Karma Chags Med’s Mountain Dharma: Tibetan Advice on Sociologies of Retreat

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KARMA CHAGS MED’S MOUNTAIN DHARMA: TIBETAN ADVICE ON SOCIOLOGIES OF RETREAT

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B.A., Occidental College, 2007

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Colorado in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, Department of Religious Studies, 2013
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Karma Chags Med’s *Mountain Dharma*: Tibetan Advice on Sociologies of Retreat
written by Eric Haynie
has been approved for the Department of Religious Studies

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Within both the Euro-American and Tibetan—both etic and emic—imaginaries, the renouncer is seen as the spiritual practitioner ensconced in an isolated world of retreat, totally separate from the world. This vision, of course, produced out of the allure of the renunciate ideal—part fantasy, part reality—that sustains the authority of the religious teacher and lineage. In this thesis I examine the category of “renunciation” in Tibetan Buddhism and the means by which the seemingly contradictory renunciate ideal and need to be involved in practical, worldly affairs are negotiated and bridged. I ground my thinking by way of a close examination Mountain Dharma: Direct Advice on Retreat, a seminal retreat advice text (Tib. zhal gdams) of 17th century religious master Karma chags med, a luminary of the Karma bka’ brgyud lineage of Tibet.

Drawing from my original translations of selected chapters of Mountain Dharma, I demonstrate that the negotiation of the ideal and the actual, in terms of renunciation, was an active process for Karma chags med, who was acutely aware of the need to account for practical, social engagement. By situating Mountain Dharma in the historical, political, and religious conjunctures of its production, I propose that Karma chags med be understood as engaging in a domesticization of renunciation. His lineage was in a nadir, its leader exiled by the Dge lugs pa sect, and the articulation of a domesticated renunciation may have been conducive to the Karma bka’ brgyud pas operating under reduced circumstances.

Building upon theorists of South Asian religion and culture, I suggest that renunciation and retreat, for Karma chags med, is best understood as orbital. His advice text explicitly prescribes a renunciate ideal, and simultaneously includes chapters detailing practices by which a retreatant can attend to worldly, social affairs, such as garnering wealth or maintaining protection from brigands. I argue that we can understand renunciation as orbital in that “renunciation” is the productive tension between the ideal and the actual, and that, in this Tibetan context, we can make sense of the term only by considering and coming to understand both.
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E. The Activity of Drogön Rechen: Notes on Daily Practice for Accomplishment in the Manner of Protectors and Deities of Wealth
Introduction

In Nicholas Roerich’s artistic oeuvre we encounter the recurrent trope of a socially withdrawn, almost otherworldly figure that is cloaked in reflection and solemnity. His painting “In thought” evinces just such an ascetic ideal through the image of a lone, robed meditator perched atop a mountain, backdropped by blue sky and the sun-reddened Himalaya. Within both the Euro-American and Tibetan imaginaries lies this ideal of the “pure” ascetic, a practitioner who has entirely divorced and separated from sociality in order to perfect religious cultivation. The idea of isolated and solitary retreat, of course, is both a Euro-American fantasy of Tibet as a hyper-spiritual and isolated country (as per Donald Lopez’s thought in Prisoners of Shangri-La) and a genuine ideal for Tibetans. It is part real—as an ideal that is articulated from within religious traditions—and part fantasy. No one is ever withdrawn fully from the world. What’s more the ascetic master must always in some way engage the world, be they a retreatant relying upon patrons for continued material support or a figure around whom settlements develop. Although Euro-American fascinations with the topic tend to romanticize the notion of the solitary figure removed from the fetters of sociality and worldliness, the ascetic ideal is always a negotiation between isolation and social ensconce ment.

In this thesis I examine the ways in which these polarities—the ideal and the actual—are rhetorically engaged and deployed within the category of renunciation. How exactly are the supposedly or presumably incongruous ideals of isolated retreat and social reciprocity negotiated? What can we glean from the disentangling of “solitary retreat” and the ascetic ideal in scholarship on South Asian and Tibetan traditions? To address these questions, I think about social histories of retreat, attending to both the idealistic and
practical concerns of renunciation by suggesting that we consider renunciation to be “orbital:” a *productive tension* between prescriptive ideals and the actual practicalities. Christian historian Peter Brown’s work cautioned against casting renunciants apart from and opposed to the social, and I bring a similar lens to Tibetan textual history. There is little to date written about the social dimensions of retreat and asceticism in Tibetan Buddhist traditions. What comes from that has been largely anthropological, and I contribute to scholarship by attending to a literary discourse analysis of those dimensions.

The primary source for this study is the Karma bka’ brgyud figure Karma chags med’s *Mountain Dharma: Direct Advice on Retreat* (Tib. *ri chos mtshams kyi zhal gdam*). The text is a pre-eminent source for this project in that Karma chags med, retaining a realistic eye towards retreat, engages in an active resurgence of an ascetic ideal reminiscent of Mi la ras pa’s life story. *Mountain Dharma* covers a breadth of topics, including preliminary practices, the geomantic arranging a retreat abode, and the advanced practices of *Mahāmudrā* and *Rdzogs chen*. Interestingly, though, he includes teachings on practices to garner wealth and power for self and patrons and to protect one from bandits and brigands—a far cry from what one might expect in a treatise about retreat amidst the mountains.

Methodologically, I engage in rhetorical analyses of selected chapters from *Mountain Dharma*. Borrowing Paul Harrison’s term—textual anthropology—I employ a methodology that asks of texts, “what does renunciation look like as a lived practice?” I do so with an eye towards the literary strategies and devices that evince the renunciant ideal, issues of social integration, and the tension between those two. In *Mountain Dharma* both the ideal of total isolation and an eminent concern for practical considerations of patronage and worldliness
emerge. These highlight the tension that is the focus of this study, i.e. the conflict between a practitioner who must retain a hermetical distance while continuing to relate to patrons and disciples. Karma chags med seems to be acutely aware of this necessity and tension even as he brings the ascetic ideal—embodied in Bka’ brgyud lore by Mi la ras pa—into visibility. This “retreat” to a historically older ideal evidences a politicization of asceticism towards advancing Bka’ brgyud interests. It is a means of constructing a new religious authority within the Bka’ brgyud tradition and beyond, which reflects its fractured political and social location in the 17th century.

This thesis is comprised of four chapters. In chapter one, I give a historical account of the religious and socio-political environment in which Mountain Dharma was written, and give a brief biography of Karma chags med. The 17th century was a troubled and quarrelsome time in central Tibet, and in detailing the tensions between the Bka’ brgyud and Dge lugs schools of Tibetan Buddhism I suggest that this seminal, extensive text on retreat practices may have been a response to the weakened political place of the Bka’ brgyud tradition. Chapter two surveys literature and current theory on renunciation in the field of South Asia. Drawing upon the likes of S.J. Tambiah, Patrick Olivelle, Gananath Obeyesekere, and Ronald Davidson, I overview and wrangle with some of the trends that have run throughout much scholarship on the topic of renunciation, towards scaffolding my claim that renunciation is itself the productive tension between a renouncer seeking to embody an ideal while remaining to some degree socially ensconced.

Chapter three overviews the genre of direct advice (zhal gdam) in Tibetan literature, and the concept of “advice” as a textual genre more broadly. Drawing from current scholarship on advice texts in Tibetan literature—which is itself rather scant—and
from Walter Ong’s work on the relationship between literacy and orality, I suggest that
*Mountain Dharma*, itself a *zhal gdam*, is as an advice text the ideal venue for textual
anthropology. Chapter four consists of close readings of selected chapters from *Mountain
Dharma*. I examine chapters that deal with both Karma chags med’s construction and
articulation of a renunciate ideal and with his explanation of matters of a more “quotidian”
grade, namely the generation of wealth and protection against robbers while in retreat.

This project contributes to scholarship by providing an introduction to *Karma chags
med*’s yet un-translated advice text. I demonstrate that the aforementioned tension
between sociality and retreat is already accounted for, so to speak, in Tibetan writing, and
that a nuanced study of renunciation ought to sustain the tension between the ideal and the
actual, for the “orbit” between the two allows us to consider renunciation without reducing
it to mere idealism. Moreover, by harnessing *zhal gdam* as a genre and examining Karma
chags med’s advice, I bring sociological dimensions of retreat in Tibetan traditions into a
more visible space, counterposed to the fantasy of hermetic isolation we find in Roerich’s
paintings.
Chapter 1 | Karma chags med and the Seventeenth Century

The present study harnesses the work of Karma chags med, a 17th century adept of the Karma Bka’ brgyud lineage of Tibet, in examining “renunciation” as expressed in Tibetan advice texts. The site of investigation and analysis are my translations of his monumental text *Mountain Dharma: Direct Advice on Retreat.*¹ The era in which the text was composed, and the time into which Karma chags med was born, was a politically and religiously trepidatious time in central Tibet (the provinces of Dbus and Gtsang) and the eastern region of Khams. His own lineage was, leading up to and during the time that *Mountain Dharma* was written, in something of a nadir. The Karma bka’ brgyud underwent persecution and forcible conversion of some monasteries at the hand of the Dge lugs pas and Gushri Khan and the Mongols. The 10th Karma pa, Chos dbying rdo rje, was exiled out of central Tibet and western Khams, spending 20 plus years away from Bka’ brgyud strongholds. As a result, the lineage was without its primary leadership, and operated under markedly reduced circumstances. Bearing in mind the milieu into which Karma chags med was born and operated, we will see, will be of sound import as we contextualize and dive into *Mountain Dharma* and the project of renunciation.

In the 1550s in Gtsang, an aristocrat (Zhing shag tshe brtan rdo rje) rose to power and eventually came to declare himself the King of Gtsang. A staunch supporter of the Karma bka’ brgyud, he extended out and maintained good relations with the leaders of the Sa skya, Jo nang, and Dge lugs pa schools, though eventually ties with the latter became tense. Over the years, Dge lugs pas encroached in on the Dbus province, founding the monasteries of ‘Bras spungs, Se ra, and Dga’ Idan, and gained patronage from many of the

¹ Tib. *ri chos mtshams kyi zhal gdam.*
provinces subjects. In the 1570s Altan Khan, leader of the Tumed Mongols, converted to Buddhism (along with his subjects) under the Abbot of ‘Bras spungs Monastery (who would become the third Dalai Bla ma Bsod nams rgya mtso). Several years later the Dge lugs pas recognized the child of a Mongol family as the reincarnation of Bsod nams rgya mtso – a political move that gained major traction for the Dge lugs pas by securing political support from a crucially-needed foreign ally.²

At the time of the fourth Dalai Bla ma’s death in 1616, tensions had escalated such that the Dge lugs pas, in tandem with their allied Mongols, attacked the royals in Lha sa. Two prevailing factions in Dbus, Gtsang, and Khams—the Dge lugs pas and the Karma bka’ brgyud pas—had been having skirmishes for some time, each seeking political and religious control. In 1617, just after the fifth Dalai Bla ma was born, the governor of Gtsang, Sde srid phun tshogs rnam rgyal, built a new monastery for the Bka’ brgyud pas and Snying ma pas on a hill above the Bkra shis lhun po monastery (a Dge lugs pa monastery), and in the construction many boulders rolled downhill and destroyed Bkra shis lhun po monastery monastic quarters. To make matters worse, on the walls of the new monastery was written “Bkra shis zil non” meaning “suppressor of Bkra shis” or “that which outshadows Bkra shis.” Cattle herds were, in retaliation, stolen from the Karma pa, and quickly the situation escalated into warfare, and as a result many Dge lugs pa monasteries in Dbus and Gtsang were forcibly converted to Bka’ brgyud institutions.³

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² Karmay, 2003, pp. 65-68.
Amidst this sectarian strife, Karma chags med was born. In 1613, he was born as Dbang grags gsung (meaning “powerful speech”) in the Ngom valley of Khams to Padma dbang grags, his father who was a skilled Snying ma scholar, and Chos skyong skyid, his mother who by most biographies was described as a wisdom dākinī. Most of his biographies claim that Guru Rin po che prophesied his birth in Khams. His mother is said to have had auspicious visions of a white horse and many dharma protectors while pregnant, and beginning just after his birth his father gave empowerments (and apparently teachings) from the Ratna gling pa terma cycle to his son. From an early age, he is said to have had auspicious and precocious signs. He practiced sādhanās and had many visions of gods and bodhisattvas at age eight. At age nine he, having met a great hidden yogi, Prawashara, resolved to become himself a powerful yogi, and began wandering among charnel grounds. It was until age nineteen the Karma chags med both wandered the charnel grounds and maintained a fairly strict retreat.

When he was 22, Karma chags med officially took monastic vows and was given his ordination name (Karma chags med) by the sixth Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi dbang phyug, one of his main gurus. In 1635, he first met the tenth Karma pa, Chos dbyings rdo rje, and was given a wealth of teachings and empowerments for several years. Karma chags med travelled with the Karma pa and his retinue to Gtsang, was examined before many thousands of monks, and was confirmed as a great and learned scholar. In honor of the

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4 The biographies that are available of Karma chags med are quite brief: an abridged and very brief biography (rnam thar) is appended at the beginning the Mountain Dharma volume, and in English both Gyatrul Rinpoche’s books on Karma chags med’s synthesis of Mahāmudrā and Rdzogs chen (translated by B. Alan Wallace) and Lama Jampel Zangpo’s book on the Pal yul Snying ma lineage (which stemmed from Karma chags med) contain brief biographies.
5 Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, 8.
6 Lama Jampal Zangpo, 34.
7 Ibid, 35-8.
Karma pa, Karma chags med offered a finger of his right hand as a butter-lamp offering, and according to both Bla ma bzang po and Karthar Rinpoche’s accounts, nearly died from a resulting infection. An excerpt from his younger life has him offering another a finger from his left hand to the Jo bo statue in Lhasa’s Jo khang Temple, before taking bodhisattva vows.\(^8\)

Karma chags med’s biographies, in which the middling years of his life from 1635-6 until the late 1640s are hardly accounted for and only lightly detailed, tell us that for most of his life from age 22 to 37 he spent much of the year in solitary retreat in a retreat house above his monastery in Dpal ri in Gtsang, and gave teachings to disciples and patrons. Around age 50, Karma chags med recognized and enthroned the great treasure discoverer (\textit{gter ston}) Mi ‘gyur ro rje.\(^9\) Karma chags med was present at Mi ‘gyur ro rje’s discovery of the \textit{Nam chos} treasure cycle (which Karma chags med cites in passing throughout both \textit{Mountain Dharma} and other texts he composed).

About this time, in the 1640s and early 1650s, tensions between Dge lugs pas and Bka’ brgyud pas intensified. Tsepon Wangchuk Shakabpa’s voluminous \textit{One Hundred Thousand Moons: An Advanced Political History of Tibet} gives 1643 as the year in which the Karma pa was driven out of Dbus and Gtsang. A disciple of the Karma pa’s had been detained after Gushri Khan (again, allied with the Dge lugs pas) laid siege to many parts of Gtsang, and in his amulet box (\textit{ga’u}) was found a letter, along with an order of the Karma pa, that berated the Dge lugs pas, demanded the freeing of Gtsang and its government, and

\(^8\) Though the source is unclear as to what this means, there have been accounts of such “phalangeal” offerings in Tibetan and Chinese Mahayana traditions [see Freiberger, \textit{Asceticism and Its Critics}.
\(^9\) Karthar Rinpoche’s biography has it that Mi ‘gyur rdo rje was Karma chags med’s nephew, and other accounts have it that they merely had a teacher-disciple relationship. Mi ‘gyur rdo rje lived only to the age of 22.
called for the assassination of Gushri Khan and the Dalai Bla ma’s regent (*sde srid*). Of course furious, Khan ordered the destruction of all Bka’ brgyud monasteries and affiliates, and eventually gained control over central Tibet.\(^{10}\) The Karma pa, feeling that he would not be safe in staying, fled to Khams and eastern Tibet in 1643. In the years after that, many Karma bka’ brgyud monasteries were, just as had been done to the Dge lugs pas in the early 17\(^{th}\) century, forcibly converted to Dge lugs pa institutions.\(^{11}\) The Karma pa would remain in exile until 1674, when at the invitation of the fifth Dalai Bla ma he returned, the two made peace, and relations between the Dge lugs pas and Bka’ brgyud pas improved.

Whilst the Karma bka’ brgyud pas were in such demise, Karma chags med was in retreat. From 1650-1663 (age 37-50), he remained in his retreat house at Dpal ri and, when not practicing, gave teachings to some students. *Mountain Dharma* was composed there in 1659. After emerging from retreat, he continued to teach his disciples and patrons until his death in 1678 at age 65. According to Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche (who taught on the *Mountain Dharma* text to a Euro-American audience in the early 2000s), Karma chags med’s disciples expressed at the time of his death that some of his incarnations were Avalokiteśvara, the great King of Tibet Srong btsan sgam po, and the 8\(^{th}\) century translator Klu’i ryal mtshan (who was one of Guru Rin po che’s 25 disciples).\(^{12}\) Interesting to keep in mind, only in the last four years of his life were the relations between the Dge lugs pas and Bka’ brgyud pas on the mend: he was born into a time of great sectarian strife, and much of

\(^{10}\) Shakabpa, 2010. Pp 349-350. Shakabpa, who was a Financial Minister of the government of Tibet, writes with a rhetoric that seems to subtly favor the Dge lugs pas. Here, his accounting of the victory over Gtsang and the Bka’ brgyud pas seems to herald the events as boon to central Tibet, ushering in a time of little sectarian conflict and peace.

