



Disciples of a Crazy Saint  
The Buchen of Spiti



First published in Great Britain in 2011  
to accompany the exhibition *Disciples of a  
Crazy Saint: The Buchen of Spiti* at the  
Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford,  
9 December 2010 – 3 July 2011.

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Photographing the Buchen

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Preliminary notes on the origin  
of the Bla ma maNipa Storytellers  
and their fate in exile today

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ISBN 978-0-902793-51-4

Design by Tawhid ar-Rahman

[www.designwithtype.co.uk](http://www.designwithtype.co.uk)

Printed and bound by EBS Verona in Italy

A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library.

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Disciples of a Crazy Saint was funded  
by a grant from the Arts and Humanities  
Research Council, with project partnership  
from the Pitt Rivers Museum,  
University of Oxford.

*Previous page:* Nyima Dorje performing as  
the deaf mother of the crazy saint Drukpa  
Kunley. Mane 2007.

# Disciples of a Crazy Saint

## The Buchen of Spiti

Spiti is the valley of the River Spiti and its tributaries. It is a high altitude desert region in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, on the border of Western Tibet. I have been documenting the culturally Tibetan communities of Spiti for nearly two decades. I travelled there several times in winter in order to photograph groups of performers called Buchen touring their theatre around the villages.

When I recently returned some of these images I was told that my black and white photographs were so awful that when I leave, people tear them up and put them in the fire. Even allowing for Buchen teasing, this was an extraordinary response and became the stimulus for the project. This book, *Disciples of a Crazy Saint*, emerged from a process of collaboration with the Buchen themselves and incorporates their own ideas of what might constitute a visual record of their theatre, their rituals and their role.

*This book is dedicated to my mother Gwyneth Sutherland.*

Patrick Sutherland. 2011

# Photographing the Buchen.



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Five men clothed in dark robes are walking in a circle on a flat grassy field. The two leaders wear distinctive cloth headdresses, the other three have hair flowing down their backs. A small audience watches from either side of a stone wall. To the right of the frame a square box, supporting a statue, stands in front of a backdrop of cloth and Tibetan *thangkas*. On the ground a smooth boulder lies before a long slab of stone, which is raised up on rocks. In the distance is the only sign of human habitation, a cluster of houses barely distinguishable from a treeless mountain landscape.

The image on the previous page was recently acquired by the British Library.<sup>1</sup> It comes from a substantial archive of photographs taken by John Coldstream a century ago. Coldstream was a British colonial administrator, a settlement officer, based in Kullu, in Himachal Pradesh, North India between 1910 and 1913.

This is the Ceremony of Breaking the Stone, an elaborate exorcism still performed by the Buchen of Pin Valley in Spiti. During the ritual, demons are summoned and entrapped in a block of stone. This is lowered on to a man's belly and then smashed with a rock.<sup>2</sup> Buchen are lay religious practitioners. They are performers of rituals, storytellers, actors, entertainers and disciples<sup>3</sup> of the fourteenth/fifteenth century Tibetan 'crazy saint', the mahasiddha Tangtong Gyalpo.<sup>4</sup> Coldstream was probably the first person to photograph the ceremony.



*Previous page and above:* Photographs of the Ceremony of Breaking the Stone by John Coldstream © The British Library.

I have been documenting Spiti since 1993 and have witnessed stone breaking ceremonies on several occasions. Little appears to have changed since Coldstream's time. The costumes, dance movements and objects gathered for the ritual appear similar to contemporary performances. The most striking difference is the hair. Older villagers can still remember when head Buchen, known as *memes*,<sup>5</sup> sported these luxurious twists of hair. Only a few Buchen wear their hair long these days, usually as thin plaits tied behind the head. In the past they would knot their waist-length hair above their heads whilst meditating, perhaps an affirmation of their connection to Tangtong Gyalpo.<sup>6</sup>

Meme Buchen undergo a process of training that involves substantial periods in retreat. They spend months in isolated caves, supervised by senior Buddhist monks from the monastery at Gungri.<sup>7</sup> The training includes memorising texts, undertaking yogic practices and mastering complex tantric techniques, including the visualisation of wrathful deities. The perfection of these techniques gives Buchen their power, the ability to summon and entrap demonic forces, to break stones and to leap on to the tips of swords. As a consequence, they are widely respected within their community.

The age and historical value of Coldstream's photographs is significant but what excites me as a photographer is his image of Lugsji the shepherd.<sup>8</sup> It is a beautifully caught and richly revealing moment. Coldstream's Lugsji is barefoot, stropic and ragged. He is blowing out flour like dragon's breath, confronting the camera with a grin and a clenched fist, apparently undaunted by this encounter with alien technology and colonial authority.



Photograph of Lugsji by John Coldstream © The British Library

In contemporary performances of the stone breaking ritual, Lugsji appears as an argumentative and irrepressible joker. He continually interrupts the proceedings. He mimics the meme Buchen's oration and spices it up with obscenities, gibberish and smatterings of Hindi. Lugsji plays to the audience, amusing the villagers with the absurdity of his language and behaviour. He occasionally mimes sexual acts or pretends to defecate on stage. Though Lugsji flouts the meme Buchen's authority and apparently makes a mockery of the whole ritual, he is eventually subdued and submits to his master.

The Lugsji performance is not mentioned in the stone breaking text.<sup>9</sup> Buchen describe it as an amusing interlude. They view it merely as entertainment and consequently unimportant in comparison with the actual ritual. In many ways it echoes the comic scenes, the joking and slapstick, within the repertoire of Buchen plays. This theatre, which the Buchen take on tour, derives from the same sources as the Tibetan Opera.<sup>10</sup> The plays are staged for the education and spiritual benefit of local village audiences. They are, in essence, morality plays. Buddhist values, the principles of karma and the concept of impermanence are enacted within dramatisations of the hagiographies of Tibetan saints. Stone breakings are commissioned exorcisms, undertaken when requested, but the theatrical tours only take place in the winter, when agricultural work is minimal.

The *onpas*,<sup>11</sup> who play Lugsji, take the role of comedians. The ability to improvise and speak rapidly is highly valued. The stage offers them a space for transgression, for uninhibited banter, often peppered with earthy humour. Even the most harrowing and tragic play offers the potential for comic elements.<sup>12</sup> Greed, jealousy, vanity, stupidity, cowardice and lust, the negative attributes of human behaviour are portrayed for ridicule. Some of this comedy takes the form of slapstick, but *onpas* also comment on the impinging modern world. They joke about how useful mobile phones are, enabling them to speak directly to village deities instead of having to engage a trance medium. They joke about the strange four-legged humans who migrate to Spiti in summer, a mocking reference to westerners with trekking poles. They joke about foreigners kissing in public, which Spiti people find hilarious, and they joke especially about sex.

Despite this contemporary commentary, the message delivered by the Buchen is essentially conservative. They employ entertainment to attract an audience, in order to encourage villagers to follow Buddhist practice. In particular they encourage them to chant the six syllable mantra of *Om Mani Padme Hum*. These communal recitations punctuate Buchen rituals, the dances at parties, songs, prayer meetings and narrations.



*Left:* Photograph of Lugsu by John Coldstream © The British Library  
*Right:* Sangye Gatuk performs as Lugsu, Lalung 2006.



As soon as I saw the Coldstream images I knew I wanted to take them back to Pin, to ‘visually repatriate’ them. I particularly wanted to show them to Sangye Gatuk, who I had once photographed in the role of Lugsu on a rooftop in Lalung. I had caught him in a pose remarkably similar to the Coldstream image. The last time I had given Sangye some prints he informed me that my black and white photographs were so awful that when I leave, people tear them up and put them in the fire. This extraordinary reaction became the stimulus for the project.

I had previously visited Spiti in winter in order to join the Buchen as they toured their theatre around the villages of Pin, Spiti and Upper Kinnaur.<sup>13</sup> I photographed their plays, the behind the scenes preparations, their audiences and the relationship they have with the communities who invite them. I enjoyed the intimate connection the actors have with an audience crowded into an animal pen in the freezing cold. I loved the slapstick and the absurd, sometimes obscene, humour, the prayer and deep emotion, the dancing and nightly parties.

I tried to document this potent mix of religion and entertainment with intimacy and affection. But the Buchen clearly find my unposed reportage images problematic. Sangye contrasted the simple difference between ‘good’ photographs and ‘bad’ photographs. Good photographs are static colour images of people facing the camera, dressed in their best clothing and ideally framed as full length portraits. Bad photographs are unposed black and



Examples of a ‘good’ photograph and a ‘bad’ photograph.

white images of people caught off guard and in movement, perhaps capturing gestures and facial expressions.

Sangye and I hold diametrically opposed views of the value of my images and the potential importance of reportage photographs as historical records. I wondered if we could negotiate a different photographic strategy that would bridge this divide. I had originally chosen to work in black and white to avoid reinforcing the romantic and colourful stereotype of a sublime Tibet. These reportage photographs are fragments of time, frozen and separated from the normal flow of life. This form of visual documentation seems quite alien to the Buchen. They are qualitatively different from the static, self composed individual colour portraits that they value.

The aim of this project was to return to Spiti with my own archive of work, as well as historical material I had gathered. I hoped to establish an approach to visual documentation appropriate to the Buchen sense of their status as serious religious practitioners but also revealing to a wider audience. I wanted to discover whether still photography could be used to document the Buchen without it being seen by them as demeaning. Could it deal with the humour and sexuality of their performances without undermining the sacred nature and spiritual message of the plays?

Most Spiti households have a few photographs displayed on the walls or in albums. They are primarily individual likenesses, ennobled and celebratory. Whether commissioned from studios or taken by friends they are invariably of people who are self-composed and presenting themselves to the camera.

Photography came early to Spiti: Samuel Bourne visited in 1863. But ownership of cameras and involvement in the processes of photography has been rare within the local community. Photographic encounters have had the privileged status of uncommon events. Prints of religious leaders are, however, widespread. They are objects of devotion, commonly placed amongst the religious texts, thanngas and offerings in prayer rooms. There is an intimate relationship with these sacred images: give a Spiti villager



Photographs by Hans Kopp from Himalaya Shuttlecock

a photograph of the Dalai Lama or other rinpoche and he will touch it to his head, an act of humility and of blessing.

I returned to Spiti in 2010, with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and project partnership from the Pitt Rivers Museum, carrying a laptop and piles of digital prints. I show the material in the fields, sitting by the stove in private houses and in the courtyard of Gungri monastery. People crowd around, clearly fascinated. Sometimes they pretend to steal prints. Several request copies of the historical images.

I show two images by Hans Kopp.<sup>14</sup> Four people identify Meme Dhaljor from Tsud. His son tells me that this famous Buchen overcame serious illness by undertaking years of meditation in a cave. Two others suggest that the photograph of three Buchen skewering their cheeks is actually a montage, a triple portrait of Meme Dhaljor. This reading has never occurred to me. Villagers in Spiti happily embrace manipulated imagery within their concept of photography. They have not absorbed a realist documentary aesthetic and certainly do not read photographs as raw slices of life. They have attitudes to still photographs that are very different from mine.

When I tell them that the Coldstream pictures are one hundred year old photographs of a stone breaking in Spiti, the Buchen contradict me. This happens repeatedly. They deny that it is Spiti, suggesting that it was photographed in Ladakh, maybe even Tibet.<sup>15</sup>

In Tsering Tobgye's home I get the same response but as the prints are being handed around, his daughter suggests that the cluster of houses in the background of the photograph looks like Thangti Gongma. We wander down the hill and see the same geological formation as in the photographs, the same buildings still standing. Coldstream's stone breaking photographs were taken by the side of the Pin River between Gungri and Sealing.

I show Coldstream's images in other places and frequently some younger person identifies the village. The older Buchen and the younger villagers seem to read the images differently. The Coldstream photographs are too old to identify the performers but all the meme Buchen try. I wonder if their difficulty with locating the images stems from their inability to recognise the faces and therefore place the performers into a context of Buchen lineages. But they explain that the robes, the headdresses and the hair all look different. The costumes are incomplete, the memes are not wearing the ornamental conch shells on their chests (see page 29). Two Buchen mention the dark skins of the performers. They notice lugsji's rags and bare feet. The photographs may trigger negative associations of poverty and primitiveness, from which they want to distance themselves.<sup>16</sup>

They also don't seem to be reading the background of the Coldstream photographs. Contemporary photographs displayed in Spiti are often studio portraits shot against an artificial backdrop. Composite images are increasingly common: some use computer generated slabs of patterned colour, others show a face montaged over a sacred landscape. These mimic popular representations of religious leaders, like the framed photographic portraits of the Dalai Lama floating in the sky over Key monastery that are on sale in the market in Kaza. Backgrounds and foregrounds seem to occupy distinct and separate spaces within the frame and photographs are not necessarily read as a form of evidence.

Spiti has satellite television but newspapers and magazines rarely penetrate into the valley. Villagers have embraced TV soaps and Bollywood films without being significantly exposed to still photography in any form apart from portraiture. The extended series of still images, the essence of documentary photography, is not a format they easily connect with.

As well as looking at historical material we examine and discuss my individual reportage photographs. The Buchen read most of the images easily and are articulate and direct in their responses. They are surprisingly positive, though generally they feel that black and white is a bit depressing compared to colour. When I ask them to look closely, they respond favourably to the detail, often commenting on specific elements of Buchen practice.

