

Article

Constituting Canon and Community in Eleventh Century Tibet: The Extant Writings of Rongzom and His *Charter of Mantrins (sngags pa'i bca' yig)*

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Abstract: This paper explores some of the work of Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo (hereafter Rongzom) and attempts to situate his pedagogical influence within the “Old School” or Nyingma (*rnying ma*) tradition of Tibetan Buddhism¹. A survey of Rongzom’s extant writings indicates that he was a seminal exegete and a particularly important philosopher and interpreter of Buddhism in Tibet. He was an influential intellectual flourishing in a period of cultural rebirth, when there was immense skepticism about Tibetan compositions. His work is thereby a source of insight into the indigenous Tibetan response to the transformations of a renaissance-era in which Indian provenance became the sine qua none of religious authority. Rongzom’s “charter” (*bca' yig*), the primary focus of the essay, is an important document for our understanding of Old School communities of learning. While we know very little of the social realities of Old School communities in Rongzom’s time, we do know that they were a source of concern for the emerging political and religious authorities in Western Tibet. As such, the review below argues that the production of the charter should be seen, inter alia, as an effort at maintaining autonomy in the face of a rising political power. The analysis also provides insights into the nature of the social obligations operant within Rongzom’s community—constituted as it was by a combination of ritually embodied and discursive philosophical modes of learning.

Keywords: Old School; Nyingma; pedagogy; philosophy; ethics

1. Introduction

The worldview of the “Great Vehicle” (*mahāyāna*, *theg chen*) tradition of Buddhism is organized around the altruistic figure of the *bodhisattva*, a type of pedagogical being, whose very existence is characterized by the vow to help sentient beings along the spiritual path.² Thus, to be a bodhisattva is to be a guide and thus a teacher. The Buddha Śākyamuni is often simply referred to as Tönpa Chomdendé (*ston pa bcom ldan 'das*): “The Lord who Teaches” or “The Conqueror Who Shows” the path to the end of suffering. Within tantric Buddhism, which is referred to as the “Indestructible” or “Adamantine Vehicle” (*vajrayāna*, *rdo rje theg pa*), the emphasis on teaching is evinced in the intimate relationship between a disciple and guru—and the student’s devotion to his or her teacher. This relationship is traditionally produced and maintained through guru yoga, “a tantric practice in which one’s

¹ David Germano (University of Virginia), James Gentry (Kathmandu University/University of Virginia), and Berthe Jansen (Universiteit Leiden) read an early draft of this article and I need to thank them each for their invaluable criticisms and suggestions.

² Sedgwick (2005) has described the bodhisattva as a figure “radically self-defined in pedagogical terms” ([1], p. 168), a being who is “defined almost simply as a being whose commitment to pedagogical relationality approaches the horizon of eternity” ([1], p. 169).

teacher is regarded as a buddha—a figure whose pedagogy is perfect.³ There is a special term in Tibetan for the tantric relationship formed between student and teacher: *damtsik* (*dam tshig*). This term corresponds to the Sanskrit term, *samaya*, which means “pledge” or “vow”. A disciple obtains *damtsik* when she receives tantric initiation, a ritual ceremony that structures the teacher-student relationship as well as the inter-personal relations of those students who have the same teacher and attend the same teachings. In that case, their relationship is couched in language of family: they are referred to as “indestructible” or “Vajra siblings” (*rdo rje mched*), a phrasing which suggests that Tibetans conceptualize these relationships as constituting a family that is not simply biological. It is a family whose relations are maintained through particular rituals and types of behaviors (i.e., “practices”). This essay provides scholarly inquiry into the ways in which Tibetan Buddhists envisioned the communities formed through *damtsik* by examining writings of eleventh-century author, Rongzom.

Rongzom is a prominent figure within Tibetan Buddhist history, in particular for Tibet’s Old School (*rnying ma*) of Buddhism. He was an important translator and exegete of Indian Buddhism, a prolific author of Buddhist literature himself, and a proponent of the authority and authenticity of Tibetan compositions of Buddhist literature⁴ in a time of cultural rebirth when “anything un-Indian was by definition un-Buddhist” ([3], p. 14). Rongzom was thereby an authoritative and influential figure flourishing in a transformative time.⁵ Not only was he arguably the first to defend the legitimacy of the Old School, he was one of its champions, arguing for the supremacy of the Old School over its New School rivals. Beyond his position as a defender of the Old School, Rongzom was also an important translator and exegete for the New Schools. By contributing to the proliferation of Old School and New School religious literature alike, he straddled an important division in Himalayan Buddhism that is still with us today.

The aim of this paper is to outline Rongzom’s contributions to pedagogical theory and practice in Tibet by exploring the scope and nature of the *damtsik* relationship envisioned in one of Rongzom’s texts. Broadly conceived, I use the term “pedagogy” to think about the history of Buddhist ways of teaching and learning; about how these connect human beings through social relationships and embed them in a community embodied by meditative and ritually embodied practice on the one hand, and discursive philosophical discourse on the other.

³ Traditionally, it is said that a Buddha, one who has gained enlightenment, precisely and perfectly intuites the best way to teach and guide beings. This perfect teaching is the purpose of a buddha’s appearance in the world.

⁴ *Dkon cog ’grel: de bas na rgyud kyi gzhung ldab bu la sogs par ston pa dang | gal te mkhan po rnams kyis bsdu shing sbyar ba srid na yang | de bzhin gshegs pa’i gyin gyis rlabs ’byung ba la tshul nges pa med pa yin pas the tshom gyi yul du bya ba ma yin no |* (RZSB, vol. 1, 84.23–85.1). Notably, in the same passage, Rongzom evinces an expansive view of authority by stating that good explanations given in non-Buddhist treatises may in fact be the result of a buddha’s blessings or emanation (*my stegs can gyis legs par bshad pa’i gzung yang sangs rgyas rnams kyi byin gyis brlabs pa dang sprul pas bshad pa yin pa |* 85.4–6). Cf. ([2], p. 284).

⁵ It may be argued that Rongzompa was not, in fact, so influential, by suggesting that his influence *did not persist* through the intervening centuries between the 11th century in which he lived and the 19th century, in which a non-sectarian movement began; or, perhaps, that Rongzompa’s work was simply overemphasized by those in the nonsectarian movements to serve their own agenda. To the contrary, I contend that Rongzompa’s work was of significant influence and concern over the centuries. Rog Bande Sherab (1166–1244) references Rongzom’s *Chos ’byung* (See [3]; [4], pp. 232, 419). The Old School preserves traditions of Great Perfection interpretation (Roerich 167) and Vajrakilaya that trace their origins to Rongzom ([4], p. 232). Critical figures for the Old School like Longchenpa and Sokdokpa Lodro Gyaltsen (16th/17th c.) both engage Rongzom as part of their own exegetical projects. In fact, in his *Phyogs bcu mun sel*, Longchenpa follows Rongzompa in interpreting the most important text for Tibet’s Old School, the *Guhyagarbhatantra*, in terms of Atiyoga—Great Perfection—even locating the source for the interpretation in the same verse from the thirteenth chapter of the tantra as does Rongzompa [5]. Notably, though, Longchenpa and Rongzompa diverge on a critical issue: the ontological status of gnosis and so-called “pure appearance” ([6], p. 226, n. 494). In this case, the fact that Longchenpa takes time to criticize Rongzompa’s view and assert his own interpretation speaks to his influence and authority—i.e., he was significant enough that Longchenpa could not ignore him. Moreover, Rongzompa also composed a commentary on the *Man ngag lta phreng*, itself a commentary on the thirteenth chapter of *Guhyagarbhatantra* attributed to Padmasambhava. Rongzom’s inclusion in Old School lineage prayers and the fact that he is the only Old School figure afforded his own section in the *Deb ther*, all evidence his ongoing influence and authority for the tradition.

This paper offers a detailed review of the text of Rongzom's tantric "charter"⁶ with an eye for contextualizing its composition in light of a rising political power in Western Tibet. As I show below, Rongzom's work is important for examining the origins of the Old School's tradition and for understanding the indigenous response to Tibet's eleventh century cultural and political renaissance. I argue that Rongzom's charter may be seen as a way of seeking autonomy from outside interference—perhaps interference from the rising political power in the West that was keen to be seen as the arbiters of true religion—i.e., authentic Buddhism. Before doing so, however, I begin by looking at the character and contents of Rongzom's extant collected works.

2. The Audacity of Autochthonous Authorship

Chapter three of *The Blue Annals*,⁷ a chronicle of Tibetan religious history attributed to Gö Lotsawa Zhönnu Pel (*'gos blo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal*, 1392–1481),⁸ recounts an interesting story about the translator, Rongzom.⁹ According to the story, there was a gathering of Buddhist scholars from the Four Horns of Central Tibet.¹⁰ A group of Tibetan Buddhist translators and intellectuals there decided to confront and censure Rongzom over his prodigious and therefore unseemly literary output.¹¹ These men thought it unacceptable (*mi rigs*) that a person born in Tibet, such as Rongzom, had composed such a large number of authoritative commentaries and scholastic treatises (*śāstra*, *bstan bcos*). Yet after seeing and discussing each treatise with the author, they were so impressed that each subsequently offered to serve Rongzom as a disciple. This constitutes a remarkable turnabout from their initial hostility.

The pertinence of this narrative is that it shows Rongzom flourished at a time in Tibet when there was immense skepticism, if not outright antagonism, toward Tibetan composition of Buddhist literature—and toward some indigenous Tibetan religious movements.¹² The fact that these would-be censors changed their minds about Rongzom's work only *after* seeing and engaging in discussion of each treatise (*bstan bcos re mthong zhing gsung glengs re mdzad pas*) suggests just how hostile the environment was toward Tibetan composition: these translators and interpreters of Buddhism were ready to censure work they had not even examined on the basis of the birthplace of the author. Considering that Tibetans have since become prolific authors of a wide variety of authoritative Buddhist literature, we may wonder why, in Rongzom's time, there was such a different attitude.

3. The Formation of "New" and "Old"

Buddhism was formally introduced onto the Tibetan plateau¹³ through the efforts of, among others, the emperor Trisong Detsen (*khri srong lde bstan*, r. 755/6-797), who is said to have lifted

⁶ More will be said on this little studied genre of Tibetan literature. As noted by Jansen, Tibetan "charters" or *chayik* (*bca' yig*) are "a generally under-appreciated resource in the study of Tibetan social history" ([7], p. 598, n. 7).

⁷ See [8].

⁸ On the historical context of this work and its authorship, see [9].

⁹ The same episode is recorded in the earliest generation of Rongzom biographies stemming from his direct disciples. See [10].

¹⁰ The Four Horns of Tibet (*ru bzhi*) are four areas in Central Tibet: the side horn of Tsang, called Rulak, the right horn of Tsang, called Yéru, the Left horn of Ü, called Yoru, and the central horn of Ü, called Uru. For an examination of the Four Horns, see ([11]; cf. [12]), who reports that the division of Tibet into the left and center horns was carried out to allocate territory to two of Langdarma's sons, Ösung and Yumten, both of whom had supporting factions vying for succession to the Langdarma's vacated throne ([11], p. 48).

¹¹ Sources typically name the following figures: Bangka Darchung (*bang ka dar chung*), Dö Khyungpo Hüm Nying (*mdo'i khyung po hüm snying*), Gö Lhétsé (*'gos lhas btas*), Gya Gyeltsül (*rgya rgyal tshul*), Marpa Dowa (*mar pa do ba*, b. 1011), Sétrom Gyatso Bar (*se khrom rgya mtsho 'bar*), Shapkyi Yangkhyé Lama (*shab kyi yang khyed bla ma*), Tsamtön Gocha (*mtsham ston go cha*), and Uyukpa Da Samten (*'u yug pa mda' bsam gtan*).

¹² According to Karmay, there was serious criticism, of which we shall have more to say below, "of the general tantric practices prevailing" outside of any institutional structure in Tibet during the late 10th and early 11th century ([13], p. 5). According to Dalton, "this so-called dark age was when Buddhism plunged its roots deep into the Tibetan soil" ([12], p. 76). Moreover, Dalton writes: "[b]y the tenth century, new [Tibetan] texts had begun to emerge that combined Buddhist teachings and practices with the traditional Tibetan fascination with the spirits of the Himalayan plateau" ([11], p. 59).

¹³ Lamentably, my account here largely ignores the presence of Tibet's prominent non-Buddhist tradition, Bön, which has been significantly influenced by the Buddhist tradition. I am currently preparing a larger study of Rongzompa's philosophy that takes the influence of Bön philosophy into greater account.

restrictions on the practice of the Buddhist religion and instructed government employees and ordinary subjects alike to practice the Buddhist religion.¹⁴ When a Buddhist monk named Lhalung Pelgyi Dorjé (*lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje*) assassinated the last Tibetan emperor, Langdarma (*glang dar ma*), the Tibetan empire imploded. Without state support, Buddhist institutions were lost; but Buddhism flourished in local communities where teachings and lineages were often transmitted along hereditary lines of family and clan.

In the eleventh century, an economic and political resurgence was accompanied by a remarkable transmission of religious literature and media into Tibet; by the end of the century, Buddhist institutions were again taking root.¹⁵ Beginning in this era of increasing religious diversity, processes that would last for more than two centuries instigated the formation of religious divisions on the basis of competing lineages that gradually came to be conceptualized at a higher level into an overarching bifurcation into the “Old” (*rnying*) and “New” (*gsar*), which leaves to the side the other religious tradition of historical Tibet, called Bön.¹⁶ Many promulgators of the new lineages of Buddhist practice imported into Tibet, which are traditionally categorized as the “New Schools” (*gsar ma*) by virtue of the fact that their transmission into Tibet stemmed from the renaissance period, were dismissive of the religious lineages and traditions that existed in Tibet prior to the eleventh-century. The aim of the Tibetan renaissance was thus “to remake religion rather than simply reviving it” ([14], p. 2). Adherents to these “old” religious lineages and traditions, however, embraced their identity as the “Old School” (*rnying ma*), which for them implied the connection to Tibet’s greatest traditions, ancient pedigrees, superior scriptural translations, and intimate association with the glorious imperial age.¹⁷

Rongzom was deeply versed in the “old” esoteric traditions preserved during the dark age and wrote brilliantly about them. But he was also a master of the new dispensations—and his personal compositions powerfully ranged over both traditions with creative and compelling lines of inquiry delivered in a snappy prose often employing distinctive images and metaphors. His extant corpus includes commentaries on important New School literature, such as his *Commentary on the Difficult Points of the Sarvabuddhasamāyogadākinījālasamvaratantra* (RZSB, vol. 2, pp. 457–620), and literature associated with the Old School tantras, such as his commentary on the most important text for the Old School, the *Guhyagarbhatantra* (RZSB vol. 1, pp. 31–250). Thus, in this turbulent religious landscape of the eleventh century, Rongzom was not only one of the most brilliant intellectuals on the Tibetan plateau but he was also a unique figure who straddled the emerging boundary between the New and Old schools.

¹⁴ Deb ther kun gsal me long: *khri srong lde bstan gyi sangs rgyas kyi chos byed mi chog pa'i bca' khrims med par bzos l blon 'bangs thams cad la chos bya ba'i bka' legs par gnang* ([15], p. 78.2–3).

