

# The Cham ritual of Padmasambhava in Tibetan Buddhism

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the origins of Cham or ritual dance in Tibetan Buddhism, structure, and components of the Cham ritual of Pamasambhava. The first part of the paper explains the Cham ritual dedicated to Padmasambhava and its three main sections: the ritual of making offerings and reading scriptures; the performing of the ritual dances; and the empowerment of Padmasambhava, known as “Light of the Lotus”. The second part of the paper gives some details of the Padmasambhava Cham, which takes place on the ninth and tenth days of the eleven day ritual, with the Cham on the ninth day known as kya’cham and that on the following day as the dngos gzhi. The Padmasabhava Cham has eighteen parts and one of these parts has seventeen sub-sections, so all together there are thirty-seven parts performed on the tenth day.

**Key Words:** Cham; Ritual; Padmasambhava; Tibetan; Buddhism

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The Cham or dance ritual dedicated to the Indian scholar Padmashambhava is performed nowadays on the tenth day of the sixth Tibetan month in almost all monasteries of the Nyingma school, and even in some monasteries of the Sa skya and Bka’ rgyud schools. It continues as a traditional ritual, but it has changed as compared to the original form, with additional sections added to incorporate new historical meanings.

Padmasambhava was an Indian Buddhist scholar, translator and practitioner in the eight century who was central in assimilating Buddhism deeply into Tibetan culture. As important as he may have been as a historical person in Tibetan culture, his significance is even greater in his role after death as he was transformed into a spiritual figure incarnated in statues, paintings, temples, rituals, and texts as a second Buddha, an incarnation of the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokitesvara, and an emanation of the Buddha Amitabha. One aspect of this cult of Padmasambhava is the sacred masked dances performed in Tibet each year in his honor.

The paper is based on Tibetan literature and on my own field work in Kathog in Eastern Tibet during the year of the monkey. It analyzes the origin of the ritual dance, the structure and significance of the ritual dance, and includes an illustration of the Cham ritual. I attempt to explain the reason, appearance and tradition of devotion to Padmasambhava through the Cham ritual as it is conducted at present.

## The origin of the Cham ritual

The full name of the Cham ritual of Padmasambhava is “The Mask Dance on the 10<sup>th</sup> Day of the Festival of the Guru” (Gu ru tshes bcu dus chen gyi cham), since the festival is held from the first to the eleventh days of the fifth or sixth lunar months, while the formal Cham is performed on the tenth. Thus, while the ritual culminates on the tenth, it is in fact a lengthy process over many days.

Many people focus on just the formal part of the dances, and overlook the overall eleven-day process which is essential to fully understand the nature and function of this pan-Tibetan ritual.

There are three texts in particular which discuss which dates the devotional rituals for Padmasambhava should be performed. One is the Padma bka' thang (莲花遗教), a gter ma or “revealed text” that was discovered by Au rgyan gling pa (邬金林巴), a gter ton or “treasure revealer” in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The second is the Slob dpon chen po pad ma' byung gnas kyi rnam thar pa gsal bar byed pa'i yi ge yid ches gsum ldan (《大阿闍黎莲花生传·三信具足》), written by Taranatha (多罗那他) in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The third is the Phur ba rig gsum (三类金刚撅), a commentary within the Phur 'grel' bum nag (金刚撅释疏汇), said to have been composed by the consort of Padmasambhava, Ye-shes-tsho-rgyal (益西措嘉), in 8<sup>th</sup> century. It is also discussed in the Tshes bchu'i mdzad ba rjes dran (初十事业祈请纪念文) by the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century Nyingma scholar, 'Ju mi pham' jam byangs rnam rgyal rgya mtsho (局·麦彭降阳朗杰加错). In these accounts we find that the birthday of Padmasambhava is said to be the 10th day of the sixth lunar month. It is on this day each year that Nyingma monasteries celebrate “The Mask Dance on the 10th Day of the Festival of the Guru” as a way of commemorating the birthday and in order to make special prayers to Padmasambhava.

The same texts give Padmasambhava's birth year as the wood monkey year, and as a result there is a particularly elaborate celebration that occurs every twelve years in the year of the monkey, with a more elaborate version every sixty years when the wood monkey year occurs. The celebration at Kathog Monastery in 2004 took place in a wood monkey year, and so was a special event witnessed only once every sixty years.

In general, Cham is referred to in Tibetan texts as rdo rje 'cham, or “Vajra Cham”, a phrase which signifies its tantric character. It is a form of ritual involving masked dance and is only found in Tibetan Buddhism. Its central part involves, on the inner or invisible level, a contemplative dance in which the dancer makes specific gestures that are referred to as rgya phyag or “symbolic seals”, known in Sanskrit as mudra, that represent the pure body, speech and mind of the dancer's yid dam or tutelary deity in the tantric traditions. The dance, performed by monks, is described in these texts as having the goals of transferring negative emotions into the virtue of practice, and of transferring suffering and the cause of suffering into the cessation of suffering and path of Dharma, such that the

merit of happiness and wisdom is increased. In particular, these texts consider that these practices reveal the unification of samsara and nirvana, or the unity of appearance and emptiness.

Externally, the gestures and movements made by the masked and costumed dancers are considered to be rendering the purity of the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, and the tantric deities into visible form that can be perceived by the lay people who gather in great numbers each year to watch them. We can thus say that the Cham ritual displays or illustrates the deep meaning of the Dharma as understood in Tibetan Buddhism.

