

**'PHRENG PO GTER STON SHES RAB 'OD ZER
(1518-1584)**

ON THE EIGHT LINEAGES OF ATTAINMENT

RESEARCH ON A *RIS MED* PARADIGM

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ABSTRACT

The model of the “eight lineages that are vehicles of attainment” (*sGrub brgyud shing rta chen po brgyad*) is a major paradigm of the so-called nineteenth century’s *ris med* movement in its transmissions and compilations. By encompassing all the highest esoteric Buddhist teachings in Tibet, as well as the spiritual and genealogical sources of all the main religious orders, it is a response to sectarianism and a unifying model while preserving the specificities of each different tradition.

As ’Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas stated in his *gDams ngag mdzod*, this model was attributed to Phreng po gter ston Shes rab ’od zer (1518-1584). Although Shes rab ’od zer lived a period of intense sectarian rivalries and civil wars in central Tibet, the account of his spiritual path recorded in his *rnam thar* includes high representatives from all the main religious orders of that time. He was therefore called both a *dge shes* and a *gter ston*.

He passed on his vision of Tibetan Buddhism’s complete path and traditions in the texts of *Study and Reflection’s Ambrosia of Immortality* (*Thos bsam ’chi med kyi bdud rtsi*) and *Meditation’s Ambrosia of Immortality* (*sGom pa ’chi med kyi bdud rtsi*). The latter is probably the original text establishing the model of the eight lineages of attainment. As such, it was quoted and commented by ’Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse’i dbang po, then directly followed by Kong sprul. This text presents equally the eight lineages of practice into eight sections of parallel construction, with the summary of each esoteric system and transmission’s history. This presentation is in itself an impartial approach of the eight summits of Tibetan Buddhism that embraces the “Identity in Diversity’s” soteriology of Buddhist traditions.

འཕྲེང་པོ་གཏིར་སྟོན་ཤེས་རབ་འོད་ཟེར་(1518-1584)་དང་སྐྱུབ་བརྒྱུད་ཤིང་རྟ་ཆེན་པོ་བརྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་བཞག་
གྲུབ་མཐའ་རིས་མེད་ཀྱི་སྟོར་ཞིབ་འཇུག་བྱེད་པ།

སྐྱུབ་བརྒྱུད་ཤིང་རྟ་ཆེན་པོ་བརྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་བཞག་ནི་བོད་ལ་སྤྱི་ལོ་དུས་རབས་བཅུ་དགུ་པའི་ནང་དུ་བྱུང་བའི་
གྲུབ་མཐའ་རིས་མེད་ཀྱི་བཀའ་བབས་དང་གཞུང་སྟོན་གསུང་གི་གཞི་གཙོ་བོ་ཅིག་ཡིན་པར་སྣང་། རྣམ་
བཞག་དེའི་ནང་དུ་བོད་དུ་དར་བའི་ནང་པ་སངས་རྒྱུས་པའི་གསང་སྟུགས་ཀྱི་ཚོས་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་བོད་ཀྱི་
ཚོས་ལུགས་ཆེན་མོ་ཀུན་གྱི་བྱུང་ཁུངས་བསྟུས་ཡོད་པས། ཚོས་ལུགས་སྟོན་གསུང་རིས་ཅན་ལ་ཁ་
ལེན་དང་ཚོས་ལུགས་ཀུན་མཐུན་ཐབས་མ་ཟད། བརྒྱུད་སོ་སའི་བྱུང་ཚོས་རྣམས་མ་ཉམས་པར་སྐྱོང་
ཚུལ་ཞིག་གྲང་རེད།

འཇམ་མགོན་ཀོང་སྐུལ་སློབ་གྲོས་མཐའ་ཡས་(1813-1899)་ཀྱི་གདམས་ངག་མཛོད་ནང་དུ་གསུངས་པར་
ལྟར་སྐྱུབ་བརྒྱུད་ཤིང་རྟ་ཆེན་པོ་བརྒྱུད་དུ་རྣམ་པར་བཞག་མཁན་གཙོ་བོ་ནི་འཕྲེང་པོ་གཏིར་སྟོན་ཤེས་རབ་
འོད་ཟེར་(1518-1584)་ཡིན་པར་གྲགས། མཁས་མཆོག་དེའི་སྐྱེ་ཆེ་རིང་བོད་དབུས་གཙང་གི་
སྟོན་གསུང་སྐྱེ་ཆེས་ལུགས་སྟོན་གསུང་རིས་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་ནང་འབྲུག་མང་པོ་བྱུང་ཡོད་ཀྱང་། ཤེས་རབ་འོད་
ཟེར་གྱི་རྣམ་ཐར་དུ་གསལ་བ་ལྟར་ཚོས་ལུགས་ཀུན་གྱི་སྐྱེ་ཆེས་དུང་དུ་ཚོས་ལུགས་ལས། ཁོང་ལ་དགོ་
ཤེས་དང་གཏིར་སྟོན་གྱི་མཚན་ཐོབ།

མཁས་དབང་དེས་གསུང་བའི་ཐོས་བསམ་འཆི་མེད་ཀྱི་བདུན་ཅི་དང་སྟོམ་པ་འཆི་མེད་ཀྱི་བདུན་ཅི་ནང་
བོད་ཀྱི་ཚོས་ལུགས་ཀུན་གྱི་ལམ་བསྟན་ཏེ། སྐྱུབ་བརྒྱུད་ཤིང་རྟ་ཆེན་པོ་བརྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྣམ་བཞག་
ཐོག་མ་ཡང་པལ་ཆེར་སྟོམ་པ་འཆི་མེད་ཀྱི་བདུན་ཅི་ནང་དུ་བརྟེན། དེ་སྤྱིར་འཇམ་དབུངས་མཁུན་
བརྩེའི་དབང་པོ་(1820-1892)་དང་དེའི་རྗེས་སུ་ཀོང་སྐུལ་གྱིས་གྲང་བསྟན་བཅོས་དེ་ལུང་དྲངས་བ་རེད་
སྟེ། དེའི་ནང་སྐྱུབ་བརྒྱུད་ཤིང་རྟ་ཆེན་པོ་བརྒྱུད་རི་རེའི་གདམས་ངག་དང་བརྒྱུད་རིམ་དང་
ཚོས་འབྲུང་སོགས་ཀྱི་བསྟུས་དོན་སྟོན་གསུང་རིས་མ་བྱས་པས་གསལ་བར་གསུང་ཡོད་དེ། བོད་ཀྱི་ནང་པ་
སངས་རྒྱུས་པའི་གསང་སྟུགས་ཀྱི་ཚོས་ཟབ་མོ་ཀུན་རོ་བོ་ཅིག་ལ་རྣམ་པར་ཐད་དུ་རྣམས་ལ་འཇུག་ཚུལ་
དང་པོ་ཞིག་རེད།

'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer (1518-1584)
on the Eight Lineages of Attainment
Research on a *Ris med* Paradigm

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Introduction

The so-called *ris med* movement in Khams during the nineteenth century was probably the last development of Tibetan Buddhism before the turmoil of the twentieth century. Its importance could be expressed as a revival or a “cultural renaissance”¹ which refreshed the essential approach to Buddhism in Tibet late in its history and became a major factor in preserving the living traditions without regard to sectarian labels. In its vast activity of transmissions and compilations, the model of the “eight lineages that are vehicles of attainment” (*sgrub brgyud shing rta chen po brgyad*) played a central and paradigmatic role. I will discuss in this chapter² why this model was given such importance by the *ris med* movement for both doctrinal and historical reasons. In that regard I will try to shed light on the author to whom this model is generally attributed: 'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer (1518-1584). I will give here a translation of his original work on the eight main lineages which conveyed the highest esoteric Buddhist teachings from India to Tibet.

¹ The expression is from E. Gene Smith's famous article, “Jam mgon Kong sprul and the Nonsectarian Movement.” In *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*, ed. Kurtis Schaeffer (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 235-72. It was first written as the introduction to *Kongtrul's Encyclopedia of Indo-Tibetan Culture*, ed. Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1970).

² I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my professor Matthew T. Kapstein, to Brandon Dotson, Ananda Massoubre, and Seiji Kumagai for their precious readings and comments which significantly improved this chapter.

