

# The Liturgies and Oracular Utterances of the Spirit-mediums of Upper Tibet — An Introduction to their *bsang* Rituals —

John Vincent Bellezza  
(Tibet Center, University of Virginia)

## Introduction

**I**n this paper, I present an introduction to the *bsang* (fumigation/incense purification) rituals of the spirit-mediums of Upper Tibet (sTod and Byang-thang).<sup>1</sup> This work, as the first in a series, introduces the liturgies and oracular utterances of the spirit-mediums, which include a wide range of ritual procedures and pronouncements. The spirit-mediums (*lha-pa/lha-mo*, *dpa'-bo/dpa'-mo*) occupy an important place in the social and religious life of Upper Tibet. It is widely held that under the possession of deities they dispense healing therapies of both a physical and psychological nature. They are also believed to protect livestock and the countryside against harm, offer sage advice, and make declarations concerning the future course of events. In my book on the cultural history of the spirit-mediums of Upper Tibet (2005), I describe the trance ceremonies in some detail but do not present their recitations and dialogues *verbatim*.<sup>2</sup> The actual words of the spirit-mediums constitute a fascinating and telling aspect of the trance proceedings from both a literary and historical perspective. These utterances are made in a variety of regional dialects (dBus, gTsang, sTod, and Hor), and in a cant peculiar to the *lha-pa* known as the 'language of the gods' (*lha-skad*).

Between 2004 and 2006, I made a series of recordings of trance ceremonies (*lha-bzhugs*) convoked by prominent spirit-mediums of the

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<sup>1</sup> The delivery of this paper at the International Association of Tibetan Studies conference in 2006 and travel to Bonn from the Indian Subcontinent was made possible through a generous grant awarded me by the Lumbini International Research Institute (Nepal), an institution dedicated to the advancement of Buddhist studies. Grants for fieldwork in Upper Tibet and the procurement of high quality portable sound recording equipment came from the Asian Cultural Council (New York), and the Donald and Shelley Rubin Foundation (New York). These fine organizations supported my research work from 2002 until 2008. In this project to record the words of the spirit-mediums, I also warmly acknowledge the assistance of the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences and the Tibet and Himalayan Digital Library.

<sup>2</sup> A pioneering study of the activities of spirit-mediums of Upper Tibet was made by Berglie 1980; 1978; 1976. An excellent overview of Tibetan spirit-mediums is found in Diemberger 2005. I consider this work highly complementary with my treatise on the cultural history of spirit-mediums (2005), in that Diemberger treats sociological and political aspects of contemporary spirit-mediumship, whereas I do not.

region.<sup>3</sup> From the digital recordings I undertook the rigorous task of transcription and translation. Translations have been prepared for the proceedings of the trance ceremonies of ten different spirit-mediums, in part or in whole. These individuals dwell in the *'brog-pa* (herder) communities of the great Tibetan upland between gNam-ru in the east and Ru-thog in the west. The work of transcription and translation was carried out in collaboration with Yungdrung Tenzin, a Bonpo scholar of exceptional ability. In addition to well known ritual materials available in written form, highly unusual liturgical sequences are also represented in the transactions of the trance ceremony. These mostly belong to the *bsang* (fumigation) and *gser-skyems* (libations) types of ritual dispensation. The trance proceedings also reveal a scarcely known genre of 'oral literature', the purported words of the deities as spoken by their human mouthpieces. This highly colorful and evocative material includes poetic recitations about the lineages and activities of the deities, discourses on religious topics, the counseling of clients, and prophecies with wide-ranging implications.

The hallmark of the words of the spirit-mediums is its stunning diversity; it encapsulates a wide spectrum of Tibetan ritual observances. To my knowledge, no other ethnographic or literary source demonstrates such a rich and unmodified juxtaposition of ritual themes derived from disparate cultural sources. In the liturgical traditions of Tibetan texts, content is dictated by sectarian compulsions with their prescribed doctrinal conventions and stipulated modes of literary presentation. On the other hand, the oral tradition of the spirit-mediums is far more eclectic and elastic. Liturgical strands from Bon, *bon* and the various sects of Buddhism are woven into recitations without critical hesitation.<sup>4</sup> The ordering of the oral liturgies is also much more fluid as it is not tightly bound by established literary tradition. As such, native and Buddhist deities, concepts and practices are interchangeable throughout the recitations, sitting right next to each other in apparent concord. Generally speaking, this eclecticism reflects the development of Upper Tibet's religious and cultural heritage over many centuries (probably from pre-Buddhist times onwards). Ancient indigenous

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<sup>3</sup> This work was carried out on the High Tibet Welfare Expedition (2004), the Tibet Upland Expedition (2005) and the Tibet Highland Expedition (2006).

<sup>4</sup> I use *bon* written in the small case here and in other instances in this paper, to refer to the entire corpus of non-Buddhist religious traditions in Tibet. In this work, no attempt is made to differentiate ancient indigenous traditions from later folk practices, and I concede that both may be bound up in the term *bon*. On the other hand, I employ the proper name (Bon) to refer to doctrines, deities and concepts directly derived from the literature of the Eternal Bon religion, an integral institutionalized faith that emerged in the late tenth century. I make this distinction to avoid necessarily equating non-Buddhist traditions with the ecclesiastic establishment of Eternal Bon and its many Buddhist inspired foundations. I hasten to add that the Bon-po (and the Buddhists for that matter) do not normally make this distinction, seeing the two types of *bon*/Bon as largely one in the same. Surely, the historical continuity that Tibetans predicate their position on has much validity (I begin to grapple with this extremely complex subject in *Zhang Zhung: Foundations of Civilization in Upper Tibet* (2008), nevertheless, the different pedigrees of tradition that make up the religious fabric of Tibet could be overlooked if only one word was used to designate them all. Bjerken (2004: 43–48) furnishes a critical discussion about the tripartite systems of classification of Tibetan religion studied by Stein and Tucci. As Bjerken makes clear, the dividing line between Buddhism/Bon and the so-called 'popular religion', 'nameless religion', or 'folk religion' is hazy indeed. That is to say, the allotment of a particular custom, tradition or belief in one category or the other is not always possible with any degree of certitude.

traditions and the various schools of Buddhism have conspired to leave their mark on the culture of Upper Tibet in a syncretistic arrangement. This is mirrored in the uncritical and embracing fashion in which the spirit-mediums conceive of their profession. In fact, the trance ceremonies and their philosophical basis are one of the best living examples of old religious and imported Buddhist concepts and practices existing side by side in the culture of Upper Tibet.<sup>5</sup>

The main bodies of ritual tradition represented in the trance ceremonies include that found in:

- Mahayāna and Vajrayāna doctrines
- Tibetan folk culture
- gCod cult practices
- The Gling ge-sar epic
- Bon Phya-gshen traditions

The *bsang* ritual usually occurs after Buddhist refuge prayers (*skyabs-'gro*) and aspirant prayers (*smon-lam*) are said. The *bsang* is a crucial part of the pre-trance invocations, which are intended to attract the attention of the relevant deities and make them amenable to assisting the spirit-medium. It has two parts: the actual fumigation of the deities with incense (*bsangs*) and the supplications to them (*lha-gsol*). Ordinarily, a long line of divinities are beckoned and cleansed with fragrant incense. The use of incense is not merely an offering but is intended to purify the deities and restore their equilibrium. It is commonly believed that the environment-bound pantheon is of a limpid composition (*gtsang-rigs*) and is especially prone to being contaminated by anthropogenic activities of a negative character. In order to counteract the harm wrought upon the gods and to insure that the ritual venue is suitably clean, incense is burnt throughout the *bsang* ritual and for the duration of the trance ceremony.<sup>6</sup> One focus of the *bsang* ritual of the spirit-mediums is the possessing deities of the trance. Typically, many different mountain gods and lake goddesses are mentioned by name, and some description of them may also be given. In addition to divinities native to Upper Tibet, great mountain gods of other areas of Tibet may also be invoked. As part of the *bsang* the so-called higher deities of Buddhism are also entreated. These include the sky-goers (*mkha'-'gro*), mGon-po (Mahākāla) and other Buddhist and Bon protectors (Chos-skyong/Bon-skyong). The *bsang* is composed in verse but unlike some of the textual variants of the ritual, the syllabification of the lines is not strictly regimented. The tone of language and style of chanting of the spirit-mediums tend to be stately and lyrical as befits a sacred ritual.

<sup>5</sup> Diemberger's (2005: 146–148) analysis of the historical development of spirit-mediumship in both pastoral and agricultural regions of Tibet is largely in sync with what I propound here. She considers that the spirit-mediums are the embodiments of ancestral and territorial deities of pre-Buddhist origin as well as being involved in Buddhist tantric practices. She further observes that these two bodies of disparate tradition are part of a two-way assimilative process that has been informing the religious life of Tibet for centuries.

<sup>6</sup> For an authoritative introduction to the themes and applications of the *bsang* ritual, see Karmay 1998, pp. 380–412. Karmay (*ibid*: 387) stresses that the cult of indigenous deities as ancestral figures for localized populations has an integral place in the *bsang*.

