

Report of BuddhistRoad Guest Lecture

25 November 2021 Cécile Ducher (CRCAO, Paris)

THE NGOK LINEAGE: THE LITTLE-KNOWN SUCCESSORS OF MARPA LOTSAWA AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN TIBET DURING THE EARLY SECOND MILLENNIUM

invited lecture at the BuddhistRoad project, CERES, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

The team of the ERC project BuddhistRoad invited Dr. Cécile Ducher (CRCAO, Paris) to give a talk on November 25, 2021, as part of our BuddhistRoad Guest Lecture Series. Dr. Ducher specialized in the religious history of the early Kagyü (Tib. bKa' brgyud) lineage, especially related to Marpa Chökyi Lodrö (1000?–1081?, Tib. Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros), his disciple Ngok Chödor (1023–1090, Tib. rNgog Chos rdor), and their lineage. As the spread of Buddhism to Central Asia in the early second millennium, and particularly the introduction of Tibetan tantric traditions from the so-called later spread (Tib. *phyi dar*) within the Tangut Empire is one of the fields studied at the CERES, Dr. Ducher presented some of her research on the influence of the Ngokpa Kagyü on Tangut Buddhist culture.

In the first part of the lecture, Dr. Ducher gave an overview of the so-called later spread of Buddhism in Tibet and the important figures that shaped its religious history, particularly those belonging to the nascent Kagyü traditions. She focused particularly on the 11th and 12th century, distinguishing four generations during which many Tibetans interacted between each others and progressively created distinct institutions. The first generation was that of the pioneers, translators of tantric systems such as Drokmi (992–1072, Tib. 'Brog mi), Marpa, and Gö Khukpa Lhétsé (fl. 11th c., Tib. 'Gos Khug pa lHas btsas), or of more sutric and scholastic approaches, such as those taught by the Indian master Atiśa (982–1054, Tib. A ti sha), and others. This was followed by a second generation, when Buddhism took root on Tibetan soil, with individuals who sometimes continued to travel to India, but increasingly stayed in Tibet to receive teachings in their own language. During the generation of their disciples, the process of lineage building started, with important masters such as Réchungpa (1083/4–1161, Tib. Ras chung pa), Gampopa (1079–1153, Tib. sGam po pa) and Ngok Dodé (1078–1154, Tib. rNgog mDo sde) developing a 'style' attracting different types of disciples. This process continued to become more complex with the next generation that



witnessed an increased institutionalisation, and a multiplication of Kagyü sub-lineages. That period, the mid to late 12th century, was also the moment when the Tangut Empire reached its zenith. During that period, Eastern Tibet (Khams), although not the center of Tibet's religious life, became an important destination for many Central Tibetans, and the place of origin and of installation of many early Kagyü meditators.

In the process of this presentation, Dr. Ducher talked more particularly of the way Marpa's teaching was received and continued by a particular family, that of the Ngok. This lineage, sometimes known as Ngokpa Kagyü, was instrumental in the spread of Marpa's tantric traditions. In the 12th century, Ngok Dodé in particular created an identity very close to that of Marpa and many tantric lineages trace back to him. The means he used to appropriate Marpa's style and authority, and how he established the ritual and commentarial foundations of his lineage were described in short.

Recent research on Tangut manuscripts and paintings has shown that the Kagyü sub-schools were quite active in the Tangut Empire in the late 12th century until its fall in 1227. Two imperial preceptors, Tsangpopa Könchok Sengé (+ 1218, Tib. gTsang po dKon mchog seng ge) and Tishri Répa Shérab Sengé (1164/1165–1236, Ti shri Ras pa Shes rab sengge), belonged to the Kagyü movement, and artworks from Dunhuang (Cave 465) and Karakhoto show a clear influence of Kagyü tantric transmissions. A commentary by Ngok Dodé in Tangut was also found in Baisigou Square *stūpa* (Chin. Baisigou fangta 拜寺溝方塔), near the ancient Tangut capital. Thus, Dr. Ducher tied together the various lineages and influences in the early Kagyü movement that may explain the presence of early Kagyü masters in the Tangut Empire. The talk was concluded by a visual presentation of the tantric transmissions spread by Marpa in Tibet and continued by the Ngok family, with a particular emphasis on masters and places of the larger Kagyü scene, such as Chokro Lü Gyeltsen (1108–1176, Cog ro Klu'i rgyal mtshan), who did not belong to the Ngok family nor went to the Tangut Empire but nonetheless played an important role in the spread of the Ngok transmissions there.

