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An Old Tibetan Myth on Retribution for Killing the Nyen (*Gnyan stong*): Manuscripts Scattered between Naxi, Tanguts, Eastern and Western Tibet

Abstract: This chapter introduces eleven versions of a myth that appear in both Tibetan and Naxi sources. The myth concerns the payment of retribution (*stong*) for killing a type of non-human being known as Nyen (*gnyan*) by members of a (human) Tibetan protoclan named Dong (Ldong). Six versions appear in Tibetan sources, and five in Naxi manuscripts. The Tibetan sources in question are the so-called Nyen Collection (*Gnyan 'bum*), of which four versions are available; the Tö Collection (*Gtod 'bum*), of which we have one version; and finally, a manuscript dealing with aquatic spirits Lu (*klu*) that was found in Gathang Bumpa Stupa, southern Tibet. One of the five Naxi versions was paraphrased in English by Joseph Rock in 1952. The fact that there are numerous surviving versions suggests that this myth was once well-known in eastern Tibet. It also provides a link between Naxi myths, East Tibetan non-Buddhist traditions, and West Tibet, where two versions of the Nyen Collection were found.

1 Introduction

The present paper touches upon a fascinating, but very puzzling, topic of a certain non-Buddhist mytho-poetic tradition related to eastern Tibet. This tradition is found in an interesting corpus of myths known as the Nyen Collection (*Gnyan 'bum*), which was the subject of an article by Samten G. Karmay¹ and two recent contributions by myself.² However, this lore apparently did not live in isolation: the surviving corpus of myths, which features in the three known versions of the Nyen Collection, is clearly not some ur-version that was immune to any changes: the extant versions bear signs of amendments, as well as additions and compilations from diverse sources. The Nyen Collection is related to three other large

1 Karmay 2010.

2 Berounsky 2016 and 2017.

corpora of texts: the Sadag Collection (*Sa bdag 'bum*), the Tö Collection (*Gtod 'bum*) and the Lu Collection (*Klu 'bum*). The four appear in the Bon canon as a quartet known as the Four Collections (*'Bum bzhi*).³ It has recently been established that the lore connected with the Nyen Collection is also to be found in a number of non-canonical works from eastern Tibet, specifically the Thewo (The bo), Zitsha Degu (Gzi rtsa sde dgu) and Drugchu (*'Brug chu*) regions of Amdo (in Sichuan and Gansu). These works represent the ritual repertoire of a class of priests known as *leu*, who practise a form of Bon that has been relatively little influenced by Buddhism. Facsimile reproductions of many of these manuscripts – often in barely intelligible Tibetan – have now been published in some 100 volumes, and further volumes of texts currently being prepared for publication.⁴ Moreover, through the published research by Toni Huber and consultations with him, it became clear that some features of the myths contained in the Nyen Collection are also present in the area of Arunachal Pradesh and eastern Bhutan.⁵ It seems that the content of these texts may also be shared by the Naxi and Primi people of present-day Sichuan province in the People's Republic of China.



Fig. 1: Two *leu* ritualists of Phenchu, Gendun (middle) and Sherab Dragpa (right), with Ngawang Gyatso; photo: author 2017.

³ For a discussion of the version of the *Klu 'bum* that constitutes one of the works in this quartet, see the contribution by Bazhen Zeren in this volume.

⁴ For an informative article in Tibetan see Blo gsal and Bkra shis tshe ring 2015. For information about the *le'u* tradition of Thewo in English see Ngawang Gyatso 2016. For the recently published ten volumes from Thewo see Tsering Thar and Ngawang Gyatso 2017; for sixty volumes see 'Brug thar 2003, for thirty volumes of manuscripts from Ldong khrom (identified erroneously as being from Mda' tshang) see 'Brug thar 2011. Some translations of the *le'u* texts by Charles Ramble and reproductions of the originals are also available on the website <http://kalpa-bon.com> (last accessed on 10 January 2018).

⁵ Huber 2013. The monumental two-volume outcome of Toni Huber's research appeared after the present chapter had been submitted for publication (see Huber 2020).

Given the existence of hundreds of barely-comprehensible ritual texts that have been made available recently, obtaining a comprehensive overview of such a vast corpus of oral and literary works related to the enormous variety of rituals would certainly be a challenging task.

Nevertheless, there is a certain promising starting point. The Nyen Collection contains a unique feature that is absent from the rest of the texts mentioned: the fact that names are frequently given both in Tibetan (*spu rgyal bod kyi skad du na*) and in ‘the language Nampa Dong’ (*nam pa ldong kyi skad du na*). This, together with the fact that Shenrab Miwo appears in these myths not as a divine Buddha-like figure but as a human specialist in ritual performances, distinguishes this particular collection of texts from those dedicated to the Sadag, Lu and Tö. Putting aside for now the problem of the identity of Nampa Dong (a name that seems to denote one of the tribes referred to as Qiang in the Chinese chronicles), the collection contains indications of apparent antiquity.⁶

The three versions of the Nyen Collection itself contain a rather large number of different myths. However, there is a single relatively long myth that is present in all three. This is rather rare, and it could suggest that this particular myth was well-known and constituted some important part of the ritual tradition connected with the Nyen. The myth contains a narration exposing the origin of the exaction of retribution for killing a Nyen (*gnyan stong*) by the early ancestors of the Dong (Ldong) clan. The myth is also interesting for a number of reasons apart from its central plot. For example, it features the famous mountain god Machen Pomra as one of its crucial characters, and it also recounts the original event that resulted in the Nyen becoming attached to trees, rocks, rivers and soil; the worship of the Nyen of stones, trees, waters and soil seems to be a pan-Tibetan tradition nowadays, and thus such an exposition of the origin of the tradition is clearly of some importance.

But the versions of this particular myth do not stop with the Nyen Collection. One of its versions appears also in the Tö Collection (*Gtod ’bum*). Despite its common plot, this version speaks not only about Nyen but also about the Sadag and Tö. This fact points to the rather ambiguous status of the Nyen as understood by this version: they are apparently beings who split into more categories of Tö and Sadag.

Joseph Rock’s two volumes of *Na-khi Nâga Cult* contain yet another version of the same myth recorded in the Naxi pictographic script, which was paraphrased by the author of the book with the aid of a Naxi ritualist.⁷ Another version in

⁶ Berounský 2017.

⁷ Rock 1952, 307–314.

pictographic script appears in a manuscript in the Harvard-Yenching collection.⁸ Moreover, three more Naxi versions of the same myth are to be found in the collections kept in Berlin.⁹ The core of the narration in these Naxi texts has been rather well preserved when compared with the Tibetan versions, but the fact that the myth is narrated in a pictographic script means that the identity of the main characters is uncertain. The fact that it primarily concerns the Nyen beings is not apparent from the Rock's English rendering of it, the identity of the mountain god Machen Pomra also remained hidden, and so forth.

Among the myths contained in the Nyen Collection of the Bon Canon there is a story in which the Wise Bat visits the dead Son of Nyen and reveals that he has produced a son. As a result, the Wise Bat leads the deceased Son of Nyen back to the world of the living and to his family. This story suggests both that the myth of the killing of the Nyen was once very well known, and also that the main body of the narration was subject to modification and embellishment.

Among the manuscripts found in Gathang Bumpa Stupa of southern Tibet appears a version of the myth which contains a very similar plot.¹⁰ These manuscripts are of uncertain date, but tentatively ascribed to the eleventh century or earlier.¹¹ In this case the conflict does not happen between the Nyen and original Dong people but between aquatic spirits (*klu*) and original people designated as Ma (Smra). It has not been recognised in either of the two studies of the myth that one of the main characters, called Maphodra (Rma pho 'bra), is none other than Machen Pomra (Rma chen pom ra) – a famous mountain god of eastern Tibet. Despite this narration having been incorporated into the series of myths (*rabs*) dealing with *byol* rituals (probably for averting bad omens, *ltas ngan*) in the regions of Central and West Tibet, the fact that Machen Pomra figures there as a main character increases the probability that the plot of this myth travelled from eastern Tibet to the locality of Gathang Bumpa Stupa in southern Tibet.

In sum, there are eleven versions of this myth available. Six of them are written in Tibetan and the other five are recorded in the Naxi pictographic script.

⁸ These are manuscripts B41 and B42. See https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/25/archival_objects/1183971 (last accessed on 9 August 2022).

⁹ See Janert 1977, 861. I am indebted to Michael Friedrich for pointing out these three versions kept in Berlin.

¹⁰ Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus and Glang ru Nor bu tshe ring 2007, Karmay 2009, Bellezza 2010.

¹¹ Karmay 2009.

2 The manuscripts

Table 1: A list of the manuscript versions.

Version A of Bon Kangjur (vol. 141, eighteenth chapter (*le'u*) entitled *Chapter on Reconciliation of People and Nyen* (*Mi dang gnyan bsdum pa'i le'u*, pp. 122–201). This is, however, formed by various narrations of apparently diverse backgrounds and the shorter story under the focus appears only on the pages 122–143, which, however continues with some extensions up to the page 180).

Version B of *Gtod 'bum* of Bon Kangyur (chapter entitled *Breaking the egg of Khyung /Khyung gi sgong nga bcag pa'i smrengs so/*, vol. 142, pp. 378–400).

Version C, addendum to a longer version without title (*Gnyan 'bum*, Bon Kangyur, 141(316)–17, *le'u* 25, pp. 316–318).

Version D, *'Phen yul rgyas pa gnyan gyi 'bum*, found in Phenchu, introduced as *Yo chu'i gnyan stong*, fol. 29a–34a, In Tsering Thar and Ngawang Gyatso, eds, *Gna' rabs bon gyi dpe dkon bris ma*, vol. 3, Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang 2017, pp. 55–65.

Version E contained in *Nye lam sde bzhi* corpus of texts (New Bonpo Katen, 253–25, pp. 615–623, *le'u* gnyis pa of *Nye lam sde bzhi'i gnyan 'bum bzhugs pa'i dbus phyogs legs so*).

Versions F, G, H, I, J: Naxi manuscript *The Story of* ¹*Ddo*-³*ssaw*-¹*ngo*-²*t'u*. Library of Harvard-Yenching Institute B–41 (north of Li-chiang/Lijang), for translation see Rock 1952, 307–314 (**F**), Library of Harvard-Yenching Institute B–42 (west of Li-chiang/ Lijang) (**G**). Three versions kept in Berlin (**H, I, J**), for references to them see Janert 1977, 861.

Version K, untitled narration forming a part of *Byol rabs* cycle of myths found in Gathang Bumpa Stüpa, see Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus - Glang ru Nor bu tshe ring 2007, Karmay 2009, Bellezza 2010.

All eleven manuscripts listed above firstly exhibit a fair knowledge about this myth in very diverse areas and epochs. The actual origin of these manuscripts can be traced back only in certain cases and with only fragmentary information about them.

