RORY LINDSAY

SAVING THE DEAD

TIBETAN FUNERARY RITUALS
IN THE TRADITION OF
THE *SARVADURGATIPARIŚODHANA TANTRA*

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RORY LINDSAY

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Contents

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Abbreviations

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. Toh 483. In *Bka' 'gyur* (Sde dge par phud). 85: 116–91. Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyal-wae 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, 2006–09.

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, Uttar Pradesh, 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, Uttar Pradesh, 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: 440–52. 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 sby-*

ang 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 mthsan. *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. New 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: 415–69. 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 thams cad kyi spyi'i cho ga gsang ba'i rgyud. In *Bka' 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma). 96: 509–82. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–09.

SDP = Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra

Toh = Ui, Hakuju, Munetada Suzuki, Yenshō Kanakura, and Tōkan Tada, eds. *A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons: Bkaḥ-ḥgyur and Bstan-ḥgyur.* Sendai: Tōhoku Imperial University, 1934.

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 curious chapter on 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 alleged horrors of Tibetan funerary practices. Odoric reports that when a Tibetan man dies, his son summons the local priests, monks, musicians, and kin to carry the body joyously to a field. After placing the body on a circular platform, a priest severs the dead man's head and gives it to the deceased's son, who makes speeches in his late father's honor. The priest then cuts the body into pieces, which the participants carry above their heads as they return to the city. Before they arrive, however, eagles and vultures descend from the mountains and begin tearing at the deceased's remains, carrying pieces of him into the sky. Everyone marvels at this omen, believing the birds to be angels of God taking the man to paradise. Reassured that his father has been rightly honored, the son then cooks his father's head and consumes it, keeping only a portion of it for a later purpose: "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."[1]

This account is one of the earliest discussions of Tibetan sky burial practices in any language,[2] though as Berthold Laufer has shown, we have little reason to

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1. Odoric of Pordenone, "On the Kingdom of Tibet, Where Dwells the Pope of the Idolaters" (*De regno Tybot, ubi est Papa ydolatrorum*), unpublished translation from the Latin by Benjamin A. Roy, Harvard University, 2018. Cf. Colonel 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.

2. Dan Martin, "On the Cultural Ecology of Sky Burial on the Himalayan Plateau," *East and West*
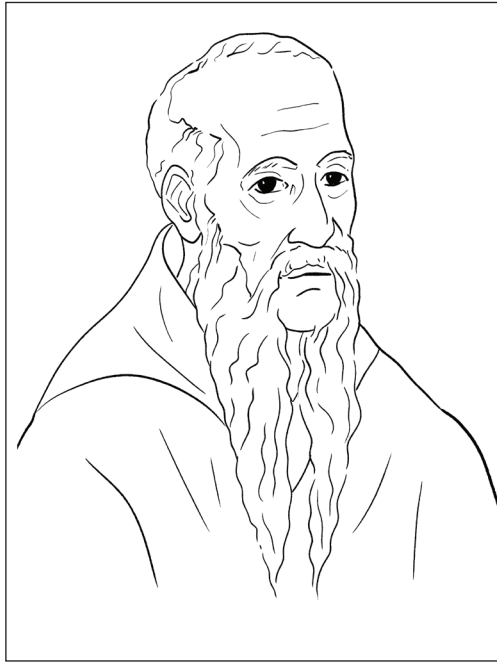
Figure 1. Odoric of Pordenone. After a render-
ing published in the Catholic periodical *Citta-
dino Italiano*, September 23, 1881.

believe that Odoric ever set foot in Tibet.[3] Rather, his description of Tibetan funer-
ary practices seems to draw on Mongol and/or Chinese sources: Giovanni da Pian
del Carpine (1185–1252), an earlier European visitor to Mongolia, also channels
Mongol stories of Tibetans eating their dead, and the Flemish explorer William
of Rubruck (1220–93) explicitly attributes such stories to the Mongols.[4] Dan
Martin dismisses such claims of cannibalism as hearsay,[5] adding 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

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.
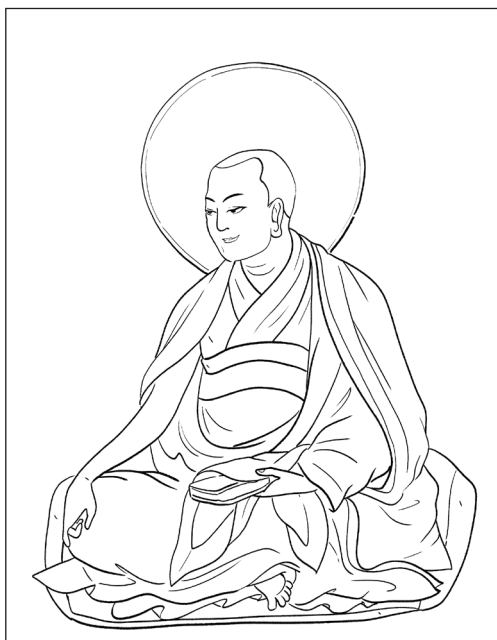
Figure 2. Chos rgyal ’Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan. After a painting in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art: *Sakya Pandita (1182–1251) and Chogyel Phakpa (1235–80) with Mahakala Lineage Masters.* Central Tibet, 17th–18th century. Pigments on cloth. Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin. C2006.66.23 (HAR 695).

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 as Imperial Preceptor[7] in Kublai's court.[8] Much of ’Phags pa's religious training and

7.   Luciano Petech states that Kublai created the office of Imperial Preceptor (Tib. *ti shri*; Chn. *di shi* 帝師) 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.

literary output was dedicated to tantric Buddhist ritual, including a tradition
of funerary practices that bears no indication of eating one's relations. Derived
from the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (hereafter the *SDP*), an Indian tantric
work first translated into Tibetan in the late eighth century,[9] these rituals involve
purifying the karma of the deceased through processes of, inter alia, empower-
ment and cremation, which are said to free the dead from bad rebirths. Indeed,
'Phags pa's great uncle, the Sa skya pa hierarch 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—especially *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 par-
roting Grags pa rgyal mtshan's instructions.[11]

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9.   There are two translations of the *SDP* preserved in the different editions of the Tibetan Bud-
     dhist Bka' 'gyur—an earlier version (which Tadeusz Skorupski and others call Version A) and
     a later version (Version B). See chapter 1 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, Uttar Pradesh, in 2006, s.l.: s.n., n.d.). Hereafter cited as *E*. Notice that the Buddhist
     Digital Resource Center gives this cursive manuscript the incorrect title *Ngan song sbyong
     rgyud kyi mngon rtogs*. 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 these rituals *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others* (*Gzhan phan kun khyab*). Further-
     more, 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

So far, Tibetan funerary manuals based on the *SDP* such as *Light Rays* have largely been ignored in Western scholarship.[12] Fascinating research has been done on ancient royal mortuary practices in Tibet,[13] and there exist a large number of scholarly and popular works on the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, or *Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*,[14] which derives from a collection of treasure texts said to have been 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

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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. More recently, Kris Anderson has produced an outstanding dissertation that examines an *SDP*-oriented funerary manual from Dunhuang and Newar-Sanskrit ritual literature based on this tantra. See Kris L. Anderson, "Raising the Dead and Saving Them: Transformations in Funerary Manuals of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2022).

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).

Figure 3. Kazi Dawa Samdup and Walter Evans-
Wentz. After a 1919 photograph.

Samdup's[16] (1868–1922) translation of this work 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*.

Thus, one of my objectives in this book 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 utiliza-
tion among prominent Tibetan writers, in particular, Grags pa rgyal mtshan

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16. Tib. Ka dzi Zla ba bsam 'grub.

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* (New York: 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.

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 question who exactly does the work of saving them. Is it the ritual experts who perform the rites? Is it the deities they invoke and merge 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 such as *Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo* differ. While the *SDP* belongs to the yogatantra class of Buddhist tantras, *Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo* and comparable works on the intermediate state[19] draw on ritual technologies derived from the highest yogatantra class.[20] As we will discuss in chapter 4, both yogatantra and highest yogatantra have comparable soteriological aims, but with the emergence of highest yogatantra came a reframing of postmortem agency and thus of 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

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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), 1353–84.

master A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams's (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.

METHODOLOGY
Theories of Agency

Given the importance of agency in my analysis, I should explain briefly 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 in the anthropologist Alfred Gell's work on agency, which frames an agent as someone who causes events to happen in their 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…. Actions very often have 'unintended consequences'

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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* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 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.

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 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 such as dolls, cars, and works of art can appear as "agents" in particular contexts. While he admits that material things cannot have intentions as human beings do, 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, their "distributed personhood," being external artifacts that connect them to social others.[28]

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

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24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 20.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 21.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 22.

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 influential theorist Bruno Latour's approach is comparable 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.... Thus, 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 nonhumans 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 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

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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.

32. Ibid., 6.

33. Ibid., 7.

34. Ibid., 43.

35. Ibid., 46.

objects, too, are agents, in the sense that they modify states of affairs and influence others, often dramatically.

Both Gell's and Latour's approaches[36] will be useful as we examine the different agents that appear in our sources, though overlooking 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 Indian and 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

In this vein, one of my objectives in this book is to trace the primary and secondary agents featured in the practices that our sources describe. Whereas the ritualists whom the manual instructs and the deities whom they invoke can be categorized as primary agents with intentions, objects such as 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 2. 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

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36. It should be noted that some proponents of Latour's theory have criticized Gell for failing to appreciate fully the agency of material objects, deeming Gell's notion of primary and secondary agents to be especially limiting. Lambros Malafouris, for example, urges us to dismiss this "unfortunate" and "artificial" distinction, arguing that we should focus instead on the "fluid dialectic between 'agents' and 'patients' as states to be acquired in practice and not as *a priori* categorical positions." See Lambros Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 136, 145. Regardless of whether one agrees with such criticisms, Gell's distinction between primary and secondary agents has been useful in this study precisely because it attributes agency primarily to conscious actors, which is consistent with the language used in the Indian and Tibetan sources under discussion. Hildegaard Diemberger productively draws on Gell's theories of agency in her analysis of Tibetan books as ritual objects. See Hildegaard Diemberger, "Holy Books as Ritual Objects and Vessels of Teaching in the Era of the 'Further Spread of the Doctrine' (*Bstan pa yang dar*)," in *Revisiting Rituals in a Changing Tibetan World*, ed. Katia Buffetrille (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 9–41.

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.[37] 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 officiants' behavior is scripted to a significant degree. They recite a certain mantra because the text tells them to. They create the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana because it is this maṇḍala that the text deems appropriate. They cremate a corpse because the text identifies this as a method for saving the dead. Even if they have memorized the manual and no longer require a physical copy of it, their agency is intertwined with its 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 readers away from the text. In some cases, he requires the officiants to draw on their own creative abilities to produce a ritual image, in others, he recommends relying on "visual transmission,"[38] 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 officiants' agency remains intertwined with that of the manual, which prompts moments of greater and lesser autonomy. If they follow the text as closely as possible, then they surrender 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 they regularly deviate from its injunctions, then they retain 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

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

38.   Tib. *mthong ba brgyud pa*.

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 figures whom it anticipates—namely, the implied ritualists who sit at the center of its ritual world.

AN INVITATION TO
GRAGS PA RGYAL MTSHAN'S FUNERAL

Before we proceed, let me say a little more about Grags pa rgyal mtshan—the author central to this book—and what we know about the context in which he produced his seminal writings on the *SDP*. 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 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 awakened 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]

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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.
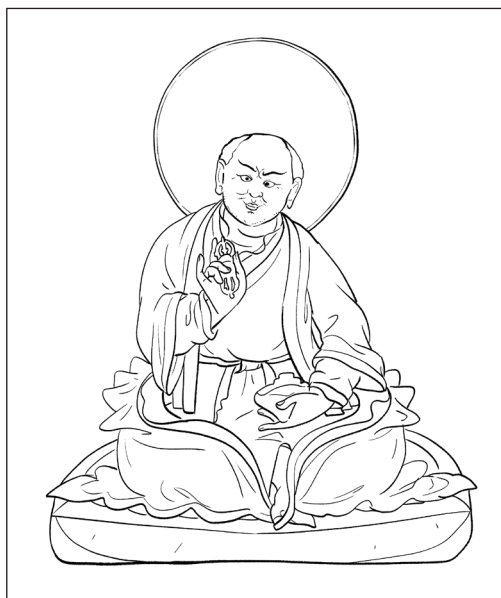
Figure 4. Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan. After a painting in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art: *Lama (Teacher), Dragpa Gyaltsen*. Eastern Tibet, 19th century. Pigments on cloth. Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation. F1996.33.2 (HAR 546).

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's 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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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

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 who apparently trained students from as far away as present-day Sri Lanka.[44] As such, his funeral was elaborate,

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into one by Grags pa rgyal mtshan. See Cyrus Stearns, *Luminous Lives: The Story of the Early Masters of the Lam 'bras in Tibet* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2001), 26–32.

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.

44. Stearns, *Luminous Lives*, 149.

and the offerings distributed to the various clerics in attendance are reported to have been so magnificent that, in Davidson's words, the 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 twenty-five-thousand-verse version, fifty *Ratnakūṭa*s, a gold-lettered eight-thousand-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]

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

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.

for religious practice, and imparting 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 study will remain primarily on the last, namely, the soteriological dimensions of these practices.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions to Scholarship on Tibetan Funerary Practices

Little scholarly work has been done on Tibetan funerary traditions based on the *SDP*. Early royal funerary practices have received some scholarly attention, and *Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo* far more so. Research also has been done on other Tibetan funerary traditions, such as in Martin Boord's book on Tibetan death rituals associated with Avalokiteśvara.[52] But apart from Kris Anderson's recent work on a Tibetan funerary manual from Dunhuang,[53] *SDP*-centered practices have largely 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 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,[54] which in turn inspired numerous later Dge lugs pa manuals.[55] We also find *SDP*-oriented texts written by

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).

53. See Anderson, PhD diss.

54. 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).

55. For example, the First (or Fourth, depending on who is deemed the actual First) 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*.

important Bka' brgyud pa authors, including the eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–54)[56] and the 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud pa writers Dwags po Paṇ chen Bkra shis rnam rgyal (1512/13–87),[57] Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659),[58] and Rje btsun Dkon mchog chos skyabs (b. 1834).[59] Further, the eclectic master

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 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 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 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*, and (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.).

56. 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 Kuijp, "Notes," 113; Steven Weinberger, "The Yoga Tantras and the Social Context of Their Transmission to Tibet," *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 23 (2010): 160.

57. 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: 436–59 (Lha sa: s.n., 2004).

58. 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.

59. 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).

’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.[60]

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*,[61] an adulatory title I have not seen used elsewhere, while a version of Dkon mchog chos skyabs’s work given to me by Michael Essex includes Sa skya Paṇḍita and Chos rgyal ’Phags pa in its opening lineage prayer.[62] 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: Glorious Sarvavid*[63] (which itself is based on Grags pa rgyal mtshan’s *Light 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 3 that Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal, 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 book 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*

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60. 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: 233–38 (’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?).

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

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

63. 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?).

Benefit of Others[64] and *Light Rays of the Requisites*.[65] 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*[66] and a topical outline titled *Outline of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*.[67] He 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*,[68] this last manual has much in common with

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64. 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*.

65. 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*.

66. 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). Hereafter cited as *K*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don bsdus pa* (cursive manuscript scanned from microfilm in Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, 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*.

67. Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi sa bcad*, in *Sa skya bka' 'bum* (Sde dge), 8: 440–52 (Dehradun: Sakya Center, 1993). Hereafter cited as *N*. 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). 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*.

68. 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

Light Rays and Grags pa rgyal mtshan's other works on mortuary practices, but it 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 Tadeusz Skorupski's study of the *SDP*, Jeffrey Hopkins's translation and study of Tsong kha pa's remarks on yogatantra in the *Great Treatise on the Stages of Secret Mantra*,[69] and Steven Weinberger's studies of the *Compendium of Principles*[70] and related yogatantric works, namely, his PhD dissertation and his 2010 article "The Yoga Tantras and the Social Context of Their Transmission to Tibet,"[71] 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[72] of the yogatantra class while labeling the *SDP* as a concordant tantra[73] 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,[74] and he adds that it is the only work of yogatantra still

Christopher Wilkinson, *Jetsun Dragpa Gyaltsan: The Hermit King* (Concord, MA: Suvarna Bhasa Publishing, 2014), 212–29.

69. Tsongkhapa 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).

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

71. Weinberger, "Social Context," 131–66.

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

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

74. Weinberger, PhD diss., 139.

being used regularly in Tibetan communities today.[75] 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 book 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 chapter 3. Bo dong Paṇ chen wrote a text titled *Definitive Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana*[76] 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 produced a detailed rebuttal, namely, his *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*.[77] 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.[78] Yet rather than debating the nuances of Madhyamaka or other philosophical matters, Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* and Go rams pa's *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others* discuss the finer points of *SDP*-centered funerary practices, including the place of highest yogatantra in these rituals, the degree to

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75. Weinberger, "Social Context," 161.

76. 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 (New 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*.

77. 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: 415–69 (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*.

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

which a tantric narrative like the opening scene of the *SDP* must correspond to actual ritual performances, and anthropocentrism in liberating rites. This book 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

From a broader perspective, this book 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 they 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[79] 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 not framed as primary actors in

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

these works, but they can be productively understood 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 useful 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 study 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 chapter 4 compares postmortem agency in the *SDP* and its commentaries with both canonical sources and works like *Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*, it returns first to the eighth century before proceeding to A mes zhabs's seventeenth-century contributions.

Chapter 1 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. Last, 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 underscore, among other things, his command over ritual protocol and his knowledge of tantric Buddhist literature.

Building on this context, chapter 2 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 officiants' actions. While the manual provides guidance on the steps that the officiants should take, in some cases it grants them greater autonomy, instructing them, for example, to rely on what they have seen others do in comparable contexts. This leads us to the ritualists' own part in saving the dead. Through a combination of mudrā, mantra, and meditation, they are understood to merge with divine actors and thereby draw on these actors' purificatory powers. Deities' involvement is likewise sustained through regular presentations of offerings—both physical and imagined—which underscores the officiants' 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 in *Light Rays* involve a broad range of actors, that is, conscious, intentional beings, like ritualists and deities, and material entities through which these actors extend their agencies in the ritual environment.

Chapter 3 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 Paṇ chen'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[80] performed in order to secure the ritual space from local spirits, visualization practices involving the ritual support and their implications for the scope of necroliberative rites (i.e., whether they can 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 chapter 4, I examine the postmortem capabilities of the dead in the *SDP*, in its commentaries, and in works on the intermediate state such as *Liberation through 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 awakened 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

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

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's *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.

1. Authorship and the Rhetoric of Authority in the Transmission of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* to Tibet

G RAGS 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 premodern 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,[81] giving us at least a *terminus ante quem*. We know also that the earliest reference to an important related work,[82] the *Compendium of Principles*, is found in the Chinese biography of Vajrabodhi[83] (671–741), a South Indian tantric master who arrived in

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81. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, xxiv.

82. 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.

83. Chn. Jingangzhi 金剛智.

China in the year 720 CE. Working with his disciple Amoghavajra[84] (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.[85] It therefore seems likely that an early version of the *Compendium of Principles* existed in the last quarter of the seventh century,[86] 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[87]) and a later one (Version B[88]). Both versions have the same basic title, which translates as the *Practices of the Thus-Gone, Worthy, and Perfect Buddha Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*.[89] There 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 com-

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84. Chn. Bukong Jingang 不空金剛.

