

The Alchemy of Accomplishing Medicine (*sman sgrub*): Situating the *Yuthok Heart Essence (G.yu thog snying thig)* in Literature and History

Frances Garrett

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Abstract This essay examines historical and contemporary connections between Buddhist and medical traditions through a study of the Accomplishing Medicine (*sman sgrub*) practice and the *Yuthok Heart Essence (G.yu thog snying thig)* anthology. Accomplishing Medicine is an esoteric Buddhist yogic and contemplative exercise focused on several levels of “alchemical” transformation. The article will trace the acquisition of this practice from India by Tibetan medical figures and its assimilation into medical practice. It will propose that this alchemical practice forms the central nexus of connection between Tibetan medicine and the Buddhist Nyingma tradition, and that this little-studied link is not a marginal feature of Tibetan medicine but rather one that has had a significant shaping factor on each tradition throughout history.

Keywords Tibetan Buddhism · Tibetan medicine · Tibetan ritual

In 1987, Tibetan doctors in Lhasa resumed the public practice of a major, week-long Buddhist ritual known as Accomplishing Medicine (*sman sgrub*, pronounced “men-drup”). Held on the grounds of the state-funded Factory of Traditional Tibetan Medicines in the center of the capital, the ceremonies are conducted by doctors who work in the Lhasa Mentsikhang (the Hospital of Traditional Tibetan Medicine) and elsewhere in Tibet. In 2001, when I attended this event, the ritual officiant was the highly regarded physician and Sakya lama, Tsultrim Gyeltsen, and the ritual actors were mainly senior Mentsikhang doctors, all of whom were authorized to perform the ceremonies by virtue of possessing the empowerments

F. Garrett (✉)
Buddhist Studies, Centre for the Study of Religion,
University of Toronto, 170 St. George St., Toronto, ON M5R 2M8, Canada
e-mail: frances.garrett@utoronto.ca

(*dbang*) and oral transmissions (*lung*) of the Buddhist *Yuthok Heart Essence* (*G.yu thog snying thig*) tradition. Over the course of the week, these doctors engaged in a complex series of procedures simultaneously inside and outside the building. Gathered around a large maṇḍala erected inside a highly decorated medium-sized meeting room, Tsultrim Gyeltsen led one group of doctors in a continuous course of recitation, while outside in the courtyard another group conducted a multi-day series of “burnt offering” (*sbyin sreg*, Skt. *homa*) rituals. At the end of the week Tsultrim Gyeltsen conducted a public long-life empowerment (*tshe dbang*). Attended by large numbers of lay people, the event joined medical, religious and lay communities and interests. Many lay people and physicians asserted that the efficacy of the factory’s medicines would be enhanced by this ritual performance, one aim of which is to consecrate the gathered medicinal materials.

Although it is conducted yearly now in a large-scale way in the Tibetan capital (after a 32 year hiatus beginning in 1955),¹ and it is a familiar practice on a more local and individualized level both inside and outside the People’s Republic of China, Accomplishing Medicine has been little commented upon in secondary scholarship. Aside from a few short ethnographic and practitioner-oriented accounts of the practice, it has been little explored, its history and literary context unstudied.² This article, the first in a series, will consider in a preliminary way the textual existence of Accomplishing Medicine. Leaving ethnographic observations for another study, the present article will instead begin with the texts that were held in the hands of the doctor-ritualists I observed in 2001. Sitting in a ring around the central maṇḍala, what were those doctors reading as the week progressed? Where did those pages come from, and how do their contents fit into the larger context of Buddhist or medical ritual or doctrinal literature? What larger historical traditions did those doctors embody as they sat together in full tantric ritual dress during that hot week in July, and what might this tell us about historical and contemporary connections between Buddhist and medical traditions?

In this essay I will argue that while the Accomplishing Medicine ceremonies are in part focused on the empowerment of medicinal substances, in the ordinary sense that they are said simply to make medicines work better, there is much more to the practice than this. A long contextual history of Accomplishing Medicine links it intimately with esoteric Buddhist yogic and contemplative exercises that are heavily focused on the “alchemical” transformation of human waste products into purified

¹ Although in 2001, I was told by the Mentsikhang administration that the event had been reestablished as a yearly ceremony, I have recently heard that it was not performed in 2007 or 2008.

² The only two ethnographic accounts of the ritual that I am aware of do not address its history or literature; see a short ethnography of an Accomplishing Medicine ritual performed by Bonpos in Dolpo in Kind (2002), and a short article on the performance of an Accomplishing Medicine to accompany a medical research study in Craig (Forthcoming). Accomplishing Medicine and its contemplative context as performed in India is addressed in a chapter on ethical and spiritual training for doctors, in Jacobson (2000). Several short but very interesting ritual manuals on Accomplishing Medicine by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama have been translated in Thub bstan rgya mtsho, Mullin and Cox (1988, pp. 331–354). The Fourteenth Dalai Lama discusses the importance of Accomplishing Medicine briefly in Bstan dzin rgya mtsho et al. (2007, pp. 253–266). A contemporary Tibetan doctor describes the rite briefly in Donden and Hopkins (1997, pp. 214–218). Some early Accomplishing Medicine literature has been discussed in Walter (1980). Also see the commentary to Plates 52–53 in Dorje and Meyer (1992).

sacramental substances in a process that unites practitioners with deities and that aims for supermundane results, such as the attainment of immortality and other paranormal powers. I will suggest further that this sphere of theory or practice is what accounts for the close relationship between the development of Tibetan medicine and the Buddhist Nyingma tradition in particular, and that this little-studied link is not a marginal feature of Tibetan medicine but rather one that has had a significant shaping factor on each tradition throughout history.

Considering the Terms

But first, we should begin by discussing, at least in a preliminary way, a constellation of terms that are used to refer to this practice. Most common is the term *smān sgrub* or *smān grub*, using two verbs (*sgrub* and its transitive parallel *grub*, the former being most common) with a related root and a similar range of meanings in either verbal or nominal forms. The term *smān*, most commonly taken as “medicine,” has a wider semantic range than the English word: it may refer to individual substances used to make medicinal compounds, or to the compounds themselves, as well as to substances we may not consider medicinal, such as poisons, pesticides or other chemical compounds. The meaning may therefore range broadly from indicating substances that are somehow especially powerful, such as chemicals, on the one hand, to any sort of “ingredients,” in a most general sense, on the other. *Smān sgrub* may be translated as “establishing,” “consecrating,” “empowering,” “perfecting,” “consummating” or “accomplishing” (*sgrub*) the *smān*, or it can mean simply “practicing” *smān*, or even “producing,” “preparing” or “making” *smān*. In the context of Buddhist practice, the term *sgrub* is part of *sgrub thabs*, the Tibetan translation for the Sanskrit term *sādhana*, which refers to ritual and/or contemplative means (*thabs*) of accomplishing (*sgrub*) an aim, as well as to texts that provide instruction in those methods. The *thabs* may be dropped in compounds, as in *sgrub sde*, the *sādhana* section of Nyingma Mahāyoga literature, or *sgrub chen*, for *mahāsādhana*, referring to a week-long intensive ritual practice done in a group. Technically a type of *sādhana*, *smān sgrub* may therefore be understood in the most general sense as a “medicine *sādhana*.”

Translation of the term *smān sgrub*, however, has proven elusive. William Stablein translates it as “power medicine,” meaning medicine that gives one supernormal powers (*siddhi*)³; like various Buddhist centers in North America where it is called “dharma medicine,” Erik Pema Kunsang uses the term “sacred medicine”⁴; Guiseppe Tucci translates the term as “mystical realization with the aid

³ Stablein (1976, p. 243).

