

# Sangs rgyas gling pa (1341-1396) & His Longevity Teachings\*

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understanding on how Amitābha has gained his central position in the display of Five Buddha Families.

Keywords: longevity teachings, treasure revealer, treasure texts, biography, Amitābha

## Abstract

The development of Amitābha tradition in medieval Tibet is an unsolved problem in the academic world, which definitely involved in complicated transmissions and confluence of different practices; therefore, need to be clarified through various aspects and approaches. In my previous studies of *'pho ba* liturgy developed in medieval Tibet, I suggest that Sangs rgyas gling pa's (1341-1396) revealed work of *'pho ba* could be one of the important sources that integrates Amitābha worship into consciousness transferring (*'pho ba*) practices. Furthermore, I notice that relevant teachings such as longevity (*tshe sgrub*) might also stimulate the formation of Amitābha tradition. Yet Sangs rgyas gling pa and his discovered works are hardly highlighted. In this short essay, I will firstly focus on his biography in order to unveil his life story, his discoveries and transmissions. Secondly I will study his longevity teaching so as to demonstrate its close association to the worship of Amitābha. It will help our

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\* 2012/6/9 收稿，2012/7/8 通過審查。

## 1. Biography of Sangs rgyas gling pa

In my preliminary study, I explored three rNying ma pa masters who produced the instructions of *'pho ba* in their work.<sup>1</sup> Among them, I discovered that Nyi zla sangs rgyas (14<sup>th</sup> century) and Sangs rgyas gling pa were closely associated with the Karma kam tshang lineage; while Klong chen pa (1308-1363) and his work had less connection with the issue that concerns my work. The results of previous studies have led me to believe that Sangs rgyas gling pa's work on *'pho ba* is likely earlier than Nyi zla sangs rgyas' work.<sup>2</sup> In addition, I was pointed to a contemporary figure of Sangs rgyas gling pa, rDo rje gling pa (1346-1405) who had exposed the teaching of *'pho ba* as well.<sup>3</sup> rDo rje gling pa's work on *'pho ba* is relatively brief and has no significant relationship with the worship of Amitābha.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Mei (2004a), especially on section 3 & 4.

<sup>2</sup> Detailed investigations in regard of the transmission of Nyi zla sangs rgyas and his son Karma gling pa have been done by Cuevas (2003). A recent doctoral study, Halkias (2006), has enhanced the interest in Nyi zla sangs rgyas' discovery text *'Pho ba 'jag tshugs ma*. However, I do not agree with his view that *'Pho ba 'jag tshugs ma* was the oldest treasure text showing Sukhāvati orientation. I believe that more work need to be done before making such declaration.

<sup>3</sup> I am thankful to Ulrich Timme Kragh for pointing out this *gter ston* and sharing his brilliant thoughts.

<sup>4</sup> *The Collected gter ma Rediscoveries of gter chen rDo rje gling pa – reproduced from manuscript from Bhutan at the order of Dingo Chhentse Rimpoche*, edited by Dordrup Sangye Lama (1976). In the first volume *rDzogs chen hūṃ skor snying*

Furthermore, I notice that relevant teachings such as longevity (*tshe sgrub*)<sup>5</sup> might also stimulate the formation of Amitābha tradition. Yet Sangs rgyas gling pa and his discovered works are hardly highlighted. In this short essay, I will firstly focus on his biography to unveil his life story, his discoveries and transmissions. Secondly I will study on his longevity teaching so as to demonstrate its possible association to the worship of Amitābha.<sup>6</sup>

The *gter ston*, treasure revealers apparently have played an essential role in the activity of rediscovering religious precepts in both Buddhist and Bon po traditions. In the case of the Buddhist

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*thig*, there are three texts related to *zhi khro teachings* (pp.143-172). Several ritual instructions connect to the death ritual such as *'chi rtags* (pp.275-282), *'chi slu* (pp.283-286), *bar do* (pp.287-293) and *'pho ba grong 'jug* (pp.293-296).

In addition to that, one can also find *rNam shes 'pho ba'i man ngag* by Ratna gling pa. See *THB* 10, Schwieger (1990:53). *Myur lam 'pho ba'i sngon 'gro'i skyabs sems* by Chos rje gling pa. See *THB* 11, Schwieger (1995: 426).

<sup>5</sup> *Tshe sgrub*, the longevity practice, is a teaching of prolonging the practitioner's life through magical divine power. A comprehensive explanation of the notion – long life and relevant rituals in Tibetan culture can be seen in Beyer (1978: 363-398). Furthermore, the specification of the magical rites related to the “soul” – *bla* and *srog*, see Tucci (1980: 191-193). Further textual reference of *tshe sgrub*, see *THB* 12, Schwieger (1999: 28, 245-247, 299)

<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewer's comments and precious information. Indeed, there are other works of *gter ston* before Sang rgyas gling pa that deserve our attention. Nevertheless, it cannot be encompassed all in this short essay. I will consider the sources that the reviewer mentioned in my future study.

circle, the *gter ston* are seen as reincarnations of Padmasambhava's close disciples, who excavated the concealed teachings or blessed objects at the prophesied place on the prophesied time for the sake of all sentient beings in the future. Teachings brought to light in such a way are branded as the direct transmission (*nye brgyud gter ma*), which in contrast to the long transmission of oral teachings (*ring brgyud bka' ma*) that have been passed down from the masters to their pupils successively.<sup>7</sup> As we will read the biography of Sangs rgyas gling pa below, three elements are necessary in the process of treasure finding. They are the authorisation, the prophecy and the guardian's protection.<sup>8</sup> The hidden teachings are normally connected to these three features to guarantee their "authentication". That is to say, only the destined *gter ston* will receive the prophecy or guidance of celestial being like Ḍākinī and then have the power to detect the location of treasures. The extracted things vary from sacred items to yellow scrolls or longevity water etc., which are believed to possess the power of blessing. Therefore, normally the activity of discovering

<sup>7</sup> See Thondup Rinpoche (1997: 46-49) and further details of clarification in Dargyay (1998: 12-61, 62-73).