1. The Model of the Eight Lineages of Attainment

1-1. A paradigm for the *ris med* movement

The *ris med* movement occurred during the nineteenth century in Khams under the leading inspiration of 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820-1899), 'Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899), and mChog 'gyur bDe chen gling pa (1829-1870).³ Ariane Macdonald had already noted the importance of these three figures in later Tibetan Buddhist history, who were connected respectively to the Sa skya pa, bKa' brgyud pa, and rNying ma pa schools or orders.⁴ *Ris med* means “without bias,” “impartial,” “non-sectarian,” and by extension “eclectic” or “universalist.” Accordingly, we could roughly describe the *ris med* movement as a vast activity of collecting, preserving, compiling, practicing, and transmitting the different Buddhist teachings of the various lineages without regard to sectarian labels and emphasizing their inner unity. As E. Gene Smith remarked, all the major historical figures of Tibetan Buddhism were *ris med* since their education included the study of various approaches with many masters. One could even consider that their eclecticism was an active factor in their excellence, because by combining different complementary views and methods, they were able to gain a greater and deeper understanding. If the Dharma is one in the *ris med* perspective, as shown in Aris' translation of 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i chos kyi blo gros' *Brief Discourse on The Essence of All the Ways*,⁵ there are different teachings and means of salvation provided

³ Other important teachers of this movement were rDza dPal sprul (1808-1887), Ju Mi pham rnam rgyal rgya mtsho (1846-1912), whose works had been most influential in the exposition of the rNying ma pa doctrines, Shar dza bKra shis rgyal mthsan (1859-1934) for the Bon tradition, and many others.

⁴ Ariane Macdonald, *Le Maṇḍala du Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1962), 91-95.

⁵ “There are many other different doctrines of the *Mantrayāna* in Tibet. Apart from differences in the names of all those systems [...], there are not in fact many real distinctions between them; the one aim common to them all is the final attainment of enlightenment. [...] Do not cut the Dharma into divisions and sections. Do not cause inconsistencies in any of the teachings. Discard blasphemies against the Dharma. Having understood that all the aspects of the teachings, which are themselves as broad as the ocean, are present in a mind that has been tamed, then practice it.” Michael Aris, “Jamyang Khyentse's *Brief Discourse on The Essence of All the Ways: A Work of the Ris-med Movement*,” *Kailash* 5.3 (1977), 226-27.

by the Buddha, in response to the different needs and capacities of various beings.⁶ By collecting teachings from many lineages, the *ris med* masters tried to overcome the limitation of the adherence to one's own school and identity, and at the same time, preserve the richness and depth of the diverse traditions, some of which were on the verge of disappearing.

There may be no single doctrinal unification of the *ris med* movement, but Kong sprul's *Five Great Treasuries* (*mDzod chen lnga*) offer a large compilation of the vision and legacy of these masters.⁷ In the *Treasury of Knowledge*, Kong sprul as a "Tibetan Leonardo" condensed the vast Buddhist traditions that were assimilated and practiced in Tibet for centuries, in an encyclopaedic form providing some of the major sources and doctrinal framework for the *ris med* movement.⁸ As E. Gene Smith observed, the *Treasury of Spiritual Instructions*, a unified collection of direct spiritual instructions from various traditions, showing their ultimate goal and identity, is particularly important to understand the intention of the *ris med* masters.⁹ Following this, Matthew T. Kapstein has demonstrated the special value of the *gdams ngag*, spiritual and heartfelt instructions on

⁶ The recent International Conference on Esoteric Buddhist Studies held in Koyasan University focused on "Identity in Diversity," a central topic for the *ris med* movement and the present chapter. Chishō Namai expressed it as follows: "The Buddhist teachings were widely disseminated with much local development, yet and when seen in light of mutual respect and understanding, they form an orderly and unified whole. The principle of identity within duality (*citrādvaita*) makes this possible. The diversity of Buddhism is the diversity of skilful means according to conditions (*pratītya*): means that are sensitive to the myriad forms of suffering encountered by each of those who need the teachings." Chishō Namai, "Foreword. Searching for Identity in Diversity." In *Esoteric Buddhist Studies: Identity in Diversity, Proceedings of the International Conference on Esoteric Buddhist Studies, Koyasan University, 5 Sept. - 8 Sept. 2006* (Koyasan, Japan: Koyasan University, Executive Committee, ICEBS, 2008).

⁷ These are the *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Shes bya mdzod*), the *Treasury of Vast Writings* (*rGya chen bka' mdzod*), the *Treasury of Spiritual Instructions* (*gDams ngag mdzod*), the *Treasury of bKa' brgyud Mantras* (*bKa' brgyud sngags mdzod*), and the *Jewel Treasury* (*Rin chen gter mdzod*).

⁸ This work is being currently translated into English. In the context of the eight lineages of attainment, the section 8-4 which presents their respective systems of instructions, has just been published and provides excellent information. *The Treasury of Knowledge. Book Eight, Part Four: Esoteric Instructions, A Detailed Presentation of the Process of Meditation in Vajrayana*, trans. Sarah Harding (New York: Snow Lion, 2008).

⁹ Smith, 263-64.

the path of realization, and has pointed out the organizational paradigm of the *Treasury of Spiritual Instructions*: the classification of the “eight great conveyances that are lineages of attainment” (*sgrub brgyud shing rta chen po brgyad*).¹⁰ They are the main *Vajrayāna* lineages of meditation and yoga that were propagated from India to Tibet: the rNying ma pa, bKa’ gdams pa, Shangs pa bKa’ brgyud, Lam ’bras, Marpa bKa’ brgyud, Zhi byed, sByor drug, and rDo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub. Both mKhyen brste and Kong sprul received the transmissions of these eight lineages¹¹ and intended to pass them on, totally or partly, to their disciples according to their specific conditions.

Thus, in this sense the model of the eight lineages of practice as used by Kong sprul could be understood as an important paradigm of the *ris med* movement which made it widely known and used. We may see two aspects within this “*ris med* paradigm”: an emphasis on spiritual realization or attainment through the most esoteric and practical instructions and a non-sectarian spiritual genealogy encompassing all orders of Tibetan Buddhism.

1-2. Tibet’s most esoteric systems

Tibet was the full inheritor of the whole corpus of Buddhism that developed in India until the thirteenth century. It received from the later Indian masters the conception of the three *yāna* or vehicles: *Hīnayāna*, the lesser or fundamental vehicle, *Mahāyāna* the great vehicle and *Vajrayāna*, the adamantine vehicle. This provides a hierarchical and coherent structure of the complex set of Buddhist

¹⁰ Matthew Kapstein, “gDams ngag: Tibetan Technologies of the Self.” In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezon and Roger R. Jackson (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1996), 275-89.

¹¹ Blo gros phun tshog, *’Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i sku phreng gong ’og gi rnam thar* (Beijing, Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1994). *’Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas*, *Phyogs med ris med kyi bstan pa ’dun shing dge sbyong gi gzugs brnyan ’chang ba blo gros mtha’ yas kyi sde’i byung ba brjod pa nor bu sna tshogs mdog can* (Bir: Tibetan Khampa Industrial Society, 1973).

teachings adapted soteriologically to different beings. *Vajrayāna* is said to be the vehicle of the most inner or esoteric teachings dedicated to those of higher capacities. The eight lineages of attainment all belong to *Vajrayāna*. The rNying ma pa lineage developed in Tibet during the first promulgation of Buddhism in Tibet principally during the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan (reign 755- c.800)¹², and received retrospectively this name meaning “the Ancients.” The other seven lineages appeared at the time or even later, of the second promulgation of Buddhism during the tenth and eleventh centuries and are known as the gSar ma pa, the new orders, in explicit contrast to the rNying ma pa, the ancient order.

As Professor Katsumi Mimaki exposed, according to the authoritative traditional texts in their clearest expression, the hierarchical and doctrinal presentation of Tibetan Buddhism are expressible in both rNying ma pa and gSar ma pa systems through a distinction between the exoteric (or lower) teachings and the esoteric (or higher) ones.¹³ Professor Mimaki also included in his work the presentation of the Bon po tradition but since the eight lineages of practice are only concerned with Buddhism we will not take it into consideration in this present work. According to the classification of the teachings of the rNying ma pa, there are nine vehicles which form a progression from the exoteric teachings to the most esoteric ones.¹⁴ The highest of all is the *Atiyoga* or *rDzogs chen*, the “Great Perfection.” In the model of the eight lineages of attainment, the main teaching of the rNying ma lineage is the *Atiyoga*. Now, if we follow the progressive classification of the gSar ma pa, the exoteric teachings

¹² For the discussion of these dates see Brandon Dotson, “‘Emperor’ Mu rug btsan and the *’Phang thang ma Catalogue*,” *JlATS* 3 (December 2007), 1-25. www.thdl.org?id=T3105.

