

Chasing the Colours of the Rainbow: Tibetan Ethnogenealogies in Flux

Reinier J. Langelaar*

This article charts various permutations of a little known ethnogenealogical tradition found in Classical Tibetan literature, which, depending on the version, plots the shared ancestry of Tibetan, Chinese, Mongol and other Asian populations. First, a contextualisation of the ethnonym 'Tibetan' (Bod-pa) is offered, followed by a brief overview of other extant origin narratives of this ethnic group. We then subsequently turn to discussions and comparisons of the selected myth's renditions, which began being written in the fourteenth century at the very latest and seem to have been particularly current on the eastern stretches of the Tibetan Plateau. This survey illustrates that depending on the time period, geographic location, authorial strategy and religious affiliation, the narrative was adapted to fit specific historical developments and socio-literary contexts and goals. Accordingly, the list of incorporated ethnic groups varies from source to source, as do their internal hierarchical ranking and specific interpretive twists. All in all, the article thus paints a picture of a fluid and malleable account in which different narrators and communities actively enlisted, adapted and instrumentalised specific visions of the ethnic group's deep past.

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*Institut für Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften), Hollandstraße 11–13, Vienna, Austria; Humboldt Universität zu Berlin.

E-mail: reinier.langelaar@oeaw.ac.at

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Introduction¹

In Classical Tibetan literature, starting at the latest in the twelfth century CE, one encounters a variety of origin narratives of the Tibetan people. The title of this article, in fact, derives from one relatively late source, the eighteenth-century history *dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang*, whose author appears dejected in view of the variety of available theories. Faced with the daunting task of sifting the truth from these many viewpoints, he remarks that the endeavour has grown akin to ‘chasing the colours of the rainbow’.² For reasons of space, therefore, we shall chase in this article but one such set of closely related myths and compare its various permutations. Even one such narrative strain, however, can already morph in various intriguing ways over time and social and geographic space. This cluster of myths, which postulates kinship with neighbouring, mainly Eastern and Central Asian, populations, deviates in many important respects from alternative, and indeed more widespread and better-known, Tibetan ethnogenealogies.

In general, Tibetan ethnic origin narratives appear in various literary contexts, yet never seem to have risen to form works, let alone a genre, of their own. Although many specifically genealogical texts existed, such individual genealogies always seem to have been associated with specific houses, lineages, groups, communities or regions. Thus, even encyclopaedic genealogical works such as the *mGo-log-rus-mdzod* or the *Reb-kong-rus-mdzod* are not only very late or even modern works, but are focused on specific eastern regions as well.³ Similarly, when the already adduced *dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang* cites a ‘single volume [on] the genealogies of Tibet’, the actual text in question in fact has a far more

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the VISCOM workshop ‘Ethnic and Tribal Origins: Narratives and Genealogies’, at the Institute for Medieval Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences, on 18 January 2017.

² ‘[...] dbus-gtsang-gi-bod-mi’i-khung[s]-’ja’-tshon-ded-pa’i-do-zlar-gyur-nas-nyed-rgyu-dka’-bar-snang-yang-’, Sum-pa-Ye-shes-dpal-’byor, *dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang*: 290.

³ The former is a work of the early twentieth or late nineteenth century (on the authors’ dates, on which some unclarity lingers, see Khri-ser-Nor-bu-rgya-mtsho, *mTsho-lho’i-mkhas-grub*: 6, 11–12). Although it comes close to being a specialised ethnogenealogy, it is heavily biased towards the eastern Plateau in general and the history of the author’s native mGo-log specifically (Gyilung Tashi Gyatso and Gyilung Thugchok Dorji, *Treasure of the Ancestral Clans*: 21–54, 101–42; Vitali, ‘Introduction’: x). The *Reb-kong-rus-mdzod* (supposedly written by rGya-bza’i-dge-bshes-’Jam-dbyangs-grags-pa) presumably does not date back further than the 1980s.

specific agenda, namely to lay out a ruling house's ancestry, which includes, yet certainly does not halt at, the genesis of the Tibetans at large.⁴ Many ethnogenealogies, furthermore, are found outside of strictly genealogical texts, and are instead contained in broader mythical materials or larger historical writings, where they often form part of scene-setting preludes that set out the origins, precursors and broader contexts to the topic at hand, such as the history of Buddhism on the Tibetan Plateau or the origins of specific rituals.

'Tibetans' (*Bod-pa*)

The ethnonym for the 'Tibetans' under discussion here is the endonymic term Bod⁵ and its various derivations (*bod-pa*, *bod-mi*, *bod-rigs*, etc.). In its primary function as a toponym, Bod originally referred to the southern central tracts of the Himalayan Plateau, which constituted the core area from which, once conquered, the Tibetan empire (from the seventh to the ninth century) expanded to swallow up vast neighbouring areas on and beyond the Himalayan Highlands.⁶ The referent of the term was therefore decidedly smaller than what is now commonly referred to as 'ethnographic Tibet' or 'Greater Tibet' (Bod-chen-po), which incorporates vast Tibetic language speaking areas outside of Bod proper, such as large parts of contemporary Sichuan and Qinghai provinces in the People's Republic of China (PRC). In colloquial usage, the relatively limited application of the associated ethnonym (*bod-pa*) still reflects this circumscribed definition up to modern days,⁷ regardless of certain later literary extensions of the underlying geographic term.⁸ That being noted, however, the literary ethnonym as found in certain ethnogenealogies may have been a somewhat more inclusive concept than its colloquial counterpart, set as it was in

⁴ 'bod-kyi-rus-mdzod-po-ti-bas-[read: bse-]ru' (a reference to the *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru*). Sum-pa-Ye-shes-dpal-'byor, *dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang*: 289.

⁵ In Central Tibetic dialects, this is pronounced somewhat like *pea* in *pearl*.

⁶ Hazod, 'Imperial Central Tibet': 166, Map 2. Note that the emperor in an early source conquers rTsang-bod, but is himself referred to as 'king of sPu' (Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire*: 8).

⁷ See, for example, Shakya Tsering, 'Whither the Tsampa Eaters': 9.

⁸ Later, sources started including areas to the east of the regions of dBus and gTsang (e.g., Richardson, 'The Fifth Dalai Lama's Decree': 442, 444; Wylie, *Geography of Tibet*: 55), while one text from 1865 even treats northeastern regions in A-mdo as part of Bod (Tuttle, 'Challenging Central Tibet's Dominance': 139–40).

juxtaposition to distant populations like the ‘Han Chinese’, ‘Indians’ or ‘Mongols’⁹ and in the abstract realm of deep ancestry, which would have allowed for subsequent diffusion from Bod.¹⁰

In any case, it is worth illustrating some of the historical tensions and perceptions of difference among the highland’s Tibetan language speaking populations, so as to deflate any false impressions that these literary ethnogenealogies reflect a widespread cultural, social or affective homogeneity of Plateau-wide ‘Tibetans’ on the grass-roots level. Many of these populations, namely, were differentiated not only by simple facts of geography but also by dialect and language,¹¹ environment and mode of livelihood, governance, local organisation, kinship organisation, dress, religious affiliation, architecture, festivals and more. To a certain degree, such differences were recognised and even institutionalised in large monasteries, where regional houses (*khang-tshan*) accommodated monks from different regions.¹² Obviously, then, tremendous diversity, at times accompanied by derision and practices of exclusion, was part and parcel of interregional interactions.

For instance, the inhabitants of those eastern portions of the highlands known as Khams have long been regarded by some as unkempt and prone to violence. In the fourteenth century, a religious figure from the Central regions of the Plateau composed a particularly vitriolic poem venting his anger towards his eastern monastic compatriots, who had apparently made his life inside the monastery walls unbearable.¹³ Slinging every insult in the book, he depicted these Khams-pa as a drinking, robbing and murdering lot of animal-like thugs, who had elevated ‘this evil behaviour of extreme transgressions’ into a type of regional curriculum.¹⁴ Similarly, in an undated biographical source describing a life likely no later than

⁹ Naturally, when translating ethnonyms from Classical Tibetan, English terms such as ‘Han Chinese’, ‘Indian’ or ‘Mongol’ are no less problematic than is ‘Tibetan’.

¹⁰ Also see the discussion below.

¹¹ For a helpful overview of the history, spread, diversity and classification of Tibetan languages, see Tournadre, ‘Tibetic Languages’.

¹² Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*: 56–57.

¹³ van Schaik, *Tibet*: 93.

¹⁴ ‘ha-cang-thal-ba’i-byed-tshul-ngan-pa-’di /a-khu-khams-pa’i-thos-bsam-sgom-gsum-yin/’ (Kun-mkhyen Klon[g]-chen-pa Dri-med-’od-zer, ‘Khams’: 270). The text repeatedly uses the term *rigs* to refer to the people of Khams, a hazy term which, in the context of men, also carries a genealogical connotation.

the fourteenth century,¹⁵ an intended marriage between a woman from Bod and an eastern nomad is opposed by the bride-to-be's family, who are puzzled by her 'insist[ence] upon marrying a man from the miserable region of Kham[s] [...]'.¹⁶ Clearly, not everybody wished to be associated, let alone identified, with these non-Bod-pa easterners.

In a similar vein, the region of Kong-po, in the southeast of the modern Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), was considered culturally distinct and looked down upon¹⁷ and listed separately from Bod in a fifteenth-century discussion of the peoples of the world.¹⁸ In a list of the diverse linguistic backgrounds of a fourteenth-century teacher's students, similarly, pupils from the eastern Plateau (*mdo-stod-smad*) are grouped alongside ethnic others such as Indians, Chinese and Mongols.¹⁹ Pastoralist nomads, too, were often excluded from the label Bod, the term being rather associated with settled, agricultural livelihoods.²⁰ Surely, then, there was differentiation aplenty.

Nonetheless, most of these differences appear to rarely, if indeed ever, pop up in genealogies that trace the Bod-pa's and other peoples' ancestry. There, although numerous ethnic groups may be listed, Bod is never accompanied by any lines of, say, Eastern Tibetic language speakers (Kham-s-pa, mDo-smad-pa, mDo-stod-pa, etc.). While the culture, character and degree of civilisation of these eastern populations may be subject to occasional doubt on the part of the heartland's literati and regular

¹⁵ The dates of the protagonist, bSod-nams-dpal-'dren, are however uncertain (Bessenger, *Echoes*: 12–16).

¹⁶ Bessenger, *Echoes*: 30.

¹⁷ Karmay, 'Mount Bon-ri': 216–17; Kapstein, *The Tibetans*: 43; also see the references given in Vitali, 'Indigenous': 113, n. 24.

¹⁸ dPal-'byor-bzang-po, *rGya-bod-yig-tshang*: 12, where they are classified as one of three Mon-pa populations.