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the hidden place and the qualification of the *gter ston*, see Urgyan Lingpa (1978: 610-618, 639-643). A panorama view on the transmission of *gter ma* cycle and the combination of the *trikāya* concept, see *THB* 9, Schwieger (1985: *Einleitung*). In addition, a comprehensive introduction on *gter ma*, see *THB* 10, Schwieger (1990: *Einleitung*). I wish to thank Timon Reichl for his help in reading German. For the authentication of the treasure texts, see Gyatso (1993: 97-134), (1996: 147-169).

treasure has been welcomed by the local community. However, in Sangs rgyas gling pa's case, we will find tension arose by his treasure hunting. Such a story has never been told, at least not to my knowledge, and thus should be told here.

The main source that records Sangs rgyas gling pa's life is entitled *sPrul sku Sangs rgyas gling pa'i gter 'byung chen mo* (Hereafter *gTer 'byung chen mo*). A concise version of it, *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, will be consulted as well.<sup>9</sup> According to the colophon, this biography was composed by an anonymous disciple of Sangs rgyas gling pa, who also gathered information from lama rin po che Bya khyung pa to fill in the gaps.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.1 Life and Discovery of Sangs rgyas gling pa

Sangs rgyas gling pa was born on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month in the male Iron Dragon year (1341) in Kong po valley.<sup>11</sup> His father

<sup>9</sup> See *gTer 'byung chen mo* in *Bla ma dgongs 'dus*, vol.1: 21-115. *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma* in *Bla ma dgongs 'dus*, vol.1: 1-20. In addition, see the short biography of Sangs rgyas gling pa in Dudjom Rinpoche (1991: 784-788) and Dargyay (1998: 132-139).

<sup>10</sup> See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.113-115.

<sup>11</sup> According to the conversion of calendars calculated by Schuh (1973: 81), the year 1341 began on 18th January. Therefore, the 29th day of the 12th month had already fallen into year 1341. The precise date of Sangs rgyas gling pa's birth was on 17th January 1341. I am grateful to Prof. Schuh for learning this detail accuracy.

was from mDo khams, a yogi called sTag lung smyon pa, and mother from Brag gsum<sup>12</sup>, whose name was Aḥ Hūṃ rgyan. At the age of five, he received upāsaka vows from mkhan po Nya ra ba gzhon nu dpal. Since then, he had recited *Maṇi* mantra and constantly saw the six syllables manifested on the earth or the rocks. Some years later, he received the initiation of *Thugs rje chen po rgyal ba rgya mtsho* (*Ocean of Victorious One, Avalokiteśvara*)<sup>13</sup> from rtogs ldan Ye shes rgyal mtshan in Nags phu. He was taken away from home to Tsa ri where he got the chance to meet the fourth Karma pa Rol pa'i rdo rje<sup>14</sup>.

Above La rgyab lhun grub in Tsa ri, he received monastic disciplines from three masters, mkhan po mChog tu gyur pa, Byang chub rdo rje and slob dpon Śākya ye shes and was given the bestowed name Sangs rgyas bzang po. Master Byang chub rdo rje instructed him to take Avalokiteśvara as main deity, therefore, he concentrated on reciting *Maṇi* mantra and several practices related to Avalokiteśvara.<sup>15</sup> The experience of encountering with various visions of Avalokiteśvara had intensified his trust and belief on the deity. When the fourth Karma pa Rol pa'i rdo rje arrived at Tsa ri, Sangs rgyas gling pa was appointed to stay closely with him and became one of his spiritual heir. Rol pa'i rdo rje left some personal

<sup>12</sup> Also in the Kong po district. See Wylie (1962: 97, 176 fn.575).

<sup>13</sup> That is a practice related to Avalokiteśvara.

<sup>14</sup> See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.25-28.

<sup>15</sup> See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.29-30.

belongings such as status and the foot print of Buddha to Sangs rgyas gling pa before he headed for central Tibet.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Sangs rgyas gling pa also met various masters while he wandered around the country.<sup>17</sup> In this period, he had several remarkable dreams and revelations that indicated his destination of being a treasure revealer.

Sangs rgyas gling pa's adventure of finding treasures began in the winter of 1363. He was guided by a child to a cave at Lhun grub<sup>18</sup> for a retreat. After being there for 25 days, he dreamt of a huge man who entered the cave and gave him three yellow scrolls. After telling him to take care of the scrolls, the man scattered away into the darkness. Sangs rgyas gling pa became very afraid when he awakened in a cold sweat. When the sun rose, he discovered three different sized scrolls. He examined the small one first. It was called *gTer gyi lde mig gsal ba'i me long* (*The Clear Mirror of Key of Treasure*), which contained the keys (*lde mig*) to unearth the cycles

<sup>16</sup> See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.31-32. A similar account is recorded in the Fifth Karma pa's biography. See *Karma rnam thar*, pp. 448-449.

<sup>17</sup> For example, in Nyang po, he obtained teachings from mkhan po Kun dga'. He met 'Bri khung rin po che Chos kyi rgyal po and received *Phyag rgya chen po Inga*. At a hermitage called mKha' gdong in Lang po, he was granted the teaching cycle of *gCod yul* from lama Chos dbying rdo rje. See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp. 33-40.

