Rekindling Ashes of the Dharma and the Formation of Modern Tibetan Studies: The Busy Life of Alak Tseten Zhabdrung

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2 REKINDLING ASHES OF THE DHARMA AND THE FORMATION OF MODERN TIBETAN STUDIES: THE BUSY LIFE OF ALAK TSETEN ZHABDRUNG
BY NICOLE WILLOCK

FEATURES

26 TIBETAN NOVELS: STILL A NOVELTY. A BRIEF SURVEY OF TIBETAN NOVELS SINCE 1985
BY FRANÇOISE ROBIN

52 TRANSLATING THE WINGBEATS: TIBETAN WRITINGS FOR THE GERMAN-LANGUAGE READER
BY FRANÇOISE ROBIN

ANNOUNCEMENT

62 TAKTSER RINPOCHÉ COLLECTION DONATED TO THE LIBRARY

NEW AND NOTABLE

64 THE LIBRARY’S FOURTH LANGUAGE: THE DZONGKHA COLLECTION

68 A SERIES OF BOOKS ON ORAL FOLK LITERATURE

72 EARLY CHILDREN’S BOOK TRANSLATED FROM ENGLISH INTO TIBETAN

75 FROM THE CHILDREN’S CORNER: SAMSARA DOG
BY ELIZABETH ROSE SHARP

Nicole Willock

Frédéric Dhumet
Editor's Note

Trace Foundation's Latse Library Newsletter has been published once a year since its inaugural issue in 2003. The newsletter is distributed widely in both print and electronic formats, and our readership has expanded to include even remote Tibetan areas, Europe, and the Americas and has been receiving positive reviews (we were pleased to see some readers lamenting on popular Tibetan internet forums about the long wait for our last issue). In order to maintain the quality of this publication, we have made two changes recently: the first is, given the amount of time expended and material covered in the newsletter, we will occasionally publish double issues so that we can ensure content of high quality. This current issue is again a double issue, covering the years 2009-2010. The second change is that the newsletter will no longer carry a news section but will focus primarily on literary content. Anyone interested in the latest news from Latse can consult the soon to be launched Trace Foundation newsletter which will be available through our website: www.trace.org.

In this issue, for 2010, we are marking the 100-year anniversary of the scholar Tseten Zhabdrung's birth, as well as the 25-year anniversary of his death. Tseten Zhabdrung made great contributions towards Tibetan language and culture in the 20th century, and to commemorate his anniversaries and honor his work, he is this issue's Featured Scholar.

We would also like to warmly welcome and thank Dr. Françoise Robin who is the Guest Editor for this issue of Trace Foundation's Latse Library Newsletter.

A note on transliteration system used: Latse Library uses the Tibetan and Himalayan Library (THL) Simplified Phonetic Transcription of Standard Tibetan for Tibetan terms that appear in our English-language articles. For more information on this transliteration scheme, please visit: www.thlib.org (see under "Reference" tab).
Considered one of the three great scholars of twentieth-century Tibet, Alak Tseten Zhabdrung Jigmé Rigpé Lodrö (A lags Tshe tan Zhab 'dun 'jigs med rig pa'i blo gros, 1910–1985) is credited with regenerating many aspects of Tibetan culture at a time of unprecedented socio-political change. Despite enduring twelve years in prison, Alak Tseten Zhabdrung energetically reclaimed his classical education to further transmit nearly all the traditional fields of knowledge including language, poetry, history, astronomy, calligraphy and Buddhist philosophy.

1 This epithet stems back to the tenth century when King Langdarma suppressed Buddhism, ending what is known in Tibetan history as the first period of dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet, “the three great scholars (mikhas pa mi gsum)”: Mar Shakyamuni (Dmar Shakyamuni), Yo Gejung (G.yo Dge ba'i byung gnas), and Tsang Rabsel (Gtsang Rab gsal) carried the Vinaya scriptures with them to Amdo, in particular to Dentik Monastery.

2 The two other scholars were Muge Samten (Dmu dge bsam gtan, 1914–1993) and Dungkar Lozang Trinlé (Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las, 1927–1997).

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by Nicole Willock
བསྟན་པོ་ཆེ་ཞེས་བསྟན་ནོར་བརྒྱ་ཆེན་གྲོས་ཞེས་བསྟན་པོའི་མེ་རོ་སླར་གསོས་པ་དང་དེ་བོད་རིག་པའི་སྒྲོམ་བསླངས་པ་སྟེ།

ཨ་ལགས་ཚེ་ཏན་ཞབས་དྲུང་ཚང་གི་མཛད་བྲེལ་ཆེ་བའི་སྐུ་ཚེ།
Although a few examples of his praise poetry for China can be found in his *A General Commentary on the Mirror of Poetics*, he never interpreted Tibetan history through the lens of Marxist ideology, unlike Dungkar Lozang Trinlé, nor did he cling to the ideals of Gelukpa hegemony. Alak Tseten Zhabdrung’s virtue lies in his steadfast commitment to the creative tradition of Tibetan scholarship that finds its roots in the work of Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyeltsen (Sa skya Pa.n.dita Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan, 1182–1251), Butön (Bu ston, 1290–1364), and continued to change and innovate with the works of Jamgön Kongtrul (‘Jam mgon Kong sprul, 1813–1899), Ju Mipham (’Ju Mi pham, 1846–1912), and many others. Alak Tseten Zhabdrung’s *Collected Works* contains a treasure trove of information on almost every aspect of traditional Tibetan Buddhist scholarship; yet throughout his autobiography he emphasized the core value to strive in one’s education (yon tan); including increasing one’s knowledge on subjects outside the realm of Buddhist philosophy, e.g. science and technology.

Alak Tseten Zhabdrung’s autobiography called *Truthful Discourse, Ambrosia for the Ear: The Life Story of Jigmé Rigpé Lodrö, Himself a Disciple of the Powerful, Matchless Shakya* (Mnyam med shākya’i dbang bo’i rjes zhung pa’i rigs megs pa’i blo gros rang gi byung ba brjod pa bden gtam ma’i bdud rtsi) documents his life, and thus most of this brief biography is drawn from this work. Written in a style that mixes traditional literary techniques with colloquialisms, Dawa Lodrö (Zla ba blo gros), the head editor of *Light Rain* (Sbrang char), a premier Tibetan literary magazine, praised Tseten Zhabdrung’s autobiography as one of the most influential pieces of Tibetan biographical literature that he has ever read.4

Tseten Zhabdrung was born on the twenty-second day of the fourth month of the iron dog year in the fifteenth rabchung (rab byung) cycle

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3 There are three printed versions of this text. The nine-volume pecha version of his *Collected Works* (gsung ‘bum) were printed at Tuwa (Mthu ba) Monastery (where the blocks are still held), and is available through the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center. The version I used for my research is found in Phrin Las ed. 1987. Mthas dbang Tshe tan Zhab drung ‘jigs med rigs pa’i blo gros kyi gsung rtsom. The Collected Works of the Scholar Tshe tan Zhab drung ‘jigs med rigs pa’i blo gros, vol. 1. Xining: Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House, pp. 499–801. The most recent edition is in Tshe tan Zhab drung ‘jigs med rigs pa’i blo gros. 2007. Tshe tan Zhab drung rje btsun ‘jigs med rigs pa’i blo gros mchog gi gsung ‘bum, Vol. 1, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, pp. 39–279.

