

PACIFIC WORLD

Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies

Third Series Number 11
Fall 2009

Special Issue Celebrating the
Sixtieth Anniversary of the
Institute of Buddhist Studies
1949-2009



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Acknowledgment: This annual publication is made possible by the donation of BDK America of Berkeley, California.

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Tsongkhapa on Tantric Exegetical Authority and Methodology

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A KEY FIGURE in the history of Tibetan Buddhism is Tsongkhapa (1357–1419 CE), the great scholar-practitioner who founded the Geluk (*dge lugs*) order of Tibetan Buddhism. He is a somewhat anomalous figure in Western scholarship who remains widely known yet poorly understood. His is a name known by those who have even a casual familiarity with Tibetan Buddhism. While many, although by no means all, of his numerous works have been translated and studied in the West, his biographies remain untranslated, leaving few resources for the study of his life and works for those who do not read Tibetan.¹

This situation is partly due to a stereotype of Tsongkhapa as a conservative scholar primarily interested in the reformation of the conduct of the monastic community. This view, which originated in Tibet and has been transmitted to the Western scholarly world, perhaps has led to what might be termed an imbalanced state of the field of Tsongkhapa's life and works. While his more scholastic works on Buddhist philosophy and doctrine have received considerable study, his works on tantra, and his biographies, have received much less attention.

In this paper, I will address this stereotype by exploring the common conception of Tsongkhapa as an accomplished scholar who was less than accomplished in the vital arena of religious practice. This, in turn, will lead into the topic of the paper, which is Tsongkhapa's own writing on the proper qualifications of a commentator on the tantras, which points to the key issue of the claims to authority that were made by key figures such as Tsongkhapa. These claims played a major role in the legitimation of the traditions that were developing in Tibet during this time period.

The view of Tsongkhapa as a conservative reformer is not incorrect, although it is, arguably, a partial view of his life and work. Tsongkhapa was best known in Tibet for his works in Tibetan philosophy. He was deeply concerned with the dissolute lifestyles of many of the monks of his time, and was dedicated to reforming monasticism. He was famous in his time for his “celebrated rehearsal of the practice of the monastic code, or Vinaya, in 1402.”² It is for this reason that Geoffrey Samuel chose to highlight Tsongkhapa as an exemplar of the “clerical” mode of Tibetan Buddhism.³

In addition to his notable activities as a scholar and reformer, Tsongkhapa was also deeply engaged in tantric practices and experienced a number of visions. However, he was not widely known as a *yogī*. In fact, he seems to have developed a somewhat contrary reputation as a solid scholar who was not immune to missteps in the complex world of advanced tantric yogic praxis.

Tsongkhapa, like many Tibetan Buddhists of his time, was conservative in the sense that he saw spiritual authority as located, generally speaking, in the past and in India, emanating thence in lineages that connected contemporary Tibetans with great Indian masters such as Śākyamuni Buddha and the *mahāsiddha* Nāropa. This is not to say that Tibetans slavishly imitated Indian paradigms; during what Ronald Davidson has termed the “Tibetan Renaissance,” spanning from the late tenth through fourteenth centuries, Tibetans translated and assimilated a vast amount of religious literature and practices from India and began the process of indigenizing it, opening it to “a specifically Tibetan articulation.”⁴

Tsongkhapa was one of several Tibetans of his time who managed to achieve a convincing synthesis of the received teachings, such that he came to be seen (retrospectively) as the founder of a new tradition, the Geluk. Yet he himself was deeply dedicated to the great masters of India. Tsongkhapa, like other contemporary Tibetan practitioners, was the recipient of numerous transmissions of lineages deriving from the *mahāsiddhas*. Tsongkhapa saw India as the locus of spiritual authority, and like Tibetans of previous generations, he sought to travel to India to personally approach this source. However, Tsongkhapa was living in what was then still a new era in the history of Buddhism, an era in which pilgrimage to India was no longer safe or worthwhile for Buddhists, due to the destruction of the major centers of Buddhist learning there.⁵

His biographies relate that, during his thirty-ninth year, Tsongkhapa had been staying at Lhodrak Drawo Monastery at the invitation of the Nying-ma Lama Lhodrak Namka Gyaltsen (*lho brag nam mkha' rgyal mtshan*), where he was receiving teachings from this lama. While there, he gave rise to a strong desire to travel to India to meet with the *mahāsiddhas* Nāgabodhi and Maitrīpa. The Nying-ma Khenchen had the ability to communicate with the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi and consulted him on this issue. Vajrapāṇi wisely dissuaded Tsongkhapa from making this trip, which, by the late fourteenth century, would have been extremely dangerous, given the fact that by this time all of the major Buddhist sites in North India had been destroyed.

Instead, Tsongkhapa and his entourage went on pilgrimage to Tsari Mountain, a sacred site in southeastern Tibet. While on pilgrimage at Tsari Mountain, Tsongkhapa refrained from drinking consecrated beer, apparently out of concern that this would be a violation of his monastic vows. As a result, the *ḍākinīs* who dwell there afflicted him with sharp pains in his feet, which were not relieved until he propitiated them. A succinct account of this event is related by Tsongkhapa's disciple Khedrup Jay, in the short biography *Haven of Faith* that is positioned, in most editions, at beginning of the first volume of Tsongkhapa's *Collected Works*.⁶ This work relates Tsongkhapa's visit to Mt. Tsari as follows:

Then he arrived with more than thirty masters at the Great Tsari.⁷ He stayed for a few days, and presented tea to the retreatants. Seeing the mountain, he performed the Saṃvara self-initiation and so forth, and many wonderful signs appeared. When he arrived at the pass that approached Tsari, he thought that even at this seat (*gnas, piṭha*) he would not engage in the *gaṇacakra* [rite]⁸ with the inner offering.⁹ As a result, he immediately had a sudden sharp pain in one of his feet. Arising as Mahākāla, he performed a Saṃvara *gaṇacakra* together with the inner offering. As soon as the *gaṇacakra* was dismissed, he immediately recovered without any pain.¹⁰

This story depicts a misstep in tantric praxis, in which Tsongkhapa, apparently out of concern for the maintenance of his monastic vows, refrained from performing an essential ritual step in highly charged environment of Tsari Mountain, widely believed by Tibetans to be the Cāritra *piṭha* of the *Yoginī* tantric systems.¹¹ It is a misstep that had a painful consequence, but one that was fortunately easily relieved by the correction of the ritual omission.

This story was very well known; it was related in Tsongkhapa's biographies,¹² and was retold by later scholars such as the Druk-pa Kagyü master Padma dKar-po (1527–1592 CE).¹³ And as Toni Huber has brought to our attention, the story is retold by the contemporary Druk-pa Kagyü *yogīs* who practice advanced tantric meditative practices in the vicinity of Tsari Mountain in order to illustrate the power of site and the devotional attitude needed to safely approach it.¹⁴

I bring up this story not to disparage Tsongkhapa or cast doubt on his qualifications for composing a commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*. Such a judgment is not mine to make, nor is it one that I personally hold. But I bring it up to illustrate the caricature of Tsongkhapa that seems to have originated in Tibet, reinforced by the telling and retelling of this story, which portrays him as a somewhat stodgy and spiritually uninspired scholar who is more concerned with ethical conundrums (should a monk consume an alcoholic sacrament?) than the conduct appropriate to the consecrated environment of the *dākinīs*. In other words, he is portrayed as learned but not fully realized.

