


Introduction to the Contents of this Special Issue

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he articles contained in this special issue of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* can be understood as constituting the first of two tangible fruits of our efforts to encourage and organize the study of the Northern Treasure Tradition. The efforts to move in this direction began in Berkeley, California with a very small panel entitled 'Recent Studies in the Northern Treasure Tradition' that was planned for the American Academy of Religion's Western Regional Conference (2018), which involved Katarina Turpeinen, Michael Burroughs, and myself (Jay Valentine) with the institutional aid of Jake Nagasawa.

The momentum that has led to this current special edition, however, began to build in significance with the recruitment of compatriots for the Northern Treasure Tradition (*Byang gter*) panel that was to be convened at the International Association of Tibetan Studies seminar in Paris, France (2019). It was during this stage that the research group found its anchorage point in the person of Stéphane Arguillère, who initially enunciated the dream of a special issue focusing on 'Jangterology.' As will be clear to anyone who reads his research manifesto (above) or his article that offers a historical analysis of the *dGongs pa zang thal* practice manuals (the final article in this special issue), Arguillère possesses an unparalleled grasp of the historical breadth and doctrinal depth of the Northern Treasure Tradition. Moreover, his participation as one of the leaders of our burgeoning research group has been indispensable.

The *Byang gter* panel in Paris (2019) was a success, bringing together a diverse group that included: Stéphane Arguillère, Kanako Shinga, Frederica Grassi, Zsóka Gelle (her paper was graciously read by Gijs Creemers), and Jay Valentine, three of whom have provided articles for this special issue. There were also significant networking successes, which, for example, gained us the support and participation of Tenzin Ghegay, who has since become the Vice Principle for Specialized Studies at The Dalai Lama Institute for Higher Studies. (We look forward to his planned presentation at the IATS Seminar (2022) in Prague.) Shortly after the 2019 seminar, we contacted Jean-Luc Achard regarding the possibility of producing this volume, and we

have henceforth enjoyed his support and participation as a core member of the research group. (Achard's welcomed contribution to this special edition is introduced in brief below.)

The following years would contain a flurry of activity aimed at recruiting researchers both for this special issue and for the collective research project entitled 'For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures' (FCHNT), which has been described in detail above. This activity led to what may be considered as the group's first major success, which was the securing of funding from the ANR. The assembly of this special issue focused on the Northern Treasure Tradition is, of course, also representative of the culmination of our activities over the past four years.

Before finally moving to the summative vignettes that aim to introduce the articles contained in this volume, we would like to take a brief moment for reflective gratitude. Indeed, those for whom we are thankful are too many to be named in a short paragraph such as this, therefore the reader is asked to imagine that each of the lists below is simply the start of a much greater enumeration that persists in our hearts and minds. Among the many who helped lay the academic foundations upon which our current studies are formed, we would especially like to thank Anne-Marie Blondeau, Martin Boord, and C. R. Lama, who was not only academically engaged but also served as an informant to many. We would also like to express our gratitude to all those who have produced works that have illuminated some aspect of the Northern Treasure Tradition's history, teachings, etc., such as Franz-Karl Erhard, Jurgen Herweg, Benjamin Bogin, and Jacob Dalton. Lastly, we want to express our appreciation for the efforts of the authors, whose articles are contained in this special issue, for, of course, this collection could not be formed without them.

Description of the Contents of this Special Issue

The first article, by Elizabeth Angowski, is constituted by a welcomed discussion of the Imperial Age pre-incarnation of *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*, namely *sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms* (fl. 8th c.). It has already been well-established that the treasure traditions and their literature is largely responsible for producing a larger-than-life profile of Guru Rinpoche, a figure who may have otherwise persisted only as a little-known historical figure. Angowski here draws attention to the fact that a similar process has transformed *sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms* from relative obscurity into one of the most important Imperial Age figures for the Northern Treasure Tradition.

The second article in this collection, written by Kanako Shinga, pro-

vides a critical edition and annotated translation of the *Longevity Practice of Vajrakīla* (*rDo rje phur pa'i tshe bsgrub*), which was revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. It is plain in the hagiographic materials that the ability to perform longevity benedictions is a quintessential component of a religious specialist's repertoire. While such life-extending rites are perhaps indirectly related to the ultimate soteriological goals of the various Buddhist pathways, the pragmatic value of extending one's life is self-evident. It is likely for this reason, among others, that longevity rites are so often requested and performed.

