Kangsol: A Vajrakila Performance Tradition of Sumthrang Monastery in Central Bhutan

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Kangsöl:

A Vajrakīla Performance Tradition of Sumthrang Monastery in Central Bhutan

by
Sonam Nyenda
B.A., Institute of Language and Culture Studies, 2008

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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This thesis entitled:
Kangsöl:
A Vajrakīla Performance Tradition of Sumthrang Monastery in Central Bhutan
written by Sonam Nyenda
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Date 4/5/16

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.
ABSTRACT

Sonam Nyenda (Masters, Religious Studies [Department of Religious Studies])
Kangsöl: A Vajrakīla Performance Tradition of Sumthrang Monastery in Central Bhutan

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Holly Gayley

The term Kangsöl (bskang gsol) means "fulfillment and offering, usually to a Dharma protector" and refers to appeasing local deities, including protective deities (srung ma) and tutelary deities. At Sumthrang Temple in central Bhutan, the Kangsöl is performed to appease its tutelary deity (yi dam) Vajrakīla (rdo rje phur pa). In all his manifestations, Vajrakīla is considered to embody the enlightened activities of all Buddhas, and is considered most efficacious in removing obstacles, purifying spiritual contamination and destroying negative forces through his wrathful compassion. Sumthrang’s form of deity practice is undertaken both for soteriological and apotropaic purposes. While there are some studies on the soteriological aspects of Vajrakīla practice, there are fewer that focus on its apotropaic aspects. This thesis seeks to contribute a clearer understanding of the apotropaic aspects of the practice, with the hopes of clarifying the ritual contexts for the violence articulated in the subjugation rites.

This project, and its focus on Kangsöl as practiced at Sumthrang, further elucidates how the annual Vajrakīla performance is enacted to affect this-worldly issues, particularly by appeasing deities and invoking a hierarchical order that brings malevolent spirits under control. Concurrently, the study reveals how this hierarchical order is thereby reflected among local community members. This is accomplished through examination of the intersections of three key components: lineage, ritual, and visual art of Sumthrang. Analysis further demonstrates how this specific Vajrakīla tradition and the annual Kangsöl festival function together for the community, offering a reliable mechanism to restore the perceived balance between the physical and non-physical realms that surround the monastery. The efficacy of this restorative tradition is understood through Sumthrang’s lineage transmission, distinct ritual enactment, and the display and propitiation of textually prescribed images that then house the living presence of Vajrakīla and his retinue. In summary, this thesis focuses on an understudied ritual endemic to one central Bhutanese community, and draws on textual attestation, ritual practices, and the visual arts to support Sumthrang’s claims of spiritual and temporal efficacy.
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Chapter I

Introduction

The villagers of Sumthrang dress themselves in their best attire and gather in the courtyard of the monastery as the sun begins to warm the autumn morning. The Sumthrang chöje (lineage holder) and his gomchens (Lay practitioners) finish their morning liturgical ritual, at halt quickly. The gomchens dress up to perform the mask dances while the villagers cluster in the monastery courtyard with excitement. By ten o’clock the mask dancers are ready and the beat of a huge drum and bell heralds their entrance onto the performance ground. One of the highlights of the Kangsöl, the annual Vajrakīla performance tradition at Sumthrang Monastery, comes on the second day when the Damtsik Ngolem (dam tshigs ngos lem) is performed. The main dancer wears a skeleton mask and a tiger-skin costume around the waste with a dorji gong (a cloak with vajra on four sides worn over shoulder) Barefoot with naked chest, he carries a yak skin and a bamboo walking stick. This figure is understood to be a samaya-breaker, one who has breached his tantric vows, and he is figuratively meant to be the "enemy of the ten pure fields" (zhing bcu tshang ba’i dgra bo). He enters the performance ground begging money from the people and beating up the Atsaras (festival clowns) and after a while goes to hide somewhere near the performance ground. As soon as the dam tshig ngo lem goes to hide yet again the drum and bell are beaten. In addition, horns and trumpet are blown, and the dance master plays the cymbal according to which the dancers follow their movement and dance rhythm. As the sounds of musical instruments fill the space with a majestic tenor, ten male wrathful emanations of Vajrakīla wearing red and blue wrathful masks enter the ground. They wear the five-colored silk scarves from the waist and dorji gong and hold a kīla and small skull cup each. The wrathful ones then finds the ngo

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1 This figure is described as (1) the enemy of the Three Jewels, (2) the enemy of the master, 3) The samaya
lem from his hiding place and hold him by his hands and legs, swings him in the air and puts him on the ground signifying the subjugation of the "enemy of the ten pure fields." As this enactment is done, children laugh finding the scene to be funny, and elders fold their hands and pray for negativity to be destroyed. This is just one of many ways that negativity is destroyed each year in Kangsöl.

Vajrakīla (rdo rje phur pa) is the yi dam deity who embodies the enlightened activities of all the Buddhas, which although, is practiced in all the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, is central to Nyingma school. The practice of Vajrakīla is famous for being the most powerful deity for removing obstacles, destroying the negative forces with his wrathful compassion and purifying the spiritual contamination. The phur pa or kīla from which the deity Vajrakīla manifest is a three-edged nail that is described to penetrate the root of emotional afflictions and purify it. The manifestation of Vajrakīla varies from one tradition to another. In *The Secret Phurba Tantra* Vajrakīla is described to have 1000 heads, 1000 arms and ten million eyes. However, in the *Nirvāṇa Tantra of Vajrakīla*, he is depicted with nine heads and eighteen arms. Then in *The Root Tantra: Wrathful Vajra*, he is described as having three faces and six arms.² So, as Sumthrag’s tradition follows the last one, it must be based upon this text. The practice of this tutelary deity in sādhana practice involves self-visualizations which are soteriological in nature, overcoming inner obstacles to the path of liberation, or that he can be invoked in public ritual performances, like Kangsöl, to subjugate demonic forces and reestablish the cosmic order. Previous scholarship on the Vajrakīla tradition has focused on text critical and philological analysis, examining the development of specific lineages and intertextual links between lineages within the Nyingma tradition. While there are a number of reputable works on Vajrakīla, no one has yet studied the Vajrakīla tradition of Sumthrag, located fifty kilometers from Bumthang in the central part of Bhutan.

² Namdrol Khenpo, *The Practice of Vajratalaya* (U.S.A: Snow Lion, 1990), 55
This thesis explores a tradition of Vajrakīla practice that is performed in one of the oldest monasteries in the central part of Bhutan called Sumthrang Samdrup Chodzong (*sum ’phrang bsam grup chos rdzong*), founded in the thirteenth century. Its founding figure is one of the earliest Buddhist masters to visit Bhutan after the legendary visit of the eighth-century Indian master Padmasambhava who is first invited to Bumthang to cure the sick king Sindhu Rāja. Whom Padmasambhava cured by bringing the local deity Shelging Karpo (*shal ging dkar po*) who took the king’s life force under his control. Padmasambhava returns back the kings lifeforce and gives the him the initiation of Vajrāni to protect the king.³ That was the advent of Vajrayana Buddhism in Bhutan. Gyelwa Lhanangpa Zijed Pel (*rgyal ba lha nang pa gzi brjid dpal*, 1164-1224), also known as Nyö Gyelwa Lhanangpa Sangay Rechen (*gnyo rgyal ba lha nang pa sang rgyas res chen*) was Sumthrang’s founding figure. He was a disciple of Drikung Chopa Jigten Sumgön (1143-1217), who founded the Drikung Kaygu School. When he came to Bhutan in the 12⁰ century, he gained control over portions of the western region of the country and started a sub-sect of Drikung tradition called Lhapa Kaygu (*lha pa bka’ brgyud*). However, this sect was eradicated. In response, he sent his son Nyoton Trulshik Choeje (*gnyos ston ’khrul zhig chos rje*, 1179-1265) to Central Bhutan to start a family lineage, based on his own Vajrakīla teachings. This is how the Vajrakīla tradition of Sumthrang started. Nyoton established the monastery in 1228 A.D as advised by his father who was also his teacher. Along with him, his father also sent a whole set of support (*rten*) to establish a monastery. These includes the set of sixteen kīlas for body support, a whole corpus of Vajrakīla tantra for speech support, a small stūpa made from three different jewels that were offered to Lhanangpa by the mermaid of Lake Mapham while he manifested his accomplishment by walking on the lake,⁴ a small roaring drum made from the skin of a

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⁴ The stupa was later taken by first king of Bhutan to be installed as mind support, while constructing Kurje Lhakang. It was installed inside the main Guru statue.
dramze kyedun (someone born seven times a Brahmin) as the knowledge support, and a kīla that was revealed as treasure from Maratīka cave by Padmasambhava to subdue the evil force as the support for enlightened activity. Many other relics like skull used by Nāropā are also still preserved in the monastery. Thus, Sumthrang considers its Vajrakīla tradition as one of the important traditions, and it is still practiced today.

In this thesis, I focus on Sumthrang's annual Vajrakīla performance, called Kangsöl (bskang gsol) which literally means "fulfillment and offering, usually to a Dharma protector" and refers to appeasing the deities of ones locality, including protective deities (srung ma) as well as the tutelary deity (yi dam), Vajrakīla himself. The Kangsöl is performed annually on the monastery grounds in November in order to appease and petition Vajrakīla to subdue evil forces and clear the surrounding area of negativity. In this interdisciplinary study, I examine the intersection of lineage, ritual, and art in order to understand how the Vajrakīla tradition and the Kangsöl festival in particular restores the cosmic balance of the area surrounding the monastery for the year. I argue that Vajrakīla in the ritual life of Sumthrang is brought into actual presence in the ritual arena in order to vivify the blessing of the unbroken lineage connection with its association with Lhanangpa as a founding figure for Sumthrang and the early establishment of Buddhism in Bhutan. As enhancement, over time the kama and terma synthesis compounds this blessing and provide the liturgies for its distinct enactment and annually consecrated images of Vajrakīla. My study is based on Sumthrang’s extensive corpus of Vajrakīla ritual manuals,5 personal observation of the ritual when growing up in Sumthrang, formal interviews with chöje Lama Wangdrag Jamtsho,6 the current lineage holder of the tradition, and informal discussion with locals during the summer of 2015.

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5 Phur pa yang gsang bla med don gyi snying po'i las byang phrin las kyi spo gri, Dpal rdo rje phur pa'i 'dabs las skabs su gden gdar, and phur pa'i bzhengs skul
6 Chöje Jamtsho is the author’s father and the interviews are conducted in informal conversations
My thesis is presented in three sections: (1) Genealogical History of Sumthrang's Vajrāṃāla Tradition (2) Kangsöl: The Annual Ritual of Vajrāṃāla, and (3) Vajrāṃāla Thangka Painting at Sumthrang Monastery, mostly working with the ritual manuals and my own observation of the annual Vajrāṃāla ritual of Sumthrang called Kangsöl. In the section on Genealogical History, I discuss the importance of Gyelwa Lhanangpa Zijed Pel (1164-1224) as the founding figure of Sumthrang and the origin point for its Vajrāṃāla tradition. Though historically, his son, Nyoton, may have been the actual founder, collective memory at Sumthrang places Lhanangpa at the center of its founding story. Since the Vajrāṃāla tradition is traced to him, the Kangsöl performance invokes not only the power of Vajrāṃāla to subjugate demonic forces, but also reinforces the living legacy of its founding figure. In the section on the Kangsöl performance, I argue how the rituals of incineration, subjugation, and hurling among others are central to the Kangsöl as ways to restore the cosmic order and ensure the welfare of the community for the coming year. I emphasize the performative dimension of Kangsöl that involve recursive features in order to ensure efficacy in the eyes of locals and enable the proclamation of victory over demonic force and celebration to close the festival. In the section on the Vajrāṃāla Thangkas, I discuss the thangkas in art historical terms and their ritual function during the Kangsöl as an aid to the choje in his visualization and support the living presence of Vajrāṃāla.

Founding Myth

Sangwa Ngag (gsang ba sngags) or "secret mantra" is popularly conceived as tantra in the ‘West’. The term tantra was first introduced into English language in 1799 by the missionaries in India. The controversy of if Buddha has taught tantra himself or not, exist even today. Although mythical origin of tantra is standardized in the tantric texts that traces

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7 Herbert V. Guenther & Chögyam Trungpa, The Dawn of Tantra (USA: Shambhala, 1975), 1
its origin from primordial Buddha through different modes of transmission, scholars have different hypothesis. Christian K. Wedemeyer in his *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism* criticizes how the origin of tantra has been framed by the contemporary scholars, including the influential Bengali scholar Benoytosh Bhattacharyya who attributed the tantric movement to the degenerate monks due to the strict morality required of them by Buddhist Vinaya. A.L. Basham claimed that tantrism to be practiced among “lower social orders” before rising to appear in the literature of elite. Whereas, Edward Conze notes tantra to be magic and witchcraft and human sacrifice cult in agriculture society beginning the human history. Others said it is a pre-Aryan practice of indigenous people that is later infused with Buddhist ideology. Tantric sources trace the origins of their teachings in several discernable patterns. According to Wedemeyer, there are five mains explanations, which are;

1. Esoteric Buddhist could merely assert that they were taught by Śākyamuni, period; or, 2. claim that they were taught by Śākyamuni in some other world. Alternatively, following trends popular among the various prolific Mahāyāna “proclaimers of Dharma” (dharmabhāṇaka), they could (3) maintain that the esoteric Mahāyāna method of mantra (mantrayana) represents the ancient and honorable teachings of all the buddhas, more venerable and profound than the transitory teachings of either Śrāvaka Way or the exoteric Mahāyāna method of the transcendent virtues (pāramitānaya). To this general model they further could add the details that (4) the scriptures were retrieved from sacred caskets hidden in stūpas or caves for future, predestined revelation, or (5) that they represent teachings presented anew in direction encounters with buddhas other than Śākyamuni (or even from Śākyamuni himself).

He mentions that these historical conceptions took shape in relationship to these precedents as put forth by by the esoteric communities.

We cannot discuss rituals dedicated to Vajrakīla without mentioning the myth of his tantra itself. To do so I will briefly mention how Khenpo Pelden Sherab and Tshewang Dongyal discuss this mythology in their *Dark Red Amulet* and what Khenpo Namdrol

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9 Wedemeyer 52
10 Wedemeyer 53
11 Wedemeyer 55
12 Wedemeyer 79
mentions in his *The Practice of Vajrakīlāya*. Then, I will contrast these with how the Sumthrang’s textual tradition narrates the mythology of Vajrakīla. According to the former two authors in their *Dark Red Amulet*, a Vajrakīla practice revealed by terton Tsasum Lingpa (date: ?, his biographies mentions only as eleventh rabjung), the teachings of Vajrakīla are taught by Buddha himself in the form of Vajrakīlaya in the pure land (*Akanistha*) to many *Vidyādharas*, which includes wrathful *dakas* and *dakinis*. Great master Garab Dorje received it directly from Vajrasattva, he then pass down to Manjushrimitra (Jampal Shenyen). According to one account different tantras including Vajrakīla tantra are later hidden into the Deche Tsegpa Stūpa by Vajrapani and Lekyi Wangmo. Later Padmasambhava and eight Vidyādhāras gathered to reveal those teachings. Padmasambhava and Prabhahasti were given the bone casket with Vajrakīla tantras. They also mentions that Padmasambhava has received Vajrakīla transmission from both Prabhahasti and Lekyi Wangmo.\(^{13}\) He later transmits to Yeshi Tsogyel and other twenty five disciples in Tibet. Later, Yeshi Tsogyel puts into the hiding places to be revealed by rightful person associated to the treasure.

