Tibetan Women as Patrons of Printing and Innovation*

Hildegard Diemberger

1 Introduction

Buddhist women played an important and often not fully recognised part in the production of books and, more specifically, in the introduction of printing as a technological innovation: from the Pāla queen who sponsored the production of exquisite palm-leaf manuscripts of the *Prajñāpāramitā* in Eight Thousand Verses and the *Pañcarakṣā* at the turn of the first millennium CE (see Fromigatti 2013, 12–13), to the Chinese Empresses Wu Zetian (r. 690–705), considered to be the woman “who discovered printing” (Barrett 2008), to the Japanese Empress Shōtoku who sponsored printing in 8th century Japan (see Kornicki in this volume), to the Mongolian Empresses of the Yuan court patronising the printing of Tibetan Buddhist scriptures in the 13th and 14th centuries (Sherab Sangpo in this volume), to the innumerable Tibetan women who contributed in various capacities to the production of literary masterpieces of the Tibetan tradition. This article concentrates on the contribution of Tibetan women to the printing of books in the 15th and 16th centuries and draws some parallels with their European contemporaries.

Chos kyi sgron ma (1422–1455) and Kun tu bzang mo (1464–1549) are some of the most prominent examples of Tibetan women who promoted cultural innovation in the Tibetan society of their time. Among many religious and artistic accomplishments they supported printing projects when this technology was still relatively new on the Tibetan plateau, promoting access to the

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written word to a larger number of people, including women. Both challenged the social conventions of their times by giving up or refusing marriage, became disciples and partners of great spiritual masters and eventually became leading spiritual figures in their own right. Their lives were described in their biographies written by direct disciples and give a unique insight into their world and the way in which they enacted Buddhist ideals, often with a particular attention to the predicaments of other women.

These famous women were not the only women to enact and support Buddhist deeds and they did not operate in isolation. Looking at the colophons of early prints and biographies of spiritual masters, many more women can be discovered as participating in the process of book production, especially as donors. In this paper I am going to follow a string of interconnected women, including the two aforementioned prominent examples, who were part of the cultural and social fabric within which early printing developed in Southern La stod and Gung thang. By looking at what can be gleaned from a range of known and newly discovered sources, I explore the aspirations, the constraints and the circumstances that led them to promote printing as well as a wide range of other cultural achievements. I also show that these women experienced lives often caught in a difficult tension between worldly commitments and spiritual yearnings and that through biographical narratives they could act as exemplars and authorising referents for later generations. Finally, I suggest that beyond the specificities of the Tibetan context, it might be a fruitful exercise to explore parallels with female patronage of book production cross-culturally, looking in particular at Medieval and Renaissance Europe.

2 Tibetan Women as Part of Religious and Political Networks

The earliest extant print from central Tibet produced at Shel dkar in 1407 does not explicitly mention a woman as patron or initiator. It was sponsored by the ruler of Southern La stod, lHa btsan skyabs, as part of the funerary practices for his father Si tu Chos kyi rin chen (?–1402). In the colophon however, some remarkable lines of praise are dedicated to his wife, bTsan lcam rgyal mo, the queen of southern La stod:¹

1 bTsan lcam rgyal mo, born in 1393, was the sister of the ruler of northern La stod, rNam rgyal grags bzang and the wife of Si tu lHa btsan skyabs (see Everding 2006, 105–106). She appears repeatedly in the biography of Chos kyi sgron ma as her mother in law (see Diemberger 2007). At the time of the print production she was only fourteen years old. The verses were therefore presumably celebrating her expected role more than her actual deeds.

The highest queen ruling over the land beyond boundaries (*mtha' yas pa*), like the moon [providing] a continuous stream of the nectar of happiness. The royal lady, with the beauty of a goddess, became the female ruler who protects both [the lay and the religious] communities according to the *dharma*. (*'grel chung*, folio 89v)²

These verses do not make it clear whether she played an active role in the production of this print. She may well have participated in the patronage operation, as members of the elite often did,³ but in this case she is celebrated more as the queen than as a patron. She was still very young and the marriage must have taken place not long before the completion of the print.

Print editions that were sponsored by rulers often had colophons that celebrated the entire land and the ruling family with its ancestry. They were among the religious deeds that enabled rulers to manifest their power and prestige as Buddhist rulers, often competing against each other and emulating powerful exemplars such as the Yuan emperors (see Tsering Dawa in this volume and Diemberger in press). These verses in the print colophon are remarkable in that they encapsulate the role of a woman member of a ruling family: she was born in the ruling family of northern La stod and had married into the ruling family of Southern La stod.⁴ While men ruled over the territory, it was women who often acted as ambassadors and mediators beyond the boundaries of a polity through marriage alliances. When involved in patrilocal marriages, which was the most common option,⁵ they could talk to both their family of origin and the family they had married into relying on their kinship networks. They were therefore an essential element in marriage alliances that held together a set of competing polities often torn by feuds and conflict.

2 Folio 89v: *Gsal ba'i bdud rts'i'i char rgyun zla gzhin ma // mtha yas sa la dbang bsgyur btsun mo mchog // lha lcām 'chi med bu mo'i dpal 'phrog ma // sde gnyis chos kyi skyong ba bdag mo byung//*

3 Female Buddhist patronage was well-established in Tibet since the imperial period. The custom of promoting printing, which was popular among female representative of the Mongolian elite, may have also had an impact in Tibetan society. Among the Mongolian female patrons of Tibetan printings was Bulughan, the wife of Togon Temur who had bestowed seals and titles to Si tu Chos kyi rin chen. She was one of the most significant supporters of the production of Tibetan prints at the Yuan court and their distribution that reached Tibet (see Sherab Sangpo in this volume).

4 She was part of an established pattern of marriage alliances between northern and southern La stod, as mother-in-law of Chos kyi sgron ma she is discussed in Diemberger 2007.

5 Patrilocal marriages were the expected norm and were the most celebrated. This does not, however, exclude the existence of a wide range of different marriage arrangements.

They also often acted as mediators internally when rifts, usually linked to succession disputes, were tearing apart ruling families within one polity.

The political structure that constituted the background against which they were operating in the 15th and the 16th century was made up of a multitude of polities, with different levels of subordination, shifting balances of power and changing allegiances. While southern La stod, like Gung thang and northern La stod, had been under the rule of Sa skya and later the Phag mo gru pa, it had a great deal of autonomy. Its ruling family, which had earlier produced some of the great Sa skya governors (Sa skya dpon chen),⁶ had also direct dealings with the Yuan emperors and later the Ming.⁷ At the same time local rulers such as the Tsha mda' sde pa were subjects of La stod lho but were ruling with a large degree of autonomy over a vast land in what currently corresponds to gNya' lam county. They also entertained direct relationship with the neighbouring Gung thang kings. A similar arrangement applied to the rulers of Zur tsho and other areas. In brief, what is mentioned in the 1407 colophon (*'grel cung*, folio 89r) as the 'polities as numerous as the stars paying respect' (*rgyal phran skar ma tsam gyis phyag byed pa*) to the centre of power of Southern La stod can be seen as reflecting the model of 'galactic' polity described by Geoffrey Samuel who adopted and adapted Tambiah's notion to the Tibetan setting (Samuel 1993, 62).

In this context marriage alliances were crucial. Elite women in particular were expected to fulfil their role both by their family of origin and the family they would marry into. However, some women were unhappy or unsatisfied with fulfilling this role and aspired to a complete dedication to a spiritual life. It was at the time of marriage that their views and expectations would surface, often leading to dramas and conflicts. Sometimes, after having rebelled, women re-negotiated their positions as religious women. Sometimes, women combined worldly and other-worldly commitments. As we shall see below, high ranking Tibetan women of this period lived lives that shared similarities

6 See Petech 1990; Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 1996; Everding 2006.

7 According to the *Shel dkar chos 'byung*, (folio 7r) Si tu Chos kyi rin chen received his title from the Yuan Emperor Togon Temur (Huizong) whose wife was an enthusiastic supporter of Tibetan printing. The Ming Emperors (Ta' ming rgyal po) were considered to be remote patrons of Buddhist monasteries on the holy mountain range of rTsiib ri (*Shel dkar chos 'byung* folio 31v, 32r). In 1413 lHa btsan skyabs received from the Ming Emperor Yongle, one of the greatest promoters of Tibetan printing, an edict which is currently preserved at the CTCRC Museum in Beijing. These political connections suggest the existence of cultural networks that at different times may have promoted the spread of printing technologies through the distribution of prints and the relevant practices.

FIGURE 13.1 *Zur tsho with Mt Tsang lha in the background.*
PHOTOGRAPH: BRUCE HUETT.

with those of their European contemporaries, given their struggles against unwanted marriages, their patronage of monastic colleges, nunneries and printing projects, spiritual aspirations and love for books.

In Tibet, female monasticism was not only a way for women to fulfil spiritual aspirations but also an acceptable route to refuse marriage and shape one's own life. In some circumstances, such spiritual power assisted the recognition of the status of women holding political positions. lHa rin chen tsho, a 13th century throne holder in Gung thang history, is such an example. She took over the regency at a time of political turmoil and ruled successfully, creating the basis for her nephew 'Bum lde dgon nag po to establish the kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang in the form that would shape the history of the region in the following centuries. Highly respected as a nun, during her rule she produced forty volumes of Buddhist scriptures of the mDo mang cycle in a dedicated workshop (see *Gung thang rgyal rabs* folio 3r, v; Everding 2000, 54–59).