¹⁵ For example, Radreng (*rwa sgreng*) monastery was established by Dromtönpa Gyelwé Jungné (*'brom ston pa rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas*), Atiśa’s chief disciple, around 1057. In approximately 1071/1073, three premier centers of learning were established: Sakya (*sa skya*) monastery was founded by Khön Könchok Gyel (*'khon dkon mchog rgyal*). In the same year, the premier center for Tibetan scholasticism and the study of Indian logical epistemology (*pramāṇa, tshad ma*) was established at Sangpu Neutok (*gsang phu ne'u thog*) by Ngok Lekpé Shérap (*rngog legs pa'i shes rab*, fl. 11th c.). According to the Bön tradition, the premier center for the study Bön philosophy, Yéru Wensakha (*g.yas ru dben sa kha*), was founded by Namkha Yungdrung (*nam mkha' g.yung drung*), also known as Druje Yungdrung Lama (*bru rje g.yung drung bla-ma*). (After Yéru Wensakha was destroyed in the fourteenth century, it was rebuilt by in 1405 by Nyamé Shérap Gyeltsen (*mnyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan*) and thereafter called Tashi Menri (*bkra shis sman ri*.) On Tibetan Buddhist scholasticism, see ([16], pp. 1–114; [17], pp. 10–13, 326–33). On this “renaissance” of Tibetan culture, see [4].

¹⁶ For an essay on Tibetan sectarianism and the emergence of a nonsectarian movement, see ([18], pp. 237–50).

¹⁷ Rongzompa declared that the early translations dating to the Imperial period—the earlier spread of Buddhism that comes, in part, to comprise a foundation for Tibet’s Old School—are superior to New School translations for six reasons. According to Lopon P. Ogyan Tanzin ([19], p. 367), “the six greatneses of the Early Translations (*snga' gyur*)” given by Rongzompa are “the greatness of the patrons, the greatness of the scholars, the greatness of the translators, the greatness of the places where the translations were made, the greatness of the doctrines translated, and the greatness of the offerings made as a support for requesting the doctrine.”

The beginning of the renaissance of Tibet's religious culture is traditionally connected with two main factions—a group of monastics in the East and the rise of an aristocratic house in the West.¹⁸ In the Western court at Gugé, the ruler, Yéshé Ö (*ye shes 'od*), claimed that tantric Buddhism had been misunderstood and misrepresented in Tibet. He felt that the village Buddhism flourishing in the absence of institutions and state control was riddled with corruption. According to Yéshé Ö and a scion of his royal house, Podrang Zhiwa Ö (*pho brang zhi ba 'od*), Tibetans also engaged in the worst type of fabrication by composing their own tantric texts during the dark age in order to give textual justification for their wrong views and behaviors, which were said to be mistaken at best and violent and licentious at worst.¹⁹ In order to establish authoritative lines of religious dispensation—and in order to establish the Western court as *the* site of emerging political power on the plateau—Yéshé Ö and Podrang Zhiwa Ö composed formal ordinances containing criticism of village religious communities and charges of fraudulence against a number of scriptures used in the Old School. Some scholars have suggested that these criticisms implicitly took aim at the *Guhyagarbhatantra*, the Old School's principal tantra.²⁰

The ordinances declare a large number of texts that were eventually codified in Tibet's Old School of Buddhism to be unacceptable and inauthentic works “fabricated” by Tibetans. For the emerging kingdom in the West, which was intent on establishing a network of Buddhist institutions, the production and dissemination of such literature and its criticism of these village teachers and their religious communities was part and parcel of their expansionist agenda, which concerned, *inter alia*, assimilating (read: bringing under control) the village religious communities who might not otherwise join the newly emerging monastic institutions of scholastic learning favored by the rulers in the West and promulgators of the New Schools.²¹ As such, some proponents of the renaissance and its New Schools saw works composed by Tibetans as *ex hypothesi* inauthentic, unauthoritative, and perhaps even dangerous. These ordinances identify, as objects of their criticism, a number of important Old School scriptures and the “householder mantrins²² living in villages who have no connection with the Three Ways and yet who claim ‘We follow the way of the Great Vehicle!’” ([13], 9 [English], 14 [Tibetan]).²³ It is perhaps no coincidence that Rongzom uses this very phrase in the title of his seminal defense of the Old School's Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) approach to the spiritual path in a text entitled *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle*.²⁴

¹⁸ Dalton addresses some of this period's figures, sociopolitical concerns, and shifts. It would seem that the translators described in the *Blue Annals* above may be said to form a third faction of loosely-affiliated translators beyond the monastic faction in the east and the aristocratic house in the West.

¹⁹ Dalton describes “the [Western] court's opposition to what it saw as a rampant abuse of tantric ritual” ([12], p. 97).

²⁰ Wangchuk [2] has questioned whether and to what degree the *Guhyagarbhatantra* was an object of concern in the eleventh century. It appears to be the case that the Indian pedigree of this work and its textual traditions were called into question, but the *Guhyagarbhatantra* is not actually mentioned in the ordinances. Nevertheless, Karmay infers that this work was an implicit object of ordinance criticism. Karmay also reports that the controversy over its Indian pedigree only came to an end when a Sanskrit original was found at Samyé (*bsam yas*) monastery by the Kadampa master Chomden Rikrel (*bcom ldan rig ral*) ([2], pp. 7–8, n. 35). *Deb ther*, however, states that Kaché Pañchen Śākya Śrībhadrā (kha che pañ chen shākya shri b+ha dra, 1127–1225) found the *Guhyagarbhatantra* Sanskrit manuscript after his arrival to Samyé (136.4–5). To be clear, though the ordinances may not explicitly name the *Guhyagarbhatantra*, they do describe several works closely connected with it as “debased” (*'dres ma*) ([2], p. 274).

²¹ This should not suggest that there were no monks connected with the Old School lineages living in dark age Tibet. For example, *Blue Annals* reports that the important tenth century figure, Zurpoché Shakya Jungné (*zur po che shakya 'byung gnas*), was a celibate “brahmacārin” ([8], 110).

²² The Sanskrit term *mantrin* corresponds to the Tibetan *ngakpa* (*snags pa*), a term used to designate a class of lay or nonordained religious specialists: virtuosi who are not monastics. See Rongzompa's *The Charter of the Mantrins*, which is treated below.

²³ To be clear, the renaissance era is not the only period wherein Tibetan authorities worried about the possibly negative influence of the tantras. During the Imperium, strict controls were placed on the translation and transmission of the tantras, as well. The “three ways” may refer to the three types of vows: monastic vows common to the Theravādayāna (*pratimokṣa*, *so thar*), bodhisattva vows common to the Mahāyāna (*bodhisattva*, *byang chub*), and commitments for tantric initiation and practice (*samaya*, *dam tshig*). Harmonizing these three vows was an important theme of the era.

²⁴ For an introduction and English translation of this text, see [20]. For a traditional presentation of Great Perfection in the context of the Old School tradition, see [21]. For a scholarly survey of the Great Perfection's place in Tibetan intellectual history, its sources, doxographies, and practices, see [22]. For a cursory survey of Bön literature, see [23]. For a Bön

Rongzom was an early proponent of autochthonous composition and an established teacher with a large group of monastic and lay disciples. Such compositions and communities appear to have been focal points for the concerns of the ascendant political faction in the West, which was keen to claim the mantle of the arbiters of *true religion* in Tibet and to extend control over a wide domain where religious institutions were hitherto largely absent and religious authority was decentralized among clans, families, and communities. Thus the ordinances authored by Yéshé Ö and Podrang Zhiwa should not only be seen as an attempt to reform and remake Tibetan religion, but also as an attempt to project political power. Rongzom was operating in an environment in which a deluge of new religious media was flooding into Tibet. But he was also contending with movements of collection, organization and system-building that strove to present theoretically cogent conceptualizations of the overall Buddhist path. These movements were thoroughly pedagogical insofar as “pedagogy”²⁵ implies systematic efforts to create and transmit theoretically consistent systems of knowledge.²⁶ With this in mind, the nature and scope of Rongzom’s compositions, and his charter, in particular, constitute an important source of information concerning the indigenous Tibetan response to the influx and growing influence of new Buddhist lineages and their proponents—both in religious and political terms.

presentation of Great Perfection, see [24,25]. For an academic survey of the Great Perfection tradition, its sources and intellectual history, see [26]. On the Great Perfection’s distinctive traditions of contemplative practice, theory and lineal history, see [27]. For an essay on “memory” in the tradition of Great Perfection, see ([28], pp. 178–96). On the broad development of the classical philosophical view of the Great Perfection tradition, see [29]. On Bön tantric epistemology, which is an incorporation of Mahāyāna logic and Bön Great Perfection that bears some remarkable similarities to Rongzom’s epistemology, see [30–33].

- ²⁵ A “pedagogical agenda,” in this particular context, refers to a “commitment to teach in ways that are consistent with, in fact that are the enactment of, [a teacher’s or tradition’s] theories of reading, writing and thinking” ([34], p. 1). Throughout this paper, the term “pedagogy” is used to “draw attention to the process through which knowledge is produced” in a systematic and traditional manner ([34], p. 3). Beyond the composition of particular texts, the move toward organized system-building can also be seen in the pedagogical agendas of such figures as Ngok Loden Shérap (*rngog blo ldan shes rab*, 1059–1110), the nephew of Ngok Lekpé Shérap, and Chapa Chökyi Sengé (*phywa pa chos kyi seng ge*, 1109–1169), whose contributions to the Tibetan study of Indian logical epistemology are relatively well-known. In short, these two men, the founder and sixth abbot of Sangpu Neutok monastery, respectively, incorporated and innovated the study of logic and epistemology (*pramāṇa*, *tshad ma*) and laid the foundations for scholastic philosophical learning in a monastic setting in eleventh century Tibet. On their contributions, see ([35,36]; [37], pp. 21–22, chapters. 21–22; [17], pp. 137–39; [38]).
- ²⁶ One well-known text produced through this effort was authored by the renaissance progenitor, Atiśa (982–1042). The Bengali Buddhist master’s *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (*bodhipathapradīpa*, *byang chub lam gyi sgron ma*), composed at Töling Tsuklakhang (*tho ling gtsug lag khang*) shortly after his arrival in Tibet around 1042, was written in order to dispel misunderstanding about the Buddhist path and to articulate the proper relationship between tantric and nontantric Buddhist practice and commitments in a monastic context that modeled a newly emergent, and soon to be dominant interpretive framework championed by the New Schools ([13], p. 8). Atiśa’s work is indeed “pedagogical”; it teaches an authoritative and theoretically informed approach to religious practice, complete with bibliography of suggested readings, and instructions on how to maintain the three types of vows that themselves comprise a complete commitment to Tibetan Buddhist life. The three types of vows are the monastic vows of the *Vinaya*, the bodhisattva vow of the Mahāyāna, and the tantric commitments (*samaya*, *dam tshig*) that accompany the initiation into and study and practice of Vajrayāna or “secret mantra” (*guhyanmantra*, *gsang sngags*). Atiśa’s own pedagogical agenda in Tibet incorporated a conscious move away from hereditary and clan-based lineal descent ([4], p. 251). For an English translation of this text, see [39]. Another eleventh century attempt at a broad pedagogy is from Atiśa’s disciple, Drolungpa (*gro lung pa blo gros ’byung gnas*, fl. 11th c.). His voluminous *Great Stages of the Teaching* (*Bstan rim chen mo*) is an overarching discourse on the path, from how to rely on a spiritual guide to the advanced stages of realization of a bodhisattva. On this figure and this text, see [40]. On distinguishing the *bstan rim* genre from the better known *lam rim* genre, see [41]. Another early attempt to present a cogent theoretical approach to the path is Gampopa’s *Precious Ornament to Liberation*, which explicates the Buddhist teachings in terms of the well-known pedagogy of “ground, path, and fruit.” For an English translation, see [42]. The “ground, path, and fruit” (**āśrayamarghaphala*, *zhi lam ’bras*) framework is, according to Dungkar (1794 s.v. *gzhi lam ’bras*), used in two senses. In the first sense of the phrase, the ground corresponds to conventional and ultimate reality, the path corresponds to the method (compassion) and insight (direct perception of the true nature of reality), and the fruit corresponds to all the qualities that are included within the buddha ground. In the second sense, the term is applied to the view, meditation, and fruit of all the vehicles. Here, the ground is a decisive resolution of the view, the path is gained through meditative experience, and the fruit is the attainment of buddhahood (*dang po gzhi kun rdzob bden pa dang | don dam bden pa gnyis | ’bras bu sangs rgyas kyi sras bsdus pa’i yon tan ruams yin | gnyis pa theg pa thams cad kyi lta sgo* [sic] *’bras gsum la sbyar ba ste | gzhi lta ba gtan la phab pa | lam sgom pas nyams su blangs pa | ’bras sub yang chub thob pa bcas* so).

4. Rongzom's Contributions to Old School Pedagogy

4.1. Composition: Authoritative Scholastic Commentarial Literature

One night Rongzom saw in his dream that he had prepared the *gSañ-sñiñ* as parched barley, and the *Saṅs-rgyas mñam-sbyor* as vegetables, and was eating them. He related the dream to his teacher, and Ru said to him: "The dream is very auspicious! It is a sign that you have penetrated the Doctrine. You should compose a commentary." Thus from the age of thirteen onwards, he became an accomplished scholar.²⁷

It is said that when he was thirteen years old, Rongzom had a dream in which the *Guhyagarbhatantra*, the most important scripture of the Old School of Tibetan Buddhism,²⁸ appeared as food that he enjoyed—that is, it became fully internalized, a part of him. Upon hearing the dream recounted, Rongzom's teacher declared the dream to be a sign that Rongzom would be a scholar of some significance. He learned Sanskrit in his youth and became a great translator of Buddhist literature in a period of *rebirth*. The renaissance-era fixation on Indian religious authority and authenticity during this period was tangible. The very beginnings of religious traditions per se in Tibet tended to presume the unquestionable authority of Indian Buddhism. On the basis of Indic models,²⁹ Tibet invested its political and socio-cultural capital into the providence of this authority. Rongzom's contribution to the tradition of Tibetan composition can be appreciated when recognized in the context of New School partisans' rejection of any form of Buddhism that was deemed to be of Tibetan providence and thereby non-authoritative.³⁰ As mentioned above, for these "neo-conservatives", "anything un-Indian was by definition un-Buddhist, so that all innovations in doctrine, ritual, behavior, or meditation instructions were, *prima facie*, illegitimate, simply because they could not be tied to an Indic text or Indian tradition" ([4], p. 14).

Thus the tangible skepticism among some Tibetan literati concerning the validity and authority of Tibetan compositions meant Rongzom's writings in the eleventh century were, as the story in *Blue Annals* suggests, audacious. The would-be critics who planned to censure Rongzom were particularly distressed that "a person who was born in Tibet composed *this many* (*di tsam*) authoritative exegetical treatises" (*śāstra, bstan bcos*).³¹ Further, some of Rongzom's writing, his *Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle* in particular, directly and indirectly counters charges against works rejected in the ordinances and the Old School's tradition of Great Perfection.³²

²⁷ ([8], p. 164).