85. Weinberger, "Social Context," 134.

86. Ibid., 135.

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*, Toh 483, 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, 2006–09). Hereafter cited as *B*. Note that some versions add *phyogs gcig pa* to the title's end. The Sde dge version omits *phyogs gcig pa* at the text's outset but includes it in the colophon.

88. *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*, Toh 485, 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, 2006–09).

89. Interestingly, Bu ston states that the later version is known by a different title: the *Nine Uṣṇīṣas 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.

pletely different text.[90] 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 Ban de Jayarakṣita[91] and adds that Ācārya Rin chen mchog[92] made revisions according to standardized terminology developed after it was first translated. Yet some Tibetan writers had different understandings of the *SDP*'s inception:[93] Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *General Overview of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* indicates that it was translated by the seven examined individuals[94] such as Dba' Mañjuśrī,[95] listing no Indian translator,

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90. For more on the differences between versions A and B, see Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 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.

91. *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 of the Bka' 'gyur.

92. 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 kyi rgya 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.

93. van der Kuijp, "Notes," 109–10.

94. 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 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 (April 2013): 148–50.

95. 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," 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.

while Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa's *Notes on the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* states that it was translated by Śāntigarbha and Dpal brtsegs Rakṣita.[96] 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,[97] walking a line between his two predecessors' claims.[98] None of these, of course, matches the statement in the *SDP*'s colophon, revealing a lack of consensus concerning 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 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,[99] their perceived power appears to have caused some anxiety over what might happen were they to fall into the wrong hands. In the Tibetan translation manual *Two Volumes on the*

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

97. 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.

98. van der Kuijp, "Notes," 110.

99. 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 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 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.

Usage of Terms,[100] 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, they have practiced perversely.[101]

Khri Lde srong btsan, who reigned from approximately 800 to 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*[102] 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[103] sections, but early kings and ministers,

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100. Tib. *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa.* For a critical 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.

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

102. "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.

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

having 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."[104]

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.[105] 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,[106] 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 used against them?

Grags pa rgyal mtshan never weighs in on whether 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* attributed

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104. [*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.*

105. van der Kuijp, "Notes," 115.

106. Ibid.

to Vajravarman.[107] Moreover, it is missing in Tsong kha pa's *Notes*, but it 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.[108] In the Sde dge Bka' 'gyur, we find it inserted between Version A (Toh 483) and Version B (Toh 485), where it is a separate work titled the *Destructive Ritual* (Toh 484).[109] Of course, we cannot say for certain who was behind the removal of this practice, but it is possible that it was the product of early state censorship.[110]

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 since it raises questions about how Tibetans came to know about this version and how the fierce burnt-offering ritual came to be included 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,[111] which means this observation may date to a time when Tibetan and Khotanese Buddhists were in contact.

Why the SDP?

Thus 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 those belonging to other "new schools"[112] of

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107. Ibid., 116; Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 361.

108. van der Kuijp, "Notes," 115–16.

109. *Mngon spyod kyi las*, Toh 484, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Sde dge par phud), 85: 191 (Delhi: Delhi Karma-pae Choe-dhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1976–79); *Mngon spyod kyi las*, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 85: 275–77 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–09).

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

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

112. 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.

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 though its precise year of composition is contested.[113] Notably, it lists the *SDP* and Buddhagupta's[114] 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.[115] 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.[116] 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 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*

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113. In her 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* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 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 (1699/1700–74), 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.

114. 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.

115. Halkias, "Tibetan Buddhism Registered," 47–48.

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

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*.[117] 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).[118] For Grags pa rgyal mtshan, a famous figure such as Rin chen bzang po having 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.[119]

Furthermore, broader Tibetan interest in the *SDP* is attested in other works composed after the age of fragmentation, including the *Claims of Ba*,[120] which frames the *SDP* and its central deity, Vairocana, as critical to early Tibetan

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117. See the list of *SDP*-related works below.

118. Bjerken, "On Mandalas, Monarchs, and Mortuary Magic," 830.

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

120. 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* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), xiv. Concerning the spellings of this and other similarly titled works, Sa 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 tu gsal* was contaminated (Tib. *ma dag*). See van der Kuijp, "Some Remarks on the Textual Transmission," 133–36.

Buddhist practice. Written in the eleventh century,[121] 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.[122] Interestingly, there is evidence that Śākyamuni, the principal deity installed in Bsam yas's first story, was regarded as an emanation body[123] of Vairocana during the Imperial Period, meaning that Vairocana may have been central to all three levels of the temple.[124]

In addition, a document appended to the *Claims of Ba* titled *Account of the Food Provisioning [for the Dead]*[125] explicitly promotes the *SDP* for the performance of Buddhist 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 btsan's funeral. Mchims Btsan bzher legs gzigs insists on the efficacy of Bon po funerals and advocates

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121. Wangdu and Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed*, xiv.

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

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

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

125. 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 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, 2013), 70.

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 Nālandā Monastery in India, Buddhist pure lands, and the protectors of the three families,[126] namely, Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi.[127] He then remarks that all the minor kingdoms[128] that had commissioned Bon po funerals, worshipped Bon po gods, and sacrificed animals fell to Tibet because they had engaged in such practices, and he therefore warns against performing a Bon po funeral for Khri Srong lde 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,[129] 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 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

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126. Tib. *rigs gsum mgon po*.

127. 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.

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

129. 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.

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."[130] Imaeda points first to PT 419, which includes the *SDP*'s root wisdom mantra,[131] and also to a text titled *Taming of the Three Poisons*, which is preserved in multiple witnesses[132] and features 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 he goes on to identify several other works outlining rituals associated with it.[133] Imaeda, Kapstein, and Cuevas have noted links between the *SDP* and PT 239/I,[134] and Kris Anderson has offered rich analysis of the connections between the *SDP* and IOL Tib J 384, a ritual manual that describes three maṇḍalas, the first of which is drawn from the *SDP*.[135] Such connections suggest that elements of the *SDP* spread as far as Dun-

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130. 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.

131. 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, "History of the Cycle of Birth and Death," 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.

132. Tib. *Dug gsum 'dul ba*. IOL Tib J 420, 421 (complete), 720 (fragment), and PT 37 (incomplete at the beginning). Imaeda, "History of the Cycle of Birth and Death," 120, n. 17.

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

134. Kapstein cites an unpublished work by Imaeda on this point. See Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 7–9. See also Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 36–38.

135. See Anderson, PhD diss.

huang during Tibet's imperial expansion, and thus that traditions related to the *SDP* had arrived at the outer reaches of Tibet's cultural influence.

Perhaps more telling, however, are the parallels between the *SDP* and the *History of the Cycle of Birth and Death*,[136] 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,[137] which he dates to around the year 800[138] and believes to be an indigenous Tibetan composition reflecting "the first efforts of the disseminators of Buddhism in Tibet."[139] 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 number of Dunhuang manuscripts related to it, had become well-known [*sic*] in Tibet by this time.[140]

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*.[141]

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

137. Imaeda, "History of the Cycle of Birth and Death," 108.

138. Ibid., 172.

139. Ibid., 107.

140. Ibid., 119–20.

141. Ibid., 169.

The connections between the *History* and the *SDP* are hard to miss. The *History* begins with a group of "gods possessed of body"[142] 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.[143] 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.[144] '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 he 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.[145]

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,[146] 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,[147] 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,

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142. Tib. *gzugs yod lha*.

143. Imaeda, "History of the Cycle of Birth and Death," 134.

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

145. Imaeda, "History of the Cycle of Birth and Death," 134.

146. Skt. *ūrṇā*; Tib. *mdzod spu*.

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

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 rit-
ual 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
kind. He then declares that everyone dies when their life is exhausted, and that
all deaths are caused by karma.[148]

Interestingly, the Buddha next discusses different ways of handling a corpse,
warning that simply cremating 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 target-
ing certain practices of concern to early Tibetan Buddhist apologists.[149]

Finally, the *History* has the Buddha identify the *Uṣṇīṣavijayādhāraṇī*[150]—a
work related to the *SDP*—as revealing the practices necessary for securing relief
from bad rebirths. Curiously, the *History* never actually states this work's pri-
mary 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.[151] This last text lists three mantras that

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148. Imaeda, "History of the Cycle of Birth and Death," 134.

149. Ibid., 167.

150. Tib. *Gtsug tor rnam par rgyal ba'i gzungs*.

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

can enable the dead to escape bad rebirths, including the *Durgatipariśodhana* mantra,[152] which is the root wisdom mantra of the *SDP*.

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.[153] The *History* thus highlights the *SDP*'s early impact on Tibetan Buddhism, showing that, even at the beginning of the ninth century, this tantra's understanding of death, the afterlife, and ways to liberate the dead had begun to influence 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 investigated questions surrounding the *SDP*'s translation into Tibetan, its mention in early Tibetan historical writings such as 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 versions 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 *Compendium of Principles* and the history

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152. According to Imaeda, the *SDP*'s primary mantra is *oṃ namo bhagavati sarvadurgatipariśodhana-rājāya tathāgatāya arhate samyaksambuddhāya tadyathā oṃ śodhane śodhane sarvapāpaṃ viśodhani śuddhe viśuddhe sarvakarma āvaraṇa viśodhani svāhā*. Imaeda, "History of the Cycle of Birth and Death," 134. The Sde dge edition reads *oṃ namo bhagavate sarvadurgatipariśo-dhanarājāya/ 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.

153. 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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, xvii). There also remains a living Sanskritic tradition of *SDP* practice among the Newar Buddhists in Nepal. For more on this, see Anderson, PhD diss.

of yogatantra, Steven Weinberger offers a list[154] of these works, which I reproduce here, adding translated titles and additional bibliographic data:

1. Buddhagupta's[155] *Word-by-Word Commentary on the Meaning of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[156]
2. Kāmadhenu's *Extensive Commentary on the Great King of Precise Rituals Called the Āryasarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*[157]
3. Vajravarman's *Beautiful Ornament: An Explanation of the Great King of the Tantras of the Blessed, Thus-Gone, Worthy, and Perfect Buddha Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*[158]

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

155. 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.

156. Buddhagupta, *Ngan song sbyong ba'i don gyi 'bru 'grel*, Toh 2624, 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). Translator(s) not identified.

157. 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*, Toh 2625, 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.

158. 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*, Toh 2626, 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 Suvidyākaravarman and Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan. While the Snar thang and Beijing editions attribute this text to Vajravarman, the Sde dge and

4. Ānandagarbha's *Ornament of Illumination: The Practices of Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*[159]

5. Ānandagarbha's *Explanation of the Practices of the Thus-Gone, Worthy, and Perfect Buddha Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*[160]

6. Surabhadra's *Stages of the Universal Maṇḍala*[161]

7. Ānandagarbha's *Sādhana of the Great Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[162]

8. Ānandagarbha's *Garland of Compassion: Rituals of the Maṇḍala of the Glorious Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[163]

Co ne editions attribute it to Ānandagarbha, whom they identify as a disciple of the former. See Weinberger, PhD diss., 152.

159. Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po brtag pa snang ba'i rgyan*, Toh 2627, 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 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).

160. 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*, Toh 2628, 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).

161. Surabhadra, *Dkyil 'khor spyi'i rim pa*, Toh 2629, 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.

162. Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor chen po'i sgrub thabs*, Toh 2630, 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).

163. Ānandagarbha, *Dpal ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga thugs rje phreng ba*, Toh 2631, 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: 1076–163 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Kiraṇākaravarman and Khyung grags.

9. Ānandagarbha's *Crematory Burnt-Offering Ritual of the Glorious Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[164]

10. Ānandagarbha's *Procedures of the Funerary Burnt-Offering Ritual of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[165]

11. Subhaganandana's[166] *Method of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[167]

12. Ānandagarbha's *Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[168]

13. Buddhagupta's *Stages of the Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[169]

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164. Ānandagarbha, *Dpal ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i ro'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga*, Toh 2632, 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.

165. Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i shi ba'i sbyin sreg gi cho ga'i las kyi rim pa*, Toh 2633, 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: 1195–223 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translated by Śraddhākaravarman and Rin chen bzang po.

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

167. Skal bzang dga' ba, *Ngan song thams cad sbyong ba'i thabs*, Toh 2634, 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.

168. Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*, Toh 2635, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 68: 373–97 (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 3.

169. Buddhagupta, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga'i rim pa*, Toh 2636, 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.

14. Buddhagupta's *Concise Summary of the Characteristics of the Maṇḍala*[170]

15. Dharmakīrti's *Maṇḍala Ritual of the Crematory Burnt Offering of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[171]

16. Ānandagarbha's *Commentary on the Sādhana of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[172]

17. Anantaparahita's *Concise Summary of the Rituals of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*[173]

18. Śrī Śūnyatāsamādhivajrapāda's[174] *Locanā's Rituals of the Purification of Bad Rebirths Extracted from the Glorious Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*[175]

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170. Buddhagupta, *Dkyil 'khor gyi chos mdor bsdus pa*, Toh 3705, 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.

171. Dharmakīrti, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i ro'i sbyin sreg gi dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*, Toh 2637, 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.

172. Ānandagarbha, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi sgrub thabs kyi 'grel pa*, Toh 2638, 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.

173. Anantaparahita, *Ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba zhes bya ba'i cho ga mdor bsdus pa*, Toh 2639, 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.

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

175. 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*, Toh 1907, 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*

19. Śraddhākaravarman's *Concise Summary of Setting the Lines of the Maṇḍala*[176]

20. Śraddhākaravarman's *Commentary on the Concise Summary of Setting the Lines of the Maṇḍala*[177]

21. Śuddhiprabha's *Practice of the Difficult Ritual of Setting the Lines*[178]

22. Dharmakīrti's *Ritual of the Lines of the Maṇḍala*[179]

23. Śāntigarbha's *Ritual of Establishing the Reliquary*[180]

24. Śāntigarbha's *Differentiating the Parts of a Reliquary*[181]

Strikingly, there are more commentarial works on the *SDP* than on the *Compendium of Principles*, even though the latter is understood to be *the* seminal work

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.

176. Śraddhākaravarman, *Dkyil 'khor gyi thig gdab pa mdor bsdus pa*, Toh 2505, 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.

177. Śraddhākaravarman, *Dkyil 'khor gyi thig gdab pa'i mdor bsdus pa'i 'grel pa*, Toh 2506, 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.

178. Śuddhiprabha, *Thig gdab pa'i cho ga dka' ba spyod pa*, Toh 2507, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Sde dge), 56: 430 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–85); 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.

179. Dharmakīrti, *Dkyil 'khor gyi thig gi cho ga*, Toh 2508, 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.

180. Śāntigarbha, *Mchod rten sgrub pa'i cho ga*, Toh 2652, 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.

181. Śāntigarbha, *Mchod rten gyi cha rnam par dbye ba*, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 38: 525–34 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008). Translator(s) not identified. Note that this text appears in the Beijing and Snar thang editions of the Bstan 'gyur but not in the Sde dge.

of yogatantra. 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.[182] 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"[183] and "treatises,"[184] 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 labeled as commentaries that were designated as such by Tibetans."[185] He goes on to name six spurious commentaries, citing first the so-called *Explanation of Tejorāja*,[186] which is probably an abbreviated title for the *Explanation of the Practices of the Thus-Gone, Worthy, and Perfect Buddha Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorāja*, which is the fifth commentary listed above. As noted, this work is attributed to Ānandagarbha in the different versions of the Bstan 'gyur that we have today, though Grags pa rgyal mtshan dismisses this attribution as 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 Snar thang and Beijing editions of the Bstan 'gyur attribute to Vajravarman, while the Sde dge and Co ne editions attribute it to Ānandagarbha.[187] Grags pa rgyal mtshan is aware of

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182. Weinberger, PhD diss., 216–17.

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

184. Tib. *bstan bcos.*

185. *'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.*

186. Tib. *Gzi brjid bshad pa.*

187. Weinberger, PhD diss., 152.

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,[188] 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.[189] 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, Go rams pa, and the eighth Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje all doubt the text's attribution to Ānandagarbha, while Tsong kha pa challenges its attribution to Vajravarman.[190]

Grags pa rgyal mtshan's third target is Ānandagarbha's *Ornament of Illumination: The Practices of 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.[191] He then dismisses a fourth text "designated as a commentary by Dge bshes Zangs dkar,"[192] 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

188. 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.

189. van der Kuijp, "Notes," 111.

190. Ibid.

191. *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.

192. *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.

Figure 5. Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan. After a painting in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art: *Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216)*. Central Tibet, 18th century. Pigments on cloth. Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin. C2006.66.123 (HAR 67).

Word-by-Word Commentary on the Meaning of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana[193]—do not hail from India but "seem to be a little helpful."[194]

Despite Grags pa rgyal mtshan's dismissal of these works, he confirms the Indian origins of four so-called treatises. The first is a certain Ye shes 'od 'phro's *Rituals of the Maṇḍala of Sarvavid*, the second is Chags med rgyal po's *Peaceful Burnt-Offering Ritual*, the third is Śāntigarbha's *Rituals for Establishing a Reliquary*, and the last is the *Rituals of the Maṇḍala of Sarvavid*, which is attributed to Ānandagarbha, though he asserts it 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

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193. This commentary appears first in our list above.

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

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.[195]

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 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

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195. *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.

those in his lineage as authoritative. This capacity of a text to influence is especially relevant 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. Notice, however, 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 of the available commentaries are authentic translations from Indian sources, after which he lists four ostensibly legitimate treatises related to the *SDP* that were 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 and his great-nephew Chos rgyal 'Phags pa's 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 regularly employed in Tibetan Buddhist literature—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,[196] a figure whose lost writings on the *SDP* are referenced twice in *Light Rays*[197] and twice in the *General Overview*.[198] 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,[199] while Brag steng pa passed it on to Mal gyo Lo tsā ba.[200] 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.

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196. *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 incorrectly 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 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.

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

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

199. 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 yogatantras, including the *Tattvasaṃgraha* to Sa chen Kun dga' snying po. See Stearns, *Luminous Lives*, 137.

200. Mal gyo Lo tsā ba, a.k.a. 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.

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 important role in demonstrating Grags pa rgyal mtshan's expertise. By defining the critical features of the *SDP* in detail, this work shows 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 *SDP*'s 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,[201] the initiation of the discourse,[202] the actual text of the tantra,[203] and the rejoicing.[204,205] What is striking about this breakdown is that he avoids mirroring the *SDP*'s three-part structure, instead dividing it according to his understanding of the text's content. It should be noted that 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 very similar analysis of the text's structure, using some of the same terminology, including the scene of the discourse, the initiation of the discourse,[206] and the rejoicing.[207] 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* repre-

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201. Tib. *gleng gzhi.*

202. Tib. *gleng bslang.*

203. Tib. *rgyud kyi gzhung dngos.*

204. Tib. *rjes su yi rang ba.*

205. *N*, 440; *O*, 17; *P*, 428.

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

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

sents. 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,"[208] which refers to the material inserted by the *SDP*'s compiler immediately after the text's title, namely, "first section"[209] and "Homage to glorious Vajrasattva."[210] 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 did I hear 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.[211] Grags pa rgyal mtshan's attention to detail is important. 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.

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[212] and the discourse initiated by the retinue.[213] This division again echoes Buddhagupta's commentary, which features almost identical terminology.[214] 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

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208. Tib. *sdud pa po*.

