

*The Development of Buddhist Traditions in Northeastern Tibet:
A New Religious History of Rebgong in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*

Renqingduojie
Xining, Qinghai, China

M.A., Silliman University, 2010
B.A., Qinghai Normal University, 2008

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Religious Studies

University of Virginia
July, 2018

© Copyright by
Renqingduojie
All Rights Reserved
July, 2018

ABSTRACT

In the late sixteenth century, a historic meeting between the third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso and the Mongol ruler Altan Khan cemented a strategic alliance between the Geluk School of Tibetan Buddhism and the Mongols. Under Mongol patronage, the Geluk School developed at an unprecedented speed, with clusters of affiliated monasteries and retreat centers quickly dotting the terrain of Amdo from north to south. The growth of the Geluk School in Amdo reached its peak in the seventeenth century, which saw the largest number of new Geluk monasteries (founded or converted) of any century before or since. As Geluk influence swept Amdo, Rebgong soon became a hotbed of religious activity with the conversion of Rongwo Monastery and its rise to prominence, later boasting a network of satellite monasteries and retreat centers.

Existing scholarship on monasticism has viewed these changes primarily through the lens of major Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and their international relationships. This approach has received well-deserved attention among scholars, yet it has led to an overemphasis on the importance of international patronage for local monastic institutions, while ignoring the internal dynamics underlying these institutions' development and expansion in their local settings. A major focus of this dissertation is the evolution of Rongwo Monastery's religious, economic, intellectual, and political influence within Amdo society. Here, the goal is to avoid the use of stereotypical representations and instead to reconstruct diverse historical realities, demonstrating the particular and contingent nature of historical periods and the agency of local religious institutions and communities in borderland regions.

Rather than a story of Rongwo Monastery, however, this dissertation is a study of religious history centered on the single region of Rebgong and an exploration of the local

intersections between personalities, institutions, practice systems, and sects in as much detail as the sources available now permit. Thus, while noting the impact of both international patronage and pan-Tibetan Buddhist trends on the region of Amdo, and avoiding a simple fixation on the Geluk community as represented at its major centers such as Rongwo Monastery, my approach is to explore in detail the levels of engagement between Rongwo and its neighboring monasteries (especially Labrang Monastery) so as to reveal the intra-school relationships that exemplified the era. In doing so, isolated Geluk developments at Rongwo are recast as part of a more complex dichotomy of developments at both Rongwo and Labrang. Lastly, lest we run the risk of presenting the image of an all-Geluk Rebgong, I turn away from Rongwo to Nyingma literature, which reveals still more of the dynamism of local sectarian rivalry, and more clearly demonstrates the contested domains of power and authority in Rebgong and Amdo beyond.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	viii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Scholar and Yogin: the Career of Shar Kalden Gyatso (1607-1677) and his	
Role in Spread of Geluk School in Amdo	17
Introduction	17
The Sources	19
Shar Kalden Gyatso's Scholarly Training	21
Establishing Geluk Philosophical Tradition in Rebgong	24
Early Lives of Shar Kalen Gyatsho	29
Reassessment of Chowa Rinpoche's Role in building up Rongwo Monastery.	31
Retreat Life	36
Integration of Scholarly and Practice Traditions	44
Relationship between Patron and Priest	57
Shar Kalden Gyatso's non-sectarian approach	67
Conclusion	75
Chapter Two: Post-Kalden Gyatso Rongwo Monastery and Geluk School in Rebgong.	77
Introduction	77
Shar Lineage After Kalden Gyatso	79
Post-Kalden Gyatso Rongwo Monastery and Geluk School in Rebgong: the case of	
Khenchen Gedun Gyatso (1679-1765) at the Helm of Rongwo Monastery.	86
Continued Growth of Scholastic Tradition led by Khenchen Gedun Gyatso at Rongwo	87
Keeper of Lineage Transmissions	95

Supporting the Livelyhood of Monastic Community	101
Building the Maitreya Image Required Gold and More	110
Bringing Home the Derge Tenjur Canon and Printing his Text Manual	115
Patron and Priest	117
Conclusion	121
Chapter Three: Establishing Labrang as the Source of Dharma: Transmitting Teachings	
Back to Labrang Monastery and Jikme Wangpo’s Successful Scholastic Career	123
Introduction	123
Controversy Surrounding Lineage Identification	127
Jikmed Wangpo as the Keeper of Transmissions of Teachings originating from Jamyang Shadpa	136
Intimate Teacher and Student Relationship between Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and Jikmed Wangpo	151
Building Labrang as the Source of Dharma	159
Leadership of Jikmed Wangpo and Extension of Influence from his Lineage and Labrang Monastery	170
Conclusion	183
Chapter Four: Nyingma School and its “Co-existence” with the Geluk School	185
Introduction	185
The Major Nyingma Figure during the era of Shar Kalden Gyatso	187
The Time of Rigdzin Palden Palden Tashi within His Written Corpus	191
Teaching Activities and Resistance from Within and Without	203
The Question of Padmasambhava	209

Defending Nyingma Treasure Tradition from Geluk Criticism	222
Advice to Religious Community: Ideals of Religious Practice	227
All Lineage Traditions are Equally Profound	235
His Nyingma Identity and Religious Ecumenism	241
Conclusion	245
Conclusion	247
Appendix 1.	253
Appendix 2.	254
Appendix 3.	255
Appendix 4.	256
Appendix 5.	257
Bibliography	258
Tibetan- and Chinese-Language Sources	258
Western Language Sources and Translations	263
Internet Sources	263

Acknowledgements

I was inspired to select the topic of the current study only as an outcome of many meetings with my advisors, professors Kurtis Schaeffer and David Germano, held during my first two years as a graduate student, weighing the pros and cons of an undifferentiated mass of potential topics. Initially, I was overwhelmed by the need to conduct initial research into each possibility that occurred to me before I could even come up with a shortlist to discuss with them. Fortunately, through the guidance and support my advisors showed me at every such meeting, I grew increasingly confident about working on a dissertation project, and this continued over the next several years. My dread of the painstaking, multi-year process of completing a sophisticated research project was immediately dispelled. Both professors assisted me in obtaining relevant primary sources as well as pointed me to existing scholarship on my eventual topic (which they had so earnestly helped me to disentangle from the range of possibilities present at our early meetings).

I am forever in debt to my main advisors Kurtis Schaeffer and David Germano, whose generosity and compassion, as well as their extraordinary scholarship, easily established them as inspirational models for my growth and training, both as an individual and a historian of religion. Their constructive comments and insightful guidance – beginning from when this dissertation was first conceived - hugely shaped the structure of this study and contributed multiple angles underlying my series of arguments. Reading their work while writing this dissertation greatly impressed upon me the importance of an in-depth study of sources. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to my two other dissertation committee members—professors Karen Lang and John Shepherd. In addition to their great scholarship, both professors are exemplary in their constant support and patience when training students like myself. Their quick comments left me

ample time to revise my chapters, with no detriment to the insightfulness of their observations. I would also like to thank Professor Karen Lang for her genuine care as demonstrated in going above and beyond to proofread parts of my draft chapters. I much appreciate Professor John Shepherd – as an anthropologist working in a different, but highly related field – for offering a valuable outsider’s perspective. I wish to thank Professor Nicolas Sihle, who first accepted me into UVa and soon afterwards introduced me to professors Kurtis Schaeffer and David Germano, encouraging me to enroll in the Department of Religious Studies despite his relocation to Paris. My other mentors at UVa, including Paul Groner, William Clarkson, Peter Metcalf, John Nemeč, Dorothy Wong, and Sonan Kachru, all contributed in significant ways at various stages of my graduate training and formation as a scholar of religion. I would also like to thank Kevin Stuart, my great mentor and first English teacher at Qinghai Normal University, who started me on the English alphabet almost two decades ago, such that I was able to write my PhD entirely in English. Other teachers I have had along the way, especially Ben Copps and Gerald Roche, continue to inspire me with their generosity, patience, and support. I also would like to take this opportunity to thank Kevin Stuart, Ben Copps, Bill McGrath, and Matt Zito for their editorial work – which they generously contributed despite my often last-minute requests.

