Opening the Eyes of Faith: Constructing Tradition in a Sixteenth-Century Catalogue of Tibetan Religious Poetry1

Stefan Larsson (Stockholm University) and Andrew Quintman (Yale University)

Introduction

Tsang smyon Heruka (1452–1507), the so-called Madman of gTsang, is best known for his novelistic accounts of early bKa’ brgyud founders Mar pa (1012?–1097?) and Mi la ras pa (ca. 1040–1123). His efforts to compile, edit, print, and disseminate the narratives and religious poetry of those early figures underscored the central role that spiritual songs of realization (mgur) played in the expression and transmission of Buddhism across the Tibetan cultural world. gTsang smyon Heruka is himself credited with composing a significant corpus of spiritual verse, which has been compiled in a volume of his own collected songs (mgur ’bum).2 He maintained his interest in literary activities through the latter part of his life. At one point, gTsang smyon returned to Chu bar in Southern Tibet, one of Mi la ras pa’s favored retreats and site of the yogin’s cremation, where he is said to have “brought many disciples to spiritual maturi-

---

1 The authors would like to thank Khenpo Choying Dorjee (Dzongsar Institute), Janet Gyatso, Roger Jackson, Dan Martin, Jann Ronis, and Kurtis Schaeffer for their assistance and comments on early drafts of this essay. Stefan Larsson would like to acknowledge the grants he received from The Lars Hierta Memorial Foundation, The Swedish Research Council (projects 2009-7077 and 2013-1421), and Margot and Rune Johansson’s Foundation.

2 gTsang smyon Heruka, gTsang pa he ru ka’i mgur ’bum. His songs are also preserved in two of the three extant biographies that gTsang smyon’s disciples composed after his passing, i.e. rGod tshang ras pa, Nyi ma’i snying po; and lHa btsun rin chen rnam rgyal, Dad pa’i sgu slong g.yo ba. The songs of gTsang smyon have not yet been studied carefully. Ilze Maruta Stearns has translated, transcribed, and edited two songs in her master’s thesis (Stearns 1985, 12, 19–20, 97–124, 130–39). Franz-Karl Ehrhard (2010, 155–57) reproduced and studied the colophon of gTsang smyon’s mgur ’bum. Stefan Larsson has written briefly about the song collection and translated some sections of the songs in his study of the madman’s life (Larsson 2012, 42–44, 159ff.). Larsson is currently involved in a research project focusing on gTsang smyon’s mgur ’bum and other related texts (Swedish Research Council, project 2013-1421).

ty through granting empowerments and instructions.” During this period he also composed several texts related to the aural transmissions (snyan brgyud) lineages of esoteric instruction originating with the early bKa’ brgyud masters, as well as works on the tantric cycle of Hevajra. Included among gTsang smyon’s writings at this time is a catalogue of spiritual songs, the text under consideration here. The composition is not a collection of verses (mgur ’bum) per se. Rather it is a catalogue (dkar chags) of songs, reflecting on the origin, forms, functions, and qualities of the wider mgur tradition. The work was completed in 1503 and wood blocks produced for a printed edition five years later. Only a single copy of the xylographic print is known to exist, preserved in the Sammlung Waddell of the Berlin State Library.

gTsang smyon Heruka’s text, entitled Opening the Eyes of Faith, has so far received little attention. It is missing from Gene Smith’s seminal 1969 study of gTsang smyon Heruka’s life and works. Kurtis Schaeffer likewise makes no mention of it in his recent overview of the printing projects of gTsang smyon and his disciples. Several scholars have briefly noted the work in passing, but to date, the text has not been the subject of a detailed study.

The catalogue offers a rare and relatively early reflection on the scope of the Tibetan mgur tradition by an author who helped make the genre famous in Tibet. This tradition is usually traced back, in part, to the early bKa’ brgyud figures Mar pa and Mi la ras pa, and the Indian siddhas before them. In turn, the practice of singing mgur is frequently understood as a primary signifier of the “oral transmission” of esoteric instructions between teacher and disciple from

---

3 rGod tshang ras pa, Nyi ma’i snying po, 207. dbang dang gdams pas gdul bya mang po smin par mdzad/. References refer to the Western pagination. Although no date is given in the biography, since rGod tshang ras pa’s rnam thar of gTsang smyon is chronologically structured, this seems to have taken place around 1503.
4 The term dkar chags is alternately spelled kar chag and dkar chag.
5 The manuscript, i.e. “Waddell 120 h” was recently made available in the Digital Library of the Berlin State Library for free viewing and downloading: http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/dms/.
7 Schaeffer 2011.
8 The text is outlined briefly in Schuh (1981, 126–27). Ehrhard (2010, 157–58) noted the text’s title and colophon data in his examination of the writings of gTsang smyon’s biographer rGod tshang ras pa. Short references to it are also found in Larsson (2012, 251) and Sernesi (2011, 186). Larsson presented a preliminary survey of the text at the International Association for Tibetan Studies Seminar in Ulaanbaatar, 2013. Quintman presented the text at the “Tibetan Translation and Transmission Conference,” Boulder, CO, October 2014.
9 On the tradition of Indian tantric songs, see for example, Guenther 1969; Jackson 2004; Kapstein 2006; Kværne 1977; Templeman 1994.
which the name bKa’ brgyud is said to have derived. As compiler and early printer of their lives and songs, gTsang smyon Heruka thus stands as a central figure in the history of Buddhist songs in Tibet. Given his centrality in the development and popularization of the genre, gTsang smyon’s thoughts about mgur are particularly significant. Despite its brevity, the madman’s catalogue bears closer scrutiny, not only because it brings to light reflections on Tibetan verse forms that have languished in relative obscurity, although that is one reason. Perhaps more importantly, Opening the Eyes of Faith makes transparent some programmatic ways in which gTsang smyon employed the song tradition to construct a distinctive religious identity. And as with his better-known literary achievements, that identity was fashioned around the ideal of the ascetic yogin and his spontaneous expressions of spiritual awakening in song.

The text is more than a simple list of song titles. It presents an indigenous Tibetan view of what mgur are and how they function. It details the suitable forms such verses can take, their necessary elements, potential flaws, and beneficial effects. It gives advice about how one should vocalize songs, to whom, and for what reasons. The catalogue reveals a picture of the mgur tradition that supports the stories Tibetans frequently tell about their esoteric traditions while also calling some of those stories into question. The text is thus interesting precisely because it helps complicate our understanding of mgur in a number of ways.

First, Opening the Eyes of Faith foregrounds the fact that mgur originated as a performative tradition. This follows the normative view that such verses are “songs of realization” and were expressed through the meditative experiences of great masters from the past. It then sets forth the ritual contexts in which those songs should be sung, together with the mental attitudes required of both performer and audience. Yet the text also reveals how mgur may function in non-performative ways. The catalogue lists only song titles and not the songs themselves. Individual titles included in the catalogue therefore seem to function as placeholders for the songs, and the instructions they transmit, while still demonstrating a valid transmission from teacher to student. The song titles here record the tradition’s lineage extending from early Indian origins (both the tantric and historical buddhas) down to the author in sixteenth-century Tibet. Moreover, many individuals represented in the catalogue’s lineage were themselves the subject of biographical writing produced by

---

gTsang smyon and his followers. In this way, the text further reflects the mechanisms through which a religious community worked to record its lineage of the past and project it forward into the future.

The catalogue also echoes the traditional description of mgur as spontaneous expressions of an awakened mind, the “unstructured experience” of great yogins. In this view, such verses stand in contrast to the more scholastic prose of academic treatises as well as the more classical poetic forms based on Indian systems of kāvya. Here again, the text also contests that view. gTsang smyon underscores how songs require careful composition, expression, timing, etc. in order to be effective. A proper verse should “maintain songs of previous masters,” “uphold authentic dharma,” “bring forth the nectar-like oral instructions,” and “cause the attainment of perfect Buddhahood.” Likewise, their performance is a highly ritualized practice, one that requires a certain degree of care and training. Verses should be preceded by appropriate expressions of devotion and framed within a proper narrative context. The body of the song is to be “elevated and majestic,” its subject “clear and unadorned,” with a tone that is charming and a melody complete.

In light of these broad observations, this essay will offer a preliminary analysis and translation of gTsang smyon Heruka’s little known song catalogue. We begin with a history of the text’s production, the individuals involved in its printing, and the wider literary context into which such a text might fit. We then briefly survey the catalogue’s contents to highlight its principal features and functions. We conclude by reflecting on the traditional views about mgur in theory represented in this text (that they are based on meditative experience, that they are a spontaneous form of oral performance) while foregrounding some of the seemingly contradictory observations about them in practice (that they are often, perhaps predominantly, transmitted in literary form, that they conform to a strictly regulated framework). This short text, we contend, illustrates how spiritual poetry, and mgur in particular, can function in different registers depending on the context: original composition, biography, collected songs, catalogue, and subsequent performance as part of a living tradition, while serving both doctrinal and programmatic purposes. gTsang smyon has made use of each of these registers in order to constitute his view of the bKa’ brgyud tradition.

In the notes, we have referenced the sources for many of the catalogue’s best-known songs, such as those found in the Mi la corpus or Mar pa biography, which themselves are primarily known through the work of gTsang smyon Heruka. We have not, however, made an exhaustive attempt to identify or annotate all of the songs mentioned in the text. Further research will no doubt provide a clearer picture of
gTsang smyon Heruka’s sources for this work. Appendix 1 provides a critical transcription of the Tibetan text. Appendix 2 presents a schematic illustration of the lineage masters recorded in Opening the Eyes of Faith, together with the number of songs attributed to each. Appendix 3 illustrates gTsang smyon’s personal transmission lineage.11

History of the Text

The full title of this work is A Catalogue of Songs Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance and Opening the Eyes of Faith (mGur gyi dkar chags ma rig mun sel dad pa’i mig ’byed). The catalogue is relatively short, spanning just nine folios, and concludes with the following colophon:

This preliminary catalogue proclaiming the dharma that brings about well-being now and in the future is unstructured experience written down by the yogin who wanders in charnel grounds, King of Blood Drinkers, in the middle autumn month of the Water-Female-Pig year.12

Although gTsang smyon Heruka’s name does not appear, the epithet “the Yogin who wanders in charnel grounds, King of Blood Drinkers” is one of the madman’s best-known monikers, found in the Lives of both Mar pa and Mi la ras pa. The date of its composition, a Water-Female-Pig year, corresponds to 1503, which agrees with information found in the madman’s own biography written by rGod tshang ras pa (1482–1559) shortly after his death.13 It is therefore beyond reasonable doubt that gTsang smyon was the text’s author.

The printing colophon provides further information about the text’s creation:

E ma ho.
This catalogue of songs, a lamp dispelling darkness,
Was printed by Kun tu bzang mo,
After she thought to benefit the Buddha’s teachings and beings.
sTod pa ’phel le of sMan khab wrote it down,

11 Publication constraints did not allow for the reproduction of chart graphics in the appendices. Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 can be downloaded here: http://andrewquintman.com/openingeyes/.
12 gTsang smyon Heruka, mGur gyi dkar chags, 9a. See the Tibetan text in Appendix 1.
13 rGod tshang ras pa, Nyi ma’i snying po, 207.
Sangs rgyal grogs mched of Zur tsho carved the blocks, and Lo pan 'Jam dpal chos lha performed the editing.\textsuperscript{14}

Although these lines do not record a precise location or date for the text’s production, they do offer a few clues about when and where it was eventually printed. Several of the names recorded here are known from other works by gTsang smyon Heruka. Kun tu bzang mo (1464–1549), who directed the printing project, can be identified as the madman’s female disciple and partner.\textsuperscript{15} She is also credited with arranging and sponsoring the block prints for at least two other literary works connected with gTsang smyon Heruka’s life and teachings: (1) his earliest biography written by dNgos grub dpal ‘bar (1456–1527); and (2) his collected songs. ‘Jam dpal chos lha can be identified as another of gTsang smyon Heruka’s disciples who collaborated with Kun tu bzang mo as editor on those two projects. The scribe sTod pa ‘phel le and carver Sangs rgyal grogs mched likewise took on identical roles in the production of those two works.\textsuperscript{16} This was, it seems, a well seasoned literary team.