To explain the nature of the Cham ritual, I consulted a text entitled *Rdo rje gar 'cham gyi cho ga'i gtam ye shes rol ba'i rgyan ches bya ba bzhugs* (《智慧妙音——话金刚法舞仪规》<sup>[1]</sup>) or “The Ornament of Wisdom Sound: Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance”, which was written by the treasure finder *gter ston'Jam dbyang dpal bzang* (伏藏师降央华让(—1554)). According to this text, there are eight important elements that make up the ritual: self-nature, interpretation, classification, function, analogy, scripture, practice and result. From these eight elements we can understand the meaning of the Cham.

The first one, *Ngo bo*<sup>[2]</sup> means *rang gzhin* or “self-nature”, refers in this context to the central meaning or inherent nature of the ritual. According to my interpretation of the text, the Cham is a method to comprehend the unification of samsara and nirvana because ultimately all phenomena appear pure in their essence on both levels; from the perspective of complete or highest wisdom, they are unconditioned and ultimate. The ritual dance presents the particular perception of the tantric tradition; it unites the worldly life of samsara with the reality of nirvana to show the true meaning of tantric and the reality of the Pure Land, indicating that all lay people can acquire the capacity of wisdom.

Secondly, *Nges tshig*<sup>[3]</sup> means *'grel bshad*, meaning “explanation” or “interpretation”, provides descriptions of the different postures or *rnam 'gyur* generally used in Tibetan forms of dance. The text lists nine of these, which, as in most dance literature, are categorized as “the nine splendid postures”: charming, martial, kind, brave, calm, ugly, horrible, laughing, and ferocious. The text also divides the main postures in the performance of the Cham into two categories: the *gar*, the posture of the hands, and the *'cham*, the posture of the feet. It explains that it was for this reason that the Vajra 'Cham used to be known as *gar 'cham*, abbreviated to *'cham*, or *rdo rje 'cham*.

In the Cham forms of Tibetan dance, it is explained that the postures and gestures of the dancers in a dance that is about a Buddha or Bodhisattva represent the body, speech and mind of that Buddha or Bodhisattva.

The third element or aspect *isdbayed ba*<sup>[4]</sup> or “classification”, which is a discussion of the different types of ritual dance. Originally, there were two types, *Bka' ma* and *gter ma*. *Bka' ma*, literally “oral transmission”, refers, in the Nyingma tradition, to teachings or traditions from primary Buddhist tantric texts that have been passed on by word of mouth. This form of Cham is created on the basis of tantric texts such as the *Dpal ldan sgyu 'phrul dra ba rtsa ba'i rgyud* (《圣妙幻网根本

[1] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound: Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, 《智者妙音——话金刚法舞仪规史》降央华让大师生著, By'Jam dbyang dpal bzang, 白玉寺藏书(以下相同).

[2] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound: Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p28.

[3] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound: Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, 'Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p28-29.

[4] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound: Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, 'Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p29.

续)), the Dpal ldan sgyu 'phrul dra ba rtsa ba'i bshad rgyud (《圣妙幻网疏续》), the 'Jig rten 'das mdo (《世间解脱经》) or the He ru rgyal po (《甚要黑若嘎》), which were transmitted by Skal ldan rgyal po dza (尕丹嘉波扎) to four masters who were said to have had understanding of "illusory emanation" (sgyu 'phrul 幻网). They in turn established rules for the dance practices and passed them on successively to the seventeenth century translator Ao rgyan smin grol gling du lo tswa ba dharma shris ras (乌金梅卓林的达玛希日(1654—1718)). That translator then created the Khrag 'tung he ru ka'i rtsa ba rdo rje'i gar 'chams (愤怒尊黑鲁嘎根本金刚法舞) or "the Cham dance of the Vajra root of the blood-drinking Heruka", which includes the practice of dgra po'i phrin las (愤怒事业) or "the activities of the wrathful", a way of illustrating the action known as "vanquishing and defeating" (dgra bgegs bsgral ba 降服). The cutting up of the gling ga or effigy found in many current versions of Cham also comes from this tradition, and was included in a contemporary performance at Kathog. According to other tantric texts such as the Dpal sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor (《等合佛》) and the Zla gsang tig le sogs kyi dgongs pa kun mkhyen rong zam pa chen po (《月密心要之遍知大桥》) established the Cham of the Ra to bcu drug ge mchod gar (十六供养天女荟贡). At Kathog, there are the Cham of Gtum rngam of the diety Heruka, the Cham of Tshogs las and 'Jam dpal phyag rgyas zil gnon of cutting the gling ga are also performed<sup>[5]</sup>. These versions of Cham come from the Bka' ma, or oral transmission.

The other type of Cham is created on the basis of gter ma or "hidden treasure". The ritual of the Padmasambhava Cham was created by Gu ru chos dbang (1212—1273) and then developed two traditions: the Zhwa nag ma or "black hat" version and the Rta dkar ma or "white horse" version<sup>[6]</sup>. The former is an extended version of the Tshe bcu yi Cham which was first performed at the monastery of Sne'u gdong rtse near Lhasa and then transmitted to the Kham area, and specifically to the monastery of Dpal yul by Kun mkhyen Chos kyi 'byung gnas. The Rta dkar ma tradition is based on a compressed version which was performed for the first time at the monastery of Thub bstan rdo rje brag, and then brought to Kathog by Mi bskyod rdo rje.

The fourth element, dgos ched or "function"<sup>[7]</sup>, refers to the actions performed in the course of the Cham. In his history of Cham, the treasure finder Gter ston' Jam dbyang dpal bzang wrote that "All sentient beings have the three pure doors of the true nature of the mind (Tathāgatagarba), just as sesame itself has oil. Thus the Vajra Cham unifies the object, the method, and the result of purification." According to the explanation given in the text, the object of purification is the impure person who "owns" attachment to desire, and who holds "I and my" in their hands with clinging quality of the ego (bdag'dzen); the path of purification is the body, speech and mind of the wisdom of the yidam, and the result of purification is the perfect accumulation of positive karma and wisdom in the present moment. Thus, appearance the visual forms of phenomena and action are the mudra of the yidam; the sound and words are the speech of the Yidam. According to 'Jam dbyang dpal bzang, in the Vajra Cham the fundamental viewpoint is the meditative realization that samsara and nirvana are one, while the action is the meditative realization that the mudra, the sound and the pure view become one.

