
The Ra Mo Che Temple, Lhasa, and the Image of

Mi bsKyod rDo rJe: The Narrative of

Ri 'Bur sPrul sKu

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Although practicing Buddhists and historians of Tibet are well aware of the Ra Mo Che Temple in Lhasa, very little about the building and its history has been published.¹ Situated a short distance north-west of the more-famous Ra Sa gTsong Lag Khang or Jo Khang, the temple received, according to the *dBa' bZhed*, the Buddha image brought to Tibet in the time of the Tang princess Ong Jo.² Early in the reign of Khri Srong lDe bTsan, while the king was still in his minority, anti-Buddhist factions led by Zhang Ma Zham Khrom Pa sKyes circumscribed royal power and murdered the pro-Buddhist minister Zhang sNa Nam Khri Thong rJe Thang la 'Bar.³ They also arranged for the image at Ra Mo Che to be removed from the temple. The plan was to return the Buddha to China, along with the head priest and his entourage. The statue's great weight, however, thwarted the scheme. After being dragged a short distance, the Buddha was left half-buried in the earth.⁴ The state of affairs in those days is indicated by *dBa' bZhed* which reports that the Lhasa *vihāra* was turned into a workshop with sheep carcasses hung from the arms of the principal holy images and entrails wound round their necks!⁵ After Buddhism was reinstated, the Ra Mo Che was returned to worship. Subject to campaigns of refurbishment and additions through the centuries, it was the centre of a number of important developments, notably becoming the seat of the upper Tantric college (rGyud sTod) established by rJe bTsun Kun dGa' Don Drub in 1474.⁶

¹In western historiography we have found little or no comment on the temple except Amy Heller in *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style*, ed. J. C. Singer and P. Denwood (London, 1997), pp. 88–89. We owe this reference to John Clarke. We do not exactly share the Heller's skepticism (based on Richardson) about the connection with Ong Jo (Kong Jo). In the *dBa' bZhed* the princess does not actually build the temple (see next note) and anyway she was not the sole agent but part of a 'cultural packet' that came with the marital link to the Tang dynasty. The most useful summary of the temple's history is Dung dKar Blo bZang 'Phrin Las, *Dung dKar Tshig mDzong Chen Mo* (Beijing, 2002): pp. 1881–1883.

²Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, *dBa' bZhed: The Royal Chronicle Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet* (Vienna, 2000). We read from the facsimile folio 3 recto (lines 3–4): *Ong Cos gSer Gyi Lha Shakya Mu Ne Cig rGya Yul Nas* [annotation below line: *rTa Pa 1 Gi Pang La Khyer Nas*] *sPyan Drangs Pa Yang Ra Mo Cher bZhugs Te*, i.e. 'A gold image of Lord Sākyamuni, brought by Ong Co from the land of China [carried on the lap of a single horseman], was also installed at Ramoche'. Later in the narrative the Hva Shang in the temple, a servant of the princess, is ordered back to China.

³*dBa' bZhed*, folio 4 verso (line 6).

⁴*dBa' bZhed*, folio 4 recto (line 7) to 4 verso (line 1): 'Bal rJe Khol La gTad De bZhag Nas Lus Po Sas gYogs Te bZhag Na Nang Par sKu sTod Yan Chad Lang Nge Myu Zhing gDa' Bar Gyur, i.e. 'After entrusting (it) to 'Bal rJe Khol, they left the statue covered with earth, but the next morning it had emerged conspicuously from the waist up'.

⁵*dBa' bZhed*, folio 4 verso (lines 4–5).

⁶'Phrin Las, op. cit., p. 1882 with further details regarding the later history of the temple.

The Ra Mo Che survived to the twentieth century but after 1959 once again became the focus of iconoclastic attention. Reviving the plan hatched by anti-Buddhists one-thousand years before, cultural revolutionaries cut the image in half and removed the top portion to China. As with many sculptures taken from Tibet at this time, the fragment ended up in a scrap-metal foundry. In 1973, however, the government began to intervene and cultural materials were rescued. With the emergence of more liberal policies in Beijing, a team of Tibetans, led by Ri 'Bur sPrul sKu, was allowed to travel to China in 1982 to recover Tibetan artefacts and arrange for their return. Many items were retrieved, including the top-half of the Ra Mo Che image. The purpose of this article is to present the text of the mission of Ri 'Bur to China and his account of the recovery of the Ra Mo Che Buddha. The temple was subject to a significant programme of rebuilding and refurbishment between 1987 and 2005 and although this work has been reported in news-briefs and on the internet, documents pertaining to the monument and the work done are not generally accessible. We thus hope that the present contribution will shed some light on this ancient monument, its documentation and complex history.

The text presented here is a translation of an extract from Ri 'Bur's, *dGe sDig Las Kyi Myong Ba*. Although this work eventually appeared in print in India, we have worked from a hand-written manuscript. This was evidently copied before the book was published.⁷ This was supplied to the present authors by Radio Free Asia who kindly agreed to our publication of the text in the present article. The style of the *dGe sDig Las Kyi Myong Ba* is literary, showing the text was composed and written, rather than being a transcription of a lecture or oral narrative. The manuscript given to us was prepared by at least three different copyists and covers nineteen pages. There is no punctuation at the end to mark the close of the story but the events described find a natural conclusion in the reinstatement of the top portion of the Ra Mo Che image in the temple at Lhasa.

Ri 'Bur sPrul sKu (1923–2006)

Before turning to the narrative itself, a brief biography of its author will provide a useful introduction and personal context for the events described.⁸ Ri 'Bur was born mGar Thar Tshe Ring in Kham, eastern Tibet, in 1923.⁹ He was recognised at the age of five as the sixth reincarnation of Bla Ma Kun dGa' Od gSal, a great scholar and teacher who spent the last twelve years of his life in solitary retreat. All five of the previous incarnations were principal teachers at Ri 'Bur monastery in Kham.

At fourteen Ri 'Bur entered Sera, one of the great dGe Lugs Pa monastic-universities in Lhasa, to begin intensive studies in Buddhist philosophy which culminated in his receiving the dGe bShes degree at the age of twenty five. During his stay in Sera, Ri 'Bur also attended teachings and initiations given by his root guru, Pha Bong Kha Rinpoche, a celebrated

⁷Ri 'Bur, *dGe sDig Las Kyi Myong Ba* ['The Experience of Virtuous and Evil Acts'] (Dharamsala, Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, 1988).

