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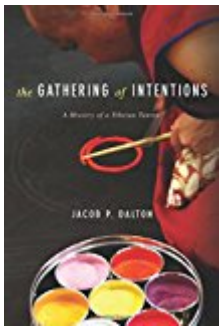

Jacob Paul Dalton. *The Gathering of Intentions: A History of a Tibetan Tantra.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. xxiii + 246 pp. $60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-17600-2.

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Commissioned by John Powers (Deakin University)

At the outset it should be observed that this is a thoroughly researched and rewarding book. If there are difficulties for the reader they are in the book's remarkable density. Every sentence requires some thought and where possible requires that the reader consult many of the cited references. This is in no manner intended as a criticism. Rather, it is a testament to the consistently high quality of Jacob Dalton's scholarship, to which we were introduced in his *Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (2011).

The present work, as the title suggests, tracks the "vicissitudes of a single ritual system" (p. xv) between the ninth century and the present time. This in itself is a rare feat for though it is possible to follow a group of tantras successfully through their lifespans with broad brushstrokes it is infinitely more difficult to do so with a single tantra. Such an approach permits the questioning of issues that might well have remained hidden had many tantras been studied. Dalton's study raises major questions such as, "Does a tantra remain the same as it travels through new phases?" (p. xvi). This leads to even larger questions, such as, "Does a tantra's periodic 'renovation' make it into an entirely new text?" As the reader will note from their reading of the present work, the author might suggest that it is less an issue of "altering or renovating" a tantra than the varying uses to which that tantra might be put and the consequent shifts in focus onto entirely different aspects of it that necessarily follow.

The text under discussion, the *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo,* or, as it referred to in the book, the *Gathering of Intentions Sutra* (*sic*), is said to have originated from a valley to the north of Kashmir and to have been written in the Burushaski language of northern Gilgit and Baltistan. By the twelfth century the tantra had come to be radically questioned--it was claimed that it was not a Buddhist work, that it was a Tibetan forgery, that it was not even Indic, and that its so-called Burushaski origins were incorrect. Jacob Dalton diligently follows this discussion as it evolved through to recent times in which the twentieth-

century lama Khenpo Nüden claims that the original text was written in Sanskrit and later translated into Burushaski and from that into Tibetan, thereby fulfilling the Tibetan Buddhist "requirement" for an authentic Indic source. To this convoluted origin account the author adds his own opinion that the original might well have been composed in Tibetan and that the core aspect of the tantra that deals with the Rudra mythos might well have derived from a Burushaski original. Moreover, Dalton is of the opinion that the Rudra myth did in fact form the core of the tantra in its original form. Later in the book he observes that in his opinion both the "*Gathering of Intentions* and its circle of 'root sutras' [*sic*] had at least one foot in a genuinely early and possibly Indian ritual system" (p. 72). Between pages 26 and 29 the author discusses the vexed issue of the apparently simultaneous arising of the tantra. Both King Dza and Rudra were said to have possessed their own views of the tantra's purpose, and Dalton examines the co-existence of both myths and the problem arising from legends of their origins in the same location but at different times.

The benefit of following a single tantra is evident in the author's meticulous tracking of the various "uses" to which it was put, and it is in this that I think the book's main strength lies. In the tantra's earliest iteration in the ninth century, Nupchen Sangyé Yeshé shaped it so that it was able to offer a place and a systematic role for all the many new tantras emanating from India. By the eleventh or twelfth century, members of the Zur clan had recast the tantra as an Anuyoga text, largely in response to critics who regarded it as a non-Tibetan forgery. By the fourteenth or fifteenth century, Tibetan use of the tantra had waned and chapter 4 ("The Rise of the Sutra [*sic*] Initiation") is, of necessity, a quite densely informative one, dealing as it does with the development of the tantra's initiation structure.

The author's shrewd comments are noted throughout the book. For example, when discussing the formation of a new lineage at the monastery of Dorje Drak in the seventeenth century, he says, "A lineage and the authority it bestows depend very much on its perceived givenness, yet it does not simply exist to be discovered; it is created.... Lineage thus pretends to be destiny but is (at least in part) narrative" (p. 78). He then discusses the formation of Dorje Drak from a variety of angles, but the main theme of this chapter is clearly the detailed discussion of the extent to which the tantra's trajectory was intimately "intertwined with the politics of the day" (p. 79).

The author continually raises issues that add a deeper dimension to what we already know of Tibet's tantric history. In particular, he notes the implications arising from the *Gathering of Intentions* and its ninefold classificatory structure of the tantras that is said to reflect the Buddha's teachings. The structure of the classification is based upon the three core themes of Suffering (Śrāvaka/Pratyekabuddha/Bodhisattva), Asceticism (Kriyā tantra/ Ubhaya tantra/Yoga tantra), and Powerful Methods (Mahāyoga tantra/Anuyoga tantra/ Atiyoga tantra).