Khenpo Namdrol’s explanation in his *The Practice of Vajrakīlāya* is not very different from the former two. He mentions his explanation as according to the tantra series. However, he mentions how the first tantra text of eight Mahāyoga tantra fell from the space on the roof of king Ja’s palace along with a small image of Vajrapāni. He then recounts how king Ja evoked Vajrasattva and it appeared to him. Vajrasattva blessed king Ja’s body, speech, and mind with his own body, speech, and mind, thus, granted him the tantric transmission. The transmission is then passed by king Ja to siddha Kukkurāja. From Kukkurāja to King Indrabhūti, who passed on to Simharāja, who in turn transmitted to princess Gomadevī. Namdrol does not have clear explanation how this transmission gets to Padmasambhava. He mentions that these teachings came to Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra,

and Śīlāmaṇju in time. Namdrol also quotes Jamgön Kongtrul that Padmasambhava received the transmission from king Ja himself. However, Wedemeyer narrates the transmission other way around excluding king Ja. He mentions that the king Indrabhūti of Zahor could not comprehend the meaning of tantric scripture and called Ācārya Kukkurāja. As Kukkurāja did not know the beginning and end of the text and cried, Vajrasattva appears to him and helps him. Then the Ācārya Kukkurāja could teach the king.\(^\text{14}\)

With regard to the Vajrakīlaya, Namdrol notes that Vajrakīla belongs to the cycle of enlightened activity within the Mahāyoga tantras. He also reminds us that, from an emic perspective, Padmasambhava is primordially enlightened and indivisible from Vajrakīla from the point of view of definitive truth. However, he explains that for the benefit of the living beings he went through the action of practicing it. Therefore, even though he received the transmission through direct visions of Vajrakīla, Padmasambhava maintained the gradual lineage. Like the former two Khenpos, Namdrol also mentions that Padmasambhava received the transmission from vajra master Prabhāhasī. Later Padmasambhava was invited to Tibet by king Trisong Detsen. While in Tibet he gave first instructions on how to practice Vajrakīla to his twenty-five heart disciples. Namdrol notes that Padmasambhava while giving the instruction, for some he gave concise teachings and for others expansive ones, thus spreading into different traditions. Consequently, the tradition of King (rgyal po’i lugs) from king Trisong Detsen, tradition of Queen (jo mo lugs) from Padmasambhava’s Tibetan consort, Yeshe Tsogyal, and tradition of Nanam (sna nam rdo rje bdud ‘joms) from Nanam Dorje Dudjom began. The first tradition of King is later revealed by Jigme Lingpa (’jigs med gling pa). The second, Jomo or Queen’s tradition is revealed by Ratna Lingpa and third Nanam tradition is revealed by Lerab Lingpa. Today Sumthrang Monastery follows the Jomo tradition revealed by Ratna Lingpa. However, it is also considered as convergent of oral

\[^{14}\text{Wedmeyer 84-86}\]
lineage and treasure lineage. We will discuss this in more detail in the latter section of genealogical history.

The myths of the origins of tantra in regard to Vajrakīla or other deities are always extracted from the Empowerment Teaching (dbang bshad). As a point of contrast to the accounts above, here I mention briefly how it is recounted in Sumthrang’s Empowerment Teaching. According to Sumthrang’s empowerment teaching text, the Blessed One, the Buddha, displayed the great maṇḍala of wrathful vajra at indefinite time and places such as Akanistha, Trāyastrimśa, Mount Malaya, and so on, and gave the transmission to the great gathering of the Vidyādharas. It is mentioned that these teachings are collected by Vajragarbha (rdo rje snying po), Vajrapāṇi (phyag na rdo rje), and Dākinī Leki Wangmo (mkha’ ‘gro ma las kyi dbang mo) and further disseminated. Thus, through the Vidyādharas, it was heard by Padmasambhava. In particular, the text mentions Padmasambhava received it from Vajrasattva, practiced it at Yang las shod cave. After he accomplished his practice, Padmasambhava went to Tibet as invited by the king of Tibet to subdue all the evil and malevolent forces. According to this lore, he then helped the Tibetan king to build the Samye Monastery, which became the body support (sku rten) to establish tantric Buddhism, translated the texts as the speech support (gsung rten), and started the sangha community as the mind support (thugs rten). After Padmasambhava gave the Vajrakīlaya instruction to his twenty-five disciples, unlike what Khenpo Namdrol has mentioned, the text mentions eight different traditions that started from different students. The eight traditions are mentioned in the footnote. Thus, the transmission from Padmasambhava until the first Sumthrang chöje Guru Nyoton Trulshik is considered oral transmission (bka’ ma) and later treasures revealed by different treasure revealers are considered treasure tradition (gter lugs). This myth is

\[\text{15} \quad \text{bcom ldan ‘das rdo rje gzhon nu’i dbang shad[bshad] skal ldan smin byed} \]

\[\text{16}(1)\text{rgyal po lugs (2)sna snam lugs (3)shud bu lugs (4)mchims bu lugs (5)jo mo lugs (6)rong zom lugs (7)sa skya lugs (8)lcam lugs} \]
important to trace back the lineage of the tradition to its origin for its authenticity and efficacy of the transmission. Lhanangpa who transmits the oral lineage to his son Nyoton falls in the eighteenth generation in the oral lineage tracing it way back to Padmasambhava. This keeps the energy of the transmission active. Consequently, later generations of Lhanangpa’s lineage converging the oral lineage with treasure lineage directly receiving from the treasure revealer himself makes the tradition more efficacious.

Studies on the Vajrakīla Tradition to Date

There are two main strains in studies on the Vajrakīla tradition to date. Scholars have tended to do text critical and philological analysis of specific lineages of Vajrakīla, intrigued yet cautious about the apotropaic aspects of the practice, especially the violence inherent in rites of subjugation. Alternatively, they have studied the soteriological aspects of the tradition in line with presentations by Tibetan lamas to foreign audiences in which subjugation is internalized as a psychological process. Martin J. Brood represents the latter strain in his study of Jang Ter (byang gter) or the Northern Treasure tradition that has historical link with the ancient lineage of the Tibetan kings. As someone who has studied Buddhism in India with numerous Tibetan Buddhist teachers in exile, he has practiced, interpreted for Tibetan teachers, and translated texts, particularly of Vajrakīla in Jangter tradition. His contributions in the scholarship of Vajrakīla studies mostly concern soteriological aspects of practice. His book A Roll of Thunder from the Void is a translation of a liturgical practice text together with explanatory notes and commentaries by the 17th century

17 There have also been studies by John C. Huntington and Lokesh Chandra on the iconography of Vajrakīla. John C. Huntington, presumably one of the earliest authors on Vajrakīla, does not choose to talk about any traditions. Rather he chooses to survey the iconography of the diverse types of phur pa and to set up broad categories of classification based on iconographic elements. A considerable variety of implements is examined and analyzed in order to determine their relationship to underlying principles. Lokesh Chandra in his Dictionary of Buddhist Iconography again choose to use byang gter images for his imagery explanation of Vajrakīlaya. Thus, most of the works that I encounter does not discuss much about the tradition I study. However, Khenpo Namdrol’s teaching, although not very close to my study, it talks about the same tradition.
master Padma Thinley of the Northern Treasures Vajrakīla. His translation focuses mainly on how to take these practices into a closed retreat and employ them for the highest benefit of oneself and all living beings and how to overcome egoistic self-interest and focus on the general welfare of the world so that it can bring changes in both thought and behavior of the practitioner.

Along similar lines, Khenpo Namdrol’s *The Practice of Vajrakīla* is a teaching given to his ‘Western’ students in Poolesville, Maryland, which is later translated and published. Even though it is the Ratna Lingpa’s treasure tradition, which is also the tradition followed by Sumthrang, it stress the soteriological aspect of the practice and not much on the apotropaic aspect of the practice. Namdrol elucidates the Vajrakīla as ground, path, and fruition of the practice towards enlightenment; he explains the generation of deities and visualization of the cosmology of the deity step-by-step. He then clarifies the three elements while generating the deity: Clarity, Pure Recollection, and Divine Pride, which are essential elements of the practice. These three are essential because the visualization and generation of the deity practice is applied here, without which the practice is incomplete. After that, to make readers understand the practice as a non-dual practice of generation and completion, the visualization of emptiness along with the deity is explained. Furthermore, to understand the chief deity and his retinues’ visualization and significance, forms of the deities, their color, posture, implements, and its significance and metaphors are explained in “Pure Recollection.” After that, Namdrol briefly explains about the five empowerments of the five Buddha families and talks about how to chant Vajrakīla mantras with understanding the meanings of it to make the practice more efficacious before concluding the book. Finally, his book ends with explanation of how such practices are concluded with dedication, aspirational prayers, and a prayer for auspiciousness.
Overall, this book stresses more the practice for enlightenment rather than destroying the actual sentient being rudra\textsuperscript{18} and liberating it. All the transgressions are somehow explained as metaphorical or psychological to tame one's own mental poisons. Although Khenpo Namdrol’s commentary gives a clear idea of the practice according to Ratna Lingpa’s treasure tradition, there are certain lapses while describing the deity figures at visualization stages. Thus, Namdrol explains the tradition according to the empowerment text (Abhiśheka), while I look closer to the sādhana manual from the cycle. Therefore, my study finds the practice more apotropaic in nature yet it is still soteriological to certain extent, which Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer would agree in their “The Dunhuang Phur pa Corpus: A Survey.” Generally speaking, the practice itself has two kinds, stod las and smad las, which the two authors would understand it as "primary rite" and "subsidiary rites." The stod las or the primary rite refers to achieving enlightenment and the smad las or the subsidiary rite more presumably adopts apotropaic rituals. Having looked at studies emphasizing the soteriological aspect of Vajrakīla, let us now briefly turn to the scholarly treatment of its apotropaic aspect.

In “To Meditate Upon Consciousness As Vajra: Ritual ‘Killing and Liberation’ In The Rnying-Ma-Pa Tradition,” Cathy Cantwell explores the meaning of sgrol ba, liberation through killing and its symbolism with reference to ritual manuals and contemporary practice. As the rite of sgrol ba in this practice involves "liberation" (sgrol ba) which means to liberate the consciousness of another being and deliver it to a pure land. Since this can be seen as equivalent to killing, and given that taking life contravenes is a basic Buddhist precept, Cantwell finds it controversial. Thus, she problematizes the apotropaic dimension of Vajrakīla and seeks to clear up this confusion. Through looking at some historical evidence,

\textsuperscript{18} Rudra: Although Khenpo Namdrol describes three different rudras, the one mentioned in this study is the third one, which is essentially negative. Khenpo describes it as a tangible being who is reborn in a malignant form as a result of broken tantric commitments. They act as the obstacles to propagations to teachings.
she asks does this act cause physical death of an actual sentient being? Jacob P. Dalton takes up the same question regarding the "liberation rite" in his *The Taming of The Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism*. Dalton associates his discussion with the Rudra myth, which has connotation with numerous ritual manuals, such as Sumthrang’s Vajrakīla. Relating to Rudra’s liberation as narrated by the myth, Dalton’s works classify how such rituals are conducted to "liberate" ones who are against the dharma. Although these rituals use an effigy of paper or dough, Dalton claims that instructions in a tenth-century Tibetan manuscript from Dunhuang cave suggests the involvement of a live victim. He also discusses “the Mongol Repeller” Sokdokpa (1552–1624) and the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) about their use of such rituals in a warfare to suggest the possibility of actual murder using apotropaic rituals of subjugation.

Although Cantwell identifies certain physical transgressions such as seeing Chinese Communist as outer enemy (*dgra bo*) who destroys Buddhist teachings and directing rituals against them, she also finds that enemies are equated to practitioner’s negative qualities, such as ignorance, self-grasping, and three poisons within their own mind. She looks into the ritual to identify who is killed however, finds herself delving back and forth into soteriological and apotropaic aspects to the rite. She then gives a detailed process of “killing and liberating” in the ritual and argues that “it would not be in accordance with the tradition to practice *sgrol-ba* as sorcery against enemies for motives of personal revenge; to do so would bring severe karmic retribution.” She somehow concludes on notes “only a dough effigy could physically be attacked” and “possibly, the actual act of killing has a particularly central place and is replete with symbolic power in the Tibetan example, precisely because of the

19 See Cathy Cantwell’s “To Meditate Upon Consciousness As Vajra: Ritual ‘Killing and Liberation’ In The Rnying-Ma-Pa Tradition.”
20 Cathy Cantwell 115
21 Cathy Cantwell116
Buddhist proscription on taking life.”

In such case, how do we understand apotropaic ritual in Buddhist tantra?

Looking at the sādhanā manual of Sumthrang’s phur pa cycle, although it emphasis more apotropaic ritual, it states certain aspects of soteriology too. The sādhanā starts with lineage prayers and refuge and goes on through generating bodhicitta, and so on, in the preliminary round. However, in the main part of the sādhanā, it starts with three types of samādhi (ting nge ‘dzin) and then goes on to generate the cosmology of the deity, its palace, the deity himself and the others. After that invitation of the deity (spyan ‘dren), offerings (mchod pa) and praise (bstod pa) are made. Although in every section there are different acts, most of the time either the main deity or other particular emanations are described and invoked. However, in the subjugation (gdabs las) rite, intense transgression of the so-called enemy of the dharma is seen. Certain transgression is seen in the exorcism, too, but not as intensely as in the subjugation, where as the exhortation section describes the deities as intensely wrathful, meaning they can harm any kinds of evil forces. Further, the smad las sub-divides into three categories called pressing down (mnan pa’i las), subjugation (gdabs pa’i las), and hurling (’phang ba’i las). These rites come in a separate text, which is added upon the actual sādhanā manual only while performing the Kangsöl ritual. Therefore, the practice is more meant to affect this-worldly activity, where certain demonic spirits that harm the practice, practitioners, and the community needs to be protected. The practice of Vajrakīla in the form of Kangsöl festival in Sumthrang Monastery is meant to appease the deity for yearlong prosperity in the community and drive away the evil forces for another prosperous year. So, therefore, how do we understand the violence of subjugation?

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22 Cathy Cantwell
23 Phur bu yang gsang bla med don gyi snying po’i las byang ’phrin las kyi spu gri
Ritual Typology

As a corrective to these trends in the study of the Vajrakīla tradition to date, in this thesis, I attempt a new interpretive approach to the apotropaic aspects of this subjugation rite. In Sumthrang’s case, although there are stages in the performance of subjugation, I argue that the ritual is used to restore the cosmic order. Restoring the cosmic order here means restructuring the hierarchical order of invisible deities and spirits as well as visible human beings so that all gets in their place and does not harm the upper or lower in their order. By doing so, it constitutes the Sumthrang community under the protective care of its chöje and monastery rather than killing anyone per se. The demonic as a force is vividly brought to life in dances, only to be subjugated and laid to rest for the year. To think through this approach, we need to understand the contents of the Vajrakīla corpus of Sumthrang as well as the different categories of ritual and how they relate to soteriological and apotropaic pursuits.

The Vajrakīla cycle of Sumthrang Monastery is claimed to be the queen’s tradition (jomo lugs). The tradition that belongs to Yeshe Tsogyel, which is revealed by Ratna Lingpa (1403-1478) from Danglha (ldang lha) mountain in Lho Drag (lho brag) in Tibet. The name of the phur pa cycle itself is phur pa yang gsang bla med or The Supreme and Most Secret Vajrakīla. The cycle contains thirty-four sections or text, which includes different sādhanas for different rituals. The lists of thirty-four texts are:

༡ དབང་བཤད་སྐལ་ལྡན་སྨིན་བྱེད།
༢ དཀོན་ཇེ་མཛོན་ལས་ཀྱི་མཛོད་པ།
༣ དཀོན་གསང་བའི་ཕྱག་མཚན་གྱི་རྣམ་ཐར།
༤ དཀོན་ཕུར་པ་གསང་བ་སྙིང་པོ་འཕྲིན་ལས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད།
༥ དཀོན་ལས་བྱང་་འཕྲིན་ལས་ཀྱི་སྤུ་གྲི།
༦ དཀོན་ལས་བྱང་བསྟོད་པ་ཟུར་འགེབས་དང་བསྲུང་མའི་བསྐུལ་རྣམས།
༧ དཀོན་ཆོས་ཁྲིད་བསྐྱེད་རྫོགས་ཀྱི་སྒོམ་ཁོག་རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་འཕྲེང་བ།
These are thirty four different texts pertaining to the volume or cycle of Sumthrang’s Vajrakīla practice called Phur pa yang gsang bla med. Among all these texts in the cycle two before the last one (ཀི&ཁུ) are missing and also the preliminary practice manual (sngon ‘gro) is also not in the text. Among the thirty four different text, such as dkyil ‘khor rnam dag dri med, don dbang vid bzhin nor bu, mar me’i smon lam may falls under stod las due to their soteriological practice in nature. Whereas, smad las gdug phur, bskul byang gdugs mda’ nag po, bzlog pa spu gri ‘kor lo, and so on falls under smad las. We can understand it from the terms gdug phur (poisonous dragger) and gdugs mda’ nag po (black poisonous arrow) used in the latter two titles. These two stod las and smad las categories are identified according to the soteriological and apotropaic nature of their practice. As the Kangsöl ritual falls more into apotropaic practice, the activity of the liberating the beings or the forces are done with four different activities, which is popularly called as las bzhi in a short form.