⁸A book by the author entitled *How to Generate Bodhicitta*, published by the Amitabha Buddhist Center, Singapore, is reported to have been printed but we have not traced a copy.

⁹Name variants according to the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (<http://www.tbrc.org>); title: ri 'bur sprul sku rgyal bstan ngag dbang rgya mtsho; primary title: ser smad ri 'bur sprul sku rgyal bstan ngag dbang rgya mtsho; personal name: mgar thar tshe ring; personal monastic name: ngag dbang phul byung.

dGe Lugs Bla ma of the time. After receiving his degree, Rinpoche returned to Kham where he spent years in retreat in a small hut he had built in the forest. After the Chinese communist invasion in 1950, the situation in Kham became increasingly dangerous and in 1955 he was advised by one of his teachers, Khri Byang Rinpoche, to return to Lhasa, where he continued to receive teachings and go on retreat.

From 1959 Lhasa itself became unsafe. Ri 'Bur endured many hardships, including imprisonment, between 1959 and 1976. Although an observer of the terrible destruction of the Cultural Revolution, he is reported to have maintained a peaceful mind and to have continued his religious practices. As he described his experiences: "I didn't really experience the slightest difficulty during those adverse conditions. This was due to the kindness of Bla Ma rDo rJe Chang (Pha Bong Kha Rinpoche). From him I had somehow learned some mental training and in those difficult times my mind was immediately able to recognise the nature of cyclic existence, the nature of afflictive emotions and the nature of *karma* and so forth. So my mind was really at ease".

Following the Cultural Revolution, Rinpoche worked with the Panchen Rinpoche to restore cultural materials and artefacts to Tibet. His main accomplishment was recovering the Jo Bo image from China and restoring it to the Ra Mo Che temple. This forms the core of the narrative presented here. Ri 'Bur left Tibet in 1987 and travelled to Dharamsala in India to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. There he lived at rNam rGyal monastery, where, at the request of His Holiness, he wrote biographies of great Bla Mas and a religious history of Tibet. Rinpoche also visited and taught overseas in Australia, New Zealand and Europe. He resided in California toward the end of his days, but returned to India in 2006, passing away that year at Sera monastery in Karnataka.

dGe sDig Las Kyi Myong Ba Las Zur Du Phyung Ba: Extracts from the Experience of Virtuous and Non-virtuous Karmic Fruits

Around that time [1982]¹⁰, when there was a degree of liberalisation of the otherwise drastic campaigns being carried out under the personal leadership and instigation of Mao Ze Dung himself, I was invited to attend a meeting convened by the [TAR] Religious Affairs Bureau.

Present at the meeting were some key people such as 'Ba' Pa sKal bZang rNam rGyal, Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau [TAR], the heads of the Cultural Relics Administration Bureau, Nor Bu Ling Kha Cultural Relics Administration Committee and a few other relevant bodies. In the meeting Director sKal bZang rNam rGyal announced: "It has been decided that the remnants of cultural artefacts of Tibet that had gone astray and missing in recent years are to be returned to Tibet. And in order to go and take charge of the serviceable cultural artefacts that are stored in Beijing, Chengdu and The Yin [Taiyun], a work-team comprising of the following people have been nominated: Ri 'Bur from the [TAR] Religious Association, Phun Tshogs Yon Tan from the Religious Affairs Bureau, Kar Ma from the Cultural Relics Administration Committee, and one Interpreter".

¹⁰Clarifications have been added here and there in square parenthesis, otherwise we have kept commentary to a minimum. Tibetan words are transcribed according to the Wylie system apart from obvious words like Dalai Lama which have entered English. Chinese names are transcribed as they were written in Tibetan except for obvious place names like Beijing etc.

He announced that I have been chosen to lead the work-team. Everyone present approved of my nomination. I felt not only elated at the prospect of being able to recover many antique and precious cultural artefacts of Tibet but also at the likelihood of recovering the upper torso of the “Jo Bo” statue of the Ra [Mo] Che temple. So, as soon as the meeting was over, I went to the ‘Phrul sNang gTsug Lag Khang [Jo Khang, Lhasa]. There I had a thorough discussion with the head attendant of the temple, dGe bShes Blo bZang Phun Tshogs of the Blo gSal Gling college. Then the two of us went to the temple near dPal Lha lCog where the lower part of the Ra [Mo] Che “Jo Bo” statue was stored.

There bowing my head on the knee of the lower part of the ‘Ra [Mo] Che “Jo Bo” statue, I fervently and intensely prayed for success in recovering its upper torso. Making detailed observations of the cut marks at the waist level and the arms around shoulder level from where the upper part of the statue had been hacked off, I took thorough measurements of the dimensions. I also did my best to take note of the material from which the statue was made. Then, I went to dPal Lha lCog. There, after making prayer requests to dPal lDan Lhamo in both peaceful and wrathful forms and seeking her blessings and support for the fulfilment of my heartfelt desires, I returned home. I informed my younger sister of the situation and she was delighted.

Then the four of us, Phun [Tshogs] Yon [Tan], Kar Ma, our interpreter De Mo dByangs sDron and I left by air on 29 December that year [1982]. We stayed in Chengdu for a few days and contacted the local Cultural Relics Administration Bureau with the intention to seek the return of Tibetan cultural artefacts located in that area. However, since no one would even acknowledge and respond to our enquiries, we suspended our work for the moment and proceeded to Beijing.

There the Religious Affairs Bureau (Central) arranged our accommodation at the Nationalities Guest House where the facilities and food were excellent. The Religious Affairs Bureau assigned a Chinese functionary named Yon Cing Tung as our assistant. He was a university graduate and a good man who did not patronise people of other nationalities. He initiated contacts with the Chinese Ministry of Culture, the Beijing City Cultural Property Administrative Bureau and other concerned offices. On 30th December we were taken to the “Gu Kung” (Old Palace) where the majority of the Tibetan cultural artefacts were stored.