**KARMA RIG 'DZIN** (born circa 1935)*i. Biographical sketch*

Karma rig-'dzin hails from Mad-pa, in Shan-rtsa county. He is a man of considerable moral authority, which is derived from the great respect 'brog-pa of the region have for him. Karma rig-'dzin is frequently sought out by fellow herders to remedy a wide range of human and veterinary ailments. Initial interviews with him were conducted in 2002 and these are described in *Calling Down the Gods* (pp. 154–169). Both his father and mother were spirit-mediums for deities indigenous to the Byang-thang. Karma rig-'dzin reports that he belongs to the Zur-bzhi lha-babs bzhi (Four God Descending Ones of the Four Corners), an illustrious lineage of *lha-pa*, which as he sees it, originated in primordial times. He is a medium for the gNyan-chen thang-lha and rTa-rgo circles of mountain gods, and for bDud-btsan dmar-po, a chief protector (*srung-ma*) of the sTag-lung bka'-brgyud subsect.<sup>7</sup>

*ii. The structure of the trance ceremony*

The trance ceremony from which a digital sound recording was made was convened by Karma rig-'dzin in sMad-pa, on May 17, 2004. Its purpose was to divine the road ahead for drivers who were accompanying part of the High Tibet Welfare Expedition. The presiding deity was the sTag-lung protector bDud-btsan dmar-po. The resulting transcription was checked with the *lha-pa* on April 27, 2006. Only the pre-trance portion of the proceedings could be reviewed by Karma rig-'dzin, as he has no recollection of what transpires after the 'descent of the gods'. The liturgical and oracular sequences of the trance ceremony were structured as follows:

1. Fumigation of the deities ritual (*bsang/lha-gsol*) (transpired between zero seconds, zero minutes and 12 minutes, 23 seconds of the trance ceremony = 00:00 to 12:23). This is a rather deliberate and cadenced portion of the ceremony with the somewhat subdued playing of the drum (*rnga*) and flat bell (*gshang*).
2. Libations offering ritual (*gser-skyems*) (12:24 to 17:31). This is a faster paced ritual but one in which the enunciation of the words is still relatively clear.
3. A discourse about Karma rig-'dzin's *lha-pa* lineage (18:06 to 20:00). This is primarily made to educate those in attendance about his trance practices.
4. A discourse about sundry historical and contemporary topics (20:01 to 28:00).
5. Prayers directed to specific deities (*gsol-ba 'debs*), refuge prayers (*skyabs*) and dedicatory prayers (*smon-lam*) (28:00 to 30:58). This portion of the

<sup>7</sup> Part of a triad of special protectors of the sTag-lung-pa, which also includes g.Ya'-dmar and dGe-bsnyen. For an account of their history, see Bellezza 2005, pp. 56–63.

ceremony consists of slow, distinct enunciations without musical instruments.

6. Invitation of the deities (*lha spyan-'dren*) to the ritual venue and body of the *lha-pa* (30:58 to 36:50). This segment begins slowly and methodically but gradually the tempo increases. It features just the drum.

7. Proclamation of the lineage of the deities (*lha-rgyud smos-pa*) (36:51 to 57:42). This sequence marks the beginning of possession by the deities of the trance. It consists of a long litany of names and descriptions of indigenous deities in verse. This is a musical segment with a euphony characteristic of many Upper Tibetan spirit-mediums. The canticle divulges the iconography of numerous divine figures in a lilting but dignified fashion. Just the drum is sounded in this interval.

8. The petitioning of the deities of the trance (*bka'-lung*) in which clients ask their questions to the *lha-pa* and he responds to their requests (57:43 to 1-03:16). More lore about the gods is also pronounced. In this conversational segment, the voice of Karma rig-'dzin has the same qualities it had during the pre-trance discourses. His possessing deity, sTag-lung bdud-btsan dmar-po, likes to speak to clients in the dialect of dBus, revealing his Central Tibetan origins.

9. Formulating the prophecy (*lung-bstan brtag-pa*) (1-03:17 to 1-05:47). This portion of the trance ceremony is highly lyrical and features the playing of the drum.

10. The oracular utterances (*lung-bstan*) and advice (*zhal-gdams*) of the *lha-pa* (1-05:49 to 1-10:14 approximately). This segment consists of a disquisition in which the fate of the client is pronounced and religious advice given, as well as a diatribe against the excesses of the old Tibet government.

11. The return of the deities to their abodes (*gshegs-bskyod*). The trance proceedings terminate with praises to the deities as they retreat from the *lha-pa's* body and ritual venue (this part of the ceremony was not recorded).

### iii. The *bsang*

Here for inspection, I present all of Karma rig-'dzin's *bsang* ritual. Normally, most trance ceremonies are prefaced with Buddhist prayers in which refuge is taken and the protection of the Buddhist divinities sought. In this ceremony however, the introductory prayers were dispensed with because Karma rig-'dzin had already made his daily religious observances. As I have commented (2005: 14), it is likely that before the Buddhacization of Upper Tibet, spirit-mediums relied solely on native deities such as those that dominate this *bsang*.<sup>8</sup> In any case, as we shall see, its liturgical structure has many *bon* or non-Buddhist characteristics. A cross-section of male and

<sup>8</sup> In Zhang Zhung (2008), I examine textual passages that specify the role of elemental spirits in the archaic funerary rites, which were designed to convey the consciousness principles of the deceased to the ancestral afterlife.

female deities inhabiting a large swathe of territory between gNam-mtsho and Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho are invoked during Karma rig-'dzin's fumigation ritual, reinforcing its regional orientation. Many lines in the *bsang* end in the verb *bsang* [*ba*] (I/we fumigate).<sup>9</sup>

The *bsang* of Karma rig-'dzin begins with the *lha* and *klu* of the dichotomous universe (composed of heaven and earth) (ln. 1). This heralding of the deities of the upper (*yar*) and lower (*yog*) realms is one of many *bon* features in this *bsang*. It is made clear that this ritual is also a *khrus* (ablutions) type, which is carried out by the sprinkling of water during the recitations (ln. 2). The first gods mentioned by name are atmospherical in quality and represent personal tutelary deities of Karma rig-'dzin in his role as a spirit-medium (lns. 4, 5). This is immediately followed by the invocation of the *mkha'-'gro*, those sky-treading benefactresses that occupy a fundamental place in the pantheon of Buddhism (ln. 6). The non-Buddhist character of the *bsang* reasserts itself with the *dgra-lha*/*sgra-bla* and *wer-ma* (a closely related class of martial spirits) (lns. 7–9). According to the Bon religion, the *sgra-bla* formed the mainstay of the pre-Buddhist tradition of spirit-mediumship. Known as *lha yi bka'-bab* (the commands of deities), this oracular system is found as part of Phya-gshen theg-pa, or the first vehicle of Bon teachings. To this day, the *dgra-lha* command a key position in the various curative and protective rites of the trance ceremonies of Upper Tibet. Another mainstay of the native Tibetan tradition is the words *ki* and *bswo*/*bsu*, which are commonly used in the *bsang* and *lha-gsol* rituals to awaken, invoke and praise the deities (lns. 11–17). Essentially, these words are employed to call to action the deities of the trance ceremony:

ln. 1: You are the *lha* and *klu* doctrine protectors (*bstan-srung*) of the four directions of dBus and gTsang in the center (*bar dbus gtsang rubzhi/ lha klu bstan-srung khyed rnams* /).

ln. 2: I invite you to come to this incense (*bsang*) and ablutions (*khrus*) [ritual] (*bsang dang khrus la spyan-'dren gshegs su gsol* /).

ln. 3: *Om A hum*.

ln. 4: I fumigate (*bsang*) gNam-bdag sgo-lha khyung-rdzong (Sky Master Portal Lha Horned Eagle Fortress) (*gnam-bdag sgo-lha khyung-rdzong bsang* /).

ln. 5: I fumigate rNam-sras thog-lha me-'bar.<sup>10</sup>

ln. 6: I fumigate all the sky-goers of formless emptiness (*ma-lus stong-nyid mkha'-'gro bsang* /).

ln. 7: I fumigate the three hundred and sixty *wer-ma*.

ln. 8: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of the eye beholders (*lta-ba mig gi dgra-lha bsang* /).

ln. 9: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of the ear listeners (*nyan-pa rna-ba'i dgra-lha bsang* /).

ln. 10: *Om A hum* (repeated many times). <The drumming begins>

ln. 11: I call the *lha* saying *ki ki* (*lha ki ki zer kyin 'bod-pa yin* /).

ln. 12: I invoke you saying *bswo bswo* (*bswo bswo zer kyin bswo ba yin* /).

<sup>9</sup> Karmay renders *bsang-ba* as 'let us purify' or 'it must be purified' (1998: 382). I have elected to use a more direct and simple phrasing in my translation, which is reflective of the candid spirit of the rituals conducted by the spirit-mediums.

<sup>10</sup> This deity appears to be a composite form combining the wealth god rNam-thos-sras with a celestial figure Thog-lha me-'bar (Blazing Thunder God).

ln. 13: *Ki* and *bswo* are the {invitation} [words] of the *lha* (*ki bswo lha yi spyan* {*drangs so*} /<sup>11</sup>).

ln. 14: *Yā* (Ah yes), I call the *lha* saying *ki ki* (*yā lha ki ki zer kyin 'bod-pa yin /*).

ln. 15: I invoke you saying *bswo bswo*.

ln. 16: *Ki* and *bswo* are the callers of the *lha* (*ki bswo lha yi 'bod-pa yin /*).

ln. 17: *Ki ki ki la bswo bswo bswo!*

ln. 18: *Hum hum ma ra yo phat!*<sup>12</sup>

<The *lha-pa* blows his copper horn (*zangs-gling*) several times and begins to play his *gshang*>

A number of important gods are invoked next in the *bsang*, including the chiefs of the *lha*, *gnyan* and *klu*, the spirits of the three planes of existence (*srid-pa gsum*) (lns. 19–21). Although well known Buddhist gods are represented here, the tripartite cosmos (*steng*, *bar*, *'og*) alluded to is yet another *bon* motif of Karma rig-'dzin's *bsang*. The Tibetan astrological gods are also singled out for special mention: the *lha* of the twelve *lo-skor* (duodecimal calendrical system), the *lha* of the nine *sme-ba* (basic constructs of existence), and the *lha* of the eight *spar-kha* (astrological trigrams) (lns. 24–26). After some repetition in the names of deities mentioned, there is a litany of Buddhist protectors (lns. 34–41). The identity of the last god/gods in this interval, Mi-mgon lcam-dral mchor-po, is not clear. The goddess of gNam-mtsho, gNam-mtsho phyug-mo, is invoked next in the liturgy (ln. 43). According to Karma rig-'dzin, this is ordinarily followed in his *bsang* by an enumeration of the goddess auxiliaries of the four cardinal directions of gNam-mtsho. He calls these subsidiary figures *gter-bdag* (treasure mistresses). They include: east – Klu-mo dung-khrab dkar-mo (residence: gNam-mtsho do?), south – Me-tog g.yang-mdzes phyug-mo (residence: mGar lha-mo gdong?), west – Sa-klu dung-skyong dkar-mo (residence: Ti-rang smug-po do?), and north – Klu-mo gser-khrab ser-mo (residence: Sems-mtsho).<sup>13</sup> In this particular ritual, however, the quartet of subsidiary gNam-mtsho goddesses was omitted. Finally, in this sequence all the invoked deities are invited to the ritual venue in order to win their favor:

<sup>11</sup> Brackets designate uncertain readings of the *lha-pa*'s utterances.