¹⁹ gZhon-nu-rgyal-mtshan, *rGyal-sras-thogs-med-rin-po-che'i-rnam-thar*: 198. Thanks to Mathias Fermer for this reference.

²⁰ See, for example, Martin, 'The Woman Illusion': 66–67; also consider the existence of constructions such as *bod-ma-'brog*, 'not quite Bod-pa, not quite a nomad' (Dondrub Gyal, Thubten Rikey and Ruskin, 'The Origin of the Tibetan Race': 57). In phrases such as 'lus-'tsho-byed-par-zas-gos-bod-'brog-sten.' (Gu-ru-O-rgyan-gling-pa, 'Blon-po-bka'i-thang-yig': 438), 'chos-grwa-chen-po-'di-nyid-la-gtogs-[pa'i]lha-sde-mi-sde-skya-ser-bod-'brog-chen-po-slob-dpon [...]' (Ricca and Fournier, 'Notes Concerning the mGon-khañ of Żwa-lu': 362), or 'bod-'brog-sde-tshan' (Petch, 'Sang-ko': 195), *bod-'brog* should presumably similarly be read as 'farmers and pastoralists', rather than 'Tibetan nomads'.

folk alike, many are nonetheless, to the best of my knowledge, implicitly treated under the same banner as far as descent is concerned. This impression harmonises with the fact that the extant descent narratives of many easterners themselves—although these sources tend to be late—also predominantly tie in to key historical episodes from the central regions, whether they revolve around imperial troops stationed at the frontiers, renowned political players, missionary figures or others.²¹

Illustrative is an autobiography from 1742 that stems from a valley some 1,200 km northeast of lHa-sa. This text draws up a genealogical web that ties together the author's ancestry and that of the inhabitants of the Plateau's heartland: all descend from the same apical union through the six proto-lineages of Bod (*bod-kyi-mi'u-gdung-drug*), clearly indicating that the people of Bod, genealogically defined, have spread far and wide.²² Similar notions are encountered in earlier sources as well. A late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century genealogy of a powerful ruling house, for instance, ends with the claim that their ancestral lineage fanned out over large swathes of the Plateau, including regions outside of Bod proper.²³ At least in the educated world of the written word, then, there was some degree of genealogical unity behind the regional diversity. Indeed, despite the wide distances involved, monastic education, pilgrimage, as well as trade ensured continuous contacts between many of these regions, and Classical Literary Tibetan—which in writing is generally called *bod-yig* or *bod-skad*, 'the language of Bod'—was in use across the Plateau.

Genealogical homogeneity, accordingly, spread beyond the mere notion of ancestry. In a likely fifteenth-century encyclopaedia we find that among the 360 languages of the world, Tibetan is listed as a single entry and is not subdivided into separate languages or dialects;²⁴ its closest cognates instead are the languages of the old polities surrounding the Tibetan imperial heartland, such as Zhang-zhung, 'A-zha and Sum-pa, which

²¹ See, for example, dGe-'dun-chos-'phel, *Deb-ther-dkar-po*: 10–11; Brag-dgon-pa-dKon-mchog-bstan-pa-rab-rgyas, *mDo-smad-chos-'byung*: 340.21–22; Kar-rgyal-don-grub, *mDo-khams-cha-phreng*: 12–13; dGe-'dun-bkra-shis, *Reb-gong-bse-lcang-skya*: 15; also see Petech, 'Sang-ko': 194–95; the two references directly below; and the '*Dur-kyis-ldong-gis-pha-rab-le'u-dbus-phyogs-bzhugsho-lo*' discussed below, Tibet and China (Version I).

²² dPal-ldan-bkra-shis, 'sKal-ldan-mgul-ba'i-rgyan': 674–75.

²³ PSIV: 36.8–15; PSIII: 28.

²⁴ 'bod-thang-gcig-pa'i-skad', 'the language of the uniform Tibetan plains' (Smith, 'A Tibetan Encyclopedia': 223–24; Don-dam-smra-ba'i-seng-ge, *bShad-mdzod*: f. 201).

were incorporated during imperial times. Similarly, Bod is also given as a single category in the text's overview of the world's 'twenty different body [types]'.²⁵ As we shall see, furthermore, this genealogical identity is in several myths associated with specific character traits. At least in the literary and scholastic discourse of such lists and myths, which obviously form a key nexus for simplification and projection, there appears to have existed some sense of an interregional 'Bod-pa-ness', which could incorporate notions of ancestry, language, shared history, appearance and even character.

A Brief Survey of Ethnogenealogies in Classical Tibetan Literature

The most famous and widespread set of myths of Bod-pa or 'Tibetan'²⁶ ancestry is, at least in most developed versions available to us, decidedly Buddhist in framing and well-known in Tibetanist literature.²⁷ Attested from at least the twelfth century onward,²⁸ it presents the Tibetans as being of unique and autochthonous stock, tying their ultimate descent to a saintly monkey that is either closely associated with, or actively identified as, a widely revered Buddhist bodhisattva, who in a teleological plot assists in populating the region to turn it into a base for the Buddhist teachings. Under the bodhisattva's guidance, the monkey reluctantly pairs up with a lustful rock-demoness, and their offspring eventually develops into humans—the Tibetans. Other features of Plateau life, too, are often intimately tied to this episode of non-human, Buddhist origins, such as the introduction of agriculture, the Plateau's wealth of gold and its population's natural inclination towards Buddhism.²⁹ Underlining their unique standing, no other earthly people are presented as being kindred.

²⁵ 'lus-mi-mthun-pa-nyiu [*read*: nyi-shu]', loc. cit.

²⁶ For practical purposes, I will regularly use 'Tibet(an)' as a translation for the emic term 'Bod' and its various derivations; the reader is requested to remain mindful of the aforementioned caveats.

²⁷ See, for instance, Kvaerne, 'Anthropogenic Myths': 308–11; Macdonald, 'Une lecture': 202–05. The myth was already widely published on in Europe in the nineteenth century; see the references and discussion in Laufer, 'Geschichtswerk der Bon-po': 27–28, n. 11.

²⁸ Macdonald, 'Une lecture': 202–03. Also, see Anonymous, *bKa'-chems-ka-khol-ma*: 45–57.

²⁹ See, for example, Nyang-Nyi-ma-'od-zer, *Chos-'byung*: 141–56.

The second and next-most common set, also regularly found in Buddhist sources, is a migration myth that banks on a translation, made around the year 1000 CE, of a commentary by a Bengali scholar³⁰ who briefly noted that the Bod-pa descended from an Indian king. Subsequent Tibetan readings added much detail and again no later than the twelfth century³¹ attached this genealogical snippet to protagonists of the fabled battle documented in the Indian epic traditions of the Mahābhārata.³² Although not explicitly Buddhist, this myth too ties the ethnic group to the South Asian cultural sphere by postulating ancestral relations with ancient India, which was to become the revered cradle of Buddhism.

Emic theories on the Tibetans' descent from subterranean serpentine spirits (*klu*) also existed,³³ as did theories where they (at least partially), like the rest of mankind in Buddhist *abhidharma* theory, ultimately issue from so-called 'deities of clear light' (*'od-gsal-lha*, Sanskrit *ābhāsvaradeva*), whose descent from a heavenly realm initiated the peopling of our world.³⁴ At least one account, moreover, allows for some ancestral plurality among the Bod-pa.³⁵ None of these theories, however, posit substantial ties of kinship with Inner or East Asian peoples. Yet interestingly, almost all of what holds for the aforementioned traditions is countered by yet another theory.

The First Tibetan and His Brother(s)

The mythical cluster scrutinised here differs in many respects from other ethnic origin stories found in Tibetan literature. It neither looks at nor even mentions India, nor does it claim any connections to Buddhist deities or postulate the Bod-pa as a genetic isolate. The serpentine spirits

³⁰ Roesler, 'The Adventures of Rāma': 48.

³¹ bSod-nams-rtse-mo, 'Chos-la-'jug-pa'i-sgo': f. 623.

³² On the Tibetan reception and development of this ethnogenealogical myth, see Haarh, *Yar-luñ Kings*: 171–77.

³³ Gu-ru-O-rgyan-gling-pa, 'Blon-po-bka'i-thang-yig': 392; Stein, *Tibetica Antiqua*: 311.

³⁴ Haarh, *Yar-luñ Kings*: 281–85. A very closely related tradition is found in Ka-thog-rig-'dzin-Tshe-dbang-nor-bu, 'bDag-po'i-deb-ther': 151–54. Note that these pedigrees only imply genealogical connections through the inclusion of the mythical IDong lineages, generally considered a branch of the Bod-pa, but do not explicitly attach 'Bod' to the larger pedigree.

³⁵ Chos-nyid-ye-shes, *gNyags-kyi-gdung-rabs*: 46–47; also see the citation from the *gTo-phug* in Gyilung Tashi Gyatso and Gyilung Thugchok Dorji, *Treasure of the Ancestral Clans*: 85.

and Indic deities, too, are absent. Instead, the Tibetans' ultimate divine origins are placed with beings of a non-Indic pantheon that came to be closely associated with Bon,³⁶ a religion that as a self-identified tradition arose in close mutual contact with, and influence from, forms of Tibetan Buddhism in the early centuries of the second millennium. Despite major doctrinal and ritual overlaps with Buddhism, Bon claims deeper antiquity through its self-identification with the Plateau's pre-Buddhist traditions and accordingly has different sources of authority and an own historical tradition.³⁷ The various permutations of this myth, for one, develop a genealogical framework of the first men, in which the Tibetans arise side by side with neighbouring populations.

Tibet and China (Version I)

Our first source is an archaic, or potentially archaizing, as well as abstruse and mistake-riddled, hand-copied text in the possession of Michael Oppitz of Berlin, titled '*Dur-kyis-ldong-gis-pha-rab-le'u-dbus-phyogs-bzhugsho-lo*, 'Chapter on the lDong Lineage of the '*Dur* [Rituals]'.³⁸ The document presents a mythical narrative that details the events leading up to, and

³⁶ Some figures however predate the rise of the Bon religion of the second millennium and already occur in texts from the imperial period (from the seventh to the ninth centuries), an example being Ya-bla-bdag-drug, who already appears in the rKong-po inscription (Richardson, *A Corpus of Early Tibetan Inscriptions*: 66–67). Similarly, not all later materials that revolve around such figures should automatically be classified as 'Bon,' a problematic catch-all category.

³⁷ On the history of Bon, see Martin, *Unearthing Bon Treasures*; Kalsang Norbu Gurung, *Emergence of a Myth*: 9–14.

