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## **The Emergence of a Myth : In search of the origins of the life story of Shenrab Miwo, the founder of Bon**

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## CHAPTER SIX

# SHENRAB'S ANCESTORS AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

### INTRODUCTION

There is an abundance names in the *mDo 'dus*. Many of these belong to members of Shenrab's family, including his ancestors. The author(s) seems to have considered these family names to be equally important to the other material contained in the *mDo 'dus*. It is evident that this life account of Shenrab Miwo could not have been successfully completed without them. One might wonder where the author(s) got these names from. I will try to answer this question by tracing the possible origins of these names. I have already discussed some of these family members, including the wives and children, in the previous chapter. Here I will discuss the name of Shenrab's father, his mother and her family background, his ancestors and his brothers.

### FATHER GYALBÖN THÖKAR, *BON PO* OF MEN & GODS

According to the *mDo 'dus*, the father of Shenrab, Gyalbön Thökar, was the son of *dmu* King Lankyi Thempake and Queen Ngangdrangma.<sup>185</sup> The queen was a daughter of *phyä* named Ade Khyapa. This indicates that the boy was a grandson of *dmu* and *phyä*, which in old Tibetan documents and another Tibetan historical source (*rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*, p. 233) are considered to be two important clans<sup>186</sup>. In this very brief account in the *mDo 'dus* (p. 55), we can see

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<sup>185</sup> On the other hand, the *Dul ba gling grags* and *rTsa rgyud nyi sgron* recorded the name of Gyalbön Thökar's mother as Lhaza Trulmo. Shardza (1985, p. 16) gives us yet another similar name, Ngangdragma, who was the lady of Sije Drangkar (an ancestral member of *dmu* lineage) and was also called *lha za*, 'a divine princess'.

<sup>186</sup> A dialogue between the ruler of *dmu* and an envoy of *phywa* (alt. *phyä*) is described in Pelliot tibétain 126 (lines 104-68). In this text, a man from the *phywa* is asking a man from the *dmu* to rule the land of the black-headed men, which latter generally refers to Tibetans (for a detailed

several names being identified as those of Shenrab's parents and grandparents. These also include the names of Shenrab's maternal grandparents, although their family name is not recorded. I will discuss the grandparents further in the ancestor section, later.

In order to trace the possible sources of the father's name, I shall first look closely at the structure of his name. His name is written in at least five different ways in the *mDo 'dus*, including some of them that probably are modified from *mi* 'human' to *myes* 'grandfather'. For the analytical discussion of this chapter, I prefer to present those names in transliteration instead of phonetic transcription. The names are:

- 1) *Mi bon lha bon rgyal bon thad/thod dkar*,<sup>187</sup> and its shorter version *rgyal bon thod dkar*<sup>188</sup> are the most well known names among the Bonpos. To translate them literally, *mi bon* means 'human bon,' *lha bon* 'divine bon,' *rgyal bon* 'royal bon,' and *thod dkar* means '[wearing a] white turban'.
- 2) *Mi bon lha bon rgyal po thod dkar* and its short version *rgyal po thod dkar*,<sup>189</sup> in which *rgyal bon* is replaced with *rgyal po* 'king'.
- 3) *Myes bon lha bon rgya bon thod dkar*,<sup>190</sup> in which *mi bon* is replaced with *myes bon* 'grandfather bon' and *rgyal bon* is replaced with *rgya bon* 'Chinese Bonpo'.
- 4) *Me(or mes) bon lha bon rgyal bon thod dkar*.<sup>191</sup> There is an alternative of *me bon* literally 'fire bon' with *mes bon* or *myes bon* in this name. The word *mes* is the alternative spelling of *myes*.

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discussion, see Karmay 1998, p. 178-80, note 31). This *dmu* and *phya* family relationship is also maintained in the *mDo 'dus*.

<sup>187</sup> See *mDo 'dus*, p. 41 and *mDo 'dus* Lhagyal, f. 18a, f. 24a for this name.

<sup>188</sup> See *mDo 'dus*, pp. 52, 55, 59, 105, 119, 191 and 203 and *mDo 'dus* Lhagyal, ff. 22b, 24b, 26a, 46a, 52a, 84a and 89b.

<sup>189</sup> See *mDo 'dus* Karmay, f. 28a, and see *mDo 'dus* Karmay, ff. 26b, f. 28a and 29b for the short name.

<sup>190</sup> See *mDo 'dus* Karmay, f. 21a.

<sup>191</sup> See *mDo 'dus*, p. 55.

5) *Yab myes rgyal bon thod dkar*.<sup>192</sup> In this name, *mi bon* or *myes bon* is replaced with *yab myes* ‘father and grandfather’, thus this name clearly shows Gyalbön Thökar as the father (of Shenrab) and the grandfather (probably of Shenrab’s son as well as, metaphorically, of Shenrab’s followers). All the instances of the word *bon* in these names seem to be an abbreviated form of *bon po* (cf. *mi’i bon po*, *lha’i bon po*, *rgyal po’i bon po* and *rgya’i bon po*).

All the above names are only present in the *mDo ’dus*. There is a slightly different name, *mi bon lha bon yo bon rgyal bon thod dkar*, recorded in the *gZer mig* (p. 15). Here, an extra word *yo bon* is added, the meaning of which is not clear to me, unless it is derived from *ye bon* ‘primordial bon’ or from *yog bon*, which is a name that appears among the thirty-three *bonpos* (see appendix 2). Nevertheless, it corresponds with *yo phyi*, a part of the name of Shenrab’s mother, which I will discuss later. The name of Shenrab’s father is one example of a name that seems to have been derived in different ways from old Tibetan sources.

### References to *mi bon lha bon rgyal bon*

Among the old Tibetan sources, I will first look at some Tibetan documents preserved in Dunhuang. Those documents were accessible only until the early 11<sup>th</sup> century due to closure of the caves in 1002 AD (Rong 2000, p. 274) or in 1035 AD (Stein 2003b, p. 591) and have become accessible again since their discovery in the beginning of the twentieth century. I assume that some fragments of texts or oral traditions that correspond to the documents preserved in Dunhuang probably were available elsewhere and Bonpos may have had access to these. To my best knowledge, these fragments and traditions are not available anymore today, apart from what has been preserved in Dunhuang sources and what may be reflected in some of our Shenrab narratives. Based on this assumption, I shall try to determine how the name of Shenrab’s father relates to the names found in the Dunhuang

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<sup>192</sup> See *mDo ’dus*, p. 203, *mDo ’dus* Karmay f. 90b, *mDo ’dus* Lhagyal, f. 89b.

documents. As stated above, the first part of the name of Shenrab's father is *mi bon lha bon rgyal bon*, which is recorded in Pelliot tibétain 1134 (Imaeda 2007, p. 149) as follows.