[5] Baimacuo 白玛措, A study on the devotional practice of Padmasambhava in Tibetan Buddhism 《藏传佛教莲花生信仰研究》, Tibetan Publishing House, Beijing, 2007, p159, p167-168

[6] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound; Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, 'Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p29.

[7] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound; Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, 'Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p30-31.

The fifth element is *dpe* or analogy<sup>[8]</sup>, a number of which are offered to explain different practices within the Cham. The posture assumed by the Yidam in the Cham is compared to that of a king being welcomed by his subjects. When we see the retinue of the Yidam in the dance section known as the or “dance of the retinue”, the dancers are said to represent the ‘*khor gyi*’ ‘chams attendants of a king who move around him “like the graceful twinkling of lights”. In the section known as the “dance of the messengers”, the performers are like soldiers arriving at the front with fierce and angry emotions; in the offering cham, they are like the daughters of the Yidam dancing with a graceful and slender posture. The others are described as being like a roc circling in the sky, lions shaking their manes, tigers roaring in the forest, and powerful eagles spreading their wings. The dancers’ chests are described as symbolizing the four great continents of every world, their waistlines are like spinning wheels, and their feet are supple like cotton and leaves.

The sixth aspect, *lung* or text<sup>[9]</sup>, refers to explanations of the Vajra Cham that can be found in texts from the Bka’ ma tradition. The three texts cited by ‘Jam dbyang dpal bzang are the Thabs kyi zhags ba’i rgyud, the Dpal gsang ba’i snying bo and the Ye shes rngams glog. These are used to demonstrate the nature of cham in the Bka’ ma texts.

In the Thabs kyi zhags ba’i rgyud, it is said that performance of the mudras, and the assumption of the brave and fierce postures should be understood as being those of a person who is liberated from the three realms, who is certain to succeed in practice, and who will obtain enlightenment as a Buddha. The Dpal gsang ba’i snying bo is cited as saying that the words and sounds used in the ritual are similar to those of a wonderful offering, while; the mudras and the physical postures of the performers are the same as the achievement of the highest and most ferocious Yidam; the chanting is the same as the successful achievement of the practice of Dharma. As for the Ye shes rngams glog, it is quoted to say that all the mudras and postures in Cham are to be understood as forms of liberation from the three realms, and that the dance performers should give the impression of floating free in the sky without obstacles. The actions of the Cham, the “Dharmamudra” or “gesture of Dharma”, are described as the best form of practice of liberation from the three realms and of achieving Buddhahood and other attainments, just as poison can be used in medicine to destroy poison. The Cham of Padmasambhava is also a practice which follows the theory and the teaching of the Buddha, and which in its mudras, postures and sounds show the body, speech and mind of the Yidam, and is the best way to practice the Dharma.

‘Jam dbyang dpal bzang’s discussion of practice, the seventh element which is *dnegos gzhi lag len*<sup>[10]</sup>, gives details about the practical implementation of the Cham, in particular those relating to the performance space and to the performer. The space used for the dance must be flat and formal. The performer or actor should be an adept, with perfect understanding, the view of the unification of samsara and nirvana, and with knowledge and action that are distinguished from those of an ordinary person. In the performance, the adept reveals the mandala of the Yidam, which means he achieves the pure body, speech, and mind of the true nature mind of Yidam. Performers are divided into three

[8] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound; Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, ‘Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p31

[9] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound; Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, ‘Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p31-32

[10] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound; Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, ‘Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p32-33.

levels of ability and capacity<sup>[11]</sup>. Those with the highest capacity have actions and postures as pure as those of a Yidam; they have the view and confidence of the nature of the Cham. Those who are of middling ability have grasped the facts relating to the Cham and have practiced and meditated on the mudra of the Yidam, so that they are able to understand the three doors and the nature of samsara and nirvana. Those of inferior understanding and weak ability use the Cham to gain profit, which inevitably results in damage to the real meaning, purpose and nature of the Cham ritual.

Practical instructions are also given in the text on the how the dance should be performed. Here, the standard advice about dance is given, the head should be held firmly, the steps should show peace and happiness, and so on. There are thirteen demands of a performer, with three principal aspects: first, the posture of the upper body should be upright and unafraid, the waist should spin, the feet should be lithe, and the legs and arms should be fluid. Secondly, movements of the arms towards the inside, should avoid beating the chest while motions in an outward direction should show strength and control like wielding a horse whip. Third, the performance of the Cham should follow the way defined by the master and the performers should not draw upon their own interpretations.

The last of the eight elements, the 'bras bu or result<sup>[12]</sup>, expounds upon the fruit of the Cham. Results are divided into two—those that can be proven from tantric texts and those that can be deduced from treasure texts. Those from the first category claim that even a single posture embodying the wisdom of Yidams in the Cham performance will bring liberation from the three realms if completed as a form of offering, and many forms of communal karma are easy to mature and ripen. By completing the posture we can remove suffering from our body and can purify the impure body, bring the Dharmakaya body to maturity, and we can achieve the Vajrapani result in the inner energy, the Bodhicitta mind, in the central wisdom channel.

