

# Reading Medicine as Scripture: The Narratives of Medical Treasures and Buddhist Medicine in Tibet

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**ABSTRACT:** Treasure texts allow their revealers to narratively frame cosmopolitan instructions. Tibetan physicians and ritual specialists, for example, have variously framed instructions for elixir extraction (*bcud len*) as the hidden instructions of Padmasambhava, as the primordial teachings of the Buddha, and as a Tibetan medical treatise. This brief survey of medical treasures in Tibet will focus on the twelfth-century *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand* attributed to Künpang Daö, also known as Kusa Menpa or Kutsa Daö, related instructions in Āyurvedic compendia and the *Four Tantras*, and the narrative framing of these medical teachings as Buddhist scriptures. Taken together, this study argues that medical treasures do not necessarily refer to a genuine past, but instead prescribe narratives for inspirational origins. Similarly, when medicine is Buddhist, medical theories and instructions become the teachings of enlightened figures, healing merges with bodhisattva ethics, and medicine becomes part of the path to buddhahood. To read medicine as scripture, then, is to embed medical practice within a narrative world. This study retrieves the narrative worlds of Buddhist medical treasures, and explores the historical contexts of their creation in Renaissance Tibet (ca. 950-1250).

## Introduction

What is the relationship between Buddhism and medicine? Scholars have used the label,

"Buddhist medicine," to describe a loose body of medical theories and therapeutic instructions that were transmitted by Buddhists, akin to Buddhist philosophy or Buddhist art. Others have denied the historical applicability of Buddhist medicine, arguing that the core of medicine lies not in religious tradition, but in empirical discovery. As early as 1937, in an entry on "Disease" (Jpn. *byō* 病) for the *Hobogirin* encyclopedia, Paul Demiéville first speculated that Buddhist physicians may have practiced in India, as opposed to "Brahmanical physicians" (Fre. *Médecins brahmaniques*).<sup>1</sup> He ultimately argued, however, that "it seems unlikely that there ever was a truly Buddhist medicine [in India], as opposed to Āyurvedic medicine."<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on the medical traditions of East Asia, Demiéville also asserted that "in the fields of medicine and surgery, [China] only seems to have gotten some theoretical formulas and fabulous anecdotes" from the Buddhists.<sup>3</sup> In his trailblazing work on the role of medicine in Buddhist scriptures, Demiéville ultimately concludes that there was no identifiable tradition of Buddhist medicine outside of Āyurveda or indigenous Chinese medicine.

Since Demiéville's early encyclopedia entry, Buddhist medicine has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Pierce Salguero has recently led the burgeoning subfield, with his monograph on *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China*, his two edited volumes of translated sources, and his *Global History of Buddhism and Medicine*.<sup>4</sup> Across these and other publications, Salguero has classified Buddhist medicine as "a loose collection of ideas and practices ... that was modified and expanded as a result of cross-cultural interactions during the vigorous geographical expansion of Buddhism."<sup>5</sup> Common examples of medical theories and instructions that are found in these sources include the four elements (Skt. *mahābhūta*; earth, water, fire, and wind) and the three peccant humors (Skt. *tridoṣa*; wind, bile, and phlegm) of South Asian inspiration, as well as narratives and ritual practices featuring Buddhist figures and divinities. In sum, Salguero uses Buddhist medicine as a term of convenience that lacks any one defining criterion across its diverse historical, geographical, and cultural contexts.

In her review of Salguero's work, Janet Gyatso has explicitly challenged the historical appropriateness of Buddhist medicine. "To the extent that we can distinguish medicine and healing," writes Gyatso, "I would prefer to say that there was no 'Buddhist medicine' until the twentieth century."<sup>6</sup> Gyatso interprets Buddhist medicine as a term that might be useful

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1 Demiéville 1937: 250; Tatz 1985: 67.

2 *Il semble d'ailleurs peu vraisemblable qu'à la médecine āyurvédique se soit jamais opposé une véritable médecine bouddhique* (Demiéville 1937: 262). Tatz 1985: 92.

3 *Alors qu'en philosophie, en linguistique, en astronomie, la Chine s'est mise avec profit à l'école de l'Inde, elle ne semble bien lui devoir, dans le domaine de la médecine et de la chirurgie, que quelques formules théoriques et des anecdotes fabuleuses* (Demiéville 1937: 265). Tatz 1985: 99.

4 Salguero 2014, 2017, 2019, 2021.

5 Salguero 2014: 2.

6 Gyatso 2017: 99.

for describing theories and instructions related to "spiritual well-being, making merit, and ritual," but one that tends to obscure the empirical modes of diagnosis and treatment associated with the "medical mentality" in Tibet.<sup>7</sup> She ultimately concludes that "it is important for our sense of history, and identity, to know that the modern West was not the only place where the empirical body took center stage for medical theory."<sup>8</sup> In other words, Tibetan scholars and physicians observed patients and developed medical instructions based on those observations, and these instructions should remain categorically distinct from the healing practices that are not grounded in empirical observation. For Gyatso, medicine is empirical, and any association between religion and medicine in Tibet derives from Buddhism's role as a "civilizational force."<sup>9</sup>

As Demiéville argued over eighty years ago, if we search for a uniquely Buddhist medicine, a medical tradition substantially distinct from those of South, East, or Central Eurasia, we will not find it. This is not to say that there is no Buddhist medicine to be found, however. Diverse medical theories and instructions — from alchemical formulae for attaining longevity, to scholastic summaries and elaborations on Āyurvedic compendia — found expression in the revealed scriptures of Tibet. Rather than seek out definitive origins for these medical treasure texts, an ambitious task that will have to await future studies, in this essay we will analyze the role of scriptural narratives in establishing the origins, ethics, and soteriological goals of medical practice throughout Tibetan history. Paraphrasing Wilfred C. Smith, scripture is a human activity;<sup>10</sup> each medical scripture names a relationship between the community of Tibetan physicians and their patients, their study and practice of medicine, and their ethical and soteriological motivations in the medical profession. By exhuming the medical treasures of Tibet, and by recognizing that the *Four Tantras* is more than a mere treatise, we retrieve the Buddhist world that these medical scriptures impart.

## **Elixir Extraction in the Medical Treasures of Tibet**

A treasure text (*gter ma*) is any instruction that is said to have been hidden in the past for the sake of instructing future generations.<sup>11</sup> In this essay, "medical treasure" refers to any text that (1)

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7 "It is more important to recognize that certain medical theorists were *reaching toward* empirical accountability than to judge, from the vantage of the twenty-first century, whether they actually attained it or not" (Gyatso 2015: 18; emphasis hers).

8 Gyatso 2017: 99.

9 Gyatso 2015: 404; citing Hallisey and Reynolds 1987.

10 Smith 1993: 18. In other words, the term "scripture" refers not to criteria that are inherent to a text, but to the relationships between texts and their readers. This essay is a study of such relationships.

11 For an overview of treasure texts in Tibet, see Mayer 2019.

is narratively framed as a treasure text, either within the scripture itself or by a group of people, and (2) contains instructions for the maintenance of health, the attainment of longevity, and/or the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of disease. Some of the earliest medical treasures in Tibet were alchemical instructions for the attainment of longevity, health, and virility. Tibetan physicians and ritual specialists usually refer to these instructions as either elixir extraction (*bcud len*) or medical attainment (*smān grub*). Previous studies of these practices have shied away from pan-Eurasian terminology like "alchemy" and "elixirs," opting instead for opaque translations like "essence extraction" and "accomplishing medicine," or simply using their phonetic transcriptions (*chülen* and *mendrup*).<sup>12</sup> In a consummate analysis of the term, *smān grub*, Frances Garret explains that the term resists translation because "it is used to refer to different traditions and can be understood from different perspectives, today and throughout history."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the same could also be said for *bcud len*, highlighting the importance of historical precision in the translation and analysis of such practices.

