

THE JOURNAL  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
BUDDHIST STUDIES

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

*Roger Jackson*  
*Dept. of Religion*  
*Carleton College*  
*Northfield, MN 55057*

EDITORS

*Peter N. Gregory*  
*University of Illinois*  
*Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA*

*Alexander W. Macdonald*  
*Université de Paris X*  
*Nanterre, France*

*Steven Collins*  
*Concordia University*  
*Montréal, Canada*

*Ernst Steinkellner*  
*University of Vienna*  
*Wien, Austria*

*Jikidō Takasaki*  
*University of Tokyo*  
*Tokyo, Japan*

*Robert Thurman*  
*Columbia University*  
*New York, New York, USA*

*Volume 13*

*1990*

*Number 1*

# CONTENTS

## I. ARTICLES

1. Tibetan Materials in the Asia Rare Book Collection of the Library of Congress by *John B. Buescher* 1
2. The Religious Standing of Burmese Buddhist Nuns (*thilá-shin*): The Ten Precepts and Religious Respect Words by *Hiroko Kawanami* 17
3. A Possible Citation of Candragomin's Lost \**Kayatravatara* by *Peter Skilling* 41
4. Meditation and Cosmology: The Physical Basis of the Concentrations and Formless Absorptions According to dGe-lugs Tibetan Presentations by *Leah Zahler* 53

## II. CONFERENCE REPORT

1. "Buddhist Soteriology: The *Marga* and Other Approaches to Liberation": A Conference Report by *Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Robert M. Gimello* 79

## III. REVIEWS

1. *Mahamudra: The Quintessence of Mind and Meditation*, by Tashi Namgyal [tr. Lobsang Lhalungpa] (Matthew Kapstein) 101
2. *Les Tamang du Népal: Usages et religion, religion de l'usage*, by Brigitte Steinmann (David Holmberg) 114

#### IV. NOTES AND NEWS

1. Notice of *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions*  
(Per Kvaerne) 117

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS 119





his work leaves this reviewer with few bones to pick, and small ones at that: clear and accurate use of Sanskrit titles of cited works in some cases, for instance, alternates in others with altogether confusing use of very rough phoneticization of Tibetan translations of Sanskrit titles: e.g., “Sa’ingōshi” (p. 33) for *Sa-yi dngos-gzhi*, i.e., *Bhūmivastu*. And the entire treatment of the bibliography and index of citations (pp. 463–88) will not be regarded as meeting the standards of contemporary academic usage. Also, I would like to encourage readers of this review to do everything in their power to stamp out the neologism “sutric,” used throughout this and many other recent books on Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>9</sup> None of this, however, distracts from this reviewer’s admiration for an exemplary and extremely important addition to the volume of Tibetan doctrinal literature now available in English translation.

There remains, however, one rather puzzling aspect of the book, the striking lack of information we find there about its author, Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal. The issues that may be raised in this connection take us beyond any questions explicitly raised in the book under review, and so will be addressed separately.

## II. *The Enigma of Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal*

Given the clear importance of the *Phyag-chen zla-zer*, the enormity of its achievement, and the fact that its popularity as an instructional text within the Bka’-brgyud traditions demonstrates the high regard in which it was traditionally held, we should expect that, as seems often to be the case with the great names in Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal history, a great deal would be known of its author, Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal. Wrong. Next to nothing seems known of him, and, though I cannot claim to have turned every stone yet, the results of my search for reliable information about him have so far been remarkably disappointing. This presents something of a puzzle, but because that puzzle is itself in some sense illuminating, an account of it seems in place here.

Mr. Lhalungpa’s introduction (p. xxi) tells us that

In writing this work the great Tibetan teacher Tashi Namgyal (1512–87) made known many of the ancient secret oral teachings and published them as xylographic prints. Among other well-known treatises by the author are *The Resplendent Jewel: An Elucidation of the Buddhist Tantra* and *The Sunlight: An Elucidation of Hevajra-tantra*. In the course of his extensive studies and training Tashi Namgyal studied with some Sakyapa teachers and even acted as the abbot of Nālandā Sakyapa Monastery, north of Lhasa. During his later years he functioned as Gampopa’s regent and as chief abbot of the monastery of Dakla Gampo, in South Tibet.