²⁸ On the place of *Guhyagarbhatantra* in Old School intellectual history, Gentry writes: "Despite controversies surrounding its Indian provenance due to the unavailability of a Sanskrit manuscript for several centuries, successive generations of Old School scholars have composed commentaries on this important esoteric scripture. It appears, in fact, that demonstrating knowledge of this *tantra* and the many interpretative issues born from its exegesis was a prerequisite for being deemed a scholar of the Old School tradition. Thus, any scholar worth his salt felt compelled to pen a commentary, making the list of *Guhyagarbha-tantra* commentators read like a *Who's Who* of the greatest Old School scholars active from the eleventh to the twentieth centuries" ([6], p. 223, n. 482).

²⁹ On the term "Indic", see ([43], p. 328).

³⁰ Davidson writes: "visible throughout this period but especially toward the end, are the neoconservatives, those who formed and propounded the new Buddhist orthodoxy. Unlike the agenda of indigenous Tibetan conservatives [such as Rongzom and other Old Schoolers who championed religion that traced its origins to the Imperium], the neoconservatives took as their standard of authenticity the feudalistic Buddhist monasteries in India" ([4], p. 13).

³¹ *bod tu skyes pa'i gang zag gis bstan bcos 'di tsam rtsom pa mi rigs so zhes zer zhing sun 'byin du 'ongs ba la* (Deb ther 209.9–10). For a general overview of how Tibetans have traditionally treated these technical exegetical treatises called *śāstras* in Tibetan Buddhist intellectual culture, see [44].

³² For example, in chapter five of this text, Rongzom often cites texts that are objects of criticism in the ordinance of Phodrang Zhiwa Ö. He then quickly asserts that the same view is taught in a number of Mahāyāna sūtras. In this way, he endeavors to show that these works, regardless of whether their author is Tibetan or not, are both authentic and authoritative. For Rongzompa, Indian provenance is not *the* requirement for authenticity and authority. In chapter 4 of the same work, Rongzom laments that those "obsessed with treatises grammar and logic" reject Great Perfection because it is "contrary to logic" (RZSB vol. 1, 477.17–21; cf. [20], p. 111). In this way, he is tacitly admitting a perceived flaw and nevertheless asserting that the rejection of the Great Perfection because it is contrary to logic is, in effect, to miss the soteriological forest for the logico-philosophical trees. He likens this move to preferring costume jewelry to actual precious stones.

While tantra is common to both the New and Old schools, the lineages and practices each adopted and championed are different.³³ The Old and New schools also diverged on the issue of the importance of exoteric schools of Buddhist philosophy and the relevance of monastic institutionalism. The New schools often embraced monasticism and exoteric Buddhist philosophical systems, both of which were rapidly developed and assimilated into particularly Tibetan forms. In contrast, the Old School, in these early centuries, tended toward lay, often hereditary lineages outside of monastic institutions.³⁴ In response to the New School's ascendancy, the Old School also engaged in new forms of literary production. Apart from the work of Rongzom, however, this early renaissance literature most typically took the form of visionary revelations, called "treasure" (*gter ma*), whose content was primarily esoteric thought and practice, or narrative tales of a glorious past, and whose authorship was deferred to the imperial past with only its current revelation attributed to modern agency.³⁵

Thus, when we consider the form and content of his writings, Rongzom stands as an important and unique early figure in the Old School's tradition of exegesis. In terms of form, much of his work projects the authority of canon;³⁶ in terms of content, his extant corpus covers a remarkable and diverse range of subjects. Rongzom Chözang's collected literary works are said to have once numbered upwards of sixty volumes,³⁷ most of these are thought to have been lost ([10], p. 78). A recently

³³ Interestingly, while the Old and New Schools differ in which tantras they principally transmit and authorize as supreme, the three major non-Geluk schools of Tibetan Buddhism—Nyingma (*rnying ma*), Sakya (*sa skya*), and Kagyu (*bka' brgyud*)—all adopted a pedagogical model significantly different from the dominant Geluk tradition ([17,38]). Thus, while the Sakya and Kagyu are New Schools, they, along with the Old School, use the *shédra* rather than the *tsödra* model. Notable, as well, has been Sakya influence on Old School scholasticism.

³⁴ The monastery of Katok (*kañ thog dgon*), founded in Kham, Eastern Tibet, in 1159, occupies an important place in the history of Old School monasticism and scholasticism (See [45]); but its history also points to some of the ruptures and discontinuities sustained over the years by the Old School's monastic movements. No comprehensive account of Old School pedagogy can be taken into account until a detailed examination of systems of learning and teaching are studied. As Gentry notes ([6], p. 223), the founder of Katok, Dampa Deshek (1122–1192), is also an important figure in early Old School philosophy. His remarkable work, *Theg pa spyi bcings*, serves as an example of an Old School text that employs normative Indian Buddhist philosophy and epistemology in the service of grounding the tantric view. The fact that Yeshé Gyeltsen (*ye shes rgyal mtshan*, b. 1395) wrote a rather fascinating commentary on this text in a scholastic idiom also suggests the long history of philosophical work at this Old School institution.

³⁵ I do not mean to suggest that prominent figures from the Old School did not author important or even philosophical works in the early renaissance era. Certainly, the *Bsam gtan mig sgron* of Nup Sangyé Yeshé (ca. tenth century) and Aro Yeshé Jungné's *Theg pa chen po'i rnal 'byor la 'jug pa'i thabs bye brag tu 'byed pa* (TBRC: W25983) may be counted as such. Duckworth writes: "While many scholars of the Nyingma tradition certainly studied the exoteric texts of Buddhist *sūtras* and *śāstras*, they did not commonly write commentaries that focused on such exoteric texts" ([46], p. xviii). This is also not to suggest that the treasure tradition is without pedagogical structure. According to Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, every major treasure revealer (*gter ston*) "must reveal a minimum of three major themes: Guru Sadhana, Great Perfection, and Avalokiteśvara" ([47], p. 372, n. 3). This threefold scheme may not have been used in the early renaissance era. Moreover, although the validity of the texts and objects that were discovered as treasure was called into question and became "a further barrier between the Rnying ma pa and the other traditions that followed the New tantric translations" ([18], p. 239), figures associated with the traditions of the New Schools—Sakya, Kagyu, and Geluk—eventually revealed treasures, as well ([18], pp. 239–40). The Four Medical Tantras (*rgyud bzhi*), which are broadly accepted as authentic by Tibetans, were themselves treasures discovered by Drawa Ngönshé (*grwa ba sngon shes*, 1019–1090), a figure who is also said to have discovered treasures for the Old School and Bön traditions ([18], p. 239). On treasure literature, see Mayer [48,49] and Hirshberg ([50], chapter 3), Gyatso [51]. On the Four Medical Tantras, see Yang Ga [52].

³⁶ One may reasonably question when Rongzom's treatises were labeled as authoritative commentaries. My view is based on several presumptions: that texts identified as commentaries in Rongzompa's extant collected works were composed as commentaries—that is, that they consciously do the exegetical work characteristic of commentary; that they were received as commentaries by his direct disciples, who recorded the controversy surrounding them; and by his would-be critics, who were putatively motivated by his composition of them. Yet, in significant respects, Rongzom's commentaries are often unconventional. For example, while Rongzom was obviously familiar with the formal protocols found in Buddhist commentaries such as a formal homage (cf. [53]) and reliance upon a single text as the basis of commentary, his extant commentaries are often without these formal features. These texts nevertheless are obviously composed in the manner of sophisticated and authoritative scholastic treatises. Moreover, the fact that Rongzom was a controversial figure in his time precisely for his composition of treatises is witnessed in an early biography attributed to a direct disciple ([10], p. 69). Köppl, discussing Rongzom's "outspoken and undaunted character" ([53], p. 19), speculates that, "especially during the eleventh century, with all its debates over authenticity", Rongzom "appears to have been unconcerned" with some of the formal protocols of his day.

³⁷ See ([10], p. 75). For an extensive catalog of his works, see Rong pa Me dpung's *Rje Dharma bha dras mdzad pa'i chos kyi rnam grangs kyi tho yig* (RZSB vol. 1, 235.1–2), which estimates the size of Rongzom's corpus as exceeding 100,000 *ślokas*. A *śloka* is

published collection of his works, *Rong zom chos bzang gi gsung 'bum* (RZSB), in two volumes, contains the following thirty-two writings:

Volume one:

1. *The Catalog of Rongzom's Collected Works: A Garland of Flowers* (*Rong zom gsung 'bum dkar chag me tog phreng ba*), pp. 1–11.³⁸
2. *The Hagiography of the Great Spiritual Guide, Chokyi Zangpo* (*Dge ba'i bshes gnyen chen po chos kyi bzang po'i rnam par thar pa*), pp. 23–30.
3. *The Ratnaṭīka, a Commentary on the King of Tantras, Guhyagarbha* (*Rgyud rgyal gsang ba snying po dkon cog 'grel*), pp. 31–250.
4. *The Intimate Space* (*khog dbug chung ngu*), pp. 251–53.³⁹
5. *The Threefold Explanation: A Commentary on the Proper Recitation of the Names [of Mañjuśrī]* (*Mtshan yang dag par brjod pa'i 'grel pa rnams gsum bshad pa*), pp. 255–90.
6. *The Pith Oral Instructions [Entitled] 'A Garland of Views'* (*Man ngag lta ba'i phreng ba*), pp. 291–300.
7. *A Commentary on the Pith Oral Instructions [Entitled] 'A Garland of Views'* (*Man ngag lta phreng gi 'grel pa*), pp. 301–51.
8. *The Rongzom translation of the Mañjuśrīkrodhamantrārtha, Vajramanḍalavidhipuṣṭināmasādhana of Ācārya Vilāsavajra*⁴⁰ (*'Jam dpal khro ba sngags kyi don gyi rdo rje'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga rgyas pa slob dpon sgeg pa'i rdo rje mdzad pa | Rong zom 'gyur bzhugs*), pp. 353–67.
9. *The Procedure for the Guhyamantra System for Casting Tsa-Tsas and Developing the Four Types of Enlightened Activity According the Vajrasattva Māyājāla* (*Rdo rje sems dpa'i sgyu 'phrul drwa ba las 'byung zhing gsang sngags kyi lugs su sātsatsha gdab pa 'phrin las bzhi sogs bsgrub tshul*), pp. 369–83.
10. *Casting Stupas in Terms of the Divine Tantras of the Vajroṣṇīṣa & the Amitayus* (*Rdo rje gtsug tor dang tshe dpag med kyi lha rgyud kyi sgo nas mchod rten gdab pa*), pp. 385–93.
11. *Notes on Cremation* (*Gdung bsreg gi tho yig*), pp. 395–98.⁴¹
12. *Instruction in Meditation and the Attendant Liturgy on Chemchok* (*Che mchog gi sgom khog bstod pa dang bcas*), pp. 399–403.
13. *Sublime Adornments: A Sanskrit File of the Mantras for the Intermediate Peaceful Ones and the Manifest Wrathful Ones* (*Zhi ba 'dring po dang khro bo snang ba dam pa rgyan gyi sngags rgya dpe la gtug pa*), pp. 405–13.
14. *The Exegetical Treatise [Entitled] Entering the Way of the Great Vehicle* (*Theg pa chen po'i tshul la 'jug pa'i bstan bcos*), pp. 415–54.
15. *Actualizing Appearances as Divine According to the System of Guhyamantra Vajrayāna* (*Gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa'i tshul las snang ba lhar bsgrub pa*), pp. 557–68.

VOLUME TWO:

16. *Great Memoranda of Theory* (*Lta ba'i brjed byang chen mo*), pp. 1–26.
17. *Miscellaneous Essays* (*Gsung thor bu*), pp. 27–130.⁴²

a unit of measure typically defined as four lines in verse or thirty-two syllables of prose (*tshigs bcad la tshig rkang bzhi re dang | tshig lhug la yig 'bru so gnyis re byas pa'i yig tshogs rtsi thabs shig*, TDCM s.v.).

³⁸ This text is Ju Mipham's 1904 work, *Rong zom gsung 'bum dkar chag me tog phreng ba* (RZSB vol. 1).

³⁹ The Tibetan term *khog dbug* is a common genre label usually meaning "internal structure," or "framework" of a particular ritual cycle, collection or commentary. My thanks to James Gentry for his note on the matter. The colophon of this text notes this short work was a discourse given by Rongzom (*rong zom gsung ngo*, 253.13).

⁴⁰ Vilāsavajra, a.k.a. Lilāvajra (*sgeg pa rdo rje*), circa late 8th century.

⁴¹ This work does not appear to have been penned by Rongzom. Rather, the work purports to record Rongzompa's instructions (*gdams ngag*). The Tibetan term for "notes" here is *tho yig*, a term referring to a document that is a mnemonic list written in order to help the reader call to mind the most important points of a given topic (*brjed tho'i yig ge | don gnad dran gso'i tho yig 'god pa*, TDCM s.v.).

⁴² Rongzompa's *Miscellaneous Essays* (*Gsung thor bu*) is itself a collection of eleven essays: on Buddhist theory (29–34.12), on the division of vehicles (34.13–50.18), on ritual offerings (50.19–53.23), on the nature of Buddhist paths (53.24–63.13), on the

18. *The Fundamentals of Consecration (Rab gnas kyi rtsa ba)*, pp. 131–34.
19. *A Text on How to Consecrate Images of the Tathāgata's Body, Speech, and Mind: An Introduction and Explanation Composed by Rongzom (Bde bar gshegs pa'i sku gsung thugs kyi rten la rab tu gnas pa ji ltar bya ba'i gzhung gi bshad sbyar rong zom gyis mdzad pa)*, pp. 135–69.
20. *A Consecratory Rite Composed by the Great Paṇḍit, Rongzom (A Sanskrit text) (Rab tu gnas pa'i cho ga rong zom lo tsā ba chen pos mdzad pa (rgya dpe'o))*, pp. 171–96.
21. *Memoranda of Various Theories and Tenets (Lta ba dang grub mtha' sna tshogs pa brjed byang du bgyis pa)*, pp. 197–231.
22. *A List Enumerating Lord Dharmabhadra's⁴³ Works (Rje Dharma bha dras mdzad pa'i chos kyi rnam grangs kyi tho yig)*, pp. 233–39.
23. *The Extensive Discourse on Commitment (Dam tshig mdo rgyas chen mo)*, pp. 241–389.⁴⁴
24. *The Charter [Entitled] 'The Eightfold Enclosure,' Written by Rongzom Chözang for Those Disciples Committed to Him (Rong zom chos bzang gis rang slob dam tshig pa rnam la gsungs pa'i rwa ba bryad pa'i bca' yig)*, pp. 391–405.
25. *Prescriptions and Prohibitions Concerning the Twenty-Eight Tantric Commitments of Mahāyoga (Rnal 'byor chen po'i dam tshig nyi shu rtsa bryad las gnang bkag gi yig ge gsal bar bkod pa)*, pp. 407–412.
26. *A Commentary on [the Sanskrit grammar of] Ācārya Smṛtijñānakīrti's Vacanamukhāyudhopama (Smra sgo mtshon cha'i 'grel pa)*, pp. 413–55.
27. *A Commentary On the Difficult Points of the Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinijālasaṃvaratantra (Sangs rgyas rgyas thams cad dang mnyam par sbyor ba mkha' 'gro ma sgyu ma bde ba'i mchog ches pa'i rgyud kyi dka' 'grel)*, pp. 457–620.⁴⁵
28. *The Condensed Body Offering (Lus sbyin bsdus pa)*, p. 621–23.⁴⁶
29. *The Dharma Tradition (Zhwa chos)*, pp. 62–626.⁴⁷
30. *A Supplication to Rongzom Chozang called 'The Churning of the Waves of Conviction' (Rong zom chos bzang la gsol ba 'debs pa dad pa'i rba rlabs mngon par g.yo ba)*, pp. 627–31.⁴⁸

nature of naturally occurring gnosis (63.14–66.1), the black snake discourse on the hierarchy of views (66.2–69.14), on the nature of buddhahood (69.15–87.8), on the general principles of tantra (87.9–104.22), on ritual initiations (104.23–105.15), on the twenty-eight *samaya* of Mahāyoga (105.16–111.20), on the view of the *maṇḍala* as the resultant play of naturally occurring great gnosis (111.21–130.6).

