



## Textualizing Memory of the Landscape in Tibet: The Pilgrimage Tradition of Mount Drakar Drel dzong

ཡུལ་མཐོ་ས་གཙང་(གཙང་)བོད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ། གངས་རི་མཐོ་གཙང་(གཙང་)ཀྱན་གྱི་(ཀྱི)གཉེན།

ཚུ་བོ་སྤང་ཡས་ཀྱན་གྱི་(ཀྱི)མགོ། ལྷ་གཉན་ཡུལ་དབྱིངས་དཀྱིལ་འདི་ན།

— ཏུན་ཏོང་ཡིག་ཆ P.T.1290 ལས་བྱུང་བའི་བསྟོན་སྒྲུ་ཞེས།  
( ཏུན་ཏོང་བསྟོན་སྒྲུ་ 8-10 བར )

**Tibet is high and its land is pure.  
Its snowy mountains are at the head of everything,  
The sources of innumerable rivers and streams.  
It is the centre of the sphere of the gods.**

– An old Eulogistic song in Dunhuang manuscript  
P.T.1290 (8th-10th century)

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### Abstract

This article explores *Mount Drakar Drel dzong*, a sacred site in *Amdo*, Tibet, through *gnas yigs* like *The Guide* and *The Praise*. These texts reveal the transformation of local deities and landscapes into Buddhist symbols, exemplifying *Buddhisization* and the interplay between memory, landscape, and religious tradition. While integrating indigenous beliefs into Buddhist frameworks, these texts selectively preserve and reshape cultural memory, balancing oral traditions with written narratives. *Drakar Drel dzong*'s evolution into a triune sacred site—*Avalokiteśvara's land*, *the second Tsari*, and *the Chakrasamvara Mandala*—reflects broader trends in Tibetan sacred geography. The study highlights *gnas yigs* as essential tools for cultural adaptation and memory, offering insights into Tibetan interactions with sacred landscapes amid shifting historical and ecological contexts.

**Keywords:** *Tibetan Sacred Geography, Buddhist Mountain Pilgrimage, History of Drakar Drel dzong, Cultural Memory, gnas yigs.*

## Introduction

The towering mountains and azure lakes of the Tibetan Plateau, as distinctive natural features, are regarded by Tibetans as sacred in various ways, with many surrounding mountains holding a special status in their social and cultural lives. Through thousands years of cultural practice within various cosmographic ideologies of the Tibetan tradition, the natural landscape has been conceptualized as a realm of sacred existence. Research has shown that interrelated notions of the mountain, encompassing indigenous cultural practices, pagan beliefs, and religious ceremonies, have contributed to the formation of a unique belief system. In the context of today's environmentally challenging world, the traditional thoughts and practices of Tibetan people regarding their interactions with the environment can be regarded as crucial contributors, providing valuable insights for addressing and rethinking environmental problems on the Plateau while complementing modern scientific methodologies. The knowledge of recognizing landscapes as prominent and numinous in Tibet could date back to prehistory and continues to persist in modern times, though weakening in many ways.

In the early Tibetan conception of space, each mountain is paired with a nearby lake, a framework referred to as *the Divine Dyads*, as proposed by *John Vincent Bellezza* (Bellezza 1997, 1-15). While the male aspect is embodied by the mountain (*yab*, the father), the lake is recognized as its female counterpart (*yum*, the mother). For example, the famous *Mount Kailash* and *Ma Pham Lake* (*ma pham gyu mtsho*) in the *Ngari region*, as well as *Gnyanchen Thanglha* (*gnyan chen thang lha*) and *Gnam Tsho* (*gnam mtsho*) in Northern Tibet, are each presented as male and female combinations. Nevertheless, on some occasions, the male and female aspects are represented by two mountains. This sacred geographical union is a common feature across nearly every part of Tibet.

Later, with the introduction of Buddhist pilgrimage in Tibet, the concept evolved into something what we call "*the Divine Triad*" form of union, where two major mountains and a lake unified into one sacred geographical entity, known as the *mountain-lake-sacred site pair* (*gang mtsho gnas gsum*). In Western Tibet, *the Divine Triad* refers to *Mount Kailash*, *Ma Pham Lake*, and *sPos Ri Ngad Ldan* (*spos ri ngad ldan*). In Eastern Tibet, specifically in the Amdo region, it includes *A-myes rma-chen* (*A' myes rma chen*), *Kokonor Lake* (*mtsho sngon po*), and *Mount Drakar Drel dzong* (*brag dkar sprel rdzong*), which will serve as the primary focus of discussion in this article. *Drakar Drel dzong* (*brag dkar sprel rdzong*)<sup>i</sup> esteemed as one of Amdo's most sacred mountains, has endured through the ages as a profound cultural symbol, reflected in both religious scriptures and oral traditions of the region—sometimes through divergent, yet at other times, complementary narratives. In this article, I will focus on the cultural formation of *Mount Drakar Drel dzong* as a case study, using a set of textual representations in the past to explore the following questions: What are the basic and fundamental principles of mountain culture in Tibet? How do different texts represent the pilgrimage to *Drakar Drel dzong*? How has the memory of the *Drakar Drel dzong* pilgrimage evolved over time, and in what ways has it changed?

In various respects, these two forms of textual narratives trace the origins, transitions, and transformations of the sacred mountain's cultural significance. The *Pilgrimage Guide to Drakar Drel dzong* (*brag dkar sprel rdzong gi dkar chag*, hereafter *The Guide*) and the *Praise of the Melodious Sound of the Right-Turning Dharma Conch for Drakar Drel dzong* (*brag dkar sprel rdzong gi bstod pa chos dung g.yas su 'khyil ba 'i sgra dbyangs*, hereafter *The Praise*) are two foundational Buddhist works that articulate the religious sacredness of *Drakar Drel dzong*. Here, I will refer to these texts by the Tibetan term "*gnas yigs*", a term that can be considered equivalent to what *Katia Buffetrille* has proposed as "*pilgrimage texts*"<sup>ii</sup> (Buffetrille 1997, 89-112).



Picture 1: Mount Drakar Drelzong and its pilgrimage route as seen through Google Earth.



Picture 2: Mount Drakar Drelzong, winter of 2019  
(Photo courtesy of the author)

### The Media of Memory: Writing Traditions of *Drakar Drelzong*

Situated at a crucial transportation crossroads leading to Central Tibet (*dbus gtsang*), *Drakar Drelzong* has historically served as a prominent center of religious pilgrimage and intellectual activity, attracting eminent figures from various traditions who produced significant literary works during their sojourns. The extant corpus of texts related to *Drakar Drelzong* is primarily composed of *pilgrimage guides* (*gnas yig*)<sup>iii</sup> authored by eminent lamas representing various religious lineages. Among these, *The Guide*, likely attributed to the 6th Karmapa, Choekyi Wangchuk, and subsequently compiled by *Drigung Cheeji Drakba*, stands out as a significant work,<sup>iv</sup> alongside *Hymns of Praise*, composed by the renowned Nyingma yogi *Zhabs dkar Tshogs drug Rang grol* (1781–1850); *The Melodious Praise of Drelzong*, authored by *Arol Lobsang Lungtrtogs Tenpai Gyaltzen* (1888–1958); *The Praise*, composed by *Dobi*

*Geshe Sherab Gyatso* (1884–1968); and *The Jewel Garland of Melodious Sound: A Pilgrimage Guide to the Great Sacred Site of Drakar Drelzong*, by the contemporary scholar *Rongwo Lhagyal Pal*. Originating from various historical periods and religious traditions, these texts provide a multifaceted array of perspectives on the development of *Drakar Drelzong's* sacred pilgrimage culture. They illuminate the ways in which religious figures have actively contributed to shaping the evolving significance of this sacred site.

In the Tibetan pilgrimage study field, much of the scholarly literature refrains from proposing overarching theories. Instead, when theoretical frameworks are employed, they are frequently used to highlight their limitations in effectively addressing the distinct aspects of Tibetan pilgrimage (*Hartmann 2024, 3*). To address this gap, I will apply *Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory* to the study of Tibetan pilgrimage. The theory of cultural memory, proposed by German scholars *Jan* and *Aleida Assmann* in the late 20th century, expands upon *Maurice Halbwachs' "social framework theory" or "collective memory" (Halbwachs, 1950)*. The *Assmanns* seek to explain how memory develops in relation to the expansion and transmission of civilization. They emphasize the cultural aspect of memory, asserting that it is sustained through structured, collective, and public forms of communication. Additionally, they categorize its modes of transmission into two distinct forms: *rituals and texts (Assmann 2005, 122-139)*. German Tibetologist *Peter Schwiieger* was the first to incorporate this theoretical approach into Tibetan studies, arguing that, in addition to collective memory, the natural landscape plays a fundamental role in shaping Tibetan civilization. (*Schwiieger 2013, 64-85*). Traditional pilgrimage guides often reflect an immersive interaction with sacred mountain landscapes, prominently illustrating the construction of collective memory. (*Buffetrille 1998, 18-34*).

