

# PUTTING THE BUDDHA TO WORK: ŚĀKYAMUNI IN THE SERVICE OF TIBETAN MONASTIC IDENTITY<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Buddhism in Tibet is sometimes described as having formed through the activities of charismatic teachers, great founding figures such as the Indian tantric adept Padmasambhava and the itinerant *yogin* Mi la ras pa (c. 1028–1111). While there is some truth to this, in its most extreme form this claim led to the appellation “Lamaism,” suggesting that Tibet’s Buddhist traditions focused primarily on the Tibetan lama or ‘master’ and were largely divorced from the figure of the Buddha. Such characterization of Tibetan religion as “Buddhism without the Buddha” is, of course, at odds with Tibet’s religious culture, where the life of Buddha Śākyamuni formed a persistent theme in narrative texts, visual arts, and ritual practices. While it may be a truism that Śākyamuni is central to Tibetan Buddhist literature and practice, there remains a nagging sense that he languishes in the background. This is literally true for the biographical murals of the Buddha’s life painted on Tibetan temple walls that serve as a backdrop for more prominent statues, hanging scrolls, and rituals that frequently capture the spotlight. The steady stream of publications about Tibetan Buddha-life narratives notwithstanding, scholarly interest in the Buddha’s life story, especially his final life on Earth, appears incommensurate with the abundance of extant literary and visual materials.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive bibliography of indigenous Tibetan Buddha-life literature has yet to be compiled (and will not be attempted here) and so remains a desideratum. Examples of early Tibetan accounts are found in Nyang ral Nyi ma ‘od zer’s (1124–1192) *Chos ’byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi’i bcud* and Bsod nams rtse mo’s (1142–1182) *Chos la ’jug pa’i mgo*. The influential Tibetan historian Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290–1364) composed several versions of the Buddha’s life, one an extended account based on Vinaya

The present essay forms part of a larger project to re-foreground the place of Śākyamuni in Tibet by exploring how images and texts related to the Buddha served as a primary organizing principle for the monastery Rtag brtan Phun tshogs gling – religious seat of the great seventeenth-century polymath Tāranātha Kun dga' snying po (1575–1634) and his Jo nang tradition in the Tibetan region of Gtsang, to the west of Lhasa (figures 1 and 2). It suggests that Phun tshogs gling's central icon – a Śākyamuni statue of miraculous origin – not only acted as an object of veneration, but also served Tāranātha more broadly in the promotion and maintenance of his monastery. It did so in several ways. First, as a representation of the Buddha of our present age, the image formed the core of Phun tshogs gling's thematic focus on Śākyamuni, a tradition I refer

sources entitled *Ston pa sangs rgyas kyi rnam thar dad cing dga' skyed* and the other a long section of his well-known *Chos 'byung* (see Stein and Zangpo 2013). Another important work is the extensive narrative written by Sna nam btsun pa (15<sup>th</sup> c.) in 1494 entitled *Sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das kyi rnam par thar pa rmad du byung ba mdzad pa 'khrul ba med par brjod pa bde bar gshegs pa'i spyod pa mchog gi gter*. Like Tāranātha in his Buddha narrative described below, Sna nam btsun pa appends a long colophon to his work in which he discusses his guiding principles and sources. Tāranātha and Sna nam btsun pa both crafted monumental narrative compositions, but the authors sharply differ in terms of style and content. Among the most popular Buddha narratives in Tibet is a translation of Kṣemendra's eleventh-century *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*, rendered as *Byang chub sems dpa'i rtogs pa brjod pa dpag bsam gyi khri shing* (Ui 1934, no. 4155). This anthology of stories, which includes accounts of the Buddha's past lives (*jātaka*) and his final incarnation on Earth, was a popular subject for temple mural paintings across Tibet. Lin 2011 describes the important place of this text within Tibetan religious culture. See also de Jong 1979 and Mejer 1992. The *Lalitavistara Sūtra* (*Rgya cher rol pa'i mdo* [Ui 1934, no. 95]) is a ubiquitous source for Tibetan authors of Buddha *vitae*, although Tāranātha argues against its use (see Quintman and Schaeffer 2016). A brief survey of the Indian antecedents for Buddha life narratives in Tibet appears in Roesler 2015. William Rockhill (1884) published an early, though highly abridged, version of the Buddha's life story based on his translations of Tibetan canonical sources. For an introduction to the Tibetan literary tradition of Buddha life narratives and a translation of an eighteenth-century Bhutanese version of Śākyamuni's life, see Tenzin Chögyal 2015. On the *jātaka* tradition in Tibet, see Kapstein 2003: 774ff. and Tropper 2005. Perhaps the most popular *jātaka* collection in Tibet, apart from the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*, is Āryaśūra's *Jātakamālā* (*Skyes pa'i rabs kyi rgyud* [Ui 1934, no. 4150]). Over the past several decades, Christian Luczanits has examined relationships between literary and visual Buddha life narratives in the Tibetan cultural world; see especially 1993, 1999, 2007, 2010, 2015, and supplementary materials on his website <http://www.luczanits.net/sites/Alchi/Sumtsek.html>. For recent work on visual narratives of the Buddha's previous and final lives at Zhwa lu Monastery in Western Tibet, see Richardson 2016.

to as the ‘Buddha Program.’ Second, and perhaps more importantly, from its position at the monastery’s ritual and architectural center, the miraculous statue served as a source of elevated prestige for Tāranātha, for his seat at Phun tshogs gling, and for his patrons in western Tibet during a period of political contestation with the Fifth Dalai Lama and the growing Dge lugs hegemony in Lhasa.

Tāranātha looms as a towering intellectual voice of seventeenth-century Tibet. He was a prolific writer, renowned for his commentaries on philosophy, tantric ritual systems, and Buddhist history. His monastic seat at Phun tshogs gling became a major site of religious activity through the sustained support of western Tibet’s powerful ruling dynasty known as the Gtsang sde srid. Even though Tāranātha lived at a time distant from the early transmission of Indian Buddhism, his persona as a religious teacher and institutional founder clearly reflected a predilection for all things Indian. David Templeman has recognized Tāranātha as an unabashed Indophile, one who self-conscientiously presented himself as a ‘virtual Indian’ in possession of an authentic Indian Buddhist heritage.<sup>3</sup> Tāranātha intentionally cast himself this way and it was, as Templeman notes, “a role in which he became indispensable to his patrons as the holder of the very last of the ‘authentic’ Buddhist lineages in India.”<sup>4</sup> Tāranātha’s claim to expertise in all things Indian thus served to legitimize his new monastery and its religious traditions while elevating them in the face of competing traditions. For Tāranātha, India was an object of personal fascination, a subject of study, and a source of inspiration central to his identity as a Buddhist virtuoso. Tāranātha’s Indian-ness would also become a highly appealing quality in the eyes of his patrons.

This essay describes how Tāranātha shaped Phun tshogs gling Monastery as a reflection of his concern for India, at least in part, through an integrated iconographic and literary program centered on the figure of Śākyamuni Buddha. This organizing principle consists of a large corpus of Tāranātha’s writings, religious artwork, and related rituals focused on Śākyamuni as the buddha of our age, a figure firmly rooted within an

<sup>3</sup> This assertion is one of the central theses of Templeman’s unpublished PhD dissertation, suggestively entitled “Becoming Indian.” See Templeman 2008, especially chapter 6.

<sup>4</sup> Templeman 2008: 7.

Indian milieu. Briefly stated, I suggest that the Buddha Program afforded a degree of institutional cachet that worked in two ways, one directed south to India, the other directed east to the central Tibetan region of Dbus and the capital Lhasa.

In the first case (directed south toward India), the Buddha Program maintained and even accentuated Tāranātha's fascination with the Buddhism of India. Tāranātha felt a deep concern for retrieving what he considered to be the early and authentic Indian tradition, especially as it relates to Buddha Śākyamuni. We shall see examples of this from Phun tshogs gling's Buddha Program below. In general terms, it is not surprising to find Śākyamuni as the iconographic leitmotif for a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. But in the case of Phun tshogs gling, Buddha Śākyamuni assumes a pivotal role in an uncommon, and perhaps unprecedented, way. Tāranātha's emphasis on Śākyamuni thus appears to be an important innovation within the Tibetan cultural world.

In the second case (directed east to Lhasa), we find that the Buddha Program includes at its center a portrait statue of Śākyamuni – the Jo bo phyogs las rnam rgyal “Lord All Victorious” – situated within the monastery's inner sanctum. Tāranātha describes this icon as having a miraculous provenance in India and direct links to the early Tibetan empire. Such stories closely parallel the well-attested tradition of extraordinary buddha images known as Jo bos, including the two famed Jo bo statues of Lhasa, which served to legitimize and protect Tibet's early ruling dynasty. And indeed, Tāranātha directly compares his image to icons in the great religious centers of Srong btsan sgam po's (c. 605–649) imperial court in Lhasa: the Ra mo che Temple and, more importantly, the Jo khang Temple, central Tibet's holiest religious site.<sup>5</sup> During a period of contestation between the powers of central and western Tibet, the Jo nang Jo bo thereby conferred upon Phun tshogs gling a status on a par with the most prominent institutions and pilgrimage centers of Lhasa.