<sup>12</sup> This mantra is usually said for dispatching deities. It does not seem particularly appropriate this early in the *bsang* ritual. One might view this as an example of how the largely illiterate spirit-medium community of Upper Tibet is not especially versed in liturgical traditions, but this is actually not the case here. The spirit-mediums sometimes purposely dispense with liturgical conventions that other types of ritualists (monks, *sngags-pa*, etc.) feel compelled to follow. For his peers, the early use of this mantra is a demonstration of the great power that spirit-mediums such as Karma rig-'dzin are reputed to have, for he is invested with the capability to summon the gods with only a minimum of formalities.

<sup>13</sup> There is also a rNying-ma tradition of four goddesses of the cardinal directions. These divinities dwell around the four bathing heads (*khrus kyi sgo-mo bzhi*) of gNam-mtsho and are conceived of along the lines of the *'phrin-las bzhi* tantric scheme of worship and ritual dispensation (pacific, expanding, empowering and wrathful modes). See Bellezza 1997, pp. 103, 104. This textual tradition may possibly represent the Buddhist adoption of gNam-mtsho's four *klu-mo* acolytes. In any case, as their names indicate, two of Karma rig-'dzin's *klu-mo* don armor made of gold and conch. According to Bon ritual tradition, it was customary for Zhang-zhung goddesses to be clad in such a fashion. For example, four lake goddesses of far western Tibet are described with armor and helmets in the *Zhang chung me ri'i sgrub skor* (Bellezza 2008: 329–331).

- ln. 19: I fumigate the {defending} Lha-chen tshangs-pa dkar-po (Brahma) (*{skyongs} lha-chen tshangs-pa dkar-po bsang /*).
- ln. 20: I fumigate the great *gnyan* sKu-lha ger-mdzod.
- ln. 21: I fumigate the great *klu* gTsug-na rin-chen.
- ln. 22: I fumigate the *sa-bdag* and twelve *brtan-ma*.<sup>14</sup>
- ln. 23: I fumigate the earth-holder Lag-pa chen-mo.
- ln. 24: I fumigate the *lha* of the twelve *lo-skor*.
- ln. 25: I fumigate the *lha* of the nine *sme-ba*.
- ln. 26: I fumigate the *lha* of the eight *spar-kha*.
- ln. 27: I fumigate gNam-bdag sgo-lha khyung-rdzong.
- ln. 28: I fumigate rNam-sras thog-lha me-'bar.
- ln. 29: I fumigate all the sky-goers.
- ln. 30: I fumigate the 360 *wer-ma*.
- ln. 31: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of the eye beholders.
- ln. 32: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of the ear listeners.
- ln. 33: I invite you here to this place of repose (*'dir bzhugs gnas la spyan-'dren no /*).
- ln. 34: I fumigate Lha-btsan rdo-rje 'bar-ba (Blazing Adamantine Lha-btsan).
- ln. 35: I fumigate bTsan-rgod jag-pa me-len (Wild bTsan Plunderer Fire Bearer).<sup>15</sup>
- lns. 36-37: I fumigate mGon-po chos-skyong ber-nag (Black Tent mGon-po Buddhist Defender).<sup>16</sup>
- ln. 38: I fumigate all the black (*rog-po*) mGon-po chos-skyong (mGon-po Buddhist defenders).
- ln. 39: I fumigate the Buddhist defender Bya-rog gdong-can (Black Bird-Headed One).<sup>17</sup>
- ln. 40: I fumigate Phyag-drug gser-khrab (Six Armed Golden Cuirass).
- ln. 41: I fumigate Mi-mgon lcam-dral mchor-po (Defender of Humans Bothers and Sisters of Riches).
- ln. 42: I invite you here to this place of repose.
- ln. 43: I fumigate the mother gNam-mtsho phyug-mo.
- ln. 44: I fumigate the owners of treasures of good fortune outcome (*las 'phro gter gyi bdag-po bsang /*).
- ln. 45: I invite you here to this place of repose.

The goddesses of the four cardinal directions around the rTa-rgo/rTa-sgo range are accorded more detailed treatment in the *bsang* (lns. 46–59). Despite being a devout Buddhist, Karma rig-'dzin admits that the rTa-rgo divinities could not be effectively brought into the Buddhist fold and retain a fundamental Bon/*bon* identity (Bellezza 2005: 157, 158). Only two of the directional goddesses are mentioned by name but all four belong to the *klu-mo* class. They are benevolent figures responsible for the protection of the

<sup>14</sup> The brTan-ma/bsTan-ma bcu-gnyis are examined in Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956, pp. 181–198.

<sup>15</sup> A *btsan* especially popular among the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud, which is also a common protective figure in the monasteries of other Buddhist sects in Upper Tibet and among the spirit-mediums.

<sup>16</sup> This appears to be a native protector of the black yak hair tent (*sbra-nag*) of the 'brog-pa who came to be assimilated to Mahākāla.

<sup>17</sup> The personal guardian of the founder of the Bhutanese state, Ngag-dbang bstan-'dzin rnam-rgyal (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 241).



local *'brog-pa* and their social and economic interests.<sup>18</sup> As is often found in the *lha-gsol* and *bskang-ba* (appeasement and expiation rituals) and in the utterances of the bards (*sgrung-mkhan*), Karma rig-'dzin uses trisyllabic indicators (*sha ra ra*, *spungs se spung* and *brengs se breng*) to vividly describe the goddesses of rTa-rgo, a native poetical device:

ln. 46: I fumigate the mistress of the east side of rTa-rgo, Klu-mo dung-skyong dkar-mo (*rta rgo shar gyi bdag po (= mo) la / klu-mo dung-skyong dkar-mo bsang /*).

ln. 47: She rides on a white lioness mount (*chibs su seng-ge dkar-mo bcibs /*).

ln. 48: I fumigate the mistress on the south side of rTa-rgo, the protectress of every human generation (*rta-rgo lho yi bdag-po (= mo) la / mi-rabs yongs kyi srung-ma bsang /*).

ln. 49: She rides on a striped tigress mount (*chibs su stag-mo ris-bkra bcibs /*).

ln. 50: She has yellow golden armor *spungs se spung* (conveys that the armor is piled high).

ln. 51: I fumigate the mistress on the west side of rTa-rgo, Dung-skyong dkar-mo of the earth *klu*.

ln. 52: She rides on a yellow orange (*ngang-ma*) female hybrid yak (*chibs su mdzo-mo ngang-ma bcibs /*).

ln. 53: She has a draped arrow in her right [hand] and a jewel in the left (*mda'-dar g.yas dang rin-chen g.yon /*).

ln. 54: Her tray of jewels (*rin-chen nor gzhong*) *spungs se spung* (conveys that the jewels are heaped high).

ln. 55: I fumigate the mistress of the north side of rTa-rgo, the protectress of humans, wealth and life, these three (*rta-rgo byang gi bdag-po (= mo) la / mi nor tshe gsum, srung-ma bsang /*).

ln. 56: She has a golden helmet on her head *brengs se breng* (conveys that the helmet is quivering).

ln. 57: She rides on a spirited big mule mount (*chibs su rgya drel rol-mo bcibs /*).

ln. 58: The big mule trots in a fine manner *sha ra ra* (conveys the unstoppable quality of the trotting) (*rgya drel 'gying 'gros sha ra ra /*).<sup>19</sup>

ln. 59: It has the five types of jewels (*rin-chen sna-lnga*)<sup>20</sup> *spungs se spung* (conveys that there are great heaps of them).<sup>21</sup>

In the next sequence of the *bsang*, a litany of goddesses who dwell in the g.Yag-pa and Nag-tshang regions is enumerated. All of these figures in one form or another are *klu-mo* who reside in the great lakes and mountains of the Byang-thang. Nevertheless, their residences are not all identifiable by Karma rig-'dzin. rGyal-gangs lha-mo is the goddess of the highest mountain

<sup>18</sup> The *bsang* ritual of the *lha-bon* priests of Dzar (in Glo) also petitions four local divine benefactresses; these are collectively known as *mo-rgyud* ([divine] female lineage). The *bsang* recitations of the *lha-bon*, as part of the *ka-lag bi-pa* ceremony, are studied in Ramble 1998, pp. 129–132.

<sup>19</sup> *'Gying* denotes a fine and imposing or majestic bearing.

<sup>20</sup> Gold (*gser*), silver (*dngul*), turquoise (*g.yu*) coral (*byu-ru*), and pearl (*mu-tig*), with some substitutions permitted.

<sup>21</sup> This line either refers to the Goddess herself or to her mule mount.

