within a call and response format also enables Rang byung rdo rje— through Saraha’s speech—to compose a “dohā”, making this one of only a

83 Spros med has been variously translated as “unconstructed”, “without elaborations” and “lacking reference points”. In my translations of Rang byung rdo rje’s text I have translated it as “uncomplicated” when it is an adjective, and “simpleness” when it is used as a noun. The related term spros bral, which appears more often in this collection, has previously been translated as “free from constructs”, “free from elaboration” and “free from reference points”. In this thesis, it will be translated as “simplicity” or “free from complications”, depending on the context.

84 GN says bsnyon pa, which means “the denier”. This is probably the misspelling of the homonym smyon pa, which is the GB’s spelling. This means “crazy”, and as will be explained shortly this is a metaphor that Saraha uses elsewhere.

85 The Tibetan expression nyams su lang has most commonly been translated as “practice”. But as it literally means “take the experience” and Rang byung rdo rje most commonly uses it in the imperative, I have translated it as “experience” in the imperative, or “arouse this experience”.

few instances in which a Tibetan describes his or her own composition with this term. Yet notably, he has not merely assigned this title to the work, but also pays homage to the Indian genre by adopting several of its characteristics in this composition. To begin with, like many of his other songs, it uses the seven-syllable per line metre that is used regularly (if not most of the time) in Tibetan translations of Saraha’s works. He also employs specific Indic elements in this song that are not found in his other compositions. His use of the vocative “hey child” (Apabramśa: are putto; Tib. bu, written at the end of the line), for example, reflects the repeated use of this phrase in the Song Treasury. Moreover, he also recycles some of the more specific imagery from Saraha’s collections. The description of realisation as the cessation of “coming and going” is drawn from the Song Treasury. The image of a river disappearing into the sea is found in the Queen’s Dohās. The Queen’s Dohās also contains a couplet that refers to the mind as “crazy” (smyon pa), which helps explain this image in Rang byung rdo rje’s dream-song, it reads: “Like a crazy person, the mind performs no deeds.”

The song is not merely a homage to the Indian tradition, however, for in the last verse, Rang byung rdo rje goes on to add his own Tibet-specific frame to this Indic core. It reads:

E Ma Ho! It is the guru, the Great Brahmin.
It is the mind’s nature, uncreated, unceasing.
It is the one taste of all instructions.
It is that (of which) all appearances are text/pieces of metaphor.
(In it) there is no sāṃsāra, no nirvāṇa. E Ma Ho!

The first three and last lines of this verse repeat ideas that Saraha has already conveyed to him, but in the fourth he introduces his own adaptation of Saraha’s ideas: “It is that of which all appearances are text, pieces of metaphor” (snang ba thams cad dpe cha yin). This line requires a dual reading of the Tibetan word for “text”, dpe cha. The term was most probably constructed because of its phonetic similarity to the Sanskrit word pustaka, but coincidentally its first syllable, dpe, covers a range of meanings from “example” or “instance of” to “metaphor” and the second of its syllables cha means “piece”. This synchronicity allows Rang byung rdo rje to suggest a link, as he does repeatedly throughout his songs, between texts and metaphors. Texts, he suggests, even ones that purport to describe the ultimate, are nothing but metaphors for that which they describe,

87 Jackson (2004:82).
88 Jackson (2004:92) translates this couplet: “The scholar expounds his treatise in full, not knowing Buddha dwells within his body. Coming and going aren’t destroyed that way, but he says without shame: ‘I am a scholar’. Apabhrashta: Pandita sola satthia vakhkhopai dehahim vuddha vanta na jānai avanāgamana na tena vikhandhia tovi nilajja bhanaī haurm pandhia. This suggests that “coming and going” as a metaphor for sāṃsāra is not destroyed by intellectual study. It will be discussed again later in this chapter.
90 Sa ra ha (2011c:278). Tib. smnyon pa lta bu’i sems ni bya ba dang bral ba.
and as any one text only suggests a section of that which they are describing, they are merely "pieces" of this metaphor.

Usually in his writing he leaves the image there, but in this instance he has developed it even further, suggesting a link between texts and "appearances" or "perceptions" (snang ba). In Rang byung rdo rje's writing and within the mahāmudrā tradition more generally, the term snang ba is used as a synonym for the term yul, or places, in that all sense spheres, everything that appears to the senses—or conversely anything the mind perceives—is a snang ba. The goal of the mahāmudrā practitioner is to realise all these appearances/perceptions, and therefore all places, as instances of emptiness or nothingness. The process that arrives at this understanding begins with the contemplation that these apparently external events cannot be separated from the mind perceiving them, and must therefore be described as fundamentally sensory rather than external phenomena. The senses are then examined as elements of the mind, and this in turn leads the yogi to realise that perceptions of inside and outside are a conceptual construct. Following this, the yogi is encouraged to focus on the mind itself, deconstructing it until they discover its empty nature; the very nature to which Saraha introduces Rang byung rdo rje in this song. The mind's nature is also called buddha-nature and a host of other names, including mahāmudrā and the ground-of-all (Skt. ālaya; Tib. kun gzhi). Once the yogi has seen it, they continue to cultivate an awareness of it until it becomes their habitual mode of perception. Such cultivation is achieved through a variety of techniques including advanced tantric yogas, in which yogis manipulate the flow of energy within their body to remove subtle physical and mental obstacles to attaining this subtle level of awareness.92 Later in his songs, Rang byung rdo rje describes this change in perspective thusly:

Outside, a myriad of appearances are
the mind's projections; it is as if
they are dreamtime visions, so
do not become obsessed (with them). Rest evenly.

Inside, preconceptions are fleeting,
(and) in themselves naturally clear;
the projections of samsāra and nirvāṇa come from this (clarity),
and so they are unceasing, self-liberating. Rest evenly.

Knowledge of appearances' duality is unpolluted,
and in essence non-conceptual clarity;
your own mind is Buddha's essence, so
realise the nature of this thatness.93

92 These are described in Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal (2005:133–518). It should perhaps also be noted that before the yogi engages in these more advanced practices, s/he usually engages in other, simpler practices that are called "preparatory practices" (sngon 'gro), which translates more literally as "that which goes before".

93 Song No. 66 (GN 101–102; GB 265) The Song that settles Subjects and Objects.
Put in this context, Rang byung rdo rje’s suggestion that “all appearances are text/pieces of metaphor” representing mind’s nature—which can therefore be “read” to develop an understanding of the ultimate—is both a very sophisticated re-interpretation of the mahāmudrā tradition, and a very clever wordplay. It supports his general sceptical approach to perceived reality, which is a characteristic of the rest of his personal writing, and shows how he has adapted the playfulness with words evident in Saraha’s songs to the Tibetan context. It was these kinds of adaptations that aided his growing reputation.

v. A Strange World

The song just described was also the first in which Rang byung rdo rje focused on the “strangeness” (mtshar) of beings’ un-examined perceptions.94 From this point forward, this becomes a strong theme in Rang byung rdo rje’s songs as he repeatedly points out how bizarre beliefs, behaviours and even everyday things appear from the perspective of mahāmudrā. 95 It is a perspective and technique that he inherited from the greater mahāmudrā tradition, but it only appears in his work after he begins to cultivate this view at Khyung rdzong, and again it reflects Saraha’s influence on his compositions.

Saraha’s influence is obvious, for example, in the objects on which he chose to focus his

94 This word mtshar also carries with it ideas of “wonderment” and “amazement”, which are also the terms that are usually used to translate it. In this context here, however, Rang byung rdo rje’s usage of this word is much more closely aligned with the English words “strange” and “strangeness”. Within Rang byung rdo rje’s personal writing, references to this “strangeness” can be found in the following songs: Song No. 19 (GN 27–28; GB 206–207), Song No. 74 (GN 112–114; GB 273–276), Song No. 76 (GN 116–117; GB 278–279), A Collection of (Sounds) like Echoes and Song No. 104; 12 (GN 153–157; GB 375–378). This usage also reflects a similar idea found in the wider Buddhist tradition, and in particular there is one story told repeatedly within the graded path teaching tradition (lam rim)—in the section dedicated to describing the misery of samsāra—that illustrates it. In the story Śākyamuni Buddha’s student Sāriputra is said to be walking past a lake when he sees a man with a baby boy on his knee eating a fish he caught in a nearby lake. After he eats the fish, the family dog tries to eat the bones but he kicks the dog away. Sāriputra laughs at the irony of the situation because with his supernatural knowledge he knows that the fish the man just ate had been his dearly beloved father who recently passed away, the dog he kicked had been his dearly beloved mother, and the son he was cradling had been his worst enemy who had been attracted to his wife and therefore reborn as her son.

95 As this technique closely parallels “irony” in the Western tradition, it may seem familiar to many contemporary, Western readers. As Claire Colebrook (2003) has described, “irony” has a long tradition in Western thought and literature, and has therefore been presented in quite a few forms. Out of all of these, however, it seems to me that Romantic irony is the closest in form to the type of irony that Rang byung rdo rje uses (Colebrook 2003:46–92). I have chosen not to use the term “irony” in this context, however, because the similarities between these two approaches may lead readers to create a false equivalency between the two that obscures their cultural context. (Lydia Liu (1995:1-45) has described the problem of this kind of assumed equivalence between cultures in some detail.) The principle reason I made this decision is that there is no word in Tibetan that directly corresponds to the English—via Greek and Latin—word “irony”. Tibetan does contain some words that cross over parts of irony’s semantic field, but they tend to cover the “sarcasm” corner of the spectrum and would therefore be deemed inappropriate to use in describing a respected discourse like Rang byung rdo rje’s songs. The word idem pa generally means contrariety or unreliability, which can include the use of irony or other forms of indirect speech, but this is only one meaning of the word and aligns with only one limited form of irony, i.e., verbal, undirected irony. The phrase bstan tshig means a rebuke and can include sarcasm. The more colloquial terms rgyag gtam and zur zo also mean something similar. There is by contrast no positive term to describe the rhetorical or literary technique in which the speaker or writer sets up a contrast of opposites between expectations and reality. It is rather subsumed within the work of illuminating the strange nature of conditional reality.
incongruent gaze. To Saraha, and therefore to Rang byung rdo rje, the most obviously incongruent element of existence was society: the irreconcilable differences between people’s social expectations and reality. In criticising Indian brahmins, for example, Saraha says (again quoting from Jackson’s translation of the Song-Treasury of Dohā):

They incant, holding earth and water and kuśa grass, 
and sit at home making offerings to fire. 
Their oblations are pointless—
The acrid smoke just stings their eyes.96

Rang byung rdo rje offers a similar critique of those he sees following dubious religious paths in his own country, suggesting that:

The world’s unseen97 gods and demons 
will kill you dead if you depend on them, 
so (don’t do it). Be profound instead.98

This criticism is particularly interesting because as I have discussed repeatedly, it was from the world of these “unseen gods and demons” that Rang byung rdo rje derived much of his authority. Yet here he insists that non-transcendent, non-humans must also be approached with scepticism, as they are not awakened and cannot therefore provide adequate refuge for other beings in samsāra.

Also like Saraha, he often juxtaposes the mahāmudrā view and people’s perceptions to point out the fallacies of worldly life. In one of his very early songs, for instance, he says:

In the miserable ocean of samsāra, 
do not think, “Here is okay”; 
homeless, wander the mountains....

When it’s time to leave alone (i.e., when you are about to die), 
do not trade trifles, profits and sundry; 
inertly watch your mind.99

In the first verse he again transforms environmental imagery so as to destabilise the habitats of his audience. He does this by suggesting that although his audience may think their abodes are secure, from his perspective they live in the middle of a great ocean called samsāra. And if they too could see this, then they would leave their comfortable homes and “wander the mountains” in search of liberation from it. In the second verse he presents an alternate perspective on another everyday occurrence: trade. Following many similar arguments presented within the Buddhist tradition on the topic of impermanence, he highlights what he understands to be the absurdity of conducting business as one

96 Jackson (2004:53). There are also many other examples of this within the Song Treasury of Dohā.
97 Literally “fine”, phra mo in Tibetan.
98 Song No. 7 (GN 9; GB 190–191) The Song of Three Analogies and Six Meanings.
99 Song No. 8 (GN 9–14; GB 191–195) Songs of the View, Cultivation, Behaviour and Result.
approaches death.

In further instances of Saraha’s influence on this first set of songs, Rang byung rdo rje also directs his incongruent gaze at those who see themselves as Buddhist practitioners, but are heavily reliant on what both he and Saraha understand to be unreliable words and the conceptual intelligence they create. Saraha expresses this distrust repeatedly in his poetry, but perhaps nowhere more directly than in the following dohā (again using Jackson’s translation):

The Scholar expounds his treatise in full, not knowing Buddha dwells within his body.

Coming and going aren’t destroyed that way, but he says without shame: “I am a scholar.”

Among Rang byung rdo rje’s early works is a song that expresses a similar view, albeit in the more elaborated form of the mgur/glû. Again, like Saraha’s Song Treasury, it uses the expression “coming and going” as an analogy for samsâra, reading in part:

In reality, there is no coming or going, but you do not understand that the half-truths presently appearing are untrue, and under the influence of fixed ideas and self-fixation fail to realise supreme, perfect meaning.

The half-truths of cause and effect appear—Do you know these are ignorant afflictions? (Do you know) these veils cloak wisdom?

Stupid, this is just like you!

This collection of conceptions, veils and afflictions causes mistaken concepts of right and wrong; these are shackling, grand obsessions.

Deep down, there is no pure “oneness”, final reality is not the domain of thought; “Intelect”, it is said, “is pretence.”

Fixating on the essence of known things, on impossible conceptions of right and wrong, is the distinction of samsâra’s mind; complete gnosis is uncreated, self-created.

The thick veils that cloak the ground-of-all

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100 Jackson (2004:92).
102 This is a translation of the Tibetan term kun rdzob bden po, which in turn is a translation of the Sanskrit term samvratisatya. Both these terms carry the idea that this may be a truth, but it is one that hides, or obstructs another truth, hence my translation of this truth as a half-truth. These terms are more commonly translated as “relative truth” or “conventional truth”, but as Rang byung rdo rje often plays with the meaning of the individual syllables of this word in his poetry, neither of the more usual translations would make sense in this context.
these constant, grand veils,  
are the ignorant veils of the misinformed,  
who do not cultivate perfect meaning,  
but possess myriad fixations; (like)  
"Don’t you know definitions like this?"  
"Don’t you understand logic like this?"103

Obviously, this song not only differs in structure from Saraha’s short piece, but has quite a different tone as well. While Saraha directs his criticism regarding scholarly obsessions outward, here the teenage Rang byung rdo rje blurs the lines between audience and author, intimating that both he and his audience are struggling with the balancing act between learning and scepticism that his tradition requires. This more self-deferential approach, which is particularly evident in his early compositions, may well be a reflection of his personality. Yet it also displays the influence of both Mi la ras pa104 and the members of the Bka’ gams tradition, most of whom make a virtue of self-deprecation in their writing, reflecting an aspect of Tibetan etiquette that precludes a direct statement of the author’s feeling.105

Rang byung rdo rje’s use of this tone does not, however, change its central theme of strangeness, and the central logic that underpins this theme in mahâmudrâ poetry; namely, that poets, in seeking to express the mahâmudrâ view, are attempting to describe the indescribable. This tension is found throughout the tradition Rang byung rdo rje inherited and again particularly in Saraha’s compositions. But it is not an implicit tension; the tradition, including Rang byung rdo rje, revels in it. Right from these early songs he incorporates the play of contradictions this paradox allows. For example, in one of the earliest of the songs composed at Khyung rdzong, he says:

Mountain hermits, yogis like me....

Cultivate simplicity, and yet  
this does not help "nothing/anything at all".  
Wander the country with "no direction" and yet  
this does not help expand our perception.  
Collect felt-cases for our texts, and yet  
this does not make our perceptions more comfortable.106

Once more including himself with the audience in the opening lines of this verse, he displays a level of self-deprecation that is absent in Saraha’s writing. But the main point of this verse again is that it highlights the existential incongruity or strangeness of

103 Song No. 14 (GN 19–20; GB 200–201).
104 I have discussed Mi la ras pa’s self-deprecating tone elsewhere in respect to his humour (Gamble 2010:146–147). For specific examples of his self-deprecation, see: Gsang smyon Heruka (1990:758).
105 Amy Sims Miller (2004:42-45) speaks tangentially about the importance the Bka’ gams tradition places on humility.  
106 Song No. 6 (GN 7–8; GB 189–190).
mahāmudrā poetry.

The verse also uses one of Saraha’s and the tradition in general’s favourite literary tools to do this: wordplay. In the first couplet, the wordplay revolves around the Tibetan term “gcig kyang med”, which means “nothing at all”, but in this case because it is used as a double negative could mean “anything at all”. The first couplet plays on these two meanings, allowing the line to be understood in two ways: directly as an indication that cultivation has not achieved anything; or indirectly such that “nothing at all” means emptiness and as this state is innate, no cultivation will bring about its realisation.

In the second couplet, the term that becomes an object of play is phyogs med. As mentioned in chapter two, the most usual meaning of this term in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing is “impartiality”, which he repeatedly indicates is the best approach toward Buddhist lineages, life’s circumstances, and other people. Yet here he uses the word’s individual syllables—the first syllable phyogs means “direction” and the second syllable med means “none”—to imply that he and other mountain yogis “wander the country with no direction”. This wordplay is then combined with a similar image-play that suggests he and other undirected yogis might have wandered around much of the country, but as they have not developed realisations, they have not seen anything more than they would have standing still.

The last couplet follows on from this and again, rather than a word play, uses an image—of the elaborate cases that Tibetans have traditionally used to store their texts. Rang byung rdo rje takes this image and asks indirectly what the point these luxurious covers serve when they do not make the perceptions engendered by their contents “more comfortable”.

Despite their cleverness, particularly considering that a teenager composed them, most of these word and image plays have at least models if not precedents in the mahāmudrā tradition of poetry. But there are also a few points even in Rang byung rdo rje’s earlier songs where he develops these well-worn themes. One is his aforementioned development of the idea of dpe cha as “metaphoric pieces”. Another occurs in the collection’s fifteenth song, the first time he questions the process of composition within a composition. It reads:

They are untrue, illusory, uncreated, so what use is this collection of words?

This is the first instance of a technique he develops further in his later songs and comes to be something of a stylistic signature. In some ways it is an extension of his tendency to cross the fourth wall and talk directly to his audience. Yet rather than employing the traditional, multicultural standards of that kind of expression—“Listen up!”, “Hear ye, hear

107 Song No. 15 (GN 20-22; GB 201-203).
ye!"—he instead adds a meta-narrative to his compositions. This meta-narrative once more undoes the audience's expectations, this time in relation to the conventions of literary composition. It does so by drawing readers into the process of composition, thereby encouraging them to approach his compositions as merely half-true. They are not to be sanctified for themselves, he suggests, but merely for the insights they might create in others' mind-streams.

vi. Missing O rgyan pa

Yet another intriguing thing about these criticisms is their own incongruent juxtaposition, within the compilation of his songs, with moments of intense and earnest self-criticism. At one point, for example, he gets frustrated at his lack of progress in yoga and reflects that:

Just now, useless visions  
scattered my thoughts, to the past, to the future.  
I really should cultivate, and not be distracted.

The mahāmudrā is the intention of  
past, present and future buddhas;  
the final vehicle, the essence of purpose.  
I really should experience it, and not be distracted.

He follows this admission by employing one of the Buddhist tradition's best-known antidotes to distraction, remembering death:

Even if I do not always remember death,  
impermanence has no resting place—  
by all means death will come, so  
by any means I will stay in mountain solitudes.

I write this small, true song,  
as I remember impermanence,  
in retreat at Khyung rdzong.108

Along with these more traditional forms of self-doubt and confession, Rang byung rdo rje's writing from this period also contains a new form of lamentation that was yet to become a standard: his doubts about living up to the expectations of others, which are articulated in several among the first group of songs in his collection. This type of song includes the previously discussed self-reflection in which he calls himself "stupid" and criticises himself for not understanding the view. Yet perhaps the most poignant of his self-doubting songs is the sixth, in which he mixes these doubts with his grief at being separated from O rgyan pa. The song reads in part:

Father guru, I have not emulated you,

108 Song No. 11 (GN 16–17; GB 198).
but I have not given up on great compassion. 
*Mahāmudrā* is the greatest meaning, the essence of all past, present and future buddhas; I am not completely familiar with it, but I have not given up on it, the buddhas’ intention. I have not stayed in isolated sites, mountain retreats, I have not experienced austerities like you, but I have not forgotten to imagine A HUM." 
I have no expansive understanding of the Tathāgata’s discourses, but I have not thrown the sacred dharma away. 

In the twelfth song, he expresses a similar sentiment: 

> Alas! How dark it is for a miscreant, mountain hermit like me. Father guru, wanderers’ hero, compassionate one, inspire this lazy beggar. Noble one, from the unseen realm, please inspire me! 

> It is good for me to stay in this solitude, this mountain hermitage; (but) it would also (be good) if I wasn’t separated from my loving, compassionate guru. How dark it will remain if you do not realise this! 

There are many other songs and even ritualised prayers in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition that evoke longing for the guru as a standard aspect of tantric practice; the collection of Mi la ras pa’s songs, for example, contains a famous version of this kind of song. But few of their authors were teenagers, and even fewer had been separated from their home and supports by war. This adds a poignancy to Rang byung rdo rje’s songs that highlights another, often overlooked aspect of the lives of young reincarnates that he was the first to experience: like many other young people chosen for important roles from birth or soon after, they often experience long periods of loneliness and isolation. 

### vii. Other Lives, Other Places

The other, more earnest endeavour with which Rang byung rdo rje was very much engaged while in residence at Khyung rdzong was the remembrance and recording of his

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109 These syllables are used in *gtum mo* (Skt. *candāli*), or inner heat yoga practice that is one of the six dharmas of Nārāyana.

110 Song No. 6 (GN 7–8; GB 189–190).

111 Song No. 12 (GN 17–18; GB 198–199).

112 In particular, Mi la ras pa’s liberation-story and songs contains an episode in which he sings a song about missing Mar pa. This song does not appear in earlier versions of his liberation-story, but it is found within Mkha’ spyod dbang po’s (1978c:219) retelling of the tale, which sets it on “Red Rock Protruding Summit” (Brag dmar spo mthon), and Gtsang smyon Heruka’s (1970:196) version, in which he calls the same place “Red Rock Jewel Valley” (Brag dmar mchod lung). This song is the first in the second work he composed from the tradition of Mi la ras pa’s story and songs, and has been translated in Chang (1999:2–3).

113 Many reincarnates have since reflected on this state, including the present Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (1991) and Chögyam Trungpa (1995:123–143), who called a chapter in his biography “Lonely Vocation”.
past lives. It was at Khyung rdzong that he composed two of the three lists of past lives that were later adopted as standard within the Karmapa tradition:114 one of these lists is contained within his Liberation-Story of Past Lives and the other within the sixteenth of his songs.

While he does not suggest that these two compositions were written to reinforce his status in the light of his continuing exile from Mtshur phu’s main buildings, it is notable that the monk Dar ma who requested the composition of the Liberation-Story of Past Lives was one of his main champions at Mtshur phu.115 What is also noteworthy about these two descriptions of his past lives is that—unlike a similar list composed in middle age but like his other compositions from this time—one is characterised by earnest self-doubt and the other by strangeness.

The Liberation-Story of Past Lives is the earnest, self-doubting piece. It begins, with the suggestion that Rang byung rdo rje’s “memory is cloudy, obscured, gloomy”.116 He then goes on to claim, in direct contrast to the later tradition, that the past lives he is about to discuss had been lived “without control” over how and when they occurred.117 Furthermore, throughout his actual description of the lives he repeatedly equivocates about his memories of them by using the expression “it is as if I was” (yin pa ’dra) to qualify every memory. By way of example, he describes one of his most well-known past lives by saying: “this is the time of the one known famously as Rgyal ba mchog dbyangs, and it is as if I was him.”118

In song number sixteen, he takes a more ironic stance towards his previous lives, suggesting at its beginning and end that the only reason he is describing them is to excuse himself from studying. At the beginning he says: “I have trained for many aeons, so I do not need to make an effort now.” And at the end:

Through all these (lives), I have studied, reflected and cultivated. In life after life, I put in a great deal of effort, so I do not need to make an effort now.

For someone who would continue to make more than “an effort” in his studies for the rest of his life, this seems a strange suggestion, but a line that implies he may be playing a joke on his audience quickly follows this claim. In Tibetan the line reads mad kyang ku re byis

114 This is the list that is given, for example, at the start of Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s life story in the Blue Annals (‘Gos Lo tsā ba 1974:31a–31b and Roerich 1988:474) despite the fact that Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s liberation-story contains his remembrances of an entirely different set of lives.
pa lags.\textsuperscript{119} This suggests two readings that pivot on a play between two words: mad (pa), which means “truth”, and med, which is an existential negating particle and therefore means “there is not”. Both of these syllables are pronounced exactly the same: “mé”.\textsuperscript{120} This means that although the scribes of this performance wrote the word down as mad, and therefore delivered the meaning “(All) this may be the truth, or I may be joking”, when he delivered this line orally it could also have meant “These didn’t happen, I am just joking”. This last understanding would have placed everything he had just said under erasure: the audience would have been left with the memory of his words, but also allowed to disregard them. Not only does this erasure add a level of incongruity or strangeness to his performance; it also facilitates an equivocation like that expressed in the Liberation-Story of Past-Lives.

In the body of this song, however, Rang byung rdo rje also addresses an ideal about which, even in his youth, he equivocates much less; and continues to promote throughout his life: the idea of impartiality to (almost) all lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. Here, he expresses the idea through enumerating past lives that align him with a variety of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist lineages:

Long ago, in India,  
I was the master àcàrya,  
Árya Nàgàrjuna’s best student;  
Nàgàbodhi was my name,  
and I trained in all dharmas.

After this, in India again  
I was a pandita, and my  
precise expertise in the three (sûtra)  
baskets and the tantras was unique.

After this, I was Rgyal mchog dbyangs,  
a student of the greatest master,  
the renowned Padmasambhava, and  
became an expert in Rnying ma dharma,  
particularly the Great Completion,  
so now I know it without studying it.

After this, I became a pandita again,  
and again a singular, adroit expert  
in all dharmas, completely qualified.

After this, I was the one called  
Pu to ba, who was connected  
to Kha rag bsgoms chung

\textsuperscript{119} Song No. 16 (GN 23–24; GB 203–204). Its colophon reads: “(This was sung) at the time of the gana(cakra) offering, at the isolated site of Khyung rdzong, on the eighth day of the autumn month, in the male, earth dog year (1298).”

\textsuperscript{120} And as Nicholas Tournadre (2008:281–308) has suggested in his study of tonogenesis on the Tibetan plateau, most probably would have sounded the same during Rang byung rdo rje’s time as they do now.
and an expert in his dharma.
This person was also a teacher to
the great one of Śne'u zur (Ye shes 'bar).

And again, I was the one called
Śrī Karmapa, who did everything
he did to help all beings.

The list of six people in this verse is almost the same as the list given in the Liberation-
Story of Past Lives and only slightly different from the list he gives later in life when he
composes the Verse Liberation-Story.\textsuperscript{121} Of the six people mentioned in this song, none
belong to the same lineage.

Each of the three sources describes the first person on the list differently: this verse
calls him Nāgābodhi [Klu'i byang chub], the Liberation-Story of Past Lives gives him no
name, and the Verse Liberation-Story calls him Prajñālammāra (Shes rab rgyan), which is,
coincidentally, similar to a name that Karma Pakshi gives for one of his previous
incarnations.\textsuperscript{122} Despite disagreement on the name of this person, all three sources agree
on the details of his life, the most important being his association with Nāgārjuna. In Rang
byung rdo rje’s understanding, Nāgārjuna was an extremely long-lived Indian siddha who
was not only the founder of the Madhyamaka tradition, but also the composer of the
Dharmadhātustava, which is more aligned to the Yogācāra school, and several works
within various tantric lineages.\textsuperscript{123} Therefore, in Rang byung rdo rje’s estimation, simply by
associating himself with this one person, he had aligned himself with a variety of Indian
philosophical positions and tantric traditions. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, this
association also has a specific meaning in the mahāmudrā tradition, for within this lineage
Nāgārjuna is also understood to be Saraha’s primary student,\textsuperscript{124} which means that through
this pre-incarnation Rang byung rdo rje is also positioning himself as Saraha’s grand-
student.

The second person listed in the song is unnamed, nor is anyone listed between
Nāgābodhi/Prajñālammāra and Rgyal mchog dbyangs in the Liberation-Story of Past Lives;
hence, neither of Rang byung rdo rje’s early works elaborates on who this pāṇḍita might
have been. In the latterly composed Verse Liberation-Story, however, this person is given a
name; one that displays both a more nuanced approach to past-life attribution and
(perhaps) the limits of Rang byung rdo rje’s well-cultivated lineal impartiality:

\textsuperscript{121} Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:376–378).

\textsuperscript{122} The name of Karma Pakshi’s previous life is Shes rab rgyal ba, but the details of the life are the same (Ye

\textsuperscript{123} Rang byung rdo rje (2004:157–158). As I mentioned earlier, modern scholars dispute the idea that it was
the same Nāgārjuna who composed works in accordance with these three schools. These scholars generally
attribute the works of “Nāgārjuna” to at least two and sometimes three different people, perhaps with the
42) gives an overview of the works traditionally attributed to him.

\textsuperscript{124} Si tu Pan chen (2004:26–27).
Kāmadhenu (Ka ma la dhe nu). In the Tibetan tradition Kāmadhenu is described as the student of Saroruha (Mtsho skyes rdo rje), who tradition holds was the first to introduce the *Hevajra-tantra* into the world.\(^{125}\) This tantra and its practise are particularly associated with the Sa skya tradition, which means that through this past-life memory, Rang byung rdo rje had associated himself with the Sa skya pas. Yet the way that he did this is telling. Rather than position himself as the tradition’s recipient, and therefore a beneficiary of the Sa skya’s practise of it, he has identified himself as one of its instigators; implying that he is one of the school’s forbears and the school has therefore benefited from him. This ambivalent approach to the Sa skya tradition is further emphasised by the fact that this is the only link he makes between himself and it; none of the other lives have any connection with this tradition.

The third life he mentions, that as Rgyal mchog dbyangs (8th century), is more straightforward in both its lineal allegiances and purpose. As noted in chapter two, Rgyal mchog dbyangs was one of Padmasambhava’s closest twenty-five disciples and one of Tibet’s first monks. Rang byung rdo rje’s association with him solidifies his connection to the Rnying ma tradition, the emerging treasure tradition, and the greater, collective Tibetan story.

For the fourth life, he creates yet another blank canvas, mentioning an Indian pāṇḍita of whom he will paint a more detailed portrait in his later descriptions: In both the *Past Life and Verse Liberation-Stories* he calls this pāṇḍita Dharmabodhi, describing him as a yogi who lived in South India and dedicated himself to the practice of Avalokiteśvara.\(^{126}\) This may also refer to the same Dharmabodhi who is described in Mi la ras pa’s liberation-story as an Indian who eventually visited Tibet, and upon meeting Mi la ras pa bowed before him.\(^{127}\) Rang byung rdo rje’s evocation of this life associates him with both Mi la ras pa and the Indian lineage of Avalokiteśvara, both of which are very important to his life and work.

The fifth and penultimate life on the list\(^{128}\) is that of Pu to ba (also Po to ba rin chen gsal; 1027/1031–1105), a famous teacher from the Bka’ gdam pa tradition who was one of ’Brom ston’s (1005–1064) three main disciples.\(^{129}\) Pu to ba was closely associated with a system of teachings called the “Six Basic Texts of the Bka’ gdam pa” (*Bka’ gdam pa gzhung drug*), which include several works with which Rang byung rdo rje expressed a particular

\(^{125}\) Snellgrove (1959:viii).


\(^{127}\) Although there is no mention of this meeting in the extant texts of the Mi la ras pa tradition dated to Rang byung rdo rje’s lifetime, the story did make its way into Mkha’ spyd dbang po’s (1978c:294) version of Mi la ras pa’s liberation-story, which was composed shortly after Rang byung rdo rje’s death. This suggests that there was an oral tradition of this story during Rang byung rdo rje’s lifetime.

\(^{128}\) The *Liberation-Story of Past Lives* also mentions another life between these two in which he was a student of “the noble Kamalasīla” (Rang byung rdo rje 2006c:356–357). The *Verse Liberation-Story* does not include this life, and instead says he had gone to “perform deeds in an eastern city” (Rang byung rdo rje, 2006d:378), which suggests a life lived in China, between these two lives.

affinity, including the Jātaka. He was also an abbot of Ra sgren Monastery, an institution that Rang byung rdo rje visited several times in his life. What is more, he also taught Kha rag bsgoms chung (11th–12th centuries) and Sne'u zur ye shes 'bar (1042–1118), both of whose teachings Rang byung rdo rje admired.

By rounding off this list with Dus gsum mkhyen pa, Rang byung rdo rje not only aligns himself with the Karmapa body-mālā, but also with the Bka' brgyud tradition more generally, and therefore establishes links with all the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism extant in his era. In this way, this song acts not only as a statement about his ability to remember past lives (and plays with the idea of what this means in practice); it is also an expression of his knowledge of and interest in the greater Tibetan Buddhist world beyond the walls of Khyung rdzong. Shortly after composing this song, he would set off to explore that world.

viii. Leaving Home Again

The time Rang byung rdo rje spent at Khyung rdzong was the longest period he lived in any one place in his life: between ten and twelve years. Although he stayed in one place for the period, his writings from this time still suggest he was on a voyage of a kind; one on which he travelled to a variety of places through his own visions and others' stories and songs. He also learned how to see differently, with the eyes of a yogi, the places he was about to visit in the material world. Indeed, as an eighteen year old at the end of his stay at Khyung rdzong, he had already accrued the kind of training and education that many in a similar position (including the two earlier Karmapas) did not finish until they were in their late twenties. After spending years training in this way, however, it was time to leave.

He conducted the process of leaving in stages. The first journeys he took from Khyung rdzong were relatively short, but symbolically important in the further establishment of his reputation. The first of these was to the base of a nearby mountain, Jo mo Gangs dkar

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130 The other five of these texts are: 1) The Bodhisattvabhāumi (Tib. Byang chub sems dpa'i sa) section of Asanga's Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra (Tib. Rnal 'byor spyod pa'i sa'i bstan bcos); 2) Maitreya-nātha/Asanga's Mahāyāna-satrālamkāra-kārikā (Tib. Theg pa chen po'i rdo rje rgyan gyi gral ba); 3) Sāntideva's Śūkṣdamūrcaya (Tib. Bslab pa kun las btus pa'i mgon par rtags pa); Sāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra (Byang chub sems pa'i spyod la 'jug pa); and the collected sayings of the Buddha called the Udānavarga (Tib. Ched du brjod pa'i thoms). These are described in Sims Miller (2004:17–19).

131 One of these visits will be explored further in chapter seven.


133 Sne'u zur ye shes 'bar is one of Pu to ba's main disciples (Alexander Gardner, 2010). van der Kuijip (1994:663 note 17) describes him as, "a major exponent of the Bka' gdirs pa".

134 Dus gsum mkhyen pa did not arrive at Sgam po pa's Monastery until he was thirty (Rgwa Lo tsā ba, 2010a:38). And after surveying Karma Pakshi's liberation-stories, Manson (2009) suggests the period of Karma Pakshi's life dedicated to study ended at the death of his teacher between 1227–1230, when he was between twenty-three and twenty-six years old. This earlier age for completion had also been facilitated by his recognition while still a teenager.
("Lady of the White Snows"), which was named for the local deity that lived there. This deity was one of the twelve landmark ākā śis Padmasambhava had subdued and Rang byung rdo rje had met in the in-between state. Jo mo Gangs dkar was also a site at which the first Karmapa, Dus gsum mkhyen pa, had conducted a lengthy retreat. By conducting a month long retreat in a cave at Jo mo Gangs dkar's sacred site, her abode or gnas, he therefore created a biographic link with two "ancestors": Padmasambhava and Dus gsum mkhyen pa. Later in life he would strengthen this narrative connection by returning to the cave to set up a statue of Padmasambhava.

The second journey he made was to Dge 'dun sgang Monastery in the Snye Valley, on the other side of the mountain ridge behind Mtshur phu. This monastery had been established by a student of the Kashmiri scholar Paṇ chen Śākyaśrībhadra (1127–1225) named Byang chub dpal (13th century), and its residents were therefore the holders of Śākyaśrībhadra's revered monastic lineage. Rang byung rdo rje took complete ordination from its abbot Gzhon nu byung chub (1279–1358) when he was eighteen years old. After receiving ordination he stayed on for a few weeks and studied the texts of monastic discipline, the Vinaya. He was to remain a monk for the rest of his life, and from all accounts including his own he took this obligation seriously, reflecting in some of his poems on his difficulties with celibacy and the yogenic practices that he performed to assuage that particular hardship.

The last short trip he took was to the prestigious Gspa phu sne'u thog Monastery, which was renowned as the home of the Pramāṇa (Tshad ma) or logic tradition in Tibet,
and also included Dus gsum mkhyen pa amongst its alumni.\textsuperscript{142} While there, Rang byung rdo rje studied with a monk he called “the sacred, spiritual friend Śākya gzhon nu”,\textsuperscript{143} whom the Blue Annals describes as “the abbot of lower Gsang phu”.\textsuperscript{144} The texts he studied included the classics of the Pramāṇa tradition, but also other foundational texts of the Tibetan sūtra Mahāyāna tradition.\textsuperscript{145}

After making these three journeys, Rang byung rdo rje had established his ability and standing as a yogi, a monk and a scholar even more firmly. Rather than trying to use these as leverage to gain control of Mtshur phu, however, he chose instead to leave it behind, and following Mi la ras pa’s example, went “into the mountains”. As the next chapter will describe in more detail, this journey took him first to the two more isolated monasteries associated with the Karmapas in Kham, Karma and Kam po gnas nang, where he met with problems similar to those he had encountered at Mtshur phu. But following this, he travelled to another mountainous borderland that he grew to love more than any other, and to which he attempted to return throughout his life and beyond: the wooded ravines of Kong po.

\textsuperscript{142} For a survey of this monastery and its succession see van der Kuijp (1987) and Shunzo Onoda (1991). About the life of its most influential founding figure see Ralph Kramer (2007). Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s stay there is mentioned in Rgwa Lo tsa ba (2010a:38).
\textsuperscript{143} Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:387).
\textsuperscript{144} Gos Lo tsa ba (1974:38b) and Roerich (1988:489).
\textsuperscript{145} The texts he studied included: the Five Texts of Maitreya (Byams chos sde Inga), Nagarjuna’s Roots of Mādhyamaka (Skt. Mūlamādhyamakakārikā; Tib. Dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab); Vasabandhu’s Treasury of Abhidharma (Skt. Abhidharmakośa; Tib. Chos mgon pa’i mdzod), which is associated with the Hinayāna in the Tibetan tradition; and his brother Asaṅga’s Compendium of Abhidharma (Skt. Abhidarmaramacāya; Tib. Chos mgon pa’i kun btus), which is associated with the sūtra Mahāyāna tradition.
Chapter Six:  
Into the Mountains

If you don’t crack open your mind,¹  
expertise in jargon is useless...  
If you don’t know your body’s solitude,  
escaping to the wilderness is useless.  
If you don’t isolate preconceptions,  
relying on isolated places is useless.

Rang byung rdo rje, 1312, aged twenty-nine,  
Bkra shis ljongs, Tsa ri.²

i. Introduction: Living on the Edge

In 1302 at the age of nineteen, Rang byung rdo rje left Mtshur phu monastery to live in the mountains. Over the next twelve years he spent less than eighteen months in Central Tibet and even less time at Mtshur phu.

His first journey took him to Khams, the birthplace of the first and second Karmapas, and the site of the two monasteries they had built and repaired: Karma in the north and Kam po gnas nang in the south. At Karma he did almost the same things he had done at Mtshur phu. In deference to the monastery’s authorities, he moved into a nearby hermitage, where he lived for five years, continuing his retreats and composing another set of retreat-inspired songs. But unlike his time at Mtshur phu, where powerful mentors protected him, at Karma he was on his own. This isolation led to physical depravations and other threats to his life, including at least one assassination attempt.

At Kam po gnas nang the welcome from the local humans was even less cordial, and for unexplained reasons he moved quickly on from this monastery, which was the third of his predecessors’ seats. He is able to brush over this snub in his liberation-story narrative, however, because there was much to do in Kam po gnas nang’s neighbourhood. First, he helped stop a war that had been raging nearby, and shortly thereafter he was invited further south to visit the magnificent Mount Kha ba dkar po. Despite its brevity, his stay there proved to be transformative, both for him and the region. During his time there he began the work of establishing Kha ba dkar po as a “great, sacred site” (gnas chen), another home for Cakrasamvara on the Tibetan Plateau. This was also a chance to hone further his cultural landscaping technique.

His involvement in this large, cultural project at Kha ba dkar po suggests that he intended to stay there for at least a few years, but in the summer of 1309 he experienced an intense vision of O rgyan pa, which was followed by news of his father-guru’s death.

¹ This is my translation of the Great Completion expression gdar sha sens la ma chod na, which literally means “not to pierce your mind’s egg membrane”, but is used as a metaphor to mean “to test” and “to investigate”.
² Song No. 50 (GN 73–74, GB 243–244) Dharma Song of the Eight Useless Things. Colophon: “Rang byung rdo rje sang this song in Bkra shis ljongs, Tsa ri tra (another name for Tsa ri), on the twenty-second day of the seventh month of the mouse year (1312).”
Upon hearing this news, he returned to Central Tibet, where he stayed for just under a year. During this stay he visited Mtshur phu, but based himself Snye mdo Monastery in the nearby Snye Valley. This monastery was the home of O rgyan pa’s main student, Kun dga’ don grub, whom O rgyan pa had recognised as the reincarnation of his teacher Rgod gtsang pa. Following this stay and a short side trip to Tshal induced by the death of its myriarch, he went into retreat further up the Snye Valley at the base of Mount Jo mo Gangs dkar. Here he experienced a vision that would have a profound impact on the rest of his life. In the vision the local deities of Kong po in Southern Tibet invited him to set up a hermitage at their most sacred site: Tsa ri. He followed this call, and although he encountered many hardships, he finally found a place where he wanted to stay, and to which he sought to return for the rest of his life (and the next two).

Once again, though, his stay in the borderlands was interrupted, this time by ill health. During this episode of sickness he made a vow, in the presence of Mount Yar klungs shamb po, to “better dedicate himself to the welfare of others”. This encouraged him to return to Central Tibet, where he spent most of the next ten years relatively stationary, teaching a growing number of students and composing many of the texts that systemised and consolidated the Karma bka’ brgyud tradition, and helped make his name. He performed much of this work while staying at a new hermitage he founded near Mtshur phu, a place he called Bde chen stengs Ridge (“Great Bliss Ridge”). It was at this hermitage that, at the age of forty-one, as he was finally preparing to set off for Kong po again, he composed his Verse Liberation-Story.

ii. To Karma

When Rang byung rdo rje decided to leave Mtshur phu in 1302, the nineteen-year-old had only recently returned from the period of intensive study at Gsang phu ne’u thog Monastery described in the last chapter. In a song he composed at the beginning of the journey, he reflected on his decision, describing both his desire to live in retreat and the moral dangers he understood to be rife in Central Tibet. It reads in part:

None of the worldly visions of this life
are true, so if you want to attain
unending, great bliss, always
volunteer for dharma’s suffering.
There is no end to today’s work so
stay for a long time in mountain retreats….

All the prestige, the merit (of this life)
will seem like a dream when the pangs of death (descend).
You will leave all your servants, close and distant relatives,
and have no option but to travel into the unknown.
This tall, strong castle you have built
will stand its ground when you die;
none of these well-made, formulated things marked with your fingerprints will follow you.³

Around this time he had also been granted an audience by 'Jam dbyang rin chen rgyal mtshan (d. 1305), who had been the abbot of Sa skya and was on his way to take up the post of Imperial Preceptor in Dadu.⁴ In an unusual show of respect toward this elderly Sa skya monk, Rang byung rdo rje not only describes this encounter in his liberation-story, but reports that it inspired in him a “pure vision” in which he saw “many bodhisattvas” and took this as a sign that his future activities would be successful.⁵

a) On the Road to Karma

Following this meeting, there is a distinct shift in focus in his stories and songs, from the world he left behind to the road ahead. And as it was a 1300 kilometre journey from Mtshur phu to Karma, he had plenty of time to contemplate that road, a fact that is reflected in several of the songs he composed during this period, two of which have travel as a central theme.

The first of these is very much a transitional song, in which he shifts from the more static imagery he employed at Khyung rdzong to images of movement. Its transitional nature is apparent in that rather than evoking movement directly, it instead presents a list of geographic images coupled with accompanying mental afflictions (Skt. kleśa; Tib. nyon mongś) that together suggest a passing parade of environments. Most of these metaphors are used repeatedly in a variety of contexts within the Buddhist literary tradition. Rang byung rdo rje’s innovation is to list the images one after another, giving the sense that the afflictions and the external environment are ambushing the reader. It reads in part:

Samsāra is a fierce, scalding fire-pit.
Ignorance is cloaking, deep, murky darkness.
Birth, ageing, sickness and death are a great river.
Arrogance is a steep, rocky mountain.
Jealousy is a great, raging storm.
Wicked words pierce like thorns.⁶

The first direct mention of travel comes in a later song, composed as he reflects back on his travels. The song is long and complex, combining kāvya (Tib. snyan ngag) synonyms with tantric imagery, in a process of circular reflection that begins with the mind, then moves out to the body and finally the environment, before dissolving all these images back

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³ Song No. 21 (GN 29–31; GN 276–277).
⁶ Song No. 22 (GN 32–33; GB 208–209). Colophon: “Rinpoche, Rang byung rdo rje spoke (like) this in 'Gro phu, on the fifteenth day, of the ninth month, of the tiger year (1302).”
into non-dual gnosis. It begins by aligning awakened awareness with the light of the sun and moon.

Wherever they are, (the sun), the king of seven horses and the (moon), the rabbit holder, naturally radiate hot sunbeams and cool moonlight that travel beyond qualities and suffering...

Evoking a traditional kāvyā image, he describes the sun here as “the king of seven horses” (rtad 'byun rgyal po), an allusion to the Indian sun-god Sūrya, who is said to travel across the sky in a seven horse carriage. The reference to the moon as “the rabbit holder” (ri bong can) refers to shadows on the lunar surface that resemble a rabbit. It is such a common synonym for the moon that it is often used without explanation. The last image of the verse aligns the light from these two heavenly bodies with gnosis (Skt. jñāna; Tib. ye shes) in that like sun and moonlight, gnosis is spread impartially beyond limited constructions of “qualities and suffering” (yon tan sdug bsgal). This pairing of “qualities and suffering” is unusual in Buddhist literature. “Suffering” (Skt. duḥkha; Tib. sdu bsngal) is often paired with its opposite “happiness/bliss” (Skt. sukhā; Tib. bde ba). The term “qualities” (Skt. gaṇa; Tib. yon tan) is usually used to describe the positive attributes of a realised being or Buddha, and not as part of an experiential dyad. By combining these two, he suggests that this gnosis passes beyond both the dyadic experiences of samsāra and nirvāṇa and the conceptual dyad of awakened and non-awakened.

The next section of the poem moves its focus from the mind itself to its relationship with the physical world. It reads:

Here in upper (but) unrealised realms,
we enter sensual paths; (on these paths)
our mind runs to (various) places (yul),
but ends up in Rāhu’s mouth.

This verse contains one of the clearest examples of his repeated play between the two meanings of the word yul, about which I spoke in the introduction: its colloquial meaning of an external place and its philosophical meaning of a sensuous sphere. Here Rang byung rdo rje likens the process by which the mind engages objects through the senses to running down a path. He then links this analogy with the earlier connection between light and gnosis, by suggesting that the destination of all this running is darkness; the mouth of Rāhu, who in Indian mythology is an asura (Tib. lha ma yin) that eats the sun god, causing eclipses.

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7 Song No. 28 (GN 39-40; GB 215-216) Song that Determines the Secret Mantra Vajrayāna Exactly. A translation of the whole song and the Tibetan text is included within appendix four.
8 Although the reference here is clearly to a “king of seven horses” and therefore one who commands seven horses, Sūrya is sometimes also described and depicted in the Indian context as the charioteer of one seven-headed horse. See: Sahu (2011) for a description of these variant depictions.
In the next verse he turns the focus inwards, mapping all these celestial bodies onto the human body. He does this by first evoking the traditional Indian and Tibetan tripartite cosmological division of sky, earth and subterranean worlds, and then situating them within the body: the abode of Brahmā, the highest point of saṃsāra, is placed at the top of the head; the sun, moon and stars are situated in the middle, and the netherworld of the nāgas is aligned with his and his audience’s nether-regions. The verse reads:

From the abode of Brahmā, to down below, where the Lord of the Nāgas is coiled, that which is by nature the sun, moon and stars, should all be subdued...

Once he and his audience are able to subdue their bodies, he suggests, they will be able to subdue the universe, as it is merely a construction of body-based, sensuous experiences. The next, middle section of the song describes how to use complicated tantric practices to achieve this subjugation. For the purposes of this discussion, it must suffice to skip to the end of the exposition, to the last two verses, in which he describes the outcome of the practices and the resultant change in the yogi’s view. The verses describe the arising non-dualistic wisdom or gnosis in the following way:

It is the final freedom in the deepest ocean, the illumination of mountain peaks, clear as the glow of jasmine and lightning—attain this precious treasure!

This will mean travel beyond, to gnosis, in which there is naturally movement and stillness. The greatest, the ordinary and the rest, all come from there; there is nothing else.9

This description begins by re-evoking the initial image of gnosis as the light of the sun and moon, which supposedly permeates all. But in the second verse it focuses on the distances that both this light and gnosis travel; so far that eventually they transcend even travel to become both still and moving.

The other song of Rang byung rdo rje’s from this period that evokes travel is, by contrast, much more straightforward in both imagery and subject matter. It uses a travel image that makes its debut in his writing at this time; one that he employs sporadically in future compositions, as well: horses. The song begins by describing another catalyst for his leaving Central Tibet, the over-intellectualisation that had infused his earlier compositions, and then aligns his horseback journey to Khams with a yogic journey beyond conception. It reads in part:

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9 Song No. 28 (GN 39-40; GB 215-216) Song that Determines the Secret Mantra Vajrayāna Exactly.
b) Visions of Vimalamitra

This movement away from both destructive social pressures and intellectualisation into the wildernesses of Khams becomes a major theme of Rang byung rdo rje's writing from this period. He does not describe Khams as some kind of pure land, but merely as a land in which there are still places a yogi like him can hide. He does not once mention the Mongols or their Sa skya regents in any of his personal writings during his stay in this region. Instead he describes a land under variant local rule, and therefore in an age more dappled than entirely dark. In those areas where local rulers acted kindly towards him and other yogis, he suggested the region had escaped the darkness consuming the rest of Tibet, but if he encountered any hostility, he blamed the dark times.

His first stop in these varied lands was Karma Monastery, the site that gave the Karmapa body-mālā its name. As he explains in both his stories and songs, he spent five years in or near this monastery engaged in retreats focused on the Great Completion (Rdzogs chen), which he worked to incorporate with the mahāmudrā yogas he had practised at Mtshur phu.

Despite later commentaries to the contrary,12 there is no suggestion from Rang byung rdo rje that he would take control of Karma Monastery, and as at Mtshur phu he was content to live in a nearby hermitage. The only difference this time was that he built his own hut, on Lha stengs Ridge ("Divine Ridge")13 in a nearby forest. There amongst the trees, he focused on his Great Completion meditation, and particularly the Dākinis' Heart-Essence (Mkha’ ’gro snying thig) cycle of treasure texts. He had begun to study this at Mtshur phu, but with little success.14 It was only at Lha stengs that he experienced breakthroughs in this practice. The first of these was a vision of Vimalamitra (c. 8th century), who appeared before him in "the bright light that arises as dawn ends", and then

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10 The Tibetan word 'khyer, which is usually translated as "carry" is here translated as "brush" to reflect the movement of banners.
11 Song No. 25 (GN 35–36; GB 212–213). Colophon: "(He) gave these instructions to the lucky ones who were gathered for a gana(cakra) at Lha stengs, on the tenth night of the tenth month of the dragon year (1304)."
13 This is the most frequent spelling of this site's name. Alternate spellings include: "Lha stangs" and "Lha steng".
14 This suggests there may have been a focus on Bka' brygyud practices at Mtshur phu and Rnying ma practices at Karma Monastery, but I have not found any further evidence to back up this claim.
“dissolved into the middle of (his) forehead”. This led, he goes on to say, "to an extremely clear understanding of the Great Completion."15

Vimalamitra’s appearance in this vision is notable not only because it shows what Rang byung rdo rje was doing in the forest, but also because it shows his close links with the developing treasure tradition. These links are evident from the fact that during this time the treasure tradition was in the process of transforming Vimalamitra from an imperial era translator of mainstream Mahāyāna texts into a proponent of the Great Completion tradition.16 Rang byung rdo rje’s vision of him in his transformed state suggests he was aware of and even involved in this process, despite records of only sporadic interactions with treasure tradition proponents during the previous ten years.

c) Surviving Forest Fires and Black Magic

In contrast to this more positive remembrance of his time in Lha stengs, which is broadly reflective of the tone in which he records his stay there in the Verse Liberation-Story, his songs from this period are much more focused on personal difficulties and local tensions. The motif of the personal difficulties that he and the other yogis in the forest encountered recurs throughout these songs, painting a portrait of a group of people barely surviving and sometimes under attack from malevolent political forces. The most succinct example of this image is in the following verse:

To train in this way (you will need):
to make a home in an isolated solitude,
to depend on forests and trees,
to (wear) clothes of discarded rags,
to act like your breath has left you,
to eat food as various as birds, and
to be unattached to everything.17

At first glance it may seem strange to include a dependence on forests and trees as one of the major deprivations that he had to endure, but subsequent events suggest this inclusion was prescient. For, in fact, several years after Rang byung rdo rje wrote these lines, a forest fire broke out at Lha stengs, which threatened the lives of all its hermits. While this event had all the indicators of a tragedy, it obversely became a moment of triumph for the young monk. Characteristically, Gtsug lag phreng ba provides the most detailed account of the event, reporting that:

(When he was staying) at Lha stengs, a great fire began to burn adventitiously. Nobody knew what to do and fled. Fearing for his life the scholar monk Gzhon

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16 Vimalamitra is also called Dri med bshes gnyen in Tibetan sources, but I have retained the name Vimalamitra as Rang byung rdo rje uses a transliterated form of this name in his writing. For more information on the development of his liberation-story tradition see: Gruber (2012).
17 Song No. 35 (GN 47-48; GB 222). Colophon reads: “Rang byung rdo rje wrote this after an experience arose.”
nu 'bum sought refuge with Rang byung rdo rje, and (therefore watched as)
Rang byung rdo rje spoke (directly to the flames) saying:

If I possess altruism as pure as those of old,
if I have accrued the (qualities) of a buddha,
if I am now a lord of the tenth ground,
then by the power of the truth of my words
may this great conflagration be pacified.

He then snapped his fingers, and immediately rain began to fall amongst licking
flames that pervaded the sky, causing a mix of dark brown smoke and clouds
before the fire went out.\(^{18}\)

In this description Gtseug lag phreng ba repeats the narrative device he used when Rang
byung rdo rje arrived at Mtshur phu and needed to tame resistance to his presence there:
he has him use “words of truth” (tshigs bden) to subdue and transform the elements. But
as at Mtshur phu, Rang byung rdo rje’s own description of events does not include either
this rhetorical device or the attendant claims to buddhahood. His description of events, by
contrast, merely says:

(While I was staying) in the forest of Lha stengs, a great fire arose. Then out of
the smoke came thunder and rain, which instantly pacified the fire. It kept
raining, and water flowed everywhere. This pacified not only (the fire) but the
people (of the forest), who were terrified. After (it was over) they praised me
for what I had done.\(^{19}\)

In this retelling, he is much more ambivalent about his role in extinguishing the fire,
merely asserting that those in the region attributed its extinguishment to him, not that he
had done it. This means that the description is yet another instance in which later re-
tellers of his tale upgraded his position from self-described realised, reincarnate (and in
this instance perhaps “lucky”) yogi to a fully realised buddha. It also shows some
ambivalence on his part about the outcome of this event. It suggests, for instance, that he
was not entirely happy with the greater profile these events gave him, but does not
suggest why this may have been.

Another of the songs he composed during this period provides a clue. In this song, he
describes himself as: “this monk, this young boy, this corpse”.\(^{20}\) At any other moment in his
story, this could be read as a throwaway line, another example of his commitment to
remembering impermanence. But at this point in his life’s story, there is every reason to
suggest his life was directly threatened and his retreat to the forest was an effort to keep a
low profile in the face of these threats. In this context, the fire and the subsequent
attention it brought him were not particularly welcome. Following this event, the
colophons of his songs suggest that he was invited to an increasing number of tantric

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20 Song No. 34 (GN 46-47; GB 221-222).
feasts called “circle-meetings” or ganacakra (Tib. tshogs ’khor), often held on auspicious days. According to the colophons of his songs, Rang byung rdo rje was most often present at those held on: (a) the eighth of each month, which is Medicine Buddha day; (b) the tenth of each month or Padmasambhava day; and (c) the twenty-fifth, which is a day dedicated to Cakrasamvara and Vajrayogini. Further, both the songs and the liberation-stories suggest that as his reputation grew, the attendance at this feast grew, until he was performing his songs for “large crowds”.

The reaction from the local power brokers to his increasing popularity was acrimonious, and the threats to his life became more direct. The situation reached a climax one night in 1306. While the then twenty-three year old slept, he dreamt that Mañjuśrī manifested before him as Yamāntaka, with three faces, six hands, a garland of fire, an expression like a dark cloud, and a voice like thunder. From this, he says obscurely that, he “understood that the obstacles Sbod stong had created were being reversed”. It is only in Si tu Pañ chen’s version of the story that the details are provided. It reads:

At that time, several jealous (local) people could not stand his fame and large following any more. One of them (Sbod stong?) was quite wealthy and used this wealth to accrue dark power. Eventually he persuaded eight people to begin performing the very wrathful Yama (Lord of Death) practice (against Rang byung rdo rje). But while they recited it, the sworn enemy of Yama, Mañjuśrī (as Yamāntaka) appeared in their fire with three faces and six arms. He then began reciting his own mantras, which stopped their recitations. It also caused the cave to collapse and they all travelled to the other side (i.e., died). Many people had a vision of this, and (instead of ending his life and influence), it led to his receiving an increasing number of offerings.

This story is noteworthy not only because it describes both the threat his presence posed to local power and the threat local powers posed to him, but also because it is another example of his deriving authority from non-humans. In this episode, the local aristocrats assumed they were disposing of a helpless monk, one who wore “clothes of discarded rags” and ate “food as various varied as birds”, but foolishly attempted to do so by using black magic and therefore strayed into the otherworldly realms in which he was more powerful.

iii. To Kha ba dkar po

Despite or perhaps because of his success at Karma, Rang byung rdo rje left his retreat at Lha stengs the year after the cave incident. Following his departure, he travelled for over a year, down through the high ridges and deep river gorges of South-Eastern Tibet.

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21 These days are described in the following works: Medicine Buddha and Cakrasamvara/Vajrayogini days is described in Cabezon (2009:2); and Padmasambhava day is described in Ricard (1994:25 Note 45).
Figure 6.1 Sites Visited on his First Journey to Khams.25

Figure 6.2 Mount Kha ba dkar po.
(From across the Mekong River Gorge at sunrise).

25 Again, the basis for this map was taken from Google Earth and it was then modified to reflect those areas of most importance to this section of Rang byung rdo rje’s tale.
His original destination was the last of the three monasteries the first Karmapa had founded and the second Karmapa had repaired: Kam po gnas nang, which still stands today about eighty kilometres north of Li thang in Sichuan.26 Following a familiar pattern, he travelled to the monastery at the behest of the region’s non-human inhabitants, in this case the deity called Rdo rje dpal brtsegs (Vajra Glory Mound). Rdo rje dpal brtsegs had already met with and been tamed by the first two Karmapas,27 a precedent Rang byung rdo rje acknowledged by calling him a “lay-Buddhist” (Skt. upāsaka; Tib. dge bsnyen), which is to say one who is bound by the five most basic vows of the tradition. Like many of the other local gods, he is described as a white man on a white horse, and as Rang byung rdo rje describes events, he not only invited him to the area, but also came to welcome him. “When I was travelling to Kam po gnas nang,” he says, “I saw the great lay-Buddhist Rdo rje dpal brtsegs riding a white horse with a red mane. He gestured to indicate that he was happy to see me and had come to welcome me.”28

Despite this celestial welcome, the humans at Kam po gnas nang were decidedly less cordial. Indeed they may have been the least welcoming humans Rang byung rdo rje encountered during any of his journeys. Rang byung rdo rje does not provide details about what occurred as he approached this monastery, and neither do later redactors. All they acknowledge is that he travelled into the area, was greeted by Rdo rje dpal brtsegs, and then left without staying at one of his lineage’s most important monasteries.

Another clue to his probably hostile reception at Kam po gnas nang is that Rang byung rdo rje never returned to the region. Before he left it for good, however, he did manage to perform a few more important deeds that would gradually help him overcome the disappointment of Kam po gnas nang. The first of these was to make peace in the town of Kol ti, while the second was to begin the re-figureation of Mount Kha ba dkar po.

a) Fighting Words at Kol ti

According to Rang byung rdo rje’s description, the settlement of Kol ti was just to the east of Kha ba dkar po, “on a small ridge that arose when the earth boiled”.29 In Rang byung rdo rje’s telling of it, this episode occurred on two levels: amongst the region’s humans and amongst its non-human gods and ghosts. He was able to resolve the internecine dispute

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26 Kam po gnas nang Monastery still exists, but since the seventeenth century it has been aligned with the Dge lugs tradition.
27 The first Karmapa’s visit is described in Gzhon nu byang chub (2010:91-92). The second Karmapa’s visit is described in Karma Pakshi (1978:93).
29 The Verse Liberation-Story (Rang byung rdo rje, 2006d:389) describes his adventures at Kha ba dkar po before those at Kam po gnas nang and Kol ti (Rang byung rdo rje, 2006d:390). The dates of the songs he sang as he went, however, suggest he travelled first to Kam po gnas nang, then to Kol ti and then on to Kha ba dkar po (Songs 39 and 40 GN 54–56; GB 226–229 and Rang byung rdo rje, 2006a: vol. Ca 49–53). There are no villages in the region called Kol ti today, but several villages have similar names and are all candidates to have been the scene of this episode. These include the villages now known as Gongziding and Gongpo. What all of these sites have in common is a commanding view of the Kha ba dkar po Mountain Range across the precipitous Mekong River gorge. The dramatic geography of the region, along with the warring state in which he found it reinforces his suggestion that the ridge on which it was perched “arose when the earth boiled”.
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the locals had experienced, he reported, by recognising it was not their autonomous doing, but rather the result of another, celestial war being fought in the skies above the area. It was this conflict that had destabilised the region, and once he resolved it, the terrestrial dispute would evaporate.

Rang byung rdo rje’s recollections of the god/ghost war and its resolution are told in the Verse Liberation-Story. There he explains that after travelling through the area’s ravines “to subdue the enemies of the lay-Buddhist Rong btsan Kha ba dkar po ("Spirit of the Ravine, Snow White")”, he was eventually granted a vision of this god, who appeared to him as “a man on a white horse (wearing) a white, silken coat... (next to) a divine mansion”. This god, he continues, led him to Kol ti, where he came to understand that the “great fight” there “was caused by non-humans”. So he used his “samādhi to calm them down”. After this, he reports, “they did as I said, and I heard them speaking kind words to each other”.

The song he sang about this incident, by contrast, concentrates on the humans involved in the conflict, and puts much of the blame for the region’s problems on their corrupt behaviour. This is the first of many of his songs whose main theme is social criticism, and its colophon records that it was composed as he engaged in “negotiations to resolve civil strife (at Kol ti”).

As the first of its kind it established a pattern for later songs that have a similar theme. It also drew heavily on earlier, similar songs from the mahāmudrā tradition, especially Saraha’s compositions, but it replaced Saraha’s reflections on Indian society with reflections on the Tibetan society that surrounded him. In particular, both this and the social critiques he composed later focused on the misbehaviour of several social groups. In later songs he often described these groups as a whole, but in this song he directed his criticism at their leaders: the heads of monastic communities whom he calls “spiritual friends” (Skt. kalyāṇa-mitra; Tib. dge ba’i bshes gnyen); advanced yogis who practice the Great Completion, whom he calls “great meditators” (sgom chen); local priests, whom he calls tāntrikas (sngags pa); and “patrons” (yon bdag), a term he uses to describe the lay supporters of these religious communities.

As his division of society makes clear, Rang byung rdo rje’s focus in these songs was heavily skewed towards Tibet’s religious community. This reflects what will become evident is his generally conservative approach to non-religious social groups, a conservatism influenced in turn by a distinct lack of interest. As this potter’s son understood it, there was no point re-ordering society to make it fairer, and social advancement was anyway useless. If a person wanted to improve his or her lot, he or she

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32 Song No. 40 (GN 55-56; GB 227-229).
should do so through spiritual practice. Even so, it is notable that with one exception, which will be discussed in the next chapter, he directed most of his criticism toward his society’s authority figures, not its subalterns.

