

Lost in Space: Tibetan formulations of the *rDzogs-chen klong-sde*

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I. Introduction¹

Tibetan Buddhist doxographies commonly divide the philosophical and meditative doctrine of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs-chen*) into three major trends or Sections (*sde gsum*) of Mind (*sems-sde*), Space (*klong-sde*) and Instruction (*man-ngag-sde*). This traditional classification has often been followed by modern researchers, although the origins and nature of this classification are unclear. It has variously been interpreted as a device for delimiting the range of authentic strands of the Great Perfection and excluding those perceived as erroneous², or as classifications proposed in order to organize the variety of heterogeneous textual material in circulation. In any case, the first and last members of the threefold scheme, Mind and Instruction Sections, are considered to represent respectively the earliest and latest forms of Great Perfection. The middle section of Space has received the least attention in modern as well as traditional treatments and less is known about its historical role in the development of Great Perfection thought, although the

1 I would like to thank Jens Braarvig and Urban Hammar for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

2 Karmay 1988, p. 206.

potential importance of its study has been recognized.³ However, the Space Section is the most difficult of the three sections to define or demarcate, as traditional sources vary significantly in their descriptions of the system. In the present paper, I review some of the key texts relevant for the study of the Space Section and discuss the differences in their presentation of *klong sde*.

Of the three sections, the Mind Section (*Sems-sde*) is the earliest stage in the development of the Great Perfection. The chief scriptures of the Mind Section are included in the well known set of Eighteen Great Scriptures (*Lung-chen bco-brgyad*).⁴ Texts belonging to this set also circulated separately or in smaller sub-sets (such as the “five early translations”, *sNga-gyur lnga*, etc), but they had a unifying theme, the overall central concept of “mind of enlightenment” (*byang-chub-kyi sems*), which also gave the name to the section as a whole. The notion of the mind of enlightenment refers to the true nature of a person’s consciousness, which is essentially identical to the state of Buddha. The texts explain how accessing and abiding in this pure and perfect state of consciousness fulfils and surpasses all the various practices and methods of other Buddhist approaches.⁵ The Mind Section has been described as “the philosophy of the serene contemplator”,⁶ that is, lacking the complexities of ritual and yogic techniques. Although definitions of the Mind Section as a doxographical category are not without problems, it has a more or less defined core in the form of the above-mentioned eighteen texts.

The third, Instruction Section (*Man-ngag-sde*), is the most well-defined among the three sections. It has its own set of scriptures called the Seventeen Tantras (*rgyud bcu-bdun*).⁷

3 Germano 1994, p. 267.

4 For several versions of the list of texts included in this set, and also of other categories of the Mind Section, see Norbu and Clemente 1999, pp. 242-255.

5 The characteristic way the Great Perfection contrasts itself to the practices of the Vajrayāna is discussed below.

6 Karmay 1988, p. 213.

7 The list of the Seventeen Tantras is given in Achard (2003), pp. 55-56.

These were said to have been transmitted to Tibet by the Indian Paṇḍita Vimalamitra, who had been active in the eighth century during king Khri srong-lde'u-btsan's reign. According to the traditional account, he transmitted these scriptures to a select few Tibetans, who then passed them on for several generations, at times hiding and rediscovering them, until they finally reached wider circulation in the eleventh century. Closely connected to the Seventeen Tantras are two sets of explanatory and supplemental material, called *Bi-ma snying-thig* and *mKha'-gro snying-thig*, attributed respectively to Vimalamitra and his contemporary, Padmasambhava. These were also presented as texts whose connection to their supposed historical authors was established through narratives of concealment and rediscovery.⁸ Texts belonging to the Instruction Section take these texts as authoritative and share their distinct terminology. Besides the various developments in their philosophical theory, the Instruction Section can be contrasted with the Mind Section in its incorporation of numerous techniques from Tantric yoga as well as its original, innovative methods. This difference in orientation is also reflected in the name of the section, as *man-ngag* mainly denotes practical instructions for the meditator, at the level of yogic and meditative techniques, sequences of contemplation etc. The system of the Instruction Section is well defined also in the sense that its actual contemplative and yogic practices are attested in its fundamental Tantras, so that there is a clear correspondence between scripture and practical instruction manuals.⁹

By contrast, the Space Section is difficult to define or characterize uniformly. It has been variously described as a

8 On the transmission lineage of these texts, see Prats (1984), pp. 197-209.

9 This applies in particular to the Seminal Heart (*sNying-thig*), often traditionally defined as the highest subdivision of the Instruction Section called with names such as The Exceedingly Profound Super-Secret Unsurpassed (*shin-tu zab-pa yang-gsang bla-na-med-pa*) etc.

trend of Great Perfection almost identical to the Mind Section,¹⁰ or alternatively as occupying doctrinally a position between Mind and Instruction Sections.¹¹ This divergence appears not only in treatments of the Space Section in modern studies, but already in the works of earlier Tibetan authors. Unlike the other two sections, the various texts and practices known under the name of Space Section were not unified into a single system. Traditional Tibetan as well as modern authors variously portray *klong-sde* as based on Vajrayāna-like methods (or even “entirely tantric”¹²) or as a purely theoretical doctrine.¹³ As will be shown in this paper, this divergence may originate from the use of different source texts. In the following, I examine three distinct formulations of the doctrine of the Space Section: *klong-sde* as a class of Great Perfection Tantras, in the Oral Tradition of the Adamantine Bridge (*rdo-rje zam-pa*), and as a pseudo-doxographical category presented in Instruction Section texts. I discuss more extensively the tradition of the Adamantine Bridge and its relation to other Great Perfection traditions and Vajrayāna.

II. The Space Section as a doxographical category

One application of the term Space Section is as a designation for a class of Great Perfection Tantras that had the metaphor of space as their central theme. These Tantras themselves frequently refer to doctrine as the ‘Twenty Thousand Sections on the Nine Spaces’ (*klong-dgu bam-po nyi-khri*). ‘Gos Lo-tsa-

10 Karmay 1988, p. 213. Also, Klong-chen rab-'byams specifically defines one sub-class of the Space Section as agreeing with Mind Section in his *Grub-mtha' mdzod*.

11 The name of one of the traditions of the Space Section, the Adamantine Bridge (*rDo-rje zam-pa*) has been interpreted as “bridging” Mind and Instruction Sections (Zhwa-dmar chos-kyi grags-pa, *sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i khrid-yig skal-bzang mig-'hyed*, NyKG vol. 19, p. 144).

12 Kong-sprul, *Shes-bya kun-khyab*, pp. 108, 304-306; Karmay 1988, p. 209.

13 Klong-chen rab-'byams, *Grub mtha' mdzod*, pp. 1141-54; Karmay 1988, p. 214.

ba (1392-1481), introducing the Space Section in the *Blue Annals*, his celebrated history of Buddhism in Tibet, describes it as follows:

It is said that the subject matter of the greater *Equal to Sky Tantra* (*Nam-mkha'-dang mnyam-pa*) consists of Nine Spaces and its text consists of twenty thousand sections (*bam-po*). The [greater version in] twenty thousand sections is that which remains in the hands of the realized ones, its complete translation being unavailable here. The subject matter of the lesser *Equal to Sky Tantra* also consists of Nine Spaces: 1) the Space of View; 2) the Space of Behavior; 3) the Space of Maṇḍala; 4) the Space of Initiation; 5) the Space of Commitment; 6) the Space of Achievement; 7) the Space of Activity; 8) the Space of Paths and Stages; 9) the Space of Fruition. Each is presented in a separate chapter in chapters 11-19.¹⁴

'Gos lo-tsa-ba identifies only one Tantra, *Equal to the End of Sky*,¹⁵ as based on this scheme of ninefold space, although in fact there are several others.¹⁶ According to this Tantra, the Nine Spaces are not separate entities but nine aspects of the single "basis of mind" (*sems-kyi gzhi*),¹⁷ the fundamental nature of consciousness. This basis is likened to space (*klong*); each of the the Nine Spaces uses the image of space to relate awareness of one's fundamental nature to different aspects of the Vajrayāna path.

The difficulty of translating the Tibetan word *klong* has been noted by several authors (e.g. Snellgrove (1967, p. 262 n. 71), Germano (1992, p. 937). The meanings of the word include 'space' and also 'center', 'interior'. *Klong-yangs* is 'spacious, expansive'. *Klong-'khyil* means 'whirlpool' or a 'round sphere of light'. *rBa-klong* means 'wave'; the 8th century Sanskrit-

14 'Gos lo-tsa-ba, *Deb-ther sngon-po*, pp. 154-155.

15 The text is found in e.g. vol. 2 of the mTshams-brag edition of the *rNying-ma rgyud-'bum*, pp. 2-278, under its complete title, *rDo-rje sems-dpa' nam-mkha'i mtha' dang mnyam-pa'i rgyud chen-po*.

16 Including some, but not all, of the texts under the *klong-sde* section of the sDe-dge edition of the NGB (listed in Appendix 2), and others such as the *rGya-mtsho klong-dgu'i rgyud* etc.

17 TshB vol. 2, p. 122.

Tibetan dictionary *Mahāvyutpatti* has *klong* as part of *klong-dang bcas-pa* to translate Sanskrit *sāvartam*.¹⁸ The fabricated Indic titles of Great Perfection Tantras give *āvarta* (Skt. for ‘whirl, whirlpool, turning’) as the original for *klong*, which may indicate the use of *Mahāvyutpatti* in constructing these titles.

The Tantras themselves, however, seem to use *klong* in a sense close to ‘space’. Buddhist scholastic lists of basic phenomena include “space”, defined that which does not hinder matter, but the word used is *nam-mkha*’ (Skt. *ākāśa*), which in Tibetan also means simply ‘sky’. It is an instance of unconditioned (i.e. not created by causes and conditions) and pure (i.e. not associated with non-virtuous qualities) phenomena.¹⁹ The word *klong* is used in the Great Perfection Tantras to convey similar qualities. It can refer to the expanse of the sky as well as the ‘mental sphere’ of an individual. The term *klong* is used to describe aspects in which the individual’s true nature of mind is analogous to space. For example, space is present everywhere and no effort is needed to reach it; it cannot be transcended; it is immense, encompassing everything; it is devoid of characteristics and cannot be apprehended; it is without center or periphery; it is eternal and uncaused; there is no support in space and nothing to focus on; and so forth.

For a summary of the doctrine of the Nine Spaces in the *Equal to the End of Sky Tantra*, I have translated here a section of its twenty-first chapter, *On the Division into Nine Spaces* (*glong dgur phye-ba’i le’u*), which describes each Space in one verse. More extensive discussions can be found in chapters 11-19 of the Tantra. For the translation, I have used the version in the *mTshams-brag* (TshB) edition of the *rNying-ma rgyud-’bum*, vol. 2, pp. 123-124. I have also consulted the *gTing-skyes* (TK) edition, where the text is found in Vol. 3, pp. 521-522. I have

18 Mahāvyutpatti no. 7037 (Sakaki 1916, pp. 453-4).

19 Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, tr. Pruden (1988), vol. I, pp. 58-59. Alternatively, *ākāśa* is part of the enumeration of six elements (*dhātu*) of matter, in this context referring to spaces of cavities (ibid., pp. 88-89).

supplied a heading to each verse; the text of the verse itself does not always mention the Space it corresponds to.

[1. The Space of View]

The self-illuminating awareness without boundary or center—
however it appears, in no way is it made into a focus.
Objectless awareness transcends thought and object.
This is the Space of Mind, the non-objectified view.

[2. The Space of Behavior]

When acting [within the state of] the wisdom of clear light—
just as grasping for characteristics is not present in the sky,
grasping for that which should be taken up or avoided is not present
in the blissful Space of carefree behavior.

[3. The Space of the *maṇḍala*]

In the uncreated *maṇḍala* of awareness,
there are no external objects to be attached to;
[everything manifests] within the mind of enlightenment as [its] inherent
clarity:
this is the Space of the uncreated *maṇḍala* of inherent clarity.

[4. The Space of Initiation]

As the triple realm is pervaded by the light of the Jewel
and non-duality is realized, the initiation is conferred:
Royal anointment through all-pervading awareness is the Space of
Initiation.

[5. The Space of Commitment]

As for the nature of mind that does not need to be maintained:
The superior commitment abides in the Basis (*gzhi*).
One does not go beyond (‘*das-pa*) the essence (*thig-le*)—
This is the Space of Commitment beyond maintaining, impossible to
transcend (‘*da’-med*).

[6. The Space of Activity]

In the sphere of reality, clear light in which there is nothing to be done,
[enlightened] activities are spontaneously accomplished without seeking.
Impartial wisdom of clear light
is the Space of supreme Activity, free from seeking.

[7. The Space of Accomplishment]

In the sphere of reality devoid of thought and focus,
one should settle with undistracted awareness of clear light

within the space of awareness of the inherent clarity of wisdom:
this is the Space of uncontrived Mind (*dgongs-pa*).

[8. The Space of Levels and Paths]

Since cyclic existence (*'khor ba, saṃsāra*) is Buddha since the beginning,
there is no aim toward which to proceed;

therefore there is no progression along the levels and paths.

This is the Space of the ultimate path, mind-itself.

[9. The Space of Fruition]

In the same way that a heap of jewels is illuminated,

the inherent clarity of awareness is spontaneous.

Not born from causes and conditions

is the Space of wisdom, the self-arising Fruition.

View (Skt. *dr̥ṣṭi*, Tib. *lta-ba*) denotes the correct worldview, the proper understanding of reality on which the religious path is based. Different schools of Buddhism define it in various ways, such as absence of self-identity in a person, lack of true existence of all phenomena, and so on. It is part of the triad of view, meditation and behavior (*lta-sgom-spyod gsum*) as elements of the Buddhist path. In this context, ‘view’ usually denotes a theoretical understanding, which one is to experientially realize in a state of meditation (*sgom-pa*). In the Great Perfection, however, view is often defined not as a theoretical position about an objective reality but in experiential terms, as a state of awareness of one’s own true nature: such awareness (*rig-pa*) is in itself said to constitute “view”. In the above verse, proper view is described through the metaphor of space, which does not have a central point or extremities (*dbus-mtha' med*). The standard description of the correct world-view in Mahāyāna (as well as Vajrayāna) is also that it is ‘free from extremes’ (*mtha'*) of reifying phenomena as existent or nihilistically asserting their non-existence. In the state of awareness of one’s true nature, one does not apprehend subject or object, nor the existence or non-existence of anything.

Proper behavior (Skt. *caryā*, Tib. *spyod-pa*) refers to one’s activities — taking up what is virtuous and avoiding the non-virtuous. According to the Great Perfection however, ultimate behavior operates within the state of “wisdom of clear light” of one’s true nature. Discriminating one’s actions as good or bad

involves grasping for characteristics, but just as there is nothing to cling to in the sky, there are no characteristics in the state of knowledge of the essential nature of one's mind.

Maṇḍala (Tib. *dkyil-'khor*) is an important concept in Vajrayāna. It denotes the enlightened dimension of a Buddha, an orderly idealized world centered on a deity. In meditative visualization, the practitioner identifies him- or herself with the deity and imagines that all of one's perception is its sacred environment. In contrast, the Great Perfection claims that to mentally create a *maṇḍala* is unnecessary. All of one's perception is already part of the domain of one's enlightened nature of mind. The true nature of mind is endowed with cognitive clarity (*gsal-ba*), which gives the mind its perceptual capacity. Perceived objects are just aspects of one's intrinsic clarity, and as such are just manifestations of one's enlightened nature, although perceived as external and impure. One's perceptual world surrounding oneself as the center is therefore said to be equivalent to a *maṇḍala*, effortlessly present by virtue of one's natural clarity.

Initiation (Skt. *abhiṣeka*, Tib. *dbang*) is the Vajrayāna rite through which the Guru authorizes the disciple to engage in the practices of a particular Tantric system. The disciple is ritually introduced to the deity and *maṇḍala*, and assumes commitments (*samaya*). Already in possession of the germ of enlightenment, formerly the disciple was like a prince who belongs to the royal family of Buddhas; initiation is analogous to coronation, enabling the disciple to "become king" and visualize oneself in the perfect form of the deity in the center of the *maṇḍala* palace. In contrast, the Great Perfection rhetorically claims that initiation is naturally obtained since the beginning. The clarity of the enlightened nature of mind encompasses the whole of space, and if one realizes the non-duality of one's perceptual world and the one's own essential clarity, this is equivalent to initiation. The term often found in Great Perfection for this recognition is "royal anointment" (*rgyal-thabs spyi-lugs*), continuing the royal metaphor found also in Vajrayāna. It should be noted that although the rite of initiation was rhetorically rejected in the Great Perfection, it does not mean that it was not performed in practice. "Royal anointment" is in fact the name of

the rite through which the disciple is introduced to the Great Perfection.

With the receiving of initiation, the Vajrayāna disciple assumes various commitments (Skt. *samaya*, Tib. *dam-tshig*) related to maintaining the continuity of spiritual practice, ethical rules, harmonious relations with the Tantric community, etc. This concept is again reinterpreted in the Great Perfection: true commitment is not going beyond one's true nature, and since this is ever-present within oneself, this commitment is also impossible to break. Or, expressed with the metaphor of space—one cannot transgress the boundaries of the commitment, just as one cannot pass beyond space.

Activity (Skt. *karma*, Tib. *'phrin-las*) means the activity of an enlightened person—the term applies to the activities of the Buddha for the good of all sentient beings, and also the charismatic activities of a Vajrayāna adept. Through various ritual practices, the Vajrayāna practitioner aims to acquire spiritual power, which is then used to enact the four types of activities—the rituals of pacification, subjugation, enrichment, and forceful elimination. These practices are criticized in the Great Perfection because they involve effort: enlightened activities are perfected just by abiding in clear light, the true nature of mind.

Accomplishment²⁰ (Skt. *sādhana*, Tib. *sgrub-pa*) refers to activities undertaken to reach enlightenment, such as engagement in rituals, recitation of mantras, etc. For the Great Perfection, achievement is effortless, since the result is already present in oneself. For this reason, the proper practice is one of non-achievement, involving only undistracted resting in the clarity of one's awareness.

In keeping with the immediacy of enlightenment ever-present in oneself, the Great Perfection also rejects the notion of gradual

20 The verse cited does not actually include the word *sgrub-pa*, “achievement”, but corresponds to the respective Space.

progression towards enlightenment.²¹ Great Perfection is sometimes described as having a single level (*sa-gcig-pa*)²² — that of Buddhahood, which is present as the true nature of one's own mind.