[= May 31, 1910] as the second youngest of eight children born to his father Yangtse [(Tib. G.yang Tshe, ≈Chi. Yang Cai 杨才], whose Tibetan name was Lozang Tashi (Blo bzang bkra shis), and his mother, Lhamotar (Lha mo thar). His birthplace, Yadzi (Ya rdzi), is more commonly known today by its Chinese name, Jishi Town (Chi. Jishi zhen 积石镇) in today’s Xunhua Salar Autonomous County of Qinghai Province. Although his patrilineal descent was Chinese, in his autobiography, Tseten Zhabdrung stated, “Starting with my father’s generation, my ancestry is a mix of Chinese and Tibetan ethnicity; but if I base my own ethnicity on written and spoken language, habits and residence, then I am exclusively Tibetan” (1987: 505). At age two, he was recognized by Amdo Zhamar Pandita Gendün Tenzin Gyatso (A mdo Zhwa dmar paṅdita Dge ‘dun bstan ‘dzin rgya mtsho, 1852–1912) of Ditsa Monastery (Lde tsha)⁴ as the reincarnation of Tseten Zhabdrung.

³ Cf. Gray Tuttle “Local History in A mdo: The Tsong kha Range (ri rgyud),” Asian Highlands Perspectives (forthcoming 2010).
⁴ The spelling of this monastery varies. It also is spelled D+hi tsha. Cf. ibid., p. 9.
a minor Geluk lineage in Amdo. He had been called “the grandson of Tsering Döndrup (Tshe ring don grub)” until this time, when he was given the name Lozang Chöpel (Blo bzang chos 'phel) by a Rebkong Nyening lama called Alak Namka tshang (A lags Nam mkha’ tshang) (1987: 517).7 Beginning at age six, he took up his throne at Tak (Stag) Monastery, and the shared thrones at each of the Six Garwaka Monasteries (Sgar ba kha drug) now located in far eastern Hualong and western Minhe counties: Tseten Monastery (Tib. Tshe tan; Chi. Tuwa), Tuwa Monastery (Tib. Mthu ba; Chi. Tuwa), Chenpuk Monastery (Tib. Gcan phug; Chi. Zhaomuchuan 赵木川), Katung Monastery (Tib. Ka thung; Chi. Gadong 尕洞), Gongkya Monastery (Tib. Kong skya; Chi. Gongshenjia 工什加), and Dentik Monastery (Tib. Dan tig; Chi. Dandou 丹斗). His initial enthronement at the Six Garwaka Monasteries was embroiled in local controversy because he was enthroned before his fellow throne-holder, Tseten Abbot (Tshe tan Mkhan po),8 whose position was

7 The Dungkar Encyclopedia entry for Tseten Zhabdrung incorrectly stated that he was given the name Lozang Chöpel by Amdo Zhamar Pandita, Cf. Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las. 2002. Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo. Beijing: China Tibetology Publishing House, p. 1706.

8 The entry for jigmé Damchö Gyatso in the Mdo smad lo rgyus chen mo mistakenly identifies Tseten Zhabdrung as an
incarnation lineages. The history of both incarnation lineages, including bygone rivalries, is addressed in Tseten Zhabdrung’s autobiography (1987: 529–531; 554–557) as well as in his account of local history called the Catalogue to Dentik Monastery. In no uncertain terms Tseten Zhabdrung Jigmé Rigpé Lodrö referred to the eighth Tseten Abbot as a “vajra brother” (1987: 533–54) as they received their first tantric initiation before the great Amdo teacher Jigmé Damchö Gyatso (’ligs med dam chos rgya mtsho), a.k.a. Marnang Dorjé chang (Mar nang Rdo rje ’chang, 1898–1946) in 1915. In their teens, they developed a fondness for each other which lasted until the tragic death of Tseten Abbot in 1958 in Xining’s Nantan Prison.

In the fire dragon year (1916), Tseten Zhabdrung received the initiate monastic vows from the fifth Seri Mani Pandita Gendün Gyeltsen (Gser ri’i Mani pañḍita Dge ‘dun bstan ’dzin rgyal mtshan, 1896–1944) at Tuwa Monastery, and was given the name Gendün Shedrup Gyatso (Dge ‘dun bshad sgrub rgya mtsho) (1987: 536). Soon after that he learned to read with his paternal second cousin Ngawang Chözin Pelzango (Ngag dbangchos ’dzin dpal bzang po), a fully ordained monk at Ditsa Monastery (1987: 508, 539). At the same time, the young Tseten Zhabdrung began to study sections of liturgical texts such as Guru Puja (Tib. Bla ma mchod pa) with geshé Lozang Dawa (Blo bzang zla ba). In 1918, his father succumbed to illness, so Tseten Zhabdrung returned to his family home in Xunhua for a short time. After returning to Tuwa Monastery in the same year, he committed to memory Maitreya’s Ornament of Clear Realizations (Tib. Mngon par rtogs pa’i rgyan) and Candrakirti’s Introduction to the Middle Way (Tib. Dbu ma la’ jug pa) (1987: 542). In 1920 at age 10, he began to study the Collected Topics (Tib. Bsdus grwa). In the same year, he met Giteng Rinpoche Yongzin Pandita Lozang Peldan considered to be superior. The history of both incarnation lineages, including bygone rivalries, is addressed in Tseten Zhabdrung’s autobiography (1987: 529–531; 554–557) as well as in his account of local history called the Catalogue to Dentik Monastery. In no uncertain terms Tseten Zhabdrung Jigmé Rigpé Lodrö referred to the eighth Tseten Abbot as a “vajra brother” (1987: 533–54) as they received their first tantric initiation before the great Amdo teacher Jigmé Damchö Gyatso (’ligs med dam chos rgya mtsho), a.k.a. Marnang Dorjé chang (Mar nang Rdo rje ’chang, 1898–1946) in 1915. In their teens, they developed a fondness for each other which lasted until the tragic death of Tseten Abbot in 1958 in Xining’s Nantan Prison.

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When Tseten Zhabdrung reached the age of thirteen in the water boar year (1923/4), he requested to finish his monastic studies with Lama Rinpoche Jigmé Damchö Gyatso who promptly brought him before Giteng Rinpoche, who instructed them both on the foundation of Tibetan classical poetry using the Fifth

12 This short poem attributed to Tsongkapa presents the three principal aspects of the Gradual Path to Enlightenment (Lamrim): renunciation, bodhicitta and the wisdom realizing emptiness. There have been many translations of this work, including among others: Ruth Sonam. 1999. The Three Principal Aspects of the Path. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.

