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The Theory and Practice of lCags-kyi-sdong-po  
in the Northern Treasure Branch  
of rNying-ma School

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# The Theory and Practice of ICags-kyi-sdong-po in the Northern Treasure Branch of rNying-ma School\*

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I address the issue of the interpretation of Tibetan “ICags-kyi-sdong-po (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣང་བོ)” for the meditative techniques described in the *Longevity Practice of the Iron-Stalk* (ཆོ་སྐབ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣང་བོ། hereafter, CD). According to the hagiographico-biographical literature (རྗམ་ཐར་),<sup>1</sup> the great

\* To begin with, I extend my profound gratitude to Prof. Florin Deleanu, my supervisor at ICPBS. I should also like to thank my colleague Dr. Corin Golding for his useful suggestions to improve this paper; and Matthew Fisk, for his insightful clarifications of my arguments. My Tibetan teacher, རྒྱ་དག་དབང་འོད་སྣང་དགོན་ཏུ་ལགས། deserves special thanks. Needless to say, I alone remain responsible for all mistakes; any shortcomings will be remedied in my ongoing PhD thesis. I shall be most grateful for any criticism, feedback, and queries, which should be addressed to the editor of the SJBS.

<sup>1</sup> Thang-stong fascinated all who knew him, so that six biographies written by his intimates are known so far. These accounts of the adept’s life are largely hagiographical in nature but offering enough data to reconstruct how he had attained the CD practice. The present article seeks to remain faithful to the six biographies as far as possible. Among them, my key textual witnesses are:

(1) *Ocean of Marvels* (ངོ་མཚར་རྒྱ་མཚོ། S), written during 1485–1517 by his direct disciple Shes-rab-dpal-ldan (ཤེས་རབ་དཔལ་ལྷན། TBRC#P7844).

(2) *Jewel Mirror in Which All Is Clear* (ཀུན་གསལ་ནོར་བུའི་མེ་ལོང། G), completed in 1609 at Ri-bo-che (རི་བོ་ཆེ།) by Lo-chen ‘Gyur-med-bde-chen (ལོ་ཆེན་འགྱུར་མེད་བདེ་ཆེན། 1540–1615; TBRC#P644), who inherited Thang-stong’s lineage. Stearns (2007: 9) reasoned that G was ‘essentially an edited and abridged synthesis of’ the earlier five works, which is clearly shown in a variant title of G (*Marvels in the Five [Biographies] Are All Clear* (ལྷ་ཡི་ངོ་མཚར་ཀུན་གསལ་བ།). A famous example of this synthesis version of biography would be ཀུན་དགའ་རྒྱལ་མཚན་གྱི་རྗམ་ཐར་གསུང་རྒྱུས་མ། (e.g. TBRC#

adept (གྲུབ་ཚེན་ *mahāsiddha*) Thang-stong-rgyal-po (ཐང་སྟོང་རྒྱལ་པོ། 1361–1485? TBRC#P2778; hereafter, Thang-stong) was said to have a formidable lifespan of roughly 125 years.<sup>2</sup> This incredible good fortune had been prophesied by Guru Padmasāmbhava (fl. ca. 8c; TBRC#P4956), who predicted that the Guru’s mental emanation (ཐུགས་སྐྱུལ་ i.e. Thang-stong) would be born out of compassion for all sentient beings and would attain longevity as a result of his perfection of meditative techniques.<sup>3</sup> One of the techniques he employed, according to detailed accounts, is the CD. Through the longevity practice (ཚེ་བསྐྱུབ་ *āyuh-sādhana*; TBRC#T27)<sup>4</sup> Thang-stong perfected the attainment of immortality

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W2CZ7932), in which the seven biographies of Sa-skya Paṇḍita Kun-dga’-rgyal-mtshan (ས་སྐུ་པ་རྗེ་ཏཱ་ཀུན་དགའ་རྒྱལ་མཚན། 1182–1251; TBRC#P1056) are covered by Ngor-chen Kun-dga’-bzang-po (ངོར་ཚེན་ཀུན་དགའ་བཟང་པོ། 1382–1456; TBRC#P1132) and transmitted to us. Here I have to remark about the Tibetan shorthands (མཚོགས་ཀྱིས་) which are in general well known such as reverse “ཏ” for final “-གས” (e.g. “ལྷཏ” for “ལྷགས”) shown in the literatures are not all read in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding Thang-stong’s date (birth, age and lifespan), there is not the space here to discuss in depth the multiple and significant differences between hagiographies and histories. Attempting to refer only to G, which specifically says that Thang-stong was born in an Iron Female Ox Year (G\_4 18,2: ལྷགས་མོ་གྲང་གི་ལོ་ ≈ 1361), and passed away in the Wood Female Snake Year (G\_4 339,18: ཤིང་མོ་སྐྱལ་ལོ་ ≈ 1485) when he was 125 plus the extra months and days of the irregular Tibetan calendar (see G\_3 342,1; G\_4 339,17: འུག་ཚུ་སྟོར་གཉིས་དང་ལོ་རྒྱུད་ལཱི་ངོ་ཐོག་གཤོལ་ཚེས་པས་དགའ་ལོ་བརྒྱ་དང་ཉེར་བརྒྱད་ [བརྒྱ་དང་ཉེར་བརྒྱད་] G\_3; བརྒྱད་ G\_4) བཞིས་པ་འུག་ཚུ་སྟོར་བརྒྱད་པའི་ཤིང་མོ་སྐྱལ་ལོ་ཚེ་འཕུལ་ཚེན་པའི་ཚེས་བཞིའི་ཉིན།). It suggests that he might have lived to be 128 years old. Cf. TD 3252: 1485 [C.E.] (8)[th རབ་བྱུང་།] ཤིང་སྐྱལ། ... ཐང་སྟོང་རྒྱལ་པོའི་རྩམ་ཐར་ལྷར་ན་ལོ་འདིར་ཐང་སྟོང་རྒྱལ་པོ་འདས། DTC 2352: ཤིང་སྐྱལ། ལྷི་ལོ་༡༤༧༧ ... འགའ་ཞིག་གིས་གྲུབ་ཚེན་ཐང་སྟོང་རྒྱལ་པོ་གཤེགས་ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་རྩམ་ཐར་དང་མི་མཐུན། For more details, see the argument made by the pioneer in this field, Stearns (2007: 11–13; 470n43).

<sup>3</sup> G\_4 339,3: ལྷ་ཚེའི་ལྷང་བསྐྱུན་ལས། བརྒྱ་བརྒྱ་ཕྲག་གཅིག་ཚེའི་ཚད། ཚེ་འདི་ན་ལྷ་མོའི་བརྒྱད་བསྐྱུབས་ན། དེ་བས་རིང་བ་ཐུབ་པར་འཇུག། For details of the prophecies given by the Guru Padmasāmbhava, see Shinga (2016).

<sup>4</sup> For a sampling of rituals of the ཚེ་བསྐྱུབ་ in the Tibetan Buddhist Canon, e.g. *Āyuh-sādhana* (P4863 (Anon.): ཚེ་བསྐྱུབ་པའི་ཐབས།). I was of course immediately tempted to compare the ཚེ་བསྐྱུབ་ with ཚེ་དབང་ (TBRC#T473) or དབང་ཚོག་ (TBRC#T48) though, in

(འཆི་མེད་) to cultivate life-long devotion to altruistic acts, e.g. building iron suspension bridges over hundreds of rivers.

Belonging to the “mind-sādhana (བྱུགས་སྐྱབ་)” (Thondup, 1986: 120) cycle of the Northern treasure (བྱང་གཏོར་) branch of the rNying-ma school,<sup>5</sup> this ritual is highly esoteric. The CD in fact is a hidden treasure teaching practised by Guru Padmasambhava himself to achieve immortality. The reason Padmasambhava hid the teaching was primarily practical. According to his prophecies (སྤང་བསྟན་), in order to remove obstacles to achieve longevity during the period of the spread of fivefold degeneracy, he concealed the treasure formulated to benefit rGod-kyi-lidem-'phru-can (ཚོད་ཀྱི་ལྷིམ་འཕྱུ་ཅན། 1337–1408; TBRC# P5254), the founder of the Byang-gter tradition.<sup>6</sup> Then, rGod-kyi-lidem-'phru-can, the upholder of the pure awareness (རིག་འཛིན་ *vidyādhara*) of the longevity practice, gained the power to purify his ordinary body and transform it into a subtle body, which is immortal (ཚེ་འདི་རིག་འཛིན་).<sup>7</sup>

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the present state of my knowledge, it would be more reasonable to limit myself to mentioning ཚོ་དབང་ only as an empowerment (དབང་བསྐྱར་བ་ *abhiṣeka*) of the ཚོ་བསྐྱབ།

<sup>5</sup> As for the བྱུགས་སྐྱབ་ Stearns (2007: 9) argues that: ‘The *Iron Tree* is the section in the Heart Practice cycle of Gökyi Demtruchen’s treasures for sustaining the essence of life through meditation on Amitābha, Amitāyus, and Hayagrīva’. Including the བྱང་གཏོར་ for a brief account of five categories of གཏོར་མ་ cycles (The Eastern/The Southern/The Western/The Northern/The Central gTer-ma Cycles) occurs in various ཐང་ཡིགས་ literature (e.g. བད་མ་བཀའ་ཐང་), see Thondup (1986: 115).

<sup>6</sup> Dudjom (1991: 780–783) depicts how and what kind of treasure teachings rGod-kyi-lidem-'phru-can discovered from a cave.

<sup>7</sup> ཚོ་དབང་རིག་འཛིན་/ཚེ་འདི་རིག་འཛིན་ is one of རིག་འཛིན་རྣམ་པ་བཞི་ the four levels of *vidyādhara*, cf. TD 2282. Dharmachakra (2006: 191) explains about ཚོ་དབང་རིག་འཛིན་ (knowledge holder with power over longevity): ‘This level of attainment occurs on the path of seeing, where the support present in the supreme state transforms into a clear, vajralike body, while the mind matures into the wisdom of the path of seeing and, as a result, one attains a state of freedom from birth and death’. For རིག་འཛིན་རྣམ་པ་བཞི་ i.e. (1) རྣམ་སྤྲིན་-རིག་འཛིན་ (2) ཚོ་དབང་-° (3) རྒྱལ་ཚེན་-° (4) ལྷན་གྲུབ་-°, see TD 2685–2686; Dharmachakra (2006: 184).

The aim of this paper is to inquire into the interpretation of the phrase “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྤོང་པོ་”, as well as the meditative techniques in the literary work of the CD. I argue that it played a key role in Thang-stong’s “Iron-Bridge pathways to enlightenment (ལྷགས་ཟམ་བུང་རྒྱ་ཀློང་ལམ་)”,<sup>8</sup> later also known as the “Thang-stong tradition (མང་ལྷགས་)” or “Iron-Bridge tradition (ལྷགས་ཟམ་ལྷགས་)”. In the Introduction (1.) I provide a summary of the literature review undertaken for this paper. I explain the context and content of the CD (1-1.) with a focus on the prophecies about CD from both the CD itself and the hagiographies (1-2.). Following this introductory section, the second chapter (2.) delineates the interpretation of the phrase “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྤོང་པོ་” and sequentially discusses the terms “ལྷགས་/ལྷགས་ཀྱི་—” (2-1.) and the terms “སྤོང་པོ་/—ཀྱི་སྤོང་པོ་” (2-2.) with reference to some instances from CD, along with the related longevity practice and also from the hagiographies. Finally, after outlining the two main key factors in the phrase, I propose a concept which exposes the main set of the theory and practice of the “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྤོང་པོ་” (2-3.) in CD.

### 1-1. Brief Bibliographical Remarks about CD

The *Longevity Practice of the Iron-Stalk* (ཆོ་སྐབ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྤོང་པོ། CD) belongs to the Heart Praxis revelation of the Byang-gter lineage. To the best of my knowledge this *sādhana* practice has not yet been critically edited, nor been translated into any European language.<sup>9</sup> CD is part of the so-called gTer-ma (གཏེར་མ་ treasure teaching) literature, said to preserve the words of Guru

<sup>8</sup> This claim is already made by Kahlen (1994: 307) as “built philosophy”, physically helping the living ones to trespass rivers and canyons, and spiritually reminding of “helping to cross ignorance and other obstacles”. Depending on the hagiographies, the phrase ལྷགས་ཟམ་བུང་རྒྱ་ཀློང་ལམ་ has some variant forms (see Shinga, 2017), but the standard texts follow the term as used here.

<sup>9</sup> Nor has it been translated into both classical and modern Chinese or Japanese. The esoteric nature of the text might provide one explanation for its neglect. Including CD, most of the longevity practice that Thang-stong had performed is compiled into very readable volumes such as ལྷགས་སྐབ་དག་པོ་ཙལ་གྱི་ཆོས་སྐོར། (CD\_1); རིན་ཆེན་གཏེར་མཛོད་ཆེན་མོ། (CD\_2).

Padmasambhava. It is recognisable by the gTer-shad (གཏེར་ཤད་ ལྷ), which are sometimes ‘used improperly to mark the subsidiary commentaries and associated rituals as well’ (Gyatso, 1996: 158). As the title of the Opening Chapter (ཚེ་རྒྱལ་བ་ལྷགས་སྒྲོང་མའི་ཐེམ་བྱང་།) shows, this *sādhana* practice might be well known with the variant “ཚེ་རྒྱལ་བ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྒྲོང་མ། (TBRC#T522)”. “སྒྲོང་མ་” appears only once in the Opening Chapter. Naturally, it seems to be a nominalised form of “སྒྲོང་པོ་” so that the variant reading here may not alter the significance and meaning of “—སྒྲོང་པོ་”.<sup>10</sup>

As Almqvist (2005: 37) explains, the Opening Chapter (ཐེམ་བྱང་།)<sup>11</sup> is a Tibetan ‘genre category of lists of contents’. In fact, the ཐེམ་བྱང་ in CD methodically arranges the contents in topical outlines (ས་བཙུང་) that constitute a complex nested hierarchy of three *sādhana*s, i.e. the Outer, Inner, and Secret (ཕྱི་ནང་གསང་བའི་རྒྱལ་བ་ཐབས་གསུམ་), extending into eleven sections (ཚོས་ཚན་བརྒྱ་གཅིག་ see Table 1).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A famous example of this nominalisation can be referred to ལམ་རིམ་ཚེན་མོ། (ཚེན་པོ་ into ཚེན་མོ་) work done by Tsong-kha-pa (རྗེ་ཚོང་ཁ་པ། TBRC#P64).

<sup>11</sup> “ཐེམ་བྱང་” or “ཐེམ་ཡིག་” literally means “inscription above a door”, cf. TD 1186; TBRC#T4CZ2366.