The enlightened state, the fruition (Skt. *phala*, Tib. 'bras-bu) of the religious path, is only brought about by proper causes and necessary secondary conditions, according to most non-Great Perfection Buddhist traditions. The argument for the necessarily causal nature of the process of enlightenment can be made even in conjunction with assertion of one's enlightened nature: the latter may be present in oneself only in the manner of a seed and, despite being substantially the same as the fruition, would require cultivation and proper supportive conditions in order to be actualized as such. The Great Perfection offers a more radical interpretation of the enlightened essence of mind, rejecting the possibility that the resultant state could be brought about by causes.

Nine Spaces and the Ten Absences

Each of the Nine Spaces expresses the doctrine of the Great Perfection through addressing an element of Vajrayāna. They demonstrate how the single practice of maintaining awareness of one's true nature encompasses the essential meaning of the respective Tantric counterparts, and even surpasses them. The doctrine of the Great Perfection is thus defined through its relation to Vajrayāna practices. As the *Equal to the End of Sky* states, the Nine Spaces constitute a complete presentation of the Great Perfection: there is no teaching of the Great Perfection that is not included within the Nine Spaces.²³

A very similar presentation of the relationships between Great Perfection and Vajrayāna is found in earlier texts of the

21 On the question of sudden versus gradual approach to the Great Perfection in the works of 'Jigs-med gling-pa (1730-98), see Van Schaik 2004a.

22 Karmay 1988, p. 47.

23 TshB vol. 2, p. 123: *rdzogs chen byang chub theg pa de/ /glong dgur ma 'dus bstan pa med/*

Mind Section, such as the *All-Creating King Tantra* (*Kun-byed rgyal-po*), and is called Ten Absences (*med-pa bcu*), which consists of the following ten negations: 1) *view* is not to be cultivated (*lta-ba bsgom-du med-pa*); 2) *commitment* is not to be kept (*dam-tshig bsrung-du med-pa*); 3) *mandala* is not to be created (*dkyil-'khor bskyed-du med-pa*); 4) *initiation* is not conferred (*dbang-la bskur-du med-pa*); 5) *enlightened activities* are not to be sought (*'phrin-las btsal-du med-pa*); 6) *paths* are not to be traversed (*lam-la bgrod-du med-pa*); 7) *levels* are not to be trained in (*sa-la sbyang-du med-pa*); 8) *behavior* is without adopting and avoiding (*spyod-pa blang-dor med-pa*); 9) *wisdom* is without obscuration (*ye-shes sgrib-pa med-pa*); 10) *spontaneous perfection* is beyond seeking (*lhun-grub btsal-du med-pa*).²⁴ These correspond for the most part to the Nine Spaces, with the exception that “attainment” (*sgrub-pa*) is replaced with “wisdom” (*ye-shes*) and the “levels and paths” category is split into two. Both the Absences and the Spaces are based on earlier lists of the principles of Tantra, found in Vajrayāna texts. Commentaries to the Guhyagarbha Tantra, one of the main scriptures of the Vajrayāna tradition in the rNyingma school, elaborated various lists of seven, nine, or ten principles of Tantra (*rgyud-kyi dngos-po* or *rgyud-kyi rang-bzhin*), which in the main corresponded to those enumerated above.²⁵

The basic structure of the presentation of the Great Perfection is very similar in the Tantras of the Mind Section and in the Tantras that employ the Nine Spaces as the main metaphor. An additional point of similarity between Mind Section Tantras and *Equal to the End of Sky* is that they do not prescribe any particular techniques for the practitioner, such as physical postures or movements, structured meditative exercises, etc. Other texts, such as the Seventeen Tantras of the Instruction Section (*Man-ngag-sde*) present various techniques for inducing

24 Tibetan from the headings to Chapters 59-68 of the *All-Creating King Tantra*, according to the chapter index in Norbu and Clemente, *Supreme Source*, p. 258.

25 Some of these lists are discussed in Germano 1994, pp. 205-207.

mental states conducive for realization of the deepest nature of mind. By contrast, Mind Section and Nine Spaces Tantras have the appearance of being “theoretical” texts, verbally introducing the nature of mind, and demonstrating how its realization is a self-sufficient spiritual practice. This does not necessarily entail that the communities that took those texts as authoritative scripture did not employ structured contemplation exercises, meditative or yogic techniques, since these may have been prescribed by separate instruction texts (*man-ngag* or *gdams-ngag*). Nevertheless, judging on the basis of these Tantras themselves, there are strong similarities between Nine Spaces texts and Mind Section Tantras, so that the two can appear “nearly identical with respect to their philosophical doctrines”.²⁶

III. Space Section as the Adamantine Bridge (*rDo-rje zam-pa*)

After introducing the Space Section as the Nine Spaces of the *Equal to the End of Sky Tantra*, ‘Gos lo-tsa-ba continues that “There is also the instruction of the Vajra Bridge based on the *Secret Wisdom (Ye-shes gsang-ba)* and other tantras, granted by Vairocana to one sPangs mi-pham mgon-po who was at that time eighty-five years old.”²⁷ Although ‘Gos lo-tsa-ba does not explicitly comment on the relation between this instruction and the previously discussed doctrine of the Nine Spaces, he seems to indicate that the tradition described, Vajra Bridge (*rdo-rje zam-pa*), is in some sense distinct from the former. The Vajra Bridge is described as an “instruction” (*man-ngag*), which usually refers to texts of a more practical character. Another significant pointer is ‘Gos’s statement that it is based not on the *Equal to the End of Sky*, but another Tantra, *Secret Wisdom*. In any case, the tradition is identified as belonging to the Space Section (its full title is “the Adamantine Bridge, the Oral

26 Karmay 1988, p. 209, p. 213.

27 *Deb-ther sngon-po*, p. 155.

Lineage of the Space Section of Great Perfection”, *rdzogs-pa chen-po klong-sde'i snyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa*).

The texts of the rDo-rje zam-pa have survived mostly as a section of the larger text collection, *rNying-ma bka'-ma rgyas-pa* (NyKG). Unlike the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients* (*rNying-ma'i rgyud-'bum*), this collection includes relatively few Tantras. Instead, it focuses mainly on “human-authored” texts, i.e. texts that had identifiable authors. Such texts included commentaries on Tantras, treatises, liturgies, instructions (*man-ngag*), etc.

The texts of the rDo-rje zam-pa collection included in the NyKG vols. 18-19, are organized into four sections, termed ‘cycles’ (*skor*):

- I. The section of the basic text and commentaries (*gzhung dang yig-sna'i skor*). This includes the short basic text by Vairocana in twenty-two lines, three commentaries by Kunbzang rdo-rje, and supplemental texts (NyKG vol. 18, pp. 5-651);
- II. The section of empowering initiatory rites (*byin-rlabs dbang-gi skor*) of varying length (NyKG vol.19, pp. 5-67);
- III. The section on application of meditation and ritual (*sgom-sgrub nyams-len-gyi skor*), consisting of brief meditation manuals by various authors, ritual texts related to the deity Heruka mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po, activity-rites of the three Dākinī, and auxiliary rituals (NyKG vol.19, pp. 67-392);
- IV. The section on advices and instructions (*zhal-gdams man-ngag-gi skor*) is subdivided into outer, inner and secret advices and contains short manuals and songs of realization by the teachers of the lineage and instructions on subsidiary practices such as transference of consciousness (*'pho-ba*), etc (NyKG vol.19, pp. 392-439).

This division appears in the headings inserted between the texts and in a separate descriptive outline of the collection.²⁸ The contents of the collection are largely the same as described in Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho's (1617-1682) record of teachings received.²⁹ It is probably the same version that his student, gTer-bdag gling-pa 'gyur-med rdo-rje (1646-1714), included into his (sMin-grol-gling) edition of the Oral Teachings of the Ancients (*rNying-ma bka'-ma*) that was the basis of the present *NyKG*.³⁰

Characteristic to the collection is the abundance of Tantric rituals, those connected with deities Heruka mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po and three Ḍākinī as well as others. This raises the question of the role of Tantric practices in the rDo-rje zam-pa as it makes its approach appear very Tantric and ritualistic in nature. However, commentators to the rDo-rje zam-pa indicate that Tantric rites are to be seen as auxiliary practices. As such, they are secondary to the main practice (*dnegos gzhi*) that is Great Perfection contemplation of the nature of mind, and which is not here practiced in the formalized context of Tantric *sādhana*.³¹

In addition to the two volumes in the *NyKG*, at least one text survives in several editions of the *rNying-ma'i rgyud-'bum*. This is the text titled *Chos thams-cad sems-nyid ye-shes-kyi rgyal-po dnegos-grub rang-byung-du spyod-par dbang-bskur-ba*, the

28 *sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i dkar-chag*, vol. 18, pp. 632-633. Author of text not given.

29 Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho, *Zab-pa dang rgya-che-ba'i dam-pa'i chos-kyi thob-yig gangga'i chu-rgyun*, Vol. 2, pp. 316-324.

30 In the present bDud-'joms edition, texts under the above four categories are supplemented by various ritual texts by 'Jam-mgon kong-sprul (1813-1899) in vol. 19.

31 For example, see *sGom-gyi khrid-rim bco-nga-pa rgyud lung man-ngag mi-'gal-ba* by 'O-la jo-sras (*NyKG* vol. 19, pp. 128-129), which describes fifteen types of instruction found in rDo-rje zam-pa, and explains that Tantric practices such as activity rites of deities, transference of consciousness (*'pho-ba*), extraction of essences (*bcud-len*) etc are all supportive practices that address various worldly problem situations and are to be applied according to particular circumstances of the practitioner.

colophon of which calls it “the Bridge of the Oral Lineage” (*rNa-brgyud zam-pa*).³² The text was known to and quoted by Kun-bzang rdo-rje, but not under the long title. Instead, the text was known to authors of the rDo-rje zam-pa lineage as *The Great Bridge, the Stacked Magical Mirrors* (*Zam-pa chen-po 'phrul-gyi me-long brtsegs-pa*; alternatively also *rna-brgyud 'phrul-mig brgyud-pa'i rdo-rje zam-pa*) The author of the *Great Bridge* is not given; the Vai-ro and gTing-skyes editions style it a Tantra (*rgyud*), but it does not follow the common format of a Tantra. What is noteworthy about this text is that appears to be basically a longer version of the basic verses (translated below), and it includes most of the lines in Vairocana’s text almost verbatim. It is unclear what relation the *Great Bridge* bears to Vairocana’s verses: it could be either the source from which the lines of the brief basic text were borrowed, or it could be an expansion based on Vairocana’s original text. Given its widespread presence in different editions of the *rNying-ma rgyud- 'bum* (especially the probably early *Vai-ro'i rgyud- 'bum*), it is likely that it circulated separately from the rest of the rDo-rje zam-pa texts from relatively early on.

The legend of the transmission lineage of rDo-rje zam-pa

Traditional histories of the succession of gurus who transmitted the teaching of rDo-rje zam-pa are found in Kun-bzang rdo-rje’s three commentaries on the basic text of rDo-rje zam-pa.³³ The

32 TshB vol. 9, pp. 617-677; Vairo'i rgyud- 'bum vol. 5, pp. 169-221; gTing-skyes vol.2, pp. 75-128. It exists also in the Rig-'dzin tshc-dbang nor-bu edition, vol. 2, ff. 35-58 (where it is classified as belonging to Mind section) and Nubri editions (according to the catalogue of Cantwell et al.). The sDe-dge edition has a *Chos thams-cad sems-nyid ye-shes rgyal-po zhes dngos-grub rang-gyur dbang-bskur-ba'i rgyud* (vol 25, ff. 250-269), but from the catalogues it appears shorter than the other editions and I haven't been able consult its contents.

33 These are the Greater, Medium and Lesser Histories found in the *NyKG* (*sNyan-brgyud rin-po-che rdo-rje zam-pa'i gdams-ngag gzhung bshad che-ba 'dzeng yab-sras-kyi slob-ma slob-dpon kun-bzang rdo-rjes mdzad-pa*, pp. 22-338; *sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i lo-rgyus 'bring-po gdams-ngag dang bcas-pa*, pp. 339-483; *rNa-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i lo-rgyus chung-ngu*, pp. 484-575).

basic text itself prescribes that as a preliminary to the main part of the teaching, the history of the lineage should be related in order to create confidence in disciples. The commentaries to the text therefore include lengthy sections on the history of the teaching, describing how it was transmitted first from the original Buddha Vajrasattva to the teacher dGa'-rab rdo-rje in the country of Oḍḍiyāna, and then through Indian teachers to Tibet. Kun-bzang rdo-rje's histories are the basis for 'Gos lo-tsa-ba's account of the lineage of rDo-rje zam-pa in his *Blue Annals*. The later Tibetan histories I've consulted³⁴ are based on the *Blue Annals*, sometimes incorporating its text verbatim. The *Blue Annals* has been translated by dGe-'dun Chos-'phel and Roerich (1976), and its account of rDo-rje zam-pa is reproduced in the *bDud-'joms Chos-'byung*, translated by Dorje and Kapstein in *bDud-'joms* (2002). The history given in the *Blue Annals* starts with the Tibetan translator Vairocana; an episode from the Indian pre-history of rDo-rje zam-pa is translated by Norbu and Clemente in the introduction to the translation of the *Kun-byed rgyal-po* (Norbu and Clemente 1999, pp. 33-35). I will therefore only briefly summarize here the history from its beginnings until Kun-bzang rdo-rje, the most important commentator on the rDo-rje zam-pa. The transmission lineage of the later teachers is given in Appendix 3.

The part of the legend that deals with the transmission in Oḍḍiyāna and India first describes how the Buddha Vajrasattva emanates a form named Sems-dag lha'i-bu, who transmits the teaching to dGa'-rab rDo-rje by placing a *vajra* on his head and uttering the syllables *A HA HO 'I*. dGa'-rab rDo-rje understands that these syllables indicate the ultimate reality of his mind: *A* signifying its uncreated nature, *HA* its non-cessation, *HO* the non-duality and *'I* the inseparability of the preceding three.³⁵

34 *Guru bKra-shis Chos-'byung, Zhe-chen chos-'byung, bDud-'joms chos-'byung.*

35 There are some shorter instruction texts in the rDo-rje zam-pa collection that are based on explanation of these four syllables. According to one of these (*Sangy-rgyas tshul-bzhi'i zhal-gdams*, *NyKG* vol. 19, pp. 366-371), disciples of lower capacity should be trained by means of the Four Signs (see section 3.3. on Four

dGa'-rab rDo-rje, having instantly realized Truth, transmits the teaching to Mañjuśrīmitra by means of the same syllables, and the latter instructs Śrīsiṃha in the same symbolic manner.

From Śrīsiṃha, the teaching is transmitted to Pa-gor Vairocana, the Tibetan translator. The story describes how Vairocana is requested by King of Tibet, Khri srong-lde'u-btsan, to go to India and bring back teachings beyond cause and effect. Vairocana undertakes the difficult journey together with his companion, Legs-grub. After numerous obstacles, they reach the master Śrīsiṃha and receive teachings from him. Vairocana first hears various Mind Section³⁶ Tantras, but is not satisfied until he receives the ultimate transmission in the form of the four syllables.

Subsequently, Vairocana is forced to escape back to Tibet, accused by Indian scholars of stealing the most precious teachings. In Tibet, he instructs the King in the doctrines he had brought. The Indian teachers then send a message to Tibet that Vairocana, instead of precious instructions, only possesses harmful teachings on malign mantras and black magic. The Tibetan ministers demand that the king order Vairocana executed, but finally settle for his exile to Tsha-ba-rong in Eastern Tibet. In Tsha-ba-rong, he meets g.Yu-sgra snying-po, who becomes one of his chief disciples. After a long time in exile, he returns to Central Tibet. On the way, he meets the old sPang Mi-pham mgon-po, whom he instructs in the doctrine. Having returned to Central Tibet, he announces that he had entrusted his teachings to three recipients: the translations of the Buddha's word were entrusted to the King Khri srong-lde'u-btsan; the Sections of Tantra and Space³⁷ (*rgyud-sde klong-sde*)

Signs below), whereas the more capable ones can be instructed by means of these four syllables.

- 36 The term used in the text is *sems-phyogs* and could also refer to Great Perfection in general. I have not found instances in Kun-bzang rdo-rje's texts of using Mind Section in the context of the Three Sections (*sde-gsum*).
- 37 The Tantra Section, according to Kun-bzang rdo-rje, refers to Anuyoga, a class of rNying-ma Tantras, while the Space Section is equivalent to Atiyoga (*MC*, p. 350).

were entrusted to g.Yu-sgra snying-po, and the single perfect truth was entrusted to sPang mi-pham mgon-po.³⁸ Afterwards, he passes away, leaving no physical remains.

The story of Vairocana, as related in Kun-bzang rDo-rje's Greater Commentary (GC, pp. 93-146) is in its basic structure the same as that found in the biography of Vairocana, *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag*.³⁹ It describes the same "sixteen trials" Vairocana endured during his journey to India and exile to Tsha-ba-rong, and quotes many of his songs that are identical (or nearly identical) in the *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag*.⁴⁰ There are differences in details, e.g. the description of the symbolic transmission in the form of four syllables is not found in the *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag*, the Space Section is mentioned but not emphasized, etc.

Vairocana's instructions to old sPang mi-pham mgon-po constitute the essential doctrines of what became known as the Oral Lineage of the Adamantine Bridge (*rna-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa*). sPang mi-pham mgon-po was ninety-five years old when meeting Vairocana (eighty-five according to 'Gos lo-tsa-ba). According to the legend, Vairocana first tried to transmit the teaching by placing his hand on sPang's head and uttering the four sacred syllables, but this manner of transmission didn't function since the old man had not been trained in the doctrines (*grub-mtha'*). Vairocana instructed him in the methods of the Four Signs,⁴¹ but as his body was weak, he wasn't able to sit straight in the meditation posture, so Vairocana had him sit with his knees held close to the body by the help of a meditation belt fastened around him, and a stick supporting his chin. He also gave him another support stick, on which he wrote some brief instructions so that sPang would not waver from the state of

38 The verse containing this announcement is also quoted in the preface to the basic text of the rDo-rje zam-pa, translated below, section 3.2.

39 The contents of the *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag* have been summarized in Karmay (1988, pp. 17-31).

40 Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho also describes this story of Vairocana as 'extracted from 'Dra-'bag' (*Gangga'i chu-rgyun*, p. 317).

