

Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po

Brief Description of the Traditions Related to the "Translator's *mchod rten*" in Kyu wang, Western Tibet

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The [stela with the] *mchod rten* of the Translator (*lo tsā ba*) [Rin chen bzang po, 958–1055] is located at 31° 43' N and 78° 52' E [at Kyu wang] (Fig. 3),¹ viz. approximately to the east of a rectangular

* The translation of this study is based on the unpublished article by the author entitled *Kyu wang na mchis pa'i lo tsā ba'i mchod rten dang 'brel yod srol rgyun skor la rags tsam brjod pa*. Field work in the Rong chung area of Western Tibet was carried out by the author in May-June 2013. It was financed by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) within the framework of the research project P21806-G19 "Society, Power and Religion in Pre-Modern Western Tibet: Interaction, Conflict and Integration" directed by Christian Jahoda at the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA), Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna. [Editors' note.]

¹ Kyu wang Rad nis (located in the Rong chung area of Western Tibet) is mentioned in the middle-length biography of the Great Translator (*lo chen*) Rin chen bzang po as the place where he was born. As it was then, today Kyu wang belongs to Rad nis village (situated on the left bank of the Glang chen kha 'bab/Sutlej river). Kyu wang is located ca. 6 km to the south of Rad nis, not very far from the Indian border. In administrative terms Rad nis is part of rTsa mda' District or Circle (*rdzong*) and belongs to the municipality (*shang*) of gTi g.yag (cf. Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po 2006: 293 and 299, n. 1).

The worldly and supramundane circumstances of Rin chen bzang po's birth are given in some detail in various extant versions of the middle-length biography of this religious figure. Not only the day but also the exact location—an oblong field at Kyu wang (*kyu wang gi zhing nar mo zhing*)—are given there: "de yang spyi mes g.yu sgra stong bshan [sic!] gyis mchod pa'i yul skyu wang rad nis zhes bya ba ru [...] de yang rta'i lo dbyar zla tha chung gi tshes bcu la bab pa dang/ yum skyu wang gyi zhing nar mo gcig tu yur ma mdzad cing yod pa la/ yum cung cig sku khams lhogs pa snyam pa cig byung nas/ zhing gnya' rub yon nas/ dngos su yum gsungs pa ltar/ g.yas pa la rma bya cig babs/ g.yon pa la khu dbyug cig babs/ spyi rtsug tu ne tso gcig babs so/!" (Rin chen bzang po rnam thar 1, f. 6a3–f. 8b3).

Compared to the text in this unpublished manuscript (which was sent to Giuseppe Tucci from Pooh in 1932) other versions show some interesting spelling variants, notably also in the case of place names: "gsum pa 'khrung (gsum pa/ 'khrungs) yul ni/ spyi me (mes) g.yu sgra stong btsan gyi mchod pa'i



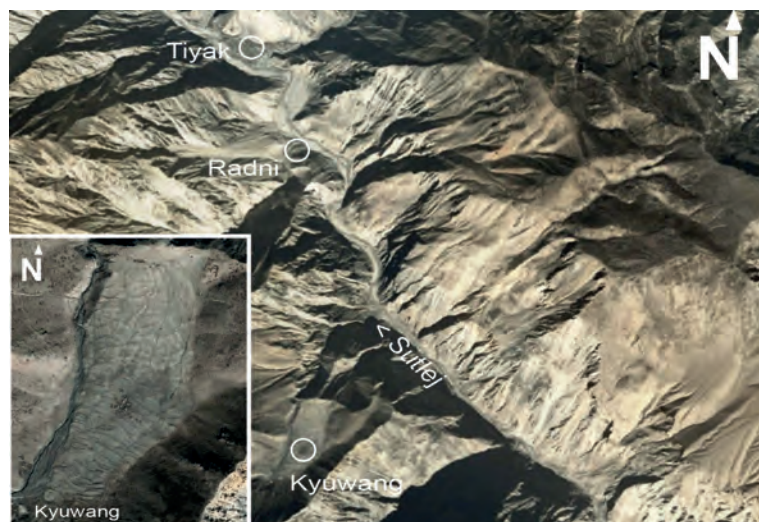
yul kyu wang rad ni zhes bya ba ru (bar) [...] rta lo dbyar zla tha chung gi tshes (tshes) bcu la yum kyu wang gi zhing nar mo cig (zhig) tu yur ma mdzad cing yod pa la/ yum cung zad sku khams log nas zhing gnya' ru byon pas/ dngos su yum gyis dpung pa g.yas pa la rma bya cig (zhig) babs/ g. yon pa la khu byug cig babs/ spyi gtsug tu ne tso gcig babs so/!" (Rin chen bzang po rnam thar 2: 58.3–61.4; variant readings are based on the text in Rin chen bzang po rnam