<sup>18</sup> If it means Lhun grub rdzong valley, see Ferrari (1958: 83 fn.28, 84 fn.30), Wylie (1962: 162 fn.446).

of *Thugs rje chen po nang nor bu* and *Phyi rgyal po*.<sup>19</sup> He found the prophecies of the treasures in the middle scroll. Furthermore, the largest scroll contained *gTer sgrub gsal ba'i me long* (*The Clear Mirror of Treasure Practice*); *Zhal gdams thugs kyi tshal pa* (*The Oral Instruction on the Fragment of Mind*), and *gTer gyi them byang* (*Treasure Inscription*). In order to prove the authenticity of the yellow scrolls, a retreat was arranged by a local lama, Chos kyī blo gros. Some auspicious signs appeared and subsequently had pleased everyone. Thus Sangs rgyas gling pa set off for his next exploration.<sup>20</sup>

After enduring many difficulties, he finally uncovered his first and the most well-known findings, *Bla ma dgongs 'dus pa'i skor* (*The Cycle of Collected Thought of the Teacher*) together with *Guru zhi sgrub bskyed rdzogs ma bu cha lag* (*The Supplementary of Sādhana of the Generating and the Perfect Stages [like] Mother and Son of the Peaceful Master*) and a waxed jar. A 14-day feast ritual was performed and consequently *'Phags pa spyān ras gzigs nang nor bu lugs* (*The Precious Inner Tradition of Avalokiteśvara*)<sup>21</sup> along with

<sup>19</sup> A series of instructions are available in the section of Avalokiteśvara in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol.35: 311-527.

<sup>20</sup> See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.51-57. The destination he headed for is a cave called Phug mo che in Phu ri Mountain. It seems to me that Phu ri is the mountain in Phu mdo rdzong. See Wylie (1962: 86, 163 fn.455), Ferrari (1958: 110 fn.114).

<sup>21</sup> The inserted note marks two texts under the title of *Nor bu lugs*. They are: *Zhi khro rta mgrin dmar nag* and *mKha' 'gro gsal byed me long skor dbang phyug dmar po'i skor*. They are not included in the collection of *Bla ma dgongs 'dus*. It

other liturgies were exposed from the jar.<sup>22</sup> This event made the whole community happy. Sangs rgyas gling pa therefore earned the respect he deserved and was referred to as “*gTer ston pa*”.<sup>23</sup>

The motif in the following chapters of *gTer 'byung chen mo* is about Sangs rgyas gling pa's ensuing treasure discovery. However, the values of these stories are not just about how, when and where he excavated the hidden treasures but also involved a broader context such as the tension that existed between the treasure hunter and the local community. I shall briefly go through this biography and present selected passages that could be useful sources for future studies.

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could be useful hint to investigate Sangs rgyas gling pa's thoughts on funeral liturgy in a broader view. That would be also helpful to compare with Karma gling pa's *Zhi khro* Cycle for the sake of clarifying their relationship. Further, their contemporary, rDo rje gling pa also had *Zhi khro* texts revealed as mentioned earlier in footnote 230. A comparison study on various *Zhi khro* Cycles in this time phrase will be interesting topic.

<sup>22</sup> In *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, it is stated that Sangs rgyas gling pa discovered 30 complete scrolls. Except for *Bla ma dgongs 'dus*, the listed titles are: *'Phags pa spyān ras gzigs dbang gi chos skor* (*The Cycle of Initiation of Avalokiteśvara*), *Yid bzhin nor bu* (*Wish-fulfilling Jewel*), *Yi dam rta mgrin dmar nag* (*Dark-Red Hayagriva Deity*), *mKha' 'gro gsal byed me long skor* (*The Cycle of Illuminist Mirror of Ḍākinī*) and *'Jig rten dbang phyug dmar po* (*The Red Lord of the World*). See *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, p.4.

<sup>23</sup> See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.57-60.

It is said that on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the waxing moon period of the 8<sup>th</sup> month in 1364, Sangs rgyas gling pa revealed the key information of treasures concealed at rTse chen brag dmar and dGye'o rong in Kong po district. He exposed many scrolls hidden in vessels, along with sacred objects such as ritual pills, the image, the hand rosary and the lotus crown of Padmasambhava.<sup>24</sup> The next finding occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the summer in the female Wood Snake year (1365) at black rock of Phu ri in Kong po valley.<sup>25</sup> By tracing the obtained key information, he reached dKar ting gdong where he unearthed more

<sup>24</sup> It is said that he revealed about 127 scrolls in total, which included *zhi* (pacifying) *rgyas* (increasing) *dbang* (empowerment) *drag* (subjugating), the Four Activities exercised in tantra. The registered titles are: the cycle of *dGos 'dod kun 'byung*, *Zhi khro sgrub pa bka' bryad*, *rDzogs chen spyi ti*, *Phur sgrub thugs kyi nying khu* and *Nor sgrub dngos grub nor 'dzin*. The cycle of *rMongs po srid spel gces phrar*, *Srog mthu mgon po par nag*, three cycles of *sPu gri*, *gTad rgyud phung byed dug rigi*, and four scrolls of *zhi khro dgos 'dod kun ba byung*. Also the various ways of removing evil omens such as *Phra men nag mo*. See *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, pp.5-6, and also *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.62-65.