41 On the Four Signs, see below, section 3.3.

Reality.⁴² By these means, sPang mi-pham mgon-po was then able to realize the sky-like nature of truth. Afterwards, he was said to have lived for a hundred years more.⁴³

Byang-chub rGyal-mtshan from the Ngan-lam clan had witnessed Vairocana announce that he had transmitted the ultimate teachings to sPang mi-pham mgon-po, and went looking for him to request teachings. sPang mi-pham mgon-po transmitted to him the instructions he had received, including the method of supporting the body with meditation belt and a stick.⁴⁴ He then went to meditate at Wa Seng-ge brag.

Za-ngam rin-chen-dbyig also had heard Vairocana's announcement and requested the teaching from sPang mi-pham mgon-po. The latter refused, saying that it was not appropriate to transmit this teaching to more than one student, and instructed him to go to Wa Seng-ge brag and request the teaching from Ngan-lam Byang-chub rGyal-mtshan, which he did. Another monk who had requested the teachings from sPang mi-pham mgon-po was Khu-'gyur gsal-ba'i mchog, who was also refused and became the disciple of Za-ngam rin-chen-dbyig. The three teachers following sPang mi-pham mgon-po in the transmission lineage were thus contemporary, lived at Wa seng-ge brag, and were said to have passed away in the same year.

The next recipient of the teaching was Byang-chub grags of the Nyang clan. At bSam-yas mChims-phu, he met another

42 These instructions are found in *NyKG* vol. 19, p. 401. *Written* instruction would seem to contradict Karmay's (1988, p. 208) suggestion that Mi-pham mgon-po was illiterate, which necessitated *oral* transmission (*rna-brgyud*) and that it is for this reason that the full title of the instruction was *rNa-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa*. The somewhat unusual term *rna-brgyud* (lit. 'ear-lineage') is also found in *Equal to the End of Sky* (*rNa-brgyud tshig gsum-gyi le'u*, TshB vol. 2, pp. 241-245) as well as in *rGya-mtsho klong-dgu'i rgyud* (*Vairo'i rgyud-'bum*, vol. 3, pp. 58, 60).

43 Kun-bzang rdo-rje's figure is the more conservative of traditional estimates. According to Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho, sPang lived to the age of 500! (*Gangga'i chu-rgyun*, p. 324)

44 The use of meditation belt and support stick remained a feature of the yogic practices of the lineage, and ritual entrustment of the meditation stick and belt became a part of the initiatory rite (*NyKG* vol. 19, pp. 48-50).

monk from the Nyang clan, Shes-rab 'byung-gnas from dBu-ru-zhwa, who requested the teaching from him. Nyang Shes-rab 'byung-gnas is also mentioned in Nyang-ral nyi-ma 'od-zer's (1136-1204) history, *Chos-'byung me-tog snying-po sbrang-rtsi'i bcud*⁴⁵ as a member of the transmission lineage of a group of texts called *bKa' ye-shes gsang rdzogs rgyud lnga*, on which more shall be said below. Nyang Shes-rab 'byung-gnas transmitted the teachings to sBa-sgom ye-shes byang-chub.

'Dzeng Dharmabodhi (1052-1168) received the lineage of teaching from sBa-sgom ye-shes byang-chub, whom he met in 1087. He was the first teacher in the lineage who transmitted the teachings of the rDo-rje zam-pa to more than one disciple. He is also the first about whom more biographical data is given by Kun-bzang rdo-rje other than the name, clan and miraculous deeds. In particular, information is given about his religious background. He met such teachers as the Indian Pha-dam-pa Sangs-rgyas, receiving the teachings of Zhi-byed; Ma-gcig lab-sgron, from whom he received her gCod-yul system of practice; from sGam-po-pa, he received his teachings on Mahāmudrā. He received the famed six Dharmas of Nāropa from dGe-bshes 'grol-sgom and the six yogas (*sbyor drug*) of Kālacakra from Yu-mo mi-bskyod rdo-rje. In short, he was extensively exposed to teachings of both old and new translations. In the dynamic and innovative religious scene of eleventh-century Tibet, he witnessed a multitude of novel systems of contemplative practice being introduced and gaining popularity. He followed suit himself, introducing to the public the doctrine that was his own specialty, the rDo-rje zam-pa received from rBa-sgom ye-shes byang-chub. The way that he initially propagated this teaching is described as offering it in exchange for the teachings received from other teachers, which illustrates the atmosphere of intense cross-pollination between the variety of religious traditions in that time period.

45 Nyang-ral nyi-ma 'od-zer, *Chos-'byung me-tog snying-po sbrang-rtsi'i bcud*, p. 490.

Apart from a few short instructions, ‘Dzeng Dharmabodhi did not compose written commentaries. His student, Kun-bzang rdo-rje, was the first to author more extensive commentaries on the doctrine of the rDo-rje zam-pa, which remain the most important sources for understanding the system. Like his teacher, he had been extensively exposed to the more novel Vajrayāna systems. The close contact between leading exponents of the rDo-rje zam-pa and new-translation Vajrayāna traditions from at least ‘Dzeng onwards left marked influences in the exposition of the tradition’s own doctrine, which was largely expressed through its relation to the emerging dominant paradigm.⁴⁶

It is not known how long the lineage lasted as a religious movement with rDo-rje zam-pa as the central practice, as it had been in ‘Dzeng Dharmabodhi’s time. The teaching continued to be transmitted, and instruction manuals continued to be composed (although not as extensive as Kun-bzang rdo-rje’s texts— see References for titles of e.g. ‘O-la jo-sras and Chos-kyi grags-pa’s texts). Nevertheless, at some point it lost its status as the main practice of the lineage. This appears to be the case at least by time of the lineage holder gZhon-nu dpal (1392-1481). By the time when the line of transmission reached gTer-bdag gling-pa (1646-1714), the Space Section “barely survive(d) in terms of [...] empowerments, experiential guidelines and verbal transmissions”.⁴⁷ Why the rDo-rje zam-pa went out of fashion is not known, but one could speculate that formidable competition from the extensive, attractively systematized doctrines of the Instruction Section may have been a chief cause.

The basic text of rDo-rje zam-pa

The basic text (*rtsa-ba*) of the tradition of rDo-rje zam-pa is a short verse text in twenty-two lines entitled *The main text on the instruction of the Adamantine Bridge, the Space Section of the Great Perfection* (*rDzogs-pa chen-po klong-sde rdo-rje zam-*

46 See section 3.3. on the Four Signs below.

47 Germano 1994, p. 279.

pa'i man-ngag-gi gzhung), which is ascribed to the 8th century Tibetan translator Vairocana. According to the tradition, it was written as a summary on how to apply in practice the essential points of a number of Great Perfection Tantras. The text is fundamental for the rDo-rje zam-pa in the sense that it forms an outline the stages and structure of religious practice in this philosophical and meditative system. Together with its commentaries, it gives an overview of the theory of the tradition.

To prepare the following translation and analysis, I have used the commentaries by Kun-bzang rdo-rje,⁴⁸ which are the most extensive explanations of the basic verses and the central theory of rDo-rje zam-pa.⁴⁹ Kun-bzang rdo-rje explains the meaning (*go-ba*) of each statement of the basic text as well as most of its separate words or phrases (*tshig*). His treatment of the individual words is often the occasion for extended discussions of various general Buddhist or specifically Tantric concepts and theories and of their relation with the doctrines of rDo-rje zam-pa. Even in his presentation of yogic techniques mentioned in the basic text, his emphasis is not so much on practical instruction of their application, but more on discussion of their function and role in the context of Buddhist religious path. While other, specialized manuals in the rDo-rje zam-pa collection give more details on the practical application of specific postures, visualizations etc.,⁵⁰ the commentaries of Kun-bzang rdo-rje give an overview of the system as a whole.

48 Dates unknown; was a student of 'Dzeng Dharmabodhi (1052-1168).

49 NyKG Vol. 18: *sNyan-brgyud rin-po-che rdo-rje zam-pa'i gdams-ngag gzhung bshad che-ba 'dzeng yab-sras-kyi slob-ma slob-dpon kun-bzang rdo-rjes mdzad-pa*, pp. 22-338, hereafter abbreviated as GC (Greater Commentary); *sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i lo-rgyus 'bring-po gdams-ngag dang bcas-pa*, pp. 339-483, (Medium Commentary, MC); *rNa-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i lo-rgyus chung-ngu*, pp. 484-575 (Short Commentary, SC).

50 E.g., 'O-la jo-sras's *rDzogs-pa chen-po klong-sde'i snyan-brgyud rin-po-che rdo-rje zam-pa'i sgom-khrid-kyi lag-len*, *gDams-ngag mdzod* vol. 1, pp. 413-416; Zhwa-dmar chos-kyi grags-pa, *sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i khrid-yig skal-bzang mig-'byed*, NyKG vol. 19, pp. 143-164.

As for the basic text itself, several versions of it are included in the *Klong-sde* section of the *NyKG*. The text is presented together with a brief anonymous interlinear commentary in pp. 13-16 in *NyKG* Vol. 18 (Version A), immediately followed in pp. 17-22 by another presentation of just the verses, without commentary but preceded by an anonymous introduction (Version B). There are differences in introductory sections and colophons of the two versions, but the main verses are identical in both.

The outline of the basic text

Following the usual Tibetan convention, the text is divided into three sections, namely preliminaries, main part and colophon. The preliminaries consist of the salutation (“Homage to the unerring, uncontrived, thought-transcending, inexpressible state”) and promise to teach (lines 1-2). Tibetan commentaries often state that for the most capable students, the preliminary sections of texts are sufficient for the understanding of the intent of the text. Here too, these sections are said to contain the essential meaning of the doctrine: words in the line of salutation (“Homage to the unerring, uncontrived, thought-transcending, inexpressible state!”) are correlated to the main elements of the religious path (view, meditation, behavior and fruition) and in another text said to be derived from a Tantra.⁵¹ The “promise to teach” (*bstan-par dam-bca’-ba*) here consists of a declaration that mind-itself, or the true nature of oneself, reveals the meaning that is its own intrinsic essence. The true act of teaching is therefore not transmission of information to one person to another, but the individual’s becoming aware of one’s previously unrecognized true nature.

Next comes the main part of the text, which is again divided into subsections. The commentarial tradition of the *rDo-rje zam-pa* has specific standard headings for these, which are used in all

51 *The King of Infinite Space Tantra* (*Klong-chen rab-'byams rgyal-po'i rgyud*), according to a commentary on the fourth chapter of the Tantra (*rDzogs-pa chen-po klong-sde'i rgyud-lung-gi rtsa-ba gces-par btus-pa*, *NyKG* vol. 18, pp. 9-17).

commentaries and outlines of the root text. The first section comprises lines 3-16 and is termed “the time of ascertaining the meaning” (*don gtan-la ‘bebs-pa’i dus*). This refers to the stages in the adept’s progress of becoming proficient in recognizing the true nature of his or her mind and dispelling doubts regarding it. The second section comprised by lines 17-19 is called “the time of having ascertained the meaning” (*don gtan-la phebs/babs-pa’i dus*) and the state of one who is able to abide in the awareness of one’s true nature. The third major section concerns “the time when the meaning manifests in experience” (*don nyams-su shar-ba’i dus*), i.e. the experiences that result from practice. The commentary compares these three sections respectively to seeing beer with one’s eyes, experiencing its taste, and the sparkle of the beer as the outer sign of its pleasant taste.⁵²

On the first stage of ascertaining the meaning, the initial step is indicated by line 3, which prescribes that the history of the lineage of teachers should be related in order to create confidence in the disciple regarding the authenticity of the teachings. In the commentaries, this line of the basic text is the occasion for telling the story of how the teaching was passed on from the mythical Indian teacher dGa’-rab rdo-rje down to the Tibetan masters.

Telling the story of earlier teachers serves as the preparation for the introduction of the actual teaching to the disciple. Line 4 (“Strike the great nail of the meaning of non-meditation”), according to the commentaries, is the heading for the subsection formed by lines 5-13, which indicates how the nature of mind should be demonstrated to the disciple. The enlightened nature of mind (called “mind-itself”, *sems-nyid*) is something that is present in oneself, and is something that does not need to be meditatively cultivated anew. For this reason, the practice of being aware of one’s true nature is called non-meditation. The Tibetan term for meditation (*sgom-pa*) has the connotation of intentional cultivation of mental qualities, and is therefore

52 MC, p. 359.

perceived as inappropriate for describing the process of recognizing qualities that are effortlessly present in oneself.

One needs, however, to make efforts to recognize the nature of one's mind. For this, the disciple should be shown the meanings of the "signs" (*brda*). In the terminology of the rDo-rje zam-pa, "signs" denote first the so-called "temporal sign"⁵³ (*dus-kyi brda*), the specific moment of time at which the disciple should engage in the experiential cultivation of what are called four essential signs (*gnad-kyi brda*) of non-conceptuality (*mir-tog-pa*), clarity (*gsal-ba*), sensation of pleasure (*bde-ba*) and the inseparability of the previous three (*dbyer-med*). These refer to experiences produced by specific yogic techniques, which function through manipulation of energy-winds (*rlung*, lines 6-7) and seminal essences (*thig-le*, lines 8-9) in the body. Their aim is to bring about a non-discursive, blissful state of awareness, in which the true nature of mind is made manifest. In addition, he or she should be taught the "path of adamant words, the key to mind" (*rdo-rje'i tshig-lam sems-kyi lde-mig*) which comprise lines 10-13 and constitute a verbal indication of the nature of mind.

Following that, one is instructed to "focus on the expanse of reality" (*dbyings-la gtad*, lines 14-16).⁵⁴ This means that one should simply rest in the non-conceptual awareness of one's own true nature. One should recognize this state as supreme

53 On this term, see below, p. 159.

54 It is noteworthy that a text by 'Jigs-med gling-pa (1729/1730-1798), a famous adherent of the Seminal Heart (*sNying-thig*) teachings of the Instruction Class, criticizes in his *Khrid-yig ye-shes bla-ma* the Space Section for "fixating on the expanse" (*dbyings la [...] gtod pa*, quoted in van Schaik 2004, p. 91, p. 349 n. 349). Could he have referred to Vairocana's text by this? The rDo-rje zam-pa is not listed among his list of teachings received (translated in van Schaik 2000). In any case, the word *gtad-pa* often has a negative connotation in the context of meditation on the ultimate, meaning undesirable "fixation" on a focal object. It is used in this negative sense even in the *Ye-shes gsang-ba* Tantra (*TshB* vol. 3 p. 5, quoted by Kun-bzang rdo-rje in *GC*, pp. 219-220.) The use of this term in the basic text could thus have been a potential target for criticism.

concentration, which is ineffable and inexpressible (line 15), and essentially equal to nirvāṇa (line 16).

Next is the stage in which the meaning is ascertained (lines 17-19). On this stage, one does not need to meditatively cultivate anything, to engage in rituals or amass virtuous actions. The reason is that the four Vajrayāna initiations are perfected in one's state of being (line 17), since these correspond to the four essential symbols. The main practices of the Vajrayāna, such as identification of oneself with deities (development stage) and esoteric yoga (completion stage) are essentially included in these initiations. In this state, the dimensions (*sku*) of Buddhahood are complete and there is nothing external to pursue. When the true state of one's mind is realized, this includes the essence of all vehicles (*theg-pa, yāna*) that lead to Nirvāṇa; there is no reason to rely on conceptualization and analysis.

Finally, the last three lines (20-22) concern the resultant state of such practice. The fortunate disciples who have met this ultimate teaching of Atiyoga need not make efforts with their body or voice, just to recognize the true nature primordially present in oneself is enough. When the enlightened nature present in oneself is realized, one becomes liberated from the suffering of cyclic existence and actualizes the state of Buddha. The colophon to the text states that was written by Vairocana as a summary of thirteen Tantras and thirteen practice manuals (*sgrub-sde bcu-gsum*), mentioning only the *Equal to the End of Sky Tantra* (*Nam-mkha'i mtha'-dang mnyam-pa'i rgyud*) by name. These twenty-six texts are listed by title in another text, *Outline of the Instruction of the Oral Lineage of the Adamantine Bridge* (*sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i man-ngag-gi khog-chings*, *NyKG* vol. 18, pp. 642-652). In the list of Vairocana's 26 sources, the Tantras discussed above in section 2.3 such as *Secret Wisdom* (*Ye-shes gsang-ba*) are listed as well as Tantras which are not mentioned in the writings of Kun-bzang rdo-rje. The list of thirteen practice texts (*sgrub-sde*) includes several texts which are often quoted by Kun-bzang rdo-rje, the most important among them the *Instruction on the Initiation of the Adamantine Bridge* (*rDo-rje zam-pa dbang-gi man-ngag*) and *The Great Bridge, the Stacked Magical Mirrors* (*Zam-pa chen-*

po 'phrul-gyi me-long brtsegs-pa). The first of these texts remains unidentified in any present-day collections.

The basic text translated here is preceded by an anonymous introduction. It does not appear in the other version of the text (*NyKG* Vol. 18, pp. 13-16) and is probably a later addition: it mentions concepts such as the rainbow body (*'ja'-lus*) and the Three Sections of the Great Perfection, and the *Buddhasamāyoga Tantra*, which were not mentioned in Kun-bzang rdo-rje's commentaries on the text.

Translation of the basic text

[17] The basic text of the Adamantine Bridge of the Space Section.

[18] I prostrate at the feet of the glorious supreme Guru who is not different from the primordial Lord. Please grant your blessing! The Ancient tradition of the Earlier Translation of Secret Mantra has the well-known twofold [classification of] extensive Orally Transmitted [teachings] and the profound [Revealed] Treasures. The first of these includes the triad of *Scripture, Illusion and Mind*.⁵⁵ Of these, the present teaching belongs to the category of Mind, the Three Sections of the Great Perfection. It is called the Orally Transmitted Lineage of the Natural Great Perfection and it summarizes the quintessence of the Yoginī Tantra of Great Bliss, the *Buddhasamāyoga*⁵⁶ [19] and extracts the essential meaning of thirteen Tantras, *Secret Wisdom (Ye-shes gsang-ba)* and others; of thirteen instructions of accomplishment, the *Instruction on Initiation*

55 Tib. *Mdo sgyu sems*, a common abbreviation referring to *The Scripture of Unified Intent (mDo dgongs-pa 'dus-pa)*, *Illusory Net (sGyu-'phrul 'dra-ba)* and *Mind Section (Sems-sde)*. These are the main texts of the three highest doctrines for the rNying-ma school, namely Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga. Mind Section in the context of this threefold classification includes all three sections of Great Perfection teachings (*rDzogs-chen sde-gsum*).

