

Buddhism in Central Asia II

Practices and Rituals, Visual and Material Transfer

Edited by

Yukiyo Kasai
Henrik H. Sørensen



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Mahākāla Literature Unearthed from Karakhoto

Haoran Hou

1 Introduction¹

Over the past two decades, scholars have come to realise the important role the Tangut Empire (ca. 1038–1227, in Chinese sources known as Xixia 西夏) played in spreading Buddhism in Central Asia. The Tangut Empire was located on the border of the Khitan Empire (907–1125, in Chinese sources known as Liao 遼), China and Tibet, and became a place where different Buddhist traditions converged, communicated, and interacted.² With the demise of the Northern Song (960–1126, 北宋) and the revival of Buddhism in Tibet, the Tangut rulers turned westward in search of spiritual guidance and sent a stream of messengers with a large number of gifts to invite Tibetan Buddhist masters from Tibet.³ Many Tibetan Buddhist masters responded positively to the enthusiasm of the Tangut rulers. A number of Tibetan monks came to the Tangut Empire to preach and held important positions at the Tangut royal court.⁴ There are

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- 1 I am grateful to Dr. Carmen Meinert and Dr. Weirong Shen for offering valuable advice on the structure of the article. In addition, I thank Dr. Iain Sinclair and Dr. Dylan Esler for reading the initial draft of my article and providing helpful comments. Needless to say, any errors that remain are mine alone.
 - 2 Carmen Meinert, “Introduction—Dynamics of Buddhist Transfer in Central Asia,” in *Transfer of Buddhism Across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, ed. Carmen Meinert (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016), 1–16. See also, Weirong Shen, “Reconstructing the History of Buddhism in Central Eurasia (11th–14th Centuries): An Interdisciplinary and Multilingual Approach to the Karakhoto Texts,” in *Édition, éditions: l’écrit au Tibet, évolution et devenir*, ed. Anne Chayet, Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, Françoise Robin, and Jean-Luc Achard (Munich: Indus Verlag, 2010), 337–362; Kirill Solonin, “The ‘Perfect Teaching’ and Liao Sources of Tangut Chan Buddhism: A Study of ‘Jiexing zhaoxin tu,’” *Asia Major* 26.1 (2013): 79–120.
 - 3 Sam van Schaik, “Tibetan Buddhism in Central Asia: Geopolitics and Group Dynamics,” in *Transfer of Buddhism Across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, ed. Carmen Meinert (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016), 57–81. See also, Karl Debreczeny, “Faith and Empire: An Overview,” in *Faith and Empire: Art and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Karl Debreczeny (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2019), 28–29.
 - 4 Elliot Sperling, “Lama to the King of Hsia,” *Journal of the Tibet Society* 7 (1987): 31–50; Maho Iuchi 井内真帆, “A Note on the Relationship between the bKa’-gdams-pa School and Mi-nyag/Xia,” *Zangxue qikan 藏学期刊 Journal of Tibetology* 8 (2013): 58–62; Carmen Meinert, “Creation of Tantric Sacred Spaces in Eastern Central Asia,” in *Buddhism in Central Asia I—Patronage*,

a number of possible reasons the Tangut emperors sought Tibetan Buddhist masters, but one of the more important ones is that the Tibetan monks were known for being adept at utilising their Tantric power to benefit their patrons in mundane matters.⁵ During a tumultuous time, being constantly drawn into warfare with their mighty neighbours, the Tangut rulers fervently hoped to solicit the protection of the divine power by relying on Tibetan Tantric adepts, and showed great interest in the wrathful rites associated with Mahākāla, the Great Black One. This deity typically appears in wrathful manifestations that eliminate obstacles and destroy enemies. In Tibetan Buddhism, he is one of the most potent *dharma* protectors. The Mahākāla cult became one of the most remarkable characteristics of Tangut imperial involvement with Tibetan Buddhism.⁶

Most scholarship on the Mahākāla cult in the Tangut Empire relies on Tibetan canonical sources and hagiographical writings. There has not been much research on the Mahākāla literature unearthed from Karakhoto. These materials are evidence that the teachings and practices of Mahākāla once circulated in the Karakhoto area. The decipherment of these texts will certainly contribute to our understanding of the Mahākāla cult in the Tangut Empire. However, to date these texts have not received much scholarly attention. To remedy this deficiency, this paper will provide a comprehensive overview of the Mahākāla literature from Karakhoto and discuss a range of issues surrounding its dissemination and translation.

2 Previous Studies

Elliot Sperling first raised the topic of the Tangut imperial engagement with the Mahākāla cult in two articles. In his first article, he researched the life and works of Tsami Lotsaba Sangyé Drakpa (fl. 12th c., Tib. rTswa mi lo tsā ba Sangs rgyas grags pa). He focused on Tsami Lotsaba's travels in India and the question of his identity—whether he was a Tangut or a Tibetan—as well as on Tsami Lotsaba's translated works related to Mahākāla. Sperling also explored his role

Legitimation, Sacred Space, and Pilgrimage, ed. Carmen Meinert and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020), 244–271, 271. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417731_012.

5 For Tibetan Tantric Buddhism at the Tangut court, see Ruth W. Dunnell, “Esoteric Buddhism under the Xixia (1038–1227),” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 465–477.

6 Jisheng Xie, “Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhist Art in the Xixia Kingdom,” in *Faith and Empire: Art and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Karl Debreczeny (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2019), 83–103.

in the development of Tangut imperial interest in the Mahākāla cult.⁷ In his second article, he investigated the career of a prominent monk of the Barom Kagyü school (Tib. 'Ba' rom bKa' brgyud pa), addressed as Tishi Repa Shérap Senge (1164/65–1236, Tib. Ti shri Ras pa Shes rab seng ge), who served as the imperial preceptor (Chin. *dishi* 帝師) at the Tangut court and was instrumental in propagating the Mahākāla instructions and practices that derived from Tsami Lotsaba.⁸ Most importantly, Sperling pointed out the continuity of the Mahākāla cult between the Tangut Empire and the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368, 元朝).⁹ After the demise of the Tangut Empire in 1227, the land of the Tanguts came under the rule of the Mongol Prince Godan Khan (1206–1251), and became an important centre of Mongol-Tibetan interactions. The Mongols learned many aspects of Tibetan Buddhism from the Tanguts.¹⁰

Since the publication of Sperling's research, a large amount of Buddhist literature has been recovered from Karakhoto, providing new sources for further study. In a study of the Karakhoto documents, the Chinese scholar Shen Weirong drew attention to five Chinese texts associated with Mahākāla. For

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- 7 Elliot Sperling, "Rtsa-mi lo-tsä-ba Sangs-rgyas grags-pa and the Tangut Background of Early Mongol-Tibetan Relations," in *Tibetan Studies, Proceedings of the 6th International Association for Tibetan Studies*, vol. 3, ed. Per Kvaerne (Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994), 801–825.
- 8 Elliot Sperling, "Further Remarks Apropos of the 'Ba' rom pa and the Tanguts," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 57.1 (2004): 1–26. In his study, Sperling mentions that the literature he found at that time was written with reference to an autobiography of Tishi Repa. At the time, however, this text had not been discovered. To the surprise of all, the autobiography of Tishi Repa referred to by Sperling recently emerged. See Minyak Repa Karpo (Mi nyag Ras pa dkar po, 1198–1262), "*Bla ma rin po che 'gro ba'i mgon po ti shri ras pa'i rnam par thar pa* [The Biography of the Precious Teacher, the Protector of All Sentient Beings, Namely Tishi Repa]," in *Lo pañ rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* [Collection of Biographies of the Buddhist Translators and Pañḍitas], vol. 7 (Beijing: Krung go'i Shes rig dPe skrun khang, 2018), 255–365. This new material is full of detailed information about Tishi Repa's activities in the Tangut Empire. For more details of this biography, see Haoran Hou, "War Magic: The Mongol's Conquest of the Tangut Empire, as Seen Through the Eyes of Tishi Repa (1164/65–1236, Tib. Ti shri Shes reb seng ge)," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 2.3 (forthcoming).
- 9 For the Mahākāla cult in the Yuan Dynasty, see Herbert Franke, "Tan-pa, a Tibetan Lama at the Court of the Great Khans," in *Orientalia Venetiana I*, ed. Merio Sabatini (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1984), 157–180. See also, Weirong Shen, "Magic Power, Sorcery and Evil Spirit: The Image of Tibetan Lamas in Chinese Literature during the Yuan Dynasty (1260–1366)," in *The Relationship Between Religion and State (chos srid zung 'brel) in Traditional Tibet*, ed. Christoph Cüppers (Lumbini, Nepal: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2004), 151–186.
- 10 Yury Kokholov, "The Xi Xia Legacy in Sino-Tibetan Art of the Yuan Dynasty," accessed June 28, 2019. <http://www.asianart.com/articles/xi-xia/>. See also, Christopher P. Atwood, "The First Mongol Contacts with the Tibetans," *Revue d'Études Tibétaines* 31 (2015): 21–45.

one of them, a hymn dedicated to Mahākāla, titled *Jixiang Dahei bazuzan* 吉祥大黑八足讚 [Hymn to Śrī Mahākāla in Eight Stanzas], he determined its Tibetan original and conducted a comparative study of its bilingual versions.¹¹ This study was groundbreaking. Since Sperling's studies rely mostly on Tibetan canonical works and the collective writings of Tibetan masters, Shen's discovery of the Mahākāla texts in the Karakhoto documents undoubtedly provides more definite evidence for the spread of the Mahākāla cult in the Tangut Empire.

Alexander Zorin published some major studies on the Mahākāla documents from Karakhoto in Tibetan. The most important of these is his monograph on a long Tibetan scroll labeled Dx 178 kept at St. Petersburg, which was published in 2015.¹² The scroll is a collection of Tibetan tantric ritual texts, consisting mainly of thirteen texts on various forms of Mahākāla, plus other texts related to Narasimha, Vajrapāṇi, etc. In this scroll, some of the Mahākāla texts are identified as passed down from Tsami Lotsaba and one of his most prominent disciples, namely, Ga Lotsaba Zhönupel. Zorin translated these texts from Tibetan into Russian and reproduced photographs of the complete scroll. These efforts greatly facilitated the research of later scholars.¹³

So far, there is a large amount of literature related to Mahākāla from Karakhoto in both the Chinese and Tibetan languages. It is a pity, however, that neither Shen nor Zorin commented upon material in other languages. The Chinese and Tibetan Mahākāla manuscripts date to the same period, from the late 12th to the 14th century. We may assume that these bilingual texts were simultaneously taught, practised, and circulated in the Karakhoto region. A comparative study of the material in both languages is much needed.¹⁴

11 Shen Weirong 沈卫荣, "Xixia mengyuan shidai de dahei tianshen chongbai yu heishu-icheng wenxian—yi hanyi longshu shengshi zao 'jixiang dahei bazu zan' wei zhongxin 西夏蒙元时代的大黑天神崇拜与黑水城文献—以汉译龙树圣师造〈吉祥大黑八足赞〉为中心 [The Worship of Mahākāla during the Tangut and Mongol Yuan Periods and the Karakhoto Documents Related to It: Centering on *The Hymn to Śrī Mahākāla in Eight Stanzas* by Ārya Nāgārjuna]," in *Xizang lishi he fojiao yuwenxue yanjiu* 西藏历史和佛教的語文學研究 [Philological Studies of Tibetan History and Buddhism], ed. Shen Weirong 沈卫荣 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 418–459.