The largest number of manuscripts – versions A, B and C – appear in the Bon Kanjur. So far the only edition of the Kanjur available has its source in a manuscript from Walkhyung (Dbal khyung) monastery in Nyarong (Nyag rong). This manuscript Kanjur is in turn based on a manuscript edition of the Kanjur from Nagchukha (Nag chu kha).¹² The origin of the manuscript of both the Nyen and Tö Collections, where the three versions of the myth under consideration appear, is ascribed to a very remote event, which might have happened around the turn

¹² For a very informative account of this version of the Bon Kanjur, see Martin 2003.

of the tenth and eleventh centuries, since it is said to have occurred before the famous rediscovery of Bon scriptures by Shenchen Luga (Gshen chen klu dga') in 1017.¹³ It would thus represent one of the earliest textual 'treasures' (*gter*) of the Bon religion. The chronicle by Shardza Trashi Gyaltsen describes it in the following way:

Once when three hunters, Mar-pa 'Phen-bzang, etc., were digging at the root of a tree to get stones beside a lake called Shel-mtsho mu-le-hed in sPu-rangs, some charcoal emerged and on further digging three wooden boxes appeared. Having found many manuscripts in them they returned home and sold them to Shu-bon dGe-bsnyan. The manuscripts were the Klu-'bum dkar nag khra gsum in three volumes, and the Klu gnyan sa-bdag gtod-kyi 'bum together with its ancillary texts.¹⁴

This mention is from Shardza's Chronicle, which the author began to compose in 1922 and is repeated almost verbatim (but mentioning 'scrolls') in the Bon Chronicle by Pelden Tshultrim (Dpal ldan tshul khrim, 1902–1973), written even later in the twentieth century.¹⁵ This is, however, somehow corroborated by other relatively late, but still earlier chronicles and catalogues of the Bon Kanjur. For example, Yungdrung Tsultrim Wangdrag (G.yung drung tshul khrim dbang grags) states in his survey of Bon literature written over the years 1876 to 1880:

This is a fourfold collection on Lu, Nyen, Sadag and Tö, which the hunter Marpa Phenla Zong extracted¹⁶ from the surface of a rock near Mulehe lake of Purang, and which increased the accomplishment of Shubon Genyen...¹⁷

Another mention appears in the chronicle by Kundrol Dragpa (Kun sgrol grags pa), written in 1742:

¹³ Martin 2001.

¹⁴ Karmay 1972, 124.

¹⁵ One of its published versions states that the work was composed between the years 1964 and 1966, but the 1972 edition says that it was completed only in the year of publication, i.e. 1972. See Dpal tshul 1988, 318; Martin 1997, 190.

¹⁶ The name of the hunter is given as Mar pa 'phen la bzang in other sources; here *gzong* appears instead of *bzang*. It could therefore be understood that he extracted the scriptures 'with a chisel' (*gzong gis*).

¹⁷ *pu rang mu le he kyi mtsho 'gram brag kha nas khyi ra ba mar pa 'phen la gzong gis gter la thon pa shu bon dge bsnyen gyi dngos grub du spel ba'i klu gnyan sa bdag gtod bzhi'i 'bum bzhi yod pas/* (G.yung drung tshul khrim dbang grags, 301).

Mar pa 'phen la bzang po found several scrolls in the treasure cavern near the lake of Purang in the three wooden boxes with White, Black and Variegeted Lu Collection in eight parts together with the four-fold Collection of the four: Lu, Nyen, Sadag and Tö...¹⁸

There are more such references differing in minor details,¹⁹ but all of them are relatively late, coming mostly from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. I have not been able to identify any references with earlier dates closer to the events described. This event is, however, briefly listed in the chronicle by Paten Zangpo (Spa bstan Bzang po) – probably from the fifteenth century – stating that a hunter rediscovered ‘fierce mantras’ (*drag sngags*) and the *Klu 'bum khra bo* from the rock of Sheldrag (Shel brag) or Drag Gyabo (Brag rgya bo) of Purang.²⁰ According to the monastic Bon tradition it is apparent enough that the versions of the Nyen and Tö Collections that form part of the Bon Kanjur are considered to be identical to the text found by the hunters in western Tibet at the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The question as to what forms the earlier basis for such statements remains open.

Since the content of the Nyen Collection also differs from the rest of the collections with the occurrence of the bilingual names given both in the language of Nampa Dong (Nam pa Ldong) and Tibetan, it is worth mentioning a rather interesting note in a chronicle from the beginning of the twentieth century. In the genre dealing with the treasure revelations of Bon scriptures, the discovery of the Fourfold Collections is followed by the discovery of ‘treasure’ (*gter*) by a certain Trotshang Druglha (Khro tshang 'Brug lha, born in 956?),²¹ who also lived in western Tibet around the same time. The text interestingly states first that his father was related to Nampa Dong, and secondly that he discovered a ritual text dedicated to Nyenje Gong Ngon (*Gnyan rje gong sngon*), with the full title *Outer sādhanā of Nyenje Gong Ngon* (*Gnyan rje gong sngon gyi phyi sgrub*). As we shall see later, Nyenje Gong Ngon figures in the myth under consideration, and a mountain with the same name is known in the area of Amchog (A mchog) of

18 *mar pa 'phen la bzang po yi/ pu rang mtsho 'gram ke'u tshang nas/ shing sgam gsum rnyed shog dril 'gar/ klu 'bum dkar nag khra gsum la/ dum bu brgyad du 'phel bar byung/ klu gnyen (=gnyan) sa bdag gtod bzhi la/ 'bum bzhi cha lag bcas pa byung/* (Sangs rgyas bstan pa spyi yi 'byung khung, 310).

19 See the notes about such references in the introduction to the Bon Kanjur Catalogue by Dan Martin. He also mentions a lineage of the masters who transmitted the texts (Martin, Kvaerne and Nagano 2003).

20 Spa bstan rgyal bzang 1991, 204.

21 The date of his birth is suggested by Dan Martin, who provides interesting details on him and his meeting with Milarepa and Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas (see Martin 2001, 117).

contemporary Amdo, not far from the famous Labrang monastery. The mention of his connection with Nampa Dong is expressed in the following way:²²

Also, the earliest of all treasures was that of Khrotshang Druglha. He was a miraculous manifestation of Shen Tsheme Öden. He was born to his father Trotshang Sekhar Nyen, who was related to the family of Nampa Dong, and his mother Darza Dronma...²³

Although, again, this reference is very late – the chronicle was composed in 1917 – and the source for this information is not provided, it can still point to the fact that the early revelations of these texts occurred partly under the influence of the mythical and ritual tradition of Nampa Dong from eastern Tibet.²⁴

The Tö Collection (*Gtod 'bum*) contains a colophon. It mentions Wal Gyalwa Nang Nyiö (Dbal Rgyal ba Snang nyi 'od) as a master who 'practised the Word,' and passed it on to Tönpa Wang Chen (Ston pa dbang chen), from whom it spread in Nguldza Gang (Dngul rdza sgang) of Dokham (Mdo khams).²⁵ The identity of these masters is not clear. Nguldza Gang is a place name associated with Khyungpo Tengchen Ling monastery (Khyung po Steng chen gling, in present-day Chamdo prefecture) and there is a high probability that the colophon mentions this place.²⁶

Regarding the titles of the myths, that of version A could be rendered as *Reconciliation of People and Nyen*. The title of version B is *Breaking the egg of Garuda* (*Khyung gi sgo nga bcag pa*). This metaphorical title is explained inside the text, when the killing of the Son of Nyen is poetically rendered as 'killing the egg of Garuda.' However, it is interesting that version A contains a similar passage, in which it does not speak about Garuda (*khyung*), but a crane (*khruṅg khruṅg*). It says that 'by killing the Son of Nyen the egg of the crane was broken' (*Gnyan 'bum*, 141). The crane is the bird of the Nyen. Due to the fact that the manuscript is written in 'headless' (*dbu med*) script, using many contractions, the term for crane is often abbreviated as *khruṅg+ng*, which rather resembles the written form

²² Mkhas grub lung rtogs rgya mtsho 2010, 503–4.

²³ *de yang gter kun gyi snga ba rje btsun khro tshang 'brug lha yin te/ khong gshen tshad med 'od ldan gyi sprul pa yin/ nam pa ldong gi rigs las mched pa'i yab khro tshang gsas mkhar gnyan dang/ yum dar bza' sgron ma gnyis su 'khrungs/*.

²⁴ Berounsky 2017.

²⁵ *Gtod 'bum*, 400: *rin po che'i gtod 'bum 'di/ dbus rtsis chu gnyer mkhan na/ dbal rgyal ba snang nyi 'od kyi bka' bsgom nas/ ston pa dbang chen gyi mnos te/ mdo khams [d]ngul rdza sgang du spel ba rdzogs so/*.

²⁶ For information about this monastery see Karmay, Nagano et al. 2003, 164–169.

of *khyung*. We may assume that in this case Garuda has come to replace the crane over the time.

Version D comes from a household in the Phenchu ('Phan chu) valley situated near the Thewo (The bo) valley of the border region of Amdo located along the border of Gansu and Sichuan provinces of the People's Republic of China. It was photographed by Ngawang Gyatso, a native of Thewo, and recently published in a ten-volume collection of reproductions of texts, most of them forming the lay tradition of *le'u* ritualists of the region.²⁷ The Nyen Collection also forms one part of the Fourfold Collection, as is the case of the Bon Kanjur version discussed above. While the Tö and Sadag Collections from Phenchu are abbreviated versions with almost the same wording as the Bon Kanjur versions, this is not the case of the Nyen Collection. The plots of the myths contained in it are sometimes similar, but the wording is very different and thus it clearly represents a different redaction of the Nyen Collection. Even an approximate age of the manuscript is impossible to establish.

It must be mentioned in this respect that the Bon chronicles repeatedly mention another discovery of the Nyen Collection, which occurred in Thewo and can be roughly dated to the eleventh or twelfth centuries. It is ascribed to a 'mad yogi' type of master, named mostly as Kyangphag Mula Drungmu (Skyang 'phags Mu la Drung mu), whose presence is still remembered in Thewo and Phenchu through the large number of miraculous imprints left by him (footprints, prints left by his urinating, imprints left by the hooves of his horse) and springs being conjured up miraculously.²⁸ What is remarkable is that in this case the Nyen Collection was not part of the Fourfold Collections. This rediscovery is mentioned in a large number of chronicles – even *Srid pa rgyud gyi kha byang* from 1310 mentions him – but in this case it does not list the Nyen Collection. The chronicle by Paten Gyalzang (Spa bstan Rgyal bzang) from the fifteenth century (1465?),²⁹ which is the earliest chronicle mentioning his rediscovery of the Nyen Collection, describes it in the following way:

Also, the miraculous manifestation of Kyangphag extracted [the following scriptures] from the White Vulture Rock: *G.yung drung chu 'bum*, *Gnyan 'bum brgyad dor*, *Lha 'bum*, *Rtsag dag yum kyi 'bum chen*. These were in thirty parts. (...) These spread among the lineages of the yogis of the east...³⁰

²⁷ Tsering Thar and Ngawang Gyatso 2017.

²⁸ Berounsky 2013.

²⁹ See Martin 1997, 78–79.

³⁰ *yang sprul sku spyang 'phags kyi/ bya rgod brag dkar nas/ g.yung drung chu 'bum/ gnyen (=gnyan) 'bum brgyad dor/ lha 'bum/ rtsag dag yum gyi 'bum chen mams la/ (...) shar pa mal 'byor*

We have no way of knowing whether this version of the Nyen Collection derives from the text rediscovered by Kyangphag. Given the similar geographical location, however, the possibility cannot be excluded.