56 I have not found mention of the *Buddhasamāyoga Tantra* (Tib. *Sangs-rgyas mnyam-sbyor*) in Kun-bzang rdo-rje's commentaries. The *Buddhasamāyoga* was one of the Tantras that the rNying-ma and gSar-ma schools had in common, and its authenticity was therefore undisputed. It may be that the connection is made between it and the rDo-rje zam-pa in order to validate the latter.

of the Adamantine Bridge⁵⁷ and others; and of the Nine Spaces, the Space of View etc. This pinnacle of all vehicles belongs to the third among the earlier, middle and later transmissions of the instructions granted by Vairocana,⁵⁸ the sole eye of the world, who penetrated the treasury of the mind [20] of the learned Śrīsiṃha and others, in total twenty-five Indian scholars.

It is said in the *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag*:

“I, Vairocana, primordially possess eleven perfect qualities.”⁵⁹

Having studied the Dharma in the country of India,

I connected words and meanings and translated scriptures.

I made virtuous the kingdom of Tibet.

When the king and ministers all turned against me,

I was banished to Tsha-ba'i rong.

Having elucidated the Sections of Tantra and Space,⁶⁰

I entrusted them to g.Yu-sgra snying-po,

making virtuous the kingdom of Tsha-ba.

I entrusted the single perfect meaning to Mi-pham mgon-po.”⁶¹

Thus, he gave the oral transmission of the instruction to Mi-pham mgon-po; starting with him, seven [generations] of lineage

57 This text (*rDo-rje zam-pa dhang-gi man-ngag*) is quoted in Kun-bzang rdo-rje's commentaries, but is not extant in the *rDo-rje zam-pa* collection.

58 Vairocana's three transmissions (*brgyud-pa gsum*) were his instructions to king Khri strong-lde'u-btsan, g.Yu-sgra snying-po, and sPang mi-pham mgon-po, respectively (see quote from the *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag* below).

59 In the *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag*, gNyag Jñānakumāra and other students praise Vairocana by enumerating his eleven perfect qualities: 1) possessing compassion and the intent to attain enlightenment; 2) being a true enlightened emanation (*sprul-sku*); 3) possessing divine eyesight; 4) not returning to cyclic existence; 5) attaining the magical feat of fast walking; 6) achieving endurance and zeal; 7) seeing the truth of Reality; 8) having purified the two obscurations [of afflictive emotions and of cognitive error]; 9) attaining the state of an enlightened one; 10) being the regent of the Teacher (Śākyamuni); 11) being a bodhisattva (*Vai-ro'i rnam-thar 'dra-'bag chen-mo*, Si-khron mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang, 1995, pp. 226-227).

60 The Section of Space is understood by Kun-bzang rdo-rje to refer to Great Perfection as a whole (see below, section 3.4).

61 This verse is not found in the Dharma seng-ge version of the *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag* (the edition quoted above).

[successors] were liberated into rainbow bodies — bodies of light — without leaving behind physical remains.

This profound and exceedingly rare doctrine, passed down by these lineage masters from face to face and ear to ear, is divided into four sections (*skor*): the section of basic texts; the section of [rites of] blessing and initiation; the section of meditative and ritual practices; and the section of advices and instructions. The first among these is

- [21] The brief basic text of the essence of thirteen instructions of accomplishment, the orally transmitted instruction of the Adamantine Bridge.

Homage to the unerring, uncontrived, thought-transcending, inexpressible state!

(1) The enlightened mind itself, pure from the beginning,

(2) Teaches the meaning of its own essence.

(3) Unlock the great treasure, the statements⁶² of the orally transmitted lineage.

(4) Strike the great nail of the meaning of non-meditation.⁶³

(5) Impart the instruction which discloses the meanings of signs.

(6) [Since one's mind] does not abide in the state without clinging,

(7) [As a remedy] impart the instruction on arresting the movement of energy-winds.⁶⁴

(8) [Since one] is not firm in [one's recognition of] mind-itself, [there is] great proliferation [of desires and clinging].

(9) [As a remedy] impart the instruction on great bliss [through

62 According to the traditional history, the first members in the transmission lineage doctrine were the mythical Indian knowledge-holders (*rig-'dzin*) dGa'-rab rdo-rje, 'Jam-dpal bshes-gnyen and Śrīsiṃha, were able to instantly realize the doctrine merely by hearing the symbolic syllables A HA HO 'I uttered by the guru. These syllables constituted the authoritative "statement (*lung*) of the orally transmitted lineage" to which the line refers (*MC*, p. 360).

63 *GC*: "In mind-itself, the nature of things, there is nothing to be meditatively cultivated." (*GC* p. 202)

64 *GC*: "If one does not abide in the state of reality in which there is no grasping, all grasping discursive thoughts that occur are mental changes induced by movement of energy-winds; mental fixation arises and this is the extreme of cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*)." (*GC*, p. 210)

manipulation of] seminal essences.⁶⁵

(10) Teach the path of adamantine words,⁶⁶ the key to mind.⁶⁷

(11) In the state that is natural, fresh, and relaxed,

(12) Since there is no place of support, awareness is freed in its own place;

(13) Since there are no [adverse] conditions, awareness is purified in its own place.

(14) Without hope or fear,⁶⁸ focus on the expanse [of reality].⁶⁹

(15) This is the supreme concentration devoid of thought and expression.

(16) Being suchness, it is nirvāṇa.

65 MC: "Since one is not firm in the meaning of mind-itself, the nature of things, endowed with four characteristics [of being beyond meeting and parting, illumination and obscuration, coming and going, origination and cessation], and since there is excessive proliferation of desires, grasping, phenomena and characteristics, the instruction on [cultivating] bliss is imparted." (MC pp. 444-445)

66 The "path of adamantine words", *rdo-rje'i tshig-lam*. The term "path of words" (*tshig-gi lam*) is found in the Tantras of the Great Perfection, referring to that which leads to "the path of meaning" (*don-gyi lam*). Cf. *Ye-shes gsang-ba* (TshB, vol.1, p. 764): *don gyi lam dang tshig gi lam/ /don ni thug phrad gsum yin la/ /de yi brda phrad tshig gi lam/ /ye shes bgrod med rdzogs pa'i lam*; also, in the Bon-po text *rGyud bu-chung bcu-gnyis* (Rossi 1998, p. 79): *tshig gi lam dang don gyi lam/ /don gyi lam la bgrod du med/ /bgrod med rtsol bral lhun la rdzogs*. The two paths are also discussed in the context of the "Space of levels and paths" in the *rGya-mtsho klong-dgu'i rgyud* (Vai-ro'i rgyud-'bum, vol. 3, pp 66-68).

67 GC: "When teaching that meaning beyond thought and expression, in which there is nothing to be meditatively cultivated, in which not even the deepest, subtlest conceptual extremes abide, actual unconditioned Reality, the diamond that cannot be destroyed by conditions —the adamantine words that are used to indicate it oppose grasping concepts that pertain to [dualistic] mind and make one realize mind-itself, the reality of things; for this reason, they are called "key". (GC p. 241)

68 GC: "Hoping to attain Buddhahood above, fearing to fall into cyclic existence below" (GC p. 277)

69 GC: "The present awareness is the state of clarity without grasping, the uncreated and uncontrived reality without hope and fear, unchanging in the three times — this is the sphere of reality. (...) Abiding without change, equipoising without wavering from this state is "focusing on the sphere."" (GC p. 278).

(17) Since the initiations are naturally complete, there is no dependence on meditation, ritual or virtuous activities.

(18) Since the dimensions⁷⁰ [of the enlightened state] are intrinsically present, one is liberated from dualistic fixation.

(19) Since one realizes truth as singular,⁷¹ one transcends investigation and analysis.

(20) This is the supreme adamantine path.

(21) The fortunate ones are liberated without effort.

(22) Liberation comes from oneself, not from elsewhere.

This is the advice of the precious orally transmitted lineage of the Adamantine Bridge, which comprises the meaning of thirteen Tantras and the essence of thirteen instructions for accomplishment — the *bKa' Samanta*⁷² *Equal to the End of Sky Tantra of Blissful Conduct* and [others, in total] thirteen Tantras that ascertain the meaning of the adamantine essence (*rdo-rje snying-po*), and the thirteen instructions for accomplishment [that concern] the practice of the meaning of the lotus essence (*padma'i snying-po*).

The teaching of the teacher Vairocana is complete.

rDo-rje zam-pa and the Great Perfection Tantras

Little information can be gleaned from the traditional histories regarding the connection between the practical instruction (*man-ngag*) of the *rDo-rje zam-pa* and the Great Perfection Tantras in the early days of the lineage. The impression that Kun-bzang rdo-rje's history gives is that Vairocana transmitted to sPang Mi-pham mgon-po only his own short instructions, apart from these no other texts are mentioned. On the other hand, *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag* says that “the tradition of the third entrustment was

70 GC: “The dimensions (*sku*) are of five kinds: apparitional dimension, dimension of reality, dimension of enjoyment, dimension of essence, and esoteric dimension” (GC p. 299)

71 GC: “According to this instruction, the meaning of all higher and lower vehicles is spontaneously present in this undifferentiable truth, which is realized as singular, without even the deepest, slightest conceptual extreme” (GC p. 300)

72 The variously spelled (*Khasamānta*, *bKa' samanta*, *Kha samunta*, etc) prefix to the title *Nam-mkha'i mtha' dang mnyam-pa*, derived from the Sanskritization of the title (*kha+sama+anta*).

transmitted to sPam sangs-rgyas mgon-po [=sPang Mi-pham mgon-po] together with complete scriptural sources, including Tantras and instructions”,⁷³ without however specifying any titles. The only commentary to a Tantra preserved in the two rDo-rje zam-pa volumes of the *NyKG* is the annotation to the fourth chapter of the *Klong-chen rab-'byams rgyal-po'i rgyud*.

In any case, by the time of Kun-bzang rdo-rje, a number of Great Perfection Tantras were associated specifically with the rDo-rje zam-pa. The *Equal to the End of Sky* (*Nam-mkha'i mtha'-dang mnyam-pa*) was known to him, but quoted only once.⁷⁴ Instead, a Tantra entitled *Secret Wisdom* (*Ye-shes gsang-ba*) had occupied the central role among authoritative scriptures cited by him. In numerous quotations it was referred to as the “fundamental Tantra” (*rtsa-rgyud*) or even specified as the “fundamental Tantra of the rDo-rje zam-pa” (*rDo-rje zam-pa rtsa-ba'i rgyud*). It was cited as the authoritative source (*lung*) for the practice of the Four Signs. In particular, the following verse was interpreted as the essential summary of the way of contemplation in the rDo-rje zam-pa:

With one's body in a secluded place, cut the attachment to external [sense data] and internal [conceptuality], [assume the posture endowed with] seven characteristics (*chos bdun*), and balance the physical elements ('*byung-ba*) [of the body]. Without blocking the six sense aggregates, settle in mere ordinary awareness. Externally, the elements of the body are balanced; internally, inhalation and exhalation are absent. One arrives at the meaning of uncontrived naturalness. That which is called “human being” is Buddha. There is no Vajrasattva apart [from oneself].⁷⁵

73 *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag*, p. 230.

74 *NyKG* vol. 18, p.326.

75 As quoted in *NyKG* vol. 18, pp. 236-237: *rang lus dben pa'i sa phyogs su/ /phyi nang 'brel thag bcad nas ni/ /chos bdun 'byung ba cha mnyam nas/ /tshogs drug dbang po ma bkag par/ tha mal shes pa tsam la bzha/ /phyi ru lus kyi 'byung ba snyoms/ /nang du dbugs kyi 'gro 'ong bral/ /ma bcos rnal ma'i don la phebs/ /mi zhes bya ba sangs rgyas yin/ /rdo rje sems dpa' gud na med/ /*

Even from this brief quote, a shift of focus is apparent in comparison with the *Equal to the End of Sky Tantra*: here, a practical instruction is given for entering the state of contemplation. A particular posture of the body is prescribed, along with preliminary exercises to balance the physical elements, way of breathing, etc. Although these are very simple instructions, they represent a different orientation from the Nine Spaces of the *Equal to the End of the Sky*.⁷⁶

In various editions of the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients* (*rNying-ma'i rgyud-'bum*, *NGB*), the *Secret Wisdom* is found in two non-overlapping versions, of respectively twelve and seventeen chapters.⁷⁷ The twelve-chapter version is more common and is found adjacent to the *Tantra of Perfect Wisdom* (*rGyud ye-shes rdzogs-pa*), another text very often quoted by Kun-bzang rdo-rje (and often described as the “Tantra on meditation”, *sgom-pa'i rgyud*). The seventeen-chapter version is found only in mTshams-brag and Vairocana editions. Quotations that Kun-bzang rdo-rje attributes to the *Ye-shes gsang-ba* are found in either one or the other of the versions. In the most cases he does not discriminate between different versions when citing, except for a single instance where he states that there are *five* Tantras of *Secret Wisdom*, related to respectively the enlightened body (*sku*), speech (*gsung*), mind (*thugs*), qualities (*von-tan*) and activity (*'phrin-las*). He then quotes the seventeen-chapter version as the Tantra on activity.⁷⁸

In fact, the *Ye-shes gsang-ba* has been described as part of a set of five texts also in other sources: the *Chos-'byung rin-po-che'i gter mdzod* by rGyal-sras thugs-mchog-rtsal⁷⁹ lists a group of Tantras called *Instructions that directly indicate spontaneous*

76 The Secret Wisdom cannot be described as exclusively method-oriented, however. Much of its text is more theoretical, at one point it also mentions the Nine Spaces, although these are not central to its presentation.

77 The twelve-chapter version is found in TshB vol. 1, pp. 727-783; the seventeen-chapter version is in TshB vol. 3, pp. 2-37.

78 *NyKG* vol. 18, p. 330.

79 List of titles given in Norbu and Clemente 1999, p. 254.

liberation (*Rang-grol mngon-sum-du ston-pa'i man-ngag*),⁸⁰ which includes Secret Wisdom (*Ye-shes gsang-ba*), Perfect Wisdom (*Ye-shes rdzogs-pa*), *The Tantra on the Supreme Spontaneously Clear Awareness* (*Rig-pa rang-gsal mchog-gi rgyud*),⁸¹ *Equal to Sky* (*mKha' sa-mun-ta nam-mkha' dang mnyam-pa*) and *The Quintessential Tantra* (*sNying-po don-gyi rgyud*).⁸² Nyang-ral nyi-ma 'od-zer in his twelfth-century history text describes a transmission lineage of a group of texts called *bKa' ye-shes gsang rdzogs rgyud lnga*, which could be interpreted as *The Proclamation, the Secret and Perfect Wisdoms [and others, in total] Five Tantras*.⁸³ The transmission lineage of these texts passes through Nyang shes-rab 'byung-gnas.⁸⁴ If this is the same person listed in Kun-bzang rdo-rje's account of the lineage, it is possible that he was the one who imported and integrated this set of Tantras into the lineage of rDo-rje zam-pa.

Although called the fundamental Tantra of rDo-rje zam-pa, the *Secret Wisdom* does not appear to be the source of the latter's characteristic terminology and concepts. The term "four essential signs" (*gnad-kyi brda bzhi*) is not found; the term *brda*, 'sign', itself is attested but not used in the specific sense of the practices that it denotes in the instructions of rDo-rje zam-pa.

80 The *Vai-ro'i 'dra-bag* also describes a *Cycle of instructions that directly indicate spontaneous liberation* (*Rang-grol mngon-sum-du ston-pa man-ngag-gi skor*) as one of the most important teachings transmitted by Śrīṣiṃha to Vairocana, without listing its contents (*Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag*, p. 70).

81 Not identified.

82 *Ye-shes 'khor-lo gsang-ba snying-po don-gyi rgyud* (TshB vol. 9, pp. 21-39), quoted by Kun-bzang rdo-rje as *Ye-shes gsang-ba 'khor-lo* (NyKG vol. 18, p. 198).

83 Nyang-ral nyi-ma 'od-zer, *Chos-'byung me-tog snying-po sbrang-rtsi'i bcud*, p. 490.

84 The whole lineage is listed as follows: Vairocana, g.Yu-sgra snying-po, sPa-sgom rdo-rje rgyal-mtshan, Rab-srang lha'i dbang-phyug, Gru mchog-gi ye-shes, Nyang shes-rab 'byung-gnas, Nyang rdo-rje snying-po, Nyang ri-khrod chen po, Zag med kyi sku rnyed pa 'Dar ston dge-'dun, gNyan lcags-byil ba, sPa-se ras-pa, rTse phrom-bar lhas-pa, gLan Śākya mgon-po and dBas grub-thob pa (Ibid., pp. 490-491).

The practices of the energy-winds and seminal essences referred to in Vairocana's text (see section 3.2) are also not described. Perhaps the connection of *Secret Wisdom* and related texts with the rDo-rje zam-pa was asserted because of the need of scriptural support to the latter. This was achieved by simply connecting specific concepts of the rDo-rje zam-pa (e.g. immobility (*mi g.yo-ba*) [of the energy-winds in the body]) with corresponding concepts found in the text of the Tantra, used in more general Great Perfection context (e.g. immobility of the true nature of mind).⁸⁵

That the *Secret Wisdom* and its associated texts circulated also independently of rDo-rje zam-pa, without being necessarily associated with the Space Section, indicates the fluidity of the concept of the Space Section in the context of doxographic categorizations. It is likely that the notion of Space Section initially originated as a descriptive term based on the predominant concept in certain Tantras (the Nine Spaces). The term was then extended to instructions (*man-ngag*) of the rDo-rje zam-pa, which were considered to experientially implement the essential meaning of those Tantras. Later, Tantras such as the *Secret Wisdom* could become classified under the category Space Section by association with those instructions, when the followers of the rDo-rje zam-pa claimed those Tantras as their own fundamental texts. Yet other Tantras, it seems, were assigned to the Space Section class because of perceived similarities between their subject matter and instructions of rDo-rje zam-pa, even though they appear to have been unknown to authors of its lineage.