“[119] *bu ni lha'i bu tsha ni srin gyi tsha' myi bon/ lha'i bon/ rgya bon brim tang gis/ rgyal tag brgyad* [120] */ ni / gnam las / bre*<sup>193</sup>*[/] se [mo] gru bzhi ni / sa la / bchas / ...*”

“The son is the son of a god and the nephew/grandson is the nephew/grandson of a demon, [he who is] the human *bon*, the divine *bon* and the *rgya bon* called *brim tang* connects the eight *rgyal* cords<sup>194</sup> in the sky and constructed *se [mo] gru bzhi* ‘four sided tomb’ on the earth.”<sup>195</sup>

As shown in the above passage, there is a long phrase *myi bon lha'i bon rgya bon brim tang*. This phrase appears to be either a description of one person called *brim tang* (the last part of the phrase), or a description of three different people judging from the punctuation marks separating them into three parts in the original document. In the latter case, I would take *myi bon*, *lha'i bon* and *rgya bon brim tang* separately. Alternatively, this phrase can also be read as a description of two persons (*myi bon lha'i bon* and *rgya bon brim tang*) as presented in the late 13<sup>th</sup>-century Tibetan history, *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* written by Khepa Dewu, which I will discuss little later.

It is well known that *myi* is an alternative spelling for *mi* and thus *myi bon*

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<sup>193</sup> There may be a different interpretation of the word *bre*, but here I translate it in the sense of *bre ba* which means ‘to connect’, ‘to display’ or ‘to weave’ as defined in Zhang (1996, p. 1906-07, see *gnam la 'ja' tshon bre ba*) and in Bon ritual texts.

<sup>194</sup> In this context, I prefer to translate *rgyal t(h)ag* as ‘a protection cord belonging to *rgyal* spirit’, as *rgyal* is, alternatively, one of the eight classes of gods and demons (Tib. *lha srin sde brgyad*). By doing so, *rgyal* spirit is assigned to remove obstacles to the funerary ritual activities.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. also Stein 2003b, p. 601-2, for *se [mo] gru bzhi* and *rgyal t(h)ag*.

for *mi bon*.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, *rgya bon* seems to be an alternative spelling of *rgyal bon* in the *mDo 'dus*, although the literal meanings of *rgya bon* and *rgyal bon* in present-day use are different. The word *rgya* refers to China,<sup>197</sup> whereas the word *rgyal* means king. As I have shown in the list of the father's names above, *rgya bon* is recorded instead of *rgyal bon* in the *mDo 'dus*, and probably the Bonpos have considered *rgya* and *rgyal* to be interchangeable.<sup>198</sup> However, the *rgya bon brim tang* that appeared in Pelliot tibétain 1134 has become *rgyal/rgya bon thod dkar* in the account of Shenrab. I will discuss *thod dkar* in the next section.

**Table:** A Speculative Example of the Name Transformation

Pelliot tibétain 1134	Transformation	<i>mDo 'dus</i>
rgya bon brim tang	rgya < alternative > rgyal brim tang > replaced by > thod dkar	rgyal bon thod dkar

The rendering of names in the *mDo 'dus* from old Tibetan documents can also be seen in some other names. Within the list of thirty-three *bonpos*, there are three names listed as *phyä bon thod dkar*, *rgyal bon bong(bon) po* and *smän bon 'bring dangs* (*mDo 'dus*, p. 53 ff.). If these names are compared with the names found in the above passage in Pelliot tibétain 1134, the similarity is evident. Here we can see that one name is spread over three names: *thod dkar* in the first name, *rgyal bon* in the second name, and *'bring dangs* (cf. *brim tang*) in the third name. This proves that several names were compiled to form one name or that an existing

<sup>196</sup> Cf. *myi bo* for *mi bo*, *myi rje* for *mi rje* in Pelliot tibétain 16 and *myi rabs* for *mi rabs* in Pelliot tibétain 1047.

<sup>197</sup> I have argued for this translation in Gurung (2009, p. 258). See Stein 2003b, p. 600 for a different opinion.

<sup>198</sup> There are other examples like, *rgya rong* and *rgyal rong* (a place in Sichuan province in China) and *rgya mkhar* and *rgyal mkhar* (a mythical palace in Bon texts), which are interchangeable too. Most of these interchangeable words are the result of how these words are pronounced by the people of eastern Tibet.

name was modified to form another.

Another reference to the name of Shenrab's father is given in the late 13<sup>th</sup>-century Tibetan history *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* written by Khepa Dewu. Although this source is dated almost two hundred years later than the *mDo 'dus*, some information recorded in this historical text could still depend on an older tradition. Furthermore, this Tibetan history apparently was composed on the basis of an older source, although the author(s) does not specify any details. In fact, the names recorded in this text are comparable to the names given in Pelliot tibétain 1134. I shall first quote the passage from the history by Khepa Dewu (1987, p. 232) and then compare that to Pelliot tibétain 1134.

“*'bring mo dre btsun rmu mo dang mi bon lha bon dang rgya 'brong tam chen po bshos pa'i sras 'chi med gshen gyi rmu rgyal tsha dang/ ce'u gshen gyi phyag(phyas) dkar tsha gnyis so.*”

“The middle daughter, *dre btsun dmu mo*, consorted with *mi bon lha bon* and *rgya 'brong tam chen po*. From [each] union, they had two sons. The first is a grandson of *dmu* King, *'chi med gshen*, and the second is a grandson of white *phyas* called *ce'u gshen*.”

This passage has been translated by Karmay as, “*mi bon lha bon* unites with the second daughter *dre btsun dmu mo*. From this union two brothers, *mtshe mi gshen gyi dmu rgyal tsha* and *gc'o'u gshen gyi phyag mkhar*, were born.” In his translation, Karmay (1994, p. 418) has omitted the name *rgya 'brong tam chen po*. He even read *mtshe mi* instead of *'chi med*, the description of the first son *'chi med gshen gyi rmu rgyal tsha*, which appears in the above history book. He seems to have used the version of Khepa Dewu's history published in 1987 in Lhasa, volume three of the series *Gangs can rig mdzod*. I have checked the same version here too. However, he has read the passage, for an unknown reason, differently

from the original passage in Tibetan.

