

On the History of the Murals in the Medical College at Labrang Monastery

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Abstract

In the inner courtyard of the medical college at Labrang Monastery the visitor finds 19 murals depicting the contents of the first two parts of the *Four Tantras* (*Gyüshi*), the well-known treatise on Tibetan medicine. The origins of these murals raise questions about a number of substantial differences in style and structure of the ‘tree metaphor’ that exist between them and the famous medical thangka illustrations based on the important commentary on the *Gyüshi*, the *Blue Beryl*. The physician and teacher Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo was the first principal of the medical college at Labrang Monastery. But whether he also created this particular tree metaphor on the murals at Labrang is uncertain. A text written by the Lhasa-based scholar, Lozang Chödrak, explains the structure of the second part of the *Gyüshi* in such a similar way, that it can be concluded that his written instructions served as the template for the Labrang murals. This reveals that the design of the mural paintings, which have been repainted at least two times, can be dated back to the beginnings of the first medical college at Chakpori.¹

Keywords

Labrang, history of Tibetan medicine, Mongol sponsorship, medical paintings, unfolded tree metaphor

Introduction

The depiction of the use of images for Tibetan medical teachings became well-known via the illustrations of the *Blue Beryl* compiled by Desi Sangyé Gyatso (Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1653–1705). The *Blue Beryl* is one of the most famous medical texts and the main commentary on the central classical treatise in Tibetan medicine, the *Gyüshi* (*Rgyud bzhi*). At least three ‘historical’

¹ This article is derived from my research project supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF project: 22965 G21). My gratitude goes first of all to the monks at Labrang Monastery who supported me in the documentation of the murals and provided good food while I was taking a rest. Special thanks goes to the painter and physician Nyingchak Jamzer, also to Natalia Bolsokhoeva and Nikolay Tsyrempilov from Ulan Ude for discussing historical aspects. Thanks go to Michael Balk for his general support and patience.

copies of this remarkable set of thangkas exist. They have been described and analysed by a number of authors.² In another treatise on the history of Tibetan medicine authored by Sangyé Gyatso, called the *Mirror of Beryl: A Historical Introduction to Tibetan Medicine*, with its short Tibetan name *Khokbuk* (*Khog 'bugs*) and translated by Kilty,³ one can find information about the original thangka set. However, the age, origin, and exact use of the available sets remain unclear. One set was brought to Buryatia, where it arrived at the Museum for the History of Buryatia in Ulan Ude⁴ after the turbulent years of the 'Stalin purges'. Some of the illustrations, notably the paintings of demons in chapter thirty-one of the second part of the *Gyüshi*, were referenced in another context in Tuva.⁵

The murals in the medical college at Labrang Monastery depict the clinical and preclinical aspects of the first two parts of the *Gyüshi*, namely the *Root Tantra* or *Tsagyü* (*Rtsa rgyud*) and the *Tantra of Explanation* or *Shégyü* (*Bshad rgyud*). In a nutshell, it can be said that the murals were created for teaching medical students and focus on central medical subjects such as anatomy, physiology, pathology, pharmacology, and therapeutic skills in the form of the metaphorical structure of an unfolded tree called *dongdrem* (*sdong 'grem*s). In contrast, the *Blue Beryl* thangkas present subjects from all four parts of the *Gyüshi* with a tendency to emphasise the philosophical or religious aspects of the treatise. Although the thangkas are meant as a memory aid for medical students, they were also used to represent medical achievements to the general public. The Labrang paintings differ substantially from the *Blue Beryl* thangkas in terms of style as well as content and they show interesting, even complementary aspects. A detailed analysis of the murals, their content, and inscriptions as well as their history in the form of a monograph is in preparation.⁶

In this paper I will concentrate on the history of these murals, which have been repainted at least twice. The life of the physicians involved in the design and teaching of the paintings will be portrayed. The following three time periods will be distinguished: first, the period of the life of Lozang Chödrak (Blo

² Emmerick 1993, pp. 56–81; Wang Lei 1994, 2000a, pp. 846–50; Meyer 1992, pp. 2–13; 1998 pp. 21–31; Parfionovitch *et al.* 1992; Bolsokhoyeva 1998, 2007b; Jampa Trinlé and Cai Jingfeng 2000, pp. 866–71.

³ Kilty 2010.

⁴ See Parfionovitch *et al.* 1992; Bolsokhoyeva 2007b, 1998.

⁵ See Schwieger 2009; Interestingly, these demons which occupy about half of the thangka depicting information on chapter 31 of the *Shégyü* can not be found in this text.

⁶ FWF project: 22965 G21. A preliminary comparison of these differences and their relation to the text they are based on is to be published soon (Sabernig. ZAS 42, in press 2013). The paper was presented at the 12th IATS seminar in Vancouver 2010: Sabernig 'Tibetan Medical Paintings illustrating the *Bshad rgyud*'.

bzang chos grags, 1638–1710); second, the life of Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo (Gtsang sman Ye shes bzang po, 1707–1785?); and third, the modern period characterised by the revitalisation of Tibetan medicine after the Cultural Revolution, lasting from 1966–1976. The historical background of the Labrang Medical College presented here is derived from various publications written by Western and Tibetan scholars. Also from my photo-material and a number of interviews including one with the physician and painter of the last two versions of the murals, Menpa Nyingchak Jamzer (Sman pa Snying lcags byams zer, born in 1950)—resulting from trips to Labrang which I undertook in 2001, 2004, 2005, and 2011.

The Life of Darmo Menrampa Lozang Chödrak and the foundation of Labrang

The design of the murals with regard to their content is not simply a regional feature of northeastern Tibet or Amdo, but dates back to the time of the establishment of the first Tibetan medical college at the Iron Hill in Lhasa, called Chakpori (*Lcags po ri*), located just opposite Potala Palace. Lozang Chödrak, head of this ground-breaking institution, wrote a text on *Unfolded Trees of the Explanatory Tantra* which forms the basis of the murals.⁷ Various titles and names are associated with this famous physician, including Darmo Menrampa (Dar mo Sman rams pa), Mengyel Lozang Chödrak (Sman rgyal Blo bzang chos grags), Lopön Rinpoché Lozang Chödrak (Slob dpon Rin po che Blo bzang chos grags), and Darmo Tsojé Lozang Chödrak (Dar mo 'tsho byed Blo bzang chos grags).⁸ As Taube has already discussed, it is not clear whether another physician with the name Lozang Chödrak might have lived at that time and he argues that it would be conspicuous if the outstanding personality Darmo Menrampa were only known by his monk name Lozang Chödrak.⁹ It has not been proven whether Lopön Rinpoché Lozang Chödrak is another name for Darmo Menrampa Lozang Chödrak but the additional name Lopön Rinpoché indicates that this person was a respected master. Regardless, the personality associated with the text, which forms the basis of the murals in the Medical College at Labrang Monastery, is the physician Darmo Menrampa Lozang Chödrak. He was born in 1638 in Darmo, a locality southeast of

⁷ Lozang Chödrak, *Bshad rgyud kyi sdong 'grem*s, 2005.