The creation of these *gnas yigs* of *Drakar Drelzong* represents a pivotal step in the textualization of cultural memory, serving as tools that encapsulate the collective imagination in written form. Unlike oral histories, these texts granted Tibetan scholarly elites access to *Jan Assmann's* concept of *"core texts" (Assmann 2011, 28–31)* within sacred landscape culture, enabling them to shape how memory was documented and conveyed. Organized with detailed accounts of the mountain's landscape and sacred sites, these texts often open with mythological narratives, entwined with local historical events and figures drawn from shared memory.

Field works I conducted at *Drakar Drelzong* suggest that by the early 20th century, *Drelzong Monastery*, which was constructed much later at the base of the *Mount Drakar Drelzong*, had gradually supplanted the mountain as the primary focus of pilgrimage activities.<sup>v</sup> In my view, the framework discussed by *Jan Assmann (Assmann 2011, 70–150, 191–205)* on transitions in cultural memory can, to some extent, be applied to analyze how Buddhist pilgrimage transitions from peripheral to central memory. As a result, in contemporary practice, the pilgrimage predominantly focuses on the monastery, with the mountain's circumambulation serving as just one component of the ritual. Despite this shift, the sacred mountain endures as a latent cultural memory, preserved within texts and rituals.<sup>vi</sup>

*The Guide* primarily narrates the myth of *Padmasambhava's*<sup>vii</sup> triumph over demons, his subjugation of the local mountain deity *Great Moon Nyan Monkey (gnan spren zla ba chen po)*, and the transformation of the mountain landscape into a sacred Buddhist site. The Tibetan term *"Nyan"* here is a very old notion, commonly alludes the numina that occupy intermediate space in the vertical axis of the universe. The mountain functions as a geographical entity dividing the universe into tripartite realms: *the lha (the gods or deities)* in the sky, *the gNyan (Mountain-dwelling spirits or worldly deities)* in the middle and *the klu (Water spirits or serpentine beings)* in the underground-known as *"the three lha klu gnyan" (lha klu gnyan gsum)*. Therefore, as *Samten. G. karmay* suggests, in this cosmographic structure, the *gNyan* is normally understood as being *the local deity or territorial god (yul lha or gzhi bdag)* as they are thought to dwell at the peaks, slopes and the foot of the mountains (*Karmay 1998, 432-451*). In this case, *the Great Moon Nyan Monkey* could be categorized as a *yul lha gzhi bdag* type of deity, strongly connected with the earlier Tibetan Mountain cult—a distinct unwritten tradition of the laity in which neither Buddhist nor Bonpo clergy play a significant role. Hence, we can easily assume that the subjugation of *the Great Moon Nyan Monkey* highlights the confrontation between indigenous culture (likely predating the Bon as a religious tradition<sup>viii</sup>) and the expanding influence of Buddhism in Tibet. This aligns with what *Katia Buffetrille* termed the *'Buddhisization'* of the Tibetan Plateau (*Buffetrille 1998, 33-47*). She examines how Buddhist practices and ideologies have been integrated into the certain region's indigenous traditions of Tibetan Plateau, leading to a unique synthesis of religious expressions. This integration has significantly influenced the cultural and spiritual landscape of Tibet, reshaping local customs and the significance of sacred sites.

*The Guide* begins with a mythological account of the sacred site's origin. The story is as follows:

*"Padmasambhava pursued seven demon spirits from Lake Kokonor (approximately 210 kilometers northeast of Mount Drelzong) to Mount Drelzong. While meditating in a cave on the mountain, the demons sealed the entrance with a massive boulder. In response, Padmasambhava used his vajra to pierce through the rock and flew out of the cave, subsequently subduing the seven demons with his magic powers. During his retreat in the Vajra Loka Palace (Dorje Lokar Phodrang) on Mount Drelzong, he encountered the mountain deity with the body of a human and the head of a monkey<sup>ix</sup>, who claimed to be the guardian of the sacred mountain. Padmasambhava subdued this guardian, initiated it into protector vows, and conferred upon it the name Great Moon Nyan Monkey."*

Surprisingly, a similar description appears in the *bKa' thang sde lnga* (*The Five Chronicles*), written by the 14th-century *terton* (treasure revealer) *Orgyen Lingpa* (1323–1360). It portrays the *Nepalese* woman *Śākyadeva* as being seduced by demons and continues with the following lines:

“To a human body with human form,  
And a monkey's head,  
A name and title were given:  
‘the Great Nyan Monkey Talpa (*brdal pa*).’”<sup>x</sup>

The name “Great Nyan Monkey” appears here with its meaning, phrasing, and context strikingly similar to what is found in *The Guide*. Textual evidence suggests that the later description most likely originates from *the bKa' thang sde lnga*. Apart from the spelling difference between “*Brdal ba*” (spreading or to spread) and “*Zla ba*” (*the moon*), likely a deviation from the original name, the other elements of the stanza remain consistent with the text, further reinforcing its connection to *the bKa' thang sde lnga*. Moreover, the depiction of the deity as a monkey, along with its descriptive imagery, appears to be directly derived from *the bKa' thang sde lnga*. Upon closer examination, this resemblance gains importance as it parallels accounts found in *Padmasambhava's* biographies. As Toni Huber suggests, many of Tibet's sacred sites are intimately connected to *Padmasambhava*, reflecting his enduring religious legacy and influence (Huber 1999, 83, 29).

This alignment demonstrates how later sources resonate closely with earlier narratives, highlighting the consistent portrayal of his profound impact in Tibet.

The second part of *The Guide* provides a Buddhist interpretation of the natural features on *Mount Drel dzong*, including its caves, relics, springs, unusual rocks, and trees. Under Buddhist symbolism, the mountain's color, caves, flora, rocks, soil, water, as well as handprints and footprints, are all endowed with religious sanctity. These sacred elements are arranged in relation to a central deity or sacred object, forming an interconnected Buddhist landscape. Through this process, the physical features of the sacred mountain are reinterpreted as sites of profound cultural and religious significance.

### The Role of Narrative Tradition in the Constructing and Forgetting Memories Memory as Forgetting

In the pre-Buddhist Tibet, mountains were generally regarded as totemic animals, genealogical deities, or ancestral spirits of clans, establishing strong ties with local communities. After Buddhism was introduced to Tibet, there was a concerted effort to assimilate and reconstruct ancient traditions to align them with Buddhist teachings. While the mountain cult maintained a continuous presence, encapsulating the Tibetan cultural perception of the landscape, territorial gods were deliberately transformed into *gnas ris*<sup>xi</sup> (sacred mountains).

As the earliest Pilgrimage text to *Mount Drel dzong*, *The Guide* consistently reflects efforts to reconcile the inherent contradictions within the identity of the mountain deity.<sup>xii</sup> The origin myth introduces *the Great Moon Nyan Monkey*, who is subdued by *Padmasambhava* and subsequently transformed into a protector deity. The process of transforming indigenous territorial deities into Buddhist sacred mountains, as discussed earlier, aligns with what *Katia Buffetrille* terms ‘*Buddhisization*.’ This transformation involves converting a mountain deity, traditionally venerated by laypeople once or twice a year on the mountain's slopes, into a Buddhist holy site where pilgrims engage in circumambulation. At the end of *The Guide*, this deity reappears in the text, having evolved into one *with flowing hair Dharma Protector* (*Zhang skyong Ral-ba-can*) and a member of the *Shambhala Vajradhara* pantheon, perfectly transitioned from a fearsome local spirit to a Buddhist guardian. The internal conflict within the narrative exemplifies the mountain deity's dual identity and twofold nature. On one hand, it becomes a compassionate protector of the Dharma, a renunciant follower of Buddhism, embodying the Buddhist worldview. On the other hand, it remains a worldly local deity, concerned with fame and fortune, reflecting a strong secular and folk tradition.

The transformation from mountain god to protector deity is not merely a change in nomenclature; it also entails a reconfiguration of status and function in response to a new cultural memory framework. This gradual process involves the evolution of the mountain's identity from that of a *territorial mountain god* (*yul lha*) to a *gnas ri*, or the residence of the territorial god. In traditional cultural memory, *the Great Moon Nyan Monkey*, a deity symbolizing the entirety of the mountain, was reimagined as just one among many mountain deities following his conversion to Buddhism. His spatial domain, once encompassing the entire mountain, was reduced to a smaller, specific area. Consequently, his role diminished from that of a principal deity to a subordinate figure, with a corresponding erosion of his functional authority. This process is emblematic of the Tibetan practice of *Opening the Sacred Gate* (*gnas sgo phye ba*)<sup>xiii</sup>,

signifying the reconstruction and reinterpretation of the mountain as a *Buddhicized* landscape. In this context, the original symbolic memory is diluted, rewritten, and, in some cases, forgotten or excluded from the canon of textual memory.