There a kindly lady named Krang Lan Phang received us warmly. She then took us to an old dilapidated building whose curtains were so badly tattered that one could see clearly through them. Above the main door was hung a large signboard in Chinese characters: Ching Khra’o Thang (Imperial Chapel for Long Life). There she said with a sense of relief: “Here – these are parts of the remnants of the Tibetan cultural artefacts brought from the factory and deposited here in 1973. Ten years have gone by. I have tried to look after them to the best of my ability. Now the property is being given back to the hands of its rightful owner”. I had a feeling that she was no ordinary Chinese woman.

At that point an elderly Chinese man said to be the Deputy Director of the Beijing City Culture Property Administrative Bureau arrived and opened the locks. When we went in and looked around, the large courtyard was filled with an assortment of statues of varying sizes heaped almost to ceiling, and in a corner to the right of the courtyard was another heap of broken parts and remnants of larger statues. There were two adjacent buildings which

were filled with statues and other paraphernalia used in worship and religious rituals, all covered in dust and heaped up like rubbish. In the two buildings near the large house were nearly a thousand copper statues measuring about one Khru (one span) whose gilding had been removed.

The aforementioned Deputy Director informed us that the cultural artefacts located there at the “Gu Kung” amounted to nearly 26 tons in weight. I said that we could weigh them up later. Thereafter the Beijing cadres left. We returned to the main building and had a proper look around. Because the statues had been left there for the past ten years and the incessant dust from the neighbouring factories had settled and accumulated on them, the collection looked like a huge heap of dusty rubbish. When I saw that I felt an immense sense of sadness: “This is the state of all these statues, dearer to us than our own hearts, the product of our Tibetan people’s hard labour accumulated down the generations!” I noticed that my colleagues also looked very sad.

Then, in order to check whether or not our mission and purpose would be realised, I picked out a statue at random from the large heap and started cleaning off the dust. It was an undamaged bronze statue of a Green Tārā with a benign expression done with consummate skill. Moreover, on a piece of yellow cloth draped around its waist was the writing: “ ‘Jam dByangs – Object of worship for divination that bestows successive drops of elixir” which I interpreted as an auspicious sign of great significance. Then, closing the doors for the time being, we returned to our lodgings.

Up to the time of the Tibetan New Year that followed [1983], I went to a furniture cooperative and ordered about four hundred wooden crates to be built to box and transport the statues; and from a nylon factory I bought nearly twenty bales of leftover pieces of nylon rags for use as wrappings and cushions to protect the statues. During that period I made all the necessary arrangements such as hiring a group of ten Chinese workers to clean up and package the statues. My colleagues also gave me their wholehearted and dedicated cooperation until the time of our return to Tibet. On my part, too, I did my best to ensure that they were not irritated or disheartened in any way.

Then when we went to seek an audience with H. H. Panchen Rinpoche, he asked: “What brings you here to Beijing?” When I submitted that we had come to look for and take charge of whatever remained of the Tibetan cultural artefacts, he immediately gave me his phone number card (554465) from the coffee table saying: “If you find any old precious statues of historical significance, you must phone me immediately.” He also took the phone number of our guest house.

On the morning of 7 January 1983, we called the group of ten Chinese workers hired to clean up the statues, and carrying an assortment of large brushes, we went to the “Gu Kung” where the statues were stored. Krang Lan Phang, the Chinese lady, unlocked the door for us and we went in. I assigned the Chinese workers to sit around the edge of the heap of statues and start the cleaning work. My three colleagues helped supervise their work so that nothing would be stolen. I busied myself checking and sorting the cleaned statues.

Then after a while I went towards the collection of larger statues heaped in one corner and suddenly felt an instinctive urge to look more thoroughly through them. As I did so, I noticed a torso of a statue slightly bigger than that of an average-sized human, lying right on

the floor in a reclining position. I felt a profound sense of elation and excitement thinking that it could possibly be the upper part of the missing “Jo Bo” Rinpoche.

Then I called Phun [Tshogs] Yon [Tan] and others to help extricate the statue. It required three strong men who just about managed to lift and move it safely to the stone floor. Immediately, I wiped the dust off its face and looked. It was the familiar precious “Jo Bo” Rinpoche that I had visited often in the past and a profound sense of joy and celebration welled up in me as if I was reunited with a dear old friend. When I took a closer look after my colleagues had cleaned the rest of the statue, I noticed that the tip of the nose and the left eye had sustained disfigurements caused by a large hammer. Around its heart and navel areas too, there were damage marks caused by reckless blows with a large hammer.

There were still fairly thick layers of gold paint under the armpits and other recesses but no traces of gold left either on the face or anywhere on the main torso. The precious ash-filling of holy relics were still there up to the level of the heart. There was a metal rod holding the statue erect which, when moved, caused the horizontal metal rods supporting the severed limbs from the shoulders, also to move. The material from which it was made was red copper (Dhzee KΩim), the same as the lower part of the statue, and in particular, the dimensions of the waist and the cross-section of the shoulder perfectly matched the corresponding severed parts. That further deepened my sense of conviction and happiness that it was the genuine piece.

Then after finishing my morning work session, I phoned H. H. the Panchen Rinpoche informing him about the discovery of the unmistakable upper torso of the Ra [Mo] Che “Jo Bo” from amongst the large heap of statues. I was asked how I could convince him that it was the unmistakable upper torso of the “Jo Bo”. I reported to His Holiness that it was indeed authentic with respect to its size and dimensions, the facial features with which I was very familiar because of my past acquaintance and also the fact that the material of the upper torso matched the material of the lower part. And there were remains of thick gilding in the crevices. In particular, the dimensions of the waist and the cross-section of the shoulder perfectly matched the corresponding severed parts. His Holiness then asked me if the nose appeared a little crooked as he remembered it. I said it was indeed so.

It was evident that His Holiness had more questions for me. So I said, at the risk of sounding impertinent: “If your Holiness doesn’t think it preposterous of me to ask this, would your Holiness mind making a brief visit here to have a look for himself?” His Holiness readily accepted. That evening His Holiness kindly visited our work site and after making a thorough and careful inspection of the statue, announced happily, “I can say with about a ninety-five percent level of confidence that this seems to be the genuine piece”. His Holiness instructed the cadres involved with the “Gu Kung” to give us any help and support required. Then he left.