In another text in the Bka' ma tradition, the Mdo dgongs'dus (集经) it is said that reliance on the six postures will free sentient beings from the six types of being, while reliance on the six songs and literal will liberate one from the six consciousnesses, the six senses and sense-objects. In the Lama dgongs'dus (上师开许集经), a text from the treasure tradition, it is written that "if the postures of the Vajra Cham are performed according to the teaching of the yogis, then all will receive the blessing of the Yidam and gather the Wisdom Dakinis in order to increase power and merit." <sup>[13]</sup> Many other treasure texts, like the Lam dgongs'dus, claim that the Vajra Cham will improve one's good karma in this world. The masters created the Vajra Cham to reveal and practice the meaning of Dharma as well as to pray to the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas, the Yidams, the Wisdom Dakinis and the protectors to bless and protect sentient beings, to achieve good karmic results and to increase worldly merit.

The Cham ritual of Padmasambhava, the Gu ru tshes bcu dus chen gyi cham, (初十莲师羌姆法会) is an example of Cham which can be understood in terms of these eight important elements. It has been carried on from generation to generation and allows us an opportunity to carry out research into the nature of Cham, and the Bka' ma and Gter ma texts allow us a glimpse into the origins of this ritual.

[11] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound; Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, 'Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p32.

[12] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound; Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, 'Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p34.

[13] The Ornament of Wisdom Sound; Explaining the Ritual of the Vajra Dance, 'Jam dbyang dpal bzang, p34.

## The structure of the Padmasambhava Cham ritual

The structure of the Cham ritual of Padmasambhava, the Gu ru tshes bcu festival, involves two key structural elements: space and time. In terms of space, the ritual is conducted both inside and outside the main hall of the temple: the main offerings, the construction of the mandala, and the reading of texts are conducted inside the main hall, while the ritual dance and the dbang or empowerment are conducted outside. In terms of time, the ritual is divided under four phases: six days for the ritual offering, two days for the textual reading, two days for the actual Cham, and one day for the empowerment. These spatial and temporal aspects unite to constitute the form of the ritual. Within the ritual itself, there are the four main components: the tshogs- mchod (the ritual of offering), reading the text of Bla ma gsang ' dus, the Vajra Cham, and the Padmasambhava empowerment known as Padma 'od 'bar or “the light of the lotus”.

### 1. The offering ritual

The prayers to Padmasambhava include primarily a special offering ritual named tshogs mchod, which literally means “the offering of groups”. It is also called the gu ru cho ga or “Guru ritual” and is held over the first six days.

Its inner meaning stems from it being a ritual practice based upon the three bodies or forms of the Buddha. The three bodies need to be understood from two perspectives. The first is based on the general Mahayana principle of the Buddha's three bodies—usually called the Dharmakaya, the Sambhogakaya, and the Nirmanakaya, which refer respectively to the Buddha's inner realization of the nature of reality, his splendid manifestations in the pure lands, and his historical emanations in the world in various forms to assist sentient beings.

The second perspective is based on tantric practice, which identifies the three bodies with the three doors (sgo gsum) of existence—body, speech and mind. In one treasure text, Padmasambhava is described as saying that these three can be contemplated through the three tantric roots<sup>[14]</sup>—the teacher or bla ma, the tutelary deity or Yidam, and the female spirit or Dakini. Specific images or objects that represented these three tantric roots are placed in the Cham mandala, and offerings are made to them.

During the ritual in Kathog, two important mandalas were constructed, one in the assembly hall of the monastery and one in the nearby bshad grwa or institute attached to the monastery. The mandalas are not painted by sand but were created by the placement of various offering items, small mandalas, the images of three roots, and a canopy or parasol (gdugs) on the top of the mandala. The mandala is three-dimensional and made up of four squares, each one smaller than the one below. Zhal zas or offerings of sweets, biscuits and fruit are placed on the first and second squares, and a sman gdor or offering cake, and an arrangement of purified water and butter shaped into petals, are placed on the third level. The three images representing the Lama, the Yidam and the Dakini are placed on the fourth level, and the multi-colored canopy is placed on the top.

There are two traditions for representing the three roots, one associated with the monastery of Rdo rje brag and the other with Smin grol gling; the practice at Kathog belongs to the former kind,

[14] The three tantric roots is the practice of Rtswa gsum (རྩ་སྒྲུབ་ཀྱི་ལུ་གུ་ལྷ་མོ་ལྷ་མོ་ལྷ་མོ་三根本合修法).

while at Dpal yul, the monks follow the Smin grol gling practice. At Kathog, the representation was in the form of a small stupa made from barley flour and decorated with petals and cloud designs made from butter. The Lama is shown by a jewel on a lotus, the Yidam by a vajra on a lotus, and the Dakini by a half-vajra on a knife shaped like a half-moon. In the mandala, the symbol of the Yidam is placed in the middle, with the Lama to its right and the Dakini on its left.

## 2. Reading the scripture of Bla ma gsang 'dus

After these six days of the offering ceremony, there are two days for reading the text known as the Bla ma gsang 'dus or “the Secret Assembly of Lamas”. At Kathog, monks started reading at seven in the morning and continued until six each night. It takes three hours to read the whole text once through. Following the three-hour chanting of the scripture, the ritual master (chog dpon) and ritual master assistant (chog dpon gyon pa) take the vajra (rdo rje), the ritual dagger (phur ba) and a small black triangular cloth for use in cutting the effigy (gling ga). The effigy is dealt with in a kind of fire ritual (homa, 护摩), in which the external act of destroying it signifies using wisdom to destroy one's own internal afflictions and demonic curses, according to the text. Monks with whom I spoke at Kathog also told me that the gling ga symbolizes afflictions, evil, and demons.

The text claims that if the body, speech, and mind of a person involved in the prayers are completely pure, then the corresponding actions of the ceremony will be pure, and all afflictions and curses will be eliminated.

