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Bya rog prog zhu, The Raven Crest

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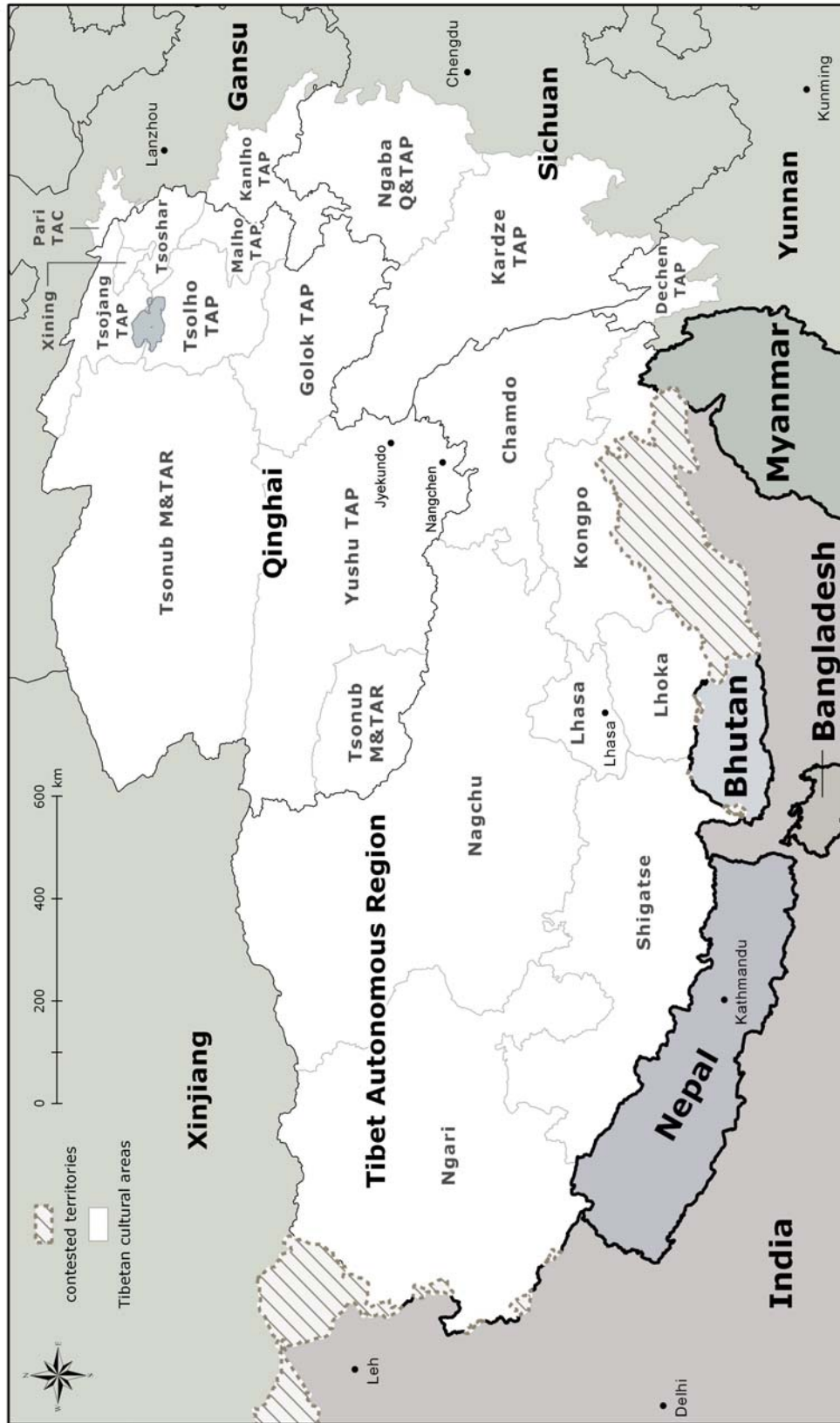
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Map of Tibet



A map of larger Tibet showing Jyekundo (sKye rgu mdo) and Nangchen (Nang chen), two of the main places where this study took place. Map by Quentin Devers for Tibetan and Himalayan Library.



Figure 1: Antonio Terrone with bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje in the latter's residence at rDza mer chen nunnery, Shar mda' town. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2007.



Figure 2: bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje offering a blessing with one of his Treasure items, a Hayagrīva ritual dagger (*rta mgrin phur pa*) in his residence at rDza mer chen nunnery. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2005.



Figure 3: bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje reciting a Hayagrīva text at Ru dren nunnery. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2000.

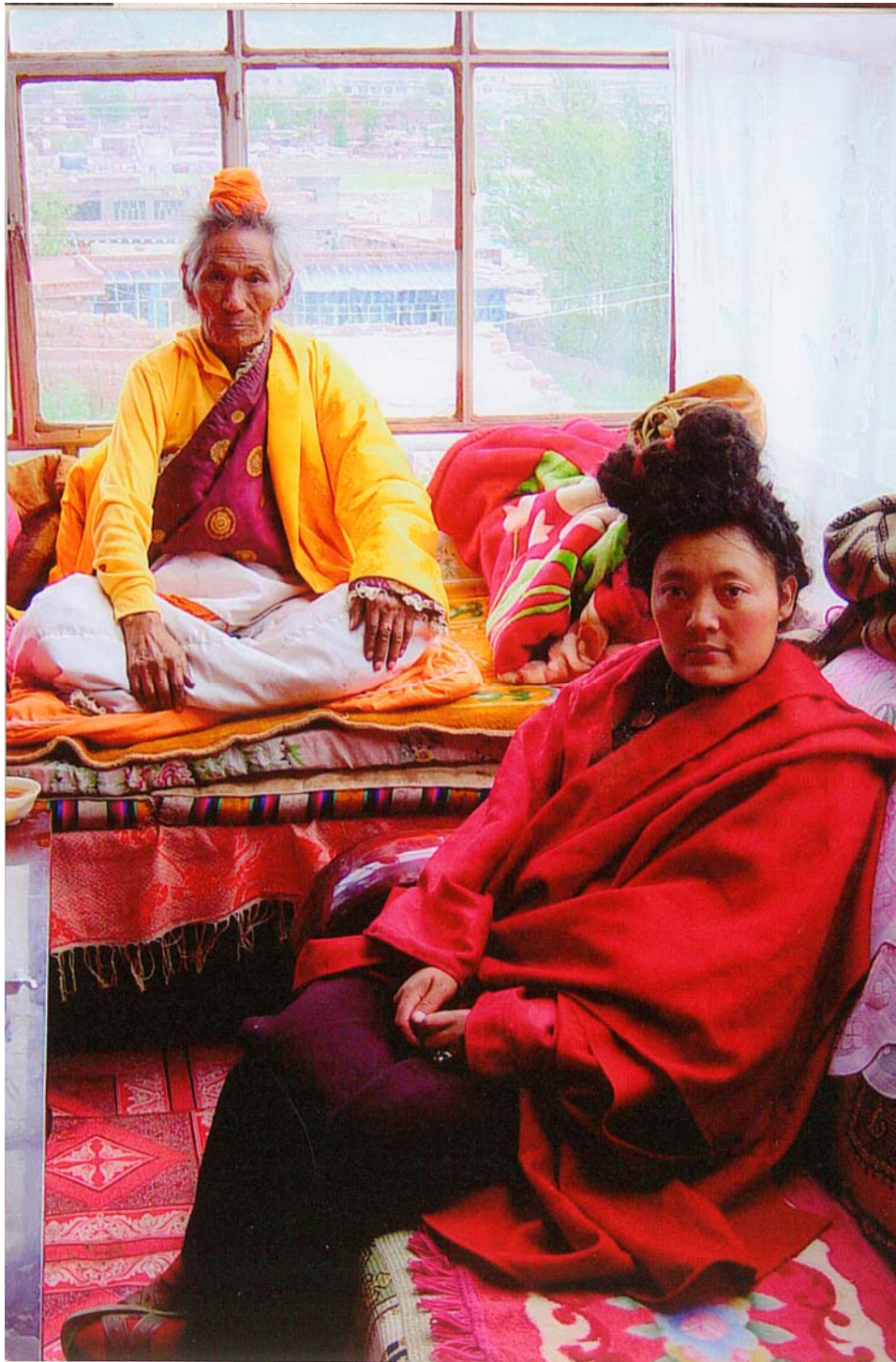


Figure 4: bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and the nun bKra shis mtsho mo, his assistant and scribe, in Shar mda' town. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2004.



Figure 5: bKra shis rgyal mtshan with dPal chen lha mo and their four children at their residence in Shar mda' town. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2005.



Figure 6: bKra shis rgyal mtshan shows one of his personal material Treasures at his residence in Shar mda' town. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2006.

Introduction



My first contact with Tibetan Treasure revealers (*gter ston*) took place in Lhasa in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) when I was studying at Tibet University (Tib. Bod ljongs slob grwa chen mo; Ch. Xizang daxue). On a sunny day in July 1997 while cruising on my White Pigeon bicycle exploring the old town and passing by the square in front of the Jokhang temple, my attention was caught by two unusual individuals shopping for meat on the southern section of the square. They were clad in white and red robes, carried massive dreadlocks wrapped around the tops of their heads, and had long *raksha* rosary beads laced across their upper bodies. I felt immediately drawn to the two lamas and after introducing myself I asked them who they were. Despite a few seconds of hesitation due to the fact that, as they later told me, they had never met a foreigner who could speak Tibetan, they were very friendly and soon introduced themselves to me.

bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his brother Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che were two non-celibate Tantric professionals from Khams who arrived on pilgrimage in Lhasa with a small entourage of relatives and devotees. They were disciples of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, whom they said was a great Treasure revealer (*gter ston chen po*) who lived in the highlands of eastern Tibet in a mountain retreat on the slope of Mount gNas chen padma. Freshly graduated from a Tibetan studies program in Italy, my mind was filled with notions of Buddhist philosophy, rNying ma literature, meditative systems, and an eagerness to discover Tibetan religious practices. This fortuitous encounter, which bKra shis rgyal mtshan later described as an auspicious meeting, gave me the opportunity to enter into contact with Tibetan religious professionals in their land.

