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LIBERATING LAST RITES:

RITUAL RESCUE OF THE DEAD IN TIBETAN BUDDHIST DISCOURSE

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of South Asian Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Tibetan funerary manuals based on the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (SDP), an Indian Buddhist work first translated into Tibetan in the eighth century. I trace the transmission and study of the SDP in Tibet and the ways that it and the works it inspired distribute agency across multiple actors—human, divine, and material—in describing ritual methods for saving the dead from bad rebirths. A fundamental claim in these texts is that their rites can liberate even those who have committed terrible acts over many lifetimes. Focusing on Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan's (1147–1216) *Light Rays for the Benefit of Others* (*Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*) and several manuals and polemical works written in response to it, I explore how these texts shift responsibility away from the deceased and assign it to a network of actors including the ritual officiant and his disciples, a panoply of deities, and ritual objects. This speaks to contemporary discussions of agency and materiality, and emphasizes the importance of the latter in the study of ritual manuals.

Focusing on agency also reveals a critical difference between works based on yogatantric sources like the SDP and those inspired by advanced yogic practices characteristic of Highest Yogatantra. While SDP-oriented manuals frame the dead as passive recipients of liberating rites, texts like *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo* (*Bar do thos grol*) imagine the

dead as agents capable of securing their own freedom. This difference in necroliberative strategy is underscored by the Sa skya pa scholar A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams' (1597–1659) *Dispelling All Obscurations: Explaining the Bardo Teachings* (*Bar do chos bshad sgrib pa kun sel*), which attempts to integrate these two models. Through a close examination of these writings, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of Tibetan traditions of Yogatantra and Highest Yogatantra vis-à-vis mortuary practices and the afterlife.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	SOURCE
A	*De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa.* In *Bka' 'gyur* (Sde dge par phud). 85: 116–91. Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1976–79.
B	*De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa*. In *Bka' 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma). 85: 164–274. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9.
C	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*. In *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge). 9: 1–117. Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993.
D	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*. In *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma). 4: 366–483. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007.
E	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer.* Cursive manuscript scanned from microfilm in Nagar, U.P. in 2006. s.l.: s.n., n.d.
F	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*. In *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*. 15: 1–111. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015.
G	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Gzhan phan nyer mkho*. In *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge). 9: 119–56. Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993.
H	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Gzhan phan nyer mkho.* In *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma). 4: 483–517. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007.
I	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Gzhan phan nyer mkho*. In *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*. 15: 112–45. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015.
J	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don.* In *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge). 8: 423–40. Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993.
K	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don.* In *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma). 4: 1–17. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007.
L	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don bsdus pa.* Cursive manuscript scanned from microfilm in Nagar, U.P. in 2006. s.l.: s.n., n.d.
M	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don.* In *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum.* 14: 412–27. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015.
N	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi sa bcad*. In *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge). 8: 440–452. Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993.
O	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi sa bcad*. In *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma). 4: 17–28. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007.
P	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi sa bcad*. In *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*. 14: 428–38. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015.
Q	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Ngan song yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyud kyi dkyil 'khor bri ba dang sgom pa'i mngon par rtogs pa la brten nas dbang bskur te sdig pa sbyang ba'i*

	thabs nye bar mkho ba'i 'od zer. In *Sa skya bka' 'bum ma phyi gsar rnyed phyogs bsgrigs*. 1: 667–700. Lha sa: s.n., 1999.
R	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Ngan song yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyud kyi dkyil 'khor bri ba dang sgom pa'i mngon par rtogs pa la brten nas dbang bskur te sdig pa sbyang ba'i thabs nye bar mkho ba'i 'od zer*. In *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*. 16: 437–58. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015.
S	Grags pa rgyal mtsan. *Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa*. In *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge). 7: 453–68. Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993.
T	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa*. In *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma). 2: 567–83. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007.
U	Grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa.* In *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*. 13: 432–46. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015.
V	Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal. *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad pa.* In *Encyclopedia Tibetica.* 55: 139–227. Delhi: Tibet House: 1972.
W	Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal. *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad pa*. In *Bo dong Paṇ chen gyi gsung 'bum chen mo.* 42: 120–207. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2014.
X	Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge. *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga lag tu blang ba'i rim pa gzhan phan 'od zer la rtsod pa spong ba gzhan phan gnod 'joms*. In *Gsung 'bum: Bsod nams seng ge* (Sde dge). 10: 415–469. Dehradun: Sakya College, 1979.
Y	Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge. *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga lag tu blang ba'i rim pa gzhan phan 'od zer la rtsod pa spong ba gzhan phan gnod 'joms*. In *Gsung 'bum: Bsod nams seng ge*. 10: 479–549. Sde dge rdzong: Rdzong sar khams bye'i slob gling, 2004.
Z	*Dkyil 'khor spyi'i cho ga gsang ba'i rgyud*. In *Bka' 'gyur: Dpe bsdur ma*. 96: 509–582. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9.

All other abbreviations embedded in Tibetan-language passages mirror those appearing in the Dpe bsdur ma editions of these works.

INTRODUCTION

In the Italian friar Odoric of Pordenone's (1286–1331) account of his journey to China, we find a short chapter on his alleged visit to Tibet. Titled "On the Kingdom of Tibet, Where Dwells the Pope of the Idolaters," this chapter describes Tibet's ample bread and wine, its wonderfully paved streets, and the supposed horrors of Tibetan funerary practices. Odoric writes of the last:

> The following is also a habit maintained in this region: it is established that, when someone's father dies, the son should speak thusly: "I wish to honor my father." From which point he should call together all the priests, the faithful, and all the players who neighbor the region, and likewise the kinsfolk, who carry the corpse joyously to a field, where they have an enormous disc prepared, over which the priest will sever the dead man's head, which they will afterwards hand over to the man's son. The son then sings with all those who knew his father, and makes many speeches in his honor. Then the priests cut his whole body into pieces which, once they have finished doing this, they then carry back, holding the pieces above their heads, and making speeches in the dead man's honor along with all who knew him. After these events are carried out, eagles and vultures descend from the mountains and in this way each one tears off a bit of him and takes it away. Then they all shout in a loud voice, saying "Hear what kind of man he was since he is blessed; for the angels of God are coming and they are carrying him to paradise!" And so by acting in this way his son feels he has been honored greatly. Since his father was so honorably retrieved by "the angels of God" (that is, by those birds), then the son immediately takes his father's head, which he cooks and consumes. He fashions himself a goblet, however, from a bone fragment or some piece of the skull, from which he and all those in his household always drink with devotion, and also in memory of his deceased father. For by acting in this way, as they purport, they show great respect for his father; from which many other customs arise and dissipate among these people.[1]

In certain ways this description matches Tibetan sky burial practices as we understand them today, from the transportation of the body to an open area to its dismemberment and

1 Odoric of Pordenone, "On the Kingdom of Tibet, Where Dwells the Pope of the Idolators" (*De regno Tybot, ubi est Papa ydolatrorum*), unpublished translation from the Latin by Benjamin A. Roy, Harvard University, 2018. Cf. Henry Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, Volume 1 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1866), 150–52. For the Latin, see Colonel Henry Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, Volume 2 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1866), xxxvi–xxxvii.

consumption by carrion birds.[2] But Odoric's reference to the "angels of God" carrying the dead to paradise is an artifact of his Christian lens, while the cannibalistic finale is clearly the lore of non-Tibetan informants. Indeed, Berthold Laufer has argued persuasively that there is little reason to believe that Odoric ever set foot in Tibet, and there is good reason to think that he based his description of Tibetan funerary practices on Mongol and/or Chinese sources.[3] Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (1185–1252), an earlier European visitor to Mongolia, also channels Mongol reports of Tibetans eating their dead, and the Flemish explorer William of Rubruck (1220–93) explicitly attributes such stories to the Mongols.[4] Like Laufer, Dan Martin dismisses these claims of cannibalism as hearsay,[5] and adds that for Chinese observers, sky burial has long been "a deciding trait of Tibet's cultural otherness,"[6] which is true of other non-Tibetan groups as well, Europeans included.

Yet while Tibet's thirteenth-century neighbors and their European visitors were spreading stories of Tibetan cannibalism, the "Pope of the Idolaters" and his Sa skya pa successors were engaging in funerary rituals of a very different kind. This "Pope" was none other than Chos rgyal 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–80), the famous Sa skya pa patriarch who grew up among Mongol elites and developed a close relationship with Kublai Khan (1215–94), serving

2 Dan Martin, "On the Cultural Ecology of Sky Burial on the Himalayan Plateau," *East and West* 46, no. 3/4 (December 1996): 356.

3 Berthold Laufer, "Was Odoric of Pordenone Ever in Tibet?", *T'oung Pao* 15, no. 3 (1914): 409–10.

4 Ibid., 409.

5 Dan Martin, "On the Cultural Ecology of Sky Burial," 356.

6 Ibid., 355.

as Imperial Preceptor[7] in Kublai's court for several years.[8] Much of 'Phags pa's religious training and literary output was dedicated to tantric Buddhist ritual, including a tradition of funerary practices that exhibits no sign of cooking and eating one's relations. Derived from the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (hereafter the SDP), an Indian tantric work first translated into Tibetan in the eighth century,[9] these rituals involve purifying the karma of the deceased through processes of, *inter alia*, empowerment and cremation, which are said to free the dead from bad rebirths. Indeed, 'Phags pa's great uncle, the Sa skya pa patriarch Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147–1216), was an influential commentator on the SDP, authoring six works on its history and practices. These texts—in particular *Light Rays for the Benefit of Others: The Rituals of Sarvavid*[10]—played a significant role in the development of funerary rites in Tibet, with numerous later Tibetan authors citing and parroting Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions.[11]

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7 Luciano Petech states that Kubilai created the office of Imperial Preceptor (Tib. *ti shri*; Chn. 帝師 *dì shī*) in 1269 or early in 1270, and that 'Phags pa was the first to occupy this station. He comments that the Imperial Preceptor lived in Beijing and "enjoyed extraordinary honours," was "disposed of large means," and exerted "a paramount influence" in Tibet. See Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yüan–Sa-skya Period of Tibetan History* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990), 36–37.

8 Laufer, "Odoric of Pordenone," 410–12.

9 There are two translations of the SDP preserved in the different editions of the Tibetan Buddhist *Bka' 'gyur*—an earlier version (which Skorupski and others call Version A) and a later version (Version B). See chapter one for a discussion of the differences between these two versions.

10 Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*, in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge), 9: 1–117 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993). Hereafter cited as *C*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*, in *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 4: 366–483 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007). Hereafter cited as *D*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer* (cursive manuscript scanned from microfilm in Nagar, U.P. in 2006, s.l.: s.n., n.d.). Hereafter cited as *E*. Notice that the Buddhist Digital Resource Center gives the cursive manuscript the incorrect title *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi mngon rtogs* for this version. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan 'od zer*, in *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*, 15: 1–111 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015). Hereafter cited as *F*.

11 The influence of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's funerary writings is reflected even in the titles of later works. The term *gzhan phan* "the benefit of others" appears in three of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's texts on funerary rites, namely, *Light Rays for the Benefit of Others*, *Requisites for the Benefit of Others* (*Gzhan phan nyer mkho*), and *A Drop of Elixir for the Benefit of Others: Last Rites* (*Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa*). His use of the term *gzhan phan* was mimicked by Sa skya pa writers for centuries: the influential scholar Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po (1382–1456) named his principal work on SDP-oriented funerary rites *Limitless Benefit for Others* (*Gzhan phan mtha' yas*), while Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge (1429–89) named his longest work on

So far SDP-oriented funerary manuals like *Light Rays* have been almost entirely ignored in Western scholarship.[12] Fascinating research has been done on ancient royal mortuary practices in Tibet,[13] and there exists a large number of scholarly and popular works on the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, or *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo*,[14] which derives from a collection of treasure texts said to be revealed by the fourteenth-century Rnying ma pa master Karma gling pa.[15] Since the American Theosophist Walter Evans-Wentz (1878–1965) published his revised and annotated edition of Kazi Dawa Samdup's[16] (1868–1922) translation of this work

these rituals *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others* (*Gzhan phan kun khyab*). Furthermore, the lesser-known fifteenth-century Sa skya pa writer Grub chen Chos kyi rin chen wrote a text clarifying *Light Rays*' recitation practices titled *Clarifications for the Benefit of Others: The Recitation Practices of Light Rays for the Benefit of Others* (*Gzhan phan 'od zer gyi ngag 'don lag len gzhan phan gsal ba*), while some five centuries later, the eastern Tibetan Sa skya pa 'Jam dbyangs kun dga' rnam rgyal composed a detailed treatise on this ritual tradition titled *Beautiful Ornament for the Benefit of Others* (*Gzhan phan mdzes rgyan*). The repeated inclusion of *gzhan phan* in the titles of SDP-oriented works underscores Grags pa rgyal mtshan's lasting impact on this ritual tradition.

12 Notable exceptions include Tadeusz Skorupski's study of the SDP, which consults Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa's (1357–1419) commentary on this tantra, and Leonard van der Kuijp's response to Skorupski's book, which briefly discusses a number of SDP-oriented texts, including those of Grags pa rgyal mtshan, Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1375/6–1451), and Go rams pa. See Tadeusz Skorupski, *The Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra: Elimination of All Evil Destinies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983). Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, "Notes Apropos the Transmission of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* in Tibet," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 16/17 (1992): 109–25. Steven Weinberger also briefly discusses Bu ston Rin chen grub's (1290–1364) writings on the SDP in his doctoral dissertation. See Steven Weinberger, "The Significance of Yoga Tantra and the *Compendium of Principles (Tattvasaṃgraha Tantra)* within Tantric Buddhism in India and Tibet" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2003), 139–57.

13 See, for example, Giuseppe Tucci, *The Tombs of the Tibetan Kings* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1950). Marcelle Lalou, "Rituel Bon-po des funérailles royales," *Journal asiatique* 240 (1952): 339–61. Hugh Richardson, "Early Burial Grounds in Tibet and Tibetan Decorative Art of the VIIIth and IXth Centuries," *Central Asiatic Journal* 8, no. 2 (1963): 73–92. Erik Haarh, "The Yarlung Dynasty" (PhD diss., University of Copenhagen, 1969). Per Kværne, *Tibet: Bon Religion. A Death Ritual of the Tibetan Bonpos*. Leiden: Brill, 1985. Chu Junjie, "A Study of Bon-po Funeral Ritual in Ancient Tibet: Deciphering the Pelliot Tibetan Mss 1042," in *Theses on Tibetology in China*, ed. Hu Tan (Beijing: China Tibetology Publishing House, 1991), 91–158.

14 Tib. *Bar do thos grol*.

15 There are many editions of this text. Throughout, I use the version reproduced from the library of Dudjom Rinpoche. See Karma gling pa, *Zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi chos skor*, 3 vols (Delhi: Sherab Lama, 1976).

16 Tib. Ka dzi Zla ba bsam 'grub.

in 1927,[17] a range of studies and new translations of it have appeared.[18] By contrast, the vast collections of other Tibetan funerary works have received far less attention, including the extensive corpus of writings centered on the SDP.

As such, one of my objectives in this dissertation is to shed some much-needed light on SDP-oriented funerary manuals in Tibet. Starting with the SDP's reception in the eighth century, I explore its early impact before turning to its utilization among prominent Tibetan writers, in particular Grags pa rgyal mtshan and later scholars who debated his interpretations. One striking feature of these works is the repeated claim that the SDP's rituals can save even those who have committed terrible acts over many lifetimes. A long personal history of misdeeds can be purified, not through the deceased's own power, but through the power of others. Indeed, the dead seem to do very little to save themselves in this ritual context, which leads us to wonder who exactly does the work of saving them. Is it the ritual expert who performs the rites? Is it the deities he evokes and merges with through practices of meditation, mantra, and mudrā? What about the material objects that our sources describe? Do they have any sort of agency in helping to secure the dead's freedom? And what role does the ritual manual itself play in a ritual performance?

Conceptions of agency are important not only because they help us to understand the logic of these rites, but also because they highlight a basic way in which the funerary rituals of the SDP and the practices outlined in works like *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo* differ.

17 For the most recent edition of this volume, see Walter Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or The After-Death Experiences of the* Bardo *Plane*, *according to Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering*. USA: Oxford University Press, 2000.

18 For an excellent summary of these works, see Bryan J. Cuevas, *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5–14. See also Donald S. Lopez, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 122–27.

While the SDP belongs to the Yogatantra class of Buddhist tantras (the second highest class of Buddhist tantra), *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo* and other works on the intermediate state[19] that preceded and followed it emerged from ritual technologies derived from the Highest Yogatantra class.[20] As we will discuss in chapter four, both Yogatantra and Highest Yogatantra have comparable soteriological aims, but with the emergence of Highest Yogatantra came a reframing of postmortem agency, and thus the nature of the afterlife itself. The intermediate state between lifetimes came to be seen as a unique opportunity in which the dead can cut through the appearances of cyclic existence, recognize reality, and self-liberate. This stands in contrast with the outlook of the SDP, which consistently frames the dead as passive recipients of liberating rites. This is not to suggest that practices characteristic of Yogatantra and Highest Yogatantra do not intermingle in Tibetan works on the SDP, though surprisingly few manuals explicitly assign soteriological agency to the dead. In fact, I have located only one text that attempts to fully integrate bardo teachings into the SDP's rituals: the Sa skya pa master A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams' (1597–1659) *Dispelling All Obscurations: Explaining the Bardo Teachings*. The earlier and later manuals that I have examined—including Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Light Rays*—seldom mention the bardo, and if they do, they do not emphasize the dead's agentive capacities while in this interval.

19 Skt. *antarābhava*; Tib. *bar ma do/bar do*.

20 For a discussion of the early classification of tantric materials in India and adoption of these doxographies in Tibet, see Weinberger, PhD diss., 21–25. See also Jan Willem de Jong, "A New History of Tantric Literature in India," in *Acta Indologica* 6 (Japan: Naritasan Shinshōji, 1984), 91–113. David Snellgrove, "Categories of Buddhist Tantras," in *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, eds. Gherardo Gnoli and Lionello Lanciotti (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1988), 1353–90.

METHODOLOGY

Theories of Agency

Given the importance of agency for this dissertation, I should explain what I mean by this term. Broadly speaking, agency denotes the ability to act and to impact others. In a sense, it can be applied to anything that exists in a causal relationship with anything else, though Western philosophical explorations of agency largely have focused on human beings.[21] Many writers root their theories of agency in intentional action—actions that are consciously initiated by a human agent for the sake of achieving some end—and this squares with Buddhist conceptions of agency that frame karma as intentional acts of body, speech, and mind.[22] Intention is important also for the anthropologist Alfred Gell's work on agency, which frames an agent as one who causes events to happen in his or her vicinity by acts of mind, will, or intention.[23] Yet while a conscious agent may cause some event to occur, Gell notes that events may not always unfold as intended; there can be (and often is) a disconnect between a person's intentions and what follows. As he puts it: "Philosophers are far from agreed as to the nature of 'minds' harbouring 'intentions' and the relation between inner intentions and real-world events. . . . [A]ctions very often have 'unintended consequences' so that it cannot be said that real-world (social) events are just transcriptions of what agents intended to happen."[24] Despite this, Gell maintains that linking

21 Markus Schlossler, "Agency," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1997–. Article published Aug 10, 2015. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/agency/.

22 One of many examples can be found in Bhikkhu Bodhi's introduction to his translation of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*: "The word *kamma* literally means 'action,' but the Buddha uses it to refer specifically to volitional or intentional action: 'It is volition, bhikkhus, that I call kamma; for having willed, one acts by body, speech, or mind' (6:63 §5)." See Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 33. For a rich and thorough discussion of this topic, see Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

23 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16.

24 Ibid.

intention to agency allows us to differentiate between mere "happenings" caused by physical laws (e.g. water running downward) and "actions" caused by prior intentions (e.g. pouring water from a vase).

What makes Gell's theory interesting is his assertion that agency is not ultimately limited to persons. He describes how certain objects like dolls, cars, and works of art can appear as "agents" in particular contexts. While he admits that material things cannot have intentions like human beings, their "thing-ly causal properties are as essential to the exercise of agency as states of mind."[25] He observes that any instance of human agency is exercised in the material world, and that attributions of agency rest on the detection of the effects of agency in this milieu. He therefore makes a distinction between *primary agents*, that is, intentional beings, and *secondary agents*, insentient objects "through which primary agents distribute their agency in the causal milieu, and thus render their agency effective."[26] He gives the example of landmines, which he believes are not simply tools of destruction, but are *parts* of the soldiers who distribute them in the sense that they are components of a particular type of social identity and agency: "but for this artefact, this agent (the soldier + mine) could not exist."[27] Since the origination and expression of agency takes place in an environment that consists of material things, the objects involved in a particular action form a part of the primary agent's identity, or, more specifically, his or her "distributed personhood," being external artifacts that connect him or her to social others.[28]

25 Ibid., 20.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 21.

28 Ibid.

Gell's conception of agency is thus relational and contextual. He writes: "My car is a (potential) agent with respect to me as a 'patient', not in respect to itself, as a car. It is an agent only in so far as I am a patient, and it is a 'patient' (the counterpart of an agent) only in so far as I am an agent with respect to it."[29] If a car rolls downhill and hits someone, in that moment it is an agent since it acts on another, and if the same car is the victim of vandalism, then in that moment it is a patient. While Gell maintains that the only genuine agents are conscious human ones, temporary relations between primary and secondary agents allow for shifts in agentive power. Hence, any patient in a given interaction is another *potential agent*, and it is important to realize also that patients in agent/patient relations are not entirely passive; they may "resist" the actions of the agent (as with a car that refuses to move or a boulder that refuses to roll), which means that being a patient may in itself reflect a form of derivative agency.[30]

The contemporary theorist Bruno Latour's approach is similar to Gell's, though he resists framing agency according to intention. He explains: "If action is limited a priori to what 'intentional', 'meaningful' humans do, it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket, a door closer, a cat, a rug, a mug, a list, or a tag could act. . . . the questions to ask about any agent are simply the following: Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent's action or not?"[31] In Latour's estimation, humans and non-humans are comparable in that both impact a given state of affairs. This supposition drives his effort to reframe the social—any instance wherein actors associate with one another—and to resist the common impulse to "limit the social to humans

29 Ibid., 22.

30 Ibid., 23.

31 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71. The inclusion of a cat in this list may seem curious, though Latour's point seems not to be that cats do not have intentions—a claim that would need some unpacking—but rather that agency is not limited to human beings.

and modern societies, forgetting that the domain of the social is much more extensive than that."[32] For him, the social consists of a multitude of actors, a wide network of agents that have become enmeshed at a particular point in time.[33] He asks: "When we act, who else is acting? How many agents are also present?"[34] In a given situation, there are animate and material actors that influence each other, such that "an 'actor' in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it."[35] Material objects, too, are agents, in the sense that they modify states of affairs and influence others, often dramatically.

Both Gell and Latour's approaches will be useful as we examine the different agents that appear in our sources, though rejecting entirely the relevance of intentional action when reading these would be misguided. While we must acknowledge, like Gell, that linking intention to action yields a number of philosophical problems, we cannot ignore that our Tibetan sources understand intentional acts to be *the* driving force behind karmic accumulations, and that they frame sentient beings and insentient objects differently when describing ritual practices. As such, when considering issues of agency, I have found Gell's approach to be particularly helpful, though Latour's emphasis on the intricacies of the actor network prompts us to expand our analysis to include a broader spectrum of participants.

The Ritual Manual and Its Reader

32 Ibid., 6.

33 Ibid., 7.

34 Ibid., 43.

35 Ibid., 46.

In this vein, one of my objectives in this thesis is to trace the primary and secondary agents featured in the practices that our sources describe. Whereas the ritualist whom the manual instructs and the deities whom he evokes can be categorized as primary agents with intentions, objects like the sand maṇḍala and the offering substances are more than mere things, being better understood as extensions of these primary actors' agencies. We will explore these issues in detail in chapter two. A work like *Light Rays*, moreover, is very clearly written to be *used.* It is a prescriptive work, not a descriptive one. It does not give an account of a particular ritual that was performed at a specific time in a specific place, though it certainly reflects the ritual world —or *worlds*, given it has been modified over the centuries—in which it was produced, giving us a clearer idea of what these practices looked like in Tibet. It explains what one *should* do when attempting to perform an SDP-based funeral, offering detailed instructions on the steps one should follow. Its rhetoric is exhortative and thus designed to compel its reader to act. In this connection, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's choice of verb form is important, for he regularly uses verbs with necessitative meaning, that is, verbs that express that an action that has not yet begun needs to be carried out.[36] Using such language, *Light Rays* compels its reader to act in specific ways, and given our interest in the many actors present in the performance of a funerary rite, we should include it too among the participants in the ritual environment.

Relying on the ritual manual, the officiant's behavior is scripted to a significant degree. He recites a certain mantra because the text tells him to. He creates the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana because it is this maṇḍala that the text deems appropriate. He cremates a corpse because the text identifies this as a method for saving the dead. Even if he has memorized the manual and no longer requires a physical copy of it, his agency is intertwined with its

36 Michael Hahn, *Textbook of Classical Literary Tibetan*, trans. Ulrich Pagel (London: s.n., 2002), 55.

exhortative power, such that the range of permissible actions is limited. Yet as we shall see in later chapters, an author like Grags pa rgyal mtshan cannot dictate each element of the ritual entirely, and there are moments when he explicitly directs the reader away from the text. In some cases, he requires the officiant to draw on their own creative abilities to produce a ritual image, in others, he recommends relying on "visual transmission,"[37] that is, methods observed while watching one's teachers, and in other cases he gives choice as to what is to be done next. Nevertheless, the officiant's agency remains intertwined with that of the manual, which prompts moments of greater and lesser autonomy. If he follows the text as closely as possible, then he surrenders a significant degree of autonomy to the manual itself, looking to it for guidance at each step in the ritual program. On the other hand, if he regularly deviates from its injunctions, then he retains a greater degree of autonomy. But this then raises a question for any scholar of ritual focusing on ritual manuals: what sort of access do we have to the second case? If we were to study contemporary performances of these rites (though I have not yet seen any lamas using *Light Rays* itself, only works influenced by it), then we could examine how certain officiants adhere to or diverge from their ritual manuals. Such research, however, would constitute a very different sort of project. Here we are limited to *what the text says*, and hence the figure whom it anticipates, namely, the implied ritualist who sits at the center of its ritual world.

Texts and Contexts

While ritual manuals remain the focus in this dissertation, I also look to sources that surround them in order to get a fuller sense of the context in which they were produced. A rich biographical literature has emerged around many of our authors, and pertinent details

37 Tib. *mthong ba brgyud pa*.

concerning the production of their funerary works can occasionally be gleaned from this literature. Relying on Tibetan biographies demands a sensitivity to the conventions of the genre, such as the almost universal avoidance of any criticism of their protagonists. As such, drawing inspiration from Dominick LaCapra, I understand these texts as possessing both "documentary" and "work-like" qualities, the former denoting the factual or literal dimensions of a text that describe empirical reality and the latter supplementing the empirical by adding to and subtracting from it, thereby "bringing into the world something that did not exist before."[38] Generally, the documentary elements of a text are framed as given—there is no need for the text to justify them, since they will be received without resistance by the text's anticipated audience. The work-like elements of a text, however, demand more attention and rationalization on the part of the author precisely because they might appear out of place or unusual to the text's readers. When reading the relevant histories and biographies, I have sought to recognize their persuasive features, that is, their rhetorical strategies for shaping how a figure is remembered, while at the same time recognizing that they may contain valuable information about the circumstances under which our manuals emerged. With this in mind, let me say a little more about Grags pa rgyal mtshan—the author at the center of this dissertation—and what we know about the context in which he produced his seminal writings on the SDP.

AN INVITATION TO GRAGS PA RGYAL MTSHAN'S FUNERAL

After Grags pa rgyal mtshan died in 1216, his nephew and disciple Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251) sent a letter to the 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud pa master Spyan snga Grags

38 Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 30.

pa 'byung gnas (1175–1255), asking him to preside over Grags pa rgyal mtshan's funeral. Sa skya Paṇḍita begins with some finely executed praise for his letter's recipient before eulogizing his late uncle:

> Our lama brought an end to the darkness of ignorance with the sunlight of his gnosis in the complete maṇḍala of knowables. He traversed the ocean of our philosophical systems and the systems of others possessing a mind that perceived what is definite and indefinite with the clear and discerning vision of knowledge and kindness. . . . Having accomplished for a time the enlightened activities of taming those who were worthy, he gathered together miraculous manifestations for the unfortunate. Served by unfathomable divine assemblies and welcomed by unfathomable varieties of offerings, he passed into Sukhāvatī.[39]

Summarizing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's life story according to his virtues, accomplishments, and departure to a pure realm at death, Sa skya Paṇḍita then turns to persuading Grags pa 'byung gnas to accept his invitation. He gives three reasons for why he should do so: first, Grags pa 'byung gnas apparently had already promised to visit Sa skya in a previous letter; second, overseeing the funeral would be of great benefit to sentient beings; and third, one of Grags pa 'byung gnas' predecessors, the highly influential Phag mo gru pa Rdo rje rgyal po (1110–70), had spent years studying at Sa skya under Grags pa rgyal mtshan's father, Sa chen Kun dga' snying po (1092–1158).[40] For these reasons, Sa skya Paṇḍita writes, Grags pa 'byung gnas should oversee Grags pa rgyal mtshan's obsequies.

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39 *bdag cag gi bla ma shes bya'i dkyil 'khor ma lus pa la ye shes kyi/ nyi ma shar bas mi shes pa'i mun pa dpyis phyung ba/ mkhyen pa dang brtse ba'i spyan ras rab tu gsal bas gnas dang gnas ma yin pa gzigs pa'i thugs dgongs can/ rang dang gzhan gyi grub pa'i mtha' rgya mtsho'i pha rol tu byon zhing . . . re zhig 'os su gyur pa'i gdul bya rnams kyi 'phrin las bsgrubs nas/ skal ba dang mi ldan pa rnams la thun mong du rnam par 'phrul ba bsdus te/ lha'i tshogs dpag tu med pas bsus te/ bde ba can gyi zhing du gshegs pa lags/.* Byang chub rgyal mtshan, *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru rgyas pa* (Lha sa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1986), 441.

40 Ibid., 442. Cyrus Stearns notes that Phag mo gru pa was closely involved in the recording and compilation of Sa chen's earliest teachings. Some important Path and Result (Tib. *lam 'bras*) works were authored by Phag mo gru pa himself, and he also wrote down other anonymous works attributed to Sa chen. Two of Phag mo gru pa's works were later rewritten and combined into one by Grags pa rgyal mtshan. See Cyrus Stearns, *Luminous Lives: The Story of the Early Masters of the Lam 'bras in Tibet* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 26–32.

In what is surely no coincidence, Sa skya Paṇḍita then embeds the title of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's longest funeral manual into his concluding verses:

> His rain clouds of compassion covered the sky of knowables.
> He possessed the **light rays** of lightning strikes of fine analysis.
> As rain **for the benefit of others** falls without end,
> I pray that the crops of virtuous beings multiply![41]

This allusion to his uncle's primary funerary text is striking and a fitting nod to his uncle's interest in mortuary practices, though it is unclear whether Grags pa 'byung gnas accepted the invitation or not. I have not found any explicit discussion of the rituals that were performed on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's behalf or who led them, but Sa skya Paṇḍita himself must have played an important role given his close relationship with his uncle and his status as Sa skya's next leader.

Notably, Grags pa rgyal mtshan is said to have served just such a role in the rites that were performed after his own relations died. Ronald Davidson argues that the pivotal moment in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's life was the death of his father, which occurred when he was only eleven years old and his brothers Bsod nams rtse mo (1142–82) and Dpal chen 'od po (1150–1203) were sixteen and eight respectively.[42] Grags pa rgyal mtshan and Bsod nams rtse mo were "the foci for many of the great scholars assembled at the funerary ceremony," and the former reportedly recited the entire *Hevajra Tantra* from memory as part of the proceedings.[43] This is particularly fitting given that Sa chen had famously articulated the Path and Result system of Highest Yogatantra, which is grounded in the *Hevajra* cycle. Sa chen was an influential figure,

41 *thugs rje'i char sprin shes bya'i mkha' khyab pa/ rnam dpyod glog gi 'phreng ba'i 'od zer can/ rgyun du gzhan la phan pa'i char 'bebs pas/ 'gro ba dge ba'i lo tog 'phel bar smon/*. Byang chub rgyal mtshan, *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru rgyas pa*, 442.

42 Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 344.

43 Ibid., 344–45.

and apparently trained students from as far away as present-day Sri Lanka.[44] As such, his funeral was quite elaborate, and the offerings distributed to the various clerics in attendance are reported to have been so magnificent that, in Davidson's words, his funeral "established a standard for postmortem rites in years to come."[45]

Grags pa rgyal mtshan also oversaw the rites that followed his two brothers' passings. A mes zhabs reports that Grags pa rgyal mtshan led the funerary rituals for Bsod nams rtse mo,[46] who died suddenly at age forty after a life dedicated to Buddhist learning, a quarter of which he had spent at the famous Bka' gdams pa center Gsang phu ne'u thog.[47] Part of the process involved sponsoring the production of thirty-seven copies of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in 100,000 Verses*, eighty copies of the 25,000-verse version, fifty *Ratnakūṭas*, a gold-lettered 8,000-verse *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, and many other such offerings.[48] He also made similar dedications when his younger brother Dpal chen 'od po—Sa skya Paṇḍita's father—died twenty-one years later. Sa skya Paṇḍita states that Grags pa rgyal mtshan offered more than 250 copies of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in 100,000 Verses* written with ink mixed with gems, and that many of these were funerary offerings.[49] He likewise erected statues and reliquaries in honor of his grandfather, father, and brothers.[50]

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44 Stearns, *Luminous Lives*, 149.

45 Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 335.

46 A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, *'Dzam gling byang phyogs kyi thub pa'i rgyal tshab chen po dpal ldan sa skya pa'i gdung rabs rin po che ji ltar byon pa'i tshul gyi rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rin po che'i bang mdzod dgos 'dod kun 'byung* (Dehradun: Sakya Dolma Phodrang, 2009), 75.

47 Ibid., 64.

48 Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 346.

49 Ibid.

50 A mes zhabs, *Sa skya pa'i gdung rabs*, 75.

It would seem, then, that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was immersed in funerary undertakings from a young age, and it is possible that his interest in SDP-oriented death rites was inspired by these experiences. At the very least, the emphasis on funerals in his biographies points to him being remembered in the tradition as a funerary specialist, though we must acknowledge that any leader of a growing Tibetan Buddhist community would have had some reason to invest in obsequies. Bryan Cuevas and Jacqueline Stone note that Buddhist funerary practices serve many functions, including strengthening ties between the religious elite and the laity, relaying the message of impermanence and the need for religious practice, and the promise that death can be overcome.[51] All of the above apply to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's case, though our focus in this thesis will remain primarily on the last, namely, the soteriological dimensions of these practices.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions to Scholarship on Tibetan Funerary Practices

Very little scholarly work has been done on the SDP's funerary rites and their Tibetan interpretations. Early royal funerary practices have received some scholarly attention, and *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo* far more so. Research also has been done on other Tibetan funerary traditions, such as Martin Boord's recent book on Tibetan death rituals associated with Avalokiteśvara.[52] But so far SDP-centered practices largely have been overlooked. This is somewhat striking given the widespread proliferation of this ritual tradition across Tibetan Buddhism's lineages. Indeed, while SDP-oriented funerary rites flourished in Sa

51 Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone, *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 2.

52 Martin Boord, *Illuminating Sunshine: Buddhist Funeral Rituals of Avalokiteśvara* (Berlin: Wandel Verlag, 2012).

skya pa circles, they were important to other lineages as well. Tsong kha pa and his student 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1374–1434), for example, produced several detailed works on these practices,[53] which in turn inspired numerous later Dge lugs pa manuals.[54] We also find SDP-oriented texts written by important Bka' brgyud pa authors, including the eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–54)[55] and the 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud pa writers Dwags po Paṇ chen

53 Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud mchan dang bcas pa*, in *Gsung 'bum: Tsong kha pa* (Sde dge), 10: 281–479 (Sde dge: Sde dge par khang, n.d.). Tsong kha pa and 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Rnam par snang mdzad kyi sgo nas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga rgyud don gsal ba*, in *Gsung 'bum: Tsong kha pa* (Sde dge) 12: 383–518 (Sde dge: Sde dge par khang, n.d.). 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig rnam bshad* (Lha sa: Zhol par khang, 1944).

54 For example, the First/Fourth Paṇchen Lama Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1570–1662) composed four texts connected with the SDP and Vairocana. These are (1) *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga rgyud don gsal ba'i snying po bsdus pa yid bzhin gyi nor bu*, (2) *Kun rig bum bskyed bsdus pa*, (3) *Kun rig gi sgo nas tshe 'das rjes su 'dzin tshul*, and (4) *Rnam snang mngon byang gi dkyil 'khor gi cho ga ngag 'don du bsgrigs pa*. See Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan, *Gsung 'bum: Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, 3: 613–753 (Bkra shis lhun po: s.n., 199-). The Dge lugs pa tantric master Nam mkha' bstan skyong (b. 1799) also composed seven works on Sarvavid's rites. These are: (1) *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi bdag bskyed mdor bsdus*, (2) *Kun rig gi bsnyen pa ji ltar bya tshul rab gsal nyi ma'i snang ba*, (3) *Bcom ldan 'das ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga'i ngag 'don sor rtse ltar bstan pa thabs mkhas ded dpon*, (4) *Bcom ldan 'das ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po kun rig gi zhi ba'i sbyin sreg bya tshul gyi cho ga lag len gsal bar bkod pa legs bshad rgya mtsho'i gces bsdus don zab dbang gi rgyal po*, (5) *Bcom ldan 'das song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi dkyil 'khor sgrub mchod rdul tshon la brten skabs kyi sa'i cho ga dang/ blos bslangs kyi skor bshad pa legs bshad nor bu'i do shal ngo mtshar rgya mtsho'i bkod pa*, (6) *Bcom ldan 'das ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi dkyil 'khor sgrub mchod rdul tshon dang 'brel skabs de nyid chab 'dren gyi tshe klu chog bya tshul phan bde'i rgya mtsho'i dgongs pa ltar bkod pa ltar bkod pa phan bde'i mchog sbyin zhes bya ba 'di nyid rgyud sde bzhi'i dkyil 'khor gyi rdul tshon chab 'dren gang la yang sbyar chog tshul zur tsam bstan pa bcas* (7) *Bcom ldan 'das ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi sgo nas skra rus cho ga bya tshul dang / sa tstsha 'debs mchog bcas dkyus gcig tu bkod pa sdig mun 'joms byed legs bshad zla tshes gsar pa'i dga' ston*. See Nam mkha' bstan skyong, *Gsung 'bum: Nam mkha' bstan skyong*, 1: 93–414 (s.l.: s.n., n.d.).

55 Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig rnam par snang mdzad chen po'i sgrub dkyil rnam rol sgo chen thar pa'i lam bzang*, in *Gsung 'bum: Mi bskyod rdo rje*, 17: 985–1050 (Lha sa: s.n., 2004). Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi sgrub dkyil la nye bar mkho ba'i phyag rgya bzhi'i rgyas 'debs,* in *Gsung 'bum: Mi bskyod rdo rje*, 18: 1–15 (Lha sa: s.n., 2004). He also discusses the SDP and its practices at length in his monumental study of Yogatantra. See Mi bskyod rdo rje, *Rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rnam bshad*, 4 vols. (Thimphu: Kunsang Topgyel, 1979). Both van der Kuijp and Weinberger note Mi bskyod rdo rje's important contributions in this domain. See van der Kuip, “Notes,” 113. Weinberger, “Social Context,” 160.

Bkra shis rnam rgyal (1512/13–87),[56] Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659),[57] and Rje btsun Dkon mchog chos skyabs (b. 1834).[58] Further, the eclectic master 'Ba' mda' Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho (1844–1904), a lineage holder in the Jo nang and Rnying ma traditions, penned three works discussing Sarvavid's rites.[59]

Notably, a number of these works explicitly acknowledge Sa skya pa figures and writings. 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan names *Light Rays* early in his *Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid*, referring to it as *The Great Light Rays for the Benefit of Others*,[60] an adulatory title I have not seen used elsewhere, while a version of Dkon mchog chos skyabs' work given to me by Michael Essex includes Sa skya Paṇḍita and Chos rgyal 'Phags pa in its opening lineage prayer.[61] Moreover, at least one of 'Ba' mda' Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho's works appears to be based on the Sa skya pa master Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po's (1382–1456) *Limitless Benefit for Others*[62] (which itself is based on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Light*

56 Dwags po Bkra shis rnam rgyal, *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga sgrib pa rnam par sel ba*, in *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, 74: 322–435 (Lhasa: s.n., 2004). Dwags po Bkra shis rnam rgyal, *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi dkyil chog de nyid gsal ba*, in *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, 74: 436–459 (Lha sa: s.n., 2004).

57 Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud gtsug gtor dgu'i sgrub thabs skor*, in *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, 104: 1–340 (Lhasa: s.n., 2004). Weinberger also notes this author's contributions. See Weinberger, "Social Context," 160.

58 Rje btsun Dkon mchog chos skyabs, *Kun rig cho ga'i rgyas 'debs sngags rgyas par bkrol ba,* in *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, 131: 297–301 (Lha sa: s.n., 2004).

59 Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho, *Kun rig sa lugs kyi thig tshon rab gsal shel dkar me long*, in *Gsung 'bum: Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho*, 16: 233–238. ('Dzam thang, Rnga ba rdzong: s.n., 199?). Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho, *Kun rig gi cho ga gzhan phan mtha' yas kyi dmigs rim snying por bsdus pa yo ga'i zab don dpag bsam snye ma*, in *Gsung 'bum: Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho*, 16: 405–67 ('Dzam thang, Rnga ba rdzong: s.n., 199?). Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho, *Kun rig cho ga'i dmigs rim dang mchod pa dang bstod pa sogs la mchan bu gnang ba*, in Gsung 'bum: Thub bstan dge legs rgya mtsho, 22: 709–896 ('Dzam thang, Rnga ba rdzong: s.n., 199?).

60 Tib. *Gzhan phan 'od zer chen mo*. 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig rnam bshad*, 17.

61 Dkon mchog chos skyabs, *Kun rig gi brgyud 'debs dang / rgyas 'debs nag 'gros su bkod pa* (s.l.: s.n., n.d.), 58.

62 Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po, *Dpal kun rig gzhan phan mtha' yas*, in *Gsung 'bum: Kun dga' bzang po* (Sde dge), 4: 37–110 (Dehradun: Sakya Centre, 199?).

Rays), though a closer comparison of these texts will be necessary to understand the extent of their relationship. I do not mean to suggest that all roads lead to Sa skya, for diverse traditions of SDP-centered practices emerged across the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism, not all of which harmonized with Sa skya pa interpretations. Indeed, we will see in chapter three that Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1375/6–1451), the progenitor of the Bo dong tradition, diverged sharply from Sa skya pa interpretations, though his decision to attack *Light Rays* also confirms Grags pa rgyal mtshan's influence.

One of the primary contributions of this dissertation is its close analysis of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's writings on the SDP. This includes *Light Rays* and two shorter texts that summarize many of the same practices, namely, *Requisites for the Benefit of Others*[63] and *Light Rays of the Requisites*.[64] Along with these manuals, Grags pa rgyal mtshan wrote a short piece on the history and contents of the SDP titled *General Overview of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*[65] and a topical outline titled *Outline of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra.*[66] He

63 Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Gzhan phan nyer mkho*, in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge) 9: 119–56 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993). Hereafter cited as *G*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Gzhan phan nyer mkho*, in *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 4: 483–517 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007). Hereafter cited as *H*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Gzhan phan nyer mkho*, in *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum* 15: 112–45 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015). Hereafter cited as *I*.

64 Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyud kyi dkyil 'khor bri ba dang sgom pa'i mngon par rtogs pa la brten nas dbang bskur te sdig pa sbyang ba'i thabs nye bar mkho ba'i 'od zer*, in *Sa skya bka' 'bum ma phyi gsar rnyed phyogs bsgrigs*, 1: 667–700. Lha sa: s.n., 1999. Hereafter cited as *Q*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyud kyi dkyil 'khor bri ba dang sgom pa'i mngon par rtogs pa la brten nas dbang bskur te sdig pa sbyang ba'i thabs nye bar mkho ba'i 'od zer*, in *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*, 16: 437–58 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015), 456–57. Hereafter cited as *R*.

65 Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don*, in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge), 8: 423–40 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993). Hereafter cited as *J*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don*, in *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 4: 1–17 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007). Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don bsdus pa* (cursive manuscript scanned from microfilm in Nagar, U.P. in 2006. s.l: s.n., n.d.). Hereafter cited as *L*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don*, in *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*, 14: 412–27 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015), 412. Hereafter cited as *M*.

66 Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi sa bcad*, in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge), 8: 440–452 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993). Hereafter cited as *N*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi sa*

likewise penned a fascinating work on funerary practices based on the *Hevajra* cycle of tantric teachings that quotes from the SDP as well. Titled *A Drop of Elixir for the Benefit of Others: Last Rites*,[67] this last manual has much in common with *Light Rays* and Grags pa rgyal mtshan's other works on mortuary practices, but diverges in important ways given its reliance on practices of Highest Yogatantra. In the chapters that follow, I examine these texts' approaches to death ritual, while considering some of the influential works that emerged in response to them.

Contributions to Tibetan Studies

Alongside my focus on Tibetan funerary rites, I also investigate Tibetan traditions of Yogatantra more broadly. So far the bulk of Western scholarship on Tibetan tantra has centered on texts belonging to the Highest Yogatantra class, while far less attention has been paid to Yogatantra. Notable exceptions include Skorupski's aforementioned study of the SDP, Jeffrey Hopkins' translation and study of Tsong kha pa's remarks on Yogatantra in the *Great Treatise on the Stages of Secret Mantra*,[68] and Steven Weinberger's studies of the *Compendium of Principles* and related yogatantric works,[69] namely, his PhD dissertation and his 2010 article "The Yoga

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bcad, in *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 4: 17–28 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007). Hereafter cited as *O*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi sa bcad*, in *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*, 14: 428–38 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015). Hereafter cited as *P*.

67 Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa*, in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge), 7: 453–68 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993). Hereafter cited as *S*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa*, in *Gsung 'bum: Grags pa rgyal mtshan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 2: 567–83 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007). Hereafter cited as *T*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Dus tha ma'i cho ga gzhan phan bdud rtsi'i thigs pa*, in *Sa skya gong ma rnam lnga'i bka' 'bum*, 13: 432–46 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2015). Hereafter cited as *U*. For a complete English translation of this text, see Christopher Wilkinson, *Jetsun Dragpa Gyaltsan: The Hermit King* (USA: Suvarna Bhasa Publishing, 2014), 212–29.

68 Tsong kha pa and the Dalai Lama, *The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra, Volume 3: Yoga Tantra*, trans. and eds. Jeffrey Hopkins, Steven Weinberger, and Kevin Vose (Boulder: Snow Lion, 2017).

69 Skt. *Tattvasaṃgraha Tantra*; Tib. *De kho na nyid bsdus pa'i mdo*.

Tantras and the Social Context of Their Transmission to Tibet,"[70] both of which discuss the SDP and its Tibetan reception. Building on Indian tantric doxographical models, Tibetan scholars designated the *Compendium of Principles* as the root tantra[71] of the Yogatantra class while labeling the SDP as a concordant tantra[72] of the same class. It should be stressed, however, that the SDP's status as a concordant work by no means diminished its influence on the Tibetan scene. Indeed, Weinberger calls it one of Tibet's most important yogatantric texts,[73] and adds that it is the *only* work of Yogatantra still being used regularly in Tibetan communities today.[74] As such, our examination of Tibetan presentations of the SDP's practices, including deity yoga techniques involving the performance of specific mudrās, mantras, and meditations, helps us to understand better the defining features of Tibetan Yogatantra. Indeed, the rites aimed at purifying the karma of the deceased are prefaced by more general practices that broadly reflect the attributes of this tradition. Interestingly, in some cases, these rituals include elements that typically fall outside the yogatantric sphere. As a result, this dissertation considers how Tibetan authors negotiated the inclusion of these elements and what this reveals about their understanding of yogatantric practices and their place in Tibetan tantra more broadly.

Exemplary of such negotiations are two polemical works concerning *Light Rays* that form the basis of my third chapter. Bo dong Paṇ chen wrote a text titled *Definitive Explanation*

70 Steven Weinberger, "The Yoga Tantras and the Social Context of Their Transmission to Tibet," *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 23 (2010): 131–66.

71 Skt. *mūlatantra*; Tib. *rtsa ba'i rgyud/rtsa rgyud*.

72 Skt. *bhāgīyatantra*; Tib. *cha mthun pa'i rgyud*. I here follow Weinberger's reconstruction of the Sanskrit from the Tibetan.

73 Weinberger, PhD diss., 139.

74 Weinberger, "Social Context," 161.

of the Rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana[75] that was highly critical of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's understanding of the SDP's practices, in response to which the Sa skya pa master Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge (1429–89) produced an aggressive rebuttal, namely, his *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*.[76] José Cabezón offers a lucid introduction to Tibetan polemical writing based on another of Go rams pa's works, *Distinguishing the Views*, which criticizes the Madhyamaka views of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361) and Tsong kha pa.[77] Yet rather than debating the nuances of Madhyamaka or other philosophical matters, here we find Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa arguing over the finer points of SDP-centered funerary practices, including the place of Highest Yogatantra in these rituals, the degree to which a tantric narrative like the opening scene of the SDP must correspond to actual ritual performances, and anthropocentrism in liberating rites. This dissertation thus examines Tibetan polemical writing of a different kind, addressing some of the issues facing scholars of tantra together with the socio-political concerns that shaped these scholars' undertakings.

Contributions to Buddhist Studies

75 Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad pa*, in *Encyclopedia Tibetica*, 55: 139–227 (Delhi: Tibet House: 1972). Hereafter cited as *V*. Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad pa*, in *Bo dong Paṇ chen gyi gsung 'bum chen mo*, 42: 120–207 (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2014). Hereafter cited as *W*.

76 Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga lag tu blang ba'i rim pa gzhan phan 'od zer la rtsod pa spong ba gzhan phan gnod 'joms*, in *Gsung 'bum: Bsod nams seng ge* (Sde dge), 10: 415–469. Dehradun: Sakya College, 1979. Hereafter cited as *X*. Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga lag tu blang ba'i rim pa gzhan phan 'od zer la rtsod pa spong ba gzhan phan gnod 'joms*, in *Gsung 'bum: Bsod nams seng ge*, 10: 479–549 (Sde dge rdzong: Rdzong sar khams bye'i slob gling, 2004). Hereafter cited as *Y*.

77 José Cabezón and Geshe Lobsang Dargyay, *Freedom from Extremes: Gorampa's "Distinguishing the Views" and the Polemics of Emptiness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006).

From a broader perspective, this dissertation also contributes to the study of Buddhist ritual manuals more generally. Like any ritual text that gives step-by-step instructions to its readers, the manuals at the center of our analysis do not, strictly speaking, describe past ritual performances, but rather communicate what one *should* do when attempting to perform a given rite. They outline the steps that ideally are to be taken, and thus are prescriptive rather than descriptive enterprises. Recognizing that these texts compel their readers to act in certain ways prompts us to imagine the performative contexts in which they were utilized, which in turn leads us to frame these works as ritual participants in themselves.

Taking this as our starting point brings agency to the forefront of our analysis. Whether we are working with Tibetan ritual manuals or manuals in other Buddhist contexts, a wide range of actors must be considered. James Gentry does just this in his outstanding work[78] on agency and ritual, which considers, *inter alia*, Tibetan traditions in which certain ritual objects are believed to possess extraordinary soteriological power. In such contexts, Latour's Actor-Network-Theory is particularly apropos given Latour's insistence that an object need not be a conscious, intentional entity in order to act. Yet many Buddhist ritual traditions would not go so far in granting agency to objects, a point that Gentry makes clear in his book. He devotes considerable attention to cases in which objects are more limited in their liberating capacities, and it is these cases that correspond closest to what we find in SDP-oriented works. Building on Gentry's insights, I argue that Gell's theory of primary and secondary agents is particularly useful for examining such ritual contexts, since it best resonates with the language found in SDP-focused manuals. Material objects are framed not as primary actors in these works, but

78 James Duncan Gentry, *Power Objects in Tibetan Buddhism: The Life, Writings, and Legacy of Sokdokpa Lodrö Gyeltsen* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

rather as secondary ones that extend human and divine agencies. Gell's theory is valuable since it brings into focus the essential functions of material elements described in these manuals, while clarifying too the capacities of the primary agents in the ritual environment. My hope is that this approach will be of value to those studying Buddhist ritual manuals akin to those addressed in the pages that follow, including those that differ in origin and regional inflection but nevertheless involve a constellation of actors and objects.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The first three chapters of this dissertation move in a generally chronological fashion, from the SDP's arrival and early influence in Tibet to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's writings on it and the authors who responded to him. Since the fourth chapter compares postmortem agency in the SDP and its commentaries with both canonical sources and works like *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo*, it returns first to the eighth century before proceeding to A mes zhabs' seventeenth-century contributions.

Chapter one begins with the reception of the SDP in Tibet, including its provenance, its alleged censorship under government decree, and evidence from Dunhuang for its early influence. I give an overview of its commentaries as preserved in the various editions of the *Bstan 'gyur*—the translated commentarial works on the Buddhist teachings—several of which Grags pa rgyal mtshan names and dismisses as forgeries. Since by his time questions had arisen about the transmission of the SDP and the legitimacy of its commentaries, I next turn to his strategies for establishing his own authority as a commentator. These include both standard practices like charting a lineage and subtler techniques witnessed in his *Outline of the*

Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra, which, on one level, is a useful guide for understanding the SDP's contents, but on another demonstrates his expertise as a scholar. By charting the critical features of the SDP in detail, this work exhibits his mastery over the root tantra while educating his audience on how this tantra is to be read. We also find cases in which Grags pa rgyal mtshan elevates his interpretations of the SDP by aligning them with the works of the famous scholar Rin chen bzang po (958–1055) and criticizing the readings of one of Rin chen bzang po's lesser-known contemporaries, Gnyal pa Nyi ma'i shes rab. Lastly, I look to moments in which Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes the omission of ritual steps in the SDP itself and recommends supplementing it with other sources, which underscores, among other things, his command over ritual protocol and his knowledge of tantric Buddhist literature.

Building on this context, my second chapter explores the many actors *Light Rays* involves in the liberation of the deceased. After addressing the available versions of this text, I provide a detailed summary of the ritual practices it outlines, paying special attention to its methods for purifying the negative actions of the departed. Turning to questions of ritual agency, I begin by discussing the role of the ritual manual itself, which dictates many of the officiant's actions. While the manual provides guidance on the steps that the officiant should take, in some cases it grants him greater autonomy, instructing him, for example, to rely on what he has seen others do in comparable contexts. This leads us to the ritualist's own part in saving the dead. Through a combination of mudrā, mantra, and meditation, he is understood to merge with divine actors and thereby draw on their purificatory powers. Deities' involvement is likewise sustained through regular presentations of offerings—both physical and imagined—which underscores the officiant's importance and the functions of certain ritual materials in securing the freedom of the

dead. Finally, I look to other objects that Grags pa rgyal mtshan describes, such as physical representations of deities, the corpse and later its ashes, and the objects that can stand in for the deceased, all of which shape the flow and outcome of the rites. Taken together, this chapter shows that acts of necroliberation are understood to be possible only through the cooperation of a network of primary and secondary actors, that is, conscious, intentional beings like the ritualist and deities, and material entities by which these actors distribute their agencies in the ritual environment.

Chapter three concerns the polemical writings of Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa concerning *Light Rays* and its yogatantric foundations. I begin by exploring the contexts in which these scholars wrote their works. In the biography of Bo dong Paṇ chen written by his student 'Jigs med 'bangs, we find references to his active dissemination of the traditions of Sarvavid Vairocana and his triumphant victory in a debate with the Sa skya pa scholar Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367–1449), who was one of Go rams pa's teachers. Importantly, this debate is said to have been sponsored by Rnam rgyal grags pa bzang po (1395–1475), a scholar-ruler from Ngam ring of Byang who, after Bo dong's passing, invited Go rams pa to give teachings in his area. It was during this stay that Go rams pa composed his response to Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques of *Light Rays*, and we find various retellings of a dream Go rams pa is said to have had while in Ngam ring in which he received inspiration and guidance for the composition of this polemic. I next provide an overview of Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* and Go rams pa's *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*, before examining some of the issues under discussion. These include the necessity and nature of the site ritual[79] performed in order to secure the ritual space from local spirits, visualization practices involving the ritual support and

79 Tib. *sa'i cho ga/sa chog*.

their implications for the scope of necroliberative rites (i.e. can they save only humans or all beings?), and the agents and objects involved in these practices and how these line up with the SDP's opening narrative. These discussions are fascinating not only for what they reveal about Tibetan scholarship on funerary practices, Yogatantra, and tantric practice more broadly, but also for what they tell us about how Tibetan commentators on the SDP understood the various actors featured in these practices.

In my fourth and final chapter, I examine the postmortem capabilities of the dead in the SDP, its commentaries, and in works on the intermediate state like *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo*. I begin by offering a brief introduction to conceptions of the bardo in India and Tibet, noting that the rise of Highest Yogatantra prompted a reframing of postmortem agency, in which death came to be seen as a unique opportunity to cut through delusive appearances and recognize the mind's naturally enlightened state, thereby ending the cycle of death and rebirth. I examine passages from the works of Nāropā (eleventh century), Yang dgon pa Rgyal mtshan dpal (1213–58), and Karma gling pa (fourteenth century), all of which cast the dead as agents capable of self-liberation, so long as the proper training and guidance are received. I then return to the SDP and canonical commentaries on it to assess to what degree, if at all, the intermediate state is acknowledged, and if so, how the activities of the dead are described. Across these latter sources, the dead are framed as passive objects of the SDP's liberating rites and have no clear role in saving themselves. Interestingly, most Tibetan works on the SDP do not emphasize the bardo or the postmortem agency of the dead. This reflects a distinction between Yogatantra and Highest Yogatantra vis-à-vis funerary practices: in the former, the dead are saved by others, while in the latter, the dead can save themselves. So far the only text I have found that attempts

to integrate the bardo teachings—and thus techniques of postmortem self-liberation—into the rituals of the SDP is A mes zhabs' *Dispelling All Obscurations*, which I explore in the final section of the chapter. This fascinating treatise actively integrates the yogic techniques of Highest Yogatantra into the SDP's yogatantric framework, thus diverging from the many influential texts that preceded it.

CHAPTER ONE

AUTHORSHIP AND THE RHETORIC OF AUTHORITY IN THE TRANSMISSION OF THE *SARVADURGATIPARIŚODHANA TANTRA* TO TIBET

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's seminal works on the SDP emerged from a complex context of troubled transmissions, suspicious translations, and centuries of sustained interest among Tibetan Buddhist writers. In the six texts he wrote on this tantra, we find discussions of the SDP's past alongside attempts to develop a complete funerary program based on its contents. The goal of this chapter is twofold: to discuss what we know about the history of the SDP in Tibet prior to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's time, and to examine rhetorical dimensions of his writings that function to frame his efforts as authoritative. Our sources span the eighth through the seventeenth centuries, but our focus remains primarily on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's texts and their treatment of the SDP and its exegetical traditions.

THE RECEPTION OF THE SDP IN TIBET

Early Chronology and the Tibetan Translations

Let us begin with the SDP in pre-modern South Asia. As with many ancient Buddhist works, it cannot be dated with precision. We know that its first translation into Tibetan was completed in the late eighth century,[80] giving us at least a *terminus ante quem.* We know also that the earliest reference to an important related work,[81] the *Compendium of Principles*, is found in the Chinese

80 Skorupski, XXIV.

81 Weinberger notes that Bu ston identifies the SDP as concordant with the *Compendium of Principles* in his *Rnal 'byor rgyud kyi rgya mtshor 'jug pa'i gru gzings*. See Weinberger, PhD diss., 94.

biography of Vajrabodhi[82] (671–741), a south Indian tantric master who arrived in China in the year 720 CE. Working with his disciple Amoghavajra[83] (705–74), Vajrabodhi is said to have been an important figure in transmitting the *Compendium of Principles* and related tantric traditions from India to China, having trained in these traditions under the Indian master Nāgabodhi in the year 700 CE.[84] It therefore seems likely that an early version of the *Compendium of Principles* existed in the last quarter of the seventh century,[85] and given the SDP's close connections with this work, it is possible that it was composed at around the same time.

There are two translations of the SDP preserved in the various editions of the Tibetan Buddhist *Bka' 'gyur*—an earlier version (which Skorupski and others call Version A[86]) and a later one (Version B[87]). Both versions have the same basic title, which reads: *The Text on the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the Completely Perfect Buddha, Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja.*[88] There

82 Chn. 金剛智 Jīngāngzhì.

83 Chn. 不空金剛 Bùkōng Jīngāng.

84 Weinberger, "Social Context," 134.

85 Ibid., 135.

86 *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa*, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Sde dge par phud), 85: 116–91 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1976–79). Hereafter cited as *A*. *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa*, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 85: 164–274 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9). Hereafter cited as *B*.

87 *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa phyogs gcig pa,* in *Bka' 'gyur* (Sde dge par phud), 85: 192–291 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1976–79). *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa phyogs gcig pa,* in *Bka' 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 85: 278–431 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9).

88 Interestingly, Bu ston states that the later version is known by a different title: *The Nine Cranial Protuberances Tantra* (Tib. *Gtsug [tor] dgu'i rgyud*). According to Weinberger, "It is by this title that the later version of the tantra is commonly referred to in Tibetan traditions—in both literary and contemporary oral traditions. There is a great deal of discussion in Tibet concerning the provenance of the later *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations* and its authenticity, which Butön expresses in his final remark on this tantra: 'Investigate whether or not this [text] was produced by Indian paṇḍitas.'" Weinberger, PhD diss., 146.

is significant overlap between these two, though some parts differ entirely, as with the primary section detailing the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana, which Version B replaces with a completely different text.[89] Since Version B appeared after Grags pa rgyal mtshan's time and played a less significant role in the subsequent Tibetan works written about this tantra, I will focus on Version A (hereafter calling it simply "the SDP" for brevity's sake).

There is significant disagreement among Tibetan scholars over who first translated the SDP. Its colophon identifies its translators as the Indian scholar Śāntigarbha and the Tibetan translator Jayarakṣita[90] and adds that Ācārya Rin chen mchog[91] made revisions according to standardized terminology developed after it was first translated. Yet some Tibetan writers had different understandings of the SDP's inception:[92] Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *General Overview of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* indicates that it was translated by the seven examined individuals[93] such as Dba' Mañjuśrī,[94] listing no Indian translator, while Tsong kha pa Blo bzang

89 For more on the differences between versions *A* and *B*, see Skorupski, XVIII–XXIV; Weinberger, PhD diss., 146–51; Zeff Bjerken, "On Mandalas, Monarchs, and Mortuary Magic: Siting the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra in Tibet," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (2005): 822.

90 *rgya gar gyi mkhan po śāntiṃ* [*G.yung=shan ting*; *Li=shān ting*] *garbha dang / bod kyi lotstsha* [*G.yung=lotshtsa*] *ba bande* [*Snar=ban dhe*] *dza ya rakṣi tas bsgyur cing* [*G.yung=zhing*] *zhus/. A*, 191. *B*, 254. The SDP variants noted here and in subsequent footnotes reflect those recorded in the Dpe bsdur ma edition.

91 Weinberger observes that Bu ston identifies Rma Rin chen mchog as the author of a now lost text titled *Answering the Objections to Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (Tib. *Sbyong rgyud kyi brgal lan*). See Weinberger, "Social Context," 150. Cf. Bu ston Rin chen grub, *Rnal 'byor rgyud gyi mtshor 'jug pa'i gru gzings*, in *Gsung 'bum: Rin chen grub* (Zhol par khang), 11: 5–187 (Lha sa: Zhol par khang, 2000), 144.

92 van der Kuijp, "Notes," 109–10.

93 Tib. *sad mi mi bdun*. This phrase denotes the first-ever Tibetan monks who are said to have been ordained by the Bengali monk Śāntarakṣita in the second half of the eighth century under the auspices of Khri srong lde'u btsan. However, Tibetan sources vary greatly on the identities of these individuals and even how many of them there were. Some lists include six individuals and some include seven, while Mkhas pa Lde'u even mentions thirteen in his history. See Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, "Some Remarks on the Textual Transmission and Text of Bu ston's *Chos 'byung*, a Chronicle of Buddhism in India and Tibet," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 25 (Avril 2013): 148–50.

94 The Sde dge edition of the *General Overview of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* reads "Dbas Mañjuśrī" (not "Dabs" as van der Kuijp reads it in his "Notes" before correcting it to Dba'. See van der Kuijp, "Notes,"

grags pa's (1357–1419) *Notes on the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* states that it was translated by Śāntigarbha and Dpal brtsegs Rakṣita.[95] Meanwhile, Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, a figure who was intensely critical of Tsong kha pa on issues of doctrine, explains in his *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others* that the SDP was translated during the time of Śāntigarbha and the seven examined individuals,[96] walking a line between his two predecessors' claims.[97] None of these, of course, match the statement in the SDP's colophon, revealing a significant lack of consensus over the translation's origins.

Tibetan Censorship of the SDP

The translation of the SDP into Tibetan in the eighth century was part of a broader effort to integrate Buddhism into the Tibetan empire. Numerous Buddhist works were selected and translated, but tantric texts were treated with caution. While tantric Buddhist rituals were an object of fascination for the elite and played an important role in the formation of the Buddhist state,[98] their perceived power appears to have caused some anxiety over what might happen

110). See also *J*, 424. The Dpe bsdur ma edition notes that the Zhwa lu manuscript reads "Sbas." See *K*, 1. In the cursive manuscript not consulted by the editors of the Dpe bsdur ma edition, this name appears as "'Bangs Mañjuśrī." See *L*, 1b. Cf. *M*, 412.

95 Tsong kha pa, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud mchan dang bcas pa*, 284.

96 Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, *Yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa'i rnam par bshad pa gzhan phan kun khyab*, in *Gsung 'bum: Bsod nams seng ge* (Sde dge), 10: 261–400 (Dehradun: Sakya College, 1979), 266. Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge, *Yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i brtag pa'i rnam par bshad pa gzhan phan kun khyab*, in *Gsung 'bum: Bsod nams seng ge* (modern edition), 10: 299–459 (Sde dge rdzong: Rdzong sar khams bye'i slob gling, 2004–14), 304.

97 van der Kuijp, "Notes," 110.