A comparison of the physical features of these three works—biography, collected songs, and catalogue—provides corroborative evidence that they were products of a single publishing atelier. The title pages of all three works exhibit strikingly similar floral treatments (see Figure 1). The design and layout of the following pages likewise closely resemble one another. Although the catalogue lacks the illustrations found in opening folio side of the biography and

\textsuperscript{14} gTsang smyon Heruka, \textit{mGur gyi dkar chags}, 9a.

\textsuperscript{15} The dPal brtsegs Institute has discovered a 73 folios manuscript \textit{rnam thar} of Kun tu bzang mo, written by her disciple mKhan rab dbang phyug in 1551. Its full title is \textit{Dus gsun rgyal ba ma lus pa bskyed pa’i yum chen kun tu bzang mo’i rnam par thar pa zab don gter mdzod mthong ba don ldan}. This text is the subject of ongoing study. Porong Dawa of the dPal brtsegs Institute and Hildegard Diemberger recently presented some of their findings at the conference \textit{Printing as an Agent of Change in Tibet and Beyond} (Cambridge University, November 2013); see Dawa and Diemberger in press; Diemberger in press; see also Diemberger 2014. Kurtis Schaeffer presented a survey of Kun tu bzang mo’s life based on this text (“\textquotequotedblleft An Introduction to the Life of Kuntu Zangmo (1464–1549) and some Remarks on Researching the History of Buddhist Women in the Himalayas,” paper presented at the Third Himalayan Studies Conference, Yale University, March 15, 2014). rGod tshang ras pa includes a brief summary of Kun tu bzang mo’s life in his biography of gTsang smyon (rGod tshang ras pa, \textit{Nyi ma’i sbying po}, 1969, 140–42). This short life story has been studied by Larsson, in press.

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Ehrhard 2010, 154–58. For the original colophons, see, dNgos grub dpal ‘bar, \textit{Dad pa’i seng ge}, 30b–31a; gTsang smyon Heruka, \textit{gTsang pa he ru ka’i mgur ‘bum}, 27a–28a. The scribe came from sMan khab and the carver from Zur tsho, regions located not far from the printing location of bSam gtan gling, as will be discussed below. For more on these texts, the place of printing, and the people who made them, see Larsson in press.
songs, each first full text folio is circumscribed by a set of double lines with a box in the left and right margins, while the pages thereafter all have seven lines of text per folio and are flanked by two vertical lines on both sides of the text (see Figures 2.1 – 2.3).17

Franz-Karl Ehrhard has recently suggested that both gTsang smyon’s biography and song collection were printed 1508 at bSam gtan gling, a monastery situated near the sacred mountain of rTsib ri in La stod Lho.18 Together with Mi la ras pa’s own biography and collected songs, they may have formed a four-part set.19 The printed edition of gTsang smyon’s catalogue Opening the Eyes of Faith was thus likely also produced in 1508 at bSam gtan gling. Indeed, rGod tshang ras pa describes exactly the kind of scene in which such activity could have taken place: shortly after the madman’s passing, a group of his close disciples including Kun tu bzang mo gathered to compile and print gTsang smyon’s life story and song collection, materials they imagined as forming a textual support for gTsang smyon’s enlightened speech (gsung gi rten).20

Opening the Eyes of Faith concludes with a two-folio catalogue of gTsang smyon’s own collected songs entitled Illuminating Sunlight Catalogue (dKar chags nyi ’od snang ba), appended directly after the printing colophon. This work was compiled by rGod tshang ras pa and this in turn suggests his involvement with the creation of Opening the Eyes of Faith.21

17 To this trio of block prints may be added a forth. Marta Sernesi has discovered that the same editor, scribe, and carver also participated in the production of gTsang smyon’s famous biography of Mar pa, a work printed just a few years earlier, in 1505 (Sernesi 2011, 185–87). She notes the clear similarities between the original print of Mar pa’s biography and the prints of gTsang smyon’s rnam thar and mgur ‘bum “in terms of page layout (mise en page) and ductus, confirming that they issued from the same workshop” (Sernesi 2011, 187). Sernesi further notes (2011, 187n17) that the print of Mar pa’s rnam thar is marked with the marginal letter ka, which could indicate an “intended continuity” between this and the later prints, which are marked with letters ga (dNgos grub dpal ’bar, Dad pa’i seng ge) and nga (gTsang smyon, gTsang pa he ru ka’i mgur ‘bum). Opening the Eyes of Faith bears no such marginal notations.

18 Ehrhard 2010, 154–58. For more on bSam gtan gling, see Larsson in press; Wangdu and Diemberger 1996, 51–54. In the colophon to his biography of gTsang smyon, dNgos grub dpal ’bar records that he composed the text in 1508 in the monastery of bSam gtan gling at rGyal gyi šri ri in La stod lho (dNgos grub dpal ’bar, Dad pa’i seng ge, 30b).

19 Ehrhard 2010, 154. As noted, Mar pa’s rnam thar could also have been included in such a set (see note 16).

20 rGod tshang ras pa, Nyi ma’i snying po, 282.

21 rGod tshang ras pa, dKar chags nyi ’od snang ba, 10b. This brief colophon concludes by identifying rGod tshang ras pa as its compiler: rdo rje’i mgur chings dkar
We can thus conclude that *Opening the Eyes of Faith* was written by gTsang smyon Heruka in Chu bar in 1503 and then likely printed in 1508. gTsang smyon’s female companion Kun tu bzang mo sponsored the project, with several other disciples acting as editor, scribe, and carver, all of whom had been involved with producing xylographic editions of their guru’s biography and collected songs. The text was likely printed at bSam gtan gling in La stod Lho, with further input from gTsang smyon Heruka’s close disciple rGod tshang ras pa. Finally, *Opening the Eyes of Faith* was itself probably issued and circulated together with gTsang smyon’s biography and songs, possibly as a kind of appendix to them.

**Precedents and Parallels for *Opening the Eyes of Faith***

Before turning to the catalogue, it will be helpful to first situate it within the broader Tibetan tradition of commentary on songs. Even with the profusion of *mgur* in Tibet, recorded in the biographies and collected songs of innumerable masters, commentary on the traditions of song and vocal performance themselves seems to have been relatively rare. It was, however, not entirely lacking, and we find some evidence for possible influences on gTsang smyon’s exposition. In his youth, he was educated in a Sa skya monastic environment and thus may have been familiar with Sa skya Paṇḍita’s famous *Treatise on Music* (*Rol mo’i bstan bcos*).22 Sa paṇ’s *Treatise* was the earliest extended theoretical treatment of the Tibetan Buddhist musical tradition, with sections covering vocal music (*dbyangs*), composition (*tshig sbyor*), and melody and words (*dbyangs dang tshig*). All three of the madman’s biographies agree that gTsang smyon studied for at least three years in the Gur pa monastic department of dPal ’khor chos sde Monastery in rGyal rtse, which was affiliated with the Sa skya tradition. During this period he studied tantric texts and he also learned to perform tantric rituals and dances. One source explicitly mentions that he studied *dbyangs* in the monastery.23

The performance of songs is also addressed in one of the oldest extant encyclopedias of traditional Buddhist knowledge in Tibet, a fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century compendium written by gTsang smyon Heruka’s contemporary Don dam smra ba’i seng ge (ca. 15th

---


century). Comprehensive works such as this often took as their primary subject the five main branches of classical Buddhist learning in the Indo-Tibetan world, the so-called five major cultural sciences (rig gnas lnga). Music (rol mo) and songs (often glu) were included within the category of “construction” or “arts and crafts” (bzo rig). Although little is known about the author, his work *Treasury of Explanation, a Wish-fulfilling Jewel* (bShad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu) includes a brief discussion about the forms and performance of song.\(^{24}\) The relevant section is contained in the *Treasury’s* thirteenth chapter on “Oral Advice on Lasting Happiness,” which sets forth an abbreviated typology of songs (mostly designated by the term glu), the six modes of singing them, their four essential points, four results, and sixteen functions.\(^{25}\) There is no evidence of a direct connection between gTsang smyon’s *Catalogue* and Don dam smra ba’i seng ge’s *Treasury*. And the latter says little about the tradition of songs of realization itself: the term mgur glu appears only in passing as one type of song. But as products of the same cultural moment in Tibet, these two works perhaps point to an increasing awareness of and interest in the forms and functions of songs. While it is unclear how widely Don dam smra ba’i seng ge’s *Treasury* circulated, bshad mdzod texts such as this, unlike Sa pan’s more scholarly *Treatise*, seem to have been composed for the benefit of a more general audience including pious lay readers, kings, and princes, who might one day become patrons.\(^{26}\) This fits well with what we know about gTsang smyon’s wish to disseminate the mgur traditions of Mar pa and Mi la ras pa to as broad an audience as possible.\(^{27}\)

Only a few autonomous song catalogues similar in form to *Opening the Eyes of Faith* are currently known, although other examples likely exist. The acclaimed rNying ma master Klong chen pa (1308–

---

25 Don dam smra ba’i seng ge, *bShad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*, 522–27.
27 On gTsang smyon’s intention to distribute the Mi la ras pa corpus to a broad audience, see Quintman 2014, 128ff. The better-known nineteenth-century compendium *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Shes bya kun khyab mdzod*) by ‘Jam mgon sKong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas (1813–1899) includes extended discussions of both the “supreme” and “common” vocal arts (ngag bzo mchog, ngag bzo phal). The former covers topics such as the dynamics and modes of chanting (gdangs), melodic contour (nga ro), ceremonial contexts, etc. The “common vocal arts” includes singing that might take place during cultural festivals and public gatherings (*Jam mgon sKong sprul, Shes bya kun khyab mdzod*, 2: 295ff; Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé 2012, 303–10). It is interesting to note, however, that sKong sprul does not mention the performance of glu and mgur in this context. The subsequent chapter on poetics focuses largely on classical forms of kāvyā.
1364) produced a Catalogue of Vajra Songs (rDo rje glu’i dkar chag), which, although brief, is alternately referred to as the Great Catalogue (dKar chag chen mo) in the colophon. Klong chen pa describes the importance of rdo rje’i mgur as effectively encapsulating the entirety of the Buddhist tradition from the time of Śākyamuni down to fourteenth-century Tibet. He emphasizes the vajra songs (rdo rje’i glu) and mgur sung by masters after visiting the great sacred sites of the rNyIng ma tradition. From among the entire mgur tradition, he singles out Mar pa, Mi la ras pa, sGam po pa (1079–1153), Gling ras pa (1128–1188), rDza ri ras pa Shes rab dpal (ca. 12th century), and the great rNying ma adept Me long rdo rje (1243–1303). These masters, he writes, “reached the level of ‘Reality Exhausted’ and then sang songs (mgur) about realizing their own aims.”28 The text concludes with a brief list of Klong chen pa’s own songs.

