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Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche: Dzogchen and Tibetan Tradition. From Shang Shung to the West

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Abstract: In July 2011 the International Dzogchen Community celebrated its 30th Anniversary. In 1981, near Arcidosso in Tuscany (Italy), Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche founded the first community or Gar of the International Dzogchen Community. He named it “*Meri-gar*”, the “Community of the Mountain-of-Fire”. In the 70s Chögyal Namkhai Norbu began to teach Dzogchen to his first students. Interest soon became widespread and having received invitations from all continents, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche began to travel and teach throughout the world. These last thirty years the Dzogchen Community has grown and now has thousands of members in over 40 countries and all continents. The main objective of the Community is to preserve and develop understanding of Dzogchen, as well as preserving Tibet's extraordinary cultural patrimony. The International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies was founded by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche with this aim and it was inaugurated by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in 1990. It has a rich collections of Tibetan books and manuscripts and publishes the teachings of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. This article draws on Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's work and legacy to describe the Dzogchen Lineage and Tibetan Tradition from the very origin of the Shang Shung Culture.

Keywords: Dzogchen; Rainbow Body; Sowa Rigpa; Shang Shung; Yantra Yoga; Ku Nye; Tibetan Moxibustion; Santi Maha Sangha; Gar/Ling; Bön

1. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche (*chos rgyal nam mkha'I nor bu*) was born in Derghe (Kham, Eastern Tibet) on December 8th 1938. At the age of two he was recognised by Palyul Karma Yangsid (*dpal yul ka rma yang srid*) and Shechen Rabjam (*zhe chen rab 'byams*) as the reincarnation or tulku (*sprul sku*) of the great Dzogchen Master Adzom Drugpa Drodul Pawo Dorje (*a 'dzom 'brug pa 'gro 'dul dpa' bo rdo rje*, 1842–1924). When he was three years old, His Holiness the XVI Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje (*rang 'byung rig pa'I rdo rje*, 1924–1981), and His Eminence the XI Tai Situpa Rinpoche, Pema Wangchuk Gyalpo (*ta'i sit u padma dbang phyug rdo rje*, 1886–1952), recognised him as the mind reincarnation of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (*zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal*, 1594–1651), the first Dharmaraja of Bhutan, the unifier of Bhutan as a nation state.

Chögyal (*chos rgyal*) means “Dharma Raja” or “Religious King” is a title conferred upon a special class of temporal and spiritual rulers. Master Namkhai Norbu holds this title as an acknowledged reincarnation of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal.

As Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal was the 18th Abbott of Ralung Monastery (*rva lung*), the traditional seat of the Drukpa Kagyu (*'brug pa bka' brgyud*) Lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, thus Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche is linked to Ralung Monastery, built in 1180 as the residence of Drogon Tsangpa Gyare Gyalwang Drukpa (*'gro mgon tsang pa rgya ras*, 1161–1211), the founder of the Drugpa Kagyu Lineage.

Rinpoche (*rin po che*) means “Precious”, it is used to address or describe Tibetan lamas and other high-ranking or high-respected Masters. This honor is generally bestowed on reincarnated lama (*sprul sku* tulku), by protocol.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche is one of the prime living masters of **Dzogchen** (*rdzogs chen*) and is among the last generation of Tibetans to have been fully educated in Tibet.

Dzogchen (*rdzogs chen*), or “Total Perfection” or “Total Completeness”, is a Teaching which reveals the original state of every individual, a condition which is presented as “perfect” because of its infinite potentiality to manifest in the variety of all phenomena of existence. Once directly awakened by the master, this perfection is experienced as one’s innermost nature, the Nature of Mind. Continuous awareness of this nature, then, is the fundamental practice that leads to the unveiling or manifestation of one’s primordial potentiality [1–11].

In his early years Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche was sent by his family to study at important Buddhist monasteries and colleges (Gonchen Monastery, Ohon tyo, Ku Ser Serjong and Zongsar Khamchen in Derghe) where he spent twelve years studying the Five Major Arts or Fields of Knowledge or Five Sciences (Art, Medicine, Grammar, Logic, Inner Meaning) and the Five Minor Arts (Rhetoric, Poetry, Syntax, Drama, Astrology) acquiring a vast and profound knowledge of all of them and excelling in the philosophical, medical, and religious fields. From Gonchen Monastery of the Sakyapa Lineage, where he studied Buddhist philosophy for many years with Khyenrab Chökyi Odzer, he received a degree.

He also received numerous Tantric and Dzogchen transmissions and teachings from many Masters, including his paternal uncle the yogin Togden (*rtogs ldan*) (a title which means “Endowed With Realisation”, an expression accorded to highly realised yogins in Tibet) Ugyen Tendzin (*u rgyan bstan 'dzin*, 1888–1962) [12] a yogin who in a single lifetime transcended the limits of dualistic phenomena

to attain the total freedom of authentic reality and achieve the *Rainbow Body*; and, besides his maternal uncle Khyentse Rinpoche Chökyi Wangchug (*mkhyen brtse rin po che chos kyi dbang phyug*), from Drubwang Rinpoche Kunga Palden (*'grub dbang rin po che kun dga' dpal ldan*), Negyab Rinpoche (*gnas rgyab rin po che*), Drugse Gyurmed Dorje (*'brug sras 'gyur med rdo rje*) and Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche (*rdzong gsar mkhyen brtse*). In 1951 he also received teachings from the yogini Master Ayu Khandro Dorje Paldrön (*a yo mkha' 'gro rdo rje dpal sgron*, 1838–1953), a disciple of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (*'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po*) and Nyala Pema Dündul (*nyag bla pad ma bdud 'dul*). She spent over fifty years in dark retreat and she also manifested the Rainbow Body.