¹³ Katsumi Mimaki, “Doxographie tibétaine et classifications indiennes.” In *Bouddhisme et culture locales: quelques cas de réciproques adaptations. Actes du colloque franco-japonais, septembre 1991*, ed. Fukui Fumimasa and Gérard Fussman (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1994), 115-36.

¹⁴ The nine vehicles of Buddhism according to the rNying ma pa are those of the 1) *Srāvaka*; 2) *Pratyekabuddha* (belonging both to the *Hinayāna*); 3) *Bodhisattva* (*Mahāyāna*); and then the tantric or esoteric vehicles (*Vajrayāna*): 4) *Kriyātantra*; 5) *Ubhayatantra*; 6) *Yogatantra*; 7) *Mahāyoga*; 8) *Anuyoga*; 9) *Atiyoga*.

are the four main *grub mtha'* or philosophical systems.¹⁵ Concerning the esoteric systems, Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290-1364), following Indian classifications, distinguished a hierarchy of four systems of *tantra*.¹⁶ Among them, the highest class is the *Anuttarayogatantra* which explicitly means the “tantra of unsurpassable union.” All the seven other lineages of attainment belonging to the gSar ma pa adhere to systems based on this class of *tantra*.¹⁷

Thus, the eight lineages of practice are in both rNying ma pa and gSa mar pa traditions, the *esotericism of the esotericism*, the highest teachings. The expression itself of *sgrub brgyud*, “lineage of attainment or practice,” also emphasizes that they are transmitting the effective means and practical guidance of the innermost sacred teachings of Buddhism in Tibet. Since all these lineages belong to the highest systems within both rNying ma pa and gSar ma pa classifications, they are all equal in hierarchy, only differing in their distinct and various ways to obtain the supreme attainment.

Moreover, if the model of the eight lineages of attainment is a non-sectarian paradigm, at the same time it provides the roots of the very identity - spirituality and genealogy - of all the main different Tibetan Buddhist orders. As Professor David Snellgrove observed “Tibetan religious orders developed [...] based upon the transmission of particular late Indian Buddhist tantric traditions, which happened to have been favoured by certain renowned teachers, who in retrospect may be regarded as their ‘founders.’”¹⁸ The systems of esoteric

¹⁵ These are the four main Indian Buddhist philosophical systems for the Tibetan gSar ma pa exegesis: *Vaibhāṣika*, *Sautrāntika* for the *Hinayāna* and the *Yogācāra* and *Mādhyamika* for the *Mahāyāna*.

¹⁶ According to the gSar ma pa, the *Vajrayāna* is composed by four sets of *tantra* from the lower to the higher: 1) *Kriyātantra*; 2) *Caryātantra*; 3) *Yogatantra*; 4) *Anuttarayogatantra*.

¹⁷ The tantras of *Cakrasaṃvara*, *Hevajra*, and *Kālacakra* belonging to the class of the *Anuttarayogatantra*, are said to be the main supports of the seven gSar ma pa lineages of attainment, according to Shes rab 'od zer's text thereafter translated. In this same text, the bKa' gdams pa and Zhi byed rely strongly to *Mahāyāna* texts. But further investigations in Kong sprul's works, for example, also show their connection with the highest class of gSar ma pa *tantra*.

¹⁸ David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan Successors* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), 486-87.

instructions of the eight lineages of attainment constituted respectively the highest part of the different main Tibetan orders' curricula.

2. Origins of the Model

2-1. Attribution to 'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer (1518-1584)

The classification of the eight lineages of attainment is generally attributed, and particularly by Kong sprul in the *Treasury of Spiritual Instructions*, to the sixteenth-century master 'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer (1518-1584).¹⁹ His introductory verses used by Kong sprul are now quite well known²⁰ but the author himself and his exact contribution still remain unknown. The present paper is precisely a first attempt to shed light on this important but unknown figure. The main mention of him made by Tibetologists was given by Guiseppe Tucci in *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*,²¹ one of the best historical surveys of sixteenth-century central Tibet, a period which is not very well known in Tibetan studies. Tucci observed that all the *Padma thang yig* versions that have reached us derived from one original version revised by Shes rab 'od zer. It is mentioned in these colophons and in the Fifth Dalai Lama's chronicles. The original was printed in 'Phyongs rgyas with the patronage of Hor bSod nams stobs rgyal.

¹⁹ This has been pointed out by Matthew Kapstein in Kapstein 1996, 277.

²⁰ They have been published with the translation of Kong sprul's quotation of Shes rab 'od zer in several publications. See Cyrus Stearns, *Luminous Lives. The Story of the Early Masters of the Lam 'Bras Tradition in Tibet* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 3-4. Ringu Tulku, *The Ri-me Philosophy of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great. A Study of the Buddhist Lineages of Tibet* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2006). Matthew T. Kapstein, "Tibetan Technologies of the Self, Part II: The Teachings of the Eight Great Conveyances." In *The Pandita and the Siddha. Tibetan Studies in Honour of E. Gene Smith*, ed. Ramon N. Prats (Dharamsala: Amnye Machen Institute, 2007), 110-11. Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé, trans. Sarah Harding, *The Treasury of Knowledge. Book Eight, Part Four: Esoteric Instructions. A Detailed Presentation of the Process of Meditation in Vajrayana* (New York: Snow Lion, 2008), 27.

²¹ Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, vol. 1 (Roma: La Libreria Dello Stato, 1949), 110-15.

For this reason, Gustave-Charles Toussaint paid a special homage to Shes rab 'od zer in his French translation of the *Padma thang yig*.²²

Until now, as far as I know from the different Tibetan lamas and Tibetologists I have consulted, and as the great scholar Kong sprul himself stated, Shes rab 'od zer seems to be the first master to propose this specific classification of the eight lineages of attainment, which was given then such posterity and importance in the *ris med* movement. All the materials were mainly established a little earlier in the *Blue Annals (Deb ther sngon po)* written by 'Gos lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal (1392-1481) but Shes rab 'od zer was probably the first to organize the esoteric or *gdams ngag* lineages in eight major lineages as a unifying and *ris med* scheme.²³ Shes rab 'od zer was also the founder of dPal ris Monastery where 'Jigs med gling pa was trained. The latter's tradition has been very influential in the rNying ma pa renaissance and an antecedent of the *ris med* movement since the mKhyen brtse incarnations are said to be his emanations. This constitutes a major link between Shes rab 'od zer and the *ris med* movement which will be developed through further research.

As a first step we give here our translation of Shes rab 'od zer's *rnam thar* written by Kong sprul to which Tucci and others have been generally referring. This is to establish the memories of Kong sprul's tradition about Shes rab 'od zer's life and activity, and to fill a gap in Tibetan studies where only brief references have been given about him. The authorship of the eight lineages' model is not mentioned in this *rnam thar* by Kong sprul. Shes rab 'od zer is however called therein both a *dges shes* and a *gter ston*, which is in itself particularly noteworthy as a *ris med* example. Although Shes rab 'od zer lived in a period of intense sectarian rivalries and civil wars of the "Reds against the Yellows" (particularly between the Karma bKa' brgyud pa order and the new ascending dGe lugs pa order) and "dBus against

²² Gustave-Charles Toussaint, trans., *Le Dict de Padma, Padma thang yig, Ms. de Lithang* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Institut des hautes études chinoises, Librairie Ernest Leroux, 1933).

²³ As an another inspiration for the *ris med* works, the *Jo nang khrid brgya*, a collection of brief instructions on all of the special teachings which appeared in India and Tibet, was also created during the sixteenth century by Kun dga' grol mchog (1507-1565/1566) and completed by rJe btsun Tāranātha (1575-1634), the successor in his incarnation lineage. It was also included by Kong sprul in the last volume of the *gDams ngag mdzod*.

gTsang”²⁴ (their respective patrons’ fiefs), the account of his spiritual training includes high representatives of all the main religious orders. This illustrates so well the paradox noted by Smith: “the roots of eclecticism and tolerance are sunk as deep into the soil of Tibetan tradition as those of sectarianism and bigotry.”²⁵ As it has been generally observed, the *ris med* movement was partly a reaction from the rNying ma pa, bKa’ brgyud pa, and Sa skya pa orders against dGe lugs pa’s hegemony. And the transmission model of the eight lineages of attainment can be a way to reconcile the various orders in the awareness of common origins, principles, and aims. So it is interesting to note that this model emerged with Shes rab ’od zer at the time where sectarian tensions between these orders were at their maximum. It must have been from Shes rab ’od zer a devoted *ris med* response and reunifying scheme while he was following his own Buddhist path with his different personal teachers.