Lay patronage, however, remained a highly appreciated and socially accepted route for women to fulfil their aspirations without renouncing their worldly commitments and without confronting the challenges of embracing monastic life against their kin's expectations.

Colophons of print editions and biographies give some insight into political and religious networks within which women played a significant part, sometimes as innovators but more often simply following established ritual protocols. I suggest that women's contribution in promoting printing was tightly connected to the role they were expected to play within the Tibetan social and political fabric of the time. Highly individualised, women's experiences reflected the outcome of both complying with and transgressing social expectations. Their life itineraries were often tortuous, and only in the few cases in which biographies are dedicated to them can they be accessed in any detail. More often, we have to rely on a patchwork of minimal information from sources that are not dedicated to them. In this they are similar to the medieval European patronesses, whose lives and deeds can be gleaned from letters, devotional books and scanty private writings or documents concerning the institutions they established.

3 **bDag mo Nam mkha' bzang mo (15th century) – Nun and Female Ruler**

A recently discovered print reveals that around 1442⁸ the ruling lady of Zur tsho devoted herself with great passion to the printing of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal's *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa snying po*, a work that encapsulated the essence of his extensive compendium the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*. According to the colophon, she was a highly respected nun addressed with the title 'female master' (*slob dpon ma*) and sponsored the printing project to make merit for the deceased ruler of Zur tsho Drung chen bSod nams rgyal mtshan and a number of other officials (see also Sharshon Tsering Dawa in this volume). She was related to him and, like him, belonged to the lineage of the Great Translator dPang lo tsā ba, which controlled the Zur tsho area (at that time and later) as part of southern La stod. Critical of popular ritual handling of scriptures as mere objects of devotion, she wanted to promote a more rigorous engagement with content and meaning, especially concerning the tantra. She thought of doing so by printing an essential work, the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa snying po*, which had just been composed by Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1376–1451) in 1441. Celebrated in the colophon for her spiritual qualities and her vision, she seems to have been involved in the project not only as a patron but also as an initiator and the driving force behind its completion.

8 For the dating see Sharshon Tsering Dawa's contribution in this volume.

The colophon reads as follows (particularly important passages are highlighted in bold):

Bowing to the Three jewels!

For the excellent aim of benefitting all living beings of the three realms of existence,

such is the table of contents of the [*dPal*] *de* [*kho na*] *nyid* [*'dus pa*] *snying po*,

containing the three-fold disciplines of the sūtra and tantra taught by all Buddhas of the three times.

Since the precious paṇḍita and translators of the past, have translated the ocean of dharma in an excellent way,

the pure doctrine of the philosophical vehicle [i.e. the sūtra] has expanded widely;

in contrast to this the pure doctrine of the tantric vehicle did not expand in such a way.

Also the sūtras were explained inaccurately,

meanings were subverted

and doubts were created.

Considering the [past] mistakes an accurate explanation sheds [now] light on the banner of the doctrine's jewel.

As far as the the ocean of the tantra is concerned,

three or four waves of tantric teachings and practices have appeared

However the precious volumes of the four classes of tantra

have become largely something to prostrate and make ritual offerings to.

Considering this issue,

thanks to the prayers to the Inner and Outer Buddhas and the power of their blessing,

the "Collected essence of the ocean of sūtra and tantra (*dPal de kho na de nyid 'dus pa*)"

explained in an excellent way the 84,000 *dharmaskandha*.

In order to enact the essence of the practice,

the [*dPal*] *de* [*kho na*] *nyid* [*'dus pa*] *snying po* was extracted from the ocean of the [*dPal de kho na nyid*] *'dus pa* (i.e. the essence of the collection was condensed in a single treatise).

Superior to all wish-fulfilling jewels,

it is excellent in fulfilling the hopes of all living beings.

Among the four continents of the universe, the excellent one is 'Dzam bu gling [inhabited by humans].

Among all countries, the excellent one is the Land of Snow.

Among all deities the excellent one is gTsang gi lha [the mountain god of Zur tsho].

The location of the god is sKyengs byed rdzong ri lha ri mo.

Here emerged the royal lineage like a wish-fulfilling tree
with roots that are very stable and the top that reaches the sky.

In this merit gathering place

like a crystalline branch of youth

**came about the female spiritual master (*slob dpon ma*) wearing the
saffron [robe] like fruits,**

Nam mkha' dpal bzang mo.

Having an ocean of wealth without limits,

a retinue and servants numerous as the stars in the sky,

and the beauty of the sun and moon of the accumulation of the two
merits,

she has become an object of admiration for all people.

As a means to enlighten the darkness of Saṃsāra's hardship

and to expand the harvests of benefits and happiness

she conducted meditation again and again.

**At this point in time, having realised that there is the [*dPal*] *de* [*kho*
na] *nyid* [*'dus pa*] *snying po***

with which not even countless moons and suns can compete,

she thought that she would promote it by using all her resources.

Generally in order to help all living beings reach enlightenment

as well as in order to fulfil the aspirations of deceased officials,

and in particular Drung chen bSod nams rgyal mtshan,

**supporting them in reaching the stage of Buddhahood, this print
edition was produced.**

The wood blocks were offered by the master sNyan grags bzang po.

**The countless rays of light of the printed treatises spread from the
hands of**

**the wonderful scribe Nam mkha' rin chen, which are like the
maṇḍalas of sun and moon,**

as well as [the hands of] the learned carver dGe bshes rGya le

and bSam pa blo gros seng ge among others.

[Spelling mistakes] which were like dust covering sun and moon,

**clouds [covering the sky] and Rahula [who obscured the sky by creat-
ing eclipses eating the moon],**

were eliminated by the scholarly 'Dul 'dzin Ngag dbang,

who created such an [accurate] clarifying system for the Great Vehicle.
 The virtues of the excellent printing greater than a wish-fulfilling jewel,
 may dispel all mistakes like countless suns and moons,
 and let comprehensive ability be obtained.
 In order to let all obstacles be eliminated
 and the two accumulation of positive conditions be enhanced,
 may the sun of the dharma spread in the ten directions
 and the moon of benefits and well-being shine in the ten directions.
 May all the relatives who have passed away achieve Buddhahood,
 and those who are still alive enjoy a long life.
 May all the wishes of the great female sponsor be realised without
 effort.
 May virtue be! May auspiciousness be!⁹

This printing project is recorded in both available biographies of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal¹⁰ as part of a set of prints produced in the first half of the fifteenth century (see Sharshon Tsering Dawa in this volume) but only attributed in general terms to the Zur tsho ba, i.e. the rulers of Zur tsho.

According to the biography of the Bo dong pa master bTsun pa chos legs (1437–1521), the official of Zur tsho known as Spang ston bSod nams rgyal mtshan (mentioned above as Drung chen bSod nams rgyal mtshan) had been killed by the ruler of northern La stod and this colophon seems to indicate that he was not the only one to die on this occasion as other deceased officials are hinted at. It is possible that he had been among the victims of one

9 For a transliteration of this passage see Appendix.

10 The relevant passage states: “Then under the sponsorship of Shel dkar chos sde the *rGyud sde spyi nam* [by Bo dong pan chen] was printed (*spar du brkos*). Furthermore the *sBas don gsal ba* was sponsored by mNga’ ris chos sde. [The print edition of the] *De nyid ’dus pa snying po* was sponsored by the Zur tsho ba. The *De nyid ’dus pa snying po* was produced [in printing] at Yar ’brog mNgon dga’ again.” Quoted from the biography of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal by Mi bskyod rdo rje, one of his disciples during the final part of his life (Biography of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal 11, folio 69v). The biography of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal by Amoghasiddhi ’jig med ’bangs (Biography of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal 1, folio 519–520) states: “The *rGyud sde rin po che spyi’i nam par gzhag pa* was supported by Shel dkar chos sde and the *Khrid yig sbas don kun gsal* was supported by mNga’ ris chos sde, the *dPal de kho na nyid ’dus pa’i snying po* was supported by the Zur tsho ba. The *dPal de nyid ’dus pa’i snying po* was produced here [i.e. Yar ’brog] again. All these texts were printed.” See also Sharshon Tsering Dawa in this volume.

of the numerous clashes between northern and southern La stod or of a local border dispute between the neighbouring polities. Whatever the cause of these deaths, producing books was a well-established way of making merit for the deceased and as such it is mentioned in the print colophon. The style of the colophon is similar to that of other print editions sponsored by rulers such as the 1407 print of Shel dkar and the 1443 print of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa snying po* produced at Yar 'brog, which include a celebration of the sacred land and its ruling family (see Sharshon Tsering Dawa in this volume). The emphatic reference to the female ruler of Zur tsho who seems to have been directly involved in the production may have also been a politically soothing way to cope with a time of grievance and instability by relying on the dharma. According to the colophon she was born into the ruling lineage (rather than marrying into it), was an achieved spiritual master and clearly celibate, and it can be inferred that she may have taken on a regency function (otherwise the ruler would have been mentioned). From this point of view, she can be seen as sharing some of the features of lHa Rin chen tsho, the queen of Gung thang mentioned above. In both cases, the production of books (manuscripts in the case of lHa rin chen mtsho, prints in the case of bDag mo Nam mkha' bzang mo) underpinned a vision of Buddhist governance that, if needed, could be enacted by a woman.

