

Sources of Tibetan Tradition

Edited by

Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew T. Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

NEW YORK

A special thank you to the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation and the University Committee on Asia and the Middle East at Columbia for crucial financial support for the publication of this book.

Columbia University Press
Publishers Since 1893
New York Chichester, West Sussex
cup.columbia.edu

Copyright © 2013 Columbia University Press
Tibetan embroidery, collection of Carolyn and Wesley Halpert
All rights reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Sources of Tibetan tradition / edited by Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew T. Kapstein,
and Gray Tuttle.

p. cm. — (Introduction to Asian civilizations)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-231-13598-6 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-231-13599-3 (paper : alk. paper) —
ISBN 978-0-231-50978-7 (electronic)

1. Tibet Region—Civilization—Sources. 2. Tibet Region—History—Sources. 3. Tibet
Region—Intellectual life—Sources. 4. Tibet Region—Social conditions—Sources.

I. Schaeffer, Kurtis R. II. Kapstein, Matthew. III. Tuttle, Gray.

DS785.A37 2012

951'.5—dc23

2011018491



Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent and durable acid-free paper.

This book was printed on paper with recycled content.

Printed in the United States of America

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

p 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

References to Internet Web sites (URLs) were accurate at the time of writing. Neither the author nor Columbia University Press is responsible for URLs that may have expired or changed since the manuscript was prepared.

If there were some things which did not occur to the minds of earlier scholars,
 Which are made known here, whoever understands them is wise;
 If whatever the older scholars have analyzed again and again
 Is now understood, there should be no surprise.

Thus, by means of whatever merit has been achieved
 By this componential analysis of the objects of comprehension
 Of the Sons of the Conquerors, who delight in the good of others,
 May I become a benefactor of beings, King of Dharma!

[Sa skya Paṇḍita (trans. Ter Ellingson), "On Music," *Asian Music* 10, no. 2 (1979): 3–4; Sa skya Paṇḍita (trans. Ter Ellingson), "Why Study Music," *Asian Music* 10, no. 2 (1979): 157–158. Translations of Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, *Rol mo'i bstan bcos*, in *Dpal ldan sa skya pa'i bka' 'bum* (New Delhi: Sakya Center, 1993), vol. 10 (*tha*), 309–321.]

A DRINKING SONG

Tibetan Buddhist poets very often focus on the heights of Buddhist contemplative life, evoking in rich imagery the spiritual realization that dedicated practitioners are said to experience. Yet poetic songs can also be occasions to address the more mundane aspects of life, such as, in the present example, the benefits of drinking beer. In traditional Tibet, songs were composed by religious leaders to address the immediate concerns of their congregation. Songs could be used for religious instruction, inspiration, conflict resolution, grieving, personal reflection, debate, ritual, or devotion. Songs were also entertainment as well as religious and moral instruction. They were meant to inspire as well as teach, and the following song was likely uplifting for those who appreciated the good qualities of a nicely crafted beer.

We learn much from this song about the social history of beer in Tibet: it was a commodity in an economy that included women, men, monks, craftsmen, and shamans. It could be employed in rituals, for medicinal purposes, and, perhaps more importantly, as a preeminent social drug. The song's author, the famous philosopher Longchenpa (1308–63) apparently drank enough beer in his life to offer a detailed psychological portrait of the drunken state, much as we would describe it today: esteem increases, perception loses its solidity, and attraction increases. We also see in this song the tension between various types of religious communities. Externally there may have been competition (for followers, patronage, religious outlook) between monastic Buddhism and yogic, noncelibate Buddhism. Yet internally—and this is the climax of Longchenpa's song, a satirical indictment of hypocrisy—it is better to partake of the world and be honest about it than to claim to be pure and lie. KRS

When the Victor's Son, the Master [Longchenpa] himself, was staying at Lhün-drup Ling, several fortunate ones asked, "Everyone drinks beer on the sly, and

in particular great meditators drink it exclusively. Yet monks who adhere to Kadampa precepts claim that only great adepts drink. Please explain the good qualities of beer and the reasons everyone drinks in a song.”

In response to this request, [Longchenpa] recited a Diamond Song entitled “Sweet Nectar Describing the Origins and Qualities of Beer.”

Homage to the Master. In praise of the good qualities of beer.
Homage to Vajravārahī.

Ancestor of beer, Vajradhara, and
The masters, deities, and muses—homage to you.
I relate the good qualities of beer,
Nectar supreme, drunk by the fortunate. Listen . . .

From the city of beautiful heavenly gods,
A single supreme nectar drop falls,
From the merit of every being in the world,
Nutritious barley becomes the grist for beer.