12 Alexander Zorin, *Buddhyskie ritualnye teksty. Po tibetskoy rukopisi XIII v.* [Buddhist Ritual Texts Based on a Tibetan Manuscript in the 13th Century] (Nauka: Vostochnaya liteatura, 2015).

13 A selection of his research is also published in English. See Alexander Zorin, "A Collection of Tantric Ritual Texts from an Ancient Tibetan Scroll Kept at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences," *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies* 17 (2013): 118–171.

14 Chinese scholar Huang Jiehua studied the Chinese Mahākāla documents excavated from Karakhoto as his doctoral dissertation. His research is mainly based on the Chinese

3 Chinese and Tibetan Manuscripts of Mahākāla from Karakhoto

After the fall of the Tibetan Empire, the Tibetan language continued to be used as an international *lingua franca* by non-Tibetan peoples, and Tibetan Buddhism kept flourishing in Central Asia from the 10th to the 14th centuries.¹⁵ The Mahākāla literature from Karakhoto was created in such a large environment, whether imported or produced locally.

This section provides an overview of the Mahākāla literature from Karakhoto and addresses the following questions: What kind of Mahākāla teachings and practices were disseminated? Are there any differences between the Tibetan and Chinese versions of the same ritual text? If so, what are they, and how did they occur?

3.1 Chinese Manuscript TK 262

The Chinese manuscript TK 262¹⁶ was manufactured in the Tangut period. It is extant in seven and a half pages, bound with a pamphlet stitch. The paper is lined. A page is 20 cm high, and the half page is 12.3 cm wide. The text is arranged vertically in columns from right to left. The calligraphic style is regular script (Chin. *kaishu* 楷书). The column is 14.2 cm high; the head margin is 3.2 cm high, and the foot margin is 2.5 cm high. Each half page has nine lines of seventeen to nineteen characters each.¹⁷ For the sake of convenience, I divide the text into seven sections, from A to G, presented section by section below.

3.1.1 Section A

The manuscript begins: “If the practitioner wants to make the offering cake [...]”.¹⁸ Then, it gives instruction on how to make offerings to invoke Mahākāla, followed by the phonetic transliteration of the *Dahei genben*

sources, and his main contribution is the transcription and collation of the Chinese literature related to Mahākāla. See Huang Jiehua 黄杰华, *Hanzang baoman hufa daheitian xinyang yanjiu* 汉藏宝鬘：护法大黑天信仰研究 [Sino-Tibetan Precious Garland: A Study on the Cult of the Dharmapāla Mahākāla] (PhD diss., Minzu University, Beijing, 2011).

15 Takeuchi, Tsuguhito, and Maho Iuchi, *Tibetan Texts from Khara-khoto in The Stein Collection of the British Library: Studies in Old Tibetan Texts from Central Asia* (Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 2016), 3–15.

16 Shi Jinbo 史金波, Wei Tongxian 魏同贤, and E.I. Kychanov, ed., *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian* 俄藏黑水城文献. *Khara Khoto Texts Preserved in Russia* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996–1998), vol. 4, 331–335.

17 A manuscript description is in Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 6, 31–32.

18 Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 4, 331: 夫修习[者]欲放施食 [...].

mingzhou 大黑根本命呪 [Root-life Mantra of Mahākāla] that the practitioner shall recite. Then it gives some instructions on how to meditate on the protective deities, how to chant this *mantra*, and how to pray for fulfilment. The offering process may also incorporate a fire offering (Chin. *shaoshi* 燒施), since an altar of fire (Chin. *huotan* 火壇) is mentioned several times.

3.1.2 Section B

This section continues to describe offerings: “If the practitioner wishes to present an offering cake, he shall fill a vessel with flesh and blood, reciting the three-character *mantra* (Chin. *sanzi zhou* 三字呪) to transform it into ambrosia (Chin. *ganlu* 甘露), and then put the palms together to chant the *mantra* [of offering] [...].”¹⁹ The spell is omitted here. He shall chant the *mantra* three times and state what he asks of Mahākāla, who comes to enjoy the offerings. After receiving the pledge from Mahākāla, he shall send the deity away.

3.1.3 Section C

This section consists of multiple *mantras*, comprising the *Mingzhou* 命呪 [Life Mantra] of Mahākāla and the six *mantras* of six different peaceful and wrathful female divinities. Their names indicate that they are associated with different purposes of ritual performance. Each *mantra* is headed by a title and begins with the seed syllable (Skt. *bīja*, Chin. *zhongzi zi* 種子字) oṃ (Chin. *an* 唵).

3.1.4 Section D

The next section is a praise titled *Zantanji* 讚嘆偈 [Verses of Praise], dedicated to Mahākāla. Zorin’s publication of the Tibetan scroll Dx 178 provided more Mahākāla material in Tibetan than Shen had access to. In light of this new material, *Verses of Praise* is a word-for-word translation of Tibetan text no. 6, *Ka* in Dx 178.²⁰ Due to space constraints, I do not undertake a detailed survey of the Chinese and Tibetan texts here, rather, I analyse some of the significant differences between the two versions. The Tibetan version opens with:

When the great *dPal rGa lo* [that is Ga Lotsaba] abided at the great charnel ground *Śītavana*, he manifestly saw of Vajra Mahākāla and at the same moment praised him with this king of hymns.²¹

19 Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 4: 夫修習者欲放施食, 則用法椀滿盛血肉, 誦三字呪變成甘露, 合掌應誦呪曰 [...].

20 Zorin, “A Collection of Tantric Ritual Texts,” 150–153.

21 The English translation is quoted from Zorin, “A Collection of Tantric Ritual Texts,” 150. Zorin provides the Tibetan transcription on the same page: *dur khrod chen po bsil ba yi 'tshal zhes bya ba na/ dpal chen po rga lo bzhugs pa'i tshe/ rdo rje nag po chen po zhal mngon sum du gzigs nas/ de nyid kyi tshe bstod pa'i brgyal po 'dis bstod do*.

The Chinese version leaves out the prayer to Ga Lotsaba and starts directly with the praise: “HŪM! At the great charnel ground Śītavana [...]”²² In addition, the last three verses and the colophon, which names Ga Lotsaba as the author of the hymn in Tibetan²³ are also lost in the Chinese version. Thus, the name of the author disappears in the translation.

Zorin identifies the “great dPal rGa lo” as Ga Lotsaba Zhönupel. He travelled to India and met Tsami Lotsaba at the Vajrāsana Monastery and submitted to the latter’s tutelage.²⁴ During this sojourn in India, Ga Lotsaba engaged in a nine-month retreat at the cemetery Śītavana and subdued the Raven-headed Mahākāla (Chin. Juwu Daheizun 具烏大黑尊) during meditation.²⁵ In Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Ga Lotsaba is regarded as the subduer of Raven-headed Mahākāla and the most important transmitter of the teaching lineage associated with this deity. This was inextricably linked to his experience while conducting the retreat at Śītavana in Bodhgaya. In the biographical record of Ga Lotsaba and in the opening verses of the hymn in Tibetan, he visualises the divine manifestation of Raven-headed Mahākāla and writes the hymn to praise the deity while residing in the cemetery.

3.1.5 Section E

This section is a *maṇḍala* sketch. The diagram is marked with information on the direction, shape, colour, and size of the different elements of the *maṇḍala*, and where the tribute shall be placed. The names of some of the tributes given in section A are written here. The sketch is meant to be used to guide the practitioner in meditation and to set up the *maṇḍala* during the offering process. The below discussed booklet F. 191: W103, Text E is a teaching on establishing a *maṇḍala* in order to make an offering to Mahākāla. There are some similarities between the two that deserve a more detailed study in the future.

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- 22 Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 4, 332: 廣大寒林墓地中 [...].
- 23 “Hymn to the Raven-headed Mahākāla composed by the great Pel Ga Lo at the great charnel ground Śītavana is complete (Tib. *dpal chen po rga los la//nag po chen po bya rog gi mying can la bstod pa//dur khrod chen po bsil ba'i mtshal du' mdzad pa' rdzogs s+ho//*)." See Zorin, “A Collection of Tantric Ritual Texts,” 153.
- 24 Sperling, “Rtsa-mi lo-tsa-ba Sangs-rgyas grags-pa,” 814.
- 25 Carl Yamamoto, *Vision and Violence: Lama Zhang and the Politics of Charisma in Twelfth Century Tibet* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 227.

3.1.6 Backside of Section E

Usually, the text is on one side of the paper and the back is left blank. The backside of this diagram is an exception, with a line of what looks like scrawled Tangut characters. The handwriting is not very clear in some places. The modern collators give it an ambiguous name, *Jiaozi yu zhaxie* 校字與雜寫 [Correcting Characters and Miscellaneous Writing].²⁶ Scholars have also overlooked this line, as none have tried to figure out exactly what it is. The line begins with the seed syllable *oM* in the Lantsha script, followed by the Tangut text (Tang. 𑖅𑖉𑖅𑖅𑖅𑖅𑖅𑖅𑖅𑖅). I tentatively translate it as: “*oM!* True Buddha and holy sages, door, three.” That is all this line literally means.

This line is either related to the text on the front of the manuscript, or it is not. If it is related, then given that the seed syllable *oM* appears at the beginning of various *mantras* in this manuscript (as described in section C), perhaps the person who wrote this line intended to emphasize the significance of that seed syllable in the *mantra* recitation and ritual performance. If it is unrelated, perhaps the scribe casually wrote down a line of notes or intended to write a new text but stopped before continuing it. But in either case, we can be sure that the text is of a Buddhist nature and that the scribe was familiar with the Tangut script. Given this, the person who scribbled this line was most probably a Tangut Buddhist practitioner. This is evidence that supports the argument that these Chinese Mahākāla texts were accessible to Tangut practitioners.

3.1.7 Section F

This section is a long *mantra* that is entitled *Daheitian genben mingzhou* 大黑天根本命呪 [The Root-Life Mantra of Mahākāla]. This *mantra* appears several times in the Chinese Mahākāla texts from Karakhoto and plays a vital role in the Mahākāla cult.²⁷ After the title, there is a two- or three-character space, followed by script indicating the end of the text: complete (Chin. *jing* 竟).