Such status would no doubt have been a direct concern for Tāranātha, but also for his benefactors, the rulers of Gtsang. Tāranātha formed relationships with most of the Gtsang sde srids and he served as a de facto

<sup>5</sup> Tāranātha, *Gnas bshad*, 172–3. See the discussion below and English translation in the Appendix.

court priest to the last two in the line: Phun tshogs nram rgyal (1550–1620) and Karma Bstan skyong dbang po (1606–1642).<sup>6</sup> It was Karma Bstan skyong dbang po who presented the icon to Tāranātha and Phun tshogs gling in 1621. Templeman has convincingly demonstrated how the Gtsang rulers – going back to their progenitor Sde srid Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje (1510?–1599) – consciously drew upon themes from the Tibetan imperial period as a strategy of self-legitimation. By linking themselves with the zenith of Tibet’s power in the past, the Gtsang rulers effectively reinvented themselves as the stewards of Tibetan religious culture for their time. The Jo nang Jo bo statue supported precisely this kind of activity by connecting those within Phun tshogs gling’s ambit to an early period of Tibetan political domination. The statue thus exemplifies key elements in the exchange that took place between Tāranātha and the Gtsang sde srids: it provided the rulers an opportunity for the fundamental Buddhist practice of merit making, while also giving Tāranātha an opportunity to engage in seventeenth-century Tibetan realpolitik by projecting his monastery’s elevated position, a position that likewise reflected well on his patrons.

The Jo nang Jo bo’s creation myth, and the story of its arrival at Phun tshogs gling, highlight a formative moment in the rise of Tāranātha’s monastic seat, and bring into relief the processes through which its identity was constituted and negotiated. Such accounts are illustrative of the need to consider more carefully the formation and status of Tibetan Buddhist monastic institutions. While the dynamics of Buddhist monastic centers have been addressed at length by scholars of South and East Asian traditions, in the work of Timothy Brook, Shane Clarke, Martin Collcutt,

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the Gtsang sde srid line, see Templeman 2008: chapter 2, and 2012. See also Tucci 1949: 44ff. Bogin 2013 describes the patronage relations between several Gtsang rulers and another important religious figure of the time, the Yol mo sprul sku Bstan ’dzin nor bu. Tibetan sources disagree about the names and dates of the Gtsang sde srid line. Templeman (2008: 71) suggests the following:

1. Zhing zhag pa (Kar ma) tshe brtan rdo rje (1510?–1599),
2. Kun spang drung (d. 1605/6),
3. Karma Bstan srung (d. 1609/11),
4. Mthu stobs nram rgyal (d. 1610),
5. Phun tshogs nram rgyal (1550–1620, ruled 1611–1620),
6. Karma Bstan skyong dbang po (1606–1642, ruled 1632–1642).

Gregory Schopen, and Michael Walsh, among others, they have received less attention by those working on Tibetan and Himalayan traditions.<sup>7</sup>

Brook, in particular, has noted that, “Institutions – the customs, usages, practices, and organizations that shape the lives of Buddhists – are what provide and perpetuate the very possibility of Buddhist life, furnishing the rituals, gestures, stories, and training through which people have access to an understanding of the Buddha.”<sup>8</sup> Institutions provide all these things. But institutions like Phun tshogs gling are likewise constituted by them – that is, by the “rituals, gestures, stories, and training” that take place within them. In Tāranātha’s case, it was the figure of Śākyamuni Buddha that encapsulated his vision of what a Buddhist monastery should be, and through which he fashioned a singular institutional identity.

As context for considering the Jo bo of Jo nang, I first briefly survey the elements of Phun tshogs gling’s Buddha Program and the Tibetan tradition of Jo bo images more generally. I then return to the mythology of Tāranātha’s Jo bo Śākyamuni as an example of how the Buddha Program served to elevate the status of Tāranātha’s monastic seat.

### **Phun tshogs gling’s Buddha Program: Building an Indian Identity Around the Buddha**

Just as the Jo bo Śākyamuni occupied the center of Tāranātha’s monastic seat, India was at the heart of his public persona. Templeman writes that

<sup>7</sup> See Brook 1993, 2005; Clarke 2014; Collcutt 1981; Schopen 1997, 2004, 2005, 2014; Walsh 2010. Georges Dreyfus (2003) surveys the intellectual and social frameworks for Tibetan monasticism, especially the great Dge lugs monastic colleges of Lhasa and their reconstituted institutions in exile. Humphrey and Ujeed (2013) present an ethnographic account of a single monastery in Inner Mongolia spanning some three centuries. Paul Nietupski’s 2011 study of Labrang Monastery in Amdo and Brenton Sullivan’s 2013 thesis on Gönlung Jampa Ling are illustrative of further site-specific work that is required among specialists of the Tibetan region. Several recent PhD theses address the role of monastic law and social regulation in the formulation of Tibetan Buddhist institutional identity: Jansen 2015a, Venturi 2013. On the literary genre of monastic constitutions (*bca’ yig*) see Cabezón 1997; Ellingson 1990; Jansen 2015b, 2017. José Cabezón is currently conducting a large-scale study of Lhasa’s Sera Monastery. See <http://www.thlib.org/places/monasteries/sera/>. On contemporary Tibetan monasticism, see Caple 2011 and Mills 2000, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Brook 2005: 145.

Tāranātha “considered himself to be an Indian, somehow caught in the ‘wrong’ body.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, much of his life was inflected by a fascination, if not a preoccupation, with all things Indian. He identified his former lives in India. He avidly read Indian epic literature (the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*) with Indian *paṇḍits* and accumulated Indian-language texts. He repeatedly claimed to have performed tantric rituals according to the “Indian tradition” (*rgya gar lugs*).<sup>10</sup> In his autobiography, Tāranātha goes so far as to equate himself with his contemporary Jahangir, the emperor of Mughal India.<sup>11</sup> This process of ‘collecting India,’ was, in Templeman’s words, an attempt at “cornering the market in Indian knowledge.”<sup>12</sup> To that end, Phun tshogs gling became a destination for dozens of Indian teachers and scholars. These included Buddhaguptanātha, a direct disciple of Śāntiguṇa, the so-called last great Indian Buddhist adept who would become one of Tāranātha’s principal teachers.<sup>13</sup> Tāranātha’s involvement with Indian virtuosi “marked [him] as a special person from his earliest days, and gave him a sense of exotic Indian *gravitas* which many other of his contemporaries were unable to match.”<sup>14</sup> Tāranātha’s religious authority was thus founded, at least in part, on his resurrection, preservation, and transmission of a distinctly Indian ‘brand’ of Buddhism.

Tāranātha’s valorization of Indian civilization was an intentional and self-conscious posture. This attitude was also predicated, at least in part, upon the domestication of Indian literary and cultural traditions that took place over the course of many centuries.<sup>15</sup> Tibet’s engagement with the sphere of Indian civilization began during the imperial period in the seventh to mid-ninth centuries, and traditional narratives valorize the role of India and South Asia in the transmission of Buddhism on the plateau. Among the most famous events of this period is the so-called Bsam yas

<sup>9</sup> Templeman 2008: 285.

<sup>10</sup> Templeman 2008: 240ff.

<sup>11</sup> Templeman 2008: 316–7.

<sup>12</sup> Templeman 2008: 13.

<sup>13</sup> On the life and activities of Buddhaguptanātha see Templeman 1997, Tucci 1931, Zongtse 1993. Tāranātha’s biography of Buddhaguptanātha, upon which these studies were made, is recorded in Tāranātha *Grub chen*.

<sup>14</sup> Templeman 2008: 211.

<sup>15</sup> For surveys of this process see Kapstein 2003, Roesler 2002.

Debate, during which the Tibetan court purportedly championed Kamalaśīla's Indian 'gradualist' approach to mental cultivation over the view of 'sudden enlightenment' supported by the Chinese monk Moheyan.<sup>16</sup> Although scholars now question the historicity of such a debate, the early Tibetan kings indeed sponsored and directed the first systematic translations of Sanskrit Buddhist texts. Such activities are attested by the early royal catalogues of the *Ldan dkar ma* and *'Phang thang ma*, and the ninth-century *Mahāvīyutpatti* and its commentary, the *Two-Volume Treatise on Word Formations* (*Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*), that include discussions of translation theory and lists of Tibetan equivalents for technical Sanskrit Buddhist terms.<sup>17</sup>

Tāranātha's reading of Indian literary classics in the seventeenth century echoes a Central Asian interest in such narratives extending back perhaps to the eighth century, illustrated by manuscript fragments that constitute the so-called Old Tibetan *Rāmāyaṇa* preserved at Dunhuang. These materials have been described as a strikingly early example of an "Indian story...told in Tibetan prose."<sup>18</sup> Several centuries later, at the outset of the period known as the latter dissemination of the *dharma* (*phyi dar*), Tibetan authors took a renewed interest in rendering Indian literary materials, structures, and themes. In addition to the vast corpus of Sanskrit Buddhist works, they translated narratives from sources such as the *Pañcatantra*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and *Mahābhārata*, adapted them to local cultural settings, and expanded them to fit specific literary needs.<sup>19</sup> Great

<sup>16</sup> Scholarship on the debate at Bsam yas, also known as the Council of Lhasa and the Council of Tibet, is extensive. See, for example, Bretfeld 2004, Demiéville 1952, Faber 1986, Imaeda 1975, van der Kuijp 1984, Tucci 1958, and Ruegg 1992. On the debate's philosophical context, see Gómez 1983a, 1983b, 1987; and Ruegg 1989. See also the five conference papers from the XVIIth IABS Congress published as "The Bsam yas Debate: Challenges and Responses" in *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 39 (2016).