The following day I was invited to bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his family's residence in gShol gsar pa, an urban area behind the Potala Palace where bKra shis rgyal mtshan explained to me the characteristics of their religious lifestyle. He told me they were non-celibate Tantric practitioners (*sngags pa*) of the meditative system known as *rdzogs chen*, the Great Perfection. They had arrived in Lhasa, regarded as the holiest place in Tibet, a few weeks earlier after an eleven month-long pilgrimage on foot performing full-body length prostrations every three steps along the path. Although a common popular practice of merit acquisition, bKra shis rgyal mtshan

explained that he specifically performed this pilgrimage to purify himself in preparation for the retrieval of a series of religious objects from a sacred place not far from the city. Being able to do this meant that bKra shis rgyal mtshan was a Treasure revealer. Treasure revealers are adepts predominantly associated with the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism and the Bon tradition who can physically retrieve and mentally reveal objects or texts called Treasures (*gter ma*) in accordance with prophecies and visions.

Despite the fact that bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his travel partners predominantly spoke Khams dialect and at that time I could only communicate in Lhasa dialect, we managed to converse quite well. In the very beginning he also showed some understandable reluctance to open up to me—a newly encountered stranger. However, shortly this barrier collapsed, leaving room for trust and reciprocal curiosity. Thanks to this extraordinary opportunity for me to learn about their religious tradition, I continued asking questions and feeling fascinated by their stories, reports, and anecdotes. I took many notes and photographs, and spent as much time with them as possible. In the following week I met with them regularly, winning their trust and establishing a mutual respect based on sincere interest. The two brothers soon set out to continue their sacred journey to Mount Kailash (Gangs rin po che), and I left for a brief trip to Kathmandu before the university semester began. Before parting, however, they invited me to go and meet them and their teacher at their mountain hermitage in Khams the following year. This meeting marked the beginning of my study of the life and activities of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, the Treasure revelation tradition in present-day eastern Tibet, and the onset of a ten-year-long encounter with Buddhist visionaries.

The Study and its Methodology

I have introduced my dissertation via recounting a personal experience because a significant portion of the information I employ in this work draws on ethnographic materials gathered in the field. At the heart of this dissertation is a study of the life and activities of a Treasure revealer, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. Framed in the larger context of contemporary visionaries and mystics and their role in a Tibetan society strongly influenced by Sino-Tibetan politics, this study addresses the following basic questions: How did Treasure revelation begin and how is it currently maintained? Who are today's Treasure revealers and why have they enjoyed a

resurgence under Chinese rule? What does the Treasure tradition offer contemporary Tibetans in Tibet? What relationship does Treasure revelation have to politics, both historically and in contemporary Tibet?

In my opinion, two factors have contributed to the flowering of religion outside the monastery in contemporary Tibet. One is the leveling of the general cultural predominance that was once undisputedly held by large monasteries and monastic institutions.¹ I argue that decades of harmful policies applied to Tibet by the Chinese government have undermined the politico-economic and cultural supremacy once held by monasteries. At the same time, some charismatic rNying ma movements have gained in strength by employing multiple elements of Tibetan mythohistorical narratives, local cults and customs, a pervasive and undisputable association with sacred geography, and an opening to diverse and often ecumenical pedagogical approaches. As a result of these phenomena, subaltern forms of revelation and charismatic leadership predominantly claimed by rNying ma adherents have thrived and continue to attract large sections of both monastic and non-celibate members of the population including indigenous Chinese Buddhist devotees.

This research starts from the historical assertion that notwithstanding their claim of increased religious tolerance, the dramatic post-Mao political campaigns have continued to weaken the pervasive force of religious faith, traditional monastery-centered religious power, religious leadership, and education, motivated by the perceived threat of potential subversive anti-government activities. This research maintains that within such a socio-political landscape and the revivalist wave in the cultural and religious sphere, a number of Tibetan rNying ma leaders are advancing charisma-based authority to promote the growth of alternative rNying ma centers of ritual and meditative instruction. In revitalizing this and other forms of traditional religious practices, they are galvanizing some of the most significant forces of today's Buddhist practice in selected areas of Khams and mGo log of eastern Tibet.

In this dissertation I examine the Treasure revelation movement as it is active in present-day cultural and ethnic regions of Tibet in the PRC. More specifically, I will explore the role of Treasure revealers in the religious world of today's Tibet. One way this research will accomplish this is by introducing a case study, the life and activities of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje (b. 1921), a well-known Buddhist master and Treasure revealer who currently lives in Shar mda' in Nang

¹ Goldstein (1998: 23-31).

chen county in the Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP). A corpus of Tantric scriptures (probably composed under visionary inspiration by Tibetan Buddhist masters) including texts on *rDzogs chen*, meditation manuals, prayers, and various rituals already existed in tenth-century Tibet.² The first Treasure revealer, however, whose works we have access to is the famed twelfth-century mNga' bdag nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1136-1204). Since he and other Treasure revealers appeared in Tibet, the larger phenomenon of Treasure revelations has apparently continued to flourish. In modern Tibet Treasure revealers still possess indisputable reputation and social status in the religious sphere.

As in the past, one of the major strengths behind the Treasure tradition is that its representatives claim to draw on prophecies in Buddhist scriptures which indicate a need to keep their Tantric teachings fresh and powerful but does so by linking them to the eighth-century early translation period of Buddhist material from India (*snga 'gyur*) and the activities of the Indian master Padmasambhava. As we shall see in the chapters ahead, within the predominant narrative of the Treasures, Padmasambhava's apocalyptic prophecy of a degenerate age (*snyigs dus*) threatening the very existence of Buddhism in Tibet motivates not only the concealment of Treasures, but also and more importantly their revelation at the appropriate time. Prophecies, astrological practices, divination, and visionary activities allow revealers to attract large followings that defy Chinese authorities' campaigns to degrade and dismiss them as "superstitious" beliefs, but do not make them immune to its crackdown on mass religious movements. The Treasure tradition also depends heavily on meditation for the production of scriptures, the establishment of lineages, and the contribution to a religious-political power and authority. Their meditation technologies relate to various sets of contemplative practices and techniques which will be described in detail below.

Sources

Since 1998 I have spent several months almost yearly in the presence of the Treasure revealers bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, his pupil bKra shis rgyal mtshan, and their entourages in eastern Tibet. Since my early interest in bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life and religious activities, I was given

² Cf. van Schaik "Early Dzogchen I: The Cuckoo and the Hidden Grain" at <http://earlytibet.com/2008/01/08/early-dzogchen-i/>

access to the old Buddhist master's personal collection of religious scriptures and Treasure texts. He authorized me not only to write about his life and activities, but also to freely consult and employ his own revelations for the purpose of this academic study. The main textual sources I have used are contained in the *Yang gsang rta mgrin rdo rje me char*, a collection of hundreds of Tantric and ritual texts that represent the bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's career as a mystic.

Beyond his revelations, this research also includes other writings from bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's collected works. For my analysis of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life included in Chapter Four of the present study I have used the autobiography that he authored in 1998, the *Rig 'dzin nus ldan rdo rje'i rnam thar bsdu pa dri med rdo rje'i zlos gar* (The Dance of the Pure Vajra: A Brief Biography of the Awareness-holder Nus ldan rdo rje). In combination with this I have used two minor autobiographical writings, the *bDe chen rdo rje'i rnam thar phran bu* (A Short Biography of bDe chen rdo rje) and the *Pra bha swa badzra'i skyes rabs gsol 'debs bsdu pa tshigs su bcad pa* (A Short Supplication Prayer in Verse to Prabhāsva vajra's Previous Existences). Chapter Five in contrast offers a study of a Tantric initiatory ritual and the production of medicinal pills based on two of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's most representative Treasure texts, the *rTa mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char gyi rtsol med gsang sngags myur lam* (The Effortless Quick Path of the Mantra according to rta mgrin rdo rje mer char) and the *Zab gsang yang tig nyi zla kha sbyor las gab gsal lag len shel dkar me long* (A Crystal Mirror of The Practice of Unveiling the Secret of the Sun and Moon's Profoundly Secret and Quintessential Union).

Other essential sources that I have employed in this study belong to the ethnographic side of the research accomplished during several years of fieldwork in eastern Tibet in present-day PRC regions of Qinghai and Sichuan. These include interviews, conversations, and participant observation with not only bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, bKra shis rgyal mtshan, and members of their communities, but also with many other active Treasure revealers. My encounters with mystics, visionaries, and leaders at their mountain hermitages, residences, and religious encampments have given me the opportunity to contextualize bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life and works in the wider spectrum of visionary activities and Treasure revelation in contemporary Tibet.

My attempt to understand the role of Treasure revealers in twenty-first-century Tibet not only relies on interviews with several Tibetan religious personalities, laypeople, and scholars outside and in various areas of Tibet, but also draws on social theory from the fields of

anthropology, political history, and literary studies in order to provide an examination that is as broad as possible of the phenomenon and the people involved in revelation.

1998 is not only the year I started on the present investigation, but it is also the year that two important works on Treasure revealers appeared, David Germano's article on mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and Janet Gyatso's monographic study of 'Jigs med gling pa's autobiographical writings. Germano's analysis of contemporary Treasure revelation movements was a fundamental departure point for my own investigation and for further expansion of this topic. In his article, Germano elaborates on the role, value, and limits of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's Treasure revelation activities, seeing them as germane to the revival of the traditional Tibetan sense of identity and as a response to the forces of modernity.³ Drawing on these and other insights my own study looks at a wider spectrum of Treasure revelation proponents in present-day Tibet who provide a variety of sources, activities, and legitimizing strategies. Despite the uncontested charismatic presence of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and his popularity as a knowledgeable teacher, prolific writer, outstanding Treasure revealer, champion of monastic values, and advocate of lay moral principles, my experience in Tibet in a number of religious encampments and with several other Treasure revealers strongly suggests that many facets of his charismatic personality are more of an exception rather than the rule for contemporary Treasure revealers.

