History and Myth: Mahāmudrā Lineage Accounts in the 12th-Century Xixia Buddhist Literature

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Abstract: Mahāmudrā—an Indo-Tibetan phenomenon of Buddhist spirituality—constitutes in its systematic presentation a path that maps out the mystical quest for direct experience of ultimate reality. Despite the post-15th century bKa’-brgyud attempts at a codified Mahāmudrā genealogy, the early Tibetan sources speak little with regards to how the different Indian Mahāmudrā threads made their way over the Himalayas. To fill this gap, the article investigates, via philological and historical approaches, the lineage accounts in the 12th-century Xixia Mahāmudrā materials against the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist landscape. Three transmission lines are detected. Among them, two lines are attested by later Tibetan historiographical accounts about Mahāmudrā, and thus belong to an Indo-Tibetan continuum of the constructed Buddhist yogic past based upon historical realities—at least as understood by Tibetans of the time. The third one is more of a collage patching together different claims to spiritual legacy and religious authority—be they historically based or introspectively projected. Not only does the Mahāmudrā topography, jointly fueled by these three transmissions, reveal the Xixia recognition and imagination of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist legacies, it also captures the complexities of the multi-faceted picture of Mahāmudrā on its way over the Himalayas during the 11th/12th century.

Keywords: Mahāmudrā; religious history of tantric Buddhism; Buddhist siddha; Tibetan Buddhism; Xixia Buddhist literature; Chinese tantric Buddhist literature

1. Introduction

Mahāmudrā (Great Seal) constitutes in its mature and systematic presentation a Buddhist path that maps out the mystical quest for direct experience of ultimate reality. To trace mahāmudrā back through a chronology of Indian Buddhist Tantra, one observes a semantic line towards interiorization and gnostication coupled with an increasingly soteriological and ontological valence. A topic of analysis rhetorically detached from—yet practically indebted to—the tantric matrices, Mahāmudrā came to be received in the Buddhist siddha environment as a gnostic index of ultimacy defined by the luminous nature of the mind. In Roger Jackson’s terms, mahāmudrā “had become a crucial Buddhist term that could describe the nature of reality and of the mind, a ritual or meditative procedure for seeing the nature, and the enlightenment ensuing from that realization.” (Jackson 2005, p. 5597).

Up to the 11th century, Indian tantric Buddhists—yogic and monastic—had devised and articulated a variety of approaches to the realization of Mahāmudrā. A number of such threads came to be known and received by Tibetans roughly around the same time, along with the tide of the most cutting-edge yogic techniques and tantric doctrines flooding over the Himalayas. In Tibet, Mahāmudrā is most closely associated with the bKa’-brgyud tradition, whose founding father sGam-po-pa (1079–1153) is shown to have taught Mahāmudrā approaches either rooted respectively in sūtra and tantra, or beyond both (Jackson 1994, pp. 14–28). sGam-po-pa’s multi-faceted picture of Mahāmudrā was systematized by later bKa’-brgyud teachers into more coherent presentations. A classic example is Kong-sprul Blo-gros-mtha’-yas’s (1813–1899) threefold classification of
Mahāmudrā into the sūtra, mantra, and essence modes (*mdo sngags snying po'i lugs*) (Mathes 2015, pp. IX–X).

As much as we should be cautious against reading too much later taxonomy and interpretations back into earlier doctrinal layers, Kong-sprul’s scheme indeed reveals three major strands of inspiration bKa’-brgyud teachers had drawn from the India Buddhist tantric and siddha discourses in crafting their Mahāmudrā edifice. In short, the bKa’-brgyud Mahāmudrā topography is primarily made up of the tantric mode represented by the Six-Teaching (*sadharma, chos drug*) praxis traced to Tilopa (988–1069), the sūtric mode by the Sahajayoga (*lhun cig skyes sbyor*) praxis of four yogas (*rital 'byor bzhis*) traced to Atiśa (982–1054), and the essence mode by the _dohā_ and Amanasikāra (*yi la mi byed pa*) cycles traced to the Saraṇa-Maitrīpa circle. Weaved together by the unifying thread of Mahāmudrā, all the three interconnected strands combined to make the core of the bKa’-brgyud curriculum.

Of the three Mahāmudrā strands already present in sGam-po-pa’s collected works, only the tantric Mahāmudrā lineage was emphasized at the start of the bKa’-brgyud institution. The orthodox bKa’-brgyud lineage accounts tended to valorize the Six-Teaching transmission in combination with the Mahāmudrā content as its primary experiential referent. The normative orthodox bKa’-brgyud lineage was only after the 15th century that the Saraṇa-Maitrīpa branch of essence Mahāmudrā came to be reinforced along the bKa’-brgyud lines, probably as a response to criticisms leveled against the Mahāmudrā beyond the tantric context initially advocated by early patriarchs such as sGam-po-pa and Bla-ma Zhang (1123–1119) (Jackson 1994, pp. 82–83; Zhang 2016, pp. 598–99). It remains in scholarly debate whether it was a genuine rediscovery of Maitrīpa’s importance in sGam-po-pa’s non-tantric Mahāmudrā teaching or merely a retroactive projection of the later bKa’-brgyud outlook back onto their predecessors.

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1 For a synoptical introduction of sGam-po-pa’s collected works, see (Krakh 2015, pp. 200–689).

2 For the early accounts about the orthodox bKa’-brgyud succession of the six teachers from Vajradhara through sGam-po-pa, see, for instance, Zhang brTson-grus-grags-pa’s two prayers to the bKa’-brgyud teachers, the bKa’ brgyud kyi gsol ‘debs dang po (*gSol skor*, ff. 4b3–5b2) and the bKa’ brgyud kyi gsol ‘debs gnyis pa (*gSol skor*, ff. 5b2–6a4); c.f. (Yamamoto 2012, pp. 84–85). Elsewhere in his _bṛgyud pa sna thogs_ Zhung ascribes this line of succession to the Mahāmudrā and Six-Teaching (*phyag rgya chen po dang nā ro’i chos drug*) transmission he received; see the _bṛgyud sna_, ff. 94b4–95a1. Worthy of note is that Zhang lists in his _bṛgyud pa sna thogs_ more than one transmission either containing “Mahāmudrā” in the title or related to it, which—besides the Six-Teaching Mahāmudrā transmission—are the Sahaja (*lhun cig skyes pa*) transmission which includes Cakrasaṇṭvara’s consort _Jñānāndakī_ (becom _ldan ‘das dpal ‘khor lo bde chod gi yum ye shes kyi mkha’ ’gro ma_), Maitrīpa (a _wa dū ti pa_), Vajrāsana (*rdzogs bcas pa_), and Abhayākaragupta, the Instantaneous Mahāmudrā (*phyag rgya chen po thog babs*) transmission which includes Bodhisattva Matiratna, Savaripa and Vajrapāṇi, and the _Dohā Commentary_ (*do rdo ’i ’gro ma*) transmission which includes Vajradhara (*rdzogs bcas pa_), Saraha, Savaripa (ri khrod dbang phyug sa ra lu), Maitrīpa (ma iri pa), and Vairocanavajra; see the _bṛgyud sna_; c.f. (Yamamoto 2012, pp. 356–360). The _Dohā Commentary_ line—nested within a complex of tangled transmissions not particularly bKa’-brgyud-pa in affiliation—is closest to the Mahāmudrā transmission sketched out in the _Blue Annals_ in that both pass through the Saraṇa-Maitrīpa circle and contain a “Vairocana” transmitting the teaching to Zhang. Through tracing Zhang’s spiritual tree based on his lineage accounts, (Yamamoto 2012, pp. 79–137) describes and discusses the processes within the bKa’-brgyud institution whereby “the impossible complexity of religious influence is streamlined into a more manageable model of inheritance,” and the Six-Teaching line which started off as “a solitary lineage” had gained “hegemonic status through appropriation and consolidation at the material and symbolic/ideological levels, and through institutionalization at the social level.”