In Amdo, many people contributed to the completion of my dissertation project. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Geshe Gedun Dondrup of Rongwo Monastery for sharing his intimate knowledge of history as well as entire days spent reading difficult passages of major polemic texts with me. I also appreciate Lharam Geshe Lobsang Nyandrak of Sera Monastery in India and Geshe Getshok of Dhitsha Monastery for their thoughts on the same literature, and the latter’s introducing me to a copy of a forgotten polemic text preserved at Dhitsha Monastery. My decision to ultimately leave out a relevant chapter on polemic literature from the current text –

which stubbornly refused to fit into the bounds of an appropriate-length study – is in no way intended to detract from their contributions, and if anything, demonstrates the opposite. I would like to thank the abbot of Rongwo Monastery Geshe Jamyang and Khenpo Yeshe Lodro of Bongya Monastery, who lent me important sources on their respective institutions. I am grateful to Geshe Kowa Tsondru of Labrang Monastery, who shared his thoughts on intellectual exchanges between Labrang and Rongwo monasteries.

In the US, I would like to thank Damchoe Gyaltzen, Bill McGrath, Matthew Zito, Gail Steve, Rubin Steve, Khamokyi, Christie Kilby, Alak Kalsang, Lobsang Tashi, Gyaltzen Sanpo, Jordan, Gedun Gyatso, Lhakpa Gyaltzen, Gen Ngawang Thokmed, Gen Tseten Chojor, Manuel Lopez, Brenton Sullivan, Max Oidtmann, and Katrina Putrin, whose support and friendship sustained me through graduate school. I also wish to acknowledge the funding I received for fieldwork in Amdo in 2015-2016 through the Robert H.O Family Foundation Dissertation Fellowship in Buddhist Studies administered by the American Council of Learned Societies and support for my pre-dissertation research through a Weedon Summer Research Travel Grant from the University of Virginia.

My profound thanks go to my parents – Dondrub and Womo – my siblings – Tsering Thar, Gonpokyi, and Phakmo Chotso – as well as my parents-in-law, their extended family, and various other relatives and friends in China, for their constant outpouring of love and support. Finally, I am fortunate to be blessed with the most wonderful and loving wife, Sangdhak Kyi. Despite my absence, she created the perfect home for our two adorable children, who were blissfully oblivious to the daunting task of their father's dissertation but whose obviously pure love was the best inspiration I could ever ask for.

Introduction

The seventeenth century is a watershed for Rongwo (*rong bo*) Monastery and the Geluk (*dge lugs*) community in Rebgong (*reb gong*), just as it is so for the Geluk School, the religious history of Amdo (*a mdo*), and even the whole of Tibet. The Mongol-Geluk relationship was first established with the historic meeting between the third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso (*bsod nams rgya mtsho*, 1543–1588) and Altan Khan (*al than han*, 1507–1582) in the Kokonor (*mtsho sngon*; lit. “Blue Lake”) region in the late sixteenth century. From that point onwards, Amdo witnessed the largest number of Geluk monasteries being either founded or converted from other sects, which included the Sakya (*sa skya*) Monastery of Rongwo being converted to Geluk rule.¹ The Geluk system of reincarnation was in its nascent stage in Rebgong during the time of the first Shar Kalden Gyatso (*shar skal ldan rgya mtsho*; 1607–1677), even after the region was integrated into the rule of the Koshot Mongols and the Geluk School reached its peak influence in Amdo. By the time that Nakwang Trinle Gytso (*nag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho*, 1678–1739) was recognized as the reincarnation of Shar Kalden Gyatso, the institution of reincarnation came to be more established, for the clan of the secular leader in Rongwo, the Rongwo *nangso* (*nang so*),² made sure that the reincarnation was identified within their family. However, the power of reincarnates and the charisma of religious dignitaries was too great to be constrain, such that both

¹ See Gray Tuttle, “Building up the Dge lugs pa Base in A mdo: The Roles of Lhasa, Beijing and Local Agency,” *Zangxue xuekan*, vol. 7 (2012): 126–40.

² This refers to the highest office in the local secular political system in Rebgong. For a discussion of the title *nangso*, see Yangdon Dhondup, “Reb kong: Religion, History and Identity of a Sino-Tibetan Borderland Town,” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 20 (2011): 38-42; Dangzengji, “Longwu nangsuo zhengquan de jianli yu longwu si de xingsheng,” *Qinghai minzu daxue xuebao*, vol. 22 (2011): 67-70; Suonanwangjie, “Nangsuo zhidu yu buluo shehui guanxi chutan—yi regong shi’er buluo shehui lishi wei lie,” *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao*, vol. 38 (2017): 53-57; and Gao Li. “Longwu Angsuo suoxia zufeng kaoshu.” *Qinghai minzu yanjiu*, vol. 26 (2015):114-148.

the heredity system and the system of succession by reincarnation within the *nangso* family were displaced when the third and all subsequent successors in the Shar lineage were identified outside the *nangso* family. The Shar lineage is currently represented by the eighth Shar, who continues to lead Rongwo Monastery, a major monastic center for Geluk Buddhist learning and practice in Rebgong.

A major goal of this study is to explore the Geluk history of Rebgong with a focus on Rongwo Monastery and its Geluk conversion in the seventeenth century, as well as its continued growth in the subsequent century. As Gray Tuttle indicates, the development and growth of the Geluk School in Amdo was spurred by the Central Tibetan Geluk patriarchs themselves directly acting in Amdo or sending or inspiring both Central Tibetans and Central-Tibet-trained Amdo scholars to fund and spread the Geluk influence in Amdo.³ The early history of Geluk influence in Rebgong was no exception in that its leaders were all trained in the primary learning institutes of the Geluk School in Central Tibet. The Geluk School's rise to a dominant position in Tibet during this period was also a direct result of the almost exclusive support and patronage of the Mongols. The mushrooming of Geluk monasteries in Amdo entailed the emergence of new power relations, new forms of institutional structure, and territorial reorganization in the region. All these political, social, and religious changes had deep implications for religious communities of Amdo society.

Shar Kalden Gyatso and Khenchen Gendun Gyatso (*mkhan chen dge 'dun rgya mtsho*; 1679–1765) are the two most crucial figures in the history of the Geluk School in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Rebgong. Shar Kalden Gyatso was the main driving force behind the spread and growth of Geluk School in Rebgong. He was well respected in the local

³ Tuttle (2012).

and larger Geluk community for his learning and for his extraordinary achievement as a meditator. He was a role model in meditation practice for the scholastic-minded Geluk monks in Rebgong, as well as the wider Amdo community. As the founder of the scholastic program at the main Geluk monasteries of Rongwo and Tashi Khyil (*bkra shis 'khyil*), as well as their associated retreat centers, he established a template for integrating both the scholastic and practice strands of Tibetan Buddhism in Geluk education.⁴ Due to the high stature of the first Shar as a great scholar and more importantly an unrivalled meditator, he was able to attract his learned disciples from Central Tibet to Rebgong, back to his monastery and hermitages. These Lhasa-trained local monks were among the first group of monks enrolled at the scholastic program founded by the first Shar at Rongwo Monastery, which indicates the central role of Shar Kalden Gyatso in building up the profile of the Geluk School in Rebgong.

Shar Kalden Gyatso's life sheds much light on the beginning of the scholastic tradition of Geluk School and its network of hermitages in Rebgong, as well as the seemingly inherent tension between the scholastic and practice strands of Buddhism. In contrast, in reconstructing the Geluk School's continued growth in the eighteenth century, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's life is a significant source of knowledge regarding the internal dynamics within Ronwgo Monastery, especially financial concerns associated with monastic institutions and his success in leading the monastery through a series of fundraising events. Because of the divergent nature of the corresponding biographical sources on these two figures, we are led to vastly different images of religious life in these two different eras in Rebgong. However, we must remember the agendas of

⁴ The tension between scholastic and meditative strands of Buddhism has been a major topic of debate among Tibetan Buddhists, mainly along sectarian lines. Outside the corpus of traditional philosophical treatises, for example, the life of Naropa (*na ro pa*) and the songs of Milarepa (*mi la ras pa*), and songs of Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho are also important discursive sites where the controversial themes are debated and contested. There are precedents for valorizing one over the other in Indian Buddhism.

the respective biographers of these religious figures and how their specific perspectives may have extraordinary influence on how we see and interpret historical events recounted in these biographical works.

There are instances in which monastic centers were heavily dependent on outside patronage from the Mongol and Manchu courts. The importance of such external patronage was even more significant for many small monasteries, where the surrounding communities had insufficient funds for building projects and other purposes. The courting of patronage and maintenance of connections with political powers were key factors driving their growth, but also were vital for their maintenance and survival. There are some cases in which Manchu support, such as the entitlement of the monasteries and the lineage lamas thereof, were of considerable significance to institutional maintenance for long periods, while in other cases it was largely symbolic and postdated the institutional acme of the monasteries. The dynamism of political and economic intersections with religion is marked by an oscillating relationship between the monastic centers and patronage. These forces should be placed in a dialogic relationship instead of a causal one. The degree of such correlation varies depending on the circumstances in particular historical time and place.