There is no single term corresponding to "ritual" in Bhutan. Different types of religious ceremonies and rituals are regularly performed, and consequently, there are many terms used just for ritual itself. For example, choga (cho ga) is a religious performance or liturgical procedure. Rimdro (rim gro) should be understood more in the context of healing somebody through a ritual. Soelchod (gsol mchod) is prayer and offering for the deities that particular devotees follow. Duechod Bumday (dus mchod bum sde) are offerings and prayers that are done annually. Drupthap (grub thabs) is sadhāna, a method of accomplishment. Although, it is quite difficult to specify which falls under soteriological and apotropaic, drupthap can be more soteriological in nature and rimdo might fall under apotropaic, as certain negative forces need to be repelled to heal a sick person. However, others seem to fall in the middle. One interesting term that is not directly used for ritual, but to the one who is accomplished in ritual performances is Kunzop (kun rdzop). Kunzop literally means “the relative.” It can also mean the opposite of ultimate. Thus, ultimate truth and relative truth in
the practice of Buddhism are important. Hence, the person who is accomplished in ritual performance is also understood to realize the ultimate truth using ritual as method. Therefore, ritual is also a practice of relative truth for realization of the ultimate truth. Kangsöl is another term used for annual festive ritual in some monasteries. It means appeasing the deities. One such ritual is the Kangsöl festival of Vajrakīla practice in Sumthrang, ritual practice of wrathful Vajrakīla that subdues the negative force. To subdue the negativity, four actions are employed by four different deities in four directions.

Lay zhi (las bzhi) is a term used for four different activities done by four Vajrakīlaya emanations in four directions. These four activities are pacifying (zhi), enriching (rgyas), magnetizing (dbang), and subjugating (drag). Purifying and calming through removing hindrances and illnesses is Pacifying. Increasing or bringing prosperity and longevity is Enriching. Influencing or attracting power to give control over situations is Magnetizing. Destructive or forceful activity through wrathful action and annihilating confusion and obstacles is Subjugating. It is also a practice of the deity yoga of the inner or higher tantras. Practitioners visualize themselves as the deity and train in pacifying conflict, sickness and famine, increasing longevity and merit, magnetizing the three realms, and subjugating hostile forces. These four activities are carried out directly as aspects of enlightened activity for the benefit of others.

Within the Vajrakīla practice system, there are two categories, the upper and the lower activities (stod las, smad las). The stod las concerns a more soteriological aspect of the ritual. This is because this category does not accommodate a great deal of transgressive activities but emphasize more enlightenment activity. For example when Vajrakīla sādhana is practiced for the rite of Great Attainment (sgrub chen), the ritual practice concerns soteriology. The smad las concerns the apotropaic aspects of the ritual and is related to the

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24 Desire realm, Form realm, and Formless realm
four activities. Specifically, the Vajraṅāla sādhana practiced in Kangsöl, an annual ritual of appeasing the deities, concerns the *smad las* practice with its sub-category rites of subjugation, hurling, and incineration rites. Therefore, *las bzhi* or the four activities in this sādhana are found in the exorcism of the hurling rite before the actual act of hurling the torma (a symbolic ritual cake of the deity) into the blazing fire. Thus, Sumthrang’s Vajraṅāla practice terms upper activity as accumulating enlightenment (*stod las byang chub sgrub pa*) and lower activity as liberating enemies (*smad las dgra bo grol ba*). The subjugation, hurling, and incinerating rites are three sub categories of *smad las* practices, which are significant to Kangsöl. These actions clear all the negative forces within that space to have prosperous year.

Central to the principles of such practices is the conceptual assembly of the ‘Five Enlightened Families’ (*rgyal ba rigs-lnga*, Skt. *panchakula*). Each Buddha is assigned a direction and each one represents the purified manifestations of the five aggregates. Additionally, each one overcomes a poison, such as anger, pride, desire, envy, and ignorance. Thus, sometimes a fifth rite activity is also added to the list when it corresponds to the Five Buddha Families. However, five Buddhas are practiced when employing to a peaceful method. When it is practiced in wrathful method, like in Vajraṅāla practice, they are four emanations, the four supreme sons (*sras mchog bzhi*). These four supreme sons correspond to the four activities of pacifying (*zhi*), enriching (*rgyas*), magnetizing (*dbang*), and subjugating (*drag*). This will be clear if we look at the translation from the text and the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>East</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>North</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vajraṅāla</td>
<td>Samaya-breaker and obstacles are fenced, caught, and hooked</td>
<td>Samaya-breaker and enemies are bind and noosed</td>
<td>Samaya-breaker and enemies are counseled by the caldron of middle doctrine</td>
<td>Samaya-breaker and enemies are magnetized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thus Eastern enemies and obstacles are pacified.</td>
<td>Thus Southern enemies and obstacles are enriched.</td>
<td>Thus Western enemies and obstacles are magnetized</td>
<td>Thus Northern enemies and obstacles are subjugated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Samaya-breaker and enemies are crazed by a bell and subdued
[Thus] Northern enemies and obstacles subjugated [single space indented quotes]

According to the standard representation of the zhi ba, rgyas pa, dbang, and drag pa deities, they are identified through the implements they hold. Generally, the deities of the zhi ba cycle holds implements such as malas and flowers. Deities of the rgyas pa cycle hold fruits and types of plants. Deities of the dbang cycle holds hook, rope, and so on, while the drag pa cycle holds kīla, swords, and so on. However, Vajrakīla itself being a wrathful and activity oriented deity does not follow the rule. All four supreme sons are depicted in wrathful implements than in the standard representations. Therefore, one cannot identify looking at its implement; thus, need to refer to the text.

The category of stod las and smad las are not always different texts or ritual. These two aforementioned rites are identified according to the nature of the rite. Although the ritual itself is enlightenment oriented, there will be a minor subjugation after the offering rite. However, Kangsöl with its three sub-categories of smad las has an apotropaic aspect of affecting the space or the community in time. Even by looking at the terms used for these two categories can simply convey the understanding of the two. Terms used for the former are light and latter are more intense. For example, the title term used for the exhortation for the stod las is just termed as deities’ exhortation (srungs ma’i bskul). However, the exhortation for the smad las is totally different part of text which has an intense term called the exhortation of the dark poisonous arrow (bskul byang dug mda’ nag po). Thus, even the terms are also more fuming in the smad las than in the stod las. For the stod las rituals it is more following the root sadhāna manual but when smad las is enacted the rites concerning the three sub-categories of it is added onto the normal sadhāna manual. The additions happen after the rite of offering (tshogs) and before the subjugation and leftover offering rite (tshogs

\[26\] Personal communication with Chöje Jamtsho
After offerings are made to the deities, the malevolent spirits are subdued and leftovers are offered to the spirits. Before doing that according to the nature of ritual additions extra rites are done. For example, if it is the empowerment of Vajrakīla, the empowerment commentary is done or if it is the smad las the exhortation of the dark poisonous arrow is recited. The description of four activities (las bzhi) and exhortation of the four heart sons are done before the actual rite of fire, subjugation, and hurling. To do so, the four heart sons of the Vajrakīla, Rathnakīla, Padmakīla, and Karmakīla are positioned in the directions of East, South, West, and North accordingly. Their activities and actions are reflected in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Heruka</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>Vajrakīlaya</td>
<td>Pacifying (zhi)</td>
<td>Samaya-breaker and enemies are fenced, caught, and hooked to pacify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>Rathnakīlaya</td>
<td>Enriching (rgyas),</td>
<td>Samaya-breaker and enemies are bind and noosed to enrich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>Padmakīlaya</td>
<td>Magnetizing (dbang)</td>
<td>Samaya-breaker and enemies are counseled by the caldron of middle doctrine to magnetize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>Karmakīlaya</td>
<td>Subjugating (drag)</td>
<td>Samaya-breaker and enemies are crazed and subdued by a bell to subjugate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: 1
Chapter II

Genealogical History of Sumthrang’s tradition

In this section I will discuss the genealogy and transmission of Sumthrang’s Vajrakīla tradition. This section will attempt to tie the local community to the founding figure Lhanangpa and the oral tradition of Vajrakīla as central to the identity of Sumthrang Monastery. Furthermore, I will argue that the unbroken line of the transmission directly from father to son rather than secondary or tertiary figures contributes more blessings to the practice and ritual that helps in efficacy of the Kangsöl performance, which we will discuss in later section. Although, Sumthrang’s oral transmission of Vajrakīla went through a certain distortion of the oral transmission, the gter ma tradition maintained its blessings and efficacy. Therefore, we get an idea of how the tradition maintains its blessings and efficacy through lineage and transmission.

One of the oldest monasteries in the country, Sumthrang Sumdrup Chodzong was founded by Nyö Gyalwa Lhanangpa (gnyos rgyal ba lha gnang pa, 1164-1224) and his son Nyoton Thrulzhik chöje (gnyos ston ’khrul zhig, 1179-1265) in the 13th century in Bumthang. Bumthang district located in central Bhutan is the hub of religious and spiritual sites and festivals with 111 temples and monasteries following either the Kagyu or Nyingma, or both. In addition, there are also 300 chöten (stūpas) and some twelve great pilgrimage sites (gnas). 27 Fifty kilometers from the proper Bumthang town on the east-west highway is Ura village situated at an elevation of 3,100 meters above sea level. Sumthrang village is located on a mild slope above Ura village. Bumthang district has four gewogs (county), which are Ura, Chumey, Tang, and Choekhor and is called Bumthang day zhi, meaning four parts or county. However, in the Praise to Bumthang (bum thang sde bzhi’i bstod pa) by Longchenpa Ramjampa (klong chen rab ’byams pa, 1308-1363), a great Dzogchen philosopher of the

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27 Bumthang Dzongkhag at a Glance, 2013
Nyenda

Nyingma school, Ura is excluded from the four visible places and he praises Ura to be sacred hidden land. He also praises the sacred place of Sumthrang and its lineage, mentioning that great religious figures reside in this place. However, in the 13th century, after Nyoton started his tradition and teachings at Sumthrang, many students started to gather in order to receive the teachings. Thus, Nyoton started the Sumthrang chöje lineage.

In the Bhutanese Buddhist system, there are three ways in which religious lineages are transmitted. (1) Lineage can be passed down from teacher to student, like in the central Drukpa Kagyu ('brug pa bka’ brgyud) monastic body. The Je Khenpo (rje mkhyen po) is the supreme lineage holder and the next Je Khenpo will be one of his students. (2) Lineage can be passed to reincarnate trulkus like Peling Yabsey Sum (pad gling yab sras gsum). The Peling lineage is held by consecutive recantations of these three reincarnate trulkus who are associated with the founding figure Pema Lingpa. (3) Lineage can be passed down from father to son, as in the case with the Sumthrang chöje. Chöje (chos rje) literally means “dharma lord” and is the title of the lineage holder. Therefore, Sumthrang lama is known by their title chöje. With the story of the chöje also come the stories of their gomchens (sgom chen). Gomchens are the students of successive Sumthrang chöjes. They play the roles of monks in the practice and upkeep of Sumthrang monastery, but unlike monks the gomchens are lay practitioners and have families. From an early time, Sumthrang monastery under the supervision of the chöjes did not have any monks, but only gomchens. Gomchen literally means ‘great meditator,’ but in the context of local Bhutanese monasteries they are just lay practitioners. Very few actually go to meditate. They make up part of the village body, each with their own families, but are also trained to perform rituals of their own local tradition or even multiple traditions and participate in performing the annual rituals in the monastery. They also participate in performing private rituals for individual families in their community. They wear red robes like monks only during the rituals and this is not unusual in local
monasteries and villages in Bhutan. Today Sumthrang Monastery has very few gomchens and faces difficulty in performing annual rituals like Kangsöl. Therefore, gomchens from nearby villages are also invited to perform their rituals.

Sumthrang monastery also called as Sumthrang Sumdrup Chodzong (sum ’phrang bsam grub chos rdzong) was founded in 13th century. Oral history recounts the monastery to be founded by Nyö Gyelwa Lhanangpa himself. However, very recently scholars credited its founder to be Nyoton, Lhanangpa’s son. Within the old folks of the Sumthrang and nearby villages, Lhanangpa is more popular and has stronger presence in the minds of older generations than Nyoton. This makes one question, if Nyoton founded the monastery, why don’t the locals know him? Therefore, we should look into the history to be precise.

Nyö Gyelwa Lhanangpa Zijed Pel (gnyos rgyal ba lha gnang pa gzi brjed dpal), the founding figure of Sumthrang Monastery was also known as Nyö Gyelwa Lhanangpa Sangay Rechen (gnyos rgyal ba lha gnang pa sangs rgyas ras chen), was born in 1164 to his father, Dragpa Pel (grags pa dpal) of the Nyö clan, and his mother Yongmo Pelka (yongs mod pal ka) in the year of the Wood Male Monkey of the Buddhist calendar. At the time when his mother conceived Lhanangpa, Zhang Yudrakpa Tsöndru Drakpa (zhang gyu brag pa brtson 'gru brags pa, 1123-1193) recognized the yet-unborn child as the

Figure 1: A new wall painting of the founding figure of Sumthrang Monastery, Nyö Gyelwa Lhanangpa Zijed Pel (1164-1224)
reincarnation of the Great Siddha of India, Krishnacharya. At the age of nineteen Lhanangpa met Drikung Jigten Sumgön (ʼbri gung ’jig rten gsum mgon, 1143-1217) who was nothing less than the Buddha for him. After meeting Jigten Sumgön until the age of thirty-seven he spent years in retreat at Mount Kailash. It was also during these years that he performed several miracles. After his retreats in Mount Kailash, in 1194 CE he left for the south, present day Bhutan, as prophesized by his teacher. There is also evidence to suggest that he visited Bhutan for reasons other than to fulfill the prophecy. In the biography of Phajo Drugom Shigpo (pha jo ’brug sgom zhig po, 1184-1251/1208-1275), called The Current of Compassion, in a footnote, it says at the early stage, according to the Kharag Nyö source, large domains of present-day Bhutan (lho kha bzhi) were offered to Nyö Yonten Drakpa (967-1072) in the 10th century by a figure of Gya (rgya) clan after receiving teachings from him. Nyö Yonten Drakpa is Lhanangpa’s grand father.

Lhanangpa visited Bhutan in his thirties, and by the age of forty-nine he went to Dagla Gampo (dags lha sgam po), the monastery of Gampopa (sgam po pa 1079-1153) in Southern Tibet, with his master Jigten Sumgön. At that time Nyö Gyalwa Lhanangpa, Gar Dampa Choding (mgar dam pa chos sdings) and Palchen Choye (dpal chen chos) also know as Nyö Gar Choe Sum (gnyos mgar chos gsum), the three main disciples of Drikung Jigten Sumgön, went to Tsari Mountain and "opened" the hidden sacred place of Tsari following the advice of their root teacher. In between he was travelling back and forth between Tibet and Bhutan. He most likely stayed in Bhutan for a total of eight to eleven years. During this time, Lhanangpa started the Lhapa School, a sub-school of Drikung tradition in Paro Chelkha (spa ro beal mkha’) and attracted many students. His religious lineage, the Lhapa, remained influential for sometime in Bhutan, forming a number of monasteries and gaining control over the western region of the country.

28 Nagpo Chopa (Nag po spyod pa) in Tibetan.
29 Yonten Dargye and P. K Sorensen, The biography of Pha ’brug sgom zhig po (Thimphu: NLB, 2001), p. II.
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In Chelkha he had many disciples and sponsors who requested him to stay back as their teacher. However, Lhanangpa instead returned to Tibet after spending a total of about 11 years, leaving his nephew Lhapa Rinchen Gyalpo (lha pa rin chen rgyal po) as his representative. His nephew soon came into conflict with Phajo Drugom Zhigpo (pha jo ’brug sgom zhig po). Therefore, towards the end of Lhanangpa's life, Rinchen Gyalpo wrote a letter expressing his concern to Lhanangpa, reporting that he was challenged in spreading his teaching in Lhomon (Bhutan) by Phajo Drugom. Lhanangpa replied by saying not to worry much, and even though his teachings may not flourish in Lhomon, the rulers of the country would be from his family lineage.30 This later proved true as one of Lhanangpa’s descendants, the famous tertön Pema Lingpa (pad ma gling pa, 1450-1521) is considered the ancestor of the current royal family of Bhutan. Hence, knowing that his lineage of teachings may not last long in the Western part of Bhutan, he made a shift to establish a family tradition in the central part of Bhutan.