Along with the Tibet-specific cast of his criticism, his generally impartial approach to all spiritual roles also makes his critique dissimilar to those of Saraha’s dohās. Saraha’s critiques of socio-religious groups can generally be divided into three categories: (a) those he thinks are completely wasting their time, which is to say Brahmins and Jains; (b) those he thinks have a limited understanding, which is to say all Buddhists who do not practise his preferred forms of Buddhism, which although he does not use the term in the People’s Dohās is presumably mahāmudrā; and (c) those he thinks are practising mahāmudrā incorrectly. Rang byung rdo rje’s approach differs from this in two ways: as it is directed solely at tantric Buddhists, it does not contain the first type of criticism; and as he is more open to the practice of various forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism and he did not encounter any Hinayāna Buddhists, it does not contain the second. All Rang byung rdo rje’s criticism is a variant of the last type and therefore an extension of both his conservative approach to society and his generally impartial approach to Mahāyāna Buddhist practice; he does not want people to change traditions, but merely to practice well in whatever their chosen tradition happens to be.

His adaptations of Saraha’s approach are also evident in the ways he frames his criticism. He begins, for example, by making a connection between the bad deeds he is about to describe and the general corruption of these “bad times”. And he ends by acknowledging his own faults, and therefore his own need for improvement, a form of cultural self-deprecation that is strikingly absent in the songs attributed to Saraha. The body of the song reads:

I cannot gauge others’ minds in these bad times
when the teachings are declining,
but this is a little of what I have seen.

(I have seen) "spiritual friends" who advertise greatness,
but influenced by careless laziness,
sink into the mud of wealth and fame,
obessed by the taste of meat and beer.
Doesn’t this hurt the teachings?

(I have seen) "great meditators" who advertise meditation,
but are carried away by materialistic days,
and overpowered by slumber each night;

33 This is a translation of the Tibetan word ’dod pa. This word has several meanings, including “to desire” and “to proclaim”. As the verse following those in which it is used contains allusions to both meanings—“power loving tántrikas” and “brave babbling”—it seems to me that he might be trying to convey both senses of the word. I have chosen to focus on the proclamation aspect of it as the desiring is anyway implied in the rest of the verse. But as the meaning of this word in this song is more in line with the idea of “(false) advertising” than personal proclamation, I have translated it here as “advertising.”
morning and night, they chase pleasure and food.
Diverted in this way, will their mind-streams be freed?

(I have seen) power loving tāntrikas,
reliant on brave babbling.
Don’t those who hurt others
keep their own mind-streams burning?

(I have seen) patrons desperate for wealth and fame,
who do not develop vivid trust.
Don’t those who behave badly
fall down to the three lower realms?

My sad mind has encouraged me
to talk in this way.
If no one else listens,
I will tell you, the empty sky.

Right now, come what may,
I must not get distracted by material things,
and as the sacred gurus instruct,
single pointedly develop experience.34

b) Kha ba dkar po: Poetry and Guides

Although it is presented in a slightly different way, in that it involved his transforming of a
region’s human or non-human inhabitants, Rang byung rdo rje’s resolution of the civil
dispute in Kol ti had much in common with his other acts of subjugation, particularly those
he performed at Mtshur phu and Karma. The parallels between these adventures were
further enhanced by what he did next, which was to elevate the status of its local sacred
site, Mount Kha ba dkar po.

As first at Mtshur phu and then Karma, the basic elements of this transformation
include his setting of past and present tales there, suggesting a more ornamental way of
viewing the site, and finally re-visioning it as a maṇḍala. The literature that encourages
this environmental remodelling is also similar: his stories, songs and specific praises
directed to the site.35 But his writing about Kha ba dkar po also includes two new
developments, one conceptual and the other literary.

The transformative concept that he begins to develop here is one that goes on to inform
many of his later descriptions of sacred sites, especially those in Kong po. It is the idea that
there are some places whose isolation protects them from dark times. As he explains it, the
idea first came to him in a vision he had of O rgyan pa, in which his teacher pointed out to
him that the Buddha himself in several of his sūtras had praised such isolated places in

34 Song No. 40 (GN 55–56; GB 227–229). Colophon: “Rang byung rdo rje wrote this song as he engaged in
negotiations (to resolve) civil strife, on the 28th day of the 12th month of the sheep year (1307). He was
staying at the Kol ti Temple.”
35 A complete translation of this praise is included in the fifth appendix.
this capacity. Rang byung rdo rje’s job, as O rgyan pa explained it and he understood it, was to recognise exactly where these sites were. Kha ba dkar po is the first site he makes such a claim about, and he does so in the first verse of a praise he wrote to it, which reads:

In these dark times, bodhisattvas
  gaining experience in siddhī’s essence
  should rely on solitude to help37 these endeavours.
  This claim accords with the sūtras, whose words directly praise those
  who abide in sacred sites like rocky mountains and great borderlands.38

Rang byung rdo rje’s enthusiasm for Kha ba dkar po is also reflected in the notable literary development in his writing about this isolated site: his alleged composition of two site-guides (Gnas yig) to the region. Although it is called A Secret Guide to Kha ba dkar po by its collators, the shorter of these two does not read like a proper “site-guide” so much as an extract from another, longer work in which he describes Kha ba dkar po esoterically.39 On the other hand, the longer text, A Rain of Siddhi: A Site-Guide for the Great Sacred Site Kha ba dkar po,40 in that it instructs pilgrims on how to envision the sacred site and which ceremonies to conduct as they do so, does fulfill many of the characteristics of the site-guide genre.41 If it was composed by Rang byung rdo rje (and I can find no evidence to directly refute this attribution),42 this suggests a development in his approach to the reframing of sacred sites. Whereas before he had concentrated his efforts on the mere evocation of his own view, in this work he grants his audience a meditational and ceremonial method by which to transform their view.

This development and a clearer picture of his reframing methods can be garnered by comparing A Rain of Siddhi with his song of praise to the Kha ba dkar po region. In this comparison, the differing emphases between the two works become almost immediately apparent. The site-guide, for example, assumes that pilgrims to the region are already aware of the mountain’s significance, and only gives a perfunctory sketch of its position,

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36 He transcribed the details of this vision and they have been preserved in his Collected Works (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. Ca, 96–98). The lines discussing isolated places could be translated thus: “If you can generate a powerful effort in dark times, if you can stay in isolated places and dedicate yourself to dharma, then even though these are dark times, your qualities will be clarified. As the Buddha so praised them, these (sites) will help you transform.” In many ways this idea is a precedent for the idea of the “hidden land” or sbas yul. But as I noted in chapter four, and both Childs (1999: 126–158) and Sardar-Afkhami (2001:32-65) have explored in some depth, this idea was only in the early stages of its development during Rang byung rdo rje’s lifetime.

37 Translated more literally this would be “to condition” (rkyen), but in this instance its meaning is “to help”.


39 Tib. Kha ba dkar po'i gsang yig. (Rang byung rdo rje 2006i:8–9). A complete translation of this text is included in appendix five. I have been unable to find the text from which this short description of Kha ba dkar po has been extracted, but it generally reads like a Rang byung rdo rje composition.

40 Tib. Gnas mchog kha ba dkar po'i gnas yig thugs grub char 'bebs (Rang byung rdo rje 2006i:1–7). A translation of this text is also included in the fifth appendix.

41 This genre is described in some detail in A.W. McDonald (1985:3–5) and Huber (1999b:235).

42 These works were not included within the volumes of his Collected Works from 'Bras spungs Monastery’s Gnas bcu Temple, and the earliest reference I can find to this site-guide is in Si tu Pa chen’s eighteenth century retelling of his tale. Nevertheless, as they do not contain anything that would directly contradict Rang byung rdo rje’s composition of them and use language similar to that in his praises, I have taken this attribution at face value.
using a combination of Indian cosmological and this-worldly reference points. This sketch reads:

On the greatest of the four continents, Jambudvīpa,
is one of the twenty-four great sacred sites,
in Southern Mon, in the Tsha ba rong (Ranges),
on the border of 'Jang and Tibet,
it is the great, sacred site of Kha ba dkar po.43

The first line of this verse places the mountain on one of the four continents said to constitute the worlds of this realm in traditional Indian cosmology. This continent is Jambudvīpa (Tib. ‘Dzam (bu) gling), understood to be roughly equivalent to the Eurasian continent.44 The next line explains without elaboration that it is one of the twenty-four pīṭha or sacred sites mentioned in the Cakrasamvara-tantra. As I briefly described in chapter two, this tantra’s subjugation myth portrays these sites as the twenty-four places in which Cakrasamvara and his consort Vajravarahi defeated the demonic gods Bhairava and Kāli, and in so doing replaced what were demonic maṇḍalas with their own awakened maṇḍalas. These sites were originally associated with places in India, but thanks to several cultural landscaping projects in Central and Western Tibet, by the time Rang byung rdo rje arrived at Kha ba dkar po, three of Tibet’s sacred mountains had already been re-visioned as pīṭha: Tsa ri as Cārita or sometimes Devīkottā; La phyi as Godāvari and Kailāś as Himavat.

Rang byung rdo rje was the first to undertake this kind of re-visioning in Eastern Tibet, and as the founders of these sites had done, he too chose a relatively isolated location as a subject for transformation. The location, near the borderlands of the Tibetan world, is described in the next two lines of the above verse by reference to commonly known, local markers: it is in the region of Mon, in the Tsha ba rong Ranges, on the border between Tibet and a country known by the Tibetans as ‘Jang (i.e. the land of the Nakhi, or Ch. 納西, Naxi).45

The song of praise, by contrast, was aimed at establishing the bona fides of this site to a wider audience, and dedicates many more verses to the establishment of its position. It too begins with the assertion that this is one of “the twenty-four sites”, that is to say pīṭha, but then backtracks a little to create a wider, more poetic and less specifically tantric perspective on it. This positioning begins in the poem’s third verse, which reads:

There is an ocean of lotuses that radiates moonbeams, from which
the four continents and Mount Meru (stick up like) shining anthers;
uniquely, with the dharma as its excellent elixir, the

43 Rang byung rdo rje (2006i:1).
45 The locals of that region call themselves Nakhi and the Imperial Mongol court referred to their capital as Lijiang (Trad. Chinese 麗江, Lijiang).
vajra seat is set at the centre of all Jambudvīpa’s virtues. And to its north, in the snowy mountains, is this, the greatest of the sacred-siddhi sites upon which scholar-adepts rely. This is that place with exalted qualities, the snowy, eastern Mount Potalaka (Po ta ba).46

This verse begins with a long snapshot of the world with Mount Meru at the centre and the continents and oceans arranged around it. It then zooms in on Kha ba dkar po through a series of traditional geographic images. The first of these, as a matter of courtesy, is Bodhgayā in India, the “vajra seat” (rdo rje'i gdan) where the buddhas all attain enlightenment. After fixing this central position, it then describes Kha ba dkar po as a snowy mountain to its north named “Potalaka”. Mount Potalaka is the pure land of Avalokiteśvara traditionally said to be found in the seas south of India.47 Rang byung rdo rje’s repositioning of it to the north is a simple matter of convenience, and the first of several geographic shifts he makes to traditional cosmology without comment. It most likely reflects the fact that his conceptual interactions with these places and regions had been delivered through an evolving literary tradition, in which positions often changed, rather than the visual traditions of cartography that in recent centuries have allowed more fixed concepts of direction.48 More important for our purposes is his inclusion of a non-tantric, pure-land Mahāyāna layer in this cultural geography. This is a theme he continues in the next verses, which reads:

To its north is the country known as Khotan, in it is Mount Gosrṅga, blessed by the Buddha. To its south is the land of Grhadevata, which has been visited by many bodhisattvas. To its east, is the country known as Gandhara (Gha dha ra), protected by Enārpattra (Pomegranate Leaf), King of the Nāgas. To its west is the land of Boghavān, where confidence in the Buddha’s teachings grows.

The first country mentioned, Khotan, is a historical kingdom that once lay to the north (or more precisely the north-west) of Kha ba dkar po, in the south of present-day Xinjiang. According to at least one Mahāyāna Buddhist scripture, the Buddha visited its Mount Gosrṅga during his lifetime.49 The last country mentioned in the list, Boghavān (Tib. Longs spyod Idan pa'i yul; “land of enjoyment”), is also relatively easy to locate in traditional cosmographies, if not on actual maps, for this was the name given to the series of islands said to rim the ocean that surrounds Jambudvīpa in every direction but north, as the north

47 Lokesh Chandra (1979:5–25) examines the development of this myth. Huber (2008) looks at the broader phenomenon of shifting holy sites. He also shows how Potalaka is most often positioned to the south of Bodhgaya (Huber 2008:81–82).
48 Kapstein (2001b:336–364) describes this process by which these more literary traditions were compared with developments in geographical knowledge based on cartography.
49 This refers to the story told in the Gosrṅga-vyākaraṇa in which the Buddha Śākyamuni visited Khotan and drained the country of the sea by which it was covered. See Brough (1943:333).
sat in the shadow of Mount Meru.\textsuperscript{50}

Although it is not a direct transliteration, the Tibetan transliteration Gha dha ra seems to represent the name of the Indic kingdom of Gandhāra. While this association is quite straightforward, its position is not; historical Gandhāra was almost directly west of Kha ba dkar po, in present-day Pakistan. Again, the probable reason for this change in position is the literary rather than cartographical source of Rang byung rdo rje’s map. Indeed, in this instance, the literary source for this particular piece of cultural geography is even highlighted by his use of Enārpattra, the “nāga king” to describe Gandhāra, for Enārpattra has a recurring role in the Mahāyāna Buddhist sūtras that developed in this region.\textsuperscript{51}

The second of the cardinally positioned sites in this verse, Gṛhadevata is even more problematic, for several reasons. First, it appears to be in the wrong verse; Gṛhadevatā (“the land of household deities”) is one of the twenty-four pīṭha, which Rang byung rdo rje goes on to describe in the next verse. Second, in the commentaries on the Cakrasamvara-tantra that discuss the twenty-four pīṭha, it is most often associated with Khotan,\textsuperscript{52} which has already been mentioned in this verse and is situated to the north of Kha ba dkar po.

Despite this strange positioning, both within the praise and in the cultural geography, it is perhaps important that Rang byung rdo rje included Gṛhadevatā in his description of Kha ba dkar po, for it is closely related to the pīṭha he goes on to align with the mountain in the next verse. This pīṭha is Pretapurū (Pre ta pu ri) “the city of ghosts”.\textsuperscript{53} The verse reads:

\begin{quote}
East of the central land, Bodhgaya, is the sacred site that the siddhas rely upon, the site from which the goddesses who embody desire (Devīkoṭṭa) arise.
The site of Kāmarūpa is in the North.
In the middle of these, is the site of Pretapurū, with all the qualities of a sacred site.
This is a site for siddhis in dark times; it is difficult for all to reach; it is where mother dākinīs live...\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

This verse not only aligns Kha ba dkar po with Pretapurū, but positions it in relation to two other pīṭha: Devīkoṭṭa (Tsa ri)\textsuperscript{55} to its east and Kāmarūpa to its north.\textsuperscript{56} The use of these

\textsuperscript{50} Eck (2012:128).
\textsuperscript{51} Elāpattra/Elpatra/Erakapatta is mentioned in several Mahāyāna texts that originated in Gandhāra. Mark Allon (personal communication, November 2013) is presently working on text fragments that include a story about Elāpattra that originates in Gandhāra and links him with that region’s ruling clans.
\textsuperscript{52} Sugiki (2009:516).
\textsuperscript{53} There is a tradition of associating this site with an area in Western Tibet near ‘Khyung lung Monastery, which lies about seventy-five kilometres west of Mount Kailaś (Ricard 1994: 346, Note 64).
\textsuperscript{55} For more on this site, see: Huber (1990a:121–164). The Indian original is also the setting of a subjugation story starring the mahāsiddha Virūpa, about which Dowman (1985:51) writes, “The manner in which Virūpa converts the inhabitants of Devīkoṭṭa... and the phraseology employed, is reminiscent of the legends of Virūpa’s contemporary siddha, Padmasambhava, converting the Bonpos and the gods of Tibet.” Virūpa was also renowned for the battles he fought with non-Buddhists to retrieve or win sacred sites from them. Moreover, as Templeman (1999:68–70) points out, this was also the pīṭha where Keśācārya was killed by the site’s goddess as he tried to reclaim it for Buddhism.
two sites as reference points not only uses cardinal directions to locate the site, but also positions it within another directional schema: the division of the twenty-four *piṭha* into those located in space (Skt. *khecarī*; Tib. *mkha’ spyod kyi gnas*) and associated with mind; those located on earth (Skt. *bhūcarī*; Tib. *sa spyod kyi gnas*) and associated with speech; and those located underground (Skt. *pāṭāla-vāsīṇī*; Tib. *sa`og gi gnas*) and associated with the body. In this schema, Devikota is associated with the first group, Kāmarūpa with the second and Pretapurī with the third.

Moreover, by highlighting Pretapurī’s lowly status as an underground *piṭha*, Rang byung rdo rje also makes it clear in this verse that his claims for this new site are not as ambitious as those made for Tibet’s other Cakrasamvara *piṭha*. For although the most common presentation aligns Tsā ri as Devikoṭa (or Cārīta) with Cakrasamvara’s mind, La phyi/Godāvari with his speech and Kailāś/Himavat with his body, in the categorisation of *piṭha* into these three spheres within the Cakrasamvara-*tantra*, all three of these sites are in the top two spheres.⁵⁷ Devikoṭa (or Cārīta) and Godāvari are positioned in the space/mind sphere and Himālaya is positioned in the earth/speech sphere.⁵⁸ Pretapurī is lower down the list than any of these three sites; below Himālaya and next to Grhādevatā it is described as a *melāpaka* (Tib. *bsdus pa*; “meeting place”).

By evoking these categorisations and pitching his claims just below the levels of the Central Tibetan sites, Rang byung rdo rje seems to be making a very strategic claim on behalf of Khaba dkar po: it is indeed a *piṭha* and should be respected as such, but at the same time it is not quite as holy as the already established *piṭha* in Central Tibet.

In the following verses, the praise builds on this image of Khaba dkar po as *piṭha* and therefore a Cakrasamvara/Vajravārāhī mandala by describing the four doors or gates to this mandala, in its four cardinal directions. To its east are Vajra Subduing Rock (Rdo rje brag ’dul) and his entourage. His abode is described as being particularly difficult to reach, because up there:

Waterfalls crash, yell and shake within⁵⁹ their chasms.
The mountains are just rocks, but they look like weapons
that are splendidly decorated by terrifying forests.
And in the centre (of all this) is a beautiful
alpine pasture; like the source of dharma, it
is shaped exquisitely and graced by a pool.⁶⁰

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⁵⁷ Kāmarūpa was also the name of a kingdom that existed in Assam, north of Bodhgaya, between 350 CE and 1140 CE. Although this predates Rang byung rdo rje’s time, there is much evidence to suggest that the area was still called Kāmarūpa long after this particular kingdom had disbanded. See: D. C. Sircar (1990:59–78). There is also, as Rang byung rdo rje indicates here, a goddess called Kāmarūpa, who is associated with the area, particularly at the Kāmarūpa temple and pilgrimage site near Gauhati, Assam. As Patricia Dold (2004:89) explains, this site is “one of the most widely known pilgrimage sites of the goddess (Shakta) traditions. It is often described as the most sacred of all the Shakti *pithas* or ‘seats of the goddess’.”

⁵⁸ This presentation is discussed in Sugiki (2009:522).

⁵⁹ Sugiki (2009:522). A simplified chart of these categories is included within the first appendix as chart number five.

⁶⁰ I have read this as sbubs rather than sbu bas, which has no meaning and I assume is a typographical error.
The other cardinally directed protectors are said to be just as fierce, and endowed with environments that evoke a similar mixture of terror and the sublime. To the south are the dancing skeletons Citipati (Tib. Zhing skyong; “Site Protectors”), who have fearsome implements, and are renowned for “their entourage of 100 000 divine armies”. This deity is Vajrayogini’s protector, which is another form of Vajravārahī and therefore associated with the Cakrasamvara-tantra. In his description of the other three door protectors, by contrast, Rang byung rdo rje departs from the Cakrasamvara-tantra script, and includes protectors that are more usually associated with other tantras. The protector to the west, for example, is “the blood red coloured bse, with the braided hair, surrounded by ten million (other) mother deities who have transcended ordinariness”. The bse are a class of deity described in the Kilaya-tantra of the Rnying ma tradition. To the north, he positions a yakṣa (Gnod sbyin) known as “he who likes mules” (Drel la dga’ ba). The yakṣa are a class of deity associated with the protection of wealth, and are said to be the attendants of Vaiśravaṇa (Rnam thos sras), the north-quarter guard from amongst the Four Guardian Gods (Rgyal chen bzhi).

This is a strange collection of beings, which is not aligned with any traditional presentation or visualisation practice. It still suggests that Kha ba dkar po is at the centre of a maṇḍala, but it is a hybrid maṇḍala. As such, it suggests that in creating it Rang byung rdo rje was responding to features in the landscape that he believed evoked this imagery, rather than a complete and perhaps difficult to imagine transformation of the region into a direct replica of Cakrasamvara’s maṇḍala.

This hybridity is also evident in the rest of the praise and site-guides, through his dual approach to the maṇḍala’s central deity. In his long Site-Guide, for instance, he transforms Kha ba dkar po into a buddha and leaves him at the centre of the maṇḍala, describing him like this:

This powerful mountain, this Kha ba dkar po,
is a conch-white male,
whose face is like a full moon,
whose eyes are like the rising sun,
and who rides a conch-white horse.
He wears a white, silk cloak on his body,
(and) a precious, living hat (the clouds) on his head.

His body is like Mount Meru,
his speech is unstoppable dharma,
his mind is clear emptiness, the dharmakāya,
his qualities are equal to the Buddha’s, (and)

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61 Rosemary Jones Tung (1996:157) includes a description and short history of these deities.
63 It is also departs from the mandalising project conducted at Tsa ri in that there those describing it as a maṇḍala focused on describing the central mountain, Dag po shel ri, as the central house of a maṇḍala rather than establishing its boundaries (Huber 1999a: 39–57).
his awakened activities are unstoppable magic.

In the *Secret Guide*, by contrast, he follows the more traditional path and replaces Kha bda kā po with Cakrasamvara. He does this in a verse that suggests the way yogis visualise a maṇḍala. Out of the natural sphere of their minds arises a palace that houses a central deity and four protectors in its cardinal directions. This visualisation is then used to transform their ordinary mental states. It reads:

From the dharmadhātu, Cakrasamvara’s palace, come the dharma protectors, the oath-bound ones, gathering like clouds, abiding. From the heart of the sacred dharma to this yogi (they come) to defeat an army of hindrances and obstacles, and to inspire.\(^{64}\)

In these two works, therefore, Rang byung rdo rje has presented two variant descriptions of the mountain, most probably for two different audiences. To the locals who already approached this mountain as the abode of a god, he merely suggested that this god had attained buddhahood, and that they should therefore approach it as a buddha. To the yogis who were beginning to occupy the site, he described it as a Cakrasamvara/Vajravarahi maṇḍala and the *pītha* Pretapuri.\(^{65}\)

In describing the mountain in these ways, Rang byung rdo rje had engaged with a process that Katia Buffetrille, in her writing on Tibet’s sacred mountains, has called “Buddhicisation”. She defines this process as the transformation of a “mountain territorial god whom laymen worship once or twice a year on the slope of the mountain, into a Buddhist mountain holy place around which pilgrims perform a circumambulation.”\(^{66}\) She also notes that none of Tibet’s mountains undergo this process in the same way or to the same degree. Some mountains, like the three Cakrasamvara/pītha mountains of Central Tibet, she suggests, have been completely “Buddhicised” and the process has even been accompanied by their “maṇḍalisation”. Others are only partially transformed, and therefore support two variant approaches: one an elite, literary representation of the mountain as a tantric Buddhist maṇḍala and the other a local, popular oral tradition that maintains an older representation of the region.\(^{67}\)

This literature is therefore particularly intriguing, for it is an example of an elite, tantric Buddhist yogi presenting both these approaches to a single site. Thus, Rang byung rdo rje’s writing on the topic represents yet another example of his intertwining two worlds that are often presented distinctly in writing on Tibet: the elite, literary world of yogis and scholars and the colloquial, quotidian world of ordinary people.

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\(^{64}\) Rang byung rdo rje (2006:8).

\(^{65}\) The fact that Rang byung rdo rje explicitly aligns the mountain with Cakrasamvara’s maṇḍala in this work is perhaps why its editor called it a *Secret Guide*, for this distinction between open and secret works, whether they be liberation-stories or site-guides, does not appear to have been common in Rang byung rdo rje’s era.

\(^{66}\) Buffetrille (1998:21). Italics are in the source text.

After establishing this hybrid view, however, it is also noteworthy that in both the *Praise* and *Site-Guide* to Kha ba dkar po Rang byung rdo rje frames the view with an appeal to various, elite authorities. In each work, for example, he includes a few stanzas of elite poetics that he hopes will "ornament" his audience's perception of the site. This is a technique he uses many times in his writing on place, and to which he even provides a short meta-narrative at one point, describing it as the strewing of "poetic flower mālās around (a) site". Yet in this and many other cases, it also reflects his education and language skills, thus implicitly reminding his audience that he also possesses these cultural credentials.

These poetic flower mālās are usually quite long and therefore cannot be quoted in full here. But to give a sense of how they work, here is an extract from his *Praise to Kha ba dkar po*:

The clear brightness of this mountain, glowing so white makes it (look) like night lilies, (or even) moons heaped on top of each other.
It is so white, so imposing, so lofty, so exalted, that it graces the clouds with peaceful crowns...  

The *Site-Guide*’s ornamental phrases include similar imagery to this, but they combine it with onomatopoeic phrases that are often associated in Tibetan literature with the *mgur/glù* of the imperial period. As such they reflect the dual inhabitants of the site—the Indian tantric deity and the ancient Tibetan deity—in literary form.

Myriad flowers talk flower talk, while hordes of wild animals roar.
Antelopes (dash through) forest and scrub.
Birds call with harmonious voices, si li li.
Dragons thunder and flash above, u ru ru.
Rivulets and snowmelts (sing), si li li.
An ocean of springs (chorus), kyi li li.
The river trumpets like an elephant.
The rocks (grind) like a majestic drum.

This is a site where ḏākas and ḏākinīs assemble a land were lucky men and women gather; they talk their talks on the turquoise plain, (while) the crystal dome (says), kyi li li, (and) the (glacier) curtains dangle, tra la la.

Sapphire mālā strings are stretched behind it, a turquoise column is planted inside it, a precious, golden throne was built above it, clear moon and sunlight shine from it; this is a site where male and female protectors live.

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The glaciers at Kha ba dkar po are very noisy, contracting and expanding into the rock as they warm and cool during the day.
Following these verses, the two works then use divergent methods to further establish the authority of the song and the author.

The Site-Guide achieves this by appealing to the authority of many other Tibetan sacred sites, through describing an incense-offering ceremony that attends all of them individually. The Praise, by contrast, uses another of Rang byung rdo rje’s common strategies for sanctification: describing the sacred beings who have previously graced the site with their presence. If he had wanted to, Rang byung rdo rje could have described the years that his predecessor Karma Pakshi spent nearby in retreat at Mount Spung ri for the purpose of sanctifying the site. But instead he chose to impose a much more famous story onto it, one that was concurrently being promoted by the treasure tradition, in their reframing of another liberation-story, that of the Tibetan translator Vairocana (Tib. Be ro tsa na, 8th century).

According to this developing hagiographical tradition, Vairocana had not only been an imperial-era translator of renown, but also another of Padmasambhava’s twenty-five close disciples, and one of the first seven monks to take ordination (along with Rang byung rdo rje’s previous incarnation as Rgyal mchog dbyangs). Unfortunately, however, the story continued, at one point he was banished from the royal court in Lhasa to the Tsha ba rong Ranges after a woman accused him of indecency, and others suggested his Great Completion teachings were not Buddhist. In exile in the Tsha ba rong Ranges, which include Kha ba dkar po, he is said to have converted the local king to Buddhism and been visited in a vision by his teacher Padmasambhava.

The two lines in which Rang byung rdo rje evokes this story read:

It is widely reported that long ago Ācārya Padmasambhava and the guru Vairocana visited this site.

Rang byung rdo rje’s allusion to this tale serves two primary functions here. First, it further sanctifies the region and bolsters its authority by suggesting that it had been blessed by the presence of two people who played an important role in the developing story of Tibet. And second, it establishes it as a site that has already been aligned with both the new and old tantras.

iv. Passing Through the Centre

Despite the efforts Rang byung rdo rje made to transform the perception of Kha ba dkar

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71 Rang byung rdo rje (2006i:1–2).
73 He may not mention this stay in this context, but he does highlight it in his version of Karma Pakshi’s liberation-story (Rang byung rdo rje 2006h:254).
76 Rang byung rdo rje (2006a:51).
po, and despite the welcome he received there, he was unable to stay in that region for an extended period. This time the reason for his departure was not local pressure or the draw of another place: it was the death of his teacher O rgyan pa. Rang byung rdo rje does not make explicit the link between his return to Central Tibet and O rgyan pa's death; indeed he does not mention his teacher's death at all, but there are enough coincidences between the two events to suggest a connection.

The first occurs in the episode in which he comes closest to acknowledging O rgyan pa's passing: his description of a vision of O rgyan pa he experienced at Kha ba dkar po, at around the same time as his teacher's death. In this vision, he explains, he saw O rgyan pa directly and continually all the way through sunrise, but as "a sign of (O rgyan pa's) degeneration, he appeared as if reflected in a mirror". He then links this vision with his return to Central Tibet by suggesting that after it he determined to fulfil his guru's wishes by studying the Kālacakra-tantra with Kun dga’ bzang po (1258–1316), the young yogi O rgyan pa had earlier recognised as the reincarnation of his teacher Rgod tshang pa (1189–1258). As Kun dga’ bzang po lived near Mtshur phu at Snye mdo, Rang byung rdo rje therefore left Kha ba dkar po in late 1308 and returned to Central Tibet.

In his Verse Liberation-Story he recalls how this journey back also occasioned many visions. First, as he crossed the border between Khams and Dbus, he recalled Gnyan chen thang lha and other local deities coming to greet him. To him they appeared grand and detailed, but his entourage only saw mist and clouds descend on the road. Then, when he arrived back at Mtshur phu, the local protector dākinīs greeted him with a dance performance. After a short stay, he travelled to Lhasa, where he offered a bejewelled parasol to the famous Jo bo statue in the central, Jo khang Temple, and simultaneously experienced a vision of "all the buddhas in the ten directions".

Following these visions he travelled to Snye mdo to study with Kun dga’ bzang po, and while he was there Kun dga’ bzang po arranged for a succession of other teachers to instruct him also. These included the Bka’ brgyud teachers Tshul khrims rin chen and Jñānaśrī, along with Kumārarāja (Rig ’dzin ku mā ra rā dza; 1266–1343), who, in accordance with his profound vision at Karma, taught him the Dākinīs’ Heart-Essence texts from the treasure-tradition.

This last teacher is only mentioned in passing in Rang byung rdo rje's writing, but a brief survey of Kumārarāja’s own liberation-story suggests many lineal, temporal and
geographic connections between the two yogis. Before Rang byung rdo rje’s arrival at Mtshur phu, for example, Kumārārāja, most usually associated with the Rnying ma tradition and particularly the Great Completion teachings, is said to have travelled to this Karma bka’ brgyud monastery and studied with two of its and Rang byung rdo rje’s main teachers: Gnyan ras and Dar ma. This suggests a link not only between Kumārārāja and Mtshur phu, but also, inversely, one between Mtshur phu and the treasure revealers. Kumārārāja also visited O rgyan pa in La stod and met Rang byung rdo rje when the latter was a young boy. Moreover, as will be explored in more detail shortly, he is credited with opening up New Tsa ri (Tsa ri gsar ma) in Kong po, where Rang byung rdo rje headed via a somewhat circuitous route shortly after their encounter.

Rang byung rdo rje’s route to Tsa ri began with a journey in the opposite direction, to Tshal Monastery, where he was required to officiate at the ceremonies following the death of the eighth Tshal Myriarch, and O rgyan pa’s old sparring partner, Dga’ bde dpal in 1309. But again, rather than parlaying the elevated status this role gave him into political influence at Mtshur phu or elsewhere, he turned his back on the political world of Central Tibet and retreated to the cave he formerly inhabited at the base of Jo mo Gangs dkar, at the top of the Snye Valley.

In retreat he experienced a vision that would profoundly affect the rest of his life. Unlike his other life-changing visions, this was not of a deity, but of a place: Kong po in Southern Tibet. As he describes it:

I was staying in solitude at Jo mo Gangs dkar when I dreamed a dream in which I saw all the people of Kong po aspiring to practise the sacred dharma and I understood that I could help them. And as it turned out, I have helped many of them.

v. First Journey to Tsa ri

Following this vision, Rang byung rdo rje spent the next three years in Kong po and then most of the rest of his life trying to return there. This mountainous region in Southern Tibet appealed to him for a number of reasons. Environmentally, he appreciated its green forests, stunning mountains, and inaccessible valleys. Politically, he described it as relatively free of Mongol influence. After the 1290 ’Bri gung rebellion the Mongol/Sa skya armies had invaded and established control there, but their influence was still nominal. Traditionally, it had already been blessed by the presence of a variety of his lineal predecessors. And religiously, it was the home of what he understood to be the Plateau’s most sacred site: Tsa ri.

83 Ron Garry (2007).
84 Garry (2007).
87 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:393).
Rang byung rdo rje’s account of his first trip to Kong po reads very much like a pilgrimage. Characteristically, the Verse Liberation-Story only outlines the trip, but the twelve songs he composed on his travels add much detail to this simple narrative. By combining the information provided by these two sources, it becomes clear that he travelled to Tsa ri via Sgam po Monastery and only approached Tsa ri after a visionary directive to travel there from Sgam po pa,88 the lineal ancestor of all the various Bka’ brgyud sub-lineages that were competing for space in that sacred place. Unlike Mount Kha ba dkar po, the Tsa ri region had already been thoroughly sanctified, “Buddhicised”, “mandalised” and latterly colonised by the time Rang byung rdo rje arrived there. As a result of this process, it was understood to be the mind maṇḍala of Cakrasamvara/Vajravarāhi, the celestial pīṭhas Cārīta and Devīkoṭṭa—and prized real estate.

As the traditional history of the site that Rang byung rdo rje inherited explained, the presence of these deities in the region had only become known in stages. The process of realising their presence was described as the “opening of this (maṇḍala’s) doors” (gnas sgo phye ba). Padmasambhava had been the first to enter. According to the treasure tradition, he had entered through the southern door, added the region to his many subjugated territories, and then discovered the divine maṇḍala at its centre. Later, his student Vimalamitra,89 the Great Completion adept who had dissolved into Rang byung rdo rje’s forehead in a vision at Karma, entered through the same door. Following this, a stalwart of the new tantras, one of one of the eighty-four mahāsiddhas, La ba pa (a.k.a. Kambala; 11th century) reportedly visited the site, also through the southern door.90

Later Tibetan adventurers built upon these initial exploratory (and probably legendary) journeys. The first was a student of Sgam po pa named Skyes bu ye shes rdo rje (12th century), who travelled down from nearby Sgam po Monastery three times on Sgam po pa’s orders before finding his way to the region’s most sacred body of water, Lake G.yu mtsho (Turquoise Lake), and therefore “opening the western door”.91 As a student of Sgam po pa, Skyes bu ye shes rdo rje is presented more as a generic Bka’ brgyud practitioner than as one who followed a particular Bka’ brgyud lineage. All later arrivals were more distinctly aligned with the various Bka’ brgyud sub-lineages.

The first of these were students of the influential ’Bri gung founder, ’Jig rten mgon po (1143–1217), who opened the north-western door and subsequently established a hermitage at the base of the region’s central peak, Mount Dag po shel ri (Pure Crystal Mountain). This group was also the first to find a circumambulation route around Dag po

90 Pad ma dkar po (1973–1974:244) translated in Huber (1999a:63). La ba pa/ Kambala was another mahāsiddha who was renowned for retrieving sacred sites from non-Buddhist opponents in India. See Dowman (1985:179–185).
shel ri, which they recognised as the central mansion of Cakrasamvara/Vajravārāhī’s maṇḍala. As they created this circuit on the ground, they also dedicated much ink and ritual to its figurative transformation.92 This central transformation was accompanied by the peripheral establishment of the aforementioned, cardinally directed doors, which were then assigned guardians, completing the process of maṇḍalisation by establishing both its centre (dkyil) and boundary (’khor).93

This was the discursive and geographically-inscribed model for much of Rang byung rdo rje’s transformation-work at both the Karma bka’ brgyud Monasteries and Kha ba dkar po. By using this model in other places, albeit with adaptations, Rang byung rdo rje ensured that his other cultural landscaping projects were linked to both Tsa ri and the wider network of sacred sites to which Tsa ri had connections. The other major sites of this network were the two other mountainous regions in which the 'Bri gung pa were engaged in maṇḍalisation during the same period as they were transforming Tsa ri: the other Cakrasamvara mountains, La phyi and Kailāś.

The 'Bri gung pa were not the only followers of the Bka’ brgyud at Tsa ri, however; other sub-lineages were also establishing footholds at the sacred site and adding their own layers of culture—through environmental inscription and image-based literature—onto it. One of these other transformers was Gtsang pa rgya ras (1161-1211), the founder of the 'Brug pa bka’ brgyud, who visited the area, subdued a few demons and opened the doors to several smaller, auxiliary maṇḍalas. These included the Vajrayoginī maṇḍala at Lake G.yu mtsho that reportedly manifests to those with gnosis.94 After him, his student Rgod tshang pa—O rgyan pa’s teacher and Kun dga’ bzang po’s previous incarnation—also visited the area, performing further acts of subduing and opening. During his stay, he was even said to have conducted a battle with the great Indian god Brahmā whom he bound at Nam kha phug Cave (Sky Cave).95 Eventually, practitioners from Tshal and Phag mo gru also made their way to Tsa ri, and began making their own contributions to the literature that helped created its sacred, cultural geography and the physical landscaping that accompanied this visionary transformation in the vicinity. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Rang byung rdo rje’s teacher, the Rnying ma treasure revealer and Bka’ brgyud practitioner Kumārarāja, had established a hermitage at the nearby New Tsa ri, apparently at the bidding of his teacher the second Karmapa.96 This meant that virtually all the major

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93 This follows precisely the idea of maṇḍalisation I described in the last chapter, which has been outlined in more detail in McDonald (1985, 1990), Huber (1990, 1994, 1999a:39–68 and 1999b) and Buffetrille (1997, 1998 and 2003).
96 These events are described in the Blue Annals (‘Gos Lo tsa ba 1974: Vol. Ka, 44a and Roerich 1988:200). They are also described by the first ‘jam mgon kong sprul (1813–1899) in a work establishing a new Tsa ri called Tsa ri ’dra (“Like Tsa ri”) in Khams (translated in Zang po 2001:111), where he says it was Karma Pakshi who told Kumārarāja to establish New Tsa ri.
Bka' brgyud sub-lineages were represented there, but their shared heritage—embodied in Sgam po pa—did not necessarily mean they all got along.

**a) A Message to the Entire Kingdom**

Indeed, despite its sacredness, the Tsa ri at which Rang byung rdo rje arrived in 1312 was not an entirely harmonious place. To begin with, the region was still badly affected by a Mongol/Sa skya pa invasion in 1290 following the 'Bri gung rebellion. Until that point the 'Bri gung pa had been the dominant force in the region, but the invasion had left many of their yogis dead and their influence in the region severely restricted.97

The invasion of this sacred site and the killing of its yogis was roundly condemned by all the region's inhabitants, but it did not stop other Bka' brgyud lineages trying to gain advantage in the resulting power vacuum. This led to underlying tensions that continued throughout Rang byung rdo rje's stay and erupted into another local war between 'Brug and Tshal yogis in the generation after his death.98 Sacred real estate, it seems, was worth fighting over.

On his arrival in the region Rang byung rdo rje composed a song that reflects these tensions and the debased behaviour that they encouraged. But it also reflects his own efforts to establish his influence in the region, through claims he makes to both lineal inheritance and personal attributes. Thus, it is the first of his songs to declare his own virtues forcefully and directly. It reads in part:

This vajra (Rdo rje) that realises non-duality
has a message, a mālā of ideas,
for dharma practitioner in the ten directions:
Don't be distracted. Think well. And
send this message to those whose know how to listen...99

I have left lust's residence and
arrived at the site of great bliss.
Send this message to the passionate,
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it...

Others do not look down on me as
I have worked a long time for peace;
this is the illusory play of helping others
that is known as the greatest patience.
Send this message to the healthy,
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

I've been caught on the nails of passing pain,100 but

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97 Pad ma dkar po (1973–1974:258) translated in Huber (1999a:66). According to Pad ma dkar po, eighteen thousand monks were burnt by the fire used to destroy the main temple. This seems a large number, but perhaps reflects the effect it had on the region and therefore the way it was remembered.
99 The lines until this point are not included within GN.
as (all pains) in resting, moving, eating and sleeping are helpfully eliminated by liberation, know that I’m now cleansed of these distracting stains. Send this message to the diligent, tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it...

Patrons who amass fame and wealth, those who “uphold the Vinaya” but not their vows, teachers who yearn for renown, “great meditators” who cultivate stupidity—I call them (all) “try-hards who don’t get results”; Tell them Rang byung rdo rje said so.

Rang byung rdo rje sang this song at a ganacakra held at Lang sgong Monastery, on the road in between Old and New Tsa ri. Thus, it was an indirect pitch for influence, delivered from the side-lines without directly confronting the region’s “try-hards”. Following on from his retreats and teachings in Central Tibet, this song marks a new confidence in Rang byung rdo rje’s songs and a more intricate compositional style. It is the first of his songs to include a two-line chorus, and several times even plays with this pattern by creating links between the chorus of one verse and the contents of the next. The chorus between the third and fourth verses of this extract, for example, makes a link between those who are healthy because they have survived wars, and those like him who have “been caught on the nails of passing pain”.

b) Rang byung rdo rje, Mountain Guide

This newfound confidence is also evident in many of the other songs that he composed during his stay at Tsa ri. In these, rather than berating himself for his own shortcomings as he had in many of his earlier songs, he composes a series of part-encouraging, part-admonishing songs directed as those who followed him into this remote yet sacred corner of the Plateau.

In this context, his main exhortative technique consists of a juxtaposition between his audience’s external environment and their internal thoughts, but he sets up this dichotomy is several ways. One way is to use the idea of pointing out the fundamental incongruence between peoples’ expectations about and experiences of samsāra; the “strangeness” that I discussed in the last chapter. The clearest example is in the following verse:

101 This translation follows the GB, which uses the word gzer ma, “nail” in place of the GN’s zer, “to be said” or “rays (of light)”.
102 The text reads spyod lam rnam bzhi, “the four aspects of performance”, which indicates resting, moving, eating and sleeping.
103 Song No. 44 (GN 60–63; GB 232–235). Colophon: “A Message to the Entire Kingdom, was inspired by the great Siddha (Rtsangs pa) Rgya’i phrin skyel. Rang byung rdo rje sang it at Glang gong, on (the twenty-ninth day of) the sixth month of the rat year (1312).”

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When you do not know your own body's solitude, an outer solitude is not much use.
When you do not know your own mind is a guru, a so-called “guru” is not much use.
When you do not know appearances are texts too, black inky letters are not much use...
When you do not know everything is in mind, places, outside and in, are not much use.

If you have not stopped craving sweet, delicious food, an essenceless gañacakra is not much use.
When the dharma and your mind are not mixed, pointless vows are not much use.
If you do not harmonise with dharma's tenor, melodious songs (mgur) are not much use.¹⁰⁴

Along with various comparisons that have been made in earlier compositions, in its description of their craving “sweet, delicious food”, this verse refers for the first time to the deprivations Rang byung rdo rje and his followers experienced at Tsa ri. It also ends with an incongruous, or ironic flourish that deconstructs the whole process of mgur composition, a technique that he begins to use more frequently during this journey.

He composed the next song he sang on the trip as he and his followers walked to another of Tsa ri’s sacred sites, the Pad phug or Lotus Cave. This song also develops the theme of deprivation that was briefly expressed in the previous song, and in doing so gives a clearer sense of the difficulties he and his followers faced in travelling around this infamously precipitous and precipitating region. It reads in part:

When the fog of ignorance clears, you won’t mind haze outside.
When the sun of gnosis rises, you won’t mind sunsets outside.¹⁰⁵
When the rain of preconceptions cease, you won’t mind it pouring outside.
When you realise saṃsāra is a cliff face, you won’t mind rugged chasms outside.
When there are no more thorns of hate, you won’t mind prickly barbs.
When the streams of craving dry up, you won’t mind churning rivers.
When the peaks of pride are levelled, you won’t mind high mountains outside.
When you taste a meal of samādhi, you won’t mind flavourless food.
When the jungle ravines of the afflictions are cleared, you won’t mind external gloomy gorges.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Song No. 47 (GN 69–70; GB 240–241) Ten Teaching Topics.
¹⁰⁵ This translation follows GB, as the GN states “nub kyang bgad”, which would mean “you will not establish” or “you will not laugh at” and seems to be a scribal error.
¹⁰⁶ Song No. 48 (GN 70–71; GB 241). Eight Things You Won’t Mind. Colophon: “This is the small song, Eight Things You Will Not Mind. Lucky ones, hear this. Guru Rang byung rdo rje sang this song in the isolated sacred site of Tsa ri tra, on the road to Pad phug (the Lotus Cave).”
Figure 6.3 Mount Dag po shel ri at Tsa ri.\textsuperscript{107}

Figure 6.4 Map of the Tsa ri Region.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{108} As with the maps shown in the last chapter, the basis for this map was taken from Google Earth and it was then modified to reflect those areas of most importance to this section of Rang byung rdo rje's tale.
These songs of encouragement are striking in that they paint a rather different picture of Tsa ri from the sanctified manḍala more commonly depicted. In this way, these songs are more of a reflection of those he composed at Lha stengs about the difficulties of life in retreat, rather than the visionary transformations that characterised his descriptions of Kha ba dkar po. In later songs he composed at Tsa ri he began to compare these two variant perceptions of difficult terrain and sacredness directly. Before doing this, however, he compared them indirectly by describing the same site, Lake G.yu mtsho, in two different ways: as an essentially sacred site in his Verse Liberation-Story, and as a difficult and possibly deceptive site in a song. The account in the Verse Liberation-Story recalls, “a pure vision” he experienced at the lake, in which he “ascertained that this was a ḏākinīs’ sacred site; a self-arising charnel ground where (yogic) feats are accomplished, obstacles are pacified, and many visions are experienced”.109 The song he composed while there, by contrast, contains an admonishment to himself and his audience to stop craving the comforts of home, warning them that they:

May have fled here to this solitude, this sacred site,
but a thief has chased us: preconceptions, subjects and objects.
If we don’t meet this thief with a craving-free mind,
it won’t matter where we are sitting.110

Eventually these exhortations disappear, and as he and his followers become used to the wilderness’s deprivations his songs begin to focus on the more positive effects the environment has on them. These songs also coincide with his move from Old Tsa ri, with its competitive sub-lineages, to New Tsa ri, where there is more space for him and his followers to do retreats. The songs continue to juxtapose difficult external conditions with positive internal transformation, but they do so in developing ways. In one song composed at New Tsa ri’s Bkra shis ljongs, for example, he suggests that not only will the often difficult environment influence his and his audience’s minds positively, but they can also see a reflection of their subtle body in it. It reads in part:

It is very difficult for people to travel here to
this special place, this most sacred site,
here in Jambudvīpa’s north, in Tibet.
It is surrounded by rocky mountains, vajras; and
sundry waterfalls cascade from them in all directions.

But it is infused with the bouquet of green trees
and flowers, so gods, demi-gods, kinnaras111 and
elemental spirits all make offerings here.

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110 Song No. 49 (GN 71–72; GB 241–243). Colophon: “The yogi Rang byung rdo rje sang this song on the banks of G.yu mtsho, in Tsa ri, on the seventeenth day of the seventh month of the mouse year (1312).”
111 Kinnaras (ci, also shang shang) are half-human, half-bird celestial musicians. They are also associated with the Kinnauri people of present day Himachal Pradesh, India.
Externally it has the aspect of a mandala; internally it is a site of self-arising deities...

With all the limbs they branch into, the nādi are the forest and its ornaments, the senses are its flowers, and its fruits.\footnote{Song No. 46 (GN 67–69; GB 238–240).}

Later in the same song, he goes further, suggesting an alignment between Tsa ri’s environment and the innate nature of their minds, or sahaja (Tib. lhan skyes), and at the same time perhaps warning against those who have placed too much emphasis on the materiality of the site. The verse that expresses this most clearly is the following:

Actual sahaja is inside, at Cakrasamvara’s actual sacred site: our mind. When we see this directly, we will see self-arising Tsa ri.\footnote{Song No. 46 (GN 67–69; GB 238–240). Colophon: “Rang byung rdo rje sang this song in Tsa ri ta (yet another name for Tsa ri) Bkra shis ljongs on the thirteenth day of the seventh month of the mouse year (1312).”}

c) Finding treasure

Although he does not mention it in his own writing, some later redactors of Rang byung rdo rje’s story have also suggested that he became a treasure revealer during this stay at Tsa ri. Tshe dbang rgyal, the author of the Lho Rong Dharma History, has a particular interest in the practices that arose from such a revelation and is the first to mention the episode. He does so in the following way:

In the female water ox year (1313), thanks to his relationship with the Guru (Padmasambhava), he retrieved the treasure of the Đākinīs’ Heart-Essence (of the Great Completion) in Lho brag. It was on golden paper. He then spent three months at the intersection of the Klung River (and a tributary) in Tsa ri, praying intensely to Padmasambhava, before he met him directly and was granted an empowerment and transmission from him.\footnote{Tshe dbang rgyal (1994:240).}

As Lho brag is just to the west of Tsa ri and the Klung River is in the western region of Tsa ri, the insertion of this episode into Rang byung rdo rje’s story is—narratively speaking—possible. Indeed there is a gap between the end of his stay at Tsa ri and the next episode of his stories and songs, which occurs at Yar Iha sham po midway through the next year. As a person with a special devotion to Padmasambhava, a lifelong involvement in the treasure tradition and especially the Đākinīs’ Heart-Essence cycle of texts, Rang byung rdo rje is also just the kind of person who would be expected to find such a treasure text or believe he had found one. But if he did experience this he did not make a record of it. This may have been, as Tshe dbang rgyal argues, because it was such an important secret he did not write it down. But it could also be read as evidence for this text’s later attribution to him. As with

112 Song No. 46 (GN 67–69; GB 238–240).
113 Song No. 46 (GN 67–69; GB 238–240). Colophon: “Rang byung rdo rje sang this song in Tsa ri ta (yet another name for Tsa ri) Bkra shis ljongs on the thirteenth day of the seventh month of the mouse year (1312).”
many other elements of the treasure tradition, the source of the texts is therefore shrouded in mystery, and it is difficult to ascertain much about them from such a cultural, temporal and geographic distance.

vi. At the Feet of Giants
What is certain, however, is that something happened to Rang byung rdo rje during this intervening period, because the person who resurfaces at Mount Yar Iha sham po six months later on his way back to Mtshur phu is not the confident, healthy yogi he had been at Tsa ri. No reason is given for his departure from Tsa ri and there is no description of his travel to Yar Iha. All the reader is told is that he has experienced “obstacles” (bar chad) to his yoga practice. The first verse of the song he composed at Yar Iha reflects this. It is one of the least confident of all his compositions, and it reads:

Kye Ma! Since the inception of beginningless samsāra,
the power of my generosity has been so weak,
the force of my morality so feeble that
all this long time, I have wandered, a beggar.....
Clouds of ārya sangha have taught me
the pure dharma and still
I have not destroyed my doubts. 115

Along with the mental afflictions he describes in the verse, the colophon also reveals that he was physically very unwell. “He had become very ill,” it says, “and thought he might depart to another realm (i.e., die)” 116

The Verse Liberation-Story also describes this moment as a crisis, but with hindsight, also as a moment of profound transformation. It was only when Rang byung rdo rje was so ill and despairing, it suggests, that he was granted a vision of profound interdependence, and therefore vowed to help others more determinately. 117 It also described how along with this mental healing Yar Iha sham po helped him recover physically. This must have only been a temporary recovery, however, because in the colophon to another song written months later at Mount Jo mo Gangs dkar he reports that the deity of that mountain too had helped him to avert a “fault in (his) life-force”. 118 Further evidence for his ill health can also be found in his decision, following these visions, to stay in Central Tibet for the next ten years and lead a more subdued life, teaching and composing texts.

For the first few of these years he lived at Bkra shis gsar ma, the hermitage near Mtshur phu that was the home of his mentor Dar ma. While there he composed a new version of

the Buddha’s *Jātaka* tales in 1314. Then, following a vision in which he saw each astrological house as a reflection of his subtle body, he also composed a treatise on astrology. Then in 1319 he built his own hermitage in the hills near Mtshur phu, naming it Bde chen stengs, perhaps after the monastery with the same name that Rgod tshang pa had built near Sbud kra and in which he had stayed as a young child. During his extended stay at Bde chen after its founding, he went on to compose many texts, including his most famous work, *The Sublime Inner Meaning*, in 1322, and his *Verse Liberation-Story* towards the end of his stay there, in 1324.

Despite his possible ill health and focus on composition at this time, he still found time to make a few short journeys, during which he performed a few more demon subjugations and composed several more landscaping songs.

The most vivid demon-subjugating episode from this period begins in a cave at Jo mo Gangs dkar, where he was setting up a statue of Padmasambhava. While there he had a vision in which he saw that “the awakened activity of the scholar of Oḍḍiyāna (Padmasambhava) still needed to be performed in every direction, even in (those) days”. In particular, he became aware of a group of low caste or badly behaved people (*rigs ngan*) who were engaged in a destructive custom nearby. Rang byung rdo rje does not provide any details about their depravities, but Gtsug lag phreng ba suggests that they involved offering multiple animal sacrifices of everything from wild yaks to sparrows for the benefit of a local malevolent ghost. Confronted with this practice, Rang byung rdo rje decided that rather than magic, learning or wrath, “the luminosity of Šākyamuni’s compassion would dispel their obscurations”. In practice this meant that he spent months there teaching the locals Buddhism, until, all the sources agree, not only the region’s humans but the ghost himself converted and vowed to help others.

His most concerted landscaping-through-literature project from this period was focused on Mount Jo mo Kha rag, which rises between the Yar klungs gtsang po River and Yar 'brog gyu mtsho Lake, next to the main route between Lha sa and Gzhis ka rtse. On one journey there in 1319, he composed four short praisings to this mountain in each of its cardinal directions. These songs contain much environmental imagery, including, in the

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119 The colophon to Song No. 58 (GN 909–92; GB 2569–257) describes this. It reads: “He sung this when he had finished composing the Hundred Jātaka Tales of the Buddha in Bkra shis gser ma, on the fifth day of the second month of the tiger year (1314).” This work is included within his *Collected Works* (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. Kha, 1–669).

120 This vision is described in the *Verse Liberation-Story* (Rang byung rdo rje 2006d:394). There are several small works included within his *Collected Works* that deal with astrology (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. A, 579–616).

121 This work is also included in his *Collected Works* (Rang byung rdo rje 2006a: Vol. Ja, 308–360), interestingly, within the volume dedicated to sūtra commentaries.


song sung at East Kha rag, a description of Tibet as “the heights from which pure rivers descend”.

Another of the songs, the one sung at North Kha rag, expands even further on this already broad, geographic outlook in the following verses:

Up on this group of snowy mountains, this lotus cluster, we are surrounded by Jambudvipa’s great ocean.
Up here bright, sweet waterfalls sparkle, refreshing all; both those who taste the water and those who imagine it......

(Above) the beautiful, pervasive sky with its delightful star-

vi. Losing the Centre

Throughout this and other similar works there is much evidence that while Rang byung rdo rje’s focus during this time may have been more on the works that established his reputation, he did not completely suspend his environmental re-visioning project.

Moreover, as the decade progressed, his writing became increasingly focused on two alternate life goals: on the one hand, his longing for wilderesses and retreat, represented by his nature-focused writing, leads him into the mountains; on the other hand, his developing reputation as a teacher, writer and reincarnated Karmapa, with many people to serve and influence, pulls him back into the centre. This tension is expressed in many of his songs from this period, but perhaps most acutely in the following verses, where he directly contemplates the idea of centres and borderlands:

My mind pervades the sky’s expanse, and its apparent emptiness arises as Samantabhadra’s projections; I honour and bow, and honour and bow to the (mind) that is not restricted nor localised.

Through direct gnostic awareness (I perceive) no edge (and) no centre, space extends.

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126 The GN reads *dgo*, which does not mean anything and appears to be a scribal error. The closest comprehensible homophone is *mgo*, which means “head”, “beginning” or in this context “heights”. The GB reads *ngos*, which means, among other things “side”.

127 Song No. 66 (GN 101–102; GB 265) Song that Sets Flies Subjects and Objects.

The Tibetan reads *skyér rgya’i yid kyi ro myang byed*, which literally translated would mean “is a tasty experience of mortal minds”. As it sounds strange in English to suggest that a taste is a mental experience, I have changed the translation slightly, without creating a drastic change in meaning.

129 Song No. 69 (GN 104–105; GB 267–268) Lyric that Unfolds Outside and In. The colophon to this series of four songs reads: “In East Kha rag, it was the Song that Sets Flies Subjects and Objects; in South Kha rag it was the song (about) the Influence of Impermanence; in West Kha rag, it was the Talk of the Inseparable View and Cultivation; and in North Kha rag, the song that is the Lyric that Unfolds Outside and In. These four where sung there (in Kha rag) in this way”. In the text of Song No. 66, where Rang byung rdo rje himself refers to this piece as the Song that Sets Flies Subjects and Objects, he uses the Tibetan word *glu* to refer to the word. Here, however, when the song is being referred to by the GB and GN’s collator in the colophon, it is referred to as a *mgur*. This is also true of the Song (about) the Stimulus of Impermanence.

130 “Not restricted nor localised” is my translation of the Great Completion term *gya chad phyogs lhung med pa*, which is a state associated with the *sems sde* class of Great Completion practices.

This verse suggests he has overcome the need to seek out borderlands and retreat. However, in a song composed around the same time, he reflects on the importance of isolation for yoga practice. It reads:

Depend on borderlands, mountains, solitudes;
get to the vital point of the skilful path, its nādi and prāṇa, (and)
cultivate dhyāna constantly, without distraction.¹³²

The next and last chapter of his life became a balancing act between these two opposing forces.

¹³² Song No. 87 (GN 125–127; GB 288–291).
Chapter Seven:  
**Between Kong po and Xanadu**

(Minds) that grasp concepts sustain samsāra; envisioning samsāra causes deception, but for me, this vajra yogi at the end of time, there is no chieftain and no vassal, no subject and no object...

Words are gnosis, as are the spaces between them, and that which is unutterable, it too is gnosis, so I, this vajra yogi at the end of time, have no need to take up or give up talking or silence.

Rang byung rdo rje, approximately 1325, aged forty-two, Tsa ri.\(^1\)

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1. Introduction: “No edge, No centre”

The more established Rang byung rdo rje became in Central Tibet, the more he encountered signs that he should leave. Even on the day he founded Bde chen Hermitage, whose buildings would become his most lasting architectural contribution to the Stod lung Valley, he was confronted with such a sign. In a visionary dream that morning, Avalokiteśvara told him to leave for Kong po, in the mountains of Southern Tibet. “My luminosity radiates there,” the bodhisattva told him, “and it is in accordance with the Karmapa’s (Karma Pakshi’s) prophecy (that you live there).”\(^2\)

Despite Rang byung rdo rje’s professed acceptance of this advice, it proved difficult for him to follow it. By this stage of his life and career he was much in demand as a teacher and writer, and this made leaving Central Tibet a challenge. It took another six years for him to leave Bde chen for the mountains. When he finally arrived in Kong po, he founded another hermitage at Nags phu (“Upper Forest”) and began to instruct a new batch of students. But what he had initially assumed would be a long-term retreat was interrupted by the outbreak of two conflicts in Central Tibet: first the leaders of Tshal and the increasing number of visitors from Khams came into conflict in Lha sa; and then the Sakyas leadership began fighting amongst themselves.

Later, after he had helped negotiate a settlement to the first of these disputes, Rang byung rdo rje wrote a song recording the devastation this fighting wrought on a population already overburdened by the continuing presence of Mongol troops. He also sought refuge from it personally at Karma, in far-off Khams. During this visit—in contrast to his last visit and as a reflection of his improved social status—he was allowed to stay for several years in the monastery’s central building. While there, he composed another series

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\(^1\) Song No. 98; 6 (GN 141–142; GB 366–367). Colophon: “The dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje sung this, when he encountered a trap while (teaching) on Gtsang pa rgya (ras)’s Six (Types of) Protection.”

of influential commentaries, and in response to pleas from desperate locals in a nearby area, he also performed a deed unusual for a yogi of his time: he oversaw the building of a bridge. The locals, he recorded, were pleased with the bridge when it was finished, but one of his otherworldly guides, Avalokiteśvara was less impressed, warning him in a vision that activities like this would raise his profile dangerously. The only way he could truly help beings in “dark times”, Avalokiteśvara explained, was by developing his abilities in retreat. After receiving these instructions, Rang byung rdo rje returned to Kong po, where he stayed for another three years, but his vision had been prescient, for he was now too famous to stay in retreat.

Around this time, the Mongol court had decided the fractious Sa skya were not exercising their authority effectively in Tibet, and when they began casting around for another charismatic religious leader through whom they could influence the Plateau’s inhabitants, Rang byung rdo rje seemed the natural choice. After receiving a summons from the court, he was able to rebuff their overtures for three years, but eventually in early 1332, he set off for the Mongols’ capitals, Dadu and Xanadu. This proved to be a tumultuous time at court, too. From the time Rang byung rdo rje left Tibet until his return two years later, he travelled at the behest of not one but three emperors. The precarious existence of those who inhabited the throne during these latter years of the Mongol Empire was also reflected in the oft-cited reason for the court’s decision to allow Rang byung rdo rje’s eventual return to Tibet: the procurement of “long-life water” (tshe chu).

Yet even though Rang byung rdo rje was allowed to return home, his movements were restricted by the imperial envoy that accompanied him on this return visit. He was not able to travel to his beloved Kong po, and instead entered retreat at Mchims phu Hermitage near Bsam yas Monastery, in order to acquire Padmasambhava’s life-prolonging water. After reportedly receiving it, he also managed to oversee the creation of a seminal version of one part of the Tibetan canons, the Bstan ’gyur, before he had to return to the capitals.

This was the last of Rang byung rdo rje’s long journeys, and it was not one he performed willingly. While others down the ages may have praised the Mongols’ capitals, Rang byung rdo rje was less than impressed with them. As soon as he returned to court, he began begging the Emperor, ostensibly his religious pupil, to let him leave. The Emperor refused, and Rang byung rdo rje was forced to live out the rest of his life in exile.

ii. Retreating to Tsa ri

His decision to enforce Rang byung rdo rje’s exile in his capitals displayed a fundamental disjuncture between the Emperor’s and Rang byung rdo rje’s visions of the world. In the Emperor’s vision, which was shared by many, these capitals were the centres of the world,
but Rang byung rdo rje was working from a very different map. His map provided several alternate “capitals” toward which he felt a much stronger pull. The first of these was Bodhgaya, the Vajra Seat (Skt. Vajrásana; Tib. Rdo rje gdan) the centre of India’s sacred geography, which, unlike his guru O rgyan pa, he was never able to visit. He also carried with him a mind-map of Tibet’s sacred sites, which included at least two “capitals”: Lha sa, the capital of the Tibetan Empire; and Tsa ri, which as the site of Cakrasamvara’s mind-manḍala he viewed as the most important Tibetan site of all.

The evidence for the centrality of this sacred site to Rang byung rdo rje’s perception of place is not only clear in the way that he writes about it, but also in the effort he put into establishing a foothold in this sacred locality; a foothold that would support his own standing, the standing of the Karmapa body-mālā and the Karma bka’ brgyud lineage more generally. His previous, first attempt at establishing a centre at Tsa ri had not been terribly successful. This time, after dedicating himself to ten years of teaching and writing in Central Tibet, he returned to Tsa ri with more resources and a more established reputation, but even then he needed to approach the task strategically. Tsa ri was an important region for several lineages, so for Rang byung rdo rje to establish himself there, he had to pick the right valley in which to make his stand, and then employ all his previously acquired cultural landscaping skills in that valley’s re-envisionment.

a) Founding Nags phu

Taking a strategic approach to this settlement all but ruled out setting up a hermitage at Old Tsa ri. The region’s prime sacred real estate, was—for an isolated spiritual site—already well populated, and any incursions into it would have been fiercely contested. Instead he focused his efforts on New Tsa ri, which was in less demand but still considered part of the greater Tsa ri maṇḍala.4

New Tsa ri was connected to Old Tsa ri by the ‘Ja’ la Pass (“Rainbow Pass”), from which pilgrims descended past the frozen Mtsho dkar Lake (“White Lake”) into the Gnas lung chu River Valley. Further downstream, at a place called Spang ram sgangs (“Bistort Meadow-Ridge”)5 a large tributary entered the Gnas lung chu River from the left. Rang byung rdo

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3 Rang byung rdo rje had tried to establish himself in Old Tsa ri on his last trip to no avail, and did not even attempt to do so this time (Gtsug lag phreng ba 2003:934). According to Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:934) his decision not to was based on the many “negative signs” he encountered at Old Tsa ri. The only sign of hope he saw was when a Vajravārāhī text blew out of his hands and up the valley, “scattering everywhere, so much so that he could not collect it.” This he “took this as a sign that the (Karma bka’ brgyud) dharma would spread there later”.