With taste and color like honey, and
Perfect fragrance like the nectar of the gods,
Just the sight of it raises the spirits; one cannot be without it.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

Drinking it is bliss, tasting it is delicious.
When it goes down, body and mind are totally blissed out.
Appearances are blissful, loose, as for one who understands what’s real.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

After drinking, in carefree repose,
In an unconscious state, one falls asleep easily,
Like one who has mastered stabilization, luminosity, and concentration.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

No sooner drunk than happy tales and
Lovely melodious songs come aplenty.
Courage and fearlessness toward others know no depths.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

In this beer, nectar with eight great flavors,
Chief of the great flavors are sweet, sour, and bitter.
All are full, without favoring any one.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

At first sweet, taste somewhat bitter,
Because it smells soft, it lingers, and one can't do without.
Consider it, its supreme wonderful flavor is unfathomable.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

Drinking it, one quickly becomes healthy and beautiful,
The ocean of voice bursts forth, speech is perfect.
Appearances sooth the senses, and mind finds joy.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

Health is evened out, all illnesses are alleviated,
Especially, phlegm and wind conflagrations are cured.
The best medicine, essence of medicines.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

When you meet it, all activity becomes relaxed.
When you drink, mental anguish ceases.
Days and nights pass by quickly without notice.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

It is necessary for all activities,
Great and small, all completely enjoy it.
Near and far, one cannot do without it.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

It achieves one's ends, it is the source of conversation,
When friends and family meet, they need it to foster flattery.
In family meetings it is needed as a distraction.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

From the powerful king on high,
To the supreme guru, the monk, the scholar,
All the influential upper classes rely upon it.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

The people of the towns in each region,
And most monasteries and even hermitages,
Rely upon it as the basis for all their wealth.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

Rule-following Kadampa so proud of their cleverness,
Philosophers and monks alike,
Drink it on the sly, so who is more covetous?
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

Men use beer for anything at all.
Women use it to master wool.
Distinguished people use it in place of work.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

Bönpo sorcerers take it as payment for drum and tambourine.
Monks take it in place of monastic items.
Adepts use it to master the sun.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

It is a powerful substance for profound secret spells,
It is used at the beginning of initiations and blessings,
It is necessary in creation and perfection meditations.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

It is a valued item in tantric feasts,
For offerings to the Master, the Deity, the Celestial Muse,
The Protectress, the guardians upon whom we rely.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

Delighting hosts of heroes and celestial muses,
And gatherings of powerful yogins,
It is a holy item for perfecting merit and wisdom.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

All people rely on it for joy,
Demons too are taken by its sweetness,
Gods as well frolic with delight.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

It increases vitality, so body and mind are happy.
It produces pleasing warmth, so concentration increases.
It makes insight more intense, thus realization dawns.
Sweet beer—its qualities are simply perfect.

Such are its inconceivable qualities.
Inexpressible, like the nectar of the gods.
The supreme taste to be found in this human realm:
May you and everyone else delight and play.

Exhibiting this manner, the carefree yogin
Achieves an uninhibited state of mind.
With this bliss may I and all living beings
Rest all day and night in bliss and happiness.

[Klong chen rab 'byams pa, *Chang gi yon tan la bsngags pa bdud rtsi'i zil mngar ma*, in *Collected Miscellaneous Writings (gsun thor bu) of Rgyal-ba Kloñ-chen Rab-'byams-pa* (Paro, Bhutan: Lama Ngodrub and Sherap Drimey, 1982), vol. 2, 328.3–331.6. Trans. KRS.]

A WEAVING SONG

Tibetan Buddhist literature is very often composed for well-educated audiences, with the expectation that readers will understand the technical philosophical vocabulary, ornate poetry, and references to Indian mythology that define so much classical Tibetan writing. If allusions to the great Indian epic hero Rāma worked to prove one's literary prowess, they also could severely limit one's audience. Literary traditions such as the songs of Milarepa went against this trend, casting the sometimes obtuse doctrinal points of Buddhist philosophy in engaging lyric poetry and using imagery from popular life to illustrate the principles of Buddhist ethics. In the popular story of Nangsa Öbum, Princess of Rinang, narratives of Tibetan life and songs with images of Tibetan material culture are employed to teach Buddhist principles of effort, compassion, selflessness, and the transformation of consciousness to a more enlightened state of mind.

As a young noblewoman in a minor principality, Nangsa Öbum is destined to be married to a proper suitor, despite the fact that her sole goal in life is to be able to practice meditation in solitary retreat, away from the intrigues of her family estate. She is married to a callous but wealthy nobleman, Drakpa Samdrup, Prince of Rinang. She marries, moves to Rinang, bears a son, and endures seven years of physical and psychological brutality from her husband and her evil aunt, Ani Nyemo. She then meets several Buddhist teachers, but before she can fulfill her desire to leave Rinang and join her teacher in retreat, her father-in-law beats her, takes her son, and imprisons her as punishment for even thinking of practicing the Dharma. Beaten and dejected, she dies in prison. Her quest really only begins there, however, for upon death she journeys through purgatory, meeting its denizens and learning of the evil deeds they committed to land themselves in such desperate circumstances. She miraculously revives, in the manner of the *délok* (chapter 14), and begins to preach to all who will listen on the importance of karma—ethical cause and effect—for staying out of purgatory and achieving a positive rebirth in the next life. In her position of authority as a revenant—one who has returned from the dead—and a teacher, she is allowed to return to her parents' home with her son. She embarks on a career as a Buddhist teacher, and like Milarepa, makes her trademark teaching the lyric poem. In the weaving song she sings to her mother after they argue over the propriety of a princess performing such “menial” labor as working with fiber and loom, she urges her audience to see the wisdom of enlightenment in the material things of mundane life. KRS

Homage to the master, the personal deities, and the muses.
May you look with compassion upon us women without religion.