<sup>12</sup> CD\_1 513,3; CD\_2 247,3: ཕྱི་རྒྱལ་བ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྒྲོང་པོ་ལྷ། ཕྱི་ནང་གསང་བའི་རྒྱལ་བ་ཐབས་གསུམ་དབྱེ་རྒྱུ་ཚོས་ཚན་བརྒྱ་གཅིག་ཡོད་ལྷ། The exact six chapter titles shown both in the CD\_1 and CD\_2 slightly differ: (#1) ཚེ་རྒྱལ་བ་ལྷགས་སྒྲོང་མའི་ཐེམ་བྱང་། (#2) ཕྱི་རྒྱལ་བ་ལྷགས་སྒྲོང་མའི་ཐེམ་བྱང་། (#3) ཕྱི་ནང་གསང་བའི་རྒྱལ་བ་ཐབས་གསུམ་གྱི་སྒྲོང་པོ། (#4) ཕྱི་ནང་གསང་བའི་རྒྱལ་བ་ཐབས་གསུམ་གྱི་གཅིག་མ། [གཅིག་མ།] CD\_2; ཡང་གསང་བའི་རྒྱལ་བ་ཐབས་གསུམ་གྱི་གཅིག་མ། CD\_1] (#5, CD\_1 sequences #5 before #4) ཡང་གསང་བའི་རྒྱལ་བ་ཐབས་གསུམ་གྱི་གཅིག་མ། [ཡང་གསང་བའི་རྒྱལ་བ་ཐབས་གསུམ་གྱི་གཅིག་མ།] CD\_2; གསང་བའི་རྒྱལ་བ་ཐབས་གསུམ་གྱི་གཅིག་མ། [གསང་བའི་རྒྱལ་བ་ཐབས་གསུམ་གྱི་གཅིག་མ།] CD\_1] (#6) ཚེ་རྒྱལ་བ་ལྷགས་སྒྲོང་མའི་ཐེམ་བྱང་།

1; #1	མྱི་རྒྱལ་རིན་ཆེན་གྲུམ་པ་ལུང་།	1-1; #2	བདུད་རྩི་བརྩུད་གྱི་སྒྲིང་པོ་ཡོད་ཏེ།
		1-2; #3	ཁ་རྒྱན་དཔག་བསམ་སྤོང་པོ་ཡོད་ཏེ།
2; #4	ནང་རྒྱལ་ལྷགས་གྱི་སྤོང་པོ་ལུང་།	2-1; #5	འོད་ལྷ་བརྩུད་གྱི་ཡལ་ག་ཡོད་ཏེ།
		2-2; #6	འཆི་མེད་རྗེ་རི་འབྲས་བུ་ཡོད་ཏེ།
3; #7	གསང་རྒྱལ་ནམ་མཁའ་རྗེ་རྗེ་ལུང་།	3-1; #8	རང་གསལ་འོད་གྱི་སྒྲོན་མ་ཡོད་ཏེ།
		3-2; #9	རྒྱུན་ཆད་མེད་པའི་རྩེ་པོ་ཡོད་ཏེ།
		3-3; #10	དམྱུས་ལོང་མིག་འབྲེད་ལྡེ་མིག་ཡོད་ཏེ།
		3-4; #11	ལས་ཚོགས་རིན་ཆེན་ཆར་འབབ་ཡོད་ཏེ།

Table 1: Topical outlines (ས་བཅད་) shown in the Opening Chapter (ཐེམ་བྱང་)

	Amitāyus/ ཚོ་དཔག་མེད།	Amitābha/ འོད་དཔག་མེད།
In: CD	12	1
In: CP	10	1
In: G	9	1

Table 2: Number of times names are found

In CD, both Amitāyus (*passim.*: ཚོ་དཔག་མེད། “Limitless Life”) and Amitābha (CD\_1 521,6; CD\_2 252,4: འོད་དཔག་མེད། “Limitless Light”) are thought to be the towering deities who are the objects of veneration (དབང་བསྐྱར་ལྟ་). The definition for them seems to be quite similar, and thus can easily be confused.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it seems that Guru Padmasaṃbhava does not clearly distinguish between Amitāyus and Amitābha. Nonetheless, Amitāyus appears throughout the longevity practice, and thus this peculiar doctrine easily extends to him, one of the three deities of long-life (ཚོ་ལྷ་རྣམ་གསུམ་).<sup>14</sup> Amitābha seems simply to represent one of the *pañca buddhāḥ* (རིགས་ལྔ་),<sup>15</sup> insofar as the

<sup>13</sup> For a recent full study on the names of Amitābha/Amitāyus, see Nattier (2006; 2007).

<sup>14</sup> A symbolic interpretation of the three deities of long-life (ཚོ་ལྷ་རྣམ་གསུམ་), cf. TD 2284: (1) Amitāyus (ཚོ་དཔག་མེད།) (2) White Tārā (སྒྲོལ་དཀར།) (3) Vijaya (རྣམ་རྒྱལ་མ།).

Sambhogakāya manifests itself in the form of the Nirmāṇakāya (see Table 2 and also Section 2-1-1. below).

### 1-2. Prophecies about CD

The gTer-ma literature often has gained its legitimacy by prophesying and performing practices that have been handed down from guru to disciple for many generations to this day. As I have argued elsewhere (Shinga, 2016), the *Bright Lamp of the Future Prophecy* (མ་འོངས་ལུང་བསྟན་གསལ་བའི་སྟོན་མེ།), a biographical prophecy (ལུང་བསྟན་ཚུལ་ཐུང་) traditionally ascribed to Guru Padmasambhava, which is embedded in the hagiographies of Thang-stong (G), has predicted the future discoverers as ‘this longevity practice (i.e. CD) will be certainly performed by the person who ...’.

One could certainly take these prophecies as ‘the central legi[t]imating device of the Treasure; it proves, or attempts to prove, that the cycle was not authored by the discoverer but rather was formulated by Padmasambhava in the past’ (Gyatso, 1996: 159). This purports to explain, under his/her<sup>16</sup> own predestined revelation, the lives of treasure discoverers (གཏེར་སྟོན་) consciously or subconsciously designated by the prophecies. The point is that the prophecies have always seen reason and wisdom as to be out of compassion for the suffering beings in a degenerate age.

CD\_1 512,2; CD\_2 246,2: This *Longevity Practice of the Iron-Stalk* (ཚོ་སྐབ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྤོང་པོ། CD) was concealed by nobody other than I (བདག་འདྲ།), Guru Padmasambhava, for the merit of the future one who has the aptitude [for cultivating this practice. ...] The secret consort of Guru Padmasambhava, whose secret name was “Goddess Caṇḍālī (ལྷ་མོ་ཙུང་ལྷོ།)”, came and wrote the Heart-Sphere of Padmasambhava (པདྨ་འབྲུང་གནས་སྤོང་ཐེག་) in the symbolic

<sup>15</sup> See CD\_1 516,4; CD\_2 248,5 (the following renders only with a custom format and omits the variant elements): རིགས་ལུ་རྒྱལ་བའི་སྤྲུགས་འདི་གདབ་ལུ་ མོ་བཟོ་སུ་རྩི་ རྩུ་མུ་དྲ་རྩི་ ཨ་མི་རྟེ་མ་རྩི་ ཀམ་བཟོ་རྩི་ རི་རོ་ཙ་ན་མི་

<sup>16</sup> Note that ‘the great majority of Treasure discoverers were men, as far as we know. One female discoverer was Jo mo sMan mo (thirteenth century)’ see Gyatso (1996: 163n10).



language of the *dākinīs*. At the waist (ཞེན་) of a rocky mountain coiling like poisonous snakes in the Northern Tho-yor Nag-po (ཨོ་ཡོར་ནག་པོ།), [the treasure text] is hidden (སྟེང་) in a casket of maroon rhinoceros hide. During the spread of fivefold degeneracy, the awareness holder rGod-kyi-ldem-’phru-can, the destined (ལས་ཅན་) secret yogin, will appear in the East of Ri-bo bKra-bzang. This treasure (i.e. CD) will be certainly performed by him (i.e. rGod-kyi-ldem-’phru-can). E-ma-ho! The fortunate son of Guru Padmasambhava.<sup>17</sup>

This passage clearly implies that the CD was concealed (བཞག་) by Guru Padmasambhava for the person who would perform the treasure teaching (གཏེར་འདི་ངེས་པར་དེ་ཡིས་སྟོན་) during the spread of fivefold degeneracy.<sup>18</sup> Most probably aimed at maintaining the blessing powers afresh, the gTer-ma literature was written in the symbolic language of the *dākinīs*, so that it well preserves distinctive features of the “Heart-Sphere (སྟིང་ཐེག་)” (Gyatso, 1996: 149) of Padmasambhava.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> CD\_1 512,2; CD\_2 246,2: བདག་འདྲ་སྐྱོད་འབྲུང་གནས་ཀྱིས། ཆོ་སྒྲུབ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྟོང་པོ་འདི། ལས་ཅན་གྱི་མའི་དོན་ཏུ་བཞག་། [...] སྐྱོད་འབྲུང་གནས་གསང་བའི་ཡུམ། གསང་མཚན་ལྷ་མོ་ཚལ་ལྷོ། [ཚལ་ལྷོ།] 2; ཚལ་ལྷོ། 1] ལྷོ་ནས་མཁའ་འགྲོའི་བར་ཡིག་ [བར་ཡིག་] 2; བར་ཡིག་ 1] ལུ་སྐྱོད་འབྲུང་གནས་སྟིང་ཐེག་བཞག་ཏུ། རྒྱུ་ལྷགས་ཨོ་ཡོར་ནག་པོའི་ཡུམ། བག་རི་ཏུ་གསུམ་སྐྱོད་ས་འདྲའི་ཞེན་བཞོན་སྐྱོག་པོའི་ནང་ཏུ་སྟེང་། [སྟེང་།] 2; སྟེང་། 1] ལས་ཅན་སྟིང་ཐེགས་མ་ལ་བདོའི་ཏུས། རི་པོ་བཀྲ་བཟང་ཤར་མའུ་ཏུ། རིག་འདྲིན་ཞེན་ཀྱི་སྟེང་འཕྲ། [འཕྲ།] 2; ཕྲ། 1] ཅན་ལས་ཅན་སྐྱོད་པའི་རྣམ་འབྲུང་འབྲུང་གཏེར་འདི་ངེས་པར་དེ་ཡིས་སྟོན་མ་མེད་ལས་ཅན་སྐྱོད་པའི་སྐུ།

<sup>18</sup> For the five defilements (cf. MVy#2335: སྟིང་ཐེག་མ་ལའི་མིང་ལ་ *pañca-kaṣāyāḥ*; 五濁名目) of the world, cf. 曇無讖 (385–433) 譯『菩薩地持經 (\**Bodhisattvabhūmi-sūtra*)』 T1581.30.928c21–23: 所謂五濁。一日命濁。二日衆生濁。三日煩惱濁。四日見濁。五日劫濁。The fast (ཆོ་སྟིང་ཐེག་མ་ \**āyushkaṣāya*; 命濁) occurs when the lifespan of human beings becomes limited to a hundred years (928c23–24: བྱོ་སྟིང་ཐེག་མ་ལའི་མིང་ལ་ 謂今世短壽人極壽百歲。是名命濁). The *eidōs* of the world is quite common to the Buddhist perspective, especially the world in the “end-age (ཏུས་མཐའ་)”. Thondup (1986: 236n122) gives us an intriguing interpretation of this ཏུས་མཐའ་ ‘The present time of war, disease, famine and emotional struggles might be a golden age for science and technology, but to spiritual eyes it might be the end-age’.

<sup>19</sup> As for the Eight Pronouncements (བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་སྐྱོད་ཐབས་) of Padmasambhava: (1) གཏེར་ཆོ་སྟིང་ཐེག་ (2) སྐྱོད་ (3) རང་དག་སྐྱོད་ (4) བདུད་ཆོ་ཡོན་ཏན་ (5) སྐྱོད་ལས་སྐྱོད་པ་

Just as predicted, the awareness holder (རིག་འཛིན་ *vidyādhara*) rGod-kyi-ldem-'phru-can (ཚོད་ཀྱི་ལྷེམ་འབྲུ་ཅན། 1337–1408) appeared in the East of Ri-bo bKra-bzang (རི་བོ་བཀྲ་བསང་།), where Thang-stong was bestowed the CD from the Great Anchorite (ལྷན་སྐངས་) Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan (དོན་ཡོད་རྒྱལ་མཚན།).<sup>20</sup> Withdrawn from the secular society, both the secret yogin (སྤྲུལ་པའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་) rGod-kyi-ldem-'phru-can and the religious hermit rGod-kyi-ldem-'phru-can left us few sources that describe their accomplishments. We are left to deduce about what types of transmissions need to be made for the above figures in detail. It may suffice here to say that, according to CD and G, Guru Padmasambhava intended to bestow this Byang-gter practice to the gTer-stons most certainly through the Mind-mandate Transmission (གཏུང་རྒྱུ་). Because he recognised the CD as his Heart-Sphere (སེམས་འབྲུང་གནས་སྤྱིང་ཐིག་). The particular of the authenticity and transmission has been studied by Thondup (1986: 101–110), who devotes considerable attention to gTad-rgya as the Guru recognised the gTer-stons ‘as his own regents and blessed them to tame the beings of the end-age (རྒྱལ་མཐའ་)’ (Thondup, 1986: 103; 236n121–122). The biographical literature (རྣམ་ཐར་) of Thang-stong supports this point in many places. In fact, G can be based on provenance of the CD, which makes it distinctive and relevant to the purpose of this discussion.

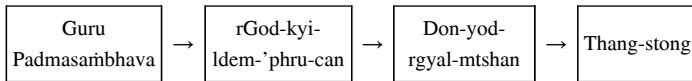


Table 3: A rough lineage

(6) ཚོད་གཏུང་མ་མའི་-° (7) རིག་འཛིན་སྤྲུལ་པའི་-° (8) འཛིན་རྟེན་རྟེན་ལས་པའི་-°. ‘Occasionally two more Pronouncements (*bka'*) may be added’, see Dargyay (1979: 31): [9] རྟེན་སྤྲུལ་དམོན་པའི་-° [10] ལྷུ་རྟེན་སྤྱིང་པའི་-°. There are various གཏུང་མ་ scripts known by the *dākas* and *dākinīs* of the vajra lands, such as ཐང་ཡིག་ ལྷུང་ཡིག་ བཤུར་ཡིག་ ལྷེམ་ཡིག་ | For more details, see Thondup (1986: 126).

<sup>20</sup> Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan seems to have played a special role from a very early time in Thang-stong’s life. The Great Anchorite not only attended Thang-stong’s birthday celebration but also gave him the name “Khro-bo-dpal-ldan (ཁྲོ་བོ་དཔལ་ལྷན།)”, see Shinga (2017).

G\_3 48,6; G\_4 47,17: When the Great Anchorite Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan was living at the sacred place (གནས་ཆེན་) of Ri-bo bKra-bzang, in an evening (སྲོད་), many treasure-owners (གཏེར་བདག་རྣམས་) such are Ekajaṭī [deity]<sup>21</sup> and others actually came right before the Great Anchorite Hermit (ཀུན་སྦྲངས་ རི་ཁྲོད་པ་) performing the tenth day rituals (ཆོས་བརྒྱུ་).<sup>22</sup> [They] told [Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan]: ‘The owner of the Dharma (ཆོས་བདག་པོ་ i.e. Thang-stong) is coming to get (ལེན་དུ་ཡོང་བ་ཡོད་པ་) [the Dharma], so give (སྲོད་ཅིག་) [him] absolutely everything in the texts (ཡི་གེ་གཅིག་ཀྱང་མ་ལུས་པར་).’<sup>23</sup>

G\_4 48,2: In the middle of the night, Ṛṣi Rāhula (ངང་སྲོང་རྣ་རུ་ལ།) appeared and (བྱུང་ནས་) announced: ‘A noble man [called] “the Great Magician (མཐུ་ཆེན་),<sup>24</sup> the Iron-Bridge Man (ལྷགས་ཟམ་པ།)” who is a mental emanation (སྤྱགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱུལ་པ་) of the [Teacher of] Uḍḍiyāna,<sup>25</sup> is coming smoothly (ཤེལ་ལེ་) to

<sup>21</sup> For Ekajaṭī (G\_3 49,1; G\_4 47,19: ཨེ་ཀ་ཇཱ་ཏི་), MVy#4277 gave ‘Eka-jaṭī; རལ་(པ་) གཅིག་མ་ 頂髻母；獨髻母’, see also BHSGD 152; MW 228 (Ekajaṭā). Stearns’ interpretation of the word provides more detail about the deity: ‘Ekajaṭī (E ka dza ti) is the main protectress of the Great Perfection teachings and is considered to be an emanation of Samantabhadri (Kun tu bzang mo). A *treasure-owner* (*gter bdag*) is a deity who has been entrusted with a hidden treasure (*gter ma*)’, see Stearns (2007: 503n396). The Ekajaṭā/Ekajaṭī is a ferocious form of Tārā, see Getty (1962: 125): ‘Ekajaṭā, the blue Tārā, is the most powerful of all the goddesses, for even to listen to her mantra repeated destroys all obstacles, brings good luck and intense religious enjoyment ... [Ekajaṭā] is one of the most terrifying manifestations in the Mahāyāna pantheon’.