The “*Rainbow Body*” (*'ja' lus*) is the transmutation of the physical constituents of the body into the essence of the five elements of which it is composed: the five lights. Thus an immaterial body, invisible to the physical eye, continues to live, actively working for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Rinpoche was invited to China in 1953 as a representative of the Tibetan monasteries. After visiting Chengdu and Chungchin, he accepted the invitation to teach Tibetan language in Menyag. From 1954 to 1957 he taught Tibetan language at the South-western University for Minorities in Chengdu (Sichuan), People's Republic of China, and thus he had the opportunity to learn Classical Chinese. During this time Rinpoche met Kangkar Rinpoche (*gangs dkar rin po che*) from whom he received instructions on the Six Yogas of Naropa and other Teachings.

In 1955 Chögyal Namkhai Norbu met the Tibetan Doctor (*menpa, sman pa*) Rigdzin Changchub Dorje (*rig 'dzin byang chub rdo rje*, 1826–1961), his main Dzogchen Master (Root Master), and stayed at his residence in Khamdogar for six months. From Changchub Dorje he received the authentic transmission and knowledge of Dzogchen, of which Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche is Lineage Holder.

The knowledge of Dzogchen goes back to ancient times. It was first transmitted by Garab Dorje (*dga' rab rdo rje*), according to the tradition, a few centuries after Buddha Shakyamuni. Dzogchen has been transmitted for centuries and centuries in an uninterrupted lineage from master to disciple down to the present day. This has remained a characteristic feature of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's way of teaching throughout his life.

In the late 1950s, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu made a pilgrimage to Tibet, India, and Nepal. While he was staying in Sikkim in 1959, the Chinese occupied Tibet and as he was forced into exile, unable to return to his homeland to join his family. Moreover when he had already been in the Western world for several years, he received the news that his large family had been captured by the Chinese, put into prison, tortured and as a consequence, without being guilty of anything, they had died.

He remained in Sikkim working as an author and chief editor of Tibetan textbooks of the Development Office of the Government of Sikkim in Gangtok (1958–1960).

Notwithstanding his young age, at the end of the 1950s he was already famous in Tibet as a spiritual master and as a scholar.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche received various and prestigious academic offers from different countries and in late December 1960 he moved to Italy on the invitation of the utmost Italian orientalist, prof. Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984), who in 1933, together with the Italian philosopher and Minister of Culture Giovanni Gentile, had founded the then Italian Institute for the Middle and Extreme Orient, IsMeO.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu worked for a time at IsMeO, now the Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient, IsIAO, in Rome where he worked with Geshe Jempel Senghe to establish and organise the Tibetan department based on the large library of Tibetan texts that prof. Tucci had created. The Rockefeller Foundation granted funds to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu for his academic collaboration with prof. Tucci.

Later on, from 1962 to 1992, he taught Tibetan and Mongolian Language and Literature at the Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, now Università di Napoli L'Orientale, the same University where professor Tucci taught Chinese language. The “Orientale” University of Naples, established on 7th April 1732 by Pope Clemente XII, is the oldest school of Sinology and Oriental Studies in Europe.

From the time he came to live in Italy, besides all his activities as a Spiritual Master, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche has done extensive research into the historical origins of of Tibet and Tibetan Culture, thoroughly investigating the autochthonous Bön Tradition and the monarchic age connected to the Shang Shung (*zhang zhung*) Kingdom. His books, which include works on history, medicine, astrology, Bön and folk traditions, are evidence of his profound knowledge of Tibetan culture and his commitment to preserving this ancient cultural heritage; they have been highly appreciated by Tibetans as well as scholars throughout the world. Prof. Namkhai Norbu's many influential and profound works have given a concrete stimulus to the diffusion of Tibetan Tradition and Culture in the West.

As well as being one of the most important living Masters of Dzogchen, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche is recognized as a leading authority on Tibetan civilization, particularly in the fields of history, literature, medicine and astrology. The results of his studies, which rediscovered the very origins of Tibetan Culture, have influenced the current historical viewpoint and are appreciated by eminent scholars as well as taught in Lhasa, Beijing and in Western universities. Other fields of his research were the origin, theory and practice of Astrology and, above all, Tibetan Traditional Medicine, a medical system which integrates the highest aspects of the culture's science and spirituality into a comprehensive system of health and healing.

His academic works reveal a profound knowledge of Tibetan culture and a steadfast determination to keep the extraordinary cultural heritage of Tibet alive and fully accessible. He has travelled extensively around the world to spread the Dzogchen Teaching, as well as dedicating himself to safeguarding Tibetan culture. His books and conference on these subjects are highly appreciated by Tibetans as well as scholars and researchers throughout the world [13–20].

In the 1960s Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche was received by His Holiness Pope Paul VI and by Italian President Giovanni Gronchi.

In 1968 he married, started a family and acquired Italian citizenship.

In 1971 Chögyal Namkhai Norbu began to teach **Yantra Yoga**, an ancient form of Tibetan Yoga combining movement, breathing and visualisation [21]. The Yantra Yoga System of Vairochana, one of the oldest systems of Tibetan Yoga dating from the eighth century, had been transmitted to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche by his uncle the yogin Togden Ugyen Tendzin (*rtogs ldan u rgyan bstan 'dzin*) and other masters in Tibet.

A few years later in 1976 he started to give Dzogchen teachings to a small group of Italian students with whom he founded the **Dzogchen Community** [22]. At that time Dzogchen was hardly known in the West and he was the first to transmit this teaching in a way that made it accessible to Western

students amid the conditions of modern society. In 1981 he founded “Merigar” (*me ri sgar*), the first Italian Centre of the Dzogchen Community, at Arcidosso, Tuscany and in 2011 the Dzogchen Community gathered from all over the world for the 30th Anniversary Celebrations “The Joy Of Being Here”.

