

The Transmission of Tibetan Medicine: Spiritual Growth, Questions of Method and Contemporary Practice

University of Oxford
ArgO-EMR workshop 2014

Thursday-Friday May 22-23
Pauling centre, Seminar room
58a Banbury Road

Sponsored by the Wellcome Trust
of the post-doctoral project by Dr. Mingji Cuomu
Transmission in Tibetan Medicine'

in the context
'Sacred

DAY ONE, Thursday 22 May 2014

2 pm

The application of the sacred transmissions in the Buddhist context

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro (Dean of Serthar Buddhist Institute)

In this paper, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro will introduce the rituals of the various levels of empowerments and also explain the purpose and underlying effects of empowerment in the individual's learning path.

3 pm

Sacred Transmissions: the concept and its significance

Mingji Cuomu (ISCA, University of Oxford)

This presentation will focus on the meaning of sacred transmission, and also briefly discuss under what philosophical view learning strategies and principles sacred transmission has been developed and how it can help to gain a better insight in studying the targeted learning fields. This deeper analysis will give rise to a discussion of how Tibetan culture encourages an interlinking of various areas of learning, enabling not only the gaining of knowledge but also better wellbeing, even the ability to achieve a 'highly awaken wisdom' (*stong nyid rtogs pa'i shes rab*). As far as the medical field is concerned, we shall examine the ability not only to learn medical related knowledge but also the ability to see causal dynamic factors (*nyes pa'i 'byung rkyen*) of the various health problems as well as a the building of inner healing power as part of the 'self-cultivation learning' (*nang gi nyams len*) as a medical physician. The presentation aims to help professionals who have begun to realise that there is an insufficiency in the current methods of knowledge transmission but not what it is that is actually missing. It underlines the significance of sacred transmission as somewhat hidden and implicit in daily medical training work.

4-4.30 pm Tea break

4.30 pm

The Yuthog Nyingthig: The Lineage of Spiritual Practices Associated with Tibetan Medicine

Geoffrey Samuel (Cardiff University & University of Sydney)

The Yuthog Nyingthig is a lineage of spiritual practice which forms part of the Dzogchen tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. It is plausibly attributed to one of the founding figures of Sowa Rigpa ('Tibetan medicine'), Yuthok Yontan Gonpo the Younger (1126-1202), who was probably also the codifier of the Four Tantras (Gyüdshi), the canonical text of Sowa Rigpa.

As a set of Buddhist practices, it forms one of a number of nyingthig ('Seminal Heart') lineages within the Dzogchen tradition, of which the best known are the four Nyingthig Yabzhi traditions codified by the distinguished 14th century Nyingmapa scholar Longchen Rabjampa Drime Ozer (1308-1364), and the Longchen Nyingthig, said to have been revealed by Longchen Rabjampa to the 18th century scholar Jigme Lingpa (1730-1798). While other nyingthig lineages contain health-related texts, these form a relatively minor part in most cases, being primarily concerned with element-balancing practices, apparently intended to assist yogins in solitary retreat to manage their physical health condition. The Yuthok Nyingthig contains a much wider range of health-related texts and practices, both Tantric and pharmacological in nature.

The importance of the Yuthog Nyingthig has decreased in recent years with the progressive biomedicalisation of Sowa Rigpa, both in and outside the PRC, though it is still widely used for the medicine-empowerment practices that form an important part of Sowa Rigpa pharmacology. A number of recent studies of Sowa Rigpa by Frances Garrett, Franz-Karl Ehrhard and others have thrown some light on the history and contents of the Yuthog Nyingthig. The relationship between the Yuthog Nyingthig and Sowa Rigpa has nevertheless not been explored in detail, and it would seem that a thorough investigation of this relationship might throw light on the complex and so far poorly understood relationship between 'spiritual' and 'medical' aspects of Sowa Rigpa.