They like the fact that you can see the skewer piercing Meme Rigzin's throat and the details of the swords (pages 26-27) and are pleased to recognise that lugsji is singing to announce his arrival from off stage (pages 30-31). They respond favourably to the photograph of Chettan Dorje and his group leaving Lidang and calling back to the villagers. They comment on the prayer wheel and the kogpo<sup>17</sup> and are intrigued when I point out the tiny



Tsewang Namgyal, Dorje Phuntsog and Sonam Palden looking at photographs, Gungri Monastery 2010.

figure of Pema Namgyal, a dark speck in the distance (pages 110-111). They approve of the photograph of Chettan Dorje and Sonam Dorje performing a mika prayer (pages 56-57). They are particularly keen to recognise and put a name to the faces of each of the Buchen performers and also to name their group and village.

They criticise some images as unsharp. The intangible qualities I would describe as the mood or atmosphere of an image seem utterly irrelevant to them. They have a problem with images where the framing cuts into faces or heads. Maintaining the integrity of the body within photographs seems important to them. They have particular problems reading a photograph of a man lying on the floor holding a long stick to his groin. This was an attempt to capture the raw sexuality of some Buchen performances. I thought the phallic nature of the image was unmistakable and had reservations about showing it to them. But every viewer I hand the print to fails to read it as a horizontal frame, turns it to a vertical position and then dismisses it, perplexed. Who would photograph someone lying down? Good photographs are of people standing up. When I question them further they are bemused that I think it has sexual connotations.<sup>18</sup>

There is a clear gap between the kinds of images I make and the formal portraits that the Buchen prefer. We have different ideas of the role of photography. In discussions with two Buchen groups in Sangnam, we come up with the idea of shooting a series of simple colour portraits of the main

characters from their winter plays. A series that might fit the Buchen concept of good photographs, whilst also having documentary value to an outside audience. We list the principal stories, the most important characters from these stories and then we choose a selection to photograph.

I encourage the Buchen to decide how they want to present themselves to camera. They make the point that they don't want me to photograph too much, that if my documentation is too thorough, no-one will want to come and see their performances.<sup>19</sup>

They gather costumes and props and we choose a neutral background within the village hall where we can set up a studio and work without disturbance. Using a digital camera and a laptop allows us to view and comment on the work as it progresses. We shoot, check, discuss and reshoot. Once in costume they often slip into character and start performing in role. They seem genuinely pleased with the results of the sessions. (pages 39-53).

The project appears to be moving forward. At the end of the sessions we go through the files and I ask each of them to make a selection for themselves. They ask me to send them prints, they even specify the size, but it's not the portraits in role they request, it's the portraits out of costume. It is clear that the Buchen want photographs, they want *my* photographs, they just don't want the kind of photographs I value most. In terms of finding a collaborative solution to documenting Buchen performances and to producing an outcome they want to own, we have hardly progressed at all.



Left: Sangye Gatuk, Sangnam 2010.



Right: Chettan Dorje, Sangnam 2010.

The portraits they choose fit into a clear convention. They are static and respectful, of people presenting themselves to the camera looking their best. They echo the images of high lamas in their prayer rooms, which in turn may link to the formal depictions of buddhas and bodhisattvas on thangkas.<sup>20</sup> Are these the source of Buchen ideas of good photography? Perhaps they can be described as *honorific*, as formal manifestations of enhanced social identity. Honour and respect are fundamental elements of daily social interaction in Spiti. They are marked through special forms of language, through positions offered and occupied within social spaces, and through music and songs performed by lower caste musicians. If these portraits are a kind of honorific form, and this is the accepted photographic convention, then my reportage is perhaps a kind of insult, like addressing someone in the wrong language, as if they were lower caste, or sitting in an inappropriate place in the room.

However my concern that any kind of informal documentary photographs of Buchen performances might be deemed inappropriate is contradicted by the Buchen desire to possess the Coldstream and Kopp images. They seem to see these old photographs as pieces of their visual history, but they don't view mine in the same way.<sup>21</sup> My photographs are contemporary images of recognisable living people that don't fit into the respectful mode of portraiture. Perhaps they are too recent to be categorised as historical documents and too informal to be displayed.

The Coldstream images contain distinctive looking thangkas. I wondered whether Dechan, my translator, and I could locate them and identify the lineages they belong to. These cloth paintings are used by meme Buchen to illustrate the key points of a story prior to a theatrical performance. They are very different from the densely symbolic thangkas commonly found in monasteries and prayer rooms. They narrate episodes of the story in simple, occasionally crude, illustrations.

I notice similarities between details on the thangkas and photographs I have made of the plays. The painted characters are not represented as static portraits but are drawn in movement. The pictures express action and relationships, emotion and suffering through gestures and body posture. I am not suggesting that these instructional thangkas are to be confused with photographs, but they are using a very direct visual language that links to reportage.

The Buchen are profoundly uninterested in the fact that I am preparing an exhibition for the Pitt Rivers Museum, but when I mention the catalogue, which Dechan translates as a book, they become quite animated.

They want to know about the contents and whether they can have copies. It's the first real sign that it might be possible to produce something that would have value to them as well as to me.

As an example of the potential appearance of the book, I make a rough layout on my laptop. I use the historical images, the studio portraits, dummy text and the black and white images too. The idea of pairing documentary photographs and related thangka details emerges through these conversations (pages 62-77). They are intrigued and ask about captions and text: we agree on the necessity of detailing names, locations and dates. I suggest approaching a Tibetan expert to write about the wider cultural context of the Buchen. For the first time they seem to get a clear sense of the potential of the work and become involved in discussing the editing, sequencing and overall structure. I check their responses. This time they are very clear that they want the book and express a desire for ownership of the images in this context.

Quite suddenly the project has come into focus. The book clearly provides a structure that contextualises the new and the old photographs. But I think they implicitly grasp something else, that a book both contains and constrains the images. Still photographs are fragments of complex events. Prints are material objects whose slippery nature takes them into contexts where their very existence may seem inappropriate. In a book they are no longer loose pieces of paper but bound into a sequence and captioned, their meaning perhaps less open to differing interpretation. The book has become the central output of the project.

For the Buchen, books are things of value. Old texts are rare objects representing lineage, authority, access to and control over specialist knowledge. Modern educational textbooks represent the potential of employment for a younger generation. But a book on the Buchen is also a possible tool to present and market themselves and their theatre further afield.<sup>22</sup>

One of the characters from the story of Nangsa Obum is a monkey, which accompanies Lama Shakya Gyeltsen. The monkey is a tiny detail of this harrowing story, sometimes dramatised into an outrageous and obscene episode. The lama plays the kogpo and the monkey dances, wiggling his red buttocks and genitalia. In front of some younger audiences these days, however, the monkey performs de-sexed. But Sangye Gatuk has decided to pose with the full glory of his monkeyhood (page 77).<sup>23</sup> I question him repeatedly afterwards. He is happy for this image to be published, and tells me he will treasure the book for his grandchildren.

Buchen performances blend the religious and the comedic, the spiritual, social and sexual, presenting them as overlapping realms of human experience. Their carnivalesque and saucy nature occasionally seems to subvert respect for religious authority, with portrayals of randy monks mumbling gibberish in place of prayer. But they also celebrate humanity and playfully attack dogmatic and unthinking convention.

The local audience for their theatre is changing and onpas now test them for the suitability of their jokes. The earthy sexuality of their performances can no longer be guaranteed to cause widespread mirth. There seems to be a conflict between the Buchen sense of themselves as religious practitioners spreading the Dharma and new attitudes to their bawdy performances. Some of their transgressive role is threatened by an increasingly educated and sophisticated younger community.

Spectacle and comedy are key elements of this local theatre but not necessarily legitimised by text. Buchen tend to denigrate the performative aspects of these plays, the locally specific, unique and intangible elements of their theatre. What I have responded to most they dismiss as mere entertainment, peripheral to what is important, which is the written story.<sup>24</sup> Much of what I have been photographing they view as marginal and perhaps my reportage work highlights an ambivalence. I have been portraying them as entertainers within a closely knit community as much as religious specialists. Musicians, entertainers and actors often have a low status in the wider Tibetan world.<sup>25</sup> Buchen are locally revered and treated as honoured guests within Pin, but they sometimes complain that they are treated like beggars<sup>26</sup> in other communities, trading the spiritual for the material, their religious performances for barley or cash.

I first showed the Coldstream photographs in a café in Tabo. Someone grabbed one with his cameraphone and texted it to his friend. It had taken a century for Coldstream's images to return to Spiti and seconds for them to be launched into the ether, joining an eclectic mix of shared portraits of His Holiness and other rinpoches, snapshots and pictures of family, sports stars and pop musicians. Mobile phones are now ubiquitous in Pin. This is hardly unusual in modern India but Pin has no phone mast or signal. The mobile is mp3 player, clock, status symbol and camera. Cameraphones are the first widely owned cameras in Spiti.

At the Dudjom Tersar Initiations at Gungri Gumpa in 2010, nuns and monks, ordinary villagers and Buchen were grabbing and sharing images. Even Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche himself was taking photographs of cultural performances. These were not the kind of posed and formal



Sonam Palden photographing with a cameraphone, Gungri Monastery 2010.

portraits the Buchen prefer. New technology offers access to image making and the power of editorial control. It may well shift the parameters of what is acceptable to photograph, and modify the way the Buchen view and embrace their self image as manifested in photographs. But I suspect it will add to rather than replace their established and deeply rooted ideas about representation.

This essay has been presented in previous forms at the International Association of Tibetan Studies (IATS) in Vancouver in 2010 and at seminars and lectures at Goldsmiths, the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford University, the University of Manchester, the World Oral Literature Project at the University of Cambridge and at a symposium on collaborative practice at the London College of Communication. I have undoubtedly benefited from the ideas generated by academic staff and students at these events and would like to thank them for their input and suggestions.

## Endnotes

- 1 I am grateful to John Falconer, Curator of Photographs at the British Library for drawing my attention to the Coldstream photographs of Spiti.
- 2 For the classic description of the ritual see Roerich, Georges de. (1932). The Ceremony of Breaking the Stone. *Journal of Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute of the Roerich Museum*, vol.2 (4), p.25-52. For a recent description of the wider current role of the Buchen, see Dollfus, P.(2004). The Great Sons of Thang stong rgyal po: the Bu chen of the Pin Valley, Spiti. *The Tibet Journal*. Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, Spring Vol XXIX. No I, 2004, pp 9-32.
- 3 Buchen (tib. bu chen, lit. great son) can also be translated as disciple or chief disciple.
- 4 For an exhaustive description of the extraordinary life and achievements of Tangtong Gyalpo see Stearns, Cyrus. (2007). *King of the Empty Plain: The Tibetan Iron-Bridge Builder Tangtong Gyalpo*. Snow Lion Publications. Colorado. For a vivid sense of the Tibetan tradition of crazy saints see also Dowman, K. and Paljor, S. (translators) (2000). *The Divine Madman. The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley*. Dawn Horse Press, California.
- 5 Meme (tib. mes mes, lit. grandfather).
- 6 Tangtong Gyalpo is usually depicted with beard and a topknot of hair.
- 7 Gungri (dgung ri) is the principal monastery in Pin Valley, belonging to the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism.
- 8 Lugsi (tib. lug rdzi, lit. shepherd).
- 9 Oral conversation with Meme Tsering Tobgye from Par.
- 10 The stories of Nangsa Obum (sNang sa 'od 'Bum), Drukpa Kunley ('Brug pa kun legs), Drimed Kunden (Dri med kun ldan), Drowa Zangmo ('Gro ba bzang mo) Lingza Chökyi (Gling bza' chos skyid) and others. The relationship between the texts used by Buchen as the basis for these plays and the texts used for Tibetan Opera (tib. a lce lha mo) performances of the same stories requires further investigation. Buchen performances differ from the Tibetan Opera in many ways: the casts are smaller, exclusively male, the dialogue is spoken not sung and the overall presentation is much less polished. They are perhaps local and peripheral forms of Lhamo.
- 11 Buchen troupes consist of three to five members with one meme, one or rarely two onpas (tib. rngon pa, lit. hunter) and one to three nyapas (tib. nya pa, lit. fisherman).
- 12 The stories are performed in different ways: they can be read directly from texts, without any form of dramatisation, or acted out from memory. Sometimes the enactments contain dramatisations as well as readings from texts. A narration might have the gathered audience weeping loudly whilst the same story can be dramatised primarily as comedy.
- 13 In the winters of 2004, 2006 and 2007.
- 14 Kopp was a German engineer imprisoned by the British alongside Heinrich Harrer and Peter Aufschnaiter. His book has a short description of Buchen performing a sword dance, usually part of the stone breaking ceremony, as a response to an outbreak of plague. Kopp, H. (1957). *Himalaya Shuttlecock*. Hutchinson, London, pp 63-65.
- 15 Buchen currently tour through Pin Valley, Spiti and Upper Kinnaur. They occasionally travel into and trade with the nomadic areas of Ladakh as far as Leh. They would previously tour to Purang in Tibet, where their visits are still remembered. Other groups of related performers were once more widely distributed in Tibet. See Tsering, T. (2011) *Preliminary notes on the origin of the Bla ma maNipa Storytellers and their fate in exile today* in this volume.
- 16 Several informants have mentioned how arduous the life of Buchen used to be, travelling away from home for months at a time, paid for their performances in food and old clothing.
- 17 A musical instrument, with three pairs of strings, strummed as an accompaniment to songs or dances.
- 18 I have chosen not to include images rejected by the Buchen in this version of this essay.
- 19 Buchen, like several other groups in Spiti, have a role as specialist performers. This gives them access to particular forms of knowledge through training and ownership of texts. This in turn endows them with status but also offers the potential for income and economic gain.
- 20 I am grateful to Imogen Clarke for this idea.
- 21 Spiti villagers occasionally request images of long dead relatives who I had photographed back in the nineties.
- 22 The Buchen are increasingly performing the stone breaking ceremony for outsiders: trekkers, visiting researchers, photographers and filmmakers.
- 23 The phallic and "obscene" elements of Buchen theatre may well have other associations apart from the comedic. For a Bhutanese parallel, see Chhoki, S., (1994). The Sacred and the Obscene in the Bhutanese religion. *Bhutan: Aspects of Culture and Development*. Kiscadale Asia Research Series No. 5, M. Aris & M.Hutt (eds.). Gartemore: Kiscadale Ltd., pp 107-122. I am grateful to Hubert Decler for drawing my attention to this article.
- 24 Though bringing villagers to the dharma through entertainment, is a role popularly associated with Tangtong Gyalpo himself.
- 25 See Stein, R.A. (1972) *Tibetan Civilization*. Stanford University Press, California pp 92-93.
- 26 The term beggar or religious beggar comes up frequently when discussing the Buchen. See Tsering, T. (2011) *Preliminary notes on the origin of the Bla ma maNipa Storytellers and their fate in exile today* in this volume p 87.