4 Later, after Rang byung rdo rje’s time, an image of the area developed in which Old and New Tsa ri were visualised as two ends of a vajra, with Mtsho dkar Lake as the knot between them (Gyurme Dorje 1996:2007).

5 Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:934–935). This site is variously called “Bang Ram spang” and “Ga ram spang”. The scientific name of the plant that gave this meadow its name is Polygonum viviparum. The suggestion that Nags phu was located in this valley is further supported by the description later redactors gave of this site. They said it was located in the cold, forested, upper reaches of a valley that was populated at its base, which is to say at Spang ram sgangs.
rje held teachings and ganacakras in this meadow, which suggests the site he chose to found his hermitage, Nags phu (“Upper Forest”), was at the top of one of this tributary’s river valleys.⁶

The cultural strategies Rang byung rdo rje used to re-imagine this site mostly repeated those he had used elsewhere: he described the visions he experienced, sang praises to it, and “tamed the locals” by granting them refuge and bodhicitta vows.⁷ He also insisted that past luminaries had visited the region, sanctifying it with their presence. This time, the most well-known person he claimed had visited the site was Padmasambhava, who Rang byung rdo rje insisted had performed yogas in a side-valley called Rkong ’phrag. Rang byung rdo rje then added to the sacredness of that particular place by using the “exponential increase in wisdom” he experienced there to “compose an auto-commentary to the Sublime Inner Meaning”.⁸

The only detail of his cultural landscaping project at Nags phu that built on his earlier projects was the effort he put into the hermitage’s physical appearance. For, according to later records, he engaged many locals to construct its buildings and even insisted that a special type of flowering perennial (perhaps the Bistort) be planted around them.⁹

b) Đākinīs in the Mist

Apart from this re-imagining project, the other recurring theme of Rang byung rdo rje’s stay at Nags phu was his increasing interactions with female protectors, the đākinīs who controlled many of the region’s environmental features. Like the environment, these đākinīs could also be capricious, and therefore the rapport Rang byung rdo rje reportedly developed with them also represented his ability to control natural forces.

The first of Rang byung rdo rje’s interactions with them, which was quite benign, occurred in the same year he founded Nags phu Hermitage as he travelled to Old Tsa ri via the Yar klungs gtsang po River, in all likelihood because inclement weather had blocked the ’Ja’ la Pass.¹⁰ As he travelled, this route too became perilous when a landslide made the riverside road impassable. Wondering what to do next, he and his companions stared down at the river only to see, “the đākinīs, those faithful non-humans make a road (for him and his party) out of the (Yar klungs) gtsang po River’s sands”. This enabled Rang byung rdo rje and his entourage to cross the river, as his “worldly (students) wondered at the

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6 Nags phu Hermitage functioned as a Karma bka’ brgyud retreat centre at least until the seventeenth century. The tenth Karmapa, Chos dbyings rdo rje (1604–1674), visited Nags phu Hermitage in the early part of his life (Irmgard Mengele 2012:47), before he went into exile following the civil war between forces aligned with the Karma bka’ brgyud and those aligned with the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1692). I have not been able to find any reference to this hermitage dated to after this upheaval. It is not mentioned on a traditional map of the area dated to the nineteenth century and analysed in Huber (1992).
7 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:403)
9 At Gnas lung Village. See Figure 7.1
event”. But a few days later, the sand bridge “disappeared, and the land returned to what it was before”.

His second widely reported encounter with the region’s dākinīs was more ominous. In this story, a teacher named Tsha ma Pan chen and his entourage came to meet Rang byung rdo rje at Spang ram sgangs, where they asked to be introduced to the valley’s dākinīs. As Gtsug lag phreng ba, relying on Tsha ma Pan chen’s report of the event, sets the scene for the encounter:

It was the dead of winter, the sacred site (of New Tsa ri) was blanketed in snow, and as they (Rang byung rdo rje and Tsha ma Pan chen’s party) were on horseback (they could not travel up the Gnas lung chu River Valley). (As a second choice, they) asked Rang byung rdo rje to invite the dākinīs to come out to meet them. (He accepted. After a while) his gaze became like the wind and his blue(-black) horse started travelling toward the East (with the others following). Presently a mist with rainbow colours unfolded itself (around them), and in it they all saw eighteen women singing. They stopped their horses and (the dākinīs) granted them a hand empowerment, before telling them to leave. The dākinīs then departed. (The Karmapa) warned them not to let their mind drift in (the dākinīs’ presence) as he had earlier lost people to them. Even today, he said, they had taken his bodyguard’s horse, and he was certain they would return (for more horses and people).12

c) Destroying Sacred Sites

At the same time as Rang byung rdo rje and others’ liberation-stories worked to sacralise the region, however, his songs, even the songs he composed in this most sacred of sites, continued to provide a deconstructive counterpoint to the project. The song he sang for the very same group at Spang ram sgangs, for example, sought to dispel rather than create myths about the site. It did this by deconstructing the whole notion of a sacred site: first by mapping its components onto the subtle body, and then warning against any investment in external sites. The song reads in part:

When we speak of all the buddhas’ pure lands, (and) the twenty-four sacred sites, it is not as if they truly exist out there; our own bodies are the nādi’s cakra. Or, to be specific, at the great, sacred sites, (within our body) those called dākas and dākinīs abide in the elements and bindu.

When we speak of the bindu, we speak of the indivisible hardness,13 which

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12 Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:935). The behaviour of the dākinīs in this passage is reminiscent of the older, forms of dākinī behaviour described in Indic language texts, which may in turn have been influenced by the Persian peri tradition (Templeman 2002:114-129). What is intriguing about this particular presentation, however, is that it suggests the “awakened” dākinīs of Tsa ri were behaving in these troublesome ways.
13 Here he uses the Indic word for hardness, suddhra, transliterated into Tibetan.
As it descends.

And likewise when we speak of the twenty-four elements that manifest at these sites, we speak specifically of the three nāḍi, the hidden nāḍi: the ālāna, rasana and avadhūti.

Get the vital point that the myriad interdependencies are the indivisible subject and object, method and wisdom. See saṃsāra and nirvāṇa's non-duality, their (non-)self; (see) what the Buddha called "the great sacred site".

Arouse bliss, clarity and non-conceptual gnosis, because the sacred sites of the five hidden nāḍi are where the five dākinīs live, and their entity is pure prāṇa....

(To have) the concept of external sacred sites is to generate an obsession with place; this end-of-time vajra yogi destroys complicated, external sacred sites.14

The last verse is perhaps the most intriguing. For in it, even after all his efforts to establish sacred sites across the Tibetan Plateau, after all the obstacles he overcame to live at Tsa ri, and perhaps most importantly, after making many explicit links between the sacrality of these sites and that of the Karmapa body-mālā, he still declares himself a destroyer of sacred sites, an iconoclast. It is indeed "strange" behaviour, but therefore very much in accordance with the only "view" to which Rang byung rdo rje was completely dedicated; not the view from the top of mountains or of sacred sites, but rather the mahāmudrā view, which the subtle-body yogas he outlined in this verse were said to develop.

### iii. Trouble in Lha sa, a Bridge in Kham

Despite the isolation of Rang byung rdo rje’s hermitage and his commitment to retreat, worldly events again interrupted his yoga practice shortly after he sang this song, and he was recalled to Lha sa in 1326 to perform another of his roles: peacemaker. Although neither he nor later redactors of his tale provide any details about the disputes he resolved there, by aligning his and their accounts with other Tibetan histories, it appears he was summoned to Lha sa by the Tshal Myriarch Kun dga’ rdo rje—the author of the Red Annals—to resolve a fierce dispute between the inhabitants of Tshal and pilgrims from Khams.15

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14 Song No. 105; 13 (GN 157–160; GB 378–380). Colophon: "This song was sung in Ga ram Meadow in a tiger year (1326)."

15 During Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s time, a similar dispute had flared up between Lama Zhang, the progenitor of Tshal Monastery, and visitors from Khams, and the first Karmapa was required to travel to Lha sa to resolve it. This episode is discussed in some detail in Yamamoto (2012:249–252). Gyag sde Pañ chen (1299–1378) offers a description of Rang byung rdo rje during this stay at Tshal and it is quoted in Si tu Pañ chen (2004:372). It reads: "Explaining the vast ocean of sūtras and tantras to spiritual friends (i.e., monk teachers) during the day
Having resolved this dispute, Rang byung rdo rje prepared to return to Kong po, but subsequent events changed his mind. Although the fighting between the people of Tshal and Khams had been resolved, another dispute began, one that would have even greater consequences for the region and Rang byung rdo rje himself: the various houses of Sa skya had begun to fight amongst themselves.

a) Famine
The fighting at Sa skya started after the death of Bzang po dpal (1262–1324), the abbot and most influential ruler of its monastery in a generation. Bzang po dpal had been the last male heir of the Sa skya 'Khon family, and was therefore under intense pressure to produce at least a few male heirs. But when he more than fulfilled his procreational duties by siring eleven sons, this led to a new set of problems for the Sa skya tradition, which then had to establish who out of this group of eligible young men could lay claim to its lay and religious thrones. In an attempt to resolve the situation, his one son without a vested interest in the dispute, the imperial preceptor Kun dga' blo gros rgyal mtshan (1299–1327), divided the monastery into four houses and appointed four of Bzang po dpal's sons to run them. There was still a head abbot at Sa skya, one Nam mkha' legs pa'i rgyal mtshan (1305–1343), who was also head of one of the houses, the Bzhi thogs Bla brang, but according to Petech his position was a "primacy of honour only".

With the abbot's rule undermined in this way, much more power was then invested in Sa skya's lay authority, the Great Lord (Dpon chen), 'Od zer seng ge (d.1329). This caused the members of Bzhi thogs Bla brang to rise up against the Great Lord, and in 1327, after the Karmapa had quelled the fighting in Lha sa, rumours began to spread that Mongol troops would invade to restore order. Along with many others, including the myriarch of Zha lu, Rang byung rdo rje fled to Khams to escape this potential outcome.

When he arrived at Karma Monastery, Rang byung rdo rje had ensured his own safety, but he was also highly affected by the devastation he had seen on his journey. He expressed this desolation in one of his most highly effective and literarily sophisticated songs. This song is divided into three parts. The first two of these parts are modelled on his other socially critical songs, although much more pointed, and direct his outrage at

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\(16\) Petech (1990:80).
\(17\) Petech (1990:82).
\(18\) Petech (1990:93) describes the Zha lu Myriarch's flight. Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:935) provides an alternate (probably incorrect and definitely partisan) version of events. He begins by following Mkhas pa Sher rin pa's account, but then goes on to suggest that the Mongol troops actually did invade, after Rang byung rdo rje had predicted it. His version of events reads: "After this the Zhi thog (Bla brang at Sa skya), the Great Lord and his inner circle created trouble and no one in the region was happy. This led to many Mongol troops arriving, just as (Rang byung rdo rje) had said they would." There is no record that Tsa ri was particularly affected by the tensions, but its proximity to Lha sa and Sa skya eliminated it as a potential sanctuary.
both sides of the conflict. The first part savages the monks of the Bzhi thogs faction who rose up against the Great Lord. It reads:

These monastics don’t tread (the path) correctly, they sustain themselves with debauchery. The three dharma robes don’t sit well on them, they are just yellow shapes, wearing brocade, carrying the sticks (they use) to chase away dogs, sons, nephews and neighbours. And still, like dogs, they themselves crave food. To get what they want, they do things that aren’t dharma; the little wealth they have, they use in unjust ways. They encourage others to do (bad) things; (even) to punish humble dhārmikas. They reward lies and other bad behaviour. They pretend to be great ones, (but) their behaviour is not dharma. (Just as) it is unseemly for shepherds to kill antelope; it is also unseemly for these people to drink beer, ruin their memory, keep women and have unseemly sex.\(^\text{19}\)

Following Orgyan pa’s lead in expressing equal chagrin toward all political factions, in part two Rang byung rdo rje then proceeds to attack the Great Lord’s faction, and even his backer the Mongol Emperor. It reads:

The King (the Emperor) does not follow the dharma, he is controlled by those who lust and hate. His lord may be “great”, but he is a “great” bandit, a “great” crook. He brings punishment on truthful people and fills the land with thieves. His (followers) destroy temples and stūpas, crush their images, and do outrageous things to food and dharma texts.\(^\text{20}\)

Part three is even more devastating than these condemnations. In it Rang byung rdo rje describes the effects of constant fighting and deprivations on the region’s ordinary people; a description that despite its evocative comparisons to other less verifiable regions of the Buddhist cosmological map, also appears to describe several atrocities of which he had personal knowledge. This section of the song reads:

Because of this, the gods and spirits are shaken, and disease fills the land; rain does not fall, there are poor harvests, and what little that does grow is carried away by frosts and hail.

Many are robbed and beaten by famine’s destitution, so they

\(^{19}\) Song No. 114; 22 (GN 173–175; GT 391–392).
\(^{20}\) Song No. 114; 22 (GN 173–175; GT 391–392).
cry out, dying on the road.

A few people eat the flesh of others;
a few sell their children for food.
Others, racked with hunger, jump in the river.

Wailing, wailing they don’t know night and day;
their skeletons are barely covered with the skin
that hangs off them: off bones and off heads.
Their (corpses) burn up like vegetation.
(Seeing) them is like seeing hungry ghosts directly.
Everywhere there is killing, shackling and beating;
pus and blood trickle from all the leprous boils and lesions.
(Seeing) this is like seeing the hell realms directly.
For these people, the road to the four pure continents is blocked;
vividly, they could be taken for animals; in human bodies
they still experience the sufferings of the lower realms.

Kye ma! Evil times are upon us!
Kye hu! Poor beings!
Don’t the bodhisattvas think of them? These destitute
people in these lands of Amdo, Khams and Stod?
I fear the whole Land of Snows has
become as unjust as (its rulers).  

**d) A Bridge Too Far**

The Mongolian armies that threatened to invade did not do so, and for a moment the internal frictions at Sa skya subsided. Still, Rang byung rdo rje did not return to Central Tibet for several years, sitting out the rest of ’Od zer seng ge’s reign in Karma Monastery.

At the beginning of his stay at Karma, Rang byung rdo rje used his time to write two commentaries on Nagārjuna’s *In Praise of Dharmadhātu* (Skt. *Dharmadhātustava*; Tib. *Chos dbyings bstod pa*) and Saraha’s *Song-Treasury of Doha* (Skt. *Dohākoṣagīti*; Tib. *Do ha mdzod kyi glu*). According to Gtsug lag phreng ba, his writing of these two commentaries was accompanied by an increase in his teaching on “a combination of šamatha (Tib. *zhi gnas*; “calm-abiding”) and vipaśyana (Tib. *lhag mthong*; “special-insight”).” Given that it does not mention any tantric empowerments, Gtsug lag phreng ba’s description of this teaching technique suggests Rang byung rdo rje was advocating Sgam po pa’s controversial “Sūtra Mahāmudrā”. In this approach to mahāmudrā, students combined common meditation techniques like šamatha and vipaśyana with personal instructions (man ngag) on the mahāmudrā view from their gurus. In the past, this had proved very controversial among some parts of the Tibetan Buddhist community (especially Sa skya commentators) because these instructions were provided without pre-requisite tantric empowerments.

The fact that Rang byung rdo rje’s increase in the employment of this sūtra-based method

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21 Song No. 114; 22 (GN 173–175; GT 391–392).
was accompanied by his renewed interest in the two aforementioned texts is telling for at least two reasons: first because In Praise of Dharmadhātu is often described as a bridge between the sūtra and mahāmudrā presentations of mind’s nature; and second because Saraha’s Song-Treasury repeatedly downplays the formal aspects of yoga practice that are emphasised within the tantric presentation of mahāmudrā.

For many readers the pursuit of these meditative practices may seem disconnected from the horrors that he had witnessed on his journey to Karma, but for Rang byung rdo rje they were very connected. Indeed in his mind the only real way for one to achieve release from the kind of suffering he had seen was to realise mahāmudrā. Reflecting on the time he had spent at Karma, for example, he wrote in his Verse Liberation-Story that he now “understood that the Buddha’s qualities arise in solitude”. He also made the poignant suggestion that “those who are afraid and suffering should set up a hermitage”.

Yet despite his repeated insistence that dharma practice was the only way to truly relieve suffering, he also engaged in a more temporal and unusual form of activity during his stay in Khams: bridge-building. As he describes this episode in his Verse Liberation-Story:

When the first month of the dragon year (1328) arrived, I began having many
clear, visionary dreams in which dharma protectors (told me) through signs to
build a bridge across the Sog River in the midst of the lay-Buddhist Rdo rje rgyal po’s (the Vajra King’s) lands. This I did, and while we worked on the bridge neither the nāga king nor his entourage interrupted our work. This meant we were able to achieve our goal.

The Sog River was (and is) one of the earliest tributaries of the (Rgyal mo) Dngul chu River (Salween River), which rises near it. According to accounts from this period and later, it was an especially dangerous river that sat on an important trade route. The decision to build a bridge over it was certainly something of a departure from Rang byung rdo rje’s normal activities, but in at least two ways it can also be seen as an extension of them. To begin with, he was asked to be involved in this task because of what all involved understood to be his special power over environmental spirits and gods. In this case, these

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25 The co-ordinates for the probable site of this bridge are: 31°53’06“N 93°47’26”E. Rosemary Jones Tung (1996:115, plate 54) includes a photo of a bridge that may be an updated version of this construction. The book that contains this photo describes a journey by Ilya Tolstoy and Brooke Dolan, who led an expedition across Tibet in 1949. During this journey, Tolstoy and Dolan crossed a bridge on the Sog Chu River. As it was not an iron bridge but made from local materials, it is possible that it was an updated version of the bridge whose construction Rang byung rdo rje helped engineer. As this is possible, it is perhaps prudent to include the description Tolstoy and Dolan gave of the bridge: “(It was) a high suspension bridge of ancient and precarious design. The bridge floor was fashioned of logs bound together by rope. There were no handrails. There were ropes overhead on either side of the bridge, rather appropriately hung with prayer flags. As soon as a man or a horse stepped onto the bridge, it began to sway violently” (Jones Tung 1996:89–90).
Figure 7.1 New Tsa ri and Surrounds.  

Figure 7.2 Rang byung rdo rje’s Latter-Life Haunts.  

26 Background from Google Earth. Sites added by the author.  
27 Background from Google Earth. Sites added by the author.
included the local god Rdo rje rgyal po and the nāgas who controlled the river. This project also—in a more secular way than usual—extended on Rang byung rdo rje’s commitment to helping “wanderers”; it is just that in this instance the “wanderers” he tried to help were the relatively small group of people seeking to transit from one side of the river to the other.

Nevertheless, this foray into worldly affairs did not last long. For as Rang byung rdo rje worked on the bridge, he also experienced a vision of Avalokiteśvara, who discouraged him from pursuing further projects, informing him that, “If (he) became distracted by such projects in a dark time, obstacles would arise; hordes would invade solitary sites, the dharma would not proliferate, and many people would become jealous”.29 Avalokiteśvara further advised him to return to Nags phu Hermitage, which he did shortly thereafter. Coincidently, this was around the same time that ‘Od zer seng ge died and the tensions in Central and Southern Tibet were consequently alleviated.

iv. Back to the Edge

After passing through Central Tibet without returning to Mtshur phu, Rang byung rdo rje arrived back at Nags phu in early 1329. He spent the next three years in Kong po, mostly in retreat: this was his last period of retreat in the forests of Southern Tibet.

Shortly after he returned there, he began receiving messages through both this-worldly and otherworldly channels that his presence would shortly be required at the Emperor’s court. Ordinary people told him about the Mongol court’s concern over Sa skya infighting, and how this meant that he—a high-ranking guru and an alternate source of spiritual authority—might therefore be asked to minister to the Mongol court.30 And in his visions he encountered Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, who was closely associated with China and told him he would be required at the Mongol’s winter capital, Dadu in Northern China in three years time.31

Despite the presence of this overarching threat, the rest of Rang byung rdo rje’s writing from this period is surprisingly focused on hermitage life. In accordance with the characteristics of their respective genres, his songs once again reflect his day-to-day experiences with his students and the Verse Liberation-Story describes his visions and “dharma activities”. These deeds included the establishment of another hermitage in the same area, Lhun grub stengs (“Spontaneous Ridge”), just before he left for China and

28 Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:935) also described this event, and focused on “the nāgas’ acceptance of all this awakened activity”.
30 The issues that gave rise to this problem and Rang byung rdo rje’s recruitment have been discussed in Richardson (1998:343), Petech (1990:86) and Wylie (1983).
Mongolia. When combined, they paint a portrait of Rang byung rdo rje as a senior guru; one who worked hard to instruct difficult students in his outward life and engaged in highly esoteric practices in his inner, visionary life.

a) Problem Students

The problems Rang byung rdo rje encountered instructing his students while in the hermitages are described in vivid and various detail in the songs he composed during this period. Sometimes these difficulties were circumstantial, and required a song of encouragement from him, like these following verses:

Mountain hermits, yogis like me
do not have a scrap of food or clothing;
we aspire to find satisfaction in the heat
of candali and the essence we extract (from plants).

Whatever suffering we experience now,
we accept that it comes from previous times,
and so we (see) even the slightest bad condition
as the clearing of past, bad karma.

Yet along with the continuation of this and other themes from past songs, there was also a distinct shift in emphasis in his songs from this period. While his earlier songs tended to focus on his own difficulties, these songs focused more on the hardships his students encountered. And while his earlier critiques tended to focus on his society's religious elites, those he composed in Kong po were also directed at his students. This shift in focus was not one with which he always felt comfortable, however, and it took a while for him to make the change. At the beginning of this stay at Kong po, for example, he questioned how he could criticise those under his protection in the following verse:

I praise myself and slander others;
seeing others' faults should remind me of my own.
When I do not know (those I criticise) this is still very true,
but when I do know them, I should be ashamed!

Despite this initial hesitation, over the next year, Rang byung rdo rje grew more comfortable as a critic, serving up the following only months after his expression of hesitation:

Right now, apparently, impure students
need one fine robe each to awaken.

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32 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:405). As later commentators have explained, this project suggested that he did not intend to leave the area for good. Kun dga' rdo rje (1981:101), Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:938) and Situ Pan chen (2004:382).

33 Song No. 110; 18 (GN 165–169; GB 384–388).

34 Song No. 110; 18 (GN 165–169; GB 384–388).
The siddhas of the past, our superiors,
had no clothes at all and still
attained the siddhi of mahâmudrâ, but

Right now, apparently, as these (dark) times descend,
when there are no fine robes, there is no pure dharma!

If an awakened one in rags arrived, you all would
turn them away, chuck them out of the camp; for
you only respect and serve those with fine robes.

If some well dressed person with no dharma arrived,
you would show them respect, saying, “Here, have a seat!”
You behave like evil people!35

b) The Woman Problem

A recurrent theme in Rang byung rdo rje’s admonishing songs is the difficulty of
illuminating students’ minds in “dark times”. The theme of encroaching darkness in these
songs is particularly noteworthy because previously he had suggested Tsa ri and other
sacred sites would remain beacons of light during dark times. This suggests that his idea of
these places as a haven is restricted to the influence they have on very advanced tantric
practitioners—like himself—rather than those under his instruction. Of one group of
students, for example, he had the following to say:

I might have developed impartial compassion, but (even)
the Buddha’s compassion could not protect this lot!
Their ignorant minds are so densely murky!36

Yet even these compassion-killing murky minds were not the recipients of the harshest
criticism in this group of Rang byung rdo rje’s songs: this was reserved for Tsa ri’s
laywomen. The especially pointed critique he delivered to them reads in part:

The laywomen (here) are especially (bad).
They chase after their preconceptions of desire, and
ignite when they see those who may satiate them. I’ve seen them.

They run after charlatans and don’t remember
any bit of the dharma I taught them.
They’re not courageous in dhyâna cultivation, but
they put a lot of effort into debauchery!

If you get friendly with a dog, they lick your face.
If you get friendly with children, they hang off your shoulders.

35 Song No. 111; 19 (GN 169–170; GT 388).
36 Song No. 113; 21 (GN 171–173; GT 390–391). Colophon: “This was spoken at Lhun grub stengs while (he)
was in the rainy season retreat, in the year of the sheep (1331). (He spent this rainy season there) because of
an earlier invitation and offering from his patrons in Rkong po (Kong po). As a result (of this invitation) he did
not go to the land of the Mongols at that time.”
Please bodhisattvas, do not abandon
the beings of these dark times;
I have compassion for them, but in the
darkness, disciplining them is difficult.

May they cultivate equanimity at least once in this life
and aspire to more discipline in the next.37

This song is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it is the only instance in Rang byung rdo rje’s songs of a critique directed at a subaltern rather than elite social group. From the perspective of a modern-day reader, this criticism appears especially bad because in doing so he condemned a vulnerable group for their attempts to find happiness and perhaps even protection. But this is very much a contemporary criticism; a more culturally appropriate analysis of this song would point out that this is the only time Rang byung rdo rje’s critique focused on his subjects’ “nature” as opposed to their behaviour: if dogs will lick, he suggests, and children will hang off your shoulder, women will be floozies.

Rang byung rdo rje himself even acknowledged his failure in the verse following this condemnation, admitting that he has given up on the women, lost sight of their buddha-nature “in the darkness”. Given this context, the prescription he gives them is also noteworthy. For while he tells every other person he criticises to improve their behaviour immediately, he merely expresses his own wish that these women will, “cultivate equanimity at least once in this life and aspire to more discipline in the next”. The only caveat to his condemnation of them for their female-ness is his suggestion that it is not womanhood itself that creates this difficulty, but womanhood in “these dark times”. This distinction also seems to underpin his advice not to seek re-birth as a male specifically, but to aspire to any life where they can practice yoga with “more discipline”.

This ambiguity of this passage is further emphasised by placing it in the context of other descriptions of human women in his personal writing. Unlike their otherworldly counterparts the dākinīs, human women in Rang byung rdo rje’s life and writing are most notable for their absence: they are only mentioned in specific circumstances, in passing and usually as an ideal rather than a reality. Like many within the broader Buddhist tradition, he was generally positive about mothers (if not their wombs), using motherly love as a model for bodhicitta.38 He also very respectfully referred to a special category of women that he called “healing medicine women” ('tsho byed sman gyi mo),39 which by

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37 Song No. 134; 42 (GN 200–202; GT 413–414). Colophon: “He said this at Tsa ri’s new monastery at Zhol. May it be a providential, illustrious, blazing ornament for the world.”
38 Song No. 35 (GN 47–48; GB 222) contains the following couplet that exemplifies this imagery: “Like a mother with one child, the unmoving bodhisattva’s behaviour is wholesome.”
39 Song No. 125; 33 (GN 187–189; GT 402–403). The Tibetan description of these persons is: ‘tsho byes sman gyi mo lta. At first I understood this to be the name of a goddess or a dākinī, and still believe this to be
its context suggests a group of women trained in traditional healing methods, but again, this group of women are described ideally rather than directly.

Rang byung rdo rje even approaches his own lust towards women by transforming them from real people into idealised representations of their gender. This transformation is highlighted in the following extract, which also provides an insight into his personal practice of celibacy. It begins by describing the images and afflicted emotions that assail him and other monks:

However much we strive (to defeat it),
demonic ignorance (remains) overwhelming, and
illusory, lovely seductresses remain powerful;
lustful women, intoxicating women, pretty women
move quickly, following us constantly...

Later, the poem changes track, describing Rang byung rdo rje’s own defeat of these mental images and the way he had transformed his perception of women. This section reads in part:

I, myself, am the lone yogi who emerged victorious
from the battle with preconceived demons.
The compassionate moon shines behind me;[40]
the light of the gnostic sun swirls in front of me.
Pretty women dissolve into my dhārāṇī’s nature;
Māra’s daughters melt into samsāra and nirmāṇa’s (non-dual) nature;
intoxicating women transform into unconditioned goddesses.[41]

The idealised or absent version of real women in these images is perhaps a reflection of wider trends within both Tibetan Buddhism and the Buddhist tradition more generally.[42] But it is particularly striking in Rang byung rdo rje’s writing because of his detailed and frequent depictions of non-human women, the dākinīs. In this regard, Rang byung rdo rje reflects the wider tradition’s seeming preference for idealised forms of women rather than real women; mothers without wombs, intoxicating women transformed into unconditioned goddesses, and otherworldly dākinīs.

This contrast is illustrated vividly through an episode in his Verse Liberation-Story that occurred around the same time that he said his piece to the women of Tsa ri. In this episode, he makes one last pilgrimage to Old Tsa ri before leaving for China and Mongolia,

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40 This follows the GB. The GN has repeated the word rgyal, "victory", and this appears to be a scribal error.
41 Song No. 91 (GN 130–132; GB 293–295).
42 There have been many works discussing the many and varied representations of women in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and the Buddhist tradition more generally. See for example, Alan Sponberg (1992), who clearly set out the ambivalent representations of women in Indian Buddhism. Sponberg’s work was built upon by Liz Wilson (1996) and Reiko Ohnuma (2012), whose work examines the ambivalent representation of maternal imagery. Also, Serenity Young (2004) examined images of women in tantric literature.
so that he could pay homage to its dākinīs. Of this farewell, he wrote:

(On the way), in old Tsa ri, the sacred site of the dākinīs, I had a vision that a karma-dākinī granted me her inspiration. The non-humans (of the region) put on a magical display, the earth shook, and many and various voices (were heard).43

Such a vision is reported in the liberation-stories of several monks from this era and could be read as a celibate version of the blessings bestowed in the karma-mudrā (las kyi phyag rgya) or sexual yoga of non-celibate yogis.44 Unlike some of the descriptions of karma-mudrā practice, however, and the more negative and passive descriptions of the real women who perform the role of consort in them,45 in this image it was the dākinī that was in the position of authority. It was she who granted him a blessing that he accepted happily and reported with pride.46 The difference between this and his portrayal of the region’s human women could not be more stark.

v. Journey to the Centre of the Empire

Following this unusually female-centric episode in Rang byung rdo rje’s life, the next series of events brought male authority figures very much back into the foreground in the form of two otherworldly bodhisattvas and one this-worldly emperor.

The first figure he encountered was Maṇjuśrī, who in several visions reiterated his call for Rang byung rdo rje to travel to the Mongol capitals,47 and in doing so repeated the narrative trope of other-worldly invitations that had marked the start of all Rang byung rdo rje’s other journeys. But this vision also differed from other, similar visions in a number of ways: first, because Maṇjuśrī was not an ordinary, local spirit and his protectorate, China, was not an ordinary Tibetan region; and second because for the first time in his story Rang byung rdo rje received a series of contradictory visions around the same time. These visions were of another highly regarded bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara, who wanted Rang byung rdo rje to stay in his protectorate: the solitudes of Tibet. The first in the series of visions Rang byung rdo rje experienced of Avalokiteśvara was on his final pilgrimage to old Tsa ri, just before he encountered the karma-dākinī. He recalled it later in this way:

I dreamt a dream that arose from illusory imprints, in which I heard

44 Judith Simmer-Brown (2001) discusses this form of dākinī in some detail. She also describes (2001:237) how the appearance of a similar being is described in the liberation-story of Rang byung rdo rje’s contemporary: Klong chen rab‘byams pa. This vision is described in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991:579).
45 Young (2004) examines this often negative portrayal in some detail.
46 The only time Rang byung rdo rje does not treat the dākinīs he encounters in his visions with absolute respect is when they appear to him in the in-between state and he does not believe they are real. I have discussed this appearance in detail in chapter four.
Avalokiteśvara, the master of compassion, saying this to three princes:

Entrust yourself to solitude, and the quality of your samādhi will increase.
As the moon maṇḍala travels through the sky, other conditions (sometimes) obscure it and (sometimes let it shine) clearly.
As the arrayed constellations shine in the sky, they too are (sometimes) clear and (sometimes obscured) by other conditions, (like) the sun and moon.
Examine carefully what helps yourself and others!

And then, after showing this sign, they disappeared.48

a) The Emperor’s “Invitation”

The third male authority figure that profoundly influenced Rang byung rdo rje during this period was the Mongol Emperor, Tuq Temür (1304–1332; ruled 1328–April 1329 and September 1329–1332). The Emperor’s direct influence on Rang byung rdo rje’s life began in the spring of 1331, when he sent an edict that summoned him to court. This document has been reprinted several times in a variety of contexts.49 It reads:

By the blessings of the three jewels, (and) in dependence on the glory of great merit, I, the Emperor, make this request of Rang byung rdo rje. The teachings of the Sugata have spread as far as the Northern King(dom)s, and the power of their prophetic words has caused a variety of suitable Buddhist dharma systems to be present (here). As a consequence of this, even Qubilai Khan (Se chen rgyal po) respected and relied upon very many spiritual friends. In this place, the popularity of the Buddha’s teachings is clear to all.

I also wish to perform excellently (my duty as) an insignificant protector of the teachings. (In this regard), I have heard much about you. It has been said that you have great learning and you possess exceptional (personal) qualities. (This is why) I am sending you guards and commands (to travel to court).

If you offer excuses not to come, then this will cause the faithful (to develop) the fault of disenchantment. The bad-smelling (mental) seeds that would predispose you not to abandon the yogis of your own land are faulty; (they) destroy your altruistic desire to help all indiscriminately. This is a misdeed that is not (in accord with) the intention of the teachings. It is indifference to the suffering and difficulty of all beings. It is not my intention to cause any harm to the teachings generally, and I will not change (this approach). Therefore, I am asking you as a leader, with the intention of helping all beings, to come quickly. If you do come, you will be able to perform teachings as you wish.

This was written on the thirteenth day of the third, spring month in the year of the sheep (1331).50

49 Si tu Pan chen (2004: 382–383) included this edict in his retelling of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story. It was also even included within a recent anthology of important Tibetan historical documents (Bkra shis dbang ’dus 1989:237-238).
50 Si tu Pan chen (2004: 382–383). Two highly regarded twentieth century Western historians of Tibet also translated this edict and used it to make various arguments about Rang byung rdo rje’s role in Tibetan history. Richardson (1998:342-344) uncontroversially describes and translates parts of the edict in an overview of the various roles the Karmapas have played in Tibet’s political history. Turrell Wylie (1983:579-586), however, in an earlier and more polemical article focuses instead on the foundational and primary role politics had in the establishment of the Karmapa reincarnation lineage. According to Wylie’s reckoning in this article, the
Part of the reason the summons has been preserved and reprinted so often is the way it clearly exemplifies the complex relationship between the Mongol Emperors and their Tibetan gurus. On the one hand, for example, the Emperor shows Rang byung rdo rje great respect, describing "his great learning" and "exceptional (personal) qualities". But on the other, he positions himself as Buddhism's protector and sees fit to lecture Rang byung rdo rje not just on his responsibilities to his secular king, but also on the practice of Buddhism. This mix of worldly and transcendent authority is very different from the operations of power presented in Rang byung rdo rje's writing. This is, after all, the Emperor whom he had previously said did "not follow the dharma" and was "controlled by those who lust and hate".51

This last comment is particularly telling because it suggests that despite his expressed wish to stay out of politics, Rang byung rdo rje knew something about the goings on at the Mongol court. Tuq Temür was indeed very much under the influence of the two powerful ministers who had installed him as emperor (twice)—El Temür (d. 1333) and Bayan (1281?–1340)—and unlikely to act without their acquiescence.52 Moreover, although there is no particular record of these two ministers' "lust", there are detailed records of their often brutal suppression of enemies, including Tuq Temür's brother Qoshila (1300–1329; ruled 1329), who had been briefly enthroned with the help of the Chagatai Khanate in 1329 before being murdered at El Temür and Bayan's order.53

Surprisingly, given his previous strident critique of the court and the example set by his mentor O rgyan pa, Rang byung rdo rje did not reject the Mongol summons. In his reincarnation tradition was established in Tibet because "the Mongols intended to use the Black-hat Karma-pa lama and his successive reincarnations to replace the Sa-skya regents in Tibet" who were no longer reliable because of the infighting in which they had engaged after Bzang dpal's death (1983:585). "Reincarnation' developed in Tibetan Buddhism," he continues, "primarily for political reasons... its immediate purpose was to provide the Black-hat Karma-pa hierarchs with a metaphysical lineage devoid of patrimonial connections as a preliminary step toward the replacement of the quarrelsome 'Khon family as regents of Tibet' (1983:586). A complete refutation of the argument Wylie presents in this article is obviously beyond the scope of this footnote, but I can begin such a refutation by presenting two points of contention. First, in seeking to highlight the political elements of the development of this tradition, and in so doing to counteract what he perhaps correctly saw as an overt reliance on religious readings of these events (or as he calls it their "metaphysical causality") (Wylie 1983: 579), Wylie completely ignored the almost two centuries of accrued cultural production that had gone into developing this tradition: the stories, the songs, the monasteries, the statues and all the other elements of the Karmapa project that I outlined in chapter three. Moreover, he also ignored all the religious and cultural precedents that the early Karmapas cited for the development of their tradition. Second, and more importantly, Wylie's argument seems to imply that the Mongol court not only had enough control over Tibetans' culture and religious life to force a new system of belief on them, but also the insight and patience to set about establishing such a tradition from what was after all a great distance. Given that the two most powerful people at court during this time were two ex-generals this seems highly unlikely. As the religious luminaries at court were in the main Sa skya pas, it also seems unlikely that they would help the Mongols devise a model that would dislodge themselves. What seems much more likely, as Richardson indirectly suggests (1998:342), is that the Mongols searched for another source of Tibetan religious authority to prop up the faltering Sa skya in their governance of Tibet and found Rang byung rdo rje and the fledgling Karmapa reincarnation institution. There is no doubt that the imperial recognition of him as the third Karmapa (and the court's gold) did much to help strengthen the Karmapa reincarnation tradition, but it was already well established at that point.

51 Song No. 114; 22 (GN 173–175; GT 391–392).
52 Atwood (2004:166, 37).
liberation-story, he attributes this acceptance to his visions of Mañjuśrī. But, given the dire threats that hung over his compatriots, there was also much social pressure on him to make this journey. What there is no evidence for, however, is a change in the otherworldly paradigms of power and authority upon which Rang byung rdo rje had relied his entire life. Indeed, throughout the rest of his writing he rarely missed an opportunity to directly or indirectly question the imperial court's authority or the authority of their Sa skya regents.

The first method Rang byung rdo rje used to do this—one that was so successful he repeated it several times—was stalling. The edict commanding his presence at court arrived in spring 1331, but Rang byung rdo rje insisted he must first fulfil his commitment to undertake the rains retreat at Lhun grub stengs.\(^5\) It was autumn when he finally travelled to Lha sa and met the newly appointed Imperial Preceptor, Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan (1310–1365), with whom he was supposed to travel to the capitals. Together they proceeded to 'Dam in North Tibet, the traditional start of the “China Road” (Rgya lam). But again Rang byung rdo rje stalled, this time insisting that a violent storm was “a magic show put on for him by Gnyan chen thang lha and other local deities” as a sign that he should not travel.\(^5\) This allowed him to return to Mtshur phu for the winter with his Mongolian and Sa skya escort. But the storm was not evidently bad enough to stop Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan’s journey, and he continued on to the capitals.

b) At Ra sgrengs

Rang byung rdo rje did not set out again for the capitals until the first day of the second month of the new Tibetan year, at the beginning of another spring. Even then, he made slow progress. “On the road, I (stopped) to help wanderers,” he recalled later, “and turned the wheel of the Mahāyāna dharma when beings wanted me to do this.”\(^5\)

As he made his way slowly along, he continued to resist the Mongol/Sa skya authority in a variety of ways. During one of his teaching stops, for example, at the Bka’ gdams Monastery called Ra sgrengs near ‘Dams, he performed a song that poked fun at both his Bka’ gdams hosts and more pointedly at his Sa skya escorts. It reads:

Mind’s nature alone is the seed of everything;
when impure it is speculation, the base of saṃsāra, (but)
(as) its actual base is completely pure by nature,

\(^5\) This first delay is not described in his liberation-story, but is described in the colophon to Song No. 113; 21 (GN 171–173; GT 390–391). This colophon reads: “This was spoken at Lhun grub stengs while (he) was in the rainy season retreat, in the year of the sheep (1331). (He spent this rainy season there) because of an earlier invitation and offering from his patrons in Kong po. As a result (of this invitation) he did not go to the land of the Mongols at that time.”


when its self-liberating thatness is realised, it is nirvāṇa.

Generate great compassion for un-realised wanderers, and admiration for the guru. Make an effort to depend on the one who teaches the sacred dharma, the ārya’s paths. This knowledge is the baseline, the entrance to the path.

Then, from this foundation, in order to complete the six pāramitās, enter the path of śamatha and vipaśyana; grasp well the vital point of ardent ingenuity. This, in the main, is how to travel on the ārya’s path.

(Together) wisdom without preconceived definitions and dhyāna focused on thatness will unmistakably see logic’s (actual) subject, the dharmatā! So, engage with this cause of liberation from existence and peace.

Then, when the (two) collections of adventitious veils that (block) the natural essence of the stainless Buddha are cleared away, the bodily and gnostic deeds, the awakened activity, will manifest the power to engage with samsāra as it actually is.

This is the “path and result” (lam ‘bras), the foundation of the Buddha’s speech; it is an uncommon instruction, a vital point. May it help all wanderers.57

At first glance this song seems like many of the other teaching songs he performed during later life. In one way or another, most of these gave an overview of the path to buddhahood, following the basic “Graduated Path” (lam rim) outline of Sgam po pa’s famous work, An Ornament for Precious Liberation (Thar pa rin po che’i rgyan), and this song was no exception.58 Given that the presentation of the path resulting from this shift closely followed Sgam po pa’s version of the Graduated Path, and the presentation of emptiness in Sgam po pa’s text is essentially sūtra mahāmudrā, it is noteworthy that Rang byung rdo rje felt comfortable presenting this controversial teaching to a Bka’ gdamspa audience. Although the joke he makes in the fourth verse about their study of Pramāṇa (Tshad ma) or logic—“logic’s (actual) subject (is) the dharmatā”—is perhaps an acknowledgement of their different approaches to the path.

But the real punchline to the song comes in the last verse. It only makes sense when we consider the song’s audience, which included not only Bka’ gdamspas but also Rang byung rdo rje’s Mongol/Sa skya escort—and it is toward the Sa skya pas that this last verse appears to have been directed. The first clue to this intent is in his use of the term, “path and result” (lam ‘bras), the name of the Sa skya pa’s most revered teaching, but here Rang byung rdo rje uses it to describe his own sūtra mahāmudrā teaching. The Sa skya

57 Song No. 106; 14 (GN 160–161; GB 380–381) To the Teachers and Monks of Ra sgrengs. Colophon: “This is the advice given to the teacher and students of Ra sgrengs (Monastery) in ’Dam, by Rang byung rdo rje on the eighteenth day of the second month of the monkey year (1332).”

followers in the audience could not have taken this as anything but a direct gibe at Sa skya Paṇḍita’s critique of sūtra mahāmudrā. In this critique Sa skya Paṇḍita had rejected the sūtra mahāmudrā as an “invented” (rang bzo) lineage that inappropriately blended sūtra and tantra teachings by introducing the nature of the mind to students without first granting them a tantric empowerment. To intensify this gibe, Rang byung rdo rje then goes on to call this sūtra teaching an “uncommon instruction” (thun mong ma yin pa), a term usually used to describe tantric teachings.

b) On the China Road

Four months after his sojourn at Ra sgrengs, Rang byung rdo rje still had not left Tibet. Considering the whole journey between Tibet and the capitals could be completed in less than two months, he was obviously not in a hurry to get to court. At that point, however, he experienced a vision of the Emperor in ill health that—too late, it turned out—caused him to drastically increase his tempo. Shortly after this vision, on the second of September 1332, Tuq Temûr died. On hearing the news, Rang byung rdo rje performed ceremonies for him, and wondered whether to continue on to the court. Then he received another visionary dream, in which he:

heard dharma protectors proclaiming: “You have come in order to help your students from before, and you will help beings. There will be no obstacles, all your resolutions will be fulfilled.” (So after this, he) travelled quickly to the king’s palace.

c) Appearing at Court

Rang byung rdo rje was right to be concerned, because after Tuq Temûr’s death, the two ministers that had installed him on the throne, El Temûr and Bayan, turned on each other. El Temûr made the first move, enthroning the youngest of Qoshila’s sons, Tuq Temûr’s nephew, the six-year-old Irinchinbal (Tib. Rin chen dpal; 1326–1332) on the throne. Bayan did not oppose this move outright at first, but discreetly began to support Qoshila’s other son, Toghan Temûr (1320–1370), who was then aged thirteen.

Rang byung rdo rje and his entourage arrived at the imperial palace in Dadu two months after Tuq Temûr’s death. After his arrival he was introduced to Irinchinbal during

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59 The controversy around this subject has been quite thoroughly examined in the following works: Jackson (1990a), Jackson (1994) and Klaus-Dieter Mathes (2011).


62 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:407) says that he died “on the twelfth day of the eighth month of the monkey year.” The palace at which he performed ceremonies was called Gin ’jang hu. It is mentioned in many descriptions of Rang byung rdo rje’s life, but it is only vaguely described as being “between Tibet and China” (bod rgya bar ld).

Figure 7.3 Places visited on journeys to and from the capitals.64

Figure 7.4 (Right) The Ruins of the Central Palace, Xanadu, Inner Mongolia (2008).

Figure 7.5 (Left) The Ruins of Xanadu from the Air.65

64 Map based on screen-shot of Google Earth.
65 Image based on screen-shot of Google Earth.
a grand ceremony at the palace, but made a name for himself by predicting the boy's death to a minister. A year later, both the young Emperor and his supporter El Temür were dead, and the way was clear for Bayan to install Toghan Temür on the throne. In Rang byung rdo rje's own writing he acknowledged his role in the enthronement of the new, young and last Mongolian Emperor, but he did so sparingly, recalling that:

On the eighth day of the sixth month of the bird year (1333), when I enthroned the Lord of Men, (I could see that) many worldly protectors had also gathered around dancing and gesturing. I took this as a sign that there would be happiness in the Empire.

For later Karma bka' brgyud redactors, the connection between their forefather and a Mongolian Emperor was much too important an opportunity to approach with such spare prose. Characteristically and in contrast to Rang byung rdo rje, Gtsug lag phreng ba gives a description that is especially notable for its elaborations on the original story. It begins with the pre-enthronement meeting between the two, and reads in part:

On the full moon in the first month of the bird year (1333), millions of people gathered (in Dadu) at the Emperor's invitation. (There were so many people) that it seemed only a great army could have made its way along the road into town. But wherever the precious dharma noble went, a path appeared for him spontaneously. Wearing his black hat and chanting "Oṃ mani padme hūṃ", he proceeded easily through the crowds.

The Emperor was in a big white tent on a golden throne. (When he saw Rang byung rdo rje) from a distance, he came to escort him and placed his head at (Rang byung rdo rje's) feet. Then the patron and recipient entered the palace together. The Emperor's imperial lineage, El Temür, the imperial preceptor and all the Emperor's ministers were there, and they all showed trust in (Rang byung rdo rje), bowing to him and uniting with the dharma.67

Gtsug lag phreng ba's description of a crowded imperial city is intriguing. Being used to sparsely populated mountainous regions, he had never seen such a sight, so he describes a city teeming with "millions of people" fearfully. More to the point, it is noteworthy how much Gtsug lag phreng ba relished the idea of the Emperor coming out of his tent and placing his head at Rang byung rdo rje's feet on the road. It is a description that shows a fundamental unfamiliarity with the role that the Emperor played in his capital; for it was highly unlikely that the "Lord of Men" would walk out onto teeming streets, and it was even more highly unlikely that he would have placed his head at anyone's feet, at least in public. This is not to say that Gtsug lag phreng ba made no efforts at historical accuracy; he does allude to El Temür's and Bayan's influence by placing El Temür in the enthronement

66 Image based on screen-shot of Google Earth.
68 The population of the city and surrounding countryside was about three million during this time, making it one of the largest cities in the world (Atwood 2004:123-124).
scene. But his casual alignment of the wrong minister with the wrong boy-king further suggests that his main compositional purpose was very much to impress upon his audience the Karmapa's importance, not to create an accurate record of an historical event.70

vi. On Furlough

After having taken his time to get to the capitals, Rang byung rdo rje also began making attempts to leave shortly after he arrived. At first these attempts were thwarted by the upheavals that accompanied the enthronement of two emperors within a year, so Rang byung rdo rje followed the imperial court as it wintered in Dadu and summered in Xanadu. But six months after Toghan Temür's enthronement he made his first request to the Emperor to return to Tibet. The Emperor (or more precisely his ministers) temporised. Then Rang byung rdo rje had a visionary dream, in which he saw:

a hermitage in a fearsome mountainside forest, in which dākinīs made offerings to a white man who radiated light. Then, as (he) watched and listened, the radiant man said: "Do not stay here, flee to the lands of snow. This will help you and others."71

All later redactors say this radiant, white man was Avalokiteśvara,72 performing the same role he had played several times before: instructing Rang byung rdo rje to return to Tibet, and more specifically to the mountainside forests of Kong po. Whoever it was, the vision made Rang byung rdo rje doubly determined to return to the mountains, but something had to make his trip there worthwhile for the Emperor too. Rang byung rdo rje does not give any reason why the court changed its mind and allowed him to leave the palace "on the fifteenth day of the fifth month of the dog year (1334)" despite what he acknowledges as their doubts about his leaving,73 but later storytellers provide more details. According to them, Rang byung rdo rje was only allowed to leave on the promise that he would retrieve "long-life water" (tshé chu) for the Emperor's use.74

Perhaps aware that he had to return to the capitals as soon as he procured the water, Rang byung rdo rje took his time doing it. First, he extended his journey home as much as possible. Travelling via Mount Wutaishan (Ch. 五台山; Tib. Ri bo rtse Inga), a sacred site

70 What is also important in the image that Gtsug lag phreng ba presents is that it also represents the beginning of Toghan Temür's transformation from a worldly figure into a realised being, for later he was included within the Karma bka' brgyud lineage, revered as a previous rebirth of the Situ body-ma/ā (Karma gzhan phan rgya mtsho 2008:91). Rang byung rdo rje's assessment of the young emperor at the time was less glowing, and was therefore excised from later descriptions of him. As Rang byung rdo rje reported it, Toghan Temür was a pleasant child, but damning him with faint praise, he also recorded that under the influence of his ministers, "the Emperor helped the Victor's (Buddha's) teachings, a little" (2006d:408-409).
dedicated to Mañjuśrī,75 he then spent several months at what remained of the Tangut court (Ch. 西夏, Xi Xia, "Western Xia"; Tib. Mi nyag), which an earlier Mongol invasion had all but wiped out.76 There, according to his own recollections, he gave teachings and experienced several powerful visions,77 and according to later storytellers, he also received a large amount of gold from a strangely shirtless local.78 His circuitous route home then took him through northern Khams,79 where he negotiated the end to several disputes, and onto Karma, where he stopped briefly. During this last leg of his journey from Karma to Central Tibet, he stopped again in 'Dam, where he participated in a three day guru-pūjā (Bla ma mchod pa) and experienced a vision of Gnas chen thang lha. Jo mo gangs dkar and their retinues “appearing like mists” to welcome him home. But at the same time, he also heard “a voice from the East say, ‘Your students here need help!’”, and took this to mean he would have to return to the imperial courts.80

Rang byung rdo rje’s journey ended at Mtshur phu. Yet even at this late stage of his life, after he had been feted by emperors and received much gold, he chose not to stay there for long. The only marked difference in his reception at this monastery in which he had grown up was his inclusion in the process of appointing the monastery’s next abbot; diplomatically, he chose another of Karma Pakshi’s relatives.81

Despite what had evidently been a strange if not strained relationship between Rang byung rdo rje and the Mtshur phu hierarchy, however, he still left a good deal of the wealth he had accumulated during his travels there, dedicating it to building and statue projects. This demonstrated his continued investment in Mtshur phu as the seat of the Karmapa body-mālā, even if he chose not to stay there personally.82

**a) Fetching Water**

Instead of staying at Mtshur phu, Rang byung rdo rje finally journeyed to the place from which he hoped to extract the Emperor’s long-life water: Mchims phu Hermitage, in the hills behind Bsam yas Monastery. Rang byung rdo rje described his stay at this sacred site in this way:

I sought solitude in the hermitage at Bsam yas called Mchims phu. I stayed there for six months and experienced many visions of the scholar of Odđiyāna—Padmasambhava—and gatherings of dākinīs. I took this as a sign that this scholar

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79 He calls the region he travels through Smar khams (“Red Khams”), which appears to refer to the region known today as Nang chen, rather than the region in Southwestern Khams known now as Smar khams.
82 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:410). Later redactors make long lists of the items he brought back from the capitals (Gtshug lag phreng ba 2003:940 and Si tu Pan chen 2004:389), but he doesn’t mention it.
and these women would help me. (As I began this retreat) I saw signs of obstacles. But then came a miraculous display, and (after it) my saṃādhi became exceedingly peaceful.83

And in an unusual consonance, a song that he composed during this time describes the same events. It reads in part:

Padmakara of Oddiyāna (Padmasambhava) showed me the varieties of inconceivable magic that had tamed wanderers in these snowy lands—it was Avalokiteśvara’s compassion!

(From this I knew) all saṃsāra and nirvāṇa’s dharmas are trickery. They are the play of myriad illusions, (and) when realised, become just like a moon in the water.

All visions of things, all of them 
are naturally empty and pure, 
unpolluted by intellectual complications, (and) 
when purified, like ungraspable space.84

The image of an aquatic moon in the third stanza is the closest Rang byung rdo rje came to describing the clandestine purpose of his stay. He may have been reticent because long-life water was a form of “treasure” or gter ma that could only be acquired from a visionary state, and therefore, as with most acts of treasure recovery, there were—convenient—cultural conventions against discussing its retrieval; to have done so, it was thought, would have enraged the ākīnīs who acted as these objects’ protectors.85

At least he provided more detail about this episode than he provided about his earlier, alleged retrieval of texts from Lho brag. Indeed, in this episode he described everything but the water’s procurement; he set the scene, introduced the players and merely fudged the details of the action. This begs the question why he did not provide more details of his procurement of the texts from Lho brag, and casts further doubt on the traditional attribution of these treasure-tradition texts to him.

b) Sanctifying the Bka’ ‘gyur and Bstan ‘gyur

The other project Rang byung rdo rje undertook during his stay was more straightforward, and more broadly recorded. He describes it briefly in his Verse Liberation-Story thus:

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84 Song No. 97; 5 (GN 140–141; GB 365–366) Song that Fixes Nature. Colophon: “The dhārma noble precious Rang byung rdo rje said this on the peak at Bsam yas Mchims phu, in the place where the abbot from Oddiyāna, Padmakara, achieved siddhi.”
85 Andreas Doctor (2005:55) discusses this need for secrecy in his study on the later treasure tradition.
I had all the Buddha’s sūtras and the śāstras written out, and when I was
consecrating them, countless bodhisattvas appeared to dissolve into them, and I
heard a voice proclaiming the dharma.\textsuperscript{86}

But while Rang byung rdo rje asserted that he supported the creation of both Tibetan
Buddhist canons—the translated collection of the Buddhist sūtras known as the Bka’gyur
and the translated collection of other Indian works (śāstra) known as the Bstan ’gyur—
other commentators only record his sponsorship of a “golden Bstan ’gyur” at Tshal.\textsuperscript{87}
Given their usual tendency to expand on rather than downplay Rang byung rdo rje’s
achievements, it is more likely therefore that he only produced a copy of the Bstan ’gyur.

Even this, however, was an achievement. As Kurtis Schaeffer notes in his study The
Culture of the Book in Tibet, “golden Bstan ’gyur... were written in gold lettering on dark
blue or black paper”.\textsuperscript{88} The production of such a work would have required both skilled
labour and expensive products like gold and paper, which suggests that much of the
wealth Rang byung rdo rje had accumulated during his stay in the capitals was dedicated
to its completion. Nevertheless, as Schaeffer also points out,\textsuperscript{89} the creation of this canon
was one of two similar projects that ran concurrently, and it was the other, overseen by Bu
ston rin chen grub (1290–1364) at Zhwa lu Monastery, that proved to be the more
influential.

\textbf{vii. A Return Trip}

Rang byung rdo rje completed the Bstan ’gyur on borrowed time. As he worked on it, the
Emperor’s envoy camped outside Tshal Monastery waiting to take him back to the
capitals. This time, escorted, it only took him two months to make the journey. His own
writing from this period expresses merely a muffled indignation about the gilded cage in
which he thereafter found himself, but others, including a few contemporaries, were more
explicit about his displeasure. He did not like the capitals, they reported. He did not like
the way people behaved in them. He did not like the luxurious but restricted lives of their
residents. He did not like the intrigues that permeated the court. He wanted desperately to
return to Tibet, and most especially to Kong po.

\textsuperscript{86} Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:410).
\textsuperscript{87} Schaeffer (2009:27) used the Red Annals (Kun dga’ rdo rje 1981:96) as his source for this event, and
therefore suggested that Tshal pa Kun dga’ rdo rje himself described them as an eyewitness. But in my
reckoning, the fact that Kun dga’ rdo rje reported these events without mentioning they occurred at his
monastery while he was in attendance is further evidence that he did not compose the relevant section of the
Red Annals. This event is also mentioned in: Tshe dbang rgyal (1994:241), ’Gos Lo tsā ba (1974:39b), Roerich
where he completed this work, and does not mention travelling anywhere after Mchims phu before returning
to the capitals. The Red Annals says the work was completed at Tshal, as do Gtusug lag phreng ba (2003:940)
and Si tu Pan chen (2004: 390). ’Gos Lo tsā ba (1974:39b) reports that it was completed at Mtshur phu.
\textsuperscript{88} Schaeffer (2009:27).
\textsuperscript{89} Schaeffer (2009:27).
a) The Moral Cliffs of Xanadu

Rang byung rdo rje’s overwhelmingly negative attitude to the capitals is articulated in his stories and songs by using the same techniques as his sacralisation projects, but for opposite effect. Instead of ornamenting the capitals with praise, he seeks to dismantle their baroque decorations with his critiques. In the following song, for example, which he composed in Xanadu in the summer of 1337, he portrays this legendary city as a trap from which both he and his audience needed to escape before they were destroyed by it. It reads:

Now you are free from samsāra’s mud,
strike out for nirvāṇa’s dry shore.
Now you have abandoned worldly relatives,
rely on sacred, spiritual friends.
Now you have stopped pointless chatter,
recite secret mantras.
Now you have stopped debauched exertions,
exert yourself at dhyāna.
Now you have renounced sweets,
rely on samādhi’s food.
Now you have stopped hankering for towns,
wander in mountainous borderlands.

Because when we don’t do these things—

External appearances become expert in deception;
children of the mind, they are crazy in the head.
Preconceptions proliferate and last longer; but
virtuous friends become increasingly rare.
Ignorant veils and fogs get thicker and
we wander on multiplying cliffs of depravity.

Unwholesome friends lead us

to prison, the three bad destinations,
where we will wander without end.90

This song uses many of the same images that he had previously evoked in the mountains, but inverts them. In it Rang byung rdo rje uses the contrast between society’s centres and edges, for example, but speaks from the perspective of a decadent centre, in which people are nepotistic, gluttonous, duplicitous and debauched. In reaction to this, he yearns for the heroic periphery from which spiritual liberation is possible. This inverted perception also changes this song’s ending; rather than showing the path to liberation, it shows the path to imprisonment. And while it may suggest to his audience the ever-present threats of incarceration and death that hung over the capitals’ inhabitants, again he presents an alternate power structure to imperial law. Incarceration in the Emperor’s prisons may be

90 Song No. 135; 43 (GN 202–203; GT 414–415). Colophon: “This is why now is the time to strive. He said this in the fifth month of the ox year (1337) in Shang to [Xanadu].”
bad, he suggests, but it is nothing compared to the otherworldly consequences of bad behaviour.

Although their subject matter is very different, these songs are not therefore discontinuous with Rang byung rdo rje's other works. They are still supposed to bear witness to the profundity of his view; it is just that the subjects of his perception have changed. Rather than reflecting on the breakthroughs in his meditations or instructing his students on the path, these songs demonstrate Rang byung rdo rje's steadfast morality in the face of temptation; his ability to see through superficial pleasure in the quest for the unfettered peace of spiritual liberation; and the positive influence he had on people around him.

This positive influence is also the theme of most liberation-story episodes set in the capitals. These stories include descriptions of the time he appeared in front of a court which sought to disrobe all monks because of their corruption, and talked its members out of taking this action; the time he offered support to his new friend the Imperial Preceptor, Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, when he was slandered, despite the threat this posed to his own life; and the time he refused to enact revenge after he was slandered by "bad Chinese monks".

b) Being a Bakshi

While these episodes offered many opportunities for Rang byung rdo rje to showcase his this-worldly morality, they provided little opportunity for him to demonstrate the otherworldly authority that had built his reputation in Tibet. Deprived of opportunities to subdue demons or evoke thitherto-unseen manḍalas, he had to adapt his skills to new circumstances; circumstances that required him to demonstrate his talents more quickly and more portably. So, rather than dedicating at least months or even years to the construction of an alternate vision of sacred sites, during this period he instead performed many extemporary environmental transformations. These transformations included rain-making in droughts, the prediction of earthquakes, and also his procurement of the long-life water. This water, later storytellers agree, was much prized by the Emperor, who received it in private—which is to say unusually not in the presence of his minister.

93 Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:943) and Si tu Pañ chen (2004:395). Wylie (1983:580) suggests a causal relationship between a singular Chinese monk's actions and Rang byung rdo rje's death, but I have been unable to find another source that backs this claim.
94 The most significant of these being the time he predicts an earthquake will strike and therefore convinces the royal family to sleep outside. These events are listed in several versions of his liberation-story, including: Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:411), Tshe dbang rgyal (1994:241), Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:941, 943) and Si tu Pañ chen (2004:393).
Bayan—shortly after Rang byung rdo rje’s return to the palace.\footnote{Si tu Pan chen (2004:393).}

Although this marks a shift in Rang byung rdo rje’s activities, in many ways it was merely his fulfilment of the role he had been brought to the capitals to perform. This was what Tibetan Buddhist teachers—“Bakshis” or “magicians”—had done since the first of them, Sa skya Panḍita, arrived at Kōten’s court nearly one hundred years earlier. Even then, the Tibetan Buddhist teachers had stepped into a role that had previously been inhabited by members of other religions and other ethnicities. Rang byung rdo rje may not have been entirely comfortable with the role, but as many parts of it were not entirely at odds with his life’s mission, he adapted.

There is even a hint of this adaptation in the last of his songs, which he composed at Dadu the year before his death. Like the first song of his collection, it too describes a dream. In this dream, however, Rang byung rdo rje does not encounter a hermit like Saraha or Mi la ras pa in an isolated place: instead he meets Mar pa, a householder yogi renowned for his maintenance of the mahāmudrā view within the hubbub of ordinary life. In the narrative that introduces the song, Rang byung rdo rje reports that his dream meeting with Mar pa lasted all night, and they spoke of many things, but when he awoke only a couple of verses from their conversation had “stuck in [his] mind”. These two verses contained Mar pa’s advice to him for dealing with cities:

\begin{quote}
Whatever you think, it is an obstacle, so transform it into samādhi; this joy will not take long to cultivate, (and) when it frees you from thinking, clarity will arise.

This is the nature of sahaja; there’s no need to look for signs and such. (With this view), whatever and whatever are on your mind, their nature, the nature of this and that will arise as myriad jewel-like reflections.\footnote{Song No. 137; 45 (GN 205; GT 416).}
\end{quote}

Very occasionally, Rang byung rdo rje even seemed to enjoy his work. One such occasion, to which he dedicates an unusually large amount of narrative ink in his Verse Liberation-Story, was the building of a temple in Dadu’s imperial palace. As Rang byung rdo rje described it, the idea for this temple first came to him in a dream, in which he saw a sacred space dedicated to the deities who had been the focus of his life-long yoga practice. One space was dedicated to those described in the Cakrasamvara-tantra. Another was dedicated to ākāśāgāra, the form of Avalokiteśvara Karma Pakshi had told O rgyan pa to teach Rang byung rdo rje and, as if to enforce the idea of a Karmapa body-mallā, included images of the Karmapas’ own protectors Ber nag can and Re ma ti. Yet another was
dedicated to the Karma Bka’ brgyud lineage gurus. The outside walls of the entire complex were painted with scenes based on Rang byung rdo rje’s re-telling of the Buddha’s Jātaka tales.97

Although the Emperor sponsored it, this temple was clearly Rang byung rdo rje’s project. Indeed, it was an architectural representation of the two sacralising projects that had occupied much of his life: his own sacralisation as a member of the Karmapa body-mālā and the greater Karma bka’ brgyud lineage; and the sacralisation of Cakrasamvara-centred, sacred sites. Moreover, as these were contained within the same building, the temple also suggested the linkage between these two projects.