98 Matthew Kapstein asserts the importance of Buddhist tantra for early Tibetan state-formation by arguing that the cult of Vairocana was promoted with imperial support, noting the connection between emperor and empire on the one hand, and Vairocana and his maṇḍala on the other. He contends that Khri srong lde'u btsan and his successors sought a "maṇḍalification" of the kingdom that involved the promotion of temples, teachers, book copying, and ritual practices. He explains, "The conversion of Tibet, therefore, was from this perspective much more than the adoption of an alien religion, as if it were a question of the application of a mere patina or veneer; it was to be the wholesale conversion, the fundamental transformation, of a human

were they to fall into the wrong hands. In the Tibetan grammatical work the *Two Volumes on the Usage of Terms*,[99] we find the ninth-century Tibetan king Khri lde srong btsan addressing his government's concerns:

> The tantras of secret mantra, according to the texts, are to be kept secret. It is also not appropriate to explain and to teach them to the unqualified. Still, in the meantime, though it has been permitted to translate and to practice them, there have been those who have not deciphered what is expounded allusively, and seizing upon literal understanding have practiced perversely.[100]

Khri lde srong btsan, who reigned from approximately 800–815, is famous for having overseen the first revision of the Tibetan literary language. Here he is quoted as repeating the common Vajrayāna dictum that the tantras must be kept from the uninitiated and he warns that some Tibetans have deviated from the Buddhist path by taking the more transgressive features of tantric works too literally. It was therefore decided that Tibetans would be permitted to practice tantra, but not all tantra. Tantric practices deemed threatening to the state were removed from state-sanctioned translations, including the *Compendium of Principles*[101] and the SDP. Grags pa rgyal mtshan addresses this in his *General Overview:*

> In this regard, it is alleged, "There is no fierce burnt offering ritual in the Cakravartin and Jvālānala[102] sections, but early kings and ministers, having

domain into a Buddha-realm, an empire governed by superhuman insight, power, and law." Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 63–65.

99 Tib. *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa.* For a critical of edition of this text, see Mie Ishikawa, *A Critical Edition of the Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa: An Old and Basic Commentary on the Mahāvyutpatti* (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1990). For an outstanding study of this work and its rhetorical and lexicographical import, see Cristina A. Scherrer-Schaub, "Enacting Words. A Diplomatic Analysis of the Imperial Decrees (*bkas bcad*) and their Application in the *sGra sbyor bam po gñis pa* Tradition," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 25, no. 1–2 (2002): 263–340.

100 Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 231, n. 60.

101 "What is of particular importance is that this censorship was applied not only to the more antinomian tantric traditions that developed in India after the *Compendium of Principles* and came to be known as Mahāyoga, but also to the *Compendium of Principles* itself, the classic tantra of institutional Buddhism." Weinberger, "Social Context," 148.

102 Jvālānala is a wrathful form of Vairocana, appearing as the central deity of one of the SDP's twelve maṇḍalas.

> feared that tantric practitioners would perform destructive rites, said, 'Don't translate it!' and it was not translated." Yet although later translators made other corrections given it was sensible to insert omissions, because this was not inserted, some have wondered, "Was it in the Indian text itself?" Also, some have alleged: "In earlier times, the Dharma assembly spread to Khotan. The fierce burnt offering ritual is in the Khotanese text."[103]

Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes two allegations about the SDP's transmission to Tibet, the first being that descriptions of the fierce burnt offering ritual were removed from the SDP's Cakravartin and Jvālānala sections. This is perhaps unsurprising given the controversial nature of this rite: it requires, among other things, blood and flesh—ideally of human origin—and is designed to overcome obstacles and to dispel or even kill one's enemies or opponents of Buddhism.[104] While burnt offering rituals of a less violent sort are used to create a positive atmosphere for Buddhist practice or for protection against negative forces,[105] it is easy to see why early Tibetan rulers might have hesitated to promote the more transgressive variants of it—what if such rituals could be turned on themselves?

Grags pa rgyal mtshan never weighs in on whether or not the fierce burnt offering ritual was originally included in these sections of the SDP, but a closer look at the canonical versions of the SDP and its commentaries gives us reason to believe that it was, in fact, removed. It is not found in the SDP's section on the Cakravartin maṇḍala as we have it today, though it *is* included in the version embedded in the *Beautiful Ornament*, a lengthy commentary on the SDP

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103 [*L+de bas na*] *'di la 'khor los sgyur* [*L=bsgyur*] *ba dang me ltar 'bar ba'i skabs kyi/* [*L−/*] *drag po'i sbyin sreg med pa'ang* [*L=pa yang*] */ sngon gyi rgyal blon rnams kyis sngags pa rnams kyis mngon spyod byed du* [*L=bsngags pas mngan spyod byas su*] *dogs nas/* [*L−/*] *ma sgyur cig* [*L=na ces*] *byas nas ma bsgyur ba yin no zhes* [*L+kyang*] *zer na yang* [*L−yang*]*/* [*L−/*] *'di la phyis kyi lo tsā* [*L=tsha*] *ba rnams kyis gzhan tsho 'gyur dag kyang* [*Zhwa−gzhan tsho 'gyur dag kyang*]*/* [*L−/*] *chad pa dag 'dzud par rigs pa las/ ma bcug pa'i phyir rgya dpe nyid la med pa yin nam* [*L=no*] *snyam du yang* [*L−yang*] *sems so/ kha cig ni* [*L= na re*] *sngon gyi dus su li* [*L= li'i*] *yul na* [*L=du*] *chos grwa* [*L=gra*] *dar/* [*L=dar bas na*] *li'i dpe la drag po'i sbyin sreg yod do zhes kyang zer ro/. J*, 424–25. *K*, 2. *L*, 1b–2a. *M*, 412–13.

104 van der Kuijp, "Notes," 115.

105 Ibid.

attributed to Vajravarman.[106] Moreover, it is missing in Tsong kha pa's *Notes*, but appears in Go rams pa's *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*. Meanwhile, the second appearance of this rite in the SDP looks to have been reinserted by editors responsible for the editions used in the creation of the Beijing *Bka' 'gyur*, while the Li thang print includes it in the colophon between the two accreditations of the translation and revision.[107] Of course, we cannot say for certain who was behind these redactions, but it is possible that they were the product of early state censorship.[108]

The second allegation that Grags pa rgyal mtshan addresses is that the fierce burnt offering ritual is included in a Khotanese version of the SDP. This is a fascinating claim in itself, since it raises the question of how Tibetans came to know about this version in the first place, let alone the inclusion of the fierce burnt offering ritual in its pages. So far I have found no additional information on this point, though it should be noted that the Tibetan empire once encapsulated Khotan, and several Khotanese works survive in Tibetan translation,[109] which means this observation may actually date to a time when Tibetan and Khotanese Buddhists were in contact.

Why the SDP?

So far we have seen a lack of consensus among Tibetan scholars concerning the SDP's provenance. There was little agreement over who translated it, and there were doubts about its completeness and faithfulness to the Sanskrit original. Like his Sa skya pa predecessors and

106 Ibid., 116. Skorupski, 361.

107 van der Kuijp, “Notes,” 115–16.

108 For more on the translation and censorship of tantric works in Tibet, see Weinberger, “Social Context,” 146–50.

109 Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 59.

those belonging to other "new schools"[110] of Tibetan Buddhism, Grags pa rgyal mtshan challenged the authenticity of certain tantric Buddhist works circulating in Tibet, rejecting many of those purported to have been translated during the Imperial Period. So why did he see the SDP as authentic while discarding many others? One possible reason is that the SDP is included in two early state-sponsored catalogues of translated works: the *Lhan kar ma* and the *'Phang thang ma*. The *Lhan kar ma* is commonly dated to the reign of Khri lde srong btsan (c. 800–815), though its precise year of composition is contested.[111] Notably, it lists the SDP and Buddhagupta's[112] commentary, a work we will address below. The *'Phang thang ma* was produced later in the ninth century at the imperial court of 'Phang thang in southern Central Tibet.[113] This catalogue also includes the SDP and a commentary, presumably that of Buddhagupta, though this attribution remains uncertain given the title differs and no author is named.[114] If Grags pa rgyal mtshan had access to either of these catalogues, then this may have confirmed for him the SDP's authenticity, but I have found no evidence that he was aware of

110 Tib. *gsar ma*. The new schools include the Bka' brgyud, Sa skya, Dge lugs, and Jo nang, all of which rejected varying portions of the tantric works championed by the "old school," the Rnying ma.

111 In his study of the *Lhan kar ma*, Herrmann-Pfandt dates this work to 812, echoing Giuseppe Tucci's 1958 assessment. See Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt, *Die lHan kar ma: Ein früher Katalog der ins Tibetische übersetzen buddhistischen Texte*, *Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens Nr. 59* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissen, 2008), xxii. Tshul khrims skal bzang Khang dkar (1985), Yamaguchi (1996), and Rabsel (1996) push back its composition to the year 824, which falls under the reign of Khri gtsug lde btsan. See Georgios T. Halkias, "Tibetan Buddhism Registered: A Catalogue from the Imperial Court of 'Phang Thang," *Eastern Buddhist* 36 (2004): 48. For a discussion of the relative chronology of the *Lhan kar ma* and *'Phang thang ma* according to Bcom ldan ral gri (1227–1305), Bu ston, Si tu Paṇ chen (1700–74), and others, see Kurtis R. Schaeffer and Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, *An Early Tibetan Survey of Buddhist Literature: The* Bstan pa rgyas pa rgyan gyi nyi 'od *of Bcom ldan ral gri* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 53–57.

112 While this influential Indian scholar of Yoga Tantra is typically identified as Buddhaguhya, the *Lhan kar ma* identifies him as Buddhagupta, spelling out the Sanskrit name: *de'i 'grel pa slob dpon bu ddha gu ptas mdzad pa*. See Herrmann-Pfandt, *Die lHan kar ma*, 178.

113 Halkias, *Tibetan Buddhism Registered*, 47–48.

114 The *'Phang thang ma* names this commentary *Ngan song rnam par sbyong ba dkyil 'khor bri byang dang bshad pa.* Ibid., 96.

these early records. Moreover, as we will discuss below, he even explicitly rejects the authenticity of Buddhagupta's commentary, which would seem to suggest that he was either aware of the catalogues and doubted their reliability, or that he had no access to them. For our purposes, at least, the inclusion of the SDP and Buddhagupta's commentary in the *Lhan kar ma* and the SDP and a commentary in the *'Phang thang ma* confirms these works' early provenance.

We do know, however, that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was well aware of the translator Rin chen bzang po, a revered and pivotal figure in the second dispensation of Buddhism to Tibet who translated five works related to the SDP.[115] Rin chen bzang po's interest in this tantra is also corroborated by his earliest available biography, which reports that he consecrated numerous maṇḍalas from the SDP when his mother died, and that he used the SDP when performing the funeral of the influential Tibetan Buddhist king Ye shes 'od (947–1024; abdicated in 988).[116] For Grags pa rgyal mtshan, a famous figure like Rin chen bzang po's interest in the SDP would have confirmed its legitimacy, and it is noteworthy that at several moments in *Light Rays*, he indicates his allegiance to Rin chen bzang po when interpreting the SDP's ritual protocol.[117]

Furthermore, broader Tibetan interest in the SDP is attested in other works composed after the age of fragmentation, including the *Claims of Ba*,[118] which frames the SDP and its

115 See the list of SDP-related works below.

116 Bjerken, 830.

117 *C*, 33, 60, 62, 81, 84. *D*, 397, 424, 426, 445, 449. *E*, 21a, 39b, 41a, 54b, 57a. *F*, 31, 56, 58, 75, 79.

118 Tib. *Dba' bzhed/Sba bzhed*. On the *Claims of Ba*, Kapstein comments: "While much that it reports is certainly fiction, its fictions are often old ones, and so of considerable interest in themselves. . . . In short, the *Testament of Ba* may be read as a work of historical fiction, which must be used very cautiously whenever it is precise factual information that is at issue, though it was certainly written on the basis of earlier documents that were much closer to the history it narrates" (Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 25). Kapstein discusses the different available versions of this text, one of which was discovered recently in Lhasa and is of considerable antiquity. Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger's study of this work indicates that it dates to no earlier than the eleventh century. See Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed: The Royal Narrative concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akadamie der Wissenschaften, 2000), XIV. Concerning the spellings of this and other similarly-titled works, Sa

central deity, Vairocana, as critical to early Tibetan Buddhist practice. Written in the eleventh century,[119] the *Claims of Ba* identifies Vairocana as one of the primary buddhas of the Tibetan Empire, noting his centrality to the original layout of the famous Bsam yas monastic complex built in 779. Vairocana, we are told, was the main divinity in the second-story shrine, while the four-faced Sarvavid Vairocana, accompanied by the eight foremost bodhisattvas and other deities, resided on the third floor.[120] Interestingly, there is evidence that Śākyamuni, the principal deity installed in Bsam yas's first story, was regarded as an emanation body[121] of Vairocana during the Imperial Period, meaning that Vairocana may have been central to all three levels of the temple.[122]

In addition, a document appended to the *Claims of Ba* entitled *Account of the Food Provisioning [for the Dead]*[123] explicitly promotes the SDP for the performance of Buddhist

skya Paṇḍita appears to differentiate between a *Rgyal bzhed*, a *Dba' bzhed*, and a *'Ba' bzhed* in his *Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab tu gsal*, and between a *Rgyal bzhed*, *Dpa' bzhed*, and *'Bangs bzhed* in his *Skyes bu dam pa rnams la spring ba'i yi ge*. Meanwhile, the sixteenth-century abbot of Ngam ring in Byang, Klu sgrub chos kyi rgyal mtshan, is reported to have said that while for the majority of Sa skya pas *Rba bzhed* and *'Ba' bzhed* were different texts, he believed that *rba* and *'ba'* were archaic terms (Tib. *brda rnying*) and that the print of the *Thub pa'i dgongs pa rab gsal* was contaminated (Tib. *ma dag*). See Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, "Some Remarks on the Textual Transmission and Text of Bu ston Rin chen grub's *Chos 'byung*, a Chronicle of Buddhism in India and Tibet," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 25 (Avril 2013): 133–36.

119 Wangdu and Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed*, XIV.

120 Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 61.

121 Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*; Tib. *sprul sku*.

122 Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 61.

123 Tib. *Zas gtad kyi lo rgyus.* I here borrow Brandon Dotson's fine translation of the title. On the dating of this work, Dotson writes: "The *Zas gtad kyi lo rgyus* has not been reliably dated, but some of its contents hint at its milieu. For example, it partakes heavily of the hagiographic tradition surrounding Vairocana, it belittles Bon, and it is aware of *gter (ma)*. Its treatment of early Tibetan ritual and historical traditions, even in refuting and lampooning them, also displays misunderstandings that are probably indicative of its temporal remove. To name only a few, it treats the title 'warlord' (*zing po rje*) as if it were a proper name; it mistakes the name of this ruler's stronghold; and it uses Mchims Dwags po as a compound toponym despite the fact that Mchims and D(w)ags po were separate, albeit neighboring, kingdoms. More egregiously, the entire funeral scenario of the *Zas gtad kyi lo rgyus* is rendered problematic by the fact that Mu ne brtsan (po), who presides over the scene, actually predeceased his father Khri srong lde brtsan, and could therefore not manage his father's funeral (Dotson 2007: 13, n. 48). The *Zas gtad kyi lo rgyus* appears after the end of the *Dba' bzhed*, and is not found in other extant versions of the *Sba bzhed*. For these reasons, it cannot be dated on the same bases that one may

funerals. It tells the story of a debate between a Bon po figure named Mchims Btsan bzher legs gzigs and a Buddhist monk (aptly) named Vairocana. At issue is how best to perform Khri srong lde'u btsan's funeral. Mchims Btsan bzher legs gzigs insists on the efficacy of Bon po funerals and advocates for the worship of tombs and mountain deities. In response, Vairocana compares Bon po tombs, palaces, and the mountain god Yar lha Sham po with the grandeur of Nālanda Monastery in India, Buddhist pure lands, and the Protectors of the Three Families,[124] namely, Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi.[125] He then remarks that all the minor kingdoms[126] that had commissioned Bon po funerals, worshipped Bon po gods, and sacrificed animals fell to Tibet because they had engaged in such practices, and therefore warns against performing a Bon po funeral for Khri srong lde'u btsan. In the end, Vairocana emerges victorious, and he and others perform the funeral according to Buddhist tradition. At this point, the *Account of the Food Provisioning [for the Dead]* recommends explicitly the SDP as a source for performing Buddhist funerals,[127] thus framing its mortuary rites as being, quite literally, fit for a king.

Thus it would appear that the SDP's cachet persisted well past the age of fragmentation. It received close attention from the translator Rin chen bzang po, its central deity Vairocana was

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date the *Sba bzhed/Dba' bzhed* itself, whose core narrative traditions ultimately go back to the founding of Bsam yas Monastery (Sørensen 1994: 10–14). At the earliest, the *Zas gtad kyi lo rgyus* dates to the end of the 'intermediate period.'" Brandon Dotson, "The Dead and Their Stories: Preliminary Remarks on the Place of Narrative in Tibetan Religion," in *Tibet after Empire: Culture, Society and Religion between 850–1000*, ed. Christoph Cüppers, Robert Mayer, and Michael Walter (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2014), 70.

124 Tib. *rigs gsum mgon po*.

125 Brandon Dotson, "Narrative Religion and Religious Narrative: On the Composition of Tibetan 'Narratives' (*rabs*) and 'Histories' (*lo rgyus*)," in *Between Empire and Phyi dar: the Fragmentation and the Reconstruction of Society and Religion in Post-Imperial Tibet*, ed. Robert Meyer and Michael Walter (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, forthcoming), 14.

126 Vairocana identifies 'Phan yul, Zhang zhung, 'A zha, Mchims Dwags po, and Snubs as the minor kingdoms.

127 For more on this work and its discussions of funerary rites vis-à-vis the SDP, see Weinberger, "Social Context," 143–46. See also Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 34–36.

framed as the foremost Buddha in Tibet's famed Bsam yas monastery, and its funerary rites had become associated with two of Tibet's most influential Buddhist kings. Uncertainties over the transmission of the SDP would have done little to undermine Grags pa rgyal mtshan and other scholars' faith in its authenticity as an Indian Buddhist source, and the prospect of developing an authoritative funerary program based on its guidelines would no doubt have been attractive. Yet so far our analysis of the SDP's transmission to Tibet largely has been limited to works written after the age of fragmentation, so do we have any other indication that the SDP was as influential for early Tibetan Buddhism as our authors suggest? Works recovered from the famous "library cave" (Cave 17) at Dunhuang offer clues about the SDP's early impact on the development of Tibetan Buddhist conceptions of death and funerary practices.

Evidence from Dunhuang: Fragments and Narrative Parallels

While no complete version of the SDP is found among the ancient Tibetan manuscripts recovered from Dunhuang, certain works intersect with it, as Yoshiro Imaeda details in his study "The *History of the Cycle of Birth and Death:* A Tibetan Narrative from Dunhuang."[128] Imaeda points first to PT 419, which includes the SDP's root wisdom mantra,[129] and also to a text entitled *Taming of the Three Poisons*, which is preserved in multiple witnesses[130] and features

128 Here using the revised English version of Yoshiro Imaeda's 1981 French publication *Histoire du cycle de la naissance et de la mort: Étude d'une texte tibétaine de Touen-houang*. See Yoshiro Imaeda, "The *History of the Cycle of Birth and Death:* A Tibetan Narrative from Dunhuang," in *Contributions to the Cultural History of Early Tibet*, ed. Matthew Kapstein and Brandon Dotson (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 120, n. 17.

129 Tib. *rtsa ba'i rig pa*. According to Imaeda, the SDP's root wisdom mantra is: *oṃ namo bhagavati sarvadurgatipariśodhana rājāya tathāgatāya arhate saṃyaksambuddhāya tadyathā oṃ śodhane śodhane sarvapāpaṃ viśodhani śuddhe viśuddhe sarvakarma āvaraṇa viśodhani svāhā*. Imaeda, 167, n. 88. The Sde dge edition reads: *oṃ namo bhagavate sarvadurgatipariśodhanarājāya/ tathāgatāya/ arhate samyaksambuddhāya/ tadyathā/ oṃ śodhane śodhane/ sarvapāpaṃ viśodhane/ śuddhe viśuddhe/ sarvakarma āvaraṇa viśuddhe svāhā*. *A*, 121. For variants in other editions, see *B*, 256.

130 Tib. *Dug gsum 'dul ba*. IOL Tib J 420, 421 (complete), 720 (fragment), and PT 37 (incomplete at the beginning). Imaeda, 120, n. 17.

this same mantra. He then looks to PT 389, which details one of the SDP's maṇḍalas with the Buddha Śākyamuni at its center, and goes on to identify several other works outlining rituals associated with it.[131] Cuevas, moreover, has established links between the SDP and PT 239/I.[132] Such connections suggest that elements of the SDP spread as far as Dunhuang during Tibet's imperial expansion, or at least that traditions related to the SDP had arrived at the outer reaches of Tibet's cultural influence.

Much more telling, however, are the parallels between the SDP and the *History of the Cycle of Birth and Death,*[133] a work well represented at Dunhuang that Imaeda takes as his focus. By comparing and combining multiple manuscripts—none of which are complete in themselves—he is able to assemble a nearly complete version of the work,[134] which he dates to around the year 800[135] and believes to be an indigenous Tibetan composition reflecting "the first efforts of the disseminators of Buddhism in Tibet."[136] The *History* tells the story of a god named 'Od 'bar rgyal who dies and whose survivors, perplexed by this display of mortality, seek to understand their fellow divinity's fate. This maps nicely onto the opening narrative of the SDP, as Imaeda observes more than once in his article:

> The similarity of the situation, the presence of the element *'od* 'light' in the names of both [deceased gods'] personalities, and the confusion raised by their deaths among their retinues suggest that the framework of our *History* may have been modelled on that of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra*, which, judging from the

131 These are: IOL Tib J 439–712. PT 37, 67, 298. IOL Tib J 440.

132 Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 36–38.

133 Tib. *Skye shi'i lo rgyus.*

134 Imaeda, 108.

135 Ibid., 172.

136 Ibid., 107.

> number of Dunhuang manuscripts related to it, had become well-known [sic] in Tibet by this time.[137]

He later concludes:

> In both texts, one is confronted with death and inquires about the whereabouts and the situation of the deceased. Given the thematic similarity between the two texts . . . we may propose that the author of the *History* might have used the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* as a source of inspiration and adapted it to his *History.*[138]

The connections between the *History* and the SDP are hard to miss. The *History* begins with a group of "gods possessed of body"[139] who are described as having been oblivious to death for eons, until their leader, 'Od 'bar rgyal, loses his magic power, good qualities, and luminosity, and stops speaking, moving, and breathing. Seeing this, his thousand sons, ten thousand parents, and many others sink deep into grief and beat their bodies, hoping for his return.[140] An old god named Dutara then appears to the grieving mass and informs them that every one of them will die like 'Od 'bar rgyal, since this is "the law of birth and death," which he cannot remedy.[141] 'Od 'bar rgyal's son Rin chen steps forward to ask Dutara if he knows a way to revive the departed, guarantee reunion with them, or ensure that they are at peace, but Dutara says that he does not, and then urges Rin chen to seek answers elsewhere. With Dutara's prompting and out of concern for his father's well-being, Rin chen sets out with a retinue of magicians to discover the nature of the law of birth and death.[142]

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137 Ibid., 119–20.

138 Ibid., 169.

139 Tib. *gzugs yod lha*.

140 Imaeda, 134.

141 Imaeda translates the Tib. *phan* as "remedy." This term, more often translated as "benefit," became important for later Tibetan works on the SDP.

142 Imaeda, 135.

By comparison, the SDP's opening narrative has the Buddha demonstrating his liberative abilities before a large retinue of gods. He fires light rays out of the circle of hair between his eyebrows,[143] setting innumerable beings on the path to liberation, after which the god Śakra asks the Buddha about the fate of their fellow divinity Vimalamaṇiprabha who had died a week earlier. To everyone's horror (and despite the Buddha's light rays), the Buddha tells them that Vimalamaṇiprabha is suffering in Avīci hell, which causes the whole lot to collapse, after which Śakra begs the Buddha to rescue their tortured friend. The basic crisis in the two works,[144] then, is the same—a god has died, and the surviving gods, mourning and anxious, want to ensure the dead's well-being.

How do the texts resolve this crisis? In the case of the SDP, the resolution comes quickly: After Śakra asks the Buddha to save Vimalamaṇiprabha, the Buddha reassures him that the rituals that he is about to teach can do just that. This, of course, not only resolves the crisis, but also promotes the SDP's efficacy as a source for tantric Buddhist ritual. By describing emotions to which almost any of its readers could relate—grief over the loss of a loved one and anxiety about their fate after death—the text prepares its readers to recognize its value as a ritual guidebook. The *History*, on the other hand, delays the resolution. It is only after traveling over vast stretches of territory and speaking to multiple learned figures that Rin chen meets the Buddha Śākyamuni, whom he finds residing in front of the *mahābodhi* tree in Bodhgayā. The Buddha begins by teaching on the nature of mortality and liberation, explaining that humans have a lifespan of one hundred years and that gods live many times longer depending on their

143 Skt. *ūrṇā*; Tib. *mdzod spu*.

144 For a rich discussion of crisis and other literary features of these two works, see Dotson, "Narrative Religion and Religious Narrative," 6–14.

kind. He then declares that everyone dies when their life is exhausted, and that all deaths are caused by karma.[145]

Interestingly, the Buddha next discusses different ways of handling a corpse, warning that simply burning it or throwing it into water will not rescue the dead, nor will putting it on top of a trident or burying it along with the deceased's possessions. He also warns against animal sacrifice, mentioning horses, buffalo, goats, and sheep. This not only paves the way for the *History*'s championing of tantric Buddhist practices, but also hints at some of the mortuary traditions to which the earliest Buddhists in Tibet objected. Such animals were psychopomp animals in pre-Buddhist Tibetan funerary rites, so it is telling that an indigenous early Tibetan Buddhist work like the *History* criticizes them; it is clearly targeting certain practices of concern to early Tibetan Buddhist apologists.[146]

Finally, the *History* has the Buddha identify the *Formula of the Victorious Cranial Protuberance*[147]—a text related to the SDP—as revealing the practices necessary for securing relief from bad rebirths. Curiously, the *History* never actually states this text's primary mantra despite its stress on the importance of reciting it, which prompts Imaeda to speculate that the *History* is in fact the first section of a three-part work, the third of which he believes to be another text found at Dunhuang called *Demonstrating the Path to the God Realm.*[148] This last work lists three mantras that can enable the dead to escape bad rebirths, including the *Durgatipariśodhana* mantra,[149] which is the root wisdom mantra of the SDP.

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145 Imaeda, 163.

146 Ibid., 167.

147 Skt. *Uṣṇiṣavijayādhāraṇī*; Tib. *Gtsug tor rnam par rgyal ba'i gzungs*.

148 Tib. *Lha yul du lam bstan pa*.

Given the correspondences between the *History* and the SDP, it seems certain that the latter inspired the former. It could not have been the other way around, of course, since the SDP's Indian origins are well attested.[150] The *History* thus highlights the SDP's early impact on Tibetan Buddhism, showing that, even in the eighth century, this tantra's understanding of death, the afterlife, and ways to liberate the dead had crept into indigenous Tibetan literature. This influence appears to have survived the age of fragmentation and was bolstered by the efforts of Rin chen bzang po, whose translations inspired Grags pa rgyal mtshan's works on this tantra.

COMMENTARIES ON THE SDP AND QUESTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY

Thus far we have looked into questions surrounding the SDP's translation into Tibetan, its mention in early Tibetan historical writings like the *Claims of Ba*, and evidence from Dunhuang regarding its impact on the early phases of Tibetan Buddhism's development. Yet we have said little about the commentarial literature that orbited the SDP and the ways in which Grags pa rgyal mtshan and others received such texts. Fortunately, many of these works survive in the different editions of the *Bstan 'gyur*. They vary greatly in length and content, some covering the entire SDP and others adding only to its instructions on particular rites. In his dissertation on the

149 According to Imaeda, the SDP's primary mantra is: *oṃ namo bhagavati sarvadurgatipariśodhana rājāya tathāgatāya arhate saṃyaksambuddhāya tadyathā oṃ śodhane śodhane sarvapāpaṃ viśodhani śuddhe viśuddhe sarvakarma āvaraṇa viśodhani svāhā*. Imaeda, 167, n. 88. The Sde dge edition reads: *oṃ namo bhagavate sarvadurgatipariśodhanarājāya/ tathāgatāya/ arhate samyaksambuddhāya/ tadyathā/ oṃ śodhane śodhane/ sarvapāpaṃ viśodhane/ śuddhe viśuddhe/ sarvakarma āvaraṇa viśuddhe svāhā/*. *A*, 121. For variants in other editions, see *B*, 256.

150 Numerous versions of the SDP survive in Sanskrit (although these correspond with Version B rather than Version A), and a number of commentaries on the SDP were composed in Sanskrit as well, though Skorupski notes that these survive only in Tibetan translation (Skorupski, xvii). There also remains a living Sanskritic tradition of SDP practice among the Newar Buddhists in Nepal.

Compendium of Principles and the history of Yogatantra, Steven Weinberger offers a list[151] of these works, which I reproduce here adding translated titles and additional bibliographic data:

1. Buddhagupta's[152] *A Word-by-Word Commentary on the Meaning of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[153]

2. Kāmadhenu's *Extensive Commentary on the Great King of Precise Rituals Called the Āryasarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*[154]

3. Vajravarman's *Beautiful Ornament: An Explanation of the Great King of the Tantras of the Bhagavān, the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the Completely Perfect Buddha, Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*[155]

4. Ānandagarbha's *The Ornament of Illumination: The Text on Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*[156]

151 See Weinberger, PhD diss., 151–55. Weinberger draws on the list of works found in *The Nyingma Edition of the Sde-dge Bka' 'gyur/Bstan 'gyur*, 4 (Oakland: Dharma Publishing, 1981), 369–79.

152 As mentioned earlier, while this influential Indian scholar of Yogatantra is typically identified as Buddhaguhya, the *Lhan kar ma* identifies him as Buddhagupta, spelling out the Sanskrit name: *de'i 'grel pa slob dpon bu ddha gu ptas mdzad pa*. See Herrmann-Pfandt, *Die lHan kar ma*, 178. Cf. Weinberger, PhD diss., 151.

153 Buddhagupta, *Ngan song sbyong ba'i don gyi 'bru 'grel*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 66: 304–461 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Buddhagupta, *Ngan song sbyong ba'i don gyi 'bru 'grel*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 33: 1256–1466 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). The translators of this work are not identified.

154 Kāmadhenu, *'Phags pa ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po zhes bya ba cho ga zhib mo'i rgyal po chen po'i rgya cher 'grel pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 66: 461–681 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Kāmadhenu, *'Phags pa ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po zhes bya ba cho ga zhib mo'i rgyal po chen po'i rgya cher 'grel pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 33: 1467–1761 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Vinayacandra and Chos kyi shes rab. Weinberger notes that Chos kyi shes rab is "probably the eleventh-century figure known also as the 'Translator from Shekar' (She dkar lo tsā ba)." Note that Weinberger here misspells Shel dkar "She dkar." Weinberger, PhD diss., 151.

155 Vajravarman, *Bcom ldan 'das de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po'i rnam par bshad pa mdzes pa'i rgyan*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 67: 2–438 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Vajravarman, *Bcom ldan 'das de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po'i rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po'i rnam par bshad pa mdzes pa'i rgyan*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 3–538 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Suvidyākarvarman and Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan (b. late thirteenth century). While the Nar thang and Beijing editions attribute this text to Vajravarman, the Sde dge and Co ne editions attribute it to Ānandagarbha, whom they identify as a disciple of the former. See Weinberger, PhD diss., 152.

156 Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po brtag pa snang ba'i rgyan*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 67: 438–579 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po brtag pa snang ba'i*

5. Ānandagarbha's *Explanation of the Text Called the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the Completely Perfect Buddha, Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*[157]

6. Surabhadra's *The Stages of the Universal Maṇḍala*[158]

7. Ānandagarbha's *The Sādhana of the Great Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[159]

8. Ānandagarbha's *The Garland of Compassion: The Rituals of the Maṇḍala of the Glorious Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[160]

9. Ānandagarbha's *The Crematory Burnt Offering Ritual of the Glorious Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[161]

10. Ānandagarbha's *The Procedures of the Peaceful Burnt Offering Ritual of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[162]

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rgyan, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 539–734 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Suvidyākaravarman and Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan (b. late thirteenth century).

157 Ānandagarbha, *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po zhes bya ba'i brtag pa'i bshad pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 2–193 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Ānandagarbha, *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po zhes bya ba'i brtag pa'i bshad pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 737–997 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Kumārakalaśa and Khyung po Chos brtson 'grus (late eleventh century).

158 Surabhadra, *Dkyil 'khor spyi'i rim pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 194–224 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Surabhadra, *Dkyil 'khor spyi'i rim pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 998–1039 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Dharmaśrībhadra and Rig pa gzhon nu.

159 Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor chen po'i sgrub thabs*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 224–48 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor chen po'i sgrub thabs*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1040–75 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Smṛtijñānakīrti (c. mid-eleventh century).

160 Ānandagarbha, *Dpal ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga thugs rje phreng ba*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 248–312 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Ānandagarbha, *Dpal ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga thugs rje phreng ba*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1076–1163 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Kiraṇākaravarman and Khyung grags.

161 Ānandagarbha, *Dpal ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i ro'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 313–35 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Ānandagarbha, *Dpal ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i ro'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1164–94 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Kanakavarman and Rin chen bzang po (958–1055).

11. Subhaganandana's[163] *The Method of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[164]

12. Ānandagarbha's *The Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[165]

13. Buddhagupta's *The Stages of the Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[166]

14. Buddhagupta's *Concise Summary of the Characteristics of the Maṇḍala*[167]

15. Dharmakīrti's *The Maṇḍala Ritual of the Crematory Burnt Offering of the Sarvadurgatpariśodhana*[168]

16. Ānandagarbha's *Commentary on the Sādhana of the Maṇḍala of the*

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162 Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i shi ba'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga'i las kyi rim pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 335–58 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i shi ba'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga'i las kyi rim pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1195–1223 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Śraddhākaravarman and Rin chen bzang po.

163 Following Weinberger's reconstruction of the Sanskrit from the Tibetan Skal bzang dga' ba.

164 Skal bzang dga' ba, *Ngan song thams cad sbyong ba'i thabs*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 358–73 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Skal bzang dga' ba, *Ngan song thams cad sbyong ba'i thabs*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1224–42 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Ninaśrī and G.yung drung 'od.

165 Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 373–397 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1243–76 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Buddhaśrīśānti and Rin chen bzang po. Weinberger suggests that this work may actually be connected with Version B of the SDP rather than Version A. See Weinberger, PhD diss., 155–56. We will explore this issue in greater detail in chapter three.

166 Buddhagupta, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga'i rim pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 397–414 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Buddhagupta, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga'i rim pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1277–1300 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Mañjuśrīvarman and Bran ka mu ti.

167 Buddhagupta, *Dkyil 'khor gyi chos mdor bsdus pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 78: 2–10 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Buddhagupta, *Dkyil 'khor gyi chos mdor bsdus pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 41: 3–14 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Sent by Buddhagupta to Dbas Mañjuśrī and Bran ka mu ti. Translated by Ka ba Dpal brtsegs. Weinberger notes that Bu ston links this text to the SDP, yet there is nothing specific in the title that indicates this relationship. He notes also that Skorupski does not include this work in his list of commentaries. Weinberger, PhD diss., 153.

168 Dharmakīrti, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i ro'i sbyin sreg gi dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga,* in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 414–55 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Dharmakīrti, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i ro'i sbyin sreg gi dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga,* in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1301–54 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Dharmapāla and Dge ba'i blo gros.

Sarvadurgatipariśodhana[169]

17. Anantaparahita's *Concise Summary of the Rituals of the Text Called Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[170]

18. Śrī Śūnyatāsamādhivajrapāda's[171] *Locanā's Rituals of the Purification of Bad Rebirths Extracted from the Glorious Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*[172]

19. Śraddhākaravarman's *Concise Summary of Setting the Lines of the Maṇḍala*[173]

20. Śraddhākaravarman's *Commentary on the Concise Summary of Setting the Lines of the Maṇḍala*[174]

21. Śuddhiprabha's *The Difficult Practice of the Ritual of Setting the Lines*[175]

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169 Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi sgrub thabs kyi 'grel pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 455–76 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi sgrub thabs kyi 'grel pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1355–81 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translator(s) not identified.

170 Anantaparahita, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba zhes bya ba'i cho ga mdor bsdus pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 476–86 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Anantaparahita, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba zhes bya ba'i cho ga mdor bsdus pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1382–96 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translator(s) not identified.

171 Reconstructed from the Tibetan Dpal stong nyid ting nge 'dzin rdo rje'i zhabs.

172 Dpal stong nyid ting nge 'dzin rdo rje'i zhabs, *Dpal ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyud las phyung ba spyan ma'i ngan song sbyong ba'i cho ga*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 45: 62–69 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Dpal stong nyid ting nge 'dzin rdo rje'i zhabs, *Dpal ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyud las phyung ba spyan ma'i ngan song sbyong ba'i cho ga*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 23: 84–93 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Avadhūtivairocanavajra and Chos kyi grags pa.

173 Śraddhākaravarman, *Dkyil 'khor gyi thig gdab pa mdor bsdus pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 56: 410–14 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Śraddhākaravarman, *Dkyil 'khor gyi thig gdab pa mdor bsdus pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 28: 1199–1204 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Śraddhākaravarman and Rin chen bzang po (958–1055).

174 Śraddhākaravarman, *Dkyil 'khor gyi thig gdab pa'i mdor bsdus pa'i 'grel pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 56: 414–30 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Śraddhākaravarman, *Dkyil 'khor gyi thig gdab pa'i mdor bsdus pa'i 'grel pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 28: 1205–27 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Śraddhākaravarman and Rin chen bzang po.

175 Śuddhiprabha, *Thig gdab pa'i cho ga dka' ba spyod pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 56: 430 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–5). Śuddhiprabha, *Thig gdab pa'i cho ga dka' ba spyod pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 28: 1228–29 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translator(s) not identified.

22. Dharmakīrti's *The Ritual of the Lines of the Maṇḍala*[176]

23. Śāntigarbha's *The Ritual of Establishing the Reliquary*[177]

24. Śāntigarbha's *Differentiating the Parts of a Reliquary*[178]

Strikingly, there are more commentarial works on the SDP than the *Compendium of Principles*, even though the latter is understood to be *the* seminal work of the Yogatantra tradition. Weinberger speculates that this is due to the SDP's "utility in a wide range of rituals," including mortuary rites and rituals for curing disease, securing material resources, overcoming enemies, avoiding an untimely death, and extending one's life.[179] This also, of course, attests to the SDP's sustained popularity among Tibetan ritualists. But just as Tibetan scholars came to question the SDP's origins, the commentaries also gave them pause. Grags pa rgyal mtshan was among the first to address these issues, taking a strong stance on the validity of some of the most lengthy and substantial commentaries. Differentiating between "commentaries and explanatory works"[180] and "treatises,"[181] he argues that *none* of the former are authentic: "In this regard, the listings of the explanations and commentaries in Tibet are inaccurate, and there are no commentaries translated from the region of India; it appears that there are about six works

176 Dharmakīrti, *Dkyil 'khor gyi thig gi cho ga*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 56: 430–31 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Dharmakīrti, *Dkyil 'khor gyi thig gi cho ga*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 28: 1230–31 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translator(s) not identified.

177 Śāntigarbha, *Mchod rten sgrub pa'i cho ga,* in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 603–12 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85). Śāntigarbha, *Mchod rten sgrub pa'i cho ga,* in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 34: 1575–88 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translator(s) not identified.

178 Śāntigarbha, *Mchod rten gyi cha rnam par dbye ba*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 38: 525–534 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translator(s) not identified.

179 Weinberger, PhD diss., 216–17.

180 Tib. *bshad pa dang 'grel pa.*

181 Tib. *bstan bcos*.

labeled as commentaries that were designated as such by Tibetans."[182] He goes on to name six spurious commentaries, citing first the so-called *Explanation of the Tejorāja*,[183] which is probably an abbreviated title for the *Explanation of the Text Called the Tathāgata, the Arhat, the Completely Perfect Buddha, Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*, which is the fifth commentary listed above. As noted, this work is attributed to Ānandagarbha in the editions of the *Bstan 'gyur* that we have today, though Grags pa rgyal mtshan dismisses this attribution, since it was made at a time when Tibetan Buddhist institutions were in decline. In other words, the text's association with the age of fragmentation prompted him to deem it unreliable.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan next challenges the authenticity of the *Beautiful Ornament*, the third commentary in our list above, which the Nar thang and Beijing editions of the *Bstan 'gyur* attribute to Vajravarman while the Sde dge and Co ne editions attribute to Ānandagarbha.[184] Grags pa rgyal mtshan is aware of the text's attribution to Ānandagarbha, but he rejects it, instead insisting that this was the product of a certain Mchims Lo tsā ba Dge tshul khyung grags,[185] a Tibetan whom he identifies as hailing from Rgyan gong in Lower Nyang, which is near to present-day Gzhis ka rtse in Central Tibet.[186] It is striking that he provides such a specific attribution for this work, and to be noted is that other Tibetan scholars shared his reservations: Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290–1364), Go rams pa, and the eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje all

182 *'di la bod na bshad pa dang 'grel pa'i rnam grangs* [*K='grel pa rnams*] *ni mi dag* [*L=grangs dag ma dag*] *la/* [*L−/*] *rgya gar gyi* [*L−gyi*] *yul nas bsgyur ba'i 'grel pa ni med de* [*L=do*]*/ bod kyis brtag pa'i 'grel par ming btags pa drug tsam snang ngo /* [*L=bod kyis 'grel par brtags pa ni drug snang ngo*]. *J*, 425. *K*, 2. *L*, 2a. *M*, 413.

183 Tib. *Gzi brjid bshad pa*.

184 Weinberger, PhD diss., 152.

185 Interestingly, the cursive manuscript reads 'Khyin lo tsha ba Dge tshul khyung grags, matching the spelling in Go rams pa's *Gzhan phan kun khyab*. See *L*, 2a. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 267.

186 van der Kuijp, "Notes," 111.

doubt the text's attribution to Ānandagarbha, while Tsong kha pa challenges its attribution to Vajravarman.[187]

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's third target is Ānandagarbha's *The Ornament of Illumination: The Text on Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*, which is the fourth commentary listed above. This work is attributed to Ānandagarbha in the extant canonical versions, but Grags pa rgyal mtshan holds it to be the work of an individual from Sprag li chung in Central Tibet.[188] He then dismisses a fourth text "designated as a commentary by Dge bshes Zangs dkar,"[189] which just may be the second commentary listed above given the alleged Tibetan translator of that work, Chos kyi shes rab, is also known as the translator from Shel dkar, a name bearing a resemblance to Zangs dkar. Grags pa rgyal mtshan finally repeats his contention that all four of these works are spurious, before explaining that the remaining two—a commentary composed by the Rnying ma pa scholar Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (eleventh century) and Buddhagupta's aforementioned *A Word-by-Word Commentary on the Meaning of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[190]—are forgeries, yet "seem to be a little helpful."[191]

Despite Grags pa rgyal mtshan's dismissal of these works, he confirms the Indian origins of four so-called "treatises" translated during the Imperial Period. The first is a certain Ye shes

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187 Ibid.

188 *de nyid snang ba'i* [*L=pa'i*] *rgyan zhes bya ba kun dga' snying po la kha 'phangs pa* [*L=nas*]/ *'bring mtshams* [*L='tshangs*] *pa'i sgrag* [*L=sgrags*] *li chung* [*L+zhes bya*] *bas byas pa*. *J*, 425. *K*, 2. *L*, 2a. *M*, 413. I here follow Tsong kha pa in reading *'bring mtshams pa* as denoting a person from Central Tibet. He writes: *'grel pa snang ba'i rgyan zhes pa slob dpon kun snying gis mdzad zer ba ni yul dbus pa yin pa'i sbrags li chung bya bas byas nas kun snying la kha g.yar par snang ngo /.* Tsong kha pa, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud mchan dang bcas pa* (Sde dge), 284.

189 *J*, 425. *K*, 2. *L*, 2a. *M*, 413. In the cursive edition, Dge bshes Zangs dkar is spelled Dge bshes zangs 'gar The preferred reading is Zangs dkar, which is located in western Tibet.

190 This commentary appears first in our list above.

191 *gnyis ni cung zad phan par snang ngo/. J*, 425. *K*, 2. *L*, 2a. *M*, 413.

'od 'phro's *The Rituals of the Maṇḍala of Sarvavid*, the second is Chags med rgyal po's *Peaceful Burnt Offering Ritual*, the third is Śāntigarbha's *The Rituals for Establishing a Reliquary,* and the last is *The Rituals of the Maṇḍala of Sarvavid*, which is attributed to Ānandagarbha but he asserts to be the work of Jo bo smṛti. The names Ye shes 'od 'phro, Chags med rgyal po, and Jo bo smṛti do not appear in our list of canonical writers on the SDP, though Śāntigarbha's work on reliquaries is clearly the twenty-third text in our list. The others are difficult to pinpoint given the little information that Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides. Interestingly, the seventeenth-century Sa skya pa master A mes zhabs Ngag dbang Kun dga' bsod nams confirms Śāntigarbha, Ye shes 'od 'phro, and Chags med rgyal po as Indian authors whose works on the SDP were translated during the Imperial Period, though he may simply be repeating Grags pa rgyal mtshan's claims.[192]

GRAGS PA RGYAL MTSHAN AS AN AUTHOR(ITY)

So far our objective has been to understand the historical context for Grags pa rgyal mtshan's writings on the SDP. We have seen how questions arose about the SDP's transmission to Tibet, we have considered reasons why Grags pa rgyal mtshan and his successors might have accepted its authenticity, and we have examined evidence from Dunhuang to better understand its significance prior to his time. But we have not yet considered the rhetorical features of his

192 *bod 'dir bstan pa snga dar gyi dus su/ rgyal po khri srong lde'u btsan gyi ring la paṇḍi ta zhi ba snying po dang / lo tsā ba dpal brtsegs kyis sbyong rgyud bsgyur cing / paṇḍi ta de nyid la brgyud/ de'i dbang bshad byung yang ding sang chad do/ /de dus ye shes 'od 'phro'i kun rig gi dkyil chog/ chags med rgyal po'i sbyin sreg/ paṇḍi ta de nyid kyi mchod rten gyi cho ga rnams bsgyur cing / de gsum la rigs gsum zhes grags so/*. A mes zhabs Ngag dbang Kun dga' bsod nams, *Rnal 'byor rgyud kyi dam pa'i chos byung ba'i tshul legs par bshad pa yo ga bstan pa'i sgo 'byed*, in *Gsung 'bum: A mes zhabs Ngag dbang Kun dga' bsod nams* (Guru Lama digital edition) (Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2011), 81.

writings that work to affirm his authority on this tantra while at the same time acknowledging the influence of his forerunners.

I should emphasize here that I am not looking to reduce Grags pa rgyal mtshan's writings on the SDP to a bid for personal authority. Their persuasive rhetorical features could produce a variety of effects, including inspiring readers to pursue the study and practice of the SDP and to seek personal and communal benefit through doing so. Such factors are no doubt important, but in the context of this chapter, it will be fruitful to consider how his writings reflect the world in which they were produced, a world in which concern for authenticity was widespread given the complications associated with the transmission of Buddhist works from India to Tibet. Let us, then, turn our attention to certain features of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's writings on this tantra that frame him and those in his lineage as authoritative. This capacity of a text to influence is especially apropos to our discussions of ritual agency in the next chapter.

Establishing a Lineage

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's initial comments on the SDP in his *General Overview* are not terribly assertive. Recall that he frames the issues he discusses regarding the censorship of the SDP as allegations rather than strong assertions of his own. He acknowledges that there are problems with the text's transmission, but he does not press the point so as to undermine the text's legitimacy. Yet notice the shift in tone when he turns to the topic of commentaries. He becomes more forceful in his opinions—dismissive, in fact—declaring that none are authentic translations from Indian sources, after which he lists four ostensibly legitimate treatises translated from Indian originals. This opens a hole in the body of literature surrounding the SDP

in Tibet, making room for his own detailed commentary, *Light Rays*, which is the focus of our next chapter.

But why should Grags pa rgyal mtshan's readers necessarily trust his understanding of the SDP? If we accept his suggestion that many works on the SDP written by Tibetans lack legitimacy, then what makes his own works any different? His biographies indicate that he never visited India and that he rarely left Sa skya, so a critic could argue that he has no more expertise on the SDP than, say, Mchims Lo tsā ba Dge tshul khyung grags, the aforementioned Tibetan figure to whom he attributes the *Beautiful Ornament.* Additionally, Sa skya was still a fledgling institution during his lifetime—it would be another five decades before it would become a major religious and political power thanks to his nephew Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251) and his great nephew Chos rgyal 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan's (1235–80) connections with the Mongol court—and thus his position as Sa skya's leader would not have done very much to legitimize his writings in the eyes of many of his contemporaries.

How does Grags pa rgyal mtshan meet these challenges? His most obvious strategy—one employed in Buddhist literature for millennia—is to detail his lineage in the transmission of the SDP. In his *General Overview*, he traces his lineage to the influential Indian Buddhist master Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna (c. 982–1054), a figure who traveled widely and spent his final years in Tibet working to revive Buddhism after the age of fragmentation. Grags pa rgyal mtshan explains that Atiśa transmitted the SDP to Go mi Sgom chen, who then taught it to a certain Skyi nor jñāna, who in turn taught it to Gnyal pa Nyi ma'i shes rab,[193] a figure whose lost writings on

193 *J*, 426. *K*, 3. *L*, 2b. *M*, 414. In the cursive manuscript, Skyi nor jñāna is rendered Kyi ngor jñāna, while Gnyal pa Nyi ma'i shes rab is incorectly rendered Dmyal pa Nyi ma shes rab. *The Blue Annals* describes Gnyal pa Nyi ma'i shes rab as a figure hailing from Lha sa who lived during the time of Rin chen bzang po. It reports that he studied the *Vajraśekharatantra* under the *paṇḍita* Kumārakalaśa and the translator Zangs dkar Gzhon nu tshul 'khrims, and that he later visited Nepal with the latter. When the Kashmiri scholar Jñānaśrī stayed at Chos 'khor Ta bo in Spiti, Gnyal pa Nyi ma'i shes rab studied under him for three years. He also received teachings from a

the SDP are referenced twice in *Light Rays*[194] and twice in the *General Overview*.[195] He also links himself to the aforementioned Rin chen bzang po, the famous translator who transmitted the SDP to Lo chung Legs pa'i shes rab and Brag steng pa Gu rub Yon tan tshul khrims. Lo chung in turn passed the SDP transmission to Dbus pa Dge ser who then transmitted it to Kha'u pa,[196] while Brag steng pa passed it on to Mal gyo Lo tsā ba.[197] Grags pa rgyal mtshan identifies both Kha'u pa and Mal gyo Lo tsā ba as teachers of his father, Sa chen Kun dga' snying po, the founder of the Sa skya tradition. Interestingly, he does not explicitly indicate that he himself received the transmission of the SDP from his father, and since he was only eleven years old when his father passed away, it is possible that direct transmission of the SDP never occurred between these Sa skya hierarchs, but of course he would have no incentive to state this directly.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's Instructions for Reading the SDP

Another of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's strategies is subtler and can be witnessed in his *Outline of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra,* which provides a detailed outline of the SDP itself. On one level, the *Outline* is a useful guide for understanding the SDP's contents, but it also plays an

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certain Mang nang pa on the *Compendium of Principles* according to Ānandgarbha's exegetical tradition. He came to be called one of the "Four Sons of Zangs dkar." See 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal, *The Blue Annals,* trans. George N. Roerich (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 354–55.

194 *C*, 33, 60. *D*, 396, 423. *E*, 21a, 39b. *F*, 30, 55–56. In *E*, the cursive manuscript, Gnyal pa is rendered Dmyal pa.

195 *J*, 426, 428–29. *K*, 3, 6. *L*, 2b, 4a. *M*, 414, 416.

196 Kha'u pa's full name is Gnang Kha'u pa Dar ma rgyal mtshan, who is mentioned repeatedly in Dmar ston Chos kyi rgyal po's (1198–c. 1259) early history of the Lam 'bras. Dmar ston credits Gnang Kha'u pa with transmitting the *Guhyasamāja* and yoga tantras including the *Tattvasaṃgraha* to Sa chen Kun dga' snying po. See Stearns, *Luminous Lives*, 137.

197 Mal gyo Lo tsā ba, aka Mal Lo tsā ba Blo gros grags pa (eleventh century), is said to have received Cakrasaṃvara transmissions from the Newar Pham 'thing brothers and the Tibetan master Klog skya Shes rab brtsegs. He was also an important transmitter of the Mahākala tradition. He resided at the Gnas gsar temple in Gung thang, which is where Sa chen received teachings from him. Ibid., 247.

important role in demonstrating his expertise as a scholar. By defining the critical features of the SDP in detail, this work demonstrates his mastery over the root tantra while at the same time educating his audience on precisely how this tantra is to be read. Since we have not yet looked closely at the SDP's contents, I will draw on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Outline* to highlight some of the its most relevant sections, while at the same time noting the *Outline*'s function as a work of legitimation.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan begins by dividing the SDP into four main sections: the scene of the discourse,[198] the initiation of the discourse,[199] the actual text of the tantra,[200] and the rejoicing[201].[202] What is striking about this breakdown is that he avoids mirroring the SDP's three-chaptered structure, instead dividing it according to his understanding of the text's content. It should be noted Grags pa rgyal mtshan was not the first to frame the SDP along such lines. Recall his assertion that the first commentary in our list—Buddhagupta's *Word-by-Word Commentary on the Meaning of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*—was not actually composed in India, but is nevertheless "a little helpful" when interpreting the SDP. As it turns out, Grags pa rgyal mtshan may have received more than a little help from this commentary in creating his outline, since it provides a similar analysis of the text's structure, using some of the very same terminology, including the scene of the discourse, the initiation of the discourse,[203]

198 Tib. *gleng gzhi*.

199 Tib. *gleng bslang*.

200 Tib. *rgyud kyi gzhung dngos*.

201 Tib. *rjes su yi rang ba*.

202 *N*, 440. *O*, 17. *P*, 428.

203 Buddhagupta, *'Bru 'grel* (Sde dge), 304. Buddhagupta, *'Bru 'grel* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1256.

and the rejoicing.[204] Starting from this foundation, he divides the scene of the discourse into six parts. The first he calls *chos,* which here is short for *chos tshan* or *chos kyi dpe tshan*—standard terms used to mean "section of the scriptures"—and thus the portion of the Buddha's tantric discourses that the SDP represents. In other words, *chos* merely denotes the SDP's title as it is indicated at the work's outset. The second part of this section is dubbed the "compiler,"[205] which refers to the material inserted by the SDP's compiler immediately after the text's title, namely, "chapter one"[206] and "Homage to glorious Vajrasattva."[207] The four remaining parts of the first section—time, teacher, place, and retinue—address the opening lines of the SDP's introductory narrative. Like many sūtras and tantras, it begins with the famous, "Thus have I heard: At one time the Lord was residing in a pleasant grove . . .", establishing the time, teacher, and location, before giving a list of the divine beings included in his retinue.[208] To be sure, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's attention to detail is impressive. He takes a short introductory section of the SDP and flags every element of it, leading his readers by the hand through its compositional structure. This positions him as an author acutely aware of the SDP's contours, including the different voices that are at work in the text.

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204 Buddhagupta, *'Bru 'grel* (Sde dge), 461. Buddhagupta, *'Bru 'grel* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1447.

205 Tib. *sdud pa po*.

206 Tib. *bam po dang po*. *N*, 440. *O*, 17. *P*, 428. van der Kuijp notes that the term *bam po* was used to designate portions of text in the earliest translations of Buddhist works into Tibetan. A *bam po* can consist of varying numbers of *śloka*s, and there is evidence that both *bam po* and *śloka* were used to calculate the payment that translators and scribes received for their work. The term *bam po dang po* in particular is normally placed near the beginning of a text immediately following the text's bilingual title and the translator's invocation, though in the SDP it is situated in between the title and invocation. In some cases this marker is located at the end of the first portion of text rather than at its beginning. See Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, "Some Remarks on the Meaning and Use of the Tibetan Word *bam po*," *Zangxue xuekan* 5 (2009): 114–32.

207 Tib. *dpal rdo rje sems dpa' la phyag 'tshal lo*. *A*, 116. *B*, 164.

208 *A*, 116–17. *B*, 164–65.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan continues to the second main section of the SDP with similar focus, dividing it into two parts: the discourse initiated by the teacher[209] and the discourse initiated by the retinue.[210] This division again echoes Buddhagupta's commentary, which features almost identical terminology.[211] The first part covers the Buddha's aforementioned liberative light show, which Grags pa rgyal mtshan interprets according to the triad of cause, method, and result: the cause is the state of concentration that the Buddha enters prior to issuing the light rays, which Grags pa rgyal mtshan calls the "causal *samādhi*,"[212] while the method is the dispersion of light rays, and the result is the liberation of beings from bad rebirths.[213] Note that this threefold reading reflects Grags pa rgyal mtshan's interpretive efforts; there is no mention of this triad in the SDP itself. Next he relays Śakra and the others' shock after witnessing such a miraculous display, along with Śakra's advance to ask the Buddha how he performed this feat. The section ends with the Buddha replying that it was no great wonder, since any buddha could do this given their immeasurable stores of merit.[214]

In the second part of this second main section, the discourse initiated by the retinue, Grags pa rgyal mtshan identifies key moments in the narrative. First, Śakra asks the Buddha to grant him the power and confidence to benefit beings, after which he asks about the fate of the deity Vimalamaṇiprabha, who had passed a week prior. The Buddha replies, "Śakra, if you

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209 Tib. *ston pa'i bslang ba*.

210 Tib. *'khor gyis bslang ba*.

211 Buddhagupta's commentary divides the initiation of the discourse into two parts: *ston pas gleng bslang ba* and *'khor gyis gleng bslang ba.* See Buddhagupta, *'Bru 'grel* (Sde dge), 304. Buddhagupta, *'Bru 'grel* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1257.

212 Tib. *rgyu'i ting nge 'dzin*. I have not found this term in the canonical commentarial literature on the SDP.

213 *N*, 440. *O*, 17–18. *P*, 428.

214 *A*, 117–18. *B,* 165–66.

know that the time for that has come, listen up!", to which Śakra exclaims, "Lord, now is the time!"[215] The Buddha reveals that Vimalamaṇiprabha is in hell, giving a detailed preview of his future rebirths, which causes the crowd of gods to collapse in sorrow.[216] They ask the Buddha if he knows of a means to liberate Vimalamaṇiprabha, and the Buddha addresses Śakra, telling him to listen as he explains what 84 million buddhas before him have taught,[217] namely, the practices required for liberating beings from bad rebirths. The last element of the opening narrative is the "actual request,"[218] which Grags pa rgyal mtshan splits in two: Śakra's formal request that the Buddha give a well-stated explanation for the sake of releasing all future beings from the three types of bad rebirths, and Brahma and the assembly asking the Buddha to explain how one can be liberated "even by hearing the name"[219]—a claim that we will revisit in the next chapter—and how, after finding rebirth as a human, one might achieve full enlightenment.

From here Grags pa rgyal mtshan moves to the third and longest section of the SDP, which he calls the actual text of the tantra. His outline of this section is highly detailed, so we must limit our discussion to its skeleton and the sections relevant to funerary rituals. He splits this section in two: the Buddha Śākyamuni's teachings on the root maṇḍalas of Sarvavid, and the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi's teachings on numerous other maṇḍalas and practices. The first is of particular interest given its importance for Buddhist death ritual, though the later sections also figure into Grags pa rgyal mtshan's larger framing of such rites. Grags pa rgyal mtshan divides

215 The SDP reads: *lha'i dbang po ci ste de'i dus la bab par shes na nyon cig . . . bcom ldan 'das dus ni lags so. A*, 119. *B,*168. For Grags pa rgyal mtshan's paraphrasing of it, see *N*, 441. *O*, 18. *P*, 428.

216 *N*, 441. *O*, 18. *P*, 428.

217 The SDP reads: *lha'i dbang po sangs rgyas bye ba phrag brgyad cu rtsa bzhis kyang bshad pa 'di ngas kyang bshad kyis nyon cig. A*, 120. *B*, 169.

218 Tib. *zhu ba dngos*. *N*, 441. *O*, 18. *P*, 429.

219 The SDP reads: *ci nas kyang ma 'ongs pa'i sems can rnams kyis mtshan tsam thos pas kyang ngan song gsum gyi lam las rnam par grol te. A*, 120. *B*, 169.

the Sarvavid Vairocana section into six parts: the Buddha's teachings on mantras and their benefits, entry into the inner maṇḍala and the initiation of disciples into the maṇḍala made of colored sand, the spiritual accomplishments[220] that depend on the cloth drawing of the maṇḍala, the Buddha's teachings on the different methods of purifying negative actions associated with bad rebirths for the sake of the dead, his teachings on delivering Vimalamaṇiprabha from bad rebirths, and his teachings on the greatness of this tantra.[221]

Deepening his analysis, Grags pa rgyal mtshan looks next to the fourth of these subsections, which serves as the foundation for his approach to funerals. He divides this subsection into four, remaining attentive to the SDP's narrative elements while also focusing on its ritual technologies. The first part is Śakra's request that the Buddha explain how to save the dead from bad rebirths, the second is the Buddha's agreement to this request, the third is the actual explanation of the various methods for purifying the dead's negative actions, and the last is an enumeration of the benefits of such practices. Grags pa rgyal mtshan says nothing more about the first two parts because they comprise only what these headings suggest—Śakra asks the Buddha for instructions and the Buddha agrees. He then divides the third section into nine subsections, each of which denotes a potential element of the funerary process. They are: the purification of negative actions having bestowed empowerment in the root maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana, purification through empowerment and the placement of an effigy or the dead's remains into a reliquary, purification through empowerment and the placement of an effigy or the dead's remains into a fragrant sanctuary, purification through the creation of a reliquary, purification through recitation of mantras, purification through the performance of a burnt

220 Tib. *dngos grub.*

221 *N*, 441. *O*, 18–19. *P*, 429.

offering ritual, purification through cremation, purification when no effigy or remains are available, and purification through the repelling of evil forces.[222]

While this brief summary reflects only a portion of the *Outline*, it gives us a sense of its organizational depth. It is important to stress that many of the sections Grags pa rgyal mtshan identifies are not signaled in the SDP itself, but rather are sections that he superimposed on it. This is not to say that his *Outline* is somehow misleading or unhelpful—it is highly useful for navigating the SDP's mazes of mantras and maṇḍalas. Yet more important for our purposes is Grags pa rgyal mtshan's attention to detail and minute parsing of the text, which functions rhetorically to illustrate his command over it. The *Outline* covers the entirety of the SDP just as a complete commentary would, but it does so in a concise and accessible way. It therefore presents Grags pa rgyal mtshan's reading of the SDP *in toto*, making the *Outline* a complete statement of scholarly expertise.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's Criticisms of Other Readings of the SDP

Alongside Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions for reading the SDP, he also levels criticisms against other readings of it. He presents multiple critiques of Dge bshes Gnyal pa, who is none other than the aforementioned Gnyal pa Nyi ma'i shes rab. When discussing the purification of negative actions through the bestowal of empowerment, he describes the requisite deity practice that is involved in this ritual:

Eighth, you should realize the deity. In this connection, Dge bshes Gnyal pa says:

> Having relied on the statement in the SDP "Having entered by means of Vajradharā's mudrā" the master enters and receives empowerment without realizing the deity before him. After that, the deity is realized.

222 *N*, 443. *O*, 20. *P*, 430.

> This is not the case—it is pointless to have entered into the sand maṇḍala without having realized the deity, and . . .[223]

Here Dge bshes Gnyal pa interprets the SDP as claiming that the ritual expert, without having realized first the maṇḍala's primary deity, should enter by forming the mudrā of Vajradharā. Grags pa rgyal mtshan rejects this position outright, stating that it is "pointless" to enter the maṇḍala without realizing the primary deity first. This is a striking remark given that Dge bshes Gnyal pa is the very author whom Grags pa rgyal mtshan identifies as his source for Atiśa's transmission of the SDP. Even though Grags pa rgyal mtshan declares his affiliation with Dge bshes Gnyal pa's transmission, he is willing to criticize the latter's reading of certain passages, which affirms his authority as a commentator. Yet this does not prevent him from acknowledging his own sources of interpretive inspiration, for he goes on to cite Rin chen bzang po on this very point:

> Well then, the SDP states, "entered by means of Vajradharā's mudrā," and furthermore, if you are wondering what is indicated by "entered," according to the remarks of Rin chen bzang po and his followers, "All that is indicated by 'entered' is having entered into the maṇḍala's mansion together with the mudrā." That is correct. Therefore, you should realize the deity beforehand.[224]

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223 *brgyad pa lha bsgrub par bya ba ni/ 'di la dge bshes gnyal* [*E=dmyal*] *pa na re/ rdo rje 'dzin mas* [*E=ma*] *zhugs nas ni/ /zhes bya ba la brten nas/* [*E−/*] *mdun du lha ma bsgrubs par/* [*E−/*] *slob dpon bdag nyid 'jug cing dbang len la/ de nas lha sgrub pa yin zer ba ni ma yin te/ lha ma bsgrubs par rdul tshon du zhugs pa la don med pa dang /. A*, 142. *B*, 195. *C*, 33. *D*, 396. *E*, 21a. *F*, 30. Cf. Skorupski, 329. Note that the line quoted from the SDP simply reads "Having entered by means of Vajradharā," and that I here supply "the mudrā of" in my translation. In doing so, I follow Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po's influential work on the SDP's rites entitled *Limitless Benefit for Others*, which references and expands on this line: "One enters the interior of the maṇḍala palace by means of the mudrā of Vajradharā." *rdo rje 'dzin ma'i phyag rgyas dkyil 'khor khang pa'i nang du zhugs/.* See Ngor chen, *Gzhan phan mtha' yas*, 39.

224 *'o na rdo rje 'dzin mas* [*E=ma*] *zhugs zhes* [*E=ces*] *pa dang / gzhan yang zhugs/* [*E−/*] *zhes* [*E=ces*] *bya ba rnams ci yin snyam na/ zhugs zhes bya ba thams cad ni/ dkyil 'khor gyi khang par/ phyag rgya dang bcas pas zhugs* [*E='jug*] *pa yin no/ /zhes rin chen bzang po 'khor dang bcas pa'i gsung ngo/ /de ni rigs so/ /de bas na lha sgrub* [*E=bsgrub*] *pa sngon la bya'o/. C*, 33. *D*, 397. *E*, 21b. *F*, 31.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan draws on one branch of his lineage to support his rejection of another. He supports his critique by pointing to the writings of Rin chen bzang po, whose understanding of this practice differs from that of Dge shes Gnyal pa. It is important to recognize that Rin chen bzang po was a famous figure in Tibet even in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's time, while Dge bshes Gnyal pa was, and remains, an obscure Tibetan scholar. If one were seeking legitimation on a point of controversy, evoking the authority of Rin chen bzang po over Dge bshes Gnyal pa would be the obvious choice. This is not to suggest that Grags pa rgyal mtshan chose Rin chen bzang po on this basis alone, for it was Rin chen bzang po's lineage that was passed down to his grandfather; he has a more immediate connection with Rin chen bzang po's line than with Atiśa's. Nevertheless, this appeal to authority simultaneously affirms Grags pa rgyal mtshan's legitimacy and acknowledges the authority of his lineage.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan again criticizes Dge bshes Gnyal pa later on in his *Light Rays*. When discussing the process of "self-initiation,"[225] that is, the process by which the ritual expert initiates himself before entry into the maṇḍala, he once again identifies Dge bshes Gnyal pa's explanation as flawed and Rin chen bzang po's as correct. He quotes both of these scholars, showing Rin chen bzang po's explanation to be both radically different and significantly more detailed. In comparison, Dge bshes Gnyal pa's version appears simplistic at best.[226] Grags pa rgyal mtshan likewise makes a comparable move in his *General Overview*, where he quotes Dge bshes Gnyal pa's assertion that in the SDP's maṇḍalas designed to bring about worldly benefits, there is no approach that involves entering states of meditative concentration.[227] Yet this time,

225 Tib. *bdag nyid 'jug pa/bdag 'jug*.

226 *C*, 60–62. *D*, 423–25. *E*, 39b–40b. *F*, 55–57.