We then moved the upper torso of the “Jo Bo” statue to an inner room and placed it upon a makeshift dais arranged with two wooden crates. Otherwise, due to lack of resources, we had no other option. That evening, after finishing the day’s job, I returned to the lodgings with a feeling of utter joy and satisfaction. The same evening His Holiness Panchen Rinpoche sent an attendant with generous gifts of meat, rTsam Pa [roasted barley flour], butter and cheese and other Tibetan food items, which turned out to be most delicious and sustaining in the days thereafter.

The next morning, we went to work and moved the upper part of the “Jo Bo” statue to an antechamber of the large hall after having it cleaned. We also placed around the “Jo bo” the other precious statues we found there. After that we went to work every morning, and made do with just simple bread and Tibetan tea for lunch, and carried on working late into the evenings. We busied ourselves with this routine – some doing the cleaning while others were packing and boxing the artefacts into crates.

During that period, many Tibetan cadres including some prominent people like sDe dGe bSod Nams Nor Bu – the Bu Krang of the Kring Yis – as well as Tibetan teachers and students living in Beijing came to visit us at our lodgings to congratulate us on the discovery of the upper torso of the “Jo Bo”. We also had some Tibetan cadres, teachers and students visiting us at our work site to seek an audience with the “Jo Bo” and to congratulate us. Likewise, during that time, we had numerous visits from the Head of the Religious Affairs Bureau (Chos Don Cus Chao Cus Krang) and other Chinese leaders who asked numerous questions on its historical background while inspecting the “Jo Bo” and the material it was made of.

And in those days H. H. the Panchen Rinpoche, too, would phone us regularly after every three days to check if we had discovered any more ancient and precious religious statues or artefacts. One day, H. H. the Panchen Rinpoche made a surprise appearance at the worksite and after offering white silk scarf¹¹ to the upper torso of the “Jo Bo”, gave us generous gifts of tea and butter saying: “We Tibetans are in the habit of drinking delicious tea”. Beginning with this repartee, he stayed on for a while regaling us with many light-hearted jokes and remarks, making it an unforgettable evening for us.

And thus we carried on with our work of cleaning and packing the statues and other objects of religious use into the wooden crates at the “Gu Kung”. Gradually the packed crates accumulated to a total of four hundred and sixty three, large and small. We kept them in the large house and locked it. We had the upper torso of the “Jo Bo” moved and installed in a clean storehouse and got it washed with fragrant water. H. H. the Panchen Rinpoche led a religious ritual to consecrate it by ceremonially painting its eyes open and applying gold paint on its face. I attended on Rinpoche to serve him in these religious rituals.

Then we went to visit the temple named ‘Khung Meo’ built in honour of the ancient Chinese scholar Khung Phu’au Tsi [Confucius] where some six tons of Tibetan cultural artefacts were stored. There were a large number of statues made of bronze and red copper (Dhzee Křim) that had escaped any kind of disfigurement. We cleaned them up as before and packed them into wooden crates. Altogether we had over six hundred wooden crates packed including the statues recovered from the “Gu Kung”. I made all the necessary arrangements for the crates to be transported by train to Ming Hran Shan in Chengdu.

One day we took stock of the statues in those six hundred crates and found that there were 13,537 statues with a total weight of over 32 tonnes.

I thought it would be of value and importance to our future generations to have a brief but accurate account chronicling the antecedents leading to the carting away of most of Tibet’s precious cultural artefacts in general and in particular, the hacking of the statue of

¹¹The term used is *sNyan Dar*, more popularly these are called *Kha bTāgs*.

“Jo Bo” Mi bsKyod rDo rJe¹² into two parts and the carting the upper torso to China; the various locations it had been moved to and stored in transit; the risks of total destruction faced; the near end of its usefulness as an object of worship and benefit to sentient beings; and how it was eventually discovered and restored to Tibet. And I also realised that it was my bounden duty and responsibility to undertake such a project.

So I approached the Director of the Cultural Relics Administrative Bureau, which was in control of the “Gu Kung” site and requested a clear account of the circumstances in which these cultural artefacts had come to be there. He replied that he did not know much about it. It was apparent that he was not keen to relate anything he knew. So I asked if there was anyone who might have such background information and knowledge. It was very evident that he was reluctant to give any helpful information and merely said, “There are a couple of such people but they are currently not resident in the Beijing area”. I felt dejected but helpless to do anything.

The next morning, I went to the “Gu Kung” and approached the Chinese lady Krang Lan Phang for help. I told her: “I wish to get some information about how these Tibetan cultural artefacts have come to be here and any other relevant background information. So, would it be possible for you to introduce me to someone who may have such information and knowledge?” She said: “Yes, sure. It’s important to collect historical information and accounts. There is somebody I know who has detailed information about this. I’ll contact him and definitely try to arrange a meeting with him one day”. I was very pleased.

Within a few days, Zhang Len Fang brought along a smart and pleasant looking Chinese cadre and introduced us. Hoping to elicit a fairly detailed account from him, we invited him to sit at the head of the table and made him feel welcome with the choicest brand of cigarettes, sweets and whatever snacks we could manage to find. Then I asked him to give us a systematic account as to how these cultural artefacts had been brought from Tibet, and what quantities of Tibetan cultural artefacts had been carted away to other provinces of China, and detailed information about the cultural artefacts that have survived and their whereabouts.

He said: “You know very well about the fact that most of the Tibetan cultural artefacts were completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966 when old things were destroyed and replaced by new things. With the exception of the cultural artefacts made of gold and silver, all the rest of the statues and religious paraphernalia that were made of yellowish copper, bronze, red copper and brass were all collected by the Tibet Cultural Relics Administrative Bureau and then systematically carted in lorries to Lu’u Yan”.

