

## Perspective

# Comparative Studies of Two Major Sets of Tibetan Medical Paintings: A Historical Perspective\*

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**ABSTRACT** Tibetan medicine, one of the time-honored medical systems in the world, has increasingly been receiving attention the world over. Tibetan medical paintings (TMP, *tib. Sman thang*) has become one of the focal points in the studies of this medical system. To date, there are many atlases and publications on TMP, which are principally based on the two major sets of TMP series existing today in the world, the Lhasa set and the Buryat set. It has been found that the Buryat set is based on the Lhasa set, which was brought in late 19th to the first half of the 20th century from Tibet to Buryatia, Russia. A careful investigation on the basic structure of the two sets reveals that there are many differences between the two sets of paintings, including the total number of the paintings involved, of which some are missing in one set, the details of the captions of some of the paintings, the existence of the 80th painting and its supervisor, and the overall order of the entire set, etc. The details of the differences are elaborated and discussed, and the prospective of developing the research to arrive at a standard and perfect TMP set in the future is also analyzed and anticipated.

**KEYWORDS** Tibetan medical painting, *Sman thang*, Lhasa set, Buryat set, Tibetan painting art, Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho

Tibetan medicine, one of the long-established traditional medical systems in the world, has been a focus of interest in the studies of Tibetology for quite some time. Studies on Tibetan medicine in the West can be traced back to the 19th century, when Alexander Csoma de Körös (1784–1842), the founder of Tibetology in the West, contributed an article introducing the most important Tibetan medical classic, the *Four Medical Tantras (Rgyud bzhi)*.<sup>(1)</sup> Though he only gave a brief introduction to this work, chapter by chapter, without his own comments, this article commences the familiarity of the Western world with Tibetan medicine. Since then, the studies of Tibetan medicine by Westerners developed steadily until the latter half of the 20th century. Tibetan medical paintings (TMP) have received much scholarly attention since the last century. It has become one of the main interests for the studies of Tibetan medicine worldwide. In Tibetan language, TMP are called *Sman thang*; here *sman* refers to medicine, while *thang* is short for *thangka*, a kind of scroll painting, which is typically hung on the wall for worshipping, depicting Buddhas or Gods. They are also used as a pedagogical tool. The manufacturing of *thangkas* has a long history of hundreds of years in Tibet. However, one of the most distinctive sets of such paintings

on medicine is a series of 79 paintings that appeared in the latter half of the 17th century and were sponsored by Desi Sangye Gyatso (Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1653–1705), the Regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lozang Gyatso (Ngag dbang blo bsang rgya mtsho, 1617–1682). Since then, replicas of these TMP, either in sets or individually, have been prepared outside Lhasa, and even outside China, including in the Western world as well. Since the end of the 20th century, an increasing number of such sets gradually appeared, often in the form of atlases, but also excerpts of their illustrations were reprinted in monographs on Tibetan medicine or in related articles in journals. Some of the important and most representative works are shown in Appendix 1.

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There are also other authors using TMPs, mostly as illustrations for their books related to Tibetan medicine or scholarly articles appearing in academic journals. Among them are Ilza Veith,<sup>(2)</sup> Ronald E. Emmerick,<sup>(3)</sup> Elizabeth Finckh,<sup>(4)</sup> Rechung Rinpoche Jampal Kunzang,<sup>(5)</sup> and many others.

### Two Sets of TMP

The publications mentioned in Appendix 1 can be classified in two main groups. The first group of works was published in the form of an atlas, including the entire or parts of the entire TMP set. Examples of this group are: the atlas published in Moscow,<sup>(6)</sup> with its entire set of paintings now collected at the History Museum of Buryatia in Ulan Ude, Russia; the atlas published in Lhasa,<sup>(7)</sup> with its entire set of paintings now held at the Commission of Cultural Relics of Tibet at the *Nor bu gling ka*; and a third set held at the old *Sman rtsis khang* (now the Hospital of Traditional Tibetan Medicine of Tibet), both located in Lhasa. Examples of the second group are: *Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet* by Janet Gyatso,<sup>(8)</sup> *A Guidebook for Health Cultivation of Tibetan Medical Thangka Series*,<sup>(9)</sup> and *An Illustrated Expositions of Medicinal Thangkas of Four Medical Tantras*,<sup>(10)</sup> all studying the paintings mainly through analyses of small vignettes from selected plates with discussions in the form of essays and narration compiled by the authors themselves.