2-2. Shes rab ’od zer’s *rnam thar* by Kong sprul

As it is said in Kong sprul’s *Root Accounts of Complete Liberation of the Hundred Treasure Discoverers (gTer ston brgya rtsa’i rnam thar)*:²⁶

The emanation of the great translator Vairocana, ’Phreng po ’Gro ’dul gling pa Shes rab ’od zer²⁷ was born on the tenth day of the sixth month of the earth male tiger year (1518) from the two households of Khri and bSam in the place of Byang ngom chen, manifesting excellent and auspicious signs. From a very young age, he awakened the potential of *Mahāyanā* through sincere renunciation, great and powerful compassion

²⁴ These are Tucci’s expressions; see again Tucci, vol. 1, 39-57, for the political history of this period which witnessed intense conflicts for spiritual authority and temporal power over central Tibet. These sectarian and partisan rivalries were due for the most part to such economical and political conditions.

²⁵ Smith, 237.

²⁶ The full name of this work is *Zab mo’i gter dang gter ston grub thob ji ltar byon pa’i lo rgyus mdor bsdus bkod pa rin chen bai dū rya’i phreng ba*. In *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 1 (Paro, Buthan: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976-80), 291-759. See Shes rab ’od zer’s *rnam thar*, 559-63.

²⁷ Kong sprul used the spelling “Phreng po” instead of “Phreng po” which has been favored by TBRC. Thus I have standardized in this whole chapter the use of “Phreng po”.

and wisdom. At the age of eight, he took the vows of a Buddhist layman²⁸ from the master Tshul khirms 'od zer²⁹ and was called Shes rab 'od zer. Then, he obtained full ordination from rDo rgyal ba, a disciple of gSer mdog paṅ chen.³⁰ He studied the treatises of logic (*mtshan nyid*) and *Guhyasamājatantra* under the guidance of dGa' ldan khri chen bstan dar ba³¹ for six years. He received from rDo rgyal ba the *tantra* collections of the Sa [skya pa] tradition, the *Kālacakratantra*, etc. His thought reached the highest perfection. When he beat the drum of scriptures and reasoning with the monks [studying] logic, nobody could refute him. So he was known by the name of a great *dge bshes*. At the age of eighteen, he met 'Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs³² and a strong faith irresistibly arose. The teacher and the disciple mutually exchanged discourses on the Dharma, so confidence increased. He received limitlessly the deep 'Bri gung and Karma bKa' brgyud teachings; the hundred thousand new and ancient *tantra*, the trilogy of the *mDo sgyu sems*³³ with explanations; the ancient orally transmitted teachings, the revealed treasures teachings with their practices and mainly the *Heart Essence of Ḍākinī* (*mKha' 'gro snying tig*). Following the *guru's* instructions, in the middle of an assembly's ocean, he made a root text in five points and he categorized in sections the teachings of the *One Hundred and Fifty Vajra Statements* (*rDo rje'i gsung brgya lnga bcu pa*). Having understood the pith of the *Single Intention* (*dGongs cig*)'s philosophical tenet, he explained completely the teachings of the *sūtra* and *tantra* cycles. Thus he accomplished the *guru's* intention and composed collections as wonderful supports that did not exist before. Abiding in ascetic virtues, he lived during eight years as a hermit who had abandoned distractions and

²⁸ *Upāsaka*, *dge brnyen*.

²⁹ According to the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre (TBRC, New York), a teacher of unknown sectarian affiliation probably Sa skya pa, connected with the E wam dgon pa of g.Yag sde paṅ chen. According to the *Nor bu'i rdo shal*, it was in this monastery that Shes rab 'od zer took the vows of layman, as we find also in Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 3 (Dharamsala: LTWA, 1973), 755.

³⁰ gSer mdog paṅ chen Shākya mchog ldan (1428-1507) of the Sa skya pa Monastery of gSer mdog can.

³¹ dGe 'dun bstan pa dar rgyas (1493-1568), important dGe lugs pa master connected with Se ra and then with dGa' ldan where he held the throne from 1565 to 1568.

³² Rin chen phun tshogs Chos kyi rgyal po (1509-1557), famous *gter ston* and abbot of 'Bri gung. See 'Bri gung dkon mchog rgya mtsho, *'Bri gung chos 'byung* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2004), 428-32. And Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, ed. and trans. Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom, 1991), 676-77, 681.

³³ The *Sūtra which Gathers all Intentions* (*mDo dgongs pa 'dus pa*) for *Anuyoga*; the *Magical Net* (*sGyu 'phrul drwa ba*) for *Mahāyoga*; and the *Great Perfection Mental Class* (*rDzogs chen sems phyogs*) for *Atiyoga*. These are the main supports of the rNying ma bka' ma tradition; see Dudjom, 599-739.

diversions. He practiced in the meditation caves of the excellent place of Grog ri rin chen spungs pa during three years. Inconceivable signs of realization appeared. He mastered the door of meditative absorption. The tenth day of the sixth month of the fire female sheep year (1546), when a *dākinī* dressed like a Mon woman offered him a cranial cup of beer; in the midst of a white light he saw the face of the King Guru Pad ma.³⁴ According to the instructions he was conferred, he revealed in that very place of treasure, the cycle of the teachings of the *Point of Liberation, Natural Liberation of Intention (Grol tig dgongs pa rang grol)*³⁵ and supports of the [enlightened] body, speech, and mind. Later, in Lhasa, he revealed relics of the *Tathāgata*, diagrams sealed with A, supports and special sacred substances which he declared to be treasures. During that time, he revealed all kinds of profound treasures from the six places of treasures. With 'Bri gung rin po che, he established the yellow scrolls. While he was practicing the treasure at Sing pa stag mo, in pure vision he came to Padma 'od.³⁶ In the aspect of the *guru* of great bliss, the master [Padmasambhava] in union with his consort bestowed upon him empowerments and oral instructions. The vision lasted for one month. At 'Phreng po, he received with 'Bri gung pa [Rin chen phun tshogs] the teachings of the *Summary of the Guru's Intention (dGongs 'dus)*³⁷ from the Lord of the *Summary of the Guru's Intention*, Nyi ma rgyal mtshan. The people of 'Phreng po praising him, he established his seat in this place. He remained three years in retreat at rDo rje brag and had a vision of O rgyan Rin po che³⁸ who said: "Nowadays, beside you, there is no one who has the knowledge to distinguish the view without illusions. Teach in order to clarify that point!" Thus he composed a treatise in few words on the profound meaning called the *Lamp Clarifying the Oral Instructions (Zhal lung gsal sgron)*. After this, he was renowned to be a scholar and an accomplished being. Everybody received the ambrosia of [his] profound teachings. He transmitted the practices, initiations and instructions of the *Heart Essence of Dākinī (mKha' 'gro snying tig)*, the *Intention, Father and Son (dGongs pa yab sras)* and the *Point of Liberation (Grol tig)*. At the initiation of the *Point of Liberation (Grol tig)*, each time there was no less than an assembly of seven thousand people. They [saw] rainbows, rains of flowers, etc., and many miraculous signs. Hor bSod namstobs

³⁴ Padmasambhava, the Precious *Guru (Gu ru rin po che)*, the tantric master at the origin of the *gter ma* tradition of the rNying ma pa.

³⁵ This is Shes rab 'od zer's major *gter ma*, included in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. See the references given in Dudjom, 257.

³⁶ The Pure Land of Padmasambhava.

³⁷ Cycle revealed by gTer ston Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396).

³⁸ Padmasambhava, named thus because he came from the land of Oḍḍiyāna (O rgyan).

rgyal,³⁹ who was endowed with the eye of the Dharma and whose clarity was pure from desires and obstructions, offered [his] patronage and restored 'Phyong dpal ri theg chen gling,⁴⁰ the temple with its sacred supports. The Dharma activity [of Shes rab 'od zer] spread in dBus, gTsang and Khams. At the age of sixty-seven, the tenth day of the sixth Mongol month, the water monkey year (1584), he passed into peace. His son, Karma kun bzang and [Karma kun bzang's] mother prayed in [Shes rab 'od zer's] presence during three days. The morning of the thirteenth day, miraculous signs appeared. [Shes rab 'od zer] gathered in the miraculous arrangement of the spirit of dPa' bo chen po thod pa'i dum bu rtsal in the city of Śāntapurī. There is a full biography with the history of the treasure-discoveries written by the Lord of Dharma [Kar ma] kun bzang and called the *Ten Chapters of Miraculous Discourses* (*Ngo mtshar ba'i gtam skabs bcu pa*).⁴¹ I ['Jam mgon kong sprul blo gro mtha' yas] had the good fortune to obtain the remaining uninterrupted [initiations that] mature and the [instructions that] liberate in [the tradition of] the *Point of Liberation* (*Grol tig*).