5.30 pm

The Arig Family Lineage of Physicians

Lama Dietschy (physician of Arig family lineage), Dr. Mona Schrempf (Wellcome Trust Research Fellow, University of Westminster, London)

The Arig *menpa gyüpa* nomadic family lineage of physicians from Kozi in Amdo has passed through at least five generations. Lama Dietschy is one of the two present holders of this tradition. The earliest known proponent was Dechen Gyatso (bDe chen rGya mtsho), alias Arig Gegen, a Tantric practitioner (*sngags pa*) of the *gcod* tradition who studied Tibetan medicine in Lhasa and taught and practiced as a physician at Labrang Monastery (Gansu Province). Following him, Arig physician lineage holders were either monk teachers at Labrang monastery, passing their knowledge along uncle-nephew transmission pathways, or they became lay physicians within their own nomadic communities in Kozi. Each generation had many other students. However, it is only within the descent lineage itself that certain religious knowledge is passed on. This includes the *gcod* tradition, as well as special *smän sngags* (tantric mantras for healing), and the initiation, transmission and empowerment into practice on a particular local female deity named Lo gyun ma, specific to the Arig tradition. Next to learning from and working together with Akhe Nyima, the founder of the Qinghai Tibetan Medical Hospital in Xining, Lama Dietschy also received religious teachings, initiations and empowerments from Akhe Tamdringya, the main theory teacher at the Qinghai Tibetan Medical College. Giving case studies, we will explain how 'secret' knowledge enables the physician 'to know' (*rig pa*), that is, to realize clearly in the refined state of mind, such things as a clear pulse diagnosis, whether or not a patient can recover (karmic reasons), what kinds of medicine the patient needs, and altogether to

succeed in fostering a better healing effect. Also, we will examine the concept of 'blessing' in the sense of empowerment (*byin rlabs*) in the making of medicines and why it is an important part of the efficacy of medicines from a family lineage point of view.

6.30 - 7pm Discussion

7.30 pm Dinner in Magic Café

DAY TWO, Friday 23 May 2014

9 am

Empowering Medicine: Authority, Embodied Practice, and Ritual Events

Sienna Craig (Anthropology Department, Dartmouth University), Barbara Gerke, Theresia Hofer, Calum Blaikie)

In December 2011, a group of 40 practitioners of Tibetan medicine from Ladakh in India, northern Nepal, and Tibetan regions of China (Tibet Autonomous Region and Qinghai Province) and four anthropologists gathered for a workshop titled, Producing Efficacious Medicine: Quality, Potency, Lineage, and Critically Endangered Knowledge. The idea for this workshop emerged from discussions between anthropologists and Tibetan medical practitioners who had gathered for the 7th International Congress on Traditional Asian Medicine (ICTAM) congress in Bhutan, in September 2009. Central to the vision of this workshop was a desire among diverse practitioners to access a particular empowerment (*dbang*), and with it a form of medical, spiritual, and embodied authority to produce and practice good medicine. Specifically, these practitioners wanted to receive the Yuthog Heart Essence empowerment (*gyu mthogs snying thigs dbang*), a text and a ritual cycle understood as foundational to Tibetan medical knowledge transmission. The ten-day workshop which grew out of this initial inspiration focused on efforts to record, validate, and pragmatically explore the diversity and depth of these individuals' knowledge and skill about medicine making. This not only included the empowerment but also eventuated in making three medicines as a collective and performing a *smān grub* (literally "accomplishing the medicine") ritual as a culminating experience.

This paper discusses this Yuthog Heart Essence empowerment event from several angles, recounting discussions had between *amchi* and anthropologists about the nature of authoritative knowledge and the roles that this sort of knowledge transmission plays at a time of significant changes, including secularized, standardized, and commoditized tendencies, to how Tibetan doctors are trained and practice today. We explore the initial motivations behind this request and the work involved in staging this ritual, including the dynamics involved in sponsoring this empowerment. Performed in a prominent *nyingma* Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Kathmandu, the event was not only open to the practitioners who came for this workshop but for an audience of more than 200 medicine practitioners, monks, and laypeople. We describe the ritual text in question and reflect on the relationship between textual, orally transmitted, and embodied forms of spiritual learning and medical authority that is produced and conferred through such ritual practice. This includes an analysis of a lively debate between gathered practitioners about the role such ritual activity plays in relation to producing efficacious medicines, participating in medical lineages, and grappling with massive changes to the form, content, expectations, and scope of Tibetan medical knowledge transmission today.