As interest in his teachings grew, Rinpoche dedicated himself to spreading Dzogchen and establishing “gars”, seats of the Dzogchen Community, which rapidly developed throughout the world. The Dzogchen Community is made up of those who are interested in following and practising the Dzogchen teachings and over the years thousands of people from all over the world have become members, giving it a completely international dimension. The Community organisation springs straight from Chögyal Namkhai Norbu’s vision: *Gar* (*sgar*, “gathering places” - the larger centres) and *Ling* (*gling*, “islands/places” - the smaller centres) form a great *Mandala* (*dkyil 'khor*, circle) which unites the different geographical areas of the world. Symbolically the Mandala represents the Universe as perceived by the individual and, in this particular case, the places where the teaching is practised. Within the vision of the Mandala there are no hierarchical relationships among or within the various Gars or Lings, but only a relationship of collaboration and cooperation. *Gar* in Tibetan means “Settlement”, and it is the term they use to designate Nomads camps. A *Gar* has a very precise meaning, according to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche: it is a place where some practitioners live and apply practice in daily life, collaborating and working together, a place where the “spirit” of the Dzogchen Teachings should always be present, because that is the center from where all its energy develops and spreads, like the heart in the human body.

The Gars are: Merigar for Europe (Merigar West in Italy and Merigar East in Romania); Tsegyalgar (*rtse rgyal sgar*) for North America (Tsegyalgar East in Massachusetts, USA and Tsegyalgar West in Baja, Mexico); Tashigar (*bkra shis sgar*) for South America (Tashigar North in Venezuela and Tashigar South in Argentina); and Namgyalgar (*rnam rgyal sgar*) for Oceania (New South Wales, Australia); and Kunsangar (*kun bzang sgar*) unifying practitioners from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Latvia and other countries of Eastern Europe and Asia.

The Gars are linked to the Lings, which form the core of the Community. Many of the Lings are located in large cities (such as Rome, Barcelona, New York and Moscow).

Apart from his spiritual activity, Prof. Namkhai Norbu is widely known for his activities on behalf of the culture and people of Tibet, especially through the organisations he has founded, including the International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies, A.S.I.A. Onlus (Association for International Solidarity in Asia, NGO), and the Dzogchen Community.

In 1988 Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche founded **A.S.I.A. ONLUS NGO** (Association for International Solidarity in Asia), an Italian ONLUS (Charity) and Non-Governmental Organisation recognised in 1999 by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is mainly active in meeting the educational and medical needs of the Tibetan population in all 25 provinces of the original Tibetan homeland. ONLUS is an Italian acronym which means Non Lucrative Organization of Social Utility.

A.S.I.A. has realized more than 200 projects and built 20 schools where 3,000 Tibetan children learn Tibetan language and Tradition.

In the year 2000 A.S.I.A. turned to some primary intervention sectors: education, the artistic and cultural heritage, water, health, nomadism and the environment.

In 2001 A.S.I.A. signed a partnership agreement with ECHO (the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission) for emergency projects and, following a series of climate catastrophes in Tibet, started to intervene in aid of the populations struck by natural disasters.

The same years saw development of the work in Italy and Europe, with implementation of educational development projects to inform civil society of Tibetan culture and real condition along with the problems of other developing countries.

In recent years it was decided to widen the areas of intervention to other Asiatic countries and, following the catastrophe of the 2005 tsunami, ASIA became involved in post-emergency and development projects in Sri Lanka.

A.S.I.A. NGO was the only foreign ngo admitted by the Chinese Government to aid and relieve the Tibetan population after the Qinghai earthquake, especially the Khampa nomad families in the autonomous Tibetan prefecture of Yushu.

In 1989 Chögyal Namkhai Norbu founded the **International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies**, which has the task of safeguarding Tibetan culture by promoting and spreading it. It had been inaugurated by His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama in 1990.

Even today Chögyal Namkhai Norbu continues to travel constantly all over the world, giving talks and holding retreats attended by thousands of people: until now he has given more than 500 Dzogchen retreats around the world (from 2005 also via webcast), and lectures, public talks and seminars at many universities.

On September 11th 2010 the ancient Tibetan medical system was the core of the Keynote Lecture given by Prof. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche in the main hall of Bologna University's Anatomy Institute (Bologna University being the oldest university, at least in the West, founded 1088).

The occasion of this address, entitled "Tibetan Medicine, Heritage of Mankind" [23–26] was the first time that the Auditorium of the Anatomy Institute had been open for a public event.

The event which was organised by the *Charity Associazione per la Medicina Centrata sulla Persona Onlus* (*Association for Person Centred Medicine Onlus*, a Charity established in Bologna according to the Italian Law) in collaboration with the International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies in acknowledgement of its overriding importance, met with high-level endorsements (Organizing Committee: Paolo Roberti di Sarsina, Luigi Ottaviani, Nadia Gaggioli, Cesare Pilati) [23–26].

2. Tibetan Medicine and Tradition

Traditional Tibetan Medicine, [26,27] known as *Sowa Rigpa* (*gso ba rig pa*) in the Tibetan language, is an ancient form of natural medicine indigenous to the Tibetan people. It is one of the Five Great "Fields of Knowledge" of the Traditional Tibetan Culture. Tibetan Medicine is an ancient science in which some of its fundamental principles are listening carefully to the patient, a close global examination: body (composed of three humours of Wind, Bile, Phlegm) mind, energy, but also surrounding circumstances, and personalised medical care. It is still practised today throughout Tibet, the Himalayan regions, India, Mongolia, Siberia and the Western world wherever Tibetans live in exile. Considered among the most essential of the ten Tibetan subjects of study, Sowa Rigpa has benefited the people of Tibet and its surrounding regions for centuries. This unique knowledge is contained within thousands of texts written in the Tibetan language but principally in the Four Medical

Tantras (*rgyud bzhi*). These Four Medical Tantras have been the primary teaching texts for training Tibetan physicians (*sman pa*) from ancient times to the present. This fundamental medical treatise is comprised of four sections, usually known as the Four Tantras: the Root Tantra, the Explanatory Tantra, the Secret Oral Instruction Tantra and the Last Tantra. The complete text encompasses 5900 verses which are grouped in 156 chapters.

The Four Medical Tantras comprise the most important treatise of Tibetan Traditional Medicine, compiled by the famous Tibetan physician (*sman pa*) Yuthog Yönten Gönpo (*g.yu thog yon tan mgon po*) after having gathered medical knowledge from various sources.

