

## SER no.024; Introduction

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## Introduction

In 1974 our colleague Per Kvaerne published for the first time a translation of the *dkar chag* by Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin (b.1813): *The Canon of the Tibetan Bonpos*.<sup>1</sup> The *dkar chag* of Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin is a catalogue of the Bonpo canonical texts. The Canon is in two parts: texts that are considered as the words of gShen-rab Mi-bo known as Kanjur (*bka' 'gyur*) and those composed by others than the master and called Katen (*bka' rten*).

Per Kvaerne scrutinized the *dkar chag* and systematically numbered all the titles given there. As a result of this enterprise, his work now serves as the standard reference for all researchers in the field.

In Tibet, inventories of books (*dpe rtsis*, *rtsis rgya*) belonging to the Canon existed in many monasteries and most of these were destroyed by the Chinese Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 70s together with the destruction of the monasteries themselves. Manuscripts or printed books were often either burned or simply destroyed by chopping them into pieces.

Here let me mention three types of catalogues of the Canon which are in my opinion representative of the kind of work among the Bonpos. The three offer different approaches to the subject-matter.

### 1. The *dkar chag* of Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin

This catalogue to which I have already referred was compiled at the hermitage of mKhar-sna just below sMan-ri monstery. It is partially based on the collection of manuscripts kept at the monastery of which Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin (b.1813) was the 22nd Abbot. His autobiography is included in the present collection (Vol. 90). The catalogue is entitled: *bKa' 'gyur brten 'gyur gyi sde tshan sgrigs tshul bstan pa'i me ro spar ba'i rlung g-yab bon gyi pad mo rgyas pa'i nyi 'od* and was published in India in 1965 (*Satapitaka Series*, Vol. 37, Part II, 31 pages).

However, the catalogue of Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin in its treatment of the subject points to a somewhat critical attitude to the admissibility of texts into the Canon and the order in which the texts ought to be arranged as is clear from the terms (*sde tshan sgrigs tshul*) he has used in the title of the work. It is therefore a theoretical work rather than simply an inventory that contains purely a list of real texts existing in a particular place. It is considered among the Bonpos as the official standard for grouping together the canonical texts. He has rejected the inclusion of a certain number of texts that were included in the Canon in the *dkar chag* by Kun-grol grags-pa on whom we shall have occasion to comment below.

Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin's approach to the subject echoes the treatment of the rNying-ma-pa texts given by Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290-1364) when he compiled the catalogue of the Buddhist Kanjur. Bu-ston allowed only five rNying-ma-pa tantras to remain in the Buddhist Kanjur. The central argument of Bu-ston for

rejecting most of the rNying-ma-pa tantras concerns the question of authenticity. In his view, most of the rNying-ma-pa tantric works never had any Sanskrit originals. They are therefore apocryphal and are not fit for inclusion in the Kanjur. The very term Kanjur (*bka' 'gyur*) conveys the idea of translation being involved.

Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin's criticism of Kun-grol grags-pa's catalogue, on the other hand, rests on a different argument. In it, Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin stands for a purist approach of the Bon tradition. For the Canon he accepts no works that are considered to have been influenced by Buddhist teachings. From about the thirteenth century onwards, however, a particular trend developed among the Bonpos. This trend has the following theme as its ideological determinant: the sage Dran-pa nam-mkha' and his wife 'Od-ldan 'bar-ma, produced twin sons. They were Tshe-dbang rig-'dzin and gYung-drung mthong-grol. The teachings they later revealed became the dominant doctrine of the trend. The group became known as 'Chi med yab sras bzhi, "The four deathless ones, father and sons". It is of particular significance that the personage called gYung-drung mthong-grol of the group was believed to be identical to Padmasambhava. They are therefore said to have lived in the eighth century.

No contradiction, it is believed, therefore exists if the Bonpo accepts a certain type of teaching of Padmasambhava. Even the rNying-ma-pa have taken the four as their saints. This trend of the Bon tradition later became known as Bon gсар ma, the "New Bon". In the following centuries a considerable number of works have been produced by the religious figures belonging to the New Bon Tradition. It is the corpus of the masters which are primarily inspired by the *bka' thang* literature of the rNying-ma-pa in their outlook that Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin has rejected in the Bonpo Canon. However, in rejecting the "New Bon", the conservatives face a dilemma. A certain number of great authors like Blo-ldan snying-po (b.1360) belongs to the new tradition and their works such as *gZi brjid*<sup>2</sup> have in fact been accepted among the cores that make up the Canon. His other writings are also included in the present collection (Vol. 271).