<sup>22</sup> ཆོས་བརྒྱུ་ (cf. TD 2287) is the day to commemorate the Guru Padmasambhava. Thang-stong was said to be born in the same tenth day of the month of miracles (ཆོ་འཕུལ་ཆེན་པོ་ \*Mahāprātihārya) in the Iron Female Ox Year (i.e. 1361 C.E.), see G\_4 18,2: ལྷགས་མོ་གླང་གི་ལོ་ཆོ་འཕུལ་ཆེན་པོའི་ཆོས་བརྒྱུའི་ཉི་མ་ཤར་བ་དང་། གུབ་ཐོབ་ཆེན་པོ་ མགོ་མཚུག་མ་ལོག་པར་འཁྲུངས།

<sup>23</sup> G\_3 48,6; G\_4 47,17: ཀུན་སྦྲངས་དོན་ཡོད་ཀྱུལ་མཚན་གནས་ཆེན་རི་བོ་བཀྱ་བཟང་ན་བཞུགས་པའི་སྤྱུ་མཐུན་དུ་ཨེ་ཀ་ཇཱ་ཏི་སོགས་གཏེར་བདག་རྣམས་མངོན་སུམ་དུ་ཡོང་ [ཡོང་] ཡོངས་ G\_3; G\_4] བཅུ་ཆོས་བདག་པོས་ལེན་དུ་ཡོང་བ་ཡོད་པས་ཡི་གེ་གཅིག་ཀྱང་མ་ལུས་པར་སྲོད་ཅིག་ཟེར།

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Mi-la-ras-pa (མི་ལ་རས་པ། 1052/1040–1135/1123; TBRC#P1853), a famous figure who is affectionately known by the same epithet མཐུ་ཆེན།

<sup>25</sup> Thang-stong as a mental emanation of Guru Padmasambhava, see Shinga (2016).

this sacred place on the tenth day of next month. [You (Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan),] prepare well (གྲབས་ལེགས་པོ་མཛོད་)!<sup>26</sup>

G\_3 49,2; G\_4 48,5: At about daybreak (ནམ་ཐོ་རངས་ཀྱི་ཆལ་), the Great [Teacher of] Uḍḍiyāna with bright white crystals (ཤེལ་དཀར་གྱི་མདངས་ཅན་) surrounded by many *dākinīs* (མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་) appeared, and said: ‘It’s me who hid (སྲིད་མཁའ་ན་) the Dharma teachings you (Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan) have as treasures. I (Guru Padmasambhava) am staying (སྡོད་) in this land of Tibet for up to (ཚུན་) 180 years to support (སྦྱོར་བ་) disciples. Hand over (གཏོང་) the Dharma treasures to me (my incarnation, i.e. Thang-stong).’ [After telling this to Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan, Padmasambhava] vanished (ཡལ་སོང་ངོ་).<sup>27</sup>

G\_3 49,4; G\_4 48,9: [Then Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan] told [his] attendants (འཁོར་རྩམས་): ‘The fully ordained monk (དགེ་སློང་ *bhikṣu*) [with the holy name of] “brTson-’grus”<sup>28</sup> is now swiftly (ལྷུར་དུ་) coming here (Ri-bo bKra-bzang) to receive the treasure teachings. He (brTson-’grus = Thang-stong) [will become] an upholder of the pure awareness of longevity (ཚེདེ་རིག་འཛིན་) by the excavation (བརྟེས་ནས་) of this treasure (གཏིར་ཁ་) [called] *Longevity Practice of the Iron-Stalk* (CD). [Thang-stong’s myriad of] followers (གུ་སློབ་) as number of stars will gather [before Thang-stong, and they] will offer (འབུལ་བ་གདའ་) [him] boundless possessions (འོངས་སྤྱོད་མཐའ་ཡས་).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> G\_4 48,2: དེའི་ནམ་གུང་གི་ཆལ་ངར་སྲོང་རྩ་ཏུ་ལ་བྱུང་ནས། ལྷ་རྒྱན་གྲགས་ཀྱི་སྐུལ་པ་སྦྱིས་བུ་མཐུ་ཚེན་ལྷགས་ཟམ་པ་ལྷ་བརྟེན་མའི་ཚེས་བཅུ་ལ་གནས་ཚེན་འདིར་ཐལ་འབྱོན་པར་ཡོད། གྲབས་ལེགས་པོ་མཛོད་ཟེར་བྱུང།

<sup>27</sup> G\_3 49,2; G\_4 48,5: བུ་ཐོ་རངས་ཀྱི་ཆལ་ལྷ་རྒྱན་ཚེན་པོ་ [ཚེན་པོ་] G\_3; ཚེན་པོ་ G\_4] ཤེལ་དཀར་གྱི་མདངས་ཅན་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་མང་པོས་བསྐོར་བ་བྱོན་ནས། བྱིད་ལ་ཡོད་པའི་ཚོས་ [ཚོས་] G\_3; ཚས་ G\_4] རྩམས་གཏིར་དུ་སྲིད་མཁའ་ན་ང་རང་ཡིན། ང་བོད་ཡུལ་འདིར་ལོ་གངས་བརྒྱད་དང་བརྒྱད་ཅུ་ཚུན་གདུལ་བུ་སྦྱོར་བ་ལ་སྦྱོད། གཏིར་ཚོས་རྩམས་ང་རང་ལ་གཏོང་བེར་ཡལ་སོང་ངོ་།

<sup>28</sup> Thang-stong owed his full ordination (S\_2 30,1: བསྟོན་རྫོགས་ *upasainpad*) to a Sa-skya monastic, i.e. dPal-’byor-shes-rab, “the Master of the Five Scriptures (བཀའ་ལྔ་པ་)” who bestowed upon him the *bhikṣu* (དགེ་སློང་) name of “brTson-’grus-bzang-po”, see Shinga (2017).

<sup>29</sup> G\_3 49,4; G\_4 48,9: དགེ་སློང་བཙུན་འགྲུས་དང་འདིར་གཏིར་ཚོས་རྩམས་གསལ་པ་ལ་ལྷུར་དུ་འབྱོན་པར་འདུག་ཁོང་གཏིར་ཁ་འདིའི་ཚོ་ [ཚོ་] G\_3; ཚོ་ G\_4] ལྷུབ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྦྱོར་པོ་ལ་ཚེདེ་རིག་འཛིན་བརྟེས་ནས་བུ་སྦྱོར་རྟེན་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་གངས་དང་མཉམ་པ་བསྐྱུས། འོངས་སྤྱོད་མཐའ་ཡས་འབུལ་བ་གདའ་

G\_4 48,13: Within the pure conduct of a fully ordained monk, the great adept (Thang-stong) then arrived at the sacred place of Ri-bo bKra-bzang on the tenth day. ‘Great Anchorite (Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan)!’ [Thang-stong] requested (ལྷུས་པ་): ‘Please take into account to completely bestow (གནང་བ་མཁྱེན་) upon me the profound Dharma of [both] the scriptures and rediscovered texts (བཀའ་གཏིང་). To practice the Dharma, I will perform meditation at this sacred place for three years.’<sup>30</sup>

G\_3 49,6; G\_4 48,17: [Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan replied to the request from Thang-stong:] ‘Because you (Thang-stong) are the Great [Teacher of] Uḍḍiyāna himself (ཡིན་པར་གདའ་), [you] probably don’t need to perform meditation.’ [Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan] explained the detail that at ‘Am-phu (འམ་ཕུ) <sup>31</sup> in the entire night (ལྷུ་མཚན་གང་) of the tenth day of last month, pure appearances (དག་པའི་སྣང་བ་) that were a mixture (འདྲེས་པ་) of dream and clear light occurred [to Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan. With that, he] said: ‘Certainly (ལོས་) I will offer the owner of the Dharma (Thang-stong) whatever [Dharma] I have.’<sup>32</sup>

G\_3 50,1; G\_4 49,1: [Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan] thoroughly bestowed (གནང་བ་) [Thang-stong] the *Magical Web* (ལྷུ་འཕྲུལ་)<sup>33</sup> and so forth of the [rNying-ma

ཞེས་འཁོར་རྣམས་ལ་གསུངས་སོ།

<sup>30</sup> G\_4 48,13: དེ་ནས་གྲུབ་ཐོབ་ཆེན་པོ་ཆོས་བརྒྱའི་ཉིན་དགེ་སྤོང་གི་ཀྲུན་སྤོང་གཙང་བས། གནས་ཆེན་རི་བོ་བཀྲ་བཟང་དུ་ཕེབས། ཀྲུན་སྤངས་ཆེན་པོས་བདག་ལ་བཀའ་གཏིང་གི་ཟབ་ཆོས་ཡོངས་སུ་རྒྱུགས་པ་ཞིག་གནང་བ་མཁྱེན། ཆོས་ཉམས་སུ་ལེན་པ་ལ་གནས་ཆེན་འདིར་བསྐྱོན་སྐྱབ་ལོ་གསུམ་བྱེད་ལགས་ལྷུས་པས།

<sup>31</sup> ‘Am-phu (འམ་ཕུ) or ‘Am-bu (འམ་བུ)?

<sup>32</sup> G\_3 49,6; G\_4 48,17: བྱིད་རང་ལྷུ་རྒྱུན་ཆེན་པོ་ཡིན་པར་གདའ་བས། བསྐྱོན་སྐྱབ་དགོས་པ་ཞིག་མིན་པ་འདྲ། [མིན་པ་འདྲ།] G\_3; མིན་པར། G\_4] འམ་ཕུ་ [འམ་ཕུ] G\_3; འམ་བུ་ G\_4] ལ་རྒྱ་བ་སྣ་མའི་ཆོས་བརྒྱའི་ལྷུ་མཚན་གང་རྗེ་ལམ་དང་འོད་གསལ་འདྲེས་པའི་དག་པའི་སྣང་བ་བྱུང་ཚུལ་རྒྱས་པར་གསུངས་ནས། རང་ལ་གང་ཡོད་ཀྱི་ཆོས་བདག་པོ་ལ་ལོས་འབུལ་གསུང་།

<sup>33</sup> The so-called *Magical Web* (ལྷུ་འཕྲུལ་) is known by various names. As Stearns (2007: 503n400) has clearly pointed out, ‘The text in this case is probably *Śrīguyagarbhatattvaviniścaya*’ (དབལ་གསང་བའི་སྣང་པོ་དེ་ལོན་ཉིན་རྣམ་པར་ངེས་པ། P455; D832). There are also a number of the commentaries in the Tibetan Buddhist Canon, e.g. *Guṇavātīśrīmahāmāyātīkā* (དབལ་སྐྱུ་འཕྲུལ་ཆེན་མོའི་འགྲེལ་བ་ཡོན་ཏན་ལྷན་པ། P2495; D1623) by

canonical] scriptures (བཀའ་མ་), and the initiations (དབང་), the reading transmissions (ལུང་), and the oral instructions (མན་ངག་) of the Dharma treasures of the awareness holder rGod-sgro-can.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. Interpretation of the Terms “ལྷགས་” and “སྤོང་པོ་”

### 2-1. The Term “ལྷགས་/ལྷགས་ཀྱི་—”

The general notion of the Tibetan term “ལྷགས་” is widely understood as an iron element (cf. MVy#5983: *lohaḥ*; 鍬; Das 396: iron), a chemical element with symbol “Fe (Lat. *ferrum*. CLD 245)”.<sup>35</sup> Although by the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (BHS) *loha* doesn’t seem to be given, MW (908 under the heading of *loha*) has remarked mainly the metal.<sup>36</sup> From the Vedic literature, metallic terms are classified, e.g. *hīraṇya-* (precious metal); *āyas-* (base metal). Iron is often referred to as the latter owing to its having a higher melting point than *hīraṇya-*

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Ratnākaraśānti (ca. 11c; TBRC#P00EGS1016642).

<sup>34</sup> G\_3 50,1; G\_4 49,1: བཀའ་མའི་སྐུ་འཕུལ་སྐོག་དང་། རིག་འཛིན་ཚོད་ཚོད་ཅན་ [sic] གྱི་གཏེར་ཚོས་ཀྱི་དབང་ལུང་མན་ངག་ཡོངས་སུ་རྫོགས་པ་གནང་བའི། ‘In his twelfth year three vulture feathers grew from the crown of his head’, see Dudjom (1991: 780).

<sup>35</sup> Other examples from the adjective bases of “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་”, e.g. MVy#4943 (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ཐོ་ལུམ་ *ayo-gudaḥ*; 鐵丸); #4981 (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱུར་ཐབས་/ལྷགས་སྐྱུར་བསྐྱུར་ཐབས་ *ankušagrahaḥ*; 能弄鐵鉤, 鉤法); #9031 (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་གར་བུ་ *ayaspindam*; 鐵筒, 鐵圈); #4941 (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ཤིང་ཤལ་མ་ རིའི་ནགས་ *ayaḥlayāḥ-śalmali-vanam*; 刀葉森林); #4284 (རྫོང་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་མ་ *vajrāṅkuṣī*; 金剛鐵鉤, 金剛鉤); #9032 (ལྷགས་ཐག་ *śr[i?]ṅkhalikam*; 鐵索); #6096 (ལྷགས་མདའ་ *nārācaḥ*; 鐵箭). MVy has no onomastics associated with “ལྷགས་”. In the meantime, there are several sources on the example “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་” shown in the title of each Tibetan Buddhist Canon, e.g. *Āryalohatunḍanāmadhāraṇī* (P414; D762: འཕགས་པ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་མཚུ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་གཟུངས།). The phrases “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་” like the example above seem to be much concerning with the incantation scriptures (གཟུངས་ *dhāraṇī*); or with the ritual of the invocation (སྐྱུར་ཐབས་ *sādhana*), e.g. *Vajraśrṅkhalāsādhana* (P4062; D3241: རྫོང་ལྷགས་ལྟོག་མའི་སྐྱུར་ཐབས།); or with the ritual commentary on *maṅḍala* (དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་ཚོག་ *maṅḍalavidhi*), e.g. *Krodharājavajrāśanijvalānāmamaṅḍalavidhi* (P3875; D3051: ལྷོ་བོའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རྫོང་ལྷགས་འབར་བ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་ཚོག།).

<sup>36</sup> MW 908: (1) red (metal) (2) made of copper/iron (3) (in later language) iron (either crude or wrought) or steel or gold or any metal (4) a weapon (5) a fish-hook (6) blood (7) the red goat (8) any object or vessel made of iron.

(gold).<sup>37</sup>

Generally, the primary meaning of “ལྷགས་” is “iron”, and thence figuratively “robust”.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, it is a catchall term so there exist almost as many adjectival notions as there are contexts in which it is used. In ancient Tibet, the Iron Age spans the period from approximately 900 BCE to 100 BCE (Bellezza, 2014: 78).<sup>39</sup> Snellgrove & Richardson (1968: 49–51) reports that Tibetans (in eastern Tibet in particular) possessed their own local traditions of metal work (e.g. arms and weapons) in a still-earlier period.

Thang-stong’s hagiographical literature records intriguing stories of how he had successfully built iron suspension bridges over hundreds of rivers (e.g. G\_4

<sup>37</sup> For the *áyas-* (iron) in contraposition to the *híraṇya-* (gold), cf. ŚB XIV 2,2,54. For more details, see Yamada (2017: 277).

<sup>38</sup> The English “iron” is usually taken to mean: (1) a metal, the most abundant and useful of those used in the metallic state; very variously employed for tools, implements, machinery, constructions, and in many other applications. (2) In figurative uses, as a type of extreme hardness or strength. (3) An instrument, appliance, tool, utensil, or particular part of one, made of the metal, cf. OED 78–83, which etymologically goes back to the Middle English *iren*, cf. EDEL 308; Goth. *aiz*; Skt. *áyas*, cf. ODEE 285; *Iron* is probably a Celtic contribution to English, but the borrowing took place in the prehistoric period, before the Germanic dialects separated, and so English shares the word with German (*eisen*), Dutch (*ijzen*), Swedish (*järn*), etc. The prehistoric Celtic form from which these all ultimately came was *\*īsarnon*, which some have linked with Latin *aes* ‘bronze’ and Sanskrit *isira-* ‘strong’. The ancient Indo-European peoples had already split up into groups speaking mutually unintelligible tongues by the time iron came into general use, so there was never any common Indo-European term for it, cf. BDWO 304; *Iron* has been conjectured that the Proto-Germanic *\*īsarnan* was borrowed from Venetic Illyrian *\*eisarnon* rather than from Proto-Celtic *Isarno-* with its initial short *i-*, cf. BDE 544. All resources refer to the etymology of English “iron” here are only available with Sasaki Takayuki (佐々木孝幸), Lecturer in English, Sophia University.

<sup>39</sup> Bellezza (2014: 113) offered a succinct survey of the Metal Age in Upper Tibet as it entered relatively late as compared to other ancient civilizations such as those of China or Persia. ‘The introduction of the forging of iron in Upper Tibet may have occurred right on the heels of innovation in copper smelting, but this remains to be proven’.

