Death Ritual Polemics: Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa on the Funerary Practices of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra*

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The *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra* (SDP) has informed Tibetan Buddhist funerary practices since it was first translated into Tibetan in the late eighth century. One of its most influential interpreters was the Sa skya pa hierarch Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147–1216), whose *Light Rays for the Benefit of Others: The Rituals of Sarvavid* offers detailed instructions for performing the SDP's rites. *Light Rays* became a source of contention for some later scholars, most notably the prolific Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1375/6–1451) and the Sa skya pa luminary Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge (1429–89). Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana* is highly critical of *Light Rays*, while Go rams pa's *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* defends *Light Rays* against Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques. This article considers the context of this dispute before examining three of the topics discussed: the necessity of purifying the site of the ritual, visualization practices associated with the object representing the deceased, and the relationship between the SDP's framing narratives and the rituals that free the dead from bad rebirths. It also reflects on the relevance of these two works for understanding ritual polemics as a form of Tibetan polemical writing.

Keywords: Tibetan Buddhism, Tantric Buddhism, ritual, death, funerary rites, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra*, Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan, Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal, polemics

ABBREVIATIONS

SDP = *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra*

A = *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa*, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Sde dge par phud), vol. 85 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1976–79), 116–91.

B = *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa*, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), vol. 85 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9), 164–274.

C = Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*, in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge), vol. 9 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993), 1–117.

D = Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer, in Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma), vol. 4 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007), 366–483.

E = Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer* (cursive manuscript scanned from microfilm in Nagar, U.P. in 2006, s.l.: s.n., n.d.).

F = Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*, in *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*, vol. 15 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015), 1–111.

S = Grags pa rgyal mtshan*, Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa,* in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge), vol. 7 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993), 453–68.

T = Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa,* in *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma), vol. 2 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007), 567–83.

U = Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa,* in S*a skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*, vol. 13 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015), 432–46.

V = Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad pa*, in *Encyclopedia Tibetica,* vol. 55 (Delhi: Tibet House, 1972), 139–227.

W = Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad pa*, in *Bo dong Paṇ chen gyi gsung 'bum chen mo,* vol. 42 (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2014), 120–207.

X = Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga lag tu blang ba'i rim pa gzhan phan 'od zer la rtsod pa spong ba gzhan phan gnod 'joms*, in *Gsung 'bum: Bsod nams seng ge* (Sde dge), vol. 10 (Dehradun: Sa skya College, 1979), 415–69.

Y = Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga lag tu blang ba'i rim pa gzhan phan 'od zer la rtsod pa spong ba gzhan phan gnod 'joms*, in *Gsung 'bum: Bsod nams seng ge,* vol. 10 (Sde dge rdzong: Rdzong sar khams bye'i slob gling, 2004), 479–549.

Z = *Dkyil 'khor spyi'i cho ga gsang ba'i rgyud*, in *Bka' 'gyur: Dpe bsdur ma,* vol. 96 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9), 509–82.

How does one best perform a funeral? For obvious and morbid reasons, this question never becomes irrelevant. And while ways of expressing our care for the deceased and our grieving selves evolve, funerals remain unfading fixtures of communal life. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that in the rich literary debate culture of Buddhist Tibet, death rites have received considerable attention. One thorough exchange on this topic involved two major figures in the history of Tibetan Buddhism: the prolific Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1375/6–1451) and the Sa skya pa luminary Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge (1429–89). Both of these authors produced multiple works on the rituals of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra* (SDP)—a tantric Buddhist work that had informed Tibetan funerary practices since the late eighth century—and their investment in these rites was made plain by their polemical writings on its contents. Bo dong Paṇ chen's most combative effort was his *Definitive Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana*,[1] which regularly cites and criticizes the Sa skya master Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan's (1147–1216) *Light Rays for the Benefit of Others: The Rituals of Sarvavid*,[2] an influential manual offering a com-

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1. Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad pa*, in *Encyclopedia Tibetica,* vol. 55 (Delhi: Tibet House, 1972), 139–227 (hereafter cited as *V*). Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad pa*, in *Bo dong Paṇ chen gyi gsung 'bum chen mo,* vol. 42 (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2014), 120–207 (hereafter cited as *W*).

2. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*, in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge), vol. 9 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993) (hereafter cited as *C*). Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*, in *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma), vol. 4 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang,

plete ritual system for rescuing the dead from bad rebirths. Bo dong Paṇ chen's objections were soon met by Go rams pa, one of the Sa skya tradition's most prominent authors, who devoted an entire text to the task, which he titled *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*.[3]

This article explores the context[4] of this exchange and the social forces that shaped it. It examines three of the many topics discussed: the necessity of the site ritual, the visualization of the ritual support, and the relationship between the SDP's framing narratives and the rescue of the dead from lower rebirths. Finally, it reflects on certain functions and features of Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa's texts as they pertain to our understanding of ritual polemics as a form of Tibetan polemical writing.

2007), 366–483 (hereafter cited as *D*). Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer* (cursive manuscript scanned from microfilm in Nagar, U.P. in 2006, s.l.: s.n., n.d.) (hereafter cited as *E*). Notice that the Buddhist Digital Resource Center gives the cursive manuscript the incorrect title *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi mngon rtogs* for this version. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*, in *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*, vol. 15 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015), 1–111 (hereafter cited as *F*).

3. Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga lag tu blang ba'i rim pa gzhan phan 'od zer la rtsod pa spong ba gzhan phan gnod 'joms*, in *Gsung 'bum: Bsod nams seng ge* (Sde dge), vol. 10 (Dehradun: Sa skya College, 1979), 415–69 (hereafter cited as *X*). Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga lag tu blang ba'i rim pa gzhan phan 'od zer la rtsod pa spong ba gzhan phan gnod 'joms*, in *Gsung 'bum: Bsod nams seng ge*, vol. 10 (Sde dge rdzong: Rdzong sar khams bye'i slob gling, 2004), 479–549 (hereafter cited as *Y*).

4. Our source materials for contextualizing these figures are largely biographical efforts that reflect how Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa were remembered and represented by their disciples and successors in works adhering to the conventions of saintly life-writing. It goes without saying that these works are not documentary windows into the past, but rather persuasive efforts that reflect the world in which they were produced, while also working to frame their protagonists as flawless exemplars of realization.

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

Bo dong Paṇ chen: Dreams, Debates, and Innovations

Let us begin by contextualizing Bo dong Paṇ chen's text. In his biography of Bo dong Paṇ chen, 'Jigs med 'bangs[5] tells the story of his teacher receiving an invitation to visit Mkhar stengs Monastery in Glo, which is located in present-day Mustang, Nepal. At that time, many people were engaged in meditation in the area, and one of them had a dream in which he heard a knock at the door. A voice on the other side said, "Since an incarnation of the Lord Mañjughoṣa will come here to teach the doctrine tomorrow night, leave your retreat and listen to his teaching!"[6] After waking and thinking this was only a dream, this meditator thought that such fortune would never come to him, but he nevertheless considered it a sign of progress. The next morning, however, someone actually came to his door and said, "Tonight the great lord of religion [Bo dong Paṇ chen] will arrive, and tomorrow morning he will give the initiations of Sarvavid Vairocana along with teachings on cultivating the resolve to become awakened. There is no chance that we will meet such a lama again. You had better leave your retreat!

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5. 'Jigs med 'bangs's full name in religion was Amoghasiddhi 'Jigs med 'bangs, though the Kathmandu edition of *Feast of Miracles* identifies him as Dkon mchog 'bangs. The *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* reports that he was a lord of Yar 'brog living in Sna dkar rtse, and that he belonged to the ruling family that supported Bo dong Paṇ chen. See Hildegard Diemberger, Pasang Wangdu, Marlies Kornfeld, and Christian Jahoda, *Feast of Miracles: The Life and the Tradition of Bodong Chole Namgyal (1375/6–1451 A.D.) according to the Tibetan Texts "Feast of Miracles" and "The Lamp Illuminating the History of Bodong"* (Clusone: Porong Pema Chöding Editions, 1997), 13.

6. *sang nub 'dir rje btsun 'jam pa'i dbyangs kyi sprul pa cig chos gsung du 'byon pa yod pas/ khyed rang 'tshams thon la nyan du shog zer/. 'Jigs med 'bangs, Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa thams cad mkhyen pa phyogs thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba'i zabs kyi rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, in *Gsung 'bum: Phyogs las rnam rgyal*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Tibet House, 1981), 401. Cf. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 78.

Other practitioners should do the same!"[7] He was delighted that he had this chance and felt that his dream was coming true.[8]

Bo dong Paṇ chen is here remembered as having actively disseminated the traditions of Sarvavid Vairocana—the principal deity of the SDP—and no less as an incarnation of Mañjuśrī. Like many scholars of his time, he had more than just a passing interest in the rituals of Sarvavid, as evidenced by his multiple contributions to their exegesis.[9] Yet he also seems to have held a deep interest in almost *all* topics of Buddhist learning: his collected works fill 137 volumes,[10] treating subjects including divination, Sanskrit grammar, poetics, epistemology, Madhyamaka, and tantra, though some of these are simply versions of canonical texts and not his own original writings.[11]

Bo dong Paṇ chen was born into a family of scholar-translators from Zur tsho, a semi-nomadic area of Southern La stod.[12] His maternal uncle was the translator Lo chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1352–1405), who himself is said to have had studied under his own maternal uncle, the translator Lo chen Byang chub rtse mo (1315–1394). Byang chub

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7. *do nub chos rje chos rgyal bas phebs nas sang snga dro kun rig gi dbang dang sems skyed tshogs chos su gnang ba yod pas/ yang yang 'di 'dra ba'i bla ma dang 'u cag 'jal dogs med 'tshams gsengs cig sgrub pa po gzhan rnams kyang gseng ba yod zer/.* 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 402. Cf. Diemberger et al., 78.

8. Ibid.

9. These are (1) *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga rgyud don gsal ba*, (2) *Gtsug tor dgu ba'i dkyil 'khor chen po'i cho ga btsan bcos lugs*, (3) *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad pa*, (4) *Ngan 'gro thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i de bzhin gshegs pa'i rigs kyi gtsug tor rnam par rgyal ma'i mngon rtogs*, (5) *Ngan song sbyong ba bshad pa'i rgyud kyi gtsug tor dgu ba'i dkyil chog rnam nges*, (6) *Ngan song sbyong ba'i gtsug tor rnam par rgyal ma'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*, (7) *Ngan song sbyong ba'i rgyud brtag pa phyogs gcig pa bshad pa*, (8) *Ngan song sbyong ba'i rgyud brtag pa phyogs gcig pa gtsug dgur grags pa'i man ngag*, (9) *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi brtag pa phyogs gcig pa'i rgyud bshad pa*, (10) *Ngan song yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyud brtag pa gnyis pa*, (11) *Ngan song yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyud brtag pa phyogs gcig pa bshad pa*.

10. This collection was condensed to ninety-five volumes in the 2014 edition.

11. E. Gene Smith observes that this collection preserves some of the translations of canonical texts that Bu ston had purged from his version of the canon. See E. Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 183.

12. Hildegard Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty: The Samding Dorje Phagmo of Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 45.

rtse mo, moreover, was the nephew of the great translator Dpang[13] Lo tsā ba Blo gros brtan pa (1276–1342),[14] who studied Sanskrit in Nepal and translated works including the *Kalāpa sūtra*, a text on Sanskrit grammar. Dpang Lo tsā ba also served as the abbot of Bo dong E for a time.[15] On the paternal side, Bo dong Paṇ chen was a descendant of the family of the famous female master Ma gcig Zha ma (1062–1149), who was an important figure in the early history of the Lam 'bras tradition in Tibet, having received instructions together with her brother Khum bu ba Chos rgyal (1069–1144) from Se ston Kun rig (1025–1122), who himself had received them from 'Brog mi Lo tsā ba Shākya ye shes (ca. 993–1077).[16] Both 'Brog mi Lo tsā ba and Se ston Kun rig were critical to the early development of the Sa skya school, the former having taught 'Khon Dkon mchog rgyal po (Grags pa rgyal mtshan's grandfather),[17] and the latter and his disciple Zhang ston Chos 'bar (1053–1135) having taught Sa chen Kun dga' snying po (Grags pa rgyal mtshan's father).[18]

Connections with the Sa skya tradition continued throughout Bo dong Paṇ chen's life. When he took full ordination with his uncle Lo chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan, the Sa skya pa scholar Red mda' ba Gzhon nu blo gros (1349–1413) acted as the master of ceremonies. Yet his relations with Sa skya pas were not always amicable. 'Jigs med 'bangs describes an encounter between Bo dong Paṇ chen and a group of Sa skya pa elites from Northern La stod in which they publicly challenge Bo dong Paṇ chen for doubting the coherence of Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Treasury of Reasoning*[19] and its autocommentary;[20] Bo dong Paṇ chen quashes their objections.[21] 'Jigs med 'bangs also details an alleged rivalry between Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa's teacher Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367–1449), framing Rong ston, an important Sa skya pa figure, in decidedly unflattering terms. On one occasion, Rong ston

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13. Sometimes rendered Spang.

14. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 45–46.

15. Ibid., 21–22.

16. Cyrus Stearns, *Luminous Lives: The Story of the Early Masters of the Lam 'bras in Tibet* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 59–60.

17. Ibid., 103.

18. Ibid., 60–63.

19. Tib. *Tshad ma rigs gter*.

20. Tib. *Tshad ma rigs gter rang 'grel*.

21. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 67–68.

and a retinue of disciples were invited to Ngam ring of Byang[22] by its famous ruler[23] Rnam rgyal grags pa bzang po, a patron of Bo dong Paṇ chen and an accomplished scholar in his own right.[24] When Rnam rgyal grags bzang praised Bo dong Paṇ chen's learning, it apparently so irritated Rong ston that he struck the ground and shouted, "He does not know anything except a little bit of poetry. In terms of grasping the Buddhist teachings, he has not excelled at all. This is certain!"[25] Given Rnam rgyal grags bzang's faith in Bo dong Paṇ chen, this outburst is said to have hobbled Rong ston's prospects of cultivating a patron-priest relationship with him, and while Rong ston was permitted to stay in the area, he failed to obtain much status there.[26]

'Jigs med 'bangs reports that when Rong ston gave public teachings following this incident, he would sometimes criticize Bo dong Paṇ chen, which prompted Rnam rgyal grags bzang to arrange a debate between the two scholars. Here again 'Jigs med 'bangs frames Rong ston as short-tempered. The day before the meeting, Rong ston asked Rnam rgyal grags bzang, "How many *maṇḍalas* does your master agree to discuss?"[27] The ruler sent someone to ask Bo dong Paṇ chen, who jokingly replied, "I agree to ten thousand *maṇḍalas*." Concerned that Rong ston would be annoyed and refuse the meeting altogether, Rnam rgyal grags bzang halved the number, saying, "He agrees to five thousand *maṇḍalas*,"[28] but Rong ston still became agitated and struck the

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22. Ngam ring of Byang was the capital of Northern La stod, which had been an important religious and political site since the time of Chos rgyal 'Phags pa (1235–80). This is also the place where Go rams pa would later pen *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*, for more on which, see below.

23. Tib. *sa spyod*.

24. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 127. For more on this figure, see Cyrus Stearns, "Namgyel Drakpa Zangpo," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed October 19, 2017, http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Namgyel-Drakpa-Zangpo-/6278.

25. *khos snyan ngag pir pir cig min pa ci yang mi shes/ gsung rab kyi don len pa la thal ba spar gang yang med phob phob yin gsung bar gyur cing /.* 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 304. Cf. Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 69.

26. Ibid.

27. *nyid kyi mgon pos dkyil 'khor ji tsam gyis/.* 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 315. Cf. Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 70.