\(^{11}\) Ibid, 349-354.

\(^{12}\) Karthar Rinpoche, 7-9.
his religious activity and teaching occurred in the midst of violent skirmishes and fluctuations of power.

**The Text: The Mountainous Mountain Dharma**

*Mountain Dharma: Direct Advice on Retreat* is a mountain in its own right. The Tibetan text has 53 chapters that span over 650 folia. In English, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche’s mere teaching on the text is contained in four volumes. The text was composed in 1659, and it remarks that it was written by Karma chags med’s disciple, Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho, outside the door of Karma chags med’s retreat house in Dpal ri. Karma chags med, in the nightly breaks between practice sessions, spoke through the door as Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho penned his teacher’s words, “his fingers riding the horse of the wind,” in the cold night air.

*Mountain Dharma*’s many chapters contain a full-breadth of material and topics. The beginning chapters include an introduction to the text itself and to the practice of retreat, advice on the three vows and the taking of refuge, and preliminary practices (*sngo ’gro*). There are didactic chapters on karma (*las*) and merit, commentaries on various *tantras* and *yogas*, and instructions on Bardo (*bar do*). “The Compendium of Precious Geomancy” advices on how one ought to determine what places are appropriate and fitting for retreat practice, and “The Pure Path to Liberation”—which we will examine in the fourth chapter—introduces the notion of retreat and constructs a retretant/renunciate ideal. There is even a chapter on Ati Yoga (*Rdzogs chen* – advanced practices of the Snying ma school), which is interesting to the effect that Karma chags med identified through and

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13 As will be later mentioned, I employed Karthar Rinpoche’s teaching on the text as a way of honing in on and selecting chapters to be translated.
through as a Karma bka’ brgyud (this accords with his posthumous casting as a pre-figurer of the Non-Sectarian (ris med) trends in 19th century Tibet.

In addition to the more doctrinally oriented chapters, there are several that deal with quotidian, day-to-day affairs and that counsel on the interaction between a monastic and his patrons and disciples. This thesis will examine two such chapters: the 23rd chapter “The Cool Shade of the Juniper Tree: Advice on Restricting Enemies, Bandits, and Thieves” and the 51st chapter “The Activity of ‘Gro mgon ras chen: Notes on Daily Practice for Accomplishment in the Manner of Protectors and Deities of Wealth.” The 24th chapter, about purifying the obscurations (sgrib pa sbyong ba) of wealthy patrons, instructs in the manner of performing rites for patrons—while in retreat—who donate and provide for the material supports of a retreat practice.

As we will see, not only are such chapters’ topics—protecting oneself in retreat against brigands and securing and securing and protecting the wealth and possessions of oneself and their patrons—relevant for the interaction between monastic and patron, but also may very well speak from the reduced circumstances in which Karma chags med and the Karma bka’ brgyud were operating. Indeed, in his introduction to his teaching on this text, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche claims that, as the tenth Karma pa was “unable to directly benefit beings in any significant way”14 (i.e. he had been exiled and driven out of central Tibet), Karma chags med’s teaching was acknowledged (by the Karma pa) as the “emanation” of Karma pa’s activity. Karma chags med, from the perspective of a present-day teacher in the Karma bka’ brgyud lineage, upheld the teachings of the Karma bka’ brgyud during troubled times and in the absence of the tradition’s leadership.

14 Karthar Rinpoche, xvi.
The sheer breadth of *Mountain Dharma* speaks to this matter as well. It is explicitly directed at the practice of retreat, but the fact that it spans the range of topics from preliminary practices, various yogic and tantric exercises, fruitional practices, and the “social” concerns of dealing with patrons and “the world” suggests that the volume could function as a guide of sorts for all manner of people.\(^{15}\) There is “something for everyone,” so to speak. I would hypothesize that *Mountain Dharma* may well have functioned as a unifying text for the temporarily sundered Bka’ brgyud pas, at least to the extent that the text itself could stand as an expression of Bka’ brgyud pa doctrine. Though we cannot conclude that *Mountain Dharma* is explicitly a response to the dispersal and fall of the Bka’ brgyud lineage at the time, it seems reasonable to infer that such a seminal and extensive volume would have been highly useful and appropriate at a time when Bka’ brgyud pas were either forcibly converted or run out of their monasteries. It could function as “leadership/counsel under the radar.” Moreover, the reinvigoration of retreat practice itself might be a reworking of the ideals of renunciation, drawing again from figures like Mi la ras pa. The curious comment that Karma chags med was the emanation of the Karma pa’s activity while exiled lends support to that explanation inasmuch as *Mountain Dharma* represents a series of teachings in completion.

As a matter of future directions, a future study of *Mountain Dharma* as a text might engage the literary histories (in Tibetan) of the Bka’ brgyud tradition in the 17\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) centuries, as well as broader historical texts of the area, and look for citations of the text and indications as to what, in Karma chags med’s wake, purposes for which *Mountain Dharma* was deployed and used. The text is still available in monastery bookstores in India

\(^{15}\) Karthar Rinpoche echoes this sentiment, xv-xvii.
and Nepal (perhaps, too, in Tibet), and so something about the text is useful and relevant still, perhaps as a seminal text on retreat. Against the possibility of these readings of the text, the scope of the present study will focus on the rhetorical dimensions of *Mountain Dharma*. I read the text with an eye towards the methods by which Karma chags med articulates ideals of renouncing, as well as the concessions thereof—or domestication of renunciation—made in his chapters on practical matters.

Turning to the topic of renunciation, chapters two and three will detail the rich literature of and on the project of renunciation, and will examine the rhetorical and literary constructions of “renunciation” in *Mountain Dharma* as both an ideal and as a lived practice. The historical backdrop of this contextualizing chapter will help cue us into political and religious fabric in and from which the text was compiled. Interestingly, as we will see the renunciate ideal is reprised in *Mountain Dharma* in a manner that resembles the characterization of the Bka’ brgyud yogin Mi la ras pa, who was and is famed, among many things, for his strict retreat practices in caves and wildly ascetic lifestyle. Over the centuries after Mi la ras pa’s passing, the Bka’ brgyud lineage was institutionalized and “scholasticized” in its assent to political and religious prominence. But in turbulent times such as the 17th century, when the Bka’ brgyudpas were operating under severely reduced circumstances, a return to the renunciate ideal embodied by figures like Mi la ras pa may well have helped to maintain an identity for the Bka’ brgyud that would both sustain a cohesive image of itself and accord with the dispersal of Bka’ brgyud monastics, teachers, and leaders.
Chapter 2 | Renunciation: Separation, Enmeshment, and Interstices

Though the idea of renunciation seems at first glance somewhat straightforward, when we peer into its history in South Asia it becomes immediately clear that the notion of “renouncing from the world” has a wide and diverse register. In some historical junctions, especially in early Indian history, those who renounce are characterized by a “pure individuality” in which they live solely and entirely apart from sociality. In others, the ideal renouncer comes into view as counter-social, transgressing some social and cultural norm (such as early Buddhists, whose ascetic lifestyle ran against the ordered āśrama system, and the Paśupatās, who were the earliest Śaivite sect and disdained the Brahmanical doctrine of dependence upon the a supreme being). What is clear though is that these are both ideals, which are arrived at by way of textual study. Some of the overarching issues that appear in scholarship on renunciation in South Asia are emphasis on conceptions of the “anti-” or counter-normativity and the supposed total separation or counter-positioning of the figure of the renouncer to the social. Early scholarship on renunciation in South Asia illuminated the social means of distinguishing renunciation. Scholars have highlighted that renouncers articulated themselves against norms visibly—by bodily markings, or conducting themselves on the fringes of social space—and that renouncers distinguished themselves in relation to those norms. In this chapter, I overview various theorists of religion and of South Asian and Tibetan social history, and highlight their important contributions to the study of renunciation. I build on their thought by probing the nuanced relationship between actual practices and prescriptive ideals and the lived “mixed-ness”, and propose that we think of renunciation, as a category, as such a productive tension.
Theoretically central to my argument are the notions of contingency and discursive situatedness. In his work on religious identity and difference, *Colors of the Robe*, Ananda Abeyesekera argues that what constitutes religious identity (and the difference that creates its other) is never self-evident, transparent, trans-historical, or trans-cultural. Rather, what come into ‘central visibility’ as concepts of religious identity and difference are “contingent conjunctures” that emerge out of an ever-shifting discursive matrix that can then fade out of view. Thus, when considering the variant forms that renunciation takes, and the assorted lenses by which it has been analyzed and viewed, it is crucial to bear in mind that renunciation is neither monolithic as a category nor readily available for “canonization” across South Asian histories. That is to say, what is centrally viewed as renunciation in one historical conjuncture may not hold the same weight in another time or place. As we will see below, the procedure of withdrawing oneself—from society, from one’s “world,” or even just from certain emotional attachments—has a different valence across traditions and periods. With that in mind, we can approach the matter with an eye towards the nuances and complexities that attend discourses on renunciation. Etic and emic articulations of renouncing, and the rhetoric thereof, can help deepen and clarify the gaze we bring to the histories of ascetic practices.

The conditions of possibility for renouncing from anything are produced only through the specificities of a historical, cultural, social, and political era. What is renounced—ideas of sociality, social and political ordering, and even normative subjectivities and livelihoods—are all constructed differently in different times, places, and ways of looking at the world. The contours of what we today regard as social engagement—and as the norm of social responsibility—determines what it means for us to
step away from it. And those contours are markedly different from those 2,500 years ago on the Indian subcontinent or 500 years ago in Tibet. What’s more, the political and cultural states of things inform how those who renounce are to be regarded, or even deter and inhibit the possibility of renouncers to do so. Thus, it remains of central importance to bear in mind the larger-scale “picture” of the worlds from and against which renunciants construct their identities.

**Mapping “Early” Renunciation: The Individual vs. the Social, Renouncer vs. Lay**

In early scholarship on renunciation and asceticism in South Asian religions, the notion of renunciation (Skt. saṃnyāsa, “laying down all”) came into view in scholastic literature through the lens of dissent, contest, and heterodoxy. Thinkers like Romila Thapar, Patrick Olivelle, and S.J. Tambiah, whose works have been foundational for work on South Asian renunciation, raised the issue of renouncers counter-positioning themselves to the social world. As we will see in this section, their scholarship renders central the prescriptive ideals of renunciation found in textual sources and highlight the categories—ascetic/householder, renunciant/lay—that emerged in ascetic traditions and practices in early South Asian history.

Romila Thapar’s work on early Brahmanical and Buddhist renunciation and asceticism highlights the counter-cultural and counter-social aspects of Buddhist and so-called Hindu renouncers. Within the āśrama social system—the four-stage life cycle of student (brahmacarya), householder (grhastha), retired hermit (vanaprastha), and renouncer (saṃnyāsa)—the renouncer was a once-polemical figure that was incorporated and homogenized into social convention.\(^\text{16}\) At one point, the renouncer’s life was folded into

\(^{16}\) Thapar 1981, 275.
a “normal” life cycle and was orthodox as the last stage of life. Over time, heterodox ways of being that ran against the grain of normative society merged with the Śramaṇa movement (of which the Jain and Buddhist traditions were a part), which rejected the authority of the Vedas and underscored the necessity of exerting oneself towards release from the binds of endless rebirth. Thapar further argues that the role of the saṁnyāsin is undeniably political: a renouncer whose self-cultivation brought about certain supra-mundane powers could wield authority over the temporal and social order, thereby becoming a threat to it. The integration of saṁnyāsin, then, into the end of the normative life-cycle (as opposed to a social order outside of the normative) was a “form of defusing the political potential of the renouncer.”

The dyad that Thapar evinces is a contraposition of the householder (grhaṇastha) and the renouncer in Brahmanical society and the early Buddhist period. She describes them as “counter-weights to each other in social balance, and there is a clear-cut distinction between the two.” The renouncer, as noted above, distinguished him/herself from the social, but nonetheless required the social world—and the counterpart of the householder—as an opposing “weight” that kept things in a balance. The renouncer was counter-social, but required the very norms they gave up to define themselves. What is of concern to the present study is a lack of nuance and “shading” in the dyadic model that existed in early India. Thapar points out to us the fundamental difference between householder and renouncer, and in this study I aim to nuance the orbiting poles of idealistic separation from society and necessary encounters with it.

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17 Ibid, 294.
18 Ibid, 284.
Patrick Olivelle, in his work on the *Saṃnyāsa Upanisads*, like Thapar notes that early on in Indian religious history renunciation as a way of life was domesticated and tucked into the folds of the social order. As the nascent impulse to renounce and leave the confines of an increasingly urban and populous city grew, that impulse was harnessed and appropriated so as to govern the bounds and possibilities of giving up social ensconce.

This enfolding of renunciation into social order paved the way for new conceptions of how a life ought to be lived, as well as new ways of knowing the world. He argues that as the āśrama system became normalized, the idea of renunciation shifted in its register from externality to internality. Rather than solely a way of life that is ritualized and evident in the social world, the act of renouncing also became an internal affair, wherein one eschews all attachment to the fruit of actions - much like *Kṛṣṇa’s* instruction to *Arjuna* in the *Bhagavad Gītā* that even the householder can abandon or renounce. Anyone, thus, could be a renouncer proper, so long as his or her way of engaging and knowing the world was mediated by abandonment of hope or attachment to the future.

Moreover, Olivelle remarks that the renouncer’s identity, qua renouncer, is produced in contradistinction to—and is in that regard dependent upon—the society that (s)he has renounced. But, as he notes in a recent article on the relationship of “The Ascetic and the Domestic in Brahmanical Society,” there is a fundamental separation between the renouncer and their “world.” Through the interesting example of modern-day professional sports, he suggests that the ascetic “is doing something that deep down we all would like to

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19 Wendy Doniger notes that during the “second urbanization” in ancient India, in which agricultural stability and increasing complexity of social structure took hold, the high birth rates and heavy population densities stirred up the desire for more bucolic or otherwise less crowded environs, and likely conjured up a “cultural memory of wide-open spaces.” Doniger, 169-171.
20 Olivelle 2011, 57.
do but do not have the talent or the courage to do,”21 and thereby non-renunciants merely “cheer them on.” Here Olivelle points out the dual facets of early South Asian renunciation. There are renouncers, and there are those that do not renounce. Olivelle’s methodology, as well as Thapar’s and, as we will see, SJ Tambiah’s, employs a reading of textual sources that produce and prescribe idealistic renunciation, and elucidates for us the counter-social elements in early Indian renunciate and ascetic livelihoods. As we move forward (later) into Tibetan renunciation, we will build off of this dyad in probing into what the practice and project of renunciation looks like on the ground, as something lived out.

It becomes clear in scholastic studies of early Indian renunciation that there is a certain multivalency with respect to the individual. In certain conjunctures the individual renouncer, the reclusive figure living in the penumbra of society—in its shadow but still visible—was accepted as the norm. In Brahmanical traditions renunciation is a project of the individual, centered upon his or her peripatetic, withdrawn lifestyle. And yet in early Buddhism, as Stanley Tambiah notes, it was quite the opposite. The notion of individualism was counter to the project of propagating the Buddhadharma to the effect that, as the tradition of the Buddha developed over the centuries, only “organized as a community and as a fraternity” could Buddhists (and Jains) pose a “major threat to the Brahman’s beliefs and supremacy.”22 Buddhism and Jainism both emerging as heterodox religiosities amidst Brahmanical society, within the project of renunciation the notion of an individual had to be eschewed in favor of a collectivity that could rightly challenge the “orthodoxy” of the āśrama system. Tambiah claims that early Buddhism grew and thrived because the element of organized renunciation exhibited by early Buddhism allowed it to

21 40.
22 Tambiah, 317.
set itself apart from normalized Brahmanical society. This is, though, an unresolved issue. Reginald Ray’s *Buddhist Saints in India* posits the opposite, claiming that the centrality of early Buddhism was in fact occupied by the solitary forest renouncer. Collective renunciation for Ray was a later development that dovetailed off the “work” of the forest renunciant. Buddhism then developed upon the “momentum” of the forest ascetic’s insights and charisma.

From the social side of things, the renouncer and the ascetic, particularly in the Buddhist and Jain contexts but also in the Brahmanical, was a *formative* figure. Tambiah, echoing Louis Dumont, highlights that orthodox incorporations and appropriations of heterodox practices and ideas helped to progress and transform the tradition. That is to say, he remarks that orthodox Brahmanical traditions incorporated heightened emphases on rebirth, karma, and vegetarianism—all of which began with *samnyāsas*—that then came to the center of Brahmanical religiosity. This was so much so that the ascetic/*samnyāsin* was a “creator of values.”

He further notes that Jain and Buddhist monasticism—that is, organized and communal renunciation—marked an innovation in the social and cultural imaginary of South Asia. The project of institutionalized, monastic life had theretofore been unexplored in Indian society. Its effect was a renunciant-collectivity formidable enough to gain cultural (and later, political) traction. Of course, a communalized renunciation was also an expression of the struggle for liberation that made the renouncer’s life possible and

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23 *Ibid, 301.*

24 This is evidenced also through the image of the world-renouncer deployed for constructing religious, political, or (moving into the modern) national identities. Mohandas Gandhi is an obvious example, as well as Anupgiri Gosain, a 18th century militant-ascetic whose particular blend of ascetic practice and military exercise has to some degree branded an identity that has been harnessed towards certain political, religious, and cultural projects. See William Pinch’s *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires.*
reasonable more broadly—it broadened the conditions of possibility for renouncing from the world.