I begin with this story because it calls to mind an important distinction made in Tibetan religious discourse, that between the scholar (*mkhas pa*) and practitioner (*grub pa*). Here, Tsongkhapa fills the role of the scholar, whose persistent adherence to discursive thought patterns lands him in trouble when he enters the world of advanced tantric practice, where discursive thought is problematic and must ultimately be abandoned. This is an important distinction, which also calls to mind more general distinctions, such as between practice and knowledge. This latter category is highlighted in the Tibetan tradition in a fashion that is particularly meaningful here, via the distinction between the ordinary knowledge of a scholar, *shes-pa*, and the gnosis that ideally results from practice, *ye-shes*.

But while Tsongkhapa's achievements as a scholar were considerable, he cannot simply be pigeonholed as a scholar. This is in fact a mischaracterization, as it fails to take into account his rich visionary life,¹⁵ as well as his four-year and one-year retreats at Ölka Chölung (*'ol kha chos lung*).¹⁶ Yet his characterization as a scholar who faced challenges in the arena of tantric practice brings up the important question of the requisite qualifications as a commentator on the tantras.

The question of the requisite qualifications of a tantric commentator is among the many fascinating issues that Tsongkhapa addresses in his extensive commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara*. This work, titled the

Complete Illumination of the Hidden Meaning (*sbas don kun gsal*), is one of his mature works.¹⁷ At some point during his sixty-third year, circa 1418 or 1419 CE when he was at the peak of his teaching career as well as the end of his life, Tsongkhapa taught his lecture series that would be recorded as his *Complete Illumination of the Hidden Meaning* commentary.¹⁸

In his introduction to this work, Tsongkhapa asks, and answers, a very important question, namely the basis of tantric commentary. On what authoritative sources should the commentator depend? He broaches, and answers, this question as follows:

In general, in explaining root tantras that are abridged from extensive tantras, on what should one rely? It is said that there are three methods [for doing this]. In the *Commentary Praising Saṃvara*, [Vajrapāṇi] stated that [the abridged tantra's import] should be realized, for the sake of those who have not had the good fortune of hearing the very extensive root tantra, through reliance upon other tantras which collect the profound adamant expressions¹⁹ of the tantras, whose teachings have been collected from the extensive tantra, or the commentaries of bodhisattvas, or the instructions of the guru. The first type includes explanations that rely on other explanatory tantras that were abridged from the extensive original tantra (*āditantra*). The second type included explanations that rely on the commentaries of bodhisattvas, like the *Commentary Praising Saṃvara*. The third type includes explanations depending on the personal instructions of those like Lūpa, Kānhapa and Ghaṅṅāpa, who are like the noble master and his students. Therefore, it is not the intention of the bodhisattvas that you should rely only on their commentaries.²⁰

In addressing this question, Tsongkhapa turned to, and paraphrased, a famous commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* by Vajrapāṇi, which is one of the three “bodhisattva commentaries” on major tantras authored by Indian advocates of the *Kālacakra-tantra* during the late tenth through early eleventh centuries.²¹ These became extremely popular and influential works in Tibet. Tsongkhapa here paraphrased a passage in this work, which occurs as follows within it: “Furthermore, due to its abundance of adamant expressions, learned ones desiring liberation should know it by means of the instruction of the holy guru, what is said in other tantras, and the commentaries written by the bodhisattvas.”²²

The first reliance recommended by Vajrapāṇi, relying on “the instruction of the holy guru” (*sadgurūpadeśā*), is completely uncontroversial. The third, on the other hand, is an obvious plug for this work, and

points to the great ambition of the advocates of the Kālacakra tradition. The second reliance is rather subtle. Later in this work Vajrapāṇi explains, “One should understand [this] Tantra by means of other tantras, since the Tathāgata stated them.”²³ Should one accept that the tantras are all genuine *buddhavacana*, authentic Buddhist scriptures, then it should logically follow that interpreting one in light of the others is not only permissible, but in fact a sensible strategy. This, however, was not the typical strategy taken by Indian Buddhist authors of tantric commentaries. Vajrapāṇi was advocating a somewhat radical exegetical strategy, and one which suited well his own approach. His method was to comment on the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*, which was very popular by the late tenth century, in light of the newly composed *Kālacakra-tantra* in order to, arguably, implicitly bolster the prestige of the latter.

Tsongkhapa was clearly sympathetic to Vajrapāṇi’s approach. Like a number of his contemporaries, Tsongkhapa was deeply concerned with the comparative and synthetic study of Buddhist literature, aiming to develop a deeper understanding of the legacy of the translations of the authoritative speech of the Buddha (*bka’ gyur*) and the Indian scholarship on it (*bstan gyur*). The many centuries of translation that ultimately resulted in the formation of the canons of Tibetan Buddhism had more or less concluded during the fourteenth century, during Tsongkhapa’s lifetime.²⁴

As a result, this strategy also suited the needs of Tsongkhapa, who was deeply concerned with the systematization of Buddhist literature. He thus did adopt the strategy of commenting on tantras such as the *Cakrasaṃvara* in light of what is taught in other tantras, although he did so sparingly, recognizing, perhaps, that this is a powerful exegetical tool that is nonetheless open to abuse, and is thus controversial. The strategy that he followed most closely was the traditional and conservative strategy, which is to follow the scripture’s own tradition of oral instructions passed down from the great gurus of the Indian tradition.

Despite Tsongkhapa’s quotation of Vajrapāṇi’s *Laghutantraṭīkā* commentary, he warns against over-reliance on the bodhisattva commentaries, noting that even Vajrapāṇi himself calls for reliance on the gurus’ oral instructions. The caveat in the last line is a testament to the work’s popularity, which apparently was great enough that Tsongkhapa felt it necessary to state that the bodhisattva commentaries alone are not suitable bases for tantric exegesis.