According to this source, *dre btsun dmu mo* had two husbands: *mi bon lha bon* and *rgya 'brong tam chen po*. From these unions, she also bore two sons: a grandson of *dmu* King and a grandson of white *Phya*. The two names of the husbands suggest a significant relationship between this source and Pelliot tibétain 1134, although Pelliot tibétain 1134 gave *myi bon lha bon* and *rgya bon brim tang* as two names of the same person, while Khepa Dewu listed them as the names of two separate persons. If we look carefully at the names: *rgya bon brim tang* in Pelliot tibétain 1134 and *rgya 'brong tam chen po* in the history by Khepa Dewu, we can find a link between the sources for this name. Given that one of these sources is dated before and the other after the *mDo 'dus*, we may conjecture that the two later accounts derive from a source similar to the passage in Pelliot tibétain 1134. Khepa Dewu could have written the *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* on the basis of the same source. In other words, the anonymous source first related in Pelliot tibétain 1134 and later recorded in the *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* could have possibly influenced the understanding of later Bonpo authors regarding the name of Shenrab's father.

Regarding the descriptive name of the first son, *'chi med gshen gyi rmu rgyal tsha*, there seems to be a conflation, as *'chi med* corresponds with *'chi med gtsug phud* (the name used for Shenrab before his descent, according to the *mDo 'dus*), and *gshen* with *gshen rab mi bo* (i.e. Shenrab Miwo). As indicated in the last part of the name, the person is said to have been a grandson of *dmu* King (Tib. *dmu rgyal tsha*). The only person who this description could be referring to is Shenrab, because he is not only described as a grandson of *dmu* King and a son of Gyalbön Thökar, but he is also connected to the name *'chi med gshen* (Chime Tsukphu plus Shenrab Miwo).

Now we can further speculate as to why it was Gyalbön Thökar (Tib. *rgyal bon thod dkar*) who was portrayed as Shenrab's father. I shall refer here to the above passage from the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Tibetan history by Khepa Dewu, regarding the



relation between the first son *’chi med gshen*, and the first husband of *dre btsun dmu mo*, *mi bon lha bon*. Bonpo authors might have interpreted the first husband *mi bon lha bon* as *mi bon lha bon rgyal bon thod dkar*. The first son, or grandson of the *dmu* King, *’chi med gshen* might have been interpreted as Shenrab Miwo. The name *’chi med gshen* could be read as combination of Shenrab’s name in his previous life, Chime Tsukphu, with *gshen* from Shenrab Miwo. Therefore, it is clear that this sort of information may have driven the author(s) of the *mDo ’dus* to assert that Gyalbön Thökar was the father, Shenrab Miwo the son, and that their family descended from the *dmu* clan.

### References to *thod dkar*

There are two different references to *thod dkar* found in the Dunhuang documents. The first is *pho gshen thod dkar* found in Pelliot tibétain 1285<sup>199</sup> and IOL TIB J 734.<sup>200</sup> It refers to male ritual priests wearing white turbans. There was a group of a hundred such priests who were invited from the white Pure Mountain (Tib. *dags ri dkar po*) to cure someone’s illness. This reference always appears before a reference to ‘female priests’ (Tib. *mo gshen*), who were also invited from the black Shadowy Mountain (Tib. *sribs ri nag mo*) to cure illness.<sup>201</sup> We can see from this reference that *thod dkar* is an epithet for a group of male ritual priests (Tib. *pho gshen*) and they were probably wearing white turbans (Tib. *la thod*). The second reference to *thod dkar* is recorded in Pelliot tibétain 1286<sup>202</sup> and Pelliot tibétain

<sup>199</sup> Pelliot tibétain 1285: [r39] “*dags ri dkar po las/ pho gshen thod / dkar brgya’bsdus te*”; [r66] “*dags rI dkar po la’ las / pho gshen thod / dkar brgya bsogs te*”; [r86] “*dags rI dkar po la / pho gshen thod dkar brgya bsdus ste*”; [r151] “*dags rI dkar po la / pho gshen / thod kar brgya bsdus kyang*”; [r165-66] “*dags rI dkar po // pho/ gshen thod kar brgya bsdus kyang*,” cf. Lalou 1958, p. 200 and Imaeda 2007, pp. 184-86, 189-90.

<sup>200</sup> IOL TIB J 734: “[2r48] *bdags raM / dkar po la / po gshen thod kar brgya bsogs te // mo bthab [pya?] blhags*” See Imaeda 2007, p. 277.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. also Blezer 2008, pp. 430-31 and Dotson 2008, pp. 48-49 for a discussion on this reference.

<sup>202</sup> Pelliot tibétain 1286/line 8: “[*myang?*] *ro ’i pyed kar na/ rje rtsang rje’i thod kar*” See Imaeda 2007, p. 197.

1290.<sup>203</sup> It is the name of a person, who is identified as the king of rTsang (nowadays spelled as gTsang) province.<sup>204</sup> What is evident from these two references is that *thod dkar* is also a name of a historical figure. Therefore, it is very likely that these references could have influenced not only the name of Shenrab's father, but also his designation as a king, and even the clothing he is described as wearing.

I should also like to mention here an interesting reference to *thod dkar* found in the list of twelve lords, spirits and masters given in the *Srid pa spyi mdos*.<sup>205</sup> According to this text, these twelve lords, spirits and masters were invited for a ritual offering at the *mdos* altar.<sup>206</sup> Among these twelve lords, spirits and masters, the first one and perhaps their leader, *gshen rab myi bo*, was asked to pacify some demonic forces, including Māra Khyapa, who often interfered in

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<sup>203</sup> Pelliot tibétain 1290/line r4: “*myang ro'i phyIr khar na rje rtsang rje'i thod kar*”, line v5: “*myang ro'i phyIr khar na rje rtsang rje'i thod kar*” See Imaeda 2007, pp. 249-50.

<sup>204</sup> See also Smith 2001, p. 219. Here the name *rtsang rje thod dkar rje* is listed among the four lords of the *stong* tribe, the fourth original Tibetan tribe.