3 Klaus-Dieter Mathes has written a series of articles (e.g., 2006 and 2007) to argue for the Indian origin for the bKa’-brgyud not-specifically-tantric Mahāmudrā by building a doctrinal connection with the Amanasikāra cycle composed by Maitrīpa and his disciples. (Krakh 2015, pp. 73–78)—as much as he acknowledges the doctrinal resemblance—denies the historical connection between sGam-po-pa and Maitrīpa. He points out a missing link to Mathes’s line by arguing that sGam-po-pa as an innovator had not so much inherited from Maitrīpa, which is evidenced by the absence of the latter in the former’s works.
As such, despite the post-15th century attempts at a codified Mahāmudrā genealogy, the extant early bKa’-brgyud materials remain vague with regards to their specific transmissions—that is, how each Indian thread made its way over the Himalayas and tangled with each other. To fill this gap, the article investigates the Mahāmudrā lineage accounts preserved in the Xixia Buddhist literature pertaining to the Tibetan subject matter, a corpus of Tangut and Chinese texts which constitutes a window into the 12th-century Tibetan attempts to assimilate and systematize the latest Indian Buddhist thoughts and praxes through the tantric axis. The Mahāmudrā lineages contained in the Xixia materials sheds new light on the Tibetan recognition of the Saraha-Maitrīpa branch in that it presents a case as early as the 12th century.

2. An Overview of the Xixia Mahāmudrā Materials

A geographical nexus in which multiple vectors of cultural influences intersect, the Hexi Corridor has facilitated transfers of Buddhist teachings and praxes in a complex web of historical dynamics and cross-cultural exchanges. As the area came under the Tangut Xixia domination (1038–1227), the Buddhist religion continued to impact and shape the local religio-cultural landscape of both intra- and inter-national levels. By the turn of the 12th century, Tibetans had begun to institutionalize their own Buddhist systems and initiate international outreach to secure patronage and extend institutional networks. As such, in an effort to build spiritual and political connections with the Tangut royal house, Tibetan masters brought to the Xixia Kingdom the cutting-edge yogic techniques of Buddhist Tantra and advanced Mahāyāna doctrinal developments.

Embracing a variety of Buddhist yogic transmissions as well as a range of doctrinal topics imported from Tibet, the Tibetan-inspired Xixia Buddhist corpus of Tangut- and Chinese-language texts span the Vajravārāhī, Čakrasaṃvara, Six-Teaching (chos drug), Mahāmudrā, and Lam ‘bras systems and topics. Scholarly knowledge of these yogic transmissions had advanced thanks to the rediscovered Xixia importance evinced by the Dacheng yaodao miji 大乘要道密集 (The Secret Collection of Works on the Essential Path of Mahāyāna, “DYM” hereafter), a collection of Chinese translated texts of Tibetan tantric teaching compiled no earlier than the late-14th century.

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4 I would use “Xixia literature” or “Xixia texts” to refer to texts in either Tangut or Chinese scripts which pertain to the Xixia regime or to its immediate aftermath. I follow most Tangutologists’ practice of using Chinese graphs to present the Tangut content through a semantic rendering. The reconstruction, if not a confirmed correspondence (e.g., “释迦” as the Chinese equivalent of “śākya”), will be marked with an asterisk (*). Phonetic reconstruction (in Gong Hwang-cherng’s system) will be provided for the Tangut term considered to be phonetic transcription from another language, be it Chinese, Sanskrit, or Tibetan (e.g., šī kja as the transcription of sākya or shījā 枪迦).

5 The Hexi Corridor, as part of the trade route networks conventionally designated as the Silk Road, runs northwest from the bank of the Yellow River up till the nowadays Xinjiang-Gansu border and is flanked by the Tibetan Plateau and the Gobi Desert to the south and the north, respectively. For a multi-disciplinary and transcultural vision for Buddhism in Central Asia as a driving force for the historical and cultural processes, see (Meinert 2016).

6 (Sperling 1987) compiles the later Tibetan historical sources to identify two bKa’-brgyud masters sent to serve in the Tangut court as “imperial preceptor” (dishi 帝师), namely gTsang-po-pa dKon-mchog-seng-ge (?-1218/1219)—disciple of Karma-pa Dus-gsum-mkhyen-pa’s (1110–93)—and his successor Tr-shri Sangs-rgyas-ras-chen (1164/5–1236) from the ‘Ba’-rom bKa’-brgyud subsect. Furthering this line of inquiries, (Dunnell 1992, pp. 102–3) comments that it was during about the 1170s that Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1139–93) had established spiritual relationships with the Tibetan bKa’-brgyud sect. From the Xixia sources in both Tangut and Chinese there could be identified several personas potentially of Tibetan origin active during the period from the mid-12th to the early-13th centuries; for details of these figures, see (Dunnell 2009).

7 For discussions on the transmission history of these tantric teachings and praxes which came from India to Xixia through the Tibetan medium, see (Sun 2014b; Solonin 2015a, pp. 429–41).

8 Back in the early half of the 20th century, Lv Cheng (1896–1989) first applied the modern academic approach of historical-philological analysis to studying the DYM (Lv 1942). It is Chen Qingying who first noted an intimate Tangut Xixia connection in the DYM (Chen 2003). Shen Weirong further builds a textual connection between the DYM and the Chinese translated tantric texts from the Khara Khoto collection and
The Xixia Mahāmudrā collection comprises Tangut-language texts and fragments scattered across approximately 15 inventory numbers originally assigned by the Institute of Oriental Studies to the Khara Khotok collection, and Chinese ones—most of which have Tangut equivalents—included in the DYM.9 Presented below is a collated list of Xixia Mahāmudrā titles provided in sequence and clusters as reflected in the bibliographical organizations shared by both the Khara Khotok collection and the DYM (Tibetan equivalent title will be provided if located):

#1. The Keypoints-Notes cluster:10

1.1. Keypoints of Mahāmudrā as the Ultimate (*Phyag rgya chen po mthar thug gi gnad bsdus; “Keypoints”):  
Khara Khotok: *大印究竟要集 (345#824, 345#2526, #2876), Agent: compiled by Dehui德慧

1.2. Notes on the Keypoints of Mahāmudrā as the Ultimate (*Phyag rgya chen po mthar thug gi gnad bsdus kyi zin bris; “Notes”):  
Khara Khotok: *大印究竟要集记 (I: 345#2858, 345#7163, 427#3817; II: 427#3817; X: 345#2851)

#2. Upadeśa on the Uncommon Meaning of Mahāmudrā in Accordance with Scriptural Instructions (*Phyag rgya chen po thun mong ma yin pa’i don lung dang mthun pa’i man ngag; “Uncommon”):  
DYM: Xinyi dashouyin buongongyi peijiao yaomen 新译大手印不共义配教要门, Agents: compiled by Maitripa; narrated by Huixian惠贤, i.e., State Preceptor Xuanzhao 玄照; translated by Huichuang 惠幢