1. Kyu wang, Rong chung area, view towards south-east/Glang chen kha 'bab (Sutlej) river valley (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).



2. Kyu wang settlement and field area, view from north-west (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

3. Radni (Rad nis), Kyuwang (Kyu wang) and Tiyak (gTi g.yag), Upper Suttlej (Glang chen kha 'bab) valley/ Rong chung area, Tsamda (rTsa mda') District, Tibet Autonomous Region, China (G. Hazod, 2019).



thar 3: 135; the text contained in *Rin chen bzang po rnam thar* 4: 12–13 follows either *Rin chen bzang po rnam thar* 2 or 3). Cf. also Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po 2006: 294f. who draws on a middle-length version of *Rin chen bzang po rnam thar* (with further variant readings) kept in the gNas bcu temple at 'Bras spungs. [Editor's note/CJ.]

field (Figs. 1 and 2).² There is about 200 metres between this [stela] (Figs. 4 and 5) and a square stone slab with the footprint of the mother of the Translator³ (Figs. 6 and 7) in the rectangular field.⁴ It [the stela] is 3,839 metres above sea level.

Two of the three stelae (*rdo ring*) there do not have any inscriptions and because one, which has engravings of a figural representation (*sku bris*) and of a *mchod rten* on each of the four sides, is a particular stela it is referred to by the villagers as the "Translator's (*lo tsā ba'i*) *mchod rten*" (Figs. 8–11). This stela with the stone carving is 0.96 metres high and 0.20 metres wide. On the south, the *mchod rten* with the figural representation is 0.80 metres high and 0.15 metres wide. On the west, the *mchod rten* with the figural representation is 0.75 metres high and 0.15 metres wide. On the north, the *mchod rten* with the figural representation is 0.80 metres high and 0.15 metres wide. On the east, the *mchod rten* with the figural representation is 0.75 metres high and 0.20 metres wide. In addition to the image with a five-partite crown (*rig lnga'i prog zhu*) (Fig. 13), there is a *mchod rten* with an umbrella consisting of thirteen rims, a vase and a lion throne (*seng khri*). On top of the vase on the eastern face, there is even a hole for a forefinger to pass through (Fig. 12).

On top of a *maṅi* wall (*man thang*) to the east of the three stelae—the stela with engraved *mchod rten* and figural representations and the two without inscriptions—there are a lot of *ma ṅe* (*maṅi*) stone engravings that have been offered. Each year around the time before sowing the field, the household (*mi tshang*) with the family name (*rus ming*)⁵ sNub begins a propitiation ritual at the site of the three

² This field, which is referred to as rectangular (*zhing gru bzhi nar mo*), is also known as the "long auspicious field" (*zhing bkra shis ring mo*) (personal communication Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, July 13, 2013). [Editor's note/CJ.]

³ The mother of the Great Translator (*lo chen*) was from a big household (*mi tshang chen po*) known as the Rad ni[s] mKhar ba ["fort household of Rad nis"] as whose maidservant (*g.yog mo*) she was responsible for irrigating the field. [This information clearly represents an account from a retrospective view that is based on the current household and family. It is not clear how this statement can be brought into agreement with the information contained in the middle-length biography of Rin chen bzang po, that his mother was a woman from the (noble) Cog ro clan or family. Editor's note/CJ.]

⁴ According to information based on satellite images, the distance between the two spots is perhaps around four to five hundred metres. [Editor's note/CJ.]