Tseten Zhabdrung's autobiography details his impressive monastic, tantric and scholastic training. He received and then further transmitted so many tantric initiations, reading transmissions, and empowerments that they are too numerous to repeat here; but it is important to mention that although he was a Geluk lama, he was well versed in teachings from all schools of Tibetan Buddhism. In addition to the cycles of Chakrasamvara (bde mchog) and Yamantaka (rdo ’jigs byed), he also received full instruction in the Sarvavid Vairocana cycle (kun rig rnam par snang mdzad) (1987: 567–8, 587, 599, 615, 653–657). He was similarly well-versed in Nyingma literature and according to the custom of the tantric communities in the region of the Six Garwaka Monasteries, he initiated the monastic constitutions (bca’ yig) and lead prayers according to the Nyingma tradition (1987: 583). Tseten Zhabdrung wittily relayed that he adhered to his Dalai Lama’s (1617–1682) commentary to the Kavyadarśa called Songs of Sarasvati (Dbyangs can dgyes glu), and by looking at examples of kavya by Böképa Mipam Gelek Namgyel (Bod mkhas pa Mi pham dge legs nmam rgyal, 1618–1685) and Amdo Zhamar Pandita. In the earth dragon year (1928), he took full vows and received the ordination name Jigmé Rigpé Lodrō in the presence of his two main teachers: Jigmé Damchö Gyatso and Yongzin Pandita Giteng Rinpoché (1987: 611). At age 24 in the wood dog year (1934), his focus was on the publication of Jigmé Damchö Gyatso’s Collected Works. He not only compiled and edited these fifteen volumes, but also initiated the construction of a printing house at Tuva Monastery to print them (1987: 653–654). The woodblocks for these tomes were re-carved and the printing house rebuilt after being burnt to the ground ca. 1965–6. They were housed there until a few years ago (ca. 2000), when they were moved to Rongwo (Rong bo) Monastery in Relpkong (Reb kong). The woodblocks for Tseten Zhabdrung’s nine volume Collected Works are currently kept at this small monastery at the edge of the Tsongka mountain range.

Tseten Zhabdrung wrote, “According to the wishes of the tantric masters of Mthu ba grong, ’Od dkar brag rdzong or Ra ma ‘dan ma, Cha rgya, Ka thung, and Tshe tan, I implemented the monastic constitutions (bca’ yig) and lead prayers according to the Nyingma tradition (1987: 583).” As Tseten Zhabdrung wrote, “According to the wishes of the tantric masters of Mthu ba grong, ’Od dkar brag rdzong or Ra ma ‘dan ma, Cha rgya, Ka thung, and Tshe tan, I implemented the monastic constitutions (bca’ yig) and lead prayers according to the Nyingma tradition (1987: 583).”

14 According to two informants this occurred as early as 1965, before the Cultural Revolution started. However, this was not confirmed by any other sources.

15 Tseten Zhabdrung wrote, “According to the wishes of the tantric masters of Mthu ba grong, ’Od dkar brag rdzong or Ra ma ‘dan ma, Cha rgya, Ka thung, and Tshe tan, I implemented the monastic constitutions (bca’ yig) and lead prayers according to the Nyingma tradition (1987: 583).”

16 "In the first of earlier eons... (sngon gyi bkak la dang bo ka) as the words of the rites rolled off my tongue," p. 583.
མཁས་དབང་ཚེ་ཏན་ཞབས་དྲུང་མཆོག་བཙོན་ཁང་དུ་ལོ་ངོ་བཅུ་གཉིས་བཞུགས་རྗེས་སྔོན་མ་ཁོང་གི་རྩ་བའི་བླ་མ་འཇིགས་མེད་དམ་ཆོས་རྒྱ་མཚོ་དང་ཡོངས་འཛིན་སྒིས་སྟེང་བློ་བཟང་བཅས་ཀྱི་སར་ཐོས་བསམ་དང་ཉམས་ལེན་ཇི་ལྟར་གནང་བའི་སྐོར་ལ་ཐགས་དྲན་གནང་བའི་ཀ་རྩོམ་ཞིག་བརྩམས་ཡོད་པ་འདི་ལྟར།

ཀ་ཡེ་ཉོན་དང་བགྲང་བྱའི་སྤོ་མཐོ་ལ་བསྙེགས་དུས། ཁ་ནས་གཞོན་རིང་རྫོགས་ལྡན་ཕུན་ཚོགས་ལ་རོལ་ཚུལ།།

ག་ལེར་གླུ་དབྱངས་སྙན་ཚིག་མགུར་རྟ་ལ་དྲངས་ཏེ། །ང་རང་བྱུང་བ་ཆ་ཙམ་གླེང་བ་ལ་སྤྲོའོ།།

ཅ་ཅོ་འདུ་ལོང་རྣམ་གཡེང་རང་བཞིན་ gameObjectཡིས་དབེན་ཞིང་། །ཆ་བྱེད་ཡ་མ་ཟུང་གི་རིག་མཐོང་ཡང་མེད་པར།།

ཇ་སྡོང་འདྲ་བའི་གྲོ་ག་མ་གལ་གྱི་འཁྲི་ཤིང་། །ཉ་རྒྱའི་དྲ་བ་ལྟར་འཛིང་རི་ཁྲད་ཀྱི་གནས་དེར།།

ཏ་ཐ་གྰ་ཏ་འཕགས་པ་འཇམ་དཔལ་གྱི་སྒྱུ་འཕྲུལ། །ཐ་མལ་ཚུལ་འཛིན་དགེ་བའི་བཤེས་གཉེན་གྱི་དྲུང་དུ།།

ད་ལྟ་ཉིད་དུ་རྗེས་འཛིན་གསོལ་བ་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག །ན་རོ་ལྡན་པའི་ཨོ་ཡའི་ཞལ་བཞེས་དེ་ཐོབ་བོ།།

པ་ཏྲ་ལྟར་འཁྱོག་ཚུལ་མིན་ལོག་མཐོང་ཀུན་སྤངས་ནས། །ཕ་བཟང་བུ་ཡིས་ཡབ་ལ་ཡིད་རྟོན་གྱི་དཔེ་བཞིན།།

བ་སྤུ་ལང་ལོང་གཡོ་བའི་དད་གུས་ཀྱིས་ཐོག་དྲངས། །མ་ལུས་ཡོན་ཏན་སློབ་པའི་དོན་གཉེར་དེ་བསྐྱེད་དོ།།

ཙ་ཏུར་གྲངས་ལྡན་ཐེག་མཆོག་འཁོར་ལོ་ཡི་རྟེན་བཟང་། །ཚ་གྲང་ཁྱད་གསོད་ཚེ་འདིའི་བྱ་ངན་དང་བྲལ་བར།།

ཛ་ཡའི་བསྟན་ལ་མཇལ་བའི་དོན་གཉེར་གྱི་ངོས་ནས། །ཝ་སྐྱེས་ཀླད་འགེམས་སེང་གེའི་བརྟུལ་ཞུགས་དེར་སྨོན་ནོ།།

ཞ་འབྲིང་དཀྱུས་མ་ལྷན་ཆུང་གར་ཁེབས་ཀྱི་དཔེ་ལྟར། །ཟ་འཐུང་འགྲོ་འཆག་སྤྱོད་ལམ་རྒྱུན་ལྡན་གྱི་དུས་ཀུན།།

