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## The *Lo rgyus chen mo* in the collection of the *Ye khri mtha' sel* attributed to Dran-pa nam-mkha'

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### Introduction

The *sPyi rgyud chen po nam mkha' dkar po ye khri mtha' sel gyi rgyud* is a collection of works which expounds teachings in the *rdzogs chen* fashion supposedly transmitted by Dran-pa nam-mkha', the eighth-century Bonpo master whose critical yet inspiring conversion to Buddhism marked the end of the so-called early diffusion of Bon (*snga dar*) and the subsequent concealment of texts. The *Ye khri mtha' sel* does not belong to any of the three main transmissions of the Great Perfection in the Bon religion (*a rdzogs snyan gsum*). However, since it is considered to be the work of such a famous Bonpo figure as Dran-pa nam-mkha', it occupies a revered place within the Bonpo canonical literature. It is also known as the Indian cycle of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen rgya gar gyi skor*), since the transmission-lineage first appeared in that country.

The collection is mentioned in the *Zab dang rgya che g-yung drung bon gyi bka' 'gyur dkar chag nyi ma 'bum gyi 'od zer* by Rig-'dzin Kun-grol grags-pa, composed in 1751 (1993: 223), as section Ca, and it is described as having five main parts (*bam po*) and twenty-five small sub-sections (*mchong chung*) which are all listed in that work. We also find it mentioned in the *bKa' 'gyur brten 'gyur gyi sde can sgrigs tshul bstan pa'i me ro spar ba'i lung g-yab bon gyi pad mo rgyas byed nyi 'od*, composed by the sMan-ri abbot Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin (1813-1875) at an unspecified date (Kvaerne 1974: 112). It is conspicuously absent from the *rGyal ba'i bka' dang bka' rten rmad 'byung dgos 'dod yid bzhin gter gyi bang mdzod la dkar chags [sic] blo'i tha ram bkrol byed 'phrul gyi lde mig*, the fantastic work in 1391 pages composed, probably in 1880, by gYung-drung tshul-khrims dbang-grags. The cycle is mentioned and/or cited by Shar-rdza bKra-shis rgyal-mtshan (1859-1934) in his *Legs bshad rin po che'i gter mdzod* (Shar-rdza 1985: 120); in the *Sangs rgyas g-yung drung bon gyi bstan pa'i 'byung ba brjod pa'i legs bshad bskal pa bzang po'i mgrin rgyan* (TBMC 1972: 379) by dPal-ldan tshul-khrims (1902-1973); and in the *Three Sources for a History of Bon* (Gyatsho 1972: 511: 4, 515: 1, 518: 2, 708: 1). It is contained in the first reprint of the Bonpo Canon, which was supervised by the late gYung-drung bstan-pa'i rgyal-mtshan, alias Bla-ma A-g-yung (1927-1998). His *gYung drung bon gyi bka' 'gyur glog par ma'i dkar chag* (1985) lists it as volume 4/Ca in five *bam po* and 445 folios, and states that it is a treasure text found at mKho-mthing in lHo-brag. We also have a copy

preserved as volume 101 in the second reprint of the Bonpo Canon supervised by Bla-ma Bon-slob Nam-mkha' bstan-'dzin from rTogs-ldan monastery in A-mdo rNga-ba. Both reprints were carried out in the late '80s. In the second reprint we read from the colophon that the cycle has been published by a bKra-shis rnam-dag, who also published other Bon works in India during the '80s. In this respect, since the volumes contained in both the first and second canonical reprint have the same number of folios/pages, we may assume that both Tibetan printings were based on the Indian one.