#3. Guided Meditation (*定引导):11
#3.1. Upadeśa on the Immediate Approach to Mahāmudrā (*Phyag rgya chen por cig ‘jug pa’i man ngag; “Immediate Approach”):

Khara Khoto: *大手印顿入要语 (297#2530, 346#892, 346#7216)

DYM: Xin yi dashouyin dunru yaomen 新译大手印顿入要门, Agents: narrated by Huixian; translated by Huichuang

#3.2. Direct Guidance on the Mahāmudrā (*Phyag rgya chen po’i dmar khrig; “Direct Guidance”):

Khara Khoto: *大手印赤引导 (297#2530, 346#7216)

DYM: Dashi ouyin yin ding/chiyindao 大手印引定/赤引导

#3.3. Transmission of the Mahāmudrā Upadeśa (*Phyag rgya chen po’i man ngag gi brgyud pa; “Transmission”):

Khara Khoto: *大手印要语师次 (346#7216)

DYM: Dashiouyin jiatuozhi yaomen 大手印伽陁支要门

#3.4. Upadeśa on the Gradual and Immediate Approaches to Mahāmudrā (*Phyag rgya chen por rim gyis ’jug pa dang cig car ’jug pa’i man ngag; “Gradual and Immediate Approaches”):

Khara Khoto: *大手印依次入等时入要语 (346#7216)

DYM: Dashiouyin jianru dunru yaomen 大手印渐入顿入要门

#4. Fourteen titles plus the preceding introduction to Lazheng’s 辰征 Mahāmudrā teaching by Imperial Preceptor Xuanmi 玄密 (“fourteen-title constellation”): 12

Khara Khoto: fourteen titles plus the preceding passage “上师曰则我师辰征云…” (348#2841, 477#4977)

DYM: fourteen titles plus the preceding passage “玄密帝师云吾师辰征做如是说”

#5. Four upadeśas including the Newly Translated Golden Garland of Mahāmudrā (Xinyi dashouyin jinyingluo deng sizhong yaomen 新译大手印金璎珞等四种要门; “four-upadeśa repertoire”):

#5.1. Upadeśa on the Golden Garland (“Golden Garland”): 13

DYM: Jinyingluo yaomen 金璎珞要门 (“Jinyingluo”)

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12 The fourteen titles run from the Eight Methods of the Mahāmudrā Dhyāna (大手印静虑八法要门) to the Four Mental Withdrawals towards the Mahāmudrā (大手印四种收心) in both Tang. inv. 348#2841 (c.f. Kychanov 1999, p. 526) and the DYM. Tang. inv. 447#4977 preserves an incomplete list of the fourteen-title constellation; c.f. (Kychanov 1999, p. 565). For a critical edition and Chinese translation of these fourteen small texts as well as comparisons against the DYM counterparts, see (Sun and Nie 2018, pp. 211–48). For Xuanmi’s introduction to Lazheng’s Mahāmudrā teaching which precedes the first title “Eight Methods,” Sun & Nie wrongly identified it as the end of the Gradual and Immediate Approaches, probably based on the DYM placement of the passage between the two clusters of the Guided Meditation and the fourteen-title constellation.

13 (Lv 1942, pp. X–XIII) confirms the Nyams kyi man ngag thig le as the Tibetan equivalent of the Jinyingluo yaomen in the canonical collection of translated treatises (bsTan-'gyur) and speculatively identified it as an abridged version of the Phyag rgya chen po gser phreng (D 2454) compiled by Maitripa. He also provides critical editions of both the Chinese and Tibetan texts of the Golden Garland and puts them in parallel for comparison; see (Lv 1942), pp. 1–16. (Sun 2012, pp. 186–87) found an alternative version of the Nyams kyi man ngag thig le in the Zhi byed snga bar phyi gsam gyi skor, a collection of Zhi-byed works dating to the 13th century. Sun further notes that the version in the Zhi byed collection is closer to the DYM Chinese translated work Jinyingluo. While the bsTan-'gyur version of the Nyams thig le gser gyi phreng ba quotes Tilopa/Tailopa (though bsTan-'gyur editions differ from each other in the exact name spelling, the name remains consistent in each edition) twice, both the Zhi byed version and the Jinyingluo attribute the two quotations to two different names, Telopa/嘚呤浪巴 and Trelopas/丁浪巴; see the Thig gser A, ff. 205a6–7; the Thig gser B, ff. 172b7–173a1; the XDJ. For an introduction to the Zhi byed collection, see (Martin 2006, p. 114).
bsTan-'gyur: dPal udiyanar tshogs ‘khor byas pa’i dus su rnal ’byor pa grub pa thob pa bzhi bcus rdo rje’i ngag bzhengs pa nyams kyi man ngag thig le gser gyi phreng ba (“Nyams kyi man ngag thig le”, D 2449)

#5.2. Ritual of Offering the Gaṇacakra to Teachers of the Lineage (“brGyud pa’i bla ma rnams la tshogs’khor ‘bul ba’i cho ga; “Offering the Gaṇacakra”):
DYM: Shicheng dengchu feng jilunyi 师等处奉集轮仪

#5.3. Upadeśa on the Quitessential Meanings of Mahāmudrā (“Quintessential Meanings”):14
DYM: Dashouyin zuanjí xin zhi yilei yaomen 大手印纂集心之义类要门
sGam po gsung ’bum: sNying po’i don Inga Idan (sGrub snying: 5b4–6b5)

#5.4. The Quartet Upadeśa of Dombi’s Intention (“Dombi’s Intention”):15
DYM: Nami zhenxin siju yaomen 那弥真心四句要门
sGam po gsung ’bum: Slob dpon dom bhi he ru ka’i dgongs pa (gNas go: 29a1–b2)
Sa skya bka’ ’bum: Slob spon chen po dom bi he ru ka’i thugs kyi man ngag yi ge bzhi pa (Phyag gces, ff. 7b4–8a3)

#6. Contemplating the Mind (*观心):16

#6.1. Upadeśa on the Mahāmudrā (“Phyag rgya chen po’i man ngag”):
Khara Khoto: *大手印要语 (167#6775), by Great Master from Tibet (*中国大师)

#6.2. Upadeśa on Aspiring for the Yoga (“rNal ’byor ’dod pa’i man ngag”):
Khara Khoto: *瑜伽仰渴要语 (167#6775)

#6.3. Upadeśa on the True Meaning of the Cognitionless (“Sems med snying don gyi man ngag”):
Khara Khoto: *无心真义要语 (167#6775), Bla-ma Sangs-rgyas (*明满上师)

#6.4. Upadeśa on the Immediate Approach to the Mind-Nature of Samādhī (*Ting nge ’dzin gyi sems nyid la cig car ’jug pa’i man ngag):

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14 I thank Doctor Yang Jie from Renmin University of China for sharing with me his finding of the Tibetan original of the Quintessential Meanings in sGam-po-pa’s Collected Works (gsung ’bum) as well as his comparative reading of both the Tibetan and Chinese texts.

