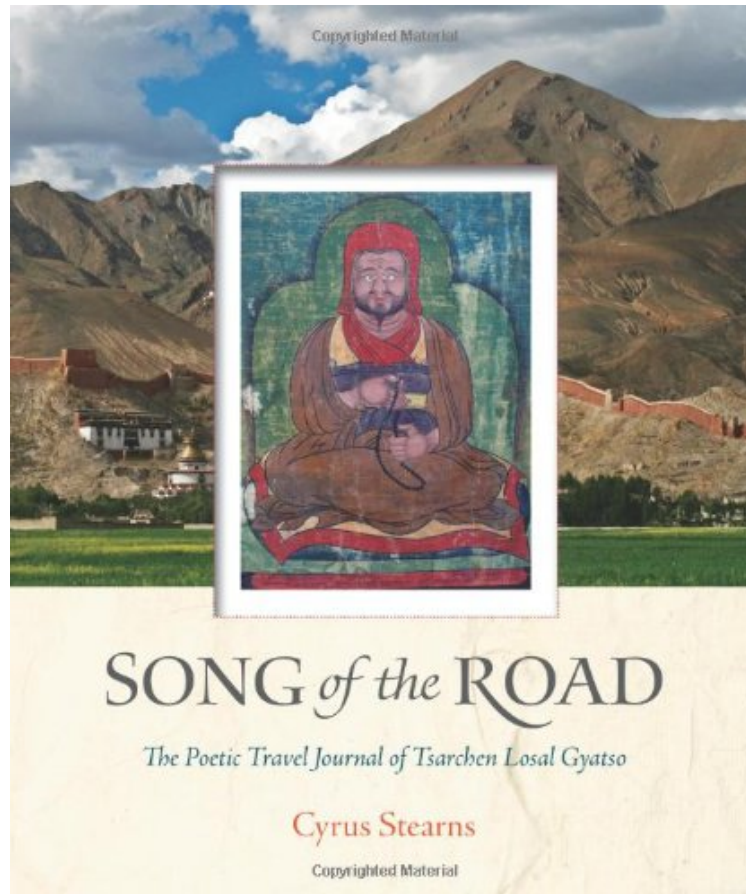


Song of the Road: The Poetic Travel Journal of Tsarchen Losal Gyatso

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From Wisdom Publications : Song of the Road: The Poetic Travel Journal of Tsarchen Losal Gyatso before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Song of the Road: The Poetic Travel Journal of Tsarchen Losal Gyatso:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. fine translation of a Tibetan travelogue (lam-yig) from 1539 By inner exile Given the brevity and scope of this work bearing the short title "Celebration of the Cuckoo" (dPyid-kyi rgyal-mo'i dga'-ston), Cyrus Stearns latest book is less ambitious than his previous tome about King of the Empty Plain: The Tibetan Iron-Bridge Builder Tangtong Gyalpo. The present one is a praiseworthy undertaking, nonetheless, that has come to completion thanks to the crucial guidance of Dezhung Rinpoche, Chogy Trichen Rinpoche, and Khenpo (abbot) Gyatso (Dehradun, India), and also because until very recently (2006) this autobiographical piece by Tsarchen Losal Gyatso - believed by some to be the embodiment of mahasiddha Virpa, ?837-909?, p. 155 - had been available only in its extracted form from the Great Fifth Dalai Lama's biography of said Sakya tantric master (not of the mad adept/drubnyn mould, as far as I can tell) who was trained in the Shangpa Kagy and Nyingma traditions as well. We

