

Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum, an Ancient Tibetan Buddhist Canon *

James Ku

PhD Student, Department of Buddhist Studies, Fo Guang University

Abstract

The Tibetans have a passion for books, as books in Tibetan Buddhism represent variously the embodiment of the Buddha's voice, a medium of Buddhist written culture, and a symbol of the religion itself. Out of all the books in Tibet, the Kangyur and Tengyur have received much scholarly attention; on the other hand, the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* (hereinafter referred to as NGB) has been relatively

* 2021/9/21 收稿，2021/12/12 通過審稿。

*作者案：本文為筆者於佛光大學 2020 年上學期在林純瑜老師教導的「當代藏學名著選讀」之期末報告的基礎上修改而成，並於 2022 年 3 月 11-12 日 Tibetan Studies International Online PhD Students Conference 上發表初稿。首先要感謝林純瑜老師近年在藏文研究與人生態度的指導與鞭策，也要感謝蘇南望傑老師接續指導我藏文翻譯與西藏歷史，以及 Stéphane Arguillère 與 Robert Mayer 教授所提供的建議與釐清。在此特別向《正觀》編輯們以及二位匿名審查老師所給予的珍貴意見，以及給予我的大力協助，表達謝意。最後要感謝張文婷學長和 Lewis Hurd 幫忙糾正中英文的文法。期盼本文能為《寧瑪十萬續》的研究起到拋磚引玉的作用。

overlooked. This is perhaps due to its difficulty of interpretation and analysis, but it nevertheless is an integral part of Tibetan Buddhism. Scholars who have studied the NGB are Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, David Germano, and Orna Almogi, among others.

This paper seeks to answer three questions about the NGB: 1) what caused its formation, 2) the formation, structure and classification of the *Sde dge* version, and 3) the genealogy of various NGB versions.

Since the late 10th century, the collection of *rnying ma tantras* (approximately 1000 in total) comprised exclusively of the Three Inner Tantras, has been claimed to have been translated from Indic languages since Padmasambhava's time. There are many versions of NGB, with multiple manuscript versions and one xylographic Derge version extant. The NGB has enjoyed support from Sakya, Gelug, and by the fifth, thirteenth and fourteenth incarnations of the Dalai Lama. Even though they claim to have been translated from Sanskrit, scholars have classified them into three categories of Indic, Indic-Tibetic, and Tibetic origins. Most fall under the Tibetic origins, while only a very small portion are of truly Indic origins.

Even though NGB has been downplayed by the *gsar ma pas* as less authentic, they remain an essential link to the earliest Buddhist scriptures in Tibet, and thus should be studied in depth. Despite the difficulty of its language and the lack of organization in its texts, these precious texts provide a link to the inception of Buddhism in Tibet,

and also paved the way for later Tibetan Buddhist Canons like the Kangyur and Tengyur.

Keywords: Tibetan Buddhism, *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, Derge, genealogy, tantra

The Tibetans have a passion for books, as books in Tibetan Buddhism represent variously the embodiment of the Buddha's voice, a medium of Buddhist written culture, and a symbol of the religion itself.¹ Out of all the books in Tibet, the Kangyur and Tengyur have received much scholarly attention; on the other hand, the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* (*The Collection of Ancient Tantras*, hereafter referred to as the NGB) has been relatively overlooked. This is perhaps due to its difficulty of interpretation and analysis, but it nevertheless is an integral part of Tibetan Buddhism. Scholars who have studied the NGB are Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, David Germano, and Orna Almogi, among others.² This paper seeks to answer three questions about the NGB: 1) what caused its formation, 2) what was the formation, structure and classification of the *Sde dge* Version, and 3) what was the genealogy of various NGB versions.

What Caused the Formation of the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum*?

The 11th century contained the watershed moment in Tibet, as the transmission of Buddhism resumed after nearly two centuries, and the new translations made the old ones look less authentic. Back in the 8th century the issue with tantric teachings were suitability, as the Tibetan

¹ Kurtis R. Schaeffer, 2009, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. VII.

² 沈衛榮、侯浩然，2016，《文本與歷史：藏傳佛教歷史敘事的形成和漢藏佛教研究的建構》，北京：北京大學出版社，頁 193-202。

dynasty banned the more controversial tantric teachings, but in the 11th century it was a question of authenticity, as most old translations lacked Sanskrit origins.³ Tibetan Buddhism has always regarded tantric teachings as crucial in gaining enlightenment, but as new tantras (*sngags gsar ma*) were flooding in and trying to gain recognition, the authenticity of the old tantras (*sngags rnying ma*) came into question.⁴

Lha Lama Yeshe 'od (947-1024 CE), the king of *Mnga' ris* in the 11th century reestablished the Buddhist monastic tradition in Western Tibet. He renounced his throne and became a monk, and he saw many malpractices of Buddhism. Even though Buddhist monastic tradition had come to a halt since Lang Darma (*Glang dar ma*) reigned (838-842 CE), the tantric teachings had been thriving since the middle

³ Samten Karmay, 2007, *The Great Perfection: A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*, Leiden: Brill, p. 121. The reasons for the lack of Sanskrit originals are various, ranging from 1) loss during the dark periods, 2) the prominence of Tibetan-made sutras and 3) the oral tradition of many Indian monks who had a tradition of memorizing whole scriptures as a way of transmission and also as a symbol of complete understanding, which came in handy when debating and composing commentaries.