In this context, the landscape has been reorganized, rewritten, reshaped, and transformed into a *Mandala* according to Buddhist philosophy, with deliberate transformations still evident in certain areas. Consequently, under the process of *Buddhicization*, natural elements such as caves, animals, plants, rocks, soil, water, and even physical imprints like fingerprints and footprints on the mountain are believed to possess *the power of blessings (byin rlabs)*. Therefore, any harm or destruction inflicted upon the mountain or its creatures, vegetation, and physical entities is considered an accumulation of *negative karma (las ngan pa bsags pa'i rgyu)*, leading to adverse consequences.



Picture 3: A Thangka Painting of the Great Moon Nyan Monkey at Drakar Drel dzong Monastery (photo courtesy of the author, 2021)

### Texts and Myths: Selective Forgetting in Cultural Memory

As stated earlier, the Tibetan Mountain cult originated as an unwritten tradition among the laity. The gods and spirits residing in places such as mountains and lakes played significant roles in local human affairs. *The Great Moon Nyan Monkey*, revered as the pre-Buddhist mountain deity of Drakar Drel dzong, embodies diverse layers of cultural memory that are preserved in local traditions. In my research, I discovered that while these older memories related to the mountain deity *Great Moon Nyan Monkey* tend to fade within written texts, they persist vividly and clearly in oral traditions, passed down through proverbs, songs, and folktales. Compared to textual records, these oral traditions appear more vivid and distinct. They are often connected to certain folk rituals, preserving past figures and events in memory, which are reenacted year after year during these ceremonies. One of the most famous examples of this is the volatile romance between *the Great Moon Nyan Monkey* and the *Red-Faced Queen (tsunmo dmaryag ma)*. A popular vernacular lore is as follows:

*“The Red-Faced Queen was originally the wife of the Great Moon Nyan Monkey, the territorial deity of Mount Drakar Drel dzong. She was renowned for her extraordinary beauty. One day, she caught the attention of a distant mountain god, Amnye Bayan. Captivated by Bayan’s honeyed words, the queen decided to elope with him. However, along the way, the Great Moon Nyan Monkey caught up with them. Furious, he unsheathed his long sword and struck the queen’s right temple. Fearing for his life, Bayan fled. As punishment, the queen was doomed to live in solitude in the valley, with her right scalp cursed to never grow new hair again.”<sup>xiv</sup>*

In texts, *the Red-Faced Queen* is referred to as *the Red-Chested Queen* (*Btsunmo Brangdmar ma*). This represents a point where written tradition converges with living realities (or oral traditions). Although the names “Red-Faced” and “Red-Chested” differ slightly, they both refer to a same mountain deity that resides in a mountain located in the southeastern lower valley, approximately five kilometers from *Mount Drakar Drel dzong*. The themes of *infidelity*, *elopement*, and *conflict* in the story form an ancient core of Tibetan sacred mountain mythology, serving as cultural markers for local nomadic communities. Unlike the figure of *Padmasambhava* in written texts, who is primarily associated with spiritual and worldly teachings, this legend reflects a more community-centered perspective, characterized by strong anthropomorphic elements.

The interactions between the mountain deities that related to Drakar Drel dzong closely mirror the dynamics of human society, offering insight into how myths resonate with local lived experiences. In cultural memory, historical facts are transformed into remembered history, thereby becoming myth. As *Jan Assmann* states, “through memory, history becomes myth. In this way, history does not lose its truthfulness; on the contrary, it gains normative and enduring power, and in this sense, it becomes real” (Assmann 2011, 28–31, 70–150).

The objective historical events of the past, when interpreted from different angles by various narrators and influenced by personal subjective factors, shift the focus of how memory is conveyed. This myth has generated multiple versions over time. However, in written texts, aside from her role as the wife of the Great Moon Monkey, the multidimensional identity and vivid characterization of the Red-Faced Queen have largely disappeared. While myths tend to emphasize the *remembrance* of these deities, texts gravitate more towards *forgetting*—or, to be more precise, the extent of forgetting is greater in textual records. This phenomenon is especially evident in *The Praise*, where the presence of mountain deities is almost completely absent.

### Narrative Traditions and the Construction of Recent Memory: “The Praise” and Others Text as Memoryscape

The other comparatively recent Pilgrimage Guide text, *The Praise*, was composed in 1945 by the renowned *Gelugpa Geshe Dobi Sherab Gyatso*<sup>xv</sup> (1884–1968) at the request of the *Third Arol Tulku Lobsang Lungtogs Tenpai Gyaltzen* (1888–1958)<sup>xvi</sup>. This work is regarded as a sophisticated and authoritative account of *Mount Drakar Drel dzong*. This work is regarded as a sophisticated and authoritative account of *Mount Drel dzong*, composed in the elegant *nine-syllable* verse structure of Tibetan literary tradition. In contrast to the narrative-focused *Guide*, *The Praise* emphasizes the glorification and veneration of the sacred site, characterized by ornate language and heavily influenced by traditional Poetics theory. Many pilgrimage guide authors from this period were *Gelugpa* monks, and *Sherab Gyatso*, drawing on a variety of other pilgrimage guides, composed his work by incorporating prophecies and traditional cultural theories such as Tibetan geomancy.<sup>xvii</sup> Consequently, *The Praise* represents a mature form of *Mount Drel dzong*’s pilgrimage literature, marking the standardization and formalization of the genre.

*Brag Dgonpa Konchok Tenpa Rabgye* (1801–?), the author of *mDo smad chos ’byung*, emphasizes the “*Second Zari*”<sup>xviii</sup> attribute of *Drakar Drel dzong* when referencing *The Guide*. However, the cited text itself does not explicitly mention this characteristic. This discrepancy highlights how interpretations or attributions by later scholars or commentators can diverge from the original textual content. The term “*Pure Crystal Mountain*” (*dag pa shel ri*) symbolizes *Mount Zari*, mentioned in *The Guide* as one of the sacred spots on *Mount Drakar Drel dzong*. However, the text does not emphasize its broader role as a representation of the entire mountain. This distinction underscores the nuanced ways in which sacred sites are contextualized, reflecting both localized spiritual significance and broader cultural interpretations. The idea of *Drakar Drel dzong* as the “*Second Zari*” likely represents a reinterpretation that arose after the creation of *The Guide*. *Mount Zari*, a sacred mountain deeply rooted in the central Tibet, seems to have been symbolically projected onto *Drakar Drel dzong*, which is located in eastern Tibet. This act of religious reinterpretation reflects a broader pattern of reimagining sacred geographies to enhance the spiritual significance of a site, aligning it with established traditions and centers of pilgrimage. In Tibetan Buddhist *gnas yigs*, *Mount Zari* is generally seen as the *Mandala Palace of Vajradhara deity* (*dpal ’khor lo sdom pa*), possessing a homomorphic relationship with the cosmic triad and *Mount Meru*’s symbolic space.

During his practice at the site, the renowned *Nyingmapa* practitioner *Zhabs dkar Tshogs drug Rang grol* (1781 - 1851)<sup>xix</sup>, commonly known as *Zhabs dkar pa*, wrote a song emphasized the attributes of *Drakar Drel dzong* as “the *Avalokiteshvara Sacred Site*” (*thugs rje chen po ’i gnas*)<sup>xx</sup>, which was blessed by *Padmasambhava*.

“Ema! The sacred mountain Drakar Drel dzong,  
Beautiful like pure crystal peaks piled up,  
Blessed by the emanation of the sovereign Pema (*Padmasambhava*),  
The supreme solitary retreat.”<sup>xxi</sup>

However, he did not reference its *Zari* attributes. Nevertheless, in *The Praise*, asserted that *Drakar Drelzong* as “being indistinguishable from the glorious Sacred Mountain *Zari*”<sup>xxii</sup> (*dpal gyi tsa ri tra dang gnyis su med*) by *Sherab Gyatso*. Thus, the idea of designating *Drakar Drelzong* as “the second Mount *Tsari*” likely emerged after the creation of both *The Guide* and the conceptualization of the *Avalokiteshvara Sacred Site*. Furthermore, the latter may be directly connected to *Zhabs dkar pa*. Additionally, the *gnas yigs* of *Drakar Drelzong*, primarily authored by *Lamas* from various traditions, frequently depict specific landscapes of the sacred mountain as sanctified by renowned masters of their respective lineages.