<sup>25</sup> The revealed texts are: *gTad khram ru sbal nag po*, *Cho 'phrul rgyal po lta khang*, *Kha skong gser thur man ngag*, *Zhing sel skye ba rgyun gcod*, *Srog thun dug chu khol ma*, the key of *Kar tir gdong* (dKar ting gdong in *gTer 'byung chen mo*). See *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, p.6, and *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.66-67.

texts.<sup>26</sup> More discoveries were exposed at other spots such as rGya mda' glang po Mt. of Nyang po<sup>27</sup> and bSam yas mchims phu<sup>28</sup>.

The following discovery took place on the first day of the last spring month in 1366, which deserves special attention here. We are told that Sangs rgyas gling pa was with a group of assistants who arrived at a stūpa called Byang sde in Long po<sup>29</sup> where they noticed some treasures were under the stūpa. They decided to break down the wall in order to uncover the treasure; however, local people were offended by their action. Starting from a dispute, this conflict evolved into a fighting affair. A crowd of Kong po approached and circulated a temple where Sangs rgyas gling pa stayed. They demanded to have the stolen treasures back, otherwise the temple would be set on fire. Nevertheless, miracles happened and the potential violent attack finally turned into a peace talk. About one week after this event, Sangs rgyas gling pa uncovered the key of *Thugs rje chen po yang gsang lugs* from the rock pillar in Lang po.

<sup>26</sup> There he disclosed *mKha' 'gro ma nag mo'i skor*, *bZo rgyud*, *bsTan pa spyi'i lung bstan*, *Daki'i mtshan 'bum gser gyi rdo rje* etc. See *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, pp.6-7, and *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.68-69.

<sup>27</sup> If it refers to rGya mda rdzong, see Wylie (1962: 176 fn.571)

<sup>28</sup> That is the mystical place where Padmasambhava buried many treasures. See Ferrari (1958: 45, 115 fn.145).

<sup>29</sup> See Ferrari(1958: 48, 122 fn.209).

On the first mid-autumn month in 1366, Sangs rgyas gling pa travelled to rKyen dung la brag that located in mChims yul of Tsa ri to excavate more treasures. This time the people of that village were happy with his exploration but declared the right to keep any exposed treasures in advance. Sangs rgyas gling pa unearthed many scrolls from a well.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, at the spot of Breg nag 'gong po chags pa, he found the cycle of *'Phags pa spyan ras gzigs yang gsang bla med*. He gave this cycle of texts to sTod pa bSod nams ye shes. Since then this line of transmission had been passed down.<sup>31</sup> In the valley called lJon pa rta mgo, he exposed 30 complete scrolls in different length from a treasure vase. The vase was unwrapped several months later in the spring of the Fire Sheep year (1367).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> What he had revealed included *Phyag na rdo rje khyud gsang ba yang khol gyi rgyud* together with mother & son, an accessory of the guardian's command. Inside of this scroll, there were also *U rgyan yab yum gyi byang sems dkar dmar*, the scroll of cycle of *mDzeg so 'tsho byed gzhon nu*, *Ngan sngags mun pa dgu rgyug*, and the cycle of *Phung thal nag po rdzas*, the cycle of *mKha' 'gro spyi rgyud rgya mtsho* etc. See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.76-78; *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, p.8.

<sup>31</sup> See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.79-81; *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, p.8.

<sup>32</sup> Inside of the vase, there were: *Thugs rje chen po'i rgyab chos*, *bCud len bdud rtsi zag med*, *dBang phyug chen po'i rlung zhags*, *dBang sdud me'i glog phreng*, *gShin rje sha zan spu gri*, *gZa' rgod cig brdud*, *A tsa ra dgu rgyug* and many introduction (*kha byang*) of treasures, and the key of *bKra shis phug ring* etc. together with some sacred items such as 7 rebirth pills and mirrors. See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.81-87; *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, p.9.

Another similar event happened when Sangs rgyas gling pa arrived at Dom tshang rong in Tsa ri. There local people gossiped that a treasure revealer of Karma pa would come to take their treasures. They decided to stop him from unearthing the treasure by any means. However, at this time they were already engaged in a war between rDza khrod shar ma pa and mChen bying po. There was little chance that anyone would detect Sangs rgyas gling pa and prevent him from his activity. He wandered around at dGyer bye ma dkar po and excavated the key information of long-life water (*tshe chu*) as well as the practice of *Klu rgyal mgrin bzang* (*The Loud Voice of the Nāga King*) on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the middle winter month in 1367.<sup>33</sup>

Sangs rgyas gling pa went to lama Chos blo to report his discovery of the long-life water. He continued on his journey and reached at the river bank of Chu rong brag 'thab in gTsang po.<sup>34</sup> At dGyer bye ma dkar po Mountain, he exposed a case in which some items like the crown of Cakrasaṃvara and longevity pills of Avalokiteśvara were contained. Moreover, a scroll called *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor* (*The Unification of the Sun and the Moon*) was also included. Then he returned to the upper part of Lhun grub. In the

<sup>33</sup> See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.88-97.

<sup>34</sup> It is recorded as Chu rong brag mtha' in Dwags po in *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, p.10.

presence of lama Chos blo, he broke a vajra<sup>35</sup> into three pieces and took out a vase filled with longevity water from the centre. Afterwards, he practiced the *sādhana* of *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor* for 11 days.<sup>36</sup> Because auspicious signs occurred, lama Chos blo trusted him and the authenticity of his discoveries. Sangs rgyas gling pa then offered longevity water to the Fourth Karma pa and distributed it to the public and whoever needed it.