The Mongol-Rongwo relationship created a major impact on the religious life in the region, including the sectarian conversion at Rongwo Monastery. However, the case of Khenchen Gendun Gyatso suggests a different picture, namely that local networks of supporting communities was a major source of the wealth essential for these monastic institutions, which certainly seems to be the case for eighteenth-century Rongwo Monastery, at least. Therefore, within any given monastic community, it is important to look at the specific stakeholders and the mechanisms pertaining to their economic activities. This research question segues into an

exploration of the mediums by which patronage was cultivated and exploited in the monastic centers. Since these major monasteries function as an autonomous body of institutions, the ways in which political, economic, intellectual, religious, and legal forces coalesced to impact their internal dynamics are the key components of my research.

This dissertation also argues that the evolution and growth of an individual monastery should be placed in relation with other monasteries in order to be properly understood, as demonstrated by the case study of multi-faced engagements between Rongwo and Labrang monasteries. Analysis of the levels of relationships between these two major monasteries situated in the same cultural region helps map out an intimate network of religio-political relations in the southern Amdo. The growth of these religious institutions took place through dynamic interdependent relationships, such that an analysis of any given monastery in itself is inadequate.

Focusing on Rongwo's relationship with Labrang Monastery (*bla brang*)⁵ in the same cultural region thus provides an excellent comparative context for this work. My selection of Rongwo and Labrang monasteries is based upon them having grown powerful side-by-side within the shared context of similar trends in religious economics, politics, and culture. The relationship also reveals to us how impactful major developments at Labrang Monastery could be in terms of shaping and influencing the religious landscape of Amdo society in general and Rebgong in particular, thanks to its geographical proximity.

Due to the lack of sources produced at Rongwo directly dealing with its relationships with other institutions, my dissertation instead conducts a thorough study of sources produced at Labrang to chronicle its growth and expansion through an ever-increasing expansion of network of its branch monasteries. The increase in influence of the main lineage master Jikme Wangpo

⁵ Labrang is a major Geluk Monastery founded in 1709 by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa (1648–1721).

(*'jigs med dbang po*, 1728–1791) and other lineage masters closely associated with Labrang are also explored. As a result, while we are able to identify few details, they are sufficient to establish the dynamism of mutual influence between these major monasteries in southern Amdo.

The rise of Geluk School in Rebgong is also accompanied with much religious activity of Nyingma School, represented by Adron Khetsun (*a 'gron mkhas btsun*, u.d.) and Rindzin Palden Tashi (*rig 'dzin pdal ldan bkra shis*, 1688–1742), two major Nyingma figures who led very active teaching careers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thus, I position Geluk development in the region in a dialogical relationship with Nyingma School's gradual growth, laying the foundations for the future Nyingma movement and the emergence of several Nyingma monastic centers. In doing so, while undertaking a diachronic history of Geluk School in Rebgong, this dissertation introduces us to a synchronic history of Rebgong in a multi-religious, intra-school context.

This dissertation thus consists of four chapters exploring important questions surrounding the rise and growth of Rongwo Monastery in the institutional history of Geluk School in Amdo. Chapter one explores the beginning of Geluk history in Rebgong in the seventeenth century, centering on Rongwo Monastery and the biographies and writings of Shar Kalden Gyatso, which are the primary sources available for outlining the religious history of seventeenth-century Rebgong. Chapter two is mainly concerned with Khenchen Gendun Gyatso, whose long life corresponds to the combined lifespans of the second Shar Ngawang Trinle Gyatso (*nag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho*, 1678-1739; henceforth the second Shar) and third Shar Gendun Trinle Rabgye (*dge 'dun 'phrin las rab rgyas*, 1740–1794; henceforth the third Shar). While outlining a sketch of the central roles of these two successors of Shar Kalden Gyatso provides a context for my focus on Khenchen Gendun Gyatso, this chapter has an unusual focus on the multiple roles

Khenchen Gendun Gyatso played in the further growth of Rongwo Monastery. Highlighted among the many qualities of his religious personae is the centrality of his position as the lineage holder and builder of extensive networks of patronage vital for the institutional growth of Rongwo Monastery.

Chapter three explores the life of Jikme Wangpo, whose aggressive expansion of the influence of his own lineage, Labrang Monastery, and its network of Geluk institutions hugely impacted the Geluk community in the neighboring area of Rebgong. An important goal of this chapter is to reconstruct the larger context of teaching transmissions vital for the lineage legitimacy of Jikme Wangpo and the growth of intellectual tradition at Labrang, while also emphasizing the role of Khenchen Gendun Gyatso as a transmission lineage master respected at Rongwo, Labrang, and beyond. A second component of the chapter is to explore the rise of Jikme Wangpo as a major institutional builder, as he establishes religious authority in a much wider network of Geluk institutions by founding new institutions and winning over the allegiance of institutions which had previously courted close relationships with Rongwo and other regional monastic centers. The overall goal of the chapter is to help us put into perspective the growth of Rongwo Monastery in the larger religious contexts of Amdo, while at the same time Labrang was undergoing unprecedented growth.

Thanks to the geographical proximity of Labrang and Rongwo, the success of Labrang Monastery in its creation of extensive network of institutions has significant implications for the historical trajectory of Rongwo Monastery's growth. Internal crises predating the growth of Labrang Monastery meant that a major faction within Labrang monastic community took refuge in the support of Rongwo Monastery and the clans of Rebgong. The Se lineage one such group in this faction, who created a strong presence in the area from the time of its second incarnate

representative of its head. Thus, in chapter three the multifaceted relationship between Rongwo and Labrang monasteries is examined to flesh out important details of levels of engagements between Geluk institutions. This chapter aims to situate the Rongwo in opposition to its main rival, Labrang Monastery, to demonstrate the complexity of religious power relations in Amdo society. In other words, southern Amdo was and still is a much-contested terrain for legitimacy and power within its own borders. This is the larger point my dissertation research will explore through the historical study of Rongwo Monastery and thus contribute to rethinking early scholarship, which has been excessively focused on single monasteries to the neglect of the multifaceted interactions between monasteries or a religious history centered on a region involving multiple institutions and communities; this further demonstrates the complexity of religious institutions in Tibet.

Chapter four is comprised of two sections, one smaller and the other longer. The smaller section is basically a sketch of the amicable Geluk-Nyingma relationship during the time of Andron Khetsun, who is a contemporary of Shar Kalden Gyatso based on the former's very brief biography. The second section is a study of Nyingma School mainly in its interactions with Geluk community in Rebgong during the life of Rindzin Palden Tashi, who is a contemporary of Khenchen Gendun Gyatso, the abbot who served two terms at Rongwo.

Existing Scholarship and the Contributions of this Dissertation

There already are many scholarly works on monasticism in Tibet. As mentioned earlier, most of the existing scholarship fall into two camps. The first camp accounting for the majority of them have a focus on single monasteries as the titles of their research projects indicate. As such, the

scope of their research is also limited to have a wider perspective of identifying central moments of these institutions and thereby situating them in larger contexts. A part of this issue has to do with a close reading of the original sources designated to be traditional histories of these monasteries (*gdan rabs*). Therefore, we can hardly resist reconstructing linear accounts of developments at monasteries focusing on the entire lineage of major reincarnation lamas such as Jamyang Zhepa,⁶ or the succession of the abbots which inherently restrain us from looking at religious developments comparatively across space and time and instead end up a general survey or overview. That said, a focus on a single monastery can also be a fruitful study of contrast or rupture between early and later developments, a good example of which is the reincarnation vs merit-based leadership system and tension between religious practice systems as explored by Jann Ronis in adequate terms.⁷ The representative or the only major scholar in the second camp is Max Oidtmann whose legal study of roles of Geluk monasteries and their networks and alliances in context of relationship between Amdo and Qing government brings much innovative correction to our understanding of religious polities of Amdo as much fractured and complex.⁸ My dissertation follows such angle to study a religious history of a region, not a single monastery, but relationships across institutions and sectarian boundaries.

As this is a historical study of monasticism and religious pluralism in Northeastern Tibet in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I will briefly review relevant existing scholarship including the ones just mentioned in order to situate the significance of my study in this

⁶ See Paul Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery: A Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands, 1709–1958* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 119–23, 127–32, 136–45, 147–50. Elsewhere, Nietupski also designed and studied an entire lineage at Bla brang Monastery. See Paul Nietupski, “Understanding Religion and Politics in A Mdo: the Sde Khri Estate at Bla Brang Monastery,” in *Monastic and Lay Buddhist Traditions in North-Eastern Tibet*, ed. Yangdon Dhondup et al. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 67–88.