What we can glean from Tambiah, Thapar, and Olivelle is a sense of counter-positioning. Whether the dichotomy is “renunciation versus householder life” or “renunciation versus lay life,” the “versus” is the operative hermeneutic for their understanding of renunciation in early India. As was demonstrated by Tambiah, renouncers came to hold formal social roles—providing religious guidance to lay communities, who in turn could help support for the material sustenance of renouncers—and became entangled within the social world. The monastery itself was its own social world, with the *vinaya*/*monastic regulation* functioning as its own legal code. Whereas in the āśrama system renunciation had the householder life as its foil, as Jain and Buddhist monasticism developed (out of the Śramana movement), the primary distinction emerged as renunciation in opposition to lay life. Yet—and Tambiah notes this quite convincingly—despite the fact that Buddhist and Jain renunciation/monasticism was in part antithetical to lay life, it was nonetheless intimately bound up in and dependent upon it. For institutionalized renunciation to thrive, lay patrons were needed to provide the material conditions for its perseverance, as agricultural and subsistence labor was devalued and trivialized in Buddhist monasticism. Gifts from the laity materially supported monastics, whose new way of “doing” life sought to move beyond the vicissitudes and passions of the lay life.\(^{25}\) Thus, there was a kind of mutuality, wherein the material support of the laity kept the monastic life going, and monasticism functioned as an exemplary form of discipline, a source of religious teachings, and a beacon of a properly lived life. However, celibacy, as

\(^{25}\) Tambiah, 305-7.
as the donning of monastic robes and shaving of one’s hair, became a central discourse on the purity of vows. Remaining celibate and refusing manual labor meant that the monastic was socially non-productive or inoperative.

As we have seen above, this scholarship on early Indian renunciation and asceticism has identified and highlighted the separation and distanciation between society and the renouncer. The renouncer came into, as we find in Buddhism’s nascent period, a mutually-beneficial relationship with the social and with their former “world.” However, the two are opposed to one another, sometimes diametrically and sometimes with overlap, but quite often as though they are part of a reified categorical difference. Is there a middle ground, an interstitial or liminal space in which one can be a renouncer and in the world? It seems to me that the dualism we find in Tambiah, Thapar, and Olivelle reflects their having examined historical periods wherein shifts and ruptures in social and cultural fabrics might be more available or suitable to such a dyad. And nonetheless, we do see a hint of the interpenetration of social worlds in their work—the very necessity of the social for the renouncer’s identity underscores such a shared-ness.

Likewise, in early Buddhism its contraposition to society and to the lay life was part of constructing a power differential, by way of which the renunciant monastic order was able to leverage the idea a life apart from the predilections of worldly life towards gaining support from, and later power within, the social order. Reginald Ray’s Buddhist Saints in India gives some nuance to the “older” models of thinking about early Buddhism’s institutionalization by supposing a three-tiered model of Buddhist life. As we have seen, monastic and lay subjectivities came into a social and religious economy of exchange. Ray highlights a tension within that exchange, noting that somewhere along the way
scholarship lost sight of the ascetic ideal, and encourages us to think triply. (1) The forest renouncer functioned to sustain and keep alive the ascetic ideal, (2) the monastic institution gains insight from the forest ascetic and brings teachings and religious support to (3) the lay, who in turn provide material support. In fact, thinking about Indian Buddhism in terms of the monastic/lay split sunders the tradition by making a “sheer implausibility out of the ideal.” Ray’s work set a benchmark in terms of thinking about Buddhist renunciation and it’s ideals, setting a tone for scholarship on the matter that shies us away from thinking in terms of binaries and absolutes.

In the historical periodization of renunciation in South Asia there is, to whatever degree it may be accordant or discordant with the project of renouncing, a locus of individualism. In the āśrama system, the renouncer, the saṁnyāsin, enters into a state of heightened individuality, being separated from the web of sociality and living in solitude. In Tambiah’s account of early Buddhism, though, that individualism becomes somewhat deconstructed. The project of “communal renunciation,” i.e. monastic life, required a sacrificing of the individual qua individual in exchange for the increased accessibility and infrastructure of the renunciant life. A Buddhist monastic setting produced—a historical innovation that had theretofore been unexplored in Indian social history—a substratum of “life support” that provided basic necessities (food, shelter and the like). But still, the identity of a monastic and renouncer came about by way of a strict disjuncture from society. The engagement of celibacy symbolized an opposition to society, and monastic robes and shaved heads represent the bodily markings of the disjuncture from society. To whatever degree, the monastery or monastic setting early on was on the fringes and outskirts of a

26 Ray, 434.
village or town. Again, as Olivelle has noted, the identity of a renouncer was produced in direct contradistinction to that which they have renounced: society and the world.

As I noted previously, Olivelle, Thapar, and Tambiah each have already recognized and identified a sense of interpenetration between social and renunciate worlds. Though there was a marked counter-positioning to the social in early Indian asceticism, that very identification-by-negation took place visibly and very much in relation to the world. Thus, already there has been a recognition of articulations against the foil of the concept of renunciation we get from Roerich. Moving forward, I build upon this already-acknowledged sense of shared register world to analyze the category of renunciation in terms of the messiness of it as a lived practice. Whereas early work South Asian traditions described asceticism’s counter-positioning by way of bodily markings and ordering of social space, I aim to think about it in terms of the lived mixedness that we find in Tibetan traditions.

**Worlds Enmeshed: Thinking Beyond Dualisms in Renunciation**

The relationship between the renouncer and her or his “world,” and coextensively the relationship between individual and society, has had a variegated history. As we have noted above, academic treatises on the subject of renunciation have evinced a sense of bifurcation, wherein the social and the individual, the renouncer and “world,” are marked by a distinct boundary. Though that “line” may be crossed and negotiated, it nevertheless is sustained as thoroughly “there” and established. It seems to me that, especially looking into later works of and on renunciation, such a hard-lining divide does not pass muster. When we probe this relationship in other historical periods, it takes on more nuance and complexity, and the demarcation is perforated. Thinking back to Abeyesekara, we should keep in mind that renunciation takes different forms at different historical and cultural
junctures. Moving forward into medieval and modern South Asia and Tibet, it will be a useful theoretical hermeneutic to understand renunciation as having a “shared register” and lack of fundamental separation with worldly affairs, and to bear in mind a kind of orbital relationship—between the world and between renunciate concerns—that scaffolds the very identity of “renouncer.”

In the 7th century CE, the changing socio-political landscape of India effected an alteration in the fabric of Buddhist religiosity. In the middle of the 7th century the Gupta imperial formation began to erode, and with it the merchant and political support base for Buddhist institutions. A feudalism of sāmantas (vassals/feudal lords) became the realpolitik of the subcontinent. Ronald Davidson’s Indian Esoteric Buddhism claims as a central thesis that “central aspects of esoteric Buddhism came to embody directly and unequivocally the structure, aesthetics, and ideology of medieval Indian feudalism.”

Briefly, his work traces how in tantric Buddhists from the 7th to 11th centuries CE came to integrate militaristic and political significations and representational schemata within religious contexts. The use of maṇḍalas is described as a positioning of the religious practitioner in the controlling center of the world—a powerful overlord over his or her world—as a mimetic appropriation of political ruling models.

Similarly, siddhas, powerful tantric adepts, “imported a politics of dominion and control” towards gaining spiritual mastery. Davidsons’s theoretical presumptions for his text are quite compelling, inasmuch as he presumes that Indian religiosity operated on a representational register that was shared with the social and the political. Important to

27 Sanderson, 115.
28 Ibid, 131-144.
29 Ibid, 337.
note is that positing a shared ground of imagery and power-dynamics calls into question any divided and dualistic approach to renunciation. Alexis Sanderson, too, remarks that Śaivite and other Indian tantric traditions are not merely anti-Vedic and anti-ritualistic rebellions against social norms. Rather than outright rejecting the ritualism of the so-called Hindu world, tantrics became “super-ritualists” who added more “exacting and limiting ritual duties to those which already bound him.” \(^{30}\) That is to say, similar to Davidson’s contribution to thinking about renunciation, Indian Tantric traditions operated on a shared ground of representation, namely that of ritual and the exercise thereof. Though tantrics and orthodoxy “Hindus” (śrautas) occupied different spheres of religiosity, they nonetheless had a very common locus in the performance of intensified ritual performances.

With the thematic of shared register in mind, it is important too to recognized the inter-relationship between the tantric practitioner and their “world.” Though tantrikas attained spiritual powers (siddhis) through their transgressive practices—which ran completely against the grain of normative society and religion, imbibing proscribed substances (meat, alcohol) and inverting social and sexual hierarchies and engaging in illicit sexual practices—they also gained worldly and social power. Their spiritual prowess cultivated the image of a personage of power and awe, whose spiritual capacities and skills could readily intervene in worldly affairs, or even subsume control over them. \(^{31}\) As we will see shortly, the figure of the armed ascetic, who in medieval and later Indian society exerted political, military, and religious authority across much of Bengal, is a prime, “on the ground” example of the aspects of worldly power that tantric practitioners have wielded at various historical junctures.

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In a gesture similar to Davidson, Gananath Obeyeskere’s work on more contemporary South Asian renunciation, namely *Medusa’s Hair*, articulates the intersections of the social and the individual by way of a psycho-semiotic study of how renouncers and ascetics are both represented and represent themselves, and how bodies mark the shared register of individual and social meaning. Tracing the life stories produced in his fieldwork in Sri Lanka, Obeyesekere’s piece highlights the function of symbols—namely, matted and dreadlocked hair—in the expression, experience, and creation of personal identity in relationship with the social. Problematizing the division of public and private symbols, Obeyesekere remarks that shared cultural symbols can be personal symbols as well, and vice versa. He argues that personal symbols—markers of identity that are meaningful to a specific subjectivity—are distinct from psychogenetic symbols in that the former entail deep motivation (i.e. stem from unconscious or otherwise “deep” levels awareness, such as dreams, myths, and fantasy), while the latter do not. He distinguishes matted hair—a personal symbol that is produced from a personally meaningful and motivated space—and the shaven head of the monastic, which as a psychogenetic symbol doesn’t carry a personal or “deep” significance as much as it is an institutional injunction, a non-choice. His point being that cultural and social symbols are indeed articulated in personal experience, the personal symbol joins the two by mediating symbols from the cultural register into the immediate and personal experience of an individual.

His specific example of a personal symbol—matted hair—is evinced through his study of three female ascetics, in whose life stories matted locks are gained after ecstatic

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32 Obeyesekere, 46.
experiences with deities or possessions thereby. The symbol of matted hair—which draws
upon the imagery and cultural memory of the renouncing yogin— is not a requisite part of
ascetic garb, and so, he argues, the “maintenance” of matted hair is based on some deep
motivation and significance for the renunciant. Of course, and again a major point, the
matted hair is just as much a communicative and interpersonal symbol as it is personal.
Obeysekere’s primary distinction draws upon the idea of the psychogenetic symbol—that
which is not imbued with a deep motivation—as those that come about less by way of
choice and more by way of injunction. The shaved head of the monastic—the counter-
example to matted hair—does not necessarily come about through a meaning-imbued
personal experience or motivation but rather by the requirement that all monks have a
shaved head.

The take-away from the dyadic approach to representations of renunciation that
Obeyesekere constructs hinges upon the revolving door between the individual and the
collective, the renouncer and society. His usage of the personal symbol as an intimately
individual affair that also lands on the cultural and social registers of meaning tells us that
the phenomenon of “renunciation” in South Asia has a sense of irreducibility to the above-
noted schism in scholarship on early South Asian religiosity. For example, a woman with
matted locks, as he presents, performs the identity of a renunciant figure on both a
personal and social level. The donning of locks signifies to her that (at least in the case
studies he presents) some tribulation of worldly strife has both occurred and been

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33 In “Hair and Society: Social Significance of Hair in South Asian Traditions” Olivelle remarks that hair serves
as a symbolic grammar, and seems to suggest that hair is a site on which cultural, religious, and even political
discourses are hashed out. Matted or dreadlocked hair—“neglected” hair—marks a body that “withdraws
form all culturally mediated produces and institutions and from all culturally demarcated geographical areas
and returns to the state of nature,” 27.

34 Of course, Medusa’s Hair is also instrumental in bringing into view the female ascetic, helping
to cue us into the contours of subjectivity of some modern, female religious specialists/figures in South Asia.
overcome in tandem with an ecstatic experience of or possession by a deity. Her hair becomes a marker to her, herself, of the memory and story that articulates her renunciation from normative social life. And, at the very same time, matted hair signifies to the social world (of course drawing upon and striking resonance with a cultural memory-repository of the figure of a renouncer) that one occupies a space of partial alterity in relationship to the social. Some ascetics—particularly those engaged in practices surrounding sacred fires and dhūnīs/fire pits—often appear with matted hair and covered in ash as a marker of both the impermanence of materiality and of a nakedness that runs counter to social conventions. The renouncer is never fully other to society—and in this case how could she be, given the that the renouncer represents herself through symbols that are both personal and social—but does indeed occupy a location that is somehow different, and the body is marked-ly so.

Though the differentiation between personal and psychogenetic symbols aids Obeyesekere in teasing out and probing the issue of personal emotional/mental investment and motivation in various examples of renunciation, it seems to me that their articulation is premised upon the primacy of the origins of symbols, thereby limiting the possible significance of the latter (i.e. psychogenetic symbols). That is, the operating distinction is whether or not one's relationship to a representational symbol is imbued with and weighted by some degree of emotional or personal experience. However, it stands to reason that a monastic's shaved head—a psychogenetic symbol that is produced not by choice but for institutional coherence—could very well precipitate and come to be associated with a deep motivation. Symbols can become personally invested even after their adoption, and so even though one takes on a type of bodily (or dispositional)
comportment by way of institutional necessity, it still can come to carry a deeply personal and meaningful significance. 35 Obeyesekere’s most meaningful contribution to the conversation on renunciation and the sociality there of is that the renouncer and society have a shared register of symbols and symbolic meaning, from which both the social world and the individual renouncer operate.

The purpose of this thesis is in part to argue that dyads in scholarship on renunciation, which attempt to fit the figure of the renouncer into a neat-fitting divide, fail to capture the nuance and “messiness” of renunciation as a lived practice. It seems that much of the impulse to view the renouncer as anti- or a-social and absorbed in a kind of hyper-spiritual state rests on the increasingly deconstructed hermeneutic of the religious vs. the secular, which emerged out of Enlightenment thought in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Enlightenment lens tells us that when examining “life” we can sift out religious phenomena and expressions from all else. The secular is the public, non-religious sphere of life, and the religious is the interior, belief-centered, de-politicized world of the individual. It is the individual whose subjectivity is the lynchpin for the enterprise of modern-secular approaches to religion.

The internal/external, private/public divide being a major theoretical presumption, the central visibility of the renunciant as tucked deep into the folds of introspective reflection—and more importantly markedly apart from the social—becomes all the more obvious. If the proper expression of religiosity is privately introspective and interior, then

35 Another point of departure—far beyond the purposes of this project but nonetheless important to note—is Obeyesekere’s Freudian leanings in his theoretical matrix. Wherever Freudian thought lands in contemporary cultural theory, it seems a stretch to extend a corpus of thought based on research on Euro-American subjectivities to the bodies, speech, and thought of South Asian renunciates (say, in his assertion that the matted locks of the female ascetic are the sublimation from the husband’s phallus to that of the deity).
it becomes anathema to think of a renouncer, whose religiosity is far beyond the average person, as being wrapped up in the fetters of the secular world. However, the more we look into historical sources and periods the more it becomes clear that such an episteme of renunciation is untenable.

In the 18th century, the Saṁnyāsa Rebellion in Northern India confronted just such a modern, secular view of religion through conflicts between the English East India Company and armed ascetics (gosains). Prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was common in the northern Indian subcontinent for wandering ascetics to bear arms, and more importantly they were adeptly martial and wielded a good deal of worldly power. William Pinch's Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires notes how, to the yogi or ascetic, “religion” is intimately bound up in victory over death. Thereby, the armed ascetic exemplified that, contrary to the Enlightenment or Protestant definition of religion, religion and power (and religion and the political) were more conjoined than disjoined. Well-acquainted with discipline and stoicism, the armed ascetic was ideally suited for the physical and mental strains of battle, and the pursuit of victory over death gave the gosain or the bairagi a heavy air of both religious and worldly power.37

In the 1770s and 80s, skirmishes in Bengal between the Company and bands of gosains escalated into frequent battles—the Saṁnyāsin/Fakir Rebellion—which Pinch notes gradually lead to an eroding of the public image and self-understanding of the gosain. What seems to have taken place is a battle of cultures and conceptions of religion. Both gosains (under the leadership of Anupgiri, a prominent religious/political/military figure in

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36 Shaivite and Vaishnavite ascetics, respectively.
37 Pinch, 16.
38 Pinch makes a point that the identity of armed ascetics/gosains had a hazy register, as saṁnyāsins and fakirs both—that is, so-called “Hindu” and Muslim ascetics respectively—were given that moniker.
Bengal in the later 18th century) and the Company sought to lay claim to the right to collect tax and tribute in Bengal, and the political-hermeneutic of the British was unable to account for the potential of naked ascetic masters to wield “earthly” power. Thus, for two plus decades groups of ascetics and Company troops collided over the nebulous space that connects the so-called religious to the so-called secular.

