

**ON THE ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRAYER  
WHEEL ACCORDING TO TWO NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
TIBETAN LITERARY SOURCES\***

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The prayer wheel has been an object of great fascination throughout the world; so much so that it has become a sort of symbolic marker of Tibetan-ness. The prayer wheels in numerous American, European and East Asian museums as well as living room curio cabinets repeat to us, almost like a mantra, "Tibet, Tibet, Tibet" every time we look at them. "What is that?" "Oh, that's a prayer wheel. It's from Tibet and . . ." On the one hand, these items have been ridiculed as a vain human attempt to mechanize the act of prayer. On the other hand, whole books have been written about them based on the universality of wheel folklore.<sup>1</sup>

A question that has rarely been formulated and that no one, so far as we know, has begun to answer is, "What sorts of things have Tibetans themselves had to say about the origin and purpose of prayer wheels?" Their use has become so intimately interwoven with their culture that it seems to have rarely occurred to Tibetans to ask this question of themselves. Otherwise it would be difficult to explain the nearly unbroken silence in Tibetan literature on a religious practice that has become so widespread and goes back (according to testimony to be brought forward here) several hundreds of years.

This makes the exceptions to the silence uncommonly interesting. The first of two Tibetan works to be considered here

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was written by the famous Gung-thang-pa Dkon-mchog-bstan-pa'i-sgron-me (1762-1823 A.D.) at the request of a monk in the largest of Mongolian monasteries in Urga, the capital of Mongolia, known today as Ulan Bator. It is impossible to date precisely, but must have been written in the early years of the nineteenth century. The life of Gung-thang-pa has only recently been outlined in an article by the Taktsher Rinpoche and Professor, Thubten J. Norbu (please consult the bibliography).

Before going on to give a translation of this text by Gung-thang-pa, we would like to point out that the term "prayer wheel" is by no means a direct translation of any Tibetan term. The texts speak of wheels ('*khor-lo*), hand wheels (*lag-'khor*), or dharma wheels (*chos 'khor*) only; but they are also commonly referred to as "mañi wheels" (*ma-ñi 'khor-lo*), because they are most usually employed in the cultus or, to be more precise, the *sādhana*, of the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion (Thugs-rje-chen-po), a form, or simply an epithet, of Avalokiteśvara whose mantra, often called for short "Mañi" or "Six Syllables" (Yi-ge Drug-ma), is the universally known "Om Mañi Padme Hūm." These Sanskrit words have almost always been translated as "Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus," or something similar. However, we believe that, in origin, the mantra had a quite different meaning. In order to demonstrate this, we will need to resort to an explanation that may require some knowledge of Sanskrit grammar; but the conclusion is a simple one.

The usual translation of the mantra assumes that the "Mañi" and "Padme" are two separate words,<sup>2</sup> rather than a single compounded unit. Let us compare, as did Francke,<sup>3</sup> the mantras of the three great Bodhisattvas (often called Lords of the Three Types—Rigs Gsum Mgon-po): Mañjuśrī, Bodhisattva of Wisdom; Vajrapāṇi, Bodhisattva of Power; Avalokiteśvara, Bodhisattva of Compassion.

Mañjuśrī..... Om Vāgīśvari Muṃ.  
 Vajrapāṇi..... Om Vajrapāṇi Hūm.  
 Avalokiteśvara..... Om Mañipadme Hūm.

For the first, we may know that no declined form of a *masculine* Vāgīśvari could end in the letter "i". A final "i" could represent one of two things, a vocative of a feminine noun ending in "ī", or a neuter noun ending in "i". Vāgīśvari, "Lady of Speech", could possibly be an epithet of Sarasvatī, the feminine counterpart of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī.

A similar grammatical argument applies as well to the form Vajrapāṇi, "The Vajra Holder". It can be a vocative of the *feminine* noun Vajrapāṇī, or the vocative of the neuter.

Likewise, Maṇi-Padme must be a vocative case of the feminine noun ending in “a” (it could not be a neuter in this case). The central part of all three mantras should be understood as feminine nouns<sup>4</sup> in the vocative case.