As for the person who is directly connected with the diffusion of the cycle, Shar-rdza quotes a prophecy contained in the *Srid pa rgyud kyi kha byang rnam thar chen mo*, another text attributed to Dran-pa nam-mkha' and discovered by Gyer Thogs-med in 1310, which predicts the encounter between Lung-bon lHa-gnyan and the son of Dran-pa nam-mkha', Tshe-dbang rig-'dzin. Shar-rdza further describes the way in which the encounter took place on repeated occasions and locations where, among other teachings by Dran-pa nam-mkha', Lung-bon lHa-gnyan was imparted instructions on the *Ye khri mtha' sel* (Karmay 1972: 277-278). Lung-bon lHa-gnyan was born in 1088 according to the abbot Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin (Kvaerne 1971: 230). We have a short biography composed by his son and spiritual recipient, Lung-sgom 'Khor-lo rgyal-po, the *Lung ston lha gnyan gi rnam thar*, contained in the *Three Sources for a History of Bon* (Gyatsho 1972: 276-286). According to this biography, his name was Lung-ston 'Od-'bar; he passed away at the age of 37, and his mystical encounters with Tshe-dbang rig-'dzin would have taken place while he was 31. dPal-ldan tshul-khrims (TBMC 1972: 385: 6) mentions other works attributed to Lung-bon (or Lung-sgom), as does Karmay (1977: 11, 108-116), who gives his dates as either 1088-1124 or 1112-1148. However the collection of the *Ye khri mtha' sel* itself is not listed in Karmay (1977).

## 1. Brief description of the *Ye khri* cycle

The copy which was available to me for the present study is volume 101 of the second reprint of the Bonpo Canon preserved in the special collection of the East Asian Library at the University of Seattle, Washington. This volume, in 445 folios or 890 pages, is composed of 12 texts. One of them, which bears no title, contains a general outline of the *Ye khri*. According to this text the whole tantra was supposedly divided into two main parts with a total of 197 chapters (*le'u*), each part being composed of two *bam po*: the first two *bam po* are considered as the root tantra (*rtsa ba'i rgyud*), which is represented by the texts entitled *gNas pa gzhi'i bam po* (44 chapters) and *Thams cad la zla ba'i bam po* (49 chapters) respectively. These texts deal with various doctrinal aspects of the Great Perfection. The colophon of the *gNas pa gzhi'i bam po* states that the text was aurally transmitted to sPrul-sku Lung-ston lHa-gnyan by rJe Ri-khrod-pa, alias Tshe-dbang rig-'dzin,

at Yar-lha Sham-po in dBus (no date is given). The colophon of the *Thams cad la zla ba'i bam po* is basically a self-laudatory description by Dran-pa nam-mkha' and does not provide much information. The other two *bam po* would be the *mTshan nyid sgra tshad kyi bam po* (48 chapters) and the *mKha' 'gro rin chen phreng ba'i rgyud gsang sngags phyi snang 'byed pa'i bam po* (56 chapters), which Rig-'dzin Kun-grol grags-pa quotes simply as the *Phyi nang 'byed pa'i bam po*. These are styled the practice tantra (*spyod pa'i rgyud*). The *mTshan nyid sgra tshad kyi bam po* is absent from volume 101. The *mKha' 'gro rin chen phreng ba'i rgyud gsang sngags phyi snang 'byed pa'i bam po* deals with explanations, questions and answers, preliminary practices, invocations. A fifth, auxiliary *bam po* is also supposed to have been transmitted. Rig-'dzin Kun-grol grags-pa quotes it as the *Ma tshang kha bskang gyi bam po*. This text is not contained in volume 101 although it is mentioned as having 15 chapters. Out of the twenty-five *mchong* that according to Rig-'dzin Kun-grol grags-pa belong to this collection, we find only five texts in volume 101 that are clearly styled *mchong*. One of these is the *Lo rgyus chen mo* which is the object of this study.

## 2. The *sPyi rgyud Ye khri mtha' sel gyi lo rgyus chen mo skos kyi mchong*

This text is the eighth one contained in volume 101 (: 759-815/29 folios) with marginal title *lo rgyus mchong*. It is mentioned by Shar-rdza (1985: 120) as the *Ye khri'i lo rgyus chen mo skong* [sic] *gi 'phyong*. It is written in *dbu med* with many abridged words (*bdsus yig*). The reprint is not a very good one and some words are altogether illegible. The *Lo rgyus chen mo* can be said to be divided into two distinct sections: the first one refers to the lineage proper, the second one to doctrinal explanations about the Ultimate Reality - although there are naturally many points of interrelation between the two. I will now present the text by paraphrasing it in its most salient points.