The Tibetan medical system is a complex synthesis developed over millennia drawing on both indigenous Tibetan culture and elements from other traditions such as the Greek (via Persia), Ayurvedic (from India) and Chinese systems. Integrating these with the already robust pre-Buddhist culture of ancient Tibetan civilization known as Shang Shung (in the Four Medical Tantras we find many names of medical herbs and other terms in the ancient language of Shang Shung, proving there was an indigenous medical literature in Tibet. Moreover ancient medical books are mentioned in early Bön texts), Sowa Rigpa flourished amid intercultural dialogue with the leading physicians of India, China, Nepal, Byzantium and Persia who travelled to Tibet as early as the seventh century. These exchanges resulted in a magnificent body of accumulated knowledge unrivalled for its depth of understanding, still intact within a vast literary tradition unknown outside Tibet until recent times. Over the centuries practitioners of Tibetan medicine have learned how to diagnose, differentiate, and categorise diseases and the influences of external factors such as timing, provocation, and imbalances in diet and behaviour. They have conducted research and developed treatment principles for physical and mental imbalances and diseases.

This evolution has also resulted in a vast pharmacopoeia of medicinal plants native to the Himalayas identified, gathered and processed according to ancient prescriptions, as well as other external therapies such as Tibetan massage (*bsku mnye*, Ku Nye) [26,28], Tibetan moxibustion (*me btsa'*, Metsa) [26,29], blood-letting, medical baths, stone and compress therapy.

Ku Nye is of ancient Tibetan origin. Through careful observation of nature, the Tibetans discovered the healing potential of herbs, barks, minerals and so forth and gradually learnt how to treat diseases, using their hands and simple substances such as butter, oil, herbs, stones, and drawing on knowledge of the circulation of energy both in the human body and in the external world.

Ku Nye (literally “ointment rub”) is one of the four therapeutic methods of Traditional Tibetan Medicine, which includes external therapies such as massage, digito-pressure and Tibetan moxibustion. Mainly popularised as a branch of Chinese Traditional Medicine, moxibustion was originally practised in Shang Shung, a pre-Tibetan kingdom whose existence can be traced back at least four thousand years.

Unique to Tibetan medicine is its philosophical view based on Buddhism in which the body-mind relationship is interconnected to all phenomena. This holistic view informs the Tibetan medical tradition, which uses sophisticated diagnostic techniques of pulse diagnosis and urine analysis in order to determine systemic imbalances, both mental and physical.

As early as the fifth century BC, the Buddha taught by using illness as a central metaphor for suffering, and healing as the primary intention of the Buddhist path to liberate beings from ignorance, the source of all suffering. This philosophical view of Buddhism permeates all aspects of Tibetan culture including Tibetan medicine, which continued to evolve according to the teachings of the

Buddha in a richly informed philosophical framework not shared with other indigenous healing traditions. Thus, the Tibetan medical system developed into a sophisticated body of knowledge, which encompasses mental and spiritual factors, not just physical, in the diagnosis and treatment of disease and the promotion of well-being and a healthy balanced life.

As a therapeutic traditional system it thus has a lot to give to a West that has not come to terms with its own approach to the problem of suffering. It forms an integral part of the Tibetan Tradition that is the Heritage of Mankind [26].

3. The Five Fields of Knowledge

Knowledge of Tibetan Culture is traditionally classified under five great “Fields of Knowledge” (*rig gnas che ba lnga*) or “Five Sciences”. These are:

The Faculty of Art (bzo rig pa) Sacred art is considered to be one of the most important aspects of Traditional Tibetan Culture, since it embodies all activities of Body, Speech and Mind.

The Faculty of Medicine (gso ba rig pa) Considered among the most essential of the ten Tibetan subjects of study, “Sowa Rigpa” has benefited the people of Tibet and its surrounding regions for centuries. This knowledge is contained within thousands of Tibetan texts and principally in the Four Medical Tantras. These Four Medical Tantras have been the basis for training Tibetan physicians since ancient times.

The Faculty of Language and Grammar (sgra rig pa) The study of the Tibetan language starts with ancient grammatical treatises such the “Thirty Verses” (*sum cu pa*) and “Use of Gender Signs” (*rtags jug pa*) by Thonmi Sambhota, as well as many other later commentaries by accomplished scholars.

The Faculty of Logic (gtan tshig rig pa) Logic is the study of the rational, conceptually consistent mind as it operates on itself and on the phenomenal world. Through the study of traditional texts this Faculty teaches how to use reasoning, based on direct perception and inference, to establish the existence and non-existence of phenomena and so forth.

The Faculty of Inner Meaning (nang don rig pa) The term “Inner Meaning” includes all the various doctrines and methods that are taught so that individuals can understand their own real condition and, according to their capacity, attain liberation. These derive from texts found in the great canonical collections of Tibet belonging to all Bön and Tibetan Buddhist Lineages.

4. Shang-Shung

The name Shang Shung [18,19] is related to something very ancient and connected with Tibetan history. Today many people believe that the source of Tibetan culture was the period when Buddhism was introduced from India to Tibet. That happened in the seventh century A.D., in the period of Songtsen Gampo, which is not so long ago. But it would be arbitrary and unjustified to believe that before the advent of Buddhism Tibet had no history or culture of its own. Chogyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche traces back the real origin of Tibetan Culture nearly 4,000 years and identifies the original Tibetan System of Writing in the ancient mar (*smar*) alphabet, from which the present cursive characters (*dbu med*) will have evolved: the Shang Shung kingdom in the region of Guge in Western Tibet is the source of Tibetan civilization.

According to prof. Norbu's view, before Buddhism spread to Tibet there was an ancient religion called Bön [15,16]. Bön existed long before there was a Kingdom of Tibet. It is hence important to study its history, and it is through the history of Bön that we can learn of the kingdom of Shang Shung. What is Shung? Shung in the later Tibetan language we know as Khyung (*khyung*). Khyung means Garuda. Garuda is a symbol just like an eagle manifestation. In the ancient Bon tradition it is a symbol of energy, just like fire. So country and culture and everything in that tradition are recognised as Shung.