The titles of this manuscript are quite confusing. The whole Nyen Collection bears the title *'Phen yul rgyas pa gnyan gyi 'bum*. The *'phen yul* mentioned here could be simply be the name of one of the four categories in the classification of the Bon doctrinal literature called the 'Four Bon portals and the Treasury as the Fifth' (*Bon sgo bzhi mdzod lnga*),³¹ usually known as *'phan yul* and representing for the most part a literature corresponding to the Buddhist 'Perfection of Wisdom' (*sher phyin*). These texts are mostly called *'bum*, which is also a category of the texts in the Bon Kanjur, and in some editions of the Kanjur it also includes the Nyen Collection. However, despite the high probability that this is what is meant, it is worth noting that this collection appeared in the valley of the 'Phan chu river, where 'Phan yul could also easily mean the 'land of 'Phan chu valley.'

The title of the myth is also confusing: *Yo chu'i gnyan stong*. While *gnyan stong* is clearly 'retribution for killing the Nyen', there are problems with *yo chu*. Given the number of spelling mistakes of the manuscript, it is probable that it should be understood as *yo bcos* 'restoring harmony.' It would then read *Retribution for killing the Nyen that restores harmony (Yo bcos kyi gnyan stong)*.

Version E represents a text from the extensive cycle of *Fourfold Direct Paths (Nye lam sde bzhi)* contained in the so-called *New Collection of Bonpo Katen Texts*. The cycle forms the whole of volume 253, comprising 1067 pages, and it is introduced as the 'word' of Tönpa Shenrab Miwo (Ston pa Gshen rab mi bo). It contains various parts dealing with the Lu, Sadag, Nyen and Tö beings, but unlike the Fourfold Collection from the Bon Kanjur, it is heavily influenced by tantric practices. The whole cycle was rediscovered by a prolific 'treasure revealer' known as Ponse Khyung Gotsal (Dpon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal, born 1175)³² at Mt Kailash.

la brgyud de dar ro/ (Spa bstan rgyal bzang 1991, 242).

31 These are Dpon gsas, Chab nag, Chab dkar, 'Phan yul. The fifth Treasury is called 'Pure Summit' (*gtsang mtho thog*). For a classical study dealing with these categories see Snellgrove 1967, 16–19.

32 The date of his birth is given by Nyima Tendzin (Karmay 1972, 173, note 3). There are some sources that consider him to be identical with Rigdzin Godemcan (Rig 'dzin rgod ldem can, 1337–1409), which is also stated as a matter of fact by Karmay (see above). This appears in the eighteenth century chronicle by Kun grol grags pa (1974, 329–336, 371–375), where his name is given as Ponse Khyung Thog or Ponse Khyung Thog Godempa (Dpon gsas khyung thog rgod ldem pa). But his surviving hagiography contains names of his contemporaries, which are in agreement with the suggested date of birth (1175), and since the dates of Rigdzin Godemcan are relatively well established, it makes it impossible for them to be the same person.

The text containing the myth under consideration has no colophon and is rather exceptional to the extent that tantric practices or notions are altogether absent from it. While in some of the texts it is stated that it was proclaimed by Shenrab Miwo and later concealed by Drenpa Namkha, two texts included in the cycle repeat almost verbatim the following phrases in their colophons:

This is a 'treasure' of Yilbon Khyung Gö (Dbyil bon khyung rgod) from the time of Shenrab Miwo, which was miraculously obtained from Mt Kailash (Ti tse gangs). He made a 'true copy' of it near Mapang Lake. Among the twenty yellowish texts on paper copied there was also this sutra reconciling the fourfold [beings]...³³

This particular version contained in *The New Collection of Bonpo Katen Texts* has its first texts on the practice of the whole cycle written by Drotsun Muwerzhi ('Gro btsun Mu wer zhi), whose name would be translated from Zhangzhung into Tibetan as Yungdrung Gyaltsen (G.yung drung rgyal mtshan). He became abbot of Menri monastery in 1662³⁴ and the colophon says that the text was composed in Yungdrung Dechenling (G.yung drung bde chen gling) monastery during the fifth month of the earth ox year, which could be 1649, at the request of a certain mantra-holder Sewer (*sngags 'chang* Sad wer) from the Dong (Ldong) clan. It specifies that the place of composition was called Drakar Lung (Brag dkar lung),³⁵ which confirms that it is the place of the Lughug Yungdrung Dechenling (Klu phug G.yung drung bde chen gling) monastery in contemporary Drachen (Sbra chen) county, which at that time had a small community of tantric practitioners.³⁶ Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that this particular manuscript version stems from the seventeenth-century manuscript located at this place.

The Naxi pictographic manuscripts containing versions F and G are part of the Library of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, which now provides online access to the manuscripts.³⁷ Versions H, I, and J are kept in Berlin.³⁸ Both of the first two manuscripts come from villages surrounding Lijang and were collected by Joseph

³³ Cf. Karmay and Nagano 2001, 1455, 1457. Tib.: *dbyil bon khyung rgod kyi/ gshen rab zhal bzhugs dus kyi gter/ ti tse gangs la dngos grub brnyes/ ma pang mthso 'gram zhal kyang bshus/ shog ser kha dras nyi shu la/ nye lam sde bzhi'i bcos mdo 'di yi zhal kyang bshus...*

³⁴ Martin 2001, 138, note 41.

³⁵ See *Nye lam sde bzhi'i yin thu gsal byed 'phrul gyi me long*, *The New Bon Katen Texts*, 253–1, 35–36. See also Karmay and Nagano 2001, 1450.

³⁶ See Karmay and Nagano 2003, 143–150.

³⁷ https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/25/archival_objects/1183971 (accessed on 9 August 2022).

³⁸ Janert 1977, 861.

Rock (1884–1962),³⁹ but the dates of their origin are unknown. Version F has been translated by Joseph Rock in his monumental work *The Na-khi Nâga Cult and Related Ceremonies*.⁴⁰ Since reading the Naxi script goes beyond my abilities, in what follows I will rely on Rock's rendering of version F. The title of the text is translated as 'To relate the story of ¹Ddo-³ssaw-¹ngo-²t'u'. It is this translation, made by Joseph Rock in cooperation with his informant priest, that is taken into account here. It must be stressed here that any English rendering of the pictographic script remains to some degree an interpretation. However, the plot of the story undoubtedly follows that of the versions recorded in Tibetan script remarkably closely. While the plot has been very well preserved in the pictographic script, the names of various beings and the names of the main characters of the story are mostly rendered only phonetically, and it seems that even Rock's informant and Naxi ritual specialist did not understand them well. These are undoubtedly of importance for understanding the myth.

The name of the main hero appearing in the title of the text as ¹Ddo-³ssaw-¹ngo-²t'u is clearly a phonetic rendering of Dongse Ngothur (Ldong sras Ngo thur/thung) of the Tibetan versions. Ngothur is the proper name and Dongse means 'son of the Dong clan.' The myth thus speaks about ancestors of the Dong clan, a clan which is listed among the five or six original clans of Tibetans.



Fig. 2: First folio of Naxi mss. B-42 with the Son of Dong Ngothur to the left; © Harvard-Yenching Institute.

³⁹ The manuscript F comes from ²Gyi-¹ts'ä-¹ndso of ²Boa-¹shi (or Pai-sha) north of Lijiang. The older inventory number is 5054. The older inventory number of the manuscript G is 1018, and it comes from ²Ghügh-¹k'o (Ch'ang shui) to the west of Lijang (see Rock 1952, 307).

⁴⁰ Rock 1952, 307–314.

Also central character in the story, who is killed by the Son of Dong, is mentioned as Naga ³Nyi-²ssā-²kyo-¹lo. This is apparently Nyen-se (*Gnyan sras*), i.e. a ‘Son of Nyen.’

The whole myth thus speaks about the conflict between ancestors of the Dong clan and the Nyen beings. This information is missing in Rock’s translation of the story.

A puzzling feature of Joseph Rock’s work is his rendering of all the different classes of beings by the collective term *nāga*, which is his translation of the Naxi term ¹ssu. Although in a number of cases it apparently stands for the Tibetan term Lu (*klu*), which is the usual translation of the Sanskrit term *nāga*, denoting an underground Indian class of beings, unlike in the Tibetan tradition this term ¹ssu is applied also as a general term comprising the following divinities and spirits:

- i. Sadag — Tibetan: *sa bdag* — Naxi: ¹ssaw-³ndaw
- ii. Nyen — Tibetan: *gnyan* — Naxi: ²nyi
- iii. Tö — Tibetan: *gtod* — Naxi: ²dtü

This is rather confusing, since these beings named Lu, Sadag, Nyen and Tö are seen as a fourfold group of spirits by the relevant Tibetan texts. One of them apparently could take on characteristics of another from time to time, but there is no indication in the Tibetan texts that Sadag, Nyen and Tö should be a subclass of some more general group of Lu, i.e. *nāgas*. It means that in the light of the Tibetan texts, the title of the Rock’s work is misleading in that it purports to deal solely with the ‘Nāga Cult’ of the Naxi (*Na-khi*).

The Naxi term ¹ssu is puzzling indeed, since it does not correspond phonetically to Lu (i.e. Tibetan term used for *nāga*), nor to any of the other classes of beings. What seems to be the hypothetical original Tibetan equivalent of the Naxi term ¹ssu is the Tibetan expression *se (gsas)*. This is known as a general category of divinities and spirits in the Bon religion, but also in the Old Tibetan texts from Dunhuang. This term has the general meaning ‘divinity,’ but is sometimes used as a synonym for, and in other cases as a specific category of gods distinct from what Tibetan texts call *lha*. The composite expression ‘se-nyen’ (*gsas gnyan*) is attested in Tibetan Bon texts. Its meaning is something like ‘Nyen divinity’ and this is in agreement with the general meaning of Naxi term ¹ssu. For some unknown reason it seems that among the Naxi it also came to be applied to the group of underground beings known as Lu (*klu*) in Tibetan, which in turn translates the Sanskrit term *nāga* of Indic Buddhist texts, but originally designated beings of non-Indic origin.

The title of the Rock’s book should thus more accurately refer not to the ‘Nāga Cult,’ but to ‘Naxi Cult of Se (*gsas*) Divinities’.

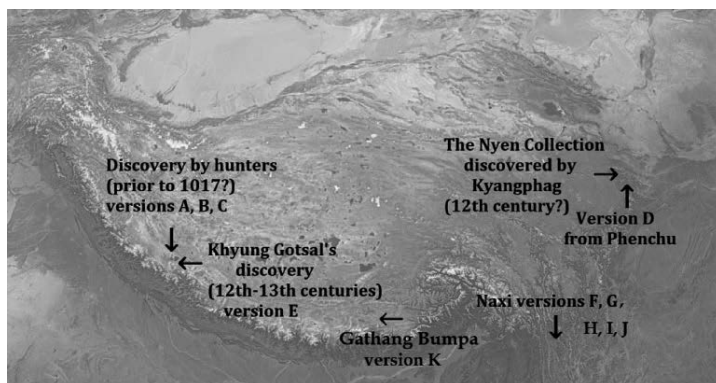


Fig. 3: Map with places of origin of the manuscripts; © author.