227 Skt. *samādhi*; Tib. *ting nge 'dzin*.

rather than turning to Rin chen bzang po, he quotes the SDP itself in order to prove that it advocates precisely such kinds of practices.[228] The commentarial task is Grags pa rgyal mtshan's in this case, for he does not explicitly rely on his Tibetan predecessors for outlining his vision of the correct reading of the text. In this way, his critiques of Dge bshes Gnyal pa work to establish his expertise as a commentator. Despite Dge bshes Gnyal pa's status as a figure in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's lineage, his readings of the SDP are repeatedly cited and rejected, which frames Grags pa rgyal mtshan and Rin chen bzang po as the interpretive victors.

Omissions in the SDP

Yet another legitimating strategy emerges in cases where Grags pa rgyal mtshan points to omissions in the SDP itself. Toward the end of his *General Overview*, he states:

> In the section on benefitting the dead specifically, what is absent in this tantra, namely, the practice of summoning the dead's consciousness, is taught having been attested to in texts including the *Compendium of Principles* and the *Trailokyavijaya Tantra*.[229]

Given Grags pa rgyal mtshan's goal of elucidating funerary rituals based on the SDP, it is fascinating that he claims that the practice of summoning the consciousness of the deceased *should* be included despite its absence in this tantra. The implication here is that the SDP's account of death ritual is lacking an important component, and it is up to the ritualist to consult related works such as the *Compendium of Principles* to understand how to perform this practice. Interestingly, Grags pa rgyal mtshan also makes similar comments in *Light Rays*. After

228 *J*, 429. *K*, 6. *L*, 4a–4b. *M*, 416–17.

229 *tshe 'das pa* [*L−pa*] *la bye brag tu phan gdags pa'i skabs las/* [*L−/*] *rgyud 'di na med pa rnam par shes pa* [*L=rnams shes*] *dgug pa la sogs pa'i* [*L=pa*] *phyag len mdzad pa ni/* [*L−/*] *de nyid 'dus pa dang /* [*L−dang /*] *khams gsum rnam rgyal la sogs pa'i gzhung gis* [*L=gi*] *dpang por* [*L=po*] *byas nas bstan pa yin no/. J*, 439. *K*, 16. *L*, 10b. *M*, 426.

discussing the necessity of the site ritual[230] by which one takes possession of the chosen location from the spirits that dwell there, he goes on to address briefly the ritual preparations.[231] He writes: "Third, since the ritual preparations are absent in this text, although they have not been done, it is appropriate to do them."[232] Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan is direct about the absence of the ritual preparations in the SDP, and he is equally direct in asserting that it is appropriate to go ahead and perform them in a funerary context. In essence, he is suggesting that following the SDP is important up to a point, but if certain practices are missing from it, and if it is common to perform such practices in comparable ritual contexts, then by all means one should go ahead and perform such rites. This claim positions Grags pa rgyal mtshan as a tantric expert capable of supplementing a seminal work like the SDP, suggesting a command over the broader ritual tradition that cuts across individual tantric sources.

Similarly, when discussing the creation of a maṇḍala for the purification of negative actions through the bestowal of empowerment, he writes:

> Drawing with colored sand: In general, blessing both the lines and colored sand is not explained in this tantra. But even if you have done this, there is no contradiction. Therefore, if this is done, the lines and colored sand are visualized as the five buddha families that have arisen from the five buddha families' seed syllables. Making offerings with whatever you possess, you should imagine them as lines and colors that have arisen on the basis of your request. How are the colors drawn? Although this is not explained in the tantra, it should be known through visual transmission.[233]

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230 Tib. *sa'i cho ga/sa chog*.

231 Tib. *sta gon*.

232 *gsum pa sta gon ni gzhung 'di na med pas ma byas kyang btub/*. *C*, 20. *D*, 383. *E*, 12a. *F*, 18.

233 *tshon gyis bri ba ni spyir rgyud 'di nas thig tshon gnyis ka la byin gyis brlab pa ni ma bshad/ byas kyang 'gal ba* [E+*ni*] *med pas* [*E+/*] *byed na/* [*E−/*] *rigs lnga'i* [*E=lnga yi*] *sa bon las byung ba'i* [*E=pa'i*] *rigs lngar bskyed la/ ci 'byor bas* [*E=pas*] *mchod de/ de dag zhu ba las byung ba'i* [*E=pa'i*] *thig tshon du bsam mo/ /ji ltar bri ba'i kha dog ni/ rgyud nas bshad pa med kyang /* [*E−/*] *mthong ba* [*E=pa*] *brgyud pas shes so* [E=*to*]/. *C*, 21. *D*, 384. *E*, 13a. *F*, 19.

One part of the empowerment requires the creation of a physical maṇḍala in which the ritual expert realizes the central deity. The SDP provides no information on how to bless this image, however, which prompts Grags pa rgyal mtshan to intervene and explain that one can perform this practice even though the SDP fails to include it. He does not provide detailed instructions on this point and informs his readers simply to follow what they have seen their teachers do over the course of their training, a process he calls "visual transmission."[234] Yet he also asserts expert knowledge of tantric ritual by breaking from the SDP's guidelines and telling his readers to include practices not outlined in the root text itself.

The Distribution of Authority

So far we have seen Grags pa rgyal mtshan employ a variety of strategies to affirm his expertise on the SDP. As a teacher at a small monastery in Central Tibet during a time when many centers were vying for support, he faced pressure to prove himself as a scholar. His most obvious strategy is to trace his lineage back to two highly influential Tibetan figures: Atiśa and Rin chen bzang po. His other strategies, however, are subtler. In his *General Overview*, he dismisses six commentaries purported to be translations from Sanskrit originals, making room for his own commentaries in the process. His *Outline*, moreover, offers a concise breakdown of the SDP's contents that demonstrates his command over the text in its entirety, while also telling his audience precisely how to read it. He likewise criticizes Dge bshes Gnyal pa's understanding of certain sections of the SDP and favors the interpretations of Rin chen bzang po, and he even

234 Tib. *mthong ba brgyud pa.* For more on the importance of empirical learning for the study and practice of tantra, see chapter two.

points to perceived gaps in the SDP itself, making efforts to supply what he believes to be missing. All of this works to promote his expertise on the SDP's history and practices.

It is important, though, to recognize the limitations of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's claims. While he asserts himself as a reliable source of knowledge on the SDP, he by no means attempts to position himself as an independent actor. Indeed, some of the same rhetorical strategies that imply his own authority also work to reaffirm the authority of specific works and figures. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's reliance on Rin chen bzang po, for example, bolsters the legitimacy of the latter, just as his references to Atiśa reinforce the latter's importance. Indeed, throughout Grags pa rgyal mtshan's studies of the SDP, he remains deferential to these individuals and their significance for the transmission and development of the SDP's practices to Tibet, just as he is to his own teachers. In the colophon to his *Outline*, for example, he explains that he wrote it having relied on his teacher who taught in accordance with Rin chen bzang po's system and other exegetical traditions.[235] Similarly, in the colophon to his *Light Rays*, he explains that he wrote it at the request of a certain Seng ge mgon, and then asks for patience from his teachers in case he has made any mistakes.[236] Such statements are common in Tibetan Buddhist literature, and they no doubt reflect the world in which they were produced, supporting a hierarchy in which a student remains subordinate to their teachers. In this way, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's writings on the SDP work to affirm his authority as a writer while also promoting or subordinating the commentarial efforts of his predecessors, thus reshaping the network of authority surrounding the SDP and its funerary rites in Tibet. Since we have not yet said very much about the details of

235 *N*, 452. *O*, 28. *P*, 438.

236 *C*, 117. *D*, 482–83. *E*, N/A. *F*, 111.

these rites, and since Grags pa rgyal mtshan articulates them most fully in his *Light Rays*, it is this work to which we will now turn.

CHAPTER TWO

WHO CAN SAVE THE DEAD?

ON THE MANY ACTORS IN *LIGHT RAYS FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS*

In chapter one, we examined the SDP's arrival in Tibet and Grags pa rgyal mtshan's discussions of its history and contents. We also considered certain rhetorical features of his writings on the SDP and the work they do to establish his expertise on this tantra while acknowledging the influence of his forerunners. We now turn to his longest funerary manual, *Light Rays*, which follows the SDP in claiming that the dead can be saved from bad rebirths if the correct rituals are performed. Its instructions are richly detailed such that a thorough examination of them is beyond the scope of this chapter, but we will survey its contents and examine specific sections that display the many actors—human, divine, and material—that play a part in saving the dead. This is important for determining how these rituals are understood to "work" in a Tibetan Buddhist context, and it helps also to clarify the ways in which the mechanics of necroliberation differ between SDP-oriented rites and those based on traditions of Highest Yogatantra, a topic to which we will turn in chapter four. One of our primary objectives is to discern the influence of the various actors described in *Light Rays*. If the dead do so little to save themselves in this ritual paradigm, then who (or what) frees them? What role, for example, does the ritual manual itself play in a performative context? How does the ritual expert's position compare with that of the deities he evokes? What sort of liberating power are mantras and mudrās understood to possess? And what functions do material objects have in these rituals? We will attempt to answer these questions by focusing primarily on *Light Rays*, but we will also consult Grags pa

rgyal mtshan's two shorter works on funerary rites, *Light Rays of the Requisites* and *Requisites for the Benefit of Others*, and a related text, *A Drop of Elixir for the Benefit of Others: Last Rites*.

A NOTE ON THE AVAILABLE VERSIONS OF *LIGHT RAYS*

Before we proceed, let me say a few words about the four versions of *Light Rays* we have available to us. The first, cited in the notes as *C*, is the edition reproduced from the Sde dge block print at the Sakya Center in Dehradun, India in 1993. The second, cited throughout as *D*, is the flawed[237] but overall useful Dpe bsdur ma edition published in Beijing in 2007, which is based on the Sde dge but includes variant readings from a manuscript from Zhwa lu monastery in Central Tibet. Third, I discovered an incomplete, cursive manuscript of *Light Rays*[238] on BDRC, cited as *E*, which had been miscatalogued under the unattested title *Manifest Realization of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*,[239] and which features numerous variants vis-à-vis the Sde dge and the Zhwa lu manuscript referenced in the Dpe bsdur ma version.[240] Finally, I also

237 *D* contains a number of typos and even omits portions of *C* (the version on which it is based) entirely. For example, on the first page, *lag tu blang ba* is mistakenly written *lag tu jang ba*, which is not a recognized term in Tibetan, and just below this, *sngon du* is erroneously written *jon du*, which again is not an accepted Tibetan term. See *D*, 366. In addition, *D* skips over an important section on page 367, omitting the lines *rang phyag na rdo rje sku mdog ljang sngon zhal gcig phyag gnyis pa/ g.yas rdo rje/ g.yon dril bu 'dzin par bsams la/ de'i snying gar nyi ma'i steng du hūṃ bsams la/*, which are found in *C*, *E*, and *F*. See *C*, 4. *D*, 367, *E*, 2a. *F*, 3.

238 Cited throughout as *E*.

239 Tib. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi mngon rtogs*. BDRC notes only that this text was scanned from microfilm in Nagar, U.P. in 2006.

240 As an example the cursive manuscript *E* includes one passage earlier in the text than in *C, D*, and *F*. The section beginning with "*de nas tshe dpag tu med pa nas . . .*" and ending with ". . . *sems dpa'i skyil krung gis bzhugs par bsams la*" that appears on pages 6–7 in *C* appears in *E* after the line "*khro bo'i bstod pa yang bya'o/,*" which appears on page 5 in *C*, meaning that if *E* were to follow *C*'s sequence, the passage would appear on page 4a instead of pages 2b–3a. We also find a number of variants in this passage when comparing *E* to *C, D*, and *F*: *de nas tshe dpag tu med pa* [*E*−*pa*] *nas 'byung ba'i* [*E=ba/*] *chos rnams thams cad dngos med par/ /sems kyis bsgoms par byas* [*E=ba bya*] *nas kyang / /a las* [*E=la*] *zla ba'i dkyil 'khor bsam/ /rang gi* [*E=gis*] *sa bon de dbus su/ /bsams nas dam tshig phyag rgya dag/ /bsam zhing de bzhin de nyid du/ /sgrub* [*E=bsgrub*] *pa pos ni bsgyur bar* [*E=ba*] *bya/ /lha yi* [*E=lha'i*] *rnal 'byor tshul du bsgyur/ /de nas rang gi*

reference the most recent edition of *Light Rays*, cited here as *F*, which was published as part of a revised collection of the works of the five founding masters of the Sa skya order.[241] This collection includes the newly discovered writings of these authors published in Lha sa in 1999, and it apparently draws on the Sde dge block prints, the Zhwa lu manuscripts, the Lu phu manuscripts, and the golden manuscripts,[242] though in the case of *Light Rays*, it follows the Sde dge almost exactly and does not explicitly note any variants found in these other three witnesses. Nevertheless, I have referenced this version throughout, since it is a largely reliable edition free of some of the more egregious typos found in the Dpe bsdur ma version.

Whenever possible, I also compare sections of *Light Rays* with corresponding selections from later scholars' works, in particular Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Treatment of the Rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana* and Go rams pa's *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*, which frequently quote Grags pa rgyal mtshan's text. In most cases, there are significant differences between the versions of *Light Rays* that we have today and the quotes we find in Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa's works, while quotes shared by these later sources correspond rather closely. This would suggest that Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa were working with a

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[*E=gis*] *sa bon dang* [*E=la*]*/ /phyag rgyas phyag rgya de byin brlab* [*E=rlobs*]*/ /ltag 'og go rim ji* [*E=ci*] *bzhin du/ /sangs rgyas rnams kyis dbang bskur ro/ zhes bya ba'i don bsgom par* [*E=pa*] *bstan pa ni/ ye shes phab cing brtan par* [*E=pa*] *byas pa'i rjes la/ oṃ svabhāva* [*E=svabhava*] *shuddhaḥ* [*E=shuddho*] *sarvadharmāḥ* [*E=sarvadharma*] *svabhāva* [*E=svabhava*] *shuddho 'haṃ* [*E=haṃ*]*/ zhes brjod pas stong par bsams la/ de'i ngang las paṃ las padma'i steng du a las zla ba'i dkyil 'khor bsam/ de'i steng du rang rang gi dkyil 'khor gyi gtso bo'i sa bon las rang rang gi gtso bo bskyed pa yin* [*E+pa*] *yang / 'gal ba med mod kyi/* [*E−/*] *'dir kun tu 'jug pa rdo rje sems dpa' bskyed par bya ste/ hūṃ las rdo rje hūṃ gis mtshan par bsams* [*E=bsam*] *la/ de las 'od 'phros bsdus gcig* [*E=cig*] *tu gyur pa las rang rdo rje sems dpa' sku mdog dkar po rab tu dgyes pa'i* [*E=pa*] *spyan gdangs pa/* [*E−/*] *dar gyi na bza' dang / rin po che'i rgyan gyis brgyan pa/ phyag g.yas pas rdo rje rtse lnga pa thugs kar stod* [*E=bstod*] *de 'dzin pa/ g.yon pas dril bu'i kha dkur brten* [*E=bstan*] *pa/ sems dpa'i skyil* [*E+mo*] *krung* [*E=khrums*] *gis* [*E=su*] *bzhugs par bsams la/. C*, 6–7. *D*, 369–70. *E*, 2b–3a, *F*, 5–6. Variants of this kind occur throughout *E* vis-à-vis *C, D*, and *F*.

241 Tib. *sa skya gong ma lnga*.

242 While I have not been able to access the Zhwa lu, Lu phu, and golden manuscripts (Tib. *gser bri ma*), the annotations in the Dpe bsdur ma edition of *Light Rays* address variants from the Zhwa lu manuscript. It is unclear whether *Light Rays* is included in the Lu phu and golden manuscript collections.

different version of *Light Rays* than those we have available to us today, a topic to which we will return in chapter three.

Additionally, still more variants are to be found when comparing quotations from the SDP in *Light Rays* with the extant versions of the tantra itself. In some cases, the quotations match exactly, but in others there are numerous discrepancies.[243] Sometimes the variant readings match one but not other canonical versions, while other times the variant is unique to *Light Rays*. While none of this should surprise scholars of Tibetan literature, it requires some decision making on the part of the translator. Unless noted otherwise, my strategy has been to follow the Sde dge (in consultation with the Dpe bsdur ma and the 2015 edition based on it) since it is generally consistent and grammatically coherent, whereas the cursive manuscript is more inconsistent and contains various misspellings and grammatical errors. I nevertheless record every variant that occurs across these versions in the footnotes. Further, in the case of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's inclusion of canonical quotations, I have followed his versions of these passages in my translations unless otherwise noted, and I have provided the variants noted in the Dpe bsdur ma edition of the *Bka' 'gyur* in the footnotes for easy reference.

243 For example, in his discussion of the preliminary approach (*sngon du bsnyen pa*), Grags pa rgyal mtshan quotes from the Śākyamuni section of the SDP. There are many differences between his quotation and that found in the canonical editions we have today. Notice in particular Grags pa rgyal mtshan's unusual employment of genitives with terminal particles that appear to signal ellipses: *rdo rje* [*A*, *B+bsdam pa*; *Snar+bsdams*] *bsdams pa las/ gung mo* [*A*, *B+gnyis*] *rdo rje 'dra bar gshibs* [*A*, *B=bsnyams*; *E=shibs*; *G.yung=snyams*; *Li*, *Co=mnyams*; *Pe=sdams*] *la/* [*E−/*] *mthe bo* [*E=the bong*] *dang /* [*A*, *B*, *E−/*] *mthe'u* [*E=the'u*] *chung* [*A*, *B+gnyis*; *G.yung*, *Pe−chung*] *brkyang* [*G.yung*, *Pe=kyang*; *Khu=brgyang*] *ba* [*A*, *B+'di*] *ni/* [*E−/*] *phyag na rdo rje yi'o* [*E=rje'o*; *A*, *B=rje'i phyag rgya'o*]*/ /de nyid las mthe* [*G.yung*, *Pe=mthe'*] *bo* [*E=the bong*] *dang mthe'u* [*E=the'u*] *chung* [*A*, *B+gnyis*] *de bzhin du byas la/* [*E−/*] *mdzub* [*E='dzub*] *mo* [*A*, *B+gnyis*] *dang /* [*A*, *E−/*] *srin* [*Li=sring*] *lag padma* [*A*, *B=padmo*; *E=pad ma*] *'dra bar bya ba* [*A*, *B=bkug pa*; *E=byas pa*] *ni* [*A*, *B+/*] *sbyong ba'i rgyal po yi'o* [*A*, *B=ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyal po'i thams cad sbyong ba'i <Snar−rgyal po'i thams cad sbyong ba'i> phyag rgya'o*; *E=rgyal po'i 'o*]*/ /de nyid las/* [*A*, *B*, *E−/*] *mdzub* [*E=gung*] *mo* [*A*, *B+dang srin lag*] *gnyis rin po che 'dra bar byas pa ni/* [*A*, *E−/*] *dbang bskur* [*G.yung*, *Pe=skur*] *ba'i phyag rgya'o/ /mthe bo* [*E=the bong*] *dang /* [*E−/*] *mthe'u* [*E=the*] *chung* [*A*, *B=mthe'u chung dang mthe bo <Snar=bos>*] *so sor mnyam* [*A*, *B*, *E=bsdams*] *la* [*Khu=lag*]*/ lhag ma thams cad* [*A*, *B=rnams*] *brkyang ba ni/* [*E−/*] *sdig pa thams cad sreg* [*E=bsreg*; *Snar=sregs*] *pa'i phyag rgya'o/ /lag pa g.yon pa* [*A*, *B=pas*] *de bzhin du bsgyur* [*Snar=rgyur*] *ba ni/* [*A*, *B=zhing bya ba ni/*; *E−/*] *las* [*A*, *B=lha*] *thams cad pa'i* [*A*, *B=kyi*] *phyag rgya'o*. *A*, 143. *B*, 197. *C*, 8. *D*, 371. *E*, 4b. *F*, 7. Cf. Skorupski, 331.

THE CONTENTS OF *LIGHT RAYS*

So far in this dissertation we have addressed specific features of *Light Rays*, but we have not examined its broader contents and structure.[244] The appendix includes a complete topical outline based on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's own numerical section markers (referenced in parentheses here and in other chapters), but in order to provide context for the practices that we will examine as we consider questions of agency, we should begin with a summary of this influential work.

1. The Preliminary Approach

Approaching the Single Tutelary Deity

The section on the preliminary approach begins with meditations on the single tutelary deity[245] (1.1). The ritualist imagines himself as Vajrasattva or his deity of choice[246] to prepare for the task of saving the dead. Having ritually protected himself, blessed his body, speech, and mind, and conferred empowerment on himself, he visualizes the scene that unfolds in the SDP's opening narrative, where the Buddha enters into a state of meditative concentration and issues light from the circle of hair between his eyebrows, liberating beings throughout the three-thousandfold

244 *Light Rays*' basic structure overlaps with many other Tibetan Buddhist ritual programs. As José Cabezón comments in *Tibetan Ritual*, despite the diversity among ritual practices based on, *inter alia*, the class of tantra to which they belong, the deities involved, and the sect in which they were developed, patterns are nevertheless discernible. Hence when comparing our outline with Cabezón's delineation of an "ideal-typical" empowerment ritual of the highest yoga class of tantras, we find significant overlap: preliminaries such as the site ritual and the preparations; the creation of a physical maṇḍala; the generation of the deity, his palace, and its surrounding environment as a visualized form; the unification of the actual deities with this visualized form; offerings and praises; visualizing the deities inside the ritual vases; the bestowal of empowerment; and the concluding rites. Cabezón calls these elements "modules"—standardized components used to create a more complex ritual structure. See José Cabezón (ed.), *Tibetan Ritual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

245 Tib. *dpa' bo gcig pa*. This term denotes a deity without consort.

246 While *C*, *D*, and *F* indicate that the ritualist may choose either Vajrasattva or another deity, *E* states only that he should imagine himself as Vajrasattva. *C*, 8. *D*, 371. *E*, 5a. *F*, 7.

world realms.[247] The ritualist puts himself in the Buddha's place and imagines receiving offerings and effusive praise from the Buddha's retinue, after which he turns to the root wisdom mantra of Sarvavid Vairocana, which he visualizes on top of a moon disk located at his heart.[248] The mantra emits light that illuminates the cosmos, after which he recites it and completes the practice. He concludes by reciting the 100-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva,[249] making torma, performing circumambulations, and producing small icons[250].[251]

Approaching the Complete Maṇḍala

In this phase, the ritualist approaches the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana (1.2). This requires visualizing the maṇḍala with four-faced Sarvavid Vairocana, white in color, seated on a lion throne at its center. Grags pa rgyal mtshan identifies the maṇḍala's deities and worldly beings together with their mantras, and they become manifest in the ritual space through the creation of a sand maṇḍala. The officiant then merges with the primary deity through the practice of deity yoga, after which he praises himself and makes offerings to himself before reciting the root wisdom mantra and the mantras of the other deities, imagining the beings in lower realms

247 *A*, 117–18. *B*, 165–66. Cf. Skorupski, 306.

248 It is unclear whether one is here to visualize the entire mantra or an abbreviated version or representation of the mantra.

249 The one hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva is commonly recited in Tibetan tantric rituals. It is as follows: *oṃ vajrasattva samayam anupālaya vajrasattvatvenopatiṣṭha dṛḍho me bhava sutoṣyo me bhava supoṣyo me bhava anurakto me bhava sarvasiddhiṃ me prayaccha sarvakarmasu ca me cittaṃ śreyaḥ kuru hūṃ ha ha ha ha hoḥ bhagavan sarvatathāgatavajra mā me muñca vajrībhava mahāsamayasattva āḥ*. See Andrew Skilton, "The Vajrasattva Mantra: Notes on a Corrected Sanskrit Text," in *The FWBO Puja Book*, fifth edition (Glasgow: Windhorse Publications, 1990).

250 Tib. *sā tstsha*.

251 *C*, 8–10. *D*, 371–73. *E*, 5a–5b. *F*, 7–8.

becoming liberated. Closing the session, he recites the one hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, reads sūtras, studies the Dharma, and makes small icons.[252]

Approaching the Deity Using a Painting on Cloth

In this third phase of the preliminary approach (1.3), the ritualist uses a cloth painting of Sarvavid Vairocana surrounded by other enlightened beings. He consecrates the painting by opening its eyes and makes offerings to it with whatever material offerings he has available to him. He meditates in front of it and performs recitations in order to absorb the deity's accomplishments, which allows him to benefit the living and the dead.[253]

2. The Funerary Rituals

Purification through Empowerment

The second part of *Light Rays* is the longest and most elaborate. It consists of seven main sections,[254] the first and longest of which is purification through empowerment (2.2.2.1). Grags pa rgyal mtshan divides this practice into two: the rituals to be performed by the officiant in particular and the introduction of the disciples into the maṇḍala and the bestowal empowerment. The first begins with approaching the deity, the ritual appropriation of the site[255] from the

252 *C*, 10–16. *D*, 373–79. *E*, 6a–9b. *F*, 8–14.

253 *C*, 16–17. *D*, 379–80. *E*, 9b–10b. *F*, 14–15.

254 Grags pa rgyal mtshan's outline of these subtopics reads: */de la bsnyen pa sngon du song bas las su bya ba ni bdun te/ dbang bskur* [*E=skur*] *te sdig pa sbyang ba* [*E=pa*] *dang / bzlas pas sdig pa sbyang ba* [*E=pa*] *dang / phyir zlog* [*E=bzlog*] *gis sdig pa sbyang ba* [*E=pa*] *dang / sbyin sreg gis sdig pa sbyang ba* [*E=pa*] *dang / ro bsregs te sdig pa sbyang ba* [*E=pa*] *dang / mchod rten btab* [*E=byas*] *pas sdig pa sbyang ba* [*E=pa*] *dang / thams cad la thun mong du ro la sogs pa'i rten med na ji ltar bya ba'i* [*E=bya'i*] *cho ga'o/. C*, 18. *D*, 381. *E*, 11a. *F*, 16.

255 Tib. *sa'i cho ga/sa chog*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's description of the site ritual became a point of contention for Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa. Bo dong Paṇ chen criticizes Grags pa rgyal mtshan's treatment of this rite, questioning his reading of canonical sources and the necessity of an extensive site ritual in this context, while

nonhuman spirits that dwell there, and the preparations.[256] The officiant uses string and colored sand to create the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana, and one cubit[257] to the south of it he draws a blue disk on top of a white lotus, where the support of purification[258] is set, which may be the corpse, bones, garments, likeness, small icons made from bone, or the written name of the deceased.[259] This is followed by the spreading of ornaments, including the laying out of offerings such as canopies, banners, parasols, plumes with tassels, ribbons, and fine fabrics, as well as the ritual vases and torma.[260]

Having established the ritual space, the officiant washes and adorns himself and again engages in meditative practices, cultivating compassion for the departed and for all beings. He ritually protects himself through the practice of personal yoga,[261] by which he guards his

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Go rams pa comes to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's defense. We will discuss this debate in detail in chapter three. Go rams pa also discusses the necessity of the site ritual in his own detailed work on the rituals of the SDP entitled *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*. See Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 296, 301–4, 357–58. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (modern edition), 339, 344–48, 409–10. One of Go rams pa's rivals, Tsong kha pa, references the site ritual and preparations several times in his notes on the SDP, initially pointing to the same verse that Grags pa rgyal mtshan cites to support its inclusion, though the terms *sa'i cho ga* and *sa chog* do not appear in the SDP itself. See Tsong kha pa, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud mchan dang bcas pa* (Sde dge), 314, 368, 386. Notably, 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan, a close disciple of Tsong kha pa who wrote a lengthy tract on the rituals of the SDP entitled *Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid*, also argues for the necessity of the site ritual, declaring emphatically: "If the site ritual and preparations and so forth were unnecessary for the maṇḍala of Sarvavid, then they would be equally unnecessary for all other maṇḍalas of the four classes of tantra!" *kun rig gi dkyil 'khor la sa chog dang sta gon sogs mi dgos na rgyud sde bzhi'i dkyil 'khor gzhan thams cad la'ang mi dgos par mtshungs so/.* See 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig rnam bshad*, 170. The site ritual also appears in a number of canonical commentaries on the SDP, including Vajravarman's aformentioned *Beautiful Ornament*, which discusses the performance of the site ritual in the context of burnt offering rites. See Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Sde dge), 135. Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 156.

256 Tib. *sta gon*. As with the site ritual, the preparations also became a point of contention for Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa. See *V*, 182–85. *W*, 161–64. *X*, 435–38. *Y*, 504–9.

257 Tib. *khru gang*.

258 Tib. *sbyang ba'i rten*.

259 *C*, 22. *D*, 386. *E*, 14a. *F*, 20.

260 *C*, 22–23. *D*, 386–87. *E*, 14a–14b. *F*, 20–21.

261 Tib. *bdag gi rnal 'byor.* Grags pa rgyal mtshan's discussion of personal yoga (*C*, 23–33. *D*, 387–96. *E*, 15a–21a. *F*, 21–30) became a subject of disputation for Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa. See chapter three.

practice and the ritual site. He performs a series of meditations on the rescue of beings from the six realms, for which he imagines receiving offerings and praise. This is followed by a period of stabilization, after which he turns to realizing the deity,[262] which involves visualizations focused on Sarvavid Vairocana and his maṇḍala together with the attendant mudrās and mantras.[263] He makes offerings and engages in the practice of self-initiation, which requires leading himself through the initiation process before initiating others.[264]

The second phase of this first method of purification involves introducing students into the maṇḍala and bestowing empowerment, which, in the funerary context, is preceded by visualizing the ritual support necessary for purifying the negative actions of the dead. A prerequisite for this is clearing away obstructive spirits that can harm the deceased's consciousness. The ritualist summons the consciousness and causes it to dissolve into the ritual support, which here can simply be a name card.[265] By reciting the appropriate mantras, negative actions of the deceased are destroyed. He then introduces his students into the maṇḍala through a seventeen-step process of initiation[266] and empowers them and the dead.[267] Once this has been completed, the ritual support may be placed either in a reliquary or a fragrant shrine (in the latter case, a drawn effigy of the deceased is typically placed on a shrine in the home of the deceased), both of which function to purify the departed's negative actions.[268]

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262 Tib. *lha sgrub pa*.

263 *C*, 33–48. *D*, 396–411. *E*, 21a–30b. *F*, 30–44.

264 *C*, 60–62. *D*, 423–25. *E*, 39b–40b. *F*, 55–58.

265 Tib. *ming byang*.

266 *C*, 65–71. *D,* 429–35. *E*, 43b–47b. *F*, 61–66.

267 *C*, 71–83. *D*, 435–47. *E*, 47b–56a. *F*, 66–77.

268 *C*, 82–83. *D*, 446–47. *E*, 55a–56a. *F*, 76–78.

Purification through Recitations

The second method involves the performance of specific recitations (2.2.2.2). Grags pa rgyal mtshan begins with the SDP's claim that after calling the name of the deceased, if the ritualist recites the appropriate mantras one hundred thousand[269] times, ten million[270] times, or one hundred million[271] times, the deceased will be reborn in the realm of the gods.[272] He provides a brief commentary, noting that if this practice is undertaken in connection with the bestowal of empowerment, then it is done either before the repulsion of negative forces and the bestowal of empowerment or during the breaks between sessions, and if it is done independently from empowerment, then it becomes the focus of the ritualist's efforts.[273] He charts the visualizations that accompany the recitations and specifies the mantras to be recited.[274]

Purification through Repelling Negative Forces

The third method involves repelling negative forces (2.2.2.3). This begins with the SDP's claim that if the ritualist cremates the body and mixes the ashes with white mustard seed[275] and sand, calls the name of the deceased, recites mantras, and then scatters the mixture into a river flowing

269 Tib. *brgya phrag stong*.

270 Tib. *bye ba*.

271 Tib. *'bum phrag stong*.

272 *A*, 130. *B*, 181. *C*, 83. *D*, 447. *E*, 56a. *F*, 78.

273 *C,* 83. *D*, 447. *E*, 56a. *F*, 78.

274 Grags pa rgyal mtshan explains that the ritualist "should recite all the mantras that appear in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* and primarily the root wisdom mantra." *rgyud nas 'byung ba'i sngags thams cad dang / gtso bor rtsa ba'i rig pa bzla bar bya'o/. C*, 84. *D,* 448. *E*, 56b. *F*, 78. See above for the SDP's root wisdom mantra.

275 Tib. *yungs dkar*.

into the ocean, the dead will be liberated from bad rebirths.[276] Grags pa rgyal mtshan expands on this passage in detail, explaining that as before, the practitioner must first perform the preliminary approach, make offerings, and visualize the ritual support, at which he tosses sand and white mustard seed to dispel negativities. He recites mantras, and after a night passes, scatters the mixture of ashes and other ingredients into a river flowing into the ocean. Grags pa rgyal mtshan emphasizes that utilizing the ritual support requires the aforementioned four-step process of clearing away obstructive spirits, visualizing the support, summoning the consciousness of the deceased, and finally destroying their negative actions. He also identifies the primary mantra to recite while tossing the white mustard seed and sand[277] and gives guidance on how to perform the necessary ablutions. Finally, the ritualist should imagine the deceased in the form of the deity, and he visualizes him or her residing in Sukhāvatī.[278]

Purification through Burnt Offerings

This approach involves purification through the performance of burnt offering rites (2.2.2.4), which Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes to be essentially no different than the burnt offerings rites

276 *A*, 133–34. *B*, 185. *C*, 84. *D*, 448. *E*, 56b–57a. *F*, 78–79.

277 The mantra is: *oṃ sarvapāpaṃ dahana vajra hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ sarvapāpaṃ viśodhani vajra hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ sarvakarma āvaraṇāni bhasmiṃ kuru hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ bruṃ vināśaya āvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ druṃ viśodhaya āvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ jvala jvala dhaka hana hana āvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ sruṃ sara sara prasara prasara āvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ hūṃ hara hara sarvāvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ hūṃ phaṭ sarvāvaraṇāni visphoṭaya hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ bhrita bhrita sarvāvaranāni hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ trata trata sarvāvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ sindha sindha sarvāvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ daha daha sarvanaraka gate he tuṃ hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ patsa patsa sarvapreta taka gate he tuṃ hūṃ phaṭ/ oṃ matha matha sarvatiryaka gate he tuṃ hūṃ phaṭ/*. *C*, 85. *D*, 449–50. *E*, 57b. *F*, 79–80.

278 *C*, 90. *D*, 454. *E*, 61a. *F*, 84–85. Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa debate this aspect of the ritual. See chapter three.

performed for the living.[279] He details four variations of this practice[280] as per the SDP's instructions: the pacifying burnt offering,[281] the enriching burnt offering,[282] the overpowering burnt offering,[283] and the fierce burnt offering,[284] noting that the first is most important, while the rest should be performed according to what has been accomplished through the first. He outlines the first in some detail, closely following the SDP's instructions.[285] It begins with the preparation of the hearth, which includes a drawn maṇḍala with eight sections featuring the symbols of the five buddha families, the sixteen bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, pratyekajinas,[286] and others. The ritualist fills the hearth with firewood, offerings inside of vases, ornaments, and substances for the burnt offering,[287] such as sesame seed, mustard seed, grain, and goat's milk.[288] Grags pa rgyal mtshan cites the SDP's claim that if one makes the burnt offering one hundred thousand times, the dead will be liberated from all forms of bad rebirth.[289] He explains also that the ritualist should dress in white garments and adornments, and "having the appearance of a buddha,"[290] should recall the misfortunes of abiding in the lower realms. The officiant approaches the

279 *C*, 91. *D*, 455. *E*, 61b. *F*, 85.

280 These four burnt offering rites correspond to the common classification of the four rites (Tib. *las bzhi*) in Tibetan Buddhist ritual, though here Grags pa rgyal mtshan is addressing the four types of burnt offering rites as detailed in the SDP.

281 Tib. *zhi ba'i sbyin sreg*.

282 Tib. *rgyas pa'i sbyin sreg*.

283 Tib. *dbang gi sbyin sreg*.

284 Tib. *drag po'i sbyin sreg*.

285 *A*, 169–171. *B*, 227–29.

286 Tib. *rang rgyal*.

287 Tib. *bsreg rdzas.*

288 *C,* 93. *D*, 457. *E*, 63a. *F*, 87.

289 *brgya phrag stong du bsregs* [*Snar=sreg*] *byas* [*E=pas*] *nas* [*A, B=na*; *E=kyang*]*/ ngan song kun las rnam par thar* [*E=thar bar 'gyur*]*/*. *A*, 170. *B*, 228. Cf. Skorupski, 354.

290 Tib. *sangs rgyas gzugs can.*

tutelary deity, lights the fire, and recites mantras while imagining the offering substances as supreme ambrosia. He makes offerings to divine and worldly beings and performs the concluding activities such as blessings and recitations. Grags pa rgyal mtshan quotes the SDP to summarize the benefits of this practice: "Also having recited the name of the deceased, the ritual expert performs the burnt offering either ten million times or one hundred thousand times, and the deceased will be freed from the negative actions of one who has come to be in the great hells."[291] He then outlines briefly the enriching burnt offering, the overpowering burnt offering, and the fierce burnt offering. The first is intended for someone who has already obtained a positive rebirth by virtue of the previous practices, and it aims to enhance their experience there and extend their lifespan. The second allows the deceased to gain dominance over the deities in that realm, while the last works to destroy any malevolent forces obstructing his or her path.[292]

Purification through Cremation

Related to the fourth method, the fifth is the purification of negative actions by way of cremation (2.2.2.5). As with the burnt offering, one begins with the creation of a hearth with a maṇḍala at its center. The size of the hearth depends on the corpse's posture: if it is "elongated"[293]—lying flat—then the hearth should measure four cubits in size, while if it is "squatting"[294]—seated upright—then the hearth should be one cubit wide and a half-cubit deep,

291 */de yi ming nas brjod nas kyang / /mkhas pas 'bum phrag brgya'am* [*A*, *B=brgya 'am*] *ni/ /yang na* [*E=ni*] *brgya phrag stong snyed* [*Co=steng*] *du/ /sbyin sreg byas par gyur pa* [*A*, *B=na*] *ni/ /dmyal ba chen por gyur* [*Snar='gyur*] *pa yi* [*Snar=yin*]*/ /sdig pa de las thar bar 'gyur/. A*, 130. *B*, 181–82. *C*, 98. *D*, 462. *E*, 66b (badly faded at this point). *F*, 91–92. Cf. Skorupski, 320.

292 *C*, 98–100. *D*, 462–65. *E*, 66b–68b. *F*, 92–94.

293 Tib. *nar mo*.

294 Tib. *tsog tsog pu*.

unless no hole has been dug, in which case the structure should be around one cubit in height.[295] The maṇḍala to be drawn at the center of the hearth consists of eight sections featuring the symbols of the five buddha families, the sixteen bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, pratyekajinas, wrathful deities, and gatekeepers. When this is complete, the ritualist lays out ornaments including flowers, canopies, and torma. Next he arranges the substances for the burnt offering, places the firewood in the hearth, and engages in the recitations and visualizations required to connect himself with the tutelary deity so as to prepare himself for the cremation. He rids the space of obstructive spirits, washes the corpse with pure water, adorns it, burns incense, imagines it as the deity, and makes offerings to it. He then fixes a series of mantras written on paper onto different parts of the body, such as *oṃ sarvavid tratha* on the right eye, *oṃ śa* on the left eye, *oṃ bha* on the groin, and the root wisdom mantra of Sarvavid Vairocana at the heart center.[296] When he lights the fire, he makes offerings to the worldly and otherworldly deities, recites mantras, and imagines the flesh, blood, and bones of the departed as divine ambrosia.[297] He summons the fire god Agni to reside in the hearth[298] and envisions the burnt offering substances as ambrosia as well. More divinities enter as he requests wrathful protectors to join in, to whom he makes offerings. The whole of the maṇḍala's inhabitants are then invited into the belly of Agni, and after making further offerings and praises, the burnt offering substances together with the flesh, blood, and bones of the corpse are imagined as ambrosia and offered to the principal deity while performing recitations. The rite culminates with the summoning of Trailokyavijaya, who tramples the negative actions of the deceased. The officiant looks for signs of success in the

295 *C*, 101. *D*, 465–66. *E*, 68b. *F*, 95.

296 *C*, 104. *D*, 468–69. *E*, N/A. *F*, 97–98.

297 *C*, 107. *D*, 471. *E*, N/A. *F*, 100.

298 *C*, 106. *D*, 470–71. *E*, N/A. *F*, 99.

fire and gives offerings and praises to the various divine actors before performing the concluding rites, which include making prayers for the living and attending a banquet[299] that the ritual's sponsors host for the ritualist and his attendants.[300]

Purification through Forming a Reliquary or Deity Image from the Dead's Remains

In this sixth practice (2.2.2.6), the officiant collects the dead's ashes and bone fragments from the hearth while reciting the mantra *oṃ vajra samājaḥ jaḥ hūṃ vaṃ hoḥ* and performing finger snaps.[301] He mixes the ashes with the five products of a cow[302]—urine, dung, milk, butter, and curd—together with scented water and places the mixture in a vase, either visualizing it as the deity and making offerings, or not visualizing it as such and reciting the root wisdom mantra of Sarvavid Vairocana and blessing the mixture with water. He strikes it until it forms a dough-like substance, and then mixes in the small bone fragments[303] along with camphor and clay, blessing the resultant lump with the root wisdom mantra. He embeds the name of the deceased into a mantra—"All the negative actions of the one called [the name of the deceased] *śānti kuru svāhā*!"[304]—which he writes and inserts into the middle of the lump.[305] He works it into the

299 Tib. *ston mo*.

300 *C*, 107–8. *D*, 472–73. *E*, N/A. *F*, 101–2.

301 *C*, 109. *D*, 474. *E*, N/A. *F*, 102.

302 Skt. *pañcagavya*; Tib. *ba byung lnga*. While Grags pa rgyal mtshan uses the more common term *ba byung lnga*, the SDP uses *ba skyes lnga*. See *C*, 110. *D*, 475. *E*, N/A. *F*, 102. *A*, 133. *B*, 185. Version B of the SDP, moreover, replaces *ba skyes lnga* with *ba yi rnam lnga*. See *Ngan song sbyong rgyud* (Version B) (Sde dge par phud), 262. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud* (Version B) (Dpe bsdur ma), 363. Cf. Skorupski, 249. Rita Langer notes the Hindu custom of placing the five products into the dying person's mouth. See Rita Langer, *Buddhist Rituals of Death and Rebirth: Contemporary Sri Lankan Practice and Its Origins* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 12.

303 Tib. *rus bu*.

304 *che ge mo zhes bya ba'i sdig pa thams cad śānti kuru* [*Zhwa+ye*] *svāha*. The term *che ge mo* signals where one is to substitute the name of the deceased. C, 109. *D*, 474. *E*, N/A. *F*, 103.

305 Tib. *'bi 'bi*.

shape of a deity or a reliquary while reciting the root wisdom mantra, and blesses it with mudrās and mantras one, two, three, five or up to 108 times, and performs recitations for up to two hundred thousand times—or however many repetitions he can perform.[306] Grags pa rgyal mtshan cites the SDP to identify the signs that will appear in confirmation of the dead's liberation, including the reliquary blazing, the image smiling, the smell of incense, the appearance of light, the appearance of various kinds of deities, miraculous displays, flowers falling from the sky, and the sounds of musical instruments like conches, drums, flutes, and lutes. He also points to the SDP's claim that if no such signs appear, the ritualist should perform additional recitations hundreds of thousands of times[307] while in a state of meditative equipoise, which will finally ensure that the deceased is reborn in a divine realm.

Rites to Perform in the Absence of a Corpse

The seventh and final method anticipates cases where the body is unavailable as a ritual support (2.2.2.7). Grags pa rgyal mtshan cites three passages in the SDP that address such situations. The first describes producing a name card, making a series of reliquaries, and performing a burnt offering rite.[308] The second endorses making a name card, performing recitations, conducting a burnt offering rite, and bestowing empowerment to the card.[309] The last involves empowering the name card, image, reliquary, or an image of their primary deity, or empowering

306 *C*, 110. *D*, 475. *E,* N/A. *F*, 103.

307 Grags pa rgyal mtshan's quotation of the SDP reads */'bum gyi phrag ni brgya stong ngam/* "hundreds and hundreds of thousands, or . . ." whereas the canonical versions of the SDP read */'bum gyi phrag* [*Pe+gis*] *ni* [*G.yung−ni*] *brgyad stong ngam/* "one hundred thousand, eight hundred thousand, or . . . ." *A*, 133. *B*, 185. *C*, 110. *D*, 475. *E*, N/A. *F*, 104. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *āṣṭau lakṣasahasrāṇi*, which matches Version A. See Skorupski, 248.

308 *A*, 133. *B*, 185. *C*, 111. *D*, 476. *E*, N/A. *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, 322.

309 *A*, 142. *B*, 196. *C*, 111–12. *D*, 476–77. *E*, N/A. *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, 330.

their son, someone from their lineage, someone bearing their name, or their servant, and placing the representation of the departed in the maṇḍala seven times for seven days and nights, after which they are liberated.[310] Based on these selections, Grags pa rgyal mtshan confirms that a ritualist can, in fact, purify the negative actions of the deceased even if their body is unavailable, using a name card and so forth instead. But he anticipates a question: what are the steps for performing the rituals outlined above in such cases? He replies that many of them can be done in the same way using an effigy, and that in the case of the burnt offering rite, one can perform it either while making offerings to the maṇḍala or during the concluding activities. Finally, regarding practices like the production of small icons, if there is no body and hence no remains, given everything else one has done, there is really no issue—the rites one has performed are sufficient to purify the departed's negativities.[311]

3. The Concluding Rites

Light Rays closes with a third section that briefly outlines the concluding rites (3). They are: empowering oneself; ritually protecting oneself, the site, and one's yoga; making offerings and supplications; requesting forbearance from the buddhas and bodhisattvas and offering apologies in the event that mistakes and omissions have been made while performing the rites; offering prayers; and finally, wishing for good fortune for the donors sponsoring the rites. Such rites are common in Tibetan ritual works, and they involve a rather large variety of actors, including obstructive spirits who must be kept at bay, the buddhas and bodhisattvas who ultimately stand

310 *A*, 169–70. *B*, 228. *C*, 112. *D*, 477. *E*, N/A. *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, 354.

311 *C*, 111–12. *D*, 476–77. *E*, N/A. *F*, 105.

above the ritualist in their perfected states, and even the individuals who are financially responsible for the funeral itself.

AGENCY IN *LIGHT RAYS*

Having sketched *Light Rays*' broader contents, let us return to the primary question driving this chapter: who (or what) saves the dead? *Light Rays* follows the SDP's claim that if the proper rituals are performed, the dead can be liberated from bad rebirths, even if they have committed terrible acts across many lifetimes. This flies in the face of the oft-repeated Buddhist doctrine that each person is responsible for his or her own karma, and it implies also that certain figures possess remarkable soteriological power, such that their ritual actions can seemingly overturn the negative karma of others. So what exactly is *Light Rays* claiming regarding the efficacy of its rites and to whom does it assign agency for their success?

Theories of Agency

Before we examine *Light Rays* and related works, it will be helpful to revisit briefly our discussion of agency vis-à-vis Gell and Latour. Generally, agency refers to the ability to act and to impact others, and it can be applied to anything that exists in a causal relationship with anything else.[312] Many theories of agency are rooted in ideas of intentional action, which corresponds with Buddhist conceptions of agency that frame karma as intentional acts of body, speech, and mind. Intention is important for Gell's theory of agency as well, which describes an agent as someone who causes something to happen by acts of mind, will, or intention.[313] Gell

312 Schlossler, "Agency," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1997–. Article published Aug 10, 2015. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/agency/.

313 Gell, *Art and Agency*, 16.

argues that linking intention to agency allows us to differentiate between mere "happenings" caused by physical laws and "actions" caused by prior intentions, yet he also insists that agency should not be limited to persons. He admits that material things cannot have intentions like human beings, but observes that any instance of human agency is exercised in the material world, and thus attributions of agency rest on the detection of the effects of agency in context. He thus distinguishes between *primary agents*, that is, intentional beings, and *secondary agents*, insentient objects "through which primary agents distribute their agency in the causal milieu, and thus render their agency effective."[314] Since agency is expressed in an environment that consists of material things, the objects involved in a given action form a part of the primary agent's identity, or, as Gell puts it, their "distributed personhood," being external artifacts that connect them to social others.[315]

Latour's theory is similar, though he rejects the importance of intention. He explains: "If action is limited a priori to what 'intentional', 'meaningful' humans do, it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket, a door closer, a cat, a rug, a mug, a list, or a tag could act. . . . the questions to ask about any agent are simply the following: Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent's action or not?"[316] In Latour's view, humans and non-humans are agentively comparable in that both impact a given state of affairs. Any instance of action involves a network of agents that have intersected at a particular point in time.[317] There are animate and material actors that influence each other, such that "an 'actor' in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities

314 Ibid., 20.

315 Ibid., 21.

316 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 71.

317 Ibid., 7.

swarming toward it."[318] Material things also are agents, since they modify states of affairs and influence others.

Both Gell and Latour's theories will be helpful as we examine the various agents present in *Light Rays* and related sources, though following Latour in rejecting the relevance of intentional action would here be misguided. Linking intention to action certainly yields a number of philosophical problems, but we cannot ignore that our sources understand intentional action to be central to karmic accumulations, and that they frame sentient beings and insentient objects differently. Thus, when considering issues of agency, I have found Gell's approach to be particularly useful, though Latour's emphasis on the actor network pushes us to expand our analysis to include a broader spectrum of actors. With this in mind, let us first examine an important yet easily overlooked participant in the ritual environment: the ritual manual itself.

The Role of the Ritual Manual

As noted in the introduction, *Light Rays* is a prescriptive text. It does not recount a particular past ritual performance, but rather explains what one *should* do when attempting to perform rites based on the SDP, giving instructions on the steps that one should follow as it details various meditative practices, deities, mantras, mudrās, maṇḍalas, ritual objects, and substances. Its rhetoric is exhortative and thus designed to compel its reader to act. It achieves this in part through its verb forms, in particular its use of the future stem. Contrary to this form's designation, in classical Tibetan the future is not, strictly speaking, a temporal stem, but rather a modal stem with necessitative meaning. It expresses that an action that has not yet begun needs

318 Ibid.

to be carried out.[319] Using such language, *Light Rays* compels its reader to act in specific ways, and given our interest in the various actors engaged in the performance of these funerary rites, we should include it as a participant in this ritual milieu.

Imagine, for example, a ritualist who chooses to rely on *Light Rays* to perform a funeral. If he adheres closely to the text, then he surrenders considerable autonomy to it, looking to it for guidance throughout the ritual performance. Conversely, if he regularly deviates from the manual's instructions, then he retains a greater degree of autonomy. But here we must wonder what kind of access we have to the second case. If this were an anthropological study of contemporary performances of these rites, then we could examine the degree to which certain officiants adhere to or diverge from their ritual manuals. But here we are limited to what the text says and thus the figure it anticipates, namely, the implied ritualist at the center of its ritual world.

This ritualist conducts the funerary process from beginning to end. He performs basic ritual tasks and more complex creative acts, including the arrangement of the ritual space, which requires the production, arrangement, and use of ritual objects. Typically in Tibetan rituals the master will be joined by disciples who assist with the performance of the rites, though *Light Rays* seldom mentions such individuals, emphasizing the disciples only in the section on the bestowal of empowerment. This puts the ritualist in a pivotal position, though his actions remain scripted to a significant degree. He recites a specific mantra because the text tells him to; he performs the site ritual and the preparations because the text recommends that they be performed; he draws the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana because it is this maṇḍala that the text prescribes; and he cremates the body because the text recognizes this as a method for saving the

319 Hahn, *Textbook of Classical Literary Tibetan*, 55.

dead. Even if he has memorized the ritual manual and no longer relies on a physical copy of it, his agency is intertwined with its injunctions. Yet Grags pa rgyal mtshan cannot dictate each element of the ritual program entirely, and there are moments when he explicitly directs the reader away from the text. In some cases he calls for creativity based on authoritative sources, in others he suggests relying on what he has seen others do in order to understand how to perform more complex tasks, and in others he gives choice as to what is to be done next. As such, there are moments when the text requires greater autonomy of the ritual performer than others, and it is these cases to which we will turn next.

Painting the Deity on Cloth

Recall that in the third phase of the preliminary approach (1.3), the ritualist connects with the deity using a painting of Sarvavid Vairocana and his retinue. *Light Rays* points to the SDP's guidelines on how to produce this image, providing only the beginning and the end of the passage to be consulted.[320] The SDP explains that one should begin by painting Sarvavid Vairocana at the center of the canvas and then other enlightened beings around him: to the right is the tathāgata Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja; to the left is Śākyamuni; below Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja is Avalokiteśvara, whose color is like the moon and who holds a lotus; below Śākyamuni is Vajrapāṇi; and between these two is Bhaiṣajyaguru, who is blue and holds a myrobalan fruit in one hand and makes the gesture of giving with the other. The ritualist also draws wrathful Hayagrīva and Trailokyavijaya, between whom are Locanā, Māmakī, Pāṇḍuravāsinī, and Tārā. At the bottom of the canvas, he draws a lotus pond with *makara*,[321]

320 *C,* 16. *D*, 379. *E*, 9b. *F*, 14.

321 Tib. *chu srin*. *Makara* are a kind of water-monster common in South Asian religious iconography. For a short discussion of them with illustrations, see Robert Beer, *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols* (Chicago:

fish, turtles, white frogs, and abundant flowers, along with incense, butter lamps, perfume, garlands, food offerings, flowers, and fruit. Finally, he includes a practitioner bowing with hands folded.[322]

Next, the officiant proceeds to consecrate the painting. The SDP states that one should make offerings to the image and perform the rite of opening its eyes.[323] If signs appear, then success has come quickly, and if not, then success comes gradually. In cases where the ritualist encounters signs including the sound of laughter, drums, or bells, or the sight of a monk, a brahmin, or a girl and fruit,[324] he succeeds quickly in obtaining higher, middle, or lower achievements. He then engages in meditation in front of the image, focusing either on the single tutelary deity or the singular devotion of the yoga of the complete maṇḍala,[325] after which he concludes by performing a series of recitations as per the SDP's instructions.

What does this tell us about the ritualist's agency vis-à-vis the ritual manual? First, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's inclusion of only the beginning and end of the SDP's instructions requires that the officiant look to an additional resource—whether memorized or physical—introducing another authoritative voice into the ritual program. This underscores what is already in plain

Serindia, 2003), 77.

322 *A*, 127–28. *B*, 178–79.

323 "Then, making offerings to the drawing's deity image, the ritualist himself should open its eyes and imagine it as genuine and blessed." *de nas ri mo'i sku gzugs de mngon par mchod de/ bdag nyid kyis spyan dbye ba bya zhing bden pa la byin gyis brlabs par dmigs par bya'o/. A*, 128. *B*, 179.

324 Version A of the SDP reads: "If a monk, a male or female (*pho mo*) brahmin, and fruit are seen . . ." */dge slong bram ze pho mo dang / /'bras bu mthong na. . . . A*, 128. *B* 170. The Tibetan of Version B reads: "If a monk, a brahmin, a girl, and fruit are seen . . ." *dge slong bram ze bu mo dang / /bras bu mthong na* . . . , while Skorupski's Sanskrit reads "having seen a monk, a brahmin, a girl, and fruit" *bhikṣubrāhmaṇakanyāś ca phalāni ca dṛṣṭvā.* See *Ngan song sbyong rgyud* (Version B) (Sde dge par phud), 258. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud* (Version B) (Dpe bsdur ma), 359. Cf. Skorupski, 240–41. I am inclined to read *pho mo* in Version A as a mistaken rendering of *bu mo*, since it is certainly more typical for monks, brahmins, and girls to be auspicious in tantric Buddhist literature than "male and female brahmins," a phrase that I have not found elsewhere in the literature.

325 *C*, 16. *D*, 379. *E*, 9b. *F*, 14.

sight: *Light Rays*' contents stem from a broader network of sources that here must be consciously acknowledged and consulted, and these works, too, come to exert direct influence over the ritual performer. As for the creative agency that such a practice requires, it of course depends on who creates the painting. If the ritualist himself produces it,[326] then we have here one of the most creative moments in the entire ritual process. While he may seek to follow *Light Rays* and the SDP as closely as possible, how he depicts each deity will be unique to his abilities and inclinations, and doubtless a large gap exists between a written description of a deity and how it is rendered on canvas. On the other hand, if he commissions a painter to create the image for him—as any artistically challenged ritualist might—then we now have two human contributors at work: the detail-oriented officiant who must confirm the painting's faithfulness to the text's instructions, and the painter with the skills necessary to produce a suitably refined work of art. When the ritualist brings the image to life via consecration, he creates a powerful object worthy of veneration. This process of actualizing a sacred image in the ritual environment allows him to engage in meditations that collapse the divide between himself and the deity. It is at this moment that his and the deity's agencies merge, a topic to which we will return later.

Creating the Sand Maṇḍala and the Importance of Empirical Learning

326 There are numerous examples of lamas with outstanding artistic abilities. The famous Bka' brgyud pa polymath Si tu Paṇ chen (1699/1700–1774) exerted tremendous influence on Tibetan art through his paintings, reviving the so-called Encampment style. For a rich study of his work, see David P. Jackson, *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2009). Moreover, in the current Dalai Lama's biography of his teacher Yongs 'dzin Gling Rin po che (1903–83), we find an interesting passage particularly apropos to our concerns: "Rinpoché spent a year and a half performing the funeral duties. After the reliquary had been constructed, Rinpoché together with Kyabjé Takdrak Rinpoché assumed the responsibility of creating the murals in the mausoleum. Gyaltsen, the chief artist, would speak highly of Kyabjé Rinpoché's great knowledge of working with colors, the grids of various deities, and so on. Not only could he produce good drawings of flowers, birds, deity implements, and so on, but he loved to do woodwork and metal work." See The Dalai Lama, *The Life of My Teacher: A Biography of Kyabjé Ling Rinpoche* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2017), 111–12.

There are other similarly creative moments for the ritualist in *Light Rays.* In the section on producing the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana (2.2.2.1.1.1.2.4), Grags pa rgyal mtshan again directs the officiant to the SDP's instructions, indicating only the beginning and end of the first passage to be consulted.[327] That passage reads:

> At the four corners there are four gates
> with four archways,
> and they are adorned with a series of staircases
> along with lions and oxen.
>
> The maṇḍala is adorned with banners and tassels, a series of garlands,
> and bells and drums.
> It is adorned with vajras, jewels, lotuses,
> and symbols of the crossed vajra.
>
> With eight threads,
> it is adorned with the outer gateways.
> One should divide it into nine parts, on the basis of which
> the gates and gateways should be divided into thirds.
>
> The lines should be cast using vajra thread.
> The lines of the central circle should be cast
> like a dharma wheel,
> and being fixed at the hub, there are sixteen spokes.
>
> These have three levels,
> and the spokes themselves should be doubled.[328]

Here the SDP describes the maṇḍala's peripheral ornamentation—lions, oxen, banners, tassels, garlands, bells, drums, jewels, lotuses, and crossed vajras—and outlines the methods for establishing its basic structure. How might a ritualist know how to render such things? As with

327 *C*, 20. *D*, 383. *E*, 12b. *F*, 18.

328 */gru bzhi pa la* [*D=las*] *sgo bzhi pa/ /rta babs bzhi dang ldan pa dang / /them skas bzhi yi phreng ba dang / /seng ge ban* [*Snar, Zhol=ba*] *glang rnams kyis brgyan* [*Snar=rgyan*]*/ /dar dang lda ldi* [*G.yung, Pe=lding*] *do shal phreng / /dril* [*G.yung=dri*] *bu dang ni rnga mas brgyan* [*Snar=rgyan*]*/ /rdo rje rin chen pad+ma dang / /rgya gram pa yi phyag rgyas brgyan* [*Snar=rgyan*]*/ /srad bu* [*G.yung=phu*] *brgyad dang ldan pa dang / /phyi yi sgo khyud rnams kyis brgyan/ /dgu yi char ni bgos pa las/ /sgo dang sgo khyud sum char bya/ /rdo rje srad bus thig gdab bo/ /dbus kyi dkyil 'khor thig gdab pa/ /chos kyi 'khor lo 'dra ba la/ /lte* [*G.yung=lter*] *bar bcas shing rtsibs* [*Khu=rtsims*] *bcu drug /rim pa gsum dang ldan pa la/ /rtsibs ni nyis 'gyur nyid du bya/. A*, 123. *B*, 173. Cf. Skorupski, 311.

many tantric works, the SDP presupposes a certain level of knowledge of how such objects are to be depicted. Interestingly, Grags pa rgyal mtshan explicitly acknowledges this, following this quotation with the statement: "That also should be known from visual transmission."[329] The term "visual transmission" stands out, since it signals the importance of empirical learning in the ritual context.[330] It is of course reasonable to assume that one does not simply *read* about how to create a maṇḍala before constructing one, nor does one just *listen* to a teacher explaining the required steps. A Tibetan ritualist knows how to create a sand maṇḍala because he has *seen* others do it, often from an early age.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan references visual transmission again a little further down, noting that while the act of blessing both the maṇḍala's guidelines and colored sand is not a practice that the SDP explains, there is no contradiction if one has done so. This involves imagining the lines and colored sand as the five buddha families that have emerged from their respective seed syllables, following which one makes offerings to them.[331] He adds that while the precise colors used for this process are not explained in the SDP, they too should be understood by means of

329 *de yang mthong ba brgyud pa las shes par bya'o/. C*, 20. *D*, 383–84. *E*, 12b. *F*, 18.

330 This relates to Janet Gyatso's work on the importance of direct observation in medical traditions in early modern Tibet. There she discusses instances of artists "painting from life," such as Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (1653–1705) artists creating medical imagery based on their observations of dead bodies (55). She also notes cases of empirical observation trumping textual authority, as with Gling sman bkra shis's certainty that the heart leans left in the bodies of both sexes (261). In the references to visual transmission discussed below, we find Tibetan authors recommending that ritualists base their artistic creations on what they have seen others do, but this differs from painting from life, since in the case of the former it is the techniques and works of others that are being internalized and mimicked. Moreover, in our sources we do not find instances of visual learning trumping textual learning, but rather visual learning *aiding* in the execution of what the texts recommend. For more on empirical aspirations in Tibetan medicine, see Janet Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

331 *tshon gyis bri ba ni spyir rgyud 'di nas thig tshon gnyis ka la byin gyis brlab pa ni ma bshad/ byas kyang 'gal ba* [*E+ni*] *med pas* [*E+/*] *byed na/ [E−/*] *rigs lnga'i* [*E=lnga yi*] *sa bon las byung ba'i* [*E=pa'i*] *rigs lngar bskyed la/ ci 'byor bas* [*E=pas*] *mchod de/. C*, 21. *D*, 384. *E*, 13a. *F*, 19.

visual transmission.[332] Moreover, a third reference to visual transmission occurs in the section on cremation. When describing the process by which one creates a maṇḍala in the crematory hearth, Grags pa rgyal mtshan writes, "In the afternoon, you should set the lines in accordance with visual transmission."[333] To be noted is that he also uses this term twice in his much shorter work on SDP-oriented rites, *Light Rays of the Requisites*, and that in both cases it is with reference to the construction of a maṇḍala.[334]

Notably, Go rams pa follows Grags pa rgyal mtshan's emphasis on empirical learning in his longest work on the rites of the SDP, *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others.* He mentions visual transmission while discussing the creation of a maṇḍala in the hearth for the pacifying burnt offering rite,[335] while discussing how one produces a maṇḍala in the hearth that is used for cremation,[336] and again while addressing how to set down the lines for the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana.[337] Notice that in all of these cases, visual transmission is referenced in connection with the creation of a maṇḍala, which makes sense given the technical requirements of a maṇḍala are not easily explained without recourse to visual experience.

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332 *ji ltar bri ba'i kha dog/ rgyud nas bshad pa med kyang / mthong ba brgyud pas shes so. C*, 21. *D*, 384. *E*, 13a. *F*, 19.

333 *phyi dro'i dus su mthong ba brgyud pa bzhin thig gdab/. C*, 101. *D*, 465. *E*, 68b. *F*, 95. *D* notes that the Zhwa lu manuscript adds more to this passage, "In the afternoon, at that site, you should carefully annoint the corpse with fragrant water and the five products of a cow, and you set the lines in accordance with visual transmission." *phyi dro'i dus su* [*Zhwa+gnas der dri zhim po'i chu dang ba byung lngas legs par byug la*] *mthong ba brgyud pa bzhin thig gdab/.*

334 *Q*, 667–68. *R*, 438.

335 "That should be understood by means of visual transmission." *de ni mthong ba brgyud pas shes so/*. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 326. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (modern edition), 373.

336 "In the afternoon, you should set the lines in accordance with visual transmission." *phyi dro'i dus su mthong ba brgyud pa bzhin thig gdab/*. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 336. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (modern edition), 385.

337 "You should set the gates alone according to visual transmission." *sgo rkyang mthong ba brgyud bzhin gdab/.* Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 358. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (modern edition), 409–10.

Moreover, the fact that "transmission" is indicated rather than, say, "study," is also noteworthy, since it underscores the importance of the guru-disciple relationship when training in tantric ritual. Bo dong Paṇ chen makes this clear when he mentions visual transmission in his *Clarifying the Meaning of the Tantra: The Rituals of the Lord Sarvavid*, a work on the rites of the SDP that was somehow overlooked in the creation of both versions of his collected works, but which I located at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India, in 2016. At the end of the text, we find the following passage:

> By trusting greatly in this method of ritual activity, I have produced a pure system after having encountered many incorrect examples and faulty explanations in the trusted manuals. In this case, for the sake of convenience, I have written primarily about the recitations alone. The methods of forming the mudrās and the practices of performing the rituals should be understood based on visual transmission, namely, the practices of the guru. If you want to understand the significance of the visualizations, you should draw on the commentarial treatises of the accomplished scholars of India and Tibet and from the elixir of the holy guru's speech.[338]

Here Bo dong Paṇ chen criticizes some of the theretofore available materials on performing the SDP's rites, declaring that he has produced a pure system in response to flawed precedent. Since he has chosen to focus only on the recitations to be performed in this ritual context, he encourages his readers to turn to visual transmission in order to understand properly the SDP's mudrās and rituals. Most striking for our purposes is that unlike Grags pa rgyal mtshan and Go rams pa, Bo dong Paṇ chen explicitly links visual transmission with "the practices of the guru." He then points to a set of unnamed Indian and Tibetan commentaries for better understanding

338 *tshul 'di ha cang 'phrin las ches pas dpe rgyun ma dag pa dang tshig lhad mang du snang ba rnams khung btsun gyi yig cha la btugs ste dag pa'i lugs su byas zhing / gnas skabs su khyer bde ba'i phyir ngag 'don kho na gtso bor byas pa yin la/ phyag rgya 'ching tshul dang / cho ga gtong ba'i lag len rnams bla ma'i phyag bzhes mthong ba brgyud las shes shing / dmigs pa'i go don rnams shes par 'dod na rgya bod kyi mkhas grub rnams kyi bstan bcos 'grel bshad rnams dang bla ma dam pa'i zhal gyi bdud rtsi las blang par bya'o/*. Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal, *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga rgyud don gsal ba* (Delhi: Ngawang Topgyal, 1984), 99–100.

the internal experiential dimensions of these practices. To be noted also is that Bu ston references visual transmission in his substantial work on SDP-oriented rites *Severing the Stream of Defilements of the Ritual Activities of the Maṇḍalas that Completely Purify All Bad Rebirths.* In his concluding remarks on these rituals, he comments, "You should carefully listen to and comprehend the tantra including the meaning and reasons behind the meditations of those rituals and so forth, and you should understand the fine details of the practices from visual transmission."[339] Notice that here Bu ston recommends visual transmission for understanding the "fine details of the practices" of the various rituals to be performed, and does not focus specifically on maṇḍala creation when citing the importance of empirical learning.