can retrace the steps - or more precisely hoofprints since he rode mostly on horseback to spare his ailing legs - of his third journey to , starting from his seat at Tupten Gepel (south of Sakya) and arriving in the vicinity of Rinpong, close to the south bank of the river Tsangpo/Brahmaputra. En route he and his fellow mendicants visited key centers of learning (Jonang, Bodong, Ngor Ewam, Shalu, etc.), sacred sites, some of whose glory had eclipsed by then, and politico-strategically important forts and castles (Panam, Nakarts, Gyants). As was common for monks of his standing, we find Tsarchen at the bestowing and receiving end of various teachings/transmissions, occasionally having ecstatic visionary experience of the wrathful manifestation of Vajrayogin (Nro Khecar) or those of dharma protectors like Takshn ("Mounted on Tiger"), et al. While going through the prose parts that are followed by poems recapturing and embellishing their gist, the reader can come across: a) evocative description of the landscape: "All the rivers and streams were fully swollen, like a sea of sapphires suddenly welling up, beautiful with garlands of waves whose white foamy smiles laughed in a hundred directions" (p. 31); b) admonition to the devout: "Small-minded persons, who accept as true the baseless gossip people speak at crossroads, risk revealing their own and many other people's faults, with a song of groundless, nervous alarm" (p. 69); c) advice to fellow pilgrims: "(a lay chieftain clever in trivial matters [i.e., parsimonious district officers and secular governors]) is of no use except as a pack ram's leather bag that dashes a fox's daylong hopes" (p. 87). To appraise the sharpness of this observation, Khenpo Gyatso comes to our aid: "[A] fox might see from far away that a leather bag has fallen from the back of a ram that is carrying provisions for a band of nomads... That night he sneaks to where the bag has been dropped but finds that it is just full of salt, and his daylong hope of something to eat is destroyed" (p. 145). Much to the delight of those who can read Tibetan, the original text is given in dbu-can script on the left-hand pages. Both the introduction and the translation themselves come with scholarly endnotes (pp. 17-21, 124-55) of the religio-cultural/historical kind, while 20 highly relevant, bw photos decorate the corpus, in addition to having the same map on the inside cover as well as on pp. 22-3; bibliography (157-62), index (163-73); + xvii (preface). Addendum: In connection with the reportedly 120-foot-tall (!) Maitreya statue at the Tropu (Khro-phu) monastery (p. 59, 134), it's worth to note there was another giant gilt copper image of the same future Buddha housed in the aptly named monastic complex of Great Maitreya in Rong (Rong Byams-chen - also called Byams-gling - chos-sde, of which a cursory mention is made on p. 153), a mile or so south to Rinpong ("Heap of Preciousness"). It was completed and consecrated in 1474, possibly under the supervision of the second abbot Kundga' bKra'-shis-ba and his patrons, Nor-bzang (1403 - died b/w 1467 and '71) and his eldest son alive, Kun-bzang of the House of Rin-spungs (see fol. 4a/131.1-3 in Yar-lungs-pa's "Rinpong Genealogy" referenced in the bibliography on p. 161, and pp. 623.21-624.2 in "Chos-'byung dPag-bsam lJon bzang" (1748 - "Wish-Granting Tree. A Religious History") by Sum-pa Ye-shes dpal-'byor (Kan-su'u Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang 1992). Estimates for the height of this gilt copper (gser-zangs) statue greatly differ: at the bottom end a three-storey mgon-khang (endnote 247 in THE GEOGRAPHY OF TIBET ACCORDING TO THE 'DZAM-GLING-RGYAS-BSHAD translated and annotated by T. V. Wylie, Rome 1962) is said to have contained a Maitreya 10 metres in height (Victor Chan Tibet Handbook (Moon Travel Guide) p. 845; Gyurme Dorje Footprint Tibet Handbook : The Travel Guide p. 252); whereas at the top end its parameters of 75 khru (~ cubit?) x 145 mtho (~ span?) found in "Vaidurya ser-po" (Yellow Beryl) correspond in Wylie's reckoning to 112.5 and 72.5 feet, respectively (ibid.). The monastery soon became a local hub for clerical education with four Sa-skyapa colleges (under the names of sTeng-rgyas, dPal-'byor-sgang, Shar-chen and lDum-ra-sdings), two affiliated with the Bo-dong bKa'-brgyud-pa-s (Nor-bu-gling and Chen-khang), and a dGe-lugs-pa one called bDe-chen. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. ... to publish something of his extensive research on this great master Tsarchen Losal Gyatso By Customer I have been waiting years for Cyrus Stearns to publish something of his extensive research on this great master Tsarchen Losal Gyatso, but I had no idea of the beauty of Tsarchen's own writings. The poems are meditations in themselves. Please, Cyrus, finish translating and publish the Tsarchen biography by the Fifth Dalai Lama so we here in the west can benefit from this enlightened being's example. - Kunga Dekyi 0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Song of the Road a different kind of movie By white tiger I enjoyed the movie which had me thinking about man's narrow perspective on life. The in your face materialism of the western world is mimicked throughout the movie. A movie worth viewing as thought provoking.