## **2. The *dkar chag* of Kun-grol grags-pa**

Kun-grol grags-pa (b.1700) was born in the region of rDza in Khams and in his later life he flourished as the prelate of the kings of Gyalrong, especially those of Khro-skyabs and Chu-chen principalities.

Kun-dga' nor-bu, the king of Khro-skyabs, had a manuscript set of the Canon consisting of 281 volumes made. It was placed in his palace called Drug-zur rnam-rgyal-rdzong. The king urged Kun-grol grags-pa to compile a catalogue of the manuscript set, which he did in 1751 in the palace of the king of Rab-brtan in Chu-chen, known as Li-ver rnam-par rgyal-ba'i rdzong. The catalogue is entitled *Zab dang rgya che g-yung drung bon gyi bka' 'gyur gyi dkar chag nyi ma 'bum gyi 'od zer*.<sup>3</sup>

It was under Kun-grol grags-pa's guide that the kings of Khro-skyabs and Chu-chen had simultaneously undertaken to carve the woodblocks of the Bonpo Canon in the eighteenth century. He himself, with a number of assistants, edited the texts and supervised the whole enterprise of preparing the woodblocks. In 1766 he wrote an account entitled *Par gyi dkar chag srid pa'i sgron me* that describes how the woodblocks for a certain part of the Canon were made.<sup>4</sup> He probably died in that year. Whether the carving of woodblocks for all the texts that he has listed in his catalogue were completed before 1766 remains uncertain, because bSod-nams dbang-'dus, the king of Rab-brtan of the Chu-chen principality, was at war against the Manchus for a number of years prior to 1766. He finally lost the war in that year, but Kun-dga' nor-bu, the king of Khro-skyabs, however, had continued carving of his own woodblocks in spite of the decree issued by the Manchu Emperor Qianlong forbidding the practice of the Bon religion in Gyalrong.

His catalogue is the most detailed inventory of the Canon that had ever been made. Kun-grol gras-pa was not content to give just the titles of texts. He also provides all the chapter headings of all works that he has listed. This catalogue was published in Beijing in 1993 under the title of *gYung drung bon gyi bka' 'gyur dkar chag*. The woodblocks of the Canon were completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

### **3. The *dkar chag* of gYung-drung tshul-khrims dbang-grags**

gYung-drung tshul-khrims dbang-grags was a disciple of sNang-ston Zla-ba rgyal-mtshan (b.1796) and was a native of the Khyung-po province in Khams. He was one of the founders of the monastery known as Khyung-po sTeng-chen. His catalogue is entitled *rGyal ba'i bka' dang bka' rten rmad 'byung dgos 'dod yid bzhin gter gyi bang mdzod la dkar chags (chag) blo'i tha ram bkrol (dkrol) byed 'phrul gyi lde mig*. This catalogue is included in the present collection (Vol. 234) and it is the catalogue of the manuscript set of the Canon that was kept in the monastery. He began to compile it in 1876 and completed it in 1880. In this he followed closely the example of the *dkar chag* by Kun-grol grags-pa in giving all the details including chapter headings. However, there is an innovation in his work. He has, unlike his predecessors, numbered all the title entries, but this is done only section by section and not as a whole. The monastery, too, was destroyed together its library during the Cultural Revolution.

### **4. The present collection of the Katen texts of Sog-sde bsTan-pa'i nyi-ma**

A whole set of manuscripts of the Canon, the Kanjur part, was hidden away in the vicinity of dBal-khyung monastery in Nyag-rong when the Tibetan areas in Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan were harshly subjugated by the Chinese during 1957-58. After the relaxation of the strict control by the Chinese at the beginning of the 1980s, it was deemed that one could now bring out what was hidden, but the worry

was that the manuscript set of the Canon was the only surviving copy in the whole of Tibet after the Cultural Revolution. It was therefore a matter of great urgency to make new copies by reproducing the manuscripts lest anything irrevocable should happen to the unique copy, but due to the great number of volumes, it represented a prohibitively costly enterprise to have them published. However, Mr sKal-bzang phun-tshogs with the staunch support of his friend Lama Ayung finally overcame all the obstacles. They encountered problems both financial and non-cooperation on the part of the people who claimed to have been the owners of the manuscripts.

However, the publishers had the backing of the Sichuan government as well as of several Tibetan officials who were mostly rNying-ma-pa working in Chengdu. The whole printed edition was published in Chengdu in 1985-1988. The new print was decried by the “owners of the manuscripts” and other Bonpos as of poor quality in its production. However, the main concern of the publishers was in fact to bring out quickly new copies of the manuscripts so that there would be no catastrophic losses should anything happen to the unique original manuscripts.

