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This book is dedicated as a Festschrift to Toni Huber, who since the start of his career has broken the boundaries of Tibetan Studies.

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A Singing Heruka Roaming the Tibetan-Himalayan Borderlands at the Dawn of the 20th Century¹

Hanna Havnevik*

Described by disciples as “a crown jewel” and “a great chieftain among siddhas”,² the saintly madman 'Khrul zhig kun bzang mthong grol rdo rje (1862–1922) was a Rnying ma pa yogin active in Tibetan-Himalayan border regions at the turn of the 20th century. He is only one of numerous Tibetan masters who crisscrossed the Tibetan-Himalayan borders and left a religious legacy in highland communities. This chapter about his life and travels, frequently together with his chief monk disciple, is a modest contribution to the research on Tibetan pilgrimage in border areas, a field in which Toni Huber has published extensively.³

Holy madmen (*smyon pa*) are highly cherished in Tibetan culture. Such figures were few in number and some of them became famous,⁴ but details about the life of crazy yogin 'Khrul zhig kun bzang mthong grol rdo rje's (aka Gu yang he ru ka)⁵ have largely remained unknown outside his circle of disciples. Urged by his followers to narrate his biography, the yogin consented and told the early part of his life story to Rdza sprul Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu (1867–1940), a religious master who became famous beyond the Tibetan world through the writings of mountain climbers, anthropologists, and tourists.⁶ Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu, commonly referred to as Rdza sprul Rin po che, wrote a biography of his teacher and also frequently mentions him in his own autobiography (*rang rnam*).⁷ Although

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¹ I wish to thank Lobsang Shastri (BDRC), Puchung Tsering (Tibet University), and Nawang Choegyal (Kathmandu) for their excellent assistance in my work on the three extensive biographies on which this chapter is based.

² *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 276.

³ Huber 1999; 2008.

⁴ See, for example, Quintman 2014; Larsson 2012; DiValerio 2015; Linrothe 2006; Kretschmar 1981.

⁵ In the title of his *rnam thar*, he is named 'Khrul zhig gu yangs he ru ka.

⁶ See Havnevik 2020: 11n.10.

⁷ In addition to the biography written by Rdza sprul ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu (1867–1940), abbr. *'Khrul zhig rnam thar* and Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu's autobiography, abbr. *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, there is also information about 'Khrul zhig's life in the autobiography of A ne Lo chen, abbr. *Rje btsun rnam thar*. Parts of 'Khrul zhig's life story have previously been published in Havnevik 2013; 2020; Wangmo 2005; 2008; Ricard 1994. See also <https://www.matthieurcard.org/en/blog/posts/kyabje-'Khrul-zhig-rinpoche-a-short-biography-1> and <https://www.matthieurcard.org/en/blog/posts/kyabje-'Khrul-zhig-rinpoche-a-short-biography-2> (both accessed September 2020). The circumstances

genre-specific eulogies are repeated throughout his accounts of 'Khrul zhig's Rin po che's life, there is no reason to doubt the author's precise narration of historical events. Particularly in his autobiography, Rdza sprul Rin po che locates events in a year-by-year – at times month-by-month – sequence, almost like a diary, enabling us to date many of his master's activities.

Rdza sprul Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu became 'Khrul zhig Rin po che's disciple after the two met at Se mo Monastery in the high pastureland of Yar 'brog, probably in 1896, when the yogin was in his mid-thirties and the monk thirty years old.⁸ They spent time together off and on in Lhasa and other places in Dbus gtsang, particularly at their respective monasteries in Yar 'brog and at Rong phu, and in the Kathmandu Valley. When they met, 'Khrul zhig Rin po che offered his star-struck disciple-to-be barley beer and insisted on treating him as his equal. The yogin introduced himself by saying that people called him “the madman of Zhwa de'u”.⁹ Although 'Khrul zhig had been ordained a novice, he followed neither the monastic path nor that of a hermit, but instead spent his life drinking beer, roaming aimlessly, and sleeping anywhere.¹⁰ When his biographer met him, 'Khrul zhig kept his hair long and loose, was dressed in a yellow robe, and wore a red meditation belt across his chest;¹¹ his attendant was carrying a barrel of barley beer. Textual illustrations portray him as a naked yogin seated on a tiger skin with a Tibetan volume wrapped in his topknot bun, indicating his status as a treasure discoverer.¹² Despite their different religious paths – that of a tantric yogin and a celibate monk – the master and disciple respected one another and maintained a close relationship for almost three decades until the master's death in 1922.

Like many other Tibetan hagiographies, 'Khrul zhig Rin po che and Rdza sprul Rin po che's life stories – although written from a religious perspective – offer a wealth of information on how charisma played out in local communities, on

surrounding the biographical process of 'Khrul zhig *rnam thar* are not clear. See 'Khrul zhig *rnam thar*: 15; Havnevik 2020: 3, 11n.7; and Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu's comments on the writing process in *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 381–83, 410, 412, 420–21, 428. He writes that he sent the draft of the first part to his teacher for approval. A collaborative biography of this kind may be classified as a hybrid between a religious autobiography (*rang rnam*) and a biography (*rnam thar*). A secret biography is mentioned twice (see 'Khrul zhig *rnam thar*: 170, 183), but I have not been able to find it.

