CHAPTER 2

Learning, Making, and Becoming Medicine

This chapter examines the interplay between knowledge and practice in Sowa Rigpa, with particular attention to the processes of self-cultivation that are integral to learning, making, and becoming medicine. Its focus is on the traditions of rejuvenation and essence extraction, known as *chülen*, which we approach through the making of medicinal butter or *menmar*. *Menmar* and *chülen* techniques engage with particular aspects of potency that manifest through the transmission and enactment of these practices. In what follows, Jan van der Valk recounts his immersive experience of participating in a medicinal butter and rejuvenation workshop led by the senior Tibetan physician Arya Pasang Yonten in Switzerland. Van der Valk's participation as both an anthropologist and a practitioner offers a unique vantage point from which to highlight some of the artisanal *menjor* aspects of medicinal butter preparation, but also to reflect on the deeper, transformative experiences of those involved.

Medicinal butter is revered for its nourishing and strengthening properties, as detailed in the *Four Tantras* (IV, 7). The teachings of Dr. Pasang—as he is commonly called by his students—draw heavily on this foundational treatise and its commentaries, as well as his own Buddhist learning, situating the workshop within broader rejuvenation currents of tradition. While we briefly introduce this wider context, the main focus of analysis is the transmission from a skilled teacher to his pupils and their mutual engagement in the learning and instantiation of a specific set of craft practices. By exploring this artisanal journey in a spiritual retreat setting, we underscore how learning or "education" transcends the mere assimilation of texts or oral teachings. In line with Tim Ingold's (2000) ecophenomenology and building further on the concept of "ritualized meshworks" (Surbhi and Van der Valk, 2025), we identify distinctive threads that come together in the making of medico-ritual potency. In the case of Dr. Pasang's workshop, this meshwork includes textual sources (including recipes), ingredients (emphasizing taste, color, and form), stages

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of preparation, and contemplative Buddhist practices of consecration (offerings, visualizations, mantras, and prayers).

The workshop took place in the Swiss Alps but transmits a Tibeto-Himalayan tradition that Dr. Pasang himself was trained in and has practiced and taught over many years. He was a renowned Sowa Rigpa teacher in institutions in both Dharamsala and Ladakh before settling in Italy, where he passes on medical and tantric lineage instructions received from his teachers. While he has certainly adjusted his teachings to European environments and international participants, we see this event as a continuation of both his institutional training in the precarious yet intimate early days of the Men-Tsee-Khang (MTK) in exile (Kloos 2008) and the *menjor* crafts we observed across the Himalayas. Before getting to the workshop, however, we first introduce the idea of *chülen* and its histories and the various forms of potency that are sculpted and layered in the making of rejuvenating medicinal butter.

Butter, essences, and rejuvenation

The Tibetan Plateau has long been home to nomadic pastoralist communities among whom butter was and remains a staple food. It is therefore not surprising that butter also became a crucial component in the preparation of medicines. In the *Four Tantras* (IV, 3), *menmar* is one of the five forms of pacifying medicinal preparations, along with decoctions (*thang*), powders (*phye ma*), pills or *rilbu*, and pastes (*lde gu*) (Yutok Yönten Gönpo 1982, 572). The milk used for making medicinal butter contributes its own potency or *nüpa*, just as it does when mixed with limestone in the making of moonlight *chongzhi* (Chapter 1). Cow and goat butters are cooling, for example, whereas sheep butter and all aged butters are warming (Yutok Yönten Gönpo 1982, 594). Depending on which substances are added, the *nüpa* can be further directed to treat specific heat or cold disorders.

The *Four Tantras* covers the making of medicinal butter in Chapter 7 of the *Subsequent Tantra* (IV, 7; Yutok Yönten Gönpo 1982, 591–94). The focus is on preparation techniques, the ingredients of different recipes, and how those techniques and ingredients affect the three psychophysiological systems or *nyepa*: *lūng* (*rlung*), *tripa* (*mkhris pa*), and *beken* (*bad kan*).[34] Although not identical to the Greek "humors," *lūng*, *tripa*, and *beken* are sometimes translated as "wind," "bile,"

34 For further discussion of these concepts, see Chapter 3. Although the standard phonetic conversion for *rlung* is "*lung*" (Germano and Tournadre 2010), we have chosen to use *lūng* to prevent confusion with the lung as an organ.

and "phlegm," including by Dr. Pasang. Butter might be a common ingredient, but it poses challenges to *menjor* practitioners because of the specific skill set required to process it. The *Subsequent Tantra* (IV, 7) explains that the potency of medicinal butter formulas hinges on careful heating processes. If the butter is heated beyond the point where the water has fully evaporated, the resulting *menmar* is less potent, but if the water is not fully evaporated, the *menmar* is more difficult to digest (Yutok Yönten Gönpo 1982, 594). This also applies to the heating and drying of honey or *drangtsi* (*sbrang rtsi*) and jaggery or *buram* (*bu ram*), substances added to the *menmar* made during Dr. Pasang's workshop. As we shall see, these processes were among the most challenging technical aspects encountered.

Amchis integrate this knowhow on ingredients and techniques with related chapters on *chülen* and rejuvenation (*Four Tantras* III, 90–91), which bring in ideas of potency from Vajrayāna Buddhism. This is why the potency of medicinal butter cannot be understood in isolation. *Menmar* formulas and practices involved in its production often have *chülen* qualities that can strengthen and rejuvenate both patients and practitioners. The central idea of *chülen* is "that vital essences can be extracted from various substances, either pharmacologically or meditatively, for the purpose of promoting longevity" (Gerke 2012 [2013], 330). *Chülen* can be taken for both preventing and treating signs of aging as outlined in the chapter on "Treating the Aged" in the *Oral Instruction Tantra* (III, 90), which presents *chülen* as increasing lifespan and enhancing complexion, the sense organs, a sharp mind, a melodious voice, and virility (Yutok Yönten Gönpo 2006, 632).

Notably, many *chülen* recipes contain butter, since it is considered rich in nutritional essence or *dangma* (*dwangs ma*), which is a pure essence of the five elements in their refined state—potent and rich in *chü* (*bcud*).[35] Its specific potencies are intimately linked to its nourishing capacity across different forms: fresh, aged, clarified, or as buttermilk in medicinal variations. In the *Oral Instruction Tantra* (III, 90), white butter is also listed as one of the five essences (*bdud rtsi lnga*), a *dütsi* or nectar that nourishes the body as it is the essence of grass. The others are honey, jaggery, limestone or *chongzhi*, and bitumen (*brag zhun*), which are the essences of flowers, trees, rock, and earth, respectively, and nourish radiance, strength, bones, and muscles.[36] *Dangma*, *dütsi* and other essences can be extracted from the natural world and have strong therapeutic potential. In the words of Desi Sanggyé Gyatso (1653–1705), the regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama:

35 *Chü* has multiple meanings such as essence, elixir, sap, moisture, potency, nutrition, extraction, taste, and nutriment, to mention a few (see Gerke 2012 [2013], 330). On the five elements or "elemental dynamics," see Chapter 3.