འ་འུར་སྤངས་ཏེ་གཅོམ་སྐྱུང་བག་ཡོད་ཀྱི་ངང་ནས། །ཡ་ཡེངས་མེད་པར་བསམ་སྦྱོར་ཚུལ་མཐུན་གྱིས་བསྟེན་ཏོ།།

ར་རིའི་སྐྱོན་བྲལ་ལྷ་མོ་དབྱངས་ཅན་གྱི་བྱིན་རླབས། །ལ་འུར་སྙིང་ལ་འཇུག་པའི་ཐབས་མཁས་ཀྱི་མཛད་པས།།

བསྟེན་པའི་དབུ་ཁྱུད་རི་མོ་འདི་དུས་ནས་བརྩམས་སོ།།

Featured Scholar

RIGHT: THE ALTAR IN THE HOME WHERE ALAK TSETEN ZHABDRUNG WAS BORN. THE LARGE BLACK AND WHITE PORTRAIT IN THE TOP CENTER IS OF HIS ROOT LAMA, JIGMÉ DAMCHÖGYATSO. ABOVE THE TABLE IS A PORTRAIT OF HIS MOTHER. PHOTO COURTESY OF JIGMÉ CHOPAK.
མངའ་བརླ་བརྟེག་སྒྲོལ་བའི་སྙིང་སྟོབས་ཆེ། །པ་སངས་ལྟར་དཀར་བློ་མཆོག་ཡང་ཡང་བསྐྱེད།

ཡཉ་མོ་མཚོ་ལ་རོལ་བའི་རྩེ་དགའ་བཞིན། །ཇ་མར་འོ་ཞོ་ཉེས་མེད་ལོངས་སུ་སྤྱོད།།

ཆ་བྱེད་དྲང་སྲོང་དགྱེས་པའི་བརྟུལ་ཞུགས་ཀྱིས། །ཅ་ཅོ་རྣམ་སྤངས་དབེན་དགོན་གནས་སུ་བསྟེན།

ང་རང་བྱུང་བ་བརྗོད་ལ་བྲེལ་བའི་ཞོར། །ག་ལེར་མནོ་བསམ་བཏང་བའི་སྐབས་ཤེད་ན།།

ཁ་ནས་ཐོན་པའི་སྙན་ངག་རོ་བརྒྱ་འདི། །ཀ་ཡེ་སློབ་ཚོགས་བློ་གྲོས་རྒྱས་ཕྱིར་སྤེལ།།

དུསྲོག་བཞི་མོ་ཐོན་པའི་ཐོན་བྱོན་མོ་ཐོག རྩེའི་རྩོམ་རིག སྤྱིད་དོན་དེ། །ཨ་ཟླ་འདྲ་བོ་ཕྱིམ་སྤྱིད་དོན་དེ། །ཨ་ཟླ་འདྲ་བོ་ཕྱིམ་སྤྱིད་དོན་དེ།

ཨ་མྲི་ཏ་ཡི་རོ་ལྡན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བཅུད། །ཧ་ཅང་ན་ཕྲའི་དུས་ནས་ཅི་དགར་མྱངས།།

ས་གསུམ་ཀུན་ཏུ་དགེ་བའི་ཡོན་ཏན་མཛོད། །ཤ་སྟག་དོན་གཉེར་སྐོམ་པ་ཆུ་འདོད་བློས།།

ལ་ཕྱེད་ཙམ་མིན་བཅུ་ཕྲག་རིག་པའི་གནས། །ར་རིའི་རྙོག་བྲལ་བརྩོན་པས་རྣམ་ཀུན་སྦྱངས།།

ཡ་མ་བརླ་ཡི་སྲིད་འབྱོར་ལན་ཚྭའི་ཆུ། །འ་འུར་གྲགས་སྟོང་འཇིག་རྟེན་ཆོས་བརྒྱད་པོ།།

ཟ་མར་སྦགས་པའི་དུག་གི་འདུ་ཤེས་ཀྱིས། །ཞ་ཡིག་འཁྱིལ་འདྲའི་སྦྲུལ་ལྟར་སྤོང་ལ་འབད།།

ཝ་དང་རྣ་བ་རི་བོང་རྩེན་པའི་གནས། །ཛ་ཡས་ལུང་བསྟན་དན་ཏིག་བྲག་སོགས་སུ།།

ཚ་གྲང་ཡལ་བོར་ཀློག་པ་ཐོས་བསམ་གྱིས། །ཙ་ཏུར་དུས་ཀྱི་ཚིགས་ཀྱང་ཐུང་སྙམ་སྐྱེས།།

མ་རྒན་ཚེ་འདིར་དྲིན་གྱིས་བསྐྱངས་པས་གཙོས། །བ་སྤུའི་གྲངས་ལས་འདས་པའི་རིགས་དྲུག་ཚོགས།།

ཕ་རོལ་སྲིད་མཐར་སྒྲོལ་བའི་སྙིང་སྟོབས་ཆེ། །པ་སངས་ལྟར་དཀར་བློ་མཆོག་ཡང་ཡང་བསྐྱེད།

ནྰ་ལེནྡྲ་དཔལ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཆོས་སྡིངས་ཀྱི། །ད་ལྟ་འདས་དང་མ་འོངས་མངོན་གཟིགས་དེས།།

ཐ་ཤལ་ཁྱིམ་གྱི་ཁྲི་མོན་ལས་བཏོན་ཏེ། །ཏ་ཐྰ་ག་ཏའི་བསྟན་ལ་ཞུགས་འདི་རྨད།།

ཉ་མོ་མཚོ་ལ་རོལ་བའི་རྩེ་དགའ་བཞིན། །ཇ་མར་འོ་ཞོ་ཉེས་མེད་ལོངས་སུ་སྤྱོད།།

ཆུ་བྱེད་དྲང་སྲོང་དགྱེས་པའི་བརྟུལ་ཞུགས་ཀྱིས། །ཅུ་རྣམ་སྤངས་དབེན་དགོན་གནས་སུ་བསྟེན།

ང་རང་བྱུང་བ་བརྗོད་ལ་བྲེལ་བའི་ཞོར། །ག་ལེར་མནོ་བསམ་བཏང་བའི་སྐབས་ཤེད་ན།།

ཁ་ནས་ཐོན་པའི་སྙན་ངག་རོ་བརྒྱ་འདི། །ཀ་ཡེ་སློབ་ཚོགས་བློ་གྲོས་རྒྱས་ཕྱིར་སྤེལ།།

དུསྲོག་བཞི་མོ་ཐོན་པའི་ཐོན་བྱོན་མོ་ཐོག རྩེའི་རྩོམ་རིག སྤྱིད་དོན་དེ། །ཨ་ཟླ་འདྲ་བོ་ཕྱིམ་སྤྱིད་དོན་དེ། །ཨ་ཟླ་འདྲ་བོ་ཕྱིམ་སྤྱིད་དོན་དེ།
IN THE LATE 1970S, AFTER HAVING SPENT TWELVE YEARS IN JAIL, TSETEN ZHABDRUNG LOOKED BACK ON HIS YOUTH AND TRAINING WITH JIGMÉ DAMCHÖ GYATSO AND GITENG RINPOCHÉ, AND WROTE A BEAUTIFUL ABECEDARIAN AND REVERSE ABECEDARIAN ACROSTIC POEM:

Attention! At the peak of age I set
Before you stories of my golden youth
Collected into rhythm, sound and words.
Distraction will not reach this quiet place
Entangled in a net of paths which lead
Forward to the hermitage, where birch
Groves, poplars, straight as tea-churns, protect.
Here to Aryā Manjushri, spiritual friend,
I bowed with hope before the Tathāgatha to
Join him as a disciple, to which he
Kindly assented, saying, “Of course, yes!”
Like the trust a son has for his father
My entire body is led by faith.
No pa-hra¹ crooked sin may I indulge
On this, my quest to learn what’s useful, true.
Parrying extremes toward the Goodly Four
Qualities of an ethical life
Resisting evil, observing Buddhist creed
Stupefied foxes admire the Lion’s roar
Trusting him, my master; I did take
Unsullied paths when I drank, ate or moved.
Verily Lhamo Yangchen² showers
Wisdom flowers; this laurel I wear
Xstatically. Studying twenty-four
Years with Lama Rinpoché, I modeled
Zealously the namtar of Dromtön to Atisha.

Zenith of Buddhas, “peacock-feather eye,” “snow-mount,”
Young I stood before him A bhyā The Fearless
Xperiencing all of Dharma’s ambrosia
Wisdom, always present in the Three Spheres
Vital water to a thirsty man,
Understanding was all I desired, and training
Topping the mountain of the Ten Sciences
Snarled like a zha: things I avoided:
Recognizing the Eight Worldly Concerns
Quandry of wealth and power: salt-water,
Poison given as food, meaningless sounds.
Oblivious to heat and cold, I read
Now in prophetic Dentik, where
Mountain goats, foxes, and rabbits play,
Learning how short the four seasons stay!
Keep liberating beings of Six Realms,
Jump beyond Samsara; With gratitude generate the
Bodhisattva Vow
Holy as Venus’ light. Removed from
Gaol (jail) of domestic life, and now residing at
Fabulous Nālandā, Trashi Chöding,
Enlivened as a fish at sea, I enjoy
Devout conduct, tea, milk, butter, yoghurt,
Currents of the eight poetic rasa,
Burst from my mouth as I slowly try to tell
About my life experiences. Broaden your mind!³

From The Collected Works of the Scholar Tshe tan Zhabs drung ‘Jigs med rig pa’i blo gros, vol. 1, pp.564–566.

Translation by Nicole Willock; co-edited by Benjamin Garceau.

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1 Decorative borders commonly found on pecha texts.
2 Tibetan for Saraswati, the goddess of poetry and scholarship.
3 I am grateful to Ben Garceau for his creativity and technical expertise in English poetry for his suggestions in the translation of this poem.
monastic vows throughout his life, despite crying when his head was first shaved at age six (1987: 537). Tseten Zhabdrung also instructed on the necessity of upholding the vinaya or monastic discipline (1987: 538–9, 569–70, 798). Although this is a common trope in Geluk-Buddhist literature, Tseten Zhabdrung’s adherence to the vinaya as a way of life is indicative of his perseverance to uphold the values of his training in a Tibetan Buddhist monastic setting, especially in light of the fact that he personally witnessed mass renunciation of vows, either voluntarily and/or mainly through coercion, for nearly twenty years from ca. 1958 to 1978. The current edition of Tseten Zhabdrung’s Collected Works (2007) comprises many volumes dedicated to his commentaries on Buddhist practice and philosophy, including liturgical texts such as “taking refuge” (in volume six), explanations on the “gradual path to enlightenment” (lam rim) in no less than three volumes (nine, ten, and eleven), while volumes twelve and thirteen contain information on several tantric cycles.

Besides excelling in the monastic curriculum, Tseten Zhabdrung was intrigued by mathematics and methodologies for the calculation of historical dates. In addition to mastering Chinese astronomy (rgya rtis), Tseten Zhabdrung wrote many essays comparing systems and methods used in calculating historical dates according to various Tibetan scholars. These essays were first published by Tseten Zhabdrung’s nephew Jigmé Chöpak (‘jigs med chos ‘phags) in A Useful Collection of Essays by the Great Scholar Tseten Zhabdrung (Mkhas dbang Tshe tan zhabs drung gi dpyad rtsom mkho bsdus, Gansu 1991). These include among others: “An Analysis of a Few Mistakes in Golok’s Historical Dates (Tib. ‘Gos lugs [Gzhon nu dpal] lo thigs bkod pa’i skor las ‘ga’ zhig nor ba’i rgyad pa)” “An Analysis of Historical Dates in the New Red Annals by Panchen Sonam Drakpa (Pan chen bsdod [nams] grags [pa] kyi rgyal rabs ’phul gyi lde mig deb gmar ga’i lo thigs kyi rgyad pa)” “An Analysis of the Historical Dates in Powo Tshelkhang Trungpa’s History of Buddhism (Dpa’ bo gsugs lag ’phreng ba chos ’byung gyi lo thigs kyi rgyad pa)” “An Analysis of the Historical Dates in the Fifth Dalai Lama’s Feast of the Early Years of the Buddhist Era (Rgyal dbang lnga ba rin po che’i deb ther rdzo’ig ldan gzhon nu’i rgya’ ston gyi lo thigs la rgyad pa)” “A New Analysis of Historical Dates in Regent Sangye Gyatso’s works; including the White Beryl and Corrections to the White Beryl, etc. (Sde srid San’g sgrangs rgya’ ston mtho’i rgya [DUs’gya] dkar dang [hai DUs’gya] gya’ sel sogs kyi lo thigs la rgyad pa)” “An Analysis of Historical Dates in compositions by Sampa Yeshe Paljor (Sum pa’i shes dpal ’byor gyis bsgrigs pa’i lo thigs la rgyad pa)” “Jigmé Chöpak is one of the main driving forces behind the publishing of the thirteen volume Collected Works (2007). Without his hard work and dedication, this project may have never been completed. He is also on the board of the Tseten Zhabdrung scholarship fund (on which see below).
Despite his precision for facts, Tseten Zhabdrung mentioned political events throughout his autobiography only tersely, which I view as his choice to prioritize Tibetan cultural heritage. Although the founding of the People’s Republic of China must surely have changed his world, on this event he wrote, “At that time, with a thundering roar proclaiming the liberation of Qinghai Province, a great change occurred throughout the vast empire (rgyal khangs)” (1987: 753). After this interjection, Tseten Zhabdrung reported in


20 Poetics (Tib. stslab rgyas, Skt. kāvya), metrics (Tib. snyan ngag sde, Skt. chandas), lexicography (Tib. mngon brjod, Skt. kosa or abhidhāna), drama (Tib. zlos gar, Skt. rātaka), and astrology (which included astronomy, arithmetic, and astrology, Tib. rtis, Skt. garita). Dreyfus, p. 102.