Now, Vāgīśvari represents a *tatpuruṣa* compound (since the first word is in a subordinate, case relation to the second), while Vajrapāṇi is a *karmadhāraya* compound (in which the second element is described by the first); but there is reason to think that Maṇi-Padme is neither of these two types of compounds, but rather a *dvandva* (conjunctive) compound which is at the same time a *bahuvrīhi* compound (one which defines, or is to be understood as an epithet of someone; often, a metonym). This gives us the translation, “O [thou who] hast a Jewel and Lotus.” A Tibetan book which gives translations for many Sanskrit language mantras gives, in fact, virtually the same interpretation, “O [thou who] hast a Jewel [and] Lotus” (in Tibetan, *Kye Nor-bu Padma-can*).<sup>5</sup>

Although, tentatively, this grammatical problem may be considered solved, we are still far from knowing what the mantra “means”. It may help a little if we understand that the four-armed Mahākāraṇika, the most popular form of Avalokiteśvara, is invariable envisioned with a crystal rosary in one of his right hands and a lotus in one of his left hands, while his remaining two hands (clasped before the Heart Center) contain a jewel.<sup>6</sup> Now it seems clear that the jewel and the lotus are both equally emblems of the Bodhisattva of Compassion—neither should be considered to be “inside” the other. Already in 1667 A.D., in the Latin language *China Illustrata*, Athanasius Kircher<sup>7</sup> wrote that Tibetans worship a god named Manipe by saying “Manipe, save us.” Even if Kircher’s statements on Tibetan culture were for the most part second or third hand and crudely polemical, he seems to have correctly identified the Maṇi-Padme as a name/epithet in vocative case.

Typically, it is this mantra, Om Maṇi-Padme Hūm, that is wound about the central axis of the cylinder. It is not a prayer in any usual sense of the word, but a part of a program of spiritual practice involving visualizations, as well as mantra recitations, and one aimed at generating the compassion of a Bodhisattva within oneself.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, it may be repeated (with much scriptural justification) to allay all sorts of mundane fears as well as anxieties about future rebirths. However, since the term “prayer wheel” has entered the English language, even finding its way into dictionaries, we have preferred to retain it despite its inaccuracy. Still, it is important to keep the subcategory of hand wheel (*lag ’khor*) distinct.

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The text by Gung-thang-pa, to be translated presently, has a particular argument which places the origin of external prayer wheels in the instructions for certain internal meditational practices. We tend to agree with this argument, even while knowing what the contrary conclusions of the cultural materialists (who would reduce all human culture to 'practical' or materialistic motives) will be. While the physical form of prayer wheels could have originated in the large revolving bookcases of Chinese Buddhist monasteries,<sup>9</sup> the hand wheel with its ball-and-chain governor (which functions to keep up the spinning momentum) was, according to the well-known contemporary historian Lynn White, a Tibetan invention which entered into machine designs of fifteenth century Italy.<sup>10</sup> If so, it would seem that a significant technological innovation was occasioned by the exigencies of the spiritual life.

This text is too short to possibly explain all the secrets of the prayer wheel's place in Tibetan life; but, if only for making the attempt, it ranks as evidence of the first importance. The translation, as it is, was made by Dan Martin, but he will not neglect to acknowledge his debts to Professors Thubten J. Norbu and Geshe Sopa (Madison) for illuminating obscure passages. The Tibetan text has been inserted at the end of this paper, since it is not, as far as we know, readily available.

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### A SHORT TREATISE ON PRAYER WHEELS

Homage to Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha.<sup>11</sup>

To speak briefly on the origin of Prayer Wheels, their accompanying contemplative visualizations,<sup>12</sup> the benefits of using them, and so forth:

For their origins, there are very many explanations in the Old Translations:<sup>13</sup>

It is the highest of protections<sup>14</sup> and  
it cuts off rebirth in the Six Types.<sup>15</sup>  
It purifies the three transitional states,<sup>16</sup> and  
the spinning is of even greater purity than  
the mantra recitation itself;  
the benefits likewise are much greater.

There are no statements in the New Tantras<sup>17</sup> teaching the use of Hand Wheels. Still, several worthy and great persons have taken up the practice and spread it among all the

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monasteries of eastern and central Tibet. However, that in itself is not sufficient reason to hold it in esteem.

"The mantra of the tutelary spins quickly." Other passages exist on the circling of recitations of the wrathful deities and their "vehicles"; and many others which tell the way the letters of the mantras circle like lamps strung together. In the *Vajra Songs*,<sup>18</sup> where it says, "It is good to turn a fast wheel," it teaches the need to turn the string of mantras in the Heart Center. Here we find the source for the practice of spinning external Wheels which are inscribed (with mantras).