36 For details, see Gerke 2012 [2013], 348–49.

"…the nourishing essences of the outer elements heal the inner elements."[37] Furthermore, butter's meltability combined with its smooth and oily characteristics make it the perfect substrate into which other substances can infuse. It thereby takes on the role of a vehicle carrying other *chülen* substances, such as the three myrobalan fruits.[38]

In the early Buddhist Nyingma tradition, *chülen* signals a variety of meanings beyond pills and decoctions used for meditation retreats but typically centers the bodily aspects of "imbibing the essence juice" (Cantwell 2017, 181; Mei 2010). *Chülen* is also part of a broader set of *dütsi* and accomplishing medicine or *mendrup* practices (Cantwell 2017), discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. These are mentioned in Tibetan Buddhist literature of the thirteenth century incorporating dietary conceptions (Garrett 2010) and in the medically oriented *Yutok Heart Essence*, known as the *Yutok Nyingtik* (see Chapters 3, 4, and 5), and are relied upon to consecrate, bless, or "accomplish" pills and other treatment methods (Blaikie 2013, Garrett 2009, Samuel 2016). Essence extraction is frequently included in larger tantric cycles (Cantwell 2015, Sehnalova 2019) and thrived in Central Tibet around the time that the *Four Tantras* became a significant medical text (Garrett 2010, 302). *Chülen* practices are also part of the three principles of the yoga of food, which became popular in Tibet in the eleventh century and was systematized further in the fourteenth (Germano 1997). *Chülen* pills are found in many Buddhist instructions for practitioners on retreat (Cantwell 2017, Oliphant 2016) and are still produced for this reason (Yeshe 2010). More recently, they have also made their way into over-the-counter Sowa Rigpa supplements, including those made by MTK in India (Gerke 2012b) and those made in Tibetan regions in the PRC.

The *Four Tantras* (III, 90–91) describes essence extraction at a substance level without elaborating on ritual or alchemical processes (Chui 2019, 231). However, in Tibet, by the seventeenth century, Sowa Rigpa had witnessed a significant shift toward incorporating tantric rituals into *chülen* rejuvenation practices, particularly under the influence of Desi Sanggyé Gyatso (Chui 2019). That his conceptualization of *chülen* differed from that of the *Four Tantras* is evident in his extensive commentaries: the *Blue Beryl* (*Vaiḍūrya sngon po*) and the *Extended Commentary on the Instructional Tantra* (*Man ngag lhan thabs*) (Sanggyé Gyatso

37 Gerke's translation of: *phyi 'byung gi dangs mas nang 'byung gi gsos byed pa* / (Sanggyé Gyatso 1982, 1138, cited in Gerke 2012 [2013], 347).

38 These are chebulic myrobalan or *arura* (*a ru ra*, *Terminalia chebula*, Skt. *harītakī*), beleric myrobalan or *barura* (*ba ru ra*, *Terminalia bellirica*, Skt. *vibhītaka*, also spelled *bibhītaka*), and emblic myrobalan or *kyurura* (*skyu ru ra*, *Phyllanthus emblica*, Skt. *āmalakī*).

1982, 1991). His approach emphasized not just the physical extraction and ingestion of essences from natural substances (such as minerals and plants) for health and longevity, but also spiritual-alchemical extraction involving complex ritual, deity invocation, and meditative practices. As we will see, Dr. Pasang integrated these practices into his workshop. Their aim is to restore physical vitality and prolong life, primarily to allow more time for spiritual practice. By engaging with protective deities and extracting the essences from the surrounding elements through visualization, *chülen* practices become a deeply spiritual endeavor reflective of broader socioreligious frameworks and Vajrayāna Buddhist cosmologies.[39]

These complex histories reverberate in the ways in which medicinal butter practices are taught today by scholarly medical and religious practitioners. In what follows, we explore *menmar* in its wider *chülen* context. What does the practice of *menmar* teach us about potency in Sowa Rigpa? Why is *menmar* important in *chülen* practices? We explore answers to these questions by looking at medicinal butter as a specific carrier or *menta* (*sman rta*)[40] of potency, through which it provides certain kinds of qualities. We also highlight consecration practices that were carried out during the workshop, which added additional forms of potency.

Forms of potency

In this and other chapters we see how potency is not easily separated into "religious" or "medical" realms, being sculpted and layered through entangled meshworks of materials and integrated body-mind practices that together create potent medicines while also transforming their makers. This is illustrated below through Van der Valk's accounts of sessions of *menmar* preparation, body-mind cleansing, and consecration. Since *menmar* is considered a rejuvenating substance, it is consecrated in a specific way after its production. During the workshop, this ritual consecration followed the Lesser Elixir of Rejuvenation (*bcud len chung ba*) rite,[41] which is dedicated to Amitāyus (*Tshe dpag med*), the Buddha of Long

39 The transmission of *chülen* practices has been continued through longevity cycles such as the revelatory *Immortal Life's Creative Seed* (*'Chi med srog thig*) propagated by Dudjom Rinpoche in the twentieth century (Dudjom Rinpoche 1979–1985, 513–17, cited in Cantwell 2017, 185), alongside many other contemporary lineages.

40 *Menta* also refers to individual substances used as "vehicles" in *menmar* recipes, such as milk, butter, and water.

41 For a medical painting of the related visualizations, see Parfionovitch, Gyurme Dorje, and Meyer 1992, vol. I, 121–22.

Life.[42] This longevity ritual, which involves visualization and mantra recitation practices, is one of the two *chülen* consecration practices briefly mentioned in the *Oral Instruction Tantra* (III, 90–91), and detailed by Sanggyé Gyatso in his *Blue Beryl* commentary (translated in Gerke 2012 [2013], 353).

The potencies crafted through visualization, mantra recitation, and prayers are among the various types of *nüpa* the reader will encounter in this book. Amchi Tsultim Gyatso mentioned that our recitation of the Medicine Buddha mantra as we mixed *chongzhi* with milk under the light of the full moon added *ngak kyi nüpa* (Chapter 1). As we will see, the preparation of medicinal butter during Dr. Pasang's workshop also relied on this mantric potency, as well as the potency of prayer (*smon lam gyi nus pa*). Workshop participants also paid attention to the potencies of shape (*dbyibs mthun gyi nus pa*) and color (*kha mdog gi nus pa*)—which are articulated through correspondences between ingredients and anatomical or pathological structures, as described in texts by the Tibetan polymath Deumar Geshé Tendzin Püntsok (b. 1672). Moreover, the ingredients added to the medicinal butter all have their own material potency, known as *dzé kyi nüpa* (*rdzas kyi nus pa*). All these forms of potency are outlined in Chapter 3 and expanded upon in Chapter 5, where we find amchis adding blessed compounds to medicines, thus adding the potency of blessings or *jinlap kyi nüpa* (*byin rlabs kyi nus pa*), and the power of realized masters transmitted through both meditative concentration and lineage, called *ting-ngédzin gyi nüpa* (*ting nge 'dzin gyi nus pa*) and *gyü kyi nüpa* (*rgyud kyi nus pa*), respectively.