*Previous page:* The late Tsewang Rigzin preparing to dance with swords. He will leap upon the swords, with the tips stuck into his belly, his armpits or his mouth. The stone breaking ceremony is an ancient and elaborate exorcism ritual. Sangnam 1998.

*Above:* The late Tsewang Rigzin reading from a photocopied text. Sangnam 1998.

*Right:* Gatuk Sonam invoking demons in order to entrap them in a block of stone. This will be laid on a man's belly and smashed. Lalung 2006.



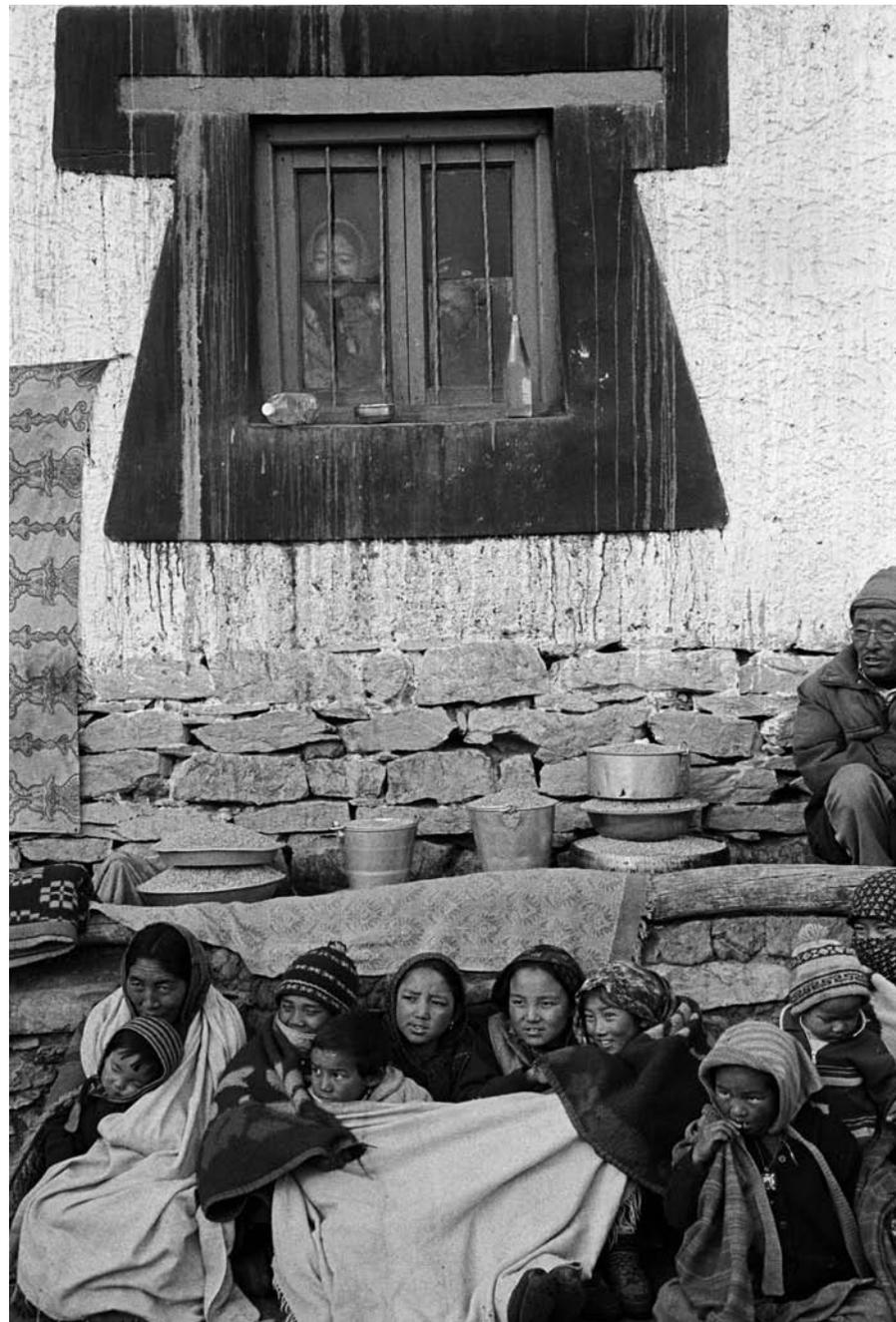


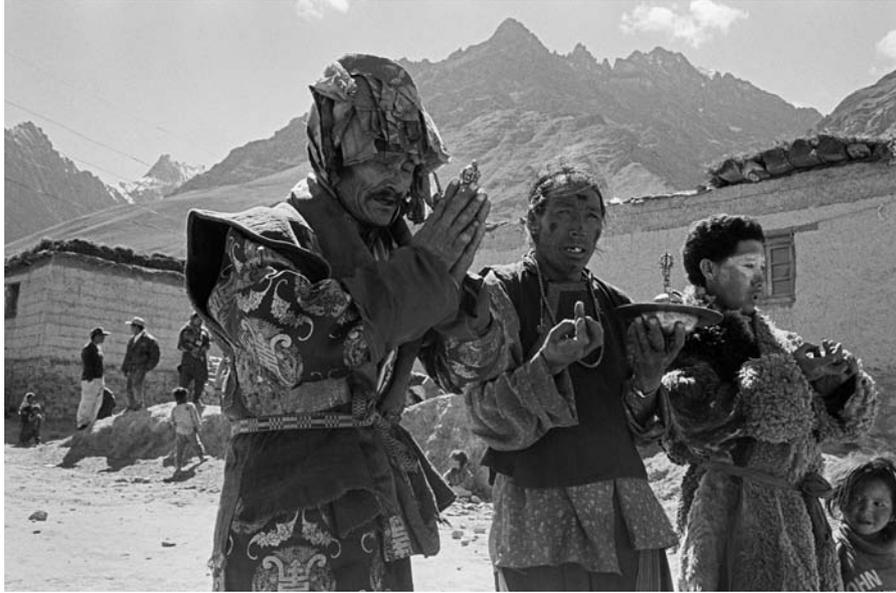


*Previous page:* Pema Namgyal performing as Lugsis the shepherd, singing to announce his imminent arrival. Lugsis is an obstreperous character, who continually interrupts the head Buchen, jokes with the audience and punctuates his performance with obscenities and gibberish. Lara 2004.

*Above:* Pema Namgyal performs as Lugsis the shepherd, confronting and challenging the head Buchen. Lara 2004.

*Right:* An audience huddles in the cold in an animal pen. Lara 2004.





*Above:* The late Tsewang Rigzin, Sonam Dorje and Sonam Palden praying in front of an 'altar'. Sangnam 1998.

*Right:* The 'altar'. A carved wooden box supports two decorated statues of Tangtong Gyalpo, a statue of Dorje Chang and offerings of barley in front of a backdrop of cloth and thangka paintings. Sangnam 1998.





*Above:* Gatuk Namgyal pinning a cloak of yellow cloth to the shoulders of Gatuk Sonam, before he dances with swords. Lalung 2006.



*Right:* Sonam Palden, the late Tsewang Rigzin and Sonam Dorje at the culmination of a stone breaking ceremony. The slab of rock has been smashed and the demons vanquished. The villagers have grabbed auspicious fragments of broken rock and are leaving. Sangnam 1998.

Gatuk Namgyal dressed as the elephant keeper from the play Drimed Kunden. Sangnam 2010.



Palden Dorje dressed as the  
crazy saint Drukpa Kunley.  
Sangnam 2010.



Sonam Dorje dressed as the deaf  
mother of the crazy saint Drukpa  
Kunley. Sangnam 2010.





Sangye Gatuk, Palden Dorje and Pema Namgyal dressed as the three squabbling beggars who come to request gifts from Prince Drimed Kunden. Sangnam 2010.

Sonam Dorje dressed as the yogi  
Rewa from the play Nangsa Obum.  
Sangnam 2010.



Gatuk Namgyal dressed as Lama  
Gomchen Kunga from the play  
Nyalla. Sangnam 2010.





Palden Dorje dressed as Drowa  
Zangmo. Sangnam 2010.

Pema Namgyal dressed as Loma, the  
yogi's disciple, from the play Nangsa  
Obum. Sangnam 2010.





*Above:* The interior of a Buchen household. Dorje Dolma, wife of Tsering Tobgye, and their daughter Tsering Yangzom are making bread on a metal box stove. Par 1998.

*Right:* Tsering Tobgye holding a kogpo. The ability to play the kogpo and lead the communal dancing and singing is a fundamental role for meme Buchen. Par 1998.





*Above:* Pema Namgyal and Chettan Dorje waiting to be served tea. Lara 2004.

*Right:* Chettan Dorje and Sonam Dorje chanting a mika prayer. The prayer is performed to drive away the damaging effects of malicious gossip (tib. mi kha) and culminates in a slow clapping. Lara 2004.





*Above:* Chettan Dorje being encouraged to drink arak, a spirit distilled from barley beer. Lara 2004.

*Right:* Women hosts. Buchen are honoured guests and were traditionally looked after by the younger unmarried women of the community. Lara 2004.

*Following page:* A spiritual siblings ceremony (tib. mched grogs), performed when the Buchen leave a village. Chettan Dorje is picking items belonging to men and women and pairing the owners together. Lara 2004.







*Above:* Tsering Angchuk and Dawa Gyaltzen, dressed as servants of the Lord of Death, keeping warm in a polythene greenhouse. The performance tells the story of Lingza Chökyi, who apparently died and witnessed the judgement of the dead and the sufferings of those consigned to hell. She was sent back into the world of the living to warn others of the fate that might await them. Langsa, 2007.

*Right:* Detail of victims being boiled alive from a thangka describing the torments of hell. Pin Valley 2010.





*Above:* Yama, the Lord of Death holding scales, a detail from a Drimed Kunden thanka. Pin Valley 2010.

*Right:* A performance of Nyalla (Hell), the story of Lingza Chökyi. Dawa Gyaltzen and Tsering Angchuk, dressed as servants of the Lord of Death drag people in front of a tribunal to account for their lives. Yama, the Lord of Death, played by Gatuk Sonam, uses scales to measure good and bad deeds. Those found wanting, will be tortured with freezing and boiling water. Langsa 2007.





*Left:* Palden Dorje dressed as the elephant keeper in a scene from the story of Drimed Kunden. During the play the elephant dances to the sound of cymbals, leaping and thrashing around wildly. Lara 2004.

*Above:* A detail from a thangka illustrating the story of Drimed Kunden. An elephant is carrying the wish fulfilling gem, the source of the kingdom's wealth, and one of many things given away by the generous prince. Pin Valley 2010.



*Above:* Pema Namgyal dressed as a head Buchen. Sangnam 2010.

*Right:* A buchen or lama manipa figure on a thangka illustrating the story of Drimed Kunden. Pin Valley 2010.





*Left:* Palden Dorje and Pema Namgyal dressed as beggars undertaking a tug of war during a performance of the Elephant, a scene from the story of Prince Drimed Kunden. Lara 2004.

*Above:* Detail from a thangka illustrating the story of Drimed Kunden. A blind man has approached the famously generous prince, who plucks out his own eyes to give them away. His wife has collapsed in shock. Pin Valley 2010.



Above: Meme Gatuk Sonam conducting a wedding ceremony in a performance of the play about the marriage of King Songsten Gampo. Langsa 2007.

Right: Pages from the text of the story of Lingza Chökyi. Pin Valley 2010.





*Above:* Sangye Gatuk dressed as a hunter, Sonam Dorje dressed as a doctor (tib. amchi) and Gatuk Namgyal dressed as a poor woman, three characters who have reached the end of their lives and are awaiting judgement by the Lord of Death. Sangnam 2010.

*Right:* The details on a thangka of the story of Drimed Kunden reveal that the hunter (dressed in white), who has spent his life killing sentient beings, will be dragged down into hell with a black rope. The poor woman, who has dedicated her life to Buddhist practice, will be spared this suffering. The *amchi* in between them has done much good in his life but has been overcharging for medicine, so will go to hell for a short period. Pin Valley 2010.





*Above:* Thangka detail from the story of Nangsa Obum. Pin Valley 2010.

*Right:* Sonam Dorje dressed as a lama and Sangye Gatuk dressed as a monkey from the story of Nangsa Obum. Sangnam 2010.