Gyatso's work is a substantial masterpiece mainly with in-depth discussions on the TMP from a religious, as well as historical perspective, describing the debates among the ancient Tibetan scholars on various topics of Tibetan medicine and their differences, addressing issues such as the nature of the *Four Medical Tantras*, tantric channels and bodily channels, position of the heart, and so forth.

It can be seen from the above that there are two different approaches to the studies of the TMP, one dealing with the entire set of paintings based on Sde srid's own conception of each painting and its gross appearance, whereas the other mainly deals with the detailed figures or the vignettes, paying attention to their minute structures, such as the morphology of human skull, the hairdos, position and inner structure such as the heart, the centers of channels, tantric channels and physical channels, sex, female anatomy and pathology, the mythical city of Tanaduk, various medicinals, and medical morality, and so forth. We think that it might be acceptable to compare these two approaches of the TMP research to the two closely

related subjects in the preclinical medical curriculum, namely gross human anatomy and histology. The former, such as the atlases published by Serindia, mainly deals with the gross structures of human body, while the latter, such as *An Illustrated Expositions of Medicinal Thangkas of Four Medical Tantras*, penetration into the minute structures of tissues and organs of the body.

When inspecting the TMP sets as a whole, they can be divided into two different sets, the one preserved in Lhasa and the other one in Buryatia. For the convenience of discussion, we refer them as the Lhasa set and the Buryat set respectively. Except for a few paintings that appeared as illustrations in journal articles or other monographs, all paintings especially those appearing in the atlases fall under either the Lhasa set or the Buryat set. Notably, despite a few exceptions, almost all the atlases published in the Western world are derived from the Buryat set, while those published in the east, are based on the Lhasa set. Here, the exceptions include two atlases: the Italian atlas,<sup>(11)</sup> and the atlas *Body & Spirit: Tibetan Medical Paintings*.<sup>(12)</sup> Although published in Western languages, the Italian atlas is based on the Lhasa set and not the Buryat set, though with slight modifications. Moreover, the Italian set also includes the 6th and 7th plates of Sde srid's originals, which are excluded from the Buryat set. The reason for these, we guess, might be due to one of its authors, Namkhai Norbu is a native Tibetan and has close relationship with the Tibetan medical circle in Tibet. He traveled to Italy to establish the Shang Shung Institute of Tibetan Medicine (Istituto Internazionale di Studi Tibetani Shang Shung). The Italian plates might have been introduced by Namkhai Norbu who naturally has the capacity to occupy TMP series originated in Lhasa. Even more interesting is the atlas *Body & Spirit: Tibetan Medical Painting*. Unlike the Russian atlas and all other atlases in Western languages which are based on the Buryat set, the paintings in *Body & Spirit* were all painted by the Nepalese artist Romio Shrestha and Artelia, both self-taught artists. According to the preface of this atlas, the artists painted their plates on the basis of both Buryat and Lhasa sets, applying their own technical conception and understanding.<sup>(12)</sup> The book depicts 79 paintings with the missing 6th and 7th plates of the Buryat set incorporated at the end of the atlas as the 78th and 79th plates respectively, yet with all the original explanatory notes of the figures all omitted (see below).

### Significance of Tibetan Medical Paintings

Images play an active and positive role as teaching methods in modern education. The Tibetan medical painting sets are such a teaching tools used for education

in the first place. It is very helpful for the comprehension of the most important medical classic, the *Four Medical Tantras* and its commentary, the *Blue Beryl*. Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, the initiator and supervisor of the TMP, clearly points out that the paintings are to supplement the *Four Medical Tantras* so that the readers can more fully comprehend this classical work. He says:

However, now I was able to supplement the words of the Root, Explanatory and Final Tantras as well as the Instructional Tantra.

As a way for everyone from the scholar to the child to easily understand the entire meaning of the above as clearly as seeing a berry<sup>①</sup> in the palm of one's hand, I commissioned a collection of medical paintings, something never before accomplished.<sup>(13)</sup>

Moreover, Sde srid's idea extended also to make the TMP a device that would strictly follow his commentary, the *Blue Beryl*. This can be seen from the beginning of the captions of all seventy-nine paintings, which read: "From the *Blue Beryl*..." (*Baidurya sngon po las...*).