The [outward] rituals for achieving the Four Actions<sup>19</sup> contained in the handbooks for the *sādhanas* of many particular deities and Dharma Protectors as well as the directions for inscribing the Life Circle [all] agree with actual instructions for contemplation. The *Guhyasamāja Tantra* says, "The Om̐ is . . . of a small chickpea-like pellet."<sup>20</sup> The way of meditating on the Inner Substance as a "drop" is explained here and by many other authorities to be the source of outward "Pellet Rites" understood in the conventional sense.<sup>21</sup>

The Fifth Dalai Lama's *Dhāraṇī Insertion* (*Gzungs gzhug*) says that the source of [the practice of] winding about [the central axis] from the beginning [of the sacred text] is found in the [fact that] the beginning of the wheel of [visualized] mantras starts from the inside.<sup>22</sup> Hence, if the contemplative visualization of an inward wheel of mantras lies at the origin of outward inscribed Wheels, then there can be no doubt that the teachings on turning a string of mantras [in visualizations] lie at the origin of the turning of external Wheels.

The *contemplative visualizations* [to accompany the spinning of the Wheel]: From whatever sūtra or mantra may be enclosed, light emanates and one offers worship to all the Buddha Realms. Their blessings coalesce and then melt within. Again, the light rays are emitted. They strike your own body. They purify the conscience<sup>23</sup> and all the obstacles to Enlightenment,<sup>24</sup> allowing the blessings of the Buddhas and Sons of Buddhas to enter. Then the light rays spread throughout the universe to cleanse the biological and non-vital worlds of any impurity. Both the biological and non-vital worlds become pure. One imagines that all beings intone together the sūtra or mantra, transmuting into a background continuity of spiritual suchness. In such manner, practicing the yogic training of body, speech and mind, the individual letters [of the sūtra or mantra] each utter their appropriate sounds, and one imagines that those who are capable of religious transformation are placed on the Paths of maturation and liberation. When this is done, one gains a

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connection<sup>25</sup> to the turning of the Wheel of Dharma [by a Buddha].<sup>26</sup>

The *benefits of spinning the Prayer Wheel*: It brings all the same benefits said to accrue from reading the respective texts. By writing one or more mantras on a slate and turning it a few times, one can openly stop contagions, frost, hail and so forth. So, spinning a special mantra *dhāraṇī* several times with pure motivation can bring unimaginable benefits. Just being struck by a wind which has touched such a Prayer Wheel cleanses a great number of sins and obstacles to Enlightenment and is said to implant the Seed of Liberation.

—Blo-bzang-bsam-gtan, a faithful monk of the monastery of Khalkha (Hal-ha) known as Khu-re Chen-mo, impressed on me the need for a work on their rationale and benefits. So I, Reverend Dkon-mchog-bstan-pa'i-sgron-me, hastily composed this brief outline of topics relating to Prayer Wheels.

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The second and last work on prayer wheels<sup>27</sup> which we have located, dating a little later than Gung-thang-pa's, it seems, is by the Seng-chen Bla-ma Blo-bzang-bstan-'dzin-dpal-'byor, a Gelugpa teacher at Tashilhumpo monastery who was born in 1784 A.D.<sup>28</sup> Like Gung-thang-pa's text, it was written at the instigation of a Mongolian monk-ethnographer,<sup>29</sup> in this case a monastic financial manager (*phyag-mdzod*) of the Torgut league named Blo-bzang-smon-lam. Since this work is relatively long and deals with matters tangential to the origin and significance of prayer wheels, it will not be translated here. We will only touch on some of the pertinent issues which it raises.

Just like Gung-thang-pa, the Seng-chen Bla-ma divides his discussion into three parts: 1) the origins of Wheels, 2) their actual use, and 3) the benefits (of their use). The first part, being the most interesting for our purposes, begins with a long story in which Nāgārjuna visits the land of nāgas<sup>30</sup> and asks the nāga king Bodhisattva for a dharma wheel (*chos 'khor*).

"This wheel quickly liberates the beings of the six types from the suffering of low rebirths just by seeing, hearing, thinking about, or touching it. After the preceding Buddha Dīpaṅkara gave it to us, we nāgas have been put at ease and several have travelled down the Path to Buddhahood. This is the Wheel of the mantra which unites the Body, Speech, Mind, Artistry and Industry<sup>31</sup> of all Buddhas—Om Maṇi-Padme Hūm. Therefore I give it to you. Establish this profound Wheel in earth, water, fire, air, and so forth, and it will benefit beings and Buddhism."