<sup>205</sup> Bonpos claim that this text was discovered in 1067 AD by Nyenton Sherab Sengge. According to Shardza (1985), he was a shepherd called Nyenton Sherab Dorje, but the people called him Nyentheng Rengan (Tib. *lhen* ‘lame’) because of his lame leg (cf. Karmay 1972, p. 153 and Blondeau 2000, p. 249). Karmay (1998, p. 346) has translated part of this text into English. In the colophon of the *Srid pa spyi mdos*, this text is attributed to Sangpo Trinkhod (Tib. *sangs po khrin khod*). Namkhai Norbu (1996, p. 581) considered this text to be an old Bon source and he identified the author as Rasang Trinakhod (Tib. *ra sangs khri na khod*), who is said to have lived in the 8<sup>th</sup>-century AD. According to Karmay (1972, p. 12), Rasang Trinakhod was born into the Khyungpo clan as one of the two sons of Gyerchen Damay (8<sup>th</sup>-century AD?, cf. Karmay 1977, p. 51 for this date). The name Rasang Je (Tib. *ra sangs rje*) from Khyungpo is also recorded in Pelliot tibétain 1286, line 7: “*zhang zhung dar pa'I rjo bo lig snya shur / blon po khyung po ra sangs rje dang*” and Pelliot tibétain 1290 (line r4): “*blon po khyung po ra sangs rje ... (line v5) zhang zhung dar ma'i rje bo lag snya shur // blon po khyung po ra sangse rje* /” The two names: Sangpo Trinkhod and Rasang Trinakhod are very similar, although it is not certain that these two names belong to the same person. Particularly, the latter part of the names Trinkhod and Trinakhod are very close. However, what can be justified here is that the narrative content of the text seems to have been derived from a source from a period contemporaneous to the Dunhuang documents.

<sup>206</sup> This altar may be similar to the altar built in the *mKha' klong gsang mdos* ritual (see Blondeau 2000, p. 279, for an illustration of the altar).

Shenrab's practices (see the previous chapter). The other nine lords and spirits (see table below) were offered whatever food and drink they desired, so that they would not cause any harm to other beings. The last two are described as divine masters (Tib. *dbon/dpon gsas*). Although not specified clearly, their task seems to have been to mediate between the spirits and the humans. Elsewhere in the same text (*Srid pa spyi mdos*, f. 3b), the author briefly writes that there were three hundred and sixty *thod dkar* in total, “*srid ni thod dkar srid/ sum rgya drug cu srid*”. This suggests that *thod dkar*, according to the *Srid pa spyi mdos*, is also the name of group of divine masters, which corresponds to some extent with the description in Pelliot tibétain 1285 and IOL TIB J 734. Apart from the name *thod dkar*, parts of a few other names like, *rmu rje* and *btsan rje* can also be found in the list of Shenrab's ancestors. This will be discussed later on in this chapter.

**Table:** The Twelve Lords and Spirits Listed in the *Srid pa spyi mdos* (f. 3b-4b)

	Their description	Place
1. gShen rab myi bo	A god of <i>gshen</i> (cf. <i>gshen lha</i> or <i>lha gshen</i> )	at the border of god and human world
2. dGung rgyal ma	Queen of the sky	at the upper of the three spaces
3. rMu rje	King of <i>rmu</i> (alt. <i>dmu</i> )	at the middle of the three spaces
4. Gu lang	Cf. Maheśvara? Tib. <i>gu lang dbang phyug</i>	at the lower of the three spaces
5. bTsan rje	Lord of <i>btsan</i> spirit	on the other side of the space
6. This rje	Lord of goblin (Tib. <i>this rang / the'u rang</i> )	in between the space
7. Ma mo	Female demonic spirit	on this side of the space
8. Dogs(dong) bdag	Lord of hole (nāga spiri?)	at the upper hole at the rainbow and the cloud
9. gNyan rje	Lord of <i>gnyan</i>	at the middle hole at mountains and rocks
10. Klu rje	Lord of nāga	at the lower hole in water
11. Thod dkar		at the palace called sNang srid

12. Wer ma		lis rgyad kyi zer ma <sup>207</sup>
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A passage from the *Khyung 'bum gong ma* (text 15 in Gansu manuscript)<sup>208</sup> sheds light on the question as to why *rgyal bon thod dkar* is attached to *lha bon* ‘divine bon’. This work informs us of a person by the name of *lha bon thod gar*, a part of the name of Shenrab’s father. According to the text, Dungmyi Lhagar invited Lhabon Thodgar to defeat his enemy, a demon named Lenpa Kyinreng. Dungmyi Lhagar is described as a primordial god and is also called *lha chen* ‘great god’. Since all the relevant events take place in a heavenly land called Lhayul Gungthang,<sup>209</sup> according to this text, Lhabon Thodgar must also be identified as a divine figure. That is probably the reason why the name *rgyal bon thod dkar* was also attached to *lha bon* ‘a divine Bon’ to construe the name of Shenrab’s father, *mi bon lha bon rgyal bon thod dkar*.

## MOTHER GYALZHEMA, MOTHER OF MEN AND GODS

Like the long name of the father, mentioned above, the mother of Shenrab also has a very long name, *mi phyi lha phyi yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma*. She is popularly known among the Bonpos by the shorter version of the name Yöchi Gyalzhema. According to the *mDo 'dus* (p. 55), the mother’s maiden name was Salwe Odenmo. When she married Gyalbön Thökar, she was initiated with the long name. In regard to the construction of this long name, the author(s) of the *mDo 'dus* used the same model as he used for the name of the father. Like the word *bon* is repeated three times in the father’s name, the term *phyi* is also repeated three times in the mother’s name. Also the first two names, *mi bon* and *lha bon*, of the father are

<sup>207</sup> The passage in the *Srid pa spyi mdos* (f.4b) reads: “*lis rgyad kyi zer ma na/ spyan ['dren ni su 'dren na]/ spyan 'dren ni wer ma 'dren/*” From the context, this *lis rgyad kyi zer ma* seems to be a name of place, but I am not clear about its location or meaning.

<sup>208</sup> No information is available so far regarding the date of this source. I am grateful to Ngawang Gyatso for sharing this rare manuscript with me.

<sup>209</sup> This toponym, *lha yul gung dang*, is found in Pelliot tibétain 1060 and IOL TIB J 731.

repeated here with the suffix *phyi*, thus becoming *mi phyi* and *lha phyi*. These are followed by *yo phyi* (cf. *yo bon*) and *rgyal bzhad ma*. As mentioned above, in the *gZer mig*, the name *yo bon* is added to the father's name, which here corresponds with *yo phyi*. However, it is not entirely certain which one of the two, *yo phyi* or *yo bon*, has influenced the other. Furthermore, *rgyal* also appears in her name (cf. *rgyal bzhad* instead of *rgyal phyi*), which probably corresponds to *rgyal bon* in the father's name. However, modifying *rgyal bon* into *rgyal phyi* (following the same system of replacement) apparently was not eligible; perhaps the latter does not carry any relevant meaning in this context.