This chapter engages with Ingold's (2018a) discussions on education and learning and his notion of correspondence to explore these various forms of *nüpa* in the making of a rejuvenating butter formula. Through this lens we aim to comprehend the crafting of *menmar* as efficacy-in-becoming, sculpted by a nuanced ensemble of skilled tasks. By presenting Van der Valk's experiences at the rejuvenation workshop, we invite readers to perceive medicinal butter preparation not merely as a technical endeavor but also as an educational journey, a transformative engagement with craft embedded in spiritual practice. Highlighting correspondences between learning and becoming, Van der Valk offers intimate glimpses of *menjor* aspects that are rarely put into words by practitioners and therefore tend to be overlooked by textual scholars. As we will see, the process of making *menmar* foregrounds hands-on experience—learning by doing under the guidance of a master teacher (*dge rgan*), often referred to respectfully as

42 See Samuel 2012 on the historical development of longevity practices associated with Amitabha (*'Od dpag med*) and Amitāyus. On longevity rituals and empowerments, see Gerke 2012a, 229–86.

Genla (*rgan lags*).[43] It also highlights the correspondence between external processes of transformation, such as making *menmar*, and internal processes such as body metabolism and spiritual transformation. This results in the cultivation of perceptual acuity and the transformation of both the maker and the product.

Crafting potency during a rejuvenation workshop: Setting the scene

In the late spring of 2019, in the Earth Pig year, I (Jan van der Valk) participated in a week-long rejuvenation workshop on the outskirts of a Swiss alpine village called Jaun together with Dr. Pasang and eighteen other students. The workshop was organized by the Tibetan Medicine Education Center (TME), a small nonprofit co-founded by Dr. Pasang in Neuchâtel in 2006 and dedicated to the transmission of Sowa Rigpa in "the West." The workshop participants, many of whom were professionally active in the fields of health and well-being,[44] formed a diverse group, hailing from over ten different countries and presenting a 2:1 female-to-male ratio. They had all previously completed a three-year distance learning course with two on-site TME workshops, or a four-year weekend course at the New Yuthok Institute (NYI) in Milan, co-founded by Dr. Pasang in 1999. This meant that they were already familiar with each other, with Dr. Pasang's way of teaching, and with the basic tenets of Sowa Rigpa epitomized by the dynamics of the three *nyepa*.

The workshop took place in a large wooden chalet, where almost all of the participants also ate and slept, enveloped in the sound of a nearby waterfall and surrounded by green alpine pastures and pine forest. As shown by Blaikie et al. (2015), who participated in the making of Sowa Rigpa medicines in Kathmandu, workshops are fruitful platforms for anthropological engagement, especially when envisioned as collaborative events of coproduction and praxis. Besides the location and participants, however, what makes this event different is my positionality as both a researcher and close student of Dr. Pasang. Instead of feigning analytical distance, I therefore refer to Dr. Pasang as "Genla," an honorific designation that

43 With some exceptions, the respectful suffix *lags* is commonly transcribed as "la" rather than "lak."

44 The participants included two biomedical doctors specialized in oncology and hematology, a dentist, a midwife, a naturopath, an aromatherapist, a Reiki master, a veterinarian, a Chinese Medicine practitioner, and teachers of Indian and Tibetan yoga. Several of these participants had integrated aspects of Tibetan medical and Buddhist praxis into their professions and personal lives.

signals my closeness to him. In this chapter, my aim as a student-practitioner-anthropologist is to take the reader along on the transformative journey of making and consecrating medicinal butter by sharing prominent moments of apprenticeship and reflection based on my personal experience, the sixty-four-page workshop booklet, forty-five A4-sized pages of handwritten notes, over six hundred photographs and video clips, and three recorded introductory lectures.

As we retrace the steps of this journey, I aim to convey a sense of how knowledge and practice are inextricably intertwined in the process of learning a craft, in ritual, and in anthropological participant observation. This synthetic approach is inspired by Ingold's reflections on education and learning, which emphasize the acquisition of knowledge as being deeply embedded in direct participation and immersion in practical activities alongside the teacher and as part of a broader community of practice (see also Wenger 1998).[45] Apprenticeship, ritual, and ethnographic practice all involve an "education of attention" (Gibson 1979, 254, cited in Ingold 2000, 166–67):

> [T]o observe *with* or *from* is not to objectify; it is to *attend* to persons and things, to learn from them, and to follow in precept and practice. This is how the apprentice observes in the practice of a skill, how the devotee observes in the routines of worship, how the anthropologist observes in the tasks of everyday life in the field. … To practice participant observation, however, is also to undergo an education. Indeed I believe there are grounds for substituting the word "education" for "ethnography" as the most fundamental purpose of anthropology. (Ingold 2018a, 61)

This chapter is not meant to resolve the broader debate around the relationship between theory and ethnography stirred by Ingold (2014, 2017; see also da Col 2017). In line with this book's focus on artisanship and the crafting of potency, it instead seeks to argue that the learning-by-doing of preparing and ingesting a ritually empowered rejuvenating medicinal butter is a self-cultivation process in which the participants themselves are equally transformed: a crafting that generates and enhances potency in both the medicines and their makers.

Over lunch on the day of our arrival, Genla welcomed us to what he called an ideal place for rejuvenation, handing out a new workshop booklet. At the very outset, he emphasized:

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45 Within anthropology, engagement in forms of apprenticeship that go beyond participant observation has a long pedigree. For a recent overview, see Selim (2024, 52–58), who introduces the notions "dual apprenticeship" and "affective pedagogy" to highlight the experiential aspects of both "knowing from the inside" (Ingold 2013b, 2) and the situated learning of how to do fieldwork.

> This is a *work*shop. *You* have to work, you must touch with your hands, body and mind together. You might burn yourself or feel nauseous, whatever, you must do it. It is not enough to look at a video, or to attend a lecture. This is pharmacy. You must work! One, two, three times, then only you begin to understand: "Ah, this is the way."

Genla's foregrounding of manual work, the senses, practice, and experiential knowledge in the making of medicine closely parallels Ingold's artisanal phenomenology. Through colorful storytelling, Genla then shared how he had himself started to seriously learn *menjor* after graduating from MTK in 1977, when he was selected for several years of further specialized training in pharmacy.[46] At that time, *menmar* was only made in winter and even then, only on demand.

The *menmar* chapter of the *Four Tantras* lists formulas to treat heat and cold disorders (IV, 7). But amchis as well as many patients know that the nourishing qualities of butter alleviate excess *lūng* and strengthen the body. It is therefore not surprising to find *menmar* as a principal treatment option in the *Explanatory Tantra*'s chapter "Abiding in a State of Health" (*Mi na ba gnas par bya ba*; II, 23). Genla drew on this chapter to explain why TME had set up this week as an intensive three-in-one workshop (making *menmar*, body-mind cleansing, and *menmar* consecration), commencing on an astrologically auspicious Earth-Water day.[47] *Menmar* is excellent for longevity, he said, but without preliminary cleansing there would be little benefit upon taking the medicine: "Preparing fresh food in a dirty cooking pot, does that make sense?"