28. *phyed du phri ste lnga stong tsam zhal gyis bzhes pa 'dug go/.* 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 316. Cf. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 70.

ground, shouting, "Since such a large number of *maṇḍalas* have not appeared in Tibet, what kind of traditions are these?!"[29]

Feast of Miracles declares that when the two scholars finally met, Bo dong Paṇ chen repeatedly exposed Rong ston's misunderstandings. At one point, Bo dong Paṇ chen asked him if he had, in fact, criticized the famed Indian Mādhyamika Candrakīrti. Rong ston confirmed this, arguing that Candrakīrti's texts were riddled with contradictions. After Rong ston produced an example, Bo dong Paṇ chen demonstrated that he had simply misunderstood Candrakīrti's statement.[30] Bo dong Paṇ chen is also said to have embarrassed one of Rong ston's disciples Dge ba rgyal mtshan (1387–1462),[31] who was renowned for his knowledge of Buddhist logic and epistemology, chastising him for not being able to read the Sanskrit original of Dharmakīrti's *Nyāyabindu*.[32] In the end, Rong ston is said to have been awed by Bo dong Paṇ chen's learning, and he later told his students that whenever he posed a question to this great master, the answer would come like endless falling rain.[33]

It is no surprise that *Feast of Miracles* paints its protagonist as flawless, for it would be extraordinary for 'Jigs med 'bangs to disparage his own teacher. While such accounts cannot be taken at face value, they highlight tensions that appear to have emerged between Bo dong Paṇ chen and Rong ston's circles. David Jackson argues that Rong ston and his guru G.yag ston Sangs rgyas dpal (1350–1414) represented "the main doctrinal alternative to the tradition of Tsong kha pa and his teacher Red mda' ba,"[34] while E. Gene Smith observes that Bo dong Paṇ chen's closest intellectual counterparts were Tsong kha pa and Mkhas

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29. *de ni gsan par gyur pa tsam gyis kun tu rig pa de thugs ma rangs par sku sa la rdebs pa dang / lhan cig tu de tsam bod du ma 'gyur nas/ lugs de dag gang 'dra cig yin zhes/.* 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 316–17. Cf. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 70.

30. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 71.

31. His longer name, Rig pa'i dbang phyug Dge ba rgyal mtshan, means "The Lord of Reasoning, Dge ba rgyal mtshan."

32. 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 329. Cf. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 71.

33. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 71–72.

34. David P. Jackson, *The Early Abbots of 'Phan-po Na-lendra: The Vicissitudes of a Great Tibetan Monastery in the 15th Century* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, 1989), 6.

grub rje Dge legs dpal bzang (1385–1438).[35] 'Jigs med 'bangs's biography certainly supports such a divide, and so too does Shākya mchog ldan's (1428–1507) biography of Rong ston, which offers a different take on how Rong ston fared against Bo dong Paṇ chen:

> At that time, he went on an academic tour of the great monastic centers including Sa skya, Bo dong E, Bzang ldan, Ngam ring, Snar thang, and Gnas rnying and so forth. Since he outshone everyone by debating with respondents, he became known as the Great Bull of Debate, and at that time was given the name Rong ston, the Lion of Speech.[36]

Notice here the mention of Bo dong E and Ngam ring, the latter being the site of Rong ston's alleged defeat. Shākya mchog ldan makes no mention of a loss at the hands of Bo dong Paṇ chen, reporting only victories.

Later, Shākya mchog ldan narrates Rong ston's purported triumphs in greater detail, describing a meeting between Rong ston and Tsong kha pa in Lha sa, during which they debated the stages of the path according to the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra.* Tsong kha pa is purported to have lost, but also to have gracefully accepted this defeat by offering Rong ston a roll of cloth.[37] Interestingly, Shākya mchog ldan also refers to a contest between Rong ston and Bo dong Paṇ chen:

> The lord himself said that when he debated on the topic of Madhyamaka with Bo dong Paṇ chen at Mngon dga'[38] Monastery in Yar 'brog, since Bo dong Paṇ chen had to concede that both the indirect truth called conventional truth and the indirect truth called ultimate truth are synonymous, his confidence was deflated.[39]

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35. Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 180–81.

36. *de'i tshe gdan sa chen po sa skya dang / bo dong e dang / bzang ldan dang / ngan ring dang / snar thang dang / gnas rnying la sogs pa'i gra sa chen po rnams su grwa skor la byon te/ lan 'debs pa po rnams rtsod pas zil gyis gnon pas rtsod pa'i khyu mchog tu grags shing / de'i tshe rong ston smra ba'i seng ge zhes pa'i mtshan gsol ba thob cing /.* Shākya mchog ldan, *Rje btsun thams cad mkhyen pa'i bshes gnyen shākya rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i zhal snga nas kyi rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar dad pa'i rol mtsho* (Sde dge: Sde dge par khang chen mo, n.d.), 15b.

37. Shākya mchog ldan, *Ngo mtshar dad pa'i rol mtsho*, 21b. Cf. David P. Jackson, *Rong ston on the Prajñāpāramitā Philosophy of the Abhisamayālaṃkāra: His Subcommentary on Haribhadra's 'Sphuṭārtha'* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1988), V.

38. This must be Mngon dga' chos sde, a Bo dong pa center founded in 1350.

39. *yar 'brog gi mngon dgar/ bo dong pa paṇ chen chos rgyal pa dang / dbu ma'i rtsod pa mdzad pas/ bo dong pas kun rdzob bden pa zhes pa'i tshig zur gyi bden pa dang*

As with 'Jigs med 'bangs's testimony, the subject under debate is Madhyamaka, but in this account—which Shākya mchog ldan attributes to Rong ston himself—Bo dong Paṇ chen is defeated. Note also that this encounter is set at Yar 'brog rather than Ngam ring, leading us to wonder whether 'Jigs med 'bangs and Shākya mchog ldan might be narrating separate incidents.

There is of course much more to Bo dong Paṇ chen's story than these disputes. Hildegard Diemberger's fascinating study of Chos kyi sgron ma (1422–55)—a female adept whom Bo dong Paṇ chen recognized as the embodiment of Vajravārāhī and whose reincarnation line continues today—provides a fuller sense of his activities and innovations. Chos kyi sgron ma originally self-identified as a Sa skya pa, which Diemberger notes is unsurprising given the Sa skya tradition's prominence in her native region of Mang yul-Gung thang during this time, and also because her paternal grandmother was ordained as a nun at a Sa skya institution.[40] Yet when she became a disciple of Bo dong Paṇ chen, she dropped her Sa skya affiliations and converted to the emerging Bo dong tradition.

Reading Chos kyi sgron ma's biography, we learn of her and Bo dong Paṇ chen's efforts to establish a tradition of full monastic ordination for women in Tibet, to revitalize nunneries, and to develop sacred dance practices for female practitioners.[41] She herself was fully ordained under Bo dong Paṇ chen, though questions remain about the doctrinal basis of this undertaking.[42] While full ordination for women did not ultimately survive in the Bo dong (or any) lineage, such endeavors were remarkably progressive for the time, underscoring Bo dong Paṇ chen's more inclusive approach to Buddhist leadership.

The biographies of Bo dong Paṇ chen and Chos kyi sgron ma also describe his death and the funerary rites that followed. Hurrying to his bedside after receiving news that he was sick, Chos kyi sgron ma asked him to remain in the world, but he was too ill to fulfill her wish.[43] She stayed with him until he died, after which she—together with Kun

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/ *don dam bden pa zhes pa'i tshig zur gyi bden pa'i tshig gnyis po/ don gcig la 'du bar khas len dgos pa byung bas/ spobs pa bcom pa yin no zhes rje nyid gsung ngo /.* Shākya mchog ldan, *Ngo mtshar dad pa'i rol mtsho,* 21b–22a.

40. Diemberger, *Religious Dynasty,* 131.

41. Ibid., 109.

42. Ibid., 133.

43. Ibid., 196.

dga' rgyal mtshan, who was the abbot of Glang 'khor Monastery, and a prominent disciple named Rgyal mtshan dkon mchog—oversaw his last rites.[44] 'Jigs med 'bangs notes that when they were cremating Bo dong Paṇ chen's body, his head was particularly difficult to ignite—evidence, apparently, of his greatness.[45] After the cremation, his remains were gathered and mixed with earth in order to make ten thousand small icons that were widely distributed, and a great reliquary was also constructed.[46] While the specific funerary traditions are not specified in either biography, the indication that Chos kyi sgron ma oversaw these rituals is striking in itself, testifying again to the Bo dong tradition's remarkable inclusivity during this period.

Go rams pa: Dreams, Polemics, and Patronage

A number of Go rams pa's biographies report that on the day he began writing his polemic against Bo dong Paṇ chen,[47] he had a dream. In Kong ston Dbang phyug grub pa's account, while Go rams pa was residing at Ngam ring, the site where his teacher Rong ston is said to have lost in debate to Bo dong Paṇ chen, he dreamed of another of his teachers, Mus chen Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan (1388–1469), who was seated on a large throne amid pristine rivers on an alpine plain.[48] Speaking with a raised voice, Mus chen declared, "Currently in Tibet, the Land of Snows, there is no one more expert in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra* than I!"[49] He was rearranging his text as he taught. He had not previously presented himself in this way, so Go rams pa wondered what

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44. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 88.

45. Ibid.

46. Diemberger, *Religious Dynasty*, 197.

47. The colophon of *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* indicates that he completed this work at Ngam ring in 1466 (*me pho khyi'i lo*). He would have been thirty-seven years old at the time. *X*, 469. *Y*, 549.

48. Tib. *ne'u gsing/ne gseng.*

49. *da lta bod gangs can na sbyong rgyud la nga las mkhas pa med gsung.* Kong ston Dbang phyug grub pa, *Rje bla ma'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rin po che'i phreng ba* (Delhi: T. G. Dhongthog, 1973), 39–40. Kong ston Dbang phyug grub pa, *Rje bla ma'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rin po che'i phreng ba*, in *Sa skya'i bla ma 'ga' yi rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 1 (E. Gene Smith's Green Books) (s.l.: s.n., n.d.), 10. Cf. Ngawang Jorden, "Buddha-nature: Through the Eyes of Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge in Fifteenth-Century Tibet" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2003), 205.

he was saying. He listened attentively to Mus chen and gained clarity on some points he had failed to understand before. But after waking up and performing his daily rituals, he forgot what Mus chen had said. He nevertheless reported that Mus chen's text had been a good one.[50]

Another of Go rams pa's disciples, Rje btsun Sangs rgyas rin chen, recounts this dream differently. He writes that Go rams pa dreamed of encountering many monks building a throne, here again on a mountain plain. Go rams pa asked whose throne they were building, and they replied that it was Mus chen's, who would be giving teachings on the SDP. Go rams pa joined in their efforts, and when Mus chen arrived and taught, Go rams pa listened carefully, recorded what he had heard on a sheet of paper after he woke up, and included Mus chen's insights in *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*.[51] Interestingly, the prominent Sa skya pa scholar Glo bo Mkhan chen Bsod nams lhun grub (1456–1532) provides a nearly identical account of the dream, though he adds that Go rams pa himself references this experience in *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*: "At the end of the composition itself, Go rams pa also writes, 'In a dream I saw the logical indication and observable quality on a mountain peak.'"[52] Here Glo bo Mkhan chen quotes a line from the concluding verses of Go rams pa's text, which reads a little

50. Kong ston, *Rin po che'i phreng ba* (Dhongthog), 40. Kong ston, *Rin po che'i phreng ba* (Green Books), 10. Cf. Jorden, "Buddha-nature," 206.

51. Note that Kong ston and Rje btsun Sangs rgyas rin chen refer to *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* (*Gzhan phan gnod 'joms*) using variations of an alternate abbreviated title. Kong ston refers to it as *Eliminating Objections to Light Rays for the Benefit of Others* (*Gzhan phan 'od zer gyi rtsod spong*), whereas Rje btsun Sangs rgyas rin chen calls it *Eliminating Objections to [Light Rays for the Benefit of Others: the Rituals of] Sarvavid* (*Kun rig rtsod spongs*). See Kong ston, *Rin po che'i phreng ba* (Green Books), 10, and Kong ston, *Rin po che'i phreng ba* (Dhongthog), 40. Cf. Jorden, "Buddha-nature," 206. *A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, Kun mkhyen bsod nams seng ge'i rnam par thar pa dad pa rgya mtsho'i rlabs phreng rnam par g.yo ba las/ Rje btsun Sangs rgyas rin chen gyis mdzad pa'i rnam thar*, in *Gsung 'bum: Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams,* vol. 29 (Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang, 2000), 14.

52. *brtsoms pa nyid kyi mjug tu/ rmi lam ri rtser rtags kyi mtshan ma mthong // zhes pa yang bris so/. A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, Kun mkhyen bsod nams seng ge'i rnam par thar pa dad pa rgya mtsho'i rlabs phreng rnam par g.yo ba las/ Glo bo Mkhan chen gyis mdzad pa'i rnam thar*, in *Gsung 'bum: Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams*, vol. 29 (Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang, 2000), 45.

differently in the versions of Go rams pa's work that we have today: "In a dream, the sunlight of the logical indication and observable quality / of discovering the profound meaning shone brightly on a mountain's peak."[53]

Other biographers provide still further variations on the dream. Ra dbon Yon tan 'byung gnas, about whom we know little except that he was a teacher of the twenty-second Sa skya throne holder 'Jam dbyangs Kun dga' bsod nams grags pa rgyal mtshan (1485–1533), gives more context for the writing of *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others.* He describes the aforementioned ruler Rnam rgyal grags bzang and his son inviting Mus chen and Go rams pa to Ngam ring Monastery,[54] where Go rams pa soon discovered that Bo dong Paṇ chen's teachings on the rituals of Sarvavid were spreading courtesy of his work *Clarifying the Meaning of the Tantra: The Rituals of the Lord Sarvavid.*[55] Alarmed that Bo dong Paṇ chen's interpretation of this tantra might come to be seen as authoritative, and provoked by Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms of *Light Rays* in the *Definitive Explanation*, Go rams pa felt compelled to produce a written rebuttal. It was at this point that he dreamed of Mus chen, whom we find already seated on a white throne on a plain adorned with various kinds of flowers. As with Kong ston's account, Mus chen declares that there are no Tibetans more expert in the SDP than he, and he offers insights that Go rams pa memorizes and later incorporates into *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others.*[56] Ra dbon concludes by adding that after overturning Bo dong Paṇ chen's mistaken views in this first work, Go rams pa proceeded to propagate authentic teachings on the SDP's practices through the composition of his detailed

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53. *rmi lam ri rtser zab don rnyed pa yi/ /rtags dang mtshan ma'i nyi 'od lham mer gsal/.* X, 469. Y, 548.

54. "The lord of men Rnam rgyal grags pa and his son invited [Mus chen and Go rams pa] to give teachings at Ngam ring Monastery." *mi'i dbang po rnam rgyal grags pa yab sras kyi [=kyis] ngam ring chos sder gsung ngag gnang ba la gdan drangs/.* A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, *Kun mkhyen bsod nams seng ge'i rnam par thar pa dad pa rgya mtsho'i rlabs phreng rnam par g.yo ba las/ Ra dbon yon tan 'byung gnas kyis mdzad pa'i rnam thar*, in *Gsung 'bum: Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams*, vol. 29 (Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang, 2000), 83.

55. Ibid., 84.

56. Ra dbon gives the title *Overcoming Confusion for the Benefit of Others* (*Gzhan phan 'khrul 'joms*) for Go rams pa's text. Ibid., 85.

commentary, *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others.*[57] This is echoed in T. G. Dhongthog's history of the Sa skya school, which lists the SDP among the tantric works that Go rams pa taught again and again, using *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others* as his manual.[58]

It should be noted that Sa skya tradition holds Go rams pa to have been an emanation of Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan.[59] Emically speaking, this could be taken to imply that *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* reflects Grags pa rgyal mtshan's very own response to Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms, albeit one he produced some 250 years after his own death while in a new human form. At the very least, Go rams pa seems to have inherited Grags pa rgyal mtshan's affinity for the SDP, and his own works rely on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's interpretations. This affinity appears to have been inspired by Go rams pa's primary tantric teacher Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po (1382–1456), under whom he was fully ordained as a monk at age twenty-seven.[60]

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57. Ibid. The colophon of *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others* indicates that it was completed at Ngor E wam chos ldan Monastery in 1469 (*sa mo gling [sic] gi lo*). Go rams pa would have been forty years old at the time. This means it postdates *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* by three years. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 400. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (modern edition), 459.