Revealed instructions for elixir extraction and medical attainments emerged in Tibet as part of cosmopolitan iatrochemical traditions. The Tibetan term for elixir extraction (*bcud len*) translates a cosmopolitan Sanskrit term (*rasāyana*), which in turn is an equivalent to the Arabic term, elixir (Ara. *al-iksīr*), the extract sought in pan-Eurasian alchemical traditions (Ara. *al-kīmiyā*).<sup>14</sup> *Rasāyana* refers to the "way of *rasa*." Due to the ambiguous nature of the term *rasa*, scholars have highlighted the difference between medical and alchemical *rasāyana*,<sup>15</sup> wherein the former refers to the prescription of elixirs for the sake of health, longevity, and other such attainments, and the latter refers to the transmutation of metals. This is a superficial distinction, however, for iatrochemical formulae include both organic and inorganic substances, and transmuted metals can be used for therapeutic purposes.<sup>16</sup> There are iatrochemical instructions

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12 For recent work on medical attainments across Nyingma and Bönpo contexts, see Sehnalova 2018.

13 Garret 2009: 210.

14 For an introduction to the history of alchemy in West Eurasia, see Principe 2013. For alchemy in Tibet and India, see Samuel 2010 and Simioli 2013. Unlike these previous studies, which primarily concern the alchemical transmutation of metals, this essay focuses on the alchemical transformation of medicinal substances, or iatrochemistry. To be clear, iatrochemistry is one form of alchemy. In an essay on the history of elixirs and alchemy throughout Eurasia, for example, Joseph Needham identifies three types of alchemy: aurification ("the conscious imitation of gold"), aurifaction ("the belief that it is possible to make gold"), and macrobotics (Needham 1975: 168). Seeing that the semantic range of the latter term has narrowed over the past forty-five years, I opt instead for iatrochemistry (lit. "chemical medicine"). I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for their stimulating comments on alchemy in Tibet, which have helped me clarify my thoughts here.

15 "The term '*rasāyana*' is a compound of two words, '*rasa*' (liquid, juice, flavour, nutritive juice, essence) and '*ayana*' (path, way) or '*āyana*' (reaching, attaining). Because of the polyvalent meanings of its elements, in particular of '*rasa*,' there are different valid possibilities for interpreting the meaning of *rasāyana*" (Wujastyk 2017: 1).

16 For a consummate study of mercurial medicines in Tibet, see Gerke 2021.

for *rasāyana* in the first-century *Compendium of Caraka*,<sup>17</sup> and al-Rāzī (854–925; Lat. Rhazes) explicitly cites Ravigupta's instructions for *rasāyana* in his early tenth-century *Comprehensive Book* (*al-Kitāb al-Hāwī*).<sup>18</sup> Around this time, scholars translated the *Siddhāsara* into Tibetan, wherein Ravigupta defines an extracted elixir (*bcud kyis len*) as "any medicine that eliminates both white hair and disease."<sup>19</sup> Thus, like their West Eurasian counterparts, Tibetan scholars first translated instructions for elixir extraction from cosmopolitan treatises, and then developed their own vernacular traditions based on these precedents.<sup>20</sup>

If it does indeed derive from the twelfth century, *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand* (*dbang po lag pa'i bcud len*) is one of the earliest examples of elixir extraction in Tibet.<sup>21</sup> The text begins with Padmasambhava requesting *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand* from Khandro Sangwa Yeshé, the *Ḍākinī* of Secret Gnosis, for the sake of yogis in a future age. He then transmits the teachings to King Tri Songdeutsen (ca. 742-800), and the latter's otherwise unknown daughter, Princess Druktsen (*sras mo drug btsan*). She hides them under a boulder that looks like a menacing Sogdian and entrusts them to the Treasure Protector, Bakkyé [=Bektsé?], Lord of Paro in present-day Bhutan.<sup>22</sup> The majority of the text is then a conversation between Padmasambhava and the King, with a brief reiteration of its provenance, and a note that Lharjé Künpang Daö revealed the work in a tiger year.<sup>23</sup>

The physician (*lha rje*; lit. "lord of the gods"), Künpang Daö (*kun spangs zla 'od*) is known by many names. In the first survey of medical treasures in Tibet, Drangti Penden Tsojé (*brang ti dpal ldan 'tsho byed*, ca. 1310-1380) reports, "Kün Menpa [=Künpang Daö] revealed the mother and son texts of the *Heap of Jewels* hidden in the thigh of Pen[den] Lhamo at

17 Wujastyk, Newcombe, and Barois 2017; Maas 2017: 75-79.

18 Kahl 2015: 151-52.

19 *Sman dpyad gces pa grub pa: sman gang skra dkar ba dang / na ba med par byed pa de ni bcud kyis len zhes bya ba yin no//* (Emmerick 1982: 414-15).

20 On the relationship between the cosmopolitan and the vernacular, see Pollock 2006: 1-36. For Pollock, a cosmopolis is a "transregional culture-power sphere" (Pollock 2006: 12), and vernacularization refers to the development of a "written literature ... in local languages according to models supplied by a superordinate, usually cosmopolitan, literary culture" (Pollock 2006: 23). For our purposes, then, the vernacular traditions of elixir extraction in Tibet emerged according to the transregional models of Central Eurasia.

21 For a synchronic survey of elixir extraction texts in Tibet, see Oliphant 2015, 2020. Although Oliphant mentions Kusa Menpa in neither study, he does identify Indra's hand (*dbang lag*) as an important ingredient in later sources (2015: 298-99).

22 *Dbang po lag pa'i bcud len: o rgyan pad ma 'byung gnas kyis/ phyi rabs rnal 'byor don ched du/ dbang po lag pa'i bcud len 'di/ mkha' 'gro gsang ba ye shes la zhus/ bsam yas kyi byang phyogs su mnga' bdag khri srong lde'u bisan la gdams so/ des sras mo drug btsan la gdams pa'o/ sras mos spa gro'i brag stod du/ brag sog po khros pa 'dra ba'i pha wang sdigs ru can gyi 'og tu sbas so/ gter srung spa gro'i jo bo bag skyes la gad do/* (A ru ra 2006: 239).

23 *Dbang po lag pa'i bcud len: slob dpon pad mas mnga' bdag la gdams nas/ mnga' bdag gis phyag bzhes mdzad pa'o/ sa ma ya/ mnga' bdag gi sras kyis spa gro brag stod du sbas pa las/ physis lha rje kun spangs zla 'od kyis stag lo la bton pa'o/ las 'phro can dang 'phrad par shog/* (A ru ra 2006: 242).

