

Anna Sehnalová

"The Bonpo Mendrup (sMan sgrub) Ritual: Its Medicine, Texts, Traceable History, and Current Practice"

Ph.D submitted in 2018 at the Charles University Faculty of Arts, Department of South and Central Asia.

I. The thesis presents a detailed analysis of a so far little studied Tibetan and himalayan ritual practice tradition, which has significance both for its religious and symbolic dimensions, and for its close connections with Tibetan healing practices and *materia medica*. The particular ritual which forms the core of the work can be seen as contributing an in-depth study of ritual practices of the Bon po, while also providing insight into broader *sman sgrub* traditions, since so much is shared – and we can learn much also from understanding which aspects are distinctive to one or the other specific lineages of practice.

II. Anna Sehnalová structures the work well, appropriately following an account of the historical background to the rituals with the ethnography of its contemporary practice, and then a discussion of key texts, including excellent diplomatic editions and translations. The medicinal substances are analysed next – the recipe, the tantric symbolic understandings of the substances, and their classifications also according to the *gso ba rig pa* medical traditions, as well as the stages in processing and compounding the medicinal materials. This analysis sheds significant new light on the conceptualisation and usage of key ingredients contained in Tibetan ritual and healing traditions. Finally, the ways in which the practices are understood by different groups and individuals within the community are examined. The thesis is well-illustrated with appropriate labelled photographs and a plan of the monastery venue.

The study makes good use both of previous academic literature on the subject, and also a large number of primary sources, especially Bon sources which are not so well known. Anna Sehnalová demonstrates considerable familiarity with these materials. Her contribution primarily consists in opening up this subject area, producing an impressive piece of work spanning historical sources on the *sman sgrub*, modern texts, contemporary oral commentary, and the presentation of her ethnography. Throughout, she includes insightful reflections, such as on the relationship between the "ritual" and "medical" approaches, and the issues of how far the ritual may differ from earlier practice given the current exile and global context.

### III and IV. **Specific comments**

p.5 nb 1 and p.346, the use of the term, Wylie transliteration, is misleading. Wylie's only contribution to the system was to suggest the capitalisation of the first letter, although like many European scholars, you tend to favour capitalisation of the *ming gzhi* instead (e.g. sMan in title). However, there is some inconsistency in the system of capitalisation in the thesis, e.g. Lha sa (p.108 etc.), where it should be lHa sa if capitalising the *ming gzhi*.

p.15

on Garrett, "*its supposed source in India and then in Tibetan treasure traditions linked to the Nyingma school*": I think this a little over-stated in implying (unlike Garrett) that the tradition only really developed in the *gter mas*. The root tantras classified by the rNying ma as the *bdud rtsi yon tan* tantras are surely based on Indian materials, and some are certainly of Indian provenance. In particular, there is an important source known as the *Eight Sections (bam po brgyad pa)* or in full, *thams cad bdud rtsi lnga'i rang bzhin nyer ba'i snying po bdud rtsi mchog gi lung bam po brgyad pa (rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, mTshams brag Volume Ngī 34: 2-68; gTing skyes Volume La: 146-200). This Ancient Tantra Collection text was accepted into some editions of the more general Tibetan Buddhist canon or Kangyur (*bka' 'gyur*), which include a select section of Nyingma tantras assumed to be of Indian provenance. For instance, it is found

in the Lhasa Kangyur, Volume 99. See also p.19 where the phrasing identifies the treasure but not the root tantra traditions.

p.27 (and p.46 note 139): *a ma ra ya*, "the name likely translates Skt. amṛta". I can see that this is what your informants have told you, but the intended Sanskrit word is surely a closer relation to the transliteration than this, *amāraya* or perhaps, *amārayaḥ*?. Although I have not seen it linked to *bdud rtsi* in rNying ma sources, we frequently find in transliteration in Tibetan mantras, *māraya*, for kill/cause to die (in wrathful rituals), and *amāraṇi* for overcoming death (in longevity rites).

p.33 "*a practice of creating a terma papta medicine anew would go against the main concept of the papta medicine*": yes, if one were attempting to create it from scratch, but we often find the creation of new papta during a mendrup ritual in which old papta is used as a basis. Thus, the linkage with the old remains, but a new mix is made, infused with additional blessings. Clearly, in the case considered here, the sanctity of the old papta is emphasised. But although the alternative account may be incorrect, it need not be dismissed purely for reasons of incoherency, since it would be possible to combine old papta sources, and create a new papta through a mendrup ritual.

p.40 note 114 "The word *bdam skar* remains unclear, it might refer to a certain name (possibly derived from a star constellation, as *skar* means star)": possibly *gdams kha* or *gdams skor* might be intended here?