The audiences of these texts collectively engage through reading, which not only captures the evolving representation of *Drakar Drelzong* as a memoryscape across different periods but also underscores the competitive use of cultural memory as a group resource. Yet, from a broader perspective, these instances of rivalry and contention often progress toward collaboration and unity, centered on the shared valorization of *Buddhization*. Taking *The Praise* as an example, while the text establishes the *Gelugpa*’s discourse framework, it does not exclude the perspectives of masters from other traditions regarding *Drakar Drelzong*. Instead, it incorporates their viewpoints through a nuanced narrative structure. This approach not only promotes the broad acceptance of the *gnas yigs* but also contributes to shaping *Drakar Drelzong*’s identity within the *Gelug* tradition.

Texts serve as reflections of a society’s underlying realities, and *gnas yigs* can be viewed as expressions and reenactments of *Buddhization*, embodying a multifaceted form of cultural memory. *The Praise* signifies that the capacity of cultural memory has reached a certain limit where the text has become canonical. The original principles of acceptance and compliance have gradually expanded throughout the entire writing tradition and have become the core criteria in the process of textual transmission (Assmann 2011, 28–31 and 70–150). In *The Praise*, unlike *The Guide*, there is no longer a need to elaborate on forgotten aspects of old memories or justify new ones. The landscape has been entirely transformed into an idealized *Mandala*, and the mountain deity has been seamlessly incorporated into the concept of a *gnas ri*.

### Memory of Cultural Heroes in Tibetan pilgrimage Written Tradition

In Tibetan tradition, spiritual teachers hold great prestige and status. Prominent figures like *Padmasambhava*, *Milarepa* (1052–1135), and *Tsongkhapa* (1357–1419) consistently feature throughout the modification of *gnas yigs*. Sacred sites acquire deep transcendent meaning through their association with these saints, as reflected in pilgrimage literature narratives. These accounts of esteemed teachers and lamas are infused with legendary features, enriched by religious and literary embellishments. They encourage a departure from conventional historical interpretations, presenting these figures as cultural heroes in Buddhist tradition—transcending the physical realm yet firmly rooted in cultural memory (*Schwieger* 2013, 64–85). These figures can be invoked, revived, and reimagined through the practices of a *yogi*, the rituals of a Eminent monk, or the pure visions of a *Guru*, thus perpetuating their influence. In the sacred site construction narratives associated with *Drakar Drelzong*, cultural heroes (See *Table 2*) such as *Padmasambhava*, *Drigung Kyobpa Jikten Gonpo* (1143 - 1217), *Tsongkhapa* (1357-1419), and the female practitioner *Machik Lapdrön* (1055-1149) are consistently active within the *pilgrimage* written tradition. Their deeds, handprints, and footprints are essential for culturally interpreting the landscape. While these *cultural heroes* may seem to transcend reality, they consistently permeate all every aspect of local daily life, underscoring the intricate relationship between cultural memory and the physical landscape.

Compared to *The Guide*, *The Praise* presents a significantly larger array of *cultural heroes*, comprising spiritual masters, accomplished practitioners, and revered high monks. Originating from diverse regions and Buddhist school backgrounds, these figures differ notably from the *semi-historical figures* previously discussed. Their well-documented interactions with the *Drakar Drelzong* tradition and verifiable historical presence establish their status as authentic historical figures. Each has devoted themselves to promoting Buddhism through activities such as preaching the *Dharma*, founding monasteries, and initiating disciples, while upholding the literary traditions outlined in *The Guide* in their scholarly and religious works. From the perspective of ordinary pilgrims, these tangible, flesh-and-blood individuals resonate more deeply and are more comprehensible than abstract conglomerations of deities representing profound theological doctrines. Under this dynamic Buddhist discursive framework, *Drakar Drelzong* has been continuously reorganized and transformed, ultimately emerging as a super-community Buddhist sanctuary.

### Reshaping Mount Drakar Drelzong as a Buddhist Mandala world

According to the theory of Buddhist sacred geography, *Mount Drakar Drelzong* is regarded as somewhat the central axis of the *Mandala* world. As something like *Toni Huber* notes, it was the ordering principle of the *Mandala* that was most frequently projected onto and embodied within the specific topography of the newly categorized cult mountains (*Huber* 1999, 26, 83). It is said that the sacred geography of *Mount Drakar Drelzong*, as described in written traditions, includes its sanctuaries of earth, rocks, woods, and other physical elements, whether naturally or artificially formed. All of these are always perceived as manifestations of some kinds of the extraordinary *Rangbyons* (*self-manifestation*), or an image or form that is believed to have appeared through the power of *byinrlabs*



(blessings) within the sacred geography of the *Great Chakrasamvara Mandala Palace* (*dpal 'khor lo bde mchog gi pho brang*) where all the supreme deities are assembled. In Buddhism, it is believed that numerous sacred sites have been blessed through the manifestations of both the *Nirmanakaya* and *Sambhogakaya*, as detailed in various tantric texts. Among these, the *twenty-four principal gnass* (sacred sites) are thought to have been consecrated by the *Sambhogakaya* aspect of Buddha *Shakyamuni*, particularly in association with the glorious *Heruka*. *Drakar Drel dzong* is acknowledged as one of these *gnass*, sanctified through the *Sambhogakaya*'s manifestation in a manner comparable to *Tsari* in southern Tibet. The worldly realm, including the twenty-four *gnass* and beyond, is said to lack existence as a unified whole. This perspective reflects a distinctive doctrinal insight, emphasizing the unique attributes of Buddhist teachings. *The Container and Content* (*snod bcud*) cosmology of Tibetan Buddhism, combined with conventional Tibetan understandings of the environment and its inhabitants, conceptualizes the landscape of *Mount Drakar Drel dzong* as a central Mandala, evoking the collective imagination of the three realms (*kham gsum*).



Picture 4: 14<sup>th</sup> Centuray *Chakrasamvara Mandala Thangka* painting (<https://www.himalayanart.org/items/77204>)

The three sacred sites—the peak (*ri rtse*) as the seat of mind, the upper slopes (*ri sked*) as the seat of speech, and the lower reaches (*ri 'gab*) as the seat of body—are understood to represent the three dimensions of enlightened manifestation within the sacred geography of *Mount Drakar Drel dzong*. Together, they embody the unity of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind within the Mandala of the glorious *Chakrasamvara*. This symbolic alignment is further mirrored in the three great sacred sites of the Amdo region, collectively known as *Gangtso Gnas Gsum*: *Amnye Machen* as the body, *Drakar Drel dzong* as the mind, and *Tsongonpo* (Kokonor Lake) as the speech, each distinctly corresponding to specific aspects of the Buddhist teachings. It is said that in the above-mentioned *Mandala*, divided into three realms—upper, middle, and lower—the rim places of the wheel (*'khor lo 'i rtsibs yul*) are adorned with *twenty-four bindus* (*thig le nyer bzhis*), which correspond to the *twenty-four sacred gates* (*gnas sgo nyer bzhis*). These places are categorized into the *eight gnas of celestial practice* (*mka' la spyo pa'i gnas brgyad*), the *eight gnass of earth practice* (*sa la spyo pa'i gnas brgyad*), and the *eight gnas of underground practice* (*sa 'og na spyo pa'i gnas brgyad*) (*bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho* 2009, 32–35).

1. **The eight gnass of celestial practice** (*mka' la spyo pa'i gnas brgyad*)
  - A. *The White Conch Dharma gnas* (*dung dkar chos kyi gnas*)
  - B. *The Yangdzong Dumo gnas* (*yang rdzong 'du mo'i gnas*)
  - C. *The Great Compassion gnas* (*thugs rje chen po'i gnas*)

- D. *The Conqueror of Enemies, the Noble One gnas* (dgra bcom 'phags pa'i gnas)
  - E. *The Wrathful Fierce Vajra gnas* (khro bo sme brtsegs gnas)
  - F. *The Eight Sugatas gnas* (bde gshegs brgyad kyi gnas)
  - G. *The Assembly of Celestial Practices gnas* (mkha' spyod tshogs kyi gnas)
  - H. *The Auspicious Mountain gnas* (bkra shis la yi gnas)
2. **The eight gnass of earth practice** (sa la spyo pa'i gnas brgyad)
- A. *The Great Elephant Waterfall gnas* (glang chen kha 'bab gnas)
  - B. *The Path of Liberation High Mountain gnas* (thar lam mtho ris gnas)
  - C. *The Dark Red Meat Mountain gnas* (sha sgya smug pa'i gnas)
  - D. *The Enlightened Attainment gnas* (sangs rgyas 'grub pa'i gnas)
  - E. *The Sacred Place of Indian Lineage gnas* (rgya gar pha dam pa'i gnas)
  - F. *The Purification by Conquering All gnas* (rnam 'joms khrus kyi gnas)
  - G. *The Cleansing Cemetery gnas* (dur khrod bsil ba'i gnas)
  - H. *The Treasure of the Earth Gods gnas* ('dzam lha gter gyi gnas)
3. **The eight gnass of underground practice** (sa 'og na spyo pa'i gnas brgyad)
- A. *The Renowned Everywhere gnas* (yongs su grags pa'i gnas)
  - B. *The Crystal Clarity gnas* (dag pa shel gyi gnas)
  - C. *The Vajra Cave gnas* (rdo rje phug pa'i gnas)
  - D. *The Brave Monkey Spirit gnas* (spre'u sems dpa'i gnas)
  - E. *The Realm of Desire Fulfillment gnas* ('dod 'jo ba yi gnas)
  - F. *The Uddiyana Mantra Water gnas* (o rgyan sngags chu'i gnas)
  - G. *The Gratitude Repayment gnas* (drin lan mjal ba'i gnas)
  - H. *The Yak Liberation Cave gnas* (ya ma thar khung gnas)