Pinch’s historical research demonstrates for us the interstitial existence of the figure of the renouncer—in the 18th and 19th centuries, at least—in South Asia. Anupgiri Gosain (the central figure of his research and metonym for “armed ascetic” more broadly) was simultaneously a religious and ascetic master, political mogul, and leader of a formidable military force. His life story tells us that, in the cultural and historical conjunctures that constituted his era, the renouncer could occupy many “worlds,” and in turn resisted canonization into any one categorized identity. Indeed, we must be diligently aware of the ebb and flow of both emic and etic approaches to understanding what a renouncer is. From the perspective of the English, gosains like Anupgiri quite rapidly shifted from allies who were employed as mercenary aid to enemies threatening colonial gain and progress—thereby demonstrating that there is a certain conceptual slipperiness that attends colonial engagement with renouncers. Similarly, in the 18th century armed renouncers quite easily fit into the folds—spiritual, economic, and political—of Indian life, and for some time even held the symbolic capital of anti-colonial resistance, being a central image of those who stood up against English colonial machinations. But as the momentum of Indian

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39 Pinch comments that it was quite regular for ascetic “troops” to expect donations and material support from both the elite and commoners in their peripatetic movements, and the introduced competition from the English precipitated tension (104-5).
40 I.e. the armed ascetic, at least from the vantage point we get from Pinch, became a problem precisely when they no longer served the purposes of the Company.
independence movements picked up in the late 19th and then 20th century, the once-celebrated armed renouncer was cast off—and into the confines of a religion/secular dyad—in favor of an increasingly pacifist ideal (whose denouement came about through M.K. Gandhi and his non-violent form of resistance).

Thus, the category or concept of “renunciation” is deployed and harnessed in variegated ways at different historical and cultural conjunctures. As we saw in the Brahmanical and early Buddhist periods, the renouncer was visible as s/he who had an identity apart from and in contradistinction to the world and society. Especially in the rhetoric of research on the *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads* (and in research there on) the “world” and the renouncer are distinctly separate categories. Similarly, work on Buddhism’s early phases characterizes renunciation as a communal phenomenon that is also a counter-world, engaged with but still totally other to society. As we see in medieval India, ascetic renouncers—“Hindu” and Muslim alike—occupied a much more nebulous space. They were very much a part of the social and political order while still retaining an idealized spiritual mastery. From even the quickest of overviews the non-static and inconstant texture of renunciation becomes readily apparent. The example of the warrior ascetic, though unusual and extreme, demonstrates that point, and moreover gestures to a certain lack of separation between the ascetic and the world of sociality.

In that same vein, Peter Brown’s work on early Christian asceticism and the Desert Fathers/holy men demonstrates how the power of renunciation is socially recognized and even deployed towards social concerns and benefit. As in South Asian contexts, where the powers (*siddhis*) of a renunciant wield political and social currency, the holy man of antiquity was through and through a man of power. His marginal living space on the
frontiers of the fearsome Egyptian desert was said to allow access to the power of the
divine, and through exorcism he asserted “the authority of his god over the demonic in the
possessed.”41 The holy man mediated conflict, and it was through that mediation that
villages and communities forged a sense of communal identity: 42 the distanced and
marginal ascetic became the very center of the community. In the coarsest sense of the
word the holy man was hermeneutical to the extent that he bridged the divine realm and
the world. Brown’s work highlights the very centrality—socially and religiously—of the
ascetic figure who takes home in the periphery of the world.

Continually, as Sondra Hausner’s ethnography of sādhus in modern day India and
Nepal demonstrates, to whatever degree conceptual and textual studies construct binaries
out of renunciation, when thinking about it “on the ground” we must sharpen our gaze. Her
analysis of fieldwork with renouncers and ascetics is a testament to the ever-social life of
the renouncer. Similar to the psycho-semiotic approach Obeyesekere takes, Hausner
grounds her work in the body and its manifold appearances and representations. Moreover,
she addresses the notion of space in relationship to the articulation of a renunciate
lifestyle—and more importantly in a sense of “spacelessness.” Hausner notes that the
renouncer in contemporary “Hindu” religiosity often is peripatetic and typically resists one
locale, and through the negotiation of “space” and “spacelessness” the narratives of her
study’s sadhus are able to represent themselves as renouncers. 43 With a hermeneutic of
“embodied dualism,” 44 she argues that all renouncers—except a scant few who can claim to
have reached the final goal of liberation—must always occupy and embody a dualism. The

41 Brown, 1971, 88.
42 Ibid, 90.
43 Hausner, 53-58., 83-89.
44 Ibid, 55-56.
body and material reality must still be addressed and attended to, and simultaneously the renouncer seeks transcendence from that.

The social break enacted by renouncers is consciously reflected in the religious effort not to unify, but to split the body from the spirit. Material reality does not say it all, renouncers argue: there are powerful forces beyond the scope of our bodies, which we cannot access without the help of religious life.\(^45\)

The lived tension implied in an embodied dualism is precisely the kind of negotiation I aim to highlight in a rhetorical, literary analysis of renunciation and retreat. Hausner, echoing Olivelle’s assertion that renouncing depends intrinsically upon its opposite (the social) with far more nuance and sophistication, quite brilliantly notes that not only does a renouncer rely upon that which they have given up for their identity, but deeply embedded within the identity of a sadhu is a fission—of body from soul, “self” from society—that must always be negotiated. In a brief reflection on her work, we are told that many renouncers regretted their inevitable ensconcement in the social world, almost as if they had embarked on a project that was doomed from the outset.\(^46\) Those who give up the world live life as an orbit between and perpetual negotiation of the “world” and its transcendence.

Though unaddressed in Hausner’s work, it seems to me that at the heart of the matter is a renunciate ideal that drives that sense of regret. Through texts, social narratives, and myths, both emic and etic understandings of what a renouncer ought to be are informed by the alluring ideal of total isolation. And yet, at least as far as anthropological work has demonstrated, the more profound insights we can gain on the matter tell us that there is always a lived tension that negotiates that ideal and the necessities of living (i.e.

\(^{45}\) Ibid, 57.
\(^{46}\) Ibid, 89.
social and material realities). *Wandering With Sādhus* is exemplary of the South Asian matrix of renunciation.

These works, which call our attention to the complexities and nuances of the relationship between the social and the renouncer, the actual and the ideal, provide precisely the kind of theoretical foil—along with Olivelle, Tambiah, and Thapar—against the perception of renunciation as a simple and mere non-dealing with the “world.” Hausner, Davidson, and Obeyesekere collectively present a heuristic that invites us to consider the ways in which renouncers are actively negotiating between, in their day-to-day lives, what they understand to be the ideals they seek to embody and the social, practical concerns that they must also accommodate.

On the Tibetan side of things, Davidson’s *Tibetan Renaissance* echoes his earlier thought by positing that the fractured Tibetan political landscape in the 9th century CE made a rich soil bed in which Tantric Buddhism could take root. Shifting clan authorities in Tibet paralleled the feudal environment in which Indian Esoteric Buddhism blossomed, which provided for a transition into the Tibetan plateau. The conditions of possibility for renunciate traditions (Tantric Buddhism) to come to prominence were in fact produced by the social and the political. It seems to me that Davidson’s text helps us gain insight into the fact that Tibetan religiosity—and renunciation—became possible precisely because the area’s socio-political makeup functioned as a fertile growth-bed.

As noted by Sanderson—and Davidson—Tantra and Tantric Buddhism relied intimately upon both the social world and on monastic or orthodox religious traditions. Rather than merely transgressing for its own sake—which Hugh Urban points out as a facet of the interaction of America with the many strains of tantric traditions—Indian Tantric
traditions intensified ritual practice in heterodox manners that stood against normative or orthodox religious (śrauta) expressions. That is, tantric practice was still very much rooted in the traditions towards which it developed an antinomian character. Echoing Tambiah, antinomian traditions were still very much bound up—in their identity, in their self-presentation, even in their practice—in the society or religiosity that they had sought to transgress.

Likewise in tantric Buddhist traditions developed and gestated in monastic settings. Christian Wedemeyer’s *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism* notes that the transgressive aspects and injunctions in tantric Buddhist scriptures are often the mere inversion of popular practices—mantra recitations, venerating monks, and so on. Indeed, he notes, the earliest tantric Buddhists were most likely “learned urban(e) Buddhist professionals” or monastics whose antinomian practices were in the spirit of non-dualism.⁴⁷ That is, the logic underpinning certain forms of tantra suggest that one embody and viscerally attest to their realization of fundamental (or ontological) non-difference by subverting Buddhist monastic purity codes and formalized and orthodox religious injunctions.

For the purposes of our inquiry into the texture of renunciation—Tibetan Buddhist renunciation—it is important to bear in mind the sense of hybridity we have been addressing. Tantric Buddhism—Vajrayāna and Tibetan—developed out of a shared nexus of the monastery, defining itself and growing in relationship with and against monastic codes and livelihoods. Moreover, as Wedemeyer and, as we will see, others have noted, the monastic/lay divide is untenable for Tantric Buddhism: non-monastic or quasi-monastic

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⁴⁷ Wedemeyer, 145-177.
individuals were also included in the realm of tantric practices and religious expression.\textsuperscript{48} That is to say, renunciation in Tibetan traditions is irreducible to the categorization of “renunciate monastic” versus “non-renunciate lay.”

Nicholas Silhé’s work on \textit{mantrins} (\textit{sngags pas}) and tantric specialists in Eastern Tibet brings to light the material and social aspects of \textit{sngags pa} and \textit{a la} livelihoods. Namely, his work emphasizes the hybridity of the spiritual or religious and the social, and details the enfolding of religious specialists and renouncers into the fabrics of Tibetan communities.\textsuperscript{49} The \textit{manrin}, moreover, functions as mediator of corpora of texts and ideologies. Sihlé demonstrates that through the \textit{ngagpa} in some religious encampments in Nepal and Tibet canonical tantric literature is translated into a local vernacular, a transaction that “take place between local orders and larger flows of culture.”\textsuperscript{50} Collections of texts hold social power, owning them being a symbol of status, and \textit{mantrins} of varying degrees of literacy bridge ritual texts into local and \textit{social} circles of significance.

Likewise Antonio Terrone’s work on treasure revealers (\textit{gter ston}) highlights how alternative religious communities and authorities have emerged and been produced in post-1959 Eastern Tibet.\textsuperscript{51} He also, in slight parallel to Silhé, addresses the social

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 178-9. Sanderson claims similarly in “Power and Purity Among the Brahmans of Kashmir” that the “visionary idealism” of Kashmiri tantric practitioners took hold with the house-holder, who continued the tradition by way of secret societies.

\textsuperscript{49} Silhé, 2009.

\textsuperscript{50} Sihlé, 2010, 49.

\textsuperscript{51} Geoffrey Samuel’s \textit{Civilized Shamans} also addresses alternative modes of religious authority by way of articulating a “shamanic” and “clerical” distinction. This model suggests that in areas with less state-control shamanic ways of “doing” religion—in Samuel’s terms those that deal with alternative realities or modes of awareness—predominated. The book itself has hugely problematic in hard-lining a divide between institutionalized religion and more esoteric/alternative expressions of religiosity that borders on exoticization and orientalism (not to mention the implications of the very title of the text). Nonetheless, Samuel’s work does encourage us to think about religion in its relationship to political, cultural, and historical periods and junctions.
configurations of non-monastic ritual and religious specialists.\textsuperscript{52} Especially in post-1959 Tibet, non-monastic and non-celibate tantric specialists (\textit{sngags pa}) and treasure revealers (\textit{gter ston}) have emerged as alternative sources of religious and cultural authority. Monastic institutions have found themselves wary of exerting influence, and Terrone notes that it is quite common for monastics, non-celibate tantrists, and lay folk to live together in religious encampments (\textit{chos sgar}) and have a mutual “economy” of religious and cultural exchange. Important to take away from the work of Sihlé and Terrone is that the distinction between householder and renouncer breaks down in Tibet—a la figure of the \textit{mantrin} (\textit{sngags pa}) and other non-celibate and/or non-monastic religious specialists—and there is something of a \textit{third space} in which renunciation and “the social” exist, neither other nor self-same. Moreover, what each of their scholarship provides is a studied articulation of renunciation on the ground. Tambiah, Olivelle, and Thapar centered themselves in the study of texts that evinced and prescribed the ideals of renouncing, which is useful inasmuch as the ideal and its rhetoric serve to structure the practice of renunciation. But what is lacking is the consideration for how those ideals take shape within cultural, social, and political realities.

The articulations that scholarship to date has produced regarding renunciation and the tensions between isolation and sociality in Tibetan traditions have primarily been of ethnographic and anthropological flavors. Silhé and Terrone have brought into view the conceptual (and political and social) complexity of religious renouncers and masters who, on the ground, live as social beings. However, as Olivelle, Thapar, and Tambiah have done with early Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jain material, we do not have much at hand that

\textsuperscript{52} Terrone, 2008 and 2009.
peers into and thinks through the rhetorical dimensions of renunciation. That is, how the text—and all varieties and genres thereof—in Tibet has been a means to negotiating the very tensions dealt with above. With that as a preface, in the proceeding section I aim to examine the content and rhetorical strategies of select chapters of *Mountain Dharma* towards addressing a Tibetan rhetoric of renunciation. Moreover, I hope to begin to probe what it might mean for us—in the midst of the deep-seated tensions of renunciate livelihood in a near-inescapable social world—to inquire into the social dimensions of retreat and of renunciation.
Chapter 3 | Advice Texts in Tibetan Buddhism

As the previous section noted, there is a broad spectrum of lenses through which “renunciation” is conceived and studied. When examining both textual-historical and ethnographic-anthropological studies, an implicit tension becomes apparent. In certain textual sources we encounter ideals of renunciation where prescriptive moments detail the practice’s paragon, but in studies of renunciation “on the ground” as a lived practice we get a sense of the renouncer’s social integration. Simply put, there is an implicit tension between the ideal of renunciation—which demands of the practitioner a complete separation from world and society—and the practicality of renunciation—which demands a necessary relationship to and ensconcement in the world. Texts are a platform on and through which ideals are articulated, made visible, and hashed out. The text, which in the form of a religious treatise is often concerned with ideal types and the construction and prescription of a crystalline ideal, does not necessarily give an accounting for the complexity of a lived life. That is to say, from our own study of texts we can glean how it is that ideals—of religiosity, ethics, or in this case renunciation—are articulated and produced by attending to linguistic and rhetorical usages. This was the methodology of the scholarship we saw in the beginning of the second chapter. In ethnographic-anthropological work, though, what we tend to encounter are ways in which communities and individuals practice, and therein we get a glimpse of how various ideals are lived out and negotiated to deal with social realities. Such work reveals the paradigmatic messiness of the enmeshment of renouncers within the world that textual accounts tend to elide.

In this study, I analyze a text whose structural and genre aspects permit its reading through both of the above-mentioned methods of investigation—it is a rare textual genre
that allows what Paul Harrison has termed “textual anthropology.” That allows what Paul Harrison has termed “textual anthropology.” Mountain Dharma: Direct Advice on Retreat, as the title informs, is an advice text. Unlike explicitly doctrinal texts, the contours of advice texts in Tibetan literature are such that they can function as a site of both textual and anthropological questioning and inquiry. That the texts are a conveyance of advice—to both purported interlocutors and the reader—makes them more practical and brings them more explicitly to the level of lived religion. Rather than solely articulations of lofty ideals (although such ideals most certainly appear), advice texts bridge the ideal and the actual, outlining a set of religious, moral, or ethical prescriptions that nonetheless take into account practical applications, and advise the reader about how one might practice or cultivate her/himself accordingly. The methodology I will employ is something of an experimental hybrid that parallels Harrison’s thought of a “textual anthropology.” This is an experimental method that takes up Harrison’s term in asking anthropological questions of textual materials. What does the text tell us about how retreat and renunciation are lived out on the ground? What kinds of social relations are implicit within it? We must of course concern ourselves with the ideals—without them we lack that which creates and structures religious meaning and import. But to merely examine narrow doctrinal issues does not do justice to the rich and often-convoluted constellation of religiosity that includes ritual, iconography, and—as is obvious for our study by now—social valences of a tradition. Some readings of prescriptive texts mistake them to be descriptive, purporting them to me more direct and actual. Turning to and investigating the genre of direct advice (zhal gdam), we can garner a sense of just how advice texts create a discursive space in which both religious ideals and religion on the ground are integrated.

54 Ri chos mtsams kyi zhal gdam.
thereby demonstrating the genre as an ideal fit for this kind of study. A textual-anthropological method examining *zhal gdams* will allow us to get as close as possible to a lived practice in a historical period—if not in a direct advice texts, where else could we look for textual evidence that approximates “actual” renunciation?