³⁸ Read: '*Dur-gyi-ldong-gi-pha-rabs-le'u-dbu-phyogs-bzhugs-so*'. The document was copied for Oppitz in 1965 from a manuscript in the possession of 'Khrul-zhig Rin-po-che (1923–2011) in Sengcephuk in Solu, Western Nepal (Michael Oppitz, personal communication). The work itself, however, likely stems from the Tibetan Plateau because, other than Sherpa genealogical materials (e.g., Oppitz, *Sherpa*: 32–62), it does not at all touch upon the Sherpa themselves, contains archaisms and displays no notable Buddhist influence. Geographically, furthermore, the text pivots around the mountain rMa-chen-spom-ra and the upper Yellow River (10b.2ff) in contemporary Qinghai, the People's Republic of China. The document's colophon, which was written by a scribe identified as the *sngags[-'cha]ng-rDof-rj[e-phun-tshogs* and excuses his poor calligraphy, unfortunately provides no information on the text's composition or provenance. The document is in cursive script on 13 unnumbered folios stitched together. The text itself, which covers seven and sometimes six lines per side, runs from f. 1b to f. 12b, with f. 1a carrying the title and f. 13a an illustration.

following, an ancestral Tibetan's death,³⁹ in an apparent bid to trace the provenance of aspects of a non-Buddhist post-mortuary rite.⁴⁰ By way of introduction, the work maps this Tibetan forefather's pedigree, which includes the entire ethnic group's ultimate origins. The text not only contains many orthographic archaisms,⁴¹ yet also references an antiquated literary figure,⁴² and presents a unique version of the ethnogenetic myth that, compared to other extant permutations, is in a less elaborated conceptual state. As we shall see, all other versions, which tend to have a solid and rather late *terminus post quem*, present more elaborate genealogies that carry unequivocal signs of later political and demographic developments. To all appearances, therefore, this text is the oldest among our witnesses.

At the outset, the document repeatedly trumpets the absolute need for genealogical knowledge. Without it, one such admonition warns that one would resemble the disdained Himalayan hill populations,⁴³ who, in the stereotyped view of Classical Tibetan literature, are barbarians ignorant of ancestry. In accordance with the work's predilection for origins, the actual provenance of the Tibetans itself is again embedded within a larger cosmogony. Known in multiple variations from other archaic and

³⁹ The text narrates how Khri-tor/gtor, the father (or grandfather) of the six Tibetan ancestral lineages, set out to track a *mdzo-mo* (a female cross of a cow and a yak) around Mt. rMa-chen. Finding his passage blocked by a frog, he stabs it with a dagger, only to then get struck by lightning and killed (10b.2–11a.5). The narrative follows up with the ensuing endeavours of his oldest (grand)son (11a.5–12b.4).

⁴⁰ For notes on the terms *'dur* and *bdur*, see Huber, *Source of Life*: Vol. 2 (Chapter 15).

⁴¹ It has multiple non-standard palatalised nasal labials (e.g., *myi'i-rgyal-po*, *dmyigs*); various instances of *'a-rjes-'jug* (e.g., *g.yu'*, *gto'*); superscribed *ra* instead of the standardised *da*-prefix (e.g., *rgos* for *dgos*); and archaic terms such as *pha-yab* (12a.5), but, notably, no instances of *da-drag*. The distribution of at least the palatalised labials may be indicative of an A-mdo Tibetan oral influence rather than archaic spelling, as the *ya-btags* is heavily favoured in words for 'man' (*myi*, *myi'u*) as well as 'eye' and its cognates (*myig*, *dmyig(s)*), yet never appears in the negating adverb *mi* or the verb *med-pa*. Like in A-mdo Tibetan, there is also repeated usage of the aspirated *chi* for the standard literary interrogative *ci*, although such instability is also an archaic feature (see Tournadre, 'The Tibetan Languages': 115–16).

⁴² 'mdur-shyen-rma-dag' (11b.1), read: *'dur-gshen-rma-dag*. He, it seems, is called upon in the wake of Khri-tor's death (11a.6–11b.2). This ritual specialist is known from Dunhuang documents (see the references in Namgyal Nyima Dagkar, 'The Early Spread of Bon': 22, n. 12), the archaic *rNel-dri-'dul-ba* materials (Dotson, 'Complementarity and Opposition': 62; Huber, 'From Death to New Life': 267) as well as the Klu-'bum collection, yet seems to have become very rare in later Bon sources (Stein, *Tibetica Antiqua*: 258).

⁴³ 'ldong-gis-[read: gi-]pha-rab-[read: pha-rabs-]bshad-nas-rgos-[read: dgos-]/ mi-la-cho-dang-'brang-med-nas-/ kha-le-mon-dang-chi-ma-'dra-' (f. 1b.1–2).

Bon-associated sources,⁴⁴ we may briefly summarise it here. At the very beginning, existence is said to have arisen out of nothingness. This event was followed by the appearance of atmospheric phenomena such as rain and lightning, upon which a ‘rock of existence’ and a ‘lake of existence’ (*yod-brag*, *yod-mtsho*) came into being. This, in turn, was followed by the appearance of three eggs of different colours: a deity hatched from the white egg; a demon (*dre*) emerged from the black egg; and from the bluish egg appeared a man named Ye-smon-rgyal-po. Despite this latter figure’s identification as a ‘man’, it is clear that he is nevertheless a superhuman character with special creative powers and deities among his descendants. From his ‘aspirations’ or ‘wishes’ (*smon-pa*), for instance, various landscapes made of precious materials arise to his right, left and front, where subsequently three lineages of non-human beings appear.⁴⁵ At this point in the narrative, Ye-smon-rgyal-po partners with a first consort, and the actual genealogy starts to unfold.⁴⁶

To our current interests, the chief descendant of Ye-smon-rgyal-po is one ‘Prince Thing-ghe, the procreator’. He becomes the father of both the Tibetans and the Han Chinese (rGya), and his arrival simultaneously signifies the dawn of mankind itself, as he is plainly identified as the latest of the divine lineage and the source of the human line. We shall encounter him more often below, in various orthographies and tweaked genealogical constellations, and he is known from other mythical contexts, too.⁴⁷ In this work, however, his role is limited to first fathering the ‘Tibet[an], ’Jong-lag-’brang’, after having paired up with what may be a sky spirit, and engendering the ‘Han Chinese, Khri-la-zham’, with a *dmu* wife. The status of seniority, importantly, is thus attributed to Tibet. Incidentally,

⁴⁴ For a comparison of such cosmogonies, revolving around eggs, see Blezer: ‘dBal-mo Nyer-bdun’; Seele, *Traditionen kosmogonischer Mythen*. I did not have access to the latter source at the time of writing. Note that such egg-centred myths also appear in origin stories, both archaic and modern, that cannot be labelled ‘Bon’ in any straightforward manner (Huber, *Source of Life*).

⁴⁵ *Phywa* (ms: *phyag*), *dmu*, and *gtsug* (ms: *btsug*). This particular passage and the larger narrative itself display obvious overlaps with the ‘dBu-nag-mi’u-’dra-chags’ in particular (see Karmay, ‘Black-Headed Man’). A similar passage also occurs in the Hermanns manuscript (Hermanns, ‘Überlieferungen’: 203). Both texts are discussed below.

⁴⁶ Anon. *Dur*, ff. 6b.7–7b.6.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Anonymous, ‘Ming-sring-dpal-bgos’: f. 418.3; Berounsky, ‘Tibetan Myths on *phyag* and *gyang*’: 64–65; Nyang-Nyi-ma-’od-zer, *Chos-’byung*: 157–58; Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*: 244.

before the birth of these two, another union already took place that spawned one ‘Phung-phung, pro-creator of the lineages of simians and horses [...]’. Presumably, however, it is Prince Thing-ghe’s father, rather than he himself, who should be construed as Phung-phung’s genitor, which would make these animal lineages patrilineal half-uncles, rather than half-brothers, to the Tibetan and the Chinese.⁴⁸

In sum, according to this pedigree, the Tibetans are not the single fruit of their ancestral lineage and are not genealogically isolated from neighbouring ethnic groups. Instead, they have a younger half-brother in the Han Chinese, while simultaneously sharing paternal ancestry with animals in ‘the lines of simians and horses’. Another remarkable difference with the largely Buddhist narratives discussed earlier is the complete absence of any association with India, Buddhist deities or larger religious teleology. In fact, there is no apparent rhyme or reason to the Bod-pa’s appearance: they simply arise in a chain of creative acts and events in which cosmogony and ethnogenealogy are intimately linked. Naturally, however, the setting is not Buddhist, and man’s descent from figures of such a non-Buddhist pantheon obviously underscores the latter’s relevance.

Since we are dealing with a scene-setting myth that gives but a quick and rough overview in order to localise within that larger setting the appearance of specific cultural phenomena, the author is hardly interested in presenting the ethnogenealogy for its own sake. Accordingly, he demoted it to an elemental building block in his narration, without additional narrative decoration or interpretative framework. We are not told, for instance, whether the first Tibetan and Han Chinese ever even met; whether they got along harmoniously or not; or whether they set

⁴⁸ ‘bsrid-pa-ye-smon-rgyol-[rgyal-po-, read: yab-bla-de’-dru-?]des-/ dung-za-dngul-mo-dang-[b]shos-pa-la-/ bsrid-pa-rgya’u-[read: rgyal-bu-]thing-ghe-bsrid-/i/ lha-rab[s]-bsrid-pa-tha-ma-yin-/ myi-rab[s]-bsrid-pa-gho-’o-[read: ’go-bo-]-yin-/ ’phrul-za-chu-lcam-dang-bshos-pa-la-/ spra-rta-rab[s]-bsrid-pa-phung-phung-bsrid-/i/ bsrid-pa-rgya’u-thing-ghe-des-/rgung-smon-dkar-mo-[read: dgung-sman-dkar-mo-?]dang-bshos-pa-la-/ bod-’jong-lag-’brang-bsrid-/ mu’-[read: dmu-]lcam-bra-ma-dang-khab-du-[read: tu-]-bzhes-pa-la-rgya-khri-la-zham-du-bsrid-/i// bod-’jang-la-brang-dang-/ ...’ (9b.3–10a.1, with *i* being a *sbrul-shad*). Although this passage presents Prince Thing-ghe as the son of Ye-smon-rgyal-po, he should likely be construed as a son of Yab-bla-de’-dru (spelled thus). The genealogy has already advanced downward to that figure’s generation, and he was the genitor in the two preceding unions as well (8b.6–9b.3). Other sources, furthermore, also pinpoint him as an ascendant of Thing-ghe (e.g., Nyang-Nyi-ma-’od-zer, *Chos-’byung*: 157–58, PSI: ff. 110.3–111.1; DBU: f. 16a.3–16b.3).

certain patterns of behaviour. Some of these gaps, as we shall see, will be filled by other witnesses.