⁷ See Jann Ronis, *Celibacy, Revelations, and Reincarnated Lamas: Contestation and Synthesis in the Growth of Monasticism at Katok Monastery from the 17th through 19th Centuries* (PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 2009).

⁸ Max Oidtmann, *Between Patron and Priest: Amdo Tibet under Qing Rule 1791–1911* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2013).

specialized field. Part two of Louis Schram's book, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier*,⁹ is valued for its ethnographic details on Tibetan Buddhist monasteries from the early twentieth century. He focused on the Huangzhong area, however, which he defined as a culturally demarcated area of the Monguor people. There is also a two-volume unpublished dissertation manuscript by Karsten focused on the study of Kubum Monastery.¹⁰ The first volume is primarily a list of major events and important figures associated with Kubum. While there are considerable details of monastic organization, for the most part it lacks historical dimension. Volume two is a compilation of biographical sketches of eminent monks and officials of the monastery in alphabetical order. In his monograph, Cech devotes a chapter on Bon monasteries, but he simply briefly identifies features of Bon monasteries as institutions.¹¹ All this scholarship makes significant contributions, but are of limited utility for my own dissertation project.

Goldstein's study of Tibetan monasticism provides us many details regarding monastic organization and economic support systems during first half of the twentieth century, as well as monasticism's revival in the second half of the century.¹² The revival of monasticism was further studied by Charlene Makley and Jane Caple with their focus on Amdo since the 1980s in ever-

⁹ See Louis M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Border*, ed. Charles Kevin Stuart (Xining: Plateau Publications, 2006).

¹⁰ See Joachim Karsten, *A Study on the sku-'bum/T'a-erh Ssu Monastery in Ching-hai* (PhD. diss., University of Auckland, 1996).

¹¹ See Krystyna Cech, *Social and Religious Identity of the Tibetan Bonpos with Special Reference to a North-west Himalayan Settlement* (PhD. diss., University of Oxford, 1987), 101–42.

¹² See Melvyn Goldstein, "The Revival of Monastic Life in Drepung Monastery," in *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival & Cultural Identity*, ed. Melvyn Goldstein and Matthew Kapstein (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 16–52; "Tibetan Buddhism and Mass Monasticism," *The Center for Research on Tibet*, n.d., <www.case.edu/affil/tibet/currentStaff/goldstein.htm>. This is an English version of the original article in French: Melvyn Goldstein, "Bouddhisme tibétain et monachisme de masse" [Tibetan Buddhism and Mass Monasticism], in *Des moines et des moniales dans le monde. La vie monastique dans le miroir de la parenté*, ed. Adeline Herrou and Gisèle Krauskopff (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), 409–24; *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913–1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 21–36.

changing political, social, and economic contexts.¹³ There is a long list of anthropological works done on Tibetan Buddhist monastic culture. Among them, I find the shamanic role of elite Buddhist monks as discussed by Geoffrey Samuel and Martin Mills to be useful categories for understanding some aspects of mass monasticism, which is especially useful in understanding Khenchen Gendun Gyatso's cultivation of extensive networks of lay patronage as he assumed multiple roles including a scholar, teacher, and ritual exorcist.¹⁴

Jan Ronis's work on Katok Monastery is in the same period in which I am exploring Rongwo Monastery.¹⁵ As Katok is a major center of Nyingma Buddhism in Kham, the sectarian identity of the monastery suggests key differences from a Geluk monastery in its key political and social alliances, as well as in religious learning and practice. Hence, Rongwo and Katok monasteries are dealing with different institutional concerns. Katok Monastery seems unconcerned with celibate monasticism, while celibacy is an important element of Rongwo Monastery, though it goes unnoticed in institutional history of Rongwo Monastery. In addition, scholasticism at Rongwo, unlike Katok, never faced any threat of displacement, and instead was continuously enhanced to meet highest expectations. Indeed, celibate monasticism and scholasticism are Geluk ideals and values which Geluk critics use as benchmark to criticize their

¹³ See Charlene Makley, *The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in post-Mao China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Jane Caple, "Monastic Economic Reform at Rong-bo Monastery: Towards an Understanding of Contemporary Tibetan Monastic Revival and development in A-mdo," *Buddhist Studies Review* 27 (2010): 197–219; Jane Caple, *Seeing Beyond the State?: The Negotiation of Moral Boundaries in the Revival and Development of Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism in Contemporary China* (PhD. diss., University of Leeds, 2011).

¹⁴ See Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 8–10. It is most relevant here that according to him, Tibetan Buddhist elite monks play multiple roles of scholar, teacher, and shaman for both lofty and worldly goals. For extensive discussions of the roles, see Samuel (1993), 223–269. Martin Mills rather presents a different angle by pointing to interconnectedness of scholars, shamans, and reincarnation lamas as a process of creating their sources of authority. See Martin Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism: The Foundations of Authority in Gelukpa Monasticism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 235–42. It is also useful to note that both Samuel and Mills are critical of classical Weberian theory.

¹⁵ See Ronis (2009).

rivals of the Nyingma School. Furthermore, the treasure tradition was never a concern or threat within the Geluk School itself. However, in Geluk-Nyingma debates in Rebgong, the treasure tradition was a major topic of debate with much at stake for the Nyingma School since it is key to much of its lineage's authenticity.

In Paul Neitupski's monograph, *Labrang Monastery: a Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands*,¹⁶ Labrang and its community situated in a border land community maintain a rather independent status, but not without having exposure to the influence of their neighbors, Central Tibetans, Manchus, Muslims, and Chinese. His descriptions and presentation of the authority structure at Labrang and its engagement with lay society presents a scene in which Labrang tightly controls its estates and supporting communities. In fact, he cultivates the image of Labrang functioning more as a state controlling much of lay communities in the region. This seems to represent a preconceived model of state control imposed on Labrang Monastery that heightens its political status as the de-factor ruler in the area.

Lineage transmission is rarely discussed by Paul Neitupski, but it is in fact a major issue threatening the Labrang monastic community, a topic extensively discussed in my dissertation. My attempts in mapping network of lineage transmissions add to the complexity of setbacks Labrang community faced, reeling from the fallout between Jikme Wangpo and the second Se Ngawang Jamyang Tashi (*ngag dbagn 'jam dbyangs bkra shis*, 1739–1813; henceforth the second Se).¹⁷ Furthermore, the scene of non-Geluk schools competing and “co-existing” within the dominant Geluk orthodoxy, as extensively discussed in the fourth chapter of my study, was

¹⁶ See Nietupski (2011).

¹⁷ For a short biography of the second Se, see Blo bzang bkra shis rab rgyas, *Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs bkra shis kyi rnam thar*. (n.d.).

given minimum attention (only during the era of the Fourth and Fifth Jamyang Zhepa, in a total of three pages),¹⁸ largely due to the limitation of sources at his disposal.

Louis Schram repeatedly claims that the important reincarnation lineages of Changkya (*lcang skya*), Sumpa (*sum pa*), and Tukon (*thu'u bkan*) are major figures whose association with Gonlung was a major cause of its influence and growth.¹⁹ Sullivan later dug deep into primary sources to elucidate the roles that these and other major figures played in creating the extensive system of economic and political support involving Tibetans, Mongols, and Manchus.²⁰ Emphasizing the highly integrative aspects of Gonlung Monastery, he provides an impressive amount of details in presenting monastic systems of governance, discipline, scholasticism, and ritual, largely on the basis of the study of two different monastic customaries. As they were composed by two major historical figures at two different points, two customaries contain enough information to reflect the concerns of the two composers as monastic leaders, and thus the institutional concerns of the monastery in general. However, one can also argue that much of the content in the customaries accounts for a generic image of Geluk institutions rather than helping us understand precise historical contexts of specific institutions.

Sullivan's elucidation of details surrounding the revolt in 1723 and its aftermath involving the destruction of Gonlung and other monasteries in the region, as well as series of subsequent initiatives to rebuild Gonlung, are most revealing.²¹ So is his argument pertaining to the increasing presence of Qing colonial forces in Gonlong and its surrounding region in relation to similar developments facing Chinese Buddhism within the empire. The repercussions of the

¹⁸ Neitupski (2011), 33–35.

¹⁹ Schram (2006), 323–29.

²⁰ See Brenton Sullivan, *The Mother of All Monasteries: Gönlung Jampa Ling and the Rise of Mega Monasteries in Northeastern Tibet* (PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 2013).