Preliminary notes on the origin  
of the Bla ma maNipa Storytellers  
and their fate in exile today

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A thangka depicting the story of Nangsa Obum (Sngang sa 'od 'bum).  
Pin Valley 2010.

### On the Terms Bla ma maNipa, Buchen and Lochen

Bla ma maNipa-s are also called Buchen or Lochen, depending on the region in Tibet. Bla ma maNipa-s roam through the countryside, encouraging others to remember the impermanence of life and the hollowness of cyclic existence, and to turn their minds towards the Dharma. In support of their efforts, they display thangka-s that depict the deeds of famous folk figures like the 'Das log' ('returnee from the death realm') Gling bza' chos skyid and others. They recount in a melodious voice, either from memory or from a text, the lessons we may learn from their exemplary lives. Bla ma maNipa-s also tell of the terrible sufferings experienced by beings in the hell realms as a result of their previous actions and encourage the public who gather to listen to their stories to recite the six-syllable maNi mantra as a way to pacify such sufferings.

In northern and eastern Khams as well as in Byang thang a slightly different tradition exists. Rather than using thangka-s as a support like Bla ma maNipa do, Jo dbyangs-s spin a maNi wheel under a canopy with hanging bells.

The wheel itself is elaborately adorned with a parasol-like canopy, a crest and all sorts of ornaments, such as a mirror, turquoise or coral stones, conch shells and crystals. Wandering across the land, they tell stories about 'Das log-s in markets and other places where the public gathers, the purpose being to inspire renunciation in the minds of the populace, get them to be mindful of death and impermanence, remember the importance of heeding the principle of karmic cause and effect, and spur them to the recognition that they will inevitably experience the effects, good or bad, of the actions that they have performed. This tradition is an invaluable one, providing accessible ways to understand and practice the Dharma for those men and women who, due to their family commitments, do not have the ability or time to read through many extensive scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

In some parts of La stod, Bla ma maNipa-s are called Buchen. Buchen, meaning literally 'great son', refers to a 'main disciple' and a 'heart son'.

At this stage it is difficult to say exactly when the term Buchen first appeared in the Tibetan literature.<sup>2</sup> In general, I believe that Buchen has commonly been used to refer to any of a lama's main disciples. This term is used in the biography of Mila ras pa (1040-1123) written by Gtsang smyon Heruka Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan (1452-1507), which states, "Ras chungpa is the great son (Buchen) of me, the father."<sup>3</sup> While Gtsang smyon's own biography contains a list of disciples, none are referred to as his Buchen. The term Buchen was sometimes applied to Bla ma maNipa-s in Spiti and

in the Tibetan areas of La stod. However, in central Tibet, the term Bla ma maNipa is used exclusively.

It is also worthwhile to note that the main disciples in the biographies of the siddha Thang stong rgyal po (1385-1458)<sup>4</sup>, who is credited as the founder of the Bla ma maNipa tradition, are usually called Buchen.

The *Thang rgyal rnam thar* by Lochen 'Gyur med bde chen states that,<sup>5</sup> “Those connected to the Buchen way through past acts and prayers will not be of a single type or clan. Rather they will appear in fifty-eight guises and forms to spur countless beings in the world to virtue.”<sup>6</sup>

In speaking with some elderly informants from the regions of Dbus gtsang, I was told that there were Bla ma maNipa-s all over Dbus and Gtsang. Some of the more famous and well-coordinated ones were from Rgyal mkhar chos rdzong and were affiliated with *Ser khyim pa* or ‘lay monasteries.’ They mostly came from two monasteries, from which one group was required to perform opera (A lce Lha mo, this was the famous Rgyal mkhar opera troupe), while the other traditionally served as Bla ma maNipa-s. I have also heard that among the Bla ma maNipa-s, there were two types: one which used a thangka as a visual aid in telling their stories and the other which used a special style of image, actually a stupa, known as a *Bkra shis sgo mang* (‘Bringing luck –many doors’, from the stupa-shaped artefact).<sup>7</sup>

#### Lochen Ratna Bhadra, ‘Fount of the Lochen Lineage’

In May 1976, during a research trip to Sikkim undertaken on behalf of the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives (LTWA) in Dharamshala, Tshe brtan dpal 'byor presented me with *‘The Biography of Lochen Ratna Bhadra’* (Lo chen ratna bha dra'i rnam thar). Handwritten in the *dbu can* script, the manuscript is 19 folios long (missing folios 10-14) with 5 or 6 lines per folio and is now housed at the LTWA.

The events described in the biography of Lochen Ratna Bhadra are closely connected to the area of lower western Tibet known as La stod and most of the Buchen-s or Lochen-s who came into exile seem to hail from there.

Lochen Ratna Bhadra's birthplace and paternity are referred to in this brief biography in the following passages: “He came from Bkra shis sgang in the Skyid po valley of Dwags po, the East and his father's name was Bkra shis rnam rgyal,”<sup>8</sup> and “In Dwags lha sgam po of Dwags po, to the East, his father was Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal.”<sup>9</sup>

The name Bkra shis rnam rgyal figures prominently in all the histories of Buddhism in Tibet, however there it refers to Dwags Po Bkra shis rnam



Tashi gomang chörten (bkra shis sgo mang mchod rten) Bhutan. 19th century. Harry G Beasley collection. Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool 54.85.40

rgyal (1513-1587), the seventeenth successor to the great Sgam po pa, also known as the Dwags lha sgam po Seat.<sup>10</sup> He could not possibly be the father of Ratna Bhadra though, for he lived a celibate life as a monk. Nevertheless, there was a well-known *'Das log* named Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal. Referring to the Dkar mdzes valley of lower Tre hor in Khams. Tre hor Gdong thog sprul sku bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (b.1933) says,

“On the eastern facing side of the valley, up a ways from the village of Lo sgang, near the Lcags rgod la pass is a place called Rdzong ra where Bkra shis rnam rgyal returned from death.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in *'Das log* Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal's descriptions of the hell realms<sup>12</sup> it reads:

“I, Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal of the east,  
On the border between Tre shod  
In the Garuda's Nest Cave  
Went into a swoon today  
Separating pure births from the dregs  
To promote virtue in these tired times.”<sup>13</sup>  
And:

'I, Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal.<sup>14</sup>

And:

“My father was called Bstan pa rab gsal  
My mother was known as A mtsho, the daughter from Lcags,  
While I, their son, am named Bkra shis rnam rgyal.”<sup>15</sup>

And again:

“And I, Dwags po, have set five hundred thousand men and women of Sa and lower Tre on the path to liberation. I am an emanation of the unequalled physician of Dwags po.”<sup>16</sup>

From these quotations, it is clear that the 'Dwags po' in this Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal's name reflects his status as a reincarnation of Sgam po pa (the unequalled physician of Dwags po (1079–1153) and is not, given his birthplace and his mother's name, a reference to the region of Dwags po in southern Tibet. He must also have lived prior to the fifteenth century. His descriptions of the hell realms state:

“My lama is Zangs ri Ras pa, an emanation of O rgyan Pad ma”<sup>17</sup>, which indicates that he (Zangs ri Ras pa) was a direct disciple of Ras chung rdo rje grags pa (1083-1161). Further down, the lines “The lama of that young monk / Is Bari Lotsaba Chos kyi grags pa,”<sup>18</sup> contain a reference to Bari Lotsaba Rin chen Grags (1040-1111). It would thus seem that the *'Das log* Dwags po Bkra shis rnam rgyal of the east lived in the first half of the twelfth century, in which case the Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal who sired

Lochen Ratna Bhadra is not identical to the aforementioned Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal but is a different figure altogether. I would suggest this as a matter for further research.

To return to the topic at hand, our protagonist's birth is treated in detail in the biography, where it says, “The son was given the name Rin chen bzang po.”<sup>19</sup> Then, after he turned three, we are told that the Indian siddha Pha dam pa sangs rgyas (?-1117) “gave (the son) the name Ratna Bhadra.”<sup>20</sup> The biography goes on to say that once Rin chen bzang po reached the age of thirteen, on Lcags zam chu bo ri, “The siddha Thang stong rgyal po dispelled obstacles to Rin chen bzang po's life by taking a lock of hair, dressing him up, and giving him a name. Upon granting him the Upasika's vows, he renamed him Lochen Ratna Bhadra.”<sup>21</sup> Upon closer inspection, the names given him at birth by Pha dam pa sangs rgyas and by Thang stong rgyal po are essentially the same; Ratna Bhadra is simply a translation of his Tibetan name, Rin chen bzang po. Still, these passages reveal that he was given the title of 'Lochen' at the age of 13.

Linking Pha dam pa (in Tibet during the second half of the 11th and early 12th centuries) and siddha Thang stong rgyal po (whose life spanned parts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and who, as I mentioned before, is also associated with the Bla ma maNipa-s) to Ratna Bhadra – as his biography does – is an attempt to attribute to him a prestigious association with two of the greatest and most popular masters active in La stod lho.

Again, in the biography, it states the siddha Thang stong rgyal po, “granted him the empowerments, transmissions and instructions for the tutelary deity the Great Compassionate One and consecrated the Aryapala Avalokitesvara. Thus, just as the headwaters of a stream can be traced back to a glacier, his Lochen lineage originates at the fount.”<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, “Night and day he listened to the siddha Thang stong rgyal po, of Lcags zam chu bo ri Mountain, who recounted perhaps ten chapters of the liberating accounts of his paternal ancestors (foremost among them his lama forebears, the Buddhist King who was an emanation of Avalokitesvara and the Buddhist King Dri med Kun ldan), seven chapters on his maternal forebears (foremost among them the story of the Gzugs kyi nyi ma) and twenty-one tales of *'Das log-s* (foremost among them the *'Das log gling bza' chos skyid*). However, after relating one minor tale, the siddha said, ‘Foremost Lochen, Ratna Bhadra, you should meditate in the gardens of Sman lding gser to the north.’” From this passage we learn Lochen Ratna Bhadra's Dharma activities would center around the area of

Ldog gzhung (He was born in Dwags po, Southern Tibet). It also identifies him as the “glacial fount for the stream of Lochen-s.”

To encourage the recitation of Avalokitesvara’s maNi mantra, Lochen Ratna Bhadra visited the village of Skyid grong,<sup>23</sup> followed by the Gnya’ lam ’tshong ’dus (a village in Gnya’ lam), O rong rdzong in Kong po and ’Bras long (possibly a misspelling of ’Bras ljongs, the Tibetan name for Sikkim). During that time he acquired a disciple, O rgyan bstan ’dzin.<sup>24</sup>

The biography states:

“This white conch I carry in my hand

Is a sign I’m a son of the Great Compassionate One.

The undiminished lineage is Ratna Bhadra’s lineage

The undiminished teaching is the teaching of the six-syllables

The undiminished Dharma is the lotus in bloom

And I am a bee on my rounds around the kingdom.

I am the Lochen who lectures on karmic cause and effect,

The hook who draws the faithful to the Dharma,

And the guide who leads the sinful to the path of repentance.

I am the source from which the Lochen-s spring.”<sup>25</sup>

The way this passage refers to Ratna Bhadra in the third person seems to indicate it was spoken by a second person other than Lochen Ratna Bhadra. What’s more, the biography states, “Lochen O rgyan bhero tsana arrived all of a sudden,”<sup>26</sup> and, “Then, as the sound of the maNi rung out from afar, Lochen Klong yangs rang grol, Lochen Bkra shis dar rgyas, and Lochen Karma ’brug grags appeared and said, ‘Son, for the good of all devote yourself to the care of others and do not let the teachings on the six syllables fade but rather rise like the sun.’”<sup>27</sup> This excerpt gives the impression that these four Lochen-s were senior to Lochen Ratna Bhadra and yet according to the biography Lochen Ratna Bhadra is ‘the glacial fount’ of the Lochen lineage and he himself is supposed to have said, “I am the source from which the Lochen-s spring.” As far as I can see, these statements are somewhat inconsistent.

The biography reads, “Lochen Ratna Bhadra’s main patron was Sde pa chos dbang lha ming, the district chief of Skyid grong.”<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the biography gives a list of the Lochen lineage beginning with Lochen Ratna Bhadra: “The Lochen lineage unfolded from there to include thirteen Lochen-s, foremost among them Lochen O rgyan bstan ’dzin, followed by Lochen Dwags lha sgam po, Lochen Bkra shis dar po, Lochen O rgyan Rig ’dzin, Lochen Blo gsal rgya mtsho, Lochen ’Jam dpal rang grol, Lochen Bstan ’dzin ’brug rgyal, Lochen ma ’Brug rgyal sgrol ma, Lochen

Ngag dbang rig ’dzin, Lochen Lar pa’i sging, (a peculiar name and spelling?) Lochen Bsod nams rig ’dzin, Lochen ’Jigs med grags pa, and Lochen Karma ’brug rgyal.”<sup>29</sup> Note that there is even one female, Lochen ma ’Brug rgyal sgrol ma, amongst them.

If this list is accurate, then, since the four Lochen-s mentioned earlier (O rgyan bhero tsana, Klong yangs rang grol, Lochen Bkra shis dar rgyas, and Lochen Karma ’brug grags) are not found in this list of thirteen Lochen-s beginning with Lochen Ratna Bhadra, they must either have preceded him or they were his contemporaries. In either case, I believe the claim that Lochen Ratna Bhadra is the direct source from which the Lochen-s spring, yet it still requires further investigation.