3.1.8 Section G

This section is a hymn to Raven-headed Mahākāla, titled *Dahei zan* 大黑讚 [Hymn to Mahākāla]. Shen transcribed and edited the Chinese text. He remarks that there are three hymns to Mahākāla in Chinese among the Karakhoto

26 Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 4, 333.

27 The importance of the *Root-Life mantra* to the worship of Mahākāla in the Tangut Empire is presented in Megan Bryson, “Between China and Tibet: Mahākāla Worship and Esoteric Buddhism in the Dali Kingdom,” in *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism*, ed. Yael Bentor and Meir Sahar (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 409–415.

documents, including *Hymn to Mahākāla*.²⁸ This hymn focuses on the manifest visualisation (Tib. *mngon rtogs*) and contributes a canonical description of Raven-headed Mahākāla.²⁹

Thanks to the efforts of the Rubin Museum of Art, a large collection of *thangka* paintings of Mahākāla are available online, including those of Four-armed Mahākāla and Raven-headed Mahākāla. A portrait of Ga Lotsaba Zhönupel appears in some of the *thangka* paintings of Four-armed Mahākāla.³⁰ Also, in some paintings, the appellation ‘Ga Lo’ or ‘Ga Lotsaba’ appears in inscriptions of the transmission lineage of Mahākāla, especially in relation to Four-armed Mahākāla. Some scholars mistakenly identify the name Ga Lo or Ga Lotsaba in these transmission lineages as Ga Lotsaba Namgyel Dorje (1203–1282, Tib. rGwa lo tsā ba rNam rgyal rdo rje), an important master in the transmission lineage of the Vajrabhairava teachings born in the Rong area of Amdo.³¹ The two Ga Lotsabas are often confused, and this issue has been unclear for years. For example, Khamtrül Sönam Döndrup (Tib. Khams sprul bSod nams don grub) appears to be confused about how to identify one such name and even questions whether Minyak Ga Lotsaba (Zhönupel) and Rongpo Ga Lotsaba (Namgyel Dorje) are the same person.³²

3.2 *Chinese Manuscript F. 191: W103*

The booklet F. 191: W103 was acquired by the Inner Mongolia Institute of Culture Relics and Archaeology during excavations in the Karakhoto area in 1983 and 1984. The manuscript was written roughly in the Yuan Dynasty.

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- 28 Shen, “The Worship of Mahākāla during the Tangut and Mongol Yuan Periods,” 425.
- 29 The hymn is transcribed and translated in Zorin, “A Collection of Tantric Ritual Texts,” 150–153. In some ways, Peking 2642/Derge 1776, *rje btsun dpal nag po chen po la bstod pa* [Praise to the Lord Śrī Mahākāla], composed by Tsami Lotsaba, is a text dedicated to the Raven-headed Mahākāla. The text is included in the canon, even though it is attributed to a Tibetan author.
- 30 For a portrait of Ga Lotsaba as depicted in an 18th-century *thangka* painting of the Drukpa Kagyü school, see Himalayan Art Resources, “Item no. 453,” accessed June 28, 2020. <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/453>.
- 31 For one such example, see Himalayan Art Resources, “Item no. 35880,” accessed June 28, 2020. <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/35880>. According to Jeff Watt’s entry, the transmission lineage of the Four-armed Mahākāla is as follows: “Vajradhara, Bodhisattva Mati, Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Acharyavira, Du Shap Greater and Younger, Vajrasana the Greater, Abhayakaragupta, Tsami Sangye Shap, Gva Lotsawa Namgyal Dorje, Khampa Aseng, Pagmodrupa, Drigung Jigten Gompo, etc.” ‘Gva Lotsawa Namgyal Dorje’ is a mistake. It should be Ga Lotsaba Zhönupel.
- 32 Khamtrul Sönam Döndrup, *Gangs can mi sna grags can gyi 'khrungs 'das lo tshigs re'u mig* [Chronological Table of Famous Tibetans in the Past] (Pe chin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2006), 132.

A total of twenty-seven pages of the booklet are preserved. The page size is 14.1 cm in width and 22.8 cm in length. Each page is written on one side, with seven lines of text, and is arranged from left to right, top to bottom. The characters are in black, but some added marks of punctuations and section division are in red. The calligraphic features suggest that at least two scribes may have been involved in writing this manuscript.³³ The booklet is a collection of five Chinese texts related to Mahākāla in a variety of literature genres. As the manuscript is incomplete, it is possible that there were more than five texts in the original. This group of five texts is numbered from A to E. In the following, I introduce and examine them one by one.

3.2.1 Text A

Text A is entitled *Jixiang Dahei xiufa* 吉祥大黑修法 [Practices of Śrī Mahākāla] and covers eight pages. The front part of the manuscript is damaged. The original name is missing. The title *Practices of Śrī Mahākāla* was invented by later collators. The main body of the text is divided into five sections, each with a subheading. The first section, *Sanshui ji* 三水偈 [Stanza of Three Waters], is mainly about how the practitioner prepares himself to pray for Mahākāla, how to bathe his hands, face, and feet with blood, poison, etc. The second section is the *Jingli ji* 敬礼偈 [Stanza of Homage]. It instructs the practitioner to praise the following characteristics of Mahākāla, such as his solemn appearance, deep voice, equipoised and immovable mind, and compassionate heart. The next section is the *Anzuo ji* 安坐偈 [Stanza of Comfortably Sitting]. The practitioner is required to visualise the symbolic image of Mahākāla and invite him to reside on top of a lotus and sun disc in the practitioner's presence. As for the textual form, the first three sections are classified as stanza (Chin. *ji* 偈, an abbreviated form of Chin. *jituo* 偈陀, Skt. *gāthā*), a genre of metre. Each section is a short hymn with seven or nine characters in one verse and ends with Sanskrit *mantras* transcribed in Chinese.

The section that follows is called the *Feng wugongshi* 奉五供食 [Five Offerings of Food], which primary focus is how to offer praise, incense, lamps, food, music, and so on, to delight the five senses of Mahākāla: the eyes, ears,

33 Regarding this archaeological excavation, see *Heicheng chutu wenshu* (*hanwen wenshu juan*) 黑城出土文書 (汉文文书卷) [The Documents Excavated from Karakhoto (Chinese Documents)], ed. Li Yiyou 李逸友 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1991), 3–10, and a transcription of the manuscript F. 191: W103 is in *ibid.*, 217–218. For digital images, see *Zhongguo cang Heishuicheng hanwen wenxian* 中國藏黑水城漢文文獻 [Karakhoto Documents Preserved in China], ed. Ta La 塔拉, Du Jianlu 杜建錄, Gao Guoxiang 高國祥, Nei Menggu Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 內蒙古考古研究所 (Beijing: Guojia Tushuguan chubanshe, 2008), vol. 8, 1667–1692.

nose, tongue, and body. This procedure is essentially how to establish contact with the deity. The text then moves on to the *Zhaoqing ji* 召請偈 [Stanza of Invocation]. The practitioner repeatedly calls for Lord Śrī Mahākāla (Chin. *Jixiang daheizun* 吉祥大黑尊) to descend. According to the ritual text, his retinue is, foremost, a hundred-thousand Rite-Protectors Raven-headed Mahākālas (Chin. Xingzun Dahei ju wumian 行尊大黑具烏面, Tib. Las mgon bya rog gdong can),³⁴ followed by the Black Flesh-eater with the Head of a Lion (Chin. Danrou ju dashizimian 噉肉具大獅子面, Tib. Sha za nag po bDud mgon seng gdong),³⁵ numbering tens of billions, and then ten million *ḍākinīs* led by the Great Mother-goddess of Yin Caṇḍikā (Chin. Dayin Tianmu Zandige 大陰天母讚帝葛).³⁶ In terms of iconography, the Rite-Protector Raven-headed Mahākāla, the Black Flesh-eater, and Caṇḍikā belong to the retinues of the Four-armed Mahākāla according to Ga Lotsaba's style (Tib. Ye shes mgon po phyag bzhi pa rGwa lo'i lugs).³⁷

In the course of the invocation, the ritual performer repeatedly invites Mahākāla to descend, along with his retinue, and ends each invocation with the following sentence: "You are invited to [dwell in] this place. May you come!"³⁸ The invocations are accompanied by offerings of specific substances, including oils, fats, alcohol, and the five ambrosias (Skt. *pañcāmṛta*, Chin. *wuganlu* 五甘露, Tib. *bdud rtsi lnga*), etc. After making the offering to Mahākāla, the ritual performer states before him the "divine action that I invoke you to do."³⁹ In this context, divine action (Chin. *faxing zhe* 法行者) means that at the behest of the ritual performer, Mahākāla shall tame or eliminate those who endanger Buddhism, disturb sentient beings, and inflict harm on themselves. This text concludes with six verses that express sincere wishes for the success of the ritual and dedicate the merit to oneself and all other sentient beings. In form and function, the final verses are, in fact, a Stanza of Transferring Merit (Skt. *pariṇāmana*, Chin. *huixiang ji* 回向偈).

Text A is emphasised here because it provides insight into the entire process of a ritual performance for Mahākāla. Accordingly, the procedure is organised

34 For the iconography of the Rite-Protector Raven-headed Mahākāla, see René Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet. The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (Delhi: Book Faith India, 1996), 48–49.

35 For the iconography of the Black Flesh-eater, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, 65.

36 For a brief description of Caṇḍikā, see *ibid.*, 46.

37 For the iconography of the Four-armed Mahākāla and his retinues according to the style of Ga Lotsaba, see *ibid.*, 46–47.

38 Ta, Du and Gao, *Zhongguo cang Heishuicheng hanwen wenxian*, vol. 8, 1673: 此處召請願降臨。

39 *Ibid.*, 1675: 汝處所委法行者。

into five stages: (1) preparatory practice, (2) visualising and seating the deity, (3) making praise and offering to the deity, (4) invoking the deity to perform the divine action, and (5) transferring the merit. The text provides a framework for performing the relevant rituals of Mahākāla and gives guidance to the practitioner in each phase. Thus, it can be categorised as an evocation (Skt. *sādhana*, Chin. *chengjiu fa* 成就法, Tib. *sgrub thabs*), a literary genre of Tantric Buddhism.⁴⁰

3.2.2 Text B

The next three texts, B, C, and D are all hymns. Text B is the *Zhizun Dahei badaozan* 智尊大黑八道贊 [Hymn to the Lord of Wisdom Mahākāla in Eight Stanzas].⁴¹ The text consists of two parts. The first is a hymn to the Lord of Wisdom Mahākāla (Chin. *Zhizu Dahei* 智尊大黑, Tib. *Ye shes mgon po nag po chen po*) and gives a brief description of this form of Mahākāla as having one face and four arms. In the text, this form is addressed as 'Raven-headed Mahākāla' (Chin. *Juwu Dahezun* 具烏大黑尊). The end part of Text B is titled *Zhesana ji* 折薩捺偈 [Stanza of Toṣana]. It primarily teaches one how to feed Mahākāla with an offering of specific substances in a skull cup (Skt. *kapāla*, Tib. *thod pa*).