⁸ See Taube 1981, pp. 6, 73. Unkrieg (2002, p. 12, [1953: XXII]) writes Dharma sman rams pa translating this with Dr. theol. et med. but Darmo refers to his place of birth and has nothing to do with 'dharma'.

⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

Lhasa. According to Tibetan sources he received his education at a location with some medical facility called Lubukling (*Klu sbug gling*) and the medical college located in Drépung (*'Bras spung*) from various teachers.¹⁰ He became an instructor at the medical schools Lhawangchok (*Lha dbang lcog*) alias Sharchenchok (*Shar chen lcog*) at one of the towers of Potala palace. He adopted the surgical method *shekchö* (*gsheg bcos*) to cure cataracts, from the Indian physician called Manaho (Rma na ho), a famous eye specialist. Due to his ability in conducting eye surgery, Lozang Chödrak became a personal physician to the Fifth Dalai Lama.¹¹

Lozang Chödrak was an author and compiler of various books. Among others, he edited the biography of Yutok Yöntan Gönpö (G.yu thog Yon tan mgon po) and revised and completed the famous commentary by Lodrö Gyelpo (Blo gros rgyal po 1509–1579), the *Mes po'i zhal lung*.¹² Some of his books were even translated into Mongolian. He stood in various lines of direct transmission listed in the *Thob yig* of Jaya Paṇḍita, from Mongolia (1642–1708).¹³ This scholar is also known by the Tibetan name of Lozang Trinlé (Blo bzang 'phrin las) and he was a student of Lozang Chödrak. The treatise was translated and analysed by Taube. According to Taube it was Lozang Chödrak who supported Sangyé Gyatso in the compilation of the *Blue Beryl*.¹⁴ He appears to have had a sharp mind and did not tire in his demands for preclinical knowledge as described in the *Shégyü*. Schaeffer translated one of these statements about 'insightful' physicians as follows:

Even though some physicians do not understand [the *Four Tantras*], they rashly think that understanding is easy. Some [on the other hand], see the [medical treatises] as difficult to understand, while others become frightened by the mere sight of a book.¹⁵

A special area of interest was physical anatomy. Lozang Chödrak attended the dissection of four human bodies, both male and female, in order to find the

¹⁰ See Jampa Trinlé, 2000b, p. 314. Among them the Fifth Dalai Lama and famous physicians like Lozang Tenpa Dargyé (Blo bzang Bstan pa Dar rgyas) or Kyépe Lozang Zöpa (Kye dpe Blo bzang Bzod pa). See Taube 1981, p. 5 f., pp. 78–83.

¹¹ See Jampa Trinlé 2000b, pp. 315 f.; Meyer 2003, p. 110; Schaeffer 2011, p. 293.

¹² Lodrö Gyelpo, *Mes po'i zhal lung*, 1985 [ca. 16th century]. More on this remarkable scholar and physician: Gerke 1999; Gerke and Bolsokhoeva 1999; Schaeffer 2003; Czaja 2006a.

¹³ According to Taube he stood in lines of transmission as follows: *Gyu thog snying thig*, *Sman gyi lha mo'i rjes gnam gi brgyud pa*, *Cha lag bco brgyad kyi lung yongs su rjogs pa thob pa'i brgyud pa*, (*snying po bsdud pa*) *Legs par thob pa'i brgyud pa*, *Bye ba ring bsrel yongs rdzogs kyi lung thob pa'i brgyud pa*, (*nyams yig brgya rtsa*) *Thob pa'i brgyud pa* (Taube 1981, pp. 66, 71, 78 f.).

¹⁴ Taube 1981, p. 73; Czaja 2007, p. 357.

¹⁵ Schaeffer 2003, p. 630.

360 human bones which are mentioned in the *Shégyü*.¹⁶ The *Shégyü* only summarises the number of bones: describing only that there are 360 small bones, 12 larger joints, and 210 smaller ones.¹⁷ In Lozang Chödrak's text all the bones are listed by their individual names resulting in a total of 622 bones and joints.¹⁸ He did the same with sinews, ligaments, and the channels mentioned in the *Gyüshi*. The result of his naturalistic approach to human anatomy is well reflected in the corresponding mural at the medical college at Labrang. He was also a specialist in Tibetan pathology, respectively nosology. Although the murals depicting these chapters appear to be the most beautiful ones—their full value can only be realised in combination with the text written by Lozang Chödrak, which exceeds the description in the *Gyüshi* and its commentaries in many cases.¹⁹

In his capacity as one of the personal physicians of the Fifth Dalai Lama and head of the Chakpori Medical College he was integrated in the inner circle of the Gelugpa in Lhasa, but it seems that his relation to Sangyé Gyatso was not without friction. In the autobiography of the Regent, which is part of Sangyé Gyatso's *Historical Introduction to Tibetan Medicine* mentioned above, Lozang Chödrak is rarely mentioned. In one brief passage, Sangyé Gyatso emphasised that he would have been able to cure people who had been abandoned by the famous court-physician Lozang Chödrak.²⁰ Divergences between the two personalities can also be found in a dispute over the origins of the *Gyüshi*. The Northern school *Jangluk* (*Byang lugs*) was in support of Sangyé Gyatso's view that the *Gyüshi* are the words of Buddha. Adherents of the rival school *Zurluk* (*Zur lugs*), however, under their famous proponent Lodrö Gyelpo thought after some careful consideration that it was the original work of a remarkable Tibetan scholar.²¹ Lozang Chödrak is mainly associated with *Zurluk*, which had different views on pharmacological aspects, too.²² However, it is to the credit of the Regent that the diverging opinions of these schools were united. With the establishment of the Chakpori Medical College

¹⁶ Meyer 2003, p. 110; Gyatso 2011, p. 311.

¹⁷ For the section on bones and joints in the *Shégyü*: Dash 1994, p. 42 f.; Clark 1995, p. 55 f.; Yutok Yöntan Gönpö, *Bdud rtsi snying po yan lag brgyad pa*, 1992, pp. 21/16–22/1. In the *Blue Beryl* commentary and the corresponding Thangka illustrations this section is explained in more detail as in the *Shégyü* but it is still less informative than in Lozang Chödrak's text: see Parfionovitch *et al.* 1992: Thangka 7+8; Sangyé Gyatso, *Bai dūr sñon po*, 1973, ff. 145/6–149/1.

¹⁸ Lozang Chödrak, *Bshad rgyud kyi sdong 'grem*s, 2005, pp. 12/23–16/2.

¹⁹ Nosology: Lozang Chödrak, *Bshad rgyud kyi sdong 'grem*s, 2005, pp. 58/5–63/16.

²⁰ Kilty 2010, p. 488.

²¹ For a detailed discussion see: Czaja 2006.

²² Taube 1981, pp. 63–66; Pasang Yontan 1988, pp. 118–121, 123; Czaja 2007, p. 350.

and the making of the thangka illustrations of the *Blue Beryl* a new period of Tibetan medicine began.