This latter trend is clearly seen also from later attempts to define the doxographical category of the Space Section in the *rNying-ma rgyud-'bum*. The late eighteenth-century sDe-dge edition of the *NGB* is one of the few editions in which texts are explicitly divided into doxographical categories.⁸⁶ Its *Klong-sde* section includes Nine Spaces texts such as the *Equal to the End*

85 The example with immobility is from *GC*, pp. 219-220.

86 These are listed and discussed in Achard (2003).

of *Sky* and the favorite texts of the rDo-rje zam-pa authors, the *Secret* and *Perfect Wisdoms*.⁸⁷ But in addition, it includes such texts as the Precious Tantra on the Arrangement of the Superior Path (*Rin-po-che 'phags-lam bkod-pa'i rgyud*),⁸⁸ which is never mentioned by Kun-bzang rdo-rje or other authors in his lineage. The text itself is dedicated to the exposition of yogic practices related to the *prāṇa* wind-energies. Presumably, it was included under the Space Section because it was perceived as similar to the rDo-rje zam-pa in its focus on *prāṇa* practices, although its text itself does not even mention the word *klong*. Also, under the Space Section is included the *Ye-shes gsang-ba'i sgron-ma rin-po-che man-ngag-gi rgyud*, which was one of the primary scriptures for the Khams tradition (*Khams-lugs*) of the Mind Section.⁸⁹ Conversely, at least one text in the *NGB* that definitely belongs to the rDo-rje zam-pa tradition, the *Stacked Magical Mirrors* (*'Phrul-gyi me-long brtsegs-pa*), is not included under the Space Section.

The Four Signs

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the distinction is often made between mind (*sems*) and nature of mind (*sems nyid*, literally “mind-itself” or “mind-as-such”). Mind is defined using such terms as clarity (*gsal*) and awareness (*rig*);⁹⁰ it is sometimes explicitly equated with consciousness (*rnam-shes*).⁹¹ Mind encompasses the perceptions (“consciousnesses”) of the five senses as well as the mental consciousness, which is counted as the sixth sense and has mental phenomena as its objects. But most importantly,

87 The Space Section of the sDe-dge edition follows almost exactly the 'Jigs-med gling-pa's (1729-1798) earlier catalogue (omitting only supplemental Tantras of *Nam-mkha'i mtha' dang mnyam-pa* and *gDams-ngag sna-tshogs 'khor-lo'i rgyud*). On his catalogue, see Achard (2001).

88 TshB vol. 1, pp. 837-863.

89 Quoted in e.g. Sog-bzlog-pa's *rDzogs-pa chen-po sems-sde'i khrid-yig*, p. 320 and elsewhere.

90 bsTan-dzin rGya-mtsho and Berzin (1997), p. 61.

91 Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa* II-34ab. English tr. in Pruden (1988), vol. I, p. 205.

mind commonly pertains to the unenlightened state: its operation is based on mistaken perception of subject-object duality, it can be associated with various afflictive emotions, it involves cognition of distinct periods in time (past, present and future) etc.

To mind is opposed the true nature of mind, which is not endowed with any of those negative qualities. It is timeless and beyond subject-object duality. All afflictive and mistaken states of mind are extraneous to it and do not inherently abide in it. It is equated with one's enlightened nature and is present in every sentient being.

The problem of religious practice thus becomes one of accessing and recognizing this deepest nature of mind. In different systems of Great Perfection, varying terms are used to describe this principle of dual mind-nature of mind. In texts of the Mind Section of the Great Perfection, the nature of mind is termed "mind of enlightenment" (*byang-chub-kyi sems*, Skt. *bodhicitta*). The term used in rDo-rje zam-pa is "actual nature of mind-itself" (*sems-nyid dngos-po'i gnas-lugs*). The term *sems-nyid* is very common also in other Tibetan Buddhist traditions than the Great Perfection.

The section of the basic text of the rDo-rje zam-pa that is concerned with the method of accessing the true nature of mind is termed "striking the great nail of the meaning of non-meditation" and is comprised by lines 4-9:

- (4) Strike the great nail of the meaning of non-meditation.
- (5) Impart the instruction which discloses the meanings of signs.
- (6) [Since one's mind] does not abide in the state without clinging,
- (7) [As a remedy] impart the instruction on arresting the movement of energy-winds.
- (8) [Since one] is not firm in [one's recognition of] mind-itself, [there is] great proliferation [of desires and clinging].
- (9) [As a remedy] impart the instruction on great bliss [through manipulation of] seminal essences.

These statements are given in the form of instructions to the preceptor who is to guide the disciple. The text first identifies that which is to be understood as the "meaning of non-

meditation”, and the following lines specify the way in which this meaning is communicated to the disciple, namely by disclosing the meanings of the four signs (*brda*). The commentary says:

First, the brief statement of the meaning of non-meditation. As for “non-meditation”, what is not to be meditated upon? In the actual reality of mind, there is nothing to be meditatively cultivated. In what way is there nothing to meditatively cultivate? The actual reality of mind is the truth endowed with the four characteristics of lacking union and separation, illumination and obscuration, coming and going, origination and cessation. It is not the object of mind, attention, thought, or intellect. There is neither the object nor the subject of meditative cultivation, there is not even a single truth that is made into an object of intellect and meditated upon. For this reason, it is non-meditation.⁹²

The statement that there is nothing to be meditated upon is not uncommon in Tibetan Buddhism. It is found, for example, in the songs of the mahāsiddhas, Indian saints to whom several Tibetan lineages trace their sources; one of them, Saraha, is actually quoted by Kun-bzang rdo-rje in his commentary.⁹³ The Hevajra Tantra also states there to be “no meditator and no meditation”.⁹⁴ Non-meditation is also the name of the final stage of fourfold practice of Mahāmudrā in the bKa’-brgyud school. The formulation of the highest contemplative practice as non-meditation would thus, in itself, not be very controversial in the Tibetan Buddhist milieu. Kun-bzang rdo-rje is careful to rule out possible nihilistic interpretations of non-meditation as not doing anything at all, but rather describes it as the middle way between conceptually constructed meditative cultivation and idle distraction:

92 GC p. 198

93 GC p. 203: *bram ze chen po sa ra ha pas gsungs pa/ /sgoms shig sgoms shig ma bsgom zhig /sgom pa'i tshe na ci yang mi bsgom pa/ /de ni rnal 'byor dam pa'i lam zhes bshad/ /*

94 HVT I.v.16 (Snellgrove 1976, pp. 16-17).

If there is meditative cultivation, this amounts to falling into the extreme of permanence; if there isn't, this is falling into the extreme of nihilism. [Here] is taught the middle way that is free from the extremes of holding onto existence and nonexistence, the straight path that does not go astray or enter the path of limitation and partiality, the non-dual union arising as one.

In general, among [the followers] of Great Perfection there are many who teach the existence and absence of meditative cultivation as two.⁹⁵ In this tradition of the Adamantine Bridge, if one said that there is something to be meditatively cultivated, [that would not be true because] since even the most profound or subtle conceptual extreme does not remain in [the perception of] truth, and there is not even an atom of something to be meditatively cultivated.

If one said that there is nothing to be meditatively cultivated, [this is contradicted by the fact that] one does not remain an ordinary worldly person; rather, one does not get distracted from the state of the four signs for even a single instant.

The absence of a focal object [of meditation] is the ultimate wisdom. Non-distraction is the ultimate method. When the absence of focus and non-distraction are applied simultaneously in one's being, this is the essential meaning of the non-dual union of wisdom and method, the wisdom endowed with four characteristics, the unmistaken and unchanging realization of the truth without limitation and partiality: this is the ultimate extensive explanation of the meaning of "striking the great nail of non-meditation".⁹⁶

Although the concept of non-meditation is in itself unproblematic and is found in other schools of Tibetan Buddhism, there are differences in how this notion is

95 In the *Medium Commentary*, Kun-bzang rdo-rje specifies that those who who assert meditation are followers of the Nyang tradition from the region of Kham; those who assert non-meditation are followers of the meditative tradition in [Central] Tibet; and those who assert the non-duality of meditation and non-meditation are followers of the tradition of rGyal-mo tsha-ba'i rong, i.e. Vairocana's tradition of rDo-rje zam-pa. (*MC* pp. 432-433).

96 *GC* p. 201-202

contextualized. It makes an important difference whether non-meditation is viewed as the resultant state of a gradual path or as applicable from the outset. It is often in the way that non-meditation and perception of the nature of mind is arrived at that differences between traditions become apparent. Characteristic to rDo-rje zam-pa is that the state of non-meditation is introduced to the disciple from the beginning of spiritual practice. This sets it apart from the more conventional Tantric traditions of the new translation schools. Nevertheless, the methods used for arriving at that state are based on, and discussed in terms of, practices of conventional Vajrayāna. It is therefore necessary first to give a brief overview of the most important aspects of the Vajrayāna path as a background for discussing the methods of rDo-rje zam-pa.

The systems of Vajrayāna practice are numerous and there is always the risk of overgeneralization when attempting to summarize its essentials. However, at the most general level, the Tibetan tradition divides the Vajrayāna practice into two stages, development (Skt. *utpattikrama*, Tib. *bskyed-rim*) and completion (Skt. *sampannakrama*, Tib. *rdzogs-rim*). This two-stage scheme applies to the so-called Anuttarayoga ('Highest Yoga') class of Tantras, to which the main practices of Tibetan Buddhist schools belong.

On the stage of development, the practitioner concentrates on visualization in order to transform the totality of his or her ordinary experience into a pure enlightened dimension. One identifies oneself meditatively and ritually with Buddha-figures, visualizing oneself in a divine mansion (*maṇḍala*) with entourages of deities, reciting mantras etc. This is done in order to counteract the habitual tendencies of perceiving oneself and the world as impure, which obscure one's innate enlightened essence. The symbolic enactment of enlightenment in meditation is imagined to clear away these obscurations and to create a cause for the future actualization of one's enlightened dimension.

The stage of development also serves as a necessary preparation for the second stage, the stage of completion. On this stage, the actualization of the enlightened state is completed. One engages in various complex yogic techniques of breathing,

postures, bodily movements, sexual yoga etc, to manipulate energy-winds and seminal essences in the subtle psychic body characterized by networks of invisible channels. Since such energies are considered to be closely related with one's psyche, yogic techniques are utilized to induce specific states of consciousness. The various systems of Vajrayāna practice differ in exactly what kinds of practices are emphasized on this stage. One common distinction is that of systems of practice called the "father" and "mother" Tantras. The father Tantras emphasize the manipulation of energy winds (Tib. *rlung*, Skt. *prāṇa*), which causes ordinary coarse states of consciousness to subside, allowing access to the subtlest state of awareness. The system of the *Guhyasamājatantra* is commonly cited as an example of the father class. The mother Tantras, traditionally exemplified by *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*, emphasize practices related to the seminal essences (Tib. *thig-le*, Skt. *bindu*), which induce states of intense blissful sensation.

The necessary prerequisite for the practice of the two stages is the rite of initiation (Skt. *abhiṣeka*, Tib. *dbang*), by which the teacher authorizes the disciple to engage in Tantric practices. The first initiation is commonly called vase initiation (Skt. *kalaśābhiṣeka*, Tib. *bum-dbang*) and authorizes the practice of the development stage. The three higher initiations — secret initiation (Skt. *guhyābhiṣeka*, Tib. *gsang-dbang*), discriminative awareness-wisdom initiation (Skt. *prajñājñānabhiṣeka*, Tib. *shes-rab ye-shes-kyi dbang*), and word initiation (Tib. *tshig-dbang*) — each authorize the disciple to practice a specific aspect of the completion stage. The practice of the energy winds, for example, is connected to the second initiation, while the practices related to development of bliss belong to the third.

The practice in Vajrayāna is strictly sequential: the disciple must first receive the initiation, then practice development stage, and only after attaining a certain level of proficiency in that, one is qualified to engage in the completion stage. Applying specific Tantric practices outside their proper context has been a cause of

controversies and debates in Tibet.⁹⁷ The Great Perfection also has, while often rejecting (at least rhetorically) the need for elaborate visualization practice, freely made use of completion stage techniques. As will be seen below, the central practice of the rDo-rje zam-pa also involves creative redefinition of Tantric completion stage practices.

The distinctive aspect of rDo-rje zam-pa is its special method for accessing mind-itself. As the basic text says, it should be introduced by “disclosing the meanings of signs” (line 5). According to the commentary, this refers to experiencing what are called the four essential signs (*gnad-kyi brda bzhi*), at a specific moment termed the sign of time (*dus-kyi brda*).⁹⁸

The four essential signs are the experiences of non-conceptuality (*mi-rtog-pa*), clarity (*gsal-ba*), bliss (*bde-ba*) and the inseparability (*dbyer mi-phyed-pa*) of the first three as the fourth. The simple techniques used to induce these are described by Kun-bzang rdo-rje as follows:

The *essential sign of clarity* refers to not blocking the senses and arises from not closing one’s eyes.

When the movement of thoughts is interrupted and no intellectual concepts arise, this is the *sign of non-conceptuality*, the imperturbability of the senses, which arises from not moving the eyes.

When there is bliss without feeling the existence of body or mind and one does not apprehend the thought, “Bliss,” this is the *essential sign of bliss*: it arises from drawing in the stomach towards the spine and taking hold of

97 A well-known example is Sa-skya Paṇḍita’s (1182-1251) criticism of what he perceived as mistaken practices of his contemporaries. In numerous instances, he criticizes such practices as practicing Vajrayāna without having properly received initiation or engaging in completion stage practices (including the Great Perfection) outside the two-stage paradigm. See e.g. Rhoton (2002) and Jackson (1994).

98 The sign of time refers to a moment in which energy-winds in the body are in a favorable state for the practice of the four essential signs. Kun-bzang rdo-rje’s commentaries state that this moment is explained in more detail during the rite of initiation and that it is not appropriate to discuss them outside of that context (MC pp. 430-431).

the lower wind-energy just by mind, thus raising it upwards by physical and mental [effort].

When the three, clarity, non-conceptuality and bliss, different in words but essentially inseparable, simultaneously manifest in one's experience, this is the *essential sign of inseparability*, which arises from letting the tip of the tongue not rest anywhere [on the palate or teeth].

At the time of inseparability, not even the most profound or subtle conceptual or verbal extreme of "separability" or "inseparability" remains: this is the essential point of mind-itself, which cannot be thought of or expressed in words but arises from settling naturally.⁹⁹

The way in which these experiences constitute "signs" is, according to the commentary, by indicating similarity through example.¹⁰⁰ The experiences point to or illuminate a referent, but are not themselves something that one should cling to:

First, as for the understanding of "sign": it is indication by means of example. For example, just as a child sees the moon relying on a finger, or the riches of a treasury are arrived at relying on a lamp, in the same way, relying on signs [indicated by] the Guru one is made to realize the truth, the actual meaning of mind-itself, endowed with four characteristics, the essence of non-meditation. But if one does not cognize the momentary awareness of the time of seeing the meaning of signs, truth is obscured by attachment and clinging to sign itself.¹⁰¹

A short instruction text by 'O-la jo-sras connects specific aspects of the nature of mind to the essential signs, relating the sign of clarity to the inherent clarity of mind-itself, the sign of non-conceptuality to emptiness, etc.¹⁰² However, the role of the essential signs goes beyond mere *symbolic* significance, but also has directly *transformative* value. The way that the signs

99 MC pp. 450-451.

100 C p. 431.

101 C p. 204.

102 *rDzogs-pa chen-po klong-sde'i snyan-brgyud rin-po-che rdo-rje zam-pa'i sgom-khrid-kyi lag-len*, gDams-ngag mdzod vol. 1, p. 410.

function in these roles is somewhat complex, and is discussed under the following section of the basic text (lines 6-9) — instructions on controlling the movement of the energy-winds in order to stop discursive thought, and inducing blissful sensations in order to counteract desires and clinging.

Signs and the yoga of winds

According to the commentary, the instruction on controlling energy-winds summarizes the essence of the father Tantra class (*pha-rgyud*).¹⁰³ In this Tantric system, the manipulation of winds is emphasized. It does not mean that other types of practice are absent there, but the emphasis is on wind yoga.

On the subtle level, the human body is considered to consist of a multitude of channels (Skt. *nādi*, Tib. *rtsa*) through which the wind-energies course. The winds are closely connected to consciousness; the winds are compared to blind horses, which carry on them crippled riders, awarenesses.¹⁰⁴ The function of the consciousnesses, which include sense perception as well as thought movement, is dependent on the movement of the winds, and can be affected by manipulation of the winds.

The winds are described as being of five main types: 1) vitalizing (*srog-'dzin*) wind related to respiration, 2) pervasive (*khyab-byed*) wind related to physical movement of the body; 3) upward-moving (*gyen-du rgyu-ba*) related to speech and swallowing; 4) downward-voiding (*thur-du sel-ba*) related to excretion and reproductive functions; and 5) fire-accompanying (*me-dang mnyam-du gnas-pa*), related to digestion.¹⁰⁵

Among the channels, the most important are three channels that run parallel to the spine, from the base of the spine up to the level of forehead. Through various methods, the coarse winds are led away from the side channels and into the central channel, where there are made to remain and dissipate. This brings about the cessation of the coarse minds dependent on those winds,

103 GC p. 210.

104 GC p. 212.

105 GC p. 212-214.

which gives the practitioner access to more subtle levels of awareness.¹⁰⁶

Kun-bzang rdo-rje divides the winds into two types, the winds of the physical body (*bem-po'i rlung*) and the wind of awareness (*rig-pa'i rlung*). The winds of the physical body are the five enumerated above: they are related to various functions of the physical body, are dependent on material elements, and perish together with the body at death. Kun-bzang rdo-rje states that controlling these winds may have the potential of inducing mental states of deep absorption, but through them one cannot achieve instantaneous realization and become enlightened in a single lifetime.¹⁰⁷

The wind of awareness, on the other hand, is mental. Specifically, it is the wind connected to the basis-consciousness (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*, Tib. *kun-gzhi'i rnam-par shes-pa*)¹⁰⁸ and the function of storing habitual tendencies (Skt. *vāsanā*, Tib. *bag-chags*), or “seeds” (Skt. *bīja*, Tib. *sa-bon*), which are impressed upon the consciousness by performed actions. The categories of basis-consciousness and afflictive mind were employed in various Vajrayāna traditions, but there are different formulations of these concepts. For example, various theories involving basis-of-all (*kun-gzhi*) and basis-consciousness (*kun-gzhi'i rnam-shes*) are used in the Tantric systems of the Tibetan Sa-skya and Karma bKa'-brgyud schools, while the dGe-lugs school rejects the existence of basis-consciousness altogether and does not make use of the concept in their theory of Tantra.¹⁰⁹ The system of the rDo-rje zam-pa, as described in Kun-bzang rdo-rje's commentaries, presupposes a theory of the basis-consciousness, but it is not fully elaborated there. Whether the theory was imported as a whole from another Vajrayāna

106 Channels, winds, and the *Guhyasamāja* system of practice based on wind yoga are described in Cozort (1986); also, Wayman (1977).