“From Lu’u Yan, they were sold and moved on to the relevant foundries in Shanghai, The Yin, Beijing, Than Cin [Tianjin], Sichuan and so on. A purchasing delegation from a foundry named the Precious Metal Smelting Foundry, situated some five kilometres to the east of Beijing city, had travelled to Lu’u Yan and bought nearly six hundred tonnes of Tibetan crafted metals. At the foundry, after the gold was removed from the cultural

¹²This is the first reference in this text to the full name of the “Jo Bo”, its history outlined in ‘Phrin Las, *op. cit.*, p. 1882. The image of Mi bsKyod rDo rJe (= Akṣobhya Vajra) is said to be that of the youthful eight-year old Buddha brought to Tibet by the Nepali wife of Khri Srong bTsan sGampo, first installed in the Jo Khang but shifted to Ra Mo Che after the king’s death.

artefacts they were reprocessed in stages and turned into various forms of cultural items for the purposes of the state and the public”.

“Then sometime in early 1973, Li Xianen [President] and Ulanfu [Director of the CPC's United Front Work Department] passed an order that the serviceable remnants of Tibet's cultural artefacts at the Precious Metal Smelting Foundry should be rescued and deposited for preservation under the care of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. So, in July that year, a representative from this central body, a representative of Beijing City Cultural Relics Bureau and the Administrative Committee of the “Gu Kung” met and passed a resolution to appoint a twenty-member work-team to sift and select the serviceable cultural artefacts still remaining at the Precious Metal Smelting Foundry for removal to Beijing and safekeeping”.

“I was a one of the twenty members of this group. When we went to the foundry and inspected their accounts and holdings, we found that of the six hundred tonnes of Tibetan cultural artefacts procured, no more than about fifty tonnes were left. Nearly five hundred and fifty-five tonnes had been smelted and processed into different objects. The remaining cultural artefacts were lying dumped in an open field barricaded by barbed wire near the foundry. We stayed there at the foundry for about two months, sorting and selecting serviceable items and pieces, and managed to salvage about twenty-six tonnes of Tibetan cultural artefacts. We moved them to Beijing and they are the ones stored at the “Gu Kung”.

One day as soon as we heard that the foundry had received a fresh consignment of cultural artefacts from Lu'u Yan, we rushed there. They had received about thirty tonnes of cultural artefacts. We managed to sort and sift out about six tonnes of serviceable artefacts from that lot. They are the ones at the 'Khung Meo' temple”.

In this way, he gave us such a detailed account of the antecedents of the whole thing that I was choked with mixed emotions. Then I asked him what quantities of Tibetan cultural artefacts were originally imported and what quantities still remained at places like Shanghai, The Yin, Than Cin, Sichuan.

He said that probably those places had also received cultural artefacts equal in weight to those imported to Beijing but he had no knowledge about the quantities still remaining. Later, I asked his name and the office he worked for. He told me that he was called Trik Tangxin' (Khriḡs Khrang Shing) and that he currently worked at the Hre 'Au'u Kung Tse bTud [?] in Beijing City. Then I asked him to write for me his name and the office where he worked. He duly obliged.

That year [1983], the Tibetan and the Chinese New Years happened to coincide on the same day. My colleagues made arrangements for the celebrations as best they could. On the Eve of Tibetan New Year, we went to the “Gu Kung” where the “Jo Bo” Rinpoche was kept. We made the propitiatory offering of *Dro So Phye Mar*¹³ as well as other offerings such as fruits and snacks that we could afford. At our lodgings, too, in front of the portrait of our ancient Dharma King Srong bTsan sGam Po, we arranged propitiatory religious offerings, the *Dro So Phye Mar*, the first servings of “chang” and tea, etc. in accordance with Tibetan custom and tradition.

¹³A decorative wooden box filled with wheat, barley and rTsam Pa topped with butter.

As the first day of the new “Water-Hog” year dawned, I turned sixty-one. We organised a prayer session chanting eulogies of the *gNas bCu*, long-life prayers for H. H. the Dalai Lama, ritual offerings to mark devotion to one’s Guru accompanied by the appropriate ritual offerings. I found it rather amusing when two Communist party cadres brought me the auspicious first servings of the various religious offerings.

Thereafter we proceeded to the “Gu Kung” and made devotional *Kha bTāgs* offerings to the statue of “Jo Bo” and prayed for virtue and goodness to flourish in this and the after-worlds. On that day, we contrived not to partake of any food from the Nationalities Guest House and confined ourselves strictly to Tibetan food and delicacies.

One day we received a joint invitation from the United Front Work Department and the State Council of Religious Affairs. We were seated at the front banquet table around which were seated some prominent leaders like H. H. the Panchen Rinpoche, Cang Phis, the Deputy Minister of the United Front Work Department, Krang Cha’o, the head of the State Council of Religious Affairs, Kra’ao Phu Kru, the President of the National Religious Association. H. H. the Panchen Rinpoche stood up first and raising a glass of soft drink made the toast: “As the time approaches for the cultural artefacts of Tibet located in Beijing to be returned to Tibet, I would like you all to join me in welcoming the event”. That was followed by the tinkling of glasses as people drank toasts of sweet drinks and intoxicants according to Chinese custom. And soon most people got engrossed in partying and celebrating.

Whilst all this merriment was going on, H. H. the Panchen Rinpoche turned towards us and exhorted: “Make sure that you don’t take out these statues from one storage and deposit them back into another in Tibet. Have these artefacts distributed among the monasteries and religious communities”. Since the high-ranking Chinese leaders present also expressed their approval of Rinpoche’s remarks, I immediately started making notes in my diary in a very conspicuous manner in the hope that this might prove useful in our future work.

Later we were also invited as guests of the National Religious Association. There, too, all the above-mentioned leaders were present. The lay-Buddhist practitioner Kra’ao Phu Kru, President of the National Religious Association made an offering of RMB 2,000 towards the upkeep and restoration of the “Jo Bo” to its former residence. H. H. the Panchen Lama picked on this remark and mentioned that the original residence of the “Jo Bo” is Ra Mo Che temple and went on to talk about its need for renovation and restoration work etc.¹⁴ Again, all the high ranking Chinese leaders present outwardly expressed their approval and support. Again, thinking that this too might come in handy one day, I immediately started making entries in my diary in a conspicuous manner.

Thereafter, having more or less completed our mission and duties in Beijing, I offered a sumptuous dinner to Yon Ping Tung and Kra’ao Khru’u Krang, the two cadres from the Religious Affairs Commission and Kring Yis Phu’u Krang, head of the Nationalities Guest House and my three colleagues to express my personal appreciation and thanks for their help and cooperation.