⁴³ “Dharmabhadra” is Rongzompa’s Sanskrit name.

⁴⁴ Deb ther (208.17–209.4), and other traditional biographies of Rongzom, sets this text within a trilogy of Rongzom works traditionally understood to explicate the so-called three higher trainings (*trisikṣā, bslab pa gsum*) specifically in connection with pith oral instructions (*upadeśa, man ngag*). There, Rongzom’s *Extensive Discourse on Commitment* is understood in the context of the higher training in ethical discipline (*adhiśīla, lhaq pa tshul khrims*). This framework is also found in the catalogue of Rongzompa’s work by his direct disciple, Rongpa Mépung (*rong pa me dpung*) ([10], p. 68). Ronald Davidson identifies Rongpa Mépung as Lopon Mépung (*slob dpon me dpung*), as he is called in *Blue Annals*, and states that he was Rongzom’s great-great-grandson ([4], p. 419, n. 87). From the lineage given in Deb ther, however, it looks as if four generations separate Mépung from Rongzom. That is, Mépung is said to be the son of Rongpa Kunga (*rong pa kun dga'*), who is the son of Chokyi Gyeltsen (*chos kyi rgyal mtshan*), who is the son of Rongpa Bumbar (*rong pa 'bum 'bar*), who is the son of Rongzompa (Deb ther 209.16–210.5; cf. [8] pp. 166–67).

⁴⁵ This text is traditionally held to explicate the so-called higher training in meditative absorption. Cf. n. 44 above.

⁴⁶ This short tantric liturgy contains a colophon stating this less than page-long work was spoken by a Tsünpa Zhenpenpa, “the monk, Zhenpen” (*btsun pa gzhan phan pa*) in order to fulfill the wishes of Orgyan Gonpo (*o rgyan mgon po*), the intelligent one born through the recitation of a *dhāraṇī* in the presence a very powerful man (*mi dbang chen po'i mdun na 'don gyi rigs las 'khrungs pa'i blo ldan o rgyan mgon po'i bzhed skong du btsun pa gzhan phan pas smras pa* (RZSB vol. 2, 623.16–18). On the identification of “the monk, Zhenpen,” see note 30.

⁴⁷ This is a short praise of the Old School containing a colophon that states this work was delivered by “the monk, Zhenpen”. According to Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, the author of this text is Zhenpen Tayé Özer (*gzhan phan mtha' yas 'od zer*, 1800–1855). I have rendered the English title in accordance with the idea that the metaphor “hat dharma” (*zhwa chos*) indicates sectarian identity (“red hats” might refer to Nyingma and Sakya, “yellow hats” might refer to Geluk, “black hats” might refer to Kagyu, and so on). As mentioned above, while the term “Old School” (*rnying ma*) is not, to my knowledge, used in RZSB, this putatively eleventh century liturgy does contain the term “Early Translation School” (*snga 'gyur lugs*, RZSB vol. 2, 626.11).

⁴⁸ At the top of this work is a Tibetanized Sanskrit title: *Mahā-panḍita-dharmabhadra-deñdhyeśa[na?]-nāthādhanī-saurmiga-abhicala-nāmah*.

31. *The Guru yoga of the Mahāpaṇḍita, Śrī Rongzom, called 'the Shower of Blessings' (Dpal rong zom paṇḍi ta chen po'i bla ma'i rnal 'byor byin rlabs char 'bebs)*, pp. 633–36.
32. *The Publisher's Colophon (Spar byang smon tshig)*, pp. 637–40.⁴⁹

A quick review of the contents of RZSB indicates that nine works designated there—numbers 1, 2, 6, 22, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32—are not in fact attributed to Rongzom,⁵⁰ leaving twenty-three Rongzom compositions listed in RZSB if we include his translations of other author's works. Notably, number 17 is itself a collection comprised of eleven distinct essays. Thus, if we count each individually, we find thirty-three Rongzom compositions given in RZSB.⁵¹ Of these twenty-three works listed in RZSB (thirty-three if we count each essay in number 17), sixteen—numbers 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 25, 26, as well as number 27—constitute exegetical treatises (*śāstra*). Among these, six—numbers 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, and 24—deal (at least in part) with exoteric Buddhist subjects, such as philosophical theory (*dr̥ṣṭi, lta ba*) and tenets (*siddhānta, grub mtha'*). One of the works, number 26, is on Sanskrit grammar, one of the branches of the so-called linguistic sciences (*śabdavidyā, sgra rig pa*).⁵² From among Rongzom's sixteen *śāstras*, eight—numbers 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 23, 25, and 27—deal explicitly in tantra while three—numbers 14, 15, and some essays included in number 17—might be described as *philosophical Vajrayāna*, which blend discussions of exoteric and esoteric subjects.

Thus, while the majority of Old School figures in the early renaissance-era focused their textually productive powers elsewhere, a review of his extant work shows Rongzom's literary output to be a full-throated engagement with the scholastic norms and philosophical discourses that became de rigueur with the ascendance of the New Schools of the renaissance. That so many of his works are labeled as authoritative and exegetical commentaries is all the more remarkable considering he flourished in a period in which there was skepticism about autochthonous composition.⁵³ When we consider this renaissance-era fixation on Indian providence as the sine qua non of religious authenticity, as well as the Old School's more general turn toward the treasure traditions (*gter ma*) as the principle means of producing early renaissance-era literature, Rongzom's embrace of the scholastic mode of discourse, his composition of authoritative Buddhist treatises, and the wide horizon of subjects he covered—from scholastic Indian Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophy to ritual, from funerary rites to architecture—indicates Rongzom's status as an unique early figure in the Old School intellectual history—and Tibet's own tradition of indigenous composition.⁵⁴

4.2. Ethics: The Charter of Mantrins

To date, little is known about the Nyingma response to the political and cultural transformations of the renaissance-era. Moreover, due to the nature of the evidence left to us, we also know very little

⁴⁹ This text does not appear to be authored by Rongzom, who is its focal point for praise (639.1–2).

⁵⁰ Number 1 appears to be the work of Ju Mipham (RZSB vol. 1, 22.21). Number 6 is attributed to the Indian tantric adept, Padmasambhāva. Number 22 is attributed to Rongpa Mepung, a direct disciple of Rongzom. Numbers 28 and 29 are perhaps the work of Zhenpen Tayé Özer. Number 30 is attributed to the famed nonsectarian master, Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (*'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po*, 1820–1892). Number 31 is attributed to Ju Mipham; and number 32 appears unattributed, though it may perhaps be the work of Alak Zenkar Rinpoche, Tupten Nyima (*a lags gzan dkar rin po che thub bstan nyi ma*), though I do not know.

⁵¹ Almogī ([10], 79), for her part, finds thirty-two Rongzom works.

⁵² The linguistic sciences (*śabdavidyā, sgra rig pa*) comprise one of the five so-called domains of knowledge (*vidyāsthāna, rig gnas*), the *locus classicus* of which is found in the sixth chapter of a text that stands as a hallmark of Indian Buddhist scholasticism, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* ([54], p. 393).

⁵³ Against the objection that Rongzompa's works were only later labeled as commentarial treatises, we have evidence in number 22: a list of Rongzompa's writings compiled by his direct disciple, Rongpa Mepung [10], which describes several Rongzompa compositions as treatises or *'grel ba* (RZSB, vol. 2: 235.6, 235.13, 236.4, 238.15). Moreover, as mentioned above, the story given above about the attempt to censure Rongzom for his compositions is found in the earliest generation of biographies attributed to his direct disciple [10].

⁵⁴ I do not believe the important compositions of Imperial era figures such as Kawa Peltsek ([s]Ka ba dPal brtsegs), Chokro Lui Gyeltsen (*cog ro klui'i rgyal mtshan*), and Yeshé Dé (*sna nam ye shes sde*), or the dark age figure, Nupchen Sangyé Yeshé (*snub chen sangs rgyas ye shes*) detracts from the remarkable nature of Rongzompa's contribution to Tibetan intellectual history. Ruegg [55] examines Yeshé Dé and his important Imperial-era work.

of the social realities of dark age religion. Given that Rongzom was simultaneously an important figure in the translation and exegesis of New School literature and one of the earliest defenders of the tantric lineages and practices transmitted through Tibet's dark age, it seems plausible (or at least useful) to presume that he was aware of the ordinances and critiques of institutionally non-affiliated tantric communities and Old School esoteric scriptures that appeared during his life.⁵⁵ Part of the political agenda of renaissance proponents involved in the critique of the Old School's practices and communities—such as the valorization of institutionalized monasticism and the wholesale rejection of Tibetan compositions—should be seen as an attempt to shift a locus of religious power and influence away from the decentralized sites of socio-political power, such as the families and clans who transmitted elements of the Old School's Buddhist traditions in local communities.⁵⁶

Just as the story of Rongzom's would-be censures above reflects Tibetan anxiety about autochthonous composition, the ordinances indicate that the Western court in Ngari (*mnga' ris*) was anxious to counter the corruption of localized tantric Buddhism, condemn scriptures deemed inauthentic,⁵⁷ and to present itself as an arbiter of *true religion*.⁵⁸ By championing an approach to the Buddhist path organized around institutional monasticism, the court set itself directly against the authority and validity of local tantric communities, which were organized around devotion to one's own (read: local) teacher. Such local tantric communities were not, however, obviously under the dominion of the emerging government in the West.⁵⁹ In this context, Rongzom's charter may be seen as one way of seeking autonomy from outside interference.⁶⁰

With local non-affiliated religious communities becoming the subject of—and perhaps *subject to*—the Western court's growing attention and reformist political agenda, Rongzom composed a charter that sets forth the rules governing life in a religious community. The charter, to the degree it is made public, may also function to counter negative perceptions of the community. In this sense, a charter may function to assuage an emerging polity's concerns and disincline it from interfering in a community's society and culture. Thus, Rongzom's tantric "charter" or *chayik* (*bca' yig*)—a term also translated as "constitution" and "written set of guidelines"—formalizes or codifies the rules of his own community of ordained householders who dedicate themselves to the practice of tantric Buddhism, called *mantrins* (*sngags pa*). Before detailing Rongzom's charter and examining what it tells us about the indigenous response to and social realities in the early renaissance-era, let us turn briefly toward the *chayik* genre itself, for a brief look at the nature and function of this little studied genre.

The Tibetan term *chayik*, which is translated here as "charter", is said to be a contraction of the phrase "a document establishing legal regulations for the ordained Buddhist community"

⁵⁵ A list of texts that were rejected as Tibetan fabrications (meaning neither authentic nor authoritative Buddhist literature) is found in Karmay ([13], pp. 31–37). There we find several titles that correspond to seminal literature of the Old School's Great Perfection contemplative tradition.

⁵⁶ Today, the Old School divides its authoritative esoteric literature into two collections. The first is comprised of revealed "treasure" (*gter ma*), efficacious objects and scriptures said to be hidden during Tibet's Imperial past in order to be brought to light at a later date, when they were most needed. The second collection consists of "the [Continuously Transmitted] Word" (*bka' ma*) collection, which is made up of esoteric scriptures that were not produced and transmitted through the revelatory mechanism of "treasure" revelation.

⁵⁷ The ordinance of Yeshe Ö, addressed and delivered to "mantrins" (*mantrika, sngags pa*) and signed by "the king of Puhrang" (i.e., Western Tibet), generally criticizes and insults the "preceptors and mantrins who reside in the villages" (*grong na gnas pa'i mkhan po sngags pa rnams*, [13], p. 16). The ordinance of Phodrang Zhiwa Ö, which was simply addressed and delivered to "religious adherents in Tibet" (*bod kyi chos pa*), comprises a list of "mantras and writings fabricated by Tibet[ans]" (*bod [pa] kyis byas pa'i sngags dang yi ge*, [13], p. 40)

⁵⁸ Cf. ([12], p. 97).

⁵⁹ Davidson [4] has written about tantric Buddhism as being based on a model of Medieval Indian polity. That is, each individual tantric community comprises its own polity (*maṅḍala*) with a sovereign at the center and vassals in the periphery. It is obvious from this model how an emerging political power might see local polities as a threat to consolidation.

⁶⁰ "Historically", Ellingson writes, "the establishment of Buddhist monastic communities has typically entailed some form of at least tacit articulation of internal autonomy vis-à-vis the state, while its breach by the state has been taken by the monastic community as unjustified interference or persecution. In Tibet, of course, the increasing growth of monastic power that eventually resulted in the formation of a bilateral monastic-secular system of state governance provides a particularly strong example of monastic autonomy" ([56], p. 229).

(*dge 'dun la 'khrims su bca' ba'i yi ge*).⁶¹ Charters differ significantly in terms of the particular rules they employ to organize a community and in terms of how exhaustively they outline those rules. Typically, however, a charter is drawn up by a respected authority who is requested to do so.⁶² Charters, Ellingson writes, tend to “condense the details of the Vinaya into basic principles of communal life and government, and articulate soteriological concepts into specific guidelines for the conduct of religious communities” ([56], p. 210). As such, the charter genre connects up politics, ethics, and philosophy—that is, how people live and learn Buddhism together as a social unit.⁶³ Thus, the term *chayik* may refer either to a genre of text in general or a particular constitutional document that functions to codify the fundamental principles of life in a particular religious community.⁶⁴ As such, Tibetan *chayik* help us understand the ideal social realities envisioned by a particular author for a specific community.

Most of the charters Ellingson surveyed describe the value of community membership; and they contain sections on the duties, observances, and procedures of the community ([56], p. 214). Charters are also important in solidifying public support for a religious community ([56], p. 212) and legitimating it in the eyes of outside agencies ([56], p. 216). Without the public’s respect and material support, monastic communities would not be capable of collecting the resources they need to pursue their vocation. This may be relevant to the discussion of Rongzom’s charter, in particular, considering the milieu of its production. The production of charters in Tibet is often associated with the political agenda of the state ([57], p. 31). In this connection, Ellingson reports that charters go beyond their roots in the legal/ethical literature of the Buddhist *Vinaya*.⁶⁵ Charters have also been used in Tibet to legitimate a tantric community in light of the “arbitrary distortions of authentic [tantric] traditions, reinforced by negative Tibetan experiences during the [dark] age of decline of political and religious institutions (ninth–eleventh centuries)” ([57], p. 217). As such, charters such as Rongzom’s *Charter of the Mantrins* may be used as a lens into sociopolitical realities on the ground. As Jansen (2015) writes,

in Tibet monastic rules were sometimes tools of the state. These particular *bca' yig* have the aim to restructure the monastery’s religiopolitical alliances and often contain rules for monasteries that are both physically and “religiously” far removed from the author’s effective power ([57], p. 31).