Picture 5: The twenty-four sacred sites of Mount Drakar Dredzong in Tibetan  
(Photo courtesy of bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, 2009)

The sacred sites found within the upper, middle, and lower realms of the mountain (gnas ri'i steng 'og bar gsum) are understood to be gathering places of deities (yi dam lha tshogs), heroes (dpa' bo), and dakini attendants (mkha' 'gro'i 'khor). As depicted in the thangka paintings of the Chakrasamvara Mandala ('khor lo sdod pa'i bris thang, see Picture 4), these sites are symbolically represented, centering around the principal deity, Glorious Heruka (dpal heruka), who embodies the ultimate bliss in union with his consort. Encircling them, the bindu (thig le) at the Mandala's periphery is portrayed as a harmonious convergence of enlightened qualities. From this perspective, the inherent truth of self-arisen awareness (rang byung gi bden pa) becomes manifest, recognized through some kind of meditative insight (rig gnas kyi rlog pa). Such understanding enables one to perceive this sacred landscape with

the clarity of a contemplative's vision, where it is both *visible to the eye* (*mig gis mthong pa*) and *tangible to touch* (*lag pas reg pa*). This *luminous realm* (*dag snang gyi zhing khams*) thus provides a foundational ground for spiritual realization (*lCang skya rol pa'i rdo rje* 2014), 83).

Thus, it is said that the sacred gates of these sites are inherently linked to practitioners of various types, who arrive in these regions following the traces of great beings of the past. These individuals come for to dwell in the secluded mountain sanctuaries, forest retreats, or by the sides of trees, among other spiritually conducive locations for retreat of esoteric practice.

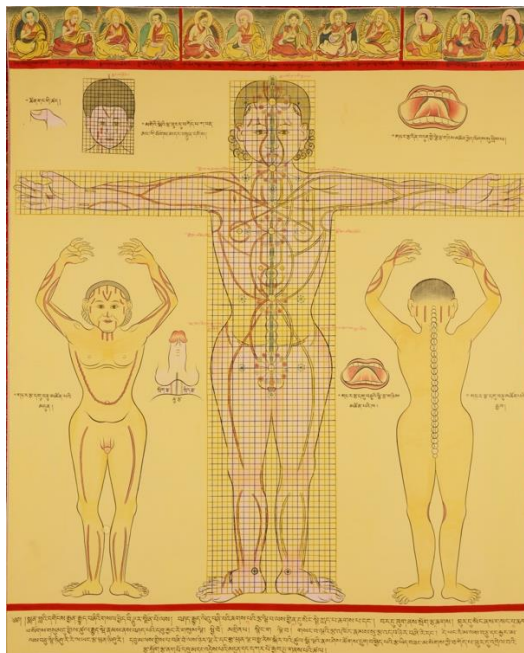
In summary, the connection between the sacred mountain and its practitioners reflects a profound relationship. According to the *Chakrasamvara* system, the *outer Mandala* (*phyi snod*) serves as a source of blessings, while the *sacred gates* correspond to the transformative potential of the practitioner's *energy channels* (*rtsa*), *inner winds* (*rlung*), and *bindu* (*thig le*). These elements align in harmony, allowing for the transmission of *blessings* (*byin rlabs*) to flow into the practitioner.

Therefore, it is believed that undertaking spiritual practice in these sites with sincere dedication leads to unparalleled blessings (*byin rlabs mchog*). This makes them uniquely powerful places for cultivating realization and attaining the ultimate goals of the *Chakrasamvara* path.

According to Tantric theory, if the practitioner correlates the *twenty-four sacred gates* (*gnas sgo nyer bzhi*) within the three regions—*upper, middle, and lower* (*stod smad bar gsum*)—with the *composite elements of the human body* (*gang zag gi phung po*), the *principal channel* (*rtsa'i gtso bo*), defined by the *three vital points* (*rtsa gsum*)—the *central* (*dbu ma*), *right* (*ro ma*), and *left channels* (*rkyang ma*)—serves as the foundational framework for these correlations. By aligning these channels and gates, one can enhance the power of blessings. The sacred channels flow from the *dbu ma*, subtly diffusing toward the *back* (*sgal phyogs*) near the spine, creating a continuum of expanding and refining energy. This flow then extends upward to the *crown apex* (*yar sna gtsug gtor*), radiating forward and focusing at the center of the *forehead* (*smin dbus kyi thod pa*). This continuum aligns with the energetic resonance of *ro rkyang*, symbolizing the "mouth" of the body opening to its intrinsic nature.

The principal path of the *channels* can be divided into three main regions, each containing numerous details. These regions correspond to different parts of the body (See *Picture 5 and 6*):

1. In the *upper section* (*stod*), from the crown of the *head* (*spyi gtsug*) to the *throat* (*phrag pa*), there are *eight sacred sites*. These are associated with the celestial activities of the deities of the *enlightened mind Mandala* (*thugs 'khor lha tshogs*), who dwell in space.
2. In the *middle section* (*bar*), from the *throat* (*mgrin pa*) to the *navel* (*'bras bu*), there are *eight sacred sites*. These correspond to the terrestrial activities of the deities of the *speech Mandala* (*gsung 'khor lha tshogs*), who dwell on the earth.
3. In the *lower section* (*smad*), from the *palms of the hands* (*lag pa'i sor mo*) to the *soles of the feet* (*rkang pa'i sor mo*), there are *eight sacred sites*. These align with the subterranean activities of the deities of the *body Mandala* (*sku 'khor lha tshogs*), who dwell below the earth.



**Picture 6:** A Tibetan Medical Illustration of the Subtle Body, Depicting the Central Channel and Its Connection to Chakrasamvara Deities.<sup>xxiii</sup>  
(Photo Courtesy of the Author, 2021)

Thus, these *twenty-four sacred sites* correspond to the *twenty-four root elements of the human body* (*lus kyi rtsa khams nyer bzhi*). Through the power of *mantra practices* (*sngags lugs*), these elements are believed to pervade and activate the body. The sacred sites are venerated by *heroes* (*dpa' bo*) and *heroines* (*dpa' mo*) who are renowned for their steadfastness and diligence in assisting others and performing their respective activities in these sacred places.

In brief, the *gnas yigs* of *Mount Drakar Drelzong* delve into the profound relationship between the act of circumambulation and the practitioner's esoteric practices at the sacred landscape. They emphasize the necessity of balancing both *internal* and *external* aspects of practice, stating that without this harmony, progress cannot be achieved. These texts also reveal the transformative power of spiritual discipline, asserting that when body and mind are aligned in pure conduct, and the practitioner locates the right place, the practitioner's path, thus, leads to the ultimate liberation and enlightenment.

## Conclusion

The cultural and spiritual significance of *Mount Drakar Drelzong* exemplifies the intricate interplay between memory, landscape, and religious tradition in Tibetan society. By analyzing *gnas yigs* such as *The Guide* and *The Praise*, this study has demonstrated how sacred geography is actively reshaped through textualization, myth-making, and ritual practice. These texts function as both preservers and reconceptualizers of cultural memory, transforming local deities and natural landscapes into symbols of Buddhist cosmology and moral narratives.

The process of *Buddhisization* (See *Table 1*), as articulated by *Katia Buffetrille*, highlights the integration of indigenous beliefs into Buddhist practices, showcasing the adaptability of Tibetan cultural systems. *Drakar Drelzong's* transformation into a *Mandala*-like sacred structure reflects broader patterns in Tibetan sacred geography, where physical landscapes are reimagined as spaces for spiritual realization. However, this process also reveals the tensions between oral and written traditions, as the vivid anthropomorphic elements of pre-Buddhist lore often fade in written narratives, lingering more prominently in oral traditions and ritual practices. Through these evolving narratives, *Drakar Drelzong* emerges as a dynamic cultural symbol, transitioning from its pre-Buddhist roots as a sacred mountain associated with the *Great Moon Nyan Monkey* to a triune Buddhist site representing the *Avalokiteśvara land*, the *second Tsari*, and later the *Chakrasamvara Mandala*. These transformations underscore the selective nature of cultural memory, where elements of history are consciously reshaped or forgotten to align with changing socio-cultural conditions.