The printing project as a Buddhist deed was also going to boost the carving skills of Zur tsho lay and monastic craftsmen, who became famous all over the region, and were later involved in famous printing projects such as the carving of the first print edition of the biography and songs of Mi la ras pa (see Porong Dawa in this volume). The involvement of 'Dul 'dzin Ngag dbang, a famous bKa'

FIGURE 13.2 *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa snying po* text printed in Zur tsho by Nam mkha' dpal bzang mo.

PHOTOGRAPH: PORONG DAWA

brgyud pa bla ma,¹¹ as editor shows that at this point in time the boundaries across sects and traditions were rather fluid. It also demonstrates the great care that was put into the project by involving a highly respected and competent spiritual master for the delicate work of editing and proof-reading.

Little is known about the lady of Zur tsho who pursued with such enthusiasm the printing of Bo dong Phyogs las nram rgyal's work, except for the fact that she was a dedicated follower of this master. Much more is known of another committed female disciple who similarly obtained the title of female master (*slob dpon ma*): the Gung thang princess Chos kyi sgron ma.

4 Chos kyi sgron ma (1422–1455) – Princess, Nun and Reincarnation

Chos kyi sgron ma was born as the first child of the Gung thang king Khri lHa dbang rgyal mtshan (1404–1464) in 1422. After a marriage into the ruling family of southern La stod, she managed to give up worldly life and became a nun. Counting on her royal kinship and on her ability as a fundraiser Chos kyi sgron ma was a great patron of the arts and crafts. Editing the teachings of her spiritual master Bo dong Phyogs las nram rgyal, she supported the production of print editions when this technology was still in its infancy in Central Tibet. Chos kyi sgron ma was particularly dedicated to the education of religious women. In her biography it is stated that she had followers everywhere, gathered an increasing number of nuns and established a good system for teaching the doctrine so that “the nuns developed good reading skills”¹² (Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma folio 73r). Together with the famous yogin Thang stong rgyal po she supported the construction of iron-chain bridges over the gTsang po River and of architectural masterpieces such as the Stūpa of gCung Ri bo che. Recognised as an emanation of the tantric deity rDo rje phag mo, she was also one of the rare examples of a fully ordained woman in the Tibetan Buddhist context. At the end of her life she went to Tsa ri with a group of her closest disciples where she died at the age of 33 and was reincarnated shortly afterwards in Kun dga' bzang mo (see below).

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- 11 Disciple of La phyi ba Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1372–1437), 'Dul 'dzin ngag gi dbang po was his successor in the Ras chung nyan rgyud tradition. See Pahlke 2012, 249. He also appears as a revered spiritual master in the Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma folio 59a. Although he is only fleetingly mentioned, this reference also supports the understanding that he was an important religious authority in the region in the 1440s.
- 12 *dpal mo mdzad kyi zhabs kyis yongs su bzung bas thegs pa'i 'og tu yang / dge 'dun ma mang du 'dus chos tshugs bzang zhing klog pa 'phel bar gyur.*

FIGURE 13.3 *The Gung thang princess Chos kyi sgron ma (1422–1455). Illumination in manuscript of the biography of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal.*
PHOTOGRAPH: HILDEGARD DIEMBERGER.

FIGURE 13.4a *The biography of Chos kyi sgron ma.*
PHOTOGRAPH: PASANG WANGDU.

FIGURE 13.4b *The capital of Gung thang.*

PHOTOGRAPH: HILDEGARD DIEMBERGER.

Her biography (Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma folio 62r–63r) gives a rare glimpse into the writing up, editing and printing of her master's teaching. Apparently the process happened as part of a session of summer religious practice involving a crowd of people:

Then she suggested to her brother gCen [i.e. Khri rNam rgyal lde] that 'Jigs bral [Phyogs las rnam rgyal] and his monastic community should be invited for the summer session of religious practice (*dbyar gnas*). Her brother gCen provided one third of the necessary support, dGe 'dun Sher pa provided one third and the Lady of Prosperity provided one third. [Phyogs las rnam rgyal] was invited to reside at Pan gnas dbu rtse temple where Sa skya Paṇḍita held and won a debate against the heretic (*mu stegs byed*)¹³ [...] The sahaja yoga (*lhan cig skyes sbyor*) according to the Mahāmudrā tradition, and the teachings of [the collection] "Clarification of the hidden meanings" (*sbas don gsal ba*) were learnt and rehearsed. The content of the teachings for the attending followers was checked, the teaching texts were written up, every textbook was edited for printing (*yig cha so so'i spar gyi zhu dag*), images of the lord's tutelary deity were printed (*rje'i thugs dam lha sku spar*) and every ritual item was looked after. [She] looked after all the activities that were performed to

13 This was the famous debate between Sa skya Paṇḍita and Harinanada. Concerning this latter see Hugot 2012, 51–102.

please the lama, providing all what was necessary for the celebration by the people assembled around the Omniscient [Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal]; arranging all kinds of food and drinks such as *chang*, a rag and honey; as well as organising the serving for the King Son of the Gods [Khri lHa dbang rgyal mtshan], the royal uncles and nephews. She never looked tired and did everything without interruption and with great joy. At that time [Chos kyi sgron ma] was told by attendants (apparently nuns) working in the kitchens: “We do not only have to carry out our tasks, we also have to serve other people to such a great extent that this is worse than worldly work!”¹⁴

The *sBas don gsal ba* teaching that was written down and edited for printing on this occasion, is presumably the same text reported as actually printed with the support of mNga’ ris chos sde in the 1453 Biography of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal (Biography of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal folio 519). It is highly likely that the printing of the *sBas don gsal ba* reflects the outcome of the religious gathering described in Chos kyi sgron ma’s biography as happening in a summer of the second half of the 1440s – a period of intense Bo dong pa printing activity.

The setting described here is remarkable in that it involved not only a large crowd but also different key players on the political scene of the time: her brother Khri rnam rgyal lde (who was in a conflictual relationship with her father) and the people of Sher (who were often rebellious vassals of her father). They were joint patrons of the enterprise with her. Her father, the king, was invited together with a wide range of royal relatives. It is also clearly stated that she took the initiative of suggesting the enterprise to her brother. Beyond the undeniable achievement of the spiritual aims, such an event was apparently part of Chos kyi sgron ma’s religious diplomacy with which she was trying to soothe the conflict ridden political leadership of her country of origin. Despite her efforts, things broke down shortly afterwards and she had to intervene directly to appease her brother who had escaped to Sher. Only after a lot of insistence she managed to negotiate a compromise. Shortly afterwards her brother was enthroned as ruler alongside her father. He would later become one of the great royal patrons of printing, supporting amongst other print editions that of the biography and songs of Mi la ras pa (see Porong Dawa in this volume).

14 For a translation of the biography see Diemberger 2007. However, in that version I omitted the important detail that this editing operation was for printing (*spar zhu dag*) and I simply translated it as ‘editing’.

The crowd involved in the event was apparently not exclusively monastic and seems to show a wider participation in the religious teaching with people presumably accessing, at least to some extent, the content of texts. According to her biography, Chos kyi sgron ma had learnt reading and writing from her mother, which seems to indicate that members of the elite, including women, were at least partially literate. The participation in the gathering may have been wider than the top dignitaries and the ritual efficacy of printed images and texts ensured that the blessing reached out to everybody, even those who were illiterate. Chos kyi sgron ma had the vision that religious education would bring peace (see below) and the multiplication of texts was one of the means through which she sought to realise it. In order to achieve this she produced both prints and manuscripts and was deeply aware of the ritual power of scriptures.

According to her biography, after the passing of Bo dong Phyogs las nram rgyal, Chos kyi sgron ma decided to have his collected works reproduced, mixing into the ink the blood from the nose of the master. This may be a literary trope or the description of an actual ritual act; the blood was probably available as Bo dong Phyogs las nram rgyal seems to have repeatedly suffered from nose-bleeds. In any case this passage reflects the feeling of a text as a relic. While Chos kyi sgron ma had earlier engaged in printing for teaching purposes, in this case the manuscript form seems to have been the preferred option (perhaps given the sheer size of the collection). Apparently the ritual significance of the book production did not come at the cost of her scholarly commitment since she organised a thorough editing workshop. Eventually she produced two sets, one for Gung thang and one for dPal mo chos sdings, Bo dong Phyogs las nram rgyal's main monastery. This was part of a wider set of activities with which she honoured her deceased master. When it came to his bodily relics, avoiding conflicts was her paramount preoccupation and therefore she distributed the bone-splinters to members of the monastic community and his ashes mixed with clay in *tsha tsha* to the lay followers.

Chos kyi sgron ma's vision of Buddhist teachings as an agent of peace is spelled out in connection to the construction of water channels around the monastery of dPal mo chos sdng: she thought that by producing enough food to support a large centre of religious learning, peace would be brought to the neighbouring polities of Gung thang, southern and northern La stod. According to her this would

benefit greatly not only those who live on the dPal thang plain but also become the best place of refuge for people from places in the sTod area, coming from India, Nepal and so on, who travel in Tibet and face great

hardship and unbearable anxiety. In particular a great seat for the monastic community could be established... scholars from Southern and Northern La stod and mNga' ris¹⁵ should gather here to study and practise the precious *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*, promoting it and The Lord of the Doctrine's commitment for the advancement of the precious Buddha's doctrine will spread. Also, thanks to these good deeds this great land can remain peaceful for some time. (folio 110 v, r).