⁴ Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche et al. (2005, p. 416; also see 282).

of medicinal herbs”⁵; Samten Karmay as “the ritual of medicine”⁶; Gyurme Dorje as “the making of medicinal elixir”⁷; Glenn Mullin as “medicinal consecration”⁸; Sienna Craig as “medicine empowerments”⁹; and Holly Gayley as “medicine-making rituals.”¹⁰ In this article I have chosen to use “Accomplishing Medicine” for *smān sgrub*, meaning to emphasize the practice’s relationship to other kinds of Buddhist *sādhana*. The reason for the term’s resistance to easy translation lies in the fact that it is used to refer to different traditions and can be understood from different perspectives, today and throughout history. *Smān sgrub* refers to a series of procedures that serve to consecrate certain edible substances—to “empower medicine”—and also sometimes to those empowered substances themselves, but as a ritual activity it also accomplishes much more than this, bestowing on the practitioner long life, miraculous powers, or an understanding of the mind’s true nature, blessing a community of practitioners and lay people, alchemically transforming impurity into purity, attacking disease-causing demonic forces, and so forth. I will address some of these possible benefits below.

Another phrase to consider is *bdud rtsi smān sgrub*. *Bdud rtsi*, pronounced “dood-tsee,” is a term with a long history of association with Indic-derived tantric, alchemical and contemplative practices. Translating the Sanskrit *amṛta*, it is typically rendered in English as “nectar” or “ambrosia,” and thus *bdud rtsi smān* sometimes refers to a rarified sort of “nectar medicine” or “ambrosial medicine” that results from the act of “empowering” or “accomplishing” (*sgrub*) those substances during the course of the *bdud rtsi smān sgrub* ritual process. In alchemical contexts the resulting “nectar medicine” may be considered an elixir of immortality. The grammatical relationship between *bdud rtsi* and *smān* is ambiguous, however. Rechung Rinpoche translates *bdud rtsi smān sgrub* as the “Ritual of Turning Medicine into Nectar.”¹¹ The *Tshig mdzod chen mo* dictionary defines *bdud rtsi* as a substance (*rdzas*) that conquers death or bestows immortality. It also notes that in the context of medicine, *rtsi* is a medicine (*smān*) that works as an antidote for illnesses that result from one’s karma, and *bdud* refers to illnesses that specifically harm one’s life-force (*tshe srog*). The common meaning for *bdud*, however, is a type of demon, leading *bdud rtsi* to be translated by Richard Kohn as “demon juice.”¹² Creative etymologies are common in the canon of writing on *bdud rtsi smān sgrub*. The thirteenth-century scholar Guru Chos dbang, for example, explains that *bdud* refers to the demons of “ignorance and conceptuality” (*ma rig nam rtog*), whereas *rtsi* is their antidote, primordial awareness (*rig pa ye shes*).¹³ The *Tantra of the Secret Cycle* (*Gsang ba ‘khor rgyud*) explains, “When

⁵ Tucci (1980, p. 122).

⁶ Karmay (1998).

⁷ Dorje, Wisdom Books, <http://www.wisdom-books.com/FocusDetail.asp?FocusRef=47>.

⁸ Thub bstan rgya mtsho, Mullin, and Cox (1988, p. 342).

⁹ Craig (Forthcoming).

¹⁰ Gayley (2007, p. 469).

¹¹ Kunzang (2001, p. 179).

¹² Kohn (2001, p. 114).

¹³ Gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug (1979, p. 278).

the elixir (*rtsi*) of the truth of dharma is applied to saṃsāra, which is like māra (*bdud*), it is called nectar (*bdud rtsi*).”¹⁴

A related term is *bdud rtsi yon tan*, in most contexts referring to a deity known as Nectar Qualities or Ambrosial Qualities (often equated with the Sanskrit, Vajrāmṛta), who in Tibet became the focal deity for a particular Nyingma practice cycle from the Eight Means of Accomplishment (*sgrub pa bka' brgyad*) tradition, about which more will be said below. *Bdud rtsi yon tan sgrub*, then, adding the verbal *sgrub*, refers more broadly to engagement in this particular set of Means of Accomplishment practices, which involve propitiating the deity Nectar Qualities: these are the Nectar Qualities sādhanas. Sometimes the term is used synonymously with *smān sgrub*, however, signaling the connections between the broad class of Accomplishing Medicine (*smān sgrub*) practice and this tantric Nyingma tradition.

Even before having studied the texts that describe these practices, as we will begin to do in a moment, we can thus begin with a general understanding that *smān sgrub* is associated in some way with alchemical, pharmaceutical, yogic, and contemplative realms of practice in Tibet. Alchemy, by which I mean techniques of transforming material substances using combined pharmacological and “mystical” realms of knowledge typically for the purpose of extending lifespan, is well-acknowledged as an important area of experience across Asia. In Tibet, internal alchemy, focusing especially on yogic and contemplative manipulations of the inner body, together with pharmacological practice, is a feature of many Nyingma and Bön tradition in particular. It is generally derived from the Buddhist and Hindu tantric Mahāsiddha, Sahajiyā, and Nāth Siddha traditions in India, and yet so pervasive did it become over centuries of Tibetan literature that it developed its own, uniquely Tibetan lineages and practices.¹⁵

A key feature of Tibetan alchemical traditions is the practice of “extracting the essence” (*bcud len*) of specific material (or symbolic) substances, transmuting that essence into a consecrated nectar or “elixir” (*bdud rtsi*), and then making this one’s exclusive diet, as part of a yogic-contemplative exercise. There are numerous methods for doing this, and this is a vast topic that I cannot address in detail here. Briefly, however, some traditions describe the preparation of a compound made of various substances, including plants, minerals and precious stones, and animal and human products, following a recipe that lists ingredients and also special instructions for their preparation, such as boiling, distilling or fermenting. In some recipes the most valued ingredients are the reproductive substances produced from the male–female pair of contemplatives during sexual union; an internal alchemical process during sexual yoga may be required to refine these substances, and upon emission they may be collected for inclusion into an elixir recipe. Alternately, the essence of each of the natural elements may be symbolically extracted from the body of the yogin him or herself, consecrated and offered to the ritual deities, who are empowered to use those magical “substances” to render the yogi’s body immortal. The ultimate aim of many of these practices is an immortal “rainbow body” (*‘ja’ lus*), that is, a body that is no longer part of the saṃsāric cycle of birth

¹⁴ Cited in Bstan dzin rgya mtsho et al. (2007, p. 263).

¹⁵ For more on these traditions, see White (1996), Walter (1979, 1980), Fenner (1979).

and death. (Such an aim is not unique to these practices, of course, as yogic contemplatives of various esoteric traditions work at creation of a rainbow body.) Lesser aims include the enhancement of the yogi's health or the attainment of magical or supernatural powers, or *siddhi*, all of which may make his or her religious practice more effective.

Although the *bcud len* and *smān sgrub* traditions do have distinct bodies of literature, the practices are closely intertwined and share many techniques and theories. I will leave the question of exploring these tangled connections for a later study, however, focusing in this article mainly on the *smān sgrub*, or Accomplishing Medicine, tradition. As I will explain further below, Accomplishing Medicine is a Buddhist practice with many forms, and it is part of the regular religious activity of various traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. It is not, in other words, solely, or even chiefly, an activity of the medical tradition. I will begin, however, with a discussion of how Tibetan historians have represented the entry of this Buddhist practice into the medical tradition.

Tibetan Doctors in Search of Accomplishing Medicine Practice

A history of the medical tradition's appropriation of the Accomplishing Medicine practice is told in the biography of G.yu thog yon tan mgon po (1112–1203), author/editor of the medical text, *Four Tantras (Rgyud bzhi)*, and as such, the “founding father” of Tibetan medicine. G.yu thog's biography was written by Dar mo smān rams pa blo bzang chos grags (1638–1710), an influential medical scholar who served as the chief doctor of the Fifth Dalai Lama. According to this account, the *bdud rtsi smān grub* was one of the main teachings received by G.yu thog and his ancestors in their travels to India. The early doctors Bi byi dga' byed and Be lha dga' mdzes ma, Indians (according to this source) who later played a role in the dissemination of Āyurvedic medicine in Tibet, were *bdud rtsi smān grub* practitioners.¹⁶ Told of the practice by Bi byi dga' byed, ‘Dre rje rgya gar Vajra, G.yu thog's grandfather, traveled to India specifically in search of the *bdud rtsi smān grub* teachings. He was directed to the Southern Sandalwood Jungle, and after some tribulation he convinces a group of eight goddesses to give him the teaching, paying them 500 measures of gold; he subsequently receives the teachings from other figures too. He returns to transmit the teachings in Tibet to his son, G.yu thog khyung po rdo rje, who: in turn transmits it to his son, the (legendary) first G.yu thog yon tan mgon po, known as G.yu thog “the Elder” (G.yu thog rnying ma), said to have lived at the time of Khri srong lde btsan.