The cradle of Tibetan culture is to be looked for in the ancient realm of Shang Shung, with revered Mount Kailash as its center and heart, and in the Bön spiritual traditions which flourished within and spread from that kingdom.

In the history of Tibet it is always explained that there were originally six brothers. These six brothers developed West Tibet, Central Tibet, East Tibet, North Tibet and South Tibet. Among these populations West Tibet (called *khyung* in more modern Tibetan language and *shung* in the language of West Tibet) became the most developed. The reason was that in the pre-Buddhist period there was a Master in West Tibet, Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche (*ston pa gshen rab mi bo che*) who is considered the first teacher of Yungdrung Bön (*g.yung drung bon* Eternal Bön). The word "Bön" has the same wide semantic range as the Sanskrit word "Dharma".

This teacher not only taught astrology and medicine but invented the first form of writing which did not exist before him. This language or writing is called the language of Shang Shung; it is called "*mar*" which means "divine", "coming from the sky" and it is considered to be a holy or divine medium.

Shang Shung became a powerful kingdom. We know of eighteen of its kings, though between the last of these and the first king of Tibet there is a long gap. Actually, we do not know the names of many of the kings of Shang Shung nor do we know anything of what they did, but we do know for certain that Bön was the official religion of the kingdom. So all these periods developed the Bön spiritual tradition and culture based on the teachings of Tonpa Shenrab.

The entire territory of present-day Tibet belonged to that kingdom, and its capital was located in the area of Mount Kailash [18]. Khyung Lung was the capital of many kings of Shang Shung. What we know of the history of Tibet refers principally to central Tibet. Even contemporary studies tend to focus on this area and neglect to investigate the area where the kingdom of Shang Shung was located. This area is practically unknown and unexplored. Interested students are referred to the literature on the Bön tradition. The kingdom of Shang Shung is not only a historical reality, but it is from there that Tibetan culture originated.

5. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche's Legacy

5.1. Dzogchen

Dzogchen (Tibetan *rdzogs pa chen po*, Sanskrit *Mahāsandhi*) [1–11], as explained, means Total Perfection and refers to the condition of primordial potentiality of each individual. The method through which we enter into the knowledge of Dzogchen and discover our real condition is called Dzogchen Teaching.

The knowledge of Dzogchen goes back to ancient times, according to the traditional religious view, in our era it was first transmitted by Garab Dorje (184 BCE to 57 CE) a few centuries after

Buddha Shakyamuni. Dzogchen has been transmitted for centuries in an unbroken lineage from master to disciple down to the present day.

The Mind's Essential Nature is said in the Dzogchen Teachings to be like the nature of a mirror. A mirror's essential nature is clear, pure, and limpid; if this was not the case no reflections could arise in it. In the same way the mind's natural condition is one of clarity, purity and limpidity. A mirror will reflect whatever is placed in front of it, but the nature of the mirror is not stained by any reflection, no matter how ugly or terrible. In the same way, if an individual remains continually present in the contemplative state that is the inherent nature of the mind, no thought however beautiful or ugly, attractive or repulsive, can stain the mind's fundamental purity, or distract or disturb the practitioner, who remains integrated in a state beyond the limits of the ego and the judging mind, experiencing the world as the play of his or her own energies. This is the effortless state of "Dzogchen", the "Great Perfection", complete in itself, and lacking nothing. But when an individual is distracted, they are no longer in the state of the Nature of the Mind; they enter into the dualistic confusion of separating their experience into that of an observing subject who perceives a seemingly external world as an object. This is said to be like mistaking the unreal reflections arising in a mirror for reality itself. The Dzogchen Teachings exist to enable those who have entered into this dualistic condition, with all its inherent suffering, to return to the "Primordial State" which is the mind's natural condition, the state of Dzogchen. This state is self-perfected and exists in every individual from the very beginning. It is only lost through the dualistic clinging of the ego-fixated mind. It does not have to be created, or constructed.

The practitioner of Dzogchen, having received Transmission of the Primordial State from a qualified master, experiences it for him or herself and no longer remains in any doubt as to what this state really is. He or she then tries to remain present, continuing in non-dual contemplation in each moment, without becoming distracted or allowing the mind to become caught up in the net of conceptualisation. Relaxing body, energy and mind in the state of pure presence or "rigpa", he or she allows the dualistic clinging of the mind to "self-liberate", without renouncing, purifying, or transforming anything. Thus the path of Dzogchen is called the "Path of Self-Liberation". On this path, all that arises in the practitioner's field of experience is seen to be essentially no more real than a reflection in a mirror. Finding oneself, through transmission from the Master and through the various practices of the Path, in the Primordial State that is one's inherent condition, one then continues in this state of contemplation, in which nothing can disturb the mind's natural spontaneously manifesting clarity. One develops in this state until one reaches total realisation, in which the bonds of dualistic existence are completely untied. There are many methods and techniques in the Dzogchen Teachings which can be learned and applied to enable one to know and develop the primordial state; but to enter and remain in that contemplative state in one's every moment is the essential practice of Dzogchen to which the symbol of the mirror points [30].

5.2. Direct Transmission

The Transmission of knowledge from Master to disciple can be Oral, Symbolic or Direct. The uniqueness of the Dzogchen Teaching is the Direct Transmission or "Direct Introduction" in which the Master and the student find themselves in the Primordial State at the same moment through one of the experiences related to Body, Speech and Mind.

Due to the power of the Transmission, the students are able to discover their own real condition in this way.

Thanks to his Compassion, Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche offers Direct Introduction three times a year, on the Anniversaries of Garab Dorje, Guru Padmasambhava and Adzom Drugpa.

In order to make it possible for people who cannot attend a retreat or come to a direct introduction in person, these direct transmissions are also offered by live webcast.