Her utopian vision, which she explicitly states as being a re-enactment of ancient Buddhist India, did not pan out. Her failure however actually supports the feeling that the biographical narrative, written close to the events, reflects real life circumstances beyond the recognisable literary tropes. This biographical narrative provides therefore a precious glimpse into the setting in which Chos kyi sgron ma promoted printing (alongside a wide range of other activities) with which she sought to realise her aspirations. Less is known of the women who followed directly in her footsteps.

5 Kun dga' bzang mo (1458–1549) – A Female Reincarnation

Chos kyi sgron ma had left for Tsa ri with a group of male and female disciples with grand plans in her mind. However, she died shortly after reaching the sacred site. As discussed elsewhere (Diemberger 2007) this left the community that had emerged around her in a difficult predicament. Without empowerment and formal transfer of authority, her disciples were unable to mobilise her network and carry on her legacy adequately. Her return in a new body appeared under those circumstances particularly compelling – although by no means to be seen as directly and instrumentally caused by these circumstances except in a wider karmic sense. Kun dga' bzang mo was identified and brought up as the re-embodiment of the deceased princess and like her an embodiment of the rDo rje Phag mo within a long succession of reincarnations (see Diemberger 2007; Tashi Tsering 1993, 20–53).

Kun dga' bzang mo was principally a religious figure, part of what would eventually become a reincarnation lineage defined through the re-embodiment of spiritual principles. Despite the prominence that she eventually acquired as part of the most famous female reincarnation line, unfortunately, information

15 In this case mNga' ris smad alias Mang yul Gung thang is meant.

about her is scanty. What we have are brief biographical sketches (in the *Bo dong chos 'byung* and in the biography of Thang stong rgyal po by 'Gyur med bde chen), her occasional appearance in other master's biographies (e.g. gTsang smyon He ru ka) and her mention in the manuscript edition of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* kept at the Potala Palace.

Kun dga' bzang mo travelled all over Tibet with dPal 'Chi med grub pa (ca.1420–1478), who had been one of the closest male members of Chos kyi sgron ma's entourage. In particular she found hospitality and support with the rulers of Yar 'brog, who had been devout disciples of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal and had been involved in a range of Bo dong pa printing projects (see Sharshon Tsering Dawa in this volume).

When dPal 'Chi med grub pa died, aged 59, Kun dga' bzang mo did for him what Chos kyi sgron ma had done for her master. In 1478 she established a workshop and in three months she had the entire collection of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*, the Collected Works of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal, edited and reproduced in manuscript form. The table of contents has survived up to the present day and is preserved in the Potala palace and refers to the time and place of the production and the central role she played in it.¹⁶

Kun dga' bzang mo was still young then and she would go on to support a great deal of Buddhist deeds, including the restoration of bSam sdings monastery and the building of monastic colleges (see Diemberger 2007). She is celebrated in the colophon of an important manuscript production but for the moment her direct participation in printing projects is uncertain. There is no doubt that at Yar 'brog she was part of a network of people deeply committed to scholarship and book production and who had embraced printing technologies with great enthusiasm (see Sharshon Tsering Dawa in this volume). She also met the famous biographer of Mi la ras pa, gTsang smyon He ru ka (see Biography of gTsang smyon He ru ka by rGod tshan ras can folios 32–33, 120–122).

Comparing Chos kyi sgron ma and Kun dga' bzang mo, it is clear that the latter was in a rather different position: her religious identity shaped her life from a very early age and by being recognised as the reincarnation of the princess she took over her network of relationships. She never had to struggle to be allowed to abandon worldly life and seems to have adapted well to a role that

16 This version of the Collected works of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal has as table of contents the text *dKar chag yid nor bzhugs / yan lag bstan bcos sdebs sbyor rtsa 'grel sogs*, Manuscript of 22 folios, kept at The Potala Palace.

was defined for her by a pre-existing network of disciples and patrons. Like Chos kyi sgron ma she was both a donor and a donee in relation to Buddhist deeds but the resources she was able to mobilise depended on the framework that she had become part of with her identification. Her family of origin is only known through the names of her parents and we don't know their social status.

Comparing Kun dga' bzang mo and the female ruler of Zur tsho, the Nam mkha' dpal bzang mo mentioned above, it is clear that the latter had a much stronger political profile and that her religious identity supported a role that she had acquired as a member of the ruling family. Embodying very different religious experiences, both contributed to the consolidation and spread of the Bo dong pa tradition and were part of a wider network that connected the region of La stod and Gung thang with Yar 'brog.

6 bDe legs chos 'dren – A Faithful Assistant and a Key Player

The biography of Chos kyi sgron ma repeatedly refers to a woman who must have been very close to her and probably played a crucial role in the establishment of her tradition: bDe legs chos 'dren. She joined her as junior religious companion and assistant nun in the 1440s and she was separated from her only when she was entrusted with specific tasks. Although she is not always highlighted, she was probably involved in substantial ways in the realisation of all the deeds of the princess, including her book production.

bDe legs chos 'dren followed the princess in her journey to Tsa ri and after her death played a significant part in the identification of Kun dga' bzang mo and probably her upbringing (see Diemberger 2007). From an analysis of Chos kyi sgron ma's biographical narrative, it can be inferred that she is likely to have played a part in the compilation of the biography, albeit not as the author.

Her social status is not clear and references to her in Chos kyi sgron ma's biography and the Biography of Thang stong rgyal po can be seen as one of the rare instances in which women of more common background and their experiences can be gleaned from narratives not dedicated to them. More often these women are part of the invisible crowd that shapes events but cannot be brought back from historical obscurity. Only in a few exceptional cases such as that of bSod nams 'dren ma (see Bessenger 2013) and later U rgyan chos skyid (see Schaeffer 2004) due to a wide range of favourable circumstances do women of a lower social standing become protagonists of dedicated narratives and rise to spiritual mastership.

7 Byang chub bzang mo (Fifteenth/Sixteenth Century) – A Leading Nun in the Region

When Chos kyi sgron ma left for Tsa ri, some of her nuns remained in their homeland. One of these was Byang chub bzang mo. In Chos kyi sgron ma's biography, she first appears as a high ranking nun (*dpon btsun ma*) of her nunnery in the vicinity of dPal mo chos sdings, and as part of the small group of nuns with whom she established the hermitage in the vicinity of rDzong dkar (Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma folio 76v–77r). She is again mentioned among the nuns who helped with the logistics in the manuscript reproduction of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal's Collected Works and the relevant celebrations at rDzong dkar: "Concerning the necessary assistance, tasks such as sending messages, grinding roasted grain [to make *rtsam pa*] and making *chang* were managed by the chief nun (*dpon btsun ma*) Byang chub bzang mo"¹⁷ (Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma 96r).

Byang chub bzang mo became a respected nun within the Bo dong pa network after the departure of Chos kyi sgron ma. She requested the Bo dong pa master bTsun pa Chos legs to write his biography (see Everding 2000, 223), which was printed after the master's demise, and assisted him in a variety of ways. She looked after him in Ko ron sBa tshe spil (Biography of bTsun pa Chos legs folio 86r) and certainly contributed in unrecorded ways to the success of the deeds of one of the great spiritual masters of her time whose works were printed and distributed across the region. .

She is probably identical with the Byang chub bzang mo mentioned as the venerable nun (*btsun ma*) consulted in 1485 by the young Kun tu bzang mo (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo 9v) when she was on her quest for a spiritual master (see below).

While so far Byang chub bzang mo remains elusive, Kun tu bzang mo is much better known thanks to the recent discovery of her biography which adds to what was already known about her from the biography of her master and consort gTsang smyon He ru ka written by rGod tshang ras chen (1482–1559).

17 *zhabs tog tha na bang chen rngod thag chang tshod pa las ka so so rnam la dpon btsun ma byang chub bzang mos thog ma byas.*

8 Kun tu bzang mo (1464–1549) – The Consort of gTsang smyon He ru ka

sPo rong dPal mo chos sdings, the monastery where Chos kyi sgron ma had taken her vows and resided with Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal, saw a few decades later (in the late 1480s) the arrival of another woman of high rank who was born in south-western Tibet, Kun tu bzang mo (1464–1549). Like Chos kyi sgron ma she had fought against her family and in particular their marriage strategies to pursue her own aspirations. She would eventually become the consort of gTsang smyon He ru ka, the great Buddhist master who compiled and had the printing blocks for the *Life and Songs of the famous Buddhist Yogin Mi la ras pa* carved.

Her story has now become better known thanks to the recent discovery of her biography written in 1551 by one of her main disciples, mKhyen rab dBang phyug, on the basis of autobiographical notes and short biographies written by other disciples (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo folio 70v).

FIGURE 13.5 *sKyiid grong valley. View from the pass leading to La ldebs.*

PHOTOGRAPH: BRUCE HUETT

She was born to the west of rTsib ri, in a place called dPyad lung Brag 'bur said to be at the distance of one *rgyang drag* from the famous pilgrimage site (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo folio 4v). From the biography of Grags pa rgyal mtshan (folio 51) we know that sPyad lung is a locality between Shel dkar and rDzong dkar not far from Na zlum, a place where gTsang smyon He ru ka often resided (see for example Biography of Kun tu bzang mo folio 8r) and where the first print edition of the biography and songs of Mi la ras pa was later produced (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo folios 16r–19v, see also Porong Dawa in this volume).