⁴ Ronald M. Davidson, 2002, "gSar-ma Apocrypha: The Creation of Orthodoxy, Gray Texts and the New Revelation," *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 212. The *gsar ma* "gray texts" are neither wholly Indian nor wholly Tibetan, and became the sources for many of the most important esoteric directions transmitted by the *gsar ma* traditions. Therefore, it can be said that the assumption that *gsar ma* translations are more authentic might not be true after all.

of the 9th to the middle of the 11th century. As a result, Lha Lama Yeshe ‘od issued an edict (ca. 985 CE) requesting everyone to refrain from tantric malpractices, and encouraged young Tibetan monks to travel to Northern India to find out whether their practices were genuine or not. The king was especially concerned with the *sbyor sgrol*⁵ (the practice of sexual rites and rites of deliverance, or killing), which was practiced under the name of *Rdzogs chen*. In particular, he was mainly aiming at the *Gsang ba snying po* (*Guhyagarbha*, the essence of secrets), even though no particular tantra was named in the edict. The tantric practices seemed to contradict everything the Vinaya taught.⁶ Later, Zhi ba ‘od (died in 1111 CE) in 1092 rejected the tantras of the *rnying ma* and their Great Perfection (*Rdzogs chen*) teachings, as “attributed to Indians, but composed by Tibetans.”⁷ The polemics between *rnying ma* and *gsar ma* continued until the end of 14th century, and as a result formed the collection of the Kangyur and Tengyur by the *gsar ma* and the NGB by the *rnying ma*.⁸

⁵ According to an email correspondence with Dr. Stéphane Arguillère on 2022/3/14, “*sbyor*” refers to subduing the female demon through rape, and “*sgrol*” refers to subduing the male demons by killing them.

⁶ Samten Karmay, 2007, *The Great Perfection: A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. 121-122.

⁷ Christian K. Wedemeyer, 2014, “Sex, Death and ‘Reform’ in Eleventh-century Tibetan Buddhist Esoterism: Khug pa lha btsas, spyod pa (caryā) and mngon pa spyod pa (abhicāra),” in *Sucāruvādadeśika: A Festschrift Honoring Prof. Theodore Reccardi*, Kathmandu: Himal Books, p. 243.

⁸ 沈衛榮、侯浩然，2016，〈文本與歷史：藏傳佛教歷史敘事的形成和漢藏佛教

In general, there are two systems of Buddhist “canons” in Tibet, the Kangyur and Tengyur of the *phyi 'gyur gsar ma* and the NGB of the *snga 'gyur rnying ma*.⁹ Many of them “had been excluded from the Kangyur, mainly because they lacked exact Indian equivalent texts as the *gsar ma* counterparts often do, rather than because of their propagation of sensuality or aggression.¹⁰ On the other hand, new *rnying ma tantras* continue to be revealed through treasure literature (*gter ma*), making the canon in a sense “unable to be closed”.¹¹ As a

研究的建構》, 頁 192-193。

⁹ Even though many of the texts in the Kangyur and Tengyur were in fact translated during the *snga 'gyur rnying ma*, the bulk of the texts were translated during the *phyi 'gyur gsar ma*, and thus the generalization was established. In general, the translations with proven Indic origins were included in the Kangyur and Tengyur, and those without were left out. Please refer to Orna Almogi, 2019, “The Human behind the Divine: Some Reflections on the Scriptural Evolution of the Ancient Tantras (rNying rgyud),” in *Unearthing Himalayan Treasures: Festschrift for Franz-Karl Ehrhard*, Marburg: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, p. 13 for more details on whether the texts had Indic origins or not. Kadri Raudsepp, 2011, “Rnying ma and Gsar ma: First Appearances of the Terms during the Early Phyi dar (Later Spread of the Doctrine),” *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 22, p. 42 suggests that the distinction between *phyi 'gyur gsar ma* and *snga 'gyur rnying ma* cannot be distinguished based on chronology, but rather on the basis of doctrinal distinction.

¹⁰ Christian K. Wedemeyer, 2014, “Sex, Death and ‘Reform’ in Eleventh-century Tibetan Buddhist Esoterism: Khug pa lha btsas, spyod pa (caryā) and mngon pa spyod pa (abhicāra),” p. 249.

¹¹ Robert Mayer, 2015, “Rnying ma Tantras,” *Brill Encyclopedia of Buddhism Online*, Brill, p. 390.

result, very few old tantras were included in the original redaction of Kangyur.¹² However, some later Kangyurs, following the 14th century Tshal pa redaction, began to accept a small, segregated *Old Tantras* section, while a regional late 17th century Kangyur from Tawang includes many more *Old Tantras* amongst the main body of its collection.¹³ Generally, the NGB is a large corpus of Tantric scriptures that has a special canonical status for the *rnying ma* school that is traditionally associated with the earliest transmission of Buddhism into Tibet during the Tibetan Imperial period (7th to 9th centuries CE). The final organization of the NGB occurred during the *phyi dar*, and its compilation may have been inspired by the exclusion of its texts from the Kangyur.¹⁴ Even though it is similar to the

¹² Kadri Raudsepp, 2011, “Rnying ma and Gsar ma: First Appearances of the Terms during the Early *Phyi dar* (Later Spread of the Doctrine),” p. 36. The root tantra of Mañjuśrī, *De nyid 'dus pa* (Gathering Thatness), the *Rnam snang mngon byang* (Tantra of the Awakening of Mahāvairocana), and the *Bsam gtan phyi ma* (Concentration Continuation Tantra) are examples of *rnying ma tantras* included in the Kangyur. Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection*, Wien: Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, p. 1 lists *Mañjuśrināmasaṃgīti* and *Guhyasamāja* as texts included in the Kangyur. Apparently, both sources share *Mañjuśrināmasaṃgīti* as a common text.