The *bdud rtsi smān grub* teachings are the focus of much activity in G.yu thog's biography, several key figures in the story undergoing long searches, passing difficult tests, and handing over large amounts of gold for the teachings. Despite all of this attention, the exact nature of the teachings is not always clear in this text. The

¹⁶ Blo bzang chos grags et al. (1982, p. 60). This section can be found translated into English in Kunzang (2001, p. 179). On the questionable attribution of these figures as Indian, see Taube (1981, p. 15).

Medicine Buddha calls *bdud rtsi smān grub* the essence of all the teachings,¹⁷ no small praise, and yet what is actually involved in doing the practice, or where one might look to learn more, is not made explicit. At G.yu thog's death, his son 'Bum seng asks him about the teaching, receiving a rather unhelpful reply:

Are there three different types of consecration, that is one in great detail, a medium one, and a short one in the Ritual of Turning Medicine into Nectar?' G.yu thog replied: 'In the greatly detailed type of ritual there are 12 basic consecrations. Each of them has 10 branch consecrations. So altogether there are 120 consecrations. In the medium type there are 9 basic consecrations. Each of them has 10 branches. So there are altogether 90 consecrations. In the short type there is one basic consecration and 10 branches, so there are 10 consecrations.'¹⁸

While this is the extent of G.yu thog's explanation here, elsewhere in the biography the practice is particularly associated with the propitiation of the eight medicine goddesses and the Medicine Buddha, and with instructions for meditating on the Medicine Buddha maṇḍala situated within the practitioner's body.¹⁹ G.yu thog tells his son 'Bum seng to practice the *bdud rtsi smān grub* after first propitiating the deities. G.yu thog advises 'Bum seng to begin with taking refuge to the three jewels and end by dedicating merit, as part of a daily morning practice of 21 recitations of the name of the principal deity and his mantras and seven recitations of the names of the attendant deities and their mantras.²⁰

While we may still be unclear about what precisely is involved in *doing* the practice of *bdud rtsi smān grub*, the beneficial *effects* of doing the practice are expressed throughout the biography. Most prominently, one may gain the power over life and death.²¹ At G.yu thog's death his son asks him pointedly about the benefit of the *bdud rtsi smān grub* practice, and G.yu thog mentions only the practice's ability to extend lifespan:

Formerly in India 'Tsho byed gzhon nu gave the detailed consecration but once, and the person who received it lived 120 years longer than his appointed span of life. My ancestor 'Dre rje Vajra gave once the medium consecrations to a person who subsequently lived 90 years longer than he otherwise would have done. I have once given to a 93-year-old person the short consecration, and he was able to live to the age of 103.²²

¹⁷ Blo bzang chos grag et al. (1982, p. 99), Kunzang (2001, p. 202).

¹⁸ Kunzang (2001, p. 318). This citation is present in Rechung Rinpoche's translation but not in the 1982 Beijing edition of the biography. The Beijing edition and Rechung Rinpoche's translation are based on a Lhasa Zhol printing house's woodblocks; Rechung Rinpoche has added some sections, however, including this one, from the Sde dge edition block-prints. I have not had the opportunity to check the Sde dge text, and so here report only on Rechung Rinpoche's translation.

¹⁹ Blo bzang chos grags et al. (1982, pp. 85–86), Kunzang (2001, p. 193).

²⁰ Blo bzang chos grags et al. (1982, p. 301), Kunzang (2001, p. 320).

²¹ Blo bzang chos grags et al. (1982, p. 146), Kunzang (2001, p. 224).

²² Kunzang (2001, p. 318). This also appears to be a segment added by Rechung Rinpoche from the Sde dge edition block-prints (see note 15 above).

While extending lifespan seems to be the dominant benefit, other gains are mentioned. The eight medicine goddesses in India praise the *bdud rtsi sman grub* as “the spirit of the awareness of all Buddhas of the three times; the instructions for practicing the power-over-life vidyādhara; the hammer which conquers armies of disease and evil spirits, pith instructions upheld by the Buddha; and the aural transmission of the *dākinīs*.”²³ G.yu thog’s father tells him that by practicing the *bdud rtsi sman grub*, “You will certainly be liberated from illness, evil influences, disasters and malignant spirits (*nad gdon bar chad bgegs*), and you will possess magical powers, clairvoyance, power and strength.”²⁴ When G.yu thog engages in the practice at his father’s urging, he reports that “I manifested immeasurable signs and abilities, and I had a vision of the Medicine Buddha with five companions, surrounded by a thousand Buddhas. With this, I recognized my own mind as the *dharmakāya*.”²⁵ Some advantages are helpful for doctors in particular: after G.yu thog khyung po rdo rje receives the teachings from his father, for example, his patients’ bodies appear transparent, revealing all illnesses as clearly as one can see “an olive in the palm of the hand.”²⁶

By the time of this seventeenth-century biography of G.yu thog, the practice of *bdud rtsi sman grub* was arguably the most central feature of the lifestory of the founding father of the medical tradition. The biography characterizes the practice in general as a *sādhana* focused on deities special to the medical tradition, and in particular as the tantric act of generating a Medicine Buddha maṇḍala within one’s own body. The reward for this effort is most notably an extended lifespan, but also to be achieved are a realization of the nonduality of one’s own mind and the Buddha’s mind—in other words, a traditionally Buddhist realization of ultimate reality—and supernormal powers, including the ability to diagnose any illness by seeing into patients’ bodies. Note that these are benefits that attach to the practitioner, and not to the medicinal substances used for healing patients, suggesting that Accomplishing Medicine or Turning Medicine into Nectar is, in this context, not essentially aimed at “empowering medicines,” although they may do that along the way, but is rather a religious practice specifically for the benefit of doctors.

Accomplishing Medicine in the Nyingma Tradition

Although it was to become the chief religious practice for Tibetan doctors, Accomplishing Medicine is a Buddhist practice performed by other traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, and as such its explication comprises a significant portion of Tibetan religious literature. Above I mentioned the deity *Bdud rtsi yon tan*, “Nectar Qualities,” more commonly known perhaps by the Sanskrit name *Vajrāmṛta*, but important in Tibet as a deity in the Eight Means of Accomplishment (*sgrub pa bka’ brgyad*) tradition. The Nyingma canon’s Eight Means of Accomplishment, a body of

²³ Blo bzang chos grags et al. (1982, p. 146), Kunzang (2001, p. 224).

²⁴ Blo bzang chos grags et al. (1982, p. 170), Kunzang (2001, p. 238).

²⁵ Blo bzang chos grags et al. (1982, p. 171), Kunzang (2001, p. 239).

²⁶ Blo bzang chos grags et al. (1982, p. 71), Kunzang (2001, p. 185).

literature that is also sometimes referred to in English as the Eight Transmitted Precepts, is the locus of a large collection of teachings on Accomplishing Medicine. These works are found among the Inner Tantras, which are the last three paths in the distinctive Nyingma doxography of nine vehicles of the Buddhist path (Śrāvākayāna, Pratyekayāna, Bodhisattvayāna, Kriyatantra, Upatantra, Yogatantra, Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga), a system that represents a scriptural division but also distinctive orientations of thought and practice. Accomplishing Medicine texts here are typically found within the Mahāyoga category, a class of teachings that are generally focused on contemplative and ritual practices relating to a personal meditation deity (*yi dam*). Mahāyoga as a scriptural division is itself divided into tantras (*rgyud sde*) and ritual practices or sādhanā cycles (*sgrub sde*). The latter group includes the important set of esoteric texts known as the Eight Means of Accomplishment. Each of these Eight designates a wrathful deity around which a complete set of ritual and meditation practices and a coherent vision of contemplative reality are organized and presented through both transmitted (*bka' ma*) and revealed (*gter ma*) texts. The fourth of these Eight focuses on the deity cult of Nectar Qualities, also known as Nectar of Immortality ('Chi med bdud rtsi), Adamantine Nectar (Rdo rje bdud rtsi, Skt. Vajrāmṛta) or Swirling Nectar (Bdud rtsi 'khyil ba, Skt. Āmṛtakundali or Āmṛtadhara).²⁷ This figure is one of five supramundane deities associated with the yoga tantras, belonging to the Ratnasambhava Buddha family; these deities are supramundane because they are propitiated on the path to liberation, in contrast to mundane deities who assist with worldly aims. It is here, in the fourth of the Eight Means of Accomplishment, that we may find teachings of Accomplishing Medicine and associated topics that became so important to the medical traditions in Tibet. We can see here, therefore, that in the eyes of Nyingma doxographers, Accomplishing Medicine is generally seen to be a Mahāyoga sādhanā cycle focused on a personal meditation deity, aimed ultimately at liberation from saṃsāra.