3.2.3 Text C

Text C is entitled *Jixiang Dahei bazuzan* 吉祥大黑八足贊 [Hymn to Śrī Mahākāla in Eight Stanzas], composed by Ārya Nāgārjuna. Shen conducted a comparative study and identified the text's Tibetan original.⁴² According to his research, the Tibetan original is titled *dPal nag po chen po'i bstod pa rkang pa brygad pa zhes bya ba* (Skt. *Śrīmahākālāstaka*). Three different Tibetan translations of this text are preserved in the *Tengyur* (Tib. *bsTan 'gyur*) (Peking. 2639, 2644 and 2645). The Chinese text *Hymn to Śrī Mahākāla in Eight Stanzas* corresponds to text VII of the Tibetan scroll Dx 178, which Zorin studied and translated.⁴³

40 For the literary genre of *sādhana*, see Daniel Cozort, "Sādhana (sGrub thabs): Means of Achievement for Deity Yoga," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezon and Roger R. Jackson (Boulder: Snow Lion, 1996), 331–343.

41 For a translation of the literature of *The Eight-Stanza Hymn to Mahākāla* in Tibet from a later period, see Pieter Cornelis Verhagen, "Notes Apropos to the Oeuvre of Si tu Pan chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699?–1774) (5)—The 'Eight-Stanza Hymn to Mahākāla': A Glimpse of the Translator at Work," *Revue des Études Tardo-antiques* 39 (2017): 166–228.

42 Shen, "The Worship of Mahākāla during the Tangut and Mongol Yuan Periods," 430–439.

43 Zorin, *Buddiyskie ritualnye teksty*, 86–93.

3.2.4 Text D

Text D is titled *Shifang hushen zan* 十方護神贊 [Hymn to the Protective Deities of the Ten Directions]. The text lists eleven names of the deities of the ten directions that the praise addresses, headed by Śakra (Chin. Dishitian 帝釋天), Agni (Chin. Huoshen 火神), and Yama (Chin. Yudi 獄帝). In Buddhism, these deities are ranked among the various heavens (Chin. *zhutian* 諸天) and their number varies. The text then moves on to the main subject, a hymn to Mahākāla.

Despite the title, the *Hymn to Protective Deities of the Ten Directions*, the text devotes a great deal of space to the praise of Mahākāla. In the stanzas, he is honoured as the meditational deity (Chin. *xiuxi zunzhu* 修習尊主, Skt. *iṣṭadevatā*, Tib. *yi dam*). After the praise of Mahākāla, the text adds a eulogy for his female consort Mahākālī (Chin. Daheimu 大黑母),⁴⁴ which is not often seen in other hymns dedicated to Mahākāla. Elsewhere, the *Tengyur* contains some independent hymns to Mahākālī.⁴⁵ Mahākāla is often depicted in images in sexual union (Tib. *yab yum*, Skt. *yuganddha*) with his secret consort (Tib. *gsang yum*, Skt. *guhyaśakti*) Mahākālī. The purpose of her union with the Great Heaven (Skt. Mahādeva, Chin. Datian 大天) is explained in Text D: “In order to pacify all the women, she sits [covering] over half of the body of the Great Heaven”.⁴⁶ The term *roushan* (柔善) translates ‘to pacify’ referring the action of removing evil and calamities.⁴⁷

The praise that follows is related to the practitioner’s mundane concerns and worldly benefits: “You know what diseases people suffer from. In your proximity, they become fearless!”⁴⁸ This suggests that this ritual may be connected to healing illness. After that, the practitioner is to pay homage to two

44 For the iconography of Mahākālī, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons*, 45.

45 An example is a hymn authored by Vararuci (Tib. mChog sred), titled *dPal lha mo nag mo chen mo la bstod pa bryad pa shes bya ba* (Skt. *Śrīmahākālastotrapadāṣṭakānāma*, Chin. 吉祥大黑天女讚八句, Peking 2643) [Hymn to Śrī Mahākālī in Eight Stanzas], in *Tengyur* (Peking edition), vol. 59, 297a6–298a4.

46 Ta, Du and Gao, *Zhongguo cang Heishuicheng hanwen wenxian*, vol. 8, 1688: 柔善一切女人故, 大天身半而安住.

47 In the manuscript *Dahei qiuxiu bing zuofa* 大黑求修並作法 [The Ritual Texts on the Evocation and Practice of Mahākāla] (B 59), *roushan* appears along with three other terms to describe the four types of the *dharma* activities: (1) pacifying (Chin. *roushan* 柔善, Skt. *sāntika* Tib. *zhi ba'i las*); (2) increasing or prospering (Chin. *yuanman* 圓滿, Skt. *pauṣṭika*, Tib. *rgyas pa'i las*); (3) dominating (Chin. *zizai* 自在, Skt. *vaśikaraṇa*, Tib. *dbang gi las*), and (4) destroying or killing (Chin. *xiangfu* 降伏, Skt. *māraṇa*, Tib. *dras po'i las*) Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng hanwen wenxian*, vol. 6, 55.

48 Ta, Du and Gao, *Zhongguo cang Heishuicheng hanwen wenxian*, vol. 8, 1688: 人何疾病汝能知, 彼處能令无怖畏.

female divinities: Yamī, the sister of Yama, who is the Lord of Death (Chin. Yudi Jiemei Mowangmu 獄帝姐妹魔王母) and Kāmeśvarī, the Goddess of Erotic Pleasure (Chin. Yujie Zizaimu 欲界自在母) who is a form of Śrīdēvī.⁴⁹

The next part is a long phonetic *mantra* of Mahākāla. This Chinese version is probably transcribed from the Tibetan transcription of the Sanskrit *mantra*. I am not able to reconstruct the *mantra*. At a glance, there are some changes, deletions, and additions in the manuscript. There are circular markings to the right of each line, perhaps meant to punctuate the successively written transliteration or to make the practitioner pause in the right place while reciting the *mantra*. These marks indicate that these ritual texts were, indeed, practiced.⁵⁰

3.2.5 Text E

This text is titled *Dahei Changzhou* 大黑長咒 [The Long Mantra of Mahākāla]. The first part is a long *mantra* in transcription, which may be the reason for the name of the text. The next part is a lecture on how to obtain the bliss of Mahākāla by establishing the *maṇḍala* and making a cake offering (Chin. *shi-shi* 施食). These two parts are written by different hands. A cake offering is one item given as ‘tribute’ to Mahākāla, which is intended to prevent the recipient from attacking the ‘tribute’ giver.

3.3 Chinese Manuscript A 7

The Chinese manuscript A 7 is titled *Ciwu Dahei yaomen* 慈烏大黑要門 [Quintessential Instructions of the Raven-headed Mahākāla]⁵¹ and was written in the Yuan Dynasty. The manuscript has a pamphlet stitch and holds eighteen pages in total. The paper is hemp. The page is 9.3 cm high, and half a page is 9.3 wide. The text is written vertically in regular script, from right to left. Each half page has seven lines, and each line consists of nine to ten characters. The front text is written in black ink with vermilion markings.⁵² The title *Quintessential Instructions of the Raven-headed Mahākāla* is given

49 For Śrīdēvī and the twin brother and sister Yama and Yamī, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons*, 22–37, 81–87. For the Goddess Kāmeśvarī, see Anna A. Golovkova, “Kāmeśvarī: Visualizing the Goddess of Desire,” in *A Garland of Forgotten Goddesses: Tales of the Feminine Divine from India and Beyond*, ed. Michael Slouber (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).

50 Carmen Meinert indicates a case of a ritual manual in use from the Karakhoto documents, see Carmen Meinert, “Embodying the Divine in Tantric Ritual Practice: Examples from the Chinese Karakhoto Manuscripts from the Tangut Empire (ca. 1038–1227),” *Revue d’Études Tibétaines* 50 (2019): 67.

51 Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 5, 180–189.

52 A manuscript description of A 7 is in Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 6, 39.

in the manuscript and precedes the main body of the text. The manuscript consists of eighteen pages: the first fourteen are text, and the last four are diagrams and sketches. The structure of the text is: (1) visualising the Four-armed Mahākāla and the Raven-headed Mahākāla; (2) a series of *mantras* chanted for different purposes (judging from the titles), headed by *Dahei genbenzhou* 大黑根本咒 [The Root Mantra of Mahākāla]; (3) rituals for making human effigies to kill enemies; (4) two *mantras*: *Wugongyang zhenyan* 五供養真言 [The Mantra of the Five-fold Offering] and *Simian zhou* 四面呪 [The Mantra of Four Directions]; (5) intoning the names of the five *tathāgatas*, each prefixed with ‘pay homage to’ (Chin. *nanwu* 南无). The remaining four pages are diagrams and graffiti: (6) on the right side is an illustration of a human effigy related to the preceding ritual text, and on the left side is a seed syllable *HŪM*; (7) a seed syllable *HŪM* with a sketch of a bird; (8) the last two pages are damaged and chaotic, with Sanskrit seed syllables overlaid on Chinese writing that seems like it is not related to the ritual.

The Chinese scholar Huang Jiehua transcribed and edited manuscript A 7.⁵³ He makes a conjectural reading of the opening part and provides a brief account of the transmission of the teaching. Based on the Chinese transcription, he takes the last master’s name as Ga Lotsaba Zhönupel, and thus considers him to be the transmitter of this text. However, this conclusion is not conclusively proven, and whether the text can be attributed to Ga Lotsaba is open to further discussion.

3.4 Chinese Manuscript B 59 and Tibetan Scroll Dx 178

The Chinese manuscript titled *Dahei qiuxiu bing zuofa* 大黑求修並作法 [The Ritual Texts on the Evocation and Practice of Mahākāla],⁵⁴ designated B 59, is a Yuan Dynasty manuscript. The paper is made of hemp. Each page is 23 cm high and half a page 14 cm wide. The text is written by a single hand in a regular script, with eleven lines per half page and seventeen characters per line. Apart from the main body of the text, a number of annotations in small characters are visible in the manuscript. The document contains a text followed by the sentence: “I am afraid the master’s teaching will be misrepresented, so I write it down.”⁵⁵ This indicates that the purpose of writing down the teaching for the first time was to ensure its purity and to be able to properly convey the message

53 Huang Jiehua 黄杰华, “Heishuicheng chutu zangchuan shixiu wenshu ‘Ciwu Dahei yao-men’ shishi 黑水城出土藏传实修文书〈慈乌大黑要门〉试释 [A Tentative Interpretation of the Tibetan Ritual Text: *Quintessential Instructions of the Raven-headed Mahākāla*],” *Xixia xue* 西夏学 [Tangut Studies] 4 (2009): 70–77.