The beginning of the text does not give the title in the somewhat customary form which relates the name of the work in the Zhang-zhung language, Sanskrit or Tibetan. It begins in a typical *rdzogs chen* fashion with an homage to Kun-tu bzang-po, who in this instance is equated to the Identity of the uncompounded Basis (*ston pa kun tu bzang po gzhi 'dus ma byas pa'i bdag nyid de la phyag 'tshal lo*). Then it proceeds by specifying that the transmission lineage that will be described is twofold: the first is the history of the lineage related to the Compassionate Teacher (*thugs rje can gyi lo rgyus*). I think the latter is to be identified with gShen-lha 'Od-dkar, since this is the way in which he is referred to in other sources connected with the Great Perfection. gShen-lha 'Od-dkar is the symbolic central figure of the Body of Perfection (*rdzogs pa'i sku*). He is also called Kun-tu bzang-po but only insofar as he is an enlightened being whose attributes and qualifications can be described, and who therefore represents the

‘expressible’ Kun-tu bzang-po (*gdags su yod pa’i Kun-tu bzang-po*). The second is the history of the blessed lineage of the Word and the Tantras (*bka’ rgyud byin rlabs can gyi lo rgyus*). The history of the enlightened lineage is expounded in a way that shows a progressive decrease from the mystical to the mundane level in which the Seven Auspicious Conditions (*phun sum tshogs pa bdun*) appear. These are the Location (*gnas phun sum tshogs pa*), the Teacher (*ston pa phun sum tshogs pa*), the Retinue (*’khor phun sum tshogs pa*), the Time (*dus phun sum tshogs pa*), the Teachings imparted (*bstan pa phun sum tshogs pa*), the Collectors of the teachings (*sdud pa po phun sum tshogs pa*), the Material Objects (*rgyu phun sum tshogs pa*).

The first Location where the teaching of the Great Perfection is expounded is, logically enough, the dimension of uncompounded and unobstructed Reality; the Teacher is Kun-tu bzang-po of the uncompounded dimension of the Basis; the Retinue is all the enlightened beings of the Body of Perfection, the unlimited number of Well-gone Ones (*bder gshegs*) of the ten directions; the time is the immutable time of the dimension of Reality; the Teachings are expounded by sNang-srid kun-gsal ’Od-’byed pa’i rgyal-po; the Collector is gSang-sngags kun-’chang rgyal-po; the Material Objects used, various kinds of precious jewels.

The second stage of transmission occurs at the level of the Body of Perfection where the Teacher is gSang-sngags kun-’chang rgyal-po, the Retinue is composed by the gYung-drung Sems-dpa’ Primordial gShen, and the Collector is bKa’-rtogs Don-mthong rgyal-po.

Then the teaching is expounded in a continent called Thams-cad ’dul-ba gsal-ba ’od-kyi-gling by the Teacher bKa’-rtogs don-mthong rgyal-po; the Collector is Ye-shes ’od-kyi bla-ma don yongs-su grub pa.

The lineage now reaches Bha-ra mu-khung ’od-kyi tshal in Zhang-zhung, with the Teacher Ye-shes ’od-kyi bla-ma don yongs-su grub pa. The Collector is Kun-gsal ’od-kyi khye’u-chung. From this location the Teacher Kun-gsal ’od-kyi khye’u-chung moves to the West to the Paradise of Supreme Bliss (*rab dga’ bde ba can gyi gnas*), at the Time when the Nine Suns clearly shine (that is to say, when the teachings of the Nine Vehicles were flourishing), and when the sounds and letters of the Four Portals and the Treasury of Bon automatically unfolded by themselves. The teachings were collected by “The Three that Know in a Pure and Clear Way.” ’Od kyi khye’u chung could possibly be identified with Ta-pi hri-tsa, who is related to the transmission of the *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* cycle. Up to this point the lineage is called “the compassionate lineage devoid of afflictions (*zag med thugs rje’i rgyud*), which is the heart transmission of the Well-gone Ones.