The *rnam thar* of Shes rab 'od zer also given in *Guru bKra shis chos byung*⁴² and the *Zhe chen chos 'byung*⁴³ gives some more details on what is here summarized by Kong sprul. It is notably stated that he was praised by the Ninth Karmapa dBang phyug rdo rje, the Fifth Zhwa dmar pa dKon mchog yan lag rnam, and that Pad ma dkar po became also the holder of the *Grol tig*. It is in association with this *gter ma* that he was mainly remembered by the tradition as a *gter ston*.

³⁹ We write “*stobs rgyal*” instead of “*stobs gyas*” which is found in Kong sprul. Hor bSod nam stobs rgyal was the prince of 'Phyong rgyas in whose lineage the Fifth Dalai Lama Blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682) was later born. Moreover the Great Fifth used ritually several of Padmasambhava's images rediscovered by Shes rab 'od zer: the images named Padmaguru and Rigs 'dus brda dbang lnga pa, as was indicated by Samten Karmay in *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama: The Gold Manuscript in the Fournier Collection* (London: Serindia Publications, 1988), 39, 42, 62, according to what Mrs. Anne Chayet has kindly informed us.

⁴⁰ The monastery where 'Jigs med gling pa (1730-1798) was trained. Some references to 'Jigs med gling pa's connections with Shes rab 'od zer's monastery of dPal ris and *gter ma* of the *Grol tig* are also given by Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self. The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 1998), 77, 81, 132.

⁴¹ According to the TBRC, this work written by Shes rab 'od zer's son, probably survived to the time of 'Jam mgon Kong sprul but has not yet surfaced.

⁴² Gu ru bKra shis, *Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1990), 544-50.

⁴³ Zhe chen rgyal tshab 'Gyur med pad ma rnam rgyal, *Zhe chen chos 'byung* (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1994), 262-69. I would like to thank very much Lama Tenzin Samphel for the indications of these two other versions of Shes rab 'od zer's *rnam thar* and for his useful advices concerning the present translation.

But as we can read, his life included all the major sources of spiritual learning and training of his time.

3. The Original Work of Shes rab 'od zer on the Eight Lineages of Attainment

3-1. Localization

A *gsung 'bum* of Shes rab 'od zer, only one volume in full, has been found in Bhutan in the collection of Lama bSod nams bzang po, published in Gangtok and then digitized by TBRC. We find there his most renowned *gter ma* cycle of the *Grol tig*, included in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, and his work on the final -s (*sa mtha'*) in Tibetan grammar.

Moreover, there are two treatises of great interest for our present purpose:

- *Study and Reflection's Ambrosia of Immortality (Thos bsam 'chi med kyi bdud rtsi)*;⁴⁴
- *Meditation's Ambrosia of Immortality (sGom pa 'chi med kyi bdud rtsi)*.⁴⁵

The two treatises deal with the trilogy of study, reflection, and meditation (*śruta cintā bhāvanā, thos bsam sgom*) which form the three steps in the development of wisdom (*prajñā, shes rab*) along with the soteriological path of Buddhism, and treat respectively the exegesis (*bshad*) and the practice or attainment (*sgrub*) of the teachings. Shes rab 'od zer offers in these works a remarkable synthesis of the different fields of Buddhism in Tibet, presenting the great expounders, holders, and lineages of transmission coming from India. The first deals with the “ten great pillars who supported the

⁴⁴ The full title is: *Gangs ri'i khrod kyi klog pa nyan bshad pa rnams kyi snyan tu bsrings pa thos bsam 'chi med kyi bdud rtsi*. In 'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer, *Gsung 'bum*, 1 vol. (Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1977), 231-42.

⁴⁵ 'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer, *Gangs ri'i khrod kyi spong ba bsam gtan pa rnams kyi snyan tu bsrings pa sgom pa 'chi med kyi bdud rtsi*, 243-66.

exegetical lineages” (*bshad brgyud ’degs pa’i ka chen bcu*);⁴⁶ and the second specifically with the “eight great chariots that are lineages of attainment” (*sgrub brgyud shing rta chen po brgyad*). If the eclectic approach is clear and manifest in these texts, Shes rab ’od zer insists also on what makes the authentic and complete Buddhist path. Thus, at the same time, the identity and specificity of each tradition or aspect is defined and precise, the universal Buddhist approach is developed, and the authenticity of its origin and completion is emphasized. In this sense, we find that the eight lineages of attainment are presented here in a non-hierarchical exposition as valid, authentic, and complete traditions and said to all descend from the primordial Buddha Vajradhara.

These two texts were in large part quoted and annotated by ’Jam dbyangs mKhyen brste’i dbang po and then by ’Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas in his *gDams ngag mdzod*. The complete text of *Study and Reflection’s Ambrosia of Immortality* and one third of *Meditation’s Ambrosia of Immortality* with substantial annotations, are included in mKhyen brtse’s collected works.⁴⁷ The *gDams ngag mdzod’s dkar chag*⁴⁸ opens with the now quite well-known first verses of Shes rab ’od zer’s *Meditation’s Ambrosia of Immortality*.

This text may be considered as an (if not the) original source of the “*ris med* paradigm” of the eight lineages of attainment. For this reason I offer here a translation of its first part. The section here translated, located in Shes rab ’od zer’s *gsung ’bum* (243-51), is the original text used and quoted by both mKhyen brtse and Kong sprul.

⁴⁶ Thon mi sam bho ṭa (early-to-mid-seventh century), Vairocana (eighth to ninth century), sKa ba dpal brtsegs (eighth to ninth century), Cog ro klu’i rgyal mtshan (eighth to ninth century), Zhang ye shes sde (eighth to ninth century), Lo chen Rin chen bzang po (957-1055), ’Brom ston pa rGyal ba’i ’byung gnas (1005-1064) and rNgog lo tsā ba bLo ldan shes rab (1059-1109), Sa skya paṇḍita Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan (1182-1251), and ’Gos Khug pa lhas btsas (early eleventh century).

⁴⁷ *Gangs ri’i khrod kyi klog pa nyan bshad pa rnams dang spong ba bsam gtan pa rnams kyi snyan du bsrings pa thos bsam dang bsgom pa ’chi med bdud rtsi ldeb*. In Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse’i dbang po, *The Collected Works (gsung ’bum)*, vol. 6 (Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1977-80), 327-74.

⁴⁸ Kapstein, 1996, 277, the reference given is: *gDams ngag mdzod*, vol. 12 (Delhi: N. Lungtok and N. Gyaltzen 1971), 645-46. For the translation of this passage of the *gDams ngag mdzod*, see Kapstein 2007, 110-29.

In mKhyen brtse's writings, it forms the root text to which mKhyen brtse added his commentary. Therefore the notes written by mKhyen brtse on the first part of this text seem to have been integrated and developed by Kong sprul when writing the *dkar chag* of the *gDams ngag mdzod*. The original text is accompanied with a few allusive notes that I only use here in my comments when necessary. At the end of the full text (266) the colophon indicates that Shes rab 'od zer (Prajñāraśmi) was in 'Phying ba stag rtse at the time of its redaction.

Beginning with a general introduction which established the model of the eight lineages of attainment, the text treats equally the eight lineages of practice in eight sections of parallel construction with two parts: firstly a summary of the esoteric instructions' system and secondly the origin of the lineage, introduction to Tibet, main masters and diffusion into its various ramifications.

3-2. Translation of *Meditation's Ambrosia of Immortality*

Meditation's Ambrosia of Immortality

*Transmitted to the ears of the renunciant meditators
from the hermitages of the snowy mountains*

Homage to the Glorious Vajradhara⁴⁹

Those who aspire to receive the sacred teaching of the realization
Should meditate upon the *guru* endowed with the three [vows]⁵⁰ as
really being a Buddha,

And practice with intensive and one-pointed attention and aspiration,
The oral lineages' instructions of the former accomplished ones.

If one were to practice continuously, day and night, erroneous
instructions,

That would be only pain without benefit.