Even though Sangs rgyas gling pa had become a recognised *gter ston*, tension still existed from time to time when treasure was about to reveal. For example, when he travelled to sNe'u gdong<sup>37</sup>, the minister of that region, rGyal mtshan bzang po invited all high masters in that region to test him. The result was very positive. All of them were happy to receive the blessing of long life water. After that, Sangs rgyas gling pa revealed the maṇḍala of *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor* at the tomb of Srong btsan sgam po<sup>38</sup>. He left for bSam yas and revealed several scrolls at Seng gdong in mChims phu brag at dawn

<sup>35</sup> The vajra was originally the divine weapon of Indra in the vedic times. It symbolises the indestructible and also bears the meaning of diamond. See e.g., Snellgrove (1971: 140). Here the vajra refers to the ritual bell.

<sup>36</sup> See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.98-105. This text is extant in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol.29: 337-381.

<sup>37</sup> See Wylie (1962: 77, 148 fn.313).

<sup>38</sup> About the tomb of Srong btsan sgam po, see Ferrari (1958: 53).

of the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the last summer month.<sup>39</sup> He offered the blessed longevity water to Chos rje paṅ chen and 'Bring gung rin po che in order to exchange teachings. He visited sPyan mnga' Chos kyi rgyal po and requested instructions such as *Tshe dpag med kyi dmar khrid* and *bDe mchog snyan rgyud*. Again he presented *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor* together with the other revealed teachings as returning gifts.

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## 1.2 The Sangs gling Transmission

The last episode of Sangs rgyas gling pa's life story is in fact incomplete. We are told that Sangs rgyas gling pa's disciples asked him for a set of teachings; however, he passed away before completing his teaching.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, we do not know much about the development of Sangs rgyas gling pa's lineage. According

<sup>39</sup> Concerning the year of this revealing, it is not recorded in either source. It was probably in the year 1368 or afterwards. The most well-known teachings he discovered here are *Thugs rje chen po rgyal po*, *Nor bu lugs kyi kha tshangs*. See *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp.112-113; and *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, p.10.

<sup>40</sup> There are actually two more events of discovery recorded in *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*. The times of findings were on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of mid-summer in the female Iron Pig year (1371), and the 18<sup>th</sup> day of first autumn in Tiger year (1374). So the last instructions he had ever exposed are *'Jam dpal bshes gnyen phyag babs and U rgyan chen pos phyi rabs don*. See *gTer 'byung tshigs bcad ma*, pp.11-12.

<sup>41</sup> According to Dargyay (1998: 137), the last teaching Sangs rgyas gling pa performed was the *bdud rtsi sman sgrub*.



to *rNying ma'i chos 'byung* of bDud 'joms 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje (1904-1987), Sangs rgyas gling pa set up his monastery at bDe chen bsam sgrub in sNyi phu. He passed away in 1396 in Byang chub gling. Most of his doctrines were received and taught by his son Ye shes rdo rje and his main disciple Bya khyung pa Seng ge<sup>42</sup>. Some of the teachings were also given to rTse le and Ta bla. The second incarnation of Sangs gling was born at Nel pa sme 'ur, but he passed away in childhood. The next incarnation was called Sangs rgyas dpal ldan.

Despite a precise trace of reincarnation line had lost, Sangs rgyas gling pa's revealed teachings have been assimilated in the mDo khams district and further on became influential in the southern part, such as in Bhutan and Sikkim.<sup>43</sup> There are several lines of the succession of his *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* teachings. Apart from the Fourth Karma pa, the other recipients are: zhwa dmar mKha' spyod dbang po (1350-1405), sNe'u gdong Gong ma chen po (1302-1373),

<sup>42</sup> Dargyay (1998: 137, 221) has marked that dPal ldan seng ge was a member of Bya khyung bshad sgrub gling monastery that is located on the left bank of the Yellow river.

<sup>43</sup> See Dargyay (1998: 137-138). Accordingly, *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* teachings was particularly disseminated through the transmission of rTse le monastery in the region of lower Khams. Besides, another significant dissemination was spread out from Rig 'dzin snying po through the Bhutan ruler mthu chen Ngag dbang rnam rgyal. The influence of Sangs gling teachings in Bhutan is said to be strong up to this date.

Sa skya bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1312-1375), and 'Bri gung Chos kyi rgyal po (1335-1407) etc. It is also said that the seventh descendant of Sangs rgyas gling pa, Rig 'dzin snying po, passed down teachings to Zhabs drung mthu chen Ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1594-1651), who later became an expert on these teachings.<sup>44</sup>

We learn a bit more detail of Sangs gling transmission in *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*. The transmission of *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* was first preserved in the family lineage (*gdung brgyud*) and later opened to the spiritual transmission (*chos brgyud*) after seven generations. The genealogical tree was:



<sup>44</sup> See Dudjom Rinpoche (1991: 787-788).

The transmission of *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* also came into Guru bKra shis's lineage. Grub mchog bzang po's unnamed brother, who settled in mKhar rgya bo, played an important role in propagating both family and spiritual lineages. There were twenty-one successive lineages that served as the chief priests in that region up to the nineteenth century when the author recorded it. Then Rig 'dzin snying po passed on *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* teachings to bDe chen dar rgyas. The latter granted all of *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* teachings to lCub ri grub chen Kun bzang rang grol, a yogi also from Nyang po. Next these teachings were given to Kun bzang rang grol's two main disciples, rig 'dzin Thugs mchog rdo rje and Kaḥ thog Rig 'dzin chen po. It was Thugs mchog rdo rje who transmitted *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* to Guru bKra shis's teacher, Padma theg mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan.<sup>45</sup>