The composition of the “bodhisattva commentaries” undoubtedly contributed to the successful dissemination of the Kālacakra tradition, and their popularity likely “raised the bar” for the composition of tantric commentaries by creating the impression that one needed to be highly realized—like Vajrapāṇi, the tantric elucidator extraordinaire—to comment on the tantras. Tsongkhapa continues his discussion with comments on this issue as follows:

This literature does imply that commentary [on the tantras] should only be done by those who have attained the supramundane cognitions. While this is not a statement concerning the many other ways of attaining such powers, there is the attainment of the five supramundane cognitions that are realized by the power of manifesting the meaning of reality by means of great bliss. This is in accordance with the explanations of Ghaṅṭāpa and Ḍombiheruka.²⁵

Tsongkhapa here refers to discussions in the Indian commentarial literature on the idealized qualifications of a guru. Ghaṅṭāpa, for example, in his presentation of advanced perfection-stage yogic practices of the Cakrasaṃvara tradition, lists attainment of the five supramundane cognitions among the qualifications for a guru in this tradition.²⁶

Here Tsongkhapa concedes a very important point. He acknowledges, and supports, the claim that tantric exegesis requires considerable spiritual attainment. However, he makes an important distinction. For him, the establishment of an exegetical tradition requires the advanced spiritual attainment of a *siddha*. Indeed, all of the major exegetical traditions of major tantras such as the *Cakrasaṃvara* are traced back to the *mahāsiddhas* of India. However, advanced spiritual attainment is not required provided that one is not innovating, but simply following pre-established tradition. He continues his explanation as follows:

Furthermore, it is the case that before developing an exegetical system on the intention of a tantra, one first distinguishes the practice systems of that particular tantra. However, it is not taught that it is necessary to obtain the supramundane cognitions in order to elucidate the meaning of the tantra, provided that one has followed a tradition created by former [masters]. Some people say that to just comment on a tantra one must have attained the supramundane cognitions, and that if one writes without them, one will go to hell. However, if one engages in tantric commentary without even having attained a trace of supramundane cognition, one is just making a fool of oneself.²⁷

Tsongkhapa mentions the more stringent view apparently held by some of his unnamed contemporaries, namely, that advanced spiritual attainments are required to comment on the tantras, and those who lack this risk a very serious consequence, namely a downfall to hell. However, he dismissed this view, and argued for the far more liberal view that the worst consequence of unqualified tantric exegesis is making a fool of oneself.

Tsongkhapa here followed expected practice and did not make a claim to authority on the basis of his own spiritual realization; he did not claim to be a *siddha*. Instead, he took the approach that is far more common in Tibetan scholastic literature, which is the claim that he follows and relies upon a prestigious exegetical tradition that traces its roots to the great saints of India. Throughout the text he claims to follow the exegetical traditions of the *mahāsiddhas*, most notably Nāropa, who was one of the most prestigious figures in the dissemination of tantric traditions to Nepal and Tibet. He makes this point in his description of his own exegetical method, which immediately follows the discussion of authority quoted above.

In that way, from among the three [approaches] here, I will explain based on two of them, the first and the third. I will conjoin the root [text] and its explanations relying upon the expositions of the creation and perfecting [stages] of Lūipa, Kāṅhapa, and Ghaṅṭāpa. Since I will explain relying on the personal instructions of Śrī Nārotapa, this explanation is distinctively excellent. Although the two stages are not shown clearly with respect to the text of the root tantra in the expositions of Lūipa and Ghaṅṭāpa, if you know well the instructions of these two, you will be able to understand by relying on the instructions which join the root [text] and its explanations. I will explain this in the context of [my presentation of] the meaning of the text.²⁸

Tsongkhapa thus presents his role as a modest but important one. He does not present himself an innovator, engaging in the ambitious task of devising a new and original interpretation of the root scripture. Undoubtedly, he would agree that a high degree of spiritual development would be a prerequisite for such a task. Instead, he presents himself as a systematizer who elucidates the scripture by applying to it the relevant explanations of the past lineage masters. In another passage later in the commentary he strongly extols this approach, stating that “Since the oral instructions of the saints explain the thoroughly mixed-up and unclear root tantra, they seem to enchant the scholars, since they give unexcelled certainty on the path. Later scholars who

rely on Nāropa's commentarial tradition should explain in accordance with that only."²⁹ Although he seems here to contradict his previous statement that he relies on two sources in commenting on the tantra, the instructions of the lineage masters as well as the explanatory tantras, this should probably be read as an indication of his strong reliance upon, and enthusiasm for, the lineage instructions.

Given the fact that he so strongly evokes the lineage instructions as the basis of his exegetical authority, it is naturally essential that Tsongkhapa establish his lineage credentials. This is a common step in tantric exegesis. For example, one of the "oral instruction" textual sources that Tsongkhapa relies on to establish his connection to the *mahāsiddha* Nāropa is a précis of the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* composed by the Kashmiri scholar Sumatikīrti, a student of Nāropa who eventually settled in the Kathmandu Valley and instructed a number of Tibetans who travelled there during the eleventh century.³⁰ This text, the *Laghusaṃvaratantrapāṭalābhisandhi*, ends with a colophon that clearly establishes the authority of the author, and hence the text. It reads as follows: "This completes the *Intended Import of the Concise Saṃvara Tantra*, composed in the presence of Śrī Nāropa's successor, the scholar Sumatikīrti. It was translated by the Indian preceptor himself, and the translator-monk Grags-mchog Shes-rab."³¹ In referring to Sumatikīrti as "Nāropa's successor" (*dpal nā ro ta pa'i rjes su 'brangs pa*), it makes a powerful assertion of lineage authority. As this colophon was likely composed with Sumatikīrti's approval if not by him, it served to bolster his prestige with the networks of communication and exchange that linked the Kathmandu Valley with Tibet.

As time progressed, the length of the lineages naturally extended. While Sumatikīrti could reasonably claim to be Nāropa's direct disciple, later Tibetan commentators had to go to greater lengths to demonstrate their connections to the master. The twelfth century Sa-skya master Sa-chen Kun-dga'-snying-po (1092–1158 CE) composed³² what is likely the earliest surviving commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*.³³ In his *Pearl Garland* (*mu tig 'phreng ba*) commentary, he presents his position in the full lineage, going back to Mahāvajradhara Buddha, as follows:

Regarding the lineage succession of the Root and Explanatory Tantras, the sixth truly and completely awakened buddha, Mahāvajradhara Buddha, explained them to the Lord of Secrets, Vajrapāṇi, who, having consecrated the master Saraha the Elder, explained them and

authorized them for him. He then consecrated and conferred authorization to Nāgārjuna. He [explained them] to Saraha the Younger who [explained them] to Master Lūipa. He [explained them] to both King Deṅgi-pa and his minister, Dārika.³⁴ The minister Śrī Dārika [explained them] to master Antara-pa, who [explained them] to master Tilopa, who [explained them] to Nāropa. He [transmitted them] to the guru Pham-ting-pa, who [explained them] to Kālacakra-pa (*dus 'khor pa*), Thang-chung-pa, and the Kashmiri guru Bodhibhadra.³⁵ They transmitted them to the great guru translator [Mal-gyo bLo-gros-grags], who explained them to my own guru [Sa-chen Kun-dga' sNying-po], who is like a crown jewel among Vajrayāna teachers in the Kaliyuga, whose name is difficult to state, but who was born in the 'Bro region in Western Tsang.³⁶ Although this is one mode of transmission, [these scriptures] were also taught to others, and one should know that [different lineages are preserved] elsewhere.³⁷

We find here both the essential claim of lineage authority, as well as an open-minded acknowledgment that this claim of lineage transmission is simply one among many lineage claims made by Tibetan masters during this formative period for the development of Tibetan scholastic and practice traditions.