It is this edition of the Kanjur, the first part of the Canon, that Per Kvaerne obtained a copy of, for the University of Oslo, beginning to organize a group of scholars in order to make an analytic catalogue in 1996. This catalogue is now being prepared for publication in Norway.

However, the Katen, the second part of the Canon, does not seem to have survived in any one set of manuscripts or printed editions either in Tibet itself or anywhere else. Although a great number of the texts that theoretically belong to the Katen part of the Canon were published in India by the Tibetan refugees with the encouragement given by Gene Smith during the 1960s and 1970s, no systematic collection of the whole of it has so far ever been made. Sog-sde bsTan-pa'i nyi-ma, the publisher of the present collection, therefore felt the urgent need of assembling together the Katen texts that were available, but in a scattered locations.

In assembling the texts Sog-sde bsTan-pa'i nyi-ma seems to have made no attempt to select texts as the Abbot Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin would have suggested if he were alive. Given the predicament of the cultural and religious situation in Tibet, it is understandable that Sog-sde bsTan-pa'i nyi-ma has wanted to collect texts almost indiscriminately and wherever he could lay his hands on them for his new edition of the Katen texts. It made no difference whether a text belonged to the old or new Bon tradition. The present collection of his edition that made its way to Tritan Norbutse monastery in Kathamandu in 2000 has 300 volumes, not counting the texts that belong to the Kanjur part of the Canon and a number of *gsung 'bum*. These have, in fact, come along with the collection.

Another characteristic of Sog-sde bsTan-pa'i nyi-ma is the lack of any systematic approach to his action. The texts in this collection are not arranged in any kind of order nor are the volumes numbered coherently in a particular way. It lacks a general title in spite of the claim that it is the “Bonpo Tenjur”. There is no indication

of the place where it is published nor the date of publication. In another words, it is totally a disorganised mass of texts. We have therefore preferred to use the term *Katen* (*bka' bsten*) which is the traditional term for this part of the Canon rather than describing it as the “Bonpo Tenjur”.

However, it must be pointed out that the collection does, indeed, contain a considerable number of rare and extremely important works that so far had never been published before. Moreover, by the process of reproducing the old manuscripts by means of photostat, however poor the quality of the reproduction may be, the value of the publication is all the same great and there is no doubt that scholars will highly appreciate having such texts in their “original form”. In this sense the publisher is to be warmly congratulated for this vast undertaking and his strenuous efforts in bringing out this composite collection.

### **5. The way in which the catalogue of the present collection is made**

Our colleague Professor Yasuhiko Nagano has a genius for organizing our work. He came to Triten Norbutse monastery with three portable computers already installed with a Tibetan programme as a gift for the monastery. It was in March 2000 that we began to prepare the work on the catalogue with four monks led by Tenpa Yundrung. Within a week the monks quickly learned how to play with the new toys. However, to deal with such a mass of texts that had no obvious regular numbering was rather daunting. It took us a whole week simply to sort them out and put them in a kind of order. We did not re-arrange the texts in any order since this would upset the already partially numbered parts of the collection and would also confuse when another library obtains the same set of texts and try to use our catalogue. We therefore decided to follow the numeration of the volumes although they are not, as mentioned earlier, always consistent. One of the problems the users of this catalogue might face is that the publisher has not set any limit to a conclusive edition so that there is no one “set of Bonpo Tenjur” with a definitive number of volumes. In the present case the collection contains 300 volumes. Tenpa Yungdrung and his colleagues completed the compilation of the catalogue within ten months in the way in which instructed. In March 2001 while we were reading the proofs of the catalogue in Triten Norbutse monastery, news had reached us to say that the publisher had continued to add more volumes to the collection as he kept finding more unpublished manuscripts!

Anyone who has ever tried to make a catalogue of Tibetan texts will understand how difficult it is to decide in what way one should do it. The Bonpo texts are no exception. On the contrary, they are more complicated than any other.

The volumes of the collection are not consistently numbered. A large part of it is numbered, however. They are simply marked as “1” and “2”. In our catalogue we have put the number “1” as 001. There are usually more than one text in one volume. The texts in one volume are therefore numbered in the following way: 001-

1 and 001-2. The number 001-1 is found by the indication of pages, e.g. 001-1 pp.1-13. There are also subsections of a text in which case they are indicated as [001-2a and 001-2b]. When there is an obvious error in spelling, the compilers suggest a better reading in a “Tibetan bracket” which is also used for indicating when something is absent, e.g. the name of an author.