3 The plot of the narrative

The myth concerns the original events relating to the Nyen divinities and ancestors of the Dong clan. I will omit here the exceptional version K that deals with aquatic spirits (*klu*) rather than the Nyen, mainly because there are two available treatments of this version in English.⁴¹ One of its main messages is to refer to an original event resulting in the subsequent ritual treatment of the Nyen, which averts harm caused by Nyen to people following the accidental killing of a Nyen being. This central message is also accompanied by an explanation as to why Nyen beings, originally beings of the intermediate space, also became attached to lakes, rocks, woods and soil, and have been accompanying humans as a part of their natural environment since those *primaeval* times. The tradition that considers the Nyen to be beings of rocks, trees, lakes and soil is widespread across the Tibetan Plateau, and also appears in Tibetan medical texts. It has its explanation here. The last message of importance is the origin of the Dong clan and its division into eighteen groups according to two of the manuscript versions. All this is localised in a very regional setting which refers to the areas stretching from Yushu (Yu shul) and Mt Machen Pomra to the Thewo region bordering on China proper.

The myth in all its versions follows a remarkably similar plot, although the details differ greatly and also the particular wording is different. All the events can be divided into the following parts:

⁴¹ Karmay 2009; Bellezza 2010.

i. The creation of the Nyen, their offspring and the origin of the Dong people

The description in version A gives rather brief and confusing details, with some probable omissions and inconsistent orthography. Version B speaks briefly about various beings, and suddenly comes to the origin of the brother and sister of Dong, who are descendants of the Lord of people – Nampa Dong (Nom pa /=Nam pa/Ldong). It then mentions the Son and Daughter of the Nyen. Version E describes simply the land of Nyen, including the Nyen brother and sister with their water springs, cattle, and so forth, and then mentions briefly the parents of the Dong brother and sister. Version D (translated at the conclusion of the paper) speaks about the progenitors of the Nyen, but then mentions that the uncle of the Son of Dong is Lord of Nyen Gong Ngon (Gnyan rje Sgong sngon), which makes clear that Dong and Nyen are related. The Naxi version F simply mentions the origin of the Son of Nyen and Son of Dong at the beginning of the world. Unlike other versions, the Daughter of Dong is considered to be his wife and not a sister.⁴²

ii. A liaison between the Son of Nyen and the Daughter of Dong

Versions A, B and F are similar in the sense that in analogous phrases they describe how the Son of Dong went to the high pastures to herd yaks, and the sister (or wife in the case of version F) worked in the fields in the lower land. She was approached by the Son of Nyen according to all versions, although some of the versions (D, E) are somehow fragmented and do not explicitly mention a love affair between them. Version A has poetic parts containing a warning by the Father of Nyen to his sons about descending to earth, a subsequent description of the beauty of the Daughter of Dong following her meeting with the Son of Dong, a miraculous occurrence of cormorants and cranes that start to weed the field and other miraculous circumstances leading to a state of bliss. The Daughter of Dong is a descendant of gods (*lha*) according to this version, and we also learn that, in the meantime, demons are spreading through the Country of Nyen and the Country of Gods and People (*lha mi*). Version F contains details about tigers taking care of the herds, wild boar ploughing fields, and other signs that the world order is being reversed. In general, the texts contain poetic parts describing the deep affection of the couple for each other, leading them to forget about the rest of the world.

⁴² As a non-specialist in Naxi, I simply follow the rendering by Rock (1952). There is, however, some probability that the Naxi pictograph could mean also sister.

iii. The killing of the Son of Nyen by the Son of Dong, and the subsequent burial of the Son of Nyen

The Son of Dong is then made aware of the highly unusual circumstances surrounding his sister. According to version F it is a servant of the Daughter of Dong who comes to the Son of Dong informing him about the love affair, but according to version B it is a Wise Bat⁴³ who does so. Version D mentions a certain Tritse Chemang (Khri tse spyan mang) who informs the Son of Dong, and version E mentions only that ‘he was summoned to listen’, failing to mention to whom he was meant to listen. Version A omits this episode completely. According to all the versions, the Son of Dong then approaches the excited couple and the Son of Nyen miraculously transforms himself into a snake upon seeing the Son of Dong arrive. Unaware of its true identity, the Son of Dong then cuts the snake into many pieces with his sword. The Daughter of Dong then explains in tears that he has killed a Nyen. They then bury him under nine layers of earth. According to version A he is entrusted to the lord of the Sadag (*sa bdag*), according to version D the Daughter of Dong treads on the burial site (in order to pollute the place and to hide the corpse), according to version F she places her dirty clothes on the place, and version E says that she places her *grum cho* (?) on top of the place.

iv. Father Nyen’s search for his son, and the disclosure of the murder during a dice game

All versions contain similar verses describing the hopeless search by the father Nyen for his son at the edge of the sky and below the earth in a formulaic manner. He then gathers armies of Nyen and descends on the country of Dong. Some versions (A and B) also mention armies of Lu, Tö and Sadag. The next episode is not altogether clear. A scene during which two beings play dice appears in all the versions, and the Son of Dong joins them. Different versions mention different names of the dice players, but it is clear enough in all the versions that during the dice game the Son of Dong reveals that it was he who killed the Son of Nyen. The Father Nyen learns it, the Son of Dong escapes from the place and the armies of Nyen (or the Nyen together with the Lu, Sadag and Tö according to version B) pursue him. Version B (from the Tö Collection) is rather inconsistent in the sense that it speaks about the Lord of Tö (Gtod rje) chasing the Son of Dong, although it was the Son of Nyen (not Tö) who was killed even in this version; it is as if version B considered Lu, Sadag and Tö to be specific varieties of the more general category of Nyen.

⁴³ For myths dealing with Wise or Clever Bat (Pha wang sgam po/rgod po) see Huber 2013 and 2020; Ramble 2014; and Berounsky 2017.

v. Chasing the Son of Dong and the final ritual of reconciliation

The subsequent events contain very similar features and episodes, although each of the versions is specific. Each gives different details, and the order of the events is also arranged slightly differently.

According to versions D and B, the Son of Dong rides his white horse and meets two deer hunters who are *btsan* demons. He changes his clothes and leaves his horse there in order to confuse the pursuing armies of Nyen. However, after meeting the demons they learn about the ruse. According to Version B, the Lord of Tö (as opposed to the Lord of Nyen) cuts off the leg of one of the *btsan* and blinds the other in one eye. The armies then continue their pursuit of the Son of Dong.

According to version A, the Son of Dong miraculously transforms into a conch-shell deer with turquoise antlers, but in vain. The Son of Dong turns towards terrestrial divinities named Kula Dongdräl (Sku bla Ldong bral/ Sku bla skyongs te ldong bra, etc.) and Kula Shampoje (Sku bla Bsham po bye); however, they do not help him. Only then does he escape to Machen Pomra. The meeting with seven men (not the two hunters) is described later.

According to version B the Son of Dong first seeks refuge with Kula Kyongte Dongdra (Sku bla skyongs te ldong bra, etc. – evidently the first divinity of version A), who fails to save him. Only then does he reach Machen Pomra (written as Rma bom bra), who is identified as his maternal uncle (as in version D). Version F, like versions D and E, mention first reaching Machen Pomra (written as ²Muàn³mi-¹ddv²dzhi in the Naxi version).⁴⁴

An event explaining the presence of the Nyen in the soil, rocks, lakes and trees takes place on the way to Machen Pomra according to most of the versions. Version A mentions a terrestrial god (*yul sa*) Machen Pomra, who builds ‘castles’ (*mkhar*) in water, soil, rocks, trees and fire following the performance of a ‘divination’ (*phya mkhan*) and ‘bon.’ The forts are ‘partly good and partly not good’ (*phyed bzang phyed ma bzang*). This is how the tradition of ritual offering of ‘forts’ originated according to the text. The Lu are then bound to the water, the Sadag become embedded in the soil, the Tö are fixed in the rocks and the Nyen become attached to trees.

⁴⁴ The written form is rather confusing, and Joseph Rock did not recognize that the text was referring to Machen Pomra. The name of Machen Pomra is mostly rendered as ²Muàn³mi-²bpa-²lo in Naxi according to Rock (1952, 132–133). The difference is in the last two syllables (¹ddv²dzhi), which are usually used as a phonetic rendering of Tibetan *rdo rje* (Skt. *vajra*), but could be used also as an equivalent for *gyung drung*, the swastika. Both of them represent something solid and, hypothetically, the expression *bom ra/ spom ra* may have been understood to have a similar meaning.

Version B says that the Son of Dong creates lakes from a mirror thrown behind him, and the Lu become immersed in them. This is how the association of Lu with lakes originated. Similarly, he uses a comb to raise mountains of earth to which Sadag become attached, and so forth.

Version D differs to the extent that it speaks only about Nyen of lakes, soil, rocks and trees and does not list any Lu, Sadag or Tö. Like the previous version it mentions a mirror and probably a golden finger-ring (*sor rubs* = *sor gdub*) and says that the Nyen became attached to water, soil, rocks and trees.

The Naxi version F contains a very brief part stating that the Tö ‘have gone to dwell on cliffs, the Lu into the water and the Nyen on trees.’ It is rather inconsistently mentioned just after the killing of the Son of Nyen by the Son of Dong.⁴⁵ This version F then has the Son of Dong escaping to Machen Pomra following the dice playing episode. At this moment, he spat and the spittle changed into the lakes, which separated him from the armies.⁴⁶ Then he pulled out a clump of hair that transformed into the trees, which again separated him from the armies. He then cast his fingernails behind him, and these changed into cliffs. One might have expected this to be the point at which the attachment of Lu, Nyen and Tö to lakes, woods and cliffs was established, but Rock’s rendering of the manuscript does not mention this.

Even the later events are not unanimously in agreement. Machen Pomra suddenly disappears according to version A, and quite strangely, the terrestrial divinity mentioned earlier as Kula Kyongte Dongdra (Sku bla Skyongs te Ldong ’bra), now named Lord of local divinities Gyongchen Dongdre (Yul sa’i rgyal po sgyogs chen ldong ’bras) appears in a dialog with the Lord of Nyen. A phrase repeated in various versions says ‘you are the Lord of terrestrial divinities, I am the Lord of Nyen.’ Later, the ‘heavenly priest’ Gong Ngon (Gnam gshen Gong sngon) appears as a main mediator of reconciliation. However, this version makes clear that Gods (*lha*), terrestrial divinities (*yul sa*), and Lu (*klu*), together with humans, stand against the Nyen in the conflict. The Son of Dong comes partly from gods and partly from the Nyen. The Son of Dong hides ‘at the heart’ of the Excellent Mountain. The Nyen cut off the shady side of the Excellent Mountain (Ri rab) and ‘cut into pieces’ (*bkrum*) a number of Lu and terrestrial divinities.

Version B contains the same phrase in the dialog between Machen Pomra and the Lord of Tö, saying that Machen Pomra is the Lord of terrestrial divinities (*yul sa*). Machen Pomra offers a ‘ransom offering’ of a dog (*khyi’i glud*) and a ‘ret-

⁴⁵ Rock 1952, 309.