<sup>17</sup> On the *Ldan dkar ma*, see Hermann-Pfandt 2002, 2008; Lalou 1953. On the *'Phang thang ma*, see Dotson 2007, Halkias 2004. For a study and critical edition of the *Mahāvīyutpatti*, see Ishihama and Fukuda 1989. On the *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*, see Ishikawa 1990, Simonsson 1957. See also Panglung 1994; Scherrer-Schaub 1999, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Kapstein 2003: 761. For a translation and study of The Old Tibetan *Rāmāyaṇa*, see de Jong 1989. See also Roesler 2016.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Roesler 2002, which surveys relevant works of Po to ba Rin chen gsal (1027/31–1105) and Mar ston Chos kyi rgyal po (13<sup>th</sup> century).



systematizers such as Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) later reformulated monastic curricula based on elite Indian models of scholasticism.<sup>20</sup>

This centuries-long process resulted in an increasingly domesticated and internalized vision of India in which the subcontinent transformed from “an exotic but remote land to an exotic land in which Tibetans found their own imaginal universe,” and then culminated in a broad range of cultural traditions through which Tibetan authors “found India within themselves.”<sup>21</sup> By the seventeenth century, articulations of Indian civilization in the form of fully internalized spheres of activity would serve Tāranātha as a touchstone for the development of his own institutional traditions and his relationships with patrons and political leaders.

The early 1600s witnessed a period of heightened unrest in central and western Tibet. The emergence of the Gtsang rulers as a dominant power in Tibet coincided with “a marked intensification of sectarian strife” through which they “sought systematically to reduce Dge lugs pa resources and influences, forcing the conversion or closure of Dge lugs pa monasteries and seizing their properties.”<sup>22</sup> Gtsang pa strongholds would likewise come under threat of assault from an emergent Dge lugs hegemony in Lhasa under the leadership of the Fifth Dalai Lama. This conflict had the sheen of religious sectarianism. Dge lugs pa orthodoxy considered a core religious view espoused by Tāranātha and his predecessor Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361) – the philosophical tenet known as “extrinsic emptiness” (*gzhan stong*) – to be heretical.<sup>23</sup> By the middle part of the century the Fifth Dalai Lama would forcibly convert Phun tshogs gling to the Dge lugs sect and lock up the wood blocks for Tāranātha’s collected works under state seal. As is often the case, however, sectarian discord served as a convenient excuse for pursuing an underlying political conflict, and Phun tshogs gling’s conversion would coincide with the demise of the Gtsang kings and the ascendancy of the central Tibetan state.

<sup>20</sup> Such activity is exemplified by Sa paṇ’s *Mkhas pa ‘jug pa’i sgo*. For translations and critical evaluations of this work, see Gold 2007, Jackson 1987.

<sup>21</sup> Kapstein 2003: 775.

<sup>22</sup> Kapstein 2006: 134–5.

<sup>23</sup> On the *gzhan stong* tradition, see Hopkins 2006 and 2007, Sheehy 2007, and Stearns 2010.

During the period of Phun tshogs gling's founding in the first decades of the seventeenth century, Templeman reminds us, "it was becoming increasingly important for a monastery and its leaders to have a certain *cachet*, something which would clearly distinguish them from every other master and which would thereby add a sense of enhanced power and therefore safety, to the monastery... Tāranātha supplied this in a clear and unambiguous manner."<sup>24</sup> The prestige associated with Tāranātha's Indian-ness lent him support in the contested claim on his own lineage as a reincarnate master.<sup>25</sup> Tāranātha and his Jo nang tradition also had to compete with the Karma Bka' bgyud tradition for patronage from the Gtsang rulers. The Karma Bka' bgyud had for centuries garnered support and veneration from secular rulers and aristocratic families (including the rulers of Gtsang) due to the high status of the Karma pa, a figure often described as Tibet's first incarnation lineage. Gtsang sde srid Phun tshogs rnam rgyal himself received from the Tenth Karma pa Chos dbyings rdo rje (1604–1674) the title "Master of the Regions of Dbus and Gtsang."<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the Gtsang rulers felt a distinct threat from their Dge lugs rivals in Lhasa, who were growing increasingly antagonistic. They were thus eventually moved to support "Gtsang's declining monasteries, over which the hurricane of war had passed, or which were sinking into squalor and poverty."<sup>27</sup> Their construction and renovation projects at Phun tshogs gling, as well as Snar thang, Bsam sdings, and Thar pa illustrate such concerns.<sup>28</sup>

In the eyes of his Gtsang patrons, Tāranātha rose above the field on the basis of a carefully constructed persona, one established through a distinctly Indian genealogy and then projected onto his new religious seat. There are clear indications that such Indocentrism influenced the renovation and expansion of the Phun tshogs gling complex. Construction began in 1615 as a collaborative effort between Tāranātha and Gtsang sde srid Phun tshogs rnam rgyal, with the latter covering much of the expense. As set forth in the *Descriptive Guide to Dga' ldan Phun*

<sup>24</sup> Templeman 2008: 241.

<sup>25</sup> See Templeman 2008: chapter 6.

<sup>26</sup> Templeman 2008: 68.

<sup>27</sup> Tucci 1949: 62.

<sup>28</sup> Tucci 1949: 62.

*tshogs gling* (*Dga' ldan phun tshogs gling gi gnas bshad*), the site would eventually form a constellation of chapels and out-buildings surrounding a large assembly hall at the center.<sup>29</sup> Several of the temples explicitly reflect Tāranātha's interest in India, most notably the "Indian Temple" (*Rgya gar lha khang*) in the central building and the "Saurashtra Temple" (*Soo raṣṭi'i lha khang*) within the ramparts of the fortress above the monastery proper.<sup>30</sup> The names of two other prominent structures located high above the monastery further reveal Tāranātha's dual concerns for India in the south and Lhasa to the east. First, Tāranātha referred to his grand fortress-like temple and residence as 'Bras spungs, a name that not only invokes the Dhanyakāṭaka Stūpa in Amarāvati in southern India where the Buddha is said to have first taught the *Kālacakra Tantra* (one of Tāranātha's specialties), but also mirrors the great Dge lugs monastic center of Lhasa founded two centuries earlier. Tāranātha also gave the name Potala to a grand chapel that stood as an outpost along the high rampart.<sup>31</sup> Mount Potalaka is, of course, the mythical Indian abode of Avalokiteśvara, who is represented in the form of Khasarpaṇi in the temple's main shrine. It is also the name for what would become, in a few decade's time, the winter residence of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, the seat of Tibet's government known as the *Dga' ldan pho brang* (named after the Dalai Lama's 'palace' at 'Bras spungs monastery), and Lhasa's most prominent landmark. Tāranātha's ambitions in establishing his new monastery, as a bulwark against a principal antagonist of his Gtsang patrons, were neither tentative nor opaque.

The Buddha Program, with its emphasis on Śākyamuni as the "Indian Buddha," fit well into this general scheme of creating an Indian oasis in

<sup>29</sup> Tāranātha, *Gnas bshad*, 176–192. A list of the secondary temples is recorded in Zongtse 1977: 35–36. The *Dga' ldan phun tshogs gling gi gnas bshad* appears in Tāranātha's collected works although its authorship is unclear. The text provides laudatory verses of Phun tshogs gling's qualities (160–4), a history of the monastery's founding (164–7), a catalogue of the central building's religious objects and artwork (167–72), and a survey of the surrounding chapels and structures (176–92).

<sup>30</sup> The *Rgya gar lha khang* is described briefly in the *Gnas bshad*, 176.8, although Zongtse does not seem to mention it. The name of the Saurashtra temple appears at the end of the text (*Gnas bshad*, 192.11), to which Zongtse (1977: 51) adds a brief description.

<sup>31</sup> Zongtse 1977: 51.

the arid highlands of western Tibet. It provided an interior logic to iconography that paralleled the broader architectural setting. In brief, the Buddha Program is an organizing principal emphasizing the figure of Śākyamuni Buddha found throughout a body of Tāranātha's writings, Phun tshogs gling's religious artwork, and the monastic community's ritual practices. It includes Śākyamuni's life story presented in literary and visual narratives, iconography and temple design, poetry, and ritual texts. We find, for example, Tāranātha's extensive literary treatment of the Buddha's final life (*The Sun of Faith, Dad pa'i nyin byed*) mirrored in the extraordinary second-floor murals known as the "Boundless Array" (*bkod pa mtha' yas*). In a detailed painting guide (*bris yig*), Tāranātha sets forth instructions for creating those narrative Buddha life murals.<sup>32</sup> In crafting these narratives, Tāranātha drew mainly from *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* sources, especially the *Samghabhedavastu*, claiming that they presented a clearer picture of who the Buddha was, where he went, and what he did.<sup>33</sup> A smaller tableau of the Buddha's life again appears in the third-floor Akaniṣṭha Chapel ('Og min lha khang). The iconography of Phun tshogs gling's grand assembly hall, located on the first floor, thematically focuses on Śākyamuni in a striking and unusual way: the room's four walls exhibit forty massive figures of the Buddha teaching scriptures associated with the Jo nang lineage.<sup>34</sup> Tāranātha also composed verses in praise of the Buddha, a treatise on the Buddha's iconometry, *guruyoga* instructions focused on the Buddha, and a series of meditation *sādhanas* devoted to different representations of Śākyamuni.<sup>35</sup>

Tāranātha does not explicitly refer to the existence of a Buddha Program at Phun tshogs gling, so evidence remains circumstantial. The combined intellectual, literary, and artistic attention Tāranātha pays to Śākyamuni nevertheless suggests a broad framework for valorizing the role of

<sup>32</sup> Tāranātha, *Dad pa'i nyin byed* and *Bris yig*. For a discussion of these literary and visual narratives, see Quintman and Schaeffer 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Tāranātha, *Dad pa'i nyin byed*, 477. Cf. Quintman and Schaeffer 2016: 36–8.