Then we despatched over six hundred wooden crates containing the statues to Chengdu Ming Hran District accompanied by two minders. We agreed that Phun Tshogs [Yon Tan]

¹⁴This statement documents that the inspiration to restore the Ra Mo Che temple can be traced to early 1983.

should go to The Yin to check and take stock, if there were any Tibetan cultural artefacts left. We made all the necessary arrangements and also obtained permission for the three of us, Kar Ma, dByang sDron and I, to accompany the “Jo Bo” on its return flight to Tibet.

On the seventeenth day of the first month of the “Water-Hog” year according to Tibetan calendar, which fell on 2 March 1983, we hired two taxis and went to the “Gu Kung” for the last time. There, exactly at 7:00 a.m. Beijing time, we prostrated before the wooden crate containing the “Jo Bo” and made propitiatory *sNyan Dar* offerings. Bowing my head respectfully, I prayed fervently: “I beseech you to continue to manifest yourself as the Protector, Guardian and Saviour of all humble people of Tibet like me and others”.

As we had the crate moved into a vehicle an auspicious shower of rain started falling which continued until we reached the airport. That, we were told, was the first rainfall in Beijing since the start of winter. No sooner had we arrived at the airport, than the rain ceased and the golden rays of the sun shone brightly, causing a brilliant rainbow to form which was witnessed by all those present.

I distinctly remember telling Phun [Tshogs] Yon [Tan] and Kar Ma that if upon arrival in Lhasa, I were to tell people about all the auspicious signs we had seen that day, I might be misunderstood as being preposterous, and therefore, they should tell people the facts that they had witnessed.

Then as the airport staff took charge of the “Jo Bo” crate and we were preparing to rest in a waiting room, H. H. the Panchen Rinpoche arrived unexpectedly. He made *Kha bTags* offerings in a celebratory mood to the “Jo Bo” crate. His Holiness gave me advice concerning installing holy relics inside the statue of the “Jo Bo” and left, after giving me a *Kha bTags*.

We got into the plane and after about two hours reached Chengdu airport. The “Jo Bo” statue was stored in the temple called “Wun Hru Yon” under the administration of the Sichuan Religious Affairs Bureau. Fruit, incense, candles and other religious ritual offerings according to Chinese tradition were elaborately arranged in front of it. A Chinese monk was appointed attendant with the duty to protect the “Jo Bo”. We were accommodated in Tibet Guest House No. 2.

While in Chengdu, we received the unstinted help and support from many high ranking Tibetan cadres such as Grags Pa from Dar rTse mDo who was the Director of the TAR Transport Bureau; Pad Ma rDo rJe from Tsha Ba sGang who was the Director of Public Security Bureau; Yar Phel from 'Ba, Deputy Director of the United Front Work Department; Blo bZang Yon Tan from rGyal Rong, Deputy Director of the Religious Affairs Bureau; bSam Shod from Lhasa, Head of the Lhasa Cultural Museum; sKal bZang dBang Mo from Lho rDzong, Head of the Nationalities Affairs Bureau. They all came to express their appreciation of the success in retrieving the historically famous statue of the “Jo Bo”. Likewise, many patriotic and nationalistic minded Tibetans also came to seek the blessings of the “Jo Bo” and to congratulate us.

Then the Chengdu City Religious Association approached us with the request for permission to organise a prayer and offering ceremony to honour the “Jo Bo”. So, we went to the “Wun Hru Yuan” temple and as we opened the crate housing the “Jo Bo”, they proceeded to begin an elaborate form of Chinese prayer and worship and started intoning the *Heart Essence of the Prajñāpāramitā* in a beautiful manner.

After that the President of the Chengdu Religious Association brought along a respected nun named Lung Nan who was accompanied by around twenty nuns. They made offerings before the “Jo Bo” statue and then in a very melodious voice, started chanting in Tibetan language the “prayer of loving kindness” related to the dGa’ lDan Lha bRgya Ma. This was followed up with prayers eulogising the virtues of the Goddess Tārā. So feeling amazed, I asked how they had learned to recite all that. She said that they were the disciples of the disciple of His Holiness the Khang gSar Rinpoche since they were taught these prayers by Khang gSar Rinpoche’s Chinese disciple named dGe bShes Yon tan rGya mTsho. My respect and faith grew even stronger.

Around this time, we received a letter from the Religious Affairs Bureau in Lhasa instructing us that the Tibetan cultural artefacts rescued from Chengdu area should be left with the Tibetan monasteries in the region. However as the Tibetan cultural artefacts were all held in the storage of Chengdu City Cultural Relics Administrative Bureau I thought that if these were not taken out from their storage now it would be impossible for the Tibetan monasteries in the region to get any of those cultural items in future.

Therefore in consultation with the above-mentioned Tibetan leaders, we approached the Chengdu City Cultural Relics Administrative Bureau and emphatically but politely requested the release of the stored Tibetan artefacts by citing the advice of H. H. the Panchen Rinpoche which was acknowledged and supported by top leaders like Cang Phis Pu’u Krang (head of the State Administration of Religious Affairs). However, they turned us down.

As a result I had to make a detailed submission to the State Administrative Bureau of Religious Affairs in Beijing explaining the situation and requesting their intervention and support. Before long, we received a reply stating that the State Administrative Bureau of Religious Affairs had instructed the Chengdu Cultural Relics Administrative Bureau to hand over the Tibetan cultural items to us and that we could go and seek their release. This made us happy. Nevertheless, when we went there, they made a further fuss by demanding payments for the cultural items to be released including the transport charges.

So we approached bKra Shi Tshe ring from ‘Ba in Kham, who was then the Head of the Chengdu *Ming Aud* for help and his intervention just managed to persuade them to release the cultural items, which we took charge of and moved over to the ‘Wun Hru Yon’ monastery. After sifting through the cultural artefacts there, looking for historically significant and well-known statues, we handed them over to the Chengdu Religious Affairs Bureau for distribution among the Tibetan monasteries in the region as early as possible.