The old Tibetan word *phyi* in the mother's name is to be interpreted as an abbreviation of *phyi mo*, which in this context means 'grandmother'.<sup>210</sup> It can be said that she was honoured as the grandmother of all human beings, as is clear from her descriptive name. From the long name of Shenrab's mother, she was known as *mi phyi* 'grandmother of men', *lha phyi* 'grandmother of gods', and *yo phyi* 'everyone's grandmother' who is called *rgyal bzhad ma* 'a blooming queen-cum-mother'.

Although they are all referring to the same woman, i.e. Shenrab's mother, in the *mDo 'dus* there are several variants of her name. I shall list them here, including also those variants that are probably only due to scribal errors.

- 1) *Mi phyi lha phyi yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma*<sup>211</sup> and its shorter version *mi phyi lha phyi'i rgyal bzhad ma*<sup>212</sup> are the name used most often by the Bonpos.
- 2) *Mi phye lha phye yo phye rgyal gzhan ma*.<sup>213</sup> The word *phyi* is replaced with *phye*, and *bzhad* with *gzhan*, probably a scribal error.

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<sup>210</sup> See Pelliot tibétain 1071/r332 “*zhang lon 'di rnams kyI myes pho dang / pha dang phyi mo dang ma' dang ...*” “these *zhang lon*'s grandfather, father, grandmother, mother and ...” The word *zhang lon* in this text seems to be a title of a high ranking position, but its real meaning is unclear to me. Almost an identical passage is also found in Pelliot tibétain 1072/line 078.

<sup>211</sup> See *mDo 'dus*, p. 55, *mDo 'dus* Karmay, f. 21r and *mDo 'dus* Lhagyal, f. 18r, f. 24v.

<sup>212</sup> See *mDo 'dus*, p. 41.

<sup>213</sup> See *mDo 'dus* Karmay f. 28r.

- 3) *mi phyi lha phyi yo phyi rgyal bzhad*,<sup>214</sup> *mi phyi lha'i yo phyi rgyal bzhed*,<sup>215</sup> and *mi phye yo phye rgyal bzhed*.<sup>216</sup> The main difference here is that *ma* is omitted, probably to achieve the required amount of syllables for this verse. In the third name, *phyi* is replaced by *phye*, which again looks like a scribal error.
- 4) *Yo phyi/phye rgyal bzhad yum*.<sup>217</sup> In this name, *ma* is replaced with *yum* 'mother'.

### The Family Background of Yöchi Gyalzhema

According to the *mDo 'dus*, Yöchi Gyalzhema, alias Salwe Odenmo, was a daughter of King Sala<sup>218</sup> and Queen Girtima. This tells us that she was born into a royal family. Also elsewhere in the *mDo 'dus* (p. 52), it is suggested that the mother of Shenrab must be from royal descent (Tib. *rgyal rigs*). However, the author of the *gZer mig* disagrees with the account in the *mDo 'dus* and supplies us with the information that the King Sala first was born in a lower class, in Tibetan *dmangs rigs*, which is equivalent to Sanskrit *śūdra*, 'commoner' or 'servant' class, in the Indian caste system. It is also suggested that it was Yöchi Gyalzhema's engagement to Gyalbön Thökar that entitled her family to become members of the royal family.

Apart from the brief account mentioned above, the author(s) of the *mDo 'dus* does not provide further details on the family background of Shenrab's mother. I shall summarize the account recorded in the *gZer mig* (pp. 15–25), which also demonstrates how Bonpos later have elaborated the story of Shenrab's mother.

Even after the whole world had been searched, it was very difficult to find a suitable bride for the Prince Gyalbön Thökar. When the Prince reached the age

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<sup>214</sup> See *mDo 'dus* Lhagyal f. 84r.

<sup>215</sup> See *mDo 'dus* p. 191.

<sup>216</sup> See *mDo 'dus* Karmay f. 84v.

<sup>217</sup> See *mDo 'dus* p. 52, *mDo 'dus* Karmay f. 26v and *mDo 'dus* Lhagyal f. 22v.

<sup>218</sup> The name Sala occurs four times in the *mDo 'dus* (p. 55, 59, 113 and 208), three of which refer to the King who was the father of Yöchi Gyalzhema and one refers to a Brahmin.

of thirteen, a father and a son came to visit him and they introduced themselves as coming from the city Langling near the lake Mule Tongdenhe<sup>219</sup> and being from a *dmangs rigs* (Skt. *śūdra*) family. The purpose of their visit was for the father to offer his beautiful daughter to the Prince. When the Prince saw that they were physically handicapped (the father was blind in his right eye and the son had a lame left leg) and to make things worse they belonged to the *dmangs rigs*, he replied with embarrassment. He said, “It is impossible that you could have a beautiful daughter, who would be appropriate to be my wife, therefore do not spread this news. If you have a beautiful daughter, then bring her secretly to the lake Mule Tongdenhe, when I go there to take a bath.”

As Gyalbön Thökar was embarrassed by this meeting he lied to those who asked him about it, but he reported this news truthfully to his father. His father responded positively and declared that it is not impossible, and that their disfigurement may be the result either of the downfall of a celestial being, or the liberation of someone from the suffering of Hell. Furthermore, his father stated that this may either be an indication of the downfall of a king to become an ordinary person, or the uplifting of an ordinary member of a lower class to rule the country as a king. The physical disabilities of the father and son are not bad omens, because blindness of the right eye is an indication of blocking the door to the lower realms and a lame left leg is an indication of benefitting sentient beings. The Prince was convinced by this reply from his father and he prepared to meet the daughter of the *dmangs rigs* family.

When the mother of the *dmangs rigs* family heard of the Prince’s response, she became sad and cried. When the father decided to send her to marry a man from the same class, the daughter begged her father not to send her away, at least until the full moon of the next month. The daughter told her father that she wished

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<sup>219</sup> A similar name is mentioned in Shardza 1985. It is a crystal lake (Tib. *shel mtsho*) called Mulehe, located in Purang (cf. Vitali 1996 for *spu rangs*). According to Karmay (1972, p. 124), three hunters, including Marpa Phenjang, found some Bonpo treasures nearby this lake.

to go to see the prince. The parents agreed to her appeal.

