

Prints about the Printer: Four Early Prints in Honour of the Mad Yogin of gTsang*

Stefan Larsson

1 Introduction

This article investigates four texts that the disciples of the mad yogin gTsang smyon Heruka (1452–1507) compiled and printed in 1508, the year after their teacher passed away. On the basis of these four prints, the article will explore how gTsang smyon's disciples, almost directly after the death of their beloved master, began composing and printing texts in his honour. Additionally, the people involved in the production of the prints and the place where the printing likely occurred will be outlined. It is worth mentioning that the texts were made by a quite disparate group of people. Two of them, rGod tshang ras pa (1482–1559) and Lo paṅ 'Jam dpal chos lha (n.d.), were tantric yogins; one of them, dNgos grub dpal 'bar (1456–1527), was a learned monk affiliated with the Sa skya tradition; and one of them, Kun tu bzang mo (1464–1549), was the female companion of gTsang smyon.

The four prints could be seen as the second step in the development of 'the school of gTsang smyon', an influential school of printing that centered around gTsang smyon and his disciples.¹ The first step was taken by gTsang smyon himself when he organized the printings of his versions of the life story and song collection of Mi la ras pa in 1488 and of Mar pa in 1505, prints that became very popular and widely disseminated. When gTsang smyon passed away,

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1 Franz-Karl Ehrhard has suggested that on the basis of the stylistic criteria of Tibetan printed texts, one may identify individual 'schools' or 'workshops,' and that these could then be named after the leading figures or religious communities with which the artists and craftsmen affiliated themselves (Ehrhard 2012, 149). Several scholars have investigated the prints that 'the school of gTsang smyon' produced, for example, Clemente 2007, 2009; DiValerio 2015a, 2015b; Diemberger and Clemente 2013; Ehrhard 2000, 2010, 2012; Larsson 2012; Larsson and Quintman 2015; Quintman 2014; Roberts 2007; Schaeffer 2007, 2009, 2011; Sernesi 2010, 2011, forthcoming; Smith 1969, 2001.



FIGURE 14.1 *Block-print illustration of gTsang smyon Heruka (dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508, 1a).*

his disciples continued his manifold activities, among them printing texts. By compiling and printing the four texts, they laid the foundation for later gTsang smyon biographies, and they also contributed in making their teacher remembered by future generations. If it were not for promoting their teacher's life and songs through printing, it is possible that the identity of "the yogin adorned with bone ornaments who roam charnel grounds", as gTsang smyon names himself in the colophon of his famous biography of Mi la ras pa, would be unknown today.² By taking this 'second step', his disciples also proved that they were capable of organizing substantial printing projects without their master's

² gTsang smyon Heruka 1991 [1488]: *dur khrod nyul ba'i rnal 'byor pa rus pa'i rgyan can.*

guidance. They thus continued in gTsang smyon's footsteps, acting as leading figures in the wider printing culture that blossomed in sixteenth-century Tibet.

2 The Four Prints

Heart of the Sun, the most extensive biography of gTsang smyon, describes how the mad yogin's disciples and benefactors carried out numerous devotional acts in honour of their guru after his passing. Besides engaging in elaborate rituals and offerings, they honoured his body by making hundreds of statues and paintings depicting him. It is also said that his disciples honoured his mind by devoting their life to practising the teachings they had received, some spent the rest of their lives in isolated retreat places, struggling to realize the innermost meaning of his teachings. Moreover, it is stated in *Heart of the Sun* that his female companion, Kun tu bzang mo, printed a collection of gTsang smyon's spiritual songs in honour of his speech. These songs, according to the biography, had been written down by his disciples and compiled by rGod tshang ras pa. It is also said that she printed his biography, which had been composed by dNgos grub dpal 'bar.³ The author's colophon of dNgos grub dpal 'bar's biography reveals that this work was completed in 1508, the year after gTsang smyon's death, in a monastery called bSam gtan gling in rGyal gyi śrī ri, La stod lho (dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508, 30b). Franz-Karl Ehrhard and Marta Sernesi have shown that the song collection was printed together with the biography, and that two catalogues of songs were printed alongside with these works (Ehrhard 2010, 157–58; Sernesi 2011, 186).⁴ Since the present article is based on these four texts it might be useful to introduce them before continuing:

3 These activities are described in rGod tshang ras pa's biography of gTsang smyon, *Heart of the Sun* (rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 281–82 [1512, 141a–141b]) and in the biography of Kun tu bzang mo (mKhan rab dbang phyug 1551, 28b). I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Hildegard Diemberger (University of Cambridge) and her colleagues, not least Porong Dawa (dPal brtsegs Institute), who discovered Kun tu bzang mo's biography and have made several unique Tibetan texts available. I would like to direct those who are interested in Kun tu bzang mo and gTsang smyon to Diemberger and Porong Dawa's contribution in this volume. For an English description of gTsang smyon's death as portrayed in *Heart of the Sun*, see Schaeffer 2007, 218–21.

4 The colophons of all four texts have been studied in detail by Ehrhard (Ehrhard 2010, 154–58). Sernesi has investigated these and other prints belonging to the school of gTsang smyon (Sernesi 2011). The two catalogues of songs have also been described by Dieter Schuh (Schuh 1981, 126–27).