Recent scholarship on Bhutanese history notes that Sumthrang monastery was founded by Lhanangpa’s son Nyoton. However, I would like to argue that although the tradition of Sumthrang was started by Nyoton, Lhanangpa remains the founding figure. There are three reasons for this claim: first, elders in the community are only familiar with Lhanangpa and not Nyoton. If all the credit goes to Nyoton, why should there be strong presence of Lhanangpa among the older generations of Sumthrang? Second, Nyorab31 while discussing about Lhanangpa’s biography mentions that the Naktsang Yang Goen (Heritage house and monastery), Laye Sharling (Eastern location) and Nubling (Western location) retreat centers, which still exist in Sumthrang were established similar to Drikung centers were established by Lhanangpa. Third, the current knowledge of Nyoton as the founder of the

30 བདག་ཚོས་མོན་དུ་མ་དར་ཀྱང་།།ཡུལ་བདག་རྒྱུད་ལས་བྱུང་ཡང་སྲིད།། See Lam Jamtsho’s Sumthrang Denrab unpublished manuscript.
31 Lam Sangnga, gnyos rabs gsel ba’i me long (Thimphu: KMT, 2000).
monastery is based on lineage prayer section of Sumthrang’s Vajrakīla text. The section of this text stress only Nyoton and highlights only his coming to Sumthrang, because it is Nyoton’s central practice that flourished in central Bhutan. Therefore, it does not mention Lhanangpa. However, after Lhanangpa foresaw the diminishing of his tradition in the Western Bhutan, he sent his son with special advice on Vajrakīla practice as a practice of enlightened activity. So that his family lineage activity in central Bhutan would flourish through his son even though his own tradition in Western Bhutan diminishes slowly. Therefore, regardless of the historical founder – the founder that the community acknowledges today is something we should pay attention to. For example, we have no idea if Guru Rinpoche was ever even a historical figure\textsuperscript{32}, but most people still credit him with bringing Buddhism into the Himalayas and Tibet. So, historical or not, we should pay attention to what people say and who they acknowledge as their founder.

\textbf{The Syncretism of bka' ma and gter ma Traditions}

Lhanangpa after returning to Tibet asked his son Nyoton Thrilshik Chöje to go to Sumthrang, prophesizing the flourishing of his Vajrakīla practice there. Lhanangpa gave his son Nyoton all the empowerments and necessary supports (rten) to start his Vajrakīla tradition in Bhutan. Nyoton then set off to Lhasa to offer his prayers to the Jowo Rinpoche (jo bo rin po che) statue before heading to Sumthrang through Monla Karchung (mon la dkar chung) pass bordering between Tibet and Bhutan. At Monla Karchung he marked his accomplishment of his Vajrakīla practice by subjugating a demon called Hordue (hor bdud) when it tried to impede his journey to Sumthrang. Parts of the demon were brought to Sumthrang to be offered to the deities, and a skull and ribs are still preserved in the monastery, which are claimed to have belonged to Hordue.

\textsuperscript{32} See Matthew Kapstein, “The Imaginal Persistence of the Empire”
Although Sumthrang’s Vajrakīla tradition practiced today is a newer version of the practice, which is syncretism of oral and treasure traditions, the lineage originated as an oral lineage that Nyotön received from his father, Lanangpa, which is passed down through Padmasambhava. The bka’ ma or the oral lineage according to the text notes, starting from Buddha Samantabadra to Palchen Dorje Zhonu (Vajrakumāra) and to Chag na Dorje (Vajrapāṇi). Vajrapāṇi prophesized King Ja, however, King Ja could not understand the meaning of the tantra. Therefore, Dorje Sempa (Vajrasattva) cleansed his bad karma and then Vajrapāṇi could give the teachings to King Ja. The lineage goes from King Ja until Ngagchang Nyeljor Tsemo (alias Gyelwa Lhanangpa) and to Guru Nyoton Throlshik Chöje. You can see the how the lineage passed down in the footnote.33

Although empowerment text that list lineage holders does not mention Ngagchang Neljor Tsemo as Lhanangpa, an unpublished manuscript of Sumthrang Monastery’s history written by the current chöje argues that Ngachang Neljor Tsemo is Lhanangpa’s name before he was fully ordained as a monk. The Vajrakīla tradition of Sumthrang came through an undisturbed oral lineage and it is extremely important to the lived tradition that Lhanangpa was the seminal figure in its transmission to Sumthrang. From Lhanangpa, the tradition was passed down by Nyotön to his son Zhigpo Tashi Syingye (zhig po bral shes seng ge, 1237-1265), the second Sumthrang chöje and so forth until the fifth chöje Jamyang Drakpa Yoedzer (’jam dbyang grags pa ’od zer, 1382-1442). At Jamyang’s time there was certain religious conflict between central government and local traditions and Jamyang had to hide all their texts of their tradition at his brother Tenpai Nima’s (bstan pa’i nyi ma) home as he was not an official teacher of their tradition. Unfortunately, most of the texts, including the

33 King Ja - Thubo Ratsa (mtha bo ra tsa) - Lhacham Para nyima (lha lcam pa ra nyi ma) - Rigzin Garab Dorje (rgig ’dzin dga’ rab rdo rje) - Palchen Rolang Dewa (dpan chen ro langs de ba) - Khapa Bodhitattva Padmasambhava - Yeshi Tshogyel - Pelgi Wangchuk - Gyelwal Nyingpo - Yonten Zangpo - Klui Gyeltshen - Ngamring Sale - Jangchub Dorje - Sherab Tshultrim - Phagpa Jamtsho - Gyelton Sangay - Sherab Gyeltshen - Vajra Heruka - Droton Jo - Droton Thugje - Droton Lhaphur – Lhanangpa – Nyoton
Vajrakīla cycle of Sumthrang tradition, were burned down in a fire incident at Tenpai Nima’s home.

The sixth chöje, Namkha Samdrup (*gnam mkha’ bsam grub*, 1398-1459) went to Lhodrak (*lho brag*) in Tibet and received Ratna Lingpa’s (*rat na gling pa*, 1403-1478) treasure tradition of Vajrakīla from the treasure revealer himself. This is most likely because Sumthrang lost its most important teaching text of Vajrakīla at his father’s time and he needed a text for the tradition to survive. We do not really know the name of Vajrakīla tradition of oral lineage prior to this syncretism. However, there is a commentary written by Nyoton about Vajrakīlaya practice called *Ma smin pa smin par byed pa smin pa grol bar byed pa* in *dbu med* script. On the other hand although almost all the text in the Vajrakīla teaching cycle of Sumthrang at present are from Ratna Lingpa’s treasure tradition, the section of the empowerment teaching is seemingly based on the aforementioned Nyoton’s text. Thus, the empowerment is still from the oral lineage while other teachings and practices belong to the treasure tradition of Ratna Lingpa.

An important feature of religious practice at Sumthrang is the syncretism of *bka ma* and *gter ma* traditions. Sumthrang’s tradition of Vajrakīla practice claims to be orally transmitted and later infused with Ratna Lingpa’s (*rat na gling pa*, 1403-1478) treasure tradition to become a convergence of treasure and oral lineages called *Phurbu Kater Chö Chig Du* (*phur bu bkas gter chu bo gchig bsdus*). Although the practice started in Sumthrang by Nyoton after he came to Sumthrang in 1228 CE, the lineage of the tradition that he brought along with him came from his father Lhanangpa, as mentioned before. When we look into the lineage, Lhanangpa falls in the sixteenth generation of the lineage holders of the orally transmitted Vajrakīla, which begins with Padmasambhava/Guru Rinpoche (eight century). Although oral accounts claims that Lhanangpa is the figure who established the Lho Nyö (*lho gnyos*) Lineage or the Nyö lineage in Bhutan, Nyoton was the historical figure who
started the Vajrakīla lineage that was bestowed to him by his father Lhanangpa. Considering Nyoton as the first chöje or religious lineage holder, the current lineage holder is the twenty-seventh lineage holder in line. So, the tradition acknowledges this historical fact even as it remembers Lhanangpa as the founding father of the tradition.

Nyoton passed down the oral transmission of the Vajrakīla practice in Sumthrang to his son, the second lineage holder Zhigpo Tashi Syingye (zhig po bkra shi seng ge, 1237-1322). The oral lineage remained the same until the fifth Chöje Jamyang Dragpa Yozer (‘jam dbyang grag pa ‘od zer, 1382-1442). However, after he passed down the lineage to his son Namkhai Tsenchen (gnam mkha’i mtsan chen, 1392-1459), Namkha also received many other traditions from different teachers. The transmission and teachings that he received aside from his own father among others included Ratna Lingpa’s treasure revealed Vajrakīla tradition. This is how Sumthrang’s Vajrakīla tradition Kater Chö Chig Due seems to have started, although it does not mention this in detail in his brief history in the genealogical book of Nyo lineage called The Clear Mirror of Nyo Lineage (gnyos rabs gsel ba’i me long).

So this tradition was passed down from father to son until the twenty-second Chöje Tsultrim Droji (tshul khrim rdo rje, 1809-1872). However, when it was time for him to pass down the Vajrakīlaya transmission to his son Norbu Wangyel (nor bu dbang rgyal, 1841-1891), Wangyel fled into the by near forest and did not receive the transmission. The reason why he did not want to be the lineage holder was that he was more interested in becoming a political figure than a religious figure. It is mentioned in his brief history that he went to the Duar War with Trongsa Penlop Jigme Namgyel (krong gsar dpon slob ’jigs med rnams rgyal, 1825-1881) who became the fifty first Druk Desi (’brug sde srid, temporal ruler), at Dungsam Dewathang (gdung bsam bde ba thangs). Thus, it looks like the transmission was somehow discontinued during this period of time. Yet, the distinctive Sumthrang tradition of

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34 Lam Sangnga 214
Vajrakīla ritual performance is still practiced in the manner of performing the Kangsöl ritual as an annual event. Although the current Sumthrang chöje did not receive the actual empowerment of the tradition from his father, he received the empowerment of Sangwa Duepa (gsang ba bsdus pa) tradition from his root teacher Lama Sonam Zangpo (bla ma bsod nam bzang po, 1888-1982), which he thought is closest to Sumthrang’s tradition. He also received transmissions of other traditions from Dudjom Rinpoche (bdud ’joms, 1904-1987) and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (dil mgo mkhyen btsi, 1910-1991). Chöje Wangdrak Jamtsho, the current lineage holder is today looking for other teachers who hold the bka ma lineage to reconnect Sumthrang’s tradition to its ancestral lineage.

Maintaining the undistorted line of transmission and practice is understood to keep the lineage active and helps in the efficacy of practice and ritual. When Sumthrang’s text belonging to the oral lineage was lost in the fire, Namkha Samdrup went to Lhodrak to receive the transmission from the treasure revealer himself so that the blessing and the efficacy would remain strong. We also know from the texts that although the textual changes happened after Namkha received the tradition from Ratna Lingpa, the empowerment section, which also has all the names of lineage holders, still belongs to the oral lineage. This is because of the importance of the Kangsöl as a link to the founding figure and annual rite to protect the local community with the blessing of presence and efficacy of the correct transmission. Even today, the names of Lhanangpa and other lineage holders are called upon in the beginning of the ritual tracing the oral lineage. Hence, even if there is a textual change in the tradition, oral transmission remains to trace the root and its blessings.
Chapter III

Kangsöl, the Annual Ritual of Vajrakīlaya

Sumthrang monastery has five main annual ritual performances throughout the year, which vary from one to five days in length. Although all the rituals are based on different deities, the majority of the five rituals are related to the Vajrakīla sādhana. The first annual ritual of the year is called Gruphai; a word that means ‘festival’ in the ancient local dialect of Ura. It is a one-day Vajrakīla sādhana performed on the fifteenth day of the first month of the lunar calendar at the end of the traditional New Year (blo gsar) celebrations. Traditionally it used to be a three days of Vajrakīla sādhana of great attainment (phur pa’i sgrub chen), but this was later shortened to a one day Gruphai. The Vajrakīla sādhana is performed for a day for this ritual and local people receive the blessings of Tsari Nyungma (rtsa ri gnyung ma), in the form of a set of sacred bamboo collected by Lhanangpa from Tsari after he accomplished in Vajrakīla practice. This bamboo is taken out from a wooden box and passed by the lama to people sitting in the monastery that the people may touch the sacred object. People chant the Vajrakīla mantra as they pass around the bamboo and at last it is returned into the wooden box to be sealed for another year. On the tenth of the fourth lunar calendar is a one day Pre Chud, a Guru Rinpoche day is also performed.

On the fifteenth of the fifth month is one day Ser Sung (ser srung) or hail stopping ritual. Although they perform the Vajrakīla sādhana for this rite, the main rite for the day is Tadrin Sangdrup (rta mgrin gsang grub), which is purported to stop the hail throughout the year. In the sixth month, from the fourth until the eighth day, a Zhitro tshog bum (zhi khro tshogs ‘bum) is performed for five days. The annual performance of this ritual was started by the current lineage holder Chöje Wangdrak Jamtsho thirty-eight years ago and continues to this day. Soon after his studies, Ashi Dechen Wangmo, the eldest daughter of the third king of Bhutan, asked him to teach the school children. Chöje Jamtso become a school teacher and
could not practice much or take full responsibility at his monastery. Ashi Dechen Wangmo took charge the country after the third king passed away and fourth king was too young to take charge. Chöje Jamtsho began this five day ritual as an apology to the monastery and tradition using the first salary he received as a teacher to finance it. On the tenth day of the eighth month, as the eighth month is considered the longevity month, a sādhana of the longevity deity (tse dpag med) is performed. Additionally, the last and the important is the Kangsöl (bskang gsol). This festively performed ritual of Vajrakīla is traditionally enacted in the tenth month of the lunar calendar, which usually falls in November.

The Kangsöl is a staged performance on the monastery ground that takes place over five days. The term Kangsöl involves appeasing, mending, and petitioning rituals to Vajrakīla. It is a time when all the locals come together to appease the tutelary deity (yi dam) Vajrakīla and other protector deities (chos srungs) for guarding the local area surrounding the monastery and the beings within that space and to petition these deities to continue their activity in the next year as well. This ritual is also meant to subjugate the evil forces and clean the space of any negativity. These negative forces are known as Dra Geg (dgra bgegs), where the ritual text could classify dra or enemy with form that can be a real human being and bgegs as a class of malignant spirits who are formless. Thus, the Kangsöl is a festival of offering involving a number of sacred dances (’cham) bringing the community together to appease the deities and celebrate together as the local area is cleared of negativity in process. As we have discussed in an earlier section, the practice of Vajrakīla involves stod las and smad las. Kangsöl is a smad las practice being apotropaic in nature. The subjugation and “liberation” of demonic and evil forces are done in three categories, Segpa (sreg pa), incineration, Nyanpa (gnan pa), subjugation, and Phangwa (’phang ba), hurling. We will understand these three tasks as we discuss the festival in detail below. To do these actions, an
accurate astrological timing is sought. The tenth month is considered as the month of the yogis’ exorcism (*sngags pa zor phan gyi zla ba*). It is also considered as the sinful month, as traditionally it is believed that in Tibet animals are slaughtered in this month. However, today as most of the younger generations are in school at this time, so the timing is also negotiated according to the school holidays. The Kangsöl ritual is performed for three to five days according to the convenience of time and decision of the lama and the community.

Kangsöl as a performative ritual tradition has numerous sequenced enactments that are expressed through multi-media. The text is recited in its standard sequence that leads the enactments. It is combined with high and low tones of the voice and hand gestures (*mudrā; phyag rgya*). Musical instruments are played loudly and intensely at the wrathful enactments and low and peaceful while performing peaceful enactments. According to Tambiah’s fourfold definition of ritual, such content and arrangements are characterized in varying degrees by formality, stereotypy, condensation, and redundancy. Among the four, redundancies is most visible in Kangsöl. We can see the repetition of central actions, the subjugation as incinerating, subduing, and hurling and also pressing the demonic down. Even in the multimedia dimension, there are music, hand gestures, chants, symbolic cakes and masked dances that amplify the central ritual actions performed by the chöje and gomchens. All of these repeated actions becomes convincing for participants who are thereby constituted under the protective power and authority of the chöje, deity, and monastery for another year.

**Day One: Tsug Ton (Preliminary Rite)**

The first day of the Kangsöl is called Tsugton (*btsug ston*), which is a preliminary rite. This rite starts towards the evening after all the preparations are finished. Preparations include making ritual cakes or torma (*gtor ma*), arranging the shrine, cleaning the monastery, and preparing the costumes for the masked dances. On this evening, the main task is the rite

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of incineration in order to drive away evil forces. Before enacting these three enactments of incineration, subjugation, and hurling, the proper time and direction are calculated according to astrology. For the first day, a time for incineration and the direction of the movement of spirits are sought from the astrologer. The time is calculated according to the Bhutanese/Tibetan zodiac. Importantly, the timing of these three enactments, which corresponds to the animals of the zodiac, should not fall on the same animal as the chöje’s birth year, as he is the central figure of the community. After that, the direction of the movement of the spirits should be identified and a huge fireplace called a Humkhang (hum khang) is prepared with old bamboo baskets and straws.