209. 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.

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

211. *A*, 116–17; *B*, 164–65.

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

213. Tib. *'khor gyis bslang ba*.

214. 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.

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,"[215] while the method is the dispersion of light rays, and the result is the liberation of beings from bad rebirths.[216] 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, as well as Śakra's inquiry into how the Buddha performed this feat. The section ends with the Buddha explaining that it was no great wonder, since any buddha could do this using their immeasurable stores of merit.[217]

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 died a week prior. The Buddha replies, "Śakra, if you know that the time for that has come, listen up!" To this, Śakra exclaims, "Lord, now is the time!"[218] The Buddha reveals that Vimalamaṇiprabha is in hell and gives a detailed preview of his future rebirths, which causes the crowd of gods to collapse in sorrow.[219] 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 eighty-four million buddhas before him have taught,[220] namely, the practices required for liberating beings from bad rebirths. The last element of the opening narrative is the "actual request,"[221] 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

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

216. *N*, 440; *O*, 17–18; *P*, 428.

217. *A*, 117–18; *B*, 165–66.

218. 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.

219. *N*, 441; *O*, 18; *P*, 428.

220. 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.

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

the Buddha to explain how one can be liberated "even by hearing the name"[222] and how, after finding rebirth as a human, one might achieve full awakening.

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 maṇḍala 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 the Sarvavid Vairocana section into six subsections: 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[223] 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.[224]

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. Grags pa rgyal mtshan then divides the third part into nine further subsections, each of which denotes a potential element of the funerary process. They are: the purification of negative actions, having bestowed empowerment

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222. 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.

223. Tib. *dngos grub.*

224. *N,* 441; *O,* 18–19; *P,* 429.

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 the recitation of mantras; purification through the performance of a burnt-offering ritual; purification through cremation; purification when no effigy or remains are available; and purification through the repelling of evil forces.[225]

While this 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 superimposes on it. This is not to say that his *Outline* is somehow misleading—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 rhetorically illustrates 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 tantric 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:

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225. *N*, 443; *O*, 20; *P*, 430.

> Having relied on the statement in the *SDP* "Having entered
> by means of Vajradharā's mudrā," masters enter and receive
> empowerment without realizing the deity before them. After
> that, the deity is realized.

> This is not the case—it is pointless to have entered the sand maṇḍala
> without having realized the deity, and...[226]

Here Dge bshes Gnyal pa interprets the *SDP* as claiming that ritual experts, without having realized first the maṇḍala's primary deity, should enter the maṇḍala 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 works to reinforce 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 if you are wondering what is indicated by "entered," according to
> the remarks of Rin chen bzang po and his followers, "All that is indi-
> cated by 'entered' is having entered the maṇḍala's mansion together

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226. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 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 titled *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.

with the mudrā." That is correct. Therefore, you should realize the deity beforehand.[227]

In this passage 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 bshes 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 importance of his lineage.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan again criticizes Dge bshes Gnyal pa later in *Light Rays*. When discussing the process of "self-initiation,"[228] that is, the process by which ritual experts initiate themselves before entry into the maṇḍala, he identifies Dge bshes Gnyal pa's explanation as flawed and Rin chen bzang po's as correct. He quotes both 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.[229] 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.[230] Yet this time, rather than turning to Rin chen bzang po, he quotes the

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227. *'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.

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

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

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

SDP itself in order to prove that it advocates precisely such kinds of practices.[231] 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 function to establish further 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 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*.[232]

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 ritualists 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 discussing the necessity of the site ritual[233] by which one takes possession of the chosen location from the spirits that dwell there, he goes on to address

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

232. *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.

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

briefly the ritual preparations.[234] He writes: "Third, since the ritual preparations are absent in this text, although they have not been done, it is appropriate to do them."[235] 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 colored sand 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.[236]

One part of the empowerment requires the creation of a physical maṇḍala in which the ritual experts realize 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*

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234. Tib. *sta gon*.

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

236. *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.

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."[237] 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.

CONCLUSION

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 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 points to perceived gaps in the *SDP* itself, making efforts to supply what he believes to be missing. All of this works to highlight 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 texts and figures. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's reliance on Rin chen bzang po, for example, affirms the legitimacy of the latter, just as his references to Atiśa reinforce Atiśa'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 in 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

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237. Tib. *mthong ba brgyud pa.* For more on the importance of empirical learning for the study and practice of tantra, see chapter 2.

taught in accordance with Rin chen bzang po's system and other exegetical traditions.[238] Similarly, in the colophon to *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.[239] 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 establish his own authority 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 these rites, and since Grags pa rgyal mtshan articulates them most fully in *Light Rays*, it is this work to which we will now turn.

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238. *N*, 452; *O*, 28; *P*, 438.

239. *C*, 117; *D*, 482–83; *E*, n/a; *F*, 111.

2. Who Can Save the Dead?
On the Many Actors in *Light Rays for the Benefit of Others*

I N CHAPTER 1, 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 4. 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 experts' position compare with that of the deities they invoke? 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 offer 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[240] 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* on BDRC, cited as *E*, which is miscatalogued under the unattested title *Manifest Realization of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*,[241] and which features numerous variants vis-à-vis the Sde dge and the Zhwa lu manuscript referenced in the Dpe bsdur ma version.[242] Finally, I also reference

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240. *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.

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

242. 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* with *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* [*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*

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.[243] 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,[244] 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 Explanation 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's 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 different version of *Light Rays* than those we have available to us today, a topic to which we will return in chapter 3.

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.[245] Sometimes the variant readings match one but not other

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'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 gyas 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.

243. Tib. *sa skya gong ma lnga*.

244. 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.

245. For example, in his discussion of the preliminary approach (*sngon du bsnyen pa*), Grags pa

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 in the footnotes every variant that occurs across these versions. 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.

THE CONTENTS OF *LIGHT RAYS*

So far, we have addressed specific features of *Light Rays*, but we have not examined its broader contents and structure.[246] The appendix includes a complete

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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 gyon 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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra,* 331.

246. *Light Rays'* basic structure overlaps with many other Tibetan Buddhist ritual programs. As José

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[247] (1.1). The ritual officiants imagine themselves as Vajrasattva or their deity of choice[248] to prepare for the task of saving the dead. Having ritually protected themselves, blessed their body, speech, and mind, and conferred empowerment on themselves, they visualize 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 world realms.[249] They put themselves in the Buddha's place and imagine receiving offerings and effusive praise from the Buddha's retinue, after which they turn to the root wisdom mantra of Sarvavid Vairocana, which they visualize on top of a moon disk located at their heart.[250] The mantra emits light that illuminates the cosmos, after which they

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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, the 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.

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

248. While *C*, *D*, and *F* indicate that ritualists may choose either Vajrasattva or another deity, *E* states only that they should imagine themselves as Vajrasattva. *C*, 8; *D*, 371; *E*, 5a; *F*, 7.

249. *A*, 117–18; *B*, 165–66. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 306.

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

Figure 6. Sarvavid Vairocana. After a 2011 paint-
ing by Tenzin Dheden commissioned by the
author.

recite this mantra and complete the practice. They conclude by reciting the one-hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva,[251] making tormas,[252] performing circumambulations, and producing small icons.[253, 254]

Approaching the Complete Maṇḍala

In this next phase, the officiants approach 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 officiants then merge with the primary deity through the practice of deity yoga, after which they praise themselves and make offerings to themselves before reciting the root wisdom mantra and the mantras of the other deities, imagining the beings in lower realms becoming liberated. Closing the session, they recite the one-hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, read sūtras, study the Dharma, and make small icons.[255]

Approaching the Deity Using a Painting on Cloth

In this third phase of the preliminary approach (1.3), the officiants use a cloth painting of Sarvavid Vairocana surrounded by other awakened beings. They consecrate the painting by opening its eyes and make offerings to it with whatever material offerings they have available to them. They meditate in front of it and

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251. 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).

252. Tib. *gtor ma*.

253. Tib. *sā tstsha*.

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

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

perform recitations in order to absorb the deity's accomplishments, which allows them to benefit the living and the dead.[256]

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,[257] 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 lead officiants, and the introduction of disciples into the maṇḍala and the bestowal empowerment. The first begins with approaching the deity, the ritual appropriation of the site[258] from the nonhuman

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

257. 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.

258. 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 Go rams pa comes to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's defense. We will discuss this debate in detail in chapter 3. Go rams pa also discusses the necessity of the site ritual in his own detailed work on the rituals of the *SDP* titled *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* titled *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 aforementioned *Beautiful Ornament*, which discusses the performance of the site ritual in the context of burnt-offering rites.

spirits who dwell there, and the preparations.[259] The officiants use string and colored sand to create the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana, and one cubit[260] to the south of it they draw a blue disk on top of a white lotus, where the support of purification[261] is set, which may be the corpse, bones, garments, likeness, small icons made from bone, or the written name of the deceased.[262] 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 tormas.[263]

Having established the ritual space, the officiants wash and adorn themselves and again engage in meditative practices, cultivating compassion for the departed and for all beings. They ritually protect themselves through the practice of personal yoga,[264] by which they guard their practice and the ritual site. They perform a series of meditations on the rescue of beings from the six realms, for which they imagine receiving offerings and praise. This is followed by a period of stabilization, after which they turn to realizing the deity,[265] which involves visualizations focused on Sarvavid Vairocana and his maṇḍala together with the attendant mudrās and mantras.[266] They make offerings and engage in the practice of self-initiation, which requires leading themselves through the initiation process before initiating others.[267]

The second phase of this first method of purification involves introducing students into the maṇḍala and bestowing empowerment, which, in the

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See Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Sde dge), 135; Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 156.

259. 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.

260. Tib. *khru gang*.

261. Tib. *sbyang ba'i rten*.

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

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

264. 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 3.

265. Tib. *lha sgrub pa*.

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

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

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 officiants summon the consciousness and cause it to dissolve into the ritual support, which here can simply be a name card.[268] By reciting the appropriate mantras, negative actions of the deceased are destroyed. The officiants then introduce their students into the maṇḍala through a seventeen-step process of initiation[269] and empower them and the dead.[270] 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.[271]

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 officiants recite the appropriate mantras one hundred thousand[272] times, ten million[273] times, or one hundred million[274] times, the deceased will be reborn in the god realm.[275] 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 ritualists' efforts.[276]

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268. Tib. *ming byang.*

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

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

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

272. Tib. *brgya phrag stong.*

273. Tib. *bye ba.*

274. Tib. *'bum phrag stong.*

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

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

He charts the visualizations that accompany the recitations and specifies the mantras to be recited.[277]

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 officiants cremate the body and mix the ashes with white mustard seed[278] and sand, call the name of the deceased, recite mantras, and scatter the mixture into a river flowing into the ocean, the dead will be liberated from bad rebirths.[279] Grags pa rgyal mtshan expands on this passage in detail, explaining that as before, practitioners must first perform the preliminary approach, make offerings, and visualize the ritual support, at which they toss sand and white mustard seed to dispel negativities. They recite mantras and, after a night passes, scatter 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[280] and gives guidance on how to perform the necessary ablutions. Finally, the officiants

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277. Grags pa rgyal mtshan explains that ritualists "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.

278. Tib. *yungs dkar*.

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

280. 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.

should imagine the deceased in the form of the deity and visualize them residing in Sukhāvatī.[281]

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-offering rites performed for the living.[282] He details four variations of this practice[283] as per the *SDP*'s instructions: the pacifying burnt offering,[284] the enriching burnt offering,[285] the overpowering burnt offering,[286] and the fierce burnt offering,[287] 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.[288] 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,[289] and others. Ritualists fill the hearth with firewood, offerings inside of vases, ornaments, and substances for the burnt offering,[290] such as sesame seed, mustard seed, grain, and goat's milk.[291] 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

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281. *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 3.

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

283. 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*.

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

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

286. Tib. *dbang gi sbyin sreg*.

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

288. *A*, 169–171; *B*, 227–29.

289. Tib. *rang rgyal*.

290. Tib. *bsreg rdzas*.

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

rebirth.[292] He explains also that the officiants should dress in white garments and adornments, and "having the appearance of a buddha,"[293] they should recall the misfortunes of abiding in the lower realms. They should then approach the tutelary deity, light the fire, and recite mantras while imagining the offering substances as supreme ambrosia. Finally, they should make offerings to divine and worldly beings and perform 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 experts perform 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."[294] 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 their path.[295]

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,"[296] lying flat, then the hearth should measure four cubits in size, while if it is "squatting,"[297] seated upright, then the

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292. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 354.

293. Tib. *sangs rgyas gzugs can.*

294. /*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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 320.

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

296. Tib. *nar mo.*

297. Tib. *tsog tsog pu.*

hearth should be one cubit wide and a half-cubit deep, unless no hole has been dug, in which case the structure should be around one cubit in height.[298] 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 officiants lay out ornaments, including flowers, canopies, and tormas. Next, they arrange the substances for the burnt offering, place the firewood in the hearth, and engage in the recitations and visualizations required to connect themselves with the tutelary deity so as to prepare themselves for the cremation. They rid the space of obstructive spirits, wash the corpse with pure water, adorn it, burn incense, imagine it as the deity, and make offerings to it. They then fix 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.[299] When they light the fire, they make offerings to the worldly and otherworldly deities, recite mantras, and imagine the flesh, blood, and bones of the departed as divine ambrosia.[300] They summon the fire god Agni to reside in the hearth[301] and envision the burnt-offering substances as ambrosia as well. More divinities enter as the officiants request wrathful protectors to join in, to whom they make offerings. The maṇḍala's inhabitants are then invited into the belly of Agni, and after further offerings and praises have been made, 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 recitations are performed. The rite culminates with the summoning of Trailokyavijaya, who tramples the negative actions of the deceased. The officiants look for signs of success in the fire and give offerings and praises to the various divine actors before performing the concluding rites, which include making prayers for the living and attending a banquet[302] that the ritual's sponsors host for ritualists and their attendants.[303]

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

299. *C,* 104; *D,* 468–69; *E,* n/a; *F,* 97–98.

300. *C,* 107; *D,* 471; *E,* n/a; *F,* 100.

301. *C,* 106; *D,* 470–71; *E,* n/a; *F,* 99.

302. Tib. *ston mo.*

303. *C,* 107–8; *D,* 472–73; *E,* n/a; *F,* 101–2.

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

In this sixth practice (2.2.2.6), the officiants collect 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.[304] They mix the ashes with the five products of a cow[305]—urine, dung, milk, butter, and curd—together with scented water and place 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. They strike it until it forms a dough-like substance and then mix in the small bone fragments[306] along with camphor and clay, blessing the resultant lump with the root wisdom mantra. They embed the name of the deceased into a mantra—"All the negative actions of the one called [the name of the deceased] *śānti kuru svāhā*!"[307]—which they write and insert into the middle of the lump.[308] They work it into the shape of a deity or reliquary while reciting the root wisdom mantra, and they bless it with mudrās and mantras one, two, three, five, or up to 108 times, and perform recitations for up to two hundred thousand times—or however many repetitions they can perform.[309] 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

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304. *C*, 109; *D*, 474; *E*, n/a; *F*, 102.

305. 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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 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.

306. Tib. *rus bu*.

307. *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.

308. Tib. *'bi 'bi*.

309. *C*, 110; *D*, 475; *E*, n/a; *F*, 103.

lutes. He also points to the *SDP*'s claim that if no such signs appear, ritualists should perform additional recitations hundreds of thousands of times[310] 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.[311] The second endorses making a name card, performing recitations, conducting a burnt-offering rite, and bestowing empowerment to the card.[312] The last involves empowering the name card, the image, the reliquary, or an image of the deceased's primary deity, or empowering 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.[313] Based on these selections, Grags pa rgyal mtshan confirms that ritualists can, in fact, purify the negative actions of the deceased even if the corpse is unavailable, using a name card and so forth instead. But he anticipates a question: What are the steps for performing the various 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, regard-

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310. 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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 248.

311. *A*, 133; *B*, 185; *C*, 111; *D*, 476; *E*, n/a; *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 322.

312. *A*, 142; *B*, 196; *C*, 111–12; *D*, 476–77; *E*, n/a; *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 330.

313. *A*, 169–70; *B*, 228; *C*, 112; *D*, 477; *E*, n/a; *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 354.

ing 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 that have been performed are sufficient to purify the departed's negativities.[314]

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 above ritualists 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 their 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?

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314. *C*, 111–12; *D*, 476–77; *E*, n/a; *F*, 105.

Theories of Agency

Before we examine *Light Rays* and related works, it will be helpful to revisit 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.[315] 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.[316] Gell 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 as human beings do 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 therefore 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."[317] 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.[318]

Latour's theory is similar, though he reconsiders 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.... Thus, 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?"[319] In Latour's view, humans and nonhumans are

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315. Schlossler, "Agency."

316. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 16.

317. Ibid., 20.

318. Ibid., 21.

319. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 71.

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.[320] 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."[321] 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 contesting the primacy of intentional action would here be misguided. Linking intention to action certainly presents a number of philosophical challenges, 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 to be carried out.[322] Using such language, *Light Rays*

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320. Ibid., 7.

321. Ibid.

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

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, officiants who choose to rely on *Light Rays* to perform a funeral. If they adhere closely to the text, then they surrender considerable autonomy to it, looking to it for guidance throughout the ritual performance. If they choose to depart from the manual's instructions, they act with greater autonomy. But in the context of this study of the text itself, we have little access to information about how officiants might have adhered to or diverged from their ritual manuals. This leaves us to consider the implied ritualists in the world of the text itself.

Ritualists conduct the funerary process from beginning to end. They perform 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. In Tibetan ritual contexts, officiants will typically 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 officiants in a pivotal position, though their actions remain scripted to a significant degree. They recite a specific mantra because the text tells them to; they perform the site ritual and the preparations because the text recommends that they be performed; they draw the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana because it is this maṇḍala that the text prescribes; and they cremate the body because the text recognizes this as a method for saving the dead. Even for officiants who have memorized the manual and are not dependent on reading it directly, their agency is still linked with its injunctions. But rather than prescribing every aspect of the ritual, Grags pa rygal mtshan directs readers away from the text at certain points. In some cases, he calls for creativity based on authoritative sources, in others he recommends relying on what one 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 ritual performers than it does in other moments, 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 officiants connect 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.[323] The *SDP* explains that one should begin by painting Sarvavid Vairocana at the center of the canvas and then other awakened 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. Ritualists also draw wrathful Hayagrīva and Trailokyavijaya, between whom are Locanā, Māmakī, Pāṇḍuravāsinī, and Tārā. At the bottom of the canvas, they draw a lotus pond with *makara*,[324] fish, turtles, white frogs, and abundant flowers, along with incense, butter lamps, perfume, garlands, food offerings, flowers, and fruit. Finally, they include a practitioner bowing with hands folded.[325]

Next, the officiants proceed to consecrate the painting. The *SDP* recommends making offerings to the image and performing the rite of opening its eyes.[326] If signs appear, then success has come quickly, and if not, then success comes gradually. In cases where the ritualists encounter signs including the sound of laughter, drums, or bells, or the sight of a monk, a brahmin, or a girl and fruit,[327] they succeed quickly in obtaining higher, middle, or lower

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

324. 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: Serindia, 2003), 77.

325. *A*, 127–28; *B*, 178–79.

326. "Then, making offerings to the drawing's deity image, one 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.