- *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*, gTsang smyon's song collection; main author: rGod tshang ras pa; full title: *The Collected Songs of the Master Heruka from gTsang: The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel Showing the Path of the All-Knowing One* (rJe btsun gtsang pa he ru ka'i mgur 'bum rin po che dbang gi rgyal po thams cad mkhyen pa'i lam ston).⁵
- *Lion of Faith*, gTsang smyon's biography; author: dNgos grub dpal 'bar; full title: *The Common Life Story of the Venerable One of gTsang – The Great Heruka: The Lion of Faith Playing on the Snowy Mountain of Good Qualities* (rJe btsun gtsang pa he ru ka'i thun mong gi rnam thar yon tan gyi gangs ri la dad pa'i seng ge rnam par rtse ba).⁶
- *The Illuminating Sunlight Catalogue*, a catalogue of gTsang smyon's song collection; author: rGod tshang ras pa (dKar chags nyi 'od snang ba).⁷
- *Opening the Eyes of Faith*, a catalogue of Buddhist songs; author: gTsang smyon; full title: *A Catalogue of Songs Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance and Opening the Eyes of Faith* (mGur gyi dkar chags ma rig mun sel dad pa'i mig 'byed).⁸

The four prints are related to one another in several ways. *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*, the song collection, for example, contains biographical information which is lacking in the biography, and the songs complement the biography in significant ways. Through the songs, we get in direct contact with the speech of the mad yogin as it were; and as listeners or readers of the songs, we can receive his instructions and advice.

Lion of Faith, the biography, on the other hand, provides its reader with central information concerning the life of the mad yogin who sang the songs. The biography follows gTsang smyon from birth to death and contains biographical data. Most importantly, since it is a 'liberation story' – *rnam thar* – it shows its readers that gTsang smyon is a completely liberated one, a Buddha, whose lineage and disciples are worthy of faith, respect, and support.

5 This text has been documented by the Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) and by the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC). The text is also available in some private collections. The text is 28 folios long.

6 This text has been documented by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project, by Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, and by dPal brtsegs Institute. The text is also available in some private collections. The text is 31 folios long.

7 This text is, to my knowledge, only available in the "Sammlung Waddell", Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung. It is included as a kind of appendix to *Opening the Eyes of Faith*, folio 9b–10b. The text is one and a half folios long.

8 This text is, to my knowledge, only available in the "Sammlung Waddell", Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung. The text is 9 folios long.



FIGURE 14.2 *Block-print illustration of rGod tshang ras pa (rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 287 [1512, 144a]).*

The two catalogues of songs are quite different from one another. *The Illuminating Sunlight Catalogue*, the catalogue of gTsang smyon's songs, contains short information about the different songs which are included in the song collection. We are informed about the circumstances around the songs; the person or persons towards whom the songs were originally directed are introduced; the subject of the songs are pointed out (i.e. instructional song, question-and-answer song etc.); the place where the songs were originally sung is mentioned, etc. *The Illuminating Sunlight Catalogue* was obviously meant to be used together with the song collection, so it was appropriate to print the works together.

Opening the Eyes of Faith, the somewhat more extensive catalogue of songs that gTsang smyon composed in 1503, is quite different from *The Illuminating Sunlight Catalogue*. It contains general information about the Buddhist song-genre and explains why songs are sung, how they are supposed to be sung, what effect they have on various types of listeners, and so on. Above all, it is

a history and rationale for Buddhist songs. Starting with songs from Indian masters and following the tradition up to gTsang smyon's own teacher, Sha ra rab 'byams pa Sangs rgyas seng ge (1427–1470), *Opening the Eyes of Faith* enumerates the songs which gTsang smyon considered to be most important. This catalogue also contains instructions on how to perform songs in the proper way. The intended audience for this text was likely gTsang smyon's disciples and this might explain why the text never became widely disseminated.⁹

3 The Place of Printing

It is rather difficult to determine where these texts were printed. It is also somewhat complicated to know exactly who were involved in their production. However, the colophons of the four texts and two biographies where the printings are mentioned give us certain clues. It is therefore to these colophons and biographies that we will now turn.

In the printing colophon of *Lion of Faith*, it is stated that the text was printed in a place called gNas chen dgon gsar (dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508, 30b). Ehrhard suggests that gNas chen dgon gsar refers to bSam gtan gling, the monastery in rGyal gyi śrī ri, La stod lho, where the biography was composed (Ehrhard 2010, 155).¹⁰ rGyal gyi śrī ri / Śrī ri is a variant name for rTsib ri, a holy mountain located northeast of Ding ri and west of Shel dkar in La stod lho.¹¹ This area corresponds to the modern-day Ding ri prefecture, in the south-western part of the gTsang province.¹² Since bSam gtan gling is referred to as “gnas chen bSam gtan gling” in the author's colophon of *Lion of Faith* (dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508, 30b), it seems reasonable that gNas chen refers to bSam gtan gling in this con-

9 Andrew Quintman and I have recently published a study and translation of the catalogue in *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* (Larsson and Quintman 2015).