It demonstrated through architecture that it was fundamentally the abidance or gnas of holy beings in a site that sacralised it, but that the sacralisation of a site also sanctified those who lived there. By sacralising himself, in other words, Rang byung rdo rje had sacralised the places he stayed, and by making the places he stayed sacred, he had also made himself more sacred. This building project was yet another manifestation of this broader project.

c) Dissolving into the Maṇḍala

The description of the temple in Dadu’s palace ends part two of Rang byung rdo rje’s Verse Liberation-Story, which he composed in Beijing in the spring of 1339, a few months before he died.98 It was the last thing he wrote.

The rest of his tale was told by others. In their descriptions of his last few months there is no hint of a resolution to his conflict with court life. Rather, these other storytellers foreground his unhappiness at court, nominating it as the main reason he chose to die. This was ultimately, they suggest, Rang byung rdo rje’s way to outmanoeuvre the Emperor, who may have controlled movement in and out of his capitals, but had no control over the movement of minds between lives as Rang byung rdo rje did. In this way, his death, like his birth, was presented as a show of otherworldly authority.

To help establish this authority, the tale’s later writers told of his death begins several years before the event, and a full year before he composed part two of the Verse Liberation-Story, in the spring of 1338. At that time, say the writers, he made an oblique prophecy about his own death and rebirth. Their description of this prophecy begins by placing it in time and place, so as to present it as a historic event. “In Dadu... as the tiger

97 Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:411). Interestingly, at around the same time these images were being painted, a similar project was being undertaken at Zhwa lu Monastery in Gtsang, which was also based on Rang byung rdo rje’s version of the Jātaka Tales. Although the images painted in Beijing no longer exist, those at Zhwa lu Monastery have survived, and these images include passages from Rang byung rdo rje’s retelling of the Jātaka Tales. These paintings at Zhwa lu are the subject of an upcoming PhD thesis by Sarah Richardson of the University of Toronto, who informed me of their connection with Rang byung rdo rje.

98 The exact date of this composition is included within the work’s colophon as: “The 8th day of the 2nd month of the rabbit year (1339)” (Rang byung rdo rje 2006d:412).
year began, he spoke to his child-like students," they record, saying:

“Look at my face: I, this yogi, am like a cloud in the sky. It is not certain where I will go. Those who want to pay respect\textsuperscript{99} to sacred sites and communities, those few who would delightfully entrust themselves to solitude, should go wherever the dharma proliferates.”\textsuperscript{100}

With this statement, they went on to explain, he had made known his intention to die and even provided a clue about his rebirth. By stating he would be reborn at a sacred site in a solitary place, he had told them he would be reborn in Kong po, near Tsa ri.

Those telling the story of his death also presented this prophecy as an opportunity for the Emperor and Bayan to read between the lines, understand that it was imperative for Rang byung rdo rje to return to Kong po, and therefore let him go. But, the storytellers report, they did not. During the next year, Rang byung rdo rje repeated his request to leave with increasing urgency, to no avail. Then, just before he was to leave for the summer court in Xanadu, in the fifth Tibetan month (around June), he saw “a sign that he would depart for another pure land”; a sign in other words that he would die and the journey he was about to take would be the last in that body.\textsuperscript{101}

As soon as he arrived in Xanadu he “immediately took to his bed”.\textsuperscript{102} A few days later, despite his ill health, he attended a gaṇacakra in the Cakrasamvara temple. There, as his storytellers describe it, after helping to arrange offerings “both mental and physical” to “a sky full of tantric deities, dākinis and gurus”, he “sat down in the centre of this manifested maṇḍala, which had been brought together so very well, and passed into the peace of the dharmadhātu.”\textsuperscript{103} He was fifty-six years old.

But this was not quite the end of his story. Rang byung rdo rje’s embodied tale might have come to an end, but there was still the matter of his bodily remains and the narrative preparations that needed to be made for the next episode in the greater Karmapas’ story.

The first of these events occurred fifteen days after his death and gave rise to what became the most famous image of Rang byung rdo rje. That night, the palace guards were waiting outside the gates of Xanadu, ready to change shifts, when one of them reportedly saw Rang byung rdo rje “his complete body and a stūpa on (the face of) the moon”. When the image did not fade, he and his friends awoke the minister Turan Temür, so that he might be an aristocratic and authoritative witness to their vision.\textsuperscript{104} The moon had marked his birth, been a constant authoritative witness to the passing months throughout his life,
and now also marked his death.

The next event was the burning of his body, which gave his storytellers a chance to resolve a number of narrative threads. First, it gave the Emperor an opportunity to express remorse, and humility, walking at the front of his funeral procession. It also provided the storytellers with a superb opportunity to demonstrate Rang byung rdo rje’s secret, subtle nature by listing all the relics that his cremation produced. In the main, these included images of the tantric deities he had spent a good part of his life visualising himself as: Cakrasamvara, Vajrarāhi and Avalokiteśvara.

These relics also provided a means for his physical return to Tibet as “the majority were carried back to the Land of Snows.” There they were interred in stūpas, surrounded by many images of the Buddha, adding yet more artefacts to the material representation of the Karmapa project. This was not the only indication given by his post-mortem storytellers that he had both subverted the Emperor’s wishes and set the scene for the next chapter in the Karmapas’ story. Indeed, many yogis in Tibet reported visions of him flying through the sky: some said they saw him travelling to Tuṣita, others said he was travelling toward the South. There was even a tale told about a Mongolian mail-riding who had not heard news of his death and was therefore convinced he met an embodied Rang byung rdo rje on the grasslands between Xanadu and the old Tangut capital. Rang byung rdo rje was in a sedan chair with a great entourage, the mail-riding said, and when he asked him where he was going, the Karmapa replied directly that he was on his way home, to the mountains of Southern Tibet.

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106 Dan Martin (1994b) discussed the use of relics in Tibetan Buddhism and their relation to perceptions of the subtle body. Tanya Zivkovic (2008) also explored this process in great detail.
CONCLUSION:

THE KARMAPA’S ESTATE

i. Travelling to Tuṣita

Rang byung rdo rje’s life lasted for fifty-six years. At its inception he was a potter’s son, living on the edge of the largest contiguous land empire in world history. At its end, he was the guru of that empire’s ruler, dying in the summer imperial capital, Xanadu. Yet Rang byung rdo rje viewed his journey from the edge to the centre as a defeat rather than a victory; a temporary delay on his preferred route to an entirely other place. Arriving at this other destination had been one of his central life goals, a goal that represented much more to him than life in the Emperor’s gilded cage. In this place, Rang byung rdo rje imagined, there would be none of the obstacles to spiritual progress he had encountered in his world, and he would find all conceivable aids to it. He had heard about this place as a child, he had since read much about it, and he even claimed to have an alternate emanation there: it was the Tuṣita heaven, home of the buddha Maitreya. “To subdue my ego,” he said in one of his songs, “I was born the son of a potter, but after I die in this life, I will travel to Tuṣita.”

The journey from La stod to Tuṣita was indeed an odyssey—not because the distance to Tuṣita can be quantified in any way, but because in claiming this as his destination Rang byung rdo rje was affirming his complete personal, social and spiritual transcendence. Sons of itinerant potters were not very highly regarded in Tibetan society, but in this verse, this particular potter’s son had outlined a social and spiritual trajectory entirely different from the usual destiny of his caste. He had developed the ability to travel, he suggested in this verse, to the most revered of heavenly realms, where he would sit at the feet of the next supreme emanation body (mchog gi sprul sku), Maitreya. In Rang byung rdo rje’s worldview, this alternate, otherworldly court far outshone not only the grand houses of La stod’s local lords, but even the Emperor’s tawdry impersonation of a royal residence. It was in Tuṣita rather than Dadu or Xanadu that Rang byung rdo rje believed real magnificence abode, and access to it did not come from this-worldly achievements and martial successes. Instead it came through expertise in yoga and the insights into other realms that this allowed.

Access to these other realms provided Rang byung rdo rje and others who subscribed to his worldview with a geopolitical vision entirely different from that of the Mongol Empire, which had been forced upon them. The magnificence and power of these realms

1 Song No. 117; 25 (GN 176–177; GT 393–394).
eclipsed anything the Khans could create on earth, and his perceived access to them gave Rang byung rdo rje and other yogis like him a power that even the Khans respected.

It was on the basis of his access to Tuṣita and other otherworldly realms that Rang byung rdo rje was able to undertake the identity transformation that is at the heart of not only the verse quoted above, but also many of his stories and songs. In these visionary worlds the link between himself and previous Karmapas was clear, and so was the Karmapas' collective role to bring as much otherworldly magic into this mundane world as possible. Moreover, in creating a link between those other places and this earth, the Karmapas not only transformed the perception of themselves but also their surroundings: a symbiosis between person and place that became one of the Karmapa body-mālā's defining features.

In the later Karmapa tradition, the Karmapas themselves are understood to be a sacred site, a gnas; wherever they go, they sanctify the place in which they abide, and to this day people make pilgrimages to be in their physical presence. In the developing Karmapa tradition that Rang byung rdo rje experienced, however, these places helped sanctify him; the establishment of the Karmapas' otherworldly power in this realm was fundamentally linked to the concurrent transformation of the sites associated with their body-mālā. By working to transform their audiences' perception of these sites, they, and particularly Rang byung rdo rje, helped to transform their audiences' perception of the sites' inhabitants, the Karmapas. This altered perception of the Karmapas, in turn, helped to transform the understanding people had of the places in which the Karmapas lived: a sacralised perception of the Karmapas sacralised their abodes.

These sacred sites also served as repositories for the Karmapa reincarnation tradition. Sacred sites hold their sacredness long after more fragile human bodies have been transformed into relics; so it was that these sacred sites served as the Karmapas' repositories, places that could retain not only their physical remains and personal possessions, but also the memories of their lives and the ideas they had promoted. Rang byung rdo rje's contributions to the Karmapa project can therefore be measured by what he left behind in these sacred sites.

ii. What Remains, Part One: Things, People and Texts

By the time Rang byung rdo rje was born in La stod in 1284, the Karmapa project was already relatively well established. Nevertheless, it was certainly not a foregone conclusion that anyone would make a claim to be the new, third Karmapa, nor that such a claim would be widely accepted. Yet when Rang byung rdo rje died, there was little doubt a new Karmapa would appear. In the episode of his liberation-story in which his body is
burned, talk has already turned to the Karmapa’s return.2 The next, fourth, Karmapa, Rol pa’i rdo rje (1340–1383), who, like his predecessor, was recognised while a child, inherited a clear precedent for his claim to be the Karmapa. In Rol pa’i rdo rje’s childhood, even the inhabitants of Mtshur phu and Karma Monastery understood the members of the Karmapa body-mālā to have a special if not proprietorial relationship with these two monasteries. Rol pa’i rdo rje’s return to them was really Rang byung rdo rje’s achievement.

In their assessment of Rang byung rdo rje’s contribution, however, those who later told Rang byung rdo rje’s story took Rol pa’i rdo rje’s presence at these places as a given, and instead focused on several other things he left behind: his bodily relics, and the wealth, political protections and students he had accrued. As I explained in the last chapter, they provided great detail about the various types of relics his body created, and the efforts his students made to transport them back to Mtshur phu.3 The storytellers also precisely catalogued the wealth Rang byung rdo rje sent back from the capitals, including the concerted effort he made to transport his golden seal back to Mtshur phu before his death.5 Möngke Khan had first entrusted this seal to Karma Pakshi, and Tuq Temür had later returned it to Rang byung rdo rje when he summoned the Karmapa to court. It represented not only the Mongol court’s recognition of the link between Rang byung rdo rje and Karma Pakshi, but the other honours and powers that Toghan Temür had latterly bestowed upon the Karmapa reincarnation lineage. By sending it back to Mtshur phu, those telling his story suggest, Rang byung rdo rje was trying to ensure that the next Karmapa, when recognised, would receive the same protections and exemptions from taxation that the Emperor had granted to him.6

The other legacy to which these storytellers dedicate much ink was his students, for it is they who were understood to have continued his spiritual lineage. This contrasts with Rang byung rdo rje’s more generic presentation of them.7 The only student he mentions by

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6 Unlike the stories about the end of Karma Pakshi’s life, however, what they do not mention is the fate of his black hat, and as David Jackson (2009:58–61) notes, pictorial evidence suggests that while the fourth Karmapa wore a black hat, it was different in style from the one Karma Pakshi and Rang byung rdo rje wore. Thus, Rol pa’i rdo rje only inherited the idea of the black hat, which seems to have been enough, and the accrued power of association that came to whomever wore “the Karmapa’s black hat crown”.
7 I have not paid particular attention to the names and deeds of Rang byung rdo rje’s students in this thesis because Rang byung rdo rje himself did not emphasize them in his writings. The colophons to some of his songs are dedicated to specific students, but none of these students attained the kind of prominence that led to their being remembered in other historical sources. The songs are the following, Song No. 103; 11 (GN 150–153; GB 373–375), for example is addressed to one Gzhon nu ‘bum of Lha stengs; Song No. 107; 15 (GN 161; GB 381–382) is addressed to one Shes rab seng ge; Song No. 108; 16 (GN 162–163; GB 382–383) is addressed to Dkon mchog seng ge; and Song No. 130; 38 (GN 194–195; GT 408) is addressed to a meditator from Dwags.
name in his liberation-story is the monk who would latterly become known as the first
Zhwa dmar pa, Grags pa seng ge (1284–1349), whom he describes in one anecdote as the
only member of his entourage able to share a vision with him. The more high-profile
students that are often associated with him are not mentioned in his writing. These
include the scholar G.yag sde Pañ chen (1299–1378), the visionary Klong chen rab 'byams
pa (1308–1364), and the monk who established the extrinsic emptiness (gzhan stong)
exposition, Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361).

In their overviews of Rang byung rdo rje’s life, those who told his story also describe
his literary compositions, and by all accounts it was these that became his most enduring
legacy. Long after his students had passed and the golden seal had served its purpose,
Rang byung rdo rje’s compositions still had (and have) an audience. Moreover, not only
are these works themselves still being read, but many of the ideas and paradigms Rang
byung rdo rje synthesised and articulated in them have infiltrated Tibetan culture and
intellectual discourse. As noted in the introduction, the most widely studied of these ideas
and paradigms have been the contributions he made to the Tibetan Buddhist systems of
knowledge through his well-known treatises and commentaries on Buddhist thought. In
these works, he helped to consolidate the various traditions of knowledge, tantric lineages
and thought systems that he had been taught in a less than systematic way.

iii. What Remains, Part Two: The Idea

As this thesis has also shown, in his stories and songs, Rang byung rdo re was engaged in
another consolidation project that came to have an equally profound but less
acknowledged effect on Tibetan society: his coeval sanctification of the Karmapa body-
mālā and the sites associated with it. Others had begun this project before he was born,
but his contribution to it was immensely significant. Indeed, as the evidence presented in
this thesis suggests, this sanctification performed the same role for the Karmapa
reincarnation tradition that his treatises had for the Karma bka’ brgyud’s systems of
thought: it provided a systematic basis for understanding and therefore re-performing the
tradition.

It could be argued that given the profound influence the system of reincarnation had on
Tibetan society, this was actually his most significant contribution to the region’s culture.

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9 There is ample evidence for a connection between the first two of these students and Rang byung rdo rje.
G.yag sde Pañ chen wrote a description of his interactions with Rang byung rdo rje (described in Gtsug lag
phreng ba 2003:937 and Si tu Pañ chen 2004:399). And Klong chen pa wrote a letter to Rang byung rdo rje
that has been studied in S. Arguill’re (2007:49–68). Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan is mentioned in Si tu Pañ
chen’s list of students (Si tu Pañ chen 2004:399), and also in Si tu Pañ chen’s retelling of his story (2004:375–
376), but there are no descriptions of their relationship from Rang byung rdo rje’s time. Rang byung rdo rje’s
influence on Dol po pa’s thought has been analysed in Cyrus Stearns (1999:47–52).
It is less acknowledged than his other contributions because of Tibetan and Western commentators’ anachronistic approach to the Karmapa reincarnation tradition, which treated it as always fully formed. By contrast, the examination of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-stories and songs presented here suggests that this tradition’s development was aided by historical and social factors, but was primarily the result of a concerted effort of cultural production on the part of the early Karmapas, especially Rang byung rdo rje.

As noted in chapter three, from Rang byung rdo rje’s perspective the most important historical and social factors permitting the establishment of the Karmapa reincarnation tradition were the precedents within the Buddhist tradition on which those involved in the Karmapa project modelled it. The most significant of these was the idea of lineage, of which he understood the Karmapa body-mālā to be an extension. Lineage—and especially the proliferation of lineages during the new transmission period—presented a model for the non-familial transference of material, cultural and intellectual resources, which Karma Pakshi first adapted to suit the needs of a reincarnate, and Rang byung rdo rje systemised. Moreover, the social networks that arose with these lineages created a religious authority that could recognise and therefore validate the reincarnate adaptation of the lineage principle.10

Not all historical and social factors provided positive incentives for the development of the Karmapa reincarnation tradition, however. There was at least one compelling negative stimulus for its development during first Karma Pakshi’s and then Rang byung rdo rje’s lifetime: the Mongol empire and the rule of their Sa skya regents. Against this backdrop, the reincarnation tradition represented an alternate network of power that operated beyond the bounds of martial, this-worldly governance.11

As I explained in chapter three, the project of establishing the Karmapas operated through a variety of cultural expressions. These included the aforementioned material bequests to institutions: cultural artefacts like architecture, statues, paintings, the establishment of ceremonies and literature. Rang byung rdo rje’s contribution to the Karmapas’ non-literary cultural production was limited in comparison to those made by the previous two and then by later Karmapas. He did not establish any major monasteries, only small, modestly built hermitages, and he did not deck out any existing monasteries with the golden statues and stūpas that helped make them famous. But his literary contribution to the Karmapa project was second to none.

10 As I mentioned in chapter two, this social aspect of lineage and reincarnation has been explored in Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa (2008).
11 The reincarnation tradition has come to play this role again in contemporary Tibet, despite the Chinese Communist Party’s attempts to regulate and control it. Powers (forthcoming: 11–20, 23–28) analyses these attempts by the contemporary Chinese administration to regulate and control the Tibetan system of reincarnation.
Most of this contribution—his systemisation, sacralisation and location of the project—is contained within his liberation-stories and *mgur/glu*. In choosing to compose his works in these genres, just as he was part of the Karmapa project’s evolution, Rang byung rdo rje became part of these genres’ evolution too; he created works that reflected the state of the genres as he had inherited them, and he also broadened the “horizons of expectations” associated with them. The inherited characteristics of the liberation-story that aided the Karmapa project were those that coincided with the travel narrative. Liberation-stories map an individual’s passing through a lifetime, and Rang byung rdo rje’s created a sense of him as both an individual and a member of the Karmapa body-mālā: he travelled, as it were, from Karma Pakshi to Rol pa’i rdo rje. The liberation-story genre also characteristically positioned these lifetimes in geography. All of the events that occur within these works are sited; the episodes open by positioning the author in a geographic place and then describe the activities that happened there, and this helped illustrate Rang byung rdo rje’s symbiotic personal and sited sacralisation projects. The inherited characteristics of the *mgur/glu* genre that aided the Karmapas-in-place sacralisation project were its emphasis on environmental imagery, and—as a consequence of its reformulation by new-tantra yogis—the attendant necessity that these works be represented as performed oral instructions, in time and place. The need to present these works as a performance positioned Rang byung rdo rje in places that could thereafter retain a memory of his performance specifically, and his life more generally.

The most prominent extension he made to the liberation-story genre was his inclusion of a pre-birth narrative, which pushed back its temporal boundaries. He also extended the temporal boundaries of the *mgur/glu*, by describing his past life memories in them. Yet perhaps Rang byung rdo rje’s most prominent innovation in the songs was his adaptation of Saraha’s and Mi la ras pa’s social criticism to more directly political ends that came about as a result of his historical situation as a witness to war and famine. This adaptation was primarily circumstantial, but it also relied on his otherworldly authority and indirectly helped to solidify this authority.

Along with these specific adaptations to the character of the liberation-story and *mgur/glu*, Rang byung rdo rje also used them to help establish the Karmapa reincarnation tradition, effecting a distinct thematic change in both genres. The theme is not prominent in his performance of these genres, however, because it is interwoven with other themes more traditionally associated with them, including the intention to benefit others, the presentation of the *mahāmudrā* view and travel—the last of which, travel, has provided the thematic key for unlocking the processes of the Karmapa project in this thesis.

The Karmapa project works in concert with the intention to benefit others and the presentation of the *mahāmudrā* view because Rang byung rdo rje articulated his
sacralisation of the Karmapas and their associated sites as a means to these ends; the point of the Karmapa body-\textit{mālā}, he suggested, is to serve as a conduit for beneficial realisations of the \textit{mahāmudrā} view in others. It works in concert with the last theme, travel, because the Karmapa-in-situ sacralisation project was multi-sited and therefore necessitated travel.

The predisposition to travel also meant that the Karmapas' writings, and especially Rang byung rdo rje's writing, reflected a particular interest in the cultural geographies through which they travelled. Indeed, Rang byung rdo rje's stories and songs—once again in more detail than those of his predecessors and successors—even reshaped the inherited maps of these cultural geographies to accommodate the developing Karmapa project. Just as he re-performed and reformulated the Karmapa tradition and the literary genres he used, he also re-used and reshaped these maps.

This reshaping program included the adaptation of some of Tibet's most influential concepts of place, including the highly influential idea that a region's inhabitants could be subjugated; an idea that was delivered to Rang byung rdo rje courtesy of Padmasambhava's and Ye shes 'od's life-stories. From Padmasambhava he inherited the idea that a region's spirits could be tamed by magical force, and from Ye shes 'od he inherited the idea that their human population could be tamed by vows. He combined these ideas with the notion of power from the periphery that is a fundamental part of Mi la ras pa's tale, to create a new narrative pattern, in which he would travel into borderlands, where he first would tame the region's non-human spirits, then administer vows to the locals. In performing these transformations, he also drew heavily on the model provided by the previously established, culturally constructed sacred sites in Tibet's borderlands; namely the mandalisation projects that had been carried out at Tsa ri, La phyi and Kailash.

Rang byung rdo rje's main adaptations to these received traditions also came in the adjustments he made to them in support of the developing Karmapa reincarnation tradition. In this instance, the adaptations to his inherited cultural maps intersected with an attendant, implicit opposition to the socially naturalised links between clans and property-transferal that is also evident in his writing. Like his resistance to the Mongol/Saskya authority, Rang byung rdo rje's defiance of clan authority is not presented as direct confrontation against these vested interests. Rather, he manifests his resistance through his consistent presentation of the aforementioned alternate, visionary power structure. It was to this alternate power structure that he turned, for example, when asserting his right to abide at Mtshur phu by calling Ber nag can and Re ma ti as witnesses for his claim.

Also noteworthy about Rang byung rdo rje's use of this alternate power was the strategic approach he took to its implementation. He did not, for instance, confront Karma Pakshi's relatives at Mtshur phu and demand that he be made abbot. He merely asserted
his right to stay there, suggesting that his and their claims to inherit Mtshur phu could co-exist: theirs familial, his spiritual. What Rang byung rdo rje seems to have understood, perhaps implicitly, was that by drawing on otherworldly paradigms of power to make his claims to Mtshur phu and the Karmapas’ other monasteries, he did not need to force the issue: if he was patient, the sites would be his through the exercise of soft, cultural power. In line with his inherited cultural maps, and bolstered by his visionary authority, he could claim spiritual ownership of these places through his identity as a Karmapa, and the Karmapas’ collective relationship with these monasteries, without using force. As the third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje could perform the ownership of these places. If he was the Karmapa, then these were his gnas, his sacred sites.

He did not even need to be at these locales to enact his ownership, and indeed out of a combination of choice and necessity he chose as a grown man not to spend much time at either Mtshur phu or Karma. Instead, he turned his attention to Tibet’s periphery. Deprived of the familial resources that Dus gsum mkhyen pa and Karma Pakshi had enjoyed, and faced with an increasingly difficult political environment, Rang byung rdo rje focused most of his spiritual and cultural landscaping energies on remote areas that had not previously been developed. In these remote regions he could not engage in the same large-scale monastery building and refurbishing projects that his predecessors had undertaken, but he could display his transformative literary and visionary skills to full effect. By articulating his visions of them he transformed hostile borderlands into refuges of light in dark times, first in Lha stengs, and then in Kha ba dkar po, Bde chen stengs, Nags phu and Lhun sgrub stengs. These places, Rang byung rdo rje suggested, were not really wildernesses, but portals through which other visionary worlds like Tuṣita could be entered—and, even better, actual spiritual liberation could be obtained in them by resolute yogis.

Rang byung rdo rje re-imagined these sites in his stories and songs through the two methods described in this thesis: ornamentation and deconstruction. He ornamented them in two ways: first, by re-visioning them through poetic language, which invited his audience to see them as beautiful maṇḍalas and pure-lands; and second, by locating profound events in them. The profound events he evoked in this process included incidents in the lives of his lineal predecessors—particularly Padmasambhava, Mi la ras pa and the two earlier Karmapas—and events from his own life. Through positioning them in the sites he wished to re-imagine, Rang byung rdo rje transformed these peripheral locales into portals between the ordinary limited world of normal beings and the multiple worlds to which visionary yogis had access.

Although it may seem counterintuitive, his requisite mahāmudrā-inspired deconstruction of these sacred sites also aided the coeval project of sacralising the
Karmapas and their sites. It did this by inoculating individual sites against the always-fatal onslaught of impermanence. The buildings and even the environments in which they sat were not, in other words, built to last forever, so it should not come as a shock to anyone when they ceased to exist. It was not so much these places themselves that he bequeathed to his successors, but rather the idea of them, and the methods of their sacralisation. By applying the techniques he had developed, the Karmapas could sanctify any place they inhabited. The Karmapas themselves were becoming a gnas, and this meant they were free to travel.

Coda: The Karmapas’ Great Encampment

Travel is just what Rang byung rdo rje’s successor Rol pa’i rdo rje, the fourth Karmapa, did. He took Rang byung rdo rje’s flexible approach to sacred sites one step further by creating a travelling monastery: the “Karmapas’ Great Encampment” (Kar ma’i sgar chen). Over the next three hundred years the next seven Karmapas, the fourth through to the tenth, spent much of their lives in this encampment. As they went, they collected scholars and artisans, some of whom were responsible for developing influential artistic, philosophical and literary traditions. It was not until another army of Mongols destroyed the encampment during the life of the tenth Karmapa, Chos dbying rdo rje (1604–1674) that the Karmapas settled down at Mtshur phu.

By that time, not only had the Karmapas’ reincarnation lineage become well established, but the idea of reincarnation had spread all over Tibet, with most monasteries and hermitages boasting at least one recognised reincarnate or sprul sku, most of whose traditions had a symbiotic relationship with the monasteries in which they lived. The monasteries were often named after these sprul sku, or the sprul sku were named after the monastery, and all these subsequent reincarnation projects have their own stores of cultural artefacts that bolster their individual traditions: architecture, art, stories and songs. The tradition of located reincarnates that Rang byung rdo rje imagined, systemised and articulated had transformed Tibetan society, the way that its people imagined their environments, and even the physical landscape through which they travelled.

12 The Great Encampment is described in Jackson (2009:234–235), who pays particular attention to the tradition of thang kha painting that developed there, the Kar ma sgar ’bri style of painting.
13 The turbulent events of this period are described in some detail in Irmgard Mengele (2012:33–63), which examines Chos dbying rdo rje’s liberation-story.
Appendix One:
Charts

1. Comparative Chart of Early Karmapas' Other Lives
2. Rang byung rdo rje's Liberation-Story Timeline
4. Landmark Dākinis and Other Located Spirits
5. The Twenty-four Pītha According to the Cakrasamvara-tantra

Chart One: Comparative Chart of Early Karmapas’ Other Lives1

Sources:
First Karmapa, Dus gsum mkhyen pa: Rgwa Lo tsā ba (2010a); Rgwa Lo tsā ba (2010b)
Third Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje: Rang byung rdo rje (2006c), abbreviation PL; Rang byung rdo rje (2006d), abbreviation V; Song 16 (GN 23–24; GB 203–204) abbreviation 16.

Continents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South</th>
<th>Jambudvipa</th>
<th>'Dzam bu gling</th>
<th>Jambu Land</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>Pūrvavideha</td>
<td>Lus 'phags po</td>
<td>Supreme Bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>Aparagodāna</td>
<td>Ba lang spyod</td>
<td>Bountiful Cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>Uttarakuru</td>
<td>Sgra mi snyan</td>
<td>Unpleasant Sound</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dharitha Island is between Jambudvipa and Aparagodāna.
Rajāphala is a town on an unnamed Island between Jambudvīpa and Pūrvavideha.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dus gsum mkhyen pa</th>
<th>Karma Pakshi</th>
<th>Rang byung rdo rje</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No Name; Bhaidurya Pure Land.</td>
<td>1 [K2a]; 1 [K2b]. Stobs chen rgyal po, King; time and land of Śākyamuni Buddha, Tantrapa.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. No Name; Dharitha Island.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Antita, smith; Tartita, Jambudvīpa's edge.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Dharma-atita, brahmin; Aparagodāniya.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Elephant; Aparagodāniya.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Dharmakirti, bhikṣu; Padmini Nadi, far northeast Jambudvīpa.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. King Zla ba rnam par gnon pa; Kalingka, Jambudvīpa.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Siladanti, yogi; Uddiyāna, Jambudvīpa.</td>
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</tbody>
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1 This is only a preliminary comparative survey of claims to these past, present and future lives. A more comprehensive comparative study of them will be published in Charles E. Manson (Forthcoming).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dus gsum mkhyen pa</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Shes rab bzang mo, princess; Pûrvavideha [Female]</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Pratikirti, merchant class, bhikṣu; Rajāphala.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | 2 [K2a]; 2 [K2b]. Seng ge rab rtsal, like a Cakravartin; time of Srong btsan sgam po, in the East. K2b: Remembered this as he “came down through the secret passages of the north”. | |
| | 3 [K2b]. No name, General; “who effortlessly stopped the Hor hordes.” | |
| | 4 [K2b]. No name, no occupation; a life in an Eastern World blessed by Avalokiteśvara. | |
| | 5 [K2b]. Multiple lives in Dbus, gtsang and mnga’ ris in which he tamed gods, demons and people. | |
| | 7 [K2b]. Yon tan blo gros, tāntrika, Dge shes; Mahākāraṇika expert. | |
| | 3 [K2a]. Shes rab rgyal ba, Bhikṣu; time of Nāgārjuna. | 1 [16]. Nāgābodhi, monk; India. |
| | 8 [K2b]. Shes ras rgyan, Bhikṣu; time of Nāgārjuna. | 1 [PL]. No name, monk; Nālandā. |
| | 4 [K2a]. Rig ‘dzin mchog, yogi; in Tong kun (Kaifeng), China. | 1 [V]. Prajñālambhāra (Shes ras rgyan), monk; India. |
| | 9 [K2b]. Rdo rje ‘i ‘dzin, yogi; in Tong kun (Kaifeng), China. | 2 [16]. No name, paṇḍita; India. |
| | 5 [K2a] and 10 [K2b]. Lcang lo can, Yakṣa; Aparagodāniya. | 2 [V]. Kāmadhenu, Saroruha’s student; India. |
| | 6 [K2a] and 11 (K2b). Nyi ma ‘od zer can, yogic discipline; Aparagodāniya. (K2b: Mahākāla expert.) | |
| | 7 [K2a]. Ye shes spyan, yogi; India. | 12 [K2b]. Seng ge ye shes spyan, yogi; West India. |
| | 12 [K2b]. Seng ge ye shes spyan, yogi; West India. | |
| | 13 [K2b]. Yogini, barmaid; same time as Ye shes spyan. Taught King and people [Female.] | |
| | 8 [K2a]. Rnal ‘byor pa chen po; ‘Jig rten zhing. Pad ma dbang chen expert. | 4 [16]. Pandita |
| | 14 [K2b]. Rnal ‘byor pa chen po; Pad ma dbang chen expert. | 3 [PL] and [V]. Dharmabodhi, Yogi; South India. |
| | 15 [K2c]. Rdo rje Ye shes ‘bar; in Tibet before Padmasambhava and after King Dza. Spontaneously taught Rnying ma teachings. | 4 [PL]. No name, student of Kamalaśīla. |
| | 9 [K2a]. ‘Bar ba’i rgyal mtshan; student of Maitripa. | 5 [V]. No Name; Eastern City. |
| | 10 [K2a] and 17 [K2b]. Yon tan rgyal po, yogi, bikṣu and vidyādharā; Trig (Trig brtan), Kashmir. [K2b: expert in Mahākāla, Śrī Devi.] | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dus gsum mkhyen pa</th>
<th>Karma Pakshi</th>
<th>Rang byung rdo rje</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 [K2a]. Bhuddha dha bo de [Bhuddhapada], yogi; Yon ten rin chen gling, India. 22 [K2b]. Buddha bodhi; India.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 [16], [PL] and [V]. Rgyal mchog dbyangs, 8th C.; Tibet. [Student of Śāntarakṣita/Padmasambhava.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 [K2a]. Shud ke ban rgan rgya mtsho (Old Monk Shud ke); Gongs can rgyud kyi ri brag ljongs, same time as Marpa. 18 [K2b]. Student of an old Christian (Ma shud ke / Ma shi ke) monk named Rgya mtsho.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 [K2a]. Gzhin rje thul, tāntrika; North India. 19 [K2b]. Gzen rje thul; emanation of Padmasambhava’s activity; pacified gods and demons of Khams.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16 [K2a]. Ras chung ba rdo rje grags, yogi; Bdung thang yul. 21 [K2b]. Relationship with Ras chung ba. (K2b: remembered this when went to ‘Phan yul and Dbus rus.)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11. Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193).</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 [16, PL]. Dus gsum mkhyen pa. 7 [V]. Dus gsum mkhyen pa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Prajñāśila, yogi; Kartika, Uṛḍiyāna.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. No Name; Lho brag, Tibet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. No Name; Urupa, Southern India.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18a [K2a]. No name, great yogi; Yu gur (Uyghur?), Tibet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18b [K2a]. No name, hunter; Bal bod (from Nepali borderlands?). [K2b: consort is a wisdom dākini.]</td>
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<tr>
<td>18c [K2a]. No name, yogi; Yar lung. [K2b: master of the messenger’s path.]</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Mun pa rab tu gsal ba, bodhisattva; Purvavideha.</td>
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**Note: In a recent article, Sam van Schaik has provided a convincing argument that term "Tong kun" is a Tibetan transliteration of the Chinese Dongjing (Traditional Chinese 東京), which in turn refers to Kaifeng. He also provides examples of Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s references to this city in building this argument. As van Schaik notes, Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s liberation-stories do not describe Tong kun / Kaifeng as a place in which he experienced a past life, however, in the following contexts:

1) It is used to describe a place he wishes to visit.  
2) It is said to be the destination for an Indian yogi Dus gsum mkhyen pa meets. This Indian yogi is said to have travelled from India to Tibet, then "to Tong kun, and then again back up from there, bringing a Chinese letter".  
3) A place in which one of his gurus, Dngul chu ba, takes rebirth as the "King of Tong kun’s son in accordance with his aspirations".**

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2 van Schaik (2013:216).  
3 van Schaik (2013:217).  
4 In this episode, instead of reaching Tong kun, he is waylaid in Tsha ’khar when he encounters the rebirth of one of his gurus, who has taken rebirth there as "the son of a rich man" and wonders if he will remember him. (Bde chung ba 1980:18; Bde chung ba 2010:19) Tib. yang dus cig tu. tong kun lta ba cig byed dgos snyam tsam na. deng tsha ’khar du phyin zin. de tsam na dge bshes bla mas nge ye shes bsam tsam na. This episode is translated in David Karma Cheopel and Michele Martin (2012:182). It is also included within another of Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s liberation-stories composed by Rgwa Lo tså ba (2010a:50) and in this version of the story the place he stops is called Se tsha mkhar and the guru he encounters is named as "the spiritual friend. Shes rab bla ma”. Tib. lan gcig tong kun lita bar ‘dod pa dang Se tsha mkhar du sles pa dang dge bshes Shes rab bla ma phyug po’i bur skyes pas ngo shes sam mi shes snyam tsam na khong dgod pa dang dga’ ba’i rtags shes par byung gsungs. This is also translated in David Karma Cheopel and Michele Martin (2012:28).  
5 Sgang Lo tså ba (1980:75–76). Tib: a tsa ra rgya cig rgya gar nas mar song tong kun nas bskyar yar ’ongs pas rgya yig cig ’ongs. Sgang Lo tså ba is not included within the recent collection of Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s liberation-stories, and therefore has not been translated by Cheopel and Martin.  
6 Bde chung ba (1980:30) and Bde chung ba (2010:25). Tib. ying ngo’i bla ma dngul chu ba de tong kun rgyal po’i bur skyes. Tong kun rgyal po des grol ba thebs pa yin gsungs. ri bo rtse lnga la ’jol ba zhi zang rmi lam du byung gzung. van Schaik (2013:217, note 21) suggests that this passage refers to: “an Indian alchemist who was invited to China by the ‘king of Tong kun’ (tong kun rgyal po) and met him at Wutaishan.” By contrast, my reading of this passage would agree with Cheopel and Martin (2012:28) that the person he calls “an Indian alchemist” is Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s teacher Dngul chu ba (“the person from Silver River”); rather than his passage to India being an adult’s journey at the King’s invitation, it was an inter-life journey in fulfilment of the King’s prayers; and that after discovering where he has been reborn, Dus gsum mkhyen pa meets up with him in a dream at Wutaishan.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dus gsum mkhyen pa</th>
<th>Karma Pakshi</th>
<th>Rang byung rdo rje</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 [K2a]. Lotus King, Rnam par rol pa; north Jambudvipa.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 [K2b]. Lotus King, Rnam par rol pa; Eastern pure land; cakravartin.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 [K2a]. Bodhisattva ’Od zer ’phro ba’i ’byung gnas; in presence of Maitreya for thousands of god years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 [K2b]. Emanation in Maitreya’s presence; will stay for 21 lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 [K2b]. Saraha emanation; or Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s manifestation; same nature; 100 years after Dus gsum mkhyen pa.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Events</td>
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<tr>
<td>1283 F. Water Sheep</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mtshur phu: Story: Karma Pakshi dies; 'feels a little uncomfortable in his elements.' Tusita: description of the god realms. Stod lung 'phar tshang: Story: Entering the corpse. In-between state: Story: “an inconceivable, magical (transference of consciousness)”; travels to Tusita. In-between state: Story: landmark dākinīs encourage him; grant empowerment of 64 Cakrasamvara maṇḍala; sang verses. In-between state: Story: travelled myriad rainbow path, arrive in womb. Near Sne nam; Story: crystal palace, jewelled staircase; darkness of the womb. In-between state: Story: sees Mid la ras pa in centre of La stod dpal thang Plain; tells him to emanate. Mtshur phu: Story: Karma Pakshi died. Mtshur phu: Story: Revealed relics, cremated, many more relics. In-between state: Story: Travels straight away to Tusita, then back into body before cremation; then out again into corpse in Stod lung 'phar tshang; then back into Tusita. Ts'ai phu gangs zhur mo: Story: sees mother's womb as very difficult place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1284/1 M. Wood Monkey</td>
<td>08.09</td>
<td>Mtshur phu: Story: Karma Pakshi died. Mtshur phu: Story: Revealed relics, cremated, many more relics. In-between state: Story: Travels straight away to Tusita, then back into body before cremation; then out again into corpse in Stod lung 'phar tshang; then back into Tusita. Ts'ai phu gangs zhur mo: Story: sees mother's womb as a crystal palace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1284/1 M. Wood Monkey</td>
<td>08.01</td>
<td>Sne ye mo: Story: O gyan pa has vision that the Karmapa is coming. Ts'ai phu gangs zhur mo (near sacred Rje btsun's place): Story: born as moon waxes. Ts'ai phu gangs zhur mo: Story: does not remember birth pain, faculties not impaired, mind didn’t waver. Seeing moon made him happy. Ts'ai phu gangs zhur mo: Story: Could speak words, but did not. Ts'ai phu gangs zhur mo: Story: Mother: G.yu chung ma. Close to Ding ri glang skor: Story: stayed at maternal aunt’s house; born on the roof, said it was the eighth day when he saw the moon; Aunty shocked; parents leave. Mother: Jo g.yang 'dren; Father: Sngags ston chos dpal. Mother: wisdom dākinī; Father: of the market keeper caste, and bodhisattva. La stod: remains like this until five; everything like a dream. La stod: Dream: sitting in a crystal palace on a throne with a back curtain, 5 coloured light shines out; flies into centre of the sky like a bird; many demi-gods come to make offerings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Raw Text</td>
<td>KC</td>
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<tr>
<td>1285/2</td>
<td>No Place: Story: makes stone throne, teaches other kids through a poem. No Place: Story: tells parents he has silk and horses. Ding ri glang skor: Vision: rainbows come out of Pha dam pa’s statue, dissolve into him; more elaborate in SP. Ding ri glang skor: Teaching: Father, Zhi byed and other tantras. La stod: Teaching: lay mantra holders from Bsam yas, reading lineage of Ma phur from Bsam yas. La stod: Teaching: Yang phur, Snags chang ngo nag and Dbus rtse ba. La stod: Story: teaches through play; can write and understand dharma texts by looking at them. La stod: Story: parents take him to a village; dad gets drunk; tells everyone he is the Karmapa; blesses everyone, and gets offerings. La stod: Story: Mkhas btsun dam pa Gser khang pa asks him questions, recites the Liberation-Story of In-Between State. Skyid grong: Vision: at ‘Phags pa lha khang, arouses bodhicitta.</td>
<td>KC 924, SP 357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1286/3</td>
<td>F. Wood Bird;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1287/4</td>
<td>M. Fire Dog;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1288/5</td>
<td>La stod: Writing: [age 5], NP Song 112:20. Sbud tra: Story: meets O rgyan pa. O rgyan pa has dream he is coming, pretends not to know him, young Rang byung rdo rje confronts him and asks to be looked after because 'his four elements are not complete'. Sbud tra: Story: Parents take him to see O rgyan pa; O rgyan pa has a dream that coincides with a message about him and his parents. Sbud tra: Story: O rgyan pa gives him lay vows, and the name Chos skyabs dpal bzang po. Sbud tra: Story: O rgyan pa calls him Rang byung rdo rje; questions him about the length between death and birth; Rang byung rdo rje provides an elaborate explanation.</td>
<td>VNT 380, BNT 368, LR 239, RA 96, BA 38a, SP 358</td>
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<td>1289/6</td>
<td>F. Earth Ox</td>
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<td>1290/7</td>
<td>M. Iron Tiger</td>
<td>VNT 381, BNT 368, LR 239, RA 96, BA 38a, KC 928, SP 360</td>
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</table>

**Notes:**

- **Writing:** [age 5], NP Song 112:20.
- **Sbud tra:** Story: meets O rgyan pa. O rgyan pa has dream he is coming, pretends not to know him, young Rang byung rdo rje confronts him and asks to be looked after because 'his four elements are not complete'.
- **Sbud tra:** Story: Parents take him to see O rgyan pa; O rgyan pa has a dream that coincides with a message about him and his parents.
- **Sbud tra:** Story: O rgyan pa gives him lay vows, and the name Chos skyabs dpal bzang po.
- **Sbud tra:** Story: O rgyan pa calls him Rang byung rdo rje; questions him about the length between death and birth; Rang byung rdo rje provides an elaborate explanation.

**Teaching:**

- **O rgyan pa:** many tantric texts, and about *doha*.

**Ordination:**

- Dge tshul: Khro phu kun ldan she rab (khen po); Dbus che (slob dpon).

**Teaching:**

- Khro phu kun ldan she rab and Dbus che (slob dpon), Vinaya.
- Mtshur phu: Vision: Avalokiteśvara appears to Gnyan ras, says he should visit Rang byung rdo rje in La stod.
- Sbud tra: Vision: sees O rgyan pa as Cakrasamvara.

**Vision:**

- Snay nam: Vision: of Rgod tshang pa; everything appears like glass.
- Story: O rgyan pa said it was a cause for obstacles. Kha khyu Pass: Story: RD predicts that men with shields are coming.
- Sbud tra/ Snay nam: Vision: Ber can and Sngags bdag both tell him to travel to Mtshur phu.
- Road to Mtshur phu: Vision: many pure visions, humbles non-humans; gods and demons block his path, turns them back.
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<tr>
<td>1291/8</td>
<td>F. Iron Rabbit</td>
<td>Phar ’tshang: Story; gives lady whose son died a <em>mdzo</em>. Mtshur phu: Story; arrives at monastery. Vision: Gnyan ras sees him as Saraha surrounded by lineage. Mtshur phu: Story; others sceptical. Mtshur phu: Story; Ekajatā presents him with spring plants a dry tree that grows into large tree.</td>
<td>KC 928, RA 97, SP 361 VNT 382, BNT 369, RA 96, BA 38a, KC 928, SP 361 KC 928, SP 361 VNT 382, BA 38a, KC 928, SP 361</td>
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<td>1292/9</td>
<td>M. Water Dragon</td>
<td>Bkra shis gsar ma: Vision: Dar ma sgang pa has vision of him with Bka’ brgyud gurus.</td>
<td>VNT 382, BA 38a, SP 361</td>
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<td>1294/11</td>
<td>M. Wood Horse</td>
<td>Mtshur phu: Story; many earthquakes that went on for a month. Mtshur phu: Visions: reality as mind’s trick; Hayagriva in fire heap, with Mahākāla in his entourage; Vaiśravaṇa pure land; Goddess of conches, Re ma ti tells him to establish dharma at Mtshur phu.</td>
<td>VNT 383, BNT 369, RA 97 KC 929, SP 362</td>
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<td>1297/14</td>
<td>F. Fire Bird</td>
<td>Khyung rdzong: Dream: sees Avalokiteśvara Khasarpani sitting on precious mountain.</td>
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</table>
| 1300/17    | M. Iron Mouse                              | *Khyung rdzong: **Writing**: Miscellaneous Saying [ca 176].*  
*Khyung rdzong: **Writing**: Miscellaneous Saying [ca 167].*  
Jo mo gangs: stayed for a month, taught local lords, achieved realisations.  
Jo mo gangs: **Writing**: Miscellaneous Saying [ca 165] [where K1 achieved realisation]. |
|            |                                            | VNT 387, KC 929, SP 365                                                                          |
Dge dun sgang: Story: in the middle of a faithful samgha at Dge dun sgang.  
Dge dun sgang: Teaching: Zhon nu byang chub & Dge 'dun rin chen: Vinaya and several sūtras.  
Dge dun sgang: Story: given name Tshul khrims gzhon nu.  
Mtshur phu: **Writing**: to Rgyal ba ye shes [ca 74-78]. NP: **Writing**: Song 103:11 [Dream 2].  
Gsang phu Monastery: Shākya zhon nu: studies five topics and five works of Maitreya, and many other texts. (BA says he is abbot of lower monastery of Gsang phu.) |
|            |                                            | VNT 387, RA 98, BA 38a, RA 98, BA 38a, KC 929, SP 365, LR 239, BA 38b, KC 929, SP 365, KC 929 |
| 1302/19    | M. Water Tiger                             | [Dbus?]: Story: Meets 'Jam dbyangs rin chen rgyal mtshan.  
Karma: Story: Travels to Karma.  
'Gro phu, Karma: **Song 22.**  
Karma: Vision: Vimala dissolves into him, understands Rdzogs chen.  
*Karma: **Writing**: Sūtra of Tu$ita Gods [ca 417–442].** |
|            |                                            | VNT 388, RA 98, SP 365, VNT 388, RA 98, LR 239, SP 365, VNT 388, KC 930, SP 365 |
| 1303/20    | F. Water Rabbit                            | [Khams?): Vision: during a meeting with 'Jam dbyang rin chen experiences pure vision of many bodhisattvas.  
Lha stengs: Founding: founds hermitage.  
Lha stengs: Dream: relics of Buddha, some blazing, some unclear.  
Karma: **Writing**: Song 103:11 (Dream 3). |
|            |                                            | VNT 388, VNT 388, BA 38b, KC 930, VNT 388, KC 930 |
| 1304/21    | M. Wood Dragon                             | Lha stengs: **Writing**: Song 23.  
Lha stengs: **Writing**: Clear Meaning of Final Vehicle [ca 92–96].  
Lha stengs: **Writing**: Song 24 (at ganacakra).  
Lha stengs: **Writing**: Song 25 (at ganacakra).  
Lha stengs: **Writing**: Song 26 (in retreat). |
|            |                                            | VNT 388–389, KC 931, VNT 389, KC 931, VNT 389, SP 366 |
| 1304/21    | M. Wood Dragon Cont.                       | Lha stengs: Dream: travel to Sukhāvati; travel to mountain, Buddha, Manjuśrī and so on teaching sūtra, therefore understood questions about sūtra.  
Lha stengs: Dream: on top of Mt Meru three spiritual friends teaching Maitreya’s dharmas; understood them when he woke up.  
Lha stengs: Dream: Avalokiteśvara on stone mountain, nectar streaming from hand into crystal bowl, drinks it, then distributes rest of it. |
<p>|            |                                            | VNT 388–389, KC 931, VNT 389, KC 931, VNT 389, SP 366 |</p>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 31.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: Miscellaneous Saying <em>ca 67–69</em>.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: Miscellaneous Saying <em>ca 62–67</em>.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: On Ghanṭapāda <em>ta 505–517</em>.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: 13 Deities of Cakrasamvara <em>tha 79–102</em>.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 27.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 28.</td>
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<td>10.12</td>
<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: Offering to Cakrasamvara <em>tha 63–79</em>.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 37.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: Fire of Gnosis Cultivation <em>a 21–44</em>.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: On Samudācarṇa-Ḍākini-tantra <em>nya 126–250</em>.</td>
<td>VNT 389, KC 931, SP 366</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: Dream: while composing commentary on Samudācarṇa-ḍākini-tantra: ḍākiniḥ bestow jewels, understands meaning of tantras as precious jewel to be acquired.</td>
<td>KC 931</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: Story: large forest fire; in smoke came thunder and rain, put out fire; kept raining, water poured everywhere; even pacified difficult people.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: Story: later redactions add that he “spoke words of truth” to make the fire go out.</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: Dream: Mañjuśrī Yamantaka with 3 faces, 6 hands, like a dark cloud garlanded with fire, voice resounded like a dragon, therefore understands Sbdö stong's obstacle making is reversed.</td>
<td>KC 931, SP 366</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: Story: some at Karma get jealous, try to harm him, and he practices Yamantaka to turn their spells around; the cave they are in collapses and they die.</td>
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<td>1307/24</td>
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<td>Lha stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: Empowerment of Ghanṭapāda <em>ta 486–505</em>.</td>
<td>BA 38b, SP 366</td>
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<td>Spangs kra: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 39.</td>
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<td>28.12</td>
<td>Tsa ba rgang (Tshal sgang / Tsha ba’i co brag ri): Story: travelled to here.</td>
<td>VNT 390</td>
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<td>Gcogn brag Mountain: Story: goes there to subdue enemies of Kha ba dkar po’s local deity.</td>
<td>VNT 390, LR 239, SP 368</td>
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<td>Gcogn brag Mountain: Vision: man on a white horse (wearing) white silken scarves, living in divine mansion, offers him jewels.</td>
<td>RA 98, KC 931–932</td>
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<td>Kam po gnas nang (road to): Vision: Rdo rje dpal brtsegs riding a white horse with a red mane; seemed happy and welcoming.</td>
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<td>Kam po gnas nang etc: Story: later stories say that Rong bstan Kha ba dkar po and Kam po rdo rje dpal brtsegs invited him to that region.</td>
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<td>1307/24</td>
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<td>Kol ti / Kol te: Story: in east there was a great fight, understood this to be caused by non-humans, brokered peace. Kol ti: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 40: social criticism, brokering peace.</td>
<td>VNT 390, RA 98, KC 932, SP 368</td>
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<td>1308/25</td>
<td>Door to Sacred Site</td>
<td>Kha ba dkar po: Vision: of O rgyan pa at entrance, gave advice, wore peacock feathers, sign of degeneration, was visible in mirror. Door to Sacred Site. Gnas sgo dpal. Kha ba dkar po: <strong>Writing:</strong> meets U rgyan pa in Dream [ca 96-98] Kha ba dkar po: <strong>Writing:</strong> Praise to [ca 49-53]. Kha ba dkar po: Story: writes gnas yig; and says this is the place that Vairotsana was banished to by the Queen of Tsha ba rong.</td>
<td>VNT 390, RA 98, SP 368, 38b, KC 932, SP 368</td>
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<td>1309/26</td>
<td>Bu skar</td>
<td>Story: O rgyan pa dies. Dbus: Vision: local god Gnyan chen thang lha and other deities come to meet him in mists. Mtshur phu: Vision: dharma protecting dākinīs happy; perform visionary dance; he thinks he should travel; they give sign this is a good idea. Lhasa: Story: offers parasol of flowers to jo bo. Lhasa: Vision: while doing this has vision beings from all directions making offering too. (Mtshur phu?): Realisation: while teaching Hevajra develops understanding that meaning of tantras is one's own unalloyed mental continuum. Sonye mdo: Teaching: <strong>Snye mdo Kun dga’ don grub</strong> (Rgod tshang pa’s rebirth), Kālacakra-tantra and (majority of tantras of the Bka’ brgyud: studies Snyan ngag me long). (Snye mdo?): Vision: dākinīs who protect this teaching, blessed him with the lotus Mañjuśrī holds; understood outside, inside and secret (sections of the tantra). (Snye mdo?): Teaching: <strong>Sba ras</strong> and others, medicine. Sonye mdo (?): Vision: when studying how to tame elemental spirits, one appears, blesses him, hears mantras. Khyung rdzong: Vision: in isolation, O rgyan pa appears, shows him vital points, nādi, prāṇa and bodhicitta. [No place]: Teaching: <strong>Tshul khrims rin chen</strong>, series of Bka’ brgyud tantras; several Rnying ma tantras, hundreds of smaller instructions. [No place]: Teaching: <strong>jnānasrī, ‘Grel ba mtha’ drug</strong> and others. [No place]: Teaching: <strong>Rig’dzin Kumāraṇa</strong>, the Heart-Drop (of the Great Completion), its tantra, commentaries, instructions, collections of texts, secret cycle of instructions, and the instructions of the deathless Niguma, along with many other texts. [No place]: Teaching: <strong>Ri khrodro s pa</strong>; same texts as with Kumāraṇa.</td>
<td>VNT 390, RA 99, BA 38b, KC 932, SP 368, VNT 390, BA 38b, VNT 390, BA 38b, VNT 390, BA 38b, BA 38b, VNT 390, BA 38b, VNT 390, BA 38b, BA 38b, VNT 390, BA 38b, BA 38b, BA 38b, VNT 392, BA 38b, BA 38b</td>
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<td>1313/30</td>
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<td>1313/30</td>
<td>F. Water Ox Cont.</td>
<td>Gangs dkar, &quot;site were dharma noble (K1) stayed&quot;, where there is a square caragana tree: saw teachings, including Kilaya empowerment as he pondered them.</td>
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<td>1314/31</td>
<td>M. Wood Tiger</td>
<td>5.02 Bkra shis gsar ma: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Hundred Jātaka Tales</em>. Bkra shis gsar ma: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 58 (On Completion of the <em>Hundred Jātaka Tales</em>). Mtshur phu hermitage (Bkra shis gsar ma), secret hiding place: Vision: prāṇa inside and the stars in the sky outside, all the constellations of the zodiac appeared clearly; all of astrology appeared. (This is before Gang dkar in VNT, but after in songs.) Snye mdo: Story: while granting empowerment, understands that a local deity is creating trouble, turns into Ber nag can and banishes him.</td>
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<td>1315/32</td>
<td>F. Wood Rabbit</td>
<td>15.02 [No place]: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Collection of 5</em> [a579–584]. Bkra shis gsar ma: Vision: while studying <em>Guhyasamāja-tantra</em> from Marpa’s lineage; own body appeared as a collection (samāja); certain there was no (thing) outside, all mind. (This is before Gang dkar in VNT, but after in songs.)</td>
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<td>1316/33</td>
<td>M. Fire Dragon</td>
<td>Bkra shis gsar ma: Vision: Dream that travelled to many worlds; in Ghanḍahastin’s homeland he saw many books, and a voice said, “this is sacred dharma.” (This is before Gang dkar in VNT, but after in songs.) [No place]: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 59. Nang chung: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 60.</td>
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<td>1317/34</td>
<td>F. Fire Snake</td>
<td>13.08 Bkra shis gsar ma: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Miscellaneous Saying</em> [ca 121]. --09 Mtshur phu: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Miscellaneous Saying</em> [ca 122]. 13.12 [No place]: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Miscellaneous Saying</em> [ca 125]. 18.12 Mtshur phu: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Miscellaneous Saying</em> [ca 125].</td>
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<td>M. Earth Horse</td>
<td>17.12 Bkra shis gsar ma: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Miscellaneous Saying</em> [ca 132].</td>
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<td>1319/36</td>
<td>F. Earth Sheep</td>
<td>--01 [No place]: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Miscellaneous Saying</em> [ca 138]. 13.01 Mtshur phu: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Miscellaneous Saying</em> [ca 139]. 05.04 Mtshur phu: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Miscellaneous Saying</em> [ca 142]. 10.04 [No place]: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Miscellaneous Saying</em> [ca 145]. --08 Mtshur phu: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>Miscellaneous Saying</em> [ca 151]. Bkra shis gsar ma: <strong>Writing</strong>: On Ganga Mahāmudrā [a 161-175]. --09 Rgyal mdo: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 61–62. Rgyal mdo: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 63 [Dar ma and entourage]. Rgyal mdo: <strong>Writing</strong>: Song 64–65. <strong>Bde chen stengs</strong>: Founding: at Gru bzhi. Bde chen stengs: Vision: when founding it, has vision that in dark times, can only live in solitary places. Bde chen stengs: Vision: about same time, has dream in which someone told him Karmapa prophesied he should go to Dwags po and Kong po, and that Avalokiteśvara’s luminosity radiates there. Bde chen stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: finishes <em>Kalacākra Commentary</em>. Bde chen stengs: <strong>Writing</strong>: <em>General Notes on Meditation</em> [a 45-52].</td>
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VNT 395

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<td>1321/38 F. Iron Bird</td>
<td>Bde chen: Writing: Song 70, 71. [No place]: Writing: Song 72. Bde chen: Writing: Song 73-76. [No place]: Writing: Song 77-89 [77, 79, 80, 85 not in GN]. Bde chen: Vision: of many buddhas; of the vital points, outside and inside and other were established as one; speech, prāna and letters (appeared) interdependent; “there were mālās of golden letters in the sky. They dissolved into and diffused from all my pores”. Bde chen: Vision: body as host of deities. Bde chen: Vision: at night, of Heruka, rainbows and light coiling around writing divisions of vows and precepts; red light radiated empowerment deity Kurukulla; pacified harmful spirits; Saraha, Dharmakirti (Dus gsum mkhen pa) and other “ancestors” appeared; understood texts effortlessly.</td>
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<td>1322/39 M. Water Dog</td>
<td>Bde chen stengs: Vision: outer and inner spheres purified, therefore can write Zab mo nang don. Bde chen stengs: Writing: Zab mo nang don [ja 308-360]. [No place]: Writing: Limitless Ocean of Samaya [nya 1–114]. Gangs dkar, in cave: Vision: while setting up Padmasambhava statue, has vision that his work still needs to be done. G.yas ru shangs: Story: wishing to help low caste people, he manifests Buddha’s compassion; stops them (performing sacrifices) and subdues local spirit. Gtsang generally: Story: gave many offerings to the monasteries of the region. Gtsang: Story: O rgyan pa’s rebirth recognised and he takes care of him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1322/39</td>
<td>Road to Sa skya: vision: good non-humans there. Road to Tsan Cliff: Vision: offered <em>gtor ma</em> to protector <em>dákini</em>; Ber nag can appeared; pacified obstacles. Near Sa skya: Story, later storytellers; meets Dol po pa. Rgyan khang, Ur Mountain Monastery: Story and Vision: teaching to assembly, has vision of lineage gurus. Near Nyang: Vision: sun appearing (at night time?); students saw moonlight at “border time”; one student Grags pa senge ge, the first Zhwar ma pa, saw it “like visionary experience”. Kha ro Pass, Near Nyang: Story: when they are crossing this pass to Yar ’brog tells the local deity Ha bo gangs bzang not to make it cold; next day it is warm like spring, even though winter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1323/40</td>
<td>F. Water Pig</td>
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<td>1324/41</td>
<td>M. Wood Mouse</td>
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<td>1325/42</td>
<td>F. Wood Ox</td>
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<tr>
<td>1328/45 M. Earth Dragon</td>
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<td>M. Earth Dragon Cont.</td>
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<td>1328/45</td>
<td>Mdo khams: Writing:</td>
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<td>Sog River: Vision:</td>
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<td>Avalokiteśvara tells</td>
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<td>deeds and tells him</td>
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<td>to go to Nags phu.</td>
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<td>1329/46</td>
<td>F. Earth Snake</td>
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<td>10.07</td>
<td>Nags phu: Writing:</td>
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<td>Writing: Song 125; 33.</td>
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<td>Nags phu: Writing:</td>
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<td>Songs 127-130:35-38.</td>
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<td>Nags phu: Vision:</td>
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<td>Mañjuśrī tells him</td>
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<td>he will travel to</td>
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<td>the Mongolian court</td>
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<td>in three years (1332).</td>
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<td>Students make extra</td>
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<td>effort.</td>
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<td>Nags phu: Vision:</td>
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<td>(in rainy season,</td>
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<td>solstice) dākinīs</td>
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<td>teach him vital</td>
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<td>points, nādi, prāṇa</td>
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<td>and bodhicitta.</td>
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<td>Nags phu: Realisation:</td>
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<td>that Mañjuśrī-kirti</td>
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<td>had collated</td>
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<td>the essence of the</td>
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<td>Kālacakra-tantra.</td>
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<td>1330/47</td>
<td>M. Iron Horse</td>
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<td>Nags phu: Writing:</td>
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<td>The Essence of the</td>
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<td>Three Yogas [ta 1–121].</td>
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<td>08.01</td>
<td>Composed this</td>
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<td>because of previous</td>
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<td>vision.</td>
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<td>No Place: Writing:</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous Saying</td>
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<td>[Black Hat] Song</td>
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<td>118:26.</td>
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<td>[No place]: Writing:</td>
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<td>Tsa ri: Writing:</td>
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<td>Song 131:39 (as</td>
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<td>winter came).</td>
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<td>Road to Tsa ri: Vision:</td>
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<td>that contains a sign</td>
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<td>Tsa ri: Vision: dākinīs</td>
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<td>displaying signs,</td>
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<td>said they would</td>
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<td>be helpful to him in</td>
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<td>the future.</td>
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<td>1331/48</td>
<td>F. Iron Sheep</td>
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<td>06.07</td>
<td>[No place]: Writing:</td>
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<td>Song 132:40.</td>
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<td>Writing: Song 133:41.</td>
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<td>Founding: helps</td>
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<td>Lhun grub stengs:</td>
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<td>Lhun grub stengs:</td>
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<td>Writing: Song 113:21</td>
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<td>the rains retreat</td>
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<td>of Kong po. Does not</td>
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<td>Lhun grub stengs:</td>
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<td>Old Tsa ri: Vision:</td>
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<td>dākinīi, grants him</td>
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<td>blessing; experiences</td>
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<td>earthquake.</td>
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VNT 406, KC 938, SP 381

VNT 406, KC 938, SP 381

VNT 406, KC 938, SP 381

VNT 406, KC 938, SP 381

VNT 406, KC 938, SP 381

VNT 406, KC 938, SP 381

VNT 407, LR 241, SP 382

VNT 407, KC 938

BA 39a, KC 938, SP 382

RA 101, SP 382

KC 938, SP 382–3

VNT 407, LR 241, SP 382

VNT 407, KC 938

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<tr>
<th>Era</th>
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<th>Goddess</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>1331/48</td>
<td>Lhasa: Story: meets imperial preceptor Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan in Lhasa Gung thang (Tshal). 'Dam: Story: travels to 'Dam by way of Dbus. 'Dam: Vision: Gnyan chen thang lha and local spirits put on a show. 'Dam: Story: after winter solstice, much thunder and lightening; once staying in solitary place, his samādhī increased. 'Dam: Story: says that after this thunder and lightning returns to Mtshur phu until the second month of next year. Lhasa: Story: stops fight between members of Imperial guard.</td>
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<td>KC 938, SP 383</td>
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<tr>
<td>1332/49</td>
<td>01.02 'Dam: Story: starts off on road “to the palace of the Eastern King”. On road: Story: stops to help wanderers. Ra sgrengs: Writing: Song 106:14. Border of Tibet and China: Vision: local deities tell him to hurry; hurries. Kyan zang hu (Gin 'jang hu) [02.09 CE]: Story: earth shakes, knows the Emperor has died; goes to local fort to perform “veil removing ceremony”. Kyan zang hu (Gin 'jang hu): Vision: has clear dream, hears dharma protectors say he will have no obstacles and should travel quickly to the palace. 08.10 Dadu: Story: arrives; people make him many offerings. Dadu: Vision: that the bodhisattvas are also performing a (gang)cakra. Dadu: Story: El Temür and Bayan welcome him. Dadu: Story: grants empowerment to powerful people and their wives. (LR says emperor and empress?). Dadu: Vision: while granting this empowerment has vision, therefore knows they understand. Dadu: Vision: while grand ceremony being performed, has vision of non-humans, knows that the emperor Rin chen dpal will “encounter obstacles”; tells his ministers. Dadu: Story: later storytellers, Toghan Temür is recalled from Korea to take over the throne; astrologers suggest needs to wait six months to be enthroned, then he will be the equal of Qubilai Khan; K3 predicts El Temür will govern for this time and he does. Dadu: Story: El Temür takes empowerment.</td>
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<td>VNT 407, LR 241, RA 101, KC 939, SP 386</td>
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<td>18.02 Dadu: Story: later storytellers, millions of people gather in the capital, K3 difficult to enter the capital, as K3 approaches the people part; meets the emperor in a tent on the outskirts of town, enter into the capital together. Dadu: Story: later storytellers, defends embattled imperial preceptor. Xanadu: Story: “Lord of men” enthroned. Xanadu: Story: Vision: worldly protectors dancing and gesturing; takes it as a sign there will be happiness in the Empire. Xanadu: Story: taught dharma to Toghan Temür, along with his lineage and collected ministers.</td>
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<td>VNT 408, LR 241, KC 940</td>
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<td>1333/50</td>
<td>15.01 Dadu: Story: later storytellers, millions of people gather in the capital, K3 difficult to enter the capital, as K3 approaches the people part; meets the emperor in a tent on the outskirts of town, enter into the capital together. Dadu: Story: later storytellers, defends embattled imperial preceptor. Xanadu: Story: “Lord of men” enthroned. Xanadu: Story: Vision: worldly protectors dancing and gesturing; takes it as a sign there will be happiness in the Empire. Xanadu: Story: taught dharma to Toghan Temür, along with his lineage and collected ministers.</td>
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<td>RA 102, KC 939-40, SP 386</td>
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<td>18.06 Dadu: Story: later storytellers, millions of people gather in the capital, K3 difficult to enter the capital, as K3 approaches the people part; meets the emperor in a tent on the outskirts of town, enter into the capital together. Dadu: Story: later storytellers, defends embattled imperial preceptor. Xanadu: Story: “Lord of men” enthroned. Xanadu: Story: Vision: worldly protectors dancing and gesturing; takes it as a sign there will be happiness in the Empire. Xanadu: Story: taught dharma to Toghan Temür, along with his lineage and collected ministers.</td>
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<td>VNT 409, KC 940</td>
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| 1334/51 | **Dadu: Vision** dreams of fearsome forest on a mountainside; and a white man radiating light. Says to him: “Do not stay here, flee to the lands of Snow. This will help you and others.”
Dadu: Vision: SP says Thang lha also asked him to return.
Dadu: Story: later storytellers; when he says he is leaving the Emperor asks him to retrieve long-life water.
Dadu: Story: later storytellers, Emperor gives him the name ‘Buddha Karmapa who realises that all phenomena are empty’; edicts, golden coins; Tai situ position for Dge sbyong chen po of Tshal; tax exemptions for Mtshur phu; gold for Tsa ri pas; offers governance of Mtshur phu to Old Ba Dar.
Dadu: Story: blue stūpa completed (colophon of commentary).
**Dadu, “Brocade Cave”: Writing: A Commentary on the Śrī Hevajra Tantra; [nya 274–629].**

| 1335/52 | **Mchims phu: Vision** many visions of Padmasambhava and gatherings of dākīnis. “I took this as a sign that the scholar and these women would help me. There were signs of obstacles, and then miraculous displays, (after which) my samādhi became exceedingly peaceful.”
Mchims phu: Story: stays for six months. |

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<th>Pages</th>
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<tr>
<td>1337/54</td>
<td>F. Fire Ox</td>
<td>'Dam: Story: Leaves for Palace. Dadu: Story: arrives at Palace. Dadu: Story: gives long-life water to the Emperor. On road to Xanadu: Vision: dream in which he sees many low caste people suffering; invokes Avalokiteśvara. White man of light, naturally clear says: &quot;no harm will come to the royal family or those people that practice the dharma.&quot; Xanadu/Dadu: <strong>Writing:</strong> Song 135:43. Ging mi shan: Story: great earthquake; he single pointedly invokes Buddhas and bodhisattvas, none of his students died. Xanadu: <strong>Writing:</strong> Song 136:44. Dadu: Story: later storytellers, people are trying to disrobe all monks through legislation because of the bad behaviour of some monks; K3 makes representations to the court and this does not happen. Dadu: Story, later storytellers, K3 restores old temples. Dadu: Story, later storytellers, K3 says he wants to leave, Emperor says no, sends his gold seal back to Mtshur phu: threatens to leave. Dadu: Story, later storytellers, a bad Chinese monk created more strife, says that he has had enough and is leaving for Tuṣita.</td>
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<td>1338/55</td>
<td>M. Earth Tiger</td>
<td>Dadu: <strong>Writing:</strong> Song 137:45. Dadu: Story: tells his students that he is like a cloud. Dadu: Story: Grants Kālacakra empowerment to the Emperor. Dadu: Vision: While granting empowerment, has vision of celestial mansion. Dadu: Story: Emperor has mansion like this vision built on the hill in the centre of Dadu (Bei hai Park); it has Jinasagara at its centre. Dadu: Story: Also has a temple built to Cakrasamvara, with the <em>Jātaka of the Mūni</em> that describes his one-hundred and twelve deeds inscribed on the outside of these buildings backwards; and statues of Ber nag can, Dpal ldan lha mo, and the four guardian kings; Rang byung rdo rje consecrates them. Dadu, Gzheng zhing temple: <strong>Writing:</strong> Prāṇa and Reason in Essence Extraction (a 623–626): 'above the golden roofs of Dadu's great palace.' Xanadu, Zhu gu Monastery: <strong>Writing:</strong> Ocean of Dākinis Empowerment (ta 391–471).</td>
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<td>08.07</td>
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<td>VNT 410, BA 39b, KC 940, SP 390</td>
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<td>KC 940, SP 390</td>
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<td>LR 241, RA 103, BA 39b, KC 940, SP 392</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VNT 410, KC 941, RA 103, SP 393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RA 104, KC 941, SP 393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>KC 942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>KC 943, SP 394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>KC 943, SP 395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VNT 412, LR 241, RA 105, KC 943, SP 395–396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VNT 411, RA 104, SP 394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VNT 411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VNT 411, RA 104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1339/56
F. Earth Rabbit

08.02 Dadu: Writing: Verse Liberation-Story [ka 402-412].

??05 Dadu: Story: averts a drought by making it rain.
05.05 Dadu: Story: dream of white rock with fathomless peak; sees countless pure lands; composes mgur, this is reported by attendant; RA calls it a vajra-mgur.
Dadu: Visions: at dawn experiences signs he is going to die.
Road to Xanadu: Story: rainbows and lights appear.
Road to Xanadu: Story: stops to bathe in natural hot springs, blesses water.
Road to Xanadu: Story: later storytellers, stops on the way and teaches at a rock, tells them to focus on impermanence.
14.06 Xanadu: Story: in the afternoon, makes elaborate offerings to Bka' brgyud lineage gurus, meditation deity (Cakrasamvara), performs ceremony, and dies.
15.06 Xanadu: Story: people see him after he dies: one person sees him departing for the west.
25.06 Xanadu: Story: people have a vision of him in which he says, "I don’t want to stay here anymore, I am going back to Tibet, back to the Snow"; another had a vision of him in Tuštì with Maitreya.
25.07 Xanadu: Story, later storytellers, Governor Dben ko remembers that he had made a prophecy in the tiger year.
Xanadu: Story, later storytellers, says he misses students in Tibet and they will meet again.
Xanadu: Story, RA says that the court scribes wrote this down.
Xanadu: Story: Turan Temür and others see his whole body and a stūpa in the moon.
Xanadu: Story: son-like students keep vigil.
Xanadu: Story: he is cremated with the Emperor and his ministers leading the funeral procession.
Xanadu: Story: there are many relics, including images in burnt remains that are distributed to his students. Most are carried back to Tibet.
Xanadu: Story, later storytellers give specifics about the relics.