155,2f). Concerning the production of iron from iron ore, Tibet still had no furnaces (ཐབ་)<sup>40</sup> at least until the 20th century. The iron used in Thang-stong's bridges was probably forged by blacksmiths (cf. G\_4 166,15: ལྷགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་བྱ་བ་བརྒྱུ་བའི་མགར་བ་) at the local level. It may not be fanciful to see his iron-bridges as created by a sustainable manufacturing enterprise that relied on the local production. At least the processes minimised negative environmental impacts while conserving energy and natural resources.<sup>41</sup> In this regard, I agree wholeheartedly with the suggestions made about the “A-lce-lha-mo (ཨ་ལེ་ལ་མོ་)” by Stearns (2007: 2; 23). Although Thang-stong is ‘said to have created as entertainment for the people while his iron bridges were being built’, it is worth noticing that the opera performances are ‘not mentioned in any of Tangtong’s biographies’.<sup>42</sup>

Iron (especially ཐོག་ལྷགས་) has played a crucial role as a ritual implement (e.g. སྤར་བུ་/སྤར་པ་ *kīla*) as well as in psychiatric medicine throughout the Himalaya.<sup>43</sup> When we read G, there is certainly nothing to describe a negative

<sup>40</sup> For ཐབ་ cf. MVy#4346: *agni-kunḍah*; 火供竈; TD 1146: ཐབ་ཀྱི་

<sup>41</sup> For the iron-bridge expedition to dPal Ri-bo-che (དཔལ་རི་བོ་ཆེ) in 1988, see Kahlen (1994: 306–307). For a detailed metallographic investigation of the iron chains of the Bhutanese suspension bridges by the ETH, Zürich, see Epprecht (1981: 150). The blacksmithing process concerning “loess doll (Jap. 高師小僧 = *Takashi-Kozō*); limonite” will be discussed in my future dissertation. G provides us a number of derivatives as for the term “ལྷགས་” (I must omit the locorum for lack of space): ལྷགས་ཀྱི་གཞོན་ iron chisel; ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ལས་ཀ་ iron work; ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ཕྱོག་ཚ་ iron hook; ལྷགས་མགར་བ་ blacksmith; ལྷགས་ལྷ་ ironclad boat; ལྷགས་མྱོ་ iron gate; ལྷགས་མྱོག་ [iron] shackles; ལྷགས་རྩར་ iron tools; ལྷགས་ཕྱར་ iron spikes; ལྷགས་མོར་ iron bowl; ལྷགས་སོལ་ powdered coal; ལྷགས་ཤུག་ ironclad ferry; ལྷགས་རི་ fence; མི་མང་པོ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ལས་བྱེད་ས་ a place where many people were working with iron; མེ་ལྷགས་ flint. In most of the cases iron (ལྷགས་) is referred to as being “precious (རིན་ཆེན་ལྷགས་)”.

<sup>42</sup> This is also discussed by Gyatso (1980: 111; 115n6); Gyatso (1986: 92f); Dollfus (2004: 10). I shall return to his charismatic activities of building bridges below, that will argue the “འཕྲིན་ལས་” had facilitated the local people to be involved in discussing their local affairs.

<sup>43</sup> The སྤར་བུ་/སྤར་པ་ ‘made of iron, or of copper, gold, torquoise, conch-shell, of sandal-



notion on the term “ལྷགས་” (iron). It denotes variables, the positive sequence components: a very rich deposit of iron (G\_4 140,18: ལྷགས་ཀྱི་གཏོར་སྟོབས་ཆེ་བ་); iron is rare in Tibet (141,17: བོད་ལྷགས་དགོན་པ་); precious iron (*passim.*: རིན་ཆེན་ལྷགས་).<sup>44</sup>

“ལྷགས་” is also found in place names. For example, Das mentions ‘a place eight miles to the south-east of Tashi-lhunpo in Tsang’ (Das 396); and G provides some proper names such as “ལྷགས་པོ་རི། (Chakpori Hill)”; “སྤལ་ལྷགས། (the sMal-lcags Mountain/Hill)”.<sup>45</sup>

However it may be, as far as Thang-stong is concerned, “ལྷགས་ཟམ་” (iron bridge(s)) or “ལྷགས་ཟམ་པ། (Iron-Bridge Man)” are the two most significant uses of “ལྷགས་”.<sup>46</sup> I can here only sketch out the three lines of “ལྷགས་” from CD

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wood and even of leather (བསེའི་ཕྱར་བྱ་) (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1975: 18). Trying to apply this variable notion of “ལྷགས་”, I must offer the *Four Tantras* (རྩུང་བཞི། TBRC#T241) for an instance. The most basic text of Tibetan medicine incorporating Indian, Chinese and Greco-Arab medical systems has explained the inherent qualities of iron as ‘ལྷགས་ཀྱིས་མཆིན་དྲག་མིག་ནད་སྐྱ་བབ་སེལ། (iron cures hepato-toxicity (མཆིན་དྲག་), ophthalmic disorders (མིག་ནད་) and generalised edema (སྐྱ་བབ་)’, see GZ 202. Shown in the pt. 2 (བཤད་རྒྱུད། Ākhyāta, ch. 20 ལྷན་གྱི་རྣམ་པ་བསྟན་པ། The Efficacy of Medicinal Substances), this explanation consists of the eight pharmaceutical materials (རྩིས་). In fact iron is in the Treasure Material (རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་རྩིན་) with the other nine treasures: (1) gold (གསེར་) (2) silver (དངུལ་) (3) copper (ཟངས་) (4) iron (5) turquoise (གཡུ་) (6) pearl (ལྷ་ཏིག་) (7) oyster shell (ཉ་ཕྱིས་) (8) conch shell (དྲང་); (9) coral (བྱུ་བྱུ་) (10) lapis lazuli (ལྷ་མེན་). I would like to extend my gratitude to Yasushi Ogawa (小川康) for his helpful remarks on GZ. For the latest article on the Northern School/Tradition (བྱང་ལྷགས་) of Tibetan medicine in the 15th and 16th centuries in Ngam-ring, see Hofer (2007).

<sup>44</sup> Other examples from G: ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ཁབ་སྟོན་ thick iron needle(s); ལྷགས་འགོར་ལྗེ་ five lumps of iron; ལྷགས་འདི་དགའ་མོ་ this iron is good; ལྷགས་ཚ་གང་ hot and/or cold iron; ལྷགས་རི་པོ་ a mountain of iron. The phrases with a verb: ལྷགས་བརྒྱུད་བ་ forge the iron; ལྷགས་ཆོལ་བ་ search for iron; ལྷགས་ཟམ་འཛུགས་པ་ build the iron bridge.

<sup>45</sup> For “སྤལ་ལྷགས།” Stearns (2007: 516n493) notes that: ‘the Malchak (Smal lcags) is the base of Chakpori (Lcags po ri), the mountain where Tangtong Gyalpo later built a temple and where the Medical College of Lhasa is located’.

<sup>46</sup> Many of the iron suspension bridges which Thang-stong built over hundreds of rivers are still in use to this day. For such bodhisattvic selflessness done by a monk, as far as I

together with the *Glorious Grant of Immortality* (འཆི་མེད་དཔལ་སྟེར། CP) and the hagiography (G). In terms of the longevity practice, CP might be the most well known in Thang-stong’s tradition (མང་སྟོང་ལུགས་/མང་རྒྱལ་ཉེ་བརྒྱད་).<sup>47</sup>

### 2-1-1. “Iron-Lotus Petals (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་པ་སྒྲ་འདབ་)”

The phrase “iron-lotus petals (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་པ་སྒྲ་འདབ་)” is found in the Chapter of Inner Sādhana of the Iron-Stalk (ནང་སྐབ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྟོང་པོ། 2; #4).

CD\_1 521,5; CD\_2 252,3: In the very early morning (མོ་རེངས་སྐྱ་རེངས་དང་པོ་ལ་), [the practitioner] sits in the comfortable seat, all to generate the aspiration to supreme enlightenment. Firstly, [clearly imagine] an iron-lotus seat with eight petals (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་པ་སྒྲ་འདབ་བརྒྱུད་གདན་) [arisen] from the very condition of emptiness. Above it (the iron-lotus seat), [visualise] yourself (བདག་ཉིད་) as Amitābha with the red body, who sits in the cross-legged posture wearing complete Nirmāṇakāya vestments. [The Amitābha as being nondual with the practitioner] holds the long-life vase with two hands in meditative equipoise.

know, no Tibetan term denotes. It was most probably because of complete set of precepts (ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་ *śīla*) that *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* must follow. From the viewpoint of the precepts, for instance, even in the field of agriculture, swinging iron tools (G\_4 167,7: ལྷགས་དར་སྟོབས་ཆེན་གྲུབ་) can be against them because killing soil-dwelling insects should be greatly avoided. More important — indeed, this is central to this paper — is Thang-stong’s socially mindful personality. So it is well said that ‘he used and developed technology for a “socialist” goal’ (Kahlen, 1994: 307). In 20th century Thailand, the struggle over the precepts consumed much of lives of “development monks (*prasong na pattanalpra nak pattana*)”. They engage in a wide range of culturally valued activities, see Bobilin (1988); Queen & King (1996); Izumi (2000); Sakurai (2000).

<sup>47</sup> At the colophon, CP reads: ཆོ་སྐབ་ལྷགས་ཟམ་ལྷགས་འཆི་མེད་དཔལ་སྟེར་ཏུ་གཤགས་པའི་ལེའུ་ཚོན་མོ། ། Cf. TBRC#T524 (འཆི་མེད་དཔལ་སྟེར་ཆོ་སྐབ་ (མང་སྟོང་ལུགས་)); TBRC#T840 (ཆོ་རྟ་བྱང་འབྲེལ་འཆི་མེད་དཔལ་སྟེར་ (མང་རྒྱལ་ཉེ་བརྒྱད་)). Many text versions of the CP (e.g. ཆོ་སྐབ་ཉེ་བརྒྱད་འཆི་མེད་དཔལ་སྟེར། In: TK, vol. 3, pp. 741–758) have been preserved, see Gyatso (1980: 115n15); Stearns (2007: 477n116). My text (abbreviated as CP) is from the Collection of rNying-ma *sādhana* ལྷགས་ཐབས་འདོད་འཛོའི་འབྲམ་བཟང་། (TBRC#W18). There CP was apparently classified in Amitāyus Group (ཆོ་དཔག་མེད་ཀྱི་སྟོར།).

The limbs of the Excellency (སྐྱེ་ཆེ་ i.e. Amitābha) are hard enough like stone (རྒྱལ་པའི་ཚད་). [Over] the right and left shoulders, the sun and moon have emerged, [the Amitābha, i.e. the practitioner him/herself] is surrounded by the halo of five lights.<sup>48</sup>

As I have mentioned earlier (see Section 1-1. above), this reference to Amitābha is unique in the CD insomuch as the figure is depicted in his Nirmāṇakāya (སྐྱེལ་སྐྱེལ་) manifestation. Being visualised to “wear complete Nirmāṇakāya vestments (སྐྱེལ་སྐྱེལ་ཆ་བྱང་དར་ཚོས་མན་བས་)” probably denotes a value having body manifested in response to the need to teach sentient beings. In the basic doctrine, as one of the five *dhyāni* buddhas (see fn. 15), Amitābha has the attributes of Saṃbhogakāya, about which, however, there are differences of opinion in the various schools.<sup>49</sup>

Here in CD, Amitābha is represented in red and in the common cross-legged position (སྐྱེལ་མདོག་དམར་པོ་སྐྱེལ་གྱུང་བཞུགས་). The colour red attributes to whatever *amṛta* of the immortality, which deserves the colour of ruby red (CD\_1 522,2; CD\_2 252,6: འཆི་མེད་ཆེ་ཡི་བདུད་ཚིས་གང་། རྒྱ་ག་དམར་པོའི་མདོག་ཅན་བས་མཉམ་།). For our purposes it will be sufficient to remember that MW (908) has firstly given “red” under “*loha*” (see fn. 36).

The practitioner generates the aspiration for enlightenment, visualises him/herself as Amitābha in complete Nirmāṇakāya vestments. He/She sits on an iron-lotus seat with eight petals arisen from the very condition of emptiness (སྐྱོང་པའི་

<sup>48</sup> CD\_1 521,5; CD\_2 252,3: མོ་རེངས་ [རེངས་] 2; རངས་ 1] སྐྱེ་རེངས་དང་པོ་ལྷུ་བདེ་བའི་སྐྱེན་ལ་  
འདུག་ནས་གྱང་། བྱང་ཚུབ་མཚོག་ཏུ་སེམས་བསྐྱེད་དོ། དང་པོ་སྐྱོང་པའི་ངང་ཉིད་ལས་ལྷུགས་ཀྱི་པ་སྐྱེ་  
འདབ་བརྒྱུད་གང་ནུ། [གང་ནུ།] 2; སྐྱོང་། 1] དེ་སྐྱོང་བདག་ཉིད་འོད་དཔག་མེད་ལྷུ་མདོག་དམར་པོ་  
སྐྱེལ་གྱུང་བཞུགས་། སྐྱེལ་སྐྱེལ་ཆ་བྱང་དར་ཚོས་མན་བས་། རྒྱག་གཉིས་མཉམ་གཞག་ཆེ་བམ་འཛིན་ལྷུ་  
སྐྱེ་ཆེ་ཡན་ལག་རྒྱག་ [རྒྱག་] 2; རྒྱགས་ 1] པའི་ཚད་ལྷུ་ཕྱག་པ་གཡས་གཡོན་ཉི་ལྔ་འཆར་། [འཆར་།] 2;  
ཆར་། 1] དངས་མ་འོད་ལྷུའི་རྒྱབ་ཡོལ་ཅན་ལྷུ་

<sup>49</sup> CD only mentions Dharmakāya (ཚོས་སྐྱེལ་) twice, where it appears to be identified with the master practitioner, e.g. CD\_1 537,2; CD\_2 258,3: རང་སེམས་ཚོས་སྐྱེར་རྫོག་མོག་ཚོད་ (to reach a conviction that my *citta* is none other than Dharmakāya). However, the matter is too complex to be treated in a brief note. I intend to examine it in more detail in a future contribution.

ངང་ཉིད་). The lotus seat (སྐྱོ་ ... གདན་) denotes the pedestal, where the Guru Padmasambhava sits.<sup>50</sup>

The long-life vase (ཚེ་བླ་མ་) to be conferred with CP designates the guru (སྐྱོ་མ་) as Amitāyus (ཚེ་དཔག་མེད།) to hold the vessel (བླ་མ་པ་).<sup>51</sup>

CP 192,2: The guru clearly manifests [himself] as Amitāyus. Into the [long-life] vase in [his] hands, [the degeneracy] would be trapped (འཁྲུགས་), [and then it (the degeneracy)] would metamorphose to the nectar of immortality (འཛིན་མེད་ཀྱི་བདུད་རྩི་).<sup>52</sup>

As I will argue below (Section 2-1-3.), CP, the longevity practice, is performed by powerful Buddhist and Bon priests (བན་བོན་མཁུ་བོ་ཆེ་རྣམས་) for people whose life expectancy (ཚེ་སྲོག་) has been reduced (སྲོག་པ་) by negative obstacles. In performing the CP, these priests are able to remove the obstacles by capturing them (བསྐྱུས་) in rays of light (CP 192,1f).

### 2-1-2. “Iron-Life Channel (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྲོག་རྩེ་)”

The term “life channel (སྲོག་རྩེ་)” refers literally to the initiand’s heart centre, and is also visually represented as such (Millard, 2007: 266). Following the “iron-lotus petals (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱོ་འདབ་)” described above, this belongs to the Inner Sādhana of the Iron-Stalk (2; #4). The term is said to be “iron-life channel

<sup>50</sup> The image is made to appear like this very condition of emptiness in the following way according to G (G\_4 49,12): བད་མའི་སྤྱང་པོ་ལ་ལྷ་རྒྱུ་ཆེན་པོ་དྲག་པོའི་ཆས་ཀྱིས་བརྒྱན་པ་དཔའ་བོ་མཁུ་འགོ་མང་པོས་བསྐོར་བ་གཟིགས། ([Thang-stong looked up to the sky, where he] saw the Great [Teacher of] Uḍḍiyāna on a lotus pedestal, adorned with forbidding garments, and surrounded by many spiritual heroes and *dākinīs*.)

<sup>51</sup> Cf. the figure of “ཚེ་དཔག་མེད། ཚེ་བླ་མ་ལྷགས་ཟམ་ལྷགས་”, see Appendix, Fig. 1 from Dagsab (1991: 89) by courtesy of the author, H. H. Dagsab Rinpoche (བྲག་གཡལ་བ་རྒྱུ་བས་མགོན་ལྗོ་ལྷན་ཤེས་རབ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།). The artwork provides us with many images of the derivatives of the word “iron”, e.g. “Eisenbehälter mit verschiedenen Krankheiten gefüllt (ལྷགས་སྲར་ནད་སྣ་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་(ཀྱིས་)གང་བ།)” see Dagsab (1991: 204).

<sup>52</sup> CP 192,2: ལྷ་མ་ཚེ་དཔག་མེད་དུ་གསལ་བའི་ཕྱག་གི་བླ་མ་པའི་ནང་དུ་འཁྲུགས་འཛིན་མེད་ཀྱི་བདུད་རྩི་རྒྱས།

(ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྲོག་ཚུ་)” whose basic character entails the *antrum* of a live bamboo cylinder (སྟུག་དྲོང་).