Janet Gyatso's study of 'Jigs med gling pa's autobiographies has shed light on important unstudied dimensions of a Treasure revealer's perception and representation of his "self". She has analyzed in great detail the narrative techniques a Treasure revealer employs to represent himself, the world he belongs to, and the activities he performs. Following Gyatso's approach I have sought to read and analyze bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's autobiographical writings as a source of information about the way he perceives himself, the way he represents his function as a Treasure revealer, and the way in which he became such. Of particular interest in reading these autobiographical writings are the modalities through which he was recognized as a Treasure revealer by others, the role of prophecies and visions in the early phase of his self-perception, and the way he depicts the religious path that culminated in his revelation of Treasures.

As David Germano pointed out in his study on mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, despite the general revival of most spheres of the Tibetan religious world, the rNying ma School in

³ Germano (1998: 88-94).

particular has scored an especially significant success in the past few decades.⁴ Although the socio-political situation in Tibet does not encourage a completely free traditional practice of religion, small mountain hermitages, monasteries, and nunneries have largely fallen under the radar and are still active and populated. This has led to an increased visibility of charismatic personalities, predominantly non-celibate Tantric professionals, who are engaging in doctrinal transmission and visionary technologies such as the revelation and dissemination of Treasures (*gter ma*).

The following anecdotes may illustrate the often surprising ways Treasure revelations are performed in present-day eastern Tibet. On a cool autumn day in the 1980s, mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1933-2003) helped by two assistants entered the waters of a mountain lake in Khams up to his waist. After having briefly recited a prayer, he submerged himself completely. After a few seconds, he re-emerged with an object enclosed in his right hand. Immediately covered with a blanket, he handed the object to one of his assistant monks who carefully wrapped the precious item in a white silk scarf.⁵ On another occasion, in February 1981, mKhan po 'Jigs med pun tshogs gave a public Mañjuśrī empowerment to a vast audience of Tibetan devotees gathered before him for the occasion. During the ceremony many people noticed the teacher looking up in the sky. After a few minutes an object “resembling a dark green bird egg” fell down from the sky, landing on the hands of mKhan po 'Jigs med pun tshogs.⁶

In September 1986 a small group of Western travelers joined a party of Tibetans accompanying a woman called Khandro Khachi Wangmo, a Treasure revealer of the Bon tradition, who was to make a circumambulation around Mount Bon (Bon ri) in Khams. During the circumambulation of the sacred mountain the Tibetan Treasure finder apparently stopped beside a boulder and struck the rock with a *phur ba* ritual dagger until a cavity was formed. A number of foreigners and other onlookers witnessed the woman retrieve two objects from the cavity in the rocky wall, including a small figurine representing Amitāyus, the Buddha of Long Life, and a nine-pointed *vajra* (*rdo rje*). One of the people present at this event, Mangyal Lhasey Tulku (a reincarnated master), Khandro Khachi Wangmo's brother and apparently he himself a

⁴ Germano (1998: 56).

⁵ This event has been copied on a VCD (no reference available). I have a copy of the VCD myself, but I don't think the VCD has ever been distributed publicly in Tibetan areas and China. The VCD is shown often in Video restaurants in sKye rgu mdo and some other villages of Khams.

⁶ See Germano for a brief description of this account (1998: 81).

Treasure revealer, told the foreigners that the purpose of the revelation of Treasures was to encourage faith in the Dharma.⁷

On November 17, 1998, the Treasure revealer bKra shis rgyal tshan accompanied by his wife dPal chen lha mo and a small entourage of devotees was performing ritual circumambulations around a hill in Khams called gNas chen mkha' 'gro 'bum rdzong, not far from sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP). As they reached a rock that he had previously seen in a visionary experience, bKra shis rgyal tshan had another vision in which a group of “sky-goers” (Skr. *ḍākinīs*; *mkha' 'gro ma*) appeared in front of him and guided him to a huge boulder that was part of a larger rock formation. The *ḍākinīs* apparently instructed him to get closer to the rock and alerted him to be ready to grab a Treasure object that would soon fall from an opening in the rock. A cavity spontaneously opened in the rock emitting a Treasure casket (*gter sgrom*) that dropped in his hands. At the same time, divine nectar (*bdud rtsi*) is also said to have poured down from the same rock opening which bKra shis rgyal mtshan promptly collected in his lower garment, assisted by his wife.

A few days after the retrieval of the Treasure relic, while taking care of the precious nectar collected during the revelation event, bKra shis rgyal mtshan took the casket and as soon as his hands touched the rock chest, it slowly cracked and opened. From the inside of the Treasure chest, bKra shis rgyal mtshan and the others present in the room saw a blazing small luminous sphere followed by a ray of light that was projected towards the middle of the room and then dissolved in the crown of bKra shis rgyal mtshan's head. According to the teacher bKra shis rgyal mtshan, he suddenly received a spiritual text or mind Treasure (*dgongs gter*) in the form of a short string of syllables that in due time he would translate into textual form. More nectar was then collected from the Treasure chest which was later to be employed for medicinal purposes.⁸

On another occasion in 1999, while in solitary meditation retreat in a sacred cave on the mountain cliff just above the Rin mda' rnam par snang mdzad monastery in sKye rgu mdo, bKra shis rgyal mtshan had a vision that showed him a group of *ḍākinīs* pointing to a place below the spot he was sitting. They told him that there was an object buried just under the place where he was sitting. In front of his wife dPal chen lha mo who was next to him, bKra shis rgyal mtshan followed the *ḍākinīs*' instructions and immediately began to dig in the ground with the help of a

⁷ Hanna (1990: 10).

⁸ gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan's personal communication. gNas chen Padma, August 2000.

piece of rock and a stick. In a few minutes he dug a hole and there he found a long object wrapped in a very old white cloth. As he unwrapped the precious object he saw an old dagger that he believed once belonged to the eighth-century female teacher Ye shes mtsho rgyal.⁹

In 2001, on a warm and sunny August afternoon, the Treasure revealer bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje asked me to help him get up from his bed and accompany him outside. We stepped outdoors where he sat down under the cobalt blue sky. He sat in silence surrounded by a group of nomads who had come to visit him and his disciples. His eyes gazed into the sky in rapture. A small crowd of people sat with him in the sun enjoying the weather. Suddenly, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje addressed one of his pupils ordering him to get pen and paper to write down what he was going to say. In the following hour bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje calmly and rigorously revealed the full text of a mental Treasure that he had just seen transferred to him in a vision.¹⁰

These are but a small number of anecdotes and stories reporting various types of visionary and mystic experiences associated with the revelations of Treasure items and teachings. Such anecdotes are an inalienable aspect of any Treasure revealer's career and abound in Treasure revealers' biographies, autobiographies, and Treasure cycles. Nowadays, in addition to manuscripts, Treasure revelations have found new channels to reach devotees such as VCDs, DVDs, and pamphlets with photos of Treasure items and even websites on the Internet.

Another predominant dimension of Treasure revelation that this study addresses is the role of non-celibate visionaries within the tradition. Despite the particular precepts of their ascetic lifestyle, the male Treasure revealers often support households and families and enjoy a well-defined social role in their communities. However, their religious identity does not derive from their social function only. Rather, it is supported by a complex and strict discipline of asceticism, religious practice, and by the Buddhist values they uphold. A Treasure revealer's identity is likely not to be restricted to the context of a Treasure site and to the entourage supporting his/her activities. As I argue in this study, a Treasure revealer's identity is shaped by a multitude of factors including early visionary experiences, support and recognition by influential masters, and the revelations the Treasure revealer discovers.

⁹ gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan's personal communication. gNas chen Padma, August 2000.

¹⁰ The author witnessed the event, and recorded it on digital tape.

Bibliographical Considerations: Western Works of Modern Scholarship

Visionary revelation in Tibet is an ancient phenomenon which has always been very powerful both culturally and politically. The importance of its products within doctrinal and philosophical traditions such as Bon and rNying ma can be appreciated by the vast collections of revealed scriptures that fill their respective canons. As I maintain in this dissertation, such a phenomenon is still valued in present-day Tibet.¹¹

Treasure revelation is a cultural form that clearly builds on previous traditions. Not only does it show influences from such Tibetan traditions as dream interpretation, divination, prophecy, the cult of relics, and visionary practice, but it also capitalizes on Tibetan popular practices such as the cult of sacred geography, pilgrimage, opening of “hidden lands” (*sbas yul*), and the memory of Tibet’s glorious imperial past. Additionally, the surrounding cultures of India and China had very similar Treasure revelation traditions.¹² Most of the Treasure revealers are non-celibate Tantric professionals who are, therefore, much more in contact with the ordinary people than their maroon-robed colleagues. Precisely because of their popular reach, they affect a wider variety of audiences in more ways than the less accessible type of “higher” religious institutions have been able to do. One example of this phenomenon that I will introduce in more detail in the chapters ahead is the recent trend of Chinese Buddhist devotees who flock by the hundreds to Tibet to receive teachings, to practice, and often to live at the religious communities of Treasure revealers. Because of its increasing social importance, Treasure revelation is a religious and cultural phenomenon worthy of being studied from sociological, religious, and anthropological points of view.

According to tradition, the origins of the diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet are intimately associated with a series of events which are believed to be related to Padmasambhava and his close disciples. Padmasambhava, an Indian saint who reached Tibet in the eighth century CE on invitation by emperor Khri srong lde’u btsan (740-c.798?), established the first roots of Tantric Buddhism in the land. Among the many deeds attributed to him is the creation of an intricate method of teaching transmission called *gter ma* or Treasures. The term *gter ma* refers to concealment and revelation of spiritual scriptures and sacred artifacts. Among the most

¹¹ Germano (1998), Terrone (2002).