⁸ *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 268. According to Wangmo, the two first met at Smin sgrol gling Monastery. Wangmo 2005: 79.

⁹ *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 288–89.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 288–89.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 287.

¹² See, for example, the miniature portrayals of the yogin 'Khrul zhig and Rdza sprul Rin po che in *Yang ti bla ma sku gsung thugs thig gi las byang 'ja' lus ye shes gseng lam zhes bya ba bzhugs so*: 3. According to Nawang Choegyol, this text was written or edited by 'Khrul zhig ngag dbang chos kyi blo gros and was an esoteric teaching of 'Khrul zhig kun bzang mthong grol rdo rje. The *gter ston* was Rdza sprul Rin po che. The text was generously provided by Nawang Choegyol in Kathmandu, October 2019.

the relationships between monastic and political leaders and between aristocrats and commoners, on material conditions, including the funding of monasteries and temples and their tax obligations, and on national, regional, and local strife. We learn about monastic intrigues and harassment, social stratification, gender disparities, self-doubt, competition, monastics breaking their vows, incest, accusations of poisoning, and banditry. Importantly, 'Khrul zhig and his attendant spent time with common householders, nuns and female religious masters, itinerant yogins and yoginīs, hermits in lifelong retreat, and male and female lay patrons, many of whom remain largely unmentioned in Tibetan historiography.

'KHRUL ZHIG RIN PO CHE'S EARLY LIFE

The madman 'Khrul zhig, who was presumably conceived in the high valleys north of Kathmandu, was born at the foot of Mount Kailash to Khams pa Bka' brgyud pa tantrics who roamed the Tibetan plateau and Tibetan-Himalayan borderlands. After the elderly yogin-father died when the boy was five years old, his young consort sought to establish a religious career for her son, taking him to lamas and sacred sites along pilgrimage paths in western and central Tibet.¹³ In accordance with hagiographic lore, the child, through his foreknowledge, is said to have repeatedly told his mother and others that he was a reincarnation of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud yogin 'Khrul zhig nam mkha'i rnal 'byor, a close companion of the highly cherished saintly madman 'Brug pa kun legs (1455–1529).¹⁴ From early on, the boy not only followed the lifestyle of his itinerant tantric parents, but also emulated the eccentricities of saintly madmen.

The complex combination of non-celibate tantric and celibate monastic paths runs throughout Tibetan religious history. 'Khrul zhig Rin po che's life story provides an insight into the deliberations of high ecclesiastics regarding the future career of children marked as extraordinary. A turning point in 'Khrul zhig's life occurred at Mtshur phu Monastery in 1868, when the great visionary Gter ston Mchog gyur bde chen gling pa (1829–1870) – cherished by both the Bka' brgyud and Rnying ma schools – cut a tuft of the seven-year-old boy's hair and gave him the name 'Khrul zhig mthong grol rdo rje.¹⁵ High lamas debated the boy's future a few years later, in the Yar 'brog region, when he was aged ten (Iron Sheep year, 1871). When he was searching for his monastic seat, lamas again discussed the boy's future, whether he was to follow the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud, Sa skya, Rnying ma, or Bsam ldings Bo dong tradition. Finally, the ninth head of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud

¹³ Havnevik 2013; 2020.

¹⁴ Kretschmar 1981.

¹⁵ He was named on the tenth of the twelfth month of the Earth Male Dragon year (1868), the same year as Karma pa Theg mchog rdo rje passed away, *'Khrul zhig rnam thar*: 124–29.

school¹⁶ convinced the others that 'Khrul zhig would be a wanderer without a fixed residence (*bya btangs kyi tshul mdzad pa*).¹⁷ He maintained that the boy should be allowed to follow his own mind but advised him to undergo monastic training, which he sought first at Stag lung, Khyer, and Bsam ldings Monasteries. At Bsam ldings, he trained together with the famous Rdo rje phag mo reincarnation Ngag dbang kun bzang bde chen dbang mo (b. 1857), five years his senior.¹⁸ Later, he was sent to the 'Brug pa bka' bgyud Lding po che Monastery. Subsequently, Zhwa de'u Monastery¹⁹ was identified as 'Khrul zhig Rin po che's seat, located in a desolate high-altitude nomadic area – described as the coldest place in Tibet – at the southern end of Yar 'brog Lake, on the trade route to the Bum thang Valley. The process of gaining the monks' acceptance of the child as a reincarnation of 'Khrul zhig nam mkha'i rnal 'byor and as the throne-holder at Zhwa de'u was arduous; it involved the boy's self-recognition based on dreams and visions, and ardent negotiation and persuasion.