The end of the seventeenth century represents a highlight in the development of Tibetan medicine supported by Sangyé Gyatso. The period is also known as the ‘birth of classical orthodoxy’ and is of decisive importance in the ‘canonisation and institutionalisation of Tibetan medical traditions’.²³ Nevertheless the Regent was confronted with internal and external political difficulties. It is well known that Sangyé Gyatso concealed the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama for fifteen years and that he died violently in 1705. Only four years after the death of Sangyé Gyatso the first Jamyang Zhépa (‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa), born in Amdo under the secular name Ngakwang Tsöndrü (Ngag dbang brtson ’grus, 1648–1721),²⁴ accepted the invitation of the Khoshut Mongol Prince Erdeni Jinong and went back to Amdo in 1709 to establish a monastery which was supported by the local Mongolian aristocracy.²⁵ Legend has it that Lozang Chödrak followed the entourage,²⁶ which would mean that he lived at least until 1709. No information is available about the exact time of his death or when he wrote the text, which was the template for the murals.²⁷ No other painting illustrating the *Shégyü* using the tree metaphor has been found at the Chakpori or anywhere else in Lhasa.²⁸ One can find modern

²³ See ‘The six Temporal Foci’, in Blezer *et al.* 2007, p. 430 f.

²⁴ Tsyrempilov 2003, p. 441. Tsyrempilov translated the biography of this scholar into Russian, including a remarkable introduction (2008).

²⁵ The prince’s name in Chinese: Henan Qinwang, in Tibetan Sokpo Gyelpo (Sog po rgyal po, see: Nietupski 1999, p. 21). The Monastery’s formal name is *dga’ ldan bzhad sgrub dar rgya bkra shis g.yas su ’khyil ba’i gling* (Wallenböck 2006, p. 155). According to Nietupski the Monastery was founded in 1709 indeed, accurately timed with the 300-year anniversary of the foundation of Ganden Monastery (*dga’ ldan dgon pa*) in Central Tibet, but this ceremony took place at Tsékhok (*Rtse khog*), in the Southeast of Qinghai. In 1710 the first building was installed at its actual position (Nietupski 2011, p. 19).

²⁶ Jampa Trinlé 2000b, pp. 319/7–8.

²⁷ Kilty dates the year of his death as 1710 (2010, p. 2), Schaeffer around 1700 (2003, p. 638 f.). According to information provided by the Arura-Group in Xining, the modern publisher of his text *Unfolded Trees on the Explanatory Tantra* he could have lived until 1712.

²⁸ Later the eminent scholar Khyenrap Norbu (Mkhyen rab Nor bu 1883–1962) wrote a book describing all *Four Tantras* with the help of the tree metaphor (Khyenrap Norbu and Jampa Trinlé 1987, see also Jampa Trinlé 1996). Interestingly, illustrations on the *Shégyü* are missing whereas the other parts are well depicted. Even earlier Losel Wangpo Péma Karpo (Blo gsal Dbang po Pad ma Dkar po) wrote a text which deals with the *Shégyü* in the form of unfolded trees with the Tibetan name *Rgyud bzhi’i ’grel ba gzhang la phan pa’i gter* (2007 [sixteenth century]) but their structure does not fit to the murals’ inscriptions. Meyer mentioned an interview with Tendzin Chödrak (Bstan ’dzin Chos grags) where he explained that Khyenrap Norbu was in Labrang in order to complete the missing thankas of the Lhasa set in the 1920s of the last century. If this information is true, it would indicate that at that time there was a complete set of thankas in Labrang as well as that he knew of the existence of the murals. Unfortunately,

illustrations, which use the tree metaphor to describe aspects of all *Four Tantras*, but these depictions do not follow the complex description of those by Lozang Chödrak.²⁹ In sum it can be stated that Lozang Chödrak was one of the most important proponents at the time of the establishment of the Chakpori Medical College in terms of practical skills such as surgery, scientific progress in Tibetan anatomy as well as the creation of didactic tools to teach Tibetan medicine. His treatise, *Unfolded Trees on the Explanatory Tantra* mentioned above, is the written basis of the murals at Labrang Monastery. Therefore his work is of crucial significance for the development of Tibetan medicine, in general, and for these murals, in particular.

During the rule of the first Jamyang Zhépa, the Labrang Monastery grew quickly and owing to the unstable political situation in Central Tibet the unique decision was made, from within the Gelugpa, that certain degrees of the curriculum should be achieved in Labrang independently from Lhasa.³⁰ Moreover, although the territory of Labrang was nominally under the control of the Beijing authorities Labrang developed territorial power through a delicate religious as well as political balancing act.³¹ Nonetheless the establishment of the Medical College at Labrang had to wait until the reign of his successor, the second Jamyang Zhépa.

The Life of Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo and the establishment of the Medical College

There are a number of field reports and travelogues on Labrang,³² a collection of works by Könchok Jikmé Wangpo (Dkon mchog 'Jigs med dbang po, the second Jamyang Zhépa 1728–1791),³³ and an outstanding classical chronicle on Labrang Monastery, which includes ten pages about the medical college.³⁴

neither Meyer nor I could find any written sources about this issue (Meyer 1996, p. 7). Monks from the Medical College at Labrang Monastery told me that it is said that there were some older thankas but that they may have been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

²⁹ For example, in the new hospital for Tibetan medicine in Labrang-district (*Bsang chur dzang bod lugs sman khang*) there is a huge wall painting that shows some trees on all *Four Tantras* but those on the *Shégyü* differ substantially from the murals in the Medical College at Labrang Monastery.

³⁰ Tsyrempilov 2003, p. 448.

³¹ Nietupski 2002, p. 122 f., 2011.

³² See Baradin 2002 [1924]; Fürholzer 1942; Li An-Che 1994; Wallenböck 2006; Makley 2007.

³³ Könchok Jikmé Wangpo, *Jam dbyangs bzhad pa*, 1971 [ca. 18th century].

³⁴ Tenpa Rapgyé (Bstan pa Rab rgyas), *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, 2005 [1801], pp. 532–43; Vostricov 1994, pp. 88, 170.



Fig. 1. The Medical College at Labrang in 2005.

Also, Yonten Gyatso wrote a detailed work on the monastery in Tibetan.³⁵ Nevertheless, very little is known about the development and curriculum of this institution. Besides the fieldwork of Li An-Che on the curriculum in Labrang and certain aspects of its medical college, a short article by Yonten Gyatso and Buffetrille,³⁶ which is based on historical literature, is still the only publication available in a European language that describes life in the medical college at Labrang. Even Nietupski's thorough analysis of the history of Labrang Monastery only mentions certain aspects of this institution.³⁷ Unfortunately, the murals are not mentioned in any of these publications. Many researchers and adventurers travelled to Labrang Monastery and left interesting photo-documentations.³⁸ Nietupski's evaluation of the Griebenow estate gives a wonderful portrayal of Labrang in the 1920s, including many photos but unfortunately it does not portray life at the medical college. Joseph Franz Rock presented a completely different and lugubrious atmosphere at the monastery. Even in his huge photographic collection, which is stored in large part at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, I could not find any pictures of the medical college or the murals. In sum it can be stated that we do not know much about the history of either the medical college or the murals.