An unpublished work on poetry attributed to the seventeenth-century bKa’ brgyud scholar and polymath Karma chags med (1613–1678) contains a brief section, itself in verse, presenting an “analysis of dohā and vajra songs” (do ha rdo rje’i glu’i rnam par dbye pa).29 Once again, we find an effort to establish the various Buddhist song traditions (glu, glu dbyangs, dohā, mgur) as encompassing the entire field of experience of the Buddhist path, from the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, to the great Indian siddhas, to the bKa’ brgyud founders in Tibet and their transmission of mahāmudrā instructions. Karma chags med writes:

All of the bKa’ brgyud lamas,
In each of their meditation sites across the land of Tibet,
Put their realization into song,
Which became the central pillar of the Practice Lineage teachings.
This is known as the “collected songs of the bKa’ brgyud.”30

As with gTsang smyon before him, the author reiterates that the tradition of songs of realization, and especially the collected songs (mgur ’bum) of its great masters, became a defining feature (“the central pillar”) of the lineage. It is not difficult to imagine that in writing those lines, Karma chags med had gTsang smyon’s literary corpus in mind.

28 Klong chen pa, rDo rje glu’i dkar chag, 362. chos nyid zad sar ’khyol bas rang don rtogs pa’i mgur bzhengs pa.
29 Karma chags med, rDo rje glu’i rnam dbye. The complete section title is Do ha rdo rje’i glu’i rnam par dbye pa sha mang gi sul zhes bya ba’i glu.
30 Karma chags med, rDo rje glu’i rnam dbye, 2b. gnas bod yul sgrub gnas so so tu/ dpal bka’ [b]rgyud bla ma thams cad kyis/ rang rang gi rtogs pa glu tu blangs/ de sgrub [b]rgyud bstan pa’i srog zhi gnis/ mtshan bka’ [b]rgyud mgur ’bum zhes su grags/.
The closest known parallel to gTsang smyon’s catalogue, albeit one that circulated later, may be the brief text entitled *Comforting the Minds of the Fortunate* (*sKal bzang yid kyi ngal gso*), an independent work traditionally included as an introduction to the famous collection of bKa’ brgyud verses *An Ocean of bKa’ brgyud Songs* (*bKa’ brgyud mgur mtsho*) compiled by the Eighth Karmapa, Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554). This is not designated a catalogue (*dkar chags*) per se, but rather serves as a practical introduction for the liturgical performance of the collection of songs that follows. Although its instructions are more explicit than those found in gTsang smyon’s catalogue, there are close parallels between the two. The outline presented in *Comforting the Minds of the Fortunate* clearly follows gTsang smyon’s own general framework; at times it seems to gloss the latter’s opaque terminology. It is therefore possible that its author not only knew of gTsang smyon’s presentation of *mgur* from nearly half a century earlier, he may have drawn upon it directly.

**Survey of Opening the Eyes of Faith**

*Opening the Eyes of Faith* begins with a traditional expression of homage to the lama and prayer of aspiration. gTsang smyon Heruka then introduces several of the text’s central themes: the Tibetan tradition of spiritual songs is rooted in the ascetic practices of Indian Buddhism, it developed primarily through the transmission and performance of tantra, and it reflects the inner experiences of yogic practitioners. The narrative here describes how great adepts renounced the world, became realized through esoteric yogic techniques, and then expressed their realization in song. In gTsang smyon’s telling, great *siddhas* of the past...

... gave up clothes, food, and renown, and became the sons of mist and clouds. Wearing empty and secluded caves as their crowns, they cut the cord of happiness and abundance as aims of this life. They continuously remembered the difficulty of obtaining freedoms and advantages. For pillows they used mind-
fulness of the uncertainty of the time death; for clothes they wore awareness of the infallibility of cause and effect; for mats they laid out mindfulness of saṃsāra’s shortcomings. Then, modelling themselves upon the downward descent of a river and the upward blaze of a lamp, they practiced the two stages of yoga continuously, day and night, without interruption. This resulted in the actualization of unmistaken experience and realization, which they then expressed in vajra songs.33

This account largely reflects mainstream views about mgur in Tibet. It also supports gTsang smyon’s stated purpose for writing the text that follows: the traditional Buddhist motivation of inspiring disciples, exhorting the wealthy to accumulate merit, and encouraging individuals to practice the path to liberation and omniscience.34 But the story here also highlights gTsang smyon Heruka’s long standing agenda to valorize the ascetic ideal, much as he did through his writings on the archetype of yogic virtuosity Mi la ras pa.

gTsang smyon next defines his terminology: “When the enlightened intentions of the victors and one’s own wishes are versified, set to music, and then expressed, such is called glu or dbyangs. When it expresses the greatness [of realization] it is called mgur.”35 The distinctions between glu and mgur, and the blurred lines of those distinctions, have been discussed at length elsewhere.36 In gTsang smyon’s view, however, mgur may be distinguished from glu not so much by means of its formal properties—although they are clearly prescribed in the text that follows—as by its referent. Songs designated mgur address what is to be praised, literally “expressing the greatness” (che brjod), which in this case may be understood as the experience and realization of great adepts. This idea is encapsulated in one of the divisions of mgur Tibetan critic Don grub rgyal (1953–1985) defines as “songs about the way in which experience and realization arise from having meditated on the guru’s instructions.”37 Nevertheless, gTsang smyon repeatedly designates songs of experience and realization not

---

33 gTsang smyon Heruka, mGur gyi dkar chags, 1b.
34 Curiously, gTsang smyon declares that he will “put into song the enlightened intentions of the victors of the three times” even though the text is written almost entirely in prose.
35 gTsang smyon Heruka, mGur gyi dkar chags, 1b.
36 For the growing literature on the poetic forms of glu and mgur, see for example Braitstein 2014; Don grub rgyal 1997; Ellingson 1979; Gamble 2014; Jackson 1996; Pema Bum 1994; Sørensen 1990; and Sujata 2005, 2008. Gamble (2014, 4ff.) notes that discussions among contemporary Tibetan critics about the glu/mgur distinction tend to focus less on genre divisions than on levels of honorific register and discourse. This also seems evident in gTsang smyon Heruka’s definition here.
37 Don grub rgyal 1997, 489. bla ma’i gtams ngag bsgom nas nyams rtags khrungs tshul gyi mgur/.
as glu or mgur but as dbyangs, a term more commonly used to refer to a song’s specific melody or performative context. It is clear, however, that in this text at least, gTsang smyon deploys the term dbyangs to refer both to the mgur tradition in general as well as to individual songs.

Having introduced the subject matter of the text, gTsang smyon cites selections from several authoritative Indian scriptures, such as Aspiration of Noble Exalted Conduct (Bhadracaripraṇidhānarāja, bZang spyod smon lam), The Litany of Names of Mañjuśrī (Manjuśrīnāma-saṅgīti, ‘Jam dpal mtshan brjod), and The Two Segments (brTag gnyis) of the Hevajra Tantra, where it is written that songs constitute an important method of Buddhist practice. He also quotes from the Sūtra of Ratnaketu (Mahāsannipātaratnaketu’dhāraṇī sūtra, ‘Dus pa chen po rin po che tog gi gzungs kyi mdo) as evidence that mgur are not a Tibetan invention, but are firmly rooted in the early Buddhism of India, where even the Buddha’s own disciples advocated the performance of song.

gTsang smyon next turns to the performance of mgur, presenting instructions first for the listener and then the singer of spiritual songs. The audience must abandon the so-called “four ruins” that might impede the proper reception of a song. He designates three capacities of audience members. There are those of highest capacity who focus on the song’s inner meaning of the Buddhist ground, fruition, and view; and those of intermediate capacity who listen to the lyrics intent on practicing meditation. These he contrasts with listeners of inferior capacity who simply “stare at the mouth of the singer, slack-jawed and tongue drooping” while concentrating on the changing notes of the singer’s voice.

He also provides guidance for how the singer should act. He should perform the songs “without giving in to childish displays of vocal ability, meaningless vulgarities, or desire for temporary pleasures.” Instead, gTsang smyon presents a long list of ways to properly employ mgur, a list that includes the variety of appropriate listeners and the content suitable for each of them. Here, he writes in the first person, suggesting that he serves as a model for others in his tradition including, perhaps, his own disciples:

To the previous lamas I sing songs of praise and pleasing offering. To kings I sing songs about the laws that establish their subjects in the ten virtues. To the common folk I sing songs about the wish for contentment. To the Lords, the Great Teachers, I sing songs about the Buddha’s teaching, namely sūtras, tantras and śāstras that are informed by scripture, reasoning, and pith instructions. To great meditators I sing songs
about experiencing tranquility and insight. To realized yogins I sing songs about manifesting the view, meditation, conduct, and fruition.... To doctors I sing songs about preparing medicinal wisdom nectar that dispels the degenerative disease of the five poisons. To merchants I sing songs about the greater profit of exchanging the sins of success in this life for the roots of virtue in the future.... To the old and frail I sing songs escorting them to the deathbed of their fixations.... To local villagers, including wealthy and faithful male and female lay followers, I sing songs that accord with the oral instructions of previous lineage holders, about the difficulty of obtaining freedoms and endowments; death and impermanence; the truth of karma, cause and effect; samsāra's shortcomings; and the benefits of liberation.38

*mGur* might be sung to gurus of the lineage and great teachers, meditators and yogins, kings and ordinary villagers alike, about all aspects of the Buddhist path, from the most profound philosophical insights and meditative experience, to the simple aspiration to practice virtue, to the foundational “four thoughts” that turn the mind toward dharma.

Performed in a proper context to an appropriate audience, *mgur* should effect certain changes in the minds of listeners, in which “the light of compassion radiates out and the blessings of the lineage enter into each of the different forms of song, which then easily take root in everyone’s mind.”39 As a result, “hypocrites have their faults exposed,” “the mournful are filled with laughter,” “the sinful feel regret,” and “the hateful pacify their cruelty.”40 When performed properly, the songs are utterly transformational, possessing six qualities to “turn the minds of even those lacking predispositions for virtue to the authentic dharma.”41

The text next describes the proper form *mgur* should take. A song should begin in a mood that is elegant and majestic, “like the upper body of a lion.” The middle is “magnificent and firm like a golden vajra,” with clear, unadorned subject matter and charming tone, sung with a powerful voice. At its conclusion, the song should be long and gentle, “like the tail of a tiger.”42 In more prosaic terms, a *mgur*
should possess three basic elements: (1) an opening expression of supplication and praise described as the song’s “opening support” (mgo ’dren); (2) a middle framework consisting of “stories and their rationale” that contain the song’s principal scope and themes; and (3) concluding prayers of auspiciousness and aspiration. gTsang smyon devotes the remainder of the catalogue to explaining the first two points, the opening supplication and then the body of the songs themselves.

Following the traditional bKa’ brgyud refrain, the lama and previous masters of the lineage serve as the primary sources of blessing and realization. “Among the recitations of yogins,” gTsang smyon reminds the reader, “nothing is more effective than supplications to the lama.” To underscore the supplication’s importance as a form of preliminary practice, the text cites a wide range of tantric literature describing the lama’s central role as well as a variety of supplicatory practices that employ the devotee’s body, speech, and mind.

It is, however, the section on the framework of mgur that forms the heart of gTsang smyon’s catalogue. Here the text presents a record of Buddhist masters, beginning with the tantric buddha Vajradhara and Buddha Śākyamuni, continuing with the Indian adepts Saraha, Tilopa, and Nāropa, and then their spiritual descendents in Tibet, including Mar pa the Translator and his disciple Mi la ras pa. The list continues with members of the bKa’ brgyud tradition down to gTsang smyon Heruka’s own teacher Sha ra ba Sangs rgyas seng ge (1427–1470). As expected in a catalogue of this kind, no actual songs are recorded. Rather, in each case, the text presents brief descriptive titles of songs attributed to individual masters. Occasionally it includes short contextual narratives describing where and when the song was composed or for whom it was sung. The format is not unlike another of gTsang smyon’s literary works: the eleventh chapter of The Life of Milarepa, in which the yogin’s various activities of taming demons and meeting disciples are surveyed in cursory fashion, forming a summary replacement for the extended accounts recorded in the Collected Songs. The lists of songs included in the catalogue are valued not for any expository function, but for their documentation of a yogic lineage stemming from the tantric and historical buddhas, to the Indian siddhas, and extending through the bKa’ brgyud lineage down to the author himself. In this context, the songs’ con-

---

aesthetically pleasing, even as they remain potent and affecting. Thanks to Janet Gyatso for her suggestions here.