Chimpu."<sup>24</sup> The *Heap of Jewels* cycle is not currently available, but Drangti's account confirms that scholars have long recognized Kün Menpa as a revealer of medical treasures. Later traditions identify Kün Menpa as Kusa Menpa, which is now a more common appellation for him in medical writing. The Desi Sanggyé Gyatso (*sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho*, 1653-1705) states that Kusa Menpa "discovered many profound treasures on [Buddhist] doctrine, medicine, and Bön at Paro and other places."<sup>25</sup>

In addition to Kusa Menpa or Kutsa Menpa, Künpang Daö is also known as Kutsa Daö (*khu tsha zla 'od*), a figure that has attracted the attention of scholars in recent years. Matthew Kapstein has analyzed and translated his philosophical treasure on the Bönpo Great Perfection,<sup>26</sup> for example, and Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer have published a series of articles on his role in Bönpo exorcisms and longevity rituals.<sup>27</sup> Despite these contributions, Guru Chöwang laments in his autobiography:

Master Kutsa Menpa of Paro Chelka revealed many yellow manuscripts and small chests during three great evocation rituals for Padmasambhava. Because he neglected his medical practices, however, his contributions to living beings were limited.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than illustrate a contradiction between Buddhism and medicine, here Guru Chöwang is retrospectively chiding Kutsa Menpa for his limited contributions in the field of medicine (*sman spyad [=dpyad]*). This is surely the source of the misinterpreted line found in later accounts, that "Doctor Kutsa, owing to his medical practice, neglected to serve living beings through the doctrine."<sup>29</sup> The explicit connection between Künpang Daö and Padmasambhava in the *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand* and Guru Chöwang's account is also notable; like some other early treasure revealers, Kutsa Menpa was claimed by both Nyingma and Bön traditions. Finally, this passage also indicates that Kutsa Menpa flourished

24 *Gsang ba man ngag gis[sic] rgyud kyi spyi don shes bya rab gsal rgyas pa: rin po che'i dpungs pa ma bu 'chim phu'i dpal lha mo'i brla la sbas pa kun sman pas ston/* (Brang ti dpal ldan 'tsho byed ND: 32b); *dpal lha mo'i rgyab la sbas pa ku sa sman pas bton* (Brang ti dpal ldan 'tsho byed 2005: 87). Note that in the later edition, Drangti identifies the treasure revealer as Kusa Menpa.

25 *Baiḍūrya'i me long: gter ston sku sa sman pa zhes bya 'byung/ zhes ku sa sman par grags pas spa gro bcal sogs nas chos/ sman/ bon gsum gyi bab gter du ma bton cing/ gter chen gzhan las kyang sman dpyad kyis 'gro don rgya che ba 'byung ba* (A ru ra 2005: 132). Kilty 2009: 176.

26 See Kapstein 2009.

27 Mayer 2013; Cantwell and Mayer 2013; and Cantwell and Mayer 2015.

28 *Ghu ru chos dbang gis gter 'byung chen mo: rje ku tsha sman pas spa gro gcal ka nas/ 'gu ru padma'i sgrub chen rnam gsum gyis sna grangs pa'i shog ser sgrom chung gang thon yang / sman spyad [=dpyad ] skyangs pas 'gro don rgya chung /* (Gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug 1979: vol. 2, 136 [f. 31b]).

29 Jikdreel Yeshe Dorje 1991: 765.

at least a generation before Guru Chöwang (1212-1270),<sup>30</sup> probably during the twelfth century. Thus, the *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand* is an early example of elixir extraction in Tibet, and a rare set of instructions attributed both to the instruction of Padmasambhava and the revelation of Künpang Daö.

Padmasambhava explains that there are two practices in the *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand*: methods for creating medicinal compounds (*sbyar thabs*) and instructions for ritual actions (*las tshogs*). The primary ingredient for both of these practices is the eponymous Indra's hand, which should be gathered in the late summer or fall (lit. "threshing season").<sup>31</sup> "It should be neither frosty, rotten, nor wilted." Instead, "it should be prepared nicely and attractively. The best [elixirs are extracted from] six handfuls; middling are from four; and the worst are from only two."<sup>32</sup> Padmasambhava then explains how to combine Indra's hand with many other ingredients to create various compounds with different effects. He promises clear eyesight, such that one can see the spirits beneath and the gods above, and clear hearing, such that one can hear the voices of gods, spirits, and humans with one's own ears. More representative of iatrochemistry, Padmasambhava also promises sexual potency, long life, radiance, youth, dark hair, speed, and the strength of an elephant (*stobs glang chen*; more on this below). Using the compounds made from Indra's hand, Padmasambhava also promises protection from all contagious diseases, all poisons, incontinence, cold sores, and visceral disorders. In sum, by combining Indra's hand with other ingredients and usually, although not always, ingesting the result, one can protect oneself from the sufferings of old age, sickness, and death. But what was Indra's hand?

Tibetan-language terms for *materia medica* are notoriously difficult to translate. In some cases, for example, Tibetan texts include instructions for Sanskrit or other foreign-language ingredients that were either unknown or unavailable in Tibet. In other cases, ecological variations across the Tibetan plateau, Himalayan valleys, and Mongolian steppe have forced physicians to use the same Tibetan-language term to name a wide variety of species with similar medicinal properties. Regarding the *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand* more specifically, scholars have generally concluded that Indra's hand refers to a member of the *Gymnadenia* genus, often *Gymnadenia orchidis*, which is a flowering orchid that grows in the high altitudes of Himalayan valleys and on the Tibetan plateau.<sup>33</sup> Despite their apparent etymological connections, Gawai Dorje has warned scholars not to mistake the Chinese

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30 Kapstein 2009: 107, n. 3.

31 The precise identity of the ingredient, "Indra's hand," is not clear from the *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand* itself, and shall be explored further below.

32 *Dbang po lag pa'i bcud len: dbang lag sos ka'am g.yul las dus btus la/ sad kyi ma khyer par/ ma rul ba/ ma zags skam sred legs par byas la/ rab tshad snyim pa gsum/ 'bring tshad do/ tha ma gang ngo/* (A ru ra 2006: 239).

33 Dawa 2009: 428.

ingredients, "xianrenzhang 仙人掌 [immortal's palm] or foshou 佛手 [Buddha's hand] for *dbang lag* [*Gymnadenia orchidis*, literally 'powerful hand']".<sup>34</sup> When and how Indra's hand became a member of the *Gymnadenia* genus is not entirely clear, but Indra's hand clearly has a long history as an ingredient in the cosmopolitan formulae of South, East, and Central Asia.

The medicinal ingredient that I translate as "Indra's hand" (*dbang lag*, *dbang po'i lag*, *dbang po lag pa*) is itself the translation of a Sanskrit term (*indrahasta*). The term first appears in Tibetan translation and transliteration in the Sarasvatī chapter of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. Therein, Sarasvatī explains that, if a member of the monastic community recites spells and bathes with medicinal ingredients, they will gain her blessed protection from misfortunes, including disease, curses, poisons, zombies, and more.<sup>35</sup> Indra's hand is one of the ingredients for the medicinal bath and, in the earliest edition translated from Sanskrit, we find instructions to add a "large measure of Indra's hand" (*dbang po'i lag dang skal ba che*).<sup>36</sup> *Indrahasta* is recorded in transliteration (Tib. *in dra hasta* = *yindaluo hexiduo* 因達囉喝悉哆) in the two other Tibetan editions, however, including the Tibetan translation from Chinese by Chödrup (*chos grub* = Chi. Facheng 法成; fl. early 9th c.),<sup>37</sup> and the translation of unclear provenance attributed to Yeshé Dé (*ye shes sde*, fl. late 8th c. and early 9th c.).<sup>38</sup> This evidence, combined with the equation of *dbang po lag pa* with *indrahastā* in the *Mahāvvyutpatti*,<sup>39</sup> allows us to conclude that Indra's hand was originally an ingredient included in the cosmopolitan formulae of first-millennium South, East, and Central Eurasia, which was later interpreted as the fingered

34 Gawai Dorje 2009: 402.

35 'Phags pa gser 'od dam pa mchog tu rnam par rgyal ba'i mdo sde'i rgyal po theg pa chen po'i mdo: *des de dag la gza' ma rungs pa ltas ngan ston pa ci mchis pa dang / dang po btsas pa'i gza' skar dang / phan tshun mi mihun par gyur pa dang / nad kyi sdug bsngal dang / 'thab pa dang / rtsod pa dang / g.yul 'gyed pa dang / rmi lam ngan pa dang / gdon bgegs dang / byad stems dang / dug dang / ngan du bgyis pa dang / sngags dang / ro langas dang / 'di lta bu la sogs pa'i sdig pa rnams kyi sgrib pa dang bgegs bgyid pa thams cad yongs su bsal nas rab tu zhi bar bgyid pas blo dang ldan pa rnams kyi khros kyi cho ga 'di ltar bgyis te/* (Krung go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug ste gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang, ed. 2006-2009a: vol. 89, 276).