Tsongkhapa's lectures on the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* that led to the composition of his commentary took place almost three hundred years after Sa-chen's and Mal Lotsāwa's (*mal lo tsā ba*) joint exposition of the same text.³⁸ Tsongkhapa, unlike Sa-chen, does not give a complete lineage linking himself back to the original expositor of this scripture, Mahāvajradhara Buddha. Rather, he starts with Nāropa, who had become by his time a major locus of tantric scriptural and praxical authority, renowned as he was as both a *mahāsiddha* as well as a great scholar-practitioner (*mkhas grub che*). Tsongkhapa shows how he is linked to Nāropa via the two prominent early figures in the transmission of the scripture to Tibet, Mal and Mar-pa Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug, both of whom studied in Nepal with Nāropa's disciples. He then jumps to two of the most prominent scholars on the text, Sa-chen and Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290–1364 CE), without filling in the gap in the transmission between them. His discussion of the transmission of this scripture occurs as follows:

The superiority of this commentarial tradition is due to Śrī Nāropa. Although he had many students, he had four principle disciples of Cakrasaṃvara, who were named Mānakaśrījñāna,³⁹ Prajñāraṅkṣita,⁴⁰ Phi-tong-haṃ-du, and Pham-ting-pa.⁴¹ Regarding the first of them,

Mardo⁴² says that he was known as the northern door guardian [of Nālandā], having become the door guardian after Nāropa. The third, [Phi-tong-ham-du,] was the elder brother of Pham-ting-pa and was called Dharmamati.⁴³ Having remained for twelve years in the presence of Nāropa, he evidently went to Mt. Wu-tai-shan in China. The fourth is the Newar Phamtiṅpa. In the Kathmandu Valley he was known as A-des-pa Chen-po. He was also known as Abhayakīrti Bhikṣu.⁴⁴ He remained in the presence of Nāropa for nine years. Through Cakrasaṃvara he obtained inferior and middling powers. His younger brother, Kālacakra-pa, served Nāropa for five years. His younger brother, Thang-chu-pa,⁴⁵ studied Cakrasaṃvara with Nāropa. The Kashmiri Bodhibhadra, having served Nāropa, studied Cakrasaṃvara. Kanakaśrī studied with Phamtingpa and the first two of the previous four.⁴⁶ He was also called the Newar Bhadanta.⁴⁷ Sumatikīrti of lesser omniscience⁴⁸ also studied with him, and also to Mānakaśrī and Phamtingpa. The Newar Mahākaruṇa studied with Kanakaśrī.

Although there are many ways in which lineages in Tibet derive from them, there were two [people] who most benefited Tibet. They were the Mal-gyo translator bLo-gros-grags-pa, and the translator known as Mar-pa Do-pa, whose real name was Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug and whose secret name was Mañjuśrīvajra. Of them, Mal-gyo studied with the three Pham-ting-pa brothers, the Kashmiri Bodhibhadra, Sumatikīrti, and the Newar Mahākaruṇa. Mar-do listened to both Pham-ting-pa and Sumatikīrti. The Venerable Sa-skya Chen-po,⁴⁹ who studied Cakrasaṃvara with the translator Mal, the translator rMa, and the lesser translator Pu-rangs, considered Mal's system to be authoritative. Mal and Sa-chen did not write about the root tantra, but Sa-chen's explanations in conference with Mal were accurately edited by a certain disciple of theirs called Puṇyavajra in a detailed commentary on the root tantra called the *Pearl Garland*. Mar-do wrote a commentary on the root tantra.⁵⁰ His disciples gZe-ba, bDe-mchog-rdo-rje,⁵¹ Nam-mkha'-dbang-phyug of India, and Cog-ro Chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan⁵² greatly propagated the Cakrasaṃvara [tradition].

Lama 'Phags-pa-'od⁵³ gave the consecrations, instructions, and explanations of the system of Sa-skya, Lo-chung,⁵⁴ Sa-chen, as well as the system of Atiśa to the Omniscient Bu-ston. Since he also received the exegetical transmission of Mar-do's system, he mastered Nāropa's explanatory style through the lineage of both the translators and the scholars. I myself heard the exegetical transmission (*bshad lung*) of the *Great Commentary on the Root Tantra* (*rtsa-gyud kyi rnam-bshad chen-mo*) from his disciple, the great Lama bDe-chen-pa.⁵⁵

This lineage list is incomplete, as it contains a gap of approximately two hundred years, the time span between the early twelfth and early fourteen centuries, when Sa-chen and Bu-ston were active. However, Bu-ston was so renowned that it was not necessary for Tsongkhapa to fill in these details. Simply indicating the lama who initiated Bu-ston in these teachings (Lama 'Phags-pa-'od) and the disciple of Bu-ston who in turn instructed Tsongkhapa (Lama bDe-chen-pa) would be sufficient, I think, to establish Tsongkhapa's position in the scriptural lineage in the early fifteen century, when this work was composed. It also thus establishes his exegetical authority, provided of course that one accepts his relatively liberal standards for tantric exegesis, namely that reception of the lineage transmission is sufficient, and total realization in the practice tradition is not an absolute requisite.

Tsongkhapa makes an interesting claim at the beginning of the second paragraph above, following his discussion of the Newar disciples of Nāropa. This claim concerns the Tibetans who studied with them and transmitted the lineages to Tibet. He claimed that "Although there are many ways in which lineages in Tibet derive from them, there were two [people] who most benefited Tibet." These two, as he indicated, were Mal Lotsāwa and Mar-pa Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug. This claim might sound unusual even to scholars of Buddhism, as both are relatively obscure figures. Indeed, the latter figure is easily confused with the much better-known Mar-pa "the Translator," Mar-pa Lo-tsāwa, also known as Mar-pa Chos-kyi-blo-gros and Mar-pa Lho-brag-pa (1012–1097 CE).

Tsongkhapa's exclusion of Mar-pa "The Translator" Chos-kyi-blo-gros from the list of Tibetans "who most benefitted Tibet" in transmitting the lineages descending from Nāropa seems, at first glance, glaring. However, Tsongkhapa here is not making a sweeping claim. Like Sa-chen, he acknowledges that there were many transmissions of important teachings descending from Nāropa. While Mar-pa "The Translator" was famous for his transmission of important teachings, such as the "six yogas of Nāropa" and his tutelage of "the most renowned saint in Tibetan Buddhist history,"⁵⁶ Milarepa, he did not play a significant role in the textual transmission of the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*, and hence is not mentioned here.⁵⁷

As we would expect in a conservative commentator whose claim to authority rests in faithful adherence to the exegetical approaches

of past masters, Tsongkhapa supports his arguments with abundant quotations from the works of these masters. He was particularly fond of Sumatikīrti's *Laghutantrapaṭalābhisandhi*. Tsongkhapa quotes and discusses almost all of this text, excluding only the homage line and colophon. His strong reliance on this text bolsters his oft-repeated claim that he is following Nāropa's exegetical tradition.