¹² See for instance the revelation of sacred texts and ritual caskets in latter Han imperial China discussed in Tsai (2006) and the cult of *nidhi* in Hindu tradition addressed in Goudriaan (1978).

fascinating systems of practice in Tibet, the Treasure tradition is also one of the most controversial.¹³

The school of Tibetan Buddhism that appropriated and developed the Treasure transmission is the rNying ma, traditionally called *snga 'gyur rnying ma*, or “the ancient school of the early translations.” According to rNying ma authors, an enormous number of Tantric teachings have been revealed and composed via the Treasure revelation system, and a number of these collections of Treasure cycles, such as those attributed to Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer for instance, have been included within the large rNying ma canon, the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*.¹⁴ This particular form of revelation, although popular in Tibet since the eleventh century, has nevertheless met with difficulties when trying to justify its origins and prove its legitimacy. Much has been written by many scholars on the origins of the Treasure tradition, its history, and the biographies of its major representatives. Of all these topics, it is the question of authorship of the teachings transmitted through Treasure revelation that has been the greatest concern for both Tibetologists and Tibetan Buddhists alike.¹⁵

Although scriptural revelation in the forms of Treasures (*gter ma*) is a major and lively force within Tibetan Buddhism, scholarly attention to it is a recent phenomenon. Looking back to early discussions in Western scholarship on Treasure revelations and related literature offers an interesting glimpse into the way Treasures and their revealers (*gter ston*) were understood by non-Tibetans. One of the earliest comments on Treasures is to be found in the writings of L. Austine Waddell (1854-1938), a Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army. Waddell was stationed in Darjeeling for many years where he studied Tibetan language and learned about Tibetan Buddhist customs and religious practices. His interests in Tibetan culture led him to write a few books that are inevitably pregnant with Protestant bias and picturesque observations of Tibetans and their religion, which at that time was mostly known as “Lamaism.” In his book *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism, with its mystic cults, symbolism and mythology, and in its relation to Indian Buddhism* published in 1895, Waddell gives the earliest derogatory opinion of

¹³ See, for instance, Andreas Doctor's recent study of 'Ju mi pham's comments on the Treasure revealers advancing a way to differentiate authentic revealers from charlatans. See Doctor (2005: 31-51).

¹⁴ The Bhutanese edition of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* is believed to include more *gter ma* texts than any other version. I am grateful to Robert Mayer for this information.

¹⁵ See Appendix Four in this volume for my general bibliography of publications on the Tibetan Treasure revelation tradition in non-Tibetan languages. Apart from a few exceptions, the bibliographical information of the works discussed and quoted in this section can be found in the the bibliographical list in Appendix Four. For those references not quoted in the topical bibliography please see selected bibliography (Secondary Sources and Critical Editions in Other Languages).

the Treasures or “hidden revelations.” About the rNying ma adherents and the Treasures he writes:

The residue who remained wholly unreformed and weakened by the loss of their best members, were now called *Ñin-ma-pa* or “the old ones,” as they adhered to the old practices. And now, to legitimize many of their unorthodox practices which had crept into use, and to admit of further laxity, the *Ñin-ma-pa* resorted to the fiction of *Ter-ma* or hidden revelations.

Just as the Indian monk Nāgārjuna in order to secure an orthodox reception for his new creed had alleged that the Mahāyāna doctrine was entirely the composition of Śākya Muni, who had written it during his lifetime and entrusted the volumes to the Nāga demigods for preservation until men were sufficiently enlightened to comprehend so abstruse a system, so in the same way several *Ñin-ma* (sic) Lāmas now began to discover new gospels, in caves and elsewhere, which they alleged were hidden gospels of the Guru Saint Padma. And these so-called ‘revealers,’ but really the *composers* of these *Ter-ma* treatises, also alleged as a reason for their ability to discover these hidden gospels, that each of them had been, in a former birth, one or other of the twenty-five disciples of St. Padma.¹⁶

Waddell’s mind was imbued with the typical view of his time that Tibetan Buddhism was not an authentic offspring of Indian Buddhism, but was rather a local creation, a form of shamanism and demonic practices. Waddell’s criticism of the rNying ma school was not addressed uniquely to the Treasure scriptures; he also condemned Padmasambhava for “his grotesque charlatanism and uncelibate life.”¹⁷ Waddell’s comments on the rNying ma and Treasure traditions reflect the contemporary opinion of his time when Tibetan Buddhism was considered by most European scholars to be merely a corrupted form of the true Buddhism, which was Indian Buddhism.¹⁸

In their attempts to understand the Treasure revelation tradition, early Western scholars of Tibetan religions focused their philological preoccupations on the *bka’ thang* literature in hopes of throwing more light on the history of ancient Tibet. The *bka’ thang* or “chronicles” are a series of scriptures that narrate the life and deeds of Padmasambhava in Tibet and are believed to have been concealed as Treasures and eventually revealed in various versions by different past Treasure revealers. Although not an academic but rather a magistrate and poet with a passion for the East, Gustave-Charles Toussaint (1869-1938) came in contact with the 1839 Peking Edition of the *Padma bka’ thang*, the text that narrates the life and deeds of Padmasambhava that had been discovered as a Treasure by O rgyan gling pa (1323-?) in the fourteenth century. After a period spent in different regions of China, Vietnam, and India and fifteen years of largely autodidactic work, Toussaint published *Le Dict de Padma*, which was a French translation of the

¹⁶ This quotation is from a later edition. Waddell (1971: 56-57).

¹⁷ Waddell (1971: 33).

¹⁸ Lopez (1998: 162).

Padma bka' thang.¹⁹ This was the first time non-Tibetan readers had access to the life of Padmasambhava and his mysterious tradition of the “hidden Treasures” (*les trésors secrets*) of Tibet. For many years this would be the only translation of the manuscript until 1978 when Thartang Tulku published an English edition based on the French original, *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*.²⁰

Among those who were first “scientifically” interested in the study of indigenous Tibetan literary material including the Treasure texts was Andrei Ivanovich Vostrikov (1904-1937). Originally written in the late 1930s, his work on Tibetan historical literature was first published in Russia posthumously in 1962. Only in 1970, thanks to the English translation of Harish Chandra Gupta, was Vostrikov’s book known to a wider audience by the title *Tibetan Historical Literature*. Along the same vein as his predecessors including Waddell, Francke, Lokesh Chandra, and Csoma de Koros, Vostrikov’s work elaborates on the bibliographical features of the *gter ma* scriptures but does not hide his skepticism of them as valid historical sources.²¹ He analyzes and classifies the main genres of Tibetan historical works and includes the *gter ma* texts in the section “Books from Buried Treasures” in which he describes a number of scriptures including the *bKa' chems ka khol ma*, *Padma bka' thang*, *bKa' thang sde lnga*, *Mani bka' 'bum* and the *bKa' thang zangs gling ma*.²²

The same *historiographical* approach is found in Giuseppe Tucci’s (1894-1984) work. In his monumental *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, he often quotes and elaborates on *gter ma* texts by emphasizing above all the content of two of the major “historical” Treasure texts, the *Padma bka' thang* and the *bKa' thang sde lnga*. Moved like most of his contemporary colleagues more by *bibliographical* and *historiographical* interests than religious concerns, Tucci recognizes the values of the two Treasure scriptures for the glimpses they offer into the spirit of the time and their reflections on historical events. He suggests that under the political stress of the thirteenth-century Mongol invasion and rule the emergence of Treasure revelation can be seen as “a sign of the yearning for the restoration of ancient times, a proof of national revival.”²³ Tucci was probably the first scholar to capture and elaborate on the spirit of the *gter ma* revelation phenomenon in fourteenth-century Tibet. He saw how the Treasures provided spiritual continuity

¹⁹ Tarthang (1978: xix-xxi). See also Toussaint (1933), and <http://members.aol.com/Lemouellic/touss.htm>

²⁰ Tarthang (1978).

²¹ Vostrikov (1970: 28).

²² Vostrikov (1970: 27-57).

²³ Tucci (1949: 112).

for the rNying ma school after the abrupt downfall of the royal dynasty of Imperial Tibet (sixth to ninth century) during the turbulent decades of this dark era, and he demonstrated how the Treasure revelation tradition provided a means for the rNying ma school to validate their doctrines. However, Tucci too maintained a sober skepticism about the authenticity of the *gter ma* texts, which he believed were not discoveries in the real meaning of the word, but rather “compilations, although often done on ancient documents by persons well versed in the sacred scriptures and in the traditions of the schools.”²⁴ He was convinced that “these gTer ston must be considered, rather than discoverers, the compilers, sometimes actually the authors of the works discussed; thus we see that, once we have established the exact date of the discovery of one of these texts, we have in fact determined the date of their composition.”²⁵

All these early trends were largely motivated by the historians’ impulse to classify and scrutinize Tibetan history and culture through bibliographical investigation and philology in an attempt to prove their particular theories. Much to these scholars’ disappointment, the Tibetan textual tradition does not offer the opportunity to understand history in a linear way, let alone the *gter ma* scriptures. This is evident in another early historical work on Tibetan religions that includes descriptions of Treasure texts, Helmut Hoffmann’s *Die Religionen Tibets; Bon und Lamaismus in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (1956). Hoffmann studied Tibetan in Sikkim and Nepal in the early 1950s, but his text is replete with words and terms of Christian derivation and romantic renderings of the life and magical activities of Padmasambhava, whose doctrines and “syncretic religion” he calls “Padmaism.”²⁶ Drawing on works by Tucci, Evans-Wentz, and Toussaint, Hoffmann takes pains to describe the deeds of Padmasambhava in Tibet and Treasure texts such as the *Bar do thos sgröl* known in the West as the “Tibetan Book of the Dead,” discovered in the fourteenth century by Karma gling pa. Hoffmann’s work became a reference also for Buddhologists interested in Treasure literature as in the case of Edward Conze. Conze’s essay on “Buddhism and Gnosis” briefly introduces the notion of *gter ma* in a wider context of revelation and *gnosis* when he investigates analogies between Mahāyāna and Gnosticism in terms of scriptural authentication.²⁷

The Tibetan Diaspora in the early 1960s also marked a new era for Tibetan studies. As hundreds of *bla mas*, monks, and Tibetan scholars left Tibet, a large community of Tibetan

²⁴ Tucci (1949: 111).