THE CRAZY YOGIN'S TRAVELS

An utterly poor boy, with only his mother to rely on, 'Khrul zhig was belittled, harassed, and mocked by fellow novices in the monasteries where he studied. This convinced him that there would be no future for him in staying in a monastery: no economic power, merit, or fame. Several painful episodes are mentioned. He was beaten with a stick when reading scriptures on a monastic balcony and lost his balance, falling down nine storeys; unclean food was put into his mouth and a dirty carpet draped on his head; there was an attempt on his life; and he was tricked into giving away his monastic robe.²⁰ Since he was not given the material support he was entitled to, 'Khrul zhig only intermittently stayed at his seat between peregrinations that combined spiritual activities with the search for material support. The inhospitable climatic conditions on the plateau were perhaps what made him wander to warmer regions on the southern side of the Himalayas, and one of the aims of his spiritual journeys was to reach Kuśinagar, where the Buddha is believed to have reached *parīnirvāṇa*.²¹ However, when he became the house lama of members of the Bum thang political elite his plans changed and he spent a year in that valley.²²

¹⁶ 'Khrul zhig rnam thar: 139 gives his name as 'Jigs med Min 'gyur dbang gi rgyal po while other sources give the name Mi pham chos kyi rgya mtsho (1823–1883).

¹⁷ 'Khrul zhig rnam thar: 139, 144.

¹⁸ Ibid.: 125, 144–45. On the Rdo rje phag mo reincarnations, see Diemberger 2007.

¹⁹ Full name: Zhwa de'u mdo sngags chos gling. See *Ngag dbang rnam thar* vol. ga: 30; *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 493; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 651, 745.

²⁰ See, for example, 'Khrul zhig rnam thar: 133–35, 141, 143, 167–68.

²¹ Huber (2008: 127–31) convincingly argues that since the late 16th century, Tibetan Buddhists have identified this pilgrimage place at Hājo in Assam.

²² See Havnevik 2013.

Although 'Khrul zhig Rin po che mainly roamed the border areas, his influence also spread in Lhasa, a city he repeatedly visited. From the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, Lhasa witnessed a vibrant yogic milieu centred around religious madmen and unorthodox yogins such as Khams smyon Dharma seng ge and 'Khrul zhig Rin po che. Dharma seng ge was a highly recognized spiritual master, scholar, and medical doctor who enjoyed the patronage of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, while 'Khrul zhig Rin po che taught esoteric and rare Rdzogs chen teachings. In these prominent yogins' entourages were many women, one of whom was the famous A ne Lo chen (1865–1951). 'Khrul zhig was not celibate; possibly A ne Lo chen and other yoginis were among his intimate partners. Late in life, he took a young consort, 'Jams dbyang bde chen ye shes chos sgron.²³

Lhasa residents were astonished when the group of ragged Rnying ma pa adepts to which A ne Lo chen belonged arrived in Lhasa in the late 1890s, led by the yogin Padma rgya mtsho 1829?–89) from A mdo,²⁴ a disciple of Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol (1781–1851). Townspeople gossiped about their eccentricities and disregard for the monastic dress code. However, the yogins' intensive religious practice and indifference to material comfort soon attracted awe and respect. Elite and noble families in Lhasa became the Rnying ma pa lamas' followers. Among 'Khrul zhig Rin po che's protégés were the noblewomen the Rag shag rje btsun mas²⁵ and other elite ladies and most likely members of the Zur khang family.²⁶ He had disciples from all walks of life, including the king of Sikkim and one of its princes, who became a monk at Smin grol gling,²⁷ members of the royal family of Bhutan, yogins and yoginīs, monastics, and ordinary Tibetans. Women seem to have followed him readily. Both Rdza sprul Rin po che and A ne Lo chen regarded him as their root-teacher. A ne Lo chen, who became a lama in her own right, enjoyed the patronage of several noble houses, including the Bde rab, Sne do, Lha lu, 'Brang stod, Bkras gshong, and Lcog bkras families.²⁸ Even Regent Rwa sgreng, the Sixteenth Karma pa, and the father of the current Dalai Lama came to see her at her monastery, Shug gseb, south of Lhasa.²⁹

A highlight in the madman's religious career was his trip to the Kathmandu Valley, a pilgrimage that invigorated his fame as a great visionary and siddha. Along with Rdza sprul Rin po che and a few attendants, 'Khrul zhig set out on horseback from Rong phu in the eleventh month of the Iron Ox year (1901), returning to Tibet four months later.³⁰ Among the famous places they visited along the path to

²³ Wangmo 2005: 368n. 210.

²⁴ Havnevik 1999 vol. 2: 706.

²⁵ *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 203; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 343.

²⁶ 'Khrul zhig stayed at Spo bo gling ga, which was probably one of Zur khang's mansions, south-west of the Jo khang. *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 329; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 457.

²⁷ *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 379, 381, 386, 425, 429.

²⁸ See Havnevik 1999 vol. 2.

²⁹ *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 450, 490, 492; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 605, 645, 649.

³⁰ Their travels are described in *Ngag dbang rnam thar*; vol. kha: 382–408.

Kathmandu, the narratives single out their homage to the statue of the great Indian yogin Pha dam pa sangs rgyas (d. 1117) at Ding ri glang 'khor, recognized as another saintly yogin.³¹ The journey must have been arduous; they crossed passes over five thousand meters high and had to send their horses back since the paths were blocked, most probably by snow. Yet, their enormous hardships are seldom mentioned in their biographies.