In sum, the creation of complex ritual objects in *Light Rays* requires greater autonomy of the ritualist. In the case of the painting, Grags pa rgyal mtshan cites the SDP without including the full passage, requiring the reader to look to a second source text. If the officiant himself creates the painting, then his unique creative abilities manifest in the ritual object, and if it is created by someone else, then at a minimum the officiant must assess the painting's fidelity to the SDP's guidelines before consecrating and performing the meditative practices that rely on it. In either scenario, the painting is a unique ritual object, not least because the SDP's verses provide only basic guidance on how it is to appear; the style of the painting is up to the artist who creates it. In the case of the maṇḍala, Grags pa rgyal mtshan again only presents a portion of the quotation to be consulted, though it is clear that while the fine details matter a great deal,

339 *cho ga de rnams kyi bsgom don dang rgyu mtshan la sogs rgyas par rgyud mnyan la khong du chud par bya zhing / lag len gyi zhib cha rnams ni mthong ba brgyud pa las shes par bya'o/.* Bu ston Rin chen grub, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga las kyi sgrib pa rgyun gcod*, in *Gsung 'bum: Rin chen grub* (Zhol par khang), 13: 671 –769 (Lha sa: Zhol par khang, 2000), 768.

they are difficult to articulate in writing, prompting him to recommend reliance on empirical learning in order to understand how the maṇḍala should be made.

Choice in the Ritual Program

While many aspects of *Light Rays*' ritual program are predetermined, there are cases where it provides a range of options to the ritualist.[340] In some instances, there are separate instructions for performing a rite either briefly or extensively, and there are also different methods of purification from which one can choose. In the first case, notice in the appendix that under the section on purifying negative actions by bestowing empowerment, Grags pa rgyal mtshan gives instructions for a condensed (2.2.2.1.1.1.1) and a detailed (2.2.2.1.1.1.2) version of what the ritual specialist should do. His instructions for the condensed version are as follows:

> First, if you are not able to draw a maṇḍala, the section on the burnt offering in the Amitāyus section of the *Tantra* states:
>
> > One should set down a suitable casting or painting
> > of the principal deity together with Vajradhara.
>
> Therefore, you should make offerings and arrange torma in abundance in front of a painting or casting. In front of that, on a platform one cubit in height where the support of purifying negative actions—the body and so forth—is set, other ornamentation is drawn beautifully on a cloth cover and so forth on a blue eight-

340 Yael Bentor notes the inclusion and exclusion of choice in certain Tibetan ritual manuals. She explains that the consecration manual composed by Khri byang Blo bzang ye shes bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (1901–81), the Junior Tutor of H. H. the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, "eliminates any choice on the part of the performers," contrasting it with one of Khri byang Rin po che's main sources, a manual written by the First (or Fourth, depending on whom is deemed the actual First) Paṇchen Lama Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1570–1662). This earlier manual contains various alternatives for the performer, being a "general manual" that can used with various tutelary deities belonging to the different classes of Buddhist tantra. It can be performed in an extensive, average, or abbreviated manner, and in places where the Paṇchen Lama's manual instructs one to perform a rite according to the system connected with their tutelary deity, Khri byang Rin po che indicates exactly what is to be done by including more detail in accordance with one of the standard Dge lugs pa manuals. As Bentor writes, "this deprives the ritual officiants of most of the responsibility for the performance and closes the door to certain possible innovations," though she adds that "it provides us with more detailed information on the complete performance." See Yael Bentor, *Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 68.

> spoked wheel on top of a white eight-petaled lotus. Or if that has not been produced, then a simple maṇḍala is also suitable. The support is set on top of that, and as with personal approach, having completed the yoga of the single tutelary deity, the gnosis-being[341] is invited either extensively or briefly to the painting on cloth and so forth, and you should make offerings either extensively or briefly with whatever you possess and give torma. As for the self-initiation that will be explained below, taking the commitments of the five buddha families is abbreviated, and the activities to be performed for the students, namely, from purifying negative actions through bestowing empowerment up to and including the production of small icons, are all suitable here. The abbreviated version of what the expert should do in particular has been taught.[342]

Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides the officiant with a considerable amount of choice. First, he anticipates cases in which one will not be able to produce a proper maṇḍala, a scenario not terribly difficult to imagine: in some circumstances there may be insufficient materials to produce a complete maṇḍala, or there may be a lack of time. Grags pa rgyal mtshan explains that in the absence of a proper maṇḍala, a painting or casting of the deity is sufficient, before which one lays offerings and torma. Next, he places the ritual support—the body of the deceased or an effigy—on a platform one cubit in height. Ideally this includes an ornate cloth cover that rests on a circular design consisting of an eight-spoked wheel set on top of an eight-petaled lotus. Here again Grags pa rgyal mtshan anticipates practical limitations: if the ritualist cannot create such an ornate setup, then simply a maṇḍala design will suffice. He then performs

341 Skt. *jñānasattva*; Tib. *ye shes sems dpa'/ye shes pa*.

342 *dang po ni/* [*E−/*] *dkyil 'khor bri bar ma nus na/* [*E−/*] *tshe dpag med kyi sbyin sreg gi skabs nas/ gtso bo* [*E=mo*] *ri mo lugs ma ru* [*A*, *B=ma'ang rung*]*/ /rdo rje can dang lhan cig bzhag* [*A*, *B=gzhag*]*/ces 'byung bas* [*E=pas*]*/ bris sku'am* [*E=sku 'am*]*/* [*E−/*] *lugs* [*Li*, *Co=lug*] *ma'i drung du/* [*E−/*] *mchod pa dang /* [*E−/*] *gtor ma rgyas par bshams la/ de'i drung du sdig pa sbyang ba'i* [*E=pas*] *rten ro la sogs pa 'jog pa'i* [*E=bzhag pa'i*] *stegs bu khru gang ba* [*E=pa*] *la/ padma* [*E=pad ma*] *'dab brgyad dkar po'i steng du 'khor lo rtsibs brgyad sngon po la gong ras la sogs pa gzhan ci mdzes su bris pa'am/ de ma grub na maṇḍala tsam yang rung ste/* [*E−/*] *de'i steng du rten bzhag la/ bdag bsnyen pa bzhin/* [*E−/*] *dpa' bo gcig* [*E=cig*] *pa'i rnal 'byor rdzogs nas/ ras bris* [*E=ris*] *la sogs pa la ye shes sems dpa' rgyas bsdus gang rung gis* [*E−gis*] *spyan drangs pa de* [*E−de*] *la/* [*E+mchod pa*] *rgyas bsdus ci 'byor pas mchod la/* [*E−/*] *gtor ma btang* [*E=gtang*] *ste/ 'og nas 'chad par 'gyur ba'i bdag 'jug ni/* [*E−/*] *rigs lnga'i sdom pa blangs* [*E=blang*] *pa la bsdus la/ slob ma la bya ba dbang bskur bas sdig pa sbyang ba* [*E=pa*] *nas bzung ste/ sā tstsha'i* [*E=tsha tsha'i*] *bar* [*E+'dir*] *thams cad 'dir* [*E−'dir*] *bya bar nus so/ /slob dpon gyi khyad par du bya ba* [*Zhwa, E−slob dpon gyi khyad par du bya ba*] *bsdus pa bstan zin to/*. *A*, 170. *B*, 229. *C*, 18–19. *D*, 381–82. *E*, 11a–11b. *F*, 16–17. Cf. Skorupski, 354.

the yoga of the single tutelary deity and invites the gnosis-being to the cloth drawing or statue in order to draw the deity's presence into the ritual environment. Notice that the invitation of the gnosis-being can be performed either extensive or briefly, and that the same applies for the process of making offerings to the object qua deity. Such cases of choice not only anticipate restrictions of time and resources, they also grant the ritualist freedom to choose what is most appropriate in a given ritual performance. Thus, even the most faithful reader of *Light Rays* is granted greater autonomy in these cases.

Conversely, the extensive version of the practice (2.2.2.1.1.1.2) is, true to its designation, highly elaborate. As the outline in the appendix reveals, this alternative requires that the ritualist perform a wide range of practices including the preliminary approach, the place ritual, the preparations, the creation of the sand maṇḍala and the placement of the deity at its center, the placement of the support, the laying out of offerings, ritual vases, and torma, the performance of the personal yoga, realizing the deity, and the practice of self-initiation, which is necessary before introducing students into the maṇḍala and bestowing empowerment. Critical differences between the brief and extensive versions are the presence or absence of the sand maṇḍala and the extent to which one engages in the overlapping practices that Grags pa rgyal mtshan outlines in the above-quoted passage.

Another means by which *Light Rays* affords the reader greater autonomy is by outlining a host of different methods for purifying the negative actions of the departed, not all of which must be performed together. Recall that the third method of purification (2.2.2.3) involves mixing the ashes of the deceased with white mustard seed and sand, calling their name, reciting mantras, and then scattering the mixture into a river that runs into the ocean. Meanwhile, the

sixth method (2.2.2.6) involves mixing the ashes with the five products of a cow together with scented water and placing the mixture in a vase, visualizing it as the deity and making offerings, or not visualizing it as such and reciting the root wisdom mantra of Sarvavid Vairocana and blessing it with water. After working it into a dough-like substance, the officiant mixes in the small bone fragments that remain from the cremation along with camphor and clay, blessing it with the root wisdom mantra. He incorporates the name of the deceased into a mantra, which he writes and inserts into the middle of the lump, before finally shaping it into either the form of a deity or a reliquary while reciting the root wisdom mantra, and blessing it with mudrās and mantras for as long as he deems appropriate. While there are elements of choice built into the sixth method itself—choosing whether to shape the lump into a deity or a reliquary and choosing how many recitations to perform—the officiant can decide to perform the third method or the sixth and not both, since the ingredients that are to be mixed with the ashes differ in these two practices; if he chooses to use all of the ashes for either of these practices, then he cannot then perform the other. The choice is ultimately his depending on the materials he has available to him and his geographical surroundings (e.g. is he proximate to a river or not?).

Does Grags pa rgyal mtshan privilege some methods of purification over others? To some degree, yes: it is surely no accident that he examines purification through empowerment (2.2.2.1) first and gives far more attention to it than the others, probably on account of its complexity and importance as a foundational practice for the others. In contrast, he describes purifying negative actions by means of recitations (2.2.2.2) only very briefly, though this may simply be because recitations are far less complicated than, say, a burnt offering rite (2.2.2.4). He gives greater attention to methods three through seven (2.2.2.3–2.2.2.7), covering each with

roughly the same level of detail. Yet as with the second, the rituals to perform in cases where the body is absent (2.2.2.8) receive reduced treatment, perhaps because many of the same rites described earlier can be performed with an effigy. Apart from the obvious attention granted to the first, we cannot easily discern whether some of these other methods are construed as more efficacious than the others; the necroliberative outcome is essentially the same. This obviously creates a greater degree of choice for the reader of *Light Rays*, letting him decide which practices to pursue.

What do Grags pa rgyal mtshan's three shorter works on funerary rites have to say about these methods? *Light Rays of the Requisites* discusses the site ritual, the preparations, the creation of Sarvavid Vairocana's maṇḍala, its associated meditative practices, and purification through empowerment. It then details purification through creating a reliquary from the deceased's remains (cf. 2.2.2.6), identifying the same six steps as *Light Rays:* the bone ritual, the clay ritual, creating a reliquary using the remains of the deceased, consecrating the reliquary, the rituals to perform if signs of success are not witnessed, and the benefits of that practice.[343] It also very briefly discusses what to do when the body is unavailable.[344] By contrast, *Requisites for the Benefit of Others*, which was written after *Light Rays of the Requisites*,[345] focuses on the protective practices of personal yoga (cf. 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.7)[346] before describing purification through the repelling of obstructive forces (cf. 2.2.2.3)—a method not detailed in *Light Rays of the Requisites*—together with the bestowal of empowerment.[347] It also explains in considerable

343 *Q*, 693–95. *R*, 456–57.

344 *Q*, 695–96. *R*, 457.

345 We know this because the former cites the latter twice by name. See *G*, 133; 147. *H*, 496; 510. *I*, 125; 137.

346 *G*, 120–25. *H*, 483–88. *I*, 112–17.

347 *G*, 133–147. *H*, 496–510. *I*, 125–137.

detail purification through the cremation of the body (cf. 2.2.2.5), listing the same eight steps that *Light Rays* features, namely, making the hearth, spreading the ornaments, laying out the burnt offering substances, stacking the firewood, performing the personal yoga, preparing the body, lighting the fire and making offerings while inviting worldly and otherworldly deities, and the concluding rites.[348]

Conversely, *A Drop of Elixir for the Benefit of Others*, a related work that draws primarily on the *Vajrapañjara Tantra* but also on the SDP, outlines three methods for purifying the negative actions of the deceased: purification through empowerment, purification through cremation, and purification through the creation of a reliquary. Since the *Vajrapañjara* belongs to the Hevajra cycle of Buddhist tantra and thus the Highest Yogatantra class, we find some intriguing differences in its procedures despite these obvious methodological parallels. In the case of cremation, Grags pa rgyal mtshan describes two distinct approaches: purification in which the corpse is the recipient of offerings, and purification in which the corpse is the provider.[349] The first is similar to what we find in *Light Rays*. The corpse receives empowerment before being placed in the hearth and visualized as the deity, after which burnt offering substances are offered to it.[350] Grags pa rgyal mtshan elaborates on the characteristics of the hearth before explaining that the ritualist must perform the protective personal yoga prior to lighting the fire and visualizing the worldly form of Agni,[351] the god of fire, as the divine force

348 *G*, 147–155. *H*, 510–17. *I*, 137–144.

349 "Here, since we are practicing the system of the Lord of Yogins (i.e. Virūpa), the way of purification is twofold: purification as if the corpse is the recipient of offerings, and purification as if the corpse is the benefactor." *'dir rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug gi bzhed pas ni ro sbyang lugs gnyis yin te/ ro mchod gnas kyi tshul du sbyang ba dang / ro yon bdag gi tshul du sbyang ba'o/. S*, 461. *T*, 575. *U*, 439.

350 Ibid.

351 Tib. *'jig rten pa'i me lha*.

driving the cremation. Finally, the officiant engages in a form of deity yoga on behalf of the deceased, visualizing the corpse as the commitment-being[352] of the nine deities of the Hevajra maṇḍala and then summoning the gnosis-being to it.

The second approach is a little different from what we have seen so far. This method is to be used when the deceased did not receive empowerment while they were alive, or they had received empowerment but failed in their commitments, or were evil.[353] The basics of the practice are the same, except that when the officiant is making offerings, he does so to the otherworldly form of Agni,[354] and he does not visualize the corpse as the deity but instead visualizes a complete four-part maṇḍala wheel.[355] He makes offerings and praises and presents the burnt offering substances, following which he grants the corpse as a burnt offering as well.[356] Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes that the ritualist can choose to offer different parts of the corpse as individual entities or can offer the whole corpse as a general offering. In the first case, he identifies the recipient or purpose of each body part:

> In the first case, you say, "The head, brains, heart, and organs should be offered to Heruka and his consort!" and you offer them. In the same way, you should apply the words "You should offer" to all of these: the lungs and intestines to Gaurī; the liver, spleen, and gall bladder to Caurī; the urine, bladder, and left

352 Skt. *samayasattva*; Tib. *dam tshig sems dpa'/dam tshig pa*. Sam van Schaik explains that the term *samaya* in tantric literature has the sense of "conjunction" or "meeting place." The commitment-being is where gnosis (Tib. *ye shes*; Skt. *jñāna*) becomes embodied. This can be a physical representation of a deity, a visualization, or a ritual substance, and thus in empowerment and sādhana practice, the gnosis-being becomes embodied in the commitment-being, the representation or visualized form of the deity. This union is termed the commitment mudrā (Skt. *samayamudrā*; Tib. *dam tshig gi phyag rgya*). See Sam van Schaik, "The Limits of Transgression: The Samaya Vows of Mahāyoga" in *Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang: Rites and Teachings for this Life and Beyond*, eds. Matthew T. Kapstein and Sam van Schaik (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 62.

353 Tib. *sdig pa can*.

354 Tib. *'jig rten las 'das pa'i me lha*.

355 *'jig rten las 'das pa'i me lha mchod pa'i skabs su ro lhar mi bskyed par dkyil 'khor gyi tsa kra yan lag bzhi rdzogs su bskyed/. S*, 464. *T*, 578. *U*, 442.

356 *bsreg rdzas rnams 'phul ba'i rjes la ro de yang mchod rdzas su phul te/*. Ibid.

> kidney with its veins and nerves to Vetālī; the anus, stomach, and colon to Ghasmarī; the muscle to Pukkasī; the blood and right kidney with its veins and nerves to Śavarī; the fluids, spinal cord and the central veins and nerves to Caṇḍalī; the bone marrow and fat to Ḍoṃbinī; the skin and limbs of enlightenment for the canopy; the eight marrows for the music of flutes and so forth. The other bones are offered to the Four Truths—put them in the kindling and firewood. The remaining parts of the corpse, including the head hair, body hair, and nails, are used to adorn the celestial palace and become fine offerings.[357]

This method diverges from the practices we have seen so far in that a person with spiritual and/or moral failings is handled differently in the crematory process. They are not visualized as a deity but instead become a burnt offering substance *for* a host of divine entities. The grotesque elements of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's description mark a significant departure from the Yogatantra practices of the SDP, which are comparatively tame. Drawing on Highest yogatantric materials, Grags pa rgyal mtshan vividly discusses the various parts of the corpse and indeed grounds the required visualization practices in such details. He then does the same in the second case where the ritualist offers the body of a morally degenerate individual as a general offering to the deities. He details this as follows:

> Alternatively, the general offerings: the urine is for washing the feet, sprinkling, and drinking. The blood is for offering water. The feces is for incense. The entrails and organs are for flowers. The brains and spinal cord are for ointment. The fat is for lamps. The muscle and bone marrow are for food. The marrow and bones are for flutes, musical instruments, and ornaments. The head hair and body hair are used to adorn the celestial palace. The collections of those have the nature of the five elements—one should offer them as the ritual substances of the sugatas.[358]

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357 *dang po ltar na mgo bo dang klad pa dang snying dang dbang po rnams ni he ru ka yab yum la dbul bar bya'o zhes brjod la dbul lo/ /de bzhin du dbul bar bgyi'o zhes pa'i tshig kun la sbyar la/ glo ba dang rgyu ma ni gau rī la'o/ /mchin pa dang mtsher pa dang mkhris pa ni tsau rī la'o/ /dri chu dang lgang pa dang g.yon phyogs kyi mkhal ma dang rtsa dang chu rgyus ni be tā lī la'o/ /gzhang dang grod pa dang gnye ma ni ghasma rī la'o/ /sha ni pukka sī la'o/* [*Zhwa−sha ni pukka sī la'o/*] *khrag dang g.yas kyi mkhal ma dang rtsa dang chu rgyus ni sha ba rī la'o/ khu ba dang gzhungs pa dang / dbus kyi rtsa dang chu rgyus ni tsaṇḍālī la'o/ /rkang mar dang tshil ni ḍoṃ bi nī la'o/ /pags pa byang chub kyi yan lag ni bla res* [*T=ris*] *so/ /rkang brgyad gling bu la sogs pa'i rol mo'o/ /rus pa gzhan rnams bden pa bzhi ste/ yam shing dang bud shing du'o/ /lhag ma skra dang spu dang sen mo la sogs pa rnams gzhal yas khang gi rgyan dang spyan gzigs su'o/. S*, 464. *T*, 578–79. *U*, 442.

In both the first case and second cases, we witness a departure from SDP-oriented rites given the transgressive nature of these visualization practices. The focus on the more repulsive substances in the body and their identification with sacred offering substances is common among works belonging to the Highest Yogatantra class, but atypical of works classified as Yogatantra. However, as mentioned, Grags pa rgyal mtshan quotes from both the *Vajrapañjara* and the SDP in this short funerary work, creating an interesting blend of the two tantric traditions in the funerary context.

Overall, *A Drop of Elixir for the Benefit of Others* details comparable strategies for liberating the dead, though in some cases the visualizations are noticeably more transgressive. Here too there is the inclusion of choice, which grants the practitioner a greater degree of autonomy. Yet by comparison, *Light Rays* provides a more comprehensive account of possible necroliberative practices and thus a wider range of options, such that any practitioner relying on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's three shorter works would be more limited in what he can do.

A Note on Repetition

Before we move on from the function of the ritual manual in the hands of the ritual expert, let us consider briefly one striking feature of the SDP's instructions on funerary practices. In certain instances, very large numbers of mantra repetitions are required. When describing the reliquary ritual, for instance, the SDP avers that the ritualist should perform it either one hundred thousand times or up to ten million times in order to exhaust the negative actions of an evil

358 *yang na spyir dbul te/ dri chu ni zhabs bsil dang 'thor thung du'o/ khrag ni mchod yon du'o/ /dri chen ni spos su'o/ /nang khrol dang dbang po rnams ni me tog tu'o/ /klad pa dang gzhungs pa ni byug par ro/ /tshil chen ni snang bar ro/ /sha dang rkang mar ni zhal zas su'o/ /rkang dang rus pa ni gling bu dang rol mo dang rgyan du bya'o/ /skra dang ba spu ni gzhal yas khang gi rgyan du'o/ /de dag 'dus pa rnams ni 'byung ba lnga'i rang bzhin te/ bde bar gshegs pa rnams kyi yo byad du dbul bar bgyi'o/*. *S*, 464–65. *T*, 579. *U*, 442–43.

individual, after which he or she will "certainly be freed from hell."[359] When addressing the power of mantric recitations, moreover, it states:

> Having called out also the name of the deceased,
> one should recite the mantra as stated.
> And if one recites it one hundred million[360] times,
> one hundred thousand[361] times,
> or up to ten million[362] times,
> the deceased certainly will be born in the god realm.[363]

This is followed by yet another passage describing the number of burnt offering rites required to achieve the same result. Again calling out the name of the deceased, if the ritualist performs the burnt offering 100,000 times or 10,000,000 times, evil beings suffering in great hells will be freed.[364] In each of these cases, the SDP sets a rather high bar for the aspiring necroliberator, demanding a vast number of repetitions. Does the SDP necessarily require this? How do Grags pa rgyal mtshan and others interpret such demands?

First, Kāmadhenu's aforementioned canonical commentary briefly unpacks the SDP's claims concerning the three options of total recitations necessary to save the dead, explaining that these reflect what is necessary to save individuals who remain hindered by large, average,

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359 *de ltar byas na* [*Snar=nas*] *nges par ni/ dmyal ba las ni grol bar 'gyur/*. *A*, 130. *B*, 181. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *evaṃ kṛte te 'vaśyaṃ narakād muktā bhavanti //*. Skorupski, 244.

360 Tib. *'bum phrag stong*.

361 Tib. *brgya phrag stong*.

362 Tib. *bye ba*.

363 *de yi* [*G.yung*, *Pe=de nas*; *E*, *Li*, *Co=de'i*] *ming nas* [*Snar=yang*] *brjod nas ni/ /ji ltar gsungs pa'i sngags bzlas shing / /'bum phrag stong ngam yang na ni/ /brgya phrag stong du tshang ba* [*E=pa*] *dang / /bye ba snyed* [*G.yung*, *Pe*, *Snar*, *Co=stong*; *Li=snyod*] *du rab bzlas na/ /lha yi* [*E=lha'i*] *gnas su nges par skye/*. *A*, 130. *B,* 181. *C*, 83. *D*, 447. *E*, 56a. *F*, 78. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *tannāma ca vidarbhya yathoktamantraṃ sahasraṃ japet // kadācit śatasahasram api pūrayed yāvat koṭim api pūrayet // devanikāyeṣūtpadyante //*. See Skorupski, 244. Notice that the first number differs in Skorupski's Sanskrit: *sahasra* means "one thousand" as opposed to "one hundred million" as we find in Version A of the Tibetan and in *Light Rays*. Meanwhile, *śatasahasra* matches the Tibetan *brgya phrag stong*—both signifying "one hundred thousand"—while *koṭi* can mean "ten million" and thus also matches *bye ba* in Version A and *Light Rays*.

364 *A*, 130. *B*, 181–82. *C*, 98. *D*, 462. *E*, 66b. *F*, 91–92.

or small amounts of negative action.[365] He gives no hint that these numbers are to be taken loosely or figuratively, expanding only on the SDP's logic for including them. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, moreover, rather flatly states that the ritualist "should recite all the mantras that appear in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* and primarily the root wisdom mantra,"[366] thus unpacking only *which* mantras are to be recited rather than saying anything more about the number of recitations that are required. Noticeably absent are the shortcuts given elsewhere that allow one to abbreviate the practice if time is limited. Moreover, Tsong kha pa's aforementioned disciple 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1374–1434) reads these lines as being included in the instructions on the burnt offering rite that follow them in the SDP, apparently disagreeing with Grags pa rgyal mtshan's reading that they reflect a stand-alone practice. After quoting the verses in full, he writes: "You should recite the name of the deceased after the mantra together with additional verses, and if you have performed the ritual that was explained in the burnt offering section together with the accomplished samādhi, it is taught that the deceased is liberated from bad rebirths."[367] Again we find no mention of the required number of recitations, but instead instructions on the practices that accompany them.

It would seem, then, that interpreters take these requirements at face value, implying that executing on them requires efforts well beyond the initial funeral itself, prompting one to perform recitations or burnt offerings for months or even years depending on the desired target

365 *bzlas pa'i grangs mi 'dra ba gsum ba stan pa ni/ shi ba de'i sdig pa che ba dang/ bar ma dang / chung ba'i dbang du byas pa'o/.* See Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Sde dge), 618. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1653.

366 *rgyud nas 'byung ba'i sngags thams cad dang / gtso bor rtsa ba'i rig pa bzla bar bya'o/. C*, 84. *D*, 448. *E*, 56b. *F*, 78.

367 *sngags kyi gsham du tshe 'das kyi ming spel tshig dang bcas pa bzla zhing / sbyin sreg tu bshad pa'i las grub pa'i ting nge 'dzin dang ldan pas byas na ngan 'gro las grol bar bstan no.* 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig rnam bshad*, 322.

number. There are also other avenues left unspoken, such as having large groups of practitioners recite these mantras simultaneously so as to more quickly reach the target number. There are likewise other rhetorical possibilities: perhaps these large numbers simply communicate the apparent difficulty of saving the dead through recitation practices, or they are designed to habituate ritualists to a way of life that involves consistent, long-term engagement. We cannot know what exactly was expected in these cases, but clearly our sources were comfortable with setting a very high bar for the completion of necroliberative feats.

Merging with Deities and Its Implications for Ritual Agency

Mudrā, Mantra, and Meditation

So far we have considered the agency of the ritualist vis-à-vis the ritual manual itself. If committed to the text in hand, the officiant's actions are largely scripted, which limits (but does not eliminate) his autonomy and creativity as a ritual performer. He stands at the center of the ritual procedures that *Light Rays* outlines, but by no means liberates the dead on his own. While such capabilities may be attributed to the Buddha in the SDP, *Light Rays* does not expect miracles from its reader, addressing instead someone sufficiently trained in Tibetan Buddhist tantric practice to perform its rites. So who or what else facilitates the dead's rescue?

Throughout *Light Rays*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan describes practices in which the identity of the ritualist morphs and merges with that of the deity. From an emic perspective, such cases involve not an ordinary person but rather one who has temporarily become a buddha or bodhisattva.[368] In order to better understand how the ritualist executes these shifts in identity, let

368 For a clear and insightful summary of this form of practice and its consequences for ritual agency, see Gentry, *Power Objects*, 305–9.

us first look to the work of Minoru Kiyota[369] and John Strong[370] to sketch a basic framework. Meeting buddhas and bodhisattvas in a ritual context involves three kinds of practices[371]: practices of the body centering on mudrā or ritual hand gestures, practices of speech centering on mantra or special language, and practices of mind centering on meditation. These correspond to the three secrets[372] of the buddhas, that is, their enlightened Body, Speech, and Mind. In a ritual setting, the tantric practitioner engages in all three simultaneously, which allows him to raise himself to the level of, and ultimately merge with, the deity and his or her enlightened qualities. Following Kiyota's and Strong's presentations,[373] this process is illustrated in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1: MEETING THE DEITY

TRIPLE ACTION OF THE MEDITATOR	RITUAL MEETING	TRIPLE SECRETS OF BUDDHAS
body >>>>>>>>>>	mudrā	<<<<<<<<<< Body
speech >>>>>>>>>>	mantra	<<<<<<<<<< Speech
mind >>>>>>>>>>	meditation	<<<<<<<<<< Mind

While the premise of visualizing oneself as a buddha (and imagining the union to be actual) is relatively easy to grasp, the function of mantra and mudrā requires some additional unpacking. In her excellent study of Indian and Tibetan theories on the nature of a buddha, Orna Almogi draws our attention to a particularly apposite passage on the different functions of mantra

369 Minoru Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1978), 69–70.

370 John Strong, *Buddhisms: An Introduction* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 247–53.

371 Skt. *trikarma*; Tib. *las gsum*.

372 Skt. *triguhya*; Tib. *gsang ba gsum*.

373 Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism*, 70. Strong, *Buddhisms*, 251.

penned by the aforementioned Tibetan savant Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, an author whom Grags pa rgyal mtshan mentions explicitly in his *General Overview*.[374] In his *Letter Clarifying the General Categories of Tantra*, Rong zom pa explains that the three types of mantras[375] share the properties of being (1) the essence of common and uncommon accomplishments, (2) the causes of these accomplishments, (3) a means of exhorting deities to action, and (4) expressions of truth.[376] He elaborates on the first by commenting, "Since mantras themselves are explained as being the deities to be attained and realized, they join in the dharmakāya and the buddha's salvific activities, and therefore are the essence of accomplishments."[377] Here Rong zom pa equates mantras with the deities themselves, the ultimate reality they reflect, and their liberating acts.[378] Interestingly, he singles out the Yogatantra tradition[379] as claiming that mantras *are*

374 To be noted is that the Sde dge block print (*J*) reads "Rong gsum chos bzang," the cursive (*L*) reads "Rong sum chos bzang," and the Dpe bsdur ma (*K*) and 2015 editions (*M*) read "Rong zom chos bzang," clearly taking some liberties to correct the Sde dge. *J*, 425. *K*, 2. *L*, 2a. *M*, 413.

375 Rong zom pa divides the general category of mantra (*sngags*) into three: secret mantra (*guhyamantra*; *gsang sngags*), knowledge mantra (*vidyā*; *rig sngags*), and *dhāraṇī* (*gzungs sngags*). Almogi notes that these three and other related terms like essence mantras (*hṛdaya*; *snying po*) and seed syllable (*bīja*; *sa bon*) are often used interchangeably to denote the same thing. See Orna Almogi, *Rang-zom-pa's Discourses on Buddhology: A Study of Various Conceptions of Buddhahood in Indian Sources with Special Reference to the Controversity Surrounding the Existence of Gnosis (jñāna: ye shes) as Presented by the Eleventh-Century Tibetan Scholar Rong-zom Chos-kyi-bzang po* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2009), 83.

376 *'di rnams la chos mthun pa ni/ thun mong dang thun mong ma yin pa'i dngos grub kyi ngo bo nyid du yang bshad pa dang / de'i rgyur yang bshad pa dang / las bskul bar bshad pa dang / bden pa'i tshig tu bshad pa rnam so/.* See Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, *Rgyud spyi'i dngos po gsal bar byed pa'i yi ge*, in *Rong zom bka' 'bum*, 1: 490–528 (Thimphu: Kunsang Topgay, 1976), 515. Cf. Almogi, *Rang-zom-pa's Discourses on Buddhology*, 85.

377 *de la sngags nyid thob cing sgrub par bya ba'i lha yin par bshad pas/ chos kyi sku mdzad pa dang bcas pa la 'jug ste/ des na dngos grub kyi ngo bo nyid yin no/.* Rong zom pa, *Rgyud spyi'i dngos po*, 515. Cf. Almogi, *Rang-zom-pa's Discourses on Buddhology*, 85.

378 For more on the indivisibility of deity and mantra, see Kunkyen Tenpe Nyima and Shechen Gyaltsab IV, *Vajra Wisdom: Deity Practice in Tibetan Buddhism*, trans. Dharmachakra Translation Committee (Boston: Snow Lion, 2012), 211–14.

379 It should be stressed that different Tibetan authors had different conceptions of what works and practices fall under the heading of Yogatantra, especially in this phase of Tibetan history when new translated tantric works were constantly arriving on the Tibetan scene. Rong zom pa surely had different notions of what counted as Yogatantra vis-à-vis Grags pa rgyal mtshan and even Grags pa rgyal mtshan's Sa skya pa predecessors, as the doxographical schemas were constantly evolving.

deities and accomplishments[380] and then quotes two canonical sources to illustrate that mantras can be used to trigger divine action.[381] Working with mantras therefore allows the practitioner to meet deities in more than one way: through their performance, the ritualist encounters both the essence of deity's accomplishments and the actual causes that may bring about such accomplishments in himself, he compels the deities to act for the benefit of himself and others, and he mimics and merges with the deities as he vocalizes their enlightened Speech.

The recitation of mantras is typically accompanied by the performance of mudrās. Describing the term's etymology, Almogi writes: "The term mudrā literally means 'seal,' 'stamp' or the 'impression or mark left by a seal,' and thus also 'image,' 'sign,' or 'token.' In the context of religious rituals, prescribed gestures often accompany mantras, and thereby function as a support for the mantric power or as a guarantee of their efficacy."[382] Mudrās qua seals reinforce a mantra's efficacy, and they also express the practitioner's "inner movement toward the deity, and finally his identification with it." Like mantras, they often are seen as symbolizing the deity or as being the deity itself.[383] Rong zom pa points to a line in the *Bodhicittabhāvanānirdeśa* to illustrate the role of mudrās in salvific action: "Just as all activities of a king are done with a seal, all enlightened activities of a buddha are done with a mudrā."[384] The claim that liberating activities are performed by way of mudrās will be particularly relevant later in this chapter.

380 *rnal 'byor gyi rgyud las kyang / gsang sngags lha dang dngos grub la gsungs so/*. Rong zom pa, *Rgyud spyi'i dngos po*, 516. Cf. Almogi, *Rang-zom-pa's Discourses on Buddhology*, 86.

381 These sources are the Rnying ma tantra *Rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po 'jig rten snang byed* and the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*. See Rong zom pa, *Rgyud spyi'i dngos po*, 516. Cf. Almogi, *Rang-zom-pa's Discourses on Buddhology*, 86.

382 Almogi, *Rang-zom-pa's Discourses on Buddhology*, 88.

383 Ibid., 89.

384 *rgyal po'i las thams cad phyag rgyas byed pa dang 'dra bar/ sangs rgyas kyi phrin las thams cad phyag rgyas bye* [sic] *de/*. Rong zom pa, *Rgyud spyi'i dngos po*, 518. For variants in the *Bodhicittabhāvanānirdeśa*, see Almogi, *Rang-zom-pa's Discourses on Buddhology*, 91.

Thus, if our goal is to better understand *Light Rays*' ritual world, we must pay attention to the ways in which it details the encounters between ritualist and deity through the employment of mudrā, mantra, and meditation. Such practices appear at the very outset of *Light Rays*, in the preliminaries to be performed in preparation for liberating rites.

Merging with Buddhas as a Prerequisite

The first preliminary involves approaching the single tutelary deity, which here means identifying with a buddha without consort. Grags pa rgyal mtshan instructs the ritualist to begin with protective measures, imagining himself first as Vajrapāṇi and then as Vajrapāṇi's wrathful form, Trailokyavijaya. He explains:

> You should meditate for a long time on bodhicitta, which you contemplate. Then, on the basis of that state, a lotus issues from *paṃ*. You should imagine a *hūṃ* on top of a moon disc that issues from *a*, and from the radiant light gathered from that, you should imagine yourself as Vajrapāṇi, green-blue in color, with one face and two hands, the right holding a vajra and the left holding a bell. A *hūṃ* is imagined on top of a sun at his heart center. From the radiant light gathered from that, you should imagine yourself as Trailokyavijaya, with innumerable heads and innumerable hands, adorned with snakes and hideous ornaments, wearing a lower garment fashioned from tiger skin, and holding various weapons, entrails, and a pile of skulls in your hands. Having clasped the vajra in a fist, and having hooked together your little fingers, the threatening mudrā is produced with your index fingers. You should protect yourself, the site, and the yoga by reciting the following mantra three times for each: *oṃ vajrasattva krodha analārka/ mahāvajra krodha/ drava drava/ vidrava/ vidrava/ sarvāpāya/ nāśaya nāśaya/ hara hara praṇāna hūṃ phaṭ*. If you perform this extensively, then you should also perform the praise of the wrathful deities.[385]

385 *snyam pa'i byang chub kyi sems yun ring du bsgom/ de nas de'i ngang las paṃ las padma* [*E=pad ma*]/ *[E−/*] *a las zla ba'i steng du hūṃ bsam la/* [*E−la/*] *de las 'od 'phros* [*E+tshur*]*'dus pa las/ rang phyag na rdo rje sku mdog ljang sngon zhal gcig phyag gnyis pa/* [*E−/*] *g.yas rdo rje/* [*E−/*] *g.yon dril bu 'dzin par bsams* [*E=bsam*] *la/ de'i snying gar* [*E=kar*] *nyi ma'i steng du hūṃ bsams* [*E=bsam*] *la/* [*E−la/*] *de las 'od 'phros 'dus pa las/ bdag nyid 'jig rten gsum las rnam par rgyal ba/* [*E−/*] *dbu mtha' yas pa/ phyag mtha' yas pa/* [*E−/*] *sbrul dang / mi sdug pa'i rgyan gyis brgyan pa/ stag gi lpags pa'i sham thabs byas pa/* [*E−/*] *mtshon cha sna tshogs dang /* [*E−/*] *rgyu ma dang /* [*E−/*] *mgo thod shas gang ba* [*E=pa*] *phyag na bsnams par bsam la/ lag pa rdo rje khu tshur byas la/ mthe'u chung lu gu rgyud du sbrel nas* [*E=la*]/ [*E−/*] *mdzub* [*E='dzub*] *mo gnyis* [*E+sbreng nas*] *sdigs* [*E=sdig*] *mdzub* [*E='dzub*] *tu byas la/ oṃ badzra sa twa kro dha* [*E=ta*] *a na lārka* [*E=larga*]/ [*E−/*] *ma*

Notice the initial emphasis on bodhicitta,[386] which directs focus away from ordinary awareness to the goal of awakening for the benefit of all beings. From here, the officiant imagines a lotus emerging from the syllable *paṃ,* followed by the syllable *hūṃ* on top of a moon disc that issues from *a.* Drawing on a visualized concentration of light, he envisions himself first as Vajrapāṇi, green-blue in color, with one face and two hands, the right hand holding a vajra and the left a bell. It is important to recognize Vajrapāṇi's significance in this context, for he is a central bodhisattva in Yogatantra literature. In the *Compendium of Principles*, he famously subjugates Maheśvara (i.e. Śiva) and purifies the negative actions of innumerable beings suffering in lower realms, delivering them to Vairocana's pure land.[387] Likewise, in the SDP, he resides at the center of no fewer than six of the text's maṇḍalas and serves as the primary teacher in chapters two and three,[388] explaining, *inter alia*, the aforementioned four burnt offering rites that purify the negative actions of those suffering misfortune, and trampling the sins of the deceased in the primary section on funerary rites.[389] By identifying with Vajrapāṇi, then, the ritualist associates

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hā badzra krodha [*E=ta*]*/* [*E−/*] *dra ba dra ba/* [*E−/*] *bi dra ba/ bi dra ba/ sarba* [*E=sa rba*] *a pā ya* [*E=a pa na ya*] *nā sha ya nā sha ya/ ha ra ha ra pra ṇā* [*E=na*; *Zhwa=ta*] *na hūṃ phaṭ/ ces* [*E=zhes*] *lan gsum gyis bdag bsrung / lan gsum gyis gnas bsrung / lan gsum gyis rnal 'byor bsrung la/ rgyas par byed na/* [*E−/*] *khro bo'i bstod pa yang bya'o/. C*, 4–5. *D*, 367–68. *E*, 2a–2b. *F*, 3–4.

386 Tib. *byang chub kyi sems.*

387 Weinberger, PhD diss., 194–96.

388 At the beginning of chapter two, the SDP marks this transition as follows: "Then, the Bhagavān Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Vajrapāṇi explained this latter section, the king of sections, by the power of the Lord." *de nas bcom ldan 'das byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po phyag na rdo rjes bcom ldan 'das kyi* [*G.yung=kyis*] *mthus brtag pa'i rgyal po brtag pa phyi ma 'di bshad do/. A*, 140–41. *B*, 194. Cf. Skorupski, 328.

389 "One should either imagine or draw Vajrapāṇi in the form of Trailokyavijaya who holds a lotus and noose, trampling the negative actions with his lotus feet, complete with all ornaments and the crown of a perfect buddha. By means of his essence mantra, in the same way one should perform the burnt offering rite one hundred thousand times or up to one million times." *phyag na rdo rje padma zhags bsnams pa'i/ /'jig rten gsum las rnam par rgyal ba'i gzugs/ /zhabs kyi padmas sdig mnan cing / /rgyan rnams kun ni rab rdzogs la/ /rdzogs sangs rgyas kyi* [*G.yung*, *Pe=kyis*] *dbu rgyan mtho/ /bsams sam yang na bris kyang rung / /de yi snying pos de bzhin du/ /brgya phrag stong ngam yang na ni/ /bye ba'i tshad du sbyin sreg* [*G.yung*, *Li*, *Pe*, *Snar*, *Co=bsreg*] *bya/. A*, 132. *B*, 184. Cf. Skorupski, 322.

with a bodhisattva explicitly tied to necroliberative acts, thus readying himself for the funerary rituals to come. The subsequent transition to Trailokyavijaya, Vajrapāṇi's wrathful form, is also grounded in the SDP, which features both Vajrapāṇi and Trailokyavijaya. It is in this state that the ritualist may effectively enact the necessary protections.

In the next phase of the preliminary, the officiant assigns mantric syllables to each finger. Grags pa rgyal mtshan cites the SDP's claim that one should first visualize their palms filled with sixteen syllables beginning with *a*, from which light rays radiate outward. *Oṃ* is set on the two thumbs; *hūṃ* is set on the two index fingers; *trāṃ* is set on the two middle fingers; *hrīḥ* is set on the two ring fingers; and *aḥ* is set on the two little fingers. With the letters arranged in this way, the ritualist generates the conviction that these are tathāgatas.[390] Grags pa rgyal mtshan elaborates, assigning male and female deities to each finger. On the thumb of the right hand is Vairocana, on the index finger is Akṣobhya, on the middle finger is Ratnasambhava, on the ring finger is Amitābha, and on the little finger is Amoghasiddhi. Likewise, on the thumb of the left hand is Vajradhātvīśvarī, on the index finger is Vajracittā, on the middle finger is Vajrābhiṣekā, on the ring finger is Vajraśastrī, and on the little finger is Vajrākhilā.[391] He comments:

> While saying *oṃ anyonya anugata sarvadharmāḥ* with even palms, you meditate on mutual contact between the deities and female deities. While saying *sphāra sphāra anupraviṣṭa sarvadharmā* with vajra palms, you should imagine them as fully engaged with one another. While saying *atyanta anupraviṣṭa sarvadharma vajra añjali* with the vajra binding, you should imagine them indivisibly mixed into one taste. When you have meditated on the mind's luminosity, you should say *vajra bandha traṭ*, and by rending the vajra binding three times, you should imagine rending all negative actions. This is called *vajra āveśa*, and you should bind what has entered into the thumb of the vajra binding. Recite *aḥ aḥ aḥ* many

390 *A*, 178. *B*, 238. *C*, 5. *D*, 368. *E*, 3a. *F*, 4. Cf. Skorupski, 362.

391 In Tibetan, the five buddhas are (1) Rnam par snang mdzad, (2) Mi bskyod pa, (3) Rin chen 'byung ldan, (4) 'Od dpag med, and (5) Don yod grub pa. Their female counterparts in this practice are (1) Rdo rje dbyings kyi dbang phyug ma, (2) Rdo rje thugs ma, (3) Rdo rje dbang bskur ma, (4) Rdo rje mtshon cha ma, and (5) Rdo rje kun ma. *C*, 5. *D*, 368. *E*, 3a–3b. *F*, 4.

> times, and the primary vajra aspect having descended into your own heart center like rain, you should cause the gnosis-being to descend, and you should rely on that. You should say *tiṣṭha vajra dṛdho me bhava śāsvato me bhava hrīḥ da yam me adhitiṣṭha sarva siddhiṃ me prayaccha hūṃ*. You should recite *ha ha ha ha ho* and release the previous mudrā.[392]

Here we find the simultaneous performance of mudrā, mantra, and meditation as the officiant encounters a network of deities. With a buddha or consort on each finger, he states *oṃ anyonya anugata sarvadharmāḥ* and places his palms together, imagining these deities in mutual contact. Reciting the mantra *sphāra sphāra anupraviṣṭa sarvadharmā*, he forms the vajra palms mudrā[393] and envisions the deities in union. Finally, he recites *atyanta anupraviṣṭa sarvadharma vajra añjali* while forming the vajra binding mudrā[394] and imagines the deities as indivisible. This indivisibility corresponds to the mind's natural nondual state, on which he meditates before forming and releasing the vajra binding mudrā three times, destroying negative actions. He then causes the gnosis-being to descend into his heart center, thus fully merging with the deity.

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392 *mnyam pa'i* [*E=ba'i*] *thal mo dang / oṃ a nyo* [*E=no*] *nya* [*E=na*] *a nu ga ta sarbba* [*E=sarba*] *dharmmāḥ* [*E=dharma*]/ [*E−/*] *zhes pas/* [E−/] *lha dang lha mo phan tshun reg par sgom* [*D=sgoms*; *E=mos*]/ *rdo rje thal mo dang / spha ra spha ra a nu pra biṣṭa* [*E=bi ta*] *sarbba* [*E=sarba*] *dharmmā* [*E=dharma*] *zhes pas* [*E=par*] *rjes su zhugs par bsam/ rdo rje bsdams* [*E=bsdam*] *pa dang / a tyanta* [*E=tan ta*] *a nu pra biṣṭa* [*E=bi ta*] *sarbba* [*E=sarba*] *dharmmā* [*E=dharma*] *badzra adzdza* [*E=a nydza*] *li/ zhes pas* [*E=par*] *gnyis su med par* [*E=pa*] *ro* [*E−ro*] *gcig* [*E=cig*] *tu 'dres par bsam/ sems 'od gsal bar bsgoms* [*E=bsgom*] *la/ badzra bandha* [*E=bhan dha*] *traṭ* [*E=tra tha*]/ *zhes brjod cing / rdo rje bsdams* [*E=bsdam*] *pa lan gsum dral bas* [*E=nas*] *sdig pa thams cad dral bar bsam/ badzra ā* [*E=a*] *be sha/* [*D, E−/*] [*F+/*] *zhes pa dang /* [*E−/*] *rdo rje bsdams pa'i mthe bong* [*E=the phong*] *nang du bcug pa bcings* [*D=bcing*] *la/ aḥ aḥ aḥ* [*E−aḥ*] *zhes lan* [*E−lan*] *mang du zlos shing rang gi snying gar* [*E=kar*] *dang po'i* [*E=po*] *rdo rje'i rnam pa char bab pa* [*E=rnam char*] *bzhin du/* [*D−/*] *ye shes pa dbab pa dang /* [*E−/*] *de brtan par* [*E=bar*] *bya ste/ tiṣṭha* [*E=ti ṣṭha*] *badzra drī ḍho* [E=*dri dho*] *me bha wa* [*E=ba*] *shā shwa* [*E=sha sha*] *to me bha wa* [*E=ba/*] *hrī* [*E=hri*] *da yaṃ* [*E=ya*] *me a dhi tiṣṭha* [*E=a ti tiṣṭa*] *sarbba* [*E=sarba*] *siddhiṃ* [*E=sid dhim*] *me pra ya tstsha* [*E=yad tsha*] *hūṃ/ ha ha ha ha ho* [*E+/*] *zhes brjod la sngar gyi phyag rgya dgrol* [*E=bkrol*]. *C*, 6. *D*, 368–69. *E*, 3b. *F*, 4–5.

393 This mudrā has the palms together with fingers interwoven at the tips. For a photograph of Jhado Rinpoche (a present-day Dge lugs pa expert on Kun rig ritual) performing it, see Tsongkhapa and the Dalai Lama, *The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra*, 83.

394 This mudrā has the hands clasped together with fingers fully intertwined. For a photograph of Jhado Rinpoche performing this mudrā, see ibid.

Such shifts in identity continue as the practice proceeds. The officiant recites the mantra *oṃ svabhāva śuddhaḥ sarvadharmāḥ svabhāva śuddho 'haṃ*,[395] imagining all phenomena as empty of inherent existence. On the basis of their empty nature, he then envisions *hūṃ* on top of a moon disc that issues from *a* on top of a lotus that issues from *paṃ*. On that foundation, from the radiant light he imagines to be gathered there, he visualizes himself as Vajrasattva, white in color, with joyful eyes open, adorned with silk garments and precious ornaments. His right hand holds a five-pointed vajra over his heart center, his left hand sets the base of his bell at his hip, and he sits in the *sattva* posture with one leg hanging down. He blesses his body, speech, and mind: to bless his body, he joins his palms at his forehead to form the prostration mudrā and says *oṃ bhṛta bhṛta sarva āvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ*; to bless his speech, he joins his palms at his throat to form the lotus mudrā and says *oṃ traṭa traṭa sarva āvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ*; to bless his mind, he assumes the vajra palms with the middle fingers touching at his heart to form the mudrā of the vajra family and says *oṃ chinda chinda sarva āvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ*.[396]

Having blessed the triad of body, speech, and mind, the officiant grants himself empowerment, which involves bodily contact with still other deities. Grags pa rgyal mtshan quotes the SDP to explain the requisite mudrās, commenting on the process of self-empowerment as follows:

> Thus, you set the first mantra and mudrā atop your head, and you should imagine Akṣobhya atop your head. Since you touch your forehead with both the second mantra and mudrā, you should imagine Vairocana at your forehead. Since you touch the top of your right ear with both the third mantra and mudrā, you should imagine Ratnasambhava at the top of your right ear. Since you touch the nape of your neck with both the fourth mantra and mudrā, you should imagine Amitābha at the nape of your neck. Since you touch the top of your left ear with both the

395 *C*, 7. *D*, 369. *E*, 2b. *F*, 5.

396 *C*, 7–8. *D*, 369–70. *E*, 4a. *F*, 5–6.

> fifth mantra and mudrā, you should imagine Amoghasiddhi there. If your own family is the tathāgata family, you should visualize Vairocana atop your head.[397]

With a retinue of buddhas residing on his body, the ritualist then visualizes himself as Vajrasattva or his chosen deity and imagines the aforementioned scene in the SDP's introductory narrative where the Buddha enters into a state of meditative concentration and issues light from the circle of hair between his eyebrows, liberating beings throughout the three-thousandfold world realms.[398] He imagines himself as the Buddha receiving offerings and praises from his retinue, at which point he focuses on the root wisdom mantra of Sarvavid Vairocana, which he envisions on top of the moon disk at his heart. This mantra illuminates the cosmos, and he recites it repeatedly to complete the session. He then concludes by reciting the 100-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, making torma, performing circumambulations, and producing small icons.[399]

Agency in the Preliminaries

Perhaps most striking about this practice is the officiant's contact and identification with such a wide variety of divine actors. While it is true that the ritualist is engaged in *visualization* practices, emically this does not detract from the reality of the deities involved. Such deities are understood to be actual enlightened beings who can intervene in the world, and thus from an

397 *sngags dang phyag rgya dang po* [*E+gnyis*] *spyi bor bzhag la/* [*E−/*] *spyi bor* [*E−spyi bor*] *mi bskyod pa* [E=*par*] *bsam par bya'o* [*E=bsam mo*]*/ sngags dang phyag rgya gnyis pa gnyis kyis dpral bar reg pas* [*E=pa*]*/* [*E−/*] *dpral bar rnam par snang mdzad bsam/ sngags dang phyag rgya gsum pa gnyis kyis rna ba g.yas pa'i steng du rin 'byung / sngags dang phyag rgya bzhi pa gnyis kyis ltag par 'od dpag med* [*E=myed*]*/ sngags dang phyag rgya lnga pa gnyis kyis rna ba g.yon pa'i steng du don* [*E+yod*] *grub* [*E+pa*] *bsam mo/ rang gi rigs de bzhin gshegs pa* [*E=rnam par snang mdzad*] *yin na/* [*E−/*] *spyi bor rnam snang* [*E=rnam par snang mdzad*] *bskyed do/. C*, 8. *D*, 371. *E*, 4b–5a. *F*, 7.

398 *A*, 117–18. *B*, 165–66. Cf. Skorupski, 306.

399 *C*, 8–10. *D*, 371–73. *E*, 5a–5b. *F*, 7–8.

emic perspective should be regarded as important agents in their own right. Consider, for example, the initial phase of the practice just described: the officiant begins by meditating on bodhicitta, the mind set on achieving enlightenment for the sake of all beings, and then uses the triad of mudrā, mantra, and meditation—including the visualization of light, mantric syllables, and objects like the lotus and moon disc—to meet and merge with Vajrapāṇi. This marks his first shift in identity. He then imagines himself as a more wrathful form of Vajrapāṇi, Trailokyavijaya, complete with snakes, ornaments, tiger skin garments, weapons, entrails, and a pile of skulls, which marks a second shift in identity. Once in this second form, he produces the threatening mudrā to protect himself, the ritual space, and his practice while uttering the fierce mantra *oṃ vajrasattva krodha analārka/ mahāvajra krodha/ drava drava/ vidrava/ vidrava/ sarvāpāya/ nāśaya nāśaya/ hara hara praṇāna hūṃ phaṭ*,[400] which roughly means: "Oṃ Vajrasattva, the blazing fire of rage, the rage of Mahāvajra! Run! Run! Run away! Run away! All be gone! There is no place to rest! Destroy! Destroy! Kill! Huṃ phaṭ!" Given these transformations, who exactly is doing the protecting? Forming mudrās maps the ritualist's body onto the deity's enlightened Body. Reciting mantras maps his speech onto the deity's enlightened Speech. Meditating on the deity culminates in unity, erasing the boundaries between practitioner and deity. Thus, at certain moments in the practice, the agency of the ritualist and that of Vajrapāṇi and Trailokyavijaya become indistinguishable.

Further, if we consider the full range of elements that Grags pa rgyal mtshan addresses in his instructions, we must include also the meditative objects that he describes. The syllable *paṃ* —a mantric instantiation of enlightened awareness—becomes the source of a lotus flower, which itself is the traditional throne of buddhas and bodhisattvas and emblematic of liberation.

400 *C*, 5. *D*, 367–68. *E*, 2b. *F*, 4.

The syllable *hūṃ* is pictured atop a moon disc—a white luminous sphere that is typically understood to represent bodhicitta—that issues from the visualized syllable *a*. Light, moreover, serves as a precursor to the appearance of both Vajrapāṇi and Trailokyavijaya, which itself is significant, since tantric deities are often framed as being coextensive with the stainless luminous mind, which is equal to the full expanse of reality.[401] In other words, this light is none other than the essential reality from which the personified deities emerge. Given these correspondences between object, deity, and the nature of mind/reality, such objects, in an ideal performance, simultaneously signify and facilitate the ritualist's transformation, prompting his advancement toward higher states of realization. By contrast, in the Trailokyavijaya phase of the practice, we find objects that are more tangible and morbid. Assuming Trailokyavijaya's multi-headed and multi-armed form, the officiant imagines himself wearing snakes and vile ornaments while holding weapons, entrails, and skulls in his many hands. These objects protect the ritualist, the site, and the practice by frightening away spirits bent on obstructing the practice, and they also give the meditator more visual material to work with as he endeavors to imagine himself in this terrifying form. Such objects serve an important purpose, even if they remain secondary to the personified deities themselves.

Overall, this network of associations—from the ritualist to the visualized deities and objects—contributes to the successful completion of the preliminary. And the network expands in the practice's remaining phases. We see this very clearly when the officiant visualizes five male and five female deities on his fingertips, using the triad of mudrā, mantra, and meditation to facilitates their contact, union, and ultimate indivisibility. He then self-identifies with Vajrasattva and later morphs again by turning to the SDP's introductory narrative, imagining

401 Skt. *dharmadhātu*; Tib. *chos kyi dbyings/chos dbyings*.

himself as the Buddha issuing liberating light rays and receiving effusive praise. Such rapid changes produce a wide cast of agents who appear and vanish, assemble and dissolve, all of whom contribute to the ritualist's efforts to rescue those suffering in bad rebirths.

Yet it would be misguided to think that the ritualist, deities, and visualized objects play equal part in the rite's success. This would ignore, for example, the basic problem of intercessory prayer.[402] Assuming we are talking about transcendental buddhas and bodhisattvas who are omniscient and merciful, we might wonder why they wait until requested to intervene and rescue those who have fallen into bad rebirths. *Light Rays* gives no clear answer, though such considerations highlight the critical role of the officiant in saving the dead, for it is he who initiates the necroliberative process. Once the ritual process has begun, he—in tandem with the ritual manual—remains the driving force for each step in the process. Just look at Grags pa rgyal mtshan's language in the passages quoted above: "You should meditate for a long time on bodhicitta," "you should imagine yourself as Vajrapāṇi," "you should cause the gnosis-being to descend," "you should imagine Amitābha at the nape of your neck." In each of these instances, the verbs carry a necessitative sense, which I translate using a strong "should," since "must" sounds too severe in this context, especially when repeated again and again. In the case of the third example, Grags pa rgyal mtshan uses the verbal substantive *dbab pa*, the future stem of the transitive *'bebs pa*, which has a causative meaning: "cause to descend." This signals that the ritualist does the work of drawing the gnosis-being into himself, completing his union with the deity. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's language very clearly frames the ritualist as the primary agent, a point to which we will return later in this chapter.

402 I am indebted to Michael Essex for stressing this point in our conversations about Kun rig practice in the Sa skya and 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud traditions.

The Function of the Maṇḍala in Rescuing the Dead

Clearly the ritualist's identification with deities is an important prerequisite for the funeral rituals that appear later in *Light Rays*. But how do the deities operate in the funerary rites themselves? Our starting point is the complex practices associated with the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana, which appear in the section on purification through empowerment (2.2.2.1). In the subsection on realizing the deity (2.2.2.1.1.1.2.8), Grags pa rgyal mtshan describes in rich detail the many beings included in Sarvavid's maṇḍala, which the ritualist visualizes while reciting the corresponding mantras (all of which Grags pa rgyal mtshan specifies) and mudrās (all of which he explains, which is no easy task when using words rather than images). Here again he provides the officiant with choice:

> In that connection, if you do this extensively, you should say each mantra for each deity respectively. If you do this for an average length of time, you should go by the number of directions: four mantras for the bodhisattvas, four for the pratyekajinas, four for the śrāvakas, and four for the outer beings. If you do this having abbreviated the practice, you should visualize them by saying one mantra for the bodhisattvas, one for the pratyekajinas, one for the śrāvakas, one for the wrathful deities who stay at the outer gates and so forth, and one for the worldly beings of the outer perimeter wall.[403]

Having recited the mantras of Sarvavid Vairocana and the four buddhas and their consorts, the ritualist is given three choices: say the appropriate mantra for each remaining deity, say four mantras for each of the four classes of deities, or say one mantra for each class, though notice in this last case there are five classes rather than four, the final class—figures on the maṇḍala's

403 *de la rgyas par byed na/* [*E*−/] *lha re re* [*E*−*re*] *la sngags re bya/ 'bring du byed na/* [*E*−/] *phyogs kyi grangs kyis byang chub sems dpa' rnams la bzhi/ rang rgyal rnams la bzhi/ nyan thos rnams la bzhi/ phyi rol* [*E*+*gyi*] *rnams la bzhi* [*E*=*bzhis*] *byed do/ /bsdus nas byed na/* [*E*−/] *byang chub sems dpa' rnams la gcig /* [*D*−/] *rang rgyal rnams la gcig/* [*D*−/] [*F*+/]*nyan thos rnams la gcig/* [*D*−/] [*F*+/]*phyi'i sgo na gnas pa'i khro bo la sogs pa rnams la gcig/* [*D*−/; *E*−*nyan thos rnams la gcig/ phyi'i sgo na gnas pa'i khro bo la sogs pa rnams la gcig*] *khor* [*E*='*khor*] *yug gi 'jig rten pa* [*E*−*pa*] *rnams la gcig* [*E*=*cig*] *gis bskyed par bya'o/*. *C*, 37. *D*, 400–1. *E*, 23b–24a. *F*, 34. Note that visible though illegible annotations may supply the longer omission in *E*.

perimeter—being divided into two, the wrathful deities residing at the outer gates and the worldly beings located at the outer perimeter wall. In the context of our discussion of the threefold practice of mudrā, mantra, and meditation, it is noteworthy that the ritualist's encounter with some of the lesser deities need only be cursory. In cases where time is limited, he need not devote his attention to each entity in Sarvavid's palace, but can meet them collectively through generalized meditative practice. Grags pa rgyal mtshan is explicit about this in the case of the peripheral beings who collectively have been invited to the maṇḍala, writing, "It is said that other than envisioning the body color of all those deities who collectively have been invited and their symbolic implements, although they have not been clearly visualized, there is no contradiction."[404] In other words, the officiant need not visualize in detail each and every figure in the maṇḍala in order to complete the practice.

A critical moment comes with the summoning of the gnosis-being to the maṇḍala. This begins with the ritualist visualizing the commitment-being—the visualized form of the deity—in front of himself. Holding a vajra and bell, he chants melodic verses requesting the gnosis-being to approach:

> You have become the protector of all beings without exception, and
> the deity who conquers the terrifying hordes of demons together with
> their armies.
> Lord who knows all realities just as they are,
> I ask you to come here together with your retinue! . . .
>
> For many innumerable eons, O Lord,
> out of love for all beings, you have compassionately purified them.
> And when you, in whom the intent of the vast aspirational prayers is perfected,
> act for the benefit of beings,
> in such cases, therefore, from the spontaneously existent palace, the full
> expanse of reality,

404 *mgron thabs kyi lha de dag thams cad kyi sku mdog dang /* [*E*−/]*phyag mtshan la sogs pa mos pa tsam las gsal bar ma bskyed kyang /* [*E*−/] *'gal ba ni med do zhes gsung ngo /. C*, 39. *D*, 403. *E*, 25a–25b. *F*, 36.

you will demonstrate various miraculous abilities and blessings.
For the sake of infinite throngs of beings,
I ask you to come, together with your excellent retinue![405]

Here we witness the importance of inviting deities to the ritual space for the purification of negative actions. The verses proclaim the Buddha to be "the protector of all beings" who "conquers the terrifying hordes of demons" and has purified beings' negative actions out of compassion "for many innumerable eons." Reciting these lines together with the right mantras promises the arrival of the Buddha and his retinue of bodhisattvas and worldly figures. The ritualist then gives offering water[406] and chants verses and mantras requesting them to stay. He again uses a combination of verse and mantra to ask for ablutions before giving his throne to the Buddha, chanting:

Out of compassion for myself and other migrators,
by the power of the miraculous abilities of the Lord himself,
for as long as I make offerings,
for that long I ask the Lord to stay![407]

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405 *ma lus sems can kun gyi mgon gyur cing / /bdud sde dpung bcas mi bzad 'joms mdzad lha/ /dngos rnams ma lus ji bzhin* [*E=yang dag*] *mkhyen gyur pa'i* [*E=pa*]*/ /bcom ldan 'khor bcas 'dir ni gshegs su gsol/ . . . /bcom ldan bskal ba* [*E=skal pa*] *grangs med du ma ru* [*C=du*]*/ /'gro la brtse phyir thugs rjes* [*E=rje*] *rnam sbyangs shing / /smon lam rgya chen dgongs pa yongs rdzogs pa'i* [*E=pa*]*/ /khyed bzhed 'gro don mdzad dus 'di lags na/ /de phyir chos dbyings pho brang lhun grub nas/ /rdzu 'phrul byin rlabs* [*E=brlabs*] *sna tshogs ston mdzad cing / / [E−/]mtha' yas sems can tshogs rnams bsgral ba'i phyir/ /yang* [*E=yongs*] *dag 'khor dang bcas nas gshegs su gsol/. C*, 40. *D*, 403–4. *E*, 25b–26a. *F*, 37. The first four lines appear in the *Āryamañjuśrīnāmasaṃgītisādhanaguhyapradīpa*: *hūṃ ma lus sems can kun gyi mgon gyur cing / /bdud sde dpung bcas ma lus 'joms mdzad pa/ /dngos rnams ma lus ji bzhin mkhyen gyur pa/ /bcom ldan 'khor bcas 'dir ni gshegs su gsol/.* See Ācārya Prajñāguru, *Mtshan yang dag par brjod pa'i sgrub thabs gsang ba'i sgron ma*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 33: 937–47 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008), 944–45.

406 Tib. *mchod yon*.

407 *bdag dang 'gro la thugs brtse'i phyir/ /nyid kyi rdzu 'phrul mthu yis* [*E=mthu'i*] *ni/ /ji srid mchod pa bdag bgyid na/ /de srid bcom ldan bzhugs su gsol/. C*, 41. *D*, 405. *E*, 26b. *F*, 38. This line appears in the *Mañjuśrīmaṇḍalavidhiguṇasambhava*: *bdag dang 'gro la thugs brtse'i* [*Snar=rtse'i*] *phyir/ /nyid kyi rdzu 'phrul mthu yis ni/ /ji srid mchod pa bdag bgyid na/ /de srid bcom ldan bzhugs su gsol/.* See Smṛtijñāna, *'Jam dpal gyi dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga yon tan 'byung gnas*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 33: 291–354 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008), 297–98.

Notice the importance of the ritualist's offerings in securing the Buddha's sustained presence. This speaks to the reciprocal relationship of the ritualist and the deity: the former only expects the latter to remain so long as offerings are available. What sorts of offerings does this involve? The verses that are to be sung next give us a general idea, listing a variety of materials including fragrant substances,[408] flowers,[409] food appropriate for gods, humans, and others,[410] and divine substances.[411] With the initial offerings complete, Grags pa rgyal mtshan instructs the officiant to summon the gnosis-being by reciting the mantra *jaḥ hūṃ vaṃ hoḥ*, at which point the gnosis-being merges with the commitment-being, transforming the visualized deity of the maṇḍala—in this case, Sarvavid Vairocana—into the actual deity. The ritualist completes the practice by performing the mudrās of the maṇḍala's many inhabitants, though Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes that this last phase may be skipped if time is limited.[412]

With the deity present, the maṇḍala becomes actualized in the ritual environment. Forming the maṇḍala in this way, the officiant creates a complex network of actors, all of whom contribute to greater and lesser degrees to the rescue of the dead from bad rebirths. He nevertheless remains the initiator of the ritual process, and in conjunction with the instructions of the ritual manual, ensures that the deities remain present for as long as necessary through the giving of material offerings.