Lochen Ratna Bhadra’s embalmed body was kept as a relic and survived the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) thanks to the faithful and courageous nuns who buried it in order to keep it out of harm’s way. It is still kept at his traditional ancestral monastery, Sman lding gser gyi dgon pa in Ldog gzhung in La stod byang.

Lochen Ratna Bhadra’s name does not appear in any form in the lists of the siddha Thang stong rgyal po’s direct disciples found in the five different biographies of the siddha<sup>30</sup> available to me.

In later times, the most famous Lochen or Bla ma maNipa was the nun Rig ’dzin chos nyid bzang mo, who was known as Shug gseb maNi Lochen or just A ne Lochen. Shug gseb maNi Lochen was born in 1865 at Mtsho Pad ma (Rewalsar) in Himachal Pradesh (then Punjab Union territory) area not far from Lahaul near upper western Tibet.

While she started out as a Bla ma maNipa, later she became the root Guru to several celebrated Bka’ brgyud and Rnying ma lamas. In her autobiography, *Granting the Bliss of Omniscience: The Life Story of Gangs shug maNi Lochen Rig ’dzin chos nyid bzang mo*, it reads, “In the Year of the Earth Hare (1939), I was visited by Tibetan Government official of the fourth rank, Lcog bkras rdo rje dgra ’dul and his wife Rnam rgyal sgrol dkar, who asked that I care for them in all of their lives until enlightenment, to which I responded with great insistence, ‘You live in the middle of the three great monastic seats of Tibet, surrounded by bodhisattvas who shine like a constellation in the night sky! How hard up you must be to place your hopes in one so unfit for such a role as me! ‘A ne Lochen’ does not mean I’m a Lo tsa ba who translates from Sanskrit into Tibetan, nor does it mean I have the spiritual qualities of renunciation and realization. In the upper western Tibetan dialect, ‘Lochen’ means ‘beggar who recites the maNi.’ Oh my, are you two confused!”<sup>31</sup>

It also reads, “MaNi Slob don dung dkar ’brug grags’s nephew, Lochen Ham sgra, who was also known as Lochen Mgo dkar, said, ‘Avalokitesvara is the male deity while this here is Tara or Ma chig in person.’ He then went on to sing, ‘The maNi melody overwhelms the world with its splendor, it is beautiful and transformative. For all who have the fortune to hear it, the six syllables make a positive and vivid impression.’ In general, the melody is that of previous Lochen-s and specifically that of Lochen Ratna Bhadra’s. In particular the melody is mine, a young beggar. Your speech is free and unhindered so please sing the six syllables in your clear voice. Having completed my training in stories such as *The Life of Snang sa who Lifts One From the Mire of Samsara* at the age of six, I inspired people to recite the maNi. And since my voice was pretty and my mind altruistic, thousands gathered to hear me. My first patron, a man named Khams pa Bkra shis, put me on a throne and offered me a mandala and so I proceeded to inspire them to recite the MaNi.”<sup>32</sup>

#### Buchen-s in India

Since Tibetans have come into exile, a significant movement has begun to preserve and spread many aspects of Tibetan culture, both major and minor. And though it is still underway, one tradition important to the folk culture of old has been neglected, that of the Bla ma maNipa storytellers.<sup>33</sup> This neglect is not limited to the young; even the older generations have virtually forgotten about them. Prompt attention and research is much needed.

In January, 1981, I visited my mother in the Tibetan refugee settlement of Kollegal in south India. While there, I carried out some fieldwork for the LTWA, of which a report was filed on February 1981.

When I asked my mother about these storytellers, she told me: “There is a proverb which says: ‘No matter how unassuming they are, Bla ma maNipa-s are equipped to handle themselves at the time of the after-death judgement.’ So they should not be underestimated. It is good that you have an interest in them. I’d be happy to introduce you to one.” And with that we went off to meet a Buchen.

1 Buchen Nor rgyas (1923-Oct. 2002), from Dingri gangs dkar in the south of Gtsang, lived in the E Village, house no. 25 of the Kollegal Tibetan settlement. He came from an unbroken line of Bla ma maNipa storytellers that went back several generations. His father travelled around Rtsib ri in Gtsang for eighteen years giving his lectures.

As Buchen Nor rgyas spoke about his life, he seemed quite capable of also giving a more full and authoritative account, including the Bla ma

maNipa way of life in Tibet and the training they received in their youth. This prompted me to ask him if, provided the LTWA paid his expenses, he would consider bringing his texts and thangka-s to Dharamshala. With great pleasure he responded, “I’d be happy to come even though at the moment the tuberculosis that’s got into my bones is flaring up. Still, I’m very grateful that the LTWA is sponsoring research into all aspects of our unique Tibetan heritage at such a critical time as this. As you have gone to all this trouble, of course I’ll come, of course I’ll do what I can to help.” His answer revealed him to be a person of great conscience.

When I asked him about others in India who made their living as a Bla ma maNipa storyteller, he said:

2 “Well first, there’s Buchen Pa sangs (?-1985 died at Bodhgaya) who’s from Spo rong in Stod. I would guess he’s in his fifties. His voice is particularly enchanting. He’s married to a woman named Tshe sgron ma and they live in the Poanta Sahib Tibetan settlement.”

3 “Then, in the Tibetan settlements at Hunsur, there’s one from Gtsang named Buchen Padma Tshe dbang (1931-24/9/2006). He’s in his fifties and suffers from tuberculosis.”

4 “There’s also Lochen O rgyan, who was born in Rdzong dga’ in Stod and lives in Mussoorie.”

5 “And Buchen ’Gyur med (c.1930-Feb.2004), who was born in Ding ri in Gtsang. He’s in his fifties and has settled in Mussoorie but during the winter he travels to sell sweaters. He only uses texts when telling his stories.”

6 “In Kalimpong there’s a Bla ma maNipa, who’s either from Gzhis ka rtse or Rgyal rtse. They say he’s got a nice thangka illustrating the lives of the great yogi Mila ras pa.”

7 “I’ve heard there are Buchen-s in Spiti who visit Mtsho Pad ma (Rewalsar) every year on pilgrimage. But that’s something you must investigate further.”

On my return to Dharamshala, I reported all of this to the director of the LTWA, A rgya Rgya mtsho tshe ring (1935-2009) and urged him to invite these Bla ma maNipa storytellers to Dharamshala as soon as possible so their stories could be recorded on tape. Accordingly, from April, 1981, Buchen ’Gyur med, Buchen Pa sangs, Bla ma maNipa zla ba and Buchen Nor rgyas were invited to Dharamshala where their stories were recorded. These approximate 200 hours of recordings are kept at the LTWA’s oral history collection.<sup>34</sup> (see the Appendix)

The Buchen tradition has also been reported in the Pin (Sprin, ‘Cloud’) valley of Spiti, which consists of fourteen small clustered villages. There they seem linked to a monastery in one of these villages, Dgung Ring (or



Box used to transport a tashi gomang chörten, as carried by itinerant priests. Charles Bell Collection, Album 9. Probably taken en route to Lhasa, November 1920. Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool 50.31.156

sometimes Dgung Ri). The monastery, Sprin dgon gsang sngags chos gling, I was told, follows the Rnying ma traditions of the Bhutanese gter ston Pad ma gling pa (1450-1521) from 'Bum thang and the New gter ma-s traced back to Bdud 'joms khrag 'thung gling pa (1835-1903) of Gser rta, Mgo log. It remains to be determined however whether all the Buchen in the Pin Valley come from this monastery or rather from all the different villages in the valley.<sup>35</sup>

The last known Ladakhi Buchen last performed in 1983-1984 and unfortunately as of today the tradition seems to have died out in the whole of the Ladakh area.<sup>36</sup>

According to Bde skyid sgrol dkar khri smon, "Rgyal mkhar is in Rin spungs County in the Gzhis ka rtse region. Although nowadays we say 'Rgyal mkhar chos rdzong' (or the 'Dharma Fortress of Rgyal mkhar'), it's actually 'Rgyal mkhar chos btsong' (or the 'Dharma Merchants of Rgyal mkhar'). Popular lore says this comes from something the lama Mo ston tsho po said, 'There's no need to work the fields where we come from because we can get by, by selling the Dharma.' Traditionally this is said to refer to the fact that the people made their livelihood through the Bla ma maNipa and *Bkra shis sgo*

*mang* storytelling and performances of ritual 'Cham dancing and Lhamo<sup>37</sup> opera.<sup>38</sup> The lama Mo ston tsho po she mentioned refers to Mes ston gtsang pa or Mes ston tshon po Bsod nams rgyal mtshan,<sup>39</sup> a disciple of Marpa chos kyi blo gros (1012-1092) the translator of Lho brag and contemporary of his spiritual heir, the great yogi Mila ras pa (1040-1123). If the 'Cham dances are dated to the twelfth century, the timing is not far off though further research is needed to determine whether Bla ma maNipa-s, the *Bkra shis sgo mang* stupas and the A lce Lhamo operas were around at such an early date.

There are said to have been several different styles of *Bkra shis sgo mang* images present in Tibet prior to 1959, including those modelled after Zangs mdog dpal ri, the Potala, Mount Tsari and Mount Kailash. In Bhutan, for instance, there were four types of *Bkra shis sgo mang* stupas: the Copper Coloured Mountain Palace, the pure realm of Sukhavati, the kingdom of Shambhala and the Rnam rgyal Stupa.<sup>40</sup> In Tibet, there are virtually no more examples of the *Bkra shis sgo mang* images used in Bla ma maNipa storytelling. However, one such *Bkra shis sgo mang* image has been in storage in the Tibet House Museum in New Delhi since the mid 1960s.

According to his biography, *Ngö mtshar rgya mtsho; The Awe-Inspiring Ocean*, Thang stong rgyal po, "gave Buchen shakya dpal bzang and eight others, a *Bkra shis sgo mang* image and a letter with his seal,"<sup>41</sup> from which we may glean that Bla ma maNipa-s carried *Bkra shis sgo mang* images.

As of now I have no precise information about whether storytellers in the whole of Tibet other than Rgyal mkhar chos rdzong use *Bkra shis sgo mang*.

In another biography of the siddha Thang stong rgyal po, *Gsal ba'i sgron me; the Illuminating Lamp*, it says, "he installed five of his ordained disciples as Buchen, Bla ma Ras chen pa, Bla ma phag nag pa, Rtsa lam bka' bcu pa, Bla ma 'phan po, and Bla ma lha rgyal bzang po, scattered barley seeds, transmitted the six syllables that are the highest form of speech and distributed what was offered to him."<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere in that biography it mentions one 'Chos rje maNipa legs pa rgyal mtshan,<sup>43</sup> which one might take to mean the Bla ma maNipa Legs pa rgyal mtshan.

When I inquired into the present-day Bla ma maNipa tradition, particularly as it exists in Rgyal mkhar chos rdzong in Tibet, I didn't hear of any activity in Rgyal mkhar chos rdzong nor did I uncover anything about storytellers who still used *Bkra shis sgo mang* images. A meagre and far from decisive clue that the tradition may have disappeared is that photographers with an ethnographic touch have not documented the use of the *Bkra shis sgo mang* in Bla ma maNipa performances.<sup>44</sup>



A nun with a tashi gomang chörten, pointing at pictures on a thangka. Charles Bell Collection, Lhasa Album Lhasa, November 1920-October, 1921. Courtesy of Private Collection.

Today in Central Tibet, the art of the Bla ma maNipa-s is termed Gzhas ma gam ('neither speech nor songs') within the Tibetan performing arts.<sup>45</sup>

The dress worn by female Bla ma maNipa-s in central Tibet is described as follows: "Female Bla ma maNipa-s wear a serge *phyu pa* dyed red, a striped silk shawl and a tall yellow hat."<sup>46</sup>

The famous female Bla ma maNipa Tshe ring chos 'dzoms [b.c. 1928], has been quoted as saying, "During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards branded me a 'demon who spreads the doctrine of blind faith' and ransacked my house, carrying away all the thangka-s and texts I used as a Bla ma maNipa. But that's not all. I was forbidden from staying in Lhasa city and banished to the village. Taking my husband and daughter with me, I had no choice but to settle in the village and forge a living off the land."<sup>47</sup>

She goes on to say, "My family has been telling the Bla ma maNi stories for several generations, most of them enjoying considerable fame in Lhasa for it. For instance, my foremothers Dam chos sgröl ma, Ye shes chos sgron, Zla ba chos sgron and my mother Bco lnga lha mo (who died at age 46) and my father Bsod nams dbang grags (who told the Bla ma maNi stories for 82 years until his death in 1962) were all Bla ma maNipa-s. Even maNipa Brtson 'drus (who almost lived to see one hundred years), a Bla ma maNipa famous during the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's reign, was an uncle on my mother's side. He was so well versed in the Bla ma maNi stories, the Thirteenth Dalai

Lama gave him a thangka depicting the story of King Srong btsan sgam po's Chinese and Nepalese queens. In fact, there was much talk in the streets of Lhasa at the time about the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's gift to him.<sup>48</sup> It is my family's good fortune to have served as Bla ma maNi storytellers over several generations. Out of deference and respect, people refer to us as 'maNi ba' or 'Lochen pa.' They also show their esteem by saying, 'Neither summer's heavy rains nor winter's frozen snows, windswept passes nor steep defiles, nor the country's fickle fortune will keep a Bla ma maNipa from telling his/her tales of karmic cause and effect!'"<sup>49</sup>