He likewise followed closely the commentaries on the tantra written by his lineage predecessors, most notably Bu-ston and Sa-chen. He often paraphrases their works, following them closely when he agrees with them. However, he does not slavishly follow them, but corrects the "errors" that he perceives in their works. His corrections are generally quite sound, as we would expect from a "conservative" scholar like Tsongkhapa. Sa-chen, for example, was obviously enamored with the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* and placed it in its own unique scriptural class, the "Further Unexcelled *Yoginī* tantras." His basis for doing so is rather slim; he largely depends on self-aggrandizing passages in the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*, which are certainly not unique in the history of Mahāyāna literature.⁵⁸ He also depends on rather ambiguous passages in the root text and commentaries. One of these is the closing passage of the tantra, at the end of the fifty-first chapter, which occurs as follows in my translation:

The inconceivable, all-pervasive reality lacks loss and gain. Contemplating thus, all of the worldly ones should not be faulted. Their inconceivable way is the inconceivable play of the buddhas, such that they delight in each and every disposition which manifests in sentient beings, in accordance with the divisions of the sūtras, and of the Action (*kriyā*), Practice (*caryā*), Yoga, and Secret (*guhya*) [tantras].⁵⁹

Although it is not entirely clear that this passage should be read in terms of Buddhist scriptural classes, the commentators generally read it in this way, often in a manner suggesting the well-known system of four tantra classes.⁶⁰

Sa-chen begins his commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* with a discussion of the scriptural classes. First he discusses the well-known division of Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures into the classical "exoteric" and tantric "esoteric" categories, which he refers to as the "Perfection scriptural collection" (*pāramitāpiṭaka*, *pha rol tu phyin pa'i sde snod*) and the "Spell Bearer scriptural collection" (*vidyādharapiṭaka*, *rig pa 'dzin pa'i sde snod*).⁶¹ He then goes on to discuss the classes of tantric scriptures, as follows:

Although there are many contradictions between the classes of tantra and the intentions of masters, regarding Śrī Nārotapa[’s intention], Master Kampala states in his commentary on the twenty sixth chapter [of the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*] that “[there are the] Action (*kriyā*), Performance (*caryā*), Yoga, *Yoginī*, and the *Mahāyoginī* tantras, which are equal to Action and Yoga [tantras].” And following the above-mentioned passage in the fifty-first chapter [of the root tantra], the classes of tantra are established as six. These are the Action tantras, the Performance tantras, the Yoga tantras, the Unexcelled Yoga tantras, the Unexcelled *Yoginī* tantras (*rnal ’byor ma bla na med pa’i rgyud*), and the Further Unexcelled *Yoginī* tantras (*rnal ’byor ma’i yang ma bla na med pa’i rgyud*).⁶²

He follows this with a description of these six classes. The first five correspond to the fourfold system that was accepted in Tibet from the fourteenth century, the Action, Performance, Yoga, and Unexcelled Yoga classes, with the latter subdivided into “Father” and “Mother” classes.⁶³ His sixth class, the “Further Unexcelled *Yoginī* tantras” consists only of the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*. He was clearly motivated by enthusiasm for this scripture, as the passages he turns to for support, from the fifty-first chapter of the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* and Kambala’s commentary, hardly provide unambiguous support for his system. The former passage was quoted above; Kambala’s comments read as follows in the surviving Sanskrit manuscript: “With respect to **common to all tantras**, in the Action, Performance, Yoga, and Higher Yoga [tantras], the nature of the *Mahāyoginī* tantras is unequalled by the Action and Yoga [tantras].”⁶⁴ This passage seems to gloss the text “all tantras” in terms of the standard four classes, and then posits a fifth, the *Mahāyoginī* tantras, that are above them, or which at least transcend the Action and Yoga tantras. However, all of the Tibetan translations differ from the Sanskrit here;⁶⁵ Sa-chen apparently interpreted an ambiguous passage in the light of his own desire to aggrandize this scripture.

Tsongkhapa here does not directly address Sa-chen’s innovative sixth tantric class, as he addresses tantric doxography elsewhere.⁶⁶ However, he is critical of the partisan approach to tantric commentary. He makes this point with respect to one of the passages that extols the tantra’s virtues, at the end of chapter three. It reads as follows: “This king of *maṇḍalas* does not occur, nor will it occur, in the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, *Samvara*, *Guhyasamāja*, or *Vajrabhairava*. Everything whatsoever, spoken or unspoken, exists in Śrī Heruka.”⁶⁷ Sa-chen read

this passage as a literal assertion of this scripture's superiority, commenting that "the king of *maṇḍalas* of this tantra does not occur nor will in the *Vajrabhairava* and so forth, as it is superior to their *maṇḍalas*."⁶⁸

Tsongkhapa presents a very sensible response to such claims. He comments, almost certainly in response to Sa-chen, that:

While it is not the case that this *maṇḍala* is superior to the *maṇḍalas* of those other ones, it does mean that it is very difficult to find since it does not occur even in those other tantras that are both profound and vast. If this were not so, then they would be superior to this tantra as well, since their *maṇḍalas* likewise do not occur in this [tantra].⁶⁹

Tsongkhapa here speaks as a true systematizer who was not merely interested in advancing a single scriptural and practice tradition, but who was faced with the much more difficult challenge of integrating a considerable number of traditions, each of which had strong partisan supporters during his time. Acknowledging any one scripture's claim to superiority is not conducive to his overall strategy of contextualizing the tantras, studying them in relation to the larger body of Buddhist literature. Unlike Vajrapāṇi (*qua* author of the Kālacakra-inspired commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*), he did this not with the goal of demonstrating the superiority of any one scripture or practice tradition, but rather with the goal of elucidating the large and complex body of texts and practices with which the Buddhists of his time and place had inherited from their Indian and Tibetan forebears.

While Tsongkhapa may not have been a *mahāsiddha* himself, his intellectual and pedagogical work was certainly accomplished. His success as a scholar was largely due to his ability to develop a coherent intellectual framework for a diverse array of traditions of philosophical inquiry, scriptural analysis, and practice. Like his forebear, Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub, his success as a systematizer is arguably one of his greatest achievements.⁷⁰ While his "system" was by no means flawless, devoid of oversights and inconsistencies, it was astounding in its breadth and convincing enough to serve as the basis for the Geluk tradition.