²¹ See Sullivan (2013), 321–84.

revolt brought massive destructions and increasing Qing oversight of the northern region of Amdo, whereas there seems to be much less of Qing influence in Southern Amdo where Rongwo Monastery is located.²² This also has to do with the pro-Qing Mongol force's alliance with Rongwo, Labrang, and other monasteries in the south. As Oidtmann argues, the 1792 institution of the golden urn and the Qing involvement in the identification process of the reincarnation of the second Jamyang Zhepa is testimony to the beginning of a long process leading to the gradual presence of Qing power in southern Amdo.²³ Based on my sources, the Qing oversight is almost non-existent in Rebgong during the period of focus in this dissertation. It remains to be seen to what extent the Qing administrative system established its presence in Rebgong, especially while access to the Qing and local archives of the region remain sealed from scholarly access.

Oidtmann's massive dissertation is a much welcome in-depth study of engagement between the Qing officials, Tibetans, and Mongols as a gradual process eventually developing the Qing pluralist legal order during the late Qing period. His careful analysis of Labrang's conflicts with its neighboring monasteries and the accompanying series of litigation is a correction to the notion of "Labrang as a unified, contiguous and autonomous domain" in early scholarship, as its authority was constantly contested by its main rivals, especially Tso, Rongwo, and Terlung.²⁴ As his dissertation focuses on the period since the 1792 institution of the golden urn, when the Qing administrative power started its gradual process of increasing its presence in Amdo, my dissertation is mainly concerned with the religious history of Rebgong during the period of two centuries preceding this important turning point in Amdo's religious and political

²² Precisely after the fall of Gonlung Monastery, the unchecked growing power of monasteries, especially Labrang, Rongwo, and Tso (*gtsos*) in Southern Amdo was in fact worrisome to the Qing officials based in the region. See Oidtmann (2013), 391. See also chapter three for an extensive discussion of the aggressive expansion of Jikme Wangpo's influence in the region.

²³ See Oidtmann (2013).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 526, n. 1095.

history. In addition, he looks at relationships between monasteries or monasteries and their supporting communities mainly from a legal perspective, whereas I look at the same issue in a predominantly intellectual sphere.

Townsend's study attributes the rise and growth of Mindrolling (*smin grol gling*) Monastery to the charisma surrounding its founder Terdak Lingpa (*gter bdag gling pa*, 1646–1714), as well as the charisma and support of his clan and patrons, especially the fifth Dalai Lama and King Polhane (*pho lha nas*, 1689–1747).²⁵ She also provides a sketch of curricular system as well as a network of its affiliates. Her major contribution is the chapter analyzing the distinctive role Mindrolling Monastery played as a major center for training in lay science in Central Tibet. Her focus on the period of Dzungar suppression of the Nyingma School and the immediate efforts in rebuilding the monastery is helpful for scholars working on Tibetan monasteries during the same period. However, her chapters are cases of theorizing Buddhism in broader terms, and thus lacking much detail necessary to build up her arguments in precise, contextualized terms in general, while also highlighting a limitation of her sources. Michael Schuman's study on Nartang (*snar thang*) Monastery is focused on the linear history of the succession of its abbots.²⁶ He points to a network of patrons and campaigns for funds in its locale and beyond as well as the monastery's relationship with the Sakya and the Mongol rulers as major factors in growth of the monastery. As he himself claims, this is the first English-language study on a Kadam (*bka' gdams*) monastery, followed by Maho Iuchi's recent work on a thirteenth-century history of the famous Kadam Monastery, Rwadreng (*rwa sgreng*).²⁷

²⁵ Dominique Townsend, *Materials of Buddhist Culture: Aesthetics and Cosmopolitanism at Mindroling Monastery* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2012).

²⁶ Michael Schuman, *Building Place and Shaping Lives: Nartang Monastery from the 12th through 15th Centuries* (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2016).

²⁷ Maho Iuchi, *An Early Text on the History of Rwa sgreng Monastery: The Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od zer of 'Brom Shes rab me lce* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

In general, with all the scholarship reviewed above, research on sectarian history is minimal, while lineage transmission is rarely discussed, or intellectual lineage is tackled by in broad strokes without paying attention to its significance in social contexts. These are precisely major topics at the center of my dissertation project on Rongwo Monastery and Geluk history in a relational context. While the economic support systems of Buddhist monasteries are presented in an ahistorical fashion in previous studies, chapter two in my dissertation provides a strong historical dimension for understanding monastic campaigns for funds and cultivation of an extensive network of patronage. This dissertation also differs from other studies that it tackles in detail a rare Geluk orientation, integrating religious practice and learning in the life and times of Shar Kalden Gyatso, abbot of Rongwo Monastery.

Chapter One

Scholar and Yogin: the Career of Shar Kalden Gyatso and his Role in Spread of Geluk School in Amdo

Introduction

Since the Geluk-Mongol alliance was cemented in the late sixteenth century, Amdo was home to the burgeoning Geluk movement fostered by strong influence from the Central Tibetan Geluk patriarchs and Mongol patronage. During this period, the foundation of a few major Geluk monasteries in the region were closely associated with the Dalai Lama lineage. As the patron and priest relationship deepened between the Geluk School and their Mongol proponents, there was an increasing number of Amdo native monks active in the region to fuel further growth of the Geluk School. Thanks to the combined efforts of these driving factors, the power of the Geluk School continued its growth and in fact, reached its peak with Geluk monastic institutions dotting the religious terrain of Amdo in the seventeenth century. This included numerous institutions that were not newly founded Geluk monasteries but were converted to the Geluk School. Rongwo Monastery is a prime example of the success story of Geluk conversion from this period. It is, therefore, important to trace central moments in the lives of eminent figures contributing to major religious and political developments in Rebgong, including this Geluk conversion.

This chapter detail explores in the life of Shar Kalden Gyatso, focusing on his contributions to the development of Geluk influence in seventeenth-century Amdo. Not only did he adopt the role of a monastic leader in founding and bolstering scholastic tradition in his home

region in Amdo, he was also an accomplished practitioner. He thus established a role model for followers of his lineage in the integration of Buddhist scholasticism and practice in the Geluk School. This encapsulation of both scholastic and practice traditions led to a general recognition by Buddhist communities in the region, regardless of their sectarian affiliation, of Shar Kalden Gyatso as a great Buddhist master with an emphasis on practice rather than scholastic learning.

The chapter is mainly concerned with Shar Kalden Gyatso's scholastic career as well as his intense retreat life. It pays close attention to historical circumstances and factors contributing to the formation of his role as a major Geluk leader in building monasticism, scholastic programs, and retreat networks in Rebgong and beyond. Instead of seeing Buddhist strands of scholastic study and meditative practice as two opposite ends in the Geluk tradition, the discussions present Shar Kalden Gyatso as playing roles in both scholastic and practice traditions with a heavy emphasis on the practice of Buddhist teachings. Notwithstanding his emphasis on meditation, he did not relegate the scholastic program to a secondary role. In order to integrate both seemingly divergent strands, he approached them as two different, but equally important phases of a successful Buddhist career towards the ultimate goal of enlightenment. In addition to the pairing of the two modes of Buddhist life, his role as founder of scholastic and retreat institutions in Rebgong, as well as his close relationship with local rulers in Amdo and his non-sectarian stance towards the Nyingma School, helped increase his charisma and increased his base of followers.

Therefore, the main goal of this chapter is to explore these themes as they illustrate the career of Shar Kalden Gyatso as a central figure in the religious history of Amdo in general, and the development of Geluk influence in Rebgong in particular.

The Sources

Due to a dearth of historical materials, my research is limited in scope. The kind of sources that I use greatly influence the nature of this study and direction I take in studying religious history of Rebgong. Years of my research on the basis of the relevant sources at my disposal pointed me to certain themes. The lack of historical and biographical sources for studying generations of leaders instrumental in sustaining and leading Rongwo Monastery as a thriving community is significant. There were biographies for certain leaders of the monastery during the seventeenth century. The available sources include six different biographies of Shar Kalden Gyatso written by six different disciples, plus one by Bipa Ngakwang Mipam Dawa (Bis pa ngag dbang mi pham zla ba, 1767-1807).²⁸ Out of all these early biographies, only the one by Zhangchub Mila has survived and is used as the main source in this chapter.²⁹

While the life of Shar Kalden Gyatso is examined primarily on the basis of the biography his close disciple, Zhangchub Mila (*byang chub mi la*, u.d.), I have also consulted a modern print of a biography of Shar Kalden Gyatso composed by contemporary scholar, Jikmed Damcho Gyatso (*'jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho*, 1898-1946), to supplement the portrayal of Shar Kalden Gyatso.³⁰ A valid argument for consulting this early modern biography is that the biographer,

²⁸ For a very short biographical account of Bis pa ngag dbang mi pham zla ba, see 'Jigs med theg mchog, *Rong bo dgon pa'i gdan rabs* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1988), 228-233; Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung* (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1982), 319.