43  gTsang smyon Heruka, mGur gyi dkar chags, 3b.
44  See Quintman 2014, 140.
tent, to which is ascribed various forms of liberative power, is less
important than their marking the authentic transmission of yogic
experience from teacher to student. It is also noteworthy that many
individuals included in the catalogue’s lineage were themselves the
subjects of biographical literature produced by gTsang smyon and
his followers. The text thus documents the songs of masters within
the author’s tradition. But it also, if somewhat indirectly, references
an entire corpus of biographical literature the madman inspired.45

gTsang smyon begins with a record of the purported origin of Ti-
betan mgur: Vajradhara’s teaching of the four classes of tantra in
verse form. He next turns to the historical buddha Śākyamuni, noting
briefly that the traditional twelvefold division of “excellent speech
ascribed to him (dvādasāṅgapravacana, gzung rab yan lag bcu gnyis) in-
cludes the branch of mixed prose and verse (geya, dbyangs bsnyad).
Next appears the great Indian siddha Saraha, with a reference to his
famous Dohā Trilogy.46 The text continues with the Indian forefathers
of the bKa’ brgyud tradition Tilopa and Nāropa, with mention of the
former’s famed verses of the Mahāmudrā Upadeśa informally known
as the “Ganges Mahāmudrā.”47 The songs attributed to these three
masters constitute one of the most important and authoritative
sources for bKa’ brgyud mahāmudrā in Tibet.

gTsang smyon follows the traditional lineage from Nāropa to the
early Tibetan bKa’ brgyud founders, beginning with translator Mar
pa Chos kyi blo gros.48 Mar pa was of course instrumental in trans-
mitting the mgur tradition and helping to domesticate its perfor-
manence within a uniquely Tibetan idiom. The text refers to ten of his
songs, including his famous interpretation of Mi la ras pa’s “dream of
the four pillars.” It is not surprising, however, that gTsang smyon
Heruka devotes greatest attention to the subject of his own singular
literary achievement, the acclaimed yogin Mi la ras pa.49 Summariz-
ing the yogin’s life here, gTsang smyon reemphasizes the traditional
view of mgur as the expression of deep realization in which “the me-
lodious voice of his experience, the lion of no-self, has the power to

References to this literature are included in the discussion that follows.
46 gTsang smyon’s disciple lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal compiled texts related to
Sa ra ha’s doḥas (Schaeffer 2011, 468).
47 gTsang smyon’s disciple dBang phyug rgyal mtshan compiled Tilopa’s and
Nāropa’s rnam thar (Schaeffer 2011, 469; Smith 2001, 77–78). lHa btsun Rin chen
rnam rgyal compiled Tilopa’s rnam mgur and Nāropa’s rnam thar (Schaeffer 2011,
469; Smith 2001, 76).
48 gTsang smyon compiled and printed Mar pa’s rnam thar in 1505.
49 On gTsang smyon’s production of Mi la ras pa’s rnam thar and mgur ‘bum in 1488,
see Quintman 2014. lHa btsun rin chen rnam rgyal later printed a well-known
collection of miscellaneous songs not included in gTsang smyon’s collections to
complement the work of his teacher (Schaeffer 2011, 470–71; Smith 2001, 76–77).
suppress all the animals of inferior views. The text mentions more than fifteen individual songs and song cycles, the latter of which constitute entire chapters of mgur and their associated narratives from Mi la ras pa’s Collected Songs. The list broadly follows the framework gTsang smyon employed there, beginning with the yogin’s subjugation and conversion of non-human spirits, followed by his training of human disciples, and then the final instructions he gave shortly before his death and cremation. He concludes with the assertion that even greater than these were the songs Mi la ras pa sang (presumably after his earthly passing) to gods and ďakinīs each in their own individual realms.

The catalogue continues with songs of Mi la ras pa’s principal disciples Ras chung pa rDo rje grags (1084–1161) and sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen (1079–1153) before turning to the latter’s pupil Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170), the great bKa’ brgyud hierarch whose followers established many of the school’s sub-branches including the ‘Brug pa bKa’ brgyud represented here. The text records a teacher-student lineage that runs from Phag mo gru pa as follows: gLing chen ras pa Padma rdo rje (1128–1188); gTsang pa rgya ras Ye shes rdo rje (1161–1211), founder of the ‘Brug pa bKa’ brgyud and recognized as the first rGyal dbang ‘Brug pa incarnation; rGod tshang pa mGon po rdo rje (1189–1258), founder of the sTod ‘Brug subsect; Yang dgon Chos kyi rgyal po (1213–1258); sPyan snga Rin chen Idan (b. 1202); Zur phug pa Rin chen dpal bzang (b. 1263); ‘Ba’ ra ba rGyal mtshan dpal bzang po (1310–1391); Nam mkha’ [seng ge]; and Byang sems bSod nams don grub (14th century). Of the

50 gTsang smyon Heruka, mgur gyi dkar chags, 6a.
51 gTsang smyon’s disciples rGod tshang ras pa and lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal compiled rnam thar of him (Roberts 2007, Schaeffer 2011, 471; Smith 2001, 77–78).
52 rGod tshang ras pa printed a short text on sGam po pa called Shes bya ma (Schaeffer 2011, 471).
53 lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal printed his rnam thar (Schaeffer 2011, 472; Smith 2001, 77).
54 lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal printed his rnam mgur (Schaeffer 2011, 472; Smith 2001, 76).
55 lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal printed his mgur ‘bum rgyas pa; Sangs rgyas dar po printed his rnam thar (Schaeffer 2011, 472).
56 gTsang smyon’s disciples lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal and Sangs rgyas dar po both printed rnam thars of him (Schaeffer 2011, 472; Smith 2001, 75, 78).
57 gTsang smyon’s disciple ‘Jam dpal chos lha composed his rnam thar (Schaeffer 2011, 473; Smith 2001, 78).
58 He is listed in gTsang smyon’s Authoritative Commentary (gZhung ‘brel) under the name Nam mkha’ seng ge (gTsang smyon Heruka, gZhung ‘brel, 114).
59 TBRC lists a master named bSod nams don grub (P1478) who was a disciple of Nam mkha’ seng ge.
two latter figures, gTsang smyon simply notes that they “sang songs that enhanced practice.”60 The last name in the list is gTsang smyon’s own root guru, Sha ra ba Sangs rgyas seng ge, about whom the author writes, “This renowned supreme holy being sang songs about how to practice the ground, path, fruition, view, meditation, and conduct.”61

The list of teachers recorded here represents two separate but parallel lineages. First, the figures belong to the ‘Ba’ ra transmission lineage of the Upper ‘Brug (sTod ‘Brug) branch of the ‘Brug pa bKa’ brgyud school.62 But the individuals also belong to one of the aural transmission lineages that gTsang smyon received from Sha ra ba and is recorded in one of gTsang smyon’s largest works, the Authoritative Commentary (gZhung ’grel).63 Aural transmission lines descended from Mi la ras pa’s three disciples Ras chung pa, sGam po pa, and Ngan rdzong Byang chub rgyal mtshan (b. late eleventh century). While gTsang smyon is most commonly associated with the Ras chung aural transmissions, the lineage preserved here stems from sGam po pa.

gTsang smyon Heruka’s religious affiliations were complex, as were those of his guru Sha ra ba.64 (See Appendix 3.) The madman was an ardent supporter of the bKa’ brgyud tradition, and much of his literary work sought to reimagine its core identity by reemphasizing the centrality of asceticism and yogic practice. gTsang smyon also directed much of his attention to the preservation and revival of specific esoteric doctrines, that is, the bKa’ brgyud aural transmission lineages. And while he has often been identified as a supporter of the aural transmissions of Ras chung pa (Ras chung snyan brgyud), in this context he clearly represents the lineage extending back to sGam po pa (Dwags po snyan brgyud). This seems in line with statements found in the biographical literature of gTsang smyon and Sha ra ba, where, when asked about their religious affiliations, both masters are recorded as saying that they followed the Dwags po bKa’ brgyud

60 gTsang smyon Heruka, mGur gyi dkar chags, 7a. Little is known about these two masters. Schaeffer notes that figures from the late-thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries are not represented among the block print texts that gTsang smyon’s tradition produced. The biographical narratives resume with Sha ra ba, gTsang smyon, and his disciples (Schaeffer 2011, 459–60).

61 gTsang smyon Heruka, mGur gyi dkar chags, 7a. rGod tshang ras pa’s disciple ’Byams pa phun tshogs (1503–1581) printed Sha ra ba’s rnam thar (Ehrhard 2012, 162n12; Schaeffer 2011, 473).


Similarly, while *Opening the Eyes of Faith* mentions eight of Ras chung pa’s songs, it does not refer to any other master of Ras chung’s transmission lineage. The catalogue of songs here seem to reflect the ambiguous and often fluid religious affiliations maintained by gTsang smyon and his immediate followers.

Having outlined the mgur tradition embodied by his own traditions, gTsang smyon makes a cursory mention of traditions of mgur outside mainstream bKa’ brgyud circles, although these appear as something of an afterthought. Here he includes songs purportedly sung by Guru Rinpoche on his meeting with Khri srong lde’u btsan, as well as songs attributed to rDza Ye shes dar po (d.u.); Ma cig labs sgron (1055–1149), acclaimed founder of the Tibetan tradition of Severance (*gcod*); the popular female Tibetan folk hero and revenant (*’das log*) sNang sa ‘Od ’bum,66 and Ri bo sgang pa.67

At the end of the catalogue’s middle section, gTsang smyon indicates that songs are not sufficient on their own but require further context about their composition. For this reason, a song should also make clear who originally composed and performed it, where it was sung, and for what reasons.68 Once again, he uses examples from Mi la ras pa’s *Collected Songs* to illustrate his point. He concludes by noting briefly that the performer should carefully consider how many songs to include on a given occasion.

The last section of the catalogue’s outline briefly addresses the prayers of aspiration and auspiciousness that should be performed at the song’s conclusion. As a model, gTsang smyon presents the following text:

Lamas and Three Jewels, I offer the songs.
Assembled *vīras* and *dākinīs*, enjoy the sounds.
Four armed protector Mahākāla, dispel hindering conditions.
Sole mother Remati, protect us like a mother her son.
Noble lady Tshe ring ma, follow us like the body and its smell.
Fortunate ones gathered here, rejoice.

For those of good auspice gathered from here and there with devotion:
May there be auspiciousness of lamas and *yidams*.

65 lHa btsun rin chen rnam rgyal, *Dad pa’i spu slong g.yo ba*, 125; Zla ba rgyal mts-han, *Sha ra rab ‘byams pa’i rnam thar*, 471.
68 gTsang smyon Heruka, *mGur gyi dkar chags*, 8a.
May there be auspiciousness of vīraś and dākinīs.
May there be auspiciousness of dharma protectors and guardians.
May there be auspiciousness of thinking to cherish others more than oneself.
May there be auspiciousness of giving up sin and practicing virtue.
May there be auspiciousness of bringing thought and action in line with dharma.
May unchanging auspiciousness remain firm.69

With the main body of the catalogue complete, gTsang smyon concludes with a short but suggestive reflection on the value of mgur and how wandering yogins like himself and his followers might employ Buddhist songs of experience in a practical way. The songs, he says, are provisions when wandering in charnel grounds and holy places, necessities when roaming savage lands and mountain retreats, offerings when meeting lamas, gifts when encountering dharma brothers, offering articles when visiting temples and stupas, goods when traveling around the countryside, ferry-fees when crossing rivers, offering gifts for requests to kings, an axe for chipping away [alms from] the wealthy and a file for scraping away [alms from] the poor.70

In this view, mgur serve as far more than just spontaneous records of awakened experience attained by great masters of the past. Rather, they retain a material relevance in the world that lies beyond their purported soteriological value. For the yogin with few material possessions, mgur function as primary transactional objects of great practical value. Songs, even those deemed to be “songs of spiritual awakening,” thus become a form of religious capital. They may be given as gifts to lamas and fellow practitioners, they may serve as fees for ferry-men when crossing rivers, they may be presented as tribute to kings, they may be used to garner offerings from the rich and the poor alike. They may even be exploited to save one’s own skin in the event of attack by bandits.