As mediums of memory, *gnas yigs* strategically embellish, modify, and fictionalize the sacred mountain's narratives, constructing a layered and evolving image that resonates with the collective Tibetan consciousness. The contributions of *cultural heroes* like *Padmasambhava* further solidify *Drakar Dredzong*'s place within the Buddhist framework, as their symbolic acts of blessing, treasure revelation, and sanctification activate and perpetuate the mountain's sacred identity. Ultimately, *Mount Drakar Dredzong* in many ways serves as a microcosm of Tibetan cultural identity, reflecting the interconnection of the natural, spiritual, and human realms. By engaging with these texts, contemporary scholarship can uncover valuable insights into the preservation, adaptation, and transformation of cultural memory. This provides a crucial lens for understanding Tibetan interactions with their sacred landscapes in the face of historical, religious, and current ecological changes.

While one should always keep in mind that *Assmann's cultural memory* framework can offer insights into the studies of the sacred geography of *Drakar Dredzong*, it is important to acknowledge its limitations when applied to Tibetan cultural practices. Rooted in Western intellectual traditions, *Assmann's* theory emphasizes textual artifacts and institutionalized forms of memory. This perspective may not fully capture the richness of Tibetan practices, where memory and identity are deeply intertwined with spirituality and oral traditions rather than written records alone. In Tibetan culture, sacred landscapes, oral histories, and embodied rituals such as pilgrimage and prayer occupy a central role in the transmission of memory. These practices often blur distinctions that *Assmann* draws between *short-term communicative memory* (spanning up to three generations) and *long-term cultural memory* (institutionalized over centuries). Instead of being codified in texts, Tibetan memory often persists through dynamic, lived experiences that renew religious and material connections across generations. Moreover, Tibetan practices frequently integrate oral and material forms of memory transmission, as seen in the continuous spiritual activities surrounding sacred sites like *Drakar Dredzong*. *Assmann's* framework, with its emphasis on textualization, might inadequately address such non-textual forms. While these aspects are beyond the scope of this research, they highlight the need for broader frameworks that encompass diverse cultural memory practices.

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<sup>i</sup> Drakar Dredzong Sacred Mountain, situated in the southwestern region of Xinghai County, within the Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, lies at the geographic coordinates of 35°30' N latitude and 99°48' E longitude, approximately 35 kilometers from the county seat. The name Drakar Dredzong, meaning "Fortress of White Rock Monkeys," is rooted in a local belief that monkeys once inhabited the area. The mountain encompasses 3.32 square kilometers, with a circumambulation route extending 7.4 kilometers. Along this path, pilgrims encounter a series of sacred Buddhist sites, including the eight gnass of celestial practice, eight gnass of earth practice, eight gnass of underground practice". Drakar Dredzong boasts three prominent peaks: White Conch Valley Peak, Avalokiteśvara Peak, and Vajra Scepter Peak. Among them, White Conch Valley Peak stands as the tallest, reaching an elevation of 6,244 meters. The mountain's landscape is distinguished by dramatic rock formations, deep ravines, numerous caves, and flourishing vegetation. From summit to base, distinct ecological zones are visible, including rocky belts, rock-grass transition zones, and bands of vegetation. The sharp, imposing peaks lend the mountain a majestic presence, and from afar, it is said to resemble a giant elephant drinking water. At the base of the mountain stands Dredzong Monastery, a prominent Gelugpa establishment. Drakar Dredzong is venerated as one of the Four Great Sacred Hermitage Mountains of Amdo, alongside Sharwa Ridzong, Pula Yangdzom, and Akyong Namdzong. The pilgrimage tradition associated with these sacred mountains is encapsulated in the saying: "In the Year of the Horse, circle Mount Amnye Machen; in the Year of the Sheep, circle Qinghai Lake; in the Year of the Monkey, circle Drakar Dredzong." This tradition holds deep significance within Tibetan culture and religious practice.

ii The scope of Tibetan pilgrimage texts, or gnas yig is extensive, and the genres encompass a variety of formats, including common pilgrimage guides or catalogs (*dkar chag*), pilgrimage interpretation (*gnas bshad*), passports (*lam yig*), pilgrimage praises (*gnas bstod*), and *bsang* offering texts (*bsang yig*). In addition, some tantric texts, biographies of prominent lamas, and travelogues are also included. These gnas yigs vary in length, ranging from brief catalogs to longer and more complex descriptions of pilgrimage routes and sacred sites, covering vast geographic areas. Sacred mountains are a prominent theme in the genre of gnas yigs, and in this article, *The Guide and The Praise* belong to the catalog and praise genres, respectively.

iii In Tibetan, the term gnas functions as a verb meaning to reside and as a noun meaning place or location. In this context, gnas yig should be understood as referring to gnas yigs, which include a variety of genres such as hymns of praise, pilgrimage guides, and catalogs.

iv *The Guide* included in *mDo smad chos 'byung* is by far the earliest known source documenting the sacred Mount Drakar Dredzong. While it vaguely attributes the work to a religious figure bearing the title of Karmapa, it does not explicitly identify the author. However, based on the biography of Drigung Cheeji Drakba (1595–1659), the compiler of *The Guide*, this Karmapa is likely to be the Sixth Zhwa Dmar Pa, Karmapa Choekyi Wangchuk (1584–1630). See Drigung Cheeji Drakba: *The Autobiography of Drigung Cheeji Drakba, Banquet of Joy* (Woodblock edition). In *Collected Works of Drigung Kagyu* (2004), PP. 78; and *Staglungpa Ngawang Tashi: The Autobiography of Rinchen Chokyi Drakpa* (Woodblock edition), PP. 237–288.

v The fieldworks i conducted at Drakar Dredzong, August 3, 2018 – August 15, 2018; January 20, 2019 – February 8, 2019; January 20, 2024 – February 19, 2024.

vi In the Chinese translation of *mDo smad chos 'byung* (《安多政教史》) by Wu Jun (吴均) and others, Drakar Dredzong Mountain was inaccurately translated as Drakar Dredzong Monastery, resulting in the misinterpretation that *The Pilgrimage Guide to Drakar Dredzong* referred to the monastery, rather than the sacred mountain. It is crucial to note that *mDo smad chos 'byung* was written over 60 years prior to the establishment of Drakar Dredzong Monastery. This translation oversight underscores a broader pattern of marginalizing or silencing sacred mountains within Tibetan religious and cultural discourse.

vii Padmasambha, also known as Guru Rinpoche, Orgyan padma, Padmasambhava was an eighth-century Buddhist master from northwest India, renowned as the pioneer who introduced Tantric Buddhism to Tibet. Invited by King Trisong Detsen, he collaborated with Indian and Tibetan scholars and masters to establish Tibetan Buddhism.

viii In the Bon tradition, this mountain is considered a sacred site for Bonpo practitioners, who circumambulate it in a counterclockwise direction, opposite to the Buddhist practice. Refer to Bonrgya Gelek Lhundrup Gyatso. (2014). *A Precious Telescope: A Concise History of Yungdrung Bon*, PP. 304.

ix Brag Dgonpa Konchok Tenpa Rabgye. (1983). *mDo smad chos 'byung*. Gansu Nationalities Publishing House, PPP. 219.

x “Go bo spre ‘u ‘i go bo can. De la ming dang mtshan btags pa. Gnyan spre brdal pa chen po lags.” Orgyen Lingpa (1986). *bKa’ thang sde lnga*. Nationalities Publishing House, Beijing, China, PP. 20.

xi In Tibetan, “gnas” translates to “residence” and “ri” to “mountain”, collectively referring to a sacred mountain that serves as the abode of a territorial deity. Locals typically venerate these deities through secular rituals, while monastic pilgrims engage in circumambulations, recognizing the site as sacred to a Buddhist or Bonpo deity. Within Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage, the natural landscape is perceived as a sacred, multi-dimensional space inhabited by one or more Dharma protectors (Chos skyong). This sacred space often mirrors the structure of a stupa, with deities like Chakrasamvara (bde mchok) at the center, symbolizing the three-dimensional Buddhist cosmology and Mount Sumeru.

xii Tony Huber, from a typological perspective, analyzes that the “opening” of sacred mountain sites on the Tibetan Plateau was primarily concentrated in the 17th century and beyond. The Guide focuses on the origin myths of the sacred sites, the main deities and protector gods, the sacred relics, as well as the traces of Padmasambhava and other renowned practitioners, embodying the characteristics of early Pilgrimage Guide texts. Refer to Huber, Toni. (1999). *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet*. Oxford University Press, PP. 29.