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408 Tib. *dri yi rdzas*.

409 Tib. *me tog.*

410 Tib. *lha dang mi la sogs pa'i zas*.

411 Tib. *lha rdzas*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan later glosses divine substances as "things produced in the mind, namely, the seven precious possessions and so forth." *lha rdzas te* [*E=dang*] *yid las byung ba rin chen sna bdun la sogs pa'o/. C*, 48. *D*, 411. *E*, 31a. *F*, 44.

412 "When the greatly abbreviated version is preferable, there is no need to show these mudrās." */shin tu* [*E=du*] *bsdus pa la dga' ba la ni/ phyag rgya bstan mi dgos so/. C*, 47–48. *D*, 411. *E*, 30b. *F*, 44.

So far we have addressed the ritualist's encounters with deities while engaging in necroliberative acts, but we have not focused on cases where deities meet directly with the deceased. A striking example of this appears in the purification of negative actions through cremation (2.2.2.5). Recall the outset of this practice, which has the officiant digging a hearth and establishing a physical maṇḍala inside of it. This maṇḍala includes eight sections featuring the symbols of the five buddha families, the sixteen bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, pratyekajinas, wrathful deities, and gatekeepers. The outer perimeter, moreover, hosts the eight great worldly deities, the eight great nāgas, the eight planets together with their stars, the eight bhairavas, the guardians of the ten directions, and the four great kings, all of whom may be represented either by writing their name, drawing their sign, or drawing *bindu*s for each.[413] Amidst this gathering of divine actors, the officiant is then able to dispel negative forces by reciting the mantra of Trailokyavijaya as many times as possible,[414] after which he prepares the corpse as follows:

> You should wash the corpse with water in a vase to which you have recited the root wisdom mantra. You should thoroughly anoint it with perfume to which you have recited the root wisdom mantra. Having recited the root wisdom mantra, you should beautify the corpse having clothed it with upper garments, lower garments, and whatever adornments are available. Having cleansed it with the smoke of frankincense and so forth and recited the mantras of various wrathful deities, that very corpse is imagined as the deity, and you make offerings to it with whatever offerings are available.[415]

Notice here the near constant employment of the root wisdom mantra: *Light Rays* instructs the ritualist to wash the corpse using water from a vase that has been blessed by the root wisdom

413 *C*, 101. *D*, 466. *E*, 69a. *F*, 95.

414 *khams gsum rnam par rgyal ba'i sngags lan ci rigs pa bzlas pas/ bgegs bsal lo/. C*, 103. *D*, 468. *E*, N/A. *F*, 97.

415 */bum pa la rtsa ba'i rig pa bzlas pa'i chus bkru bar bya'o/ /rtsa rig bzlas pa dris nye bar byug par bya'o/ /rtsa rig bzlas te/ stod g.yogs dang / smad g.yogs dang / ci rigs pa'i rgyan gyis klubs te mdzes par bya'o/ /gu gul la sogs pa'i dud pas bdug cing / khro bo gang yin pa'i sngags bzla bar byas nas/ ro de nyid lha yin snyam du bsams la ci 'byor pa'i mchod pas mchod de/.* Ibid.

mantra, to perfume the corpse using scent blessed with the root wisdom mantra, and then simply to recite the root wisdom mantra, highlighting its power to purify and render efficacious whatever it touches. The ritualist then dresses the corpse, purifying it with incense, and reciting the mantras of wrathful deities to ward of negative forces. Finally, he imagines the corpse *a*s the deity, meaning that the transformations we have seen on the part of the ritualist now apply to the deceased.

The importance of mantra is underscored yet again in the next phase of the practice. The ritualist writes mantras on paper during the daytime[416] and fixes them onto eighteen parts of the body.[417] A number of these mantras name Sarvavid explicitly, and the process culminates in the placement of Sarvavid's root wisdom mantra at the corpse's heart center. The inclusion of a deity's name in a mantra is important, since employing that mantra summons their salvific powers. Recall Rong zom pa's claim that mantras *are* the deities themselves and can be recited to exhort the deity to act. With mantras now adhered to the body itself, it becomes the host of eighteen instantiations of the deity and eighteen exhortations calling on him to intervene in the world. This network of divine figures adds to the already established community of divinities in the hearth's maṇḍala, creating a broader network of actors in the ritual environment.

416 *nyin mor shog bu la bris te/. C*, 104. *D*, 468. *E*, N/A. *F*, 97.

417 The eighteen body parts and the mantras to be placed on them are: (1) the forehead: *oṃ śodhane sarva pāpaṃ viśodhani/ śuddhe viśuddhe sarva karma āvaraṇa viśuddhe svāhā*; (2) the right ear: *oṃ śodhani śodhani/ oṃ sarva apāyaṃ/ sarva satvebhyo hūṃ*; (3) the left ear: *oṃ sarva apāya viśodhani hūṃ phaṭ*; (4) the head hair: *oṃ tratha*; (5) the two shoulders: one *hūṃ* on each; (6) above the nose: *oṃ sarvavid sarva āvaraṇa viśodhaya hana hūṃ phaṭ*; (7) the waist: *oṃ sarvavid hūṃ*; (8) the right knee: *oṃ sarvavid phaṭ*; (9) the left knee: *oṃ sarvavid aḥ*; (10) the upper part of the right foot: *oṃ sarvavid tratha*; (11) the upper part of the left foot: *oṃ sarvavid oṃ*; (12) the right ankle: *oṃ sarvavid sva*; (13) the left ankle: *oṃ sarvavid aḥ*; (14) the tip of the nose: *oṃ sarvavid hūṃ*; (15) the right eye: *oṃ sarvavid tratha*; (16) the left eye: *oṃ śa*; (17) the groin: *oṃ bha*; (18) the heart center: *oṃ namo bhagavate sarvadurgatipariśodhanarājāya/ tathāgatāya/ arhate samyaksambuddhāya/ tadyathā/ oṃ śodhane śodhane/ sarvapāpaṃ viśodhane/ śuddhe viśuddhe/ sarvakarma āvaraṇa viśuddhe svāhā*. *C*, 104. *D*, 468–469. *E*, N/A. *F*, 97–98.

The ritual expert finally lights the fire and invites a host of otherworldly and worldly divinities to the site of the cremation. Reciting the mantra *oṃ agnaye mahāteja/ sarvakarmaprasādhaka/ kāruṇyakrītva* [*Zhwa+tritamahādhija*] *satvārtha/ asmana sannahito bhava/*, he summons the fire god Agni—white in color with one face and four hands, seated on a throne of white lotuses and horns, holding a jewel and club in his right hands and a lotus and water vase in his left hands—to reside in the hearth.[418] He imagines the burnt offering substances as ambrosia, and whether burning everything at once or placing items in the fire in turn, he recites the mantra *oṃ agnaye sarvapāpaṃ dahana śāntiṃ kuru* [*Zhwa+ye*] *svāhā* and makes offerings and praises.[419] More divinities enter the fold as he requests wrathful protectors engulfed in flames to join with the assembly, to whom he makes offerings three times over. The whole of the maṇdala's inhabitants are then invited into the belly of Agni, and after making still further offerings and praises, the burnt offering substances together with the flesh, blood, and bones of the corpse are imagined as ambrosia and offered to the principal deity while reciting a modified version of the root wisdom mantra.[420] The cremation culminates with the ritualist summoning Trailokyavijaya, trampler of negative actions, and reciting a customized recitation that includes the name of the deceased and calls for his negative karma to be pacified.[421] He then looks for signs of success in the fire and gives offerings and praises to the deities before

418 *C*, 106. *D*, 470–71. *E*, N/A. *F*, 99.

419 *C*, 106. *D*, 471. *E*, N/A. *F*, 99–100.

420 "Having imagined the other burnt offering substances together with the flesh, blood, and bones of the corpse as ambrosia, *sarvapāpaṃ śāntiṃ kuru* [*Zhwa+ye*] *svāhā* is affixed to the end of the root wisdom mantra, and you should offer the ambrosia 108 times to the principal deity." *bsreg rdzas gzhan rnams dang / ro'i sha khrag rus pa dang bcas pa rnams bdud rtsir bsams te/ rtsa ba'i rig pa'i mjug tu/ sarvapāpaṃ śāntiṃ kuru* [*Zhwa+ye*] *svāhā/ zhes btags la/ gtso bo la brgya rtsa brgyad du dbul bar bya'o. C*, 107. *D*, 471. *E*, N/A. *F*, 100.

421 *oṃ vajrasattva krodha analārka mahāvajra krodha drava drava/ vidrava vidrava/ sarvāpāya/ nāśaya nāśaya/ hara hara praṇāna hūṃ phaṭ/ che ge mo'i sdig pa thams cad śāntiṃ kuru* [*Zhwa+ye*] *svāhā*. The term *che ge mo* signals where one is to substitute the name of the deceased, and thus the latter part of the recitation means "Pacify all the negative actions of X!". *C*, 107. *D*, 472. *E*, N/A. *F*, 101.

performing the concluding rites, which include giving torma, making prayers for the living, and attending a banquet that the funerary rite's sponsors arrange for the ritualist and his attendants.[422]

Not only do these practices demonstrate the consistent presence of divine actors throughout the cremation, they also reveal specific ways in which the dead become yoked to these divinities. Whereas earlier the corpse was imagined as the deity and deserving of praise, in the latter phases of the ritual its flesh, blood, and bones become offering substances, marking a significant shift in the identity of the corpse as a ritual object. The name of the deceased is also embedded in mantric recitations, which indicates to the deity whom is to be rescued, while at the same time integrating that name into mantric syllables that instantiate the deity's liberating power.

In sum, throughout the practices we have examined so far in this chapter, the ritualist, his disciples, and the deities he invokes remain active participants, and we also cannot ignore the place of the manual itself in dictating the course and content of these rites. In this network of agents, the consciousness of the deceased assumes a passive role, appearing to do very little to secure his or her escape from bad rebirths. We have seen cases where the dead's consciousness is summoned to the ritual support, but even here they do not seem to *do* much of anything except arrive and receive help. This pattern is clear in the SDP itself, where it is only after the dead is ritually delivered to a heavenly realm that he or she regains personal agency and begins to study

422 *C*, 107–8. *D*, 472–73. *E*, N/A. *F*, 101–2.

and practice the Dharma in an ideal environment.[423] We will examine this topic in depth in chapter four.

Yet the dead's passivity throughout rites of necroliberation should not lead us to think that they have no function at all in the process. We have just discussed the ritual involvement of the corpse, and we have seen also material substitutes for the body in cases where it is absent. Indeed, the majority of *Light Rays*' rituals feature material objects of some kind, and these objects play an important role in the successful completion of these rites. Thus, before we conclude our inquiry into many the actors responsible for acts of necroliberation, let us consider the importance of material objects as *Light Rays* frames them.

The Place of Objects

So far in our discussion we have encountered a variety of material things, among them a painting of Sarvavid Vairocana, a maṇḍala produced from sand, the body, bones, and garments of the deceased, effigies of the deceased such as a likeness or written name, ritual implements including vajras, bells, and vases, and material offerings such as torma, offering water, burnt offering substances, canopies, banners, parasols, plumes with tassels, ribbons, and fine fabrics. Are these things incidental or critical to the rite's success? Are some objects more important than others? To better understand the functions of these things in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's funerary rituals, let us first look to James Gentry's important work on objects in Tibetan ritual.

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423 "The individual who is liberated from negative actions, even after being born in the race of pure gods, will listen to the Buddha and to dharma discourse forever." *sdig las rnam grol bdag nyid de/ dag par gyur pa'i lha rnams kyi/ rigs su skyes par gyur nas kyang / de ni rtag tu sangs rgyas dang / chos bgro* [*Li*, *Snar*, *Co*, *Zhol='gro*] *ba ni thos par 'gyur/*. *A*, 130. *B*, 181. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *te ca vimuktapāpamahātmānaḥ śuddhāvāsadeveṣūtpannāḥ/ satataṃ buddhadharmasaṃgītim prāpnuvanti/*. Skorupski, 242.

Three Types of Ritual Objects

In *Power Objects in Tibetan Buddhism*, Gentry outlines three categories of objects used in Tibetan ritual contexts. The first are potent materials held to liberate beings through sensory contact alone. Focusing on the writings of the Rnying ma pa master Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624), Gentry details a variety of such materials, including pills created from the flesh of someone born for seven consecutive lifetimes as a brahmin. Brahmin flesh, Gentry explains, is identified in several Indian Buddhist tantras as capable of conferring mundane and soteriological powers,[424] and when mixed with other ingredients and "accomplished" through ritual means, yields pills that can liberate through ingestion. Similarly, Sog bzlog pa describes medical compounds designated as "ambrosia"[425] that are claimed to benefit their consumers. Their effects include the eradication of illness and untimely death, the removal of obstructive forces, purification of breaches in one's Buddhist commitments, increased clarity in deity yoga and meditative practice, and even full awakening.[426] Interestingly, Sog bzlog pa cites none other than Grags pa rgyal mtshan when giving instructions on how to use ambrosia pills, explaining that one should store them in a fine vessel such as "one's own personal relic casket" and ideally eat eight pieces per day, one at the beginning and end of each of the four periods of the day.[427] While Grags pa rgyal mtshan was certainly aware of ambrosia pills and their supposed benefits, he uses the term differently in *Light Rays*. As mentioned earlier, during the cremation process he instructs the ritualist to *imagine* certain objects like the flesh, blood, and bones of the corpse *as* ambrosia and offer them to the principal deity; no physical pills are involved. Yet powerful pills

424 Gentry, *Power Objects*, 58.

425 Skt. *amṛta*; Tib. *bdud rtsi*.

426 Gentry, *Power Objects*, 321.

427 Ibid., 320–21.

are not the only efficacious materials that Gentry includes in the first category of objects. He also describes amulets that liberate those who wear them and sacred visuals that liberate those who see them. In chapter four, we will consider a fourth kind of sensory liberation that Sog bzlog pa and other Rnying ma pa authors promote—liberation through hearing.

Yet objects of such awesome intrinsic power do not figure into *Light Rays* or Grags pa rgyal mtshan's other works on SDP-oriented funerary rites. In these sources, we find materials that largely fall under Gentry's second category, that is, objects that have less intrinsic power and therefore "require more diverse means to create or augment power in ritual settings."[428] Among them are deity images, effigies, and all "the usual ritual paraphernalia" featured in most Tibetan Buddhist ritual performances.[429] Gentry explains that these objects gain power through the ritual operations to which they are subjected, including the mediating functions of deity yoga.[430] Examining rites designed to repel invading armies, he notes:

> In their mimetic production of artifacts, all of these rites appear to amplify the general tantric pattern of enmeshing things within a choreographed series of visual, sonic, and physical interactions, through which diverse agencies—human and non-human—are mediated and directed into and through material objects.[431]

In other words, ritual items like effigies become powerful through their ritual integration with human and non-human forces rather than through inclusion of potent substances like brahmin flesh. As an example, Gentry looks to the *Twenty-five Ways to Repel Armies*,[432] a ritual cycle revealed by Sog bzlog pa's teacher Zhig po gling pa (1524–83), which describes a practice

428 Ibid., 294.

429 Ibid.

430 Ibid., 341.

431 Ibid.

432 Tib. *Dmag zlog nyer lnga*.

configured to repel enemies using "oblation weapons."[433] Here the ritualist is instructed to imagine that oblations connected with his own tutelary deity have become weapons while a sacrificial pit has opened up before the enemy's tutelary deity. He then envisions throwing the oblations into the imaginary pit, an act that is purported to destroy the enemy's powers, before finally visualizing violent local deities consuming the flesh, blood, and hearts of the enemy army. Gentry explains that since here we are dealing only with an ordinary dough oblation, the source of efficacy at work is "supernatural agency" mediated through "the series of mimetic cognitive and physical interactions with that oblation."[434] Simply stated, the object becomes powerful through its subjection to ritual practices.

Finally, Gentry identifies a third class of objects: materials used in initiation rites that Sog bzlog pa treats as "props for the communication or representation of underlying meanings."[435] These objects are not assumed to possess much power on their own, but instead aid in facilitating the condensation of meaning as the officiant works to communicate select doctrines to his initiates in the ritual milieu. Focusing on the nine vehicles initiation rite of the Rnying ma school, Gentry identifies some of the objects that fall under this category. These include vases, letter images, and deity images in the case of the Akṣobhya eight-petal maṇḍala,[436] and the sixty-two initiation substances of Yogatantra, which include mustard seed, *dūrvā* grass, gems, mirrors, bells, and parasols.[437] The officiant shows each one to the initiates

433 Tib. *gtor zor*.

434 Gentry, *Power Objects*, 341.

435 Ibid., 357.

436 Gentry notes that the Akṣobhya initiation is the final of eleven initiations into the "vehicle of gods and men" (*lha mi'i theg pa*), which is the first of the nine vehicles of the Rnying ma tradition. Ibid., 359.

437 Ibid.

by holding them up at the right moment, and also brings them into contact with initiates by carrying them through the crowd and touching them to their bodies. While sensory contact of this sort may in some cases serve a purpose beyond the conferral of doctrinal meaning, Gentry points to Sog bzlog pa's insistence that these objects also help initiates comprehend the characteristics of the nine vehicles. To be sure, this use of materials is not prevalent in *Light Rays*, though we do find emphasis on doctrinal comprehension in the section on introducing students into the maṇḍala and bestowing empowerment (2.2.2.1.1.2). Our focus moving forward, though, will be on objects that fall under Gentry's second category.

Physical Representations of Deities

While one could make the case that *all* of the objects that Grags pa rgyal mtshan addresses in *Light Rays* have some importance—why include them if they serve no purpose?—certain things are more critical than others. Among these are representations of buddhas and bodhisattvas in the form of paintings or physical maṇḍalas. As we have seen, these artful items appear regularly in the text, such that removing them would compromise its coherence and practicability. Recall, for example, our discussion of the third phase of the preliminary approach (1.3), which involves approaching the deity in reliance on a painting on cloth. Here the officiant uses the painting to initiate contact with Sarvavid Vairocana, who resides at its center. He is accompanied by a retinue of male and female divinities together with animals, flowers, ornaments, and a practitioner at the bottom bowing with hands folded. What is striking is the painting's obvious mimetic function: not only does it feature renderings of the deities the ritualist seeks to

encounter, but also a figure corresponding to the officiant himself. The dynamics of the ritual are thus built right into the image, providing a visual template for the rites to be performed.

Once the painting is complete, the ritualist consecrates it. By “opening” Sarvavid's eyes, his presence becomes actual, and the image becomes a powerful object worthy of veneration. This locates the image in Gentry's second class of ritual objects. Yet of primary concern is what the painting *does* in *Light Rays*' estimation. The SDP describes the signs that may appear as indication of the consecration's success: if the officiant hears laughter, drums, or bells, or sees a monk, a brahmin, or a girl with fruit, then he succeeds quickly in obtaining accomplishments, but if he does not see such signs, he obtains accomplishments more gradually.[438] While it is clear that consecrating the image benefits the officiant, the causality at work is ambiguous: how do these accomplishments result from the consecration? Are they the product of merit or does the deity actively confer them? Grags pa rgyal mtshan points to the SDP's injunction that after performing protective practices and recitations in front of the image, the officiant should retreat to an isolated area and practice throughout the night. It then describes what to do if certain visions occur:

> If one sees the primary deity,
> his son, or gods,
> then to the degree to which he is pleasing as a vessel of merit,
> he should request supreme accomplishment.[439]

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438 *de nas ci ste mtshan ma zhig mthong na ni myur du dngos grub thob par 'gyur ro* [*Pe−ro*]*/ 'on te ma mthong na ni ring mo zhig nas dngos grub tu 'gyur te/. A*, 128. *B*, 179. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *tato yadi nimittaṃ paśyet siddhyati śīgram/ yadi na paśyec ciraṃ siddhyati/.* Skorupski, 240.

439 */ji* [*A*, *B*, *E=ci*] *ste gtso bo'am* [*A*, *B=gtso 'am*; *E=gtso bo 'am*] *de yi* [*G.yung*, *Pe*, *E=de'i*] *sras/ /yang na lha rnams mthong gyur* [*G.yung*, *Pe*, *E='gyur*] *na/ /bsod nams snod las* [*A*, *B=la*] *ci dga' bar* [*G.yung*, *Li*, *Pe*, *Co=ba*]*/ /dngos grub mchog ni gsol bar bya/. A*, 129. *B*, 180. *C*, 16. *D*, 379. *E*, 10a. *F*, 15. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *tataḥ pradhānaṃ ca tatputraṃ ca devāṃś ca yadi paśyati/ tadā yathābhājanam īpsitottamasiddhiṃ vijñāpayet/.* Skorupski, 242.

Here the officiant is instructed to request accomplishments from the deity, which highlights the transmissive logic of the practice. Once in the deity's presence, a direct reception of realization is possible, so long as one is a worthy recipient of such blessings. Grags pa rgyal mtshan concludes with a statement that reads differently depending on the version of *Light Rays*. If we follow the Sde dge and those based on it, then it states: "It is said that if the drawn maṇḍala has been produced, in front of that cloth drawing that has been taught above, one is able to produce all benefits and so forth for the living and the dead." If we follow the cursive manuscript and the Zhwa lu manuscript cited in the Dpe bsdur ma edition, then it reads: "It is said that if the drawn maṇḍala has *not* been produced, in front of that cloth drawing that has been taught above, one is able to produce all benefits and so forth for the living and the dead."[440] Both readings are possible. The first emphasizes the importance of the maṇḍala that the ritualist has created in the second phase of the preliminary propitiations (1.2). With the environment transformed by the maṇḍala, the ritualist may perform rites in front of the painting to produce "all benefits and so forth" for the living and the dead. On the other hand, the second reading stresses the singular importance of the painting in cases where the maṇḍala has not been produced. While I am inclined to follow the second given we have already seen (and will return to) Grags pa rgyal mtshan substituting the painting for a maṇḍala, both readings stress that engaging in meditative practice *in the vicinity of the image* makes a critical difference: the painting, once consecrated, enables the practitioner to meet the deity, receive accomplishments, and begin working toward the rescue of the dead.

440 *dkyil 'khor bri ba* [*E=bar*] *grub* [*E*, *Zhwa=ma grub*] *na/* [*E−/*] *gong du bstan pa'i ras bris* [*E=ris*] *de'i drung du tshe ldan* [*E=tshe dang ldan ba*] *dang / tshe 'das pa'i don la sogs pa thams cad bya bar nus so* [*E+/*] *zhes gsung ngo /. C*, 17. *D*, 380. *E*, 10a. *F*, 15.

It should be noted, however, that throughout Grags pa rgyal mtshan's discussion of this preliminary and the passages in the SDP from which he draws, the painting is *acted on* either as the direct or indirect object. "The Lord Sarvavid is drawn in the same way on cloth";[441] "Then, making offerings to the drawing's deity image, the ritualist himself should open its eyes and imagine it as genuine and blessed";[442] "Then, having blessed the visual form directly with mantras and mudrās, one should make offerings with whatever they possess."[443] While the painting serves an important role, it is not framed agentively. To borrow again Gell's language, it is an object through which the primary agents—the ritualist and the deity—interact and distribute their agency in the causal milieu. As such, it is both mimetic and mediating: mimetic in the sense that it depicts the very scene playing out in the actual world with the practitioner bowing before the deity and his retinue, and mediating in the sense that it serves as an interface through which the deities and the officiant interact. It is an extension of both the ritualist and the deity's agencies, which meet and cooperate in service of the dead.

Physical maṇḍalas have a comparable function, though they are clearly more elaborate in form and in use. We already have discussed how the creation of a maṇḍala transforms a ritual space, establishing a network of primary agents who accompany the ritualist when rescuing the dead. While in the case of the painting on cloth the ritualist is responsible for consecrating it, engagement with the maṇḍala is generally more complex, as evidenced by the numerous

441 *ras la bcom ldan 'das thams cad rig pa de bzhin du bris la/*. *A*, 128. *B*, 178. *C*, 16. *D*, 379. *E*, 9b. *F*, 14. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *paṭe bhagavantaṃ sarvavidaṃ tathaiva likhet/*. Skorupski, 240.

442 *de nas ri mo'i sku gzugs de mngon par mchod de/ bdag nyid kyis spyan dbye ba bya zhing bden pa la byin gyis brlabs par dmigs par bya'o/*. *A*, 128. *B*, 179. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *tataḥ paṭasatyādhiṣṭhānam avalambya cakṣurunmīlanaṃ kṛtvā pūjayet/*. Skorupski, 240.

443 *de nas gzugs de gsang sngags dang / phyag rgya mngon par byin brlabs nas/ ci bdog pas ni mchod par bya/*. *A*, 128. *B*, 179. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *tataḥ paṭaṃ mantramudrābhir adhitiṣṭhet*. Skorupski, 240.

mantras and mudrās one (ideally) is to perform as they visualize each member of the maṇḍala's community. However, from a material perspective, the rather demanding task of creating a physical maṇḍala may for some have an inhibitory effect. Recall that in the condensed version of purification through empowerment, Grags pa rgyal mtshan anticipates cases where one is unable to create such an object. He writes:

> First, if you are not able to draw a maṇḍala, the section on the burnt offering in the Amitāyus section of the *Tantra* states:
>
> > One should set down a suitable casting or painting
> > of the principal deity together with Vajradhara.
>
> Therefore, you should make offerings and arrange torma in abundance in front of a painting or casting.[444]

In cases where time is short or materials are scarce, the ritualist can opt to proceed without a maṇḍala; a more basic representation of the deity image may suffice. A deity image of some kind is therefore necessary, whether it is a maṇḍala, a painting, or a statue. The first is clearly preferable given the elaborate practices Grags pa rgyal mtshan explains in connection with Sarvavid's maṇḍala, but the dead can still be freed using other mediating objects. While there is flexibility as to what the ritualist uses, the fact remains that he must use *something*, highlighting that materials too are critical to the ritual process.

Material Offerings

In addition, among the more ubiquitous materials in *Light Rays* are the physical offerings given to deities and worldly spirits. Grags pa rgyal mtshan devotes a full subsection to this topic in his

444 *dang po ni/* [*E*−/] *dkyil 'khor bri bar ma nus na/* [*E*−/] *tshe dpag med kyi sbyin sreg gi skabs nas/ gtso bo* [*E=mo*] *ri mo lugs ma ru* [*A, B=ma'ang rung*]*/ /rdo rje can dang lhan cig bzhag* [*A*, *B=gzhag*]*/ces 'byung bas* [*E=pas*]*/ bris sku'am* [*E=sku 'am*]*/* [*E*−/] *lugs* [*Li*, *Co=lug*] *ma'i drung du/* [*E*−/] *mchod pa dang /* [*E*−/] *gtor ma rgyas par bshams la/. A*, 170. *B*, 229. *C*, 18. *D*, 381. *E*, 11a. *F*, 16. Cf. Skorupski, 354.

explanation of purification through empowerment, though these objects figure prominently in other sections as well. In the empowerment section, Grags pa rgyal mtshan writes that when laying out the offerings, the ritualist "should clear away the obstructive spirits including those who eat flowers and so forth; by saying *oṃ vajra yakṣa hūṃ*, they are dispelled."[445] Here he explains the risk that offerings will be consumed by malevolent spirits rather than reach the deities for whom they are intended, and offers a simple practice to prevent this. He then proceeds to outline the complex practices that go along with making material offerings, which include visualizations, mantric recitations, and mudrās.

While the full range of practices are too elaborate to detail here, let us look to a sample passage so as to get a sense of them. Early in the granting of offerings, the officiant recites verses coupled with mantras that demonstrate the mechanics of the rite. Grags pa rgyal mtshan comments:

> Whether you do so with or without melody, you should make offerings by means of verse and mantra:
>
> > That which I have arranged respectfully
> > and whatever offering water there is
> > in the unfathomable oceans of world systems—
> > if I offer this to however many buddhas there are together with their sons,
> > then please may you all, possessed of compassion,
> > having accepted whatever you like,
> > act for the benefit of beings!
> >
> > *oṃ sarvatathāgata arghaṃ pratīcca pūja megha samudrā spharaṇa samaye hūṃ*
>
> Saying this, you present the offering water.[446]

445 *de las dang por* [*E=po*] *dngos su 'byor ba* [*E=pa*] *bshams pa rnams la/ me tog za ba la sogs pa'i bgegs bsal bar bya ste/ oṃ vajra yakṣa hūṃ/ zhes pas* [*E=bya bas*] *bsangs/. C*, 48. *D*, 411. *E*, 31a. *F*, 44.

446 *ngag tu dbyangs dang bcas pa'am* [*E=pa 'am*]/ [*E−/*] *dbyangs med kyang rung ste/ tshigs su bcad pa dang /* [*E−/*] *sngags kyis dbul bar bya ste* [*E=bya'o*]/ *rab 'byams* [*E='byam*] *rgya mtsho dpag med na/ /mchod yon ji snyed yod pa dang / /bdag gis gus par bshams pa 'di/ /ji snyed sangs rgyas sras dang bcas/ /de snyed rnams la bdag 'bul na/ /thugs rje mnga' ba khyed rnams kyis/ /ci bde bar ni bzhes nas kyang /* [*E−/thugs rje mnga' ba*

Grags pa rgyal mtshan goes on to reproduce these lines of poetry six more times, substituting additional offerings and adjusting the mantra accordingly by imbedding the corresponding Sanskrit words for each offering into the mantra. The offering water is followed by flowers, incense, lamps, perfume, food, and music (the last is typically represented by a conch). These offerings are standard in Tibetan Buddhist ritual and can be found in the most basic of shrines. Yet they also tell us something about the logic of the practice. First, there is the actual physical offering substance versus the imagined offering substance to which it corresponds. The physical offering may be relatively modest—perhaps just a small cup of water—but it expands through meditation to include *all* of the offering water contained in every ocean throughout the universe. A simple offering is therefore imagined to be something extraordinary. Next, the officiant addresses all buddhas and bodhisattvas, requesting that after having taken what they like from the vast pool of offering water, they draw on their compassion to act for the benefit of beings. As noted earlier, it is curious that these omniscient, compassionate beings are *prompted* to rescue the dead—why have they not already intervened? While *Light Rays* provides no clear answers to this question, there is an obvious logic of reciprocity at work. After giving a physical offering and imagining it to be something far greater, the deities would seem to be obligated to respond. We are here reminded of the work of Marcel Mauss, who argues that gifts are never free, since they compel a recipient to give back according to obligatory cycles of giving and returning, thus affirming communal solidarity.[447] Such logic appears again and again in *Light Rays* as the

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khyed rnams kyis/ /ci bde bar ni bzhes nas kyang /] */sems can don kun mdzad du gsol/* [*E=bzhes nas sems can don kun mdzod/*] */oṃ sarvatathāgata arghaṃ pratīcca pūja megha samudrā spharaṇa samaye hūṃ/* [*E=oṃ sarvatathāgata gagana samaye hūṃ/*] *zhes pas mchod yon no/. C*, 48–49. *D*, 412. *E*, 31a–31b. *F*, 44–45.

447 See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

officiant requests the presence and aid of buddhas and bodhisattvas in securing the freedom of the dead.

Lastly, there is a subtler way in which these objects shape the ritual. As with the deity images, these things are *acted on* in the ritual environment and do not play an explicitly agentive role. However, as material objects, their "thing-ly causal properties," as Gell would put it, remain instrumental to the officiant's exercise of agency in the ritual environment. As the ritualist offers each substance, he modifies the verses to be recited in conformity with the object he is about to offer, and he does the same with the Sanskrit mantras. The materials thus influence the form of the practice and the behavior of the officiant, while at the same time serving as extensions of his agency in the ritual milieu, contributing to the achievement of his goal of impelling the deities to act.

Corpses, Ashes, and Ritual Supports

A final set of important objects are the corpse, the ashes, and the ritual support. We have already noted how the size and posture of the corpse dictate the size of the hearth the ritualist digs, and we have seen also how the corpse may be imagined as a deity at certain moments and a material offering at others. The body's identity as a ritual object thus changes as the funerary program proceeds. Recall, for example, the sixth method of purification, which involves creating a reliquary from the dead's remains (2.2.2.6). Here the ritualist mixes the ashes with the five products of a cow—urine, dung, milk, butter, and curd—together with scented water. He sets the mixture in a vase and strikes it until it becomes a dough-like substance, and then mixes in the small bone fragments that remain from the cremation along with camphor and clay, blessing the

resultant lump with the root wisdom mantra. After including the deceased's name in a mantra and inserting into the middle of the lump, he shapes it into the form of a deity or a reliquary while reciting the root wisdom mantra, blessing it with mudrās and mantras and performing recitations for up to two hundred thousand times. The SDP claims that doing this will liberate the dead, at which point signs of the rite's success including the reliquary blazing, the image smiling, the smell of incense, and the appearance of deities should emerge.[448]

This is comparable to the practices Gentry outlines while describing the creation of liberating substances such as brahmin-flesh pills and ambrosia pills. But here ingredients like the five products of a cow, scented water, and camphor are not framed as having the same kind of power as those that make Gentry's first class of objects so potent. The ashes of the deceased are significant in that their inclusion connects the rites to the individual who has died, but they too are not *intrinsically* powerful (unless, of course, the deceased is a seven-times born brahmin or a highly realized master, a scenario that *Light Rays* does not address). So what makes this practice efficacious? It would seem that as with the other objects we have discussed in this section, the ritual process is the determining factor. Central to the ritual's power are the utterance of specific mantras and the formation of certain mudrās, together with the inclusion of the dead's name in a mantra that is inserted into the lump. Yet perhaps most striking from a material perspective is the ritualist's fashioning of the lump into a small deity image or reliquary. We have seen cases where the officiant visualizes the deceased as the deity, but here the merger is far more tangible, for the dead's remains are physically reconstituted and reshaped to *become* the deity or a reliquary, both of which represent enlightened awareness. This fascinating use of the dead's remains could be framed as bringing the principles of deity yoga into the material realm,

448 *C*, 108–11. *D*, 473–76. *E*, N/A. *F*, 102–5.

and while the ashes and other ingredients may be secondary to the liberating power of mantra, mudrā, and meditation, they are nonetheless essential to the performance of the practice.

Finally, Grags pa rgyal mtshan anticipates cases where the corpse is unavailable as a ritual object (2.2.2.7). Here a ritual support is necessary, as confirmed in three passages in the SDP. The first recommends producing a name card, making a series of reliquaries, and performing a burnt offering rite;[449] the second suggests making a name card, performing recitations, conducting a burnt offering rite, and bestowing empowerment to the card;[450] and the third requires empowering the name card, image, reliquary, or an image of their primary deity, or empowering their son, someone from their lineage, someone bearing their name, or their servant, and placing the representation of the deceased in the maṇḍala seven times for seven days and nights, after which they will be liberated.[451] A common thread among these passages is the written name of the deceased, which alone can serve as a substitute for the body. But the last passage Grags pa rgyal mtshan quotes expands the number of possible objects to include an image of the dead, a reliquary, a deity image, or even using a relative of the deceased or their servant. This flexibility emphasizes yet again that while a number of objects may suffice for the performance of necroliberative rites, an object or person *of some kind* must be present in order for the ritual to be effective.

CONCLUSION

449 *A*, 133. *B*, 185. *C*, 111. *D*, 476. *E*, N/A. *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, 322.

450 *A*, 142. *B*, 196. *C*, 111–12. *D*, 476–77. *E*, N/A. *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, 330.

451 *A*, 169–70. *B*, 228. *C*, 112. *D*, 477. *E*, N/A. *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, 354.

We began this chapter by considering a fundamental claim of SDP and *Light Rays*: if the proper rituals are performed, the dead can be liberated from bad rebirths regardless of their karma. In seeking to understand the logic of such practices, we looked to issues of agency: if the dead do relatively little to save themselves in this context, then who does the work of rescuing them? We looked first to the ritual manual itself, the text to which any careful reader/ritualist is beholden. While the manual dictates much of what the ritualist does, it also grants him greater autonomy in certain cases, as when it instructs him to rely on empirical experience in order to perform especially complex creative tasks. Following the manual's injunctions, the reader becomes a primary agent in the performative milieu, but his identify also shifts as the funeral proceeds, and his agency becomes intermixed with that of buddhas and bodhisattvas through the triad of mantra, mudrā, and meditation. Among these human and divine agents we also encounter secondary agents, that is, objects through which the ritualist and the deities distribute their agency in the ritual environment. When determining who saves the dead, there is thus no single, independent actor, but rather a mesh of textual, human, divine, and material agencies, all of which contribute to the ritual's completion.

CHAPTER THREE

DEATH RITUAL POLEMICS

So far we have examined the early history of the SDP in Tibet, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's rhetoric as a commentator on it, and the agencies at play in *Light Rays*' funerary rituals. Now we will turn to responses to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's efforts. *Light Rays* in particular was highly influential, inspiring dozens of later works on SDP-oriented rites.[452] It also received criticism, particularly at the hands of the prolific savant Bo dong Paṇ chen, who regularly references and attacks *Light Rays* in his *Definitive Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana*. These objections were met by one of the Sa skya tradition's most prominent authors, Go rams pa, who devoted an entire work to rejecting them, which he titled *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*. In this chapter, we will explore the context[453] of this debate and the issues at stake, focusing on the disputes most relevant to questions of agency.

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452 Most commentators only cite *Light Rays*, though some also cite *Requisites for the Benefit of Others*. For example, Go rams pa turns to this much shorter work in his *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others* when discussing the inclusion of the sixteen bodhisattvas and other deities in the courtyard (Tib. *khyams*) on the second tier of the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana. See Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 308. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (modern edition), 353. A nineteenth-century Sa skya pa from Sde dge named Kun dga' dpal ldan also references *Requisites for the Benefit of Others* in his lengthy work on SDP-oriented rites entitled *Beautiful Ornament for the Benefit of Others*, citing it while discussing, *inter alia*, the ritual support for purification of the negative actions of the deceased. See Kun dga' dpal ldan, *Ngan song sbyong ba'i sdig sbyong sgo dgu'i rnam bshad gzhan phan mdzes rgyan* (Sgang tog: Ngor dgon pa, 19??), 313–14. In addition, we also find references to *Requisites for the Benefit of Others* in the work of the early twentieth-century Sa skya pa 'Jam dbyangs kun dga' rnam rgyal, who was an abbot of Rdzongs sar Khams bye in Khams. In his text on these rites that shares the very same name as Kun dga' dpal ldan's work, he references *Requisites for the Benefit of Others* when addressing its influence on Ngor chen's *Limitless Benefit for Others*. He also cites it together with *Light Rays* when addressing songs of praise used in these rites. See 'Jam dbyangs Kun dga' rnam rgyal, *Dpal ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i sdig sbyong sgo dgu'i rnam bshad gzhan phan mdzes rgyan* (Delhi: Ngawang Topgyal, 1979), 152, 242.

453 Our source materials for contextualizing these figures are largely biographical efforts that reflect how Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa were remembered and represented by their disciples and successors in works adhering to the conventions of saintly life-writing. It goes without saying that these works are not documentary windows into the past, but persuasive efforts that reflect the world in which they were produced, while also working to frame their protagonists as flawless exemplars of realization.

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

Bo dong Paṇ chen: Dreams, Debates, and Innovations

In his biography of Bo dong Paṇ chen, 'Jigs med 'bangs[454] tells the story of his teacher receiving an invitation to visit Mkhar stengs monastery in Glo, which is located in present-day Mustang, Nepal. At that time, many people were engaged in meditation in the area, and one of them had a dream in which he heard a knock at the door. A voice on the other side said: "Since an incarnation of the Lord Mañjughoṣa will come here to teach the doctrine tomorrow night, leave your retreat and listen to his teaching!"[455] After waking and thinking this was only a dream, this person thought that such fortune would never come to him, but nevertheless considered it a sign of progress. The next morning, however, someone actually came to his door and said: "Tonight the great lord of religion [Bo dong Paṇ chen] will arrive and tomorrow morning he will give the initiations of Sarvavid Vairocana and give teachings on cultivating the resolve to become awakened. There is no chance that we will meet such a lama again. You had better leave your retreat! And other practitioners should do the same!"[456] He was delighted that he had this chance and felt that his dream was coming true.[457]

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454 'Jigs med 'bangs' full name in religion was Amoghasiddhi 'Jigs med 'bangs, though the Kathmandu edition of *Feast of Miracles* identifies him as Dkon mchog 'bangs. The *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* reports that he was a lord of Yar 'brog living in Sna dkar rtse, and that he belonged to the ruling family that supported Bo dong Paṇ chen. See Hildegard Diemberger, Pasang Wangdu, Marlies Kornfeld, and Christian Jahoda, *Feast of Miracles: The Life and the Tradition of Bodong Chole Namgyal (1375/6–1451 A.D.) according to the Tibetan Texts "Feast of Miracles" and "The Lamp Illuminating the History of Bodong"* (Clusone: Porong Pema Chöding Editions, 1997), 13.

455 *sang nub 'dir rje btsun 'jam pa'i dbyangs kyi sprul pa cig chos gsung du 'byon pa yod pas/ khyed rang 'tshams thon la nyan du shog zer/*. 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa thams cad mkhyen pa phyogs thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba'i zabs kyi rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, in *Gsung 'bum: Phyogs las rnam rgyal*, 1: 1–643 (New Delhi: Tibet House, 1981), 401. Cf. Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 78.

456 *do nub chos rje chos rgyal bas phebs nas sang snga dro kun rig gi dbang dang sems skyed tshogs chos su gnang ba yod pas/ yang yang 'di 'dra ba'i bla ma dang 'u cag 'jal dogs med 'tshams gsengs cig sgrub pa po gzhan rnams kyang gseng ba yod zer/*. 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 402. Cf. Diemberger, 78.

457 Ibid.

Bo dong Paṇ chen is here remembered as having actively disseminated the traditions of Sarvavid Vairocana, and no less as an incarnation of Mañjuśrī. Like many scholars of his time, he had more than just a passing interest in the rituals of Sarvavid, as evidenced by his multiple contributions to their exegesis.[458] Yet he also seems to have held a deep interest in almost *all* topics of Buddhist learning: his collected works fill 137 volumes,[459] treating subjects including divination, Sanskrit grammar, poetics, epistemology, Madhyamaka, and tantra, though some of these are simply versions of canonical texts and not his own original writings.[460]

Bo dong Paṇ chen was born into a family of scholar-translators from Zur tsho, a semi-nomadic area of Southern La stod.[461] His maternal uncle was the translator Lo chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1352–1405), who himself is said to have had studied under his own maternal uncle, the translator Lo chen Byang chub rtse mo (1315–1394). Byang chub rtse mo, moreover, was the nephew of the great translator Dpang[462] Lo tsā ba Blo gros brtan pa (1276–1342),[463] who studied Sanskrit in Nepal and translated works including the *Kalāpa Sūtra*, a text on Sanskrit

458 These are: (1) *Bcom ldan 'das kun rig gi cho ga rgyud don gsal ba*, (2) *Gtsug tor dgu ba'i dkyil 'khor chen po'i cho ga btsan bcos lugs*, (3) *Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad pa*, (4) *Ngan 'gro thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i de bzhin gshegs pa'i rigs kyi gtsug tor rnam par rgyal ma'i mngon rtogs*, (5) *Ngan song sbyong ba bshad pa'i rgyud kyi gtsug tor dgu ba'i dkyil chog rnam nges*, (6) *Ngan song sbyong ba'i gtsug tor rnam par rgyal ma'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*, (7) *Ngan song sbyong ba'i rgyud brtag pa phyogs gcig pa bshad pa*, (8) *Ngan song sbyong ba'i rgyud brtag pa phyogs gcig pa gtsug dgur grags pa'i man ngag*, (9) *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi brtag pa phyogs gcig pa'i rgyud bshad pa*, (10) *Ngan song yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyud brtag pa gnyis pa*, (11) *Ngan song yongs su sbyong ba'i rgyud brtag pa phyogs gcig pa bshad pa*. All but the first appear in both versions of his collected works.

459 This collection was condensed to 95 volumes in the 2014 edition.

460 E. Gene Smith observes that this collections preserves some of the translations of canonical texts that Bu ston had purged from his version of the canon. See E. Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 183.

461 Hildegard Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty: The Samding Dorje Phagmo of Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 45.

462 Sometimes rendered Spang.

463 Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 45–46.

grammar. Dpang Lo tsā ba also served as the abbot of Bo dong E for a time.[464] On the paternal side, Bo dong Paṇ chen was a descendant of the family of the famous female master Ma gcig Zha ma (1062–1149), who was an important figure in the early history of the Lam 'bras tradition in Tibet, having received instructions together with her brother Khum bu ba Chos rgyal (1069–1144) from Se ston Kun rig (1025–1122), who himself had received them from 'Brog mi Lo tsā ba Shākya ye shes (c. 993–1077).[465] Both 'Brog mi Lo tsā ba and Se ston Kun rig were critical to the early development of the Sa skya school, the former having taught 'Khon Dkon mchog rgyal po (Grags pa rgyal mtshan's grandfather)[466] and the latter and his disciple Zhang ston Chos 'bar (1053–1135) having taught Sa chen Kun dga' snying po (Grags pa rgyal mtshan's father).[467]

Connections with the Sa skya tradition continued throughout Bo dong Paṇ chen's life. When he took full ordination with his uncle Lo chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan, the Sa skya pa scholar Red mda' ba Gzhon nu blo gros (1349–1413) acted as the master of ceremonies. Yet his relations with Sa skya pas were not always amicable. 'Jigs med 'bangs describes an encounter between Bo dong Paṇ chen and a group of Sa skya pa elites from Northern La stod in which they publicly challenge Bo dong Paṇ chen for doubting the coherence of Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Treasury of Reasoning*[468] and its autocommentary,[469] but he quashes their objections.[470] 'Jigs med 'bangs also details an alleged rivalry between Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa's teacher Rong

464 Ibid., 21–22.

465 Stearns, *Luminous Lives*, 59–60.

466 Ibid., 103.

467 Ibid., 60–63.

468 Tib. *Tshad ma rigs gter*.

469 Tib. *Tshad ma rigs gter rang 'grel*.

470 Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 67–68.

ston Shes bya kun rig, framing Rong ston, a Sa skya pa luminary, in decidedly unflattering terms. On one occasion, Rong ston and a retinue of disciples were invited to Ngam ring of Byang[471] by its famous ruler[472] Rnam rgyal grags pa bzang po, a patron of Bo dong Paṇ chen and an accomplished scholar in his own right.[473] When Rnam rgyal grags bzang praised Bo dong Paṇ chen's learning, it apparently so irritated Rong ston that he struck the ground and shouted: "He does not know anything except a little bit of poetry. In terms of grasping the Buddhist teachings, he has not excelled at all. This is certain!"[474] Given Rnam rgyal grags bzang's faith in Bo dong Paṇ chen, this outburst is said to have hobbled Rong ston's prospects of cultivating a patron-priest relationship with him, and while Rong ston was permitted to stay in the area, he failed to obtain much status there.[475]

'Jigs med 'bangs reports that when Rong ston gave public teachings following this incident, he would sometimes criticize Bo dong Paṇ chen, which prompted Rnam rgyal grags bzang to arrange a debate between the two scholars. Here again 'Jigs med 'bangs frames Rong ston as short-tempered. The day before the meeting, Rong ston asked Rnam rgyal grags bzang: "How many maṇḍalas does your master agree to discuss?"[476] The ruler sent someone to ask Bo

471 Ngam ring of Byang was the capital of Northern La stod, which had been an important religious and political site since the time of Chos rgyal 'Phags pa. This is also the place where Go rams pa would later pen *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*, for more on which, see below.

472 Tib. *sa spyod*.

473 Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 127. For more on this figure, see Cyrus Stearns, "Namgyel Drakpa Zangpo," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed October 19, 2017, http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Namgyel-Drakpa-Zangpo-/6278.

474 *khos snyan ngag pir pir cig min pa ci yang mi shes/ gsung rab kyi don len pa la thal ba spar gang yang med phob phob yin gsung bar gyur cing /.* 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 304. Cf. Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 69.

475 Ibid.

476 *nyid kyi mgon pos dkyil 'khor ji tsam gyis/.* 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 315. Cf. Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 70.

dong Paṇ chen, who jokingly replied, “I agree to ten thousand maṇḍalas.” Concerned that Rong ston would be annoyed and refuse the meeting altogether, Rnam rgyal grags bzang halved the number, saying, “He agrees to five thousand maṇḍalas,”[477] but Rong ston still became agitated and struck the ground, shouting, “Since such a large number of maṇḍalas have not appeared in Tibet, what kind of traditions are these?!”[478]

Feast of Miracles declares that when the two scholars finally met, Bo dong Paṇ chen repeatedly exposed Rong ston's misunderstandings. At one point, Bo dong Paṇ chen asked him if he had, in fact, criticized the famed Indian Mādhyamika Candrakīrti. Rong ston confirmed this, arguing that Candrakīrti's texts were riddled with contradictions. After Rong ston produced an example, Bo dong Paṇ chen demonstrated that he had simply misunderstood Candrakīrti's statement.[479] Bo dong Paṇ chen is also said to have embarrassed one of Rong ston's disciples Dge ba rgyal mtshan (1387–1462),[480] who was renowned for his knowledge of Buddhist logic and epistemology, chastising him for not being able to read the Sanskrit original of Dharmakīrti's *Nyāyabindu*.[481] In the end, Rong ston is said to have been awed by Bo dong Paṇ chen's learning, and he later told his students that whenever he posed a question to this great master, the answer would come like endless falling rain.[482]

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477 *phyed du phri ste lnga stong tsam zhal gyis bzhes pa 'dug go/.* 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 316. Cf. Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 70.

478 *de ni gsan par gyur pa tsam gyis kun tu rig pa de thugs ma rangs par sku sa la rdebs pa dang / lhan cig tu de tsam bod du ma 'gyur nas/ lugs de dag gang 'dra cig yin zhes/.* 'Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 316–17. Cf. Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 70.

479 Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 71.

480 His longer name Rig pa'i dbang phyug Dge ba rgyal mtshan means “The Lord of Reasoning, Dge ba rgyal mtshan.”

481 Jigs med 'bangs, *Ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston*, 329. Cf. Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 71.

482 Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 71–72.

It is no surprise that *Feast of Miracles* paints its protagonist as flawless, for it would be extraordinary for 'Jigs med 'bangs to disparage his own teacher. While such accounts cannot be taken at face value, they highlight tensions that appear to have emerged between Bo dong Paṇ chen and Rong ston's circles. David Jackson argues that Rong ston and his guru G.yag ston Sangs rgyas dpal (1350–1414) represented "the main doctrinal alternative to the tradition of Tsong kha pa and his teacher Red mda' ba,"[483] while E. Gene Smith observes that Bo dong Paṇ chen's closest intellectual counterparts were Tsong kha pa and Mkhas grub rje Dge legs dpal bzang (1385–1438).[484] 'Jigs med 'bangs' biography certainly supports such a divide, and so too does Shākya mchog ldan's (1428–1507) biography of Rong ston, which offers a different take on how Rong ston fared:

> At that time, he went on an academic tour of the great monastic centers including Sa skya, Bo dong E, Bzang ldan, Ngam ring, Snar thang, and Gnas rnying and so forth. Since he outshone everyone by debating with respondents, he became known as the Great Bull of Debate, and at that time was given the name Rong ston, the Lion of Speech.[485]

Notice here the mention of Bo dong E and Ngam ring, the latter being the site of Rong ston's alleged defeat. Shākya mchog ldan makes no mention of a loss at the hands of Bo dong Paṇ chen, reporting only victories.

Later, Shākya mchog ldan narrates Rong ston's purported triumphs in greater detail, describing a meeting between Rong ston and Tsong kha pa in Lha sa, during which they debated

483 David P. Jackson, *The Early Abbots of 'Phan-po Na-lendra: The Vicissitudes of a Great Tibetan Monastery in the 15th century* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, 1989), 6.

484 Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 180–81.

485 *de'i tshe gdan sa chen po sa skya dang / bo dong e dang / bzang ldan dang / ngan ring dang / snar thang dang / gnas rnying la sogs pa'i gra sa chen po rnams su grwa skor la byon te/ lan 'debs pa po rnams rtsod pas zil gyis gnon pas rtsod pa'i khyu mchog tu grags shing / de'i tshe rong ston smra ba'i seng ge zhes pa'i mtshan gsol ba thob cing /.* Shākya mchog ldan, *Rje btsun thams cad mkhyen pa'i bshes gnyen shākya rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i zhal snga nas kyi rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar dad pa'i rol mtsho* (Sde dge: Sde dge par khang chen mo, n.d.), 15b.

the stages of the path according to the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra.* Tsong kha pa is purported to have lost, but also to have gracefully accepted this defeat by offering Rong ston a roll of cloth.[486] Interestingly, Shākya mchog ldan also refers to a contest between Rong ston and Bo dong Paṇ chen:

> The lord himself said that when he debated on the topic of Madhyamaka with Bo dong Paṇ chen at Mngon dga'[487] monastery in Yar 'brog, since Bo dong Paṇ chen had to concede that both the indirect truth called conventional truth and the indirect truth called ultimate truth are synonymous, his confidence was deflated.[488]

As with 'Jigs med 'bangs' testimony, the subject under debate is Madhyamaka, but in this account—which Shākya mchog ldan attributes to Rong ston himself—Bo dong Paṇ chen is defeated and deflated. Note also that this encounter is set at Yar 'brog rather than Ngam ring, leading us to wonder whether 'Jigs med 'bangs and Shākya mchog ldan might be narrating separate incidents.

There is of course much more to Bo dong Paṇ chen's story than these disputes. Hildegard Diemberger's fascinating study of Chos kyi sgron ma (1422–55)—a female adept whom Bo dong Paṇ chen recognized as the embodiment of Vajravārāhī and whose reincarnation line continues today—provides a fuller sense of his activities and innovations. Chos kyi sgron ma originally self-identified as a Sa skya pa, which Diemberger notes is unsurprising given the Sa skya tradition's prominence in her native region of Mang yul-Gung thang during this time, and

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486 Shākya mchog ldan, *Ngo mtshar dad pa'i rol mtsho*, 21b. Cf. David P. Jackson, *Rong ston on the Prajñāpāramitā Philosophy of the Abhisamayālaṃkāra: His Sub-commentary on Haribhadra's 'Sphuṭārtha'* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1988), V.

487 This must be Mngon dga' chos sde, a Bo dong pa center founded in 1350.

488 *yar 'brog gi mngon dgar/ bo dong pa paṇ chen chos rgyal pa dang / dbu ma'i rtsod pa mdzad pas/ bo dong pas kun rdzob bden pa zhes pa'i tshig zur gyi bden pa dang / don dam bden pa zhes pa'i tshig zur gyi bden pa'i tshig gnyis po/ don gcig la 'du bar khas len dgos pa byung bas/ spobs pa bcom pa yin no zhes rje nyid gsung ngo /.* Shākya mchog ldan, *Ngo mtshar dad pa'i rol mtsho*, 21b–22a.

also because her paternal grandmother was ordained as a nun at a Sa skya institution.[489] Yet when she became a disciple of Bo dong Paṇ chen, she dropped her Sa skya affiliations and converted to the emerging Bo dong pa tradition.

Reading Chos kyi sgron ma's biography, we learn of her and Bo dong Paṇ chen's efforts to establish a tradition of full monastic ordination for women in Tibet, to revitalize nunneries, and to develop sacred dance practices for female practitioners.[490] She herself was fully ordained under Bo dong Paṇ chen, though questions remain about the doctrinal basis of this undertaking.[491] While full ordination for women did not ultimately survive in the Bo dong pa (or any) lineage, such endeavors were remarkably progressive for the time, underscoring Bo dong Paṇ chen's more inclusive approach to Buddhist leadership.

The biographies of Bo dong Paṇ chen and Chos kyi sgron ma also describe his death and the funerary rites that followed. Hurrying to his bedside after receiving news that he was sick, Chos kyi sgron ma asked him to remain in the world, but he was too ill to fulfill her wish.[492] She stayed with him until he died, after which she—together with the abbot of Glang 'khor monastery Kun dga' rgyal mtshan and a prominent disciple Rgyal mtshan Dkon mchog—oversaw his last rites.[493] 'Jigs med 'bangs notes that when they were cremating Bo dong Paṇ chen's body, his head was particularly difficult to ignite—evidence, apparently, of his greatness.[494] After the cremation, his remains were gathered and mixed with earth in order to

489 Diemberger, *Religious Dynasty*, 131.

490 Ibid., 109,

491 Ibid., 133.

492 Ibid., 196.

493 Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 88.

494 Ibid.

make 10,000 small icons that were widely distributed, and a great reliquary was also constructed.[495] While the specific funerary traditions are not specified in either biography, the indication that Chos kyi sgron ma oversaw these rituals is striking in itself, testifying again to the Bo dong pa tradition's remarkable inclusivity during this period.

Go rams pa: Dreams, Polemics, and Patronage

A number of Go rams pa's biographies report that on the day he began writing his polemic against Bo dong Paṇ chen,[496] he had a dream. In Kong ston Dbang phyug grub pa's account, while Go rams pa was residing at Ngam ring, the site where his teacher Rong ston is said to have lost in debate to Bo dong Paṇ chen, he dreamed of another of his teachers, Mus chen Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan (1388–1469), who was seated on a large throne amid pristine rivers on an alpine plain.[497] Speaking with a raised voice, Mus chen declared, "Currently in Tibet, the Land of Snows, there is no one more expert in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* than I!"[498] He was rearranging his text as he taught. He had not previously presented himself in this way, so Go rams pa wondered what he was saying. He listened attentively to Mus chen and gained clarity on some points he had failed to understand before. But after waking up and performing his daily

495 Diemberger, *Religious Dynasty*, 197.

496 The colophon of *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* indicates that he completed this work at Ngam ring in 1466 (*me pho khyi'i lo*). He would have been 37 years old at the time. *X*, 469. *Y*, 549.

497 Tib. *ne'u gsing*/*ne gseng*.

498 *da lta bod gangs can na sbyong rgyud la nga las mkhas pa med gsung.* Kong ston Dbang phyug grub pa, *Rje bla ma'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rin po che'i phreng ba* (Delhi: T. G. Dhongthog, 1973), 39–40. Kong ston Dbang phyug grub pa, *Rje bla ma'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rin po che'i phreng ba*, in *Sa skya'i bla ma 'ga' yi rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* (E. Gene Smith's Green Books), 1: 1–19 (s.l.: s.n., n.d.), 10. Cf. Ngawang Jorden, "Buddha-nature: Through the Eyes of Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge in Fifteenth-Century Tibet" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2003), 205.

rituals, he forgot what Mus chen had said. He nevertheless reported that Mus chen's text had been a good one.[499]

Another of Go rams pa's disciples, Rje btsun Sangs rgyas rin chen, recounts this dream differently. He writes that Go rams pa dreamed of encountering many monks building a throne, here again on a mountain plain. Go rams pa asked whose throne they were building, and they replied that it was Mus chen's, who would be giving teachings on the SDP. Go rams pa joined in their efforts, and when Mus chen arrived and taught, Go rams pa listened carefully, recorded what he had heard on a sheet of paper after he woke up, and included Mus chen's insights in *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*.[500] Interestingly, the prominent Sa skya pa scholar Glo bo Mkhan chen Bsod nams lhun grub (1456–1532) provides a nearly identical account of the dream, though he adds that Go rams pa himself references this experience in *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*: "At the end of the composition itself, Go rams pa also writes, 'In a dream I saw the logical indication and observable quality on a mountain peak.'"[501] Here Glo bo Mkhan chen quotes a line from the concluding verses of Go rams pa's text, which reads a little differently in the versions of Go rams pa's work that we have today: "In a dream, the sunlight of

499 Kong ston, *Rin po che'i phreng ba* (Dhongthog), 40. Kong ston, *Rin po che'i phreng ba* (Green Books), 10. Cf. Jorden, PhD diss., 206.

500 Note that Kong ston and Rje btsun Sangs rgyas rin chen refer to *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* (*Gzhan phan gnod 'joms*) using variations of an alternate abbreviated title. Kong ston refers to it as *Eliminating Objects to Light Rays for the Benefit of Others* (*Gzhan phan 'od zer gyi rtsod spong*), whereas Rje btsun Sangs rgyas rin chen calls it *Eliminating Objections to [Light Rays for the Benefit of Others: the Rituals of] Sarvavid* (*Kun rig rtsod spongs*). See Kong ston, *Rin po che'i phreng ba* (Green Books), 10. Kong ston, *Rin po che'i phreng ba* (Dhongthog), 40. Cf. Jorden, PhD diss., 206. A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, *Kun mkhyen bsod nams seng ge'i rnam par thar pa dad pa rgya mtsho'i rlabs phreng rnam par g.yo ba las/ Rje btsun Sangs rgyas rin chen gyis mdzad pa'i rnam thar*, in *Gsung 'bum: Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams*, 29: 1–31 (Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang, 2000), 14.

501 *brtsoms pa nyid kyi mjug tu/ rmi lam ri rtser rtags kyi mtshan ma mthong / /zhes pa yang bris so/*. A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, *Kun mkhyen bsod nams seng ge'i rnam par thar pa dad pa rgya mtsho'i rlabs phreng rnam par g.yo ba las/ Glo bo Mkhan chen gyis mdzad pa'i rnam thar*, in *Gsung 'bum: Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams*, 29: 31–60 (Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang, 2000), 45.

the logical indication and observable quality / of discovering the profound meaning shone brightly on a mountain's peak."[502]

Other biographers provide still further variations on the dream. Ra dbon Yon tan 'byung gnas, about whom we know little except that he was a teacher of the twenty-second Sa skya throne holder 'Jam dbyangs Kun dga' bsod nams grags pa rgyal mtshan (1485–1533), gives more context for the writing of *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*. He describes the aforementioned ruler Rnam rgyal grags bzang and his son inviting Mus chen and Go rams pa to Ngam ring monastery,[503] where Go rams pa soon discovered that Bo dong Paṇ chen's teachings on the rituals of Sarvavid were spreading courtesy of his work *Clarifying the Meaning of the Tantra: The Rituals of the Lord Sarvavid*.[504] Alarmed that Bo dong Paṇ chen's interpretation of this tantra might come to be seen as authoritative, and provoked by Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms of *Light Rays* in the *Definitive Explanation*, Go rams pa felt compelled to produce a written rebuttal. It was at this point that he dreamed of Mus chen, whom in this version we find already seated on a white throne on a plain adorned with various kinds of flowers. As with Kong ston's account, Mus chen declares that there are no Tibetans more expert in the SDP than he, and he offers insights that Go rams pa memorizes and later incorporates into *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*.[505] Ra dbon concludes by adding that after overturning Bo dong Paṇ chen's

502 *rmi lam ri rtser zab don rnyed pa yi/ /rtags dang mtshan ma'i nyi 'od lham mer gsal/. X*, 469. *Y*, 548.

503 "The lord of men Rnam rgyal grags pa and his son invited [Mus chen and Go rams pa] to give teachings at Ngam ring monastery." *mi'i dbang po rnam rgyal grags pa yab sras kyi* [=*kyis*] *ngam ring chos sder gsung ngag gnang ba la gdan drangs/.* A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, *Kun mkhyen bsod nams seng ge'i rnam par thar pa dad pa rgya mtsho'i rlabs phreng rnam par g.yo ba las/ Ra dbon yon tan 'byung gnas kyis mdzad pa'i rnam thar*, in *Gsung 'bum: Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams*, 29: 60–128 (Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang, 2000), 83.

504 Ibid., 84.

505 Ra dbon gives the title *Overcoming Confusion for the Benefit of Others* (*Gzhan phan 'khrul 'joms*) for Go rams pa's text. Ibid., 85.

mistaken views in this first work, Go rams pa proceeded to propagate authentic teachings on the SDP's practices through the composition of his detailed commentary, *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*.[506] This is echoed in T. G. Dhongthog's history of the Sa skya school, which lists the SDP among the tantric works that Go rams pa taught again and again, using *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others* as his manual.[507]

Sa skya tradition holds Go rams pa to have been an emanation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan.[508] Emically speaking, this could be taken to imply that *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* reflects Grags pa rgyal mtshan's very own response to Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms, albeit one he produced some 250 years after his own death while in a new human form. At the very least, Go rams pa seems to have inherited Grags pa rgyal mtshan's affinity for the SDP, and his own works rely on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's interpretations. This affinity appears to have been inspired by Go rams pa's primary tantric teacher Ngor chen, under whom he was fully ordained as a monk at age 27.[509] Ngor chen himself wrote two important works on SDP-oriented rites—*Limitless Benefit for Others* and *Clearing Away the Defilements of the Sādhana of the Complete Maṇḍala of Sarvavid*—and both of these efforts claim explicitly to

506 Ibid. The colophon of *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others* indicates that it was completed at Ngor E wam chos ldan in 1469 (*sa mo gling* [sic] *gi lo*). Go rams pa would have been 40 years old at the time. This means it postdates *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* by three years. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 400. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (modern edition), 459.

507 *sbyong rgyud rje nyid kyi ṭī ka'i steng nas yang yang bshad pa mdzad do.* Dhongthog Rinpoche, *Dpal ldan sa skya pa'i bstan pa rin po che ji ltar byung ba'i lo rgyus* (New Delhi: T. G. Dhongthog Rinpoche, 1977), 239. Cf. Dhongthog Rinpoche*, The Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism: A History*, trans. Sam van Schaik (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2016), 144. In his endnotes, van Schaik writes: "This commentary by Gorampa does not seem to be extant" (Dhongthog, *Sakya School,* 230). This is mistaken, as the commentary Dhongthog Rinpoche is alluding to is *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others,* of which we have multiple editions. Perhaps van Schaik would not have made this error had he correctly translated a line that occurs on the next folio: *sbyong rgyud kyi ṭī ka gzhan phan kun khyab* (Dhongthog, *Lo rgyus*, 240), which he renders "*Benefit of Others Permeating Everything*, a commentary on the *Saṃpuṭa Tantra*" (Dhongthog, *Sakya School*, 146). This should read: "*All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*, a commentary on the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*."

508 *rje btsun grags pa'i sprul par grags.* Dhongthog, *Lo rgyus*, 234. Cf. Dhongthog, *The Sakya School*, 141.

509 Cabezón, *Freedom from Extremes*, 34.

represent Grags pa rgyal mtshan's intent.[510] Mus chen too was a student of Ngor chen, and Go rams pa studied with both of them while at Ngor E wam chos ldan monastery.[511] Notably, Go rams pa acknowledges his indebtedness to these masters in his *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*[512] and *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*,[513] which confirms their influence.

As a determined defender of Sa skya pa tradition, it is unsurprising that Go rams pa felt compelled to capsize Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques. We also must not forget that Go rams pa studied directly—albeit briefly—under Rong ston when he was nineteen years old, and that the apparent rivalry between Rong ston and Bo dong Paṇ chen's circles likely spilled into Go rams pa's training. Yet *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* is not Go rams pa's best-known polemic. Far more influential is his later invective against Tsong kha pa and Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan's interpretations of Madhyamaka, titled *Distinguishing the Views*,[514] which José Cabezón and Geshe Lobsang Dargyay have translated in full. In penning this critique of Tsong kha pa's approach to the Middle Way, Go rams pa was of course taking on another of Rong ston's foes, albeit one whom he apparently already had defeated in debate, but whose influence was quickly growing thanks to the surging Dga' ldan pa tradition at this time.

Another intriguing link in the literature between Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa relates to place and patronage. Recall that according to 'Jigs med 'bangs, the famous scholar-myriarch Rnam rgyal grags bzang of Ngam ring was an avid supporter of Bo dong Paṇ chen,

510 Ngor chen, *Gzhan phan mtha' yas*, 37. Ngor chen, *Dpal kun rig gi dkyil 'khor yongs rdzogs kyi sgrub thabs sgrib pa rnam sel*, in *Gsung 'bum: Kun dga' bzang po* (Sde dge), 4: 5–37 (Dehradun: Sakya Centre, 199?), 37.