107 *bem po'i rlung de tsho bzung yang / ting nge 'dzin rgyud la skye ba'i lam byed nus pa yod kyang / skad cig ma'i don rtogs nas tshe gcig gis sangs rgya ba'i rlung de min pas/*

108 GC p. 215.

109 Wayman 1977, p. 203.

system, or was an original innovation, is a question that would require more detailed comparative study than is possible to undertake here. Below, the basis-consciousness in the rDo-rje zam-pa is discussed only at the general level as presented in Kun-bzang rdo-rje's commentaries, in relation to the winds and the practice of the Four Signs.

Unlike the winds of the physical body, there is only one kind of awareness-wind, but it can manifest in different aspects: as afflicted wind (*kun-nas nyon-mongs-pa'i rlung*) when under the influence of nescience or error; or as purified wind (*rnam-par byang-ba'i rlung*) when under the influence of awareness and realization;¹¹⁰ in the latter aspect it is also called wisdom wind (*ye-shes-kyi rlung*). A parallel distinction applies to basis-consciousness: the unchanging basis-of-all (*kun-gzhi*), i.e. ultimate reality, is the basis of both cyclic existence and nirvāṇa; but consciousness can manifest in different aspects, afflicted or purified, within that same underlying reality.¹¹¹

In its afflicted state, awareness-wind has three further aspects:

- The first is connected with the part of the basis consciousness that stores seeds, and in particular the seeds of ignorance, which is the basis of all error;
- The second aspect is the wind that moves the afflicted mind and is connected with discursive concepts, in particular the mistaken concept of anger and its seeds;
- The third aspect is the container of habitual propensities, especially those of desire; it is also related to the experience of suffering.¹¹²

110 GC p. 216.

111 This underlying reality, 'basis-of-all' (*kun-gzhi*), according to Kun-bzang rdo-rje, is not a positive phenomenon, but rather is not established as ultimately real (GC p. 216).

112 From the brief description in MC, the precise significance of several technical terms and their relation to each other (e.g. how is anger associated with specifically the afflicted mind and habits to desire and suffering?) remain unclear to me. MC pp. 450-451: *dang po sa* [450] *bon cha'i kun gzhi ma rig pa'i*

Their counterparts, the corresponding aspects of purified wind of awareness, are also three:

- purified clarity (*gsal-ba rnam-par byang-ba*), which is self-clarity and self-awareness,¹¹³ devoid of ignorance;
- purified non-conceptuality (*mi-rtog-pa rnam-par byang-ba*), devoid of intellectual concepts and in particular concepts of anger; and
- purified bliss (*bde-ba rnam-par byang-ba*), in which one does not feel body and mind to be present, and which is devoid of all suffering.¹¹⁴

The aim of spiritual practice, making one's true nature manifest in one's experience, is thus equivalent to transforming (*gnas-'gyur*) the impure, or afflicted, aspects of the awareness-wind into their purified counterparts. The method through which this is effected is the simultaneous practice of the Four Signs at the specific moment when the wisdom wind becomes accessible, termed "the sign of time" (*dus-kyi brda*).¹¹⁵ The essential sign of clarity, induced by open eyes and unblocked senses, is analogous to the first aspect of the wisdom-wind, purified clarity and thereby enables recognition of it. By means of the sign of clarity, the aspect of basis-consciousness that stores the seeds of ignorance is transformed into purified clarity and manifests as self-clarity and self-awareness.¹¹⁶ In the same way, the essential sign of non-conceptuality, induced by immobility of the eyes, is

sa bon la/ 'khrul pa kun gyi gzhi gti mug gi sa bon cha'i rlung dang gcig / nyon mongs pa can gyi yid 'gyu byed kyi rlung dang / dran rtog gi yid log par rtog pa zhe sdang gi sa bon cha'i rlung dang gnyis/ bag chags sogs byed kyi rlung ni/ 'dod pa'i yid bag tsam la chags pa'i rten byas nas/ sdug bsngal la sogs pa'i snod byed pas/ 'dod chags kyi sa bon cha'i rlung dang gsum mo/ /

113 Self-awareness (*rang-rig*) means that the truth of Reality, essentially nothing whatsoever yet endowed with unapprehendable clarity, is cognized (*rig*) to be the nature of one's own mind; self-clarity (*rang-gsal*) means that that clarity of Reality is the clarity of one's own mind (GC p. 219)

114 MC pp. 442-443.

115 GC p. 217.

116 MC p. 443.

analogous to the aspect of purified non-conceptuality. Engaging in it purifies the respective impure aspect, afflictive mind, making it manifest as non-conceptual Reality.¹¹⁷ The terms used to describe the function of the essential signs are 'identification' (*ngos-bzung*) of the wisdom wind, and 'transformation' (*gnas-gyur*) of affliction to purity.

The first two signs, clarity and non-conceptuality, are said to be the essence of the instructions of the father Tantras. They appear, however, much simpler than the practices used in these Tantras to cause the winds to enter the central channel.¹¹⁸ The signs do not require intense meditative concentration or strenuous physical exercises, but involve relatively little effort. What they do have in common with the father Tantra practices is that they are based on manipulation of winds, and that they stop the conceptual mind. Whether the techniques of the signs are directly derived from similar methods in some father Tantra systems, or whether they are the result of experimentation based on Tantric principles, it not known.¹¹⁹ Various similar methods involving the gazes are found in other traditions of the Great Perfection. When discussing the practice of fixation of the gaze to induce the sign of non-conceptuality, Kun-bzang rdo-rje cites the verse:

The gaze without closing the eyes is called the 'Lion's Gaze', and [makes one] superior to other yogins.¹²⁰

The verse is here attributed to the A-ro tradition of the Great Perfection (*A-ro'i rdzogs-pa chen-po*).¹²¹ With only slight

117 Ibid.

118 Cozort 1987, pp. 68-78.

119 Kun-bzang rdo-rje cites tantras of the new schools (such as the *Kālacakra* etc) as authoritative sources (*lung*) to support the authenticity of the practice of the gaze, but these don't seem to have been actual *sources* for these practices. E.g. a quotation is given from the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, "The single eye of wisdom is unstained" (GC p. 235: *ye shes mig gcig dri ma med*).

120 GC pp. 235-236: *a ro'i rdzogs pa chen po las/ mig ma btsun pa'i lta stangs ni/ /seng ge'i lta stangs zhes bya ste/ /rnal 'byor gzhan las khyad par 'phags/*

modification, the same verse is also quoted in a Bon Great Perfection text from the tradition *A-khrid*, where it is attributed to 'Od-zer dpag-med.¹²² However, I am unaware of other Great Perfection traditions apart from rDo-rje zam-pa in which the gazes are associated with father Tantras or the concept of transformation (*gnas*- 'gyur).

Signs and the yoga of seminal essences

Clarity and non-conceptuality, the first two signs which were correlated with winds, purify two of the three aspects of awareness-wind. The remaining aspect that needs to be transformed is the wind associated with seeds of desire, and also suffering. The next lines (8-9) of the text that prescribe developing blissful sensations are related to purifying this third aspect. According to the commentaries, this is the function of the third and fourth essential signs, respectively bliss and inseparability. These signs are said to be the essence of the mother Tantras. These Tantras emphasize manipulating elements of the subtle psychic body called *seminal essences* (Skt. *bindu*, Tib. *thig-le*). These represent the pure essences of male and female essential fluids and are believed to reside everywhere along the network of channels, but especially concentrated in the top of the head and the solar plexus.¹²³ In Tantric practice, yogic exercises, breathing and concentration is used to move the seminal essences through the channels to specific psychic centers, with the aim of inducing intensely blissful awareness.

Kun-bzang rdo-rje gives a description of the process of generating bliss in the context of Vajrayāna practice, and gives his assessment:

121 The tradition of A-ro originates with the eleventh-century teacher A-ro ye-shes 'byung-gnas. It was also known as the Khams tradition (*Khams lugs*) and is said to belong to the Mind Section of Great Perfection (Karmay 1988, pp. 126-127).

122 Bru-sgom rGyal-ba g.yung-drung (1996), p. 89: 'od zer dpag med kyi gsung ltar mig ma btsums pa'i rnal 'byor de/ rnal 'byor kun las khyad du (par) 'phags/ seng ge lta stangs zhes su spyod ces pas/

123 Cozort 1987, p. 72.

As for imparting the instruction on bliss and seminal essences, there are two: seminal essences of contaminated bliss abiding in the body, and seminal essences of uncontaminated bliss abiding in the mind.

As for the contaminated seminal essences that abide in the body, one uses one's own body as the method,¹²⁴ makes the winds serviceable, acquires a discriminative-awareness [consort],¹²⁵ and makes the channels serviceable. On that as the basis, at the time of the third initiation— that of discriminative awareness[-wisdom]— the meaning of the Great Symbol (Skt. *mahāmudrā*) is indicated as non-dual bliss. However, this [bliss] based on another's body is a bodily tangible:¹²⁶ it is conditioned and perishes in adverse conditions, and thus is a relative truth. It is not the bliss that enables one to instantly realize Truth and become a Buddha in a single lifetime. As an example,¹²⁷ it is unable [to indicate] the meaning.¹²⁸

Kun-bzang rdo-rje here criticizes the usual Tantric yoga of seminal essences for the impure nature of the experiences it produces. Since these experiences, although blissful, are conditioned, perishable and liable to change, they do not share crucial qualities of the ultimate nature of mind, which is unconditioned and immutable. Such experiences are not therefore valuable in indicating one's actual ultimate nature. Instead, one should work with seminal essences of the mind:

Therefore, the uncontaminated bliss that abides in mind is taught here. If one asks whether it is at all possible to take hold of the insubstantial bliss that abides in the mind, it is possible. How is it taken hold of? It is taught

124 "Using one's own body as the method" refers to techniques of generating bliss, such as generation of psychic heat (Skt. *caṇḍālī*, Tib. *gtum-mo*), in which the yogin does not make use of a sexual consort (Germano 1994, p. 309).

125 "Discriminative awareness" (Skt. *prajñā*, Tib. *shes-rab*) is the term used for the consort for sexual yoga, which is used to induce bliss.

126 I.e., a mere sensory experience.

127 The third initiation produces an "example wisdom" (*dpe'i ye-shes*) in the disciple, which is a facsimile of the "actual wisdom" (*don-gyi ye-shes*), arrived at in the fourth initiation.

128 *MC* pp. 445-446.

that it is taken hold of by means of signs. Which signs? The essential sign of bliss and the essential sign of inseparability transform the container of habitual propensities¹²⁹ etc, [which is] suffering, and indicate uncontaminated bliss and the truth of Reality as inseparable.¹³⁰

The last two signs complete the purification of the awareness-wind, transforming the third afflicted aspect of suffering into an aspect of bliss. Although the essential signs are described in a sequential manner, all four are engaged in simultaneously, thus unifying the essential points of both father and mother Tantras.¹³¹

Both pairs of signs are explained as encompassing the essence of the respective body-oriented yogas of winds and seminal essences. Signs are described as superior to the latter by virtue of their being of mental, rather than physical, nature. The Vajrayāna practices are said to have some provisional benefit, but are rejected as directly valuable in inducing realization in favor of the much simpler practice of the four signs. Since awareness-winds and seminal essences of the mind are described as mental phenomena, the process of accessing them appears equivalent to recognizing the nature of the mind, expressed in terms based on the Tantric view of the body. Connections with the body still remain, since the signs themselves are also based on physical practices, but these are very simple and effortless compared to the Tantric completion stage practices.

A similar move away from the manipulation of physical elements of the body is found in the writings of Klong-chen rab-'byams in the context of Seminal Heart (*sNying-thig*), the practice of the Instruction Section of Great Perfection. He

129 The commentaries describe the third aspect of the afflicted awareness-wind as the "container of habitual propensities and so on" (*bag-chags sogs-kyi snod*). It is not specified what else (*sogs*) other than habits it contains, and whether and how the habits are different from "seeds" (*sa-bon*).

130 GC p. 222.

131 GC p. 223.

describes the ideal contemplative path as based on the wisdom-wind, which he insists is purely mental:

In brief, “gnostic winds” is just a label applied to Compassionate Expression’s essential awareness—since it is present with the indivisible triune identity of essence, nature and Compassionate Expression, it is termed “primordial (*ye*) cognition (*shes*) (the literal rendering of “gnostic”). It is termed “wind” (*rlung*) in that its mere stirring and mere aware-ing share concordant qualities with wind. [...] The “channel/winds” [praxis and theory] of lower spiritual vehicles are ignorant of this, such that they view the non-elaborated essence of the moving winds as the gnostic winds. Having thus seized hold of them, they insert the coarse winds from the right and left [channels] into the central channel. In this way bringing about [sensations of] “clarity” through the right channel’s winds, “bliss” through the left channel’s winds, and “non-conceptuality” through the central channel’s winds, the winds remain in the central channel with these triune [sensations of] bliss, clarity and non-conceptuality, such that [visions of] seminal nuclei and rainbow light emerge. Furthermore, this is [believed] to be the sign of taking hold of the [body’s] five elemental energy-winds [fire, earth, water, wind and space].

This is, however, a quite distorted view. [...] As for attaining stability upon taking hold of these [winds], though they claim they have taken hold of the gnostic winds, actually they are not cognizant or aware of even an iota of their true dimension, except for having simply heard the name “gnostic winds”.¹³²

As in rDo-rje zam-pa, the traditions of the Instruction Section relegated Vajrayāna-style forceful manipulation of the winds and essences to an inferior level,¹³³ while the main practices involve simpler (“effortless”, *rtsol-bral*) techniques. This is a shared characteristic between rDo-rje zam-pa and Instruction

132 Translation from Germano 1994, p. 317. ‘Gnostic wind’ in this quotation translates *ye-shes-kvi rlung*, rendered as ‘wisdom wind’ in the present paper.

133 In the Instruction Section, conventional Tantric methods such as “psychic heat” (*gtum-mo*) were still used, but only as secondary practices (Germano 1994, p. 313).

Section, while the actual practices (such as “leapover”, *thod-rgal*) of the latter are substantially different from the Four Signs.

It should be noted that although Kun-bzang rdo-rje sees the tradition of rDo-rje zam-pa as belonging to the translation of old translations (*rNying-ma*), it nevertheless presents the theory of the Four Signs in terms of father and mother Tantras, categories which originate from the new translation schools. The old translations speak of the categories of Mahāyoga and Anuyoga, which are often described by later authors as parallel to the father and mother Tantras, respectively.¹³⁴ By choosing to state the theory of rDo-rje zam-pa in terms of the newer schools, Kun-bzang rdo-rje attempts to reach out to the followers of the new translation traditions, demonstrating its validity (and superiority) with respect to newer Tantric systems. The use of Tantric terminology may give to the corpus of rDo-rje zam-pa an appearance of being “entirely Tantric”,¹³⁵ but it is important to note that it departs in significant ways from conventional Tantric practice. One example is the rejection of the main practices of the completion stage (*rdzogs-rim*) as coarse and physical, and instead proposing alternative, simplified methods, claimed to be closer to mind than body. Also, the practices of the four signs are discussed in the commentaries without any reference to the stage of development (*bskyed-rim*), on which one visualizes forms of enlightened deities and their divine dimensions.

Kun-bzang rdo-rje’s commentaries also discuss Tantric initiation (*dbang*) in relation with the four essential signs. Initiation is explained in the commentary to line 17 of the basic text: “Since the initiations are naturally complete, there is no dependence on meditation, ritual or virtuous activities.” He describes the essential elements of Vajrayāna initiation and states that the most important of them is the experience (*nyams myong*) that the rite aims to engender in the disciple.

134 Among others, this association is made Klong-chen rab-'byams in his *Grub-mtha mdzod* (Germano 1994, p. 249).

135 Karmay 1988, p. 209.

Experience, he argues, constitutes the essential meaning of the initiation, and as such, is present also in the four signs. He begins with the first of the four stages of initiation, initiation of the vase:

Intended for those with inferior abilities is the outer initiation of the vase. One relies on the *maṇḍala* made of colored powders. The substance [used] for initiation is the “victorious vase”. The place where initiation is conferred is the head of the physical body.¹³⁶ The obscuration purified is the three obscurations of the body. The instruction is that of the path of development stage, indicating the body of the deity as illusion-like. The experience is the lamp-like experience of the awareness of all phenomena as one’s own mind, and their clarity as that of one’s own mind. The authority [conferred] is to practice the path of development stage and to listen to teachings. The necessity is that of reversing attachment to one’s ordinary body. The result is the emanation-dimension (Skt. *nirmaṇakāya*, Tib. *sprul-pa’i sku*) [of enlightenment]. As the commitment, one should guard against bodily [negativities] such as taking what is not given, etc.

If the experience of self-awareness and self-clarity¹³⁷ does not arise, then although the rite of the initiation is complete, its meaning is incomplete and therefore the initiation remains incomplete. When the meaning becomes manifest in one’s mind as self-awareness and self-clarity, then the rite as well as meaning will be complete, and the initiation has been bestowed and obtained.

From the point of view of this instruction, from among the four signs, [if one engages in the first,] resting without blocking the sense-doors, the experience of awareness [of phenomena as] one’s own [mind] and clarity [of the perception of phenomena as the clarity of] one’s own [mind]. Although the rite of the vase initiation is not complete in this, the meaning is naturally complete.¹³⁸

In the similar way, he discusses in turn each of the three higher initiations. The experience that constitutes the essential meaning

136 This refers to touching the head with the ritual vase.

137 On “self-clarity” (*rang-gsal*) and “self-awareness” (*rang-rig*), see n. 113.

138 GC pp. 286-287.

of the second, secret initiation, is that of non-dual bliss and emptiness (*gnyis-med bde-ba*). The same meaning is arrived at using the third essential sign of drawing upward the lower wind.¹³⁹ The characteristic experience of the third, discriminative awareness-wisdom initiation is that of non-conceptual Reality (*mi-rtog-pa'i chos-nyid*), corresponding to the second essential sign of non-conceptuality produced by unmoving eyes. At the time of the fourth initiation, one should cognize truth in which not even the most profound or subtle conceptual or verbal extreme remains. The same is achieved by means of the fourth sign. In this way, the four signs contain the essence of the four initiations.