In the *Nyingma Collected Tantras (Rnying ma rgyud 'bum)* canon, the Means of Accomplishment section's Nectar Qualities Immortality tantras ('Chi med bdud rtsi yon tan gyi rgyud), as they are called at the beginning of this section of the canon, include at least twelve distinct texts (although the number and order varies slightly by canon edition), reaching together over 600 folios in length.²⁸ This is a fairly large body of literature. These tantras cover a range of esoteric topics, including primarily contemplative, ritual, alchemical and yogic subtle body practices, much of which is focused on use of the "five nectars" (*bdud rtsi lnga*, Skt. *pañcāmṛta*). These are five impure products of the human body—feces, urine, "red bodhicitta" or (menstrual) blood, "white bodhicitta" or semen, and flesh or marrow (*dri chen*, *dri chu*, *rak ta* or *byang sems dmar po*, *byang sems dkar po*, *sha chen* or *rkang mar*)—which are to be transformed through a yogic and/or culinary alchemy into powerful purified substances. The teachings from these tantras have

²⁷ A deity maṇḍala for Vajrāmṛta is depicted at Raghu and Lokesh (1995, pp. 38–39).

²⁸ Detailed comparisons of various editions of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* can be found online at the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library (<http://www.thdl.org/collections/literature/ngb/>), documenting work directed by David Germano, and also at "Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu Edition of the rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum: An Illustrated Inventory" (<http://ngb.csac.anthropology.ac.uk/>), a catalog by Cathy Cantwell, Robert Mayer and Michael Fischer.

been sources for centuries of writing on the use of the five nectars. The tantra known as the *Eight Chapters on Nectar* (*Bdud rtsi bam po brgyad*), for instance, was also included in the Bka' 'gyur, and has been an especially important source for Tibetan medical and religious writers focused on all manner of tantric ritual practices utilizing nectars.²⁹ The long-life practice of essence-extraction (*bcud len*) and related rituals propitiating the wrathful deity Swirling Nectar—which spawned a large body of writing by medical and religious writers on essence-extraction over hundreds of years—is the subject of the fourteen-chapter *Swirling Nectar's Immortality Tantra* (*Bdud rtsi 'khyil ba 'chi med tshe'i rgyud*) in this Nectar Qualities Immortality tantras collection. The *Precious Rosary Tantra of the Nature of the Five Nectars of all [the Buddhas]* (*Thams cad bdud rtsi lnga'i rang bzhin rin po che 'phreng ba'i rgyud*), contains in the ninth of its seventeen chapters a section on Accomplishing Medicine, and the last tantra of the collection, the *Nectar which Possesses the Light of Wisdom* (*Bdud rtsi ye shes 'od ldan gyi rgyud*), is the collection's main locus of practical writings on the healing of illness. The Nectar Qualities Immortality tantras' teachings thus range from the most exalted teachings on the attainment of immortality or absolute liberation, to the more everyday level of healing common illnesses.

Each of the Eight Means of Accomplishment is given Indian provenance with the attribution of an Indian originator or source of transmission. The Nectar Qualities cycle is associated with the Indian master Vimalamitra. Tradition reports that in India a *ḍākinī* gave Vimalamitra the tantra of the deity Mahottara,³⁰ known in Tibetan as Supreme Heruka (Che mchog he ru ka). Supreme Heruka is the Ratna family deity associated with Nectar Qualities, embodying all the Buddhas' enlightened qualities. He is also the deity located in the very center of the Eight Means of Accomplishment maṇḍala, thus placing the teachings of the Nectar Qualities cycle at the very center of the entire Means of Accomplishment tradition. Vimalamitra, who spent many years in Tibet in the late eighth or early ninth century, is one of the primary transmitters of Mahāyoga and early Great Perfection (Rdzogs chen) teachings into Tibet. He is especially associated with the Great Perfection Mind Series (*Sems sde*) teachings, the Mahāyoga Web of Magical Transformations (Sgyu 'phrul drwa ba, Māyājāla) tantras, and the deity cult of Nectar Qualities.³¹ Vimalamitra shared these teachings with Padmasambhava (although an actual relationship between the two figures is unlikely, so the mechanics of this transmission is unclear), who taught them to King Khri srong lde btsan, who promptly had them hidden away.³² The Nectar Qualities teachings were controversial for Tibetans in the ensuing centuries, likely a result of their

²⁹ For example see Skyem pa tshes dbang (2000, pp. 133–134). The full title of the *Bdud rtsi bam po brgyad* is *Thams cad bdud rtsi lnga'i rang bzhin dngos grub chen po nye ba'i snying po mchog*. See Walter's dissertation for a translation of the first, third and sixth texts of this set.

³⁰ Gyurme et al. (2002, pp. 482–483).

³¹ David Germano's work (unpublished manuscript) on the early history of Great Perfection authors has been helpful for this section.

³² The teachings of both Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava on these topics are addressed in Walter (1980).

esoteric and ethically transgressive nature. In the tenth century, the practice of Accomplishing Medicine was apparently well known enough, and well feared enough, to be condemned in King Yeshe Od's *Ordinance*, an anti-Nyingma decree banning dangerous ritual practices dominant in Tibet at the time.³³ Consider the distance traveled by this practice cycle, once outlawed as a danger to the state, a millennium later performed for public consumption in the Chinese government-sponsored medical factory of Tibet's capital!

Vimalamitra, Padmasambhava, and Śrīsimha, with his Tibetan translator Vairocana, comprise the "founding fathers" of the Nyingma tradition. That these figures play a critical role in the Nyingma tradition is well known; less often addressed is the equally critical role they have played in the formation and development of the medical tradition in Tibet. The intertwining of Nectar Qualities teachings with the history of the medical tradition makes clear that it is with the Nyingma school that medicine has been particularly connected.

Links between the medical tradition and the Treasure tradition (*gter lugs*) further strengthen this bond with the Nyingma. Although the Eight Means of Accomplishment cycles are attributed to Indian originators, the figures responsible for their centrality in Nyingma practice and literature are two Tibetan Treasure Revealers who "found" what Khri srong lde btsan had squirreled away in the ninth century. Living at around the same time as G.yu thog yon tan mgon po and his students were editing or composing the *Four Tantras (Rgyud bzhi)* and the *Yuthok Heart Essence (G.yu thog snying thig)*, these two figures organized a chaotic mass of practices and rituals into a coherent textual corpus. Prime among these is Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192), the first of Tibet's prolific Treasure Revealers, and the central architect of the Eight Means of Accomplishment tradition. Nyang ral discovered one of two sections of the Eight Means of Accomplishment, the *Gathering of All Sugatas (Bde gshegs thams cad 'dus pa)*, which records the story of how these teachings were given by a dakini to a set of eight Indian masters who then became experts in those practices. Nyang ral's large *Gathering of All Sugatas* collection, comprising thirteen volumes in the Mtshams brag manuscript edition, includes a *Root Tantra of the Heruka Assembly (Che mchog 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud)* and several individual works on Accomplishing Medicine. Nyang ral's incarnate successor, Gu ru Chos dbang (1212–1270), also a prolific Treasure Revealer, is responsible for recovery (or authorship) of the second section of the Eight Means of Accomplishment, that of the *Consummation of Eight Secret Means of Accomplishment (Bka' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs)*. Here too we find writings specifically addressing Accomplishing Medicine.³⁴

The Eight Means of Accomplishment and its Accomplishing Medicine teachings are thus among the very earliest of revealed Treasures in Tibet, allegedly traceable back to the time of the first diffusion of Buddhism into Tibet. Dudjom Rinpoche's account of the early Treasure tradition names Grags pa sngon shes (b. 1012), who is

³³ Karmay (1998, pp. 8, 11).