In examining the life of Sangs rgyas gling pa, we find some characteristics that meet our general impression about the treasure revealers. For example, the visionary power of meeting celestial beings, the ability to discover sacred objects, to bless and preach to the public, to guide pilgrimages and to calm social unrest. Except for the positive performance, ironically Sangs rgyas gling pa's activity of discovery also caused problems. From the narrative, we see two specific lines of tension; one is between the local residents and the

treasure revealer, the other between the treasure revealer and religious leaders. First for the local people, it was wonderful to learn that they had treasures in their territory; however, having an outsider who comes in and takes these treasures away is another story. A perfect example that illustrates the ambivalence was the event took place at Byang sde 'bum pa in Long po. Sangs rgyas gling pa and his entourage uncovered some relics of Buddha from a stūpa. The anger of the local people would be understandable, just imagine a stūpa turned into a heap of stones. As previously noted, an armed force was organised to chase Sangs rgyas gling pa's group away. An interesting question that we should consider is who has the right to claim the ownership of the treasures? Should it be the treasure revealer who physically mined them out or should the local people who have control over their own territory? Second, for the religious leaders, the issue involved here was about the authenticity of the treasures and probably a bit of a power game as well. After the treasures were accepted, these local masters approached to the treasure revealer and insisted to have a part of sacred objects or a copy of the unearthing teaching for various reasons. To some extent, the treasure revealer from outside could threaten their social status and wealth that partly depended upon the lay believers' donations. Therefore, it was important to have what the treasure revealer had discovered.

This story also provides information about the close connection of Sangs rgyas gling pa and the Karma bKa' brgyud lineage. The region where Sangs rgyas gling pa found treasures was the parish that

<sup>45</sup> See *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, pp.743-745.

belonged to the bKa' brgyud tradition. It is also obvious that the main recipients of *Bla ma dgons 'dus* cycle were leaders associated with this School. Late in the life of Sangs rgyas gling pa, he distributed longevity water to many people and taught the relevant teachings to other masters, yogi and lay people. His effort to circulate longevity practice is quite evident.

## 2. The Way of Attaining Longevity

In this section, I shall explore a bit further on Sangs rgyas gling pa's longevity teachings. It is my hope to shed some light on the evolution of Amitābha worship in medieval Tibet through various liturgies like *tshe sgrub*. Here I will concentrate on longevity liturgies included in the *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* and continue with the *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor*<sup>46</sup> compiled in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. First though, a brief review on the long-life ritual is necessary here. The concept of longevity is clearly not a promoted theme in the early Buddhist doctrines. It has become popular in the Mahāyāna literature most probably due to the necessity of fulfilling the common wish of the lay followers. This trend has continued and further elaborated in later Vajrayāna tradition. The aspiration of having an extending life might appear to be driven away from the superb idea of achieving liberation, yet a compassionate motivation is often emphasised in the instruction. In the rNying ma tradition, the rite of longevity is

<sup>46</sup> See *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol.29: 337-381.

particularly prominent.<sup>47</sup> That has to do with their grand master Padmasambhava who is regarded as the emanation of Amitābha.<sup>48</sup>

The first step to approach the wish of longevity is to receive the long life initiation called *tshe dbang*. It is normally a public ritual though sometimes it can also engage in the private meditation trainings. The whole concept of *tshe dbang* is actually a form of consecration. That is to say, the ritual specialists must evoke the divine spirit or energy and transfer the ritual substances such as herbal pills, ritual cakes or water into the pills of life (*tshe ri*), the cake of life (*tshe gtor*) or the elixir nectar (*tshe chu or bdud rtsi*). When these consecrated things are distributed to the participants, the sacred power of extending life will then become functioning on the receivers. The demand of this ritual is rather high; therefore, it can be arranged when someone's life is endangered or simply as a regular

<sup>47</sup> For example, Mi pham rnam rgyal (1846-1912) contributed several liturgies related to longevity. See information in *THB* 5, Schuh (1973: 123-124, 184-187). Kong sprul also edited some rNying ma rituals related to Amitāyus, see *THB* 6, Schuh (1976: 170-171, 179). Furthermore, a lot of instructions connected to Amitāyus and Amitābha can be found in *Rin chen gter mdzod* vol.30-32. For example, the reference of longevity teaching of Padma gling pa, see *THB* 13, Schwieger (2009: 327-328). And the motif of *rTa mgrin and Tshe dpag med*, see *THB* 13, Schwieger (2009: 328-333).

<sup>48</sup> See Dudjom Rinpoche (1991: 468-474).

ceremony for the whole community.<sup>49</sup> The deities that associate to this ritual can be various; nevertheless the most popular group are the Tshe lha rnam gsum (three deities of long life): Tshe dpag med, sGrol dkar and rNam rgyal ma. I reckon that by tracing the dissemination of longevity practice, it will also help to shed some light on the transmission history of Amitābha and Amitāyus.<sup>50</sup>

## 2.1 Longevity Practice for Oneself and Others

Three liturgies can be found in the *Bla ma dgongs 'dus*. They are *Tshe sgrub gdams pa*,<sup>51</sup> *gZhan don sgrub pa*<sup>52</sup> and *rGyun khyer gyi*

<sup>49</sup> The most comprehensive study of longevity practice is that of Beyer (1978: 373-398). And the clarification of Tucci (1980: 126, 191-192).

<sup>50</sup> For instance, Shaw (1994: 117-122) points out a very interesting transmission of longevity practice through an Indian yoginī Siddharājñī. It is believed that Siddharājñī had encountered Amitāyus directly and thus received sufficient teachings from him. Then Ras chung pa was imparted with this teaching and brought it back to Tibet. This type of long-life ceremony designed by Siddharājñī is still alive nowadays although many practitioners might not be aware of its origin.