(6444 m) in the meridian range just west of Shan-rtsa, but even she has a *klu-mo* persona (ln. 64).<sup>22</sup> Mu-tig dar-la g.yu-mtsho resides in the eponymous lake of Ba-tsha, in g.Yag-pa (ln. 63); sKe-rengs/sKe-ring 'bum-mtsho phyug-mo is the goddess of sKe-ring mtsho, in Shan-rtsa (ln. 65); and Ngang-bzang klu-bkra mchor-mo is the goddess of Mu-skyu mtsho, in sMad-pa (ln. 66). The prominent position of the *klu-mo* in the *bsang* reflects the potent role they have in the religious life of the Byang-thang. As archetypal divine females (*mo-lha*), the *klu-mo* goddesses are the epitome of fertility, nurture of the young, and insurance of healthy crops and flocks. Accordingly, they have a critical function in the curative and apotropaic rites of the *lha-pa*:

ln. 60: I fumigate Klu-mo dung-seng dkar-mo (White Conch Lion Female Klu).

ln. 61: I fumigate Klu-mo cang-seng g.yang-lha.

ln. 62: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of the thousand (innumerable) human generations (*mi-rabs stong dgra-lha bsang l*).

ln. 63: I fumigate Mu-tig dar-la g.yu-mtsho.

ln. 64: I fumigate rGyal-gangs lha-mo drel-bzhon (Mountain Queen Goddess Rider of the Mule).

ln. 65: I fumigate sKe-ring 'bum-mtsho phyug-mo.

ln. 66: I fumigate Ngang-bzang klu-bkra mchor-mo (Good Goose Bright Klu of Riches).

ln. 67: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of the thousand human generations.

The consequent figures to undergo purification with incense are the gods of rTa-rgo (thought to mean 'snow mountain' in the language of Zhang-zhung), a group known as rTa-rgo mched-bdun rol-brgyad (lns. 68–76). The names of the individual members in Karma rig-'dzin's *bsang* differ significantly from those found in the relevant *gsol-kha* literature, a sign of the inherent fluidity of the oral tradition.<sup>23</sup> The gods of the rTa-rgo range are important possessing figures of spirit-mediums in much of the Tibetan cultural world, a legacy perhaps of the prominence they are supposed to have enjoyed in ancient times. According to Bon tradition, rTa-rgo was the soul rock formation (*bla-brag*) of the Zhang-zhung kingdom. In any event, this region is very rich in pre-Buddhist (archaic cultural horizon) monumental ruins. The most valuable figure in the rTa-rgo brotherhood for Karma rig-'dzin and other spirit-mediums is Ngo-dmar lha-btsan (a chief possessing deity), and this is reflected in his mention twice in the *bsang*. The god sGo-bdag (Master of the Portal) (ln. 77) and the three 'Om-thang deities (lns. 80, 82, 86) are well known members of the rTa-rgo group and occupy

<sup>22</sup> According to the manuscript *gNyan chen g.ya' spang pa'i mchod sprin nam mkha' 'brug sgra* (*Voice of the Dragon of Space: Cloud Offerings to the Great gNyan of the Slate [Mountain] and Meadow*), compiled at rTa-nag thub-bstan (a Sa-skya monastery in bZhad-mthong-smon) by the abbot Ngag-dbang bstan-pa'i rdo-rje (folio 4a, 4b): "The mistress wife and noble woman of the only man gNyan-chen g.ya'-spang (a mountain god of Shan-rtsa) is Shel-tsha gangs kyi rgyal-mo (rGyal-gangs lha-mo), the white woman of conch with a marvelous turquoise visage. You are the attractive woman at the margin of the slates and meadow. In your hand you hold a *ga'u* (a container for sacred substances) of crystal. You ride on a white lion mount. You are surrounded by a circle of one hundred thousand *gangs-sman*. Your secret name is Gangs-klu sman-cig ma (Only sMan Mountain Klu Woman)"

<sup>23</sup> For these standard lists of the rTa-rgo mched-bdun rol-brgyad, see Bellezza 1997; 2005.

prominent landforms in the vicinity.<sup>24</sup> Nag-mer gser-mtsho phyug-mo is the protectress of a small holy lake situated high up on the flanks of Ngo-dmar lha-btsan (ln. 78). This pilgrimage lake is popularly conceived as being the right eye of the goddess Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho.<sup>25</sup> Shod-tram phug, a vital location for the initiation of spirit-mediums, is also located on the flanks of Ngo-dmar lha-btsan (ln. 79).<sup>26</sup> According to Karma rig-'dzin, the *btsan* yaks noted in the ritual are the *nor-bdag* of rTa-rgo, the divine protectors of yaks and other livestock (ln. 81). Another livestock god noted is the *lha-lug* or 'divine sheep', the protector of sheep and ally of spirit-mediums (ln. 87). The rTa-rgo gods are described in colorful language characteristic of *bon* liturgical traditions (lns. 83, 84, 87, 88), a form of verse that has spread to Buddhist texts and especially those of the Bon religion:

ln. 68: I fumigate Byang-btsan rta-rgo dkar-po (White Snow Mountain Northern bTsan).

ln. 69: I fumigate rTa-rgo dge-rgan rogs-cig (Only Friend Venerable Old Snow Mountain).

ln. 70: I fumigate Yon-tan chos-rgyal 'bum-me (Dharma King of Excellence One Hundred Thousand Fires).

ln. 71: I fumigate rTa-rgo Gangs-bzang lha-btsan (Snow Mountain Good Mountain Lha-btsan).

ln. 72: I fumigate rTa-rgo gangs-thig btsan-dmar (Snow Mountain Snow Spots Red bTsan).

ln. 73: I fumigate rBa-rong lha-btsan smug-po.

ln. 74: I fumigate rTa-rgo lcags-nag dgu-khri.

lns 75, 76: I fumigate rTa-rgo ngo-dmar lha-btsan (Snow Mountain Red-Faced Lha-btsan).

ln. 77: I fumigate sGo-bdag lha-btsan spun-bdun (Master of the Portal Seven Lha-btsan Brothers).

ln. 78: I fumigate Nag-mer gser-mtsho phyug-mo (Overflowing Blackness Golden Lake of Riches).

ln. 79: I fumigate rTa-rgo shod-tram phug-pa.

ln. 80: I fumigate rTa-rgo 'om-thang gong-ma.

ln. 81: The thunderous grunts (*ngar-skad*) of the *btsan* yaks *di ri ri* (conveys a thunderous sound).

ln. 82: I fumigate rTa-rgo 'om-thang bar-pa.

ln. 83: The sound of the *btsan* army *di ri ri* (*btsan-dmag skad-sgra di ri ri* /).

ln. 84: Their arrow, spear, the bow and arrow and sword *shigs se shig* (conveys a quaking motion) (*mda' mdung 'khor-gsum shigs se shig* /).

ln. 85: I invite you here to this place of repose.

ln. 86: I fumigate rTa-rgo 'om-thang 'og-ma.

ln. 87: The bleating (*'ba'-sgra*) of the *lha-lug di ri ri* (conveys a very sharp sound).

ln. 88: The whistles (*bshug*) of the *btsan* men *kyu ru ru* (conveys a whistling sound).

ln. 89: Please come to this place of repose.

<sup>24</sup> The shrine of sGo-bdag on the rTa-rgo 'phrang and that of 'Om-rong ('Om-thang) are described in Bellezza 1997, pp. 315, 327 (n. 43), 398.

<sup>25</sup> For lore about this holy lake, see Bellezza 1997, p. 404.

<sup>26</sup> Information on this cult cave is found in Bellezza 1997, p. 403; 2005, pp. 70, 71, 156–158.

ln. 90: Please come, we invite you for *tshogs* (ritual cakes) (*tshogs la spyan-'dren gshegs su gsol /*).

The next interval of Karma rig-'dzin's *bsang* is devoted to the Mount Ti-se (Gangs rin-po-che) region, many of the places and deities of which are well known (lns. 91–100). Some of the great pilgrimage centers located around Ti-se are mentioned by name in this litany (lns. 91, 95, 96, 98). The sky-treading goddess of rGyang-grags monastery on the inner circuit of Ti-se is a substantial cult figure for many of Upper Tibet's spirit-mediums (ln. 94). She appears to be a native protectress of the locale that was subsequently brought into the Buddhist pantheon. The goddess rJe-btsun grol-ma dkar-sngon is said to be the guardian goddess of sGrol-ma la, the famous pass straddling the high point of the Ti-se pilgrim's circuit (ln. 97). dMag-zor rgyal-mo/dPal-ldan lha-mo is Tibetan Buddhism's most important protectress, a key defender of the trance ceremony:

- ln. 91: I fumigate the great lake Ma-pham g.yu-mtsho.
- ln. 92: I fumigate the great *klu* gTsug-na rin-chen.
- ln. 93: I fumigate Lha-dbang rdo-rje g.yu-sgron (Adamantine Power Lha Turquoise Lamp).
- ln. 94: I fumigate rGyang-grags mkha'-'gro dkar-mo.
- ln. 95: I fumigate the great holy place (*gnas-chen*) sPre-ta pu-ri.
- ln. 96: I fumigate the great holy place Gangs-dkar ti-se.
- ln. 97: I fumigate rJe-btsun sgrol-ma dkar-sngon (White and Blue Noble Queen Savioress).
- ln. 98: I fumigate the cemetery (*dur-khrod*) bSil-ba tshal.<sup>27</sup>
- ln. 99: I fumigate the mistress of the cemetery dMag-zor rgyal-mo.
- ln. 100: I invite you to this place of repose.

