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Bya rog prog zhu, The Raven Crest

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STELLINGEN

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION PROPOSITIONS

BYA ROG PROG ZHU, THE RAVEN CREST: THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF BDE CHEN 'OD GSAL RDO RJE, TREASURE REVEALER OF CONTEMPORARY TIBET

ANTONIO TERRONE

1. Due to the PRC's strict control over monasteries' organization and functions such as education, ritual practice, and most importantly population, Treasure revealer's communities have mushroomed in size and significance. This becomes evident by looking at some of the most popular religious encampments in Eastern Tibet such as mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's bLa rung sgar and Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan's Ya chen sgar.

2. In numerous areas of present-day eastern Tibet, Tibetan Buddhist religious teachers employ Treasure revelation and visionary practices to regain control over traditional forms of religious leadership, to remap sacred landscapes, and to re-negotiate cultural identity.

3. Within the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism the revelation of sacred artifacts and Buddhist manuscripts in Tibetan areas of the People's Republic of China not only has never ceased, but it has gained renewed popularity in recent years.

4. The religious activities of the Buddhist visionary bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje provide a good example of the revival of religious practice in Tibetan areas characterized by charismatic leadership, visionary experiences, religious material culture, and millenarian thought.

5. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje offers himself not only as a traditional link between Tibet's past and the current need to safeguard a Tibetan sense of religious identity, but also as an ideological force behind the contemporary renaissance of Buddhism in his land.

6. Despite occasional controversies within revelation communities in present-day Tibet, esoteric practices such as consort practices and traditional forms of prognostication are still widely performed. For example the couple bKra shis rgyal mtshan and mKha' 'gro dPal chen lha mo of Nang chen have established themselves as a dynamic couple who engage in visionary activities and earn their livelihood by offering divinatory services.

7. In a current attempt to revitalize monasticism, the late Buddhist master and visionary mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1933-2003) introduced strict codes of moral and ethical conduct regarding Tantric masters and Treasure revealers' consort practices. However, his emphasis on celibacy overlooks a crucial point: historically, most Treasure revealers were non-celibate and many had multiple consorts.

8. There is a great continuity between present-day Treasure revealers and those of the eleventh century. The essential ideals underlying the tradition are the same, namely, the retrieval of supposedly ancient manuscripts and

other sacred items in a ritual context that can authenticate and legitimate contemporary religious practices and spiritual traditions.

9. The recent decades of economic reforms and the relative, yet at times volatile, relaxation of religious policies in the PRC seem to have contributed to a Tibetan modernity characterized in part by a significant re-growth of interest in Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese. I call this trend a "new Journey to the West."

10. Large religious encampments (*chos sgar*) and mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) have recently expanded their congregational landscape by becoming attractive centers of education and training not only for monastics of all sectarian affiliations, but also for an increasing number of non-celibate and lay devotees attracted by the opportunity to study in an eclectic environment and benefit from the presence of the charismatic leader.

11. The internet is a viable means to reach out to new Buddhist devotees and establish new ways of spreading teachings and advice. In China, several websites of Tibetan Buddhist visionaries have appeared on the Internet. Employing combinations of biographies, digital photos, religious symbols, and audio-video technology, these Websites are "new generation biographies" that are incorporating multimedia technology into traditional forms of religious instruction to attract a wider cyber-sangha.

12. One of the most visible ways in which bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje promotes a strong sense of religious identity and lineage continuity is by propagating the *rTsol med* or the "Effortless [Path]," a Tantric initiation ritual for lay people that provides, among other things, a complete list of ornaments for the intiand. By dressing in a certain way and wearing these ornaments through a ritualized initiation, the followers of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje adhere to a specific attire, much in harmony with the path of the non-celibate Tantric professional.

13. Flying over Tibet in a vulture's body and then reading words from a mirror are the best ways to perform divination in Eastern Tibet.

14. Eating female Yak's yogurt is by far the best culinary delicacy in the entirety of Tibet from a vegetarian's point of view.