Upon being asked when the tradition of reciting maNi began, she responded, "As for the Bla ma maNipa tradition, the Master Padmasambhava blessed us with the maNi, in the latter half of the thirteenth century, Guru chos dbang [1212-1273] composed many maNi tales and transmitted the maNi mantra on a vast scale. At the same time, the art of Bla ma maNi storytelling spread. In *The Stories of Guru chos dbang*, a Bla ma maNi scripture still extant today, it describes how he affixed bells above the door and stove to remind his mother to recite the maNi mantra which embodies the essence of the Buddha's teaching. Even now when a Bla ma maNi tells his or her stories, he or she must stop to recite the six syllable maNi mantra at four points during the tale, a custom which is almost certainly based on Guru chos dbang's text."<sup>50</sup>

I then asked her how old she was when she began to tell the Bla ma maNi stories. She said, "As my forbearers told the Bla ma maNi stories, from a young age I delighted in listening to and telling their stories. Once I turned eight, my parents taught me not only to read and write and how to sing the different maNi melodies, they also made me recite the Bla ma maNi texts. Then, by the time I was thirteen, I could go out on my own and tell the Bla ma maNi stories in public. When you're actually telling the Bla ma maNi stories, you have to memorize the order in which they're told and their basic plot lines. The first step is to recite a verse of going for refuge, second to recite the maNi in four ways, third to offer homage, fourth to tell the story, and fifth to recite a verse of auspiciousness. I always follow this traditional format in telling the stories."<sup>51</sup>

Regarding her life as a Bla ma maNipa in Dbus prior to 1959 she said, "During the Great Prayer Festival and teachings given in the first and second months of the Tibetan year, I would sit along the Gling skor and tell the Bla ma maNi stories, while during the third month I would tell them on the edge of the teaching area in the Bar skor market. In the holy month of Saga zla ba, I would tell them along the Gling skor in the morning and the Bar skor



A nun showing pictures to passersby on the road. From this thangka she illustrates the story of Nangsa Obum (Snang sa 'od 'bum). Charles Bell Collection, Lhasa Album Lhasa, November 1920 October 1921. Courtesy of Private Collection.

in the afternoon. From the first to the twentieth of the fifth month, Rnam rgyal Monastery had a summer holiday at the Naga Palace Park behind the Potala in Lhasa where I would go to tell the stories to the monks. From the first to the seventh of the sixth month, the monks of Rnam rgyal performed a Guhyasamaja ritual in Sbyar rag gling kha Park where I would go to tell the stories. During the Zho ston festival in the seventh month it was customary for us to beg alms from some of the monasteries near Lhasa such as Kun bde gling, Gnas chung, and Bkra shis khang gсар. Traditionally, at these places, we Bla ma maNi-pa-s were given gifts of fried Tibetan bread called Kha zas, dried fruit, meat, butter and tea. On the morning of the last day of the seventh month, we would bring money and silk scarves and exchange gifts with the Sde pa khri pa (holding the Mkhan chung administrative position of the Tibetan Government at Rnam rgyal Monastery) and the bursar of Bkra shis khang gсар at 'Bras spungs monastery. Then, in the afternoon we would begin telling our Bla ma maNi stories. For twenty days in the eighth month, during which Rnam rgyal Monastery celebrated the end of the summer retreat at Sbyar rag gling kha Park, we were required to tell our Bla ma maNi stories to the monks. In the ninth and tenth months we would carry our Bla ma maNi props on pilgrimage to Chu gsum in Lho kha, Rtsed thang, Yar 'brog, 'On, Tshal gung thang, and Dga' ldan, telling stories along the way. The eleventh and twelfth months we worked at home.<sup>52</sup> When we told the Bla ma maNi stories, following tradition, we would hang our thangka up and arrange on a table in front a white stupa to the right, a statue of Arya Tara to the left, and water bowls, a mandala and butter lamps in the centre. Even though I am now old, when I can get away from the farm, I go to Lhasa to tell the stories, just like in the days of old.<sup>53</sup>

#### Promoting the maNi Cult

As the famous Bla ma maNi pa tshe ring chos 'dzoms stated above, in the latter half of the thirteenth century, Guru chos dbang composed several maNi tales and transmitted the maNi mantra on a vast scale while at the same time, the art of Bla ma maNi storytelling began to spread.

Towards the end of 1882, Rig 'dzin kun bzang nges don klong yangs completed *The Crystal Gem*, his chronicle of Rnying ma Lamas in Tibet, in which he states unequivocally, "Today's tradition of promoting the maNi was not always around. After the Mnga' bdag nyang [ral nyi ma'i 'od zer] rinpoche (1124-1204) revealed the King's writings, which had been hidden as a spiritual treasure in Lhasa, his heirs in the Nyang clan introduced the custom of encouraging the populace to recite the maNi. Later, Guru chos

dbang turned the maNi wheel and began lining thoroughfares with carved stones, which proved to be of particular benefit to beings.<sup>54</sup>

Gter ston Guru chos dbang began to emphasize the importance of reciting the maNi mantra and his teachings focused on the Avalokitesvara Mahakarunika cycle which was a follow up of a tradition already widespread in the latter half of the eleventh century in Tibet.

In fact, we can find references to maNi going back as far as the eleventh century. As predicted by the Mad Woman of Lhasa, in 1048 the great Indian master Atisa withdrew Srong btsan sgam po's final testament (known as *Rgyal po'i bka' chems ka khol ma*, or The Testament of the King) from a vase-shaped pillar in Lhasa's Jokhang temple. Today, different versions of this text exist in varying lengths and with varying degrees of legibility. Two other testaments, including the minister's testament called *Zla ba 'dod 'jo* or 'The moon which provides what one needs,' and the queen's testament called *dar dkar gsal sgron* or 'A lustrous white silk scarf' are not available.

Later, the maNi bka' 'bum combined elements of several *gter ma* revelations, including Gter ston rje btsun shakya bzang po's revelations on sutra, Grub thob dngos grub's work on tantric practice and the Mga' bdag nyang ral nyi ma'i 'od zer's gter ma-s on the Guru's oral instructions.<sup>55</sup> All of this served to support the growth of the cycle of teachings focused on Mahakarunika, which prompted 'Gos lo gzhon nu dpal to observe, "Just as the bodhisattva Manjushri looks after the lands of China, the land of Tibet has been embraced by the bodhisattva, the mahasattva, Arya Avalokitesvara, who extends his blessings to even the tiniest child. His maNi mantra flows naturally from the lips of all, men, women and the ordained alike. Though blessings may be obtained by supplicating mundane deities, Avalokitesvara is swifter to respond. Avalokitesvara appeared in the guise of a king, Srong btsan sgam po, so that now he is the deity and his temple lies at the heart of Tibet's religious life. Even the mountain on which the king built his residence was named Potala after Avalokitesvara's abode."<sup>56</sup> Regardless of the veracity of such an account, from the thirteenth century onward several prominent Tibetan lamas such as the Karmapa, the 'Brug chen, and the Dalai Lama were all taken to be emanations of Avalokitesvara.

I believe Guru chos dbang's written efforts to promote the recitation of the maNi are found in texts such as the two volumes (E and VAM) of *maNi bka' 'bum dri med mthong dad*<sup>57</sup> and *maNi mchod pa 'cham dbyangs rgyas pa*,<sup>58</sup> which are to be found in Guru chos kyi dbang phyug's collected works. During Gter ston guru chos dbang's campaign to encourage the populace to recite maNi mantra, Chag lotsaba (1197-1264) and Bu ston rinpoche (1290-

1364) both wrote polemics (*A Repudiation of Perverse Interpretations of the Unsurpassed Tantras of Secret Mantra*) against him.<sup>59</sup> Brag sgo rab 'byams pa Phun tshogs rgyal mtshan wrote a polemic in 17th century, *Sincere Letters on the Defilements Introduced by the King Srong btsan sgam po's Works*.<sup>60</sup>

The biography of the second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1204/06-1283) contains a reference to efforts to promote the maNi amongst the populace. It reads, prior to 1246, "Late one night, an oceanic array of secret wisdom dakinis danced before him in a dream saying, 'Even you don't know how to recite maNi padme,' to which he replied, 'In that case, how does one?' In a single voice, four dakinis responded by singing the melody and then told him, 'From now on, recite it in this melody and all who hear it will enjoy its blessings and great benefit for beings will accrue.' From that point forward he endeavoured to sing the maNi pad me melody."<sup>61</sup> The promotion of the recitation of the six-syllable mantra for the good of beings becomes somewhat of a theme in the lives of later Karmapa-s, as witnessed by similar episodes recounted in the biographies of the third Karmapa Rang 'byung rdo rje (1284-1339),<sup>62</sup> the fourth Karmapa Rol pa'i rdo rje (1340-1383),<sup>63</sup> and the seventh Karmapa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454-1506).<sup>64</sup>

## In Conclusion

Although Tibetan oral tradition attributes the creation of the A lce Lha mo opera tradition to the siddha Thang stong rgyal po, there is no clear mention of it in his biographies. Similarly, his biographies say nothing specific about his instituting the traditions of Bla ma maNipa storytellers using thangka-s as visual aids, or carrying the *Bkra shis sgo mang* images or performing *Pho ba rdo bshags*.

Nevertheless, through a close comparison of his varied activities for the wider community, as recounted in those biographies, one gets the impression that he may very well have begun these aspects of the Bla ma maNipa tradition. Not only are there several allusions to be found, the preliminary prayers recited by Bla ma maNipa-s and the introductory remarks given at performances of the *Pho ba rdo bshags* both suggest a connection to the siddha Thang stong rgyal po. The Spiti Pin valley Buchen's prelude comment starts by saying that the ceremony of breaking the stone (*Pho ba rdo bshags*) is said to have been first performed by Thang stong rgyal po.<sup>65</sup>

Along with their performance of the *Pho ba rdo bshags* the Buchen of Spiti<sup>66</sup> will sometimes perform a brief play about the *Northern King of the Wildman's Shepherd*, an episode from the story of the Buddhist King Nor bzang, display a thangka, tell the associated story and encourage the people to

recite the maNi mantra. Occasionally, they will also enact a scene from Yama the Lord of Death's courtroom. In Tibet, the *Pho ba rdo bshags* performers come from the Lhamo opera troupes of Chung ri bo che in La stod byang and the Bla ma maNipa-s from Glang skor in Dingri.<sup>67</sup>

I have also heard about a certain monk called Sku shog Bkra shis rnam rgyal of Spiti who at one time conducted research on the Buchen-s of the Pin Valley and there was even a plan to take them to perform abroad however I am unaware of the status or results of these efforts.

In 1999, with support from The Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, the President of the Tibet Fund Sku ngo Rin chen dar lo invited Buchen 'Gyur med (c.1930-Feb. 2004) from India to teach a one-week course of eight hours per day at Thugs rje chos gling, a nunnery near the Swayambhunath Stupa in Nepal. He trained twenty-eight nuns in recitation of the maNi and telling the stories of the great yogi Mila raspa, Snang sa, 'Gro ba bzang mo, and the Buddhist King Nor bzang. Venerable Bstan 'dzin chos 'dzoms (b.c.1972), one of the students of Buchen 'Gyur med, later promoted the maNi and told the stories to a sizable crowd of men and women in the assembly hall at Thugs rje chos gling.<sup>68</sup>

For several years, Patrick Sutherland of England visited Spiti for research on the Buchen of Spiti.<sup>69</sup> At the 12th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies held at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, from 15-21 August 2010, he also read a interesting and well documented paper entitled "Disciples of a Crazy Saint: Photographing the Buchen of Spiti". I have also heard that Bstan 'dzin chos rgyal of New Delhi recorded the interviews he carried out decades ago with Bu chen 'Gyur med yet I have not obtained detailed confirmation of this.

In June 2000 Bu chen 'Gyur med was invited to participate at 'Tibetan Culture Beyond the Land of Snows' at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Washington, DC, America. This was the first time a Bla ma maNipa taught the Dharma outside of Tibet, India or Nepal. In October of 2001, Blo bzang dbang rgyal organized a Free Spirit Festival in Dharamshala and invited Buchen 'Gyur med to Dharamshala specifically for the occasion. The Festival was held at the Tibetan Institute for the Performing Arts. Acharya Nyi ma tshe ring translated into English most of the talk Buchen 'Gyur med gave that day while the talk in its entirety was recorded on Hi8.

The Free Spirit Festival line-up has not been solely interested in modern Tibetan performing arts, it has also concerned itself with much older customs that are in danger of dying out, as evidenced on that particular occasion by its showcasing the Bla ma maNipa tradition.<sup>70</sup>

In September of 2006, Prof. Ven. Ei-ichi Kaneko of Saihoji invited Tshe ring sgröl ma (b.1943), the daughter of Buchen Pa sangs (?-1985) to Nagano, Japan. Tshe ring sgröl ma told the stories of Snang sa and Khye'u Pad ma 'od 'bar for one month at Prof. Kaneko's temple and in Tokyo for one day.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, I cannot end this paper without mentioning two research topics that are worthy of further study. The first one occurred while reading the biography of the 13th Dalai Lama. We find for the year 1927 the following mention: "In the place of 'Bras spungs, bla ma maNi ba sgo mang Blo bzang lha dbang appointed Bsam blo dge bshes dge 'dun kun bzang."<sup>72</sup> This institutionalized 'Bras spungs Bla maNipa are unknown in the literature and need some research. The second one is a suggestion to start a study of the Jo dbyangs minstrels' tradition in Khams. There are a number of haunting photographic records from as early as the late 19th century, but nothing is written about them.