Actually, the 79-painting set represents the entire text of the *Blue Beryl*, and some of its content go beyond that of the *Four Medical Tantras* itself. This might have influenced the producer(s) of the Buryat set to omit some of the paintings, because they considered that these omitted plates represent neither the *Four Medical Tantras*, nor the *Blue Beryl*, but other scholars' idea (see below). Gyatso emphasizes the main aim of the TMP as "an easily scanned overview of the text's contents."<sup>(14)</sup> One might be able to find the locations of the names of all the animals and the locations mentioning sexual behavior among humans in the *Four Medical Tantras* and the *Blue Beryl* by checking these in the corresponding places on the plates of the TMP. Thus, to a certain extent one can consider it an index for the readers because of its completeness.

Not only aiming at the popularization of medical knowledge, the painting set also reveals the authority and prestige of the rulers, the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent,

with a bold ambition. In some *thangkas*, the portrait of the ruler occupies the central position of the painting in larger size, and even the past sages such as Padmasambhava or Bairochana and many others are depicted surrounding the ruler in much smaller sizes. As stated by Sde srid himself: "The Omniscient Lotus-holder's pair of feet will be stable like a *vajra*, and the dominion of the heavenly appointed Ganden Podrang that integrates religion and politics will stay a long time."<sup>(15)</sup> Sde srid mentions in his *Mirror of Beryl* (*Gso rig sman gyi khog 'bugs*) and in the *Blue Beryl* that his intention to produce such a set of paintings is not only to illustrate his *Blue Beryl* for an easier understanding, but also to implicitly proclaim the high authority of his regime, the Ganden Podrang (*Dga' ldan pho brang*) and express his lofty wishes for the longevity of the Dalai Lama and a long duration of his government. This shows that his ambition reached far beyond the simple pedagogical purpose.

### Provenance and Evolution of Two Sets of TMP

Although the entire set of the original 79 paintings was virtually completed in the year 1703, as stated by Sde srid himself in his own work *Mirror of Beryl*, at the time when he wrote the *Blue Beryl* in 1688, he already mentions about "a collection of paintings", which refers to the paintings of the *Root Tantra* (the first part of the *Four Medical Tantras*), and had been completed by then; while those of the other three *Tantras* were underway.<sup>(16)</sup> In the year 1697, Sde srid presented a total of 60 paintings to the Sixth Dalai Lama, Tshangyang Gyatso (Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho), during his enthronement. During that decade, the paintings were reproduced repeatedly in unknown number, similarly Sde srid did not specify the numbers in his works. The paintings could have spread outside the palace to the secular world, where similar paintings are not necessarily be painted by professionals of such medical painting sets, but could be painted by non-professional painters through studying those illustrations in other sources to "conceive" these paintings, such as the Tibetan scholar Hgyur med rnam rgyal at Leh,<sup>(17)</sup> and Romio Shrestha (a non-professional artist for TMP) and his assistants at the Kathmandu studio to produce a whole set of TMP during a period of 7 years.<sup>(12)</sup>

Hence, it is practically infeasible to make an estimation of how many paintings existed then, even at the time of Sde srid's death. Nevertheless, during the investigation on the TMP set in 1976, which was conducted by a research team dispatched to Lhasa by the Chinese Central Government, it was found that the paintings preserved there at that time numbered to over 200. It is said that during the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai

<sup>①</sup>The Tibetan original here is *skyu ru (ra)*, whose scientific name should be *Phyllanthus emblica* L. Berry is a rendering causing confusion. Some dictionary renders it as hawthorn, or gooseberry which is also not accurate. In view of the Chinese name of 庵摩勒 in ancient Chinese herbal monographs, it would be more accurate to translate this fruit as emblica fruit, or Indian gooseberry as its popular title.

Lama, Thubten Gyatso (Thub bstan rgya mtsho), the whole set of paintings was entirely reproduced several times in separate years around 1918, 1923, and 1933.<sup>(18)</sup>

It can be said with certainty that all TMP atlases that exist today in the world are reproduced directly or indirectly from one of these original Lhasa sets. Gyatso asserts that the Buryat set is the one reproduced during the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and was then brought to Buryatia and most recently has been kept at the History Museum of Buryatia in Ulan Ude.<sup>(14)</sup> Unfortunately, exactly how this set traveled to Buryatia, Gyatso does not give us her source. Almost all the atlases of TMP published in Western languages are derived doubtlessly from the Buryat set.