¹³ Robert Mayer, 2015, “Rnying ma Tantras,” p. 391.

¹⁴ David B. Gray, 2009, “On the Very Idea of a Tantric Canon: Myth, Politics, and the Formation of the Bka’ ’gyur,” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* 5, p. 20. Therefore, even though the NGB texts are older than those

Kangyur in physical reproduction, the texts are exclusively tantras, and more specifically, they belong to the Inner Tantras of the *rnying ma pa*: *Mahāyoga*, *Anuyoga* and *Atiyoga*.¹⁵ In other words, there are no sutras, vinayas, or commentaries, only the higher tantras of the *rnying ma* school. Out of the 1000 NGB texts, perhaps only three have their own commentaries: the *Guhyagarbha* tantras, the *mDo dgongs 'dus*, and the *Kun byed rgyal po*, in which only the *Guhyagarbha* tantra still enjoys a living commentarial tradition up to this day.¹⁶ Even after finding the original Sanskrit manuscripts of *rnying ma tantras* like *Guhyagarbha* and *Dorje phur pa* tantras in monasteries, most texts remain dubious in the eyes of the *gsar ma pas*.¹⁷

Despite being questioned about its authenticity, the supporters of *rnying ma* have come up with six different reasons for its superiority over the *gsar ma* tantras.¹⁸ First, the greatness of the benefactors, the

of the Kangyur and Tengyur, its compilation and formation came later.

¹⁵ Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection*, p. 1.

¹⁶ Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection*, p. 2.

¹⁷ 陳鑒維, 2011, 〈藏族典籍文獻—寧瑪十萬續略述〉, 《中國藏學》1, 頁 123。A copy of the Sanskrit *Guhyagarbha Tantra* was found by Bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri at the *Bsam yas* Monastery in the 13th century, and Sakya Pandita found a copy of the Sanskrit *rDo rje phur pa* taught by Padmasambhava near an old monastery near Nagqu.

¹⁸ Kadri Raudsepp, 2011, “Rnying ma and Gsar ma: First Appearances of the Terms during the Early Phyi dar (Later Spread of the Doctrine),” pp. 39-40. This is quoting

three ancestral kings who were the sublime Lords of the Three Families in kingly guise. Second, the locations of the early translations were recorded in places like the *Bsam yas* and other holy places of the past. Third, the distinctions of the translators of the past: they were not like *gsar ma* translators who only travelled to Nepal and India during winters (implying the *rnying ma* translators stayed in India to study for longer periods). Fourth, the distinction of scholars who supervised the ancient translations like Śāntaraṅgita, Buddhaguhya and Vimalamitra, who understood directly the meaning of the texts. They did not make word-for-word translations like the *gsar ma* translators, but directly translated the meaning of the texts. They also had purer motivations, and were not seeking gold in exchange for tantra translations and initiations, as the *gsar ma* often did. Fifth, in the past one had to pay much higher prices for the teachings than at the time of the *gsar ma* translations. Sixth, the translations of the past were completed at the time when the doctrine of the Buddha was at its peak in India. There were also many teachings that did not exist in India but were taken directly from the Buddha realms (this point was perhaps to refute the lack of original Sanskrit tantras). The *gsar ma* translators, like ‘Gos lo tsa ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392-1481 CE) stated in the *Blue Annals* (*deb ther sngon po*), that *gsar ma* translations were superior because of the activities of the great translator Rin chen bzang po (958-

Rong zom pa chos kyi bzang po’s *The Commentary of Guhyagarbha* (*Dkon cog ‘grel*), stated by Dudjom Rinpoche in his book *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, pp. 889-890.

1055 CE).¹⁹ The six reasons provided by the *rnying ma* were all supporting its origin and superiority over the *gsar ma*, but they didn't answer the questions pertaining to its Tibetic origins (or the lack of an Indic origin). Also, even though the texts were claimed to have been translated by able translators, the numerous textual errors did not seem to have supported the arguments. On the other hand, the argument that *gsar ma* translations were better because of Rin chen bzang po also didn't seem to stand, because he was just one translator (albeit an iconic one) and could not have possibly translated everything or edited every new translation. The best way to handle the polemics is to accept the tantras as what they were, and accept that both the *rnying ma* and *gsar ma* translations were integral parts in the history of transmission of Buddhism to Tibet, and finally settle the differences.

Why were the Old Tantras named the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* (literally translated as *The One Hundred Thousand Ancient Tantras*)? According to myth, there was a root tantra about the size of 100,000 stanzas that never materialized, in which some were revealed by Vajrapāṇi to King Indrabhūti.²⁰ The *'bum* (or “one hundred thousand”) came to represent the large number of root tantras in existence by Indian and Tibetan Buddhists, most of which were not revealed to the

¹⁹ Kadri Raudsepp, 2011, “Rnying ma and Gsar ma: First Appearances of the Terms during the Early Phyi dar (Later Spread of the Doctrine),” p. 40.