After cutting the Ling-ka with the vajra, the dagger and a ritual sword with a vajra on its hilt, the two monks offer the food to the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas, the Yidams and the Lama (Padmasambhava). Then they give the food and drink to the protector of the world and of the beyond. At the end of the ritual of Bla ma gsang 'dus, which takes place in the hall, a Lama who that year has been awarded the status of Khan po recites a speech in praise of the great 19<sup>th</sup> century Nyingma scholar, 'Ju mi pham 'jam dbyangs rnam rgyal rga mtsho. I was told that this is a tradition at Kathog, with the speech delivered each year by a newly appointed Khanpo during the Gu ru tshe bcu ritual.

## 3. The Vajra Cham of Padmasambhava

After these initial eight days of ritual preparation, the Cham of Padmasambhava is performed. The Cham lasts two days and takes place, on the ninth and tenth days of the overall ritual.

These sacred dances have been traditionally performed in Nyingma monasteries since the thirteenth century. Since it was first created by Gu ru chos dbang in the thirteenth century, two main performance styles of the Padmasambhava Cham have evolved, as we noted before, called the “black hat” (zhwa nag ma) and the “white horse” (rta dkar ma) forms, based respectively on, the monastic practices at Smin grol gling and Rdo rje brag. The style described here is the white horse form from Rdo rje brag Monastery. A detailed explanation of the rta dkar ma form of the Cham will be given later in the paper (see section part III).

## 4. The empowerment of Padmasambhava

The dbang or empowerment of Padmasambhava is given on the last day outside the hall, in the same place where the Cham will be performed later. It follows a text known as the Gu ru pad ma 'od 'bar dbang chen, or the “Great empowerment of the light shining from the Lotus Guru”, a treasure text revealed by Rin 'dzin glung gсар snying po (1625—1692), and is one of many tantric empowerments that can be given as part of rituals relating to Padmasambhava.



The empowerment is required, according to the text, for a practitioner who wishes to go on to “creation stage” (skyes rim), or to the “perfection stage” (rdzogs rim) practices. If he or she has meditated on and visualized Padmasambhava before, the empowerment will lead to ’bras bu or “results”, and to what are called the “four empowerments”,<sup>[15]</sup> or, if he or she has not yet done so, they will “plant the seed of good affinities”.

In terms of most ordinary Tibetans who come and receive the empowerment, the perceived benefit is related to his or her wishes and to their future rebirths, for which they seek protection and happiness from Padmasambhava and from the sprul sku or reincarnated Lama; the “inner” or esoteric meanings of the empowerment are probably not known to the lay followers.

In 2004, there were about four thousand monks and believers who received the empowerment outside the assembly hall. About six thousand other people stood in line along the mountain road leading up the mountain to the monastery. Each year, the sprul sku who gives the empowerment is assisted by a different group of Lamas (the term here refers to those monks who have completed the three year retreat, as well as those who are recognized as sprul sku). In 2004, the empowerment was given by a sprul sku from Yunnan, while a group of four monks carried a box containing artifacts left by Kathog su du rin po che and a canopy or parasol. Other monks carried a bell (dril bu), texts, a small statue of the Buddha, a vajra, a phurba and a vessel (bum pa). After giving the Empowerment in the main area outside the assembly hall, the group of Lamas and monks went by car to the end of the line half way down the mountain and gave the empowerment to the lay believers one by one. This took five hours. After that, the ten thousand devotees disappeared and Kathog monastery regained its ordinary air of calm and tranquility.

## **The Basic Structure of the Vajra Cham of Padmasambhava**

Generally there are two forms of this Cham: the skya ’cham and the dngos gzhi. The first is performed without masks and without costumes; the dngos gzhi is the formal performance of the Cham, in which masks and costumes are worn. The masked dance lasts two days, with the skya ’cham performed on the first day and the dngos gzhi on the second day. Much of the performance is the same on each of the two days, but at Kathog 16 sections were shown on the first day, which is seen as a preparation for the full performance of the 36 sections on the second day. The performers on the first day, without masks or costumes, show great concentration and a serious demeanor in order to demonstrate the purity of the “three doors” and the appropriate state of mind and spirit.

The Cham of Padmasambhava has eighteen sections, with one section having eighteen sub-sections. Rather than describe each section, I divide the Cham into four key phases in order to point out the general principles of the dance. As with most forms of Cham, there are four main parts of the liturgy: first, the marking and cleansing of the place and the making of the offering; secondly, the Cham of the

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[15] The four Empowerments are the Empowerment of body, speech, mind, and precious word. There are different functions and benefits for each of them, such as sku dbang to achieve the ability of influence and accomplish the reincarnation body; gsang dbang to gain the capacity to explain the Dharma and the power of vanquishing and defeating; tig dngang to receive the sman ngag of mind from Padmasambhava; and tshig dngang to plant the seed of achievement of Buddhahood and the complete wisdom (the “wisdom of Dharmadatu”) through the “Great Perfection” (rdzogs pa chen po) prac

protectors; thirdly, that of the two forms of the Yi-dam; and fourthly, the Cham of the Lama. The historical and cultural sections and the songs of the villagers can be counted as a fifth part<sup>[16]</sup>.