The following sequence is mostly dedicated to the *dgra-lha*, the warrior spirits of Tibet (lns. 101–129). Several celebrated *btsan* of Upper Tibet are also offered purification in this interval (lns. 101, 102, 104). The *dregs-pa* are likewise heeded (a large class of minor deities of diverse origins) (ln. 111), as well as Kha-'dzin and sKyes-bu chen-po, appellations for any manner of indigenous gods (lns. 108, 109). The *dgra-lha* act as personal protectors and patrons, achieving their ends through aggressive actions and militaristic means. This extremely popular class of gods has been amalgamated to Buddhist doctrines and notions of piety, but here in the *bsang* of Karma rig-'dzin they retain their indigenous character as mercenary spirits. The *dgra-lha* are unabashedly beseeched to provide for the needs of their supplicants and to destroy enemies. As noted, according to the Bon tradition, the *dgra-lha* (*sgra-bla*) were the original objects of possession for Tibetan spirit-mediums.<sup>28</sup> The conspicuous place of these deities in Karma rig-'dzin's *bsang* ritual lends credence to this assertion, as does the central placement of the *dgra-lha* in many of the curative, apotropaic and fortune-bestowing rites of various trance ceremonies:

<sup>27</sup> Originally a great charnel ground in India. The Ti-se counterpart is located above 'Bri-ra phug monastery on the trail leading to the sGrol-ma la.

<sup>28</sup> The tradition of Bon *sgra-bla* in spirit-mediumship is comprehensively examined in Bellezza 2005.

- In. 101: I fumigate bTsan-rgod rol-pa skya-bdun.<sup>29</sup>  
 In. 102: I fumigate the great bTsan 'bar-ba spun-bdun.  
 In. 103: I fumigate gNyan-stag dmar-po of the *dgra-lha*.  
 In. 104: I fumigate Zangs-ri 'bar-ba btsan-rgod.  
 In. 105: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of the father (*pha*) and paternal uncle (*A-khu*).  
 In. 106: I fumigate the *lha* of the mother (*ma*), maternal aunt (*sru-mo*) and maternal uncle (*zhang*).  
 In. 107: I fumigate the four brothers of the long-life lineage (*tshe-rabs*).  
 In. 108: I fumigate Kha-'dzin (Great Advisor) and your circle.  
 In. 109: I fumigate sKyes-bu chen-po (Great Holy Man) and your circle.  
 In. 110: I fumigate Ye-shes chen-mo (Great Wisdom Mother) and your circle.  
 In. 111: I fumigate the *dregs-pa* (haughty ones) and your circle.  
 In. 112: I invite you here to this place of repose.  
 In. 113: I fumigate dGra-lha me-stag dmar-po (Red dGra-lha Sparks).  
 In. 114: I fumigate Mi-bdun rta-bdun (Seven Men Seven Horses).  
 In. 115: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of the swift ones (*myur-mgyogs-can*).  
 In. 116: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of abiding virility and bravery (*dpa' rgod 'dzoms-pa*).  
 In. 117: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of indomitable bravery (*dpa'-snying che-ba*).  
 In. 118: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of abiding swift power (*mthu-myur 'dzoms-pa*).  
 In. 119: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* of the cutter of the life-force of the enemy (*dgra-srog gcod-pa*).  
 In. 120: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* that plunders the enemy's wealth (*dgra-nor 'dzoms-pa*).  
 In. 121: You *dgra-lha* and your circles please come here (*dgra-lha 'khor-bcas gshegs su gsol /*).  
 In. 122: I fumigate the great army (*dmag-dpung chen-mo*) of *dgra-lha*.  
 In. 123: You are mounted on an onager with a white muzzle (*chibs su kha-dkar rkyang-bo bcibs /*).  
 In. 124: Always be our advisor and befriend us (*kha-'dzin yun du 'grog-par gyis /*).  
 In. 125: { / / }<sup>30</sup> *thibs se thib* (conveys a convergence of great numbers of spirits).  
 In. 126: Surrounded by a circle of one hundred thousand *dgra-lha* (*'khor-yang dgra-lha 'bum gyis bskor /*).  
 In. 127: I fumigate the 920,000 *dgra-lha*.  
 In. 128: I fumigate 990,000 *dgra-lha*.  
 In. 129: I invite you here to this place of repose.

The next portion of the *bsang* contains a welter of divinities in which little attempt is made to separate one type from another (Ins. 130–155). It begins with the *btsan* of Bar-tha, Go-ra, gNam-ru, and another named *btsan* (Ins. 130–132), as well as the *ma-sangs* (ancestral spirits) and *wer-ma* (warrior

<sup>29</sup> A study of this *btsan* brotherhood popular in Upper Tibet is made in Bellezza 2005.

<sup>30</sup> This pair of slashes enclosed in brackets designates that one or more words in a line are inaudible.

spirits) (lns. 131, 133). The *dgra-lha* are described using quaint similes of the Upper Tibetan oral tradition (lns. 134–137). In the midst of these diverse gods dPal-ldan lha-mo is invoked (ln. 139). In the Buddhist tradition, she is often viewed as the chief (*gtso-mo*) of these kinds of local and elemental spirits but in the *bsang* of Karma rig-'dzin she has an intimate place among them rather than being singled out for special treatment. Among more mountain gods and elemental spirits, the *dgra-lha* are again cited (ln. 149, 150). In the purification of the great mountain god of southern Tibet Yar-lha sham-po (ln. 152) and 'Od-lde spu-rgyal (ln. 153), an ancestral king, the caesura *ni* is added to the lines for greater emphasis. This grammatical structure is likewise encountered in the Dunhuang manuscripts and ancient *gsol-kha* literature:

- ln. 130: I fumigate Nam-ra and bTsan-rgod go-ra.
- ln. 131: I fumigate the *ma-sangs*, rKyang-khra and others.
- ln. 132: I fumigate Zog gi bdud-btsan smug-po.
- ln. 133: I fumigate the three hundred and sixty *wer-ma*.
- ln. 134: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* who are like a herd of congregating yaks (*dgra-lha 'brong khyu rub 'dra bsang /*).
- ln. 135: I fumigate the wielders of swords (*gri bzung*) who are like a herd of congregating yaks.
- ln. 136: I fumigate the spear holders (*mdung bzung*) who are like a mob.
- ln. 137: I fumigate the bow holders (*gzhu bzung*) who are like a congregating herd of onagers.
- ln. 138: I fumigate the red butcher of bSam-yas (a *btsan* deity).
- ln. 139: I fumigate dPal-ldan dmag-zor rgyal-mo.
- ln. 140: I fumigate 'Brong-dur rog-po of bSam-yas (a wild yak god).
- ln. 141: I fumigate A-myes rma-chen spom-ra (the great mountain god of A-mdo).
- ln. 142: I fumigate the three hundred and sixty orders of *rma*.
- ln. 143: I fumigate the excellent southern world (*lho yi 'dzam-bu-gling mchog*).
- ln. 144: I fumigate the three hundred and sixty circles of *klu*.
- ln. 145: I fumigate gNyan-chen thang-lha of the west.
- ln. 146: I fumigate the 360 circles of the *gnyan*.
- ln. 147: I fumigate Lha-mtsho spos-gnas of the north.
- ln. 148: I fumigate the three hundred and sixty circles of *btsan*.
- ln. 149: I fumigate all the mighty *dgra-lha*,
- ln. 150: Roving in all directions, east, south, west, and north (*shar lho nub byang kun 'grogs-pa'i / dgra-lha gnyan-po thams-cad bsang /*).
- ln. 151: I fumigate the *rma* fraternal lineage (*rabs-mched*) and the brothers and sisters (*lcam dral*).
- ln. 152: I fumigate that Yar-lha, yes, sham-po (*yar-lha de ni sham-po bsang /*).
- ln. 153: I fumigate that 'Od-de, yes, spu-rgyal.
- ln. 154: I fumigate gNyan-po sku-lha ger-mdzod.
- ln. 155: I invite you here to this place of repose.

The next sequence of the *bsang* is dedicated to the gNyan-chen thang-lha group (lns. 155–165). It brings the zoomorphic circle of this mountain pantheon to the fore (lns. 160–164). These are well known remedial spirits of

the Upper Tibetan spirit-mediums, mirroring the dominance of the pastoral way of the life in the region:

- In. 155: I fumigate gNyan-chen thang-lha of the world.
- In. 156: I fumigate Thang-sras mchor-po of gNyan-chen thang-lha.
- In. 157: I fumigate Thang-lha yar-bzhur btsan-po.
- In. 158: I fumigate Thang-lha'i dge-bsnyen dkar-po.
- In. 159: I fumigate the circle of three hundred and sixty *gnyan* of Thang-lha.
- In. 160: I fumigate the white *lha-rta* (divine horses) of Thang-lha.
- In. 161: I fumigate the *lha-nor gwa-pa* (divine yaks with a white face) of Thang-lha.
- In. 162: I fumigate the *lha-lug gwa-pa* (divine sheep with a white face) of Thang-lha.
- In. 163: I fumigate the *lha-ra ngang-ba* (orange divine goats) of Thang-lha.
- In. 164: I fumigate the *khyi-btsan dmar-po* (red *btsan* dogs) of Thang-lha.
- In. 165: I invite you here to this place of repose.