<sup>34</sup> These include the so-called "twenty sūtras of definitive meaning" (*nges don gyi mdo nyi shu*) as determined by Dol po pa. See Quintman and Schaeffer 2016: 61–5. For a Chinese language review of these murals see Yan 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Tāranātha, *Bcom ldan 'das*; *Rgyal ba'i sku gzugs*; *Sangs rgyas rjes dran*; *Yi dam rgya mtsho*, 29:79–126.

the Buddha and for effectively bringing him to life. We find such a valorization at work in Phun tshogs gling’s inner sanctum (*dri gtsang khang*), the very heart of the monastery’s ritual space. Records show that the principal icons of this hall, and thus of the larger institution, were statues (now destroyed) of the seven Tathāgatas (*de bzhin gshegs pa bdun*) representing seven buddhas of past and present ages. At their center sat a massive Śākyamuni Buddha statute constructed from large quantities of copper and gold<sup>36</sup> (figure 3). Tāranātha himself notes the Indian precedent for an iconographic grouping of the seven Tathāgatas even as it remained relatively uncommon in Tibet.<sup>37</sup> And in the midst of these figures, representing teachers from the distant past up to our current age – at the Buddha Program’s very center – stood a singular representation of Śākyamuni called *Phyogs las rnam rgyal*, “All Victorious,” a Jo bo image of miraculous origins. It is to the tradition of such statues that we now turn.

### Jo bo Statues as “Lords” of the Temple

Identified by the title Jo bo, Tāranātha’s central icon exemplifies a class of miraculous images found across Tibet.<sup>38</sup> The Tibetan word *jo bo* can be translated as “master,” “lord,” or “the Lord” and often serves as an epithet for historically or locally important religious statues depicting Buddha Śākyamuni. The relevant gloss in the *Great Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary* defines *jo bo* as “a statue of a *tathāgata* adorned with the ornaments of an enjoyment body (*sambhogakāya*).”<sup>39</sup> Jo bo images are thus typically depicted in iconographic forms associated with *sambhogakāya* figures, wearing elaborate robes, headdress, jewelry, and other forms of ornamentation. The title can also imply a statue’s direct

<sup>36</sup> Tāranātha, *Gnas bshad*, 170.

<sup>37</sup> Tāranātha, *Gnas bshad*, 169; Robert Linrothe, personal communication, March 31, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Recent work on the Jo bo tradition in Tibet includes the early discussion by Walsh 1938, which has now been superseded by Blondeau 1995; Sørensen 1994; Sørensen et al. 2007; Warner 2008, 2011a, and 2011b. For an art historical analysis of the Lhasa Jo bo Śākyamuni, see von Schroeder 2001: 926–9.

<sup>39</sup> *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, s.v. “jo bo.”

connection to Srong btsan sgam po and his court during the formative period of the Tibetan empire, thus creating a locus of authenticity and legitimation.<sup>40</sup> The tradition of designating images with the title Jo bo became widespread in Tibet and other Tibetan Buddhist cultural zones. Warner includes a list of ninety-nine such statues and objects, although Tāranātha's Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal is not counted among them.<sup>41</sup>

The model for such icons in Tibet is the image ubiquitously referred to as the Jo bo Śākyamuni, believed to serve as a living proxy for the historical Buddha and thus revered as one of the region's most sacred images. The Jo bo Śākyamuni sits in the *sanctum sanctorum* of Lhasa's principal temple known to Tibetans as the 'Phrul snang gtsug lag khang and is a, if not *the*, principal focus of Buddhist pilgrimage activity across the Himalayan region. The temple complex is now usually referred to as the Jo khang or "house of the Jo [bo Śākyamuni]." This name thus defines one of Tibet's oldest and most important religious sites through the presence of one exceptional statue.

It is difficult to overstate the Jo bo Śākyamuni's stature within Tibetan religious culture. The statue served as a primary lens through which Tibetan scholars understood and narrated the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet and the history of its spread throughout the region. The image is revered as an object of great potency; recent studies have described it as the "national palladium of Tibet," emphasizing its apotropaic powers.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Tibetan religious histories record extensive narratives about the icon's divine origin and various miraculous powers. In many respects, the Jo bo Śākyamuni resembles a broader class of statues believed to originate during the time of the Buddha. Such objects are sometimes referred to as Udayana Buddha images, referring to the Indian royal sponsor of a portrait purportedly made during the Buddha's lifetime. This tradition remains prevalent in East Asia, perhaps most prominently at Seriyōji Temple in Japan.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Warner 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Warner 2008: 329–343: Appendix One "Statues Named Jowo and Jowo Śākyamuni Simulacra."

<sup>42</sup> Sørensen 1994: 65, n. 101; Warner 2008: 190ff.; 2011a, 3.

<sup>43</sup> For a general overview of the tradition of the so-called 'Udayana statues' see Carter 1990; Adaval 1970. For accounts of the first Buddha images from Pāli canonical sources

The phenomenon of Buddha statues serving as national palladia more broadly is well attested across Asia, where such images often bear direct links to royal courts and the legitimation of their rule. This was indeed the case for the Jo bo Śākyamuni, as it was for Tāranātha's own icon in the centuries that followed. Examples can also be found in the so-called Emerald Buddha (Phra Kaew Morakot) and Sinhala Buddha (Phra Phuttha Sihing) in Thailand, which maintain direct ties to the royal family and are believed to influence the wellbeing of the nation.<sup>44</sup> Another prominent example may be seen in the four Ārya “brother” statues (*'phags pa mched bzhi*) of Avalokiteśvara said to have spontaneously appeared from the trunk of a single sandalwood tree in southern Tibet: Ārya Ukhang (*'Phags pa u khang*), known as white Matsyendranāth, in Kathmandu; Ārya Jamali (*'Phags pa 'ja ma li*), known as red Matsyendranāth, in Patan; Ārya Lokeśvara in the Potala Palace, Lhasa; and Ārya Wati Bzang po (*'Phags pa wa ti bzang po*) in Skyid grong, southern Tibet.<sup>45</sup> These statues create a network of powerful objects spread across the Himalayan region from Lhasa on the Tibetan plateau down to the Kathmandu Valley. The last of the four brothers was enshrined in the Himalayan frontier village of Skyid grong where it became famous as the Skyid grong Jo bo, an “object of devotion traditionally considered only second to the Jo bo of Ra sa 'Phrul snang [i.e., the Jo bo Śākyamuni].”<sup>46</sup>

see Swearer 2004. On the domestication of such images in East Asia, see Henderson and Hurvitz 1956; Sharf 1996, Sharf and Sharf 2001. Warner (2008: 160–98) compares Tibetan Jo bo creation myths with those associated with other “first images of the Buddha.”

<sup>44</sup> See Brown 1998, Lingat 1934, Notton 1933, Reynolds 1978, Swearer 2004, Tambiah 1982.

<sup>45</sup> The Mīnanāth in Patan is sometimes included as a fifth ‘brother.’ Accounts of the brother statues appear in many traditional Tibetan sources, including the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* (1:382–4) and *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (Sørensen 1994: 189–195). Ehrhard 2004 provides the most extensive analysis to date of the 'Phags pa wa ti bzang po; see pp. 57–74 for his discussion of the “brother statue” traditions. On the Red and White Matsyendranāth statues, see also Locke 1973, 1980; Vergati 1985. Alsop 1990 describes the Ārya Lokeśvara image in the Potala Palace. The Skyid grong Jo bo was smuggled out of Tibet by Tibetan guerilla fighters in the 1960s and currently resides in the Dalai Lama's private chapel at his residence in Dharamsala, India – a testament to the icon's continued significance.

<sup>46</sup> Vitali 2007: 286.

Such images of the Buddha could afford state and local rulers immediate political legitimacy as well as access to an enduring royal lineage perceived as authentic. Stanley Tambiah observed more than three decades ago that, for Buddhist polities whose leadership was in constant flux, Buddha images helped provide their possessors “with legitimation, and at the same time embodied a genealogy of kingship by serving as the common thread that joined a succession of kings and polities with separate identities.”<sup>47</sup> Such images, Tambiah argues, could prove more effective to would-be rulers of Buddhist societies than even royal kinship or lineage because “the possession of Buddha statues (and relics), rather than kinship, was interpreted as conferring legitimacy and power to kings and rulers,” precisely because such images were “treated as the palladia of their kingdoms and principalities.”<sup>48</sup> As we shall see, Tāranātha was keenly aware of these dynamics as the Jo nang Jo bo passed to Phun tshogs gling Monastery from his royal patron.

Stories about the Lhasa Jo bo Śākyamuni – together with its ‘twin’ known as the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje, discussed later in this essay – appear in several early Tibetan literary sources. These religious texts describe the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet and the establishment of its first monasteries, and were instrumental in the formation and maturation of the cult of religious kings. By at least the eleventh century, the statue had become a central character in the master narrative of Buddhism’s arrival in Tibet. Descriptions of the Jo bo Śākyamuni first appear in the *Testimony of Ba/Wa* (*Sba bzhed/Dbā’ bzhed*), one of our earliest indigenous sources for the Tibetan imperial period reputedly written by a member of Khri Srong lde brtsan’s (r. 755–c. 800) court but perhaps dating to the ninth or tenth century.<sup>49</sup> The *Pillar Testament* (*Bka’ chems ka khol ma*), attributed to Srong btsan sgam po but dating perhaps to the late eleventh century, contains the earliest description of the Jo bo Śākyamuni’s construction by a divine artisan.<sup>50</sup> This story was later repeated

<sup>47</sup> Tambiah 1982: 19.