Then begins the description of the so-called lineage of the compassionate blessing (*thugs rje byin rlabs kyi rgyud*). This is analyzed by way of a Primary Cause (*rgyu*), Circumstantial Causes (*rkyen*) and the Effect (*’bras bu*). The Primary Cause is the merit accumulated by worthy individuals in the past; the Circumstantial one is the compassion of the Well-gone Ones, together with the

prayers of previous Bla-mas and saints; the Effect is the attainment of the unsurpassable Enlightenment of the Well-gone Ones.

We then have a description of a former prophecy concerning the *Ye khri mtha' sel*. The treasure text is put into written form in India, from where it is transmitted to a succession of sages. These are listed, together with their personal spiritual accomplishments, as:

1. gShen Man-bha Bi-sha
2. gShen Thugs-rje g-yung-drung grub pa
3. Khro-gsas Pad-ma 'od-zer
4. gShen Blo-rdzogs g-yung-drung seng-ge
5. gShen Bon-khrims Yongs-su dag-pa
6. gShen bDud-rtsi yang-dag grub pa
7. gShen Don-yod bDe-ba gnam-gsas
8. O-rgyan Rab-gsang-ba lHa'i snying-po
9. rTag-gzigs-kyi mKha'-'gro gsum
10. dBang-grub sMan-gyi gshen-rab
11. gYung-drung rgyal-po gshen-rab
12. gSas-grags bDud-rtsi gshen-rab 'bar-ba
13. Bru-sha'i mKhas-pa lnga
14. gShen Pra-ti bha-ra
15. gShen Hol-ril pa-ti
16. gShen Dra-sho zang-he
17. gShen A-mo Sing-he sil-shi
18. gShen Maksha pe-tsa
19. gShen Tshad-med 'od-ldan, who is said to have received instructions from all the teachers in Zhang-zhung, India, Thod-dkar, Bru-sha and so on. He passed his knowledge to
20. dMu-gshen mKhas-pa Dran-pa nam-mkha', who retained the power of long life. Dran-pa nam-mkha' transmitted the teachings to:
21. sPrul-sku Khri-srong sde [sic]-btsan,
22. Be-ro tsa-na, who was impartial as to Bon and Chos,
23. gCo-za Bon-mo, who attained perfect Enlightenment, and to
24. sPrul-sku Ri-khrod chen-po. The latter transmitted the teachings to
25. sPrul-sku lHa-gnyan, who in turn taught them to
26. Lung-sgom 'Khor-lo rgyal-po.

Subsequently, many special treasures of the Word related to this cycle are said to have been handed down and mastered by gNyag-ston lHa-'bar, who passed them on to sPrul-sku lHa-rje-gyer. The latter transmitted them to Gyer Nam-mkha' g-yung-drung, an emanation of Dran-pa nam-mkha'; and now, the text says, they are retained by Gyer-ston mChod-[?], while the teachings related to the *spyi rgyud Ye*

*khri mtha' sel* proper come directly from rJe Ri-khrod Chen-po. We shall note that Gyer Nam-mkha' g-yung-drung is mentioned by Shar-rdza as being one of the recipients of the Yer-rdzong-ma treasure texts (Karmay 1972: 153). Except for the very well known figures, I was not able to identify the other names.

The lineage, as it is described so far, is called the “compassionate blessing male lineage” (*thugs rje byin rlabs kyi brgyud pa pho rgyud*). Interestingly enough we now have a quite detailed description of the female lineage (*mo rgyud*) of the *Ye khri* cycle, which in itself is a rare occurrence in Tibetan religious literature. The text however does not use the pattern of the Seven Auspicious Conditions in this case.

The female lineage begins as a compassionate blessing from the Mother Kun-tu bzang-mo who abides in the contemplative state beyond afflictions. At the level of the Body of Perfection the lineage unfolds cosmogonically in the form of the Five Wisdoms represented by five queens who purify the main afflictions:

Kun-tu bzang-mo

North

Yum-bskyod las-kyi rgyal-mo (Envy)

Centre

Nam-mkha' dbyings-kyi rgyal-mo (Mental darkness)

West

Yum Ma-chags mdzes-pa'i rgyal-mo  
(Desire)

East

Yum Rig-pa 'od-kyi rgyal-mo  
(Aversion)

South

Yum 'Byung-ba rlabs-kyi rgyal-mo (Pride)