If this image of mgur seems at odds with the orthodox view of their role in Tibetan religious life, it is not an unfamiliar one. The various registers in which spiritual songs may function are exemplified in the life story and song collection of gTsang smyon’s famous role model, Mi la ras pa. The Mi la ras pa corpus illustrates a wide variety

69  gTsang smyon Heruka, mGur gyi dkar chags, 8a–b.
70  gTsang smyon Heruka, mGur gyi dkar chags, 8b.
of contexts for the composition and performance of *mgur*. On some occasions, songs serve largely to transmit key doctrinal ideas and insights. But we also find examples of *mgur* used in the transactional manner outlined in the catalogue: Mi la repeatedly sings to defend himself from attack by bandits, he offers verses to the King of Bhaktapur, and he receives food and drink in return for his poetry, enabling him to continue his ascetic practice. In composing his catalogue of *mgur*, gTsang smyon seems to have had in mind precisely these kinds of stories, nearly all of which he had a hand in editing.

gTsang smyon encourages the catalogue’s readers, likely his own circle of disciples, to adopt these modes of performance. He explicitly claims that even when used as objects of exchange, songs will serve as an “aid for faith” to promulgate the bKa’ brgyud tradition. If the singer of *mgur*, gTsang smyon says,

is a yogin of the three sacred snow mountains, the outskirts of bustling towns, the middle reaches of slate and snow mountains, along the foothills of mist-shrouded woods, assembly halls where *vīras* and *dākinīs* gather, the dwellings of noble sages, [such places are] the central mast of the great ship of the bKa’ brgyud teachings, the cornerstone of the mansion of the Practice Lineage teaching, a great sacred site where meditation naturally increases.\(^7^1\)

gTsang smyon here is speaking directly to those yogins who wander among “the three sacred snow mountains,” undoubtedly a reference to the great pilgrimage mountains of Ti se (Kailash), La phyi, and Tsa ri, each of which had become an important bKa’ brgyud retreat site by the late fifteenth century. As a result, gTsang smyon specifies his intended readership: a small group of bKa’ brgyud yogins, likely his own followers, emulating the lifestyle of Mi la ras pa and thus gTsang smyon himself, practicing meditation in remote locations and singing songs of realization. Such places form “the central mast of the great ship of the bKa’ brgyud teachings, the cornerstone of the mansion of the Practice Lineage.” Although perhaps few in number, gTsang smyon understood these individuals as essential to the traditions he had worked so hard to preserve and transmit.

\(^7^1\) gTsang smyon Heruka, *mGur gyi dkar chags*, 8b.
Conclusions

In his study of the Tibetan genre of *dkar chags*, “tables of contents” or “catalogues,” Dan Martin writes that such works “are among the most challenging, intriguing and fascinating documents for the historian of Tibetan culture, society, religion, [and] politics.” But, he continues, “they are not being used very much by researchers, perhaps in part because they are still considered ‘just boring lists’.”72 As we have suggested, gTsang smyon Heruka’s *Opening the Eyes of Faith* is more than a simple outline or collection of “boring lists.” As a catalogue of songs (*mgur gyi dkar chags*) *Opening the Eyes of Faith* indeed records lists of individual verses. But in this brief text, gTsang smyon also provides a window into how Tibetan “songs of experience” were composed, performed, remembered, and circulated, in order to serve both the loftiest ideals of the Buddhist tradition and the mundane requirements of wandering yogins. Martin adds that *dkar chags* can describe “the construction and/or content of items which the Tibetan Buddhist traditions consider holy and capable of bestowing blessings.”73 *Opening the Eyes of Faith* does indeed illustrate how *mgur* are to be “constructed.” It also nicely illustrates how gTsang smyon Heruka positioned the tradition of *mgur* to define his vision of what the bKa’ brgyud was in the past and should be for future generations.

As we have seen, the catalogue brings gTsang smyon’s institutional identity into view largely through the representation of lineage. On one level, the catalogue traces the contours of the *mgur* tradition from its Indian origins up to the time of writing. It does so largely through the documentation of one particular line of bKa’ brgyud masters from Mar pa and Mi la ras pa through gTsang smyon’s own guru Sha ra ba. While most of these masters are central figures in the ’Brug pa bKa’ brgyud tradition, the lineage affiliation of the last figures in the line, including Sha ra ba and gTsang smyon He ru ka himself, remains uncertain. It is clear, however, that the catalogue records one of several aural transmission lineages, the *Dwags po snyan brgyud*, that lies at the heart of the bKa’ brgyud esoteric doctrine and of gTsang smyon’s religious community. On another level, the catalogue seems to document the larger program of lineage building activities to which gTsang smyon and his disciples were deeply committed. These activities included the compiling and printing of biographies and song collections of early bKa’ brgyud masters, many of which are explicitly or implicitly represented in the catalogue. As a *dkar chags*, a “catalogue” or “list,” *Opening the Eyes of Faith* records a

---

73 Martin 1996, 504.
collection of verses attributed to great masters of the past. But it also serves as a kind of logbook for many of gTsang smyon’s broader projects.

The text also exemplifies how mgur functioned in many registers. In some contexts, such verses are understood to be spontaneous and revelatory articulations of religious experience, expressions of an awakened mind that are unmediated by ordinary cognitive processes. Yet for the catalogue’s readers, the recitation of mgur is a highly constrained verbal performance requiring a good deal of forethought and expert knowledge. Like other forms of esoteric Buddhist activity, the singing of tantric songs was a deeply ritualized and formalized endeavor. The catalogue suggests that mgur are primarily a vehicle for the transmission of esoteric Buddhist knowledge. They are to be valued for their liberative efficacy because they encapsulate the most profound insights of Buddhist meditators. Yet the text also demonstrates that mgur are equally important for negotiating the daily activities of a wandering yogin, in the model of Mi la ras pa or even gTsang smyon himself. Songs could be used by ascetics, who kept few possessions of their own, as a kind of religious capital, suitable for exchange among teachers and disciples, royal patrons, even ferrymen and bandits. In the end, gTsang smyon suggests that these various registers are not separate. The value of mgur “in the world” derives specifically from the fact that they express the Buddha’s deepest insights about the nature of reality.

Opening the Eyes of Faith never achieved the widespread fame realized by gTsang smyon’s writings about Mi la ras pa and Mar pa. This was, perhaps, by design, since the catalogue seems to have been written as a kind of practical guide for a smaller audience of disciples and followers, those yogins who “wander among the three sacred mountain retreats” of Southern Tibet. There is evidence, however, that it did attract some interest by followers in the lineage. We have already noted that there are close parallels between Opening the Eyes of Faith and Comforting the Minds of the Fortunate (sKal bzang yid kyi ngal so), a relatively short text that was included as an introduction to the famous collection of bKa’ brgyud verses, An Ocean of bKa’ brgyud Songs (bKa’ brgyud mgur mtsho), compiled in the mid-sixteenth century. It is also noteworthy that nearly the entire text was copied and glossed within the collected songs of the eighteenth-century ‘Brug pa bKa’ brgyud lama Ngag dbang tshe ring (1717–1794). Born in Ladakh several centuries after gTsang smyon’s passing, he founded rDzong

---

74 Ngag dbang tshe ring, rNam thar gsung skor, vol 2, 13ff.
khul Monastery in Zangs dkar, far from the Tibetan region where the madman’s followers carried out their printing activities. But like gTsang smyon, Ngag dbang tse ring spent long periods in retreat and took an active interest in the composition and transmission of mgur, activities that earned him the title Lord of Yogins (rtan ’byor dbang po), much like gTsang smyon and Mi la ras pa before him. It is unclear how Opening the Eyes of Faith came to be included in Ngag dbang tse ring’s works.\(^7^5\) Nevertheless, its presence there attests to the enduring power of gTsang smyon’s advice about mgur for subsequent members of the lineage. And it provides evidence that the catalogue indeed served gTsang smyon’s larger program for establishing new models for yogic and ascetic practice, models that would continue to inspire generations to come.

---

75 Tsering 1979, 3. The two volume collection of Ngag dbang tse ring’s works appear to have been edited in 1827 by his disciple Tshul khrims ‘byung gnas a.k.a bZhad pa rdo rje. In his preface to the collection, Gene Smith writes, “During the passage of years, various folia have been removed and sections have disappeared. It is possible that some of the sections intact have little to do with Ngag dbang tse ring” (Ngag dbang tse ring, rNam thar gsung skor, preface).
Figures 2.1-2.3

Figure 2.1

Opening folios, gTsang smyon Heruka’s biography by dNgos grub dpal ’bar (TBRC W2CZ6647)

Figure 2.2
Opening folios, gTsong snyon Heruka’s collected songs (TBRC W4CZ1248)

Figure 2.3

Opening folios gTsong snyon Heruka’s Opening the Eyes of Faith (Waddell 120 h)
English Translation of *A Catalogue of Songs Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance and Opening the Eyes of Faith*

Namo guru.

The nature of mind is primordially dharma-kāya. Its luminosity is all-pervading and spontaneously accomplished as mahāmudrā. May I attain buddhahood that manifests distinctly, vividly, quietly, and brilliantly, and then benefit the teachings and beings.

The victors and siddhas of the past undertook hardships in order to directly realize the nature of mind. They eagerly undertook hardships, bore the burden of their path, took a low position, wore ragged clothes, and decorated their minds with ornaments. They gave up clothes, food, and renown and became children of mist and clouds. Wearing empty and secluded caves as their crowns, they severed the cords of hope for happiness and abundance as aims of this life. They continuously remembered the difficulty of obtaining freedoms and advantages. For pillows they used mindfulness of the uncertainty of the time death, for clothes they wore awareness of the infallibility of cause and effect, for mats they laid out mindfulness of saṃsāra’s shortcomings. Then, using the examples of the downward descent of a river and the upward blaze of a lamp, they practiced the two stages of yoga continuously, day and night, without interruption. This resulted in the actualization of unmistaken experience and realization, which they then expressed in vajra songs. The experience and realization that arose in the minds of previous buddhas and mahāsiddhas were expressed as vajra songs.

At present, in order to make these songs serve as the contributory cause for inspiring my fortunate and faithful disciples, as an exhortation for the wealthy to accumulate merit, and as an encouragement for the fortunate to accomplish liberation and omniscience, I will put into song the enlightened intentions of the victors of the three times.

In Indian languages, the songs are called gīti (gi rti) and in Tibetan, glu or dbyangs. [2a] Furthermore, when the enlightened intentions of the victors and one’s own wishes are versified, set to music, and then expressed, such is called glu or dbyangs. When it expresses the greatness [of realization] it is called mgur.

If you want to apply this to the enlightened thoughts of the previous victors, it says in the *Aspiration Prayer for Excellent Conduct* (Bhadracaryāpraṇidhānarāja, bZang po spyod pa’i smon lam gyi rgyal po), “I praise all the sugatas and clearly proclaim the highest qualities of
all the victors with the sounds of an ocean of songs in their various forms.” As it says, songs express all the qualities of the victors and likewise express their enlightened intention. Furthermore, it says in The Litany of Names of Mañjuśrī (Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgiti, 'Jam dpal mtshan brjod), “Countless ecstatic great Vajradharas, holders of Secret Mantra, extolled those songs sung.” In accordance with this, the King of Tantras, The Two Segments (brTag gnyis) says, “Dance! And also sing songs! Songs are perfectly pure mantras and dance, the very act of meditation. Therefore the yogin always, always, sings songs and dances.”

