



The legend of Cig car ba criticism in Tibet: a list of six Cig car ba texts in the Chos 'byung me tog snying po by Nyi ma 'od zer (12th century)

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The twelfth century work Chos 'byung me tog snying po by Nyang Nyi ma 'od zer mentions a list of six texts which are said to represent the system of Chinese Meditation Buddhism connected to Heshang Mahayana, the apparent advocate of a subitist path to awakening in the legendary debate of bSam yas. This particular form of Chinese Meditation Buddhism spread to Tibet in the eighth century via the Central Asian oasis Dunhuang and became known as Cig car ba. Nyi ma 'od zer is the first Tibetan scholar to mention such a systematic corpus of texts connected to the development of the Cig car ba school. Soon after, Sakya Pandita and Bu ston mention again this list with slight variations. At the time of Bu ston the legend was complete that these texts were actually composed by Heshang Mahayana himself. Although none of these texts were probably composed by him, the creation of that corpus of texts was rather used for one particular aim, namely to criticise Chinese Meditation Buddhism, Cig car ba, and eventually stigmatize it as a heretical path.

The aim of the present paper is to identify some of the texts mentioned in the list of Nyi ma 'od zer in order to elucidate the very complex situation of a variety of Chinese Meditation Buddhist teachings spreading in Dunhuang and in Tibet in the eighth and ninth centuries. At least two titles are connected to sixth and seventh centuries meditation masters from central China, namely Wolun and Hongren. These two figures are known from a number of Dunhuang manuscripts representing the situation of Chinese Meditation Buddhism before the split of this movement into the Northern branch of Shenxiu advocating gradualism and the Southern branch of Huineng promoting subitism. The analysis of some of these Dunhuang manuscripts will reflect this very situation. Moreover, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes' bSam gtan mig sgron (9th/10th centuries), the very first commentary quoting extensively from texts now available among the Dunhuang materials, also quotes texts which later appear in the above mentioned list of Nyi ma 'od zer. Although Sangs rgyas ye shes is the only early Tibetan scholar to have analysed the

Cig car ba tradition on a wide textual basis and has qualified it as an authentic Buddhist path, nonetheless, he deprives the tradition of the possibility gaining complete insight into the absolute. As it will be demonstrated, Sangs rgyas ye shes thereby seems to fail acknowledging that some metaphors of Chinese Meditation Buddhism actually point to a kind of 'luminous emptiness' which he only connects to the rDzogs chen teachings. In this regard Sangs rgyas ye shes might even be seen as the first critic in the Cig car ba/ rDzogs chen debate – although the later Tibetan tradition might have criticised him for being pro Cig car ba!