So these are the instructions of the great accomplished ones.⁵¹

Listen, great meditators everywhere!

The lord of sentient beings in the Land of Snow⁵² prophesied by the
Victorious

Was the sole intention of the unique teaching

Of the ancient King of the Dharma, the single divine monarch,⁵³

Who was here in the hermitages of the snowy mountains, the Second
Teacher.

The definitive translator Pa gor Bai ro,⁵⁴

The descendant of the Victorious' line, 'Brom ston the layman,⁵⁵

⁴⁹ The primordial Buddha or *Ādibuddha* in the tantric teachings.

⁵⁰ The three vows (*trisaṃvara*, *sdom pa gsum*) are the vows of personal liberation (*prātimokṣa*, *so sor thar pa*), of the awakened mind (*bodhicitta*, *byang chub sems dpa'*) and of a tantric practitioner (*vidyādhara*, *rig 'dzin*), corresponding to the three vehicles of the Buddhist teachings in Tibet (*Hīnayāna*, *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna*).

⁵¹ *Mahāsiddha*, *grub thob chen po*, great realized tantric adept.

⁵² Avalokiteśvara.

⁵³ According to M. Kapstein (2007), this refers to the *Maṇi bka' bum* traditions associated with the king Srong btsan sgam po.

⁵⁴ Vairocana, at the time of Khri Srong lde btsan and Padmasambhava, source the rNying ma pa lineage (n°1 here in *Meditation's Ambrosia of Immortality*) during the first period of introduction of Buddhism in Tibet.

The great learned and accomplished, 'Khyung po rnal 'byor pa,⁵⁶
 The great *guru* who spoke the two languages, 'Brog mi,⁵⁷
 The almighty yogin, venerable Mar pa,⁵⁸
 Dam pa rgya gar⁵⁹ who resided in the state of attainment,
 The translator Gyi co,⁶⁰ the learned and accomplished O rgyan pa.⁶¹
 These eight great pillars established in the north the lineages of
 attainment
 Which perfectly came from the glorious Vajradhara.
 Here in the hermitages of the snowy mountains, these eight great
 traditions of the lineages of attainment,
 Are the legacy of the former great accomplished ones.
 Those aspiring to liberation should follow their paths.

1. rNying ma pa, “The Ancients’ School”

Whatever appearances arise in the field of the six consciousnesses⁶²
 Is the primordial wisdom of the natural state, perfect since the
 beginning.
 Contemplating one’s own face without being distracted from non
 meditation,⁶³
 Abiding in the experience of the four visions,⁶⁴
 Are the main practices of the Great Perfection (*rDzogs chen*)

⁵⁵ 'Brom ston rGyal ba'i 'byung gnas (1104-1163) the disciple of the indian master Atīśa Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna (982-1054), at the origin of the bKa' gdams pa lineage (n°2).

⁵⁶ Khyung po rnal 'byor Tshul khriims mgon po (c.1050-c.1140) from the valley of Shangs, founded the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud lineage (n°3).

⁵⁷ 'Brog mi lo tsā ba Śākya ye shes (992-1072) who transmitted the Lam 'bras lineage (n°4) originated from the Indian *mahāsiddha* Virūpa.

⁵⁸ Mar pa chos kyi blo gros (1012-1097), disciple of the Indian *mahāsiddha* Naropā, source of the Mar pa bka' brgyud lineage (n°5) and its different branches.

⁵⁹ Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas (died in 1117) transmitted the Zhi byed lineage (n°6) connected to the gCod lineage.

⁶⁰ Gyi gyo Zla ba'i 'od zer (“Gyi co” in Shes rab 'od zer's text) introduced the *tantra* of Kālacakra with a first translation in 1027, and its system of yoga through the lineage of sByor drug (n°7).

⁶¹ O rgyan pa rin chen dpal (1230-1309) went to Oḍḍiyāna and received from Vajrayoginī a direct revelation founding the rDo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub instructions lineage (n°8).

⁶² The five sensorial consciousnesses and the mental consciousness.

⁶³ Practices of *khregs chod*, “Cutting through resistance.”

⁶⁴ Visionary practices of *thod rgal*, the “all-surpassing realization.”

teachings.

The three main supports are the *tantra* (*Mahāyoga*), the precepts (*Anuyoga*) and the spiritual instructions (*Atiyoga*).

The sublime and special instructions of Śrī Siṃha⁶⁵

Were initially transmitted to the *mantra* adept Vairocana,

Who having realized them, spread them here in the hermitages of the snowy mountains.

Through [the traditions of] sGyus, Nyang, rMa, 'Khon, Zur, gNubs and gNyos,

Srid, Rags, dPyal, sKyo, sTon, and g.Yung, etc,

An infinity of ancient oral transmissions of the initial translation appeared.

The glorious Zur pa⁶⁶ are the ornaments of the Great Perfection teachings.

2. bKa' gdams pa, “The Transmitted Precepts and Instructions School”

Meditating assiduously upon the precious human life difficult to obtain, impermanence and death,

The deeds and their ineluctable results, the imperfection of *samsāra*,
And the two *bodhicitta*,

Are the main practices of the bKa' gdams pa teachings.

The main supports are the Treatises of the Vast Conduct (*rGya chen spyod pa'i gzhung*).

The sublime and special instructions of the divine lord [Atiśa]

Were initially transmitted to the son of the Victorious 'Brom ston pa,

Who having realized them, spread them here in the hermitages of the snowy mountains.

There are those following the treatises (*gzhung pa*), the study and explanation of the six bKa' gdams pa texts,⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Disciple of the first human rDzogs chen master, dGa' rab rdo rje.

⁶⁶ On the lineage of the Zur family see Dudjom, 617-49.

⁶⁷ The notes of the text briefly refer to the *Garland of Birth Stories* (*Jātakamālā*, *sKyes rabs*) the *Collection of Purposeful Sayings* (*Udānavarga*, *Ched du brjod pa'i tshom*) concerning faith; the *Compendium of Lessons* (*Śīkṣāsamuccaya*, *bSlab btus*) and the *Introduction to the Conduct of a Bodhisattva* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*, *sPyod 'jug*) concerning the right conduct; the

Those following the instructions (*gdams ngag pa*) condensing the practice of the Four Noble Truths,⁶⁸
And those following the instructions of Gung thang and Nag tsho's oral transmission,
Sublime followers of the treatises endowed with the two streams of explanation and practice.

3. Shangs pa bKa' brgyud, "The oral lineage of Shangs"

The trunk [is] the six yogas; the branches [are] the reliquary;
The leaves [are] the methods of integration; the flowers [are] the two *Khecharī*;
The fruit is the progressive meditation of the immortality of body and mind:⁶⁹
These are the main Shangs pa bKa' brgyud practices.
The main support is the *tantra* of Cakrasaṃvara.
The sublime and special instructions of the primordial wisdom *ḍākinī* [Niguma],
Were initially transmitted to the learned and accomplished Khyung po rnal 'byor
Who having realized them, spread them here in the hermitages of the snowy mountains.
The unique transmission was kept under the seal of secrecy in a lineage of seven generations.
Sangs rgyas ston pa spread [these teachings] to all the fortunate ones.
The oral transmission branched out in many ways in dBus, Shang, and Nyang.

Bodhisattva Level (Bodhisattvabhūmi, Byang sa) and *the Ornament of the Sūtra of the Great Vehicle (Mahāyānasūtralaṃkāra, mDo sde rgyan)* concerning meditation.

⁶⁸ Taught by the Buddha Śākyamuni in the first turning of the wheel of Dharma: the truth of suffering (*duḥkhasatya, sdug bsngal gyi bden pa*), the truth of origin (*duḥkhasamudayasatya, kun 'byung gi bden pa*), the truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya, 'gog pa 'i bden pa*), and the truth of path (*mārgasatya, lam gyi bden pa*).

⁶⁹ This classification differs from the traditional one repeated by Kong sprul in which: the roots are the six yogas (of Niguma which are closed to those of Naropā, see next notes on the Mar pa bKa' brgyud), the trunk is the reliquary of the Great Seal (*Mahāmudrā*), the branches are the methods of integration, the flowers are the two *Khecharī* and the fruit is the immortality of body and mind; so that there is normally no mention of the leaves. These are the Five Golden Teachings (*gSer chos lnga*) of the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud.

Those who entered the stream of its practice were particularly noble and excellent.