The ritual itself is a combination of prayers, offerings, mantra recitations, and ritual music in between the prayers and chants. The actual ritual starts with reciting the lineage praise and then refuge, generation of the aspiration, and the Seven-Limb Prayer (yan lag bdun pa). It then praises the deities, invokes them, and makes the offerings, which will take whole day from 9AM in the morning till 5PM in the evening. However, for the preliminary evening, all these ritual will be done in condensation, which can be six to seven hours. Chöpon (chos dpon) or shrine or ritual attendants arranges a wood candle, a medium basket full of tennis ball size stones, and bucket of water. Children of the village normally, prepare howla, a semi-rotten tree crushed into powder and roasted to make huge fire when throwing onto the wood candle fire. These are the materials used to drive away demonic and evil force.

Additionally, the Chöpon should also prepare an effigy of a human image made from dough with its hands and legs tied and private parts erected. This effigy is used in the pressing down rite and is pressed down under the triangular-shaped piles of wood in the courtyard of the monastery. In the middle of the ritual is the chanting of mantras. First the

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37 For example Thorang (tho rangs) or dawn is Tiger, Nam Lang (gnam langs), the morning is sheep, dragon, snake, dog, pig, rat, and so on.
38 His duty is to make sure to do all offerings are done according to the recitation and prayers. For example, when to sprinkle the Due tse and Rak Ta (bdud rtse, rka ta), when to display the torma, and so on.
mantra of the central figure Vajrakumāra (rdo rje gzhon nu) is chanted, and then the mantras of four sons, ten emanations, and other intense mantras. The rule of chanting the mantra is, if the central figure’s mantra is chanted for 100 times, four sons should be fifty each, twenty-five each for ten emanations and so forth. This is to accumulate the power of mantra according to the power of the respective figures in hierarchical order according to their centrality and importance. When mantras are chanted, the Chöpon display all of the materials in front of the chöje’s throne. At the end of the chant, the Chöpon brings each material one by one to the chöje and gomchens, holding it with his wrist crossed and palms down. The lama and monks also cross their wrists with their palms facing down and blow down through their outer surface of the hand on the material in order to bless them. This enactment empowers the power of the materials with the energy of mantra to bless the materials. In order for the ritual to be efficacious, it must be performed perfectly. The use of materials, mudras, and mantra repetitively, makes sure that nothing is missed out and that the energy is created to dispel the evil forces.

After that is the Rising Exhortation (gzheng bskul), where the chöje and gomchens all stand up in respect to the deities and ask the deities to rise from their places to help drive away the evil forces. A Black Hat Dance (zha nag rnga ’cham) is performed as chöje and the gomchens do the exhortation Vajrakīla deities. The Black Hat Dance is an enactment of Vajrakīla to invite the deity into the ritual arena. After this, the torma of malevolent spirits (bgegs gtor) is displayed by the Chöpon in the center of the temple. This torma is made with a butter lamp in front of it. The lama will then bless (byin rlabs) the torma, and then the four Ging (ging bzhi) or the four wrathful messengers will be performed. Alongside the performance of the four gings, the rite for gegtor (gegs gtor) to gather and dispel all the obstructing gegs spirits (gegs) is done. After the gegtor rite is completed, the Chöpon picks up the gegtor, which is in a plate with his palms down, and goes around the shrine clockwise.
The four wrathful messengers, the black hat performer, and all the people present will follow the Chöpon. In the mean time the chöje and gomchens will rise from their seats and follow them. All the participants, who are mostly young and middle-aged villagers, scream and whistle as they join the performers. Whistling is understood to be calling the demonic and spirits. Some young children prepare their own howla to throw fire on their friends, which is meant to drive the evil forces. Everybody makes a clockwise round of the monastery and walks out screaming and yelling in a gesture to chase away the demonic. Subsequently, they all gather in front of the monastery where the Chöpon has prepared the Linga (ling ga), an effigy of evil under a triangularly stacked pile of wood. The chöje and gomchens with their power of visualization, mudra, and mantra, brings the evil forces and also the samaya-breakers, who are enemies of the Dharma and who harm sentient beings, into the effigy and presses them down under the nine lower realms. Then a fire ritual is done to incinerate the evil forces, thus, it is also incineration ritual (bsreg pa) along with pressing ritual. Thus, the evil forces with form are incinerated and without form are pressed and under nine realms. In the Pedling tradition (Pema Lingpa’s treasure tradition), the incineration is different from Sumthrang’s tradition. It is done with heating the oil in the fire, and displaying an effigy drawn on a paper and holding it about twelve to fifteen inches higher than the heated oil. According to the ritual, a freshly made and heated scoop of wine is poured into the oil to raze the fire to burn the image held high.

After the pressing and incineration are completed, local community members and monastics again follow the Chöpon, this time from house to house following the astrological direction. The wrathful messengers will follow the Chöpon holding a wooden candle with a blazing fire, splitting the howla (powdered and roasted wood) and making a huge fire (which remains only for an instant). Someone also carries water and sprinkles it after them. Finally, the lama will chant his mantras and throw the tennis ball sized stones. These are
meant to chase the evil forces through the astrological path they move on that particular day and time. At the end of the chase, all the evil forces enter the humkhang, the fireplace, which is prepared earlier. At the humkang site, the chöje presides over the exhortation while the four wrathful messengers move and dance around the humkang guarding it. As soon as the exhortation chant is finished the cymbal is beaten loud and the horn and thighbone trumpets are blown intensely to signify the wrath of the Vajrakīla. Thus, the redundant actions of and the multimedia aspects used to perform the rite are designed to viscerally affect participants. Subsequently, fire is put to the humkhang, along with all the rites, mantra, and mudra, and burns up the evil forces. After that all the participants return back to the monastery and a rite of reinstating life force (tshe khugs) is done to regain the life force, in case some participants might have weakened their life force out of fear in the process. The first day, preliminary rite is significant in that the chöje oje goes from house to house to dispel evils. All these enactments are part of the redundancy to ensure that the invisible beings are made palpable in the ritual arena and that the ritual is collectively perceived as efficacious.

Day Two: Nang Cham (Inner Dance)

The second day is called Nang Cham (gnang ‘cham) or Inner Dance because it is the day dedicated to the protector deity Drag Tsen Dorji Dradul’s (brag btsan rdo rje dgra ‘dul) masked dance performance inside the monastery. The chöje and gomchens are the main performers and women bring offering of different kinds of foods in small bamboo baskets called bangchung and walk with their offering before the deity performance. Men hold flags of different kinds and elders and other people prostrate and receive blessings. The deity dance is performed in the center of the monastery and villagers sit at the two sides. Although the day is dedicated to the protector deity, the main sādhana is still Vajrakīla. The protector deity’s sādhana is included along with the Vajrakīla sādhana. As this day is composed mostly
of performances of different masked dances, the lama and monks start the sādhana early in the morning from 2 AM in the morning and leave after the offering rite around 9 AM to be continued in the evening and start the mask dances. The process of the sādhana is same almost every day starting with reciting the lineage prayer, taking refuge, seven-branch prayer, invitation, and offering. However, as the daytime is occupied by masked dances, there is not enough time for the full sādhana practice. Therefore, on the second day chöje and gomchens keep other sections of sādhana brief and elaborate the chendren (spyan ‘dren), which is invocation or inviting the deity and chodpa (mchod pa), which is offering. In the process visualization of the deity is also done by the ch chöje oje according to the text. We will discuss the visualization in a later section while discussing the thankgas and iconography of Vajrakīla. Chendren is an important part of the festival where villagers come to the ritual site to make prostrations. This is because, it is the time when deities reach in the ritual arena and the prostrating signifies the reception of the deities.

The early part of the day is occupied by the performance of the protector deity and his lords of the four directions, which occur inside of the monastery. Subsequently, other masked dances that take place during the day include Sacha (sa bcag), the dance of two oxen who perform the founding of the ground, Tsen cham (btsan ‘cham), the dance of the four lords of the protector deity, which is performed inside is performed again outside with more choreography, three different types of heruka dances, four garuda dances, and lord of crematorium dance. Among the three types of heruka dances, a dance called Cha Ging (bca’ ging) is dedicated to the ten wrathful emanations of Vajrakīla. The masked dance itself is an enactment of the subjugation of a samaya-breaker by the ten wrathful emanations. A samaya-breaker is performed in the form of zhawri also called as Damtsig Ngolem (dam tshig ngo lem) meaning the one who broke the samaya. The former is the term used by locals. He wears a skeleton mask and carries a skin of a sheep to symbolize four-sided human skin (mi lpag
He begs for money among the people and hides at some place near the courtyard. After that comes the ten wrathful emanations’ performance. The ten wrathful emanations find the samaya-breaker from his hiding place, hold him by his hands and legs in four directions and put down on the ground. These are enactments of subduing the samaya-breaker that are the rudras in the text.

In the evening, after completing the masked dances of the day, the lama and monks return to the monastery to complete the sādhanā from where they left in the morning. They do the completion stages (bsdu rim) of the sādhanā, where the deities are sent back to there respective places. If not the social entertainments, this is more or less the second day. The varieties of mask dances are preformed at a mundane level to entertain the community as well as to reaffirm the devotion and commitment of community to bringing peace and harmony. Mask dancers are displayed with colorful dresses and sounds in the monastery ground and villagers gather to not only enjoy it's the entertainment but also to make their offerings in the form of money during the break of the dances, receive blessings, and make prayers.

Day Three: Dablay (Subjugation)

The third day starts at same time in the morning with same process of sādhanā. However, the most important thing for third day is the Dablay (gdab las) or the subjugation rite in the evening. The chöje is the central performer and gomchens recite and say the prayers. Villagers gather in the monastery to witness the subjugation in this phase of enactment. On the third day, unlike during the first day Toed pa (stod pa) or praise of the Vajrakīla cycle of deities and Kangwa (bskang ba) or the appeasing rite is elaborately done and other sections are kept in brief. The masked dances of the day are four stag dances that are done on the founding of the ground for the day and others are black hat dance, Drel cham (subjugation dance), and Tshog cham (dance of offering). These three dances all have certain
enactments of subjugation rites, however, they are not necessarily connected with Vajrakīla but more with other historical events of monastery.

Nevertheless, the essential part of the day is the subjugation rite in the evening. The first thing while continuing the sādhana in the evening is the Goye (sgo dbye) or the unveiling of the deities. As the unveiling rite is done, the Chöpon unveils all the Vajrakīla thangkas which are hung according to their direction in the temple, so that the deities descend to the ritual. This is done everyday in the morning and veiled again in the evening as the completion rite is done. After that, the appeasing and apology are performed. The apology is done in case the lama has unintentionally made some mistakes over the past year. For that, a wine is brewed from nine different grains called Gutse (dgu brtse). This wine is then displayed in a caldron that is claimed to be a treasure revealed by Terton Pema Lingpa39 and an offering is made to appease the Vajrakīla and other protective deities. The gutse is then shared among the villagers and also send it to family members who could not make to the Kangsöl. After that, to start the activity of the subjugation, a seat is also prepared near one of the pillars for the lama. Subsequently, the masked dance of the four messengers of Vajrakīla brings in the symbolic wrathful maṇḍala made on a cloth, held by its four corners, in the center of which is placed a three-sided box. Chöpon then place all the symbolic weapons around the box according to their respective directions. Inside the three-sided box, a symbolic Rudra, a naked human effigy with his hands and legs tied, and his private parts erect, is placed. The chöje then rises from his seat and goes to the newly prepared seat by the pillar. Subsequently, he stands on the seat and start reciting the invocation of the truth (bden bdar). The bden bdar text, which is a separate text from the actual ritual manual invokes all the deities starting from the central figure dpal chen rdo rje zhon nu, the four heart emanations

39 this figure one of the most important treasure revealer in Bhutan and Himalayan region is associated to this monastery because his father is the son of the fifth lineage holder Jamyang Dragpa Yoedzer’s (1382-1442) twin brother Tenpai Nima. He is born to latter’s son Dondrup Zangpo, whose body is still preserved in sumthrang monastery.
(sres bzhi), the ten wrathful emanations (khro bo bcu), the devourers, the killers, and so on accordingly to help the chöje in bringing down the life force of the rudra into the maṇḍala for subjugation. It is recited by the chöje alone standing on his new seat. In the meantime, gomchens and villagers remain in complete silence.

After invoking the deities, the text identifies who the rudras are. It describes laymen and women who have broken their samaya vows, who have physically attacked the guru or have been mentally negative to the guru, who have destroyed the religious structures like temples and stupas, and those who have killed their parents and teachers. All of these are considered rudras. However, the text stresses the ones who are the enemy of the teacher and the dharma as particularly malevolent. The chöje calls upon these by reciting, “those are not my enemy but yours,” giving the reason that the deity has to transgress those kind of figures instantly. The transgressive part of the text reads to bring the rudra and his family into the mandalic torma (The symbolic human) instantly, separate their lifespan, life force, and soul all apart, let their intestines roll at the foot path, let their right eye bleed red and left eye bleed black, and so on. Although, the text explains who the enemies are and how they should be transgressed, an actual being has never been subdued or killed in the history of Sumthrang Kangsül. It more focus on bringing the evil spirits that harms the harmony of local community under control.

After reciting this, the ch chöje oje goes to the other room to get dressed in a black hat dance. Normally black hat dance is called Zhanag, meaning the black hat. However, in this ritual he is known as ngagchang (sngags ’chang) meaning the yogi or the yogi dance. He then performs the yogi dance and get on the seat near the pillar to subjugate the rudras. As the chöje plays the role of yogi and Vajrakīla enacting the subjagation rites, the gomchens follow the lead of Umze (dbu mdzad) or the chant master in chanting the sections of subjagation rite and play the musical instruments accordingly. As the gomchens recite the subjagation rite,
the chöje visualizes himself as Vajrakīla and all others present in the temple as the other deities of the Vajrakīla cycle. He then visualizes the rudra into the displayed mandala, before the subjugation. The chöje then enacts the subjugation in eleven phases following the gomchens recitations. The eleven phases of subjugation are: (1.) Displaying the Linga (ling a bca’ ba), (2.) Calling in the spirits of the rudra (sgrub bya ‘gugs pa), (3.) Separating the rudra from the gods who safes him (lha dang dbye ba), (4.) Control of the form (gzugs la dbang ba), (5.) Separating the parts (byed du gzhug pa), (6.) Intoxicating (smyo ru gzhug pa), (7.) Here it is more like using the yogi’s visualization power. The current chöje mentioned that this is the part where the visualization is more complicated. He said there are instant generation and dissolution needs to be done (tse lung khrus lung gi dgongs pa bstan pa), (8.) The wrathful compliance (khro ba’i mthun), (9.) The shower of weapons (mtshon cha’i char), (10.) Crushing to dust (rdul du rlog pa), and finally (11.) Offering the physical remaining Vajrakīla (zhal du btab pa). Furthermore transgression happens in the text as these enactments are done. As the yogi has visualized himself into the Vajrakīla, he calls on to the right attendants of Vajrakīla to transgress the rudra force through gomchens recitation and chöjes visualization. The ones who have the hook are called to hook the mouth of the rudra, the ones who have chains are called to tie the waist, and ones with hammer are called to beat and crush. The chöje with all the symbolic implements that were earlier

Figure 2: Sumthrang choje enacting the subjugation rite
displayed around the three-sided box does the enactment. After all the subjugation rites are completed, the ch öje oje holds the three-sided box in his two hands, goes in front of the shrine and the subjugated beings are offered to the deities (g zhal du stob pa) and the soul of the rudras are liberated. After all the rites are done, the completion rite is not done for this night. Therefore, the Vajrakīla thangkas are not veiled unlike other days.

Traditionally, in this night there is a culture called Kora Lay Dro (Let’s go around). During this night it is understood that the deities remain with the humans, thus people do not sleep the whole night but rather circumambulate the inner-circle of the monastery chanting the Vajrakīla mantra. People also go around the houses and pour cold water on those who are sleeping to wake them up. Hence, it is the community living with the deities. For that the thangkas of Vajrakīla play greater role here. As the Vajrakīla has been brought down in the person of ch öje and in the artwork and without doing the completion rite the thangkas hold the living presence of Vajrakīla for the whole night. Therefore, the living presence of Vajrakīla bestows the blessing upon the people and the community and aids in the efficacy of the ritual. The emic understanding is Vajrakīla does the subjugation, where as the etic understanding is they are enacting their own identity as a community with Vajrakīla and Lhanangpa as crucial figures around whom they gather. The ch öje in some ways embodies these figures for the community, which makes the community feels protected for the year. The thangkas therefore, do not only symbolize or represent Vajrakīla; they are also supports (r ten) for his presence.