Later on we attended receptions of the Chengdu Religious Affairs Bureau and the Chengdu Religious Association. At the reception hosted by the Chengdu Religious Association we met sKyab mGon sPrul sKu, the religious head of six tribes of the Li Thang area as well as other Bla Ma-s and reincarnates. At the reception the Director and Deputy Director of the Chengdu Religious Affairs Bureau were also present. In the presence of everyone I made the announcement: “We have entrusted the Religious Affairs Bureau with about five tonnes of Tibetan cultural artefacts for distribution among the Tibetan monasteries and temples in the region which I believe they will do in the near future. Among this lot is a human-sized statue made of yellow copper which I request to be handed over to Li Thang monastery”. Li Thang sKyab mGon was visibly pleased with this. I also

remember receiving a letter some time later which confirmed that the above-mentioned Buddha statue had indeed been installed in Li Thang monastery.

Phun Tshogs Yon Tan arrived from The Yin with the news that there was no more than a tonne of Tibetan cultural artefacts such as statues and other religious objects. The rest had already been smelted. Around this time, we received a cable from Lhasa instructing us that the assortment of statues and religious artefacts previously held at the storage in Ming Hren district alongside the crates of statues arrived by rail from Beijing, should be handed over to the Chamdo Kron Chus Bureau. So we went there along with Director Grags Pa. From there we cabled the concerned officials in Chamdo to come down to take charge of the statues and few other damaged religious artefacts that were stored there.

We returned to Chengdu. With the help of Director Drags Pa we hired some lorries from the Chamdo Transport Bureau and started sending the crates of statues to Lhasa in stages. As cabled earlier, two Deputies arrived from Chamdo and we handed over to them charge of the relevant cultural artefacts as instructed. And having completed the work in the Chengdu area, Phun Tshogs Yon Tan left early in the morning to book the air tickets to transport the crate containing "Jo Bo" to Tibet.

As he was leaving, a light shower started and was soon followed with five successive peals of the dragon's thunder, which I interpreted to be very auspicious. When he returned with the flight bookings, I checked the tickets and noticed that the arrival date in Lhasa happened to be exactly the 15th day of the third Tibetan calendar month. This auspicious full-moon day landing had occurred by pure chance without any prior planning. Then I cabled Lhasa Religious Affairs Bureau to arrange several transport vehicles to be ready at Gong dKar Airport on the 15th of the Tibetan calendar.

In the afternoon of the 14th day of the Tibetan calendar, the Chengdu Religious Affairs Bureau sent us two vehicles. In one we loaded the crate containing the "Jo Bo" statue and we got into the other to go to the airport. At the time of our departure, mKhar rDo Rinpoche and many Tibetan well-wishers gave us a warm send-off. At the airport the leaders and officers there received us warmly.

The next morning around day break we had the crate containing "Jo Bo" loaded on the flight. Then we too boarded the plane. After a while the plane took off and climbed higher and higher. In about an hour or so, on seeing the snowy ranges and mountain peaks of our highland, I was filled with joy. At some places the clouds on the mountain peaks appeared like the billowing smoke from burning incense to propitiate the divine spirits, and elsewhere the long white ribbon of clouds floating appeared to be proffering auspicious white *Kha bTags* in a congratulatory spirit. And still atop other mountain peaks, the cloud formations appeared like a multi-layered *maṇḍala* offerings. All these wonderfully auspicious signs and symbols that were like a veritable feast for sore eyes and made me ecstatic with a sense of well-being.

Besides the vehicles we had ordered in advance, I also imagined and expected that there would also be a procession of monks ready with all the religious musical instruments and finery befitting the occasion to receive and welcome the "Jo Bo" at Gong dKar airport. Lost in these thoughts, we soon landed.

We were met by Ven. Tshe sMon Gling, Secretary of the Religious Affairs Bureau and Ven. Seng Chen who had come together in a vehicle. But forget about the procession of monks to welcome us – there wasn't even a separate vehicle to transport the crate containing

the “Jo Bo” statue! I felt devastated reflecting on this clear insult and indifference to religious protocol for such a holy occasion. My colleagues also looked despondent.

Then Ven. Seng Chen said to me: “An important political conference is going on in Lhasa and so we have got only one vehicle”. I suggested “Ven. Tse sMon Gling, you and I could squeeze in the vehicle along with the crate of the “Jo Bo” and leave first. Phun [Tshogs] Yon [Tan] and Kar Ma can stay behind to catch a bus later. What do you think?”

On hearing that, the faces of Phun [Tshogs] Yon [Tan] and Kar Ma turned red. I too felt a cold shiver of guilt and sadness. These two had made so many sacrifices and worked so hard on the mission, and now at this time of the triumphal return of the “Jo Bo” to Lhasa, they have to be left behind in this treacherous manner. But I had no choice.

We placed the crate of “Jo Bo” at the back of the vehicle in a reclining position. Then the three of us sat in the front and drove off. Being squeezed, the journey was fairly uncomfortable. After a while, the rooftops of the Potala came into view and taking off my hat, I recited a prayer for the long life of His Holiness the Emanation of Avalokiteśvara.

Shortly afterwards we reached the front courtyard of the ‘Phrul sNang gTsong Lag Khang which was thronged with thousands of devout Tibetans, monks as well as the laity – men and women – from all provinces of Tibet who were resident in Lhasa, waiting to welcome back the “Jo Bo”. They rained down an avalanche of white *Kha bTags* on our vehicle and soon a procession of monks piped the religious instrumental music from the gate of the temple to welcome the “Jo Bo”. The Abbot (mKhan Po) and a few monks appeared carrying incense to purify and cleanse the air.

There were also film crews recording the event and I thought to myself: “I’ve left behind my colleagues and here I’m in advance. If I appear in the film later, what might my colleagues feel and think? This is not right.” So, carrying the bunch of fresh barley shoots for auspicious offerings that I had brought from Chengdu, I got off the vehicle and half-ran into the Jo Khang. Once inside, I offered the fresh bunch of barley shoots to the image of “Jo Bo” Śākyamuni and remained there reciting a few prayers.