Like so many Tibetan pilgrims before them, the yogin and his companion visited the three famous Buddhist *stupas* – Stag mo lus sbyin, Boudhanath, and Swayambunath – as well as Glang ru lung bstan at the Nāgārjuna Hill, north-west of Swayambunath, reputed to be the Buddha's throne.³² Thereupon they visited Yang le shod, which has several important Buddhist holy sites and was where, according to legend, Guru Rin po che reached enlightenment. They returned to Boudhanath, named Nepal's *stupa* (Bal yul kyi mchod rten), with the aim of restoring and re-consecrating it after decay. The madman and his entourage were entertained by Chandra Shamsher at the Thapathali Durbar Palace,³³ where they were offered gifts as well as promised assistance in the restoration project. On their way back to Tibet, the "king's" (Bal po rgyal po) servants escorted them to Rasuwa at the Tibetan border. Rdza sprul Rin po che, in a rather eulogizing manner, describes how 'Khrul zhig Rin po che and himself were respectfully treated by Chandra Ramsher in Kathmandu as well as by locals in the middle hills, during their pilgrimage to the Valley. Tibetan Buddhist masters, including nuns, were not, however, always popular. According to Colin Rosser,³⁴ Chandra Shamsher declared that a group of Buddhist Newars who had hosted a Tibetan lama staying near the Swayambunath *stupa*, should be downgraded because of the pollution they had incurred.³⁵ Rosser's account of the popularity of the Tibetan lama among Newar Buddhists and Chandra Shamsher's conception of pollution spread by the lama makes fascinating reading. Rosser writes,

During the two years or so that he remained there, his fame as a holy man and expounder of the Doctrine spread throughout the Kathmandu Valley and people of all castes came to Kindol Baha in increasing numbers to see him and to hear him preach. (...) he seems to have aroused a new enthusiasm among large numbers of those Newars who professed to be Buddhist by religion, and he began to gather around him in Kindol Baha a small group of active and celibate Newar monks, from various castes, inspired by his example and teaching. (...) the activities of this Tibetan lama and the enthu-

³¹ On Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, see Martin 2006.

³² They visited the *stupas* in the first month of 1901, when Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu was thirty-seven years old. *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 382–86.

³³ Chandra Shamsher reigned from 1901 to 1926.

³⁴ Rosser 1966: 68 ff.

³⁵ I thank Charles Ramble for bringing Colin Rosser's article to my attention. For another reference to Bal po rgyal po, most likely Chandra Shamsher, see *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 142; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: n. 790.

siastic response of a growing Newar audience attracted the attention and anger of the current Kana maharaja, Chandra Shamshe. (...) he ordered the Tibetan lama to leave the Valley, and sent his police to expel the eight or ten Newar monks (...). He further pronounced all those Newars who had bowed their heads to the lama, and who had eaten food distributed by him and his assistants following gatherings at Kindol Baha as impure (...).³⁶

Another narrative found in A ne Lo chen's autobiography, describes how she was harassed and her mother and friend Ye shes sgröl ma sexually abused on their way to Yol mo. A ne Lo chen was chased by an *a tsar* (*a sādhu*), while her mother and friend were caught, led away and abandoned naked by a bridge, presumably raped.³⁷ And once, among the *rong pa*, most likely in Yol mo, the secret consort of Bla ma Spa rang from Ban thang dgon pa wanted to arrange a marriage between their son and the young girl, but the mother and daughter escaped in order to avoid domestic life.³⁸

There is also another story from 1885 (*bya lo*),³⁹ when A ne Lo chen was twenty-one years old.⁴⁰ Prior to the whitewashing of the three *stupas* and the printing of their catalogues, her encouragement to make people recite *mañi* made the Indian priests (*rgya bla ma*) take an oath to stop what she calls the evil custom of offering the heads of water buffalo [on poles] and tie the intestines around the "demon" Pukkasi (*ma mo Pu ska si*, Skt. Pukkasī).⁴¹ Clearly, Tibetan religious specialists, including women, were received differently by elite and common practitioners in border areas between Tibet and Nepal as well as in the middle hills, in Kathmandu and the Valley.

THE YOGIN'S CAREER AS A TREASURE DISCOVERER

Tibetan hagiographies have a developmental sequence describing the protagonist's path from childhood to spiritual maturity, a pattern also followed in 'Khrul zhig Rin

³⁶ Rosser 1966: 105–06.

³⁷ *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 64; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 201. For A ne Lo chen's travels in border areas, the middle hills in Nepal, and the Kathmandu Valley, see *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 62–87, 103–40, 145; Havnevik 1999 vol. 2: 197–215, 237–77, 287.

³⁸ See *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 66; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 203. A ne Lo chen's mother says that when she was young she repeatedly went to pay taxes to the king's (*rgyal po*) estate. *Sar a ma chung dus rgyal khang du khral skyal du mang po 'gro myong gsungs / Rje btsun rnam thar*: 63; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 199.

³⁹ I assume the year is *shing mo bya*.

⁴⁰ By Tibetan reckoning.