511 Jörg Heimbel and Dominique Townsend, "Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed October 24, 2017, http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Ngorchen-Kunga-Zangpo/2387.

512 *X*, 469. *Y*, 549.

513 Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 399–400. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (modern edition), 459.

514 Tib. *Lta ba'i shan 'byed*.

counting him among his primary teachers. Rnam rgyal grags bzang appears to have been an eclectic figure; he studied under masters from various traditions and developed expertise in the *Kālacakra Tantra* and Tibetan medicine, about which he wrote extensively and exerted considerable influence.[515] Bo dong Paṇ chen's death in 1451 must have been a great loss for the 55-year-old ruler, but his curiosity and commitment to learning apparently never waned. We read in the biographies of Go rams pa that it was this same ruler and his son who fifteen years later invited Mus chen and Go rams pa to teach at Ngam ring. It is striking that Go rams pa composed a polemic against Bo dong Paṇ chen under the patronage of the latter's devotee, and we must wonder about the dynamics of that relationship: Was Go rams pa attempting to reassert the Sa skya tradition's prominence before an aristocrat who had aligned himself with Bo dong pa and Jo nang pa teachers? Did he feel compelled to avenge Rong ston's supposed loss at this same location, or at least to counter an anti-Rong ston narrative that had circulated there? Of course we can only guess. But this connection of patronage and locale is an intriguing element of the dispute between Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's circles, and indeed one that should not be underestimated given the importance of patronage for any religious community.

After his sojourn at Ngam ring, Go rams pa continued to travel and teach, and thanks to the support of patrons connected with the emerging Rin spungs court,[516] he established two new Sa skya pa monasteries in Rta nag, not far west of Gzhis ka rtse in Gtsang. Rta nag gser gling was the first, which he founded in 1466, the same year he had visited Ngam ring and written *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*. This monastery served as his base for the next

515 Stearns, "Namgyel Drakpa Zangpo," *Treasury of Lives.*

516 Go rams pa's direct patrons were Drung chen Nor bu bzang po (d. 1466) and his son Don grub rdo rje. See Cabezón, *Freedom from Extremes*, 44, 267–68.

several years.[517] After enjoying success in the area, Go rams pa founded a second monastery in 1473, which he named Thub bstan rnam rgyal, where he developed a new monastic curriculum for the study of Buddhist philosophy and tantra. Following a three-year tenure as the sixth abbot of Ngor E wam chos ldan, Go rams pa returned to Rta nag and continued teaching and writing.[518] In 1488, he planned a trip to Sa skya, but was initially blocked by rulers who feared he would perform rituals on behalf of the surging Rin spungs pas. He was eventually permitted to go to Sa skya as planned, but while returning to Rta nag in 1489, he fell ill while staying at a monastic center in Sngon mo rdzong and died. His body was transported to Thub bstan rnam rgyal where it was cremated, and one portion of his remains was used to make small icons while the other was placed in a large Buddha statue.[519]

Bo dong Paṇ chen's **Definitive Explanation**

Having made some progress in contextualizing Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* and Go rams pa's *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*, we should describe their basic contents. Let us begin with Bo dong Paṇ chen's work. His *Definitive Explanation* forgoes the typical homage and introductory verses found at the beginning of so many Tibetan Buddhist texts, starting instead with a direct declaration of his objective: "Now I should explain my definitive treatment of the nature of the rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana from the root *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*."[520] While the SDP is Bo dong Paṇ chen's focus, he by no

517 Ibid., 35.

518 Ibid., 36.

519 Sadly, Go rams pa's monasteries and the statue containing his remains were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Ibid., 39–40.

520 *da ni ngan song yongs su sbyong ba'i rtsa ba'i rgyud kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi cho ga de nyid rnam par nges pa bshad par bya ste/. V*, 140. *W*, 120.

means sticks to it, looking to many other canonical works as well. In fact, the first third of the text—which appears to have once been a separate work altogether[521]—consists of a series of back-to-back quotations from the SDP, the *Vajra Peak Tantra*,[522] the *Tantra of the General Secret Rituals of All Maṇḍalas*,[523] Version B of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*,[524] the *Net of Illusions Tantra,*[525] the *Compendium of Principles*, and the *Compendium of Consecrations Tantra*[526] that, taken together, provide a canonical foundation for his vision of a complete ritual performance in the tradition of Sarvavid Vairocana. These citations detail a variety of practices that correspond to the ritual sequence that Bo dong Paṇ chen presents in the latter two-thirds of his text.[527] It is in this latter section that he regularly cites *Light Rays* and rejects its interpretations. The basic structure of this portion of the work is outlined in Table 2 below:

TABLE 2: TOPICAL OUTLINE OF BO DONG PAṆ CHEN'S *DEFINITIVE EXPLANATION*

1. The preparations[528]
- 1.1. The preliminary approach
  - 1.1.1. The attributes of the primary deity and his maṇḍala (*V*, 164. *W*, 143)
  - 1.1.2. The timing of the approach (*V*, 165. *W*, 143–44)
  - 1.1.3. The number of recitations to be performed (*V*, 165. *W*, 144)

521 Go rams pa refers to this section and the latter section of the *Definitive Explanation* as two separate texts in his *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*. See below.

522 Skt. *Vajraśekhara Tantra*; Tib. *Gsang ba rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud rdo rje rtse mo*.

523 Skt. *Sarvamaṇḍalasāmānyavidhiguhya Tantra*; Tib. *Dkyil 'khor thams cad kyi spyi'i cho ga gsang ba'i rgyud*. Hereafter *Secret General Tantra.* This tantra is classified as belonging to the Kriyātantra class of Buddhist tantras.

524 Bo dong Paṇ chen follows Tibetan scholars of Yogatantra like Bu ston in calling Version B of the SDP the *Gtsug dgu'i rgyud* or simply *Gtsug dgu.* He calls Version A of the SDP the *Ngan song sbyong rgyud* or some variant of this title. He cites Version B numerous times throughout his *Definitive Explanation* but focuses primarily on Version A. For more on this, see below.

525 Skt. *Māyājālamahātantrarāja/Māyājāla Tantra*; Tib. *Rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po sgyu 'phrul dra ba*.

526 Skt. *Supratiṣṭhatantrasaṃgraha/Supratiṣṭha Tantra*; Tib. *Rab tu gnas pa mdor bsdus pa'i rgyud.*

527 *V*, 139–63. *W*, 120–42.

528 Tib. *sbyor ba*.

TABLE 2 (CONTINUED)

1.2. The site ritual[529] (*V*, 167–82. *W*, 146–61)
1.3. The preparatory rites[530] (*V*, 182–85. *W*, 161–64)

2. The main practice[531]
2.1. The lines and colors of the physical maṇḍala that is to be created (*V*, 185–90. *W*, 164–69)
2.2. Placing the deity in the maṇḍala (*V*, 190–92. *W*, 169–70)
2.3. The meditative practices to be performed (*V*, 192–200. *W*, 171–79)
2.4. The mudrās of the mahāmudrās[532] (*V*, 200–5. *W*, 179–84)
2.5. Offerings and praises (*V*, 205–11. *W*, 184–90)
2.6. The vase recitations to be done first for the self-initiation (*V*, 211. *W*, 190)
2.7. The actual self-initiation (*V*, 211–221. *W*, 190–200)
2.8. Purifying negative actions by bestowing empowerment to the deceased (*V*, 221–26. *W*, 200–6)

3. The concluding rites[533] (*V*, 226–27. *W*, 206–7)

The basic format of this ritual program is similar to that found in *Light Rays*, though Bo dong Paṇ chen covers fewer practices and offers fewer details while describing the practices that he does include, leaving such technicalities to his *Clarifying the Meaning of the Tantra: The Rituals of the Lord Sarvavid* and certain other of his works on SDP-oriented rituals. His *Definitive Explanation* is thus not a ritual manual *per se*, but more a *study* of these practices and their canonical foundations. Indeed, one would have a very difficult time performing these rites using this text alone, not least because of the many detours it takes into controversy.

529 Tib. *sa'i cho ga/sa chog*.

530 Tib. *sta gon*.

531 Tib. *dngos gzhi*.

532 Here the term mahāmudrā refers to one of the four types of mudrās used in yogatantric practice. This four-fold typology stems from the *Compendium of Principles*. The four mudrās are the commitment mudrā (Skt. *samayamudrā*; Tib. *dam tshig gyi phyag rgya*), the doctrine mudrā (Skt. *dharmamudrā*; Tib. *chos kyi phyag rgya*), the action mudrā (Skt. *karmamudrā*; Tib. *las kyi phyag rgya*), and the great mudrā (Skt. *mahāmudrā*; Tib. *phyag rgya chen po*). Very basically, these mudrās are performed to map one's body, speech, mind, and activities onto those of the deity. For a discussion of these four vis-à-vis the writings of Buddhaguhya, see David B. Gray, "Imprints of the 'Great Seal': On the expanding semantic range of the term of mudrā in eighth through eleventh century Indian Buddhist literature," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 34, nos. 1–2 (2011 [2012]): 430–33. For a translation of Mkhas grub rje's discussion of these four according to the Yogatantra tradition, see Tsongkhapa and the Dalai Lama, *The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra,* 139–53.

533 Tib. *rjes* (here an abbreviation of *rjes chog*).

Yet we must acknowledge that *Light Rays* also takes such detours, albeit far less frequently. Recall, for instance, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's criticism of Dge bshes Gnyal pa in the section on realizing the deity (2.2.2.1.1.1.2.8):

> Eighth, you should realize the deity. In this connection, Dge bshes Gnyal pa says:
>
> > Having relied on the statement in the SDP "Having entered by means of Vajradharā's mudrā" the master enters and receives empowerment without realizing the deity before him. After that, the deity is realized.
>
> This is not the case—it is pointless to have entered into the sand maṇḍala without having realized the deity, and . . .[534]

Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan quotes a now lost work of his predecessor Dge bshes Gnyal pa, rejecting his reading of the SDP before proceeding with his own interpretation. While this brief acknowledgement and rebuttal of another Tibetan writer need not prevent us from calling *Light Rays* a ritual manual, it marks a break in the flow of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's ritual instructions. In a performative context, such asides are unlikely to have been recited or even outwardly acknowledged, and instead represent an interpretive annotation aimed at drawing the reader's attention to past misunderstandings and avoiding them. In a sense, such moments anticipate the rhetoric of Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation*, but they do not change *Light Rays*' primary function. In short, *Light Rays* is still very much a ritual manual, while Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* serves a more scholastic and persuasive—if not polemical—purpose.

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534 *brgyad pa lha bsgrub par bya ba ni/ 'di la dge bshes gnyal* [*E=dmyal*] *pa na re/ rdo rje 'dzin mas* [*E=ma*] *zhugs nas ni/ /zhes bya ba la brten nas/* [*E−/*] *mdun du lha ma bsgrubs par/* [*E−/*] *slob dpon bdag nyid 'jug cing dbang len la/ de nas lha sgrub pa yin zer ba ni ma yin te/ lha ma bsgrubs par rdul tshon du zhugs pa la don med pa dang /. A*, 142. *B*, 195. *C*, 33. *D*, 396. *E*, 21a. *F*, 30. Cf. Skorupski, 329. I should restate here that the line quoted from the SDP simply reads "Having entered by means of Vajradharā," and that I supply "the mudrā of" in my translation. In doing so, I follow Ngor chen's *Limitless Benefit for Others*, which references and expands on this line: "One enters the interior of the maṇḍala palace by means of the mudrā of Vajradharā." *rdo rje 'dzin ma'i phyag rgyas dkyil 'khor khang pa'i nang du zhugs/.* See Ngor chen, *Gzhan phan mtha' yas*, 39.

Go rams pa's Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others

Go rams pa's rebuttal begins with an homage to his guru (who perhaps here is Grags pa rgyal mtshan rather than Ngor chen or Mus chen, since Go rams pa refers to Grags pa rgyal mtshan as "guru"[535] only a few lines down) and to Vajrasattva. He then praises Grags pa rgyal mtshan in verse before beginning to undermine his opponent:

> The victorious lord[536] guru, an ocean of good qualities,
> adorned with lotuses of excellent accomplishment,
> is the site of pure joy and ease for his retinue seeking liberation
> and a treasury of precious jewels of all glorious good qualities.
>
> I bow down respectfully at the feet of this excellent teacher,
> luminous with the glory of virtuous renown.[537]
> Having unified the knowledge and compassion of the Three Jewels,
> he grasps well the victory banner[538] of the teachings in this degenerate age.
>
> The Second Victor, the lord Sa skya pa,
> provided a feast for fortunate students,[539]
> in which even subtle defilements that mistakenly appear
> are not witnessed by the eyes of omniscience.
>
> He provided this having understood well the meaning of the
> *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* spoken by the Victor
> from a tradition of genuine lineage,
> which Ānandagarbha, who was prophesied by the Victor,
> discerned precisely according to the Victor's intent.
>
> However, I have not tolerated obscurations of the sun on the pure path
> by clouds of fallacious scripture and reasoning
> and a ritual text that carelessly comments on the meaning of the

535 Tib. *bla ma*.

536 Tib. *rje btsun*. This of course refers to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's full name in religion, Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan.

537 Tib. *grags pa*. This too is an allusion to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's name.

538 Tib. *rgyal mtshan*. Here again Go rams pa embeds a part of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's name into the verses.

539 This "feast," of course, is none other than *Light Rays*.

Tantra[540]
written by one reputed to be a scholar.

After clearing away everything amidst the clouds of erroneous speech,
with the great wind of inexhaustible scripture and reasoning,[541]
which emerges from the sky of extensive investigation,
I will clarify the sun's light rays for the benefit of others.[542]

These carefully constructed lines of verse laud Grags pa rgyal mtshan and his lineage while accusing Bo dong Paṇ chen of wrong interpretations. As noted above, Go rams pa embeds parts of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's name in this poem, and even identifies him as the Second Victor, that is, a fully enlightened buddha second to Śākyamuni. Such language is not unusual in Tibetan literature, but it underscores Go rams pa's profound devotion to this Sa skya pa hierarch. Go rams pa then turns to Bo dong Paṇ chen, alluding to the names of his works under consideration while suggesting that he is not the great scholar some believe him to be, and, more to the point, is a purveyor of false views.

Next, Go rams pa briefly outlines Grags pa rgyal mtshan's lineage in connection with the SDP. He traces the transmission back to Rin chen bzang po, who, according to Go rams pa,

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540 Tib. *rgyud don.* This is doubtless an allusion to the name Bo dong Paṇ chen's ritual manual, *Clarifying the Meaning of the Tantra* (*Rgyud don gsal ba*).

541 Tib. *lung dang rigs pa*. Here again Go rams pa alludes to Bo dong Paṇ chen's writings, in this case his *Definitive Treatment of the Scriptures* (*Lung gi rnam nges*) and *Rational Definitive Treatment* (*Rigs pa'i rnam nges*). For more on these, see below.

542 *dpal ldan yon tan kun gyi rin chen gter/ /thar 'dod 'dab bzang dga' zhing bsti ba'i gnas/ /dngos grub bzang po'i padmos rnam mdzes pa/ /yon tan rgya mtsho rje btsun bla ma rgyal/ /dkon mchog gsum gyi mkhyen brtse gcig bsdus nas/ /snyigs dus bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan legs 'dzin cing / /rnam dkar grags pa'i dpal gyis lham me ba/ /smra ba bzang po'i zhabs la gus phyag 'tshal/ /rgyal bas gsungs pa'i ngan sbyong ba'i rgyud/ /rgyal bas lung bstan kun dga' snying po yis/ /rgyal ba'i dgongs pa ji bzhin phye ba'i don/ /rgyal ba gnyis pa rje btsun sa skya pas/ /yang dag brgyud pa'i srol las legs bzung nas/ /skal ldan gdul bya'i dga' ston bkye ba la/ /'khrul par snang ba'i dri ma phra ba yang / /thams cad mkhyen pa'i spyan gyis ma gzigs so/ /'on kyang mkhas par grags pa 'ga' zhig gis/ /rgyud don rang dgar 'grel pa'i cho ga dang / /ltar snang lung dang rigs pa'i sprin tshogs kyis/ /lam bzang nyi ma sgrib pa ma bzod nas/ /rnam dpyod yangs pa'i mkha' dbyings las byung ba'i/ /mi zad lung dang rigs pa'i rlung chen gyis/ /log par smra ba'i sprin rum kun bsal nas/ /gzhan phan nyi ma'i 'od zer gsal bar bya/. X*, 416–17. *Y*, 480–81.

received these teachings in the early part of his life[543] from the Indian scholar Buddhaśānti, who himself was trained in the tradition of the great commentator Ānandagarbha. Rin chen bzang po then received a second SDP transmission later in his life[544] from the Indian scholar Dharmapāla, who was fourth in a line of transmission going back to Ānandagarbha himself. Go rams pa explains that Rin chen bzang po then transmitted these teachings to Brag steng pa Yon tan tshul khrims, who in turn passed them to Mal gyo Blo gros grags pa, who himself was a teacher of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's father Sa chen Kun dga' snying po.[545] Curiously, Go rams pa makes no mention of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's claim that his lineage in the tradition of the SDP can also be traced to Atiśa. Why this is the case remains unclear.

After establishing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's lineage, Go rams pa reports on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's motivations for writing the five works on the SDP that he did:

> Situated in this oral lineage, the protector Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan, whose mind was indistinguishable from Mañjughoṣa, having feared that the SDP tradition would vanish because future generations of disciples would be unable to hold this oral lineage, composed his quintessential instructions on the method of explaining this tantra, namely, his *General Overview for the Benefit of Others*;[546] his *Outline*[547] of this tantra; his notes on this tantra;[548] *Light Rays for the Benefit of Others*, which concerns the stages of its practice; and his *Requisites for the Benefit of Others*.[549]

543 Tib. *sku tshe'i stod la*.

544 Tib. *sku tshe'i smad la*.

545 *X*, 417–18. *Y*, 482–83.

546 Tib. *gzhan phan spyi chings*. This is another name for his *General Overview of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (*Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don*).

547 This is his *Outline of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (*Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi sa bcad*).

548 This is Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Light Rays of the Requisites* (*Nye bar mkho ba'i 'od zer*).

549 *snyan brgyud du bzhugs pa phyi rabs kyi gdul bya rnams kyis snyan brgyud 'dzin par mi nus pas bka' srol nub par dogs nas/ mgon po 'jam pa'i dbyangs dang mi gnyis pa'i thugs mnga' ba rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan gyis/ rgyud bshad thabs kyi man ngag gzhan phan spyi chings/ rgyud kyi sa bcad/ rgyud kyi mchan/ lag tu blang pa'i rim pa gzhan phan 'od zer/ gzhan phan nyer mkho rnams mdzad do/*. *X*, 418. *Y*, 483.

Emphasizing here Grags pa rgyal mtshan's ostensibly altruistic intentions for producing these five works, Go rams pa goes on to add that they are fully congruous with Indian precedent, stemming from the "flawless" tradition of Ānandagarbha.[550] He then turns to Bo dong Paṇ chen's texts, addressing "the one well known as Bo dong Phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba," noticeably omitting the "Paṇ chen" or "great scholar" from his title. He mentions three works in particular: *Clarifying the Meaning of the Tantra: The Rituals of the Lord Sarvavid*, the *Definitive Treatment of the Scriptures*,[551] and the *Rational Definitive Treatment.*[552] These last two are combined in what is known today as the *Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana*, the first third being the *Definitive Treatment of Scripture* and the latter two-thirds being his *Rational Definitive Treatment*.[553]

The format of the body of *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* corresponds to that of *Light Rays* itself. Go rams pa reproduces *Light Rays*' basic division into two parts, namely, the preliminary approach (1)[554] and the stages of the rituals to be performed (2), and he follows also the division of the preliminary approach into three, namely, approaching the single tutelary deity (1.1), approaching the complete maṇḍala (1.2), and approaching the deity having

550 *'di dag ni rgyal bas lung bstan pa'i grub chen kun dga' snying po'i bka' srol skyon med pa'i bla ma brgyud pa las 'ongs pa. X*, 418. *Y*, 483.

551 Tib. *Lung gi rnam nges*.

552 Tib. *Rigs pa'i rnam nges*.

553 This is confirmed in his conclusion to his selection of quotes in the *Definitive Explanation*, which reads: "The nineteenth division of the scriptures of the definitive treatment—the rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana's maṇḍala from the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*." *Ngan song yongs su sbyong ba kun rig rnam par snang mdzad kyi dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga rnam par nges pa'i lung gi le'u bcu dgu pa'o*. *V*, 163. *W*, 142. It appears that this collection of citations was once the nineteenth in a series of like collections that have since been reorganized. We find in his collected works, for example, similar collections titled *Lung gi rnam nges* that pertain to the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* and the maṇḍala of Vajrapāṇi.

554 As with previous chapters, I here reference in parentheses the corresponding sections of *Light Rays* as outlined in Table 5 in the appendix.

relied on a painting on cloth (1.3). After meeting Bo dong Paṇ chen's objections to these preliminaries, Go rams pa turns to the second main section, the stages of the rituals to be performed. Here again he follows *Light Rays*, dividing his discussion into two: the activities of the ritual expert (2.2.2.1.1.1) and the introduction of the disciples into the maṇḍala and the bestowal of empowerment (2.2.2.1.1.2),[555] the first of which he follows *Light Rays* in dividing into ten (2.2.2.1.1.1.2.1–2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10). He then turns to the introduction of students into the maṇḍala and the bestowal of empowerment, before closing with rebuttals of Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques of other practices of purification and the concluding rites. The contents of *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* are outlined in Table 3 below:

TABLE 3: TOPICAL OUTLINE OF GO RAMS PA'S *OVERCOMING HARM FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS*

Homage and introductory verses (*X*, 416–17. *Y*, 480–81)

Introduction (*X*, 417–19. *Y*, 481–84)

Replies to Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques:

1. The ritual activities to be performed by ahead of the empowerment
- 1.1. The preliminary approach (*X*, 419–31. *Y*, 484–99)
- 1.2. The site ritual (*X*, 431–35. *Y*, 500–4)
- 1.3. The preparatory rites (*X*, 435–38. *Y*, 504–9)
- 1.4. Drawing the maṇḍala and placing the deities (*X*, 438–442. *Y*, 509–14)
- 1.5. Placing the support for the purification of negative actions (N/A)
- 1.6. Laying out the ornaments (*X*, 442–43. *Y*, 514–15)
- 1.7. The personal yoga (*X*, 443–48. *Y*, 515–22)
- 1.8. Realizing the deity (*X*, 522–33. *Y*, 448–57)
- 1.9. The offerings and torma to be given (N/A)
- 1.10. The self-initiation (*X*, 457. *Y*, 533–34)

2. Introducing the disciples into the maṇḍala and bestowing empowerment (*X*, 457–61. *Y*, 534–39)

555 This increase in decimal points reflects Go rams pa's omission of a number of basic divisions indicated in *Light Rays*. For example, Go rams pa does not mention the division of these rituals into those performed for one's own benefit and those performed for the benefit of others, the division of those performed for the benefit of the living and those performed for the benefit of the dead, and the sevenfold division of the methods of purifying the negative actions of the deceased. This is because the majority of Bo dong Paṇ chen's objections relate to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's discussion of purifying negative actions by bestowing empowerment, and he therefore focuses on the subtopics included under this practice in particular.

TABLE 3 (CONTINUED)

3. Other methods of purification and the concluding rites (X, 461–68. *Y*, 539–47)[556]

Conclusion (*X*, 468–69. *Y*, 547–59)

Notice that the sections on placing the support for the purification of negative actions and the offerings and torma have no page ranges. This is because despite Go rams pa's listing of all ten subsections at the outset, he does not actually engage with these two as distinct topics of discussion in the body of the text, instead skipping them and proceeding to the next topic. Why does he neglect these two? In the first case, Bo dong Paṇ chen does not critique Grags pa rgyal mtshan's very brief discussion on placing the support of purification,[557] and thus there are no controversies for Go rams pa to address. In the second case, Bo dong Paṇ chen does cite Grags pa rgyal mtshan in his discussion of torma offerings, and in fact questions Grags pa rgyal mtshan's categorizations of torma offerings and his suggestion that the ritualist may perform these offerings either briefly or extensively (in Bo dong Paṇ chen's view, only an extensive torma offering is sufficient).[558] Yet for reasons that are unclear, Go rams pa does not address these particular objections directly, instead only echoing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's remarks on torma offerings while discussing the distribution of ornaments.[559] It thus would appear that Go rams pa listed these ten subsections for the sake of remaining faithful to *Light Rays*' structure, but not with the aim of actually addressing each one in turn.[560]

556 Go rams pa does not explicitly identify these as constituting a separate subsection of his work, but the passages from *Light Rays* under discussion here are not part of the introduction of the students into the maṇḍala and the bestowal of empowerment, and so should be set apart.

557 For Grags pa rgyal mtshan's discussion of this practice, see *C*, 22. *D*, 385–86. *E*, 14a. *F*, 20.

558 *V*, 210–11. *W*, 189–90.

559 *X*, 443. *Y*, 515.

560 Unless, of course, the version of Go rams pa's work that we have today is incomplete, though I have found no other evidence to support this possibility.

THE CONTROVERSIES

Now that we have considered the basic context and contents of Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's works, let us turn to some of the issues they address. These are too numerous to explore *in toto*, but we can examine some of the discussions most relevant to questions of ritual agency. The general pattern of these exchanges is as follows: Bo dong Paṇ chen cites and criticizes a passage from *Light Rays*, to which Go rams pa responds by first citing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's original statement and Bo dong Paṇ chen's objections, before finally attempting to overturn the latter. Unsurprisingly, Go rams pa argues that Grags pa rgyal mtshan is correct in each case, though he often expands on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's explanations and provides commentary on them while at the same time heightening the contrast between Sa skya pa and Bo dong pa understandings of SDP-oriented funerary rites.

Disputing the Site Ritual

One subject to which considerable attention is devoted is the site ritual. In chapter two, we briefly discussed Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions for performing this rite, which is common in Tibetan tantric traditions and comes in diverse forms. In her article "The Earth Ritual: Subjugation and Transformation of the Environment," Cathy Cantwell states that the site ritual is an "essential component of the preliminary rites for the consecration of a site as a suitable place for Vajrayāna practice," adding that it should be performed at the beginning of a retreat or practice session since it is required for establishing the boundaries of the ritual space and for the creation of the maṇḍala.[561] Meanwhile, in his article published shortly after Cantwell's, "The Sa

561 Cathy Cantwell, "The Earth Ritual: Subjugation and Transformation of the Environment," *Revue d'Études Tibétaines* 7 (April 2005): 4.

chog: Violence and Veneration in a Tibetan Soil Ritual," Alexander Gardner opens by citing Karma chags med's (1613–78) explanation that the site ritual must be done when preparing to construct a funeral pyre, temple, reliquary, castle, and other such structures in order to "properly reckon with the serpent (*lto 'phye*)."[562] The serpent to which Karma chags med refers is a kind of "autochthonous serpentine deity," to borrow Gardner's phrasing, that oversees a location and must be subjugated when performing a ritual there.[563] In many iterations of this practice, we find the ritualist summoning the serpent from underground and forcing it to listen to his demands, which culminates in him gaining mastery over its territory.

The literature on the site ritual is remarkably diverse. Gardner observes: "By the seventeenth century, ritual specialists could turn to various Kriyā, Yoga, Mahāyoga, Anuttarayoga and possibly Anuyoga tantras, as well as canonical Indian and Tibetan commentaries, for divergent scriptural basis for their presentations of the *sa chog* rite."[564] In order to provide a starting point for understanding the practices that these sources describe, Gardner draws on four ritual manuals[565] and a modern ethnographic study[566] to sketch a generic outline of the site ritual's stages: (1) preliminary practices including requesting permission to use the site from the earth goddess, consulting any human landowners if applicable, and making preliminary offerings; (2) laying out a grid used to determine the position of the serpent based

562 Alexander Gardner, "The Sa chog: Violence and Veneration in a Tibetan Soil Ritual," *Études Mongoles et Sibériennes, Centrasiatiques et Tibétaines* 36–37 (2006): 2.

563 Ibid.

564 Ibid., 3.

565 Gardner's primary sources are: (1) Karma chags med's *Sa chog mdor bsdus bya tshul gsal ba*, (2) Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa's *Sa bdag lto 'phye chen po brtags pa'i rab tu 'byed pa nyes pa kun sel*, (3) Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (1653–1705) *Vaiḍūrya dkar po*, and (4) Bco brgyad khri chen Thub bstan legs bshad rgya mtsho's (1920–2007) *Dgon gnas 'debs yul sa dpyad dang sa brtag bzung gtsug lag khang rgyag stang*.

566 Mary Van Dyke, "Grids and Serpents. A Tibetan foundation ritual in Switzerland," in *Constructing Tibetan Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. F. J. Korom (Quebec: World Heritage Press, 1997), 178–227.

on astrological calculations,[567] (3) drawing the serpent on the grid and determining the location of its vital spot,[568] that is, where the digging—or symbolic stabbing—is to be done, (4) the presentation of offerings, (5) digging in the vital place and thereby forcing the serpent to submit and cede the land to the officiant,[569] (6) examining the soil that has been dug from the vital place and testing its fecundity, (7) burying a treasure vase to "alleviate the serpent's torment," as Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho puts it,[570] and (8) releasing the serpent by erasing the drawing of it and the grid and asking it to depart. Gardner stresses that all eight steps are not included in every account of the site ritual, and sometimes they are mentioned but not explained, presumably because the author expects the reader to know how to perform the given step without further elaboration.[571]

567 Gardner notes that miscalculations can have significant consequences. He cites a passage from Chos kyi grags pa's manual, which reads: "If one recklessly approximates the date in ignorance of the measurement of the body and the place and the attainment, this will be very serious; one will come down with the five poisons of sight, touch, thought, breath and so forth. [Were one to dig] on the head, back, tail, arm, face, buttocks and so forth of the nāga, the king of all the earth lords, with his retinue of gods and demons, Rāhu, the eight classes [of gods and demons]: when facing an army one's general will be killed; if a maṇḍala is drawn, the master will pass away; if one takes a wife, she will die; if one confronts magic [one] will suffer the spells; if one [practices in] a charnel ground, an astrologer will die; if one offers a banquet plagues will arise; if one stages performances harm will befall everyone; if one attempts to cure an illness the life-force will be stolen; if one builds a house it will become a charnel ground. Thus whatever is done, it is said that obstacles or illness will befall you: if one erects a dharma-throne the teachings will decline; if one performs a bleeding or moxibustion the cure will be reversed and the life-force will be destroyed. Therefore it is important to be careful in this matter." Gardner, "The Sa chog," 13.

568 Tib. *sa dmigs*. Gardner cites Chos kyi grags pa's warning regarding digging in the wrong location: "If one digs elsewhere than in [the] vital [place, and digs in] the nine-fold place, one's father, mother, son, relative, wife, daughter, and companion will die. If one chooses the back, one will die oneself or be expelled from the place. If the tail is selected, horses, cows, oxen, and so forth, the four-legged [beasts] will be destroyed and one's own strength will also diminish." Gardner, "The Sa chog," 13.

569 On this point, Gardner elaborates, "It is clear from Karma chags med, Chos kyi grags pa, [Sde srid] Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and Bco brgyad khri chen that the serpent does not surrender its authority of its own free will. All four of our manuals instruct the ritualist to assume wrathful guise and subjugate the earth, digging in the vital place not simply to test the soil and bury the treasure vase (the subsequent two steps) but to terrorize the serpent and force him to submit to human authority." Gardner, "The Sa chog," 11.

570 Ibid., 12.

571 Ibid., 3.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's Account of the Site Ritual

Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides only a brief sketch of the site ritual in *Light Rays*, directing the reader to other sources for more detailed instructions. He writes:

> From the Sarvavid section [of the SDP]:
>
> > One should begin[572] to bless the site
> > by means of such a ritual,
> > including a temple, a garden,
> > a reliquary, a shrine, and a shrine room[573] and so forth.
> > At that site that is blessed,
> > one should draw an outer maṇḍala.
>
> So, if you perform the site ritual extensively at the location where it is required, you should act in accordance with the explanation in either the *Vajra Peak Tantra* or the *Secret General Tantra*, or in accordance with the condensed meaning of those, that is, what appears in the maṇḍala rituals. If you have not accomplished even those activities, you should give torma copiously at that location, and you should peacefully solicit the non-human spirits who reside in that location. Reciting wrathful mantras, you pelt them with mustard seeds and incense smoke, and you should forcefully solicit them. You subjugate them with your hands, and the ground is meditated on as space. Having recited *oṃ bhū khaṃ* and *oṃ hana hana krodha hūṃ phaṭ* many times, you should perform well the sweeping[574] to beautify the ground, which you do according to the size of the maṇḍala. This abbreviated site ritual reflects the speech of the guru.[575]

572 Preferring the SDP's *brtsam* over *Light Rays*' *tsam*.

573 Tib. *kun dga'*, which is short for *kun dga' ra ba*.

574 Reading *ga dar* as *gad dar*.

575 *gnyis pa sa'i cho ga ni kun rig* [*X*, *Y+gi skabs*] *nas/ gtsug lag khang dang skyed* [*Li*, *Co=bskyed*] *mos tshal/* [*E* 12a] */mchod rten lha khang kun dga' sogs/ /ji bzhin pa yi* [*G.yung*, *Li*, *Pe*, *Co*, *E=pa'i*] *cho ga yis/ /gnas ni byin gyis brlab pa tsam* [*A*, *B=brtsam*]*/ /byin gyis brlabs pa'i gnas der ni/ /phyi yi* [*G.yung*, *Pe*, *E=phyi'i*] *dkyil 'khor bri bar bya/ /zhes* [*E=ces*] *'byung bas/* [*E, X, Y−/*] *sa chog* [*V*, *W=sa'i cho ga*] *bya dgos pa'i sa phyogs su* [*V*, *W=dgos pa rnams kyi phyogs su*; *X*, *Y=dgos pa rnams kyi cho ga*] *rgyas par byed na/* [*V*, *W−/*] *rdo rje rtse mo'am* [*E=rtse mo dang*]*/ gsang ba spyi rgyud nas* [*V*, *W=na*] *bshad pa bzhin nam/ de dag gi don bsdus pa/* [*E, X, Y−/*] *dkyil 'khor cho ga rnams* [*X*, *Y=chog gzhan*] *nas 'byung ba bzhin bya'o/ /de tsam bya ba ma grub na* [*V, W=grub nas*]*/* [*E*, *V*, *W−/*] *sa phyogs der gtor ma rgyas par btang la/* [*E−/*] *sa phyogs de na gnas pa'i mi ma yin pa la zhi bas bslang / khro bo'i sngags bzlas* [*X*, *Y=zlos*] *shing /* [*E*, *V*, *W−/*] *gu gul gyi dud pa dang* [*V*, *W+/*] *yungs kar* [*V*, *W=dkar*] *gyis brab cing /* [*E*, *V*, *W*, *X*, *Y−/*] *drag pos bslang* [*V=slang*] *ngo / /lag pas mnan la* [*E=pas*] *sa gzhi nam mkhar bsgoms te* [*E=sgom ste*]*/ oṃ bhūkhaṃ/* [*E*, *V*, *W*, *X*, *Y−/*] *zhes pa dang* [*E=zhes brjod pas*]*/* [*E−/*] *oṃ hana hana krodha* [*E=krota*] *hūṃ phaṭ/ zhes* [*C*, *D*, *E*, *F=ces*] *mang du bzlas te* [*X*, *Y−/*] *dkyil 'khor ji tsam byed pa'i sa gzhi mdzes par ga dar* [*V*, *W=thar*] *legs par bya'o/ /sa chog* [*X*, *Y=cho ga*]

Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan begins by grounding the site ritual in the SDP, pointing to a passage that describes blessing the site of a temple, garden, reliquary, shrine, and shrine room. He then directs the reader to two other works—the *Vajra Peak Tantra* and the *Secret General Tantra*[576]—which outline a more detailed version of this practice.[577] As we have seen elsewhere in *Light Rays*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan anticipates cases where an extensive version of this rite is unfeasible, prompting him to detail a condensed version that can be performed in its stead. This begins with the presentation of many torma offerings to solicit the non-human spirits who reside there. Once they emerge, the rite turns violent, with the ritualist reciting wrathful mantras and pelting the obstructive entities with mustard seeds and accosting them with incense smoke, after which he subjugates them with his hands. With the spirits overpowered, the ground becomes pure and is imagined as space, after which the ritualist concludes by sweeping the area.

Bo dong Paṇ chen's Critiques

Bo dong Paṇ chen provides a more detailed account of the site ritual in his *Definitive Explanation* than does Grags pa rgyal mtshan, dedicating fifteen folio sides to its exegesis. He attacks *Light Rays* more than once in this section, critiquing not only its account of the site ritual, but also its description of certain preliminary practices, such as visualizing oneself as green-blue Vajrapāṇi during the practice of approaching the single tutelary deity (Bo dong Paṇ

bsdus pa 'di ni bla ma'i gsung ngo [*E=bla ma'i phyag len no*]/. *A*, 123. *B*, 173. *C*, 19–20. *D*, 382–83. *E,* 11b–12a. *F,* 17–18. *V*, 167–68. *W*, 146. *X*, 431–32. *Y*, 500–1. Cf. Skorupski, 311.

576 The *Secret General Tantra* belongs to the Kriyātantra class of Buddhist tantras.

577 Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho also directs readers to the *Secret General Tantra* for guidance on this ritual. See Gardner, "The Sa chog," 3.

chen argues that Vajrapāṇi must be white in this context).[578] His discussion of the site ritual is thus significantly broader than Grags pa rgyal mtshan's, though much of it focuses on visualization practices, leaving the rite's outward mechanics to other sources.

Bo dong Paṇ chen wastes no time in attacking Grags pa rgyal mtshan's work. He begins his treatment of the site ritual by quoting *Light Rays*' explanation of it, after which he argues that Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides no proof at all for accepting a maṇḍala rite that does not require a site ritual, a scenario that Grags pa rgyal mtshan implies by specifying that he is addressing cases that demand such a practice. Bo dong Paṇ chen then turns to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's recommendation that one look to the *Secret General Tantra* and *Vajra Peak Tantra* for guidance on performing an extensive site ritual, quoting a passage from the former:

> In a sage's abode and an oxen's pen,
> on caves and mountain peaks,
> where the ground is solid,
> in an empty house, on a stone slab,
> in front of a reliquary, on an island of streams,
> on the shores of a lake
> one purifies the ground and investigates it and
> does not need to act meticulously.
> Although one has set foot on solid ground, there is no need there.
> Even faults including being uneven and so forth,
> need not produce doubts there.[579]

Bo dong Paṇ chen reads this passage as indicating that an extensive site ritual is not required in some contexts. This prompts him to press Grags pa rgyal mtshan on his understanding of the

578 *C*, 4. *D*, 367. *E*, 2a. *F*, 3. *V*, 171. *W*, 150. *X*, 419–20. *Y*, 484–85.

579 *drang srong gnas dang ba lang* [*Z=glang*; *G.yung=zlang*] *lhas* [*X*, *Y=ba glang slas*]*/ /phug dang ri yi* [*G.yung*, *Li*, *Pe=ri'i*] *rtse mo dang / /sa gzhi gang na 'thas pa dang / /khang steng* [*X, Y=stong*; *Z=thog*] *dang ni rdo leb* [*X=lab*] *dang / /mchod rten drung dang 'bab chu'i gling / /mtsho rnams kyi* [*Co=kyis*] *ni 'gram dag tu/ /sa gzhi* [*G.yung=bzhi*] *sbyang dang* [*Z=zhing*] *brtag pa* [*G.yung=brtags*] *dang / /nan tan du ni bya mi dgos/* [*Z+/der ni zug rngu dbyug mi dgos/*] */'thar par* [*X*, *Y='thas par*] *bcags* [*Z=bcag*] *kyang der mi dgos/ /mtho* [*V*, *Z=mthon*] *dman la sogs skyon rnams kyang* [*Snar*, *Zhol=gang*] */ /der ni dogs pa bskyed mi dgos/. V*, 168. *W*, 147. *X*, 432. *Y*, 501. *Z*, 512. *Dkyil 'khor spyi'i cho ga gsang ba'i rgyud*. In *Bka' 'gyur: Dpe bsdur ma*. 96: 509–582. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9. Here cited as *Z*.

SDP and the *Secret General Tantra*. As Bo dong Paṇ chen sees it, Grags pa rgyal mtshan is sending mixed messages: he cites the SDP's statement "One should begin to bless the site / by means of such a ritual . . .", which gives reason to believe that the extensive site ritual is necessary, and then points to the *Secret General Tantra*, which gives reason to believe that such a ritual is unnecessary.[580] In Bo dong Paṇ chen's view, the *Secret General Tantra* is in fact recommending a brief purification practice,[581] though he notes that the process of seizing the site[582] from the local spirits is equally important for all locations where a maṇḍala is to be constructed. He then explains that a complex site ritual may be condensed through a combination of mantra recitation and meditative absorption, adding that the extensive site ritual described in the *Vajra Peak Tantra* need not apply in such cases.[583] Finally, he argues that Grags pa rgyal mtshan's claim that one should recite the mantras *oṃ bhu khaṃ* and *oṃ hana hana krodha hūṃ phaṭ* and perform the attendant mudrās is appropriate in Niruttarayogatantra,[584] but should not be included in a yogatantric ritual—"there is no valid reason at all for doing this here!"[585]

580 *V*, 168. *W*, 147. *X*, 432–33. *Y*, 501–2.

581 Tib. *sa sbyang ba*.

582 Tib. *sa gzung ba*.

583 ". . . because here, having removed the extensive embellishments of the ritual, condensing greatly the complexities of what is to be done by means of saying *oṃ sha* and *oṃ bha*, one performs recitations, and since this is itself done primarily in samādhi, just as one does not perform extensively the approach of the three samādhis and so forth, the extensive site ritual of the *Vajra Peak Tantra* also does not apply in this context." *'dir* [*X*, *Y='di*] *ni cho ga'i spros pa rgya chen po rnams dor nas oṃ shaḥ* [*X*, *Y=sha*] *oṃ bhaḥ* [*X*, *Y=bha*] *zhes bya ba'i tshul gyis bya ba'i* [*X*, *Y=bya ba*] *spros pa shin tu bsdus te/* [*X*, *Y−/*] *bzlas pa dang* [*X*, *Y+/*] *ting nge 'dzin la gtso bor byed pa nyid yin pas na* [*X*, *Y+/*] *ji ltar ting nge 'dzin gsum la sogs pa'i bsnyen* [*V=snyen*] *pa rgyas par* [*V=pa*] *mi byed pa ltar/ rdo rje rtse mo'i sa chog rgyas pa yang 'dir skabs su ma babs pa'i phyir* [*X*, *Y*+dang]*/. V*, 169. *W*, 147. *X*, 433. *Y*, 502.

584 Tib. *rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i rgyud*.

585 *'dir byed pa'i tshad ma ci yang med pa'i phyir ro/. V*, 169. *W*, 147–48. *X*, 433. *Y*, 502.

Go rams pa's Reply

Go rams pa addresses each of Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms in turn. In answer to the objection that Grags pa rgyal mtshan has provided no proof for his acceptance of a maṇḍala rite that does not require a site ritual, Go rams pa contends that it is perfectly permissible to forego such a rite when using an "old maṇḍala enclosure," for in such cases the obstructive spirits already have been dispelled.[586] He then examines Bo dong Paṇ chen's claim that Grags pa rgyal mtshan contradicts himself by citing the SDP, which gives reason to believe that the extensive site ritual is necessary, and then the *Secret General Tantra*, which gives reason to believe that such a ritual is unnecessary. Go rams pa fires back that the passage quoted from the *Secret General Tantra* does not actually teach that an extensive site ritual is unneeded, but rather argues that a *purification* of the site is unnecessary,[587] an important distinction that he accuses Bo dong Paṇ chen of overlooking.

On the topic of abbreviating the site ritual, Go rams pa argues that whether or not one performs the rite extensively or briefly is determined by context, such that even the unnecessity of an extensive site ritual when creating a sand maṇḍala cannot be established as a general rule. He explains:

586 "This is because since it is suitable to construct a sand maṇḍala without doing the site ritual in an old maṇḍala enclosure, the ritual of the sand maṇḍala that does not require the site ritual is accepted, and Bo dong Paṇ chen's reason that there is no proof is not established." *dkyil 'khor gyi khang pa rnying pa la sa chog ma byas par rdul tshon gyi dkyil 'khor bzhengs su rung bas sa chog mi dgos pa'i rdul tshon gyi dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga khas blangs pa la shes byed med pa'i gtan tshigs ma grub pa'i phyir. X*, 433. *Y*, 502–3. Cantwell mentions a similar convention in her article, citing the *Dpal rdo rje phur bu bdud 'joms gnam lcags spu gri'i stod las sgrub chen gyi khog dbub grub gnyis 'dod 'jo'i dga' ston*, a text included in the collected works of Bdud 'joms Rin po che, which states that the practice of examining the site is unnecessary in an old practice place. Cantwell, "The Earth Ritual," 6.

587 "This is because the text has already stated that cleansing is unnecessary: 'One purifies the ground and investigates it and / does not need to act meticulously.'" *gzhung snga ma las/ sa gzhi sbyang dang brtag pa dang / /nan tan du ni mi bya dgos/ /zhes sbyang ba mi dgos par gsungs pa'i phyir ro/. X*, 434. *Y*, 503.

> This is because the site ritual is not posited as extensive or brief on the basis of a detailed or simple maṇḍala, but is posited as extensive or brief on the basis of the level of difficulty of making requests to the guardians of the directions[588] and elemental spirits[589] in the area. For example, it like this: since the three robes of a fully ordained monk are to be made in accordance with the size of the monk's body, they are to be measured according to his own measurements. And since the sitting mat depends on the size of one's living quarters without relying on the size of the monk's body, it is to be measured according to the Sugata's measurements.[590]

Go rams pa's point is that the complexity of the site ritual is not relative to the complexity of the maṇḍala to be constructed, but rather to the effort required to subdue the protectors and spirits that reside in a given area. He makes an analogy to shore up his case, stating that monastic robes are tailored in relation to the size of a monk's body, while a sitting mat is made according to the dimensions of the room in which it is to be used and *not* according to the monk's body, meaning that the traditional measurements of the Buddha may be utilized for its creation. While these examples may seem obscure, the argument is quite simple: since the focus of the site ritual is taking control of the ritual space, one should act in accordance with this aim and not some unrelated concern. In the case of monastic robes, they must fit the person, and so they are tailored according to his measurements, whereas the monk's sitting mat must fit the room and hence the traditional measurements of the ideal meditator—the Buddha—may be used.

Go rams pa next responds to Bo dong Paṇ chen's charge that the mantras *oṃ bhu khaṃ* and *oṃ hana hana krodha hūṃ phaṭ* belong to Niruttarayogatantra practice but not Yogatantra. Go rams pa acknowledges that these mantras are seen "in some branches of Niruttarayogatantra

588 Tib. *phyogs skyong*.

589 Skt. *bhūta*; Tib. *'byung po*.

590 *sa chog ni/ dkyil 'khor rgyas bsdus kyi sgo nas rgyas bsdus su 'jog pa ma yin gyi/ phyi rol gyi phyogs skyong dang 'byung po la slong dka' sla'i sgo nas rgyas bsdus su 'jog pa'i phyir ro/ /dper na chos gos gsum po dge slong gi lus che chung dang 'tshams par bya ba yin pas rang khrus gzhal bar bya ba yin la/ gding ba ni/ dge slong gi lus la mi ltos par gnas mal che chung la ltos pas bde bar gshegs pa'i khrus gzhal ba bzhin no/. X*, 434. *Y*, 503–4.

ritual," but argues that if they were inappropriate for a Yogatantra context, then the three torma offerings commonly presented to guardians of the directions, elemental spirits, and obstructive spirits would be unsuitable here as well, since these offerings are also described in another class of tantras—the Kriyātantras.[591] Go rams pa avers that using higher tantric sources to supplement the SDP is unproblematic, since in the passage that Grags pa rgyal mtshan quotes from the SDP that reads "One should begin to bless the site by means of such a ritual," the rite itself is not clearly elucidated. He remarks: "Since the rituals are not explained clearly here, we require supplements from other tantras, and there is no reason here that *oṃ bhu khaṃ* and so forth, which are explained in the Niruttarayogatantras, are unsuitable."[592] In other words, Go rams pa is willing to draw from higher streams of tantric Buddhist tradition while outlining SDP-oriented rites, whereas Bo dong Paṇ chen wants to limit such borrowings.

Analysis

There are some striking differences between Grags pa rgyal mtshan's account of the site ritual and the versions of it that Cantwell and Gardner outline. Gardner observes that "all our manuals have in common laying the grid, drawing the serpent, digging in the vital spot, and making offerings,"[593] but in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's condensed version, there is no mention of creating a grid, performing astrological calculations to determine the location of the serpent, drawing the serpent, or digging a hole so as to stab it, doubtless because such practices are complex and time

591 *oṃ bhu khaṃ zhes sogs bla med kyi cho ga'i yan lag 'ga' zhig la mthong bas 'dir byar mi btub na bya rgyud nas gsungs pa'i cha gsum yang 'dir byed du mi rung bar 'gyur/. X*, 434. *Y*, 504.

592 *'dir gsal par ma bshad pas rgyud sde gzhan nas kha bskang dgos la/ bla med nas bshad pa'i oṃ bhu khaṃ sogs 'dir mi rung ba'i rgyu mtshan yang med pa'i phyir ro/. X*, 435. *Y*, 504.

593 Gardner, "The Sa chog," 4.

consuming. Instead of targeting the earth goddess or serpent specifically, Grags pa rgyal mtshan describes subjugating a more general class of entities—non-human spirits—which Go rams pa glosses as guardians of the directions (the broader category under which the earth goddess typically falls) and elemental spirits.

Interestingly, Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not mention the serpentine deity or the earth goddess anywhere in *Light Rays*, though he does reference the latter in *A Drop of Elixir for the Benefit of Others: Last Rites* while discussing the preparatory rites that immediately follow the site ritual.[594] Here he identifies four preparatory rites to be performed: (1) the preparatory rite of the earth goddess, (2) the preparatory rite of the deity, (3) the preparatory rite of the vases, and (4) the student preparatory rite. It is perhaps in response to this that Bo dong Paṇ chen provides the same list in his *Definitive Explanation*, only to suggest that the preparatory rite of the earth goddess is inappropriate in an SDP-oriented context: "the preparatory rite of the earth goddess has not been explained anywhere in Yogatantra."[595] Bo dong Paṇ chen also mentions the serpent[596] when discussing the process of setting the deity in the maṇḍala, including it among

594 Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions on the preparatory rites are as follows: "The rituals included under the preparatory rites: the preparatory rite of the earth goddess, the preparatory rite of the deity, and the preparatory rite of the vases. These are similar to the ritual methods used for the living. As before in the student preparatory rite, one should visualize the support, summon to it the consciousness of the deceased, clear away obstructive spirits, and purify the negative actions of the dead as was done earlier. The rest of the practice should be no different than what is done for the living. The recitations following this should actually be done by the relatives of the deceased and so forth, or they can be accomplished through visualization. One should know the rituals to be practiced in detail from the *River of Empowerments*. Such are the preparatory rites." *sta gon du gnas pa'i cho ga ni/ sa'i lha mo sta gon dang / lha sta gon dang / bum pa sta gon ni tshe dang ldan pa la byed pa'i cho ga'i skabs dang 'dra la slob ma sta gon gyi sngon du rten bskyed pa dang / rnam shes dgug pa dang / bgegs sbyang ba dang / sdig pa sbyang ba rnams sngon du byas la/ lhag ma rnams ni tshe dang ldan pa dang khyad par med par bya'o/ /de'i rjes su bzlas pa rnams ni bu la sogs pa'i gnyen 'brel gyis mngon du byed pa'am byed par bsams pas 'grub bo/ /lag tu blang ba'i cho ga zhib tu dbang gi chu bo las shes so/ /sta gon no// S*, 455. *T*, 568. *U*, 433.

595 *sa'i lha mo sta gon ni rnal 'byor gyi rgyud gang nas kyang ma bshad*. *V*, 184. *W*, 163.

596 Bo dong Paṇ chen uses the term "great serpentine earth lord" (Tib. *lto 'phye chen po sa bdag*).

other non-human entities such as *gandharva*,[597] *garuḍa*,[598] *yakṣa*,[599] *rakṣasa*,[600] and elemental spirits.[601] Go rams pa's *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*, moreover, twice mentions both the earth goddess and the serpent, but not in sections focusing on the site ritual.[602] It would seem, then, that while these particular beings are prominent in Cantwell and Gardner's sources, they do not play a significant role in the SDP-oriented works under consideration in this chapter.

As for Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's argumentation, Bo dong Paṇ chen has two overarching concerns: Grags pa rgyal mtshan's fidelity to his sources and his inclusion of practices derived from Niruttarayogatantra. He first accuses Grags pa rgyal mtshan of having no proof for his implicit acknowledgement that certain sites do not require the site ritual, the implication being that he has no canonical foundation for this possibility. He then accuses Grags pa rgyal mtshan of misreading his sources, before finally arguing that some of his instructions are appropriate only to Niruttarayogatantra and not Yogatantra. Go rams pa, in contrast, takes a more liberal approach to the site ritual. When dismissing Bo dong Paṇ chen's first objection, he does not provide any canonical support for cases where no site ritual is required, but rather appears to draw on convention by declaring that an old site that has already been cleansed of obstructions need not be cleansed again. In answer to the charge that Grags pa rgyal mtshan is misreading his sources, Go rams pa replies that it is Bo dong Paṇ chen who is guilty of this: the *Secret General Tantra* is in fact arguing that a purification of the site is unnecessary, rather than

597 Tib. *dri za*.

598 Tib. *nam mkha' lding*.

599 Tib. *gnod sbyin*.

600 Tib. *srin po*.

601 *V*, 190. *W*, 169.

602 *X*, 281, 310, 312, 376. *Y*, 321, 354, 356, 432.

recommending a brief purification practice. Go rams pa next argues that the degree of detail with which one performs the site ritual depends on what is required to successfully overcome the negative spirits in that location—a practical approach grounded in circumstance rather than textual fidelity. Finally, he admits that the mantric practices Grags pa rgyal mtshan outlines are indeed found in certain strands of Niruttarayogatantra, but he insists that drawing from higher classes of tantra while engaged in yogatantric practices need not be seen as compromising the integrity of the practice. All told, Go rams pa here comes off as more flexible in his approach to the site ritual, at least while defending Grags pa rgyal mtshan's decisions in this section.

On the topic of ritual agency, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's account of the site ritual and Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's responses bring into focus a component of the ritual network that we only briefly discussed in chapter two. We have already discussed the agentive relationships that emerge between the ritualist and the deities who assist in liberating the dead, but now having unpacked more fully the site ritual, we should consider the agentive significance of the entities it addresses. Recall that in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's condensed version, the officiant first gives torma at the location to be used for the funerary rituals, after which he peacefully solicits the non-human spirits who reside there. Once the malevolent spirits are before him, the officiant recites violent mantras and pelts these spirits with mustard seeds and incense smoke, forcefully soliciting their submission to his demands. He then subjugates them with his hands, and gaining victory, imagines the ground as pure space, free of any obstructive entities, before concluding the practice by reciting fierce mantras designed to ward off any demons who might attempt a return. Taken together, these practices underscore the fact that we are engaging with a Buddhist world in which unseen forces remain a constant threat. Even an

outwardly serene location may be populated by invisible assailants who can interfere dramatically with the rite's progress and the fate of the human actors involved. Further, when Go rams pa glosses Grags pa rgyal mtshan's term “non-human spirits” to mean guardians of the directions and elemental spirits, we begin to get a better sense of the different classes of beings with which the officiant must contend. The guardians of the directions are typically petitioned to assist the officiant in keeping negative spirits at bay,[603] whereas the elemental spirits are nefarious and thus the ritualist's primary opponents. Just as the deities constitute a network of unseen actors who can assist in saving the dead, these spirits constitute a network of unseen predators that can actively resist the ritual's progress. It should be stressed that such beings are recognized in Tibetan tradition as conscious, intentional actors and so should be framed as an opposing set of primary agents. They are met and subdued by human and divine actors in concert with material offerings and mantras, which, as we have already argued, serve as secondary agents that extend the ritualist's agency in the ritual environment, the offerings helping to lure the malevolent spirits out of hiding and the mantras assisting in their defeat.

Disputing the Visualization of the Ritual Support

Another topic of controversy for Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa is the ritual support,[604] the object representing the deceased in the ritual context. We have already seen how different objects can serve this function, such as the deceased's written name, an image of the dead, a

603 As noted, the earth goddess is typically included among the directional guardians. Cantwell notes that once the officiant ritually solicits the earth goddess for assistance, she is “obliged to recognise the legitimacy of using the earth for the Buddhist maṇḍala, to surrender her prior rights to the possession of the earth and to act as a benevolent protectress of the practice.” Cantwell, “The Earth Ritual,” 9. For further discussion of this class of beings, see Bentor, *Consecration of Images and Stūpas*, 207.

604 Tib. *rten*.

reliquary, or a deity image. At issue in this section is how the ritualist works with the chosen object.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan on Visualizing the Ritual Support

At the outset of his examination of the practices of introducing disciples into the maṇḍala and bestowing empowerment (2.2.2.1.1.2), Grags pa rgyal mtshan cites an unnamed opponent: "In this regard, someone claims: 'It being unnecessary to visualize the support, it is appropriate to act as one does with the living.'"[605] In response, Grags pa rgyal mtshan once again evokes the authority of Rin chen bzang po, who asserts that both the visualization of the ritual support and the introduction of students into the maṇḍala are required.[606] After discussing the prospect of obstructive spirits interfering with the consciousness of the deceased (2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.1)—a topic to which we will turn in chapter four—Grags pa rgyal mtshan briefly explains the visualization practice (2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.2):

> Then, second, visualizing the support: You should purify into emptiness the support such as the name card and so forth with the mantra *oṃ śa śūnyatā jñānavajra svabhāva śuddho 'haṃ*. In that you should visualize the deceased issuing from the first letter of the name of the deceased or the letter *nrī.* If they had a tutelary deity, it is suitable also to visualize them as the deity.[607]

605 *'di la kha cig na re/* [*E*−/] *rten bskyed pa mi dgos te/* [*E*−/] *gson po bzhin byas pas btub bo* [*E=po*]/ /[*E*−/ /] *zhes zer la/. C*, 62. *D*, 426. *E*, 41a. *F*, 58.

606 "According to Jo bo Rin chen bzang po's quintessential instructions, the visualization of the support and entry into the maṇḍala are required." *jo bo* [*E=jo 'o*] *rin chen bzang po'i man ngag gis* [*E=gi*]/ [*E*−/] *rten bskyed pa dang /* [*E*−/] *'jug pa dngos so/. C*, 62. *D*, 426. *E*, 41a. *F*, 58.

607 *de nas gnyis pa rten bskyed pa ni* [*Zhwa, E*−*gnyis pa rten bskyed pa ni*] *rten ming byang la sogs pa ste* [*E=de*]/ *oṃ śa śūnyatā jñānavajra svabhāva śuddho 'haṃ* [*E=oṃ śunyata jñanavajra svabhava śuddho 'ham*] *gis stong par sbyang / tshe 'das kyi ming gi yi ge* [*Zhwa*−*yi ge*; *X*, *Y=ming yig*] *dang po'am/* [*E*−/] *nrī* [*E=nri*; *X*, *Y=ṇi*] *las tshe 'das der bskyed* [*X*, *Y+la*]/ *de la yi dam* [*C*, *D=yid dam*] *gyi lha yod na* [*X*, *Y+yi dam gyi*] *lhar bskyed kyang btub bo* [*E=po*]/. *C*, 64. *D*, 427–28. *E*, 42a–b. *F*, 59. *X*, 460. *Y*, 537.

Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes that whatever object the ritualist chooses to use as the support, he should recite the mantra *oṃ śa śūnyatā jñānavajra svabhāva śuddho 'haṃ* in order to purify it and recognize its empty nature. Next he should visualize the deceased on the basis of either the first letter of their name or the letter *nrī*, or if they had engaged in a specific deity practice while they were alive, he should visualize them in the form of that deity. Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not elaborate any further on this topic, proceeding to the summoning of the deceased's consciousness to the support (2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.3) and finally to the elimination of their negative karma (2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.4).

Bo dong Paṇ chen's Critiques

As with Grags pa rgyal mtshan's account, Bo dong Paṇ chen's discussion of the ritual support is succinct and appears in the section on purifying negative actions by bestowing empowerment.[608] Bo dong Paṇ chen begins by explaining that the ritualist either should draw an image of the deceased on paper or write their name with saffron and set it on the departed's garments. Placing all this in front of the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana, he grants empowerment to the dead. Bo dong Paṇ chen touches on the threat of spirits interfering with this practice before going on to remark:

> Also in that regard, since a support is necessary, you should summon the consciousness of the deceased to their undecomposed corpse, and if there is no corpse, you should visualize the deceased in their living form issuing either from the first letter of the name of the deceased adorned with bindus, from *naṃ*, or from *nrī*. As for visualizing them issuing from the letter *ṇi*, there is no proof for that, and when one says *naṃ ra*, *naṃ* is the seed syllable of human beings, and since the mind of the bardo being relies predominantly on *rlung*, the letter *ra* from *rlung* is inserted after *naṃ*.[609]

608 See section 2.8 in the outline of Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* above.

Here Bo dong Paṇ chen recommends using the corpse as the ritual support so long as it has not begun to decompose. If the corpse has already begun to decay, then the officiant should visualize the deceased the way they appeared while alive issuing from the first letter of their name or from the seed syllables *naṃ* or *nrī*. Bo dong Paṇ chen then cites Grags pa rgyal mtshan without naming him, referencing a claim in the version of *Light Rays* he had available to him that one should visualize the first letter of the name of the departed issuing from the seed syllable *ṇi*, an assertion that Bo dong Paṇ chen dismisses. He then offers an explanation for combining the seed syllable *naṃ* with *ra*: *naṃ* is the seed syllable of human beings, and since the consciousness of someone in the bardo state relies predominantly on wind or *rlung*, the first letter *ra* in the word *rlung* is placed after *naṃ*.

Go rams pa's Reply

Go rams pa responds first by agreeing that *naṃ* is indeed the seed syllable of human beings, but he challenges Bo dong Paṇ chen's discussion of visualizing the deceased in connection with this syllable, arguing that Bo dong Paṇ chen is here guilty of ignoring the context in which these practices are described. In his words:

> That is incorrect, because even though *naṃ* is indeed the seed syllable of humans, as for visualizing the deceased issuing from that, this is not certain in both what has appeared earlier in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* and what

609 *de la yang* [*X*, *Y=la'ang*] *rten dgos pas ro ma nyams pa la dgug cing / med na tshe 'das kyi ming yig dang po* [*W=bo*] *thig les brgyan pa'i* [*X*, *Y=pa'am*]/ [*W−/*] *naṃ* [*W=ni*] *zhes pa'am/* [*X*, *Y−naṃ zhes pa'am*] *nrī* [*W=ṇri*] *las gson po'i rnam pa bzhin bskyed par bya ste/ ṇi las bskyed* [*W=skyed*] *pa la ni shes byed med la/ na* [*X*, *Y=naṃ*] *ra zhes pas* [*X*, *Y=pa*] *naṃ mi'i* [*W=ṇi yi*] *sa bon yin pa dang / bar do'i sems* [*X*, *Y=bar do'i shes pa*] *ni* [*W=ṇi*] *rlung shas che ba la brten pas* [*W=nas*] *na la* [*X*, *Y=las*] *rlung gi raṃ* [*X*, *Y=ra*] *yig bcug pa'o/. V*, 221. *W*, 201. *X*, 460. *Y*, 537–38. It should be noted that the 2014 typed edition of Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* (cited throughout as *W*) appears to be based on the cursive manuscript found in the 1972 version of his collected works (cited throuhout as *V*), and that the variants witnessed in the former seem to stem from misreadings of the cursive and thus are not to be emphasized. Additionally, in the final sentence of my translation, I follow Go rams pa's version of the quotation for the syllables *naṃ* and *ra*, since these make better sense in context than the *na* and *raṃ* found in the cursive version of Bo dong Paṇ chen's work.

> follows. This is because in the case of what has appeared earlier, these rituals of Sarvavid are explained for the sake of the god Vimalamaṇiprabha, and since in the case of what follows they are taught for the benefit of the six classes of beings, visualizing any of the six classes of beings who have died as issuing from the seed syllable of humans is a joke![610]

Here Go rams pa situates the act of purifying the negative actions of the deceased in the broader context of the SDP's contents. Its instructions on such practices are preceded by the introductory narrative in which the gods ask the Buddha how they can rescue their deceased friend Vimalamaṇiprabha who had died and fallen into Avīci hell. They are likewise followed by instructions focusing not just on human beings, but on all six classes of beings. Go rams pa elaborates:

> Also, in the case of what follows, this is known because it is stated in the Sarvavid section:
>
> > Whether a man, woman, god, nāga, yakṣa, rākṣasa, animal, preta, or hell being, the body of the deceased should be inserted into the maṇḍala. If one bestows empowerment, even if the deceased has been born as a hell being, having been liberated immediately, they are born in the god realm.
>
> and in the Śākyamuni section:
>
> > As for gods, nāgas, yakṣas, rakṣasas, and so forth, namely, those who have been born in the continua of bad rebirths, by performing recitations, the burnt offering rite, and empowerment for the corpse of the deceased, their image, or having written their name and so forth, they are liberated from bad rebirths.[611]

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610 *de ni mi 'thad de/ naṃ mi'i sa bon yin du chug kyang de las tshe 'das bskyed pa ni sngon byung dang rjes 'jug gi nyams len gnyis ka la ma nges pa'i phyir te/ sngon byung la kun rig gi cho ga 'di rnams lha'i bu nor bu dri ma med pa'i ched du gsungs pa yin cing / rjes 'jug la rigs drug gi sems can gyi don du gsungs pa yin pas/ rigs drug gang shi yang mi'i sa bon las bskyed pa ni bzhad gad kyi gnas yin pa'i phyir ro/. X*, 460–61. *Y*, 538.

611 *rjes 'jug de ltar yin par yang kun rig gi skabs nas skyes pa'am/ bud med dam/ lha'am/ klu'am/ gnod sbyin nam/ srin po'am* [*G.yung*, *Pe=bu'am*]*/ byol song ngam/ yi dwags* [*A*, *B=dags*] *sam/ sems can dmyal ba* [*A, B+la*] *sogs te gang yang rung ba shi ba'i lus dkyil 'khor du bcug ste* [*Snar*, *Zhol=te*] [*A*, *B+/*] *dbang bskur na/ sems can dmyal bar skyes na yang de ma thag tu rnam par thar nas lha'i rigs su skye bar 'gyur ro zhes dang / shāka thub kyi skabs nas lha dang / klu dang / gnod sbyin dang / srin po* [*G.yung*, *Pe=bu*] *la sogs pa ngan song gi rgyud* [*A*, *B+kyi dbang*] *du gyur pa rnams* [*A*, *B+kyi*] *shi ba'i ro dang* [*A*, *B=ro'am*]*/ gzugs brnyan nam/ ming la sogs pa'ang* [*A*, *B=pa*] *bris nas* [*A*, *B=te*] *bzlas brjod* [*A*, *B=bzlas pa*] *dang / sbyin sreg* [*G.yung*, *Pe=bsreg*; *Snar=sregs*] *dang / dbang rnams kyis snga ma bzhin du ngan song* [*A*, *B+thams cad*] *las* [*A*, *B+yongs su*] *grol*

Here Go rams pa quotes two passages from the SDP that demonstrate that all beings may be delivered to a heavenly realm through the bestowal of empowerment—the practice's efficacy is not limited to humans. He then takes another jab at Bo dong Paṇ chen for this alleged misunderstanding:

> Therefore, concerning the claim here that one must visualize the deceased issuing from the seed syllable of humans, since now it is observed that one performs the ritual when a human being has died, it appears that this has produced grounds for confusion, but it is clear that Bo dong Paṇ chen has not investigated the meaning of the tantra![612]

Go rams pa's point is that while the emphasis here is on rites to be performed for the sake of a person who has died, the SDP's rituals are in fact designed to help *any* being, and thus choosing to tether the visualization to the seed syllable of humans limits the scope of its efficacy.