Then Nāgārjuna brought the practice back to Indian and gave it to the skygoer Lionface (Siṃhavaktrā). She gave it to Tilopa, Tilopa to Naropa, and Naropa to Marpa who brought it to Tibet. The lineage continues up to the second Karmapa hierarch, Karma-bakshi (1206-1283 A.D.).<sup>32</sup> The Seng-chen Bla-ma had seen such a manuscript work which said, "There is much about the benefits of these Wheels in the collected works of Karma-bakshi," but he was evidently not able to consult these collected works directly, since he leaves it as a matter for future investigation.

In the second part, on the actual use of prayer wheels, he acknowledges that there are several different ways of going about it. Still, he gives some recommendations about the central axis (the "life wood," *srog shing*) and so forth. The central axis should be of sandal, juniper or other non-poisonous wood, with various mantras and *dhāraṇīs* inscribed at its top, sides and bottom. The ink should be mixed with fragrances. When winding the strips of paper around the axis, the letters should show on the outside. Whether one starts with the beginning or end of the mantra makes no difference, but in the time of the author, the former practice was widespread. The roll should be measured to fit the size of the cavity in the wheel. Then various *dhāraṇīs* and designs are suggested for inscribing in circular pattern on the tops and sides of the wheel's exterior.

In the third part, the Seng-chen Bla-ma again cites the work by Karma-bakshi, with its 7-syllable verse, directly, telling how establishing a wheel in any of the four elements liberates the beings who inhabit that element from suffering and bad rebirths. Those who require more detail are told to search in the collected works of "Karma[-bakshi]." Then there is a long quote from a *dhāraṇī* of eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara<sup>33</sup> on the benefits of the "heart" [mantra] and of fasting on the 14th and 15th of the month. This is followed by another quote from *The Vastly and Totally Completed Thought of Great Compassion*<sup>34</sup> telling how the use of the mantra purifies even such terrible crimes as destroying a stūpa or stealing the property of monks. Then he cites the verses of praise to Avalokiteśvara by the Indian nun Dpal-mo.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, he cites a work by the author of our first work on wheels, Gung-thang-pa's work on fasting rites (*Smyung-gnas-kyi Zur Rgyan*), as his source for the preceding citations (except for the first which derived from a work by Karma-bakshi).<sup>36</sup> None of these quotes say anything directly about prayer wheels, but only about the benefits of fasts and recitations involving the Six Syllables; the benefits of prayer wheels are only implied.

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In the closing lines, the Seng-chen Bla-ma voices his disapproval of the practice of putting more than one sacred text inside the same prayer wheel. Dedicatory verses and a colophon complete the work.

These two early nineteenth century works, while they may be quite illuminating as examples of Tibetan views on the general use of prayer wheels, leave us with many questions about the when and how of their invention. Since the Seng-chen Bla-ma could quote (directly or indirectly) from a work by Karma-bakshi, we may assume these Wheels were already in existence at the beginning of the Mongol period in the mid-thirteenth century. Still, we have no way of knowing whether they existed then in their present form. Did Karma-bakshi bring them back from China? Were they introduced into Tibet from India along with the main Bka'-brgyud-pa spiritual lineage in the eleventh century? Or did they, as Gung-thang-pa suggests, exist in Tibet already in the time of the Old Translations? We do not know.

We also cannot know for certain from the evidence at what time the ball-and-chain governor became attached to the wheel, making the hand wheel (*lag 'khor*) possible.<sup>37</sup> In the seven-syllable verse citations of Karma-bakshi's work by the Seng-chen Bla-ma, one finds the terms dharma wheel (*chos 'khor*) and wheel (*'khor-lo*) only. These wheels could be powered by the four elements (and, presumably, the earth-powered wheels were turned by human agency), but the hand wheel does not occur there. It may be so that our late literary sources provide us with no compelling reason to believe the ball-and-chain governor was a part of the prayer wheel in this early period (an important part of Lynn White's argument for diffusion), but neither do they provide any compelling reasons for doubt. Instead, they make us wish for more evidence.

Further studies of Tibetan sources as well as early Chinese ethnographies and some possible Indian evidence<sup>38</sup> will bring more light to this particular issue. The question is not an idle one, since it promises to yield evidence which could be used to argue for or against certain classic and contemporary models of the history of science and of technological development. Is it so strange to imagine that human striving (*sādhana*) within the religious sphere would have an effect on technology? Or could this be a case of "reinventing the wheel"?