21 Undoubtedly one reason for this ambiguity could be that he feared political reprisals. However, I don’t view this to be the main reason because many of the Chinese biographical entries on him emphasize his role in nation-building projects such as his choice to prioritize Tibetan cultural heritage. In addition, I think he was certainly appealing to his Tibetophone audience, including his many students both monastic and lay. His autobiography thus also served a didactic purpose, i.e. to teach his readers on Tibetan language, culture, and history.
detail on the process of finding the reincarnation of Lama Rimpoché Jigmé Damchö Gyatso, who had passed away of natural causes a few years before. This is followed by another several pages of various Dharma activities (1987: 753–760). By the end of the summer of 1954, Alak Zhabdrung was called to Beijing to participate in the Tibetan translation of the new Chinese Constitution. In October of 1954, he met with both the Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama, who were in Beijing attending the National People's Congress. Although Tseten Zhabdrung mentioned these political events in his autobiography, he consistently prioritized Tibetan Buddhist cultural repertoires. For example, while in Beijing, he provided detailed information on the teachings he received from the Dalai Lama in the Yonghegong, and barely mentioned the events around celebrating the new constitution.

After returning back to Qinghai, he taught on the science of language, especially on

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22 In Qinghai Province, Alak Zhabdrung had been previously recruited to work as a translator for the Qinghai Provincial Translation Committee (Mtsho sngon zhing chen rtsom sgyur u yon Ihan khang). Tseten Zhabdrung 1987, p. 766. Cf. Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las, 2003, p. 1706.

23 This meeting took place in a chapel of the Yonghegong, the famous Tibetan Buddhist complex in Beijing. Consistent with the rest of his autobiography, Alak Zhabdrung gives the dates for this event according to the Tibetan calendar (the twenty-second day of the eighth month), which corresponds to October 18, 1954.

24 In Alak Zhabdrung’s life narrative, he also highlighted that His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s junior tutor Trijang Rinpoché (Khri byang Rin po che, 1900/1–1981) commented on the erudition of Tseten Zhabdrung’s root lama, Jigmé Damchö Gyatso. Trijang Rinpoché then commissioned Tseten Zhabdrung to print a copy of Jigmé Damchö Gyatso’s Collected Works which Tseten Zhabdrung had compiled and edited. This was fulfilled after Alak Zhabdrung returned back to Qinghai. Tseten Zhabdrung 1987, p. 770.
གསལ་དུ་བྲིས་འདུག་མོད། རྩ་ཁྲིམས་གསར་པའི་དགའ་སྟོན་གྱི་མཛད་སྒོ་དེ་དག་ཡུང་ཧེ་གོང་དུ་ཁོང་གིས་༧རྒྱལ་བ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་ལས་གསུང་ཆོས་ཞུས་པའི་སྐོར་ཞིབ་ཡོངས་མི་དམངས་འཐུས་མི་ཚོགས་ཆེན་ལ་བཅར་བཞིན་པའི་༧རྒྱལ་བ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་


Oral testimony from two unrelated sources stated that Tsetsen Abbot was arrested in 1958 and brought to Nantan prison in Xining, where he subsequently died. Personal communication, Xining 2008. Alak Zhadrung’s Catalogue to Dentik Monastery tersely stated that the life of the Eighth Tsetsen Abbot Jigmé Rigzin Nyingpo (Tshe tan mkhan po ’jigs med rigs pa’i snying po) came to an end in his forty-ninth year, which would have been 1958.” Mėlo smarub pa’i gnas chen dan tig shel gyi n bo le lag dang bcas pa’i dkar chag dgon ldan nag gi ‘gyud mangs.” In Tshe tan Zhabdün drung ‘jigs med rigs pa’i blo gros mchog gi gsal ‘bum, Vol. 3, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, p. 379. 2010. Catalogue to Dentik Monastery. 2008. Tsetsen Zhabdrung’s Catalogue to Dentik Monastery tersely stated that the life of the Eighth Tsetsen Abbot Jigmé Rigzin Nyingpo (Tshe tan mkhan po ’jigs med rigs pa’i snying po) came to an end in his forty-ninth year, which would have been 1958.” Mėlo smarub pa’i gnas chen dan tig shel gyi n bo le lag dang bcas pa’i dkar chag dgon ldan nag gi ‘gyud mangs.” In Tshe tan Zhabdün drung ‘jigs med rigs pa’i blo gros mchog gi gsal ‘bum, Vol. 3, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, p. 379.
Tseten Zhabdrung's poems depict the terror of this time:

Kye ma!
Who can save the monasteries from destruction,
protect those who bear saffron robes,
when those who stand in the ranks of Dharma-holders,
carelessly cast off their vows like chaff?
Kye ma!
Can anyone still sleep peacefully, knowing the karmic results of these actions made with anger and weapons against the Three Supports,
places respected by worship and prostrations?
Kye ma!
Trembling with fear! The holy texts, volumes dispelling ignorance are fastened to the soles of shoes, a terror never even conjured by Langdarma.

(1987: 779)

Tseten Zhabdrung was unable to return to his monasteries, and was sent to Beijing to do translation work, where he shared a room with Muge Samten. By late 1961 or early 1962, the extremely tense political atmosphere in Amdo subsided to the point that he could return home. After arriving in Xunhua County in Qinghai, he worked with the Panchen Lama to restore the monastery in the Panchen Lama’s home town of Wendu (Tib. Bis mdo), which had been left with seven monks after the religious reforms that had followed the massive anti-communist uprising of 1958. It is likely that at this time, he played a role in collecting information that formed the basis for the Panchen Lama’s famous 70,000 character petition.

Nevertheless, in the first decade of Chinese Communist rule he published many books,

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27 Due to its ambiguous dating in Tseten Zhabdrung’s autobiography, in the IATS seminar in Bonn 2006, I presented that this poem was about the Cultural Revolution. However after my fieldwork and various interviews in 2008 and upon further reflection of this poem’s placement in his autobiography, I now believe that this poem expressed Tseten Zhabdrung’s horror at the destruction of Tseten Monastery and the death of Tseten Abbot in 1958.

28 In the early 1960s, Alak Zhabdrung worked with the Panchen Lama to increase the number of monks at Wendu to 103. However, Wendu was destroyed in 1967 at the height of the Cultural Revolution. Cf. Pu Wencheng. 2001. *Qinghai Fojiao Shi* (History of Buddhism in Qinghai Province). Xining: Qinghai People’s Publishing House, p. 113.

29 This is similar to other Tibetan authors at the time. As Lauran Hartley stated, “The projects of the 1950s maintained a critical thread of continuity from the pre-Communist era, laying the foundation for later literary negotiation,” Hartley and
two of which are known to be still extant: a manual on letter writing ('Phrin yig spel tshul lhag bsam padmo 'dzum pa'i nyin byed), and as mentioned the first edition of his General Commentary on the Mirror of Poetics (Snyan ngag spyi don). Tseten Zhabdrung's dictionary Dag yig thon mi'i dgongs rgyan, republished in India in 1969, was first written in the early 1950s (1987: 778). He also wrote a treatise on Tibetan grammar including a brief history of the Tibetan language called the Thon mi'i zhal lung. This major work

30 Held in the rare books collection of the East Asian Library at Columbia University. I would like to express my gratitude to Lauran Hartley for this information.
31 Held at Latse Library, New York City. I am deeply indebted to Pema Bhum for this information.
32 This history of Tibetan grammar (Thon mi'i zhal lung) is an extremely influential work. It is now in its tenth print run at 40,030 copies.
comparing many different systems of grammatical analysis is still used as a textbook, and was reprinted in India in the late 1980s. Additionally, Alak Tseten Zhabdrung mastered different styles of calligraphy and even created new scripts. His unparalleled skills as a calligrapher can be seen in volume 8 of his Collected Works (2007), which reprinted several calligraphy pamphlets all written in different styles in his own hand.