The Labrang Medical College was established in the late eighteenth century. At that time Tibetan medicine was spreading in an institutionalised form

³⁵ Yonten Gyatso, *Cho sde chen po*, 1987.

³⁶ Yonten Gyatso and Buffetrille 1987, pp. 7–10.

³⁷ Nietupski 2011, 1999.

³⁸ Nietupski 1999 has evaluated and documented the Griebenow estate, see also Fürholzer 1942; Rock 1956 (Rock in Walravens 2003); Buchwald-Ernst 2005.

from the medical college at Chakpori in Lhasa to Kham, Amdo, Mongolia, and even to Beijing, as Thupten Tsering, the last director of the historical institution,³⁹ wrote in his article:

For the personal physician of the saviour Rje-btsun Dam-pa of Khal-kha in Mongolia, physician Blo-bzang Chos-phel and Skal-bzang Yar-'phel of Lcags-po-ri were sent one after another. Similarly, many wise physicians were sent to Mongolia. In the same way Ta-lama 'Jam-dbyangs Mkhas-grub of Lcags-po-ri was sent to act as the personal physician of Lcang-skya Rolpei Rdor-je the royal Guru of the Emperor of China.⁴⁰

In 1784 the Medical College in Labrang, formally known as Menpa Dratsang Sorik Zhenpenling (Sman pa grwa tshang gso rig gzhan phan gling), was established under Könchok Jikmé Wangpo.⁴¹ With the help of the sponsorship of the Mongol prince Tendzin Wangchuk (Bstan 'dzin dbang phyug), an elder associate of the young religious throne holder, construction of the medical college buildings began.⁴² In the first half of the following century, the work was completed by Lozang Tupten Jikmé Gyatso (Blo bzang thub bstan 'Jigs med rgya mtsho 1792–1855), the second successor or third incarnation of the Jamyang Zhépa.⁴³ He became famous for his ascetic practices and stable state of meditation. He did not enlarge the monastery⁴⁴ but is supposed to have reformed the monastic rules in the medical college.⁴⁵ Originally the medical college was modelled on the Chakpori in Lhasa.⁴⁶ According to Thupten Tsering for this purpose and...

³⁹ Gerl and Aschoff 2005, p. 21.

⁴⁰ Thupten Tsering 2005, p. 63. The original Tibetan version appeared in 1986 (see Gerl and Aschoff 2005, p. 21).

⁴¹ Most publications date to the foundation of the college in 1784 (e.g., Li An-Che 1994, p. 149; Meyer 1997, p. 118; Jampa Trinlé 2000b, pp. 363/12; Nietupski 2011: p. 21), only Yonten Gyatso and Buffetrille date to the year 1763 (1987, p. 7).

⁴² Nietupski 2011, p. 130. According to Nietupski, the Mongol prince also started the Labrang printing house (2011, p. 30). The *Annotated Catalogue* of the collection of Mongolian manuscripts and xylographs M1 of the Institute of Mongolian, Tibetan, and Buddhist studies of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences shows that many treatises from the Labrang Printing house have been brought to Buryatia: Tsyrempilov (Compiler), Vanchikova (Editor) 2004.

⁴³ Li An-che 1989, p. 125; Nietupski 1999, p. 22.

⁴⁴ Nietupski 1999, p. 22. (?) Nietupski mentions in the same context a record that includes '*Mongol Sponsorship for the later renovation of the Medical college's Meeting hall*' (Nietupski 2011, p. 21).

⁴⁵ Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil. 2007 [?], p. 6.

⁴⁶ See Meyer 1997, p. 118; Bolsokhoyeva 2007a, p. 339.

...on the request of the learned 'Jigs-med Dbang-po, the 2nd incarnation of 'Jam-dbyangs Bzad-pa [sic.] of Bkra-shis 'Khyil monastery and the minister Ching-Wang Bstan-'dzin Wang⁴⁷ to H.H. Skal-bzang Rgya-mtsho, the 7th Dalai Lama, the physician Gtsang-smam Ye-shes Bzang-po was sent to act as the principal for the monk medical institute of Bkra-shis 'Khyil.⁴⁸

Who was this eminent scholar and physician and when did he go to Labrang? We know that the Seventh Dalai Lama was already dead in 1758.⁴⁹ Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo was born in 1707, two years after the death of Sangyé Gyatso and two years before the foundation of Labrang Monastery. In 1724 he was enrolled at the medical college at Chakpori.⁵⁰ Like Lozang Chödrak, the scholar Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo was a personal physician to the Dalai Lama—in his case the Seventh Dalai Lama. According to Gerl's enquiries Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo was also director at the Chagpori.⁵¹ Jampa Trinlé (Byams pa Phrin las) has discovered that already in 1743, at the age of 36,⁵² Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo was asked to go to the eastern Tibetan region Kham and around Qinghai-Lake called *Tsongön* (Tib. Mtsho sngon, Mong. Kokonor, in the Amdo region) to become the personal physician to the Mongolian prince Tendzin Wangchuk who was mentioned above and supported the later establishment of the medical college at Labrang Monastery. Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo taught at different places such as at Shachyung (Bya khyung) Monastery and Rongwo Gomchen (Rong po Dgon chen) while at Labrang Monastery he taught the *Tsagyü* and *Shégyü* with the help of unfolded trees.⁵³ Jampa Trinlé states that from the very beginning a medical classroom was installed close to the Kalachakra College and a medical curriculum was introduced.⁵⁴ The Kalachakra College was established in 1763.⁵⁵ The Mongolian scholar of medicine Emchi Lozang Dargyé (Sog po mer rgan Am chi chung ba Blo bzang dar rgyas) was one of his most important students.⁵⁶ According to the

⁴⁷ In the Tibetan version of this text, the name is written as Ching lang [sic.] Bstan 'dzin Wang is probably an error.

⁴⁸ Thupten Tsering 2005, p. 63.

⁴⁹ More on the history of the Dalai Lamas: Schulemann 1958, p. 314.

⁵⁰ <http://www.tbrc.org>. 28.05.2013 16:44.

⁵¹ Gerl and Aschoff 2005, p. 105.

⁵² Jampa Trinlé (2000b, pp. 362/14) writes 37 (*sum cu so bdun*) in accordance with the Tibetan way of reckoning the age of an individual.

⁵³ Jampa Trinlé 2000b, pp. 363/4.

⁵⁴ Jampa Trinlé 2000b, pp. 363/5–11.

⁵⁵ Li An-Che 1994, p. 149. This might be the reason why the establishment of the Medical College was dated back to that year by Yonten Gyatso and Buffetrille (1987, p. 7) but most probably their western date is just a mistake because the mentioned wood-dragon year would be 1784 and 1763 is a water-sheep year.

