

RARE BUDDHIST TEXTS KEPT IN ORGYAN CHOS GLING

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Ogyen Chöling is normally known as Tang Ogyen Chöling (Stang O rgyan chos gling). It is regarded as one of the eight establishments in Bhutan by Klong chen rab 'byams (1308-1363). Tang refers to the valley where Ogyen Chöling is located and is in the Bumthang region, Central Bhutan. Ogyen Chöling is situated on the top of a hill that rises at the northern side of the valley dominating a magnificent view of the whole area. In the vicinity of the establishment, there is also a cave reputed to have been at one time the place where Klong chen rab 'byams, the great philosopher, practised meditation while in exile from Tibet.

Ogyen Chöling is mainly a religious establishment, but it has the look of being a manor with a small charming village and fields on its eastern side. The owner of the manor is a family that has maintained it for centuries and it belongs to the *chos rje* stratum in the Bhutanese social hierarchy. The family traces its line back to Rdo rje gling pa as its ultimate ancestor. Rdo rje gling pa (1346-1405) is one of the five great *gter ston* of the Rnying pa ma school and also a master of the Rdzogs chen teaching in the Bon tradition under the name of G.yung drung gling pa.

It was in October 1999 that Françoise Pommaret introduced me to Ashi Kunzang and the family of Ogyen Chöling. After staying in their residence at Jakar, we went up to Ogyen Chöling for a short visit, and it was on this occasion that I was shown a collection of books then packed up in boxes made from leather and also bamboo. They were stored away in one of the dark rooms on the ground floor of the temple called Jo bo Lha khang. The boxes of which there were about fifteen were stacked one on top of the other resting against the wall on one side of the room. I opened two boxes and found volumes and volumes of assorted texts in both manuscripts and printed editions. Some were wrapped up in cloth, others in the thick Bhutanese paper. The first thing that caused me to worry was the penetration of damp. As it was damp and cold in the room a fire stove was brought in to keep me warm while I looked through some of the books just out of curiosity. On this occasion the prevalent feeling that one had was that something had to be done rapidly about the condition in which the collection was kept as well as compiling a catalogue.

In October 2000, on a second visit to Ogyen Chöling, I therefore began to sort out the whole collection of books and put them into order

so that I could number the texts. There were all together 511 texts. While I began to compile a catalogue Ashi Kunzang had one of the rooms known as Gtor khang on the fourth floor of the Dbu rtse building converted into a library. However, my stay of less than two weeks on this occasion at the place was too short to complete the work on the catalogue. On a third visit in October 2001 I stayed there for 12 days and this time I was able to complete a draft of the whole catalogue.

There are other Buddhist texts which are not included in the catalogue. The Jo bo lha khang contains a set of Kanjur of the Snar thang edition and an unknown edition of the *Klu 'bum* of the Bon tradition in three volumes; in the Rdo sems lha khang, which is an adjoining piece of the Jo bo lha khang, is a beautiful Punakha edition of the *Brgyad stong pa* (*Astasahasrika prajnaparamita*, No. 734, *The Tibetan Tripitaka*, Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1962); in the Tshe dpag med lha khang of the Dbu rtse building there are Buddhist sutras written in gold and silver as well as manuscript copies of other sutras. In the same temple a few woodblocks for printing the *Bka' thang 'dus pa* of O rgyan gling pa (1239-1367) are kept. It was Mi dbang Dbang chen rdo rje (*alias* Mtsho skyes rdo rje), a prominent member of the family who had these woodblocks carved, but no date is given for the carving of the wood blocks. He lived in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Books for various purposes are also kept in the Gzims chung, a private bedroom-cum-chapel used by the head lama of the family, Lama Nus ldan (1930-1985). This chapel is found in the building of the living quarters of Ogyen Chöling. There are no particular texts in this place that are not found in the Library or not entered in our catalogue.

The Writings of Rdo rje gling pa (1346-1405)

There are 21 manuscript volumes, containing the writings of Rdo rje gling pa (*alias* G.yung drung gling pa). These ancient manuscripts are beautifully executed and are kept in the Jo bo lha khang and therefore not available for consultation. In 1984, a set of these 21 volumes was, however, published under the title *Texts of the Rdo rje gling pa Tradition from Bhutan* in Thimphu by Kunzang Tobgyel. A copy of this printed edition is held in the Library and so entered in our catalogue (A.343-1-21).

The texts contained in the manuscripts just referred to are of a major part of Rdo rje gling pa's writings. No record could be found as to when or who made the collection of these manuscripts. Judging from the biographical accounts of this master, he was a prodigious author strongly inclined to an eclectic approach to religious practices. Most of his writings appear under the cover of the *gter ma* tradition. Many of the