**Day Four: Torjab (Hurling)**

As the completion rite is not done the earlier evening, there is no generation rite for the fourth day. The sādhana does not commence from the beginning like other days because all of the deities are already there within the space and there is no need to invoke them once
again. Thus, the day starts with Serkem (ser kyem) or the wine offering and smoke offering (gsang rabs). Right after these two rites, the lama and monks stand up for the rising exhortation, yet again calling upon the deities to rise from their seats and prepare for hurling the evil forces.

A huge three-sided blue hurling torma (symbolic cake) of Palchen Dorje Zhonu (central figure Vajrakīla deity) is made. It is prepared with all the adornments that are described in the text and depicted in the art with all the symbols. After that the mantras for the deities are recited for a day or three to seven days (there are rituals along the mantra recitation) and at the end the astrologically accurate day and time is set to hurl the torma into the fire the same way as on the first day.

On the fourth day the exorcism, hurling, and yet again another incineration are performed. This redundancy of different rites and enactments to have persuasive power of the ritual to make sure the all evil forces are subjugated. The chöje dresses into a yogic dress (which is the same as the black hat dance costume), all the symbolic ritual cakes of the different deities are displayed on the floor in line according to their class with the Palchen torma (the huge three-sided on) at the end. The exorcism rites are recited. At a place that is the astrologically determined correct place for exorcism, a huge bonfire is prepared from old
bamboo baskets, long pieces of wood, and dried hay. Grass is piled onto it just as in the first night. This is later visualized as a castle for the evil spirits before it is incinerated. Later all the ritual cakes are taken to that place along with the yogi, monks, and community members. While going out towards the direction of the hurling place, the ritual music is played and everybody chants the Vajrakīla mantra. The chöje visualizes himself as the īla and all others as the four heart sons, ten emanations, and other attendants. All gomchens and villagers walk before the chöje and the evil forces are meant to be chased by the Vajrakīla deities. Later at the hurling spot, the lama visualizes the bonfire as a castle and draws the evil forces into it with the power of his meditation, mantra, and mudras and burns it down. After the fire catches, according to the recitation of the text the symbolic cakes of the deities and the three-sided Palchen torma, which has a sharp pointed tip, is hurled into the fire with its tip towards the fire, further subjugating the forces.

After the rites are completed and as everybody returns back to the monastery, the chöje yet again walks at last visualizing that all those sentient beings are protected inside the maṇḍala of Vajrakīla. The crowd sings a victory song until it reaches the courtyard. In the

![Figure 4: chöje, gomchens, and villagers pressing down the remaining evil forces](image)
courtyard, all the ritual objects that were taken to the hurling spot are gathered in the middle of the courtyard and the chôje, gomchens, and all the people surround it in a circle to press in the final remaining forces, which may have returned through some faults. The people in the crowd cross their hands and hold the hands of the ones near them, put their right feet inside and go in circle chanting the mantra. Thus, the remaining forces are pressed under the lower realms with the power of the mantra. At the very end everybody shouts, “The gods are victorious and the demons defeated.” Thus, victory being declared, it is an important performative moment where the efficacy of the ritual is acknowledged by the community and the celebrations commence.

**Day Five: Tashi (Auspiciousness)**

Fifth day is a thanksgiving and biding farewell to the deities and predicting the upcoming future. All of the ritual cakes of different deities are taken on the roof of the monastery as a gesture of biding farewell to the deities. Later as final rite of auspiciousness, everybody fills their cup with wine and places it either in front of them or in middle of the monastery. As the lines of auspiciousness are recited everybody throws rice in the air, which would fall into the cups. At the end people count the rice that has entered into their cup and predict there year according to the number of rice grains that entered their cup. For example, if there are three or nine grains, it is considered very good sign. These numbers are interpreted in various ways according to the Buddhist symbolic numbers such as nine yanas and so on. Thus, the five days of Vajrakîla sādhana and the Kangsöl festival ends.

**Interpreting the Kangsöl Ritual**

In the Kangsöl performance, the chôje embodies Vajrakîla, the two are homologized in the ritual as acted. The gomchens wear the red robes like monk, recite prayers and play the
religious music instruments. The laity gather in the monastery from time to time to make prostrations, make offerings, and witness the rites of subjugations. This annual Kangsöl is the time when the community members come into contact with their protective deities, appease them, get help from the deities to clear the space once again from all negativity, and celebrate. However, the emic understanding of the Kangsöl is to restore the cosmic balance using the power of beneficent deities to destroy the malevolent spirits and evils through redundant enactments.

In Kangsöl, the enactment to destroy the evil forces and to restore the cosmic balance is done more than three times. The evil forces are incinerated on the first night, subjugated on the third night, and hurled on the fourth night. In addition, they are also pressed down in the very beginning of the ritual before incineration and at the very end of the five days after the hurling. Although performing any one of these enactments may suffice, three are performed to make sure that if one fails the others do not. For example, the standing exhortation is done before each of these three enactments of incineration, subjugation, and hurling. Although, it should be fine reciting it once in each enactment, it is recited three times. Besides reciting it, the chöje and gomchens need to stand up to show their respect for the deity and play the musical instruments that please the deities to come to the ritual. Therefore, the recitations, materials that they use, mantras, visualization by the chöje, instruments, and mask dances are multiple expressions that creates the redundancy to make sure the ritual is efficacious.

In Stanley Tambiah’s “A Performative Approach to Ritual,” Tambiah notes that ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication constituting patterned and ordered sequence of words and acts, which is often expressed in multiple media. Sumthrang Kangsöl makes use of multiple media that are patterned and sequenced to create communication between the chöje, deities, gomchens, and the villagers. The actual
performance of Kangsöl through the use of multimedia brings the lay community each year to reestablish them under the protection of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, lamas and monastery, seeking to reorder the cosmic balance. In doing so, we can see how the Kangsöl brings to life and to central visibility the opposition of enlightened and demonic that it seeks to balance. However, while the purpose of the ritual is to exorcise the demonic and reestablish the cosmic order, what is also reestablished annually is the central role of the monastery in bringing spiritual protection and blessings to the community.

To reestablish the protection of deities, the chöje and gomchens first invoke the deities into the ritual by reciting the texts and playing the music. In addition, dramatized enactments are performed such as the yogi dance of the chöje and the dances of the four wrathful messengers. The ritual text itself has different sections that are recited to define the deity’s world, their praise, invitation, offering, asking to reach to the evils, and so on. The pitch and tone of the recitation change from section to section. Similarly, the tone of the music changes according to the sections of the recitation. There are various musical instruments that are used in the ritual. The rhythm of the music and the chants are lead by the chant master (dbu mdzad) and differ according to the peaceful and wrathful nature of the deities being propitiated. The sounds becomes loud and intense at wrathful recitations of the text and low and pleasant at peaceful sections of recitation. This multi-media aspect would in some sense complete Tambiah’s idea of the media for communication. These are in line with “‘Noise’ and ‘redundancy’ in his information theory. He refers to ‘Noise’ as “any interference in a channel that affects the correct reception of signals.”40 The tones of the recitation and music played according to the relevance to the text and enactments of the ritual is believed to create a correct reception as the performers enact to put the deities into task. In line with this, Tambiah mentions that,

40 Tambiah 131
From the point of the view of text or discourse construction, the ‘stacking’ (as Gossen calls it) of the parallel couplets one after the other enables the performers to extend texts, give them embellishments (with stylistics bounds), explore nuances of multivocal meanings; and from the point of the view of performative efficacy the structure of the entire recursive recitation may be seen as an iconic analogue of the cycles of creations of the cosmic order in their temporal and spatial regularity and cumulative effect.41

Comparably, in the Kangsöl ritual, the recitation, prayers, mudras, and music in addition to the different costumes that the masked dancers and the differences in the masked dances are multivocal. Additionally, the chöje will be noticed switching his costume from a monk’s robes to a yogi dance costume, signifying the embodiment of Vajrakīla. The costumes of the masked dances like the five colored silk scarfs (*dar sna lnga*), vajra cloak (*rdo rje gong*), tiger costume (*rtag gsham*), etc, each have their own meanings which help in the performative efficacy through their meaning and enactment. All these elements that one can see and hear have multivocal meanings. For example, when the lama performs the black hat dance, the costume that he wears is not a normal ordinary costume. A vajra cloak or *rdo rje sgong*, which has a crossed vajra and worn over the shoulder signifies the four cardinal directions of the maṇḍala of the deity that he will be visualizing. When he wears it and visualizes the deity, he not only embodies the deity but also positions himself in the maṇḍala. Likewise, other sound and visual things too have their respective meanings. For example, the music that accompanies the yogi dance performance is called *gurdung* (nine notes). This note is more loud and intense, which is why it is used to invite the deities like Vajrakīla. Therefore, when all these enactments are performed through multimedia with multiple meanings, the force of the divine is gathered and energy of the demonic spirits are summoned and destroyed to reorder the spatial regularity. By presiding over the Kangsöl and reactivating the monastery, the chöje, who is the lineage holder of the tradition and lama of the community, brings the community under its protection.

41 Tanbiah 137
As the cosmic balance is restored through the performance and enactments with multimedia and multivocal meanings, Kangsöl brings to life and to central visibility the opposition dynamic, which can be seen in the structure and setting of the ritual. Catherine Bell in her *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* discusses "ritual oppositions and hierarchies." She noted that “[B]inary oppositions almost always involve asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination by which they generate hierarchically organized relationships.”

Correspondingly, hierarchical arrangements of the tormas (symbolic ritual cake) of the deities on the shrine at Kangsöl are placed according to the hierarchy of the deities. Torma (*gtor ma*) are meant for the deities’ consumption and are made in various shapes and sizes according to the importance of deities and the hierarchy to symbolize them. They are also beautifully ornamented by colorful butter arts. The torma of Vajrakīla of Kangsöl is called yidam torma, the torma of about the tutelary deity. It is about 4ft to 5ft and it is placed in the top center of the shrine. At the four sides of the yidam torma are smaller tormas, which symbolize the four sons and five at the front and five at the back symbolizing the ten wrathful ones. At the right side are the tormas of twelve protectors of Vajrakīla and on the left are the tormas of the three protectors of Danglha of Lhodrag in Tibet. This is because the text of Vajrakīla is revealed from Danglha, as described above, and these three

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42 Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 102
protectors protect the treasure lineages. Slightly lower come the tormas of Sumthrang’s local protective deities. These protective deities were originally evil forces, which were repeatedly bound under an oath of allegiance to Buddhism by Padmasambhava during the eighth century or alternatively by some other Buddhist figures later. Among these, those protector deities who were subjugated directly by Padmasambhava are considered higher than those who were not. The deities are generally categorized into two: 1) supermundane, who are the wrathful manifestations of enlightened beings, the yidam deity like Vajrakīla; and 2) worldly protectors, who are bound by Padmasambhava. Sumthrang’s local protectors fall into the second category. Therefore, the tormas of these deities are arranged in this manner. Additionally, the torma of the malevolent spirit is placed at the very lower front of the shrine indicating its subordinate position. Furthermore, while food (tshogs) offerings are made, when all the offerings are placed on a long table in front of the shrine, a bowl of offering for the spirits is placed beneath the table.

Similarly, the arrangement of the seats for the performers and participants are organized in same way. The lama, who is the main performer, sits on the highest throne and others sit according to their role. For example, the umdze sits next to the lama and then the others in a row. Villagers who gather to watch the ritual and pray, sit below the monks. Thus, Bell’s understanding of asymmetrical relationship of dominance and dynamic opposition is manifest in this ritual. The enlightened and demonic are shown not only to be in opposition but hierarchical structures of the enlightened forces as higher than the demonic forces are seen. Likewise, the laity place themselves below the monastics. They prostration to the chöje and gomchens and also to the shrine, make monetary offerings to the shrine, and share the remains of the offering such as gutse wine, enacting their devotion and respect Vajrakīla.

If we think about efficacy in emic terms, in the Kangsöl, the demonic is subjugated and the cosmic balance is reordered. In etic terms, the whole community is once again
renewed and put under the beneficence of the lama and the monastery annually. This is noticed in three occasions of incineration, subjugation, and hurling. In the first occasion, when people witness the burning by the fire of the wood powder, they are made aware that the power of the enlightened deities are burning the evil forces that are attached with them. Similarly, during the subjugation rite, when the effigy is stabbed and subjugated, observers have a certain feeling that demons are killed and that they are safe. Finally, when they return from the hurling, everybody sings on top of their lungs saying, “gods have won and evil has lost.” This is a declaration and acknowledgement by the community that the enlightened ones have won over evil and will protect them until next Kangsöl. Therefore, the ritual pervasively enacts the subjugation of demonic force such that it becomes a social fact, visually experienced through the multimedia performance.
Chapter IV

Vajrakīla Thangka Painting of Sumthrang Monastery

For the monastery to uphold the tradition as well as for the ritual to be efficacious, supports (rten) play an essential part. The blessings of monasteries are most of the time rated by the relics and supports that they hold. These supports and relics are also integral to the efficacy of the rituals that are performed in that particular monastery. Sumthrang Monastery being the upholder of the Vajrakīla practice has number of supports that are related to Vajrakīla practice. A sixteen kīlas that is handed down by Lhanangpa to his son Nyoton and brought to Sumthrang in 13th century remains one of the important supports. This set of kīla is sealed in a wooded shrine and is not meant to be for public display. A vajra and a kīla that is claimed to be used by Padmasambhava to subdue evil forces at Yangleshö cave (yang le shod kyi brag phug) in present day Pharphing, Nepal was also in possession of Sumthrang chöjes. However, this particular vajra and kīla are now with Ashi Dechen Wangmo of the royal family. The Sumthrang community believes that certain misfortune in the community are due to these relics getting away from its place. However, one integral image and relic is a collection of a set of Vajrakīla thangka, which is still preserved at Sumthrang dedicated to this practice. These thangkas are made according to Sumthrang’s sadhāna text. The thangkas are unfurled once in a year at the annual Kangsöl festival. In this section, we will examine the set of thangkas that are dedicated to this practice and preserved for centuries and how it aids the practice and ritual.

General Use of the Thangkas

Thangkas are Tibetan Buddhist scroll paintings, usually on cotton, that depict deities, teachers, maṇḍalas, and other subjects. They are often decorated with silk with strips stitched at the four sides jari marser (rgya ri dmar ser) and a rectangular piece at the bottom of the
image called *thong* (*thong*). The significance of jari marser and thong are not known. However, if one tries to extrapolate a meaning based on the design of title pages of Buddhist texts, the title of a text is always inside a double lined box. This four sided; double lined box refers to the four beams of a house, which signify the maṇḍala of that particular text, according to Sumthrang chöje. Similarly, the jari marser seems to serves same purpose and the thong he said might be the mattress of the throne that we see on the paintings. Therefore, it serves as a complete symbolic maṇḍala of the deity that can support the living presence of the deity whenever, it is invoked.

To install such thangkas as support (*rtén*) in a private shrine room or a temple, they need to be consecrated. By consecrating it, the energy of the deity is invoked within the image that helps the image to be efficacious. Therefore, Sumthrang’s Vajrakīla thangkas are consecrated by writing the particular deity’s mantra on the back of the thangka. The thangkas are taken out only once a year during the annual festival at the Kangsöl, where the deities are invoked into the image through the ritual. The thangka with the central figure Vajrakumāra is hung in the middle or center facing the chöje who sits on the throne facing the shrine. The other ten wrathful ones are hung inside the four pillars within the monastery in four cardinal directions and four intermediary directions according to the directions they belong. The ones belonging to zenith and nadir are hung before the one, which is hung for North and after the one hung for South respectively. The direction of thangkas needs to be proper and right so that it could support the presence of the deities as they descend into it. It subsequently, helps the efficacy of the ritual. The thangkas are all veiled. They are unveiled only during the invitation rite (*spyan ’dren*) then are veiled once again during the completion rite (*bsdu rim*) towards the evening. When the thangkas are unveiled, it holds the living presence of the deities and are believed to be present among the people in the temple and when they are veiled in the evening, they are believed to be returning back to their abodes. Therefore,
although people normally stay in and around the monastery during this ritual, they make sure to prostrate during the invitation rite, as the deities are believed to descend into the ritual.