p.80 note 251, Cantwell, 2017, observed a very similar pattern of eight vidyādhara in the Nyingma mendrup she studied.: Yes, although these vidyādhara did not have a similar supportive role to that of the eight goddesses here. On the contrary, they represented the Indian sages of the past who attained immortality, and therefore, they become the conduit for the medicinal consecrations.

p.89 reference to, "the Western sangha" (also p.101). You clarify this grouping on p.103, but some clarification is needed p.89 – or a cross-reference to that discussion, since the word, Western, would seem inappropriate for this international group.

p.93 auspicious words (*bkra shis tshigs*): is *tshig* intended? Otherwise, the translation, *auspicious verses* might seem more appropriate.

p.104 From those adherent[s] to Tibetan Buddhism, only the families of Nyingma and Kagyü schools were interested.: I think this deserves more discussion. It is not altogether clear to me why this should be, especially in the light of your comments p.279 relating to perceptions of the efficacy of the *smān sgrub* amongst those beyond the specific community.

p.122 The translation and diplomatic editions are appropriately based on that in use at the monastery studied.

p.123 equal corruption, see chapter 4. The question arises as to how the practitioners deal with the problem of incoherencies, given that these texts are actually in use? This is unlike the case of a sacred scripture which is rarely read, and even more rarely (or never) used in practice. Noted examples in the edition include p.353 nb.1119, where all mss have omissions; or the error shared by AC nb.1128, presumably corrected in B; and also nb.1117. In another instance, AB are mistaken nb. 1127.

p.124, also 126 and elsewhere, *four seasons* for *dus bzhi* (p.346). This seems an odd translation, when the meaning seems clear, conforming to the usual sense of the four times (past, present, future, and the timeless).

p.125 two verse lines seem to be omitted in translation (see comment p.346)

complexion? I am not sure what word is intended, and I am puzzled by the translation of the whole of this line (p.347 line 1 '*dus la tshangs grongs nyid kyi rtsi/*)

final line, "swirls to myself", but this reading has involved a correction of the text, "bdag *la*". Ms C's reading *bdal ba*, looks more appropriate (p.347 nb.1024), and then *ba* does not need to be emended to *la*.

p.126 "place, master, offerings...": note that these requirements seem closely to correspond to "the five perfections" (*phun sum tshogs pa lnga*) – of (i) the place, (ii) the principal practitioner, (iii) the retinue, (iv) the requisite substances and (v) the time – referred to widely in ritual manuals and commentaries in Buddhist *Mahāyoga* Generation Stage contexts.

p.127ff. Manuscript page numbers would be helpful for this long section of translation.

p.127 "blissful maṇḍala", but p.347 Ms A, *lte ba'i* (nb.1026) makes good sense, the hub of the maṇḍala. Since Ms A is the base text and its readings given priority, some note should be given here if it is to be emended.

p.128 and repeated in the verses below, "Enter to the enemies..." This does not altogether make good sense, and I think it may be better to re-work the whole verse to bring out the sense better. It is surely referring throughout to the *smān* substances. So perhaps something like: [this medicine] is made as an offering for the deities and gods; enters as a *bdud* demon into the enemies... [347 nb.1030]; settles as nectar for the Bon... etc.

p.132 the [four] directions: this is misleading, implying the cardinal directions, but in fact it is surely the intermediate directions, clearly given in the text as *mtshams bzhi* p.349.

p.133 To the washing in the water...: This does not seem to make good sense, and I am uncertain how you are dealing with the different readings – here, p.350 nb.1067, it appears the Ms A is mistaken.

p.133 Bon itself: the Bon nature (*bon nyid*, p.350)?

p.134 in addition: I think *steng du*, p.350 here more likely to mean, above (i.e. above the shrine).

translation of 350 *dkar ser*; *dkar ljang* etc. Generally, such terms would suggest one colour (yellowish white, or pale yellow etc.) – here they are given as, white and yellow etc. Is this on the basis of the performance? This did not seem to be clear from the photographs.

"To them in the Centre..": "These are activated... in the centre"

p.135, notes 355, 359. It would be useful to elaborate here. In particular, what is surely implied is that the union of the male and female deities is producing the male and female fluids (bodhicittas) which are streaming into and consecrating the medicinal substances.

p.136 Thus is praised: Thus, they are praised.

p.143 nb. 366 *dgregs* (p.356 line 1): I think it most likely that this is a contraction, and *dgra bgegs* is intended, so, The enemies and obstacles are liberated in this place. *rdzu 'phrul* here is likely simply to indicate magical power, not emanation.

p.157 nb.411, *me ri phur 'debs*: In Buddhist Phur pa, *me ri* is the Mountain of Fire which is the deity's buddha field. The connotation would seem to be similar here. In the Bon Phur pa root tantra, the *Ka ba nag po*, there are *me ri* in the principal directions, with different colours. The phrase, *phur 'debs*, is for the striking or planting of the phurbu. I think this verse is specifically invoking the Phur pa deities.