⁶¹ Ellingson ([56], p. 207). Ellingson is careful to qualify the phrase “ordained Buddhist community” (*samgha, dge 'dun*) in this context as being applicable to “both monks and nuns in general and particular local communities” ([56], p. 212). I take this to mean to include mantrins (*mantrin, sngags pa*). To be sure, charters are not simply “appendices” to the Vinaya. See Jansen [58], whose thesis observes this is clearly not the case. Charters have also been used to constitute guidelines for lay behavior. Cf. ([57], pp. 30, 33; [7], p. 598, n. 8; 2015b).

⁶² Ellingson ([56], p. 209; [57], p. 29; cf. [58], p. 22). In the case of Rongzom’s *Charter of the Mantrins*, the wording that opens the text does not explicitly state that the charter was requested, but it does make a connection between anxiety about local religion and Rongzompa’s discourse (*gsungs*) on the charter, which was apparently recorded by an attendee.

⁶³ The fifty-one charters Ellingson studied indicate a common layout. They have general and specific sections, which he describes as follows: “The provisions found in the general section deal mainly with basic principles of the organization of monastic communities derived from Buddhism and the Vinaya code . . . The introductory portion of the specific provisions deals with the overall history and structure of the particular monastic community and with matters pertaining to the *bca'-yig* itself. Some of this material may also be found in other sections of the *bca'-yig*, rather than grouped together in a single section. The history of the monastery and its relation to specific Buddhist traditions, together with any changes in tradition which may have necessitated composition of a new *bca'-yig*, are subjects almost certain to be covered, since the implications of the established legitimacy and content of such traditions extend beyond the *bca'-yig* itself to the body of unwritten rules and practices which are the non-documentary components of the monastic constitution” ([56], p. 213). Berthe Jansen [57] offers a summary description of the category: “Monastic rulebooks, regulations, or codes exist wherever there are Buddhist monasteries. Rather than being commentaries to or explanations of the vinaya or the pratimokṣa vows, these works mostly pertain to the physical space of the monastic compound and its inhabitants. Their rules are often perceived to be more provisional, more flexible, and more temporary than the rules or vows found in formal Vinaya literature. This makes these works valuable for a study of the historical development of Buddhist monasteries and their organization” ([57], p. 29).

⁶⁴ No two religious communities are the same so their respective charters vary widely. While the same charter may be used to govern several monasteries ([7], p. 599), a particular charter may also “abound with local flavor . . . [and] explicitly state their local and contemporary purpose” with respect to a community (Jansen [57], p. 31).

⁶⁵ Jansen’s thesis argues the charter genre’s roots are found in ad hoc “works parallel with Vinaya” ([58], p. 5) with no true Indian precedent, not even the elusive *kriyakarika* mentioned in Sanskrit ([58], p. 16).

Thus, I would like to emphasize three aspects of the charter genre in connection with Rongzom's *Charter of the Mantrins*. First, a charter should be seen as an *inward-facing* document that governs relations through informing members of a community of the social and ethical expectations of membership. Second, the charter is also an *outward-facing* document meant to shore up the reputation so vital to these communities. Third, and as an extension of this second aspect, I would emphasize that Rongzom's charter may also be seen as part of a political agenda in which a religious community objectifies itself through the document of regulations in order to assuage and avoid criticism and outside political interference. Considering the vital role of monasteries in Tibetan politics and culture and the fact charters are "a generally under-appreciated resource in the study of Tibetan Buddhist social history" ([7], p. 598 n. 7), Rongzom's *Charter of the Mantrins* is "a resource for understanding the internal structure and workings" of his community ([56], p. 206), namely lay tantric practitioners of the Old School. As we are interested in these groups' responses to the renaissance, we are particularly fortunate that Rongzom's *Charter of the Mantrins* survives.⁶⁶

Let us now turn to the content of the text itself.

The full title of Rongzom's charter is *The Charter [Entitled] 'The Eightfold Enclosure', Taught by Rongzom Chözang for Those Disciples Committed to Him*,⁶⁷ which I am referring to simply as *The Charter of the Mantrins* (cf. *sngags pa'i bca' yig*). In its opening passage, which prefaces the circumstances in which the charter was written, *The Charter of the Mantrins* connects dark age religious communities and renaissance-era reformers. It opens with a passage referencing the wedding of prince Songtsen Bar (*srong btsan 'bar*)⁶⁸ and seems to imply that aristocratic concerns about the degeneration and corruption of Buddhist life among both lay and ordained communities prompted Rongzom to gather his disciples and give them the discourse that comes down to us as *The Charter of the Mantrins*. At the top of *The Charter of the Mantrins*, we read:

In the dragon year,⁶⁹ at the wedding the prince Songtsen Bar (*srong btsan 'bar*), a descendent of Pawa Désé (*pha ba lde se*), ruler of the region of lower Tsang in the Four Horns of Tibet, recognized that both mantrins (*sngags pa*) and ordained clergy—the *bandé*—were distracted from their vows and commitments and lacking in diligence with respect to a rigorous understanding of the holy Buddhist teachings (*dharmā*). After that, in the region of Narlungrong, Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo gathered his committed disciples and, after putting up some representations of the Three Jewels, gave a discourse primarily for householders who are mantrins.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ellingson states that the ideological foundation of the *bca' yig* genre is found not only in the Buddhist monastic regulations codified in the Vinaya (*'dul ba*) section of the Tibetan canon (Cf. [58], p. 5), but it is also derived from concern over the corruption of tantric practice ([56], p. 217). For a typology of literature assembled in the Tibetan canons, see Cabezón and Jackson [59]. For a brief introduction to the Tibetan Kangyur (*bka' 'gyur*)—Tibetan Buddhism's collection of Buddhist discourses classically attributed to the Buddha or sanctioned by him—(see Harrison [60]; Jansen [58], p. 17) following Ellingson, reports that "the first *bca' yig*-like text contains" instructions given by Lama Zhang (*zhang brtson 'grus grags pa*, 1123–1193). It appears, then, that Rongzom's *Charter of the Mantrins* is our earliest extant example of a *bca' yig*.

⁶⁷ Tib. *rong zom chos bzang gis rang slob dam tshig pa rnam la gsungs pa'i rwa ba brgyad pa'i bca' yig*. See (RZSB vol. 2, pp. 391–405). I am particularly indebted to Lama Chönam, Chöying Namgyal, who read through sections of this text with me. I am also very grateful to James Gentry, who first discussed Rongzompa's charter with me in 2009 and gave me notes of his own work on this text. I must also thank them both for discussing the nature of the *damtsik* relationship.

⁶⁸ Drongbu Tsering Dorje, of the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences, identified Songtsen Bar as the religious name (*chos ming*) of Yeshé Ö (Steve Weinberger, email to the author on 15 January 2012). As is well-known, Yeshé Ö was married and had a child long before he became ordained as a Buddhist monk (Kapstein [61], p. 91); van der Kuijp, however, is doubtful about this identification; for his part, van der Kuijp reports that a more likely pre-ordination name was Tri Désong Tsuktsen (*khri lde srong gtsug btsan*) (email to the author, 22 July 2016).

⁶⁹ Dragon years in the eleventh century correspond to 1028 (*sa 'brug*), 1040 (*lcag 'brug*), and 1064 (*shing 'brug*). As mentioned already, Rongzom's dates are uncertain; but considering the traditional account of his meeting with Atiśa found in his standard biographies (see [10]), each of the three dates seems a plausible one but for the 1024 date of death offered by van der Kuijp (n.d.), which would suggest that each of the dates is too late to be plausible.

⁷⁰ *Sngags pa'i bca' yig*: *'brug gi lo yul ru lag gtsang smad kyi btsad po pha ba [lde] se'i yang dbon | rgyal bu srong btsan 'bar sku khab bzhes pa tsam gyis dus na | sngags btsun sde gnyis kyi ban de kun kyang so so'i sdom pa dang dam tshig bsrung ba la g.yel zhing dam pa'i chos legs par 'dzin pa'i rtsol ba dang mi ldan par mthong nas | yul [Rnar] lung rong du | rong zom chos kyi bzang pos rang gi dam*

As the title of this work indicates, Rongzom's disciples were bound to him through tantric commitments—his “committed disciples” or *damtsikpa* (*dam tshig pa*). According to *The Charter of the Mantrins*, these “householder mantrins” (*sngags pa khyim pa rnams*),⁷¹ *ngakpa* in Tibetan, are expected to maintain traditional Buddhist standards of behavior. Specifically, *The Charter of the Mantrins* directs Rongzom's students, whether fully ordained or partially ordained lay practitioners, to maintain the so-called five bases in ordinary training.⁷² Without these bases, he writes, it will be impossible to practice the Perfection of Insight (*prajñāpāramitā*, *sher phyin*) or Secret Mantra (*guhyanmantra*, *gsang sngags*). Moreover, without these five bases in ordinary training, Buddhists tend to continually transgress their religious pledges by means of the four great root downfalls associated with the Mahāyāna.⁷³

One must accept and maintain the Buddhist teachings. If not, the holy teachings (*dam chos*) will fade from the world in four ways, which, when considered, indicate concern about the possibility that Buddhism was not being properly practiced, that people were not keeping their vows and pledges, and that the cultural capital of Buddhism was fading as a result.⁷⁴ How should Buddhists respond to such a situation? Rongzom writes: “I have decreed that in order to avert these possibilities and uphold the holy teachings, whether dharma practitioners are busy with worldly affairs or residing in a hermitage, [they] should receive transmission from a spiritual guide, analyze profound texts, explain them to others without embellishment, and make effort in generating realization within their own mental continuum.”⁷⁵

The Charter of Mantrins is thus intensely interested in the status of the Buddhist teachings, those who teach them, and the environments in which teachings occur. In order to maintain the “influence and power” of the teachings, the community is expected to make offerings to and serve the Buddhist teacher who is their source, unless that teacher's actions erode the prestige of the teachings, in which case he or she should be removed from their teaching position within the community. The text also displays anxiety about destruction of the natural environment. Rongzom's charter exhorts the community to respect the environment and refrain from damaging it (RZSB vol. 2, 396.24).

The Charter of Mantrins warns against the four major transgressions of one's tantric commitments (*samaya*, *dam tshig*). It argues that in order to avoid these transgressions, disciples must maintain the eight decrees or pledges (*bca' ba*). These decrees constitute walls that trace the social contours

tshig pa rnams bsdus te | dkon mchog gsum gyi rten gnas bu 'ga' yang btsungs nas | dang por khyim pa'i sngags pa rnams la bca' ba bgyis pa'i mdo (RZSB vol. 2, 393.1–393.7)

⁷¹ Dreyfus notes a preference for calling such householder mantrins “nonordained” rather than *lay* because they, too, are virtuos. Hence, they are not part of the laity but form a different class of religious specialist whose status is similar to that of monks and nuns” ([17], p. 339, n. 20).

⁷² Rongzom lists the five bases of training (*thun mong gi bslab pa'i gzhi lnga*) as the rejection of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and wrong views. He further delineates the commitment to abandoning sexual misconduct in the context of two camps of mantrins: those who are fully ordained laypersons who are not celibate (*upāsaka*, *dge bsnyen*) and those who are partially ordained laypersons who are not celibate (*sna 'ga' spyod pa'i dge bsnyen*).

⁷³ The four great root downfalls (*rtsa ltung chen po bzhi*) consist of rejecting the holy dharma, rejecting bodhicitta, acting miserly and acting harmfully toward sentient beings.

⁷⁴ First, the Buddhist teachings (*dharma*) fade when, even though there are monastics and scripture (corresponding to two of the Three Jewels of teacher (*buddha*, *sangs rgyas*), teaching (*dharma*, *chos*) and community (*saṅgha*, *dge 'dun*)), there is no realization in one's continuum and no effort to cultivate it. Second, the dharma fades when, although there is that type of effort, one does not adhere to the vows and tantric commitments. Third, the dharma fades when it has little to no influence and power. Fourth, the dharma fades when, in the absence of proper protocols, people on the outside do not respect the holy dharma and dharma practitioners (*'di ltar banḍe dang glegs bam yod kyang rtogs pa rang gi rgyud la mi rten cing rtsol ba mi byed na chos nub pa'i char gtogs pa yin no | | de lta bui rtsol ba yod kyang sdom pa dang dam tshig la gnas pa'i mi byed na yang chos nub pa'i char gtogs pa yin no | | chos kyi mnga thang chung zhing med na yang chus nub pa'i char gtogs pa yin no | | dam pa'i chos dang chos pa'i gang zag la phyi rol gyi skye bo rnams btsun par mi byed la tshad mi 'rdzugs na yang chos nub pa'i char gtogs pa yin no* (RZSB vol. 2, 394.10–16).

⁷⁵ *Sngags pa'i bca' yig*: *'di rnams bzlog cing chos gzung ba'i phyir | dang por gang zag chos pa rnams 'di 'dzis non kyang rung | dgon pa la gnas kyang rung | dge ba'i 'chad pa'i spro ba med pas kyang | rang gi rgyud la rtogs pa bskyad pa'i nan tan bya bar bcas so* (394.16–20).

of a community's ethics within a "Vajra Enclosure" (*rdo rje rwa ba*).⁷⁶ The phrase, "Vajra Enclosure", then, is the overarching metaphor of Rongzom's charter. As is well-known, the Sanskrit term *vajra* may mean "indestructible". Thus, in order to adhere to the pledges and vows associated with tantric commitments (*samaya, dam tshig*), Rongzom's disciples are expected to diligently maintain the eight commitments that would constitute an indestructible (*vajra*) and enclosed (*rwa ba*) community of religious practitioners.⁷⁷ Here, let me give the eight decrees to be pledged, successful adherence to which constitutes the Vajra Enclosure. The eight pledges are as follows:⁷⁸

1. Do not mix tantric commitments with the five types of impure people (*gang zag dme ba lnga dang dam tshig mi bsre ba*).
2. Do not offer tantric feasts marked by the four types of impurities (*ma dag pa rnam pa bzhi dang ldan pa'i tshog mchod mi bya ba*).
3. Do not engage in debating the dharma among those with tantric commitments because of being proud of one's insight and learning, which is like a peacock seizing a snake (*dam tshig pa'i nang du shes rab dang thos pa snyem pas rma bya sbrul 'dzin lta bus chos kyi rtsod pa mi bya ba*).
4. Do not, having raised the standard or banner of one's own philosophical speculation, discipline people as if they were dogs using the intimate instructions [of a] guru or scholarly companion (*rang gi rtog ge dan du 'phyar nas bla ma dang grogs po mkhas pa'i gdams ngag khyi 'khrid du mi bya ba*).
5. Do not discipline disciples and companions [as one] disciplines a dog (*slob ma dang grogs po khyi 'dul gyis mi 'dul ba dang lnga*).
6. Masters should not restrict disciples or break away from the community and disciples should not reject and insult a former Master (*slob dpon gyis slob ma rgyang tshad dang sde ris su mi gcad pa dang | slob mas kyang slob dpon snga ma spang zhing brnyas pa mi bya ba*).
7. Do not, either obliquely or forcefully, especially praise teachings that one believes or practices; and do not disparage a teaching one does not believe or practice (*rang dad cing spyod pa'i chos la lhag par gzhog bstod dang bstan bstod mi bya zhing | rang ma dad mi spyod pa'i chos la gzhog mi smad pa dang bstan mi smad pa*).
8. Those who request teachings should not take themselves to be special or create boundaries [between themselves and others on account of their respective teachings]; and those who bestow the teachings, once they are underway, give the rites without adding or omitting anything; and, without diminishing or concealing the power and influence of the teaching, they clarify authoritative scripture (*chos zhu ba rnams kyi kyang lhag par mthong 'dod dang mtshams gzung mi bya zhing | chos ster ba rnams kyi kyang ster phan chod cho ga lhag chad med par sbyin zhing rang gi chos kyi mnga' thang yang dbri 'chab med par lung gsal ba*).