⁵⁶ Jampa Trinlé 2000b, pp. 365/13.

information given by the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo died shortly after the foundation of the medical college at Labrang Monastery.⁵⁷ Many of his books are supposed to have remained at other places.⁵⁸ The Arura Group in Xining has published a collection of Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo's texts including one text⁵⁹ describing the unfolded trees of the *Tsagyü* extensively but his statement on the *Shégyü* and the following parts of the *Gyüshi* is very brief and cannot be compared with Lozang Chödrak's elaborate text which forms the written basis of the murals. Another text of Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo's included in this collection deals with Tibetan Anatomy or *néluk* (*gnas lugs*).⁶⁰ The author refers to different older anatomical texts on the subject including Lozang Chödrak's treatise but in general he retains the orthodox view described in the *Blue Beryl* and does not follow the more naturalistic anatomical description based on human dissection written by Lozang Chödrak, which is still present on the murals. In summary, it can be concluded that Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo was important for the foundation of the Labrang Medical College but that the medical knowledge represented in the murals reflects the work of Lozang Chödrak.

Although Labrang is one of six leading Gelugpa monasteries it is well known for integrating the thoughts of other religious groups. Various incarnations of the Jamyang Zhépas are known for their connections to the older Buddhist traditions of the Nyingmapa.⁶¹ According to Nietupski the medical college was in close contact with the Tantric college of *ngakpa* (*sngags pa*) near Labrang as well as to the Kirti Monastery in modern Sichuan.⁶² Today these relations seem to be of less importance, but during our conversation some of the monks explained that Labrang was regarded as the 'mother monastery' of over hundred smaller monasteries and many educated physicians from the medical college at Labrang taught medicine in various smaller monasteries.

Labrang Monastery became famous for the high level of its scholarship, not only in Lhasa and Amdo but also among scholars and physicians in Mongolia and Buryatia. The Buryat Monastery 'Tshugol Datsang' (Tib. Bkra shis chos 'phel gling), founded in 1826, followed the school of Buddhist philosophy *Tsennyi* (*mtshan nyid*) at Labrang and many Buryat monks went to Tibet or

⁵⁷ <http://www.tbrc.org>. 28.05.2013 16:44.

⁵⁸ Jampa Trinlé 2000b, pp. 363/13–21. Yet it is not known which of his works have survived the Cultural Revolution but over the last three decades respectively since the beginning of the revitalisation of Tibetan medicine many books have been republished.

⁵⁹ Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo, *Gtsang sman sdong 'grel tikkā mun sel*, 2007.

⁶⁰ Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo, *Bshad pa'i rgyud kyī gnas lugs*, 2007.

⁶¹ Nietupski 2011, pp. 31–36, 141; The newly built residence of the living sixth Jamyang Zhépa is located just beside the Nyingmapa temple.

⁶² For this rather complex issue see Nietupski 2011, pp. 32–36.

Mongolia to complete their studies. Monks from the monastery at Aga (Tib. Bkra shis lhun grub gling) usually went to Labrang for this purpose.⁶³ According to Bolsokhoyeva, the medical college of ‘Tshugol Datsang’ followed the curriculum of the Chakpori but the medical college at Labrang played an important role in the establishment and development of the medical schools of Tshugol and Aginsk. The medical college of Aginsk was founded in 1884,⁶⁴ exactly one hundred years after the foundation of the one at Labrang. During a personal conversation with the Buryat historian, Natalia Bolsokhoyeva, she told me that one major influence on Buryat’s curriculum was probably Labrang’s pharmacology, because the flora in Amdo was similar to local Buryat plant resources. All interviewed physicians explained that the medicinal substances would have been used in strict accordance with classical texts such as the *Gyüshi* or the famous pharmacopoeia called the *Shelgong Sheltreng* (*Shel gong Shel phreng*). However, oral medical knowledge of plants would have been transmitted from teacher to students as well and would have been based on what was locally known. Many monk physicians have modern pharmacopoeia standing on their bookshelves, which would suggest the possibility for substitutes. This does not necessarily contradict the classical texts as the orthodox view still allows for the substitution of many traditional ingredients. This does not necessarily contradict the classical texts as the orthodox view still allows for the substitution of many traditional ingredients growing plants that grow in the rich flora of the huge regional grasslands, plants that can be found in Mongolia and Buryatia, too.⁶⁵

Use and development of the murals

The use of the unfolded tree metaphor to illustrate the *Shégyü* is still alive and in use in the medical culture at Labrang. In 2000 the small museum inside the hospital exhibited small painted copies of the murals and a physician told me that he painted the trees, copying out the murals, during his own education. In 2005 monks at the Medical College showed me some plastic leaves, which can be used as a didactic tool and are prepared especially in the shape of the leaves on the murals. With the help of these tools a certain topic can be discussed—a little wooden twig symbolises the main content and the leaves are attached during the explanation to demonstrate certain topics. I was told that the system is also used during examinations similar to what we know

⁶³ Vanchikova 2003, p. 451; Tsyrempilov 2003, p. 441.

⁶⁴ Bolsokhoyeva 2007a, p. 339 f.; Bolsokhoyeva and Gerasimova 1998, p. 34.

⁶⁵ More on substitution of certain ingredients: Sabernig 2011.



Fig. 2. The courtyard with some of the new murals. Along the bottom one can see the drainage, which made the repainting necessary.

about the use at the Chagpori Medical College.⁶⁶ The unfolded tree metaphor is mainly employed during the earlier stages of medical education and, in the early spring, when theoretical aspects are discussed. Later on during the year, students receive practical teaching about medical plants in the grasslands.

Yet it is not clear when the first version of the murals was painted and who authorised them. The eighteenth-century chronicle on Labrang Monastery does not mention the murals or the concept of the unfolded tree in the Medical College. The colophon of the famous illustrated *materia medica* by the Mongolian scholar Jampel Dorjé ('Jam dpal rdo rje)⁶⁷ indicates a connection between the treatise and the Medical Colleges at Labrang and Kumbum Monastery, but no unfolded trees on the *Shégyü* are depicted in this treatise.⁶⁸ The unfolded trees illustrate the contents of the *Tsagyü* as they are already well known through the illustrations of the *Blue Beryl* in a different style. The illustrated *materia medica* is interesting in itself but it does not show any structural connections to any of the Labrang murals.

⁶⁶ See also: Gerl; Aschoff 2005, p. 152.

⁶⁷ Jampel Dorjé, *Dri med shel phreng nas bshad pa'i sman*, 1971, pp. 24/1/5.

⁶⁸ Thanks to a hint from Stacey van Vleet, who is working on the history of Tibetan medicine's spread into Amdo, I went to see the colophon on some aspects of the unfolded trees and Tibetan *materia medica* but no direct connection could be found.

