

# DISCUSSING THE DHARMA: ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS (DRIS LAN) BY 15TH CENTURY KAGYUPA MASTERS AS SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF TIBETAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY

LECTURE BY JIM RHEINGANS

Tibetan texts entitled *dri lan* or *dris lan* ('questions and answers' or 'answers to questions') predominantly consist of written answers to one or more questions, mainly containing short treatments of queries about the Buddha's teaching that are suited to specific individuals. At a first glance, such texts seem to be related to letters and instructions. In most cases, answers refer to written questions; at times inquiries are rephrased or we find longish series almost resembling a treatise. Such works are not only useful for gaining an overview of otherwise complex doctrinal issues, but also offer insights into didactic strategies, rich with historical details. They further figure prominently among the early sources on the *mahāmudrā* – a significant portion of the *Dwags po bka' 'bum*, for example, consist of question and answers. After a brief introduction, this paper examines selected *dri lan* as key sources for the study of Tibetan religious history by presenting (so far little researched) case studies from the textual corpus ascribed to Karma 'phrin las pa (1456–1539), and works by Chos grags ye shes (1453–1524) and Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554). Topics range from questions on Buddhist vows, religious history, and Madhyamaka to meditation, tantric ritual and the Sakyapa's path and fruit system. This presentation also reflects on the production and form of *dri lan*, as well as their possible function within the religious schools. In conclusion, I shall attempt to sketch a frame for *dri lan* as a text type and discuss how to meaningfully continue our research with this fascinating aspect of Tibetan written artefacts.

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Karma phrin las pa, cropped image of illuminated block print folio @ Buddhist Digital Resource Centre