These Vajrakīla thangkas are used as objects of veneration, as references for practitioners and monks during the ritual, and body supports (sku rten) for the monastery and particularly for Kangsöl. More importantly, the chöje and the gomchens use them to visualize the deities while performing the rituals. Moreover, they aid practitioners in reminding visualization process and understanding the meanings of the figure’s color, implement, posture that are represented in the thangkas. Therefore, it helps the chöje’s enactment and efficacy in the Kangsöl. Chöje use the images during generation stage meditations to help visualize the deity and at the end, the visualized deity is deconstructed into emptiness. These two phases are known as generation and completion stages (skyes rim, rdzogs rim). This process of practice is key to every Tantric system of practice to attain the ultimate realization through such a course. This follows the soteriological aspect Buddhist system, which is to practice emptiness to realize the ultimate reality. It is based on the understanding of the obscurational and ultimate truth that everything in obscurational truth is a case of psychological construction. Anything that is psychologically constructed is ultimately empty of its reality, thus, deconstructed into emptiness in the end. However, in Kangsöl, as it concerns to affect the space around the monastery to restore the cosmic balance, it is more about bringing the deity into the ritual to help restore the cosmic balance.

To restore the cosmic balance, chöje needs to embody his yi dam Vajrakīla. To embody it, the nature of chöje’s self is considered as the base of the practice. Depending on a visualized form of the deity—in this case the Vajrakīla—the self is generated as Vajrakīla. Thus, the self becomes the base or the dependent. The chöje has to then generate through this process by transforming himself into the deity of ultimate realization, thereby abandoning the composition of the ordinary self. This practice particularly in Kangsöl unites the lama (chöje)
and *yi dam* (Vajrakīla) to protect the villagers within the maṇḍala of Vajrakīla and also to increase the efficacy of ritual to bring the evils under control. As we understand that the thangkas are hanging in the monastery, it is understood that the deities are present in the thangkas alive until the chöje invokes within him. Therefore, until the completion stage in the evening, thangkas are considered as the living deities in emic understanding.

The perfection stage is the ultimate stage of the practice. In it, the practitioner has a realization of the ultimate truth, or at least attains a better understanding than one had before. The psychological construction of the self and the deity is transformed into oneness inseparable from each other and then is further deconstructed into emptiness. This is because it is the formation through interdependence and nothing is existent in itself. The slightest inclination of self or even to the deity is abolished that the relation of conventional and ultimate truth is realized. Therefore every system of tantra practice is the means to attain the truth of emptiness but in a more complicated way yet is known to be the swift path to realization. However, this is soteriological practice of the deity. Either in the soteriological practice or in apotropaic enactment, thangkas play a greater role to draw blessings and efficacy. Furthermore, it also helps practitioners to aid as a point for the practice.

**The Vajrakīla Thangka Collection of Sumthrang**

There are eleven thangkas in Sumthrang Monastery’s Vajrakīla thangka collection. There is also one extra thangka that has the Vajrakīla with nine heads and sixteen arms. The primordial Buddha Kuntu Zangpo (*kun tu bzang po*) is at top center, with a yellow Buddha at his right in the earth touching mudra and Vajradhara at his left. Further at the right is Yeshe Tshogyel with a kīla in her right hand. Further at the left is Padsambhava sitting on the lotus petal in the blazing fire with his right hand raising a vajra and left hand holding a kīla in the subjugation form. At the bottom of the thangka, the five sons (*sras lnga*) are depicted.
However, as the Vajrakīla text practiced in Sumthrang is related to three faced Vajrakīla, it makes one wonder if the oral tradition which Sumthrang used to practice is nine face Vajrakīla. Anyway, I will leave this for future study and not dwell on this, much. The primary thangka in the set depicts Palchen Dorje Zhonu (Vajrakumāra) as the central deity with three heads, six arms, four legs, in union with a consort, trampling on four devils which represent the four hindrances to spiritual realization\(^4\), as the central deity. In this thangka it depicts four sons, two on each at both the side. In most of the traditions, four sons are depicted with kīla abdomen stabbing effigies in in the triangular jail. However, in Sumthrang’s tradition all four are not triangular jails but circular, square, semi-circular, and triangular jails for each sons, which represents the four activities, pacifying (gzhi), enriching (rgyas), magnetizing (dbang), and subjugating (drag) respectively. The central figure is then surrounded by ten wrathful ones in union with their consorts. Wrathful ones are the emanations of the Vajrakīla in ten directions. Eight charnel grounds (dur khrod chen po bṛgyad) are shown in the gaps between the deity figures. The eight charnel grounds are significant in tantric Buddhist as it is the places where the eight energy centers of rudras body rest. It depicts Padmasambhava at the top center, raising a vajra in his right and kīla in his left hand. There are two unnamed figures at the sides of Padmasambhava. The figure at the right side holds a skull cup in his left hand and a kīla in the right. The other figure at Padmasambhava’s left side with a text in his right hand and left hand in teaching mudra. The remaining ten thangkas have one wrathful ones each, with their two emanations called gochen and tramen, which are executioners and devourers. Each of the pieces have also two or three lineage holders shown at the top of the deity figures and two or three other protectors (phur srungs) at the bottom. Some of the thangkas also depicts the charnel grounds.

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\(^4\) 1. 'chi bdag bdud, 2. lha bu bdud, 3. phung po bdud, 4. nyon mongs bdud
The dates of these thangkas are not known clearly. In Lam Sangag’s genealogical history of Sumthrang Monastery’s lineage holders called *The Clear Mirror of Nyo Lineage*, most likely to be these thangkas, are mentioned. Specifically, it mentions that the third lineage holder Vajra Duepa (1262-1296) commissioned some thangkas. Vajra Duepa’s story narrates that while the painter was working, he pointed his finger at his own nose and told the painter that Vajrakīla should look like him. When the painter looked at him, he saw Duepa manifesting in the form of Ī." Sangag narrates that the painting is made looking at Vajra Duepa manifesting as Vajrakīla. However, the color pigments, quality, and styles are not consistent with paintings from the 13th century. Moreover, one of the thangkas in the set includes the first Druk Desi or secular ruler of Bhutan Tenzin Rabgay (*bstan 'dzin rab rgyas, 1638-1696*) and the second Gangteng Trulku Tenzin Legpai Dondrup (*bstan 'dzin legs pa'i don grub, 1645-1727*) among the lineage figures. According to the biography of Tenzin Rabgay by Je Ngawang Lhendrup (*rje ngag dbang lhun grub*), he mentions that the paintings on the right wall of Tango monastery were done by one of the Sumthrang Choeje and his pupils. This particular chöje’s paintings includes Phajo and his sons and are seen on the ground floor of Tango Monastery known as the Tsangkhang Wogma Trulkuyi Lhakhang (the lower floor of trulku shrine hall) with Lord Buddha as the main figure of worship. The specific name of Sumthrang Chöje is not mentioned in Tenzin Rabgay’s biography. However, in the Sumthrang’s genealogical history, younger brother Penchen Ngawang Sonam of fifteenth Sumthrang Chöje Pema Choerab (1627-1687) went to Tango and later became one of the four Lopens (highest title after the religious head called Je Khenpo) of central monastic body. He is the only son of Sumthrang who went to Tango around that time. As the time period seems to fit in together, probably the Sumthrang chöje mentioned in

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44 Lam Sangnga 124
45 ngag dbang lhun grub . bstan 'dzin rab rgyas kyi rnam thar . TBRC W2CZ5987. 1 vols. [bhutan]: [ s. n. ], null. http://tbrc.org/link?RID=W2CZ5987, 220
Tenzin Rabgay’s biography must be Penchen Ngawang Sonam. The paintings therefore, might be his work. We also doubt that the Vajrakīla tangkas of Sumthrang might also have been his works, as Tenzin Rabgay is depicted on one of the thangkas and Sonam worked for him.

**Visualization in Sumthrang’s Vajrakīlaya**

In the Kangsöl, the visualization of Vajrakīla is done by the chöje while the gomchens chant and recite the liturgy. By visualizing and embodying the Vajrakīla, he embodies the identity of Vajrakīla to the community who bounds the community within his maṇḍala. The visualization is done along the recitation of the textual description of the sadhāna. According to Sumthrang’s *Vajrakīla sadhāna* text, the description of the image starts from the creation of maṇḍala in the section called “progressive stacking of elements” (Tib: ’byung ba rim brtsgs). In this section of the sadhāna, the text describes the cosmology of the deity. The cosmos of the deity is created through visualization. It begins with visualizing the outer structure and the palace of the deity and then the deity and other retinues. The text describes that while creating the outer structure, an empty space is visualized and a strong swirling wind blows from it. Above the swirling wind an ocean of blood (*rag ta*) forms. Blood represents the fearfulness, and thus, is depicted for its wrathfulness that could destroy the negative forces (or the negative emotions) of the practitioner. Due to the over swirling of the wind and the ocean of blood, it then forms the golden estate on which three-sided mountains appear with blazing fire of *kalpa* storming in ten directions. Thus, the outer world of the deity is generated.

After the creation of the outer world, next the palace of the deity is created. Yet again it starts from emptiness, in the state of vajra mind of the visualizer, the maṇḍala of wisdom is constructed with dark blue three-sided triangular base on which piles of fresh and dried skulls
are stacked. The skulls are screwed with thunderbolt nails. The spokes of the wheels, encircling rims of the maṇḍala palace are ornamented with precious jewels. The four cardinal directions have courtyards and gates. Likewise, all the pillars, beams, and so on are ornamented with precious items. Around it, is eight charnel grounds. At the very end of the visualization of the palace, the whole cosmos is visualized upon the indestructible vajra inside the midst of the blazing fire of wisdom, without any outer or inner obscuration. Thus the palace of the Vajrakīla is generated.

As the palace is now constructed, there should be someone residing in the palace. Therefore, practitioner invokes the deity and invite it into the generated palace. The invocation process also entails an extensive practice of visualization known as the self-generation, where the self is merged into the process. A blue syllable hung radiates from the heart of the practitioner and the base deity (Samayasattva) is generated before the practitioner and therefore the Vajrakīla is now visualized before oneself. As the light from the practitioner’s heart continuously radiates into the blue hung in the heart of the base deity, it invokes the blessings and a light radiates from the heart of the base deity that invites the wisdom form of the deity (Jñānasattva) and its retinues before sinking into the base deity, becoming one. Further, from the three door parts of the base, the deity radiates the light that sinks into the three door parts of the based self or the practitioner transforms the ordinary self equal and non-different to the base deity attaining the purification of the ordinary form into an extraordinary form. This process of homologizing the chöje and Vajrakīla in Kangsöl brings the quality and power of Vajrakīla into the chöje to make the rites efficacious during the enactments.

The invocations of the Vajrakīla deities are yet again done by chöje with gomchens reciting the lines. The sadhāna describes the positions and descriptions of the Vajrakīla deities, starting with Palchen Dorje Zhonu (Tib: dpal chen rdo je gzhon nu) as the central and
The four sons (sras bzhi) are in the four cardinal directions; specifically, Vajrakīla in the east, Ratnakīla in the south, Padmakīla in the west, and Karmakīla in the north. After that there are ten male and female wrathful emanations (khro bo bchu, khro mo chu). The male emanations have three faces with the female emanations as their consorts. These ten wrathful ones are positioned in the four cardinal directions, four intermediary directions, the zenith, and the nadir. The text further describes two additional emanations on the right and left sides of these ten wrathful ones called ‘headed ones’ or ‘studded ones’ (mgo can, phra men). These emanations have humanoid bodies and the heads of birds and animals. All the figures depicted with bird heads are female executioners (gsod byed) and the those with animal heads are male devourers (za byed). The general term tramen is applied to both the executioners and devourers. Tramen means ‘fastening together’, which refers to the animal heads attached to humanoid bodies. In The Practice of Vajrakilaya, Khenpo Namdrol says that “the heads of various animals and birds are ‘studded’ onto the bodies of gods, symbolizing the inseparable union of the expanse of reality and wisdom.”

In this context, if one understands reality as samsāra and wisdom as the truth, it contemplates two different things, which are represented in these figures. So they therefore, provide points for mediation on how samsara is real yet impermanent and, therefore, does not exist separately from the truth. This process aims to help getting rid of the obscuration of reality. However, this is more in soteriological understanding. In apotropaic understanding of this practice all these qualities are invoked and embodied by chöje to gain the power of Vajrakīla to restore the cosmic balance by repelling the negative forces.

Furthermore, other protectors are positioned in four directions along the upper rims of the of the maṇḍala wheel, as well as lower rims of the maṇḍala, and along the rims. For example, the four divine protectors of the maṇḍala border (dam can nu kha mched bzhi)
guard in the four cardinal directions along the rims of the maṇḍala. The four Remati sisters (re ti mchêd bzhi) guard above the rim in the four directions and the four earth-owner protectors (sa bdag chen mo bzhi) guards the lower part of the rim in the four directions. Thus, the maṇḍala of Vajrakīla is created. Such maṇḍalas are artistically represented, mentally generated, and can also be symbolized through hand gestures called mudras.

**Artistic Depiction of Sumthrang’s Vajrakīlaya and Differences from Other Traditions**

Images, when correctly painted, generally follow textual descriptions. These depictions can appear in single compositions, or in a set of thangkas. Thus, Sumthrang’s Vajrakīla thangkas too follow its textual descriptions. Although, the whole māṇḍala is not created, all most all the key figures within the cosmology are represented in the eleven thangkas as textually described. As mentioned earlier, the upper sections of the thangkas depict the lineage holders and lords of family (rigs bdag), that the particular practitioner follows, which in Sumthrang’s case is Vajrasattva (rdo rje sems pa). At the center of each thangkas are the large depictions of the ten wrathful ones of the ten directions in in union with their consorts. Each of the ten wrathful ones has one animal headed devourers and one bird headed executioners at their left and right sides. At the bottom of the thangkas are the different protectors of the maṇḍala and the charnel grounds. Although, the depictions are mostly found in line with the text, however, some slight inconsistencies are seen. For example, in the text it mentions that the central consort’s right hand hugs the neck of the male and her left hand feeds the male blood in a white conch shell. Although the image’s left hand adheres the textual description, the consort’s right hand instead holds a flaying knife, a feature not found in the text. Similarly, when texts describe the four land-owner guards, each of the four is described as having mane-like hair with a kīla on every single hair. Although the manes are depicted, the kīlas are not. However, this might be because of the smaller size
of the image that did not allow the sufficient space. In addition, the protectors are described in the text as riding unusual animals, such as a three-legged horse, an eight-tonged wild dog, a three-legged copper bear. However, in the image three legs and eight tongues are not depicted as per the textual description. Thus, when the images do not match the text, it cannot support the presence of the deities. However, these are considered minor discrepancies, which may not affect the efficacy of ritual much.

There are also some unique depictions in this set that are distinct from other traditions. In Sakaya and some other Nyingma traditions, such as Jangter tradition, four sons (five sons in sakaya) are depicted with three sided kilas for abdomen, either standing on a rudra being, slightly poking the nail into it or stabbing effigy in a triangular jail. However, in Sumthrang’s case, the four sons stabs effigies in four different jails each. This is because they perform four different activities as we have discussed in earlier sections. The other unique quality is the rudras that the ten wrathful ones trample upon. The text states that the trampled rudras should be hostile forces of gods, nagas, fire gods, earth gods, and so on, who are represented by two naked male and female beings in sakaya and Jangter traditions. Sumthrang’s paintings depicted these differently. For example, Stobs po che (Mahābala), associated with the nadir, tramples the earth god (sa bdag), which is depicted as a scorpion like creature under his right feet and a three faced crocodile-like creature under his left feet. Similarly others figures in separate thangkas too have faces or bodies that derivate from the text. In addition, in places where the artist had more freedom, we find additional unusual qualities. A few examples include the cliff on the eighth thangka that of the northern direction—made in the shape of a dragon breathing a red cloud, with spirits dancing in it. Elsewhere, on the ‘nadir’ composition, the cliff on which the wrathful one stands upon looks like a large frog or a turtle. Moreover, colorful clouds of rainbow, flowery dragons in the

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47 གསེར་གྱི་འཕར་བ་མྱུར་བའི་ལྕེ་བརྒྱད་མ།། མཛུ་ལྡན་དཔལ་སྤྱོད་པའི་རྐང་གསུམ་མ།།
clouds and sharp mountains are some other artistic depictions of these paintings. These are neither described in the text nor seen on the other thangkas that I compared earlier.