36 'Phags pa gser 'od dam pa mdo sde'i dbang po'i rgyal po zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo (Krung go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug ste gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang, ed. 2006-2009a: vol. 90, 68).

37 'Phags pa gser 'od dam pa mchog tu rnam par rgyal ba'i mdo sde'i rgyal po theg pa chen po'i mdo: *in dra hasta* (Krung go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug ste gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang, ed. 2006-2009a: vol. 89, 276). This choice reflects the Chinese-language transliteration by Yijing 義淨 (635-713). See *Jin guangming zuisheng wang jing* 金光明最勝王經: *yindaluo hexiduo* 因達囉喝悉哆 (Daizo Shuppansha 1924-1934: vol. 16, 435).

38 'Phags pa gser 'od dam pa mdo sde'i dbang po'i rgyal po zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo: *indra hasta skal ba che/* (Krung go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug ste gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang, ed. 2006-2009a: vol. 89, 647). On the provenance of this edition and its potential relationship with a Chinese source, see Radich 2014, 2015. As far as I can tell, the T664 edition contains neither a transliteration nor a translation of *indrahasta*. See *Hebu jin guangming jing* 合部金光明經 (Daizo Shuppansha 1924-1934: vol. 16, 386).

39 *Bye brag tu rtogs par byed pa* (Krung go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug ste gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang, ed. 2006-2009b: vol. 115, 168).

citron fruit (*Citrus medica var. sarcodactylis*) in East Asian traditions, and a Himalayan orchid (*Gymnadenia orchidis*) in Tibetan tradition.

Like Indra's hand, knowledge of elixirs and alchemical instructions spread throughout Eurasia in the latter half of the first millennium of the Common Era. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Tibetan treasure revealers like Künpang Daö adapted these cosmopolitan practices to focus on the extraction of elixirs from a single ingredient, Indra's hand. Unlike parallel instructions in Āyurvedic treatises, however, the *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand* are the inspired teachings of Padmasambhava, revealed from the Himalayan landscape. Although the worldly goals of health and longevity are shared across the cosmopolitan traditions of alchemy, medicine, and magic, by framing the *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand* as a treasure text, Künpang Daö implicitly links his alchemical instructions to the narrative world of Padmasambhava's treasure tradition in Tibet. In the next section we examine a similar example of narratively reframing instructions for iatrochemistry, but this time as the summarized teachings of Brahmā and the reported speech of the Buddha, Master of Medicine.

## The Medical Treatise and the Medical Scripture

In the eleventh century, before the flourishing of Künpang Daö and other medical treasure revealers, the most important medical text in Tibet was the *Essence of the Eight Branches*, a cycle of Āyurvedic instructions translated from Sanskrit. The privileged position of this work is exemplified by its place in the Tibetan canons, from which the *Four Tantras* (*rgyud bzhi*) is still excluded. Whereas the *Essence of the Eight Branches* presents itself as a summary of other medical tantras, the *Four Tantras* is a medical scripture taught by the Buddha, Master of Medicine, and transmitted within a lineage of enlightened sages. By the turn of the fourteenth century, scholars had canonized the *Essence of the Eight Branches* cycle as treatises translated from Sanskrit, and chose to exclude the *Four Tantras* from the Tibetan canons based on its non-Indian origins.<sup>40</sup> The authors of the *Four Tantras* had already proposed solutions for this contradiction as early as the thirteenth century, however, allowing students to read the *Four Tantras* as both a Tibetan treatise and a Buddhist scripture.

Like Künpang Daö's medical treasure, summaries and elaborations upon cosmopolitan medical instructions continued in South Asia down to the end of the first millennium of the Common Era. Composed in the seventh century, around the same time as Ravigupta's *Siddhasāra*,<sup>41</sup> Vāgbhata's *Compendium of the Essence of the Eight Branches* (*yan lag brgyad*

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40 For early observations on this exclusion, see Csoma de Kőrös 1835. For debates on the origins of the *Four Tantras*, see Karmay 1990; Czaja 2005-2006; Yang Ga 2010, 2014; and Gyatso 2015.

41 Emmerick 1975-76.

*pa'i snying po'i bsdus pa* = Skt. *aṣṭāṅgahr̥dayasaṃhita*) presents itself as an ambitious summary of all other medical teachings, both historical and legendary. The root text of the *Essence of the Eight Branches*, for example, begins with a divine memory. In the beginning, Brahmā remembered the Knowledge of Life (Skt. *āyurveda*).<sup>42</sup> He then taught it to the other gods and sages, who recorded their understandings in various medical tantras, both legendary and still extant. "Extracting only the best from these tantras," Vāgbhaṭa claims, "the *Essence of the Eight Branches* is neither too succinct nor too elaborate."<sup>43</sup> Thus, the root text of the *Compendium of the Essence of the Eight Branches* is a scholastic treatise that represents the essence extracted from all cosmopolitan medical knowledge. Following its translation in the eleventh century, this treatise became the central text for the development of medical scholasticism in Tibet.

Summarizing and elaborating upon other Āyurvedic compendia, the *Essence of the Eight Branches* provides iatrochemical instructions for fertility and virility (*ro tsa ba*= Skt. *vājīkaraṇa*), which comprise the last two chapters of the root text. These instructions begin with a warning: "For those who have impure bodies, extracting elixirs and using formulae for virility would be useless, like dyeing a sullied cloth."<sup>44</sup> After performing these purification practices, according to one formula, one should place myrobalan fruits into a large tree stump, cover them with grass and mud, and finally cook them in a hearth of cow dung. One should then consume the cooked myrobalan fruits along with honey, ghee, and boiled milk for one month, while also avoiding forbidden foods and activities. "After eleven days, one's hair, teeth, and nails will fall out," Vāgbhaṭa promises, "and within a few days, one will gain a nice body, confidence with women, the strength of an elephant, supreme clarity, bravery, and intelligence, and one will live for one thousand years."<sup>45</sup> Like the *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand*, this and other formulae from the *Essence of the Eight Branches* promise health, longevity, and virility, sometimes even using the same language, such as the "strength of an elephant." Thus, the formulae for elixir

42 On Āyurveda as Brahmanical medicine, see Zysk 1999.

43 *Yan lag brgyad pa'i snying po bsdus pa: tshangs pas tshe yi rig byed dran// skye dgu'i bdag la bshad pa yin// de yis tha skar des brgya byin// des rgyun shes stsogs drang srong la'o// de yis me bzhin 'jug la stsogs// de rnams kyis rgyud so sor byas// shin tu 'thob pa de rnams las// rab ces phal cher btus pa ni// shin tu bsdus min rgyas min par// yan lag brgyad pa'i snying po byas//* (Krung go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug ste gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang, ed. 2006-2009b: vol. 111, 143-44). Translated in conversation with Murthy 1991-1992: vol. 1, 4-5; and Vogel 1965: 45-50.

44 *Yan lag brgyad pa'i snying po bsdus pa: ma sbyangs pa yi lus la ni// bcud kyis len dang ro tsa ba'i// sbyor ba dri ma can gyi ni// gos kyi tshon ltar don med 'gyur//* (Krung go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug ste gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang, ed. 2006-2009b: vol. 111, 813). Translated in conversation with Murthy 1991-1992: vol. 3, 381.