10 Since *gnas* is a common name for a holy place, and *dgon gsar* means 'new monastery', it should be kept in mind that there are many different places in Tibet referred to as 'gNas', 'gNas chen', 'dGon gsar' etc., and there are several different monasteries and hermitages named bSam gtan gling as well.

11 Buffetrille mentions that a variant term used for Śrī ri ('glorious mountain') / rTsib ri ('mountain [in the shape] of Ribs') is Shi ri 'mountain of the dead' (Buffetrille 2013, 40). She also states that some scholars consider Shi ri/rTsib ri to be a distortion of the Sanskrit word *śrī*, 'glorious' (Buffetrille 2013, 40, n. 13). The biographies of gTsang smyon refer to the place as Shri ri, which I assume is a variant spelling of Śrī ri.

12 For a map of rTsib ri and the Ding ri area, see Buffetrille 2013, 60; for a map of rTsib ri, see Thub bstan shes rab 2004, 32–33; for maps of La stod lho, see Everding and Dzongphugpa 2006, inset; Wangdu and Diemberger 1996, 158.



FIGURE 14.3 *Block-print illustration of 'Jam dpal chos lha ('Jam dpal chos lha 2013 [16th century], 75b).*

text. This assumption is further strengthened by the fact that two of the people involved in the production of these early prints were abbots of bSam gtan gling for a while, Lo paṅ 'Jam dpal chos lha who edited the texts and dNgos grub dpal 'bar who wrote the biography.¹³

Unfortunately, the place where the printing occurred is not clearly specified in *Heart of the Sun* or in Kun tu bzang mo's biography. There are some references to Ding ri in the latter, however, and since rTsig ri, the holy mountain

13 This is pointed out by Ehrhard (Ehrhard 2010, 155), who refers to *The Buddhist History of Shel dkar* where this is stated (Wangdu and Diemberger 1996, 53; Everding & Dzongphugpa 2006, 191). Lo paṅ 'Jam dpal chos lha is referred to as Lo paṅ Ras chen in *The Buddhist History of Shel dkar*, and it is not mentioned when he and dNgos grub dpal 'bar served as abbots of bSam gtan gling.

where bSam gtan gling is located, is situated in the Ding ri area, these references verify that the printing blocks could have been made in bSam gtan gling. Kun tu bzang mo's biography describes the event as follows:

All the monks [and] disciples [then] assembled in the cave of Ding ri again. The great disciples from sTod and sMad, and so forth, constructed a statue which resembled the lord, meaningful to behold, made from gold and copper. Accompanied with [a statue] made by the benefactor of the teachings, the great king of mNga' ri, it was installed at Chu bar. Moreover, as a support for the veneration of the speech of the Heruka, the Victorious Mother, the [female] master and the disciples made two [texts], a biography and a song collection. The heart-sons, the great disciples, exhorted the lord dNgos grub dpal 'bar, saying that [he] had to compose [a biography], and the heart-son rGod tshang pa compiled the song collection. Having made the prints, they were taken to Brod phug.¹⁴ After having distributed [the texts] all over sTod, sMad, and so forth, the funerary services were excellently completed.¹⁵

Although no place of printing is given in the colophons of the song collection and the two catalogues of songs, there are several factors indicating that these three texts were printed together with the biography. As mentioned, it is stated both in *Heart of the Sun* and in Kun tu bzang mo's biography that the biography and the song collection were printed together. This is also revealed in the texts themselves: the biography is marked with letter *ga* in the margin and the song collection with the letter *nga*, indicating that they belong to the same collection. The similar page layout also indicates that all four texts were issued together, and so does the fact that the same people were involved in producing the four prints, a fact we will have reason to return to. But first let us have a closer look at bSam gtan gling, the place where the texts likely were made.

14 Brod phug is a variant spelling of Grod phug, which is an abbreviation of Grod pa phug (Belly Cave), a famous Mi la ras pa cave in gNya' nang.

15 mKhan rab dbang phyug 1551, 28b: *slar yang gra bu slob thams cad ding ri'i phug par du 'dzom/stod smad kyi bu chen sogs/sku'i rten rje nyid sku'dra mthong ba don ldan gser zangs las grub pa gzhengs (bzhengs)/ bstan pa'i sbyin bdag mnga' ri gong ma chen mo'i gzhengs pa de dang bcas/ chu bar du gdan drangs/ yang rgyal yum dpon slob rnams kyis/ gsung gi rten du rje he ru ka de nyid kyi nmam thar/ rje dngos grub dpal 'bar la thugs sras bu chen rnams kyis mdzad dgos zhes bskul nas mdzad pa dang/ mgur 'bum thugs sras rgod tshang pas sgrigs pa gnyis/ par du gzhengs nas brod (grod) phug tu gdan drangs/ stod smad kun du par 'gyed mdzad pa sogs dgongs rdzogs legs par grub rjes/.*

The Buddhist History of Shel dkar (Shel dkar chos 'byung) provides a brief overview of the history of bSam gtan gling, and in this historical chronicle it is said that the monastery was the main monastery of rTib ri (Wangdu and Diemberger 1996, 52–54, 59). Given the school of gTsang smyon's close links to Mi la ras pa, it is noteworthy that a Mi la ras pa cave called 'Plain of the Hidden Cave' (lKog phug thang) is located below bSam gtan gling.¹⁶ This could be one of the reasons why the school's founder, gTsang smyon, who was considered to be a reincarnation of the 'cotton-clad' yogin and often meditated in caves where Mi la ras pa had meditated, visited the area.