Expanding (and Erasing) the Ethnic Brotherhood: The Mongols (Versions II and II-b)

Fortunately, we find this myth in other versions, too, all of which may be of later date. One rather interesting version of it was incorporated into the *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru*, a descent charter of the ruling house of Phag-mo-gru, dating from the last several decades of the fourteenth or the early fifteenth century.⁴⁹ The genealogy,⁵⁰ although again presented in a regrettably pithy form, nevertheless displays several remarkable differences, or perhaps developments. Similar to the source described above, it presents a creative event and subsequent genealogical chain, again including the spontaneous formation of eggs and the initial appearance of Ye-smon-rgyal-po. Our ancestral prince, too, again arrives on the scene, his name now spelt mThing-ge,⁵¹ a homophone in most present-day pronunciations. This time around, however, his offspring has increased.

To wit, after the Tibetan and Chinese⁵² siblings, mThing-ge begets a third human son in the form of the ‘Child of mThing, the Eastern Mongol’ (*mthing-phrug-hor*), thus broadening the set of ethnic groups with another, Inner Asian, population.⁵³ This expansion of the myth must be tied to the historical developments emanating from the Mongolian steppes in the century and a half preceding this text’s composition. In the early thirteenth century, the Mongol empire had started mushrooming across the Inner

⁴⁹ On this text, see especially Stein, ‘Source ancienne’; Czaja, *Medieval Rule*: Chapter 1; Langelaar, ‘Singular Volume of the Rlangs’; for an encyclopaedic study of the Phag-mo-gru-pa, see Czaja, *Medieval Rule*.

⁵⁰ Summarised in Stein, *Tribus anciennes*: 15; translated in Karmay, ‘Petit homme tête-noire’: 130–31; Czaja, *Medieval Rule*: 34 (which glosses over the ethnogenealogical aspects), and Bellezza, *Zhang zhung*: 349–51 (which overlooks the ethnicity of the Chinese brother).

⁵¹ Or, in other witnesses, ‘mThing-gi’ (PSI: f. 111.1; PSV: 6.13).

⁵² Note that all accessible extant witnesses spell *rgyal*, ‘victory’, for rGya, ‘Han China’ (PSI: f. 111.2; PSII: f. 13.2; PSIII: 6.7–8; PSIV: 10.1; PSV: 6.15), but cf. bSod-nams-rgyal-mtshan, *Mig-'byed-'od-stong*: 484.5, which retains the correct spelling, rGya.

⁵³ ‘rgyal-bu-mthing-ges- lha-lcam-dkar-mo-khab-tu-bzhes-pa’i-sras-/ bod-ljongs-la-brangs-/[]dmu-za-mthing-sgril-ma-khab-tu-bzhes-pa’i-sras-/ rgyal-[read: rgya-]khri-la-zham-/ de-yi-sras-rgyal-po-che-chung-gsum-dang-rgyud-brgyad-du-yongs-/ mthing-mo-khab-tu-bzhes-pa-la-/ mthing-phrug-hor-srid- hor-la-a-bo’i-hor-rabs-mched-gsum-gyed’ (PSII: f. 13.1–4).

Asian grasslands under Genghis Khan (1162–227), to soon cover enormous stretches of the Eurasian landmass under his descendants. The Tibetan highlands, not exempt from these drastic onslaughts, were invaded in 1240. The period thereafter witnessed the implementation of both a census and new administrative units, so-called ‘myriarchies’ (*khri-skor*), while much administrative power ended up being concentrated in the hands of the Tibetan Sa-skyia hierarchs under Mongol overlordship.

The Phag-mo-gru-pa were the administrators of one such subordinate myriarchy in the new Mongol-dominated political landscape. Furthermore, it was one of their heads, named Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan, who finally toppled and succeeded to Sa-skyia’s Mongol-backed hegemony in the 1350s—on the cusp of the broader collapse of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in 1368. By the time our source was written down, therefore, recent political history had been awash with Mongol influence. A subtle yet telling illustration of this process is offered by Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan himself, who disapprovingly noted how one of his predecessors used to wear Mongol-style clothes and footwear.⁵⁴ This broader state of affairs crystallises in the ethnogenealogy recorded in their house’s descent charter, where now the Mongols’ presence too had to be accounted for.

Notably, the timing of this apparent augmentation of the pedigree dovetails with a comparable geographic broadening of interest evident in Tibetan language histories written from the 1360s onward. At that point in time, the royal lineages of, for instance, the Mongols and the Western Xia also started to be included in historical writings, thus rupturing the traditional Indo-Tibetan approach of older (Buddhist) works.⁵⁵ Around the very same time, furthermore, we first start encountering important Mongol loanwords such as *chol-kha* for ‘province, division’⁵⁶ and *deb-ther* for ‘book’,⁵⁷ in Classical Tibetan sources. Instead of ‘a reflection of early ethnohistorical realities’,⁵⁸ the updated myth therefore is a neat echo of contemporary developments in historiography and cultural and political memory. The composition of the *’Dur-kyis-ldong-gis-pha-rab* discussed above, whose author seemingly had neither precedent nor incentive to

⁵⁴ Czaja, *Medieval Rule*: 104, n. 55; Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan: ‘bKa’-chems’: 117.

⁵⁵ Tuttle, ‘Challenging Central Tibet’s Dominance’: 15–58. Also see van der Kuijp, ‘Tibetan Historiography’: 44–45.

⁵⁶ Yang, ‘Tracing the *Chol kha gsum*’: 559.

⁵⁷ Van der Kuijp, ‘Tibetan Historiography’: 44.

⁵⁸ Bellezza, *Zhang zhung*: 350.

include any Mongol populations, simply appears to have predated these developments. Once established, however, the new and broadened ethnic perspective was to have long-lasting effects: Every other version of the ethnogenealogy at our disposal was to include the Mongols as well.

What is more, this genealogical work may not have halted at adding merely the Mongols proper. After introducing this third sibling, the work goes on to state that he had sons in the form of ‘three brothers, the lineages of A-bo’i-hor’.⁵⁹ Bellezza asserts that this latter ethnonym must refer to the populations that are presently better known as A-po-hor or A-pha-hor,⁶⁰ although the term’s historical orthography is highly unstable.⁶¹ Matters of spelling aside, the name would refer to a set of largely nomadic populations in present-day eastern Nag-chu (Ch. Naqu) prefecture, in the northeastern TAR.⁶² Both Tawa and Karmay note that these people in the past had been under the rule of Mongol lords, causing them to adopt the ethnonym Hor themselves.⁶³ They considered themselves ethnically distinct and ‘often asserted their own origin myth, according to which their king was a descendant of a Mongol prince belonging to the lineage of Genghiz Khan [...]’⁶⁴

At face value, there are some arguments to make in favour of this identification. First, the term A-bo’i-hor and its cognates are rare and most contemporary references to Mongols simply have ‘Hor’, which gently suggests our text’s ‘A-bo’i-hor’ may indeed have been a different entity. There is, furthermore, a geographic case to make for the inclusion of such a smaller regional population in this text in particular. As I will

⁵⁹ See Footnote 53 for the Tibetan text.

⁶⁰ Bellezza, *Zhang zhung*: 350.

⁶¹ Bellezza gives the spellings A-po-hor, A-pha-hor (*Zhang zhung*: 350), as well as A-pa-hor and A-pa’i-hor (*Divine Dyads*: 288, n. 47). Karmay presupposes the spelling A-pha-hor (‘Thirty-Nine Tribes’: 181). We find A-po-hor, A-pho-hor as well as the abbreviated A-po in Krang-dbyi-sun, *Tshig-mdzod-chen-mo*: 3121–22. In primary sources we find references to A-bo-hor ([Khod-po-Blo-gros-thogs-med], *gSer-’od*: f. 316.5), U-ba-hor (DBU: f. 8b.2, emended to A-ba-hor in the edited text (96)) and even U-ga’i-hor (f. 24a.7) and U-ga-hor (f. 24b.6) (both emended to A-ga-hor (106, 107)). The spelling O-bo’i-hor (PSIII: 8.09), lastly, is a copying error for A-bo’i-hor (PSIV: 10.3–4).

⁶² Karmay, ‘Thirty-Nine Tribes’: 181. Also see Tawa, ‘Tribes of Hor’: 35.

⁶³ Karmay, ‘Thirty-Nine Tribes’: 184; Tawa, ‘Tribes of Hor’: 35.

⁶⁴ Karmay, ‘Thirty-Nine Tribes’: 184. Bellezza even implies their sustained intermarriage with ethnic Mongols by describing them as ‘clans of mixed Tibetan and Mongolian stock [...]’ (Bellezza, *Zhang zhung*: 350), although he adduces no historical evidence for this (Bellezza, *Divine Dyads*: 288, n. 47).

argue elsewhere, the traditions preserved in this descent charter appear to be mainly of eastern derivation.⁶⁵ The regions in question, largely located in the border areas between contemporary Nag-chu and Chab-mdo prefectures (Ch. Naqu and Changdu, TAR), border on and in part even overlap with the modern A-po-hor territories. If their settlement history has been relatively stable, therefore, any potential historical presence of the A-po-hor at this time would have been most keenly felt in this area, which could have provided a rationale for absorbing these Mongol-influenced neighbours into local genealogical traditions.

Yet it would be rather rash to accept this as sufficient evidence for identifying a six-century-old ethnonym with the forebears of the present-day A-po-hor. In fact, when we dig deeper, the case for such an identification swiftly grows feebler. First, the genealogy attributes the Hor ancestor with nothing but A-bo'i-hor offspring, which means that the Mongols proper are either shed from the pedigree or, if A-bo'i-hor and Hor were used synonymously for the later A-po-hor, wholly absent from it to begin with. Instead, then, it is more persuasive to construe the name's 'A-bo'i'-prefix, and all its variants, as comparable to similar—and sometimes redundant—bi-syllabic prefixes occasionally found in front of other ethnyms. We may call to mind the names of the mythical ancestral populations of the Plateau (e.g., bSe-khyung-dBra) or names such as sPu-rgyal-Bod for the shorter Bod, Nag-po-rGya for China (rGya), Chu-khrel-'Jang for Nanzhao ('Jang) and Khe-le'i-Mon for Himalayan hill peoples (Mon). These latter names form a list in which a term such as 'A-bo'i-Hor' would not only structurally fit, but, in other sources, indeed does appear.⁶⁶ This, of course, argues in favour of identifying the A-bo'i-Hor as the Mongols proper, an impression perhaps further fortified by references that link them to the implementation of taxation, classify them as 'adversaries' to the Tibetans⁶⁷ and associate them with force.⁶⁸ More could certainly be said on this issue, but let us move on to other matters for now.

⁶⁵ Langelaar, 'Singular Volume of the Rlangs'; Stein, 'Source ancienne': 92. Cultural, linguistic as well as toponymic elements in the text suggest such a provenance.