4. Lam 'bras, “the Path and Fruition”

Empowerment conferred on as cause, the external and internal creation phases,

The meditation in four sessions and the profound empowerment as path,

Training in the three paths and inviting primordial wisdom:

These are the main practices of the Path and Fruition (*Lam 'bras*) teachings.

The main support is the *tantra* of Hevajra.

The sublime and special instructions of Gayadhāra

Were initially transmitted to the great *guru* 'Brog mi,

Who having realized them, spread them here in the hermitages of the snowy mountains.

[There were] the traditions of Gyi co, 'Brom, Zhang ston, Zhwa ma

The traditions of Ko brag, Mang lam, Cha gan, Jo nang,

The traditions of dBang rgyal, Sa [skya]; the traditions of lCe sgom and mTha' rtsa.

The Sa skya pa having accomplished the ocean of the *Dharma* traditions

Are the crown ornaments of all the lineages of attainment.

5. Mar pa bKa' brgyud: “the Oral lineage of Mar pa”

Recognizing one's own face in the phase of the Great Seal (*Mahāmudrā*), pure knowledge,

Remembering it through an attention without distraction,

And meditating upon the path of methods⁷⁰, unifying view and conduct,

⁷⁰ The six yogas of Naropā: inner heat (*gtu mo*), apparitional body (*sgyu lus*), dream (*rmi lam*), luminosity (*'od gsal*), the intermediate state (*bar do*), and transference of consciousness (*'pho ba* or in another body: *grongs 'jug*).

These are the main Dwags po bKa' brgyud practices.
 The main support is the mother *tantra* of Cakrasaṃvara.
 The sublime and special instructions of Naropā
 Were initially transmitted to the venerable Marpa⁷¹
 Who having realized them, spread them here in the hermitages of the
 snowy mountains.
 The Khro phu pa and the glorious 'Brug pa,
 The Tshal pa bKa' brgyud, the Kar ma pa emanations,
 The 'Bri [gung], Stag [lung], g.Ya' [bzang], and Phag [gru] bka'
 brgyud,
 Adorn most of the snowy mountains and valleys
 With the practices of the incomparable Dwags po's⁷² oral lineages.
 The holders of the glorious 'Brug pa lineage are the treasures of their
 stream.

6. Zhi byed, “Pacification”

All the phenomena apprehended [are] empty in essence,
 The mind which apprehends them [is] also non-conceptual emptiness,
 In the state of non-conception, immobile in clarity-emptiness,
 These are the main practices of the Pacification (*Zhi byed*) teachings.
 The main supports are the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* and the *River Sūtra*.⁷³
 The sublime and special instructions of [Pha] Dam pa sangs rgyas,
 Instructing others through symbols and words,
 [Were transmitted] here in the hermitages of the snowy mountains in
 three successive lineages:
 The first is the lineage of the venerable Ong po lo tsā ba,
 The following are the lineages of rMa, So, and Kam,
 And the last is the lineage of the two great sons' traditions.
 Dam pa kun dga' was the foremost spiritual son.

⁷¹ Mar pa lo tsā ba chos kyi blo gros (1012-1097).

⁷² sGam po pa dwags po lha rje (1079-1153) was the disciple of the great ascetic Mi la ras pa (1040-1123), and is said to have joined the two streams of the bKa' gdams pa and of the bKa' brgyud pa's *Mahāmudrā*.

⁷³ *Chu klung mdo?*

7. sByor drug, “the Six Yogas”

Through withdrawal⁷⁴ and meditation⁷⁵ the form of emptiness appears;
Through energy control⁷⁶ and retention⁷⁷ one abides in cessation.
Through consummation⁷⁸ and absorption⁷⁹ great bliss is generated;
These are the main practices of the Six Yogas (*sByor drug*) teachings.
The main support is the root and condensed *tantra* [of Kālacakra].
The sublime and special instructions of the great Kālacakrapāda⁸⁰
Were initially transmitted to the translator Gyi co,
Who having realized them, spread them here in the hermitages of the
snowy mountains.
The profound path of [the traditions of] Gyi co, Rwa, ’Bro, rTsa,
gNyos, Chag, dPyal, Rong,
rGwa, Tshal, Ko, ’Gos, master Orgyan pa,
Sa, Jo, Zhang and kLog, Lung, and dBang rgya,
Appeared on the earth of the Land of Snow.
The Jo nang pa are endowed with the continuity of its practice river.

8. rDo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub “the Service and Attainment of the Three Indestructible Realities”

The service of body controls its energetic centres,
The attainment of speech is the *vajra* recitation and yoga of vital
energy.
The great attainment of the mind maintains the essence without
effusion.
These are the main practices of the Service and Attainment (*bsnyen
sgrub*) teachings.
The main supports are the *tantra* of Cakrasaṃvara and Kālacakra.

⁷⁴ *Pratyāhāra, sor sdud.*

⁷⁵ *Dhyāna, bsam gtan.*

⁷⁶ *Prāṇāyāma, srog rtsol.*

⁷⁷ *Dhāraṇā, ’dzin pa.*

⁷⁸ *Anusmṛti, rjes dran.*

⁷⁹ *Samādhi, ting nge ’dzin.*

⁸⁰ Cilupā (eleventh century), who went to the sacred kingdom of Śambhala and then introduced the *Kālacakratantra* in India.

The sublime and special instructions of the Indestructible Yoga
(*Vajrayoga*)

Were initially transmitted to the learned and accomplished O rgyan pa,
Who having realized them, spread them here in the hermitages of the
snowy mountains [to]

mKhar chu rin po che who obtained a prophecy from [his] divinity,

[To] the realized Seng ge, the glorious sBu tra ba,

[And to] the incomparable analyst, venerable Zur phug pa.

Because he had obtained the prophecy, the first lineage holder [was]
the sublime [mKhar chu rin po che].

Separated from the *gter ma* and *tantra* or supposedly revealed by
divinities,

The oral fabricated lineages

Do not conform to the traditions of the former accomplished and
learned ones.

They are not the oral lineages of Vajradhara.⁸¹

3-3. Tibetan transliterated text⁸²

[243] // *Sgom pa 'chi med kyi bdud rtsi zhes bya ba bzhugs so//*

[244] / /gangs ri'i khrod kyi spong ba bsam gtan pa rnam kyi
snyan tu bsrings pa/ sgom pa 'chi med kyi bdud rtsi zhes bya ba/
/dpal rdo rje 'chang la phyag 'tshal lo//rtogs pa'i dam chos su
len 'dod na/ /gsum ldan bla ma sangs rgyas dngos su
bsgoms/ /grub thob gong ma'i snyan rgyud gdams pa la/
/dran 'dun drag pos rtse gcig nyams su long/ /log pa'i gdams
pa nyan⁸³ mtshan khor yug tu/ /nyams su blangs kyangs ngal ba don
med pas/ /de phyr grub chen gdams pa 'di yin zhes/ /phyogs kyi
sgom chen kun la 'di bsrings so/ /rgyal bas lung bstan [245] /gangs

⁸¹ This is a strong manner to emphasize the authenticity and excellence of the eight lineages of attainment coming from Vajradhara.

⁸² 'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer, 243-251. This is the root text translated above. Some variations of the spelling can be observed. I remain here simply accurate to this edition of Gangtok.

⁸³ I read *nyin* which is found in mKhyen brtse, 348.

can 'gro ba'i mgon /gcig tu bstan pa 'ba' zhig nyer dgongs pa'i/
 /sngon gyi chos rgyal lha gcig khri brtsan de/ /gangs ri'i
 khrod kyi ston pa gnyis pa yin /zhu chen lo tsā pa gor bai ro dang /
 /rgyal ba'i gdung tshob 'brom ston u pa si/ /mkhas grub chen po
 khyung po rnal 'byor pa/ /skad gnyis smra ba'i bla chen 'brog mi
 dang // rnal 'byor dbang phyug rje btsun mar pa'i zhabs/ /grub pa'i
 sar bzhugs dam pa rgya gar dang/ /gyi co lo tsa mkhas grub o
 rgyan pa /
 byang phyogs bsgrub rgyud⁸⁴ 'degs pa'i ka chen brgyad/ /dpal ldan
 rdo rje 'chang nas legs 'ongs pa'i/ /gangs ri'i khrod 'dir bsgrub
 rgyud srol chen brgyad/ /de dag grub thob gong ma'i gshegs shul
 yin /thar 'dod rnams kyang lam de'i [246] rjes su zhugs/

[1. rNying ma pa]