In addition to the cleansing of our bodies to become suitable vessels for rejuvenation, the main goal of the workshop was the preparation of Dresum Menmar (*'bras gsum sman mar*), a medicinal butter recipe based primarily on the three myrobalan fruits. According to the *Oral Instruction Tantra* (III, 90): "Medicinal butter of the fruits *arura*, *barura*, and *kyurura* clears the senses, generates strength, eliminates combined disorders [of the three *nyepa*], and sublimely maintains one

46 Dr. Pasang was given the privilege of this further training because he graduated top of his class. His *menjor* teachers were Lamenpa Jamyang Tashi of Tsona (1918–1986) and Tsering Wangyel Dozur (1931–1975), husband of the renowned Tibetan physician Ama Lobsang Dolma Khangkar. In 1982, he participated in the highly complex processing of mercury sulfide into precious pills (*rin chen ril bu*) under the guidance of Lamenpa Tenzin Chödrak (1922–2001). This event is discussed in Gerke 2021, 108–16.

47 According to Tibetan astrology, Earth-Water days are more auspicious because of the matching nourishing elements, which together are called a "youth combination" (*lang tsho sbyor*), and are also an ideal time for communal gatherings.

at the prime of life."[48] Its preparation consisted of much more than simply adding together ingredients. It involved a step-by-step process of removing impurities and extracting the essence or *chülen*. In a final stage before ingestion, the now medicated and clarified butter was ritually perfected and consecrated.

On the day after our arrival, we got up at 5:30 a.m. for a short Medicine Buddha practice (Skt. *sādhanā*),[49] Tibetan yoga and breathing exercises, and guided meditation. The formal teaching started after breakfast with an extremely condensed overview of *chülen* practices as expounded in Buddhist commentaries, tantras, and revealed treasure texts called *terma* (*gter ma*). Cutting to the core of this vast field of knowledge, Genla pointed out that besides treating disease, one of medicine's principal goals is prolonging life (*Four Tantras* I, 2). The quest for the transformation of the ordinary body into an enlightened vajra state parallels the alchemical idea that base metals can be transmuted into gold, as well as related mythologies and practices of turning mercury—the "king of poisons"—into the ultimate medicine. The section on medicinal *chülen* in our booklet further summarized that "[t]he essential purpose of *chülen* is to amplify medicines' potency for development of strength and prolongation of life, by the use of detoxified substances." The key is to transform and empower the five elements of which both raw materials and our bodies are made into deathless nectar, or *dütsi*.

The *Oral Instruction Tantra*'s chapter entitled "Treating the Aged through Essence Extraction" (*Rgas pa gso ba bcud len*; III, 90) outlines the benefits, places, and supporting behaviors for rejuvenation practices, followed by treatment methods organized along with a dozen listed formulas. It concludes with a note on the duration for which the elixirs should be taken. While covering these aspects, Genla hinted at how the gradual metabolic refinement of the *lüzung dün* (*lus zungs bdun*, "seven bodily constituents") into radiance (*mdangs*) is related to the quality of the sexual fluids and libido (*ro tsa*), as well as its importance for tantric practices involving essence drops (*thig le*). Throughout the week, kitchen metaphors that associated cooking with digestion, as well as with medicine making and purification of both body and mind, were a recurring theme. As illustrated in what follows, this correspondence of external and internal processes of transformation—of making and becoming—is a key feature of both learning the craft of *menjor* and learning as an anthropologist through participant observation.

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48 Van der Valk's translation of: *a ru bar skyur 'bras bu'i sman mar gyis / dbang gsal stobs skye 'dus pa'i nad sel te / na tshod dar la 'jog pa'i dam pa yin /* (Yutok Yönten Gönpo 1982, 549).

49 For the concise practice text, which was compiled by Dr. Pasang for daily recitation, see Arya 2022, 233–38.

Preparing Dresum Menmar

Formulation

The twenty stanzas that describe the procedure for making medicinal butter in the *Four Tantras* were elaborated across five pages in our workshop booklet, although no single script was closely followed during any of the *menjor* practices we carried out. The proportions of the butter recipe (Table 1) also diverged from the text, adapting to the availability and quality of the ingredients, the particularities of the extraction processes, and the intuition of our teacher and his main assistant Elena Gherlone—an Italian nurse who had twice attended the NYI four-year course and became an expert in making Genla's medicinal butter and cleansing decoction. After two hours of teaching and a tea break, we started the manual work, the first stage of which was grinding.

Table 1 Composition of the recipe for Dresum Chülen Menmar (Three Fruits Elixir Medicine Butter). The amounts were measured after cleaning and sorting, except for those indicated with an asterisk (*), which were weighed prior to further processing.

Tibetan name	Botanical name	Vernacular name	Amount
Main ingredients			
arura (*a ru ra*)	*Terminalia chebula*	chebulic myrobalan	500 g
barura (*ba ru ra*)	*Terminalia bellirica*	beleric myrobalan	300 g
kyurura (*skyu ru ra*)	*Phyllanthus emblica*	emblic myrobalan	350 g
Additional ingredients			
buram (*bu ram*)	*Saccharum officinarum*	jaggery	750 g*
drangtsi (*sbrang rtsi*)		honey	600 g*
dzati (*dzA ti*)	*Myristica fragrans*	nutmeg	25 g
kharutsa (*kha ru tshwa*)		Himalayan black salt	50 g
pipiling (*pi pi ling*)	*Piper longum*	long pepper	50 g
sukmel (*sug smel*)	*Elettaria cardamomum*	green cardamom	50 g
chaga (*bca' sga*)	*Zingiber officinale*	ginger	50 g
chawa (*lca ba*)	*Angelica sinensis*	Chinese angelica	50 g

Table 1 *Continued*

Tibetan name	Botanical name	Vernacular name	Amount
sedru (*se 'bru*)	*Punica granatum*	pomegranate	100 g
	Vehicles		
oma (*'o ma*)		local cow milk (raw)	5 l
mar (*mar*)		local butter	5 kg
chu (*chu*)		tap water	14 l + 9 l + 9 l
	Pill coating		
kara (*ka ra*)	*Saccharum officinarum*	rock sugar	500 g (partly used)

Grinding

First, we crushed the three myrobalan fruits to grain size using mortar and pestle, making sure to remove the stones and other impurities. Genla was rather strict, dictating that the grinding should be done without distraction and preferably while reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra. The fragments were not to be ground too finely, for they would then sink to the bottom of the cooking vessel and easily get burnt, nor were they to be too coarse as this would impede proper extraction. This rather monotonous and tough labor is nothing less than spiritual practice, Genla explained as we worked. The hard ingredients represent our ignorance and delusions while each beat is an instance of mind training. Mortar and pestle represent wisdom (*she rab*) and method (*thabs*). Only by simultaneously cultivating the six perfections (Skt. *pāramitā*) and striving toward enlightenment for the benefit of all beings (Skt. *bodhicitta*) can the raw materials truly be transformed into nectar.[50] This medicinal butter was to be an antidote to the demons of aging and death, so outer and inner transformation ought to go together. The students diligently tried to put this into practice, effectively learning by simultaneously making and becoming medicine, increasing their healing potential. In Ingold's terms (2017, 2018a, 2018b), this is an education through correspondence that takes

50 Dr. Pasang often communicated using Sanskrit Buddhist terminology instead of Tibetan because the former is more familiar to many non-heritage practitioners.

place through careful participation alongside mentors, fellow students, and alive substances. Artisans join with and attend to the ways of their materials, just as I attended and responded to them as an (anthropological) participant-observer.