⁴¹ *bya lor mar bal yul du phebs mchod rten rnam gsum la sku dkar gsol / mchod rten rnam gsum gyi dkar chag par du bskrun / nged nas dkar chag gi ma ñi bskul ba 'i rkyen gyis ngon rgya bla ma nas ma he re re bsad mgo tshogs sha la bzhas / ma mo pu ska si la rgyu ma dkri ba bcas kyi ngan srol chags 'dug pa la phyin chad ma he gsod rgyu med par dam bca' byas / Rje btsun rnam thar*: 145; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 286.

po che's life story. His unconventional behaviour, visions, and attainment of miraculous powers (*siddhi*) were part and parcel of his recognition as a yogic "saint". His failures in revealing treasures feature as episodic moments, such as when he had spiritual blockages at places including Mtsur phu, Tsa ri, the Bum thang Valley, and near Padma tshal in Yol mo.⁴² The impurity of a nun, a chattering nun and monk, and disobedience among his disciples are recorded as reasons.⁴³ One such mishap is said to have led to misfortunes, including a serious illness that nearly cost the madman his life.⁴⁴

After his failure to open the southern door to the hidden valley Padma tshal, which he had been prophesied to reveal,⁴⁵ 'Khrul zhig Rin po che's return journey to Tibet was finally crowned with his success as a treasure discoverer, a climax in his religious career. Through clairvoyance he envisaged that he would be able to rediscover a treasure near Brag dkar rta so on the Gung thang-Mang yul border, only partly retrieved by his former reincarnation, Phying dkar don yod rdo rje (aka Lung don He ru ka),⁴⁶ a disciple and teacher of the great Zhabs dkar Rin po che. An old nun acted as messenger and facilitator, as women often do in treasure discoveries. She was familiar with the *gter ston*'s testament and her intervention led to the recognition of 'Khrul zhig as one of Phying dkar don yod rdo rje's three prophesied embodiments, the other two being a prostitute and a butcher.⁴⁷

Following 'Khrul zhig Rin po che's recognition, and after numerous deliberations among the monks at the nearby Rdzong kha chos sde Monastery, where the sealed treasure chest was kept, it was finally handed over to the madman. Among its contents were a skin couch, a dry skull, a trident, a volume with a torn upper page, and a sealed copper box. Inside the box, 'Khrul discovered treasure scripts (*gter shog*) along with white mustard seeds.⁴⁸ This rediscovered treasure (*yang gter*) is, according to 'Khrul zhig Rin po che's reincarnation,⁴⁹ the guru section of the practice manual (*sgrub thabs*) of *Yang ti nag po* ("the Black Quintessence"),⁵⁰ kept in a mask. While the 15th-century lineage-holder Dung mtsho ras pa had discovered the Yi dam section, the later reincarnation Phying dkar don yod rdo rje had discovered the *dākinī* and the guru sections. The full revelation of the guru section was, however, broken because Phying dkar don yod rdo rje's consort died.⁵¹ While

⁴² Sa'u gangs in Yol mo was the birthplace of A ne Lo chen's mother; see *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 62; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 197.

⁴³ 'Khrul zhig rnam thar: 122, 181; Havnevik 2013: 14; *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 392.

⁴⁴ *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 392, 395.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 17, 389. On Yolmo's sacred landscape, see Torri 2020.

⁴⁶ *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 395.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 397.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 401–02.

⁴⁹ See Ricard 1994: 563n. 3.

⁵⁰ In *Ngag dbang rnam thar* we find the spelling Yang tig nag po throughout. For a preface to *Yang ti nag po gser gyi 'bru gcig pa'i chos skor*, see Smith 1974. See also Ricard 1994: 63n.17.

⁵¹ Ricard 1994: 563n.2 and 3.

'Khrul zhig was destined to complete the revelation, the biography does not mention either the practice manual or the mask.⁵²

Although he had received many transmissions from high lamas, 'Khrul zhig Rin po che is reported to have said that he was a man with only one teaching, the Yang ti nag po⁵³ which he conferred on Rdza sprul Rin po che several times.⁵⁴ A ne Lo chen, along with sixty adherents, received the teaching when he gave instruction on how to meditate in absolute darkness in Zangs yag brag, a Padmasambhava cave south of Lhasa. She also became one of the madman's spiritual heirs as a lineage holder, with permission to teach.⁵⁵

THE SAINTLY MADMAN'S CHARACTER

As a young boy, 'Khrul zhig is described as having been a sensitive child, prone to spending time with animals instead of playing with other children. One of his patrons and protégés – Lcam grags nga lha mo, the ex-wife of the governor (presumably of Tag rtse), who later married a Chinese leader in Lhasa – described him as hyperactive, running up and down the walls of the fortress and deity temples like a goat; she interpreted this as evidence of his saintly nature.⁵⁶ 'Khrul zhig's erratic behaviour is repeatedly described: he is a drunkard, short-tempered, or with a scary appearance, sleeping carelessly here and there. On occasion he wore female clothing and told his female yoginī disciples to tie their hair in a topknot and circumambulate the Bar skor naked.⁵⁷ The madman was quick to shed tears on achieving spiritual attainments or on feeling gratitude, compassion, or sorrow; he had a good sense of humour and readily sang spiritual songs (*mgur*) and danced.⁵⁸ On several occasions, he healed people. Once, in Lho kha, he offered his "sacred urine" (*gsangs chab*) to a wealthy lady on the verge of death. The elixir made her vomit parasites and is said to have cured her.⁵⁹ 'Khrul zhig Rin po che's quest for the attainment

⁵² The mask is said to be kept as a holy object at the Rdzong dkar chos sde Monastery re-established in South India by the Tibetan community-in-exile. Nawang Choegyal, personal communication, Kathmandu September 2019.