²⁹ The biography of Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho composed by Byang chub mi la is included in the collection of works by Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho, now available in both block and modern print. See Byang chub mi la, *Skar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i rnam thar*, in Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho and Dge 'dun ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho, *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol.1 (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999), 1-99; Byang chub mi la, *Skal ldan rgya mtsho'i rnam thar*, in Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho and Dge 'dun ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho, *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol.1 (Rebgong: Rong bo dgon chen), 1-60.

³⁰ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho, *Sku phreng dang po grub dbang skal ldan rgya mtsho*. In 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho, *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i skyes rabs rnam thar* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997), 107-261.

Jikmed Damcho Gyatso, might have had access to multiple biographical sources on Shar Kalden Gyatso. While nearly everything in the biography by Zhangchub Mila is repeated in the modern biography by Jikme Damcho Gyatso, certain important historical details are only available in this modern biography. The latter biography does not conflict with critical data in the early biography, therefore, Jikme Damchoe Gyatso may have had multiple biographical sources of Shar Kalden Gyatso at his disposal, stressing the importance of consulting this modern biography. This makes even more sense when we consider the fact that the other biographies were written by close disciples of Shar Kalden Gyatso. These now unavailable biographies may contain important historical information and serves as distinctive sources. Jikme Damchoe lists and briefly compares them so it is highly likely that he consulted them at the time of his composition of the biography. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, we have access to only one of these early biographies.

In addition to the biography of Shar Kalden Gyatso, his *Brief History of How Buddhism Grew in Amdo (A mdor bstan pa dar tshul gyi lo rgyus; henceforth Amdo History)*,³¹ *collection of songs (mgur 'bum)*,³² and *Offering for Cleansing to Shakyung [Bya khyung bsang mchod; henceforth Offering for Cleansing]*,³³ contained in the collection of works by Shar Kalden Gyatso, provide important information regarding Shar Kalden Gyatso's sectarian outlook. These works also greatly assist our understanding of the patronage he enjoyed as well as the ideals he

³¹ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho, *A mdor bstan pa dar tshul gyi lo rgyus*. In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1 (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999): 180-187. *Bstan pa* is a generic term and equivalent to dharma. However, in the particular context of this work and most of his songs, Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho employed *bstan pa* to refer to the Geluk School.

³² While contained in the collection of his works, his corpus of songs also circulates as an independent work in modern print format. See Shar kal ldan rgya mtsho, *Shar kal ldan rgya mtsho'i mgur 'bum* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1994).

³³ See Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho, *Bya khyung bsang mchod*, In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 3 (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999): 232-233. *Bya khyung* is the main local deity representing the entire Rebgong area.

envisions of a religious career. Due to a paucity of sources, all his works listed above are the only major contemporary sources available for studying the religious history of Rebgong in general and the Geluk history of the region in particular.

Both Lozang Chodrak (*blo bzang chos grags*)³⁴ and Sherap Tashi (*shes rab bkra shis*, 1647-1716) are disciples of Shar Kalden Gyatso and each of these two disciples is a subject of a biography. However, the former's biography is currently unavailable, and a biography of the latter written by the second Shar Ngakwang Trinle Gyatso, the reincarnation of Shar Kalden Gyatso, is available.³⁵ The biography of Sherap Trashis is very brief and not very informative whereas the first Shar's biography reveals details in terms of the foundation of his scholastic program and hermitages as well as the perceived tension between scholasticism and meditation, indicative of his successful model of integrating two strands of Buddhism in the Geluk School.

Shar Kalden Gyatso's Scholarly Training

The young Shar Kalden Gyatso was trained in the Shangtse (*byang rtse*) College of Ganden (*dga' ldan*) Monastery.³⁶ The early modern biographer Jikme Damchoe Gyatso (*'jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho*, 1898-1946) is extremely helpful in revealing more information surrounding

³⁴ His birth and death dates are unknown, except for the year 1641, when he served as the second abbot of Rongwo Monastery. See 'Brug thar and Sangs rgyas tshe ring, *Mdo smad rma khug tsha 'gram yul gru'i lo rgyus deb ther chen mo* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2005): 573.

³⁵ Ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho, *Rje btsun dam pa shes rab bkra shis pa'i rnam par thar pa lhag bsam sprin gyi sgra dbyangs rna ba'i dga' ston byin rlabs myur 'jug*, In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho 'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 4 (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999): 181-197.

³⁶ For a brief history of Ganden Monastery and its subsidiary colleges, see http://studybuddhism.com/web/en/archives/study/history_buddhism/buddhism_tibet/gelug/brief_history_ganden_monastery.html.

important details in the life of Shar Kalden Gyatso.³⁷ Zhangchub Mila (*byang chub mi la*, 1646-1716)³⁸ includes a brief account of Shar Kalden Gyatso's entry into scholastic program in Central Tibet, while Jikme Damchoe Gyatso provides additional details, probably excerpted from the early biographies. We thus have a few, very important historical details from those early biographies in his modern biography of Shar Kalden Gyatso. However, we must acknowledge that these historical presentations might be later additions to those early biographies.

Shar Kalden Gyatso's background as a member of the Rongwo *nangso* family was an important factor influencing in which Central Tibet monastery to enroll in.³⁹ According to Jikme Damchoe Gyatso, when Shar Kalden Gyatso first visited Ganden Monastery, Tshultrim Chppel (*tshul khrims chos 'phel*, 1560-1623), the then abbot of Shangtse College, ordered him to stay at Shangtse.⁴⁰ His half-brother and teacher Chowa Rinpoche Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen (*chos pa rin po che blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*, 1581-1659, henceforth Chowa Rinpoche)⁴¹ wanted him to stay at Drepung (*'bras spungs*) since most monks from Amdo are enrolled in Gomang (*sgo mang*) College of Drepung Monastery,⁴² however, in the presence of the abbot of Shangtse College, Shar Kalden Gyatso had no choice and agreed to stay at Shantse. The abbot was pleased and said to Chowa Rinpoche, "[I] can get other monks even if it is not your young nephew. [I]

³⁷ For a biography of 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho, see Rje 'jigs med rigs pa'i blo gros, *Rje btsun 'jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho'i rtogs brjod gdung sel sman gyi ljon pa*. In *'Jigs med rigs pa'i blo gros kyi gsung 'bum*, vol. 2 (Beijing: mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007): 21-418.

³⁸ Mkhas btsun bzang po. *Byang chub mi la ngag dbang bsod nams*. In *Rgya bod mkhas grub rim byon gyi rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 5 (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1973-1990): 650-651.

³⁹ The secondary literature touching on the relationship between the Shar lineage and Rongwo *nangso* uncritically states that the entire Shar lineage reincarnates within the family of Rongwo *nangso*.

⁴⁰ For a history of Dga' ldan Monastery and its subsidiary colleges, see Grong khyer lha sa srid gros lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad yig rgyu cha rtson 'bri u yon lhan khang, *Dga' ldan dgon pa'i lo rgyus*.

⁴¹ For a brief biography of Chos wa rin po che, see Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho, *Rje btsun blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam thar dad pa'i 'dren byed*, In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol.1 (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999), 100-133.

⁴²For a study of Drepung Monastery and its subsidiary colleges, see <http://www.thlib.org/places/monasteries/drepung/intro.php#!essay=/dreyfus/drepung/intro/all/>

have thought about him because Rongwo *nangso* is wealthy and powerful, and can bring benefits to the monastic population at Shangtse College which is a wonderful thing.”⁴³ Thus, when the abbot insisted, Chowa Rinpoche had to acquiesce.⁴⁴

The abbot became the throne holder of Ganden Monastery, technically the head of the entire Geluk Buddhism enterprise, four years after the arrival of Shar Kalden Gyatso in Central Tibet.⁴⁵ It was hard for Chowa Rinpoche to refuse a request from such an important monk scholar and leader. It is clear that the abbot was interested in the family background of Shar as Shar because it could bring wealth and other benefits to support the college. This was in addition to the major contribution of the monastic population from Shar’s home region where Geluk Buddhism was soon to take root and flourish. Even though the abbot was mainly responsible for managing scholastic programs as the main teacher, he was equally concerned with procuring material support, which he understood as central to the sustenance of the institution. This realization was not limited to the abbot of Shangtse College. Many abbots and senior monastic leaders shared a concern for institutional growth and maintenance.⁴⁶

After nearly ten years of training, Shar Kalden Gyatso undertook debate examination on the ten main treatises or scholarly subjects and successfully achieved the Kachu (*bk’a bcu*)

⁴³ ‘Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 118: *khyed kyi dbon chu,ng ‘di min yang grwa pa rnyed ‘ong ste/ rong bo tshang stobs ‘byor shogs che bas byang rtse’I grub rgyaun gyi phan thogs la bsams p yin/ de bzang*. Here, interestingly, Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho is referred to as a young nephew (dbon chung) rather than younger brother (spun chung).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 117-118.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of how Rongwo Monastery successfully became self-sufficient as well as the role of abbots assuming financial responsibilities in the modern context, see Jane Caple, “Monastic Economic Reform at Rong-bo Monastery: Towards an Understanding of Contemporary Tibetan Monastic Revival and Development in A-mdo,” *Buddhist Studies Review*, vol. 27 (2010): 197-219.

degree⁴⁷ at Sangpu Neutok (*gsang phu ne'u thog*).⁴⁸ He had extensive knowledge of scholarly subjects, especially the Perfection of Wisdom and the Middle-Way philosophy. During his post-Central Tibet life, even after the completion of his curricular training in Central Tibet, he was continued deepening his learning of Buddhist knowledge with a focus on Buddhist philosophy—the Middle-way philosophy and Perfection of Wisdom literature.