327. 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.

achievements. They then engage 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,[328] after which they conclude by performing a series of recitations as per the *SDP*'s instructions.

What does this tell us about ritualists' 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 officiants look to an additional resource—whether memorized or physical—introducing another authoritative voice into the ritual program. This underscores what is already in plain 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 ritual performers. As for the creative agency that such a practice requires, it of course depends on who creates the painting. If the officiants themselves produce it,[329] then we have here one of the most creative moments in the entire ritual process. While they may seek to follow *Light Rays* and the *SDP* as closely as possible, how they depict each deity will be unique to their 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 they commission a painter to create the image—as any artistically challenged ritualists might—then we have an additional human contributor at work:

Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 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.

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

329. There are numerous examples of lamas with outstanding artistic abilities. The famous Bka' brgyud pa polymath Si tu Paṇ chen 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* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2017), 111–12.

detail-oriented officiants who must confirm the painting's faithfulness to the text's instructions, and a painter with the skills necessary to produce a suitably refined work of art. When the ritualists bring the image to life via consecration, they create a powerful object worthy of veneration. This process of actualizing a sacred image in the ritual environment allows them to engage in meditations that collapse the divide between themselves and the deity. It is at this moment that the officiants' and the deity's agencies merge, a topic to which we will return later.

Creating the Sand Maṇḍala and the Importance of Empirical Learning

There are other similarly creative moments discussed 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 officiants to the *SDP*'s instructions, indicating only the beginning and end of the first passage to be consulted.[330] 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.

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

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.[331]

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 ritualists know how to render such things? As with 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."[332] The term *visual transmission* stands out, since it signals the importance of empirical learning in the ritual context.[333] It is of course reason-

331. /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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 311.

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

333. 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*

able 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. Tibetan ritualists know how to create a sand maṇḍala because they have 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 lines 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, after which one makes offerings to them.[334] 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 visual transmission.[335] Third, in the section on burnt-offering rites, Grags pa rgyal mtshan recommends relying on visual transmission for understanding how to set the lines for the required maṇḍala.[336] Moreover, a fourth 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."[337] 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.[338]

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*

of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). For more on visual transmission in Tibetan Buddhism, see Rory Lindsay, "Visual Transmission in Tibetan Ritual Polemics," *The Journal of Religion* 103, no. 1 (January 2023): 74–83.

334. *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.

335. *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.

336. C, 92; D, 456; E, 62a; F, 86.

337. *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 anoint 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/.*

338. Q, 667–68; R, 438.

for Others. He mentions visual transmission while discussing the creation of a maṇḍala in the hearth for the pacifying burnt-offering rite,[339] while discussing how one produces a maṇḍala in the hearth that is used for cremation,[340] and again while addressing how to set down the lines for the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana.[341] Notice that in all of these cases, visual transmission is referenced in connection with the creation of a maṇḍala, which makes sense given that the technical requirements of a maṇḍala are not easily explained without recourse to visual experience.

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 Blessed 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

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339. "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.

340. "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.

341. "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.

of the accomplished scholars of India and Tibet and from the elixir of
the holy guru's speech.[342]

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 recita-
tions 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 ritu-
als. 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 prac-
tices of the guru." He then points to a set of unnamed Indian and Tibetan com-
mentaries for better understanding the internal experiential dimensions of these
practices.

To be noted also is that Bu ston references visual transmission in his substan-
tial 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 con-
cluding remarks on these rituals, he comments, "You should carefully listen to
and comprehend the tantra including the meaning and reasons behind the med-
itations of those rituals and so forth, and you should understand the fine details
of the practices from visual transmission."[343] Notice that here Bu ston recom-
mends 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* demands greater
autonomy of the officiants. In the case of the painting, Grags pa rgyal mtshan

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342. *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.

343. *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.

cites the *SDP* without including the full passage, requiring readers to look to a second source text. If officiants create the painting, then their unique creative abilities manifest in the ritual object, and if it is created by someone else, then at a minimum the officiants 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, 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 officiants.[344] 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

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344. 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 the 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/Fourth Paṇchen Lama Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan. This earlier manual contains various alternatives for the performer, being a "general manual" that can be 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.

for a condensed (2.2.2.1.1.1.1) and a detailed (2.2.2.1.1.1.2) version of what ritual specialists 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 tormas 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-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 the personal approach, having completed the yoga of the single tutelary deity, the gnosis-being[345] 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 tormas. 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 vajra masters should do in particular has been taught.[346]

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

346. *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/*

Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan provides officiants with a considerable amount of choice. First, he anticipates cases in which they 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 officiants should lay offerings and tormas. Next, they place 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 atop an eight-petaled lotus. Here again Grags pa rgyal mtshan anticipates practical limitations: if the officiants cannot create such an ornate setup, then simply a maṇḍala design will suffice. They then should perform the yoga of the single tutelary deity and invite the gnosis-being to the cloth drawing or statue in order to draw the deity into the ritual environment. Notice that the invitation of the gnosis-being can be performed either extensively or briefly and that the same applies for the process of making offerings to the object qua deity. Not only do such cases of choice anticipate restrictions of time and resources, but also they grant officiants the freedom to choose what is most appropriate in a given ritual performance. Thus, even the most faithful readers of *Light Rays* are 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 ritualists 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 tormas; 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

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'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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 354.

overlapping practices that Grags pa rgyal mtshan outlines in the above-quoted passage.

Another means by which *Light Rays* affords greater autonomy to its readers 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 officiants mix in the small bone fragments that remain from the cremation along with camphor and clay, blessing it with the root wisdom mantra. They incorporate the name of the deceased into a mantra, which they write and insert 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 they deem 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—officiants can decide to perform the third method or the sixth but not both, since the ingredients that are to be mixed with the ashes differ in these two practices; if they choose to use all of the ashes for either of these practices, then they cannot then perform the other. The choice is ultimately theirs, depending on the materials they have available to them and their geographical surroundings (e.g., are they 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 other methods, 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 six (2.2.2.3– 2.2.2.6), 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 (2.2.2.7) 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 readers of *Light Rays*, letting them 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.[347] It also very briefly discusses what to do when the body is unavailable.[348] By contrast, *Requisites for the Benefit of Others*, which was written after *Light Rays of the Requisites*,[349] focuses on the protective practices of personal yoga (cf. 2.2.2.1.1.1.2.7)[350] 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.[351] It also explains in considerable 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.[352]

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 meth-

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347. *Q*, 693–95; *R*, 456–57.

348. *Q*, 695–96; *R*, 457.

349. We know this because *Requisites for the Benefit of Others* cites *Light Rays of the Requisites* twice by name. See *G*, 133, 147; *H*, 496, 510; *I*, 125, 137.

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

351. *G*, 133–47; *H*, 496–510; *I*, 125–37.

352. *G*, 147–55; *H*, 510–17; *I*, 137–44.

ods for purifying the negative actions of the departed: 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.[353] 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.[354] Grags pa rgyal mtshan elaborates on the characteristics of the hearth before explaining that ritualists must perform the protective personal yoga prior to lighting the fire and visualizing the worldly form of Agni,[355] the god of fire, as the divine force driving the cremation. Finally, they engage in a form of deity yoga on behalf of the deceased, visualizing the corpse as the commitment-being[356] 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.[357] The basics of the practice are the same, except that when officiants

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353. "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.

354. Ibid.

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

356. 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 Kapstein and Sam van Schaik (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 62.

357. Tib. *sdig pa can.*

are making offerings, they do so to the otherworldly form of Agni,[358] and they do not visualize the corpse as the deity but instead visualize a complete four-part maṇḍala wheel.[359] They make offerings and praises and present the burnt-offering substances, following which they give the corpse as a burnt offering as well.[360] Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes that ritualists 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 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 Ḍombinī; the skin and limbs of awakening 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.[361]

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

359. *'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.

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

361. *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.*

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 yogatantric 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 ritualists should offer 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 are 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.[362]

In both the first 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.

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362. *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.*

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 practitioners relying on Grags pa rgyal mtshan's three shorter works would be more limited in what they can do.

A Note on Repetition

Before we move on from the function of the ritual manual in the hands of ritual experts, let us briefly consider 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 ritualists should perform it either one hundred thousand times or up to ten million times in order to exhaust the negative actions of evil individuals, after which they will "certainly be freed from hell."[363] 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[364] times,
> one hundred thousand[365] times,
> or up to ten million[366] times,
> the deceased certainly will be born in the god realm.[367]

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363. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 244.

364. Tib. *'bum phrag stong*.

365. Tib. *brgya phrag stong*.

366. Tib. *bye ba*.

367. *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*

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 ritualists perform the burnt offering one hundred thousand times or ten million times, evil beings suffering in great hells will be freed.[368] In each of these cases, the *SDP* sets a rather high bar for aspiring necroliberators, 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, or small amounts of negative action.[369] 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 ritualists "should recite all the mantras that appear in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* and primarily the root wisdom mantra,"[370] 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 disciple 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan 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

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śatasahasram api pūrayed yāvat koṭim api pūrayet // devanikāyeṣūtpadyante //. See Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 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*.

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

369. *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.

370. *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.

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."[371] 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 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 number. There are 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 officiants vis-à-vis the ritual manual itself. If committed to the text in hand, the officiants' actions are largely scripted, which limits (but does not eliminate) their autonomy and creativity as ritual performers. They stand at the center of the ritual procedures that *Light Rays* outlines, but they by no means liberate the dead on their own. While such capabilities may be attributed to the Buddha in the *SDP*, *Light Rays* does not expect miracles from its readers, addressing instead those who are sufficiently trained in tantric Buddhist 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 identities of ritual officiants morph and merge with that of the deity. From an emic perspective, such cases involve not ordinary people but rather those

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371. *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.

who have temporarily become buddhas or bodhisattvas.[372] In order to better understand how ritualists execute these shifts in identity, let us first look to the work of Minoru Kiyota[373] and John Strong[374] to sketch a basic framework. Meeting buddhas and bodhisattvas in a ritual context involves three kinds of practices:[375] 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[376] of the buddhas, that is, their awakened Body, Speech, and Mind. In a ritual setting, tantric practitioners engage in all three simultaneously, which allows them to raise themselves to the level of, and ultimately merge with, deities and their awakened qualities. Following Kiyota's and Strong's presentations,[377] 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 penned by the

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

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

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

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

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

377. Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism*, 70; Strong, *Buddhisms*, 251.

aforementioned Tibetan scholar Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, an author whom Grags pa rgyal mtshan mentions explicitly in his *General Overview*.[378] In his *Letter Clarifying the General Categories of Tantra*, Rong zom pa explains that the three types of mantras[379] 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.[380] 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."[381] Here Rong zom pa equates mantras with the deities themselves, the ultimate reality they reflect, and their liberating acts.[382] Interestingly, he singles out the yogatantra tradition[383] as claiming that mantras are deities and accomplish-

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378. 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.

379. 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 Controversy 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.

380. *'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.

381. *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.

382. 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.

383. 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.

ments[384] and then quotes two canonical sources to illustrate that mantras can be used to trigger divine action.[385] Working with mantras therefore allows practitioners to meet deities in more than one way: through their performance, ritualists encounter both the essence of the deities' accomplishments and the actual causes that may bring about such accomplishments in themselves, they compel deities to act for the benefit of themselves and others, and they mimic and merge with deities as they vocalize their awakened 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."[386] 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."[387] Like mantras, they often are seen as symbolizing the deity or as being the deity itself. 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 awakened activities of a buddha are done with a mudrā."[388] The claim that liberating activities are performed by way of mudrās will be particularly relevant later in this chapter. 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 ritualists and deities through the employment of mudrā, mantra, and meditation. Such

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384. *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.

385. 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.

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

387. Ibid., 89.

388. *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.

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 officiants to begin with protective measures, imagining themselves 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 disk 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.[389]

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389. *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*

Notice the initial emphasis on bodhicitta,[390] which directs focus away from ordinary awareness to the goal of awakening for the benefit of all beings. From here, officiants should imagine a lotus emerging from the syllable *paṃ*, followed by the syllable *hūṃ* on top of a moon disk that issues from *a*. Drawing on a visualized concentration of light, they envision themselves 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.[391] 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 sections 2 and 3,[392] 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.[393] By identifying with Vajrapāṇi, then, ritualists associate with a bodhisattva explicitly tied to

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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 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.

390. Tib. *byang chub kyi sems.*

391. Weinberger, PhD diss., 194–96.

392. At the beginning of the second section, 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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 328.

393. "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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 322.

necroliberative acts, thus readying themselves 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 ritualists may effectively enact the necessary protections.

In the next phase of the preliminary, the ritual officiants assign mantric syllables to each finger. Grags pa rgyal mtshan cites the *SDP*'s claim that ritualists 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, officiants generate the conviction that these are tathāgatas.[394] 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.[395] 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 times, and with the primary vajra aspect

394. *A*, 178; *B*, 238; *C*, 5; *D*, 368; *E*, 3a; *F*, 4. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 362.

395. 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.

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 dṛḍho 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.[396]

Here we find the simultaneous performance of mudrā, mantra, and meditation as
the ritual officiants encounter a network of deities. With a buddha or consort on
each finger, they state *oṃ anyonya anugata sarvadharmāḥ* and place their palms
together, imagining these deities in mutual contact. Reciting the mantra *sphāra
sphāra anupraviṣṭa sarvadharmā*, the officiants form the vajra palms mudrā[397]
and envision the deities in union. Finally, they recite *atyanta anupraviṣṭa sar-
vadharma vajra añjali* while forming the vajra binding mudrā[398] and imagine
the deities as indivisible. This indivisibility corresponds to the mind's natural
nondual state, on which they meditate before forming and releasing the vajra
binding mudrā three times, destroying negative actions. They then cause the
gnosis-being to descend into their heart center, thus fully merging with the deity.
    Such shifts in identity continue as the practice proceeds. Officiants recite the

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396. *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 ṣṭa*] *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 tiṣṭa* [*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.

397. 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 Tsong-
    khapa and the Dalai Lama, *The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra*, 83.

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

mantra *oṃ svabhāva śuddhaḥ sarvadharmāḥ svabhāva śuddho 'haṃ*,[399] imagining all phenomena as empty of inherent existence. On the basis of phenomena's empty nature, they then envision *hūṃ* on top of a moon disk that issues from *a* on top of a lotus that issues from *paṃ*. On that foundation, from the radiant light they imagine to be gathered there, they visualize themselves as Vajrasattva, white in color, with joyful eyes open, adorned with silk garments and precious ornaments. Grags pa rgyal mtshan explains that Vajrasattva's 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. The officiants should then bless their body, speech, and mind: to bless their body, they join their palms at their forehead to form the prostration mudrā and say *oṃ bhṛta bhṛta sarva āvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ*; to bless their speech, they join their palms at their throat to form the lotus mudrā and say *oṃ traṭa traṭa sarva āvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ*; to bless their mind, they assume the vajra palms with the middle fingers touching at their heart to form the mudrā of the vajra family and say *oṃ chinda chinda sarva āvaraṇāni hūṃ phaṭ*.[400]

Having blessed the triad of body, speech, and mind, the officiants grant themselves 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 fifth mantra and mudrā, you should imagine Amoghasiddhi

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

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

there. If your own family is the tathāgata family, you should visualize Vairocana atop your head.[401]

With this retinue of buddhas residing on their body, the officiants next visualize themselves in the form of Vajrasattva or their chosen deity and imagine 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.[402] They imagine themselves as the Buddha receiving offerings and praises from his retinue, at which point they focus on the root wisdom mantra of Sarvavid Vairocana, which they envision on top of a moon disk at their heart. This mantra illuminates the cosmos, and they recite it repeatedly to complete the session. They then conclude by reciting the one-hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, making tormas, performing circumambulations, and producing small icons.[403]

Agency in the Preliminaries

Perhaps what is most striking about this practice is the officiants' contact and identification with such a wide variety of divine actors. While it is true that ritualists are engaged in visualization practices, emically this does not detract from the reality of the deities involved. Such deities are understood to be actual awakened beings who can intervene in the world and so from an emic perspective should be regarded as important agents in their own right. Consider, for example, the initial phase of the practice just described: the officiants begin by meditating on bodhicitta, the mind set on achieving awakening for the sake of all beings,

401. *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 gyon 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.

402. *A,* 117–18; *B,* 165–66. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra,* 306.

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

and then use the triad of mudrā, mantra, and meditation—including the visualization of light, mantric syllables, and objects like the lotus and moon disk—to meet and merge with Vajrapāṇi. This marks their first shift in identity. They then imagine themselves as Trailokyavijaya, a more wrathful form of Vajrapāṇi, 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, they produce the threatening mudrā to protect themselves, the ritual space, and their practice while uttering the fierce mantra *oṃ vajrasattva krodha analārka/ mahāvajra krodha/ drava drava/ vidrava/ vidrava/ sarvāpāya/ nāśaya nāśaya/ hara hara praṇāna hūṃ phaṭ*,[404] 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 ritualists' bodies onto the deity's awakened Body. Reciting mantras maps their speech onto the deity's awakened 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 ritualists 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 also include the meditative objects that he describes. The syllable *paṃ*—a mantric instantiation of awakened awareness—becomes the source of a lotus flower, which itself is the traditional throne of buddhas and bodhisattvas and emblematic of liberation. The syllable *hūṃ* is pictured atop a moon disk—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.[405] 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 ritualists' transformation,

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

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

prompting their 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 multiheaded and multiarmed form, the officiants imagine themselves wearing snakes and vile ornaments while holding weapons, entrails, and skulls in their many hands. These objects protect the ritualists, the site, and the practice by frightening away spirits bent on obstructing the practice, and they also give meditators more visual material to work with as they endeavor to imagine themselves 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 ritualists 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 officiants visualize five male and five female deities on their fingertips, using the triad of mudrā, mantra, and meditation to facilitate their contact, union, and ultimate indivisibility. They then self-identify with Vajrasattva and later morph again by turning to the *SDP*'s introductory narrative, imagining themselves 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 ritualists' efforts to rescue those suffering in bad rebirths.

Yet it would be misguided to think that the ritualists, deities, and visualized objects play equal parts in the rite's success. This would ignore, for example, the basic problem of intercessory prayer.[406] 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 to this, though such considerations highlight the critical role of the officiants in saving the dead, for it is they who initiate the necroliberative process. Once the ritual process has begun, they—in tandem with the ritual manual—remain 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 bodhi-citta," "you should imagine yourself as Vajrapāṇi," "you should cause the gnosis-being to

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406. 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.

descend," and "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 ritualists do the work of drawing the gnosis-being into themselves, completing their union with the deity. Grags pa rgyal mtshan's language very clearly frames the ritualists as the primary agents, a point to which we will return later in this chapter.