In *Heart of the Sun*, a version of gTsang smyon's biography which rGod tshang ras pa composed four years after the four prints were made, it is mentioned that gTsang smyon once went to Śrī ri bSam gtan gling and met its abbot, bSod nams mchog drug (=grub).¹⁷ It is stated that this abbot had heard of gTsang smyon for a long time, and that he had several auspicious dreams the night before gTsang smyon's arrival. When gTsang smyon came, the abbot invited him to his residence and after having conducted a huge ritual feast, the abbot said:

Nowadays there is nobody who surpasses Your Eminence [gTsang smyon] as a holder of the bKa' bgyud teachings in these areas. Therefore, since it is necessary to spread the teachings of the Buddha, I request you to take responsibility of my monastery. This is the main practice centre in La stod lho, and since I've become old you must take over the responsibility, by all means.¹⁸

gTsang smyon replied to the abbot in the following way:

In general, since I am a vagabond, I won't take the lead of a fixed monastery [...]. In particular, my spiritual father, Sha ra rab 'byams pa Sangs rgyas seng ge, told me to stay in the three holy snow mountains

16 Mi la ras pa sang one of his famous songs in this cave (Thub bstan shes rab 2004, 57–59; gTsang smyon 1991, 320–22; Chang 1989 [1962], 157–58). Buffetrille notes that the memory of the Mi la ras pa site has faded nowadays (Buffetrille 2013, 50).

17 bSod nams mchog drug could be the same person as ('Dzam gling pa chos rje) bSod nams chos sgrub, who was abbot of bSam gtan gling for a while according to *The Buddhist History of Shel dkar* (Wangdu and Diemberger 1996, 53).

18 rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 134 [1512, 66b]: *deng sang 'di phyogs nas rang re bka' rgyud kyi bstan pa 'dzin pa la skyes bu khyed las lhag pa mi 'dug pas/ nga'i gdan sa 'di yang khyed kyis rtsis gzhes (bzhes) mdzad nas sangs rgyas kyis bstan pa spel dgos/ 'di la stod lho'i sgrub sde kun gyi gtso bo yin cing kho bo yang rgas 'dus pas ci nas kyang mdzad dgos [...]*.

[i.e. La phi, Tsa ri, and Ti se]. Since I have received this command, I have no plans to stay here. But I rejoice in the greatness of your pure perception and in your good supreme attitude. In the future, it is possible that my disciples will be of benefit for this monastery of yours.¹⁹

gTsang smyon's disciples did indeed benefit the monastery, as mentioned, two of gTsang smyon's main disciples became abbots of bSam gtan gling; and the earliest prints that the school of gTsang smyon made after gTsang smyon's passing were probably produced there. In *The Buddhist History of Shel dkar*, it is stated that although the monastery appeared outwardly to belong to the Sa skya tradition during this period, its main practice was bKa' brgyud (Wangdu and Diemberger 1996, 53). This too indicates that the tradition of gTsang smyon, which was bKa' brgyud, was practised at the monastery during this period.²⁰

It is noteworthy that it is stated in Kun tu bzang mo's biography that the woodblocks were taken to Grod phug after completion (see quote above). This indicates that, although the texts appear to have been compiled, written down, and carved in bSam gtan gling, the actual printing may have occurred in Grod phug. According to *Heart of the Sun*, the printing blocks of gTsang smyon's Mi la ras pa works were moved from 'Na dum Shel phug where they were made to a printing house in gNya' nang grod phug (rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 152 [1512, 75a]). It seems appropriate that the woodblocks made in honour of the mad yogin where moved to this place and stored there together with the printing blocks of gTsang smyon's famous Mi la ras pa works.

4 The People Involved in the Production of the Prints

According to the colophons of *Lion of Faith*, *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*, and *Opening the Eyes of Faith*, it was gTsang smyon's female companion Kun tu

19 rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 134 [1512, 66b]: *kho bo spyir bya bral ba yin pas gzhi bzung gi dgon pa bdag tu mi 'dzin cing/ [..]/ khyad par pha sha ra rab 'byams pa sangs rgyas seng ge'i gsung gi gnas gsum kyi gangs ri la sdod gsungs pa'i bka' yod pas/ kho bo 'dir gdod pa mi 'char/ 'on kyang khyed rang dag snang che zhing lhag bsam bzang pa rjes su yid rangs/ ma 'ongs pa na kho bo'i slob rgyud kyi khyed kyi gdan sa 'di la phan thogs pa 'dra srid gsung/*

20 It is noteworthy that bSam gtan gling eventually changed its religious affiliation and became a 'Brug pa bka' brgyud monastery, but this happened later (Wangdu and Diemberger 1996, 53; Buffetrille 2013, 42, 50). Buffetrille mentions that the monastery was affiliated with the bSam gding convent as well (Buffetrille 2013, 50). This further complicates the religious affiliation of the monastery, since this convent belonged to the Bo dong pa tradition.

bzang mo who financed these printings. It is stated in the colophon of *Lion of Faith* that:

All necessities for accomplishing the printing
 Was assembled through the enlightened attitude and great blessings
 [Of] the magnificent woman, the delightful good master,
 The Victorious Mother who is endowed with the marks of a wisdom
 dākinī.
 [She who] mastered all the profound and meaningful oral instructions,
 [And] traversed the inner paths and stages through progression of the
 four joys.²¹

Kun tu bzang mo also sponsored the printing of *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel* and she was also involved in arranging its beginning.