CD\_1 522,2; CD\_2 252,6: [The practitioner must] keep visualising from the crown of [his/her] head (སྤྱི་བོའི་གཏུག་) to [his/her] secret place (གསང་གནས་), an iron-life channel (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྲོག་ཚུ་) resembling an upright pillar of bamboo (སྟུག་དྲོང་ཅམ་). The bright light of the emptiness prevails inside [the iron-life channel], they are very refined five-coloured lights gleaming. Imagine a conch-shell coloured letter of *mantra* as a dew-drop outside of the life channel.

From Blissful Pure Land (བདེ་བ་ཅན། Sukhāvātī), invite Jñānasattva (ཡེ་ཤེས་སེམས།), who resembles oneself (རང་འདྲ་) above in the sky. The longevity nectar (ཚེ་བརླུང་) exudes out of the [long-life] vase, [and then] flows into your (the practitioner’s) Aperture of Brahma (ཚངས་བུག། *brahmarandhra*). [Thereby the contemplative (i.e. initiand)] becomes one with the deity who bestowed the initiation (དབང་བསྐྱར་ལྡུ་). From [the longevity] nectar [both of] the deity and [practitioner’s] life channel (སྲོག་ཚུ་), luminous light brightens and fulfills itself.<sup>53</sup>

The term “iron-life channel (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྲོག་ཚུ་)” is used here to denote ‘the central “psychic-nerve (nāḍī)”’ (Kvaerne, 2005: 187).<sup>54</sup> We are told that it is situated at the heart centre of the practitioner’s body.<sup>55</sup> Dasgupta starts his

<sup>53</sup> CD\_1 522,2; CD\_2 252,6: སྤྱི་བོའི་གཏུག་ནས་གསང་གནས་བར་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྲོག་ཚུ་སྟུག་དྲོང་ [སྟུག་དྲོང་] 2; སྟུག་གཏུང་ 1] ཅམ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྲོག་ཚུ་གཏུང་ 2; གཏུགས་ 1] བ་ལྷ་བྱར་བསམ་ལྷ་ནང་ན་ [ན་] 1; ཅི་ 2] ལྷ་འདྲེན་གསལ་དངས་ [དངས་] 2; དང་ 1] ལའོག་ལྷ་འདྲེན་ལྷ་བྱར་བསམ་ལྷ་བདེ་བ་ཅན་ནས་ ཡེ་ཤེས་སེམས་ རང་འདྲ་སྟུག་དྲོངས་མཁའ་ལ་བཞུགས་ བུམ་པའི་ནང་གསང་ཚེ་བརླུང་ལྷ་བདག་གི་ ཚངས་ [ཚངས་] 2; ཚང་ 1] བུག་ནང་བའི་དབང་བསྐྱར་ལྡུ་དང་དབྱེར་མེད་ལྷ་རྣམས་ ལྷ་དང་སྲོག་ ཚུའི་ [ཚུའི་] 2; ཚ་ 1] བདུད་རྩི་ལས་ལྷ་འདྲེན་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྲོག་ཚུ་འཛེན་མཐངས་དང་ལྷ་རྣམས་

<sup>54</sup> For ཚུ་ cf. MVy#3991: *sīrā*; 𑀲𑀸; Dharmachakra (2006: 223; 225): channel/energetic channels. While as for ཚུ་དབྱེན་ (TD 2212), Dharmachakra (2006: 172) provided us a more specific definition and perspective: ‘The central channel is the main energetic channel in the body, running vertically through its center. Its upper end is located at the cranial aperture on the crown of the head, while its lower end is found in the secret place (the perineum)’.

<sup>55</sup> I have taken this rendering from Millard (2007: 266): ‘the ‘life channel’ (*srog rtsa*)

analysis of the plexus (the *cakra*/the lotus) system with the spinal cord, ‘widely known as the *Merudaṇḍa*, which is taken to be one bone from the bottom of the back up to the medulla oblongata’ (Dasgupta, 1958: 146).<sup>56</sup> Dasgupta then goes ahead to analyse the nerves with “*avadhūtī* (བུ་ཏི་)” (cf. Jäschke 208: དུ་ཏི་ aorta?),<sup>57</sup> ‘through which flows the Bodhicitta, and this *Avadhūtīkā* leads to the Sahaja-bliss’ (Dasgupta, 1958: 155).

It is held “stalk (སྣང་པོ་ *daṇḍa*)” and “life channel (སློབ་ཆ་)” are connected by means of an intermediary substance, which is supposed to be the connection between the bright wisdom mind itself (i.e. Amitābha) and the practitioner/initiator. Iron (ལྷགས་) helps the function of making the “stalk/life channel” robust. Accordingly, we might compare this notion with a corresponding reference to “firmness” in relation to iron in Thang-stong’s hagiography.<sup>58</sup>

Meanwhile, outside of the life channel, a conch-shell coloured syllable of *mantra* (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་འབྲུ་), which corresponds to “*hrīḥ* (རྗེ་ཅུ་)”,<sup>59</sup> is gleaming like a

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situated at the heart centre, is the location of the most important of the five winds in connection with Tibetan psychiatry, the ‘life holding wind’ (*srog 'dzin rlung*). According to the body part, see also TD 2989 (སློབ་ཆ་): (1) སློབ་ཆ་ལ་མཐོང་གི་རྟེན་དུ་གྱུར་པའི་ཆ། (2) འཁོར་བའི་ཆ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ཆ་བར་གྱུར་ཅིང་སློབ་ཆ་འདྲིན་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཆ།

<sup>56</sup> The *Merudaṇḍa* is to be referred to *Śrīsampūṭikā*, ‘where it has been said that in the form of the skeleton-bone the great mountain Sumeru remains in the body’ (Dasgupta, 1958: 147).

<sup>57</sup> As for *avadhūtī*, see BHS GD 72: ‘an artery, vein, or canal (*nāḍī*) in the body’. Jäschke (208) mentions སློབ་ཆ་ under the heading of གཏུམ་པོ་ that ‘in the more developed mysticism the power which meditating saints by dint of long continued practice may acquire of holding back their breath for a great length of time, by which means the air is supposed to be drawn from the རྩ་མ་ and རྩང་མ་ (two veins, v. [i.e. see] ཆ་བ་) into the དབྲུ་མ་ (སློབ་ཆ་ དུ་ཏི་ aorta? [sic]) thus causing a feeling of uncommon warmth, comfort, and lightness inside, and finally even emancipating the body from the laws of gravity, so as to lift it up and hold it freely suspended in the air’ (Here, Tibetan citations have been provided in emended དབྲུ་ཅན་).

<sup>58</sup> G\_4 315,2: མདུན་ནས་དུག་མདའ་མང་པོ་བརྒྱབ་པས་སྐྱའི་མདུན་ལྷགས་སུ་སོང་། ཅི་ཡང་མ་གཞོད། ([When the merchants] shot [Thang-stong] many poisonous arrows from [his] front, then [his] front side of body turned to iron and [he] was not injured at all.)

dew-drop (ཟླུབ་པ་). The seed-syllable “*hrīḥ*” means more than the seal of Amitābha. In this regard, Govinda (1983: 230) explains that ‘in the HRĪḤ we dedicate the totality of our transformed personality (which thus has become the *Vajrakāya*) to the service of *Amitābha*’.

The practitioner/initiand invites (སྐྱུན་ངངས་) *Jñānasattva* (ཡི་ཤེས་སེམས་ [དཔའ་])]. One of the three *sattvas* set forth in development stage practice (སེམས་དཔའ་སྲུང་བརྟེན་),<sup>60</sup> *Jñānasattva* is ‘visualized in the heart center of the samaya being ... It can involve visualizing a form that resembles the samaya being, ... yet it can also entail meditating on a deity with a form, color, face, and arms that are different than the samaya being, or meditating on a symbolic implement that arises from the seed syllable’ (Dharmachakra, 2006: 219).

For *Jñānasattva* in this CD, I am following the argument developed by Dharmachakra in assuming that *Jñānasattva* is indeed visualised as it is similar to oneself (རང་འདྲ་) above in the sky. The wisdom (ཡི་ཤེས་ *jñāna*) being (སེམས་དཔའ་ *sattva*) is the deity in its heart centre, thereby the contemplative/initiand becomes one (དབྱེར་མེད་ *abheda*) with the deity who bestowed the initiation (དབང་བསྐྱར་ལྷ་).

### 2-1-3. “Iron-Hook (ལྷགས་ཀྱུ་)”

The phrase “iron-hook ལྷགས་ཀྱུ་)” follows the above-mentioned “life channel (སློབ་རྩེ་)” located in the same chapter (2; #4).

CD\_1 523,1; CD\_2 253,4: [From] deep meditative absorption in *mantra*, luminous rays in the shape of an iron-hook (ལྷགས་ཀྱུ་) [illuminate] all the world

<sup>59</sup> CD\_1 533,1; CD\_2 256,2 (#4, see fn. 12): བྱང་སྐྱུབ་རྩི་ལྷོ་ [བྱང་སྐྱུབ་རྩི་ལྷོ་] 2; ཡང་གསལ་རྩི་ 1] གཅིག་མ་བཞུགས་སོང་ Regarding the seed-syllable “*hrīḥ*”, see Govinda (1983: 183f); Dharmachakra (2006: 112).

<sup>60</sup> (1) *Samaya-sattva* (དམ་ཚིག་སེམས་དཔའ་); (2) *Jñāna*-° (ཡི་ཤེས་-°); (3) *Samādhi*-° (ཉིང་འཛིན་-°), cf. TD 2944: ལྷ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཚུལ་ཞིག་སྟེ། དམ་ཚིག་སེམས་དཔའ་དང་། ཡི་ཤེས་སེམས་དཔའ་དང་། ཉིང་འཛིན་སེམས་དཔའ་བཅས་ཅིག་ཅར་དུ་བསྐྱེད་པའོ། DTC 2085: བདག་དམ་ཚིག་སེམས་དཔའ་ ལྷགས་ཀར་ཉི་ལྷ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཡི་ཤེས་སེམས་དཔའ་ རྒྱན་མེད། དེའི་ལྷགས་ཀར་ཉིང་འཛིན་སེམས་དཔའ་ རྗེ་ལ་སློབ་པ་ལྷག་ན་འཛིན་ལ་ས་བོན་ཡི་གེས་མཚན་པའོ།

as a vessel and the sentient beings as its content (སྣོད་བཟུང་). [Subsequently,] compassionate grace (ལྷགས་རྗེའི་བྱིན་ལྡབས་) of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, [the fundamental quality of luminous rays,] would be condensed (བསྐྱུས་) into [the above-mentioned *mantra*, i.e.] “... *siddhi* (སྒྲིལ་)”.<sup>61</sup>

The “iron hook (cf. MVy#4284: རྗོ་རྗེ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་མ་ *vajra-aṅkuṣī*; 金剛鐵鉤; 金剛鉤)”, too, is significant. It alludes to a tool that illuminates the entire *bhājana/sattva-loka* (སྣོད་བཟུང་ container and its contents).<sup>62</sup> Although the luminous rays have a form similar to the robust iron-hook (EWA Bd. 1, p. 47: *aṅkuṣa vāñc*), the fundamental quality is said to be the compassionate grace of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. By deep meditative absorption in *mantra*, the grace (བྱིན་ལྡབས་) subsequently would be condensed (བསྐྱུས་) into the above-mentioned *mantra* (ལྷགས་ i.e. CD\_1 522,5f; CD\_2 253,3f: སྣོ་ལྷུང་ ལྷྱུང་ ... སྒྲིལ་ལྷུང་ལྷྱུང་) itself.

Hence, through the precept, the practitioner is introduced to a broad Mahāyānic philosophical perspective, which directs attention to the whole receptacle world. According to the CP, the “*ལྷགས་* (iron)” denotes the robust firmness that primarily relates to the circular mountain range of iron (ལོང་ཡུག་ ལྷགས་ཀྱི་རི་བོ་ \**cakravāḍa*) that encircles the universal base (འོག་གཞི་), according to Buddhist cosmology (Gethin, 1998: 114–119).

CP 192,3: Furthermore (ཡང་), the emanating light rays would strike all the realms of cognitive experience (ལམས་ཐམས་ཅད་ *sarvadhātu*) of the four elements.

[Among the four elements,] the earth element is defined as “all beings hard and solid”. [For instance,]

[1] the universal base (འོག་གཞི་) of gold wheel (གཞེན་གྱི་སྐ་གཞི་ \**kāñcana-cakra*),

<sup>61</sup> CD\_1 523,1; CD\_2 253,4: ཉིང་འཇིན་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་འོད་ཟེར་ནིུ་ ལྷགས་ཀྱི་ལྷ་བྱས་སྣོད་བཟུང་གངུ་ [གངུ་] 2; དངུ་ 1] སངས་རྒྱལ་བྱང་ཚུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་ཡིུ་ ལྷགས་རྗེའི་བྱིན་ལྡབས་ [ལྡབས་] 2; བཟུབས་ 1] སྒྲིལ་ [སྒྲིལ་] 1; སྒྲིལ་ 2] བསྐྱུས་ུ་

<sup>62</sup> For སྣོད་བཟུང་ see TD 1601: (1) བྱི་སྣོད་ཀྱི་འཇིག་རྗེན་དང་ནང་བཟུང་གྱི་སེམས་ཅན། (2) སྣོད་བཟུང་དང་དེའི་ནང་དུ་ལྷག་ལྷུའི་དངོས་རིགས།



[2] the *axis mundi* of Sumeru (རིའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རི་རབ།),  
 [3] the seven golden mountains (གསེར་གྱི་རི་བདུན་) and  
 [4] the four continents (སྤིང་བཞི་ \**caturdvīpa*) and the eight subcontinents  
 (སྤིང་ཕྱན་བརྒྱད་ \**aṣṭadvīpa*)  
 which abide (གནས་པ་) as far as the circular mountain range of iron  
 (ལྷགས་གྱི་རི་པོ་ \**cakravāḍa*) surrounds (ཁོར་ཡུག་).<sup>63</sup>

Empowerment lights emanating from Amitāyus (CP 191,6 ... 193,2) would strike (ཕོག་) all the realms of cognitive experience of the four elements (འབྲུང་བ་བཞི་ \**catvāri mahābhūtāni*). Among the four motifs (earth/wind/water/fire), the earth element (འབྲུང་བ་ས་) is regarded as particularly significant. This element (ས་ *prthivī*) is well defined as “all beings hard and solid (སྲ་ཞིང་འཇམས་པ་ *kaṭhina*)”, and has provided the world to abide as far as the circular mountain range of iron (ལྷགས་གྱི་རི་པོ་ \**cakravāḍa*) surrounds (ཁོར་ཡུག་).<sup>64</sup>

In the same Mahāyāna hermeneutical theory under consideration here, “ལྷགས་ (iron)” can be defined not only by the quality “robust”, but also by the absolute value of the magnetic. Concerning this attribute, CP refers to “iron-filings (ལྷགས་ཕྱེ་)” in terms of the *mantra* and *samādhi* related to a ritual of the nectar of immortality (འཆི་མེད་གྱི་བདུན་ཚེ་).

CP 192,1: Owing to zealous conduct of material things, *mantra* and *samādhi* [performed] by powerful Buddhist priests and Bon priests, things which reduce [your] life expectancy (ཆེ་སོག་) and so forth would be captured all at once (འུབ་གྱིས་) by the rays of light. Just as (ལྷན་) a magnet captures iron-filings (ལྷགས་ཕྱེ་) [all at once].<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> CP 192,3: ཡང་འོད་ཟེར་འཕྲོས་འབྲུང་བ་བཞིའི་འཇམས་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་ཕོག་། འོག་གཞི་གསེར་གྱི་ས་གཞི་དང་རིའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རི་རབ། གསེར་གྱི་རི་བདུན། སྤིང་བཞི་སྤིང་ཕྱན་བརྒྱད། ཁོར་ཡུག་ལྷགས་གྱི་རི་པོ་པོའི་བར་ན་གནས་པའི་འབྲུང་ [འབྲུང་] ད་གྲུང་ 192,4] བ་སའི་བརྒྱད་སྲ་ཞིང་འཇམས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་།

<sup>64</sup> The rest of four motifs appears with each definition (CP 193,2: བརྒྱད་དང་ལྷུས་པ་) according to a precise order, see CP 191,6: འབྲུང་བ་སའི་བརྒྱད། སྲ་ཞིང་འཇམས་པ། 192,5: འབྲུང་བ་རླུའི་བརྒྱད་བརྒྱན་ཞིང་གཞེར་བ། 192,6: འབྲུང་བ་མེའི་བརྒྱད་འབར་ཞིང་སྲེག་པ། 193,1: འབྲུང་བ་རླུང་གི་བརྒྱད་ཡང་ཞིང་གཡོ་བ།

According to the CP, we assume the powerful Buddhist priests and Bon priests (བན་བོན་མཐུ་བོ་ཆེ་རྣམས་) are able to capture (བསྐྱུས་) some of the causes that reduce (སྐོག་པ་) our life expectancy (ཆོ་སྲོག་) by the zealous conduct (སྦྱོར་བ་ \**prayoga*) of “material things (རྒྱས་)”, “*mantra* (སྒྲགས་)” and “*samādhi* (ཉིང་ཇེ་འཛིན་)”. It is brought out by means of a metaphor. Suppose we compare the situation of a magnet (རྫོགས་ལེན་) capturing (བསྐྱུས་) iron-filings (སྒྲགས་ཕྱེ་).