⁵ Due to lack of information, in this case it cannot be determined whether *rus* denotes a wider social concept, such as implied by dGe rgan's description of *rigs rus*, that is, groups which trace their descent patrilineally from a common ancestor, reflecting conditions at the beginning of the 20th century (see dGe rgan 1976: 324–325). According to him, *rigs rus pa* (members of this type of kinship group) were called *pha spun* by the people in Ladakh, *rus pa* by people in Rong and sTod, and *pha spad* or *pha rus* by the population in Spiti. Cf. also Jahoda 2017. [Editor's note/CJ.]



4. Stelae, lower (northern) part of Kyu wang, view towards north-east (downhill) (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

5. Stelae, lower (northern) part of Kyu wang, view towards south-west (uphill) (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

This stela with carved images on four sides is conceived as an object for ritual circumambulation and stands in the tradition of *mchod rten* (*stūpa*) and sculptures oriented towards the four directions of space. The concept to create images as cosmic configurations, which frequently represent centres of mandalic sites, is a constant feature in the early Western Tibetan religious-artistic tradition. [CK].

6. Location of stones with footprint (*zhabs rjes*) of *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po's mother according to local tradition; upper (southern) part of Kyu wang, view towards south-east (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

7. Stones with footprint (*zhabs rjes*) of *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po's mother according to local tradition; upper (southern) part of Kyu wang (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

stelae known as the "Translator's (*lo tsā ba'i*) *mchod rten*" by offering bread and various other offerings. One day later all the fathers among the inhabitants of this village circumambulate the three stelae three times on horseback after which a circumambulation of the auspicious meditation cave of the translator at the bottom of a rocky mountain to the west is made (Fig. 14). Subsequently, after a goat kid (*ra rtsid bu*)⁶ has been killed on top of a square stone slab near the three stelae its intestines and all other internal organs are burned and then, still smouldering, cast away and a red offering (*dmar mchod*)⁷ is performed. Then, after the consumption of beer

and singing of songs, dancing and other festive activities, the sowing of the field can start.

The rectangular field extends to the west of the three stelae or the "Translator's *mchod rten*". Slightly above this there is a pond where in summertime many swans and ruddy geese take up residence. In wintertime when the water is frozen everything turns white. Even higher up from the rectangular field there is a spring which is said

⁶ When about one year old the [goat] kid (*rtsid bu*) is referred to as goat (*ra*).

⁷ That is, an offering of the blood of a slaughtered animal. Offerings of this kind were also performed in former times and partially up to the present in

certain villages in Upper Kinnaur and Spiti valley. In Poh, a village ca. 10 km to the west of Tabo, goats and sheep were still being killed for this purpose some decades ago. In his youth (in the late 1960s) the present *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po *sprul sku* himself saw the blood of the slaughtered animals on the *rwa co* in Kyibar and Hikim in upper Spiti valley (personal communication, New Delhi, February 27, 2000) (cf. Jahoda 2006: 35f.). [Editor's note/CJ.]

8. Stela, "Translator's (*lo tsā ba'i mchod rten*", view facing east (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

The figures are engraved in a graphic, planar and rather schematic manner into the block. The figural types stand in the refined and lasting tradition of early Kashmir-style sculptures of Western Tibet. The style appears to be related to early monuments of the Western Himalayan region; examples are the sculptures in the Assembly Hall (*du khang*) of Tabo (Spiti valley), attributed to the renovation of the temple in the mid of the 11th century. The artifacts represent a stye which is strongly related to that of Kashmir, and they were most probably created together with the artists brought by the Great Translator Rin chen bzang po. Characteristics include the broad shoulders, v-shaped muscular upper body, large crown and earrings, and long curled hair. [Editor's note/CK.]

Fig. 9. Stela, "Translator's (*lo tsā ba'i mchod rten*", view facing south (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

Unfortunately the gestures (*mudrā*) are hardly readable but the images may represent a unified program comparable to the monumental fourfold-image of rNam par snang mdzad (Vairocana) at Tabo crowned by images of small *stūpas*. *Stūpas* at the top of a nimbus are often found in haloes of sculptures associated with the West Tibetan kingdom. The four images recall as well miniature *stūpas* from Swat (8th–9th century) featuring the four Tathāgatas which face the respective directions of space (cf. Luczanits 2009: Cat. no. 291, p. 366). [Editor's note/CK.]



to be the place where the water snake⁸ of the Great Translator was released (Fig. 15).