In these changing times, Tibet's heritage is being forgotten. The exile community is losing its interest in and the desire to preserve cultural and artistic traditions. Instead everyone, government and people alike, devote their energies to fads: world peace, the glitter of pseudo-science and organic farming. Rupert Murdoch and Star Plus are like an epidemic that ravages the rich soil of our old traditions. As a result, the Bla ma maNipa tradition in exile is now fatally wounded. Though the tradition may well carry on for another two or three generations in some isolated areas of Tibet, even there the performing traditions of all the '*Bras bu gling nga' mchod sprin gar pa* dancers, *Pho ba rdo bshags*, and *Bkra shis sgo mang* performers are vanishing like rainbows. This is a great tragedy.

Translated from Tibetan to English by the Ven. Sku zhabs Blo bzang bzod pa lags (Bob Miller) of Lhun grub 'Chi med dga' tshal gling (Sga rje khams dbus) Monastery, Sidhpur, Dharamshala. I am also gratefully indebted to my friends Dr. Roberto Vitali and Dr. Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy for editing this short paper. However if there are any mistakes, they are entirely mine. I am indebted to my friend Emma Martin, Curator, National Museums Liverpool for efficiently helping me to locate the relevant photographs from the Sir Charles Bell collections for my paper. This is an abridged version of a paper read at the International Conference: Exploring Tibet's History and Culture, organised jointly by the University of Delhi and the Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, and held at the University of Delhi in November 2009.

#### Endnotes

- 1 See Introduction by Bkra shis tshe ring in *'Das log dkar chag thar pa'i lam ston gsal ba'i sgron me*, Paro, Bhutan, 1983, pp.273-278.
- 2 *Rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug chen po mi la ras pa'i rnam mgur*, Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1981, p.787:1.
- 3 I have also noticed that in Rje btsun Mi la ras pa's biography we find "nya ma" and "bu slob" for the disciples. We also know that generally disciples are called "Bu slob" or "Zhal slob" (honorific), direct disciples are called "Dngos slob". A disciple of the direct disciple is called "Yang slob". Honorific word for the disciple is "Thugs sras" or "Heart Son" and blood son is called "Rigs Sras". Sometimes, I have the feeling that the term Nya-ma is related to the lay disciples.
- 4 Tashi Tsering, "On the dates of Thang stong rgyal-po", in Ramon Prats, ed., *The Pandita and the Siddha: Tibetan studies in honour of E. Gene Smith*, Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamshala, 2007, p.270. Also see Stearns, Cyrus. *King of the Empty Plain: The Tibetan Iron-Bridge Builder Tangtong Gyalpo*. Snow Lion Publications, Boston, 2007.
- 5 Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1982, p.72:3.
- 6 More references on Bu chen, see *Thangrgyal rnam thar*, pp. 88:15; 208:15; 245:17; 273:17. "Bu slob" means Bu chen dpon slob pa, see page 291:8; p. 292:3; p. 292:6; p. 292:13 "Ma Nipa" (Most probably Bla ma maNi pa?); p. 310:18 "Bu slob"; p. 315:11; p. 324:5; p. 324:10; p. 324:17 "MaNipa" *Rje grub thob chen po lcags zam pa'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, by Las stod byang pa dpal ldan shes rab. It has 283 folios and 565 pages.
- 7 Oral communication with Sku ngo mkhan chung Gnas gsar thub bstan sangs rgyas (1912-1989) and Bla mkhyen Brag mthon byams pa rgyal mtshan (1939-1997).
- 8 *Lochen ratna bhadra's rnam thar bzhugs so*, fl. 1ba.
- 9 *ibid.*, fl.3ba.
- 10 Per K. Sorensen & Sonam Dolma, *Rare Texts from Tibet: Seven Sources for The Ecclesiastic History of Medieval Tibet*, Lumbini International Research Institute, 2007, pp.225-229.
- 11 *Tre hor gdong sprul bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan gyi 'dir snang yo lang lo rgyus brjod pa zol med ngag gi rol mo zhes bya ba dge*, SapaN bshad sgrub gling, 2004, p.3.
- 12 *Shar dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar rin chen phreng ba las, Shar dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal gyi dmyal ba'i dkar chag rin chen phreng ba yid bzhin nor bu rin po che*.
- 13 *Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal gyi dmyal ba'i dkar chag bzhugs*, fl. 1na.
- 14 *ibid.*, fl. 5na.
- 15 *ibid.*, fl 32a.
- 16 *ibid.*, fl 13ba.
- 17 *Gu(r) bkras chos 'byung*, Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, Beijing, 1990, pp. 501-502.
- 18 *Dwags po bkra shis rnam rgyal gyi dmyal ba'i dkar chag bzhugs*, fl. 18na.

- 19 *Lochen ratna bhadra's rnam thar bzhugs so*, fl. 6na. Sometime in the middle of 1998, Monika Szegegi of the Gate of Dharma Buddhist College, University ELTE, Budapest, Hungary has studied the subject of Bla ma maNi pa in general and alone with A lce snang sa. She was particularly interested about Lochen Ratna Bhadra biography. Up to now I have no knowledge of any of her publications. Dr Hanna Havnevik read a paper entitled, "Ma Ni pa, 'Das log, gcod pa, Ri khrod pa and A ni: Folk-religious, Non sectarian and Monastic Trends in the Religious Practice of Jetsun Lochen Rinpoche (1865-1951)", at the 8th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1998. Ayllyan Yalaz did her ISP on Buchen 'Gyur med for SIT Nepal programme, 2001; and Zsoka Gelle wrote, "*Masters of the Mani mantra*" in 2003.
- 20 *Lochen ratna bhadra's rnam thar bzhugs so*, fl. 6na-6ba.
- 21 *ibid.* fl. 8na.
- 22 *ibid.* fl. 8na-8ba.
- 23 *ibid.* fl. 14ba.
- 24 *ibid.* fl. 19na.
- 25 *ibid.* fl. 17na-17ba.
- 26 *ibid.* fl. 17na-17ba.
- 27 *ibid.* fl. 18ba.
- 28 *ibid.* fl. 19na.
- 29 *ibid.* fl. 19ba.
- 30 1 *Rje grub thob chen po lcaags zam pa'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rgya mtsho* by his chief disciple La stod byang pa dpal ldan shes rab, *The Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of Thang stong rgyal po*, National Library of Bhutan, Thimphu, 1984, vol. I;
- 2 *Bla ma thang stong rgyal po'i rnam thar gsal ba'i sgron me* by his direct disciples Dkon mchog dpal bzang and the Bhutanese Spa gro ba bde ba bzang po, *The Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of Thang stong rgyal po*, National Library of Bhutan, Thimphu, 1984, vol. ii;
- 3 *Grub pa'i dbang phyug chen po lcaags zam pa thang stong rgyal po'i rnam par thar pa kun gsal sgron me bdud rtsi'i 'phreng ba mihong bas yid 'pbrog* by Sngags rams pa kun dga' bsod nams grags pa dpal bzang, a son of La stod byang pa dpal ldan shes rab, written at the behest of one Blo gros rgyal mtshan, a descendant of Thang stong rgyal po. *Thang stong rgyal po'i rnam thar*, reel number AT 85/11. The document is in the National Archives, Ramshahpath, Kathmandu;
- 4 A small supplementary biography called *Grub thob chen po'i rnam thar phyi ma las mya ngan las 'das pa'i skor*; *ibid.*, fol. 161na-fol. 166bai;
- 5 *Dpal grub pa'i dbang phyug brtson 'grus bzang po'i rnam par thar pa kun gsal nor bu'i me long (Thang rgyal rnam thar)* by Lo chen 'Gyur med bde chen, a descendant of Thang stong rgyal po, written in 1609. Si khron Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1982.
- 31 *Gangs shug maNi lo chen rig 'dzin chos nyid bzang mo'i rnam par thar pa rnam mkhyen bde ster zhes bya bzhugs*, Published by Sonam Topgay Kazi, Gangtok, Sikkim, 1975, pp. 471-472.
- 32 *Gangs shug maNi lo chen rig 'dzin chos nyid bzang mo'i rnam par thar pa rnam mkhyen bde ster zhes bya bzhugs*, p. 34.
- 33 Regarding Bla ma maNi/ storytellers, please see Sir Charles Bell, *The People of Tibet*, OUP, 1968, p. 215; Franz Michael, *Rule by Incarnation; Tibetan Buddhism and its role in Society and State*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1982, pp. 152, 154; *Sde dpon mi drag gi sras mo gzbon nu ma zhib gis sge'u khung nas mthong ba'i bod kyi rgyal sa lha sa'i snang tshul mdor bsdus* by Tsha rong dbyangs can sgröl dkar, Edited and annotated by Tashi Tsering, Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamshala, 2006, pp. 94-95; Bur sras pa rin chen dar lo nas brtsams, *Gnya' nang tshong 'dus pa'i bu tsha rgyal khams pa*, deb dang po, Historical Materials of Dbus gtsang Series, No.3, Edited by Tashi Tsering, Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamshala 2009, pp.171-177. One film was made about the Buchen 'Gyur med's teachings to nuns in Thugs rje chos gling Nunnery in Nepal. The film was directed by Tsering Ritar Sherpa <http://www.milaproductions.com.np/filmography/films-produced/7-lama-mani.html>
- 34 Please note the report of the LTWA making records of the Lama maNi pa, refer to Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, *Newsletter*, 1982, p. 21.
- 35 Please note that in Roerich's article, even though he was specifically writing on the Bu chen of Pin valley of Spiti, he referred in his text only to Lochen. See for example p. 25 "Chief Lama- actor or Lochen / Lo tsa ba chenpo" (sic) and even "Lama mani pa". Maybe his transcriber Lama Lobsang Migyur Dorjee (he is either Bhutanese or Sikkimese and also worked with the Dutch-Tibetologist Johan Manen in Calcutta in 1920's to 1940's) has changed it into Lochen. Please also see p. 31 where it says, "Thang stong rgyal po chos kyi ngang la bzhugs// Lochen gong ma chos kyi ngang la bzhugs//".
- Georges de Roerich, "The Ceremony of Breaking the Stone", *Journal of Urusvati*, Published by Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute of Roerich Museum, Naggur, Kulu, Vol.11, 1932, pp.25-51; H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, "The Tibetan Ceremony of Breaking the Stone", *Folk*, Copenhagen, (Dansk Etnografisk Tidsskrift Vol. 4, 1962, pp. 65-70; Siegbert Hummel, "The Tibetan Ceremony of Breaking the Stone", *History of Religions*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1968, pp.139-142; Pascale Dollfus, "The Great Sons of Thang stong rgyal po: The Bu chen of the Pin valley, Spiti", *The Tibet Journal*, Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, Dharamshala, Spring, Vol. xxix, No 1, 2004, pp. 9-32.
- Please find the following books to see whether there is anything on Buchen of the Pin Valley of Spiti.
- 1 Hay, William C. "Reports on the valley of Spiti and facts collected with a view to a future settlement", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (Calcutta Branch) XIX 1850, pp.429-51, 1 map;
- 2 Gerard, J.G. "Observations on the Spiti valley and circumjacent Country within Himalaya", *Asiatic Researches*, Calcutta/Serampore, xvii,2, 1833, pp.238-78;
- 3 Francke, A.H. "Musikalische Studien in West Tibet", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, Vol LIX;
- 4 Hutchinson, J. *Chamba State Gazetteer*, Lahore, 1910;
- 5 Harcourt, A T.P. *Himalayan districts of Kooloo, Laboul and Spiti*, London, 1871, p.67;