54 Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 6, 42–59.

55 Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 6, 49: 上師所傳法恐妄故書寫.

of the teacher. At the same time, it reflects a process of changing the medium of the teaching, from oral to written. We cannot determine whether this teaching was first put down in this particular manuscript or if it was copied by the scribe from another source. The manuscript is not complete. The beginning section is mutilated, and the end part is fragmentary. It comprises a total of thirty-four full pages and two half pages.⁵⁶

Dx 178 is a long scroll consisting of eight separated leaves. The text is written on both sides in Tibetan cursive script. This copy was sent to St. Petersburg in 1913 and has been considered a Dunhuang scroll ever since, before being re-examined by Zorin and identified as a Karakhoto document. Zorin dated the scroll to the 12th to 13th centuries. He further provided a detailed codicological and palaeographical description of the Tibetan scroll and an introduction to its structure and content.⁵⁷ It is therefore not repeated here. The following discussion revolves around B 59 and the connection between it and Dx 178.

3.4.1 Structure and Content of B 59 and Its Equivalent Parts in Dx 178

The Chinese manuscript B 59 is by far the largest collection of Chinese Mahākāla texts recovered from Karakhoto and contains some twenty-three ritual texts of varying length. These texts do not seem to be particularly organised and are rather miscellaneous. It is not possible to go through all the texts of B 59 in this paper, but only a few preliminary findings from the current study. In terms of content, B 59 contains a considerable number of the Four-armed Mahākāla and the Raven-headed Mahākāla-centered rituals and practices. The same holds true for Dx 178. Another notable feature is that a number of texts in B 59 refer to the use of human effigies.⁵⁸ In Chinese, this kind of ritual is called *Yuanren lie xing* 冤人哩哦行 [Ritual of Making Use of Human Effigies].⁵⁹ A preliminary comparison of some of the ritual text in Tibetan and Chinese indicates that *yuanren* (冤人) is used to translate the Tibetan word *bsgrub bya*, ‘the object of the ritual’, referring to the ritually targeted person or spirit. The

56 For a description of manuscript B 59, see Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 6, 44.

57 Zorin, “A Collection of Tantric Ritual Texts,” 119–121.

58 For the iconography and ritual use of human effigies in Tibet, see Bryan J. Cuevas, “Illustrations of Human Effigies in Tibetan Ritual Texts: With Remarks on Specific Anatomical Figures and Their Possible Iconographic Source,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third series 21.1 (2011): 73–97.

59 For a study of the ritual of making human effigies based on Chinese sources, see Shen Weirong 沈衛榮, “Lun Xixia fojiao zhi hanzang yu xianmi yuanrong 論西夏佛教之漢藏與顯密圓融 [Discussing Tangut Buddhism’s Synthesis of Sino-Tibetan Traditions and Exoteric and Esoteric Doctrines],” *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 *Journal of Chinese Literature and History* 1 (2020): 265–309.

Chinese word *lǐe* (哩哦) is transcribed from the Tibetan term *ling ga*, a phonetic transliteration of the Sanskrit term *liṅga*, literally meaning mark or sign, which is interpreted as ‘substitute effigy’ in the Tantric ritual context. Another Tibetan word for *liṅga* is *ngar mi*. The Chinese term *lǐe* is also alternatively written as *lin’ge* (蘭葛), as found in the Karakhoto documents.⁶⁰ The effigies from these Mahākāla texts from Karakhoto come in a variety of forms, two or three dimensional, drawn on paper or on cloth from the cemetery, and moulded in dough, earth, clay, or other materials. These rituals are usually performed with the purpose of suppressing, subduing, maddening, or killing the object of the ritual.⁶¹

By comparing the Chinese and Tibetan Mahākāla materials from Karakhoto, six Chinese texts in B 59 are found to have a corresponding Tibetan text or paragraph in Dx 178. Although the six Chinese texts are silent as to their authors, translators and transmitters, we find through their Tibetan counterparts that two of them are derived from Ga Lotsaba. Recall that Dx 178 includes the *Hymn to the Raven-headed Mahākāla*, composed by Ga Lotsaba during his retreat at the great charnel ground Śītavana, and its Chinese version is found in another Karakhoto manuscript TK 262, section D, titled *Verses of Praise* (see section 3.1.4). Undoubtedly, Ga Lotsaba occupies an important place in the Chinese and Tibetan Mahākāla literature unearthed at Karakhoto. His name also appears on a passage in B 59 on the transmission of the Mahākāla teachings, which will be discussed below.

3.4.2 The Transmission Lineage of The Quintessential Instruction for Self-Apprehension in B 59

The Chinese manuscript B 59 contains a text entitled *Zisheshou Jimen* 自攝受齋門 [The Quintessential Instruction for Self-apprehension]. The first section is corrupted. The end part preserves a record of the teaching lineage:

The sequence of the transmission of the quintessential instruction is: Dharma Master Lingchu passed it on to Master Xianjue, the latter to Dharma Master Jingangzuo, then to Amiegaluo’ebaheng Caotouluti’e,

60 Shen, “Lun Xixia fojiao,” 298, no. 2.

61 In a lecture given by Dr. Iain Sinclair, he points out that Mahākāla eats ‘bad’ people. Thus, Mahākāla’s ‘tribute’ potentially involves the human sacrifice of victims who harm Buddhism. In Karakhoto, it seems that effigies were the usual substitute for live sacrifice. Iain Sinclair, “Whose Heads did Mahākāla Hunt? Interreligious Contacts among Forgotten Kingdoms in Sumatra,” (paper presented at the workshop “Interreligious Relations in Early Southeast Asia: Encountering Buddhists, Brahmins and Indigenous Religions,” CERES Ruhr University Bochum, January 16–17, 2020).

then to Dajixiang, then to Master A, then to Master Langbu, then to Alang Zuozhu, then to Master Ka. From that teacher, the purified and devout disciples receive this teaching. It cannot be passed on to those who do not believe in it. *The Quintessential Instruction for Self-apprehension* ends.⁶²

Based only on their names, some masters in this account appear to be of Indian and Tibetan origins. Documenting the transmission lineage of a teaching is a means of maintaining its orthodoxy. But beyond its religious significance, it also has historical value, chronicling how the teaching is believed to have spread from India through Tibet to the Tangut Empire. I here describe this transmission lineage drawing on previous studies.⁶³

The Mahākāla teaching lineage ultimately goes back to the a-historical deity Vajradhara. But our text is silent on this. The first name on the transmission lineage, namely, Dharma Master Lingchu (鈴杵法師), refers to the Indian adept Ghaṅṭāpāda (*alias* Vajraghaṅṭāpāda). He is an important teacher in the lineage of the Four-armed Mahākāla. Ghaṅṭāpa passed this teaching to Master Xianjue (賢覺師). Xianjue is a Chinese translation of the name of the Indian master Bhadrabodhi (ca. 10th c.), often referred to as Bodhibhadra, who bestowed the *bodhisattva* precepts on Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982–1054, Tib. A ti sha Mar me mdzad dpal Ye shes) at Nālandā. Xianjue passed it on to Dharma Master Jin'gangzuo (金剛座法師), that is, Vajrāsana (Tib. rDo rje gdan pa). Zeng reconstructs the names of the next four masters in the lineage in Tibetan and Sanskrit. Accordingly, the next two names on the lineage are transcribed: Amiegaluo'ebaheng (阿滅葛囉萼八恆) and Caotouluoti'e (草頭路替訛), that is, Abhayākara Gupta and Tsami Lotsaba Sangyé drakpa. The word *lut'i'e* (路替訛) is a phonetic transcription of the term *lo tsā ba* 'translator,' The name Caotouluoti'e is alternatively written as Caotou Yishi (草頭譯師). Yishi is a semantic translation of *lo tsā ba*, the 'translator.' Both names are associated with Tsami Lotsaba Sangyé drakpa. The next is Dajixiang (大吉祥) 'Great Auspiciousness.' This name translates to Tibetan as Pelchenpo (Tib. dPal chen po). In the literature related to Mahākāla, this name is often used to refer to Ga Lotsaba, namely, Pelchenpo Ga Lotsaba Zhönupel. Regarding the next person in the lineage, Ashi (阿師) 'Master A,' Zeng points out that Master A probably refers to A Sengé Wangchuk (Tib. A Seng ge dbang phyug), whose name

62 Shi, Wei, and Kychanov, *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 6, 43: 彼剂门相襲次第者：鈴杵法師傳賢覺師，彼師傳金剛座法師，彼師傳阿滅葛囉萼八恆草頭路替訛，彼師傳大吉祥，彼師傳阿師，彼師傳浪布師，彼師傳阿浪座主，彼師處傳替上師，彼師處淨信弟子授得此法。无信人勿傳者矣，自攝受劑門也。

63 The most important study on the record of the Mahākāla teaching lineage in B 59 is Zeng, "Xixia Daheitian chuancheng chutan," 151–158.

follows Ga Lotsaba's in the transmission lineage preserved in the *History of the Lord of Wisdom Mahākāla*. She further notes that A Sengé Wangchuk was also known as Lama A Seng (Tib. Bla ma A seng) and Khampa A Seng (Tib. Khams pa A seng). Lama A Seng resided with Ga Lotsaba at Gyel Lhakhang (Tib. rGyal lHa khang) and gave the teachings of the Raven-headed Mahākāla to the First Karmapa Düsum Khyenpa (1110–1193, Tib. Dus gsum mkhyen pa).⁶⁴ The next few masters in this lineage are not yet identified. In the name Alang Zuozhu (阿浪座主), Alang is probably part of the master's *dharma* name, or his surname, but is otherwise unidentified. The word *zuozhu* literally means 'the lord or owner of the seat', corresponding to the Tibetan word *densapa* (Tib. *gdan sa pa*), meaning 'abbot' or 'throne-holder.'

4 Ga Lotsaba Zhönupel and His Role in the Spread of the Mahākāla Cult from India to the Tangut Empire

In his study of Tsami Lotsaba Sangyé Drakpa, Sperling makes use of an early biography of Ga Lotsaba by Lama Zhang. This text contains a detailed account of Ga Lotsaba's meeting with Tsami Lotsaba in India and his submission to the latter's tutelage.⁶⁵ Ga Lotsaba was one of Lama Zhang's root teachers. Thus, this text also sheds light on Lama Zhang's life. Carl Yamamoto utilises it to study the social and religious activities of Lama Zhang.⁶⁶ In discussing the teaching lineages Lama Zhang received, Yamamoto points out that the version of the Mahākāla teachings he adopted is primarily for the Raven-headed Mahākāla derived from Ga Lotsaba. He further states that the Ga Lotsaba was a specialist in the Raven-headed Mahākāla and subdued this wrathful deity while meditating on Cakrasaṃvara at the great charnel ground Śitavana in the vicinity of Bodhgaya.

