



## Patterns in the ritual dissemination of Padma gling pa's Treasure Cycles

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Padma gling pa (1450–1521) is Bhutan's indigenous saint *par excellence* in a country that owes much of its Buddhist heritage to proselytizers from Tibet. Acquiring prominence in large part due to his status as a gter ston, Padma gling pa attained widespread renown in his own lifetime, and the treasures (gter ma) he revealed became focal points of regional identity and religiosity. The very grassroots nature of his career, building a base first locally in Bum thang and later extending it to Lho brag and Kong po, contributed to his standing as a local saint with implications for Bhutanese nation formation in the centuries following his death.

Elsewhere I argue that narrative genres in Padma gling pa's treasure corpus construct a blueprint for modes of dissemination enacted in the ritual arena. Specifically, I trace the construction of temporal junctures, or contact points, that link Padma gling pa and his discovery sites to Padmasambhava and establish the basis for ritual efficacy. The emphasis on face-to-face meetings depicted in narrative genres suggest direct contact as a normative mode of dissemination for the primarily ritual content of Padma gling pa's corpus. In his autobiography, moreover, it is evident that access to Padma gling pa's treasure cycles involved a face-to-face mechanism of authorization (*bka' lung*), often via a community event. I conclude that a community of faithful (*dad pa ldan*) is both addressed and constituted by Padma gling pa's textual production and its dissemination.

In this paper, I examine more closely the modes and patterns of ritual dissemination recorded in Padma gling pa's autobiography. As such, I hope to supplement Michael Aris' study of Padma gling pa by focusing on ritual activities, omitted for the most part in *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives*. Padma gling pa's autobiography provides a plethora of information concerning his ritual activities and makes evident the extent to which he vigorously propagated his treasures. Consistently, Padma gling pa notes the sponsor, location, scale and participants of rituals he performed as well as the gifts received as offerings. While I provided several examples of this previously, this paper proposes a

more systematic analysis of Padma gling pa's ritual activities, which may yield insights into the social historical dimensions of treasures. Indeed, because treasures are often the focal point for public occasions, in their discovery and in their dissemination, it is important to investigate the contribution of gter stons to community formation in Himalayan areas.

As part of this systematic analysis, I attempt to reconstruct the network of people and places linked through the propagation of Padma gling pa's treasures. While tantric rituals often involve a group of participants with concomitant pledges of allegiance, treasures constitute community in a unique way, because they are anchored to a geographic place. In his early career as a gter ston, Padma gling pa typically disseminated his treasures in large-scale gatherings throughout the area surrounding a discovery site. Over time, he consolidated a network of sites within the four valleys of Bum thang and across the border in southern Tibet as his domain of conversion (*gdul zhing*). Indeed, if we map his discovery sites across the Himalayan landscape, we can see the extent to which Padma gling pa's career began locally and expanded into a decidedly regional scope.

While I hope this paper will contribute to a further understanding of Padma gling pa as a religious figure of special importance to Bhutan, I also intend to augment the foundational scholarship on gter ma by Janet Gyatso. Specifically, by considering the role of gter ma in community formation and regional identity, I emphasize the social function and performative dimensions of treasure texts. In addition, by detailing the patterns in the ritual dissemination of Padma gling pa's treasures, I hope to make a theoretical contribution to ritual studies more broadly by explore a suggestion made by Charles Ramble: the triangulation of text, community and place.