/tshogs drug yul du snang ba gang shar yang / /gdod nas grub pa'i
 gnyug ma'i ye shes de/ /rang zhal blta zhing bsgom med ma yengs
 pa/ /snang bzhi'i don la mnyam par 'jog pa nyid/ /rdzogs chen
 chos kyi nyams len gtso bo yin/ /brten gzhi'i gtso bo rgyud lung man
 ngag gsum/ /dpal gyi seng ge'i khyad par gdams pa mchog
 /dang por bka' babs sngags 'chang bai ro yis/ /thugs nyams
 bzhes nas gangs ri'i khrod 'dir spel/ /sgyus nyang rma dang 'khon
 zur gnubs gnyos dang/ /srid rags dpyal dang skyong ston g.yung
 la sogs/ /snga 'gyur rnying ma'i bka' rgyud bgrang yas byon/ dpal
 ldan zur pa rdzogs chen bstan pa'i rgyan//

[2. bKa' gdams pa]

/[247] dal 'byor brnyed dka' mi rtag 'chi ba dang / /las 'bras bsłu
 med 'khor ba'i nyas⁸⁵ dmigs dang / /byang chub sems gnyis nan gyi
 bsgom byed pa//bka' gdams chos kyi nyams len gtso bo yin/ /rten
 gzhi'i gtso bo rgya chen spyod pa'i gzhung / /lha gcig jo bo'i

⁸⁴ The different spelling *sgrub brgyud* is to be found in mKhyen brste and in the later tradition which we have followed in the present chapter.

⁸⁵ Again I read *nyes dmigs* according to mKhyen brtse, 351.

khyad par gdams pa mchog/ /dang por bka' babs rgyal sras 'brom
ston gyis/ /thugs nyams bzhes nas gangs ri'i khrod 'dir spel//bka'
gdams gzhung drug nyan bshad gzhung pa dang //nyams len bden
bzhir khrid bsdu gdams ngag pa/ gung thang nag tsho'i bka' rgyud
gdams pa 'og/ /bshad bsgrub chu bo gnyis ldan gzhung pa mchog

[3. Shangs pa bka' brgyud]

sdong po chos drug yal ga ga'u ma/ /lo ma lam khyer me tog mkha'
spyod gnyis/ /'bras bu lus sems 'chi med bsgom rim ste/ /bka'
rgyud shangs pa'i nyams len gtso bo yin /rten gzhi'i gtso bo 'khor
lo sdom pa'i rgyud/ /ye shes mkha' 'gro'i khyad par gdams pa
mchog dang por bka' babs mkhas grub khyung po yis/ /thugs
nyams bzhes nas gangs ri'i khrod 'dir spel/ / [248] brgyud rim bdun
tu chis rgyud bka' rgyas btab/ /sangs rgyas ston pas skal ldan yongs
la spel/ /dbus shang nyang sogs bka' rgyud rnam mang gyes/
/nyams len rgyun gyi 'jags legs khyad par 'phags/ /

[4. Lam 'bras]

/rgyu dbang bskur nas phyi nang bskyed rim dang/ /lam dbang zab
mo thun bzhir bsgom pa dang/ /lam gsum bsgoms pas ye shes 'dren
byed pa/ /lam 'bras chos kyi nyams len gtso bo yin/ /rten
gzhi'i gtso bo dgyes pa rdo rje'i rgyud/ /ga ya rda ra'i khyad par
gdams pa mchog /dang por bka' babs bla chen 'brog mi yis/
/thugs nyams bzhes nas gangs ri'i khrod 'dir 'pel//gyi co 'brom
dang zhang ston zha ma lugs/ /ko brag mang lam cha gan jo nang
[249] /lugs/ /dbang rgyal sa lugs lce sgom mtha' rtsa lugs/
/chos lugs rgya mtsho'i mthar son sa skya pa/ /gang 'dir
sgrub rgyud kun gyi gtsug gi rgyan /

[5. Mar pa bka' brgyud]

phyag chen dus su dangs ma'i shes pa ste/ /rang ngo shes nas ma
yengs dran 'dun dang/ /thabs lam bsgoms nas lta spyod zung du

sbrel/ /bka' rgyud dags po'i nyams len gtso bo yin/rten gzhi'i
 gtso bo ma rgyud bde mchog ste/ /nā ro ta pa'i khyad par gdams
 pa mchog /dang por bka' babs rje btsun mar pa yis/ thugs dam
 gzhes nas gangs ri'i khrod 'dir spel/ khro phu pa dang dpal
 ldan 'brug pa dang/ /tshal pa bka' rgyud sprul sku karma pa/
 /'bri stag nam gnyis g.ya' phag bka' brgyud de/ /mnyam med
 dags po'i bka' rgyud nyams len gyis/ /gangs can ri sul phel bar mdzes
 par byas/ /dpal ldan 'brug pa rgyud 'dzin chu bo'i gter/ /

[6. Zhi byed]

/gzung ba'i chos kun rang rang ngo bos stong / 'dzin pa'i sems
 kyang spros bral stong pa nyid// /spros med ngang la gsal stong mi
 g.yo ba/ /zhi byed chos kyi nyams len gtso bo yin /rten gzhi'i
 gtso bo sher phyin chu klung mdo/ /dam pa sangs rgyas khyad par
 gdams pa mchog/ /brda' dang gsung gi gzhan la bstan pa las// [250]
 gangs ri'i khrod 'dir rgyud pa rim pa gsum/ /brgyud pa dang po rje
 btsun ong lo sogs / brgyud pa bar ba rma so skam gsum dang/
 /brgyud pa tha ma bu chen gnyis gyi lugs/ /dam pa kun dga'
 thugs sras mchog gis 'phags/

[7. sByor drug]

/sor bsdud bsam stan stong gzugs 'char ba dang/ /srog rtsol 'dzin pa
 srog 'gog gnas par byed/ /rjes dran ting 'dzin bde chen bskyed pa
 ste/ /sbyor drug chos kyi nyams len gtso bo yin/rten gzhi'i
 gtso bo rtsa ba bsdus pa'i rgyud/ /dus zhabs pañ cen khyad par
 gdams pa mchog /dang por bka' babs gyi co lo tsā yis/
 /thugs nyams gzhes nas gangs ri'i khrod 'dir spel/ /gyi co
 ra 'bro rtsa gnyos chag dpyal rong/ /rgwa tshal ko mgos o rgyan
 yon ston pa dang/ /sa jo zhang gsum lkog lung dbang rgya lugs/
 /de sogs zab lam gangs can 'dzin mar shar/ /nyams len chu bo'i
 rgyun ldan jo nang pa/ /

[8. rDo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub]

/sku'i bsnyen pa lus gnad byed bcings dang/ gsung gi bsgrub pa
rdor bzlas srog rtsol dang/ /thugs kyi sgrub chen dangs ma 'dzag
med 'ching/ /bsnyen bsgrub chos kyi nyams len gtso bo yin
/rten gzhi'i gtso bo [251] /bde mchog dus 'khor rgyud/ /rdo rje
rnal 'byor khyad par gdams pa mchog /dang por bka' babs mkhas grub
o rgyan pas/ /thugs nyams bzhes nas gangs ri'i khrod 'dir spel//yi
dam lung thob mkhar chu rin po che/ /rtogs ldan seng ge dpal ldan bu
tra ba/ /rnam dpyod mtshungs med rje btsun zur phug pa/
/brgyud 'dzin lung bstan thob phyir dang po mchog

/gter rgyud ma 'brel yi dam lung bstan tu/ /khas len smra ba'i bcos
ma'i snyan rgyud rnam/ /mkhas grub gong ma'i srol dang mi
mthun pas/de dag rdo rje 'chang gi bka' rgyud min

Conclusion

The model of the eight lineages of attainment encompasses all the highest esoteric teachings of Buddhism in Tibet and the origins of its main religious orders. It is a response to sectarianism as a unifying model based on a soteriological approach, while at the same time preserving the specificities of each different tradition. If 'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer may be considered as the first to have formulated this model, it was through an eclectic education during a time of intense sectarianism. His original work on the eight lineages of attainment, *Meditation's Ambrosia of Immortality*, demonstrates how these eight lineages share common origin and goal in the state of Vajradhara, giving their pith instructions, development in Tibet and highlighting the authenticity, identity, and specificities of Tibetan Buddhist esoteric traditions. For these reasons, this model was adopted centuries later as a structural element of 'Jam mgon Kong sprul's *ris med* compilation of the *Treasury of Spiritual Instructions*.

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