⁶⁶ 'pha-spun-nag-po-rgya-dang-1/ khyim-[m]tshes-khe-le'i-mon-dung-[read: dang-]2/ nyyan-ya-[read: gnyen-ya-]chu-khrel-'jang-dang-3/ 'thab-ya-u-ga'i-hor-dang-4/ nga-rang-sku-[read: spu-]rgyal-bod-dang-lnga/' (DBU: 24a.6–7); [Khod-po-Blo-gros-thogs-med], *gSer-'od*: ff. 315–16, cited in Footnote 68 below.

⁶⁷ 'u-ga-hor-la-mda'-khral-'jal/' (DBU: 24b.6–7), 'thab-ya-u-ga'i-hor/' (24a.7).

⁶⁸ 'spu-rgyal-bod-kyi-tshe-g.yang-dang/[...] nag-po-rgya-yi-'phel-g.yang-dang-/[...] a-bo-hor-gyi-btsan-g.yang-dang-/[...]' ([Khod-po-Blo-gros-thogs-med], *gSer-'od*: 315.5–316.5).

Interestingly, the *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru*'s version of the Tibetans' ancestry seems to have been the cause for censorial retouching. This revision took place in the *Mig-'byed-'od-stong*, an early sectarian religious history of the *bKa'-brgyud* school of Buddhism, written in 1418, which was commissioned by a Phag-mo-gru hierarch and written by his brother, the abbot of an important *bKa'-brgyud* monastery.⁶⁹ The text in question summarises several parts of the descent charter, yet introduces a number of small changes and omissions to its content, generally downplaying any undesired religious affiliations. For instance, it drops a reference to a Bon-po ancestor and also substitutes the rise of the cosmic egg from the elements—a notion explicitly identified as Bon-po by the author—with a Buddhist version in which the egg is emanated by a virtuous deity instead.⁷⁰

In like manner, the ethnogenetic account was altered too. First, the Chinese forefather is no longer presented as Tibet's younger sibling, yet is listed as his son. This change causes all following figures to descend from him, conclusively turning him into a Tibetan rather than a Chinese⁷¹ ancestor. The Mongol brother and his A-bo'i-hor offspring, furthermore, are dropped altogether.⁷² This erasure of inter-ethnic brotherhood was subsequently carried over into a series of later histories that directly or indirectly relied on the *Mig-'byed-'od-stong*. The fifteenth-century *lHo-rong-chos-'byung*, for instance, simply omits the problematic first generations in its genealogical summary,⁷³ whereas two well-known

⁶⁹ On this work and kindred texts, see Sernesi, 'A Manual on Six Yogas': 138–43.

⁷⁰ Langelaar, 'Singular Volume of the Rlangs'.

⁷¹ Note that the ethnonym rGya is multivalent and accordingly not an unambiguous ethnic marker.

⁷² 'la-kha-rgyal-po-'khrungs: des-lung-kha-hril-mo-khab-du-[read: tu-]bzhesh-pas: sras-mched-3-byung-pa-las: che-ba-mthing-ge'i-sras-'od-[read: bod-]jongs-la-brangs-dang: rmu-za-'thing-sgril-ma-2-sdebs-pa'i-sras-rgya-khri-la-zhang-byung-ngo/ de-la-sras-3-dang: brgyud-brgyad-yod-pa-las: de-dagi-chung-bas-'thing-mo-khab-tu-bzhesh-pa-la-sras-3-byung-pa'i-khri-rje-gnyan-thang-gi-sras-dpalha-byung-ngo' (bSod-nams-rgyal-mtshan, *Mig-'byed-'od-stong*: 484.3–6). Note that Bod, 'Tibet', is erroneously rewritten 'od, 'light', which however is nothing but a later scribal error. A subsequent author who relied on MB'OT retains the original spelling 'Bod' (rGyal-dbang-lnga-pa, *dPyid-kyi-rgyal-mo*: 118).

⁷³ rTa-tshag-Tshe-dbang-rgyal, *lHo-rong-chos-'byung*: 352. The pedigree in this passage in fact primarily follows Wang-Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan, 'lHa-rigs-rlangs-kyi-rnam-thar-chig-rgyud', which in turn may or may not rely on the *Mig-'byed-'od-stong*. Yet Tshe-dbang-rgyal certainly consulted that latter work himself as well for narrative elaborations within the genealogical framework, as well as, perhaps, for the pedigree itself (e.g., compare *lHo-rong-*

seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works do include the ethnogenetic episode, yet in a similarly unrecognisable form.⁷⁴ Accordingly, modern scholars who had to rely on such later retellings of the *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru* seem to have been unable to spot the ethnogenesis.⁷⁵ This account, furthermore, was obscured yet further in the eighteenth-century *rGyal-blon-gdung-rabs*, where even the Tibetan son was omitted.⁷⁶

Theoretically, this chain of alterations could ultimately be based on an inadvertent misreading by the *Mig-'byed-'od-stong's* author. The Classical Tibetan language's pro-drop tendencies could have caused confusion as to whether it was Prince mThing-ge or his son, the Tibetan, who contracted the next reported marriage and thus engendered the Chinese. Yet to the observant reader, the exact nature of these relations does emerge from the source's contents and structure. Moreover, in light of the fact that the author also removed other textual Bon-affiliated elements not to his liking, I suspect that this rewriting of the house's pedigree was another conscious effort to better align, or at least less clearly clash, with orthodox Buddhist notions. Although it is still obvious from the reworked genealogy that the Tibetans descended from Bon-associated deities, the explicitly ethnogenealogical passage has been watered down, and the apparent voice of heterodoxy has been muffled.

In sum, even when looking at merely two witnesses, we already see several noteworthy variations or developments in this account of origins. For obvious historical and political reasons, the myth in the *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru* was updated to include Mongol populations. The text's specific regional provenance, moreover, might perhaps have played a role in its incorporation of a relatively small regional populace, although this seems doubtful. In any case, the text included such new elements only to be regressively adapted once more in its reading tradition: Later literature, in an apparent bid to better conform to orthodox Buddhist historiography, sifted out the greater part of the ethnogenesis myth and silenced its central

chos-'byung: 351.3–8 and 352.17–9 with bSod-nams-rgyal-mtshan, 'Mig-'byed-'od-stong': 488.5–7 and 492.3).

⁷⁴ rGyal-dbang-lnga-pa, *dPyid-kyi-rgyal-mo*: 118 (translations of this passage can be found in Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*: 632; Nag-dban Blo-bzan rGya-mtsho, *Queen of Spring*: 93); Sum-pa-Ye-shes-dpal-'byor, *dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang*: 289–90.

⁷⁵ Haarh, *Yar-lun Kings*: 259; Hermanns, 'Abstammungsmymthen': 296; Nag-dban Blo-bzan rGya-mtsho, *Queen of Spring*: 93; Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*: 632.

⁷⁶ Blo-bzang-bstan-pa'i-rgyal-mtshan, *rGyal-blon-mang-po'i-gdung-rabs*: f. 45.1.

points, thus again erasing the ancestral brotherhood between the Tibetans and some of their neighbours.

Ethnic Expansion, Narrative Elaboration and Tibetan Primacy (Version III)

We can spot additional dynamics when we compare the aforementioned version with yet another, more elaborate permutation of the narrative, as found in the *dBu-nag-mi'u-'dra-chags*. This fascinating yet difficult mythological text, which incorporates elements from both Bon and Buddhism, offers an explanatory framework for the brothers' ethnic differences, adding much narrative meat to the relatively bare-bones genealogical structures offered by the texts discussed above. An excerpt from this work, known solely through a single manuscript, has been translated by Hoffmann into German, and the text was subsequently studied in more detail and partially translated into French by Samten Karmay.⁷⁷ Before we inspect the myth itself, however, let me make a brief contextualising note on the work's dating.

Despite the document's own claims to eighth-century authorship,⁷⁸ Karmay has pointed out that a mention of the Mongol ruler and first Yuan emperor, Kubilai Khan (r. 1260–94), rules out any date before the mid-thirteenth century.⁷⁹ This date can be pushed still further towards the present since the text also seems to contain a reference to Kubilai's cousin, the second Yuan Emperor Temür Khan (*hor-this-mur*) (r. 1294–307),⁸⁰ which moves the *terminus post quem* several decades forward. What is more, the text also mentions a Buddhist canon, or *bka'-'gyur*, written in

⁷⁷ Hoffmann, *Märchen*: 5–9; Hoffmann, *Handbook*: 107–08; Karmay, 'Petit homme tête-noire' (the latter in turn translated into English as Karmay, 'Black-Headed Man'). The manuscript was published along with a redacted transcription in Karmay and Nagano, *Blue Cuckoo*: 91–149.

⁷⁸ It claims to have been written by the Tibetan Emperor Khri-srong-lde-btsan (Karmay, 'Black-Headed Man': 258–59; DBU: 34b.7–35a.1).

⁷⁹ Karmay, 'Black-Headed Man': 258–59, n. 57; Karmay, 'Petit homme tête-noire': 100, n. 58; Karmay and Nagano, *Blue Cuckoo*: xi. The Tibetan passage is found in DBU: f. 27a.6–7. Cf. Karmay, 'Wind-Horse and Well-Being': 418 (where he attributes the text to 'around the thirteenth century', albeit without providing any *terminus ante quem*) and Karmay and Nagano, *Blue Cuckoo*: xi–xii (where he attributes it to 'the Mongol period in Tibet'.)

⁸⁰ 'hor-this-mur-a-chen-thang-na-'dug' (DBU: f. 23b.6–7). On the toponym A-chen-thang, likely near Lake Qinghai, see Lamminger, 'Der Sechste Zhva dmar pa': 70–71.

golden ink.⁸¹ These canons grew out of loose text collections only in the fourteenth century, with the earliest one presumably tracing back to the 1310s.⁸² All things considered, therefore, the *dBu-nag-mi 'u-'dra-chags* in its current redaction should be dated no earlier than the 1300s, likely to a similar time period and context as the *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru* discussed above—that is, after the mid-fourteenth century—with whom it shares multiple peculiarities beyond the ones we can discuss here.

In this work, we again find a cosmological episode feeding into a divine pedigree, which leads to the genesis of man and to our acquaintance, the creator prince, whose name is now spelt 'Thing-ge. He once more begets three sons with three different wives, the first son being Tibet, the second China and the third Mongolia. The document however further expands this ancestral family with several populations, even though these play no further role in the ensuing narrative. With one additional wife 'Thing-ge engenders 'Bo (an unidentifiable entity),⁸³ 'J[a]ng (Nanzhao) and [L]i (Khotan). Despite apparent repeated mentions of the A-bo'i-hor,⁸⁴ this name is not listed in the ethnogenealogy.⁸⁵ With another wife, furthermore, a set of non-humans is spawned, namely, the monkey, badger, Himalayan brown bear and perhaps another, missing, animal. These creatures, described as 'non-human brothers similar to man',⁸⁶ call to mind the monkeys and horses listed in the *'Dur-kyis-ldong-gis-pha-rab* discussed above, with which additional, more specific overlaps also exist.