“The Teachings are communicated through Transmission. They enable us in this way to discover many things that we can't discover with our intellectual judging minds, with all their limitations. The value of the teaching is that it enables us to get beyond all these limitations. The Transmission is really very, very important for the teachings, and if we really understand what we mean by a teaching, we must understand that it is based on Transmission. We must respect and preserve the authenticity of the Transmission. This doesn't mean that if we follow a teaching we can't do other things. We can integrate everything. But by “integrating everything” we don't just mean mixing everything up with the teaching. We have many problems with this kind of thing. Many people don't understand this fundamental point, and they learn a little about the Dzogchen Teaching and its methods and mix it up with psychotherapy. I am not against psychotherapy. It can be very useful. But if we become involved with psychotherapy we should do so in the right way, not mixing it up with the teachings. Otherwise the Dzogchen Teachings will be lost for future generations, for our children and grandchildren. All the teachers of Dzogchen from Garab Dorje to the present day have preserved the traditions of the Transmission in a very pure way, and I feel that it is very, very important that we continue in the same way. I have always been very concerned with ensuring that the transmission of the Dzogchen teachings is maintained correctly. To teach the Dzogchen teachings means to give Transmission of Dzogchen. If I teach to people who do not keep the Transmission in a pure way, but who instead create problems with the transmission, that is very negative for me personally as well as for the person who distorts the transmission, because I am the one who taught them and I have thus entered into a relationship with them based on Transmission. If I am not sure of the situation in relation to how people will be respond to my trust in teaching them, it is much better that I keep quiet. That was the idea that was behind my not teaching. But then, at the same time, I know that some people are capable of keeping the Transmission in a pure way. If I were to keep quiet I would hinder those people who are really ready to work in a genuine manner with the teachings. That is why I now teach.” Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche [30].

5.3. Guruyoga

“Guru” means Master, “yoga” means having knowledge or understanding of one's own authentic state, the essential condition in which there is nothing to change or modify. This is the state of the Guru. Guruyoga is, therefore, the main element in Dzogchen practice.

5.4. Three Series of the Dzogchen Teaching: Semde, Longde and Mennagde

Mañjuśrīmitra was Garab Dorje's main disciple. He studied 75 years with Garab Dorje (*Prahevajra* in Sanskrit) and classified the 6,400,000 verses of the Dzogchen Teachings into categories, recorded the oral transmissions as he had received the transmission of all Dzogchen teachings from Garab Dorje,

his Root Master, and subdivided them into Three Series: Semde, Longde and Mennagde or Upadesha. The Three Series are three ways of presenting the Teaching, each with its corresponding methods of practice; the aim of all three, however, is to lead to final realization.

In *Semde* (*sems-sde*), the “Mind Series”, the practitioner is introduced to the Nature of Mind in order to have a concrete experience of it.

Longde (*klong-sde*) means the “Series of Space”. In this instance space refers to the Primordial Dimension of Emptiness which serves as a basis for manifesting the Clarity of the practitioner.

Mennagde (*man-ngag sde*) the Essential or Quintessence Series of “Secret Instructions” or Upadesha, comprises special teachings and methods based on the Masters’ experiences, with the aim of helping the practitioner progress towards complete realization.

5.5. Longsal Terma Cycle

The Longsal Cycle of Teachings was received by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche through “Clear Light Dreams”. Eight volumes of these teachings, comprising the essence of the three series of Dzogchen in their fundamental aspects of vision, meditation, and behaviour, have been published so far. The complete title of this Cycle is *Longchen Osal Khandroi Nyingthig* (*klong chen ‘od gsal mkha’ ‘gro’I snying thig*) or *The Luminous Clarity of the Universe, Heart Essence of the Dakinis*.

5.6. Santi Maha Sangha

Santi Maha Sangha is a course of study and practice on nine levels started by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche in 1994. The aim of Santi Maha Sangha, which in the ancient language of Oddiyana means “Dzogchen Community”, is to guarantee continuation of the Dzogchen teaching as originally transmitted by Garab Dorje, and as the Master has been transmitting it for more than thirty years within the Dzogchen Community. After the “Base” level, whose contents are presented in *The Precious Vase*, there are three levels devoted to Semde, three to Longde and the final three to Mennagde or Upadesha.

5.7. The Dance of the Vajra

The Dance of the Vajra, taught for the first time by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche at the beginning of the Nineties, is a meditation in movement based on the Song of the Vajra and other mantras found in the original Tantras of Dzogchen. It is practised on a mandala representing the correspondence between the inner dimension of the individual and the outer dimension of the world. The Dance of the Vajra uses sound and movement to harmonise the energy of the individual and to integrate his or her three existences of body, voice and mind by knowledge of his or her own authentic condition, in a state of contemplation.

5.8. Yantra Yoga

Yantra Yoga or the Yoga of Movement [21], is one of the oldest recorded systems of Yoga that exists in the world. It is based on the text *Nyida Khajor* or *The Union of Sun and Moon Yantra* written in the 8th century by the master Vairochana, although its oral tradition is even more ancient. Chögyal

Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche has written an extensive commentary on the root teachings by Vairocana (was born in VIII century in Central Tibet in the Nyemo district in Jekhar. He was sent to India to bring back the Dzogchen texts and transmission by King Trisong Detsen *khri srong lde btsan*) based on his own training and knowledge of Yantra Yoga received from his uncle Togden Ugyen Tendzin, then from Gyurmed Gyaltzen (*'gyur med rgyal mtshan*), the son of his Root Master Changchub Dorje, and from various masters in Tibet. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu has also received clarification from Adzom Drugpa Drodul Pawo Dorje through “Clear Light Dreams”.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche started to transmit this teaching in Italy at the beginning of the Seventies.

Yantra Yoga, combining rhythmic movement, breathing and visualization, is a fundamental method of integrating the quintessence of Dzogchen Teaching in the three doors (body, energy and mind) of the practitioner. Through positions and movements combined with breathing, one's energy is coordinated and harmonised, so as to let the mind relax and find the authentic balance needed for achieving the state of contemplation. Yantra Yoga makes use of various types of movement and position linked to different aspects of breathing in order to control and coordinate the vital energy or prana. Since our physical and mental well-being depends mainly on the condition of our energy, by practising Yantra Yoga we can keep ourselves in good health and reach a calm, present and relaxed mental state which is the basis for understanding our own true condition.