The renovation of the murals after the Cultural Revolution

The murals were repainted in around 1985 when Labrang Monastery was renovated after the destruction during the Cultural Revolution. In 2007 another renovation of the murals was required due to drainage problems of rainwater in the courtyard. A drainage system was installed and the teaching gallery, where the murals are located, was lifted. Interestingly, the same artist who painted the previous murals also did the new version. The painter, Nyingchak Jamzer, and some monks who received parts of their education at the Labrang Medical College explained that with the help of the supervision of the painter's late medical teacher, Akhu Tenpa Gyatso Tsang (A khu Bstan pa Rgya mtsho Tshang), it was possible to restore the previous design. I was informed that in order to renovate the murals correctly Akhu Tenpa Gyatso Tsang was advised by a group of traditional physicians. According to Jampa Trinlé, the venerable monk physician Akhu Tenpa Gyatso Tsang, was born in 1925 and entered the monastery at the age of eight. Later he received his education in Lhasa, and was famous for his knowledge and teachings on Tibetan pharmacology and introduced advanced pharmaceutical production and external applications in the 1950s. With the military takeover of Labrang in 1958 things changed dramatically. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, he not only had to endeavour to protect his old books but also his life.⁶⁹

In the early eighties, during the era of 'open door politics' a revitalisation of Tibetan culture and medicine took place. By 1979 a new hospital had already been built inside the monastery and a few years later the murals were renovated. The secular painter and physician, Nyingchak Jamzer, born in Kangtsa (Rkang tshwa) near Tsö (Tib. Gtsos, Chin. Hezuo), executed the restoration. He began his education with some basic biomedical training, and then learned traditional painting and medicine at Labrang with his teacher Akhu Tenpa Gyatso Tsang. For most of his life, he worked in a hospital. The repainting of the murals took a few months to finish in both cases because he had to work as a medical doctor at the hospital and was only able to paint the new versions at the medical college during his free time. Now he is retired and serves with his knowledge at the monastery of his birthplace.

He explained that neither his teacher nor anyone else could tell him the exact details of the murals' history or the original painter. He told me that he had travelled to various monasteries in Sichuan and around Lhasa but he had never seen any depictions like the unique assemblage of the tree metaphor on the murals in Labrang. Another physician, an old monk, told me that he had heard the original murals dated back to the time of Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo.

⁶⁹ Jampa Trinlé 2000, pp. 488/1–93/10.

The differing versions of the Labrang murals and the *Shégyü*

Both documented versions of the Labrang murals contain a total of 385 different branches, which can be regarded as identical in relation to content (there are some grammatical differences, e.g., one branch shows a different number of leaves and another is painted in a different style while still depicting the same information). In comparison with Lozang Chödrak's text, one branch is missing in both of the Labrang versions and vice versa. In the first documented version of the Labrang murals, 15 branches showed a different number of leaves from that in Chödrak's text.⁷⁰ Interestingly, most of these branches show signs of correction: either retouched or with leaves added whereas in other parts there are hardly any visible corrections. In many cases these corrections show diverging or additional aspects to Lozang Chödrak's text. The new murals do not exhibit these tracks. In the following analysis the character of these corrections will be shown with the help of some examples:

Branch II.2. in Fig. 3, in the middle of the magnified mural, illustrates the classification of female disorders as described in chapter twelve of the *Shégyü*. The leaves indicate 32 pathogenic categories (three thin leaves which count for ten diseases and two larger ones, which each count for one disease, makes 32). This is the number specified briefly in the *Shégyü* over three verses.⁷¹ In the corresponding chapter Lozang Chödrak's text lists 36 female disorders instead of 32 and each of them are named.⁷² Looking closer at the image, one can see clearly that this branch used to have 36 leaves, as four leaves have been retouched. It appears that the information depicted in the murals switched from Lozang Chödrak's text back to the classical text, the *Shégyü*. Interestingly, all 36 female disorders can be found in both important commentaries of the *Gyüshi* but in a different sequence.⁷³ In contrast, Thangka 19 of the illustrations to the *Blue Beryl* on pathology has only a single figure as a sort of placeholder for all the female diseases mentioned in the *Shégyü*.⁷⁴ A similar situation can be found with branch II.5.4.ii. on the same tree. The branch deals with lesions (*rma*); Lozang Chödrak lists 16 lesions while the *Shégyü* lists

⁷⁰ A deeper analysis of the relationship between the text and the murals can be found in the article: 'Tibetan medical paintings illustrating the *Bshad rgyud*' and general aspects on *The Medical Murals at Labrang Monastery* in another short article (Sabernig: 2014).

⁷¹ Dash 1994, p. 154; Clark 1995, p. 89; Yutok Yöntan Gönpö 1992, pp. 42/4–5.

⁷² Lozang Chödrak, *Bshad rgyud kyi sdong 'grem*s, 2005, pp. 46/18–47/6.

⁷³ Sangyé Gyatso, *Bai dūr snon po*, 1973, f. 289/1–3; Lodrö Gyelpo, *Mes po'i zhal lung* 2005, pp. 430/19–431/2.

⁷⁴ Parfionovitch *et al.* 1992, p. 209, No. 106. This small figure shows the existence of 32 women-diseases as mentioned *Shégyü*, so the number seems to be more a question of classification.



Fig. 3. The branch at the bottom symbolises only 32 categories of female disorders. Four leaves have been retouched. The branch in the upper part of the painting shows another retouched leaf.

only 15.⁷⁵ The correlating branch at Labrang shows 15 leaves and signs of a retouched 16th one.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Yutok Yöntan Gönpö, *Bdud rtsi snying po yan lag brgyad pa* 1992, pp. 45/8–11; Lozang Chödrak, *Bshad rgyud kyi sdong 'grem*s, 2005, pp. 57/3–11; Dash 1994, p. 176 f.; Clark 1995, p. 96.

⁷⁶ In both commentaries *rlig blug* is mentioned but not necessarily counted as a wound on its own: Sangyé Gyatso, *Bai dūr sñon po*, 1973, pp. 301/1; Lodrö Gyelpo, *Mes po'i zhal lung*, 2005, pp. 455/7–9, 455/19–21. The thangka-illustrations do not mention the category of wounds in the *Shégyü* at all.

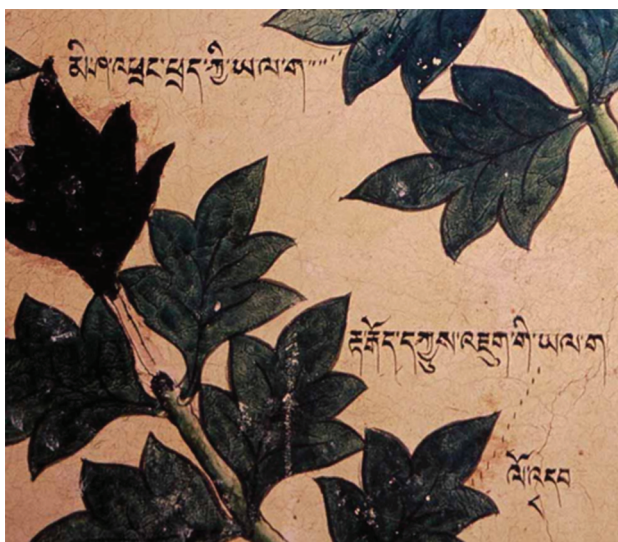


Fig. 4. The tracks are still visible in the mid-eighties version.