Subsequently, the work further transcends our preceding witnesses by offering an explanatory narrative framework for the ethnic diversity of the

⁸¹ DBU: f. 33b.5.

⁸² Eimer, *Überlieferung des tibetischen Kanjur*: xiii–xiv.

⁸³ Karmay, 'Black-Headed Man': 267, n. 85. Hoffmann redundantly reads 'bo as if *bod*, 'Tibet' (*Märchen*: 9), which is followed in Karmay and Nagano's edited text, where Yi is additionally emended to Mon (DBU: 101).

⁸⁴ For the spellings used in the manuscript, see n. 61.

⁸⁵ The omission of the A-bo'i-hor/A-bo-hor from the genealogy further strengthens our impression that they should be identified with the Hor proper, who are listed.

⁸⁶ 'srid-pa-rgyal-bu-'thing-ge-des/ phyva-[*read*: phywa-]lcam-dkar-mo-khab-du-[*read*: tu-]bzhes-pa-la/ bod-'dzom-la-phrom-srid/ dmu-za-khri-ma-dang-bsdab-[*read*: bsdebs-]pa-la/ rgya-khri-la-bzhes-srid/ khri-mo-dang-bsdab-[*read*: bsdebs-]pa-la/ khri-phrug-hor-srid/ dpyig-[dbyig-?]sna-ma-dang-bsdab-[*read*: bsdebs-]pa-la/ 'bo-dang-'jong-[*read*: 'jang-?]dang-yi-[*read*: li-?]dang-3-srid/ gnyan-mo-dang-bsdab-[*read*: bsdebs-]pa-la/ sprel-dang-bgrum-pa-[*read*: grum-pa-]tred-mong-[*read*: dred-mong-]4-srid// de-mi-min-mi-'dra-spun-4-yin' (DBU: f. 16b.3–6). Symmetry with the preceding sibling trios suggests that it might be preferable to emend the numerals from '4' to '3', rather than assuming the elision of a fourth animal.

three main brothers. Set in the wake of their father's death, as related in detail by Karmay, the passage documents how Tibet, China and Mongolia got into an altercation over who would get to handle his corpse. The issue is finally resolved, following mediation, by ritually dividing the body and divvying up the portions. The Tibetan, indicative of his high standing, gets the first pick and lays claim to the upper body and head. He proceeds to cremate his portion, offer libations and present a horse and sheep 'as (sacrificial) offerings'.⁸⁷ The Mongol brother, next in line, obtained the waist along with the thumbs. While burying the former in the sand, he retained the latter. The Chinese, lastly, casts his largest share, the lower body, into the water, while similarly hanging on to the smaller portion, the heart.

Subsequent to these individual passages, the text ties the respective ethnic groups' perceived characteristics to their shares of the original man's body, and their funerary customs to the way the larger shares were discarded. Thus, the Mongols' skill in archery is to be tied to their ancestor's retention of the fingers, whereas his burial of the father's waist instituted 'the custom] of Mongols throwing [their] fathers' corpses into pits'. The Chinese's actions engender the Chinese funerary custom of water burial, while the heart serves to explain their materialism (*nor-snying-che-ba*, 'to have a big heart [for] wealth'),⁸⁸ as well as, perhaps in combination with the lower body, their demographic abundance.⁸⁹ As such, the tale constitutes an untypical ethnic variation of the trope of 'creative dismemberment', in which mythical scenes of animal meat

⁸⁷ Karmay, 'Black-Headed Man': 268. The Tibetan term in question for 'offering' is the not wholly clear *gtad-yar*.

⁸⁸ The last two translations are mine.

⁸⁹ Karmay, 'Black-Headed Man': 267–69. 'bod-kyi[s]-khog-stod-mgo-'byar-bdam/lus-kyi-gtso[-b]o-gho-[read: mgo-]yin-bsam/ rang-grub-mchod[-rt]en-rtsa-ba-na/ gshen[-ra]b-mu-cho-spyan[-dra]ng[s]-nas/ shing-sba-bsnyug-[read: smyug-]2-kyi-me-la-bsregs/li-rgun-2-kyi-'de-gu-bkyes/ mdo-ba-rta-la-bya-ru-btsug/ rta-lug-2-kyi-gtad-yar-byas/ bod-kyi-pha-ro-sbyin-bsreg-blug-pa-dang/ rta-lug-2-kyi-gdad-yar-[read: gtad-yar]-de-nas-srid/hor-kyi-[read: gyi-]rk[e]d-pa-[m]theb-bzhag-thob-pa-de/ zla-ba-'i-lung-pa-zla-bkra-der// pha-ro-bye-ma-'i-nang-du-sbas-nas-mthe-'ong-[read: mthe-bong-]bzung/ hor-gyi[s]-pha-ro-dong-la-skyur-ba-de-[-nas]-srid/ mda'-nag-phran-[read: mda'-nyag-phran- (Karmay, 'Petit homme tête-noire': 124)]skyen-pa-de-nas-srid/ rgyas-khog-smad-snying-'byar-thob-pa-de/kham-gyi-[read: khams-kyi-]ra-rgya-zla-ba-der// pha-ro-chu-la-'phong-nas-snying-de-bzung/ rgyas-pha-ro-chu-la-'phen-pa-de-nas-srid/ rgya-nor-snying-che-ba-de-nas-srid/mi-'phel-che-ba-de-nas-srid//' (DBU: f. 17b.1–7).

division serve as the genesis of social groups.⁹⁰ The Chinese, notably, beyond being presented as numerous and infatuated with wealth, are not credited with any specific skill here—a depiction in tune with their ancestral occupation of the bottom rung in the distribution hierarchy. Needless to say, this is quite different for the Tibetan.

As the text continues, the Chinese's descendants grow ever more numerous due to their retention of the potent heart, but 'the [population of] Tibet stagnated in the third generation [...]'.⁹¹ In search for relief, therefore, the Tibetan brother sets out to visit his Chinese sibling in a bid to procure the organ. He eventually manages to buy access to circumambulate and fumigate the heart, although he must do so naked, to prevent him from spiriting it away in his clothes. Resourcefully, the Tibetan therefore clinches a sheep's heart under his armpit and manages to swap it with the paternal relic. Eventually alarmed by his wife that something is amiss, the Chinese gives chase. Having caught up with his fleeing brother at the Sino-Tibetan border, the Tibetan slyly suggests crossing the river to continue the discussion on the other side. Yet as soon as he has crossed, he flings the bridge into the river below. The Chinese brother, reduced to tears, is forced to turn back down to China, whereas the Tibetan triumphantly returns to his homeland. He performs purification rituals for the heart, and his problems cease.⁹²

In this work, then, the Tibetan is assigned not only seniority but the ancestor's efficacious heart; his head; and certainly the smarts as well—establishing an apparent additional link between the inherited body parts and their beneficiaries' character traits. The Tibetan clearly ranks first.

Different Explanations for the Tibetan's Success (Versions IV and V)

Other sources, too, report on this primeval quarrel between the Tibetan and Chinese, or at least the former's reproductive issues. The specific authorial project involved, however, is quite important in accounting for the Tibetan's success in navigating trouble ('the demon of infertility', *rmang-bdud*) and outmanoeuvring his Chinese sibling. This variability

⁹⁰ The trope has been reported from among the Tamang, Sherpa (Macdonald, 'Creative Dismemberment') and Northern Magar of Nepal, as well as some old Tibetan documents (Oppitz, 'The Bull').

⁹¹ 'bod-mi-rab[s]-3-la-rmongs-pa-la' (DBU: f. 18a1).

⁹² DBU: ff. 17b.7–20a.2; Karmay, 'Black-Headed Man': 269–70.

is beautifully illustrated by two additional works that are both related to the narrative preserved in the *dBu-nag-mi'u-'dra-chags*. In contrast to that latter text, which seems to naturalise the Tibetan's superior position by placing him first in the distribution order, associating him with the capital body part (the head), and having him simply outwit his Chinese brother, these other works offer rather different interpretive frameworks.

Our first instance is provided by a text titled 'The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel, [a Text on] the Virtues of Erecting Incense Burners' or *bSang-khang-phub-pa'i-yon-tan-yid-bzhin-nor-bu*. Its contents were described by bsTan-'dzin-rnam-rgyal, who compared some of its elements with the *dBu-nag-mi'u-'dra-chags*. This undated work, which claims to have been authored by gShen-rab-mi-bo, the founder of Bon,⁹³ relates the origins and benefits of a widespread construction used to bring smoke offerings (the *bsang-khang*) and in doing so provides a highly similar account of origins. Yet here, interestingly, the Tibetan's retrieval of the paternal relic from the clutches of the Chinese is explicitly explained by his reliance on this ritual device.⁹⁴ The narrative thus sacrifices the Tibetan's admirable ingenuity and instead chalks his edge up to the ritual efficacy of the incense burner—the central subject of the text. Clearly, the author had a specific axe to grind, and it took centre stage in the narrative he presented.⁹⁵

Similarly, the importance of the author's background shines through in yet another source, the *rGyal-rabs-bon-gyi-'byung-gnas* (alias *Gling-bzhi-bstan-pa'i-'byung-khung*s), a history of the Bon religion written in the fifteenth century.⁹⁶ Here too we encounter a version of the myth, again with a similar twist. Although the Chinese brother does not explicitly appear in the brief narrative, the Tibetan is once more faced with difficulties reproducing

⁹³ bsTan-'dzin-rnam-rgyal, *bSang-yig*: Section 1.

⁹⁴ As cited and emended in bsTan-'dzin-rnam-rgyal, *bSang-yig*: Section 2: '... rgyal-(rgya-)mi-rab-(rabs-)gsum-la-'phan-pa'i-tshe/ /bod-mi-rab-(rabs-)gsum-la-rmang-pa-ci-bzhin-byas/ /g.yon-gyi-bco-lnga-rtse-la-ma-smod-nas/ /ci-ltar-byas-na-rmang-mdud-(bdud-)grol-bar-byas/ /de-gsum-zhal-nas-re/ /khyod-pha-mtshun-rgya-la-shor-zin-pa/ /pha-mtshun-lon-pa'i-blo-yod-na/ /rmang-bdud-de-nas-grol-bar-zer/ /bod-kyi-khri-tho-des/ /bsang-khang-phub-nas-lha-bsang-byas/ /lha-bsang-byas-pa'i-yon-tan-gyis/ /rgya-nas-pha-mtshun-lon-pa-bzhin/

⁹⁵ Similarly, the rise of the *phywa*, *dmu* and *gtsug* deities, which in the *dBu-nag-mi'u-'dra-chags* and the *'Dur-kyis-ldong-gis-pha-rab* was connected to the precious landscapes that arose from the wishes of Ye-smon-rgyal-po, is in this text attributed to that same figure having built a large incense burner (bsTan-'dzin-rnam-rgyal, *bSang-yig*: Section 1).