<sup>48</sup> Tambiah 1982: 5.

<sup>49</sup> See Wangdu et al. 2000. For a discussion of the earliest known fragments of this source see van Schaik and Iwao 2008.

<sup>50</sup> Many redactions and editions of this text exist. See, for example, *Bka’ chems ka khol ma*, 27ff. See also Warner 2011b: 4.



and expanded in numerous other sources including *The Collected Teachings on the Maṇi [Mantra] (Maṇi bka' 'bum)* and *The Dharma History 'Distilled Sweet Essence of Flowers' (Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud)*, a late-twelfth-century religious history by the acclaimed treasure revealer Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192). These sources and others contain a variety of different and occasionally conflicting accounts.<sup>51</sup>

One of the most elaborate accounts appears in the extensive fourteenth-century history of Tibet's imperial period *Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies (Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long)*, which describes the Jo bo Śākyamuni's creation in the following way.<sup>52</sup> While the Buddha is away in heaven teaching his mother, his patron King Prasenajit wishes to see the face of his teacher. He sends the artisan Viśvakarman to heaven to create a lifelike sculpture after the Buddha's own image. This resulted in two statues: the Jo khang Jo bo Śākyamuni and the Ra mo che Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje. Tibetan sources describe the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje and Jo bo Śākyamuni as a natural pair of representations, sometimes called "the two brother Jo bos (*jo bo mched gnyis*)," the former as an eight-year-old boy and the latter at twelve years old. The two images were then brought to Tibet in the seventh century, the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje carried by the Nepalese princess known as Bhṛkuṭī (Khri btsun) and the Jo bo Śākyamuni by the Chinese princess Wencheng Gongzhu. While Bhṛkuṭī's statue was originally housed in the 'Phrul snang gtsug lag khang/Jo khang and Wencheng's in the Ra mo che, the images were later switched. Thus according to Tibetan tradition, the two brother Jo bos have occupied their current resting places since the latter days of the Tibetan empire.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, 1: 40–120. Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, *Chos 'byung me snying*, 268ff. On the authorship of the latter work see Hirshberg 2016: chapter 4, and van der Kuijp 2016: 246, n. 114. Sources for the legends and early history of the Jo bo Śākyamuni are reviewed in Sørensen 1994 and Warner 2008: Appendix Two.

<sup>52</sup> Chapter Two of this work presents in detail the creation of the Jo bo Śākyamuni and its travel to China, together with accounts of other important images, through three inter-related stories: what Sørensen calls the Trikāya Legend, the Mahābodhi Legend, and the India-China Legend. See Sørensen 1994: 59–73.

<sup>53</sup> The intertextual histories, and indeed the historicity, of these complex narratives have been contested both in traditional Tibetan writings and in contemporary scholarship.

### The Jo nang Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal “Lord All Victorious”

If figures of Śākyamuni Buddha abound in the iconographical program of Phun tshogs gling, the Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal serves as the monastery’s principal and most sacred relic. It resides within the monastery’s primary ritual space – the inner sanctum (*dri gtsang khang*), to the west of the main assembly hall. The chapel is ringed with murals of tantric deities that span several stories. The room was, however, dominated by a series of statues representing the seven Tathāgatas made by Nepalese craftsmen in 1618–19, which included a grand Śākyamuni at the center, some 23 hand-spans high.<sup>54</sup> The Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal currently sits at the center of the hall, encased within a wooden case framed with glass (figure 4).

We find confirmation of the statue’s high status and acclaim in accounts of pilgrims and dignitaries who visited Phun tshogs gling. In 1817 Chos kyi dbang phyug (1775–1836), abbot and *sprul sku* of Brag dkar rta so Monastery in southern Tibet, made the Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal a primary object of veneration.<sup>55</sup> A century later, following his visit to Phun tshogs gling in 1919, Kaḥ tog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho (1880–1925) described the chamber this way: “It is a twelve-pillar inner sanctum with a life-size [image of Śākyamuni called] Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal made of metal alloy. Like the [Ra mo che Jo bo] Mi bskyod rdo rje, it lacks a crown. It is said to have belonged to the Gtsang pa Sde srid.”<sup>56</sup> The comparison to the Jo bo image of the Ra mo che Temple in Lhasa is notable here, as it figures in Tāranātha’s own description of the statue (discussed below), from which Chos kyi rgya mtsho may have drawn his remarks. During the first half of the twentieth century, the pioneering Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci was perhaps the first non-Tibetan to describe the image, although not by name, in his *Tibetan Painted*

For a current bibliography of research extant in Tibetan and European languages, see Warner 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Tāranātha, *Gnas bshad*, 173–4.

<sup>55</sup> Chos kyi dbang phyug, *Chos kyi dbang phyug gi rang rnam*, 375–6.

<sup>56</sup> Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *Dbus gtsang gnas skor lam yig*, 469. *Gtsang khang ka ba bcu gnyis / jo bo phyogs las rnam rgyal li ma mi tshad / mi bskyod rdo rje ltar dbu rgyan med / gtsang pa sde srid kyi yin par grags /*

*Scrolls*. Based on his visit to Phun tshogs gling in 1939, he writes, “the central deity is a Jo bo of gilded bronze, of a good Nepalese make.”<sup>57</sup>

In Tāranātha’s rendering, the Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal has an illustrious provenance, extending back to the time of the Buddha and his disciples, and passing through great institutions of the Tibetan empire, before arriving at his own monastery. Tāranātha’s *Descriptive Guide* to Phun tshogs gling gives the following account, translated in full in the appendix.<sup>58</sup> Some one hundred years after Mahākāśyapa’s regency following the death of the Buddha in India, eight temples were established to commemorate the Buddha’s eight great acts (*aṣṭamahāprātihārya*). Within each of these temples, divine craftsmen miraculously fashioned a statue of Śākyamuni performing one of these acts. The Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal was the statue produced in the temple commemorating the miracle of the Buddha taming the wild elephant Dhanapāla (or Nalagiri), thereby foiling one of Devadatta’s assassination plots. The statue eventually made its way to Tibet and the palace of Srong btsan sgam po, where it served as the ruler’s personal meditation image. During the subsequent reign of Khri Srong lde btsan the statue was moved to the Bad rnam Temple of Bsam yas Monastery, where it remained for many centuries. The statue is said to have been lost in a flood; some believed it was spirited away to another realm by *nāgas*. It later turned up unharmed and was eventually moved to Sne’u gdong Palace, the seat of the Phag mo gru family that ruled Tibet during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Finally, in 1621, at the bequest of Tāranātha’s patron the Gtsang sde srid Karma Bstan skyong dbang po, the image was brought to Phun tshogs gling, where it was installed as the central icon within great assembly hall’s inner sanctuary.

The statue currently stands beneath a finely wrought aureole, said to have been crafted by Tāranātha himself. It is lavishly gilt, adorned with jewelry, and encrusted with jewels, including a five-petal crown, earrings, and an ornate breastplate necklace. Brocade robes currently cover

<sup>57</sup> Tucci 1947: 197.

<sup>58</sup> Tāranātha *Gnas bshad*, 388ff./172ff. Cf. Zongtse 1977: 36ff. Tāranātha provides a similar account in his autobiography. See *Rang rnam*, 89–90. This passage is also noted in von Schroeder 2001: 707–8.

the entire body, making it impossible to discern its formal composition or posture. The statue thus awaits further analysis.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the statue is still regarded as Phun tshogs gling's principal relic, a status underscored by the reproduction of its origin story posted on the shrine nearby (figure 5).

If the Jo bo Phyogs las nram rgyal's treatment with crown and jewels brings to mind the great Jo bo statues of Lhasa, so too does Tāranātha's brief account of its history. Tāranātha claims the image was produced not during the Buddha's lifetime but nearly a century after his death. Nevertheless, like the Lhasa Jo bos, it is said to have been crafted in India near the seat of the Buddha's enlightenment by the hands of a divine artisan. And like the Lhasa Jo bos it then traveled to Tibet where it maintained close associations with rulers of the imperial court, including Srong btsan sgam po, before arriving at Jo nang Phun tshogs gling.

In his contemporary history of Phun tshogs gling Monastery, Champa Thupten Zongtse records an identical account of the Jo nang Jo bo's pedigree with one important addition: the statue first passes through the palace of the rulers at Bsam grub rtse.<sup>60</sup> This piece of information is important since it affirms that it was Tāranātha's patron Karma Bstan skyong dbang po who installed the statue in Phun tshogs gling. We find a parallel to this activity when, several years earlier in 1619, Karma Bstan skyong's predecessor Phun tshogs nram rgyal presented Tāranātha with three religious supports (a buddha statue, a religious text, and a *stūpa*), objects that had been captured from the personal shrine belonging the ruler of the neighboring enclave at Snar thang, whom the Gtsang sde srid had defeated in 1617.<sup>61</sup>

A similar fate may have fallen upon the Jo bo Phyogs las nram rgyal. In 1620, during a campaign through the Yar lung Valley, Phun tshogs

<sup>59</sup> Kaḥ thog Si tu's note from a century ago that the Jo bo Phyogs las nram rgyal lacked a crown is of interest since such ornamentation is clearly visible today. It is possible the image had fallen into disrepair at the time of his visit. It is also possible that a crown was added as part of restorations made following the Cultural Revolution. Local oral histories will likely clarify the matter.

<sup>60</sup> Zongtse 1977: 36. Bsam grub rtse was the old name for the town of Shigatse and its fortified palace served as a strategically-located political seat first for the Rin spungs ruling family, and later the Gtsang sde srid.