This, however, does not mean that followers of the rDo-rje zam-pa tradition rejected the need for initiatory rites or practices of deity yoga. There was a rite of initiation called “the Guru’s blessing of the way of meditation” (*sgom-tshul bla-ma'i byin-rlabs*). Judging from the extant texts,¹⁴⁰ this rite was in fact in the form of the four Vajrayāna initiations related to a deity, mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po. There are also a number of ritual texts related to visualization of deities (*sādhana*s and *maṇḍala* rituals) in the rDo-rje zam-pa collection. Clearly, deity visualization was practiced despite the claimed self-sufficiency and superiority of the four signs. Nevertheless, it seems significant that generation stage is not given any role in the basic text and commentaries.¹⁴¹ Although deity visualization was not excluded from actual practice, its importance was thereby diminished and its role shifted from that of the central practice to periphery. One could

139 There appears to be an inconsistency in Kun-bzang rdo-rje’s commentary here, as in another section he associates the practice of bliss with the third initiation rather than second.

140 *sGom-tshul bla-ma'i byin-rlabs rgyas-pa*, ‘bring-po, *bsdus-pa*, respectively *NyKG* vol. 19, pp. 28- 51, 51-63, 63-69.

141 It is possible that the deity mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po was not originally an integral part of rDo-rje zam-pa. Colophons to some of its rituals state as their author a certain Avadhūtipa, who is not listed among the lineage gurus. Namkhai Norbu (2001, p. 26) considers ‘Dzeng Dharmabodhi responsible for introducing the practice of mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po to rDo-rje zam-pa.

speculate that the transmission of initiation in connection with a specific deity may have provided the necessary format or vehicle for the continuity of the lineage.¹⁴² Given the need to prove the authenticity of the teachings and unbroken transmission, the teachers of the lineage could not afford to dispense with initiation, the standard device of transmission in the Vajrayāna-dominated environment.

IV. *Klong sde* from the perspective of the Instruction Section

The previous sections described how the concept of Space Section was used to categorize various Tantras and the instructions of the Adamantine Bridge. From the 12th century onwards, a further interpretation of the notion of the Space Section was introduced with the emergence of the Instruction Section (*Man-ngag-sde*). In the Instruction Section, the Space Section is presented in the context of the Three Sections of the Great Perfection (*rDzogs-chen sde-gsum*). It is not known whether the threefold scheme was adopted from an earlier tradition or whether it was the original innovation of the Instruction Section. In the presentation of the Instruction Section, the threefold scheme is hierarchical: the Mind and Space Sections are both described as inferior to the Instruction Sections, both having some slight bias in their understanding of the Great Perfection. However, in presenting their version of the Three Sections, the followers of the Instruction Section did not refer to Space Section teachings as they were found in various Tantras or in the instruction texts of the rDo-rje zam-pa. Instead, they proposed original definitions of the Space Section, with no apparent link to the older texts at all. Despite this, it was presented as if the Space Section described referred to an existing class of Tantras. The descriptions of the Space Section

142 According to Kun-bzang rdo-rje's history, Vairocana himself initiated sPang mi-pham mgon-po relying on the ritual of the deity Yang-dag-thugs (*GC*, p. 151).

thus became a pseudo-doxographical category, which was adopted and repeated by generations of later Tibetan scholars.

A case in point is the presentation of the Space Section found in Klong-chen rab-'byams's (1308-1363) *Grub-mtha' mdzod* (*Treasury of Spiritual and Philosophical Systems*). This work is one of Klong-chen rab-'byams' seven most famous and influential treatises known as the 'Seven Treasuries' (*mdzod-bdun*). It is an extensive doxographical treatise, which presents the gradation of the various theories and spiritual approaches, culminating with the Great Perfection and ultimately the Seminal Heart teachings of the Instruction Section. The latter system, of which Klong-chen rab-'byams was a leading proponent, is the prevalent focus of his works. He devotes less attention to Mind Section, but some among his works are specifically concerned with its theory and practice.¹⁴³

The *Grub-mtha' mdzod* is Klong-chen rab-'byams's only work in which the Space Section is treated in more than a cursory manner. Nevertheless, its presentation of the Space Section became influential among later authors. Because Klong-chen rab-'byams had become a leading authority on the Great Perfection because of his expositions of the Instruction Section, later scholars often turned to *Grub-mtha' mdzod* also for a definitive statement of the philosophical system of other Sections. Besides being a comprehensive and systematic arrangement of the various systems, the treatise is an accessible source in that it aims to bring the doctrines into the conceptual domain of mainstream philosophical discourse. For instance, the views of the Space Section and its various subcategories are systematically analyzed from the general Madhyamaka point of view, scrutinizing their position with regard to existence (*yod*) and non-existence (*med*), assertions (*yin*) and negations (*min*). By proving that a doctrine is free these ontological extremes, it is shown that it belongs to the authentic Middle Way, which

143 E.g. his *Trilogy on Self-liberation* (*Rang-grol skor gsum*), *Trilogy on Resting* (*Ngal-gso skor gsum*) and his commentary on the *Kun-byed rgyal-po* Tantra, the *Jewel Ship* (*Rin-chen gru-bo*).

would have been a prerequisite for being acceptable for mainstream Tibetan scholastic traditions.

I will refrain here from translating the Klong-sde section of the Grub-mtha' mdzod, since it has been incorporated practically verbatim into bDud-'joms *History of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*. I give below only the outline of the sub-categories of Klong-sde as given by Klong-chen rab-'byams, as an illustration of his method of classification.

1. The Black Space
 - a) The Black Space of Activity (*mdzad-pa klong-nag-gi sde*)
 - b) The Black Space of Compassionate Expression (*thugs-rje klong-nag-gi sde*)
 - c) The Black Space of Emanation (*sprul-pa klong-nag-gi sde*)
2. Variegated Space
 - a) The Variegated Space that conforms to the Mind Section, teaching existence (*sems-sde-dang mthun-pa'i klong khra bo*)
 - b) The self-contained Variegated Space that teaches non-existence (*med-smra rang-gnas-dang mthun-pa'i klong khra-bo*)
 - c) The Variegated Space that conforms to Instruction Section and teaches existence and nonexistence (*yod-med mang-ngag-dang mthun-par smra-ba'i klong khra-bo*)
3. The White Space that asserts mind (*klong dkar-po sems-su smra-ba*)
 - a) The White Space of inexpressible great spontaneous manifestation
 - i) The Space of the Ocean (*rgya-mtsho'i klong*)
 - i.1) the Greater Space of the Ocean
 - i.2) the Lesser Space of the Ocean
 - ii) The essence of the Space of the Sky (*nam-mkha'i klong*)
 - ii.1) The essence of the Space of the Sun and the Moon (*nyi-zla'i klong*)
 - ii.2) The essence of the Space of the Jewel (*rin-po-che'i klong*)
4. The Infinite Space that transcends causality (*klong rab-'byams rgyu-'bras la-bzla-ba*)
 - a) The Outer Infinity of inaction (*bya-ba-dang bral-ba phyi'i rab-'byams*)
 - b) The Inner Infinity that teaches according to its own textual tradition of tenets (*grub-mtha' rang-gzhung-du smra-ba nang-gi rab-'byams*)
 - c) The Secret Infinity that eliminates obstacles (*gegs-bsal-ba gsang-ba'i rab-'byams*)

- d) The Infinity of Suchness that reveals the vital points (*gnad bkrol-ba de-kho-na-nyid-kyi rab-'byams*)

The above categories are subsumed under the Four Spaces:

1. The Space of Display (*rol-pa'i klong*)
2. The Space of Ornament (*rgyan-gyi klong*)
3. The Space of Reality (*chos-nyid-kyi klong*)
4. The Space of Freedom from Activity (*bya-bral-gyi klong*)

These, in turn, are subsumed under Nine Spaces:

1. The Space of the changelessness of view (*lta-ba-la 'pho-'gyur med-pa'i klong*)
2. The Space of the absence of assertion and negation in meditation (*sgom-pa-la yin-min med-pa'i klong*)
3. The Space of the absence of hope and fear in fruition (*'bras-bu-la re-dogs med-pa'i klong*)
4. The Space of the absence of establishment and elimination in essence (*ngo-bo-la grub-bsal med-pa'i klong*)
5. The Space of the unceasing display of nature (*rang-bzhin ma-'gags rol-pa'i klong*)
6. The Space of the liberation of appearances and mind in characteristics (*mtshan-nyid-la snang-sems grol-ba'i klong*)
7. The Space of the changelessness of the Expanse; (*dbyings-la 'pho-'gyur med-pa'i klong*)
8. The Space of the self-manifestation of unceasing display (*rol-pa 'gag-med rang-shar-gyi klong*)
9. The Space of the spontaneously equal, primordially liberated total presence (*lhun-mnyam ye-grol cog-gzhag gi klong*)

These in turn are subsumed within three:

1. the Space of the great immensity of spontaneous presence (*lhun-grub yangs-pa chen-po'i klong*)
2. the Space of effortlessness of natural luminosity (*rang-gsal bya-rtsol med-pa'i klong*)
3. the Space of primordial accomplishment without action (*ma-byas ye-nas grub-pa'i klong*)

Although no references to actual Space Section texts are given, the system is categorized into various categories and subcategories. These divisions does not seem to be attested in actual Space Section Tantras in the present-day editions of the *rNying-ma rgyud-'bum*. Klong-chen rab-'byams also lists the Nine Spaces, but these do not correspond to the list found in Tantras such as the *Equal to the End of Sky* (*Nam-mkha'i mtha'-dang mnyam-pa*). Unlike the standard ninefold list, it does not correspond to the ten basic principles of Mahāyoga Tantra. Despite not quoting any titles, he states the number of Tantras, chapters and even verses that teach this system, thereby creating an impression that he is classifying actual textual material. Neither is there any apparent connection between the described categories and the system of rDo-rje zam-pa. All sub-categories of the Space Section are presented as basically technique-free, without reliance on the physical body or structured sessions of meditation. It is likely that, as suggested by Germano, Klong-chen-pa's doxographical divisions are thematical in nature, representing different flavors of contemplation rather than descriptions of actual literature.¹⁴⁴ Another possible way to view these categories would be as definitive standards against which statements in actual literature could be compared in order to position a specific text or statement as conforming to Mind Section, Space Section etc. For example, bDud-'joms Rin-poche has used Klong-chen rab-byams classification to identify a *doha* by Maitripa as in accord with the view of the Space Section (bDud-'joms 2003, pp. 329). In any case, Klong-chen rab-'byams himself does not explain the intent or purpose of his classification, but just matter-of-factly presents it as *the* Space Section.

Besides Klong-chen-pa's, there are other, generally shorter presentations of the Space Section from the perspective of the Instruction Section. These typically offer different classifications of the subdivisions of Klong-sde. For example,

144 Germano 1994, pp. 285.

yet another redefinition of the Nine Spaces, different from both *Equal to the End of Sky Tantra* and Klong-chen-pa's presentation, is found in the *Subsequent Tantra of Great Perfection Instruction* (*Man-ngag rdzogs-pa chen-po'i rgyud phyi-ma*) rediscovered by 'Jigs-med gling-pa (translated in van Schaik 2004a, p. 152). Another text, *The Precious Grindstone Cutting Through the Proliferation of Space Section(s)* (*Rin-po-che bye-ma reg-gcod-kyis klong-sde'i spros-pa gcod-pa*, TshB vol. 10, pp. 845-853), also apparently a rediscovered treasure text, lists no less than forty-seven Sections of Space.

rDo-rje zam-pa and the Instruction Section

Although Instruction Section texts do not seem to refer to characteristic concepts and practices of rDo-rje zam-pa such as the Four Signs,¹⁴⁵ the two systems share certain (broad) similarities; indeed, the very name of the Adamantine Bridge has been explained by a Tibetan author as referring to its "bridging" the gap between Mind and Instruction Sections.¹⁴⁶ One of the most important questions with regard to the rDo-rje zam-pa therefore concerns its relation to the Instruction Section. To analyze the possible influence of various Space Section materials in the historical development of the Instruction Section would require detailed comparative work, utilizing extensive textual material from both classes of texts. Although it is not

145 Neither have I found occurrences of the term Instruction Section (*man-ngag-sde*) in Kun-bzang rdo-rje's commentaries or elsewhere in the collection. In general, Kun-bzang rdo-rje's commentaries or other earlier texts of the rDo-rje zam-pa do not utilize the tripartite classification of Mind, Space and Instruction Sections. Kun-bzang rdo-rje's commentary in fact uses the term Three Sections (*sde gsum*), but as referring to what is more commonly known as the Three Sections of Inner Tantra (*nang-rgyud sde gsum*). He breaks the sections up as '*chos-sde*, referring to Mahāyoga; *rgyud-sde*, referring to Anuyoga; and *klong-sde*, referring to Atiyoga (MC, pp. 349-350). In this way, the Three Sections correspond to the three higher categories of Tantra in the common rNying-ma ninefold classification of spiritual paths, and the Space Section is here used as synonymous with Great Perfection in general.

146 Zhwa-dmar chos-kyi grags-pa, *sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i khrid-yig skal-bzang mig-'byed*, NyKG vol. 19, p. 144.

possible to undertake such a study here, I shall briefly summarize below some broader parallels and divergences between the Space and Instruction Sections.

One similar concept appears in the history of the rDo-rje zam-pa, in which seven generations of its teachers were described as having passed away without leaving physical remains. This phenomenon later became known as the "rainbow body" (*'ja'-lus*), referring to the dissolution of the gross physical elements of the human body into their purified essences in the form of rainbow-coloured lights.¹⁴⁷ Specifically, the attainment of the rainbow body was connected with specific practices of the Instruction Section. The teachers of the rDo-rje zam-pa also seem to have elaborated some theory about the transformation of the physical elements of the body as a result of spiritual realization, as is evident from an episode of the history on Nyang byang-chub grags, teacher of Nyang shes-rab 'byung-gnas:

[Nyang byang-chub grags] said: "I'll put on a show for you two, father and son."¹⁴⁸ Look at me!" And when the teacher Shes-rab 'byung-gnas and sBa-sgom looked from right and left sides, they didn't see him in the middle. He had turned into a whirlwind the size of a cubit that whirled this way and that way and then turned into a fire. Then he turned into a metal water basin that brimmed with water and, whirling greatly, abruptly turned back into the teacher. He then said, "It happens like this when the impure residue of elements is purified, but the pure essences have not yet dissolved. When habitual mental appearances have been exhausted but one has not separated from the body [composed] of physical elements, the elements manifest like this. Although one may see with discriminating awareness the meaning of there being nothing to meditate upon, such mastery is obtained easily by maintaining the state of non-distraction with

147 On *'ja'-lus*, see Shardza Tashi Gyaltsen, *Heart Drops of Dharmakaya: Dzogchen Practice of the Bon Tradition*; also, Karmay 1988, pp. 190-196.

148 Nyang shes-rab grags is addressing Nyang shes-rab 'byung-gnas, who was his senior, and the latter's student rBa-sgom, then a youngster.

regard to the [Four] Signs (*brda*). Maintaining non-distraction is very important.”¹⁴⁹

Although I have yet to identify the occurrence of the specific term “rainbow body” (*’ja’-lus*) in Kun-bzang rdo-rje’s texts (the term used instead is *lhag-med-du gshegs-pa*, ‘passing without remainder’), the rDo-rje zam-pa lineage eventually become renowned as the “lineage in which everyone achieved the rainbow body”, referring to such manifestation of highest realization in seven successive teachers from sPang mi-pham mgon-po down to rBa-sgom ye-shes byang-chub.¹⁵⁰ One sixteenth-century interpretation offered for the name rDo-rje zam-pa, the “Adamantine Bridge”, was that it bridges the ordinary human body and the rainbow body.¹⁵¹

The presence in the lineage of two teachers from the Nyang clan, Byang-chub grags and Shes-rab ’byung-gnas, is itself a possible point of connection with the Instruction Section, which may or may not be significant. Nyang shes-rab ’byung-gnas was specifically said to be from the Nyang clan temple of dBu-ru-zhwa. dBu-ru-zhwa was the site where in the 11th century the Instruction Section emerged, allegedly through the discovery of its texts that were hidden there by Nyang Ting-’dzin bzang-po.¹⁵² The creative experimentation with yogic techniques concentrated at dBu-ru-zhwa and in the Nyang lineage that eventually resulted in the emergence of the Seminal Heart (*sNying-thig*), may have had some influence from the teachings of the Adamantine Bridge, although whether and to what extent this occurred must be examined on the basis of textual research.

Another point of similarity appears between the historical narrative of the Instruction Section and the main deity in the

149 GC, pp. 164-165.

150 *Gu-ru bkra-shis Chos-’byung*, p. 188.

151 Zhwa-dmar chos-kyi grags-pa, *sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa’i khrid-yig skal-bzang mig-’byed*, *NyKG* vol. 19, p. 144.

152 Karmay 1988, pp. 209-210.

rituals used in rDo-rje zam-pa, mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po.¹⁵³ The Instruction Section speaks of twelve primordial teachers (*ston-pa bcu-gnyis*), with the ancient Buddhas with Śākyamuni as the last and the first eleven having promulgated the teachings of the Great Perfection epochs ago.¹⁵⁴ The eleventh of those teachers was mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po. The Tantra that the teachers of the rDo-rje zam-pa considered as the fundamental Tantra, *Secret Wisdom* (*Ye-shes gsang-ba*), mentions in its *Chapter on Prophecies* (*Lung bstan-pa'i le'u*) a mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po, who had in the past transmitted that Tantra to seven disciples.¹⁵⁵ mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po is also the interlocutor in the *Jewel Light of Wisdom Tantra* (*Ye-shes rin-chen 'od-kyi rgyud*),¹⁵⁶ which is listed as one of the so-called "thirteen Lotus Essence texts" that Vairocana's basic text was said to summarize.¹⁵⁷ It is possible that practices related to the deity mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po were incorporated into the rDo-rje zam-pa on the basis on such mentions in the Tantras. Whether the Instruction Section narratives concerning the teacher mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po originate from the Tantras circulating in the rDo-rje zam-pa lineage or from another source, is not known. In any case, no "pre-history" or account of the spread of Buddhist teachings before Śākyamuni was elaborated in the history of the rDo-rje zam-pa. No cosmological theories were developed about the origins of the universe, the deviation from the pristine original state into unawareness etc, such as they are found in the Instruction Section.