The lineage is further described as manifesting itself at an external, internal, secret and unsurpassably secret level, where the spacial arrangement is maintained, with each of the five Queens, lHa-mo and mKha'-'gro-ma performing a different taming action and having different attributes. From these the teaching is transmitted to Five gYung-drung sems-ma. These are: Nam-mkha' skyes-gcig-ma, Sems-bskyed g-yung-drung-ma, Chus-bskyed yang-dag 'Phags-ma, 'Od-'gro gsal-'bar-ma and Kun-grol[?] 'od-'bar-ma. The female lineage up to this point is defined as “compassionate transmission devoid of afflictions” (*zag med thugs rje'i brgyud pa*) and occurs only through direct recognition (*rig pa thabs kyis brgyud*).

We now enter the realm of the Body of Emanation where the teaching is transmitted by way of spiritual accomplishment. In a location of Zhang-zhung

called dBal-'gying tsa-ba-can, after miraculous events, a daughter with special attributes is born to Khyung-ne 'od-kyi slags-pa-can and to Tsa-ti-ma gsal-ma sgron-ma-can (no name is given). Then, in India, the mKha'-'gro-ma U-li-shag translates the teachings in Sanskrit. Starting with U-li-shag, the lineage unfolds to twenty-two or twenty-four mKha'-'gro-mas of Spiritual Accomplishment (*grub thob kyi mkha' 'gro ma nyi shu rtsa gnyis sam rtsa bzhi la brgyud*). Here twenty-two are listed, together with their distinctive signs of realization:

1. rGya-gar U-li-shag
2. dBal-mo-za Nam-mkha' 'od-kyi rgyal-mo
3. Rwa-zhags-za gSal-ba'i dbyings-phyug ma
4. Zhang-zhung-za 'Od-kyi bla-ma
5. lDong-?-za 'Khor-mo-skyong
6. rTag-gzigs-za Mang-byed gsal-byed-'od
7. U-rgyan-za Rigs-ngan-ma bDud-rtsi-skyong
8. rGya-gar-gyi Pha-'thing-za mThu-chen-ma
9. rGya-za gSal-ba 'od-sgron-ma
10. 'Khor-po-za Dri-med mdangs-ldan-ma
11. gCo-za 'Od-kyi rdzu-'phrul-ston
12. ?-? sNa-tshogs-ston
13. Lung-brgyan-za sNang-ba brda-ston
14. Mi-nyag-za Thos-'bebs 'od-zer-can
15. U-rgyan-za Nam-mkha' yum[?]-skrags 'phro-ma
16. She-ber-za 'Od-thang ma
17. Kha-che-za rGyan-ldan-ma
18. Gyer-za Brag-chen-rtsal

Now follows the female lineage which received the Four Initiations (*dbang bzhi*) from Dran-pa nam-mkha' and rJe Ri-khrod-pa Chen-po:

19. mKha'-'gro Nyi-ma 'od-'bar-ma
20. mKha'-'gro Nyi-ma stong-khyab-ma
21. mKha'-'gro Ma-ha su-ka si-ti-ma
22. mKha'-'gro gCo-za Bon-mo

As for the above names, I was able to identify only two: we have a short biography of Nyi-ma stong-khyab-ma, alias lHa-lcam Nyi-ma stong-khyab, and one of gCo-za Bon-mo in the *gter ma* discovered by bDe-chen chos-kyi dbang-mo, born in 1868 (Kvaerne 1971: 239), the *mKha' 'gro rgya mtsho' rnam thar gsang ba'i mdzod nyi ma'i snying po mun sel sgron ma* (Rossi 1999). There, Nyi-ma stong-khyab is presented as an Indian princess and as a tantric partner of Tshedbang rig-'dzin. gCo-za Bon-mo is associated with Li-shu stag-ring, the eighth-



century master who supposedly translated the cycle of the Three Proclamations (*bsgrags pa skor gsum*) from the Zhang-zhung language into Tibetan, and who also transmitted the cycle of the *Yang rtse klong chen*. gCo-za Bon-mo and Li-shu stagering are both quoted in the above *gter ma* where they prophesy the decline of Bon and the hiding of texts at the time of King Khri-srong. gCo-za Bon-mo is also the one who is asked to invite back the banished Bon-po priests from the North in order to save the king's life (Karmay 1972: 100).