58. *sbyong rgyud rje nyid kyi ṭī ka'i steng nas yang yang bshad pa mdzad do.* Dhongthog Rinpoche, *Dpal ldan sa skya pa'i bstan pa rin po che ji ltar byung ba'i lo rgyus* (New Delhi: T. G. Dhongthog Rinpoche, 1977), 239. Cf. Dhongthog Rinpoche, *The Sa skya School of Tibetan Buddhism: A History*, trans. Sam van Schaik (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2016), 144. In his endnotes, van Schaik writes, "This commentary by Go rams pa does not seem to be extant" (Dhongthog, *The Sa skya School*, 230). This is mistaken, as the commentary Dhongthog Rinpoche is alluding to is *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*, of which we have multiple editions. Perhaps van Schaik would not have made this error had he correctly translated a line that occurs on the next folio: *sbyong rgyud kyi ṭī ka gzhan phan kun khyab* (Dhongthog, *Lo rgyus*, 240), which he renders "*Benefit of Others Permeating Everything*, a commentary on the *Saṃpuṭa Tantra*" (Dhongthog, *The Sa skya School*, 146). This should read "*All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*, a commentary on the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra.*"

59. *rje btsun grags pa'i sprul par grags.* Dhongthog, *Lo rgyus*, 234. Cf. Dhongthog, *The Sa skya School*, 141.

60. José Cabezón and Geshe Lobsang Dargyay, *Freedom from Extremes: Gorampa's "Distinguishing the Views" and the Polemics of Emptiness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 34.

Ngor chen himself wrote two important works on SDP-oriented rites—*Limitless Benefit for Others* and *Clearing Away the Defilements of the Sādhana of the Complete Maṇḍala of Sarvavid*—and both of these efforts claim explicitly to represent Grags pa rgyal mtshan's intent.[61] Mus chen too was a student of Ngor chen, and Go rams pa studied with both of them while at Ngor E wam chos ldan Monastery.[62] Notably, Go rams pa acknowledges his indebtedness to these masters in his *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*[63] and *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*,[64] confirming their influence.

As a determined defender of Sa skya tradition, it is unsurprising that Go rams pa felt compelled to capsize Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques. We also must not forget that Go rams pa studied directly—albeit briefly—under Rong ston when he was nineteen years old, and that the apparent rivalry between Rong ston and Bo dong Paṇ chen's circles likely spilled into Go rams pa's training. Yet *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* is not Go rams pa's best-known polemic. Far more influential is his later invective against Tsong kha pa and Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan's interpretations of Madhyamaka, titled *Distinguishing the Views*,[65] which José Cabezón and Geshe Lobsang Dargyay have translated in full. In penning this critique of Tsong kha pa's approach to the Middle Way, Go rams pa was of course taking on another of Rong ston's foes, albeit one whom he apparently already had defeated in debate, but whose influence was quickly growing thanks to the surging Dga' ldan tradition at this time.

Another intriguing link in the literature between Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa relates to place and patronage. Recall that according to 'Jigs med 'bangs, the famous scholar-myriarch Rnam rgyal grags bzang

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61. Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po, *Dpal kun rig gzhan phan mtha' yas*, in *Gsung 'bum: Kun dga' bzang po* (Sde dge), vol. 4 (Dehradun: Sakya Centre, 199?), 37. Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po, *Dpal kun rig gi dkyil 'khor yongs rdzogs kyi sgrub thabs sgrib pa rnam sel*, in *Gsung 'bum: Kun dga' bzang po* (Sde dge), vol. 4 (Dehradun: Sa skya Centre, 199?), 37.

62. Jörg Heimbel and Dominique Townsend, "Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed October 24, 2017, http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Ngorchen-Kunga-Zangpo/2387.

63. X, 469. Y, 549.

64. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 399–400. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (modern edition), 459.

65. Tib. *Lta ba'i shan 'byed.*

of Ngam ring was an avid supporter of Bo dong Paṇ chen, counting him among his primary teachers. Rnam rgyal grags bzang appears to have been an eclectic figure; he studied under masters from various traditions and developed expertise in the *Kālacakra tantra* and Tibetan medicine, about which he wrote extensively and exerted considerable influence.[66] Bo dong Paṇ chen's death in 1451 must have been a great loss for the fifty-five-year-old ruler, but his curiosity and commitment to learning apparently never waned. We read in the biographies of Go rams pa that it was this same ruler and his son who fifteen years later invited Mus chen and Go rams pa to teach at Ngam ring. It is striking that Go rams pa composed a polemic against Bo dong Paṇ chen under the patronage of the latter's devotee, and we must wonder about the dynamics of that relationship: Was Go rams pa attempting to reassert the Sa skya tradition's prominence before an aristocrat who had aligned himself with Bo dong pa and Jo nang pa teachers? Did he feel compelled to avenge Rong ston's supposed loss at this same location, or at least to counter an anti-Rong ston narrative that had circulated there? Of course we can only guess. But this connection of patronage and locale is an intriguing element of the dispute between Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's circles, and indeed one that should not be underestimated given the importance of patronage for any religious community.

After his sojourn at Ngam ring, Go rams pa continued to travel and teach, and thanks to the support of figures connected with the emerging Rinpung court,[67] he established two new Sa skya monasteries in Rta nag, not far west of Gzhis ka rtse in Gtsang. Rta nag gser ling was the first, which he founded in 1466, the same year he had visited Ngam ring and written *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*. This monastery served as his base for the next several years.[68] After enjoying success in the area, Go rams pa founded a second monastery in 1473, which he named Thub bstan rnam rgyal, where he developed a new monastic curriculum for the study of Buddhist philosophy and tantra. Following a three-year tenure as the sixth abbot of Ngor E wam chos ldan, Go rams pa returned to Rta nag and continued teaching and

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66. Stearns, "Namgyel Drakpa Zangpo," *Treasury of Lives.*
67. Go rams pa's direct patrons were Drung chen Nor bu bzang po (d. 1466) and his son Don grub rdo rje. See Cabezón, *Freedom from Extremes*, 44, 267–68.
68. Ibid., 35.

writing.[69] In 1488, he planned a trip to Sa skya, but was initially blocked by rulers who feared he would perform rituals on behalf of the surging Rin spung pas. He was eventually permitted to go to Sa skya as planned, but while returning to Rta nag in 1489, he fell ill while staying at a monastic center in Sngon mo rdzong and died. His body was transported to Thub bstan rnam rgyal where it was cremated, and one portion of his remains was used to make small icons while the other was placed in a large buddha statue.[70]

Bo dong Paṇ chen's Definitive Explanation

Having provided some context for Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* and Go rams pa's *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*, let us next turn to their contents. Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* forgoes the typical homage and introductory verses found at the beginning of so many Tibetan Buddhist texts, starting instead with a direct declaration of his objective, "Now I should explain my definitive treatment of the nature of the rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana from the root *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra*."[71] While the SDP is Bo dong Paṇ chen's focus, he by no means sticks to it, looking to many other canonical works as well. In fact, the first third of the text—which appears to have once been a separate work altogether[72]—consists of a series of back-to-back quotations from the SDP, the *Vajra Peak Tantra*,[73] the *Tantra of the General Secret Rituals of All Maṇḍalas*,[74] Version B of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*

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69. Ibid., 36.

70. Sadly, Go rams pa's monasteries and the statue containing his remains were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Ibid., 39–40.

71. *da ni ngan song yongs su sbyong ba'i rtsa ba'i rgyud kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad par bya ste/. V*, 140. *W*, 120.

72. Go rams pa refers to this section and the latter section of the *Definitive Explanation* as two separate texts in his *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*. See below.

73. Skt. *Vajraśekhara tantra*; Tib. *Gsang ba rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud rdo rje rtse mo.*

74. Skt. *Sarvamaṇḍalasāmānyavidhiguhya tantra*; Tib. *Dkyil 'khor thams cad kyi spyi'i cho ga gsang ba'i rgyud* (hereafter *Secret General Tantra*). This tantra is classified as belonging to the Kriyātantra class of Buddhist tantras.

tantra,[75] the *Net of Illusions Tantra*,[76] the *Compendium of Principles*, and the *Compendium of Consecrations Tantra*[77] that, taken together, provide a canonical foundation for his vision of a complete ritual performance in the tradition of Sarvavid Vairocana. These citations detail a variety of practices that correspond to the ritual sequence that Bo dong Paṇ chen presents in the latter two-thirds of his text.[78] It is in this latter section that he regularly cites *Light Rays* and rejects its interpretations. The structure of this portion of the work is outlined below:

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF BO DONG PAṆ CHEN'S *DEFINITIVE EXPLANATION*

1. The preparations[79]
   1.1. The preliminary approach
      1.1.1. The attributes of the primary deity and his *maṇḍala* (*V*, 164. *W*, 143)
      1.1.2. The timing of the approach (*V*, 165. *W*, 143–44)
      1.1.3. The number of recitations to be performed (*V*, 165. *W*, 144)
   1.2. The site ritual[80] (*V*, 167–82. *W*, 146–61)
   1.3. The preparatory rites[81] (*V*, 182–85. *W*, 161–64)

2. The main practice[82]
   2.1. The lines and colors of the physical *maṇḍala* that is to be created (*V*, 185–90. *W*, 164–69)

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75. Bo dong Paṇchen follows Tibetan scholars of Yogatantra like Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290–1364) in calling Version B of the SDP (translated in the first half of the thirteenth century by Chag Lo tsā ba Chos rje dpal [1197–1263/4]) the *Gtsug dgu'i rgyud* or simply *Gtsug dgu*. He calls Version A of the SDP (translated in the late eighth century) the *Ngan song sbyong rgyud* or some variant of this title. He cites Version B numerous times throughout his *Definitive Explanation* but focuses primarily on Version A.

76. Skt. *Māyājālamahātantrarāja/Māyājāla tantra*; Tib. *Rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po sgyu 'phrul dra ba*.

77. Skt. *Supratiṣṭhatantrasaṃgraha/Supratiṣṭha tantra*; Tib. *Rab tu gnas pa mdor bsdus pa'i rgyud*.

78. *V*, 139–63. *W*, 120–42.

79. Tib. *sbyor ba*.

80. Tib. *sa'i cho ga/sa chog*.

81. Tib. *sta gon*.

82. Tib. *dngos gzhi*.

2.2. Placing the deity in the *maṇḍala* (*V*, 190–92. *W*, 169–70)

2.3. The meditative practices to be performed (*V*, 192–200. *W*, 171–79)

2.4. The *mudrās* of the *mahāmudrās*[83] (*V*, 200–5. *W*, 179–84)

2.5. Offerings and praises (*V*, 205–11. *W*, 184–90)

2.6. The vase recitations to be done first for the self-initiation (*V*, 211. *W*, 190)

2.7. The actual self-initiation (*V*, 211–221. *W*, 190–200)

2.8. Purifying negative actions by bestowing empowerment to the deceased (*V*, 221–26. *W*, 200–6)

3. The concluding rites[84] (V, 226–27. W, 206–7)

The basic format of this ritual program is similar to that found in *Light Rays*, though Bo dong Paṇ chen covers fewer practices and offers fewer details while describing the practices that he does include, leaving such technicalities to his *Clarifying the Meaning of the Tantra: The Rituals of the Lord Sarvavid* and certain other of his works on SDP-oriented rituals. His *Definitive Explanation* is thus not a ritual manual per se, but more a *study* of these practices and their canonical foundations. Indeed, one would have a very difficult time performing these rites using this text alone, not least because of the many detours it takes into controversy.

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83. Here the term *mahāmudrā* refers to one of the four types of *mudrās* used in Yogatantric practice. This fourfold typology stems from the *Compendium of Principles*. The four *mudrās* are the commitment *mudrā* (Skt. *samayamudrā*; Tib. *dam tshig gyi phyag rgya*), the doctrine *mudrā* (Skt. *dharmamudrā*; Tib. *chos kyi phyag rgya*), the action *mudrā* (Skt. *karmamudrā*; Tib. *las kyi phyag rgya*), and the great *mudrā* (Skt. *mahāmudrā*; Tib. *phyag rgya chen po*). Very basically, these *mudrās* are performed to map one's body, speech, mind, and activities onto those of the deity. For a discussion of these four vis-à-vis the writings of Buddhaguhya, see David B. Gray, "Imprints of the 'Great Seal': On the Expanding Semantic Range of the Term of Mudrā in Eighth through Eleventh Century Indian Buddhist Literature," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 34, nos. 1–2 (2011 [2012]): 430–33. For a translation of Mkhas grub rje's discussion of these four according to the Yogatantra tradition, see Tsong kha pa and the Dalai Lama, *The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra, Volume 3: Yoga Tantra*, trans. and eds. Jeffrey Hopkins, Steven Weinberger, and Kevin Vose (Boulder: Snow Lion, 2017), 139–53.

84. Tib. *rjes* (here an abbreviation of *rjes chog*).

Yet we must acknowledge that *Light Rays* also takes such detours, albeit far less frequently. For example, Grags pa rgyal mtshan criticizes a certain Dge bshes Gnyal pa in his section on realizing the deity:

> Eighth, you should realize the deity. In this connection, Dge bshes Gnyal pa says:
>
>> Having relied on the statement in the SDP "Having entered by means of Vajradharā's *mudrā*" the master enters and receives empowerment without realizing the deity before him. After that, the deity is realized.
>
> This is not the case—it is pointless to have entered into the sand *maṇḍala* without having realized the deity, and...[85]

Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan quotes a now lost work of Dge bshes Gnyal pa, rejecting his reading of the SDP before proceeding with his own interpretation. While this brief acknowledgement and rebuttal of another Tibetan writer need not prevent us from calling *Light Rays* a ritual manual, it marks a break in the flow of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's ritual instructions. In a performative context, such asides are unlikely to have been recited or even outwardly acknowledged, and instead represent an interpretive annotation aimed at drawing the reader's attention to past misunderstandings and avoiding them. In a sense,

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85. *brgyad pa lha bsgrub par bya ba ni/ 'di la dge bshes gnyal [E=dmyal] pa na re/ rdo rje 'dzin mas [E=ma] zhugs nas ni/ /zhes bya ba la brten nas/ [E-/] mdun du lha ma bsgrubs par/ [E-/] slob dpon bdag nyid 'jug cing dbang len la/ de nas lha sgrub pa yin zer ba ni ma yin te/ lha ma bsgrubs par rdul tshon du zhugs pa la don med pa dang /. De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa,* in *Bka' 'gyur* (Sde dge par phud), vol. 85 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1976–79), 142 (hereafter cited as *A*). *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa,* in *Bka' 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), vol. 85 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9), 195 (hereafter cited as *B*). *C*, 33. *D*, 396. *E*, 21a. *F*, 30. Cf. Tadeusz Skorupski, *The Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra: Elimination of All Evil Destinies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), 329. I should note that the line quoted from the SDP simply reads, "Having entered by means of Vajradharā," and that I supply "the *mudrā* of" in my translation. In doing so, I follow Ngor chen's *Limitless Benefit for Others*, which references and expands on this line: "One enters the interior of the maṇḍala palace by means of the *mudrā* of Vajradharā." *rdo rje 'dzin ma'i phyag rgyas dkyil 'khor khang pa'i nang du zhugs/.* See Ngor chen, *Gzhan phan mtha' yas*, 39.

such moments anticipate the rhetoric of Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation*, but they do not change *Light Rays*' primary function. In short, *Light Rays* is still very much a ritual manual, while Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* serves a more scholastic and persuasive—if not polemical—purpose.