²⁰ David B. Gray, 2009, “On the Very Idea of a Tantric Canon: Myth, Politics, and the Formation of the Bka' 'gyur,” pp. 9-10.

human realm.²¹ *Rnying ma* tradition continued this tradition and used the “one hundred thousand” to represent the large corpus of tantras that is believed to be in existence. On the other hand, *‘bum* in classical Tibetan also means “many” or “all,” like *gsungs ‘bum* (collected works) or *mgur ‘bum* (collection of spiritual songs), and doesn’t necessarily mean “one hundred thousand” specifically.²² Therefore, the NGB has been known as *The Collection of Ancient Tantras*.

Formation, Structure and Classification of the *Sde dge* Version

Since the late 10th century, the rejection and disapproval of certain *rnying ma* tantric scriptures have been collectively designated as *The Collection of Ancient Tantras (Rnying ma’i rgyud ‘bum)*.²³ NGB is a

²¹ David B. Gray, 2009, “On the Very Idea of a Tantric Canon: Myth, Politics, and the Formation of the Bka’ ’gyur,” p. 15.

²² Stephan V. Beyer, 1998, *The Classical Tibetan Language*, New York: State University of New York Press, p. 223.

²³ Even though its scriptural authenticity is the apparent reason for its denunciation, the problem was much deeper than that. Orna Almogi, 2019, “The Human behind the Divine: Some Reflections on the Scriptural Evolution of the Ancient Tantras (*rNying rgyud*),” pp. 5-6, suggests that other factors, including the fall of a central religious and political power, translations uncontrolled by the state and the dissemination of controversial esoteric texts and practices, the struggle for religious, political and economic power, and also inter-sectarian and inter-personal rivalries, seemed to have played a role in not only rejecting *Ancient Tantras* but also

collection of approximately one thousand heterogenous esoteric texts comprising of exclusively the tantric scriptures of the “Three Inner Tantras”: Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga,²⁴ which claims to have been translated from Indic languages from the time of Padmasambhava.²⁵ Since the exact circumstances of the emergence of the *rnying ma* tradition is one of the least clearly defined areas of Tibetan history in modern scholarship, the earliest origin of *rnying ma tantrism* is quite disputed: some have argued that it began during the Imperial period, while others say it could not have started before the breakdown of the Empire in 842.²⁶ Most of the Sanskrit original of the NGB Tantras have long been lost, but they represent the early

scriptures and doctrines of other competing schools. Yet, the main reasons were the lack of an Indian origin or Sanskrit manuscript, and also because of its promotion of dubious practices.

²⁴ Robert Mayer, 2006, “The Textual Criticism of the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* Tradition,” *Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the IATS, 2003, Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis Studies in Its Formative Period, 900-1400*, Leiden: Brill, p. 96.

²⁵ Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, 2008, *Early Tibetan Documents on Phur pa from Dunhuang*, Wien: Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, p. 2.

²⁶ Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, 2008, *Early Tibetan Documents on Phur pa from Dunhuang*, p. 3. According to the different versions of *Sba bzhed*, some versions said that during the Imperial period only Caryā tantras were permitted to be translated, and other versions said that Kriyā and Caryā tantras were translated in full, while Mahāyoga translations were held back because people were not ready.

traditions of Buddhism in Tibet, including the *Rdzogs chen* and other early Buddhist philosophical thoughts, and thus represent the turbulent eras of the 8th to 10th centuries.²⁷

The NGB is currently available in several editions which differ in content and order. The original version is usually said to have been compiled in 42 volumes²⁸ by the 15th century Ratna gling pa (1403-1479 CE), but there is evidence of its existence in some form prior to the mid 12th century.²⁹ Later, under the patronage of the *Sde dge* ruler, ‘Jig med gling pa (1729-1798 CE) and his disciple Dge rtse pan chen ‘gyur med mchog grub (1761-1829 CE) used Ratna gling pa’s version as its basis while also used *Smin grol gling* manuscript and other manuscripts as a comparison, underwent collation, editing and

²⁷ 陳鑿維，2011，〈藏族典籍文獻—寧瑪十萬續略述〉，頁 123。

²⁸ Robert Mayer, 2015, “Rnying ma Tantras,” p. 391.

²⁹ Janet, Gyatso, 1996, “Drawn from the Tibetan Treasury: The gTer ma Literature,” In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, Ithaca: Snow Lion, p. 149. The NGB that Ratna gling pa compiled is no longer extant according to 沈衛榮、侯浩然，2016，〈文本與歷史：藏傳佛教歷史敘事的形成和漢藏佛教研究的建構〉，頁 193. Kun spangs sgrags rgyal had compiled a proto-NGB and kept it at Gtsang ‘ug bya lung, which dates to 11th or 12th century according to Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection*, p.12. Robert Mayer, 2015, “Rnying ma Tantras,” p. 391 states that a collection was compiled at the seat of the Zur family, a famous *rnying ma* hereditary lineage. A collection in 30 volumes containing 335 texts (or 375 by another count) is also mentioned in the biography of *rnying ma* master Nam mkha’ dpal (1171-1237 CE), who compiled it when his father died.