Without forgetfulness, having removed duplications and omissions,
 The venerable one, the great Mother, Kun bzang
 Arranged this precious garland which fulfils all needs,
 Up to the instructions to the heart-son Chos mchog.²²

rGod tshang ras pa also had a prominent role in the production of the texts, he was the main compiler of *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel* and he also authored *The Illuminating Sunlight Catalogue*. It is said in the colophon of *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel* that he compiled the main part of the collection, from the songs with instructions to king bSam grub lde and onwards (rGod tshang ras pa [1508]a, 27b).²³

21 dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508, 30b: *par du sgrubs pa'i mthun rkyen ma lus pa//ye shes mkha' 'gro'i mtshan ldan rgyal ba'i yum//zab don man ngag kun la rang byan chud//dga' bzh'i'i 'gros kyis nang gi sa lam bgrod//bzang po'i yongs 'dzin dges pa'i dpal yon mo//gang de'i brlabs chen sems bskyed rkyen gyis sbyar*].

22 rGod tshang ras pa [1508]a, 27b: *dgos 'byung rin chen phreng ba 'di nyid kyi//thugs sras chos mchog la gdams yan chad par//rje btsun drung du yum chen kun bzang gis//lhag chad bsal nas mi rjed (mi brjed) bzungs su bkod*].

23 In Kun tu bzang mo's biography rGod tshang ras pa is said to be the compiler of gTsang smyon's song collection (mKhan rab dbang phyug 1551, 28b: *mgur 'bum thugs sras rgod tshang pas sgrigs pa*), and I have chosen to list him as its author when referring to the work. However, it should be kept in mind that several disciples were involved in the making of all four texts.



FIGURE 14.4 *Block-print illustration of Kun tu bzang mo (rGod tshang ras pa [1508]a, 28a).*

The Illuminating Sunlight Catalogue has a short colophon which simply states that,

For the sake of clarifying Vajrayāna, this catalogue outlining the vajra songs, *Illuminating Sunlight*, was composed by rGod tshang ras pa, the minor spark among the assembled sparks following the sun [gTsang smyon]. May all beings attain the state of Vajradhāra! Eṃam!²⁴

24 rGod tshang ras pa [1508]b, 10b: *rdo rje theg pa'i gsal byed du/ rdo rje'i mgur chings dkar chags ni/nyi 'od snang ba zhes bya 'di/nyi ma'i rjes 'brang dkar tshogs kyi/ dkar phran rgod tshang ras pas sbyar/ 'gro kun rdo rje 'chang thob shog// e bam//.*

This short colophon does not give any information about the sponsor, editor, scribe, or carvers involved in the production of the print, but the other three texts mention that gTsang smyon's heart-son and personal secretary, Lo paṅ 'Jam dpal chos lha, was the editor (*zhus dag*), that sTod pa Nam mkha' 'phel le from sMan khab was the scribe, and that the carvers came from Zur tsho, areas in La stod lho, northwest of rTsib ri. *Lion of Faith* and *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel* name the following carvers: Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan, rDo rje dpal, (Nor bu) g.Yang 'phel, and dGe 'dun rgyal mtshan (dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508, 31a; rGod tshang ras pa [1508]a, 28a; cf. Ehrhard 2010, 154–58).

Marta Sernesi has discovered that the same editor (Lo paṅ 'Jam dpal chos lha), scribe (sTod pa Nam mkha' 'phel le), and two of the carvers (Sangs rgyal and rDor dpal) also participated in the production of gTsang smyon's biography of Mar pa, a work which was printed just a few years earlier, in 1505, while gTsang smyon was still alive.²⁵ It is interesting to note, as Sernesi points out, that the life story of Mar pa is marked with the letter *ka* in the margin, which could indicate a continuity between this and the later prints, which are marked with letters *ga* (*Lion of Faith*) and *nga* (*The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*). Sernesi also mentions the striking similarities between the original print of Mar pa's biography and the four prints "in terms of page layout (*mise en page*) and *ductus*, confirming that they issued from the same workshop" (Sernesi 2011, 187).