Establishing the Geluk Philosophical Tradition in Rebgong

A monk trained in philosophical tradition through study and debate, Shar Kalden Gyatsho was a key figure in establishing the philosophical tradition of Geluk Buddhism in Rebgong. In 1630, a few years after his return from Central Tibet, he began teaching by fostering a Geluk curriculum system following the intellectual lineage of the Shangtse College of Gaden Monastery. I am unsure how wide-ranging or comprehensive the exoteric subjects that were studied were during the time of Shar Kalden Gyatso. However, I doubt that the curriculum was as rigorous as later, given the role of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso in the later period of building up the monastic education system during his abbatial office, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

⁴⁷ This degree is awarded to monks after passing debate examinations on ten specified major exoteric treatises. For a discussion of monastic degrees, see Georges Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003): 144-145. For a brief description of monastic degrees at Labrang, see Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po, *Bkra shis 'khyil gyi mtshan nyid grwa tshang thos bsam gling gi 'dzin gra gtugs rgyu'i skor gyi sgrig lam*, In *Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang poi'i gsung 'bum*. vol 10 (New Delhi: ngawang gelek demo, 1971): 223-228.

⁴⁸ For a short history of Gsang phu ne'u thog, see Rin chen chos ldan and Kun dga' 'byung gnas, *Gsang phu'i gdan rabs*. For more on Gsang phu ne'u thog, see Shunzo Onodo, "Abbatial Successions of the Colleges of gSang phu sNe'u thog Monastery," *The Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology*, vol. 15 (1990): 149-1071; Leonard van der Kuijp, "The Monastery of Gsang-phu Ne'u-thog and Its Abbatial Succession from ca. 1073 to 1250," *Berliner Indologische Studien*, vol. 3 (1987): 103-127.

Shar Kalden Gyatso's major teachings were later transcribed and compiled into three volumes of works covering both exoteric and esoteric teachings. They were studied and transmitted among his lineage followers up to now. Though his works were not regarded as official text manuals or supplements, his versified summary of collection of topics (*bsdus grwa'i rtsa tshig*) was probably intended for pedagogical purposes, especially for the cohort of his students.⁴⁹ The transmission of Shar Kalden Gyatso's teachings, especially a few individual teachings, both exoteric and esoteric, and songs were highly valued in the larger Geluk community.

As a renowned scholar, what circumstances and factors inspired Shar Kalden Gyatso to build the scholastic program at Rongwo Monastery that flourished as a learning center in the region? In his article surveying the pattern and growth of Geluk influence in Amdo, Gray Tuttle claims that the influence of Central Tibetan masters either directing or inspiring the foundation or conversion of monasteries is a driving force behind the rise of Geluk School in Amdo. Here, I follow this approach and utilize Tuttle's methods in identifying important roles these Central Tibetan masters played in the lives of Amdo monks and institutional history of the Geluk School in the region.⁵⁰

It has been nearly two centuries since the foundation of the premier learning institutes of Geluk Buddhism in Central Tibet and when Choewa Rinpoche first visited those learning centers and underwent a few years of mostly esoteric training. During his second visit, in 1617, he brought his younger half-brother, Shar Kalden Gyatso, to enroll at Shangtse College of Ganden

⁴⁹ See Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho, *Bsdus grwa'i rtsa tshig*, In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 3 (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999): 59-62. We lack information regarding the date of composition and for what purpose the versified summary was written.

⁵⁰ See Tuttle (2012); and Gray Tuttle, "Pattern Recognition: Tracking the Spread of the Incarnation Institution through Time and across Tibetan Territory," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 38 (2017): 29–64.

Monastery, with the latter eventually completing the highest monastic degree of bka' bcu within a decade. In general, Geluk followers from Amdo looked to Central Tibet as the source of high ideals of Geluk Buddhist learning and practice represented by its premium learning institutes. There were also influential Central Tibetan Geluk masters as well as Central-Tibet trained Geluk masters such as the two brothers' teachers active proselytization that resulted in an exponential emergence of new monasteries and retreat sites in seventeenth century Amdo. Chowa Rinpoche and Kalden Gyatso, the leading religious figures in Rebgong, were easily carried away by the currents of the sweeping Geluk influence in Amdo with nearly exclusive support of the Mongols on the Geluk side.⁵¹

It is undeniable that both brothers believed that a systematic education program was crucial if the Geluk School was to flourish in Amdo as in Central Tibet. Since Gonlung (*dgon lungs*)⁵² was equipped with a philosophical college, the first of its kind in Amdo, and because it was founded by Gyalse Donyo Chokyi Gyatso in 1604, who taught Shar Kalden Gyatso while the latter was in Central Tibet, the brothers did not even have to look to Central Tibet, given the relatively closeness of Gonlung as a model to replicate in a college of scholastic learning at Rongwo Monastery. Gonlung's claim to be the first monastery to establish a philosophical college in Amdo,⁵³ it can be concluded that the curriculum system for Geluk Buddhist teachings was still nascent in the region.

⁵¹ The Mongols in the Kokonor Region committed full allegiance to Geluk School, except for Tsogtu Taiji, who persecuted the school between 1634 and 1637. See Tuttle (2012), 134, 136. See also Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung* (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1982): 31-32; Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan, *Rgya bod hor sog gi lo rgyus* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1990): 65-66; and Ye shes dpal 'byor, *Mtsho sngon lo rgyus tshangs glu gsar snyan* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1982): 8-13.

⁵² For a study of Gonlung Monastery, see Brenton Sullivan, *The Mother of All Monasteries: Gönlung Jampa Ling and the Rise of Mega Monasteries in Northeastern Tibet* (PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 2013).

⁵³ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 76; Sullivan (2013), 17.

While in Central Tibet, Shar Kalden Gyatso's teachers were arguably important in the formative years of his intellectual life. However, his relationships with teachers he met in Amdo during his post-Central Tibet life asserted a greater influence. In his biography as well as his, semi-biographical songs, he lists a number of key Geluk teachers who played a crucial role developing the Geluk School in Amdo. Although he received initiations from the fifth Dalai Lama Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso (*ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, 1617-1682), his contact with the Geluk patriarch were held to a minimum. However, the influence of the first Panchen Lama Lozang Chokyi Gyaltsen (*blo bzang chso kyi rgyal mtshan*, 1567-1662) looms large in his religious career. This religious personality is arguably one of most learned scholars and bearer of transmissions of major Geluk teachings and taught all of Shar Kalden Gyatso's most important teachers. Shar Kalden Gyatso personally received full ordination precepts from the Panchen Lama.

From the list of teachers, Shar Kalden Gyatso revered and continued to find inspiration throughout his life in Dewa Choje Tendzin Lozang Gyatso (*sde ba chos rje blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho*, 1593-1638),⁵⁴ Gyalse Lozang Tendzin (*rgal sras blo bzang bstan 'dzin*, b. seventeenth century),⁵⁵ and Kowa Chokyi Gyatso (*ko 'u ba cos kyi rgya mtsho*, 1571-1635).⁵⁶ Nearly all were eminent scholars and institutional leaders exercising great influence in the larger Geluk community. It is important to note these Geluk masters as they significantly contributed to the growth of the Geluk School in Amdo. Shar Kalden Gyatso's relationships with these masters

⁵⁴ For a biography of Sde ba chos rje blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, see Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho, *Sde pa chos rje bstan 'dzin blo bzang rgya mtsho'i rnam thar dad pa'i sgo 'byed*, In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1 (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999): 100-137. See also Sullivan (2013), 91-115.