Go rams pa's Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others

Go rams pa's rebuttal begins with an homage to his guru (who perhaps here is Grags pa rgyal mtshan rather than Ngor chen or Mus chen, since Go rams pa refers to Grags pa rgyal mtshan as "guru"[86] only a few lines down) and to Vajrasattva. He then praises Grags pa rgyal mtshan in verse before beginning to undermine his opponent:

> The victorious lord[87] guru, an ocean of good qualities,
> adorned with lotuses of excellent accomplishment,
> is the site of pure joy and ease for his retinue seeking liberation
> and a treasury of precious jewels of all glorious good qualities.
>
> I bow down respectfully at the feet of this excellent teacher,
> luminous with the glory of virtuous renown.[88]
> Having unified the knowledge and compassion of the Three Jewels,
> he grasps well the victory banner[89] of the teachings in this degenerate age.
>
> The Second Victor, the lord Sa skya pa,
> provided a feast for fortunate students,[90]
> in which even subtle defilements that mistakenly appear
> are not witnessed by the eyes of omniscience.
>
> He provided this having understood well the meaning of the
> *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra* spoken by the Victor
> from a tradition of genuine lineage,
> which Ānandagarbha, who was prophesied by the Victor,
> discerned precisely according to the Victor's intent.

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86. Tib. *bla ma.*

87. Tib. *rje btsun.* This of course refers to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's full name in religion, Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan.

88. Tib. *grags pa.* This too is an allusion to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's name.

89. Tib. *rgyal mtshan.* Here again Go rams pa embeds a part of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's name into the verses.

90. This "feast," of course, is none other than Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Light Rays for the Benefit of Others.*

However, I have not tolerated obscurations of the sun on the pure path
by clouds of fallacious scripture and reasoning
and a ritual text that carelessly comments on the meaning of the *Tantra*[91]
written by one reputed to be a scholar.

After clearing away everything amidst the clouds of erroneous speech,
with the great wind of inexhaustible scripture and reasoning,[92]
which emerges from the sky of extensive investigation,
I will clarify the sun's light rays for the benefit of others.[93]

These carefully constructed lines of verse laud Grags pa rgyal mtshan
and his lineage while accusing Bo dong Paṇ chen of mistaken inter-
pretations. As noted above, Go rams pa embeds parts of Grags pa rgyal
mtshan's name in this poem, and even identifies him as the Second
Victor, that is, a fully enlightened buddha second to Śākyamuni. Such
language is not unusual in Tibetan literature, but it underscores Go
rams pa's profound devotion to this Sa skya pa hierarch. Go rams pa
then turns to Bo dong Paṇ chen, alluding to the names of his works
under consideration while suggesting that he is not the great scholar
some believe him to be and, more to the point, is a purveyor of false
views.

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91. Tib. *rgyud don.* This is doubtless an allusion to the name of Bo dong
Paṇchen's manual for performing the practices of the SDP, namely, *Clarifying
the Meaning of the Tantra* (*Rgyud don gsal ba*).

92. Tib. *lung dang rigs pa.* Here again Go rams pa alludes to Bo dong Paṇchen's
writings, in this case his *Definitive Treatment of the Scriptures* (*Lung gi rnam nges*)
and *Rational Definitive Treatment* (*Rigs pa'i rnam nges*). For more on these, see
below.

93. *dpal ldan yon tan kun gyi rin chen gter/ /thar 'dod 'dab bzang dga' zhing bsti ba'i
gnas/ /dngos grub bzang po'i padmos rnam mdzes pa/ /yon tan rgya mtsho rje btsun
bla ma rgyal/ /dkon mchog gsum gyi mkhyen brtse gcig bsdus nas/ /snyigs dus bstan
pa'i rgyal mtshan legs 'dzin cing / /rnam dkar grags pa'i dpal gyis lham me ba/ /
smra ba bzang po'i zhabs la gus phyag 'tshal/ /rgyal bas gsungs pa'i ngan sbyong ba'i
rgyud/ /rgyal bas lung bstan kun dga' snying po yis/ /rgyal ba'i dgongs pa ji bzhin
phye ba'i don/ /rgyal ba gnyis pa rje btsun sa skya pas/ /yang dag brgyud pa'i srol las
legs bzung nas/ /skal ldan gdul bya'i dga' ston bkye ba la/ /'khrul par snang ba'i dri
ma phra ba yang //thams cad mkhyen pa'i spyan gyis ma gzigs so/ /'on kyang mkhas
par grags pa 'ga' zhig gis/ /rgyud don rang dgar 'grel pa'i cho ga dang / /ltar snang
lung dang rigs pa'i sprin tshogs kyis/ /lam bzang nyi ma sgrib pa ma bzod nas/ /rnam
dpyod yangs pa'i mkha' dbyings las byung ba'i/ /mi zad lung dang rigs pa'i rlung chen
gyis/ /log par smra ba'i sprin rum kun bsal nas/ /gzhan phan nyi ma'i 'od zer gsal bar
bya/. X, 416–17. Y, 480–81.

Next, Go rams pa briefly outlines Grags pa rgyal mtshan's lineage in connection with the SDP. He traces the transmission back to the influential Tibetan translator Rin chen bzang po (958–1055), who, according to Go rams pa, received these teachings in the early part of his life[94] from the Indian scholar Buddhaśānti, who himself was trained in the tradition of the great commentator Ānandagarbha. Rin chen bzang po then received a second SDP transmission later in his life[95] from the Indian scholar Dharmapāla, who was fourth in a line of transmission going back to Ānandagarbha himself. Go rams pa explains that Rin chen bzang po then transmitted these teachings to Brag steng pa Yon tan tshul khrims, who in turn passed them to Mal gyo Blo gros grags pa, who himself was a teacher of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's father Sa chen Kun dga' snying po.[96] Curiously, Go rams pa makes no mention of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's claim that his lineage in the tradition of the SDP can also be traced to Atiśa. Why this is the case remains unclear.

After establishing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's lineage, Go rams pa reports on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's motivations for writing the five works on the SDP that he did:

> Situated in this oral lineage, the protector Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan, whose mind was indistinguishable from Mañjughoṣa, having feared that the tradition of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra* would vanish because future generations of disciples would be unable to hold this oral lineage, composed his quintessential instructions on the method of explaining this tantra, namely, his *General Overview for the Benefit of Others*;[97] his *Outline*[98] of this tantra; his notes on this tantra;[99] *Light Rays for the Benefit of Others*, which concerns the stages of its practice; and his *Requisites for the Benefit of Others*.[100]

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94. Tib. *sku tshe'i stod la.*

95. Tib. *sku tshe'i smad la.*

96. X, 417–18. Y, 482–83.

97. Tib. *gzhan phan spyi chings.* This is another name for his *General Overview of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (*Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don*).

98. This is his *Outline of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (*Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi sa bcad*).

99. This is Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Light Rays of the Requisites* (*Nye bar mkho ba'i 'od zer*).

100. *nyan brgyud du bzhugs pa phyi rabs kyi gdul bya rnams kyis snyan brgyud 'dzin par mi nus pas bka' srol nub par dogs nas/ mgon po 'jam pa'i dbyangs dang mi gnyis pa'i thugs mnga' ba rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan gyis/ rgyud bshad thabs kyi man*

Emphasizing here Grags pa rgyal mtshan's ostensibly altruistic in-
tentions for producing these five works, Go rams pa goes on to add
that they are fully congruous with Indian precedent, stemming from
the "flawless" tradition of Ānandagarbha.[101] He then turns to Bo
dong Paṇ chen's texts, addressing "the one well known as Bo dong
Phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba," noticeably omitting the "Paṇ chen"
or "great scholar" from his title. He mentions three works in particu-
lar: *Clarifying the Meaning of the Tantra: The Rituals of the Lord Sarvavid*,
the *Definitive Treatment of the Scriptures*,[102] and the *Rational Definitive
Treatment*.[103] These last two are combined in what is known today as
the *Definitive Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana*, the first
third being the *Definitive Treatment of Scripture* and the latter two-thirds
being his *Rational Definitive Treatment*.[104]

The format of the body of *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*
corresponds to that of *Light Rays* itself. Go rams pa reproduces *Light
Rays*' basic division into two parts, namely, the preliminary approach
and the stages of the rituals to be performed, and he follows also the
division of the preliminary approach into three, namely, approaching
the single tutelary deity, approaching the complete *maṇḍala*, and ap-
proaching the deity having relied on a painting on cloth. After meeting
Bo dong Paṇ chen's objections to these preliminaries, Go rams pa turns
to the second main section, the stages of the rituals to be performed.
Here again he follows *Light Rays*, dividing his discussion into two: the
activities of the ritual expert and the introduction of the disciples into

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*ngag gzhan phan spyi chings/ rgyud kyi sa bcad/ rgyud kyi mchan/ lag tu blang pa'i
rim pa gzhan phan 'od zer/ gzhan phan nyer mkho rnams mdzad do/. X, 418. Y, 483.*
101. *'di dag ni rgyal bas lung bstan pa'i grub chen kun dga' snying po'i bka' srol skyon
med pa'i bla ma brgyud pa las 'ongs pa. X, 418. Y, 483.*
102. Tib. *Lung gi rnam nges.*
103. Tib. *Rigs pa'i rnam nges.*
104. This is confirmed in his conclusion to his selection of quotes in the
Definitive Explanation, which reads: "The nineteenth division of the scriptures
of the definitive treatment—the rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana's *maṇḍala* from
the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra*." *Ngan song yongs su sbyong ba kun rig rnam
par snang mdzad kyi dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga rnam par nges pa'i lung gi le'u bcu dgu
pa'o. V, 163. W, 142.* It appears that this collection of citations was once the
nineteenth in a series of like collections that have since been reorganized. We
find in his collected works, for example, similar collections titled *Lung gi rnam
nges* that pertain to the *Guhyasamāja tantra* and the *maṇḍala* of Vajrapāṇi.

the *maṇḍala* and the bestowal of empowerment,[105] the first of which he follows *Light Rays* in dividing into ten. He then turns to the introduction of students into the *maṇḍala* and the bestowal of empowerment, before closing with rebuttals of Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques of other practices of purification and the concluding rites. The contents of *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* thus can be outlined as follows:

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF GO RAMS PA'S *OVERCOMING HARM FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS*

Homage and introductory verses (*X*, 416–17. *Y*, 480–81)

Introduction (*X*, 417–19. *Y*, 481–84)

Replies to Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques:

1. The ritual activities to be performed ahead of the empowerment
    1.1. The preliminary approach (*X*, 419–31. *Y*, 484–99)
    1.2. The site ritual (*X*, 431–35. *Y*, 500–4)
    1.3. The preparatory rites (*X*, 435–38. *Y*, 504–9)
    1.4. Drawing the *maṇḍala* and placing the deities (*X*, 438–442. *Y*, 509–14)
    1.5. Placing the support for the purification of negative actions (N/A)
    1.6. Laying out the ornaments (*X*, 442–43. *Y*, 514–15)
    1.7. The personal yoga (*X*, 443–48. *Y*, 515–22)

1.8. Realizing the deity (*X*, 522–33. *Y*, 448–57)

1.9. The offerings and *gtor ma* to be given (N/A)

1.10. The self-initiation (*X*, 457. *Y*, 533–34)

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105. Go rams pa omits a number of basic divisions included in *Light Rays*. For example, he does not mention the division of these rituals into those performed for one's own benefit and those performed for the benefit of others, the division of those performed for the benefit of the living and those performed for the benefit of the dead, and the sevenfold division of the methods of purifying the negative actions of the deceased. This is because the majority of Bo dong Paṇ chen's objections relate to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's discussion of purifying negative actions by bestowing empowerment, and he therefore focuses on the subtopics included under this practice.

2. Introducing the disciples into the *maṇḍala* and bestowing empowerment (*X*, 457–61. *Y*, 534–39)

3. Other methods of purification and the concluding rites (X, 461–68. Y, 539–47)[106]

Conclusion (*X*, 468–69. *Y*, 547–59)

Notice that the sections on placing the support for the purification of negative actions and the offerings and *gtor ma*[107] have no page ranges. This is because despite Go rams pa's listing of all ten subsections at the outset, he does not actually engage with these two as distinct topics of discussion in the body of the text, instead skipping them and proceeding to the next topic. Why does he neglect these two? In the first case, Bo dong Paṇ chen does not critique Grags pa rgyal mtshan's very brief discussion on placing the support of purification,[108] and thus there are no controversies for Go rams pa to address. In the second case, Bo dong Paṇ chen does cite Grags pa rgyal mtshan in his discussion of *gtor ma* offerings, and in fact questions Grags pa rgyal mtshan's categorizations of *gtor ma* offerings and his suggestion that the ritualist may perform these offerings either briefly or extensively (in Bo dong Paṇ chen's view, only an extensive *gtor ma* offering is sufficient).[109] Yet for reasons that are unclear, Go rams pa does not address these particular objections directly, instead only echoing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's remarks on *gtor ma* offerings while discussing the distribution of ornaments.[110] It thus would appear that Go rams pa listed these ten subsections for the sake of remaining faithful to *Light Rays*' structure, but not with the aim of actually addressing each one in turn.[111]

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106. Go rams pa does not explicitly identify these as constituting a separate subsection of his work, but the passages from *Light Rays* under discussion here are not part of the introduction of the students into the *maṇḍala* and the bestowal of empowerment, and so should be set apart.

107. *gtor ma* are dough oblations that are a staple of Tibetan tantric ritual.

108. For Grags pa rgyal mtshan's discussion of this practice, see *C*, 22. *D*, 385–86. *E*, 14a. *F*, 20.

109. *V*, 210–11. *W*, 189–90.

110. *X*, 443. *Y*, 515.

111. Unless, of course, the version of Go rams pa's work that we have today is incomplete, though I have found no other evidence to support this possibility.

THE CONTROVERSIES

Now that we have looked at the context and contents of Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's texts, let us turn to some of the issues they address. The general pattern of these exchanges is as follows: Bo dong Paṇ chen cites and criticizes a passage from *Light Rays*, to which Go rams pa responds by first citing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's original statement and Bo dong Paṇ chen's objections, before finally attempting to overturn the latter. Go rams pa often expands on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's explanations and provides commentary on them while at the same time heightening the contrast between Sa skya and Bo dong understandings of SDP-oriented funerary rites.

Disputing the Site Ritual

One subject to which considerable attention is devoted is the site ritual. This rite is standard in Tibetan tantric traditions and comes in diverse forms. In her article "The Earth Ritual: Subjugation and Transformation of the Environment," Cathy Cantwell states that the site ritual is an "essential component of the preliminary rites for the consecration of a site as a suitable place for Vajrayāna practice," adding that it should be performed at the beginning of a retreat or practice session since it is required for establishing the boundaries of the ritual space and for the creation of the *maṇḍala*.[112] Meanwhile, in his article published shortly after Cantwell's, "The Sa chog: Violence and Veneration in a Tibetan Soil Ritual," Alexander Gardner opens by citing Karma chags med's (1613–78) explanation that the site ritual must be done when preparing to construct a funeral pyre, temple, reliquary, castle, and other such structures in order to "properly reckon with the serpent (*lto ʼphye*)."[113] The serpent to which Karma chags med refers is a kind of "autochthonous serpentine deity," to borrow Gardner's phrasing, that oversees a location and must be subjugated when performing a ritual there.[114] In many iterations of this practice, we find the ritualist sum-

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112. Cathy Cantwell, "The Earth Ritual: Subjugation and Transformation of the Environment," *Revue d'Études Tibétaines* 7 (April 2005): 4.

113. Alexander Gardner, "The Sa chog: Violence and Veneration in a Tibetan Soil Ritual," *Études Mongoles et Sibériennes, Centrasiatiques et Tibétaines* 36–37 (2006): 2.

114. Ibid.

moning the serpent from underground and forcing it to listen to his demands, which culminates in him gaining mastery over its territory.