Extraction into water

After grinding the fruits, we prepared the additional ingredients and started the first round of extraction by adding the ground ingredients one by one to a large pot of boiling water while stirring continuously (fig. 42). Genla once again stressed the need to integrate medical knowledge on metabolism and the physiology of the three *nyepa* in order to gain deeper pharmacological insights. The *Four Tantras* provides an explicit metaphor that compares the churning stomach to the stirring of a cooking vessel (II, 3, 5). The digestive process is activated by metabolic heat—*medrö*—which consists of decomposing phlegm (*bad kan myag byed*, the water in the pot), digestive bile (*mkhris pa 'ju byed*, the fire), and fire-accompanying wind (*me nyam rlung*, which acts like combustible gas). In the same vein, we were told to stir the pot clockwise while preparing the medicinal butter, aligning with the absorption of food as it passes through the stomach and large intestine. The step-by-step refinement of the raw materials into butter essence not only parallels

Figure 42 Dr. Pasang shows participants an ingredient he is about to add to the pot for extraction, while a student stirs the mixture clockwise. Jaun, June 2019. Photo J. van der Valk (all rights reserved).

the gradual refinement of the seven bodily constituents, from nutritional essence to reproductive fluids and radiance; the potencies of the medicine also impact these bodily processes upon ingestion, effecting a direct correspondence of elements, tastes, and qualities (see Chapter 3).

The next several hours were spent stirring, boiling down the watery liquid to a thick soup (initially to about half of its volume), filtering out the residue, tasting it, and then repeating the cycle in newly added water until the decoction pieces lost their taste. These consecutive stages of filtration purified the gross elements into their subtle essences, mirroring the transformation of nutrients to more and more subtle constituents in the body through the removal of waste products (*snyigs ma*). In the words of Genla: "To increase our subtle radiance, we need a subtle butter." Purification thus occurs in interdependence with the three tantric activity levels of body, speech, and mind: outer (cooking), inner (digestion), and secret (emotions). Genla also repeatedly applied the Buddhist Middle Way (Skt. Mādhyamaka) perspective in his insistence on avoiding all extremes in a pragmatic sense. The final butter, for instance, should not be too strong nor too weak. Adding a high amount of ingredients relative to milk and butter would not be conducive for long-term use, for which a blunt quality is preferable; this quality also counteracts the sharpness of "bile" and fevers. Too mild a butter would have few additional material effects to ghee, which has inherent yet rather mild rejuvenating properties on its own. The three myrobalans together are slightly cooling, but we added several warming ingredients to protect and strengthen the digestive fire.

Processing of jaggery and honey

While the main decoction continued to boil, we processed jaggery and honey into powders (figs. 43–45). *Buram*, the essence of trees, restores bodily strength, while *drangtsi* is the essence of flowers and nourishes radiance. The processing involved cutting the jaggery (fig. 43), dissolving the sweet substances in water, and then evaporating all the liquid in a pan while stirring (fig. 44). Special care and expertise were required to ensure that the substances did not get burnt (excessive caramelization would create a dark and bitter-tasting product) nor remain undercooked (which would create a material that cannot be powdered properly, leading to crunchy bits in the butter). Elena sat on a chair right next to the electric heater, frequently gauging the increasing thickness of the sugary liquid using a wooden ladle, watching its color darken, and paying attention to the amount and intensity of the bubbles and the changing aroma. Explaining that the evaporation process should be halted at the very moment a faint burnt smell is detected, she also attended to other sensorial cues such as the bubbles and strength of the heat source.

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Figures 43–45 Steps in *buram* (jaggery) processing: cutting and dissolving in water (fig. 43); heating (fig. 44); molding the purified paste into rods, which will then be frozen and crushed into powder (fig. 45). Jaun, June 2019. Photos J. van der Valk (CC-BY-SA 4.0).

When it was ready, the semi-liquid was spread out on an oven plate to cool. Precise timing was again key, since the quickly solidifying paste then had to be "pulled" as much as possible using our hands, which we covered in a layer of butter to protect the skin—though not entirely successfully—from the heat. The more the increasingly rubbery material was stretched, the lighter its color became, which is a sign of refinement. The pulling continued until we obtained long, hardened rods the thickness of a finger (fig. 45). If the dry *buram* or *drangtsi* rods still feel sticky to touch, you can infer that there is some residual water left, which is not good. This is part of the embodied knowledge accumulated through a training of the senses that includes learning how textures communicate the qualities of substances. The rods were then folded into oven paper and put into the freezer to harden further, after which they were crushed into powder.

This ensemble of tasks can be interpreted through Ingold's "ecology of materials" as a sensory attunement to the dynamic properties of materials-in-becoming, a generative process in which the artisan "thinks *from* materials, not *about* them" (Ingold 2012, 437; see also Ingold 2000). To borrow from Ingold (2013b, 159), we can recognize that "skill is the ground from which all knowledge grows, that 'imitation' is shorthand for processes of attunement and response of great subtlety and complexity and that skilled practice entails the working of a mind that, as it overflows into body and environment, is endlessly creative." This further underscores the correspondence between making and maker that was taught explicitly by Genla

through the lenses of Sowa Rigpa and tantric Buddhist practice. Mutual processes of becoming were an integral part of undergoing an education in *menjor*, applying as much to learning a craft as to spiritual (self-)transformation.

Extraction into milk and butter

Once the main decoction was ready, we added heated cow milk while reciting verses from the Medicine Buddha *sādhanā* and his mantra, taking measures to prevent the mixture from curdling. We then boiled it down again and added the butter. The essence of the medicinal ingredients was thus extracted into water, transferred to milk, and finally condensed into butter. We applied several tests to verify that all the water had been "cut out" while also repeatedly removing the impurities that collected like algae on the liquid's surface. The purified *buram* and *drangtsi* powders were added the day after, once the butter had cooled down, condensing it further. Our work was only done late in the evening. Genla concluded that "in pharmacy, participation is most important." What was required was "to spend time together, not hurry, talk, eat, share, and wait until the master shows you." When all these conditions are met, "learning is fast." As a participant, I would add the words "intensive" and at times "overwhelming" to the last sentence. It felt like I did not have enough hands and eyes to grasp and capture the key techniques even (or particularly!) with the help of audiovisual recordings and notes.