³⁴ A third treasure revealer associated with the Eight Means of Accomplishment canon is Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (1337–1408/09); he was extremely prolific, but I have not identified any texts of his that pertain to *smān sgrub* practices.

said to have discovered the *Four Tantras*, as the second great Tibetan Treasure Revealer, and so with the *Four Tantras* and the Nectar Qualities texts sharing this early history, we have the medical tradition firmly situated in the important spot of the Treasure tradition's origins.³⁵ The fact that the Nectar Qualities deity is at the center of the Eight Means of Accomplishment maṇḍala also indicates the degree to which the medical tradition located its religious practice in a very important, not at all marginal, Buddhist arena.

Accomplishing Medicine in the Treasure Tradition

From these early origins, Accomplishing Medicine became a prominent aspect of the Nyingma Treasure tradition. Although for the medical tradition the central textual authority for Accomplishing Medicine is now the *Yuthok Heart Essence*, there are many other teaching cycles focused on Accomplishing Medicine. While it is beyond the scope of this article to investigate the differences between these cycles, a quick survey will help us understand the wider context in which the medical tradition's *Yuthok Heart Essence* should be seen. We may begin by looking at the nineteenth-century compilation of Treasure texts, the *Precious Treasury of Revealed Teachings (Rin chen gter mdzod)*, accepting here the judgment of that collection's editor, 'Jam mgon kong sprul (1813–1899), about which are the most important Accomplishing Medicine cycles.

The *Precious Treasury of Revealed Teachings* includes thirteen Accomplishing Medicine (*sman sgrub*) or Nectar Qualities Sādhana (*bdud rtsi yon tan gi sgrub*) cycles spanning two and a half volumes of the collection, volumes 45 through 47 in the Stod lung mtshur phu redaction, nearly 1400 folio pages in all. The first cycle consists of ten texts attributed to the *Yuthok Heart Essence* tradition.³⁶ Its place at this section's beginning is indicative of the importance of this cycle to the practice in general, and its inclusion of a number of texts not gathered under the title *Yuthok Heart Essence* by more recent editors indicates that writings on this esoteric tradition extend far beyond those works most commonly used today as guides to the Accomplishing Medicine practice.

After the first cycle, which covers roughly 250 folios, the remaining twelve cycles demonstrate that Accomplishing Medicine is a topic about which medical scholars wrote prolifically, but it is also a topic of significant concern to Nyingma and Kagyü Buddhist writers not known for special connections to medical lineages. In other words, this is a *Buddhist* practice most centrally. Following the *Yuthok*

³⁵ Gyurme et al. (2002, pp. 751–754).

³⁶ Only four of these works are included within the *Yuthok Heart Essence* anthologies published under that title at Chagpori in the late nineteenth century or more recently by the Ngak Mang Institute (these collections will be discussed below). It is not clear to me whether the tenth of these, entitled *Brang ti'i dngul bre las drang srong ser skya spun gsum gyi rig gtad kyi chog mthong gsal me long zhes bya ba bzhugs so*, pages 37–47 in volume 46, should be considered part of the Yuthok tradition according to the *Rin chen gter mdzod*.

Heart Essence cycle, ‘Jam mgon kong sprul includes a 30-folio work by Karma chags med (1610–1678), an influential Karma Kagyü scholar known for his syntheses of Kagyü and Nyingma teachings, which became especially important in the Dpal yul and Gnas mdo traditions. The next cycle includes a sādhana text that has been transmitted in the ‘Bri gung Dkar brgyud pa tradition, but that was authored by the renowned physician Zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje (1439–1475). Founder of the Zur tradition (*zur lugs*) of medicine, Zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje is also closely tied to the development of the *Yuthok Heart Essence* tradition, as I will explain further below.

The third cycle of the *Precious Treasury Accomplishing Medicine* section features four texts from the Heart Essence of Vimalamitra (Bi ma snying thig) tradition revealed by Mchog gyur gling pa (1829–1870), a prolific Nyingma Treasure Revealer who was one of ‘Jam mgon kong sprul’s own teachers. This is followed by a set of three guru sādhana teachings from a text revealed by ‘Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po (1820–1892), another of ‘Jam mgon kong sprul’s teachers and one of the main figures in the “non-sectarian” (*ris med*) tradition. Next, the fifth cycle contains a famous set of early teachings known as the *Great Vase of Nectar: Healing Techniques* (*Gso thabs bdud rtsi bum chen*) and *A Vase of Immortality Nectar* (*‘Chi med bdud rtsi bum pa*), attributed to Rdor ‘bum chos kyi grags pa, an extremely prolific Revealer whose treasures were of great importance to the medical tradition. These texts are said to be eighth-century works by Padmasambhava, and they contain a wealth of specific healing techniques for a wide range of disease conditions, many of which are cited as authoritative by later medical writers, such as Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho.³⁷

The seventh cycle consists of works revealed by another renowned Treasure Revealer, Ra mo shel sman ye shes, who lived in the thirteenth century, and edited in the nineteenth century by ‘Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po. The eighth is a 15-folio Accomplishing Medicine work by Ratna gling pa (1403–1473), a prolific Nyingmapa especially known for his authoritative compilation the *Collected Tantras of the Ancients*. The ninth cycle features four texts by the Nyingmapa Legs ldan rdo rje (1512–1625), and the tenth consists of two works revealed by ‘Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po. The eleventh and twelfth cycles reprint four Accomplishing Medicine works by Nyang ral nyi ma ‘od zer and Gu ru Chos dbang, two of the major organizers of the Eight Means of Accomplishment tradition, discussed above, and the final cycle records another work by the nineteenth-century Mchog gyur gling pa. Following these thirteen cycles on Accomplishing Medicine practices across centuries of writing, the *Precious Treasury* appends nearly 300 pages of writing specifically on the related practice of essence-extraction (*bcud len*); I will not summarize those here, but their inclusion by ‘Jam mgon kong sprul within the broad category of Nectar Qualities practice should be noted.

Without doubt, a full study of this entire corpus would make a magnificent contribution to our understanding of the Accomplishing Medicine literary tradition,

³⁷ For references to these works in medical texts, see Skyem pa tsho dbang (2000, p. 985), Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1994, pp. 1145–1147), Zur mkhar pa blo gros rgyal po (1989, p. 515). Lineage holders of the *Bdud rtsi bam po brgyad* are listed along the tops of the seventh and eighth *thangkas* in Dorje and Meyer (1992).

but short of reaching that stage, I can make three simple points. First, the great volume of writing on the topic of Accomplishing Medicine (recalling that the *Precious Treasury* records only a selection of writings on any given topic) is truly impressive—despite having rarely been mentioned in secondary scholarship, this is clearly a major component of Buddhist thought and practice. Second, we may add this topic to our list of those to which *both* medical and religious writers were dedicated, as another example of the interpenetration of medical and religious realms.³⁸ And third, we should take note of the fact that the *Yuthok Heart Essence* itself is but one tradition among many; further research into the particular distinguishing features of these various Accomplishing Medicine traditions will help us better understand both what we read in these texts and what we see on the ground when observing an Accomplishing Medicine ritual performance.