Chapter 3 ("The Spoken Teachings") discusses the early Zur tradition and the oral teachings on the tantra. Among the topics covered are the genesis of the terma tradition and the Zur lineage's awkward relationship with that class of literature. Its resistance toward terma and its insistence on holding them at bay led to accusations being made that both prelates, the Greater and Lesser Zur (Zurché and Zurchung), had composed their own texts, passing them off as genuine. The effect of the second wave of Indian teachings entering Tibet is summarized and discussed, and the author notes that they had the effect of offering their adherents "unprecedented power and prestige" (p. 51). This, he observes, led in part among the New School adherents to a process of "growing interest among Tibetans in constructing lineages tying themselves and their teachings back to India" (p. 55). The tempo of this "archaeological" process

seems to have been maintained well into the sixteenth century. This search for Indic "originals" was extremely difficult for the Nyinmgma Old School members, for whom the obtaining of the requisite proof was far more difficult.

In what for this reviewer was the most exciting chapter (chapter 5: "Dorjé Drak and the Formation of a New Lineage"), Dalton deals with what he calls "Nyingma Politics in the Seventeenth Century." He provides us with detailed information on the fifth Dalai Lama and his uneasy relationship with both the Mongols and the rulers of Tsang. Of especial interest to the reviewer was the highly critical (and yet apparently objective) statement made by the fifth Dalai Lama that the ruler of Tsang, Karma Tenkyong Wangpo, "did not practice the secret mantra of the Nyingma [School] as his main doctrinal system" (pp. 91-92). From that point the Great Fifth goes on to detail the many and varied failings of Karma Tenkyong Wangpo, whose "tiny bit of practice" of the Nyingma was that of Zhikpo Lingpa's terma cycles. The Great Fifth further claims that the Tsang ruler might have been intending to retroactively "take over" one of the core aspects of Dorjé Drak, namely the Northern Treasures (p. 92n38). Here we have clearly entered the byzantine world of seventeenth-century Tibetan politics with a vengeance!

In chapter 6 ("The Mindröling Tradition"), Dalton discusses the Mindröling monastic tradition of the Nyingma and examines the position it occupied with the original rituals of the ***dGongs 'dus*** and its subsequent shaping by those whom Dalton refers to as "the Mindröling brothers" (p. 111). Dalton gives a sound and reasoned argument for why it was Mindröling that took the Nyingma back to a more solidly founded textual and ritual past. Moreover, he discusses why Mindröling came to reinstate public ritual, reintroduce to certain initiates the public performance of the ***Gathering of Intentions*** maṇḍala, and place a stronger accent on a Nyingma sense of ***communitas***. Among other topics, the author discusses the remarkable changes within the Nyingma that sought for a larger view of the role of the ***Gathering of Intentions***, in particular the linking together of its public ritual performance and the presenting of larger and more elaborate state ceremonies. This move may also be extrapolated to a renewal of a nascent national sentiment, although this is not explicitly discussed by the author.

In the seventh and final chapter ("Returns to the Origin"), Dalton tracks the slow demise of the tantra as a unique and separate entity. After the eighteenth century, he writes, it had become so much a part of the background of all Nyingma practice that it was no longer regarded as a remarkable work. Rather, it had become such an intimate aspect of practice that it had become in fact "the scene" itself and had almost perfectly blended into the general Nyingma background.

The final chapter focuses on the Nyingma need for a sense of unity, or as the author refers to it, "homogenization." In this chapter he tracks the so-called nineteenth-century Nyingma "revival" in eastern Tibet and notes the focal location of the tantra's maṇḍala, lying as it did rather incongruously almost at the heart of public ceremony. Dalton addresses the vexed question of how a tantra that had been largely ignored as a part of Nyingma praxis for some centuries could become so focal in public ceremony. As far as I understand it, the tantra's dynamics had been so thoroughly integrated into Nyingma practice as a visionary overview of the entire system that it no longer seemed to offer anything new. The exception, as Dalton notes, was that "in the festival, as in early Tibet, the ***Gathering of Intentions*** and its mandala provide the ritual architecture within which the other tantric systems operate" (p. 123).

In the book's stirring finale, the author meticulously details the harrowing and complex tale of Penor Rinpoché's saving of the last manuscript of Khenpo Nüden's precious commentary on the tantra, a tale worthy of a thriller novel. This ac-

count alone is entirely worth the price of the book. Without a doubt this is a highly recommended book and a very successful exploration of the life and vicissitudes of a single tantra.