⁴⁶ Rock 1952, 311.

tribution for killing.’ Following the agreement by Tö he invites Shenrab Miwo to perform the ritual.

Version D also has a phrase that describes Machen Pomra as the Lord of Terrestrial Divinities. Following the contest, when Machen Pomra cuts off the top of the Excellent Mountain (Ri rab), the Son of Dong travels to Lord of Nyen Gong Ngon, who is his maternal uncle. Gong Ngon competes with the Lord of Nyen (Gnyan rgan dar ba) and, following his victory in an archery contest, the ritual of reconciliation is performed.

Version E suddenly changes from the narrative style into a formulaic ritual text, which alludes to Machen Pomra saving the Son of Dong. Gong Ngon is also mentioned in the unclear parts.

The Naxi version F narrates that after the meeting Machen Pomra, the Son of Dong reaches the husband of his aunt, named ¹Mbbû-³ch’i-²k’wua-¹ddü.⁴⁷ The retribution for killing the Son of Nyen is then negotiated.

vi. Continuation of the story

The most extensive versions, A and B, have relatively long concluding parts. Version B contains a rather large addendum (389–400). It speaks about Shenrab (Gshen rab) and his ritual during which the ‘ransom offering’ (*glud*) is made along with a ‘retribution for killing’ (*stong*), which are, however, considered insufficient. The text then narrates events connected with kings of Sumpa, Zhangzhung and eventually Minyag (Tangut) in a formulaic manner, which bring satisfaction to the Son and Daughter of Dong. Finally, the text states that it took fourteen years to fully resolve the problem. Eventually, the corpse of the Son of Nyen is retrieved, the Daughter of Dong washes it in ‘nine lustrations’ (*tshan dgu*) and applies ‘nine kinds of medicines.’ The Son of Nyen is brought back to life and given the name Nyen Dong Gongkar (Gnyan ldong mgon dkar, ‘White Protector of the Nyen and Dong’).

A much longer narration extends the main story of the myth of version A (138–180), and following that several other self-contained shorter myths featuring the same character of Son of Dong are added to the main body of the myth (180–202). The core story of the myth refers to what has until now been the regional setting of eastern Tibet, but the location is suddenly expanded to the whole world according to Buddhist cosmology in version A.

This extension contains parts dealing with the ritual reconciliation of the enmity (*mkhon*) between gods (along with the Dong people) and the Nyen. It

47 The Tibetan rendering of this name is uncertain. The first two syllables make no sense, but the two last (²k’wua-¹ddü) could hypothetically stand for Kula Dong (Sku bla ldong).

seems that this is a unique feature of this version in the sense that it sees the gods (*lha*) standing against the Nyen. It also appears in the parts where four continents of Buddhist cosmology surrounding Mt Meru are mentioned, and one wonders if this version does not represent an attempt to modify the local cosmologies (that are themselves probably already the result of an amalgamation) connected with Nyen, Lu, terrestrial divinities (*yul sa*), Kula (*sku bla*) with those based on Buddhist doctrines and represented by gods (*lha*), to which the terrestrial divinities (*yul sa*) and Lu (*klu*) are added.

The text does indeed suddenly narrate a number of episodes in which many Nyen are initially almost destroyed by 'heavenly priests' (*gnam gshen*), and subsequently tamed. It is then described in the formulaic phrases that their army enters the surrounding countries of Sumpa, Jang and Minyag, defeats enemies and brings satisfaction to the Son of Dong. They continue along the points of the compass and similarly destroy enemies of the four continents surrounding Mt Meru.

Then the Daughter of Dong is given to a Nyen, and she gives birth to numerous classes of Nyen. One of the subsequent episodes narrates the origin of the eighteen families of the Dong clan. Nyen asks the heavenly priest to change the name of the Son of Dong, who is named Pozi Dongbu (*Spo zi ldong bu*). He is given the name Yab Dong Chenpo (*Yab ldong chen po*, Great Father of Dong), and then marries a female water spirit, Lumo, named Crystal White Maiden (*Shel gyi mi mo dkar mo*), who is unable to produce offspring. Following a ritual performed by a priest, she gives birth to an undefined physical mass. The horns of a dragon are offered to it, and thanks to addition of the semen of 'White Man' (*Mi dkar po*) it develops bones. Then, they take a piece of tarnished gold, to which ambrosia and incense are applied so that it gains breath. Still, the offspring does not have a heart that 'remembers' (*dran*), and he does not have the 'heart of a Nyen.' They take a sheep's heart from the heavenly Turquoise Lake and the earth's golden heart, and he gains a heart that 'remembers.' He still does not speak, but the turquoise attached to the neck of Wise Bat touches his mouth, and he begins to speak. He does not know how to walk, but the necessary knowledge is given to him by the golden snake and the antelope. He then marries six wives, each of whom has three sons. And this is how the eighteen families of the Dong clan originated.

Another episode narrates a conflict between the planet Mars and the Nyen, and finally the Nyen become the 'warrior gods' (*sgra bla*) of the Dong clan.

It is revealed by the text itself that these parts represent a compilation from diverse sources and that several Nyen Collections once existed. In the conclusion of the story about the origin of the eighteen families of the Dong clan it is stated: 'in one of the traditions of the Nyen Collections it is said that he fathered many sons...' (*bu mang ba'i pha zhes gnyan 'bum rgyud cig las bshad do*).

4 Names of the main characters and places

One of the most difficult obstacles to understanding the myth outlined above is the style of writing in Tibetan, which in almost all cases of the manuscripts listed above (of which manuscripts C and E are more comprehensible) poses a number of difficulties stemming from the orthography and the number of contractions used in the ‘headless script’ of Tibetan (*dbu med*). An example of their abbreviated style can be seen in the following sentence of the manuscript version D:

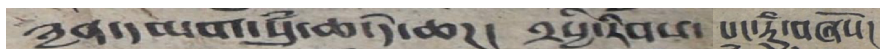


Fig. 4: Extract from manuscript version D.

ny+y+n dmag sum cha de chaT/ 2s+y+i ribs pang ru+o+m bzhos /

Corrected reading: *gnyan dmag gsum brgya der chags/ gnyan gyis ri rab pang rum tu gshegs)*

Translation: *300 soldiers of Nyen appeared there. The Nyen proceeded to the height of the Most Excellent of Mountains.*

Such abbreviations are probably the result of the combination of attempts to save space on paper – a rare and expensive commodity –, an environment in which standardised orthography is not imposed, and the presence of remote dialects, which differ from the more familiar pronunciations of Tibetan.

These conventions of abbreviation could well be compared to the contemporary phenomenon of SMS text messages. A good example could be:⁴⁸

C u 2morrow and plz b there

See you tomorrow and please be there.

Both of these examples use homophones that include numbers, graphemes and unorthodox spelling.

It is therefore not surprising that all the manuscripts also use several different orthographies for the place names and the main characters of the myth, not only in the entirety of the narration of the myth, but sometimes even within a single line of the manuscript.

In order to save place and reduce somehow a lengthy list of variant readings, the most usual names of the main characters of the particular versions of the myths will be given in Table 2.

⁴⁸ It is just a matter of chance that this example comes from Niger, since it might just as easily be from another part of the world (see Endong and Essoh 2015, 41).

Table 2: Main characters of the story according to the manuscripts.

Manuscript Versions	Father of Nyen	Son of Nyen	Son of Dong	Daughter of Dong	Ritualists invited	Name of the Dong land	Name of the land of Nyen
A	Gnyan gyi rgyal po	Gnyan gyi bu	Ldong Spong ngo thung/ Spo zi ldong bu	Ldong lcam skar mo/ dkar mo	Gnam gshen dgong sngon/ Rma bom bra	Thebs chu slang steng	Kho shu ya lde
B	Gnyan u ldong 'od po	Gnyan dang ro sna phyung (?)	Ldong sras Spo na go ro	Sring ldong lcam tse smad	Gshen rab	–	Pho ma yags steng
C	Gnyan rgan de ba	Gnyan sras	Ldong sras	Ldong lcam	Gnyan bon thang thang grol ba	–	–
D	Gnyan rgan dar ba	Gnyan sras 'phro ba	Ldong sras Spro thung	Yo lcam dkar mo	Gshen rab mi bo gnyer	Lteng yul skar ba	Pho ma gser steng
E	Gnyan rgan de ba	Gnyan gyi bu	Ldong sras Ngang tur	Ldong lcam	Gnyan bon thang thang grol ba/ Gshen rab mi bo	Ngo bzung	Pho ma g.ya steng
F and G	¹ Ssu- ³ mun- ² gkv- ¹ p'ër	³ Nyi- ² ssâ- ² kyo- ¹ lo	¹ Ddo- ³ ssaw- ¹ ngo- ² t'u	¹ Ddo- ³ dsho- ¹ khyü- ² ma	² Dto- ¹ mba ³ Shi- ² lo	–	–

Table 2 and the names used in the myths embody precious information about the context of the myth. It is interesting that the name of Po Nagoro (name of the Son of Dong) figures in the list of the ancestors of Dong clan.⁴⁹ Its name does not make much sense in Tibetan. It will be seen that his name is rather confusingly given as Pozi Lhungdul (Spo zi lhung rdul) in the Tangut language (see below). These features may reflect an origin among the people close to Tanguts.

The name of the father Nyen, whose son has been killed in the myth, is given as Nyen Gen Deva or Nyen Gen Darba (*Gnyan rgan de ba/dar ba*, i.e. 'Old Nyen Darba/Deba') in the mss. C, D, E. Even the Naxi name ¹Ssu-³mun-²gkv-¹p'ër contains indications that it refers to the Old Nyen (*Gnyan rgan*): the syllable ¹ssu designates 'divinity' (Tib. *gsas*), ³mun means 'old' and ²gkv-¹p'ër is 'white head'.⁵⁰ A mountain with the name Nyen Gen Darba is located close to the Thewo valley of the district of the same name. Quite remarkably, the nearest village that worships the mountain is called Dongbo (Ldong bo), a reference to the Dong clan within the name of the village.

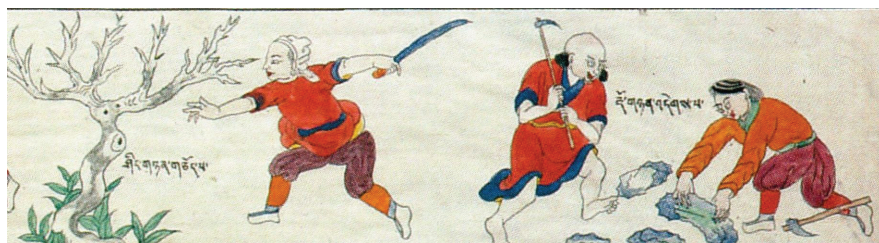


Fig. 5: Disturbing the Nyen of the tree and the stone, Tibetan Medical Paintings, plate 46, detail 2; © Serindia Publications.

This could be just a coincidence, since Tibetan place names recur in different locations, and one finds mountains, rocks and lakes with similar names across the Tibetan Plateau. But another hint giving some weight to such identification is the manuscript version A, which locates the Dong land in Thebchu (Theb chu). This name is in fact one of the old names of the river (The chu, Theb chu) that runs through the Thewo valley.⁵¹ There are therefore grounds for believing that this region is connected with the myth.

