



**Report on PhD thesis by Nyima Hojer Lama, “The Genealogy of Ya-ngal Family of Dolpo (Critical Edition of the Text, Translation into English, Analyses of Abbreviations and Introduction to the Dolpo Dialect).”**

Nyima Hojer Lama has submitted for examination a thesis entitled “The Genealogy of Ya-ngal Family of Dolpo (Critical Edition of the Text, Translation into English, Analyses of Abbreviations and Introduction to the Dolpo Dialect)”. The thesis, amounting to 246 pages, includes an abstract, a table of contents, an introduction, three chapters, five appendices and a bibliography. The main body of the thesis is contained in the three chapters, that are entitled respectively: “The Ya-ngal family of Tibetan royal priests in Dolpo”; “Translation of the main text: genealogy of the royal priests Ya-ngal”; and “The Dolpo dialect and abbreviations”. As the title indicates, the thesis is essentially a study of an eminent agnatic lineage of lamas of the Bon religion, the Ya-ngal. The textual basis of the investigation is a text, dating from the early nineteenth century, with the brief title of *Ya-ngal gdung-rabs*. Various versions of this work are known to exist, and these have formed the basis for earlier studies of the Ya-ngal clan and the territories they frequented by a number of authors in the past. The candidate makes due acknowledgement of the contributions of these earlier scholars, but his work builds on the foundation laid by their publications in a number of important ways. While the most extensive use of the text to date has focused on the settlement of Lubrak, a Bonpo settlement in Mustang that was founded by a member of the clan in the early thirteenth century, the geographical focus of this study is the adjoining region of Dolpo, which forms the greater (highland) part of the modern Nepalese district of Dolpa (*sic*). This focus is fully justified by the fact that, while the clan was extinguished in Mustang in the nineteenth century (the last member, a nun, died in or shortly after 1876), it continues to flourish in several settlements in Dolpo, of which which author himself is a native. Although Dolpo has been the subject of a few ethnographic studies, its early history is poorly understood, and the opening section of the first chapter is devoted to a presentation and assessment of the Tibetan sources in which the region makes its first appearance. The section also includes a more general discussion of the region, with observations on its tradition subdivisions, populations statistics, its mediaeval history and developments arising as a consequences of its integration into the modern nation-state of Nepal. I am not aware of any other study of Dolpo that presents the area so extensively over such an protracted temporal period, and using such a wide range of literary sources.

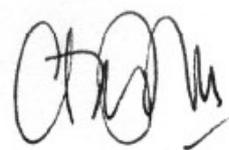
The following section of the chapter focuses on the Ya-ngal clan itself. The clan is mentioned in early Tibetan sources as having been present near Lhasa during the imperial period (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries). However, other works, notable the oldest Bonpo history, the 12<sup>th</sup>-century *Grags pa gling grags*, project the antecedents of the clan back in time to the arrival on earth of the mythical first king of Tibet, gNya' khri btsan po. According to this account, Ya-ngal was one of three chaplains who received the divine king when he descended from heaven.

Following a reconstruction of the clan's fortunes in Central Tibet, the author goes on to trace its migration to Nepal and the activities of its members - especially with respect to the founding of temples and settlements - in the high Himalayas, notably Dolpo. The author expends considerable effort in disentangling the different lineages of the clan and to establish a plausible chronology for the most important figures. He concludes the chapter with a section devoted to a treatment of the various witnesses of the main text that are available to him. He has been able to secure four witnesses, and to these adds a fifth, a digitised text that himself published on the basis of one of his sources in 2005. In this section he sets out a convincing stemma for the four works, following the Lachmannian principle that "community of error implies community of origin". His comparative approach equips him to rectify errors of pagination in some of the witnesses.

The third chapter contains a translation of the core text. The latter is by no means always easy to understand, but the translation is accurate and fluent. The transliterated text itself is provided in an appendix, but the author of the thesis has chosen this second chapter to record differences between the textual witness in footnotes. While this does not of course produce a critical edition of the text itself, it does give him an opportunity to discuss the differences in meanings resulting from the readings. This annotated translation, covering pages 46-94, is followed by a meticulous reconstruction, in diagrammatic form of the entire genealogy (pp. 95-98). In the third chapter (pp. 100-115) the author returns to Dolpo, so to speak, with an opening section on the linguistic features of the regional dialect. While the inclusion of the section is justified by the near-absence of linguistic research on this dialect, its particular relevance is to be found in the fact that the text that lies at the core of the thesis, as well as other texts related to the Bon religion, contain unusual grammatical constructions that are derived from the dialect. Bonpo manuscripts, even more than Buddhist works are characterised by numerous contracted forms. Published lists of such contractions do exist, but the next two sections in this chapter address the topic in an unprecedented depth of detail, beginning with a section on "secret" and "numeric" scribal conventions before proceeding to a presentation and analysis of the particular contracted forms (of which there are very many) used in the manuscript witnesses of the core texts.

The thesis is an important contribution to our knowledge of a particularly important Bonpo lineage in a geographical and cultural setting that has for centuries been its heartland. It is equally important as a building block in our understanding of local Tibetan manuscript traditional.

On the basis of the observations made above, I conclude that the thesis meets the standard requirements of a doctoral thesis; I further recommend that it should be defended in public, and that it merits a pass.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Ramble', with a stylized flourish at the end.

(Professor) Charles Ramble  
*Directeur d'études*

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