It is mentioned in *Heart of the Sun* that gTsang smyon brought in craftsmen from sMan khab and Zur tsho also when he printed the biography of Mi la ras pa, more than fifteen years prior to printing the biography of Mar pa (rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 138–39 [1512, 68b–69a]).²⁶ Moreover, in the same text it is said that gTsang smyon invited two scribes from sMan khab when he was preparing to have his large Aural Transmission collection written down with gold letters, by the end of his life (rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 245 [1512, 123a]). The above mentioned 'Jam dpal chos lha also served as the editor, when Kun tu bzang mo made a new edition of gTsang smyon's collection of Mi la ras pa's songs; an enterprise that took place not long after having completed the four prints. In this printing project, the scribe and carvers also came from sMan khab and Zur tsho in La stod lho (mKhan rab dbang phyug 1551, 29a).

dNgos grub dpal 'bar, who wrote *Lion of Faith*, was another central figure in the production of the prints. This erudite Sa skya monk was born in a place situated about two miles west of rTsib ri, and his mother and father were local rulers of the area (Byams pa tshul khriims 2007, 76). Due to his vast learning, dNgos grub dpal 'bar was known as Paṅ chen gZhung brgya pa dNgos grub dpal

25 The printing is mentioned in *Heart of the Sun* (rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 235 [1512, 118a]: *rje btsun mar pa'i rnam thar mgur 'bum spar du bzhengs*).

26 Cf. Ehrhard 2000, 18, n. 16; Sernesi 2011, 185.

'bar, and he was later praised for having mastered "all the scriptures of India and Tibet without exception."²⁷ It is somewhat unexpected that this learned and influential Sa skya monk became one of gTsang smyon's main disciples. According to the biographies of gTsang smyon, dNgos grub dpal 'bar met the mad yogin at the important Sa skya monastery 'Bras yul sKyed mo tshal in gTsang, about a year before gTsang smyon began compiling Mi la ras pa's biography and song collection.²⁸ It is said that gTsang smyon, who was believed to be an emanation of Mi la ras pa, recognized that dNgos grub dpal 'bar was an embodiment of Mi la ras pa's foremost disciple, the scholarly monk sGam po pa (1079–1153) when they met (Byams pa lha btsun grags pa 2005 [1528], 9–12).²⁹ When dNgos grub dpal 'bar later received instructions from gTsang smyon in Zal mo brag in dBus, he was asked by the mad yogin's close disciples to compose his life story. He completed the root-verses of the biography in 1507, and later, the close disciples requested him to write explanations to these verses of praise. In 1508, he completed the biography, based upon what he "heard from the master himself, some originating from reliable sources, and other things from reasonable argument."³⁰ Since dNgos grub dpal 'bar was the abbot of bSam gtan gling for a while, it is possible that this well-connected and prominent monk-scholar contributed in the printing enterprise that took place there more actively than the colophons reveal.³¹

The relationship between gTsang smyon and his female companion Kun tu bzang mo was even more important than that between gTsang smyon and dNgos grub dpal 'bar. Kun tu bzang mo had a particularly central position, not only in gTsang smyon's tradition, but also in the printing projects that were carried out in his honour. Since Kun tu bzang mo both exhorted and financed

27 Byams pa tshul khriims 2007, 76: *rgya bod kun gyi gsung rab ma lus pa*.

28 Their meeting is described in all the three extant biographies of gTsang smyon (rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 133 [1512, 66a]; lHa btsun rin chen rnam rgyal 1971 [1543], 93 [47a]; dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508, 15b–16a).

29 In a biography of dBang phyug rgyal mtshan (1474–1552), a disciple of gTsang smyon, it states that dBang phyug rgyal mtshan is Gam po pa's incarnate (Rang grol dbang phyug, 6a–7b).

30 dNgos grub dpal 'bar 1508, 2b: *rje btsun nyid la dngos su thos pa dang/ 'ya' zhiq ni yid ches pa las rgyud de thos pa dang/ gzhan dag ni rgyu mtshan dang bcas pa'i gtan tshigs las nges pa rnyed pa rnams/ phyogs gcig tu bri bar bya'o/*.

31 Unfortunately, very little is said in the biography of dNgos grub dpal 'bar about his involvement in this printing project. It simply states that he wrote a biography of gTsang smyon, but the details around the enterprise are not mentioned (Byams pa lha btsun grags pa 2005 [1528], 75). dNgos grub dpal 'bar's biographer, Byams pa lha btsun grags pa, also appears to have been an abbot in bSam gtan gling for a while (Wangdu and Diemberger 1996, 53).



FIGURE 14.5 *Block-print illustration of dNgos grub dpal 'bar (Byams pa lha btsun grags pa 2011 [1528], 383).*

the prints around which this article centres, it is important to say more about her before the conclusions.

In the supplication to gTsang smyon and his many disciples, which is included in *Heart of the Sun*, Kun tu bzang mo is the first person praised after gTsang smyon, indicating thus her importance for the tradition:

I pay homage to Kun tu bzang mo,
 The Mother, who is the main emanation of the Kechara celestial realm,
 The yoginī who gives birth to the Victorious Ones,
 The holder of the secret treasury of the speech of the Venerable One
 [gTsang smyon].³²

32 rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 259 [1512, 130a]: *mkha' spyod gtso mo sprul pa'i yum//rgyal ba skyed mdzad rnal 'byor ma//rje btsun gsung gi gsang mdzod 'dzin//kun tu bzang mo la phyag 'tshal//.*

In this supplication prayer, Kun tu bzang mo is praised as the upholder of the speech activities of gTsang smyon. As mentioned above, the biography and song collection which she printed is said to have been done in honour of gTsang smyon's speech. Kun tu bzang mo thus appears to have had a special responsibility for the propagation of gTsang smyon's teachings, including his life story and songs. While other disciples made life-long retreats, renovated the Svayambhū Stūpa, or printed texts of other masters related to the tradition, Kun tu bzang mo assured that gTsang smyon's own life story and songs were printed.