⁴⁹ For example, *Dbu nag mi'u 'dra chags* mentions him (Spo na 'go ro) as an ancestor of Dong clan (Karmay and Nagano 2002, 108).

⁵⁰ Rock 1952, 316, note 697.

⁵¹ Berounsky 2007.



Fig. 6: Nyen Gen Darba in Thewo; photo: author 2017.



Fig. 7: Nyen Gen Darba on the mural of Lhason Monastery, Thewo; photo: author 2017.

Another divinity mentioned in the myth is Nyenje Gong Ngon (*Gnyan rje dgong/gong sngon*). He figures as a heavenly priest in version A, but appears also as a maternal uncle of the Dong brother and sister in version D and appears also in versions E and C. A mountain of the same name is located not far from the Thewo and Phenchu regions in the higher pastures west of Thewo, close to the area now known as Amchog (*A mchog*).



Fig. 8: Typical landscape of Thewo region – The Nyen mountains near Khapalung (*Kha pa lung*); photo: author 2017.

Two other identifiable divinities are rather remote from the Thewo region. But Machen Pomra is frequently worshipped in Thewo and surrounding valleys. He is one of the main protectors of the Bon monasteries here, but even lay people worship him as their personal protective divinity and the lay ritual traditions present here (called *le'u*) are a testimony to the vitality of the cult of Machen Pomra here through the large number of surviving manuscripts dedicated to this divinity.



Fig. 9: Nyenje Gong Ngön as seen from Amchog; photo: author 2017.

Another divinity present in most of the manuscript versions is Kula Gyogchen Dongdra (Sku bla Skyogs/Sgyogs chen ldong bra).⁵² This divinity appears in the list of Thirteen Gurla (*mgur lha bcu gsum*) gods.⁵³ He is better known as Gatö Jowo (Sga stod jo bo) nowadays and his location is in the remote place of Yushu (Yu shul), on the border between Chumarleb (Chu dmar leb) and Trindu (Khri 'du) Counties, Qinghai Province, some 300km west of Mt Machen Pomra close to the place from which the Yellow River rises.

The identification of these mountain divinities enables one to locate the itinerary of the Son of Dong's flight from the armies of Nyen. It starts from the Thewo region and leads north-west to Machen Pomra and even to the west of it. This region is called 'homeland' (*pha zhing*) in version E, and we may deduce that this was the original place of the Dong clan.

⁵² The name is most commonly written as Sgyogs chen gdong ra in the later Tibetan texts.

⁵³ Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956, 213; Karmay and Nagano 2003, 171.



Fig. 10: Statue of Machen Pomra in the Tsotshang Monastery (Gtso tshang dgon), Thewo; photo: author 2017.

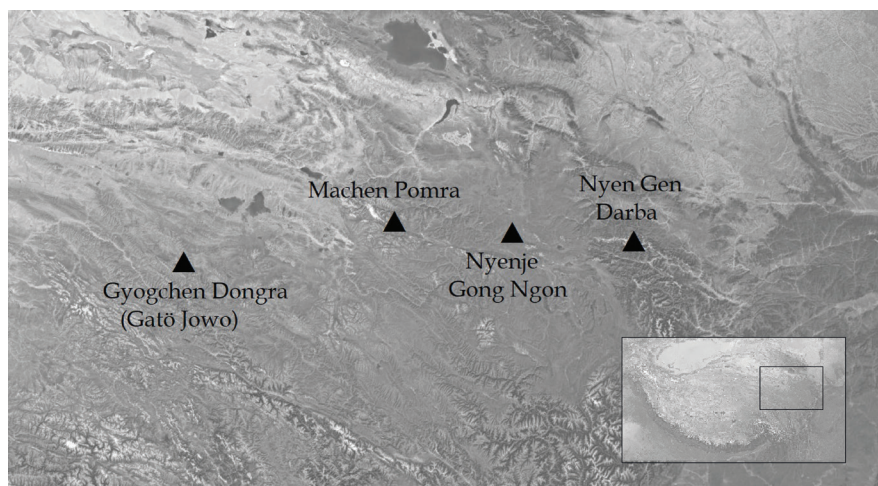


Fig. 11: Map of the mountain divinities appearing in the myth; © author.

Manuscript version A, a version of the Nyen Collection from the Bon Kanjur, contains rather suprising mentions of several names in both Tibetan and Minyag (Tangut) languages. It is the only text of this kind in the Nyen Collection. A number of other myths contained in the Collection give bilingual names in Tibetan and Nampa Dong (Nam pa Ldong), but never in Tangut. This makes the myth under consideration unique. The bilingual names are listed in Table 3.⁵⁴

Table 3: Tangut names according to version A.

Tibetan	Tangut	Translation
Spo zi ngo thung	Spo zi lhung rdul	(Name of the Son of Dong)
Ldong lcam dkar mo	Ye smre phrom	White Lady of Dong (name of the Daughter of Dong)
Mi yul rta g.yu can	Nar sgong phrom ze phrom	Land of People with horses and turquoises.
Gnam gyi bu sa'i bu/ 'greng dbu nag gi rje ru gshegs pa	Mur lta zur can khrung phrong zi khru / phrong ni na ga za gzig ni tseng zi phrong zi	Son of sky, son of earth. The one who arrived as Lord of the black-headed upright (people).
Gnam sngon po'i bu g.yu 'od can/ sa gro mo'i bu mo gser gyi sgo nga mi (=me) 'bar ma	Mo na gzi gu phrom kug/ sprin zi thag zi/	Son of the blue sky with turquoise light. Daughter of the reddish-grey earth-blazing golden egg.
Yab ldong chen spo zi	Mo na zi'i phol khyo	Pozi, Great Father of Dong

Although some of the names seem to be rather confusing, and further analyses of them will require further research, it is nevertheless clear that the text considers its origin to be connected with the Tangut people. The Tangut kingdom (1038–1227) did not encompass the territories of the localities presented in this myth, but lay to the north of them. Nevertheless, Tanguts saw their origins in the region where the Yellow River rises, and this is the place of Mt Gyogchen Dongra mentioned in the myths.⁵⁵ It might be well the case that the myth reflects the tradition of a particular Dong clan that had settled in the Thewo region, but whose original homeland was in the Yushu area and who were related to the Tanguts.

⁵⁴ *Mi dang gnyan bsdum pa'i le'u*, 123, 174–175.

⁵⁵ See Kepping 1995.

5 Concluding remarks

The length of the particular versions of the myth presented in this paper and their corrupt nature has prevented detailed analyses and translations of each of them separately. However, even from the preliminary observations and summary analyses offered in this paper, it is possible to draw several conclusions.

First of all, this myth is a witness of a certain mytho-poetic tradition that made its appearance in western Tibet in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but with content that suggests an origin in eastern Tibet. Although some versions are rather blurred, the core of most of them refers to the places stretching between Thewo region up to the Machen Pomra range and the source of the Yellow River in Yushu. The names in the Tangut language present in version A could be taken as a sign of the proximity of the original Dong clan, whose mythical ancestors are the main characters of the myth, to the Tangut people. The Naxi versions further witness that much of their ritual traditions are based on the Tibetan originals: these are, specifically, the rituals dealing with beings called Nyen, Sadag, Tö and Lu, which were for some unknown reason or just incidentally collectively called 'ssu (Tib. *gsas*) and rendered as *nâga* by Joseph Rock. Such confusion concerning their identity contributes to significant misunderstandings of Naxi myths and rituals. This is also an area which clearly invites further research in the future, the case of the myth mentioned in this paper probably being just one example of more extensive relations between Naxi religious traditions and non-Buddhist eastern Tibetan lore.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix: Retribution for killing the Nyen (examples and original texts)

1 Version D

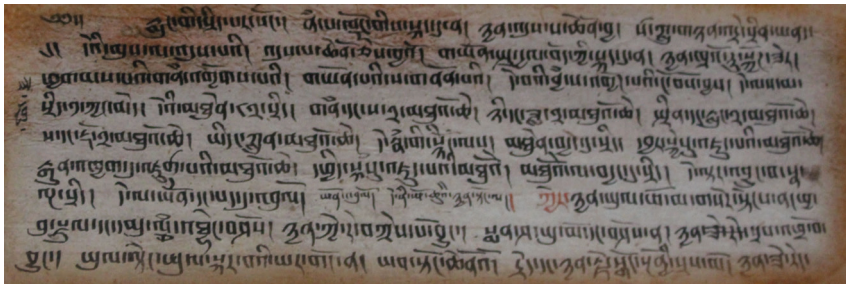


Fig. 12: Version D, fol. 29a.

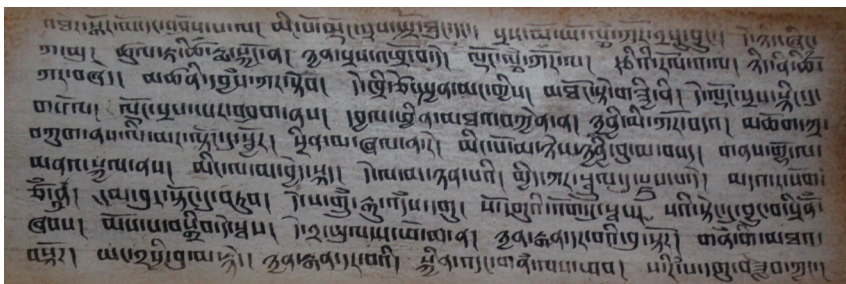


Fig. 13: Version D, fol. 29b.

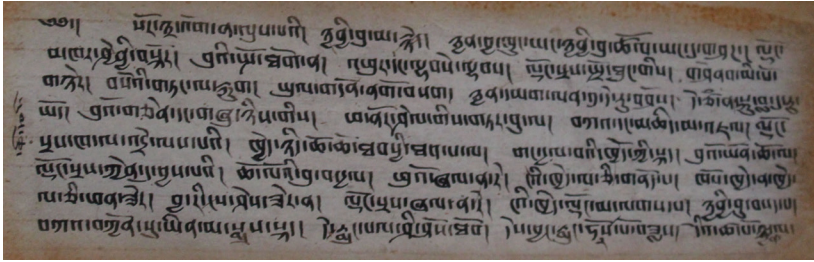


Fig. 14: Version D, fol. 30a.

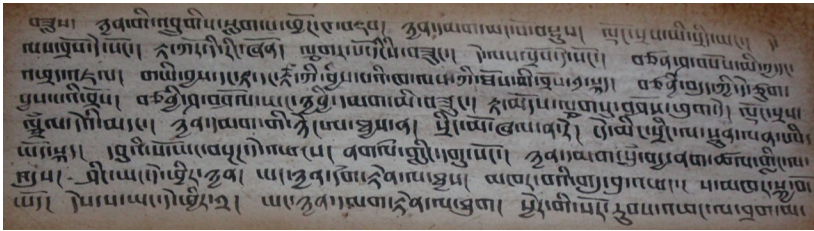


Fig. 15: Version D, fol. 30b.