²⁵ Tucci (1949: 112).

²⁶ This refers to the English edition. Hoffmann (1961: 50).

²⁷ Conze (1967: 658-59).

refugees descended into India and later Switzerland carrying with them not only personal items, but also works of art and numerous rare texts and manuscripts. Thanks to the vision, commitment, and efforts of E. Gene Smith, the preservation and diffusion of Tibetan manuscripts gained new momentum. After he joined the Library of Congress New Delhi Field Office, Smith reproduced and published thousands of Tibetan texts and manuscripts from the Tibetan-speaking communities of India, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal between 1968 and 1985, often with scholarly introductions written by him. It was in two of these famed “introductions,” specifically the “The Autobiography of a Rnying ma pa Visionary Mkhan po Ngag dbang dpal bzang in the *Ngagyur Nyingmay Sungrab* and his Spiritual Heritage” and “Jam mgon Kong sprul and the Nonsectarian Movement” in *Kongtrul’s Encyclopedia of Indo-Tibetan Culture* (1970) that Smith provided an erudite history of the rNying ma school. In the latter, he also commented on the *gter ma* tradition and reminded us that “the false prophet is a possibility that plagues any tradition that accepts the principle of continuing revelation with doubt.”²⁸ In his introductions portraying the rNying ma school, Smith explained the historical and doctrinal context that frames the *gter ma* texts and the revealers who produce them. Commenting on the presence of criticisms among rNying ma scholars, Smith wrote:

Many *gter ma* texts are superb examples of Tibetan literature. It is important to remember, however, that Tibetan Buddhism, especially the form followed by the rNying ma pa, is intended first and foremost to be pragmatic—a putting into practice of the insight realized by all the buddha and bodhisattvas of the past. The explanation for the multiplicity of metaphors and tutelary deities lies in the fact that there must be a practice suited to every sentient being somewhere. Forms or metaphors that were relevant yesterday may lose their efficacy in the changed situation of today. Achieving realization through the practice of a teaching is the ultimate test. Certain discoveries or revelations may have a greater relevance in a given situation and produce especially remarkable results.²⁹

Among those Tibetans who moved to India were also a number of scholars who brought with them their life experience and knowledge of the Tibetan world of *gter ma* revelation. Such is the case of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche whom the Italian Professor Luciano Petech, then working for the IsMEO and Professor Tucci, met in India and invited to Rome. Born in sDe dge in 1938, Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche arrived in Italy in 1960 and worked first at the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO) in Rome and then in 1962 became the first Professor of Mongolian and later of Tibetan Language and Literature at the Oriental Institute of Napoli

²⁸ Smith (2001: 240). Gene Smith’s “introductions” has been republished in 2001. See Smith (2001).

²⁹ Smith (2001: 240-41).

University. At that time the Oriental Institute of Napoli University had the largest number of departments of Asian and African studies in Italy and one of the largest in Europe. An expert of the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism, Namkhai Norbu was also a teacher of *rDzogs chen* or the Great Perfection and the *gter ma* tradition to which he had been exposed since his childhood in Khams. He expounded his views on the *rDzogs chen* tradition, his Tibetan teachers (among whom the Treasure revealer Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje), and the *gter ma* tradition in his autobiographical classic *The Crystal and the Way of Light: Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen*, published in 1986.³⁰ After Namkhai Norbu's arrival in the southern Italian city of Napoli, many students gathered around him since rumors soon spread among the students in the corridors of the "l'Orientale" (as the institute was commonly called) that since Namkhai Norbu was a Buddhist *bla ma*, his compassion forbade him to fail students. His classes were thus packed with students. His early follower and university student was an enthusiastic Spaniard named Ramon Prats. Prats committed to following his "teacher" everywhere listening to his teachings, talks, lectures, and classes. Soon the two established a close teacher-disciple relationship, and Prats absorbed everything he could from Namkhai Norbu, becoming particularly fascinated with *rDzogs chen* and the lives and deeds of Treasure revealers. After a few years working as lecturer, in 1988, Prats obtained a post as associate professor at the Oriental Institute. For the first few years, his classes were given in tandem with those of Namkhai Norbu until the latter retired in 1991. In 1982, Prats published his dissertation *Contributo allo Studio Biografico dei Primi Gter-ston* in which he transcribed, edited, translated, and analyzed a selection of biographical writings (*rnam thar*) of early Treasure revealers based on the list in the famed *gTer ston rgya rtsa'i rnam thar* authored by Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas.³¹ Soon Prats also produced a series of articles and publications on various aspects of *rDzogs chen* and *gter ma* studies that became the focus of his research career. His book on the lives of the early Treasure revealers was particularly important because together with Eva M. Dargyay's previously published work *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet* (1979), Prats provided the first Western-language translations of the lives of a number of early revealers and marked the beginning of biographical studies in Tibetan Buddhism.

Anne-Marie Blondeau's studies in the ritual and textual traditions of the rNying ma school including the Treasure tradition have become a landmark in the discipline. As director of

³⁰ Norbu and Shane (1986).

³¹ Prats (1982).

studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (religions tibétaines) in Paris, she often led her “conferences” by reading and translating long passages from various kinds of ritual texts such as cosmological treatises, apotropaic rituals, and Treasure texts while providing her comments and interpretations. Scrutiny of the *Padma bka’ thang* and the *bKa’ thang sde lnga* has been the focus of her attention until recently and is the topic of some of her widely read publications including “Le Lha-‘dre bka’-thang,” “Analysis of the Biographies of Padmasambhava according to Tibetan Tradition: Classification of Sources,” and “*Les bKa’ thang et la question du nationalisme tibétain.*”³²

The 1980s and 1990s saw developments shaped by the methods of *history of religion* in which the *gter ma* texts and the auto/biography of Treasure revealers were not only considered for their historical validity, but also, and I believe most importantly, for what they represented in their cultural and religious milieu. Benefiting from the large collection of material compiled by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project³³ of which he was the director from 1988 to 1993, Franz-Karl Ehrhard studied a number of Treasure revealers’ manuscripts and analyzed the notion of hidden valleys (*sbas yul*) discussed in them. Noteworthy essays of his include “The Role of ‘Treasure Discoverers’ and their Writings in the Search for Himalayan Sacred Lands” and “Religious Geography and Literary Traditions: The Foundation of the Monastery Brag-dkar bsam-gling.”³⁴

Interestingly, few Tibetan scholars seem to have been seriously interested in studying and publishing on the Treasure tradition. This makes us wonder if this is simply a coincidence or if does the lacuna of Tibetan-authored research on the Treasure tradition hide a deeper discomfort? A number of Tibetan scholars of the past such as ’Jig rten mgon po (1143-1217) and Sa skya paṇḍita (1182-1251) have been skeptical of Treasure and their revealers. One recent exception is Tulku Thondup, a rNying ma lama who has published prolifically on the subject of Treasure revelation, in particular his 1986 translation and study of a text explaining the Treasure tradition written by the erudite rNying ma scholar the third rDo Grub chen ’Jigs med bstan pa’i nyi ma (1865-1926). In this book titled *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*, Tulku Thondup provides the first English-language panorama of

³² Blondeau (1971, 1980, 2001).

³³ The Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) based in Kathmandu (1970-1999) has preserved and reproduced in microfilm form thousands of Tibetan ancient manuscripts (but also Sanskrit, Nepali, and Newari) including auto/biographical writings and Treasure teachings (*gter chos*) of major revealers. These manuscripts are stored at the National Archives in Kathmandu where are currently available to scholars for consultation.

³⁴ Ehrhard (1999; 2001).

the Treasures in all their forms. Tulku Thondup's book is interesting not only for his effort to make such an important text available to non-Tibetan readers, but also because it offers a bird's eye view of the *gter ma* tradition including the thorny issues of fake revealers and false Treasures.

Since the appearance of essays touching upon the Treasure tradition and its literature beginning as early as the nineteenth century, one of the main themes has been that of *authenticity*. In 1989, Michael Aris (1946-1999), who was then a lecturer in Asian History at St. John's College in Oxford, published a book titled *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives* concerning two eminent and rather controversial figures of the Tibetan Buddhist world: Padma gling pa (1450-1521) and Tshang dbyangs rgya mtsho, the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706). Despite its erudition and importance in terms of Tibetan auto/biographical studies, the book generated discomfort among many scholars for the message his analysis conveyed to his readers. After having read and studied the autobiographical writing of the famed Treasure revealer and Bhutanese national icon Padma gling pa, this leading academic expert of the then relatively young discipline of Tibetan Studies concluded that Padma gling pa was an impostor. Aris wrote:

There is a peculiar reluctance on the part of many modern scholars to recognize the entirely fabricated nature of the Tibetan "treasure-texts". It is as if their enthusiasm for things Tibetan and Himalayan has blinded them to an obvious truth. There is no evidence whatsoever to support the claim that any of the "rediscovered" texts of the cult actually date from the period claimed for them. [...] Yet some modern scholars go so far as vehemently to insist on the cult's entire dependence on the physical discovery of the texts originally composed in the eighth century, with only the minor proviso that there were a few imposters who jumped on the band wagon. Some writers avoid the issue altogether, presumably for fear of bringing Tibetan Buddhism into disrepute. Others hold that the self-proclaimed discoverers obtained genuine texts in the way they described, but then subjected these to a process of heavy editing. Even two of the foremost and most respected authorities maintain that: 'No imaginative and roguish group of Tibetans sat down to invent all the stuff out of their heads.' But a reading of Pemalingpa's autobiography suggests that this is precisely what did happen.³⁵

Despite the undoubtedly rational reasoning that brought Aris to his conclusions about Padma gling pa's life as a Treasure revealer, his comments left a bitter taste in many scholars' mouths. It was not only the conclusion *per se* was disturbing, but also the tone and the nuances of his partisan statements. A few years later, a group of four scholars agitated by Aris's comments led by sLob dpon Padma Tshe dbang, the monk-scholar and former director of the prestigious National Library of Bhutan, published a book in response to Aris's work titled *The Treasure*

³⁵ Aris (1989: 96-97).