Sperling and Yamamoto's studies focus on Tsami Lotsaba and Lama Zhang respectively, while Ga Lotsaba has never been given sufficient attention. The latter's biography,⁶⁷ written by Lama Zhang Yudrakpa Tsöndrū Drakpa (1123–1193, Tib. Zhang gYu brag pa brTson 'grus grags pa), the founder of the Tselpa

64 For the phonetic reconstruction of these names into the Tibetan or Sanskrit language and their identification, see Zeng, "Xixia Daheitian chuancheng chutan," 151–152, 156–157.

65 For Ga Lotsaba's study with Tsami Lotsaba in India, see Sperling, "Rtsa-mi Lo-tsa-bā Sangs-rgyas Grags-pa," 801, 809–811.

66 Yamamoto, *Vision and Violence*, 39–40.

67 Lama Zhang Yudrakpa Tsöndrū Drakpa, "dPal chen rGwa lo'i rnam thar byang chub sems 'byongs ma [The Biography of Ga Lotsaba]," in *dPal ldan tshal pa bka' brgyud kyi bstan pa'i mnga' bdag zhang g.yu brag pa brtson 'grus grags pa'i gsung 'bum rin po che* [Collected

Kagyü school (Tib. Tshal pa bKa' brgyud pa), bears witness to the history of the spread of the Tantric teachings and practices from India to Tibet and its surrounding areas.⁶⁸ In an effort to clarify Ga Lotsaba's role in the early transmission of the Mahākāla cult, the following study delves into his biography to collect relevant information.

4.1 *Taming Raven-Headed Mahākāla: Ga Lotsaba's Retreat at the Great Charnel Ground Śītavana*

According to Ga Lotsaba's biography, during the retreat at the great charnel ground Śītavana of Bodhgaya, he dwelled in a 'meditation cave called Bodhi Tree' (Tib. Shing nya gro ta'i phug) in the middle of the cemetery. Risen corpses (Tib. *ro langs*), flesh-eaters (Tib. *sha za*), and jackals (Tib. *lce spyang*) live around the dwelling. After making a feast offering and a cake offering, he settles down. At the beginning, he is constantly disturbed by Raven-headed Mahākāla and is not able to enter meditative absorption (Skr. *samādhi*, Tib. *ting nge'i 'dzin*). As he has never seen this thrilling demonic creature before, he does not know who he is or where he comes from, addressing him as the Lord of Destruction (Tib. 'Jig pa'i bdag po). After subduing Mahākāla in meditation, he makes a breakthrough in his practice and gained many spiritual attainments, including having visions of the Cakrasaṃvara *maṇḍala* and being visited by wisdom *ḍākinīs*.⁶⁹ The text goes on to recount Ga Lotsaba's miracles and accomplishments during his retreat, and how he interacts with the local rulers and other practitioners.

Works of Lord of the Teachings of the Tselpa Kagyü School, Lama Zhang Yudrakpa Tsöndrū Drakpa], vol. 1 (Kathmandu: Gam po pa Library, 2004), 181–222.

68 In a study of Tibetans who visited the Indian monastery Vajrāsana, Roberto Vitali presents a synopsis of Ga Lotsaba's biography written by Lama Zhang. Roberto Vitali, "In the Presence of the 'Diamond Throne': Tibetans at rDo rje gdan (Last Quarter of the 12th Century to Year 1300)," *The Tibet Journal* 34.3–35.2, Special Issue: The Earth Ox Papers (2009–2010): 201–204. For the ritual texts involving the use of human effigies, see Haoran Hou, "The Ritual Use of Human Effigies in the Esoteric Buddhist Literature from Karakhoto," *Buddhist Road Paper* 2.8 (forthcoming).

69 Lama Zhang, *rGwa lo'i rnam thar*, 190.1–191.2. For reference, another source addressed *dPal Ye shes mgon po'i lo rgyus* [History of the Lord of Wisdom Mahākāla] gives a more detailed account of Ga Lotsaba's meeting with the Raven-headed Mahākāla and his requesting for the ritual text of evocation from the divinity at the great charnel ground Śītavana. See Phakmo Drukpa Dorjé gyelpo, "dPal Ye shes mgon po'i lo rgyus [History of the Lord of Wisdom Mahākāla]," in *Dus gsum sangs rgyas thams cad kyi thugs rje'i rnam rol dpal ldan phag gru rdo rje rgyal po mchog gi gsung 'bum rin po che* [Collective Works by Phakmo Drukpa Dorjé Gyelpo] (Kathmandu: Khenpo Shedrub tenzin and Lama Thinley namgyal), vol. 7, 273.3–275.3.

Accordingly, the retreat culminated in a war-magical battle:

A boisterous noise was coming from the sky. All the heretics showed up and led their army to the Lama [Ga Lotsaba]. The latter went into meditative absorption. By doing so, he transformed into the Three-eyed Heruka before the soldiers, who were terrified and fled back. Following this, he meditated in front of a Buddhist image of Āryāvalokiteśvara to the left of the *bodhi* tree. He had a vision of Avalokiteśvara sitting in the semi-cross-legged posture [...] after seeing the goddess Mārīcī, he asked her for spiritual instructions. In front of the self-arisen stone image [(Tib. *rdo sku rang byon*)] of Mahākāla, he made a cake offering and sat down. Consequently, he saw the Two-armed [Mahākāla] up in the sky and wrote a hymn of him that began with: ‘*HŪM!* From the great charnel ground Śītavana [...]’. Next, he set his sights on the Four-armed [Mahākāla] on the earth and asked him for the vital-heart *mantras* and the evocation [of Mahākāla]. Later, when the evocation texts previously written by Lama Minyak and the revised version [by him] were [compared], it was said that there was no distinction between the *mantras* and the manifest realisation [(Tib. *mngon rtogs*)]. There was also not a fixed structure to the text [...].⁷⁰

The following points are worth noting in relation to this account. First, Ga Lotsaba is described as transforming into a three-eyed Heruka in a meditative state and repulsing the heretic military forces.⁷¹ Second, the account mentions that Ga Lotsaba wrote a hymn for the Two-armed [Mahākāla] after seeing him. It is a hymn dedicated to the Raven-headed Mahākāla. The hymn appears in the excavated literature of Karakhoto in both Tibetan and Chinese (see section 3.1.4). Third, the end part of the cited paragraph is not clear, and

70 Lama Zhang, *rGwa lo'i rnam thar*, 195.2–196.2: *nam mkha' la 'ur sgra chen po dang/ mu stegs pa'i mi thams cad kyang der byung ste/ bla ma la dmag drangs pa dang/ bla ma ting nge'i 'dzin la bzhugs pas dmag thams cad kyis he ru ka spyen gsum par mthong nas bros so/ /de nas yang nya gro ta'i g.yon phyogs na sangs rgyas pa'i rten 'phags pa spyen ras gzigs yod pa'i drung du bsgoms te spyen ras gzigs phyed skyil du bzhugs pa'i zhal mthong/[...]/ lha mo 'od zer cad mthong nas gdams ngag zhus/ dpal nag po chen po'i rdo sku rang byon gyi drung du gtor ma mdzad nas bzhugs pas/ nam mkha' la phyag gnyis pa zhal mthong ste/ hūm/ bsil ba'i tshal gyi dur khrod nas/ zhes pa'i bstod pa mdzad/ de nas sa la phyag bzhi pa'i zhal gzigs te/ srog snying dang sgrub thabs la sogs pa dngos su zhus/ / phyis bla ma me nyag gi sgrub thabs snga ma dang/ zhu thug mdzad pas sngags rnam dang mngon rtogs la khyad par ma byung zer/ go rim cag cag po'i nges pa ni ma byung bar 'dug.*

71 Regarding war magic in Tantric Buddhism, see Iain Sinclair, “War Magic and Just War in Indian Tantric Buddhism,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* 58.1 (2014): 149–164.

my translation is rather tentative. It gives a clue as to the role of Ga Lotsaba in the formation of the Mahākāla literature: he received the teaching from the divine author Mahākāla and engaging in editing the work of his teacher Lama Minyak. In the text, Lama Minyak, literally meaning the ‘Tangut Lama,’ refers to Tsami Lotsaba Sangyé Drakpa, who is associated with five texts on Raven-headed Mahākāla.⁷² One of them is described as passed down from Tsami Lotsaba to Ga Lotsaba.⁷³

Tsami Lotsaba was not the only (human-form) teacher from whom Ga Lotsaba received the Raven-headed Mahākāla teachings. The Tibetan canon contains a ritual text titled *dPal mgon po bya rog ma'i bskangs kyi cho ga'i rim pa* [The Sequence of the Ceremony of Fulfilling the Glorious Lord the Raven-headed Mahākāla] (Skt. *Śrīnāthakākayonitarpaṇavidhikrama*, Peking 4960), authored by Abhayakāra and translated by Ga Lotsaba. Tsami Lotsaba also worked with the Indian master Abhayakāra to translate many texts associated with Mahākāla. Abhayakāra and Tsami Lotsaba served as Ga Lotsaba's most important teachers in India. The three names Abhayakāra, Tsami Lotsaba, and Ga Lotsaba often appear together in the Mahākāla teaching lineages.

4.2 *Rainmaking and the Tangut Emperor's 'Drum of the Law': Ga Lotsaba's Activities in Eastern Tibet and His Connection to the Tangut Royal Court*

After learning about the early transmission of the Raven-headed Mahākāla in India, the next question is: how did this deity come to the Tangut Empire? Sperling emphasizes the crucial role Tsami Lotsaba and Tishi Repa played in spreading the Mahākāla teachings in the Tangut realm. In contrast to his teacher and disciple, Ga Lotsaba's importance in this regard has been

72 The two terms ‘*me nyag*’ and ‘*mi nyag*’ are alternatively present in Tibetan sources. For Tsami Lotsaba's involvement in the Mahākāla literature, Sperling lists all the available Mahākāla works connected with Tsami Lotsaba. Sperling, “Rtsa-mi Lo-tsa-bā Sangs-rgyas Grags-pa,” 813–818. The five texts are preserved in *Bya rog ma bstan srung bcas kyi chos tshan pod lnga bzhugs pa las mgon po'i rgyud dang sgrub thbs man ngag skor* [Collected Tantras and Related Texts Concerned with the Propitiation of Mahākāla and his Retinue] (Palampur: Sungrab nyamso gyunphel parkhang [Tibetan Craft Community], 1973–1979). This collection also contains a number of Ga Lotsaba's translations of Indian texts and self-written works related to Mahākāla of the raven-headed and other forms. Owing to paragraph limitations, I shall not attempt to list all these texts here. It should be noted that this Mahākāla anthology of the Pakmo Drupa School (Tib. Phag mo gru pa) is one of the most important collections of Tibetan Mahākāla literature in addition to the Tibetan Buddhist Canon.