cataloging, and eventually produced the only xylographic NGB known as the *Sde dge* NGB (please refer to Appendix 1 for a detailed categorization of the *Sde dge* NGB).³⁰ Despite being excluded from the Kangyur, *The Collection of Ancient Tantras* were fervently supported and practiced by other schools, including the Sakya school of the *Rdo rje phur pa* (*Vajrakīlaya*) deity, the Gelug monastery located in Sera of the *Rta mgrin yang gsang* (*Hayagrīva*) deity, and several incarnations of the Dalai Lama, including the fifth, thirteenth and fourteenth.³¹

The *Sde dge* NGB edition was produced between 1794 and 1798 in *Sde dge* of eastern Tibet, and was commissioned by the Queen of *Sde dge*, Tshe dbang lha mo. The carving of the woodblocks was supervised by the *Mahāpaṇḍita* from *Kaḥ thog*, Dge rtse pan chen 'gyur med mchog grub, who also collated and edited the texts.³² The *Sde dge* xylograph was made using exemplars from monasteries of *Rdzogs chen*, *Kaḥ thog*, *Stag bru brag dmar*, and *Dpal spungs*, as well as those made by 'Jigs med gling pa, a lama from Go 'jo, and the fifth Dalai Lama. All seven of these *Paṇḍitas* comprehensibly reviewed, reordered, and edited to make this renowned NGB edition of 414 texts

³⁰ 沈衛榮、侯浩然，2016，《文本與歷史：藏傳佛教歷史敘事的形成和漢藏佛教研究的建構》，頁 193。

³¹ Robert Mayer, 2015, "Rnying ma Tantras," p. 392.

³² Mihai Derbac, 2007, "rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum: A Tibetan Buddhist Canon," Master's thesis, University of Alberta, p. 22.

in 26 volumes.³³ The *Sde dge* edition has a preeminent status and stands apart from other versions of NGB. The thorough redaction rendered its reading to be viewed as more consistent, coherent and grammatical than other editions, and it is widely perceived as the final and most authoritative version of the NGB.³⁴

When the texts are classified according to their possible origin, they fall into three distinct categories: Indic, hybrid Indic-Tibetic, and Tibetic.³⁵ Although the corpus of the *The Collection of Ancient Tantras* contains translated Indic texts, they constitute only a small portion of it. The majority are indigenous Tibetan compositions, while some others consist of a blend of Indic and Tibetic textual layers.³⁶

Most texts of Indic origin were considered authentic and thus included in the Kangyur, but some were put into a separate *Rnying rgyud* section instead of the general *rgyud* section to fit their doubtful status. Among the NGB of Indic origin are *Susiddhikaratantra* and *Subāhupariṣcchātantra* (Kriyā class), *Vairocanābhisambodhitāntra* (Caryā class), *Tattvasaṃgrahatantra*, *Vajrasikharatantra*,

³³ Robert Mayer, 2006, “The Textual Criticism of the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* Tradition,” pp. 105-106.

³⁴ Robert Mayer, 1996, *A Scripture of The Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis*, Oxford: Kiscadale Publications, p. 235.

³⁵ Orna Almogi, 2019, “The Human behind the Divine: Some Reflections on the Scriptural Evolution of the Ancient Tantras (rNying rgyud),” p. 9.

³⁶ Orna Almogi, 2019, “The Human behind the Divine: Some Reflections on the Scriptural Evolution of the Ancient Tantras (rNying rgyud),” p. 12.

Durgatipariśodhanatantra, and *Śrīparamādyatantra* (Yoga class), and *Guhyendutilaka-* tantra, *Guhyasamājatantra*, *Buddhasamāyogatantra*, and **Guhyagarbhatantra* (Mahāyoga class).³⁷

A large number of scriptures seem to be of Indic-Tibetic origin because they contain layers of alternating Indic and Tibetic textual elements. This category includes a variety of possible courses of scripturalization and of ratios between the Indic and Tibetic elements, ranging from transformation of existing translated Indic non-scriptural texts into scriptures, on through “paraphrasic renditions” of translated Indic texts and their compilation and reorganization into new ones, to incorporations of passages from Indic texts into largely indigenous compositions. An example of a scripture of hybrid Indic-Tibetic category is the *Byang chub sems bsgom pa('i rgyud)*, (The Tantra of) Meditation on Bodhicitta. We witness the transformation of an Indic treatise, the *Bodhicittabhāvanā* ascribed to the Indian master Mañjuśrīmitra into an Ancient Tantra. There are two versions of the text in a scripturalized form, which serve as witnesses to two stages of the scriptural evolution of this text. Another text, the *Kun byed rgyal po* demonstrates a rather strong Tibetan involvement leading to an

³⁷ Orna Almogi, 2019, “The Human behind the Divine: Some Reflections on the Scriptural Evolution of the Ancient Tantras (rNying rgyud),” p. 13, even though Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection*, p. 1 listed *Guhyasamāja* as included in the Kangyur.