In autumn, at about the time of the harvest, thirteen horsemen from the village come to the site of the "Translator's *mchod rten*" and have to perform a red offering (*dmar mchod*) for the territorial deity

⁸ In local oral tradition it is said that the Great Translator [Rin chen bzang po] brought seven blue water snakes from India, one of which was set free at his birthplace at the rectangular field [at Kyu wang], as a result of which abundant water sprang from this place.

(*yul lha*) | pyi [*i phyi*, *a phyi*,⁹ grandmother] Chu dbang ma ("Water Governing One").¹⁰ In the morning a ritual barley flour offering

⁹ *a phyi* is the usual spelling in dictionaries (see, for example, Goldstein 2001: 1188). The spelling *i phyi* and in particular *i phi* follows the pronunciation in Central Tibetan and Western Tibetan dialects respectively. The pronunciation in the surrounding areas is *ībī* (Tabo, Spiti: "old woman, grandmother"), *jībī* (Ru thog, sGar thog, sPu rang: "old woman (h)") (see Bielmeier et al. 2008: 963–964). [Editor's note/CJ.]

¹⁰ As for this I phi Chu dbang ma, in fact I phyi Chu khang ma ["Water House One"]: this is a female being, a deity that is said to have been invited from



Fig. 10. Stela, “Translator’s (*lo tsā ba’i*) *mchod rten*”, view facing west (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

Fig. 11. Stela, “Translator’s (*lo tsā ba’i*) *mchod rten*”, view facing north (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

The oblong upright block of stone is narrower on the top and recalls the shape of other stelae in historical Western Tibet, such as the ones at lCog ro in Purang and PooH in Upper Kinnaur. It features on each side a sitting bodhisattva and a *stūpa* above. The high *stūpas* are of different types and topped by sun and moon. Visibility on all four sides, together with the narrowing in the uppermost part of the block—which recalls the finial of a *stūpa*—appear to indicate that the monument is rather conceived as a sculpture designed to be ritually used by circumambulation. [Editor’s note/CK.]

(*’brang gyas*) is prepared and then offered. After this when the horses have been saddled and the men dressed up [the place of] l phi Chu dbang ma[’s residence] is circumambulated [on horseback]. Then, along with its circumambulation, offerings are made in the rectangular field. After arriving at the east of the “Translator’s *mchod rten*”, they circumambulate a big juniper tree there. Then three horse races are held on the convenient surface of a plain to the west of the

lands to the south (*mon*). [See Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po 2006: 298 for further information on l phi Chu dbang ma. Editor’s note/CJ.]

rectangular field. Then they return and [the place of] l phi chu dbang ma[’s residence] is circumambulated again. A drummer¹¹ then brings a goat and performs a circumambulation of the “Translator’s *mchod*

¹¹ The function of drummer (*rnga brdungs mkhan*) is passed on within the drummer’s family, with its residence at gTi g.yag, patrilineally from father to son (*pha tsha bu rgyud*). [Persons with this function seem to belong in Rad nis—as also, for example, in Spiti—to families where this function is hereditary. It is not clear whether at Rad nis these families constituted an endogamous community and represented a socially subordinate group as was (and to a large extent still is) the case in Spiti. Editor’s note/CJ.]

12. Upper part of stela, "Translator's (lo tsā ba'i) mchod rten", view facing east, detail of mchod rten with an umbrella consisting of thirteen rims, a vase and a lion throne (seng khri) (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).



13. Lower part of stela, "Translator's (lo tsā ba'i) mchod rten", view facing east, detail of image with a five-partite crown (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).



rten" by leading it around clockwise (*g.yas skor*). After finishing the circumambulation, the goat is killed¹² there on top of a square bolder with a smooth surface. The goat meat is apportioned based on the *mu*¹³ of the field and the internal organs are roasted underneath a square stone on a piece of uncultivated land.

Later, with the liberal consumption of beer and the performance

¹² As for the procedure of killing the goat: after tying it up it is killed by suffocation.