In the *Ka ba nag po*, the *gze gyad* are a specific set of retinue deities, the *gze ma gyad mo*, a set of twenty animal-headed emanations, part of the central wisdom maṇḍala.

p.158 I think pure is better than clean as a translation of *gtsang ma* here.

p.163 nb.437 '*dzab*, derivative of Sanskrit, *japa*.

p.164 eight roots of medicine, and especially the phrase, *rtsa brgyad stong la sbyar ba'i sman*, occurs throughout rNying ma practice – see my article,

"Reflections on Pema Lingpa's *Key to the Eight Principal Tantric Medicines*, and its relevance today", in Dasho Karma Ura, Dorji Penjore and Chhimi Dem (eds) 2017 *A Maṇḍala of 21st Century Perspectives: Proceedings of the International Conference on Tradition and Innovation in Vajrayāna Buddhism*, July 2016, Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, Thimphu, Bhutan: 163-175. ISBN 978-99936-14-88-3. Available on Open Access from:

<http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/publicationFiles/ConferenceProceedings/Mandala%2021st%20Century/Mandala%20of%2021st%20Century%20Perspectives.pdf>

You give an interesting variation on the set here.

p.165 oral explanation of the term *ra sa ya na* as a *zhang zhung* word. As you point out p.166, it is actually Sanskrit (*rasāyana*). This kind of example raises the question of how aware the Bon community may (or may not be) of the derivation of different elements of their tradition – perhaps they are fully aware, but simply insistent on asserting their alternative understandings?

p.167 onomatopoeia – this exact kind of form is used widely in rnying ma tantric sādhanas. I could give you numerous examples. Of course, the form is Tibetan, and is ubiquitous in rnying ma Buddhist tantric practice.

p.167-168 I do not think that the use of the pestle and mortar is simply derivative of *gso ba rig pa*. The pestle and mortar may be used in many daily life activities (so too the hammer), and in tantric contexts, they are used especially in wrathful rituals, with the same metaphysical explanations we find here.

p.168 The close relationship between *gso ba rig pa* and the Bon *sman sgrub*. This is an important aspect of the study, and one to investigate in further consideration of Buddhist *sman sgrub* rituals. It may be on the one hand, that Buddhist *sman sgrub* rituals may have lost some aspects of a linkage when many of the practitioners were, like Amchi Nyima here, both *sngags pa* practitioners and *sman pa* in their local communities. But conversely, it may be that Amchi Nyima may not be altogether representative of the Bon lineage holders of the past (nb. p.178 which discusses the narrow transmission of the recipe through Amchi Nyima, and the

incorporation of some knowledge specific to his regional background etc.)? If not all were simultaneously medical practitioners, their understanding of the substances may not have been so closely linked to *gso ba rig pa* understandings, especially since you rightly point out p.297 that each instantiation of the *smān sgrub* recipe will inevitably be different.

p.169-173 This is a very good discussion of the concept of *bdud rtsi*. Note also that Indian myths relating to *amṛta* are reflected in Tibetan tantric sources, and sources such as the *rgyud bzhi* – for instance, the myth of the churning of the ocean and the production of *amṛta* is recounted in the chapter on poisons (your source, TMPa, Plate 51).

p.173 *bdud* as a positive destroyer of evil: this idea is also found widely in Buddhist tantric sources on wrathful deities.

p.190 *zur brgyad log brgyad*. I wonder if *logs* is intended, so, eight corners/edges/facets and eight surfaces.

p.192, also p.256 *kha che* given as "Muslims", but *kha che* is widely used to apply to the place, Kashmir, which is the appropriate meaning here.

p.208 *spos snag*: is *snag* here for black, or a mistake for *sna*? Also p.209, 222 and elsewhere.