altogether new text.³⁸

The vast majority of the NGB belongs to the category of Tibetic origin. These are Tibetic scriptures composed within the Tibetan cultural sphere over a long period of time, including texts that have been discovered by treasure revealers (*gter ston*), are called the hidden teachings (*gter ma*). Numerous editions of the *Rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum* were formed, enlarged, and produced in a milieu close to influential treasure revealers. The treasure revealers, however, function as a mere pipeline through which scriptural revelation is enabled, either remained entirely anonymous or semi-anonymous. Although they can be regarded as indigenous, they are often the result of a combination of original creativity and innovation on the part of their revealer-cum-creator and of the ability to draw upon a wide pool of existing texts and of doctrinal ideas of various sorts.³⁹

Overall, the old tantra traditions extant today do reflect some genuinely old traditions, including several that were already well developed by the time the Dunhuang caves were sealed in the 11th century. A small but important core of old tantra texts had close Indian counterparts, even if further redactions might have been created in Tibet. Some texts, such as PT44, were deliberately redacted by Indian siddhas to suit Tibetan audiences. Likewise, IOL Tib J321 suggests

³⁸ Orna Almogi, 2019, “The Human behind the Divine: Some Reflections on the Scriptural Evolution of the Ancient Tantras (rNying rgyud),” pp. 14-18.

³⁹ Orna Almogi, 2019, “The Human behind the Divine: Some Reflections on the Scriptural Evolution of the Ancient Tantras (rNying rgyud),” pp. 18-21.

Padmasambhava as the revealer of *Thabs zhags* scripture, with winged Herukas in accordance with indigenous Tibetan religion.⁴⁰ The analysis done by Almogi sheds some light on the origin of the tantras in NGB, but I was hoping for a more in-depth analysis done on tantras with Indic-Tibetic origin, for example a concrete example, and the author could have provided the percentage of the texts that had *gter ma* origin to show how much of the Tibetic origin tantras were due to *gter ma* sources. Nevertheless, the analysis was very insightful and provided proof of its Tibetic sources.

Genealogy of Various NGB Versions

The surviving NGB is highly variable: the original NGB has long been lost, and the surviving copies differ from each other. This has caused the extant NGB to be frequently unreadable because of textual corruption, which is mainly due to eyeskip and the confusion of homophones. This has resulted in many NGB to have substantial portions incomprehensible even to the most learned Tibetan lamas.⁴¹ The reason for the incomprehensibility of the NGB can be attributed to its use of ancient Tibetan, and also because it had not gone through thorough editing and standardization like the Kangyur and Tengyur. Yet, it is precisely because of these ancient and original texts that the

⁴⁰ Robert Mayer, 2015, “Rnying ma Tantras,” p. 394.

⁴¹ Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection*, p. 8.

NGB is so valuable. Unlike the Kangyur and Tengyur⁴², the NGB has not been as thoroughly studied, but Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell have been the main pioneers in the field.

There were seven surviving NGB collections available (with one more becoming accessible) as of 2007, including the *Sde dge* xylograph (D), and the manuscript collections of Mtshams brag (M), Sgang steng-a (G), Gting skyes (T), Rig ‘dzin tshe dbang nor bu (R), Kathmandu (K) and Nubri (N), while Sgang steng-b manuscript in Bhutan was in the process of being digitized. Several collections represented separate editions while others seemed to have been simple copies.⁴³ In the past, there were theoretically hundreds of NGB

⁴² Prominent scholars of Kangyur and Tengyur include Helmut Eimer, Paul Harrison and Peter Skilling, among others.

⁴³ Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection*, pp. 11-12. According to 陳鑿維, 2011, 〈藏族典籍文獻—寧瑪十萬續略述〉, 頁 123 there are 11 collections available, and according to Robert Mayer, 2015, “Rnying ma Tantras,” p. 392 there are 13 collections extant that fall within 6 different doxographical redactions. Since the two articles were written later, more rnying ma’i gryud ‘bum collections have been discovered following the publication of Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell in 2007. 陳鑿維, 2011, 〈藏族典籍文獻—寧瑪十萬續略述〉, 頁 124-125 has 4 more collections, including: 吉隆版 (skyid grong)·毗盧版 (bai ro)·策瑪續版 and 頂果法王/敦珠法王版. Robert Mayer, 2015, “Rnying ma Tantras,” pp. 395-396 categorized into 6 different redactions: a) Bhutanese recension in 46 volumes include: Mtshams brag, Sgang steng-a, Sgang steng-b, Dgra med rtse, Dpa’ sgar, Sangs rgyas gling; b) South-Central Tibetan recension in

collections, since every major *rnying ma* monastery would have felt they needed one, and that represents a loss of approximately 90% since the pre-1950s.⁴⁴ The BDRC website provides scanned images of three NGB collections: the *Sde dge* xylograph (D), the Mtshams brag manuscript (M) and the Gting skyes manuscript (T), while the THDL website provides the catalogues to the same three NGB versions.⁴⁵ Thanks to advances in systemic analysis in textual variants, a genealogical tree had been suggested by Dr. Robert Mayer.

After preliminary analysis of four tantra texts, the following pattern has emerged:⁴⁶

33 volumes include: Gting skyes and Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu; c) Tibetan-Nepalese borderlands recensions in 37 volumes include: Nubri and Kathmandu; d) *Sde dge* xylograph in 26 volumes; e) Gdong dkar la manuscript from Bhutan in 28 volumes; and finally f) Gzhi chen dgon manuscript from Gzhi chen dgon in Gandze in 33 volumes.