45 *Yan lag brgyad pa'i snying po bsdus pa: de ltar zhag ni bcu gcig 'das// skra so sen mo lhags par 'gyur// de nas nyin zhag cung zad nas// gzugs bzang bud med la phod cing // stobs ni glang po dang 'drar 'gyur// mchog tu yid gzhungs snying stobs dang // blo ldan lo stong 'tsho bar 'gyur//* (Krung go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug ste gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang, ed. 2006-2009b: vol. 111, 816). Translated in conversation with Murthy 1991-1992: vol. 3, 386.

extraction in the *Essence of the Eight Branches* are instructionally related to, but narratively distinct from, the iatrochemical instructions of Künpang Daö's medical treasure.

The chapter on elixir extraction in the *Four Tantras* continues in the tradition of summarizing cosmopolitan instructions for health, longevity, and virility. The *Instructional Tantra* (*man ngag rgyud*), the third of the *Four Tantras*, concludes with three chapters on "Healing Old Age: Elixir Extraction" (*rgas pa gso ba bcud len*), "Virility" (*ro tsa bar bya ba*), and "Seeking a Woman" (*bud med btsal ba*).<sup>46</sup> Over thirty years ago, Ronald Emmerick demonstrated that the chapter on elixir extraction found in the *Four Tantras* includes several stanzas that derive directly from the *Essence of the Eight Branches*.<sup>47</sup> Like the *Elixirs Extracted from Indra's Hand* and the *Essence of the Eight Branches*, the author of the *Four Tantras* generally provides new formulae, but makes the same promises of health, strength, and virility. If one consumes the four nectars (*rtsi bzhi*) and the five juices (*dwangs ma lnga*), for example, "one will escape the nine life-destroying diseases. The signs of old age will decline; one will attain the body of a sixteen-year-old, the prowess of a lion, the strength of an elephant, the complexion of a peacock, and the speed of a thoroughbred horse; and one's life will be equal to that of the sun and the moon."<sup>48</sup> Thus, like Künpang Daö and Vāgbhāta, the authors of the *Four Tantras* promise the same "strength of an elephant," but provide innovative formulae to attain this common goal. Unlike Künpang Daö, however, the *Four Tantras* reproduces entire sections of the *Essence of the Eight Branches*, demonstrating the direct reliance of the former on the latter.<sup>49</sup>

Whereas Künpang Daö elaborated upon cosmopolitan instructions and framed them as a treasure text, the authors of the *Four Tantras* elaborated upon the iatrochemical instructions of the *Essence of the Eight Branches* and framed them as a Buddhist scripture. The *Root Tantra*, the first of the *Four Tantras*, explains that the Buddha, Master of Medicine, appeared before four separate retinues of gods, sages, Buddhist insiders (*nang pa'i 'khor*), and non-Buddhist outsiders (*phyi pa'i 'khor*).<sup>50</sup> These retinues feature many of the same figures that were central in the *Essence of the Eight Branches*, including Brahmā, Prajāpati, the Aśvins, Indra, Ātreya, and Agniveśa, as well as a half-dozen other sages who also appear in other medical texts from this period. By including these divine and sagely characters in its narrative frame, the *Four*

46 For a detailed study of the former chapter, see Gerke 2012. For the latter two chapters, see Gyatso 2015: 302-309.

47 Emmerick 1990.

48 *Man ngag rgyud*: 'di dgu'i bcud long srog gcod nad dgu grol// rgas pa'i rtags nub bcu drug lta bu'i lus// seng ge'i risal la glang bo lta bu'i stobs// rma bya'i mdangs ldan mgyogs cang shes rta// tshe srog nyi zla gnyis dang mnyam par 'gyur// (Rje bstan 'dzin don grub 2010: vol. 3, 617-18). Translated in conversation with Emmerick 1990: 90, 96.

49 Yang Ga 2010: 238-40.

50 Rje bstan 'dzin don grub 2010, vol. 1, 19-20. For a translation of this scene, see Schaeffer, Kapstein, and Tuttle 2013: 279-82.

*Tantras* positions itself as sharing the same cosmopolitan knowledge as the *Essence of the Eight Branches*.

At the same time, however, the *Root Tantra* draws a distinction between Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions. In the *Four Tantras*, the "extremist Grandfather Brahmā" (*mu stegs kyi mes po tshangs pa*) is listed along with Viṣṇu and Kumāra in the "retinue of [non-Buddhist] outsiders" instead of the "retinue of the gods."<sup>51</sup> Here the narrative frame of the *Four Tantras* asserts that there are Buddhist bodhisattvas, explicitly non-Buddhist gods, and other gods and sages that are not clearly affiliated. The *Four Tantras* does not deny the validity of the traditions that derive from Brahmā, however, but still labels them as explicitly non-Buddhist. It also implies that the Buddha ultimately inspired Brahmā's memory of medical teachings found in Āyurvedic compendia.<sup>52</sup>

The majority of the *Four Tantras* is framed as a dialogue between two sages. At the beginning of each of the *Four Tantras*, Rikpé Yeshé (*rig pa'i ye shes*; lit. "Gnostic Awareness") and Yilé Kyé (*gid las skyes*; lit. "Mind-Born") emanate from a different quality of the Buddha, Master of Medicine, King of Beryl Light. These emanations effectively connect each of the four tantras to the narrative established in the first chapter of the *Root Tantra*, the narrative frame (*gleng gzhi*; lit. "Basis of Discussion") for the *Four Tantras*. Like other narrative frames found in Buddhist literature, most editions of the *Four Tantras* begin with the phrase, "Thus have I heard at one time," establishing the work as the reported speech of the Buddha.<sup>53</sup> The "I" here implicitly refers to Yilé Kyé, the sagacious student of Rikpé Yeshé, himself also an emanation of the Buddha. Indeed, the opening narrative frame of the *Four Tantras* explains that it derives from the retinue of neither the non-Buddhists nor the Buddhists, but from the tradition of sages:

With each word spoken by the teacher, each of the four retinues heard the instructions taught within their own tradition. This [tradition] is called the "Tradition of the Sages," because it allows one to "straighten out" the peccant humors of one's own body, speech, and mind, and to balance the imbalanced humors of others.<sup>54</sup>

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51 The term that I translate as "extremist" (*mu stegs*) is a derogatory term used to describe non-Buddhist traditions. See Kapstein 2000: 104, and 244, n. 81.

52 For an explicit Tibetan narrative of the Buddha teaching medicine to Brahmā, see McGrath 2017.

53 All xylographic editions of the *Four Tantras* begin with the phrase, "Thus have I heard at one time" (*'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus cig na*). See Rje bstan 'dzin don grub 2010: vol. 1, 21, n. 15. By contrast, an early commentary has the phrase, "Thus have I said at one time" (Brang ti dpal ldan 'tsho byed 1977: 24 [f. 12b]: *'di skad bdag gis bshad pa'i dus cig na*). This latter phrasing establishes the *Four Tantras* not as reported speech, but as the direct speech of the Buddha. For further examples of the latter, see Gyatso 2015: 433, n. 22.

54 *Rtsa rgyud: ston pas gsungs pa'i tshig gcig la 'khor rnam pa bzhi so so rang rang gi ston pa'i lugs su go bar zad do// 'di ni rang gi lus ngag yid gsum nyes pa med par drang por bsrangs nas gzhan gyi nyes pa ma snyoms pa snyoms par byed pas drang srong gi lugs zhes bya'o/* (Rje bstan 'dzin don grub 2010: vol. 1, 20).

According to this scene, the *Four Tantras* is not the direct speech of the Buddha himself, but instead represents reported speech from the retinue of sages. Here we also find an emphatically Tibetan etymology for the word, "sage" (*drang srong*), as deriving not from the Sanskrit (*r̥ṣi*; lit. "seer") but from the notion that they "straighten out" (*drang por bsrangs [=srong]*) the peccant humors of themselves and others. Rather than represent medical teachings as recorded by Brahmanical sages, however, in subsequent chapters the *Four Tantras* reframes this tradition as the enlightened teachings of the Buddha, expressed by means of two emanated sages.