The literature on the site ritual is remarkably diverse. Gardner observes, "By the seventeenth century, ritual specialists could turn to various Kriyā, Yoga, Mahāyoga, Anuttarayoga and possibly Anuyoga tantras, as well as canonical Indian and Tibetan commentaries, for divergent scriptural basis for their presentations of the *sa chog* rite."[115] In order to provide a starting point for understanding the practices that these sources describe, Gardner draws on four ritual manuals[116] and a modern ethnographic study[117] to sketch a generic outline of the site ritual's stages: (1) preliminary practices including requesting permission to use the site from the earth goddess, consulting any human landowners if applicable, and making preliminary offerings; (2) laying out a grid used to determine the position of the serpent based on astrological calculations;[118] (3) drawing the serpent on the grid and determining

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115. Ibid., 3.

116. Gardner's primary sources are (1) Karma chags med, *Sa chog mdor bsdus bya tshul gsal ba*, (2) Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659), *Sa bdag lto 'phye chen po brtags pa'i rab tu 'byed pa nyes pa kun sel*, (3) Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Vaiḍūrya dkar po*, and (4) Bco brgyad khri chen Thub bstan legs bshad rgya mtsho (1920–2007), *Dgon gnas 'debs yul sa dpyad dang sa brtag bzung gtsug lag khang rgyag stang.*

117. Mary Van Dyke, "Grids and Serpents. A Tibetan Foundation Ritual in Switzerland," in *Constructing Tibetan Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. F. J. Korom (Quebec: World Heritage Press, 1997), 178–227.

118. Gardner ("The Sa chog," 13) notes that miscalculations can have significant consequences. He cites a passage from Chos kyi grags pa's manual, which states,

> If one recklessly approximates the date in ignorance of the measurement of the body and the place and the attainment, this will be very serious; one will come down with the five poisons of sight, touch, thought, breath and so forth. [Were one to dig] on the head, back, tail, arm, face, buttocks and so forth of the nāga, the king of all the earth lords, with his retinue of gods and demons, Rāhu, the eight classes [of gods and demons]: when facing an army one's general will be killed; if a maṇḍala is drawn, the master will pass away; if one takes a wife, she will die; if one confronts magic [one] will suffer the spells; if one [practices in] a charnel ground, an astrologer will die; if one offers a banquet plagues will arise; if one stages performances harm will befall everyone; if one attempts to cure an illness the life-force will

the location of its vital spot,[119] that is, where the digging—or symbolic stabbing—is to be done; (4) the presentation of offerings; (5) digging in the vital place and thereby forcing the serpent to submit and cede the land to the officiant;[120] (6) examining the soil that has been dug from the vital place and testing its fecundity; (7) burying a treasure vase to "alleviate the serpent's torment," as Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705) puts it;[121] and (8) releasing the serpent by erasing the drawing of it and the grid and asking it to depart. Gardner stresses that all eight steps are not included in every account of the site ritual, and sometimes they are mentioned but not explained, presumably because the author expects the reader to know how to perform the given step without further elaboration.[122]

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be stolen; if one builds a house it will become a charnel ground. Thus whatever is done, it is said that obstacles or illness will befall you: if one erects a dharma-throne the teachings will decline; if one performs a bleeding or moxibustion the cure will be reversed and the life-force will be destroyed. Therefore it is important to be careful in this matter.

119. Tib. *sa dmigs*. Gardner ("The Sa chog," 13) cites Chos kyi grags pa's warning regarding digging in the wrong location:

If one digs elsewhere than in [the] vital [place, and digs in] the ninefold place, one's father, mother, son, relative, wife, daughter, and companion will die. If one chooses the back, one will die oneself or be expelled from the place. If the tail is selected, horses, cows, oxen, and so forth, the four-legged [beasts] will be destroyed and one's own strength will also diminish.

120. On this point, Gardner ("The Sa chog," 11) elaborates,

It is clear from Karma chags med, Chos kyi grags pa, [Sde srid] Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and Bco brgyad khri chen that the serpent does not surrender its authority of its own free will. All four of our manuals instruct the ritualist to assume wrathful guise and subjugate the earth, digging in the vital place not simply to test the soil and bury the treasure vase (the subsequent two steps) but to terrorize the serpent and force him to submit to human authority.

121. Ibid., 12.

122. Ibid., 3.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's Account of the Site Ritual

Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides only a brief sketch of the site ritual in *Light Rays*, directing the reader to other sources for more detailed instructions. He writes:

> From the Sarvavid section of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra*:
>
>> One should begin[123] to bless the site
>> by means of such a ritual,
>> including a temple, a garden,
>> a reliquary, a shrine, and a shrine room[124] and so forth.
>> At that site that is blessed,
>> one should draw an outer *maṇḍala*.
>
> So, if you perform the site ritual extensively at the location where it is required, you should act in accordance with the explanation in either the *Vajra Peak Tantra* or the *Secret General Tantra*, or in accordance with the condensed meaning of those, that is, what appears in the *maṇḍala* rituals. If you have not accomplished even those activities, you should give *gtor ma* copiously at that location, and you should peacefully solicit the non-human spirits who reside in that location. Reciting wrathful mantras, you pelt them with mustard seeds and incense smoke, and you should forcefully solicit them. You subjugate them with your hands, and the ground is meditated on as space. Having recited *oṃ bhu khaṃ* and *oṃ hana hana krodha hūṃ phaṭ* many times, you should perform well the sweeping[125] to beautify the ground, which you do according to the size of the *maṇḍala*. This abbreviated site ritual reflects the speech of the guru.[126]

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123. Preferring the SDP's *brtsam* over *Light Rays'* *tsam*.

124. Tib. *kun dga'*, which is short for *kun dga' ra ba*.

125. Reading *ga dar* as *gad dar*.

126. *gnyis pa sa'i cho ga ni kun rig [X, Y+gi skabs] nas/ gtsug lag khang dang skyed [Li, Co=bskyed] mos tshal/ [E 12a] /mchod rten lha khang kun dga' sogs/ /ji bzhin pa yi [G.yung, Li, Pe, Co, E=pa'i] cho ga yis/ /gnas ni byin gyis brlab pa tsam [A, B=brtsam]/ /byin gyis brlabs pa'i gnas der ni/ /phyi yi [G.yung, Pe, E=phyi'i] dkyil 'khor bri bar bya/ /zhes [E=ces] 'byung bas/ [E, X, Y-/] sa chog [V, W=sa'i cho ga] bya dgos pa'i sa phyogs su [V, W=dgos pa rnams kyi phyogs su; X, Y=dgos pa rnams kyi cho ga] rgyas par byed na/ [V, W-/] rdo rje rtse mo'am [E=rtse mo dang]/ gsang ba spyi rgyud nas [V, W=na] bshad pa bzhin nam/ de dag gi don bsdus pa/ [E, X, Y-/] dkyil 'khor cho ga rnams [X, Y=chog gzhan] nas 'byung ba bzhin bya'o/ /de tsam bya ba ma grub na [V, W=grub nas]/ [E, V, W-/] sa phyogs der gtor ma rgyas par btang la/ [E-/] sa phyogs de na gnas pa'i mi ma yin pa la zhi bas bslang / khro bo'i sngags bzlas [X, Y=zlos] shing / [E, V, W-/] gu gul gyi dud pa dang [V, W+/] yungs kar [V, W=dkar] gyis brab cing /*

Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan begins by grounding the site ritual in the SDP, pointing to a passage that describes blessing the site of a temple, garden, reliquary, shrine, and shrine room. He then directs the reader to two other works—the *Vajra Peak Tantra* and the *Secret General Tantra*[127]—which outline a more detailed version of this practice.[128] As we find elsewhere in *Light Rays*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan anticipates cases where an extensive version of this rite is unfeasible, prompting him to detail a condensed version that can be performed in its stead. This begins with the presentation of many *gtor ma* offerings to solicit the non-human spirits who reside there. Once they emerge, the rite turns violent, with the ritualist reciting wrathful mantras and pelting the obstructive entities with mustard seeds and accosting them with incense smoke, after which he subjugates them with his hands. With the spirits overpowered, the ground becomes pure and is imagined as space, after which the ritualist concludes by sweeping the area.

Bo dong Paṇ chen's Critiques

Bo dong Paṇ chen provides a more detailed account of the site ritual in his *Definitive Explanation* than does Grags pa rgyal mtshan, dedicating fifteen folio sides to its exegesis. He attacks *Light Rays* more than once in this section, critiquing not only its account of the site ritual, but also its description of certain preliminary practices, such as visualizing oneself as green-blue Vajrapāṇi during the practice of approaching the single tutelary deity (Bo dong Paṇ chen argues that Vajrapāṇi must be white in this context).[129] His discussion of the site ritual is thus significantly broader than Grags pa rgyal mtshan's, though much of it

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[E, V, W, X, Y-/] drag pos bslang [V=slang] ngo / /lag pas mnan la [E=pas] sa gzhi nam mkhar bsgoms te [E=sgom ste]/ oṃ bhu khaṃ/ [E, V, W, X, Y-/] zhes pa dang [E=zhes brjod pas]/ [E-/] oṃ hana hana krodha [E=krota] hūṃ phaṭ/ zhes [C, D, E, F=ces] mang du bzlas te [X, Y-/] dkyil 'khor ji tsam byed pa'i sa gzhi mdzes par ga dar [V, W=thar] legs par bya'o/ /sa chog [X, Y=cho ga] bsdus pa 'di ni bla ma'i gsung ngo [E=bla ma'i phyag len no]/. A, 123. B, 173. C, 19–20. D, 382–83. E, 11b–12a. F, 17–18. V, 167–68. W, 146. X, 431–32. Y, 500–1. Cf. Skorupski, Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra, 311. All other abbreviations mirror those in the Dpe bsdur ma edition.

127. The *Secret General Tantra* belongs to the Kriyātantra class of Buddhist tantras.

128. Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho also directs readers to the *Secret General Tantra* for guidance on this ritual. See Gardner, "The Sa chog," 3.

129. *C*, 4. *D*, 367. *E*, 2a. *F*, 3. *V*, 171. *W*, 150. *X*, 419–20. *Y*, 484–85.

focuses on visualization practices, leaving the rite's outward mechanics to other sources.

Bo dong Paṇ chen wastes no time in attacking Grags pa rgyal mtshan's work. He begins his treatment of the site ritual by quoting *Light Rays*' explanation of it, after which he argues that Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides no proof at all for accepting a *maṇḍala* rite that does not require a site ritual, a scenario that Grags pa rgyal mtshan implies by specifying that he is addressing cases that demand such a practice. Bo dong Paṇ chen then turns to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's recommendation that one look to the *Secret General Tantra* and *Vajra Peak Tantra* for guidance on performing an extensive site ritual, quoting a passage from the former:

> In a sage's abode and an oxen's pen,
> on caves and mountain peaks,
> where the ground is solid,
> in an empty house, on a stone slab,
> in front of a reliquary, on an island of streams,
> on the shores of a lake
> one purifies the ground and investigates it and
> does not need to act meticulously.
> Although one has set foot on solid ground, there is no need there.
> Even faults including being uneven and so forth,
> need not produce doubts there.[130]

Bo dong Paṇ chen reads this passage as indicating that an extensive site ritual is not required in some contexts. This prompts him to press Grags pa rgyal mtshan on his understanding of the SDP and the *Secret General Tantra.* As Bo dong Paṇ chen sees it, Grags pa rgyal mtshan is sending mixed messages: he cites the SDP's statement "One should

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130. *drang srong gnas dang ba lang [Z=glang; G.yung=zlang] lhas [X, Y=ba glang slas]/ /phug dang ri yi [G.yung, Li, Pe=ri'i] rtse mo dang / /sa gzhi gang na 'thas pa dang / /khang steng [X, Y=stong; Z=thog] dang ni rdo leb [X=lab] dang / /mchod rten drung dang 'bab chu'i gling / /mtsho rnams kyi [Co=kyis] ni 'gram dag tu/ /sa gzhi [G.yung=bzhi] sbyang dang [Z=zhing] brtag pa [G.yung=brtags] dang / /nan tan du ni bya mi dgos/ [Z+/der ni zug rngu dbyug mi dgos/] /'thar par [X, Y='thas par] bcags [Z=bcag] kyang der mi dgos/ /mtho [V, Z=mthon] dman la sogs skyon rnams kyang [Snar, Zhol=gang] / /der ni dogs pa bskyed mi dgos/. V, 168. W, 147. X, 432. Y, 501. Z, 512. Dkyil 'khor spyi'i cho ga gsang ba'i rgyud, in Bka' 'gyur: Dpe bsdur ma, vol. 96 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9), 509–582 (here cited as Z).*

begin to bless the site / by means of such a ritual . . .", which gives reason to believe that the extensive site ritual is necessary, and then points to the *Secret General Tantra*, which gives reason to believe that such a ritual is unnecessary.[131] In Bo dong Paṇ chen's view, the *Secret General Tantra* is in fact recommending a brief purification practice,[132] though he notes that the process of seizing the site[133] from the local spirits is equally important for all locations where a *maṇḍala* is to be constructed. He then explains that a complex site ritual may be condensed through a combination of mantra recitation and meditative absorption, adding that the extensive site ritual described in the *Vajra Peak Tantra* need not apply in such cases.[134] Finally, he argues that Grags pa rgyal mtshan's claim that one should recite the mantras *oṃ bhu khaṃ* and *oṃ hana hana krodha hūṃ phaṭ* and perform the attendant *mudrās* is appropriate in Niruttarayogatantra,[135] but should not be included in Yogatantric rituals like those rooted in the SDP—"there is no valid reason at all for doing this here!"[136]

Go rams pa's Reply

Go rams pa addresses each of Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms in turn. In answer to the objection that Grags pa rgyal mtshan has provided no proof for his acceptance of a *maṇḍala* rite that does not require a site

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131. *V*, 168. *W*, 147. *X*, 432–33. Y, 501–2.

132. Tib. *sa sbyang ba.*

133. Tib. *sa gzung ba.*

134. ". . . because here, having removed the extensive embellishments of the ritual, condensing greatly the complexities of what is to be done by means of saying *oṃ sha* and *oṃ bha*, one performs recitations, and since this is itself done primarily in *samādhi*, just as one does not perform extensively the approach of the three *samādhis* and so forth, the extensive site ritual of the *Vajra Peak Tantra* also does not apply in this context." *'dir [X, Y='di] ni cho ga'i spros pa rgya chen po rnams dor nas oṃ shaḥ [X, Y=sha] oṃ bhaḥ [X, Y=bha] zhes bya ba'i tshul gyis bya ba'i [X, Y=bya ba] spros pa shin tu bsdus te/ [X, Y-/] bzlas pa dang [X, Y+/] ting nge 'dzin la gtso bor byed pa nyid yin pas na [X, Y+/] ji ltar ting nge 'dzin gsum la sogs pa'i bsnyen [V=snyen] pa rgyas par [V=pa] mi byed pa ltar/ rdo rje rtse mo'i sa chog rgyas pa yang 'dir skabs su ma babs pa'i phyir [X, Y+dang]/.* V, 169. W, 147. X, 433. Y, 502.

135. Tib. *rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i rgyud.*

136. *'dir byed pa'i tshad ma ci yang med pa'i phyir ro/.* V, 169. W, 147–48. X, 433. Y, 502.

ritual, Go rams pa contends that it is perfectly permissible to forego such a rite when using an "old *maṇḍala* enclosure," for in such cases the obstructive spirits already have been dispelled.[137] He then examines Bo dong Paṇ chen's claim that Grags pa rgyal mtshan contradicts himself by citing the SDP, which gives reason to believe that the extensive site ritual is necessary, and then the *Secret General Tantra*, which gives reason to believe that such a ritual is unnecessary. Go rams pa fires back that the passage quoted from the *Secret General Tantra* does not actually teach that an extensive site ritual is unneeded, but rather argues that a *purification* of the site is unnecessary,[138] an important distinction that he accuses Bo dong Paṇ chen of overlooking.