Revealer of Bhutan: Pemalingpa, the Terma Tradition and its Critics. The team decided to write their version of Padma gling pa's life and legacy in order "to highlight some contemporary questions about our understanding and interpretation of Himalayan Buddhist cultures."³⁶ Their critique of Aris's work and scholastic stance takes a sharp tone when they write:

Causing offence, however, may plausibly be justified. But a closer look at the book shows that it fails to fulfill the requirements of adequate understanding and insight. There might be a case to make against Pemalingpa, who knows. But this book certainly has not made it. No serious proof against Pemalingpa is given by Aris.³⁷

Other Tibet specialists took the painful task to express concern about Michael Aris's statements, but the fundamental questions remain unsolved: is Treasure revelation a truthful means of Buddhist transmission? Are Treasure revealers authentic or are they charlatans? We know that these are questions that have always existed among scholars both Tibetan and non-Tibetan. In Tibet, criticism of the Treasure system dates back to the very beginning of the tradition itself in the eleventh century. Outside Tibet, scholars began to inquire about the Treasure tradition only recently.³⁸

The newly revived debate about the origins of the *gter ma* tradition gained momentum with the publication of an important article by Matthew Kapstein in 1989. "The Purificatory Gem and Its Cleansing: A Late Tibetan Polemical Discussion of Apocryphal Texts" was to leave a mark and become a reference for the insights it provided into understanding the debates on the authenticity and validity of Treasure revealers in Tibet.³⁹ One of Kapstein's points in the article was to explore the notion of canonicity by analyzing the positions of two major Tibetan dGe lugs pa scholars Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor (1904-1987) and Thu'u kwan chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802). Kapstein concluded that there is not enough evidence to indicate the existence of a distinct genre of "Buddhist apocrypha" as classified for instance in the Judeo-Christian tradition. He admits, however, that Treasure scriptures are a very close approximation in that are considered authentic by the rNying ma adherents but "pseudepigraphical and anathematic" by their opponents.⁴⁰ Kapstein demonstrates that Tibetan scholars attempted to provide criteria with

³⁶ Tshewang (1995: vii).

³⁷ Tshewang (1995: 126).

³⁸ For another comment on Aris's' statements on Padma gling pa see Martin (2001: 16-29).

³⁹ Kapstein (1989).

⁴⁰ Kapstein (1989: 220).

which to classify and validate revealed material in a context in which two factions emerged: one inclined to attack and one proposing to canonize apocryphal scriptures.⁴¹

Some scholars have approached the study of revelation in Buddhism from a *comparative* point of view, seeing liturgical analogies in neighboring cultures. Robert Mayer has studied *gter ma* revelation in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* and published his reflections in a number of articles and a book titled *A Scripture of The Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis*.⁴² His work epitomizes one of the major concerns that haunted many Tibetologists: the origins of the *gter ma* tradition. Largely moved by the urge to contextualize Treasure revelation within Tibetan Buddhism and wider Asian religious traditions, Mayer has not only attempted to follow up on Samuel's clerical/shamanic dichotomy, but he also suggested a solution to the tensions between closed canon/*bKa' 'gyur* and open canon/*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. Whereas the former represents the purity and globalism of the Sanskritic letter and therefore clerical orthodoxy according to Mayer, the latter reflects the need for continuity and localization in which the innovative spirit behind the movement is fueled by fresh revelations (*gter ma*) and visionary productions (*dag snang*). For Mayer, both currents are equally justified and are not necessarily mutually excluding.⁴³ Mayer suggests Indian antecedents for the Tibetan Treasure tradition, arguing that “the Tibetan *gter-ma* tradition is primarily a Tibetan elaboration of Buddhist systems already well attested in Indian and Chinese literature many centuries before the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet.”⁴⁴ For instance, he discusses the practice of *nidhidarśana*, “finding treasures,” a cult belonging to the Hindu tradition of Viṣṇu Māyā previously studied by the Dutch Indologist Teun Goudriaan.⁴⁵

Ronald Davidson agrees that the parallels between the Indic notion of *nidhi* and Tibetan Treasure are intriguing.⁴⁶ In his impressive historical overview of the ninth- to early thirteenth-century *Tibetan Renaissance*, Davidson dedicates an entire chapter to revelation titled “Treasure Texts, the Imperial Legacy, and the Great Perfection.” Expanding on the notion of the imperial ideology behind Treasure revelation, Davidson shows how the birth of this tradition had more to

⁴¹ Kapstein (1989: 243-44).

⁴² Mayer (1994, 1996, 1997).

⁴³ Mayer (1996: 149-53).

⁴⁴ Mayer (1996: 70).

⁴⁵ Goudriaan (1978).

⁴⁶ Davidson (2005).

do with the material remains of the Tibetan empire than with the myth of Padmasambhava's prophetic vision, which developed at a later stage.

An important aspect of Treasure revelation studies is an interest in the voices of Treasure revealers as conveyed in their *autobiographical writings*. This influential medium emphatically unveils the world of *gyer ma* revelation through the eyes and words of its agents. The pioneer of studies in Tibetan autobiography as well as the author of the burgeoning topic's most successful study is Janet Gyatso. Gyatso's first attraction to the Treasure tradition in Tibetan Buddhism was sparked by the life and revelations of the great fourteenth- fifteenth-century Treasure revealer Thang stong rgyal po. Since completing her doctoral degree in 1981 with a dissertation on this famed *gyer ston* and his tradition titled *The Literary Transmission of the Traditions of Thang-stong rGyal-po: A Study of Visionary Buddhism in Tibet*, Gyatso authored numerous publications about Treasures and their revealers. Using a methodology based on literary theories analyzing autobiography and supported by extensive research in Tibetan Buddhism, Gyatso's study of one of the most prominent Treasure revealers of Tibet, 'Jigs med gling pa (1730-1798), titled *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*, is considered one of the most important Tibetan studies publications in recent decades.⁴⁷ Gyatso's works are seminal for various reasons. First of all she belongs to the first generation of scholars who, like Jeffrey Hopkins, Robert Thurman, and Gene Smith, benefited from contact with Tibetans in exile, especially in India and Nepal, and thus were exposed to a new research method borrowed from anthropology, namely that of *ethnographic fieldwork*. Second, she introduced new methodologies in her studies such as those of comparative literature, specifically autobiographical studies, and gender studies. Thirdly, Gyatso framed her writings within the field of the history of religions, a discipline particularly important in American higher education. All this is evident in Gyatso's collections of essays such as "Signs, Memory, and History: A Tantric Buddhist Theory of Scriptural Transmission," "Genre, Authorship, and Transmission in Visionary Buddhism: The Literary Tradition of Thang-stong rGyal-po," and "The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition," to mention only a few.⁴⁸ In these works Gyatso opened the field of Tibetan Studies to new facets of the Treasure tradition. In particular, she highlighted the legitimation strategies Treasure revealers and their adherents utilized in order to present themselves and their Treasures as authentic. Although Gyatso suggests possible Indian

⁴⁷ Gyatso (1998).

⁴⁸ Gyatso (1986, 1992, 1993).

and Chinese antecedents to the Treasure tradition, she emphasizes its indigenous Tibetan factors.⁴⁹ She wrote:

Thus do they who can proclaim that they have discovered Buddhist scriptures in the Tibetan earth (or mind) distinguish themselves. In the course of so doing, the discoverer's appropriation of Indian or of indigenous powers is not merely a reversion to the past or a reinscription of embeddedness. Rather, the thrust of the Treasure discoverer's rhetoric is to make themselves into autonomous individuals, who cultivate spiritual powers without a human teacher.⁵⁰

Of particular interest for the development of the field of rNying ma studies, especially scriptural traditions with an emphasis on *gter ma* material, is the work of David Germano. Germano's exploration of the world of Tibetan Buddhism and especially Tantric lore continues the focus on the *history of religions* point of view. His works are primarily based on the study of *rDzogs chen* (the Great Perfection) with particular attention to the *snying thig* (Seminal Heart) system according to the doctrinal codification of the great rNying ma polymath and Treasure revealer kLong chen rab 'byams pa (1308-1364). One of Germano's strongest assertions is the indigenous origins of the *gter ma* system. Germano graduated in 1982 from the University of Wisconsin where he studied under Geshe Sopa and was immediately hired at the University of Virginia to teach alongside the famous specialist in dGe lugs pa philosophy Jeffrey Hopkins, who founded the University of Virginia's Tibetan Buddhist Studies program in the 1970s. The once dGe lugs pa-oriented program of study has gradually become a rNying ma stronghold.⁵¹ Germano's main interests are tenth- to fourteenth-century Tibetan religious history, Treasure revelation, *rDzogs chen* thought, and the revival of Buddhism in contemporary Tibet. He wrote a seminal essay on the history of *rDzogs chen* titled "Architecture and Absence in the Secret Tantric History of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*)" and a series of articles published in books and on-line.⁵² Additionally and more relevant for the present survey, Germano also produced an influential work on the phenomenon of *gter ma* revelation in contemporary Tibet. In his "Remembering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in People's Republic of China," Germano introduced readers to the world of Tibetan Treasure

⁴⁹ Gyatso (1998: 151).

⁵⁰ Gyatso (1998: 152-53).

⁵¹ For a description of Jeffrey Hopkins's career see Lopez (1998: 163-75).

⁵² Germano has published a number of articles and essays on the Tantric Canon of the rNying ma (*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*) and on Tibetan religious literature on the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library portal. Please see www.thdl.org.

revealers in present-day Tibet, a topic rather neglected by modern scholarship.⁵³ Combining ethnographic research with historical background, Germano narrates the rise of one of the most famous Treasure revealers of twentieth-century Tibet, mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1933-2003), outlining his career as a revealer and the fortunes of his religious encampment called bLa rung sgar in mGo log. His research has showed how this ancient, although controversial, form of scriptural and spiritual legitimation, is still an innovative force against the backdrop of the “transformed landscape” of twentieth-century Tibet.⁵⁴

With Gyatso and Germano, studies on the Tibetan Treasure tradition have entered a new phase. Their ground-breaking works and multidisciplinary approaches have given new momentum to the field. No longer are Treasure texts and their revealers investigated for their “historicity” and “validity,” but rather they are explored as a means to understand a tradition and its adherents, to better imagine their socio-historical context, and to interpret the complexities they voice. Therefore, attention has shifted from a purely philological to a more *socio-historical inquiry* in which scholars consider the Treasure authors for what they have produced within their tradition, the social role they play in their communities, and for whom they claim to be.