The Function of the Maṇḍala in Rescuing the Dead

Clearly the ritualists' 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 ritualists visualize 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 ritual officiants 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.[407]

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407. *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*
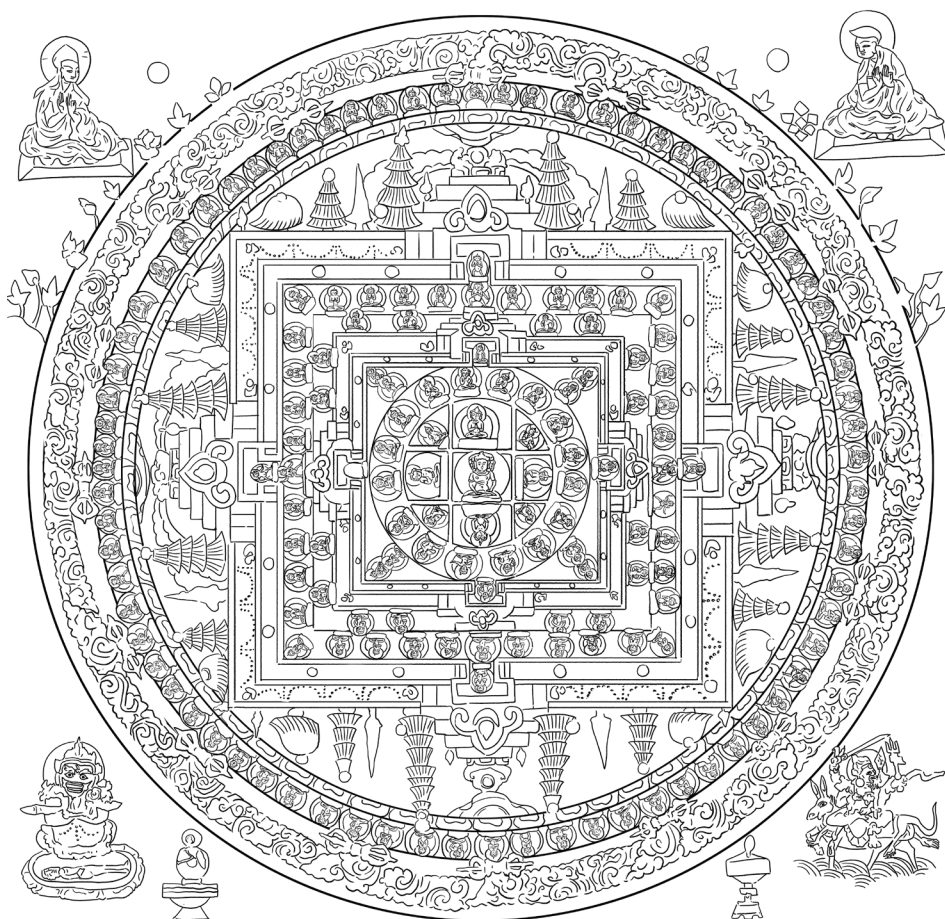
Figure 7. The maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana. After a painting in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art: *Mandala of Sarvavid Vairochana*. Central Tibet, 19th century. Pigments on wood. Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin. C2006.66.151 (HAR 126).

Having recited the mantras of Sarvavid Vairocana and the four buddhas and their consorts, the ritualists are 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 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 ritualists' encounter with some of the lesser deities need only be cursory. In cases where time is limited, they need not devote their 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."[408] In other words, officiants 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 ritualists visualizing the commitment-being—the visualized form of the deity—in front of themselves. Holding vajra and bell, they chant 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! ...

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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.*

408. *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.*

> 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,
> you will demonstrate various miraculous abilities and blessings.
> For the sake of infinite throngs of beings,
> I ask you to come with your excellent retinue!⁴⁰⁹

Here we see 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. Ritualists then should give offering water⁴¹⁰ and chant verses and mantras requesting them to stay. They again use a combination of verse and mantra to ask for ablutions before giving their throne to the Buddha, chanting:

> Out of compassion for myself and other migrators,
> by the power of the miraculous abilities of the Lord himself,

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409. *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.

410. Tib. *mchod yon*.

for as long as I make offerings,
for that long I ask the Lord to stay![411]

Notice the importance of the ritualists' offerings in securing the Buddha's sustained presence. This speaks to the reciprocal relationship between the ritualists and the deity: the former only expect 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;[412] flowers;[413] food appropriate for gods, humans, and others;[414] and divine substances.[415] With the initial offerings complete, Grags pa rgyal mtshan instructs the officiants 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 ritualists should complete 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.[416]

With the deity present, the maṇḍala becomes actualized in the ritual environment. Forming the maṇḍala in this way, the officiants create a complex network of actors, all of whom contribute to greater and lesser degrees to the rescue of the dead from bad rebirths. The officiants nevertheless remain the initiators of the ritual process and, in conjunction with the instructions of the ritual man-

411. *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 Varabodhi, *'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.

412. Tib. *dri yi rdzas*.

413. Tib. *me tog*.

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

415. Tib. *lha rdzas*. Grags pa rgyal mtshan later glosses the term *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.

416. "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.

ual, ensure that the deities remain present for as long as necessary through the giving of material offerings.

Deities and the Dead

So far, we have addressed the ritualists' 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 officiants 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, each of whom may be represented either by writing their name, drawing their sign, or drawing *bindu*s for each.[417] Amid this gathering of divine actors, the officiants are then able to dispel negative forces by reciting the mantra of Trailokya-vijaya as many times as possible,[418] after which they prepare the corpse in the following way:

> 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.[419]

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

418. *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.

419. *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*

Notice here the near constant employment of the root wisdom mantra. *Light Rays* instructs the officiants to wash the corpse using water from a vase that has been blessed by the root wisdom 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 ritualists should then dress the corpse, purifying it with incense and reciting the mantras of wrathful deities to ward off negative forces. Finally, they imagine the corpse as the deity, meaning that the transformations we have seen on the part of the ritualists now apply to the deceased.

The importance of mantra is underscored yet again in the next phase of the practice. The ritualists are to write mantras on paper during the daytime[420] and fix them onto eighteen parts of the body.[421] 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 deities 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.

Ritual experts finally should light the fire and invite a host of otherworldly and

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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.

420. *nyin mor shog bu la bris te/.* C, 104; D, 468; E, n/a; F, 97.

421. 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*; and (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, 468–69; E, n/a; F, 97–98.

worldly divinities to the site of the cremation. Reciting the mantra *oṃ agnaye mahāteja/ sarvakarmaprasādhaka/ kāruṇyakrītva* [*Zhwa+tritamahādhija*] *satvārtha/ asmana sannahito bhava/,* they summon 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.[422] They imagine the burnt-offering substances as ambrosia, and whether burning everything at once or placing items in the fire in turn, they recite the mantra *oṃ agnaye sarvapāpaṃ dahana śāntiṃ kuru* [*Zhwa+ye*] *svāhā* and make offerings and praises.[423] More divinities enter the fold as officiants request wrathful protectors engulfed in flames to join with the assembly, to whom they make offerings three times over. The whole of the maṇḍala's inhabitants are then invited into the belly of Agni, and after making still further offerings and praises, the officiants imagine the burnt-offering substances together with the flesh, blood, and bones of the corpse as ambrosia, and they offer these to the principal deity while reciting a modified version of the root wisdom mantra.[424] The cremation culminates with the ritualists summoning Trailokyavijaya, trampler of negative actions, and reciting a customized recitation that includes the name of the deceased and calls for their negative karma to be pacified.[425] The ritualists then look for signs of success in the fire and give offerings and praises to the deities before performing the concluding rites, which include giving tormas, making prayers for the living, and attending a banquet that the funerary rite's sponsors arrange for them and their attendants.[426]

Not only do these practices demonstrate the consistent presence of divine

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422. *C,* 106; *D,* 470–71; *E,* n/a; *F,* 99.

423. *C,* 106; *D,* 471; *E,* n/a; *F,* 99–100.

424. "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.

425. *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.

426. *C,* 107–8; *D,* 472–73; *E,* n/a; *F,* 101–2.

actors throughout the cremation, but 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 who is to be rescued to the deity, 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 ritualists, their disciples, and the deities they invoke 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 escape bad rebirths. We have seen cases where the dead's consciousness is summoned to the ritual support, but even here the dead 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 are ritually delivered to a heavenly realm that they regain personal agency and begin to study and practice the Dharma in an ideal environment.[427] We will examine this topic in depth in chapter 4.

Yet the dead's passivity throughout these 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 practices. Thus, before we conclude our inquiry into the many actors responsible for acts of necroliberation, let us consider the importance of material objects as *Light Rays* frames them.

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427. "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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 242.

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 tormas, 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.

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,[428] and when mixed with other ingredients and "accomplished" through ritual means, it yields pills that can liberate through ingestion. Similarly, Sog bzlog pa describes medical compounds designated as "ambrosia"[429] 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.[430] 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

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428. Gentry, *Power Objects*, 58.

429. Skt. *amṛta*; Tib. *bdud rtsi*.

430. Gentry, *Power Objects*, 321.

relic casket" and ideally eat eight pieces per day, one at the beginning and end of each of the four periods of the day.[431] 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 ritual officiants to imagine certain objects such as 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 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 4, 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."[432] Among them are deity images, effigies, and all "the usual ritual paraphernalia" featured in most Tibetan Buddhist ritual performances.[433] Gentry explains that these objects gain power through the ritual operations to which they are subjected, including the mediating functions of deity yoga.[434] 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 nonhuman—are mediated and directed into and through material objects.[435]

In other words, ritual items like effigies become powerful through their ritual integration with human and nonhuman forces rather than through inclu-

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431. Ibid., 320–21.

432. Ibid., 294.

433. Ibid.

434. Ibid., 341.

435. Ibid.

sion of potent substances like brahmin flesh. As an example, Gentry looks to the *Twenty-Five Ways to Repel Armies*,[436] a ritual cycle revealed by Sog bzlog pa's teacher Zhig po gling pa (1524–83), which describes a practice configured to repel enemies using "oblation weapons."[437] Here ritualists are instructed to imagine that oblations connected with their own tutelary deity have become weapons while a sacrificial pit has opened up before the enemy's tutelary deity. They then envision 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."[438] 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."[439] These objects are assumed not to possess much power on their own but instead aid in facilitating the condensation of meaning as officiants work to communicate select doctrines to their 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,[440] and the sixty-two initiation substances of yogatantra, which include mustard seed, *dūrvā* grass, gems, mirrors, bells, and parasols.[441] The officiants show each one to the initiates by holding them up at the right moment, and they also bring these objects 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

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436. Tib. *Dmag zlog nyer lnga*.

437. Tib. *gtor zor*.

438. Gentry, *Power Objects*, 341.

439. Ibid., 357.

440. 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.

441. Ibid.

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 officiants use the painting to initiate contact with Sarvavid Vairocana, who resides at its center. Sarvavid 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 that ritualists seek to encounter, but it also includes a figure corresponding to the ritual performer. 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 ritualists are instructed to consecrate it. By "opening" Sarvavid's eyes, the presence of this deity becomes actual, and the painting 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 indications of the consecration's success: if the officiants hear laughter, drums, or bells, or see a monk, a brahmin, or a girl with fruit, then they succeed quickly in obtaining accomplishments, but if they do not see such signs,

they obtain accomplishments more gradually.[442] While it is clear that consecrating the image benefits the officiants, 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 officiants 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.[443]

Here the officiants are instructed to request accomplishments from the deity, which highlights the transmissive logic of the practice. Once one is 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."[444] Both readings

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442. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 240.

443. /*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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 242.

444. *dkyil 'khor bri ba* [*E=bar*] *grub* [*E, Zhwa=ma grub*] *na*/ [*E−*/] *gong du bstan pa'i ras bris* [*E=ris*]

are possible. The first emphasizes the importance of the maṇḍala that ritualists create in the second phase of the preliminary propitiations (1.2). With the environment transformed by the maṇḍala, ritualists 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 that 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 practitioners to meet the deity, receive accomplishments, and begin working toward the rescue of the dead.

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";[445] "Then, making offerings to the drawing's deity image, one should open its eyes and imagine it as genuine and blessed";[446] and "Then, having blessed the visual form directly with mantras and mudrās, one should make offerings with whatever they possess."[447] While the painting serves an important role, it is not framed agentively. To borrow Gell's language, it is an object through which the primary agents—the ritualists and the deity—interact and distribute their agency in the causal milieu. As such, it is both mimetic and mediating: it is 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 it is mediating in that it serves as an interface through which these deities

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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.

445. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra,* 240.

446. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra,* 240.

447. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra,* 240.

and the officiants interact. It is an extension of both the ritualists' and the deities' 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 ritualists when rescuing the dead. While in the case of the painting on cloth the ritualists are responsible for consecrating it, engagement with the maṇḍala is generally more complex, as evidenced by the numerous mantras and mudrās ritualists (ideally) are 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 tormas in abundance in front of a painting or casting.[448]

In cases where time is short or materials are scarce, the officiants 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

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448. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 354.

to what the ritualists use, the fact remains that they must use something, high-
lighting that materials too are critical to the ritual process.

Material Offerings

In addition, among the more ubiquitous materials in *Light Rays* are the physi-
cal offerings given to deities and worldly spirits. Grags pa rgyal mtshan devotes
a full subsection to this topic in his explanation of purification through empow-
erment, 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 ritual officiants "should clear away the obstructive spirits includ-
ing those who eat flowers and so forth; by saying *oṃ vajra yakṣa hūṃ*, they are
dispelled."[449] Here he explains the risk that offerings will be consumed by malev-
olent spirits rather than reach the deities for whom they are intended, and he
offers a simple practice to prevent this. He then proceeds to outline the complex
practices that go along with making material offerings, which include visualiza-
tions, mantra recitations, and mudrās.

While the full range of practices are too elaborate to detail here, let us look
to a sample passage to get a basic sense of them. Early in the giving of offerings,
officiants recite 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,

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449. *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.

act for the benefit of beings!
*oṃ sarvatathāgata arghaṃ pratīcca pūja megha samudrā
spharaṇa samaye hūṃ*

Saying this, you present the offering water.[450]

Grags pa rgyal mtshan goes on to reproduce these lines of poetry six more times, substituting additional offerings and adjusting the mantra accordingly by embedding 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 are included 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 officiants address 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

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450. *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 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.

giving and returning, thus affirming communal solidarity.[451] Such logic appears again and again in *Light Rays* as officiants request the presence and aid of buddhas and bodhisattvas in securing the freedom of the dead.

Last, 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 officiants' exercise of agency in the ritual environment. As the ritualists offer each substance, they modify the verses to be recited in conformity with the object they are about to offer, and they do the same with the Sanskrit mantras. The materials thus influence the form of the practice and the behavior of the officiants, while at the same time serving as extensions of their agency in the ritual milieu, contributing to the achievement of their 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 that the officiants dig, 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 ritualists mix the ashes with the five products of a cow—urine, dung, milk, butter, and curd—together with scented water. They set the mixture in a vase. Next they strike it until it becomes a dough-like substance, and they mix 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 it into the middle of the lump, they shape 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 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 should appear, including

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

the reliquary blazing, the image smiling, the smell of incense, and the appearance of deities.[452]

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 such as 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 ritualists' fashioning of the lump into a small deity image or reliquary. We have seen cases where the officiants visualize 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 awakened awareness. This fascinating use of the dead's remains could be framed as bringing the principles of deity yoga into the material realm, 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;[453] the second suggests making a name card, performing recitations, conducting a burnt-offering rite, and bestowing empowerment to the card;[454] and the third requires

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452. *C*, 108–11; *D*, 473–76; *E*, n/a; *F*, 102–5.

453. *A*, 133; *B*, 185; *C*, 111; *D*, 476; *E*, n/a; *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 322.

454. *A*, 142; *B*, 196; *C*, 111–12; *D*, 476–77; *E*, n/a; *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 330.

empowering the name card, the image, the 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.[455] 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 element of choice shows yet again that while a number of objects may suffice for the performance of necroliberative rites, the fact remains that an object or person of some kind must be present in order for the ritual to be effective.

CONCLUSION

We began this chapter by considering a fundamental claim of the *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 careful readers/ritualists are beholden. While the manual dictates much of what the ritualists do, it also grants them greater autonomy in certain cases, as when it instructs them to rely on empirical experience in order to perform especially complex creative tasks. Following the manual's injunctions, the readers become primary agents in the performative milieu, but their identity also shifts as the funeral proceeds, and their 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 ritualists and 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.

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455. *A*, 169–70; *B*, 228; *C*, 112; *D*, 477; *E*, n/a; *F*, 105. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 354.

3. Death Ritual Polemics

S O F A R W E H A V E 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.[456] 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,

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456. 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 court-yard (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 titled *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.

we will explore the context[457] of this debate and the issues at stake, focusing on the disputes most relevant to questions of agency.

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS
Bo dong Paṇ chen: Dreams, Debates, and Innovations

In his biography of Bo dong Paṇ chen, 'Jigs med 'bangs[458] 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!"[459] 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 Dharma [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 bet-

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457. 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 rather persuasive efforts that reflect the world in which they were produced, which also work to frame their protagonists as flawless exemplars of realization.

458. 'Jigs med 'bangs's 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.

459. *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 zhabs 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 et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 78.

ter leave your retreat! And other practitioners should do the same!"[460] He was delighted that he had this chance and felt that his dream was coming true.[461]

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.[462] Yet he also seems to have held a deep interest in almost *all* topics of Buddhist learning: his collected works fill 137 volumes,[463] 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.[464]

Bo dong Paṇ chen was born into a family of scholar-translators from Zur tsho, a semi-nomadic area of Southern La stod.[465] His maternal uncle was the translator Lo chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1352–1405), who himself is said to have studied under his own maternal uncle, the translator Lo chen Byang chub rtse mo (1315–94). Byang chub rtse mo, moreover, was the nephew of the great translator

460. *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 et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 78.

461. Ibid.

462. 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*, and (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.

463. This collection was condensed to ninety-five volumes in the 2014 edition.

464. E. Gene Smith observes that this collection 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* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2001), 183.

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

Dpang[466] Lo tsā ba Blo gros brtan pa (1276–1342),[467] who studied Sanskrit in
Nepal and translated works including the *Kalāpa Sūtra*, a text on Sanskrit gram-
mar. Dpang Lo tsā ba also served as the abbot of Bo dong E for a time.[468] 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).[469] 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),[470] 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).[471]

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 chal-
lenge Bo dong Paṇ chen for doubting the coherence of Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Trea-
sury of Reasoning*[472] and its autocommentary,[473] but he quashes their objections.[474]
'Jigs med 'bangs also details an alleged rivalry between Bo dong Paṇ chen and
Go rams pa's teacher Rong ston Shes bya kun rig, framing Rong ston, a Sa skya
pa luminary, in decidedly unflattering terms. On one occasion, Rong ston and a

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466. Sometimes rendered Spang.

467. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 45–46.

468. Ibid., 21–22.

469. Stearns, *Luminous Lives*, 59–60.

470. Ibid., 103.

471. Ibid., 60–63.

472. Tib. *Tshad ma rigs gter*.

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

474. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 67–68.

retinue of disciples were invited to Ngam ring of Byang[475] by its famous ruler[476] Rnam rgyal grags pa bzang po, a patron of Bo dong Paṇ chen and an accomplished scholar in his own right.[477] 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!"[478] 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 Rnam rgyal grags bzang, and while Rong ston was permitted to stay in the area, he failed to obtain much status there.[479]

'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?"[480] The ruler sent someone to ask Bo 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,"[481] but Rong ston still became agitated and struck the ground, shouting, "Since

475. 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.

476. Tib. *sa spyod*.

477. Diemberger et al., *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.

478. *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 et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 69.

479. Ibid.

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

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

such a large number of maṇḍalas have not appeared in Tibet, what kind of traditions are these?!"[482]

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 Rong ston had simply misunderstood Candrakīrti's statement.[483] Bo dong Paṇ chen is also said to have embarrassed one of Rong ston's disciples Dge ba rgyal mtshan (1387–1462),[484] 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*.[485] 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.[486]

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's 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,"[487] 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).[488] 'Jigs med 'bangs's biography certainly sup-

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482. *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 et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 70.