**Situating Zhal Gdams**

Buddhist texts translated into or written in Tibetan are intimately bound up in traditions’ methods of self-cultivation and instruction. As Matthew Kapstein points out, they are in some way “technologies of the self.” *Sutras, tantras, commentaries, philosophical treatises, polemical texts, texts on stages and paths, advice and counseling texts—all are put to task, as a “spiritual pharmacopeia,” to effect a certain way of thinking or being, to produce a certain subject out of the reader and interaction with the text. Moreover, as Kurtis Schaeffer’s work (particularly in *The Culture of the Book in Tibet*) demonstrates, textuality and the material production of texts serve to produce, defend, and sustain particular religious traditions. By aiding in the production of certain kinds of “selves,” texts as “technologies” ensure the continuation of a tradition. They help sustain and scaffold the transmission of the Buddhist tradition across times and spaces, and the variegated genres and types of texts do so in different ways.

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55 Kapstein employs this term in his essay on advice texts in “Tibetan Technologies of the Self,” but curiously makes no reference to its history in the thought of Michel Foucault. Foucault’s usage indicates procedures which a subject performs on and through his/her body and soul as a means of veridiction, of arriving at a state of happiness, wisdom, or perfection. Thus, *zhal gdams* texts (our genre at hand) are most certainly some correlate of *technologies of the self* inasmuch as their production and engagement are a way of cultivating a certain kind of Buddhist practitioner. What’s more, Foucault’s discussions of these technologies (alternately and later cast under the umbrella term “care of the self”) are traced back to monastic traditions in medieval Europe, wherein confessionary procedures construct and authorize certain modes of subjectivity in the monastery (see Edward McGushin, *Foucault’s Askesis*). Advice texts encapsulate an intimate connection between student and master (more on this to come)—as well as a connection with a particular tradition or lineage—and are utilized precisely for producing, authorizing, and negotiating proper pre-modern Buddhist/monastic/ascetic subjectivities.
Zhal gdams texts—the genre we encounter here with Direct Advice on Retreat—are wide-reaching with respect to their style and their context, given that they are produced out of historically specific junctures. Is zhal gdams even a genre? It is most certainly an emic category, as the term appears in titles of collections of individual texts of advice. In this study I do not seek to define the genre myself, but rather am elucidating and inquiring into the texture of one specific text referred to as “zhal gdams.” For the translation of the term, I have opted for “direct advice:” zhal is the honorific for “presence”—as well as “face” and “mouth” (and functions as a general honorific particle)—and gdams is the present tense of the verb meaning to advise or counsel. Thus, “zhal gdams” means something to the effect of “advice from the mouth [of a master],” or alternatively “advice in the presence [of a master].” With that in mind, these texts are “direct” because, as the genre title informs us, there is the presumption of an immediate encounter between master and disciple. This is sometimes reflected in a dialogical literary structure between the author and a supposed interlocutor, as in the Mountain Dharma volume and in question-and-answer (dris lan) texts such as Pha dam pa sangs rgyas’ advice to the people of Tingri. Oral transmission of esoteric and exoteric knowledge is central to Tibetan Buddhist notions of transmission.

Zhal gdams are cognate to two other genres of advice texts, gdams ngag (“oral instructions” or “oral advice”57) and man ngag (“pith instructions”58). The latter, as the name might suggest, entail brief instructions that point out the very essence of the matter,

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56 Kapstein highlights the Sanskrit upadeśa as a correlate of Tibetan advice texts, though scholarly examination of Tibetan and Sanskrit accounts seems scant. Eugene Bernouf’s Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism suggests that upadeśa can be both esoteric and exoteric. They are directly related to explication of tantric literature, but Bernouf points out the terms usage in a wide variety of textual volumes and styles that explain, comment on, and give advice on the dharma (p. 109-111).

57 From the Bod Rgya Tshig Mdzod Chen Mo: “phan pa’i ngag,” meaning “helpful/beneficial speech,” p. 1349. It seems plausible that “zhal gdams” is an honorific title for gdams ngag, as “zhal” is also employed as a general honorific particle.

and generally are of a more esoteric grade. *Gdams ngag*, though, are somewhat wider in scope, concerned with instructions on practicing meditative and yogic traditions. *Gdams ngag* are related to the Sanskrit genre of *upadeśa*, which is related to tantric literature in terms of both exoteric and esoteric advice. A presumed orality of the text is common in many genres in Indic and Tibetan literature, which is suggestive of the transmissionary process of passing teachings down to disciples, and so on. But, nonetheless there are elements of *zhal gdams* that are suggestive of practical and even, as we will see later, quotidian matters that are included in addition to doctrinal and religious concerns. As Matthew Kapstein has argued, *gdams ngag* are in large part an articulation and expression of the “dynamic interaction between master and disciple,” an interaction out of which a student is reoriented and attuned to the goal of a teaching. They are used as guidance for and instruction on practice, functioning to bolster realization and attainment.

In that regard, the “heartfelt-ness” of *gdams ngag*—stemming from the guru-disciple relationship—is shared by Karma chags med’s *zhal gdams*. In the introductory chapter Karma chags med recapitulates a dialogue with his student and disciple Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho, which frames the composition of *Direct Advice on Retreat* as an interactive composition. In the text’s “narrative,” Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho petitions Karma chags med for advice and teaching on practicing “mountain dharma” (*ri chos* – this apparently is a metonym in this text for retreat practice), and in spite of his initial resistance Karma chags med concedes to give teachings to his disciple. Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho, we are told, sat at the door of his teacher’s retreat cabin, braving the cold winds of winter, to put his words and answers to paper. And we readers sit there beside Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho,

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anticipating Karma chags med’s instructions, already in the mindset of being in a retreat abode. The reader’s footing into the text—which Irving Goffman posits as an “alignment, set, stance, posture, or projected self” that helps us manage the production and reception of a speech act—comes by way of this textual device that invites us to sit at Karma chags med’s door as well. The dialogical framework of a conversation or question-and-answering, cleaves a rupture and opening into the text (as opposed to a certain “closed-ness” that might be found in an expository piece or a treatise), the upshot being that, as we find in question-and-answer (dris lan) texts, the reader is invited into the conversation and may even have her/his own questions addressed. Moreover, this initial dialogue of *Mountain Dharma* clues us into the tensions within renunciation that appear in later chapters. The ideal of separation is invoked through the physical barrier between master and disciple. This is the closure that is nonetheless transgressed by the very transmission of this text—the irony is that this advice would not exist if there were not a sociality to retreat. The realities of the social engagement of the renouncer are there right in front of us, reflected back to us by way of that separating door.

Though there is a relative dearth of scholarship on *zhal gdam* as a genre, what does become apparent through examining this text is that the heartfelt advice on religious practices is but one of several aspects of the text’s content. Not all *zhal gdam* texts share the conversational framing, but nonetheless do share presumptions about the direct or personal nature of the advice. What we find in *Mountain Dharma* are not only counsel on practice and realization but also advice on more quotidian, day-to-day affairs. Protection

60 Goffman, 128.
61 Of course, there is an implicit conflict in this footing. It would be impossible for us to ascertain whether or not this is a transparent reflection of how the text arose, and yet as a textual device it frames nicely the content of *Mountain Dharma*. 
from robbers, generation of wealth and prosperity, and propitiation of protector deities are all included within the *Mountain Dharma* volume. Those chapters pertain not to realization but to securing the conditions in which realization becomes a possibility—and in some cases purely “worldly” affairs. Holly Gayley’s scholarship on Mkhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs demonstrates a similar breadth of genre material that goes beyond realization. In “The Ethics of Cultural Survival,” she examines ’Jigs phun’s *Heart Advice (snying gtam)* as a venue by which he articulates a “middle path” for Tibetans. His advice constructs and calls for an “alternative modernity” that would allow Tibetans to retain their Tibetan-ness, while remaining open to modernist ideologies, without being trapped by full-on assimilation into modernity nor by cultural isolationism. *Heart Advice* accords with *Mountain Dharma* in the sense that it, too, concerns itself with issues beyond the purview of just spiritual attainment. Namely, it focuses on cultural preservation—’Jigs phun reminds that “everyone should cherish their own people and the knowledge of their people”62—and a kind of Buddhist modernism, one that highlights the “rational, social, ethical, and ‘this-worldly’ dimensions of Buddhism.”63 Gayley’s work on ’Jigs phun’s advice text provides us an excellent example of the quotidian—or perhaps, “extra-contemplative” or “extra-realizational”—dimensions that Tibetan advice texts can encompass: ’Jigs phun’s *zhal gdam* includes prescriptions for bodily comportment, as well as calls for the preservation of Tibetan identity through language and traditional dress.64

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62 Gayley, 12.
63 Ibid, 59.
64 Her article also interestingly notes the incorporation of ’Jigs phun’s advice and religious teachings into contemporary Tibetan pop music and vocal styles (*rdung len*), which gives us a sense of the scope in which his advice texts have been employed and utilized.
Once again, if we consider the modes of inquiry into a direct advice text, the "personalized" aspect of the text—wherein the narrative structure is framed dialogically—leaves room for the ‘anthropological’ kind of investigation we find in Terrone, Sihlé, and others, which inquires into how communities interpret and employ textual corpora—i.e. texts’ sociological dimensions—and how texts configure into religious teachings and rituals.

Considering the relationship between orality and literacy may be of service. As I said previously, there is a sense of "closed-ness" of expository treatises. Simply put, in the structure of many doctrinal Buddhist texts (and genres) there is no dialogical structure. Propositions, tenets, and so forth are proffered one-directionally. In his work in *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong remarks that writing is a “solipsistic operation”:”\(^{65}\) words are alone on a page, devoid of the richness of personal interaction, author isolated from readership. He moreover points that the more literate a person or culture is, and the more textually-minded they are, the less expectation there is for formal discourse or semblances of dialogue.”\(^{66}\) The literary effect of a text posed as a dialogue is that it conjures up a texture of intimacy and directness to the author.

Of course, Ong privileges (and acknowledges as much) a literacy that is “naturally” inverse from orality, where as it develops, the rhetorical elements that suggest interactivity—the “Dear Reader” gesture, for example—wane. Not so in Tibetan Buddhist literary traditions. There, we find an alternate texture of literacy, wherein the reading of a text is very often an oral (and group) exercise, and the noetic processes of reading are more than simply silent and introspective. Text recitations—reading aloud from and sounding the words of a text—are not solely the territory of abedecarian or neophyte readers, but

\(^{65}\) Ong, 101.
\(^{66}\) Ibid, 171.
are integrated into didactic practices and ritual performances. Ong’s terms acknowledges a kind of a third space in which manuscript culture is melded with oral traditions—a “limited literacy” as opposed to “elite literacy”\textsuperscript{67}—and the dissemination and transmission of texts and knowledge takes place through an admixture of literacy and orality. The Tibetan sense of literacy parallels this third space.

Stepping back into \textit{zhal gdam}s, the oral and aural aspects of Tibetan textuality inform us that the composing, reading and utilization of an advice text is something that to varying degrees takes place in a \textit{social} setting. Moreover, whereas Ong emphasizes the “solitude” and isolation of modern/contemporary writers in their moments of composition, in \textit{zhal gdam}s the very inception and inscription of the text is centered at and emerges out of a dynamic, human interaction—or at least it is framed that way. This, in addition to the advisory (and dare I say worldly) nature of advice texts, suggests that \textit{direct advice} can be a venue for both textual and anthropological modes of inquiry. That is, in advice texts that blur—or at least problematize—reducibility to pure orality or literacy it is possible for both idealistic doctrine and pragmatic counsel to stand side-by-side.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid, 93.
Chapter 4 | Between a Rock and a Common-Place: Thinking Towards a Sociology of Retreat

“Because of loved ones, and desire for gain, Disgust with worldly life does not arise. These, then, are the first things to renounce. Such are the reflections of a prudent man.”
-Śāntideva, The Way of the Bodhisattva

Because revulsion is the foot of meditation, all activities of this life should be tossed out like what was presented to the Brahmins.”

“You can bring the many worlds under your power, because whatever you need falls like rain.”
-Karma Chags med

Mountain Dharma: Direct Advice on Retreat has 53 chapters whose contents, written almost entirely in verse, run the gamut from preliminary practices to advanced practices (Mahāmudrā/Phyag rgya chen po and Dzogs chen), and a whole matter of doctrinal and practical concerns in between. In terms of typologies, in the first series of chapters there are explanations of preliminary practices, which cover refuge, the taking of the three vows (of prātimokṣa/monastic code, the bodhisattva vow, and tantric vows/samāya), the generation of bodhicitta or the mind of enlightenment, accumulating merit, daily offerings, and the practice of guru yoga. There are “middling” chapters, which cover the practice of geomancy in ascertaining the suitability of a retreat abode, instruct on the propitiation of protector deities, and introduce the concept of the bar do (the stage between death and rebirth) and instruct on guiding the dead in transitioning the bar do. Then there are advanced practices, such as Mahāmudrā and Dzogs chen, and their combined practice, and teachings on various tantric rituals. (See Appendix A for the dkar chag/table of contents of the text).

Before moving into the content of selected chapters, it should be noted that the two general modes of inquiry I have mentioned—“textual” investigation examining religious ideals and prescriptions, and “anthropological” questioning that highlights how traditions are lived—can more or less be deployed separately in each chapter. That is, from what I
have seen in my work on *Mountain Dharma* it seems that Karma chags med is fully engaged in the rhetorical production of both the ideal of renunciation and addressing the practical concerns relating to a practitioner trying to live out those ideals, which makes the text so interesting in examining the sociological dimensions of retreat. Does the negotiation of the ideal and of practicality gestures towards the social dimensions of retreat? Though a thorough study of such a “sociology” would require both extensive textual and on-the-ground ethnography of his tradition today, the texture of the rhetoric and content of *Mountain Dharma* permits us to at least begin thinking towards a sociology of retreat, as the text is all we have for Karma chags med’s time. For the analysis of the text, I have selected three chapters for analysis: one presents the ideal of renunciation, and the others offer salient examples of practicality and social reality that counter that ideal. To date, there are no full translations of *Mountain Dharma* into English—all translations here are my own original work. There are, however, published teachings by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche—*Karma Chakme’s Mountain Dharma*—that are transcriptions of his exegesis on the text. Karthar Rinpoche’s teachings provided a guide in selecting chapters prudent for this study.

**Introducing Retreat**

In the introductory chapter to *Mountain Dharma*, “Seeing it, You Smile: Introduction to Mountain Dharma,”<sup>68</sup> we already get a sense of retreat and renunciation being situated in the “between.” That is, renunciation is situated between a village and distant lands, in a retreat cabin on the outskirts of towns, and conceptually situated between social

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<sup>68</sup> See Appendix B.
engagement and total isolation. The title, “Seeing it, You Smile,” seems to gesture to the sense of delight at the prospect of retreat (or even delight in the dharma more generally).

We find our “footing” as readers in part by way of an interaction between Karma chags med and Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho, who approaches his teacher’s retreat cabin. In their exchange, we find the standard element of authorial humility in Tibetan literature – Karma chags med introduces himself as follows:

One who composes out of great intellectual ambition.
I am a hypocrite who greatly desires fame.
I construct things with belief in permanence.
I collect retinue because I hold what is near dearly.
I benefit beings out of desire for wealth.
I live in retreat out of a great fear of death.

In this way, he plays down his own realization and satirizes the motivation for dictation, following suite with the common humilific trope, as is standard for the opening of any Tibetan composition. Such a rhetoric of humility serves to establish the author as being of the proper disposition—only writing at the urging of a persistent and pressing student—and as being ultimately of service to the transmission of their tradition. Karma chags med then further humbles himself by summarizing his retreat practices (which he says he undertook as a vow to his patrons), noting that leading up to the text’s composition he slept away twelve months in hiding, in a small, nice dwelling on the outskirts of a village.

Though this is but a minor inclusion in his introductory framing, it might tell us much still. It is of course couched in humilific rhetoric—spending a year peacefully sleeping

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69 The Tibetan is mthong ba ’dzum shor.
70 Each chapter of Mountain Dharma is written in verse. Translations cited are also in verse to retain the texts reading aesthetic.
71 The emic expression of this device—khengs skyung ba, “laying aside arrogance”—is in greater degree elucidated in José Cabezon’s Buddhism and Language (75-6). The skyung ba—letting down—brings up the sense of setting the author’s own commitments and impressions to the periphery in service to genuine transmission. Whether or not we can surmise the possibility of un-inflected authorship, it is interesting to keep perspective of the tradition in mind.
away isn’t what anyone would expect in retreat—but Karma chags med’s iconic status for the Karma bka’ brgyud tradition allows us to read between the lines. He situates his own retreat practices on the interstices of “society” and monastic solitudes. This might clue us into the “place” retreat and renunciation occupied at the time—theoretically distant from the social world but still very much near it.