<sup>61</sup> Zongtse 1977: 351.

rnam rgyal marshaled his troops to surround and eventually seize the Palace of Sne'u gdong.<sup>62</sup> This suggests that Phun tshogs rnam rgyal may have claimed the Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal as a kind of 'spoils of war,' at which point it was moved to Bsam grub rtse and then finally Phun tshogs gling. Tāranātha claims in his autobiography that Phun tshogs rnam rgyal had indeed intended to offer the statue to Phun tshogs gling and had gone so far as to issue an order for the transfer, although it would fall to his son and heir to carry out the command.<sup>63</sup> With a note of wry humor, Tāranātha writes that it is said the statue encountered "some difficulties" during its journey from central Tibet, but from the Gtsang pa palace of Bsam grub rtse to Phun tshogs gling "there was no trouble at all."<sup>64</sup> Sacred images such as the Jo bo could thus serve as a kind of indexical reminder for the conquest of political foes, demonstrating what Templeman has referred to as the "awkward relationship" between patron and patronized, one that "bent religion toward the secular and... which employed [various kinds of] religious justifications."<sup>65</sup> Tāranātha includes an interesting note in his autobiography that seems to exemplify just such a justification. He writes that, while the Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal statue was at Sne'u gdong, some lamas declared they did not want the image because it was Tibetan (and thus not Indian). Tāranātha next advocates for the excellence of Tibetan religious objects, "Both the means of construction and the blessings of statues from the time of the Tibetan Dharma kings are better than those of middling or worse Indian statues." He concludes, however, that the Phyogs las rnam rgyal statue is indeed special because "it came from Vajrāsana," and thus maintains a connection to the seat of the Buddha's enlightenment.<sup>66</sup>

Tāranātha adds one additional comment in the origin story that further elevates the status of "his" Jo bo. He writes: "It seems that, in terms of their likeness, design, or form, there is little difference between the Jo bo

<sup>62</sup> Czaja 2013: 314–5.

<sup>63</sup> Tāranātha, *Rang rnam*, 89.

<sup>64</sup> Tāranātha, *Rang rnam*, 90.

<sup>65</sup> Templeman 2012: 76.

<sup>66</sup> Tāranātha, *Rang rnam*, 90. *Rgya lha 'bring man chad las bod chos rgyal kyi dus kyi rnams bzo sgros dang byin rlabs gnyis kar bzang / 'on kyang 'di rdo rje gdan nas byon par gnang zhing /*

Phyogs las nam rgyal, the Maitreya Dharmacakra in the 'Phrul snang Temple, and the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje in the Ra mo che Temple.”<sup>67</sup> Tāranātha here makes explicit what was merely implied elsewhere in his brief origin story: a correspondence between Phun tshogs gling’s Jo bo and the great icons of Lhasa. The Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje’s pivotal role in the story of Buddhism’s arrival in Tibet has already been mentioned. But why does Tāranātha here refer also to the lesser-known statue called Maitreya Dharmacakra? And why is it paired with the Ra mo che Jo bo?

To answer these questions, we may note that most early accounts link the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje and Maitreya Dharmacakra to the Nepalese princess Bhṛkuṭī, who is said to have carried both images to Tibet as part of her dowry in marriage to Srong btsan sgam po.<sup>68</sup> The scene, here recorded in the *Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies*, is evoked in a verse recited by Bhṛkuṭī’s father, the king of Nepal, as they prepare for the princess’s departure. The king here reassures his daughter that the pair of statues will not only protect her during the journey but will also provide immeasurable benefit for the people of Tibet:

My tutelary deity Mi bskyod rdo rje  
 And the reverend Maitreya Dharmacakra  
 Were created by manifestation-sculptors  
 From a mound of accumulated precious materials of various kinds  
 As a tutelary deity for the Indian Dharmarāja Kṛkin,  
 And were consecrated by Buddha Kāśyapa himself  
 When a human lifespan was twenty thousand years.  
 First the Maitreya Dharmacakra was created.  
 Thereafter Mi bskyod rdo rje was cast,  
 A creation of limitless wonder  
 Ornamented with the major and minor signs of greatness,  
 It is the source of benefits and happiness,  
 A symbol for the faithful  
 Whose qualities on being seen, heard, contemplated, or touched are beyond  
 imagination,  
 An image without comparison in the world,

<sup>67</sup> Tāranātha, *Gnas bshad*, 172–3.

<sup>68</sup> The historicity of a Licchavi princess named Bhṛkuṭī remains the subject of debate among scholars, although Tibetan tradition generally regards her as the daughter of the Licchavi king Aṃśuvarman. See Regmi 1969: 186; Shakya 1997; Slusser 1982: 32–3; Sørensen 1994: 199–200; Vitali 1990: 71–2.

For the accumulation of merit by future sentient beings.  
 It was revealed by prophecy  
 That this was to be the Teacher of gods and humans,  
 King of Śākya, at the age of eight.  
 When these images were made, the world was filled with light,  
 And the gods caused flowers to fall like rain.  
 Although this excellent symbol,  
 Endowed with such qualities,  
 Is as dear to me as my own eyes,  
 I give it to you, my beautiful daughter.  
 This image of the reverend Maitreya Dharmacakra  
 I give to you to lead all beings to virtue.<sup>69</sup>

The king here describes the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje's creation at the hands of a mythical ruler and consecration by the buddha of a previous age. According to some accounts, it is said to have remained in the realm of the *nāgas* for some two thousand years, a detail Tāranātha echoes in the story of his own image.<sup>70</sup> As noted above, the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje first sat in the Lhasa Gtsug lag khang, the temple for which it was constructed, but later moved to the Ra mo che in the late seventh century during the reign of Mang srong mang btsan (c. 626–676). Tibetan historians typically assert this switch took place in order to hide the Jo bo Śākyamuni from an invading Chinese army.<sup>71</sup> Its surroundings in the Ra mo che Temple are more modest than those of the Jo bo Śākyamuni, but the statue remains an important focus of contemporary Buddhist practice in Lhasa.<sup>72</sup>

Although not as illustrious as the Lhasa Jo bos, the Maitreya Dharmacakra statue likewise held a place of considerable importance in Tibetan religious life. The name refers to an image of the future buddha Maitreya seated with his hands in the *dharmacakramudrā*, the gesture of “turning the wheel of dharma.” It has been described as “the most

<sup>69</sup> Translation after Bsod nams rgyal mtshan et al. 1996: 125–6. Cf. Sørensen 1994: 207–8.

<sup>70</sup> *Bka' chems ka khol ma*, 30. See Warner 2011b: 14. According to another redaction of the same text, the Jo bo Śākyamuni likewise resided in the *nāga* realm for five hundred years.

<sup>71</sup> See for, example, Sørensen 1994: 347.

<sup>72</sup> For a description of the Ra mo che Temple and its Jo bo image in the 1980s, see the account by Ri 'bur Sprul sku (1923–2006) translated in Gonkatsang and Willis 2009.

famous Maitreya statue in Tibetan Buddhist histories,” an image that “seems to have been revered in equal measure with [Bhṛikuṭī’s] statue of [Jo bo Mikyo Dorje] Akṣobhya...”<sup>73</sup>

Echoing the verses of Bhṛikuṭī’s father, the Fifth Dalai Lama provides the following account of the statue’s origins in his *Crystal Mirror Inventory of the Miraculous Temple at Lhasa*:

Inside the chapel is the statue of Buddha Maitreya made in red bronze, which was commissioned by (the ancient Indian) king Kṛkin (Kri kri) at a time when the human lifespan was 20,000 years. It was consecrated by Buddha Kāśyapa, and was the object of the Nepalese king’s devotions at the time when Bhrikuti became the queen of the (Tibetan) Dharmaraja, and came (to Tibet) as part of the marriage agreement. This amazing image, one of the ‘deities emanating light’ actually got down to walk through the gorge on the road (from Nepal to Tibet).<sup>74</sup>

Shakabpa’s modern *Inventory to the Great Chapel* fills in the story further:

... the princess Bhṛikuṭīdevī is said to have reached Lhasa during that period (circa 632–34), bringing a dowry of precious jewels and sacred images. Foremost among these were: the statue of Jo bo Akṣobhyavajra (*jo bo mi bskyod rdo rje*), depicting the buddha the size of an eight-year-old, which is revered for having been consecrated by Śākyamuni Buddha himself; the statue of Maitreya in the Gesture of Teaching the Dharma (*byams pa chos ’khor*), which had been consecrated by Buddha Kāśyapa...<sup>75</sup>

Other early sources provide evocative details of the journey both statues undertook from Nepal to Tibet. *The Distilled Sweet Essence of Flowers* describes the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje and Maitreya Dharmacakra riding side by side atop an elephant up to the Tibetan border region of Mang yul.<sup>76</sup> *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* gives an even more colorful account: officials realized that transportation by chariot would be impossible through the steep Himalayan terrain, yet no ordinary beasts

<sup>73</sup> Alexander and van Schaik 2011.

<sup>74</sup> Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Shel dkar me long*, 20ff. Translation after Akester 2005.

<sup>75</sup> Zhwa sgab ba, *Catalogue and Guide to the Central Temple of Lhasa*. Translation after Dorje et al. 2010: 49.