Finally, the curiosity which prayer wheels evoke in the world outside Tibet is perhaps understandable, but avoidable. When people have developed a basic understanding of *sādhana* in general (a more nuanced understanding of the *sādhanas* of Avalokiteśvara in particular) and a better understanding of the Buddhist ways of paying respect to holy script, Prayer Wheels

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will appear to be less curious and more logical, even expectable, given their historical background and usage within the religious culture of Tibet.

## NOTES

1. See Simpson, *Buddhist Praying Wheel*. For some remarkable photographs of various prayer wheels, see the work by Alvin Hunter in the bibliography appended here.

2. As examples for this usual interpretation, see Wayman, *Yoga*, p. 76; Combe, *A Tibetan on Tibet*, p. 48; Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 148; Ekvall, *Religious Observances*, p. 116; Schlagintweit, *Buddhism in Tibet*, p. 120; David-Neel, *Magic and Mystery*, p. 259 ff.

3. Franke, "Meaning of the Om-mani-padme-hum Formula."

4. It is uncertain why these mantras should be of the feminine grammatical gender. Thomas (p.464) and Franke (op.cit.) believed that they must refer to the feminine counterparts of the Bodhisattva (see also Bharati, *Tantric Tradition*, pp. 133-34). We are not so certain about this. It may be that the mantras were on their own side considered to be in 'feminine' relationships with the male Bodhisattvas. D. C. Bhattacharyya, for one, believes that certain mantras preceded feminine deities who emerged as personifications of them (*Studies*, p. 68). Prajñāparamita is a more obvious example of a text which took on feminine iconographic form (ibid., p. 29 ff.) Of course, this historicist model of deity developing after text appears to conflict with our argument on the meaning of the Six Syllables as given below. There may be no point to this argument at all, since grammatical gender in Sanskrit, as in other languages, bears an ambiguous relation to natural gender.

5. See Sde-srid, *Blang*, p. 574, line 4 (and also p. 568, which reads: *kye nor bu padma*). Snellgrove (*Indo-Tibetan*, vol. 1, p. 195) translates, "O thou with the jewelled lotus!" This is grammatically a possibility, since it takes the Maṇi-Padme to be a *karmadhāraya* compound, but it does not take into account the iconographic syntax. Of course, grammatically defensible meanings may scarcely touch the full range of meanings that have been found in these six syllables, and we have no intention of subtracting them. For a larger view of the meaning of this mantra, please consult Govinda, *Foundations*, and Kyabje Yonzin, "The Significance of the Six Syllable Mantra." As these works make clear, mantras are just the opposite of "meaningless"; rather, they are extraordinarily meaning-laden.

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6. For a painting of the four-armed Great Compassion, see Janet Gyatso, *Technique*. This work also contains a translation of one of the most popular *sādhana*s of Great Compassion in use in Tibet, that by Thang-stong-rgyal-po, along with very readable and concise explanations of the visualizations and recitations involved. It is therefore highly recommended as background for this paper. Readers of Tibetan books may be interested to know that the Tibetan text behind J. Gyatso's work may be found appended to the biography of Thang-stong-rgyal-po by 'Gyur-med-bde-chen (pp. 349-50), and several commentaries on it are available. For details, see Gyatso, *Literary Transmission*, p. 109 ff.

7. Kircher, *China Illustrata* Latin text, p. 71; translation by C. van Tuyl, p. xxiv. Note also, for curiosity's sake, the engraving of "Manipe" on p. 72. For more on this work, see van Tuyl, "Account of the Journey" (especially p. 8, which has the same translated passage on "Manipe"). See also Desideri's early 18th-century refutation of Kircher in Filippi (ed.), *An Account of Tibet*, pp. 295-96. Desideri here comes quite close to the conclusion about the meaning of Maṇi-Padme which we have put forward above. For an even earlier European notice (circa 1250) of the "On mani baccam", or, "God, thou knowest", see William of Rubruck, *Journey*, p. 146.

8. The Tibetan word *gsol-'debs* may mean "prayer" as a request for favors, but the word does not appear in this context. The *smon-lam* is a more characteristic Mahāyāna "prayer", but more of an "aspiration", a "wish" that one will one day or in some future life be in a position to benefit others.

9. Goodrich, "Revolving Book-case". See also Ekvall, *Religious Observances*, pp. 120-21.

10. White, *Medieval Technology*, p. 116, etc. See also Aris, "Tibetan Technology".

11. The Sanskrit names for the founder, doctrines and followers (especially the monks and nuns) of Buddhism.

12. The Tibetan word translated as "contemplative visualization" is *dmigs-pa*. In this context it refers to the creation of mental objects as a support for spiritual practice. The word "imagination" could have been used as well.