Presently, they brought in the crate containing the upper torso of the “Jo Bo” Mi bsKyod rDo rJe. The temple attendants had arranged a magnificent throne set facing the image of “Jo Bo” Śākyamuni. Upon this throne-seat they placed the crate containing the “Jo bo” Mi bsKyod statue. Then, I unlocked the crate and unveiled the “Jo Bo”. It was like witnessing the auspicious reunion of the two supreme representatives of Lord Buddha in Tibet and my religious conviction and piety seemed to become more deep-seated. The attendants then proceeded to offer ceremonial bowls of sweetened rice and *Kha bTags* to the two “Jo Bo” images. Then I joined the abbots and monks present there in the recitation of the “Seven-limbed Prayer”. Soon we were plied with generous servings of sweet-rice delicacies.

After a while, dGe bShes Blo bZang Phun Tshogs of ‘Dras sPungs Blo Gsal Gling college [then the head attendant of the Jo Khang] came to offer me a congratulatory silk *Kha bTags* with an envelope containing cash gifts. Many other attendants also came to congratulate me with *Kha bTags* offerings. Thereafter, I went home and rested for a few days.

As the people from all the three provinces of Tibet resident in Lhasa were rejoicing and celebrating the reunion of the two “Jo Bo”-s and streaming in to make offerings and seek blessings day after day, a rumour spread expressing doubts about whether the recently

brought torso of the “Jo Bo” was authentic. It was as if this rumour was incited by the forces of darkness or motivated by sheer jealousy.

Some people got carried away by such rumour-mongering and felt snared in the web of doubt and suspicion. So dGe bShes Blo Sang Phun Tshogs suggested that in order to dispel suspicion from the minds of such people, it was opportune to fit together the upper and lower parts and restore “Jo Bo” Mi bsKyod rDo rJe. We did just that, and even managed to exactly match the patterns of the robes on the two parts, and succeeded in dispelling any shadow of doubt from the minds of the small number of doubters.

TSERING GONKATSANG
The University of Oxford

MICHAEL WILLIS
The British Museum

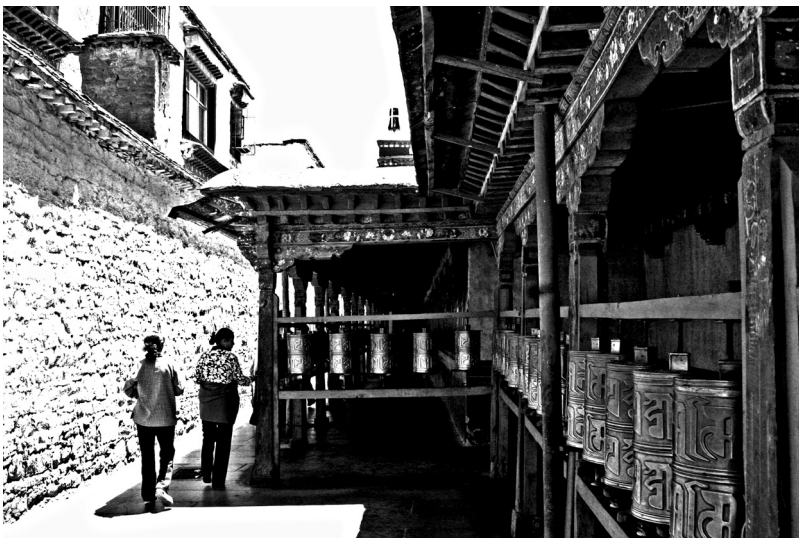


Fig. 1. Lhasa. Ra Mo Che temple exterior showing ranks of prayer wheels after conservation.

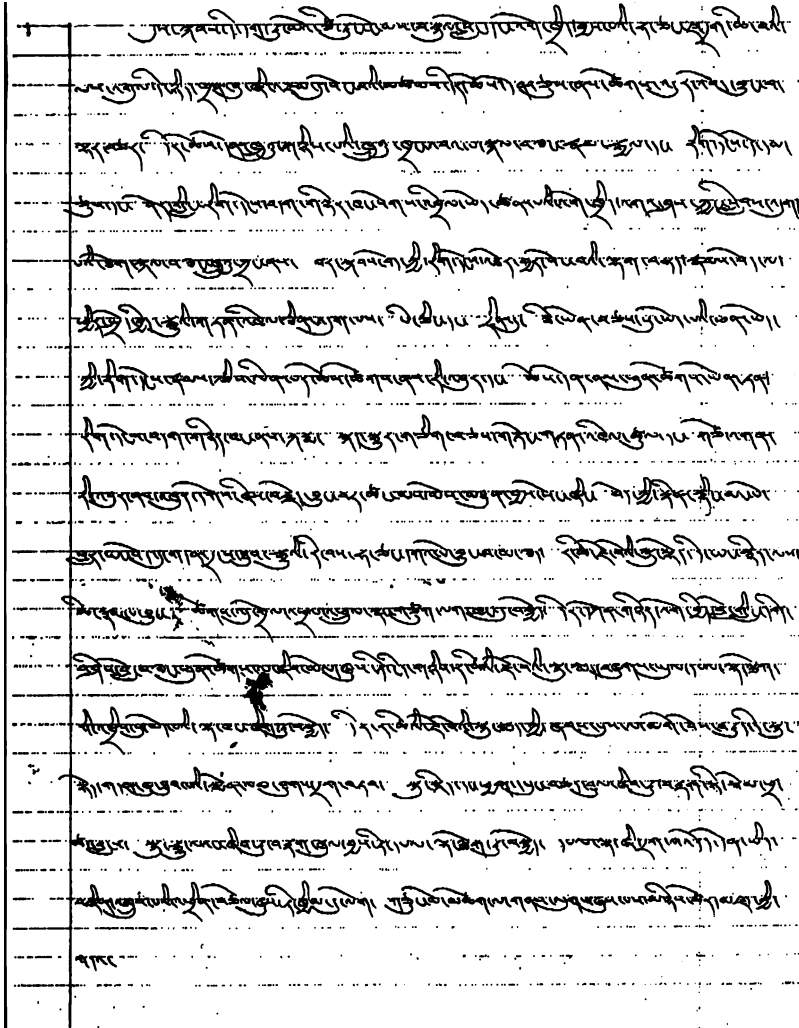


Fig. 2. Sample page from the manuscript.
Extracts from the 'Experience of Virtuous and Non-virtuous Karmic Fruits'.