⁴⁴ Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection*, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Mihai Derbac, 2007, “rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum: A Tibetan Buddhist Canon,” p. 21. The THDL website is <https://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/canons/ngb/>. The BDRC has recently launched a new website at <https://library.bdrc.io/>, and the NGB versions can be found by searching for “rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum”. In an email correspondence on 2021/12/10, Dr. Robert Mayer also suggested useful websites like [Endangered Archives Project](#) and Resources for [Kanjur and Tanjur Studies](#).

⁴⁶ Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection*, p. 16. The four tantra texts are *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, *Sho na dkar nag gi rgyud*, *Myang 'das*, and *rDo rje*

- ◆ D stands on its own
- ◆ MG form a distinct family
- ◆ TRNK form a distinct family
- ◆ In all texts except *Myang 'das*, TRNK and MG have significant shared errors
- ◆ In the *Phur pa bcu gnyis*, NK and TR are further differentiated by significant shared errors

It is more important to analyze every text individually than looking at the whole collection, but the stemmatic pattern shown so far is indicative of some fundamental patterns within the NGB transmission.

Paul Harrison suggested three ways in determining the affinities of the various accessible editions of Kangyur and Tengyur, and the same rules may be applied to the NGB: 1) to examine Tibetan histories, biographies and the catalogues of these editions for information relating to their creation; 2) to note carefully the order of sections and individual titles within the editions, since this can also indicate affinities and 3) to apply classical text-critical techniques to the problem, by editing individual texts.⁴⁷ In the study of NGB, primarily method three and to some degree method two have been employed in determining the genealogy of the NGB, but thus far there seems to be little evidence of change over time among the various versions, and

khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud.

⁴⁷ Paul Harrison, 1996, "A Brief History of the Tibetan bKa' 'gyur," In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, Ithaca: Snow Lion, p. 80.

the genealogy can only be loosely traced. However, due to the scarcity of historical literature from the 7th to early 9th century, method one is more difficult to implement, unless there is relevant information in the prefaces and colophons to the extant NGB versions that explain their formations.⁴⁸ Since most of the NGB in Tibet have been destroyed, this genealogy will always be partial and incomplete, but nevertheless working with the current collections will still be invaluable and give us an indication of what the NGB had been in the past. As more NGB collections are discovered and more scholars devote time and effort in this field of research, its genealogy and history will become more comprehensive.

Conclusion

The NGB is a collection of Tantric scriptures that has a special canonical status for the *rnying ma* school that is traditionally associated with the earliest transmission of Buddhism into Tibet during the Tibetan Imperial period (7th to 9th centuries CE). Even though it has been doubted and attacked by the *gsar ma pas* due to its lack of Sanskrit originals and also because of dubious practices such as *sbyor sgrol*, it has been highly valued by *rnying ma* practitioners, and Rong zom pa had even argued that it was of higher quality than the Kangyur and Tengyur. Even though most NGB texts are not

⁴⁸ Andrej Ivanovic Vostrikov, 1994, *Tibetan Historical Literature*, London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, p. 21.

included in the Kangyur, and few have supplementary commentaries, most *rnying ma* monasteries perhaps had at least one copy before the invasion of Chinese in the 1950s. The ‘*bum* (or “One Hundred Thousand”) placed in the naming of the tantras refers back to an imaginary large quantity of root tantras (100,000 stanzas in total) believed to have existed in both Indian and Tibetan traditions. On the contrary, ‘*bum* also means “many” or “all”, therefore giving it the translation of *The Collection of Ancient Tantras*.

Since the late 10th century, the collection of *rnying ma* tantras (approximately 1,000 in total) comprised exclusively of the Three Inner Tantras, have been claimed to have been translated from Indic languages since Padmasambhava’s time. There are many versions of NGB, with multiple manuscript versions and one xylographic version extant. The only xylographic version is the *Sde dge* edition that was carefully collated and edited by many high *Paṇḍitas*, thus it is widely perceived as the most authoritative version of the NGB. The NGB has enjoyed support from Sakya, Gelug, and by the fifth, thirteenth and fourteenth incarnations of the Dalai Lamas. Even though they claim that the texts have been translated from Sanskrit, scholars have classified them into three categories of Indic, Indic-Tibetic, and Tibetic origins. Most fall under the Tibetic origins, while only a very small portion are of truly Indic origins.

There are currently seven surviving NGB collections available, and more will surely emerge as they continue to be discovered in

monasteries in Tibet and elsewhere.⁴⁹ Interestingly, most of them are manuscript versions and only the *Sde dge* version is xylographic. This is due to the fact that each *rnying ma* monastery held its own unique, highly customized version, and also because most resources were allocated into printing the Kangyur and Tengyur under the patronage of wealthy and influential Tibetan leaders, who were unsure whether the NGBs were worth promoting. Also, because NGBs were made up of exclusively tantric texts, the most essential parts were most likely not written down and instead passed on orally as oral transmissions (*bka' ma*) by high lamas, thus making the mass production of the NGB unlikely and unnecessary. The *rnying ma* school has always been deemed as the least centralized and organized school, and its textual diversity and lack of a centralized printed version reflect this phenomenon. Despite not having the most essential parts written down, the NGB is still of utmost importance because of its antiquity and the wealth of information it contains.