Who are these five types of impure people to be avoided? Rongzom describes them as those with broken tantric commitments, those who have killed other people, those who make a living through evil acts, and those who make an unwholesome living, such as butchers (*shan pa*), hunters (*rngon pa*), bandits (*chom rkun*), and prostitutes (*smad 'tshong ma*). Association with the five types of impure people is anathema because:⁷⁹

1. It contradicts the scriptural pronouncements of Secret Mantra: avoiding companions whose tantric commitments are broken is found in the inner and outer [tantras]; avoiding association

⁷⁶ That is, the four root downfalls particular to the Indestructible Vehicle of Secret Mantra (*gsang sngags kyi rdo rje theg pa*) are (1) sincerely disparaging the Vajra Master's presence; (2) totally relinquishing bodhicitta (i.e., emitting semen); (3) refuting the teachings on the state of equality; and (4) fighting with one's Vajra siblings—i.e., those who share one's tantric commitments. The fact that they are referred to in familial terms is indicative of the intimate social context in which Tibetans situate tantric commitments and communities.

⁷⁷ *rwa ba brgyad bsdams pa la sogs pa la nan tan bya bar bcas so* (394.20).

⁷⁸ These eight pledges are found in (RZSB vol. 2, 398.16–399.3).

⁷⁹ These nine faults are given in (RZSB vol. 2, 399.9–400.5).

with killers, the insolent (*ma rab*), the wicked, and not sleeping together with impure and unclean people, is also rejected in writings on tantric rites of enrichment.⁸⁰ In the *General Tantra of Secrets* [it states that] one should not bind oneself through tantric commitments to anyone who makes an unwholesome living. That being the case, [associating with the five types of impure person] is proscribed by scriptural pronouncements (*gcig tu gsang sngags kyi bka' dang 'gal ba yin te | de yang dam tshig nyams pa dang mi grogs pa ni sngags phyi nang kun nas mang du 'byung ngo | | gshed ma ma rab sdig can dang mi 'grogs shing mi dme ba dang gang zag mi gtsang ba dang lhan cig mi nyal ba ni pu si ti ka ra las 'byung ngo | | ngan pas 'tsho ba dam tshig par mi gzung ba ni gsang ba spyi rgyud las 'byung ngo | | de ltar na bka' dang bal ba'i nyes pa dang gcig*).

2. If these [impure] people have been introduced to the teaching, the entire community will not overcome negative karma and the master will become a lord of evil (*'di rnams chos su bcug na 'khor thams cad sdig pa'i las la mi bzlog ste rang yang sdig pa'i dpon por 'gyur ba dang gnyis*).
3. Previously, when the holy dharma was being translated in the land of Tibet, the mantrins decreed not to introduce impure people to the teaching. Thus, the fault contradicts and destroys the excellent dharma tradition of the past (*sngon bod yul du dam pa'i chos bsgyur ba'i tshes sngags pa rnams kyis gang zag dme ba rnams chos su mi zhugs pa'i bca' ba byas pas | sngon gyi chos lugs bzang po dang 'gal zhing bshig pa'i nyes pa dang gsum*).
4. The fourth fault is that the Protectresses of Secret Mantra and the Pure Vajra Dakinis become offended thereby causing obstructive conditions for Mantrins (*gsang sngags kyis rung ma rdo rje mkha' 'gro ma gtsang ma rnams 'khangs te sngags pa rnams la rkyen dang bar chad 'byung ba dang bzhi*).
5. If the Knowledge Mantras and Secret Mantras become adulterated through impure actions, there will be no spiritual accomplishment (*rig sngags dang gsang sngags rnams dme ba'i las kyis gos pa'i skyon gyis dngos grub mi 'grub pa dang lnga*).
6. Through impure actions, the power of Secret Mantra is impaired and thereby the power and blessing are diminished and the teaching will decline (*dme ba'i las kyis gsang sngags mthu nyams te mthu dang byin rlabs chung bas bstan pa dman par 'gyur ba dang drug*).
7. The seventh fault is that the holy dharma will not be respected (*dam pa'i chos mi btsun par 'gyur ba'i nyes pa dang bdun*).
8. No human beings describe people who behave in that way in laudatory terms; and, in this case, with the thought “No force and special power will emerge here,” they [garner] the fault of suspicion and indifference, which is the eighth fault, [all of which] form the basis for rupturing the Vajra Enclosure (*de ltar spyod pa'i gang zag de la skye bo thams cad kyis kyang bsngags pa mi brjod cing 'di la mthu dang rtsal mi 'byung ngo snyam du bsam ste gzem bag chung ba'i nyes pa dang brgyad kyi steng do rdo rje rwa ba 'bral ba'i gzhur 'gyur te*).
9. Accordingly, if a master's tantric commitments are pure and the disciples is not pure, the master will become circumspect.⁸¹ Similarly, if the disciple maintain pure tantric commitments and the master does not, the student will become circumspect, which means it is not possible to harmonize their view and conduct, which means that the student will naturally become aloof and isolated—and something similar can also happen between [vajra]siblings, who will then

⁸⁰ The term given here is *pu si ti ka ra*. This term may be a Tibetan rendering of the Sanskrit term *puṣṭikara*. In this case, it may be a noun or, more likely, an adjective—something “effecting nourishment/enrichment.” In tantra, the term *puṣṭikara* or *puṣṭikaraṇa* is one of four general types of tantric activity (*caturkriyā*, *las bzhi*)—pacifying (*sānti*, *bzhi ba*), enriching/nourishing (*puṣṭi*, *rgyas pa*), enthralling (*vaśī*, *dbang ba*), and wrath/destruction (*marāya/abhicāra*, *drag po*). *Puṣṭi* becomes *pu si ti*, reflecting the Tibetan pronunciation of *puṣṭi*, which is rendered *pu si ti* via “separation [by] vowel” (*svarabhakti*). My thanks to Wiesiek Mical for this information. A search of TBRC finds the term given in a collection of tantric commentaries (*Sngon byon sa skya pa'i mkhas pa rnams gyi rgyud 'grel skor*, W3JT13352) where it is connected with action tantra (*bya ba'i rgyud*, *kriyātantra*). Perhaps Rongzom is referring to a chapter or section of writings dealing with such rites. According to Dorje Wangchuk (Berthe Jansen, email to author, 28 February 2017, the term *pu si ti ka ra* corresponds to *su si ddhi ka ra*, which identifies Tōh. 807: *Susiddhi-kara-mahā-tantra-sādhana-upāyika-pāṭala* (*Legs par grub par byed pa'i rgyud chen po las sgrub pa'i thabs rim par phye ba*).

⁸¹ The Tibetan phrase used here—*zhe la 'dzem*—might also be translated as “should be careful” or “avoid.”

disparage and speak unflatteringly to one another. This becomes a cause for distance and division between [vajra] siblings. For that reason, I have decreed that you avoid adulterating tantric commitments through associating with the five types of impure person (*'di ltar slob dpon dam tshig gtsang la slob ma mi gtsang na slob dpon zhe la 'dzem \ de bzhin du slob ma dang tshig gtsang la slob dpon mi gtsang na slob ma'i zhe la 'dzem ste \ lta spyod bstun du ma btun pas rang bzhin gyi snying ring zhing dben du 'gyur te \ mched lcām dral nang du yang de bzhin tu 'gyur ro \ | gzhan yang gcig la gcig dp̄ya zhing ma bsngags pa brjod par 'gyur la \ de'i lan du phyir yang khro zhing tshig ngan smra ste \ de'i dbang gis rdo rje mched rnams rang bzhin gyi snying ring zhing bye bar 'gyur te \ de'i phyir gang zag dme ba rnam pa lnga dang dam tshig mi bsre ba'i bca' ba byas so*).

The second of the Eightfold Vajra Enclosure concerns the tantric feast. The tantric feast offering (*ganacakra/puja, tshog*) is an important part of the social and ethical life of Tibetan tantric Buddhism. *The Charter of the Mantrins* exhorts students to avoid any feast offering rite that is marked by impurities. First, avoid making a feast offering qualified by impure ritual accoutrements, such as those obtained by means of killing and stealing. Second, avoid making a feast offering qualified by impure ritual procedure, those done in the context of speculation, laziness, and a concern for remuneration. Third, avoid making a feast offering qualified by impure resources that are hoarded for one's own use. Last, avoid making a feast offering qualified by impure dedication. In the Mahāyāna, religious practice should be carried out and dedicated for the benefit of all sentient beings and in order to attain the unexcelled state of awakening. Summarizing this passage,⁸² Rongzom writes:

Having acted in this manner (*'di ltar byas nas*), the fault of contradicting scriptural pronouncements, the fault of associating with naturally wicked people, the fault of being affected by unusual obstacles, the fault of the displeasure of wandering spirits of the ritual feast (*tshogs*), which is an obstacle to spiritual accomplishment, and the fault of unflattering stories, all form the basis for rupturing the Vajra Enclosure. Among [vajra] siblings, as well,⁸³ it is hoarding resources for oneself that causes vajra siblings to become displeased. Due to the influence of the incompatible behavior of different communities, moreover, there is insulting and denigrating talk. Due to that influence, Mantrins naturally become estranged; and this is a cause of division. For these reasons, I have decreed you avoid offering feasts marked by the four types of impurities.⁸⁴

The third and fourth parts of the Eightfold Vajra Enclosure concern the ethics of philosophy.⁸⁵ The third decree constituting the Vajra Enclosure calls for a pledge to avoid “engaging in egoic philosophical debates with members of one's own community in the manner that a peacock seizes a snake”. In short, peacocks in this context represent the haughty and argumentative philosopher whose interest lies in projecting ego through disputation rather than genuine exchange through dialog. In Rongzom's words,

⁸² This section is found in (RZSB vol. 2, 400.12–17).

⁸³ “Vajra siblings” (*rdo rje mched lcām*) is a term that refers to people who share the same master and have attended the same ritual initiations. The use of such a trope denoting common ancestry is indicative of Tibetan Buddhism's tendency to see religious association in terms of intimate relations that go beyond the biological associations that constitute family in this world.

⁸⁴ Sngags pa'i bca' yig: *'di ltar byas na bka' dang 'gal ba'i nyes pa dang \ rang bzhin gyis sdig pa dang 'brel ba'i nyes pa dang \ sgrub pa lhag pas 'phog pa'i nyes pa dang \ tshogs kyi nyul le rnams ma dga' ste las dang dngos grub mi 'grub cing bar chad du 'gyur ba'i nyes pa dang \ ma bsngags pa'i gtam gyi nyes pa 'phog par 'gyur ba'i steng du yang \ rdo rje rwa ba 'dral ba'i gzhir 'gyur te \ mched lcām dral nang du yang kha tshar dang gsog 'jog gi dbang gis gcig la gcig ma rangs pa skye bar byed \ tshog pa gzhan yang spyod pa ma mthun pa'i dbang gis gcig la gcig 'pha smod dang tshig ngan smra ste \ de'i dbang gis sngags pa rnams [401] rang bzhi gyis rnying ring zhing bye ba'i rkyen du 'gyur ro \ | de'i phyir ma dag pa rnam pa bzhi dang ldan pa'i thog mi bya bar bcas so* (RZSB vol. 2, 400.17–401.2).

⁸⁵ I use the phrase *ethics of philosophy* to refer to the nature of a philosophical relationship between people. That is, since philosophical exchange is both an important part of Buddhist culture and inherently social (Cf. Huizinga [63], p. 153, on the “indubitable play qualities [i.e., a back and forth of dialogue] in the art of declamation and disputation”), we may speak of the ethical nature of the relationship between two philosophical opponents. In Buddhist terms, then, we may ask if one's motivation for philosophical exchange is *virtuous and nonvirtuous*, proper and efficacious or not, and whether such an exchange facilitates spiritual progress or is simply an outcome of egoic intentions wrapped up in Buddhist theory.

when a peacock seizes a snake, it first stomps on the snake's tail. When the snake strikes, the peacock stuffs the tip of its wing into snake's mouth, gaining protection from its bite, after which the peacock carefully strikes the snake's vital point. Similarly, some with no consideration for their tantric commitments, who feel pride at their own learning and insight, test their vajra companions [with philosophical disputes] and answer their words with nothing but sophistry (*kha byugs*). From that safety, one strikes at the companion's vital point—whatever he or she does not understand.⁸⁶

Peacocks also have a particular reputation in Buddhist discourse for enjoying poison. This helps us understand Rongzom's metaphor. For example, the first verse of *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons* (*mtshon cha 'khor lo*) attributed to Dharmarakṣita (fl. 9th c.), which is said to have been transmitted into Tibet by a progenitor of the New School movements, Atiśa, states that peacocks "thrive on the essence of virulent poison."⁸⁷ In the ninth chapter of his sixteenth century commentary on Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatārā*, Pawo Tsukla Trengwa (*dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba*) writes: "Snakes make the peacock feel happy. Poison is pleasure for those familiar with extracting the essence" ([62], p. 729). Peacocks are thus said to be pleased to encounter a poisonous snake. This is because the peacock can alchemize its poison and enjoy it in the process. In this sense, the peacock is feeding off what is poisonous for the rest of us. Likewise, some intellectuals, rather than engaging in philosophical exchange in genuine pursuit of knowledge and insight, peacock-like philosophers only engage in philosophical dialog to buttress their egos and humiliate interlocutors. Thus, to engage in philosophy in the manner of a peacock is to be driven by something anathema to the Buddhist idea of spiritual advancement: a negative intention or egoic desire for social conflict—doing philosophy to put down the views of others and to show off.⁸⁸ Rongzom's image of doing philosophy in the manner that a peacock seizes a snake above is thus meant to conjure up the image of an egoic philosopher who seeks out dispute with those less able and interested than oneself. This type of philosophy creates social conflict within a community—and, just as deleterious, perhaps disrepute from without. The only acceptable reason for engaging others in philosophical debate is to increase insight into the nature of reality and to shine a positive light on other's qualities.