The authors of the *Four Tantras* framed their instructions as both parallel to and the source of the *Essence of the Eight Branches*. According to its opening narrative frame, the *Four Tantras* represents the teachings of the Buddha as understood by the tradition of sages, distinct from those of either the gods, the Buddhist insiders, or the non-Buddhist outsiders. Unlike the *Essence of the Eight Branches* and other Āyurvedic compendia, however, the *Four Tantras* frames even the medical teachings of Brahmā as ultimately deriving from those of the Buddha, a theme that can be found in other Tibetan medical texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>55</sup> The *Four Tantras* then circumvents the role of Brahmā altogether, and ultimately presents itself as the teachings of sages, Rikpé Yeshé and Yilé Kyé, who emanated from the Buddha directly and who are absent from the retinue of sages mentioned in the *Essence of the Eight Branches*. Thus, despite their shared instructions on iatrochemistry, the *Essence of the Eight Branches* frames its instructions as a medical treatise composed by Vāgbhāṭa, while the *Four Tantras* should be read as a Buddhist scripture, taught and reported by enlightened sages.

## The Medical Apocryphon and the Medical Treasure

Just as Vāgbhāṭa's summary of Āyurvedic knowledge had to be translated into the Tibetan language, the medical teachings of the Buddha also had to come to Tibet by means of either translation or revelation. Were they first recorded in an Indian language and then translated into Tibetan, like many other Buddhist scriptures? Or were they directly taught in Tibetan? Unlike Künpang Daö's medical treasure, the *Four Tantras* itself does not explain its own history of transmission to Tibet, and so later students of the medical scripture had to compose one. An important account that we will explore below frames the *Four Tantras* as a medical treasure that was translated during the imperial period, concealed by the Tibetan King, and finally revealed in the eleventh century. Despite these claims, however, the architects of the Tibetan canons chose to exclude the *Four Tantras* from the Canon of Translated Scriptures (*bka' 'gyur*). Indeed, one particularly candid scholar, Chomden Rikpé Reldri (*bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri*,

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<sup>55</sup> Again, see McGrath 2017.

1227-1305),<sup>56</sup> explains why:

Some have said that there are both non-Buddhist and Buddhist medical texts — that there are non-Buddhist tantras and Buddhist sutras and tantras, wherein the Buddhist tantras include the *Root Tantra*, the *Explanatory Tantra*, the *Instructional Tantra*, and the *Subsequent Tantra* [that is, the *Four Tantras*]. But these treatises, sutras, and tantras were all composed in Tibet. They are treatises that were composed by an individual [and presented] as if they were the medical teachings of the Ones Gone Thus.<sup>57</sup>

This condemnation shows that some scholars of late thirteenth century saw the *Four Tantras* as apocryphal and its Tibetan authors as disingenuous. During this time, however, an ambitious student of Yutok, Sumtön Yeshé Zung (*sum ston ye shes gzungs*, fl. early 13<sup>th</sup> c.), edited and expanded upon the cosmopolitan instructions of his teacher, finally setting them down in writing. In contrast to the later criticisms of Chomden, by the year 1234, Sumtön Yeshé Zung had completed the central scripture for a Buddhist medical tradition that would continue to "shine like the sun in the sky."

Sumtön Yeshé Zung studied with Yutok Yönten Gönpo and his disciples in the early thirteenth century. Sumtön describes the details of his education and his contributions in the *Indispensable Account of Transmission* (*brgyud pa'i rnam thar med thabs med pa*, ca. 1234). In this work, he traces the transmission of medical teachings from the emanated Buddhist sages, Rikpé Yeshé and Yilé Kyé, down to the Tibetan sage, Yutok Yönten Gönpo, by means of treasure revelation. Like the narrative frame found in the *Root Tantra*, Sumtön's account begins with the Buddha, Master of Medicine, and the emanated sages, Rikpé Yeshé and Yilé Kyepa. As opposed to the oral transmission described in the *Four Tantras*, however, "master of redactors, Sage Yilé Kyé, recorded [this dialogue] with melted beryl in a precious golden tome and then wrapped it in satin adorned with suns, crystals, and silken fabrics."<sup>58</sup> Eventually the teachings of the *Four Tantras* passed from utopian sages to identifiably Indian figures, such as Kumāra Jīvaka, Nāgārjuna, and Vāgbhaṭa himself. The implication of this narrative, in line with that of

56 For more on Chomden's role as an architect of the Tibetan canons, see Schaeffer and van der Kuijp 2009.

57 *Gso ba rig pa rgyan gyi me tog: kha cig gso spyad gzhung las phyi nang gnyis// phyi pa'i rgyud dang nang pa'i mdo rgyud gnyis/ rgyud la rtsa rgyud bshad rgyud man ngag rgyud// rgyud phyi la sogs rnam pa gzhan smra ba// de kun bod kyi byas pa'i bstan bcos te// mdo rgyud de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsung rabs dang // gso rig gang zag byas pa'i bstan bcos yin/* (Bod ljongs bod lugs gso rig slob grwa chen mo 2014: vol. 3, text 40, 472 [ff. 2a-2b]).

58 *Med thabs med pa'i mchong [=phyong] gsum: sdud pa'i rta [=bdag] po drang srong yid las skyes kyis/ rin chen gser gyi glegs bam la/ bhe du rgya'i zhun mas bris/ za 'og nyi ma ris kyis bris/ de steng shel ras dar men dril/* (Bod ljongs bod lugs gso rig slob grwa chen mo 2014: vol. 3, text 3, 257 [f. 2a]). For a full translation and introduction to this text, see McGrath 2017.

the *Four Tantras*, is that the *Essence of the Eight Branches* derives from the *Four Tantras*, and not the other way around.

Finally coming to Tibet, Sumtön explains that Vairocana, the celebrated scholar of the Tibetan imperial period, translated the *Four Tantras* under the aegis of Tri Songdetsen. The latter then "concealed them in a pillar in the center of the upper chapel of the Three Families at Samyé monastery."<sup>59</sup> Like Kün pang Daö's medical treasure examined above, here Sumtön associates the teachings of the *Four Tantras* with the glory of the Tibetan imperial period. Unlike most other medical treasures, however, the *Four Tantras* represents a Buddhist scripture translated by Vairocana, rather than the inspired teachings of the Second Buddha, Padmasambhava. Shifting from the Imperial period on to Renaissance Tibet, Sumtön then describes that Drapa Ngönshé (1012–1090) revealed the *Four Tantras* from a pillar at Samyé, and transmitted it to Üpa Dardrak (*dbus pa dar grags*), Tsojé Könkyap (*'tsho byed dkon skyabs*), and Yutok Gönpö (*g.yu thog mgon po*). By explaining that the *Four Tantras* was taught by the Buddha, recorded by Yilé Kyé, transmitted by Indian sages, translated by Vairocana, concealed by Tri Songdetsen, and finally revealed by Drapa Ngönshé, Sumtön effectively shifts the status of the *Four Tantras* from the reported speech of the Buddha, to a cosmopolitan scripture that was recorded in a South Asia, translated into Tibetan during the Tibetan Empire, and finally redacted by Tibetan scholars during the Tibetan Renaissance.