483. Diemberger, *Feast of Miracles*, 71.

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

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

486. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 71–72.

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

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

ports 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 he was given the name Rong ston, the Lion of Speech.[489]

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 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.[490] 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'[491] 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.[492]

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489. *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.

490. 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.

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

492. *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*

Figure 8. Chos kyi sgron ma. After a mural in Snye mo bye mkhar Monastery, Central Tibet. Original photograph courtesy of Hildegard Diemberger. Used by permission.

As with 'Jigs med 'bangs's testimony, the subject under debate is Madhya-maka, 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 won-der 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 dis-putes. Hildegard Diemberger's fascinating study of Chos kyi sgron ma (1422–55)—a female adept whom Bo dong Paṇ chen recognized as an 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 also because her paternal grandmother was ordained as a nun at a Sa skya insti-

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bcom pa yin no zhes rje nyid gsung ngo /. Shākya mchog ldan, *Ngo mtshar dad pa'i rol mtsho,* 21b–22a.

tution.[493] 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.[494] She herself was fully ordained under Bo dong Paṇ chen, though questions remain about the doctrinal basis of this undertaking.[495] 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.[496] She stayed with him until he died, after which she—together with Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, the abbot of Glang 'khor Monastery, and a prominent disciple named Rgyal mtshan Dkon mchog—oversaw his last rites.[497] '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.[498] After the cremation, his remains were gathered and mixed with earth in order to make ten thousand small icons that were widely distributed, and a great reliquary was also constructed.[499] 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.

493. Diemberger, *Religious Dynasty*, 131.

494. Ibid., 109.

495. Ibid., 133.

496. Ibid., 196.

497. Diemberger et al., *Feast of Miracles*, 88.

498. Ibid.

499. Diemberger, *Religious Dynasty*, 197.

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,[500] 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.[501] 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!"[502] 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 rituals, he forgot what Mus chen had said. He nevertheless reported that Mus chen's text had been a good one.[503]

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

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500. 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 thirty-seven years old at the time. *X*, 469; *Y*, 549.

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

502. *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.

503. 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.

Figure 9. Mus chen teaching Go rams pa. After a painting in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art: *Lama (Teacher), Konchog Gyaltsen, Muchen Sempa Chenpo*. Tibet, 16th century. Ground mineral pigment on cotton. Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin. C2006.66.254 (HAR 368).

insights in *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*.[504] 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.'"[505] Here Glo

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504. 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 Objections 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 gyo 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.

505. *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 gyo ba las/ Glo bo Mkhan chen gyis mdzad pa'i rnam*

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 the logical indication and observable quality / of discovering the profound meaning shone brightly on a mountain's peak."[506]

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,[507] 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 Blessed Sarvavid*.[508] 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*.[509] Ra dbon concludes by adding that after overturning Bo dong Paṇ chen's mistaken views in this first work, Go rams pa proceeded to propagate authentic teachings

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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.

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

507. "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 gyo 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.

508. Ibid., 84.

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

on the *SDP*'s practices through the composition of his detailed commentary, *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*.[510] 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.[511]

Sa skya tradition holds Go rams pa to have been an emanation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan.[512] 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 Kun dga' bzang po, under whom he was fully ordained as a monk at age twenty-seven.[513] 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 represent Grags pa rgyal mtshan's intent.[514] Mus chen too was a student of

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510. 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 forty 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.

511. *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 (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 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*."

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

513. Cabezón and Dargyay, *Freedom from Extremes*, 34.

514. Ngor chen, *Gzhan phan mtha' yas*, 37; Ngor chen, *Dpal kun rig gi dkyil 'khor yongs rdzogs kyi*
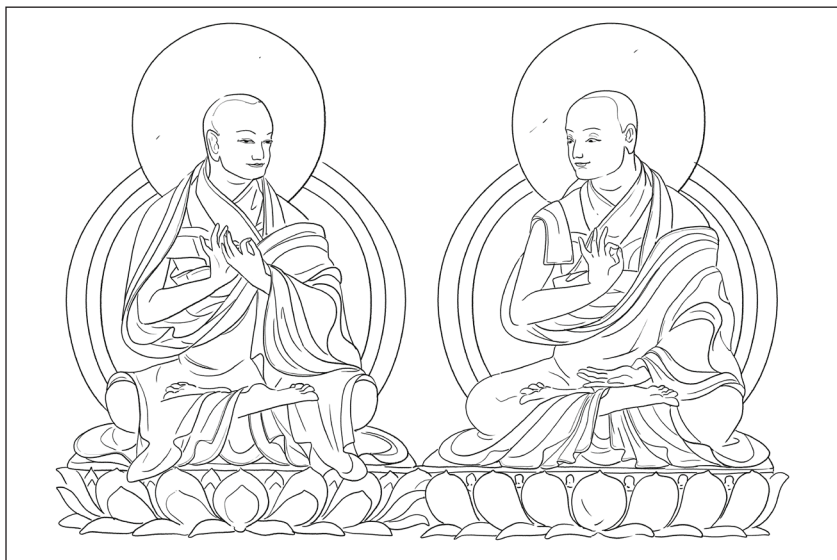
Figure 10. Mus chen teaching Go rams pa. After a painting in the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: *Sakya Lineage*. Central Tibet, 16th century. Opaque watercolor on cloth. Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection. Gift of Paul Mellon. 68.8.118.

Ngor chen, and Go rams pa studied with both of them while at Ngor E wam chos ldan Monastery.[515] Notably, Go rams pa acknowledges his indebtedness to these masters in his *Overcoming Harm for the Benefit of Others*[516] and *All-Pervasive Benefit for Others*,[517] which confirms their influence.

As a determined defender of Sa skya 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's and Bo dong Paṇ chen's circles likely spilled into Go rams pa's training. Yet *Over-*

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sgrub thabs sgrib pa rnam sel, in *Gsung 'bum: Kun dga' bzang po* (Sde dge), 4: 5–37 (Dehradun: Sakya Centre, 199?), 37.

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

516. *X*, 469; *Y*, 549.

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

coming 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*,[518] 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, 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.[519] Bo dong Paṇ chen's death in 1451 must have been a great loss for the fifty-five-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

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

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

court,[520] he established two new Sa skya 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 several years.[521] 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.[522] 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.[523]

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 discuss my definitive explanation of the nature of the rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana from the root *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*."[524] While the *SDP* is Bo dong

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

521. Ibid., 35.

522. Ibid., 36.

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

524. *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.

Paṇ chen's focus, he by no 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[525]—consists of a series of back-to-back quotations from the *SDP*, the *Vajra Peak Tantra*,[526] the *Tantra of the General Secret Rituals of All Maṇḍalas*,[527] Version B of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*,[528] the *Net of Illusions Tantra*,[529] the *Compendium of Principles*, and the *Compendium of Consecrations Tantra*[530] 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.[531] 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:

<div align="center">

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

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1. The preparations[532]
  1.1. The preliminary approach
    1.1.1. The attributes of the primary deity and his maṇḍala (*V*, 164; *W*, 143)

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525. 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.

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

527. 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.

528. 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.

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

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

531. *V*, 139–63; *W*, 120–42.

532. Tib. *sbyor ba*.

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

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

534. Tib. *sta gon*.

535. Tib. *dngos gzhi*.

536. 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.

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

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.

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," masters enter and receive empowerment without realizing the deity before them. After that, the deity is realized.
>
> This is not the case—it is pointless to have entered the sand maṇḍala without having realized the deity, and…[538]

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 acknowledgment 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

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538. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra,* 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.

even outwardly acknowledged and instead represent an interpretive annota-
tion aimed at drawing readers' attention to past misunderstandings in order
to avoid 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.

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

Go rams pa's rebuttal begins with an homage to his guru (who here is perhaps
Grags pa rgyal mtshan rather than Ngor chen or Mus chen, since Go rams
pa refers to Grags pa rgyal mtshan as "guru"[539] 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[540] 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.[541]
> Having unified the knowledge and compassion of the Three Jewels,
> he grasps well the victory banner[542] of the teachings in this degenerate age.
> The Second Victor, the lord Sa skya pa,
> provided a feast for fortunate students,[543]
> in which even subtle defilements that mistakenly appear

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539. Tib. *bla ma*.
540. Tib. *rje btsun*. This of course refers to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's full name in religion, Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan.
541. Tib. *grags pa*. This too is an allusion to Grags pa rgyal mtshan's name.
542. Tib. *rgyal mtshan*. Here again Go rams pa embeds a part of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's name into the verses.
543. This "feast," of course, is none other than *Light Rays*.

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 *Tantra*[544]
written by one reputed to be a scholar.

After clearing away everything amid the clouds of erroneous speech,
with the great wind of inexhaustible scripture and reasoning,[545]
which emerges from the sky of extensive investigation,
I will clarify the sun's light rays for the benefit of others.[546]

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

544. Tib. *rgyud don*. This is doubtless an allusion to the name of Bo dong Paṇ chen's ritual manual,
Clarifying the Meaning of the Tantra (*Rgyud don gsal ba*).

545. 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.

546. *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 song 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.*

and even identifies him as the Second Victor, that is, a fully awakened 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 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, received these teachings in the early part of his life[547] from the Indian scholar Buddhaśrīśānti, 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[548] 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.[549] 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*;[550] his *Outline*[551]

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547. Tib. *sku tshe'i stod la*.

548. Tib. *sku tshe'i smad la*.

549. *X*, 417–18; *Y*, 482–83.

550. Tib. *Gzhan phan spyi chings*. This is another name for his *General Overview of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (*Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi spyi don*).

551. This is his *Outline of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* (*Ngan song sbyong rgyud kyi sa bcad*).

of this tantra; his notes on this tantra;[552] *Light Rays for the Benefit of Others*, which concerns the stages of its practice; and his *Requisites for the Benefit of Others*.[553]

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.[554] 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*,[555] and the *Rational Definitive Treatment*.[556] These last two are combined in what is known today as the *Definitive Explanation of the Rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana*, the first third being the *Definitive Treatment of the Scriptures* and the latter two-thirds being his *Rational Definitive Treatment*.[557]

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)[558] and the stages of the rituals

552. This is Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Light Rays of the Requisites* (*Nye bar mkho ba'i 'od zer*).

553. *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.

554. *'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.*

555. Tib. *Lung gi rnam nges*.

556. Tib. *Rigs pa'i rnam nges*.

557. 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.

558. As with previous chapters, I here reference in parentheses the corresponding sections of *Light Rays* as outlined in Table 5 in the appendix.

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 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),[559] 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:

<div align="center">

TABLE 3: TOPICAL OUTLINE OF GO RAMS PA'S
OVERCOMING HARM FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS
</div>

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 ahead of the empowerment
    1.1. The preliminary approach (*X*, 419–31; *Y*, 484–99)
    1.2. The site ritual (*X*, 431–35; *Y*, 500–04)
    1.3. The preparatory rites (*X*, 435–38; *Y*, 504–90)
    1.4. Drawing the maṇḍala and placing the deities (*X*, 438–42; *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)

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559. 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.

Notice that the sections on placing the support for the purification of negative actions and the offerings and tormas 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,[561] 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 ritualists may perform these offerings either briefly or extensively (in Bo dong Paṇ chen's view, only an extensive torma offering is sufficient).[562] 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.[563] 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.[564]

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560. 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.

561. For Grags pa rgyal mtshan's discussion of this practice, see *C*, 22; *D*, 385–86; *E*, 14a; *F*, 20.

562. *V*, 210–11; *W*, 189–90.

563. *X*, 443; *Y*, 515.

564. 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 and Bo dong understandings of *SDP*-oriented funerary rites.

Disputing the Site Ritual

One subject to which considerable attention is devoted is the site ritual. In chapter 2, 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.[565] Meanwhile, in his article published shortly after Cantwell's, "The Sa 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*)."[566] The serpent to which Karma chags med refers is a kind of "autochthonous serpentine deity," to borrow Gard-

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565. Cathy Cantwell, "The Earth Ritual: Subjugation and Transformation of the Environment," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 7 (April 2005): 4.

566. Alexander Gardner, "The Sa chog: Violence and Veneration in a Tibetan Soil Ritual," *Études Mongoles et Sibériennes, Centrasiatiques et Tibétaines* 36–37 (2006): 2.

ner's phrasing, that oversees a location and must be subjugated when performing a ritual there.[567] In many iterations of this practice, we find officiants summoning the serpent from underground and forcing it to listen to their demands, which culminates in them 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."[568] In order to provide a starting point for understanding the practices that these sources describe, Gardner draws on four ritual manuals[569] and a modern ethnographic study[570] 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 on astrological calculations;[571] (3) drawing the serpent on the

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567. Ibid.

568. Ibid., 3.

569. 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 *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*.

570. Mary Van Dyke, "Grids and Serpents. A Tibetan Foundation Ritual in Switzerland," in *Constructing Tibetan Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. F. J. Korom (St.-Hyacinthe, Quebec: World Heritage Press, 1997), 178–227.

571. 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

grid and determining the location of its vital spot,[572] 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;[573] (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;[574] 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 readers to know how to perform the given step without further elaboration.[575]

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 readers to other sources for more detailed instructions. He writes:

> From the Sarvavid section of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*:
>
>> One should begin[576] to bless the site
>> by means of such a ritual,

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the life-force will be destroyed. Therefore it is important to be careful in this matter." Gardner, "The Sa chog," 13.

572. 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.

573. 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.

574. Ibid., 12.

575. Ibid., 3.

576. Preferring the *SDP*'s *brtsam* over *Light Rays'* *tsam*.

including a temple, a garden,
a reliquary, a shrine, and a shrine room[577] 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 tormas copiously at that location, and you should peacefully solicit the nonhuman 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 bhu khaṃ* and *oṃ hana hana krodha hūṃ phaṭ* many times, you should perform well the sweeping[578] to beautify the ground, which you do according to the size of the maṇḍala. This abbreviated site ritual reflects the speech of the guru.[579]

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577. Tib. *kun dga'*, which is short for *kun dga' ra ba*.

578. Reading *ga dar* as *gad dar*.

579. *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 bhu khaṃ/* [*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*] *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*, 500–01. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 311.

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 readers to two other works—the *Vajra Peak Tantra* and the *Secret General Tantra*[580]—that outline a more detailed version of this practice.[581] 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 nonhuman spirits who reside there. Once they emerge, the rite turns violent, with ritualists reciting wrathful mantras and pelting the obstructive entities with mustard seeds and accosting them with incense smoke, after which they subjugate the spirits with their hands. With the spirits overpowered, the ground becomes pure and is imagined as space, after which officiants conclude 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 chen argues that Vajrapāṇi must be white in this context).[582] 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

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580. As previously noted, the *Secret General Tantra* belongs to the kriyātantra class of Buddhist tantras.

581. 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.

582. *C*, 4; *D*, 367; *E*, 2a; *F*, 3; *V*, 171; *W*, 150; *X*, 419–20; *Y*, 484–85.

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 rec-
ommendation that one look to the *Secret General Tantra* and *Vajra Peak Tan-
tra* 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.[583]

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 *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 rit-
ual...," 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.[584] In Bo dong Paṇ chen's view, the *Secret General*

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583. *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 thams cad kyi spyi'i cho ga gsang ba'i rgyud*, in *Bka' 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 96:
509–82 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–09). Here cited as *Z*.

584. *V*, 168; *W*, 147; *X*, 432–33; *Y*, 501–02.

Tantra is in fact recommending a brief purification practice,[585] though he notes that the process of seizing the site[586] 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.[587] 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 highest yogatantra,[588] but this should not be included in a yogatantric ritual—"there is no valid reason at all for doing this here!"[589]

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.[590]

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585. Tib. *sa sbyang ba*.

586. Tib. *sa gzung ba*.

587. "...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.

588. Skt. *yoganiruttaratantra*; Tib. *rnal 'byor bla na med pa'i rgyud*.

589. *'dir byed pa'i tshad ma ci yang med pa'i phyir ro/. V*, 169; *W*, 147–48; *X*, 433; *Y*, 502.

590. "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*, 502–03. Cantwell mentions a similar convention in her article, citing

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,[591] 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 nonnecessity of an extensive site ritual when creating a sand maṇḍala cannot be established as a general rule. He explains:

> This is because the site ritual is not posited as extensive or brief on the basis of a detailed or simple maṇḍala, but it is posited as extensive or brief on the basis of the level of difficulty of making requests to the guardians of the directions[592] and elemental spirits[593] in the area. For example, it is 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.[594]

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.

591. "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.*

592. Tib. *phyogs skyong*.

593. Skt. *bhūta*; Tib. *'byung po*.

594. *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*

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 that person's 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 highest yogatantra practice but not yogatantra. Go rams pa acknowledges that these mantras are seen "in some branches of highest yogatantra 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.[595] 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 highest yogatantras, are unsuitable."[596] In other words, Go rams pa is willing to draw from higher streams of tantric Buddhist

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, 503–04.

595. *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.

596. '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.

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,"[597] 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 consuming. Instead of targeting the earth goddess or serpent specifically, Grags pa rgyal mtshan describes subjugating a more general class of entities—nonhuman 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.[598] Here he identifies four

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597. Gardner, "The Sa chog," 4.

598. 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.

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."[599] Bo dong Paṇ chen also mentions the serpent[600] when discussing the process of setting the deity in the maṇḍala, including it among other non-human entities such as gandharvas,[601] garuḍas,[602] yakṣas,[603] rākṣasas,[604] and elemental spirits.[605] 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.[606] It would seem, then, that while these particular beings are prominent in Cantwell's 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 highest yogatantra. He first accuses Grags pa rgyal mtshan of having no proof for his implicit acknowledgment 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 highest yogatantra 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. Rather, he appears to draw on convention

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599. *sa'i lha mo sta gon ni rnal 'byor gyi rgyud gang nas kyang ma bshad. V*, 184; *W*, 163.

600. Bo dong Paṇ chen uses the term "great serpentine earth lord" (Tib. *lto 'phye chen po sa bdag*).

601. Tib. *dri za*.

602. Tib. *nam mkha' lding*.

603. Tib. *gnod sbyin*.

604. Tib. *srin po*.

605. *V*, 190; *W*, 169.

606. Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (Sde dge), 281, 310; Go rams pa, *Gzhan phan kun khyab* (modern edition), 321, 354.

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 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 highest yogatantra, 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 2. We have already discussed the agentive relationships that emerge between the ritualists 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 officiants first give tormas at the location to be used for the funerary rituals, after which they peacefully solicit the nonhuman spirits who reside there. Once the malevolent spirits are before them, the officiants recite violent mantras and pelt these spirits with mustard seeds and incense smoke, forcefully soliciting submission to their demands. They then subjugate them with their hands, and gaining victory, imagine 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 a rite's progress and the fate of the human actors involved. Further, when Go rams pa glosses Grags pa rgyal mtshan's term "nonhuman 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 officiants must

contend. The guardians of the directions are typically petitioned to assist the offici-
ants in keeping negative spirits at bay,[607] whereas the elemental spirits are nefarious
and thus the ritualists' primary opponents. Just as the deities constitute a network
of unseen actors who can assist in saving the dead, these spirits constitute a net-
work 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, inten-
tional 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 offer-
ings and mantras, which, as we have already argued, serve as secondary agents that
extend the ritualists' 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,[608] 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 reliquary, or a deity image. At issue in this
section is how ritualists work 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.'"[609]
In response, Grags pa rgyal mtshan once again evokes the authority of Rin chen

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607. As noted, the earth goddess is typically included among the directional guardians. Cantwell
    notes that once officiants ritually solicit the earth goddess for assistance, that goddess 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 prac-
    tice." Cantwell, "The Earth Ritual," 9. For further discussion of this class of beings, see Bentor,
    Consecration of Images and Stūpas, 207.