Moreover, the Buddha Gathering Sūtra of Ratnaketu (Mahāsaṃnipāta-ratnaketudhāraṇī sūtra, 'Dus pa chen po rin po che tog gi gzungs kyi mdo) says,

> Once the four heart-sons śrāvaka-arhats, noble Śāriputra and the rest, were staying to collect alms at the four respective gates, the eastern and so forth, of the great city Rājağrha. Several emanations of māra appeared to each one of the Noble Ones. They ridiculed and laughed at them, saying: “Ascetic, sing a song! Ascetic, do a dance!” In response, the Noble Ones said, “Friends, let us sing like it has never been done before in the world! Let us dance like it never has been done before in the world!”

Thus, they defeated all [the emanations of māra] by means of dharma songs and established them on the path of ripening and liberation. I, the yogin, will likewise sing a song in accord with them.

You fortunate ones present here should also abandon the “four ruins” (sad bzhi) of the listener, and listen. As for the four ruins of the listener: [2b]

> Drunken stammer ruins the song.
> Mixing with [the noise of] dogs and children ruins the song.
> Mixing up listening and not listening ruins the song.
> Engaging with the wares of merchants ruins the song.

Having eliminated these activities, those of superior capacity listen to the meaning of the ground, fruition, and view, while those of intermediate capacity, who are involved in practicing meditation and

76 Peking Kangyur 716, Vol. 11, 268a2–271b4.
79 Peking Kangyur 806, Vol. 32, 201b3-300b3.
conduct of the path, listen to the prosody of the lyrics. Those of inferior capacity stare at the mouth of the singer, slack-jawed and tongue drooping, they listen to the changing notes of the lyrics. You should listen in the manner of both superior and medium capacities.

Furthermore, without giving in to childish displays of vocal ability, meaningless vulgarities, or desire for temporary pleasures, I, a singer of songs, sing these songs to those assembled here to exhort them to virtue and as an aid for their faith.

To the previous lamas I sing songs of praise and pleasing offering. To kings I sing songs about the laws that establish their subjects in the ten virtues. To the common folk I sing songs about the wish for contentment. To the Lords, the Great Teachers, I sing songs about the Buddha’s teaching, namely sūtras, tantras and śāstras that are informed by scripture, reasoning, and pith instructions. To great meditators I sing songs about experiencing tranquility and insight. To realized yogins I sing songs about manifesting the view, meditation, conduct, and fruition. To mantra practitioners I sing songs about wrathful mantras of no-self and emptiness that liberate the enemy of self-grasping into dharmadhātu. To Bon pos I sing songs about summoning [true] richness, namely realizing that conceptual thoughts of wrong views are dharmakāya. To doctors I sing songs about preparing medicinal wisdom nectar that dispels the degenerative disease of the five poisons. To merchants I sing songs about the greater profit of exchanging the sins of success in this life for the roots of virtue in the future. To young men I sing songs about conquering enemies, the afflictions, by wearing the armor of compassion and wielding the weapon of wisdom. [3a] To swaggering boys and girls who have forgotten the dharma about the excellent body of the precious lama, I sing songs about the melodiousness of the teachings and songs of the holy dharma, the great value of the seven noble riches,⁸⁰ and the joy and happiness embodied by the city of liberation. To the old and frail I sing songs escorting them to the deathbed of their fixations. To immature beings I sing songs about playing in the world of childish perceptions as if they were dreams and illusions. To local villagers, including wealthy and faithful male and female lay followers, I sing songs that accord with the oral instructions of previous lineage holders, about the difficulty of obtaining freedoms and endowments; death and impermanence; the truth of karma, cause and result; samsāra’s shortcomings; and the benefits of liberation.

---

⁸⁰ I.e., faith, discipline, generosity, learning, decorum, modesty, and knowledge.
In this way, having turned the perfectly pure oral instructions of former masters into songs—as is said, “although only one thing is taught it is understood in a variety of ways”—the light of compassion radiates out and the blessing of the lineage enter into each of the different forms of song, which then easily take root in everyone’s mind. The signs that their perceptions are transformed are the following. Hypocrites have their faults exposed. Those with deranged minds feel ashamed. Men and women full of pride are panicked. Those who dislike companions feel dejected. The wailing of widows abates. Foolish women declare their physical faults. Foolish men are shaken up. Children stop playing around. The mournful are filled with laughter. The misery of the suffering is driven away. The sinful feel regret. Those who are twisted by permanence control their minds. The miserly become munificent. Those craving sense pleasures overcome their grasping. The hateful pacify their cruelty. Ignorant people gain mindfulness. The sophistries of logicians are destroyed. Those who explain the scriptures incorporate experience of their meaning. The melancholic breath a sigh of relief. Renunciates are moved to tears. The faithful run away to practice dharma. The steadfast give rise to exertion. Those with karmic connection attain siddhi. [3b]

These songs, which turn the minds of even those lacking predisposition for virtue to the authentic dharma, should be sung so that the six dimensions of songs are brought about:

- maintaining, they maintain the songs of previous masters;
- upholding, they uphold the authentic dharma;
- bringing forth, they bring forth the nectar-like oral instructions;
- benefitting, they benefit the minds of all;
- liberating, they liberate from saṃsāra;
- attaining, they cause attainment of perfect buddhahood.

First, when the song begins with the opening support (mgo ‘dren), it should be elevated and majestic. In the middle, the words that express its subject matter should be clear and unadorned; the metaphors and their meaning should be well matched and easy to understand; the tone should be charming and the melody complete; and the voice should be powerful and magnificent. When the song concludes it should be gentle with an easy end. Moreover, the beginning of the song is elevated and majestic like the upper body of a lion. Its middle part is magnificent and firm like a golden vajra. The end of the song is long with an easy end, like the tail of a tiger.

First, supplications and praises form the song’s opening support (1). In the middle, stories and their rationale form the song’s liturgical
framework (2.1), an outline together with introductions are how the songs are put together (2.2), and time markers together with sections keep it to the proper length (2.3). Prayers of auspiciousness and aspiration form the song’s conclusion (3).81

1. Supplications and Praises Form the Songs’ Opening Support

Among the recitations of yogins, nothing is more effective than supplications to the lama. This can be illustrated with the following examples from everyday life: If the sun doesn’t rise in the east, the glaciers of the Ha bo [Mountains]82 in the west won’t melt. If the winds don’t blow from the north, the sandalwood forests in the south won’t sway. If the walls of the upper irrigation canals don’t collapse, muddy water won’t flow in the lower canals. [4a] If clay isn’t heated, the lac won’t stick. If the child doesn’t cry, the mother won’t hold it. If just three things are said, father and son can’t communicate. If just three steps are taken, the upper and lower valley can’t be distinguished. If hard work isn’t done, delicious food won’t be enjoyed.

Now I’ll connect the meaning of these examples with the victors’ enlightened mind, which will explain the reason for including supplications. If the two accumulations aren’t gathered, the two obscurations won’t be purified. If the three poisons aren’t given up, the three bodies won’t be obtained. If you don’t engage the three gates in virtue, you won’t be liberated from samsāra’s three realms. If you don’t meditate, you won’t realize the essence of mind. If you don’t endure hardship, good qualities won’t arise. If you don’t offer supplications, you won’t receive blessings.

Furthermore, the venerable Mar pa said:

Whoever supplicates will receive blessings.

81 Compare this with the outline in the sKal bzang yid kyi ngal so that introduces the bKa’ brgyud mgur mtsho: First, the songs are preceded by supplications, offerings, and praises. Secondly, the main body, which is the songs, is accompanied by stories describing the occasion for the song. The clarification of the songs is accomplished by reading the verses attentively. In accordance with the time and situation, the songs may be put together in various ways. Finally, the liturgy is drawn to an end with a ganacakra and with verses of auspiciousness and aspiration [Nālandā Translation Committee 1989, 11] (dang po gsol ‘debs mchod bstod dang bcas nas mgur gyi sna ’dren/ bar du lo rgyus ’byung khung dang bcas nas mgur gyi khog dbubs/ tshig bcad ’bru snon dang bcas nas mgur gyi gsal btab/ dus tshod gnas skabs dang bstun nas mgur gyi mtsham sbyar/ mthar tshogs ’khor bkra shis smon lam dang bcas nas mgur gyi cho ga bsdu dgos/ [sKal bzang yid kyi ngal so, 332]).

82 A mountain range in Nyang stod.
Whoever benefits others will please the victors.  
Whoever accumulates merit will attain happiness.  
Whoever meditates will realize the fundamental nature.  
Whoever recites the essential will gain ability and power.  
Whoever protects samaya will accomplish his wishes.  
Whoever manifests sacred outlook will attain awakening.

Therefore, supplication is very important.  
Moreover, there are four ways of performing supplication: Giving up unwholesome actions and carrying out virtue with one’s body is the body supplication. Similarly, giving up unwholesome actions and carrying out virtue with one’s speech is the speech supplication. Giving up unwholesome actions and carrying out virtue with one’s mind is the mind supplication. In this way, the roots of virtue of the three gates all become supplications.

The fourth is to perform supplication with the three gates combined simultaneously. [This fourth category is divided] into three: extended supplication, supplication in the way of a jewel, and intense supplication. [4b]

Extended supplication is to pray with a tune to the entire lineage, from the blessed one, the great Vajradhara, down to one’s root guru.

Supplication in the way of a jewel is to dissolve into one’s root guru all the objects of refuge that are worthy of offerings such as the lineages, chosen deities, and the three jewels. Then pray that all needs and desires of this life and the next are granted.

Intense supplication is when a faithful and diligent person, who is terrified of samsāra and the lower realms, wants to attain the supreme accomplishment of mahāmudrā in this very life. In a secluded cave he expresses physical devotion with palms folded together and eyes full of tears. Within that state, convinced that his root guru is the primordial essence and unification of all the objects of refuge worthy of offerings and with his mind full of devotion and intense longing uninterrupted by other thoughts, he cries out the name of his root guru with a strong and rapid voice. Then he prays for his desired aim, namely liberation from the suffering of samsāra and the three lower realms, and the quick attainment of awakening.

Moreover, supplicating the lama becomes supplicating all the objects of refuge worthy of offerings. The Cakrasamvara Samvarodaya Tantra (bDe mchog sdom ’byung gi rgyud) says, “The lama is the Buddha, the lama is the dharma. Likewise the lama is the saṅgha. The lama is the creator of all. To the lamas I bow down.”

The Samvarodaya also says, “Completely abandon all offerings except for perfect offerings to the lama. By pleasing him, supreme all-knowing wisdom is attained. How could merit not be made if one offers to the master of unsurpassed deeds, the highest Vajrasattva?”
The Litany of Names of Mañjuśrī says, “An object for homage, worthy of offerings and praise; continually worthy of veneration, worthy of respect and the highest acclaim, worthy of salutation: such is the highest lama.” The *Bright Lamp Wisdom Tantra* (Ye shes gsal sgron gyi rgyud) says,

The merit of having recollected the lama is greater than having meditated for hundred thousand aeons on the body of a deity with the major and minor marks. Meditate on the lama, not the deity.

The *Great Array of Ati Tantra* (*A ti bkod pa chen po’i rgyud*) says,

Whoever meditates upon the kind lama, appearing through the secret mantra, upon his head, in his heart, or in the palm of his hands, such a person holds the good qualities of a thousand buddhas.