The Buryat set was compiled and originally planned for publication under the title *Atlas Tibetskoy Mediciny* in the 1940s. In 1949, a draft of this atlas was completed, but, due to various reasons, it was not published formally until 1994. A few years prior to this atlas, a group of scholars, including Yuri Parfionovitch of the Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, Gyurme Dorje (Gyur med dor rje) of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and Fernand Meyer of the National Center for Scientific Research in Paris, made a thorough research of the set, resulting in the compilation of a new publication entitled *Tibetan Medical Paintings: Illustrations to the Blue Beryl Treatise of Sangye Gyamtso (1653–1705)*, published by Serindia in London in 1992. It includes a volume of paintings and another volume of texts, which was reprinted by Harry N. Abrams in New York the same year. Four years later, a German version was published by the Paul Haupt Verlag in Bern, translated and edited by Thomas Geist, Günther Heck, and Daniel Winkler. The existing Italian edition is not a complete set, but only includes 41 paintings. It is quite different from other Western TMP publications, because it is not based on the Buryat set, as already mentioned above.

According to one of the most authoritative Russian scholars on TMP, Natalia Bolsokhoyeva, there are different stories on the origin of the Buryat set of TMP. She maintains that most likely it was one of the important figures in the history of Tibet and Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, Agvan Dorjiev (1854–1938), when studying Buddhist philosophy and literature in the Goman datshang (sgo mang grwa tshang) in the prestigious Drepung ('bras spungs) Monastery, and became the tutor of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, knew the access to the Tibetan medical paintings at Lhasa's Chagpori (Iron Mountain) medical

college. He managed to secure money from the Dalai Lama so as to commission and produce a copy of this illustrative guide of the *Four Medical Tantras and Blue Beryl*. Still, there are two suggestive stories about the TMP traveling from Lhasa to Buryatia. One of them was Bazar Baradiin (1878–1937), when traveling to Bla brang Monastery between 1905 and 1907 in Amdo Province (north-west Tibet)<sup>(2)</sup> brought the TMP back to Buryatia. Another story says that it was Sherab Sunuev (1860–1930), an Aginsk Buryat, when studying Tibetan medicine in the Serkhog manba datshang for as long as 10 years, at the very end of the 19th to the beginning of 20th centuries. Moreover, Sunuev and his disciples studied the fundamentals for Tibetan medicine by using the TMPs when it was kept at the Tsugol Medical School in Chita region. In addition, this set of paintings was later transferred by D. Norboyev (1887–1935) to another medical school in the Aschagat Monastery where it was used as visual aids for Tibetan medicine. It was not until 1936 that Z. Zhabon (1899-1971), a member of the "Republican Organization of the Society of Militant Godless", brought it to the Buryat-Mongolian Museum of Atheism (now known as the History Museum of Buryatia) and kept there until now.<sup>(19)</sup> In addition, Winder gave another story claiming that it was Klokov who discovered it during an expedition to Tibet.<sup>(20)</sup> All the available stories did not reveal the way of how the Buryat set found its way from Tibet to Buryatia due to lack of hard evidences, especially document, literature or archeological proof. Just like Bolsokhoyeva herself put it frankly: "We do not, however, have enough information to give a final account of who really brought 'The Atlas of Tibetan Medicine'<sup>(3)</sup> to Buryatia."<sup>(19)</sup>

In summary, by 1976, there were only two complete sets of TMP preserved in modern Tibet, both in Lhasa, one at the Hospital of Traditional Tibetan Medicine of Tibet (*Sman rtsis khang*), and the other at the Commission of Cultural Relics of Tibet, which is located in the Summer

<sup>(2)</sup>Historically, Amdo is not a province in China's geography, but one of the 3 major regions densely inhabited by the Tibetan ethnic group (the 3 regions include Ü-tsang, Khams, and Amdo). Amdo is an ancient region covering parts of the now Gansu, Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces. Now Amdo is a county of the Tibet Autonomous Region of People's Republic of China.

<sup>(3)</sup>Bolsokhoyeva uses the term "The Atlas of Tibetan Medicine". However, here the "Atlas" is obviously inappropriate, because, in English language, "Atlas" refers to "a bound collection of tables or plates" [see Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition 2003:78]. In fact, the Russian version of the atlas of TMP was not actually and formally published until 1994. Hence, the "Atlas" Bolsokhoyeva mentions here should be a set of painting scrolls rather than an independent "Atlas".

Palace of the Dalai Lama (*Nor bu gling kha*). On the other hand, there is only one nearly complete set of the original TMP existed outside Tibet, now preserved at Ulan Ude.