608. Tib. *rten*.

609. *'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.

Figure 11. Go rams pa. After a painting in the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Art: *Gorampa Sonam Sengge, Sixth Abbot of Ngor.* Central Tibet, ca. 1600. Opaque watercolor on cloth. Berthe and John Ford Collection, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund. 91.514.

bzang po, who asserts that both the visualization of the ritual support and the introduction of students into the maṇḍala are required.[610] 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 4—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 empti-
> ness the support such as the name card and so forth with the mantra

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610. "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.

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.[611]

Here Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes that whatever object the officiants choose
to use as the support, they should recite the mantra *oṃ śa śūnyatā jñānavajra
svabhāva śuddho 'haṃ* in order to purify it and recognize its empty nature. Next,
they should visualize the deceased on the basis of either the first letter of their
name or the letter *nrī*, or if the dead had engaged in a specific deity practice while
they were alive, ritualists 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.[612] Bo dong Paṇ chen begins by explaining
that the officiants either should draw an image of the deceased on paper or write
their name with saffron and set it on their garments. Placing all this in front of
the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana, the officiants should then bestow empower-
ment on the deceased. Bo dong Paṇ chen touches on the threat of spirits inter-
fering 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

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611. *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 svabh-
hava 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.

612. See section 2.8 in the outline of Bo dong Paṇ chen's *Definitive Explanation* above (Table 2).

form issuing either from the first letter of the name of the deceased adorned with *bindu*s, 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*.[613]

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 ritualists should visualize the deceased the way they appeared while alive, and they should imagine the deceased 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

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613. *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 throughout 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.

the dead 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 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![614]

In this passage 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.

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614. *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.*

And in the Śākyamuni section:

> As for gods, nāgas, yakṣas, rākṣasas, 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.[615]

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![616]

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.

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615. *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 bar 'gyur ro [A, B=byed do] zhes gsungs pas shes so/. A, 122, 142; B, 171–72, 196; X, 461; Y, 538.*

616. *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.*

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!"[617]

<p style="text-align:center">ᴀɴᴀʟʏꜱɪꜱ</p>

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 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.[618] 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*."[619] 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

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617. *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.

618. 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.

619. *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.*

Paṇ chen and Go rams pa cite.[620] 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.

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."[621] 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,"[622] 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 2 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

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620. *G*, 135–36; *H*, 499; *I*, 127.

621. Tib. *bzhad gad kyi gnas*.

622. Tib. *'khrul gzhi*.

Figure 12. Bo dong Paṇ chen. After a statue originally in Spo rong dpal mo chos sdings Monastery in southwestern Tibet; it is now in Spo rong dpal mo chos sdings Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal. Used by permission.

are brief but clear: start with a material object, visualize it as pure emptiness using a mantra, and then, in 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 officiants' visualizations and use of mantras that make the object efficacious in a rit-

ual 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."[623]

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 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 masters should imagine that the deceased is reborn in Sukhāvatī, and they 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 masters themselves. Having come to this place miraculously, the deceased makes offerings to the vajra masters and to the maṇḍala, and the vajra masters 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!" They should imagine the deceased saying this and making offerings to

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623. Gentry, *Power Objects*, 294.

them. They too again make offerings to Amitābha, and they should imagine again the deceased having gone to Sukhāvatī.[624]

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 them. 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 masters themselves, the deceased makes offerings to the vajra masters and to the deity of the maṇḍala, and having expressed delight, the vajra masters make offerings again to Amitābha, and they should imagine the deceased as having gone to Sukhāvatī.[625]

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,[626] 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

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624. *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.

625. *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, 203–04; X, 461–62; Y, 539.

626. Skt. *ūrṇā*; Tib. *mdzod spu.*

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 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 masters, and the substitute of Vimalamaṇiprabha is the deceased, the vajra masters and the deceased who is represented by them 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 masters and the deity of the maṇḍala.[627]

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627. *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.

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[628] corresponds to the Buddha, the ritualists correspond to the chief god Śakra, and the deceased corresponds to Vimalamaṇiprabha. Based on these connections, Bo dong Paṇ chen reasons that the ritualists 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 officiants and the deity of the maṇḍala who are responsible.

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.[629] 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 masters and their retinue, should be imagined as having gone to Sukhāvatī.[630]

Bo dong Paṇ chen again references the scene in the *SDP* in which

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628. Amitābha is the Buddha who oversees the pure land Sukhāvatī, which is the ideal realm in which one can take rebirth.

629. *V*, 224–25; *W*, 204; *X*, 462–63; *Y*, 540.

630. *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*, 204–05; *X*, 463; *Y*, 540.

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 ritualists and their disciples, and that the officiants 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 the *Nine Uṣṇīṣas*, which here seems to denote teachings found in Ānandagarbha's aforementioned *Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, a work translated by the Indian scholar Buddhaśrīśānti and Rin chen bzang po.[631] He then argues that Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not explicitly indicate in *Light Rays* that the story of the mirac-

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631. We already have noted Weinberger's observation that the abbreviated title the *Nine Uṣṇīṣas* (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 Uṣṇīṣas* that appears only in Rin chen bzang po's translation of Ānandagarbha's *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 Uṣṇīṣas* 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 *Nine Uṣṇīṣas* to refer to Version B of the *SDP* is found in his *Definitive Explanation*. He 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.

ulous rescue of Vimalamaṇiprabha should be applied to the funerary process, and thus "there is no basis for engaging in these disputes and investigations!"[632] 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 masters, 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 masters.[633]

Here Go rams pa argues that we cannot expect funerary rites to unfold as they do in the story of Vimalamaṇiprabha, because if in such practices Amitābha corresponds to the Buddha, the vajra masters correspond 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 simultaneously need to make offerings to both Amitābha and the vajra masters, which is outside of the ritualists' 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

632. *brgal zhing brtag pa de dag 'jug pa'i gzhi med pa'i phyir dang /. X, 463; Y, 541.*

633. *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.*

should precisely match the sequence of events that unfolds as the officiants save 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 *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 misunderstands 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 ritualists, 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 officiants 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 officiants 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 ritualists and the deity should be placed on the same agentive footing as material objects, then we would run into some trouble. But the remarks of Grags pa rgyal mtshan, Bo dong Paṇ chen, and Go rams pa actually help to justify our emphasis on the ritualists and the deities, while at the same time leaving room to acknowledge the many other elements of these rites that play a 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 writ-

ings. 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* fit 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 after 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 not only did Go rams pa believe strongly in Grags pa rgyal mtshan's superiority as an interpreter of the *SDP*, but also he sought 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 2, 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 ritualists' 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.

4. What the Dead Can Do

IN CHAPTERS 2 AND 3 we examined the primary and secondary agents at work in *Light Rays* and related texts. We explored how the ritual manual, the ritualists, 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*. Last, we will focus on A mes zhabs's *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.[634] 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.[635]

In the hands of tantric Buddhist writers, however, more elaborate bardo theories emerged.[636] 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[637] central to highest yogatantra.[638] 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 techniques that manipulate the winds and seminal fluids in the channels of the subtle body to produce nonconceptual states of awakened awareness.[639] Such states are commonly linked to the experience of dying,[640] 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

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634. Robert Kritzer, "Antarābhava in the Vibhāṣā," *Maranatha: Bulletin of the Christian Culture Research Institute* (Notre Dame Women's College) 3, no. 5 (1997): 90.

635. Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 41.

636. Ibid., 44.

637. 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.

638. 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 highest yogatantra.

639. 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 (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2002).

640. Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 45.

bardo states—the bardo spanning birth to death,[641] the bardo of dreaming,[642] and the bardo of becoming[643]—all of which he cast as opportunities for yogic practice.[644] By contrast, Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen (1079–1153) and his disciple Phag mo gru pa Rdo rje rgyal po 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.[645] Other formulations of the bardo concept also emerged during this period, but Nāropā's was the most influential.[646]

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*,[647] 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.[648]

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641. Tib. *skye shi bar do/skye 'chi bar do*.

642. Tib. *rmi lam bar do*.

643. Tib. *srid pa bar do*. The bardo of becoming refers to the interval between lifetimes during which one proceeds toward a new rebirth.

644. Cuevas, *The Hidden History*, 49.

645. Ibid., 50.

646. Ibid., 47.

647. Skt. *Karṇatantravajrapada*; Tib. *Snyan rgyud rdo rje tshig rkang*.

648. I here largely follow Cuevas's 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*

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 awakened 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, 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 from the Perilous Paths of the Bardo*[649] 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[650] 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:

'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*, Toh 2338, 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: 1822–28 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008), 1825.

649. 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 Sakya 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* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2006), 523. Stearns notes that the "lord of Sakya" 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.

650. Tib. *ting nge 'dzin bsam gtan gyi bar do*.

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 *rig pa* 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![651]

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 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 ingrained deeply into later works such as *Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*, better known in the West as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Revealed[652] by the fourteenth-century master Karma

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651. *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.

652. 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.

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,[653] 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,
> > 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![654]

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653. Tib. *rigs kyi bu*.

654. Here I largely follow Gyurme Dorje's excellent translation. See Karma Lingpa, *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*

As with many other passages in Karma gling pa's *Liberation through 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!" and "Think of the Three Precious Jewels!"—designed to compel the dead to operate in self-salvific ways. The 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.[655] While this comes in a variety of forms classified according to different deities, lineages, and the types of realization that can result,[656] 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.[657] Meanwhile, if it exits through the

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.

655. Skt. *utkrānti*; Tib. *'pho ba*. This is one of the six yogas ostensibly taught by Nāropā. Early descriptions of this practice appear in the Jñānapāda school of Guhyasamāja commentary initiated by Buddhajñānapāda (ca. 750–820). Catherine Dalton notes that Buddhajñānapāda's *Dvitīyakrama* features one of the earliest discussions of yogic transference of consciousness in a Buddhist text. See Catherine Dalton, "Enacting Perfection: Buddhajñānapāda's Vision of a Tantric Buddhist World" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2019), 242.

656. Ibid., 151.

657. Karma Lingpa, *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*

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.[658] 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 therefore characterized as a means to "buddhahood without meditation,"[659] since years of meditation and yogic rigor are not required for its success.[660]

Transference rituals are also regularly performed on behalf of the dying and those who have passed.[661] 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, officiants should bestow 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).[662] 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

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kha bar do gdams ngag, in *Zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi chos skor*, 2: 379–400 (Delhi: Sherab Lama, 1976), 398.

658. Karma Lingpa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 214; Karma gling pa, *'Pho ba dran pa rang grol*, 398.

659. Tib. *ma sgom sangs rgyas*.

660. Georgios T. Halkias, *Luminous Bliss: A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 150.

661. Ibid.

662. Karma Lingpa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 215; Karma gling pa, *'Pho ba dran pa rang grol*, 399.

toward 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!"[663]

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, 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 through 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 through Hearing in the Bardo*, we find a fascinating set of instructions on what officiants 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

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663. Here I largely follow Gyurme Dorje's translation. See Karma Lingpa, *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.

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.[664]

Here *Liberation through 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 they 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

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664. I here follow Gyurme Dorje's translation for the most part, but I 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 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 Lingpa, *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.

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 through 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

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![665]

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.[666] Yet here the *SDP* is ambiguous in that it does not specify when

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665. *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 saptadivāsā abhūvan / bhagavan sa kutropapannaḥ sukhaṃ duḥkhaṃ vānubhavati/ idaṃ bhagavan vyākuru sugata vyākuru/.* Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra,* 122–24.

666. 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

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 prophesies 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[667] and suffer from various impairments for sixty thousand years, following which he will endure eighty-four thousand years of plague, leprosy, boils, and bleeding.[668] The Buddha adds that "there are no breaks in the succession from one suffering to another"[669] and that Vimalamaṇiprabha "does harm to others and produces various karmic obscurations uninterruptedly,"[670] but while it is tempting to interpret these statements as signaling that there is no intermediate state between rebirths, here again the *SDP* 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

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days." Kritzer, "Antarābhava in the Vibhāṣā," 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, seven days, or forty-nine days. See Louis de La Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, trans. Leo Pruden (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), 393–94.

667. Skt. *pratyantajana*; Tib. *mtha' 'khob kyi mi*.

668. *A*, 119; *B*, 168. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 307. For a full translation of the corresponding passage in Version B, see Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 5.

669. *sdug bsngal ba dang / sdug bsngal brgyud pa dang /*. *A*, 119; *B*, 168. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 307. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B is clearer: *duḥkhaduḥkhaparamparām na vicchedayati*. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 124.

670. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 307. Skorupski's Sanskrit of Version B reads: *nānākarmāvaraṇāni cāvicchedena karoti/*. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 124.

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 this section, 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 he bows before the Buddha, praising him and proclaiming the following:

> E ma! The awakened activities
> of the Śākya Protector are so marvelous!
> Because of these, beings who have fallen into bad rebirths,
> are liberated as quick as lightning![671]

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.[672] 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

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671. *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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 324.

672. *A*, 136–37; *B*, 189. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 325.

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.[673]

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 awakening"[674] 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 awakening directly."[675] The active verbal form *kurvanti* used in the Sanskrit of Ver-

673. *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.

674. *phyir mi ldog pa'i sa la gnas/ /rim gyis byang chub thob par 'gyur/.* See Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 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 *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Sde dge, 131; Dpe bsdur ma, 152) and Ānandagarbha's *Snang ba'i rgyan* (Sde dge, 499; Dpe bsdur ma, 614). They also appear in certain Tibetan works on the *SDP*, including Tsong kha pa's *Ngan song sbyong rgyud mchan dang bcas pa* (342) and 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Kun rig rnam bshad* (303).

675. *avaivartikabhūmipratiṣṭhitāś ca krameṇa bodhiṃ sākṣāt kurvanti/.* Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 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*

sion 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

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 Āryasarvadurgati-pariśodhanatejorāja*, 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,'[676] the statement 'seven days have passed since then'[677] refers to seven days in Jambudvipa only, that is, conventions that this region has established."[678] 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

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song sbyong rgyud (Version B) (Dpe bsdur ma), 360. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 243.

676. *A*, 119–20; *B*, 167–69. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 307.

677. *A*, 119; *B*, 167–68. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 307.

678. *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.

opening and closing lines of the section and then notes that the narrative is "easy to understand,"[679] 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 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?"[680] The king here is none other than Vimalamaṇiprabha in a past life, and the transgression of immediate retribution[681] 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 he dies soon after.[682] Explaining how the king comes to be 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."[683] 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

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679. *tshig gi don ni go sla'o.* Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Sde dge), 506; Kāmadhenu, *Rgya cher 'grel pa* (Dpe bsdur ma), 1522.

680. *'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.

681. Tib. *mtshams med pa.*

682. *A*, 145–48; *B*, 199–202. Cf. Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 332–35. For an English summary of the story, see Skorupski, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 42–43.

683. *'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.

death and rebirth during which any variety of rebirths are possible.[684] 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!"[685] Kāmadhenu strongly opposes the possibility that Vimalamaṇiprabha resides in an intermediate state during the weeklong 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 Detailed Account of the Previous Aspirations of the Seven Tathāgatas*. How could it be understood that the god Vimalamaṇiprabha had an untimely death?"[686] 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 *Detailed Account of the Previous Aspirations of the Seven Tathāgatas*,[687] a canonical tantric Buddhist work surviving in Tibetan[688] and Chinese translation[689] that lists nine distinct kinds of untimely death.[690] These are: (1) dying due to a lack of proper

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684. Tib. *srid pa'i bar do/srid pa bar do*.

685. *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.

686. *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.

687. Skt. *Āryasaptatathāgatapūrvapraṇidhānaviśeṣavistara*.

688. 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*.

689. *Yao shi liu li guang qi fo ben yuan gong de jing* 藥師琉璃光七佛本願巧德經, in *Taishō Tripiṭaka*, eds. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe, vol. 14, no. 451. For an English translation of this version, see Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1979), 173–217.

690. There is no known Sanskrit manuscript of this text, but a large portion of it is almost identical to the *Detailed Account of the Previous Aspirations of the Blessed Bhaiṣajyaguruvaiḍūryaprabha*, which is available in three Sanskrit editions based on the Sanskrit manuscripts excavated in Gilgit in the early twentieth century. For a complete translation of this shorter work, see *The Detailed Account of the Previous Aspirations of the Blessed Bhaiṣajyaguruvaiḍūryaprabha* (*Bhagavānbhaiṣajyaguruvaiḍūryaprabhasyapūrvapraṇidhānaviśeṣavistāra*, Toh 504), trans. Dharmachakra Translation Committee (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2021). For a translation of the *Detailed Account of the Previous Aspirations of the Seven Tathāgatas*, see *The Detailed Account of the Previous Aspirations of the Seven Thus-Gone Ones*

medical treatment; (2) dying because of legal punishment; (3) dying due to care-lessness that leads to abduction at the hands of nonhuman spirits; (4) dying in a fire; (5) drowning; (6) falling victim to lions, tigers, foxes, snakes, or other preda-tory animals; (7) falling from a mountain; (8) dying from poison, sorcery, or con-tact with zombies;[691] and (9) dying from hunger or thirst.[692] 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 dif-ferently, or he interpreted certain lines as alluding to the bardo of becoming with-out 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"[693]—and adds that if anyone wonders why the different hellish lifetimes that the Buddha prophesied for him did not come to pass, the answer is, "they were conquered by the power of secret mantra."[694]

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 Vimalamaṇi-prabha. In his view, the bardo of becoming is limited to cases where one dies before their time, and in this instance, Vimalamaṇiprabha went straight from heaven to hell without interval. In this way, he follows the *SDP* in attributing the primary agentive power to the Buddha and his tantric practices, leaving lit-tle room for agency on the part of the departed.

(*Saptatathāgatapūrvapraṇidhānaviśeṣavistara*, Toh 503), trans. Dharmachakra Translation Committee (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2021).

691. Skt. *vetāla*; Tib. *ro langs*.

692. 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*, Toh 503, 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, 2006–09), 791–92.

693. *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.

694. *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.

We also find reference to the bardo of becoming in Vajravarman'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.[695] 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."[696] After someone dies, ritualists should wait seven days before proceeding with the cremation. Then, when the second week has passed, they should ritually liberate[697] the departed from hell; after the third week, they should liberate them from the realm of the pretas or "hungry ghosts"; after the fourth week, they should liberate them from the animal realm; after the fifth week, they should liberate them from the realm of the demigods; after the sixth week, they should liberate them from the human realm; and after the seventh week, they should liberate them from the god realm.[698] At this point, the foundational consciousness[699] of the being in the bardo of becoming is "penetrated by the cause of turning away from cyclic existence,"[700] and officiants perform a series of visualization practices and mantra recitations to facilitate their release. In contrast with Kāmadhenu's commentary, here we see a more familiar take on the bardo of becoming; it is not explicitly limited to cases of untimely death, and the officiants are 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 ritualists 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 *Crematory Burnt-Offering Ritual of the Glorious Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, though

695. As noted in chapter 1, while the Snar 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.

696. Tib. *srid pa bar ma do'i cho ga.*

697. Tib. *bsgral ba.*

698. Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Sde dge), 146–47; Vajravarman, *Mdzes pa'i rgyan* (Dpe bsdur ma), 170.