Another interesting adjustment occurs in the tree that depicts chapter 28 of the *Shégyü*, which covers the specifics of therapeutic intervention. Branch I.3. on skills characterised as sending a ‘wild horse into a race’ (*rta rgod dkyus ’jug*) has nine leaves while Lozang Chödrak’s text describes only eight leaves. The ninth leaf in the mural is a little bit darker in an offset position and the number is still eight.

The same situation can be found regarding branch I.8. on the same tree. This branch on ‘conflict resolution through the most important’ (*gtso pos ’khrugs zlum*) gives information about specific medicinal substances for certain symptoms or diseases. It shows 28 leaves, but the last two leaves again look slightly different and are positioned a little to the side. Again the branch carries the original number, namely 26, which correlates to the text. Other branches on the murals show similar corrections. Another topic that should be discussed is the number of leaves on the three branches on the stem of the *materia medica*. The corresponding *Shégyü* chapter (chapter 20) explains the value of different pharmacological substances. In both texts, the *Shégyü* as well as Lozang Chödrak’s text, 99 ‘tree-medicines’ or *shingmen* (*shing sman*), ‘mucilaginous-medicines’ or *tsimen* (*rtsi sman*), and ‘liquid medicines’ or *tangmen* (*thang sman*)⁷⁷ are listed but neither text says which substance belongs to

⁷⁷ The translation of these types of medicinal substances differs from publication to publication and the discussion on the correct translation and meaning is still going on. It would go

which group. In the Medical College at Labrang Monastery, the branches show clear numbers for each group, 51 *shingmen*, 20 *tsimen*, and 28 *tangmen*. No connection could be found between these numbers and the *Four Tantras* and their three commentaries: *Bye ba ring bsrel*, *Mes po'i zhal lung*, and *Vaidūrya sngon po*.⁷⁸ The famous 18th-century pharmacopoeia of Tendzin Püntso (Bstan'dzin phun tshogs, 1673–1743), the *Shel gong Shel phreng*,⁷⁹ and the associated illustrated treatise by Jampel Dorjé,⁸⁰ classify these substances clearly but the number of leaves does not correspond with these treatises.⁸¹ Lozang Chödrak wrote a pharmacological work specifically about the 20th chapter of the *Shégyü*, too.⁸² Although it includes all categories of substances, still he does not distinguish precisely between the substances and groups of 'tree—', 'mucilaginous—', and 'liquid medicines'. In the case of these frequently used medicinal substances the responsible authority has chosen a yet unknown classification. Possibly this variation should be seen in light of the period of modernity and the related revitalisation of Tibetan medicine.

beyond the scope of this article commenting these terms in detail but some examples should be given here. The group of *shingmen* is often translated as 'wood-medicines' (Parfionovich *et al.* 1992, p. 219) or 'tree-medicines' (Yuthok Yonten Gonpo 2008, p. 205; Clark 1995, p. 139). The survey of the most famous Tibetan pharmacopoeia (Tendzin Püntso, *Shel gong Shel phreng* 1994) and the illustrated Tibeto-Mongolian materia medica of Jampel Dorjé (*Dri med shel phreng nas bshad pa'i sman*, 1971) reveals a clearer classification of the categories: but this group covers different parts of a tree such as leaves, blossoms, fruits, nuts, roots, barks, resins, and wood. The group *tsimen* is commonly translated as 'nectar-medicines' (Parfionovich *et al.* 1992, p. 219) or 'exudates and secretions' (Tendzin Püntso, *Shel gong shel phreng*, 1994; Jampel Dorjé, *Dri med shel phreng nas bshad pa'i sman*, 1971; Dash 1995, p. 134) and contains substances of animal origin such as bile of a bear (*dom mkhris*) or musk (*glu rtsi*), aromatic fruits such as cardamum (*sug smel*), or cloves (*li shi*), and mineral substances such as mineral pitch (*brag zhun*). The group *tangmen* is sometimes translated as 'medicines from the plains' or 'plateau' (*thang* means plain or steppe, see Parfionovich *et al.* 1992, p. 219) or 'decoctions' and 'boiled extracts' (Tendzin Püntso, *Shel gong shel phreng*, 1994; Jampel Dorjé, *Dri med shel phreng nas bshad pa'i sman*, 1971; Dash 1995, p. 134 f.). Different types of plants belong to this group, such as frequently used liquorice (*shing mngar*) or toxic thorn-apple (*thang phrom*). Sometimes they are also called 'shrub-medicine' (Yuthog Yonten Gonpo 2008, p. 205) because this group includes many shrubs or annual vegetables. The Tibetan-Chinese dictionary *Bod rgya tshigs mdzod chen mo* emphasises the liquid character of this type of medicinal substance (BGT 1985, pp. 1142–43). However, in many cases the biological specification of Tibetan medical terms varies and ingredients are often substituted (see Sabernig 2011).

⁷⁸ Although the *Vaidūrya sngon po* shows hints of some classification of these three groups it does not help to identify all the substances (Sangyé Gyatso, *Bai dūr sñon po*, 1973: f. 413/4 f.).

⁷⁹ Tendzin Püntso, *Shel gong shel phreng*, 1994.

⁸⁰ Jampel Dorjé 1971.

⁸¹ These treatises include more ingredients or different versions of a specific substance but even if these aspects are taken in consideration there cannot be found any connection to the given numbers.

⁸² Lozang Chödrak, *Bshad pa'i rgyud kyi le'u nyi shu pa*, 2007.

The late Akhu Tenpa Gyatso Tsang not only worked untiringly in his efforts to preserve the heritage of Labrang medical culture, but also he is well-known as a specialist on ‘modern’ Tibetan pharmacology.⁸³ It was perhaps him who classified the pharmacological groups, while the total number originated in the *Shégyü*. This is one possible hypothesis.

The ornamentation of the murals is another interesting feature. The didactic structures of the trees, namely the stems, branches, and leaves symbolising a certain number of items, all look more or less the same. In contrast to this, the ornamented images in each mural show beautiful landscapes with gentle ranges of hills, sometimes surrounded by rocky mountains encircled by tender clouds. Waterfalls spring forth from the rocks or little rivers babble through the grasslands looking similar to the countryside around Labrang. No animal is depicted in any of the murals but botanical features are placed in the foreground. These plants are part of the local flora such as *Gentiana sp.*, *Plantago sp.* or *Aconitum sp.* No plant has been depicted twice. The ornamentation of the Labrang murals illustrating the *Shégyü* is even more elaborate than those illustrating the *Tsagyü*. The illustrated plants in the 2007 version of the murals appear to be the same species and they are painted even more thoroughly than in the mid-eighties execution. Although the new murals show the chapters in a different sequence from the previous version,⁸⁴ in some cases, the depicted botanical plants are always connected with the original chapter. The painter did not explain the meaning of these plants or why certain species have been chosen but timidly explained that the murals would not be complete, in terms of the *materia medica* of the *Shégyü* as well as in terms of their botanical depiction. He said that he had painted all the plants of the treatise including their blossoms, leaves, and roots for the museum of the old Labrang Hospital that I visited in 2001.