228 Clearly, the cosmological maṇḍala scheme is very similar to the fivefold Buddhist tantric schema, although here, some of the features associated with the north and south have been reversed.

p.245 A similar fivefold classification of animal species is given in rNying ma sources on *smān sgrub*, found, for instance in the Pema Lingpa text (noted above p.164), and repeated in Terdak Lingpa's manual on *smān sgrub*. However, that classification does not appear to include mythological creatures (unicorns, dragons etc.).

p.269 Table 16, another term to add: *phab gta' rgyun ldan*. *Phab rgyun* is a short form of this. The *rgyun ldan* implies the continuity over the generations as it is transmitted purely.

p.280 I wonder if the presentation of the elite philosophical view may be a little over-stated, using phrasing such as, represents *only* an external *rten*/support, or the idea that it is of no use to someone who has not prepared? I suspect that such statements may have been rather exaggerated for effect, but not really intended at face value. An inner understanding would normally be expected to complement the outer, rather than setting up a potential for conflict. Probably, many of the teachers promoting these views would nonetheless subscribe to the idea that *smān sgrub* is efficacious for animals and the environment etc., as discussed in the following pages – which could not be the case were it only a support for meditative reflection.

p.285 note 964 on vegetarianism in the Dudjom tradition – yes, in the line following Chatral Rinpoche (*bya bral sangs rgyas rdo rje*, 1913-2015), but not necessarily the other branches.

p.298-299 The increasing frequency of the ritual. This is interesting, and a feature also of rnying ma practice in exile, although in that case, it seems more a matter of increasing numbers of *sgrub chen*, which may or may not involve *smān sgrub*. Besides the matter of increasing sponsorship, it would seem to be related to the perceived needs of contemporary practitioners (the need for relatively short bursts of intensive communal practice); but perhaps also as you seem to suggest here, to concerns over maintaining the continuity in the modern world.

p.346 two verse lines seem to be omitted in translation p.125 (*rnam shes... thams cad...*)

p.348 nb.1040 but *zhugs* is expected and makes sense here (also again, p.349)

p.357 nb.1187 (=p.145-6 translation): it seems clear that Ms C is in error here – it would be worth noting this explicitly.

### **minor spelling corrections etc.**

p.11 extend: extensive

p.14 reminded: has reminded us

p.18, 30, 297 extend: extent

p.35 spam: span

p.41 lead: led

those who opposed: could be re-phrased, otherwise an object is needed

p.53 detailly: detailed

p.58 out of scratch: from scratch

p.65 hanged: hung

p.69 calmed: calm

was by: not sure what is intended here. consulted, conformed to?

p.70 blown own: blown one's own

p.71 all wet: wet

p.75 of own: of one's own

p.76 "The four remaining vessels were poured in unground medicinal plant substances...": needs to be re-worded, Unground medicinal plant substances were poured into the four remaining vessels...

p.84 the main deities of the peaceful and wrathful: the main peaceful and wrathful deities

p.91 form: from

p.100 attachement: attachment

p.102 few nuns: a few nuns?

p.118 extend: extensive

p.120 independent on: independent of

p.124 cf Chapter?

p.128 (and verses below, 129 etc.) ripen: ripened

p.131 consciouness: consciousness

note 348 rededer: rendered

p.132 moutains: mountains

p.133 with as: as

Thus is purified (and repeated below in similar phrases, Thus is offered p.135): Thus, it is purified

p.134 joint: joined

extense: extent

by compassion: with compassion (and below repeated)

p.135 Fiercious: Ferocious or Vicious?

p.143 Ten million of: Ten million (delete, of)

p.145 protectoress: protectress (and elsewhere, p.147)

p.147 moistering: moistening

p.154 dispers: disperses (and in the repeating verses below)

p.157 spledorous: splendid?

invocation: invocation

p.183 *sang ba gal chen*: *gsang ba*? (Below p.193 the commentary gives, *gsang*).

p.184 *nam kha*: *nam mkha'* intended? (See also p.200)

p.186 *u pal*: we would expect *ut pal*, *ut pa la*, or *ud pal*. (Perhaps check the text? I note that a different spelling is given p.220)

212 "This how the phrases was". Need to re-word.

p.230 line 4 delete "and" (or line 3, change "following" to "followed")

after p.234, Table 12, sheet 1 first entries, "In joining..." etc. Does this mean, "In compounding..."?

p.293 extent: extensive/detailed

p.294 in the exile: in exile. Also, of the exile: of exile

p.295 I am concerned: I know

p.296 first such a: the first such

principle: principal

p.298 used to be: been previously

p.340 *skya 'imchod*: *skya'i mchod*

p.343 acquire: have acquired?

p.348 (ms p.96) *byang phogs*: *byang phyogs*

*gyu* (nb.1038): *rgyu* intended?

p.363 *sbyan*: *spyän*

#### V. Conclusion

The work submitted clearly meets the standard required for a doctoral dissertation. I recommend the dissertation for a public defence.

I recommend the submitted dissertation with the tentative grade of pass.



30/08/2018 Dr. C.M. Cantwell.