### Main Differences between the Two Sets of TMP

As we have seen there are quite a number of TMP publications in different languages in the world, a careful investigation reveals that all TMP in these different publications can be basically classified as two different sets. One of the sets is directly derived from the original set produced under the auspices and supervision of Sde srid himself and its successive reproductions, of which, until now, only two complete sets still survive and are preserved in Lhasa. The second set is mostly derived from the set now collected in the Khangalov Museum of History of Buryatia in Ulan Ude of Buryatia, Russia.

Superficially, the gross appearance of both sets is quite similar, yet, it can be found through careful examination that there are quite a lot of obvious differences between these two sets, the important ones of which are explored in this section.

### Total Number of Paintings

Regarding the exact number of paintings in the Lhasa set, Sde srid as director and supervisor of its first compilation is the most authoritative person to speak. According to his *Mirror of Beryl*, which is the only work mentioning the exact number of this series of TMP, there are altogether 79 paintings.

Interestingly, the Lhasa set has the 80th paintings, whereas, the Buryat set actually has only 76 paintings. By examining the arrangement of these 76 paintings in the latter set, it is evident that the first 5 plates of the two sets are identical. Strangely, the 6th and 7th plates of Sde srid's original set were omitted in the Buryat set and superseded by the 8th and 9th original plates, hence, the total of 77 plates. As a result, the original ordinal number of the 8th and 9th plates become the 6th and 7th in the Buryat set. Consequently, the ordinals of the paintings that follow are ahead by two numbers. In addition, due to unknown reason, from its very beginning, the 62nd plate of the Buryat set is originally missing, as a result, the actual number of Buryat set has only 76 plates (see below).

Since all the atlases published in Lhasa and Beijing carry an 80th plate in the original set (please refer to the *Collection of Series of Painting Scrolls of Rgyud Bzhi* and *Explanation of the Four Medical Trantras [sic!] through*

*Eighty Medical Thangkas* and other atlases published in Lhasa), then, the Buryat set reveals 4 plates less than the Lhasa atlases from the original Sde srid's set. The changes of the number of plates have a story to tell. As indicated in the postscript of the *Blue Beryl*, the TMP the Sde srid produced were drawn by Lho brag nor bu rgya mtsho and sketched and color-painted by Lhas pa dge gnyen. Till then, altogether 60 plates were completed, yet, the contents of these plates are not specified.<sup>(21)</sup> However, the Fifth Dalai Lama's stupa (mausoleum), which was built after this period included 50 pieces of TMP inside, demonstrating that fifty of the 60 paintings were used as funeral objects buried in the mausoleum as recorded in the *Catalogue of the Stupa of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Mchod sdong 'dzam gling rgyan gcig rten gtsug lag khang dang bcas pa'i dkar chag thar gling rgya mtshor bgrod pa'i gru rdzings byin rlabs ky'i bang mdzod)*.<sup>(22)</sup> This demonstrates that the TMP became an invaluable treasure in the eyes of the Tibetan people. By 1697, when the Sixth Dalai Lama was enthroned, Sde srid offered him a 20-volume work on the "five sciences (*rig pa lnga*)" and 62 plates of TMP.<sup>(22)</sup> This means that during that period of approximately a decade, the total number of paintings did only change slightly.

It was not until 1703 when Sde srid ultimately presented the total number of the plates as 79.<sup>(23)</sup>

As indicated by the captions of all the plates in both sets grouped according to the four parts of the *Four Medical Tantras*, the number of plates are as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Number of Paintings in Each Part of Four Medical Tantras in Both Sets**

Section of Tantra	Number of paintings	
	Lhasa set	Buryat set
Fundamental Tantra	4	4
Explanatory Tantra	35	33
Instructional Tantra	16	16
Conclusive Tantra	24	23
Total	79	76

Sometime later, the compiler(s) of the Buryat set discovered that the entire set lacked the 62nd plate. Consequently, they invited the painter Robert Beer to imitate the plate including its captions from the original Lhasa set with a black and white line sketch without colors; it thus stood out from the entire set. The caption of Beer's copy, instead of 62nd in the Buryat set, has remained as the 64th plate as in the Lhasa set. As a result, the Buryat set has a double captions of the 64th

painting, one for the 62nd plate, the other for the real 64th plate. This strange error was followed by the painter of the *Body & Mind*, who obviously painted this plate after the Buryat set rather than the original Lhasa set.