Thus the assumption can be made according to the powerful Buddhist and Bon priests, an intriguing connection. In regard to this phrase, we may observe the practitioners have been primarily rNying-ma-pas and Bon-pos, because ‘these two groups had much overlap in their Treasure activity’ (Gyatso, 1996: 148). Cech (1993) has argued that the powerful Buddhist priests and Bon priests seem to share many features of their ritual environment. ‘The structure of the religious pantheon is the same and the iconographic portrayal of the deities very similar’ (Cech, 1993: 43). Nonetheless, the assumption of a connection between the Buddhist (Vajrayāna) and Bon rituals centred on this longevity practice deserves further study.<sup>66</sup>

Meanwhile, we find in Thang-stong’s hagiography that he himself once provided an understanding of the “iron hook (སྒྲགས་ཀྱུ་)” that takes up a more particularly Tantric worldview, as we will see shortly:

<sup>65</sup> CP 192,1: བན་བོན་མཐུ་བོ་ཆེ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་རྒྱས་སྒྲགས་ཉིང་ཇེ་འཛིན་གྱི་སྦྱོར་བ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཆོ་སྲོག་སྐོག་པ་ལ་སྐོགས་པ་རྣམས། འདྲ་བའི་དེས་རྫོགས་ལེན་གྱིས་སྒྲགས་ཕྱེ་བསྐྱུས་པ་ལྟར་འུབ་གྱིས་བསྐྱུས།

<sup>66</sup> Bon-pos had adopted the policy of imitating Buddhism, especially rNying-ma School so that ‘the beliefs of systematized and adapted Bon are consequently identical with’ (Stein, 1972: 240–241) the school doctrines. Reconstruction of the Bon religion took place with the development of the rNying-ma School, ‘by the discovery of large numbers of *gter-ma* texts which provided a mechanism for the gradual transformation and reshaping of the Bon religion’ (Samuel, 1993: 322). The gross of important studies (mainly done by A. M. Blondeau in 1970-80’s) of an early example of the ‘cross-pollination’ between the Buddhist and Bon-po treasure traditions are provided in Gyatso (1996: 162n3).

G\_4 303,18: [After Thang-stong gave Īśvara and his consort an edict, he said:] ‘If you (Īśvara and his consort) disobey this [edict], I will drag [you] into the vast furnace of emptiness by the clear, empty and naked iron-hook (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་).’<sup>67</sup>

The hagiography tells us here that Thang-stong had valued the iron-hook as a tool for disciplining. He called the tool “clear, empty and naked iron-hook (གསལ་སྤོང་རྗེན་པའི་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་)”, which can be utilised to drag (འགྲུག་) people who eat the flesh and blood of humans into the vast furnace of emptiness (སྤོང་ཉིད་ཡངས་པའི་ཐབ་ཁུང་).

On another occasion Thang-stong had utilised the “iron hook” as follows:

G\_4 129,13: [Thang-stong gave an edict in verse to the eight tribes as follows:] ‘Take your own body as an example, and do not cause harm to others! If [you] do not obey a promise of peace, [you] the harmful demons and obstructing spirits leading [people] astray, who are the delusive appearance of the latent habituated tendencies [created from] mental, physical and other things,  
 [#1. I (i.e. Thang-stong) will] seize (བཀྲུག་) [you] with the iron hook (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་) of unimpeded charismatic activities,  
 [#2] bind (བཅིངས་) [you] with the noose (ཞགས་པ་) of infinite compassion,  
 [#3] lock (བརྟུག་) [you] in infallible (འཆུགས་མེད་) vajra shackles (ལྷགས་སྒྲོག་),  
 [#4] drive [you] mad (ཚྱོས་པར་བྱས་) with the forceful sound (སྒྲ་དག་པོ་) of ‘hūm’,  
 [#5] put (བརྟུག་) [you] in the vast corral (ར་བ་) of emptiness, and  
 [#6] surround (བསྐོར་) [you] with the fire of self-manifesting (རང་སྣང་མེ) wisdom (ཡི་ཤེས་).’<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> G\_4 303,18: འདི་ལས་འགལ་ན་སྤོང་ཉིད་ཡངས་པའི་ཐབ་ཁུང་དུ། གསལ་སྤོང་རྗེན་པའི་ལྷགས་ཀྱིས་འགྲུག་།

<sup>68</sup> G\_4 129,13: རང་གི་ལུས་ལ་དཔེ་ལོང་ལ། གཞན་ལ་གཞོན་པ་མ་བྱེད་ཅིག ། ཞི་བའི་དམ་ལ་མི་ཉན་བ། གཞོན་བྱེད་གཞོན་བགྲུགས་ལོག་འཛེན་གྱི། འཇུགས་སྣང་བག་ཆགས་ཡིད་གཟུགས་རྣམས། འཕྲིན་ལས་ཐོགས་མེད་ལྷགས་ཀྱིས་བརྟུག་། ལྷགས་རྗེ་ཚད་མེད་ཞགས་པས་བཅིངས། འཆུགས་མེད་རྗེ་རྗེའི་ལྷགས་སྒྲོག་བརྟུག་། སྒྲ་དག་པོས་ཚྱོས་པར་བྱས། སྤོང་ཉིད་ཡངས་པའི་ར་བར་བརྟུག་། ཡི་ཤེས་རང་སྣང་མེ་ཡིས་བསྐོར།

Among the six skillful means (ཐབས་ *upāya*),<sup>69</sup> Thang-stong would utilise (བཀུག) the “iron hook (ལྷགས་ཀྱི)” of “unimpeded, charismatic activities (འཕྲིན་ལས་ཐོགས་མེད་)” primarily to tame the harmful demons and obstructing spirits (གཞོན་ཕྱིད་གདོན་བགོགས་).<sup>70</sup> The chief characteristic of these evil creatures worthy of remark is the delusive appearance (འཁྲུལ་སྣང་) of the “latent habituated tendencies (བག་ཚགས་ *vāsanā*)” created from mental, physical and other aspects (ཡིད་གཟུགས་རྣམས་), which can lead people astray (འོག་འདྲེན་).

Hence, the edict, which is referred to as the “promise of peace (ཞི་བའི་དམ་)”, suggested an interpretation of the “iron hook (ལྷགས་ཀྱི)” such as the “charismatic activities (འཕྲིན་ལས་)”<sup>71</sup> that has a connotation of some public works motivated by religion, for example building bridges for leading the local people to be involved in discussing their local affairs.

### 2-2. The Term “སྣང་པོ་/—ཀྱི་སྣང་པོ་”

All languages definitely have terms corresponding to “སྣང་པོ་”. In English there are two main candidates: (1) trunk or stem of a tree; (2) stalk of a plant (Das 720). It is intriguing therefore to speculate about which Sanskrit word is translated into the Tibetan “སྣང་པོ་”. As for “སྣང་པོ་”, MVy suggests its equivalent as *gaṇḍa* and *druma*.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> See also G\_4 201,9: ལྷགས་ཀྱི་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་བརྒྱན་པ་འདི། ཐབས་ཤེས་བྱུང་དུ་འབྲེལ་པ་ཡིན། (This decoration with two iron clasps (ལྷགས་ཀྱི) is the union (བྱུང་དུ་འབྲེལ་པ་) of method (ཐབས་ *upāya*) and wisdom (ཤེས་ *prajñā*).)

<sup>70</sup> Different lists of the eight tribes of gods and demons (ལྷ་མིན་སྣེ་བརྒྱད་) can be found, see TD 3090–3091; Gyurme & Kapstein (1991: 158–159); Stearns (2007: 480n160).

<sup>71</sup> DTC 1389 defining འཕྲིན་ལས་ as: སྤྱིར་འཕྲིན་ལས་ནི་མཚན་སྣོད་ཀྱི་འཕྲོ་འདུའམ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་མཚན་པ་འཕྲིན་ལས་ལ་གོ་དགོས་ཏེ། སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་འཕྲིན་ལས་ནི་རང་གི་རྒྱར་གྱུར་པའི་ཡི་ཤེས་ཚོས་སྤྱི་བདག་རྒྱུན་ལས་བྱུང་བའི་རྣམ་དཀར་གྱི་ཡོན་ཏན་དེ་རིགས་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱིས་གསུལ་བྱའི་རྒྱུད་ལ་འཇུག་པར་བྱེད་པའི་ལས་དེ་ཡིན།

<sup>72</sup> MVy#3384: མི་ཏོག་སྣང་པོ་རྒྱས་པའི་ཅོད་པན་ཅན་ *puṣpa-druma-kusumita-mukutaḥ*; 花樹滿鬢; #3414: མི་འམ་ཅིའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་སྣང་པོ་འམ་ལྷོན་པ་ *druma-kinnara-rājā*; 人非人王樹. For *druma*, BHSGD (273) gave “tree”. For “སྣང་པོ་” see also TSDN 2754: (1) *skandhaḥ* (2) *vrkṣaḥ*; TSDL 1322: (1) *kāṇḍa* (2) *gaṇḍa* (3) *gulma* (4) *druma* (5) *nāla* (6) *mṛṅāla* (7) *vrkṣa* (8) *stambha*.

The MVy provides many interpretations of *gaṇḍa*, including that of the Sanskrit compound found in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* (MVy#1341: རྫོང་པོ་བཞོན་པ།/རྫོང་པོ་བཞོན་པ། 大乘密嚴經).<sup>73</sup> However, the meaning of this title *Gaṇḍavyūha* has been studied in the literature for several decades;<sup>74</sup> as Gómez notes, the name is ‘indeed problematic, and nowhere within the text itself do we find anything which could explain or hint at the interpretation of this title’ (Gómez, 1968: lxi). In the BHS, the *gaṇḍa* primarily means: (1) stalk of a plant; (2) piece, part, or portion [of something] (BHSGD 208).<sup>75</sup>

Philological analysis also suggests “རྫོང་པོ་” contains a notion of “core elements” or “essential part” of some property. In fact, on that note, Osto (2009) has proposed that the *gaṇḍa* occurring in some compounds (e.g. *gaṇḍa-śaila*) can mean “great/greatest” “big” or “massive”.<sup>76</sup> The other clue we have towards the “རྫོང་པོ་ (*gaṇḍa*)” as “core” “essential” may be considered with the phrase

<sup>73</sup> In terms of “རྫོང་པོ་བཞོན་པ།”, the colophon of *Avatamsakasūtra* (Av\_t D362a5; P237a1) reads: “རྫོང་པོ་ལ་བརྒྱན་པ།”, see Hori (2012: 13).

<sup>74</sup> Comparing with the CD, there is such an extent of notable studies on the title *Gaṇḍavyūha*, e.g. Gómez (1968: lxi–lxvi); Wogihara (1972); Hara (1973); Warder (1980: 424); Sakurabe (1997); Murakami (2006); Osto (2009); Hori (2012).

<sup>75</sup> As a polysemous term, the interpretations of *gaṇḍa* (e.g. “cheek(s)” and “stalk”) have been concerned with many texts. For the *Buddhacarita* (5.53), Johnston (1972: pt. II, p. 71) has interpreted *gaṇḍa* as ‘stalk’ after many references from ‘Buddhist works’ such as *Avadānaśataka* (Avś), *Aupapātikasūtra*, *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and *Mahāvastu*. In this regard, Speyer (1958) has translated *gaṇḍa* in *mūla-°-patra-(puṣpa)-phala-bhaiṣajya* (Avś [pt. II,] 133,12) as ‘stalk’ based on the Tibetan ‘equivalent རྫོང་བུ་’, see Speyer (1958: [pt. II,] 133n4). I assume it’s also worth to check the reference done by Mayrhofer (siglum EWA). It takes into consideration the derivation of the term *gaṇḍa* from Dravidian, see EWA Bd. 1, p. 459. The argument put forward also by Hara (1973: 32n1).

<sup>76</sup> For the interpretation, Osto has proffered the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (III.13.22), wherein the *gaṇḍa* ‘appears to mean something like “giant,” “massive” or “great.” Thus once again *gaṇḍa-śaila* is being used to emphasize the exceptional size of rocks.’ (Osto, 2009: 278). The *gaṇḍa* of the same *gaṇḍa-śaila* in the *Amarakośa* (2.3.6) is also considered to ‘possibly carry even greater emphasis or a more superlative sense than simply “great,” such as “the greatest or biggest of rocks.’ (Osto, 2009: 279).

“སྣོང་པོ་ལྔ་” (Das 720: Five Plants of Buddhism)” found in \**Anavataptanāgarāja-pariprcchā* (ལྷའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་མ་རྫོས་པས་ཞུས་བཤེན་པ། APS).<sup>77</sup>

In the CD, the term “སྣོང་པོ་” appears only in its topical outlines (ས་བཅད་ see Section 1-1. above). Also in G, there is no paraphrase of “སྣོང་པོ་” but some denominations, e.g., trunk of a fir tree (ཐང་ཤིང་སྣོང་པོ་); trunk of a sandalwood tree (ཅན་དན་སྣོང་པོ་); a juniper tree (ཤུག་སྣོང་).

In this context, here I might have to briefly mention “སྣོང་བུ་” as a variation of the “སྣོང་པོ་”. Slightly differed from “སྣོང་པོ་”, the “སྣོང་བུ་” (MVy#6223: *daṇḍaḥ*; 樹)” has never been used in CD. While G has a substantial number of lines in the use of “སྣོང་བུ་”.

G\_4 54.4: [During the retreat, Thang-stong had a vision of] four deep holes whose depths were difficult to comprehend. [He] set [long] jewelled ladders with a hundred *rungs* (སྣོང་བུ་) [into the holes], and brought many sentient beings that were inside the holes up to the surface.<sup>78</sup>

This vision of long-jewelled ladders (རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་རྒྱས་) with a hundred rungs (སྣོང་བུ་) came from the experience of his retreat (སྐྱམ་མཚམས་). In the vision, Thang-stong lowered the four-jewelled ladders into the four deep holes (དོང་) and rescued many living beings trapped below. In order that they may carry these sentient beings to the surface (སྣོང་བུ་བཏོན་པའི་སྣང་བ་བྱུང་), the precious ladders must be robust. The representation of ladders is a standing character to connect the lower forms of existence in *samsāra* to higher forms of existence. This sort of the altruistic intention can be the key to understand his construction of iron-bridges. As Stearns (2007) has pointed out, this jewelled ladder vision would inspire Thang-stong later to ‘construct unprecedented iron bridges over turbulent rivers’ (Stearns, 2007: 38).