<sup>76</sup> Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer, *Chos ’byung me snying*, 205.



of burden were able to carry the statues. Suddenly, two female cross-bred yaks (*mdzo mo*) miraculously appeared, one each to support the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje and the Maitreya Dharmacakra. When the trail became too rugged even for animals, the statues are said to have stood up and walked part of the way on their own.<sup>77</sup>

The Maitreya Dharmacakra was eventually enshrined inside the Lhasa Gtsug lag khang, within a chapel directly adjacent to the Jo bo Śākyamuni's inner sanctum.<sup>78</sup> Shakabpa provides a description of the statue *in situ*:

Next to the platform there is the west-facing Chapel of Maitreya in the Gesture of Teaching the Sacred Doctrine (*byams pa chos 'khor gtso 'khor*), which has an original seventh century sloping Newar doorframe. It contained a red bronze image of Maitreya in the teaching gesture, with webbed fingers that, according to legend, had been commissioned by King Kṛkin and consecrated by Buddha Kāśyapa.<sup>79</sup>

As illustrated by such records, it is clear that Princess Bhṛkuṭī's Maitreya Dharmacakra, like her Buddha Mi bskyod rdo rje, was considered to be an exceptional religious object. Both images were created and consecrated through divine intervention and both would be housed in preeminent temple complexes of Lhasa associated with Tibet's great imperial past.

With these descriptions in mind, we can return to Tāranātha's comparison of the Jo nang Jo bo to the two images of Lhasa. What first seemed to be a perfunctory statement clearly signals a broader agenda, especially from the pen of an author as wise to the ways of patron relations as Tāranātha. When he writes that there is "little difference" between his Jo bo Phyogs las mnam rgyal, the Maitreya Dharmacakra, and the Ra mo che Mi bskyod rdo rje, he is suggesting a functional equivalence. Phun tshogs gling's central icon – presented by Tāranātha's chief benefactor and enshrined by the lama himself – is no ordinary image. Rather, at a

<sup>77</sup> Sørensen 1994: 207–211.

<sup>78</sup> See Dorje et al. 2010: no. 34.

<sup>79</sup> Zhwa sgab ba, *Catalogue and Guide to the Central Temple of Lhasa*; translated in Dorje et al. 2010: 74. As Shakabpa (Zhwa sgab ba) notes, the current statue is a replica although the aureole may be original.

time of increasing tensions between western and central Tibet, the Buddha of Phun tshogs gling, and thus the monastery itself, could literally stand face to face with the most important religious institutions of central Tibet.

## Conclusion

We have already noted how the Gtsang rulers sought to legitimate their administration by associating themselves with the great rulers of Tibet's imperial period. In part they reimagined the past and their role in it through a kind of "retrospective genealogy."<sup>80</sup> Tāranātha was no doubt aware of this dynamic, just as he was painfully aware of the need for ongoing patronage for the survival of his monastic complex. The Buddha Program in general and the Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal in particular served two of Tāranātha's most pressing aims: expressing his deeply-felt connection with the traditions of India, and creating an institutional identity that would elevate the prestige of his religious seat and thereby raise the prominence of his Gtsang patrons.

In comparing his central icon to the Ra mo che Mi bskyod rdo rje and Maitreya Dharmacakra, Tāranātha clearly echoes traditional accounts of these two Lhasa images: (1) His Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal, like the other statues, claims miraculous origins dating back to a time close to that of the Buddha. (2) His Jo bo was made by the hand of a divine artisan just as the Lhasa Jo bo was made by Viśvakarman. (3) His Jo bo resided in various important religious centers during the period of the Tibetan empire just as the Lhasa Jo bo dwelled in the mythical land of Uḍḍiyāna and the monastic centers of Nālandā, Vikramaśīla, and Odantapurī before departing for China.<sup>81</sup> (4) His Jo bo sits within the inner sanctum of Phun tshogs gling, just as Bhṛkuṭī's Mi bskyod rdo rje once resided within the Lhasa 'Phrul snang Temple and was later moved to the Ra mo che. (5) His Jo bo similarly parallels Bhṛkuṭī's Maitreya statue, one of the most venerated images of its kind that was itself located in a chapel adjacent to the Jo khang's inner sanctum. (6) It is also not incon-

<sup>80</sup> Templeman 2012: 75.

<sup>81</sup> Warner 2008: 156–7.

sequential that both statues originate in South Asia (although Nepal, and not India strictly speaking), through the activities of the Nepalese princess Bhṛkuṭī. This is no doubt an association that Tāranātha would have found meaningful.

These points raise a further question: Given the Jo bo Śākyamuni's immense importance throughout the Tibetan world, why did not Tāranātha liken his image to the resident of the Lhasa Jo khang, natural twin of the Ra mo che Mi bskyod rdo rje and most famous Buddha image in Tibet, and instead mention it only in passing? The answer can be found in the records of rulers who used the figure of the Lhasa Jo bo as a political device, only to end in ruin. In the Tibetan imagination, the Jo bo Śākyamuni is not only an autonomous and animate being, possessing an agency that compassionately supported Buddhism's transmission to Tibet. Tibetans also depict the statue as a protector of Buddhism, capable of violence – even murder – when necessary, directed against those considered to be a threat.<sup>82</sup>

Bon po hostility toward Buddhism is a recurrent theme in the narratives of imperial Tibet. One such account, drawn from the *Testimony of Ba/Wa*, describes a Bon po priest who attempts to oust his Buddhist rivals by removing the Jo bo Śākyamuni from Lhasa and banishing it to India. After a second, and unsuccessful, attempt at eviction, the true power of the Jo bo (referred to as the “Chinese idol”) manifests:

The *zhang blon* (minister) who had persecuted the [Buddhist] doctrine died in this life with endless suffering, and all kinds of misfortunes occurred. According to the...divination omen of superior and inferior [people] which all correspond, the Chinese idol [i.e., the Jo bo] has been angered. Hence, there is a narrow-mindedness harming the body and the authority [of the Tibetan emperor]. The Chinese idol should therefore be retrieved [from Mang yul] and be worshipped.<sup>83</sup>

The *Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* echoes this account. As Bon po leaders prepared to remove the Jo bo Śākyamuni, they found that

<sup>82</sup> See for example Warner 2008: 79ff. In this regard, the Lhasa Jo bo resembles the Emerald Buddha in Thailand, which is said to “wring the necks of those who tell a lie in its presence” (Brown 1998: 37).

<sup>83</sup> Wangdu et al. 2000: 42.

“not even a thousand men were able to move it, wherefore [it eventually got] firmly stuck into the ground... As consequence, some of the ministers who were in opposition to Buddhism died after they were caught [by] insanity, some died by having [their] backs broken and famine, plagues and many ominous omens occurred.”<sup>84</sup> Here we find the Jo bo graphically bringing death and destruction to the enemies of Buddhism, and to those who would harm the statue itself.

Another account, from the Fifth Dalai Lama’s autobiography, reflects similar themes. In 1639, Don yod rdo rje (b. 17<sup>th</sup> century), the King of Be ri in eastern Tibet and a supporter of the Gtsang rulers, dispatched a message to western Tibet in the hopes of forming an alliance with the Gtsang pas against central Tibet. The message said,

...next year I will come to Dbus Gtsang [central and western Tibet] with my own army. Since the copper statue called Jo bo Rin po che [i.e., the Jo bo Śākyamuni] leads the enemy forces [of Gushri Khan], it should be drowned in the river. Se ra, ’Bras spungs and Dga’ ldan [Lhasa’s 3 great monasteries aligned with the Dalai Lama] should be destroyed, and a *stūpa* should be erected in each of these places.<sup>85</sup>

Unfortunately for all involved, the message was intercepted. The Fifth Dalai Lama then notes, “the Gtsang pa king and his ministers were unable to act because the matter concerned the copper image of the Jo bo Śākyamuni.” This led the Dalai Lama to conclude with a powerful condemnation: “it became transparent that this [King of] Be ri was a [deserving] object for the practice of ritual murder (*las sbyor*)...”<sup>86</sup> Two years later in 1641, Gushri Khan defeated the King of Be ri, and the following year (1642) marched against Tāranātha’s patron, the ruler of Gtsang, forcing him to surrender in his palace at Bsam grub rtse.

These events all took place during the years following Tāranātha’s death in 1634. Yet in the end, they show that Tāranātha was indeed prescient in his knowledge of just how potent a symbol a Jo bo statue – and in particular the Lhasa Jo bo – could be. By instead invoking the Maitreya

<sup>84</sup> Sørensen 1994: 363–4.

<sup>85</sup> Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Rang rnam*, Vol. Ka: 98b.4–99a.1. Translation after Tashi Tsering 2010: 144. Cf. Shakabpa 1967: 105–6.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

Dharmacakra and the Ra mo che Mi bskyod rdo rje as reflections of his central icon, Tāranātha could elevate his own image without crossing what may have effectively formed a line in the religious sand of seventeenth-century Tibet. By bringing his image of Śākyamuni – the Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal “All Victorious” – into the service of Phun tshogs gling, it seems Tāranātha was as cautious as he was politically savvy.

## Appendix

### Tāranātha’s description of the Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal according to the *Descriptive Guide* (*Gnas bshad*, 172–3)

Concerning the Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal: some one hundred years after the Teacher’s regent Mahākāśyapa assumed the lion throne, the Mahābodhi Temple of Vajrāsana in India was constructed. At that time, many miraculous statues were made by divine artisans. Although there are many different stories describing the greatness of the Jo bo Śākyamuni of the ’Phrul snang [Temple of Lhasa], it came into being at just that time.<sup>87</sup> In the eight directions from where the Mahābodhi Temple sits were eight temple shrines (*gandhola*). In each of those was a shrine room and a statue depicting one of [Buddha’s] eight acts.<sup>88</sup> These were all

<sup>87</sup> Tāranātha seems to diverge from the more usual Tibetan accounts in which the Jo bo is fashioned by Viśvakarma during the Buddha’s lifetime.