Summing up the problems of egoic philosophy and its detrimental social effects within a religious community, Rongzom writes:

The faults obtained from having behaved in this way are given in scriptural pronouncements. In the Discipline of the Secret Mantra (*gsang sngags 'dul ba*) it is proclaimed: "Do not debate a Great Vehicle companion using the might of your insight." Thus, [this kind of behavior obtains] the fault of contradicting scriptural pronouncements, the fault of exacerbating the afflictive states of mind in oneself and others, and, on top of that, people will grow angry with and speak unflatteringly about those who enjoy debating the dharma, which forms the basis for rupturing the Vajra Enclosure. In this way, whether or not a debate has been won or lost, people develop bad attitudes and grow distant. If the debate ends in a draw, [each disputant has] holds their own position and leaves it there. Therefore, I have decreed (*bca' ba byas so*) you should pledge not to engage in debates about the dharma among those who [share] tantric commitments without concern for increasing

⁸⁶ Sngags pa'i bca' yig: *dper na rma bya sprul 'dzin pa ni dang po sbrul gyi mjug ma nas mnan te | sbrul so 'debs su byung ba na gshog pa'i rtse mos sbrul gyi khar btsangs te | de'i skyabs nas sbrul gyi gnad sar rim gyis mchog bar byed do | | de bzhin du la la dag thos pa dang shes rab kyis nga rgyal gyi rgyu dang ldan pa dam tshig gi ngor mi lta ba rnams | grogs po la nyams sad cing grogs pos smras pa'i tshig la ni kha byugs tsmā gyis lan ldog cing | de'i skyabs nas grogs pos gang mi shes pa de la gnad du 'dzugs par byed do* (RZSB vol. 2, 401.3–9).

⁸⁷ *bstan du bcud kyi rma bya 'tso ba ltar* (Dharmarakṣita [64], 37.4–5).

⁸⁸ On the folly of philosophical certainty, reference may also be made to Rongzompa's *Theg chen tshul 'jug*. See Sur ([20], pp. 57, 111, 105, 121, 169).

insight or illuminating others's qualities. It is permissible if people engage each other directly in comparing philosophical positions.⁸⁹

The fourth part of the Eightfold Vajra Enclosure also concerns the ethics of philosophy. In particular, the fourth decree is to pledge to refrain from “raising the banner of one’s own philosophical speculation, guiding people as if they were dogs using the intimate instructions [of a] guru or scholarly companion”.⁹⁰ Here, the guilty party brags about the teachings he has received, the teachers from whom he received them, and the purity of his own philosophical views.⁹¹ Such behavior punctures the Vajra Enclosure, creates dissention among Vajra siblings, and hinders spiritual accomplishment.

The fifth part of the Eightfold Vajra Enclosure, which also uses the human-canine relationship as a model, concerns the ethics of teaching and spiritual instruction. In particular, it pertains to how one disciplines students. According to *The Charter of the Mantrins*, “one should not discipline disciples as if they were dogs.” What does this entail and how does it connect to the ethics of teaching? Rongzom writes: for example,

when someone spends time with a fierce dog, at first, before they know the dog, they take caution and calm the dog, repeatedly giving it food, and speaking softly and kindly. When they get to know the dog, however, they insult and yell at the dog, and do not calm the dog. They beat the dog with rocks and sticks.

Similarly, when they first meet someone they associate with, such as a disciple or a friend, some people, when first getting to know them, will speak sincerely (*gsong*), use soft words and words that are soothing. After getting to know them, they will be rude (*gyong*) and unpleasant (*mi bde*) and provocative; they will ridicule (*spyo bar byed*) those who disagree with them even a little and make them feel demoralized (*yid 'byung bar byed*).

The fault here is that after generating bodhicitta one will pledge (*dam bca'*) to take care of all sentient beings, after which one is not permitted to either deceive even ordinary sentient beings or make them unhappy (*sun dbyung ba*). That being the case, what need is there to even mention [this type of] training through trickery and dispiriting behavior, especially with regard to close disciples and companions who are connected through a holy being.

On top of being a great downfall, [this] forms a basis for rupturing the Vajra Enclosure because, for those who behave in this way, there is no state of agreement between the Vajra master and the qualified companions. Thus, for someone who disciplines students [as if disciplining] dogs, in return [his or her disciples] will lose faith, become dispirited, find joy in turning away [both teacher and teaching]. Therefore, I have decreed that people should not be disciplined like dogs.⁹²

⁸⁹ Sngags pa'i bca' yig: 'di ltar byas pa'i nyes pa ni | bka' las kyang | theg pa chen po'i grogs po la | | shes rab rtsal gyis brtsad mi bya | | zhes gsang sngags 'dul ba las gsungs pas | bka' dang 'gal ba'i nyes pa dang | bdag dang bzhan gnyis ka la nyon mongs pa 'phel ba'i nyes pa dang | chos kyi rtsod pa la dga' ba'i gang zag de la mi rnams kyang sdang zhing ma bsnags par 'gyur gyi steng du | rdo rje rwa ba 'dral ba'i gzhir 'gyur te | 'di ltar rtsod pa rgyal 'pham du gyur na yang ngan sems skye zhing snying ring bar 'byur ro | | mnyam du rtsod na yang phyogs 'dzin cing bye bar 'gyur te | de bas na shes rab 'phel ba dang yon tan gzhan la snang bar bya ba'i ngor mi lta bar dam tshig pa nang du chos kyi rtsod pa mi bya bar bca' ba byas so (RZSB vol. 2, 401.9–17).

⁹⁰ Sngags pa'i bca' yig: rang gi rtog ge ba dan du 'phar zhing bla ma dang grogs po dam pa'i gdams ngag la khyi khrid du 'khrid (401.18–19).

⁹¹ Cf. Sur ([20], pp. 57, 111, 126–27).

⁹² Sngags pa'i bca' yig: dper na mi rnams khri gum po dang lhan cig tu 'grogs pa'i tshel dang po ma 'dres tsam na ni 'dzem par byed cing yid srin par byed | zan yang dang yang du ster zhing | ngag 'jam pa smra zhing brnyas pa dag mi byed do | | rdo dbyug gis bsnun par byed do | | de bzhin gang zag la la dag slob ma'am grogs po lta bu la 'dang po 'phrad nas 'grogs pa'i tshel dang po ma 'dres tsam na ni gson zhing de la ngag 'jam zhing yid srin par byed la 'dres par gyur nas ni gyong zhing mi bde ste | yid mi srin cing rang gi yid dang [ma] mthun pa cung zad tsam gyi phyir yang khro'am spob dag pa byed cing yid 'byung bar byed de | 'di'i nyes pa ni byang chub kyi sems bskyad nas sems can thams cad gzung bar dam bcas kyi 'og tu | sems can phal pa rnams kyang bslu zhing sun dbyung ba'ang ma gnang na | lhaq par yongs su gzung ba'i slob ma dang | dam pas 'brel ba'i grogs sgyus 'dul zhing sun dbyung ba lta ci zhi smos te | ltung ba chen por 'gyur gyi steng du rdo rje rwa ba 'drawl ba'i gzhir 'gyur te | 'di ltar khri 'dul mkhan de la slob ma dang grogs po de rnams phyir zhing ma dad par 'gyur | yid 'byung bar 'gyur | phyir phyogs pa la dga' bar 'gyur | phag tu ngan tu smra bar 'gyur | yul du lhan cig 'grogs pa mi dga' bar 'gyur te | de'i dbang gis rdo rje rwa ba 'dral bar 'gyur bas | de'i phyir khyi 'dul mi bya bar bca' byas so (402.9–21).

The concern for the social integrity of the community here is clear, as is the negative outcome for a community in which a teacher is not motivated by the highest spiritual ideals. Masters who abuse long-time disciples thereby damage their own commitments, create dissention among their students, and create the conditions for losing members of the community. In addition, they bring a bad reputation to the community.

The decree constituting the sixth part of the Eightfold Vajra Enclosure also concerns the ethics of a Buddhist master and the effort to maintain a somewhat ecumenical attitude about students studying other traditions with other teachers. This is particularly interesting considering Rongzom's milieu. Moreover, the sixth part of the enclosure stresses that students, for their part, should not reject their previous teachers—even if the teacher is superficial and cranky. It states that Buddhist masters should not restrict disciples or break away from their community; and their disciples should not reject and insult any former masters they may have previously been connected with. Here again Rongzom's explanation is quite clear:

In this case, a master, once having formed a community, who stops disciples from receiving scriptural transmission from others and closes the door on those who have faith in a variety of entryways to complete liberation, creates division by telling students to stay away from other [teachers]. This causes the master to have a downfall connected with those negative intentions. The disciples, moreover, will not be pleased, even those who listen to the teachings⁹³ of the dharma will lose faith. [Even if one's disciples] displease the master by ignoring his pronouncements and they go to other teachers despite the master's disapproval (*mi dges*), it is still a major transgression of tantric commitments. And disciples, for their part, should not abandon a previous master, even one with few qualities or a bad nature. Even in the case that the master has an extremely bad nature, when in his or her company continuously, act conscientiously; when not sharing the master's company, uphold his exalted mind (*thugs gzung*). That being the case, I have decreed the master should refrain from restricting one's disciples; and the disciples should not denigrate any former master. This is because such behavior will form the basis for rupturing the Vajra Enclosure.⁹⁴

What are the lamentable social consequences of partisanship in eleventh century Tibet? Buddhists might be active in one religious community with a particular teacher or religious center or they might travel to different religious centers in order to receive teachings from a master specializing in a particular lineage of ritual, theory, and practice. If a teacher forbids students from meeting other teachers or students take to criticizing previous teachers, negative effects would be felt inside and outside that community. Students might feel resentful of being unable to enjoy the rare opportunity to receive the holy teachings of the Buddha. But it would be a transgression of one's commitment to his or her guru if the guru's command is disobeyed. *The Charter of the Mantrins* is also concerned with social consequences outside the community, within the broader religious culture, but always as they pertain back to the behavior of those within the community. An overarching topic of interest in the charter is the power and influence of the Buddhist teaching, which it sees diminished by partisan division.

⁹³ *bka' nyan pa*: this term, literally "someone who listens to the *vacana*" or Buddhist teachings, suggests an obedient and faithful disciple.

⁹⁴ Sngags pa'i bca' yig: 'di ltar slob dpon gyis slob ma sde ris su byas nas | slob mas gzhan la lung nod pa dang | rnam par thar ba'i sgo sna tshogs la dad pa rnams sgo bkag nas gzhan la ma byed cig ces ris su bcad na | slob [403] dpon rang la ngan sems kyi ltung ba 'byung ba dang | slob ma yang bka' nyan pa yang yid mi dga' ste | yid kyi ma dad pa 'byung | bka' ma nyan te slob dpon mi dges bzhin du gzhan du phyin na yang dam tshig gi gcugs chen por 'gyur ro | | slob mas kyang slob dpon snga ma yon tan chung yang rung rang bzhin ngan kyang rung ste spang bar mi bya'o | | slob dpon de shin tu rang bzhin ngan na yang | rgyun du lhan cig gnas pa la bag bya ste phyi rol nas thugs gzung ngo | | de bas na slob dpon gyis kyang slob ma rgyang tshad du byas pa dang | slob mas slob dpon snga ma ma bkur ba las | rdo rje'i dam tshig rwa ba 'dral ba'i gzhir 'gyur bas 'di mi bya bar bca' ba byas so (402.22–403.8).

Part seven of the Vajra Enclosure extends the ethics of teaching and the concern for the deleterious effects of virulent partisanship. That is, *The Charter of the Mantrins* states that “one should not, either obliquely or forcefully, praise teachings that one believes or practices. And one should not disparage a teaching one does not believe or practice.”⁹⁵ Explaining this admonition, Rongzom writes:

The fault of either obliquely or forcefully praising the teachings and practices one has faith in or disparaging teachings one does not believe or practice is as follows: in addition to [subjecting oneself to] the downfall qualified by flattering and denigrating the holy dharma and persons, [this] forms the basis for rupturing the Vajra Enclosure. Thus, people who are introduced to different entryways to the holy dharma, whether through the influence of one’s lineage, spiritual guide, or circumstance, will engage in practice when they have faith; and will not engage in practice when they do not have faith. Therefore, simply teaching the various entryways to complete liberation and the various conceptual constructions of karma, given the absence of any totalizing scheme [for such], there is no grounds for the praise and disparagement. In addition, engaging in such praise and disparagement of the holy dharma will make dharma practitioners unhappy. As a consequence, (*rkyen gyis*), dharma practitioners will not be a unified community. Thus, I have decreed you should not speak in this manner.⁹⁶

The eighth and final component of the Vajra Enclosure concerns the politics of teaching and the attitudes of disciples and the actions of the master. The rule seems concerned with restraining petty rivalries within the community concerning the favor of the master, in order to diminish internal dissension. In Rongzom’s words, “those who request teachings should not take themselves to be special and create boundaries [between themselves and others on account of the teachings they have received]; and those who bestow the teachings, once they are underway, should give the rites without adding or omitting anything; and without diminishing or concealing the power and influence of the teaching, they should clarify scripture.” Explaining this decree, Rongzom writes:

Those who request teachings, who desire to see the master as their friend and maintain boundaries (*tshad ma bzung byas*), will subsequently displease those on the outside. If given while displeased, the person who bestows the teaching will be displeased. And if it is given, those who requested it will be displeased. Thus, mantrins will become estranged from one another and this will become a cause of division [in the community more broadly]. If those who bestow the dharma do not offer the rites completely and without any obfuscation (*lhag chad dang dbri ‘chab med*) once they begin to teach, then, on top of being struck by hindrances, they will destroy their tantric pledges and commitments. For that reason, those who request the teachings should investigate and analyze and evaluate and [then make a] request. Those who bestow the teachings, moreover, [should] teach the essential terms. As long as they teach, they should do so without exaggeration and obfuscation. If not done in this manner, the mutual dharma connection [between master and disciples will become corrupt and] will again annihilate their tantric commitments; plus, from the perspective followers of the lineage and the flimsy sample donations [that are offered],

⁹⁵ Sngags pa’i bca’ yig: *rang dad cing spyod pa’i chos la gzhog bstod dang bstan bstod smra zhing rang ma dad pa’i chos la gzhog smad dang bstan smad smra ba* (403.8–10).

⁹⁶ Sngags pa’i bca’ yig: *dam pa’i chos dang gang zag la sgro skur byas pa’i ltung ba la sogs pa ‘byung gi steng du rdo rje rwa ba a’ dral ba’i gzhir ‘gyur te \ ‘di ltar gang zag rnam dam pa’i chos kyis go so sor ‘jug pa’ang \ rigs dang bshes gnyen dang rkyen gyi dbang gis \ gang dad pa nas \ jug cing spyod la \ ma dad pa nas mi \ jug ste \ de bas na rnam par thar ba’i sgo sna tshogs dang \ las kyi spros pa sna tshogs gsungs par zad de \ phyogs gcig tu nges par chad pa med pas bstod smad kyi gnas ma yin pa’i steng du yang \ chos la bstod smad byas pas chos pa rnam mi dga’ bar \ gyur te \ de’i rkyen gyis chos pa rnam nang mthun du mi ster te \ de’i phyir \ ‘di mi smras bar bca’ ba byas so* (403.10–17).