NOTES

1. To my knowledge, none of Tsongkhapa's biographies have been translated into Western languages. The best resources for the study of his biography remain Rudolf Kaschewsky's *Das Leben des Lamaistischen Heiligen Tsongkhapa Blo-bzañ-grags-pa (1357–1419). Dargestellt und erläutert anhand seiner Vita. Quellort allen Glückes*, 1 Teil, Asiatische Forschungen band 32 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974) and Robert A.F. Thurman's *Life & Teachings of Tsongkhapa* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1982), which contains a short biography related by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey on the basis of the standard biographies.
2. Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetans* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 121.
3. See Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), esp. 16–18, 506–515. Samuel notes Tsongkhapa's engagement in tantric and visionary practices (p. 507), and is careful to point out that his "shamanic" and "clerical" modes of Tibetan Buddhism are not mutually exclusive, with most Tibetan Buddhist lamas engaged in both to varying degrees (p. 20).
4. Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 373.
5. For a harrowing first-person account from a Tibetan Buddhist pilgrim who witnessed the destruction wrought in North India by the Turks during the mid-thirteenth century, see George N. Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvāmin (Chag lo-tsa-ba Chos-rje-dpal), a Tibetan Monk Pilgrim* (Patna: K.P. Jawaswal Research Institute, 1959).
6. Given the later rise of the Geluk school, many copies of his *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)* were eventually published. In writing this essay I made use of the scans of the sKu-'bum byams-pa-gling edition published by the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC), as noted below.
7. Here I read *tsa rim chen as tsa ri chen*.
8. The *gaṇacakra* or *tshogs 'khor* is a tantric rite sometimes translated as a "feast," as it involves making offerings of food, drink, etc. to the deities and guru, followed by the consumption of the consecrated offerings by the participants. Regarding this rite see Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 318–322.
9. The *gnang mchod*, which typically would involve an offering of consecrated beer.
10. My translation from the text at mKhas-grub-rje, *rje brtsun bla ma tsong kha*

pa chen po'i ngo mtshar rmad du byung ba'i rnam par thar pa dad pa'i jug ngogs (in the *rje gsung 'bum*, sKu-'bum byams-pa-gling ed., vol. ka, *rnam thar* 1a-74a; pp. 1-147. TBRC work no. W22272008, vol. serial no. 0673), fol. 36b.7-37a.3.

11. Regarding this site see Toni Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

12. Rudolf Kaschewsky, *Das Leben des Lamaistischen Heiligen Tsongkhapa Blo-bzañ-grags-pa (1357-1419), Dargestellt und erläutert anhand seiner Vita, Quellort allen Glückes*, 1 Teil, Asiatische Forschungen band 32 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), 130-131.

13. For a translation of Padma dKar-po's account see Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain*, 62-63.

14. *Ibid.*, 61.

15. A short perusal of Tsongkhapa's biographies indicates that he did have a number of significant visions of spiritual entities such as bodhisattvas and siddhas brought on by his intensive practice. See Kaschewsky, *Das Leben des Lamaistischen Heiligen Tsongkhapa Blo-bzañ-grags-pa*, 107-117, 130. See as well Thurman, *Life & Teachings of Tsongkhapa*, 16-22, for descriptions of his visions of various buddhas; bodhisattvas such as Maitreya, Mañjuśrī, and Vajrapāṇi; and the *mahāsiddhas* Nāropa and Tilopa.

16. See Thurman, *Life & Teachings of Tsongkhapa*, 17, 21-22.

17. I am in the process of finishing a complete translation of this work, which will be published in three volumes: a two-volume translation and a one-volume critical edition. The first volume of the translation is currently in press.

18. See Kaschewsky, *Das Leben des Lamaistischen Heiligen Tsongkhapa Blo-bzañ-grags-pa*, 329. Since Tsongkhapa lived for sixty-two years (1357-1419 CE), this event took place during the last year of his life, in 1418 or 1419 CE.

19. "Adamantine expressions" (*vajrapāda*) are the instances of symbolic speech found in the tantras, which require detailed explanation.

20. My translation from Tsongkhapa, *bde mchog bsdus pa'i rgyud kyi rgya cher bshad pa sbas pa'i don kun gsal ba* (in the *rje yab sras gsung 'bum*, bKra shis lhun po par rnying print. TBRC scan of a reprint from old bkra shis lhun po blocks, vol. nya, *sbas don* 1a-251b; pp. 415-916. TBRC work no. W29193, vol. no. 5130; Dharamsala: Sherig Parkhang, 1997), fol. 13b-14a. For an annotated translation see David Gray, *Tsongkhapa's Illumination of the Hidden Meaning: Maṇḍala, Mantra, and the Cult of the Yoginīs (An Annotated Translation of Chapters 1-24)* (New York: AIBS/CBS/THUS [Columbia University Press], forthcoming).

21. These are (1) the *Vimalaprabhāṭikā* commentary on the *Laghukālacakra-tantra*,

attributed to Puṇḍarīka; (2) the *Hevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā*, a commentary on the *Hevajra-tantra*, attributed to Vajragarbha; and (3) the *Laghutantraṭīkā*, a commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*, attributed to Vajrapāṇi. The latter two are commentaries written from the Kālacakra exegetical perspective by advocates of that tradition. Regarding the dating of these texts, see Claudio Cicuzza, *The Laghutantraṭīkā by Vajrapāṇi: A Critical Edition of the Sanskrit Text*, Serie Orientale Roma 86 (Roma: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 2001), 24–26. The *Vimalaprabhāṭīkā* has been edited in J. Upadhyāya, ed., *Vimalaprabhāṭīkā of Kalki Śrī Puṇḍarīka on Śrī Laghukālacakra-tantrarāja*, vol. 1 (Saranath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1986); and V. Dwivedi and S. S. Bahulakar, eds., *Vimalaprabhāṭīkā of Kalki Śrī Puṇḍarīka on Śrī Laghukālacakra-tantrarāja*, vol. 2 (Saranath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1994). The *Laghutantraṭīkā* has been edited in Cicuzza, *The Laghutantraṭīkā by Vajrapāṇi*. The *Hevajrapīṇḍārthaṭīkā* has been partially translated and edited in Francesco Sferra, “The Elucidation of True Reality: The Kālacakra Commentary by Vajragarbha on the *Tattvapaṭala* of the *Hevajratantra*,” in *As Long as Space Endures: Essays on the Kālacakra Tantra in Honor of H.H. The Dalai Lama*, ed. Edward A Arnold (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2009), 93–126.

22. My translation from the Sanskrit in Cicuzza, *The Laghutantraṭīkā by Vajrapāṇi*, 52, and the Tibetan at To. 1402, *sde-dge* rgyud ‘grel vol. ba, fol. 82b–83a.

23. My translation from the Sanskrit in Cicuzza, *The Laghutantraṭīkā by Vajrapāṇi*, 124, and the Tibetan at To. 1402, fol. 124b.

24. The development of the Tibetan canonical Kangyur and Tengyur collections originated in the cataloguing of textual collections at the great libraries at the Shalu and Nartang monasteries from the late thirteenth through mid-fourteenth centuries, shortly before Tsongkhapa was born. See Kurtis R. Schaeffer, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 12–14.

25. My translation from Tsongkhapa, *bde mchog bsdus pa’i rgyud kyi rgya cher bshad pa sbas pa’i don kun gsal ba*, fol. 14a.

26. Among other things, he also indicates that the guru should have attained the tenth bodhisattva stage. See Ghaṅṅāpa, *Śricakrasaṃvarapañcakrama* (To. 1433, D rgyud ‘grel vol. wa, 224b–227a), fol. 224b.6–225a.1.