⁹⁶ Martin, *Unearthing Bon Treasures*: 46; also see Blezer, 'Two Conquests': 35, 53. I would like to thank Henk Blezer for providing me with two versions of this text.

in the third generation. This time around, however, the honour of restoring Tibet's fecundity goes neither to natural wit nor to the serviceable incense burner, but rather to the 'Bon [teachings], which released [Tibet] from the demon of infertility'. This release enables, in the next sentence, the seven Tibetan proto-lineages to come about, thus incisively tying a key genealogical episode in Classical Tibetan historiography to the grace of the Bon religion.⁹⁷ In each of these three narrations, then, the Tibetan appears victorious, with the first two explicitly⁹⁸ marking this as a victory over his ethnic neighbour China. Yet the narrative interpretation of these events, and the cause of primordial Tibetan success specifically, could differ quite substantially depending on what the author sought to valorise.

Shifting the Ethnic Hierarchy (Versions VI and VII)

Other variants of the myth do not always seem to have claimed Tibetan primacy, or Tibetan success, in this primordial setting. Another version, for instance, to which we unfortunately only have indirect access, seems to slightly shift this explicit ranking between the Tibetans, Chinese and Mongols. Rin-chen-rgyal-mtshan indirectly cites⁹⁹ a passage from the fourteenth-century Bon text *gZi-brjid*, an enormous 12-volume biography of the religion's founding figure. In the passage, lands covering one-third of the Earth are divided among Tibet, China and Mongolia, who 'are offspring of the same father'. This specific narration certainly builds on a closely related tradition and still suggests Tibetan seniority and narrative primacy by listing Tibet first. Yet after the lands have been partitioned, he obtains only one part, while China receives two shares and Mongolia secures three.¹⁰⁰ In taking up the ethnic groups' respective territorial ranges,

⁹⁷ 'phywa-rje-yab-bla-bdal-drug-gi-sras- [...] sne'u-phrom-la-'khrungs/ [...] [de'i-sras-] rgyal-bu-'thing-ge-yin/ de'i-sras-bod-mi-yi-rigs-yin/ de-las-rgya-bod-hor-gsum-byung-/ de'i-sras-bod-rje-gdung-dkar/ de'i-sras-bod-'jo/ de'i-sras-'bras-dkar/ de-nas-bod-mi-rabs-gsum-du-rmang-bas/ rmang-bdud-bkrol-ba'i-bon-byas-pas/ mi-bu-rus-drug-zhang-po-sgo-nga-[read: dang-]bdun-'phel [...]]' (Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan, 'rGyal-rabs-bon-gyi-'byung-gnas': ff. 27.3–28.1). Note that the term *rmang-bdud*, 'demon of infertility', occurs in all three sources adduced in this section.

⁹⁸ This hierarchy does not emerge explicitly from the *rGyal-rabs-bon-gyi-'byung-gnas*, yet may have been presupposed.

⁹⁹ A-krong-Rin-chen-rgyal-mtshan, personal communication.

¹⁰⁰ 'mdzad-mdo-rgyas-pa-mdo-dri-med-gzi-brjid-las/ "drug-[read: dru-gu-]phrom-hor-gyi-zhing-drug-yod-[]]ces-dang"de-yang-'dzam-bu-gling-gi-sum-cha-gcig-rgya-bod-hor-

this account is unique among the sources discussed here, and it is from this alternative perspective that the Mongols seem to carry the day as the territorial heavyweight among the three.

In yet another permutation, the hierarchical shift is more dramatic. The account in question is however very late and transmitted through oral intermediaries and should accordingly be treated with extreme caution in relation to our other witnesses. It is nevertheless worth recounting here due to its simultaneous parallels with, and glaring divergences from, the *dBu-nag-mi'u-'dra-chags*. Évariste Huc, a French Catholic missionary who travelled in China, Mongolia and Tibet in the 1840s, recounts the tale being told by an elderly nomadic layman from the northeastern Plateau, around sKu-'bum monastery, near Xining, Qinghai province. Citing learned lamas as his authority, the man described an idyllic primordial past in which but one man existed. This primordial being, who remains unnamed, had three sons—the ancestors of the Chinese, Tibetans and Mongols. This trio, again, ended up in a disagreement over how to dispose of their deceased father's body. All this is still familiar.

Yet, this time around, the ethnic hierarchy is completely reshuffled. The order of the sons has changed, with the Chinese now being mentioned first. He too, moreover, now gets the first pick and lays claim to the father's head, as well as his arms. The association with these body parts is then adduced to explain the Chinese's high intelligence, as well as their success in the arts and industry. The ancestor of the Tibetans, now the middle son, received the father's chest, revealing why they have 'lots of heart and courage' and why some populations among them 'have proved unconquerable'. The youngest son and ancestor of the Mongols, lastly, received the lower portion of the body, an association which serves to explain why his descendants are but a simple people, 'without face and without heart', whose only redeeming quality is their stability in the saddle.¹⁰¹ Gone are the Tibetan's wit, the Mongol's thumbs and adeptness at archery and the Chinese's association with mere greed and reproduction.

Due to the nature of the material, we cannot rule out the possibility that this revamped hierarchy is an effect of faulty reproduction or

gsum-pha-gcig-pa'i-bu-brgyud-yin-pas[...]yul-dum-bu-lnga-ru- [read: drug-tu]-bgos-pa'i/cha-gcig-bod-la-thob/ phyed-gnyis-rgya-la-dbang-/ phyed-gsum-hor-gyi-mnga'-ris-suyod"-ces-gsungs-pa-dang-' (A-krong-Rin-chen-rgyal-mtshan, 'Hor-sbra-chen-rdzong': 7, my emendations).

¹⁰¹ Huc, *Souvenirs d'un voyage*: 148–50.

conscious distortion on part of either the nomad or Huc himself.¹⁰² We should accordingly treat the account carefully as historical ethnography. If taken at face value, however, part of the hierarchical shift may perhaps be attributed to the permutation's origins in the northeastern corner of the Plateau, at the doorstep of Han Chinese regions, as well to political developments in these border areas, where the Chinese Qing dynasty had grown more assertive after 1724, a change that was to the detriment of Mongol power in the region.¹⁰³ But such an interpretation might be too straight-forwardly deterministic, and perhaps a contamination of two separate textual traditions offers a more elegant explanation.¹⁰⁴ Yet regardless of this version's developmental trajectory—that is, whether it reflects Tibetan textual sources; local oral traditions; faulty memory; personal bias; conversational dynamics; or even an ethnographer's misrepresentation—it will invariably be an evocative signpost of the fluidity of this origin narrative in the hands of different narrators.

Merging Myths (Version VIII)

A last version, finally, is of interest due to its syncretic merger of the myth with the better-known Buddhist narrative of the monkey and the rock-demoness. The document in question was collected in far northeastern dPa'-ris and first described and translated by Hermanns. It contains both Bon and Buddhist references, as well as some irregular spellings, described as 'old' (i.e., archaic) by the German missionary-cum-Tibetanist.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Certainly, the account is not a whole-sale invention on the part of Huc, because its roots in older Tibetan traditions are obvious and the missionary himself believes the Tibetans to descend from Shem, one of Noah's three sons (Huc, *Souvenirs d'un voyage*: 150).

¹⁰³ On the situation leading up to the 1723 revolt in Qinghai, see Kāto, 'Lobjang Danjin's Rebellion'; on subsequent Qing influence in A-mdo, see, for instance, Goldstein, *History of Modern Tibet*, vol. 3: 81–83; Nietupski, 'Reverend Chinese': 185–89 and the sources cited there.

¹⁰⁴ The order of the siblings given here corresponds to terse summaries of the pedigree as found in Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan, 'rGyal-rabs-bon-gyi-'byung-gnas': f. 27.5; Chos-nyid-ye-shes, *gNyags-gdung-rabs*: 46; dPal-'byor-bzang-po, *rGya-bod-yig-tshang*: 12–13; Hermanns, 'Überlieferungen': 196, which all use the standing phrase *rgya-bod-hor-gsum* ('China, Tibet, Mongolia, these three [...]') to succinctly refer to all three ethnic groups at once. If these pithy summaries were reelaborated into creative dismemberment myths, the result could well resemble Huc's account.

¹⁰⁵ Hermanns, 'Überlieferungen': 161. Unfortunately, the published transcription was edited to conform to standardised orthography. He only notes it spells *rge* for *dge*, and *gho* for *mgo*, features we also find in other witnesses.

Hermanns himself unsatisfactorily dated the text to the early thirteenth century.¹⁰⁶ Putting the problems with his specific arguments aside, the appearance of the Mongols in the ethnogenalogy and the use of the loanword *chol-kha* both indicate that the text in its current redaction is of more a recent date. Eveline Yang's study into the origins of that latter Mongolian term could not locate it in any Classical Tibetan texts predating the 1360s.¹⁰⁷ This earliest possible date in the latter half of the fourteenth century fits comfortably with that of the *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru* and the *dBu-nag-mi'u-'dra-chags*.

Early in this text's clipped cosmogonic pedigree, we once again encounter eggs, Ye-smon-rgyal-po, as well as a 'King Thing-heng' (*rgyal-po-thing-heng*), an obvious variation of our now well-familiar prince (*rgyal-bu*). According to this text he had nine children, China being mentioned first, followed by Tibet and Mongolia. Here China again appears in the first slot, yet the phrase used in this context is a stock formulaic order for listing China, Tibet and Mongolia in a word-economic fashion (*rgya-bod-hor-gsum*), and accordingly, their internal age ranking may be left open to debate. Nevertheless, the absence of any explicit claim of Tibetan seniority or primacy is notable. This fact in itself already sets the source apart from most of the texts adduced earlier, where the Tibetan tends to be the ranking sibling.¹⁰⁸ Besides these three ethnic groups, the six other sons are Nanzhao; two border populations of the Himalayan hills (Mon and Khe-le); the Oirat Mongols (Sog-po); the Nepali; as well as 'non-humans with the appearance of humans'¹⁰⁹—another (oblique) reference to animals. The inclusion of the Nepali marks our first encounter with a population from the Indian subcontinent, a southward expansion that is pushed further in an eighteenth-century text that also adds India, as well as Kashmir.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Hermanns, 'Überlieferungen': 162–64.

¹⁰⁷ Yang, '*Chol kha gsum*': 559.