### 1. Marking and cleansing the site of the Cham and making the offering

Religious dance in Tibetan Buddhism has the function of purifying the worldly realm. Before the main part of the Cham begins, in order to invite and welcome the Yi-dams, the Lama and the protectors into the performance area, it is considered necessary to purify that space and to give offerings to them. The performers use the “mudra of the Yidams”, a set of gestures and postures, to do this symbolically. Four of the 18 sections of the Padmasambhava section belong to this part of the ceremony. The first is the Cham of the Funeral Grounds (dur khro 尸陀林), which features performers with skeleton masks who symbolically cleanse or purify the space. Second is the Cham of the Drink-Offering or Libation (gser skyems 饮甘露舞), performed by ten monks wearing golden hats with peacock feathers and holding vajra daggers (phur ba 厥) and skull bowls (thod pa 头骨碗) to offer the “nectar” (bdud rtsi) the Yidams. This is followed by the Cham of Marking Boundaries (mtshams gcod 断魔除障), which is performed by fifteen monks representing other-worldly protectors (‘jig rten pa’i srung ma 世间护法), wearing black masks with dark hair and skulls on the crest of the mask; these masks ensure that all wishes will be satisfied, and signify that these protectors are full of wisdom. The purpose of this part is to remove all the obstacles from the performance space and to expel any demons from the area so as to properly welcome the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas and Padmasambhava. The performers wield daggers to show their fierce and courageous nature. Before the end of this Cham, after the purification procedure has been completed, other monks mark out the dance area by drawing a line of flour on the ground. The fourth of these sections is called “the Cham of the Lion’s Roar” (seng ge sgra sgrog 狮子吼). It is performed by fourteen monks wearing the wrathful masks with red hair ornamented with white skulls, who wield daggers and vajras. It represents the use of the Dharma to purify the minds of people and to arouse the correct viewpoint. These four Cham sequences purify the space and delineate it, and at the same time purify people’s minds and clear up their unconventional opinions.

### 2. The Cham of the Protectors

The concept of “protection” has a long history in Buddhism. For example, in the Sutra of Infinite Life (无量寿经) and the Abhidharmakosa-sastra (阿毗达磨俱舍论), protection has two meanings: specifically, to shield and maintain positive ways of practice for particular practitioners and more generally, to support and endorse the teachings of the Buddha.

In Tibetan religion, the notion of “protectors” underwent a major expansion, as a whole new set of spiritual figures were classified into two kinds of protectors: the worldly protectors and the transcendent protectors. The transcendent protectors are understood to be liberated from Samsara, and thus are seen as possessing great compassion and wisdom. The worldly protectors reside within the world of sentient beings and among local people and places, and offer protection for their daily life and religious practice.<sup>[17]</sup>

[16] Padma'tsho (Baimacuo), A Study on the Devotional Practice of Padmasambhava in Tibetan Culture. Tibetan Publishing House, Beijing, 2007. 147-190

[17] Padma'tsho (Baimacuo), The Structure of Guru Vcham Ritual of Kathog Monastery in the Kham Area, China Tibetology, CSSCI, Beijing, No. 1, 2014, 138-144.

In the Padmasambhava Cham, there are five sections that each deal with one or other of these two forms of protection. The first one is called the Cham of the Four Doors (sgo bzhi 四护法), referring to the four protectors at the door of the mandala; this relates to the worldly protectors of the Cham. It is performed by four monks who wear red masks and carry vajras and skull bowls. They come to the site of the Cham and spinning quickly to the sounds of horn, drums and the chanting of the monks, reveal their power to protect the Dharma and its practitioners.

The second of these five sections is the Cham of the Transcendent Protectors ('jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma 出世间护法). The performers in this Cham have two aspects, calm and fierce, representing protectors who have passed beyond this world and been liberated from Samsara. This Cham includes within it the Cham of Keng chen bcu drug (骨骼护法), which is performed by twelve monks wearing masks with white skulls on their crests, who are divided into two groups to dance. This sequence has two procedures: first, the twelve monks walk around an edifice made of wood, with three floors, that is placed beside the performance area to symbolize the bzang mdo dpal ri or palace of Padmasambhava. Then they dance in the main area, running around the performance space. At this point in the Cham, lay members of the audience light firecrackers, creating much excitement in the crowd.

The third of the protector section is the Cham of Bskul pa (激励护法), which is performed by ten monks wearing hats with peacock feathers, copper mirrors, and colored streamers. These indicate that their minds are bright and can dispel the blindness of the people, and that protectors belong to the Transcendent Protectors, and use their wisdom to confront depravity and overcome evil. The peacock feathers signify the cleansing of poisons and symbolize purity and calm.

The Cham of Bsgral pa (救度护法) is then performed by eight monks in fierce red masks, indicating that they are Transcendent Protectors who save human beings from suffering, bring them to the pure place of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas, open their minds to unconventional ideas and opinions, and enlighten them with the truth. It is followed by the Cham of Lhag ma (拉麻) or "residue", a term which refers to the concept that all the deities of the four directions share the remaining evil body<sup>[18]</sup>. It is performed by two monks in wrathful masks, one red, the other blue, whose intricate movements represent the two emanation bodies of each of the 28 deities in each of the four directions, a total of 112. At Kathog the two dancer-deities offered the nectar made from the remains of the body, that is considered evil but which was in principle originally pure, to all four directions' deities. This Cham completes the protection part of the Padmasambhava ritual.

### 3. The Cham of the Yidams

In the Tibetan dictionary, the *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* (2002), "Yidam" (本尊) is defined as the main tutelary deity or meditative deity assigned to an individual practitioner as the focus of their contemplative practice and devotion. These can be peaceful or wrathful manifestations of the Buddha. The first syllable means mind or consciousness (yid), while the second means to manage or administer (as in *dam skyong*) or to restrict (*dam bsgrags*). Thus the Yidam is understood as not simply an external deity, but as a revelation of internal Buddhahood. So the masked dance of the Yidam is centrally about the posture and seals or mudras of the pure body, speech, and mind of the

[18] The remaining evil body means the remaining body of effigy (gling ga) which symbolizes afflictions and obstacles.

Buddha. There may be a different view for most lay people, for whom the Cham is principally a performance in which the deities and protectors attend symbolically to them personally there and then, and at which the act of witnessing the masked dances is believed to clear up negative karmic effects and to bring them merit and success.

The Cham of the Yidams (Yidam 'cham) has two main sections, one which features the Yidams themselves, in both peaceful and fierce forms, and one which features the retinue of the Yidams. In the Padmasambhava Cham, each of them has five sub-sections or subsidiary Chams.