The Benefits of Accomplishing Medicine

The presentation of the benefits of Accomplishing Medicine as found in G.yu thog's biography, above, is generally in line with discussions found in the textual canons just surveyed. I have discussed elsewhere the centrality of the practical and miraculous powers of the nectars to this body of tantric practice. The five nectars, purified forms of human excrement, marrow, urine, blood, semen and flesh/marrow, together with “five meats” (*sha lnga*, Skt. *pancamāṃsa*), the flesh of cow, dog, horse, elephant, and human, are used in many aspects of tantric ritual. As central offerings they are also referred to as “pledges” or “sacrament” (*dam tshig*, Skt. *samaya*), and Indian and Tibetan Buddhist tantras alike prescribe the consumption of these sacramental substances for a range of mundane and supermundane purposes. The nectars and meats are a critical ingredient in healing and occult recipes in both religious and medical literature.

The power of the consecrated nectarous soup or pills that are created during the Accomplishing Medicine rites cannot be understated. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, in remarking upon an Accomplishing Medicine ceremony in 2000 that produced 500 kilos of nectar for the consecration of Lerab Ling, Sogyal Rinpoche's dharma center in France, stated that through this performance “the blessing of the buddhas was invoked for Tibet, its people, and its destiny, as well as for the future of Buddhism in Europe and the West.”³⁹ In his speech at that event he cited a hymn to the nectars by Padmasambhava, which concludes with the claim that,

Should anyone about to die
 Take some of this sacred nectar,
 He or she will gain the level of vidyadhara
 Regardless of what kind of life was led.
 Indeed, it is a substance sacred and supreme.⁴⁰

³⁸ For more such examples, see Garrett (2005, 2007, 2008), Gyatso (2004), and Garrett and Adams (2008).

³⁹ Bstan dzin rgya mtsho et al. (2007, p. 265).

⁴⁰ Cited in *Ibid.*

The *Eight Chapters on Nectar*, mentioned above, agrees: “O Manjushri, should a person work for the benefit of living beings for a thousand aeons, the merits produced are not as great as those generated by this nectar-like medicine. For this medicinal substance even has the ability to lead beings from the eighteen great hells to the path of final liberation.”⁴¹

These early pronouncements have sustained the Accomplishing Medicine practice for centuries, making it a central Buddhist practice in all schools in Tibet, not only in Nyingma or medical traditions. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama hosts a performance of a Vajrakīlaya-oriented Accomplishing Medicine ritual yearly. Historically monasteries throughout Tibet maintained such an annual practice “as a method of contributing to the happiness of all beings,” declared the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who upheld the same regular practice, arguing further that “whoever relies upon this ambrosial nectar gains power over every *siddhi* of both samsara and beyond. It effortlessly fulfills the good of both oneself and others. Therefore do not doubt its efficacy.”⁴² While today in Lhasa some will tell you that a performance of Accomplishing Medicine at the Factory of Traditional Medicines will enhance the efficacy of the pills they take for common health conditions, it is clear that for many tantric practitioners, historically and today, the benefits of the practice are quite a bit more substantial.

The Yuthok Heart Essence

It should be clear by now that while it is the texts of the *Yuthok Heart Essence* that dictate the ritual process for most doctors who practice Accomplishing Medicine, at least today, there are numerous other Accomplishing Medicine systems and practice lineages. In other words, Accomplishing Medicine is a common Buddhist tantric practice, practiced widely by many Tibetan Buddhist traditions, which was adopted as especially important for the medical tradition. The *Yuthok Heart Essence* is just one tradition among many. I will return now to a question I asked at the beginning of this article, namely, what document was it that Tibetan doctors held in their hands as they performed the Accomplishing Medicine ritual I witnessed in 2001? I was told at the time that it was the *Yuthok Heart Essence* they were reading—but what exactly is that?

There are several easily available published works entitled *Yuthok Heart Essence*, or *G.yu thog Snying thig*. One is a 1981 Leh publication released by D. L. Tashigang, based on photographic reproductions of an 1888 woodblock set from the Chagpori (*lcags po ri*) medical college. In 2004 the Ngak Mang Institute⁴³ together with the Beijing National Publishing House released an edition of the *Yuthok Heart Essence* in Western book format. I mentioned above the

⁴¹ Cited in Thub bstan rgya mtsho et al. (1998, p. 352).

⁴² Ibid., pp. 352–354.

⁴³ The NgaK Mang Institute, founded in Xining in 1999, is an organization dedicated to the preservation and promotion of tantric traditions and communities through various culture, health and education projects in Tibet and through a network of regional branches worldwide.

presence of a series of *Yuthok Heart Essence* texts in the *Precious Treasury* compilation. Despite the common title, each of these collections contains a different set of individual texts, with only some overlap. In the case of the 2004 Ngak Mang edition, which is perhaps now the most easily available publication, the title *Yuthok Heart Essence* refers to an anthology of works themselves composed by different authors from different time periods and of quite different sorts of content. At the core of this anthology, however, is a set of texts that is represented as the “root text” of the *Yuthok Heart Essence*.

Tradition holds that the core teachings of the *Yuthok Heart Essence* originated with G.yu thog yon tan mgon po (1112–1203), who passed the transmission on to his student, Sum ston ye shes gzhungs, who wrote down these teachings as a series of works that now form the root text of the *Yuthok Heart Essence* collection. According to Ngak Mang co-founder Lce nag tshang nyi zla he ru ka (b. 1971), a scholar and doctor known to English-speaking students as Dr. Nida Chenagsang, the *Yuthok Heart Essence* is considered a religious teaching (*chos skor*) transmitted to G.yu thog yon tan mgon po as a “profound pure vision” (*zab mo dag snang*) from a *dākinī*. It was disseminated by G.yu thog as “the perfect practice of the interpenetration of medicine and religion” (*sman chos zung ‘jug gi nyams len mthar phyin pa*), organized particularly as a religious practice for doctors.⁴⁴ Chenagsang calls the *Yuthok Heart Essence* and the *Four Tantras* “the two heart-jewels (*snying gi nor bu gnyis*)” of G.yu thog, the former a jewel of the Vajrayāna, the latter a jewel of medicine. He also points to the collection’s importance as an early Great Perfection teaching. Despite its clear affiliation with the Nyingma tradition, however, Chenagsang emphasizes the unbiased quality of the teachings, insisting that it is important to practice the *Yuthok Heart Essence* as a non-sectarian tenet system (*grub mtha’i phyogs ris med pa*).⁴⁵

The core of this anthology—that is, the portion that is said to have been recorded by Sum ston ye shes gzhungs—is a collection that itself contains up to 49 individual texts (depending on how the texts are differentiated). Some of these are very short, several being less than a page in length, and yet because in all extant editions these separate works are titled individually, with distinctive title pages and sometimes radically different sorts of content, as well as different authors, they can be referred to as “texts” rather than “chapters.”⁴⁶ This collection of 49 (or so) texts is called the *Rays of Compassion Dispelling the Darkness of Suffering, a Practice Cycle of Empowerments and Guru Sādhana* (*Byin rlabs bla ma sgrub pa’i chos skor sdug bsngal mun sel thugs rje’i nyi ’od*), or, as it is known in short, the *Yuthok Heart Essence Guru Sādhana* (*G.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub*). The individual texts of the collection are named in the Appendix.