It should also be noted, however, that an important byproduct of the performance of any religious services is that such activities forge important connections (*rten 'brel*) between the participants. In such contexts, longevity benedictions are particularly useful because, unlike complicated empowerments that might require prior training by the recipients, longevity benedictions can be given to anyone. Thus, we often witness the performance of life-extending rites for lay patrons and children in the hagiographic materials of the tradition. One important example involves Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, the third incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, who performed longevity rites in 1617 for a young child, who would later be known as the Fifth Dalai Lama.¹ Conversely, longevity rites are also performed by lamas who are still quite young. For example, a six-year-old Rig 'dzin sKal bzang padma dbang phyug (c. 1720–1770), the fifth incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, performed longevity rites in order to forge a connection (*rten 'brel*) between himself and the King of lCags la.²

From a different perspective, however, the Byang gter treasures in general can be understood in terms of 'life-extension.' In *The Ray of Sunlight* (*sPrul sku chen po'i rnam thar gSal byed nyi ma'i 'od zer*), the primary biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, it is explained that just as Guru Rinpoche was able to extend the life and reign of Emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan, the Northern Treasures themselves, when wielded by Guru Rinpoche's future regents, have the ability to extend the reign of future monarchs, particularly the dynasty of Mang yul Gung thang.³

With the significance of longevity blessings in mind, readers are sure to find Kanako Shinga's very accessible translation of the *rDo rje*

¹ For details regarding this event, see Boord, Martin (2010), *A Roll of Thunder from the Void: Vajrakīla texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition: Volume Two*, Berlin: Wendel Verlag, p. xvii.

² This event is described within the biography of sKal bzang padma dbang phyug, which appears in Gu ru bkra shis (b. 18th c.) (1990), *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, p. 692.

³ To read about this relationship in more detail, see Herweg, Jurgen (1994), *The Hagiography of Rig 'dzin Rgod kyi ldem 'phru can and Three Historical Questions Emerging from It*, M.A. thesis, University of Washington, pp. 69-71.

phur pa'i tshe bsgrub quite illuminating. Therein, we find that there are forces, divinities, etc., in every dimension and direction constantly working to deplete our life force and that those who wield this rite can not only name each offender, but can also call upon a great host of divinities to counter these nefarious beings to preserve and extend one's life.

The third article, by Alexandra Sukhanova, is the first of four articles involving mNga' ris *Paṅ chen* Padma dbang rgyal (c. 1487-1542), who stands out among the Byang gter patriarchs of the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries for his favorable stance toward monasticism. As a group, these articles make the case that it is difficult to underestimate the role of Padma dbang rgyal in the early history of the Northern Treasure Tradition. Sukhanova's presentation of this master's life and works far exceeds previous offerings on several fronts. First, her historiographic approach that identifies and analyzes the relationships between twelve different hagiographic sources is appreciated for its clarity and methodological strength. Second, there is an amazingly thorough and detailed analysis of the sacred geography related to the birth and exploits of Padma dbang rgyal in Mustang, which is replete with illuminating photographs. Third, the overall account of Padma dbang rgyal's life is rather extensive and presented in a sophisticated manner that allows for a critical understanding of the biographical material.

The fourth article, by Jean-Luc Achard, begins with a succinct but very enlightening presentation of the early life and education, revelations and advanced training, and demise of Padma dbang rgyal. In this case, however, the biographic materials serve as a strong introduction to an exceptionally clear explanation of the teachings and organization of one of Padma dbang rgyal's revelations, *The Heart Drops of Samantabhadra* (*Kun bzang snying tig*). As such, this work represents yet another contribution to the study of what is often considered the crown-jewel of the Northern Treasure Tradition, its immense collection of Great Perfection teachings. On the one hand, this article will be of interest to those involved in the comparative study of Great Perfection teachings across various traditions, which is an active area within Tibetology. On the other hand, the lucid explanation of Great Perfection theology and practice is strong enough to stand on its own as an effective introduction to the subject and intriguing enough—given the detailed discussions of meditation practices, death and the other intermediate states, and enlightenment—to demand one's attention throughout.

In the fifth article, by Christopher Bell, our attention is drawn to a Dharma protector known as Tsi'u dmar po, who is the focus of a cycle of treasure scriptures revealed by Padma dbang rgyal and his younger

brother named *Rig 'dzin* Legs ldan rdo rje (c. 1512–1625). Bell offers a well-researched explanation of how this Dharma protector that originated within the treasure scriptures of the Byang gter Tradition was eventually incorporated into each of the major traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. The article is completed with a translation of the root tantra for Tsi'u dmar po entitled *The Warlord's Tantra* (*dMag dpon gyi rgyud*). As will be expected by anyone familiar with the genre, the root tantra offers an account of the macabre origins and taming of Tsi'u dmar po, the details emerging as part of a conversation between a Bhagavan and his interlocutor, in this case Hayagrīva and the *ḍākinī* rDo rje bde byed ma respectively. The articles by Achard and Bell can be thought of as didactic counterpoints in that they demonstrate the diversity of theological perspectives, practices, and concerns not only within a single treasure tradition, but within the treasures of a single treasure revealer.