After the section that deals with the lineage, the remaining part of the text concentrates on the exposition of the *rdzogs chen* doctrine. Most of the points presented are quite well known from other Bonpo sources of the Great Perfection. Here I would like to mention in particular the description of the Ultimate Reality, given in *Lo rgyus chen mo*, according to the Five Great Principles (*che ba lnga*). It is interesting to see these principles mentioned in this context, and to compare them with those found in the *sGom gyi gnad gsal bar phye ba bsam gtan mig sgron* by gNubs-chen Sangs-rgyas ye-she (Karmay 1988). In this work, the five *che ba* are given as the five qualities of the Great Identity (*bdag nyid chen po*). We shall note that the Great Identity, together with the Condition (*ngang*) and the Nature (*rang bzhin*) constitute the threefold axiom that according to the Bonpo Great Perfection represents the Ultimate Reality. The *Lo rgyus chen mo* lists them as follows:

I. The Great Principle of Enlightenment as the Dimension of the Ultimate Reality, given that the Mind-itself is unborn from the origin (*sems nyid gdod ma nas ma skyes pas bon nyid dbyings su sangs rgyas pa'i che ba*).

II. The Great Principle of Enlightenment as really perfected, given that all appearances are the Mind-itself (*snang ba sna tshogs sems nyid yin pas mngon par rdzogs par sangs rgyas pa'i che ba*).

III. The Great Principle of Enlightenment as Great Identity, given that no other phenomenon exists outside of the Mind (*sems las ma gtogs pa'i bon gzhan med pas bdag nyid chen por sangs rgyas pa'i che ba*).

IV. The Great Principle of Enlightenment as not being something that can be created, given that the state of Enlightenment of the Mind-itself is beyond effort and action (*sems nyid sangs rgyas kyi g-yo rtsol las 'das pas ma byas par sangs rgyas pa'i che ba*).

V. The Great Principle of there being no Enlightenment since in the Nature of the Mind the realization of Enlightenment is inexpressible (*sems kyi rang bzhin la sangs rgyas kyi rtogs pa mi brjod pas sangs rgyas med pa'i che ba*).

Karmay (1988: 114) mentions the Five Principles contained in the *bSam gtan mig sgron* as follows:

1. *mngon du sangs rgyas pa'i che ba* ("direct enlightenment"). This corresponds to the second Principle of the *Lo rgyus chen mo*.

2. *bdag nyid chen por sangs rgyas pa'i che ba* (the “Great self as the Enlightenment”). This corresponds to the third Principle of the *Lo rgyus chen mo*.
3. *rang rig pa bdag nyid che ba* (“the Self-awareness as the Great self”). Karmay (1988: 114) also quotes the definition given by Rong-zom Chos-kyi bzang-po (ca. eleventh century) in his *Theg pa chen po'i tshul la 'jug pa* which reads: *chos kyi dbyings su sangs rgyas pa'i che ba*. This has a correspondence with the first Principle of the *Lo rgyus chen mo*.
4. *de yin pa'i sangs rgyas pa'i che ba* (the affirmation of the 3rd).
5. *thams cad nas thams cad du sangs rgyas med pa'i che ba* (“Enlightened: at all time”).

At a first glance, the way in which the *Lo rgyus chen mo* expounds these five principles with respect to the *bSam gtan mig sgron*, seems to be clearer and more coherent. It certainly conforms to the fundamental tenets of the metaphysical view of the Great Perfection, as we find it expounded in many sources, such as the Three Proclamations, the *Yang rtse klong chen* and the Aural Transmission from Zhang-zhung (Rossi 1999). One wonders whether this may not be another case of textual transformation; the matter requires further comparative analysis.

The present paper represents a very preliminary approach to the study of this huge and hitherto inedited collection of the *Ye khri mtha' sel*. Undoubtedly, both the *Ye khri mtha' sel* cycle and the *Lo rgyus chen mo* can be considered as an interesting source of support, primarily, but not limited to, a better understanding of the Great Perfection as formulated in the Bon religion.

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