13. This means the first translations of Buddhist Tantras under the old Tibetan imperial dynasty. They are generally accepted (although sometimes with reservations) by all Tibetan Buddhists even though the Indian (or Central Asian, or Chinese) originals from which they were translated were, for the most part, no longer available for inspection in the 10th and 11th centuries. Many sūtras were also translated during the same period, but their authority has never been held in doubt (and those early sūtra translations were mostly revised later on,

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sometimes several times). The "verses" translated here would seem to be a composite of several quotes from various sources. Gung-thang-pa cites them as general examples of the sorts of things the Old Translation sources have to say on the subject.

14. Mantras are said to "protect" the mind during meditation (according to a traditional etymology of the Sanskrit word).

15. The Six Types are the beings belonging to the six realms of possible rebirth in Buddhist soteriological cosmology. They are "gods", "demi-gods", humans, animals and "hungry ghosts", as well as the inhabitants of the hells. Each realm is said to be *purified* by one of the Six Syllables of Om Maṇi-Padme Hūm. This is probably the oldest "use" of the mantra, which may be traced to the *Karaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (found among the Gilgit manuscripts of the 6th to 7th centuries), and exists as well in Tibetan documents from Tun-huang and in chapters 37-39 of the *Zangsgling-ma* biography of Padmasambhava rediscovered by Nyangral Nyi-ma-'od-zer (1124-1192?). For a discussion of these sources, see Imaeda, "Note préliminaire," and references provided there.

16. The three transitional states (*bar-do*) are: 1) the moment of death, 2) the after-death state, 3) the time of rebirth.

17. "New Tantras" means the tantra translations done by Rinchen-bzang-po and others beginning in the mid-tenth century A.D., in order to distinguish them from the tantras which had been translated previously (note 13, above).

18. The title given in the text is *Rdo-rje Tshig Sbram*. *Rdo-rje Tshig-rkang* is Tibetan for Sanskrit *Vajrapada* (or *Vajradohā*), the ecstatic songs of the adepts known as Siddhas. I am unable to trace the text referred to. This and the other brief quotations are difficult to interpret out of context, even if the general sense seems clear.

19. The Four Actions are classifications for fire rites (*sbyin-bsreg*) as well as general motivations which prompt ritual activities. They are: 1) peace (*zhi*), 2) growth, or increase (*rgyas*), 3) influence (*dbang*) and 4) force. Without an underlying aspiration for bringing Enlightenment for all beings, these can be ordinary magical, rather than spiritual, motives. In this paragraph, Gung-thang-pa cites a few supporting instances of religious externals which had their origins in contemplative visualizations.

20. Some allusion to the "chick-pea" in the heart according to the *Guhyasamāja* system may be noted in Wayman, *Yoga*, p. 273.

21. In the conventional sense, these Pellet Rites involve physically present pellets distributed as a sacrament, said to grant long life. In the ultimate sense, they relate to the indestructible 'substance' of meditational experience conceived of as a "drop" (or pellet, or "seed" mantra) in contemplative visualizations.

The "indestructible drop" (*mi-shigs-pa'i thig-le*) is said to reside in the Heart Center.

22. In his 1649 work entitled, *Gzu-gnas Blo-ldan Ngo-mtshar Skyed Byed Gzungs-'bul-gyi Lag-len 'Khrul Spong Nyin-mor Byed-pa* (contained in *Rituals of Rdo-rje-brag*, vol. 1, pp. 389-437), the Fifth Dalai Lama discusses various ideas about how the *dhāraṇīs* should be wound about the central axis. His discussion does not directly concern prayer wheels, since these *dhāraṇī* rolls are meant to be inserted in (stationary) images or stūpas. He says that, according to Bu-ston, they should be wound from the end (of the *dhāraṇī*), while according to Ngor-chen, they should be wound like a snake (?) beginning from the Om̐ (i.e., the first letter). After considering the question, citing a few Tantras, the Dalai Lama comes out in favor of the tradition of Ngor-chen, finding no scriptural authority to support the tradition of Bu-ston (pp. 410-11). Future studies of prayer wheels should take these *dhāraṇī* rolls into account, and attempt to determine whether one could have influenced the development of the other.

23. At one time, 'conscience' meant the same as the word 'consciousness' does today. Consciousness of faults is called *sdiḡ-pa* in Tibetan because it "stings" (*sdiḡs-pa*). Remorse and regret are, in Buddhist as well as Christian worlds, a primary motive for undertaking the religious life.