As mentioned above, there are two atlases published in Western languages that do not follow the number of plates of the Buryat set. These are the *Body & Spirit* in English and the Italian *Il tesoro celeste: l'arte tibetana della medicina*. We have already seen why the Italian version is different from the Buryat set. It carries only 41 plates with the 6th and the 7th plate repositioned in the second section of the set, although the ordinal numbers in its captions remain intact. The *Body & Spirit*, though basically edited as the Moscow Buryat set, does include the 6th and 7th plate, but these were moved to the end of the publication as the 78th and 79th plates with all its original vignette labels omitted, yet again the original captions remain unchanged. This shows that the compilers of this atlas actually treat these two plates as "addenda" (see below). Moreover, the 62nd plate is colored and is also different compared to other western versions. There are also some particular features in this edition which are discussed further below.

### Fate of the 6th and 7th Plates

The 6th and 7th plates were "lost" in the Buryat set at the time of its production. It is reasonable to infer that the producer(s) of this set intentionally excluded these two paintings from Sde srid's original set, evidenced by the fact that the captions of this set have the complete ordinal numbers from the 1st to the 77th plates following a smooth sequence. In other words, at the time of its production, the original 6th and 7th plates were superseded by the original 8th and 9th plates.

There are different interpretations on the disparity of these two plates between the two TMP sets. Janet Gyatso argues that the "The Desi also credits Lhunding Namgyel Dorje with teaching him a tradition of anatomical iconometry and other anatomical points... and also with creating 'side illustrations (*bris cha zur*)'..."<sup>(14)</sup> She infers that these should be referred to the 6th and 7th plates in the original series.<sup>(14)</sup> We feel that this idea is still not very convincing. The term *bris cha zur* might mean "side paintings," or separate, or even incidental, appendix<sup>(24)</sup> paintings as compared to the other main paintings. Although Sde srid exalted Lhunding's idea, yet he still arranged these two *bris cha zur* at the beginning of the *Explanatory Tantra* rather than treating them as "side" (-incidental) or "separate" plates with similar importance as

any other plates in the series and resists to move them to the end of the entire set as "addenda". This arrangement appears in Sde srid's masterpiece, *Mirror of Beryl*, which was completed in his final year. From there it is clear that Sde srid considered these two plates to be an integral part of the TMP set rather than a "side", "separate", or even "incidental" part. Fernand Meyer claims that these two plates might have been introduced by Sde srid as "addenda" in the series because they were drawn for Sde srid by Lhunding Namgyel Dorje.<sup>(25)</sup> Indeed, Sde srid admires the Lhunding School, and especially respects Lhunding's painting skills. However, this is unlikely the main reason and sufficient evidence for the omission of these two plates. Moreover, we do not find any mention or possible explanations by the Sde srid himself in any of his own works regarding his potential preference to introduce these two plates as an appendix or incidentally. It should be noted that the captions of these two plates follow the same modality as all the other plates, beginning with: "From the *Blue Beryl*... painting [number ...] illustrates the..." (*Sman bla'i dgongs rgyan rgyud bzhi'i gsal byed Baidurya sngon po las...bkod pa ste bris cha ste...*), which demonstrates that Sde srid treated them with the same significance as all other plates.

Furthermore, there are also other sources, other than the Lhunding School, such as the medical text *Lunar King of Medical Investigation* (*Sman dpyad zla ba'i rgyal po*), and so forth, that are mentioned in the *Four Medical Tantras*, *Blue Beryl*, and the entire TMP sets, yet, these do not constitute the similar reason as that for deleting the 6th and 7th plates. What is more, when looking at the actual content of the 6th and 7th plates, they comprise a pair of related anatomical structures. They depict vessels in the regions of the head, neck, chest, abdomen, and extremities, 13 suspending vessels, hidden vessels, watery vessels, white vessels, together with 77 points for blood-letting and extra points, points for moxibustion, some pulsating vessels. All these items are scattered here and there in different chapters in the *Blue Beryl*; they are not concentrated in a single chapter like the contents of other plates. Those chapters containing the above anatomical structures include chapter 13 and 20 of the *Conclusive Tantra* (*Phyi ma rgyud*) and chapters 60 and 85 of the *Instructional Tantra* (*Man ngag rgyud*). Sde srid collected these contents together to form this pair of paintings (the 6th and 7th) instead of displaying them in their relevant locations. To us it appears clever enough to arrange these items in such a way, which effectively saves space and makes the entire set less bulky. As to exactly

why Sde sridd placed the 6th and 7th plates the way he did is an interesting topic open to further exploration.