5.9. *The International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies*

The International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies (SSI) is an international non-profit organisation that seeks to broaden the world's understanding of traditional Tibetan culture. At this moment in history preservation of this rich and exceptional culture is of utmost importance, as it is in real danger of being lost.

The mission of the Shang Shung Institute is to deepen the knowledge and the understanding of the Tibet's cultural traditions in its religious, historical, philosophical, artistic, medical, and social aspects in order to contribute to the survival and preservation of this culture.

Its purpose is to encourage cooperation among interested groups and individuals, thus keeping alive the essential values of these traditions.

The Shang Shung Institute was founded in Italy in 1989 by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, and inaugurated in 1990 by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.

Other branches of the SSI have since been established in North America, Austria, UK, Russia, and Argentina which work together as one promoting all initiatives to this end.

The SSI develops and supports projects in various countries including: translation, publication, and archiving of Tibetan texts; organisation and presentation of international cultural and educational events to share and preserve the Tibetan heritage, and formal courses of study in the Tibetan arts and sciences.

“The Shang Shung Institute exists for the preservation of Tibetan Culture and to translate Tibetan books into Western languages. Through the Shang Shung Institute we are trying to do something to maintain the survival of Tibetan Culture and understanding. Shang Shung, the name of the Institute, reflects the source of Tibetan culture and history - it was known as a great empire throughout the

Orient and the study of Shang Shung is extremely important if we are to understand the great antiquity, the unique nature and the universal importance of Tibetan Culture, past and present.” Prof. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, Founder of the Shang Shung Institute.

5.10. Multimedia Archive

The preservation and development of a large multimedia archive is one main focus of the Shang Shung Institute in Italy. The archive of the SSI contains a vast library of Tibetan language books, as well as a recording of every teaching or lecture that Chögyal Namkhai Norbu has given since 1976.

The library of more than 4,000 Tibetan books and manuscripts is one the most important specialist libraries in the West.

The Italian branch of the Shang Shung Institute also makes Chögyal Namkhai Norbu’s teachings available through live internet-based webcasts.

5.11. School of Tibetan Medicine

The study of traditional Tibetan Medicine, one of the oldest continuously practised healing systems on earth, is the main focus of the Shang Shung Institute in North America, founded in 1994.

It’s achievements include: an extensive library of educational resources on Tibetan culture, an onsite and online bookstore full of materials on Tibetan Culture and the Dzogchen Teachings of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, and many public programs and courses on Tibetan Culture & Art.

The most extensive project of the school to date is its four-year English-language programme of Tibetan medicine, based on the curriculum of the traditional medical schools of Tibet. The first of its kind in the West, this course takes place in Conway, Massachusetts, and culminates in a final internship at Qinghai University Tibetan Medicine College in Xining, China.

The “4-year Traditional Tibetan Medicine program” aims to educate doctors in the ancient tradition of Tibetan Medicine according to Tibetan standards.

The importance and the potential of the 4-year programme is also reflected in another Institute objective: formal application steps to make the “4-year Traditional Tibetan Medicine Program” compliant with official licensing regulations as per the State of Massachusetts Board of Education. In other words, completion of the application process will allow us to operate as a “post secondary proprietary school”. Once this licence is obtained, the appeal of the 4-year course will radically change: it will not only respond to students’ personal interest, but bring them much closer to a real legitimate professional career.

5.12. Ka-ter Translation Project

The “Ka-ter translation project” (Ka-ter is short for Kama (*bka’ ma*), the unbroken Master to disciple textual tradition, and Terma (*gter ma*) the tradition of rediscovered texts) is the main focus of the Shang Shung Institute in Austria. Its goal is to study and research into the Tibetan language. This project includes a special training for translators from Tibetan, as well as an initiative to translate ancient Dzogchen texts into Western languages. The aim of this unique project is to guarantee correct

and precise translations of Dzogchen texts so that future generations may have access to their unique wisdom.

About the Ka-Ter translation project Chögyal Namkhai Norbu said: “In order to become familiar with the unique knowledge of the ancient masters of Tibet, one must comprehend their scriptures and precious texts and make them available for future generations in Western language in a precise and correct translation. The Ka-ter Translation Project is an important step in that direction. I really hope that all of you who are interested in this area will support this project, directly or indirectly, and collaborate with its various aspects. You are really welcome to collaborate on this project!”

“The language tradition of the Tibetan people is the basis of the knowledge and history that the six original clans of the Tibetan people passed down from generation to generation. It is indisputable that the Tibetan language is the vein of life for all history and culture and therefore, the value of Tibetan knowledge and history is not just for Tibetan scholars alone. International scholars have also clearly realized that Tibetan knowledge is not just for Tibetan people, but it is important for all of humanity and for this reason they not only pay attention to it, but also care a lot about Tibetan culture. From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank these scholars. Concerning the Tibetan language, the Tibetan people who originated from the six original clans live on the top of the world in the very large area known as the Land of Snows. Even though there are many dialects in this area, this place is well known as a holy Buddhist place. From the time of the three great ones, Shantarakshita, Padmasambhava and Trisong Deutsen until today, thanks to Buddhism, which can be considered the best of the five major sciences, all of the Tibetan people from Ngari to Amdo and Kham have a common language, a written language that allows them to understand each other. All scholars know this fact. However, Tibetan society needs to continue to develop their knowledge based on the changing times and situations by creating new terminology and vocabulary, and many scholars believe that we should use the already existing common language to create these new terms and vocabulary. The knowledge and economic development of each area should take into account the importance of rapid globalization. Therefore, it is necessary to cooperate in these efforts otherwise the Tibetan language could become endangered. It is important not only to be aware of this situation, but also to cooperate to retain the valuable knowledge of each nation. This is especially true for our Tibetan knowledge, which we need to save since it is of great value for all of humanity. Because of this, in these changing times and situations, I think it is very important to develop Tibetan knowledge. I would particularly like to let scholars know that I have spent many years researching the ancient history of the lineage of the six original Tibetan clans of Shang Shung and Tibet. These are also related to the famous five major sciences”.