On the topic of abbreviating the site ritual, Go rams pa argues that whether or not one performs the rite extensively or briefly is determined by context, such that even the unnecessity of an extensive site ritual when creating a sand *maṇḍala* cannot be established as a general rule. He explains:

> This is because the site ritual is not posited as extensive or brief on the basis of a detailed or simple *maṇḍala*, but is posited as extensive or brief on the basis of the level of difficulty of making requests to the guardians of the directions[139] and elemental spirits[140] in the area. For example, it like this: since the three robes of a fully ordained monk are to be made in accordance with the size of the monk's body, they

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137. "This is because since it is suitable to construct a sand *maṇḍala* without doing the site ritual in an old *maṇḍala* enclosure, the ritual of the sand *maṇḍala* that does not require the site ritual is accepted, and Bo dong Paṇchen's reason that there is no proof is not established." *dkyil 'khor gyi khang pa rnying pa la sa chog ma byas par rdul tshon gyi dkyil 'khor bzhengs su rung bas sa chog mi dgos pa'i rdul tshon gyi dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga khas blangs pa la shes byed med pa'i gtan tshigs ma grub pa'i phyir. X*, 433. *Y*, 502–3. Cantwell mentions a similar convention in her article, citing the *Dpal rdo rje phur bu bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri'i stod las sgrub chen gyi khog dbub grub gnyis 'dod 'jo'i dga' ston*, a text included in the collected works of Bdud 'joms Rin po che, which states that the practice of examining the site is unnecessary in an old practice place (Tib. *sgrub gnas rnying pa*). Cantwell, "The Earth Ritual," 6.

138. "This is because the text has already stated that cleansing is unnecessary: 'One purifies the ground and investigates it and / does not need to act meticulously.'" *gzhung snga ma las/ sa gzhi sbyang dang brtag pa dang / /nan tan du ni mi bya dgos/ /zhes sbyang ba mi dgos par gsungs pa'i phyir ro/. X*, 434. *Y*, 503.

139. Tib. *phyogs skyong.*

140. Skt. *bhūta*; Tib. *'byung po.*

are to be measured according to his own measurements. And since the sitting mat depends on the size of one's living quarters without relying on the size of the monk's body, it is to be measured according to the Sugata's measurements.[141]

Go rams pa's point is that the complexity of the site ritual is not relative to the complexity of the *maṇḍala* to be constructed, but rather to the effort required to subdue the protectors and spirits that reside in a given area. He makes an analogy to shore up his case, stating that monastic robes are tailored in relation to the size of a monk's body, while a sitting mat is made according to the dimensions of the room in which it is to be used and *not* according to the monk's body, meaning that the traditional measurements of the Buddha may be utilized for its creation. While these examples may seem obscure, the argument is quite simple: since the focus of the site ritual is taking control of the ritual space, one should act in accordance with this aim and not some unrelated concern. In the case of monastic robes, they must fit the person, and so they are tailored according to his measurements, whereas the monk's sitting mat must fit the room, and hence the traditional measurements of the ideal meditator—the Buddha—may be used.

Go rams pa next responds to Bo dong Paṇ chen's charge that the mantras *oṃ bhu khaṃ* and *oṃ hana hana krodha hūṃ phaṭ* belong to Niruttarayogatantra practice but not Yogatantra. Go rams pa acknowledges that these mantras are seen "in some branches of Niruttarayogatantra ritual," but argues that if they were inappropriate for a Yogatantra context, then the three *gtor ma* offerings commonly presented to guardians of the directions, elemental spirits, and obstructive spirits would be unsuitable here as well, since these offerings are also described in another class of tantras—the Kriyātantras.[142] Go rams pa avers that using higher tantric sources to supplement

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141. *sa chog ni/ dkyil 'khor rgyas bsdus kyi sgo nas rgyas bsdus su 'jog pa ma yin gyi/ phyi rol gyi phyogs skyong dang 'byung po la slong dka' sla'i sgo nas rgyas bsdus su 'jog pa'i phyir ro/ /dper na chos gos gsum po dge slong gi lus che chung dang 'tshams par bya ba yin pas rang khrus gzhal bar bya ba yin la/ gding ba ni/ dge slong gi lus la mi ltos par gnas mal che chung la ltos pas bde bar gshegs pa'i khrus gzhal ba bzhin no/. X, 434. Y, 503–4.*

142. *oṃ bhu khaṃ zhes sogs bla med kyi cho ga'i yan lag 'ga' zhig la mthong bas 'dir byar mi btub na bya rgyud nas gsungs pa'i cha gsum yang 'dir byed du mi rung bar 'gyur/. X, 434. Y, 504.*

the SDP is unproblematic, since in the passage that Grags pa rgyal mtshan quotes from the SDP that reads, "One should begin to bless the site by means of such a ritual," the rite itself is not clearly elucidated. He remarks, "Since the rituals are not explained clearly here, we require supplements from other tantras, and there is no reason here that *oṃ bhu khaṃ* and so forth, which are explained in the Niruttarayogatantras, are unsuitable."[143] In other words, Go rams pa is willing to draw from higher streams of tantric Buddhist tradition while outlining SDP-oriented rites, whereas Bo dong Paṇ chen wants to limit such borrowings.

Analysis

There are some striking differences between Grags pa rgyal mtshan's account of the site ritual and the versions of it that Cantwell and Gardner outline. Gardner observes that "all our manuals have in common laying the grid, drawing the serpent, digging in the vital spot, and making offerings,"[144] but in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's condensed version, there is no mention of creating a grid, performing astrological calculations to determine the location of the serpent, drawing the serpent, or digging a hole so as to stab it, doubtless because such practices are complex and time consuming. Instead of targeting the earth goddess or serpent specifically, Grags pa rgyal mtshan describes subjugating a more general class of entities—non-human spirits—which Go rams pa glosses as guardians of the directions (the broader category under which the earth goddess typically falls) and elemental spirits.

Interestingly, Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not mention the serpentine deity or the earth goddess anywhere in *Light Rays*, though he does reference the latter in *A Drop of Elixir for the Benefit of Others: Last Rites* while discussing the preparatory rites that immediately follow the site ritual.[145] Here he identifies four preparatory rites to be performed:

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143. *'dir gsal par ma bshad pas rgyud sde gzhan nas kha bskang dgos la/ bla med nas bshad pa'i oṃ bhu khaṃ sogs 'dir mi rung ba'i rgyu mtshan yang med pa'i phyir ro/.* X, 435. Y, 504.

144. Gardner, "The Sa chog," 4.

145. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions on the preparatory rites are as follows:

> The rituals included under the preparatory rites: the preparatory rite of the earth goddess, the preparatory rite of the deity, and the

(1) the preparatory rite of the earth goddess, (2) the preparatory rite of the deity, (3) the preparatory rite of the vases, and (4) the student preparatory rite. It is perhaps in response to this that Bo dong Paṇ chen provides the same list in his *Definitive Explanation*, only to suggest that the preparatory rite of the earth goddess is inappropriate in an SDP-oriented context: "the preparatory rite of the earth goddess has not been explained anywhere in Yogatantra."[146] Bo dong Paṇ chen also mentions the serpent[147] when discussing the process of setting the deity in the *maṇḍala*, including it among other non-human entities such

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preparatory rite of the vases. These are similar to the ritual methods used for the living. As before in the student preparatory rite, one should visualize the support, summon to it the consciousness of the deceased, clear away obstructive spirits, and purify the negative actions of the dead as was done earlier. The rest of the practice should be no different than what is done for the living. The recitations following this should actually be done by the relatives of the deceased and so forth, or they can be accomplished through visualization. One should know the rituals to be practiced in detail from the *River of Empowerments*. Such are the preparatory rites.

sta gon du gnas pa'i cho ga ni/ sa'i lha mo sta gon dang / lha sta gon dang / bum pa sta gon ni tshe dang ldan pa la byed pa'i cho ga'i skabs dang 'dra la slob ma sta gon gyi sngon du rten bskyed pa dang / rnam shes dgug pa dang / bgegs sbyang ba dang / sdig pa sbyang ba rnams sngon du byas la/ lhag ma rnams ni tshe dang ldan pa dang khyad par med par bya'o/ /de'i rjes su bzlas pa rnams ni bu la sogs pa'i gnyen 'brel gyis mngon du byed pa'am byed par bsams pas 'grub bo/ /lag tu blang ba'i cho ga zhib tu dbang gi chu bo las shes so/ /sta gon no//

Grags pa rgyal mtshan*, Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa,* in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge), vol. 7 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993), 455 (hereafter cited as *S*). Grags pa rgyal mtshan*, Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa,* in *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma), vol. 2 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007), 568 (hereafter cited as *T*). Grags pa rgyal mtshan*, Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa,* in *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum,* vol. 13 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015), 433 (hereafter cited as *U*).

146. *sa'i lha mo sta gon ni rnal 'byor gyi rgyud gang nas kyang ma bshad.* *V*, 184. *W*, 163.

147. Bo dong Paṇchen uses the term "great serpentine earth lord" (Tib. *lto 'phye chen po sa bdag*).

as *gandharva*,[148] *garuḍa*,[149] *yakṣa*,[150] *rakṣasa*,[151] and elemental spirits.[152] Go rams pa's *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*, moreover, twice mentions both the earth goddess and the serpent, but not in sections focusing on the site ritual.[153] It would seem, then, that while these particular beings are prominent in Cantwell and Gardner's sources, they do not play a significant role in the SDP-oriented works under consideration here.

As for Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's argumentation, Bo dong Paṇ chen has two overarching concerns: Grags pa rgyal mtshan's fidelity to his sources and his inclusion of practices derived from Niruttarayogatantra. He first accuses Grags pa rgyal mtshan of having no proof for his implicit acknowledgment that certain sites do not require the site ritual, the implication being that he has no canonical foundation for this possibility. He then accuses Grags pa rgyal mtshan of misreading his sources before finally arguing that some of his instructions are appropriate only to Niruttarayogatantra and not Yogatantra. Go rams pa, in contrast, takes a more liberal approach to the site ritual. When dismissing Bo dong Paṇ chen's first objection, he does not provide any canonical support for cases where no site ritual is required, but rather appears to draw on convention by declaring that an old site that has already been cleansed of obstructions need not be cleansed again. In answer to the charge that Grags pa rgyal mtshan is misreading his sources, Go rams pa replies that it is Bo dong Paṇ chen who is guilty of this: the *Secret General Tantra* is in fact arguing that a purification of the site is unnecessary, rather than recommending a brief purification practice. Go rams pa next argues that the degree of detail with which one performs the site ritual depends on what is required to successfully overcome the negative spirits in that location—a practical approach grounded in circumstance rather than textual fidelity. Finally, he admits that the mantric practices Grags pa rgyal mtshan outlines are indeed found in certain strands of Niruttarayogatantra, but he insists that drawing from higher classes of tantra while engaged in Yogatantric practices need not be seen as compromising the

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148. Tib. *dri za.*
149. Tib. *nam mkha' lding.*
150. Tib. *gnod sbyin.*
151. Tib. *srin po.*
152. *V*, 190. *W*, 169.
153. *X*, 281, 310, 312, 376. *Y*, 321, 354, 356, 432.

integrity of the practice. All told, Go rams pa here comes off as more flexible in his approach to the site ritual, at least while defending Grags pa rgyal mtshan's decisions in this section.

<center>*Disputing the Visualization of the Ritual Support*</center>

Another topic of controversy for Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa is the ritual support,[154] the object representing the deceased in the ritual context. Different objects can serve this function, such as the deceased's written name, an image of the dead, a reliquary, or a deity image. At issue in this section is how the ritualist works with the chosen object.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan on Visualizing the Ritual Support

At the outset of his examination of the practices of introducing disciples into the *maṇḍala* and bestowing empowerment, Grags pa rgyal mtshan cites an unnamed opponent: "In this regard, someone claims: 'It being unnecessary to visualize the support, it is appropriate to act as one does with the living.'"[155] In response, Grags pa rgyal mtshan evokes the authority of Rin chen bzang po, who asserts that both the visualization of the ritual support and the introduction of students into the *maṇḍala* are required.[156] After discussing the prospect of obstructive spirits interfering with the consciousness of the deceased, Grags pa rgyal mtshan briefly explains the visualization practice:

> Then, second, visualizing the support: You should purify into emptiness the support such as the name card and so forth with the mantra *oṃ śa śūnyatā jñānavajra svabhāva śuddho 'haṃ*. In that you should visualize the deceased issuing from the first letter of the name of the deceased or the letter *nrī*. If they had a tutelary deity, it is suitable also to visualize them as the deity.[157]

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154. Tib. *rten.*

155. *'di la kha cig na re/ [E–/] rten bskyed pa mi dgos te/ [E–/] gson po bzhin byas pas btub bo [E=po]/ /[E–/ /] zhes zer la/. C, 62. D, 426. E, 41a. F, 58.*

156. "According to Jo bo Rin chen bzang po's quintessential instructions, the visualization of the support and entry into the *maṇḍala* are required." *jo bo [E=jo 'o] rin chen bzang po'i man ngag gis [E=gi]/ [E–/] rten bskyed pa dang / [E–/] 'jug pa dngos so/. C, 62. D, 426. E, 41a. F, 58.*

157. *de nas gnyis pa rten bskyed pa ni [Zhwa, E-gnyis pa rten bskyed pa ni] rten ming byang la sogs pa ste [E=de]/ oṃ śa śūnyatā jñānavajra svabhāva śuddho 'haṃ [E=oṃ śunyata jñanavajra svabhava śuddho 'ham] gis stong par sbyang / tshe 'das kyi ming*

Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes that whatever object the ritualist chooses to use as the support, he should recite the mantra *oṃ śa śūnyatā jñānavajra svabhāva śuddho 'haṃ* in order to purify it and recognize its empty nature. Next he should visualize the deceased on the basis of either the first letter of their name or the letter *nrī*, or if they had engaged in a specific deity practice while they were alive, he should visualize them in the form of that deity. Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not elaborate any further on this topic, proceeding to the summoning of the deceased's consciousness to the support and finally to the elimination of their negative karma.

Bo dong Paṇ chen's Critiques

As with Grags pa rgyal mtshan's account, Bo dong Paṇ chen's discussion of the ritual support is succinct and appears in the section on purifying negative actions by bestowing empowerment.[158] Bo dong Paṇ chen begins by explaining that the ritualist either should draw an image of the deceased on paper or write their name with saffron and set it on the departed's garments. Placing all this in front of the *maṇḍala* of Sarvavid Vairocana, he grants empowerment to the dead. Bo dong Paṇ chen touches on the threat of spirits interfering with this practice before going on to remark:

> Also in that regard, since a support is necessary, you should summon the consciousness of the deceased to their undecomposed corpse, and if there is no corpse, you should visualize the deceased in their living form issuing either from the first letter of the name of the deceased adorned with *bindus*, from *naṃ*, or from *nrī*. As for visualizing them issuing from the letter *ṇi*, there is no proof for that, and when one says *naṃ ra*, *naṃ* is the seed syllable of human beings, and since the mind of the *bardo* being relies predominantly on *rlung*, the letter *ra* from *rlung* is inserted after *naṃ*.[159]

gi yi ge [Zhwa-yi ge; X, Y=ming yig] dang po'am/ [E–/] nrī [E=nri; X, Y=ṇi] las tshe 'das der bskyed [X, Y+la]/ de la yi dam [C, D=yid dam] gyi lha yod na [X, Y+yi dam gyi] lhar bskyed kyang btub bo [E=po]/. C, 64. D, 427–28. E, 42a–b. F, 59. X, 460. Y, 537.
158. See section 2.8 in the outline of Bo dong Paṇchen's *Definitive Explanation* above.
159. *de la yang [X, Y=la'ang] rten dgos pas ro ma nyams pa la dgug cing / med na tshe 'das kyi ming yig dang po [W=bo] thig les brgyan pa'i [X, Y=pa'am]/ [W–/] naṃ [W=ni] zhes pa'am/ [X, Y–naṃ zhes pa'am] nrī [W=ṇri] las gson po'i rnam pa bzhin bskyed par bya ste/ ṇi las bskyed [W=skyed] pa la ni shes byed med la/ na [X, Y=naṃ] ra zhes pas*

Here Bo dong Paṇ chen recommends using the corpse as the ritual support so long as it has not begun to decompose. If the corpse has already begun to decay, then the officiant should visualize the deceased the way they appeared while alive issuing from the first letter of their name or from the seed syllables *naṃ* or *nrī*. Bo dong Paṇ chen then cites Grags pa rgyal mtshan without naming him, referencing a claim in the version of *Light Rays* he had available to him that one should visualize the first letter of the name of the departed issuing from the seed syllable *ṇi*, an assertion that Bo dong Paṇ chen dismisses. He then offers an explanation for combining the seed syllable *naṃ* with *ra*: *naṃ* is the seed syllable of human beings, and since the consciousness of someone in the *bardo* state relies predominantly on wind or *rlung*, the first letter *ra* in the word *rlung* is placed after *naṃ*.