The ensuing sequence begins with the Rong-lha / Rong-btsan gods of Khams, a celebrated group of *yul-lha* (Ins. 166–168). The rest of the sequence is primarily directed towards the rGya-gar ('India'), a diverse class of possessing and remedial gods (Ins. 169–190). These include Indian Buddhist tantric adepts of yore (Ins. 171, 177); Thang-stong rgyal-po, the fifteenth-century Tibetan mastermind (In. 172); and a variety of cult gods involved in the proceedings of the trance ceremony. Also, famous personages of the *gcod* tradition, Pha dam-pa sangs-rgyas and Ma-cig lab-sgron, are heralded (Ins. 174, 175). These twelfth-century historical figures act as patrons and protectors of the trance. Each line ends in the typical fashion with the verb *bsang*:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| In. 166: Rong-lha rgyal-mtshan of the south.                 | In. 176: Adepts of the <i>gcod</i> lineage |
| In. 167: Rong-btsan kha-ba dkar-po                           | In. 177: Sa-ra ha-pa                       |
| In. 168: Three hundred and sixty valley Rong-lha.            | In. 178: sNgags-chen hum-nag me-'bar       |
| In. 169: <i>Lha</i> lineage of eighty <i>rgya-gar</i>        | In. 179: Invitation                        |
| In. 170: rGya-gar me-ri dmar-po                              | In. 180: rGya-gar me-ri dmar-po            |
| In. 171: Eighty <i>sngags</i> lineage <i>rgya-gar</i>        | In. 181: rGya-gar A-tsa sngon-po           |
| In. 172: The adept ( <i>grub-chen</i> ) Thang-stong rgyal-po | In. 182: rGya-gar ri-brag mchor-po         |
| In. 173: Yum-chen kun-dga' blo-gros                          | In. 183: rGya-gar { / }                    |
| In. 174: Pha-cig dam-pa sangs-rgyas                          | In. 184: rGya-gar { / }                    |
| In. 175: Ma-cig yum kyi sgron-ma                             | In. 185: rGya-gar { / }                    |
|  | In. 186: rGya-gar yar-rtse bla-ma          |
|  | In. 187: rGya-gar chos-sgrub bla-ma        |
|  | In. 188: Yar-rtse dbu-dkar bla-ma          |
|  | In. 189: White vulture of the west         |
|  | In. 190: Invitation                        |

Consequent invocations in the *bsang* are for A-ne gung-smān rgyal-mo (Noble Woman Benefactress of the Heavens Queen), a personality of the Gesar epic, who appears to be modeled on the ancient goddess gNam-phyi gung-rgyal (Celestial Grandmother Queen of the Heavens) (lns. 191–213):

On the right side of the eight [parts] of heavens, on the left side of the eight [parts] of the heavens, between the horns of the male wild yak of the white clouds, in the precious house of crystal, I fumigate A-ne gung-smān rgyal-mo. On your head you wear a golden crown of five diadems (*rigs-lnga*). Your golden crown of five diadems *thibs se thib* (conveys a sparkling). You have the conch [white] face of the full moon. Your eyes are like the great star at dawn. In your right hand you hold the *ḍaru* of acacia (*seng-ldeng*)<sup>31</sup> with hangings (*'phur-ma*). The melodious sound of the *ḍaru khro lo lo* (conveys a musical sound). In your left hand you hold a white silver bell. The melodious sound of your bell *khro lo lo*. From your mouth you blow a human thighbone trumpet (*rkang-gling*). The sound of the human thighbone trumpet *di ri ri* (conveys a thunderous sound). On your body are precious ornaments. Also, you are surrounded by a circle of one hundred thousand *mkha'-'gro*. You ride the white lioness below you. You lead the blue dragon behind you. On the plain you lead a black (*rog-mo*) cow. I fumigate the chief of the one hundred thousand *mkha'-'gro*. I invite you here to this place of repose.<sup>32</sup>

The next sequence of Karma rig-'dzin's *bsang* recitations are for a collection of tantric tutelary deities (*yi-dam*), Buddhist protectors (Chos-skyong) (lns. 214–228), as well as for a couple native goddesses of Tibet. These latter figures are the well-known mountain goddess of the gNyan-chen thang-lha range, Jo-mo gangs-dkar, and the long life quintet Tshe-ring mched-lnga (lns. 214, 219). Once again, we see the intertwining of diverse classes of deities with no regard for their relative doctrinal status. Reference to the 360 horse-headed tutelary gods uses a numerical ascription common in the Bon tradition (ln. 226). All of these lines of the liturgy end with the verb *bsang*:

ln. 214: rGya-gar jo-mo gangs-dkar  
 ln. 215: mKha'-'gro sgron gyi dbang-mo  
 ln. 216: mKha'-'gro ye-shes mtsho-rgyal  
 ln. 217: dPal-ldan dung-skyong lha-mo  
 ln. 218: 'Bri-gung A-phyi chos-skyong  
 ln. 219: dPa'-mo tshe-ring mched-lnga  
 ln. 220: Invitation

<sup>31</sup> In a Bon mythic origins of the drum (*rnge-rabs*) text, acacia is recorded as one of five different types of wood growing around the world mountain Ri-rab, from which the primeval *gshen* sTag-la me-'bar made drums. See Bellezza 2005, pp. 425–427.

<sup>32</sup> *dgung-gnam brgyad gi g.yas zur na / dgung-gnam brgyad kyi g.yon zur na / sprin-dkar 'brong-pho'i rwa bar na / rin-chen shel gyi khang chen na / A-ne gung-smān rgyal-mo bsang / dbu la gser gi rigs-lnga gsol / gser gyi rigs-lnga thibs se thib / zhal ras bco lnga'i dung zla la / spyān-mig tho-rang skar-chen 'dra / phyag g.yas seng-ldeng ḍaru bsnams / ḍaru gsung-snyān khro lo lo / phyag g.yon dngul-dkar dril-bu bsnams / dril-bu gsung-snyān khro lo lo / zhal nas mi rkang-gling-bu 'bud / mi rkang skad-sgra di ri ri / sku la rin-chen rgyān-cha la / 'khor yang mkha'-'gro 'bum gyis bskor / 'og la seng-ge dkar-mo bcibs / rol la g.yu-'brug sngon-mo khrid / thang la ba-mo rog-mo khrid / mkha'-'gro 'bum gyi gtso-mo bsang / 'dir bzhu-gnas la spyān 'dren no |.*



- In. 221: Khro-bo rta-mgrin dmar-po
- In. 222: Yi-dam rdo-rje 'jigs-byed
- In. 223: Yi-dam kha-gsung brag-btsan
- In. 224: Khro-bo rngam-chen 'bar-ba
- In. 225: Se-ra rta-mgrin 'bar-ba
- In. 226: Three hundred and sixty rTa-mgrin
- In. 227: Invitation
- In. 228: Invitation to partake of *tshogs*

The final part of the *bsang* returns to native deities of Upper Tibet, not all of which can be identified by Karma rig-'dzin (lns. 229–237). All lines terminate in the customary fashion with *bsang*. Although, he is not yet fully possessed, Karma rig-'dzin discloses that this interval was orchestrated by the gods themselves. He states that this is so because he has no recollection of what was spoken and this is not the way in which he would customarily end his *bsang* ritual. It seems as though the native divinities of Upper Tibet are exercising the right to be the last ones heard in the liturgy. In the *bsang*, they co-inhabit the liturgy with the so-called higher gods of Buddhism with no apparent contradiction or conflict. Here the two streams of Tibetan religious tradition, lamaist and non-lamaist, exist side by side as if each one was oblivious of the other. The deities of both categories appear to be able to fulfill the same protective and patronizing role, intimating that the Buddhist gods may not be as essential to the trance ceremony as they are unswervingly stated to be. This would seem especially true if one takes a long view of the history of Upper Tibetan spirit-mediumship:

- In. 229: Lha-btsan mi-dkar (White Man Lha-btsan)
- In. 230: Lha-ri { // }
- In. 231: Lha-ri mi-bkra rta-bkra (Divine Mountain Shining Man Shining Horse)
- In. 232: sKya-rengs and her circle, the assembly of *lha*
- In. 233: bTsan-rgod {byang-chub} grags-pa
- In. 234: {g.Yu-lung brag-btsan jo-bo}
- In. 235: {g.Yu-'od} tsha-tsha dmar-po
- In. 236: { // } Gangs la nyi-shar
- In. 237: Invitation

### PHO BO SRID RGYAL (born circa 1927)

#### *i. Biographical sketch*

Pho-bo srid-rgyal, a kind and gracious man, is gNam-ru's senior-most *lha-pa*. I first had the privilege of interviewing him in 2003 (October 31 to November 2). Pho-bo srid-rgyal's paternal clan is sBa-pha and his maternal clan gDong-pa. He worships a paternal clan god (*rus-lha*) named Khams-btsan, divulging his ancestral origin in eastern Tibet some generations ago. His main gods of possession are Thang-lha mi-dkar rta-dkar (the Thang-lha group), rKyang-khra (the main *btsan* of gNam-ru) and bTsan-rgod nam-ra (the main *btsan* of Bar-tha), all well known figures in the eastern Byang-thang. Pho-bo srid-rgyal's mentor was the famous spirit-medium of Ring-pa,

dPon-skyā mGon-po dbang-rgyal (died circa 1974), the father of the late dPon-skyā lha-dbang.<sup>33</sup> Pho-bo srid-rgyal states that when the two spirit-mediums went into trance together they would perform *bsang* and *gser-skyems*, to strengthen the bonds between themselves and the deities. This was necessary so that they would prove reliable partners in the service of the community. Pho-bo srid-rgyal notes that at the age of 25, a consecration ceremony (*rab-gnas*) was made for him by the high lama Sa-skyā gong-ma. His final act before becoming a fully empowered spirit-medium was to undertake an 11-day pilgrimage around gNam-mtsho. Pho-bo srid-rgyal reports going into trance many dozens of times per year. He has no set fee schedule and treats the indigent free of charge. Those who can afford to pay for his services offer either money or livestock. In many ways, his regimen of curative rites resembles that of the great dPon-skyā lineage to which he is connected through tutelage. He observes that none of his four children practice as spirit-mediums.