The opening interaction between Karma chags med and Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho structures *Mountain Dharma’s* reasons for composition. Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho tells his master that he has “several texts on mountain dharma,” composed by the Bka’ brgyud masters, but I have not even received the reading transmissions, and there are great difficulties in putting them into practice.” Thus, truly as an advice text *Mountain Dharma* is cast as detailing how one ought to go about practicing in retreat and practicing in the Bka’ brgyud lineage. At this point in the text, the ideal of renunciation is set forth. Karma chags med tells his disciple that the Bka’ brgyud’s essential points of retreat practice are as follows:

[It] is renouncing all activities of this life,
   Renouncing homeland and taking up a mountain abode,
   Being fearful of impermanence and the thought of death,
   And forgoing food, clothing, and conversation
   To drink water, suck stones, and don the attire of a corpse.
   Other than sustaining the essence of your own mind,
   There is nothing else to do.
   Other than three supplications to your lama,
   You should have no recitations or accomplishments.
   There is nothing to contemplate
   Other than the arrival of Yama, Lord of Death.
   Should faithful patrons arrive,

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72 This eponymous term is used frequently throughout Karma chags med and Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho’s dialogues, and generally seems to be synonymous with retreat. Jeffrey Hopkins’s *Mountain Doctrine*, which is a piece on Dol po pa she shab rgyal mtshan (founder of the Jo nang pa school) and other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*), notes that the term indicates that “mountain doctrine” or “mountain dharma” is the definitive meaning of the dharma that is contemplated and practices by yogins in mountain retreat (pp. 5-7). Thus, “mountain dharma” indicates the stuff of retreat, and in our text all things associated with retreat practice
Like a weakened or downed deer
  Flee to a solitary place, or somewhere quiet.
  That is the Mountain Dharma of the Bka’ brgyud Masters.
  That is a practitioner, carried by the wind, without destination.

The ideal produced here tells us of a renouncer, solitary in a mountain abode, who has
given up everything of their “world.” As we saw in some images of the renouncer in earlier
South Asian traditions, Karma chags med constructs the retreatant as totally separated
from society. Invoking the memory of figures like Mi la ras pa, he enjoins his student to
abscond at the arrival of others to his retreat abode, suggesting one must eschew all human
contact while engaged in a retreat. Ray’s work parallels this assertion in claiming that,
contrary to Tambiah’s association of Buddhism with communal renunciation, the act of
“going homeless” was central for early Buddhism. Whereas, as we saw, (post-Aśokan)
Buddhism’s idea and ideal of collective renunciation was emphasized as a means to
garnering social and political power, by the 17th century in Tibet the Buddhist tradition was
woven well-into the fabric of society. And so it makes sense on some level that the ideal
for a renouncer in 17th century Tibet would hinge upon dislocation and non-attachment
from one’s family, home, and monastery. This also accords with the historical state of
things. Given that the Bka’ brgyud pas had fallen from political power were operating
under such reduced circumstances, the reinvention of the renunciate ideal was all the more
applicable in maintaining institutional identity. Their displacement could be reconfigured
as a return to the roots of their lineage.

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73 R.A. Stein’s *Tibetan Civilization* highlights the intersections of Tibetan Buddhist clergy, society, and culture. Despite his problematic use of “ecclesiastical” as a descriptor for the mode of political and state/village operation—which of course maps an ill-suited and generally incongruous religious/secular divide onto Tibet’s history—his work in detailing the contours of Tibetan culture and society were formative for the Tibetan Studies field.
Moreover, a sense of destitution or poverty emerges when Brtson 'grus rgya mtsho is told that the Bka’ brgyud way of retreat is the renouncing of the “necessities” of life (food, clothing, and conversational interaction) to live a rather extreme ascetic lifestyle—"sucking on stones" for sustenance and "donning the attire of a corpse." Somewhat simply put, the reader is presented with the idea of the itinerant and wandering ascetic, which was being revived during the period in which Karma chags med lived, “carried by the wind”—divorced wholly from social convention and (ideally) indifferent to food, clothing and shelter.

Immediately after telling his disciple what the ideal renunciant/retreatant looks like, he sets himself up as a foil to that ideal. He claims he has always remained near his place of birth, has "never lived alone for even a day," and even owns livestock. With “merely a house” as his retreat abode, he claims to have too little experience with “mountain dharma” to say anything meaningful or authoritative about it: by his own words he is patently non-renunciate. He then notes that “from age eight onwards [he’s] eaten food donated to [him].” This last comment—that Karma chags med has eaten only donated food —serves as a legitimating element in this otherwise self-humbling speech. Eating donated food is emblematic of the monastic community, and so what is subtly indicated is that since age eight he has been a monk. It is interesting that the rhetoric of humility here also allows for a more realistic picture of Karma chags med and of retreat to emerge.

This introductory chapter precisely frames what the tensions of renouncing and retreat are. Karma chags med articulates and nods to the traditional ideal of renunciation—taking up a mountain abode, wearing rags, solely contemplating the arrival of death off on one’s own—and then immediately jumps into language that implies a more “lived” sense of
renunciation, wherein one might remain near their town, have work animals, and have a surrounding retinue. Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho’s request sheds some light on both. His final entreaty claims “A great teaching that cannot be practiced/ Is just a text that causes a heavy burden./ I request your advice on how to practice it,” (emphasis mine). This request is emblematic of the tension between ideals and practicality. Here we have a disciple of a retreat master—who is in retreat—at his teacher’s retreat door asking how to put into practice the ideal form of retreat, which demands isolation. The situation is inescapably ironic, and seems to embody the very tension at the core of this study.

On one level, this informs us that in their historical and social context there was yet no text on how one ought to put the Bka’ brgyud pa renunciate ideal into practice. More importantly though, this signals to us that Mountain Dharma is—and of course we would expect this given its being an advice text—primarily concerned with how retreat is to be done. That is, how the ideal of renouncing is, from the mouth of a master, to become a lived practice. The political and social environs of the 1650s, as we saw in the first chapter, were such that the Bka’ brgyud pa’s were in a state of demise. By emphasizing the practice of retreat at a time when the tradition’s monasteries were forcibly converted and its head figure was absent, Karma chags med might be read as suggesting the Bka’ brgyud as an institution be in a “retreat” of sorts. As his dual motifs in the introduction (as well as several chapters) seems to hint at, through the negotiation between the ideal and the actual practice of renunciation and retreat we get a sense not only of sociological aspects of retreat, but also that a new image of the renouncer him/herself emerges out of that very negotiation.
Direct Advice on Retreat

The sixteenth chapter, “The Pure Path to Liberation: Oral Advice on Retreat” elaborates the Bka’ brgyud renunciate ideal. Karma chags med highlights common Buddhist tropes of suffering, attachment and aversion, and the precious human birth in order to exhort the reader to “give up” and renounce. All activities of this life—anything social or not involved in contemplating the dharma—should “be tossed out like what was presented before the Brahmins,” and one ought to wish for nothing other than the fruition of unsurpassable enlightenment. “Revulsion is the foot of meditation”—a common statement for the Bka’ brgyud lineage and part of the Vajradhara lineage supplication for the Karma Bka’ brgyuds (written by Ban sgar 'jam dpal bzang po in the 15th or 16th century)—and so turning away (zhen log – to dispose of attachment, “revulsion”) from attachment to anything is central to renouncing and practicing retreat. To bring the point home, he summons an image of extreme renunciation from the early Bka’ gdam pa tradition, whose practitioners “Being qualmish towards death [chi bar togs nas], did not make fire,/ Which impelled exertion in the dharma.” The rhetoric of the verse tells us that being ever haunted by the imminence and unavoidability of death, the Bka’ gdam pas acted as though death would come overnight, and so made due with only the scarcest of provisions—hence their not making fires for warmth, etc. And in another sense, the eschewing of fire may also summon the ideal of Mi la ras pa, the cotton clad yogin, whose mastery of inner heat (gtum mo) tantric practices meant heat from without was unnecessary. Whichever reading we make of this moment in the text, it is clear that Karma

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74 See Appendix C.
75 Presumably, this is a dig at non-Buddhist Indic religious doctrine—i.e. that which was presented to the Brahmins—which does not affirm anātman/no-self.
chags med is constructing the image of the socially-withdrawn renouncer, engaged in extreme austerity.

Essentially, what is to be renounced is everything—joys, aversions, all that is seen as good or bad in life—but Karma chags med particularly seems to emphasize the renunciation of homeland (*pha yul spang ba*). As in the introductory chapter, he enjoins the aspiration that “one should intend to one day be a guest in hermitage,” indicating a sense of social non-location—being a guest means that one is not of a place, merely passing through and not at all attached or linked to a place. This is further emphasized when he writes that Phag gru and Ras chen (two prominent Bka’ brgud figures, the former a student of Sgam po pa and the latter Mi la ras pa’s disciple) “did not return after renouncing their homelands.” Paralleling the itinerant and peripatetic aspects of renunciation in early Indian traditions, uprooting from the “home” is central.

On another level, though, the concept of renunciation in retreat is in this chapter cast as a matter of attitude. That is to say, though Karma chags med emphasizes the abandoning of homeland, the notion of abandoning (*spangs ba*) carries the sense of one’s disposition towards the world. One’s relationship to their natal place has the capacity to increase both attachment and aversion—“Warmth towards friends and hostility towards enemies increases”—but if one’s realization is such that they are not swayed no matter their location, then one need not renounce it physically. He writes:

The land to abandon  
Is the very place where desire and hate increase.  
Whether or not it is your homeland, if there desire and hate do not increase,  
Even if you don’t abandon it, you won’t not renounce.

Thus, if one’s physical place does not arouse within him or her either affinity or antipathy, then the retreatant may still be said to properly renounce even if (s)he does not leave that place. Renunciation then, even though the examples and language indicate that it is a
matter of getting up and leaving, is fundamentally about the attitude of non-attachment. Karma chags med further remarks that even though “friends and kin are samsāra’s bathwater” (’khor ba’i bshal thag), he reminds us that because all beings are, from beginning-less time, established as having been one’s mother and father, one must not cling to or push away anyone. This already softens the ideal of renunciation, and leaves room for the possibility of social engagement. If we think in terms of retreat sociologically, then this cleaves open a space for a sociality within retreat. So long as one’s approach to social interaction is mediated by a studied equality towards all people and situations, then one need not worry that their practice and renunciation will be blighted.

**Not by the Hairs of the Boar: Restricting Enemies**

Perhaps the most interesting chapter of the *Mountain Dharma* volume for thinking about the retreat as social is the twenty-third chapter, “The Cool Shade of the Juniper Tree: Advice on Restricting Enemies, Bandits, and Thieves.” As the title indicates, the chapter is advice on practices that are meant to ward off thieves and those of ill intent. It describes the details of daily practices a retreatant should employ to fend off and prevent robbery and malfeasance of brigands, and gives a context in which one would perform such practices.

The chapter opens as Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho conveys his fear of being harmed by bandits and thieves, and so supplicates Karma chags med for practices that will protect him. Karma chags med’s reply, interestingly enough, is first and foremost an assertion that his student need not be alone: “Lama, you yourself have many excellent qualities, And so it isn’t

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76 Literally “cyclic existence’s dishwater.” Bathwater, I think, bridges the Tibetan resonance to Euro-American registers, being something one tosses out without a second thought.

77 The Tibetan reads: mya ngan med pa’i shing, literally “the tree of non-suffering.”

78 See Appendix D.
necessary to live alone without monastics.” In accord with what we saw in the last chapter, Brtson 'grus rgya mtsho’s qualities trump the need for total isolation during retreat. But, he says, having too many (ha cang) horses, attendants, and pack animals is “a summoning of enemies,” perhaps hinting at a sense of elitism within retreat, and presumably cautioning that one should “keep it simple” with regards to the material and labor supports of a retreat. The use of ha cang is interesting—it indicates excessiveness in the sense that one ought not have too many horses and attendants, but implicitly says that having just a few is fine. Again here we see a domestication of the renunciate ideal.

Basically, the chapter is Karma chags med’s instruction on the sādhaā (sgrub thabs) of Marici, a form of Dpal ldan lha mo (Skt. Śridevi). Dpal ldan lha mo is a wrathful protector deity, the female consort of the wrathful deity Mahākāla, who often appears blue in color sipping blood from a skull and in modern times viewed as the protectress of Tibet. In the practice the deity Marici appears as a 16-year-old girl (though the text does not indicate who that might be – just a girl), adorned with garments and jewels, holding a needle in her right hand and a thread in her left. She sits atop a yellow wild boar, and in the visualization from her emerge concentric fences of vociferous, snorting boars. The practices in the chapter—two variations of these visualizations—are daily practices mean for protection of the practitioner, his/her entourage, and possessions.

The mantra used for morning practice (Om Marichi Öserchen Dakjak Mi Nor Tamje Kyop Shik Svāhā - Tib. om mā rī tṣyī 'od zer can bdag cag mi nor thams cad la skyobs shig swā hā is itself indicative of a renunciate ideal being lived out. The asks for Marici to “protect us, all people and all wealth.” That is to say, the retreatant supplicates Marici that not only they

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79 the text reads grwa pa, meaning “monk.” It carries a sense of being a novitiate or pupil, and so I have opted for “monastic,” but it may well indicate having subordinate monastic attendants.
be protected, but their material (and as we will see, animal) possessions be kept safe. Talk about non-attachment! This is of course surprising to the extent that the ideal of renouncing—being “carried by the wind” and being content with “sucking stones and donning the garb of corpses” as Karma chags med puts it—doesn’t leave much room for spending time everyday towards protecting one’s life and possessions. The use of this mantra in this context gestures to the complexity, nuance, and even irony of retreat as Mountain Dharma presents it. Though we were told several times that in retreat one ought to abandon all, here without comment Karma chags med intimates, as he has advised his student, that one almost naturally would have attendants, horses, and wealth. The presumption of an entourage is common, as higher bla mas in retreat might have at least one attendant. As we saw with the beginning of the chapter, Karma chags med seems to be domesticating the renunciate ideal, perhaps a reflection of the mediation of traditional ideal with actual and present-day realities or even an instance of a “domesticated” renunciation for the benighted Karma bka’ brgyud. Of course, it stands to reason that hoping to ensure one’s livelihood would allow them further practice, which in turn helps more sentient beings down the line. Nonetheless, it is striking to encounter wealth-protection practices in a text called Direct Advice on Retreat.

How is it that we can conceptually account for practices like this in a text that is patently about retreat and the renunciate life? Isn’t the point of retreat to disentangle oneself from the fetters of attachment to transient things? Explicitly, Karma chags med’s comments in the “Advice on Retreat” chapter indicate the lack of need for isolation for his disciple who is of sufficient realization, and that non-necessity of isolation lends to the inclusion of wealth-protection practices. By being unattached and without desire, dealing
with worldly things is less of an issue. The presumption of realization at least permits the elite to have an entourage. In practical chapters of this volume the sociology of retreat is implicit.

But it seems to me that at a subtle level what we find in Mountain Dharma is the very negotiation of the renunciate identity itself. That is, “renouncer” comes into view by way of the toggling between an ideal and practicality, between isolation and sociality. Karma chags med the renouncer, as renouncer, can appear to us precisely through the marshaling of both of these poles—without Brtson ‘grus rgya mtsho outside the door, pen in hand, this text would not have appeared. Obviously, living the renouncer ideal to the letter is functionally impossible—even in the story of Mi la ras pa he had visitors to his cave and had to deal with varying social situations, and one must always be enmeshed in some degree of sociality. Conversely, living a social life without an ideal—a “gravitational pole” of sorts to keep “renouncing” meaningful—would undermine the prestige of retreat and the focus of practice. And so, if we are to theorize or otherwise analyze “renunciation” we must bear both in mind: the project of renunciation is always already an oscillation between ideals and reality.

Garnering Wealth

In the fifty-first chapter of Mountain Dharma, we gain an increased sense of the more “worldly” element of this “orbital” renunciation. “The Activity of ‘Gro mgon ras chen: Notes on Daily Practice for Accomplishment in the Manner of Protectors and Wealth Deities” contains advice and instructions on practices both for protection and for generation of wealth. The practices—based on visualization (dmigs pa) meditations of

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80 See Appendix E
Mahākāla (*ber can*) as tutelary deity (*yi dam*)—are procedures meant, basically, to bring about wealth. Karma chags med does not indicate for *whom* one would generate prosperity—perhaps this is an opening for oral advice (in the centuries subsequent from the text’s production) to clarify what he means—but in the visualizations themselves one visualizes all matter of “bountiful horses[^81^], wealth, possessions, and food” gathering and dissolving into the practitioner. The inclusion of wealth practices raises an interesting point—why does one go into retreat that includes wealth practices? It seems outright contradictory to include any sense of opulence in a contemplative schema that undermines attachment. And yet, garnering wealth allows for a teacher’s dharma activity to flourish, and in that sense is a legitimate pursuit for retreat. I raise this only to suggest that we sustain the tension we have, as Euro-Americans, in encountering this kind of material. Perhaps works like *Mountain Dharma* might perform some kind of work on us, demanding us to refigure our perceptions of retreat and of renunciation.