<sup>77</sup> APS P823.220a4; D156.212a3: (1) ཐབས་ལ་མཁས་པ། (2) ཤེས་རབ་གྱི་ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ། (3) སེམས་ཅན་ཡོངས་སུ་སྒྲིན་པར་བྱེད་པ། (4) དམ་པའི་ཚོས་ཡོངས་སུ་འདྲིན་པ་དང་རྗེས་སུ་ཆགས་པ། (5) ཁོང་ཁྱོད་བཅས་ལ་བསམ་བཏང་སྣོན་པ།

<sup>78</sup> G\_4 54.4: དོང་ཆེན་པོ་གཏིང་རྟོགས་པར་དཀའ་བ་བཞི་ལ། རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་རྒྱས་སྣོང་བུ་བརྒྱ་པ་རེ་བཏོན་པ་ནས་དོང་ནང་གི་སེམས་ཅན་མང་པོ་སྣོང་བུ་བཏོན་པའི་སྣང་བ་བྱུང་།

The next sequence describes delving into the core formula of this vision. His teacher, the Indian master Dharmaratna (པཎ་སྐུབ་དབང་པོ་རྒྱ་ཀུ་ར།), explained the four holes as the lower forms of existence (ངན་སོང་ \**āpāyika*) in depths of which are difficult to fathom (གཏིང་དཔག་དཀའ་བ་). The extending of the ladders to higher forms of existence (མཐོ་རིས་ \**sugati*) is a sign (རྟགས་) that Thang-stong will build (འདྲུགས་པ་) unprecedented (སྔོན་མེད་) precious iron-bridges over great rivers that are difficult to cross (བཞོན་དཀའ་).<sup>79</sup>

“སྔོང་བྱ” is here the supportive principle, which acts upon matter as well as upon mind. In terms of the matter, for an instance *Prajñādaṇḍa* (ཤེས་རབ་སྔོང་བྱ PD) says:

PD vs. 92 (PD\_C pp. 48–49; PD\_t P149a4; D106b5): Those who always delight to benefit all sentient beings are supreme just like a precious lamp [that] has neither relied on oil, the container nor the wick (སྔོང་བྱ).<sup>80</sup>

PD substantiates the particular interpretation of “སྔོང་བྱ”, the wick of a lamp. In this knowledge lies the supreme value of the *nūṭisāstra*, in so far as the matter of a wick is differentiated from the precious lamp (རིན་ཆེན་སྔོན་ [མི]). Although oil, container and the wick all comprise the lamp, they are not the quintessence of that which guides all sentient beings in case they get lost.<sup>81</sup>

## 2-2-1. “Vase Mouth Ornament Wish-fulfilling Tree (ཁ་རྒྱན་དཔག་བསམ་སྔོང་པོ་)”

The phrase “Vase Mouth Ornament Wish-fulfilling Tree (ཁ་རྒྱན་དཔག་བསམ་སྔོང་པོ་)” configures a part of the topical outlines (1-2; #3). It locates the chapter of Outer Sādhana of Treasure Vase (ཕྱི་རྒྱུབ་རིན་ཆེན་བྱམ་པ། 1; #1) with the

<sup>79</sup> G\_4 55,3: ངན་སོང་སྐྱེ་གནས་གཏིང་དཔག་དཀའ་བའི་དོང་། བའི་ལ་མཐོ་རིས་སྐྱས་སྔོང་བརྒྱུ་པ་རེ། བརྟུགས་པ་བཞོན་དཀའ་ལྷི་ལྷི་ཆེན་པོ་ལ། སྔོན་མེད་རིན་ཆེན་ལྷགས་ཟམ་འདྲུགས་པའི་རྟགས།

<sup>80</sup> PD vs. 92 (PD\_C pp. 48–49; PD\_t P149a4; D106b5): རྟག་ཏུ་སེམས་ཅན་པན་དགའ་རྣམས། རིན་ཆེན་སྔོན་ལྷ་མཚོག་ཡིན་ཏེ། ལྷམ་ [ལྷམ་] PD\_C; PD\_t D; བརྒྱན་ PD\_t P ལ་བརྟུགས་པར་མི་བྱེད་ཅིང་། སྔོང་དང་སྔོང་བྱ་ལ་བརྟུགས་ [བརྟུགས་] PD\_C; P; ལྷམ་ D མིན།

<sup>81</sup> See PD\_C (Campbell, 1919) p. 48, fn. \* [sic]: ‘It is believed that certain jewels have the inherent quality of emitting light’.

preceding Elixir of the Amṛta Essence (བདུད་ཅིའི་བརྟུང་གྱི་སྒྲིང་པོ། 1-1; #2). The inner element of the Treasure Vase is described by the Elixir of the Amṛta Essence (#2); and the outer by the Vase Mouth Ornament Wish-fulfilling Tree (#3).

CD\_1 524,2; CD\_2 254,4: [The practitioner, you] should wrap [the long-life vase] up with a pure garment, and then adorn it with a branch of the wish-fulfilling tree (དཔག་བསམ་སྒྲིང་པོ་). Expand the above-mentioned *mantra* (སྐྱུགས་) and the meditative contemplation. [Thereby] the *amṛta* essence (བདུད་ཅིའི་བརྟུང་) would be condensed (བསྐྱུས་) into the [long-life] vase, and then pervade (བསྐྱེས་) [the long-life vase]. From yourself (རང་ the practitioner him/herself) luminous light spreads, and hence *siddhi* of long-life (ཚེ་ཡི་དངོས་གྲུབ་) would [also] be condensed (བསྐྱུས་) into [the long-life vase].

Concerning the enlightened activity of long-life (ཚེ་ཡི་ཕྱིན་ལས་) that was illuminated by meditative stabilisation. Oh Bhagavat Nātha Jñāna Amitāyus! Goddesses who control the five elements! Please increase the long-life and fortune (ཚེ་དང་གཡང་) of the practitioner, [i.e.] me. Please recover (ཐུག་ཅིག་) [my] long-life (ཚེ་) that is scattered (འཕྲོས་[ང་།]), lost (འབྲས་མས་[ང་།]) and dissipated (ཡར་བ་) among the upper and lower of 10 directions of *bhājanaloka*.<sup>82</sup>

The characteristic implement of a branch of the wish-fulfilling tree (དཔག་བསམ་སྒྲིང་པོ་ *kalpavṛkṣa*) is now placed into Amitāyus' long-life vase to adorn the mouth (འཕྲུག་). The special aptitude for this Tantric accomplishment is brought into the practitioner through the ritual form of *abhiṣeka*.

The practitioner has invoked and invited the Jñānasattva (ཡི་ཤེས་སེམས། see Section 2-1-2. above), so that the deity can be an inherent aspect of the Bhagavat Nātha Jñāna Amitāyus' (བཙེམ་ལྷན་མགོན་པོ་ཡི་ཤེས་ཚེ་དཔག་མེད།), i.e. practitioner's

<sup>82</sup> CD\_1 524,2; CD\_2 254,4: གཙང་མའི་གོས་དཀྱིས་དཔག་བསམ་སྒྲིང་པོས་བརྒྱན་ཤོང་ལྟར་སྐྱུགས་དང་ཉིང་འཛིན་རྒྱས་པར་བྱུང་བདུད་ཅིའི་བརྟུང་བསྐྱུས་བྱམ་པའི་ནང་དུ་བསྐྱེས་པར་ལས་ [རང་ལས་] 2; རང་ལ་ 1] འོད་འཕྲོས་ཚེ་ཡི་དངོས་གྲུབ་བསྐྱུས་ཉིང་འཛིན་གསལ་བས་ཚེ་ཡི་ཕྱིན་ལས་ [ཡི་ཕྱིན་ལས་] 2; ཡིས་འཕྲིས་ 1] ལྷ་བཙེམ་ལྷན་མགོན་པོ་ཡི་ཤེས་ཚེ་དཔག་མེད་འབྲུང་བ་ལྷ་ལ་དབང་རྒྱུར་[རྒྱུར་] 2; བསྐྱུར་ 1] ལྷ་མོའི་ཚོགས་ལྷ་ལ་འབྱོར་བདག་གི་ཚེ་དང་གཡང་སྤེལ་ཅིག་སྒྲིང་འོག་ཕྱོགས་བརྒྱ་སྒྲིང་གྱི་འཛིན་ཉེན་ལུང་འཕྲོས་ [འཕྲོས་] 1; ཐོས་ 2] དང་འབྲས་མས་དང་ཡར་བའི་ཚེ་ཐུག་ཅིག་



own enlightened mind in reality. Together with the symbol of the longevity and good fortune (ཚོ་དང་གཡམ་), the Goddess (ལྷ་མོ་) also plays a prominent part to control (དབང་སྐྱུར་) the practitioner, who is dependent upon the body as a corporeal organism — viz, the five elements (འབྲུང་བ་ལྔ་). This is because earth/water/fire/air/space (ས་ཁུ་མེ་རླང་ནམ་མཁའ་) or wood/fire/earth/iron/water (ཤིང་མེ་ས་ལྷགས་ཁུ་) embrace the practitioner's body, by which the *siddhi* and the enlightened activity of long-life (ཚོ་ཡི་དངོས་གྲུབ་/ཚོ་ཡི་ཕྱིན་ལས་) can be regulated. Among the upper and lower of the 10 directions of *bhājanaloka* (སྣོད་གྱི་འཛིག་རྟེན་), our natural life is said to be scattered (འཕྲོས་པ་), lost (འབྲུམ་པ་) and dissipated (ཡར་བ་). In this regard, the *siddhi* can be characterised by the whole aspect of the four fundamental sufferings (སྐྱེ་ལྷན་འཆི་ \**janma-mṛtyu-jarā-vyādhī*).

CD\_1 525,1; CD\_2 255,3: Put the long-life vase above the crown of [your (i.e. practitioner's)] head. *Siddhi* [attained by] the above-mentioned three essences (སྣོད་པོ་གསུམ་) pervades (བསྐྱེམ་) [the long-life vase. Thereby] the *amṛta* flows down through your Aperture of Brahma. Imagine wherever trunk [of your] body (ཁྲིག་པ་) has been full of *siddhi*. Through the *cakra* (འཁོར་ལོ་), i.e. into your heart centre, the Bhagavat Nātha Vajra Amitāyus dissolves. Imagine [in this wise, you] have attained the *siddhi* of immortality.<sup>83</sup>

Here the term “ཁྲིག་པ་ (trunk of the body)” denotes something akin to the “སྣོད་པོ་”. It alludes to the central psychic-nerve (*avadhūti*; ལྷ་རྟི་). Through the practitioner's Aperture of Brahma (ཚངས་བུག་) the *amṛta* flows down, wherever the trunk has been full of *siddhi*. The “three essences (སྣོད་པོ་གསུམ་)” most probably renders “སྐྱགས་རྟིང་འཛིན་/བདུད་ཚིའི་བརྟུང་”, with which the practitioner has attained the *siddhi*. As a result of the visualisation, the Bhagavat Nātha Vajra

<sup>83</sup> CD\_1 525,1; CD\_2 255,3: ཚོ་བུམ་གྱི་བོའི་གཙུག་ཏུ་བཞག་ཤོང་གི་སྣོད་པོ་གསུམ་གྱིས་དངོས་གྲུབ་བསྐྱེམ་མུ་བདག་གི་ཚངས་ [ཚངས་] 2; ཚང་ 1] བུག་བརྟུང་ནས་བདུད་ཚིའི་བབས་ལྷོ་ཁྲིག་པ་ [ཁྲིག་པ་] 2; ཁོར་པ་ 1] གང་ཞིང་དངོས་གྲུབ་ཐོབ་པར་བསམ་མུ་བཅོམ་ལྷན་མགོན་པོ་རྗེ་ཚོ་དཔག་མེད་ལྷོ་འཁོར་ལོ་བརྟུང་དེ་བདག་གི་སྣོད་གར་ [གར་] 2; ལར་ 1] ཐིམ་ལྷོ་འཆི་ཡི་དངོས་གྲུབ་ཐོབ་པར་བསམ་མུ་

Amitāyus dissolves (ཐེམ་) into his/her heart centre (སྙིང་ག་). As for the *cakra* (འཁོར་ལོ་), TSDN (1156) lists “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་” as “*ayomayaṃ cakram*”. Through such a robust wise, the initiand has been said to attain the *siddhi* of immortality (འཆི་མེད་ཆེ་ཡི་དངོས་གྲུབ་).

### 2-3. The Phrase “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣོང་པོ་”

The phrase “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣོང་པོ་” consists of the lexemes “ལྷགས་” and “སྣོང་པོ་” joined by a “ཀྱི་” a genitive case suffix (འབྲེལ་སྐྱེ་).<sup>84</sup> However, it is difficult to see how “ལྷགས་” could be linked with “སྣོང་པོ་”, thus the connotation of the phrase is not necessarily immediately graspable at the lexical level. To cite a common example with “—སྣོང་པོ་”, *Prajñādaṇḍa* (ཤེས་རབ་སྣོང་པོ། PD) can be presumed ‘Tree of Wisdom’ (Campbell, 1919: [iii]) and/or ‘Staff of Wisdom’ (Hahn, 2009: 1).<sup>85</sup> However, Nāgārjuna does not paraphrase the compound “*prajñādaṇḍa*” within the *nītiśāstra* itself.

There is no attested equivalent in BHS or Pāli of the “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣོང་པོ་”. Further, the CD has only, so far as I know, been literally translated into English, and that was rendered by Stearns (2007: 130) as “The *Iron Tree*, the longevity practice”. Still, the exact relationship between “iron” and “tree” remains unclear: Is there necessarily the connotation of an “iron tree”? Does it intentionally denote “tree of iron”? or “something possesses iron-tree”? or “the tree [part] of iron” in the partitive genitive case? No satisfactory explanation has been given to this polysemic phrase so far.

Here, we can find a clue in the \**Brahmajālasūtra* (ཚངས་པའི་བྱ་བའི་མདོ། Brmj).<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Cf. ལྷགས་ལྷགས། vs. 6: གི་ཀྱི་འི་ཡི་ལྷ་པོ། རྣམ་དབྱེ་བྱུག་པ་འབྲེལ་སྐྱེ་དང་། The Tibetan genitive particles, in general, often through not necessarily consecutive with the premodifiers.

<sup>85</sup> Although the *nītiśāstra* (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་བསྟན་བཅོས་) offers no paraphrase on its title ཤེས་རབ་སྣོང་བྱ། the PD substantiates the particular interpretation of “སྣོང་བྱ་” as a wick of a lamp, see Section 2-2. above.

<sup>86</sup> Brmj\_1 (P1021; D352) is not parallel version to the Nikāya *Brahmajālasutta* (DN I, pp. 1–46) or the Āgama 佛說梵網六十二見經 (T21). As for the 62 Views, Khangkar (2016) examines the Tibetan reception of the 62 mistaken views mainly taking into detailed

Brmj\_t P75b7; D73a7: [There are people who think all things] are like [a firm] iron tree trunk (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣོང་པོ་), if so, sentient beings who have such [wrong] views wander entirely around the *saṃsāra*. However, there is nothing which can be said to be everlasting (*nitya*). What do the eternalists (རྟག་པར་སློབ་ནམས།) rely on? Where and by what do [they] abide?<sup>87</sup>

Brmj uses “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣོང་པོ་” in the sense of the mistaken view of eternalism. Simply because all things, even the most firm iron, are impermanent, they continue to experience birth, existence, change, and death within the *saṃsāra* (འཁོར་ i.e. ཁོར་བ་).

We can see here two different semantic lines in the use of “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣོང་པོ་”: (1) the heretical view of permanent objects of eternalism (cf. TSDN 1764: རྟག་པར་སློབ་ *nityavādaḥ*; *sāśvatavādaḥ*) criticised in such Mahāyāna scriptures as the Brmj; and (2) the doctrine of immortality as seen in such longevity practices as CD and CP. The later type considers the practitioner’s life (སྲོག་ *jīva*; ཚེ་ *āyus*) can become eternal, indestructible, which is metaphorically likened to “an iron tree”. If one knows that we are deathless, he/she will also realise the birthless.<sup>88</sup> The cyclical *saṃsāric* pattern of death and re-birth merely occur as ‘a *rite de passage*: the deceased leaves behind the familiar vicissitudes of human life and enters into a new modality of being beyond’ (Holt, 2005: 147).

CD itself does not directly mention “ལྷགས་” in the above eternalistic views. In the text, the term refers to specific sorts of substances such as simple positive “robust iron”. Meanwhile, within the biographical literatures of Thang-stong, we must find his voice in order to be freed from these “tight iron shackles

account of *satkāyadrṣṭi*.

<sup>87</sup> Brmj\_t P75b7; D73a7: ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣོང་པོ་ལྷར་འདུག་པ་སྟེ། དེ་ལྷར་ན་སེམས་ཅན་གྱིས་ལྷན་འདི་དག་གི་རྟོག་ཏུ་རྒྱག་ཅིང་འཁོར་ལ། རྟག་པར་དེ་ལྷ་བྱ་དང་མཚུངས་པ་མེད་པའོ། རྟག་པར་སློབ་ནམས་ཅེ་ལ་རྟོན་ཅིང་ཅི་ལ་གནས་ནས་ཅི་ལ་གནས་བཅས་ཏེ།

<sup>88</sup> Stearns (2007: 28) argues that: ‘[CP] is a ritualized version of the original visionary teachings of Tangtong Gyalpo that focus on the realization of immortality. These methods are for the achievement of longevity, but the ultimate aim is to realize that “death” is a mistaken concept. If one knows that the mind is birthless, one will also realize that it does not die’.