¹³ *mu* is a Chinese measure of area. The author uses the Tibetan spelling *rmu*. [Editor's note/CJ.]

of dances a festive celebration takes place and (people) enjoy the pleasures of life. On the next day the field is harvested [by sickle]. On the first day [of the harvest] due to the fact that the drummer harvests [with a sickle] according to his wish and desire whatever of the fields of the village occurs best (to him) and is allowed to take (this) away, there is a very large income for him.

After arrival in Rad nis¹⁴ village (Fig. 16) seven or eight villagers in

¹⁴ Rad nis seems to be the common spelling adopted in the middle-length biography of Rin chen bzang po. This spelling is also used here (despite the

turn give the drummer seventeen bunches of bundles of wheat piled up in the fields after harvest (*gro lcog*).¹⁵ In addition around noon on the 29th day of the first month of the Tibetan calendar an extensive ritual of chanting the (*om*) *ma ni (pad me hūṃ)* mantra is performed (for him).

On the auspicious 30th new-moon day of the Tibetan month (*gnam gang*), at the beginning the first sample of offering beer (*chang phud*) is offered to the monastery. At this time the women wear *be rag*¹⁶ headdresses and brocaded clothes. The men wear *sog zhwa* [“Mongolian-type”] hats, robes of golden and white brocade and black yak-skin boots. In this way invocations and offerings to the local gods (*lha gsol*) are made in a proper way. Furthermore the men from the mKhar ba (“fort household”) family of Rad nis wear brocade clothes with a particular design (*ri mo*).

At that time a majestic mountain-shaped *gtor ma*, which is also called a mountain (*ri bo*), is made and the Rad nis Pag si¹⁷ family performs an offering rite for the territorial deity (*yul lha*) *mes* (“ancestor”) rDo rje legs pa and for this there is a ceremonial arrow with different-coloured ribbons (*mtshon ched kyi mda’ dar*) tied to it. At the time when *mes* rDo rje legs pa enters a trance medium the drummer is absolutely needed and after the descent of the god is finished lots of offerings of butter, tea, meat and salt must be given to the drummer.

Since the drummer is a good blacksmith (*lcags bzo*)¹⁸ he makes things required for the peasants’ field work, [such as] hoes (*stog rtse*)¹⁹

author’s use of Rad ni throughout the unpublished article in Tibetan). According to local tradition, the name of the village is pronounced as *ra nyi* in the local language the real meaning of which is *ra gnyis* (two goats) (cf. Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po 2006: 294). [Editor’s note/CJ.]

¹⁵ See also Goldstein 2001: 203. [Editor’s note/CJ.]

¹⁶ *be rag* is loosely fastened ornamental headdress which hangs from the forehead to the back of the head. It is supported by a piece of brocade which is elegantly adorned with turquoise stones.

¹⁷ It is from this family that the trance medium (*sku khog*) of the territorial deity (*yul lha*) known as *mes* rDo rje legs pa speaks, and, as for this function, a deity enters the body of a trance medium, it is passed on patrilineally from father to son (*pha tsha bu rgyud*).

¹⁸ Based on research in Tabo and elsewhere one can assume that the function of blacksmith and drummer were united or “reserved” for a social (marginalised) group which is usually referred to as *bzo ba* or *mgar ba* (blacksmith). Their work belonged to an inherited system of intra-village cooperation and exchange which seems to have been in force all over historical Western Tibet. One element of the obligatory labour performed by the blacksmiths was related to their function as musicians (drummers) at festivals and on festive occasions (see Jahoda 2012 and 2015: 214–215). [Editor’s note/CJ.]

¹⁹ *stog rtse* is colloquial Western Tibetan (*stod mnga’ ris*) language. In fact it can be described as a two-bladed hatchet (*sta re kha gnyis ma*) or also as a hoe (*’jor*).



14. Meditation cave (*sgrub phug*) of *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po at the bottom of a rocky mountain above Kyu wang (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).



15. Place where the great translator’s snake was released (*lo tsā ba’i chu sbrul glod sa*) (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).