Another important recent addition to studies in Treasure revelation is the work currently being done on revaluation in the Bon tradition. No other work on Treasure revealers with the exception of Gyatso's has gone so far as the monographic study of Dan Martin. His book *Unearthing Bon Treasures: Life and Contested Legacy of a Tibetan Scripture Revealer* finally opens a window on the little known world of Bon po Treasure revealers. Martin shows great concern for studies on the Treasure tradition in other publications as well such as his informative essay on Treasure revelation within the context of the cult of relics called “Pearls from Bones: Relics, Chortens, Tertons and the Signs of Saintly Death in Tibet.”⁵⁵ Another scholar and prolific author of studies in the rNying ma and Bon traditions is the Frenchman Jean-Luc Achard. With particular attention to the role of Treasure revelation in the production and development of the *rDzogs chen* doctrine, Achard has devoted much of his time to the study of material from various Treasure revealers and their literary productions. Among his most representative works are “bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480-1535) et la Révélation du *Yang tig ye shes mthong grol*,” *L'Essence Perlée du Secret — Recherches philologiques et historiques et historiques sur l'origine de la*

⁵³ Goldstein and Kapstein (1998: 53-94).

⁵⁴ Germano (1998: 76).

⁵⁵ Martin (2001, 1994).

Grande Perfection dans la tradition rNying ma pa, and *Bon Po Hidden Treasures: A catalogue of bDe chen gling pa's Collected Revelations*, which are significant readings for anyone seriously interested in the field.⁵⁶

Despite the plurality of topics and the multifaceted aspects of the Treasure revelation phenomenon, that of authenticity is probably the one that has spurred more attention among scholars over the years. Another example of this is Andreas Doctor's work *Tibetan Treasure Literature*, published in 2005. An interesting feature of his book is his translation and study of 'Ju mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1912)'s complex text *gTer ston rtag pa chu dwangs nor bu* in which he warns about the dangers of false Treasure revealers and how to validate them.⁵⁷

Current scholarship is becoming more nuanced by expanding on earlier research methodologies but also building new trends. As in other disciplines like the study of Christianity, *gender* is becoming an increasingly active analytical category in Treasure studies. More and more students combine innovative methodological attitudes drawn from *literary theory*, *anthropology*, and *gender studies* with language skills and fieldwork research among "contemporary" Tibetans in their land. For example, Sarah Jacoby applies literary theory focusing on autobiography and gender studies to analyze the auto/biographical writings and life of the famed female *gter ston* mKha' 'gro bde ba'i rdo rje (a.k.a Se ra mkha' 'gro) (1892-1940) and the social context in which she lived.⁵⁸ Her study investigates the ways in which a female religious leader arose in a largely male dominated religious culture in addition to analyzing the issue of consort practices in the context of revelation from a female perspective. She discloses a world of revelation and devotion for us, but also a world of power, conflicting tensions between monastic and non-celibate lifestyles, and religious community tensions. Such a study offers us an interesting platform from which to understand the same issues as they appear in the contemporary perspective.

Finally, turning our gaze to contemporary Tibet, the present-day context is rich in opportunities to study the Treasure tradition and the Treasure revealers. Alongside explorations of other previously understudied groups such as *sngags pas*, and *rnal 'byor pas*, Treasure revealers' contemporary activities and cultural influence are claiming more attention and interest from current historians of Tibetan religions. The investigation of *lived religion*, in this case the

⁵⁶ Achard (1999, 2004, 2005).

⁵⁷ Doctor (2005: 31-51).

⁵⁸ Jacoby (2007).

practice of Treasure revelation, offers a window into the ongoing life and significance of Treasure revealers. In a conservative culture like that of Tibet, the study of living Treasure revealers has the potential to help understand the phenomena in the past. The variety of sources employed in the study of lived religion show the complexities of the phenomenon and the creativity of expression reached by the religious community in general and the Treasure revealers in particular. Today's Treasure revealers' productions include not only catalogues of their Treasures (*gter rdzas*), Treasure teachings (*gter chos*), and *opera omnia* (*gsung 'bum*), but also pamphlets, pins, talismans, photos and posters, audio-tapes, VCDs, and DVDs, and more recently Websites. Although all these products are not necessarily of great artistic or literary value, they are nevertheless valuable glimpses into the phenomenon of revelation in the present-day context.

More needs to be done to understand the role and the meaning of Treasure revelation in Tibet today. Revelation in all its aspects such as Treasure items (*gter rdzas*), mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*), and pure visions (*dag snang*) is still a vibrant force behind the technologies of Tantric literature and ritual in today's Tibet. The figure of the *gter ston* is as active as the criticism he or she sometimes attracts relating to his/her lifestyle and moral behavior within the religious community. Is it possible that present-day Treasure revealers are moved by the same urge and the same necessity to reveal and disseminate their Treasures as their predecessors? What does it mean to be a Treasure revealer, and are the criteria for evaluation the same as in the past? And especially, are the Treasure cycles (*gter skor*) and teachings (*gter chos*) valued the same as they were in the past? These are only a few of the working questions that I have attempted to address in my writings including "Visions, Arcane Claims, and Hidden Treasures: Charisma and Authority in a Present-Day Gter ston" published in 2002 and "Tibetan Buddhism Beyond the Monastery: Revelation and Identity in rNying ma Communities of Present-day Kham" in 2008. A study of Tibetan ideas of authentic Treasure revealers titled "*Anything is an Appropriate Treasure Teaching!*" Authentic Treasure Revealers and the Moral Implications of Non-celibate Tantric Activities" is in press.⁵⁹ I believe that the study of present-day Treasure revealers and their works can benefit the study of the Treasure tradition in general and can help us understand more about this tradition as a distinctive facet of Tibetan religion.

⁵⁹ Terrone (2002).

Scope of the Project and Outline of the Chapters

Despite the fact that there have been a number of studies devoted to Buddhism in contemporary Tibet, no book-length investigation of Treasure revelation in present-day Tibetan regions of the PRC has been published to date. This dissertation fills this lacuna in research on modern Tibet. Within that, the present study has two main aims. The first is to explore how currently active Treasure revealers have revived and reinvented their Treasure revelation practices in the face of major social and political changes that have taken place in the PRC. Through an analysis of contemporary Sino-Tibetan politics and the role of religion therein, this study answers the following questions: why and how have religion, and the Treasure revelation tradition in particular, enjoyed a resurgence under Chinese rule? What does the Treasure tradition offer today to Tibetans and an impressive number of ethnic Chinese as well? The second aim of this work is to investigate why and how people become Treasure revealers in Tibet by focusing on the life and religious activities of one such contemporary Treasure revealer, gTer chen bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. Years of fieldwork using participant observation methods living with bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and members of his community provide important data that help us understand the dynamics of these religious congregations and the roles they play in their teachers' revelations and doctrinal compositions.

In Chapter One, I open this study with an introduction to the major features of the Treasure tradition as it is represented in some popular Tibetan religious literary works on the subject. Far from being an exhaustive history, it nevertheless provides background on how the narrative strategies on the origins of Treasure revelations emerged as a revitalization effort with multiple objectives: 1) to assert rNying ma/Ancient identity within the gSar ma/New emerging Buddhist schools in the Tibetan religious renaissance; 2) to revive the supremacy of the early translation movement, the Tibetan imperial ideology, and the royal patronage of Buddhism during the eighth-century dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet; 3) to maintain an open rNying ma canon *vis-à-vis* the larger Tibetan Buddhist canon, thus legitimating newly composed doctrinal material; and 4) to affirm the important role that the non-celibate religious elite had in the dissemination of Buddhist doctrine in Tibet. This background in the Treasure tradition will create the matrix on which we can further develop our understanding of the phenomenon as it exists today. My interest in such a task is to demonstrate one central thesis of this study: just as Treasure ideologies originally came into being as a response to the religious and political

pressures in tenth-century Tibet when “modern” traditions challenged the old/ancient communities, likewise in the present context some Tibetan religious leaders employ Treasure revelation as a successful means to respond to the political pressures of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Tibet under Chinese rule.

Chapter Two offers an overview of the socio-political impact of decades of Chinese government religious policies in Tibet. My extensive fieldwork experience indicates that as in the past, the phenomena of the decline of Buddhism, the arrival of external colonizing forces, the re-creation of a link to the imperial and glorious age of dynastic Tibet, and the therapeutic power of freshly revealed Buddhist materials are still acting as major channels of collective memory. Additionally, the economic and political scenarios and the forces of change that appeared in post-Mao China allowed Tibetan areas to engage again in more overt expressions of religious belief and practice. In the past three decades Tibetans in the eastern areas of Kham and Amdo have gradually regained access to many popular practices forbidden in the Maoist past such as pilgrimages, offering to monasteries, the erection of private shrines at home, and local ceremonies and festivals.

In such a context, I argue that the Chinese government’s political strategies applied to Tibetan areas relating to the large-scale economic development of the country have caused a weakening of crucial religious authority for many monastic institutions by debilitating their economic power, incapacitating their political influence, limiting their education authority, and diminishing one of their crucial instruments, their large monastic population. After years of persecution and political control, the historical role of monasteries as exclusive guarantors of religious authority and scholastic legitimacy and as institutional centers of traditional instruction has drastically decreased. Nevertheless, the Tibetans’ spirit of adaptation and their struggle for the preservation of their religious and cultural identity has resulted in a reestablishment of many monastic activities including the publication of religious material, some collective religious festivals and rituals, and in some cases a revitalized education and instructional system for monastics. Concomitantly, however, a number of alternative forms of religious authority have emerged in eastern Tibet that emphasize the often eclectic nature of the rNying ma community such as visionary activities, Treasure revelation, and the formation of large and innovative religious communities as centers of practice and cultural production.