Nonetheless, his fate was to be the same as a majority of Tibetan leaders of the day. Alak Tseten Zhabdrung was arrested in late September 1987 (1987: 787), and confined at Nantan (Ch. 南滩) prison 

After Alak Zhabdrung’s release from prison in July of 1976, he spent two years recuperating at his family’s residence in Jishi Town of Xunhua County (1987: 789). In the spring of 1978, Ngawang Chödar (Ngag dbang chos dar), then director of the Tibetan Studies Department at Northwest Nationalities Institute in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, invited Alak Zhabdrung to join the staff of the Tibetan Studies Department (1987: 799).

It was here that Alak Zhabdrung trained the next generation of Tibetan historians, scholars, and translators. His former students comprise some of the most important people in Tibetan studies today. The first group of graduate students (Tib. zhib ’jug slob ma; Ch. yanjiu xuesheng 研究生) in his class included the historian and translator Pu Wencheng (Ch. 蒲文成), the current head editor of the Tibetan literary magazine

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34 Tseten Zhabdrung did not specify the name of the prison where Tseten Abbot had died in 1958. We know that he was incarcerated in Nantan (南滩) from Dung dkar Blo bzang ’phrin las. 2003, p. 1706. This was further affirmed by personal communication in March 2008.

35 Pu Wencheng’s contributions in making Tibetan historical sources available to a Chinese language readership are formidable. He has written extensively and critically on Tibetan Buddhist history, and also translated many Tibetan primary sources into Chinese including, among others: Bu ston’s History of Buddhism (Ch. Badun fojiao shi 布顿佛教史, Tibet. Bu ston Chos ’byung), Gendun Chophel’s White Annals (Chi. Bai shi 白史, Tibet. Deb ther dkar po), Jangkya Rolpé Dorjé’s (Lcang skya Rol pa’i rdo rje) biography of the Seventh Dalai Lama (Ch. Qishi dalai lama zhidun hengtang shi, Tibet. Rigyal ba’i dbang po thams cad mkhyen ’grogs edo rje ’chang blo bzang bskal bzang rgya mtsho dpal bzang po’i zhag snga nas kyi mnyam thar mdo tsam byod pa dpag bsam zin po che’i sne ma).

28 བདོ་དཀར་བོ་བཞང་གི་དབང་བསྒྱུར་བའི་དབོ་དཀར་བཞང་ ’ཐོང་ཁྲན་གྱི་དབང་བསྒྱུར་བའི་དབེ་འདུན་པའི་གྲངས་ ༡༠༣ ལ་ ༡༡༣ ན་གསལ། 29 བདོ་དཀར་བོ་བཞང་གི་དབང་བསྒྱུར་བའི་དབོ་དཀར་བཞང་ ’ཐོང་ཁྲན་གྱི་དབང་བསྒྱུར་བའི་དབེ་འདུན་པའི་གྲངས་ ༡༠༣ ལ་ ༡༣༠ ན་གསལ་ ༡༩༥༠ ོབས་ཀྱི་ལོ་ཟླ་དག་གི་ནང་བྱུང་ ༡༩༦༠ ོལོའི་མགོ་སྟོད་དུ་ཨ་ལགས་ཞབས་དྲུང་གིས་པཎ་ཆེན་རིན་ ༡༩༦༠ ོལོའི་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བའི་གུང་ཁྲན་ངོ་རྒོལ་གྱི་གྱེན་ ༡༩༦༠ ོལོའི་མགོ་སྟོད་དུ་ཨ་ལགས་ཞབས་དྲུང་གིས་པཎ་ཆེན་རིན་ ༡༩༦༠ ོལོའི་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བའི་གུང་ཁྲན་ངོ་རྒོལ་གྱི་གྱེན་ ༡༩༦༠ ོལོའི་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བའི་གུང་ཁྲན་ངོ་རྒོལ་གྱི་གྱེན་
Light Rain (Sbrang char) Dawa Lodrö (Tib. Zla ba blo gros; Ch.: Dawa Luozhi 达哇洛智), the assistant dean of South-Central University for Nationalities and historian Gao Rui (Ch. 高瑞, Tib. Gnya' gong Dkon mchog tshe brtan), and the historian Könchok (Dkon mchog), who has since passed away. This select group of graduate students accompanied Tseten Zhabdrung on pilgrimage to Lhasa, where he also gave lectures at Tibet University in the summer of 1981. A few undergraduate students in the Tibetan Studies Department in Lanzhou were permitted to attend Alak Zhabdrung's graduate classes in that first year, due to their high level of Tibetan. This group included Pema Bhum (Tib. Pad ma 'bum, Chi. Wanma Ben 万马奔), the director of Trace Foundation's Latse Library in New York City.

36 The importance of Light Rain in the Tibetan literary world is astounding. As Tsering Shakya stated, “Aply titled Light Rain was to become the premier literary journal in Tibet. More than any other publication, it shaped and established the foundation of modern Tibetan literature;” in Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani Eds. 2008, p. 66.
At Alak Zhabdrung’s behest, Pema Bhum continued at Northwest Nationalities Institute (now University) to pursue his graduate work. From his undergraduate days until Alak Zhabdrung’s death, Pema Bhum worked together with Tseten Zhabdrung. Other well-known graduate students included the famous writer Repkong Dorjekhar (Reb gong Rdo rje mKhar) and the writer Chabga Dorjé Tsering (Chab ’gag Rdo rje tshe ring), among others.

While it may be impossible to estimate how influential Alak Zhabdrung is or was as a teacher and scholar, the print run numbers for one of his works can provide a general indication of audience reach. Alak Zhabdrung’s textbook on Tibetan poetics General Commentary on the Mirror of Poetics had an initial print run in 1957 in Qinghai of 2,050 copies. In 2006, it was in its fifth print run at 40,305 copies. To give a comparison, a major reference work, a Tibetan-Chinese bilingual dictionary (Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo) was in its eighth print run in 2008 at a comparable number of 44,300 copies. One of Alak Zhabdrung’s greatest contributions lies in the writing of this textbook, which made the subject of Tibetan classical poetry available on a scale probably unprecedented in Tibetan history.

Besides all of this, Alak Zhabdrung contributed to the revitalization of Tibetan culture in two other significant ways. After Alak Zhabdrung was rehabilitated by the government, a few years after his release from prison, he was given a large sum of compensation money for being falsely imprisoned. He used this as seed-money to start a scholarship fund for talented Tibetan Studies undergraduates with financial need at Northwest Nationalities Institute. This scholarship fund still exists today and has been expanded to include scholarships for high school students in the Tibetan Studies Middle School in Xunhua.