Another parallel between the Space and Instruction Sections, which was discussed in the preceding chapter on the Four Signs, is the trend of emphasizing mental over physical aspects of yogic practice, e.g. emphasizing the "wisdom wind" (*ye-shes-kyi*

153 This connection is pointed out in Norbu (2001), p. 7.

154 For a story of the twelve teachers and its origins, see Norbu and Clemente (1999), pp. 22-26.

155 TshB, vol. 1, p. 777. This is the twelve-chapter version of the *Secret Wisdom*; the seventeen-chapter version does not mention mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po.

156 TshB vol. 3, pp. 439-473.

157 *sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i man-ngag-gi khog-chings*, *NyKG* vol. 18, p. 649.

rlung) over "material winds" (*bem-po'i rlung*), etc. Related to this is their rejection of strenuous physical practices such as found in Tantric practices of the newer schools in favor of more gentle, "effortless" (*rtsol-bral*) styles of practice. Here, further research would be needed to answer the question of whether this similarity results from borrowing between different lineages of the Great Perfection or simply represents a parallel trend in the development in their doctrines. In the case of rDo-rje zam-pa, it would be necessary to examine the extent of influence on their doctrine from such Tantras as the *Kālacakra* and the *Guhyasamāja*, which are referred to throughout Kun-bzang rdo-rje's commentaries.

Despite the existence of such general similarities between the Space and Instruction Sections, the differences between them are also substantial. The central practices of the Instruction Section, "cutting through" (*khregs-chod*) and "leapover" (*thod-rgal*), with their intricate preliminary and subsidiary practices, represent a completely different system of yogic and meditative practice from the relatively simple Four Signs of the rDo-rje zam-pa. The Instruction Section theories of the basis (*gzhi*) and manifestation from the basis (*gzhi-srang*) are also not found in the rDo-rje zam-pa; the latter's theory of all-basis (*kun-gzhi*) and its transformation (*gnas-'gyur*) is probably closer to the new-translation (*gsar-ma*) Tantras than the Seminal Heart (*sNying-thig*). Also, the historical narrative of transmission of rDo-rje zam-pa from India to Tibet is generally closer to the Mind Section account than the Instruction Section, in that it was transmitted through Vairocana.¹⁵⁸ Both Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava, the key figures in the transmission of the Seminal Heart and related lineages, are absent from its lineage succession.

158 As seen above, the lineage's story of Vairocana, is related the *Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag* or its earlier form. Kun-bzang rdo-rje's account of earlier Indic teachers, however, omits a long list of teachers between 'Jam-dpal bshes-gnyen and Śrīsiṃha (*Vai-ro'i 'dra-'bag*, pp. 48-85).

V. Conclusion

The source for the variety of descriptions of *klong-sde* is the existence of distinct textual traditions that claim to expound the Space Section. The earliest of these seem to be the Tantras which structure their presentation of the essential theory of the Great Perfection according to the concept of Nine Spaces (*klong dgu*), with the *Equal to the End of Sky Tantra* (*Nam-mkha'i mtha'-dang mnyam-pa*) often mentioned as the foremost among them. Tantras based on the concept of the Nine Spaces have strong similarities with the texts of the Mind Section (*Sems sde*). The classification of Nine Spaces is parallel to the ten absences (*med-pa bcu*) of the Mind Section. The two classes of Tantras are also similar in their orientation to view (*lta-ba*) or philosophical theory, and their lack of applied instructions (*man-ngag*) on meditative cultivation.

A different kind of doctrine characterized as Space Section appears in the texts related to the instruction (*man-ngag*) of rDo-rje zam-pa (“Adamantine Bridge”), an instruction which is said to summarize the essence of the Tantras such as the *Equal to the End of Sky*. However, this text differs from the latter Tantra in its orientation to methods, which are described in terms common in Vajrayāna but not mentioned in the *Equal to the End of Sky*. Although the rDo-rje zam-pa is considered by the tradition to belong to the Space Section, neither Space (*klong*) nor the Nine Spaces (*klong-dgu*) are an important concept in Vairocana’s basic text or its associated commentarial literature. The only connection of rDo-rje zam-pa to the concept of *klong* seems to be the claimed association with the *Equal to the End of Sky Tantra*. The Tantra itself nor its central concepts do not figure prominently in the writings of the rDo-rje zam-pa tradition. Rather, at least by the time of Kun-bzang rdo-rje, focus had shifted to another group of texts, which consisted of *Secret Wisdom Tantra* (*rGyud ye-shes gsang-ba*), *Perfect Wisdom Tantra* (*rGyud ye-shes rdzogs-pa*) and other texts. These texts also circulated without being considered to belong to the Space Section, but eventually were classified as *klong-sde* in the collections of ancient Tantras, probably because of their

connection to the rDo-rje zam-pa. This process also resulted in the inclusion to the category of *klong-sde* several other texts on the basis of perceived similarities with the rDo-rje zam-pa but without any evident historical connection to the tradition. Far from being uniform, the Space Section as a doxographical category in the NGB collections thus became a container for very different texts. In addition, the concept of the Space Section appears to be used in the Instruction Section as a pseudo-doxographical category to classify supposedly existent textual material, but without reference to actual texts. The implication of this variety of divergent ways of understanding the Space Section is that it is impossible to describe *Klong-sde* as a single, discrete trend of the Great Perfection thought, but a rather a fluid category which has been historically applied to different categories of texts. It is always necessary to specify which texts and traditions are referred to when the Space Section is employed as an analytical category.

Comparing the tradition of rDo-rje zam-pa with Vajrayāna, it is seen that despite the presence of Tantric ritual in the tradition, the various Vajrayāna practices were seen by the tradition itself primarily as having a secondary role to the main practice, which is Great Perfection contemplation. The rDo-rje zam-pa incorporated Vajrayāna practices into their system for various temporal aims while retaining the separate identity of the Great Perfection contemplation, rather than, vice versa, integrating the Great Perfection into an overall Tantric paradigm, which was the approach in some other movements. Furthermore, extant commentaries explain the doctrine of the rDo-rje zam-pa on the basis of concepts found in the new translation schools of Tantra. In a similar way that the earlier Nine Spaces texts had defined the doctrine of the Great Perfection through contrasting themselves to the Vajrayāna, the 12th-century developments of the rDo-rje zam-pa were elaborated in relation to the contemporary Tantric movements, which laid emphasis utilizing the human body in attaining spiritual realization. Kun-bzang rdo-rje's exposition of the system of rDo-rje zam-pa transposes the problem of recognition of the true nature of consciousness to a body-based discourse employing the terms "energy-winds" (*rlung*) and "seminal essences" (*thig-le*), the key concept of the

completion stage of Vajrayāna. Despite the use of new Tantric schools' terminology in the commentaries, their body-based practices are argued to be inferior to simpler Great Perfection-style mental practices. In this, Kun-bzang rdo-rje's rhetoric is parallel to that of the Seminal Heart tradition. Another parallel between the Space and Instruction Sections is mNgon-rdzogs rgyal-po, who is the central deity in the Tantric rites employed by the rDo-rje zam-pa and is also mentioned as a teacher in Tantras such as *Secret Wisdom (Ye-shes gsang-ba)*. As a teacher, he is also mentioned in the Instruction Section. Both systems also have a parallel notion of death without leaving physical remains, the concept which was later known as rainbow body ('ja' lus). However, these parallels are of a rather general kind, and whether they resulted from actual influences and contact between different lineages, or are simply parallel developments, must be shown by further comparative research.

Appendix 1. Tibetan text of the basic text of rDo-rje zam-pa

[17] klong sde rdo rje zam pa'i gzhung bzhugs so/ /

[18] gdod ma'i mgon po dang rnam dbyer ma mchis pa dpal ldan bla ma dam pa'i zhabs la phyag 'tshal lo/ /byin gyis brlab tu gsol/ de la 'dir gsang sngags snga 'gyur rnying ma pa'i ring lugs la rgya che ba bka' ma dang zab pa gter ma gnyis su yongs su grags pa'i dang po la mdo sgyu sems gsum gyi/ 'dir sems phyogs rdzogs pa chen po sde gsum las rnal 'byor ma rgyud bde stong sangs rgyas [19] mnyam sbyor gyi snying po'i bcud bsdu shing ye shes gsang ba la sogs pa'i rgyud sde bcu gsum dang / rdo rje'i zam pa dbang gi man ngag la sogs pa'i sgrub sde bcu gsum dang / lta ba'i klong la sogs pa klong dgu'i don gyi bcud phyung ba rang bzhin rdzogs pa chen po'i snyan brgyud rdo rje'i zam pa zhes theg pa thams cad kyi rtser gyur pa 'di nyid 'jig rten mig gcig lo chen bai ro tsa nas mkhas pa Shri singha sogs rgya gar gyi paṇ chen nyi shu rtsa lnga'i thugs kyi gsang mdzod brtol [20] ba'i gdams pa zab mo la brgyud pa snga phyi bar gsum du byung ba las/ phyi ma'i skor yin te bai ro'i 'dra bag tu/

bdag nyid bai ro tsa na mchis pa 'di/ /

yang dag bcu gcig don dang ye nas ldan/ /

rgya gar yul nas chos bsilabs nas/ /

sgra don bsdebs nas bka' bsgyur te/ /

bod kyi rgyal kham dkar por btang //
 rgyal dang blon po kun log nas//
 spyugs nas tsha ba'i rong du mchis//
 rgyud sde klong sde'i bka' bkrol nas//
 g.yu sgra snying po nyid la gtad//
 tsha ba'i rgyal kham dkar por btang //
 yang dag don gcig mchis pa de//
 mi pham ngon po nyid la gtad//

ces spang mi pham ngon po la snyan brgyud du gdams shing de nas bzung
 ste brgyud pa bdun gyi bar du phung po lhag med 'ja' lus 'od skur grol ba sha
 stag tu byon pa'i brgyud pa'i bla ma rnams kyi zhal nas zhal/ snyan nas
 snyan du brgyud pa'i zab cing ches dkon pa'i chos skor la/ gzhung dang yig
 sna'i skor/ byin rlabs dbang gi skor/ sgom sgrub nyams len gyi skor/ zhal
 gdams gdams pa'i skor dang bzhi'o/ /dang po la/ /sgrub sde bcu gsum gyi
 snying po snyan brgyud rdo rje zam pa'i rtsa ba'i gzhung chung bzhugs so¹⁵⁹/
 /[21]

ma nor ma bcos bsam 'das brjod med ngang la phyag 'tshal lo/

- (1) gdod nas dag pa'i byang chub sems nyid kyis//
- (2) nyid kyi ngo bo nyid kyi don bstan pa//
- (3) rna brgyud lung gi gter chen 'grol//
- (4) bsgom med don gyi gzer chen gdab//
- (5) brda don 'grol ba'i man ngag sbyin//
- (6) 'dzin med ngang la mi gnas par//
- (7) g.yo 'dzin rlung gi man ngag sbyin//
- (8) sems nyid mi brtan spros chen la//
- (9) bde chen thig le'i man ngag sbyin//
- (10) rdo rje'i tshig lam sems kyi lde mig bstan//
- (11) tha mal gnyug ma so ma lhug pa'i ngang//
- (12) rten med pas na rig pa rang sar grol//
- (13) rkyen dang bral bas rig pa rang sar dag//
- (14) re dogs med par dbyings la gtad//
- (15) bsam brjod bral bas ting 'dzin mchog//
- (16) de bzhin nyid du mya ngan 'das//
- (17) dbang ngang gis rdzogs pas bsgom sgrub dge ba'i chos la mi ltos/

159 The title line of Version A is *rdzogs pa chen po klong sde rdo rje zam pa'i man ngag gi gzhung zhal gdams dang bcas pa bzhugs so*.

- (18) sku rang chas su gyur pas gnyis 'dzin las grol/
 (19) don gcig tu rtogs pas rtog dpyod las 'das/
 (20) 'di ni rdo rje'i lam mchog ste/ /
 (21) skal ldan 'bad pa med par grol/ /
 (22) grol ba rang byung gzhan las min/
 bka' sa manta nam mkha' dang mnyam pa bde ba kun tu spyod pa'i¹⁶⁰ rgyud
 las phye ba'i¹⁶¹ [22] rdo rje snying po'i don gtan la 'bebs par byed pa'i rgyud
 sde bcu gsum dang / padma'i snying po'i don nyams su len pa'i sgrub sde
 bcu gsum las/ gdams ngag 'di ni rgyud sde bcu gsum gyi don/ sgrub sde bcu
 gsum gyi snying po ma brgyud rin po che zam pa'i gdams ngag go/ / slob
 dpon Bai ro tsa nas bstan pa rdzogs so/ /

Appendix 2. Space Section Tantras in the sDe-dge edition of the NGB

1. The Tantra of the King of Infinite Space (*Klong-chen rab-'byams rgyal-po'i rgyud*, 48 chapters, 111b-169b).
2. The Condensed Fundamental Tantra of the Great Space of the Ever-Good (*Kun-tu bzang-po nam-mkha'-che rtso-ba bsdu-pa'i rgyud*, 17 chapters, 169b-180a).
3. The Enlightened-mind Tantra of the Arising of the Intrinsic Power of Awareness of the Ever-Good (*Byang-chub-kyi sems kun-tu bzang-po rig-pa rang-rtsal shar-ba'i rgyud*, 14 chapters, 180a-187a).
4. The Precious Tantra on the Wheel of Various Advices (*Rin-po-che gdams-ngag sna-tshogs 'khor-lo'i rgyud*, 16 chapters, 187a-195a).
5. The Precious Tantra on the Arrangement of the Superior Path (*Rin-po-che 'phags-lam bkod-pa'i rgyud*, 10 chapters, 195a-203b).
6. The Vajrasattva Tantra Equal to the End of Sky (*rDo-rje sems-dpa' nam-mkha'i mtha' dang mnyam-pa'i rgyud*, 27 chapters, 203b-248b).
7. The Instructional Tantra, the Precious Lamp of Secret Wisdom (*Ye-shes gsang-ba'i sgron-ma rin-po-che man-ngag-gi rgyud*, 16 chapters, 248b-257a).

160 Version A omits *bde ba kun tu spyod pa'i*.

161 Version A om. *phyé ba'i*.

8. The Tantra of the Precious Wheel (*Rin-po-che 'khor-lo'i rgyud*, 8 chapters, 257a-261b).
9. The Tantra of Secret Wisdom (*Ye-shes gsang-ba'i rgyud*, 12 chapters, 261b-279b).
10. The Enlightened-mind Tantra of Perfect Wisdom (*Byang-chub-kyi sems ye-shes rdzogs-pa'i rgyud*, 10 chapters, 279b-288a).
11. The Great Perfection Tantra Teaching the Purity of Enlightened Mind that Engages in Everything (*rDzogs-pa chen-po byang-chub-kyi sems kun-la 'jug-pa rnam-dag ston-pa'i rgyud*, 5 chapters, 288a-297b).
12. The Enlightened-mind Tantra of the *Vajra* Radiating Light (*Byang-chub-kyi sems rdo-rje 'od-'phro'i rgyud*, 12 chapters, 298a-303a).

Appendix 3. Transmission lineage of the rDo-rje zam-pa

Source: Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho, *Gangga'i chu rgyun rDo-rje sems-dpa'*, dGa'-rab rdo-rje, 'Jam-dpal bshes-gnyen, Śrīsimha, Vairocana, sPang mi-pham mgon-po, dBu-ru brag-ral-ba Ngan-lam Byang-chub rgyal-mtshan, mDo-khams stod-pa Za-ngam rin-chen-dbyig, Yar-klungs phyos-pa Khu-'gyur gsal-ba'i mchog, sNye-mo g.yung-drung-ba Nyang byang-chub grags, dBu-ru-zha lha-khang-ba Nyang shes-rab 'byung-gnas, Lo-mo sBa-sgom ye-shes byang-chub, E-gong-po-ba 'Dzeng Dharmabodhi (1052-1168), E-gong-po-ba 'Dzeng Jo-sras, Kun-bzang rdo-rje,¹⁶² rJe-btsun Sangs-rgyas rdo-rje, sKye-tshe Ye-shes dbang-phyug, Dwags-po ze-dkar-ba gzig ye-shes dbang-po, Khrab la-kha-ba'i mkhan-chen Dur pa bsod-nams 'od, La-kha-ba'i Dur-ston Vajreśvara, Bla-ma Go-ri blo-ldan, Bla-ma 'O-la jo-sras, mTha'-bzhi gZhon-nu dbang-phyug, mTha'-bzhi brTson-'grus dbang-phyug, mTha'-bzhi Grags-pa rin-chen, Khrab la-kha-ba Śākya rgyal-po, Thub-bstan yongs-su rdzogs-pa'i bshes-gnyen yid-bzang rtse-pa 'Gos-lo gzhon-nu dpal (1392-1481), Nges-par thams-cad mkhyen-pa sPyan-snga zhwa-dmar chos-kyi grags-pa ye-shes dpal-bzang (1453-1524), Shel-brag sprul-sku chos-kyi blo-gros, Khyung-tshang ras-chen blo-gros dpal-ldan, Sprul-sku Karmaguru, Chos-dbang bstan-'dzin nyi-ma, Khyab-bdag khra-tshang-pa rdo-rje mi-rtog rtal (1595-1671), Za-hor Bande (Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho) (1617-1682).

162 Student of both 'Dzeng Dharmabodhi and 'Dzeng Jo-sras.

Abbreviations

NyKG: rNying-ma bKa'-ma rgyas-pa
 NGB: rNying-ma'i rgyud-'bum
 TshB: rNying-ma'i rgyud-'bum, mTshams-brag edition
 TK: rNying-ma'i rgyud-'bum, gTing-skyes edition

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- GC: *sNyan-brgyud rin-po-che rdo-rje zam-pa'i gdams-ngag gzhung bshad che-ba 'dzeng yab-sras-kyi slob-ma slob-dpon kun-bzang rdo-rjes mdzad-pa*, NyKG vol. 18, pp. 22-338.
- MC: *sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i lo-rgyus 'bring-po gdams-ngag dang bcas-pa*, NyKG vol. 18, pp. 339-483.
- SC: *sNyan-brgyud rdo-rje zam-pa'i man-ngag-gi khog-chings*, NyKG vol. 18, pp. 642-652.
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