
***The Treasury of Knowledge: Book Six, Part Four: Systems of Buddhist Tantra: The Indestructible Way of Secret Mantra.* By Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé. Translated by Elio Guarisco and Ingrid McLeod. Introduced and annotated by Elio Guarisco and edited by Ingrid McLeod. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2005. ISBN 1-55939-210-X. Pp. 583.**

With this publication, Elio Guarisco and Ingrid McLeod have contributed to the field of Buddhist and Tibetan studies an important and welcome translation of the fourth chapter (*Systems of Buddhist Tantra: The Indestructible Way of Secret Mantra*) of the sixth book (a study of the tenets of the three vehicles) of Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé's *Treasury of Knowledge*. Jamgön Kongtrul ('jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas; 1813–1899) was one of the key figures in Tibet's *Rimé* (*ris med*; non-sectarian) movement and in the context of Tibetan Buddhism as a whole is remembered as among the best writers and teachers. His collected writings include many multi-volume works, among which *The Treasury of Knowledge* (*shes bya mdzod*) in ten books is an encyclopedic masterpiece covering everything from the nature of the Buddha to training in ethics. The *Treasury* consists broadly of two parts. The first part is a root text called "The Encompassment of All Knowledge" (*shes bya kun khyab*) which is a complex, verse-form summary of the three vehicles of the Buddhist path. The second part is an enormous auto-commentary on the root text entitled "The Infinite Ocean of Knowledge" (*shes bya mtha' yas pa'i rgya mtsho*). Together, the root text and commentary make up the *Treasury of Knowledge*.

The book reviewed here includes a translation of the relevant portion of the root text, followed by Jamgön Kongtrul's auto-commentary. The language of the root text is technical and its content densely packed. Without the commentary it would be close to incomprehensible:

Those who proceed sequentially rely on the cause, the view of wisdom,

And the condition, contemplation with application, which comprises devotion meditation and definitive perfection.

Conduct in the path of method is deliberate behavior; and in the path of liberation, conscientiousness.

These bring one to the result: the four kinds of awareness-holders.
(67–8)

When explained by the auto-commentary, however, the root text unfolds beautifully. It unpacks into a meticulously detailed analysis of the systems of *tantra* in Tibetan Buddhism. As a *Rimé* text, the *Treasury* covers both the *tantra* traditions of the new (*gsar ma*) and ancient (*mying ma*) translation schools, though the latter receives considerably less attention than the former. After two chapters detailing definitions and classifications of *tantra*, *mantra* and the indestructible vehicle (*vajrayāna*) Jamgön Kongtrul proceeds to dedicate the following fourteen chapters to the *tantras* of the new translation schools:

Action (*kriyā*), Conduct (*caryā*), Yoga and Highest Yoga. Fully nine of these explore doctrines and rituals of the Highest Yoga. Explanations of the understanding of the individual and deity, and the initiations, rituals and conduct of the practitioner engaged in the four classes of *tantra* are laid out in detail in this fascinating and at times overwhelmingly detailed text.

The last four chapters are dedicated to the systems of *tantra* of the ancient translation schools, laying out in a much more concise manner the definitions, practices, rituals and conduct entailed by *maha-*, *anu-* and *ati-yogas*. While it would perhaps have been preferable to have the new and old schools more evenly represented, what Jamgön Kongtrul has written on the topic is nonetheless deeply informative.

The sheer scope of Jamgön Kongtrul's *Treasury* sets it apart from comparable works which have been previously translated into English, such as Khedrupjé's (*mkhas grub rje*) early fifteenth-century work *Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras* (*rgyud sde spyi'i rnam par gzhag pa rgyas par brjod*), translated by F.D. Lessing and Alex Wayman in 1968 (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas). Since Khedrupjé was working in a sectarian context, laying out the *tantras* according to what was at the time the new system of the Geluk (*dge lugs*) school, it is understandably a work on a smaller scale. In this portion of his *Treasury*, Jamgön Kongtrul was undertaking an entirely different project, trying to formulate an analysis of the astoundingly diverse tantric traditions of Tibetan Buddhism in a single work. The result is an astoundingly rich text, even if the language is somewhat stiff.

Whether there is beauty in Jamgön Kongtrul's original verse or not is indeterminable since the original Tibetan text has not been included. While it would have been preferable to have included the Tibetan version, one hesitates to call its absence a flaw since the English alone weighs in at close to 600 pages. Nonetheless, a detailed glossary would have been helpful for readers who are familiar with Tibetan in order to compensate for the inevitable process of interpretation that pervades any translation.

Guarisco and McLeod have, on the other hand, provided extensive helpful notes to the text, a complete bibliography of the works cited by Jamgön Kongtrul, and a detailed outline of the *Systems of Buddhist Tantra* as an appendix. While admittedly Guarisco's "Introduction" is not entirely helpful or illuminating (Jamgön Kongtrul's text is much clearer), that doesn't detract from the great contribution the translators have made in making this important text accessible to a broader audience.

With respect to issues surrounding the translation itself, the translators acknowledge the difficulties they face in working from Tibetan to English, where a mechanical translation is "stilted at best, misleading at worst" (52) and have made a valiant and I believe successful effort to produce a consistent and accurate translation of Jamgön Kongtrul's text. While another translator may have made different decisions on how best to handle the language, Guarisco and McLeod have produced an engaging and mature result.

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