10 am

Tibetan Medical Education in Exile

Stephan Kloos (Austrian Academy of Sciences)

This paper will give a broad ethnographic and historic overview of Tibetan medical education in exile, that is, mainly in India. While the transmission of Sowa Rigpa expertise in pre-1959 Tibet and along the Himalayan belt until today is characterized by a variety of teaching modes, I will argue that for various historical, political and pragmatic reasons, within the exile community this has been almost exclusively restricted to institutions. The three main training institutions in the Tibetan exile are the Dharamsala Men-Tsee-Khang, the Darjeeling Chagpori, and the Central University for Tibetan Studies (CUTS) in Sarnath. Discussing these three medical colleges and their curricula, I will show both the differences and the continuities to other institutional and non-institutional teaching modes. Contrary to widespread assumptions regarding the secularization of Tibetan medical education in large institutions or the loss of lineage affiliations, at least some of these institutes explicitly operate on the logics of the (medical and spiritual) lineage and make increasing efforts to inculcate their students with a religious (Buddhist) ethics, occasionally even resorting to monastic routines. Finally, this paper will briefly discuss the latest developments regarding Tibetan medical training in India, as it is poised to be newly regulated by a national curriculum and degree system after its official recognition by the government.

11 am - 11.30 am Coffee

11.30

A Comparative Study of Tibetan Medicine Curriculums

Colin Millard (Queen Mary, University of London)

This paper will discuss changing forms of Tibetan medical knowledge viewed through developments in Tibetan medicine curriculums. Tibetan medicine education has occurred through four teaching modes, these are: person to person medical lineages based on an apprenticeship pattern of learning; small schools; monastic medical schools, and large secular medical colleges. The view taken here on the transmission of Tibetan medical knowledge draws on a body of literature on the situated nature of learning. Education must be considered in its social, cultural, historical and political context. In this sense the form of knowledge and the methods of how that knowledge should be reproduced are deeply interrelated. Each of the Tibetan medical modes of transmission has its own patterns of teaching and curriculum, with different views Tibetan medical knowledge and different roles for memorisation, lineage, and assessment. This paper will compare curriculums in each of these modes beginning with the premodern modern modes of person to person medical lineages and curriculums in early monastic medical schools. The paper will then move on to consider forms of knowledge and patterns of transmission in modern curriculums in medical schools in Tibet, Nepal, India, and in the UK and the US.

12.30 am

Sacred transmission in Tibetan medical education

Lucham Gyal (Dean of Qinghai Tibetan Medical College)

As Tibetan medicine is viewed as one of the five major disciplines in Tibetan culture, it needs to follow the same transmission methods as required in the five volumes of teaching (*gzhung bka' pod lnga*¹).

In this paper, I would like to focus my research on some of the transmission methods that have been particularly emphasised in traditional education, which are mainly represented by empowerment, textual reading transmission, didactic teaching, hands on experience (*thong brgyud phyag len*) and special instruction passed to a single transmission lineage (*gdam pa chig brgyud*). Presenting this through a simple example, one requires the empowerment of the "Yuthog Nyingthig" (*G.yu thog snying thig*), the textual reading transmission of "Instructions of Secret Command - Seal Teachings" (*gdams nag bak' rgya ma*) and the detailed didactic teaching of "the Four Tantras" (*rgyud bzhi*) in order to become a fine physician. Physicians, who have not obtained these three transmissions, even if they have received a single transmission lineage from the greatest of masters, would still not be considered as having satisfied the requirements for gaining correct results. In addition, it would not be beneficial to read and learn the texts without having received the required empowerment and textual reading transmission. On the other hand, it is obvious that these days there is no way to keep matters unchanged and resist any foreign cultural influences, when information and technology are at such a fast pace of development, and therefore it is also difficult to keep Tibetan medicine unaffected by the influences of modern medicine and science. Therefore instead of rejecting such impact, we shall carefully examine the different problems, which arise, and attempt to solve them with the aim of preserving traditional knowledge in the new social and cultural environment.

1.30 pm – 2. pm Discussion

2.30 pm – 3.30 pm Lunch in the Gardeners Arms on Plantation Road

4 pm – 6 pm (to be confirmed)

Round Table Discussion with Tibetan Medical Practitioners

A discussion between spiritual Masters, traditional medical practitioners and social science researchers on holistic healing approaches.

¹ 1) logic. {*tshad ma*}. degree curriculum. 2) Madhyamika. {*dbu ma*}. middle way view. 3) Prajnaparamita. {*phar phyin*}. valid cognition. 4) Abhidharma-Kosha. {*mngon pa mdzod*}. phenomenology. 5) Vinaya. {*dul ba*}. Syn monastic discipline. {*gzhung po ti lnga*}