In the opening and introductory passage of the chapter Karma chags med says that during dharma protector practices (*bskang gsol*), “Every session of meditation on mantra and visualization includes resources, control, and power (*Longs spyod mnga’ thang shugs*)/Thus, it is helpful to have literacy (*shes tshad*) in practices to exhort dharma protectors.” Later on, he states that if one in earnest strives “for pure supplications to protectors, / And [has] the ornaments of mantra and visualization,/ [One] can bring the many worlds under [one’s] power,/ Because whatever [one needs] falls like rain.” Important to note here is the sense of worldly power that undergirds this chapter’s advice. Much more than merely

[^81^]: The Tibetan reads *rta g.yang*, with *rta*, whose common register is ‘horse.’ However, it can have the meaning of a sweet or intoxicating drink (Dan Martin), or in a specialized medicinal sense as a conveyor of medicine into the body. Given the situated-ness of *Mountain Dharma* in a monastic-yet-extra-institutional context, and the context of wealth and bounty of the practices of this chapter, I’ve opted to retain it as “horse.”
desiring to protect wealth, here we have an instance of ritual procedures by which wealth and prosperity are actually sought out. The practices are explicitly pointed out as “worldly offering and praise,” and we can moreover infer that the very existence of this chapter indicates the relevance and importance of its content. Indeed, the statement that all mantra practices necessarily include power and control indicates that needing to deal with issues of power (i.e. supplicating dharma protectors for issues of worldly concern) is something inescapable – having a “literacy” of them is helpful and necessary. It is almost as if Karma chags med is making a concession of some sort, indicating that retreat is some how always already sociological, and this text as a practical guide helps one learn the contours thereof.
Conclusion

What are we to make of this idea – a “sociology of retreat” or the social aspects thereof? Obviously, and as I noted at the beginning of this section, a thorough inquiry into the idea would require extensive literary and anthropological research, and so in that sense is outside the scope of this study. Through this study, nonetheless, we have gained enough traction in the matter to establish that renunciation is never total, and that in this time period there was a domestication of a model of renunciation that admits and accounts for practicality. As I have suggested, the unique nature of *Mountain Dharma*, as an advice text, serves as a venue for both textual and “anthropological” modes of inquiry. The ideal retreat is proffered, articulated, and prescribed (as non-social and isolated), and at the same time we encounter authorizations of, even injunctions to, social engagement. This permits our asking of the text not only “what are the doctrinal and philosophical tenets that undergird the practice of retreat?,” but also “what does retreat look like as a lived practice on the ground look like?”

At the most course level, *Mountain Dharma* demonstrates that among the Karma bka' brgyuds in 17th century eastern Tibet, the project of renunciation (in retreat) was very much bound up in the social world and order of things. As Karma chags med indicates, one ought to have “literacy” in practices that both protect and garner prosperity. These of course would be put to use for oneself and for one’s patrons, upon whom a practitioner and renouncer relies upon for the very possibility of retreat—the patron provides food, shelter, and financial support, and in turn receives guidance and instruction from the renunciant. This means that, from the side of practical concerns, it is functionally out of the question for a retreatant, a renouncer, to *not* have social engagement and enmeshment. In that case, the
“sociology” would indicate that a renouncer in retreat can—nearly must—sustain social relations. Echoing the voice of the Buddhist traditions since its inception, it would seem that Karma chags med is providing for something of a “middle way” of conduct, for being neither overly indulgent in the world nor too-far removed from it. However, the sense we get here is more of domestication: the middle-way analogy is a useful rubric, but the idea of an implicitly equanimous tract does not capture the sense of interpenetration of worlds that Karma chags med’s words throughout *Mountain Dharma* points out.

On the matter of just how one goes about that engagement, Karma chags med remains mute in the text – nowhere does he seem to grapple explicitly with the tension between the ideal and the actual. It seems that renunciation in this case is domesticated to an inner attitude, rather than an outwardly observable discipline or habitus (such as images of Mi la ras pa green-hued from eating solely nettles and ribs sticking out). This allows for one to renounce within, or rather near to, their social world. That is, renunciation is necessarily always visible. Thinking back to Abeyesekara, what this study has demonstrated is that in the socio-political and religious conjunctures of 17th century Tibet, the category of renunciation became visible as and in terms of visibility itself. In terms of Mi la ras pa, it was marked on his body. In terms of the sociological retreat we find in *Mountain Dharma* renunciation is visible as set apart while still remaining fundamentally part of the local “map.” The renouncer is thus simultaneously here and there, part of the world while standing somehow outside of it.

There are, it seems to me, two ways in which to understand the predicament of Karma chags med having not indicated how the ideal and the actual are bridged. Firstly, the doctrinal gap leaves space for the oral transmissionary process to subsume authority on
the issue: as the text is taught and passed from master to disciple, the teacher's commentary complements and supplements the text—“advice on the advice.” Secondly, this gap allows for a renouncer to determine the “when” and “how” of social engagement. In that way, (s)he must endeavor to perpetually sustain the poles of “ideal renouncer” and “socially-ensconced person” such that, when necessary and pressing, (s)he engages with the world and enters into the social “economy,” all the while with a demeanor of non-attachment. The negotiation between the two must not fall into “orbital decay,” where one wins out over the other. Only the two together can allow for “renouncer” to be meaningful. And yet the non-specific articulation of how to balance the two suggests the negotiation—the sociological concern—of retreat remains contextually and situationally emergent. Renunciation is the productive tension between the ideal and the actual.

It seems to me Karma chags med is doing precisely this in Mountain Dharma. In the introduction to the text and the chapter on introducing retreat, he nods to the traditional renunciate ideal by prescribing it and giving it a “voice.” And then in later chapters, he almost outright ignores or undermines the traditional ideal. With that in mind, on a subtler level it seems that within the space and negotiation between the renunciate ideal and social reality, a “sociology of retreat” is always already implicit. Thinking again alongside J.S. Tambiah, the renouncer or retreatant cannot be fully extricated or separated from that which they renounce precisely because they rely on it for the very identity as “renouncer.” The inclusion of both chapters on “formal,” paradigmatic renunciation for the Bka’ brgyud and pragmatic, “worldly,” and social engagements in Mountain Dharma is not a problem because the two are co-constitutive of renunciation. The ambiguities that emerge in Karma
chags med’s writings echo the ambiguities of renunciation more broadly, as I have been calling it, as an orbit or productive tension between actual and ideal.

Moreover, bearing in mind the contingent nature of renunciation, *Mountain Dharma* gestures that the project of renunciation at the socio-political-historical conjunctures of its composition entailed concern for protection—of practitioner and social circle—against brigands and enemies and for sustaining and generating prosperity. A domestication of renunciation, as Karma chags med produces in this text, accords well with the reduced circumstances the Karma bka’ brgyud faced in the 17th century. Being in “retreat” itself politically speaking, constructing the ideal of a renouncer who is socially engaged *and* removed—internally for certain, physically perhaps—from the social world might have sustained institutional identity and coherence amidst otherwise unstable times. It would then remain a project for other studies of retreat to situate the concept in terms of the specifics of its time and place in order to gain footing into the nuanced texture of “renunciation.”

**Future Directions**

As I have gestured to at a few points, probing a sociology of retreat in relationship to *Mountain Dharma* in depth would demand a great deal of textual and anthropological investigation. Regarding the situation of *Mountain Dharma* and Karma chags med in the religious and socio-political environment of Tibet’s turbulent 17th century, Tibetan-language histories of the Bka’ brgyud lineage would help in garnering a more nuanced and detailed view of what precisely was going on in the mid-17th century and in the absence of

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82 This of course accords with the state of affairs in terms of local/village and, more importantly, the relative nadir of the relationship with the Dge lugs pas for the Bka’ brgyud pas, who were vulnerable and no longer protected by the state.
the Karma pa. The same would go for Dge lugs pa histories to the extent that the sectarian rivalry between them and the Bka’ brgyud pas was such that each school’s individual historical narrations would likely furnish interesting and divergent perspectives. Moreover, because of the interrelations between the Dge lugs pas, the Bka’ brgyud pas, and the Mongolians, both Mongolian and Chinese historical treatises would be sound sources for inquiring into non-Tibetan vantages on the trepidations of central and eastern Tibet in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century.

Works by Karma chags med’s disciples in the Gnas mdo bka’ brgyud lineage and Dpal yul snying ma lineage—a Karma bka’ brgyud offshoot and Snying ma tradition begun by him, respectively—might too render something interesting. Here especially I think of Rig ‘dzin kun bzang shes rab, Karma chags med’s disciple and founder of the Dpal yul monastery. As even a brief glance into biographical (\textit{rnam thar}) and autobiographical (\textit{rang gi rnam thar}) material evidences, a wealth of historical, social, and doctrinal information can be learned from looking at the ways in which Tibetan lives are narrated and written. In addition to surveying the literary or religious works of Karma chags med’s contemporaries, both his and other’s \textit{rnam thars} would provide another view into the social, political, and religious worlds of the seventeenth century.

At the time of this writing it remains unclear how “accessible” the Tibetan locales in which Karma chags med lived and taught are and will be in terms of travel and research restrictions. His birthplace in the Ngom valley in Khams (now the eastern border of the Tibetan Autonomous Region) may well have some vestiges of his time there in the form of monastic literature and records (for he was, indeed, a monastic from age eight onwards). His monastery, Dpal ri, in Gtsang would also likely be a fruitful source of information on his
life as a teacher living in retreat. In India, too, Rnam grol gling monastery in Mysore holds the Dpal yul lineage, a Snying ma tradition that was founded by Karma chags med. Given the relative centrality he played (and likely plays) in these locations, it seems reasonable to presume something useful could be gained by conducting research there.

Especially interesting would be an inquiry into his retreat abode near Dpal ri monastery—does it still exist? If we are thinking in terms of the social dimensions of retreat, how are the geographic and architectural arrangements accordant or discordant with such a notion? What is the topography of retreat at Dpal ri and elsewhere? One direction might also employ interviews with contemporary lineage holders of both the Dpal yul and Gnas mdo traditions, querying how each tradition views Karma chags med as a forebear. Do Bka’ brgyud pas and Snying ma pas view him differently? How does each think about the idea of retreat in terms of *Mountain Dharma*?

Bearing questions and concerns of intertextuality in mind, looking at the history of renunciation from within the Tibetan tradition might help “triangulate” or locate where the *Mountain Dharma’s* orbital approach lands on the map of emic discourses on giving up the world. Again, treatises and doctrinal texts, biographical material, and advice texts on topics related to “retreat” or renunciation would help gain a sense of what other Tibetans, across times and spaces, have had to say about the matter.

A study of the contemporary place of *Mountain Dharma* would give us insight into how it is put to use—where the “rubber meets the road” and, possibly, where the ideal is negotiated with actuality. I bought a copy of the text at Shes chen monastery in Kathmandu the summer of 2011, and so clearly it is relevant enough to be taught and read 500 years after its being penned. What kind of liturgies and teachings integrate the text’s many
chapters? Do retreatants nowadays have a copy with them when doing daily practice? What about *Mountain Dharma* is so captivating today? How does its title—*zhal gdam*s or direct advice—configure into its place in Tibetan religiosity? What other texts are taught or utilized under the rubric of “retreat?”

The idea of retreat and renunciation is still very much an ongoing debate within Buddhism across the board. The issues raised by Karma chags med are *living* questions, and ethnographic engagement would provide interesting perspective on the valences of renunciation today. On an ontological level, the grounds of renouncing are in part premised upon a belief in the substantiality of the world, and this is a manner in which Tibetans might articulate their approach to the matter. If one understands—or realizes—the fundamental implication of emptiness/śūnyatā/anātman, in some sense then what need to renounce? A further study might engage other chapters of *Mountain Dharma* wherein Karma chags med addresses the view and the ways that a Buddhist view comes to bear upon matters of retreat and renunciation. A fundamental question would be – is it merely a matter of changing one’s outlook to the world, from one of attachment to one of non-attachment? What might attachment mean politically and socially, in terms of renouncing? It would certainly nuance this study to both query the implications of a system of thought that, ultimately, calls for the dissolution of all polarities (“self” vs “other,” and so forth) on the project of renouncing from the world, and to probe the meaning of the term “renunciation” itself within Tibetan Buddhism’s lineages and histories.

Bringing contemporary Tibetan religious figures into conversation with the long-standing discourse on renouncing, as well as with my own questions, would help garner a sense of just how the matter is understood today. Given the contours of Tibetan Buddhist
religious and monastic life today (and in the wake of both Sino-Tibetan conflict and of modernity), how are Tibetan Buddhists articulating and engaging the project of renunciation? How to they conceive of themselves (or do they?) as sustaining the orbit that I have articulated in this thesis? Sustaining the idea of renouncing as an open question that continues to be hashed out, it would be an intriguing project to look into where it stands in current conjunctures of religious, cultural, and global aspects of Tibetan religiosity.

As I noted in chapter 1, *Mountain Dharma* is indeed a mountain. The textual-anthropological method I have employed here is likely but one of many possible “expeditions” to grapple with it. What other ways might future scholarship seek to traverse its religious, social, and political topography?
Bibliography

Tibetan:


English:


Mountain Dharma: Direct Advice on Retreat

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3) For generating a stable resolve to emerge from cyclic existence, there is “Disengaging from the Dice: Abandoning the Path of Cyclic Existence.”

4) For individuals of the Great and Small Vehicles, there is “The Noble Gandi: Elucidation of Practice.”

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6) In order to protect against all fears in cyclic existence, there is “Protection from All Fear: Direct Advice on Taking Refuge.”

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83 Dkar chag.
84 Gzhung lam.
16) So that fools and those of little intelligence can practice easily, there is “The Pure Path to Liberation, Direct Advice on Retreat.”

17) For perfecting the accumulations and bringing illness and evil spirits on the path, there is “The Axe that Cuts through Self-Clinging: Giving Away One’s Body.”

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86 Ngo sprod.
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48) To powerfully draw Dharma Protectors to oneself, there is “Gathering Rotten Meat and Honey: Soul Stones and Supporting Objects.”

49) So that all obstacles are cleared, and that what one wishes is accomplished, there is “Jewel of the Gods: Writings on Torma.”

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87 Bogs ’don.
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53) For concealing one’s virtue in an inexhaustible treasury, there is “The Precious Gem: Direct Advice on Dedication.”

54) So that secret mantra is not distorted and blessings remain potent, there is “Of the Enumerations of Dharma: The Performance Tantras of the Single Lineage.”

\textsuperscript{88} Ras chen.
\textsuperscript{89} Lho brag.
Chapter 1
Seeing it, You Smile: Introduction to Mountain Dharma

Namo Ratna Guruya
I, the one called Rāga Asya,
Will arrange the causes and condition for the composition of the Introduction
To Advice on Mountain Dharma
Briefly and in verse.
I am one who composes out of great intellectual ambition. I am a hypocrite who greatly desires fame. I construct things with belief in permanence. I collect retinue because I hold what is near dearly. I benefit beings out of desire for wealth. I live in retreat out of a great fear of death. Before four learned and scholarly lamas, I vowed one-pointed practice, And, to great people and patrons, Vowed substantial retreat practice. Leaving pack animals in the mountains, I took up in a small, nice dwelling on the outskirts of a village. Fearing illness and death, I cautiously etched out residence For twelve months I peacefully slept, hidden away. After that year, Lama Tsundru Gyatso,90 Who is of good family, clear minded, intelligent, Faithful, and respectful, Came to the door of my retreat cabin and said,
But have not experientially attained them.  
I have aspired to remain solely in mountain retreat,  
But never received instructions on Mountain Dharma.  
I have several texts on Mountain Dharma  
Composted by the Kagyu Masters,  
But I have not even received the reading transmissions,  
And there are great difficulties in putting them into practice.  
Though you have composed many texts,  
You have not yet written on Mountain Dharma.  
I humbly request that you compose one.  
It is said your hand has diminished,  
And writing will be difficult for you,  
Thus if you speak, I will write.”

Then, Tsundru Gyatso commenced offering a *maṇḍala*,  
Golden and blessed, bearing the footprints  
Of the light-crowned ones.\(^{91}\)  
He then offered volumes of his own composition,  
Performed many prostrations,  
And one hundred mandala offerings.  
Then I, Rāga Asya, said  

“He He Tsundru Gyatso,  
The essential point of Mountain Dharma,  
As explained by our Kagyu forebears,  
Is renouncing all activities of this life,  
Renouncing homeland and taking up a mountain abode,  
Being fearful of impermanence and the thought of death,  
And forgoing food, clothing, and conversation  
To drink water, suck stones, and don the attire of a corpse.  
Other than sustaining the essence of your own mind,  
There is nothing else to do.  
Other than three supplications to your lama,  
You should have no recitations or accomplishments.  
There is nothing to contemplate  
Other than the arrival of Yama, Lord of Death.  
Should faithful patrons arrive,  
Like a weakened or downed deer  
Flee to a solitary place, or somewhere quiet.  
That is the Mountain Dharma of the Kagyu Masters.  
That is a practitioner, carried by the wind, without destination.  
I have been unable to practice as such,  
Living for a long time in the place of my birth—  
The name of the place is bound on me.

\(^{91}\) This seems to be a reference to Kagyu forebears.
Surrounded by kinsmen, nobles, and monks,
I have never lived alone for even a day.
From age eight onwards I’ve eaten food donated to me,
And these days I own livestock.
Death has not spiked my heart,
And my retreat abode is merely a house.
Thus I have no means to compose a Mountain Dharma.
I might approximate what the Kagyu Masters have said,
But it would be common knowledge and all would be embarrassed—
It’s like the nose being embarrassed by the mouth’s speech.
I do not have experience,
So who would trust me if I did teach it? 
Thus, I cannot compose a Mountain Dharma.”