Go rams pa concludes by mocking Bo dong Paṇ chen's remarks on adding the letter *ra* to the seed syllable *naṃ* given the consciousness of the deceased is driven by *rlung* or wind. Go rams pa writes: "As for the statement that the letter *ra* from *rlung* is inserted, when applying the four letters *ya*, *ra*, *la*, and *wa* to the four elements, it is said that *ya* is wind and *ra* is fire, but applying *ra* to wind is unprecedented talk!"[613]

Analysis

One striking feature of Go rams pa's response to Bo dong Paṇ chen is his silence on the issue of utilizing the syllable *ṇi*. Bo dong Paṇ chen argues that there is no proof for Grags pa rgyal

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bar 'gyur ro [*A*, *B=byed do*] *zhes gsungs pas shes so/*. *A*, 122, 142. *B*, 171–72, 196. *X*, 461. *Y*, 538.

612 *des na 'dir mi'i sa bon las bskyed dgos par 'dod pa ni da lta mi shi ba'i tshe na cho ga byed par mthong bas 'khrul gzhi byas par snang gi/ rgyud kyi don la dpyad pa ma yin par gsal lo/*. *X*, 461. *Y*, 538–39.

613 *rlung gi ra yig bcug ces pa ya ra la wa bzhi 'byung ba bzhi la sbyar ba'i tshe na ya rlung dang / ra me la sbyar bar bya ba yin gyi/ ra rlung la sbyar ba ni sngon med pa'i gtam mo/*. *X*, 461. *Y*, 539.

mtshan's claim that one should visualize the deceased issuing from this seed syllable, arguing instead that one should visualize them issuing from *naṃ* or *nrī.* Go rams pa does not fully reject this, quietly accepting Bo dong Paṇ chen's instructions to use *nrī*, while also acknowledging that his opponent is at least correct in asserting that *naṃ* is the seed syllable of human beings. Interestingly, when Go rams pa quotes *Light Rays*, he includes *ṇi* in the quotation—he does not attempt to correct Grags pa rgyal mtshan's text or sweep the error under the rug.[614] By contrast, all of the versions of *Light Rays* available today read differently. These works state: "In that you should visualize the deceased issuing either from the first letter of the name of the deceased or the letter *nrī.*"[615] The Sde dge and the two modern versions based on it read *nrī*, and the cursive manuscript reads *nri*, a variant that we should not weigh too heavily since for the most part this version does not mark long Sanskrit vowels. Notably, this same remark appears in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Requisites for the Benefit of Others*, and here again we find the syllable *nrī* instead of the *ṇi* that both Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa cite.[616] Based on this and the myriad other variants observed when comparing the versions of *Light Rays* that we have today with the quotations from it recorded in Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's writings, it would appear that either Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa had an alternative version of the *Light Rays*, or that sometime after their debate, Grags pa rgyal mtshan's works were edited, and in this particular case *corrected*, perhaps even in response to Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticism and Go rams pa's tacit acceptance of it.

614 The block print of Ngor chen's *Limitless Benefit for Others* reads *na* in one instance but *nrī* in another. See Ngor chen, *Gzhan phan mtha' yas*, 95–96. Meanwhile, the fifteenth-century scholar Grub chen Chos kyi rin chen's commentary on *Light Rays* reads *ṇi*. See Grub chen Chos kyi rin chen, *Gzhan phan 'od zer gyi ngag 'don lag len gzhan phan gsal ba*, in *Gsung 'bum: Chos kyi rin chen*, 3: 1–66 (s.l.: s.n., n.d.), 21a.

615 *tshe 'das kyi ming gi yi ge* [*Zhwa−yi ge*; *X*, *Y=ming yig*] *dang po'am/* [*E−/*] *nrī* [*E=nri*; *X*, *Y=ṇi*] *las tshe 'das der bskyed* [*X*, *Y+la*]*/. C*, 64. *D*, 428. *E*, 42a–b. *F*, 59. *X*, 460. *Y*, 537.

616 *G*, 135–36. *H*, 499. *I*, 127.

Yet while Go rams pa acknowledges that *naṃ* is the corresponding seed syllable of human beings, he objects emphatically to Bo dong Paṇ chen's use of it in this context. For him, focusing on this syllable is tantamount to neglecting the bodhisattva vow to save all beings; the purificatory practices under discussion are said to rescue beings in all six realms, not just humans, and thus Go rams pa sees no place for anthropocentrism in this context. After providing quotations from the SDP that demonstrate the full scope of these rites, he deems Bo dong Paṇ chen's focus on *naṃ*—and therefore humans—a "joke."[617] This is an interesting move on Go rams pa's part, not least because Grags pa rgyal mtshan's focus in *Light Rays*—and indeed in all of his texts on SDP-oriented rites—is the practices to be performed for the sake of rescuing a person who has died from bad rebirths. Go rams pa acknowledges this when he states that the need to explain the rites to be performed when someone has passed have produced "grounds for confusion,"[618] but he is adamant, despite Grags pa rgyal mtshan's obvious focus on human beings, that Bo dong Paṇ chen has misunderstood the objective.

This discussion also has implications for our investigation into ritual agency. Recall that in chapter two we examined the objects that can function as a ritual support. While it is clear from the SDP and *Light Rays* that a variety of objects may suffice, this flexibility does not detract from the fact that an object *of some kind* is needed for the performance of the practice. In this sense, the ritual support is a critical object for the ritual's progress, yet Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's remarks underline the arguably greater importance of the visualizations that are applied to this object. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions as we have them today are brief but clear: start with a material object, visualize it as pure emptiness using a mantra, and then, in

617 Tib. *bzhad gad kyi gnas*.

618 Tib. *'khrul gzhi*.

that purified object, visualize the deceased emerging from the first letter of their name or the letter *nrī*. In the version of *Light Rays* that Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa had available to them, the seed syllable *ṇi* was used instead, a mistake that was ultimately corrected to read *nrī*. Thus, what might seem like a minor difference was apparently of great concern for these authors; the efficacy of the visualization hinged on getting the seed syllable right. If the ritual support were visualized with the wrong syllable, then the practice could fail, and thus the subsequent steps of summoning the dead's consciousness and eliminating their negative karma would be in vain. In this way, a ritual support such as a name card is *significant* given its relationship to the identity of the departed, but it is the officiant's visualizations and use of mantras that make the object *efficacious* in a ritual context. This aligns with Gentry's aforementioned second category of ritual objects: those that have less intrinsic power and thus "require more diverse means to create or augment power in ritual settings."[619]

Disputing Narrative and Necroliberative Performance

One of the last issues Go rams pa takes up in *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* concerns Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's comments regarding the liberation of the deceased and the offerings to be made once this goal is realized. These comments appear in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's treatment of the third method of purifying the negative actions of the dead, that is, purification through repelling negative forces (2.2.2.3). Since there are substantial variants between the version of this passage found in *Light Rays* as we have it today and the version found in Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's works, I will

619 Gentry, *Power Objects*, 294.

provide separate translations of them before proceeding to Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's responses.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan on the Necroliberative Process

The available versions of *Light Rays* read as follows:

> Then the vajra master should imagine that the deceased is reborn in Sukhāvatī, and he should imagine elder bodhisattvas born previously in Sukhāvatī making offerings to the deceased. The deceased too having made offerings to the Buddha Amitābha and his retinue, through investigating the cause of rebirth there, understands that it is the power of the vajra master himself. Having come to this place miraculously, the deceased makes offerings to the vajra master himself and to the maṇḍala, and the vajra master should imagine the deceased expressing delight: "How wonderful, O Buddha! Wonderful, O Buddha! How wonderful, O Buddha! Well done! Because of this, our bad rebirths have been purified! I have been introduced into the conduct of the bodhisattva!" He should imagine them saying this and making offerings to himself. He too again makes offerings to Amitābha, and he should imagine again the deceased having gone to Sukhāvatī.[620]

By contrast, the version of this same passage found in Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's works reads:

> Then, the consciousness of the deceased, indivisible with the deity, is reborn in Sukhāvatī and the elder bodhisattvas make offerings to him. The deceased too makes offerings, having seen Amitābha together with his retinue. Through investigating the cause of rebirth there, understanding that it is the power of the vajra master himself, the deceased makes offerings to the vajra master himself and to the deity of the maṇḍala, and having expressed delight, the vajra master

620 *de nas tshe 'das bde ba can du skyes par bsam zhing /* [*E*+/] *bde ba can du byang chub sems dpa' sngar skyes pa'i rnying pa rnams kyis/* [*E*−/] *de la mchod par bsam* [*E*+*zhing*]*/ des kyang sangs rgyas 'od dpag med 'khor dang bcas pa la* [*E*−*la*] *mchod nas/ der skye ba'i rgyu brtags* [*E*=*rtags*] *pas/ rdo rje slob dpon bdag gi mthu yin par shes te/ rdzu 'phrul gyis 'dir 'ongs nas/* [*E*−/] *bdag dang dkyil 'khor la mchod pa byed cing / ched du rjod* [*E*=*brjod*] *pa* [*E*=*par*] *byed par bsam* [*E*=*bsams*] *ste* [*E*=*te*]*/ e* [*A*, *B*=*kye*] *ma'o sangs rgyas e* [*A*, *B*=*kye*] *sangs rgyas/ /e* [*A*, *B*=*kye*] *ma* [*A*, *B*, *E*=*ma'o*] *sangs rgyas mdzad pa legs/ /gang phyir ngan song bdag cag sbyangs* [*Snar*=*sbyang*]*/ /byang chub spyod pa nyid la bzhag* [*A*, *B*=*bkod*; *E*=*gzhag*]*/ /ces brjod cing bdag la mchod par bsam/ bdag gis kyang slar de la* [*E*, *Zhwa*−*la*] *mchod cing / slar bde ba can du song bar bsam zhing. A*, 117. *B*, 166. *C*, 90. *D*, 454–55. *E*, 61a–b. *F*, 84–85.

> makes offerings again to Amitābha, and he should imagine the deceased as having gone to Sukhāvatī.[621]

The most obvious difference between these two versions of the passage is their length. The version found in the available editions of *Light Rays* includes a quotation from the SDP's opening narrative in which the Buddha's retinue praises him after he issues light rays from the tuft of hair between his eyebrows,[622] liberating countless beings from the bonds of their defilements. This quotation is missing from Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa's version. Notice also that Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa's version specifies that the consciousness of the deceased is inseparable from the deity as it enters Sukhāvatī, whereas the extant versions of *Light Rays* here indicate only that the deceased is reborn in Sukhāvatī. There is of course considerable overlap between these two versions of the passage as well, but here again the many variants give us reason to believe either that Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa had an alternative version of *Light Rays* available to them, or that *Light Rays* was edited after their time.

Bo dong Paṇ chen's Critiques

Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms focus on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions vis-à-vis moments in the SDP's narrative. After providing the above quotation from *Light Rays*, Bo dong Paṇ chen declares that *some* of what Grags pa rgyal mtshan has said is incorrect, refraining from

621 *de nas tshe 'das kyi rnam shes lha dang dbyer med bde ba can du skyes pa la* [*V*, *W+/*] *byang chub sems dpa' rnying pa* [*W=snying bo*] *rnams kyis* [*V*, *W=kyi*] *mchod/ des kyang 'od dpag med 'khor bcas* [*V*, *W+kyi*] *zhal mthong nas mchod de/* [*V*, *W−mchod de/*] *der skye ba'i rgyu brtags pas rdo rje slob dpon bdag* [*V*, *W=dbang*] *gi mthur shes te* [*V*, *W+/*] *bdag dang* [*V*, *W+/*] *dkyil 'khor gyi lha* [*V*, *W−gyi lha*] *la mchod cing ched du brjod nas* [*W=na*]*/* [*W−/*] *bdag gis kyang de nyid slar mchod de* [*V=te*]*/* [*W−/*] [*V*, *W+slar*] *bde ba can du song bar bsam mo/. V*, 224. *W*, 203–4. *X*, 461–62. *Y*, 539.

622 Skt. *ūrṇā*; Tib. *mdzod spu*.

dismissing all of it. He begins by explaining that in the SDP's introductory scene, Śakra and his retinue make offerings to the Buddha after he liberates countless beings from bad rebirths. Later, Vimalamaṇiprabha, the god who had fallen to Avīci hell, makes offerings to the Buddha and Śakra and performs recitations once he is rescued. Bo dong Paṇ chen continues:

> Then, moreover, since it is said that Vimalamaṇiprabha came to Tuṣita Heaven having made offerings to the Bhagavān and his retinue and to Śakra and his retinue, in accordance with what follows, since the substitute of the Bhagavān is Amitābha, the substitute of Śakra is the Vajra master, and the substitute of Vimalamaṇiprabha is the deceased, the Vajra master and the deceased who is represented by him should also make offerings to Amitābha and his retinue, and when the cause of the deceased being reborn as a god is examined, it is understood to be the Vajra master and the deity of the maṇḍala.[623]

Here Bo dong Paṇ chen references the scene in the SDP in which the gods ask the Buddha to see Vimalamaṇiprabha, and Vimalamaṇiprabha appears and makes offerings, prompting the gods to rejoice and praise the Buddha for rescuing their companion. Bo dong Paṇ chen then maps the actors involved in a funerary performance onto those featured in the tantra's liberation narrative: Amitābha[624] corresponds to the Buddha, the ritualist corresponds to the chief god Śakra, and the deceased corresponds to Vimalamaṇiprabha. Based on these connections, Bo dong Paṇ chen reasons that the ritualist and the deceased should make offerings to Amitābha and his retinue, just as Śakra and Vimalamaṇiprabha do in the SDP. He likewise reiterates that when the deceased examines the cause of their rebirth as a god, they find that it was the ritualist and the deity of the maṇḍala who are responsible.

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623 *de nas slar yang nor bu dri med bcom ldan 'das 'khor bcas dang /* [*X, Y−/*], *brgya byin 'khor bcas mchod nas dga' ldan* [*X*, *Y=tshal*] *du song bar gsungs pas/* [*W−/*] *rjes 'jug ltar na/* [*X*, *Y−/*] *bcom ldan 'das kyi tshab 'od dpag med* [*X*, *Y+/*] *dang* [*X*, *Y−dang*] *brgya byin gyi tshab rdo rje slob dpon dang /* [*W−/*] *nor bu dri med kyi tshab tshe 'das yin pas/ rdo rje slob dpon dang /* [*W−/*] *des* [*X*, *Y=de nas*] *mtshon pa'i tshe 'das kyis kyang 'od dpag med 'khor bcas mchod cing / de nas tshe 'das ltar skye ba'i rgyu brtags pa* [*X*, *Y=pas*] *rdo rje slob dpon* [*X*, *Y+dang dkyil 'khor gyi lha'i mthur shes te/*]. *V*, 224. *W*, 204. *X*, 462. *Y*, 539–40.

624 Amitābha is the Buddha who oversees the pure land Sukhāvatī, which is the ideal realm in which one can take rebirth.

Notice that none of this supports Grags pa rgyal mtshan's claim that elder bodhisattvas give offerings to the dead once they are reborn in Sukhāvatī. This is one of Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions, and he cites snippets from the SDP to support his view that, once liberated, the dead should make offerings to the gods and others rather than receive them.[625] Bo dong Paṇ chen concludes by reinforcing the connection between the necroliberative process and the primary figures in the SDP's narrative:

> For it is the case that also after expressing his delight, Vimalamaṇiprabha, having made offerings to the Bhagavān and his retinue and to Śakra and his retinue, is accepted as having gone to Tuṣita Heaven. Thus, following this, the deceased, having made offerings to the maṇḍala and to the Vajra master and his retinue, should be imagined as having gone to Sukhāvatī.[626]

Bo dong Paṇ chen again references the scene in the SDP in which Vimalamaṇiprabha expresses his gratitude and makes offerings to the Buddha, Śakra, and the rest, stressing also Vimalamaṇiprabha's delivery to Tuṣita Heaven. He then relates this to the objective of SDP-oriented rituals for the dead, noting that like Vimalamaṇiprabha, the dead, once rescued, should make offerings to the network of deities in the maṇḍala and to the ritualist and his disciples, and that the ritualist should imagine the dead safe in Sukhāvatī.

Go rams pa's Reply

Go rams pa is brief in his response to Bo dong Paṇ chen's remarks. He begins by asserting that Bo dong Paṇ chen has not properly investigated this topic, citing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's statement in *Light Rays* that instructions on purifying the path for the departed are to be found in

625 *V*, 224–25. *W*, 204. *X*, 462–63. *Y*, 540.

626 *ched brjod byas pa'i rjes su yang* [*X*, *Y=su'ang*] *nor bu dri med kyis bcom ldan 'das 'khor bcas dang brgya byin 'khor bcas la mchod pa byas nas dga' ldan* [*X*, *Y=dga' ba'i tshal*] *du song bar bzhed pas* [*X*, *Y+/*] *rjes 'jug la tshe 'das kyis dkyil 'khor dang slob dpon* [*X*, *Y+khor*] *bcas la mchod nas bde ba can du song bar bsam bya yin pa'i phyir ro/. V*, 225. *W*, 204–5. *X*, 463. *Y*, 540.

The Nine Cranial Protuberances, which here seems to denote teachings found in Ānandagarbha's aforementioned *The Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, a work translated by the Indian scholar Buddhaśrīśānti and Rin chen bzang po.[627] He then argues that Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not explicitly indicate in *Light Rays* that the story of the miraculous rescue of Vimalamaṇiprabha should be applied to the funerary process, and thus "there is no basis for engaging in these disputes and investigations!"[628] He adds that even if such a narrative were applied to an actual funerary practice, there is no certainty that events would unfold in precisely the same way. Addressing Bo dong Paṇ chen, he explains:

> This is because since you also have accepted that the substitute of the Bhagavān is Amitābha, the substitute of Śakra is the Vajra master, and the substitute of Vimalamaṇiprabha is the deceased, just as Vimalamaṇiprabha has made offerings at the same time to both the Bhagavān and Śakra, you would need to accept that the deceased gone to Sukhāvatī makes offerings at the same time to both Amitābha and the Vajra master.[629]

627 We already have noted Weinberger's observation that the abbreviated title *The Nine Cranial Protuberances* (Tib. *gtsug dgu*) came to refer to Version B of the SDP in Tibetan writings on Yogatantra (Weinberger, PhD diss., 146). But here we can be certain that Grags pa rgyal mtshan is not referencing Version B of the SDP directly, because Chag Lo tsā ba Chos rje dpal (1197–1263/4) translated this work after Grags pa rgyal mtshan's death. Moreover, elsewhere in *Light Rays*, Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides a short quotation from *The Nine Cranial Protuberances* that appears only in Rin chen bzang po's translation of Ānandagarbha's *The Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* and not Chag Lo tsā ba's translation of Version B of the SDP. Grags pa rgyal mtshan writes: *gtsug dgu nas kyang / yungs dkar me tog dang ldan pas/ /gsang sngags bzlas shing brdeg par bya/. C*, 85. *D*, 449. *E*, 57b. *F*, 79. The corresponding passage is found in Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga* (Sde dge), 395. Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1270. Weinberger has already noted that this work of Ānandagarbha appears to be connected with Version B of the SDP and not Version A (Weinberger, PhD diss., 155–56). Thus, given that Grags pa rgyal mtshan seems to be using the title *The Nine Cranial Protuberances* to refer to Ānandagarbha's text while later scholars like Bu ston and Bo dong Paṇ chen use this same abbreviated title to refer to Version B of the SDP, it would appear that they are referencing the central maṇḍala described in both works. An example of Bo dong Paṇ chen using the title *The Nine Cranial Protuberances* to refer to Version B of the SDP may be found in his *Definitive Explanation* states: *gtsug dgu las/ de nas chos thams cad bdag med par bsgoms nas . . . rdo rje lag par 'gyur zhing phyag rgya bcang bar nus par 'gyur ro/. V*, 141–42. *W*, 121–22. For the corresponding passage in the SDP, see *Ngan song sbyong rgyud* (Version B) (Sde dge par phud), 199–200. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud* (Version B) (Dpe bsdur ma), 288.

628 *brgal zhing brtag pa de dag 'jug pa'i gzhi med pa'i phyir dang /. X*, 463. *Y*, 541.

629 *khyed rang gis kyang bcom ldan 'das kyi tshab 'od dpag med dang / brgya byin gyi tshab rdo rje slob dpon dang / nor bu dri med kyi tshab tshe 'das yin par khas blangs pas/ nor bu dri med kyis bcom ldan 'das dang brgya byin gnyis la mchod pa dus gcig tu byas pa ltar/ tshe 'das bde bcan du gshegs pa des 'od dpag med dang rdo rje slob dpon gnyis la mchod pa dus gcig tu byed par khas blang dgos pa'i phyir ro/. X*, 463. *Y*, 541.

Here Go rams pa argues that we cannot expect funerary rites to unfold in precisely the same way as they do in the story of Vimalamaṇiprabha, because if in such practices Amitābha corresponds to the Buddha, the Vajra master corresponds to Śakra, and the deceased corresponds to Vimalamaṇiprabha, then just as Vimalamaṇiprabha simultaneously makes offerings to the Buddha and Śakra after he is freed, the deceased, now liberated, would need to simultaneously make offerings to the both Amitābha and the Vajra master, which is outside of the ritualist's control and therefore may or may not occur.

Analysis

The fact that Bo dong Paṇ chen here specifies that only some of what Grags pa rgyal mtshan states is incorrect signals that his criticisms are relatively modest. For the most part, he agrees with Grags pa rgyal mtshan's remarks, but he objects to the suggestion that elder bodhisattvas make offerings to the deceased reborn in Sukhāvatī. His basic position is that the story of Vimalamaṇiprabha's rescue should match precisely the sequence of events that unfolds as a ritualist saves the dead. The problem is that Grags pa rgyal mtshan's ritual instructions do not perfectly map onto the story of Vimalamaṇiprabha, and thus Bo dong Paṇ chen finds reason to criticize them.

Go rams pa is rather puzzled by Bo dong Paṇ chen's analysis, citing Grags pa rgyal mtshan's assertion that the process of purification through repelling negative forces can be understood by looking to Ānandagarbha's *The Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, a work that corresponds to Version B of the SDP. By failing to recognize this, Bo dong Paṇ chen fails to understand the features of the practice, and thus his

attempts to link it to the SDP's narrative are misguided; Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not indicate here that he is working to mirror the SDP's narrative structure. Finally, Go rams pa argues that attempting to link the Buddha, Śakra, and Vimalamaṇiprabha to Amitābha, the ritualist, and the deceased respectively leads to problems, in that the deceased—once delivered to the pure land—may or may not act precisely as Vimalamaṇiprabha does in the SDP's account.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this dispute for our purposes is the explicit recognition that the ritualist and the deity of the maṇḍala do the work of saving the dead. Grags pa rgyal mtshan specifies this in his comments, and Bo dong Paṇ chen very clearly reinforces this position. Does the fact that these passages identify the ritualist and the deity as the agents of necroliberation mean that our discussion of mantras, mudrās, and material objects is misguided? Certainly not, given that Gell's distinction between primary and secondary agents dovetails nicely with the attributions of agency found here. If our thesis had been that conscious actors like the ritualist and the deity should be placed on the same agentive footing as material objects, then we would certainly run into some trouble. But the remarks of Grags pa rgyal mtshan, Bo dong Paṇ chen, and Go rams pa in fact help to justify our emphasis on the ritualist and the deities, while at the same time leaving room to acknowledge the many other elements of these rites that play a decidedly secondary role in service of the primary agents' aims.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have seen how two prominent Tibetan authors who were invested in the SDP and its practices responded to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's writings. Bo dong Paṇ chen and his disciples attempted to forge a distinctive identity for the emergent Bo dong pa tradition through

their writings and innovations, and Bo dong Paṇ chen's criticisms of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's approach to the SDP fits a broader pattern of discord witnessed among Bo dong pas and Sa skya pas. Meanwhile, the evidence that Go rams pa composed *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* at Ngam ring having been invited there by Bo dong Paṇ chen's disciple Rnam rgyal grags bzang, the scholar-ruler of Ngam ring, gives us reason to think that Go rams pa not only believed strongly in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's superiority as an interpreter of the SDP, but that he sought also to demonstrate that his tradition was superior to the Bo dong pa tradition that Rnam rgyal grags bzang had long patronized.

To be sure, the polemical tone of Bo dong Paṇ chen's and Go rams pa's SDP-oriented works was foreshadowed by Grags pa rgyal mtshan's own brief asides against the likes of Dge bshes Gnyal pa, but the primary work that these three texts do differs: *Light Rays* is above all a manual designed to be used in a ritual setting, while the *Definitive Explanation* and *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* are scholastic studies that coax their readers toward a certain sectarian position, while at the same time investigating the doctrinal and practical underpinnings of the rites in question. Bo dong Paṇ chen and Go rams pa employ a number of strategies as they do battle over *Light Rays*' claims, citing issues ranging from fidelity to canonical source texts to practical concerns, but the message on both sides is clear: our version of these rites is the most authentic and efficacious.

Finally, on the topic of ritual agency, these disputes add depth and focus to our analysis in chapter two, drawing our attention to the broader network of oppositional actors and the rituals that must be performed to face them, to objects such as the ritual support that become efficacious only in relation to ritualist's efforts, and finally to explicit claims made by our

authors regarding the primary actors who endeavor to save the dead. In the next chapter, we will continue our investigation of ritual agency by considering the significance of the bardo state between death and rebirth as it pertains to SDP-oriented rites.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT THE DEAD CAN DO

In chapters two and three we examined the primary and secondary agents at work in *Light Rays* and related texts. We explored how the ritual manual, the ritualist, the disciples, the deities, and the material elements of the rites operate in tandem to rescue the dead from bad rebirths. Throughout, we have seen how the dead are framed as patients rather than active agents working to secure their own release, a necroliberative paradigm that stands in contrast to that found in influential Tibetan works on the bardo or intermediate states, wherein the dead are framed as agents capable of self-liberation. So what are the dead understood to be doing in SDP-oriented ritual contexts? Do we find discussion of the bardo in the SDP and its commentaries, and if so, are the dead framed as possessing any kind of agency in such intervals? We will begin by briefly contextualizing intermediate-state theory and exploring the models of agency reflected in influential Tibetan works on the bardo, before turning to the SDP and its canonical commentaries to understand how these texts frame the capacities of the dead, focusing in particular on the presence or absence of intermediate states. We then will turn to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's funeral manuals and related Tibetan works, such as Tsong kha pa's commentary on the SDP and 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid*. Lastly, we will focus on A mes zhabs' *Dispelling All Obscurations: Explaining the Bardo Teachings*, a text devoted to integrating bardo theory into the SDP's rites.

AGENTS IN THE BARDO

The Bardo in Context

The existence of an intermediate state between lifetimes was a point of contention among early Indian Buddhist scholiasts. Some including the Theravādins and Vibhajyavādins denied its existence, while the Sarvāstivādins, Sautrāntikas, and Yogācārins accepted it but contested its duration.[630] The *Mahāvibhāṣā* and Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, two major Indian Buddhist works belonging to the Abhidharma class of canonical literature, offer detailed accounts of the intermediate state, and the latter became the standard presentation of postmortem transition for Tibetans as early as the Imperial Period.[631]

In the hands of tantric Buddhist writers, however, more elaborate bardo theories emerged.[632] Cuevas observes that tantric Buddhists melded Abhidharmic theories of the intermediate state with new conceptions of the body associated with advanced yogic practices, and bardo theory thus became integrated with the generation stage and completion stage practices[633] central to Highest Yogatantra.[634] Generation stage practices are comparable to the forms of deity yoga detailed in yogatantric sources like the *Compendium of Principles* and the SDP, wherein one purifies and refines their awareness by identifying with the deity through meditation, mantra, and mudrā. By contrast, completion stage practices involve yogic

630 Robert Kritzer, "Antārabhava in the Vibhāṣa," *Maranatha: Bulletin of the Christian Culture Research Institute (Notre Dame Women's College)* 3, no. 5 (1997): 90.

631 Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 41.

632 Ibid., 44.

633 This was especially true in Tibet. As Cuevas puts it, "The history of the bardo in Tibet is essentially the history of conceptual developments within the framework of this twofold system of tantric practice." Ibid., 45.

634 In the case of the Rnying ma pa, the highest forms of Buddhist tantra fall under the Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga classes, while for the Gsar ma schools such as the Bka' brgyud pa, Sa skya pa, and Dge lugs pa, the highest forms fall under the heading of Niruttarayogatantra.

techniques that manipulate the winds and seminal fluids in the channels of the subtle body to produce nonconceptual states of enlightened awareness.[635] Such states are commonly linked to the experience of dying,[636] and death in this yogic context came to be viewed as an opportunity for recognizing the nature of reality and escaping birth and death.

Tantric reimaginings of the bardo expanded the semantic range of the term itself. The Indian tantric master Nāropā, for example, outlined three discrete bardo states—the bardo spanning birth to death,[637] the bardo of dreaming,[638] and the bardo of becoming[639]—all of which he cast as opportunities for yogic practice.[640] By contrast, Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen (1079–1153) and his disciple Phag mo gru pa Rdo rje rgyal po (1110–70) provided an alternative triad in which the bardos were individuated according to yogic techniques: the first involved the apprehension of the mind's luminosity, the second the apprehension of the illusory body, and the third the closing of the womb door.[641] Other formulations of the bardo concept also emerged during this period, but Nāropā's was the most influential.[642]

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635 Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 45. For a helpful discussion of the generation and completion stages, see Jamgön Kongtrul, *Creation and Completion: Essential Points of Tantric Meditation*, trans. Sarah Harding (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2002).

636 Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 45.

637 Tib. *skye shi bar do/skye 'chi bar do*.

638 Tib. *rmi lam bar do*.

639 Tib. *srid pa bar do*. The bardo of becoming refers to the interval between lifetimes during which one proceeds toward a new rebirth.

640 Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 49.

641 Ibid., 50.

642 Ibid., 47.

Reframing Postmortem Agency

Such innovations in bardo theory involved a reimagining of human beings' postmortem capabilities. Dying and death became important opportunities for securing freedom from cyclic existence. In Nāropā's *Vajra Verses on the Oral Tradition*,[643] we find his aforementioned tripartite model of the bardo coupled with a succinct explanation of what to do in such states:

> In the three types of bardo, unrealized embodied beings
> should blend generation stage, illusory body, and luminosity into the
> dharmakāya.
> The elements—earth, water, fire, and air—dissolve gradually.
> After the eighty conceptual minds have ceased, the three visions pass.
> White, red, and mind are combined in the lotus.
> Recognizing the luminosity, mother and child mix inseparably.[644]

While the scope of these esoteric instructions is not easily grasped without commentary, the basic claim is that the yogin devoted to the practices of the highest tantras can actively engage with the experiences of the bardo to become awakened. By working with the subtle body through generation and completion stage practices, the yogin can recognize the mind's luminosity—its naturally enlightened state—and become liberated, even after death.

Notably, we find similar conceptions of postmortem agency in the writings of Yang dgon pa Rgyal mtshan dpal (1213–58), who was a close disciple of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's nephew and chief disciple Sa skya Paṇḍita. Yang dgon pa penned a fascinating work titled *Liberation*

643 Skt. *Karṇatantravajrapada*; Tib. *Snyan rgyud rdo rje tshig rkang*.

644 I here largely follow Cuevas' translation. See Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 48. The corresponding Tibetan reads: *ma rtogs lus ldan bar do rnam gsum la/ /bskyed rim sgyu lus 'od gsal chos sku 'dre* [*Pe*, *Snar=skur bsre*]*/ /sa chu me rlung 'byung ba rim* [*Pe*, *Snar=rims*] *gyis thim/ /brgyad cu 'gags nas snang ba gsum 'das te/ /dkar dmar sems gsum chu skyes nang du 'dzom/ /'od gsal ngos 'dzin* [*Pe*, *Snar=zin*] *ma bu dbyer med 'dre* [*Pe*, *Snar='dres*]*/*. Nāropā, *Snyan rgyud rdo rje tshig rkang*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 52: 604–8 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85), 607. Nāropā, *Snyan rgyud rdo rje tshig rkang*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 26: 1822–1828 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008), 1825.

from the Perilous Paths of the Bardo[645] in which he outlines, *inter alia*, generation and completion stage practices aimed at securing liberation while in the bardo of this life, instructions on both the bardo of samādhi meditation[646] and the bardo of dreaming, practices to be performed at the moment of death, and instructions for navigating the bardo of becoming that one experiences between lifetimes. Describing the last, he writes:

> The appearances of this life have ceased. While outer appearances have not yet dawned, there are a variety of self-and-other illusory appearances that have arisen as the mental body forms with the consciousness and wind energies. This is called the bardo of becoming. Since illusory appearances have not been recognized and the natural state of *rigpa* has not been withstood, from the combined flow of attachments, aversions, and cravings, one meets again with an unfortunate place of birth. That is the worst path![647]

Here Yang dgon pa summarizes the bardo experienced between lifetimes, describing how the familiar experiences of this life stop, giving way to a bewildering array of appearances as one's consciousness and wind energies form a mental body that roams the frightening straits of the bardo of becoming. Yang dgon pa explains that someone enters this interval only if they have not recognized the appearances of the preceding bardo states as illusory and are unable to

645 Given Yang dgon pa's connection with Sa skya Paṇḍita and his reception of the Lam 'bras transmission, his text on the bardos remained authoritative in Sa skya pa circles for centuries. The Sa skya pa master Gnas gsar 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang phyug (1524–68) mentions Yang dgon pa's text as a source for his own account of the bardo of becoming in his *Summarizing Notes on the Outer Creation Stage*, which is included in his *Expansion of the Great Secret Doctrine* (*Gsang chen bstan pa rgyas byed*). He writes: "Many different opinions about this exist, but here the explication of the treatise written by Yar Bumawa exactly according to the teachings of the great venerable lord of Sakya, and *Liberation on the Precipitous Pathway* composed by Gyalwa Yangönpa, are both taken as authoritative. Furthermore, the explanations of *Liberation on the Precipitous Pathway* that do not agree with the text of Bumawa are set aside. Thus my master taught." See Cyrus Stearns, *Taking the Result As the Path: Core Teachings of the Sakya Lamdré Tradition* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 523. Stearns notes that the "lord of Sa skya" is Sa chen Kun dga' snying po and that the text on the intermediate state by G.yar sbu ma ba has not survived. Stearns, *Taking the Result As the Path*, 682.

646 Tib. *ting nge 'dzin bsam gtan gyi bar do*.

647 *tshe 'di'i snang ba ni 'gags/ phyi ma'i snang ba ma shar ba'i bar na/ rnam par shes pa rlung dang yid kyi lus su langs pa'i 'khrul pa'i snang ba rang gzhan sna tshogs shig 'dug pa de la srid pa'i bar do zhes bya'o/ /de 'khrul snang ngos ma zin cing rig pa rang so ma thub pas/ chags sdang sred len gyi rgyun 'brel nas/ skye gnas ngan pa'i srid pa nying mtshams sbyor ba ste so 'phrang tha ma'o/.* Yang dgon pa Rgyal mtshan dpal, *Bar do 'phrang sgrol gyi gzhung gdam pa,* in *Gsung 'bum: Rgyal mtshan dpal*, 2: 55–138 (Thimphu: Tango Monastic Community, 1984), 112.

withstand the overpowering brilliance of luminous awareness. Advanced yogins, of course, would not have come this far, as they would have cut through postmortem appearances and embraced the mind's natural luminosity without fear or confusion. By this account, the dead possess a significant degree of agency and can free themselves if only they have the skill to do so.

Agency in the Treasure Texts of Karma gling pa

The idea that the dead can save themselves is engrained deeply into later works like *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo*, better known in the West as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Revealed[648] by the fourteenth-century master Karma gling pa, this and other works included in his collection regularly frame the dead as primary agents capable of awakening. Consider the following passage:

> O Child of the Lineage,[649] that which is called death has now arrived. You are leaving this world. But in this you are not alone. This happens to everyone. Do not be attached to this life! Do not cling to this life! Even if you remain attached and clinging, you do not have the power to stay—you will only continue to roam within the cycles of existence. Therefore, do not be attached and do not cling! Think of the Three Precious Jewels!
>
> O Child of the Lineage, however terrifying the appearances of the intermediate state of reality might be, do not forget the following words. Go forward remembering their meaning. The crucial point is that through them recognition may be attained:
>
> > Alas, now, as the intermediate state of reality arises before me,
> > Renouncing the mere thought of awe, terror, or fear,
> > I will recognize all that arises to be awareness, manifesting naturally of itself,

648 Tradition holds Karma gling pa works to be "revealed" treasure texts (Tib. *gter ma*) originally composed by the Indian master Padmasambhava and hidden away for centuries before being recovered and circulated. For a fascinating discussion of the workings of Tibetan treasure revelation, see Janet Gyatso, "The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition," *History of Religions* 33, no. 2 (1993): 97–134.

649 Tib. *rigs kyi bu*.

Knowing such sounds, lights and rays to be visionary phenomena of the
intermediate state.
At this moment, having reached this critical point,
I must not fear the assembly of Peaceful and Wrathful Deities,
which manifests naturally![650]

As with many other passages in Karma gling pa's *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo*, here we find detailed instructions for cutting through the frightening appearances of the bardo. Interestingly, Cuevas has questioned whether this particular work was regularly used in Tibetan funeral liturgy; in his estimation, other works from Karma gling pa's collection have occupied the central role in funerary practices, and the specific work in which the above passage is found, *Reminder of the Bardo of Reality Itself*, is a meditation text to be utilized by advanced practitioners of the Great Perfection. While it is difficult to determine how this text has been used over the centuries, whether it was studied in anticipation of death by advanced practitioners, recited to advanced practitioners who were dying or dead by similarly qualified officiants, or recited to those who were less advanced in the hope that it may be of some benefit, the basic premise that the dead can find freedom remains constant. Notice in particular the imperatives that the above passage employs—"Do not be attached to this life!", "Think of the Precious Three Jewels!"—designed to compel the dead to operate in self-salvific ways. The

650 Here I largely follow Gyurme Dorje's excellent translation. See Karma Gling pa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, trans. Gyurme Dorje (New York: Viking, 2005), 235. The corresponding Tibetan reads: *kye rigs kyi bu da ni nga 'chi ba zhes bya ba de slebs pa yin no: 'jig rten 'di nas pha rol du 'gro ste: khyod gcig pu ma yin te: kun la 'byung bas tshe 'di la chags pa dang zhen pa ma byed cig: chags pa dang zhen pa byas kyang bsdad dbang ni med: khyod rang 'khor bar 'khyams pa las mi 'ong: ma chags shig: ma zhen zhig: dkon mchog gsum rjes su dran par gyis shig: kye rigs kyi bu chos nyid bar do'i snang ba 'jigs skrag ci ltar shar nas byung yang khyod rang tshig 'di ma brjod par gyis la tshig don yid la dran bzhin du song zhig: des ngo 'phrod pa'i gnad yod do: kye ma bdag la chos nyid bar do 'char dus 'dir: kun la sngangs skrag 'jigs snang spangs byas nas: gang shar rang snang rig par ngos shes 'jug: bar do'i snang tshul yin par shes par bya: don chen 'gag la thug pa'i dus tshod 'dir: rang snang zhi khro'i tshogs la 'jigs mi bya:*. Karma gling pa, *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol las: Chos nyid bar do'i gsal 'debs thos grol chen mo*, in *Zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi chos skor*, 3: 41–114 (Delhi: Sherab Lama, 1976), 54–55.

hope is that they will recognize what they are experiencing as unreal contrivances of their own deluded awareness, and in doing so, free themselves from cyclic existence.

Elsewhere in Karma gling pa's liturgical collection we find discussion of a related practice: transference of consciousness.[651] While this comes in a variety of forms classified according to different deities, lineages, and the types of realization that can result,[652] it generally involves the dying person using yogic techniques to transfer their consciousness through the aperture of the crown fontanel at the moment of death. If the consciousness exits in this way, then rebirth in a pure realm is all but guaranteed.[653] Meanwhile, if it exits through the eyes, then one is reborn as a universal monarch; if through the left nostril, then as a human being; if through the right nostril, as a yakṣa; if through the ears, as a god of the form realm; and if through the navel, as a god of the desire realm. Bad rebirths, however, will result from transference through the lower orifices: one is reborn as an animal if the consciousness transfers through the urethra, as a hungry ghost if through the sexual organ, and as a hell being if through the rectum.[654] The stakes are clearly very high, yet Karma gling pa's text frames transference as a viable practice even for those who have not dedicated their lives to yogic training. It is

651 Tib. *'pho ba*. This is one of the Six Yogas ostensibly taught by Nāropā. Georgios Halkias notes that the contemporary Dge lugs pa author Thub bstan ye shes (1935–84) suggests that the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* addresses consciousness transference, though Halkias adds that this influential tantra "does not spell out the detailed instructions in the exact form in which it is practiced today." Georgios T. Halkias, *Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 150.

652 Ibid., 151.

653 Karma gling pa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 214. Karma gling pa, *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi: Rdzogs rim bar do drug gi khrid yig spyi don bzhi pa 'pho ba dran pa rang grol 'chi kha bar do gdams ngag*, in *Zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi chos skor*, 2: 379–400 (Delhi: Sherab Lama, 1976), 398.

654 Karma gling pa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 214. Karma gling pa, *'Pho ba dran pa rang grol*, 398.

therefore characterized as a means to "buddhahood without meditation,"[655] since years of meditation and yogic rigor are not required for its success.[656]

Transference rituals are also regularly performed on behalf of the dying and those who have passed.[657] Such practices are more similar to those outlined in the SDP and its commentaries; the living work on behalf of the dying or dead to help facilitate their release, thus assuming greater necroliberative responsibility. In Karma gling pa's instructions on consciousness transference, for example, we find a section on how to aid those who cannot undertake their own transference. To avoid an unfortunate rebirth, the officiant bestows lay vows and empowerment to the dying person, which of course corresponds to the central postmortem purification rites of the SDP and *Light Rays* (2.2.2.1).[658] Meanwhile, for a dying person whose cognitive abilities are especially inhibited, a simpler practice may be performed:

> In the case of those who cannot do even that, and whose capacity is indistinguishable from that of animals, one should repeat the words "Homage to Buddha Ratnaketu!" many times, directing these words towards the head of the dying person. As a consequence, they will certainly be liberated from bad rebirths, because, when in the past this buddha made his aspirational prayer, he did so saying "May all who hear my name be liberated from bad rebirths!"[659]

This method of salvation is akin to practices outlined in the SDP and *Light Rays* in claiming that recitation alone can save the dead (2.2.2.2). The difference is that rather than reciting a mantra,

655 Tib. *ma sgom sangs rgyas*.

656 Halkias, *Luminous Bliss*, 150.

657 Ibid.

658 Karma gling pa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 215. Karma gling pa, *'Pho ba dran pa rang grol*, 399.

659 Here I largely follow Gyurme Dorje's translation. See Karma gling pa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 215. The corresponding Tibetan reads: *de tsam yang mi nub pa'i dud 'gro dang khyad med pa rnams la: mgo phyogs nas: sangs rgyas rin chen gtsug tor can la phyag 'tshal lo: zhes lan mang du brjod pas ngan song las nges par grol te sangs rgyas 'dis ni sngon smon lam btab pa'i tshe: bgag gi ming thos pa thams cad ngan song las thar bar gyur cig:*. Karma gling pa, *'Pho ba dran pa rang grol*, 399–400.

one offers repeated obeisances to Ratnaketu in the presence of the dying person, which inspires faith while at the same time tapping Ratnaketu's salvific power.

Watching Your Own Funeral: A Reference to the SDP's Rites in Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo

Such commonalities between the SDP and Karma gling pa's works are unsurprising given the latter acknowledges the former directly. In the section on the bardo of becoming in *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo*, we find a fascinating set of instructions on what the ritualist should say to the deceased as they witness their own funeral:

> Once again, even when death rituals are being performed on your behalf including the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* and recitations of the *Kaṅkaṇīdhāraṇī* and so forth, you may perceive with your present subtle cognitive ability that these rites are being performed impurely and distractedly, and that those who are performing these rituals are impure in both their commitments and vows and are careless in their conduct. As a result, you may have no faith in them, you may form a bad opinion of them, and you may become fearfully and horribly aware of their negative past actions and so forth, as well as of their impure practice of the teachings and rituals. Feeling this, you will experience the utmost sadness and think: "Alas, they have betrayed me! They have definitely betrayed me!" As a consequence of your profound disenchantment, instead of maintaining purity of perception and feelings of respect, negative opinions and loss of faith will arise in you. Thus, these perceptions and feelings will form a connecting link that will certainly propel you into bad rebirths, and the rituals will do more harm than benefit.[660]

660 I here follow Gyurme Dorje's translation for the most part, but disagree with his translation of the first line. The Tibetan reads: *yang khyod kyi phyir du gshin po'i cho ga kaṃ ka ni 'don pa dang : ngan song sbyong ba la sogs khyod kyi don du byas kyang*. Gyurme Dorje translates this as: "Once again, even when the *Kaṅkaṇīdhāraṇī* incantation for the dead is being recited for you and the *Purification of the Lower Realms* (*Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra*) is being recited on your behalf. . . ." However, I read the *gshin po'i cho ga* as appositional with the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* and the recitation of the *Kaṅkaṇīdhāraṇī.* The verb *'don pa* here governs only the *Kaṅkaṇīdhāraṇī*, so the SDP is being *performed* rather than recited in this case. The full passage in Tibetan reads: *yang khyod kyi phyir du gshin po'i cho ga kaṃ ka ni 'don pa dang : ngan song sbyong ba la sogs khyod kyi don du byas kyang : des mi dag pa dang : gnyid pa dang : yengs pa la sogs pa byas pa dang : dam tshig sdom pa mi gtsang ba bag med pa'i spyod pa de rnams khyod kyi las kyi mngon shes phra mos mthong nas 'ong gi: de la khyod ma dad pa dang : log lta skyes pa dang : 'jigs shing skrag nas las nag po la sogs pa dang : chos spyod cho ga ma dag pa rnams kyang shes 'ong gis: der khyod kyis bsams pa la: kye ma 'di rnams kyis bdag bslus so: nges par bslus so: snyam nas shin tu yi mug ste: yid mi dga' ba chen po dang*

Here *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo* explicitly acknowledges the SDP's funerary rituals, and imagines the dead watching these rites as they are performed for them. It warns that in the confusion of the bardo of becoming, the dead may become suspicious of the ritual actors who are working for their benefit, and might question their integrity and abilities and even feel betrayed. The negative emotions that can arise during this period are said to be enough to propel the deceased toward a bad rebirth, and such emotions also can interfere with the efficacy of the rites. To be sure, this excerpt puts a fascinating spin on the obstacles to which the SDP and *Light Rays* frequently allude, since here obstacles may arise from the deluded perceptions of the dead. Rather than abiding as passive recipients of the SDP's purifications, the dead remain conscious actors who can either benefit from these rituals or not depending on their perceptions of them.

However, the question remains whether SDP-centered works, which are rooted in yogatantric tradition, frame the dead's capacities in ways comparable to those found in texts like *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo*. Do we find any reference to the agency of the departed, or are external rites deemed sufficient to spare the dead from bad rebirths regardless of where they may be?

THE DEAD IN THE SDP AND ITS CANONICAL COMMENTARIES

What the Dead Do in the SDP

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bcas nas: dag snang mos gus mi skye ba'i steng du: log lta dang ma dad pa skye ba 'ong bas: des mtshams sbyar nas nges par ngan song du 'gro bas: des na phan pa bas gnod pa che ba yin gyis:. Karma gling pa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 282–83. Karma gling pa, *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol las: Srid pa'i bar do ngo sprod gsal 'debs thos grol chen mo*, in *Zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi chos skor*, 3: 115–62 (Delhi: Sherab Lama, 1976), 132–33. Cuevas also quotes this passage in his *Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and his translation rightly differentiates between the recitation of the *Kaṅkaṇīdhāraṇī* and the performance of the SDP's mortuary practices. He reports that Kapstein suggested to him that the *Kaṅkaṇīdhāraṇī* is a dhāraṇī associated with the Buddha Akṣobhya. See Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 37–38.

In order to understand the role of the dead in the SDP and its commentaries, let us return to its opening narrative. Here we find Śakra asking the Buddha the following:

> O Bhagavān, the one named Vimalamaṇiprabha died and fell from this very region of the gods of the Thirty-three. Seven days have passed since then. O Bhagavān, where was he reborn? Is he experiencing happiness or sorrow? We ask that you reveal this, O Bhagavān! We ask that you reveal this, O Sugata![661]

Notice Śakra's specification that seven days have passed since Vimalamaṇiprabha's death. The number seven stands out, in that some Indian Buddhist sources claim that the dead will wander for seven days before finding a new rebirth.[662] Yet here the SDP is ambiguous in that it does not specify when precisely Vimalamaṇiprabha was reborn. He may have been reborn immediately after he fell from his heavenly abode, or at any point in the seven days since then; since no mention is made of an intermediate state, it is unclear how his migration unfolded.

Answering Śakra, the Buddha announces that Vimalamaṇiprabha is in Avīci hell. He prophecies the other rebirths that Vimalamaṇiprabha will have to endure: his suffering in Avīci will last twelve thousand years, after which he will experience a slightly less tortuous hell for ten thousand years, following which he will be reborn among animals and spirits for ten thousand years, after which he will be reborn among the so-called border people[663] and suffer

661 *bcom ldan 'das sum cu rtsa gsum pa'i lha'i ris 'di nyid nas lha'i bu nor bu dri ma med pa'i 'od ces bgyi ba zhig shi 'phos te/ dus las 'das nas dgung bdun lon lags na/ bcom ldan 'das de gang du skyes/ bde ba dang sdug bsngal ni ci zhig myong bar 'gyur* [*G.yung*, *Li*, *Pe=gyur*]*/ bcom ldan 'das lung bstan du gsol/ bde bar gshegs pa lung bstan du gsol/. A*, 119. *B*, 167–68. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *bhagavan itas trayastriṃśaddevanikāyād vimalamaṇiprabhanāmno devaputrasya cyutasya kālagatasya saptadivasā abhūvan / bhagavan sa kutropapannaḥ sukhaṃ duḥkhaṃ vānubhavati/ idaṃ bhagavan vyākuru sugata vyākuru/.* Skorupski, 122–24.

662 Discussing various early Indian Buddhist opinions on the intermediate state, Kritzer writes: "Sarvastivādin opinion is that *antarābhava* endures for 'only a short time.' However, others say that it lasts for an indeterminate length of time, for seven days, or for forty-nine days." Kritzer, "Antārabhava in the Vibhāṣa," 90. Kritzer here appears to be alluding to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, which reports on differing views such as the intermediate state lasting either for an indeterminate period of time, a week, or seven weeks. See Louis de La Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, trans. Leo Pruden (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), 393–94.

663 Skt. *pratyantajana*; Tib. *mtha' 'khob kyi mi*.

from various impairments for sixty thousand years, following which he will endure eighty-four thousand years of plague, leprosy, boils, and bleeding.[664] The Buddha adds that "there are no breaks in the succession from one suffering to another"[665] and that Vimalamaṇiprabha "does harm to others and produces various karmic obscurations uninterruptedly,"[666] but while it is tempting to interpret these statements as signaling that there is no intermediate state between rebirths, here again the SDP again is ambiguous. The point may simply be that his suffering will be unceasing, a claim that does not necessarily preclude an interval between lifetimes. It is striking also that the Buddha specifies that Vimalamaṇiprabha will produce karmic obscurations incessantly in these hells, for this indicates that once he is reborn in such realms, he comes to possess a kind of destructive agency with no ready recourse to free himself. It is through external power—the liberating power of the Buddha and the SDP's rituals—that Vimalamaṇiprabha is saved from a prolonged visit to hell.

Later in the chapter, the gods ask to see Vimalamaṇiprabha, who by then has been rescued from Avīci. The Buddha obliges, and Vimalamaṇiprabha appears before the assembly. Vimalamaṇiprabha is understandably ecstatic to be back in his heavenly home, and bows before the Buddha, praising him and proclaiming the following:

> E ma! The enlightened activities
> of the Śākya Protector are so marvelous!
> Because of these, beings who have fallen into bad rebirths,
> are liberated as quick as lightning![667]

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664 *A*, 119. *B*, 168. Cf. Skorupski, 307. For a full translation of the corresponding passage in Version B, see Skorupski, 5.

665 *sdug bsngal ba dang / sdug bsngal brgyud pa dang /. A*, 119. *B*, 168. Cf. Skorupski, 307. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B is clearer: *duḥkhaduḥkhaparaṃparāṃ na vicchedayati.* Skorupski, 124.

666 *gzhan la gnod pa byed pa dang / las kyi sgrib* [*G.yung*, *Pe=kyi bsgrib*; *Snar*, *Zhol=kyis sgrib*] *pa bar chad med pa rnam pa sna tshogs byed pa dang /. A*, 119. *B*, 168. Cf. Skorupski, 307. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *nānākarmāvaraṇāni cāvicchedena karoti*/. Skorupski, 124.

Having acknowledged his indebtedness to the Buddha for his rescue, Vimalamaṇiprabha and the other gods present offerings of various ornaments such as jewels, gold, silver, necklaces, bracelets, armlets, and earrings; assorted articles such as parasols, banners, ribbons, tassels, and drums; various resting places such as thrones, beds, palaces, and mansions; various offering substances such as flowers and incense; and even their own bodies, speech, and minds. They also present animals including cows, horses, lions, tigers, monkeys, antelopes and others.[668] Indeed, the very fact that Vimalamaṇiprabha is able to give such offerings highlights a shift in agency resulting from his delivery into a pure realm. Unlike his stint in hell, during which he generated obscurations in perpetuity, here he is able to engage in works of devotion and accumulate merit with the aim of one day becoming realized.

Interestingly, the sections of the SDP that deal specifically with funerary rites emphasize this same agentive shift. Consider the following:

> Lord of the Gods, listen! Those great evildoers, the evil beings who have become subjected to hell and so forth, are by all means easily liberated from the suffering of hell. Listen! Having drawn the maṇḍala in that way and having performed the recitations 108 times to the vase as before, one should perform the empowerment. Then, having purified all negative actions, the evildoers are quickly freed from the suffering of hell and so forth. The great beings who are liberated from negative actions, even after being reborn in the lineage of pure gods, will hear the Buddha and his teachings continually.[669]

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667 *e* [*G.yung*, *Pe*, *Snar=kye*] *ma shākya mgon po yi* [*G.yung*, *Pe=yis*]*/ sangs rgyas mdzad pa ya mtshan* [*Snar=tshan*] *che/ gang phyir ngan song lhung ba yi* [*Co=yis*]*/ sems can myur du glog bzhin grol/. A*, 136. *B*, 188. Cf. Skorupski, 324.

668 *A*, 136–37. *B*, 189. Cf. Skorupski, 325.

669 *lha'i dbang po nyon cig sems can dmyal ba la sogs pa'i dbang du gyur pa'i sems can sdig pa byed pa/ sdig pa chen po byed pa de dag ci nas kyang sems can dmyal ba'i sdug bsngal* [*G.yung=sngal*] *las thabs sla bas grol bar 'gyur ba nyon cig de bzhin dkyil 'khor bris nas ni/ snga ma bzhin du bum pa la/ brgya rtsa brgyad du bzlas nas ni/ dbang bskur ba ni rab tu brtag* [*G.yung*, *Pe=rtag*] *de nas sdig pa kun sbyangs te/ dmyal ba la sogs sdug bsngal las/ de ni myur du rnam par thar/ sdig las rnam grol bdag nyid de/ dag par gyur pa'i lha rnams kyi/ rigs su skyes par gyur nas kyang / de ni rtag tu sangs rgyas dang / chos bgro* [*Li*, *Snar*, *Co*, *Zhol='gro*] *ba ni thos par 'gyur/. A*, 129–30. *B*, 180–81.

The Buddha explains that beings who have fallen into an unfortunate rebirth can be liberated through the bestowal of a posthumous empowerment. Once their negative actions have been purified, they will be reborn in a heavenly realm where they will have direct access to the Buddha and his teachings. The implication, of course, is that exposure to these will allow one to generate the insight necessary to achieve final liberation. This point is made explicit in versions of the SDP embedded in certain canonical commentaries, which add two lines to the above passage not found in the Sde dge and other printed editions of Version A. These lines read "residing in the non-returning stage / gradually they will obtain enlightenment"[670] and are almost identical to what we find in the corresponding Sanskrit and Tibetan of Version B, which read "residing in the non-returning stage / gradually they will experience enlightenment directly."[671] The active verbal form *kurvanti* used in the Sanskrit of Version B is particularly telling, since it indicates very clearly that those who have been rescued seek final liberation through their own efforts. Yet nowhere in either version of the SDP do we find explicit discussion of the bardo, and the rituals in these works are clearly directed at rescuing those who already have fallen into bad rebirths.

Discussions of the Bardo in Canonical Commentaries on the SDP

670 *phyir mi ldog pa'i sa la gnas/ /rim gyis byang chub thob par 'gyur/.* See Skorupski, 319. While these lines do not appear in the Sde dge edition and are not noted in the Dpe bsdur ma edition, they do appear in some canonical commentaries including Vajravarman's *Beautiful Ornament* (Sde dge, 131. Dpe bsdur ma, 152) and Ānandagarbha's *Ornament of Illumination* (Sde dge, 499. Dpe bsdur ma, 614). They also appear in certain Tibetan works on the SDP, including Tsong kha pa's *Notes on the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (342) and 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid* (303).

671 *avaivartikabhūmipratiṣṭhitāś ca krameṇa bodhiṃ sākṣāt kurvanti/.* Skorupski, 242. */phyir mi bzlog pa'i sa la gnas/ /rim gyis* [*G.yung*, *Pe*, *Snar=rim kyis*] *byang chub mngon sum byed/. Ngan song sbyong rgyud* (Version B) (Sde dge par phud), 259. *Ngan song sbyong rgyud* (Version B) (Dpe bsdur ma), 360. Cf. Skorupski, 243.

While the SDP itself does not mention bardo states, several canonical commentaries on it discuss them briefly. In Kāmadhenu's aforementioned *Extensive Commentary on the Great King of Precise Rituals Called the Āryasarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*, we find a fascinating discussion of the mechanics of death and rebirth vis-à-vis the SDP. Commenting on the section in which the Buddha details Vimalamaṇiprabha's fall to hell and prophesies his future rebirths, Kāmadhenu first addresses Śakra's remark that seven days have passed since Vimalamaṇiprabha's passing: "In the passage starting with 'O Bhagavān, from this very region of the gods of the Thirty-three' and ending with 'the assembly fell on their faces,'[672] the statement 'seven days have passed since then'[673] refers to seven days in Jambudvipa only, that is, conventions that this region has established."[674] Kāmadhenu adds that some have claimed that the reference here to seven days refers to seven god days, which is the equivalent of seven human years, while others say it denotes forty-nine days. Such discrepancies, he reasons, merely boil down to mistaken thinking.

Kāmadhenu next cites a later section in the SDP in which the Buddha explains the past-life events that led to Vimalamaṇiprabha's ascent to heaven and fall to hell, a section that is missing from Version B. Kāmadhenu cites the opening and closing lines of the section and then notes that the narrative is "easy to understand,"[675] as he often does when a section of the SDP does not need much commentary. He nevertheless anticipates an objection: "If that is so, then

672 *A*, 119–20. *B*, 167–69. Cf. Skorupski, 307.

673 *A*, 119. *B*, 167–68. Cf. Skorupski, 307.

674 *bcom ldan 'das sum cu rtsa gsum gyi lha'i ris 'di nyid na* [*Pe*, *Snar=nas*] *zhes bya ba nas/ kha bub* [*Pe*, *Snar=spub*] *tu 'gyel zhes bya ba'i bar la dus las 'das nas dgung bdun lags na zhes bya ba ni/ 'dzam bu'i gling kho na'i zhag bdun te/ tha snyad rnams ni gling 'dis rnam par gzhag* [*Snar=bzhag*] *pa yin la/*. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Sde dge), 506. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1521–22.

675 *tshig gi don ni go sla'o*. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Sde dge), 506. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1522.

why is the king born in the god realm as soon as he dies, even though he had committed a transgression of immediate retribution? Why in this case did he certainly not experience a lower place of birth?"[676] The king here is none other than Vimalamaṇiprabha in a past life, and the transgression of immediate retribution[677] refers to him murdering his father in order to seize the throne, an act that causes his mother to die from grief. As the story goes, the regicidal son-cum-king later ventures into the woods and encounters a Buddhist ascetic who explains to him the hellish rebirths that result from murdering one's parents. Overcome by fear, the king seeks refuge in the Three Jewels and acknowledges his wrongdoing, but dies soon after.[678] Explaining how the king comes to reborn in heaven, Kāmadhenu states: "It is the power of remorse and confession, and it is the power of existing in the Buddhist lineage. Although the king had done something terrible, since he felt remorse and had admitted his faults, he became purified and cleansed."[679] The king's last-minute regret and devotion to the Buddhist teachings are enough to propel him to a divine rebirth, and Kāmadhenu explains that while the king had committed an inexpiable act, the negative karma from this would be experienced *after* a lifetime spent in heaven. Vimalamaṇiprabha, of course, does in fact end up in hell, but his torment only lasts seven days thanks to the Buddha's actions.

Next, Kāmadhenu examines the possibility that Śakra's mention of seven days refers to the bardo of becoming, which typically refers to the interval between death and rebirth during

676 *'o na ci'i phyir rgyal po de mtshams med pa byas* [*Pe*, *Snar+pa*] *bzhin du/ shi ma thag tu lha'i gnas su skyes/ de lta na ni nges par* [*Pe*, *Snar+dang*] *skye gnas myong bar ma gyur to zhe na/*. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Sde dge), 506. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1522.

677 Tib. *mtshams med pa*.

678 *A*, 145–48. *B*, 199–202. Cf. Skorupski, 332–35. For an English summary of the story, see Skorupski, 42–43.

679 *'di ni 'gyod cing rab tu bshags* [*Pe*, *Snar=gshegs*] *pa'i mthu dang rigs la gnas pa'i mthu yin te/ las ma rungs pa byas pa yang 'gyod cing bshags pas dag cing byang bar 'gyur te/*. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Sde dge), 506. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1522.

which any variety of rebirths are possible.[680] He writes: “Some allege that the seven days also are the phase of the bardo of becoming. This claim has no scriptural basis or proof whatsoever!”[681] Kāmadhenu opposes strongly the possibility that Vimalamaṇiprabha resides in an intermediate state during the week-long interval between his passing and Śakra's query, arguing that there is no evidence for such a claim. He continues: “Abiding for an extended period in the bardo of becoming only concerns those who suffer an untimely death, as is very clearly stated in the *Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra Titled the Extensive Specifics of the Former Aspirations of the Seven Tathāgatas*. How could it be understood that the god Vimalamaṇiprabha had an untimely death?”[682] In Kāmadhenu's view, remaining for an extended period in the bardo of becoming is reserved for cases where one dies unexpectedly. He references the *Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra Titled the Extensive Specifics of the Former Aspirations of the Seven Tathāgatas*,[683] a canonical tantric Buddhist work surviving in Tibetan[684] and Chinese translation[685] that lists nine distinct kinds of untimely death. These are: (1) dying due to a lack of proper medical treatment; (2) dying because of legal punishment; (3) dying due to carelessness that leads to abduction at the hands of non-human spirits; (4) dying in a fire; (5) drowning; (6)

680 Tib. *srid pa'i bar do/srid pa bar do*.

681 *kha cig na re zhag bdun yang srid pa bar ma do'i gnas skabs yin no zhes zer te/ 'di la ni lung dang sgrub par byed pa ci yang med do/*. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Sde dge), 507. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1523.

682 *srid pa bar ma dor ni ring du gnas pa dus ma yin pa shi ba kho na'i dbang du byas pas/ 'phags pa de bzhin gshegs pa bdun gyi sngon gyi smon lam gyi khyad par rgyas pa zhes bya ba/ theg pa chen po'i mdo las rab tu gsal bar gsungs pa* [*Pe*, *Snar=la*]*/ lha'i bu de ni dus ma yin par shi ba zhes bya ba 'di ga las* [*Pe*, *Snar=la*] *shes/*. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Sde dge), 507. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1523.

683 Skt. *Āryasaptatathāgatapūrvapraṇidhānaviśeṣavistara*.

684 Tib. *Phags pa de bzhin gshegs pa bdun gyi sngon gyi smon lam gyi khyad par rgyas pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*.

685 *Yào shī liú lí guāng qī fó běn yuàn gōng dé jīng* 藥師琉璃光七佛本願巧德經, in *Taishō Tripiṭaka*, edited by Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabevol, vol. 14, no. 451. For an English translation of this version, see Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 1979), 173–217.

falling victim to lions, tigers, foxes, snakes or other predatory animals; (7) falling from a mountain; (8) dying from poison, sorcery, or contact with zombies[686]; and (9) dying from hunger or thirst.[687] His assertion that Vimalamaṇiprabha did not suffer an untimely death is reasonable enough, since none of the nine cases found in the sūtra apply to Vimalamaṇiprabha's passing, and the SDP is clear that he had lived out his karmically allotted time in heaven. But it should be noted that neither the Tibetan nor the Chinese versions of this work reference the bardo of becoming, so perhaps Kāmadhenu's version read differently or he interpreted certain lines as alluding to the bardo of becoming without specifying as much here. He concludes by insisting that Vimalamaṇiprabha had gone straight to hell when he died—"therefore, Vimalamaṇiprabha was born as a hell being for seven human days"[688]—and adds that if anyone wonders why the different hellish lifetimes that the Buddha prophesied for him did not come to pass, it is because "they were conquered by the power of secret mantra."[689]

Kāmadhenu's discussion is interesting in that it rejects the possibility that the SDP is alluding to a bardo state when discussing the passing of Vimalamaṇiprabha. In his view, the bardo of becoming is limited to cases where one dies before their time, and in this particular instance, Vimalamaṇiprabha went straight from heaven to hell without interval. In this way, he

686 Skt. *vetāla*; Tib. *ro langs*.

687 See *'Phags pa de bzhin gshegs pa bdun gyi sngon gyi smon lam gyi khyad par rgyas pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Sde dge par phud), 87: 496–546 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1976–79), 536–37. *'Phags pa de bzhin gshegs pa bdun gyi sngon gyi smon lam gyi khyad par rgyas pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 87: 743–813 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–9), 791–92.

688 *de bas na sems can dmyal bar mi'i zhag bdun skyes* [*Pe*, *Snar+la*]/. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Sde dge), 507. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1523.

689 *ji ltar lung bstan pa'i lo 'bum dang / drug khri dang / drug stong gi lhag ma ni gsang sngags kyi mthus bcom par zad do/*. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Sde dge), 507. Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1523.

follows the SDP in attributing the primary agentive power to the Buddha and his tantric practices, leaving little room for agency on the part of the departed.