15 A comparative reading reveals that the Chinese edition Nami zhenxin siju yaomen does not completely parallel either of the two Tibetan editions found from the collected works of sGam-po-pa and rJe btsun Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1147–1216), respectively. The DYMY edition elaborates on the four aspects of the mind, namely the threefold essence (本体), the fourfold intrinsic nature (自性), the fourfold commitment (记句), and the threefold deviation (迷惑). The Tibetan editions, though with minor variants, agree with each other in terms of an order different from the DYMY’s, namely the three essences (ngo bo gsung), the four commitments (dam tshig bzhi), the three deviations (gol sa gsung), and the four means of settling the mind (bl[gh]zag thabs bzhi, i.e., 心之自性分四 in the DYMY). Compared to the Sa skya bka’ ’bum edition, the sGam po gsung ’bum edition misses several lines under the “four means of settling the mind.” The DYMY and SK editions differ from each other in terms of the order of the four means. Nonetheless, this piece of Dombi’s Heruka’s instruction seems to be quite well received across Tibetan Buddhist traditions during the 12th century. I thank Doctor Yang Jie from Renmin University and Sun Penghao from Harvard University for sharing with me the information regarding the Tibetan equivalent of the Nami zhenxin siju yaomen in the sGam po gsung ’bum and Sa skya bka’ ’bum respectively.

16 (Kychanov 1999, pp. 463–64) lists five titles under the “Contemplation of the Mind.” I adjust Kychanov’s Chinese reconstructions, and English translations are all mine. In the Xixia Buddhist materials in both Tangut and Chinese, the expression “middle kingdom” (中国) makes frequent appearances in notations as an indicator of people’s geographical origin. Both (Shi 2002, p. 40) and (Nie 2005, pp. 7–8) confirm that this “middle kingdom” refers to Tibet, not China. (Chen 2003, p. 104) has a different theory, arguing that the zhongguo present in the DYMY is the self-designation applied by the Tanguts themselves. However, based on several cases that people with the “middle kingdom” appended to their title have a confirmed Tibetan origin, the term should point to Tibet. (Shen 2007, p. 293) further speculates the “middle kingdom” might literally transcribe the Tibetan dbus yul.
Khara Khotokh: *静虑心性顿入要语* (167#6775), by Great Master from Tibet (*中国大师*)

#6.5. *Summarized Guidance on the Mahāmudrā* (*Phyag rgya chen po'i dmar khris don bsdus; “Summarized Guidance”*):

Khara Khotokh: *大手印定引导略文* (167#6775, 347#875)

#7. Zhang’s *Upadeśa* on the Ultimate of the Profound Path of Mahāmudrā (“Ultimate”), Ch. 8–13:

Khara Khotokh: *ṣja-na-ju-pji-rjar-pja (g.yu brag pa)* 师所作《道究竟要语》 (450#4806)

Zhang gsung 'bum: *Phyag rgya chen po lam zab mthar thug zhang gi man ngag* (Phyag lam: 61b–74b)

The *DYM* ordering of Chinese titles preserves in one way or another the manner in which their Tangut equivalents were put together and organized. The *DYM* listing of titles reproduces the textual order of the two Tangut clusters—the *Guided Meditation* (#3) and fourteen-title constellation (#4)—the latter immediately succeeding the former through the intermediary passage of Xuanmi’s introduction to his master’s teaching. Thus, we have a reason to deduce that the *DYM* four-*upadeśa* cluster headed by the *Jinyingluo* (#5) also preserves the original organization of how the Tangut equivalents were wrapped into a textual composite, though they are unfortunately missing from the Khara Khotokh collection.

3. A Chronology Inside the Xixia Mahāmudrā Materials

A rough chronology in this textual corpus can be established based on the colophonic information. The *Keypoints-Notes* cluster (#1) was produced during around the mid-12th century. It presents a line starting from the Buddha through a list of Indian teacher lineages headed by the *bKa’-brgyud* patriarchs Mar-pa Chos-kyi-blo-gros (1012–1097), Mi-la-ras-pa (1028/40–1111/23), and

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17. Doctor Zeng Hanchen from Shaanxi Normal University noticed this Tangut text and located its Tibetan original in Bā-ma Zhang’s *Collected Works*. I thank her for sharing this piece of information with me.

18. After an opening praise to the Buddha Śākyamuni (*ṣji-ka* 称迦), the *Keypoints* presents a succession of eight versified biographies of Vimalakīrti (*awi-mo 维摩*), Saraha (*ṣja-rjar-za*), Nāgārjuna (*龙树, Klu-grub*), Śāvariṣa (*山巒, Ri-khrud-zhabs*), Maitrīpa (*慈师*), Jñānakīrti (*智称, Ye-shes-grags-pa*), Vāgīśvara (*语主, Ngag-gi-dbang-po*), brTson-’grus (*精进*). See the *Keypoints* (inv. 2526, ff. 1b1–4b8; inv. 824, ff. 1b1–4b3); c.f. (Sun and Nie 2018, pp. 296–301). For a survey of these figures, see (Solonin 2011, pp. 285–88; 2012a, pp. 248–62). The succession line from Saraha, Śāvariṣa, to Maitrīpa is well received in Tibet as the common origin of the Mahāmudrā transmissions; see, for instance, the *Deb sngon* (vol. 2, p. 985.1–6): *rgyal ba shāksa thub pa'i bstan pa 'di la phyag rgya chen po zhes lam phu du phyung bar mgo 'don nikan bram ze chen po sa ra ha gda' ba bu 'de'i lugz 'dzin pa rgya gar na rje ri khrod zhabz yab sras yin la ... yab ri khrod zhabz kyi lugs sras me tri bas gzang nas slob ma rnam pa phyag rgya chen po'i lam la bkod pa las dzaam bu'i gling du khyab par gyur pa yin no 11*.

19. According to the *Notes* (I, f. 4a5–6), brTson-’grus’s Dharma lectures took place in a *renshen* 壬申 year, either 1152 or 1212. Based on Dehui’s career year, which had ranged through the reign of Renzong (1139–1193), (Solonin 2015a, p. 428) dates the work to 1152. For Dehui’s identity and career, see (Dunnell 2009, pp. 47–49). Moreover, (Solonin 2012, pp. 245–46) translates the *Notes*’ colophon (X, ff. 26a1–27b4) which describes Dehui’s experience of studying with brTson-’grus in Tsong-kha (tsong-kha), the northeastern area of Tibet bordering the Tangut Xixia.
probably sGam-po-pa (1079–1153).20 Entering the Xixia domain, the line then reaches Imperial Preceptor Xuanmi 玄密, Master Dadao 大宝, and State Preceptor Xuanzhao.21 Xuanmi could be a Tibetan residing in Xixia.22 The Chinese translated text jinjingluo under the DYM four-upadeśa constellation preserves a slightly divergent lineage which bypasses the bKa’-brgyud patriarchs after Maitripa, but in its Xixia part reaches Xuanmi and ends with Xuanzhao as well.23 The Offering the Gañacakra within the same constellation of texts records the identical line of figures, except the substitution of Xuanmi for Master Zhan 喇嘛瞻 and the omission of Xuanzhao in the end.24

Probably having risen from the position of state preceptor (国师), Xuanmi obtained his imperial preceptor (帝师) title no earlier than 1194,25 which dates this textual group produced through Xuanzhao possibly to the turn of the 13th century. The fourteen-title constellation (#4), though without any colophonic information, should be considered to belong to the same textual group in terms of transmission since it preserves Xuanmi’s introduction to his master’s teaching.

From among the texts and textual constellations charted above, the Keypoints-Notes (#1) represents an earlier layer of Xixia Mahāmudrā works produced by Dehui during the mid-12th century, while the Uncommon (#2), the Guided Meditation (#3), the fourteen-title constellation (#4), and the four-upadeśa constellation (#5) belong to the relatively later textual production by Xuanzhao at the turn of the 13th century. An interesting connection between these two textual groups lies in the

20 Without knowledge of the DYM’s Xixia import, (Lv 1942, p. XII) identifies Lazheng 辨征 in the DYM lineage as Bla-ma Blo-chen, a disciple of ‘Phags-pa (1235–80). (Shen 2007, p. 282) speculates that the Chinese name lazhang phonetically transcribes the Tibetan lhā rje, the title for sGam-po-pa bSod-nams-rin-chen (1079–1153) who is at the same time Mi-las-pa’s disciple. The phonetic reconstruction of lazhang’s Tangut equivalent as lhā-dzijī corroborates Shen’s assumption.