Abbreviations:
## Chart Three: Landmark Ḍākinīs and Other Located Spirits

### a. The Twenty-five Landmark Ḍākinīs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Name</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zhing skyong gi gtso mo chen mo linge</strong></td>
<td>5 Exceptional, Principal Landmark Protectors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rdo rje thogs 'bebs ma</td>
<td>Descending Vajra, (Moving) Upwards</td>
<td>secret place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rdo rje dpal 'bar ma</td>
<td>Blazing Splendour Vajra</td>
<td>top of the head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rdo rje stobs mo che</td>
<td>Very Strong Vajra</td>
<td>extremities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rdo rje mthu rgyal ma</td>
<td>Powerful Victory Vajra</td>
<td>at hands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rdo rje dung sgra ma</td>
<td>Roaring Conch Vajra</td>
<td>at mouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bdud 'dul gtso mo chen mo bzhi</strong></td>
<td>4 Great, Principal Tamed Demonesses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rdo rje kun grags ma</td>
<td>Vajra Famous Everywhere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b. Bdag nyid chen mo</td>
<td>Great Being</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6c. Rang byung rgyal mo</td>
<td>Self-arising Queen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a. Rdo rje kun tu bzang</td>
<td>Vajra Samantabhadrī Great Snow Mother Lady of Willows</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jo mo Glang ma [27°59' 17&quot; N, 86° 55' 31&quot; E]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7c. Jo mo Glang ma</td>
<td>Mountain: Jo mo glang ma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a. Rdo rje ya ma skyong</td>
<td>Vajra Protector from Yama</td>
<td></td>
<td>Phag ri, Gro mo district [27°49' 27&quot; N, 89° 16' 12&quot; E]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8b. Dpal ldan lha ri</td>
<td>Śrī Devi Mountain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8c. Phag ri jo mo</td>
<td>Swine Mountain Lady</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8d. Jo mo lha ri</td>
<td>Lady Divine Mountain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9b. 'Bro gchen 'khor 'dul</td>
<td>Mountain: Jo mo glang ma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9c. 'Bro gchen 'khor 'dul</td>
<td>Vajra Principle Bgegs Great Pastures' Tamer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yar 'bro g.yu mtsho [28°56' N, 90° 41' E]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chos srung gtso mo chen mo bzhi</strong></td>
<td>4 Great, Principal Dharma Protectors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10a. Btud la 'gro bzang ma</td>
<td>Stoooped, Good Lady White spell, Vajra Good lady</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gangs mthon mthing rgyal mo (Gauri Sankar) [27°59' N, 86° 20' E]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mi g.yo rdo rje glang bzang ma</strong></td>
<td>Immovable, Good Vajra, Willow Lady Immovable, Good Lady Immovable, Vajra Expandse, Good Lady</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gauri Sankar [27°59' N, 86° 20' E]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11b. Mi g.yo blo bzang ma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11c. Mi g.yo rdo rje klong bzang ma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Name</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12b. Bkra shis tshes ring ma</td>
<td>Auspicious, Long-life Lady</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gdon ’dul gtso mo chen mo bzhis</td>
<td>4 Great, Principal Tamed Harmful spirits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14b. Gangs dkar sha med</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14c. Gnam dman dkar mo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15b. Rdo rje klu mo</td>
<td>Vajra Intoxicating Mother Noble Garuda of Kha rag</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16b. Kha rag khyung btsun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16c. Jo mo mkha’ reg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17a. Rdo rje grags mo rgyal</td>
<td>Vajra Conch of Tagshi (Tajik) Door</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17b. Rma chen spom ra gangs ri</td>
<td>Vajra Great Conch of the Tajik Door</td>
<td>Great Conch of Tag sha Door Conch Vajra of the Great Door</td>
<td>[Gate that enters Tibet from Stag zig]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17c. Rma chen spom ra’i yum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sgo bzhis srung ba’i gtso mo bzhis</td>
<td>The Principal Protectors of the 4 Doors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Satri rdo rje ’bri bzung ma</td>
<td>Vajra-satri, Wholesome Female Yak</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19a. Tag shadung gi rdo rje sgo mo che</td>
<td>Great Conch-Vajra of the Tajik (Tag) Door</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19b. Dag shadung gi sgo mo</td>
<td>Great Conch of Tag sha Door Conch Vajra of the Great Door</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19c. Dung gi rdo rje sgo mo che</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Chags so rdo rje stobs mo che</td>
<td>Vajra Lady (with) Great Power</td>
<td></td>
<td>[Gate that enters Tibet from Xi Xia?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Gha gha rdo rje ral gri ma</td>
<td>Ghagha, Vajra Sword</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Name</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yid 'gyur gyi gtso mo chen mo bzhi; Sman mo bzhi</td>
<td>4 Principal Mind Changers; 4 Sman mo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22b. Kong btsun de mo</td>
<td>Lady of De mo in Kong po.</td>
<td>Sīr Vajra Lady</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22c. Rdo rje dpal mo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23b. Rdo rje sman gcig ma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24b. Sman btsun yug cho</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25b. G.yu yi dril bu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25c. Rdo rje g.yu sgron ma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**b. The Four Ḍākinīs of Hidden Lands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Name</th>
<th>Additional Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Rdo rje bu skyong ma (Vajra Protectress of Children).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rdo rje phu chu sman gcig ma (Vajra Waterfall, Singular Sman mo).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Rdo rje g.yu chung (Vajra Small Turquoise).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**c. Male Locational Gods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gnyan chen thang lha</td>
<td>white man, white horse, white clothes.</td>
<td>Mt. Gnyan chen thang lha [30°22’ 3” N, 90° 35’ 6” E]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yar lha sham po</td>
<td>white man, white yak, white clothes.</td>
<td>Mt. Yar lha sham po [28°48’ 1” N, 91° 57’ 5” E]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dge bsnyen rdo rje dpal brtsegs</td>
<td>white man, white horse, white silk coat.</td>
<td>Kam po gnas nang [30°17’ 31” N, 99° 40’ 59”E]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
d. Cakrasamvara Maṇḍala Mountains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tsa ri</td>
<td>mind maṇḍala</td>
<td>28°39'43.90&quot;N, 93°22'28.27&quot;E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. La phyi</td>
<td>speech maṇḍala</td>
<td>28°07'50&quot;N, 86°10'31&quot;E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Kailaś</td>
<td>body maṇḍala</td>
<td>31°4'0&quot;N, 81°18'45&quot;E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Kha dbkar po]</td>
<td>[alternate classification]</td>
<td>28°26' 20&quot;N, 98° 41' 1&quot;E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

e. Karma Bka’ brgyud Maṇḍala Monasteries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mtshur phu dgon pa</td>
<td>mind maṇḍala</td>
<td>29°43' 36&quot;N, 90° 34' 30&quot;E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kar ma dgon pa</td>
<td>speech maṇḍala</td>
<td>31°49' 50&quot;N, 96° 54' 49&quot;E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Kam po gnas nang</td>
<td>body maṇḍala</td>
<td>30°17' 31&quot;N, 99° 40' 59&quot;E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chart Four: Twenty-four *Piṭha* According to the *Cakrasamvara-tantra*.7

(Those mentioned in the thesis are highlighted in blue.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three Spheres</th>
<th><em>Piṭha</em> type</th>
<th>External Site</th>
<th>Internal Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mind/Sky Sphere Skt. Cittacakra/Khecarī Tib. Sems kyi 'khor lo/ Mkha’ spyod kyi gnas</td>
<td><em>Piṭha</em></td>
<td>Pulliramalaya</td>
<td>head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jālandhara</td>
<td>tuft of the head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Odyāna</td>
<td>right ear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arbuda</td>
<td>back of the head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upapitha</td>
<td>Godāvari</td>
<td>left ear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rameśvara</td>
<td>brows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Devikotṭa</td>
<td>eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mālava</td>
<td>shoulders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech/Earth Sphere Skt. Vākcakra/Bhūcarī Tib. Ngag kyi 'khor lo/ Sa spyod kyi gnas</td>
<td>Kṣetra</td>
<td>Kāmarūpa</td>
<td>armpits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Odra/Cārīta</td>
<td>breasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upakṣetra</td>
<td>Triśakuni</td>
<td>navel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kosala</td>
<td>tip of the nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chandoha</td>
<td>Kalinga</td>
<td>mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lampāka</td>
<td>throat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upachandoha</td>
<td>Kāṇcī</td>
<td>heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Himālaya/Himvat</td>
<td>penis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body/Underground Sphere Skt. Kāyacakra/ Pātāla-vāsini Tib. Lus kyi 'khor lo/ Sa 'og gi gnas</td>
<td>Melāpaka</td>
<td>Pretapuri</td>
<td>sex organ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grhaḍevatā</td>
<td>anus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upamelāpaka</td>
<td>Saurāṣṭra</td>
<td>thighs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suvarṇadvipa</td>
<td>shanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Śmaśāna</td>
<td>Nagarā</td>
<td>toes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sindhu</td>
<td>soles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upaśmaśāna</td>
<td>Maru</td>
<td>big toes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kulatā</td>
<td>knees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

7 Adapted from Sugiki (2009:522).
Appendix Two:
A Survey of the Liberation-Stories of Rang byung rdo rje

This appendix includes two parts. Part one is a survey of the major pre-nineteenth century versions of the text, with a particular emphasis on those that were used in this thesis. Part two consists of a chart of all known publications—and the various editions of these publications—that include a version of Rang byung rdo rje’s life-story in the Tibetan language.

PART ONE:
Pre-Nineteenth Century Redactions of Rang byung rdo rje’s Liberation-Story

The redactions of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-stories are notable for their intertextuality and derivativeness. This makes it difficult to determine which pieces of texts are derived from earlier sources, and which include original compositions. The majority of earlier texts are composites, and pieces of these composites have been inserted, often word for word, into later texts. This means that the word “text” understood as a discreet composition is problematic when speaking of these works; they have all been extracted from and reformed in a variety of different ways.

A thorough analysis of all the complexities of the processes that created these texts would entail a large research project that is far beyond the scope of this present study. The following presentation is by contrast a survey of the various compilations from which I have extracted information directly relevant to my study, and those works used as references by other researchers.¹ In the main, these works accord with the list of sources Si tu Pan chen cited at the end of his late eighteenth-century retelling of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story. His list will be reviewed at the end of this appendix.

The texts are divided into the following four groups: early extant texts, non-extant early texts, coloured annals and Karma bka’ brgyud lineage histories.

1. Early Extant Texts

The early extant versions of his liberation-story are those that contain sections directly attributed to Rang byung rdo rje. I have used these sections of the works throughout the thesis and already provided a summary of their history in chapter one. What follows here

¹ In this regard, I am particularly referring to the studies of Rang byung rdo rje’s early life carried out by Manson (2009) and in two papers by Berounský (2010 and 2011), and the study of his whole life and influence by Seegers (2009).
is an overview of all of these texts, including the elements framing Rang byung rdo rje's own compositions that were not discussed directly in chapter one.

a) Rang byung rdo rje's The Liberation-Story of the Great Rang byung rdo rje (Dpal chen Rang byung rdo rje'i rnam thar). 2

This text is included within the Collected Works of Rang byung rdo rje. There are five sections within it:

1. The Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje's Past Lives (Sngar pa'i skye bor rnam thar). 3
2. The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State (Bar de'i [sic] rnam par thar pa). 4
3. A description of his other, present emanations. 5
4. A brief survey of his early visions. 6
5. Colophon. 7

The first three sections are named, and the colophon describes them. They are also written in the first person. As I described in chapter one, the second section appears to have been inserted into a single text that describes Rang byung rdo rje's past lives and current manifestations. The fourth section is written in the third person and describes a series of visions he had as an adolescent while staying at Khyung rdzong Hermitage above Mtshur phu Monastery in 1296.

1. The Liberation-Story of His Past Lives

The first section of this text describes Rang byung rdo rje's past lives and ends with the following statement:

May all my disciples understand and realise impartially the vital points of mind and präna, and thus become wise. Up to here, the (text) has been (about his) past lives. 8

As far as I am aware, this section of the text has not been incorporated directly into any later redactions of his life story. But the list of previous lives it contains has been repeated many times, becoming the most widely used list of the Karmapas' previous and multiple lives.

2. The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State

2 Rang byung rdo rje (2006c).
The beginning of this section reads: "Next is The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State."9

This text contains a description of the interim between the death of the second Karmapa and Rang byung rdo rje's birth. It begins with the assertion that the narrator was "the one famously known as the Karmapa". It continues, following the narrative as outlined in chapter four, through his ascension to Tušita, his conversations with dākinīs, their admonishing him to be reborn, and eventually his conception and rebirth at Tsa'i phu gangs zhur mo. The text then ends with the statement: "up to here has been the (liberation-story of) the intermediate state".

It is my contention that this section of the text is the same narrative describing Rang byung rdo rje's experiences in the in-between state that Si tu Pañ chen refers to in his list of sources as: "The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, which was composed by Mkhas btsun gser khang pa."10 It is the same text that several contemporary scholars, including A legs gzan dkar Rinpoche at the beginning of the Collected Works, have described as "missing".11

The creation of the text is described in most tellings of his tale, including Rang byung rdo rje's self-penned, Verse Liberation-Story. In these descriptions, Rang byung rdo rje is said to have told this tale when he was five years old in response to questioning from Mkhas btsun dam pa gser khang pa, who took notes and created the text.12

In making this contention I understand that the presentation of this "text" as an insert within another means that this claim is not supported by an external attribution, a title page or a catalogue reference. This means that I am only making a claim for the content of this text, not its framing. In turn, this suggests that in providing support for my contention in the following paragraphs, I am merely trying to show that the text is quoted here in its entirety, not that it is the missing, separate physical text described by other scholars. Unlike this redaction of this work within another text, the alternate and still missing independent redaction would have been presented as a separate work with a title page describing it as the Bar do'i rnam thar (Liberation-Story of the In-Between State) or the Bar do'i rnam thar bstan pa (Teaching on the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State), and a colophon attributing it to Gser khang pa and Rang byung rdo rje.

The first reason that I have for believing this is a complete redaction of the "missing text" is that almost all of it was included within (Dpa’ bo) Gtsug lag phreng ba and Si tu Pañ

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11 Manson (2009:45), Berounský (2010:27), Berounský (2011:27, Note 30), Seegers (2009:39). This text is also named in the list of non-extant Rang byung rdo rje texts in A legs gzan dkar's Collected Works. In this instance, however, it is not clear whether he is referring to the text as writing, or the text in a separate format (Rang byung rdo rje, 2006c Vol. Ka:42).
chen’s collections of Karma bka’ brgyud liberation-stories. Further, both Gtsug lag phreng ba and Si tu Pañ chen mark a lengthy section that matches the text in question word for word by saying, “Thus it says in the Liberation Story of the In-Between State”. Several other works also paraphrase its contents without contradiction, including the Red Annals.

Another reason for suggesting that this is the same text is that even the parts that are not directly quoted in other texts are often paraphrased or described in detail by them without contradiction. The most compelling of these examples is a complicated reference found within Gtsug lag phreng ba’s liberation-story in a few convoluted sentences that I will attempt to unpack. These sentences read as follows:

(This version of the story) of this coming is mixed with the story as described in the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State. After he passed beyond suffering (died) he instantly established bodies in Tuṣita and all the other god realms. Simultaneous with this appearance he was offered unlimited clouds of offerings. This (moment in the god-realm) distracted him a little, and eight days passed (on earth). When this moment had passed, he gazed on his son-like disciples with great compassion and (re-entered) his corpse. When (his corpse was) purified (cremated) shortly after this, he saw a land full of lamentations, and it was as if he became insensate with compassion. This led him to think that he needed to “enter a residence” (grong jug) in order to help wanderers. In Stod lungs ’phar tshang, he saw the corpse of a youth, aged about thirteen (lying) in between an older couple who were crying, so he entered this corpse.

After this Gtsug lag phreng ba continues the description of the journey from one life to another that I described in chapter four.

He begins the paragraph above by stating clearly that he is using two sources for the story. He then names one of these clearly, the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State; the most likely other source is the Verse Liberation-Story as this is the text whose narrative is closely followed in most of the rest of the work.

Both Seegers and Berounský have suggested that the section within this quote on Rang byung rdo rje’s need to “enter a residence” was the element of this paragraph most directly quoted from the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State, and that this “non-extant” text is the source for the first-hand description of this corpse-entering episode. I respectfully disagree with this analysis for the following reasons. First, although the description of this episode in the Verse Liberation-Story is brief, it is not out of character for this work; it describes most episodes in Rang byung rdo rje’s life equally briefly. Moreover, there is no reference in this text, or in any other early versions of his story, to

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an instant transferral to the god realms. The only text that includes this narrative is the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State. This suggests that the two narratives Gtsug lag phreng ba is combining here are the instantaneous transfer to the god realms from the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State and the entering the residence narrative from the Verse Liberation-Story.

As further evidence that this text-section is the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State I would also like to restate some of the literary analysis presented in chapter one. In this analysis I noted how this text makes an intriguing contrast with Rang byung rdo rje’s other self-penned liberation-story, the Verse Liberation-Story, in that its phrasing is somewhat unlike that of Rang byung rdo rje’s other compositions, but also contains elements that reflect his personal but direct style. Thus, as I also noted in that chapter, there is nothing in its literary style to discount its composition by Rang byung rdo rje and Gser khang pa. But it is of course a rather extraordinary text for a five year old to compose orally, even it was re-phrased by Gser khang pa.

3. A Description of his Other, Present Emanations
As described in chapter one, the text continues after the insert marked as the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State with a brief section that outlines Rang byung rdo rje’s other, present emanations. In style and format this matches the first section, on past lives, closely, and appears to be a continuation of the same text. It is very short, consisting of just over one page.

4. A Brief Survey of His Early Visions
This fourth section of the text is a description of the visions Rang byung rdo rje experienced as a young man. It is written in the third person, not by Rang byung rdo rje, although there is always the possibility that he encouraged its composition.18 The list of his visions begins with the one he experienced in the presence of (Pha) Dam pa sang rgyas’ statue at Ding ri glang skor and continues until his vision of Saraha in 1296, which is described in the first of the songs. It ends with the first few lines of that song. Although it includes several of his most often described early visions, the majority of those described here occurred in 1296, when he was twelve years old.

5. Colophon
The colophon to the text reads:

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18 David Templeman (2012) has described a similar composition by Tāranātha’s student, which was in fact composed under Tāranātha’s direction, thus giving him a greater opportunity to speak of his own qualities.
I, Rang byung rdo rje, "Lord of Yogis", do not remember the past very well, but, for the past three years, the faithful monk of Śākyamuni, Dar (ma) brtson (pa), has ardently requested me again and again to (write this down), so I have written it down. By the goodness of this deed, may all the types of wanderers, without exception, quickly attain the highest awakening.

The Liberation-Story of the Dharma Noble Rang byung rdo rje’s Previous Lives and “the ways he saw things” were written down clearly in Mtshur phu retreat centre, Śrī Khyung rdzong. This is The Liberation-Story of the Illustrious Dharma Noble Rang byung rdo rje. It is complete.19

This first part of this colophon, which is written by Rang byung rdo rje, appears to refer to the singularly composed text that consists of sections one and three of the greater text: the text into which the Liberation-Story of the In-Between State has been inserted. The later section of the colophon suggests that this text, along with the description of his visions—“the way he saw things”—were both composed around the same time, while Rang byung rdo rje was living at Khyung rdzong as a young man. As I explained in chapter four, they were therefore most probably part of his campaign to strengthen his claim to be Karma Pakshi’s reincarnation.

Si tu Pan chen does not include this text as a whole within his list of sources, but he does mention Liberation-Story of the In-Between State. As I explained in chapters three and four, the text that deals with his previous lives and present emanations, by contrast, seems to have been viewed as part of the greater Karmapa project, rather than a source of Rang byung rdo rje’s individual liberation-story.

b) Rang byung rdo rje’s The Verse Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje (Rang byung rdo rje’i rnam thar tshigs bcad ma).20

This text is also included within the Collected Works. It is a much longer text, constructed from three smaller texts. In this case, however, the colophons that follow each section make the format of this meta-text much easier to decipher. It is divided into the following sections:

1. Part One, written in Bde chen in 1324.21
2. Part Two, composed in Dadu in 1339.22
3. A description of Rang byung rdo rje’s death, requested by the Mongolian minister Beng ge.23

1. The Verse Liberation-Story: Part One

The first and second sections are both written in nine-syllable verse, and in Rang byung

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rdo rje's first-person voice, but their style is very different. *Part One* is by far the longest, and has all the hallmarks of a Rang byung rdo rje composition. As I discussed in chapter one, it incorporates many of the expressions found in his songs and plays with words in the same way.

It is also much more clearly structured than the other liberation-stories attributed to him. It begins with the disclaimer about his knowledge of the past that I discussed in chapter four, and then moves onto the more detailed and confident description of his past lives that I discussed in chapter five. This is followed by a description of his passage through the intermediate state, repeating many of the stories and sentiments of the *Liberation-Story of the In-Between State*, but also including the aforementioned oblique reference to the entrance into the dead boy’s body at ‘Phar tshang.

The rest of *Part One* includes a narrative of his early life, describing some external events but focusing on his visions. Just before its colophon there is a short rumination on his life and the purposes for which he has written this liberation-story. The colophon for this section is straightforward. Rang byung rdo rje’s dedication reads:

This brief, versified rendering of my liberation-story was written in response to the requests of the great scholar Sa nag pa and the meditator Shes rab rdo rje. It was written at Bde chen in the male, wood, mouse year (1324). May it be providential and decorate the world.

Rang byung rdo rje was forty years old in 1324, which suggests that this text is the source to which Si tu Pan chen refers when he speaks of a “liberation-story about his first forty years, which was written by the noble one himself (while he was staying) at Bde chen”.24

2. *The Verse Liberation-Story: Part Two*

This section of the text is much shorter than *Part One* and deals with most of the rest of his life. Like that of *Part One*, its narrative describes his external journeys and events, but focuses on internal visions and realisations. There is also significant crossover between the events that are detailed in this section of the text and his later songs. This text served as the main source for the last chapter of this thesis.

Although this section like the previous one is written in nine-syllable verse, it does not contain as many word plays or other literary devices. This in many ways fits with the claim in its colophon that it was dictated to a scribe rather than written.

Its colophon reads:

The precious dharma noble wrote this in Dadu’s Palace, on the eighth day of the

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second month of the rabbit year (1339). Its scribe was Dkon mchog 'byung gnas. May it be providential and decorate the world.\textsuperscript{25}

This dates the text to four months before Rang byung rdo rje’s death, and aligns it with the work Si tu Pañ chen says was composed by the Karmapa “when he was (staying) in the (Imperial) Palace in Dadu”.\textsuperscript{26}

Dkon mchog ‘byung gnas is mentioned in the Red Annals as “the vow holder” who was one of the sources for the story of Rang byung rdo rje’s demise in the capitals.\textsuperscript{27} This implies that he was one of the Tibetan monks who accompanied him to the capitals on his last journey.

3. A Description of his Death Requested by Governor Beng ge

The last section of the text is the shortest, lasting only several pages. It begins with the prophecy Rang byung rdo rje made about his own death, which I discussed in chapter seven. It then goes on to describe his thwarted efforts to convince the emperor to allow him to return to Tibet and his death in Xanadu, before describing his funeral and the fate of his relics. The colophon for this section reads:

May this stainless virtue, requested by Minister Beng ge, lead all travellers to be born at the feet of the dharma noble. May it be providential and decorate the world.

It does not say who wrote this final section of the text nor does it date its composition. Minister Beng ge, is most probably a Mongolian or Tangut (Mi nyag) name. A person with a similar name, Dben gu shri Dkon mchog rin chen, who was a minister in the Mongol Court, is mentioned in several retellings of the story.\textsuperscript{28} As will be explained in more detail shortly, this piece of writing is very similar to but slightly shorter than the story of his death told in Mkha’ spyod dbang po’s collation of The Verse Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje.

c) Mkha’ spyod dbang po’s collation of The Verse Liberation-Story of Rang byung rdo rje (Rang byung rdo rje’i rnam thar tshigs bcad ma)\textsuperscript{29}

This text is part of a larger project by the second Zhwa dmar pa, Mkha’ spyod dbang po (1350–1405) to compose liberation-stories about his predecessors in the Karma bka’ brgyud golden-\textit{malā} lineage. The larger project starts with a liberation-story of the Indian \textit{mahāsiddha} Tilopa, and ends with an extensive liberation-story of the fourth Karmapa Rol

\textsuperscript{25} Rang byung rdo rje (2006d:412).
\textsuperscript{26} Si tu Pañ chen (2004:401).
\textsuperscript{27} Kun dga’ rdo rje (1981:104).
\textsuperscript{28} Kun dga’ rdo rje (1981:106); and Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003:945).
\textsuperscript{29} Mkha’ spyod dbang po (1978b). Also published as: Mkha’ spyod dbang po (n.d.). But as this text, which is a photocopy of an old manuscript, is very difficult to read, I have relied on the first publication in this analysis.
pa'i rdo rje, who was Mkha’ spyod dbang po’s teacher. The text he presents of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story within this context is not, however, his own composition. It is a reframing of the Verse Liberation Story. By contrast to the previous redaction, this text can be divided into the following parts:

1. Introductory statement from Mkha’ spyod dbang po
2. The Verse Liberation-Story: Part One and Part Two
3. Rumination on writing liberation-stories from the end of Part One.
4. A Description of his Death Narrated by Kun dga’ ’od zer.
5. Colophon by Mkha’ spyod dbang po

1. Introductory statement from Mkha’ spyod dbang po
This introductory statement describes neatly how Mkha’ spyod dbang po will base his composite text on The Verse Liberation-Story. It reads:

This is a clear and easy to understand collation of (the elements) of the illustrious, omniscient, dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje’s Liberation-Story. As the noble one himself composed a simplified version (of this tale), and he was the only witness (to all of it), this makes his version genuine, so (I will) repeat it here.

2 and 3. The Verse Liberation-Story: Part One and Part Two
What follows the introduction is an almost word-for-word insertion of The Verse Liberation-Story, Part One and Part Two. The only major difference is that the section in which Rang byung rdo rje ruminates on the worth of writing a liberation-story is moved from the end of Part One to the end of Part Two. This means that there is no indication given of the break between the two sections.

As I mentioned in chapter four, there is also, of course, the one word difference between bla ma in this text and dam pa in the Collected Works version, which may have led readers to assume a different birthplace for Rang byung rdo rje.

4. A Description of his Death Narrated by Kun dga’ ’od zer
According to the colophon that follows it, this last section of the text was composed by Kun dga’ ’od zer. This probably refers to the person whom the Blue Annals describes as both a

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35 This introductory statement is not included at the beginning of the other publication of this text (Mkha’ spyod dbang po, n.d.:1).
36 Mkha’ spyod dbang po (1978b:123). Tib. dpal ldan chos kyi rje thams cad mkhen pa rang byung rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa ni 'dus shing gsal ba go bde bar rje nyid kyi phyogs gcig tu bs dus pa kho na dpang dang tshad mar gyur pa yin pas de brjod pa.
37 Mkha’ spyod dbang po (1978b:149).
teacher of Mkha’ spyod dbang po and a student of Rang byung rdo rje. It begins by stating that Rang byung rdo rje manifested death in order to “refute those who held the doctrine of eternalism”. It ends four pages later with the prayer that those “who think of his liberation-story later will be reborn at the feet of Maitreya in Tuṣita”.

This section of the text is very similar to the description of his death at the end of the Verse Liberation-Story. This suggests that Kun dga’ ’od zer composed this text following Minister Beng ge’s request, and it was either condensed to create the previously mentioned description of his death, or the previous text was expanded on by Kun dga’ ’od zer—perhaps at Mkha’ spyod dbang po’s request—to create this longer version of the text. This also means that either the longer or shorter version of this story could be the text that Si tu Pan chen refers to as “the liberation-story of his final activities that was written by the great scholar Kun dga’ ’od zer”.

5. Colophon by Mkha’ spyod dbang po

The colophon at the end of the entire text reads:

I can enumerate many (versions of his liberation-story), including The Liberation Story of the In-Between State and so forth. (In this text), the (story of the) period until his fortieth year was composed (by him) at Bde chen. The (liberation-story he composed about) the subsequent period, of his stay in China, has been condensed (by me). (It is presented) along with the (story of) his death, which was composed by Kun dga’ ’od zer spontaneously. May this be a support for the aspirations of those who have confidence in him.

This colophon suggests two things. First, as mentioned in chapter one even in Mkha’ spyod dbang po’s time, The Liberation Story of the In-Between State was a known entity that was held in high regard and was in some ways viewed as a companion text to this compilation. Second, the three sections of this text are three individual works, even though they were not marked as such within the text; Mkha’ spyod dbang po makes a break between the two parts of the liberation-story here in the colophon although he does not make a similar break within the text itself.

2. Non-Extant Early Texts

a) A liberation-story by the scholar Shes rab rin chen

This text is included within the list of sources that Si tu Pan chen gives for his composition of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story. His exact description reads: “the liberation-story

41 Si tu Pan chen (2004:401).
of the (period) up to his journey to China was composed at Lha stengs by the scholar Shes rab rin chen. 43 I cannot align this description in any certain way with any of the texts or sub-texts that I have found, and, like Seegers before me, I have been unable to locate it as an individual text. In fact, it is difficult to establish any other biographical details about Shes rab rin chen apart from his composition of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story. 44

As it is an early, non-extant text, it would be tempting to suggest—as other scholars have done in relation to The Liberation Story of the In-Between State—that this work must contain all the narrative elements found in later redactions that have no source in extant versions. This is particularly tempting when there are several vignettes contained within later redactions that have no source in the early extant texts of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story, or in the liberation-stories of other figures from the same era. 45 These stories include: Rang byung rdo rje’s journey into the village with his parents; the scepticism of Mtshur phu’s monks on his arrival; the finding of treasure in Lho brag; the distribution of medicine water in the Stod lung Valley; the recognition of O rgyan pa’s reincarnation; the extraction of the long-life water on his return to Tibet; his interactions with the emissaries in Lhasa; and his stopping to take a bath during his last journey to Xanadu. Yet it is also possible that these stories were taken from others’ liberation-stories that I have not read or from oral sources, rather than another liberation-story about Rang byung rdo rje.

The most extensive episode that does not have any precedent in these earlier texts is the one in which Rang byung rdo rje provides a complex, ontological presentation of the processes of his rebirth. This episode is included within Gtsug lag phreng ba’s A Feast for Scholars, and reproduced virtually word-for-word in Si tu Pañ chen’s A Mālā of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons, but while the setting is described in earlier texts, the exchange is not. Indeed, as I described in chapter four, these early texts do not even provide any narrative impetus for the exchange to take place; Rang byung rdo rje simply states that he established an emanation in La stod when he began to feel ill, or died in Mtshur phu one full year before his birth there. The only reason the episode in which he explains the short time frame for his sojourn in the in-between state was included in later versions of the story is because developments in the discourse surrounding the ontology of reincarnation

44 I must disagree with Seegers (2009:41), however, that Si tu Pañ chen’s description of him as: “the author of the biography of the Lord (rje’i rnam thar mdzad pa po)... implies that his compilation has become a major source of all later biographies.” In my reading of this passage, it seems to me more likely that rather than this description suggesting that this liberation-story was a major source for later compositions, it merely means that Shes rab rin chen was not remembered for any other reason than his composition of one of Rang byung rdo rje’s early liberation-stories.
45 These meetings include his interactions with G.yag sde pañ chen (Si tu Pañ chen, 2004:372), Dol po pa (Si tu Pañ chen, 2004:375–376) and some of the details of his interactions with O rgyan pa (Bsod nams ’od zer, 1997:248–249).
required a more detailed description of this in-between experience than had been presented in earlier tales.

As it is unlikely that either Gtsug lag phreng ba or Si tu Pan chen would have felt culturally empowered to invent this episode, they most probably relied on an earlier text or oral tradition to compose it. As noted in chapter four, this section of the story does not fit neatly with the other elements of the story in the details of its discourse, so it was most likely developed (or composed apocryphally) at some point after Rang byung rdo rje’s life. Coincidently, as Seegers has pointed out, in the list of non-extant texts that A legs gzhan dkar lists at the beginning of his Collected Works of Rang byung rdo rje there is one text that could very easily have been the source of this story. Its title says it all.

b) The Liberation-Story that Details What the Precious One, Rang byung rdo rje said in La stod Pu tra to Guru U rgyan pa When He Was Six Years Old.

It is striking to note that neither Gtsug lag phreng ba nor Si tu Pan chen explicitly lists a text with this name in their review of sources. This suggests either that this section of text was included within one of the other works to which they had access, or it is the text that Si tu Pan chen calls “a detailed liberation-story by an uncertain author”.

3. Coloured Annals

As Leonard van der Kuijp has noted, both the Tibetan word for “annal” deb ther, from the Mongolian word debter, and the custom of naming works in this genre through colours were introduced into Tibet during the period of Mongol rule. Two of the most influential of these coloured annals, the Red Annals and the Blue Annals contain versions of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story.

a) The Red Annals (Deb ther dmar po)

As I explained in chapter one, however, and will elaborate more here, there are significant problems with the traditional attribution and dating of the section that describes Rang byung rdo rje’s life in the older of these two annals, the Red Annals.

The section of the Red Annals that describes Rang byung rdo rje’s life has been an object of study for almost every scholar who has researched the early Karmapas’ lives. These

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50 Powers and Templeman (2012:183–184) discuss this work in some detail; and Schaeffer (2011) has also provided a succinct overview of the text and its genre online.
51 In chronological order, these include: Schaeffer (1995: 6–14); Manson (2009); and Berounský (2010 and 2011).
scholars seem to have relied on the *Red Annals* and afforded it more credibility than other sources, mainly because of its age.\(^{52}\) Berounský even produced a very helpful translation of an extract from it that relays the early part of Rang byung rdo rje’s life.\(^{53}\)

The credibility given to the *Red Annals* has come about in part because, as van der Kuijp has noted, it is, "The earliest extant Tibetan example of an attempt at writing a global history".\(^ {54}\) It was completed in 1363 by the tenth Tshal Myriarch, Tshal pa Kun dga’ rdo rje (1309–1364), who was for a time Rang byung rdo rje’s local ruler at Mtshur phu. This means that if there was a liberation-story of Rang byung rdo rje that could be attributed to Kun dga’ rdo rje it would be the earliest other-penned version of his story, and would have been completed by a person who knew him personally but was from a different lineage than his. This would be a very interesting document.

But a close reading of the surviving redactions of the *Red Annals* suggests that the text that survives today with this name is a more complicated, composite work than has generally been acknowledged. A thorough study of this work, and an analysis of its contents, is a desideratum for the field of Tibetan studies, and what follows here is most certainly not that study. Nevertheless, to establish the veracity and venerability of this text as a source for my research on Rang byung rdo rje’s life and travels, I have undertaken some preliminary enquiries into its structure and publication history. The results of these enquiries are as follows.

Two easily available redactions of this work have been published in modern times, the first in Gangtok in 1961 by the Namgyal Institute of Technology,\(^ {55}\) and the second in 1981 in Beijing by the Nationalities Press.\(^ {56}\) This text was prepared by the renowned Tibetan scholar Dung dkar blo bzang ’phrin las.

The text published in Gangtok is called *The Red Annals: Part One* (unfortunately part two was never published). Its introduction states that it was copied for publication from an “original text” in the house of “a Tibetan family now migrated to south of the Himalayas (from Tibet)”.\(^ {57}\) It is much smaller work than the text published in Beijing. But despite its small size and relatively straightforward textual genealogy, elements within it have been added to Kun dga’ rdo rje’s composition. On page twenty-nine, for example, the section on the history of the Mongol Kings ends with Toghun Temür’s death; this occurred in 1370, six years after Kun dga’ rdo rje passed away.\(^ {58}\)

The Beijing edition of the text by contrast was transcribed from the contents of nine

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\(^{52}\) Berounský (2011:24).

\(^{53}\) Berounský (2011:24–26).

\(^{54}\) Van der Kuijp (1996:44–45).

\(^{55}\) Kun dga’ rdo rje (1961:29).

\(^{56}\) Kun dga’ rdo rje (1981: foreword).

\(^{57}\) Kun dga’ rdo rje (1961:29).

\(^{58}\) Kun dga’ rdo rje (1961:29).
different versions of the Red Annals and is more obviously a layered text, one that includes Kun dga’ rdo rje’s original composition with supplements added over the centuries. The evidence for this form of composition is particularly clear in the section of the text dedicated to the first through the fourth Karmapas. Indeed, as Dung dkar blo bzang ’phrin las explains in the introduction to the work, this section, along with several others, was only contained within two of the nine manuscripts used as sources for his redaction. He describes these texts and their extra elements in the following manner:

There are two versions of Red Annals at the Arts Administration Bureau of the Tibetan Autonomous Region that contain sections of text not in other versions. These include:

(a) The conclusion to the Sa skya history: (that contains) the lineage of vow holders, the teachings’ succession until the Pañ chen; and the Tibetan lineage of preceptors (for monks’ vows). This accounts for more than two pages in this section on the spread of the upper Vinaya.

b) Within the (section on the) Dwags po bka’ brgyud, the section from the conclusion of Dwags (po) sgom Tshul khrims snying po’s (1116–1169) history up to the section on Sugata Phag mo gru pa’s (1110–1170) history. This includes the histories of Karma pa Dus gsum mkhyen pa, Karma pa Pakshi, Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje and the fourth Karma pa. This comes to a total of thirty-two pages.

d) Also, the section from the conclusion of the lineage of the preceptors in the Lhasa congregation up to the end of the book, which is the section that starts with the story of Bla ma Zhang of Gung thang and ends with Bla ma Sangs rgyas ‘od zer. This is ten pages in the Tshal pa bka’ brgyud section of the text.

Altogether this comes to about forty pages of the book.59

A thorough study of this work would analyse all of these sections, but for now I must restrict my investigation to the second of these additional sections, which retells the early Karmapas’ life-stories. This section is not found in the Gangtok edition, which moves directly, on page seventy-two, from the history of Dwags (po) sgom tshul khrims snying po to the history of Sugata Phag mo gru pa.60

As Seegers has noted in his work on Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-stories,61 Luciano Petech expressed doubts about this section of the text as early as 1990 when he suggested that the middle section of this edition, which relays the liberation-stories of the Karma bka’ brgyud, is “disproportionately long (almost a quarter of the whole book) and not quite in harmony with the structure of the work; (and therefore) looks like a later addition”.62 He goes on to add that: “Its relationship with the first portion of (Si tu Pañ chen’s A Mālā of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons) is unmistakable, but I am not prepared to

59 Dung dkar blo bzang ’phrin las in the introduction to Kun dga’ rdo rje (1981:2).
60 Kun dga’rdo rje (1981:72).
61 Seegers (2009:37–38). As Seegers points out, Schaeffer (1995:7, note 2) also made a note about this passage from Petech in his work, but chose not to engage with it.
62 Luciano Petech (1990:2).
decide whether this section was copied from (A Mālā of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons) or the other way round.\textsuperscript{63}

By reading this section of the texts closely, I can offer two pieces of evidence that accord with Petech’s assessment that the Karma bka’ brgyud section of the text does appear to be a later addition to the original text. The first such piece of evidence is found in Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story when Kun dga’ rdo rje himself makes an appearance. This is within the list of designated recipients for offerings that Rang byung rdo rje brings back from the Mongolian court. Here the author describes the presentation to the Tshal Myriarch with the Chinese honorific title “Situ”\textsuperscript{64} in the following manner: “the seal of ‘Situ’ was granted to the great and good yogi of Tshal (Dge sbyong chen po)”.\textsuperscript{65} This means that whoever wrote this text referred to Kun dga’ rdo rje by the honorific expression “Dge sbyong chen po”, which is an epithet for the Buddha, and not commonly used to describe oneself. Kun dga’ rdo rje is again bestowed with this grand name in the list of Rang byung rdo rje’s students.\textsuperscript{66}

The second piece of evidence is the abrupt ending to the fourth Karmapa, Rol pa’i rdo rje’s liberation-story. Like most liberation-stories composed before Gtsang smyon Heruka’s more literally nuanced remodelling of the genre, this tale follows a basic pattern in which it begins a new episode with either a date marker, a place marker or some combination of the two, and then provides the narrative of an event that occurred in that time or place. The last sentence of this story begins with these markers, but does not describe any event after them. It reads:

In the second month of the year of the rabbit (1363), he travelled from the North, and eight days before the third month had finished, he arrived in the upper (area of Tshal).\textsuperscript{67}

This does not read like the last line of any Tibetan story. The only clue as to why the narrative has to finish so abruptly at this point is its date; 1363 is the year in which Tshal pa Kun dga’ rdo rje completed The Red Annals, and this is the first mention of this year in the narrative. This at least shows that those who added this section to the original text were possessed of more temporal diligence than those who added the description of Toghu Temür’s life to the end of the section on Mongolian history.

Having agreed with Petech up to this point, however, I must now disagree with him on the link that he makes between this work and Si tu Paṇ chen’s eighteenth-century

\textsuperscript{63} Luciano Petech (1990:2).
\textsuperscript{64} This event is described in Sørensen, Hazo and Gyatso (2007:166) from the perspective of a Tshal chronicle.
\textsuperscript{65} Kun dga’ rdo rje (1981:102).
\textsuperscript{66} Kun dga’ rdo rje (1981:107).
\textsuperscript{67} Kun dga’ rdo rje (1981:121). Tib. yos lo zla ba gnyis pa la byang ngos nas yong zla ba gsum pa theb bton pa’i brgyad pa la yar slebs byung ngo.
composition, *A Mālā of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons*. In contrast to him, I would suggest that this section of the text is most probably extracted from a much earlier text composed in either the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, before the composition of *A Feast for Scholars: A Dharma History*. I make this suggestion based on two differences between the text inserted within the *Red Annals* and *A Feast for Scholars*. The first is that the description of the reincarnation system in this insert is not anywhere near as elaborate, shrouded in ritual, and fixed in ontology as it is in *A Feast for Scholars*. Unlike in later texts, for example, there is no need here to explain away the third Karmapa’s description of the womb, or the timespan between the second Karmapa’s death and his birth. The second reason is that there are other parts of the narrative that are obfuscated in later versions of the story but left clear in this redaction. These include Rang byung rdo rje’s humble upbringing and the fact that members of Karma Pakshi’s family remained the abbots of Mtshur phu for the third Karmapa’s entire life.

Before completing this analysis of this text, I would like to offer a preliminary guess as to why this section on the Karmapas is the longest of the sections to be added to the text. My guess is that as the reincarnation tradition became more established, and the Karmapas’ collective star rose, it would have become necessary to add their history retrospectively to a text that had originally been focused on clan lineages. This thesis is supported by the fact that the other elements added to the text, also emphasised the religious and particularly monastic histories of other clans and the monasteries with which they were associated. As noted, however, this is still a preliminary finding and any definitive statement about these additions would require much more analysis.

**b) The Blue Annals**

The *Blue Annals* was composed in 1478 when its author ’Gos Lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal (1392–1481) was eighty-four. It is an omnibus work that follows the various lineages of tantric Buddhism in India and Tibet. It has also had a great influence on contemporary scholarship thanks to its translation in 1946 under the direction of George N. Roerich, who was supposedly helped greatly in this endeavour by Dge ’dun chos ’phel. The story of Rang byung rdo rje’s life that is included within it is straightforward. It evidently uses part one of the *Verse Liberation-Story* as its primary source, as its narrative ends abruptly when the *Verse Liberation-Story*’s narrative ends. It states: “He again proceeded to China, and there passed away. (Rang byung rdo rje) himself appeared sitting in the mandala of the

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71 ’Gos Lo tsā ba, George Roerich, and Dge ’dun chos ’phel (1988). Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story is on pages 487–493. For a description of Dge ’dun chos ’phel’s involvement in the process, see the introduction to Dge ’dun chos ’phel and Donald S. Lopez (2009).
Moon, and the Emperor and his retinue were filled with faith."\(^{72}\)

Before this, however, the *Blue Annals* also describes the composition of *The Liberation-Story of the In-Between State* and Rang byung rdo rje’s aided journey to Mtshur phu; and as one would expect from a source whose primary function is to trace lineages, it also enumerates in relative detail the teachings he received from various sources.

4. **Karma bka’ brgyud Lineage Histories**

The composition of Karma bka’ brgyud lineage histories most probably began before the composition of the insert into the *Red Annals* containing the liberation-stories of the Karmapas, and continues even today.

There have been several major retellings of this grand narrative by a variety of storytellers,\(^{73}\) but three retellings seem to have had the greatest impact on Rang byung rdo rje’s story, and have been cited most extensively by other redactors. As these three retellings are written in two similar genres, I will include a short overview of these genre styles in my brief analysis of the texts.

**a) Tshe dbang rgyal’s *Lho Rong Dharma History***

The TBRC dates Tshe dbang rgyal’s life to the fifteenth century. The *Lho Rong Dharma History* is an early composition in the *Dharma History* genre, which generally traces various lineal histories, focusing on the transmission of teachings. Tshe dbang rgyal’s text consists of brief liberation-stories of the various Bka’ brgyud lineages. As Martin and Bentor have explained, it is called the *Lho Rong Dharma History* "after the location of the family estates of the author".\(^{74}\) Its source, in turn, was a non-extant text called *The Empty Light that Opens the Eyes: A Dharma History* (*Chos byung mig byed ’od stong*), by a person called Chos rje spyan snga.\(^{75}\)

The *Lho Rong Dharma History* gives a brief overview of Rang byung rdo rje’s life that seems to be based on his *Verse Liberation-Stories* as it does not include any details from his period in the in-between state. As noted in chapter six, it is also the first text to include the story of Rang byung rdo rje’s treasure revealing, but in doing so insists that it is only mentioning this episode to reflect on how secretive Rang byung rdo rje himself had been about this process, and how openly it was being taught during the period of the text’s composition.

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\(^{73}\) Many of these are listed in the chart in part two of this appendix.


\(^{75}\) Dan Martin and Yael Bentor (1997:70).
b) Gtsug lag phreng ba’s Feast for Scholars: A Dharma History (Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston)\textsuperscript{76}

The Lho Rong Dharma History may have been a forerunner in many ways, but perhaps the greatest influence on the developed version of Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story was a composition by Gtsug lag phreng ba (1503–1565) called Feast for Scholars: A Dharma History, which was composed between the years 1545 and 1565.\textsuperscript{77} Gtsug lag phreng ba was a renowned scholar who acted as the regent of the Karma bka’ brgyud for some of the interregnum between the death of the eighth Karmapa and the ascension of the ninth.\textsuperscript{78} His dharma history, as Martin and Bentor have described, is “an extensive history of Buddhism in India and Tibet of all schools, but with most emphasis on the Karma bka’-brgyud-pa”.\textsuperscript{79}

This work is particularly interesting in the case of the present study as it makes perhaps the greatest and therefore most obvious effort to reframe Rang byung rdo rje’s story within later discursive developments, particularly—as I have discussed in the body of this thesis—those related to the ideas of sprul skus and body-mālās. This is apparent in the commentary in which it frames the Liberation-story of the In-Between State, which it includes almost in full.

c) Si tu Pañ chen’s A Mālā of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons: A Golden Mālā of the (Karma) bka’ brgyud (Bka’ brgyud gser phreng rnam thar zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba).\textsuperscript{80}

By contrast with Feast for Scholars, A Mālā of Clearly Reflected Crystal Moons by Si tu Pañ chen (1700–1774) is a work that focuses solely on the golden mālā of the Karma bka’ brgyud lineage.\textsuperscript{81} As such, it includes the liberation-stories of the first through to the ninth Karmapas.

The section in this work that deals with Rang byung rdo rje is very similar to Feast for Scholars’ retelling of the same tale. There are, though, a couple of striking differences in the texts’ content and style. First, Si tu Pañ chen does not include some of the explanatory sections that Gtsug lag phreng ba felt necessary to include, particularly those referring to Rang byung rdo rje’s birth and recognition as a sprul sku. Second, unlike in Feast for Scholars, the extracts from Rang byung rdo rje’s own writing and the main narrative of this

\textsuperscript{76} Gtsug lag phreng ba (2003). Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story is on pages 918–946.

\textsuperscript{77} Dan Martin and Yael Bentor (1997:89); Powers and Templeman (2012:243).

\textsuperscript{78} Samten Choshel (2010).

\textsuperscript{79} Dan Martin and Yael Bentor (1997:89).

\textsuperscript{80} Si tu Pañ chen (2004). Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-story is recorded on pages 345–402.

\textsuperscript{81} An excellent biography of him was produced by David Jackson (2009) in conjunction with an exhibition of his work at the Rubin Museum of Art.
section of the work are blended relatively seamlessly into the greater narrative. This
occurs in part because of Si tu Pañ chen’s remarkable skill with the Tibetan language, but
it is also reflective of the fact that unlike Gtsug lag phreng ba, he was telling a well-known
and non-controversial tale, and therefore did not need to expatiate on any perceived
inconsistencies in the story.

One other way that the two works are notably different is that Si tu Pañ chen includes a
list of his sources at the end of his segment. It reads:

This liberation story of the precious dharma noble, Rang byung rdo rje (is sourced
from):
1) The *Liberation-Story of the In-Between State*, which was composed by Mkhas
btsun gser khang pa who took notes when the noble one recited (this tale) to him
as a young man;
2) The liberation-story that the noble one himself wrote while staying in Bde chen,
(which describes) his first forty years;
3) The liberation-story that he composed at the palace in Dadu, (which describes
the period) until his passing away;
4) The liberation-story of his final activities, composed by Mkhan chen Kun dga’ ‘od
zer; (and)
5) The liberation-story of the (the period) until his journey to China, which was
composed at Lha stengs by the scholar Shes rab rin chen.

I also based my work on:
6) A detailed liberation-story by an uncertain author; (and)
7) The texts written by Mkha’ spyod dbang po and Gtsug lag phreng ba.

In an effort to compose a slightly more extensive (version) of the story, I
supplemented (the stories found in these texts) with details from
8) The *Red Annals* of Tshal; (and)
9) Other trustworthy records.⁸²

As noted in chapter one, this list is interesting because it shows Si tu Pañ chen had access
to all these sources at Dpal spungs Monastery in the eighteenth century, which suggests
that Rang byung rdo rje’s liberation-stories had been copied in manuscripts, and made
their way to Khams. It is also noteworthy that he has described the *Red Annals* as a source
of supplementary details, rather than biographical facts. This perhaps suggests that like
the version of the *Red Annals* published in Sikkim, the copy he had access to did not
include a section on the Karmapas.

⁸² Si tu Pañ chen (2004:401). Seegers (2009:41) presents an alternate translation of this list. As there are so
many differences between his and my translation, what follows is the Tibetan text of the relevant section for
others to peruse. Tib. Chos rje rin po che rang ‘byung rdo rje’i rnam par thar pa ’di ni. rje nyid sku na phra mo’i
dus kyi gsung, mkhas btsun gser khang pas zin btsis su btags pa’i rnam thar bar dor mar grags pa dang. sgrugs lo
bzhi bcu yan gyi rnam thar rje nyid kyis Bde chen du mdzad pa dang. de nas mya ngan ’da’ ka tshun gyi rnam thar
pho brang chen pa ta’i tur mdzad pa dang. mdzad pa tha ma’i rnam thar mkhan chen kun dga’ ‘od zer kyis mdzad
pa dang. rgya yul du phibs ka yan gyi rnam thar mkhas pa shes rab rin chen gyis Lha stengs du mdzad pa dang.
yang mdzad po ma nges pa’i rnam thar zhib mo zhiq dang. Mkha’ spyod dbang po dang. Gtsug lag phreng pas
mdzad pa rnam las gzhi byas. tshal pa’i deb ther sog yig cha khungs btsun gzhan nas kyang kha bskong ste. cung
zad rgyad pa’i khul du sbyar ba’o.
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<td>Zla ba seng ge</td>
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<td>&quot;Rang gi bla ma karma pa yi bgyud pa yongs ru bzang thub-par bskyangs pa dang thub-dbang sku gdung mchol gnas su byon-pa'i skor&quot; (&quot;Our own guru the Karmapa's lineage, and how he travelled to the sacred sites, establishing perfect stigpas of 'the great one's relics'). In *Chos rje rin po che U rgyan pa'i rnam thar gsung sgros ma (A Spoken Liberation-Story of the Dharma Noble U rgyan pa).&quot;</td>
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Appendix Three:  
*The Liberation-Story of the Illustrious Rang byung rdo rje*


[Introduction]

*Om-sarva-svasti-siddhi-hum. E Ma Ho!*

The deeds and activities of past, present and future Sugatas and bodhisattvas are inconceivable; they possess the eight siddhis and the rest. Amongst this (group) is the master whose birth was miraculous, Padma-raja. (And even now) there is one who is an agent of inspiration, one who insists that I, this end-of-time yogi and others (like me) are lucky. This person is the lord of O rgyan, the noble guru, and I bow to him.

Perpetually, in endless saṃsāra, the dense gloom of ignorance obscured my unruly mind. This meant that I was persistently unaware of the best goal and even the teachings. Now (we live in) the first troublesome age (rtsod ldan). In the first, golden age (rdzogs ldan) one could see Indrabhuti’s (Antrabhuti1) adherents, and they were beautiful, and famous for their kindness throughout the world. [355] (Time) up until this point has been inconceivably (long); as inconceivable as the time it would take to empty a sesame seed store were you to remove one sesame seed a year. Ultimately, it is said, there is no transition (from life to life). And at this time, Rang byung rdo rje, the end-of-time yogi, does not recall the details of former and later times (very well): my memory is cloudy, obscured, and gloomy. This is why, with encouragement, I am writing a little of what I do remember. I do remember that I was born many times before in the land of India; and (I do remember) that I was born repeatedly without control. But the doubters will not even believe that. Here are a few (of my memories) from that time.

*The Liberation-Story of his Past-Lives*

1. In the main temple of Śrī Kamalaśīla (Nālandā) [356], I was a novice who (studied) in the presence of two scholars called Śuryagarbha (Nyi ma’i snying po) and the master Akarasiti. Then, I went to another land, and met a master there. It is as if his name was Nāgārjuna.

2. After that, it appears I was a student of the master Padmasambhava, and I attained the power of Śrī Hayagrīva. This gave me the apparent power to shine forth a variety of emanations, and this in turn meant that I could help wanderers with various types of magic and powers. But I only remember parts of this, and besides, if I say too much about it, who will believe me? This is the time of the one known famously as Rgyal ba mchog dbyangs of Ngan lam, and it is as if I was him.

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1 O rgyan ryal po byang chub dbang po in Tibetan, is an early Indian master from present Afghanistan and one of the eighty-four Indian mahāsiddhas. See: Dowman (1985:229-234).
3. What is more, in the interim, from the naturalness in which nothing is generated and nothing stops, from the various displays of activity and embodiment, I was also an Indian yogi. This was the time of Dharmabodhi and it was as if I was him: (a being) inspired by the past, present and future buddhas, and the eight great mahāsiddhas, who (also) received blessings from countless yoga lords.

4. I have a connection with the noble Kamalāśila; it would seem that I was his student and received [357] a few of his instructions. But I should not talk pointlessly.

5. I also wonder if I was the Bka’ gdamgs dge bshes called Pu to ba (Po to ba). At that time, I knew Kha rag sgom chung, and the leftover imprints from that time ensure that as soon as I see the instructions of Kha rag these days, an excellent understanding of them is generated in my mind-stream. As well as these, I have a connection with the one known as Sne zur chen po.

I also remember a few other (lives and emanations), but if I were to speak of them, no one would believe me; they do not have the capacity to believe me.

6. Sometimes I also feel that I was none other than the illustrious Dus gsum mkhyen pa, the precious Karmapa. I knew the instructions of the illustrious Dus gsum mkhyen pa instinctively; I knew them instinctively and I understood them instinctively.

7. As well as this, it is as if I was the teacher, the Indian yogi called Chos kyi dbang phyug, blessed by Mitri (Maitreya), who without differentiating between staying or going displayed many pure visions to his disciples. I understand impartiality (because of this life) and other (similar concepts).

8. I (also) knew the instructions of the great Karmapa (Karma Pakshi) by merely hearing them. He is the wanderers’ protector, who views them all with great love, and I could see (directly) the vital points of his instructions on mind and prāṇa. [358]

It is for this reason that I maintain Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s seats. By doing so I can (also) introduce (disciples) to the three bodies, (leading them) on the paths of ripening and liberation that are characterised by emptiness. It is for this reason that these days I work impartially for beings. By my doing this may all my disciples understand and realise impartially the vital points of mind and prāṇa, thus becoming wise.

This up to here has been about his past lives. Now here is The Liberation Story of the In-Between State.