*ii. The structure of the trance ceremony*

The trance ceremony from which a recording was made was held on the morning of May 21, 2004. The presiding deity of possession was rKyang-khra (Variegated Onager), considered to be a son of gNyan-chen thang-lha.<sup>34</sup> The purpose of the trance was to bless the participants of the ongoing High Tibet Welfare Expedition, which had suffered a number of logistical setbacks. The liturgical and oracular sequences of the trance ceremony were structured as follows:

1. *bsang* (3:47 to 9:20). A rhythmic chant. Near its end the pace of the recitations picks up in intensity until most of the last 14 lines of the ritual are inaudible. The *bsang* is made to the accompaniment of the drum and *gshang*. The *bsang* ritual culminates in the gods entering Pho-bo srid-rgyal, a development marked by his crying, “*phat!*”
2. *Lha-rabs* (proclamation of the lineage of the deities) and ‘*phrin-bcol* (entrusting of activities to the deities) (9:21 to 29:20). This section of the trance ceremony is characterized by poetic and often cryptic descriptions of the deities and their places of residence. The officiating god rKyang-khra announces his identity to those in attendance only well into this portion of the proceedings. Pho-bo srid-rgyal as this *btsan* spirit conjures a long line of protective *dgra-lha* and livestock deities. Interspersed between these native gods are occasional lines appealing to Buddhist protectors and sky-goers but very few proper names are articulated. Under possession, the timbre of the *lha-pa*'s voice is shallower. He plays his drum regularly and sometimes his *gshang* as well. The descant melody changes in pitch and tempo several times during this segment.

<sup>33</sup> The family history and activities of the *lha-pa* dPon-skyā/Pho-bo lha-dbang are detailed in Bellezza 2005, pp. 110–141.

<sup>34</sup> Information on this *btsan*, derived from the oral and literary traditions, is found in Bellezza 2005.

3. *Lung-btsan* (the declamation of prophecies) (29:21 to 34:35). The gods declare that the High Tibet Welfare Expedition would indeed prove successful with all its aims being realized. There would however be challenges and we are told, “You make the prayer of clearing obstacles whatever place you go” (*khyod sa-gar song-bar chad lam sel thon /*). This segment also features the use of the drum and *gshang*. The enunciation of the words tends to be clear and measured, and the manner of chanting rhythmic.

4. *gShegs-bskyod* (the retreat of the deities from the *lha-pa* and the return to their abodes) (34:36 to 39:30). rKyang-khra orders back the hosts of helping spirits under his charge to their homes in picturesque and stimulating language. The impression is one of tremendous activity taking place. This last part of the trance ceremony is musically identical with the preceding section; they are only differentiated from one another by what is being sung. The *lha-bzhugs* culminates with the word *phaṭ*, indicating that Pho-bo srid-rgyal has returned to his normal frame of consciousness.

### iii. The *bsang*

The fumigation ritual of Pho-bo srid-rgyal begins in a conventional fashion with a Buddhist dedication (lns. 1–16). Technically speaking, it is not possible to fumigate or make any other type of action that could have any impact on the Buddha or other-worldly Buddhist protectors (*'jig-rten las 'das-pa'i srung-ma*). In this theological context, the *bsang* becomes an offering of incense (*bsang-mchod*) rather than a cleansing procedure. In the first step of the performance, Pho-bo srid-rgyal calls upon the assistance of and takes refuge in Buddhism and its tutelary deities (*yi-dam*), sky-goers (*mkha'-'gro*), and protectors (*srung-ma*). This reflects the hierarchal arrangement of the deities in the trances of Upper Tibet; those of Buddhism watch over and orchestrate the actions of the ‘lesser’ divine members of the ceremony. It is popularly held by the spirit-mediums that all the transactions of the trance are made under the auspices of the Buddhist gods, which have full discretion over the spirits incumbent in the physical environment:

ln. 1: *Om A hum bdzra gu-ru padma siddhi hum.*

ln. 2: I offer the lama Dharma protector { / / } purification (*bla-ma chos-skyong { / / } bsang /*).

ln. 3: I offer the objects of refuge Triple Gems purification (*skyabs gnas dkon-mchog gsum-po bsang /*).

ln. 4: I offer the assembly of pacific and wrathful tutelary deities purification (*yi-dam zhi khro'i lha tshogs bsang /*).

ln. 5: I offer the sky-goers, wealth *lha* and Buddhist Doctrine defenders purification (*mkha'-'gro nor-lha bstan-skyong bsang /*).

ln. 6: Please receive these holy offerings (*mchod-pa dam-pa 'di bzhes la /*).

ln. 7: Please receive this adamant libation (*rdo-rje gser-skyems 'di bzhes la /*).

ln. 8: Please carry out the activities to which you are entrusted (*bcol-ba'i phrin-las sgrub gyur cig /*).

Ins. 9 to 16: <consists of a nearly identical repetition of the above lines>

Once the dedication is complete, there is a litany of Buddhist protective deities, some of which were originally enlisted from the indigenous pantheon (Ins. 17–28). These protectors (both minor and important) hold positions between the rarefied ontological plane of Buddhas and tantric tutelary gods and that of the genii loci. Like commanders on the battlefield, the Buddhist protectors mediate between the Buddhist sovereigns and the indigenous spirits (the foot troops who carry out the work of healing and combating demons). The *lha-srin sde-brgyad* are the eight orders of elemental spirits as conceived in Buddhist tradition (ln. 29). They are found in the retinue of many a Buddhist protector. Each line of this segment of the ritual ends with *bsang* (I/we fumigate), as does much of the rest of the liturgy:

- ln. 17: I fumigate Lha yi dbang-po brgya-byin (Indra).
- ln. 18: I fumigate Lha-min dbang-po thag-bzang (a king of the demigods).
- ln. 19: I fumigate Klu yi rgyal-po {dga'-po} (a king of the *klu*).
- ln. 20: I fumigate Mi'am skyes-mchog.
- ln. 21: I fumigate gNod-sbyin gang-ba bzang-po.<sup>35</sup>
- ln. 22: I fumigate the Dharma defender Ma-ha ka-la (mGon-po).
- ln. 23: I fumigate gNod-sbyin shan-pa gri-thogs.<sup>36</sup>
- ln. 24: I fumigate Srin-po {g.yu yi srog-bdag}.
- ln. 25: I fumigate bDud-po re-ti 'gong-yag.<sup>37</sup>
- ln. 26: I fumigate Chos-skyong gnod-sbyin dmar-po.<sup>38</sup>
- ln. 27: I fumigate Lha-mo {cang-seng blo-ldan}.
- ln. 28: I fumigate dGe-bsnyen rdo-rje {legs-pa}.<sup>39</sup>
- ln. 29: I fumigate the *lha-srin sde-brgyad* and their circles.
- ln. 30: Please carry out the activities to which you have been entrusted.

Now the focus of the *bsang* shifts to the native pantheon but with the generic kinds of figures found throughout the Tibetan cultural world. Perforce, many of these gods and goddesses have assumed Buddhist iconographic forms and classifications. Unlike the *bsang* of Karma rig-'dzin, very few deities specific to the Upper Tibetan environment are heralded by Pho-bo srid-rgyal. I am of the opinion that the more standardized *bsang* of Pho-bo srid-rgyal is a liturgical innovation whose origin postdates the genre recited by Karma rig-'dzin. Although there is an interpenetration of Buddhist

<sup>35</sup> This god belongs to a subdivision of the Dregs-pa sde-brgyad known as Phyi yi sde-brgyad. This division of deities is commonly invoked during magic ceremonies. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956, p. 254.

<sup>36</sup> This god is part of a subdivision of the Dregs-pa sde-brgyad known as gSang-ba'i sde-brgyad (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 255, 259).

<sup>37</sup> Originally, a chief *bdud* in the retinue of the Bon deity Mi-bdud 'byams-pa. According to Buddhist reckonings, he is a member of a subdivision of the Dregs-pa sde-brgyad known as gSang-ba'i sde-brgyad (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 255, 259, 274, 288).

<sup>38</sup> This is the well known protector Tsi'u dmar-po, a chief of the *btsan*. This god is scrutinized in Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956, pp. 166–176.

<sup>39</sup> An important protector who resides in sGar-sde. He is studied in Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956, pp. 154–159; Bellezza 2005, pp. 302–311.

deities in Karma rig-dzin's *bsang*, it is largely founded upon native or *bon* liturgical traditions.

The first deity mentioned, Klu-rgyal dung-skyong, is a popular king of the *klu* who is believed to reside in many places across the plateau (ln. 31). Reference to the *dgra-lha* of the right shoulder and the *ma-mo* of the left shoulder is an old Tibetan belief concerning the relative position of gender-specific protectors on the human body (lns. 38, 39). In addition to the ubiquitous *sde-brgyad* and *lha-btsan* (lns. 40, 41), there are what appear to be personal guardians who reside inside the human body (lns. 42, 43). Localized and astrological divinities are accorded a number of lines in the recitations (lns. 44, 49–53). These are immediately followed by celebrated Buddhist *sa-bdag* (earth sovereigns) (lns. 56, 57). Two lines are also devoted to the 'go-ba'i *lha-lnga*, the quintet of guardian spirits who are thought to have various seats on the human body (ln. 60, 61):

ln. 31: *Kye!* We offer to the excellent *klu*, Klu-rgyal dung-skyong.

ln. 32: Nag-po { / / }.

ln. 33: { / / / }.<sup>40</sup>

ln. 34: In the center (*dbus-phyogs*).

ln. 35: To the *sde-brgyad* and their retinues in [all] directions (*phyogs gi sde-brgyad 'khor-bcas la /*),

ln. 36: Receive this adamantine libation,

ln. 37: And please carry out the activities to which you have been entrusted.

ln. 38: I fumigate the *dgra-lha* manifestations of the right shoulder (*dpung g.yas dgra-lha'i sprul-pa bsang /*).

ln. 39: I fumigate the *ma-mo* manifestations of the left shoulder.

ln. 40: I fumigate the *sde-brgyad* manifestations of the right side of the body (*glo g.yas sde-brgyad sprul-pa bsang /*).

ln. 41: I fumigate the *lha-btsan* manifestations of the left side of the body.

ln. 42: I fumigate the *gza'-bdud* and *gnyan-bdud* manifestations [in],

ln. 43: The eyes, heart and liver, these three (*mig dang snying dang mchin-pa gsum/ gza'-bdud gnyan-bdud sprul-pa bsang /*).

ln. 44: *gZhi-bdag* manifestations and their retinues,

ln. 45: Carry out the activities to which you have been entrusted.

lns. 46–48: <a largely repetitive sequence pertaining to Buddhist protection and refuge>

ln. 49: I fumigate the seventy-five *dpal-mgon* (minor protectors often of the *yul-lha* class).

ln. 50: I fumigate the haughty (*dregs-pa*) *lha-srin sde-brgyad*.

ln. 51: I fumigate the five orders (*sde-lnga*) of Srid-pa'i *gza'-chen* (Great Planets of Existence).

ln. 52: I fumigate [the deities] of the year, month, day, and time { / / } (*lo zla zhag dus { / / } bsang /*).

ln. 53: All the *yul-lha* and treasure protectors,

ln. 54: With your retinues please receive this libation (*yul-lha gter-srung ma-lus pa/ 'khor-cas gser-skyems 'di bzhes la /*).