21 See the Transmission and the DJY. While the Tangut lineage lacks the three last persons due to the paper damage, the Chinese version is complete. The whole lineage, with both the Tangut and Chinese names included, runs as follows: the Buddha (i.e., Samyaksambuddha; DYM: 真实究竟明满), Bodhisattva Matiratna/Blo-gros Rin-po-che (DYM: 菩提勇识大宝意解脱师), Saraha (DYM: 萨啰曷师), Savaripa (ṣja-rjar-pja; DYM: 萨啰巴师), Avadhūtipa (ja-ua-dui-qï-pïa; DYM: 亚斡诺帝, alias Maitripa), Bla-ma Mar-pa (lja-mja-pja-pïa; DYM: 辦麻马巴), Mi-la-ras-pa (mji-zii-lja-rjar-sja-pja; DYM: 铬移铬啰悉巴), Bla-ma Lha-rje (lja-mja-lhja-dzij; DYM: 裸麻裸征), Imperial Preceptor Xuanmi (ษja-mji-thma-rtwa, Imperial Preceptor Xuanmi (षja-mji-thma-rtwa, DYM: 玄密帝师), Bla-ma *Rin-chen (DYM: 大宝师), State Preceptor Xuanzhao (DYM: 玄照国师). C.f. (Solonin 2011, pp. 283–84, 2012a, p. 240; Sun and Nie 2018, pp. 195–96).

22 Xuanmi first came to modern scholarly attention in (Lv 1942, p. III) as the transmitter of the DYM Chinese translated work jieshi daqugu yulu jingangji jie 解释道果语录金刚记句, a partial commentary on the Lam’bras bu dang bcas pa’i gdmans nag. (Nishida 1977, p. 24, #076) lists its Khara Khoto Tangut equivalent *境果语录金刚句之解具记 (Tang. 251), with the same notation lines containing Xuanmi as the transmitter. (Kychanov 1999, pp. 487–88) reproduces this entry in the Catalogue. (Chen 2000) investigates the life and Buddhist activities of Xuanmi and identifies him with Master Wusheng, the biographical subject of the Wusheng shangshi chu xian gan ying gong desong 无生上师出现感应功德颂, a long verse composition included in the DYM. Chen’s identification based on the existence of the honorary title “wu sheng shangshi” 无生上师 (Master Wusheng), however, is hardly acceptable; c.f. (Shen 2007, p. 275–76; Dunnell 2009, p. 69). (Nie 2005, p. 245) brings to attention a Tangut notation in a Cakrasāmyāra text Tang.Ś.inv. 128#2838 (c.f. Kychanov 1999, p. 545) reading as “*中国大乘玄密帝师沙门慧称” (Imperial Preceptor Xuanmi of the Mahāyāna from the Middle Kingdom (i.e., Tibet), Śramaṇa *Prajñākṛiti/Shes-rab-grags-pa), which gives Xuanmi’s religious name and points to his Tibetan origin. In addition to Tang.Ś.inv. #128#2838, Wei Wen in his descriptive catalogue of the Xixia Cakrasāmyāra texts records another text Tang.Ś.inv. 126#2521 (c.f. Kychanov 1999, p. 544) bearing the same notation; see (Wei 2013, p. 40), #5, 43, #1. For more discussions on Xuanmi, see (Dunnell 2009, pp. 26–36).

23 See the XD. The jinjingluo lineage, which is not seen in the Tibetan edition, runs as follows: Śavaripa (萨斡哩巴), Maitripa (铭得哩师), Vajrapāṇi (金刚师), the Neplese Asū (巴巴无生), Vajraguru (末则啰) 孤啰, Imperial Preceptor Xuanmi (玄密帝师), *fähigwajra (智金刚), and State Preceptor Xuanzhao (玄照国师).

24 See the SFS.

25 See the XD.
recorded collaboration between Dehui and Xuanmi towards the last decades of the 12th century. As shown in the colophonic information from the Khara Khoto collection, Dehui had translated at least two tantric texts of the Cakrasamvara and Six-Teaching praxes taught by Xuanmi. In the notation, Xuanmi holds his imperial preceptor title and Dehui bears the title “State Preceptor Zhizhao from Mountain Lan” (兰山智昭国师), which he started to hold around the 1180s. This again dates the texts to the turn of the 13th century.

Besides the two textual groups produced through Dehui and Xuanzha, respectively, the composite Contemplating the Mind (#6)—which contains a few titles either containing “Mahāmudrā” therein or pointing to the Mahāmudrā subject matter—and the Tangut translated work Ultimate (#7) originally authored by Bla-ma Zhang’s (1123–1193), however, lack verifiable information for proper dating. Nonetheless, the date of the Contemplating the Mind might be proximate to that of the Guided Meditation since the former contains a summary of the Direct Guidance (#3.2), while the Ultimate should date to no earlier than 1164, supposedly the time around which its Tibetan original was composed.

Another issue concerns the Tibetan original. Although the Tibetan originals of the Golden Garland, the Dombi’s Intention, and the Ultimate still exist, it still remains uncertain whether all of the Tangut texts were direct translations from Tibetan, or indigenous composition based on orally received Tibetan teachings, as well as whether each of the DYM Chinese texts directly translated from Tibetan or Tangut. To solve the issue requires closer historical-philological analyses of the relevant texts in the immediate temporal context of their production at both intra- and inter-corpus levels.

4. The Mahāmudrā Transmissions from the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Landscape to the Tangut Xixia

I chart below the three different, yet related, complete lines of Mahāmudrā transmission extracted from the Xixia materials (Table 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keypoints (#1.1)</th>
<th>Transmission (#3.3)</th>
<th>Jinyingluo (#5.1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Śākyamuni</td>
<td>Samyaksaṃbuddha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vimalakīrti</td>
<td>Bodhisattva Matiratna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saraha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nāgārjuna</td>
<td>Śavaripa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maitrīpa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jñānakīrti</td>
<td>Bla-ma Mar-pa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vāgīśvara</td>
<td>Mi-la-ras-pa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brTson-’grus</td>
<td>Bla-ma Lha-rje</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vajraguru</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dehui</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imperial Preceptor Xuanmi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26 Dunnell (2009, p. 49) lists “three tantric yoga works” Dehui had translated in collaboration with Xuanmi, which are the two Cakrasamvara texts (Tang.#inv. 126#2521, 128#2838) also listed in Wei Wen’s descriptive catalogue (#5, #11) and one Six-Teaching text titled *风气入于心 (The Wind entering the mind). All the three texts bear the notations: *中国大乘玄密帝师沙门慧称传 and *兰山智昭国师德慧译. Probably due to the discursive writing style of 425#3708, (Kychanov 1999, p. 542) wrongly records for Xuanmi’s notation as *中国大师帝师沙门慧自在 (the Great Master from Tibet, Imperial Preceptor, Śramaṇa *Prajñāsvara/Shes-rab-dbang-po).