During the prince's bathing event, the Prince was looking at the centre of the city full of astonishment. Seeing the Prince's amazement, the Brahmin Salkhyab Oden asked, "You do not seem to appreciate the amusing performances of the gods, nāgas and humans; but you seem to be entertained by something else in the city centre. What is the amusement that you see there?" The Prince replied, "There is a beautiful girl on the top of the white palace in the centre of the city of Langling. Is she the daughter of a nāga, who has come in the form of a human, or a sky-goddess, who has come in the form of a nāga or a human? I am amazed by this, therefore I am smiling."

The Brahmin saw the girl and went to gather information about her family background. He asked the girl, but she left without reply. Then he made enquiries among the local people who told him about her family. The Brahmin reported this to the Prince, who sent him again to enquire further. The lame son received the Brahmin. When the Brahmin found the girl exceptionally beautiful, he also became excited. He suggested to the parents that they offer their daughter to the prince. Although the father and son disagreed, the girl proposed a condition. The girl sent message that if the prince wishes to be with her from his heart, he should offer a royal position to her parents. The Brahmin conveyed the girl's proposal to the prince. The latter accepted the proposal and decided to appoint the girl's parents to royal positions. The Brahmin gathered the people of the city of Langling and announced the enthronement of the girl's parents. The father Sala was enthroned as a king, the mother Girtima as a queen and the brother Salkhyab as a prince. After the marriage, the daughter Salwe Odenmo was named *mi phyi lha phyi yo phyi rgyal bzhad ma*. In this long story from the *gZer mig*, there are at least two points to consider. The family of *dmangs rigs* (Skt. *śūdra*), in which Shenrab's mother was born, and the activities of the Brahmin, which are also reported in the *Lalitavistara*.

The *dmangs rigs* or the caste (Skt. *varṇa*) system in general is rooted in



Indian culture and does not apply to Tibet, although the system is mentioned in numerous early Tibetan translations of Indian Buddhist texts. These early Tibetan texts have probably influenced the understanding of the social order among Bonpos. However, the author(s) of the *mDo 'dus* describes the origin of the four castes differently from how we know it from Indian texts or Tibetan translations. In the following passage from the *mDo 'dus*, the four castes are said to have originated from the four elements: earth, water, fire and wind.

“The nāgas were miraculously born from the four elements: earth, water, fire and wind. The royal caste born from the earth, the merchant caste from water, the Brahmin caste from fire, and the commoner from wind.”<sup>220</sup>

Although this passage describes the four castes of nāga spirits, the variation indicates a different understanding of the four-caste system in Tibet. We may understand that this interpretation of the four castes also applies to the human realm, although the author(s) of the *mDo 'dus* does not explicitly mention these four together anywhere in the text. The author(s) does however mention all the four castes: Royal caste (Tib. *rgyal rigs*), Merchant caste (Tib. *rje'i rigs*), Brahmin caste (Tib. *bram ze'i rigs*) and Commoner caste (Tib. *rmang rigs gdol ba*) on various other occasions and there they do apply to the human realm.<sup>221</sup>

The four-caste system has been elaborated further in later Bonpo works, and there it more clearly is connected to humans. I shall present two relevant passages from the *gZer mig* and the *mDzod sgra 'grel*. The four castes are even organized in hierarchical order in accordance with their distinct natures. The *gZer mig* describes that there are four human castes. People belonging to royal caste (Tib. *rgyal rigs*, Skt. *kṣatriya*) are the greatest, those belonging to merchant caste

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<sup>220</sup> *mDo 'dus* (p. 13), “*byung bar smon lam btab pa las/ sa chu me rlung 'byung bzhi las/ klu rnams rdzu 'phrul las la skyes/ sa la rgyal rig/ chu las rje'u rigs 'byung/ me las bram ze rlung las rmang rigs 'byung/ de tshe rigs bzhi klu chen brgyad*”

<sup>221</sup> See *mDo 'dus*, p. 40, pp. 47-48, p. 207.

(Tib. *rje'i rigs*, Skt. *vaiśya*) are the purest, those belonging to Brahmin caste (Tib. *bram ze'i rigs*, Skt. *brāhmaṇa*) are the noblest, and those belonging to commoner caste (Tib. *rmangs rigs*, Skt. *śūdra*) are the lowest (*gZer mig*, p. 14).

A very similar interpretation is also given in the early 12<sup>th</sup>-century Bon cosmological text, *mDzod sgra 'grel*.<sup>222</sup> According to this text, the greatest are those who belong to the royal group. The noblest are those who belong to the merchant group, the purest are those who belong to the Brahmin group and the lowest are those who belong to the commoner group (*mDzod sgra 'grel*, p. 28). However, in contrast to the categorization of castes in the *gZer mig*, the status of the merchant caste and the Brahmin caste are switched in this Bon cosmological text. This suggests that there was no standard categorization of the four caste systems among the Bonpos. Since the system of the four castes is foreign to Tibetan culture, its categorization depends largely on how an author understands the four castes, or how he remembers the interpretation of the four caste system, as it appears in relevant texts.

## ANCESTOR OF *DMU* FAMILY

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, in the list of Shenrab's paternal lineage that appears in the *mDo 'dus* only two male ancestors are recorded. The first one is his grandfather the king of *dmu* named Lamgyi Thempake and his father Gyalbön Thödkar. Let me paraphrase here the relevant passage: There was a king of *dmu*, named Lamgyi Thempake, in the Barpo Sogyé palace, in the land of Olmo Ling, in Jambudvīpa. He consorted with the *phya* Princess Ngangdrangma, a grand-daughter of Matsun Trulmo. Their son was Gyalbön Thödkar, who married Gyalzhema with whom he had nine sons and one daughter. The youngest of them was Shenrab, who became the ruler of the kingdom (*mDo 'dus*, pp. 41–42 and 55).

In later Bon sources, the paternal lineage list of Shenrab's ancestors was further extended, to include three or more names and their female partners. The

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<sup>222</sup> This text is said to have been discovered by Gyermi Nyiod and Maton Sidzin in 1108 AD.

inclusion of these names demonstrates the way in which the life account of Shenrab continued to develop. I shall discuss that expansion providing examples from two earlier Bon sources (*Dul ba gling grags* and *ITa ba khyung chen*) and from a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Bon history (Shardza 1985). The *Dul ba gling grags* (p. 118–19) has three extra names in the list of Shenrab’s ancestors.<sup>223</sup>

From the heart of Shenlha [Odkar], a brown-reddish light arose and landed on the peak of the brown *dmu* mountain. That [light] transformed into a human, who possesses a white light. He was called Muchug Kyirzhon. His union with Lhaza Gangdrag<sup>224</sup> bore a son named Mutsenzhergyi Gyalpo. [The latter] consorted with a *phya* lady called Gyalmo and they had a son named Mutsen Gyalpo. [The latter] and [his wife] Rimnam Gyalmo’s son was *dmu* King Langyi Themke. The latter consorted with Lhaza Trulmo and their son was *dmu* King Thökar [the father of Shenrab Miwo].