Then Tsundru Gyatso pondered a moment and again beseeched

“Lama Rāga Asya, You
Have been a monastic of moral grounding since a young age.
You have relied on many lamas, great and brilliant.
You are rich in advice and transmissions of both the Sarma and Nyingma.
Though you performed village rites early on,
You completed limitless tutelary deity practices.
After that, you fulfilled your promise of
Thirteen years of practice.
The prophecies of meritorious dharma masters were fulfilled
Through many Earth Terma and Sky Dharmas.92
For seven years you have expanded the welfare of beings of the ten
directions,
And are revered and respected by a great many.
Now you have vowed a life in retreat.
I request you to compose a Mountain Dharma
In accordance with your own experience,
Particularly great renunciation, and so forth.
Even if it is explained, I cannot practice it.
A great teaching that cannot be practiced
Is just a text that causes a heavy burden.
I request your advice on how to practice it.”

I, Rāga Asya, had many tutelary deity practices to complete in short periods of sun,
And I have not seen even one composition
On Mountain Dharma.
I have had many protector rites and expulsion visualizations,
But have had no time for examination.

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92 This may be a reference to the chos skor of gter ston Mi’gyur rdo rje, who was recognized by Karma Chags Med.
Nonetheless, during the inter-session breaks at night,
I spoke whatever came to mind,
And Lama Tsundru Gyatso
Wrote them down with great faith,
Wearing light clothing in the cold winds of the new year,
Patiently taking instruction.
His fingers, riding the horse of the wind,
Wrote everything as I said it.
There are no citations or quotations from sutras and tantras,
So the learned won’t see or hear it.
However, I think there are no conflicts whatsoever
With the sutras and tantras.
There is no highbrow talk of emptiness,
So it won’t be seen or heard by those of high realization.
However, I think there are no errors,
Sidetracks, or misunderstandings.
There is no poetry or rhetorical composition,
And even though the elements of composition are incomplete,
I think it will be beneficial to the mind.
If you practice like this properly,
Though you may not become renowned as a Siddha,
I think you will progress on the path to awakening.
Therefore, it was written without stinginess
Of ink, paper, or pen.
This completes the Introduction
To Advice on Mountain Dharma.
Chapter 16
The Pure Path to Liberation: Direct Advice on Retreat

Namo Guru Mahāmudrāye.
I prostrate to the precious Kagyu Lineage.
The Kagyu method of wandering in solitude
Has arisen in my mind, though I have not grasped it.
Even though I know how to say what it is like, I don’t speak confidently.
Since I have just a mere measure of experience in practice,
That may be of help to unfortunate ones like myself,
I will set forth whatever arises in my mind.
Because revulsion is the food of meditation,
All activities of this life
Should be tossed out like what was presented before the Brahmins—
Utterly turning away from attachment is taught as vital.
Although at first food, clothing, shelter, and bed are vital,
One should intend to one day be a guest in hermitage.
Affirm in your mind that there will be long generations of death.
Even though you may be born as a god or human after dying,
Contemplate well-being, impermanence, and the suffering of change.
Aside from the fruition—unsurpassable pure understanding—
Do not wish for any of cyclic existence’s joys.
That is the method of turning away from samsāric attachment.
For example, all previous Kadampas,
Being qualmish towards death, did not make fire,
Thinking that it would purpose an incitation of effort in the dharma.
Though you will soon die swiftly due to impermanence,
There are several years to attain awakening,
And you can later travel to Sukhāvatī.
You do not become a renunciate by practicing long-life sādhanās,
Such as the Dakpo attainment of White Tara.
Continually, attachment to your homeland is attachment to the realm of cyclic existence.

Warmth towards friends and hostility towards enemies increases—
Therefore, it is said that Phaktru⁹³, Rechen, and so forth
Did not return after renouncing their homelands.
However, in the human realm, the land to abandon
Is the very place where desire and hate increases.
Whether or not that land may not be excessive in desire and hate,
Even if you don’t abandon it, you won’t-not become a renunciate.
For example, the Martag, Sakye, Tritags, and so on,
Naming a place to enhance a lama’s name
And like a homeland being whatever place [that lama] was.

⁹³ Phag gru.
Whoever it is—great friend or great foe—renounce them.
Friends and kin are samsara’s bathwater.
Whatever they give does not sate hopes for house and abundance.
Through thorough analysis it is established that all six classes of beings are your mothers and fathers—
Therefore renounce even excessive nostalgia for family.
Whatever resentments you have towards kin are not renunciation,
Since one enters into the dharma by means of family.
Therefore both teachings and family are of benefit.
For example, like the dri94 and the tiger—family lineages born in this world—
When there is self-kindness, kindness to progeny is possible.
Commoners do not know who needs whom.
Such was the testament of Guru Padma.
Material wealth, prosperity, and hostile attractions are causes of suffering:
If there are absent, they are inadequate and if there are present they are the beckonings of ghosts and enemies.

94 ‘Bri.
Chapter 23
The Cool Shade of the Juniper Tree: Advice on Restricting Enemies, Bandits, and Thieves.

Namo Guru Daki Mari
Lama Tsundru Gyatso,
Who greatly wished to practice solitarily,
Said “I have little experience practicing the excellent doctrine alone.
Fearing harm by enemies and bandits,
I need advice on defending and warding them off.”
Lama, you yourself have many excellent qualities,
And so it isn’t necessary to live alone without monastics.
Having a great many riding horses, monastic attendants, pack animals, and dwellings
Is a summoning of enemies.
In this degenerate era, there are many who commit wrongdoings, who are powerful conquerors,
And who slanderously and with joy take the lives of people who are without fault.
There are many instructions on protection from them,
But of the Old and New Translations, the sutras, tantras, and treasure texts
It is said there is none greater than Öserchen.97
There are many faces, arms, large retinues, and so forth,
And the vast mandala is explained in the Vajra Garland Tantra and elsewhere.
However, here the two-armed form is accordant with the lineage according to the Kalpatantra.98
As is said in the ocean of sādhanās and mind treasures.
Her entity is Palden Lhamo, and Rangjungma,99 Marichi the fourteenth, dispeller of bandits.
To practice the profound instructions of this deity
One must obtain the empowerment and reading transmission.
In instantaneous recollection, on a lotus flower atop a moon,
You yourself are Öserchenma, golden-hued and beautiful.
She is of one face with a peaceful smile, adorned by a topknot and crown.
She wears a blue upper garment, and white lower garments.101
She appears as a 16-year-old, and is adorned with silk and precious jewels.
She holds a needle in her right hand and thread in her left.

95 Mya ngan med pa'i shing.
96 The texts reads grwa pa, meaning “monk” or “monastic”. It carries a sense of being a novice or pupil, and thus I have rendered it as attendant here, meaning subordinate monastics.
97 Od zer can.
98 Rtog pa'i rgyud.
99 Śridevi, a protector goddess.
100 Rang byung ma.
101 Ang rag sham thabs dkar.
She sits cross-legged atop a yellow wild boar.  
To your right and left manifest all those to be protected.  
You are within three spheres of sun and moon.  
In the innermost the sun is below and the moon above.  
In the middle sphere, the sun is on the left and the moon on the right.  
In the outermost the sun is above and moon below.  
The sun and the moon's light rays are immensely brilliant,  
Such that all cannot bear to gaze upon it.  
Beyond that, fences of yellow wild boars  
Comprise three massive concentric fields, which are terrifying.  
They all project out vociferous snorts.  
Atop a moon at your heard lies the syllable MAM.  
Emanating light from a mantra garland around it  
Near to the Indian Juniper tree.  
Visualize innumerable ones like you\textsuperscript{102} being invited and dissolving inseparably,  
And, attaining the power of wisdom, being ornamented on the crown by Vairocana.  
Recite as many times as you can  
\textbf{OM MA RI CHI SVA HA}  
This is the protection mantra for mornings,  
\textbf{OM MA RI CHI ÖSER CHEN DAKJAK MI NOR TAMJE KYOP JIK SVA HA}\textsuperscript{103}  
In the afternoon visualization for binding enemies and thieves,  
From your heart emerges the emanation of the goddess,  
And from the abode of the deity arrives the goddess,  
Similarly riding a yellow wild boar, pervading the transient world,  
Running like a flash of lightning, and like the wind, in the ten directions.  
Visualize that all enemies, bandies,  
And calumnious ones who would harm you  
Have their mouths and eyes sewn up by the goddess.  
\textbf{OM MA RI TSYI VADRADALI VADALI VARALI VARAHAMUKHE SARVADUSHTA PRADUSHTANAM NÖ CHE DRAJAK CHOMKUN TAMJE CHAKSHU MUKHAM BANDHA BANDHA SVA HA}  
Repeat these as much as is deemed important.  
These both are a daily protection practice.  
For strict retreat, it is taught that one should recite  
The above 6-syllable mantra 600,000 times.  
Even if you have not completed this initiatory retreat separately,  
It is said White Tara, Kurukulle, Lomachen,\textsuperscript{104}  
And Rangjung Gyalmo\textsuperscript{105} are of one continuity.  
Completing these other retreats is implicitly the same.  
Even if you have not completed the above retreat,  
Reciting the mantra continually in each session,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{102} Le Öserchenma, the tutelary deity of this practice.  
\textsuperscript{103} “Om Marichi Öserchen protect we people and our wealth, Sva Ha.”  
\textsuperscript{104} Blo ma can.  
\textsuperscript{105} Rang byung rgyal mo.
\end{flushright}
Or reciting it fervently when there is great need,
Enemies, bandits, and fear of the king\textsuperscript{106} are warded off.
There is no instruction more profound than this.
When it is important to protect horses and pack animals,
Protection cords spun by a pure young woman are best.
Pure wool of whatever thickness is suitable,
And the length of an arrow or an armspan will do.
First, meditate on the deity and perform a few mantras.
Then, closing your eyes and mouth and not breathing,
Tie twenty one knots on each protection cord.
Visualize that each knot is the goddess.
The long mantra should be recited as many times as you can – 100 or 1,000 –
And visualize summoning innumerable wisdom goddesses that then dissolve
Into light and enter into the knots.
Perform the consecration rite with the Essence of Dependent Arising \textit{mantra},
Tying cords to people, horses, pack animals, and livestock.
That is the supreme protection against enemies, bandits, and predators.
These activities are accordant with \textit{tantras} and instructions.
My principal tutelary deity is the same,
And I have completed many practices.
Despite a strict seal of secrecy,
Because you, Tsundru Gyatso, are a heart disciple, I will teach you.
The instructions of the New and Old Translations, oral transmissions, treasure texts
and Sky Dharma\textsuperscript{107}
Are all united into this single relic.
The words are sparse but the meaning is great, and they will be accomplished
through practice.
It is clearly established that this is to be kept hidden, and I confess that
transgression to the gods.
Through virtue may all those who engage the excellent doctrine in these degenerate
times
Be free from the dangers of enemies and bandits.
May all be without disputation and slander.
These words were spoken in the ruby-hued Shugchang\textsuperscript{108} year,
The Year of the Dog – protecting against bandits –
On the 28\textsuperscript{th} day of the month when Yama, Lord of Death, is on the move.
When all’s eyes were obscured and in darkness,
The Black Mantrin Rāga Asya spoke these words
To Rupa Tsundru Gyatso, who scribed them.
Signs are snakes, monkeys, cats, donkeys,
Horses, elephants, buffaloes, bears, and dogs
Fighting each other – and you – in a dream, causing you fear.

\textsuperscript{106} Rgyal po’i ‘jigs pa.
\textsuperscript{107} A teaching cycle (chos skor) of gter ston Mi ’gyur rdo rje, who was Karma chags med’s nephew.
\textsuperscript{108} Shugs ’chang
Then, recite the mantra twice as many times or more.
In a dream you might abide in an ocean or on a mountain,
Meet the Buddha or a bodhisattva,
A young, beautiful, and ornamented young woman,
Or meet Öserchenma and receive prophecy.
Perfume diffuses or butter lamps keep:
These are signs of accomplishment in mantra practice.
For a time of six months, three months, or 28 days,
Or 2,400,000 repetitions or less,
At least 600,000 – these will accomplish the practice.

These sayings were taken out of the Precious Garland of Activities about approach, accomplishment, and activity. These are notes on this sādhana for those of little intelligence. OM MA RI CHI SVA HA. The “YI” should be said swiftly. 23rd chapter.

Maṅgalam.

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109 Phreng rin po ches mdzad pa.
Chapter 51
The Activity of Drogön Rechen: Notes on Daily Practice for Accomplishment in the Manner of Protectors and Deities of Wealth

Namo Guru Mahākālaye
The activity of Drogön Repa Chenpo—
The body of emanation of Dombi Heruka—
Although all know of many texts on the matter
Of accomplishment in the manner of the protectors and wealth deities
There has been no textual explanation, and therefore practices have been weak.
I will expound in accordance with the collected arrangement of petitionary offerings,
While these practices are not performed separately,
During peaceful stages in practices of entreatling the Dharma protectors
Every session of meditation on mantra and visualization
Includes resources, control, and power.
Thus, it is helpful to have literacy in practices to exhort Dharma protectors.
In-between sessions, having instantly transformed yourself into the tutelary deity,
You are, in actuality—in accordance with the texts on Mahākāla-without-consort—
The protector of the ten directions
And appear as such encircled by ten Mahākālas.
Moreover, in the center are five precious subtle channels
All of which are adorned by many precious ornaments and jewels.
Deities of wealth—and the eight accompanying deities—encircle you as well.
In the heart-center is your tutelary deity.
If there is no other tutelary deity with which you are well-familiar,
Cultivating Yeshe Gonpo Lekden is sufficient.
Whichever you practice, at the top of the sun at the center of your heart
Is an azure HUM. Finally, repeat the mantra, turning to the right.
In front of you is the union of many accompanying deities—meditate on this in accord with the treatises.
They are all ornamented by precious jewels.
From the mantra at the center of your heart, emanate rays of light.
The light should touch the ten protectors, as yourself.
That light exhorts the eight accompanying wealth deities.
Life, merit, and wealth are gathered and penetrate into yourself.
Again, envision in front light emanating out of you as an exhortation.
In front of you, on the extremities of the protectors of the ten directions

110 ’Ggro mgon ras pa chen po.
111 Bde ba min.
112 Ggasol kha.
113 Rtsa phran.
114 Ye shes mgon po legs ldan.
115 I.e. one’s own yi dam or Yeshe Gonpo Lekden.
116 Grar bzhugs.
Are the Lords of Treasure Dzambhala and Vaiśravaṇa,117
Cattle gods, hunters, and Remanta.
Remanta is a bearer of great fortune.
From these four deities of wealth, emanate light.
Bountiful horses118, wealth, possessions, and food
Are all gathered and dissolve into you and your dwelling.
Occasionally you can, by emanating light from your body,
Envision a raining down of whatever various precious things are needed.
At the end of the petitionary offering, you should strive to says this mantra as many
times as possible:
“Om Mā Ha Kā La Ye Hri Phat,”
And to yourself the mantra “Ratna Siddhi Siddhi”
As many times as possible.
This is a supreme prosperity practice,
And mantras and visualizations are sufficient when practicing supplications to
protectors.
Slight changes of the distinctive visualization
Are invoking Mahākāla in union with Mahākāli with self-generating light,
And light emanations to Mahākāla-Mahākāli from Vaiśravaṇa and Dzam Hla.
By vigorously exhorting these last two,
The various and precious foods, wealth, and enjoyments
Can be visualized as falling like rain and arising like a dense fog.
Again, arouse the protectors of great abundance with light.
Think of all the bountiful horses collected and dissolved back into themselves.
In front of you invoke the protectors of the West and North with light,
And visualize the collected bounty of wealth dissolving back into itself.
Sever misfortune and it then transforms into increasing prosperity.
This practice of Mahākāla-Mahākāli with retinue
Is generally said to be included in the tantras of deities of offerings and praise
Because it is established as a worldly offering and praise.
The Mahāsiddha Pakshi said that
“By holding lineage, keeping samaya,
Performing expansive offerings and praises, and exhorting praise,
Without needing to try to accomplish them,
The four activities of the enlightened are achieved.”
Therefore, if you strive for pure supplications to protectors,
And have the ornaments119 of mantra and visualization,
You can bring the many worlds under your power
Because whatever you need falls like rain.

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117 Dzam b+ha la dang rnam thogs sras.
118 The Tibetan reads rta g.yang, with rta, whose common register is ‘horse.’ However, it can have the
meaning of a sweet or intoxicating drink (Dan Martin), or in a specialized medicinal sense as a conveyor of
medicine into the body. Given the situated-ness of Ri Chos Mtshams Kyi Zhal Gdams in a monastic-yet-extra-
institutional context, and the context of wealth and bounty of the practices of this chapter, I’ve opted to retain
the conventional meaning.
119 The Tibetan is sham bu, which is an ornamental fringe on a door or house.
Although this is supreme among the wealth deities,
It is said that there is none other like it.
These intelligent words are ruby-colored lotuses.
They were spoken by the monk Rāga Asya
On the holy-day of Maheśvara on the last day of the eighth month,
A day in which the protectors were thrice moved.\textsuperscript{120}
Lama Tsundrü Gyatso\textsuperscript{121} recorded the words.
Confessing his faults to the gods, he wrote them precisely, and the text is suitable to conceal.

May the virtuous teachings of the ten directions increase.
This chapter 51 is to be kept secret form unsuitable recipients.
May it be auspicious.

\textsuperscript{120} Mgon pol an gsum rgyu ba’i nyin.
\textsuperscript{121} Brtson 'grus rgya mtsho.