73 Zorin, *Buddiyskie ritualnye teksty*, 111–118.

overlooked. His role needs to be studied more closely, especially because a number of Mahākāla texts related to Ga Lotsaba were excavated at Karakhoto.

Ga Lotsaba's biography narrates his activities after his return to Tibet from India and provides a window to his connection to the Tangut Empire. At the age of thirty, he went to India, studied there for almost fourteen years, and then returned to Tibet. After spending several years in Central Tibet, he left for Eastern Tibet around the late 1140s. He spent seven years in Eastern Tibet. During this time, he returned to his birthplace, Teuchung (Tib. The'u chung) in the Tsongkha (Tib. Tsong kha) area of Amdo and found that his parents were no longer alive. He stayed there for fewer than ten days and received an invitation from the Emperor of China (Tib. *rgya nag gi rgyal po*). Reluctant to go forward, he fled back to Kham, where he engaged in restoring monasteries, subduing heretics, and preaching the *dharma*. In this period, he was also active in the Sok region (Tib. *sog*) of Nyak River (Tib. Nyag chu). Biographical accounts of Ga Lotsaba in Eastern Tibet portray him as a ritualist who specialised in water management and rainmaking. At the Nyak River (Tib. Nyag chu), he went into meditation, demonstrating the miracle of splitting the water asunder and establishing a narrow path through the gorges. This made no one dare to make an enemy of him. He used his super knowledge (Tib. *mngon shes*) to help his donor find some lost horses. Thereafter, he was perceived by the donor as a man displaying magical power.⁷⁴ In the mid-1150s he left Eastern Tibet for Central Tibet, passing through the place Drak of the Gor region (Tib. *'gor rdzong gi brag*),⁷⁵ where he stayed for several months. An interesting account of his experiences in this place is given in his biography:

The local inhabitants of Drak of the Gor region begged him [Ga Lotsaba] to pray for rain. At first, he did not accede to this request. But after their repeated pleas, he bestowed upon them the drum of the law (Tib. *khriṃs mnga*) that was said to belong to the Tangut emperor and instructed: 'Wherever there is need of rain, strike this drum there. Wear a raincoat such as a felt garment before you go, because the rain comes down right away [at the stroke of the drum].' What happened next was exactly what he said it would be.⁷⁶

74 Lama Zhang, *rGwa lo'i rnam thar*, 206.2–208.5.

75 The location of Gor dzong drak is not clear. Vitali assumed this place is in Latö (Tib. La stod) in Central Tibet, where Ga Lotsaba had sojourned for a while upon his return from India. See Vitali, "In the Presence of the 'Diamond Throne,'" 203.

76 Vitali, "In the Presence of the 'Diamond Throne,'" 209.3–5: *'gor rdzong gi brag la yul mi mams kyis char dbab par zhu ba phul bas dang po ma gnang nan drag po bskyed pa'o phyi da la/ me nyag rgyal po'i khriṃs mnga rin zer ba'i mnga zhig bskur nas/ char gar dgos pa'i sa*

The miracle of making the rain fall is a narrative plot device common in the Tibetan hagiographical writings.⁷⁷ What is curious here is the reference to the ‘drum of the law.’ Fernanda Pirie discusses this term, its various symbolic meanings, and its development in Tibetan Culture, mentioning the early section of *rLangs kyi po ti bse ru rgyas pa* [The History of the Lang Family] (ca. 14th c.) that records the sage Jangchub Drékol’s (ca. 11th c., Tib. Byang chub ’dre bkol) travel to Eastern Tibet in search of his destined disciples.⁷⁸ When the sage arrived at Mt. Wutai, the ruler Ling Gesar (Tib. gLing Ge sar) approached him and asked for magical powers. In return, the ruler offered him various gifts, including the ‘great drum of the law, the glorious subjugator’ (Tib. *khriims kyi rnga ma che zil gnon*), the ‘black banner of the law, the conqueror of the enemy’ (Tib. *khriims dar nag po dgra ’dul*), and other devices.⁷⁹ Here again we see the drum of the law. Pirie considers the genealogy of the Lang (Tib. rLangs) clan to be of a semi-mythical nature and is, therefore, inclined to think that the word refers to a symbolic shamanic object. She also mentions that the drum of the law also appears in the *Pad ma bka’ thang* [Chronicles of Pema] written by Orgyen Lingpa (1323–ca.1360, Tib. O rgyan gling pa) in 1352 in a description of

thams cad la rnga ’di brdungs dang char ’babs kyis/ phyung pa la sogs pa char khebs gon la song/ de ma thag tu ’babs yin no gsungs pa la de kho na bzhin du byung/.

- 77 For water control and rainmaking in the Buddhist context, see Per K. Sørensen, “Lhasa Diluvium: Sacred Environment at Stake: The Birth of Flood Control Politics, the Question of Natural Disaster Management and Their Importance for the Hegemony over a National Monument in Tibet,” *Lungta* 16 (2003): 85–134, and Robert DeCaroli, “Snakes and Gutters: Nāga Imagery, Water Management, and Buddhist Rainmaking Rituals in Early South Asia,” *Archives of Asian Art* 69.1 (2019): 1–19.
- 78 In her blog post, Fernanda Pirie has an interesting discussion of how the meaning of the drum of the law has shifted in Tibetan historical and religious writings. She makes the hypothesis that in the early Tibetan literature, the term was primarily used symbolically, implying the shamanic power. Later, as Tibetan society became more and more secularised, the term was gradually used more straightforwardly to denote political authority, military power, or law justice. She also suggests that there is also a possibility that the shift is in an opposite direction. But the materials she uses are much later, 14th and 15th century sources. The biography of Ga Lotsaba written by Lama Zhang is a 12th century text. In it we see a dualism presented in the description of the drum of the law: the coexistence of secular authority and shamanic power. See Fernanda Pirie, “The Drum of the Law: Symbol of Shamanic Power, Warfare, or Justice?” July 24, 2018, accessed June 28, 2020. <http://tibet.anlaw.org/node/56>.
- 79 Regarding Jangchub Drékol of the Lang clan and his encounter with Ling Gesar, see Olaf Czaja, *Medieval Rule in Tibet: The Rlangs Clan and the Political and Religious History of the Ruling House of Phag mo gru pa. With a Study of the Monastic Art of Gdan sa mthil* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014), 65–68.

Khubilai Khan's (r. 1260–1294) attack on Sakya monastery in the 1280s.⁸⁰ She assumes that the usage of the term here is more prosaic, indicating the army with the imperial authority. She further points out that these two texts likely draw on earlier literature.

The History of the Lang Family and *Chronicles of Pema* were both written down in the 14th century. In contrast, Lama Zhang's biography of Ga Lotsaba dates from the 12th century. It provides a much earlier use of this terminology, 'drum of the law.' There are some interesting similarities in the plots concerning the 'drum of the law' in *The History of the Lang Family* and the biography of Ga Lotsaba. First, both Jangchub Drekol and Ga Lotsaba were offered the drum during their travels in Eastern Tibet. And, secondly, the persons who gave them the drums were secular rulers, either of a legendary or historical character. The latter point needs further analysis. Ga Lotsaba's biography claims that his drum was once possessed by a Tangut imperial ruler. Of course, the stated source of this drum may be fabricated. But, in terms of a narrative pattern, the term 'drum of the law' is associated with a historical figure of the Tangut emperor in Ga Lotsaba's biography, much earlier than it is association with Khubilai Khan in the *Chronicles of Pema*. Of even greater interest is that Ga Lotsaba's biography indicates how he used the drum. In that tantric context, the drum is transformed into a religious implement and plays a mediating role in rainmaking. By striking it, the worldly authority derived from the drum's initial owner is transformed into a tantric or shamanic power that brings down the rain. This is a fascinating incident, where we see political authority, musical performance, and ritual action all intertwined in one drum.⁸¹

4.3 *Ga Lotsaba's Network(s) in Eastern Tibet and Other Possible Routes for Mahākāla's Transmission to the Tangut Empire*

Ga Lotsaba and his teacher Tsami Lotsaba were both born in Amdo.⁸² However, while his teacher is often addressed as Lama Minyak, the 'Tangut teacher,' Ga

80 For this incident, see Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain: Ecclesiastic and Secular Hegemony in Medieval Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 185–187.

81 In her blog, Pirie refers to Arthur Mark Trewin's doctoral dissertation, which points out that the drum is a means by which kings entered the transcendental world and gained legitimacy as such. For the role the drum played in ritual and political activities in the Kingdom of Ladakh, see Arthur Mark Trewin, "Rhythms of the Gods: The Musical Symbolics of Power and Authority in the Tibetan Buddhist Kingdom of Ladakh" (PhD diss., City University, London, 1995).

82 Lama Zhang, *rGwa lo'i rnam thar*, 181. 4–5. The text describes Ga Lotsaba's birthplace: "The place called Teuchung [(Tib. The'u chung)] in Tsongkha [(Tib. Tshong kha, the Tibetan text reads 'gtsang ka')], in the southern part of Yar mo thang [(Tib. dByar mo thang)]

Lotsaba is called 'Kham pa,' that is, 'a person from Kham.' His clan name Ga was presumably extracted from the regional place name Minyak Ga (Tib. *Mi nyag Gha*).⁸³ This may be due to Ga Lotsaba's vigorous missionary activities in Kham. He arrived in Kham in the late 1140s and stayed there for seven years, until the mid-1150s. In roughly 1149, Lama Zhang went to see Ga Lotsaba, who was residing at Nakshö (Tib. *Nags shod*) in Western Kham. He then spent six years there studying with Ga Lotsaba and accompanied him when he returned to Central Tibet in the mid-1150s. In the meantime, Ga Lotsaba gave Lama Zhang many instructions and initiations, including rituals for the Six Yogas of Nāropa, Cakrasaṃvara, Kālacakra, and Mahākāla. The practices of Mahākāla that Lama Zhang received from Ga Lotsaba were mainly related to Raven-headed Mahākāla.⁸⁴ According to the tradition of Ga Lotsaba, Raven-headed Mahākāla serves in the retinue of Four-armed Mahākāla; thus, they are propagated jointly. These two forms of Mahākāla played an important role in Lama Zhang's political and military activities.⁸⁵

Sperling suggests that the Mahākāla teachings reached the Tangut Empire through transmissions from Tsami Lotsaba to Ga Lotsaba, then to Lama Zhang, and finally to Tishi Repa. He stresses the important role that Tishi Repa played in this transmission. Tishi Repa arrived in the Tangut Empire in the second half of the 1190s and remained there until its demise in 1226. During the last three decades of the Tangut Empire, Tishi Repa was active at the Tangut royal court, where he expelled the Mongols and other invaders using the magic of Mahākāla.⁸⁶ Sperling's studies were groundbreaking for the study of Tibetan Buddhism in the Tangut Empire and provided some very important discoveries. Ongoing research into the Karakhoto documents uncovers Mahākāla texts

in Amdo, on the border of the two [lands] China and Tibet" (Tib. *rgya bod gnyis kyi sa mtshams/ mdo smad kyi dbyar mo thang gi lho phyogs gtsang ka'i the'u chung zhes bya ba*). The location of Teuchung has not been identified. *Yar mo thang* is a famous place in the history of Sino-Tibetan relations, where the Sino-Tibetan peace treaty of 730 was concluded. Previously, scholars were divided as to where the place was. A recent study shows that it is located in present-day Yatang (牙塘) of Hezheng Country (和政縣) of Linxia Autonomous Prefecture (臨夏州) in the central part of Gansu Province (甘肅省). See Xie Guangdian 謝光典, "Yemotang wei Daxiachuan Buzheng 野摩塘 (dByar mo thang) 為大夏川補證 A Study of the Historical Place Name of dByar Mo Thang," in *Xiyu lishi yuyan jikan 西域歷史語言集刊 Historical and Philological Studies of China's Western Regions*, vol. 7, ed. Shen Weirong 沈卫荣 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2014), no. 7, 535–547.