As we will see in the following quotation, four names are added in the second source, *ITa ba khyung chen* (pp. 4–6), which is approximately datable from the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>225</sup>

There was a king called Muchug Kyerab, who was a direct descendant of the nine *then*.<sup>226</sup> In this lineage, the king who had the power to liberate [his

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<sup>223</sup> Another early Bon text *rTsa rgyud nyi sgron* (pp. 79–80) also follows the *Dul ba gling grags* list: *dmu phyug skyer zhon, dmu btsan bzher gyis rgyal po, dmu btsan rgyal ba, dmu rgyal lan gyi them skas, rgyal po thod dkar, ston pa gshen rab*.

<sup>224</sup> This can be compared to Lhaza Gungdrug, one of the six wives of Shenrab Miwo in the *mDo ’dus*. Another comparable name Lhamo Gangdrag appears in the Bon cosmogonical text, the *mDzod phug*.

<sup>225</sup> According to the colophon, a person with the family name *rma* discovered the text *ITa ba khyung chen* in Shampo cave. He is identified as *rma* Sherab Loden in a small note, but I assume that *rma* in the colophon refers to *rma* Sherab Sengge (b. 12<sup>th</sup>-century), because many other Bon texts were discovered by him in the same cave.

<sup>226</sup> The nine *then* spirits are said to be descendants of a god.

people] was the *dmu* King Lampa Chakar. The king who was enthroned in the place of [Lampa Chakar] was the *dmu* King Tsenpa Gyerchen. His successor was the King Thogje Tsenpa, and the latter's successor was *dmu* King Langyi Themke. He [*dmu* King Langyi Themke] was succeeded by Gyalbön Thökar, the one who supported all existence.

As seen in the two passages above, it is generally agreed that all the figures are kings and are descendants of the *dmu* family. However, the main difference in these two earlier sources, *Dul ba gling grags* and *ITa ba khyung chen*, is that the lists are not consistent. For instance, the second and the third names recorded in the *Dul ba gling grags* are not given in the *ITa ba khyung chen*. Instead, the second and third names are different and a fourth name is also added in the *ITa ba khyung chen*. This inconsistency between the two texts is probably due to different sources.

Nevertheless, these early sources have influenced later Bonpo authors, when presenting lists of Shenrab's ancestors. This is evident from the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Bon history by Shardza. Shardza's Bon history has received great attention in Western academia as it has been translated into English by Karmay (1972). Shardza combined the two lists above and then extended it to create a well-known list of Shenrab's ancestors. As can be seen in the table below, Shardza gives eight names, including the father Gyalbön Thökar, and thus pushed the family lineage of Shenrab Miwo about eight generations back. In Namkhai Norbu (1996, p. 48–49), who seems to consider this to be an authentic list of the *dmu* kings, the list of Shenrab's ancestors is pushed even further back, to thirteen generations.

**Table:** Ancestor of the *dmu* Family

<i>mDo 'dus</i> (pp. 41–42)	<i>Dul ba gling grags</i> (pp. 118–19)	<i>lTa ba khyung chen</i> (pp. 4–6)	Shardza 1985 (pp. 17–18)
X	Muchug Kyirzhon	King Muchug Kyerab	Muchug Kyerzhon
X	X	<i>dmu</i> King Lampa Chakar	<i>dmu</i> King Lampa Chagkar
X	Mutsenzhergyi Gyalpo	X	Muzher Gyalpo
X	X	<i>dmu</i> King Tsenpa Gyerchen	<i>dmu</i> King Tsenpa Gyerchen
X	Mutsen Gyalpo	X	Mugyal Tsenpo
X	X	King Thogje Tsenpa	<i>dmu</i> King Thogje Tsunpa
<i>dmu</i> King Lamgyi Thempake	<i>dmu</i> King Langyi Themke	<i>dmu</i> King Langyi Themke	<i>dmu</i> King Langyi Themke
Mibön Lhabön Gyalbön Thökar	<i>dmu</i> King Thökar	Gyalbön Thökar	Gyalbön Thökar
Shenrab Miwo	[Shenrab Miwo]	[Shenrab Miwo]	Shenrab Miwo

## NINE BROTHERS OR NINE WAYS

In chapter twelve of the *mDo 'dus*, Shenrab is described as the only son of Gyalbön Thödkar,<sup>227</sup> but chapter six of the *mDo 'dus* informs us that King Gyalbön Thödkar and Queen Gyalzhema had nine sons and one daughter. This is to say that there were nine brothers and one sister in Shenrab's family. The three elder brothers were called *Phya gshen*, *sNang gshen* and *Srid gshen*, who became teachers of three heavenly realms (Tib. *lha gnas gsum*).<sup>228</sup> The three middle brothers *Phrul gshen*, *Mi/Ye gshen* and *gTsug gshen* went to tame the *g.yen* spirits

<sup>227</sup> *mDo 'dus*, p. 105, “*rgyal bon thod dkar bu cig gshen rab 'di*”

<sup>228</sup> I have not been able to identify these three heavenly realms.

of the three spheres: *yar g.yen* ‘the spirits in the sky’, *bar g.yen* ‘the spirits in the intermediate sphere’ and *sa g.yen* ‘the spirits on the earth’.<sup>229</sup> They became the masters of the *g.yen* spirits. The younger three brothers are *Grub gshen*, *Grol gshen* and *gShen rab* (Shenrab). These three stayed to assist their mother Gyalzhema. The sister, Ngangringma, was married to *phyä* Antse Lenme, who gave birth to a son named Yikyi Khyeuchung. The youngest of the nine brothers, Shenrab, became the ruler of the kingdom and he married six wives and had ten children, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

This description of the nine brothers is nowhere to be found in the other accounts of Shenrab Miwo. What can be the possible origin of this description? In chapter seventeen of the *mDo ’dus*, there is a list of the Nine Ways of Bon or the nine methods for teaching the doctrines of Bon.