<sup>51</sup> The complete title is: *Tshe sgrub kyi gdams pa bdud rtsi snying po'i yang zhun zhes bya ba bdag don sgrub pa'i thabs* (*The Instruction of Longevity, the Refined Essence of Nectar – the method of achievement for one's own purpose*). See *Bla ma dgongs 'dus*, vol.1: 519-550.

<sup>52</sup> The complete title is: *sPros bcas gzhon don du sgrub pa'i gdams pa* (*The Elaborated Instruction of Longevity for the Purpose of Others*). Ibid, pp.551-575.

*gdams pa*.<sup>53</sup> The third text is an abridged version of the previous two, so it will not be consulted in the ensuing discussion. *Tshe sgrub gdams pa* begins with an invoking prayer that is dedicated to Amitābha in the form of *dharmakāya*, Avalokiteśvara in *saṃbhogakāya* and Padmasambhava in *nirmāṇakāya*. In the preliminary preparation, the yogi should modify his body in meditation posture, exhale impure air nine times and then keep the breath in a gentle and steady circulation. Furthermore the yogi should also supplicate to the trio of deities for being granted the essence of life, the immortal Vidyādhara.

In the main training, the first part is to envision a *maṇḍala*, the world of the divine beings, which derives from a red syllable Hri that is the nature of the yogi's consciousness. The first emerging vision is an eight-petal lotus in the middle of the splendour palace that locates right in the centre of the *maṇḍala*. Then the red syllable Hri appears in the core of the lotus, which transforms to be Skull Garland Powerful One (*Thod phreng rtsal*), the secret name of Padmasambhava. To zoom in the image of Padmasambhava, we find Amitābha on his crown, Avalokiteśvara on his throat and mKha' 'gro

<sup>53</sup> The complete title is: *Tshe sgrub rgyun khyer gyi gdams pa rang gzhan gnyis ka la gces pa rdo tje'i snying po* (*The Instruction of Daily Practice for Longevity, the Essence of Vajra Which is Useful for Both Oneself and Others*). See *Bla ma dgongs 'dus*, vol.7: 373-376. It is also extant in *Rin chen gter mdzod*. See further information in *THB* 13, Schwieger (2009: 326).

gSang ba ye shes (Ḍākinī Guhyajñāna?) on his heart. Further on, three syllables *Oṃ Aḥ Hūṃ* come into view on the hearts of these three figures respectively. Then the focus shifts to the eight petals of lotus. At this time, Vajrasattva, Ratnasambhava, Vairocana and Amoghasiddhi arise in the east, the south, the west and the north directions one after the other.<sup>54</sup> Four of them are in the appearance of *sambhogakāya*. In addition, four wrathful deities are positioned at the four corners. Four protectors from each of the Buddha Families guard at the four gates of maṇḍala. All these celestial beings embrace their consorts and hold the nectar vase on their left hands. Besides, they all have *Oṃ Aḥ Hūṃ* three syllables on their crown, their throat and their heart, same as the emanated Padmasambhava in the centre.

The second part of the main training is to add mantra-recitation along with the continuous visualisation. The three syllables *Oṃ Aḥ Hūṃ* at the centre spread out to all divine beings of the ten directions. Owing to the supplication of the yogi, all of the sacred beings dissolve into the light and then return to the body of Padmasambhava. This procedure is repeated three times and hence the initiations of the body, speech and mind are complete. Subsequently, Amitāyus and his consort appear at the heart of Padmasambhava. A stem of a lotus becomes visible in the midst of ocean-like *amṛta* that derives from syllable Bam at the heart of Amitāyus. Then a golden five-pronged

vajra come to our sight in the lotus. In the middle of the vajra, syllable *Nṛ* is surrounded by *Oṃ Aḥ Hūṃ*. The luminosity of these syllables stretches to all Buddhas of the ten directions, collects their blessing and then returns to syllable *Nṛ*. After that, the marvellous radiance splits and melts into syllable E and syllable Bam on the top and at the bottom of the vajra respectively. Both syllables then turn to be white and red nectar on the two ends. These two colours of nectar intermingle and overflow the lotus. It then drops down upon the head of the yogi. This section ends with prayers that invoke for blessing, for longevity, for expelling obstacles and for displaying the sign of achievement.

The third part of the main training provides instruction when the yogi needs to take a break. The key point is to maintain strong faith and devotion. The imagined deities and gods melt one by one and become absorbed into the yogi's heart. As for the long term practice, it is said that to take a break on the full moon date or the beginning of each month will be better. Finally, the signs of achievement are explained in the last part. It is said that the yogi's body will be very strong without any illness and will not even have the grey hair. Altruistic thoughts will increase in his mind, and unstained pleasure will last very long. The ultimate goal of this training is to be reborn in the magnificent world like Sukhāvātī.

Next in the teaching of *gZhon don sgrub pa* (*The Practice for Others*), it shares the same techniques mentioned above. That is to

<sup>54</sup> Regarding the visualisation of five Buddhas and their symbolic meanings, see Beyer (1978: 73-74).

say, the yogi assimilates the energy of life that is invoked from sacred assembly in order to prolong the life span of his own as well as the patron's life through visualising the radiance that transforms from his consciousness. When the yogi stops the performance for a break, he should recite the mantra according to *Amitāyus sūtra* (*Tshe mdo*). In addition, several substances such as grains, herbal pills, beer or water that are consecrated during the ritual can be eaten or drunk. It is believed that people who eat or drink these substances will also obtain the force of life. In the colophon of this text, it states that gZa' mtsho rgyal bdag wrote the teaching that was given by Padmasambhava and then concealed in a secret place.