The *Ḍākinīs Suppressing with Splendor Tantra* (*mKha’ gro ma zil gyis gnon pa’i rgyud*) says, “The exalted merit of anointing sesame oil on a single pore of the vajra master is greater than making offerings to as many buddhas and bodhisattvas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges.”

In accordance with those statements, the lama is the highest and most excellent being embodying all those who are praiseworthy.

### 2.1. Stories and their Rationale for the Songs’ Liturgical Framework

First, the sovereign lord of all the victors, the great *sambhogakāya* Vajradhara, taught scriptures of the four classes of tantra, the *Net of Magical Manifestation* (*sGyu ’phrul dra ba, Māyājālamahātantrarājanāma*) and other versified tantras, in song (*mgur*).

Vajradhara’s emanation, the victor Śākyamuni, taught the twelve divisions of scripture, such as the sūtras and including the division of teachings in mixed prose and verse, in song.

---

83 Cf. Davidson 1981, 37, verse 152.
84 We read *a ti sha bkod pa’i rgyud* as a mis-citation of the *A ti bkod pa chen po*. Thanks to Dan Martin for this suggestion.
Furthermore, the glorious Saraha, emanation of the victors and forefather of all the siddhas, sang many songs about the intrinsic reality, such as the Dohā Trilogy (Do ha bskor gsum).

Te lo Shes rab bzang po, who is inseparable from Cakrasamvara, taught the vajra songs that are the root of the aural transmissions. As their ancillaries he taught in song the eight inconceivable pith instructions to eight named yogins, each in their respective abode,\(^85\) inconceivable spontaneous songs to Nāropa on the banks of the Ganges River, and the natural state of dharmatā.\(^86\) [5b]

Tilopa’s heart-son, the learned and disciplined supreme being who attained accomplishment, the glorious Nāro Pañ Chen, taught about practicing the four empowerments and a summary of the six dharmas as vajra songs.\(^87\)

Nāropa’s supreme heart-son, the translator Mar pa Lotsāwa, dispelled the darkness of ignorance in Tibet with the sun and moonlight of his compassion and knowledge of multiple languages. He then illuminated and spread the teachings of the Buddha’s essence like the sun shining on mountain snows. He sang an inconceivable number of songs including an offering of realization to the lama, a long song in the drone of a tamboura;\(^88\) the song of sparkling dew drops that clears away the drowsiness of meditative equipoise;\(^89\) the iron hook of mind-awareness that gathers wild and scattered discursive thoughts;\(^90\) the wail of the dākinīs\(^91\) that clears away sadness and the long whistling song of the dharma protectors;\(^92\) the view like a large garuda stretching out its wings: a grand dohā vajra song (do ha rdo rje mgur chen) that ascertains the natural state;\(^93\) and the song of hardships endured for the sake of dharma that cultivates perseverance in dharma.\(^94\)

Furthermore, he sang songs in accordance with the needs in various situations, such as the song of urgent command to his son;\(^95\) the song of the benediction of auspiciousness;\(^96\) the song of the father,
Opening the Eyes of Faith

mother, and son;\textsuperscript{97} and the song interpreting the signs of the four pillars in the dream.\textsuperscript{98}

[Mi la ras pa] became Mar pa’s principal disciple, renowned throughout the snowy land of Tibet. He had opened the channels of the throat enjoyment \textit{cakra}, so an ocean of vajra songs issued forth. He had naturally liberated the knots of the central channel, so the cycle of the dualistic mind was expelled from the start. Because he examined the inner awareness-mind, all manifest outer appearances dawned as scripture.\textsuperscript{99} The example of his intense effort in practicing meditation day and night without interruption impelled others to progress on the path. Through his exceptional devotion to the previous lineage masters, he received transmission of the lineage blessings. Having attained mastery over his mind and inner energies, he clearly displayed various miracles such as soaring in the sky like a bird.\textsuperscript{[a]} Like an unbridled white lion, he roamed the expanse of snow mountains, unbounded and limitless as the sky. The melodious voice of his experiences, the roaring of the lion of no self, had the power to suppress all the animals of inferior views. Nowadays, the name Mi la ras pa is famous throughout world, like the sun and moon. This superior being sang the following songs.

In the early part of his life he offered his realization to the lama in the song of the seven branches.\textsuperscript{100} Then he sang the song of the prophetic dream of the four pillars\textsuperscript{101} and the song of going up to gTsang.\textsuperscript{102} Missing his father and mother in his homeland, he sang an inconceivable number of songs, the song of the fervent pledge to practice, and so forth.\textsuperscript{103}

In the middle part of his life, about his accepting non-human spirits as his followers,\textsuperscript{104} he sang many songs to the gods, \textit{dākinīs}, and spirits, such as the cycle on accepting as a follower the king of obstacles, Vināyaka, and the six recollections of the lama;\textsuperscript{105} the cycle on La phyi chu bzang;\textsuperscript{106} the cycle on the demoness of Ling ba brag;\textsuperscript{107} the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{97} Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mar pa’i rnam thar}, 154–59; Nālandā 1986, 165–71.
\item \textsuperscript{98} Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mar pa’i rnam thar}, 172–75; Nālandā 1986, 185–88.
\item \textsuperscript{99} Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur}, 3–7; Quintman 2010, 4–8.
\item \textsuperscript{100} Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur}, 100–101; Quintman 2010, 88–89.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur}, 109–10; Quintman 2010, 95–96.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur}, 125; Quintman 2010, 111.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur}, 133–35; Quintman 2010, 119–20.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur}, 196–269; Chang 1989, 1–94.
\item \textsuperscript{105} This is the first of the song cycles in the \textit{Mi la’i rnam mgur ‘bum}. Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur}, 197–203; Chang 1989, 1–10.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur}, 203–14; Chang 1989, 11–22.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Cf. \textit{gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur}, 228–42; Chang 1989, 38–57.
\end{itemize}
cycle on La se dgon pa; the cycle on the goddess of bSe and the local spirit of Rag ma;\textsuperscript{108} the cycles on the king of Gro thang\textsuperscript{109} and the blue pigeon;\textsuperscript{110} the cycle on Yol mo gangs ra;\textsuperscript{111} and the cycle on the five sisters of long life.\textsuperscript{112}

As for what he taught in order to accept human disciples as his followers, he sang songs in the extensive cycles on how he met each of the male and female adepts who were his heart-disciples: his eight principal heart-sons, his thirteen close-sons, and his four female disciples. Moreover, he sang songs to male and female realized yogins and to male and female practitioners who had faith and so forth, which comprise the miscellaneous cycles.

At the end of his life, there are the songs in the cycle of bodily miracles that heartened all his disciples,\textsuperscript{113} the cycle on his final advice before passing away; and his final vajra song from within the cremation chamber: the song summarizing the essential meaning.\textsuperscript{114}

Even more extensive than those were the innumerable songs sung to gods and \textit{ḍākinīs} for the sake of establishing beings on the paths of ripening and liberation. In these cases, he stayed in the individual abodes of each of the gods and \textit{ḍākinīs} and [6b] benefited beings.

Having mastered the inner channels, energies, essences, and \textit{samādhi}, the heart-son of the Venerable [Mi la ras pa] Ras chung rDo rje grags pa brought all outer appearances, such as the four elements, under his control. He then sang many songs, such as the song offering experience and realization to the lama,\textsuperscript{115} the earlier and later cycles on requesting permission to travel to Central Tibet to fulfill his wishes,\textsuperscript{116} the cycle on teaching for the benefit of others: the wearisome hardship and the eight mansions of the view; the cycle on Bya yul sGo brag; the cycle on Lady lDem bu: how adverse circumstances become helpful; the cycle on Yar lha sham bu; and songs on how to interpret omens and dreams.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{108} Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 250; Chang 1989, 58–67.
\textsuperscript{109} Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 250–54; Chang 1989, 68–73.
\textsuperscript{110} Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 265–69; Chang 1989, 88–94.
\textsuperscript{111} Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 254–64; Chang 1989, 74–87.
\textsuperscript{112} Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 451–521; Chang 1989, 296–361.
\textsuperscript{113} This is the final cycle in the \textit{mgur ’bum}. Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 802–12; Chang 1989, 662–73.
\textsuperscript{114} Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 851–52; Quintman 2010, 210–11: Pur khang nang nas rdo rje glu’i mgur nas byung ba’i rnying po gnad drug gi mgur ’di gsungs so. Note that the \textit{rnam thar} has \textit{gnad drug} instead of \textit{gnad dril}.
\textsuperscript{115} Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 389–93, 592–93; Chang 1989, 227–31, 436–37.
\textsuperscript{116} Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 731–53; Chang 1989, 584–605.
\textsuperscript{117} A portion of the text is illegible here.
Furthermore, [regarding sGam po pa,] who became a genuine heart-son of bZhad pa rdo rje [i.e., Mi la ras pa], the previous victor said, “In the north a fully ordained monk named Physician will appear and cause the Mahāyāna to spread and flourish.” In accordance with this prophecy, he is famous nowadays in this land of snow mountains as the physician of Dwags po, who spread the essential teachings of the Practice Lineage and caused them to flourish. This great being sang innumerable songs, such as the song of accepting lay followers sung to patrons and the song of resolving grasper and grasped, sung to disciples.

His heart-son, the protector of beings, glorious Phag mo gru pa, sang many songs about view, meditation, conduct, fruition, and practice.

Phag mo gru pa’s heart-son, the siddha gLing chen ras pa, whose realization is exalted all the way to the Ganges River in India, sang many songs, such as the former and latter songs of offering and praise to the [Three] Jewels; the song of praise to lamas and sacred places; the song of thirteen critiques in response to the behavior of many beings, many songs on the eight kinds of necessities, and the cycle on Mig mangs gangs.

The heart-son of the venerable gLing, the protector of beings gTsang pa rgya ras, sang many songs, such as the song of removing the obstacles of yoga; the song of examining the experiences of meditation and view; the song of arousing faith in lay disciples; the reason for singing songs; the reason for not singing songs; the kha dgog po ma; a message to the kingdom; and the garuda of rTsa ri.

The great austerities of his heart-son, the victor rGod tshang pa, caused the teachings of the practice lineage to shine like the sun. He sang innumerable songs, such as the song of voluntary hardships; the song that matures disciples; and the song expressing knowledge to disciples.

His heart-son Yang dgon chos kyi rgyal po sang many songs, such as the song of the spontaneous realization of the view and the song of the seven branches.

His heart-son, sPyan snga rin ldan sang songs such as the song of inevitable cause and effect.

His heart-son, the omniscient Zur phug pa, sang songs such as the song of oral instructions to the disciples.

---

118 This prophecy is usually attributed to the The Great Compassion White Lotus Sūtra (sNying rje chen po Padma dkar po’i mdo, Mahākārmapuṇḍarikasūtra), cited in Mi la ras pa’s mGur ‘bum (gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 618; Chang 1989, 463).
His heart-son, the supreme individual ‘Ba’ ra ba rGyal mtshan dpal bzang po, sang many songs, such as the song of the twelve analogies and the song of bringing what’s desired.

His heart-son, the Venerable One with the name of Nam mkha’, sang songs that enhanced the practice and removed obstacles of disciples.

His heart-son, Byang sems bSod nams don grub, sang songs that encouraged practice.

The heart-son who encompassed the essence of the nectar of speech of many superior lamas and siddhas such as Byang sems bSod nams don grub, my father, who brought together the wisdom and compassion of the buddhas of the three times during this period of the five degenerations and then acted for the benefit of the teachings and sentient beings, was called Sha ra ba Sangs rgyas seng ge, an incomparable emanation, who illuminated the teachings of the Practice Lineage realization. This renowned supreme and holy being sang songs about how to practice the ground, path, fruition, view, meditation, and conduct.