27. My translation from Tsongkhapa, *bde mchog bsdus pa’i rgyud kyi rgya cher bshad pa sbas pa’i don kun gsal ba*, fol. 14a, 14b.

28. My translation from *ibid.*, fol. 14b.

29. My translation from *ibid.*, fol. 22a.

30. Sumatikīrti actually played a significant role in the dissemination of the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* in Tibet. He and two of his Tibetan disciples, Mal-gyo

Lo-tsā-ba bLo-gros-grags and Mar-pa Chos-kyi dbang-phyug (ca. 1043–1138 CE) were involved in the production of all three of the revised Tibetan translations of this scripture. For more information on these texts see David Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra: Editions of the Sanskrit and Tibetan Texts* (New York: AIBS/CBS/THUS [Columbia University Press], forthcoming). See also Emberto F. Lo Bue, “The Role of Newar Scholars in Transmitting the Indian Buddhist Heritage to Tibet (c. 750–c.1200),” in *Les habitants du toit du monde: Études recueillies en hommage à Alexander W. Macdonald*, ed. Samten G. Karmay and Philippe Sargant (Nanterre: Societé d’Ethnologie, 1997), 649.

31. Sumatikīrti, *Laghusamvaratantrapāṭalābhisandhi* (To. 1411, *sde dge rgyud ‘grel*, vol. ma, 352a–353a), 353a; this text is edited and translated in David Gray, *Tsongkhapa’s Illumination of the Hidden Meaning: Maṇḍala, Mantra, and the Cult of the Yoginīs (An Annotated Translation of Chapters 1–24)* (New York: AIBS/CBS/THUS [Columbia University Press], forthcoming).

32. I use the term “composed” to indicate that the text, like many Tibetan texts of this time period, were not “written” by the author, but rather compiled from notes taken by disciples of oral teachings. Tsongkhapa’s commentary was likely composed in this fashion, as we learn from the colophon of this work. For more information on how this work was composed see Gray, *Tsongkhapa’s Illumination of the Hidden Meaning*.

33. To my knowledge, the earliest Tibetan commentaries on the *Cakrasamvara* are Sa-chen’s *Pearl Garland* commentary (Sa-chen Kun-dga’ sNying-po, *dpal ‘khor lo bde mchog gi rtsa ba’i rgyud kyi ṭika mu tig phreng ba*, in *The Complete Works of the Great Masters of the Sa Skya Sect of the Tibetan Buddhism. Vol. 1. The Complete Works of Kun dga’ snying po*, comp. bSod nams rgya mtsho [Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 1968], 288.3–380.3) and a commentary by the translator Mar-pa Chos-kyi dbang-phyug, which Tsongkhapa quotes. While the latter work is probably several decades older, I am not aware of any surviving copies of it, so Sa-chen’s work may very well be the oldest extant Tibetan commentary, if not the first.

34. Sa-chen here reverses their normal roles; usually, Dārīka is identified as a king, and Deṅgi-pāda his minister. For example, see Tsongkhapa, *dpal ‘khor lo bde mchog rim pa lnga pa’i bshad pa sbas pa’i don lta ba’i mig rnam par ‘byed pa* (in the *rje gsung ‘bum*, sKu-‘bum byams-pa-gling ed., vol. tha, *mig ‘byed* 1a–37a; pp. 222–293. TBRC work no. W22272008, vol. serial no. 0682), fol. 2b.

35. Pham-thing-pa was a prominent Newari student of Nāropa, and Dus-‘khor-pa and Thang-chung-pa were his younger brothers. Bodhibhadra was a fellow disciple studying with Pham-thing-pa under Nāropa. Roerich erred in identifying him as Pham-thing-pa’s brother. See Lo Bue’s critique (“The Role of Newar Scholars,” 644) of George N. Roerich’s translation (*The Blue Annals*, 2nd ed. [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976], 382). He was most likely the

Kashmiri Paṇḍita Śrī Bhadra, who is said to be a disciple of Nāropa in gTsang-smyon Heruka's biography of Mar-pa Lho-brag-pa (Gtsan-smyon He-ru-ka, *The Life of Marpa the Translator*, trans. Nālandā Translation Committee [Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1982], 58).

36. I believe that the penultimate master, the “great guru translator” (*bla ma lo tsā ba chen po*), was Mal-gyo Lo-tsā-ba bLo-gros-grags, who had indeed studied with these masters in Nepal (see Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 382). The ultimate guru is almost certainly Sa-chen; here we see the voice of his disciple Puṅyavajra who wrote the text. Note that the birthplace given for Sa-chen is *la stod 'bro yul*. I read 'bro yul, the “land of the 'Bro,” as a variant of *grom* or *brom*, his actual birthplace; the 'Bro were a powerful clan in the *la stod* region of Western Tsang, where he was born; see Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 80–81. Regarding his life, see Cyrus Stearns, *Luminous Lives: The Story of the Early Masters of the Lam 'Bras Tradition in Tibet* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 133–157, and Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 293–303. Many thanks to Prof. Ronald Davidson for his assistance with the identification of figures mentioned in this passage.

37. Sa-chen Kun-dga'-snying-po, *dpal 'khor lo bde mchog gi rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi ṭika mu tig phreng ba*, 291.2.

38. As noted above, Tsongkhapa lectured on this subject during the last year of his life, ca. 1418–1419 CE. As we will see in Tsongkhapa's comments below, Sa-chen's commentary derived from his work with Mal Lotsāwa, dating to approximately 1130 CE. See Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 338.

39. His name occurs in the *Blue Annals* in the list of masters in the *Cakrasaṃvara* lineage received by Mar-pa Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug. In this source his name is listed as Manakaśrījñāna. See Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 385.

40. He was one of Nāropa's disciples. See *ibid.*, 384.

41. The label *pham-thing-pa* is not a proper name, but a title meaning “the one from Pharping,” an important Buddhist pilgrimage site at the southern edge of the Kathmandu Valley. It is sometimes used as a name for one of the brothers, and sometimes used to refer to the brothers in general. Regarding this see Lo Bue, “The Role of Newar Scholars,” 643–652.

42. *Mar-do* is a nickname for Mar-pa Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug, who was also known as Mar-pa Do-pa.

43. According to the *Blue Annals*, Dharmamati was the eldest of the Pham-thing-pa brothers. He studied under Nāropa for twelve years, and then went on pilgrimage to Mt. Wu-tai in China. His remains are reported to be enshrined near mChod-rten-dkar-po on the Sino-Tibetan border. See Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 381.

44. Some sources link the name Abhayakīrti with the older brother, a.k.a.

Dharmamati, and connect the younger “Pham-thing-pa” with the name Vāgīśvarakīrti. See Lo Bue, “The Role of Newar Scholars,” 644.

45. His name is usually given as Thang-chung-pa. See Lo Bue, “The Role of Newar Scholars,” 644, and Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 381.