Space restrictions together with the inadequacy of the deterministic and dissecting logic of explication (see also Ingold 2018c) prevent me from truly sharing the creative subtleties of skilled, responsive thinking-doing. But the togetherness with Genla and overflowing of experience across mind, body, and environment that I experienced are also characteristic of immersive anthropological encounters. Following the celebrated pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (1869–1952), Ingold (2018a, 53) points out that learning—as opposed to passively "being taught"—is more than a process of apprenticeship or training. True educational participation transforms both master and student, who work side by side "in a spirit of patient experimentation, relating in the first place as persons with stories to tell, through endless cycles of demonstration, experimentation and verification."

Cleansing

The second day of the workshop also started before sunrise. This time no breakfast or other meals were served, since we were fasting in preparation for the "body-mind cleansing" (*lus sems bkru sbyong*), scheduled for the day after. In

Figure 46 Cross sections of *honglen* (*Picrorhiza kurroa*) rhizomes of different sizes; the concentric layers are perceived to resemble the gross anatomy of blood vessels. Jaun, June 2019. Photo J. van der Valk (CC-BY-SA 4.0).

addition to finishing the preparation of the medicinal butter, we readied the cleansing decoction. This particular cleansing was invented by Dr. Pasang and had been put into practice in group retreats at least twice yearly for more than two decades. It is based on the extensive purgation chapter in the *Four Tantras* (IV, 14), but the cleansing formula is milder because it excludes potentially toxic laxative ingredients such as *durji* (*dur byid*, commonly identified as the root of *Euphorbia fischeriana*). Genla introduced us to the ingredients one by one, reciting their potencies but also revealing their practical applications, relevant physiological impacts, and indicative sensory characteristics. He showed how morphology is not trivial but didactic. The elongated fruit pods of *dongga* (*dong ga*, *Cassia fistula*), which resemble the shape and segmentation of the colon, stimulate the intestines (thus curing the liver by releasing its waste products). A cross section of *honglen* rhizome (*hong len*, *Picrorhiza kurroa*), which drains impure blood, evokes a blood vessel (fig. 46).

These "similarity medicines" (*'dra sman*) heal by virtue of bearing characteristics similar to anatomical or pathological structures. This correspondence between the universe (macrocosm) and the body (microcosm) and its application to herbal lore is not confined to tantra and Asian scholarly medicines; it is a ubiquitous concept, known as the doctrine of signatures in the West, where its roots can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and later proponents such as Paracelsus (1493–1541). Although much vilified by modern scientists, ethnobiologists have reinterpreted the doctrine of "like is cured by like" (*similia similibus curantur*) as post hoc attribution and accorded it a vital mnemonic function in the transmission of traditional knowledge that may also elicit a placebo effect (Bennett 2007). Expanding the scope of signatures to include olfactory and gustatory clues, Bradley Bennett (2007) further postulates the ethnobotanical law that plants with strong odors and tastes are generally preferred in medicine and ritual, and that these

sensory signs indeed correlate with bioactive molecular compounds. Nevertheless, building on the ecological psychology of James Gibson, Ingold (2000, 164) holds that "the skilled practitioner consults the world, rather than representations." Perception as a skillful mode of action is practical:

> [O]ne learns to perceive in the manner appropriate to a culture, not by acquiring programmes or conceptual schemata for organising sensory data into higher order representations, but by "hands-on" training in everyday tasks whose successful fulfillment requires a practised ability to notice and to respond fluently to salient aspects of the environment. In short, learning is not a transmission of information but—in Gibson's (1979, 254) words—an "education of attention." (Ingold 2000, 166–67)

If we redefine culture as "consist[ing] and persist[ing] in variable skills of perception and action" (Ingold 2018a, 40), there is no need to hide perception behind the interpretation of signs.[51] The abovementioned herbal potencies of shape and color might be labeled "imaginary" constructs or merely symbolic by some, but this categorization exposes an underlying Cartesian dualism of subject and object, of mind (intellection) and body (sensation), epitomized by the idea of the placebo. Following Ingold, we can move beyond the cognitivist-behaviorist ontology underlying such categorizations if we recognize that body and mind "are not two separate things but two ways of describing the same thing—or better, the same process—namely the environmentally situated activity of the human organism-person" (2000, 171). Our teacher entrusted us with what he considered to be one of the secrets of medicine making: the correspondence between sensory and healing properties of raw materials. But he was not just disseminating information. The real secret, which can only be revealed in and through practice, is emulating the master and thus developing one's own perceptual acuity.

After Genla's introduction, we proceeded by grinding the raw materials for the cleansing decoction, as well as infusing the *dongga* seed pulp (figs. 47–49) and pre-boiling *honglen* rhizomes separately. The ground materials were then added to a large kettle of water together with the rest of the ingredients (which will be left unspecified) and boiled down repeatedly for several hours. Throughout the boiling process, we stirred the mixture clockwise and recited the Medicine Buddha mantra. Early the next morning, the decoction was reheated, the *dongga* extract

51 There is a lingering debate in sensory anthropology on the validity of representationalist theories of knowledge production (Ingold 2011a). At the same time, "[t]here is widening recognition that nature or nurture should not be studied in isolation," and "mutual recognition that knowledge-making is a dynamic process arising directly from the indissoluble relations that exist between minds, bodies, and environment" (Marchand 2010, S2).

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Figures 47–49 Processing *dongga*: Dr. Pasang introduces the ingredient to participants (workshop materials are visible in the background) (fig. 47); we crush the *dongga* pods, extracting the black pulp while discarding the seeds and papery septa using a kitchen knife (fig. 48); the pulp is then infused in hot water and sieved to obtain a blackish extract (fig. 49). Jaun, June 2019. Photos J. van der Valk (all rights reserved).

and *honglen* decoction added along with other final ingredients, and then it was ready to be distributed. Once again, Genla emphasized outer-inner relationality, reminding us that "we are micro-beings in the universe, and bacteria are micro-organisms inside us," and that the three mental poisons (*dug gsum*: delusion, anger, and desire) correspond with the three *nyepa*, and the three body locations (upper, middle, and lower). Genla concluded:

> If you study more, understand more, it comes out that diseases are byproducts of the blockage of the waste products. How many years blocked? You never know. Years! … Many causes, but ultimately, the solution is to clean, to give relief to the organs. … If the organs are depressed, the mind gets sad. When the land is humid, clouds develop. … We hide and hold a lot inside. This, we need to release without shame.

After this reflection, the decoction was transformed into nectar through our recitation of verses from our Medicine Buddha practice text. We were then instructed to gradually drink at least one or two cups of the very bitter-sour brownish liquid, followed by at least three cups of hot salted water, while visualizing the decoction as completely purifying the three levels. After practicing some yogic exercises, keeping the abdomen warm with a blanket, and emptying our bowels for the first time, we continued to drink the salty water until our stool became completely liquid and more or less clear. We then switched to plain hot water, which needs to be drunk in a quantity sufficient to remove any traces of the medicine and salt. After taking a rest, a shower, and putting on new and preferably light-colored clothes, we finally consumed a large scoop of medicinal butter by letting it melt on our tongues. We broke our fast with a sober but delicious lunch of rice, nettles, and boiled vegetables. It felt like being reborn. A fresh start. The group was serene and joyful.