The text itself contains little information regarding its author: even the opening praise-verses, for instance, omit specific reference to his personal teachers. It is only in the colophon that he situates himself for us (p. 411):

...I, Gampopa Tashi Namgyal, started composing this text at an auspicious time and completed it on an auspicious day of the third month of the Ox year, at the Nāgakoṭa retreat, below the glorious monastery of Taklha Gampo. The founding of this monastery was prophesied by the Buddha. The scribe was Thupden Palbar, who is himself a dedicated master of the Mantrayāna system.

A translator's note (p. 461) tells us that “[t]he Ox year could be either the Wood Ox year, 1566 C.E., or the Fire Ox year, 1578 C.E.”

We have before us, then, a number of substantive assertions regarding Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal, a few of which find some confirmation in the text's own colophon, the remainder being presented without textual support. In the absence of an available (auto)biography, or even of a substantial historical note in a synthetic history of Tibetan Buddhism or of one of its particular schools, it may be worthwhile to examine the assertions made here with some care. The absence of extensive written evidence is, of course, part of the puzzle, and I shall return to this question below. Let's first, however, examine the positive assertions in turn:

1. Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal was affiliated with Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po Monastery.

2. He lived from 1512 to 1587, had some connection with the Sa-skyapa school, and “even acted as abbot of Nālandā Sakyapa Monastery.”

3. He composed “other well-known treatises,” including the *Phyag-chen zla-zer*, which was written in an Ox year equivalent to either 1566 or 1578. Moreover, he was responsible for the xylographic publication of his own work.

- 1.

This is, of course, supported by the author's colophon. Confirmation of his monastic affiliation may be found elsewhere as well, for instance in the notes on Tibetan monastic institutions compiled by the patron of 19th century Tibetan Buddhist eclecticism, 'Jam-dbyangs Mkhyen-brtse'i dbang-po (1820–92):

As for Dwags-la sgam-po: It was founded by Dwags-po Rin-po-che Bsod-nams rin-chen [a.k.a. Sgam-po-pa]—the heart-like spiritual son of Mi-la Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje, the great pillar of the lineage of attainment following Lord Mar-pa—when he was in his forties. It became the source of all the Bka'-bryud-s [i.e., of the four great and eight lesser lineages stemming from Sgam-po-pa, *Bka'-bryud che-bzhi chung-bryad*], and was later preserved by Sgom-tshul Tshul-khrims snying-po and [Sgam-po-pa's] other nephews, and by the *all-knowing Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal* and other emanational rebirths, who came successively.<sup>6</sup>

Sgam-po-pa's monastic seat, then, appears to have been maintained by a familial line and by a line of *sprul-sku-s*, Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal having figured among the latter.

Histories of the Bka'-bryud schools sometimes include a brief discussion of Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po's beginnings and early succession immediately following the life of the founder: as the English version of *The Blue Annals* provides a readily available example, there is no need to repeat this material here.<sup>7</sup> But the distinction of its founder notwithstanding, Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po and its traditions had lapsed into some obscurity within four centuries of its foundation. This is well-indicated by no less a Bka'-bryud historian than Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag phreng-ba, writing during the period 1545–65, who expresses uncertainty as to whether those in the line of Dwags-l(h)a sgam-po's hierarchs have formed a continuous master-disciple succession.<sup>8</sup>

2.

The dates, 1512–87, assigned to Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal by Mr. Lhalungpa are those that have been adopted by the U.S. Library of Congress, and are found in recent Tibetan chronologies as well.<sup>9</sup> However, the reader who undertakes the tedious task of reading Tshe-tan Zhabs-drung's recent compendium of Tibetan chronologies in its entirety will find Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal entered with two conflicting sets of dates, the alternative being 1398–1458, the name given with the birth-year further qualified with the phrase *rong-ston-gyi slob-ma*, “disciple of Rong-ston.”<sup>10</sup> Rong-ston is, of course, the famous Sa-skya-pa scholar Rong-ston Shes-bya kunzigs/-rig (1367–1449), who founded the “Nālandā” (actually Nālendra) monastery in 1435–6. In the light of the assertion that the author of the *Phyag chen zla zer* had been abbot of this Sa-skya-pa establishment, this matter clearly demands careful consideration. Were there two Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal-s, or just one? And if one, did he belong to the mid-sixteenth century or to the early fifteenth?