<sup>40</sup> Three slashes enclosed in brackets designates that an entire line in the recording is incomprehensible.

- In. 55: Carry out the activities to which you have been entrusted.  
 In. 56: I fumigate Sa-bdag hal-khyi nag-po (a deity of astrology and divination).<sup>41</sup>  
 In. 57: I fumigate Sa yi lha-mo brtan-ma (an earth goddess).<sup>42</sup>  
 In. 58: I fumigate the Dharma protectors and the great kings *sde-brgyad*.  
 In. 59: I fumigate the seventy-five mGon-po.<sup>43</sup>  
 In. 60: I fumigate all the *gzhi-bdag* of this country (*yul 'di'i gzhi-bdag thams-cad bsang /*).  
 In. 61: I fumigate the *pho-lha* (god of males), *dgra-lha* and *srog-lha* (god of the life-force).  
 In. 62: I fumigate all the *mo-lha* (goddess of females) and *zhang-lha* (uncle god).

Indigenous and Buddhist deities are unabashedly interwoven in the next segment of the *bsang* (Ins. 63–69). One might see this as a sign of the tremendous commitment that Pho-bo srid-rgyal has to Buddhism and indeed, this is the case. Although he will soon be possessed by local spirits and his consciousness replaced by theirs, his faith lies squarely with the divinities and tenets of Vajrayāna Buddhism. His religion, his conceptual and affective beacon, will see him through the difficult transition and keep him safe while his own consciousness rests somewhat precariously in the mirror (*gling*) of the trance ceremony. Yet, I think the interposition of native and Buddhist motifs must be seen in a historical light as well. These represent two cultural categories of largely independent historical genesis that have become intermingled over the centuries. Without critical self-reflection on the part of contemporary *lha-pa*, indigenous and Buddhist religious traditions have been brought together in the *bsang* as mutually beneficial forces, which reinforce the efficacy of one another. At least as regards the trance ceremonies of the spirit-mediums, these disparate traditions can be seen as having an equivalent function and worth. Pho-bo srid-rgyal concludes these recitations by offering the deities and his root lama the purification of incense (Ins. 71–73):

- In. 63: To all the *gzhi-bdag* of tangible existence and their circles,  
 In. 64: Please receive these adamantine offerings and incense (*snaug-srid gzhi-bdag 'khor-bcas la / rdo rdo-rje bsang mchod 'di bzhes la /*).  
 In. 65: Carry out the activities to which you have been entrusted.  
 In. 66: I fumigate the glorious lamas of {ordinary and special consummations} (*{mchog thun dngos-grub} bsang /*).  
 In. 67: I fumigate the pilgrimage protectors of the ocean of Buddhist scriptures and sky-goers (*rgyud-sde rgya-mtsho'i gnas-srung mkha'-'gro bsang /*).  
 In. 68: Mother protectors, *sa-bdag* and {Tshe-ring} mched-lnga to you,

<sup>41</sup> According to the *Vaidūrya dkar po*, this well known *sa-bdag* has human, canine, avian, and serpentine anatomical features (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 264).

<sup>42</sup> According to the *Vaidūrya dkar po*, she holds a vessel at her breast and is yellow in color (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 264, 265).

<sup>43</sup> The various mGon-po often appear in a group of seventy-five members. They are described in detail in Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956, pp. 38–67.

ln. 69: I give offerings of incense, perfectly carry out our wishes (*ma-mgon sa-bdag* {*tshe-ring*} *mched-lnga la / bsang-mchod 'bul-lo bsam-don lhun-'grub mdzod* /).

ln. 70: *Om Arya kro ta hu lu sarba tista bdzra hum phaṭ.*

ln. 71: I fumigate the three hundred and sixty *yi-dam*.

ln. 72: I fumigate the root lama of myself in this period (*rang-rang dus da rtsa-ba'i bla-ma bsang* /).

ln. 73: {I fumigate} the twelve *brtan-ma*.

The last segment of Pho-bo srid-rgyal's *bsang* has a very different quality about it than the previous ones. For one thing, the chanting is now much more musical and the tempo livelier. The pace of the performance picks up to the point that many of the last lines are completely inaudible. It is thought that the deities of the trance having been beckoned to the ritual venue are descending upon the spirit-medium's *gling* and his very body. As his own consciousness begins to dim, he beseeches his Buddhist allies to remember and help him (lns. 74–77). In the recitations he asks them to 'be aware of him' or 'think about him', rendered by the verb *mkhyen*. In a last self-conscious act he earnestly prays to his root lama (*rtsa-ba'i bla-ma*) to stay with him (ln. 78). The moment of possession is drawing close for Pho-bo srid-rgyal because in rapidly sung lines he announces the presence of its gods. First they appear as a generic group, merely known as the *sde-brgyad* (ln. 80). But in the course of scant seconds, the chief of the possessing spirits is made known to the spirit-medium; it is an aspect of the great mountain god gNyan-chen thang-lha in his most pacific form (lns. 81–86). As Pho-bo srid-rgyal's consciousness slips from his body, this god is described in the guise of a long life deity holding a silver urn and draped arrow. Other lines follow but most of them are incomprehensible and what can be gleaned has little context (lns. 87–99). The import of these recitations appears to be that more and more gods and goddesses are entering the spirit-medium and *gling*, as his consciousness is displaced to a special site in the *gling*:

ln. 74: *Kye!* Please think about me tutelary god Gu-ru drag-po (*yi-dam gu-ru drag-po mkhyen* /).

ln. 75: Please think about me great mothers (*yum-chen*) and sky-goers.

ln. 76: {///}

ln. 77: Please think about me the root lama of myself.

ln. 78: I pray to you, please stay above the crown of my head (*gsol-ba 'debs so spyi-bo'i gtsug du bzhugs* /).

ln. 79: {///}

ln. 80: Circle of *lha sde-brgyad* {/ /}.

ln. 81: The power master of the world *lha* ('*dzam-gling lha yi mthu bdag* /).

ln. 82: Thang-lha of the world ('*dzam-gling thang-lha*).

ln. 83: The world's master of power gNyan-chen thang-lha ('*dzam-gling mthu-bdag gnyan-chen thang-lha* /).

ln. 84: You ride on a light orange horse of the *lha* mount (*chibs su lha-rta ngang-dkar bcibs* /).

ln. 85: You {hold a draped arrow} in your right hand (*phyag g.yas {mda'-dar bsnam}* /).

In. 86: You hold a white silver urn (*dn̄gul-dkar bum-pa*) in your left hand.

Ins. 87–89: { / / / }

In. 90: Great mothers and sky-goers { / / }.

Ins. 91–96 { / / / }

In. 97: bTsan-rgod nor-bu spun-bdun (Wild bTsan Jewel Seven Brothers).

Ins. 98, 99 { / / / }

In. 100: *phaṭ!*

Relying on the borrowed body of the *lha-pa*, rKyang-khra announces his identity after vividly describing his abode. The god warbles, “Hey (*A kho-re*), the borrowed body of me, yeah (*nga*), gZugs mchor-po (Handsome Body). Hey, if you do not know the body of me, yeah, bTsan mchor-po (Handsome bTsan), yeah, it is me the eastern {jewel of} the world, hey, known as rKyang-khra.”<sup>44</sup> Poetic and often enigmatic verses mark the utterances of the possessing deities. I shall explore these and other verbal aspects of the trance ceremonies of Upper Tibet in due course.

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<sup>44</sup> *nga gzugs mchor po'i rang lus la A kho re g.yar po de / nga btsan mchor po'i rang lus la A kho re ma shes na / nga shar {nor bu'i} 'dzam gling la A kho re rkyang khra zhig zlo /*. Diemberger (2005: 113–115) provides an unannotated translation (Tibetan words phonetically rendered, and without the benefit of the Tibetan text) of a possessing deity, an emanation of rTa-rgo, announcing his presence in old style language to those in attendance. This occurred in the trance ceremony of a female spirit-medium (*lha-bka'-ma*) from Ngam-ring.



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*P1: Karma rig-'dzin donning his ritual attire before the start of the trance ceremony.*



*P2: Karma rig-'dzin as the god bDud-btsan dmar-po receiving an offering scarf (kha-btags) from one of the supplicants. Note the mda'-dar in the left hand of the spirit-medium.*



*P3: Pho-bo srid-rgyal with an assistant preparing the altar for his trance ceremony.*



*P4: Pho-bo srid-rgyal possessed by Kyang-khra forcefully recalls the lineage of the deities while playing his big drum (rnga-chen) and gshang.*