27 As Dunnell mentions, Dehui started out as a “Juexing Dharma Preceptor 觉行法师,” “had been promoted to Lanshan Juexing State Preceptor” by 1167, and “appears with the title of Lanshan Zhizhao State Preceptor 兰山智昭国师” by 1184; see (Dunnell 2009, p. 48).

28 (Martin 1992, p. 254) dates the composition of Zhang’s Lam zab mthar thug to the period around 1161 to 1164. The Tangut translated work should be dated after that time.
It is obvious that all the three lines—no matter what mythological origins each appears to have—share claims to descent from the Saraha-Maitripa circle, one arriving at the person of Dehui and the other two at Xuanzhao.

4.1. The Mahāmudrā Transmission in Tibetan Accounts

The Blue Annals (comp. 1476–1478) seems to be the earliest extant historiographical source to sketch a Mahāmudrā transmission initiated in India by this Saraha-Maitripa circle. The line started off with Saraha, the Great Brahman (bram ze chen po), and then reached consecutively through Śavaripa and Maitripa. Maitripa had received a multitude of disciples, including the four senior (che ba bzhi), seven medium (bring bdun), and ten junior (chung ba bcu) ones. The four senior disciples include Sahajavajra (bian cig skyes pa’i rdo rje), Devākaracandra (alias Śunyatāsāmadhi), Rāmapāla (dga’ ba skyong ba), and Vajrapāni (phyag na rdo rje). The Blue Annals further notes that the transmission of Mahāmudrā from India to Tibet had undergone three lines of translation activity during the early, the middle, and the late periods (snga phyi bar gsun). The early translation (snga ’gyur) was carried out by Nirūpa who obtained the teaching from Kāropa. The middle translation (bar ’gyur), branching into the upper and lower transmissions (stod smad gnyis), was carried out by Vajrapāni and the Nepalese Asū, respectively. The late translation (phyi ’gyur) was undertaken by a mNga’-ris-pa Nag-mo-sher-dad, who had obtained the teaching during his encounter with the old Vajrapāni in India. In addition, there was Mar-pa’s side transmission (zur ’gyur), which entered Tibet slightly earlier than these three transmission lines. This side transmission actually was initiated by Atiśa (jo bo chen po rje lha gcig), who allegedly studied the Uttaratantra treatises and the dōhas with Maitripa. Temporally mediating between Mar-pa’s side transmission and Nirūpa’s early transmission was Paṇḍita Vairocanaarkṣita, who is said to have translated Saraha’s “Three Cycles of Dohā” (do hā skor gsun) and received Bla-ma Zhang as his disciple.

4.2. The Transmission (#3.3) Lineage

Among the three Mahāmudrā lineages extracted from the Xixia materials, the Transmission lineage in its Indo-Tibetan part parallels what was meant by the Blue Annals as “Mar-pa’s side transmission.” Its extension from Mar-pa down through Mi-la-ras-pa and sGam-po-pa is shown in Mi-bskyod-rdo-rje’s bKa’-brgyud Madhyamaka lineage as belonging to the Maitripa-Marpa line. Moreover, the Uncommon (2), allegedly compiled by Maitripa and belonging to the same Xuanzhao-produced textual group as the Transmission (#3.3)—though remaining silent as regards descent from any bKa’-brgyud patriarchs—contains a threefold path structure into the provisional
meaning (fangbian yi 方便义, drang don/neyārtha) of pāramitā, the definitive meaning (jueding yi 决定义, nges don/nitārtha) of tantra, and the quintessential meaning (zhenxin yi 真心义, snying po'i don) of Mahāmudrā. This is in line with sGam-po-po’s threefold path division into the sūtric, the tantric, and the Mahāmudrā modes.

4.3. The Jinyingluo (#5.1) Lineage

The Jinyingluo lineage represents another line recorded in the Blue Annals. Vajrapāni is listed by the Blue Annals as one of the “four senior disciples” of Maitrīpa, and his disciple the Nepalese Asū (bal po skye med) had received gYor-po rLung-ston rDo-rgel-bla-ma (i.e., Vajraguru in the Jinyingluo lineage) as a disciple when Asū was residing in Tibet. This line is associated with the Zhi-byed tradition attributed to Pha-dam-pa Sangs-rgyas (d. 1117) in that the Zhi-byed edition of the Nyams kyi man ngag thig le reveals a closer proximity to its DYM Chinese equivalent jinyingluo than the bsTan-’gyur edition. According to the Blue Annals, Pha-dam-pa—one of the “ten junior disciples” of Maitrīpa—and Asū had overlapped in their sojourns in Tibet, during which both were visited by a rMa-sgom Chos-kyi-shes-rab.

4.4. The Keypoints (#1.1) Lineage

Now, we are left with the last one of the three lineages present in the Xixia Mahāmudrā materials, that which is borne by the Keypoints-Notes cluster (#1). The Keypoints presents a line of eight patriarchs after Śākyamuni which traces a descending arc of spiritual accomplishments, the previous two, the third mode guarantees that one never regresses—even those of the low faculty are born as gods. See the Deb sngags, pp. 1005–6, 1007.14 (Roerich 2016, vol. 2, pp. 860, 862). (Sun 2012, p. 186) identifies gYor-po rLung-ston with Vajraguru.

See (Jackson 1994, pp. 24–28). In his reply to Dus-gsum-mkhyan-pa’s inquiries, sGam-po-po laid out three Buddhist paths, namely the laṅkāna mode of the pāramitā taking reasoning for its path, the secret mantra mode of the generation and perfection stages taking beneficial blessing for its path, and the sahaja (i.e., Mahāmudrā) mode of the luminosity taking direct perception for its path; see the Dus zhus (f. 62b2–4): lam rnam pa gsum du ’gro gsung ngo rjes dpag lam du byed pa dang ’byin brlabs lam du byed pa dang ’rnyon sum lam du byed pa gsum yin gsung mtshan nyid lam pha rol tu phyin pa ni rjes dpag lam du byed pa bya yin lugs kyi theg pa chen po gsgags ni bskyed rdzogs gru la brten nas byin brlabs lam du byed pa yin lugs kyi ’rnyon sum lam du byed pa ni thon cig skyes pa ’od gsal bya ba yin gsung. In the immediately following dialogical thread, sGam-po-po further comments that by the pāramitā mode (pha rol tu phyin pa’i lugs) the experiential realization (rgtos pa) arises through the trio of bodhicitta (byang chub kyi sams), illusion-like (rgyu ma lta bu), and emptiness (stong pa), while by the mantra mode (sngags kyi lugs) the realization arises through the trio of the body as deity (lus lha), the speech as mantra recitation (ngag bzas pa), and the mind as laṅkāna (yid chos nyid). As for his own mode (i.e., the Mahāmudrā), sGam-po-po does not specify within the same dialogical thread what philosophy and practice it entails. But he mentions that, unlike the previous two, the third mode guarantees that one never regresses—even those of the low faculty are born as gods. See the Deb sngags, pp. 1005–6, 1007.14 (Roerich 2016, vol. 2, pp. 860, 862). (Sun 2012, p. 186) identifies gYor-po rLung-ston with Vajraguru.