A summary of the life of Rong-ston may be found on pp. 1080–82 of the Roerich translation of *The Blue Annals*. On p. 1082 we find the following:

Before his passing into Nirvāṇa, he appointed to the Abbot's chair the Dharmasvāmin bKra-śis rnam-rgyal. This one also laboured extensively for the benefit of the Doctrine, preached, erected large images, etc. He was born in the Earth-Male-Tiger (sa-pho-stag—1398 A.D.) and passed away at the age of 61.

According to the Tibetan manner of calculating one's age, that would have been 1458.

We have therefore a *Chos-rje* Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal: he is not explicitly identified in *The Blue Annals* as *Dwags-po* Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal.<sup>11</sup> However, a recent account of Rong-ston's life and work does refer to him as “Dags-po-dbon Paṅ-chen Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal” and as “Dwags-po paṅ-chen Bkra-shis-rnam-rgyal.”<sup>12</sup> The primary source cited is Gser-mdog Paṅ-chen Shākya-mchog-ldan's (1428–1507) biography of Rong-ston,<sup>13</sup> where on plate 336, lines 5–6, we find one *Dags-po dbon-por grags-pa Pan[sic!]-chen Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal*, “Paṅ-chen Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal famed as the Dags-po nephews.” Not only does Rong-ston's disciple have the same name and titles similar to those of the author of the *Phyag chen zla zer*, but the addition here of the title *dbon-po* immediately calls to mind the *dbon-brgyud*, “nephews' line,” among Sgam-po-pa's successors, referred to above, where it was distinguished from the line of *sprul-sku-s* to which our subject belonged.

There are, however, better reasons to doubt the identification of the two, and to argue that the *mahāmudrā* master indeed belonged to the sixteenth century. To begin with, it seems odd that 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba, author of *The Blue Annals* and a scholar with powerful Bka'-brgyud affiliations, would have failed to mention that Rong-ston's successor had been the author of important and influential Bka'-brgyud treatises if that had indeed been the case. Less circumstantially, we have a record of the *mahāmudrā* master Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's lineage, known from two independent sources: Kaṅ-thog Rig'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu (1698–1755),<sup>14</sup> and 'Jam-mgon Kong-sprul Blo-gros mtha'-yas (1813–99), who takes this up in the *dkar-chag* of his encyclopedic anthology of Tibetan Buddhist meditational traditions, the *Gdams ngag mdzod*.<sup>15</sup> The former may, I believe, be considered particularly good testimony in this instance: Tshe-dbang nor-bu was a noted historian with strong Bka'-brgyud connections; coming, as he does, during the early eighteenth century it seems unlikely that he would place a mid-sixteenth century figure in the early fifteenth; and, significantly, Paṅ-chen Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal appears to have



It will be immediately apparent that the absence of more precise information on the dates of most of these persons presents some obstacles to the use of these lists as evidence to decide the case of Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal. Given that five generations of teachers are reported as intervening between him and Tshe-dbang nor-bu, whose dates are quite well established, however, it does seem more plausible to assign Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal to the sixteenth century, assuming an average of roughly thirty years per generation, a figure nearly consistent with the distribution of the list overall. And certainly, the dates assigned to Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's grand-disciple Nor-bu rgyan-pa appear to clinch the matter.

About this last point, however, we must exercise some caution, for Nor-bu rgyan-pa's dates are known from just the same very recent sources as Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal's, and, because he belongs to the same lineage, may be subject to similar possibilities of error. What we must do, then, is determine just what sources the recent chronologists have utilized. Earlier chronological documents, combined with the evidence of the lineage lists, would do much to bolster the argument.