Moreover, the authentic bKa’ rgyud lamas sang many songs to tame beings, each in accordance with their specific needs in order to benefit them.

In the tradition of Ancient Mantra, the one who was born in a lotus and whose life span is equal to the sun and the moon is called Padmakara, an emanation who openly subdued corrupting and malicious beings, such as [evil minded] seers and bloodthirsty demons. [7b] By annihilating them, he performed innumerable deeds for the benefit of the teachings and sentient beings. His amazing deeds are beyond measure and he also sang innumerable songs, such as I am greater than the king, and I am nobler to the queen.119

Furthermore, previous siddhas of the oral transmissions (bka’ rgyud),120 such as rDza Ye shes dar po, Ma cig labs kyi sgron ma, sNang sa ‘Od ‘bum pa, and Ri bo sgang pa, expressed their experience and realization in songs, which are inconceivable and indescribable.

Some of these are songs that burst forth from the depths of experience and realization, some are songs that arose through the perception of objects, and some were sung in response to supplications made by disciples.

119 Cf. Padma bka’i thang, 369–75; Ellingson 1979, 230.
120 The term bKa’ rgyud in this context does not refer to the tradition stemming from Mar pa and Mi la ras pa, but rather to other traditions in which oral transmission is emphasized.
2.2. An Outline Together with the Verses:  
the Songs’ Introduction

These songs that were sung by siddhas of the past may here be understood in the following way. They are a breeze that dispels the drowsiness and torpor of meditators. They are iron hooks that rein in scattered and agitated minds, bringing forth experience and realization. They remove obstacles for those who suffer. They enhance well-being for those who are happy. They are heart-advice that encourages the faithful to practice dharma. They are the intended meaning of the victors of the three times. They are lamps that dispel the darkness of ignorance. They are rivers that purify the latencies of the two obscurations. They are bonfires that consume the firewood of a belief in a self. They are the ground that generates excellent qualities. They block the door of samsāra and the lower states. They show the path of liberation and the higher states. They become the glory and protector of all beings.

Concerning these completely pure statements [i.e. the songs], which are suffused with auspiciousness, one should say which siddha lama sung them, where they were sung, and for what purpose.

One should express the individual great qualities of these siddha lama kings as explained above, and then sing [their songs]. [8a] [For example,] when singing the songs of venerable Mi la, briefly praise his greatness as described above. In a more extensive way, one should recite the entire section from the larger biography, from “Moreover, here in the snowy land of Tibet, in the beginning, like a pit of fire...” up to “The one called the Glorious Venerable Mi la bZhad pa rdo rje, the great Heruka himself, who is as famous as the sun and moon, has said....”

[Concerning the second and third points,] one should state the place where and for what purpose a song was sung. For example, when singing the Ling ba brag song cycle, explain that the songs were sung in the cave of the sacred site of Ling ba brag. When describing the purpose for which it was sung, say it was sung for the sake of establishing on the paths of ripening and liberation the broth-

---

121 The outline heading at this point in the text (dkar chags tshigs bcad dang bcas te dbyangs kyi ngo sprod [7b]) is different from that found in the text’s opening section (dkar chag ngo sprod dang bcas te dbyangs kyi mtshams sbyar [3a]).
122 Provisional translation.
123 The quotations point to the introductory section to The Life of Milarepa wherein gTsang smyon Heruka provides a brief summary of the yogin’s life. Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 3–8; Quintman 2010, 4–11.
er and sister demons of Ling ba’i brag and so forth, all beings sub-
sumed within the six classes of transmigrators, the five paths, or the
four modes of birth. Moreover, one should state it just as it is de-
scribed in the text, starting from “In order to fulfill the command of
his lama, the venerable Mi la ras pa went to meditate at Ri bo dpal
‘bar. Then, having reached Ling ba’i brag . . .”

As illustrated by this, what is suitable for [the song about] Ling ba
is appropriate for whatever other songs are sung. Analyze the per-
son, place, and purpose, and then sing.

2.3. Time Markers Together with Sections
Keep the Proper Length

One should judge how many songs to sing in order to benefit beings.

3. Prayers of Auspiciousness and Aspiration for
the Songs’ Conclusion

Lamas and Three Jewels, I offer the songs.
Assembled vīras and dākinīs, enjoy the sounds.
Four armed protector Mahākāla, dispel hindering con-
ditions.
Sole mother Remati, protect us like a mother her son.
Noble lady Tshe ring ma, follow us like the body and its
smell.
Fortunate ones gathered here, rejoice.

For those of good auspice gathered from here and there
with devotion:
May there be auspiciousness of lamas and yidams.
May there be auspiciousness of vīras and dākinīs.
May there be auspiciousness of dharma protectors and
guardians. [8b]
May there be auspiciousness of thinking to cherish oth-
ers more than oneself.
May there be auspiciousness of giving up sin and prac-
ticing virtue.
May there be auspiciousness of bringing thought and
action in line with dharma.
May unchanging auspiciousness remain firm.

124 Cf. gTsang smyon Heruka, Mi la’i rnam mgur, 228; Chang 1989, 38.
It should be just so. If [such recitations are] too numerous, the king’s ears will ache. If too few, the minister will not understand. Suitable and fit, like the temperature of milk, they should be said in a concise way just like that.

Concerning the sayings of the lamas of the past, lamps of wisdom that open the eyes of faith, for us yogins who practice the two stages of meditation and belong to the lineage of compassion, they are provisions when wandering in charnel grounds and holy places, necessities when roaming savage lands and mountain retreats, offerings when meeting lamas, gifts when encountering dharma brothers, offering articles when visiting temples and stūpas, goods when traveling around the countryside, ferry-fees when crossing rivers, offering gifts for requests to kings, an axe for chipping away [alms from] the wealthy and a file for scraping away [alms] from the poor. Even when meeting bandits we reply in song, and on such occasions the advice should be an exhortation to practice virtue.

Having provided such an aid for faith, if one is a yogin of the three sacred snow mountains, the outskirts of bustling towns, the middle reaches of slate and snow mountains, along the foothills of mist-shrouded woods, assembly halls where viras and dākinīs gather, the dwellings of noble sages, [such places are] the central mast of the great ship of the bKa’ brgyud teachings, the cornerstone of the mansion of the Practice Lineage teaching, a great sacred site where meditation naturally increases.

Yogins coming from such remote places should consider what is of benefit for this life and the next, and then put effort into accumulating food and provisions for retreat. Or if one naturally gathers [9a] the accumulations, food offered to the lama becomes a supporting condition for one’s own nourishment, and so forth. Thus practice in a broad way. Sing whatever is appropriate to the situation.125

In this way, in order to connect sentient beings to wholesome predispositions and the Mahāyāna dharma, the sayings of previous masters that explain the earlier and later profound methods for encouraging all beings in virtue, whatever was needed and appropriate, are lamps of wisdom that dispel the mind’s darkness. This preliminary catalogue proclaiming the dharma that brings about well-being now

---

125 Provisional translation."brog 'di zhes bya ba nas byon pa'i rnal 'byor pa rnams la / 'di phyi'i don la bsams nas sgrub rgyags lam chas kyi tshogs bsog (gsog) yang dag mzdad 'tshol zhes sam / rang bzhin gyi tshogs [9a] bsog (gsog) yin na / zas 'brel 'tsho ba'i 'thun (mthun) 'gyur sogs / 'rgya che ba phyag len la 'debs 'tshal lo / zhes pa gang rlung dbyangs len yul dang sbyar te bya'o /.
and in the future is unstructured experience written down by the yogin who wanders in charnel grounds, King of Blood Drinkers, in the middle autumn month of the Water-Female-Pig year (1503). By the virtue of doing so,

Through the power of spreading the Buddha’s teaching and causing it to flourish
May all beings, limitless as space, have perfect happiness, and then
Have an attitude that cherishes others more than oneself,
Abandon sinful action and practice virtue, and thereby Quickly attain the result of perfect Buddhahood.
Evāṃ

E ma ho.
This catalog of songs, a lamp dispelling darkness,
Was printed by Kun tu bzang mo,
After she thought to benefit the Buddha’s teachings beings.
śTod pa ’phel le of sMan khab wrote it down,
Sangs rgyal grogs mched of Zur tsho carved the blocks,
and Lo pa Ḗjam dpal chos lha performed the editing.
Through the virtue of having completed this, may all beings, limitless as space,
Perfect accumulations, purify obscurations, and quickly attain the three bodies.

manghalaṃ bhavantu shubhaṃ

Tibetan Language References

Kun dga’ bsod nams (1597–1660). Rol mo’i bstan bcos kyi ’grel ba. sDe dge par khang.


dNgos grub dpal ‘bar (1456–1527). Dad pa’i seng ge. rJe btsun gtsang pa he ru ka’i thun mong gi rnam thar yon tan gyi gangs ril dad pa’i seng ge rnam par rtshe ba. NGMPP reel number L834/2. TBRC, W2CZ6647. Written in 1508.


Thu’u bkwan blo bzangchos kyì nyi ma (1737–1802). dGe ldan bstan pa’i mdzes rgyan. Khyab bdag rdo rje sems dpa’i ngo bo dpal ldan bla ma dam pa ye shes bstan pa’i sgron me dpal bzang po’i rnam par thar pa mdo tsam brjod pa dge ldan bstan pa’i mdzes rgyan. Kan su. 1989.


_____.

---


---


---

lHa btsun chos gyi rgyal po’i rnam mgur. dPal ldan bla ma dam pa mkhas grub lha btsun chos gyi rgyal po’i rnam mgur blo ‘das chos sku’i
English Language References


Diemberger, Hildegard. 2014. “Women as Patrons of Printing and Innovation.” In *Buddha’s Word: The Life of Books in Tibet and Beyond*. Edited by Hildegard Diemberger, Mark Elliot and


Appendix 1: Tibetan Text

( ) corrections
<> suggested readings for unclear text

We have corrected minor orthographic inconsistencies present in the original text, adding a tsheg between a final nga and a shad, and deleting the shad after a final ga.
Opening the Eyes of Faith

Opening the Eyes of Faith
Revue d’Études Tibétaines

2b
3b བོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་དབྱིན་པོ་བོད་ཀྱི་ཤཱཀྱིས་རྒྱུ་དབྱེང་འབྲེལ། དུས་བརྒྱ་དེ་ཆེས་མི་འགན་འཛིན་ནོ། དབྱེལ་བརྒྱུད་ལུས་རྒྱུས། དེ་བོད་ལྟེ་མི་འགན་འཛིན་ནོ།

"བཏབ་དོན་དཔོན་ོངས་བོད་ཀྱི་འཕྲིག་བོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་དབྱིན་པོ་བོད་ཀྱི་ཤཱཀྱིས་རྒྱུ་དབྱེང་འབྲེལ། དུས་བརྒྱ་དེ་ཆེས་མི་འགན་འཛིན་ནོ། དབྱེལ་བརྒྱུད་ལུས་རྒྱུས། དེ་བོད་ལྟེ་མི་འགན་འཛིན་ནོ།"
Opening the Eyes of Faith
Opening the Eyes of Faith
Opening the Eyes of Faith
བོད་ཡིག་ལ་ཐུབ་ཀྱང་བཟང་བེན་པོ་སེམས་དཔའི་སློབ་མཁན་གྲོལ་ཏུ་དམ་ཅིག་སོ། ། བོད་ཡིག་དང་པོ་སོགས་སེམས་ལྡན་པོ་གྲོལ་ཏུ་ཏོག་པོ་མཆེད་དག་ཆེན་པོ་བོད་ཀྱིས་རིག་ལྟར་བུ། །

9a
(བོད་ཡིག་དང་པོ་སོགས་སེམས་ལྡན་པོ་)
Appendix 2

http://andrewquintman.com/openingeyes/

Appendix 3

http://andrewquintman.com/openingeyes/