titles given in the biographical accounts are, however, not to be found among the manuscripts. It seems a large part of his writings are either lost or have not yet come to light. However, some of his writings are in fact extant, but not included in the collected writings contained in the manuscripts. For example, in his biographical accounts of the Rnying ma pa textual rediscoverers (the *Gter ston brgya rtsa'i rnam thar*, Tibetan Nyingmapa Monastery, Arunachal Pradesh, 1973, p.213), Kong sprul Yontan rgya mtsho (1813-1899) states that the master made the rediscovery of a group of texts belonging to the Bon tradition: the *Gser thur*, "The Gold Needle". In the *Gser thur* texts, Rdo rje gling pa signs his name as G.yung drung gling pa or Bon zhig gling pa. It is stated that he made the rediscovery of the texts in one of the caves at Paro Taktshang, Bhutan (Samten G. Karmay, "Dorje Lingpa and His Rediscovery of the 'Gold Needle' in Bhutan", *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol.2, No. 2, Winter 200, 1-40. 2000). There is yet another group of Bon texts known as the *Tshe dbang bod yul ma*, "The veneration of Tshe dbang in Tibet" that he is said to have extracted from a cave on Mount Bkra shis phyug mo, located south of the Tsangpo river, a few kilometres from Shigatse in Tsang, Central Tibet. He signs himself in these texts also as Bon zhig gling pa. These two groups of texts are to be found among the recent publications of Bon texts (Samten Karmay, Yasuhiko Nagano, *A New Collection of Bon Katen Texts*, Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001, Nos. 259 and 260).

Rare Books in the Collection

The Library at Ogyen Chöling contains a certain number of other rare and important Buddhist works. For instance, the works of the following masters were only accessible in Ogyen Chöling after the wholesale destruction that took place in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution and the country itself was sealed off. The following are just a few examples of rare works: the collected writings of Zhang G.yu brag pa 'Gro ba'i mgon po (1123-1193), a beautiful manuscript in *dbu med* script under the general title of *Rnam thar bka' rgya ma* (C.007). This was reproduced and published in two volumes in 1981 in Thimphu under the title of *Zhang bla ma'i rnam thar bka' rgya ma'i skor*.

This master is known by various names: Zhang Bla ma, Zhang tshal pa, Brtson 'grus g.yung drung and Brtson 'grus grags. He is considered as the founder of the Tshal pa bka' brgyud, a subsect of the Bka' brgyud pa order. He was first a warrior attacking the neighbouring areas of Tshal Gung thang, that led to the formation of the Tshal pa myriarchy. He eventually became, however, an eminent meditator and a great exponent of the Mahamudra philosophy which he taught and wrote about under the term Dkar po gcig thub, "the White one that has power of itself", but

he is mostly remembered for having founded two monasteries Tshal Yang dgon and Gung Thang situated to the east of Lhasa and a great stupa he built known as Gung thang sku 'bum all at Gung thang.

Another rare work is the collection of writings of Lho brag grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1326-1401). Again it is a manuscript of very high quality (D.001). This was reproduced and published in 1985 under the title of *The Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of Lho brag grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan*.

Lho brag grub chen was both a master and a disciple of Tsong kha pa (1357-1419) and is considered to have had great influence in Tsong kha pa's interpretation of the Vajrayana practices in Tibet. There is yet another manuscript (D.003) containing the writings of dBen sa rdo rje 'chang Blo bzang don grub (1504/1505-1566) with the title of *Blo bzang bka' bum*. It is a manuscript (6 x 44 cm) that has 523 folios and written in the cursive script with nine lines on each folio. There is not even a divisive space between individual texts which are in fact mostly very short ones.

Rgyal ba Blo bzang don grub is an obscure figure among the Dge lugs pa masters for the reason that he represented a tradition which was not wholly accepted by the main current teachings. His tradition is generally known as Dben sa snyan bryud, but Panchen Blo bzang chos rgyan (1567-1662) devoted a work to this tradition and in this work he calls it Dge ldan bka' bryud. He was later followed by other Dge lugs pa masters such as Gung thang dKon mchog bstan pa'i sgron me (1762-1823). However, the Fifth Dalai Lama (1616-1682) had a qualm about the appellation of Dge ldan bka' bryud since he tended to have an aversion to anything that has got to do with the Bka' bryud pa school.

Blo bzang don grub is known to have maintained the earlier views of Tsong kha pa. These views were expressed when Tsong kha pa was a young man and were later considered as still immature. There is certainly a leaning towards Rnying ma pa doctrines in the writings of Blo bzang don grub and this was probably the main reason why his tradition remained unfamiliar among the Dge lugs pa themselves. He was the head of the small monastery known as Lha phu dben sa chos sde (or simply Dben dgon), situated near Shigatse, hence his title Dben sa rdo rje 'chang, and was recognized as the 3rd reincarnation of Mkhas grub rje Dge legs dpal bzang (1385-1438), and later retrospectively counted as the 3rd Panchen Lama.

Of all the collection, perhaps the most interesting are the writings of Byang chub brtson 'grus, filling a large volume (A.056). The woodblocks of his writings are kept in Rab brtan rgyal po'i pho brang (Krong sa rdzong). Byang chub brtson 'grus was a nineteenth century eccentric but

very influential figure in Bhutanese political history. He was a Tibetan monk at the small monastery Dben dgon which we just mentioned. After leaving the monastery he had become a somewhat lapsed Dge lugs pa and began to have an impartial approach towards all the religious orders and incessantly wandered about between Tibet and Bhutan. On several occasions he was at Ogyen Chöling and it was perhaps through his influence that Ogyen Chöling acquired the manuscript copy of the writings of Rgyal ba Blo bzang don grub. Françoise Pommaret will publish an article on the life of this master in the *Journal of Bhutan Studies*.