Interestingly, a set of smaller copies of the murals in the museum showed completely different ornamental details. In some landscapes, there are peacocks, musk deer, elephants, and even whales splashing around the water. The original meaning of these depictions is not clear. Within the content of the *Shégyü* there is nothing which explains these features, although the first chapter of the *Tsagyü* describes the landscape around the mythical medical city Tanaduk (Lta na sdug).⁸⁵ Peculiarly, chapter one and six of the *Tsagyü* are not illustrated in the murals, even though chapter six of the *Tsagyü* describes the

⁸³ See Jampa Trinlé 2000, pp. 488–93.

⁸⁴ Today, chapters 1–12 follow the exact sequence of the *Shégyü* while the chapters 13–31 follow the old sequence of the previous murals.

⁸⁵ According to Dash this mythical city has been ‘variously identified as Varanasi (presently in Uttar Pradesh) and Bodha Gaya (presently forms part of Bihar)’ (Dash 1994, p. 3). Others tend to



Fig. 5. Ornamentation to the mural depicting Chapter 31: the healing physician.

metaphor of three unfolded trees in every detail and therefore forms the conceptual basis of the murals. Nobody could explain why chapter one is neglected⁸⁶ but it looks like that the ornamentation somehow symbolises a regional interpretation of the medical city and its region. The animals painted in the museum are part of the description in the *Tsagyü*⁸⁷ but none of the mentioned costly medicines such as special herbs, fruits, or spices are depicted either in the museum or in the murals. If the intention was to portray an analogue to the mythical medical city then the painting of the local flora and landscape could indicate that the authorities of the medical college regarded the region around Labrang as the centre of medical thinking. It would also emphasize the tradition of Lodrö Gyelpo on the origin of the *Gyüshi* as a treatise written by a Tibetan scholar. The murals also reflect the life of the sage, Yutok Yöntan Gönpö the elder, who would have received instruction on the *Shégyü* from Padmasambhava with the help of an unfolded tree during his journey to Oḍḍiyāna. The famous biography was edited by Lozang Chödrak, the central personality for the design of the murals.⁸⁸ Nowadays nothing can be found in Labrang that indicates thoughts like this but in a small monastery, called Kangtsa Gönpa (Rkang tsha dgon pa), the birthplace of the painter Nyingchak Jamzer, he depicted many details of the description of the first chapter of the *Tsagyü*. This includes the above-mentioned animals—peacocks, musk deer, and elephants—and fruits, such as pomegranate (*se 'bru*) and

locate this place in the Land Oḍḍiyāna or near Mount Meru (see Parfionovitch *et al.* 1992, p. 17).

⁸⁶ The standard-answer was that the *Tsagyü* is not that important within the scope of the murals where the *Shégyü* is the focus.

⁸⁷ Translation by Dawa *et al.*: 'Peacocks, Shang-Shang, parrots or other birds sing melodiously at the top of the medicinal forest, while elephants, bears, musk deer and others who have good medicinal value dwell on the ground' (2008, p. 6). See also Yutok Yöntan Gönpö, *Bdud rtsi snying po yan lag bgyad pa*, 1992 pp. 2/15–7; Dash 1994, p. 13; Clark 1995, p. 24 f. The first Thangka of the illustrations to the Blue Beryl shows the plants and animals mentioned in this chapter in a little different and enlarged arrangement (Parfionovitch *et al.* 1992, pp. 18, 173).

⁸⁸ Jampal Kunzang translated the text written by Lhündrup Trashi (Lhun grub Bkra shis) into English: Jampal Kunzang 2001; and see Lhündrup Trashi 2005.

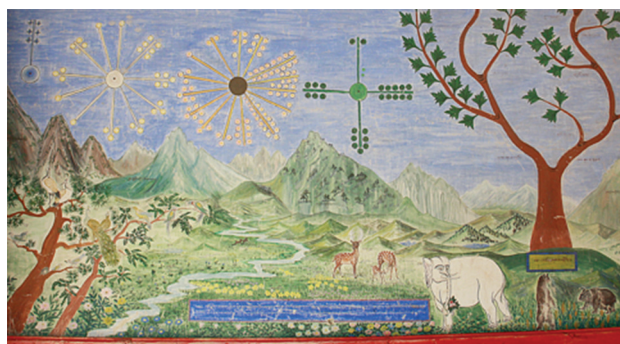


Fig. 6. Painting by Nyingchak Jamzer at Kangtsa Gönpa depicting the general structure of the *Gyüshi* and many of the animals living near the mythical medical city as described in the first chapter of the *Tsagyü*.

myrobalan (*a ru ra*). Interestingly, although this monastery is quite small in size his mentor, the famous Akhu Tenpa Gyatso Tsang, was throne holder of its medical college.⁸⁹

Although there are a few aberrations among these 385 branches it can be stated that the new murals preserve the content of Lozang Chödrak's text, but unfortunately the painting-style of stems, branches, and leaves is less elaborate and, sadly, the substratum of the walls shows severe damage in many cases. The painter told me that the quality of the colours available was quite different to that of the colours he had used in the former version. In the case of the first version, he received some traditional pigments from an old monk whereas, in the case of the second version, he used some kind of synthetic colour.

Conclusion

With the establishment of the medical college at Labrang Monastery, supported by the sponsorship of the Khoshut Mongol aristocracy, a prominent centre of Tibetan medicine was created in Amdo. The intellectual property of the murals can be attributed to Lozang Chödrak, associated with the Chakpori Medical College in Lhasa. His biography is a good example of how Tibetan medicine expanded to Amdo and Mongolia but his work is clearly connected with the *Zurluk* medical tradition and the political leaders of Lhasa in the 17th century. Some specific aspects, such as the demand for preclinical knowledge as described in the *Shégyü*, or the controversial discussion about

⁸⁹ See Jampa Trinlé 2000, pp. 488/1–93/10.

contents of the first chapter of the *Tsagyü* regarding the history of Tibetan medicine, are still reflected in the murals. To understand the diverging aspects of Tibetan *materia medica* as shown in the corresponding mural further research will be necessary. It is still not clear when the first or original version of the murals was painted. The earliest time would be the late 18th century, in the time of the teachings of Tsangmen Yéshé Zangpo, but obviously he did not create them. It is not clear what the original murals looked like because the documented material only shows their history in the time of the revitalisation of Tibetan medicine and after the murals were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. This period is clearly connected to the life of the late instructor of the medical college at Labrang, Akhu Tenpa Gyatso Tsang, and the educated secular painter and physician, Nyingchak Jamzer.

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