24. There are two sorts of obstacles to Enlightenment according to Mahāyāna: 1) obstacles due to mistaken view of knowable objects (*shes-bya*) and 2) obstacles due to troubling emotions (*nyon-rmong*s).

25. In this context, "connection" (*rten-'brel*) also means a "prophecy" that one will one day be so fortunate as to be born in a time and place in which the words of a Buddha will be heard first hand.

26. *Dharma-cakra-pravartana*, "turning the Wheel of Dharma", is an expression used for the Buddha's preaching in general. Sometimes, it is said that there were three "turnings" (see Joshi, *Studies*, p. 240, for examples). The expression may have something to do with the origins of prayer wheels, as was suggested long ago by Rockhill (*Land of the Lamas*, p. 334, or, *Notes on Tibet*, p. 18). It may be interesting to speculate in terms of later developments on how the attributes of Vairocana came to be mixed with those of Avalokiteśvara. In the mandala typologies, Vairocana (who is pictured with the gesture of "turning the Wheel of the Dharma" in iconography) presides over the Wheel type, which counters or encompasses the "basic poison" of stupidity/delusion (*gti-mug*). Avalokiteśvara is Bodhisattva of the Lotus type with its basic poison of

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attachment/lust. Therefore, it is a mystery that the early text from Tun-huang called *Civilizing the Three Poisons* should recommend the Om̐ Maṇi-Padme Hūṃ (in variant forms) of Avalokiteśvara for purifying stupidity/delusion. It may prove profitable to investigate how this symbolic interchange took place to understand better the origins of the prayer wheel. See Imaeda, "Note préliminaire" as well as Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan*, vol. 2, p. 454. Evidently, the word Maṇi-Padma was preserved as part of a Vairocana mantra in Japan (see Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 149).

27. Schlagintweit (*Buddhism in Tibet*, p. 232) noted already in the mid-19th century the existence of some books on the benefits of turning prayer wheels, but he names no specific titles or authors.

28. The title of this work is *Ma-ṇi Lag-skor sogs-kyi Lag-len dang Phan-yon Bshad-pa: Dad-ldan Dga' Skyed*, contained in Seng-chen Rdo-rje-'chang, *Collected Works*, pp. 485-95.

29. The use of prayer wheels in Mongolia was already well enough established in 1636, that the Manchu ruler T'ai-tsung could recommend to his ministers that the practice be prohibited. See Farquhar, "Emperor as Bodhisattva", p. 21.

30. The story is often told how Nāgārjuna visited the land of the nāgas and brought back the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* to the land of humans (although wheels are not given as the reason for this visit). See, for example, Tāranātha, *Seven Instruction Lineages*, pp. 5-6.

31. The work 'industry' is used here in an older sense. 'Phrin-las is work aimed at the welfare of others, and in traditional Tibetan society, this word covered bridge and dike building, as well as other such public works as monastery and temple building.

32. Evidently, the Seng-chen Bla-ma quotes this story from a work which in turn quotes Karma-bakshi, but he could not consult the original work. The seven-syllable verses here and in part three would seem to represent the actual words of Karma-bakshi, but to be certain, it would be necessary to trace the textual source. For biographical information on Karma-bakshi, see Karma Thinley, *History of the Sixteen Karmapas*, pp. 47-52. It is perhaps of interest to note (on p. 48) that he initiated the practice of 'communal singing' of the Six Syllables. See also 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba, *Blue Annals*, pp. 485-87. For information on the few available works from the collected works of Karma-bakshi, said to have once filled six volumes, see Kapstein, "Limitless Ocean".

33. Seng-chen's passage on pp. 492 (line 4) to 493 (line 2) is equivalent to Derge Kanjur, Rgyud, vol. *tsa*, folio 138 verso (line 3) to folio 139 recto (line 1) in the work entitled 'Phags-pa Sphyan-

*ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug Zhal Bcu-gcig-pa zhes bya-ba'i Gzungs* (Tohoku nos. 693 & 899).

34. Full title: '*Phags-pa Byang-chub-sems-dpa' Spyian-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug Phyang Stong Spyian Stong dang ldan-pa Thogs-pa Mi Mnga'-ba'i Thugs-rje-chen-po'i Sems Rgya-cher Yongs-su Rdzogs-pa zhes bya-ba'i Gzungs*. This work may be found in the Tantra section of the Derge Kanjur, vol. *tsa*, folios 94-129; and in vol. *e*, folios 168-205 (Tohoku nos. 691 and 897).