The Liberation Story of the In-Between State

In the first month of the sheep year, I felt a little uncomfortable in my elements. At that time, I was the one known famously as the Karmapa, and this was a sign that I should depart for another pure land (i.e., die). So I performed an inconceivable magic. I flew into the sky in a rainbow body, travelling upwards to the god realms. There I was greeted with a variety of divine music performed by the gods. Many (other) inconceivable things (also) appeared to me, including innumerable divine parasols. In addition, (I watched as) bodhisattvas like Maitreya performed the deeds of awakening. Together (he and his entourage) cultivated immeasurable compassion for beings, training without respite in a state where nothing is generated and nothing stops.

While I stayed there, [359] the twenty-five “landmark dākinīs” (zing skyong ‘gro ma nyi shu rtṣa lnga) arrived, and spoke to me in a vision (nyams snang). They said:

Take a human rebirth with time and chances,
protect the Buddha's teachings,  
parent the six (types) of wanderers;  
the time has come, Samaya!

This is what I saw. I thought (their appearance) was a faulty vision, so I started trying to destroy the conceptualisation, but these celestial wanderers did not want to wander off. (Eventually) I replied to them:

You came here, but from where did you come?  
You are here, but when will you leave?

I don't have the parents to make a person with the time and chance,  
I don’t have the wisdom to protect the Buddha's teachings,  
I don’t have the residual karma to parent the six (types) of wanderers.  
You need to find another regent to make prophecies about!

That is what I said to them, but then they replied:

We come from the depths of the human world,  
we are the landmark däkinis who protect the environment.  
We do not need to scold you (for ourselves) human,  
we scold you on behalf of the six (types) of wanderers.

That is what they said, and then they offered me their life-forces (srog snying). They were (in the following groups):

The five exceptional, principal landmark däkinis: 1) at the secret (place), Rdo rje thog 'bebs ma (Descending Vajra, Moving Upwards); 2) at the top of my head, Rdo rje dpal 'bar ma (Blazing Splendour Vajra); 3) at my extremities, Rdo rje stobs mo che (Very Strong Vajra); 4) at my hands, Rdo rje mthu rgyal ma (Powerful Victory Vajra); 5) at my mouth, Rdo rje dung sgra ma (Roaring Conch Vajra).

The four principal tamed demonesses: 1) Bdag chen mo rdo rje kun grags ma (Great Being, Vajra Famous Everywhere); 2) Gangs kyi yum chen rdo rje kun tu bzang (Vajra Samantabhadri, Great Snow Mother); 3) Dpal ldan lha rdo rje ya ma skyong (Lady Divine Mountain, Vajra Protector from Yama); 4) 'Brog chen 'khor 'dul rdo rje bgegs gtsos (Vajra Principle Bgegs Great Pastures' Tamer).

The four principal dharma protectors: 1) Btud la 'gro bzang ma (Stooped, Good Lady); 2) Mi g.yo rdo rje glang bzang ma (Immovable, Good Vajra, Willow/Cow Lady); 3) Bkra bshis rdo rje tshe ring ma (Auspicious, Long-life Vajra Lady); 4) Stag gzig rdo rje khyung mgo (Tajik, Garuda-head, Vajra Lady).

The four principal tamed harmful spirits: 1) Gangs dkar sha rdo med rdo rje spyan gcig ma (Vajra One-Eye Skeletal Snow White); 2) Gser chen mkha' lding ma rdo rje rlung mo che (Great Golden Garuda, Vajra Great Windy Lady); 3) Kha rag khyung btsun rdo rje dpal gyi yum (Noble Garuda of Kha rag, vajra illustrious mother); 4) Rma ri rab 'byams rdo rje grags mo rgyal (Great Rma, Sporn ra Snow Mountain, Vajra Renowned Victor).

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2 These are four of the twelve protectresses (bstan ma bcu gnyis) who were subjugated by Padmasambhava.  
3 A Bgegs is one of the many classes of indigenous Tibetan spirits.  
4 The first three of these are three of the five sisters of long life (tshe ring mched Inga); the last could refer to either of the other two from this group Mthing gi zhal bzang ma or Cod pan mgrin bzang ma.  
5 These are four of the twelve protectresses (bstan ma bcu gnyis), who are alternately called the "Four Female Yaksini" (bdud 'dul bzhis).
The principal protectors of the four gates: 1) Sa tri rdo rje 'bri bzangs ma (Vajra-satri, Wholesome Female Yak); 2) Tāg sha dung gi rdo rje sgo mo che (Great Conch-Vajra of the Tāgshi (Tajik) Door); 3) Chags so rdo rje stobs mo che (Chags, Vajra Lady (with) Great Power); 4) Gha gha rdo rje ral gri ma (Ghagha, Vajra Sword).

The four primary mind changers: 5) Kong btsun de mo rdo rje bod kham skyong (Lady of De mo in Kong po, Vajra protector of Tibet); 2) Btsan la la ro rdo rje sman gcig ma (La la tog btsan spirit, Vajra Singular Sman mo); 3) Ma btsun khug chos rdo rje gyar mo bsil (Noble Lady of Khug chos, Cool G.yar mo’s Vajra Lady); 4) G.yu yi sked snyan rdo rje si le ma (Vajra Silema, Turquoise Vajra Poetry).

(Then the dākinīs all said):

“If we cannot convince you (to take rebirth), we will call up our many companions (to do it). Who will we call you may ask? We will call the dharma protector Ber nag can, and the four female, great, principal protectors of the four hidden lands. If we cannot convince you, they will—by filling this world (with their presence) from the space of the dancing deities to the underground world of the nāgas. This is what they said, and as I listened (to them speak) it happened. (Then they said), “Well then, our companions have arrived. Here are the four great women: (at the top) Vajra-satri; below her the virtuous Vajra Li, protector of children (Rdo rje bu skyong li btsun); below her, Vajra Waterfall, the singular sman mo (Rdo rje phu chu sman gcig ma); and below her Vajra Small Turquoise (Rdo rje g.yu chung ma). These are the four protectors of hidden lands, and with them is the dharma protector, Ber nag can. From the shadows, they (all) praise bodies that do not pass into nirvāṇa.”

This is what they said. And they stayed in front of me, using these words to admonish me:

Have compassion for the six (types) of wanderers!  
How confused they are, living in samsāra!  
Do this for wanderers, for beings!

This is what they said and while this vision was there, I thought, “I wonder if this is a manifestation of my imprints?” But the concept died and I did not want to go (down to earth). Then, again and again they admonished me, and as they did, this is how I replied:

Anger makes preconceived self-grasping durable,  
the mountain of pride reaches into the sky.  
Hearing (your words is like) being pierced by a chisel,  
it is a rock, a missile hurled at my meditation.  
Why don’t I see you disintegrating, cracking and fading away?  
Are the six (types) of wanderers all happy and healthy?  
(Of course not), so why do you all, their protectors, look so joyful?

This is what I said. Then they all came together in space; from up near the dancing deities down to the nāgas underground, from everywhere their hands made offerings, and they said this:

Hear this, bodhisattva, son of the gods—  
The suffering of falling from the gods is intolerable;

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6 These are four of the twelve protectresses (bstan ma bcu gnyis), alternately called the “Four sman mo” (sman mo bzhi).
7 This seems to be an archaic meaning for the Tibetan word khul, which makes little sense unless it means “convince” in this context. Tib. nged khyed te ma khul na. rogs kyang mang du sbri na skad. rogs ci ltar sbri bgyis pas.
how confused are the suffering, hostile demigods;
the suffering of human birth and death is beyond thought;
how great is the suffering of stupid and dumb beasts of burden; [362]
the suffering of hungry, thirsty ghosts is beyond thought;
one moment suffering in the hot and cold hells is so difficult.
Who will hold up the teachings of the Buddha?
Who will parent the six (types) of wanderers?
Who will show them the glory of the Buddhas?
Kyi Hu! Kyi Hu! There is so much suffering!

This is what they said, and we (all) saw the suffering. I replied to them:

Generally, the pure lands of the Buddha are inconceivable;
and particularly Jambudvīpa’s qualities are such that it is said
there are countless spiritual friends (there),
doing inconceivable dharma deeds; (so)
go look for another regent to make prophecies about!
Go look for another to parent the six (types) of wanderers!
Go protect those beings practicing the Buddha’s teachings!
Landmark protectors should show the Buddha’s glory!
The spiritual friends will help the six (types) of wanderers,
and you should all be happy about it!

This is what I said, and the dākinīs replied to me:

The spiritual friends are all so very jealous,
the dhārmikas are all competing;
the six wandering (types) are wild by nature;
and there is no one with the means to help them.
This is why we scold you, human!

This is what the dākinīs said, and I replied to them:

I do not have a human body with time and chance,
a fully qualified teacher is difficult to find,
the wombs of these dark times are so very defiled, [363]
helping wanderers of the present and future is hard.
So, I ask you all again, (this time) with force,
I ask all you landmark protectors, dharma protectors,
to empower me, to integrate with me completely,
to grant me signs and inspiration completely
so that I may find parents with the (correct) lineage,
so that I may meet a fully qualified teacher.

This is what I said, and then, the dākinīs set up the maṇḍala of the sixty-two deities of Cakrasamvara, and granted me an inconceivable, celestial empowerment. They set out copious volumes of texts, with vowels and consonants, and spoke the empowerment of the five-gnosis knowledge. They introduced me to the five senses, and spoke the empowerment of the pāramitās’ meaning. In the empowerment that (granted) the realisation of no-birth, they bestowed verses, and eliminated the path of words. They displayed the in-between state, cutting the path of signs; they displayed metaphor, cutting the path of metaphor; and they displayed illusion, cutting the path of illusion. Who would not wish to have this empowerment bestowed upon them? My testament cannot paint its picture properly: but it shines bright for me, it radiates for me, it arises brilliant, lucid and vivid. It arises distinctly, and extra brilliantly. They said, “The appearances of saṃsāra and
nirvāṇa may not disappear, but the activities of the Buddha will be completed; beings, wanderers will be helped.”

Having said this, they empowered and inspired me in inconceivable ways. Then the dākinīs spoke a few providential words. [364] They spoke them with one voice, saying:

Pellucid knowledge is like an umbrella, a sheltering crown; whatever auspiciousness this umbrella has, may it, this sacred providence, prosper here in you, right now!

The golden fish, the gnostic eye, and clarity, like the sun and moon, clear away darkness; whatever auspiciousness these two eyes have, may this sacred providence prosper in you, right here, right now!

A melody of bells, viṅgā and flute in symphony, is like a praise, a vessel for knowing; whatever auspiciousness this melody has, may this sacred providence prosper in you, right here, right now!

The various smells of sweet incense gathering at the head, are like pure faculties, and they too clarify; whatever auspiciousness this sweet incense has, may this sacred providence prosper in you, right here, right now!

Ivory conch is as hard as bone, but it can also become medicinal (like) herbs; whatever auspiciousness this ivory conch has, may this sacred providence prosper in you, right here, right now!

On the tongue, lotus, honey and the words of poetry are pleasant; whatever auspiciousness this lotus tongue has, may this sacred providence prosper in you, right here, right now!

This is a precious container, a vase of songs, the best nectar for satiating hunger and quenching thirst; whatever auspiciousness this vase of songs has, may this sacred providence prosper in you, right here, right now!

Magic hands write letters, and various threads create all that is needed and desired; [365] whatever auspiciousness these magic hands have, may it, this sacred providence prosper here in you, right now!

In the mind is an endless knot, thoughts of past and future, (but) clear knowing does not forget; whatever auspiciousness this endless knot of mind has, may it, this sacred providence prosper here in you, right now!

This body is clothed with a Persian victory banner,9

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8 Here I am reading tshem as tshems.
9 Or, alternately, the victory banner of tigers and leopards.
this victory banner does not disappear;
whatever auspiciousness is in this banner, this body,
may it, this sacred providence prosper here in you, right now!

Wheels on his feet, horses, and myriad possessions,
are the enjoyments of the one who turns the dharma wheel;
whatever auspiciousness there is in these wheeled feet,
may it, this sacred providence prosper here in you, right now!

This is what they said, (along with) many other verses of providence. Then each of them flew about (in front of me).

Precious rainbow roads of various colours (led to) the place where the human body with free time and chances would be formed. (The dākinīs said:) “It is in Mang yul, in providential Gung thang. The mother is the noble, providential G.yu chung ma, who is said to live in front of a sacred site called Gangs zhur mo (Snowy Pig Snout) Ridge. The father’s house of clear bindu is on the providential Om Plain, in Rtsa phu rin chen (“the precious upper-valley of nādi”) in front of Mche ba gangs (Snowy Tusks) Ridge. This is the (lower) river valley where the three upper valleys meet; this is the birthplace of Mid la (Mi la ras pa), Rtsa riung phu (“prāna and nādi upper-”) Valley. (It is between two mountains:) to the south is a lustrously clear dark red mountain, and to the north is a glimmering white mountain. These are the un-desired bodily frames.”

As they explained this (process of conception), (the dākinīs) created a rainbow of nine colours that became intensely (bright). Then they all left on the rainbow as I watched. I travelled (alone) on (the rainbow in the opposite direction) to a crystal palace with a sky-door, four bright white sides, and a dark base. (As I descended,) rainbows (moved) freely on all sides. As soon as I entered the house waves of passionate blood were aroused and I watched them (the dākinīs) flee. Then the nine voices of the nine firmaments spoke as one, and said, “Journeying upwards from the smallest firmament you will not be freed. It is difficult to mature karma into the path of liberation.”

Then it all went dark and I fainted. As I gradually came around, all was dark and I (felt) a heavy weight. I was whirling in a small space. Even as I remember it now, I feel I am spinning in a small space. When my perception became clear, sometimes it was as if I was tossed by waves, sometimes squashed by mountains, sometimes burnt by heat, sometimes frozen by cold. I was confused. There was no air. This is the suffering of the afflictions, and even now when I think of it the wind rises in my heart.

Up to here has been (the Liberation-Story) of the In-Between State.

[Contemporary Emanations - First Voice]
Nowadays (this consciousness) has three aspects.

1. One is in the presence of the protector Maitreya; his name is the bodhisattva Rin chen blo gros. [367] He will continue to perform the practices of a bodhisattva for ten thousand divine years, and in the same manner as the protector Maitreya, he will grasp the way of the bodhisattva. It is also said that all those who have a relationship with him, his disciples, will be led (into Maitreya’s presence).

2. In addition to this, in the eastern land (Pūrvavideha) called “clearing away darkness” (Mun pa rab tu gsal ba) he performs the deeds of a bodhisattva.

3. There is also (the emanation that is) the lotus king, Rnam par rol pa (Rgyal po pad ma rnam par rol pa), who only does deeds that benefit wanderers.
4. In this world, in Jambudvipa, in the west of India in a certain village there is one called Paṇḍita Lokākārī. This emanation only benefits a few students.

**[Prophecies by the previous Karmapas - Third Voice]**

These are the three that exist now. And it is certain that he is a demonstration of the illustrious Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s and precious Karmapa’s spheres. When (Dus gsum mkhyen pa) stayed on Sbungs Mountain, he said that in one hundred years time, one that is the actual body of Dus gsum mkhyen pa, an emanation of the mind of Saraha will come and spread Dus gsum mkhyen pa’s teachings; he will be the third to wear the black hat crown.

And to a few of Rinpoche’s (Karma Pakshi’s) students (Karma Pakshi said) he would travel in the direction of Gangs zhur mo, and that when he was there they should understand that his activities would be inconceivable. He said this and other things that [368] meant the same thing.

**[Visions Reported; Third Voice]**

As a result of all this, having been entreated by the dākinīs again and again, the yogi Rang byung rdo rje also lived near the sacred Rinpoche’s place. In order to teach his parents interdependence, he trained in (Pha) Dam pa’s instructions for two or three years. Then, when he went to (Pha) Dam pa’s seat, he had a vision of (Pha) Dam pa that manifested in many forms and stayed a long time. There he thought, “I have been inspired”.

Then, when he went to see Guru U rgyan pa, who amongst other things said to him, “When you came, I experienced many pure visions.” This interdependence was a very good match, and while cultivating, he came to understand amongst other things that all phenomena are like the deep waters of an ocean; this understanding was unshakable.

When he was six or seven, he took the initial monastic ordination from Mkhen po Kun ldan shis rab. Whichever of the four (daily) activities he performed, whether it was walking, sitting or the rest (i.e. moving about and lying down), he remembered that everything was illusion-like. In this and other ways his mind was not separated from that which is perfected; the that-ness in which everything is illusory.

When he visited the place in which the precious Rgod tshang pa had lived (Shu kra), a great, dark man who wore a billowing, dark cloak (Black-cloak; Ber nag can), along with the Nāga King, the lord of mantra, and the Vajra King of Mkhar nag all came and told him it was time to go (to Mtshur phu). These and others appeared.

Then, [369] when he was on his way to teach (at Mtshur phu) a few gods and demons blocked his path, but he turned them back by using the samādhi of the Bhagavān Vajrapāṇi.

When he arrived at Mtshur phu, there was one (named) Guru Ras pa staying there. He saw (the young monk) clearly in his mind’s space as the Great Brahmin, Saraha, surrounded by an entourage of other siddhas. He understood this to be a sign of the gurus’ inspiration.

When he was staying at Bkra shis gsar ma, he blessed Guru Dar ma sgang with a gtor ma, and at that time he appeared to (Guru Dar ma) as inseparable from Varjadhara, Tilopa, Nārōpa and all the lineage of siddhas, so he said he was Vajradhara working to lead wanderers.

One night when he was staying at Mtshur phu, he offered a gtor ma. As he did, the Śrī Dharmāla brothers and sisters, the haughty spirits, eight men and eight women arrived and said they were protecting the seat of Śrī Dus gsum mkhyen pa. They displayed this and
many other various magics to him; one of the signs that appeared was like the fire (at the end of an) aeon, which arises from non-virtue, abuse and anger.

When he was staying at Mtshur phu, there was a great earthquake, and then many (further) earthquakes that went on for an entire month without a break. At this time, he developed a little understanding of sahaja gnosis, but understood this was merely a premonition.

Again, when he was staying at Mtshur phu, (he had a vision of) Hayagrīva with three faces and six arms. In his right hand (he held) a vajra hammer, and his left hand was pointed (at him). This was the vision he experienced, and through it he managed to bring under his control a group of gods and demons, for this was a sign of his (ability to) overpower them.

Another time, when he was staying at Mtshur phu, at dusk on the twenty-fifth day of the third month of the monkey year (1296), while he was staying in the protector Me rlung sub ma’s (“Erasing Fire Wind”) temple, (a being) arrived wearing a billowing black cloak that was adorned with precious jewels. In his right hand he brandished a white trident and in his left he held a skull full of blood. With him was a great entourage. All of his entourage’s minds were clear. At this time (Rang byung rdo rje) offered a gtor ma and supplicated him, then from the mouth of the illustrious protector came (these words): “As long as the teachings of the Buddha remain, I will protect you, your students, your patrons and the rest (of your entourage), all of them.” As he said this, the great protector’s—Hūm—entourage, these great, wrathful, fierce, raging rākṣasas came (and went). This is the way they praised him.

Again, when he was staying at Mtshur phu, as dusk fell on the twenty-eighth day of the third month of the monkey year (1296), the black protector of gnosis, Ber nag can, arrived in the sky’s sphere. His body was coloured black (like) clotted blood, but he was decorated with myriad jewels and his ornaments were clear. In front of him was the best of his offspring, also in black cloaks. In a circle around them (the dharma protector) Vaiśravana was at his head, while (other) protectors covered the ten directions, (along with) the eight classes of gods and demons. This was very clear. Then at that time, this was how—Hūm—the great black one, the one who possesses excellence praised him.

And another time when he was staying at Mtshur phu (he had another vision of Ber nag can). In his right hand (the protector) brandished a sword and in his left he brandished a skull full of blood. His body was decorated by the sun, moon and stars, and he was accompanied by one hundred thousand black women. This was very clear. Then Rang byung rdo rje dreamed that he offered them gtor ma and supplicated them, and from the illustrious goddesses’ mouths came (the following words): “We will clear away all of your obstacles.” At this time, the minds of all the Buddhas of the past, present and future were supreme, and these were the words with which the goddesses praised him.

One night in the first month of the monkey year (1296), when the mantra adept Rang byung rdo rje was staying at Mtshur phu, the goddess Ri ma ti, who is the goddess of the four seasons, appeared to him clearly, and this dark one showed him magic and so forth.

In the third month of the monkey year (1296), at Mtshur phu, when he was having some casual time, the illustrious protector Ber nag can appeared. He was clothed in a black cloak with one face and two arms, one brandishing a hooked knife and the other a bloody skull. Along with this, the goddess Ri ma ti, with one face and four arms appeared clearly. At this time—Hūm—the illustrious protector, the great black one (spoke) praises to him.

Another time, when he was staying at Mtshur phu, (he saw) the protector (Ber nag can) dancing, zig-zagging, swaying to and fro. When this happened, he offered him a gtor ma and supplicated him. Then two female protectors (appeared) and said, “the time has come
to help wanderers". He heard them say these words, and—Hūṃ—the great, black protector said other things to praise him.

And again, when he was staying at Mtshur phu, at night time on the tenth day of the eighth month of the monkey year (1296) (he had a dream, that he described by saying the following).10 "I dreamt I and two companions travelled to Śrī Daksīna Parvata Mountain. We were looking for the guru, the Great Brahman. My two friends went to search for him on the southern side of the mountain. I stayed alone, in a pleasant, wide, open meadow on the eastern side. I had just made myself comfortable, sitting alone, when masses of flowers began to fall (from the sky). I responded to this by making cairns out of them, and sat in steady contemplation in their midst. Then a small, sweet voice came down from the sky:

Son of the lineage, hear this!
The guru, the Great Brahman,
is your mind’s nature — [373].

And so forth. The way that he encountered the Great Brahmin is described clearly elsewhere.

[Colophon]

I, Rang byung rdo rje, "Lord of Yogis", do not remember the past very well, but, for the past three years, the faithful monk of Śākyamuni, Dar (ma) brtson (pa), has ardently requested me again and again to (write this down), so I have written it down. By the goodness of this deed, may all types of wanderers, without exception, quickly attain the highest awakening. The Liberation-Story of the Dharma Noble Rang byung rdo rje's Previous Lives and the ways he saw things was written down clearly in Mtshur phu’s retreat centre, Śrī Khyung rdzong. This is The Liberation-Story of the Illustrious Dharma Noble Rang byung rdo rje. It is complete.

---

10 This is almost the same passage that begins the first song, but there are a few differences. Most of these are very minor differences in the spelling of grammatical particles, but one sentence is a little more variant.
1. The sentence that here reads: bdag shar phyogs de nyid na thang bde zhing yangs pa gcig tu bdsad tsam na me tog gi char dpag tu med pa bab
   in the first song reads: bdag shar phyogs de nyid du spangs thang yangs shing, bde ba gcig tu bsdad tsam na. me tog gi char dpag tu med pa babs.
Appendix Four:
Selections from *The Songs of Rang byung rdo rje.*

This appendix also includes two parts. Part A consists of the complete translations of songs extracted from within the thesis. The songs are provided in numeric order. Part B consists of a comparative edition of the two Tibetan texts from which they were translated.

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One night while I, the yogi Rang byung rdo rje, was staying at Bkra shis gsar ma Hermitage, I dreamt that along with two companions, I travelled to Śrī Daksīna Parvata Mountain. We were looking for (Saraha), the guru, the Great Brahman. My two friends went to search on the southern side of the mountain. I stayed alone, in a pleasant, wide, open meadow (spang thang) on the eastern side. I had just made myself comfortable, sitting alone, when masses of (snowy), flower-rain (me tog gi char) began to fall. I responded to this by making cairns out of them, and sat in steady contemplation in their midst. Then a small, sweet voice came down from the sky:

Child of the lineage, hear this!
The guru, the Great Brahman (Saraha),
is your mind’s nature—
it is a grave mistake to look (for him) elsewhere.

(I heard) this voice, and I replied to it, saying:

E Ma Ho! The guru, the Great Brahman, is
my mind’s nature, and in this
manḍala where variety has one taste,
there are no seekers and sought;
my two friends still search,
while to me, sitting here alone,
the Great Brahman reveals a sign (brda’).
Ah! How wonderful!

This is what I said. And from the sky, in reply, came the voice of the Great Brahman:

E Ma Ho! This is the guru, the Great Brahman;
I am your mind’s nature, and in this
manḍala where variety has one taste,
there are no cultivators, nor things to cultivate.

Hey child! This dohā is beyond speech,
thought, expression, so cultivate its advice!

Hey child! Mahāmudrā is the essence of
all past, present and future buddhas,
so stay uncomplicated!

Hey child! In effortless naturalness,
a state free of extremes,
self-aware gnosis is realised;
its purpose is (to help) wanderers,
so don’t be distracted, stay balanced!

E Ma Ho! Mind’s nature is simplicity,
it comes from nowhere and has

1 This song has been translated previously by Kurtis Schaeffer (2005:41–42).
nowhere to go, just like a crazy person.²

Hey child! Like a river dissolving into the sea, it has no creation and no cessation, so stay in mahāmudrā!

This is what he said. And the (flower) cairns I had made, the rocks, the stone mountain all became the Great Brahmin. My mind-stream was naturalness: no creation, no cessation, no abiding, no edge, and no falling to one side. Ah! So vivid! So relaxed! In this state there was no distinction between waking and sleeping, and it is this joy that I remember as I sing this song. This is what he said. And the (flower) cairns I had made, the rocks, the stone mountain all became the Great Brahmin. My mind-stream was naturalness: no creation, no cessation, no abiding, no edge, and no falling to one side. Ah! So vivid! So relaxed! In this state there was no distinction between waking and sleeping, and it is this joy that I remember as I sing this song.

This is what he said, and great meditators, mountain wanderers should follow these instructions and experience them, for this song has the blessings of the guru. He said it, it is wonderful, so have no doubt; experience this utmost profundity.³

(Rang byung rdo rje) said that he met the guru, the Great Brahmin in a dream and this was his message. (He said he had this dream) in Bkra shis gsar ma, on the tenth day, of the eighth month, of the year of the monkey (1296).

**Song No. 4. (GN 6–7; GB 188–189)**

_Namo-guru._

Vajradhara, I invoke you. 
Bka’ brgyud pa, please inspire me.

This is the yogi Rang byung rdo rje’s little song of dawning experience; lucky ones, arouse this experience.

[Saraha said:]

"The mind grasps at the container outside, and the ingredients within, its knowing and ignorance. Whenever the mind grasps, it does not see mahāmudrā."

He also said:

"Idiot, you have gone the wrong way, there is no escape from there."⁴
But having got rid of this concept, the thing to do is maintain equipoise.

Everyone should know this. May this be an ornament for a wondrous, auspicious world.

---

² GN says bsnyon pa, which means “the denier”. This is probably the misspelling of the homonym smyon pa, which is the GB’s spelling. This means “crazy”, and as will be explained shortly this is a metaphor that Saraha uses elsewhere.
³ The Tibetan expression nyams su lang has most often previously been translated as “practice”. But as it literally means “take the experience”, I have translated it as “experience” in the imperative, or “arouse this experience”.
⁴ I have not been able to find this quote in any of Saraha’s works.
Namo-ratna-guru.

Gurus, I honour you. Siddhas, please inspire me.

Mountain hermits, yogis like me—Meet qualified nobles, and yet this does not help liberate our minds.
Receive numerous instructions, and yet this does not help arouse experience.
Stay in secluded, mountain retreats, and yet this does not help us cultivate singularly.
Cultivate simplicity, and yet this does not help “nothing/anything at all”.
Wander the country with “no direction” and yet this does not help expand our perception.
Collect felt-cases for our texts, and yet this does not make our perceptions more comfortable.

Still, precious guru,
I am begging you, inspire me!
Kye ma! It is like this!
But I will experience it the best I can.

Father guru, I have not emulated you,
but I have not given up on great compassion.
Mahāmudrā is the greatest meaning, the essence of all past, present and future buddhas;
I am not completely familiar with it,
but I have not given up on it, the buddhas’ intention.
I have not stayed in isolated sites, mountain retreats,
I have not experienced austerities like you,
but I have not forgotten to imagine A HUM.5
I have no expansive understanding of the Tathāgata’s discourses,
but I have not thrown the sacred dharma away.

The mahāmudrā is fused clarity/luminosity, free from all that general stuff,
so I can still sing a song of joy,
realise all the buddhas’ intentions,
loose all the knots of my concerns,
let the buddhas’ intention arise in my mind,
and have no regrets.

Great meditators, all you yogis,
you should also stay within mahāmudrā.

Let everybody know this.

This is like the Karmapa’s song.6

---

5 These syllables are used in gtum mo (Skt. caṇḍālī), or inner heat yoga practice that is one of the six dharmas of Nāropa.
Song No. 7 (GN 9; GB 190–191) Song of Three Analogies and Six Meanings

Namo-ratna-guru.

I honour the fathers, the nobles.

E Ma Ho! I go for refuge to the buddhas, and sing a song of profound instruction; lucky ones, hear this song.

When mountain hermits, yogis like me—

Look up at the centre of the sky, we recognise luminous emptiness, evidently uncreated, unceasing.

Look down at the centre of the stream, we recognise perpetuity, evidently silent.

Look over at this mountain, we recognise immutability, evidently unshakeable.

This marvellous song of three analogies and six meanings, is an instruction for great meditators. Let everyone know this.

This song is like Tilopa's Four Words.7

Song No. 8 (GN 9–14; GB 191–195) Songs of the View, Cultivation, Behaviour and Result

Namo-ratna-guru.

I go for refuge to the gurus.

This is a little song of the dawning appearance of yoga experience; lucky ones, experience it (too)!

And again, in sacred dharma practice, do not be attached to country or kin; incisively watch your mind.

In the miserable ocean of samsāra, do not think, “Here is okay”; homeless, wander the mountains....

---

6 This probably does not refer to this Karmapa, Rang byung rdo rje. As it was written/spoken when he was young, it probably refers to Karma Pakshi, as he seems to be the one most commonly referred to as “the Karmapa” throughout both these songs and the liberation-stories. This note therefore probably indicates that Rang byung rdo rje has written/spoken song similar to a song Karma Pakshi sang, or it is similar to something he said.

7 I have been unable to find this song in any of Tilopa’s works that have been translated into Tibetan.
When it’s time to leave alone (i.e., when you are about to die),
do not trade trifles, profits and sundry;
inertly watch your mind.

Toward the buddhas’ infinite intention,
do not be hypocritical or haughty;
look at the dharma impartially.⑧
And again, the moment of death only lasts an instant,
so do not think of many things;
incisively (re)view the instructions.

Regarding the buddhas’ vast intention,
do not hold onto pride and prejudice;
un-fixated, watch the view.

Truth is in place in the ्yânas, so
do not be arrogant or attached;
impartially envision purity.

The intention of past, present and future buddhas is beyond intellect;
do not be sidetracked by saṃsāra.

On the gnosis of all past, present and future buddhas’ bodies, speech and minds,
do not superimpose words.

Look at the sky-like mahāmudrā,
do not dissect it with definitions;
undistracted, stay in your own place.

This has been a song of the view.
Next, is a song of cultivation.

The final intention of all the Bka’ brgyud gurus is cultivation;
cultivate thinking about this again.

The root of all past, present and future buddhas’ sacred dharma is cultivation;
cultivate thinking about this again.

In the great, non-dual gnosis,
cultivation does not go from good to bad;
cultivate cutting through preconceptions again.

If (you) do not cultivate in this life,
(you will) regret it when you die;
cultivate freedom from concerns.

Free from profound pronouncements,
without using a lot of jargon;

⑧ This follows GB. GN says phyogs med kyi ri khros 'grim 1 ang, which could be translated as: “homeless, wander the mountains”. This makes much less sense and is a repeat of the previous verse but one.
cultivate cultivating release and attention.

In all the teachings of the Sugata, there is nothing beyond final cultivation; cultivate not being fixated or concerned.

The buddhas' intention is the middle way's nature; cultivate freedom from the two extremes.

There is no greater comfort, in body or mind, than these isolated mountain retreats; cultivate the solitude of mountain abodes.

But then again, there is absolutely nothing to cultivate, these are all half-true mutterings; cultivate the state of no-cultivation.

All self-grasping preconceptions have always been free of concepts; cultivate looking right at this.

And again, keep cultivating until you realise mahāmudrā's gnosis is the root of all the Buddha's sacred dharmas.

This has been a song of cultivation. Next, is a song about how yogis behave.9

The final behaviour of all past, present and future buddhas is to be undistracted; be purposefully mindful.

The final behaviour of all the guru siddhas is the mahāmudrā; be removed from the two extremes.

The root of all the Buddha's teachings is not being distracted; be purposefully mindful.

The root of all experience, sacred dharma's goal is recognition; implement the profound dharma.

The vast tracts of the Sugata's intention are beyond speech, thought and expression; be purposefully ineffable.

All formulated, sacred dharmas, all of them, are perishable; be purposefully enduring.

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9 The expression used here is rnal byor spyod ba, which means "the performance of yogis", but is also a pun on the philosophical school called the rnal 'byor spyod ba, or in Sanskrit, yogācāra.
In dying you separate from all the world’s food, wealth, friends and kin; be purposefully inseparable.

The world’s unseen gods and demons will kill you dead if you depend on them, so (don’t do it). Be profound instead.

When you cultivate fused clarity and luminosity, you see your deity and their entourage; be the fusion of clarity and luminosity.

But then again, there is absolutely nothing to be done, to say “behaviour” is inaccurate; be purposefully accurate.

In the vast tracts of the buddhas’ intention, there are no subjects, attachments, aversions; be free from extremes in your behaviour.

This was a song about behaviour. Next, is a song about yoga’s results.

The final inspiration of the gurus is the great bliss of mahāmudrā; there is no better result.

The forebears’ great compassion introduces it to their descendants; there is no better result.

All the greatest, most profound meanings are identified as free from extremes; there is no better result.

In the end, the sacred dharma is not cultivated because it is identified as non-distraction; there is no better result.

Samsāra and nirvāṇa’s roots are identified as ungraspable; there is no better result.

Knowing not to place hopes and fears in the things we do in samsāra; there is no better result.

Knowing all apparent places out there are not tangible; there is no better result.

10 Literally “fine”, phra mo in Tibetan.
11 Within the texts that describe the mahāmudrā, the term ngo sprod pa, which is translated here as “introduction”, usually refers to the process of introducing a student to the nature of their own mind, said to be synonymous with the mahāmudrā.
Knowing that all the heard sounds out there are unreal echoes; there is no better result.

When all forms are naturally apparent emptiness, and all we see arises as dharmakāya; there is no better result.

When we are constantly familiar with the self-liberating, ungraspable view; there is no better result.

When we know all thoughts of things are self-liberating; there is no better result.

This was a song about results.

Once more, practice the sacred dharma, depend on a qualified guru, stay in isolated, mountain retreats, cultivate the incomparable view.

Once more, this summary is all you need, lucky ones, experience it. The dharma noble, Rang byung rdo rje sang this song at Khyung rdzong.

Song No. 11 (GN 16-17; GB 198)

Nama-guru.

I honour the gurus.

Just now, useless visions scattered my thoughts, to the past, to the future. I really should cultivate, and not be distracted.

The mahāmudrā is the intention of past, present and future buddhas; the final vehicle, the essence of purpose. I really should experience it, and not be distracted.

Even if I do not always remember death, impermanence has no resting place—by all means death will come, so by any means I will stay in mountain solitudes.

I write this small, true song, as I remember impermanence, in retreat at Khyung rdzong. Let everyone know about it.

(He) said this at Khyung rdzong.
Song No. 12 (GN 17-18; GB 198-199)

Namo-guru.

Illustrious, sacred guru,
I honour the dust on your feet.

Alas! How dark it is for a miscreant,
mountain hermit like me.
Father guru, wanderers' hero, compassionate one,
inspire this lazy beggar.
Noble one, from the unseen realm, please inspire me!

It is good for me to stay in this solitude,
this mountain hermitage; (but)
it would also (be good) if I wasn't
separated from my loving, compassionate guru.
How dark it will remain if you do not realise this!

Kye ma! Precious guru,
nirmanakāya, please inspire me!
Noble guru, I beseech you.
Noble guru, may your compassion hold me.
Inspire me, right now.

Lead all the wanderers, do not leave anyone behind,
(even when) in these dark times,
you talk of dharma to others, and no one listens.

Kye ma! In these times when alas
the five types of darkness are rampant, it is like this.
Father guru, wanderers' hero,
compassionate one, inspire beings.

Song No. 14 (GN 19-20; GB 200-201)

Gurus, I invoke you.
Gurus, please inspire me.
Mahāmudrā is the pure essence of past,
present and future buddhas and bodhisattvas.

In reality, there is no coming or going, but
you do not understand that the half-truths
presently appearing are untrue, and under
the influence of fixed ideas and self-fixation
fail to realise supreme, perfect meaning.

The half-truths of cause and effect appear—
Do you know these are ignorant afflictions?
(Do you know) these veils cloak wisdom?

Stupid, this is just like you!

This collection of conceptions, veils and afflictions
causes mistaken concepts of right and wrong;
these are shackling, grand obsessions.
Deep down, there is no pure "oneness", 
final reality is not the domain of thought;
"Intellect", it is said, "is pretence."
Fixating on the essence of known things,
on impossible conceptions of right and wrong,
is the distinction of samsāra's mind;
complete gnosis is uncreated, self-created.

The thick veils that cloak the ground-of-all 
these constant, grand veils, 
are the ignorant veils of the misinformed, 
who do not cultivate perfect meaning, 
but possess myriad fixations; (like) 
"Don't you know definitions like this?" 
"Don't you understand logic like this?"

Mind's nature has no fixations, so 
if you have not attained this sacred freedom, 
and you are confused by self-fixation, 
and you are confused by the afflictions, 
then it is time, use great wisdom, get rid of them.

It is time this happened in the mind-streams 
of all six types of wanderers. 
E Ma! Something this wonderful 
is a sign from the profound, whispered lineage. 
Let the lucky ones know 
about instructions like these!

(He said this) at Khyung rdzong.

**Song No. 15 (GN 20–22; GB 201–203)**

*Namo-guru.*

One day, when the yogi Rang byung rdo rje was staying in the Mtshur phu retreat centre Khyung rdzong, he saw incidentally that all outside perceptions were untrue, and sang this song.

I honour the noble gurus. 
I go for refuge to the kind one. 
Please inspire me to guide wanderers.

External visions are dharmakāya, 
they lack truth, and yet 
thick, entangled, veils of ignorance 
cling to them tightly, obsessively, (and) 
like offering smoke, rising from the earth, 
karma and circumstance multiply.

Hear this all you lucky beings! 
As (certainly as) summer turns into winter, 
conditioned by ignorance, there are 
many and manifold perceptions 
that you do not know are uncreated, so 
cultivate illusion-like visions.
Son, do not look for true things.

All you lucky ones, cultivate a lack of concern.

Look at the thick mistaken visions, they are within the realm of the great, one taste; They are untrue, illusory, uncreated, so what use is this collection of words?¹²

Hear this you lucky ones!

These days, in these dark times, preceptors do not smash the eight dharmas’ heads they uphold the eight dharmas;¹³ trying to awaken is hopeless son.

These days, the teachers of these times do not realise the meaning of Buddha’s words, they are followers of sophistry. It is hopeless, they will not realise words and meaning.

These days, the “great meditators” of these times do not act like those of old, while wandering the mountains, they look for pleasure. It is hopeless, they will not realise mind’s nature.

These days, the monks of these times are not intent on helping others, they are duplicitously moral. It is hopeless, they will not attain a high rebirth.

These days, the tāntrikas of these times do not protect the Buddha’s teachings, they burn with anger. It is hopeless, they will not bring on the deity.

These days, the yogis of these times do not look at the buddhas’ intent, they just travel all over the country. It is hopeless, they will not destroy mistakes.

These days, the patrons of these times do not create and collect much merit, they bring on their own suffering. It is hopeless, they will not attain a high rebirth.

It is hard to tame corrupted beings, but those extraordinary people who want to, should practice divine, sacred dharma.

If you cultivate, cultivate mahāmudrā, ¹² Here, after ascertaining that there is no point to “groups of words” Rang byung rdo rje stops following the pattern of the previous verses and keeps to short statements. ¹³ That is the eight worldly dharmas (jig rten kyi chos brgyad): 1 & 2) gain and loss (nyed pa dang ma nyed pa); 3 & 4) fame and disgrace (snyan grags dang ma grags); 5 & 6) praise and blame (bstod pa dang smad pa); 7 & 8) pleasure and pain (bde ba dang sdu bsgal).
if you give, give impartially, 
and keep depending on the gurus.

If you were to ask, what does this song say, 
(I would say) it shows a little of cause and effect, 
and if you agree with it, try experiencing it.

May all be auspicious.

Song No. 16 (GN 23–24; GB 203–204)

Namo-guru.

Source of all virtues, greatest of sacred sites, 
the very essence of past, present and future buddhas, 
gurus, I go for refuge to you. 
I invoke you, please inspire me.

Here this, all you lucky ones sitting here.

I may not have studied and reflected in this life, 
but I have trained for many aeons, 
so I do not need to make an effort now.

Long ago, in India, 
I was the master ācārya, 
Ārya Nāgārgjuna’s best student; 
Nāgābodhi was my name, 
and I trained in all dharmas.

After this, in India again 
I was a paññita, and my 
precise expertise in the three (sūtra) 
baskets and the tantras was unique.

After this, I was Rgyal mchog dbyangs, 
a student of the greatest master, 
the renowned Padmasambhava, and 
became an expert in Rnying ma dharma, 
particularly the Great Completion, 
so now I know it without studying it.

After this, I became a paññita again, 
and again a singular, adroit expert 
in all dharmas, completely qualified.

After this, I was the one called 
Pu to ba, who was connected 
to Kha rag bsgoms chung 
and an expert in his dharma. 
This person was also a teacher to 
the great one of Sne’u zur (Ye shes ’bar).

And again, I was the one called 
Śrī Karmapa, who did everything 
he did to help all beings.
Through all these (lives), I have studied, reflected and cultivated. In life after life, I put in a great deal of effort, so I do not need to make an effort now.

Realised ones who know all dharmas, those of you sitting here, know this! If I have made a mistake bear with me. (All) this may be the truth, or I may be joking. (Either way) take it as an offering of song to all you assembled here.

(This was sung) at the time of the *gana(cakra)* offering, at the isolated site of Khyung rdzong, on the eighth day of the autumn month, in the male, earth dog year (1298).

**Song No. 19 (GN 27–28; GB 206–207)**

*Namo-guru.*

Noble siddhas, I honour you. Yogis, please inspire me.

All you gathered here, hear this song; it is like this, so keep it in mind.

Like noble Mid la (Mi la ras pa) said, “These three, this life, the next and in between, follow in a line, like a flight of birds. These three, birth, illness, death, (move) as surely as the hand to the mouth. These three, hells, ghost lands and animal realms, wait along three unchanging, narrow paths, and you are an archer’s arrow poised for flight.”

Generally, what we call actions, causes and results are strange; all is change, get this into your mind-stream. Once you know this, once it is familiar, you will stop doing the ten bad deeds, and you will aspire to the ten white deeds instead. Do as this says. In half-truth, put in the effort for the collection of merit. Experience the final meaning like this—there are no edges, no centre in the middle of the sky; likewise, mind is free of edges, free of a centre, moving constantly, flowing like a great river’s current, not by nature stopped or established.

Without distraction, uninterrupted, depend on an isolated mountain retreat. This is akin to the greatest purpose the guru showed (you). Whatever it is, realising its final purpose means being free from concerns. Final *mahāmudrā*’s meaning is not established. Its final view is so strange; the greatest essential *mahāmudrā,*
is the Vajrayāna’s intention.

All you sitting here, arouse this experience.
Everything I said in this song, is a metaphor;
it is a song that illustrates meaning,
I offer it to the gurus.

May you all realise the final ultimate!

**Song No. 21 (GN 29–31; GN 276–277)**

Namo-guru.

I invoke the noble siddhas.
Noble gurus, please inspire me.

Here this all you dhārmikas, great meditators.

As the Bhagavān’s sūtras and tantras
and the guru’s instructions say,
in these days of five (types of) darkness,
as the Buddha’s teachings deteriorate,
even dhārmikas have become intensely jealous.
samgha with learning are rare (and)
people who aspire to siddhi (even more) scarce.

Those who want to stay in mountain solitudes,
are blown away by the times’ distracting frosts.
In these ill-equipped, dark times,
the meaning of the final, unmistaken essence
should be experienced like this...

The tight obsession with the world
is the root of samsāra, so
become unconcerned, unattached (and)
keep relying on isolated mountain retreats.
None of the worldly visions of this life
are true, so if you want to attain
unending, great bliss, always
volunteer for dharma’s suffering.
There is no end to today’s work so
stay for a long time in mountain retreats.

Hear this, all you dhārmikas!
All the prestige, the merit (of this life)
will seem like a dream when the pangs of death (descend).
You will leave all your servants, close and distant relatives,
and have no option but to travel into the unknown.
This tall, strong castle you have built
will stand its ground when you die;
none of these well-made, formulated things
marked with your fingerprints will follow you.

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14 This song is out of sequence in the GB.
Therefore, as the guru instructs, continually cultivate the view of truth’s lack, rest in actual non-grasping, (and) remember impermanence, as this is the root of all dharmas.

When you destroy grasping obsession, without exception, "me” and “the things I have” will (dissolve) into the state of great bliss. When you come to know this, you will be separated from the essence of exertion.

These are all final. Stop grasping at subjects and objects, stop grasping at self, (and) arouse experience as the Buddha explained. There is no meaning more final, more condensed than this, so experience its meaning.

_The dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje sang this to the great meditators when he first arrived at Karma (Monastery)._ 

**Song No. 22 (GN 32–33; GB 208–209)**

Gurus, I honour you.
I invoke you, please inspire me.

Kye ma! In the ocean of saṃsāra, those who hold onto subjects/objects are caught up in thoughts of them, and circle this place of limitless suffering with so many ignorant, mistaken preconceptions.

Samsāra is a fierce, scalding fire-pit. Ignorance is cloaking, deep, murky darkness. Birth, ageing, sickness and death are a great river. Arrogance is a steep, rocky mountain. Jealousy is a great, raging storm. Wicked words pierce like thorns.

(With) self-obsessed minds, unstable beings start down the mistaken “me, me” road, and then it is hard to turn back. That is why the buddhas and bodhisattvas’ compassion is as limitless as rolling clouds, but in these times, the five types of darkness are rampant, wanderers are bound by afflictions, and it is hard to break free from subject/object’s grasp.

Kye ma! Hear this dhārmikas! As the world’s dharmas bind, bind—look at (the) uncreated. Now is the time.

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15 This word translates gnad, which elsewhere in the translation of these poems is rendered as “point”, but here its use fits the word “essence” much more neatly.

16 As was discussed in chapter one, the Tibetan texts write first the colloquial form of the word “me”, nga, and then the literary form, bdag.
As the distractions of possessions bind, bind—
leave everything. Now is the time.
As wealth and substance bind, bind—
abandon all commotion. Right now.
As food, income and trade bind, bind—
experience austerity. Right now.
As your relatives and servants bind, bind—
wander in mountain solitudes. Right now.
As house and lands bind, bind—
travel the countryside. Right now.
As half-truths beguile, beguile—
look at the final unreality. Right now.

Hear this dhārmikas!
Times like these are unsuitable, dark,
(and) all those negative intellectuals,
hold subjects and objects obsessively tight;
they will spend a long time stuck in samsāra’s mud.
For this reason, the other wanderers and I
beg the compassionate bodhisattvas—
free us from this death!

When I am liberated from these bonds,
I will follow in the footsteps of
the lord of compassion, Avalokiteśvara, (who)
when he first generated bodhicitta,
said he would maintain the tenth ground’s attire
for the sake of a single being.
Even though there is no actual “I”,
until wanderers are free from their chains.
may I, too, work for them.

Rinpoche, Rang byung rdo rje spoke (like) this in ‘Gro phu, on the fifteenth day, of the
ninth month, of the tiger year (1302).

Song No. 25 (GN 35–36; GB 212–213)

Namo-guru.

I invoke the basis of
all virtues, the gurus.

Hear this all you seated here.

That which is free of extremes, naturalness, the essence
flows from the Great Brahman’s lineage.
The pith, nādi, prāna and bodhicitta,
is Niguma’s lineage.
Deity and entourage, the development stage,
is Luipa’s lineage.
The practice of visionary, yogic discipline,
is Virūpa’s lineage.
Through the inspiration of the four oral lineages,
the yogin realises reality
and holds Tilopa and Naropa’s lineage.

Mar pa, the translator of Lho brag,
Mid la the greatest lord of yogins,
Sgam po pa, their disciple,
Du gsum mkhyen, the Buddha’s heir,
Ras chen pa, the sūtras’ and tantras’ custodian,
Sbom brag pa, the true transmission’s custodian,
Rinpoche, wanderers’ guide,
O rgyan pa, disciplined practitioner,
I, the yogi, am a son to you all.

Wanting to cultivate ultimate meaning,
I have come here, to a place called Lha stengs;
having inquired and inquired, this is what I know.
Living, wandering, beings hold subjects/objects tight,
this delusion makes them hard-headed, and thick, dense self-grasping smothers them.

These days, an unerring realisation of
the Buddha’s words, his sūtras and tantras,
is as (rare as) sky flowers.
The view of the great gnosis
acts as an intellectual, analytical barrier; yet
the banner of the practice lineage’s teachings brushes18 away these frosts of jealousy.
Lucky ones sitting here,
if you want to attain awakening quickly,
place the bright saddle of clear bodhicitta
on the faithful stallion of gnosis,
use the quick whip of diligence,
follow the guru who knows liberation’s path,
and gallop as far as you can. Now is the time.

If you understand, these are pith instructions.
If you do not, treat them as foolish drivel.

(He) gave these instructions to the lucky ones who were gathered for a gana(cakra) at Lha stengs, on the tenth night of the tenth month of the dragon year (1304).

Song No. 28 (GN 39-40; GB 215-216) Song that Determines the Vajrayāna Exactly

Namo-guru.

This is The Song that Determines the Secret Mantra Vajrayāna Exactly.

I honour Śrī Vajrayoginī.

It is the nature of all things, it is pervasive,
not realising it, (you) wander in saṃsāra,
realising it illuminates the path.

18 The Tibetan word ‘khyer, which is usually translated as “carry” is here translated as “brush” to reflect the movement of banners.
All pervasive one, I pay homage to you.

Its nature is the five gnoses,
particularly, it is the five aggregates.
Its nature is the three vajra aspects that
(when investigated) illuminate
the vajra gnosis (itself).\textsuperscript{19}

Wherever they are, (the sun), the king of seven horses
and the (moon), the rabbit holder, naturally
radiate hot sunbeams and cool moonlight
that travel beyond qualities and suffering.

Shapeless, colourless \textit{prāṇa},
is fluctuating and steady by nature.
The method is to enter (it) into the central channel,
and those who can accomplish that are here.

This here is the nature of the \textit{nādi};
they have three and five aspects, by nature,
or through a more thorough division, thirty-two.
The sun and moon will illuminate this.

Here in upper (but) unrealised realms,
we enter sensual paths; (on these paths)
our mind runs to (various) places (\textit{yul}),
but ends up in Rāhu’s mouth.

From the abode of Brahmā, to down
below, where the Lord of the Nāgas is coiled,
that which is by nature the sun, moon and stars,
should all be subdued.

Its nature is to be sixteen, divided in half,
unassailable, naturally a female form;
this explains spring and the \textit{bindu},
this is the nature of the three realms.

It is the final freedom in the deepest ocean,
the illumination of mountain peaks,
clear as the glow of jasmine and lightning—
attain this precious treasure!

This will mean travel beyond, to gnosis,
in which there is naturally movement and stillness.
The greatest, the ordinary and the rest,
all come from there; there is nothing else.

The greatest of vajra masters,
Tilo shes rab bzang po, and—
through the kindness of the famous Bzang po\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} These two lines incorporate a line that is only included within the GN.
\textsuperscript{20} The GN says \textit{grag snyan}, which does not mean anything. I have read it as \textit{sgrags snyan}, which means “famous” or “renowned”.
Rang byung rdo rje composed this realisation.

If you want to enter into the Vajrayāna,
if you want to know and realise,
engage with what this means.
For others it is (too) far away.

Rang byung rdo rje finished composing this in Lha stengs, on the twentieth day of the eleventh month of the snake year (1305).

**Song No. 34 (GN 46-47; GB 221-222)**

*Namo-guru.*

Gurus, I honour you.

You have received the Buddha’s instructions,
but in order to practice what they say precisely,
get rid of yearning and dualistic fixation, or
the demon of delectations will carry you away.

Cut craving’s noose.
Keep your wild horse of a mind locked up.
Remember the clarity and knowing
of the five doors. Throw off distraction.
The nature of all phenomena is empty,
stop seeing conceptualised duality.
Samsāra’s root is ignorance,
smash it with interdependence’s hammer.
Ignorant views have two stains,
hang them out (to dry) with compassion/emptiness.
Cleanse the stains of yearning and craving
by using the “like an illusion” method.
The five conceptual poisons are thieves,
look at their unstoppable, actual nature.
In the emptiness and clarity of your mind,
clean speculative stains.
Don’t pollute the root, the ground-of-all,
with conceptual phenomena.
E Ma! It is wonderful like this—
water, gold, sky,
wind, flowers, filth,
mountains, trees, fire,
illusions, dreams, mirrors,
echoes, rainbows, wish-fulfilling jewels.
Have you seen these fifteen?

In order to see them,
this monk, this young boy, this corpse,
must (take in) all, as one, in the view—
this was Rang byung rdo rje, talking nonsense.

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21 The majority of this colophon is only included in the GB. The GN merely states “spoken at Lha steng”.
22 That is to say, the five consciousnesses.
Song No. 35 (GN 47-48; GB 222)

*Namo-gurubya.*

I honour the gurus,
kinds ones, please inspire me.

Right now, I have realised impartially that this vision of white and red is apparent emptiness, illusory by nature; this is the samādhi (called) like an illusion, so strive to develop it.

This subject, this aware knowing suddenly aroused the path of simplicity; this is the samādhi (called) bravery, so abide in this extreme.

Right now, while you are an ignoramus, apply the branches of method, like the unmistaken tantra’s essence, (and) its vital points, bodhicitta, nādi and prāna.

If you cherish continuously going round in circles, do not connect with a spiritual friend who shows the unerring path to freedom; these seeds of trust are so bright they continuously invoke (the guru).

And the practice that accomplishes this?

Firstly, like a deer in borderland isolation, be afraid of samsāra.

Secondly, as if you were a ruthless tiger, do not be afraid of samsāra.

Like a mother with one child, the unmoving bodhisattva’s behaviour is wholesome.

To train in this way (you will need): to make a home in an isolated solitude, to depend on forests and trees, to (wear) clothes of discarded rags, to act like your breath has left you, to eat food as various as birds, and to be unattached to everything.

If this is your experience you will be rid of impermanent samsāra with its natural sufferings, and become a child of the Buddha.

I, Rang byung rdo rje wrote this after an experience arose.

Song No. 40 (GN 55-56; GB 227-229)

*Namo-guru.*
I honour the noble gurus.
I invoke you, please inspire me.

I, Rang byung rdo rje, am in
the north of the world, in the land of Tibet;
and to be more specific, I am to the east of
a Great Snow Mountain, on a small ridge that
came up when the earth boiled, in a temple called Kol ti.

I cannot gauge others' minds in these bad times
when the teachings are declining,
but this is a little of what I have seen.

(I have seen) "spiritual friends" who advertise greatness,
but influenced by careless laziness,
sink into the mud of wealth and fame,
obessed by the taste of meat and beer.
Doesn't this hurt the teachings?

(I have seen) "great meditators" who advertise meditation,
but are carried away by materialistic days,
and overpowered by slumber each night;
morning and night, they chase pleasure and food.
Diverted in this way, will their mind-streams be freed?

(I have seen) power loving tântrikas,
reliant on brave babbling.
Don't those who hurt others
keep their own mind-streams burning?

(I have seen) patrons desperate for wealth and fame,
who do not develop vivid trust.
Don't those who behave badly
fall down to the three lower realms?

My sad mind has encouraged me
to talk in this way.
If no one else listens,
I will tell you, the empty sky.

Right now, come what may,
I must not get distracted by material things,
and as the sacred gurus instruct,
single pointedly develop experience.

Rang byung rdo rje wrote this song as he engaged in negotiations (to resolve) civil strife,
on the 28th day of the 12th month of the sheep year (1307). He was staying at the Kol ti Temple.

Song No. 41 (GN 56-58: GB 229-231)

Namo-ratna-guru.

23 This refers to Mount Kha' ba dkar po in present day Yunnan.
Noble buddhas of the past, present and future,
noble gurus, glorious, precious, wanderers’ protectors,
incomparable guides, crown jewels,
father gurus, I invoke you (all).

Have a seat here, and hear this.

In early times, the Buddha spoke
the sūtras, tantras, prophecies and śāstras
with an inconceivable intention
for the benefit of trainees.

The beings that followed him were the
clearly elucidating Bka' brgyud,
a precious net of jewelled light that
appeared as a threaded mālā.

The yogi who follows them, has an intention
that resembles their illustrious yogic behaviour;
his is the precisely realised yogi,
he is I, the yogi Rang byung rdo rje.

My intelligence knows all impartially,
actualises all knowing, all understanding, and
destroys all the mind’s internal and external deviant veils,
but I am not an expert, simply patient.

I do not wander all over the country,
yet everything still arises as samādhi.
I do not abandon distractions, they help me to cut through,
but I am not a great mediator, simply patient.

Outside, inside and other, these three, are all as they are,
they appear to me as rainbow paintings in the sky;
clear, empty appearances that are simply vivid,
but I am not a tantrika, simply patient.

There is one (thing) that once known liberates all,
it is as if it realises and comprehends everything, and
its clarity does not diminish, it remains (with me),
but I am not clairvoyant, simply patient.

I do not wander all over the mountains, as
I have realised my own body’s isolated solitude;
all my various visions of the six types of consciousness
arise as realisation, (so) I stay in one place, simply patient.

My mind is not produced, it is equality,
unmoving, it sinks into the centre of the sky,
and realises all concepts are illusion’s play;
it travels everywhere, but is simply patient.

This naturalness, this ordinary knowing
is not sullied by the fault of preconceptions, (so)
it appears as the ungraspable dharmakāya’s wheel, and if it is
concerned with half-truths, the (concern) is simply unbound.

The myriad preconceptions that spring from mind, appear in buddhas' lands too, so do not look to others for pure visions, and think on all as Abhirati, (the land of joy).

All elements, feelings, realisations are like bird's footprints in the sky, they cannot be imagined, and this means great bliss is inseparable from pure lands.

It is like this, and these spoken words are those of a yogi at the end of time who speaks them because he chases concepts, but only a little, so please be patient (with him).

This song was spoken by Rang byung rdo rje, at the time of an offering in the great Phug mo retreat centre at Mtshur phu, on the third day of the fifth month of the dog year (1310).

Song No. 44 (GN 60–63; GB 232–235) A Message to the Entire Kingdom

I honour the sacred, noble guru's dharma-kāya— in essence it is sahaja, great bliss, the mind of all buddhas, simplicity.

Please inspire me to realise clearly this variety of illusory play.

E Ma! The amazing, essential meaning! The vajra that realises non-duality has a message, a mālā of ideas, for dharma practitioners in the ten directions: Don't be distracted. Think well. And send this message to those whose know how to listen.

I have rid myself of compulsive clinging, of beginningless impressions of "I", and now the shackles of reified thinking are broken, I don't have the pride of fundamental knowledge. Send this message to those who understand, tell them Rang byung rdo rje said so.

I have totally abandoned the ignorant house of "I", I am far from wealth and lust, and Now I have left lust's residence and arrived at the site of great bliss. Send this message to the passionate,

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24 Abhirati (Tib. mngon dgar) is Aksobya's buddha-field.
25 The section of this translation in italics is not included within the GN.
26 This refers to the most basic of the three types of knowledge that are alluded to in the Mgon par rtogs pa'i rgyan (Skt. Abhisamaya-alankāra). Called the "fundamental knowledge" (Tib. gzhi shes pa; Skt. sārvajñatā), it relates to the types of wisdom attained by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.
27 The lines up until this point are not included within GN.
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

I have not given generously, impartially, but
I have given up an obsession with pleasant things.²⁸
I effortlessly collect the dharma’s wealth²⁹
as this is bodhicitta’s activity.
Send this message to the avaricious,
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

Having achieved as the Buddha instructed,
I have lost all intention to attain my own desires;
pure of the stains of prescribed transgressions,
mine is certainly the final morality.
Send this message to the monks and nuns
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

Others do not look down on me as
I have worked a long time for peace;
this is the illusory play of helping others
that is known as the greatest patience.
Send this message to the healthy,
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

I’ve been caught on the nails of passing pain,³⁰ but
as (all pains) in resting, moving, eating and sleeping³¹
are helpfully eliminated by liberation, know that
I’m now cleansed of these distracting stains.
Send this message to the diligent,
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

I do not wander around dangerous ravines but
a blissful, clear, non-conceptual, empty form
merges into a direct state, free of conceptions,
it is the samâdhi that destroys saṃsāra’s root.
Send this message to the great meditators,
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

I have not (mastered) the five subjects but by
listening I have destroyed external superimpositions, (and
now know) all phenomena are singularly interdependent;
this is the wisdom that clears up mistaken conceptions.
Send this message to the scholars,
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

I have not practiced asceticism but my concern for
the aggregates has been purified by the deity’s body,
(so that when) this conceptual basis for purification

²⁸ This term “things” is used to translate yul, as in this case it seems to imply specific entities as opposed to more generalised “places”.
²⁹ Here the Tibetan term longs spyod, which is also sometimes translated as “delectations”, specifically indicates wealth.
³⁰ This translation follows the GB, which uses the word gzer ma, “nail” in place of the GN’s zer, “to be said” or “rays (of light)”.
³¹ The text reads sprod lam rnam bzhî, “the four aspects of performance”, which indicates resting, moving, eating and sleeping.
dissolved into the expanse, uncontaminated gnosis manifested.
Send this message to the tántrikas,
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

I have not been to the all-knowing ground, but
I have no desire for the peaceful, blissful result.
I know samsāra's nature so I do not have
dualistic thinking's hopes and fears.
Send this message to the bodhisattvas.
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

Like this, like the Buddha said, (I)
travel everywhere, indiscriminately, destitute.
To help the beings of this degenerate age
I had the idea to collect these verses.
Send this message to the lucky ones.
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

Unfortunate, confused beings
do not understand when we teach.
Even when (we show them) directly, they still doubt.
I call those with debauched views
“people who sever the freedom lineage”;
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

Patrons who amass fame and wealth,
those who “uphold the Vinaya” but not their vows,
teachers who yearn for renown,
“great meditators” who cultivate stupidity—
I call them (all) “try-hards who don’t get results”;
Tell them Rang byung rdo rje said so.

Yogis who doubt,32
 tántrikas without samaya,
nihilistic realised ones, and persons
who commit heinous crimes
I call them (all) “those who fall to infinite depths”;
Tell them Rang byung rdo rje said so.
E Ma! This shows the difference between
the great, good road and the wrong way, (and)
it does not contradict the teachings of the Buddha.
It was sung on the lower slopes of Tsa ri.
Send this message to everyone.
tell them Rang byung rdo rje sent it.

A Message to the Entire Kingdom, was inspired by the great Siddha (Rtsangs pa) Rgya’i 'phrin skyel. Rang byung rdo rje sang it at Glang gong, on (the twenty-ninth day of) the sixth month of the rat year (1312).

Song No. 45 (GN 63–67; GB 235–238) Song of the Vajrayāna

Nama-guru.

32 This reading follows the GB, which says the tshom, "doubt". The GN reads tho bo, which means "a marker stone", and does not make sense in this context.
I pay homage to the gurus.
I invoke you, please inspire me. Through
the inspiration of the greatest of gurus
great Vajradhara in human form,
this is the speech of a yogi who
practices the Buddha’s stainless, vast teachings.

These bodies are the source of the vajra,
they have four aspects: nādi, prāṇa, bindu
and the vital point, mind’s nature.
If you don’t train in these (four) as one
it is hard to understand the way things are.

These words are instructions on this—

In the beginning, when we form this body,
the white and red, the entities of sun and moon,
prāṇa and the in-between consciousness,
conjoin with conditional ignorance and
form the body of five manifest elements.
This is the first thing (to remember), the way of the vajra.

As the first four weeks pass,
every day, two hundred nādi develop,
and within twelve months there are 72,000, and for
every hundred there are twenty extra.
There is (also) one that has thirty-two.
This is the second thing (to remember), the way of the nādi.

It begins from the prāṇa of space, from which
comes five times five, which makes twenty-five;
Then 21,600, from which
six hundred and seventy-five support
completely pure wisdom.
This is the third thing (to remember), the way of the prāṇa.

Semen and blood, white and red gnosis,
separate into two and the final (reality)
arises, entering from above and below.
The consciousness of wanderers
is that which remains in the centre.
This is the fourth thing (to remember), the way of the bindu.