If it is somewhat more coherent in terms of its origins than the larger *Yuthok Heart Essence* anthology, the *Yuthok Heart Essence Guru Sādhana* contains, in

⁴⁴ Sngags mang zhib ‘jug khang (2005, p. 2), and see similar comments on p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ This is actually not true without exception: the Ngak Mang edition divides the work into 49 distinct texts, but in doing so it divides several works that in the Leh edition are united under a common text title (although identified by distinctive section headings).

terms of its contents, a diverse assortment of topics. The 49 texts include writings on rites of empowerment and long-life, tantric commitments and liturgies for daily practice; several forms of outer, inner and secret *sādhana* instructions; supplication to the protector deities and lineage gurus, and offerings of *torma* and medicines; completion stage and Great Perfection yogas; and the occult use of spells and recipes for healing and exorcism, as well as recommendations for the use of mantras, yantras, divination, poisoned razors, spinning blades and other protective and wrathful magical operations. Despite this diversity, the collection's practices are conceptually (if not sequentially) organized into three stages of teaching, meant to form a complete contemplative-yogic curriculum for the Tibetan doctor. First, its generation stage (*bskyed rim*) "approach-accomplishment" (*bsnyen sgrub*) practices include directions on "approaching" the personal deity (*yi dam*) through mantra recitation and a request that the deity's charismatic power (*byin rlabs*) will descend into the practitioner, followed by a request that the "accomplishments" of the various classes of *dākinī* and *sugatas* enter one's awareness, both of these being preliminary steps to taking on the identity of the deity. Also part of this stage of practice are a range of ritual or magical operations (*las tshogs*), such as spells, exorcisms, divinations, and offerings of medicines and *torma*. Next, the collection presents a range of completion stage (*rdzogs rim*) practices, including subtle body channel (*rtsa*) yogas that manipulate the presence of the deity in the practitioner's body, wind (*rlung*) yogas that transform speech into mantra, and quintessential drop (*thig le*) yogas that transform the mind into the *dharmakāya*, plus a form of the set of six yogic exercises that involve the transformation of inner heat, dreams, clear light, illusory body, intermediate state, and consciousness transfer, and also a teaching of subtle body yogic movements (*rtsa rlung 'phrul 'khor*). Finally, the collection includes a brief set of Great Perfection teachings, including pointing-out (*ngo sprod*) instructions for "breaking through" to primordial purity (*ka dag khreg chod*) and directions for the practice of natural release or self-liberation (*rang grol*). Considered a full tantric practice cycle, the *Yuthok Heart Essence* is thus said to have the power to bestow enlightenment in a single lifetime, giving its practitioners the ability to attain a rainbow body.⁴⁷

The *Yuthok Heart Essence Guru Sādhana* therefore contains a complete tantric practice that is ultimately oriented toward Nyingma Great Perfection teachings. This entire set of teachings is also referred to collectively and in a general sense as Accomplishing Medicine (*smān sgrub*). Although this core collection is held ordinarily to be the creation of G.yu thog yon tan mgon po, scribed by his student Sum ston ye shes gzhungs, only the first twenty works of this core collection are in fact attributed to Sum ston, with the next twenty works, roughly, attributed to the fifteenth-century Zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje, and the last ten texts attributed to the nineteenth-century Karma 'jigs med chos kyi seng ge (who is also known as Khams smyon dharma seng ge). The anthology underwent various revisions and expansions over many centuries, in other words, and it is therefore impossible to say what G.yu thog yon tan mgon po may in fact have taught, or even what Sum ston ye shes gzhungs may

⁴⁷ Sngags mang zhib 'jug khang (2005, 4). The introduction to this edition contains a more thorough summary of the collection's contents than I have given here.

have actually recorded. Zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje revised and expanded the collection in the fifteenth century, as did Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho in the seventeenth century. In the early nineteenth century, Kong sprul yon tan rgya mtsho (1813–1899) included portions of the anthology in his *Precious Treasury*, and the anthology was again revised by Chagpori's Karma 'jigs med chos kyi seng ge in the late nineteenth century. A body of literature has also grown around this core collection, such that the Ngak Mang Institute's edition of the *Yuthok Heart Essence*, for example, has nearly thirty additional small texts preceding the core collection, an assortment of hymns and liturgical arrangements outlining rites for recitation, fire offering, empowerment, and so forth, authored by 'Jam dpal bde legs rgya mstho (d.1777), Kong sprul yon tan rgya mtsho, Karma 'jigs med chos kyi seng ge, and others.⁴⁸

The woodblock prints produced at Chagpori at the time of Karma 'jigs med chos kyi seng ge are those that are most commonly used today. Without manuscript evidence from an earlier period, we cannot claim definitively that any of the works in this anthology are as early as Sum ston ye shes gzhungs or G.yu thog yon tan mgon po, and indeed we may not be able to date them confidently to any earlier than the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the tradition does consider them to be the teachings of G.yu thog, and further text critical research will no doubt reveal other evidence that will help clarify the collection's dating.

Conclusion

In this article I have considered the literary, doctrinal and historical contexts of the central Buddhist ritual performed by doctors in Tibet. Although for some, the practice of Accomplishing Medicine is primarily a process of enabling medicinal pills to work more effectively, the question of just how it is that this happens, and what else happens along the way, has been little investigated. In the preceding pages we have seen the practice to be part of a larger contemplative and yogic curriculum aimed at developing a doctor's transcendent wisdom and power to an extent that he or she is transformed into the deity itself, in typical tantric Buddhist fashion, acquiring all the attendant supernormal abilities that such a being may have. This transmutation of the practitioner is alchemical on various levels: the coarse material objects of ritual practice are transformed into purified elixirs (and so the medicinal pills are "empowered"), and also the coarse physical body of the ritual practitioner is similarly purified, and his or her coarse technical abilities are also transformed into supernormal powers. In this "medicine sādhana" (*smān sgrub*), the doctor-practitioner accomplishes all of these aims, him or herself becoming medicine itself, capable of transmitting the Medicine Buddha's healing power directly into patients' bodies. This understanding underlies my choice of "Accomplishing Medicine" as a translation for *smān sgrub*: the term hints at the idea that it is not only the medicines themselves that are accomplished (both in the sense of being completed or perfected, and in the sense of having superior ability or potency), but it is also the doctor-practitioner who has, through this sādhana, accomplished the act of making

⁴⁸ The authorship of these texts is discussed in the introduction to *Ibid*.

him or herself into medicine. Accounts of the *smān sgrub* practice in G.yu thog's biography support this notion, as does an examination of the *Yuthok Heart Essence* practices, and their siblings in the Nectar Qualities tantras, all of these sources clearly presenting this as a religious practice for doctors' benefit. Of course, such doctors, as Great Vehicle Buddhists, are to work ultimately for the benefit of others, so the distinction may not be quite so clear cut; my emphasis on *smān sgrub* as religious cultivation for doctors, moreover, is not meant to undermine the perceived effects of these procedures on the medicines themselves, but rather simply to expand our understanding of how this process works.

This article has also addressed the historical nature of the connection between Buddhist and medical traditions in Tibet. While the interpenetration of these realms is often noted, the precise lines of connection have been little studied, and thus the close associations between the *Yuthok Heart Essence* tradition and key Nyingma figures are especially illuminating. The strong Gelukpa orientation of the Chagpori and Mentsikhang medical institutions in Central Tibet from the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama up to today, as well as in the exile medical community in India, makes this important and continuing bond between medical and Nyingma traditions all the more fascinating. (Eric Jacobson notes that the Dharamsala Mentsikhang must employ a Nyingma lama particularly for the purpose of initiating medical students into these practices.⁴⁹) Today, at a point in history when many aspects of Tibetan medicine considered "religious" are being eliminated from the tradition, particularly in Tibetan regions that are governed by China, the continued importance of the vibrant Accomplishing Medicine ceremonies indicates a point of flourishing inter-connection between medical and religious domains.

Appendix: Heart Essence of Yuthok Anthologies

Individual text titles in the NgaK Mang edition	NgaK Mang page numbers	Leh 1981 page numbers
G.yu thog snying thig gi ngo sprod rags bsdus	1	–
Section One, Las tshogs skor		
g.yu thog snying thig gi las tshogs dang smān sgrub skor gyi le tshan dkar chag tu bkod pa	1	–
lcags ri grwa tshang gi 'dus tshogs su thog ma'i zhal 'don gyi rim pa	3	–
'chi med bdud rtsi bum pa'i rgyun khyer snying por dril ba	4	–
g.yu thog snying thig gi bla sgrub brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs	7	–
g.yu thog snying thig gi brgyud 'debs smon lam dang bcas pa	11	–

⁴⁹ Jacobson (2000, 138 ff 42).