Go rams pa's Reply

Go rams pa responds first by agreeing that *naṃ* is indeed the seed syllable of human beings, but he challenges Bo dong Paṇ chen's discussion of visualizing the deceased in connection with this syllable, arguing that Bo dong Paṇ chen is here guilty of ignoring the context in which these practices are described. In his words:

> That is incorrect, because even though *naṃ* is indeed the seed syllable of humans, as for visualizing the deceased issuing from that, this is not certain in both what has appeared earlier in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana tantra* and what follows. This is because in the case of what has appeared earlier, these rituals of Sarvavid are explained for the sake of the god Vimalamaṇiprabha, and since in the case of what follows they are taught for the benefit of the six classes

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[X, Y=pa] naṃ mi'i [W=ṇi yi] sa bon yin pa dang / bar do'i sems [X, Y=bar do'i shes pa] ni [W=ṇi] rlung shas che ba la brten pas [W=nas] na la [X, Y=las] rlung gi raṃ [X, Y=ra] yig bcug pa'o/. V, 221. W, 201. X, 460. Y, 537–38. It should be noted that the 2014 typed edition of Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* (cited throughout as W) appears to be based on the cursive manuscript found in the 1972 version of his collected works (cited throuhout as V), and that the variants witnessed in the former seem to stem from misreadings of the cursive and thus are not to be emphasized. Additionally, in the final sentence of my translation, I follow Go rams pa's version of the quotation for the syllables *naṃ* and *ra*, since these make better sense in context than the *na* and *raṃ* found in the cursive version of Bo dong Paṇ chen's work.

of beings, visualizing any of the six classes of beings who have died as issuing from the seed syllable of humans is a joke![160]

Here Go rams pa situates the act of purifying the negative actions of the deceased in the broader context of the SDP's contents. Its instructions on such practices are preceded by the SDP's introductory narrative in which the gods ask the Buddha how they can rescue their deceased friend Vimalamaṇiprabha who had died and fallen to Avīci hell. They are likewise followed by instructions focusing not just on human beings, but on all six classes of beings. Go rams pa elaborates:

> Also, in the case of what follows, this is known because it is stated in the Sarvavid section:

> > Whether a man, woman, god, *nāga*, *yakṣa*, *rākṣasa*, animal, *preta*, or hell being, the body of the deceased should be inserted into the *maṇḍala*. If one bestows empowerment, even if the deceased has been born as a hell being, having been liberated immediately, they are born in the god realm.

> and in the Śākyamuni section:

> > As for gods, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *rakṣasas*, and so forth, namely, those who have been born in the continua of bad rebirths, by performing recitations, the burnt offering rite, and empowerment for the corpse of the deceased, their image, or having written their name and so forth, they are liberated from bad rebirths.[161]

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160. *de ni mi 'thad de/ naṃ mi'i sa bon yin du chug kyang de las tshe 'das bskyed pa ni sngon byung dang rjes 'jug gi nyams len gnyis ka la ma nges pa'i phyir te/ sngon byung la kun rig gi cho ga 'di rnams lha'i bu nor bu dri ma med pa'i ched du gsungs pa yin cing / rjes 'jug la rigs drug gi sems can gyi don du gsungs pa yin pas/ rigs drug gang shi yang mi'i sa bon las bskyed pa ni bzhad gad kyi gnas yin pa'i phyir ro/. X, 460–61. Y, 538.*

161. *rjes 'jug de ltar yin par yang kun rig gi skabs nas skyes pa'am/ bud med dam/ lha'am/ klu'am/ gnod sbyin nam/ srin po'am [G.yung, Pe=bu'am]/ byol song ngam/ yi dwags [A, B=dags] sam/ sems can dmyal ba [A, B+la] sogs te gang yang rung ba shi ba'i lus dkyil 'khor du bcug ste [Snar, Zhol=te] [A, B+/] dbang bskur na/ sems can dmyal bar skyes na yang de ma thag tu rnam par thar nas lha'i rigs su skye bar 'gyur ro zhes dang / shāka thub kyi skabs nas lha dang / klu dang / gnod sbyin dang / srin po [G.yung, Pe=bu] la sogs pa ngan song gi rgyud [A, B+kyi dbang] du gyur pa rnams [A, B+kyi] shi ba'i ro dang [A, B=ro'am]/ gzugs brnyan nam/ ming la sogs pa'ang [A, B=pa] bris nas [A, B=te] bzlas brjod [A, B=bzlas pa] dang / sbyin sreg [G.yung, Pe=bsreg; Snar=sregs] dang / dbang rnams kyis snga ma bzhin du ngan song [A, B+thams cad]*

Here Go rams pa quotes two passages from the SDP that demonstrate that all beings may be delivered to a heavenly realm through the bestowal of empowerment—the practice's efficacy is not limited to humans. He then takes another jab at Bo dong Paṇ chen for this alleged misunderstanding:

> Therefore, concerning the claim here that one must visualize the deceased issuing from the seed syllable of humans, since now it is observed that one performs the ritual when a human being has died, it appears that this has produced grounds for confusion, but it is clear that Bo dong Paṇ chen has not investigated the meaning of the tantra![162]

Go rams pa's point is that while the emphasis here is on rites to be performed for the sake of a person who has died, the SDP's rituals are in fact designed to help *any* being, and thus choosing to tether the visualization to the seed syllable of humans limits the scope of its efficacy.

Go rams pa concludes by mocking Bo dong Paṇ chen's remarks on adding the letter *ra* to the seed syllable *naṃ* given the consciousness of the deceased is driven by *rlung* or wind. Go rams pa writes, "As for the statement that the letter *ra* from *rlung* is inserted, when applying the four letters *ya*, *ra*, *la*, and *wa* to the four elements, it is said that *ya* is wind and *ra* is fire, but applying *ra* to wind is unprecedented talk!"[163]

Analysis

One striking feature of Go rams pa's response to Bo dong Paṇ chen is his silence on the issue of utilizing the syllable *ṇi*. Bo dong Paṇ chen argues that there is no proof for Grags pa rgyal mtshan's claim that one should visualize the deceased issuing from this seed syllable, arguing instead that one should visualize them issuing from *naṃ* or *nrī*. Go rams pa does not fully reject this, quietly accepting Bo dong Paṇ chen's instructions to use *nrī*, while also acknowledging that his opponent is at

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las [A, B+yongs su] grol bar 'gyur ro [A, B=byed do] zhes gsungs pas shes so/. A, 122, 142. B, 171–72, 196. X, 461. Y, 538.

162. *des na 'dir mi'i sa bon las bskyed dgos par 'dod pa ni da lta mi shi ba'i tshe na cho ga byed par mthong bas 'khrul gzhi byas par snang gi/ rgyud kyi don la dpyad pa ma yin par gsal lo/. X, 461. Y, 538–39.*

163. *rlung gi ra yig bcug ces pa ya ra la wa bzhi 'byung ba bzhi la sbyar ba'i tshe na ya rlung dang / ra me la sbyar bar bya ba yin gyi/ ra rlung la sbyar ba ni sngon med pa'i gtam mo/. X, 461. Y, 539.*

least correct in asserting that *naṃ* is the seed syllable of human beings. Interestingly, when Go rams pa quotes *Light Rays*, he includes *ṇi* in the quotation—he does not attempt to correct Grags pa rgyal mtshan's text or sweep the error under the rug.[164] By contrast, all of the versions of *Light Rays* available today read differently. These works state, "In that you should visualize the deceased issuing either from the first letter of the name of the deceased or the letter *nrī*."[165] The Sde dge and the two modern versions based on it read *nrī*, and the cursive manuscript reads *nri*, a variant that we should not weigh too heavily since for the most part this version does not mark long Sanskrit vowels. Notably, this same remark appears in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Requisites for the Benefit of Others*, and here again we find the syllable *nrī* instead of the *ṇi* that both Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa cite.[166] Based on this and the myriad other variants observed when comparing the versions of *Light Rays* that we have today with the quotations from it recorded in Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's writings, it would appear that either Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa had an alternative version of *Light Rays*, or that sometime after their debate, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's works were edited, and in this particular case *corrected*, perhaps even in response to Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticism and Go rams pa's tacit acceptance of it.

Yet while Go rams pa acknowledges that *naṃ* is the corresponding seed syllable of human beings, he objects emphatically to Bo dong Paṇ chen's use of it in this context. For him, focusing on this syllable is tantamount to neglecting the bodhisattva vow to save all beings; the purificatory practices under discussion are said to rescue beings in all six realms, not just humans, and thus Go rams pa sees no place for anthropocentrism in this context. After providing quotations from the SDP that demonstrate the full scope of these rites, he deems Bo dong

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164. The block print of Ngor chen's *Limitless Benefit for Others* reads *na* in one instance but *nrī* in another. See Ngor chen, *Gzhan phan mtha' yas*, 95–96. Meanwhile, the fifteenth-century scholar Grub chen Chos kyi rin chen's commentary on *Light Rays* reads *ṇi*. See Grub chen Chos kyi rin chen, *Gzhan phan 'od zer gyi ngag 'don lag len gzhan phan gsal ba*, in *Gsung 'bum: Chos kyi rin chen*, vol. 3 (s.l.: s.n., n.d.), 21a.

165. *tshe 'das kyi ming gi yi ge [Zhwa-yi ge; X, Y=ming yig] dang po'am/ [E-/] nrī [E=nri; X, Y=ṇi] las tshe 'das der bskyed [X, Y+la]/. C, 64. D, 428. E, 42a–b. F, 59. X, 460. Y, 537.*

166. *G, 135–36. H, 499. I, 127.*

Paṇ chen's focus on *naṃ*—and therefore humans—a "joke."[167] This is an interesting move on Go rams pa's part, not least because Grags pa rgyal mtshan's focus in *Light Rays*—and indeed in all of his texts on SDP-oriented rites—is the practices to be performed for the sake of rescuing a person who has died from bad rebirths. Go rams pa acknowledges this when he states that the need to explain the rites to be performed when someone has passed have produced "grounds for confusion,"[168] but he is adamant, despite Grags pa rgyal mtshan's obvious focus on human beings, that Bo dong Paṇ chen has misunderstood the objective.

Disputing Narrative and Necroliberative Performance

One of the last issues Go rams pa takes up in *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* concerns Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's comments regarding the liberation of the deceased and the offerings to be made once this goal is realized. These comments appear in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's treatment of the third method of purifying the negative actions of the dead, that is, purification through repelling negative forces. Since there are substantial variants between the version of this passage found in *Light Rays* as we have it today and the version found in Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's works, I will provide separate translations of them before proceeding to Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's responses.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan on the Necroliberative Process

The available versions of *Light Rays* read as follows:

> Then the vajra master should imagine that the deceased is reborn in Sukhāvatī, and he should imagine elder bodhisattvas born previously in Sukhāvatī making offerings to the deceased. The deceased too having made offerings to the Buddha Amitābha and his retinue, through investigating the cause of rebirth there, understands that it is the power of the vajra master himself. Having come to this place miraculously, the deceased makes offerings to the vajra master himself and to the *maṇḍala*, and the vajra master should imagine the deceased expressing delight: "How wonderful, O Buddha! Wonderful, O Buddha! How wonderful, O Buddha! Well done! Because of this, our bad rebirths have been purified! I have been introduced into the

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167. Tib. *bzhad gad kyi gnas.*
168. Tib. *'khrul gzhi.*

conduct of the bodhisattva!" He should imagine them saying this and making offerings to himself. He too again makes offerings to Amitābha, and he should imagine again the deceased having gone to Sukhāvatī.[169]

By contrast, the version of this same passage found in Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's works reads:

> Then, the consciousness of the deceased, indivisible with the deity, is reborn in Sukhāvatī and the elder bodhisattvas make offerings to him. The deceased too makes offerings, having seen Amitābha together with his retinue. Through investigating the cause of rebirth there, understanding that it is the power of the vajra master himself, the deceased makes offerings to the vajra master himself and to the deity of the *maṇḍala*, and having expressed delight, the vajra master makes offerings again to Amitābha, and he should imagine the deceased as having gone to Sukhāvatī.[170]

The most obvious difference between these two versions of the passage is their length. The version found in the available editions of *Light Rays* includes a quotation from the SDP's opening narrative in which the Buddha's retinue praises him after he issues light rays from the tuft of hair between his eyebrows,[171] liberating countless beings from the

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169. *de nas tshe 'das bde ba can du skyes par bsam zhing / [E+/] bde ba can du byang chub sems dpa' sngar skyes pa'i rnying pa rnams kyis/ [E-/] de la mchod par bsam [E+zhing]/ des kyang sangs rgyas 'od dpag med 'khor dang bcas pa la [E-la] mchod nas/ der skye ba'i rgyu brtags [E=rtags] pas/ rdo rje slob dpon bdag gi mthu yin par shes te/ rdzu 'phrul gyis 'dir 'ongs nas/ [E-/] bdag dang dkyil 'khor la mchod pa byed cing / ched du rjod [E=brjod] pa [E=par] byed par bsam [E=bsams] ste [E=te]/ e [A, B=kye] ma'o sangs rgyas e [A, B=kye] sangs rgyas/ /e [A, B=kye] ma [A, B, E=ma'o] sangs rgyas mdzad pa legs/ /gang phyir ngan song bdag cag sbyangs [Snar=sbyang]/ /byang chub spyod pa nyid la bzhag [A, B=bkod; E=gzhag]/ /ces brjod cing bdag la mchod par bsam/ bdag gis kyang slar de la [E, Zhwa-la] mchod cing / slar bde ba can du song bar bsam zhing. A, 117. B, 166. C, 90. D, 454–55. E, 61a–b. F, 84–85.*

170. *de nas tshe 'das kyi rnam shes lha dang dbyer med bde ba can du skyes pa la [V, W+/] byang chub sems dpa' rnying pa [W=snying bo] rnams kyis [V, W=kyi] mchod/ des kyang 'od dpag med 'khor bcas [V, W+kyi] zhal mthong nas mchod de/ [V, W-mchod de/] der skye ba'i rgyu brtags pas rdo rje slob dpon bdag [V, W=dbang] gi mthur shes te [V, W+/] bdag dang [V, W+/] dkyil 'khor gyi lha [V, W-gyi lha] la mchod cing ched du brjod nas [W=na]/ [W-/] bdag gis kyang de nyid slar mchod de [V=te]/ [W-/] [V, W+slar] bde ba can du song bar bsam mo/. V, 224. W, 203–4. X, 461–62. Y, 539.*

171. Skt. *ūrṇā*; Tib. *mdzod spu*.

bonds of their defilements. This quotation is missing from Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa's version. Notice also that Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa's version specifies that the consciousness of the deceased is inseparable from the deity as it enters Sukhāvatī, whereas the extant versions of *Light Rays* here indicate only that the deceased is reborn in Sukhāvatī. There is of course considerable overlap between these two versions of the passage as well, but here again the many variants give us reason to believe either that Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa had an alternative version of *Light Rays* available to them, or that *Light Rays* was edited after their time.