**Table:** Nine Brothers v/s Nine ways<sup>230</sup>

The Nine ways ( <i>mDo ’dus</i> , ch. xvii)		The Nine brothers ( <i>mDo ’dus</i> , ch. vi)
1. <i>Phya gshen</i>	=	<i>Phya gshen</i> (B1)
2. <i>sNang gshen</i>	=	<i>sNang gshen</i> (B2)
3. <i>Phrul gshen</i>	=	<i>Phrul gshen</i> (B4)
4. <i>Srid gshen</i>	=	<i>Srid gshen</i> (B3)
5. <i>dGe snyen</i>	=?	<i>gTsug gshen</i> <sup>231</sup> (B6)
6. <i>Drang srong</i>	=?	
7. <i>A dkar sngags rgyud</i>	=?	<i>Grub gshen</i> <sup>232</sup> (B7)

<sup>229</sup> See the thirty-three *bonpos* listed in appendix 2, who were also responsible for subduing the spirits of these three spheres.

<sup>230</sup> For the nine ways of Bon, see Snellgrove 1967, pp. 9-11.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. *gtsug phud thob pa’i gshen*, the *gshen* who has removed his crown and renounced worldly life, thus becoming an ascetic monk. This name also corresponds to *gtsug gshen* of Tsugshen Gyalwa, otherwise known as Yikyi Khyeuchung.

<sup>232</sup> The Tibetan terms *grub* and *grol* have the connotations of ‘practicing’ and ‘liberating’, which belong to Tantric practices, while *sgrol (lam)* may also refer to the *rdzogs chen* path, the ninth of the Nine Ways.

	=?	<i>Grol gshen</i> (B8)
8. <i>Ye gshen</i>	=	<i>Mi/Ye gshen</i> (B5)
9. <i>rDzogs chen a ti ba'i sde</i>	=?	<i>Grol gshen</i> (B8)
	≠	<i>gShen rab</i> (B9)

Among the names of the nine brothers listed in the table, five names (B1–B5) exactly match five of the nine Bon doctrinal teachings. Three names (B6–B8) are also related to four of the Nine Ways (5–7 and 9), but only from their contexts. The remaining name, *gShen rab* (B9), does not match any of the Nine Ways, but since he is identified as Shenrab Miwo, he is the one who taught the Nine Ways. Therefore, I argue that most of the names of the eight brothers of Shenrab Miwo, as listed in the *mDo 'dus*, are derived from the doctrinal systems of the Nine Ways of Bon. It is still a mystery why such an interpretation was made, given that it does not add any credibility to the life account of Shenrab. In fact, it contradicts the assertion in chapter twelve of the *mDo 'dus* that Shenrab was the only son. However, considering the highly composite nature of this text, we probably should not expect consistency.

In regard to how the names of the nine brothers were constructed, a few other factors are also worth discussing. There are two names listed among the thirty-three *bonpos* in the *mDo 'dus* (pp. 53–54) that are relevant here: *srid(srid) bon* and *phya bon*. According to Pelliot tibétain 1285, the term *phya* is used to describe a ritual (text) to be recited (Tib. *mo btab phya klags*),<sup>233</sup> thus the priest who performs that ritual is known as *phya bon*. This document also informs us that there are two kinds of ritual priests: *bon* and *gshen* (see Dotson 2008, pp. 43–44). Since both the terms *bon* and *gshen* designate a ritual priest, the names *phya bon* and *srid bon* could have been reinterpreted as *phya gshen* and *srid gshen* in the list of Shenrab's brothers in the *mDo 'dus*.

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<sup>233</sup> The *phya* ritual is generally performed to avert misfortune and to develop a long life. See *A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo terms* (Nagano [et al] 2008), p. 152.

**Table:** Some Other Examples of *bon* and *gshen* designations

<i>bon</i>	<i>gshen</i>	Source
<i>Phrul bon</i>	<i>Phrul gshen</i>	Stein (1972, p. 230)
<i>Lha bon</i>	<i>Lha gshen</i>	
<i>Ye bon</i>	<i>Ye gshen</i>	
<i>Dur bon</i>	<i>Dur gshen</i>	
<i>'Ol bon</i>	<i>'Ol gshen</i>	PT 1285

## CONCLUSION

As discussed above, the way the names of Shenrab's parents, ancestors, and other family members are presented in the *mDo 'dus* demonstrably can be traced back to earlier sources. As for the name of the father, we can find two separate names in the Dunhuang documents: *mi bon/ lha'i bon/ rgya bon brim tang* and *thod dkar*. It is evident that the first two names, *mi bon* and *lha'i bon* are kept as in the original. A part of the third name, *rgya bon* was modified and put together with *thod dkar* found in old Tibetan documents. The intermingling of the names derived from old Tibetan sources is proven by the other names found in the *mDo 'dus* (p. 54) and the late 13<sup>th</sup>-century Tibetan historical text called *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*. The relationship between *mi bon lha bon* and *'chi med gshen*, as father and son, is also recorded in this history. Since *'chi med gshen* is none other than Shenrab, later Bonpo authors may have remembered him as the son of *mi bon lha bon* Gyalbön Thökar, and a grandson of a *dmu* king. After the father's name was settled, a similar model was applied to construe the name of Shenrab's mother. In the word formations with *bon*, *bon* was replaced by *phyi*. As I have shown above, only two of Shenrab's ancestors were listed in the *mDo 'dus*, but this list was extended in later sources. By the time of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Bon historical text by Shardza, this list had increased up to four times in length and it was extended even further by Namkhai Norbu, who added several other names. In addition, confusion between the names of the Bon doctrinal teachings and personal names in the



*mDo 'dus* raises questions and quite obvious suspicions regarding the construction of this extended group of nine brothers.

Based on this evidence, I conclude that the names found in the *mDo 'dus* had several origins. These names serve to help construe the hagiography of Shenrab, but also to connect the *mDo 'dus* to other available historical sources. The author(s) seems to have had recourse to many old sources and/or oral traditions when including these names. Although the names that are recorded in the *mDo 'dus* are comparable to the names that appear in documents preserved in Dunhuang, I do not assert that they necessarily derive from those specific texts. This would in fact be very unlikely, because there is a gap between the date of sealing of the cave in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century and the emergence of the *mDo 'dus* in approximately the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. But I do assume that older Tibetan documents or oral traditions, which correspond to what has been preserved in Dunhuang, were available to Bonpo authors and also influenced later works, including the *mDo 'dus* and the later 13<sup>th</sup>-century Tibetan history by Khepa Dewu.