Within this socio-religious background, Chapter Three claims that visionary revelations seem to be particularly fit to reestablish a religious discourse with regard to ritual authority, the

codification of new identities, and the promotion of ancient religious narratives. Tibetan religious professionals such as Treasure revealers and non-celibate Tantric adepts (*sngags pa*) have become increasingly visible in the religious and social landscape of Tibet. Treasure revelations, often in the form of publicly witnessed events (*khrom gter*) play an important role in fostering faith in the devotees, nurturing hope in the followers, and in contributing to the preservation and continuation of the traditional transmission of the Buddhist teachings and meditation practices.

In Chapter Three, I also discuss in detail some of the features that characterize Treasure activities in modern Tibet through introducing a number of contemporary visionaries who mostly live and operate in northern and central areas of Kham. I explore the charismatic aspect of their leadership, the different aspects of their revelations, and the communities that surround them. Large religious encampments (*chos sgar*) and smaller Tantric mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) led by Treasure revealers (*gter ston*), non-celibate Tantric adepts (*sngags pa*), and ascetic yogis (*rnal 'byor pa*) have emerged in recent decades. Their leaders have successfully reestablished local control over religious identity and their system of education, which has been threatened so often under the current regime. Far from being either large administrative monastic institutions or small mountain retreats, these religious gatherings or religious encampments are characterized by a new emphasis on traditional education and instruction. The ambivalent nature of these hybrid encampments—both monastery and mountain hermitage, both monastic and lay residents, both monks and nuns—which often host thousands of Buddhist practitioners and enthusiastic devotees, has recently translated into a threat felt by Chinese government authorities and officials. Behind the controversial control of the Chinese government over Tibetan religious encampments is its sensitivity to issues related to links between the religious centers and the Tibetan government in exile, support for the Dalai Lama, and the presence of anti-Chinese sentiments and activities easily perceived by the central government as “splittist.” (Ch. *fenlie*). Nevertheless, present-day Treasure revealers have been largely successful in developing their religious communities despite the constraints of the current political climate.

Chapter Three will therefore analyze the revitalization of the Treasure tradition and the cult of the Treasure revealers as evidence of Tibetans' ongoing attempts to regain access to previous forms of Tibetan Buddhist authority and traditional religious transmission, and to portray their role in the formation of some of the most active rNying ma communities in twentieth-century Kham. As we shall see in more detail below, *gter* revelation, the cult of Treasure revealers, the constitution of religious communities around them, and the phenomenon

of the non-monastic, or better quasi-monastic religious encampments (*chos sgar*) have given a vibrant impulse to the practice of Buddhism in recent decades, but especially after the early 1980s.

gTer chen bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje

Chapter Four will introduce us to the life and religious experience of one such present-day Treasure revealer, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. Born in 1921 to a nomadic family in sKye rgu mdo county (Yushu TAP), bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life was fueled with the freedom of movement and straightforwardness of life as a nomad. Due to a difficult childhood, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje showed a predilection for a solitary lifestyle. This soon led him towards contemplative isolation in the wilderness. At the age of six he left his native land and parted from his family, living for a few years the life of a vagabond. In tune with the lifestyle of influential Tibetan yogis, who have become milestone models in Tibet's religious history, such as rJe btsun Mi la ras pa and Zhabs dkar, the young would-be *gter ston* also chose the path of hardship and solitary confinement as the way to personal liberation.⁶⁰ His early visions and ecstatic experiences associated with Padmasambhava were later interpreted as signs of a specific auspicious connection (*rten 'brel*) with a distant past of Tibetan history. More exclusively, this association was soon to determine the young bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's future as one of Padmasambhava's main emissaries (*pho nya*) and then to his being proclaimed a Treasure revealer.

By looking at bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life we have the opportunity to explore the paradigms that are enacted in the process of recognition of a Treasure revealer. Additionally, we will examine to the dynamics and circumstances that were conducive to the formation of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje as a Treasure revealer. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje began to experience visions and prophetic dreams very early in his life, visions that announced his potential career as a revealer. He met his first teacher, bKra shis chos 'phel, with whom he studied Tibetan language and entered the path of Buddhist practice. After having received teachings and complete

⁶⁰ rJe btsun Mi la ras pa bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1040-1123) is the most famous and beloved among Tibet's greatest yogis. His biography, *rJe btsun mi la ras pa'i rnam thar rgyas par phye ba mgur 'bum* by gTsang smyon He ru ka (1452-1507), is among the most popular and influential life accounts in Tibet. Disciple of another great religious figure of twelfth century Tibet, Mar pa lo tsa ba chos kyi blo gros (1012-97), founder of the bKa' brgyud tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, Mi la ras pa is the model of all Tibetan Buddhist ascetics. Another great example of Tibetan *yogi* and hermit is Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol (1781-1851), one of the most well-known rNying ma ascetics of the eighteenth century.

instructions on the *naro mkha' spyod* and Vajrayoginī (*rdo rje rnal 'byor ma*) from bKra shis chos 'phel, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje set off on a long pilgrimage in search of sacred sites and holy places where he could practice in solitude. His quest brought him not only to the major sacred places (*gnas chen*) of central Tibet, but also as far as Bhutan, Nepal, and India, which he reached in the mid 1940s, just a few years before the British Raj left India.

Despite the fact that he spent most of his formative years traveling across central Tibet studying with some of the most renowned teachers of twentieth-century Tibet, it was back in his native land of Khams in the late 1940s that bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje met those who were to become his most influential teachers, Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje and especially Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje. Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje (also known as dPal me mkhyen brtse kun bzang 'gro 'dul, 1897-1946) was a monastic and among the most outstanding practitioners and teachers of the bKa' brgyud school of Tibetan Buddhism. He was the founder of the dPla me mdo sngags bshad grub sgling monastery in Shar mda', Nang chen, in Qinghai. Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje (1926-c.1978) was one of the most active Buddhist practitioners and teachers of *rDzogs chen*, the Great Perfection system of meditation. Originally from Nyag rong (hence his name Nyag rong bla ma), he was a non-celibate *mantrin* (*sngags pa*) who lived most of his life in the religious encampment (*chos sgar*) Nyag bla sgar (or Nyag bla dgon) that he established in the Go 'jo area of Chab mdo. He received teachings from both rNying ma and Bon po teachers. The distinctive characteristics of these religious figures were to leave a profound impact on bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, for whom they were major sources of inspiration. They recognized the young practitioner's potential for Treasure (*gter ma*) revelation and encouraging his visionary activities. Since the early 1940s bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje has revealed more than four-hundred Treasure texts collected in twelve volumes.

Soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje established a series of small mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) on the well-known Great Sacred Site Lotus Crystal Mountain (gNas chen padma shel ri) in the Small Zur mang (Ch. Xiao Sumang) area near sKye rgu mdo and rDza mer chen, in Shar 'da', Nang chen. He was able to accomplish this because of the support of some monastic communities of the area, especially Zur mang and dPal me monasteries with which he maintained strong contacts. In 1979 bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje aligned himself with the main liturgical practices of dPal me monastery on account of a series of re-discoveries (*yang gter*) associated with his previous teacher and mentor, Grub dbang bde

chen rdo rje, who had been the founder of the monastery. This shows us the often interrelated nature of Treasure revealers and monastic institutions.

From 2001 to 2007 bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje lived at the rDza mer chen lhun grub gling nunnery at the invitation of the spiritual leaders of the convent. There he provided spiritual assistance, guidance, and ritual instructions for the monastic retreatants, mainly nuns who live in retreat at the meditation centre (*sgrub khang*) of the nunnery at the foot of Mount rDza mer chen. With a small but thriving community of monastics, lay followers, and non-celibate practitioners, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's activities are gaining momentum and his collection of revealed teachings fills more than ten volumes, making him one of the most prolific and active Treasure revealers in present-day Khams. In 2008 bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje accompanied by bKra shis mtsho mo and a handful of largely female monastics moved to his newly built nunnery, 'Od gsal chos gling a few miles west of Shar mda' town.

Chapter Five opens with a description and analysis of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's collection of Treasure cycles and offers brief outlines and a study of his production. Aside from the collection of revelations, among bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's manuscripts are some texts that he composed that can provide insight into his identity as a Treasure revealer and the importance he attached to his discoveries. In Chapter Five I elaborate on some of the features of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's Treasures and teachings, which follow the classical and conventional triad sets of *bla rdzogs thugs*. By looking at his Treasure cycles and especially the *Yang gsang rdo rje me char*, I argue that one of the central themes of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revelation production is to provide legitimacy and status to the class of non-celibate Tantric professionals called the white-robed and matted-haired group (*gos dkar lcang lo'i sde*). Particularly important in this regard is the *rTsol med*, a Treasure teaching attributed to Padmasambhava that represents an initiation ritual for Tantric adepts. Interestingly, this text lists a number of regalia (*rgyan*) that supposedly provide the adept with the appropriate signs of his rank. My argument is that such a ritual scripture is not only intended to provide legitimacy to the class of non-celibate adepts, but also provides a distinctive identity to the lineage initiated by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje.

As a Treasure revealer, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje instructs his disciples predominantly by employing doctrinal teachings and instructional material drawn from his cycles of revelations. Largely modeling his religious person on that of many Treasure revealers of the past, namely his two major teachers Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje and Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje, bDe chen 'od

gsal rdo rje represents the non-celibate Tantric practitioner. Many Tibetan Buddhists believe that a *gter ston* is a source of *gter ma* items and teachings but also of wisdom and divine power. The Treasure revealer is thus revered as a highly energizing and centripetal force in the maintenance of religious beliefs and practices and in the establishment and development of religious revival and cultural identity. In the final part of this last chapter I will, therefore, also provide some analysis of the social role that bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje plays in his community by describing the way he represents himself not only as a Treasure revealer but also as a prognosticator and healer.