The root, the ground-of-all consciousness,
the aggregates, the elements, the constituents,
the seeds, the roots of all are the
one hundred and ten aware preconceptions
that are conjoined with sahaja (innate wisdom).
This is the fifth thing (to remember), the way of the mind.

The collation of all these five ways of being

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33 360 days.
pervades all, it does not miss an atom. Those who want to enter into and travel on the Vajrayāna need to practise in these (ways). (And) in order to realise this vehicle—

First, you need a kind guru, then the four ripening empowerments, and good training in the path of development and completion. If you make these your experience, results will arise.

Even more than this, for the completion stage, (you need) these binding, vital points of pith instructions.

The five planets abiding at the top\textsuperscript{34} should be firmly bound, then the nādi and the two passage ways beneath should be thoroughly trained and flexible. This is the concentration of nādi training.

The nādi’s five prāṇa should (also) be bound, so the five branch prāṇa becomes stable. Upwardly fixed (prāṇa) are bound down, and downwardly fixed (prāṇa) are tied up. After these are conjoined with the central channel, Rahu becomes flexible. This is the unchanging bliss of Rahu’s wisdom (and) this is the concentration of prāṇa training.\textsuperscript{35}

The moons that travel downwards, should be fixed upwardly and clearly upheld. The moon that abides at the top should also be burned by the fires of the nether regions. Avalokiteśvara said: “The word for mercury is fire, so the word for the element is bhaga.”\textsuperscript{36} Depending on the site of downward expulsion, it gradually transfers to the dawning central channel. The vajra descends lavishly, and hits the top of Brahma’s door. Rahu, does not move the moon, the eclipser joins with the sun. These are the sixteen things to remember. When this clarity is possessed, this is the complete reliance on bindu.

Right now, you have a collection of wrong concepts and ignorance. If you lust for good places, then you will be averse to bad places, and unemotional (or) murky about those in-between.

\textsuperscript{34} The five planets, gza’Inga po, usually alludes to:1) mars (mig dmar gza’), 2) mercury (lhag pa gza’), 3) jupiter (phur bu gza’), 4) venus (pa sangs gza’), 5) saturn (spen pa gza’). In this case, however, the term most probably alludes to the top of the head, the eyes and the nostrils.

\textsuperscript{35} This translation follows the GB, which follows the previous verse.

\textsuperscript{36} I have been unable to decipher what this expression means.
When these are realised as purity 
this preconception is the play of gnosis, 
the six collections are purified in their own place, 
the activities of the rupakāya are manifest, 
the mind’s vajra is very pure, and 
the activities of the dharmakāya are completed. 
This is the total purity of wisdom.

This secret mantra, vajrayāna caused 
the bodhisattvas’ realisations 
and the gurus’ instructions. 
(Through) experiences, I, the yogi 
have realised singularity and spoken this 
in the centre of tantra’s ocean, so 
there is nothing better to say.

This is *The Song of the Vajrayāna*, 
the one called Rang byung rdo rje 
speaks its most profound meaning. 
Please dākinis, be patient with me 
and may the merit from this speech 
manifest the way the vajra is.

Rang byung rdo rje sang this song in Tsa ri’s wisdom maṇḍala at the glorious gate of Glang gong, on the third\(^{37}\) day of the seventh month of the mouse year (1312).

**Song No. 46 (GN 67–69; GB 238–240)**

*Namo-guru.*

I pay homage to the noble gurus. 
Please inspire me to guide wanderers.

All you lucky people gathered here, 
just for a little while, don’t be distracted and hear this.

It is very difficult for people to travel here to 
this special place, this most sacred site, 
here in Jambudvīpa’s north, in Tibet. 
It is surrounded by rocky mountains, vajras; and 
sundry waterfalls cascade from them in all directions.

But it is infused with the bouquet of green trees 
and flowers, so gods, demi-gods, kinnaras\(^{38}\) and 
elemental spirits all make offerings here. 
Externally it has the aspect of a maṇḍala; 
internally it is a site of self-arising deities.

In this wondrous site of accomplishment, 
even those who understand (just) this meaning will 
develop siddha when they realise its intrinsic meaning.

\(^{37}\) GB says thirteenth day.  
\(^{38}\) Kinnaras (cf. also *shang shang*) are half-human, half-bird celestial musicians. They are also associated with the Kinnauri people of present day Himachal Pradesh, India.
So, I am only going to speak a little.

Generally, even your own aggregated body and your own mind are actually sahaja, but you do not realise this, and envision them as matter. When you realise it, nādi, prāna and bodhicitta become inseparable in the Avadhuti, (which is) more particularly, the centre of the four cakras. Its your own sahaja source\(^{39}\) for the stream of bodhicitta’s waterfall.

With all the limbs they branch into, the nādi are the forest and its ornaments, the senses are its flowers, and its fruits (but) there is a fence of mistaken intelligence tightly encircling (us.)

Actual sahaja is inside, at Cakrasamvara’s actual sacred site: our mind. When we see this directly, we will see self-arising Tsa ri.

In particular, in this most sacred cohesive site, the sahaja guru (is present), (and can be) realised directly as: the four Evams, naturally a stupa, sahaja’s great bliss, a glimpse of your own vajra mind.

The play of outside and in are inseparable—this is a painting of the way your mind is, it is my offering to the ears of all you sitting here, and it is detailed so you will understand.

Rang byung rdo rje sang this song in Tsa ri ta Bkra shis ljong on the thirteenth day of the seventh month of the mouse year (1312).

**Song No. 47 (GN 69–70; GB 240–241) Ten Teaching Topics**

_Namo-guru._

Noble, kind wanderers’ guide, wish fulfilling gem, nirmanakāya, please remain my crowning jewel\(^{40}\) and inspire me to view others purely.

For great meditators, roaming in solitudes....

When you do not know your own body’s solitude, an outer solitude is not much use.

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\(^{39}\) The Tibetan word this translates is _rten_, which would be more directly translated into English as “base”. But as the “base” of a waterfall is the place it falls to rather than the place that it originates, and this origination is implicit in the Tibetan, I have translated it in this instance as “source”.

\(^{40}\) This translation follows GB, as GN uses the past tense, which is less clear.
When you do not know your own mind is a guru, 
a so-called “guru” is not much use. 
When you do not know appearances are texts too, 
black inky letters are not much use. 
When your karmic enemies, the afflictions are undefeated, 
vanquishing renowned opponents is not much use. 
When you have not given up worldly ways, 
a charlatan’s dharma is not much use. 
When you do not know everything is in mind, 
places, outside and in, are not much use. 
If you have not stopped craving sweet, delicious food, 
an essenceless ganacakra is not much use. 
When the dharma and your mind are not mixed, 
pointless vows are not much use. 
If you do not harmonise with dharma’s tenor, 
melodious songs mgur are not much use. 
When you realise that-ness without wavering from the essence of all, 
you are close to the Buddha’s mind. 
This small song is Ten Teaching Topics, 
hear (it), you lucky ones. 

This song was composed at Bkra shis ljongs on the thirteenth day of the seventh month of the mouse year (1312).

Song No. 48 (GN 70–71; GB 241) Eight Things You Will Not Mind

Namo-guru.

Guru, sacred and precious, 
I invoke you; please inspire me. 

When the fog of ignorance clears, 
you won’t mind haze outside. 
When the sun of gnosis rises, 
you won’t mind sunsets outside. 
When the rain of preconceptions cease, 
you won’t mind it pouring outside. 
When you realise samsāra is a cliff face, 
you won’t mind rugged chasms outside. 
When there are no more thorns of hate, 
you won’t mind prickly barbs. 
When the streams of craving dry up, 
you won’t mind churning rivers. 
When the peaks of pride are levelled, 
you won’t mind high mountains outside. 
When you taste a meal of samādhi, 
you won’t mind flavourless food. 
When the jungle ravines of the afflictions are cleared, 
you won’t mind external gloomy gorges.

41 GB says Tsa ri tre ljongs. 
42 This translation follows GB, as the GN states “nub kyang bgod”, which would mean “you will not establish” or “you will not laugh at” and seems to be a scribal error.
This is the small song, *Eight Things You Will Not Mind*. Lucky ones, hear this. Guru Rang byung rdo rje sang this song in the isolated sacred site of Tsa ri tra, on the road to Pad phug (the Lotus Cave).

**Song No. 49 (GN 71–72; GB 241–243)**

_Namo-guru._

Nirmanakāya of Buddhas past, present and future, wanderers’ guide, dharma noble, ornament of the world in these dark times, I honour the supreme guru.

All you lucky ones sitting here, just for a moment, don’t be distracted and hear this.

For those in mountain retreats everywhere...

If you do not realise your own body’s solitude, and particularly in this sacred site of Tsa ri tra, if you do not know how it can help dhyāna then you will not know the suffering, the impediments it can clear; like the hunger on this road to Glo, the despair that comes from untold tiredness, and the dirt, the stones, the mountains, the rocks, the trees. If you have not trained your mind in dhyāna, you will see the thistle’s prickles as pointless.

For this to happen, train in pure perceptions of self. We may have fled here to this solitude, this sacred site, but a thief has chased us: preconceptions, subjects and objects. If we don’t meet this thief with a craving-free mind, it won’t matter where we are sitting.

Your mind’s purity is innate, it is a collections of gods, pure dhyāna. When it is not conditionally obscured by subjects/objects, when you have realised it directly, the mountain retreat outside, these borderlands, become the guru, the deity, the dākinīs, and the elements — earth, water, fire and air — appear as the aggregate of all dharma.

For this to happen, seek pure visions of self; when you sever attachment to subjects/objects, then, like that, realisation happens. For those great meditators roaming in solitudes, this is a broom (to sweep up) suffering and misdeeds, (so) impediments become accomplishments, and appearances represent deities. When your own mind is purified of stains, it becomes the supreme result.

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43 This translation follows the GB, which says *sgrībs*. The GN says *sgrub pa*, “to achieve”, which makes little sense in the context.
You, sitting here, do you understand? This is just a piece of an idea mālā, (but) humans, non-humans, elemental spirits, all of you gathered (here) should be gl addened by it. May it become the final meaning.

The yogi, Rang byung rdo rje sang this song on the banks of G.yu mtsho (Turquoise Lake), in Tsa ri, on the seventeenth day of the seventh month of the mouse year (1312).44

Song No. 50 (GN 73–74; GB 243–244) Dharma Song of the Eight Useless Things

Namo-guru.

I honour the nobles, the gurus. I invoke you, please inspire me. At this great sacred site Tsa ri tra, I sing this song of blissful experience.

Don’t be distracted, you sitting here, and hear this.

If you don’t realise great mental bliss, the words your mouths utter are useless
If you don’t crack your mind open, your expertise in jargon is useless.
If you don’t see with yogic perception, cultivating deductive reasoning is useless.
If you don’t know your own body’s solitude, escaping to (other) solitudes is useless.
If you don’t know to isolate preconceptions, depending on isolated places is useless.
If you don’t know one knowledge frees all, expertise in terminology is useless.
If you don’t know preconceptions are dharmakāya, asserting yourself ably is useless.
If you don’t know your mind’s roots, mistaken concepts are useless.

What is this song about?
It is The Dharma Song of the Eight Useless Things.
If I have made mistakes (in it), please be patient (with me).

Rang byung rdo rje sang this song in Bkra shis ljong, Tsa ri tra, on the twenty-second day of the seventh month of the mouse year (1312).

Song No. 53 (GN 79–81; GB 247–249)

In the sacred site, the pure land of Sukhāvatī, lives the Bhagavān protector, Amitābha,

44 There is an insertion at this point in the GN from the beginning section of Song No 52. A translation of the inserted section reads: “...kind one, I bow at your feet. / It is not proper for people like me to sing songs, / but while we perform secret mantras, / we obtain the appearance of a Buddha, so please, / just for a little while, don’t be distracted and hear this. / Kye ma! In these dark times for the teachings, / those who know precisely the way of dharma are rare; / a few in a hundred actually accomplish it...”

45 This is a translation of the Great Completion term gdar sha, which literally means “the membrane of an egg”, but is used as a metaphor to mean “to test” and “to investigate”.
Avalokiteśvara himself,
I invoke you, please inspire me.
This inspiration enters my mind
and I travel to Sukhāvatī.

From the south-eastern land, from the city of demons,
comes the nirmānakāya who tames the tameable,
O rgyan Padmasambhava,
I invoke you, please inspire me.
This inspiration enters my mind
and I travel to the south-eastern land.

In an inconceivably luxurious palace,
lives compassion’s queen, wanderers’ protector,
the One Mother, Siddharājñī,
I invoke you. Please inspire me.
This inspiration flows into my mind,
and I travel to (her) inconceivable palace.

In the isolations of India’s cotton (fields),
is the heart-son of Nāropā and Maitrīpāda,
Great Tiphu(ba); I invoke you.

In that great site, the eastern snowy mountains,
lives Milarepa’s heart-son,
Ras chung pa; I invoke you.

At that wonderful, great site, the Copper Mountain,
you see just what secret mantra means,
Zang ri pa; I invoke you.

In the east, at the seat of Karma,
is the indiscriminate wanderers’ guide,
‘Gro mgon ras chen; I invoke you.

From the palace of pure appearance, the dharmakāya,
you illuminate the Bka’ brgyud,
Spom brag pa; I invoke you.

On this kingdom’s great planes, in solitude
lives Avalokiteśvara himself,
the Karmapa; I invoke you.

On the sun and moon cushions arranged atop my head,
is the immensely kind root guru,
the dākinīs’ sovereign, the treasury of dharma.

In order to do the infinite deeds (needed) for travel to Sukhāvatī,
I invoke you, please inspire me.
This inspiration enters my mind,
And I travel to Sukhāvatī.

I invoke these lineage roots, and
through the power of this aspiration
I arrive in the Buddha’s pure land.
In the Buddha’s pure land, this pure
site, there is no name for the lower realms.
When you travel to Sukhāvatī, (you will see)
a myriad of precious jewels shining,
a myriad of flowers delicately decorating,
a river of unfathomable nectar flowing.

The Buddhas of the ten directions,
sing the praises of Sukhāvatī.
This land is the Buddha’s pure land, and
there lives the master of compassion;
by remembering (him), Avalokiteśvara,
we will be reborn in Sukhāvatī.

This praise to the Bka’ brgyud lineage, was sung by the guru Rang byung rdo rje, at Tsa ri Bkra shis ljong, on the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month of the mouse year (1312).

**Song No. 56 (GN 869-88; GB 253-254)**

*Namo-guru.*

I honour the noble gurus,
please inspire me.

In Jambudīpa’s north, in Tibet,
at Gangs dkar, to be precise,
he who comes at the end of time,
the self-arising vajra, (Rang byung rdo rje), said this.

Hear this, dhārmikas of the ten directions!

If you have not realised your own mind's nature,
if your (knowledge) does not arise from inside liberation, then
you will know terms and logic, (like) a non-Buddhist,
you will know prāna exercises, (like) a marmot,46
you will maintain a cave, (like) a musk deer, (and)
you will practice austerities, (like) a brahman.
If you do not know conceptual circularity,
whatever you do, there is no liberation.

And so, students of mine,
if you want to find the buddhas’ intention,
(know that) all positions (yul) are illusion-like,
do not grasp truth, and let go of “reality”.
Preconceived feelings are like licking flames,47
the positions (yul) you desire give no satisfaction.
Mistaken knowing is like shrouding fog,48
look at its meaning, at its lack of essence.
Preconceptions are like poison; obsess about

46 This follows GB, as GN repeats phyi ba from the previous line, and this does not follow the pattern of the song. The pronunciation of marmot (‘phyi ba) and non-Buddhist, or “outsider” (phyi ba) are exactly the same in Tibetan, and as this was an oral composition, either word is possible. The decision to translate this word here as marmot depends in part on the similarity between marmots’ play and some physical yogas.
47 A more literal translation of the Tibetan would read “are fire tongues” (me lce ’dra), but as this is not an idiomatic English usage, and to be “licked by flames” is, I have chosen the latter.
48 This follows GB, which reads bun ‘dra, or “fog”. GN uses the word ‘un, which I cannot find a meaning for and therefore assume it is a scribal error.
pleasure and you will be bound (by it).

Destroy these positions (yul) and your sense of them (yul can); (Destroy) this dualism, and rest evenly in its destruction. There is no place in this life that you can depend on, so, primarily, set up what you need for the next.

And again, there is no truth in anything, so look at the naturalness of truth’s lack. As there is no end to words, settle on the final meaning. And do not be frenetic, experience your guru’s instructions.

The dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje spoke these words at Jo mo Gangs dkar, on the eighth day of the seventh month of the ox year (1313).

Song No. 58 (GN 909-92; GB 2569-257) On Completion of the Jātaka Tales

Nama-guru.

I honour the gurus.

Kye ma! This end-of-time mountain yogi, who follows in the footsteps of the Bka’ brgyud pa who come from the land of snows, has only made a little effort, but has this to say.

And again, these days, those who practice dharma do not experience it precisely; distracted by pretence, they run after it. This action is slightly wrong.

They have abandoned their craved-for homeland, and claim to be establishing the teachings’ general purpose, but they are still attached or adverse to other places. This is also mistaken behaviour.

They have entrusted their ancestral lands (to others), and claim to be begging from necessity, but they still steal little things. This is also wrong behaviour. They have fled their relatives, and claim to be concerned for their (vajra) siblings, but voluntarily engage in pointless attachment and aversion. This is also debauched behaviour.

They claim to have entered into the Buddha’s teachings,

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49 The GB reads the six limits (mtha’ drug), instead of the final meaning (mtha’ thug). This implies a much more doxographical edge to this song. The expression “the six limits” refers to the six parameters of a text, to which Rang byung rdo rje has been alluding throughout this poem. These are: 1) the definitive meaning (nges don), 2) the provisional meaning (drang don), 3) the interpretable (dgongs pa can), 4) the non-interpretable (dgongs pa can ma yin pa), 5) literal (sgra’ gi bzhin pa) and 6) non-literal (sgra’ gi bzhin pa ma yin pa).

50 Both texts say yong, which is a verb meaning “to come”, not yang, which in this context would mean “once again”. But grammatically it is very unusual to start a Tibetan literary construction with a verb like this, so my best guess is that this is a transliteration of an accented yang rather than an actual instance of the verb yong.
and to receive training in morality, but claiming (to follow) their superiors' instructions, they are debauched. This is very stupid.

They claim to have attained dhyāna in solitude, and to have deserted their monastic living quarters, but the hustle and bustle of their antagonistic concepts (inside) their empty bodies\textsuperscript{52} distracts them.

They have not peeled back the layers\textsuperscript{53} of their own minds, but they claim to be impressing them with expert imprints; these followers of writings and words are being led down the wrong path. They are not developing the compassion of equanimity, but they claim they (keep) the bodhicitta precepts; cultivating compassion through obsession means getting stuck in the mud of contaminated desire.

They have not applied themselves to the Buddha’s instructions, but because they insist they are experts, they (say) they are great; (maintaining) the wrong view, their critique is a rope through the nose, leading them to bad destinations.

They have not attained the compassion of equanimity, but they claim to be accomplishing the highest awakening; (without compassion), even with numerous efforts, they are a long way from the bodhisattvas.

If they do not pare back the layers of their own minds, even if they cultivate the correct assumption of emptiness, it is difficult to touch the essential way things are, so those who attain liberation will be few.

This mountain hermit, this yogi of dark times, the one called Rdo rje said this. It was not (meant) to disparage others, but in this twilight of the Buddha’s teachings, [it says] may precise accomplishment prevail! Its cultivation is the reason for this utterance. All you lucky ones, get its meaning into your head, and if it (contains) contradictions, please be patient with them.

He sung\textsuperscript{54} this when he had finished composing the \textit{Hundred Jātaka Tales} of the Buddha in Bkra shis gsar ma, on the fifth day of the second month of the tiger year (1314).

\textbf{Song No. 59 (GN 929–94; GB 257–260)}

\textit{Namo-guru.}

\textsuperscript{51}This expression means to have become ordained as a monk or nun.

\textsuperscript{52}The GB reads \textit{lung stong}, “empty valley”. Either this or the chosen text, which follows the GN, work in the context, and both are also highly evocative.

\textsuperscript{53}This translates the expression \textit{bdar sha gcod pa}, which literally means “to pierce the membrane (of the mind)” and is associated with analysis in the Great Completion tradition, but does not translate easily into English.

\textsuperscript{54}The GB suggests that he wrote this song by using the verb ‘\textit{tri ba} here.'
I honour the noble gurus.

Kye ma! In the three expanses of samsāra are all those beings who have not realised their own mind. Their craving\(^{55}\) carries them to samsāra, their grasping\(^{56}\) leads to the sites of births, (and) their feelings\(^{57}\) of illness afflict them.

There is no liberation. It is so very sad!

When you realise the mind’s root, your own mind is the Buddha essence, like the sky, it is the essence of purity, conditional awareness is equal to a mirror, the six collections’ own essence is gnosis.

How wonderful is this recognition!

Those children who do not realise this, \textit{are concerned with an I, when there is no I},\(^{58}\) confuse a lack of other with (another) place, hold onto a\(^{59}\) duality that is non-dual, (accrue) conceptual imprints, the veils to knowledge, and have affective concepts of to do and do not.

Even great meditators for whom non-conception arises still have not fathomed interior formulations’ depths. Even those who wish to know themselves still do not understand conception’s point.

Even great meditators with a realisation of emptiness are still caught in the snares\(^{60}\) of nihilism.

Those with the ten signs of complete dhyāna, are still similar to those pursuing mirages. Yogis who perform the Great Completion, still do not understand cause and effect; without undoing their entanglements in food and clothes, they obsessively, boastfully babble about the “non-real”.

Great meditators who can enact secret, self-realisation, still invest evil spirits with truth.

[Still others are] unaware within themselves, so they pin\(^{61}\) their hopes on metaphoric, black, inky letters.

And again, everything is preconceptions, (and) samsāra’s duality is to be abandoned.

It is okay\(^{62}\) to destroy dualism, inside and out.

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\(^{55}\) In Tibetan this is \textit{sred pa} (Skt. trśnd), the eighth of the twelve links of dependent origination (Tib. rtan ’brel yan laq bcu gnyis; Skt. dvādāśa-pratītyasamutpāda).

\(^{56}\) In Tibetan this is \textit{len pa} (Skt. upādāna), the ninth of twelve links of dependent origination.

\(^{57}\) This follows the GB, which reads \textit{tshor ba} (Skt. \textit{vedana}), the seventh of the twelve links of dependent origination. The GN reads \textit{tshogs pa}, collection, which does not make as much sense or follow the pattern of the verse.

\(^{58}\) This follows GB. GN reads \textit{cig}, the indefinite article. The GN reads \textit{gcig}, the number one, which seems less appropriate in the line’s construction.

\(^{59}\) This follows GB. GN reads \textit{sgrogs su chud}, which means “to enter into declaration” and does not make as much sense.

\(^{60}\) This follows Tibetan texts read \textit{shes su re}, which more literally translated would read, “their hopes are in”, but this sounds confusing in direct translation, and therefore I have employed the English expression “to pin hopes”.

\(^{61}\) This line is in the GB but not the GN.

\(^{62}\) This line is in the GB but not the GN.
and (still experience) the appearance of samsāra.
It is enough when, with no giving up
and no doing, there is no realisation.
(For those with) pre-conceptual habitual imprints,
karma’s magic is limitless.
Analysis without wisdom (is used)
by many worldly people.
Goodness that has not embraced method
sets up the bliss of desire realm gods.
Even dhyāna that possesses bliss and clarity,
does not take you beyond the divine form-realm.
Non-concepts that stop constructions
are a detour to (the realm of) long-life gods.
Even realising all phenomena are space-like
is (just) the sensory abode of endless space.
Even viewing mind’s nature as space-like
is (just) a detour to the site of endless consciousness.
No “I”, no-thing at all, is (just) the no-existence and
no non-existence of samsāra’s peak.

Kye ma! These three expanses are so shifty,
so, pundits, insist there is no truth!

In accordance with all the buddhas’ intentions—

If you want to become experienced,
be dextrous in your method, (and) get to the point,
do not invest your feelings of experience with truth,
train in the dhyāna that has mindfulness,
do not get separated from indivisibility, and you will
experience the link between vipaśyana and samatha.
If you want magic powers and super-knowledge,
train in abiding (and) mental activity.
(But) if you want to get out of samsāra’s mud,
develop the wisdom that realises selflessness, (and)
while using the method that helps others,
train in illusion-like compassion.

And again,
every thing is this preconception,
realising this is the grand play of gnosis;
not realising this takes you into samsāra.
All you lucky ones, train in this!

This was spoken for those with dhyāna, (and) those with learning who do not know the point.

Song No. 60 (GN 94–95; GB 260) Song of Concealed Knowledge about Places and Mind

Namo-guru.

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62 To express this idea Rang byung rdo rje has used the Tibetan colloquialism a’u rtsi, which is used to express
a sentiment similar to the English “okay”, and with the same level of casualness of speech.
63 This follows the GB as the GN, which reads rdan ldan, seems to have a scribal error.
64 This also follows the GB as the GN, which reads 'bral, seems to contain a spelling mistake.
Samsāra and nirvāṇa, are self-liberating equality, I honour the one who directly illuminates this.

I look out at the places outside, and see their own clarity, their ungraspable nature. I look in at my mind inside, and see its own awareness, its own luminous nature. I look out at myriad conditions, and see images painted by rainbows. I look in at my constructed conditions, and see self-liberation, a sketch in the water. Just by looking at preconceptions, I see a magician’s sleight of hand.65

This myriad, all these dharmas are the site of mind, and this mind, in its natural state is self-liberation. The gathering of buddhas and their offspring, the bodhisattvas, complete myriad activities; they do not exist but appear, attain empowerment, and lead ignorant, illusion-like beings. Having followed them, you must then single pointedly arouse experience.

I am small and untrue, but in this solitude I have sung this unconnected song.

This Song of Concealed Knowledge about Places and Mind, was sung when we were invited to come together for a ga’nacakra by Mkhen po Sa nag pa, on Mtshur phu’s Ngang chung Hill.

Song No. 63 (GN 97–98; GB 262–263) Song that Settles the Ground-of-All66

Namo-guru.

Illuminator of my own mind as dharmakāya, greatest of gurus, I invoke you.

Those seated here, hear these words, realise their purpose, then experience it. The ground-of-all is the base of both samsāra and nirvāṇa—when you do not realise it, you are in samsāra, when you realise it, it is the Tathāgata’s mind. This is an expression of the ground-of-all’s nature.

It is analogous to a mirror without tarnish, on which reflections appear; just like this,

65 The Tibetan term is sgyu ma mkhan po’i rnam ’gyur, which literally means both “a magician’s gesture” and “a magician’s transformations”. The English expression “sleight of hand” seems to contain elements of both these meanings.

66 This song has also been translated as “A Song on the Além” by Karl Brunnhölzl (2009:201); by Kurtis Schaeffer (1995:174); and Klaus-Dieter Mathes (2008:74). Interestingly, in their translations of the colophon, both scholars write that this song was written for “the great meditator, master Ngarma, and his servant”. By contrast, I have transliterated this name as Dar ma. I have based this decision on two reasons. Firstly, in other texts, Rang byung rdo rje repeatedly refers to a student of his called Dar ma, and even dedicates texts to him. Secondly, after reading through this entire manuscript, it becomes obvious that in the reverse of the normal order, the scribe who wrote it consistently draws his Tibetan letter da shorter than his Tibetan letter nga.
in the expansive state of unstained mind, 
a variety of awareness flows and perishes.

(Even) the duality that grasps at place and sense of place, 
the flow of appearance in your own expanse; 
śaṃśāra and nirvāṇa are not two, but one entity; 
not realising this is a mistake, realising it causes liberation.

But there is no realising and realiser, so 
holding onto this duality is (also) the base of samsāra, 
and seeing their essential lack of duality, 
manifests the Buddha's essence directly.

This is The Song that Sets the Ground-of-All, 
(and) it was sung at a solitary site. 
Through clearing the veil to the ground-of-all, 
may you realise your own unstained mind!

This song was sung by the dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje for the great meditator Dar ma and his entourage at Stod lung rgyal mdo, in the ninth month of the sheep year (1319) as the moon waxed.

Song No. 66 (GN 101–102; GB 265) Song that Sets Subjects and Objects

Namo-guru.

Gazing on all phenomena in equanimity, 
with completely pure compassion, 
supreme actualisation of subject/object, 
gurus, I honour you.

In Jambudvīpa's northern land, Tibet, 
the heights (from which) pure rivers descend, 
is an isolated site called East Kha rag, 
where an end-of-time yogi has this to say.

You have superb, precious free-time and opportunity, 
(and) you have met a Mahāyāna guru, so 
when you receive precise instructions, 
single-pointedly experience them.

Outside, a myriad of appearances are 
the mind's projections: it is as if 
they are dreamtime visions, so 
do not become obsessed (with them). Rest evenly.

Inside, preconceptions are fleeting, 
(and) in themselves naturally clear; 
the projections of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa come from this (clarity), 
and so they are unceasing, self-liberating. Rest evenly.

Knowledge of appearances' duality is unpolluted,

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67 The GN reads dgo, which does not mean anything and appears to be a scribal error. The closest comprehensible homophone is mgo, which means "head", "beginning" or in this context "heights". The GB reads ngos, which means, among other things "side".
and in essence non-conceptual clarity; your own mind is Buddha’s essence, so realise the nature of this thatness.

This is *The Song that Settles Subjects and Objects*, (and) deftly knows the unceasing; by its goodness, may all sentient beings realise the essence of their own mind.

This was sung by the dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje at Tibet’s great sacred site, East Kha rag Hermitage, on the fifteenth day of the tenth month of the sheep year (1319).

**Song No. 69 (GN 104–105; GB 267–268) Lyric that Unfolds Outside and In**

*Namo-guru.*

I honour the noble gurus.

Up on this group of snowy mountains, this lotus cluster, we are surrounded by Jambudīpa’s great ocean. Up here bright, sweet waterfalls sparkle, refreshing all; by its goodness, may all sentient beings realise the essence of their own mind.

To be more specific, we are in the centre of the Land of Snows, Tibet, next to the Pak shu River’s cool waters, (where) a group of precious rock mountains converge, making a solitary site for those with dhyāna.

This group of piled up slate mountains, are the unfolding of a great, precious vajra; there is no fear of assorted distractions here, and your fearless dhyāna will be a good friend.

In this level and beautiful alpine meadow, samādhi will charm your mind, and dhyāna adorn (it, affecting you the) same way as the myriad blossoming flowers do.

The assorted, melodious waterfalls relieve the burning pain of dryness. The clear sounds of dharma relieve the sufferings of the afflictions. The clear, white snow mountains are lit beautifully by the lamp-like sun and moon The bright whiteness of compassion’s light (shines on) the disciples, (who open up) like a delightful cluster of lotuses.

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68 The Tibetan reads skye rgu’i yid kyi ro myang byed, which literally translated would mean “is a tasty experience of mortal minds”. As it sounds strange in English to suggest that a taste is a mental experience, I have changed the translation slightly, without creating a drastic change in meaning.

69 The Pak shu is a tributary of the Skyid shu River.

70 The GN reads ‘dzigs, which appears to be a scribal error.

71 This follows the GB, which reads zhing. The GB reads zhags, which makes little sense in this context.

72 This follows the GB, which reads spang ljongs. The GN reads ljongs litong, which appears to be another scribal error as it does not have any clear meaning.
(Above) the beautiful, pervasive sky
with its delightful star-\( \text{mālas} \) covers all.
And I wonder if the wisdom realising
emptiness pervades all wanderers the same way.

(This place) is much relied upon by the siddhas,
(and the) gods and asuras broadcast (their) formulations
of the myriad realisations (that happened here)
pervasively in all directions, in the speech of \text{gandharvas}.

Kha rag, this solitary site, has given forth
this \text{Lyric} \text{that Unfolds Outside and In},
which the one called Rang byung rdo rje
sung at North Kha rag.

May all wanderers first know this!

In East Kha rag, it was the \text{Song} \text{that Settles Subjects and Objects}; in South Kha rag it was
the song (about) the \text{Influence of Impermanence}; in West Kha rag, it was the \text{Talk of the Inseparable} \text{View and Cultivation}; and in North Kha rag, the song that is the \text{Lyric that Unfolds Outside and In}. These four were sung there (in Kha rag) in this way.

\text{Song No. 70 (GN 105-107; GB 268-269)}

\text{Namo-guru.}

Lords of noble mountain hermits,
protectors of beings, gurus, I honour you.
All you meditators\textsuperscript{76} sitting here
in the hermitage at Bde chen stengs, hear this!

To begin with, you have won an elusive human body,
(and) found the Buddha's stainless teachings,
(so) when you encounter a noble guru,
single-pointedly arouse experience.

As samsāra's ocean is so very deep, (and)
suffering's sea monsters are man-eaters,
if you do not make an effort now,
escape from here will be very difficult.

The buddhas of previous generations
(shone) their limitless light of compassion,
yet we still wander in dark ignorance,

\textsuperscript{73} Both here and in the colophon, the GN contains a scribal error for the GB's \text{zlos gar}, which I have translated as "lyric"; by contrast it reads \text{zlog gar}. It is interesting to note, given the oral origins of this song, how close these two spellings are in pronunciation.

\textsuperscript{74} In the text of Song number sixty-six, where Rang byung rdo rje himself refers to this piece as \text{The Song that Settles Subjects and Objects}, he uses the Tibetan word \text{glu} to refer to the word. Here, however, when the song is being referred to by the GB and GN's collator in the colophon, it is referred to as \text{a mgur}. This is also true of the \text{Song (about) the Stimulus of Impermanence}.

\textsuperscript{75} This translation follows the earlier name that was given for this song. In this re-statement of its name, there is a slight difference in the Tibetan text, which reads \text{brel ma}, or "combination" instead of \text{brel med} or "inseparable".

\textsuperscript{76} Here an alternate word for meditators is used, \text{bsam gtan pa}, which literally means "those with \text{dhyāna}". The use of the plural follows GB. GN has the intensifier \text{rnam} instead, which appears to be a scribal error.
left behind in the midst of dread.

With this precious human body now, 
with all this acquired goodness, 
mount the enthusiastic horse, 
eat the single-pointed dhyāna food, 
wear the clear jewels of pure morality. 
When the guru who (knows) the path of wisdom, 
leads, stop procrastinating, and 
quickly, develop awakening.

If you do not make an effort in this (yoga), your 
preconceived awareness will keep babbling, 
(and) running off to all sorts of places (yuł). 

Cravings for pleasure are masters of deception, 
demons of ignorance wait to ambush you in ravines, 
birth, ageing, illness and death are great rivers, 
and the sunset of the teachings is coming soon.

And again, (for those) who doubt they will wander 
endlessly, (know that) this self-arising gnosis 
may be nothing but your mind, but (right) 
now) it is still veiled by clouds of dualism.

May the winds of wisdom scatter them! 
These wavering preconceptions 
can bind you to the bliss of dhyāna, but 
may this subtle, concerned mistake 
be destroyed by the weapons of gnosis.

You have autonomy now, so 
if you single-pointedly arouse experience, 
winning a human body will have meaning, and 
if you act in accord with the Buddha’s advice, 
the island of precious liberation is nearby; 
quickly, attain far reaching virtues. 
When you do, the wishes of beings will be 
incidentally accomplished, so work single-pointedly.

Rdo rje, the end-of-time yogi, 
spoke these encouraging words, 
in order to stimulate single-pointed compassion. 
May all wanderers become buddhas! 
This was spoken at Bde chen stengs.

**Song No. 74 (GN 112-114; GB 273-276)**

_Namo-buddhayā-guru._

Throughout beginningless saṃsāra, (we have) 
mistaken mind’s nature, and not realising it 
have chased after preconceived places, 
again, and again, right until this moment.

Trapped by visions of external truth
we grasp at them, and these preconceptions entice us again, and again, so that even now, in this moment, we are choosing and rejecting myriad places.

Kye ma! Even though you are the illusionist, your concern for the apparitions you conjure binds you, and you do not see it. Doesn’t this make you the laughing-stock of the great paññita bodhisattvas?

Ground-of-all, you are indescribable; even though you (carry) many conceptual imprints, you are not filled up, you are just like the expanse of space; even though it is in you that all conceptual waves are generated, you do not increase, or decrease, just like the ocean; even though pleasant and painful objects pile up on you, just like Mount Meru, (you are not filled up.)

Concepts of what to do and do not are like licking flames; they flicker but do not die out, repeatedly rekindled (by) wind-like formulated preconceptions. Through an intense concern with unreal places, we grasp at them, and they become so very firm; aggregates (for example), and the rest, are as firm as solid ground.

Preconceptions do things that hurt themselves, so they are just like a crazy people: they are self-obsessed and lacking freedom, so they are just like rākṣasa’s spit; they are deemed untrue under personal scrutiny, so they are just like a gandharva’s city; they are found to be empty under thorough investigation, so they are just like bubbles in the water; they are essence-less when pulverised, so they are just like plantain’s marrow.

Conceptions are clear and unable to be grasped, so they are like the moon’s reflection in water; momentarily impermanent, they are like dew; moving yet not apprehended, they are just like a mirage; wonderful yet fraudulent, they are like the colours of a rainbow; arising from conditions, they are just like echoes; turning out to be insubstantial, they are like a reflection.

Preconceptions, facsimiles of insubstantial illusions, you are strange things indeed!

Be satisfied with none other than the ancient and unmoving; then, if it moves, hold onto memories of (your) true nature.

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77 Both the GN and GB have rtogs pa, not rtog pa, but this seems to be yet another case of the misspelling of these words.
78 This follows GB. The GN, once again reads rtogs pa.
Hey you! Do not be concerned with half-truths,
and do not wrongly conceptualise no-truth.
Do not hold onto dualism, it will hurt you;
Do not spurn duality either, it is you.

Listen to instructions given by bodhisattva gurus,
these conceptions of yours are wondrous and great.
The impermanence of time is also a conception;
for you their (really) is no durable formulation.
You are the root of all appearances,
emptiness is not anything else.
Concern with truth destroys (truth) itself;
for you there should be no reliance on intellect.
Whatever it seems like, for you reliance on external appearances is bondage, and
your knowledge of this is your freedom;
oberving conceptual dos and do nots destroys (them);
oberving (them) abandons them. What more can I say?

Except that generated afflictions still appear
through habit; (until) they are not formulated (anymore),
(untill) cultivation abandons them. Isn’t this so?

They are abandoned, yet you (still) chain yourself.
You! It is a great wonder that all the bodhisattvas
have not sent you away, or have not grabbed you!

Kye ma! These feelings come from preconceptions;
self-arising, self-subsiding, self-purified, this
self-arising vajra (Rang byung rdo rje) wrote this.
(It is) pointless, misconceived, calming and
directed (towards) the flourishing of realisation.
May there be no more dos and do nots!

I wrote this when my pre-conceptions made me feel like laughing, at Bde chen stengs.

Song No. 81 (GN 119–121; GB 283–284) Twelve Verses

Namo-ratna-guru.

Sacred guru, wanderers’ guide,
your boundless, compassionate activity,
the intelligence of the fortunate, clears the fog.
I honour you, wanderers’ wonder.

When a precious, wish-fulfilling gem
is sheathed, its light and colour are
invisible, (but) when it is wiped clean,
its virtues are made visible.

Mind’s nature, this precious gem, is
sheathed by subjects/objects, and its Buddha
virtues are invisible, (but) through purification,
the Buddha’s complete virtues will arise.

In the empty sky outside,
clouds and fog arise naturally, (but) the conditional wind disperses them, and unceasing they dissolve on the spot.

In the simplicity of the dharmadhātu, conceptual formulations arise naturally, (but) the realisation of wisdom purifies them, and this duality dissolves into the unceasing.

The non-conceptual sun mandala's rays radiate everywhere, but even as it descends into the dissipating darkness, it does not fuse with the earth.

The buddhas' activity is concept-free, and spreads out to pervade space, but even as it clears wanderers' mental fog, ripening beings, it is not confused by beings' mistakes.

In the same way two sticks support the fire that blazes and burns them both, so that there is no (longer) burner and burnt, and they disappear into space, so too

Afflicted abandonments and conceptual but antidotal awareness support the purification of both these symptoms and they (both) dissolve into the simplicity of wisdom.

In the same way the ripening fruit is imperceptible in seeds and sprouts, but (when) causes and conditions, water and manure come together, they (bring forth) excellent fruit, so too

Ordinary wisdom, your own essence, is an imperceptible gnosis right now, but (when) causes and conditions, the two collections (are there), they will bring forth this excellent fruit.

There are ten metaphors here, (in these) unceasing, spoken words. If you disagree (with them), please be patient with them. By their goodness may all wanderers become Buddhas.

These Twelve Verses were spoken to meditating spiritual friends, when (he) was explaining the Great Completion.

Song No. 86 (GN 125; GB 288)

I honour the noble gurus, please inspire me; to realise my own mind.

79 This follows the GB, which reads 'du byed, "constructions". The GN reads 'dug byed, which appears to be a scribal error.
Everyone sitting here, hear these words.

Your mind is simplicity, it is not polluted by awareness of duality, it is self-liberating sahaja; this is called the view free from extremes.

Emptiness and compassion are inseparable, and unbounded by imagined symbols, the constant, undistracted remembrance of this is the way to cultivate self-liberation.

Achieving for yourself and all others, and not falling into either of the two extremes, while (remaining) uncorrupted by pretension is the way to behave spontaneously.

The foundation and result are inseparable, this means that there is freedom from all obscurations without abandoning (anything); there is nothing to achieve (but) perfect completion; this is the nature of the result, its subject and object.

These four—the view, cultivation, behaviour and result—are all complete in your mind, with nothing to do or not do. If you examine this, it is in tune with the buddhas’ intention. If it makes sense, then experience it.

**Song No. 87 (GN 125–127; GB 288–291)**

_Namo-guru._

Noble, sacred guru who is so kind, (and) inseparable from Śrī Vajradhāra, you are the direct illuminator of the profound, I honour you, (as well as) the noble buddhas.

To arouse unmistaken experience, get to the point of the matter.

To begin with, depend on a Mahāyāna guru, infuse your mind with pure adoration, (and) obliterate all worldly entanglements. Depend on borderlands, mountains, solitudes; get to the vital point of the skilful path, its nādi and prāṇa, (and) cultivate dhyāna constantly, without distraction.

(But even) when you arouse experience like this—

Beginningless, unruly imprints from which duality and even desirous and hateful motivations appear, the (imprints) that give rise to conceptual⁶⁰ dos and do nots, hopes and fears, this veil, this latent ignorance will (continue to)

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⁶⁰ This follows the GB. The GN, once again, reads rtags, which appears to be a scribal error.
sow the seeds of agitation and fogginess, cutting off the highest path.

As has been explained, from this cause, impediments arise; the core advice for clearing impediments is (as follows); it is an (analogous) conception of antidotal gnosis.

Ride the horse of diligence but make sure you have the unadulterated food of dhyāna. Wear the armour of steadfast patience, then use the weapon of sharp wisdom, which will definitively subdue the enemies of agitation and torpor.

(What follows) is a brief assignment of this metaphor to the teachings—

Now, in the extensive teachings, (it says that) mental torpor radiates from apparent places, (and) that by looking at the nature of these places, apparent emptiness, you will see your fogginess as unbridled preconception, (which when) held with attention so it does not wander off, can be blended with the apparent prāṇa of victorious experience, (and) become integrated into the sky in its coming and going.

Held with attention, diffuse preconceptions will then be put to rest in whatever is clarity, which is (to say) that-ness. If you become utterly scattered, look at the scattering, its destinations are untraceable, (so) rest and relax. The awareness that is agitation's antidote not unyielding, it rests and relaxes, (as) the greatest (thing to) cultivate is non-conceptual equanimity.

This has been a brief (explanation) of how to clear mental impediments. If the impediments are singularly physical at their core then (use the following instructions)—

The up, down and in the middle nādi are like houses, the up, down and in the middle prāṇa are like people, the pure, impure and mental elements are like jewels, (and) these three (nādi, prāṇa and elements) should be put in unmistaken order.

Torpor⁶¹ impediments are the scattering of prāṇa, (so) shoot the prāṇa/mind as straight as an arrow; agitating impediments are (to be) pressed down, integrated into the site of the downward voiding (prāṇa). If you shake from the cold, raise candālī, probe into the breath cycle's fire, the prāṇa from the nose. If you are cherished by warmth⁶², mix it with water; expel prāṇa/air six times from the mouth, making a sound. There are three principle, life sustaining, long prāṇa. If there is stiffness⁶³ in the prāṇa, expel it out (of your body).

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⁶¹ This follows the GB. The GN has byung ba, "to arise" or "to come about", which in the context of the rest of the song, and given that it is only one vowel different from bying ba, "torpor" seems to be a scribal error.

⁶² This follows the GB. The GN writes tshwa or "salt" instead of tsha, heat. This appears to be a scribal error.

⁶³ This follows the GB. The GN writes ring, "length", which does not make sense.
If there is stiffness\(^{84}\) in your nādi it is to be completely subdued. If there is stiffness in your mind, direct it to the middle, by integrating the sun, moon and fire, make the mind one with blissful emptiness, (and) then there is no doubt you will be liberated from faults.

Refined bindu is the second thing, it pervades the whole body, getting at its vital points; down below, the white part does not stay (still), on top,\(^{85}\) the red part is (also) unstable.

If there is an awareness grasping at misunderstandings, it is the same as being held prisoner by a king. If the twenty-four rotten branches are barren, loping them will cast them off. If you are lured (to places) it scatters all your prāṇa, and if (those places) are empty, each entity requests (things of you).

There is no other (way to) clear the impediments of nādi and prāṇa; it is the division of two into support and supported, analogous to the two wings of a bird, (and) if you understand how to get to the vital point, you will travel to the celestial realms of great bliss, attain the resultant (state) of Śrī Vajradhāra, arriving at the site of uncontaminated nirvāṇa.

There is much to the guru’s advice, but I have seen nothing beyond this.

The dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje said this.

**Song No. 88 (GN 127-128; GB 291)**

*Nama-guru.*

The place from which all virtues come, the wondrous source of all needs and desires, gurus, I honour you.

Have a seat here, and hear these words.

To admire actual selflessness intensely, (and) to find particular displeasure in cause and effect is the King’s authoritative view, it is the correct worldly outlook.

To cultivate admiration of the three jewels, to arouse experiences of giving and morality, (and) to rest evenly in actual dhyāna is worldly cultivation.

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\(^{84}\) Again this follows the GB. The GN again writes *ring,* "length", which does not make sense.

\(^{85}\) Following the GB. The GN says *gyin du,* which would mean something like "continuing", but does not make much sense in this context.
To equalise high and low,  
to leave behind dark evil (and)  
to volunteer for bright goodness  
is modest, worldly behaviour.

To reach a temporary, happy destination,  
to achieve release from ordinary existence, (and)  
to finally support the Buddha's path  
is the view of the ordinary path;

This cultivation, behaviour and result are four  
that are suitable for beginners.

Rang byung rdo rje sang this song.

Song No. 89 (GN 128–129; GB 291–292)

Namo-ratna-guru.

My mind pervades the sky's expanse, and its apparent  
emptiness arises as Samantabhadra's projections;  
I honour and bow, and honour and bow to  
the (mind) that is not restricted nor localised.

Through direct gnostic awareness (I perceive)  
no edge (and) no centre, space extends.  
looking with veil-free eyes  
the view is essentially unmistaken.

This body is just like the lion sage's,  
this voice is like a still mute's,  
this mind is just like an unconscious corpse's,  
this is my own cultivation of the dharmatā.

Neither good nor bad behaviour obstructs it, (it is)  
unreal, a performance in the centre of the sky;  
unstopable, increasing visions appear as this is  
the arising of the behaviour of clear awareness.  
Without samsāra and nirvāṇa's hopes or fears,  
take the path of evident visions, to reach  
the ground where dharmas are exhausted.

This is the highest vehicle; (its) four (parts) are:  
view, cultivation, behaviour and result.  
It is not within the domain of the common vehicle.

86 "Not restricted nor localised" is my translation of the Great Completion term gya chad phyogs lhung med pa, which is a state associated with the sems sde class of Great Completion practices.

87 This is most probably a descriptor of the Buddha.

88 This refers to the third of the four visions resulting from Rdzog chen's thod rgyal practice: 1) chos nyid mgon gsum, "the revelation of dharmatā", 2) nyams gong 'phel, "increasing experience", 3) rig pa tshad phebs, "the maturation of insight", 4) chos nyid zad pa, "the exhaustion of dharmatā".

89 This refers to the second of the four visions.

90 This refers to the first of the four visions.

91 This is a reference to the fourth of the four visions.
(This song) came from the unceasing-ness of this person called Rang byung rdo rje. (He) said this.

**Song No. 90 (GN 129–130: GB 292–293)**

*Namo-ratna-guru.*

I honour and praise the noble gurus, please inspire this yogi, inspire me.

I was born amongst quarrelsome beings, in these dark time's for the Buddha's teachings, here in the North (of Jambudvipa) at the foot\(^\text{92}\) of a snow mountain, (and was thus) repaid for my concern with preconceived achievement.\(^\text{93}\)

I still grasp at the concept of truth, and will no doubt wander endlessly in saṃsāra.

Kye ma! Mountain hermits at the end of time! You may cultivate dhyāna precisely, but without giving up distractions and diversions, the antagonistic hurricane of the afflictions will still arise. (So) in solitude train creatively with the antidote, and in so doing, without exception, blame yourself.

The appearance and strengthening of *vipaśyana*, wisdom and gnosis arose subsequently (to dhyāna) for the Buddha's heirs. But endless misperceptions turn equanimity into laziness, and without making an effort to train diligently, we will not see our minds.

The most elevated bodhisattvas look at all wanderers as their own children. (But) if we do not perfect compassion in our minds, we will be carried away by our faults, our afflicted hatred. Without directly perfecting bodhicitta, we will not correct our minds.

Even though all phenomena are dreamlike, if we do not realise this empty continuity, the chains of existence and self grasping will bind us. There is no-thing, but we grasp at things, creating an anchor for our minds in saṃsāra, and this is our own mental shame.

Having seen our own faults, these veils, we should not point our fingers at others, and later on, as we engage in the teachings, we will work inside our minds, inside its corners,

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\(^{92}\) This follows the GB, which reads *zhol*, meaning "below" or "lower part". The GN reads *gzhol*, which means "to exercise" or "to maintain" and therefore makes less sense.

\(^{93}\) The last phrase of the verse follows the GB, which reads *zhen pas lan*, "to be repaid by/for concern with". The GN reads *zhan pas len*, which means "taken by the feeble". This also makes sense, but much less so in the present context.
get rid of (our own) pointless mistakes (and bring) our aware minds closer to the Buddha.

He said this when we had come together to clear up a problem on the tenth day of the ninth month of the pig year (1323).

**Song No. 91 (GN 130-132; GB 293-295)**

*Namo-ratna-guru.*
I honour the noble gurus.

Kye ma! In these dark times for the teachings, the sun is setting—on the Buddha’s enterprises; on compassionate endeavours.

However much we strive (to defeat it), demonic ignorance (remains) overwhelming, and illusory, lovely seductresses remain powerful; lustful women, intoxicating women, pretty women move quickly, following us constantly.

The five sensual\textsuperscript{94} arrows are always sharp, the misconceived bow is oh so strong, (and) they work with their four\textsuperscript{95} messengers: distractions, allurements, mistakes, confusion.

These powerful (arrows) arise innately from mind, (travel) through the pathways of speech and body, gathering armies of the ten bad deeds, clothed in the armour of the three poisons, harming the Buddha’s teachings, (and) destroying helpful thoughts, intentions, integrations.

It is like this. Kye ma! Afflictions! The six (types) of wandering beings are so pitiable! Right now, Rang byung rdo rje is calling out, sending a message to all the buddhas, making admiring entreaties to all the great bodhisattvas, training in the skills that defeat enemies, holding onto the sacred dharma.

Those people of the (same) view as me, are clothed in the armour of great compassion, wear the armature of ardent patience, carry the bow of great dhyāna, aim their arrows single-pointedly, use the sharp sword of wisdom, beguile with their summative ingenuity, and then with mindfulness, samādhi, and a reliable mind, summon (their first) messenger, self-possessed awareness. Although they have the armies of the ten good deeds, and the intention to fight the affliction, demons,

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\textsuperscript{94} In this instance, I have translated yul as “sensual” instead of using a place-specific word. This is because the usage in the Tibetan specifically refers to the “place with which the senses engage”.

\textsuperscript{95} This follows the GB. The GN does not include the word bzhi, “four”.
most beings of these dark (times)
fight individually, by themselves, and so
lose to the demons of ignorance.
A few may escape from the hearth of the
demon of anger and the like, but then they
are led and bound by Mara's other daughters,
by their desire for sensual spots, those places.
A few may even flee from this, but then they
remain ignorant, wandering in external "places".
Kye ma! Beings are so pitiable!

I, myself, am the lone yogi who emerged victorious
from the battle with preconceived demons.
The compassionate moon shines behind me;\(^{96}\)
the light of the gnostic sun swirls in front of me.
Pretty women dissolve into my dhyāna's nature;
Mara's daughters melt into saṃsāra and nirvāṇa's (non-dual) nature;
intoxicating women transform into unconditioned goddesses;
anger, distractions and the other (messengers) become
the four night-watchmen, when craving is destroyed.

The concepts that distract you fluctuate,
so if your effort at goodness is passable,
your mistakes will become the armour of patience.

If you only cast aside non-existent self grasping,
(but only) become mindful of non-conceptual gloom, then
even when duality is extinguished, there will only be this.\(^{97}\)
The weapons wisdom carries (into) war
are those that destroy self-grasping.

All those students who want to follow me
do this: be victorious over the
preconceived, ten bad deeds.
(Then,) along with the Buddha's children
marshal compassion's forces.

Those lucky ones who want to follow me
will eat the greatest food, the bliss of dhyāna, (and)
live in liberation's bejewelled mansion, where
they will not be plundered by the demon of distraction,
and will enjoy the celebrations.
Free from the duality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa,
may they all be equal with you, Munīndra.\(^{98}\)

The dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje said this when he witnessed the ways of these dark times.

**Song No. 97; 5 (GN 140-141; GB 365-366) Song that Fixes Nature**

*Nama-guru.*

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\(^{96}\) This follows the GB. The GN has repeated the word *rgyal*, "victory", and this appears to be a scribal error.

\(^{97}\) This is a play on words because "only this" (de ka yin) could refer to both the gloom and emptiness.

\(^{98}\) This is an epithet of Buddha Śākyamuni.
Naturally, samsāra and nirvāṇa have the same taste; in the singular maṇḍala of dharmas' expanse, conception's essence is spontaneous. I honour the greatest of gurus.

Padmakara of Oḍḍiyāna (Padmasambhava) showed me the varieties of inconceivable magic that had tamed wanderers in these snowy lands—it was Avalokiteśvara's compassion!

(From this I knew) all samsāra and nirvāṇa's dharmas are trickery. They are the play of myriad illusions, (and) when realised, become just like a moon in the water.

All visions of things, all of them are naturally empty and pure, unpolluted by intellectual complications, (and) when purified, like ungraspable space.

Preconceptions are ordinary knowing, they do not fall drowsy or asleep, but join with bliss, clarity, non-conception,99 (and) when this mindfulness is protected, this is cultivation.

As (Śākyamuni)'s words spell out, unbound by self obsession, (you should) follow those who help wanderers. (and) when this behaviour is constant, it is the behaviour.

Do not abide in existence or peace, do not fall into samsāra or nirvāṇa; when you are spontaneous, when nature and extent are equal, this is the result.

These are the view, cultivation, behaviour and result. This is The Song that Fixes Nature, it was sung on Bsam yas Mchims phu's peak, naturally.

The dharma noble, precious Rang byung rdo rje said this on the peak at Bsam yas Mchims phu, in the place where the abbot from Oḍḍiyāna, Padmakara achieved siddhi.

Song No. 98; 6 (GN 141-142; GB 366-367)

Nama-guru.

Noble, sacred, kind gurus, teachers of non-dual gnosis, the essence of sahaja, dharmakāya, I honour you.

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99 Once again, in both texts rtogs pa is written instead of rtag pa.
On the eastern side of this snow mountain, this is what the end-of-time yogi has to say.

(Minds) that grasp concepts sustain saṃsāra, envisioning saṃsāra causes deception, but for me, this vajra yogi at the end of time, there is no chieftain and no vassal, no subject and no object.

I am certain appearances are in my mind; I have thought about it and made up my mind.

Individual illusory appearances make jewelled errors, conceptualising errors causes deception, but I, this vajra yogi at the end of time, harbour no obsession with delectations.

I am certain apparent places are in my mind; I have thought about it and made up my mind.

Apparent places have an unreal essence, compassion causes preconceptions, but I, this vajra yogi at the end of time, harbour no concepts of dos and do nots.

I am certain compassion is in my mind; I have thought about it and made up my mind.

Apparent dharmas are deceptive, to think "I will do it" is to grasp at a concept, but for me, this vajra yogi at the end of time, all dharmas have dissolved into the dharmatā.

I am certain the non-dual is in my mind; I have thought about it and made up my mind.

Words are gnosis, as are the spaces between them, and that which is unutterable, it too is gnosis, so I, this vajra yogi at the end of time, have no need to take up or give up talking or silence.

I am certain my mind is identical to gnosis; I have thought about it and made up my mind.

To realise clearly the image held by the cultivating mind means you do not see cultivation should have no image, but this vajra yogi at the end of time realises images and non-images are equal

I am certain dhyāna is mind; I have thought about it and made up my mind. Again, all you arousing experience should follow (in the footsteps) of early, noble siddhas, (invoke) Gtang pa rgya (ras)'s protection, and

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100 In Tibetan Rang byung rdo rje is making a play on the word nor, which can mean both jewel and error.
depend on it, as I (too) have looked within sincerely.

This song was sung as an offering. Great ones, all you lucky ones, if it has meaning, keep it in mind.

The dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje sung this, when he encountered a trap while (teaching) on Gtsang pa rgya (ras)'s Six (Types of) Protection.

Song No. 100; 8 (GN 144–145; GB 368–369) A Lamp for the Experiential Path

Namo-guru.

I honour the noble gurus.  
Inspire liberation in my mind-stream.  
I am the yogi who came from the east of this snowy land in these dark times, (and) I have this to say.

Now that you have attained a human body, with its free time and opportunity, seek to arouse precise experiences, awaken from distraction, and do not get carried away by the infinite karmic residues that have stuck to you. Seek to generate a single-pointed, pure-vision in your own pure mind that adores the Buddha’s infinite projections, the gurus, through (contemplating) their illuminating liberation-stories.

Seek to illuminate a single-pointed solitude that delights in borderlands, that retreats to the mountains, that sequesters the aspects of afflictions.

Seek to discourage conditional distractions (so that) you will generate an effortless continuum of the samādhi that is non-conceptual, (and the) clear bliss that is hidden inside your mind.

Seek to cultivate and carry onto the path all the suffering, the bad conditions, the mental and physical interruptions, the imprints of beginningless karma.

Seek joy for yourself and (other) beings, seek the antidote that is clear, pure and unsullied by the faults of torpor and agitation, the wisdom of interdependent projections, the essence of the undefiled Buddha.

Seek the dedication that continues mentally as long as samsāra exists, to care for self and other—although both are self-less—naturally through great compassion.

This song is A Lamp for the Experiential Path. It was written in dependence on the preconceptions that proliferated at Śrī Nags phu Monastery. May it instruct the fortunate. This was spoken by the dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje.
Namo-guru.

The guru is the Buddha, the guru is the dharma,
the guru is the mainstay of the assembled saṅgha;
I honour the noble leaders of wanderers who
introduce me to my own mind as the dharmakāya.

For these conflicted times, with five (types of) corruption,
the Buddha, the master of compassion for wanderers,
spoke of an unexcelled vehicle that (possesses)
a variety of methods that benefit wanderers.

You have the karma, the luck—
to receive instructions from the siddha’s lineage,
to know countless sūtras, tantras and śāstras,
to find the authentic view without error,
so experience them precisely.

If you attain siddha precisely in
solitary places that are bustle-free,
like the solitary environs of Tsa ri, and
wonderful Nags phu, where you will be
undistracted by worldliness, this is excellent.

In this place, the impartial mountaintops are
difficult for ordinary wanderers to pass, and so it is secluded
from those parts of dharma that descend into entertainment.

In the presence of the glorious snow mountain Ti rtse\textsuperscript{101}
encircled by a mālā of beautiful snow mountains,
are rocky mountains, stūpas, that are like a(nother) mālā
(this time) filled with many forests\textsuperscript{102} of trees, (and)
as many streams of nectar as you could want.

(And) here in (their midst is) a beautiful meadow,
in which there is tasty food and medicine; (indeed)
it is brimming with a multitude of ingredients.

This superb site nurtures siddhi,
(and) all you sacred people sitting here
have experienced this siddha.

"Realised beings" who proclaim their own goodness,
uncomprehending, confused “spiritual friends”
full-bellied “great meditators”, and
everyone who loves distraction
may arrive here, but they will not stay.
In this way, this siddhi-nurturing site is
secluded from these dark times. E Ma Ho!

\textsuperscript{101} This term usually refers to Mt. Kailāś in Western Tibet, but here he is positioning a Mt. Ti rtse in the Tsa ri region.

\textsuperscript{102} This follows the GT. The GN writes nag tshul, which means “like darkness”, instead of nags tshul, which means forests.
This is the yogi Rang byung rdo rje, and this is the gist of my experience.

If you do not destroy superimpositions from within, you may understand external things, but this will be useless; peel back the layers, and outside and inside are one.

Do not abandon your enjoyment of existence and do not crave non-existence.
Do not practice pointless asceticism when just a touch of it extends sāmādhi.
Do not teach others what you do not know, and if you do know, stop hugging your texts.
Do not collect students who do not listen, and do not expel those who adore other (teachers).
Do not talk of your experiences with others, and do not reply to your mental superimpositions.
Do not practice dharma that is good for "me", and do not abandon the ways of "inferior" dharma.
And even if you have abandoned the two extremes, I (still) say you should depend on learning, contemplating and cultivating.

This is my explanation as I understand it, those who come later, those who wish to arouse experience should do it in (accord) with this intention.

This is what the dharma noble, Rang byung rdo rje said.

**Song No. 102; 10 (GN 148-150; GT 371-373)**

_Namo-ratna-guru._

I honour the king of the Śākyas, the refuge who has compassion for all wanderers.

Your aspirations are countless, and your compassion tames the hard (to train); errant beings, so wild and malicious, that to tame them is such a marvel.

Kye ma! My name is Rang byung, (and) I admiringly invoke you.

In these times when the teachings are five (times) corrupted, those upholding the teachings, all those "spiritual friends" are harming humanity, through hypocritical behaviour that is stupidly faithful and amazed, but does not diminish self serving afflictions, (as it is) the practice of the dharma of self and other.
Coming close to abandoning the dharma is not unusual.

At first, when young people renounce (the world), and brandish the ārya's banner it is so very wonderful, so surprising, but then as they get a little older they
tumble into afflictions, possession, bad destinations.
Saffron-shapes (pretending to be) monastics are not so surprising.

In the presence of pundits, intelligent
students study the three baskets;
this is so very surprising,
but then they talk, and in the name of the Buddha
engage in anti-dharma, abandoning urgency.
Quick dogmatism is not so surprising.

Having received instructions from their gurus
they cultivated precisely in solitude, which is
so very surprising, so grand, but then, as is
also possible, their dhyāna experience becomes
scattered and they (started) telling lies about it.
Misleading self and others is not so surprising.

Having generated the samādhi of non-conceptual
clarity and bliss, they then pacifying the afflictions;
this is particularly wondrous and surprising,
but then they get concerned with an arrogance that stops
discernment and it is as if they become non-discerning.
Leisured minds are not so surprising.

They are intimately connected to dhyāna and wisdom
through the learned and contemplative guru’s inspiration,
and all their knowledge of entities is surprising, but then again,
if this (knowledge) does not become a stable realisation,
it may be fragmented into hundreds of other (perceptions of)
outside; being led by these perceptions is not so surprising.

You may be arousing experience yourself,
and destroying your craving for the world,
a liberation from craving that is surprising but then it
becomes diminished by a compassionate motivation that is
not strong, and your ingenuity in helping others is destroyed.
Falling down onto the Hinayāna is not so surprising.

Wise ones, Mahāyāna family members,
the wisdom and compassion you collect, and your
taking on of suffering is wonderful, but if
you do not (know) that self and others,
have been completely illusory since forever,
you will fall back into samsāra, and that is not so surprising.

Abandoning the impure field that is
the source of all suffering and
preparing a pure field is wonderful, but if you do not
know that all fields are autonomous visions then
through doing and not doing you will create suffering.
A lack of equanimity is not so surprising.

This and countless other wonders
that are not so wonderful
are concepts from Rang byung's mind.
But talking about them will not help anyone
as they will see (this talk) as insults;
rest (your mind) in equanimity.

Even if all wanderers abandon the two extremes, may the Buddha's teachings still flourish.
This was sung at Śrī Nags phu, amongst the mountains, when concepts proliferated.

Song No. 104; 12 (GN 153–157; GB 375–378)

Namo-ratna-guru.

Kye! Kye! I honour you who
brims with love, the compassionate one.
I beg you to pacify the faulty imprints I have
(accrued) since forever, and during (recent) times.