She was the youngest of four children and was given the birth name of mGon mo skyid. She was the daughter of the brother of a local official ruling over gNya' nang called sTag la nang pa, who belonged to the lineage of Shākya bzang po, the famous ruler (*dpon chen*) of Sa skya. Her mother seems to have remained resident in dPyad lung Brag 'bur and Kun tu bzang mo often moved back and forth between the lower areas of gNya' nang and her mother's residence in the higher areas west of the rTsib ri. At that time gNya' nang seems to have been administered from Tsha mda', an important centre west of Ding ri sGang dkar, just like sKyid grong was administered from rDzong dkar and mKhar rta Pha drug from Shel dkar. This is clearly stated in the colophon of a print produced by one of Kun tu bzang po's disciples: "Within the prosperous polity of Tsha mda', in the great hidden resort of gNya' nang"¹⁸ (Text 39 in Porong Dawa's collection, folio 68v). There was therefore a tight connection between the lower and the higher areas of the polity that corresponded roughly to current Nyalam County and this was achieved through a range of routes, the most important being the one via Glang 'khor and the Thong la pass (see map).

Kun tu bzang mo was a sickly child and showed early signs of wanting to pursue a spiritual life. In 1485 she met Byang chub bzang mo, one of the nuns belonging to Chos kyi sgron ma's retinue, and asked her about the best way of finding a true spiritual master (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo, folio 9v). At the same time she was promised as a bride to the tantric lama of bKra shis mkhar in a marriage that was seen as very convenient to her family because of the standing of the bKra shis mkhar family and its links to the rulers of Tsha mda' (*Tsha mda' sde pa*). She opposed the marriage; then eventually agreed but before the full conclusion of the marriage process her husband died. This led to a range of negotiations involving her paternal aunt who had married A ra dPal

18 *chab srid dar rgyas sde chen tsha mda' khul sbas ba'i sti gnas snya (gna') nang lung chen.*

bzang, a member of the Zur tsho ruling family, suggesting that she could come to Zur tsho as a secondary wife.

Refusing all the arrangements her family was trying to make, she kept pursuing her quest for a spiritual life. Her predicament led her to a dramatic escape one night from bKra shis mkhar, which must have been located just north of Na zlum in the vicinity of 'Gu tsho.¹⁹ This is vividly described in the biography (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo, folio 13r–14r):

Eventually, she arrived at sPo rong dPal mo chos sdng where things did not work out too well for her. When she asked to take refuge and cut her hair, the spiritual master Byang sems Rin chen dpal refused as they already had problems with high ranking women wanting to take vows. After a lot of insistence she was able to take refuge and was given the name dPal ldan skyid. At dPal mo chos sdngs she practiced meditation and received the teachings of Bo dong Phyogs las rnam rgyal. However she was repeatedly told that she should return to bKra shis mkhar. The spiritual master Byang sems rin chen himself suggested she should go to suitable monasteries in southern La stod, which would benefit her religious practice and her living conditions. He then emphasized: "If you stay here there is the risk that the people led by A ra ba [i.e. the Zu tsho ruler] may disturb and oppress not only you but also me" (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo, folio 16r).²⁰

Feeling the pressure, she decided to leave dPal mo chos sdngs and pursue her spiritual quest elsewhere. She sent her assistant dGon chung pa to see "the incomparable great He ru ka who, having returned from Tsa ri, was staying at Na zlum Shel phug in order to produce the print edition of the biography and songs of Mi la ras pa" (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo, folio 16r).²¹ gTsang smyon invited her saying that he was prepared to teach her the dharma.

The biography reports a range of spiritual and social events taking place at Na zlum, including a New Year celebration in which she was a cause of embarrassment because she refused to join a formal gathering and was

19 The approximate localisation of bKra shis mkhar is enabled by the mention of the sMan chu river, which flows through the sMan khab area, in the nocturnal escape episode. The sMan chu joins the river that comes from Zur tsho to form the Bong chu in the 'Gu tsho area, just north of Na zlum. Also, at folio 12r the biography reports that when she met with Bla ma bSod nams bzang po she said: "We are from the 'Gu tsho side (*nga nams 'gu tsho phyogs nas yin*)". Having married into the bKra shi mkhar family, she repeatedly refers to herself as the *dpon mo* of bKra shis mkhar, which would indicate an overlap, or at least a convergence, between the two proclaimed places of belonging.

20 *'dir bzhugs rang a r a ba tsos khyed rang khyer rjes nged la yang myed tser byas nyen yod.*

21 *mnya' med he ru ka chen de nyid gnas mchog dpal tsa ri nas phebs te rje btsun mi la ras pa'i mam mgur par du gzhengs pa la na zlum shel phug na bzhugs.*

FIGURE 13.6 *dPal mo chos sdings monastery.*
 PHOTOGRAPH: HILDEGARD DIEMBERGER

reading the life and songs of *Mi la ras pa*, poorly dressed in a separate room. At that time seated in a top position of the seating row were the spiritual son of *gTsang smyon Heruka*, *lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal* (1473–1557), and his mother, described here as an emanation of the *rDo rje phag mo* (*Yum rdor je phag mo*).²² As high ranking guests belonging to the *Gung thang* royal family, they invited her to join but to no avail. They must have been either visiting or possibly taking refuge, having escaped the *Gung thang* court intrigues that led to the assassination of *lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal*'s father.²³

At *Na zlum*, *Kun tu bzang mo* received many teachings from *He ru ka* and his disciples. Eventually, after they completed the printing project, they transferred the blocks to *gNya' nang Gro phug*, a sacred site of *Mi la ras pa* in central *gNya' nang*. She kept travelling in the region, going to *Gung thang*, *Glo bo* and other areas, often returning to *gNya' nang* and going into retreat in *La phyi*. After a while, when she was on her own, she received news of *gTsang smyon He ru ka*'s passing which distressed her greatly. Shortly afterwards *dNgos 'grub*

22 On *lHa btsun*'s mother as an emanation of the *rDo rje phag mo*, see Clemente 2009, 3,3; Diemberger & Clemente 2013, 125.

23 On this episode, see Clemente 2014, 457–63; Diemberger & Clemente 2013, 122–125.

FIGURE 13.7
Kun tu bzang mo as depicted in her biography.
PHOTOGRAPH: PORONG DAWA.

FIGURE 13.8 *Biography of Kun tu bzang mo. Her image is drawn showing her as an old woman; the image of her master gTsang smyon He ru ka is just sketched. Perhaps the artist struggled with the fact that he died long before her and no memory of his appearance or iconographic representation was available to him.*
PHOTOGRAPH: PORONG DAWA.

dpal 'bar (1456–1529)²⁴ wrote gTsang smyon He ru ka's biography, for which the blocks were carved in rTsis ri bSam gling in 1508 and subsequently taken to Grod phug (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo folio 28r–29r, see also Larsson in this volume and Sernesi 2011). The same happened for gTsang smyon He ru ka's works.

A short while after the completion of the funerary rituals for her master, Kun tu bzang mo decided to reprint *Mi la ras pa's* songs because the first print had some deficiencies:

At that time the victorious mother (*rgyal yum*) [Kun tu bzang mo] thought: 'When the master was alive, he told me that the woodblocks of

24 dNgos grub dpal 'bar was one of the closest disciples of gTsang smyon Heruka and the author of the first of his biographies.

the songs of *Mi la ras pa* have letters that are generally too small in shape (*yi ge chung*s); thus what was in his mind in relation to the carving wasn't fully achieved.' Generally, in order to benefit the dharma and the living beings and not to turn away from the master's thought, she decided to revive the printing activity (*par gyi zhig bsos*). She sent disciples with letters and with the relevant ceremonial gifts to *Gu ge*, *sPu rangs* and other places to collect donations." (Biography of *Kun tu bzang mo*, folio 29r)

After a preparatory stay at *Shes phug chu shing sgang* of *bKar shis sgang* in *Chu dbar*, "they went to *Brod phug* (*Grod phug*) of *gNya' nang*. They gathered from disciples and the sponsors up to *Tsa ri* all the donations necessary for the support of the speech (*gsung rten*). They then stayed at *Se phug* [in *La phyi*] and gathered all what was necessary for the printing such as the wood blocks. All the donations that were sought for from all directions arrived plentiful and in a short time. The scribes and carvers from *sMan khab* and *Zur gtso* were called many times. The disciple *Lo pañ* [*ras pa 'Jam dpal chos lha*] did the editing and one hundred and eight blocks were newly produced. (Biography of *Kun tu bzang mo*, folio 29r)

The narrative then highlights the fact that when the marking phase was completed (*spyān 'byed grub*) on the remaining blocks, *Kun tu bzang mo* let the craftsmen enjoy a ceremony and payed their salaries. Once the carving operation was completed, they consecrated all the wood blocks with a lavish performance of the relevant consecration ritual (*rab gnas*) and a fire ritual (*kha skong sbyin sreg*) according to the sand maṇḍala of *Cakrasaṃvara*. At that point rainbows appeared in the blue sky and a pleasant scent spread everywhere. As a further miraculous sign it is mentioned that when the illuminations were completed with the finishing touches, everybody saw that, in the images, the wisdom-beings had arrived in person (*ye shes pa phebs*) and obtained great faith. The wood blocks were then 'invited' to *Drod phug* (*Grod phug*) and spread the prints to sponsors and disciples everywhere. (Biography of *Kun tu bzang mo*, folio 29v).²⁵