¹⁰⁸ This straightforward and uncommented listing however agrees with brief summaries of this pedigree as found in dPal-'byor-bzang-po, *rGya-bod-yig-tshang*: 12–13; Chos-nyid-ye-shes, *gNyags-gdung-rabs*: 46; Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan, 'rGyal-rabs-bon-gyi-'byung-gnas': f. 27.5.

¹⁰⁹ 'rGya bod hor gsum, ajañ ðañ bzhi, mon khe le gnyis ðañ drug, sog po bal bo gnyis ðañ brgyad, mi min, mi['] ji cha byad can ðañ dgu red'. (Hermanns, 'Überlieferungen': 196, translation on pp. 178–79).

¹¹⁰ '... rgya-gar-dang-/kha-che/ bal-yul-hor-sog-sogs-la-gyes-pa-yang-mang-du-snang-ngo-/', (Chos-nyid-ye-shes, *gNyags-gdung-rabs*: 47).

Yet the most fascinating aspect of the Hermanns manuscript regards its aforementioned merger of two distinct ethnogenealogical traditions, fusing our tradition of focus with the Buddhist ethnic origin narrative of the *bodhisattva* monkey and the demoness. The two traditions are neatly stitched together by swapping the latter pair's customary offspring, a set of simian proto-Tibetans, with eggs, from which Ye-smon-rgyal-po subsequently appears.¹¹¹ In doing so, this text may take the non-partisan approach towards Bon- and Buddhist-associated traditions the farthest among our witnesses. Although this chimes with other ecumenical sources like the *dBu-nag-mi'u-'dra-chags* and the *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru*, it provides a stark contrast with the way in which the Buddhist ethnogenealogy is treated in the Bon history already adduced above. That source explicitly addresses and dispels the Buddhist notion of simian ancestry by dryly noting that it cannot hold true 'since Tibetans have no tails', before adding that the Tibetans are to be distinguished from a Chinese border population that is said to have such appendages.¹¹² A somewhat similar sectarian approach, as discussed above, seems to have been pursued by the Buddhist *Mig-'byed-'od-stong*, which in its apparent reluctance to embrace a heterodox ethnic origin story jettisoned ethnogenealogical references from the Bon-affiliated pedigree.

Conclusion

All in all, within the already broad diversity of emic ethnogenetic theories found in Classical Tibetan literature, we see that even one such set can display a marked degree of diversity. Most versions we have of the myth of the ancestral prince and his ethnically diverse sons seem to date from

¹¹¹ 'Da mgo nag mi[']ji srid thsul la: Mi dan po sañs rgyas thams cad kvi [read: ky]i] gsuñ gi sprul ba. Yi dam thugs rje chen po[']ji sku[']ji sprul ba de sprel gyi rgyal po byañ chub sems dpa[']] dan brag srin mo gnyis [read: gnyis] bsdebs pa las sgoñ drug tu sred [read: srid]. sGoñ ba brdol pa[']ji nan shed nas lha lha ma yin gnyis, mi byol soñ gnyis, dmyal ba yi dwags gnyis, dan drug tu sred [read: srid]. De agro ba rigs drug red. Khyad par sras gcig yod pa de sred pa [read: srid pa] ye smon rgyal po red'. (Hermanns, 'Überlieferungen': 196 (my emendations), translation on pp. 178–79).

¹¹² '... der-spyan-ras-gzigs-kyi-sprul-pa-spre'u-zhig-yar-lung-gi-brag-la-bsgoms-bsdad/de-dang-brag-srin-mo-'dus-pa-las-bu-byung-ba-ni-mi-rgyud-du-gyur-skad bod-rnga-ma-can-byung-zer-te/ de-mi-bden-la/ bod-la-rnga-ma-med-pa'i-phyir-ro/ yang-rnga-ma-yod-pa-zhig-shar-phyogs-rgya-nag-gi-mtha'-la-yod-zer-te-'di-dang-mi-rigs-so-so'o/' (Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan, 'rGyal-rabs-bon-gyi-'byung-gnas': f. 26.2–4).

the latter half of the fourteenth century onward, with the *'Dur-kyis-ldong-gis-pha-rab* being a possible earlier exception. In modern times, such ethnogenetic narratives may perhaps morph particularly quickly,¹¹³ yet this overview demonstrates that even without the dynamics of modern nation-states, hard borders and sharply increased mobility, these traditions can be highly fluid. On the Tibetan Plateau, they became the site of a cultural rivalry over the definition of the early history, and thus, the genealogically defined identity, of the ethnic group—an imagined community that these very narratives of course helped to create and sustain.

Early on, the myth may have only accounted for the rise of the 'Tibetans' (Bod-pa) and the 'Han Chinese' (rGya) (Version I). After the mid-fourteenth century, however, when the Plateau's historiography developed a broader geographic approach in the wake of the Mongol conquests and their political aftermath, the Mongols, too, were absorbed into the tradition (II, etc.). Yet other versions expanded the ethnic scope even further (III, VIII, etc.). Most of these permutations provided the Tibetan sibling with a pre-eminent position, or at least senior status, within these mythical multi-ethnic constellations (e.g., I, II, III), but the success of the primordial Tibetan could be explained in quite different ways. Such alterations could help boost various agendas by tying the successful genesis of the Tibetans to an author's or a community's favoured cultural phenomena, such as a ritual device (IV) or the Bon religion (V). Yet other witnesses either relativised, omitted or explicitly rejected the Tibetan's high ranking (VI, VIII and VI).

Similarly, the way rival ethnogenetic theories were treated, too, was rather diverse. Sectarian Bon and Buddhist histories could reject or dilute theories perceived to belong to the other school (V and II-b), whereas more syncretic texts either failed to pass such judgement (III, IV, etc.) or blatantly ignored any potential sectarian boundaries by fully fusing separate ethnic origin narratives (VIII). These contrasts reinforce the impression that this myth circulated in quite different social contexts: parochially Bon-po; parochially Buddhist; or in the social spaces between the more strictly guarded boundaries of scholastic traditions.

In keeping with the variety of factors that led these communities and their narrators to adopt, adapt and in the process often instrumentalise specific visions of the ethnic group's past, the level and direction of

¹¹³ See, for example, Huber, 'Relating to Tibet'.

‘corrective’ control that was exercised on the genealogy would likely have been quite different in each context. This plurality, accordingly, casts the spotlight of our attention squarely onto each individual narration’s peculiarities. Ideally, these should be connected to their respective texts’ historical time frames, geographic provenance, subject matter, religious and broader social affiliations, associated textual traditions and/or intended audiences. Although this is feasible to some degree for a number of witnesses, detailed provenance information unfortunately remains quite scarce for several other sources, which impedes a firmer grasp of the influences at work. Simultaneously, however, we have been able to somewhat narrow down the suggested time frames for some of our witnesses, while highlighting a number of intertextual connections that, when explored further, may shed additional light on the relations between, and provenance of, our materials.

In this context, it should finally be noted that many of the texts scrutinised here, including perhaps our oldest witness, carry signs of an eastern, rather than central or western, geographic origin.¹¹⁴ If this set of ethnogenealogies persisted particularly, or perhaps even originated, on the eastern stretches of the Plateau, this may help explain one of its most salient features. As already mentioned above, these myths appear unique in broader Classical Tibetan literature in postulating deep ancestral ties between the Tibetans and the Chinese and Mongols. Surely, from a perspective of proximity and interaction, these eastern regions, located closer to the population centres of the Han Chinese and the strongholds of the Mongols, would have offered a more naturally hospitable environment for such a (north-)eastern ethnic orientation than the central or western portions of the Plateau. Accordingly, a geographic prevalence or even inception of this set of ethnogenealogies in the eastern highlands would chime in perfectly with their contents.

¹¹⁴ The narrative of Version I is set around rMa-chen-spom-ra and the upper Yellow River, see n. 38; Version II is largely set in Western Khams (Langelaar, ‘Singular Volume of the Rlangs’); Version III displays linguistic influences from Khams (Karmay and Nagano, *Blue Cuckoo*: xi); on Version IV, no info is available; Version V was written in Khyung-po, in Western Khams (Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan, ‘rGyal-rabs-bon-gyi-’byung-gnas’: f. 191.4); Version VI was written by Blo-ldan-snying-po, who was from, again, Khyung-po; Versions VII and VIII were collected from the Plateau’s far northeast. It should perhaps be added that the sources adduced elsewhere in this article, which also present the ethnogenealogy but hail from the central regions of the Plateau, are essentially secondary sources in that they merely cite the myth in scholastic surveys of the various available theories, yet do not tend to endorse it.

Abbreviations

DBU = Anonymous. 2002. ‘dBu-nag-mi’u-’dra-chags’, in *The Call of the Blue Cuckoo: An Anthology of Nine Bonpo Texts on Myths and Rituals*, edited by Samten Karmay and Yasuhiko Nagano. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology: 91–149.

PSI = Anonymous. 1978. ‘Rlañs kyi gduñ rgyud po ti bse ru’, in *The History of the gÑos Lineage of Kha-rag and a Version of the Rlañs po ti bse ru Containing the Genealogy of the Rlañs Lineage*. Dolanji: Khedup Gyatso: ff. 97–337.

PSII = Anonymous. 1974. ‘Rlangs po ti bse ru’, in *IHa rigs rlañs kyi rnam thar. A Detailed Account of the Rlañs Lineage of Phag-mo-gru-pa Rulers of Tibet; Incorporating Version of the “Rlañs po ti bse ru” and the “Si tu’i bka’chems” of Si-tu Byañ-chub-rgyal-mtshan*. New Delhi: T. Tsepal Taikhang: ff. 2–212.

PSIII = Anonymous. 1986. ‘IHa-rigs-rlangs-kyi-skye-rgyud’ & ‘Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru-che-dge-yig-tshang-dang-mi-rgyud-grol-thabs’, in *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru-rgyas-pa*, edited by Chab-spel-tshe-brtan-phun-tshogs. IHa-sa: Bod-ljongs-mi-dmangs-dpe-skrun-khang: 1–99.

PSIV = Anonymous. 1982. *IHa-gzigs-rlangs-kyi-gdungs-[sic!]rabs-po-ti-bse-ru-bzhugs*. IHa-sa: Bod-ljongs-spyi-tshogs-tshan-rig-khang.

PSV = Anonymous. n.d. ‘Rlangs-kyi-gdung-rgyud-po-ti-bse-ru-zhes-bya-ba-bzhugs-so’, in *Rlangs-kyi-gdung-brgyud-po-ti-bse-ru-zhes-bya-ba-bzhugso*. Dharamsala, India: Manuscript in the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives: 1–97.

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- bSod-nams-rtse-mo. 2007. ‘Chos-la-’jug-pa’i-’sgo-zhes-bya-ba’i-bstan-bcos-bzhugs’, in his *gSung-’bum*, vol. 3. Beijing: Krung-go’i-bod-rig-pa-dpe-skrun-khang: ff. 525–633.
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