See (Sun 2012, p. 186) speculates that the Nyams kyi man ngag thig le included in the Zhi byed sngags bar phyin gsum gyi skor might be the edition Pha-dam-pa acquired directly from his teacher Maitrīpa. See (Sun 2012, pp. 186–87). Sun Penghao identifies Kṣṇā the Junior (nag po chung) listed under Maitrīpa’s “ten junior disciples” with Pha-dam-pa Sangs-rgyas and further notes the connection of this transmission with Pha-dam-pa Sangs-rgyas’s Zhi-byed tradition.
possibly intent on a Buddhist eschatology. Below is a chart presenting the spiritual status assigned by the *Keypoints* accounts to Śākyamuni and each of the patriarchs (Table 2):\(^{37}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Spiritual Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Śākyamuni</td>
<td>Buddha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vimalakirti</td>
<td>10th bhūmi Dharmameghā (chos kyi sprin), <em>十地法云</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saraha</td>
<td>8th bhūmi Acalā (mi sgo ba), <em>八地不动</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nāgārjuna</td>
<td>6th bhūmi Abhimukhi (mungon du ‘gyur ba), <em>六地现前</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Śavaripa</td>
<td>4th bhūmi Arcismati (’od ’phro ba), <em>四地焰慧</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maitrīpa</td>
<td>2nd bhūmi Vimalā (dri ma med pa), <em>二地离垢</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jñānakirti</td>
<td>1st bhūmi Darśanamārga (mthong lam), <em>初地见道</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vāgīśvara</td>
<td>Prayoga-mārga: the ūsma (drod), mārdha (rtse) and ksānti (bsod) stages, <em>暖顶</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brTson-'grus</td>
<td>Saṃbhāra-mārga (tshogs lam), <em>资粮道</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *Keypoints* lineage departs from the other two Xixia Mahāmudrā transmissions by its generally—thought not entirely—“sūtric” or exoteric tone. Transmissions oriented towards exoteric philosophy or non-tantric praxes tend to locate their origin in Śākyamuni—the historical, or so-called emanation body (*sprul sku*), Buddha—but this is quite rare in Buddhist yogic lineage accounts. Right after Śākyamuni, the curious placement of the mythological figure Vimalakirti as the first patriarch further adds to the sūtric tone in the lineage presentation.\(^{38}\) Moreover, the “Nāgārjuna” inserted between Saraha and Śavaripa might be read as the tantric “Nāgārjuna” who had studied with Saraha and was at the same time a Madhyamaka philosopher, while remaining silent in regards to the yogic episodes later accrued in the tantric context.\(^{40}\)

Apparing like a patchwork of discrete personalities nested within a complex of interconnected transmissions, the patriarch line does, however, find itself based in the Tibetan tantric historiographical tradition. The succession from Saraha through Nāgārjuna, Śavaripa to Maitrīpa in the *Keypoints* is paralleled by Tāranātha’s (1575–1634) presentation of the Mahāmudrā lineage as one

\(^{37}\) The spiritual hierarchy goes from the tenth bhūmi of the first patriarch, consecutively through the eighth, sixth, fourth, second, and first bhūmis of the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth patriarchs respectively, up to the prayoga and saṃbhāra stages of the seventh and eighth patriarchs; see the *Keypoints* (inv. 2526, ff. 1b1–4b8; inv. 824, ff. 1b1–4b3). The *Daśabhūmikasūtra* constitutes a systematic and methodical presentation of the ten bodhisattva bhūmis, correlating each with seminal doctrines of Buddhism; see the *DBh*.

\(^{38}\) Vimalakirti does not gain as wide a popularity in Tibetan Buddhism as in the Sinitic Buddhist milieu. In Xixia, however, the figure seems to gain a certain degree of valence. (Solonin 2012, p. 251) notes another Tangut case of Vimalakirti’s presence: the composite “Instructions on the Dhyāna Meditation” (*修禅要论, *bSam gtan gyi gdams ngag; Tang,#inv. 291#4824), which consists of several short titles, is attributed to the collective composition of Vimalakirti (aujī-nu-khij 摩诃 topics) and Avalokiteśvara (*观音). For a detailed study of this “Instructions on the Dhyāna Meditation,” see (Yuan 2016) which further confirms that the work was transmitted by Pha-dam-pa Sangs-rgyas.

\(^{39}\) For a tantric account (mixing with the “sūtric” episodes) of the life and Buddhist activities of Nāgārjuna as one of the 84 Indian tantric Siddhas, see the *Grub lo*, ff. 49–54 (Robinson 2014, pp. 75–80). For a general survey of the Siddha Nāgārjuna, see (Dowman 1986, pp. 112–22).

\(^{40}\) The mixed accounts combining the lives of the 2nd-century Madhyamaka philosopher Ārya Nāgārjuna and the 9th-century Guhyasamāja expert Ācārya Nāgārjuna are in line with the phenomena of name appropriation inside the Buddhist tantric circles, which reflects a tendency to project identities of tantric masters back to those of earlier Madhyamaka scholars; see (Seyfort Ruegg 1981, pp. 105–6). For an early biographical account of Nāgārjuna which retains only the “sūtric” episodes, see Kumārajiva’s (344/409/413) translation titled “A Biography of Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna” (Longshu puṣa zhuan 龙树菩萨传, T no. 2047, vol. 50). For a survey of Nāgārjuna’s biographical accounts in Tibetan and Chinese sources, see (Walliser 1922).
of the seven yogic transmissions in the bKa’ babs bdun ldan. According to Tāranātha, the Mahāmudrā transmission started with Rāhula (i.e., Saraha) and then proceeds through Nāgārjuna to Śavaripa. Śavaripa first received Lūyipa as his disciple and later Maitrīpa.41

Jñānakīrti, who succeeds Maitrīpa in the Keypoints, is a little-detailed figure in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist yogic lineage accounts.42 The currently available sources at my disposal show that only Tāranātha’s bKa’ babs bdun ldan places this figure in a Tantra exposition lineage (rgyuul kyi bshad pa’i brgyud pa) ahead of Ratnākaraśānti.43 If Tāranātha’s account is reliable, the only possible connection Jñānakīrti has with Maitrīpa—his predecessor in the Keypoints lineage—is the latter’s experience of studying with Ratnākaraśānti before meeting Śavaripa.44

The last Indian personality Vāgīśvara, attributed by the Keypoints as a Nepalese (*piṇ-po 国人, bal po) expert in the sixty-two deities (*六合二佛) Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala praxis, could almost certainly be identified with the 11th-century Nepalese Thang-chung-pa (who later acquired the name “Vāgīśvara” because of his spiritual accomplishment). He was born into the Pham-thing family and, together with his elder brother Abhayakīrti (*jigs med grags pa), played an instrumental role in the Cakrasaṃvara transmission from India to Tibet.45 Based on the fifth Dalai Bla-ma Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho’s (1617–1682) recorded list of teachings (thob yig) Gaṅgā’i chu rgyun, Vāgīśvara, and Abhayakīrti had acted as the nexus where multiple Indian lineages of Cakrasaṃvara teachings converged and further made their ways into Tibet.46 Among the nine lines of lineage from the Lūyipa tradition of the Sixty-two Deities Cakrasaṃvara maṇḍala praxis which purifies the egg-born proclivity (nīla byor dbang phyug lu hi pa sbyang gzhis srong skyed sbyong byed ldar legs par ‘gal ba’i he ru ka’i rigs dpal ‘khor lo sdom pa lha drug cu rtsa guṇis kyi ris bris kyi dkyil ‘khor chen po), the Sa-skya line (sa lugs) and Mar-pa line (mar lugs) overlap in terms of lineage segment from the originator Vajradhara through the Pham-thing brothers (pham thing sku mchog) Vāgīśvara and Abhayakīrti. Both lines in their shared part reproduce the Saraha-Nāgārjuna-Śavaripa succession between Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi and Lūyipa.47 In this way, our Keypoints lineage is echoed by at least one branch of the Cakrasaṃvara transmissions mediated by the Pham-thing family from India through Tibet.