We also find reference to the bardo of becoming in Varjavarman's *Beautiful Ornament*, one of the aforementioned commentaries that Grags pa rgyal mtshan believes to be an indigenous Tibetan work rather than a translation from Sanskrit.[690] While commenting on the SDP's instructions for cremating the body and working with the remains, Vajravarman details a "ritual of the bardo of becoming."[691] After someone dies, the ritualist should wait seven days before proceeding with the cremation. Then, when the second week has passed, he should ritually liberate[692] the departed from hell; after the third week, he should liberate them from the realm of the *preta*s or "hungry ghosts"; after the fourth week, he should liberate them from the animal realm; after the fifth week, he should liberate them from realm of the demigods; after the sixth week, he should liberate them from the human realm; and after the seventh week, he should liberate them from the god realm.[693] At this point, the foundational consciousness[694] of the being in the bardo of becoming is "penetrated by the cause of turning away from cyclic existence,"[695] and the officiant performs a series of visualization practices and mantra recitations to facilitate their release. In contrast with Kāmadhenu's commentary, here we see a more

690 As noted in chapter one, while the Nar thang and Beijing editions attribute this text to Vajravarman, the Sde dge and Co ne editions attribute it to Ānandagarbha, whom they identify as a disciple of the former. See Weinberger, PhD diss., 152.

691 Tib. *srid pa bar ma do'i cho ga*.

692 Tib. *bsgral ba*.

693 Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Sde dge), 146–47. Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 170.

694 Skt. *ālayavijñāna*; Tib. *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*.

695 *de nyid kyi tshe srid pa bar ma do'i sems can gyi* [*Pe*, *Snar+don*] *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa 'khor ba la* [*Pe*, *Snar=las*] *ldog pa'i rgyus 'dzug* [*Pe*, *Snar='jug*] *pa yin te/*. Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Sde dge), 147. Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 170.

familiar take on the bardo of becoming; it is not explicitly limited to cases of untimely death, and the ritualist is to observe seven weeks of rites following the moment of passing, which became standard practice in Tibetan mortuary practices. But as with the SDP and Kāmadhenu's text, notice that here again the emphasis is on the liberative capacities of the ritualist and the deities and so forth and not on the efforts of the deceased—the dead do not seem to *do* much of anything to save themselves.

Interestingly, we find very similar instructions in Ānandagarbha's *The Crematory Burnt Offering Ritual of the Glorious Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, though Ānandagarbha's version offers clearer language and greater detail. For example, whereas Vajravarman's text simply states, "in the second seven-day period, you should liberate the deceased from the hell realms,"[696] in Ānandagarbha's text we read:

> Accordingly, regarding the second seven-day period, in the sixteenth region of the maṇḍala of hell, you should construct the maṇḍala of the Nine Crown Protuberances in the middle of a deep corpse pit possessing the child of the lineage.[697] In that place, you should make offerings fully in accordance with precisely these rituals, and like fishing from a pond, by reciting the root wisdom mantra before a white vase, you should extract the mind of the person in the bardo of becoming in the form of a bindu from that place.[698]

Here Ānandagarbha adds considerable detail to the laconic instructions found in Vajravarman's work. He outlines the practices that one should perform to save the departed from hell, including visualizing the creation of the maṇḍala of the Nine Crown Protuberances and the extraction of

696 *bdun* [*Pe*, *Snar+pa*] *gnyis pa la dmyal ba'i gnas nas bsgral ba dang / gsum pa la yi dwags kyi gnas nas bsgral ba dang /*. Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Sde dge), 147. Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 170.

697 Reading the ambiguous *bu bcas* "possessing the child" as *rigs kyi bu bcas* "possessing the child of the lineage," a phrase used in bardo literature to denote the person whom one is trying to rescue from bad rebirths.

698 *'di ltar bdun pa gnyis pa la ni dmyal ba'i dkyil 'khor gling bcu drug pa la ro dong* [*Pe*, *Snar=dang*] *zab bu bcas pa'i dbus su gtsug tor dgu pa'i dkyil 'khor bzhengs la/ de la cho ga ji lta ba bzhin du yongs su mchod la rdzing bu'i nang nas nya bton ba ltar/ rtsa ba'i sngags bum pa dkar po la bsngags pas srid pa bar ma do'i sems thig le'i gzugs su gnas pa gdon par bya'o/*. Ānandagarbha, *Ro'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga* (Sde dge), 331–32. Ānandagarbha, *Ro'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1187.

the deceased from a pit of bodies by reciting the root wisdom mantra before a ritual vase. As with Vajravarman's instructions, after liberating the deceased from each of the six realms, the departed is "penetrated by the cause of turning away from cyclic existence,"[699] and the officiant further assists the dead with a series of visualization practices and recitations. Despite the additional details that Ānandagarbha's text provides, here again the dead are not framed as freeing themselves, but rather are understood to be liberated through the power of these rites. The dead are at great risk of falling into any sort of undesirable rebirths as they wander in the bardo of becoming, and they seem unable to get free of this predicament without external aid. As we have seen in the previous chapters, this other-power model of liberation is central to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's SDP-oriented works, though there are several references to bardo states that we must explore to understand how they align with the canonical works just discussed.

THE BARDO IN GRAGS PA RGYAL MTSHAN'S FUNERAL MANUALS

Spirits, Zombies, and the Bardo in Light Rays

Variations of the term bardo[700] only appear twice in *Light Rays*. In the section on introducing students into the maṇḍala (2.2.2.1.1.2.1), Grags pa rgyal mtshan explains that the ritualist must first visualize the ritual support (2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1), a practice that consists of four stages: dispelling obstructive spirits (2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.1), visualizing the ritual support (2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.2), summoning the consciousness of the deceased to the support (2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.3), and destroying

699 *de nyid kyi mtshan mo srid pa bar ma do'i sems can gyi kun gzhi rnam par shes pa 'khor ba las ldog pa'i rgyus 'jug pa yin te/*. Ānandagarbha, *Ro'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga* (Sde dge), 332. Ānandagarbha, *Ro'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1188. Cf. Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Sde dge), 147. Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 170.

700 In the first instance, Grags pa rgyal mtshan uses the term *bar ma do* rather than *bar do*, which we see also in canonical commentaries on the SDP. *C*, 63. *D*, 427. *E*, 42a. *F*, 59. In the second instance, he uses the term *srid pa bar ma*. *C*, 64. *D*, 428. *E*, 42b. *F*, 60.

their past negativities (2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.4). Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes that this order is not fixed: if the officiant purges the ritual space of obstructive spirits after having visualized the support and summoned the deceased's consciousness, then that too is effective.[701]

What harm can obstructive spirits cause? Grags pa rgyal mtshan begins by acknowledging a specific worry about their capacity to afflict the dead:

> First, in this regard, some allege that after becoming associated with obstructive spirits, the consciousness of the deceased is collected by the obstructive spirits and taken away. That is not the case, because obstructive spirits do not know where the consciousness resides.[702]

The concern here is that the dead's consciousness might fall prey to evil spirits who then abscond with it, depriving it of the benefits of the SDP's rites, among other things. Grags pa rgyal mtshan declares this fear to be groundless, since such spirits do not know where the consciousness is located. He then elaborates on the capacities of these entities, outlining three types. First, there are the gandharvas who race toward the mind at the moment of death.[703] Notice the term "mind"[704] is used rather than "consciousness,"[705] which apparently avoids any contradiction with Grags pa rgyal mtshan's previous assurance that evil spirits cannot locate the consciousness of the departed. Grags pa rgyal mtshan explains that these gandharvas approach

701 *C*, 62–63. *D*, 426. *E*, 41b. *F*, 58.

702 *dang po ni 'di la kha cig bgegs* [*E=gcags*] *'brel* [*E+zhes*] *zer nas/* [*E−/*] *tshe 'das kyi rnam shes bgegs kyis tshags byas pa de* [*E+dang*]*'bral* [*E='brel*] *bar byed pa yin/* [*E−/*] *zhes zer ba ni ma yin te/ bgegs kyis* [*Zhwa−bgegs kyis*] *rnam shes gang na gnas mi shes pa'i phyir ro/. C*, 63. *D*, 426. *E*, 41b. *F*, 58.

703 Tib. *dri za'i 'chi ka ma'i yid la nye bar rgyug pa*. Gandharvas (literally "scent eaters") are a class of spirits that consist on odors. The type of gandharva mentioned here also appears in the canonical *Sūtra on Questions Concerning Death and Transmigration* (Skt. *Āyuṣpattiyathākāraparipṛcchāsūtra*; Tib. *Tshe 'pho ba ji ltar 'gyur ba zhus pa'i mdo*), which includes a nearly identical term: *dri za 'chi ka ma'i sems la nye bar 'jug pa*. In a draft translation of this sūtra, Tom Tillemans translates this as "the gandharva who preys upon the minds of those on the verge of death," and notes that he has not found any additional information on this particular kind of spirit. See Tom J. F. Tillemans, "An Annotated Translation of the Sūtra of Questions Regarding Death and Transmigration," (University of Lausanne: s.n., n.d.), 17, 29.

704 Tib. *yid.*

705 Tib. *rnam par shes pa/rnam shes*.

the dying at the moment of death, and "since they do harm to the living having seized the body of the deceased, they are destroyed for the benefit of the living."[706] In other words, they have the power to animate the corpse and use it to harm those in its vicinity, and must be purged for the sake of the living.

The second type of spirit has two subtypes: co-emergent ghosts[707] and co-emergent gods.[708] Interestingly, Grags pa rgyal mtshan describes the ghosts as powerful and the gods as weak, noting that the ghosts are in fact "extremely harmful,"[709] since they can seize the body of the deceased and inhabit it, again turning the corpse into a zombie. Since they are a threat to the living—and apparently the co-emergent gods as well[710]—they too should be ritually destroyed.[711]

Finally, in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's account of a third category of obstructive spirits, we find mention of the bardo. He explains that certain spirits can harm the dead whether they are wandering in the bardo or have been reborn.[712] In order to prevent this, the ritualist should

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706 *tshe 'das pa'i gzugs bzung nas/ gson po rnams la gnod pa byed pa yod pas/* [*E*−/] *gson po la phan gdags pa'i phyir tshad bcad pa* [*E*=*gcad pa*] *dang /. C*, 63. *D*, 426. *E*, 41b. *F*, 58.

707 Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa'i 'dre*.

708 Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa'i lha*.

709 Tib. *shin tu 'tshe*.

710 "The ghosts should be destroyed for the sake of benefitting the living and the co-emergent gods." *gson po dang lhan cig skyes pa'i lha la phan gdags pa'i phyir 'dre de tshar gcad de/. C*, 63. *D*, 427. *E*, 41b. *F*, 59.

711 *C*, 63. *D*, 427. *E*, 41b–42a. *F*, 58–59.

712 "Third, since it is possible also that obstructive spirits will harm the deceased themselves whether they have taken birth or are in the bardo by virtue of their karma, for the sake of benefitting the deceased as well, one should perform the fierce burnt offering rite." *gsum pa ni* [*E*=*na*]/ [*E*−/] *tshe 'das pa* [*E*−*pa*] *nyid la'ang* [*E*=*la*] *bar ma do'am* [*E*=*bar do 'am*]/ [*E*−/] *skye ba blangs nas* [*E*−*nas*] *kyang rung ste/* [*E*−/] *las kyi dbang gis bgegs gnod pa'ang* [*E*=*pa 'ang*] *srid pas/* [*E*−/] *de la'ang* [*E*=*la 'ang*] *phan gdags pa'i phyir/* [*E*−/] *drag po'i sbyin bsreg* [*E*=*sreg*] *gi bar gyis* [*E*−*gyis*] *bya ste* [*E*=*te*]/. *C*, 63. *D*, 427. *E*, 42a. *F*, 59.

perform a fierce burnt offering rite to dispel the obstructive entities, as indicated in the SDP itself:

> Then, with their negative actions overcome,
> the embodied one, free from obstructive spirits,
> should enjoy whatever bliss is available
> in the three realms in the higher and human worlds.[713]

Sourced from the SDP's section on the fierce burnt offering rite, this passage suggests that once the negativities of the deceased have been purified and the obstructive spirits have been cleared, the dead will enjoy rebirth either as a human or god. Here again the SDP makes no explicit mention of the bardo, while Grags pa rgyal mtshan's discussion frames bardo beings as vulnerable and in need of rescue. Works like *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo* also emphasize the vulnerability of those roaming the intermediate state, but the difference here is that Grags pa rgyal mtshan says nothing of these beings endeavoring to save themselves. The primary responsibility falls on the shoulders of the ritualist and the deities he evokes, which in this last case is the wrathful Trailokyavijaya.

How should a ritualist dispel these obstructors? Grags pa rgyal mtshan briefly discusses the necessary practices. In the case of the gandharvas, purging them through a pacifying rite is appropriate, which is done by giving torma three times. In the case of the co-emergent ghosts and co-emergent gods, one performs a mixture of peaceful and fierce practices, giving each spirit barley flour dough squeezed between the fingers[714] and small butter lamps[715] and reciting

713 */*[*E*−/] *de nas de yi* [*E=de'i*] *sdig 'joms* [*A*, *B=bcom*] *lus/ /bgegs dang bral* [*A*, *B=phral*] *te ci bde bar/ /mtho* [*E=mtho'*] *ris 'jig rten mi yi* [*E=mi'i*] *nang / /khams gsum par* [*A*, *B=pa na*; *Khu=pa ni*] *ci bder spyod/*. *A*, 172. *B*, 230. *C*, 63. *D*, 427. *E*, 42a. *F*, 59. Cf. Skorupski, 356. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *sarvapāpādivighnānāṃ nāśayet tasya dehinaḥ // tataḥ sauhatapāpātmā nirvighnaś carate sukham // svargalokeṣu mānuṣye yāvat trailokyadhātuṣu // anenaiva krameṇāśu kuryāj janmanīha sthitān //*. See Skorupski, 224.

714 Tib. *chang bu*.

715 Tib. *ting lo'i mar me*.

fierce mantras many times. Finally, as mentioned, the third class of spirits requires the fierce burnt offering rites outlined in the SDP, which Grags pa rgyal mtshan states should be performed as long as necessary.[716]

Summoning the Dead in Light Rays

We find a second reference to the bardo in *Light Rays*' instructions on summoning the consciousness of the deceased to the ritual support (2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.3). Grags pa rgyal mtshan explains that the ritualist should first form the mudrā of Trailokyavijaya and imagine light radiating outward from the syllable *hūṃ* located at his own heart center and from either the syllable *nrī* or *hūṃ* at the heart center of the deceased. He then should imagine summoning the deceased's consciousness and "should state the truth,"[717] saying aloud:

> With the blessings of the truth of the Buddha, the truth of the Dharma, the truth of the Saṅgha, the truth of the fierce male deities of the secret mantras and wisdom mantras, the truth of the fierce female deities of the dhāraṇī mantras, and the spoken truth of the Bhagavān Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja Sarvavid Vairocana with retinue, O [the name of the deceased] who has passed away, wherever you are in the three realms or the four modes of birth, come here immediately![718]

Drawing on the power of the Buddha, his teachings, the Buddhist community, wrathful male and female deities, and Sarvavid Vairocana, the officiant draws the dead into the ritual environment.

716 *C*, 63–64. *D*, 427. *E*, 42a. *F*, 59.

717 *bden pa brjod par bya ste/. C*, 64. *D*, 428. *E*, 42b. *F*, 60.

718 *sangs rgyas kyi bden pa dang / chos kyi bden pa dang / dge 'dun gyi bden pa dang / gsang sngags dang /* [*E*−/] *rigs sngags kyi khro bo rnams kyi bden pa dang / gzungs sngags kyi khro mo* [*E=bo*] *rnams kyi bden pa dang / bcom ldan 'das ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba* [*E=pa'i*]/ [*E*−/] *gzi brjid kyi rgyal po kun rig rnam par snang mdzad 'khor dang bcas pa'i bka' bden pa dang / bden pa chen po'i byin gyis brlabs kyis/* [*E*−/] *tshe 'das pa che ge mo zhes bya ba/* [*E*−/] *khams gsum mam* [*E*−*mam*] / [*E*−/] *skye gnas bzhi gang na gnas kyang skad cig la 'dir mchis par* [*E=mchi bar*] *gyur cig/. C*, 64. *D*, 428. *E*, 42b. *F*, 60.

He calls out to them wherever they may be in the desire realm,[719] form realm,[720] or formless realm,[721] even if they are experiencing one of the four modes of birth,[722] namely, birth from an egg,[723] birth from a womb,[724] birth from heat and moisture,[725] or a miraculous birth.[726] Grags pa rgyal mtshan explains that the ritualist should then recite mantras and merge the departed with the ritual support: "Saying *oṃ ṭakki hūṃ jaḥ* three times and also *oṃ śodhane śodhane sarvapāpaṃ apaṇaya hūṃ phaṭ*, the deceased is summoned from their dwelling place, whether it be the bardo of becoming or one of the six realms in which they have taken rebirth, and should be dissolved into the support."[727] Having just mentioned the three realms and four modes of rebirth, Grags pa rgyal mtshan now identifies the location of the deceased as either the bardo of becoming or one of the six realms of existence, although all of these intersect. Regardless of where the deceased may be, the mechanics of their summoning remain somewhat ambiguous; do the dead decide to come, or are they forced to come by the power of the rites? We must note that the verb used for "summoned"—*bkug pa* (present: *'gugs pa*)—is transitive and the deceased

719 Skt. *kāmadhātu*; Tib. *'dod pa'i khams*.

720 Skt. *rūpadhātu*; Tib. *gzugs khams.*

721 Skt. *ārūpyadhātu*; Tib. *gzugs med khams*.

722 Skt. *caturyoni*; Tib. *skye gnas rnam pa bzhi/skye gnas bzhi*.

723 Skt. *aṇḍaja*; Tib. *sgong skyes*.

724 Skt. *jalābuja*; Tib. *mngal skyes.*

725 Skt. *saṃsvedaja*; Tib. *drod gsher skye*.

726 Skt. *upapāduka*; Tib. *rdzus skye*. The fourfold model of birth can be traced to Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya.* For a synopsis of Vasubandhu's discussion, see Frances Garrett, *Religion, Medicine, and the Human Embryo in Tibet* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 27. For Vasubandhu's discussion in translation, see La Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, trans. Leo Pruden, 380–81.

727 [*E+/de nyid bsdus pa la/ oṃ badzra sa twa hūṃ dza/*] *oṃ ṭakki hūṃ dzaḥ zhes lan gsum brjod la/ yang /* [*E−/*] *oṃ sho dha ne sho dha ne sarbba* [*E=sa rba*] *pā paṃ a pa ṇa ya* [*E=ya na*] *hūṃ phaṭ* [*E−phaṭ*]*/ ces* [*E=zhes*] *bya ba* [*E=bas*] *srid pa bar ma'am* [*E=ma 'am*]*/ 'gro ba rigs drug gang du* [*Zhwa−gang du*] *skyes kyang gang na gnas pa nas bkug la/ rten la bstim par bya'o/. C*, 64. *D*, 428. *E*, 42b–43a. *F*, 60.

here is the direct object, but this does not provide enough evidence to discount entirely any agency on the part of the departed. At the very least, it is clear that Grags pa rgyal mtshan's emphasis remains on the power of the SDP's practices, and thus it would seem that even here the dead do very little apart from coming when called.

The Bardo in A Drop of Elixir for the Benefit of Others: Last Rites

A Drop of Elixir for the Benefit of Others: Last Rites also briefly addresses the bardo. This text is unique among Grags pa rgyal mtshan's mortuary texts in that it draws on both the *Vajrapañjara Tantra* and the SDP. Since the *Vajrapañjara* belongs to the Hevajra cycle of Buddhist tantra and thus the Highest Yogatantra class, *A Drop of Elixir* does not center on yogatantric practices specifically as do *Light Rays* and the other shorter manuals.

A Drop of Elixir twice mentions the bardo. The first occurrence closely relates to what we have seen in *Light Rays*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan describes the process of visualizing the ritual support and summoning the dead's consciousness as before, though with some important variations:

> Then you should summon the consciousness: with the blessings of the truth of the Buddha, the truth of the Dharma, the truth of the Saṅgha, the spoken truth of the lord gurus, and the spoken truth of the deities in the Bhagavān Hevajra's maṇḍala, O [the name of the deceased] who has passed away, wherever you are in the three realms, come here immediately![728]

The basic instructions are the same as those found in *Light Rays*, except that in place of the fierce male and female deities and Sarvavid Vairocana with retinue, we find deities from

728 *de nas rnam shes dgug par bya ste/ sangs rgyas kyi bden pa dang / chos kyi bden pa dang / dge 'dun gyi bden pa dang / rje btsun bla ma rnams kyi bka' bden pa dang / bcom ldan 'das dgyes pa rdo rje'i dkyil 'khor gyi 'khor lo'i bka' bden pa'i byin rlabs kyis tshe 'das pa che ge mo zhes bya ba khams gsum gang na gnas kyang skad cig gis 'dir mchis par gyur cig*. *S*, 455–56. *T*, 569. *U*, 434.

Hevajra's maṇḍala. As such, this is a practice that can be adapted either to a Yogatantra or Highest Yogatantra context simply by swapping out the deities, which underscores the fluidity of such ritual modules in a funerary context.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan next instructs the ritualist to summon the deceased by reciting three times the mantra *oṃ vajra gaurī ākarśaya jaḥ/ oṃ vajra caurī praveśaya hūṃ/ oṃ vajra vetālī bandha vaṃ/ oṃ vajra ghasmarī vaśaṃ kuru hoḥ.* Once the consciousness arrives, the officiant dispels obstructive spirits to prevent them from interfering with the deceased's deliverance from bad rebirths. Here again the instructions are very similar to those found in *Light Rays*, but this time Grags pa rgyal mtshan warns about spirits interfering at the moment of death, in the bardo, in the next place of birth, and with the dead's enlightenment. This last possibility is not included in *Light Rays*' discussion of this rite, though it should be noted that rebirth in a pure realm is typically framed as a prelude to awakening, since one can quickly make progress in the presence of enlightened beings. In any case, while Grags pa rgyal mtshan again mentions the bardo here, we find no discussion of the dead actively seeking liberation; the emphasis remains on freedom through external rites.

However, the second occurrence of the term bardo in *A Drop of Elixir* is somewhat different. In the section on the tantric feast gathering,[729] Grags pa rgyal mtshan gives instructions on what the ritualist should say to his disciples, quoting an unnamed work attributed to the Brahmin Kṛṣṇapāda.[730] The quoted passages concern the classic Mahāyāna schema of the five

729 Skt. *gaṇacakra*; Tib. *tshogs kyi 'khor lo.*

730 Tib. Bram ze nag po zhabs. This is none other than Nag po pa, a student of Virūpa to whom the Lam 'bras is traced. Nag po pa of course is associated with the Hevajra cycle and is identified as the author of a canonical Hevajra sādhana, which gives the name Slob dpon Paṇḍita Nag po'i zhabs in its colophon. See Nag po pa, *Dgyes pa'i rdo rje sgrub pa'i thabs de kho na nyid gsal bar byed pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (*Dpe bsdur ma*), 5: 662–687 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008), 685.

paths,[731] which begin with initial engagement with Buddhist practices up to complete enlightenment. Teaching the clearing of the path, the ritualist says aloud:

> The path of accumulation is like a mirage.
> The second path is like smoke.
> The third you see as lightning.
> The fourth is like a butter lamp.
> The fifth is the emptiness of everything.
> That itself is buddhahood.
> In this bardo of becoming itself,
> may your five paths come to an end![732]

Then showing the path, the ritualist says:

> Since your five paths have come to an end,
> the five aggregates are the five Buddhas,
> the five afflictions are the five ḍākinīs,
> the eight consciousnesses are the five gnoses,
> the four elements are the four female deities,
> having severed the flow of the wheel of life,
> the wheel of Dharma is fully turned.
> Saṃsāra becomes nirvāṇa.[733]

In these passages, we find explicit acknowledgment of the possibility of becoming enlightened while in the intermediate state between lifetimes. The details of this remain unexplained, but the equation of the imperfect features of the mundane self with the perfected and the supramundane (e.g. the five aggregates being equal to the five Buddhas and so on) is typical of Highest Yogatantra practices of transformation. However, it is important to recognize that these

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731 Skt. *pañcamārga*; Tib. *lam lnga*. The five paths are (1) the path of accumulation (Skt. *saṃbhāramārga*; Tib. *tshogs lam*), (2) the path of preparation (Skt. *prayogamārga*; Tib. *sbyor lam*), (3) the path of vision (Skt. *darśanamārga*; Tib. *mthong lam*), (4) the path of cultivation (Skt. *bhāvanāmārga*; Tib. *sgom lam*), and (5) the path of no more learning (Skt. *aśaikṣamārga*; Tib. *mi slob lam*). For a concise synopsis of these five, see *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. "pañcamārga."

732 *tshogs lam smig rgyu lta bu ste/ /gnyis pa du ba lta bu yin/ /gsum pa glog tu khyod kyis mthong / /bzhi pa mar me lta bu ste/ /lnga pa thams cad stong pa nyid/ /sangs rgyas pa ni de nyid do/ /srid pa bar do 'di nyid du/ khyod kyi lam lnga mthar phyin shog /*. *S*, 458. *T*, 571. *U*, 436.

733 *khyod kyi lam lnga mthar phyin pas/ /phung po lnga ni sangs rgyas lnga/ /nyon mongs lnga ni mkha' 'gro lnga/ /rnam shes brgyad ni ye shes lnga/ /'byung ba bzhi ni lha mo bzhi/ /srid pa'i 'khor lo rgyun bcad nas/ /chos kyi 'khor lo yongs bskor te/ /'khor ba mya ngan 'das par 'gyur/*. *S*, 458. *T*, 572. *U*, 436.

instructions are directed at the ritualist's living disciples and not the deceased. While Grags pa rgyal mtshan points to the possibility of liberation in the bardo, his focus throughout remains on the rituals that can purify the negative actions of the dead rather than real-time instructions for bardo beings on how to cut through the appearances of the intermediate state. Moreover, it is important also to remember that this work is grounded primarily in the Highest Yogatantra teachings of the *Vajrapañjara Tantra* and not the yogatantric instructions of the SDP, and that such a difference in orientation makes this text a more natural environment for yogic practices involving the intermediate state.

THE BARDO IN LATER TIBETAN WORKS ON THE SDP

As with Grags pa rgyal mtshan's influential works on the SDP, the bardo remains a relatively unimportant concept in the majority of SDP-focused writings that followed. In Tsong kha pa's commentary on the SDP, for example, he addresses the aforementioned debate about whether the seven days that have passed since Vimalamaṇiprabha's death reflect either seven god days or the intermediate state, both of which Tsong kha pa strongly rejects, arguing instead that they refer to seven human days.[734] Later in the commentary, Tsong kha pa again references the bardo while discussing the summoning of the dead's consciousness, though his brief remarks here essentially echo the procedures detailed in *Light Rays*.[735] Meanwhile, in the lengthy *Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid* penned by Tsong kha pa's student 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan, we find more elaborate coverage of these same topics. 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan

734 Tsong kha pa, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud mchan dang bcas pa* (Sde dge), 298.

735 Ibid., 353.

mentions the bardo while discussing the summoning rite,[736] the threat of obstructive spirits,[737] and potential durations of the intermediate state between lifetimes,[738] but like Tsong kha pa, does not stress the bardo as an opportunity for the deceased to liberate themselves, focusing instead on salvific rites.

Similarly, in Ngor chen's influential *Limitless Benefit for Others*, we find only one reference to the bardo, again in the section on summoning the dead's consciousness to the ritual support. Ngor chen's instructions for this practice[739] are basically identical to those found in *Light Rays*—he integrates Grags pa rgyal mtshan's language into his own work, which is perhaps unsurprising given he twice acknowledges how closely he has followed Grags pa rgyal mtshan in producing his manual. In the opening verses, he declares that he will explain the rituals "according to the intent of the supreme Rje btsun in particular,"[740] while in the concluding verses he writes that he has followed the "excellent speech of the Rje btsun who in reality is Vajradhara."[741] In contrast, Go rams pa's highly detailed *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others* does not mention the term bardo at all, which further underscores that the focus of these works is on rites that can rescue the dead rather than instructions for the dead on how to liberate themselves. However, despite this trend, I have located one innovative text dedicated to integrating the bardo teachings with the SDP's rites. This effort was penned by the seventeenth-century scholar A mes

736 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig rnam bshad*, 305.

737 Ibid., 317.

738 Ibid., 335–37.

739 See Ngor chen, *Gzhan phan mtha' yas*, 96.

740 *khyad par rje btsun mchog gi dgongs pa ltar/.* Ibid., 37.

741 *rdo rje 'chang dngos rje btsun gsung rab ltar/.* Ibid., 109.

zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, and it is his text to which we will direct our focus for the remainder of the chapter.

A MES ZHABS' ATTEMPT AT SYNTHESIS

Context and Contributions

A mes zhabs was born into the Sa skya 'Khon family and was the twenty-seventh throne-holder of the Sa skya school. His paternal uncle[742] and father[743] were the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth Sa skya throne-holders respectively. He flourished during a period when Sa skya's influence and resources had waned, and while he was prolific, producing over 700 works during his lifetime, the majority of his texts were never printed and did not circulate widely.[744] His interests lay primarily in tantra and history, and in the editing and preservation of the Sa skya tradition's rich literary heritage.[745] In the words of Jan-Ulrich Sobisch:

> By the seventeenth century, both the political power and the religious importance of the Sa-skya-pas had long declined. A-mes-zhabs himself had no essentially new teachings to add; his main contribution—and that is his great importance for the historian of Tibetan literature—was to preserve, reestablish, and edit, as much as possible of the precious contributions of his forefathers.[746]

While it is true that many of A mes zhabs' works preserve Sa skya pa tradition rather than advance it, his capacity for creativity should not be overlooked. In his *Dispelling All*

742 'Jam dbyangs bsod nams dbang po (1559–1621).

743 Sngags 'chang Grags pa blo gros (1563–1617).

744 Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, *Life, Transmissions, and Works of A-mes zhabs Ngag-dbang-kun-dga'-bsod nams, the Great 17th-Century Sa-skya-pa Bibliophile*, Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland (VOHD), Supplementband 38 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007), 5–6.

745 Ibid., 10.

746 Ibid.

Obscurations: Explaining the Bardo Teachings,[747] for example, we find innovations in SDP-oriented funerary rites unlike anything I have seen elsewhere. Rather than only mentioning the bardo in passing as do Grags pa rgyal mtshan, Ngor chen, and others, A mes zhabs provides instructions on how to integrate the bardo teachings into the SDP's ritual system, specifying when and how to speak to the dead. *Dispelling All Obscurations* therefore departs from major writings on the SDP, and is an example of how A mes zhabs did, in fact, have something new to add.

A Note on the Production of **Dispelling All Obscurations**

Dispelling All Obscurations features a short colophon in which A mes zhabs offers a glimpse into the circumstances of the work's production. He first acknowledges the influence of his uncle 'Jam dbyangs bsod nams dbang po's teachings and expresses devotion to both his father Sngags 'chang Grags pa blo gros and his primary teacher Mus chen Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan. This reference to his uncle would suggest that 'Jam dbyangs bsod nams dbangs po also had endeavored to integrate the bardo teachings into the funerary rites of the SDP, though I have found no further evidence of this. A mes zhabs notes that this text was completed in the "red hall"[748] at Sa skya's Bzhi thog residence[749] on the first completion day[750] of the waning phase of

747 A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, *Bar do chos bshad sgrib pa kun sel*, in *Gsung 'bum: A mes zhabs Ngag dbang Kun dga' bsod nams* (Guru Lama digital edition) (Kathmandu: Sachen International, 2011).

748 Tib. *tshoms dmar*.

749 Tib. Bzhi thog bla brang. In his famous history of the Sa skya school, A mes zhabs describes the history of four residences at Sa skya—the Bzhi thog Bla brang, Rin chen sgang Bla brang, Lha khang Bla brang, and Dus mchod Bla brang—that emerged from different 'Khon family lines. A mes zhabs himself was born into the Dus mchod Bla brang line.

750 Tib. *rdzogs pa dang po.* This corresponds to the twentieth day of the month in the lunar calendar. See Sobisch, *Life, Transmissions, and Works*, 527.

the second month[751] of the twenty-first year of the sexagenary cycle, which corresponds to March 25, 1647. A mes zhabs would have been age fifty at the time. He adds that he composed this work "having thought that I should benefit the community of students of equal status with myself, including the child of the lineage Ngag dbang bsod nams dbang phyug."[752] Ngag dbang bsod nams dbang phyug (1638–1685) is none other than A mes zhabs' son, who would become the twenty-eighth Sa skya throne-holder and would have been nine years old at the time this work was written.

Integrating the Bardo Teachings into the Rituals of Sarvavid

Dispelling All Obscurations begins with a statement of purpose—"Now, the precise way of explaining the bardo teachings in relation to the rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana is as follows"[753]—after which A mes zhabs identifies his primary source for understanding Sarvavid's rites: Ngor chen's *Limitless Benefit for Others*. Given that Ngor chen's manual relies heavily on *Light Rays*, we might wonder why A mes zhabs uses Ngor chen's work rather than Grags pa rgyal mtshan's. Why not go straight to the source? One possible reason is the organizational simplicity of Ngor chen's text in comparison with *Light Rays*. I outline the former in Table 4 below:

TABLE 4: TOPICAL OUTLINE OF NGOR CHEN'S *LIMITLESS BENEFIT FOR OTHERS*

1. Preliminaries (38)[754]
2. The main practice (38)
2.1. The rituals of the officiant (38)

751 The term *dbo bzla ba* here denotes the second month of the Tibetan lunar calendar.

752 *sa skya pa sngags 'chang ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams kyis rigs kyi bu ngag dbang bsod nams dbang phyug la sogs te rang dang skal ba mnyam pa'i slob ma'i tshogs rnams la phan par bsam nas/*. A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 652.

753 *'dir kun rig gi cho ga dang 'brel bar bar do chos bshad ji lta ba'i tshul ni/*. Ibid., 626.

754 Pagination reflects the Sde dge block print of Ngor chen's text cited previously.

TABLE 4 (CONTINUED)

2.1.1. The personal yoga (39)
2.1.1.1. Protective meditations (39)
2.1.1.2. The actual self-visualization (45)
2.1.1.2.1. The causal meditation that establishes the deity (46)
2.1.1.2.2. The result—the actual visualization of the deity (47)
2.1.1.2.3. The stabilizing recitations to be performed (49)
2.1.2. The vase recitations (52)
2.1.3. The front visualization and offerings (55)
2.1.3.1. Realizing the maṇḍala (55)
2.1.3.2. Making offerings to the maṇḍala (71)
2.1.3.3. The self-initiation (82)
2.1.3.4. The recitations to be performed (82)
2.2. The rituals to be done for the disciples (83)
2.2.1. Caring for the living and oneself (83)
2.2.1.1. The preparatory rites of the disciples (84)
2.2.1.2. The rituals of the main practice (91)
2.2.1.2.1. The empowerment of the vajra disciples (91)
2.2.1.2.2. The empowerment of the ritual expert (92)
2.2.1.2.3. The concluding bestowal (94)
2.2.2. Caring for the dead by purifying all negative actions (95)
3. The concluding rites (106)

The contrast between this and the outline of *Light Rays* found in Table 5 in the appendix is striking. *Light Rays* is far more complex, including about five times the number of subsections, and thus is presumably more difficult to utilize in a ritual setting, especially given the asides in *Light Rays* discussed above. There may be other reasons why A mes zhabs decided to use Ngor chen's text, but a more streamlined manual is likely preferable from a practical standpoint.

A mes zhabs calls his text an "addendum"[755] to *Limitless Benefit for Others*, and specifies the section of Ngor chen's work in which his bardo teachings are to be integrated, namely, the section on caring for the dead (2.2.2), to which A mes zhabs refers as the rituals of the "southern gate" of the maṇḍala, a term used for rites for the deceased.[756] In particular, the officiant should integrate A mes zhabs' instructions before completing the purification of the

755 Tib. *lhan thabs*. Ibid., 652.

756 Sobisch, *Life, Transmissions, and Works*, 527.

avarice of the departed.[757] At this point in the ritual performance, he should say: "Oh! You the deceased known by this name, having passed from this world to the next world, listen up with an undistracted mind with faith and respect!"[758] As we have seen in works like *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo,* the ritualist is to engage directly with the dead in order to help them achieve liberation in the intermediate state. A mes zhabs then writes that one should announce the different types of bardo states aloud:

> Now you are in the bardo state, and in general, the bardo has three subcategories: the bardo of dreaming, the bardo spanning birth to death, and the bardo of becoming. From among these three, the bardo of dreaming is the dreams one experiences while asleep. The bardo spanning birth to death has two subcategories: the birth phase of becoming and the death phase of becoming. From these two, the birth phase of becoming is from the beginning of taking birth in any of the four modes of birth up to the actual approach of the death of that very body in which one was born, and the death phase of becoming, from the point of view of the gradual dissolution of the elements, is said to span from the earth element dissolving into the water element up to the consciousness dissolving into the luminosity that is total emptiness. So in the context of that luminosity, if you have prior experience in meditating on the path, then having recognized that luminosity at the time of the ground, you become indivisibly mixed with that. By meditating, having recognized the mother and son luminosity, those elements are taken as the first step of the path and so forth.[759]

First the officiant should inform the dead that they are in the intermediate state and then relay what exactly this entails. As with Nāropā, A mes zhabs identifies three discrete bardos: the bardo

757 A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 626.

758 *'o/ 'jig rten 'di nas 'jig rten pha rol tu tshe las 'das pa ming 'di zhes bgyi ba khyed dad cing gus pa'i sgo nas sems ma yengs par nyon cig*. Ibid.

759 *khyod da lta bar do'i gnas skabs yin cing / spyir bar do la/ rmi lam bar do/ skye 'chi bar do/ srid pa bar do gsum las/ rmi lam bar do ni/ gnyid kyi gnas skabs su nyams su myong ba'i rmi lam rnams yin la/ skye 'chi bar do la skye srid dang / 'chi srid gnyis las/ skye srid ni skye gnas bzhi po gang rung du skye ba len pa'i 'go brtsams pa nas bzung ste/ skyes pa'i lus de nyid 'chi ba la mngon du phyogs pa'i bar yin cing / 'chi srid ni/ 'byung ba rim bsdud kyi dbang du byas na/ sa chu la thim pa nas rnam par shes pa thams cad stong pa 'od gsal la thim pa'i bar la zer ba yin pas/ 'od gsal de'i skabs su/ sngar lam bsgoms pa'i nyams myong yod na/ gzhi dus kyi 'od gsal de ngos zin par byas nas/ de dang dbyer med du bsres te bsgoms pas 'od gsal ma bu ngo 'phrod nas lam sna zin pa sogs 'byung ba de rnams yin la/*. Ibid., 626–27.

of dreaming,[760] the bardo spanning birth to death,[761] and the bardo of becoming.[762] He says little about the bardo of dreaming, since it is largely irrelevant in this context, but divides the second into two subcategories: the birth phase of becoming[763] and the death phase of becoming.[764] The first begins with rebirth via any of the aforementioned four modes and ends with death's onset. The second begins with the dissolution of the elements, spanning the earth element dissolving into the water element through the consciousness dissolving into the mind's empty luminosity. If the deceased is an experienced meditator, then they can recognize the dawning of the mind's luminosity and merge with it. This process is typically described as a meeting of two luminosities: mother luminosity and child luminosity. As Gyurme Dorje explains:

> A fundamental distinction is made between the inner radiance of the ground (*gzhi'i 'od-gsal*) and the inner radiance of the path (*lam-gyi 'od-gsal*). The former, which is also known as the 'mother inner radiance' (*'od-gsal ma*), occurs naturally at the time of death, when it indicates the presence of the Buddha-body of Reality (*dharmakāya*), but which may not be accompanied by an awareness of its nature. The latter, which is also known as the 'child inner radiance' (*'od-gsal bu*) is an awareness of the ultimate nature of mind cultivated by the meditator in life, i.e. the realisation of the nature of the 'mother inner radiance' as it is developed in meditation. Buddhahood is achieved when the 'mother inner radiance' and 'child inner radiance' conjoin.[765]

The mother luminosity—or "mother inner radiance," as Gyurme Dorje translates it—dawns automatically at death, but only those sufficiently adept at meditation can recognize it. This learned awareness of the mind's luminosity is labeled the child luminosity, and the union of the mother luminosity and child luminosity produces awakening.

760 Tib. *rmi lam bar do*.

761 Tib. *skye 'chi bar do*.

762 Tib. *srid pa bar do*.

763 Tib. *skye srid*.

764 Tib. *'chi srid*.

765 Karma gling pa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 478.

To be sure, inserting such teachings into Ngor chen's program brings about a significant shift in necroliberative strategy. Rather than maintaining focus on the primary agency of the ritualist and the deities, A mes zhabs places greater emphasis on the responsibility of the dead, recognizing them as primary agents in their own right. Yet it is generally believed that capitalizing on the brief appearance of the mind's luminosity at the moment of death is difficult to accomplish, and thus A mes zhabs addresses the various experiences that can follow. He first explains cases in which one does not experience an intermediate state: "Now you are in the phase of the bardo of becoming, and in addition, generally there are four cases in which there is no bardo state between lifetimes: unobstructed ascent to enlightenment, unobstructed descent into hell, movement toward awakening, and being a deity in the four formless absorptions."[766] He glosses each of these in turn: unobstructed ascent to enlightenment results from "being skilled in recognizing the luminosity";[767] unobstructed descent into hell results from committing an inexpiable bad action or breaking a vow; movement toward awakening refers to the aforementioned practice of consciousness transference, which A mes zhabs notes can be performed by oneself or by another; and being a deity in the four formless absorptions leads to no bardo state, since under such circumstances "one is the embodiment of samādhi, and thus there is no need for a place of rebirth."[768] These cases are exceptional, however, and generally the dead proceed to the bardo of becoming, a topic to which we will turn next.

766 *khyed da lta srid pa bar do'i gnas skabs na yod pa yin pas/ de yang spyir bar do med pa bzhi ste/ yar gyi zang thal/ mar gyi zang thal/ sad pa rjes kyi 'gro ba/ gzugs med skye mched mu bzhi'i lha'o/*. A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 627.

767 *'od gsal 'byongs pa*. Ibid.

768 *ting nge 'dzin gyi lus yin pas skye gnas len pa'i mtshams sbyor mi dgos pas so/*. Ibid., 628.

The Thirteen Qualities of a Bardo Being

A mes zhabs' strategy for guiding those who are traveling between lifetimes is a kind of liberation through education: the ritualist should outline in detail the defining characteristics of bardo beings with the aim of enabling the deceased to save themselves by recognizing their experiences for what they are: illusory products of mistaken awareness. A mes zhabs acknowledges that certain śravaka sects do not accept the existence of an intermediate state and then points to Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* as authoritatively overturning this view by establishing the existence and qualities of the interval between lifetimes.[769] Drawing on Vasubandhu's discussion and citing many other canonical sources along the way, he outlines the characteristics of a bardo being according to thirteen subtopics: (1) the labels given to the bardo being; (2) its form; (3) its shape; (4) its color; (5) its size; (6) its orientation; (7) its diet; (8) its visibility; (9) its karmic accumulations; (10) its powers; (11) its lifespan; (12) its rebirth; and (13) its signs. Indeed, A mes zhabs' highly scholastic approach to the bardo teachings sets his work apart from texts like *Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo*; he draws heavily on canonical sources throughout, leading the dead through these sources as though training them in a monastic curriculum.

769 Here A mes zhabs is pointing to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*'s third chapter, which discusses the nature of a bardo being in some detail. For the relevant sections in English, see La Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, trans. Leo Pruden, 383–442. For the corresponding Tibetan, see Vasubandhu, *Chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi bshad pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge) 140: 52–515 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85), 221–80. Vasubandhu, *Chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi bshad pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 79: 65–677 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008), 274–345.

Concerning the first characteristic of a bardo being, A mes zhabs cites the terms found in Vasubandhu's work: “mind-arisen,”[770] “existence-seeking,”[771] “scent-eater,”[772] “intermediate being,”[773] and “that which is formed.”[774] Briefly, “mind-arisen” implies that the bardo being is not dependent on external conditions like semen and blood, and therefore is mind-dependent; “existence-seeking” reflects the intermediate being's desire to find a new rebirth; “scent-eater” denotes that it consists on scents; “intermediate being” means that it exists in the interval between lifetimes; and “that which is formed” refers to the view that it possesses a visible existence[775] once it has arisen in the birth phase of becoming.

As for the second through eighth characteristics, the form of the bardo being denotes the belief that it is “unhindered,”[776] and can pass even through diamonds.[777] Its shape corresponds to the type of being it will become in its next rebirth,[778] and this principle applies also to its color (e.g. those destined to be animals are said to have a smoky color, whereas those destined for a heavenly realm are golden.[779] Its size, moreover, is said to match that of a child who is five or six years old;[780] its orientation depends on its future rebirth (gods look upwards; humans,

770 Skt. *manomaya*; Tib. *yid las byung ba*.

771 Skt. *saṃbhavaiṣin*; Tib. *srid pa tshol ba*.

772 Skt. *gandharva*; Tib. *dri za*.

773 Skt. *antarābhava*; Tib. *srid pa bar ma*.

774 Skt. *nirvṛtti*; Tib. *'grub pa*. A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 628. Cf. Vasubandhu, *Chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi bshad pa* (Sde dge), 280. Vasubandhu, *Chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi bshad pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 346.

775 Tib. *mngon par phyogs pa'i srid pa*.

776 Tib. *thogs med*.

777 A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 628–629.

778 Ibid., 629–30.

779 Ibid., 630–31.

780 Ibid., 631.

animals, and hungry ghosts look straight ahead; and hell beings look downward);[781] and it eats scents—pleasant ones if powerful and unpleasant ones if weak.[782] Who can see such a being? Beings with a "pure divine eye,"[783] as well as bardo beings of the same kind.[784]

Interestingly, in the ninth section on karmic accumulations, A mes zhabs examines the limits of karma in determining the fate of intermediate beings. He responds to the claim in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* that a bardo being who is karmically destined for rebirth in a particular realm cannot be diverted from that destiny:

> While indeed it is claimed that one cannot reverse the course of a bardo being from good rebirth to bad rebirth and bad rebirth to good rebirth, that is the system of the Lesser Vehicle. As it is said in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya:* "If you ask why, it is because it is reversed. While residing there, karma is accumulated." Accordingly, even if one is a bardo being on course to a bad rebirth because of having previously performed non-virtuous actions, if empowerment is performed by a good guru, and one's kin and so forth act with virtuous altruism and are without grief, then one's course can be reversed from a bad rebirth to a good rebirth.[785]

In this passage, A mes zhabs dismisses the claim that one's destination in the intermediate state cannot be altered, assigning this view to the so-called Lesser Vehicle or Hīnayāna. Indeed, this move is critical to the legitimacy of the SDP's rites and the bardo teachings that A mes zhabs is attempting to integrate, for if A mes zhabs were to accept that the fate of an intermediate being

781 Ibid., 631–32.

782 Ibid., 632–34.

783 Tib. *lha mig dag pa*.

784 Ibid., 634.

785 *bde 'gro'i bar do nas ngan 'gro'i bar do dang / ngan 'gro'i bar do nas bde 'gro'i bar dor mi bzlog par 'dod mod/ de theg chung pa'i lugs yin la/ kun las btus las/ ci* [*Sde=ji*] *ste na bzlog* [*Sde=ldog*] *go /de na gnas pa yang las bsog go* [*Sde=sog*; *Pe*, *Snar=la sogs pa'o*]*/ zhes gsungs pa ltar sngon mi dge ba spyad pas ngan 'gro'i bar srid grub na'ang / bla ma bzang po'i dbang dang / nye 'brel la sogs pas dge ba rnam dag mya ngan med par phan sems kyis byas na/ ngan 'gro'i bar srid nas bde 'gror ldog go*. Ibid., 635. Cf. Asaṅga, *Chos mngon pa kun las btus pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 134: 87–239 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85), 155. Asaṅga, *Chos mngon pa kun las btus pa*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 76: 116–313 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008), 197.

could not be altered, then such practices would be meaningless, since no variety of ritual or instruction could spare them. Notice in particular the emphasis on the officiant's virtue and ritual power, as well as the composure of those related to the dead. A mes zhabs adds that even if bardo beings are on course to a good rebirth after having accumulated merit through virtuous actions in the past, if their spiritual companions are overcome with grief, sob, fight with one another, kill another being, fail to perform funerary rituals according to an authentic tantric source, set out material offerings improperly while exhausted or drunk, or perform corrupted rituals by thinking of worldly gains, then this too can cause them to swerve off course.[786] These comments are striking in that they reemphasize the primary agency of the living in relation to the dead. While A mes zhabs recognizes the dead's potential to secure their own liberation (so long as they are sufficiently adept in yogic practices and can cut through the bardo's illusions), he also acknowledges the broader network of living actors to whom the dead are connected and the capacity of these associated actors to assist or hinder the dead's progress.

The tenth feature of bardo beings to which A mes zhabs refers is their supernormal powers.[787] He explains that beings in the bardo of becoming can fly through the sky and pass through most objects, but lack the capacity to enter directly into a ritual support that has been blessed, Bodhgayā, or a mother's womb.[788] Regarding the duration spent in this state, A mes zhabs notes that it can last up to seven weeks if the conditions for rebirth do not arise sooner, and he discusses also the ways in which one can be reborn, namely, the four modes of birth that we discussed earlier.[789] Finally, A mes zhabs divides the signs of being in the bardo state into

786 A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 635.

787 Skt. *ṛddhi*; Tib. *rdzu 'phrul*.

788 A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 639.

789 Ibid., 642–45.

two subcategories: certain signs[790] and uncertain signs.[791] The six certain signs are unhindered movement through objects; effortless travel to other places; not sinking or becoming wet when in water and not falling to chasms; inability to communicate with relatives; not seeing the sun, moon, planets, or stars; and neither casting a shadow nor leaving footprints.[792] The six uncertain signs are not remaining in a single location, not having any fixed support, unpredictable behavior, uncertain food sources, uncertain companionship, and uncertain objects of awareness.[793] The officiant's aim is to get the deceased's attention despite this instability and to encourage them to understand their experiences as illusory.

A mes zhabs' Concluding Instructions on Working with the Dead

In the final sections of A mes zhabs' text, he instructs the ritualist to further engage directly with the departed. While acknowledging the terrifying sounds and images of the bardo of becoming, the officiant should encourage the deceased to calm themselves: "By thinking that all appearances are mistaken appearances, relax and be at ease!"[794] One also should anticipate that the dead will perceive the ritualist and his disciples as evil, feel angry and greedy when seeing the living eating food, and become desirous when seeing any possible parents engaged in sexual intercourse. To correct these missteps, the ritualist should say aloud, "these only create the causes of falling into cyclic existence's triad of bad rebirths—not one single benefit will come to

790 Tib. *nges pa'i rtags*.

791 Tib. *ma nges pa'i rtags*.

792 A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 645–46.

793 Ibid., 646.

794 *snang ba thams cad 'khrul snang du 'dug snyam du glod la zhog mdzod/*. Ibid., 648.

you!",[795] and encourage the dead to see these sights as expressions of enlightened awareness. Still later, the officiant is told to say aloud: "Since we the ritual experts are acting in unison for your benefit, may you who has passed away with one-pointed determination go for refuge!"[796] All of these examples involve the ritualist addressing the dead directly in order to help them navigate the bardo. By recognizing the capacities of bardo beings to self-liberate, such instructions also attribute primary agency to the dead, rather than framing them as *objects* of purificatory rites.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have seen how Highest Yogatantra brought a shift in perceptions of the soteriological capacities of the living and the dead. Generation and completion practices involving the manipulation of the subtle body, as well as the belief that experiences in the afterlife are products of deluded awareness that can be overcome, led to a reimagining of death as an opportunity to become fully liberated, so long as the proper training and/or real-time guidance are in place. While the SDP's yogatantric vision of necroliberation focuses on external rites designed to deliver the dead to a heavenly realm in which they can achieve liberation under the tutelage of buddhas and other divine beings, works of the Highest Yogatantra class promise immediate liberation, recognizing the primary agency of the dead in obtaining this end. In keeping with the SDP's approach, most Tibetan works centered on this tantra frame the dead passively and reserve primary agency for the ritualist and the deities. In the work of A mes

795 *'khor ba ngan song gsum du ltung ba'i rgyu byed pa ma gtogs khyed rang la phan thogs gcig kyang mi yong pas/*. Ibid., 649.

796 *khyed kyi grogs dan du nged slob dpon rnams kyis kyang mgrin gcig tu byed pa yin pas/ tshe las 'das pa khyed rang yang skyabs su 'gro ba dang phyag 'tshal ba sogs kyi 'dun pa rtse gcig tu mdzod cig ces slob dpon gyis brjod la/*. Ibid., 651.

zhabs, however, we find an explicit attempt to bring highest yogatantric practices into the SDP's yogatantric framework, thus adding the dead to the list of primary agents capable of necroliberative feats. Thus, one generally overlooked difference between yogatantric and highest yogatantric practices is how they conceptualize the soteriological potential of the afterlife, a difference that was generally preserved in the Tibetan commentarial tradition with the notable exception of A mes zhabs' *Dispelling All Obscurations*.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have explored a major tradition of Tibetan Buddhist funerary practices that so far has received only brief attention in Western scholarship. I have discussed the SDP's transmission to Tibet in the eighth century, its censorship by government officials, its use in royal funerals, and its broader impact during the imperial period. My primary focus, however, has been on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's influential works of the SDP, including his remarks on the history of this tantra and its commentaries, his detailed outline of its contents, and *Light Rays*, his seminal funerary manual based on the SDP's instructions.

In my analysis of *Light Rays*, I have focused on its soteriological claims and the logic of its practices. Understanding this text requires consideration of a network of actors, one of which is the text itself. *Light Rays* determines much of what an attentive reader does throughout the ritual process, though we have seen cases in which it grants the reader greater autonomy, giving him choice, directing him to other ritual texts, and in some cases, instructing him to rely on what he has seen others do. The ritualist reading the manual is of course central to the rites' progress, but Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not expect him to save the dead without aid. Throughout *Light Rays*, we find practices that involve the officiant merging with deities so as to access their salvific powers and integrate them into the ritual process, as well as providing regular installments of offerings, both material and imagined, in order to maintain the deities' presence. Drawing inspiration from Latour and Gell, I also have pointed to the critical function of certain material objects. While these objects are not understood to liberate beings on their own, they serve as material extensions of divine and human agencies, and thus play an important role in the success of the rites. Focusing on questions of agency is important not only for understanding

the logic of liberation in this ritual frame, but also for recognizing how SDP-oriented funerary practices differ from those focusing on the capabilities of the dead while in the intermediate state between lifetimes.

In chapter three, I examined Bo dong Paṇ chen's critiques of *Light Rays* and Go rams pa's replies. In order to contextualize this exchange, I looked to the biographical materials that orbit these figures. By investigating the rivalries that had emerged in Sa skya, Bo dong, and Dge lugs circles by this time, as well as the role of the scholar-ruler Rnam rgyal grags bzang, who had been a longtime student and patron of Bo dong Paṇ chen, and who, after Bo dong Paṇ chen's death, invited Go rams pa to Ngam ring where he penned his funerary rejoinder, I situated this debate in broader issues of sectarianism and patronage. Looking to several of the issues under discussion, I pinpointed issues facing Tibetan scholars of tantra, such as the integration of yogatantric and highest yogatantric practices, methods for taming local spirits, visualizations involving the deceased and the scope of liberating rites, and the connection between agents in the SDP's opening narrative and those engaged in actual ritual performances.

Finally, in chapter four, I investigated the capacities of the dead in Tibetan funerary works, both canonical and indigenous. I explored how the rise of Highest Yogatantra prompted a reframing of postmortem agency, which cast death as a unique opportunity to cut through deluded awareness and recognize the nature of reality and become liberated. Given the intermediate state is an old but contested concept in Buddhist India, I first sought to understand its relevance to the SDP and its commentaries. While I have found no mention of the bardo in the SDP, I did find discussion of it in several canonical commentaries, though none of these emphasize the dead's capacities to save themselves, focusing instead on rituals that do this work

on their behalf. Strikingly, the same is true of SDP-oriented Tibetan works like *Light Rays*. This highlights an important difference between yogatantric approaches to death and their highest yogatantric counterparts: in the first case, the dead are framed as fated wanderers in need of rescue, while in the latter case, they possess a degree of self-salvific agency and can free themselves. Thus, by focusing on questions of agency, we find an important distinction between yogatantric and highest yogatantric approaches to the afterlife. The only text I have found that attempts to integrate these two necroliberative models is A mes zhabs' *Dispelling All Obscurations*, though further reading needs to be done across traditions to see if other similar works came before or after.

To be sure, this dissertation offers only a preliminary glimpse of the large collection of extant Tibetan works on the SDP and its practices. Going forward, I intend on completing an edition and translation of *Light Rays*, as well as a more comprehensive study of A mes zhabs' fascinating *Dispelling All Obscurations*. There are other Sa skya pa works deserving of close study as well. Ngor chen's *Limitless Benefit for Others* remains highly influential, and has prompted numerous commentarial works. Future studies also should examine Go rams pa's lengthy *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*, and more recent works such as the early twentieth-century author 'Jam dbyangs kun dga' rnam rgyal's detailed study of SDP-oriented practices. What prompted Sa skya pas to continue writing on this tradition? What sets these various works apart and how do they intersect? Do later Sa skya pas “correct” Grags pa rgyal mtshan, or do they simply paraphrase and expand on his instructions?

As noted, there are significant SDP-oriented texts to be found in other Tibetan Buddhist traditions as well. Apart from the occasional reference, I have set aside the rich SDP-centered

writings of Tsong kha pa and 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan, not to mention those produced by later Dge lugs pas, all of which deserve scholarly attention. Likewise, 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud pas in particular have produced detailed studies of the SDP's rituals, and these too should be examined to gain a fuller sense of their importance for the history of Yogatantra and funerary traditions in Tibet.

Aside from future textual work, there is ample opportunity to research living SDP traditions. The only Tibetan Yogatantra system that is frequently practiced today is that of the SDP,[797] and indeed Sa skya pas in particular regularly perform SDP-centered funerary rites. My first encounter with such rituals was in Boxborough, Massachusetts in 2011, when the 41st Sakya Trizin performed a four-hour purification ritual for the dead with his son Ratna Vajra Rinpoche (who is now the 42nd Sakya Trizin), among other disciples. The email announcement for this event read:

> This beautiful ritual, one of the oldest in Tibetan Buddhism, comes from the Sarvadurgati Parishodana [*sic*] tantra. It consists of beautiful chanting, with elaborate symbolic hand gestures (called mudras) performed along with mantras as they are recited. The purpose of this ritual is to purify the deceased's karma of taking rebirth in lower realms, ensure rebirth in higher realms, and the eventual attainment of buddhahood.[798]

The ritual was indeed beautiful: the mudrās were intricate and the recitations were melodic and haunting. It was open to the public and well attended, and those present could make a monetary offering and fill out a form with the names of their deceased loved ones—pets included—so that they might be freed from unfortunate rebirths. The event was very emotional for some attendees. I helped the organizers collect some of the forms, and one woman handed me a small film canister with tears in her eyes and told me, “Please be careful with this. Some of my husband's

797 Weinberger. “Social Context,” 160.

798 The Sakya Institute of Buddhist Studies, Email message to author, May 23, 2011.

ashes are inside." I have chosen to stick to my training and rely on texts in order to say something about the history of this rich ritual tradition, but anthropologists will find the SDP's practices alive and well in communities across the Tibetan Buddhist world, and with luck might shine a light on the current forms these traditions have taken for our and others' benefit.

APPENDIX

TABLE 5: TOPICAL OUTLINE OF GRAGS PA RGYAL MTSHAN'S *LIGHT RAYS FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS*

Title (366)[799]
Introductory verses (366)

1. The preliminary approach (366)
- 1.1. Approaching the single tutelary deity (366)
- 1.2. Approaching the complete maṇḍala (373)
  - 1.2.1. Condensing the root wisdom mantra and the mantras of the all deities and reciting them as a rosary mantra, or (377)
  - 1.2.2. Reciting each mantra in turn (377)
- 1.3. Approaching having relied on the painting on cloth (379)

2. The stages of the rituals to be performed (380)
- 2.1. The rituals performed for one's own benefit (380)
- 2.2. The rituals performed for the benefit of others (380)
  - 2.2.1. The rituals performed for the benefit of the living (380)
  - 2.2.2. The rituals performed for the benefit of the dead (380)
    - 2.2.2.1. Bestowing empowerment and purifying negative actions (381)
      - 2.2.2.1.1. Purifying negative actions by bestowing empowerment (381)
        - 2.2.2.1.1.1. The rituals to be performed first by the officiant (381)
          - 2.2.2.1.1.1.1. What is to be done when condensing the practice (381)
          - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2. What is to be done extensively (382)
            - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.1. The approach to be made beforehand (382)
            - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.2. The site ritual[800] (382)
            - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.3. The preparations[801] (383)
            - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.4. Drawing the maṇḍala and placing the deity (383)
              - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.4.1. Drawing with string (383)
              - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.4.2. Drawing with colored sand (384)
              - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.4.3. Placing the deity (385)
            - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.5. Placing the ritual support[802] of the purification of negative actions (385)
            - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.6. Laying out the ornaments (386)
              - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.6.1. Laying out the offerings (386)
              - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.6.2. Laying out the vases (386)
              - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.6.3. Laying out the torma[803] (387)
            - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.7. The personal yoga[804] (387)
              - 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.7.1. Meditating on the protection circle[805] (388)

799 Pagination reflects that of the Dpe bsdur ma edition (cited throughout as *D*).

800 Tib. *sa'i cho ga/sa chog*.

801 Tib. *sta gon*.

802 Tib. *rten*.

803 Tib. *gtor ma*.

804 Tib. *bdag gi rnal 'byor*.

805 Tib. *srung 'khor.*

2.2.2.1.1.1.2.7.2. Praising the wrathful deities (389)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.7.3. Commanding obstructive spirits[806] (391)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.7.4. Protecting yourself by means of the four *hūṃ*s (391)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.7.5. Protecting yourself by means of the four assistants (391)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.7.6. Stabilizing (392)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.8. Realizing the deity (396)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.9. Making offerings and giving torma (411)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.9.1. Making offerings to otherworldly deities (411)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.9.2. Giving torma to worldly beings (423)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10. The self-initiation[807] (423)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.1. The daily confession (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.2. Giving blessings by means of mantras and mudrās and saying prayers (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.3. Explaining the profound doctrine (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.4. Performing the protections (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.5. Imagining tying on the blindfold (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.6. Assuming the mudrā of Vajradharā (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.7. The descent of the jñānasattva into oneself (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.8. Binding oneself to the tantric commitments (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.9. Scattering flowers for the primary deity (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.10. Fixing a flower to your head (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.11. Imagining untying the blindfold (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.12. Showing the maṇḍala (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.13. Visualizing the commitments (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.14. Teaching the commitments (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.15. Reading out the commitments (425)
2.2.2.1.1.1.2.10.16. Giving the vows (425)
2.2.2.1.1.2. Introducing students into the maṇḍala and bestowing empowerment (425)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1. Introducing students into the maṇḍala (425)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1. Visualizing the ritual support (426)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.1. Dispelling obstructive spirits (426)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.2. Visualizing the ritual support (427)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.3. Summoning the consciousness of the deceased to the ritual support (428)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.1.4. Destroying negative actions (428)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2. The actual introduction of students into the maṇḍala (429)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.1. The daily confession (430)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.2. Giving blessings (431)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.3. Offering prayers (432)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.4. Explaining the profound doctrine (432)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.5. Protecting yourself and the students (433)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.6. Blindfolding the students (433)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.7. Having assumed the mudrā, introducing students into the maṇḍala (433)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.8. Imagining the wisdom of all tathāgatas entering into the students' bodies in the form of the syllable *hūṃ* (433)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.9. Binding the students to the tantric commitments (433)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.10. Scattering flowers (433)

806 Tib. *bgegs*.

807 Tib. *bdag nyid 'jug pa/bdag 'jug*.

TABLE 5 (CONTINUED)

2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.11. Fixing flowers to the students' heads (434)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.12. Undoing the blindfolds (434)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.13. Showing the students the maṇḍala (434)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.14. Visualizing the commitments (434)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.15. Inspiring confidence in the commitments (434)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.16. Reading out the commitments (434)
2.2.2.1.1.2.1.2.17. Giving the vows (434)
2.2.2.1.1.2.2. Bestowing empowerment (436)
2.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Bestowing empowerment having condensed the practice in accordance with the SDP (436)
2.2.2.1.1.2.2.2. Bestowing empowerment extensively (436)
2.2.2.1.2. Purifying negative actions having bestowed empowerment and set the ritual support in a reliquary (446)
2.2.2.1.3. Purifying negative actions having bestowed empowerment and set the ritual support in a fragrant shrine (446)
2.2.2.2. Purifying negative actions by means of recitations (447)
2.2.2.3. Purifying negative actions by means of repelling negative forces (448)
2.2.2.4. Purifying negative actions by means of burnt offering rites (455)
2.2.2.4.1. The pacifying burnt offering (456)
2.2.2.4.1.1. Making the hearth (456)
2.2.2.4.1.2. Laying out the firewood (456)
2.2.2.4.1.3. Making offerings and so forth (456)
2.2.2.4.1.4. Laying out the ornaments (456)
2.2.2.4.1.5. Laying out the burnt offering substances (456)
2.2.2.4.1.6. Assembling the materials to be worn by the practitioner (456)
2.2.2.4.1.7. Inviting the deity, making offerings, and offering praise (456)
2.2.2.4.1.8. The concluding rites (456)
2.2.2.4.1.9. Describing the benefits of this practice (456)
2.2.2.4.2. The enriching burnt offering (455)
2.2.2.4.3. The overpowering burnt offering (455)
2.2.2.4.4. The fierce burnt offering (455)
2.2.2.5. Purifying negative actions having cremated the body (465)
2.2.2.5.1. Making the hearth (465)
2.2.2.5.2. Spreading out the ornaments (466)
2.2.2.5.3. Laying out the burnt offering substances (467)
2.2.2.5.4. Stacking the firewood (467)
2.2.2.5.5. Performing the personal yoga (467)
2.2.2.5.6. Preparing the body (467)
2.2.2.5.7. Lighting the fire and making offerings when inviting the worldly and otherworldly deities (470)
2.2.2.5.8. The concluding rituals (473)
2.2.2.6. Purifying negative actions by producing a reliquary (473)
2.2.2.6.1. What is to be done when condensing the practice (473)
2.2.2.6.1.1. The bone ritual (474)
2.2.2.6.1.2. The clay ritual (474)
2.2.2.6.1.3. Creating a reliquary using the remains of the deceased (474)
2.2.2.6.1.4. Consecrating the reliquary (475)
2.2.2.6.1.5. The rituals to perform if signs of success are not seen (475)
2.2.2.6.1.6. The benefits of that practice (476)
2.2.2.6.2. What is to be done extensively (476)
2.2.2.7. The rituals to be performed if there is no ritual support such as the body (476)

TABLE 5 (CONTINUED)

3. The concluding rites (478)
- 3.1. Bestowing empowerment to oneself (478)
- 3.2. Protecting oneself, the site, and the yoga (478)
- 3.3. Making offerings and requests (478)
- 3.4. Asking for forbearance and requesting the deities to approach (478)
- 3.5. Prayers (478)
- 3.6. Auspicious acts for the donors (482)

Colophon (482)

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