⁵³ *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 292.

⁵⁴ *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 310–11, 317. Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu received Yang ti nag po together with Rje btsun lo chen, most likely in 1900; see *ibid.*: 347.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 344–47; *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 329–30, 412–13; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 457–59, 555–57.

⁵⁶ *'Khrul zhig rnam thar*: 134.

⁵⁷ *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 277; *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 330; Havnevik 1999 vol. 2: 459.

⁵⁸ A ne Lo chen says 'Khrul zhig sang many *mgur*, *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 374, 377; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 501, 503. In Rdza sprul rin po che's *rang rnam*, there are numerous references to the singing of spiritual songs and dancing. 'Khrul zhig Rin po che initiated the singing and dancing on several occasions.

⁵⁹ *'Khrul zhig rnam thar*: 137, 175–76, 177, 212–13.

of miraculous powers is a recurrent theme; he continuously had revelations and dream-visions that were said to have come true.

RITUALS PERFORMED AND LIVELIHOOD RECEIVED

As is the case in numerous Tibetan hagiographies, accounts of 'Khrul zhig Rin po che's life enumerate the sacred sites he visited and his veneration of lamas, monasteries, *stupas*, statues, relics, and holy sites. While a number of Tibetan monasteries were amazingly rich, and high reincarnations, lamas, and well-known monks could amass great wealth, wandering yogins like 'Khrul zhig Rin po che and his parents before him lived from hand to mouth, sleeping in caves, tents, and provisional lodgings. When 'Khrul zhig's fame as a yogin spread, he travelled with a small number of attendants, often between two and seven, along with horses and pack animals. 'Khrul zhig Rin po che is described as generous; he supported rituals performed at his disciple's monastery Rong phu, gave tea offerings to monk assemblies, donated wealth for the renovation and building of statues and temples, redistributed gifts of food, clothes, and money, and attempted to persuade locals to support impoverished hermits.⁶⁰ Although his wealth was modest, his charisma and popularity brought provisions and housing his way, and in return he offered blessings and teachings.

During his travels in border regions, people from various ethnic groups gathered to receive blessings and teachings from the yogin. As in other similar Tibetan sources, the ethnically diverse inhabitants of highland communities on the south side of the Himalayas are referred to as "valley people" (*rong pa*). Since many were unfamiliar with the Tibetan language and basic Buddhist doctrines, the yogin missionized with the help of translators, offering teachings on how to take refuge in the Three Jewels and on the recitation of *maṇi* mantras.⁶¹ Contrary to what we find in some other Tibetan biographies,⁶² valley people are not derogatorily described – not even in the account of an episode during which locals by Lake G.yu mtsho near Tsa ri showered the yogin with stones, causing him to fail at retrieving a lake treasure.⁶³

Accounts of the madman's life offer lively descriptions of worship performed on the plateau and in border areas, including which rituals (*cho ga*) were in demand, for what reasons, and when they were carried out, as well as the number of worshipers flocking to the master's feet. The lama was repeatedly asked to perform rituals of protection and purification, rituals for long life and healing, and rituals to increase

⁶⁰ *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 337, 371–75, 380, 393, 416.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 383, 386. A ne Lo chen was a professional *ma ni pa*; Havnevik 1999.

⁶² See, for example, *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 64, 122, 142, 145; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 201, 265, 281, 287.

⁶³ *'Khrul zhig rnam thar*: 215.

merit, eliminate obstacles, fulfil wishes, secure luck and prosperity, or prevent epidemics and climatic calamities – such as drought and floods, failing crops, and famine. His repertoire ranged from soteriological teachings to magical rites for this-worldly benefits, the dividing line between them being fluid.

FAME IN THE TIBETAN BORDERLANDS AND ACROSS THE HIMALAYAN RANGE

'Khrul zhig Rin po che passed away on the fifth day of the ninth month of the Water Dog year (1922) at his seat by Yar 'brog Lake.⁶⁴ A messenger sent to A ne Lo chen at Shug gseb invited her to his deathbed and death rituals, but neither she nor Rdza sprul Rin po che could attend. Grief stricken, A ne Lo chen commemorated his death yearly by staying for three weeks in a Yang ti nag po dark meditation retreat.⁶⁵

The Rnying ma pas maintained a strong tradition of wandering lamas and household priests, and for centuries their institutionalization had been weak, even though the six great Rnying ma pa monasteries were famous throughout Tibet and the celibate tradition gradually attained a momentum similar to that of the reformed schools. 'Khrul zhig Rin po che and his followers grappled with combining the tantric yogin and monastic traditions, and at the end of his life, with the help of Rdza sprul Rin po che, he attempted to establish a tradition of fully ordained monks at what appears to have been his new monastery in Yar 'brog. A ne Lo chen, herself a wandering yoginī for decades, changed her career to that of a celibate nun and established a monastic institution Shug gseb south of Lhasa for three hundred nuns as well as for lay yoginīs.⁶⁶