25 *de'i tshe rgyal yum nyid kyi dgongs pa la: rje bzhugs dus/ rje mid la'i mgur 'bum gyi par shing phal cher yi ge chungs shing: kos thugs gzhed bshin ma byung gsung pas/ spyir bstan 'gro la phan pa dang: bye brag tu: je dgongs pa phyin ci ma log pa yin pas/ par gyi zhig bsos mdzad par thugs thag spyad: bu slob rnams/ gu ge: pu rangs sogs: so sor bka' shog rten dan/... de nas gnya' nang brod phug tu phebs te: tsa ri man gyi bu slob dang sbyin bdag rnams la'an gsung rten dan bcas 'bul sdud gnang: dpon slob kyis ze phug tu bzhugs: par sogs 'phral dgos kyi chas rkyen mams bsgrubs/: phyags kyi 'bul sdud rnams kyang/ stobs che ba myur du sleb*

For the re-carving of the blocks of the songs (possibly including the biography?)²⁶ of Mi la ras pa, Kun tu bzang mo chose a new strategy: this time rather than taking the wood to the place where sponsors and craftsmen were based as her master had done, she invited them to Mi la ras pa's holy site of Se phug in the densely wooded La phyi area where birch (the most commonly used wood for printing blocks) is plentiful. On this occasion the operation seems to have taken much less time (just a few months), possibly taking into account summer rains and winter snows, and was relying on a wider sponsorship network as well as an experienced team of craftsmen that had been involved in Kun tu bzang mo's projects before. She managed to convince them to go to a holy but very remote area and kept their spirits happy by organising a large scale celebration and payment of salaries before the end of the project.

It is also likely that the criticism of the letter size of the original blocks may have prompted some stylistic innovation, but only the retrieval of these original prints will make an evaluation possible. The scribes and the carvers were from sMan khab and Zur tsho as in the Na zlum edition (see Porong Dawa in this volume). Many were presumably the same that had been involved in Kun tu bzang mo's 1508 projects of rTsib ri bSam gtan gling (Sernesi 2011, 186–187). As in the case of the Na zlum and rTsib ri print editions, she had the blocks taken from Se phug to Gro phug printing house in central gNya' nang.

The Grod phug printing house, which is located in a Mi la ras pa site relatively close to Kun tu bzang mo's paternal family home, was apparently an important place for gTsang smyon He ru ka and his disciples. Later Kun tu bzang mo restored it (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo, folio 43r) and had some of her spiritual daughters based there or in its vicinity (see below).

After a long period spent in the La stod region, during which she visited many places including the Hidden Valley of mKhan pa lung,²⁷ she decided to go to Tsa ri in south-eastern Tibet (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo, folio 47).

te: sman khab dang: zur tsho nas yig mkhan dang kos mkhan mang du bos: thugs sras lo pan pas zhu dag mdzad: par shing brgya dan brgyad gsar du bzheng.

26 In the reference to the Na zlum print edition, songs and biography (*rnam mgur*) are mentioned collectively. In Ze phug only the songs (*mgur*) are mentioned but it is possible that both were meant.

27 mKhan pa lung is a famous hidden valley (*sbas yul*) considered to have been revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem phru can, a rNying ma pa master with a close connection to the Gung thang royal house. The mention of Kun tu bzang mo as opening the hidden valley seems to attest to the fact that by then mKhan pa lung, located to the south of Pha drug, was at least known. Kun tu bzang mo's interest in the hidden valley may have been not exclusively spiritual as these were areas rich in wood and paper and medicinal plants.

Kun tu bzang mo followed the same route as Chos kyi sgron ma. In contrast to her, however, she enjoyed a long life there. She established herself as a spiritual leader in the Dvags po and Kong po regions and was recognised as an emanation of the rDo rje phag mo (Biography of Kun tu bzang mo folio 58r) before dying at the venerable age of 84 in 1549.

Kun tu bzang mo's biography mentions long lists of male and female disciples, and of monasteries she established or supported. As the spiritual heir of gTsang smyon He ru ka, she had a network that spanned the whole of Tibet and included some of the greatest spiritual masters of her time. Most famous among them is perhaps rGod tshang ras chen (1482–1559), whom she empowered as throne holder in Ras chung phug. Certainly she contributed in a significant way to establishing some of the texts that were produced by gTsang smyon He ru ka and his disciples as classics of Tibetan literature (see Ehrhard 2010, 129–162 and also Larsson in this volume).

Although she was considered an emanation of the rDo rje phag mo, as was the mother of lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal, Kun tu bzang mo does not seem to have been recognised in a female re-embodiment and no reincarnation line originated from her. Her legacy was passed on through teacher-disciple relationships and kinship.

Certainly, Chos kyi sgron ma and Kun tu bzang mo belonged to the same networks of patronage, religious practice and kin: Chos kyi sgron ma's sister 'Dzam gling rgyal mo and her niece, mKha 'gro rgyal mo, had songs dedicated to them by gTsang smyon He ru ka as they visited him in 'Od gsal phug in Ron phu to receive religious teachings. Kun tu bzang mo ensured that these songs were put into print as part of a collection of songs by her master (see *gTsang smyon's mgur 'bum*, 11v, 12r).

It is thanks to these larger networks that the deeds of great spiritual masters became part of a narrative tradition that has survived and thrived up to the present day. Women were an important part in these relationships in which kinship, patronage and religious affiliation intersected and ensured that deeds were achieved, traditions maintained and sometimes innovation enabled.

9 dBang mo Yang 'dzom (16th Century) – A Niece and Local Heir of Kun tu bzang mo's Legacy

A recently discovered text (see text 39 in Porong Dawa's collection), a handwritten copy from a print of the biography of Nāropā by dBang phyug rgyal mtshan (1474–1552) – which was reprinted in gNya' nang in the vicinity of Grod phug – gives insight into what happened to Kun tu bzang mo's printing

activities in her homeland after her departure for the east. The printing project was managed by a spiritual daughter (*thugs sras*) of Kun tu bzang mo called dBang mo g.Yang 'dzom and her sisters. They were her nieces (*dbong mo*) and were presumably taking care of the printing house after their aunt's departure. Connected to the ruling family of gNya' nang (as was Kun tu bzang mo) they were in a good position to mobilise resources to take forward the legacy of Kun tu bzang mo there. Like many spiritual masters before her, dBang mo dpal 'dzom took the opportunity of fulfilling the remaining wishes of an important and [presumably] deceased person and his family to initiate the print edition of a work that had been composed upon the request of her famous aunt. As in the case of many other women, very little is known of Kun tu bzang mo's nieces but we can be certain that their aunt had been a source of great inspiration for them. Having transformed from rebel to moral exemplar, Kun tu bzang mo had become an authorising referent that commanded respect and protected whoever was carrying on her legacy.

The Tsha mda' ruling family seems to have been an important element within the patronage network that promoted the composition and printing of important works by gTsang smyon He ru ka and his school: they were among the sponsors of the first print edition of Mi la ras pa's biography and songs and the daughter-in-law of the Tsha mda' rulers had a song dedicated to her by gTsang smyon He ru ka soothing her grief at the passing of her husband, which was printed by Kun tu bzang mo within the collection of gTsang smyon songs (see *gTsang smyon's mgur 'bum*, f. 11v–12r).

10 Gung thang Queens and Other Women

Many of these patronage networks spanned entire regions. The links between southern La stod and Gung thang were particularly close and often stretched beyond the actual polities through marriage alliances, religious connections and trade relations. Trans-Himalayan trading routes certainly played an important part in the development of printing, as wood, paper, ink and colorants were often sourced through trade. The *Gung thang rgyal rabs* mentions Khri lHa dbang rgyal mtshan, Chos kyi sgron ma's father, as the first to produce print editions among his merit making deeds and this might be linked to the expansion of his network in cis-Himalayan regions.

According to Chos kyi sgron ma's biography, Khri lHa dbang rgyal mtshan married as a secondary wife "one of the Bong rdzogs sisters" (Biography of Chos kyi sgron ma folio 7v). Chos kyi sgron ma's mother was deeply disappointed

with this: she had had only two daughters from the king but she had married him only four years before; they were both young and could have still tried to have a male heir. Khri lHa dbang rgyal mtshan however either for personal passion or, more likely, political necessity decided to marry a woman from the ruling clan (Bong rdzogs)²⁸ of the kingdom immediately to the south of Gung thang, currently corresponding to an area in the Rasuwa valley in Nepal. She became the mother of Khri rNam rgyal lde, a great sponsor of printing. Her origin was, however, completely omitted by the *Gung thang rgyal rabs*, either for lack of evidence or deliberately (she would have been considered a *mon pa/ron pa*), and Chos kyi sgron ma's mother and Khri rNam rgyal lde's mother were conflated.

The upper Rasuwa area was, and to some extent still is, famous for its paper, dyes and wood. The local rulers controlled the trans-Himalayan trade route and especially the sKyid grong passage. It is therefore plausible that the kinship network of the Gung thang kings played a part in securing the sourcing of the materials that were essential for the production of print editions. Later, in some cases, blocks were actually carved in regions corresponding to Hidden Valleys (*sbas yul*) such as sKyid mo lung (see Porong Dawa in this volume), Helambu (Yol mo) and Langtang (Lang 'phrang) (Ehrhard 2013; forthcoming).