Bo dong Paṇ chen's Critiques

Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms focus on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions vis-à-vis moments in the SDP's narrative. After providing the above quotation from *Light Rays*, Bo dong Paṇ chen declares that *some* of what Grags pa rgyal mtshan has said is incorrect, refraining from dismissing all of it. He begins by explaining that in the SDP's introductory scene, Śakra and his retinue make offerings to the Buddha after he liberates countless beings from bad rebirths. Later, Vimalamaṇiprabha, the god who had fallen to Avīci hell, makes offerings to the Buddha and Śakra and performs recitations once he is rescued. Bo dong Paṇ chen continues:

> Then, moreover, since it is said that Vimalamaṇiprabha came to Tuṣita heaven having made offerings to the Bhagavān and his retinue and to Śakra and his retinue, in accordance with what follows, since the substitute of the Bhagavān is Amitābha, the substitute of Śakra is the vajra master, and the substitute of Vimalamaṇiprabha is the deceased, the vajra master and the deceased who is represented by him should also make offerings to Amitābha and his retinue. When the cause of the deceased being reborn as a god is examined, it is understood to be the vajra master and the deity of the *maṇḍala*.[172]

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172. *de nas slar yang nor bu dri med bcom ldan 'das 'khor bcas dang / [X, Y-/] brgya byin 'khor bcas mchod nas dga' ldan [X, Y=tshal] du song bar gsungs pas/ [W-/] rjes 'jug ltar na/ [X, Y-/] bcom ldan 'das kyi tshab 'od dpag med [X, Y+/] dang [X, Y-dang] brgya byin gyi tshab rdo rje slob dpon dang / [W-/] nor bu dri med kyi tshab tshe 'das yin pas/ rdo rje slob dpon dang / [W-/] des [X, Y=de nas] mtshon pa'i tshe 'das kyis kyang 'od dpag med 'khor bcas mchod cing / de nas tshe 'das ltar skye ba'i rgyu brtags pa [X, Y=pas] rdo rje slob dpon [X, Y+dang dkyil 'khor gyi lha'i mthur shes te/]. V, 224. W, 204. X, 462. Y, 539–40.*

Here Bo dong Paṇ chen references the scene in the SDP in which the gods ask the Buddha to see Vimalamaṇiprabha, and Vimalamaṇiprabha appears and makes offerings, prompting the gods to rejoice and praise the Buddha for rescuing their companion. Bo dong Paṇ chen then maps the actors involved in a funerary performance onto those featured in the tantra's liberation narrative: Amitābha[173] corresponds to the Buddha, the ritualist corresponds to the chief god Śakra, and the deceased corresponds to Vimalamaṇiprabha. Based on these connections, Bo dong Paṇ chen reasons that the ritualist and the deceased should make offerings to Amitābha and his retinue, just as Śakra and Vimalamaṇiprabha do in the SDP. He likewise reiterates that when the deceased examines the cause of their rebirth as a god, they find that it was the ritualist and the deity of the *maṇḍala* who are responsible.

Notice that none of this supports Grags pa rgyal mtshan's claim that elder bodhisattvas give offerings to the dead once they are reborn in Sukhāvatī. This is one of Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions, and he cites snippets from the SDP to support his view that, once liberated, the dead should make offerings to the gods and others rather than receive them.[174] Bo dong Paṇ chen concludes by reinforcing the connection between the necroliberative process and the primary figures in the SDP's narrative:

> For it is the case that also after expressing his delight, Vimalamaṇiprabha, having made offerings to the Bhagavān and his retinue and to Śakra and his retinue, is accepted as having gone to Tuṣita heaven. Thus, following this, the deceased, having made offerings to the *maṇḍala* and to the vajra master and his retinue, should be imagined as having gone to Sukhāvatī.[175]

Bo dong Paṇ chen again references the scene in the SDP in which Vimalamaṇiprabha expresses his gratitude and makes offerings to the Buddha, Śakra, and the rest, stressing also Vimalamaṇiprabha's delivery to Tuṣita heaven. He then relates this to the objective of

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173. The Buddha Amitābha is said to oversee the pure land Sukhāvatī, which is believed to be the ideal realm in which one can take rebirth.

174. *V*, 224–25. *W*, 204. *X*, 462–63. *Y*, 540.

175. *ched brjod byas pa'i rjes su yang* [*X, Y=su'ang*] *nor bu dri med kyis bcom ldan 'das 'khor bcas dang brgya byin 'khor bcas la mchod pa byas nas dga' ldan* [*X, Y=dga' ba'i tshal*] *du song bar bzhed pas* [*X, Y+/*] *rjes 'jug la tshe 'das kyis dkyil 'khor dang slob dpon* [*X, Y+khor*] *bcas la mchod nas bde ba can du song bar bsam bya yin pa'i phyir ro/. V*, 225. *W*, 204–5. *X*, 463. *Y*, 540.

SDP-oriented rituals for the dead, noting that like Vimalamaṇiprabha, the dead, once rescued, should make offerings to the network of deities in the *maṇḍala* and to the ritualist and his disciples, and that the ritualist should imagine the dead safe in Sukhāvatī.

Go rams pa's Reply

Go rams pa is brief in his response to Bo dong Paṇ chen's remarks. He begins by asserting that Bo dong Paṇ chen has not properly investigated this topic, citing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's statement in *Light Rays* that instructions on purifying the path for the departed are to be found in *The Nine Cranial Protuberances*, which here seems to denote teachings found in Ānandagarbha's *The Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, a work translated by the Indian scholar Buddhaśrīśānti and Rin chen bzang po.[176] He then argues that Grags pa

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176. Steven Weinberger observes that the abbreviated title *The Nine Cranial Protuberances* (Tib. *gtsug dgu*) came to refer to Version B of the SDP in Tibetan writings on Yogatantra. See Steven Weinberger, "The Significance of Yoga Tantra and the Compendium of Principles (*Tattvasaṃgraha Tantra*) within Tantric Buddhism in India and Tibet" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2003), 146. But here we can be certain that Grags pa rgyal mtshan is not referencing Version B of the SDP directly, because Chag Lo tsā ba Chos rje dpal translated this work after Grags pa rgyal mtshan's death. Moreover, elsewhere in *Light Rays*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides a short quotation from *The Nine Cranial Protuberances* that appears only in Rin chen bzang po's translation of Ānandagarbha's *The Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* and not Chag Lo tsā ba's translation of Version B of the SDP. Grags pa rgyal mtshan writes: *gtsug dgu nas kyang / yungs dkar me tog dang ldan pas// gsang sngags bzlas shing brdeg par bya/. C*, 85. *D*, 449. *E*, 57b. *F*, 79. The corresponding passage is found in Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), vol. 68 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85), 395. Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma) (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008), 34:1270. Weinberger has already noted that this work of Ānandagarbha appears to be connected with Version B of the SDP and not Version A (Weinberger, "Significance of Yoga Tantra," 155–56). Thus, given that Grags pa rgyal mtshan seems to be using the title *The Nine Cranial Protuberances* to refer to Ānandagarbha's text while later scholars like Bu ston and Bo dong Paṇ chen use this same abbreviated title to refer to Version B of the SDP, it would appear that they are referencing the central *maṇḍala* described in both works. An example of Bo dong Paṇ chen

rgyal mtshan does not explicitly indicate in *Light Rays* that the story of the miraculous rescue of Vimalamaṇiprabha should be applied to the funerary process, and thus "there is no basis for engaging in those disputes and investigations!"[177] He adds that even if such a narrative were applied to an actual funerary practice, there is no certainty that events would unfold in precisely the same way. Addressing Bo dong Paṇ chen, he explains:

> This is because since you also have accepted that the substitute of the Bhagavān is Amitābha, the substitute of Śakra is the vajra master, and the substitute of Vimalamaṇiprabha is the deceased, just as Vimalamaṇiprabha has made offerings at the same time to both the Bhagavān and Śakra, you would need to accept that the deceased gone to Sukhāvatī makes offerings at the same time to both Amitābha and the vajra master.[178]

Here Go rams pa argues that we cannot expect funerary rites to unfold in precisely the same way as they do in the story of Vimalamaṇiprabha, because if in such practices Amitābha corresponds to the Buddha, the vajra master corresponds to Śakra, and the deceased corresponds to Vimalamaṇiprabha, then just as Vimalamaṇiprabha simultaneously makes offerings to the Buddha and Śakra after he is freed, the deceased, now liberated, would need to simultaneously make offerings to

using the title *The Nine Cranial Protuberances* to refer to Version B of the SDP may be found in his *Definitive Explanation* states: *gtsug dgu las/ de nas chos thams cad bdag med par bsgoms nas . . . rdo rje lag par 'gyur zhing phyag rgya bcang bar nus par 'gyur ro/. V*, 141–42. *W*, 121–22. For the corresponding passage in Version B of the SDP, see *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa phyogs gcig pa*, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Sde dge par phud) (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1976–79), 85:199–200. *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa phyogs gcig pa*, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Pe bsdur ma), vol. 85 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9), 288.
177. *brgal zhing brtag pa de dag 'jug pa'i gzhi med pa'i phyir dang /. X*, 463. *Y*, 541.
178. *khyed rang gis kyang bcom ldan 'das kyi tshab 'od dpag med dang / brgya byin gyi tshab rdo rje slob dpon dang / nor bu dri med kyi tshab tshe 'das yin par khas blangs pas/ nor bu dri med kyis bcom ldan 'das dang brgya byin gnyis la mchod pa dus gcig tu byas pa ltar/ tshe 'das bde bcan du gshegs pa des 'od dpag med dang rdo rje slob dpon gnyis la mchod pa dus gcig tu byed par khas blang dgos pa'i phyir ro/. X*, 463. *Y*, 541.

the both Amitābha and the vajra master, which is outside of the ritual-ist's control and therefore may or may not occur.

Analysis

The fact that Bo dong Paṇ chen here specifies that only some of what Grags pa rgyal mtshan states is incorrect signals that his criticisms are relatively modest. For the most part, he agrees with Grags pa rgyal mtshan's remarks, but he objects to the suggestion that elder bod-hisattvas make offerings to the deceased reborn in Sukhāvatī. His basic position is that the story of Vimalamaṇiprabha's rescue should match precisely the sequence of events that unfolds as a ritualist saves the dead. The problem is that Grags pa rgyal mtshan's ritual instructions do not perfectly map onto the story of Vimalamaṇiprabha, and thus Bo dong Paṇ chen finds reason to criticize them.

Go rams pa is rather puzzled by Bo dong Paṇ chen's analysis, citing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's assertion that the process of purifica-tion through repelling negative forces can be understood by looking to Ānandagarbha's *The Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, a work that corresponds to Version B of the SDP. By failing to recognize this, Bo dong Paṇ chen misunderstands the features of the practice, and thus his attempts to link it to the SDP's narrative are misguided; Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not indicate here that he is working to mirror the SDP's narrative structure. Finally, Go rams pa argues that attempting to link the Buddha, Śakra, and Vimalamaṇiprabha to Amitābha, the ritualist, and the deceased respectively leads to problems, in that the deceased—once delivered to the pure land—may or may not act pre-cisely as Vimalamaṇiprabha does in the SDP's account.

CONCLUSION: RITUAL POLEMICS AS GENRE

In this article we have seen how two prominent Tibetan authors who were invested in the SDP and its practices responded to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's writings. Bo dong Paṇ chen and his disciples attempted to forge a distinctive identity for the emergent Bo dong tradition through their writings and innovations, and Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's approach to the SDP fits a broader pattern of discord witnessed among Bo dong pas and Sa skya pas. Meanwhile, the evidence that Go rams pa composed *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* at Ngam ring having been invited there by Bo dong Paṇ chen's disciple Rnam rgyal grags bzang, the scholar-ruler of Ngam ring, gives

us reason to think that Go rams pa not only believed strongly in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's superiority as an interpreter of the SDP, but that he sought also to demonstrate that his tradition was superior to the Bo dong tradition that Rnam rgyal grags bzang had long patronized.

To be sure, the polemical tone of Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's SDP-oriented works was foreshadowed by Grags pa rgyal mtshan's own brief asides against the likes of Dge bshes Gnyal pa, but the primary work that these three texts do differs: *Light Rays* is above all a manual designed to be used in a ritual setting, while the *Definitive Explanation* and *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* are scholastic studies that coax their readers toward a certain sectarian position, while at the same time investigating the doctrinal and practical underpinnings of the rites in question. Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa employ a number of strategies as they do battle over *Light Rays*' claims, citing issues ranging from fidelity to canonical source texts to practical concerns, but the message on both sides is clear: our version of these rites is the most authentic and efficacious.

What do these two works tell us about ritual polemics as a form of Tibetan polemical writing? In the case of the debate over the site ritual, we find a preoccupation with both fidelity to authoritative sources and to doxographical purity. Bo dong Paṇ chen accuses Grags pa rgyal mtshan of misunderstanding the SDP and another work, the *Tantra of the General Secret Rituals of All Maṇḍalas*. Go rams pa fires back that Bo dong Paṇ chen is the one who is misreading these texts. As with other forms of polemical literature, there is tremendous concern for reading authoritative works correctly, and the language used to make these arguments is precisely the same sort of technical language that one would expect of topics more philosophical than subduing serpent deities before a funerary rite. There is also concern about doxographical purity: can a ritualist performing a Yogatantric rite draw on Niruttarayogatantra sources? There is a decidedly scholastic quality to many of the exchanges between Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa that reflects a broader concern for textual authority and learning.

However, Go rams pa's rejoinder that using an "old *maṇḍala* enclosure" without cleansing the site beforehand could just as easily be based on practical knowledge he acquired through his training; his source for this argument is unclear given he provides no canonical citation in this case. Indeed, numerous funerary manuals based on the SDP

and other ritual texts recommend relying on "visual transmission"[179] for understanding certain practices, so it is possible that Go rams pa is drawing on what he has seen his own teachers do rather than the authority of written works. In other words, the genre of ritual polemics need not be limited to book learning, but appears to draw on practical experience as well.

Further, when discussing the ritual support, recall that Bo dong Paṇ chen criticizes Grags pa rgyal mtshan for claiming that one should visualize the first letter of the name of the departed issuing from the seed syllable *ṇi*, arguing instead for using the syllables *naṃ* or *nrī*. Go rams pa does not reject this, apparently accepting Bo dong Paṇchen's instructions to use *nrī*, while also acknowledging that his opponent is at least correct in asserting that *naṃ* is the seed syllable of human beings. Interestingly, when Go rams pa quotes *Light Rays*, he includes *ṇi* in the quotation—he does not attempt to correct Grags pa rgyal mtshan's text or hide the error. Conversely, all of the versions of *Light Rays* available today read *nrī*. Based on this and other variants we find when comparing the available versions of *Light Rays* with the quotations from it recorded in Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's writings, it would appear that either Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa had an alternative version of *Light Rays* or that sometime after their texts were circulated, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's works were edited and in this case perhaps corrected in response to Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticism and Go rams pa's acceptance of it. It thus appears that ritual polemics can become resources for subsequent editors to correct the very source texts these works are discussing, and thus change how rituals are performed by those who use such texts as manuals.

Finally, our examination of Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's biographies highlights the obvious but ever-important reality that these polemical works were shaped by the political circumstances in which they were written, while at the same time revealing the potential concerns of their anticipated readership. Bo dong Paṇ chen had a history of picking on Sa skya authors, perhaps in an attempt to distinguish his nascent Bo dong order from the Sa skya tradition. Go rams pa, by contrast, had been invited by Bo dong's patron Rnam rgyal grags bzang to give teachings at Ngam ring, and it was here, at a location so important for the Bo dong tradition, that Go rams pa argued for the supremacy of

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179. Tib. *mthong ba brgyud pa.*

the Sa skya approach to tantric funerary rites. Such context matters a great deal when considering the conclusions these works reach, not to mention their persuasive dimensions. But by evaluating the topics that these two works address, we also begin to get a sense of the concerns of their anticipated readers—patrons and fellow ritualists tasked with performing SDP-oriented funerals. Such concerns include methods for gaining control over local spirits, the functions of a corpse in a ritual context, and clarifications concerning the protocol of offerings to be given to the enlightened beings who save the dead, all of which point to the perennial question with which we began: how does one best perform a funeral?