The legacy of Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu paved the ground for the madman's reincarnation, who fled to Solukhumbu along with the exodus of refugees in 1959. Rdza sprul Rin po che had for decades maintained a close relationship with Sherpas in Solukhumbu and many considered him to be their main lama.⁶⁷ Sherpas frequently walked across high Himalayan passes in the Mount Everest region to Rong phu to receive their master's teachings. In 1919 (Earth Sheep year), on the twenty-ninth day of the eighth month, the lama travelled to Solukhumbu where he was enthusiastically received by monastic processions and laypeople lining up with offerings of flowers and prayer scarfs. He ordained monks and nuns and consecrated Steng po che and Thang smad monasteries,⁶⁸ where the Rong phu tradition is still maintained and which are famous for celebrating the Ma ṅi ril sgrub Festival.

⁶⁴ On 'Khrul zhig Rin po che's death, see *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 401; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 541; *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. ga: 143, 149, 154; Wangmo 2005: 357.

⁶⁵ *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 401; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 541.

⁶⁶ On the emphasis on a multiplicity of paths in Rnying ma and Ris med traditions, see Samuel 1993: 546–51.

⁶⁷ *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. kha: 409, vol. ga: 61–63, 65, 68.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. ga: 86–106.

In 1924, a son born to 'Khrul zhig the madman's former consort, 'Jams dbyangs bde chen ye shes chos sgron, who descended from Dbon ras Dharma seng ge⁶⁹ and Bstan 'dzin chos dar from Par shing chos lung Monastery, was recognized as 'Khrul zhig's reincarnation.⁷⁰ Named 'Khrul zhig ngag dbang chos kyi blo gros (1924–2011),⁷¹ he was trained at Smin sgröl gling Monastery and became Rong phu's abbot in 1940.⁷² In exile, he established Thub bstan chos gling Monastery near Junbesi in 1968 as his main seat and, later, Rdza rong Smin sgröl thub bstan chos gling near Swayambunath. These monasteries became leading exile institutions in maintaining and reviving the Rnying ma pa monastic tradition.⁷³

'Khrul zhig ngag dbang chos kyi blo gros became highly respected, famous not only in the Solukhumbu region, but throughout the Himalayas, among Tibetan communities-in-exile, and in the West. He was one of the teachers of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, and in 2010 became the official head of the Rnying ma pa tradition. A reincarnation, Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin blo gros rab gsal, was recognized by the Dalai Lama in 2015, but is challenged by the vast majority of Skyabs rje 'khrul zhig rin po che's monks and nuns. Another boy, Ngag dbang 'jigs mad sprin las kun skyabs, born 22 January 2014, was recognized by the Fourth Rdo grub chen Thub bstan sprin las dpal bzang po, the most senior living Rnying ma pa high lama. An official robe offering ceremony was held at his main monastery Thub bstan mdo sngags chos gling in Solukhumbu, while his enthronement ceremony, planned for 7 November 2020, has been postponed due to the COVID-19 lockdown of the monastery.⁷⁴

The current dispute over the rightful reincarnation and the involvement of some of the most renowned Tibetan lamas in exile show the prestige and importance of 'Khrul zhig rin po che's reincarnation lineage. While the lineage's monastic tradition continues in Nepal, the madman's rare Rdzogs chen Yang ti nag po teaching

⁶⁹ Wangmo 2005: 368n, 2010. On Dbon ras Dharma Seng ge, see https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Wonre-Dharma-Senge/TBRC_P912, accessed September 2020. On RigpaWiki, his mother's name is said to be Jamyang Wangmo; see https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title='Khrul_zhig_Rin_po_che#Born_in_1924.2C_in_Central_Tibet.2C_in_an_old_family_of_Dharma_practitioners, accessed September 2020.

⁷⁰ On the reincarnation of 'Khrul zhig mthong grol rdo rje, see *Ngag dbang rnam thar*, vol. ga: 160–62, 171–73.

⁷¹ He came to A ne Lo chen's Shug gseb Monastery twice, where she conferred on him teachings from 'Khrul zhig Rin po che. In return, he gave her transmissions. *Rje btsun rnam thar*: 486–87; Havnevik 1999, vol. 2: 639–41.

⁷² See https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title='Khrul_zhig_Rin_po_che, accessed 11 September 2020, Wangmo 2005: 368–69n. 210.

⁷³ https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title='Khrul_zhig_Rin_po_che, accessed April 2020.

⁷⁴ The other boy was born to Ngag dbang 'jigs brel chos kyi dbang phyug, the lineage holder of Ma ra ti ka bla ma, and the mother O rgyan sgröl ma thabs shes zung 'brel. I thank Nawang Choegyal for information about the disputed reincarnation (Kathmandu, October 2019) and for photos and official documents sent to me in November 2020. See also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5Qs-wgSGAA> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wt-J8snCDro>, both accessed 11 May 2020.