**Depictions of the Lineage in the Thangkas**

As mentioned before, the lineage holders of Sumthrang’s Vajrakīla tradition are depicted in the upper registers of each of the thangka compositions. The lineage holders include Padmasambhava, Mahasiddha Saraha, Acharya Buddhaguhya, King Indrabūti, Rathna Lingpa, the first Sumthrang Chöje Nyoton Thrulzhik (1179-1265), another sixteen Sumthrang Chöje 48, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651), the Drukpa master who unified Bhutan, Fourth Druk Desi Tenzin Rabgay (1638-1696), and second Gangteng Trulku Tenzin Legpai Dendup (1645-1727). All these lineage holders are not arranged orderly in the thangka, for example, the first Chöje Nyoton and fourteenth Chöje Karma, and ninth chöje Shari Badra are depicted together on one thangka and not first, second, and third together. The reason is not clear.

The lineage figures depicted on the thangkas give a sense of how the lineage is passed down. The siddha figures are associated with Padmasambhava in the transmission of tantra in general and Vajrakīla tantra in particular as we have seen in the origin story. And Sumthrang chöjes as this is their own tradition, which is passed down from Lhanangpa connecting to Padmasambhava. The second Gangteng Trulku Legpai Dondrup might have some connection to Sumthrang as he is the reincarnation of Pema Lingpa’s student and Pema Lingpa being the descendant Sumthrang Chöje family. However, the depictions of Zhabdrung and Tenzin Rabgay may have been because of Penchen Ngawang Sonam’s to association with Tenzin Rabgay and central monastic body. Furthermore, there is one more unidentified figure at the

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top center in the thangka that focuses on Amṛtakūḍalā (Bdud rtsi khyil ba) of the north. He is seated crossed-legged on a lotus displaying the wheel of teaching mudra. He wears a monk’s robe with a text tied in his hair. In the clouds behind him, Padmasambhava is shown alongside some monks. To his right side is an unnamed Sumthrang Chöje and left is Zhubdrung. This makes one wonder if he is Lhanangpa himself, as he is not inscribed in the list of Sumthrang Chöjes. However, this will be difficult to conclude at this point.

Representations of Vajrakīlaya Deities

The central figure of Palchen Dorje Zhonu and each of the ten wrathful ones are all depicted with three faces, six hands, four legs, and in union with a female consort. Their colors, implements, and the hostile forces that they trample upon differs according to their direction and task. However, in the interest of time and space, we will discuss the central figure for better understanding. This is because the ten wrathful ones are the emanations of the central figure and even the text gives major description on the central figure. Therefore, others will be mentioned in a table below for further understanding. These representations of Vajrakīla are how it is depicted in the thangkas and are invoked into it by the chöje and gomchens in Kangsöl. Vajrakīlaya deities are invoked each day into the thangkas and by unveiling it along the invocation remind people the living presence of Vajrakīlaya. Although the thangkas are unveiled every evening, it is kept unveiled on the third night where the villagers acknowledge the presence of Vajrakīla by not sleeping for the whole night.

Palchen Dorje Zhonu (Vajrakumāra) is shown with a white right face, red left face, and dark blue center face with three eyes on each face. The text describes it as, nine eyes staring in ten directions. His mouth is open and his tongue rolls up in between his fangs. His right two hands hold a nine-pronged vajra and five-pronged vajra. His two left hands hold a blazing fireball and a three-pointed khatvanga. The last two remaining hands together rolls
the kīla dragger called the Mount Meru kīla, relating to its massive size. He wears an elephant’s skin and bone ornaments. All these ornaments come in set, which will be discussed later. The female consort is depicted with two legs unlike the male, her left feet lifting around male counterpart’s waist.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Ten wrathful ones</th>
<th>Implements</th>
<th>Tramples upon hostile force of…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zenith</td>
<td>Hūm chen ka ra (Krodha. Hūmkāra)</td>
<td>Arrow kīla</td>
<td>Gods (Lha yi gdon tshogs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Rnam rgyal (Vijaya)</td>
<td>Vajra Cakra</td>
<td>Fresh Skull Bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Gyug pa sngon po ()</td>
<td>Vajra Fire</td>
<td>Fresh skull Baton with dried skull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Gshen rje gshed (Yamāntaka)</td>
<td>Vajra Baton with a gem</td>
<td>Yama (Gshen rje gdon tshogs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>Mi gyo mgon po (Acala)</td>
<td>Vajra Rope</td>
<td>Fresh skull Hook knife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Rta mgrin (Hayagrīva)</td>
<td>Vajra Crossed vajra</td>
<td>Nagas (Klu yi gdon tshogs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW</td>
<td>Gzhan gyi mi thubs (Aparājita)</td>
<td>Vajra Hook</td>
<td>Wind gods (Rlung lha’i gdon tshogs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Bdud rtsi khyil ba (Amṛtakundalini)</td>
<td>Vajra Sword</td>
<td>Yaksas (Gnod sbyin gdon tshogs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>Khams gsum rnam rgyal (trailokyavijaya)</td>
<td>Vajra Crossed vajra</td>
<td>Devils (Bgegs kyi gdon tshogs)</td>
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<td>Nadir</td>
<td>Stobe po che (Mahābala)</td>
<td>Vajra Arrow</td>
<td>Earth gods (sa bdag)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: 2

All these visual components carry specific meanings. The meaning and gesture of some symbols are delineated in the praise (stod pa) section of the text while others are discussed elsewhere such as in the exhortation (bskul byang). The nine pronged vajra symbolizes the over coming of the conceptual thoughts through the nine yanas (thegs pa rim pa dgu) while the five pronged vajra induces the five states of sentient beings as a basis or
support. The blazing fireball in the first left hand represents the burning of the karmic residues and the three pointed khatvanga cuts through the three poisons from their root. Khenpo Namdrol explains that the union of the figure with his consort (yab yum) as the symbol of the non-duality of the expanse of emptiness and expression of primordial wisdom and the blue color of the deity is its unchanging reality. According to the text, three faces of the deities represent the three bodies of Buddhahood, namely, the dharmakaya, sambogakaya and the nirmakaya. The three states of through liberation. The six arms of the deity symbolize the six transcendent perfections. The four legs denote four legs of miraculous transformation.

Vajrakīlas are also adorned with different types of bone and other ornaments that reflect their wrathfulness, each of which has symbolic meaning. However, all these ornaments come in set with their meanings. An standard set of ornaments are worn by the deities that are both peaceful and wrathful. For the wrathful deities, eight ornaments of charnel ground, which includes, three divine garments, two hanging ornament, and three anoint elixir are depicted. In addition, there are also six-serpent ornament and eight attires of splendor. All these symbolize the enlightened qualities of Vajrakīla, which when depicted correctly on the image supports the presence of the Vajrakīlaya deities.

Among the eight ornaments of the charnel ground, the three divine garments are; human skin, elephant’s skin, and tiger’s skin. Those with little experience with such a depictions sometimes mistake such wrathful figures for demons, because they do not understand the metaphorical meanings of the depictions and their representations. A deity wearing these skins and skulls do not mean that he feeds on sentient beings; rather, these ornaments are used as symbols to depict certain meanings in order to guide to liberation.

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49 Phur pa yang gsang bla med don gyi snying po’i las byang phrin las kyi spo gri in Phur pa yang gsang bla med, Sumthrang’s text
50 Phur pa yang gsang bla med don gyi snying po’i las byang phrin las kyi spo gri in Phur pa yang gsang bla med, Sumthrang’s text
51 Namdrol 65
through wrathful means, actions that look aggressive to an outside gaze but are rather fueled by ultimate compassion.

The human skin (*mi lpags gyang gzhi*) draped over the shoulders of Vajrakīla depicts the practitioner’s triumph over the attachment. The reason why it is human skin is one of the prime attachments we have is to our own body, for that reason a metaphoric human skin is worn by the deity. The elephant’s skin draped over the upper part of the deity’s body symbolizes the subjugation or overcoming of one’s ego and therefore, delusion. Tiger skins represent overcoming anger. These three, as a set, symbolizes the over coming of the three poisons which is quite similar to the depiction of pig, snake, and roster in the center of the Buddhist wheel of existences. Vajrakīla wears a crown of dried human skulls and a necklace comprised of dried skulls, moist skull and freshly served human heads. He also wears five serpent ornaments; specifically, a white serpent tied up in his hair, a yellow serpent as an earring, a red serpent necklace, green serpents as bracelets and anklets, and a black serpent necklace, which hangs down below the waist. Furthermore, Khenpo Namdrol mentions that Vajrakīla and the ten wrathful ones also appear in *the eight-fold attire of the glorious ones*. This includes their hair-tangled mess, which symbolizes the turning away from the samsara. He only mentions the vajra wings that can destroy everything. However, Sumthrang’s paintings depict both vajra and the gem wings that represent the skillful means and wisdom according to the sadhāna. All the wrathful ones wear a red and blue silken diadem, which surpass the externalism and nihilism. Half vajra as its topknot that symbolizes as the lord of the particular deity family, however, in Sumthrang’s paintings the topknot half vajra is not depicted in the painting. Namdrol also mentions that Vajrakīla wears rhino hide armor for his power and considers the intimate sexual union of the consort as an ornament of wisdom.52

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52Namdrol 64
The Vajrakīla should appear like an steel in the brilliance. They are surrounded by an aura of the fire, symbolic of primordial wisdom.

The wrathful deities such as Vajrakīla are depicted in nine demeanors (gar gyi nyams dgu). Although it is not necessarily displayed, all the wrathful are meant to reflect all the nine demeanors. These are the characteristics come in sets of three, which corresponds to body, mind, and speech. The three associated with the body are seductive, heroic, and repulsive, which further corresponds to the three poisons of desire, hatred, and ignorance. The three that associated with speech are laughter (described as sounding like ha ha and he he), malicious threats, and terrifying roars. And the three that associated with the mind are compassion, which can incite ignorant sentient beings, desire to tame all irredeemable beings with the wrathfulness of the Vajrakīla and serenity that never wavers from the expanse of reality.

Further, the practitioner visualizes Vajrakīla as the supreme wrathful deity as controlling the three realms with his splendor. In doing so, Khenpo Namdrol reminds that one who practices should simultaneously keep in mind all the symbolic meanings. Thus it is the visual imagery that helps to arrive the point of focus while mediating or visualizing in the form of pure recollection (rnam dag dren pa).

All those iconographic depictions on thangkas and visualization done by chöje following the textual description are the support for the Vajrakīla to have a place to enter into. Khenpo Namdrol notes, “visualization of the maṇḍala and the seats within the maṇḍala, is called the ‘supporting’ aspect of the maṇḍala, since it supports the deities who take their places upon it; the deities in turn are reffered to as the ‘supported’.” Therefore, as the Vajrakīla are supported by these images, they are considered to be in living presence in the form of art or in the embodiment of chöje. Hence, their living presence within the ritual arena

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53 Namdrol 64
54 Namdrol 64
55 Namdrol 65
56 Namdrol 57
is essential for the efficacy for the Kangsöl to gather the evil force, subdue them and reorder the cosmic balance.

**Conclusion**

Most of the scholarship on tantric practices focused on soteriological aspects. When some analyzed its apotropaic nature of the practices, they even tend to get too far by claiming practitioners transgression of actual beings by such practices. The practice of tantric rituals to reorder the cosmic balance and create harmony within a community, such as by balancing the hierarchal order of humans and spirits, is often overlooked.

To reorder the realm of deities and bring spirits under control, offerings and appeasements are done in tantric rituals, according to their hierarchy. This is a peaceful method to put them where they belong. When certain spirits keep on distorting the order, the chöje reorders through commandment by exhorting the deity and embodying him. At the very last, subjugation is done. However, subjugation does not necessarily mean killing a being, it subdues the ‘evilness’ of the spirit and turns it into ‘goodness’ and puts it back into order. In tantric practice, everything needs to be in order. For example, a tantric initiate while starting h/her practice needs to follow the same order. If the practitioner wants to practice Vajrakīla, s/he cannot do that before practicing Guruyoga (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*) because the guru or the teacher comes first in the order. Without acquiring the quality of guru, ones body, speech, and mind cannot support the deity, when the practitioner embodies the deity. It is like trying to plug in low voltage cable into high electric current socket. It would damage the cable due to high voltage in the socket. Thus, the cable needs to have a quality to receive the current from the socket. Therefore, maintaining the order is very essential.

In Sumthrang the reordering of the cosmic balance is enacted to its community with the performative Vajrakīla practice in the form of Kangsöl festival. The orders are visible in the
hierarchical arrangements of tormas (symbolic ritual cake) on the shrine, deities on the thangkas (paintings of deities), and sitting arrangements of the chöje (head priest), gomchens (lay monks), and laity. All are arranged in a hierarchical fashion and in a similar manner the cosmic balance is reordered. The efficacy of this performative tradition to restore the cosmic balance is understood through its blessed lineage and transmission, distinct ritual enactment, and textually followed images that support the living presence of Vajrakīla deities.

The transmission of Vajrakīla that passes down from Padmasambhava to Sumthrang’s founding figure Lhanangpa, which is flourished through Nyoton and then from fathers to sons of Sumthrang chöjes, maintains the blessings and efficacy. Moreover, when Namkha Samdrup received the gter ma (treasure tradition) lineage from its revealer Rathna Lingpa himself and synchronized with the oral lineage, the blessing and efficacy of Sumthrang’s Vajrakīla tradition becomes even stronger. Similarly, the set of Vajrakīla thangkas that are made following the textual description supports the living presence of the Vajrakīla deities as they are brought down into the images. Having proper symbols and representations of the deities depicted on the thangkas serve as repositories for the presence and power of the deities, which Sumthrang’s thangkas did quite well. The villagers are reminded of the presence of the deities by unveiling the thangkas. This enactment of the presence of the deities is seriously felt in the community on the third night of the ritual when the thangkas are left unveiled. People do not go to sleep for a whole night because deities are still present among them. Hence, they chant the deity’s mantra and stay awake the whole night. In addition, the distinct enactment of the Kangsöl and the roles played by the chöje, gomchens, and laity also contributes to the efficacy of the ritual. Throughout the Kangsöl, chöje becomes the identity of the founding figure and embodies the Vajrakīla. The gomchens play an active role in chanting, reciting, and saying the prayers in the text, playing the instruments,
and performing the mask dances. Villagers prostrate, make offerings, and share the remains from the ritual to connect with the divines.

Therefore, the energy of lineage helps in the efficacy of the ritual and ritual enactment brings down the presence of the deity into the art. The thangkas therefore, holds the actual presence of the deity into the ritual arena. The symbol of its presence is signified through the veiling and unveiling of the images, which reminds the participants of the deities’ presence among them. The invitation or bringing down of the deities into the image every year activates the image with the deities’ energy and contributes to the efficacy of the ritual. The chöje’s meditative practice, the lineage that he has received, and the proper enactments of the rites benefit him to call the deity into the ritual arena and with his embodied power of Vajrakīla controls the demonic to bring it under order. The chöje brings demonic under control and reorders it through redundant actions of incineration, subduing, hurling, and pressing down to make sure that all the demonic forces are subjugated and put under order. On the other hand, the hierarchy of the cosmos is shown through a recursive organization of deities and spirits in the thangkas, tormas and shrine, and visualization of chöje. Hence, through the enactment and symbolic representation, the cosmic balance of the area surrounding the Sumthrang monastery is once again restored by bringing down the living presence of Vajrakīla into the ritual arena within the thangkas and embodiment of chöje. The demonic forces are then subjugated, controlled, and put under order to bring peace in the community for one more year.

I witnessed Sumthrang Kangsöl as I grew up in this village. It is an exciting experience to study my own tradition from a academic perspective. As I took part in and witnessed Kangsöl for decades, my own understanding of Kangsöl is that, it is an annual ritual and festival where all the villagers gather to make our offerings and receive the protection of chöje and deities. My first study of my tradition through an academic lens
provided me emic and etic understanding of the ritual, which is very important for someone in the tradition to understand. The emic understanding of Kangsöl is that Vajrakīla does the subjugation of the demonic in the embodiment of chöje. The etic understanding of it is as an enactment of the community’s identity with the presence of tutelary deity Vajrakīla and founding figure Lhanangpa embodied by the chöje for the community. And villagers gathering to the Kangsöl to feel protected for the year are a crucial aspect of the village’s important festival, which is not often realized by the villagers as they enact it.

Being one of the community members observing this festival for decades, I did not in my youth contemplate much on the meanings of why we do it and how it benefits the village. Similarly, except the chöje and some other gomchens, majority of the community members does not know the meaning either. For example, at the night of subjugation rite when people do not sleep for the whole night, many people think that as an entertainment part of the festival and often forget about the presence of the Vajrakīla. Therefore, I would like to bring back my work to my community and hope to find out what their reaction and feelings are and to educate them with the meanings of Kangsöl that I have learned from my academic study.
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