

Khenchén Tenpa Yungdrung Rinpoche

Preface

Yungdrung Bon, the ancient religious tradition of Tibet and the Himalayas, represents a distinct and enduring spiritual system with a rich historical and doctrinal foundation. Attributed to its founder, Buddha Tönpa Shenrab Miwoche, Bon encompasses a comprehensive framework of teachings known as the Nine Ways of Bon (Bon Thegpa Rimgu), each addressing the diverse capacities and spiritual inclinations of its practitioners. Within this schema, Dzogchen (Dzogpa Chenpo), or the Great Perfection, is revered as the ninth and most profound path.

The first four of the Nine Ways primarily emphasise ritual and practical methods designed to promote the temporal well-being of sentient beings. These include disciplines such as divination, astrology, healing, traditional medicine, prosperity rites, longevity practices, and rituals and means for supporting the dying and the deceased. Deeply integrated into the fabric of everyday life, these practices have been transmitted and preserved across generations in various forms throughout the communities and institutional traditions of Tibet and the greater Himalayan region.

In contrast, the remaining five Ways of Bon are oriented toward the attainment of higher spiritual realisation. These comprise the path of renunciation, focused on monastic discipline; the path of transformation, characterised by tantric methods; and the path of liberation, centred on the advanced yogic meditation practices of Dzogchen. The transmission of these teachings occurs through three principal modalities known as the Three Streams of Transmission: Wang (empowerment), Lung (textual or reading transmission), and Tri (instruction – both theoretical and experiential). Full reception of these three components is essential for the authenticity and continuity of the practice, particularly for those who hold the responsibility of conferring teachings and transmissions. According to established lineage protocols, for instance, a teacher who has not personally received the Lung or Wang of a particular cycle from a qualified lineage-holder is not authorised to transmit them to others.

An expanded dimension of ritual practice in the Bon tradition involves the use of a diverse array of sacred objects and substances, each imbued with symbolic and ritual significance. These implements are intentionally acquired and carefully preserved by practitioners, often passed down over generations, serving as supports that sustain the efficacy and authenticity of the practice. Among these ritual supports are *tsakali* – miniature painted cards or icons – used in visualisation, empowerment and protection rituals.

The present volume focuses on a unique set of *tsakali* associated with the Zhangzhung Nyengyü cycle of Dzogchen teachings, a lineage preserved within the Kama tradition of oral transmission. Unlike Terma (Revealed Treasures), which are discovered texts often concealed for future revelation, the Zhangzhung Nyengyü has been transmitted in an unbroken line from teacher to disciple over centuries.

This study, edited by Agnieszka Helman-Ważny, represents a pioneering interdisciplinary investigation into these rare and culturally significant objects. Through the integration of textual and iconographic analysis with material science methodologies – including the examination of paper, pigments, ink and script – the work offers new perspectives on the historical and ritual functions of *tsakali*. This innovative approach bridges important gaps in the study of Tibetan material culture and contributes meaningfully to our broader understanding of the religious, artistic and intellectual history of Tibet and the Himalayas.

I extend my sincere appreciation and congratulations to the authors for these scholarly contributions, and I recommend this volume to all those engaged in the study of Tibetan religions, art history, material culture and cross-disciplinary research. It is my hope that this work will inspire further inquiry and offer valuable insight into one of the world's oldest and most complex spiritual traditions.

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