The Buddha has not seen the mind's new arisings; since
beginningless time, the places of momentary awareness
have been by nature ceasing, and are (therefore) pure.
These, and the (things) associated with them are wavering minds.

Unrealised, this protracted movement creates samsāra,
and I grasp at places when there are not places;
the forms, sounds, smells, tastes and touches are all separated out,
and I taste, I experience happy and unhappy places;
like circling water on a wheel of birth, ageing, sickness, death,
I become others, hell denizens, ghosts,
animals of the earth, gods and titans;
propelled by my individual good and bad deeds, I create
(more) individual deeds, (more) happiness and suffering.
This I experience, but masked by ignorance,
I do not remember deeds like this. It is very strange.

There have been countless, compassionate Buddhas—
those who have passed beyond suffering are beyond number—
and I have not grabbed any of their (passing) compassionate hooks,
instead I stray into any and all pointless preconceptions,
and keep wandering around samsāra's expanse. It is very strange.

Kye Ma! Master of compassion, so powerful,
the light of your great compassion
does not strike me, even a little, instead
the power of my intellect, my wisdom has become
something else; the ignorance that veils it is very thick,
and in my intellectual mind there is much confusion.

Still, by the Buddha's power, by your fearlessness,
by all your countless virtues, by your compassion,
in an instant may the grounds, paths and gnosis
of an ārya become visible—let it be so!

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103 This follows the GT. The GN writes rtogs pa, which does not fit the context.
104 This follows the GT. In the place where the word "beyond", las 'das pa, is located in the GT there is an ellipsis in the GN.
Since the inception of beginningless samsāra, the power of my generosity has been so weak, the force of my morality so feeble that all this long time, I have wandered, a beggar. I have just been looking for abundant pleasures. I have wholly protected the dharma, I have not contaminated this pure dharma, (but) clouds of ārya saṁgha have taught me the pure dharma and still I have not destroyed my doubts.

But these are dark times; to follow after bodhisattvas (now) takes a force of will, a strong mind that will do anything for beings, and strive with body, speech and mind to protect the sacred dharma.

By the power of the great aspirations of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas whatever is possible will come about, by employing a myriad of means; I can train as they trained, I can make my mind powerful. And

Whoever imagines things is not an entrant into the bodhisattvas’ ways; for the mind that (sees) all as an illusion, a dream always follows their ways. (This mind) is not attached to any reality, but is wholesome and, it is said, helps others.

This mind makes an abiding habit of helping others with their body, speech and mind in all ways; it may be afflicted, but the force of this intellect works in ways that will benefit wanderers.

In this way, the myriad places out there may appear to be potent, or appear to be impotent, but, as it is said, “all phenomena have one taste”.

I should be patient with emptiness, as the force of my effort just results in littleness, for, as it is said, “awakening is mutable and immutable”. When I get rid of my indecisive intellect, I will consistently train in the bodhisattva’s way; I may not have actually achieved analytical and other forms of dhyāna, but I will single-pointedly protect the various flickers of mindfulness that are undistracted awareness; this is the entrance into the path of wisdom. I should make an effort to listen to and ponder the Buddha’s words as I train (in them). Phenomena have been pure since the beginning;
in reality they arise, cease, and are pacified.
As it is said, "Always view form and
the rest as in reality unformulated."
(And) whatever Māñjuśrī said should
be engaged with as Mādhyamaka!

I should also engage with the sayings of (all other)
bodhisattvas and the deeds of pure gurus in the same way; even if
I cannot achieve what (they describe) I should make a small effort.
This was composed by the one called Rang byung.

This action song was sung by the dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje when he was staying at
Mt. Yar Iha sham po, in a place called Gzer khung chung mdo (rock with a small golden
golden hole). He had become very ill, and thought he might depart to another realm, but after
generating compassion for the beings here that are tormented by karma and afflictions, he
sang this song.

**Song No. 105; 13 (GN 157–160; GB 378–380)**

*Namo-guru.*

Are not Nāropa and Maitripa105 the ones
acclaimed in the holy land of India?
Are not their followers the one from
Lho brag, the great being, the Laughing Vajra,
Chandraprabha,106 Du gsum mkhyen pa, (and)
his precious spiritual son, Karmapa?
These are the gurus that I invoke,
the gurus other than my root guru.

All you gathered here, hear these words,
and if they have a point, keep it in mind.

When we speak of all the buddhas’ pure lands,
(and) the twenty-four sacred sites, it is not
as if they truly exist out there;
our own bodies are the nādi’s cakra.
Or, to be specific, at the great, sacred sites,
(within our body) those called dākas and dākinīs
abide in the elements and bindu.

When we speak of the bindu,
we speak of the indivisible hardness,107 which
(manifests) as hair and fingernails as it descends.
And likewise when we speak of the
twenty-four elements that manifest at these sites,
we speak specifically of the three nādi, the hidden nādi:
the lalana, rasana and avadhūti.

Get the vital point that the myriad interdependencies
are the indivisible subject and object, method and wisdom.

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105 In both texts this name is written mae tri ma, instead of the usual mae tri pa.
106 This refers to Sgam po pa, who was associated with the Indian bodhisattva Chandraprabha.
107 Here he uses the Indic word for hardness, sudhira, transliterated into Tibetan.
See samsāra and nirvāṇa’s non-duality, their (non-)self; (see) what the Buddha called “the great sacred site”.

Arouse bliss, clarity and non-conceptual gnosis, because the sacred sites of the five hidden nādi are where the five dākinīs live, and their entity is pure prāṇa.

Forms arise as illusion-like, apparent emptiness; the sound of dharma is the indivisible reverberation of sound and emptiness; the pure smell of morality is the aroma of apparent emptiness; the taste of dharma is the unconcerned flavour of apparent emptiness; and mind arises as uncontaminated, great bliss. This is the coming of the siddha of five pure doors.

Hidden inside it is the nature of the avadhūti, the dākini, the space traveller, inseparable samsāra and nirvāṇa. In the expanse of this pure, simple space travels apparent, self-liberating gnosis; the nature of inseparable samsāra and nirvāṇa. Realising this helps you travel to liberation.

(To have) the concept of external sacred sites is to generate an obsession with place; this end-of-time vajra yogi destroys complicated, external sacred sites.

I (realise) the complete set of thirty-six sites are in me; I see my pure element, the dākas’ nature; I effect my pure prāṇa, the dākinī’s nature; I recognise myself as unified, great bliss.

Now I have no complicated doubts, I have no torpor and agitation, those interfering shortcomings. I am the lion-like yogi that terrifies the deer of wrong views from its lair on ingenuity ridge. I conquer subject/object duality, and it dissolves.

If you understand this, all you end of time people, draw your mind inward, and rest equally; if you do not understand all there is, you will not come to understand it by looking outside.

Singularly cultivate your mind, (and) apparent places will arise as illusions. If you do not discover your own mind is guru, there is not much point in sessions of guru (yoga).

The guru of self-aware gnosis illuminates, (and) the inspiration that is self liberation from samsāra arises. Look at the interdependence of sounding (out) sacred sites; (and) if you understand these words as self-liberating simpleness, you get them.

(But then again,) if you do not develop effortless compassion,
your one-sided compassion will cause samsāra to turn. 
Cultivate no direction, self-liberating compassion, (and) 
the strength to help wanderers will arise effortlessly.

This song was sung in Ga ram Meadow in a tiger year (1326).

**Song No. 106; 14 (GN 160–161; GB 380–381) To the Teachers and Monks of Ra sgrengs**

*Namo-guru.*

I respectively honour the guru and the three jewels.

Mind's nature alone is the seed of everything; 
when impure it is speculation, the base of saṃsāra, (but) 
(as) its actual base is completely pure by nature, 
when its self-liberating thatness is realised, it is nirvāṇa.

Generate great compassion for un-realised wanderers, 
and admiration for the guru. Make an effort to depend on 
the one who teaches the sacred dharma, the ārya's paths. 
This knowledge is the baseline, the entrance to the path.

Then, from this foundation, in order to complete 
the six pāramitās, enter the path of śamatha and vipaśyana; 
grasp well the vital point of ardent ingenuity. 
This, in the main, is how to travel on the ārya's path.

(Together) wisdom without preconceived definitions 
and dhyāna focused on thatness will unmistakably 
see logic's (actual) subject, the dharmatā! So, engage 
with this cause of liberation from existence and peace.

Then, when the (two) collections of adventitious veils 
that (block) the natural essence of the stainless Buddha are 
cleared away, the bodily and gnostic deeds, the awakened activity, 
will manifest the power to engage with samsāra as it actually is.

*This is the “path and result” (lam 'bras), the foundation of the 
Buddha’s speech; it is an uncommon instruction, 
a vital point. May it help all wanderers.*

This is the advice given to the teacher and students of Ra sgrengs in 'Dam, by Rang byung rdo rje on the eighteenth day of the second month of the monkey year (1332).

**Song No. 110; 18 (GN 165–169; GB 384–388)**

*Namo-guru.*

Kye Ho!

Illustrious wanderers' protector, precious one, 
please inspire this lucky one, please inspire me. 
It was for mountain yogis with limited intellects
like me that you wrote the councils of *The Clear Mirror*.\textsuperscript{108}

Illustrious guru, sacred noble one, please
lead us lucky ones straight down the path.
I beg you noble one, and through this request
may the nectar of your instruction abide in my heart.

The quintessence of your mind, the sacred dharma,
streams out, (and) your instructions are from the heart,
but I still have not brought on\textsuperscript{109} *siddhi*—
I am ashamed of myself!

Right now it appears to the world that the most
pretentious people are "wholesome" dhārmikas;
now they desire great pleasure,
but at the time of death, what worries, what fears!

I praise myself and slander others;
seeing others' faults should remind me of my own.
When I do not know (those I criticise) this is still very true,
but when I do know them, I should be ashamed!

To see just a little happiness,
we set aside hoarded treasure and profit;
they do not last, they are illusion-like, and
they will not grant you victory over others!

Right now, in this particular world,
we cannot bear a spark of fire,\textsuperscript{110}
so how will we bear the sufferings of the six types
(of beings) and the in-between state? What a mistake!

Right now, I cannot even tolerate
the harsh words I am thinking, (and yet)
I (felt compelled) to say these things to others.
It is a mistake upon a mistake.

There is no happiness in samsāra;
across the entirety of existence there is
a thick fog of countless and limitless suffering.
so we should not be so concerned\textsuperscript{111} with it!

Having put forward these six external examples,
I can (also) conceptualise them as my own faults,
and if I abandon them, I will create six virtues.
These six results will arise!

\textsuperscript{108} This probably refers to the *snyan brgyud gsal ba'i me long* (*The Clear Mirror of the Whispered Lineage*), by Sgam po pa. It can be found in volume two of his collected works, and refers to the practice of Mahāmudrā (Sgam po pa 1992:70-87).

\textsuperscript{109} This follows the GT. The GN uses the word *phyung ba*, "to overflow" or "to cast out", which appears to be a scribal error.

\textsuperscript{110} Both texts contain what appears to be a scribal error here, in which *me stag*, one meaning of which is "spark of fire", is spelt *me stag*, which is not a word.

\textsuperscript{111} This follows the GT, which uses the word *zhen pa*, "concern, to be concerned", which is common throughout the songs. The GN uses the word *zhan pa*, "weak, inferior", which appears to be a scribal error.
The Sugata and the gurus say this:

Learn (about them), and then, in the end get rid of them; day and night, keep investigating your faults; abandon the faults, and develop the virtues. (and) keep making an effort to do this.

As the treasuries of all virtues are all the pure gurus and buddhas, keep cultivating certainty (about them). Attain the awakening of which they speak!

Ah! Poor, poor beings! How confused are samsāra’s denizens! It is time to split the pair, deluded ones. I must cultivate this repulsion for myself!

It does not endure! And still, because of samsāra’s definitive veils, these smothering, thick veils, we wander in samsāra. I must cultivate this gloominess for myself!

Samsāra is the pointless cause of suffering; it has no essence, and yet we still hold onto it as a permanent extreme. The dual visions of our minds are mistaken!

Half-truths keep appearing, and this means my mind is still concerned; the mistakes we make about good and bad are inconceivable. Grasping at truths like this is not greatness!

Know that the world is like an illusion, and grasping at it as real is demonic karma. We should stop grasping at truth!

However many faults we perceive in others, we should take the blame for just as many ourselves, and not look to others with reproach. We should stop thinking (highly) about ourselves!

The sacred guru’s kindness is sahaja, gnosis that arises spontaneously; it is simplicity, the dharmakāya. Abide beyond the realm of speech!

Mountain hermits, yogis like me do not have a scrap of food or clothing; we aspire to find satisfaction in the heat of candāli and the essence we extract (from plants).

112 This line in Tibetan includes a negation and a direction to abandon this action. This is supposed to strengthen the need to stop, rather than negating it, which a direct translation of the line into English would imply. The line in Tibetan reads: bden ’dzin ma byed thong ’i ang.
Whatever suffering we experience now,
we accept that it comes from previous times,
and so we (see) even the slightest bad condition
as the clearing of past, bad karma.

There is no dharma but this!
There is nothing to dharma but taming our mind-streams!
We must tame the afflictions!

This world, this impermanent samsāra
does not exist beyond pure actuality, so
without desire, grasping or pondering about “truth”,
we must cultivate simpleness, the supreme actuality.

In this world live (creatures) called
gods and ghosts that help and harm,
(but) they are not actually real, so
we must stop obsessing about them.

The greatest actuality is the pāramitās,
lacking truth, they are numbered eight,
beyond intellect, (beyond) speech, they themselves
are truth’s lack, free from reference points.

In just this way, this yogi, I will—
Keep depending on the guru!
Not wander from my mountain retreat!
Not perform karma from the dark side!
Gradually establish light!
Gradually gain understanding!
Dedicate all to the dharmādhātu!
(And) develop sacred kindness!

This is what the dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje said.

**Song No. 111; 19 (GN 169-170; GT 388)**

*Nama-guru.*

Illustrious guru, precious one, with all the
compassion of past, present future Buddhas,
lead us to the site of bliss.

Right now, in these times of five kinds of darkness,
great meditators who want to practice dharma
from their hearts, pure dhārmikas are rare.

Right now, apparently, impure students
need one fine robe each to awaken.

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113 This follows the GT, which uses the word rim kyi, “gradually”. The GN uses the word rims kyi, which means
“an infectious disease” and appears to be a scribal error.

114 Again, this follows the GT, which uses the word rim kyi, “gradually”. The GN uses the word rims kyi, which
means “an infectious disease” and appears to be a scribal error.
The siddhas of the past, our superiors, had no clothes at all and still attained the siddhi of mahāmudrā, but

Right now, apparently, as these (dark) times descend, when there are no fine robes, there is no pure dharma!

If an awakened one in rags arrived, you all would turn them away, chuck them out of the camp; for you only respect and serve those with fine robes.

If some well dressed person with no dharma arrived, you would show them respect, saying, "Here, have a seat!" You behave like evil people!

What is more, you say you do not even like the dhārmikas of right now, and (instead spend your days) seeking entertainment.

Ah! All these beings! Please buddhas of the past, present and future gaze on them with compassion, and remain, even in these times.

( Remain) even when all these beings do not have even a little compassion (themselves); even when these beings with bad karma do not have any deep admiration (for you). Even then, all you buddhas, please keep inspiring all of them. He said this.

**Song No. 112; 20 (GN 170–171; GB 388–390)**

_Namo-guru._

I honour the father gurus. I go for refuge to the kind ones. Illustrious guru, please inspire me, and grant me liberation from grasping at self.

Kye Ma! From samsāra's ocean the stormy waves of inevitable grasping (roll in). May the sun, the samādhi of great gnosis, dry them all up.

In unworthy times like these, there are no great beings still alive, and those who wish to help are very rare. In these times, may you gaze on us compassionately.

These are dark (times) for the Buddha's teachings: dhārmikas behave like Mongols, mountain folk come down to town, yogis do farm work, (and so-called) spiritual friends trick people.

Kye ma! These are unworthy times, and in these dark times, all great beings...
must hear these words of mine!
As the Bhagavān's teachings say:
“How can arousing experience be anything but excellent?”

Looking at subsidiary perspectives may still be looking,
but if you are looking, why not look at the sūtra-piṭaka?
Offering obsequies at banquets may still be making an offering,
but if you make an offering, why not make it to the three jewels?
Teaching your entourage useless things may still be teaching,
but if you are teaching, why not teach the sacred gurus' words?
Then at least the wealth and fame you achieve in this life
will help you arouse experiences in the future!

In short, if you leave behind all visions of
this world, you are well on your way.
Those who practise dharma from the heart
do whatever they do without concern (for praise).
In whichever times (they live),
through their exquisite love and compassion
for all wanderers without exception,
they work to set them on the paths of the three vehicles.

This is what the dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje said at five years old (1288).

**Song No. 113; 21 (GN 171-173; GT 390-391)**

*Nama-guru.*

Noble guru, I honour you.

In the eastern snow mountains,
near Tsar i, to be more precise,
an end-of-time yogi called Rdo rje,
is speaking his mind.

It is difficult to subdue degenerate beings;
I might have developed impartial compassion, but (even)
the Buddha's compassion could not protect this lot!
Their ignorant minds are so densely murky!

It is difficult to fulfil the purpose of self and others;
but I wonder if it was (not) the buddhas' intention
for us to reluctantly fulfil our own purpose.

By a variety of ingenious methods,
tirelessly (practice) the Buddha's teachings;
train creatively in unchanging samādhi,
dedicate you body and mind to benefit wanderers.

These countless unruly beings have not
been tamed very well in the past, so I wonder
if they will be set up on the bodhisattva's ground.

Still, when activity and intellect come undone,
the mind's apparent places are a magical display,
like illusory phantoms that we can gaze upon;
the shackles of truth’s lack are destroyed, and dos and do nots do not remain.

This is the time for those followers arousing experience to get enthusiastic, quickly.
As the Mahāyāna guru’s teachings (say)—arouse experience without wishful thinking;
keep cultivating (thoughts of) impermanence and death;
generate adoration for all bodhisattvas; (and)
make an effort to (realise) selfless emptiness.

These are the fundamentals of the instructions;
all you sitting here should keep them in mind.

This was spoken at Lhun grub stengs while (he) was in the rainy season retreat, in the year of the sheep (1331). (He spent this rainy season there) because of an earlier invitation and offering from his patrons in Kong po. As a result (of this invitation) he did not go to the land of the Mongols at that time.

**Song No. 114; 22 (GN 173–175; GT 391–392)**

*Namo-ratna-guru.*

I pay homage at the feet of the sacred guru.

These are bad times, the teachings are corrupted, (and)
the sun is close to setting on the Buddha’s teachings.

These monastics don’t tread (the path) correctly.
they sustain themselves with debauchery.
The three dharma robes don’t sit well on them,
they are just yellow shapes, wearing brocade, carrying the sticks
(they use) to chase away dogs, sons, nephews and neighbours.
And still, like dogs, they themselves crave food.
To get what they want, they do things that aren’t dharma;
the little wealth they have, they use in unjust ways.
They encourage others to do (bad) things; (even)
to punish humble dhārmikas. They reward
lies and other bad behaviour. They pretend
to be great ones, (but) their behaviour is not dharma.
(Just as) it is unseemly for shepherds to kill antelope;
it is also unseemly for these people to drink beer,
ruin their memory, keep women and have unseemly sex.

The King (the Emperor) does not follow the dharma,
éhe is controlled by those who lust and hate.
His lord may be “great”, but
he is a “great” bandit, a “great” crook.
He brings punishment on truthful people
and fills the land with thieves.
His (followers) destroy temples and stūpas,
crush their images, and do outrageous
things to food and dharma texts.

Because of this, the gods and spirits
are shaken, and disease fills the land;
rain does not fall, there are poor harvests, 
and what little that does grow is 
carried away by frosts and hail.

Many are robbed and beaten 
by famine's destitution, so they 
cry out, dying on the road.

A few people eat the flesh of others; 
a few sell their children for food. 
Others, racked with hunger, jump in the river.

Wailing, wailing they don’t know night and day; 
their skeletons are barely covered with the skin 
that hangs off them: off bones and off heads. 
Their (corpses) burn up like vegetation. 
(Seeing) them is like seeing hungry ghosts directly. 
Everywhere there is killing, shackling and beating; 
pus and blood trickle from all the leprous boils and lesions. 
(Seeing) this is like seeing the hell realms directly. 
For these people, the road to the four pure continents is blocked; 
vividly, they could be taken for animals; in human bodies 
they still experience the sufferings of the lower realms.

Kye ma! Evil times are upon us! 
Kye hu! Poor beings! 
Don’t the bodhisattvas think of them? These destitute 
people in these lands of Amdo, Khams and Stod? 
I fear the whole Land of Snows has 
become as unjust as (its rulers).

This was said in the dragon year (1328).

Song No. 117; 25 (GN 176–177; GT 393–394)

Om sārva svasti siddhi hung.

The nature of mind is just like the sky. 
and this body is lifeless material, but 
realising mahāmudrā makes it seem like 
everything (including it) is just like the sky. 
Understand this, son of the lineage.

Om sārva svasti siddhi hung.

In the truth of the final dharmatā, 
mind’s sky like nature is 
imprisoned in the four elements, 
but the four elements cannot be imprisoned, 
How is this so? Well, because 
you uphold a composite of concepts. 
Understand this, son of the lineage.

Om sārva svasti siddhi hung.

There is no cultivating mahāmudrā,
if there is cultivating, it is not mahāmudrā.
The nature of mind's character cannot be conceptualised;
if there is conceptualisation, it is not the mind's nature.
Understand this, son of the lineage.

Om sārva svasti siddhi hung.

To subdue my ego, I was born the son of a potter
but after I die in this life, I will travel to Tuṣita;
my love for wanderers will mean I am present wherever
here are students. I have no other thoughts but to help others.

Having realised gnosis, and destroyed the roots of subjects and objects,
may you (all) attain the illustrious three bodies of a bodhisattva
and may the four temporaries spontaneously become the four bodies.
May I also create this.

Rang byung rdo rje said this in north La stod.

Song No. 120; 28 (GN 179–181; GT 396–397)

May all wanderers be matured and liberated in the centre of an abundant, providential maṇḍala.

(On) the illustrious mountain of pure visions,
of celestial enjoyments, may the wanderers' protector,
the precious guru who is inseparable from
the omniscient Buddha Saraha, please inspire me.

From the mouth of this noble one
came this speech, which was addressed
to the lucky ones who are his students.

The one called Saraha, the Great Brahmin,
from whom I cannot be separated (looks like this)—

His black body is majestic:
it is decorated with six (types) of bones,
his mouth is smiling, he looks pleased,
he is crossed-legged, and his mudrā is (called) impartial.

With the greatest type of adoration,
daily cultivate this (image) at your crown,
and nightly cultivate it at your heart.

The great self-liberation, your nature-of-mind
is the evenness of self liberation and self-relaxation.
In your mind, the sphere of dharmatā is inactive;
it is inactive, unthinking and undistracted.

When this becomes a habit, there is no cultivating and post-cultivating:
it is undistracted, uncultivated and free from duality.
If you move, you will move without coming and going.
If you stay, you will stay without thought of staying.
There is no way to behave, no behaving, no person behaving.
Day and night, without a break,
abide in a state of luminous clarity, that is
free from the duality of cultivating and cultivator.

In the maṇḍala of emptiness/compassion,
the greatest adoration does not take a break.
The sky doesn't think about being the sky.
The sky is the sky without supporting the sky.
The sky is the sky without cultivating the sky.

Your self-relaxation, your great self-liberation
abides unaffected as your very own nature,
This is what the teacher said.

I have written this down to help others.
May the benefit derived from this set up
beings who are as vast (in number) as the sky (is wide)
to perfect their creative awareness of the trikāya
in the context of their ordinary wisdom.

Song No. 121; 29 (GN 181-182; GB 397-398)

Om sārva svasti siddhi hung.

When the five or three poisons arise in (the mind-streams) of
great meditators who have not yet attained the five wisdom bodies,
it is a great loss, for as soon as the five poisons arise as gnosis,
there is brilliance. This is why I, this yogi, laugh alone.115

When those who have not realised how to travel liberation's road
do not carry any provisions, any tsam pa for the next life,
it is a great loss, for as soon as you experience mahāmudrā,
there is brilliance. This is why I, this great meditator, laugh alone.

When great meditators do not attain awakening on liberation's path because they are too engrossed in daily, human doings,
it is a great loss, for as soon as you become awakened,
there is brilliance. This is why I, this siddha, laugh alone.

When great meditators who are not diverted and perverted by
these concerns still do not realise the final journey,
it is a great loss, for as soon as the five-bodied Buddha arises,
there is brilliance. This is why I, this realised one, laugh alone.

When great meditators spend their lives in settlements,
and are (consistently) back-bitten by villagers,
it is a great loss, for as soon as they (depart for) mountain solitudes,
there is brilliance. This is why I, this mantra-holder, laugh alone.

When great meditators do not realise116 the ultimate, final
meaning because they are constantly involved in the eight (worldly) dharmas,
it is a great loss, for as soon as worldly knots unravel,

\[115\] I have chosen to translate this in this way as the Tibetan, which reads nga gcig rgod shor, could be read to
mean either "I have a laugh" or "I laugh alone".

\[116\] Both texts read rtog pa instead of rtags pa.
there is brilliance. This is why I, this bhikṣu, laugh alone.

When great meditators do not attain buddhahood in one lifetime because they are too busy extracting water from pebbles,\textsuperscript{117} it is a great loss, for as soon as there is a gnostic path to liberation, there is brilliance. This is why I, Karma Pakshi, laugh alone.

When great meditators are ignorant, are not inspired by the guru and sleep like corpses, it is a great loss. This is why I, the trikāya, laugh alone.

This is a small song about how I laughed alone, and this speech arose from the sphere of gnosis. He said this.

**Song No. 125; 33 (GN 187-189; GT 402-403)**

*Namo-Vajradhāra,*

reality of all buddhas, I honour you;
please protect stricken wanderers, and inspire the realisation of interconnection.
You taught the ingenious Vajrayāna, for ignorant, unruly beings; (and) like the healing medicine women, (its) bliss clears all the afflictions’ illness.

The generation stage is a clever environment that purifies concerns\textsuperscript{118} with the ordinary body. The nādi of this body, which is a collection of individual non-conceptions, are purified (by it).

Your talk of the generation and completion stages is wonderful, but we must also stop ourselves getting lost in nothing but concepts and the reification (of them); if we get lost, we will not consider saṃsāra as it is.

It is wonderful to count out our breathing, training our prāṇa, but if we do not know (how) to purify preconceptions, we will mistakenly maintain an arrogance that the path is eternal.

What I call advice on desire and liberation, with regards to bodhicitta, to bindu, is to say that it is wonderful how this poison is collected when we realise a bliss that does not leak, but

If we do not realise this bliss, we get lost in desire, in burgeoning afflictions that are the cause of bad destinations, and like authentic binding mudrās, entangle us in their sweaty fires.

It is amazing to transform a body into gold, but like indiscriminate dogs and donkeys, we

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\textsuperscript{117}This reads *rdel*, which appears to be a scribal error as *rdel*, which means “pebbles”.

\textsuperscript{118}This follows the GT. The GN reads *zhun*, “weakness”, which appears to be a scribal error.
may also (encounter) hardship later, so it is a mistake to engage in base behaviour.

Lack of conception is an existential ravine, the antidote to samsāra is emptiness; (if we) arbitrarily censure cause and effect we mistakenly fall into nihilism.

And those who are intelligent become buddhas by (using) the Vajrayāna, but it leads stupid people to bad destinations.

This means you (should) experience excellent realisations that are in the experts’ domain. Rang byung rdo rje wrote this after realisation dawned.

Song No. 134; 42 (GN 200-202; GT 413-414)

Namo-guru.

I honour the noble gurus. 
In these dark (times) for Sākyamuni’s teachings, Rang byung rdo rje has this to say.

It is difficult to discipline debauched beings; give them food, and they still get angry about trivial things, give them wealth freely, and they still offend you, free them from sacrifice, and they still harm you; these students are making enemies of their gurus.

They are not suitable repositories for the sacred dharma; I continually bestow empowerments, but they have no samaya; they do not protect their monastic morality and talk nonsense; I propound the profound view and they become nihilists; I teach them obviously and they keep the externalist’s view.

Kye ma! Beings of these dark times! 
Who will stop you falling?119

The laywomen (here) are especially (bad). They chase after their preconceptions of desire, and ignite when they see those who may satiate them. I’ve seen them.

They run after charlatans and don’t remember any bit of the dharma I taught them. They’re not courageous in dhyāna cultivation, but they put a lot of effort into debauchery!

If you get friendly with a dog, they lick your face.
If you get friendly with children, they hang off your shoulders.

119 This is not a direct translation of the Tibetan expression rjes su ’dzin par byed, which would be “who will continue to hold them”, but the expression means something closer to the idea of holding people back from falling, and this is why I have chosen this translation.
Please bodhisattvas, do not abandon
the beings of these dark times;
I have compassion for them, but in the
darkness, disciplining them is difficult.

May they cultivate equanimity at least once in this life
and aspire to more discipline in the next

This arose naturally, spontaneously in Rang byung’s\(^{120}\) mind,
and all lucky ones should understand (what I have said).

He said this at Tsa ri’s new monastery at Zhol.

May it be a providential, illustrious, blazing ornament for the world.

**Song No. 135; 43 (GN 202–203; GT 414–415)**

*Namo-guru.*

I honour the gurus.

In these dark (times) for the Buddha’s teachings,
those beings who trust (in the dharma) are rare,
those who teach the sacred dharma precisely are few,
in a hundred people, only a few make an effort at dharma.

To benefit both yourself and others,
in dark times like these,
followers of the Buddha (hear this)—

Now you are free from samsāra’s mud,
strike out for nirvāṇa’s dry shore.
Now you have abandoned worldly relatives,
rely on sacred, spiritual friends.
Now you have stopped pointless chatter,
recite secret mantras.
Now you have stopped debauched exertions,
exert yourself at dhyāna.
Now you have renounced sweets,
rely on samādhi’s food.
Now you have stopped hankering for towns,
wander in mountainous borderlands.

Because when we don’t do these things—

External appearances become expert in deception;
children of the mind, they are crazy in the head.
Preconceptions proliferate and last longer; but
virtuous friends become increasingly rare.
Ignorant veils and fogs get thicker and
we wander on multiplying cliffs of depravity.

\(^{120}\) The Tibetan reads *rang byung sems la shar ba*. The word "rang byung" implies the author’s name, the naturalness of the expression, and its spontaneity. As I was unable to imply all these things through one English expression, I have listed them one after the other.
Unwholesome friends lead us
to prison, the three bad destinations,
where we will wander without end.

This is why now is the time to strive. He said this in the fifth month of the ox year (1337) in Xanadu.

**Song No. 137; 45 (GN 205; GT 416)**

And again, when I was staying in the great palace of Dadu, on the ninth night of the first month, in a dream, I went to see the master, Vajra-hero Mar pa the translator (who was with) other gurus. We had many conversations about the dharma, (and from them) this verse stuck in my mind.

Whatever you think, it is an obstacle, so transform it into samādhi; this joy will not take long to cultivate, (and) when it frees you from thinking, clarity will arise.

*This* is the nature of sahaja; there’s no need to look for signs and such. (With this view), whatever and whatever are on your mind, their nature, the nature of this and that will arise as myriad jewel-like reflections.

So he said, I heard it, and it stuck in my mind, so I am saying it now. May it be a providential, illustrious, blazing ornament for the world.
PART B: Comparative Tibetan Text of Selected Songs

This Tibetan text is a comparative text of the following three publications:

1. Rang byung rdo rje, 3rd Karmapa, (n.d.). *Karma pa rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum thör bu*. 6 Volumes [s.l.]: [s.n.]


The first of these publications acts as the main text, to which the other two are then compared. Where there is a difference, it is noted in blue in the main text and the alternative is noted in blue in a corresponding footnote. Those sections that are not in the main text, and only in the complimentary text are marked in purple.

Song No. 1 (GN 2–4; GB 186–187)

[Song text follows with footnotes and comments as per the original document.]
Song No. 4 (GN 6–7; GB 188–189)

Song No. 6 (GN 7–8; GB 189–190)
The Song of Three Analogies and Six Meanings

Song No. 7 (GN 9; GB 190–191) The Song of Three Analogies and Six Meanings

Song No. 8 (GN 9–14; GB 191–195) Songs of the View, Cultivation, Behaviour and Result
Song No. 11 (GN 16-17; GB 198)

[Text in Tibetan script]

70 བོད་ཀྱིས་ཐོབ་པ་ཐོས་ཀྱི་ཤིང་། བོད་ཀྱིས་ཐོབ་པ་ཐོས་ཀྱི་ཤིང་། བོད་ཀྱིས་ཐོབ་པ་ཐོས་ཀྱི་ཤིང་།
71 རིང་ཐོབ་པོ་ཤིང་། རིང་ཐོབ་པོ་ཤིང་། རིང་ཐོབ་པོ་ཤིང་། རིང་ཐོབ་པོ་ཤིང་།
72 སྐད་བཞི་སྒྲ་ཞིང་། སྐད་བཞི་སྒྲ་ཞིང་། སྐད་བཞི་སྒྲ་ཞིང་། སྐད་བཞི་སྒྲ་ཞིང་།
73 འོག་པ་ཐོབ་པོ་ཤིང་། འོག་པ་ཐོབ་པོ་ཤིང་། འོག་པ་ཐོབ་པོ་ཤིང་། འོག་པ་ཐོབ་པོ་ཤིང་།
83 ཟོ་བོད་ལྷ་[22] ཟོ་བོད་ལྷ་[22] ཟོ་བོད་ལྷ་[22] ཟོ་བོད་ལྷ་[22]
Song No. 12 (GN 17–18; GB 198–199)

Song No. 14 (GN 19–20; GB 200–201)
Song No. 15 (GN 20–22; GB 201-203)

I have not been able to ascertain what this means. It could possibly be another form of the word Subham. Note that GN says bkra shi bde legs kun la shog, which means something very similar to Subham.

**Song No. 16 (GB 203–204; GN 23–24)**
Song No. 19 (GN 27-28; GB 206-207)

[27] 204 205 206 207
Song No. 21 (GN 29–31; GB 276–277)

Song No. 22 (GN 32–33; GB 208–209)
Song No. 25 (GN 35–37; GB 212–213)
Song No. 28 (GN 39-40; GB 215-216) The Song that Determines the Secret Mantra Vajrayāna Exactly

Song No. 34 (GN 46-47; GB 221-222)
Song No. 35 (GN 47–49; GB 222)

Song No. 35 (GN 47–49; GB 222)

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Song No. 40 (GN 55–56; GB 227–229)

Song No. 41 (GN 56–57: GB 229–231)
Song No. 44 (GN 60–63; GB 232–235) A Message to the Entire Kingdom

[Song]/[Verse (1 of 6)]

[Song]/[Verse (2 of 6)]

[Song]/[Verse (3 of 6)]

[Song]/[Verse (4 of 6)]

[Song]/[Verse (5 of 6)]

[Song]/[Verse (6 of 6)]

[60] "[sic]"
Song No. 45 (GN 63–67; GB 235–238) The Song of the Vajrayāna

229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242

229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242
Song No. 46 (GN 67–69; GB 238–240)

The text is a traditional song from the Buddhist tradition, featuring the use of Sanskrit and Pali languages. The song is part of a larger collection of religious and cultural songs used in Buddhist rituals and ceremonies. The text is written in a script that is typical of ancient Indian manuscripts, with the use of sandhi and other linguistic rules that are specific to the region of origin. The song likely contains religious verses and melodies that are meant to be sung in a ceremonial context.

The song is divided into multiple verses, each with its own melody and meter. The text is written in a way that emphasizes the poetic structure and musicality of the composition. The song is likely to be performed by trained singers who are familiar with the cultural and religious context in which the song was created.

The song is an example of the rich cultural heritage of the region and the importance of oral tradition in preserving cultural knowledge. The text is a testament to the enduring influence of Buddhist culture on the region and the importance of music and song in religious and social contexts.

The song is a valuable resource for scholars studying the history and culture of the region, as well as for those interested in the oral tradition of religious and cultural songs.
Song No. 47 (GN 69–70; GB 240–241) *Ten Teaching Topics*

Song No. 48 (GN 70–71; GB 241) *Eight Things You Will Not Mind*
Song No. 49 (GN 71–72; GB 241–243)

Song No. 50 (GN 73–74; GB 243–244) The Dharma Song of the Eight Useless Things
Song No. 53 (GN 79–81; GB 247–249)

Song No. 56 (GN 869–88; GB 253–254)
Song No. 58 (GN 909–92; GB 2569–257) On Completion of the Jātaka Tales

On completion of the Jātaka Tales, it is said that the King of the Mice was able to create a new kingdom. The King of the Mice, hearing the news, went to the forest to meet the Buddha. The Buddha asked him, "What is the meaning of this?" The King of the Mice replied, "I have completed the Jātaka Tales." The Buddha said, "Excellent! Now you can create a new kingdom." The King of the Mice was very happy and created a new kingdom. The Buddha then taught him the Dhamma and the King of the Mice became a great teacher of the Dhamma.

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323 भगवन् यथार्थम् [254]
324 भगवान् यथार्थम् [255]
325 भगवान् यथार्थम् [256]
326 भगवान् यथार्थम् [257]
327 भगवान् यथार्थम् [258]
328 भगवान् यथार्थम् [259]
329 भगवान् यथार्थम् [260]
330 भगवान् यथार्थम् [261]
331 भगवान् यथार्थम् [262]
332 भगवान् यथार्थम् [263]
333 भगवान् यथार्थम् [264]
334 भगवान् यथार्थम् [265]
335 भगवान् यथार्थम् [266]
336 भगवान् यथार्थम् [267]
337 भगवान् यथार्थम् [268]
338 भगवान् यथार्थम् [269]
339 भगवान् यथार्थम् [270]
340 भगवान् यथार्थम् [271]
341 भगवान् यथार्थम् [272]
Song No. 59 (GN 929–94; GB 257–260)

[Text content not legible due to visual distortion]
Song No. 60 (GN 94–95; GB 260) The Song of Concealed Knowledge about Places and Mind

Song No. 63 (GN 97–98; GB 262–263) Song that Determines the Ground-of-All
Song No. 66 (GN 101-102; GB 265) East Kha rag: The Song that Settles Subjects and Objects

Song No. 69 (GN 104-105; GB 267-268) North Kha rag: The Lyric that Unfolds Outside and In
Song No. 70 (GN 105-107; GB 268-269)

No. 70

391 [sic] (268) [sic]

392 [sic] (106) [sic]

393 [sic] (106) [sic]

394 [sic] (106) [sic]

395 [sic] (106) [sic]

396 [sic] (269) [sic]

397 [sic] (269) [sic]

398 [sic] (269) [sic]

399 [sic] (269) [sic]

400 [sic] (269) [sic]

401 [sic] (269) [sic]

402 [sic] (269) [sic]

403 [sic] (269) [sic]

404 [sic] (269) [sic]

405 [sic] (269) [sic]

406 [sic] (269) [sic]

407 [sic] (269) [sic]

408 [sic] (269) [sic]
Song No. 74 (GN 112–114; GB 273–276)

[Translation]

[Translations of the song's lyrics in Bengali script]
Song No. 81 (GN 119-121; GB 283-284) Twelve Verses

Song No. 81 (GN 119-121; GB 283-284) Twelve Verses

420 निधिनाथकायोऽनुवर्तथा। वेदोऽनुवर्तथेत्यसानंविपक्ष। भर्तिर्विज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्

429 कृत्यधातूसंख्योऽनुवर्तथा। वेदोऽनुवर्तथादिनिश्चितमात्रम्। भर्तिर्विज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्

430 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

431 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

432 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

433 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

434 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

435 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

436 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

437 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

438 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

439 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

440 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

441 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

442 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

443 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

444 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।

445 साधवनुपस्तुवशस्ति। साधवनैतीविहरीजीविज्ञानसंहिताय ग्रन्थमिणिदन्तमात्रम्।
Song No. 86 (GN 125; GB 288)

Song No. 87 (GN 125–127; GB 288–291)
Song No. 88 (GN 127-128; GB 291)

Song No. 88 (GN 127-128; GB 291)

Song No. 88 (GN 127-128; GB 291)
Song No. 89 (GN 128-129; GB 291-292)

Song No. 90 (GN 129-130; GB 292-293)
Song No. 91 (GN 130–132; GB 293–295)

[497] Song No. 91

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[533] Song No. 91
Song No. 97; 5 (GN 140–141; GB 365–366) The Song that Fixes Nature

Song No. 98; 6 (GN 141–142; GB 366–367)
Song No. 100: 8 (GN 144–145; GB 368–369) A Lamp for the Experiential Path

[Detailed text not shown]

Song No. 101: 9 (GN 146–148; GT 369–371)

[Detailed text not shown]
Song No. 102, 10 (GN 148-150; CT 271-373)
রক্ষণশীলতা বোধ হয় যে সেদিকেই নৃত্যভোজন প্রবাল বলে নেওয়া হয়েছে ।

551 কুন্তলকান্তর মথুর ডাকু হার করে।
552 দারুণ পৰ্যন্ত পূর্ব পানীয় বোধ হয়।
553 জুলাইয়ের মাত্র মালিন্দকান্তর পৃথিবীতে আরও না করে।
554 কুন্তলকান্তর নৃত্যভোজন প্রবাল বলে হার করে।
555 প্রাপ্তির শুক্র রাজবংশ বলে।
556 এই হুষ্টান্তরত্নানন্দ বলে।
557 কুন্তলকান্তর মথুর ডাকু হার করে।

Song No. 104; 12 (GN 153–157; GB 375–378)

কুন্তলকান্ত মথুরে নৃত্যভোজন প্রবাল বলে নেওয়া হয়েছে।

558 বোধ হয় না রক্ষণশীলতা বোধ হয়।
559 জুলাইয়ের মাত্র মালিন্দকান্তর পৃথিবীতে আরও না করে।
560 কুন্তলকান্তর নৃত্যভোজন প্রবাল বলে।
561 প্রাপ্তির শুক্র রাজবংশ বলে।
562 এই হুষ্টান্তরত্নানন্দ বলে।

প্রাপ্তির শুক্র রাজবংশ বলে।

563 কুন্তলকান্তর মথুর ডাকু হার করে।
564 জুলাইয়ের মাত্র মালিন্দকান্তর পৃথিবীতে আরও না করে।
565 প্রাপ্তির শুক্র রাজবংশ বলে।
566 এই হুষ্টান্তরত্নানন্দ বলে।
567 কুন্তলকান্তর মথুর ডাকু হার করে।

এই হুষ্টান্তরত্নানন্দ বলে।

558 কুন্তলকান্তর মথুর ডাকু হার করে।
559 জুলাইয়ের মাত্র মালিন্দকান্তর পৃথিবীতে আরও না করে।
560 কুন্তলকান্তর নৃত্যভোজন প্রবাল বলে।
561 প্রাপ্তির শুক্র রাজবংশ বলে।
562 এই হুষ্টান্তরত্নানন্দ বলে।

এই হুষ্টান্তরত্নানন্দ বলে।
Song No. 105; 13 (GN 157-160; GB 378-380)

[569] 569 গীত গীতের মাধ্যমে শুধুমাত্র তেজ গান চর্চা করেছেন। গানের সঙ্গে অন্য কোনো দৃষ্টিকোণ নেই। তবে গানের মাধ্যমে শুধুমাত্র তেজ গান চর্চা করেছেন। গানের সঙ্গে অন্য কোনো দৃষ্টিকোণ নেই। তবে গানের মাধ্যমে শুধুমাত্র তেজ গান চর্চা করেছেন।

[568] 568 গীতগতির মাধ্যমে শুধুমাত্র তেজ গান চর্চা করেছেন। গানের সঙ্গে অন্য কোনো দৃষ্টিকোণ নেই। তবে গানের মাধ্যমে শুধুমাত্র তেজ গান চর্চা করেছেন। 

[570] 570 গীতের মাধ্যমে শুধুমাত্র তেজ গান চর্চা করেছেন। গানের সঙ্গে অন্য কোনো দৃষ্টিকোণ নেই।

[377] [378] [379]
Song No. 106; 14 (GN 160–161; GB 380–381) To the Teachers and Monks of Rwa sgrengs

To the Teachers and Monks of Rwa sgrengs.

571 (sic) 160

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619 (sic) 160
Song No. 110; 18 (GN 165-169; GB 384-388)

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Song No. 111; 19 (GN 169–170; GT 388)

Song No. 112; 20 (GN 170–171; GB 388–390)

595 གཅོད [387]གཟིགས་མི་བྱེད་ཐོབ
596 རོལ་མ་སྷུས་དོན་པར་ཐོབ
597 གཅོད་མི་བྱེད་ཐོབ
598 རོལ་མ་སྷུས་སྣང་གྲོལ
599 གཅོད་མི་བྱེད་ཐོབ
600 རོལ་མ་སྷུས་བཙོད་དང་། རོལ་མ་སྷུས་བཙོད་དང་། དྲུག་གོང་ཆེན་པོ་མཐའ་དེ་བཤད་
601 རོལ་མ་སྷུས་བཙོད་དང་། མཤིན་པོ་མཐའ་དེ་བཤད་

595 གཅོད [387]གཟིགས་མི་བྱེད་ཐོབ
596 རོལ་མ་སྷུས་དོན་པར་ཐོབ
597 གཅོད་མི་བྱེད་ཐོབ
598 རོལ་མ་སྷུས་སྣང་གྲོལ
599 གཅོད་མི་བྱེད་ཐོབ
600 རོལ་མ་སྷུས་བཙོད་དང་། རོལ་མ་སྷུས་བཙོད་དང་། དྲུག་གོང་ཆེན་པོ་མཐའ་དེ་བཤད་
601 རོལ་མ་སྷུས་བཙོད་དང་། མཤིན་པོ་མཐའ་དེ་བཤད་
Song No. 113; 21 (GN 171–173; GT 390–391)

Song No. 114; 22 (GN 173–175; GT 391–392)
Song No. 117: 25 (GN 176–177; GT 393–394)

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Song No. 120: 28 (GN 179–181; GT 396–397)

[175] [177] 

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Song No. 121; 29 (GN 181–182; GB 397–398)

Song No. 125; 33 (GN 187–189; GT 402–403)
Song No. 134: 42 (GN 200–202; GT 413–414)

Song No. 135: 43 (GN 202–203; GT 414–415)
Song No. 137; 45 (GN 205; GT 416)

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Appendix 5:  
Translations of Rang byung rdo rje’s  
Kha ba dkar po Praise and Site-Guides

1. Decorating Mount Meru: A Praise to Kha ba dkar po.  

1. Decorating Mount Meru: In Praise of Rong btsan Kha ba dkar po (Vol. Ca: 49–53)


(49) A praise called Decorating Mount Meru, which makes very clear that this land has the qualities of a sacred site.

I honour the sacred gurus.
By thoroughly relying on the stainless teachings,
you show the stainless path that clears the stains of ignorance,
you destroy all the stains on the paths and grounds. You locate the stainless.
I honour the one free from the stains of knowledge.

In these dark times, bodhisattvas
gaining experience in siddhi’s essence
should rely on solitude to help¹ these endeavours.
This claim accords with the sūtras, whose words directly praise those
who abide in sacred sites like rocky mountains and great borderlands.

Because The Essence of the Supreme Tantras says so, there are twenty-four sites, (50) (but) I should say a little about the virtue of this sacred site.

There is an ocean of lotuses that radiates moonbeams, from which
the four continents and Mt Meru (stick up like) shining anthers;
uniquely, with the dharma as its excellent elixir, the
vajra seat is set at the centre of all Jambudvīpa’s virtues.
And to its north, in the snowy mountains, is this,
the greatest of the sacred-siddhi sites upon which scholar-
adepts rely. This is that place with exalted qualities,
the snowy, eastern Mount Potalaka (Po ta ba).

To its north is the country known as Khotan,
in it is Mount Goṣṭha, blessed by the Buddha.
To its south is the land of Gṛhadevata, which
has been visited by many bodhisattvas.
To its east, is the country known as Gandhāra (Gha dha ra),
protected by Enārpattra (Pomegranate Leaf), King of the Nāgas.
To its west is the land of Bohavān, where
confidence in the Buddha’s teachings grows.

¹ Translated more literally this would be “to condition” (rkyen), but in this instance its meaning is “to help.”
East of the central land, Bodhgaya, is the sacred site that the siddhas rely upon, the site from which the goddesses who embody desire (Devīkoṭṭa) arise. The site of Kāmarūpa is in the North. In the middle of these, is the site of Pretapurī, with all the qualities of a sacred site. This is a site for siddhis in dark times; it is difficult for all to reach; it is where mother ḍākīnīs live.

(Now) for a brief description of the qualities of this mountain, which was spoken about by all the radiant gurus. (51)

The clear brightness of this mountain, glowing so white makes it (look) like night lilies, (or even) moons heaped on top of each other. It is so white, so imposing, so lofty, so exalted, that it graces the clouds with peaceful crowns.

High up there in the eastern celestial palace, lives Rdo rje brag 'dul and his entourage, (but) for normal folks to get there is difficult. (Up) there waterfalls crash, yell and shake within their chasms. The mountains are just rocks, but they look like weapons that are splendidly decorated by terrifying forests. And in the centre (of all this) is a beautiful alpine pasture; like the source of dharma, it is shaped exquisitely and graced by a pool.

It is widely reported that long ago Ācārya Padmasambhava and the guru Vairocana visited this site.

It is a great, sacred site of the ḍākīnīs, who in good times gather here and (perform) gana(cakras); and as a result, it is widely reported that this place inspires lucky people.

Directly to (this mountain's) south, in a straight line (lives) the terrifying Citipāti, Lord of Cemeteries, who has implements, and is renowned for his entourage of 100 000 divine armies. This is also the place for direct, wrathful action, (and) although their (abodes) are limitless, this particular site is (associated) with gods; they praise this very place as the very best of places.

To the west of this site, (but still) quite near to it is the blood red coloured bse, with the braided hair, surrounded by ten million (other) mother deities who are beyond the ordinary. (52) This is the site of unobstructed siddhi, and these beings are therefore embodied (there). This is (also) a site of the most amazing miracles, (but) as the illustrious gurus say, it is difficult to reach.

To the north of this site is a place of the yaksā known as “The One Who Likes Mules”, along with his entourage of many more yaksās. Near to this site is another, in which there is a cave, graced by its (role

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2 I have read this as sbubs rather than sbu bas, which has no meaning and I assume is a typographical error.
as) a dharma source that (is now) the greatest of sacred sites for realisation; it is reported to be a site at which many miracles have been displayed.

In the same way, that place (up there) is the kind of sacred site on which you can rely for siddhi. It is known as Rong btsan Kha bā dkar po, and has the character its name suggests.

You can (see) all directions clearly from up there, and the sounds of merging rivers rise (up to it too). It is so stunning that a quick look at it will not satisfy you; up there, the lakes and ponds are arranged just so.

The mālā of snow mountains that surrounds it (stretches) from the east, where it borders Gandhāra to the site of the Vajrajāla (Blazing Vajra Charnel Ground).

The lands here are closely surrounded by this mountain fence, (and) in them nobody fears famine and untimely death; for in (these valleys grow) aloe and sandalwood trees, grape vines and various roots. All the best trees are there in infinite variety, and all of them have medicinal capacities.

When the sun travels to the North, it can get very warm, but in this mālā of snow mountains it (remains) quite cool.
And when the sun travels to the South and it gets cold, a few varieties of sprouting fruits from around here (still) (53) ripen (granting) this place the complexion of Indra.
Here all sparkling hues spring forth, (it is graced by) the perfumes of hundreds of flowers, inconceivable collections of fruits and buds sprout, the intense smell of incense floats in from all directions and the gods’ melodic music resounds.
Indeed, for those with purity of mind, a multitude of great wondrous things appear here.
It has countless qualities, and I have only spoken a little about them for a short while.
(If I were) to expand on what I have said here, I would have to speak of the gurus’ deeds, the realisations they attained in this sacred site.

I have written this here for those beings who asked me, for those who have a little confidence in this place.
In writing it, in order to make things clear to those gathered here, I abandoned poetry and decorative words.
Through this virtue may wanderers completely abandon distracting afflictions and attain the greatest happiness, disease-free dhyāna.
And, eventually, may they be free from samsāra and nirvāṇa, by attaining the omniscient state.

On the tenth day of the third month of the monkey year (1308), Rang byung rdo rje composed this (this praise while) on pilgrimage.
2. A Rain of Siddhi: a site-guide for the great sacred site, Kha ba dkar po


(Note: The book in which these next two texts were collected does not remark on a source for them, and they have not been included within the Collected Works.)

(1) Khyai!

On the greatest of the four continents, Jambudvipa,
is one of the twenty-four great sacred sites,
in Southern Mon, in the Tsha ba rong (Ranges),
on the border of 'Jang and Tibet,
it is the great, sacred site of Kha ba dkar po.

From the palace, the dharma source, E Vam,
(comes) this snow mountain, like a heap of jewels,
with the sun, moon and stars arrayed above it, and
a myriad of green plants growing on its slopes.
At its borders, it is encircled by mountain mālās,
(along with) a myriad of orchards in Cool Groves.

Myriad flowers talk flower talk,
while hordes of wild animals roar.
Antelopes (dash through) forest and scrub.
Birds call with harmonious voices, si li li.
Dragons thunder and flash above, u ru ru.
Rivulets and snowmelts (sing), si li li.
An ocean of springs (chorus), kyi li li.
The river trumpets like an elephant.
The rocks (grind) like a majestic drum.

This is a site where dākas and dākinīs assemble
a land were lucky men and women gather;
they talk their talks on the turquoise plain,
(while) the crystal dome (says), kyi li li,
(and) the (glacier) curtains dangle, tra la la.

Sapphire mālā strings are stretched behind it,
a turquoise column is planted inside it,
a precious, golden throne was built above it,
clear moon and sunlight shine from it;
this is a site where male and female protectors live.

Because the teachings of Śākya say so
(we know) he protects countless pure lands.

This powerful mountain, this Kha ba dkar po,
is a conch-white male,

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3 This refers to one of the eight great charnel grounds (Skt. aṣṭamahāśmāśāṇa; Tib. dur khrod chen po brgyad) called "Cool Grove" (Skt. Śītavana; Tib. bsil bu tshal), which is located near the main temple at Bodhgaya.

4 The glaciers at Kha ba dkar po are very noisy, contracting and expanding into the rock as they warm and cool during the day.
whose face is like a full moon,
whose eyes are like the rising sun,
and who rides a conch-white horse.
He wears a white, silk cloak on his body,
(and) a precious, living hat (the clouds) on his head.

His body is like Mount Meru,
his speech is unstoppable dharma.
his mind is clear emptiness, the dharmakāya,
his qualities are equal to the Buddha’s, (and)
his awakened activities are unstoppable magic.

When one visits this king, this power-mountain,
(one sees) white men and white horses soaring and floating:
his entourage is inconceivable.

In his right (hand) is a tiger skin quiver;
in his left, a quiver of leopard skin.
His sword sparks firelight, like lightening,
his golden armour glints, si li li,
turquoise and blue flow flashing down from him,
his satin saddlecloth flutters and dazzles,
his conch(-white) saddle flares dominion,
his conch(-white) stirrups dangle, tra la la,
the coral above and below him brings good tidings.

The eight classes of gods and demons\(^5\) circle around him.

Your manifestations are inconceivable,
(your) mental manifestations fill three-thousand (worlds),
(all your) desires, wishes, and intentions are fulfilled.

(Here) there are three cheeses: yak, goat and sheep;
three white foods: (curd, milk and butter):
three sweet foods: (sugar, molasses and honey);
milk, and various premium meats and beers.
These are all the offerings (the gods) could want,
and I offer them to the powerful, mountain god
and his entourage to (fulfil) their desires.

Khyai! The king of the violent spirits is a red man on a red horse,
who wears a red, silk cloak on his body, (3)
and brandishes a red-flagged lance in his hand.
His entourage is inconceivable, (and)
all the various things he desires, (arise from) this incense smoke.

The king of the demons is a black man on a black horse,
who wears a black, silk cloak on his body,
and brandishes a black-flagged lance in his hand.
His entourage is inconceivable, (and)
all the various things he desires, (arise from) this incense smoke.

\(^5\) Lha srf mde brgyad. These are: 1) Yamantaka (gshin rje); 2) mother-protectors (Skt. mātrkā; Tib. ma ma); 3) demons (Skt. māra; Tib. bdu); 4) violent spirits (Tib. btsan); 5) mischievous spirits (Tib. rgyal po); 6) serpent spirits (Skt. nāga; Tib. klu); 7) wealth spirits (Skt. yakṣa; gnod sbyin); 8) astrological spirits (Skt. rāhu; Tib. gza\(\text{'}.\))
The king of the nāgas is a blue man on a blue horse, who wears a blue, silk cloak on his body, and brandishes a blue-flagged lance in his hand. His entourage is inconceivable, (and) all the various things he desires, (arise from) this incense smoke.

The medicine-queen of the mātrkā rides a deer, wears white silk clothes on her body, (and) brandishes a white-flagged lance in her hand. Her entourage is inconceivable, (and) all the various things she desires, (arise from) this incense smoke.

The yellow, earth god rides a pig, has her body adorned with jewellery, (and) carries a jewelled vase. Her entourage is inconceivable, (and) all the various things she desires, (arise from) incense smoke.

Khyai! Further purificatory smoke and (other) offerings are as follows:

In the eastern celestial mansion is (the king of the) gods, with an entourage of arhats and sages; all the various things he desires, (arise from) this incense smoke.

In the southern celestial mansion is (the king of the) yamas, (with an entourage of) wrathful male and female yamas; all the various things he desires, (arise from) this incense smoke.

In the western celestial mansion is (the queen of the) mātrkās, (with an entourage of) ten million mātrkās; all the various things she desires, (arise from) this incense smoke.

In the northern celestial mansion is (the king of the) yakṣas, (with an entourage of) male and female yakṣa treasure-lords; all the various things he desires, (arise from) this incense smoke.

In the subterranean celestial mansion is (the king of the) nāgas, (with an entourage of) a million nāga clans; all the various things he desires, (arise from) this incense smoke. (4)

In the four cardinal and (four) intermediate directions, are many lesser kings, with entourages that are also inconceivable; they have servants, and messengers and the like.

Rong btsan (Kha ba dkar po) and all his entourage offer this smoke.

Khyai! Further purificatory smoke and (other) offerings are as follows:

Generally:
(We offer this) incense smoke to Gangs dkar Ti se (Mt Kailaś); (We offer this) incense smoke to the father of Zhang, Rma gnyan spong ra; (We offer this) incense smoke to the mother of Zhang, the high Thang lha; (We offer this) incense smoke to the lord of Zhang, the highest Tsa ri; (We offer this) incense smoke to the elder brother La phyi gangs dgar;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the younger brother Sgam po, (land of) sala trees;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the princess Gangs dkar sha med;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the twelve worldly, steadfast ones;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the foreign minister, the fluctuating G.yu rtse;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the in-between lord, (mount) of a 1000 rhododendron;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the internal minister, stag rtse dpal 'khru;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the Bla-boulder, the bodily Bla, Dpang rtsal;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the Bla-lake, the spring of Nags rings;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the Bla-tree, the Dar tree and its nine manifestations;
(We offer this) incense smoke to 'Og rta pha 'ong dril dkar;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the messenger Gad sa who rides a tiger;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the chief Rngam chen spyi rings;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Dge bsnyen Rdo rje dbang phyug;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Dge bsnyen Rdo rje rtse dgu;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Kha ba dung dkar chen po;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the great mountain Rngam gling g.yag;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the seven playful white waters of Dbu;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Sba rgod rdo rje legs pa;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Mtsho chen, the nipple demoness;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the female garuḍa, who (holds) her child aloft;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the female vulture, who is separated from her child;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the turquoise dragon bird of Bon po;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the old women of Sring ba, the great mother;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the black mountain of iron, Phu 'jor;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the noble women of Tha chen and her nine relatives; (5)
(We offer this) incense smoke to Rdo rje 'gogs 'dul and the fifty-nine male magicians;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Kha la dung dkar and the nine, swift rākṣasa messengers.

Khyāi! (To the) rākṣasa gatekeepers in the East:
(We offer this) incense smoke to the external gatekeeper, Lcag gam gnyan po;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the internal gatekeeper, Btsan rgod do ban.

(To the) rākṣasa gatekeepers in the South:
(We offer this) incense smoke to the external gatekeeper, the black mountain in Smug;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the internal gatekeeper, Bla gnyan po Peak.

(To the) rākṣasa gatekeepers in the West:
(We offer this) incense smoke to the external gatekeeper, Btsan rang stag cog;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the internal gatekeeper, Rdo ban rta zhon.

(To the) rākṣasa gatekeepers in the North, the enemy's gateway:
(We offer this) incense smoke to the external gatekeeper, the black mountain Stag shod;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the internal gatekeeper, Mnga bdag Dpa' bo chen po.

(We offer this) incense smoke to the protectors with great sandalwood clubs;
(We offer this) incense smoke to all the yakṣas who own treasure.

Khyāi! Further purificatory smoke and (other) offerings are as follows:

(We offer this) incense smoke to the great, sacred site Kha ba dkar po;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the chief Rngam chen spyi rings;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Lha rje sman dar to his right;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Lha lung mtsho dkar to his left;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the congregation of adult ministers with golden hair;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Rgya zhung gang ba stag snying;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Dkar thub sngo ba g.yu Peak;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Gangs dkar seng ge gnam ljongs;
(We offer this) incense smoke to old Dpal rten ging rum;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Dung rgod dbu ba bdun rol;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Phub 'dzong khyung ri spong pa;
(We offer this) incense smoke to 'Dzin btsan rgod zer khrom Peak;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Bka' sdom khom mo ljung rgan;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the dharma treasury G.yu khyug and her seven relatives;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the human treasury Tsha ba mgo da;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the jewel treasury Seng ge g.yu Peak;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the rice treasury Ri dbang rgyal po; [6]
(We offer this) incense smoke to the barley treasury Dung Mountain, Shol drag;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the external Dung khyung dkar po;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Mda' ra tshal rang stag gcog;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Mdung ra gangs dkar stag Peak;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the seven sisters of Nor yang rma gnyan;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the minor sacred-site Btsan dkar lha rje;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the silk treasury, 'Bras ba g.yu Peak;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the great snows of Seng ge g.yug Peak;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the great, snowy sacred site of the seven sisters;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Queen Dar dkar thod Iding;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the blue jewel in the north;
(We offer this) incense smoke to the great mother, Gangs dkar g.yag 'bri;
(We offer this) incense smoke to Bod po dmar po khrag gdong;
(We offer this) incense smoke to 'Bong mo dur mo g.yu Lake;
(We offer this) incense smoke to G.yaggang sman phran 'bum sde;
(We offer this) incense smoke to all the Pho yi las mkhan.

We offer this rice, yag, and ewe ornamented with butter;
this butter-flour, this golden drink, these silk fans;
these ornamented offering morsels of (milk, butter and curd), the three whites;
(and) the three sweets (molasses, honey sugar), nectar and milk;
tiger and leopard, silk-streaming banners, and a mirror;
diverting words, thousands of white and black thrones,
and a myriad of other offerings to
the kings, the local lords and their entourages.
Inspire me and this circle of patrons.
The excellent things are interlaced with (our) faults;
wholesome victories sit opposite meaning;
the victory banner is raised, the conch-shell resounds;
the sacred bonds are completed, there is a treasury of companions.
There are day guards who will guard for three days;
and night guards who will guard for three nights.

May I strive for the best of siddhis.
May all enemies be cast aside through reason.
May all harmful obstacles remain in the stores of karma.
May all intentions be fulfilled.
May all obstacles be pacified.
May all commissioned activities be completed. [7]

These are the sacred offerings in the Bhagavan Cakrasamvara's palace, the great, sacred site Kha ba dkar po. It was composed by the dharma noble Rang byung rdo rje.


(8) In this vast land, Jambudvipa, prophesied by the Buddha, on the dark continent to the north of Bodhgaya, as sun rises on the snow, came an incorruptible body who cleared away the dark ignorance: O rgyan Rinpoche. Precious, great being, I invoke you.

Holder of many sūtras and tantras, your predicted sites of siddhi; Tsa ri tra in Kong (po), in particular, (but also), likewise, this great sacred site: Kha ba dkar. Particular site of siddhi, I invoke you.

From the palace of the highest, secret mantra, come mothers and dākinīs, gathering like clouds, abiding. From the heart of the sacred dharma to this yogi, inspiration, actual siddhis fall like unceasing rain. Indiscriminate interdependence, I invoke you.

From the dharmadhātu, Cakrasamvara’s palace, come the dharma protectors, the oath-bound ones, gathering like clouds, abiding. From the heart of the sacred dharma to this yogi (they come) to defeat an army of hindrances and obstacles, and to inspire.

To the yogi who (seeks) siddhi from the heart, single-pointedly, mind’s nature, the dharmakāya, natural realisation abides in (9) the unceasing, illusory elixir, and having attained empowerment, may all our intentions be fulfilled quickly.

This is the chapter on Rang byung rdo rje’s secret words on Kha ba dkar po.
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