One more reason supporting our argument that the 6th and 7th plates are organic integral parts of the entire set and are placed at the appropriate position in the set is that all the images of significant figures appearing in the history of Tibetan medicine are drawn and placed in the top rows of the first 17 plates. The number of these figures from the 1st to the 17th plate adds to 218<sup>④</sup>. In the Buryat set, due to the missing of the two plates, the figures total only 182. All the important figures here belong to the different medical schools in the pre-Buddhist and Buddhist periods. The missing of these historic figures in the paired-paintings would constitute an interruption of the medical lineage. This is another reason we think, Sde sridd did not want to change the positions of the 6th and 7th plates to the end of the set as "side illustrations" and become incidental ones.

### About 80th Plate

Since we've written an original Chinese article dealing exclusively with this account,<sup>(26)</sup> we omit this section here. Anyone interested in this problem may refer to that article.

### Confusion about Captions

Each plate has a Tibetan paragraph at the bottom, explaining the range of chapters of the *Four Medical Tantras* that are illustrated. At the end of each such caption, the ordinal number of the plate in the set is indicated. The Buryat set follows or is based on the Lhasa set in its reproduction, but due to the carelessness of the painter and other reasons, some of the captions on a few plates in the Buryat set have errors and confusion. The 47th and 48th plate in the Buryat set, for instance, reveal erroneous ordinal numbers, and read: "...[the above content] is thus arranged as the two [plates], the forty-eighth and forty-ninth [plate]" (...*bris cha ste zhe bryad dang zhe dgu pa gnyis so*).<sup>(27)</sup>

This is an apparent error committed by the painter and should be read as 47th and 48th respectively in the Buryat set. Notably, the painter of the Buryat set also made a similar oddness when painting its 49th plate which, in Sde sridd's original set, is the 51st plate. The caption of this Buryat plate ends "...[the above content] is thus arranged as the forty-ninth [plate]" (...*bris cha zhe*

*dgu pa'o*).<sup>(27)</sup> Thus, the Buryat set has a double ordinal number of 49 in the captions of two different plates, while the ordinal number for its 47th plate is missing. This does indeed cause some confusion and has affected the continuity and integrity of the Buryat set.

There are other peculiar issues in the captions of the TMP series. When dealing with the physical body, the painted structures of the body are always depicted in paired plates, which means one plate depicts the anterior (front) view and the other the posterior (rear) view. There are altogether 7 such paired paintings in the Lhasa set, i.e. plates 6 to 7, 9 to 10, 11 to 12, 16 to 17, 40 to 41, 49 to 50, and 74 to 75, whereas, there are only 6 such paired paintings in the Buryat set due to the missing 6th and 7th plates. What interest us are the captions in such paintings. Unlike the captions of the regular single paintings, the text of the captions in these paired paintings has a peculiar format, and is written across both paintings. Such paired paintings should be hung next to each other when using them for teaching or other demonstrating purposes. Otherwise, the captions would be illegible. A remark on how to read the captions is added at the end of each plate of these paired paintings, there is a sentence reading:<sup>⑤</sup>

The method of reading all the issues in the captions need to be brought together to correlate with the posterior [view, i.e. the first paired painting].

The method of reading all the issues in the captions need to be brought together to correlate with the anterior [view, i.e. the second paired painting].

These reminders are absolutely necessary or the meanings of the entire captions of the paired paintings would be at odds. Regarding the translation of these caption, the English version of the atlas published in London offers the best translation,<sup>(27)</sup> while a lot of the other atlases, both Western and Oriental, did not translate these captions well. The atlas published in Xining, for instance, even has these captions re-written in the compilers' own words and presents a text of its own instead of translating the original captions.<sup>(28)</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

It is universally recognized now that the TMP or *Sman thang* are intuitive visual art objects of great historical

<sup>④</sup>The number of the figures in this set is counted as 12,12,12,12,12,23,13,12,14,12,12,12,12,12,12,12,12 across the first seventeen plates respectively.

<sup>⑤</sup>The Tibetan original of these remarks read like this: *Kha byang klog lugs dang don thams cad rgyab rjes ma dang sprod dgos./ Kha byang klog lugs dang don thams cad mdun gong ma dang sprod dgos.*

value and exquisite pieces of craftsmanship, unique and incomparable in the world. Their creation was initiated and supervised by Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. According to his *Mirror of Beryl*, compiled in 1703, the entire set of TMP consists of 79 plates. Within a period of 15 years, from 1682–1697, 62 paintings were produced, but at present it is unknown if any of these original paintings still exist. It is very likely that all now extant TMPs are reproductions.