5.13. Cultural and Educational

The Shang Shung Institute regularly organises courses, seminars, and events related to all aspects of Tibetan culture. Our formal courses of study train students in the ancient Tibetan arts and sciences, including art, language, and traditional Tibetan medicine. We also promote informal events with the aim of introducing the general public to Tibetan culture. Our cultural and educational events have been promoted all over the world, primarily in North America and Europe.

5.14. Shang Shung Publications

Shang Shung Publications (Shang Shung Edizioni) was founded in Italy in 1983 with the mission of publishing the teachings of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and of other Masters belonging to the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition. In 2006 the publishing house merged with the International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies.

The editorial activity covers both the translation of Tibetan texts by qualified translators, ensuring precise correspondence to the original meaning, and the transcription and translation of oral teachings given by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche in the international centers of the Dzogchen Community and elsewhere. This activity produces publications of great interest for both Dharma practitioners and the general public, along with a series of texts dedicated to the specific methods of Dzogchen, meant only for practitioners.

Shang Shung Publications, in collaboration with the International Publication Committee (IPC) of the Dzogchen Community, routinely checks all translations of the works of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche in various languages. Together, the Shang Shung Institute, the Publishing House and the IPC guarantee that all publications meet the required standards and ensure the protection of all aspects of copyright at the international level.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu said about translations: “If you want to have an understanding of Dzogchen, then we need the original books. And particularly, if in the future you want to teach and keep that transmission, you must study and apply the original texts. It is not sufficient that you follow a teacher and listen what he says, although that might be good for you if you practice, for your realization. However, if you are a practitioner, you must also think about tomorrow and of other people. In fact, when we do practice we say from the beginning that we practice to benefit all beings. But how do we benefit them if we don’t teach and do not preserve the Teachings for the future? So that’s why we also need to know about the original books of Dzogchen. That is very important.”

The Shang Shung Institute also publishes *The Mirror*, the bi-monthly newspaper of the International Dzogchen Community. Recently, Shang Shung Publications has expanded to include locations in Argentina and Russia.

Conclusions

I hope from the deep of my heart that the first biography ever published of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche will be of some help to preserve pure and develop understanding of Dzogchen, as well as preserving Tibet’s extraordinary cultural patrimony.

I deserved my very best to outline both his enormous work of Master as Dzogchen uninterrupted Lineage Holder and from the side of his academic research.

Paying Homage and Devotion to my Master, I Take Refuge in the Guru, *Namo Guru Bhyā*.

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Appendix

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Charity Association for Person Centred Medicine—Associazione per la Medicina Centrata sulla Persona ONLUS (Organizzazione Non Lucrativa di Utilità Sociale—Non Lucrative Organization of Social Utility)

<http://www.medicinacentratasullapersona.org>

International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies

Shang Shung Institute Italy www.shangshunginstitute.org

Shang Shung Institute USA www.shangshung.org

Shang Shung Institute Austria www.ssi-austria.at

Shang Shung Institute UK <http://www.shangshunguk.org/v1/>

The Mirror, The Newspaper of the International Dzogchen Community of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche

<http://www.melong.com/>

The Shang Shung Tibetan Healing Center

<http://www.tibetanmedicinecenter.com/shangshung/Welcome.html>

The International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies—Multimedia Portal

<http://www.shangshunginstitute.com>

The Shang Shung School of Tibetan Medicine

<http://shangshung.org/home/school.html>

<http://tibetanmedicineschool.org/>

Shang Shung Publications

<http://www.shangshungpublications.org>

Yantra Yoga

<http://www.yantrayoga.org>

The Dance of the Vajra

<http://www.the-dance-of-the-vajra.org/en/>

Association for International Solidarity in Asia ONLUS—Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)

www.asia-ngo.org

Merigar 30th Anniversary Celebrations “The Joy Of Being Here” July 2011

<http://www.merigar30blog.com>

<http://www.merigaranniversary.org>

Dzogchen Communities (Gar) Worldwide

Merigar West - Europe (Italy) www.dzogchen.it

Merigar East - Europe (Romania) www.dzogchen.ro

Kunsangar South - Ukraine <http://www.dzogchencommunity.ru>

Tsegyalgar East - North America (Massachusetts, USA) www.tsegyalgareast.org

Tsegyalgar West - North America (Baja, Mexico) www.tsegyalgarwest.org

Tashigar Norte - South America (Venezuela) www.tashigarnorte.org

Tashigar Sur - South America (Argentina) www.tashigar-sur.com.ar

Namgyalgar - Oceania (Australia) www.dzogchen.org.au

Dzogchen Lings Worldwide

USA

Kundrolling, NYC www.nydzogchen.com

Dondrupling, Berkeley California www.dzogchencommunitywest.org

Seattle, Washington www.dzogchenseattle.org

Europe

Austria www.dzogchen.at

Czech Republic www.dzogchen.cz

France www.association-dzogchen.org

Germany www.dzogchen.de

Great Britain www.dzogchencommunity.org

Greece www.dzogchen.gr

Holland www.dzogchen.nl

Hungary www.dzogchen.hu

Lithuania www.dzogchen.lt

Poland www.dzoczen.pl

Slovakia www.dzogchen.sk

Spain Kundusling www.dzogchen.es

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Bari: Kunkyhabling mw-pugliaebasilicata@dzogchen.it

Brescia: Kunsalling www.kunsanlling.it

Bologna: Desalling www.desalling.org

Milan: Dribselling www.dzogchenmilano.it

Naples: Namdeling www.dzogchennapoli.org

Rome: Zhenphenling www.zhenphenling.it

Termoli: Adzaming www.adzaming.it

Venice: Gyamtsholing www.gyamtsholing.org

Russian-Speaking Countries

www.dzogchencommunity.ru

Rinchenling www.rinchenling.ru

Israel

dzogchen.org.il