41 See the bKa’ bdun, ff. 181b5–189b6 (Templeman 1983, pp. 2–14). Jñānakīrti, also known as Ye-shes-grags-pa in Tibetan, left only two works in the Tibetan bsTan’-gyur: the De kho na nyid la ‘jug pa (*Tattvāvatāra, D 3709) and the Pha rol tu phyin pa’i theg pa bsgom pa’i rim pa’i man ngag (*Pāramitāyānabhāvanākramopadeśa, D 3922–4542). (Mathes 2006, pp. 206, 223–24) points out that gzhon-nu-dpal in his Blue Annals (Deb sngon, vol. 2, pp. 846–48) refers to Jñānakīrti’s *Tattvāvatāra in arguing that gSangs-po-pa’s pāramīta Mahāmudrā is in line with Maitrīpa’s assertion, and further analyzes the content of the *Tattvāvatāra as an Indian case of the pāramītā mode of approach to Mahāmudrā.
42 See the bKa’ bdun, f. 225a5–6 (Templeman 1983, p. 66); c.f. (Lu 2018, p. 151). For further discussions regarding Jñānakīrti’s active years, see (Lu 2018, pp. 152–53).
43 (Tatz 1987) draws on a Sanskrit account of Maitrīpa’s life in a Nepalese Sham Sher manuscript as an early version of the master’s biography, against which he checks later Tibetan accounts. For Maitrīpa’s version with Ratnākaraśānti, see (Tatz 1987, pp. 698–701).
44 For a detailed survey of Vāgīśvara’s religious activities as well as the relevant Tibetan historical records, see (We 2013, pp. 69–84). According to the Tibetan historiography about the Cakrasaṃvara teachings, Vāgīśvara had visited Tibet in person and closely connected with Tibetan lo-tsa-bas such as Mar-pa-do-pa and Klog-skya; see, for instance, rje-btsun Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan’s (1374–1432) historiography of the Lūyipa Cakrasaṃvara tradition (bDe lo, ff. 10a3–12a1). The Tibetan bsTan’-gyur preserves five of his translated works in collaboration with Tibetan translators. Vāgīśvara translated Kuṣalipada’s dPal ‘khor lo sdom pa’i snjyid po’i de kho na nyid bsdu pa (D 1505) and dGe-ba’i-mgon-po’s dPal ‘khor lo sdom pa’i guṇis su med pa’i bsmam gtan gyi man ngag nīla byor gyi gtum mo (D 1508) in collaboration with Mar-pa-do-pa, and the rDo rje phyug mo’i madr bsdu pa’i bṣod pa (D 1595), the Seng ge sgra’i gzungs (D 704), and the Seng ge sgra’ dam bcos pa’i gzungs (D 912) with Klog-skya Lotsāba, and his own ritual manual gSangs ba’i dus pa’i dbang bskur ba’i cho ga madr bsdu pa (D1887) was translated by Mar-pa-do-pa (c.f. (We 2013, p. 71).
45 See the zab thob, pp. 247–60; c.f. (We 2013, pp. 28–31, 70).
46 See the zab thob, pp. 247–48, 251. For an earlier lineage presentation of the Lūyipa Cakrasaṃvara tradition by Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan, see the bDe lo.
5. Conclusions

Not only does the Mahāmudrā topography, jointly fueled by these three transmissions, reveal the Xixia recognition and imagination of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist legacies, it also captures the complexities of the multi-faceted picture of Mahāmudrā on its way over the Himalayas during the 11th/12th century. Both the Transmission and the Jīnyingluo lineages are attested by later Tibetan historiographical accounts about Mahāmudrā, and thus belong to an Indo-Tibetan continuum of the constructed Buddhist yogic past as based upon historical realities—at least as understood by Tibetans of the time. Unlike these two, the Keynotes lineage represents an ahistorical linking of diverse selected lineal segments into moments of a “structured totality” through a distinctively Xixia recognition and imagination. More of a collage than a homogeneous line of reality, it patched together different Indo-Tibetan claims to spiritual legacy and religious authority—be they historically based or introspectively projected. Primarily based on the classical Saraha-Maitrīpa Mahāmudrā line, the Keynotes lineage appropriated a Cakrasaṃvara succession of the Lūipa tradition. The addition of the personality Jānakīrtha—unseen elsewhere in other Mahāmudrā lineages—is probably due to considerations of both the teacher’s expertise in the Mahāmudrā thoughts and his potential overlap with Maitrīpa, which again reinforces the constructed nature of the lineage. Meanwhile, in situating the succession of eight patriarchs into a spiritual hierarchy structured by both the Five Paths (pañca-mārga, lam lnga) and Ten Grounds (daśa-bhūmi, sa bcu) schemes, the lineage accounts do not so much simply paraphrase the pre-existing legends relating the masters’ religious activities and spiritual accomplishments as give expressions to a structured path of Buddhist soteriology across both the sūtric and tantric registers.

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Abbreviations

1. Sigla


2. Primary Sources:

2.1. Tangut Works:

Transmission Upadesa on the Mahāmudrā Transmission (*大手印要语师次), Tang. inv. 345#7216: f. 23.

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48 See (Yamamoto 2012, pp. 24–28, 90–96) methodological discussions on Bla-ma Zhang’s hegemony-building project through the case of the lineage as a “discursive formation.”
Notes on the Keypoints of Mahāmudrā as the Ultimate (大手印要门集记), vol. 1 (commentary on the first part of the DJY from the beginning till the end of Nāgārjuna’s biography), Tang.#inv. 345#2858 (manuscript, 22 folios), Tang.#inv. 345#7163 (manuscript, 34 folios), and Tang.#inv. 427#3817 (manuscript, the first 29 folios on verso).

Notes on the Keypoints of Mahāmudrā as the Ultimate (大手印要门集记), the final volume (commentary on the final part of the DJY which is missing in the currently available texts) and colophon, Tang.#inv. 345#2851 (manuscript, 26 folios).

Keypoints of Mahāmudrā as the Ultimate (大手印要门集记), Tang.#inv. 345#2526 (xypograph, 27 folios, incomplete), Tang.#inv. 345#824 (manuscript, 20 folios, incomplete) and Inv. 2876 (manuscript, 24 folios, incomplete). In (Sun and Nie 2018, pp. 295–335) (Tangut text and Chinese translation, based on #2526 and #824).

2.2. Tibetan Works:

bDe lo


bKa’ bdun


brGyud sna


Dus zhus


Dwags stshing


gNas go


Grub lo


gSol skor


Phyag gces


Phyag lam


sGrub snying


Thig gser A

dPal dbyinjar tshogs ’khor byas pa’i dus su rnal ’byar pa grub pa thob pa bzhi bcus rdo rje’i mgur bzhengs pa nyams kyi man ngag thig le gser gyi phreng ba. P 3277.

Thig gser B


Zab thob

Ngag-dbang Blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho, Zab pa dang rgya che ba’i dam pa’i chos kyi thob yog gnyag’i chu rgyun las glegs bam dang po. In NgS: 1–600, vol. 1.

2.3. Indian Works

DBh

Dasabhumikasutra. In (Rahder 1926 and Société belge d'études orientales) (Sanskrit text).

2.4. Chinese Works

DJY


SFJ

Shicheng dengchu feng jilun yi 师承等处奉集轮仪. In DYM, vol. 4.

XDBP


XDJ


References


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