rGod tshang ras pa had a particularly close relationship with Kun tu bzang mo and he considered her to be one of his main teachers.³³ As mentioned, rGod tshang ras pa was also the author of two of the four early prints, which Kun tu bzang mo printed. Kun tu bzang mo and some other close disciples of gTsang smyon later urged him to make another version of the biography (rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 284 [1512, 142b]). This was to become the most extensive version of gTsang smyon's life story, the *Heart of the Sun*. In this version, the songs he had printed some years earlier were included. rGod tshang ras pa also incorporated much material which is lacking in dNgos grub dpal 'bar's version, for example, he provides the following biographical information about Kun tu bzang mo (rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 140–42 [1512, 69b–70b]):³⁴

Kun tu bzang mo was the daughter of the oldest brother of the leader of gNya' nang sTag la and it is said that she had faith, diligence, wisdom and compassion already as a small child. She had no interest in worldly affairs, but only wanted to devote her time to the practice of Buddhism. Since she was endowed with the outer, inner, and secret signs of a wisdom ḍākinī, everyone felt attracted to her.

When she became older, she did not want to marry, but only wanted to practice Buddhism. However, her parents did not allow their beloved daughter to become a hermit and forced her to marry a rNying ma lama from bKra shis mkhar. Just a few months after their marriage, her husband died. Kun tu bzang mo saw this as an opportunity to devote her life to the practice of Buddhism, but she was still not allowed to leave her worldly obligations; her relatives and in-laws wanted her to stay where her former husband had lived. One night, Kun tu bzang mo sneaked away, accompanied by an attendant. They travelled during the nights and stayed hidden during the days, so that nobody could find them. Eventually, they reached dPal mo chos sding where Kun tu bzang mo received novice vows from the abbot. In dPal mo chos sding, she was taught

33 This is mentioned in rGod tshang ras pa's autobiography (Ehrhard 2010, 145).

34 Cf. Stearns, I. M. 1985, 90, n. 30.

the teachings of Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1376–1451) and Ma cig lab sgron (1055–1149). It is said that, although she attained great compassion and renunciation, no experience or realization arose when receiving these teachings.

Around that time, she heard that gTsang smyon was making the woodblocks of Mi la ras pa's biography and song collection in 'Na dum Shel phug in La stod lho. When she heard about gTsang smyon, "an almost intolerably strong faith arose", and she immediately decided to go to 'Na dum Shel phug to meet him.³⁵ The night before Kun tu bzang mo's arrival, one of the around hundred female practitioners who were among gTsang smyon's retinue, dreamt that a woman with bone ornaments and dressed in silk clothes came to visit gTsang smyon. The woman in the dream had guided many people and she brought along many precious offerings. When gTsang smyon's female disciple told her teacher about the dream, gTsang smyon said that "the woman [in the dream] has the marks of a *ḍākinī* and the power to spread the essential doctrine. She will come [here] and none of you will be her equal."³⁶

The same day, at noon, Kun tu bzang mo and her attendant arrived. They brought along precious gifts and offered all their ornaments and belongings to gTsang smyon. gTsang smyon became pleased and accepted them with kindness. He bestowed an empowerment to them and gave them the Four Letter Mahāmudrā instructions. Due to this, Kun tu bzang mo attained the extraordinary experience and realization that the teachings she had received earlier had been unable to give rise to.

While this was happening, Kun tu bzang mo's relatives from sTag la and her in-laws in bKra shis mkhar had begun quarrelling. When Kun tu bzang mo, out of compassion, settled the dispute, her relatives, who were just about winning the case, became angry. As a result of this, Kun tu bzang mo's relatives refused to provide her with provisions. gTsang smyon decided to use these circumstances to test Kun tu bzang mo's faith and fortitude and to purify her from her inner obscurations. He therefore did not provide her with any support. This did not discourage the remarkable woman. Without any solid food, she listened, reflected, and meditated with great diligence. She became famous for her strong determination and received all the central instructions from gTsang smyon, such as the six doctrines of Nāropa, the Secret Conduct, the Aural Transmissions, the Hevajra Tantra, and so forth. Having received all the tantras, commentaries, and oral instructions, she studied and practised in

35 rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 141 [1512, 70a]: *dad pa'i gdungs shugs mi bzod pa lta bu byung bas.*

36 rGod tshang ras pa 1969, 141 [1512, 70a]: *bud med mkha' 'gro ma'i mtshan dang ldan pa snying po'i bstan pa dpel (spel) nus pa khyed tshos 'gran du med pa cig yong ba yin gsungs/.*

a perfect way. Step by step, she attained all the levels and stages of the path, and became a very learned and powerful yoginī.

Kun tu bzang mo eventually became a master in her own right, and the other disciples of gTsang smyon held her in great esteem. After she had printed the biography and song collection of gTsang smyon, in the summer and in autumn, she bestowed teachings to about hundred people in Ku ra byang gling, indicating that she was already a great master who spread the teachings of gTsang smyon, not only through prints, but through teachings and empowerments as well.