xiii The opening of a sacred gate (gnas sgo phye ba) is an important cultural construction in Tibetan history, where mountains are envisioned as conceptualized natural landscapes. This process is initiated by esteemed masters and great spiritual figures, who open the gate to the sacred mountain through the composition of pilgrimage texts, thus marking the beginning of the mountain’s Buddhicisation. Although the texts do not explicitly mention who first opened the gate to the sacred mountain of Drakar Dredzong, we can infer from existing documents that it was most likely the Sixth Karmapa of the Red Hat lineage, Choekyi Wangchuk.

xiv The side of the sacred mountain where the Red-Faced Queen resides is lush with vegetation, while the other side is barren, covered with red soil, with no grass or trees growing.

xv Geshe Sherab Gyatso (1884–1968) was a distinguished Tibetan scholar, teacher, and politician from a place called Dobi in Yadzi (循化县), Amdo. Earning the esteemed Geshe Lharampa title, he played significant roles in Nationalist and Communist China, serving as president of the Buddhist Association of China. He tragically died during the Cultural Revolution due to Red Guard violence.

xvi Arol Lobsang Lungtogs Tenpai Gyaltsen, born in the Rebgong region of Amdo, was the founder of Dredzong Monastery. Owing to his profound Buddhist scholarship, he attracted many disciples and was widely revered throughout the Amdo region.

xvii The colophon of Praise mentions “drawing on and synthesizing various pilgrimage guide texts.” Refer to Sherab Gyatso. (2013). *Collected Works of Sherab Gyatso, Volume 2*. Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House, PP. 495.

xviii Brag Dgonpa Konchok Tenpa Rabgye. (1983). *mDo smad chos 'byung*. Gansu Nationalities Publishing House, PP. 217.

xix Zhabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (1781–1851) was a highly revered Nyingma lama and yogin from Amdo, celebrated for his profound spiritual insight and extensive writings. His life is chronicled in his autobiography, a beloved text in Tibetan literature, which reflects his journey from a wandering yogin in childhood to his ultimate spiritual realization. Born in Rebkong, a center of tantric practice in Amdo, Zhabkar spent much of his life meditating in sacred places across the Tibetan Plateau, including remote locations like Labchi and Kailash, and even in an isolated retreat on an island in Lake Kokonor. A key aspect of Zhabkar’s spiritual legacy is his wide-ranging teachings and the fact that he influenced many of the most significant lamas in Kham and Amdo during the 19th century. His work is notable not only for its spiritual depth but also for its accessibility, making it a lasting part of Tibetan Buddhist literature. His poetic works, particularly on Dzogchen practices like Trekchö and Tögal, are highly regarded, and his autobiography remains a cornerstone for understanding the path of a Tibetan yogin

xx Zhabs dkar Tshogs drug Rang grol. (1985). *The Biography of Zhabs dkar pa*. Qinghai People’s Publishing House, PP. 357.

xxi “E ma brag dkar sprel rdzong ri, rin chen shel dkar spungs ltar mdzes, rgyal dbang padma ‘byung gnas kyis, byin gyis brlabs pa ‘i bven gnas mchog.” See Zhabs dkar Tshogs drug Rang grol. (1985). *The Biography of Zhabs dkar pa*. Qinghai People’s Publishing House, PP. 370.

xxii See Sherab Gyatso. (2013). *Collected Works of Sherab Gyatso, Volume 2*. Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House, PP. 494.

xxiii In Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, the three channels of the human body—the central (rtsa dbu ma), right (rtsa ro ma), and left (rtsa rkyang ma)—are closely linked to the Chakrasamvara Mandala and the sacred space for meditation. The channels guide the flow of subtle winds (rlung), essential for inner transformation. The central channel aligns with the Mandala’s axis, representing unity and ultimate reality, while the right and left channels correspond to solar and lunar energies. The Chakrasamvara Mandala reflects the perfected universe and is visualized within the subtle body, integrating its geometry with the practitioner’s inner channels. Similarly, the meditation site mirrors the Mandala, harmonizing the external environment with the practitioner’s internal practice. This alignment

of body, Mandala, and place facilitates the realization of the non-duality of mind and world, embodying the union of samsara and nirvana central to the Chakrasamvara tradition.

## Appendix 1

**Table 1:** Comparison of the Landscape Buddhisization in The Guide and Praise.

| <b>Gnas yigs</b> | <b>The Guide</b>   | <b>The Praise</b>   |
|------------------|--|---|
| <b>Mandalas</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Four Tantric Mandalas (rgyud sde bzhi'i dkyil 'khor)</li> <li>2. Akanishta Dharmadhatu Palace ('og min chos dbyings pho brang)</li> <li>3. Eighty-petaled Tiger-Liberating Mandala (stag sgrol thig le brgyad cu'i dkyil 'khor)</li> <li>4. Blissful Pure Land's arrangement (bde ba can gyi zhing bkod)</li> <li>5. Eightfold Mandala of the Bodhisattvas surrounding Vairochana (bcom ldan rnam snang sems dpa' brgyad 'khor)</li> <li>6. Pure Prasphotakah Celestial Palace Mandala (dag pa rab 'byams gzhal yas khang)</li> <li>7. Mandala of Eight Siddhas (sgrub pa bka' brgyad dkyil 'khor)</li> <li>8. the Chakrasamvara Mandala ('khor lo sdom pa'i dkyil 'khor)</li> <li>9. Four Tantric Mandalas</li> </ol>   | <p>the Chakrasamvara Mandala (khor lo sdom pa'i dkyil 'khor)</p>  |
| <b>Deities</b>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Naturally Appeared Guru Siddhi (gu ru sing dha rang byon)</li> <li>2. Avalokiteshvara with Dharma Victors (spyan ras gzigs dang chos mchog)</li> <li>3. Medicine Buddha (sangs rgyas sman bla)</li> <li>4. Fierce Vajra Holder and Sixteen Guardians (drag po phur ba phur srung bcu drug)</li> <li>5. Buddha Maitreya with eight closest disciples (rgyal ba byams pa nye ba'i sras brgyad)</li> <li>6. Avalokiteshvara (spyan ras gzigs)</li> <li>7. Male and Female Lord of Death (gshin rje pho gdong mo gdong)</li> <li>8. Lord of Death (gshin rje chos rgyal)</li> <li>9. The Dharma Protector with flowing hair (zhing skyong ral ba can)</li> <li>10. The Red-Chested Queen (btsun mo brang dmar ma)</li> <li>11. Sixteen Arhats (thub pa gnas brtan bcu drug)</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Avalokiteshvara (spyan ras gzigs)</li> <li>2. Victorious Vajra Holder (dpal ldan rdo rje)</li> <li>3. Twenty-four Dakinis (da ki na ni nyer bzhi)</li> <li>4. King of Dharma (chos rgyal)</li> <li>5. Arya Tara (arya tare ma)</li> </ol> |
| <b>Masters</b>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Padmasambhava (u rgyan Padma 'byung gnas)</li> <li>2. Drikung Kyobpa Jigten Gonpo ('bri gung skyob pa 'jig rten mgon po)</li> </ol>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Padmasambhava (padma sambha wa)</li> <li>4. Drikung Jigten sum Gon('bri gung 'jig rten gsum mgon)</li> <li>5. Labkyi Dronma (lab kyi sgron ma)</li> <li>6. Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyeltsen (sa pan kun dga' rgyal mtshan)</li> </ol>         |