g.yu thog snying thig gi las byang dpag bsam ljon shing	13	–
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi dam can gyi mngon rtogs gsal ba'i me long	25	–
byin rlabs bla sgrub las rtsa ba gsum gyi mdangs bskang 'od kyi dra ba	35	–
chos skyong gi gsol kha myur mgyogs glog gi 'od 'bar	39	–
g.yu thog rtsa gsum dang 'brel ba'i tshogs glu rdo rje'i tshig gi rgyud mangs	42	–
gnod sbyin chen po rdo rje bdud 'dul gyi las byang yongs 'du'i 'khri shing	44	–
tshe yi rig byed gling gi bstan srung spyi'i gtor 'bul 'phrin las char 'bebs	60	–
gnod sbyin tsi'u dmar po'i gsol mchod dpal lha dang tshe ring mched lnga l bstan	74	–
ma bcu gnyis sogs kyi mchod gtor 'bul tshul lha mo'i bstod pa sems nyid 'phrin las ma	76	–
80	–	
Section Two, sman sgrub skor		
rlabs chen rgyal ba'i spyod pa las/ sman sgrub drang srong dgongs pa'i rgyan ⁵⁰	82	492
g.yu thog snying thig gi dbang chog bdud rtsi'i chu rgyun	101	–
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi zhi ba'i sbyin sreg ye shes me long sogs las bzhi'i sbyin sreg	135	557
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi rgyas pa'i sbyin sreg bsod nams ri bo	140	567
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi dbang gi sbyin sreg khams gsum 'gugs pa'i lcags kyu	145	575
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi drag po'i sbyin sreg rta rngams 'bar ba	149	582
rten gsum rab tu gnas pa'i cho ga bkra shis 'dod 'jo	154	–
rdo rje'i lha mo bcu drug gi mchod phreng dri za'i rgyud mang	175	–
rab gnas kyi rgyud las gsungs pa'i mchod phreng kun tu rgyu	178	–
Section Three, sman sgrub nyams len		
khrid yig sogs kyi skor		
rje btsun ma hA gu Na'i snyan brgyud kyi gdams pa zab mo nyams su len pa'i tshul nram par bshad pa sku gsum zhing khams bgrod pa'i them skas	180	429

⁵⁰ This text has also been published independently as Khams-smyon Dharma-senge, Rlabs chen rgyal ba'i spyod pa las Sman sgrub drañ sroñ dgoñs pa'i rgyan z'es bya ba bzugs so (Delhi, 1973) [Delhi : s.n., 1973], "Ritual for the preparation of medicinal pellets according to the G'yu thog sñiñ thig cycle".

g.yu thog snying thig gi gtor ma'i dpe'u ris	215	355
byin rlabs bla sgrub sdug bsngal mun sel thugs rje'i nyi 'od phyi nang gsang gsum nyam su len pa'i zin bris bklags chog tu bkod pa yon tan 'byung gnas	221	359
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi bsnyen yig dngos grub rol mtsho	258	541
g.yu thog snying thig byin rlabs bla sgrub las kha byang	266	1
g.yu thog snying thig las byin rlabs bla ma sgrub pa'i chos skor sdug bsngal mun sel thugs rje'i nyi 'od ces pa'i thog mar lo rgyus dge ba'i lcags kyu	268	5
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi dbang chog bde chen klong yangs (kha) – 1	290	41
g.yu thog snying thig gi bla sgrub kyi don dbang mdor bsdus (ga) – 2	307	67
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi dam tshig rdo rje'i rgya mdud (nga) – 3	310	71
dam tshig rdo rje'i rgya mdud las zhal gdams gsal ba'i sgron me (ca) – 4	313	74
g.yu thog snying thig zab mo bla sgrub las phyi sgrub yid bzhin nor bu (cha) – 5	316	78
g.yu thog snying thig bla ma nang sgrub dgos 'dod kun 'byung (ja) – 6	322	87
g.yu thog snying thig zab mo bla sgrub las gsang sgrub skal ldan myur 'dren (nya) – 7	326	93
g.yu thog snying thig bla ma dril sgrub ye shes 'khor lo (ta) – 8	331	102
zab mo bla sgrub las mkha' 'gro myur mgyogs (tha) – 9	333	104
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub mkha' 'gro myur mgyogs (da) – 10	337	111
byin rlabs bla sgrub sdug bsngal mun sel thugs rje'i nyi 'od las rigs lnga'i mngon rtogs bsdus pa (na) – 11	338	112
g.yu thog snying thig gi bla ma nang sgrub kyi zhal gdams dngos grub kyi rdzing bu (pa) – 12	339	112
g.yu thog snying thig gi bla ma gsang sgrub kyi zhal gdams mchog gi bde lam (pha) – 13	341	114
khros ma'i gsang sgrub – 14	–	115
byin rlabs bla ma sman rgyal gyi sgrub thabs las grub chen ma hA gu Na'i snyan brgyud gsang sgrub (ba) – 15	343	116
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi phyi gtor bsngos pa kun tshim (ma) – 16	346	121

bla ma sman rgyal gyi sgrub thabs las gzhung dngos grub kun gyi 'byung gnas las phyi gtor bsngos pa kun tshim sman mchod dang gtor ma'i lhan thabs tshogs gnyis myur rdzogs las byang ma bu don sdebs (tsa) – 17	348	124
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi bdud rtsi sman mchod lhan thabs – 18	–	142
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi gtor ma'i lhan thabs tshogs gnyis myur rdzogs – 19	–	143
byin rlabs bla sgrub las rtsa ba gsum gyi mdangs bskang 'od kyi dra ba (tsha) – 20	362	145
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi rdzogs rim sku gsum rang shar (dza) – 21	366	150
bla sgrub sdug bsngal mun sel gyi 'khrul 'khor gyi rtsa tshig (wa) – 22	387	183
g.yu thog snying thig byin rlabs bla sgrub kyi chos skor las ngo sprod 'khor 'das rang grol chen mo (zha) – 23	390	186
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi 'byung ba lus 'khrugs kyi gegs sel (za) – 24	398	199
byin rlabs bla sgrub las gsang ba bar chad bdud kyi gegs sel ('a) – 25	431	253
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi lam rtags gsal byed nor bu'i sgron me (ya) – 26	432	254
bla sgrub brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs (ra) – 27	441	268
g.yu thog snying thig gi bla ma'i nral 'byor byin rlabs kyi chu bo (ra) – 28	443	270
byin rlabs bla sgrub las nyams len rgyun khyer (la) – 29	445	272
g.yu thog snying thig gi gtor mchod 'bul ba (sha) – 30	448	276
gang sku gsang chen ma (sa) – 31	450	278
byin rlabs bla sgrub las tshe dbang 'chi bdag bdud 'joms kyi sgrub pa (ha) – 32	451	278
g.yu thog snying thig gi bla sgrub kyi tshe dbang 'chi bdag bdud 'joms (a) – 33	454	282
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi sbyin sreg las kun myur 'grub (ki) – 34	458	286
byin rlabs bla sgrub kyi las tshogs las srung 'khor 'jigs pa kun skyob (khu) – 35	461	291
g.yu thog snying thig las lha sman gyi pra sgrub dngul dkar me long (ge) – 36	463	294
byin rlabs bla sgrub las lha sman gyi rjes gnang ma la bu 'khor (ngo) – 37	469	303
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi las tshogs lha sman rgab 'dre mnan thabs mthu stobs gser gyi ri bo (ci) – 38	472	306

dngul bre las drang srong ser skya'i sgrub thabs (chu) – 39	474	309
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi drang srong pra sgrub yid bzhin nor bu (je) – 40	477	314
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi dam can gyi mngon rtogs gsal ba'i me long (nyo) – 41	482	322
dam can sde dgu'i mdangs bskang dregs pa tshar gcod (ti) – 42	485	326
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi bka' srung sde dgu'i mchod bstod bskul gsum spu gri dug ngar (thu) – 43	489	332
byin rlabs bla sgrub las dam can sde dgu'i sgrub thabs drag po mtshon cha'i 'khor lo dgra srog dmar 'byin – 44	494	338
chos skyong gsol kha myur mgyogs glog gi 'od 'bar (de) – 45	500	348
g.yu thog snying thig bla sgrub kyi dam can sde dgu'i sngags byang srog gi thig le (no) – 46	503	351
g.yu thog snying thig gi rdzogs rim nye brgyud gsol 'debs – 47	504	353
dam chos sdug bsngal mun sel thugs rje'i nyi 'od kyi cha lag ku su la'i tshogs gsoq – 48	505	353

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