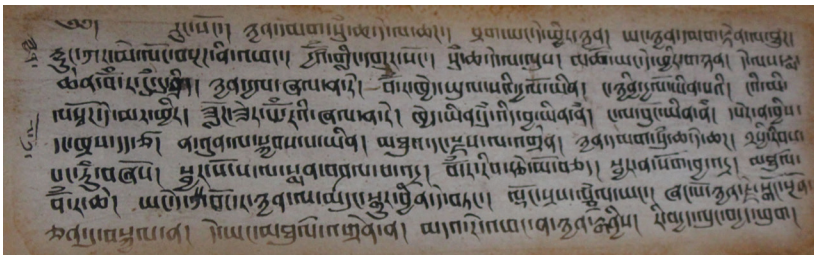


Fig. 16: Version D, fol. 31a.

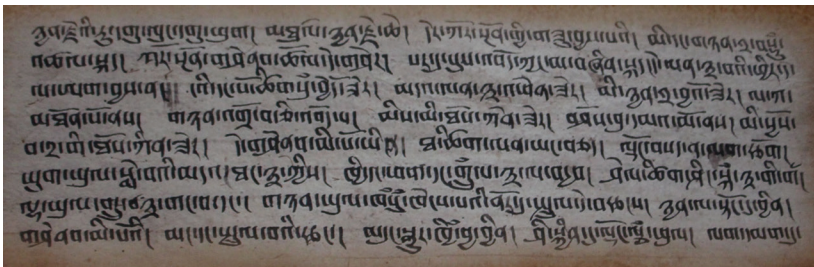


Fig. 17: Version D, fol. 31b.

[fol. 29a] kyer ny+y+n (gnyan) yul pho ma gser steng na phyha bu sdzul (rdzu 'phrul) dang dmu lcam th+he+ng (=thang nga?) bshos/ ny+y+n (gnyan) kye re bkres po byung/ sman sha yu mo dang bshos na/ ny+y+n (gnyan) ze red sras 'phro ba byung/ yul lteng yul skar ba'i yar gong na/ yab stong chen+o+'o (chen po 'o)/ red dang nya+y+n (gnyan) rje sgong sngon+y+i (sngon gyi) sras mo/ ny+y+n (gnyan) ze red [fol. 29b] 'theng skor mo dang bshos pa la/ ming po ldong sras spro thung dang/ sras mo yo lcam kar+m+o (dkar mo) 2+su (gnyis su) byung/

de nyid zhing ka mu/ tshul rta (=lta?) tshim rma skyong na/ ny+y+n (=gnyan) sras 'phro ba de/ ldong lcam kor (=dkar mo) la rtsi'i (=brtse'i) rol ba la/ nyid (=nyin) ni tshim kar bzhed/ mtshan+i (=mtshan ni) dbyams (=byams?) kar stob/ de khri tse spyang mang gyis/ mthong ste gzi+y (=gzigs pa) ni/ de ldong sras snying (=snyan) du gsol/ ldong sras yar bshag (=gshegs) nas/ dbyal phyin mtha' bkyen na/ ny+y+n+y+i (gnyan gyi) mi kor (=dkar po) bda'/ mchog kra (=rta?) bkug nas li mar ltong du sbyor/ srin ma (=sring mo) zhal na re/ ming po ma nyes ny+y+n+y+i (=gnyan gyi) bu ma bsad/ gnas g+ho (=mgo) la mna' skyal nas/ ming la ma byed skad/ de la ma nyan pa'i/ myid kar (mi dkar) sbrul du sdzu (rdzu) pa de/ mda' ra sog (=phog?) tsam 1 na/ dum bur stong du btub (=gtub)/

de sa grum rgu 'dams dgu/ so (=sa) dgu'i 'og du sbas/ sa'i steng du byung ba srin+m+o (=sring mo'i) zhabs/ mos pa bsgribs de sbas/ de 2 (gnyis) yul sa pho ma na/ ny+y+n (=gnyan) rgan dar ba'i bu stor/ gnam gi mtha' bskor/ yang 2+s+y+i (gnyan gyis) bu ma rnyed/ ny+y+n (gnyan) rgan dar ba'i/ skyin 'dang gnam las phab/ sa rim pa dgu bzlab kyang/ [fol. 30a] sor 3 'og na lus pa'i/ ny+y+n+y+i (=gnyan gyi) bu ma rnyed/ ny+y+n (gnyan) bya khyung yang ny+y+n+y+i (gnyan gyi) bu tshol yang du gshags (=gshegs)/ ldong mkhar sh+y+e+n+y+i (=gshen gyi) bskor/ bu'i spo thog na/ 'phur dang lhabs+e (lhabs se) lhabs/ ldong sras spro thung gis/ gshen+b (gshen rab) mi po gnyer/ bso'i gtang la rkug (=bkug)/ yul gdon nag+o (nag po) bsag/ ny+y+n (=gnyan) dmag lan 1 de ru bshos (=bshegs)/ de tsam na sku bla du ru (=de ru) yod/ bu'o gcen dang gzhu (=gcung) nyis (=gnyis) gis/ pha nor shel gi gtar bu (=thar bu?) la bka' dang mchid ma 'jal/ ldong sras kha la 'dre las pa'i/ khyed nyid (gnyis?) cho cho thabs+y+i (=thabs kyi) thab (=thabs) pa la/ gang rgyal ba'i khyod (=khyer) kyi skad/ bu'o yon cho la ldong sras kyen (=rkyen?) du byas pa'i/ cho lo bu ba rgyal/ phu'o zhal na red/ nga'i khyed la ci gnod pa/ khos kyed (=khyer) na kyed la ci phan zer/ bla ri ngas shes zer na/ ldong sras zhal na re/ nga'i khyed ldong ma lags pa/ ny+y+n+i (gnyan gyi) bu bsad pa/ bka' bkyon su yin ma smras skad/ de rlung pal shi shos thob/ des byang rlung hos+r po bzlas/de'i tsha po ny+y+n (gnyan) la [fol. 30b] bzlas/ ny+y+n (gnyan) gi 'brugis ('brug gis) bsag pa phyogs 4 brdab/

ldong sras yi srid yang/ de las bros de song/ rta kor (=dkar po) di ring zhon/ lcag+r po (=lcag dkar po?) di+ngis (?) bzung/ de las pros (=bros) de song/ btsan sha bsos mi 2+y (=gnyis) dang 'phrad 'jal (=mjal)/ g.yi (=g.yig) byas dang rta dang

rta+x⁵⁶ ki byi pa'i kha las ki thos gi bros 1 skad/ btsan+yi (=btsan gyi) bdud kyī
 de tsug byas pa'i bros/ btsan+y+i (btsan gyi) sha bshol yang ny+y+n+y+i (gnyan
 gyi) dmag mi bzung/ rta mdos lcags+u (lcags su) bshos phug (bshol phang?) de/
 ldong sras lcam+r+l (lcam dral) de'i mdang (=mdangs)/ ny+y+n (=gnyan) dmag
 gi nyeng (=rnyed) a th+y+s (=thug)⁵⁷ na/ sring mo zhal na re/ nged ming sring
 la sngun lan i yod skad/ dbu'i so yang bsngang (=sngangs) de 'phangs/ nag+l+l
 (=nag tshal) gling dgu (=du) song/ shing yang de phyir ny+y+n (gnyan)/ yang
 ny+y+n (gnyan) d+>+g (=sa bdag) rten la th+y+s (=thug)/ mkhar ba'i gdu bu
 'phang/ sa mkhar skya bo yod/ des sa yang de phyir 2 (=gnyan)/ yang ny+y+n
 (gnyan) dmag rten la thug/ s+yer (gser) gi sor rubs 'phang la brag ma [fol. 31a]
 rung (=ru?) song/ ny+y+n (gnyan) dmag sum cha (=sum brgya?) de la chags/ brag
 yang de phyir ny+y+n (gnyan)/ yang ny+y+n (gnyan) dmag rten la thud (=thugs)/
 rngung (=dngul) kar (=dkar) me long bsngang (=sngangs?) ni 'phang/ rgya+o+m+
 (=rgya mtsho'i) gling dgur song/ sum cha (=brgya?) de la lus/ mtsho yang de phyir
 gnyan/ de las rma chen boṃ ra duṃ du sprin (=sbran)/ ny+y+n (gnyan) rgyal zhal
 na re/ boṃ ra khyed yul sa'i rgyalo (=rgyal po) yin/ nga ny+y+n+y (=gnyan gyi)
 rgyal po yin pa'i/ nga'i mi l+swogs (=la ...?gsod) de mar phyir/ zlogs zer poṃ ra'i
 zhal na re/ khyed yin duṃ 'di bya yin naṃ/ nga la bung+o (=bu yong? bu slong?)
 yin naṃ/ dper na byis (=byi) dang khras dad (=ded) tsa/ na 'un la skyabs pa yin/
 mthu' (=mthu) dang rdzas (=rtsal) la 'gren (=gran)/ ny+y+n (=gnyan) dmag sum
 cha (=sum brgya?) de chags/ 2s+y+i (gnyan gyis) ribs (=ri rab) pang (=dpang/
 spang?) ru+o+m (?) bzhos (=bshegs?)/ sbyar po sa la sman bshal pa 'dra/ boṃ ra
 rib (=ri rab) rtse mo bcad/ sbyar na sog bya (=so bya) 'dra/ mthul (mthu rtsal)
 boṃ ra che/ yang de k bong ra (=bom ra) ny+y+n (gnyan) la mdung (=mdangs?)
 sgyur byin de btang/ ldong sras lc+r+m+l (lcam dral) yang/ zhang po ny+y+n
 (gnyan) rje sgong sngon can du bskyal na/ de yang mthu+l (mthu rtsal) 'gren
 (=gran) na/ mda' re 'phang na ny+y+n (gnyan) rgan+y+i+s (rgan gyis)/ ri brgyad
 lung brgyad phug/ [fol. 31b] ny+y+n (gnyan) rje'i ru (=ri) dgu lung dgu phug/ der
 kor (=gong) sngon gyi gzu byas pa'i/ mi dang gnyan 2 bsduṃ 'tshal skad/ kor
 (=gong) sngon gshen+b (gshen rab) tshol de gshegs/

(29a) Hey! In the Nyen country Phoma Serteng,
 from the union of Dzutrul, the son of Cha [beings],
 and lady Mutheng-nga,
 appeared Nyen Kyere Trepo.

56 It is apparently *rta* with a cross above it, but one would expect *lcags* ('iron') here.

57 Although the emendation may strange, *th+y+s* bears apparently meaning *thug* later in the text.

From [his] union with Mänsha Yumo,⁵⁸
appeared Troba, the Son of Nyen.

High up in the country of Tengyul Karba,
dwells Father Great Tong.
He coupled with the daughter of Gong Ngon, the Lord of Nyen,
[named] Nyen Zere Theng Gormo.
(29b) Older brother Trothung,⁵⁹ the Son of Dong,
and daughter Yocam Karmo, the two,
appeared [from their union].

And she, [Yocam Karmo] herself,
at the edge of the field,
at [the place called] Makyong,
was looking with satisfaction.
That Throba, the Son of Nyen,
[engaged] in love-play,
with [Yo]cham Karmo of Dong.
During the days, they satiated their strong desire,
during the nights, they consummated their love.