Up until his death in 1985, Alak Zhabdrung continued to give Dharma teachings and empowerments throughout eastern Amdo. He also worked with the Panchen Lama, his student...
Shardong Rinpoche (Shar gdong Blo bzang bshad sgrub rgya mtsho, 1922–2001/2) and other important Amdo lamas to rebuild all of the Six Garwaka monasteries, his own monastic seat at Tak Monastery, as well as Karing Monastery (Ka ring) and Shakyung Monastery (Bya khyung). He passed away peacefully at Labrang Tashikyil (Bla brang bkra shis ‘khyil) of natural causes. An elaborate cremation ceremony at Labrang followed which drew thousands of mourners. His main reliquary stūpa is located at Dentik Monastery. Tseten Zhabdrung's legacy lives on in his writings, his scholarship fund, and his efforts to rebuild local monasteries as well in those he inspired with his teachings.

The lineages of Tseten Zhabdrung and Tseten Abbot continue to this day. The Ninth Tseten Abbot Ngawang Lozang Tenpé Gyeltsen (Ngag dbang blo bzang bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan) was recognized in 1991. The seventh Tseten Zhabdrung Lozang Jampel Norbu (Blo bzang ’jam dpal nor bu, b.1988) was recognized in 1993. In 1994, he

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37 2008: 西藏 70 期 3 目的為 2008 年に 70 を中心に 3 つの資本が発行
38 2008: 西藏 70 期 3 目的為 2008 年に 70 を中心に 3 つの資本が発行

MAP OF TAK MONASTERY AND THE SIX GARWA OR MONASTIC SEATS OF TSETEN ZHABDRUNG. IMAGE COURTESY OF NICOLE WILLOCK.
began his monastic education with Shardong Rinpočé at Shakyung Monastery. Both took up their thrones at the Six Garwaka Monasteries in 1993, and continue to be very active in their communities.

After a twenty-year vacuum, Alak Tseten Zhabdrung Jigmé Rigpé Lodrö played a crucial role in the revitalization of Tibetan culture and language both inside and outside of monastic settings. By transmitting his classical knowledge in new innovative ways, he effectively bridged two worlds. His contributions to Tibetology especially live on in the generation of scholars that he trained, who continue to teach and inspire students of Tibetan Studies around the world.

In conclusion, this essay serves as a brief introduction to the life and works of the great Tibetan scholar Tseten Zhabdrung Jigmé Rigpé Lodrö. I have attempted to take a well-rounded approach succinctly showing his contributions to many fields of Tibetan scholarship as well as presenting a brief biography on his life. His life history and accomplishments will be elucidated more fully in my forthcoming dissertation.43

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43 I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who have guided me in the research for this work, especially Elliot Sperling, Gendun Rabzal, Pema Bhum, Gray Tuttle, and Lauran Hartley for their support and continuing guidance in pursuing this project. I express my sincere thanks to those who generously shared their stories on Tseten Zhabdrung with me including: Pema Bhum, Dawa Lodrö, Pu Wencheng, Cao Rui, Lu Gyalthun (Glu rgyal bum), Sangjégyal (Sangs rgyas rgyal), Regong Dorjékar (Reb gong Rdo rje mkhar), Gegen Demchok (Bde mchog), Gendun (Dge' dun), Lamchokgyal (Lha mchog rgyal), and Huare Sangjé (Dpa' ri sangs rgyas). I am also very grateful to Jikmé Chöpak (Jigs med chos 'phags) for his dedication to upholding the memory of his great uncle. To the memory of Professor Jamyang Drakpa (Jam dbyang grags pa), who left us all too soon, may Tibetan Studies continue to flourish! I extend my deep appreciation to Gangri and Huatsegyal for their research assistance. To Professor Tsewang Dorjé and his former student Kyungdrik (Khyung 'brug), I am immensely grateful for their support in my research while at Qinghai Nationalities University and travelling to all Six Garwaka Monasteries. Thanks also to the staff at QNU who made my research in Xining possible. All views and interpretations of Tseten Zhabdrung’s life history are solely my own, as well as any errors or inaccuracies.
ཡོངས་ནས་མདོར་ཙམ་ཞུ་རྒྱུའི་འབད་བརྩོན་བསྟེན་པ་ཡིན། ཁོང་གི་སྐུ་ཚེ་དང་བོད་ཀྱི་རིག་གནས་ཀྱི་སྡེ་ཁག་མང་པོར་བཞག་པའི་ཁོང་གི་མཛད་རྗེས་དག་ཕྱོགས་མཚོན་ཆེད་ཡིན་ལ། ངས་ཁོང་གི་སྐུ་ཚེའི་རྣམ་ཐར་མདོར་ཙམ་ཞུ་བ་དང་ལྷན་དུ་འཇིགས་མེད་རིགས་པའི་བློ་གྲོས་མཆོག་གི་གསུང་རྩོམ་དང་སྐུ་ཚེའི་སྐོར་རོབ་ཙམ་པའི་སློབ་མ་ཚོ་ལ་འཆད་ཁྲིད་དང་སྐུལ་ལྕག་གནང་མཁན་གྱི་ཁོང་གིས་སྦྱོང་བརྡར་བཞག་པའི་ལེགས་སྐྱེས་དག་ནི།  མུ་མཐུད་ནས་འཛམ་གླིང་ཁྱོན་གྱི་བོད་རིག་སུམ་ཚོགས་པའི་ངོས་ནས་ཟམ་པ་སྦྲེལ་བ་རེད། ལྷག་དོན་ཁོང་གིས་བོད་རིག་པར་ཡོད། རང་གི་སྲོལ་རྒྱུན་གྱི་ཤེས་ཡོན་དེ་དག་སྔོན་མེད་ཀྱི་ཐབས་ལམ་གསར་པ་མེད་རིགས་པའི་བློ་གྲོས་ཀྱིས་དགོན་པའི་ཕྱི་ནང་གཉིས་ཀའི་ཁོར་ཡུག་ཏུ་བོད་ཀྱི་རང་གི་ཆོས་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་སློབ་གཉེར་མགོ་བརྩམས་ཤིང་། མུ་མཐུད་ནས་རང་རང་གི་༡༩༩༤ ལོར་ཁོང་གིས་བྱ་ཁྱུང་དགོན་དུ་ཤར་གདོང་རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་སྐུ་མདུན་ནས། ༡༩༨༨ ལོར་འཁྲུངས།} ༡༩༩༣ ལོར་ངོས་འཛིན་མཛད་པ་རེད།

43 འཁོར་བའི་བོད་ཀྱི་སྐུ་ཚེ་ཀྱི་མཛད་རྗེས་ཀྱི་དགོན་པ་དུ་འདིའི་ཆེད་དུ་ལམ་སྟོན་གནང་བ་དང་རྒྱབ་སྐྱོར་གྱིས་ཨ་རི་ཨིན་དི་ཡ་ན་སློབ་གྲྭ་ཆེན་མོའི་ལས་བྱེད་རྣམས་ལ་ཡང་རྒན་ཆེན་མོ་ཚེ་དབང་རྡོ་རྗེ་དང་ཁོང་གི་སློབ་ཟུར་ཁྱུང་འབྲུག་གཉིས་ལ་མཚོན་ན།