Fortunately, we can be fairly certain regarding the identity of the immediate sources of contemporary Tibetan chronologies in the case with which we are here concerned: the chronology of Tshed-dbang nor-bu himself;<sup>16</sup> and that of Sum-pa Mkhan-po Ye-shes dpal-'byor (1704–87).<sup>17</sup> Both concur in assigning the birth of Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal to 1513 (Water Bird, Ninth Rab-byung), and Sum-pa gives the year of his death as 1587 (Fire Pig, Tenth Rab-byung). Both concur in assigning the birth of Sgam-po-pa Nor-bu rgyan-pa to 1588 (Earth Rat, Tenth Rab-byung), and Sum-pa specifies 1633 (Water Bird, Eleventh Rab-byung) as the year of decease. It seems very unlikely that both of these eighteenth century historians, writing in different parts of Tibet and adhering to different traditions, would be similarly wrong about *all* of this. Moreover, the occurrence of the name of Sgam-po-pa Nor-bu rgyan-pa among the circle of Rnying-ma-pa and Bka'-brgyud-pa luminaries gathering around Rig-'dzin 'Ja'-tshon-snying-po (1585–1656) offers further confirmation of the general accuracy of these dates. We must, I believe, accept the conclusion that there were two Dwags-po Pañ-chen Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal-s, one a fifteenth century Sa-skyapa, the other a sixteenth century Bka'-brgyud-pa.

One further puzzle must be raised in this connection: Sman-dsong mtshams-pa Rin-po-che, in his history of the successive Karma-pas, mentions as a disciple of Karma-pa IX Dbang-phyug rdo-rje (1554–1603) a certain “Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal-gyi







though he may have been, Dwags-po Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal swam in a backwater.

There is, I think, a moral here for those involved in Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal and religious studies, at least as presently practiced in the English-speaking world. It has become too often the case that we permit epithetic characterizations—"great scholar," "enlightened master," and the like—to stand in place of substantive historical research. By themselves, such descriptions are hollow and uninformative; they are a lazy way to avoid finding out who these people really were. Sometimes the inquiry, as in the present instance, will yield less than we might have hoped for, even throwing aspects of the record into doubt. No matter. In gaining a clear sense of the areas of darkness, we perceive more distinctly the pockets of light. Given the present tenuous conditions for the preservation of Tibetan culture and learning, the small gains won in this fashion seem not to be without value.

## NOTES

1. Throughout the present review, "Bka'-brgyud" will be used, as is often the case, to refer collectively to the Mar-pa Bka'-brgyud traditions, the lineages stemming from the translator Mar-pa Chos-kyi blo-gros (1012–97), and not to such traditions as the Shangs-pa Bka'-brgyud that, despite the common name, must be historically distinguished.

2. See *Collected Works (Gsun[sic!]-'bum) of Kun-mkhyen Padma-dkar-po* (Darjeeling: Kargyud Sungrab Nyamso Khang, 1973), vol. 21, pp. 7–370.

3. The text is available in a modern xylographic edition from Rum-btegs, Sikkim. It is not without interest to note that the two works just mentioned belong to the same historical period as the text whose translation is here reviewed.

4. This is not the place to repeat the now extensive bibliography of Kamalaśīla, the "Bsam-yas debate," and related topics. The 1987 *Louis H. Jordan Lectures* (University of London) by David S. Ruegg represent the most recent and thorough attempt at synthesis. The *Bhāvanāyogāvatāra* does not appear to be directly referred to by Bkra-shis rnam-rgyal; its relationship with the three *Bhāvanākrama* has been rightly insisted upon by Luis O. Gómez, "El Bhāvanāyogāvatāra de Kamalaśīla," *Estudios de Asia y Africa* XIV (1979), pp. 110–37.

5. This verbal monstrosity is, of course, formed on analogy to "tantric," which is itself an Anglicization of Sanskrit *tāntrika*, "pertaining to the tantras," a term perhaps not used in Buddhist texts, but sufficiently well-known from other Sanskrit traditions to warrant its adoption. But there can be no such word in Sanskrit as \**sūtrika*; the grammatically correct form would be *sautrika*, a term