83 Vitali, "In the Presence of the 'Diamond Throne,'" 201.

84 For Lama Zhang's meeting with Ga Lotsaba and his study with the latter in Kham, see Yamamoto, *Vision and Violence*, 56–59.

85 *Ibid.*, 228.

86 Sperling, "Further Remarks," 1–26.

associated with Ga Lotsaba. His biography refers to the symbolic expression ‘drum of the law of the Tangut emperor’, implying some kind of connection to the Tangut royal court. Based on this, we should re-evaluate the role Ga Lotsaba played in propagating Mahākāla teachings in the Tangut Empire.

According to Ga Lotsaba’s biography, he spent seven years in Eastern Tibet, where Lama Zhang studied the Mahākāla and other teachings under him. There were likely also students from local and surrounding areas who studied with him. At the end of the biography, Lama Zhang lists important disciples from different areas who gathered around Ga Lotsaba. He mentions that Ga Lotsaba had eight disciples or spiritual sons from the Kham area but does not specify their names.⁸⁷ One of them is noted as ‘the bestower of his full ordination’ (Tib. *khong rang gi mkhan po*), and the other seven are said to be from Dri lung (Tib. ’Bri klung).⁸⁸ The record of Ga Lotsaba’s early years in his homeland notes that he took the full ordination at the age of twenty. The monk who gave him full ordination was a disciple of Geshe Ngok Lotsaba called Wangton (Tib. dBang ston). Geshe Ngok Lotsaba most likely refers to Ngok Zhedang Dorjé (1090–1166, Tib. rNgog Zhe sdang rdo rje).⁸⁹ Ga Lotsaba studied Vinaya, Madhyamaka and Pramāṇa with Wangton, after which he left for India at the age of 30, not meeting Wangton again until nearly two decades later in the early 1150s. During his stay in Kham, he returned once to his hometown in Amdo, where he came across Wangton. For ten days, he imparted empowerments and instructions to Wangton. This is how his ‘bestower of full ordination’ later became his student. However, the biography does not specify the names of the teachings that he gave to Wangton, and there is not sufficient relevant information about Wangton to identify him.

As the Chinese scholar Zeng Hanchen indicates, the *History of the Lord of Wisdom Mahākāla* has a teaching lineage for the Raven-headed Mahākāla. It

87 Lama Zhang, *rGwa lo'i rnam thar*, 222. 2–3: *de yang thugs rje che/ mdo khams su byon pa'i sras ni/ khong rang gi mkhan po dang/ 'bri klung na snga dro re re'i ting nge 'dzin mnga' ba bdun bzhugs pa de rnams lags te.*

88 Dri lung is a place in Kham, in present-day Yushu Prefecture (玉树), Qinghai Province (青海省).

89 Much of the Tangut commentarial material on the *Samputatantra* found at Baisigou Square *stūpa* (Chin. Baisigou fangta 拜寺沟方塔) close to the Tangut capital in the Helan Mountain Range (賀蘭山) is translated from the works of Ngok Zhedang Doje. See Haoran Hou, “Notes on the Translation and Transmission of the *Samputa* and *Cakrasaṃvara Tantras* in the Xixia Period,” in *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism*, ed. Yael Bentor and Meir Sahar (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 355–376; for Baisigou see also Meinert, “Creation of Tantric Sacred Spaces in Eastern Central Asia,” 250, 255 and the map of the Tangut Empire here https://static.ceres.rub.de/media/filer_public/5b/ea/5bea3720-dffa-4669-9564-33d63a2633ab/buddhistroad_map_3.jpg.

mentions a Cokro Chökyi Wangchuk as having directly received this ritual text from Ga Lotsaba. Zeng doubts this Cokro Chökyi Wangchuk is the same person as Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen (1108–1176, Tib. Cog ro Chos kyi rgyal mtshan). She speculates further that, perhaps because Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen's most important teacher is called Marpa Dopa Chökyi Wangchuk (1042–1136, Tib. Mar pa Do ba Chos kyi dbang phyug), the author of the text confuses Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen's name with that of his teacher.⁹⁰ Little is known about the life of Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen. He was born in Amdo and served as a figure crucial to the spread of the Cakrasaṃvara teachings in the Tangut Empire.⁹¹ From the available textual evidence, it appears that he had studied the teachings of Mahākāla under Ga Lotsaba. In the *mGon po'i rgyud skor* [The Tantric Cycle of Mahākāla], there is a text entitled *dPal chen po rGwa lo'i slob ma Cog ro Chos rgyal gyis mdzad pa'i gtor chen* [The Great Offering of Cake Written by Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen, the Disciple of the Glorious Ga Lotsaba].⁹² This text is concerned with the cake offering according to the system of Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen. The full title explicitly labels Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen as a disciple of Ga Lotsaba. In the same volume, there are two other texts related to Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen. One is entitled *rGwa los mdzad pa'i gSang sgrub kyi zhal gdams: Cog ro'i lugs* [Instructions of the Secret Evocation Composed by Ga Lotsaba: The System of Cokro]⁹³ and the other is *Cog ro' lugs: Sum dril gyia*

90 For the confusion between the two names, Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen and Cokro Chökyi Wangchuk, see Zeng Hanchen 曾汉臣, "Xixia Daheitian chuancheng chutan yi Heishuicheng wenshu *Daheitian qixiu bing zuofa wei zhongxin* 西夏大黑天传承初探以黑水城文书〈大黑求修并作法〉为中心 [A Preliminary Study of the Teaching Lineage of Mahākāla during the Tangut Period: Centering on *The Ritual Texts on the Invocation and Practice of Mahākāla*]," *Zhongguo zangxue* 中国藏学 *China Tibetology* 1 (2014): 158.

91 Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen's commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara* (originally named *Herukābhidhāna*) was lauded by Butön Rinchen drup (1290–1364, Tib. Bu ston Rin chen grub) as one of the best of its kind in the Tibetan literature but it has been lost in Tibetan. However, a Chinese translation of this work from the Tangut era was recently discovered. For a study of the Chinese version of Cokro's commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara*, see Wei Wen 魏文, "Shiyi dao shisi shiji shangle jiaofa zai Xizang he Xixia de chuanbo: Yi liangpian Xixia hanyi mijiao wenshu he zangwen jiaofashi wei zhongxin 十一到十二世紀上樂教法在西藏和西夏的傳播：以兩篇西夏漢譯密教文書和藏文教法史為中心 [The Spread of the *Cakrasaṃvara* in Tibet and the Tangut Empire in the 11th and 12th Centuries: A Study Centering on Two Chinese Translated Tantric Texts in the Tangut Era and the Dharma History of the *Cakrasaṃvara* Teachings in the Tibetan Language]" (Ph.D. diss., Renmin University, Beijing, 2013). In a previous publication, I examine Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen and the transmission of his commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara* in the Tangut Empire. See Hou, "Notes on the Translation and Transmission," 355–376.

92 *Bya rog ma bstan srung bcas kyi chos tshan*, vol. 3, 169–175.

93 *Ibid.*, 157–160.

can zhes bya ba dpal bya rog ma'i gsang sgrub [The System of Cokro: The Secret Evocation of the Raven-headed Mahākāla Titled 'Three Combined and Sealed'].⁹⁴ It is clear from the titles of these texts that Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen, a contemporary of Ga Lotsaba, received the teachings on Mahākāla, in particular the teachings on the Raven-headed Mahākāla, from the latter. He may have made a special contribution to the development of Ga Lotsaba's Mahākāla teachings, hence his passed-down system is specially called the system of Cokro (Tib. *Cog ro'i lugs*). What is special about Cokro Chökyi Gyeltsen's transmission? This needs to be clarified by future research.

5 Conclusion

This paper surveys an under-explored area of discovery in the Tangut Empire of Central Asia: The Mahākāla literature. It has two main focuses. The first is to introduce the Chinese Mahākāla documents excavated at Karakhoto, which have not yet received sufficient attention from scholars, and analyses their structure and content from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhist literature. In doing so it hopes to bring these Chinese texts back into the context of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism and highlight their value for a better understanding of the Mahākāla cult in its early stage. The cult of Mahākāla is essentially a complex of tantric teachings and practices. An effective approach to investigating the cult would be to return to the religious context and scrutinize the surviving ritual texts, which gave rise to it.

Another focus of the paper is to explore how the Mahākāla literature was transmitted to the Tangut Empire. To this end, the paper delves into the hagiography of Ga Lotsaba, whose name appears several times in the Karakhoto documents, analysing his missionary activities in Eastern Tibet and uncovering the lineage of masters and disciples that formed around him. Knowing that it may not be possible to reconstruct the complex networks of the spread of the Mahākāla cult through the hagiography of a single master, this paper simply seeks to spotlight the role of Eastern Tibetan monks in the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the Tangut Empire.

Research on the Mahākāla literature from Karakhoto is still in progress. The next step will be to carry out a complete transcription and translation of these excavated texts described above. More importantly, a comparative study between the Chinese and Tibetan language texts will be undertaken to find the

94 *Bya rog ma bstan srung bcas kyi chos tshan*, vol. 3, 147–149.

original Tibetan versions for more Chinese texts. At the same time, the study will look for parallels to the Tibetan texts excavated at Karakhoto from the canonical sources, thereby exploring the internal connections between these two bodies of literature. By doing so, the study hopes to provide greater insight into the formation, dissemination and development of the Mahākāla literature in the Tangut Empire.