Thritse Chenmang,
seeing them and watching them,
reported all to the Son of Dong.
The Son of Dong proceeded there,
he came to the lady at the edge [of the field].
Chasing the white man of Nyen,
summoning an excellent bright [horse] (?),
he arrived at the copper slope of a mountain.⁶⁰
The younger sister said:
'Elder brother, do not punish him,
do not kill the Son of Nyen!'
Swearing an oath at the summit of that place,
she told her elder brother not to do that.
He did not listen to her.

⁵⁸ The name could be rendered as 'Hind of the deer of *sman* [beings].'

⁵⁹ He is mentioned also as Trothug or Pothog (Spro thug/Spo thog) later in the text.

⁶⁰ This part is not clear, and the translation is only tentative.

That white Nyen transformed into a snake.
As a row of assembled arrows,⁶¹
he cut him into thousand pieces.

At that place of full mutilation,
he was hidden below the nine [layers] of earth.
Sister's foot appeared on the top of that place,
deliberately polluted he was hidden.
These two,
caused the son of Old Nyen Darba to be lost
from the country (*yul sa*) Phoma [Serteng].

[His father] travelled around the edge of the sky,
but did not find his son.
The Old Nyen Darba,
made hail fall from the sky.
Though it loosened nine layers of earth (30a),
he did not find his son,
left below the top [of the place where the sister's] toes [had been].⁶²

Even the bird of Nyen, Khyung,
went again in search of the son of Nyen.
It roamed around the Dong castle of priests,
to the place where the Son [of Nyen] went,
it flew—*lhab se lhab*.

Trothug, the Son of Dong,
invited Shenrab Miwonyer to ease the situation.
The black demons Don (*gdon*) of that country gathered,
in a moment, the armies of Nyen arrived.

⁶¹ The translation is only tentative. The usual meaning of *mda' ra* is 'archery enclosure,' however, it seems to convey the image that the cut pieces of the body of snake resembled 'gathered arrows.'

⁶² The translation is tentative. The text explicitly mentions 'three toes' (*sor gsum*). The toes refer to the polluting act of stepping on the place by the feet of the sister. Number three has also a symbolic meaning as the 'top' of something, and this is what is probably meant here.

At that time, the Kula (*sku bla*) was present there.⁶³
 The elder son [of the Kula] and the younger one,⁶⁴
 met for discussion and talked,
 about [dividing] the father's crystal goods and riches.⁶⁵
 The Son of Dong, whose mouth was relying on demon Dre, said:
 'You two, play dice.
 Whoever wins will take [the riches].'
 The dice of the younger brother,
 was made favourable by the Son of Dong,⁶⁶
 the younger brother won the dice game.

The elder brother said:
 'What harm comes to you from me?
 Of what benefit for you is his taking [the riches]?
 Only the Soul-Mountain (*bla ri*) knows it with all certainty.'
 The Son of Dong said:
 'My affection towards you was not good,
 I have killed the Son of Nyen.'⁶⁷
 Do not tell anyone who is to be blamed for it.'⁶⁸

It reached the Wind, Palshisho,
 it was repeated to the northern Wind, Höpo,
 and his nephew repeated it to the Nyen.
 The threat of Nyen's dragons fell on the four directions,
 many armies of Nyen gathered.

63 Kula (*sku bla*) is an epithet of several terrestrial divinities in the text. It appears also in the name of Machen Pomra (Sku bla rma bom bra/pom ra/pom bra), but not exclusively. It is not clear which divinity is meant here. Version B (142) speaks about a certain Sku bla na re tsang and his sons.

64 The sons mentioned in the version B could be hypothetically taken as sons of Machen Pomra, since this mountain deity is frequently addressed simply as Kula (*sku bla*) in the myths of Nyen Collections.

65 Version B says that they argued about the division of the father's wealth.

66 Version B describes how the Son of Dong empowered the dice by spells.

67 Version B speaks about a 'bad omen of death' (*shi than*) present in the result of the game.

68 These verses speak about the demon (somehow related to the killing of the Son of Nyen) who causes the Son of Dong to favour the younger brother, who gains the wealth of his father, the mountain divinity. This is contrary to common habit, since older brothers usually inherit property. The Son of Dong then realises that it was the killing of the Nyen which caused him to act in such a way.

However, the Son of Dong was able
to escape and flee away.
Riding a white horse,
holding a white whip,⁶⁹
escaping he fled away.

He met a deer of the demon Tsen,
and two men⁷⁰ hunting it.
Breathing heavily [he was told]:
‘[Leave] the horse and whip here.
Since they heard that childish talk, escape!’
Having done as he had been [told by] Tsen and Du he fled away.⁷¹
The two demons Tsen hunting deer were not taken by armies of Nyen,
those of appearance of the brother and sister of Dong,
the ransomed horse and whip were left there.

Being found by the armies of Nyen,
which were almost reaching them,
the Sister of Dong said:
‘Do we, brother and sister,
have something to be left in front of us?’⁷²
Being frightened he threw away a tooth of his head,
it reached the region of woods.
Three hundred troops of Nyen gathered in the woods,
and this is why the woods are Nyen.

69 The text reads *rta dkar po di ring zhon/ lcags (=lcag) dkar dungs si bzung/*. The meaning of the expressions *di ring* and *dungs si* is not clear and these are omitted in the translation. I am indebted to Charles Ramble for pointing out the possible meaning of *lcags* (= *lcag*, ‘whip’).

70 The number given in the original could mean also ‘seven.’ However, taking into consideration version B, which speaks about two demons, ‘two’ is taken here as probably the more correct reading.

71 The translation of this part is very tentative and it seems that part of the sentences are missing here. The general meaning has been reconstructed with the aid of version B, which is closest in these parts and more detailed. It speaks not about ‘white whip,’ but about ‘white cloth.’ Demons serve as a ransom offering (*ngar mi*), the horse and the cloth of the Son of Dong are intended to create the impression that he himself is present.

72 The text reads *sngun lan*, which literally means ‘in front—to react/answer.’

The troops of Nyen reached the ‘support’ of lords of soil.
 The bracelet of bell metal was cast away,
 it became a greyish castle of earth and stones,
 and this is why the soil is Nyen.

Escaping to the bolder the golden ring⁷³ was cast away,
 three hundred troops of Nyen became attached to it,
 and this is why the boulders are Nyen.
 The troops of Nyen reached their ‘support.’

Escaping to the region of lakes,
 a silver mirror did they cast away,
 three hundred [of troops] were left there,
 and this is why the lakes are Nyen.

From there they continued to Machen Pomra [searching] for reconciliation.
 The Lord of Nyen said:
 ‘Pomra, you are the lord of terrestrial divinities (*yul sa*),
 I am the lord of Nyen.
 And because of that murder by people,
 drive back!’
 Pomra said:
 ‘You, would it not do to be reconciled?
 Has not the son [of Dong] come to me?
 For example, when being chased by a hawk,
 the mouse finds protection in the fog.
 Let’s compete in power!’

Three hundred troops of Nyen appeared there,
 they proceeded to the height of the Most Excellent of Mountains (*ri rab*).
 Pomra cut the top of the Most Excellent of Mountains,
 Pomra was stronger in power.⁷⁴
 Granting a rooster (?) to Nyen,⁷⁵
 Pomra conferred it on them.

⁷³ The translation is tentative, but it is probable that *sor rubs* might be an expression for ‘finger-ring.’ Probably *sor rubs* < *sor gdub*, ‘ring.’

⁷⁴ I am omitting here two sentences the meaning of which is not clear.

⁷⁵ The text reads *mdung bsgyur* (‘spear-averting’), which could mean *mdongs bsgyur* (‘appear-

ldong sras dang thog tis bsad zin/ der mi dang gnyan gnyis byed (=byed)/ de nas rma pom ra yis/ mi dang gnyan gnyis par du/ shel tshig khri dkar stong nag gis/ mi dang gnyan gnyis bsadums so/ de'i yon tan gyis/ mi dang gnyan gnyis mjal/ de ring yang gnyan bya mtshams bu 'dis/ mi dang gnyan gnyis sprad do/ le'u yon bdag gis/ gnyan gyi ma bu sprad pas/ yon bdag gi gnyan ma bu yis/ ma bu rtag du sprad/ de nas gnyan rgan de ba yis/ gnyan bon thang thang grol ba gnyer/ gnyan gzhi dkar po bting/ bzang bya bcu gsum dang/ pha bong ljags sgom (=pha wang ljags sgam) dang gnyan po sprul skar la 'phrin pa [fol. 317] btang/ pha bang (=pha wang) yang gnyan yul yang nas chas/ pha bang ljags sgom (=ljags sgam) ste/ gnyan sras sbrul dkar gyi drung du phyin/ khye'u na re/ khyed kyi bu yis ng 'phen pa yin no zer/ gnyan sras zhal na re/ pha bang khyed kyi rdzun ma byed/ nga la gson dus su mu med pa la/ shi na bu gar byung skad pa dang/ pha bang zhal na re/ khod ldang (=ldong) lcang dang bshos pa'i bu ni/ mi khri ltong khyab bya ba yin/ de gnyan rgan de ba gnyis kyis/ nga pha bong (=pha wang) phrin pa btang ba yin pas/ da nga'i zla ru 'dug dgos skad/ gnyan chen sbrul dkar de/ pha ma lcags mkhyen (=pha wang ljags sgam) gyi khyid (=khrīd) nas 'ongs/ pha zhal dang bu ngo phrad do/ de le'u yon bdag gi pha zhal dang ngo 'phrad do/

Then, salutation to the meeting of mother and son of Nyen!
 At the past place of the beginning,
 when the people and Nyen dwelled in their own respective countries,
 the son of Old Nyen Deva,
 Was with the passing of time killed by the Son of Dong,
 people and Nyen were divided.

Then, Ma[chen] Pomra,
 in between Nyen and humans,
 by ten thousand white and a thousand black scorched grains,
 reconciled [the dispute between] people and Nyen.

By the virtue of that,
 the humans and Nyen met.
 And even today this bird of Nyen—*mtshams bu* (?),
 makes humans and Nyen meet.
 By meeting mother and son,
 caused by the donors of *leu* (*le'u yon bdag*),⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Tib. *le'u*. It denotes a particular ritual tradition and it is a name both for the ritual specialists within such tradition and ritual. Traces of such a ritual tradition can be found in Thewo. See

the mother and son of the donors,
the mother and son meet forever!

Then, [for] the Old Nyen Deva,
the white basis of Nyen was spread,
by Nyenbon Thangthang Drolba Nyer.
He dispatched to the White Snake of Nyen (i.e. the Son of Nyen)
thirteen fine birds,
and the Bat with wise tongue as messengers.

Though the Bat
left the vast country of Nyen,
that Bat with wise tongue,
reached the [dead] Son of Nyen—the white snake.

The youth [Bat] said:
‘I was dispatched by your son.’
The Son of Nyen said:
‘You, Bat, do not lie!
When I was alive, I had no son.
Having died, how would my son appear?’
The Bat said:
‘The son from your union with the Daughter of Dong,
is named Mitri Tongkhyab (Mi khri stong khyab).
He and Old Nyen Deva, the two,
have sent me—the Bat—as a messenger.
Now, you must be my companion!’
That great Nyen—white snake—
was led by the Bat with wise tongue.
On their arrival, the faces of father and son met.
Similarly, the donors of *leu*,
make the faces of father and son meet.