(1) The Cham of Yidams. Firstly, the Cham of the Yidams themselves, which starts with the Cham of Descent of Blessings (byin 'bebs 欣拔) and shows the Yidams in their peaceful aspect. Performed by 13 monk-dancers wearing hats with images of the five Buddhas, this Cham symbolizes the wise Buddha coming to give blessings and to eradicate the cause of the suffering that afflicts all sentient beings. It is followed by the Cham of Gtum rngam (忿怒尊), a representation of the Yidams in wrathful form, performed by twenty monks who represent Yidams and wear gold, red and blue masks. They take vajras and skull bowls and slowly revolve around the altar-stage. This part is taken from the Buddhist text<sup>[19]</sup>, and refers to an account of a ferocious Yidam, led by Heruka who methodically conquered evil in a majestic way.

The third of these dances is the Cham of Tshogs las (施身法舞), which is performed by 12 monks wearing fierce red masks and holding the vajra and skull bowls. This represents the offering of their own bodies to show compassion, revealing that a pure and kind mind is the most important element in practice, and helping to arouse the notion of Bodhicitta. During this Cham, a gling ga is cut up by Cham dpan, the main Yidam. The last of these five dances, the Cham of 'Jam dpal phyag rgyas zil gnon (文殊胜印法舞) or "Suppressed by the Mudra of Manjushri", is then performed by 29 monks wearing golden masks and wielding vajras and skull bowls, representing twenty-nine Yidams and protectors, as well as the Bodhisattva Manjusri and his consorts, and the Five dhyani Buddhas and their consorts, among others. This dance includes members of the Yidams' retinues wearing animal masks. They are described as using a fierce demeanor to remove evil, defend the rule and the truth, emanating in many forms to protect the Dharma and its practitioners.

(2) The Cham of the Yidams' Retinue. The second group of dances in this section of the ritual is known as the Cham of the Yidams' 'khor ba (眷属) or retinue. It includes the Cham of Rlung'tshub gnyis (两旋风) or "two whirlwinds", which is performed by two monks wearing fierce masks. Its meaning is similar to that of the Dgu bskor gnyis (十八圈<sup>[20]</sup>), but the image of the whirlwind further reinforces the idea of upholding justice and dispelling evil spirits through its ability to revolve and sweep away all evil. It is followed by the Cham of Shwa gyag gnyis (鹿牛二者) or "both cow and deer" is then performed by a performer wearing a deer's head mask and one with a bull's head mask to symbolize the power and force of the retinue of the Yidams. In Bon monasteries this Cham is also performed, but it shows a protector of Tsan<sup>[21]</sup> coming to the worldly protector to educate people not to kill.

[19] Buddhist text is the Bka' ma text, or oral transmission, which discussed in the part I of this article.

[20] Padma'tsho (Baimacuo), A Study on the Devotional Practice of Padmasambhava in Tibetan Culture, Tibetan Publishing House, Beijing, 2007, 162.

[21] Baimacuo, The Presentation of Bon Cham Ritual of Songpan, Collected Papers of Research on National Religious Studies, Edited by Chengyuping, Sichuan Minzu Publishing House, July 2003, 79-86.

#### 4. The Cham of the Lama

The word Lama, as in the phrase bla la med pa, means incomparable, the excellent one or the supreme one. Generally, a Lama describes a lam ston mkhan, one who can lead the way to truth. In the ritual of Gu ru tshes bcu, this incomparable guide is Padmasambhava, the focal point of the ritual, as opposed to the skya'chams or dances performed on the first day' of the Cham.

In the Padmasambhava Cham, the Cham of the Lama is composed of eighteen subsidiary sections or dances. These can be divided into three parts: the Cham of the eight manifestations of Padmasambhava, the Cham of the five dhyani Buddhas and their consorts, and the Cham that tells history including debates and villagers' songs.

The first of these, the Cham of the eight manifestations of Padmasambhava, reflects the achievements of Padmasambhava and shows the function or nature of each manifestation through the performer's appearance and the instruments he holds. For example, the Cham of Gu ru nyi ma'od zer or "The Sunlight of the Guru" is performed by one monk wearing a fierce mask with a hat adorned with five skulls, holding the kha Tam (trident) and a bronze mirror. It refers to a story about Padmasambhava confronting some non-Buddhists who were in their way to sell alcohol: Padmasambhava blocked their way and drank their five hundred buckets of alcohol in one second. When they asked him to pay them, said he replied that he would repay them at sunset, but then, assuming the aspect of He rug ga (hakrasamvara), he then held the sun stationary for seven days and seven nights in order to convince the non-Buddhists convert. The dance is intended to represent the compassion and wisdom of the Guru, his love for sentient beings and his determination to remove their ignorance and to accomplish unselfish actions.

Another of the subsidiary dances in this sequence is the Cham of Gu ru seng ge sgra sgrogs, the "manifestation of the Lion's Roar of the Lama". This is performed by two performers holding vajras and skull bowls. It symbolizes Padmasambhava's ability, like a as the howling lion, to convert non-Buddhists and demons and to educate and liberate all sentient beings who are caught in the cycle of existence. The Cham of the Five Dpal bo (Dakas) and Dpal mo (Dakinis), their consorts shows the importance of the practice of understanding the role of the five dhyani Buddhas and their consorts, a practice which is seen as having been passed on by Padmasambhava to his students for them to inherit. Again, for most lay Tibetan the main meaning of this Cham series would be that it shows that Padmasambhava has come to that place and has given blessings to the believers.