35. This is the Indian nun Dpal-mo, whose name could be re-Sanskritized as either Śrī or Lakṣmī, most likely the latter. In 1963, a biography of "Kamala Bhikshuni" was published separately. It is by a 'Brug-pa Lama named Rab-brtan who stayed at a leprosy hospital at Kalimpong. See Rab-brtan, *Dge-slong-ma Dpal-mo'i Rnam-thar*. This nun is remembered mainly for her role as initiator of the tradition of a popularly performed fasting rite which was named after her (*Dpal-mo lugs*), and as the author of some praises to Great Compassion (Peking nos. 3549, 3560 and 3561) as well as a *sādhana* devoted to the eleven-headed form (Peking no. 3557). She would seem to belong to the earlier half of the eleventh century. See especially 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba, *Blue Annals*, pp. 1007 ff. (the story of her lineage ends on p. 1018). The text of hers which is quoted here is '*Phags-pa Spyian-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug-gi Bstod-pa* (Tohoku no. 2739). Her famous *Po Bstod* is so called because it is a poetic work of praise (*bstod*) in which the bulk of the lines end in the syllable *po* (Tohoku no. 2738).

36. This work, entitled, *Smyung-gnas-kyi Cho-ga'i Zur Rgyan Bde-ba-can-gyi Lam-yig*, written in the year 1816, may be found in *Gung-thang-pa, Collected Works*, vol. 7, pp. 289-326. It is about the fasting rites according to the tradition of Dpal-mo (whose story he tells on pp. 293-94). The majority of the third part of Seng-chen's work is copied from this work: pp. 492 (line 3) through 494 (line 1) in Seng-chen's work is the same as pp. 295 (line 2) through 297 (line 1) in this work by Gung-thang-pa.

37. The very learned Mongolian Tibetan scholar who goes by the name Chos-rje Bla-ma told me (Bloomington, June 8, 1987) he believes that the wheel with ball-and-chain governor came into existence during the fourth or fifth *rab-byung* (in other words, between 1207 and 1326). He also told me of a recent work on wheels by a Geshe named Stong-thun (correct spelling?) which was published some years ago by the Institute of Tibetology at Gangtok. I was unable to consult this work.

38. I would like to thank Dr. Gregory Schopen (Indiana University, Bloomington) for making available to me his not-yet published paper entitled, "A Note on the 'Technology of Prayer' and a Reference to the 'Revolving Book-case' in an 11th Century Indian Inscription."

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Prayer wheels larger than human size are to be seen in separate rooms in Tibetan Buddhist temples and can also be set in motion by pilgrims. With the help of a small bell the number of revolutions can be counted. The cylinders of fixed prayer wheels are often inscribed with the formula "Om mani padme hum" (meaning "jewel in the lotus") in ornamental Lantsa (Ranjana) letters. Dan Martin, "On the Origin and Significance of the Prayer Wheel According to two Nineteenth-Century Tibetan Literary Sources". *Journal of the Tibet Society*, vol. 7, Indiana University, 1987. Simpson, William: *The Buddhist Praying Wheel*, London, 1896. Retrieved from "[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tibetan\\_prayer\\_wheel&oldid=936564541](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tibetan_prayer_wheel&oldid=936564541)". On the origin and significance of the prayer wheel according to two nineteenth-century tibetan literary sources\*. Dan Martin. The prayer wheel has been an object of great fascination throughout the. of Tibetan-ness. numerous American, well as living room curio cabinets repeat to us, almost like a every time we look at them. is that?" the one hand, these items have been ridiculed as a vain human act of prayer. The first of two Tibetan works to be considered here whose uncommon humanity has been a reliable source of uncommon inspiration. Thanks also to Chos-rje Bla-ma, Geoffrey Samuel, Gregory Schopen, Geshe Sopa, Michael Walter and others for various helps, hints and encouragements. The journal of the tibet society. "On the Origin and Significance of the Prayer Wheel, According to Two Nineteenth-Century Tibetan Literary Sources." *Journal of the Tibet Society* 7 (1987): 13-29. Studholme, Alexander. *The Origins of Oá'f Maá'ñi-padme hÁ'á'f: A Study of KÁraá'ñá\_vyÁ«ha SÁ«tra*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002. Verhagen, P. C. "The Mantra 'Oá'f maá'ñi-padme hÁ'á'f' in an Early Tibetan Grammatical Treatise." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1990): 133-138. Alexander Gardner.