The sixth article in the collection, by Dylan Esler, draws attention to another cycle of wrathful teachings within the Northern Treasure Tradition; in this case it is a cycle focused on the deity Yamāntaka, which persists as an integral part of the ritual program at rDo rje brag Monastery in India. Following a somewhat reverse trajectory of what we find in Bell's article, Esler explains how a treasure cycle revealed by rGya Zhang khrom (c. early 11th cen.) eventually takes root within the Northern Treasure Tradition. The first of the well-known Byang gter masters to wield rGya Zhang khrom's Yamāntaka treasures is none other than Padma dbang rgyal, followed closely by Legs ldan rdo rje. Padma dbang rgyal is preceded in the transmission records, however, by a relatively unknown figure named Nam mkha' dpal ldan, who appears to have been a disciple of the Byang gter master Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1454–1541).⁴ Among the many welcomed components of Esler's article one finds a summary of the life of rGya Zhang khrom that includes comparisons to the treasure career of *Myang ral* Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192). Byang gter enthusiasts are sure to recognize themes that also appear in the life of other treasure revealers such as *Rig 'dzin* rGod ldem.

The seventh contribution, by Jay Valentine, is constituted by a summary of *The Chariot of Marvels* (*Ngo mtshar 'dren pa'i shing rta*), a travel memoir authored by *Rig 'dzin* Padma 'phrin las (c. 1641–1717), the fourth incarnation of *Rig 'dzin* rGod ldem. The narrative chronicles Padma 'phrin las's four-month pilgrimage in 1690 from rDo rje brag in Central Tibet to the original epicenter of the Northern Treasure Tradition in Byang Ngam ring. Along the way to and from these sacred

⁴ For an amazingly long list of the disciples of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, see Valentine, Jay (2018), 'The Great Perfection in the Early Biographies of the Northern Treasure Tradition: An Introduction to and Translation of *The Life of Nam mkha'i rgyal mtshan*,' *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, N. 43, January 2018, pp. 126-127.

lands, Padma 'phrin las is received as a master of celebrity status by both religious and secular leaders, and he offers a nearly constant stream of benedictions and empowerments. The article includes a discussion of a selection of episodes to demonstrate the variety of content within the travel memoir.

The eighth article is a complement to Stéphane Arguillère's translation (French version: 2016; English version: in press) of a practice manual (*khrid yig*) of the *dGongs pa zang thal* (1366?), the main rDzogs chen cycle in the Northern Treasures — the work of *sPrul sku* Tshul lo or Tshul khriṃs bzang po (1895–1954).⁵ In the book, the Tibetan text is nearly completely boiled down to a finely devised patchwork of innumerable quotations or slightly paraphrased texts (either from rGod ldem's *gter ma*, or from a text of Klong chen rab 'byams' *mKha' 'gro yang tig*, the *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin*). In this paper — an English adaptation of an article already published in French in an earlier issue of the *RET*,⁶ Arguillère, attempting to gain additional clarity on *sPrul sku* Tshul lo's text, ventures in a survey of all the preserved and accessible practice manuals of the *dGongs pa zang thal*, excluding the instructional texts belonging to the *dGongs pa zang thal* itself.

After a brief inventory of this literature and some remarks on the curious absence, in all these manuals, of tantric aspects of *dGongs pa zang thal*, the article proceeds to a chronological examination of this literature, identifying mostly two blocks: On the one hand, the two 16th-century manuals from the tradition of Kaḥ thog in Khams — those of Śākya rgyal mtshan and bKra shis rgya mtsho, which are put in their context — and on the other hand, the 17th-18th-century manuals from the rDo rje brag tradition: Zur Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669), gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714), Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717) and Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755).

The fruits of this comparative examination of a thousand pages of various practice manuals are rich in unexpected results, notably on the poorly known traditions of Kaḥ thog — but paradoxically null in terms of the initial objective, which was to try to better understand the work of *sPrul sku* Tshul lo. Or rather, the investigation leads to the disconcerting but fascinating conclusion that *sPrul sku* Tshul lo, though a conservative mind, has, so to speak, wiped the slate clean and started all over again on the basis of the *gter chos* alone, just complemented by Klong chen pa's *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin*.

The volume concludes with a select bibliography of secondary materials written in Western Languages that are dedicated in significant

⁵ This summary was written by Stéphane Arguillère.

⁶ 'Histoire des manuels de pratique du dGongs pa zang thal.' *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, CNRS, 2018, Études rDzogs chen — Volume I, 1 (43), pp.196-255.

measure to the Byang gter. It is our sincere wish that in some small way, the work presented in this volume inspires ever more research in this subfield, requiring the continuous expansion of this bibliography.