<sup>88</sup> To my knowledge, no evidence for such a constellation of temples, shrines, and images at Bodhgaya has yet appeared. Tāranātha was clearly interested in the religious architecture at the site. His extensive *History of Buddhism in India* (*Rgya gar chos ’byung*) includes a chapter on the history of image makers (*sku gzugs bzheng pa po ji ltar byung ba’i tshul*) in which he writes the following:

For about one hundred years after the Teacher’s *parinirvāṇa*, there were many [skilled artisans] like [those of the past]. But thereafter, there were no longer many of them around. A great number of divine artisans then emanated in human form and created numerous images such as the eight wondrous statues of Magadha, which included Mahābodhi (Byang chub chen po) and Mañjuśrī Dundubhīśvara (’Jam dpal rnga sgra). The *stūpas* at the eight great sacred sites and the inner ambulatory at Vajrāsana were made by Yakṣa artisans during the time of King Aśoka. Nāga artisans also made many images during the time of Nāgārjuna.

(*Ston pa mya ngan las ’das nas kyang lo brgya tsam gyi bar du de ’dra shin tu mang ngo / de nas de ’dra cher med pa na / lha’i bzo ba mang po mir sprul nas byung ste / byang chub chen po dang / ’jam dpal rnga sgra la sogs pa ma ga dhā rten ngo mtshar can*)

made by divine artisans. From among them, the Jo bo Phyogs las nram rgyal is [a depiction of Śākyamuni] taming the elephant Dhanapāla. It seems that, in terms of their likeness, design, or form, there is little difference between the Jo bo Phyogs las nram rgyal, the Maitreya Dharmacakra in the Lhasa 'Phrul snang Temple, and the Jo bo Mi bskyod rdo rje in the Ra mo che Temple. Furthermore, it originally served as the personal religious object (*thugs dam*) of the *dharmarāja* Srong btsan sgam po and resided in his royal palace. Then during the reign of the *dharmarāja* Khri Srong lde btsan it traveled to the region of Bsam yas, where it resided within the Bad rngam Temple. Later, there were terrible flooding problems [at Bsam yas] and the Bad rngam and Hwa shang Temples, among others, sustained water damage. For a while the statue was lost and some wondered if it was taken by *nāgas*. Some years later, it was recovered with no damage whatsoever from the ruins of the temple. Gradually, by way of Sne'u gdong Palace and so forth,<sup>89</sup> it came to this great temple hall in the Iron-Bird year (1621). Afterwards, Lord [Tāranātha] himself made the throne, the back, and other elements. He installed it to benefit beings and the splendour of its blessings filled all of space.

*brgyad la sogs pa mang du bzhengs / rgyal po mya ngan med kyi dus gnas chen po brgyad kyi mchod rten dang / rdo rje gdan gyi nang skor sogs gnod sbyin gyi bzo bos bzhengs / klu sgrub kyi dus klu'i bzo bos bcos pa'ang mang du byung ngo /* Tāranātha, *Rgya gar chos 'byung*, 265. Cf. Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1990: 347.

The *stūpas* Tāranātha described as being in the “inner ambulatory at Vajrāsana” may be what he has in mind in his account of the Jo bo Phyogs las nram rgyal above. In writing this, he was perhaps drawing on an extensive body of Tibetan literature about the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment including travel diaries and pilgrimage guides dating as early as the twelfth century. Given his interest in all things Indian, it is likely that Tāranātha knew this material well. At least one such work is included in the Bstan 'gyur (\**Mahābodhyuddeśa*. *Byang chub chen po mdor bstan pa*. Sde dge Bstan 'gyur, Rgyud, vol. Tshu, ff. 106b.6–110a.6. Ui 1934, no. 3757.) Other early works include accounts by Chag Lo tsā ba Chos rje dpal (1197–1264), Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer and Bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri (1227–1305). On Chag Lo tsā ba's journey to Vajrāsana in 1234, see Roerich 1959. See Schaeffer 2011 for a survey of this literature. Further research is needed to discern which particular sources and traditions Tāranātha may have worked from in this account.

<sup>89</sup> Zongtse (1977: 36) adds “and Bsam grub rtse,” i.e., the palace of Tāranātha’s patron.

jo bo phyogs las rnam rgyal 'di'i dbang du byas na / ston pa'i rgyal tshab 'od srung chen po seng ge'i khri la 'khod pa nas lo brgya tsam na / rgya gar rdo rje gdan gyi byang chub chen po bzhengs / dus de tsam na / lha'i bzo bos bzhengs pa'i sku gzugs 'phrul dang ldan pa mang du byung / 'phrul snang gi jo bo shAkya mu ni la che ba 'byung ba'i gтам rgyud mi 'dra ba du ma yod kyang / dus de skabs ka byon par gda' / dpal byang chub chen po bzhugs pa'i phyogs mtshams brgyad na / gan d+ho la brgyad yod / de dag re re na lha khang re re / mdzad pa brgyad kyi nang nas mdzad pa re re'i sku brnyan bzhugs / de thams cad lha'i bzo bos bzhengs pa yin par gda' / jo bo phyogs las rnam rgyal 'di ni de'i nang nas / glang po che nor skyong btul ba de yin / lha sa 'phrul snang gi byams pa chos kyi 'khor lo dang / ra mo [389] che na bzhugs pa'i jo bo mi bskyod rdo rje dang / phyogs las rnam rgyal 'di gsum zhal bzhin sogs bzo bkod dbyibs khyad par med pa lta bur bzhugs / 'di yang dang po chos kyi rgyal po srong btsan sgam po'i thugs dam gyi rten mdzad / physis pho brang du bzhugs pa yin / de nas chos rgyal khri srong lde btsan gyi ring la / bsam yas kyi phyogs su phebs / bad rngam pa'i lha khang du bzhugs pa las / dus physis chus gnod pa chen po byung ba'i skabs shig bad rngam pa dang hwa shang lha khang sogs mang po zhig la chu skyon byung / sku 'di re zhig ma rnyed / klus spyang drangs pa yin zer pa yang byung ste / physis lo shas lon dus bsha' bud kyi non pa sogs ye med par lha khang gi shul nas rnyed / rim pas pho brang sne'u gdong sogs brgyud nas / lcags mo bya'i lo la gtsug lag khang chen po 'dir phebs pa lags / de rjes khri rgyab la sogs pa rje btsun nyid kyi zhal bkod mdzad nas bzhengs / 'gro ba'i don du mnga' gsol mdzad de/ byin rlabs kyi gzi byin mkha' dbyings gang bar bzhugs pa 'di lags/

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## ABSTRACT

This essay forms part of a larger project to re-foreground the place of Śākyamuni in Tibet by exploring how images and texts related to the Buddha served as a primary organizing principle for the monastery Rtag brtan Phun tshogs gling, religious seat of the great seventeenth-century polymath Tāranātha Kun dga' snying po (1575–1634) and his Jo nang tradition in the Tibetan region of Gtsang. It suggests that Phun tshogs gling's central icon – a Śākyamuni statue of miraculous origin referred to as the Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal, “Lord All Victorious” – not only acted as an object of veneration, but also served Tāranātha more broadly in the promotion and maintenance of his monastery. It did so in several ways. First, as a representation of the Buddha of our present age, the image formed the core of Phun tshogs gling's thematic focus on Śākyamuni, a tradition I refer to as the ‘Buddha Program.’ Second, and perhaps more importantly, from its position at the monastery's ritual and architectural center, the revered statue served as a source of elevated prestige for Tāranātha, for his seat at Phun tshogs gling, and for his patrons in western Tibet during a period of political contestation with the Fifth Dalai Lama and the growing Dge lugs hegemony in Lhasa. Tāranātha's Jo bo statue of Śākyamuni Buddha encapsulated his vision of what a Buddhist monastery should be and played an instrumental role in fashioning a singular institutional identity.



Figure 1: Tāranātha Kun dga' snying po,  
Phun tshogs gling Monastery (photo by author).



Figure 2: Rtag brtan Phun tshogs gling (photo by author).

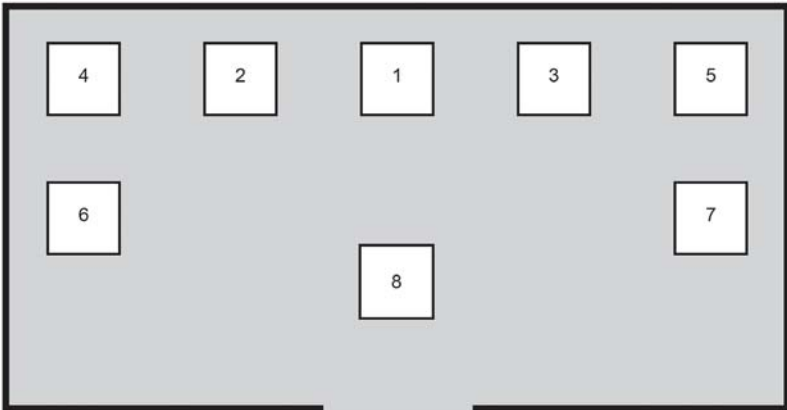


Figure 3: Phun tshogs gling's Inner Sanctum (not to scale):  
 1. Śākyamuni, 2. Vipāśin, 3. Śikhin, 4. Viśvabhū, 5. Krakucchanda,  
 6. Kanakamuni, 7. Kāśyapa, 8. Jo bo Phyogs las rnam rgyal.



Figure 4: Jo bo Phyogs las mam rgyal (photo by author).



Figure 5: Jo bo Phyogs las mam rgyal shrine with Tāranātha's history prominently displayed, lower right (photo by author).