46. Regarding Kanakaśrī see Lo Bue, “The Role of Newar Scholars,” 652–653.

47. The Newar Bhadanta (misspelled in Tsongkhapa’s text as *ba-dan-ta*) was, according to gZhon-nu-dpal, a servant to Pham-ting-pa’s younger brother Thang-chung-pa, who was instructed by Pham-ting-pa to meditate on Vāgīśvara. He did this and afterwards threw a flower into a stream as a test of his attainment. He did so thrice, and all three times it flowed upstream. He only noticed this, however, on the last throw, and hence attained only middling success. His servant, however, drank of the water downstream, and hence gained the success that his master failed to acquire (Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 381). Tsongkhapa’s identification of the Newar Bhadanta with Kanakaśrī appears to be incorrect. He evidently was an Indian from Magadha who studied at Vikramaśīla and was a student of Nāropa. See Lo Bue, “The Role of Newar Scholars,” 652.

48. This seems likely to be a Newar Buddhist figure of this name. There was also a well-known Kashmiri of this name who assisted with the translation of texts in the Cakrasaṃvara tradition, but he studied with Nāropa himself. See Lo Bue, “The Role of Newar Scholars,” 649.

49. That is, the great Sa-skya master Sa-chen Kun-dga’-snying-po (1092–1158).

50. This would be the *Mar do lo tsa ba chos kyi dbang phyug gi bde mchog rtsa rgyud kyi bsdu don dang tikka rgyas pa*. This is text no. 12165 in A-khu-ching Shes-rab-rgya-mtsho’s *tho yig*, a catalogue of texts available at Labrang Monastery during the early twentieth century, published in Lokesh Chandra, *Materials for a History of Tibetan Literature*, 3 vols., Śata-Piṭaka series, Indo-Asian literatures, v. 28–30 (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1963). Unfortunately, this text does not seem to have come to light yet. Many thanks to Gene Smith for bringing this text to my attention.

51. Tsongkhapa here reads *gze ba bde mchog rdo rje*, which I read as a reference to two people, namely Mar-do’s disciple gZe-ba-blo-ldan, who is usually known as gZe-ba. gZe-ba’s son, to whom he transmitted the Cakrasaṃvara teachings, was bDe-mchog-rdo-rje. See Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 384–385.

52. Regarding Cog-ro Chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan (1108–1176), see Roerich, “The Role of Newar Scholars,” 386–387.

53. That is, his teacher Yon-tan-rgya-mtsho, also known as Kun-mkhyen ‘phags-pa-‘od.

54. Tsongkhapa here uses the title *lo-chung*, “The Lesser Translator,” in reference to Mar-pa Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug.

55. This refers to Chos-dpal-bzang-po, also known as Gong-gsum-bde-chen-pa. He was a disciple of Bu-ston who in turn taught Tsongkhapa.
56. Lobsang P. Lhalungpa, trans., *The Life of Milarepa: A New Translation from the Tibetan* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1992), back cover. His fame, one should note, spread rapidly; Milarepa was already renowned “as the most famous holy man in Tibet” by the mid-fourteenth century (Schaeffer, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet*, 55), and Tsongkhapa was certainly aware of this, given the patronage he received in Lhasa from the Phakmodrūpa Kagyü leader Drakpa Gyeltsen (Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, 120).
57. Tsongkhapa was well aware of Mar-pa Chos-kyi-blo-gros’s contributions; see, for example, his writing on the subject of the so-called “six yogas of Nāropa,” translated in Glenn H. Mullin, *Tsongkhapa’s Six Yogas of Naropa* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1996).
58. The brief self-aggrandizing passages found in the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*, at the ends of chapters 3, 27, and 30, are quite typical, and are found in many tantras. They are quite tame compared to the extended self-extolling passages found throughout Mahāyāna sūtras such as the *Lotus Sūtra*. See, for example, chaps. 17–19 of that scripture, translated in Leon Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sūtra)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 245–278.
59. Translated in David B. Gray, *The Cakrasaṃvara Tantra (The Discourse of Śrī Heruka): A Study and Annotated Translation* (New York: AIBS/CBS/THUS [Columbia University Press], 2007), 381–382.
60. For a discussion of this passage see *ibid.*, 382n28.
61. See Sa-chen Kun-dga’ sNying-po, *dpal ’khor lo bde mchog gi rtsa ba’i rgyud kyi ſika mu tig phreng ba*, 289.2.
62. *Ibid.*, 289.3–4.
63. For a discussion the formation of Tibetan tantric doxography see Jacob Dalton, “A Crisis of Doxography: How Tibetans Organized Tantra During the 8th–12th Centuries,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 115–181.
64. My translation from the following passage in Kambala’s *Śrīherukābhīdhāna-sādhananidhi-pañjikā* (*Herukāvidhāna* [National Archives of Nepal, ms. no. 4-122, *baudhdhātāntra* 87. Mf. B31/20, Moriguchi #610. 73 palm leaves, Newari script]), fol. 38b.7: *sāmānya sarvatantrāṅṅam iti | kriyācaryāyogayogottarāḍḍisu / mahāyoginītantrasaṃbhāva kriyātulya yogena*.
65. The canonical translation reads as follows: *rgyud kun gyi ni thun mong du / zhes bya ba ni bya ba dang spyod pa dang rnal ’byor dang rnal ’byor ma rnams dang / rnal ’byor bla ma’i rgyud chen po’i rang bzhin du bya ba’i sbyor ba dang mtshungs pa ma yin no* / (fol. 40b). Sa-chen, apparently relying on another translation,

or perhaps producing an impromptu translation with Mal Lotsāwa, quotes the text as follows: *bya ba dang / spyod pa dang / rnal 'byor dang / rnal 'byor ma rnams dang / rnal 'byor ma'i rgyud chen po bya ba dang / sbyor bas lhan cig mnyam par gyur par byed pa'o* / (Sa-chen Kun-dga' sNying-po, *dpal 'khor lo bde mchog gi rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi tika mu tig phreng ba*, 289.4).

66. He does so in his *Great Stages of the Mantra* or *sngags rim chen mo* (*rgyal ba khyab bdag rdo rje 'chang chen po'i lam gyi rim pa gsang ba kun gyi gnad rnam par phye ba*, in the *rje gsung 'bum*, sKu-'bum byams-pa-gling ed., vol. ga, 1-497a; pp. 1-993. TBRC work no. W22272008, vol. serial no. 0675).

67. Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra (The Discourse of Śrī Heruka)*, 176-177.

68. Sa-chen Kun-dga' sNying-po. *dpal 'khor lo bde mchog gi rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi tika mu tig phreng ba*, 308.1.

69. My translation from Tsongkhapa, *bde mchog bsdus pa'i rgyud kyi rgya cher bshad pa sbas pa'i don kun gsal ba*, fol. 63a. For an annotated translation see Gray, *Tsongkhapa's Illumination of the Hidden Meaning*.

70. Regarding this see Robert A.F. Thurman, "Tsoñ-kha-pa's Integration of Sūtra and Tantra," in *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization. Proceedings of the 1982 Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies Held at Columbia University*, ed. Barbara Nimri Aziz and Matthew Kapstein (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985), 373-382.