Consecration

In the afternoon of the third day of the workshop, we started setting up the altar and offerings (fig. 50) for the consecration of the medicinal butter we had prepared earlier. Placed at its center were a scroll painting, or *tangka* (*thang ka*), a blue translucent statue of the Medicine Buddha, and a Tibetan version of the *Medicine Buddha Sutra* (Skt. *Bhaiṣajyaguruvaiḍūryaprabhārājasūtra*), in front of which saffron water and fresh flowers were offered. A second smaller set of offerings was placed before a print of a medical painting centered on the white-colored Buddha Amitāyus. Offering cakes or *torma* (*gtor ma*) made from slices of bread were offered to the protector deities and local nonhuman beings to prevent obstacles. A heartfelt personal engagement is key to receiving spiritual blessing, but also to learning *menjor*: "One should not just prepare and drink a fixed formula; if we don't use our own feeling, intuition cannot develop," Genla explained. At the same time, he advised us to "give up your self and join with the Medicine Buddha."

Genla cited and commented on the lines of the *Oral Instruction Tantra* (III, 90) that describe the ritual aspects accompanying the Lesser Elixir of Rejuvenation *chülen* consecration rite (Yutok Yönten Gönpo 1982, 550). He elaborated on the visualization and transmitted the mantra that we each had to recite at least 10,000 times. The visualization involved communion between oneself (as one's tutelary deity) and the *maṇḍala* of the Buddha of Long Life, Amitāyus, centering on the medicinal butter and its transformation into nectar. Five-colored nectar light is absorbed into and then emitted from the medicine, refilling the life energy (*tshe srog*) of one's central channel (*rtsa dbu ma*) via the crown chakra, from where it subsequently spreads to the ten directions to increase the lifespan of all beings.

Figure 50 The altar with offerings and three plates of the medicinal butter at its center; a picture depicting the Lesser Elixir of Rejuvenation practice hangs to the left of the Medicine Buddha. Jaun, June 2019. Photo J. van der Valk (CC-BY-SA 4.0).

The next two days were devoted intensely to this practice with four ninety-minute sessions in addition to the usual morning and evening retreat schedule. Our teacher gradually gave more and more extensive meditation instructions. Along the way, he skillfully pushed us to new heights by extolling our exceptionally beneficial circumstances and, later on, boosting our self-discipline and stamina by conversely pointing out how our luxuriously ideal conditions and "rich people dharma" obstruct real spiritual progress. Practicing together created an atmosphere of mutual inspiration and support, a community or sangha of fellow practitioners striving toward the same goal.

The interrelations between body and mind, medicine and spiritual transformation, were a recurring theme for contemplation. Imbibing medicinal butter was not presented as sufficient to reach enlightenment, the importance of dietary discourses and practices in Tibetan Buddhist literature notwithstanding (Garrett 2010, 2019). But this does not imply that *chülen* (and medicines more generally) cannot directly contribute to spiritual healing, here understood as reducing ignorance and the afflictive emotions. These mental poisons pervade our bodies in both gross and subtle forms, the body providing the material conditions for their operation. Natural substances also carry both gross and subtle potencies, which

can be optimized and put to use through medical and ritual processes. Spiritual healing or "dharma medicine" thus encompasses more than *sādhanā* and mantras. Medicine is one of the foremost skillful means available on the bodhisattva path as it offers the gift of life. From a tantric perspective, the capacity to (self-) transform and heal stems from the extent to which the "poison" of samsaric life, marked by the suffering of birth, disease, old age, and death, can be consumed and "digested" into nectar.

The rigorous retreat program and focused concentration (fig. 51), as well as the communal harmony, secluded beauty of the surroundings, and ritualized interactions with one's self, the landscape, and its nonhuman inhabitants, induced spiritual experiences that challenge common perceptions of reality and causation. Workshop participants were sensitized to synchronicity with the environment: subtle changes in weather, unexpected electricity outages, the exact end of a session being marked by unusual church bell ringing, the uncanny presence of crows, flower offerings staying fresh for days—all these phenomena were meaningful. Several participants had vivid dreams, which were interpreted with care at the breakfast table. Some reported colors and visions during or after meditation, which were discussed discreetly with the teacher. On a more relaxed day at the end of the week, one motivated student requested early morning guided meditation to which only a small number of people turned up. Near the end Genla explained a special technique, which we were told not to share with anyone. Following the instruction, I suddenly felt pressure on my sternum and an intense feeling in the center of my chest which made me want to laugh and cry at the same time. The student who had made the request gasped for air and started crying. Genla encouraged her, stating that this technique is a great removal of obstacles, a most potent cleansing.

Some of the more experienced practitioners had participated in Medicine Buddha retreats with Dr. Pasang over the past fifteen years. They had become more familiar with a mode of being that includes interactions with protectors and local serpent spirits known as nagas or *lu* (*klu*). Although it might not seem directly related to the preparation of medicine butter, meditative transformation within an encompassing spiritual ecology is an essential constituent of the generation of potency in and between practitioners and their products. This shows characteristics of an "animic ontology" (Ingold 2006): a relational way of being and becoming in a responsive lifeworld that bridges the division between "reality" and immaterial thought and imagination. There is little to be gained here from applying the etic/emic distinction of the rational social scientist who follows in the footsteps of Francis Bacon (1561–1626), empirically dissecting the "facts of nature" and confirming the authority of materialist-reductionist science. Instead, the experiences shared above are approached more fruitfully as dynamic and

Figure 51 Early morning session in which workshop participants meditate and recite mantras together. Jaun, June 2019. Photo J. van der Valk (all rights reserved).

potentially transformative ways of relating *with* and not as beliefs *about* the world (Ingold 2006, 2013a). This shifts the focus from extracted facts and objects to immersive participation and empathy. From this perspective, imagination can be redefined: rather than understanding it as the ability to form mental images or representations, at a more fundamental level, imagination can be seen "as a way of living creatively in a world that is not already created" (Ingold 2018b, 43).

The creative potential of practices such as visualization, mantra recitation, and aspirational supplication is captured by concepts like the potency of prayer. It is consciously developed and applied for both soteriological and pragmatic purposes, including the consecration of medicinal butter. The latter is an interactive process through which medicines and practitioners together become potent rejuvenators as the essences of the elements are extracted, concentrated, and redistributed to increase the lifespan of all beings. Genla noted repeatedly and pointedly throughout our courses that genuine faith (not belief) and prayer are forces without equal. To take such phenomena seriously and not merely as metaphorical cultural constructs, anthropologists have turned to what Michael Jackson (1989) refers to as "radical participation" (see also Nadasdy 2007). Prerequisites for this approach are deep immersion and the cultivation of skills and the senses, as well as a willingness to treat personal and extraordinary experiences as valid.