Fig. 1. Ngag dbang 'jigs mad sprin las kun skyabs. 2018 © Nawang Choegyul/ *Thub bstan mdo sngags chos gling*



is also maintained in the US by Sprul sku Sang ngags from Khams.⁷⁵ 'Khrul zhig kun bzang mthong grol rdo rje crossed many boundaries in his life: socially, he went from extreme poverty to becoming the house lama of royalty; religiously, he combined the yogic and the monastic paths; psychologically, he switched between mental states; and geographically, he walked and rode to the borders of Tibet and beyond. The political upheavals in Tibet from the 1950s onwards, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, dramatically stopped the saintly madman's legacy from being carried forward in the country of his birth. It was continued, however, on the southern side of the Himalayas through the missionary work of his disciple Rdza sprul Rin po che and, later, through the madman's famous reincarnation in exile.

⁷⁵ <http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07ecg67bkcd2a69fc6&llr=os7gp4bab>. On Sang ngag Rin po che, who was born in Khams and recognized as a Ris med lama; see <https://retreat.guru/teachers/6343/tulku-sang-ngag-rinpoche-1>, accessed September 2020. On Yang ti Nag po, see <http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07ecg67bkcd2a69fc6&llr=os7gp4bab>, both accessed 10 September 2020.



Fig. 2. The Dalai Lama with the young reincarnation, his parents and monks from Rdza rong thub bstan mdo sngags chos gling in Dharamsala. 2019 © Nawang Choegyul/ *Thub bstan mdo sngags chos gling*

APPENDICES:

Govt. Regd. No: 485
SWC Affiliation No: 42666



འཇུའི་རྒྱལ་བ་སྐྱེས་མཛད་སྤྱུག་མཆོག་གླིང་འདུས་སྤྱི།
Thupten Dongak Choeling Sangha
ཐུཔེན་དོ་ཅཱཀ་ཇོ་ལིང་སྐྱེད་
(Founded by H.H. Trulshik Rinpoche)

Dear dharma followers & all the disciples of His Holiness Trulshik Rinpoche,

We are pleased to inform you all that regarding the gracious reincarnation of His Holiness Trulshik Rinpoche, the supreme savior of Dharma and sentient beings, we made a humble request last year to the His Holiness 4th Dodrupchen, Kyabje Dodrup Thupten Thinley Palbar - the most compassionate great master of oldest (Tibetan Buddhist) sect, a renowned scholar and practitioner, as well as an undisputed great universal ancestor of Nyingmapa tradition - to bestow us with his primal vision, His Holiness wholeheartedly and lovingly accepted to give instructions and profound declaration. Seeing it right and appropriate time to declare: **His Holiness recently made this kind proclamation that a son born to the father, Ngawang Jigdrel Chokyi Wangchuk, the lineage holder of Maratika Lama, and the mother Orgyen Dolma is an unmistakable reincarnation of His Holiness Late Trulshik Rinpoche.**

We would like to share this joyous moment by sharing the images and videos of Rinpoche’s auspicious hair cutting ceremony to you all.

- The Administrative Office
Dzarong Thupten Do-Ngag Choeling Monastery, Solukhumbu
(the primary seat of His Holiness Trulshik Rinpoche)

Dated: 29th May, 2018 (on fullmoon day of Saga Dawa, the month of occurrence of three most sacred deeds of the Buddha, Earth Dog Year of Tibetan Era 2145)



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Fig. 3. The Fourth Rdo grub chen’s official announcement of the reincarnation of the late 'Khrul zhig rin po che (1924–2011). 2020 © Nawang Choegyul/ Thub bstan mdo sngags chos gling



SWC Affiliation No. 42666

འཇུཤེན་དོང་མཁོ་ཤོལ་གླིང་སངས་པ་སྐོར་སྒྲིལ་གྱི་
Thupten Dongak Choeling Sangha
ཧུཤེན་དོང་མཁོ་ཤོལ་གླིང་སྐོར་སྒྲིལ་གྱི་

(Founded by H.H. Trulshik Rinpoche)

Govt. Regd. No. 485

EXCELLENT NEWS!

2019, Nov. 14th

On November 13th, 2019, Trulshik Rinpoche's Yangsi Ngawang Jigme Trinley Kunkhyab received an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Dharamsala, which is wonderful news worthy of great delight for all those who have pure faith in the previous Trulshik Rinpoche and especially for his disciples.

His Holiness advised Yangsi Rinpoche to strive and be diligent in his studies of Buddhist scriptures for the benefit of the teachings and of beings. His Holiness was grateful to meet Yangsi Rinpoche and expressed his gratitude with joy and affection, along with a recitation of the Manjushri Prayer.

We pray that the life and lotus feet of Yangsi Rinpoche will be firm, with his enlightened activity flourishing like the waxing moon.

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Fig. 4. An official letter from Rdza rong thub bstan mdo sngags chos gling announcing the reincarnation (*yang srid*) of the late 'Khrul zhig rin po che (1924–2011). 2020 © Nawang Choegyul/ *Thub bstan mdo sngags chos gling*

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