[the corruption] will spread throughout all Secret Mantra and to the *dharma*, causing it to degenerate. Therefore, avoid this type of situation.⁹⁷

With this, Rongzom moves to conclude his Charter of the Mantrins. “In short”, he writes, “having pledged to protect the minds of the vajra siblings from all that is contrary [to the integrity of the community as it is bound by tantric commitments], one has, in that manner, made the eight types of pledge that protects the Vajra Enclosure”.⁹⁸ In this conclusion, Rongzom exhorts his audience to listen and engage in maintaining this ethical enclosure, which is vital for protecting the community from the internal and external conditions of social discord.⁹⁹ Among his concluding thoughts, Rongzom offers some interesting insights into the concerns of this eleventh century community, the illegitimate use of magical ritual suppression (*nan*) and the taking up of arms against aggressors. Rongzom warns against the ordained clergy (*bandé*) taking up arms in order to pursue a group of enemies should a conflict begin between that group and a member of the community. If the enemy does not directly threaten the *dharma*, taking up the fight is not permitted. In this case, Rongzom is explicit about the boundary of social obligation found between the personal and the communal: if one person’s fights become the fights of the entire community, the community will suffer—its very existence will be threatened. The only exception, he writes, is the case in which an enemy of Buddhism arrives bent on its pollution and destruction. In that case, it is permissible to enlist community members in the fight.¹⁰⁰

With regard to when adversaries appear and somebody calls upon friends for help: in the case that a given monk takes up arms and infiltrates his enemy’s lands, once the offensive deed is done to the enemy,¹⁰¹ the enemy’s father, sons, and siblings will return to respond with more negativity. In that case, I have decreed that it is not permitted for the *dharma* [practitioners to go to] war;¹⁰² and [the individual who first called for help from the community] should settle his dispute on his own the best he can. The exception to this is the case in which the enemy is set against the spread of *dharma*. Otherwise, one’s companions [from the Buddhist community] should not be involved in fending off [one individual’s enemy] because in such cases hatred is created, which makes an individual unable to do their practice. It is also unacceptable because it would lead to being wiped out. Not only that (*slar*), since it would contribute to the destruction of the *dharma*, in such situations, [uninvolved members of the community] should not [act out] against the others [i.e., the enemies].¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Sngags pa’i bca’ yig: chos zhu ba rnam kyis slob dpon ni grogs po la mthong ‘dod dang | tshad ma zung byas nas | pha rol yid ‘byung bar byed de | mi dga’ bzhin du byin na yang ster ba po mi dga’ bar ‘gyur | ma byin na yang zhu bap o mi dga’ bar ‘gyur te | de’i dbang gis sngags pa nang snying ring bar ‘gyur zhing bye ba’i rkyen du ‘gyur ro | | chos ster ba rnam kyis kyang ster phan chad cho gal hag chad dang dbri ‘chab med par ma byin na | rang la sgrub pas ‘phog pa’i steng du dam tshig gi sel du ‘gyur te | de’i phyir chos zhu ba rnam kyis kyang brtags shing dpyad la tshod blang zhung zhu’o | | ster ba rnam kyis kyang rang gi [404] snying tshig smras la | ster phan chad sba ‘chab med par bya’o | | de lta ma byas na | phan tshun du chos kyi ‘brel bas slar dam tshig gi sel du ‘gyur ba dang | rigs rjes dang dpe yon phra mo la bltas nas gsang sngags kun tu spel bas kyang chos nyams par ‘gyur bas | ‘di lta bu yang ‘dzem ste (403.18–404.4).

⁹⁸ Sngags pa’i bca’ yig: mdor na rdo rje spun gyi sems dang ‘gal gyis dogs pa thams cad bsrung ba’i bca’ ba byas te | de lta rdo rje rwa ba bsrung ba’i bca’ ba rnam pa brgyad byas so (404.4–6).

⁹⁹ Sngags pa’i bca’ yig: rwa ba brgyad po ‘di dag thob na | rdo rje slob dpon dang mched lcam dral bye bar ‘gyur ba’i chos las ‘byung ba’i rnyen rnam ni bzlog par ‘gyur ro | | gzhan phyi rol gyi rkyen byung na rdo rje mched lcam gzhan gyis ji lta rig pa’i zhal che byas te | de bzhin du nyon cig (404.6–9).

¹⁰⁰ I would like to thank Lama Chönam, Chöying Namgyal, for his help and explanations of this passage.

¹⁰¹ Lama Chönam states that the language here indicates that the offended party is one monk. He also states that the language suggests a violent outburst leading to a violent reprisal. Rongzompa is warning against the broader community getting involved in such disputes between individuals.

¹⁰² This phrase might also be understood as “dharma war.”

¹⁰³ Sngags pa’i bca’ yig: dgra byung ba’i ra mda’ bya ba’i skabs su | gal te bande [cf. Pali bhante] rang gis go mtshon bzung ste g.yul du zhugs pa la dgra byung ba dang | de’i [404] pha dang bu dang spun zla la sogs pas gzhan la myes pa byas nas de’i lan du de dag la tshur nyes pa byas pa lta bu la ni chos dmag drang pa’i shags med de | rang bzhin gyis phan ci nus kyi byas te bya bar bca’ ba byas so | | dgra yang dkon mchog la tshad ‘jug pa’i dgra ma gtogs pa | rang cag spyod lam ma thub pas sdang ba’i phyogs su gyur nas ‘grub pa lta bu la ni grogs pos bzlog pas mi lang | rigs kyang mi rigs dby[il]s su yang ‘gyur ro | | slar dam pa’i chos dma’ bar ‘gyur bas | ‘di lta bu la ni gzhan mi bzlog go (404.3–7).

The final exhortations of *The Charter of the Mantrins* concern members of the community whose physical health might separate them from the life and subsistence of the community. Here, Rongzom instructs his disciples on what to do if one of their own is struck by blindness or paralysis, which prevents them from work. The community, he writes, is not benefitted from promoting destitution. Further, in case any member of the community contracts leprosy, they should be provided with meat in the winter and butter in the summer for as long as they live. If the person closest to and responsible for the leper is unable to make the trip to provide for the leper himself, an agent must be sent instead. These rules of ethical behavior are important enough to the life of Rongzom's community that a failure to maintain them will result in expulsion from his tantric community:

Second, I have decreed when blindness and paralysis prevent someone from doing farm work, each should make a pledge to provide for them.¹⁰⁴ For who does it help if they become destitute? Third, in case someone from among the vajra siblings should contract leprosy, then provide each with some joints of meat for winter months and a measure (*bre*) of butter for summer months for as long as that person lives. If you yourself are unable to make the trip to provide for him or her in person, you must send someone in your stead. If these decrees are transgressed, the transgressor should be removed [kicked out] of the community.¹⁰⁵

Throughout the *Charter of the Mantrins*, we observe the author's attention to the possibility of social discord and ill-repute damaging the integrity of "the Vajra Enclosure" that is erected through the pledges of community members and which functions to maintain the community's ethical integrity; and we see the intimate inter-relations of such a community as an autonomous social unit with obligations to those whose physical conditions might nevertheless preclude them from participating in the ongoing life of the community.

On the one hand, Rongzom's charter is steeped in Mahāyāna ethics—humility, respect for one's teacher, compassion, and so forth. Yet, *The Charter of the Mantrins* also reflects a strong and intimate concern for the fabric of a small community and interpersonal relationships between its members. These social and emotional lessons are for a specific religious community. In this sense, the charter reflects the values and reality of the communities that emerge out of the dark age—small scale, non-institutional, highly focused on the growth and maintenance of healthy personal relationships between student and teacher, disciples of the same teacher, disciples of different teachers, and so on. The charter also shows that members of this small scale, non-institutional tantric Buddhist community was deeply concerned with philosophical discourse. In all this, Rongzom is clearly attuned to the Mahāyāna ethos throughout. And he is using them to both critique, reinforce, and defend this type of local, non-affiliated and non-monastic tantric community, building an adamantine fence around them comprised of ethical descriptions of and prescriptions for the life of the group. Beyond being an unbreakable enclosure around the community, these adamantine bonds described in Rongzom's charter also constitute bonds between individual members of the community composed of humility, mutual concern and respect.

On the other hand, *The Charter of the Mantrins* represents a resolutely tantric constitution that envisions the ethics of Rongzom's community in a way that is different from standard Mahāyāna ethics. The individual building block of Rongzom's social institution qua community is the *damtsikpa* (*dam tshig pa*): "committed disciples" or "those who are bound [to a teacher]" by vows and pledges.

¹⁰⁴ Berthe Jansen indicates (email to the author, February 2017) the ambiguity of phrase *slongs sbrams pa re sbyin*, which suggests that each person in the community give a token contribution from the things they have gathered.

¹⁰⁵ Sngags pa'i bca' yig: *gnyis pa rdo rje'i mched kyi nang du long ba dang zha grum byung nas so nam mi nus na | mched rnams kyis slongs sbrams pa re sbyin par bcas so | | de nas kyang tshé ring zhing 'phongs par gyur na phyis sa yang phan ci rigs su gdags so | | gsum pa ni | mched kyi nang du mdze nad 'byung ba yang srid na | dguns ni sha lhu re dang dbyar mar 'bre re ji srid 'tsho'i bar du bskal bar bya'o | | de'ang rang re'i drung du thugs par mi nus pas 'grul la bskur zhing gtong ngo | | bca' ba 'di rnams las 'gal na phyir dbyung bar bya'o (405.7–13).*

As discussed above, this phrase indicates the highly ritualized relationship between a disciple and master—and others who also share the same tantric vows (*samaya*, *dam tshig*). This community flourished at a time that may be described as a “post-tantra” period in Tibet.¹⁰⁶ In this milieu, the community described in *The Charter of the Mantrins* represents a combination of ritual/embodied and discursive/philosophical modes of learning. Rongzom’s students are bound to him by tantric pledges the successful maintenance of which constitutes an indestructible enclosure of safety and stability.

5. Conclusions

Above, we have looked at Rongzom’s extant corpus of writings. With its large number of exegetical treatises on a wide range of topics associated with both Old and New traditions of Buddhism, his corpus reveals the significant contribution Rongzom made to the Old School’s own tradition of exegesis. Not only was Rongzom an early author, he was an influential one. The Old School credits Rongzom with developing a distinctive philosophical approach to the interpretation of its most important scripture, the *Guhyaagarbhatantra*.¹⁰⁷ Further, recalling the *Blue Annals* anecdote discussed above, I would argue that Rongzom’s contribution to the tradition of autochthonous composition within Tibet is something of a watershed moment in Tibetan intellectual history. For while Rongzom’s prolific work may have attracted critics, it also won them over. In fact, several of his would-be censors not only became his disciples, but many became prolific authors themselves.

We then turned our attention to Rongzom’s *Charter of the Mantrins*, a text in which a local religious community’s leader describes the various ways in which his religious community might thrive and survive—and the various ways in which it might otherwise break apart and die. Rongzom envisions a community whose unimpeachable integrity results from maintaining a set of commitments that comprise a combination of the ritual/embodied and discursive/philosophical domains of religious life. This *chayik* offers a religious leader’s view of the character and scope of the *damtsikpa* relationship, the neither impenetrable nor insignificant boundaries of a *ngakpa* community, and the mandate to observe the ethico-philosophical and social bonds that comprise it. It is thereby a significant source of evidence about the daily concerns of a local tantric community in eleventh century Tibet.

Rongzom was an early and resolute voice for the centrality of philosophical discourse in the Old School. He was also deeply concerned with the ethics of teaching and religious discourse both in terms of theory but also in terms of social practices. While details remain for further study, our look at *The Charter of the Mantrins* reveals concern for maintaining disciplined and healthy ritual, social, and philosophical relations between teachers, their students, and others. Constituted within such relations, the community occupies an unassailable space in which students have faith and investment in the authority, prestige, and potency of Buddhism, its teachings, and its teachers. It is maintained

¹⁰⁶ The term “post-tantra” is a term used by David Germano to describe the period in Tibetan religious history in which we find a philosophification of tantric practice that employs the same type of reflection typically employed in Madhyamaka and Yogācāra discourse. “Post-tantra” is also characterized by several other factors: a critique of practice meditation, valorization of the natural state, a critique of ritual, a critique of violent and sexual imagery, and critique of scholasticism. “Post-tantra” movements include early Great Perfection and its emphasis on the Mind Series (*sems sde*) genre. A particularly fascinating consequence of post-tantra is the formulation of categories of practice that become Buddhist paths—or “vehicles” (*vyāna*, *theḡ pa*)—in and of themselves. For example, in the nine-vehicle schema common to both the Old School and Bön, we find that Great Perfection, a contemplative system that develops during the period of post-tantra, is its own vehicle.

¹⁰⁷ Traditionally, Old School exegeses of the *Guhyaagarbhatantra* may be divided into two camps. In the first, there are those who interpret the scripture in terms of Mahāyoga tantra theory and practice; and in the second are those that interpret the scripture in terms of “the highest yoga” (*atiyoga*) called “Great Perfection” or *dzokchen* (*rdzogs chen*). It is this second camp that is traditionally connected with Rongzom (and Longchenpa). The fact that there are two camps of interpretation should not suggest that their interpretations are mutually incompatible. Within the Old School, both interpretations are said to be insignificantly dissimilar. That is, they are said to resolve the same view. Cf. Ju Mipham’s *Spyi don ‘od gsal snying po: gnyis pa rgyud pa don rnam par bshad pa’i tshul la shing* ([65], p. 76) *ta’i lam srol chen po gnyis te | rgya che ba thun mong gi bshad tshul dang | zab pa thun min gyi ‘chad tshul gnyis las | dang po rig sngags ‘chang ba kun gyi rgyal po dpal ldan zur pa’i bka’ srol rmad du byung ba ste | ma hā yo ga rang gzhun ltar ‘chad pa’o | | gnyis pa ni smra ba’i seng ge rong klong rnam gnyis kyi dgongs pa bla na med pa ste | de yang rgyud ‘di ni ma hā’i a ti yin pas | rdzogs chen la gsum du phyē ba’i a ti’i ma hā dang gnad gcig pas na | gsang ba rdzogs pa chen po la (75.21–76.6).*

through proper practice of ritually embodied forms of life, such as the tantric feasts (*gaṇacakra, tshogs*); and through a disciplined philosophical ethic. When the two intersect, they construct the adamant lattice-work that shields Rongzom's small scale, non-institutional and philosophically engaged tantric community from the corrosive forces that surround it.

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Abbreviations

Bka' 'gyur	Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1998–2009.
Bstan 'gyur	Bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2005.
Deb ther	Gö Lotsawa Zhonnu Pel ('gos blo tsā ba gzhon nu 'phel). <i>Deb ther sngon po</i> . vol. 1–2 Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1984.
Dungkar	Dungkar Lobsang Trinlé (<i>dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las</i>). <i>Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo</i> . Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002.
Ju Mipham	Jamgön Mipham Gyatso ('jam mgon mi pham rgya mtsho, 1846–1912).
RZSB	Rong zom chos bzang gi gsung 'bum, vol. 1–2. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang (1999).
Sngags pa'i bca' yig	Rong zom chos bzang gi gsung 'bum, vol. 2. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang (1999): 391–405.
TDCM	<i>Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo</i> . Chengdu: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang.

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