Even though the NGB has been downplayed by the *gsar ma pas* as less authentic, it remains an essential link to the earliest Buddhist scriptures in Tibet, and thus should be studied in depth. Despite the difficulty of its language and the lack of organization in its texts, the NGB provides a link to the inception of Tibetan Buddhism, and these

⁴⁹ Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, 2007, *The Kīlaya Nirvāṇa Tantra and the Vajra Wrath Tantra: Two Texts from the Ancient Tantra Collection* listed 7 versions, 陳鑒維, 2011, 〈藏族典籍文獻—寧瑪十萬續略述〉 listed 11 versions, and Robert Mayer, 2015, “Rnying ma Tantras,” listed 13 collections.

precious collection of corpuses also paved the way for later texts like the Kangyur and Tengyur. More attention should be focused on the study of the NGB in Asia, and thus we can gain new insights on the inception of Buddhism in Tibet.

Appendix 1: Category of texts in the *Sde dge* xylograph NGB⁵⁰

- I. The Instructions, Atiyoga
 - A. The Category of Secret Instructions (*Man Ngag sDe*)
 - i. Most Secret Sublime Tantras
 1. Yang ti
 2. sPyi ti
 3. A Ti
 - ii. Secret Tantras
 - iii. Outer and Inner Tantras
 - B. The Inner Tantras, the Great Expanse (*Klong sDe*)
 - C. The Outer Tantras, the Category of the Mind (*Sems sDe*)
 - i. Text of the Cycle of Kun ched Gyal po
 - ii. The Eighteen Tantras on the Cycle of Mind
 - iii. The Other Texts of the Cycle of Mind
- II. The Precepts, Anuyoga
 - A. The Four Root Sutras
 - B. The Six Tantras
 - C. The Twelve Rare Tantras
- III. The Development, Mahāyoga
 - A. The Eighteen Tantras (*rgyud sde*)

⁵⁰ Tulku Thondrup Rinpoche, 1997, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*, Boston: Wisdom Publication, pp. 182-183.

- i. Root Tantra: Guhyagarbhamāyājāla-tantra
- ii. The Seventeen Explanatory Tantras
 - 1. The Five Root Tantras of Body, Speech, Mind, Virtues and Actions
 - 2. The Five Tantras of Explanation of the Method of Practice
 - 3. The Five Tantras on the Aspect of Conduct
 - 4. The Two Additional Tantras
- B. The Eight Sādhanas of the Eight Great Maṇḍalas
 - i. Terma Texts
 - 1. Lama Gong du by Sangs rgyas gling pa
 - 2. Yi dam De sheg Du pa by Nyang Nyi ma Od zer
 - ii. Canonical Tantras
 - 1. The Tantras of the Body, Mañjuśrī
 - 2. The Tantras of the Speech, Padma
 - 3. The Tantras of the Mind, Yang dag
 - 4. The Tantras of Virtues, Amṛta
 - 5. The Tantras of Actions, Vajrakīla
 - 6. The Tantras of Inciting and Dispatching, Ma mo
 - 7. The Tantras of Offering and Praise to the Worldly Deities
 - 8. Tantras of Terrifying Mantras of Exorcism

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古老的藏文大藏經《寧瑪十萬續》

佛光大學佛教學系博士生三年級谷有量

中文摘要

藏人一向對書籍情有獨鍾，因為在藏傳佛教中書籍在不同程度上代表了佛陀的教誨，佛教的書寫文化，甚至成為佛教的象徵。在所有的藏傳佛教典籍中，《甘珠爾》和《丹珠爾》備受學術界的重視，而《寧瑪十萬續》則長期被忽視。這或許是由於其文字艱澀難懂，導致解讀與分析上的困難，但卻無法改變它在藏傳佛教中的重要性。長期關注《寧瑪十萬續》的學者有 Robert Mayer, Cathy Cantwell, David Germano 和 Orna Almogi 等人。

本篇論文主要針對《寧瑪十萬續》的下列三個問題做探討：

- 1) 《寧瑪十萬續》是在什麼樣的時空背景下產生的？
- 2) 德格版《寧瑪十萬續》的構成、結構與分類
- 3) 各種版本之間的關係及其系譜

《寧瑪十萬續》是從十世紀後期，一個據說是源自於蓮花生大士時期的寧瑪派密續典集逐漸成形，其內容有大約一千部

的古藏文密續。在早期，幾乎每一個寧瑪派寺院都有自己獨特的《寧瑪十萬續》收藏本，但如今尚存的僅幾部寫本及一部德格版刻本。《寧瑪十萬續》受到薩迦派與格魯派、以及五世、十三世與十四世達賴喇嘛的支持。雖然它號稱是完全翻譯自梵文，但其實有三種來源語：梵文、梵藏文及藏文。其中絕大部分是在藏地以藏文書寫，僅有一小部分真正翻譯自梵文。

雖然《寧瑪十萬續》受到新譯派的攻擊與質疑，但它仍然是藏傳佛教中最原始的佛教經典之一，也因此更應該受到高度重視，進行更深入的研究。即便其文字艱澀難懂且缺乏條理，但它們卻是最古老的藏傳佛教文獻，也在某種程度上為後來的《甘珠爾》與《丹珠爾》奠定了藏文佛教大藏經的基礎。

關鍵詞：藏傳佛教、《寧瑪十萬續》、德格版、系譜、密續