This completes the four main sequences of the Padmasambhava Cham—those of cleansing and offering, of the protectors, of the Yidams, and of the Lama. Within these four sections there are specific dances, each of which has to be studied in each version of the ritual. We might find, for example, that there is no Cham of the Lama in the Cham of the Yul lha or local deities, but one will always find the Cham of marking and cleansing the performance area, the Cham of the Protectors, and the Cham of the Yidams. The Cham of the Lama is unique to certain rituals and is performed at certain monasteries and at certain times.

#### 5. Other Sections: Historical and cultural sequences of the Cham

As we have seen, 'Jam dbyang dpal bzang maintained that the Cham is derived from Buddhist sutras and from treasure texts. But changes in culture in more recent times have led to changes in the Cham, including the addition of some new content, an increase in the importance of the role of history

and the results of increased contact between Han Chinese and Tibetans. So now the Padmasambhava Cham has a third origin; that of local history and culture. This can be seen in from the Cham of the Lama in this version of the ritual; it includes the Cham of Chos rtsod (辩经) or “religious debate”, which refers to the particular form of Buddhist study in the Tibetan monastic tradition and reflects its cultural significance. The other Cham is Rtsal rtse (杂技) or “acrobatics”, and Rgya dpon (清朝官员表演) or “Qing dynastic officers show”, which reflects the extent of cultural exchange and interaction in local history. Another Cham, called Tshogs glu or “group song”, includes a villager who sings folk songs in praise of Padmasambhava and of the tenth day of the festival.

At the end of the Padmasambhava Cham, all the monks, nuns and many of the lay believers follow a group of monks who take different instruments to complete one cycle of the Bzang mdo dpal ri palace. They then return to the performance area and walk as a Nor bu dga' 'khyil<sup>[22]</sup> design, an auspicious sign that represents the fulfillment of happiness and wealth, as well as symbolizing impermanence and transformation. The entire day-long Cham finishes with the nor bu dga' khyil amid the sound of the Tibetan horn and the blowing of conches.

## Conclusion

The Padmasambhava dance ritual can be seen in terms of its religious function or as a social process. As a belief system, it is a process in which relationships are constructed within the community and within the religion; the performance of the ritual creates a relationship between the ritual and the believers; and between believers and Padmasambhava, the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. At the same time new relations are formed between lay people and the monastic community, with on the one hand lay people achieving satisfaction of some sort as a result of the ritual and on the other hand, with the monastic community transforming the function of religion. All of these relationships are achieved through the process of ritual and within the belief system.

These are aspects of belief in Padmasambhava are conveyed or achieved in the Cham through a series of signs, actions and objects. First, the ritual of offering and the Cham link Padmasambhava to the believers at the same time as achieving the transmission of meaning and power, in the Buddhist sense. The Cham and the ritual process structure a precise system of belief and communication, a clear hierarchy from the ritual practitioners to Padmasambhava, and through him to the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas, and through them to the community of Tibetans or other believers.

The ritual practitioners include a reincarnated Lama, a Khenpo or abbot, a Chog dpon or ritual master, and the musicians, dancers and so on. They cross the boundary between the sacred and the secular worlds and are given the capacity of communication between the sacred and the human.

On the one hand, the ritual produces satisfaction in the minds of the believers as a result of watching and participating in it, and because it creates an opportunity for them to support the monastic community. Actions such as the chanting of the mantra of Padmasambhava and the performance of prostrations to him and to the Buddha or the Bodhisattvas during the Cham embody

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[22] Padma'tsho (Baimacuo), A Study on the Devotional Practice of Padmasambhava in Tibetan Culture. Tibetan Publishing House: Beijing, 2007. 190.

the commitment of the devotees, for whom the watching of the ritual will help remove obstacles from their lives, and assist in the accumulation of merit and virtue for their future lives, as well as the fulfillment of aspirations. On the other hand, the Cham demonstrates the main ideas in exoteric and esoteric Buddhist teaching, such as the importance of developing compassion, eliminating heretical thinking and transforming erroneous views so as to acquire correct understanding.

The ritual consists of a series of external signs and symbolic concepts that represent communication between humans and the supernatural, and between the lay people and the monastic community. These signs include the text that are chanted, the items used in the offering ceremony, the instruments used by the dancers, and ritual actions such as prostration, mudra, the burning of incense and circumambulating. Those signs and ritual acts all have symbolic meanings which transmit religious meanings from the monastic community to the lay people.

This enhancement of communications between the monastery and the neighboring villages creates an atmosphere of social unity, bringing together religion and society. In some parts of the ritual, villagers also take part alongside the monks in the performance—this happens, for example, in the Cham of *tshogs glu* or “group song”, in which a villager sings a song, and the discipline-master of the monastery goes on behalf of the monastery to present a *bka’ rtags* to the villager. In the Cham of the eight emanations of Padmasambhava, villagers stand behind Padmasambhava holding the banner and at other times they light firecrackers. In addition, villages near the monastery contribute to the ritual by supplying tea, milk, yogurt, butter and herbs to the monks and nuns, and they voluntarily work and cook in the kitchen, which has become a traditional custom. This again helps construct a traditional and organic sense of community between the monastery and local villages. Therefore the tradition of the ritual of *Gu ru tshe cu* achieves the function of religious and social communication.

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中文题目:

## 藏传佛教中的莲花生金刚法舞

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**摘要:**论文通过寺院文献与实地研究, 阐释了藏传佛教金刚法舞仪式的起源以及莲花生大师羌姆的结构与程式。论文首先分析了羌姆法会为期十一天的整体结构: 荟供与诵经、金刚法舞仪式、“莲花光”灌顶; 其次, 论文分析了莲花生金刚法舞程式的过程结构, 同时说明了“嘉羌”和“果毅”的意义, 以及三十七个程式的结构。

**关键词:**金刚法舞仪式; 莲花生; 藏传佛教