699. Skt. *ālayavijñāna*; Tib. *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa.*

700. *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.

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,"[701] 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 Uṣṇīṣas in the middle of a deep corpse pit possessing the child of the lineage.[702] 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.[703]

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 Uṣṇīṣas and the extraction of 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,"[704] and the officiants further assist the dead with a series of visualization practices and reci-

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701. *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.

702. 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.

703. *'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.

704. *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.

tations. 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*[705] 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 officiants 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 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 officiants purge the ritual space of obstructive spirits after having visualized the support and summoned the deceased's consciousness, then that too is effective.[706]

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

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705. 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.

706. C, 62–63; D, 426; E, 41b; F, 58.

the obstructive spirits and taken away. That is not the case, because obstructive spirits do not know where the consciousness resides.[707]

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.[708] Notice the term *mind*[709] is used rather than *consciousness*,[710] 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 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."[711] In other words, they have the power to animate the corpse and use it to harm those in its vicinity, and they must be purged for the sake of the living.

The second type of spirit has two subtypes: coemergent ghosts[712] and coemergent gods.[713] Interestingly, Grags pa rgyal mtshan describes the ghosts as power-

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707. *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.

708. Tib. *dri za'i 'chi ka ma'i yid la nye bar rgyug pa.* The type of gandharva mentioned here also appears in the canonical *Sūtra of Questions Regarding Death and Transmigration* (Skt. *Āyuṣp attiyathākārapariprcchāsūtra*; 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 his 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 *The Sūtra of Questions Regarding Death and Transmigration* (*Āyuṣpattiyathākārapariprcchāsūtra*, Toh 308), trans. Tom Tillemans (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2021).

709. Tib. *yid.*

710. Tib. *rnam par shes pa/rnam shes.*

711. *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.

712. Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa'i 'dre.*

713. Tib. *lhan cig skyes pa'i lha.*

ful and the gods as weak, noting that the ghosts are in fact "extremely harmful,"[714] 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 coemergent gods as well[715]—they too should be ritually destroyed.[716]

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.[717] In order to prevent this, the officiants should 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.[718]

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

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714. Tib. *shin tu 'tshe*.

715. "The ghosts should be destroyed for the sake of benefitting the living and the coemergent 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.

716. *C*, 63; *D*, 427; *E*, 41b–42a; *F*, 58–59.

717. "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.

718. */[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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 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, *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, 224.

pa rgyal mtshan's discussion frames bardo beings as vulnerable and in need of rescue. Works like *Liberation through 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 ritualists and the deities they invoke, which in this last case is the wrathful Trailokyavijaya.

How should the officiants 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 tormas three times. In the case of the coemergent ghosts and coemergent gods, the officiants perform a mixture of peaceful and fierce practices, giving each spirit barley flour dough squeezed between the fingers[719] and small butter lamps[720] and reciting 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.[721]

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 officiants should first form the mudrā of Trailokyavijaya and imagine light radiating outward from the syllable *hūṃ* located at their own heart center and from either the syllable *nrī* or *hūṃ* at the heart center of the deceased. They then should imagine summoning the deceased's consciousness and "should state the truth,"[722] 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

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719. Tib. *chang bu.*

720. Tib. *ting lo'i mar me.*

721. *C*, 63–64; *D*, 427; *E*, 42a; *F*, 59.

722. *bden pa brjod par bya ste/. C*, 64; *D*, 428; *E*, 42b; *F*, 60.

> 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![723]

Drawing on the power of the Buddha, his teachings, the Buddhist community,
wrathful male and female deities, and Sarvavid Vairocana, the officiants draw the
dead into the ritual environment. They call out to them wherever they may be
in the desire realm,[724] form realm,[725] or formless realm,[726] even if they are experi-
encing one of the four modes of birth,[727] namely, birth from an egg,[728] birth from
a womb,[729] birth from heat and moisture,[730] or a miraculous birth.[731] Grags pa
rgyal mtshan explains that the ritualists 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 sum-
moned 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."[732] Having just mentioned the three realms and four modes of rebirth,

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723. *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.*

724. Skt. *kāmadhātu*; Tib. *'dod pa'i khams.*

725. Skt. *rūpadhātu*; Tib. *gzugs khams.*

726. Skt. *ārūpyadhātu*; Tib. *gzugs med khams.*

727. Skt. *caturyoni*; Tib. *skye gnas rnam pa bzhi/skye gnas bzhi.*

728. Skt. *aṇḍaja*; Tib. *sgong skyes.*

729. Skt. *jalābuja*; Tib. *mngal skyes.*

730. Skt. *saṃsvedaja*; Tib. *drod gsher skyes.*

731. Skt. *upapāduka*; Tib. *rdzus skyes.* The fourfold model of birth can be traced to Vasubandhu's
Abhidharmakośabhāṣya. For a synopsis of Vasubandhu's discussion, see Frances Garrett, *Reli-
gion, Medicine, and the Human Embryo in Tibet* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 27. For Vasu-
bandhu's discussion in translation, see La Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, trans. Leo
Pruden, 380–81.

732. [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

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 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![733]

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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.

733. *de nas rnam shes dgug par bya ste/ sangs rgyas kyi bden pa dang / chos kyi bden pa dang / dge 'dun*

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 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 officiants 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 officiants dispel 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 achievement of awakening. 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 awakened 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,[734] Grags pa rgyal mtshan gives instructions on what officiants should say to their disciples, quoting an unnamed work attributed to the Brahmin Kṛṣṇapāda.[735] The quoted passages concern the classic Mahāyāna schema of the five paths,[736] which begin with

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.

734. Skt. *gaṇacakra*; Tib. *tshogs kyi 'khor lo*.

735. 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: 662–87 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008), 685.

736. Skt. *pañcamārga*; Tib. *lam lnga*. The five paths are (1) the path of accumulation (Skt.

initial engagement with Buddhist practices up to complete awakening. Teaching the clearing of the path, ritualists say 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![737]

Then showing the path, the officiants say:

> 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.[738]

In these passages, we find explicit acknowledgment of the possibility of

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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 Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), s.v. "pañcamārga."

737. *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.*

738. *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.*

becoming awakened 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 yogatantric practices of transformation. However, it is important to recognize that these instructions are directed at ritualists' 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 to remember also that this work is grounded primarily in the highest yogatantric 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.[739] 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*.[740] 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 mentions the bardo while discussing the summoning

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739. Tsong kha pa, *Ngan song sbyong rgyud mchan dang bcas pa* (Sde dge), 298.

740. Ibid., 353.

rite,[741] the threat of obstructive spirits,[742] and potential durations of the intermediate state between lifetimes,[743] but like Tsong kha pa, he 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[744] 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,"[745] while in the concluding verses he writes that he has followed the "excellent speech of the Rje btsun who in reality is Vajradhara."[746] 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 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'S 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[747] and father[748]

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741. 'Dul 'dzin Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Kun rig rnam bshad*, 305.

742. Ibid., 317.

743. Ibid., 335–37.

744. See Ngor chen, *Gzhan phan mtha' yas*, 96.

745. *khyad par rje btsun mchog gi dgongs pa ltar/*. Ibid., 37.

746. *rdo rje 'chang dngos rje btsun gsung rab ltar/*. Ibid., 109.

747. 'Jam dbyangs Bsod nams dbang po (1559–1621).

748. Sngags 'chang Grags pa blo gros (1563–1617).

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 seven hundred works during his lifetime, the majority of his texts were never printed and did not circulate widely.[749] His interests lay primarily in tantra and history and in the editing and preservation of the Sa skya tradition's rich literary heritage.[750] 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.[751]

While it is true that many of A mes zhabs's works preserve Sa skya tradition rather than advance it, his capacity for creativity should not be overlooked. In his *Dispelling All Obscurations: Explaining the Bardo Teachings*,[752] 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 it is an example of how A mes zhabs did, in fact, have something new to add.

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749. 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.

750. Ibid., 10.

751. Ibid.

752. 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).

Figure 13. A mes zhabs Ngag dbang kun dga'
bsod nams. After a painting in the collection
of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: *Ngawang
Kunga Sonam Jamgon Ameshab Surrounded by
His Previous Incarnations*. Central Tibet, late
17th–early 18th century. Opaque watercolor on
cloth, silk mounts. Berthe and John Ford Col-
lection. Gift of the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Car-
penter Foundation. 91.513.

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 acknowl-
edges 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 (1542–1618). This refer-
ence 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"[753] at Sa skya's Bzhi thog residence[754] on the first completion day[755] of the waning phase of the second month[756] 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."[757] Ngag dbang bsod nams dbang phyug (1638–1685) is none other than A mes zhabs's 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"[758]—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:

753. Tib. *tshoms dmar*.

754. 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.

755. 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.

756. The term *dbo bzla ba* here denotes the second month of the Tibetan lunar calendar.

757. *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.

758. *'dir kun rig gi cho ga dang 'brel bar bar do chos bshad ji lta ba'i tshul ni/.* Ibid., 626.

TABLE 4: TOPICAL OUTLINE OF NGOR CHEN'S
LIMITLESS BENEFIT FOR OTHERS

1. Preliminaries (38)[759]
2. The main practice (38)
    2.1. The rituals of the officiants (38)
        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 vajra disciples (91)
            2.2.1.2.2. The empowerment of ritual experts (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

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759. Pagination reflects the Sde dge block print of Ngor chen's text cited previously.
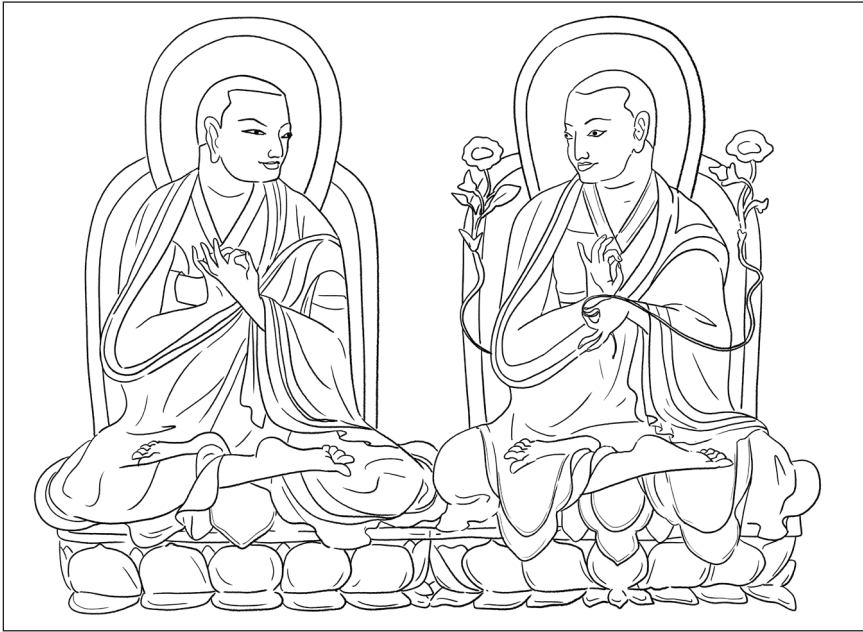
Figure 14. Ngor chen teaching Mus chen. After a painting in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art: *Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo (1382–1456) and Muchen Sempa Chenpo Konchog Gyaltsen.* Central Tibet, late 15th century. Ground mineral pigment on cloth. Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin. C2006.66.153 (HAR 128).

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"[760] 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), which A mes zhabs refers to as the rituals of the "southern gate" of the maṇḍala, a term used for rites for the deceased.[761] In particular, officiants should integrate A mes zhabs's instructions before completing the purification of the avarice of the departed.[762] At this point in the ritual performance, they should say: "Oh! You the deceased known by this name, having passed from this world to the next world, listen up

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760. Tib. *lhan thabs*. A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 652.

761. Sobisch, *Life, Transmissions, and Works*, 527.

762. A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 626.

with an undistracted mind with faith and respect!"[763] As we have seen in works like *Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*, ritualists are 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.[764]

First the officiants should inform the dead that they are in the intermediate state and then relay what exactly this entails. Following Nāropā, A mes zhabs

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763. *'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.

764. *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.

identifies three discrete bardos: the bardo of dreaming,[765] the bardo spanning birth to death,[766] and the bardo of becoming.[767] He says little about the bardo of dreaming, since it is largely irrelevant in this context, but he divides the second into two subcategories: the birth phase of becoming[768] and the death phase of becoming.[769] 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.[770]

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

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765. Tib. *rmi lam bar do*.

766. Tib. *skye 'chi bar do*.

767. Tib. *srid pa bar do*.

768. Tib. *skye srid*.

769. Tib. *'chi srid*.

770. Karma Lingpa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 478.

the child luminosity, and the union of the mother luminosity and child luminosity produces awakening.

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 ritualists and the deities, A mes zhabs places greater emphasis on the responsibility of the dead, recognizing them as being 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 awakening, unobstructed descent into hell, movement toward awakening, and being a deity in the four formless absorptions."[771] He glosses each of these in turn: unobstructed ascent to awakening results from "being skilled in recognizing the luminosity";[772] 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."[773] These cases are exceptional, however, and generally the dead proceed to the bardo of becoming, a topic to which we will turn next.

The Thirteen Qualities of a Bardo Being

A mes zhabs's strategy for guiding those who are traveling between lifetimes is a kind of liberation through education: officiants 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

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771. *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.

772. *'od gsal 'byongs pa*. Ibid.

773. *ting nge 'dzin gyi lus yin pas skye gnas len pa'i mtshams sbyor mi dgos pas so/.* Ibid., 628.

products of mistaken awareness. A mes zhabs acknowledges that certain śrāvaka 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.[774] 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's highly scholastic approach to the bardo teachings sets his work apart from texts like *Liberation through 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.

Concerning the first characteristic of a bardo being, A mes zhabs cites the terms found in Vasubandhu's work: "mind-arisen,"[775] "existence-seeking,"[776] "scent-eater,"[777] "intermediate being,"[778] and "that which is formed."[779] 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

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774. 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*, Toh 4090, 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*, Toh 4090, in *Bstan 'gyur* (Dpe bsdur ma), 79: 65–677 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008), 274–345.

775. Skt. *manomaya*; Tib. *yid las byung ba*.

776. Skt. *saṃbhavaiṣin*; Tib. *srid pa tshol ba*.

777. Skt. *gandharva*; Tib. *dri za*.

778. Skt. *antarābhava*; Tib. *srid pa bar ma*.

779. 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.

that it possesses a visible existence[780] 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"[781] and can pass even through diamonds.[782] Its shape corresponds to the type of being it will become in its next rebirth,[783] 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).[784] Its size, moreover, is said to match that of a child who is five or six years old;[785] its orientation depends on its future rebirth (gods look upward; humans, animals, and hungry ghosts look straight ahead; and hell beings look downward);[786] and it eats scents—pleasant ones if powerful and unpleasant ones if weak.[787] Who can see such a being? Beings with a "pure divine eye"[788] and bardo beings of the same kind.[789]

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 its course is reversed. While residing there, karma is accumulated." Accordingly, even if one is a bardo being on course to a bad rebirth because of

780. Tib. *mngon par phyogs pa'i srid pa*.

781. Tib. *thogs med*.

782. A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 628–29.

783. Ibid., 629–30.

784. Ibid., 630–31.

785. Ibid., 631.

786. Ibid., 631–32.

787. Ibid., 632–34.

788. Tib. *lha mig dag pa*.

789. A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 634.

having previously performed unvirtuous 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.[790]

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 intermediate beings 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 officiants' virtue and ritual power and 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.[791] 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.

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790. *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*, Toh 4049, 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.

791. A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 635.

The tenth feature of bardo beings to which A mes zhabs refers is their supernormal powers.[792] He explains that beings in the bardo of becoming can fly through the sky and pass through most objects, but they lack the capacity to enter into a ritual support that has been blessed, into Bodhgayā, or into a mother's womb.[793] Regarding the duration spent in this state, A mes zhabs notes that it can last up to forty-nine days 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.[794] Finally, he divides the signs of being in the bardo state into two subcategories: certain signs[795] and uncertain signs.[796] 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 into chasms; inability to communicate with relatives; not seeing the sun, moon, planets, or stars; and neither casting a shadow nor leaving footprints.[797] 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.[798] The officiants' aim is to get the deceased's attention despite this instability and to encourage them to understand their experiences as illusory.

A mes zhabs's Concluding Instructions on Working with the Dead

In the final sections of A mes zhabs's text, he instructs ritualists to further engage directly with the departed. While acknowledging the terrifying sounds and images of the bardo of becoming, the officiants should encourage the deceased to calm themselves: "By thinking that all appearances are mistaken appearances, relax and be at ease!"[799] The officiants also should anticipate that

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792. Skt. *ṛddhi*; Tib. *rdzu 'phrul*.

793. A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 639.

794. Ibid., 642–45.

795. Tib. *nges pa'i rtags*.

796. Tib. *ma nges pa'i rtags*.

797. A mes zhabs, *Sgrib pa kun sel*, 645–46.

798. Ibid., 646.

799. *snang ba thams cad 'khrul snang du 'dug snyam du glod la zhog mdzod/*. Ibid., 648.

the dead will perceive them and their 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 officiants 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 you!"[800] and encourage the dead to see these sights as expressions of awakened awareness. Still later, the officiants are told to say aloud: "Since we the ritual masters are acting in unison for your benefit, may you who has passed away with one-pointed determination go for refuge!"[801] All of these examples involve the officiants 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. Most Tibetan works centered on the *SDP* frame the dead passively and reserve primary agency for ritualists and the deities. In the work of A mes zhabs, however, we find an explicit attempt to bring highest yogatantric practices into

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800. *'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.

801. *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.

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's *Dispelling All Obscurations*.

Conclusion

IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS, 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 late 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 on 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 attentive readers do throughout the ritual process, though we have seen cases in which it grants readers greater autonomy, giving them choice, directing them to other ritual texts, and in some cases, instructing them to rely on what they have seen others do. Ritualists reading the manual are of course central to the rites' progress, but Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not expect them to save the dead without aid. Throughout *Light Rays*, we find practices that involve officiants merging with deities so as to access their salvific powers and integrate them into the ritual process, as well as practices that involve officiants 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 framework, 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 3, 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 4, 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's *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 book 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* and a more comprehensive study of A mes zhabs's fascinating *Dispelling All Obscurations*. There are other works by Sa skya pa authors deserving of close study as well. Ngor chen's *Limitless Benefit for Others* remains highly influential, and it 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*,[802] 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 Forty-First Sakya Trizin performed a four-hour purification ritual for the dead with his son, the Forty-Second 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

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802. Weinberger, "Social Context," 160.

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.[803]

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 with tears in her eyes handed me a small film canister and told me, "Please be careful with this. Some of my husband's 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 they might shine a light on the forms these traditions have taken for our and others' benefit.

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803. The Sakya Institute of Buddhist Studies, email message to author, May 23, 2011.

Appendix

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804. Pagination reflects that of *C* and *D*.

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

806. Tib. *sta gon*.

807. Tib. *rten*.

808. Tib. *gtor ma*.

809. Tib. *bdag gi rnal 'byor*.

810. Tib. *srung 'khor*.

811. Tib. *bgegs*.

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

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