(ལྷགས་སྒྲིབ་དམ་པོ་)”, which literally shackles all sentient beings (འགྲོ་ཚམས་) to *saṃsāra*, the cycle of transmigration through birth and death.

S\_2 386,3; G\_4 222,1: [Thang-stong prayed to noble Avalokiteśvara (འཕགས་པ་སྐྱུན་རས་གཟིགས།) that:] ‘[There are] sentient beings who are bound by the tight iron shackles (ལྷགས་སྒྲིབ་) of [the dichotomous way of] subject and object, and thus are experiencing suffering in the horrible dungeon. Please sublime deity (ལྷ་མཚོག།), by you [the sentient beings] may be quickly protected! Om-maṅi-padme-hūṃ!’<sup>89</sup>

Thang-stong used the tight “iron shackles (ལྷགས་སྒྲིབ་)” in the dichotomous way of a “subject and object (གཟུང་འདྲིན་ *grāhyagrāhaka*)”. The character of grasper and grasped explains specifically the reason why sentient beings are experiencing suffering in the horrible dungeon (ཐར་མེད་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱེད་ལྗོངས་). To go back to the “iron-hook (ལྷགས་ཀྱུ་)” (see Section 2-1-3. above), the tool which Thang-stong called “clear, empty and naked iron-hook (གསལ་ལྡོང་རྗེན་པའི་ལྷགས་ཀྱུ་)” or “iron hook of unimpeded charismatic activities (འཕྲིན་ལས་ཐོགས་མེད་ལྷགས་ཀྱུ་)” provides an illuminating solution against the fallacious perspective.

The shackles/fetters (ཀྱུན་ཏུ་སྦྱོར་བ་ *saṃyojana; bandhana*) is a well known Buddhological jargon with references to the three/five/nine/ten bonds (Gethin, 1998: 72–73; 193–194). All entanglements can bind us to the world, cause to rebirth.<sup>90</sup> They are also said related to “ལྷགས་”:

G\_3 233,2; G\_4 233,3: [The three prisoners] vehemently called [Thang-stong] out for the salvation (གསོལ་བ་དྲག་ཏུ་བཏབ་པས་): ‘Master, great adept, see [us] with your compassion!’ Thereby iron (ལྷགས་) that bound the three prisoners fell off by themselves. Even the doors of the jail and the staff room (མཁར་) opened

<sup>89</sup> S\_2 386,3; G\_4 222,1: གཟུང་ [གཟུང་] G\_4; བཟུང་ S\_2] འདྲིན་ལྷགས་སྒྲིབ་དམ་པོས་བཅིངས་ཀྱུར་པའི། ཐར་མེད་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱེད་ལྗོངས་འགྲོ་ཚམས་ལ། ལྷ་མཚོག་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་སྐྱུར་ཏུ་བསྐྱེད་ཏུ་གསོལ་མི་མེད་པར། [བརྗེད་] G\_4; བད་མེ་ S\_2] ལྷོ།

<sup>90</sup> For ཀྱུན་ཏུ་སྦྱོར་བ་ cf. TD 18: ཉོན་མོངས་པ་སྟེ་དེའི་དབང་གིས་ཁམས་གསུམ་ལ་ཡིད་མི་འབྱུང་བས་དགོ་བམ་མི་སྦྱོང་ཅིང་མི་དགོ་བ་བསྐྱབས་པས་ཕྱི་མ་ལ་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱེད་དང་ཀྱུན་ཏུ་སྦྱོར་བར་བྱེད་པ།

by themselves, [they all] went out [from the jail] freely (ཅི་བདེར་). By releasing [the prisoners, the great adept (Thang-stong) actually] liberated [them] from the sufferings of death.<sup>91</sup>

For this metaphor, there may be no need to postulate further representation. The three prisoners (བཙོན་པ་གསུམ་) eloquently express ourselves who have been enchained by iron (ལྷགས་) in the jail (བཙོན་ཁང་), i.e. *samsārasamsṛti* (*sam-√sr*). By the ultimate act of compassionately releasing (བློས་པས་) the prisoners from the jail, Thang-stong actually liberated them from the sufferings of death (འཆི་བའི་སྲུག་བསྐྱེལ་).

### 3. Conclusion

I should perhaps conclude by remarking that the notion of “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣོད་པོ་” can be translated as “iron-like (i.e. firm/robust) stalk (*avadhūtī*)” in the *Longevity Practice of the Iron-Stalk* (ཆོ་སྐབ་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྣོད་པོ། CD). The *āyuhśādhana* clearly specified itself as a treasure teaching (གཤེར་མ་) concealed by Guru Padmasambhava (fl. ca. 8c) for the person who would perform the treasure teaching during the period of the spread of fivefold degeneracy. Just as prophesised in the treasure teaching, the awareness holder rGod-kyi-ldem-'phrucan (1337–1408) appeared. This is the key statement behind the Northern treasure (བྱང་གཏེར་) of CD, which had been performed by Thang-stong-rgyal-po (1361–1485?) owing to the fortune of meeting the Great Anchorite Don-yod-rgyal-mtshan.

“ལྷགས་ (iron)” occurs in three different collocations in CD. The first is “iron-lotus petals (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་པ་སྐྱ་འདབ་)”, above which the practitioner would visualise him/herself as Amitābha (འོད་དཔག་མེད།) who holds the long-life vase (ཆོ་བུམ་).

The second, “iron-life channel (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སློབ་ཆ་)”, denotes the iron-like

<sup>91</sup> G\_3 233,2; G\_4 233,3: ལྷ་མ་གྲུབ་ཐོབ་ཆེན་པོ་ལྷགས་རྗེས་གཟིགས་ཤིག་ཟེར་བའི་གསོལ་བ་དྲག་ཏུ་བཏབ་པས། བཙོན་པ་ [བཙོན་པ་] བཙོན་ G\_3; བཙོན་(པ) G\_4) གསུམ་བཀྱིགས་པ་དང་ལྷགས་བརྒྱབ་པ་རང་གོལ་དུ་བྱུང་། བཙོན་ཁང་དང་མཁར་གྱི་སྐོ་ཡང་རང་བྱེད་ལ་སོང་ནས་ཅི་བདེར་ཐོག། ལྷོས་པས་འཆི་བའི་སྲུག་བསྐྱེལ་ལས་གོལ་བར་མཛད་དོ།

central psychic-nerve, which the practitioner must also keep visualising from the crown of his/her head (མྱུ་བོའི་གཙུག་) down to the secret place (གསང་གནས་). Thus it resembles an *antrum* of a live bamboo (སྐྱུག་དོང་), which looks like an upright pillar (ཀ་བ་བརྩུག་པ་). This iron-like robust “life channel (སློབ་ཚུ)” bears a similarity with “stalk (སྣང་པོ་)”, an intermediary substance. They both play an indispensable role in relaying the bright light of the emptiness (སྣོང་པ་འོད་གསལ་) to the practitioner/initiand. For both the “life channel (སློབ་ཚུ)” and “stalk (སྣང་པོ་)”, “iron (ལྷགས་)” has the function of establishing their firmness.

The third example, “iron-hook (ལྷགས་ཀྲུ་)”, which alludes to a tool that illuminates the entire bhājana/sattva-loka (སྣོད་བརྩུད་). Although the luminous rays have a form similar to the robust iron-hook (*aṅkuśa vāñc*), the fundamental quality is said to be the compassionate grace of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Hence, through the precept, the practitioner is introduced to a broad Mahāyānic philosophical perspective and his/her attention is directed to the whole receptacle world.

For more connotation of the term “ལྷགས་ (iron)”, I required another Longevity Practice; the *Glorious Grant of Immortality* (འཛི་མེད་དཔལ་སྣོད་ CP) as well. The CP explicitly references iron, which denotes the robust firmness of the *cakravāḍa* (འོར་ཡུག་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་རི་བོ་) which encircles the universal base of Buddhist cosmology. Furthermore, in the same Mahāyāna hermeneutical theory under consideration here, “ལྷགས་ (iron)” can be defined not only by its robustness, but also as the absolute value of the magnetic. It can attract all beings in the environment, so that consequently the “iron-hook” can grapple with the fivefold degeneracy (སྣོབ་མ་ལྷ་ *pañca kaṣāyāḥ*) and put them into the long-life vase.

Meanwhile, there is only one reference to “སྣོང་པོ་” in CD, i.e. “དཔག་བསམ་སྣོང་པོ་ (branch of the wish-fulfilling tree)”. According to the passages, a branch of the *kalpavṛkṣa* should be placed into Amitāyus’ long-life vase to adorn the mouth (འཇུག་). The special aptitude for this Tantric accomplishment is brought into the practitioner through the ritual form of *abhiṣeka*. Furthermore, “འོག་པ་ (trunk of the body)” denotes something akin to the “སྣོང་པོ་”. It alludes to the central psychic-nerve (*avadhūtī*; ལྷ་ཉི་). Through the practitioner’s Aperture of

Brahma (ཚངས་བྱུག་) the *amṛta* flows down, wherever the trunk has been full of *siddhi*. As a result of the visualisation, the Bhagavat Nātha Vajra Amitāyus dissolves (ཐིམ་) into his/her heart centre (སྤྲིང་ག་), in this wise, the initiate has attained the *siddhi* of immortality (འཆི་མེད་ཚེ་ཡི་དངོས་གྲུབ་).

Another implication of the phrase “iron stalk (ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྤྲོང་པོ་)” is that it may mark the heretical view of eternalism (རྟག་པར་སྐྱེ་བ་) found in the \**Brahmajālasūtra* (ཚངས་པའི་བྲ་བའི་མདོ། Brmj). In this regard, we saw two different semantic lines in the use of “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྤྲོང་པོ་”: (1) the heretical view of permanent objects of eternalism (རྟག་པར་སྐྱེ་བ་) criticised in such Mahāyāna scriptures as the Brmj; and (2) the doctrine of immortality as seen in such longevity practices as CD and CP. The later type considers the practitioner’s life (སློབ་ཀྱི་ *jīva*; ཚེ་ *āyus*) can become eternal, indestructible, which is metaphorically likened to “an iron tree”. By the consecration (དབང་བསྐྱར་ *abhiṣeka*), the practitioner becomes undifferentiated with the deity who is the object of veneration (དབང་བསྐྱར་ལྟ་). For such inseparability (དབྱེར་མེད་ *abheda*), the “ལྷགས་ཀྱི་སྤྲོང་པོ་” acts as a metaphor for the “iron-like robust life channel” to lead the *siddhi* from Amitāyus to the initiate.

As I have illustrated with several examples, the practitioner experiences to be free from the cyclical saṃsāric pattern of death and re-birth merely occur as a *rite de passage*; therefore, he/she should be spontaneously abiding in the so-called “birth and death-transcending Great Bliss (CD\_1 523,5; CD\_2 254,1: རླུ་ཤི་གཉིས་མེད་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་ངང་)”. While seemingly fragile, yet against the inevitable fact of life, the channel maintains an umbilical cord like esoteric firmness in the heart of the Nirmāṇakāya’s (Amitāyus/Amitābha) bounty.

Appendix



E 10 ཚེ་དཔག་མེད། / ཚེ་སྐྱེ་བ་སྐྱུག་མཚམ་ལྷག་ས།  
Tshe-dpag-med/ Tshe-sgrub ICags-zam-lugs  
(Amitayus/... Ayuhsadhana)

Fig. 1: ཚེ་དཔག་མེད། ཚེ་སྐྱེ་བ་སྐྱུག་མཚམ་ལྷག་ས། (Dagyab, 1991: 89) by courtesy of the author,  
H. H. Dagayab Rinpoche (བྲག་གཡམ་བ་སྐྱེ་བ་སྐྱུག་མཚམ་ལྷག་ས་མཚོ་ལྷན་ཤེས་རབ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།).



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- ATH *Proceedings of the International Seminar on the Anthropology of Tibet and the Himalaya*. Zürich: Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich, 1993.
- Av *Avatamsakasūtra*.
- Av\_t Av. སངས་རྒྱས་ལལ་པོ་ཆེ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཤིན་ཏུ་རྒྱས་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ། P761 (1b1 (vol. 25, p. 1f)–253a6 (vol. 26, p. 321)); D44 (vol. 8, p. 1f, 1b1–363a6).
- Avś *Avadānaśataka*. See Speyer (1958).
- BCCRS *Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*. London: Routledge, 2005–.
- BDE Robert K. Barnhart. *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*. New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1988.
- BDWO John Ayto. *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Word Origins*. London: Bloomsbury, 1990.
- BHSGD Franklin Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, vol. 2. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985.
- Brmj \**Brahmajālasūtra*.
- Brmj\_t Brmj. ཚངས་པའི་དྲ་བའི་མདོ། P1021 (vol. 40, p. 285f, 72b8–88b8); D352 (vol. 15, p. 456f, 70b2–86a2).
- CD བྱང་གཏིར་ཆེ་སྐྱབ་ལྷགས་སྡོང་མ།
- CD\_1 CD. In: ལུགས་སྐྱབ་དག་པོ་ཙལ་གྱི་ཆོས་སྐོར། Gangtok: Bari Longsal Lama, 1980. 4 vols. (TBRC#W23453), vol. 2, pp. 515–544.
- CD\_2 CD. In: རིན་ཆེན་གཏིར་མངོན་ཆེན་མོ། New Delhi: Shechen Publications, 2007–2008. 70 vols. (TBRC#W1KG14), vol. 19, pp. 245–265.
- CLD D. P. Simpson. *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*. New York: Wiley, c1968.
- CP ཆེ་སྐྱབ་ལྷགས་ཟམ་ལྷགས་འཆེ་མེད་དཔལ་སྟེར། In: སྐྱབ་ཐབས་འདོད་འདྲིའི་འབྲུམ་བཟང་། Gangtok: Sherab Gyaltzen, 1977. 2 vols. (TBRC#W18), vol. 1, pp. 185–195.
- D Derge Block-print of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka. *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka*. Taipei Ed. Taipei: SMC Publishing, c1991.

- Das Sarat Chandra Das. *Tibetan-English Dictionary*. Compact Ed. Kyoto: Rinsen Book, 1988.
- DTC དུང་དཀར་སློབ་ཐབས་འཕེལ་ལས། (1927–1997; TBRC#P1161). དུང་དཀར་ཚིག་མཛོད་ཆེན་མོ། བེ་ཅིན། གྲུང་གོའི་བོད་རིག་པ་དཔེ་སྟུན་ཁང། 2002.
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- EWA Manfred Mayrhofer. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1992–2001. 3 Bände.
- G ལོ་ཆེན་འགྲུར་མེད་བདེ་ཆེན། (1540–1615; TBRC#P644). ཀུན་གསལ་འོར་བུའི་མེ་ལོང།
- G\_3 G. S.l.: s.n., n.d. 181 fols. (TBRC#W4CZ1085).
- G\_4 G. 成都: 四川民族出版社, 1981. 346, 2 p. (TBRC#W21690).
- GZ ཡོན་ཏན་མགོན་པོ། (790–833; TBRC#P4333). བདུད་རྩི་སྤོང་པོ་ཡན་ལག་བརྒྱད་པ་གསང་བ་མན་ངག་གི་རྒྱུད་ལས་རྩ་བའི་རྒྱུད་དང་བཤད་པའི་རྒྱུད། Dharamsala: Tibetan Medical & Astrological Institute of H. H. the Dalai Lama, 2008. xix, 375 p. (TBRC#W1KG2121).
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- MVy *Mahāvīyūtpatti*. See Sakaki (1973).
- MW Monier Monier-Williams. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Repr. Ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986.
- ODEE C. T. Onions. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.
- OED J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- P Peking Block-print of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka. *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka*. Peking Ed. Tokyo: Tibetan Tripiṭaka Research Institute, 1955–1961.
- PD Traditionally attributed to Nāgārjuna. *Prajñādaṇḍa*.
- PD\_C PD. See Campbell (1919).
- PD\_t PD. ལུགས་ཀྱི་བསྟན་བཅོས་ཤེས་རབ་སྣོད་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ། P5821 (vol. 144, p. 2f, 145a4–156b7); D4329 (vol. 51, p. 299f, 103a7–113a4).
- S ཤེས་རབ་དཔལ་ལྷན། (fl. ca. 5c; TBRC#P7844). རོ་མཚར་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

- S\_2 S. In: TK, vol. 1, pp. 1–565.
- ŚB *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*. See Weber (1964).
- STM *Soundings in Tibetan Medicine: Historical and Anthropological Explorations*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- T 大正新修大藏經. Quoted from CBETA.
- TBRC Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center. (As of July 2016, the official name of TBRC has been changed to Buddhist Digital Resource Center.)
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