Since TMP are painted on scrolls they can easily be rolled up and transported. They were brought out of the Potala palace and the capital Lhasa and spread outside its place of origin. Again, since it is a kind of painting art, embracing the ambition of spreading Tibetan medicine for altruistic purpose, and also including the aspirations for a long-lasting rule of the *Dalai Lama's Ganden Podrang (Dga' Idan pho brang)* Government, the reproduction of these paintings was encouraged as an altruistic career, and, to some extent, it was imitated and reproduced outside the Potala palace, especially among common people. Replicas became very diverse in their format, patterns, styles of the vignettes and their labels, as well as the captions of the plates. Even the full size of all plates is not identical among the different sets.

The first original set of paintings was prepared at the medical college of Chagpori (*Lcags po ri*, the "Iron mountain") in Lhasa, and for certain the vast majority of all later replicas all stemming from this mother set, directly or indirectly. To the best of our knowledge, to date no complete set of Sde srid's original TMP set exists, even in Lhasa. After the mid-1970s when the "Cultural Revolution" in China was just over, some people, including Byams pa 'phrin las and one of our authors, Prof. CAI Jing-feng, were lucky enough to witness the entire official collection of TMP in Lhasa. Even though, at that time altogether two hundred plates had survived in the depository, only two complete sets of 80 paintings are now extant and were identified as having been painted during different periods. Based on multiple approaches for identification, including social, archeological, religious, historical and cultural methods, it was found that the 130 paintings collected at the old *Sman rtsis khang* (now Hospital of Traditional Tibetan Medicine of Tibet) were produced during different periods (Table 2).<sup>(29)</sup> At the time a team of scholars assessed these paintings but did not declare any of them as "originals." To detect the original paintings, if there are any, requires further and careful investigation.

Evidently, most of these paintings were reproduced

**Table 2. Time of Production of 130 Plates Collected and Preserved at *Sman rtsis khang***

Time of production	Number
Before 1617 (prior to the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama)	1
1617–1688 (reign of the Fifth and Sixth Dalai Lama)	1
1688–1875 (the period after the Fifth Dalai Lama's death leading up to the Twelfth Dalai Lama's reign)	96
After 1876	32

after the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Only one plate was produced during his reign, while another one was produced before his reign. It's a pity that the team investigating these thangkas did not specify exactly which of these two plates belonged to these periods. What should be emphasized here is the authenticity and reliability of the TMP in the atlases published in the Western world. By analyzing the errors that appeared in the captions of the Buryat set as mentioned above and the differences of the format, proportion of the vignettes, and so forth, it is not difficult to draw a conclusion that during the reproduction of the Buryat set the painter(s) and designer(s) made certain modifications to the original Lhasa set, including the contents of captions, as well as modifications of the original vignettes' position and their labels, changing the appearance of some pictures with diagrams, or even leaving out original material, as, for example, in the case of the allegorical trees (2nd, 3rd, and 4th plates);<sup>(30)</sup> or the omission of all the vignettes' labels of Sde srid's original 6th and 7th plates.<sup>(12)</sup> Needless to say, the original paintings produced in Lhasa are more authentic and reliable and closest to Sde srid's original paintings than any other set produced outside Tibet. Now it is widely recognized in the field of Tibetan medicine that the entire set of TMP was originally produced in Tibet, and that some differences did occur in the Buryat set, including the exact number of the set, the number of missing paintings, and the causes for their omission in the Buryat set.

In this article, we have discussed the TMPs and their valuable historical significance through the comparison of the two major sets. Over the past decades, scholars from various medical, religious, historical, anthropological fields have accessed this eye-pleasing, exquisite presentation of arts and crafts. In addition to the colorful sceneries of habitual and natural beauty, we can compare the gross appearance of these two sets of TMP, each with its own specificities. Through comparison, we have detected several strong points but also the shortcomings of each set. Yet, confusions still exist in the interpretation of many aspects of the sets. We sincerely wish that through our

exploration and endeavor, ultimately and hopefully in the foreseeable future, an atlas of more precise, standard and even perfect interpretation might be offered to further explore the originality and connotations, goodwill, and intentions of its producer Sde sridd Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho so as to spread its altruistic benefits to the whole world, with wellbeing and auspiciousness.

### Conflict of Interest

Both authors declare that there is no conflict of interest between them.

### Author Contributions

Both Zhen Y and Cai JF read and collect material resources from historical and modern literature. Zhen Y drafted the English manuscript, and Cai JF checked, redacted and finalized the whole article.

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