After Chos kyi sgron ma, we find a whole host of women, especially members of the royal family, mentioned in the relevant colophons involved in printing operations. In most cases, these are simply female names within long lists of sponsors. Only by cross-referencing them in different colophons, biographies and the history of Gung thang (*Gung thang rgyal rabs*) do glimpses of these women's stories sometimes emerge.

In some cases, one wonders whether the production of print editions was a catalyst for the establishment of patronage networks that bridged political rifts and consolidated existing ties in the name of a shared Buddhist vision of merit making. For example there are Gung thang prints that list in their colophons members of rival factions within the royal family. After Khri rnam rgyal lde (1426?–1502)²⁹ the Gung thang dynasty had split into two competing branches (emerging from his two wives), with bitter rivalry and even murder separating them (see Diemberger and Clemente 2013, 119–142). At that time,

28 Bong rdzogs (which is both a place and a clan name) is tightly connected to the Bong rdzogs Ghale, the name of a ruling clan in the Upper Rasuwa. See Campbell 1996, 222–245.

29 Khri rnam rgyal lde's dates are usually given as 1422–1502 according to the *Gung thang rgyal rabs*. The biography of Chos kyi sgron ma however suggests that 1422 was her date of birth and that her brother was born some four years later (see Diemberger 2007).

queens belonging to opposing factions seem to have joined forces in sponsoring print editions: Gu ge ma dKon mchog bzang/rgyal mo, wife of Khri Kun dga' rnam rgyal lde (?–1524) and Shes rab rgyal mo, wife of bSam sgrub lde supported a print edition of the Yang dgon pa spiritual songs and other works (see Diemberger & Clemente 2013, 131, n. 78). This and other examples suggest that colophons should be understood not only as a mere reflection of actual processes but also as powerful narratives enacting religious and political arrangements through their compilation and reading, processes in which women often played a distinctive part.³⁰

Gung thang prints not only mention a significant number of women but also present colophons that involve a large number of people of different standing, suggesting that printing operations involved a wider participation beyond the political and religious elite (see Clemente in press b). From this point of view women may have had an important part in widening access to the written word. The extent of this process however remains to be evaluated and has so far proved difficult to glean from extant sources.

11 Women as Spiritual Leaders and Patrons: Compliance, Transgression and Innovation

Either enacting patronage from a position of compliance with social norms or, more rarely, transgressing them, women certainly played a part in the cultural life of 15th/16th century Tibet. Some of the sacred women mentioned above were recognised as emanations of the deity rDo rje phag mo. Three cases that are known within this network – Chos kyi sgron ma, the mother of lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal and Kun tu bzang mo – indicate that this occurred more often than the rare instances in which women became established as reincarnation lines. It seems, rather, that by being identified as rDo rje phag mo these women had their unconventional achievements and relationships accepted as the result of their embodiment of the sacred power that comes from transgressing and transcending conventions. (On features that epitomize the deity they embody, Vajrayoginī/rDo rje phag mo, see English 2002.) Further, marriage seems to have played an important part: Chos kyi sgron ma abandoned her marriage to become a disciple and perhaps consort of spiritual masters (and her divorce triggered a war); lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal's mother was

30 At least one woman is also mentioned among artists who worked on printing projects. On this figure, see Clemente in press a.

a close disciple of gTsang smyon He ru ka, probably after having been the lover of a member of the Gung thang royal house (Shes rab dpal bzang);³¹ Kun tu bzang mo refused a range of marriage arrangements and eventually became the consort and spiritual heir of gTsang smyon He ru ka. All three of them reportedly shaped their destiny and their personal relationships in ways that did not comply with the expectations of their kin groups and their community more generally. To what extent this kind of behaviour remained a prerogative of elite women, who had the means and the manoeuvring space to fight their battles, remains to be explored as more women emerge from a close scrutiny of the historical records. The fact that the bSam sdings rdo rje phag mo – the institutionalised reincarnation of Chos kyi sgron ma – eventually became the protectress of women who refuse marriage (see Dhondup K and Tashi Tsering 1979, 11–17) seems to indicate that these issues were more widespread than the few prominent cases we know of. Certainly, the possibility of relating to this kind of female sacredness afforded opportunities to a number of women – and to male members of the Buddhist congregation who supported them – to shape their religious lives in ways that enacted traditions creatively, and also created an environment conducive to innovation. However, in a context in which anything new tended to be seen as equivalent to corruption of the doctrine and departure from transmitted authority, this would usually be conceptually framed in terms of continuities with the past; such a framework of interpretation applied to printing, too.

Printing in Tibet is certainly to be seen in continuity with other forms of book production. Rather than superseding manuscript production it complemented it, retaining many elements of continuity. However, certain features of blockprinting, and the relevant processes, were innovative in that they seem to have enabled a wider spread of the written word and promoted an enhancement of editorial practices. In what ways might this introduction of printing have impacted on women?

Women, at least those belonging to the elite, were not excluded from literacy but the number of literate women is likely to have been quite limited. It is difficult to find information on whether female literacy was enhanced through printing. Chos kyi sgron ma, who had learnt how to read from her mother, expressed commitment towards teaching reading skills to nuns, which

31 The informal character of her relationship is the most plausible explanation for the fact that lHa btsun Rin chen nam rgyal was included in the genealogies only belatedly (he is ignored by the *Gung thang rgyal rabs*), see also Diemberger and Clemente 2013, 119–142.

suggests that at least for religious women a larger availability of books was likely to have had an impact. This involved not only direct reading but also the practice of reading books to people. When Kun tu bzang mo was travelling around reading the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, she either used her own copy or more likely the volumes that were available in the relevant households: ornate manuscript editions or copies that had been printed by Chos kyi sgon ma's brother Khri rnam rgyal lde a few years before (*Gung thang rgyal rabs* 15r; Everding 2000, 139; Ehrhard 2000, 14). A more widely distributed royal edition was produced shortly afterwards by King Kun dga' rnam rgyal lde (see Ehrhard 2013, 143–171). Availability of common texts in printed form enhanced therefore the performance of ritual reading as part of religious services. As far as Kun tu bzang mo's own reading skills are concerned, she presumably acquired them when she was brought up by her aunt who was a nun and who is likely to have taught her how to perform religious services for people – an important merit making and fund raising activity.

Some of the women who followed masters became influential spiritual figures even if their deeds can so far be gleaned only from the narratives of others, where they are only marginal figures – as was the case of Chos kyi sgron ma and Kun tu bzang mo until their biographies came to light.

FIGURE 13.9 *Nuns at Be rtse performing a tshogs ritual (the sheep is a tshe thar offering). This nunnery was established on one of the sacred sites where dNgos grub dpal 'bar, disciple of gTsang smyon He ru ka, used to reside.*

PHOTOGRAPH: HILDEGARD DIEMBERGER.

FIGURE 13.10

Ani Rig 'dzin lha mo. She has a slob dpon degree and is the head of a nunnery in Bhutan. Female spiritual masters of the past are highly inspirational for Buddhist nuns of the current era.

PHOTOGRAPH: HILDEGARD
DIEMBERGER.

12 From Tibet to Europe: A Cross-cultural Look

High-ranking Tibetan women of this period lived lives that shared some similarities with those of their European contemporaries, given their struggles against unwanted marriages, patronage of monastic colleges and nunneries, spiritual aspirations and love for books. They also operated through their female networks, often through the medium of book exchanges, to influence the political dynamics of the age. They remind us of the patronesses of Cambridge colleges or the ladies who sponsored the production of manuscripts and prints. Many of these women acted as aristocratic patrons, often having freed themselves from marriage obligations through widowhood, refusal of marriage or celibacy vows and some of them devoted themselves to monastic lives. These women often shared their experiences, creating networks similar to the Tibetan elite networks described above often linking to important religious figures of the time: bishops and arch bishops, and inspired each other. For example Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) who, after refusing marriage, had established the order of the Clarisse in 12th century Italy, was a source of inspiration and a moral exemplar for Marie de Saint Pol (1303–1377), the patroness of Denny Abbey and foundress of Pembroke College, who requested in her will to be buried in a nun's habit (Ward 2002; see also Field 2010, 384–387). At the same time Marie de Saint Pol was a friend of Elisabeth de Burgh (1295–1360), patron of Clare College and collector of art works with whom she shared experiences and aspirations. Frances Underhill (1996) describes how Elizabeth de Burgh exemplifies the possibilities of female cultural leadership and patronage in medieval

England, which was one of the few domains in which a public role for women was sanctioned. It enabled self-empowerment in a world unconcerned with female self-actualisation. Many of the books she owned would have been illuminated religious works and there is a record of her giving an illuminated book to her daughter. She ensured that poor boys in her village should be instructed in singing, grammar and logic. Both Marie de St Pol and Elizabeth de Burgh lived through periods of Civil War in England in which their relatives were involved and when female networks were important in maintaining some stability. It is interesting that in the preamble to her statutes for Clare College she specifically mentions that the scholars should “live in harmony”.

Dedication to books shaped the lives of many of these women and some of them became involved in printing. For example Margaret of York (1416–1503) was the patron of the translation and printing of the first book in English, the *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy* by Willam Caxton (see Rutter 1987, 440–470). Caxton's prologue, as transcribed by James Ames in 1749, extols the virtues of Margaret of York and her importance to the project, including her making corrections to his English, and could be compared to some exultant descriptions of patrons in Tibetan colophons.³²

Across Europe we find women among the patrons of printing affording easier access for the broader population in the local language, such as Isabella d'Este (1475–1539) who was a significant patron of several arts and supported the printing of a range of books, insisting on good quality and reasonable prices (McCash 1996, 33). She also played an important diplomatic role acting as regent for Mantua during the absence of her husband and when her son was a minor. Sometimes called ‘Machiavelli in skirts’ she was renowned for her diplomatic skills and, like some of her Tibetan counterparts, she negotiated to avoid war with a neighbouring polity, France (see Marek 1976).