An early curriculum and history of Tibetan medicine confirms the flourishing of the Yutok school at the turn of the thirteenth century. According to its colophon, Cherjé Zhangtön Zhikpo (*che rje zhang ston zhig po*) composed the *Blazing Peak of the Victory Banner: Arranging the Contents of the Origins of Medicine* (*sman gyi byung tshul khog dbubs rgyal mtshan rtse mo 'bar ba*) in the female wood-mouse year (*shing mo byi*) of 1204.<sup>60</sup> This date is most probable, particularly if we consider the claim that five generations separate the birth of Cherjé from the

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59 *Med thabs med pa'i mchong* [=phyong] *gsum: de la bai ro tsa nas zhus/ khri srong sde btsan khong la stad/ mnga' bdag khri bsrong lde btsan des/ bsam yas dbu rise rigs gsum gyi/ bar khang ka ba'i nang du sbas/ de nas 'dod lha'i zhag gsum nas/ grwa ba mngon shes can gyis bton/ 'dzam bu gling gi bdag por gyur/* (Bod ljongs bod lugs gso rig slob grwa chen mo 2014: vol. 3, text 3, 257-58 [ff. 2a-2b]).

60 *Sman gyi byung tshul khog dbubs rgyal mtshan rtse mo 'bar ba: la stod geung sa'i gling po gar kar shing mo byi pa'i spyid zla ra ba'i spus su zhang ston zhig po la shin tu gus pa'i slob ma kham sman rtsas rdha pa sogs pa'i yangs nyes 'bos sangs rgyas 'bul nas zhu pas gang par/ 'gro ba'i don la dgongs nas yi ger dkod pa'o/* (Che rje zhang ston zhig po ND: 46b). See also Martin 2007: 311. Dan Martin first published a preliminary analysis of this manuscript over ten years ago, but the temporary closure of the Tucci Collection in Rome prevented further analysis until recently. I had the opportunity to study the manuscript in the summer of 2019, and I would like to thank Michela Clemente for her hospitality and assistance during my brief visit to the Biblioteca Nazionale.

translation of the *Essence of the Eight Branches* in 1015.<sup>61</sup> This means that Cherjé's account is a rare narrative of the early medical traditions in Tibet over the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the only such account that does not derive directly from the Yutok school itself.

Placing the date of the *Blazing Peak of the Victory Banner's* composition at 1204 is important, because it separates the flourishing of Yutok Yöten Gönpo from that of his prolific student, Sumtön Yeshé Zung. Indeed, Cherjé provides the earliest extant description of Yutok, but does not elaborate upon any of his students. It comes in a section of the text where Cherjé instructs members of his own school about how they might prepare to debate with other schools or traditions (*lugs*).<sup>62</sup> Cherjé identifies Tsojé Könkyap as the "Teacher from Upper Tsalung" (*tsha lung stod ston*) and Yutok Yönten Gönpo as "Yutokpa" (*g.yu tog pa'*), and states that they taught in their tradition: 1. a narrative frame for medical teachings; 2. the reason for needing medical teachings; 3. a curricular outline; 4. a topical outline; and 5. scholastic commentaries on medical instructions.<sup>63</sup> Thus, according to Cherjé, Yutok and his teacher, Tsalung Tötön, should be remembered not for the instructions of the *Four Tantras*, but for their narrative, pedagogical, and scholastic innovations. Taken together, we can infer that there were multiple Tibetan traditions of scholastic medicine by the twelfth century, all of which drew from a common body of cosmopolitan medical instructions. After these brief summaries, Cherjé also states that there were countless other lineages that did not proliferate in twelfth-century Tibet because they were "afraid of letters."<sup>64</sup> This final criticism of traditions that were "afraid of letters" indicates that, with the exception of a few schools of medicine focused on the study of the *Essence of the Eight Branches*, most healing traditions in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Tibet were predominantly oral traditions.

In the *Indispensable Account of Transmission*, Sumtön Yeshé Zung explains that he, like Yilé Kyé in the opening scene, finally put the *Four Tantras* into writing. After the *Four Tantras* had passed from Drapa Ngönshé down to Tsojé Könkyap and Yutok, Sumtön heard about these famed physicians from his home in Rumtsam (*ru mtshams*). He entered the Yutok school and

61 Five generations with twenty years per generation results in a total of 100 years. Five generations with thirty years per generation results in a total of 150 years. Mangmo Mentsün would have already been an adult in 1015, so, Cherjé Zhangtön Zhikpo was probably born between 1140-1165. This means that he would have been between 40-65 years old in 1204. If we assume shorter generations, the wood-mouse year of 1144 might also be possible, but less likely. For further discussion and a chart of these generations, see Martin 2007: 311, 324.

62 Dan Martin describes these figures in his otherwise consummate study of the text, but somehow missed the passage on Tsalung Tötön and his famous student, Yutok. See Martin 2007: 319.

63 *Sman gyi byung tshul khog dbubs rgyal mtshan rtse mo 'bar ba: slob dpon// tsha lung stod ston nam g.yu tog pa' la sog pa' lugs kyi gleng gzhi bstan pa// dgos pa ston pa/ don gyi khog dbubs pa/ skyus kyis sa bcaad pa/ tshig gi 'bru gnyer ba dang lngar dod do/* (Che rje zhang ston zhig po ND: 28a).

64 *Sman gyi byung tshul khog dbubs rgyal mtshan rtse mo 'bar ba: gzhan lugs dpag tu med des yi ge 'jigs nas ma spros so//* (Che rje zhang ston zhig po ND: 28a).

studied along with the other disciples for three years before receiving permission to redact the *Four Tantras*, purportedly from Yutok himself. Yutok transmitted his teachings to Sumtön along with the blessings of the sages and told him to redact his notes in secret. Sumtön reports:

I followed his instructions. Sometimes I wrote on mountaintops, sometimes in the deepest valleys, sometimes in the deepest forests. Thirteen years later, in a *jina*-horse year [1234], in Pagor Temple in Yeru, I used my notes to compose a text. [A scripture] previously unknown, unexperienced, and unseen, now shines like the sun in the sky. May it shine gloriously for all living beings.<sup>65</sup>

Like Cherjé, Sumtön states that Yutok was a master physician, scholar, and educator. Sumtön learned oral instructions from Yutok, redacted his notes over a thirteen-year period, and finally finished the *Four Tantras* in the *jina*-horse year of 1234 at Pagor temple (*dpa' khor* [=spa gor] *lha khang*) in the district of Yeru.<sup>66</sup> Based on the absence of the *Four Tantras* and other members of the Yutok school from Cherjé's description in 1204, as well as Chomden Rikpé Reldri's criticism of the *Four Tantras* from the second half of the thirteenth century, I argue that 1234 is the horse year in which Sumtön redacted a complete edition of the *Four Tantras*. With this redaction, Sumtön closed the *Four Tantras* off from the further accretion, and thereby opened it to the scholastic commentaries and summaries of subsequent generations.

There is no single narrative frame for the *Four Tantras*. Readers can interpret the *Four Tantras* as a Tibetan treatise that summarizes and expands upon the *Essence of the Eight Branches* and other cosmopolitan instructions. This perspective is not new, of course, for Chomden Rikpé Reldri first expressed it in the second half of the thirteenth century, albeit in a critical fashion. We can also interpret the *Four Tantras* as a Buddhist scripture, which allows us to hear its medical instructions as the speech of the Buddha, Master of Medicine. Indeed, by reading its medical teachings as scripture, the scholars and practitioners of Tibetan medicine can frame the *Four Tantras* as the inspired source of all medicine, like a sun that shines in the sky, reflecting in all other medical traditions. In addition to these concerns over origins and influence, however, reading the *Four Tantras* as a medical treasure allows physicians to heal in accordance with Buddhist ethics and other narrative prescriptions. In other words, reading the

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65 *Med thabs med pa'i mchong* [=phyong] *gsum: gsung pa bzhin du lag len byas/ res 'ga['] ri bo'i rtse la bris/ res 'ga['] drog* [=grog] *po'i phug du bris/ res 'ga' shing gi tshig khar bris/ de nas mi lo bcu gsum nas/ rnam* [=gnam] *lo rgyal po rta lo la/ g.yas ru dpa' khor* [=spa gor] *lha khang du/ phyi mo zin bris dpe la bshus/ sngan chab* [=chad] *thos tshor mthong ba med/ da ni mkha' la nyi shar bzhin/ 'gro ba'i dpal du shar bar shog* (Bod ljongs bod lugs gso rig slob grwa chen mo 2014: vol. 3, text 3, 258 [f. 3a]).