She gave instructions on Mahāmudrā, on the Six Dharmas, on Cutting, and so forth. To those with the most excellent acumen, she bestowed the empowerments and instructions of the Aural Transmission of the Ḍākinīs as practical guidance. It is said that she taught in the most excellent way.³⁷

Among the disciples who were instrumental in the making of the four prints around which this article centers, Kun tu bzang mo stands out as the most important one. Acting as gTsang smyon's representative and spiritual heir, she was in charge of the printing project. Her importance for the school of gTsang smyon, and for gTsang smyon's legacy overall, appears to have been larger than previous studies reveal.

5 Conclusions

Kun tu bzang mo met gTsang smyon for the first time when the mad yogin printed Mi la ras pa's life story and song collection. She thus witnessed his efforts in 'benefitting the beings and the teachings' through printing biographies and songs. When meeting gTsang smyon, she must also have met editors, carvers and scribes. She was most likely inspired by the remarkable success of gTsang smyon's Mi la ras pa prints when she decided to print texts in gTsang smyon's memory; and what could be more suitable than honouring the great printer through printing his own biography and songs?

37 mKhan rab dbang phyug 1551, 28b–29a: *dbyar ston gnyis sgrags nas/ ku ra byang gling tu/ drung kun dga' chos grags pa sogs rgya (brgya) phrag tsam la/ phyag chen/ chos drug/ gcod yul/ sogs kyi khrid pa gnang/ dbang po yang rab rnam la mkha' 'gro snyan [brgyud] gyi dbang dang gdams pa rnam nyams khrid du gnang bas/ khrid mo shin tu legs byung gsung ngo/.*

When Kun tu bzang mo printed texts in honour of her master in 1508, she contributed to the consolidation of a school of printing that was to continue for a long time. Kun tu bzang mo inherited a contact network of wealthy patrons, skilled craftsmen, authors, and editors who were devoted to the mad yogin and had worked for him previously. As the consort of gTsang smyon, Kun tu bzang mo appears to have had a unique position within his school. She obviously was a suitable person to continue the printing activities that gTsang smyon so skilfully had started. However, she was not alone in this undertaking, there were a core group of close disciples specialized in book production and printing that helped her execute the printing project. gTsang smyon's secretary Lo paṅ 'Jam dpal chos lha edited the texts that the learned monk dNgos grub dpal 'bar and the yogin rGod tshang ras pa had compiled. Then they employed skilful craftsmen who wrote down the letters and carved the blocks. It is noteworthy that the scribes came from sMan khab and the carvers came from Zur tsho, two areas in La stod lho that appear to have been centres for this type of craftsmanship in the region at the time.

These people set the standards for the many other printing projects that the school of gTsang smyon carried out in the coming years. The school both reprinted the works of their guru and compiled and printed a large number of works that had not been printed before. The most important centres for these later printing activities were not bSam gtan gling and rTsib ri, however, but Brag dkar rta so in sKyid rong and Ras chung phug, south of rTsed thang. The prolific printer lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal (1473–1557) was the leading figure in Brag dkar rta so, while rGod tshang ras pa, who had also participated in the rTsib ri printing project, took the lead in Ras chung phug. Using the biography and song collection which Kun tu bzang mo printed in rTsib ri as sources, these two masters also compiled and printed their own versions of gTsang smyon's life story.³⁸

The prints that gTsang smyon's disciples made in rTsib ri and other places never became as influential and widely known as gTsang smyon's own prints of Mi la ras pa and Mar pa. Although it is mentioned in Kun tu bzang mo's biography that the biography and song collection she printed were widely disseminated, few copies of these texts are extant today. It is likely that new prints were made from the same blocks also after 1508, but the demand for these prints were apparently not large enough to make the production of new printing blocks necessary. In stark contrast to the printings of Mi la ras pa and Mar

38 David DiValerio recently wrote an article about how the three different biographies and the song collection are related to each other (DiValerio 2015a).

pa that were reprinted again and again in numerous editions, gTsang smyon's life story and songs were gradually more or less forgotten.

It is somewhat puzzling that this influential and charismatic yogin, who lived such a colourful life, sang such extraordinary songs and created some of Tibet's most beautiful and beloved literature, did not receive more attention in his own right. The prints containing his life stories and songs, and the surviving statues of him, show that he was famous when he passed away and that his fame continued for about a century, but the memory of him faded away. The reason for this was perhaps lack of institutional and financial support in the new political situation that arose when the dGa' ldan pho brang government of the Fifth Dalai Lama came to power in 1642. When this happened, many of the religious and political leaders who had supported the bKa' brgyud tradition lost their power and influence. The printing efforts of Kun tu bzang mo and gTsang smyon's other disciples were not entirely wasted, however; some copies of the many prints that Kun tu bzang mo and the other disciples of gTsang smyon made did survive the vicissitudes of time. Thanks to these surviving prints, the songs and life stories of gTsang smyon and many other bKa' brgyud masters were preserved. These prints indicate that Elisabeth Eisenstein is right when stating that preservation was possibly the most important of all the new features introduced by the duplicative powers of print (Eisenstein 1979, 113).

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