There is also evidence that women in medieval Europe became significant acquirers of books. For instance Isabella d'Este had a vast library and an increasing number of studies are casting light on women's holdings and use of books. In European book history, it seems that women played a part not only as patrons but also as readers, being fond especially of vernacular literature, which they actively promoted. Women are also acknowledged to have made a major contribution to translation in the medieval and renaissance period (Lawrence-Mathers 2010). They were also critical in the education of their daughters, who would not normally have had formal schooling like male children.

32 See “Typographical antiquities: being an historical account of printing in England” printed by W. Faden and quoted in McCash 1996, 33.

In a parallel way, Tibetan women are likely to have had an important part in the popularisation of texts through many practices, ranging from patronage of book production, to reading and having books read, to teaching children and other women how to read and write, to the few cases in which they became accomplished spiritual masters recognised as such by both men and women of their communities. It is argued that involvement with books and book production enabled these women to find an identity in a society in which they had little property and few legal rights.

13 Conclusion

It can be suggested that, as sentient beings, Tibetan women have been striving towards enlightenment like their male counterparts, reflecting the vision that Alan Sponberg (1992, 8) calls 'soteriological inclusiveness'. However, as it is well attested, the social and cultural fabric of the relevant time, often by means of Buddhist gender discriminating narratives, have often placed them in positions that implied subordination to a wide range of expectations and social constraints. Looking at the lives of a number of women who were involved in Buddhist deeds such as the printing of scriptures we can identify some common features in their experiences: Most of the known female patrons and female spiritual leaders tended to belong to the elites, since such a social position offered both the means and the manoeuvring space for realising spiritual aspirations. Women of lower background were likely to rise to spiritual prominence only under exceptional circumstances. However, women of lower backgrounds are likely to have participated in many Buddhist deeds in different unrecorded capacities, as for example the repeated references to the generic involvement of nuns suggests. Even the more prominent women tend to disappear from records over time as some of the above mentioned examples show (e.g. the female ruler of Zur tsho and Chos kyi sgron ma).³³

Elite women involved in the patronage of printing, in addition to the overall Buddhist soteriological aims, seem to have had distinctive ways of engaging in such an activity, which related to the position they occupied in marriage alliances. In a world of political fragmentation and local conflicts, in which they had to act as ambassadors through their kinship ties, they seem to have been in a particular position to act as promoters of peace and mediation – often

33 Zur tsho bdang mo mentioned elsewhere as the Zur tsho ba; Chos kyi sgron ma mentioned in a single line in the Gung thang rgyal rabs and ignored in relation to the production of prints.

joining forces with spiritual masters who were powerful mediators and negotiators (when they were not engaged in sectarian fights and patronage competition).³⁴

Biographical narratives have played an important part in the enactment and transmission of a morality of exemplars in the Buddhist context. Thus the lives of Buddhist women played an important part as 'authorising referents' for later generations (see Gyatso and Havevik 2005; Diemberger 2007). In addition to the few female biographies, colophons and records of patronage sometimes contain powerful narratives in this direction, even if they are more difficult to interpret because of the lack of contextual information – this would have been known at the relevant time and possibly passed on through local oral tradition.

Book production seems to have offered women an important route to fulfil their spiritual aspirations, produce merit for their deceased family members, and at times reinforce their religious profile in ways that could consolidate a political position (given that it was much more difficult for a woman to be seen as a strong and legitimate ruler than for a man),

In contrast to the few women who engaged critically with the social and cultural setting within which they were operating, many more found less disruptive ways of fulfilling their aspirations both as nuns and benefactresses. Patronage often provided a rewarding and less problematic way of taking part in Buddhist deeds (see also Willis 1985), contributing substantially to their realisation: providing the opportunity to compose new spiritual works, the food for scribes and carvers, the arrangements for the materials necessary for constructing religious objects or the resources to establish a workshop. We often only know of these women's contribution from a brief mention of their names as sponsors at the end of documents. It is difficult to glean what motivated them and how they pursued their aspirations from fragments and traces in sources that were not dedicated to them. Even if we do not know their story, it can be assumed that their ways of enacting Buddhist patronage was directly connected to the position they occupied within wider kinship, religious and political networks. In this they remind us of many medieval and renaissance patronesses in Europe, who supported book culture and a wide range of spiritual institutions that became hubs of education and learning. In both cases their legacies lives on in the traditions and achievements to which they contributed as women in a men's world.

34 The role of lamas in the mediation of disputes has been analysed in detail by Fernanda Pirie (2012) on the basis of ethnographic evidence from Amdo. Some of her reflections can be seen as relevant to historical contexts.

Appendix

Transliteration of the colophon of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa snying po* printed at Zur tsho. Text n. 10 Porong Dawa's collection:

Folio 175v

dkon mchog gsum la gu bas phyag 'tshal nas/ srid gsum sems can kun gyi don mchog phyir// dus gsum sangs rgyas kun gyi mdo sngags kyi// slab gsum de nyid snying po'i dkar cag bshad//sngon gyi lo pan skyes mchog dam pa yi/dam chos rgya mtsho legs par sgyur ba la/ mtshan nyid theg pa'i dam chos dar na yang// sngags kyi theg pa de chos de lta min//mdo ba bshad la yang yang dag pa ma bshad dan//log par bshad dang the mtshom du bshad pas// ma dag mthong phyir dag pa'i rnam bshad kyis//bstan pa'i rin po che rgyal mtshan lham mer [...]s// rgyud sde rgya mtsho'i tsho gas las rgyud kyi ni//rba rlabs gsum bzhi bshad sgrub ltar byed kyang//rgyud sde bzhi glegs bam rin po che//phal cher phyag mchog tsam gyi yul du gyur//tshul 'di mthong nas phyi nang rgyas pa la//gsol ba gtab cing de yi byin brlabs mthus//mdo rgyud rgya mtsho'i de nyid dus pa ni//chos tshoms brgyad khri bzhi stong legs par [...]shad//de yi sgrub pa snying por by aba phyir//rus pa rgya mtsho'i de snyid snying po ni//yid bzhin nor bu kun las ches lhag pa//gro kun re ba skang phyir legs par phyung//

gling bzhi nang nas gling mchog 'dzam bu gling//yul gyi nang nas yul mchog kha ba can//lha'i nang nas lha mchog gtsang gi lha//lha gnas bskyeng byed lha ri mo//der ni rgyal rigs dpag bsam shing chen rgyas//rtsa brtan rtse mo mkha' la reg pa byung//rgya chen bsod nams phun tshogs sti gnas der// lang

Folio 176r

tsha shel gyi lcug phran lta bu la//ngur smrig lo 'bras 'dzin pa'i slob dpon ma//nam mkha' dpal bzang mo zhes grags pa byung// 'byor pa'i chu gter pha mtha' mi mang zhing/'khor ba yog ra mkha'i skar ma lta bar dar//tshigs gnyis nyi zla shar [...] 'ogs gyi smon pa'i gnas su gyur/'khor ba'i 'gal rkyen mun pa kun sel cin// phan bde'i lo tog thams cadrgyas byed pa'i // thabs ni ci zhig yong yang dang yang//bsam [...] mdzad pa'i rtul shugs thob par gyur// skabs der de nyid snying po zhes bya ba//nyi zla grangs med kyis kyang 'gran med pa// yod par dgongs nas yod pa'i dngos po kun// kun du btang nas de nyid spel bar dgongs//spyir gyi 'gro kun byang chub thob phyir dang/zhal ngo gshegs pa mams kyi dgongs rdzogs dang/ khyad par drung chen bsod nams rgyal mtshan sogs//rgyal ba'i go 'phang thob phyir spar 'di sgrubs//

spar shing bshes gnyen grags pa bzang pos phul//'phrul gyi yig mkhan nam mkha' rin chen dang//rkos byed mkhas pa dge ba bshes rgyal le dang//bsam pa blo gros seng ge la sogs pa'i//lag gnyis nyi ma zla ba'i dkyil 'khor las/ spar gzchung 'od zer grangs med 'di spros so//nyi zla'i rdul ngad sprin dang sgra gcan sogs//dag gsal gnyen po'i phyogs su mdzad pa'i//dul 'dzin mkhas pa ngag dbang zhes bya ba//shing rta chen po de yis srol 'di phye//

yid shin nor bu bas kyang ches ltag pa'i//rin chen spar mchog sgrubs pa'i dge ba na//nyi zla grangs med shar ba lta bu yis// skyon yon spang thams cad mthar pyin shog//gal rkyen bar chad thams cad bsal ba dang//mthun rkyen tshogs gnyis thams cad? rgyas bya'i phyir//bstan pa'i nyi ma phyogs bcur rgyas pa dang//phan bde'i zla ba phyogs bcur 'phel bar shog//sku gnyen gshegs pa thams cad bder gshegs dang//ma gshegs pa kun sku rtse mi 'da' dang// khyad par sbyin bdag chen mo rang nyid kyi// bzhe don thams cad 'bad med lhun grub shog

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