

Rare and Important Manuscripts Found in Tibet

By James Blumenthal

The past few years has been an exciting time for scholars, historians, and practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism as dozens of forgotten and lost Buddhist manuscripts have been newly discovered in Tibet.¹ The majority of the texts were discovered at Drepung monastery, outside of Lhasa, and at the Potala Palace, though there have been smaller groups of texts found elsewhere in the Tibet. The single greatest accumulation is the group of several hundred Kadam texts dating from the eleventh to early fourteenth centuries that have been compiled and published in two sets of thirty *pecha* volumes (with another set of thirty due later this year). These include lojong (mind training) texts, commentaries on a wide variety of Buddhist philosophical topics from Madhyamaka to *pramana* (valid knowledge) to Buddha nature, and on cosmology, psychology and monastic ethics. In addition to these Kadam texts from the early followers of Atisha, a small but important find of Gelug and Sakya texts were also discovered in the Potala Palace.

The discovery of this incredible body of Buddhist literature represents perhaps the most important find of Buddhist texts since the unearthing of the Dunhuang manuscripts in the early twentieth century or the Gandharan manuscripts found in Afghanistan about twenty years ago. The publication of these texts offers the opportunity for deepening our knowledge of the historical development and the context out of which living traditions emerged creates the possibility of further enriching our understanding and experience of the traditions. Thus, this is an exciting and important discovery for many.

The largest group of texts was found at the Ganden Podrang (the Dalai Lamas' residence) at Drepung Monastery, a small part of the monastery that was spared the destruction that most monasteries (including most of Drepung) endured during the Cultural Revolution. The texts were originally held in the library of Karma Tenkyong Wangpo (1606-1642) and were brought to the Ganden Podrang in the early seventeenth century. Included are incredibly important writings by many of the greatest masters and most famous figures from the early centuries of the later dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet including the great translators Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo (d. 1055), Ngok Lotsawa Loden Sherab (1059-1109) and Patsab Lotsawa

Nyima Drak (b. 1055). Patsab Nyima Drak was the translator of Chandrakirti's writings into Tibetan and the individual most responsible for the spread of the Prasangika-Madhyamaka view in this early period. Included among this new discovery of Kadam writings are two of his original compositions: a commentary on Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, and a commentary on Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Deeds of a Bodhisattva*.

Perhaps the greatest Tibetan philosopher from this period, and to this point, the missing link in scholarly understanding of the historical development of Tibetan Buddhist thought was Chaba Chökyi Senge (1109-1169). This recent find produced sixteen previously lost or unknown texts by Chaba including several important Madhyamaka and *pramana* treatises. Among the newly known titles are: *Commentary on the Two Truths in Madhyamaka*, *Commentary on [Kamalashila's] Illumination of Middle Way*, *Commentary on [Shantarakshita's] The Ornament of the Middle Way*, *Condensed Meaning of the Mahayana Uttaratantra*, *A Presentation Based on the Mahayana Sutraalankara*, *Dispelling the Darkness with Regards to Valid Knowledge*, and *A Commentary on Ascertaining Valid Knowledge*. In addition to Chaba's own writings, we now have many texts by Chaba's eight great disciples as well.

The Gelug materials include a 552-page commentary on Tsongkhapa's *Illumination of the Thought of [Chandrakirti's] Entrance to the Middle Way* entitled *A Condensed Explanation of the Essence of the "Illumination of the Thought"* by Kunkhyen Lodro Richen Senge (15th CE). He was a disciple of the great master, Jamyang Choje, the founder of Drepung Monastery. Kunkhyen Lodro Rinchen Senge went on to become the fifth abbot of Sera Monastery and the founder of Je College at Sera. The other newly-discovered Gelug texts were composed by Gungru Gyaltsen Zangpo (1383-1450), a disciple of Tsongkhapa, Gyaltsab, and Khedrub. These texts, which include commentaries on the writings of Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, and Chandrakirti, and Perfection of Wisdom literature among others, had been missing from circulation since the early eighteenth century.

All told, this is an incredible body of literature with the potential to illuminate much and benefit many. Scholars and practitioners now have much work to do. ●

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¹ The texts are being published and made available through the Paltseg group and China Tibetology Publishing House in Beijing.