16. Rad nis village and monastery (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

[*tog r/tse*]),²⁰ ploughshares (*thong gshol*), sickles (*zo rwa [zor ba]*),²¹ axes (*sta gri*), hooked knives (*ku ram*),²² ladles (*thum bu*),²³ and so on. Because the household in which the blacksmith function was passed on at Rad nis has no [other] work, it is said that there is no other way but to immediately accept any request from the peasants and it is never allowed to say there is no time etc. Even though he [the blacksmith] manufactures whatever has to be made, the peasants are as well obliged to give sumptuous parties (for him) and to host (him) so that there is absolutely no way for him to perform his work carelessly. At the time when Rad nis village “feeds” (*gso*) [that is, performs an offering ritual to] the water snake [mentioned above], or if there is a sick person in Rad nis village or whatever else happens in this way, the habitual practice was to kill a black goat and to perform a red offering (*dmar mchod*). Later, after the territorial deity (*yul lha*) was bound to the teachings of the Translator, on the 26th (*nyi shu [rtsa] drug*) [day] of each month bread known as *ru bri*²⁴ was offered [to her]. Due to the fact that this was [more] suitable [with respect to the teachings], the tradition of performing a red offering (*dmar mchod*) was terminated. Then, after performing a burnt offering (*bsur btang*), this bread is distributed to everyone and eaten. The donor (*sbying bdag*) is the Rad nis mKhar ba (“fort household”) family. At this time, [they] go to the place of residence of the territorial deity (*yul lha*) rDo rje legs pa and drink beer and perform dances. After bringing the remaining beer into Rad nis monastery [they] happily celebrate. During the same time the drummer goes everywhere to the households to ask for beer and thereby receives a lot of beer, meat and so on. In the evening of this [day] all the young men and women from each household of Rad nis village sing and dance the whole night and fully enjoy life.

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²⁰ Based on the linguistic data compiled by Bielmeier et al. the tool referred to by this name seems to be a hoe. This agrees in particular with the use of the word in the local dialect at Tabo (Western Innovative Tibetan: pronunciation *töktse*; cf. Bielmeier et al. 2008: 339, where the spelling is rendered as *tog tse* or *tog rtse*). See also Jahoda 2015: fig. 36, p. 315, for an illustration of a *s/tog r/tse* from Tabo. [Editor’s note/CJ.]

²¹ *zor ba* seems to be the most common spelling (cf. also Bielmeier et al. 2008: 775). [Editor’s note/CJ.]

²² A *ku ram* is a hooked knife (*gri ’gugs*) especially for heavy cutting.

²³ A *thum bu* is Western Tibetan (*stod mnga’ ris*) dialect (*yul skad*) meaning *skyog* [skyogs, ladle].

²⁴ There is no information as to the kind of bread this is. [Editor’s note/CJ.]

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Appendix: Places Associated with the Great Translator Rin chen bzang po by Local Oral Tradition (Figs. 17–24)

The following places are named as such in a final paragraph of Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po's text and in the named folders into which his photographic documentation was divided by him. [Editors' note.]



17. The place of residence of Lord (*jo bo*) rDo rje chen mo who was invited by the Translator (*lo tsā ba*) [Rin chen bzang po] is located beneath a red hill, not far from the rectangular field at Kyu wang. The place where Lord (*jo bo*) rDo rje chen mo is worshipped between Rad nis and Kyu wang on a footpath along a narrow ledge on the side of a precipice where many quartz stones are heaped up (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

18. Place where the Translator's horse was tied to a juniper tree (*lo tsa ba'i rta 'dogs sa shugs pa*) (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).





19. The Translator's *gtor ma* plate and round *gtor ma* offering (*lo tsā ba'i gtor gzhong dang 'brang rgyas*) (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

20. The Translator's solitary stone (*lo tsā ba'i chigs rdo*) (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

21. Reverence to the Translator (*lo tsā ba'i dbu rjes*) (Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).





22. The Translator's throne
(*lo tsā ba'i bzhugs khri*)
(Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

23. The Translator's cooking
pot or eating bowl (*lo tsā
ba'i zhal lu 'am zhal mchod*)
(Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

24. The Translator's saddle
(*lo tsā ba'i rta sga*)
(Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po, 2013).