- 6 Diack, A. H. *Gazetteer of the Kangra District 1883–84*. Revised by P.D. Agnew, 4 Vols, Lahore, 1889–1897 (Parts II–IV, Kulu, Lahoul and Spiti), pp.89–90.
- It is tempting to think that the Indian Government’s study on “Ethnomusicology-Tribal Music” should have a separate book on the “A Directory of Buchen-s or the Spiti musicians”.
- A Polish photographer / researcher Marek Kalmus completed a Ph.D. (2007) on the “Symbolism and meaning of the Ceremony of breaking the stone (Pho bar rdo gchog)”, Jagiellonian University Library, Krakow, Poland. He hopes to publish a book based on his Ph.D. at some time.
- 36 Sa phud thub bstan dpal ldan, Thang rgyal gyi srol maNi pa, *La dwags kyi shi ra za, Shes rab zom*, lo 10, ang 2, deb grangs 28, Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, Leh, Ladakh, 1988, pp.1-22; ‘MaNipa’ in *La dwags*, Sa phud thub bstan dpal ldan gyis brtsams, 1983, pp. 178-183.
- See also Bkra shis rab rgyas, Grub chen thang stong rgyal po dang maNi pa’i srol, *La dwags kyi shi ra za, Shes rab zom*, lo 4, ang 1, deb grangs 7, Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, Leh, Ladakh, pp.1-13.
- 37 *The Singing Mask Echoes of Tibetan Opera*, Lungta 15, Winter 2001, Guest Editor: Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamshala. Content: Introduction, Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, p. 3; Preliminary study of the lha mo, Jeanette Snyder, p. 8; Reflections on Thang stong rgyal po as the founder of the a lce lha mo tradition of Tibetan performing arts, Tashi Tsering, p. 36; Script of the exordium of the hunters, the bringing down of blessings of the princes, the songs and dances of the goddesses, and the auspicious conclusion, Lobsang Samten, p. 61; The actor in the Tibetan lha-mo theatre, Dieter Schuh, p. 97; Explorations in the vocal art of the lhamo performer: Commenting a demonstration by Tenzin Gonpo, Isabelle Herion-Dourcy, p. 119; The wandering goddess: Sustaining the spirit of ache lhamo in the exile Tibetan capital, Jamyang Norbu, p. 142.
- See also Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, *Ache Lhamo: Jeux et enjeux d’une tradition théâtrale tibétaine*. Ph.D. dissertation, Anthropology Department, Université Libre de Bruxelles, and Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris), IV<sup>e</sup> section, 2004 (2 volumes).
- 38 “Rgyal mkhar lha mo tshogs par brtag dpyad byas pa’i snyan zhu” in *Bod ljongs zhib ’jug*, 2001, number 3, p.93.
- 39 *Lho rong chos ’byung* by Rta tshag tshe dbang rgyal gyis mdzad, *Bod ljongs bod yig dpe nying dpe skrun khang*, 1994, pp. 70-71.
- 40 Imaeda, Yoshiro and Doffu Drukpa. 1982, Bhutan no tashigoman/ Tashi gomang of Bhutan. Supplementary brochure, “Asian Concepts of the Cosmos” Exhibition. Tokyo: La Foret Museum; Marceline de Montmollin, “bKra shis sgo mang of Bhutan: On a Specific Tradition of Shrines and its Prolongation in the Museum of Ethnography in Neuchatel (Switzerland)”, Monograph Series occasional papers 2, *Tibetan Studies, Proceeding of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Narita*, 1989, Vol. 2, Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992, pp. 605–613.
- 41 *ibid.* p. 532:1.
- 42 *ibid.* p. 276:4.
- 43 *ibid.* p. 404:2
- 44 Phun tshogs mam rgyal gyis brtsams, “Rin spungs kyi lo rgyus rags bsdsu” which appeared in the three successive issues of the *Bod ljongs zhib ’jug*, 1988 (1), pp. 129-145; *Bod ljongs zhib ’jug*, 1988 (2), pp. 126-133; *Bod ljongs zhib ’jug*, 1988 (3) pp. 90-99. In these above issues there is not a single mention of the Rgyal mkhar chos rdzong bla ma maNi pa tradition.
- 45 Bsod nams tshe ring gis brtsams, Hor khang byams pa bstan dar gyis bsgyur, “Bod kyi dmangs khrod bla ma maNi pa grags can tshe ring chos ’dzoms kyi skor gleng ba” in *Bod ljongs sgyu rtsal zhib ’jug*, 1997 (1). p. 109.
- 46 *ibid.* p. 109.
- 47 *ibid.* p. 110.
- 48 *ibid.* pp. 110–111.
- 49 *ibid.* p. 111.
- 50 *ibid.* p. 111; Prof. R.A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, Stanford, CA, 1972, p. 268, “In the thirteenth century, the famous Nyingma-pa saint Guru Chhowang (1212–1273) ... is supposed too, to have written legends for strolling storytellers (ma-ni-pa) and directions for the masked dances (‘Cham).” My limited understanding is, the early Rnying ma pa Gter ston-s such as Grub thob dngos grub, Nyang ral nyi ma’i ’od zer (1124–1192) & Guru chos dbang (1212–1270), are the propagators of the “Spyan ras gzigs/ thugs rje chen po’i chos skor,” The Avalokitesvara instructions and practice cycle. They are the ones who taught how to recite the six syllable mantra, most probably began the use of the Phreng ba (rosary), and wrote manuals on how to meditate, sadhanas, fire pujas and so on. Some of their students can be called just “maNipa” which doesn’t mean Bla ma maNi pa but one who simply teaches spyan ras gzigs kyi grub thabs and chos skor. Therefore Guru chos dbang was not a bla ma maNipa like the Bla ma MaNi pa of today. He was one of the foremost and greatest forces to propagate the Thugs rje chen po’i chos skor in Tibet. He is repeatedly attributed to be the founder of the Tshes bcu ’cham of Tibet.
- 51 Bsod nams tshe ring gis brtsams, Hor khang byams pa bstan dar gyis bsgyur, “Bod kyi dmangs khrod bla ma maNi pa grags can tshe ring chos ’dzoms kyi skor gleng ba” in *Bod ljongs sgyu rtsal zhib ’jug*, 1997 (1). pp. 111–112.
- 52 *ibid.* pp. 112–113.
- 53 *ibid.* p. 113.
- 54 *Bod du byung ba’i gsang sngags nga bsgyur gyi bstan ’dzin skyes mchog rim byon gyi rnam thar nor bu’i do shal*, Dalhousie, 1976, pp. 121–122. Also see Thugs rje chen po’i ’khor lo’i phan yon’ in *Mkhas grub chen po karma chags med kyi gsung rtsom nyer mkho ges bsdsu bzhus so*, deb gsum pa, Khams nang chen chos sde ’ba’ sngang gnas mdo gsang sngags chos ’phel gling gi dpe nying nyams gso tshogs pas bsgrigs, n.d., pp.75-93; Dam chos, ‘Bod kyi maNi ’khor lo’i skor rags tsam gleng ba, *Bod ljongs sgyu rtsal zhib ’jug*, 1998 (2), pp.80-85.
- 55 See *Gu(r) bkraas chos ’byung*, Krung go’i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, Beijing, 1990, pp. 372-373; 379-381; 392; 490; 496-497.
- 56 *Deb ther sngon po*, ‘Gos lo gzhon nu dpal gyis brtsams, Smad cha, Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1984, p.1173.

- 57 Also see Gu ru chos dbang, *MaNi bka' bum chen mo*, Published by Kunsang Topgey, Thimphu, 1976.
- 58 Gter ston gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug gis mdzad pa, zhu dag byed pa po slo dpon padma la, Published by Kunsang Topgyel and Mani Dorji, Thimphu, Bhutan, 1979. It has 60 folios.
- 59 *Sngags log sun 'byin gyi skor bzbugs so*, Chag lo tsaba dang 'Gos khug pa lha btsas sogs kyi mdzad pa, Published by Kunsang Topgyel and Mani Dorji, Thimphu, Bhutan, 1979, pp.13,26.
- 60 "Bka' gdams pa dang dge lugs pa'i bla ma rags rim gyi gsung 'bum dkar chag" in *Klong rdol ngag dbang blo bzang gi gsung 'bum*, glegs bam gnyis pa, RA, Bod ljongs bod yig dpe mnying dpe skrun khang, 1991, pp.604-605.
- 61 *Sgrub bygyud karma kam tshang rgyud pa rin po che'i rnam par thar pa rab 'byams nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba zhes bya ba bzbugs so*, in *Ta'i si tu kun mkhyen chos kyi 'byung gnas bstan pa'i nyin byed kyi bka' bum*, volume DA, Sherab-Ling Institute of Buddhist Studies, Sansal 1990, pp.184-185.
- 62 Ibid. p.311.
- 63 Ibid. pp.447-478.
- 64 Ibid. p.630.
- 65 Georges de Roerich, "The Ceremony of Breaking the Stone", *Journal of Urusvati*, Published by Urusvati Himalayan Research Institute of Roerich Museum, Naggar, Kulu, Vol.11, 1932, p.25.
- 66 A point to note is that Roerich, not Lama Lobzang Mingyur Dorje, used the term "Pho bar rdo gcog" which means breaking the stone on the stomach. Bsod nams dar rgyas zhol khang writes in his *Glu gar tshangs pa'i chab rgyun*, (page 15; 8) "pho ba rdo gshag" Which roughly means cutting the stone on the stomach. Generally the term pho ba rdo gshag is used among elder Tibetans.
- 67 *Gnya' nang tshong 'dus pa'i bu tsha rgyal kham pa*, deb dang po by Bur sras pa rin chen dar lo, Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamshala, 2009, pp. 171-174.
- 68 *Tibetan Storytelling in Nepal and India* by Stephanie Caius Carlisle, (B.A. Thesis) Wesleyan University, The Honors College, Middletown, Connecticut, April, 2005, pp.84-85.
- 69 *Spti the forbidden valley*, Patrick Sutherland, (Introduction by Tenzing Sonam), Network Photographs, London, 2000.
- 70 Oral communication with Blo bzang dbang rgyal, McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala.
- 71 Oral communication with Phur bu sgröl ma, daughter of Buchen Tshé ring sgröl ma, Sidhbari, Dharamshala.
- 72 *Lhar bcas srid zhi'i gsug rgyan Gong sa rgyal ba'i dbang po bka' drin mtsbungs med sku phreng bcu gsum pa chen poi rnam par thar pa rgya mtsho lta bu las mdo tsam brjod pa ngo mtshar rin po che'i phreng ba zhes bya ba'i glegs bam smad cha bzbugs so*, Compiled by Phur lcoq thub bstan byams pa tshul khriims bstan 'dzin in 1940, Lhasa Zhol par khang edition, fl.268ba2.

## Appendix

Table of the recordings of Bla ma MaNipa's stories kept at LTWA's oral history collection\*.

Volume No.	Name of the Bla ma MaNipa	Recording Date	Hours
301-322	Buchen 'Gyur med (c. 1930-Feb. 2004) Song of the Bla ma maNipa-s, Preliminaries, An Exhortation to Remember Impermanence, The Story of the Buddhist King Dri med kun ldan, The Mournful Song of the Four Main maNi-s, Dedication, Aspirational Prayers, Mandala Offering and Dedication, Auspicious Verses, The Sa skyas maNi Melody, The Story of A lce snang sa 'od de 'Bum pa, The maNi Tune, An Exhortation to Recite the maNi, The Story of the Hermit Kun dga rang grol, The Story of 'Das log pad ma chos skyid, The Song of the Six Syllable Teaching, The Story of Khye'u pad ma 'od 'bar, The Longing maNi Melody, An Appeal to Take Impermanence to Heart, The Stupa Song, The Story of the Buddhist King Nor bzang, The Story of Gzugs kyi nyi ma the Brahmin's Daughter, The Story of 'Das log karma dbang 'dzin, The Story of the Handsome Prince Bzod pa'i dbang phyug, and an interview with Buchen 'Gyur med which includes him telling his life story	29/4/1981- 14/5/1981	about 134 hrs & 55 mins
323-328	Buchen Pa sangs (?-1985) The Story of Rgya bza', The Story of Pad ma 'od 'bar, The Story of Sras guru chos dbang, The Story of the Bhikshuni Shrimati, Buchen Pa sangs's life story, and the maNi sung to various melodies	19/6/1981- 26/6/1981	about 24 hrs
344-347	Bla ma maNipa zla ba (?-?) The Story of A lce snang sa 'od de 'bum pa, The Story of Pad ma 'od 'bar, The Story of the Handsome Prince Bzod pa'i dbang phyug	1981	about 15 hours & 30 mins
879	Buchen Nor rgyas (1923-Oct. 2002) An alphabetical poem, An Exhortation to Remember Impermanence, The History of the Bla ma maNipa, The Story of King Li, The Story of King G-yu sna don grub and others	25/11/1986	about 7 hrs
1134- 1135	The Stories of Cung don chen and Don yod, The Story of the Master Dri med Kun ldan, The Story of Nor bzang	14/2/1994	about 14 hrs & 30 mins
Total about 195 hrs & 55 mins			

\* I am grateful to Sku zhab Karma mkhas grub of Audio-Visual department of the LTWA for providing me the detail information.

### Acknowledgements

My extensive fieldtrips to Spiti rely heavily on the unwavering love and support of my wife Clare Jarrett and my children Catherine, Maddy and Jamie.

This project would not have been possible without the participation, encouragement and advice of a large number of people. I am particularly grateful to the Buchen themselves, especially Tsering Angchuk, Jigmet, Tenzin Choepel, Chettan Dorje, Nyima Dorje, Palden Dorje, Sonam Dorje, Sangye Gatuk, Dawa Gyaltzen, Gatuk Namgyal, Pema Namgyal, Tsewang Namgyal, Sonam Palden, Dorje Phuntsog, the late Tsewang Rigzin, Gatuk Sonam, Pema Thondup, Tsering Tobgye, Gatuk Tsering and Lhundup Tsetan.

I would also like to thank my many friends and collaborators in Spiti: Nono Sonam Angdui, Netaji and Yankit Dolma, Padma Dorje, Tsering Dorje, Dechen Lhundup, Lotey, Tashi Namgyal, Narinder Rana, Tsering Takpa, Ashok Thakur, Sarojini Ganju Thakur, Pemba Tsering, Yomed Tulku and my colleagues and advisors elsewhere: Rupert Cox, Peter Cusack, Isobel Clouter, Pascale Dollfus, Elizabeth Edwards, John Falconer, Clare Harris, Veronika Hein, Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, Christian Jahoda, Wolf Kahlen, Christianne Papa-Kalantari, Marek Kalmus, Emma Martin, Sara Shneiderman, David Toop, Janet Topp-Fargion, Mark Turin, Eve Waring, Graham Woodhouse, Chris Wright and John Wynne.

Chris Morton, Curator of Photograph Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum was incredibly supportive from the start. Tashi Tsering, founding director of the Amnye Machen Institute, not only provided his wonderfully rich essay, but also suggested I look closely at the Buchen thangkas. Janice Hart tirelessly edited and polished my grant application. Tawhid ar-Rahman diligently worked on the beautiful design for the book. Over the years my work in Spiti has been gratefully received funding from a number of different organisations including the BBC World Service, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the British Library, the London College of Communication, the Arts Council and the Frederick Williamson Trust at Cambridge University.

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*Previous page:* Chettan Dorje's troupe of Buchen leaving Lidang on their way to Lara. Buchen can be away from their homes in Pin Valley for months. In former times they would travel as far as Purang in Western Tibet. The sound of them calling back to the villagers echoes through the silence. Lara 2004.