Because of the need to indicate the nature of the texts of which there are mainly three types, each text has to be designated within the framework of thirteen entries. This involves having a lot of empty space if all the thirteen entries are kept with each text. In order to reduce the useless space, only the entries that apply to a text are given. Users of the catalogue will therefore have to familiarize themselves with the following guide first in order to understand the intended meaning of each number of the thirteen entries.

They are:

1. Title (*mtshan byang*) མཚན་བྱང་
2. Margin title (*zur byang*) ཟུར་བྱང་
3. Author, editor, compiler (*rtsom pa po, zhu dag pa, sgrig pa po*)  
ཚུམ་པ་པོ་ ཟུ་དག་པ་ སྐྱིག་པ་པོ་
4. Colophon (*mdzad byang*) མཛད་བྱང་
5. Rediscovered text (*gter ma*) གཏིར་མ་
6. Rediscoverer (*gter ston*) གཏིར་སྟོན་
7. Place of rediscovery (*gter gnas*) གཏིར་གནས་
8. Colophon of rediscovery (*gter byang*) གཏིར་བྱང་
9. Oral Tradition (*snyan rgyud*) སྐྱོན་རྒྱུད་
10. Receiver of Oral Tradition (*snyan rgyud phabs mkhan*)  
སྐྱོན་རྒྱུད་ཕབས་མཁན་
11. Colophon of Oral Tradition (*snyan byang*) སྐྱོན་བྱང་
12. Section (*le grangs, le tshan*) ལེ་གྲངས་ ལེ་ཚན་
13. Comments (*'grel bshad*) འགྲེལ་བཤད་

Here are three examples of how this framework is applied to a text in accordance with its specific type in the catalogue. In the Example I the text is written by an author. In the Example II the text is a rediscovery and in the Example III the text is of Oral Tradition.

### Example I

#### 012-9

1. gsang sngags ma rgyud rgyal ba rgya mtsho'i mngon rtogs thugs rje nyi ma'i 'od zer pp. 73-126
2. mngon rtogs
3. rnam dag 'od zer
4. de ltar gsang sngags ma rgyud kyi mngon rtogs thugs rje nyi ma'i 'od zer zhes bya ba rgyud 'grel dang gshen nyi ma'i phyag len gtsor bzung nas bstan pa'i mnga' bdag gshen ston gtsug phud 'od zer gyi zhabs rdul spyi bor len pa'i btsun pa rnam dag 'od zer gyis khri brtan nor bu'i rtse la sbyar ba dge legs 'phel//

### Example II

#### 001-5

1. gshen rab mchog de bzhin gshegs pa'i gtsug tor las byung ba'i gdugs dkar mo can gzhan gyis mi thub phyir zlog rigs sngags rgyal mo'i tshe chog mi 'gyur gur khang pp.79-92
2. tshe chog
5. gter ma
6. dbyil ston khyung rgod rtsal
7. zhal zang brag
8. phyis dbyil ston khyung rgod rtsal gyis gter nas bton pa'o//

### Example III

#### 002-10

1. dbal gsas gsang sgrub kyi dbang chog g-yung drung sgron gsal pp.399-444
2. khro dbang
9. snyan rgyud
10. kun dga' tshul khrims
11. de ltar dbal gsas dbang chog g-yung drung sgron gsal zhes bya ba/ rim par rgyud (brgyud) nas bla chen dran pa nam mkhas stang dmu tsha gyer med la brgyud/ des sa pho sprel lo'i lo sar (gsar) gyi nya la nges med kun dga' tshul khrims bdag la brgyud nas cvo (bco) lnga lo'i bka' rgya grol tshe/ chu phag zla 7 tshes 17 la bris pa'o//

The texts in the present collection should ideally be identified where possible by providing the numbers given in the catalogue of Per Kvaerne to which we have already referred. However, due to the complexity of the way in which the texts are assembled, the compilers have not been able to give the numbers of identification.

The catalogue is in 2 volumes. Volume 1 contains the main catalogue in Tibetan and volume 2 the indices of text titles and proper names. In making the

indices, the catalogue, which is in Tibetan, was converted into Roman characters on computer and only then processed in order to make the indices. Processed in this way, every variation of titles and proper names could automatically be entered, but of course without cross references.

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<sup>1</sup> *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. XVI-Nos.1-2, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> A new edition of this work has appeared: *mDo dri med gzi brjid*, Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 2000, Vols. 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> Rig-'dzin Kun-grol grags-pa, *gYung drung bon gyi bka' 'gyur dkar chag*, Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> On this *dkar chag* see S. G. Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle, Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998, pp.41-42.