## 2.2 The Unification of the Sun and the Moon

As we learn in the first section, *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor* was the most important teaching that Sangs rgyas gling pa propagated in the last period of his life. He extensively circulated this practice and granted the water of longevity to the public. *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor* consists of immense visualisation and mantra recitation alongside the prayers of blessing. The main deity to be envisioned here is the four arms Avalokiteśvara who holds Amitābha on his crown and bears mTsho skyes rdo rje (Padmasambhava) at the heart. All of them are with their consorts and have the vases that contain long life water in their hands. On this base, a four-petal lotus unfolds and gradually the configuration of a maṇḍala is established in the yogi's vision. Then step by step the imagination focuses on each

of these celestial groups regarding their colours, dressing and hand gestures. Naturally the common feature is the long-life vase grasped in their left hands. By imagining the stream of longevity nectar that infuses into the yogi's body from his crown, it is believed that the yogi will achieve the vajra body of immortality. That body is said to have the power of maintaining a changeless life without any obstacle, which is just like the everlasting sun and moon. Additionally, a ritual of summoning the force of life is operated, which is followed by four kinds of initiations. In the end there is a long prayer expressing the wish to absorb all essences of nectar in order to increase the span of life.

The inlaid history (*lo rgyus*)<sup>55</sup> of this text deserves some attention here. The background was set at the time of Khri srong lde btsan who intended to learn methods that led him to achieve longevity Vidyādhara (*tshe'i rig 'dzin*). Padmasambhava explained to him that by receiving the initiation of longevity granted by deities, one could attain longevity Vidyādhara. Furthermore, if one drank longevity water he would be able to live for thousands years. Due to the doubt of ministers that the king could be killed if the nectar water was poisoned and subsequently the whole kingdom would possibly be robbed, the initiation ritual did not go through. Master Padmasambhava therefore transmitted various initiations, prophecies and instructions to the king and the prince Dam 'dzin. He predicted

<sup>55</sup> See *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol.29: 346-349.

that in the future the incarnation of the prince would expose these treasure vases to benefit the sentient beings.

This lineage history was written in the conventional format of treasure literature. The original event was constructed to happen at the court of king Khri srong lde btsan and the religious instructor was surely Padmasambhava. A clear message comes to us is that the quality of *amṛta* water was beyond all doubt. It will be one's own loss to suspect the water. As required in most of the ritual practices, a strong faith and devotion to the sacred substance must be built up. Through invoking mind as such, the practitioner can experience the sacred time and the sacred place again and again in his daily training. Another point to notice is that Sangs rgyas gling pa was indicated to be the reincarnation of the prince Dam 'dzin according to this narrative.

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The longevity liturgies that we have read through in this essay reveal the common aspiration of human beings. The practices of longevity elucidate methods of life-prolonging. In Sangs rgyas gling pa's *tshe sgrub* liturgies, he delicately depicted Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara and Padmasambhava in the form of *dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya*, which construct a trio set of deity. The manifestation of this trio is either as Padmasambhava or

Avalokiteśvara. In the process of generating *maṇḍala*, the position of Amitābha (the trio group) was shifted to the centre, whereas Vairocana was marginalised to the west side. It seems to be a good example that demonstrates how Amitābha has gained his central position in the display of Five Buddha Families.

By investigating longevity liturgies in this essay, we find the trace of how *tshe sgrub* and *'pho ba* would possibly be converged in one ceremony at later development. Namely, the liturgies *'Da' ka 'chi brod 'pho ba* of Sangs rgyas gling pa and *'Pho ba 'jag tshugs ma* of Nyi zla sangs rgyas.<sup>56</sup> It was their common association – Amitābha who functions as a bridge to fasten them together. There is no reason for us to deny that the cult of Amitābha or Amitāyus has disseminated around Tibet via these kinds of longevity liturgies since they have remained alive among Tibetan cultural settings throughout history. To clarify the development of Amitābha in Tibetan Buddhist history is definitely not a simple task. However, I think several interesting practices and liturgies do provide useful information for us to solve the puzzle. So far I have only consulted to *'pho ba* and *tshe sgrub* these two types of liturgies produced by certain rNying ma pa masters and therefore, no conclusive statement should be made here. I should continue the theme of study and enlarge the scale of my sources in the future. Hopefully, a satisfactory result can come to light soon.

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<sup>56</sup> See footnote 2.

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# 桑傑林巴（1341-1396）及其長壽教法

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## 中文提要

關於中世紀西藏的阿彌陀佛信仰一直是個學界未解的問題。這問題涉及了複雜的傳承與各種教法的匯集，需要透過不同的角度與路徑來釐清。根據筆者的中世紀西藏遷識法之演變史研究，發現十四世紀寧瑪派的伏藏師桑傑林巴的遷識教法很可能是將阿彌陀佛信仰與臨終遷識的修法匯集在一起的重要文獻之一。在研究過程中，筆者也發現了相關的教法如長壽成就法也可能是促成阿彌陀佛信仰傳統的因素之一。雖然桑傑林巴與他的伏藏作品對此主題有相當的貢獻，但學界對他的介紹與研究幾乎是空白。這篇短文的目的就在彌補這個遺憾。本文分為兩部分，首先將介紹這位伏藏師的生平以及他所發掘的伏藏與傳承。第二部分將探討他的長壽修法以說明此法與阿彌陀佛信仰的密切關係。此外，從桑傑林巴的長壽成就法中我們也得以窺知阿彌陀佛是如何在五方佛的壇城中獲得中心的地位。

關鍵詞：長壽教法，伏藏師，伏藏，傳記，阿彌陀佛