|                      |   |   |
|----------------------|---|---|
|                      |   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. <i>Je Tsongkhapa Lobzang Drakpa ('jam mgon blo bzang grags pa</i></li> <li>8. <i>Shar Kelden Gyatso (skal ldan rgya mtsho)</i></li> <li>9. <i>Serkhangpa (gser khang pa)</i></li> <li>10. <i>Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol (zhabs dkar ba tshogs drug rang grol)</i></li> <li>11. <i>Lobsang lungrigs Gyatso (Lobsang lung rigs rgya mtsho)</i></li> <li>12. <i>Lobsang Lungtog Tenpai Gyeltsen (blo bzang lung rtogs bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan)</i></li> <li>13. <i>The Great Leader Jir Degpon ('jir dge dpon po)</i></li> </ol> |
| <i>Sacred Places</i> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The pure Shri Pristine Crystal Cave (dag pa shri shel gyi phug pa)</i></li> <li>2. <i>Bird Garuda (bya khyung ga ru ta)</i></li> <li>3. <i>Ugyen Miraculous Water (u rgyan sgrub chu)</i></li> <li>4. <i>Master Padma's Falling Abode (slob dpon padma 'byung gnas lhung bzed)</i></li> <li>5. <i>Ugyen's Sacred Throne (u rgyan bzhugs khri)</i></li> <li>6. <i>The Cow Bestowing Breast (dod 'jo ba yi nu ma)</i></li> <li>7. <i>Treasure Sacred gate (gnas sgo gter kha)</i></li> <li>8. <i>Intermediate Path of Liberation (bar do'i 'phrang lam)</i></li> <li>9. <i>Bai Durya Alms Bowl (be da rya'i lhung bzed)</i></li> <li>10. <i>Ninety-nine Stages of Liberation (thar ba'i them skas zhe dgu)</i></li> <li>11. <i>Sacred Footprints of Guru Padmasambhava (u rgyan padma'i zhabs rjes)</i></li> <li>12. <i>The Imprint of drum and other implements (phyag rnga sogs kyi rjes)</i></li> <li>13. <i>Path Steps of Liberation (thar lam them pa'i skas)</i></li> <li>14. <i>Six Nectar Types of Medicinal water (sman chu bdud rtsi ro drug )</i></li> <li>15. <i>Chu Bzang White Mountain (chu bzang brag dkar)</i></li> <li>16. <i>Footprints of Machin Bomra mountain Deity (rma chen sbom ra'i zhabs rjes, spel mo brag)</i></li> <li>17. <i>Peak of Spelmo (spel mo brag)</i></li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Holy Water (grub chu)</i></li> <li>2. <i>Mountain Pass of Higher Realm (mtho ris la)</i></li> <li>3. <i>The Front Mountain Tara (mdun ri sgrol ma'i ri)</i></li> <li>4. <i>Right Mountain (g.yas ri)</i></li> <li>5. <i>Left Mountain (g.yon ri)</i></li> <li>6. <i>Pure Crystal Mountain (dag pa shel ri)</i></li> <li>7. <i>Chenmo Water (chen mo'i chu)</i></li> </ol>  |

**Table 2:** The Role of Cultural Heroes in the Buddhisization Process of Drakar Dredzong

| <i>Cultural Heroes</i> | <i>Schools</i> | <i>Date of Birth and Death</i> | <i>Major Activities at Drakar Dredzong</i> |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|--|
|                        |                |                                |  |

|  |                  |                  |   |
|--|------------------|------------------|---|
| <p><i>the 6th Redhat Karmapa, Choekyi Wangchuk</i></p>                     | <p>Kagyü</p>     | <p>1584-1630</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Composed The Guide</i></li> <li>2. <i>Revealed Sacred Sites</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Mandalas: Four Tantric Mandalas , Akanishta Dharmadhatu Palace ('og min chos dbyings pho brang), Eighty-petaled Tiger-Liberating Mandala (stag sgrol thig le brgyad cu'i dkyil 'khor), Mandala of Pure Crystal (bde ba can gyi zhing bkod), Eightfold Mandala of the Bodhisattvas surrounding Vairochana (bcom ldan rnam snang sems dpa' brgyad 'khor), Pure Prasphotakah Celestial Palace Mandala (dag pa rab 'byams gzhal yas khang), Mandala of Eight Siddhas (sgrub pa bka' brgyad dkyil 'khor), the Chakrasamvara Mandala ('khor lo sdom pa'i dkyil 'khor), Four Tantric Mandalas.</i></li> <li>2) <i>Deities: Naturally Appeared Guru Siddhi (gu ru sing dha rang byon), Avalokiteshvara with Dharma Victors (spyang ras gzigs dang chos mchog), Medicine Buddha (sangs rgyas sman bla), Fierce Vajra Holder and Sixteen Guardians (drag po phur ba phur srung bcu drug), Buddha Maitreya with eight closest disciples (rgyal ba byams pa nye ba'i sras brgyad), Avalokiteshvara (spyang ras gzigs), Male and Female Lord of Death (gshin rje pho gdong mo gdong), Lord of Death (gshin rje chos rgyal), The Dharma Protector with flowing hair (zhing skyong ral ba can), The Red-Chested Queen (btsun mo brang dmar ma), Sixteen Arhats (thub pa gnas brtan bcu drug).</i></li> <li>3) <i>Masters: Padmasambhava (u rgyan Padma 'byung gnas), Drikung Kyobpa Jigten Gonpo ('bri gung skyob pa 'jig rten mgon po).</i></li> <li>4) <i>Sacred Places: The pure Shri Pristine Crystal Cave (dag pa shri shel gyi phug pa), Bird Garuda (bya khyung ga ru ta), Ugyen Miraculous Water (u rgyan sgrub chu), Master Padma's Falling Abode (slob dpon padma 'byung gnas lhung bzed), Ugyen's Sacred Throne (u rgyan bzhugs khri), The Cow Bestowing Breast ( dod 'jo ba yi nu ma), Treasure Sacred gate (gnas sgo gter kha), Intermediate Path of Liberation (bar do'i 'phrang lam), Bai Durya Alms Bowl ( be da rya'i lhung bzed), Ninety-nine Stages of Liberation (thar ba'i them skas zhe dgu), Sacred Footprints of Guru Padmasambhava (u rgyan padma'i zhabs rjes), The Imprint of drum and other implements (phyag rnga sogs kyi rjes), Path Steps of Liberation (thar lam them pa'i skas), Six Nectar Types of Medicinal water (sman chu bdud rtsi ro drug ), Chu Bzang White Mountain (chu bzang brag dkar), Footprints of Machin Bomra mountain Deity (rma chen sbom ra'i zhabs rjes, spel mo brag), Peak of Spelmo (spel mo brag).</i></li> </ol> </li> </ol> |
| <p><i>A'mgron Khes Tsün Gya Tsho" (a mgron mkhas btsun rgya mtsho)</i></p> | <p>Ningma pa</p> | <p>1604-1679</p> | <p><i>In 1638, although it was made known that a Gnas yig was compiled here, it has been lost to history.</i></p>   |
| <p><i>Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol</i></p>                             | <p>Gelupa</p>    | <p>1781-1851</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Recognized Drakar Drel dzong as the Avalokiteshvara Sacred Site.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Composed a series of praises and songs on Drakar Drel dzong.</i></li> </ol>  |
| <p><i>Arol Lobsang lungrigs Gyatso</i></p>                                 | <p>Gelupa</p>    | <p>1805-1888</p> | <p><i>Discovered the sacred sites of Buddha Ruling Over the Klu (klu dbang rgyal po'i sku), Naturally Appeared Yogini (nal 'byor ma rang byon), Tiger Garuda (stag khyung), Eleven-Faced Avalokiteshvara (spyang ras gzigs bcu gcig zhal), Avalokiteshvara with One Thousand Hands/Eyes (phyag stong spyang stong), Naturally Appeared Holy Dharma Raja Yama (dam can chos rgyal rang byon).</i></p>  |
| <p><i>Arol Lobsang Lungrtogs Tenpai Gyaltzen</i></p>                       | <p>Gelupa</p>    | <p>1888-1958</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Established the Drakar Drel dzong monastery.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Composed The Melodious Praise of Drel dzong.</i></li> </ol>  |

|  |                      |                  |   |
|--|----------------------|------------------|---|
| <p><i>Dobi Geshe Sherab Gyatso</i></p> | <p><i>Gelupa</i></p> | <p>1884-1968</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Composed The Praise</i></li> <li>2. <i>Revealed Sacred Sites</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Mandalas: the Chakrasamvara Mandala</i></li> <li>2) <i>Deities: Avalokiteshvara, Victorious Vajra Holder, Twenty-four Dakinis, King of Dharma, Arya Tara</i></li> <li>3) <i>Masters: The Great Leader Jir De gpon, Padmasambhava, Drikung Jigten sum Gon, Labkyi Dronma, Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyeltsen, Je Tsongkhapa Lobzang Drakpa, Shar Kelden Gyatso, Serkhangpa, Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, Lobsang lungrigs Gyatso, Lobsang Lungtog Tenpai Gyeltsen (blo bzang lung rtogs bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan).</i></li> <li>4) <i>Sacred Places: Holy Water (grub chu), Mountain Pass of Higher Realm (mtho ris la), The Front Mountain Tara (mdun ri sgrol ma'i ri), Right Mountain (g.yas ri), Left Mountain (g.yon ri), Pure Crystal Mountain (dag pa shel ri), Chenmo Water (chen mo'i chu).</i></li> </ol> </li> </ol> |
|--|----------------------|------------------|---|

**Appendix 2**

1. *The Pilgrimage Guide to Drakar Dredzong (brag dkar sprel rdzong gi dkar chag)*
2. *The Praise of the Melodious Sound of the Right-Turning Dharma Conch for Drakar Dredzong (brag dkar sprel rdzong gi bstd pa chos dung g.yas su 'khyil ba'i sgra dbyangs)*