In *Song of the Road*, Tsarchen Losal Gyatso (1502-66), a tantric master of the Sakya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, weaves ecstatic poetry, song, and accounts of visionary experiences into a record of pilgrimage to central Tibet. Translated for the first time here, Tsarchen's work, a favorite of the Fifth Dalai Lama, brims with striking descriptions of encounters with the divine as well as lyrical portraits of Tibetan landscape. The literary flights of *Song of the Road* are anchored by Tsarchen's candid observations on the social and political climate of his day, including a rare example in Tibetan literature of open critique of religious power. Like the Japanese master Basho's famous *Narrow Road to the Interior*, written 150 years later, Tsarchen's travelogue contains a mixture of luminous prose and verse, rich with allusions. Traveling on horseback with a band of companions, Tsarchen visited some of the most renowned holy sites of the Tsang region, including Jonang, Tropu, Ngor, Shalu, and Gyantse. In his introduction and copious notes, Cyrus Stearns unearths the layers of meaning concealed in the text, excavating the history, legends, and lore associated with people and places encountered on the pilgrimage, revealing the spiritual as well as geographical topography of

Tsarchen's journey.

"Over the history of Tibetan Buddhism, travel across mountain and plain has long provided an occasion for profound reflections on more spiritual paths. Such reflections abound in *Song of the Road*. Readers of both English and Tibetan owe a great debt to the renowned translator Cyrus Stearns for bringing this almost forgotten work to the audience it so richly deserves." (Donald Lopez, Chair, Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan)"Cyrus Stearns's *Song of the Road* is a rare gem shining light on the life of the remarkable Tibetan master Tsarchen Losal Gyatso. This beautiful rendering of Tsarchen's autobiography captures, with such freshness, the immediacy and profound insight that characterize the Tibetan master's spiritual journey." (Thupten Jinpa, Institute of Tibetan Classics)From the Inside FlapIn *Song of the Road*, Tsarchen Losal Gyatso (1502-66), a tantric master of the Sakya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, weaves ecstatic poetry, song, and accounts of visionary experiences into a record of pilgrimage to central Tibet. Translated for the first time here, Tsarchen's work, a favorite of the Fifth Dalai Lama, brims with striking descriptions of encounters with the divine as well as lyrical portraits of Tibetan landscape. The literary flights of *Song of the Road* are anchored by Tsarchen's candid observations on the social and political climate of his day, including a rare example in Tibetan literature of open critique of religious power. Like the Japanese master Basho's famous *Narrow Road to the Interior*, written 150 years later, Tsarchen's travelogue contains a mixture of luminous prose and verse, rich with allusions. Traveling on horseback with a band of companions, Tsarchen visited some of the most renowned holy sites of the Tsang region, including Jonang, Tropu, Ngor, Shalu, and Gyantse. In his introduction and copious notes, Cyrus Stearns unearths the layers of meaning concealed in the text, excavating the history, legends, and lore associated with people and places encountered on the pilgrimage, revealing the spiritual as well as geographical topography of Tsarchen's journey.