Here, the educational impetus of participant observation and of anthropology resurfaces. Both anthropology and education are ways of studying *with* others, along paths of growth and discovery that go beyond the opposition of the production and transmission of knowledge. As Ingold (2018a, 17) puts it: "[e]very way of knowing, then, is a distinct life-line, a biographical trajectory. It follows that becoming knowledgeable is part and parcel of becoming the person you are." As participants undergoing an education of attention in a medicinal butter and rejuvenation workshop, we necessarily became medical as well as tantric artisan-practitioners, however inexperienced we were.

Discussion

Toward the end of the workshop, Dr. Pasang summarized the teachings he had imparted as follows:

> The Amitāyus practice protects life and removes the fear of death arising from attachment to self. This practice of compassion is ultimately the basis for the development of the science of medicine, dharma being the supreme cure for the three [mental] poisons. Physical medicines are all wonderful, but their essence is *chülen*. All therapies are wonderful, but most important is to clean the body-mind. Longevity is the essence of Sowa Rigpa. This is *upadeśa* [the pith instruction], no more.

In this chapter, Van der Valk showed how learning to make rejuvenating medicinal butter is about much more than the assimilation of foundational texts or the oral transmission of authoritative knowledge. Rather, it is an open-ended, collaborative, skill-based, experience-led improvisational endeavor in a responsive environment, which involves working with dynamic substances that transform and are transformed by both material and "imaginary" forces. The master-teacher is equally a co-participant, traveling along the path from raw materials to consecrated *chülen* medicine as a guide, pointing out critical junctures in the taskscape by recounting the steps of the recipe as an exemplary biographical narrative being relived "through endless cycles of demonstration, experimentation, and verification" (Ingold 2018a, 53).

The perceptual system of the workshop participants as novices was fine-tuned as they came to resonate with the relevant properties of materials-in-becoming. Decocting myrobalans and caramelizing jaggery involved "finding the grain of things and bending it to an evolving purpose" (Ingold 2018a, 42). Along the way, the master's secret became the apprentice's journey. As illustrated in the accompanying figures, these transmissions and transformations took place in a community

of practice that was both artisanal and spiritual, and in which bodies—especially hands—and minds collaborated.

It might appear as if craft has not always been highly valued in Sowa Rigpa, given its heavy emphasis on textual mastery and scholasticism. The *Explanatory Tantra*'s chapter on the "Activities and Qualities of the Physician" (*Bya byed sman pa*; II, 31), however, presents dexterity (*rnam pa bzo ba*) as fourth in a set of six qualities that characterize eminent practitioners, the others being intelligence, kindheartedness, commitment, diligence, and proficiency in social mores (MTK 2008, 281, 286).[52] Dexterity here refers to the ability to craft forms, including medical instruments and materia medica, as well as to hone diagnostic skills and therapeutic techniques. The same chapter also states that: "A physician who does not know how to compound pacifying medicines is like a farmer who does not know how to work the field."[53] Intelligence and practical skills come together in the qualities defining an ideal expert or *khepa* (*mkhas pa*). Artisanal skill itself is a form of intelligence. Along with other anthropologists of craft, we therefore question the binaries that hamper clear understanding of "relationships between head and hand, thinking and grasping, knowing and making, belonging and producing," as well as the way "concepts of humanity, materiality and quality" are framed, mobilized, and shaped over time (Greiner and Pröpper 2016, 212).

Artisanship remains a vital quality of physicians up to this day, particularly at smaller scales of production. One reason why we might not find craft processes detailed in texts very often is the importance of certain transmission practices that we frequently encountered while working with amchis, and which we came across in Chapter 1: guiding explanations or *tri*, practical experience or *laklen*, engaged observation or *tongwé gyü*, and closely guarded pith instructions or *men-ngak*. Other scholars have also noted that secrecy protects knowledge from improper intent (da Col 2012, S187; Tidwell 2017, 403–4); as recognized in the *Four Tantras* (e.g., III, 87–89) knowledge of healing can be misused. The evident primacy of skilled practice, however, does not imply that textual knowledge cannot be intricately involved in the training, ethical formation, and spiritual refinement of practitioners. Tawni Tidwell (2017) for instance treats textual memorization and mastery as foundational for Tibetan medical expertise, highlighting the central role of auto-pedagogical processes in this "conceptual-perceptual dialectic" (438). At the same time, she acknowledges that "the textbook [of embodied knowledge] is written through the relationship of teacher and student" (520). It is this aspect of *menjor* that we have focused on in this chapter. We will revisit related ideas and

52 For a detailed exposition of this chapter, see Tidwell 2017, 412–33.

53 MTK (2008, 296) translation of: *zhi sbyor mi shes sman pa de / so nam mi shes zhing pa 'dra.*

consider their connection to contemporary shifts in *menjor* education in Chapter 4, which covers three different institutional environments in Nepal.

Ingold maintains that the transformative, educational potential of anthropology lies in the practice of participant observation, which is "to join in correspondence with those among whom we study" (2018a, 63). In this sense, "to practice anthropology is to undergo an education" (63). Anthropology and education can be seen as parallel or even equivalent undertakings, both being founded on an ontological commitment that honors the participatory coupling of perception and action, knowing and being—of what we owe to others and the world for our formation. Van der Valk therefore approached the workshop on which this chapter is based not as data collection for an "ethnographic case study" (see Ingold 2017), but as an experience that involved speculative reimagining of ways of thinking and be(com)ing.

Through his sharing of this experience, we have learned how natural ingredients become (part of) potent medicines in the tradition of Sowa Rigpa, and how student-practitioners gain practical expertise in *menjor*. Throughout Van der Valk's narrative, we find correspondences between macro- and microcosms, between bodily actions and mind training, between material detoxification and mind purification, and between medicine making and metabolism. We argue that it is these relationships that allow potency to be shaped by a synergy of textual sources, substances (including potencies of taste, color, shape), cooking-related processes, and Buddhist praxis (offering, visualization, mantra, and prayer). The synergistic nature of these ritualized meshworks of refinement and rejuvenation thoroughly blurs dichotomies of body/mind, nature/culture, and medicine/religion.

We do not wish to argue that our interpretation of Ingold's theoretical musings perfectly overlaps with Sowa Rigpa's (or the *Four Tantras*') epistemology, Tibetan Buddhist cosmologies, or the individual perspectives of Dr. Pasang and his workshop's participants. Nor was it our intention to overlook these altogether. We concur with Giovanni da Col (2017, 6), who points out that the aim of ethnographic theory "is not an explanation, a truth-effect, or a judgment of rationality or irrationality but rather a 'felicitous' intelligibility emerging out of the uncertainty of everyday life" that grants a sort of satisfaction. Moreover, participant observation has the potential to be revolutionary when it makes us question our own theories and assumptions about the world, and challenge hegemonic authorities and discourses (Shah 2017). By illustrating some of the auspicious correspondences between artisanship and anthropological fieldwork, we wish to inspire researchers and practitioners to experiment across disciplinary boundaries. And by foregrounding how the knowledge/power of Tibetan medical artisans-in-becoming is generated in the very processes that craft the potency of medicines, we hope to have shown that this kind of making is transformative in multiple ways.