66 For a description and map of Yeru, as well as a list of districts including Pagor, see Dotson 2009: 197-199, 209. I would like to thank Per Sørensen for discussing the identity of Pagor Temple with me.

*Four Tantras* as scripture allows healers to integrate the narrative world of Buddhist medicine into their practices and into their lives.

## Conclusions: The Buddhist World of Medical Treasures in Tibet

The practice of medicine requires the fusion of narrative worlds. When a person becomes sick, they often must narrate their illness to a physician. The physician then reconciles this narrative with their own training to diagnose the disease of the patient. "To know what patients endure at the hands of illness and therefore to be of clinical help," writes Rita Charon, "requires that doctors enter the worlds of their patients, if only imaginatively, and to see and interpret these worlds from the patients' point of view."<sup>67</sup> The task of the historian of medicine, then, is similar to that of the physician; one must retrieve the narratives of the past and reconcile them with their understandings of history. By entering the narrative worlds of medical treasures, we can also retrieve the institutional, ethical, and soteriological implications of Buddhist medicine in Tibet.

Although the ethical and soteriological implications of Künrang Daö's medical treasure remain largely implicit, the *Four Tantras* explicitly explains how and why one should practice medicine. In the second chapter of the *Root Tantra*, for example, Rikpé Yeshé states, "Those who wish to fulfill their duties, accumulate wealth, and find pleasure, should train in the instructions of the Knowledge of Healing."<sup>68</sup> This is a paraphrase of "Fulfilling duty (Skt. *dharma*), accumulating wealth (Skt. *artha*), and finding pleasure (Skt. *kama*)," recorded in the teachings of the Brahmanical sage, Ātreya, in the opening to the *Essence of the Eight Branches*.<sup>69</sup> Rather than study the "Knowledge of Longevity" (*tshe yi rig byed* = Skt. *āyurveda*), however, here the *Four Tantras* states that physicians should study the "Knowledge of Healing" (*gso ba rig pa* = Skt. *cikitsāvidyā*), or Sowa Riga, one of the five fields of scholastic knowledge (*rig gnas lnga* = Skt. *pañcavidyā*). In addition to the three worldly aims of life, the *Four Tantras* also promises "liberation" (*thar pa* = Skt. *mokṣa*);<sup>70</sup> but not from cyclic existence. "Those

67 Charon 2006: 9.

68 *Rtsa rgyud: chos dang nor dang bde ba sgrub par 'dod pa'i gang zag gis gso ba rig pa'i man ngag la bslab par bya'o/* (Rje bstan 'dzin don grub 2010: vol. 1, 23). A similar line appears in the first chapter of the *Bshad rgyud: 'gro drug gtso bor gyur pa mi lus la// mi na gnas dang na ba gso ba dang // tshe ring chos nor bde ba sgrub pa'i phyir// gso ba rig pa'i don rnams mdor bsdu na//* (Rje bstan 'dzin don grub 2010: vol. 1, 55).

69 *Yan lag brgyad pa'i snying po bsdu pa: tshe ni ring bar 'dod pa yis// chos dang nor dang bde ba bsgrub// tshe yi rig byed lung bshad pa// rab tu gus par bya bar gyis//* (Krungr go'i bod rig pa zhib 'jug ste gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang, ed. 2006-2009b: vol. 111, 143). Translated in conversation with Murthy 1991-1992: vol. 1, 3; and Vogel 1965: 48.

70 On the aims of life, see Doniger 2009: 199-211.

beings who wish to achieve liberation from the sufferings of disease and those who wish to be held in high esteem by others," Rikpé Yeshé instructs, "should all train in the Knowledge of Healing."<sup>71</sup> Just as the Buddha promised liberation from the suffering of rebirth, in the practice of Sowa Rigpa, Rikpé Yeshé promises liberation from the sufferings of disease.

In addition to fulfilling one's professional duties, accumulating wealth, finding pleasure, and liberating oneself and others from the sufferings of disease, the *Four Tantras* also promises the soteriological *summum bonum* of Buddhahood. In the *Explanatory Tantra*, the second of the *Four Tantras*, we find instructions for ritually embodying the Buddha, Master of Medicine. After reciting mantras and developing divine pride, one should imagine dispelling diseases and demons from oneself, and saving one's patients from death. The *Explanatory Tantra* concludes these instructions for attainment with explicitly soteriological concerns: "By healing patients and abandoning thoughts of deception, as a final result one will progress to the stage of unsurpassed Buddhahood."<sup>72</sup> The *Four Tantras* promises that, by altruistically practicing medicine as part of the bodhisattva path, a physician will ultimately attain unsurpassed awakening.

Sumtön Yeshé Zung, he who allowed the teachings of the *Four Tantras* to shine like the sun in the sky, practiced Buddhist medicine. "I imagined Master Yutok Gönpö to be like the sage Rikpé Yeshé, and I really am Yilé Kyé," Sumtön recalls. "I am sure that he was my teacher in previous lives, for his kindness was immense, and I shall never forget to place him on my crown. May he continue to grant me his blessings."<sup>73</sup> Read as a treatise, the *Four Tantras* is a medical text composed by the scholar and physician, Yutok Yönten Gönpö. Read as scripture, however, the *Four Tantras* is the recorded speech of the Buddha, Master of Medicine, transmitted by Indian sages, translated by Tibetan scholars, concealed as a medical treasure by a Tibetan king, and finally revealed by Tibetan sages. As such, medical students who enter into the Buddhist world of the *Four Tantras* gain the blessings of this lineage, and, with altruistic practice, may even ultimately attain the *summum bonum* of awakening. Buddhist medicine, then, is narrative medicine. By forging its narratives through the alchemy of medical treasures, the *Four Tantras* is scripture and treatise, cosmopolitan and vernacular, Buddhist and Tibetan.

71 *Rtsa rgyud*: 'gro ba gang zhig nad kyi sdug bsnal thar bar 'dod pa dang / gzhan gyi spyi bos bkur bar 'dod pa'i gang zag gis gso ba rig pa'i man ngag la bslab par bya'o/ (Rje bstan 'dzin don grub 2010: vol. 1, 23).

72 *Bshad rgyud*: mihar thug 'bras bu g.yo sgyu 'dod pa rnams// spangs nas nad pa gso ba la 'jug pa// bla med sangs rgyas la bgrod 'gyur zhes// 'tsho mdzad sman pa'i rgyal bos bshad pa yin// (Rje bstan 'dzin don grub 2010: vol. 1, 274-75). Translated in conversation with Gyatso 2015: 359.

73 *Med thabs med pa'i mchong* [= 'phyong] gsum: mkhas pa g.yu thog mgon po de/ drang srong rig pa'i ye shes lag[s] pa 'dra/ dngos rang yid las skyes sam mnyam [= snyam] tshe rabs kyis bla ma yin par nges/ bsam kyin sku drin che ba'i phyr/ mi [b]rjed rgyun du tsugs [= gtsug] tu 'khur/ rgyun chad med par byin gyis rlobs/ (Bod ljongs bod lugs gso rig slob grwa chen mo 2014, vol. 3, text 3, 258 [f. 3a]). For further discussions of this passage, see Yang Ga 2010: 90; 2014: 160; Gyatso 2015: 153.

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