⁵⁵ For biographical information on Rgal sras blo bzang bstan 'dzin, see Byang chub mi la (1999), 41-47, 54-55, 59-61; Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 56-57.

⁵⁶ For a biography of Ko 'u ba cos kyi rgya mtsho, see Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho, *Rje btsun chos kyi rgya mtsho dpal bzang bo'i rnam thar*, In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol.1 (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999): 77-84.

must have had important influence on his later role as the leader of a regional religious community in the same region where those same masters were instrumental in catalyzing the growth of the Geluk tradition.

Shar Kalden Gyatso was very well aware of the status of the Geluk School in Amdo as he was author to *Amdo History*. This short, yet important work was composed in 1652 after seeing off the fifth Dalai Lama during his stopover in Amdo on his journey to the Qing court.⁵⁷ This work clearly demonstrates Shar Kalden Gyatso's intimate knowledge of both Central Tibetan and Amdo masters playing central roles in helping Geluk School grow to its dominant position in Amdo. He lists the third through fifth Dalai Lamas and other major Geluk masters, including his own teacher, Dewa Choje Lozang Tenzin. He paid close attention to the founding of monasteries and retreat centers with the founding dates and founders given in chronological order. The foundation of scholastic programs at these monasteries in chronological order was also a central theme he followed in his *Amdo History*. He rightly considers the presence of the Dalai Lamas and other Geluk leaders in Amdo as a watershed moment for the rise of the Geluk School in this frontier. He contrasts Central Tibet and Amdo as center and border of the Dharma and eventually celebrates the spread of dharma from the northern land to the still further north where it flourished. He also identifies himself as part of this Geluk campaign and sees himself playing a due role in the crucial development of the Geluk School in Amdo.

In addition to Rongwo Monastery, Jangchup Mila notes that Shar Kalden Gyatso also assumed the role of the main teacher (head of monastic community) at Gengya (*rgan rgya*)

⁵⁷ Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 162. For a detailed study of the fifth Dalai Lama's journey and its political significance, see Gray Tuttle, "A Tibetan Buddhist Mission to the East: The Fifth Dalai Lama's Journey to Beijing, 1652–1653," In *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition: Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. Bryan Cuevas and Kurtis Schaeffer (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 65-87.

Monastery and thus managed two monasteries simultaneously.⁵⁸ However, Jikmed Damchoe mentions that Shar Kalden Gyatso was in charge of Dobi (*rdo sbis*) Monastery, instead of Gengya Monastery, as its main teacher for a number of years.⁵⁹ Jikmed Damchoe writes that it was the year after founding of the philosophical college at his own seat, Rongwo Monastery, in which Shar Kalden Gyatso visited Dibi Monastery and gave extensive teachings. Chowa Rinpoche was previously responsible for the crafting of a large Maitreya image at Dobi Monastery so it seems the monastery was strongly associated with Chowa Rinpoche and reasonably enough, his brother Shar Kalden Gyatso who quickly established him as a famed scholar would teach at and lead the monastery.⁶⁰ This is even more likely when we consider the fact that Dobi Monastery was founded by Samten Rinchen, the ancestor of three *nangsos* ruling the Rebgong region. As a member of the Rongwo *nangso* family and the towering religious figure in his native region, as well as the reincarnation of Samten Rinchen, who was better than Shar Kalden Gyatso to lead Dobi Monastery as its main teacher which was in the custody of one of three *nangsos*—Dobi *nangso*?

Early Lives of Shar Kalen Gyatsho

The reincarnation lineage identity, as well as his vision of promoting monasticism and scholastic program, also played a role in building the religious authority of Shar Kalden Gyatso. While Shar Kalden Gyatso was live, Gyalse Lozang Tendzin and several other Geluk masters,

⁵⁸ Byang chub mi la (1999), 17-18.

⁵⁹ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 139. For a history of Rdo sbis Monastery, see Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 354. See also Phun tshogs, *Rje btsun pra dz+nyA sa ra mchog gi srid zhi'i legs tshogs 'dod rgur 'jo ba'i mdzad 'phrin dang rdo sbis grwa tshang gi gdan rabs dad gsum nor bu'i chun po* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1998.): 37-73, 131-320.

⁶⁰ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 139.

including certain eminent disciples of Shar Kalden Gyatso were tasked with identifying early lives of Shar Kalden Gyatso.⁶¹ His close disciple and Rebgong native, Chumar Lozang Gyatso (*chu dmar blo bzang rgya mtsho*, b. seventeenth century), who travelled to Central Tibet seeking a secret biography of Shar Kalden Gyatso from Gyalse Lozang Tendzin claims, however, that Shar Kalden Gyatso was the reincarnation of Samten Rinchen (*bsam gtan rin chen*, b. fourteenth century), the founder of Rongwo Monastery and disciple of Choje Dondrup Rinchen (*chos rje don grub rin chen*, b. fourteenth century).⁶² According to Chumar Lozang Gyatso, Samten Rinchen reincarnated as Samdrup Rinchen (*bsam 'grub rin chen*, b. sixteenth century), the immediate predecessor of Shar Kalden Gyatso, a contention Lozang Tenpa Rapgye (*blo bzang bstan pa dar rgyas*, b. sixteenth century) agrees with.⁶³ Samdrup Rinchen was an important leader of Rongwo Monastery who gave preliminary vows to Chowa Rinpoche. His identification with the abovementioned three masters informs us that the founder of Rongwo Monastery as a Sakya Monastery, the founder's reincarnation, and the Rongwo leader who was one generation before Shar Kalden Gyatso are none other than Shar Kalden Gyatso himself. Shar Kalden Gyatso was thus the rightful religious heir to continue as the head of the monastery. In addition to being within the same reincarnation lineage, Shar Kalden Gyatso was also a member of the Rongwo *nangso* family, who were custodians of the monastery. His family background thus strengthened his religious authority in the area as head of the monastery. However, according to Jangchub

⁶¹ See 'Jig med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 21-106, for a long list, including Buddha's disciple Shariputra, who were early lives of Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho. Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho himself was also involved in identifying his early lives, as were his disciples and other Geluk masters. For more on this, see Byang chub mi la (1999), 59-64; and 'Jigs med lung rigs rgya mtsho, *Reb gong chos 'byung gdan sa gsum gyi gdan rabs* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2010): 23, 25.

⁶² On many occasions, Rgyal sras blo bzang bstan 'dzin identified certain predecessors in Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho's reincarnation lineage including 'Brom ston and Phu chung. He states that two early lives of Shar Skal ldan rgya mtsho were associated with Rongwo, but he does not identify them. He also foretold that Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho would reincarnate at Rongwo. See Byang chub mi la (1999), 59-61, 63-64.

⁶³ Byang chub mi la (1999), 62; Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 319-320.

Mila, since his lineage identity was known within the inner circles of Shar Kalden Gyatso (his masters and disciples), it had limited effect in contributing to his religious stature in the eyes of the wider monastic and lay community. Nevertheless, the fact that Shar Kalden Gyatso's self-identification with, at least Milarepa, the lineage could significantly have impacted how Shar Kalden Gyatso envisioned his religious career in building Buddhist institutions in the region.⁶⁴

Reassessment of Chowa Rinpoche's Role in building Rongwo Monastery

While we attribute the foundation of the scholastic system at Rongwo entirely to Shar Kalden Gyatso in secondary literature, we must fairly reassess the roles that he and his teacher/half-brother Chowa Rinpoche played. Chowa Rinpoche was actually the mastermind behind the plan to implement two major institution building projects in Rebgong: the foundation of a scholastic college at Rongwo and a retreat community at Tashi Khyil (*bkra shis 'khyil*), making it the future center of a hermitage network in the area. More precisely, Chowa Rinpoche led Rongwo Monastery after his return from Central Tibet in 1608. This was his first extended stay there and one year after the birth of Shar Kalden Gyatso. Shar Kalden Gyatso credits Chowa Rinpoche with propagating the ritual tradition, especially the death anniversary of the Geluk founder, Tsongkhapa, and instituting strict monastic rules,⁶⁵ during the period between his two visits to Central Tibet. During his second visit to Central Tibet, he brought along young Shar Kalden Gyatso to enroll in Shangtse College for extensive training. Meanwhile, Chowa Rinpoche was

⁶⁴ Byang chub mi la (1999), 40; His lineage starts with Shariputra (*shA ri'i bu*). It is probable that only few disciples accepted him as a reincarnation of Mi la ras pa. See also Victoria Sujata, *Tibetan Songs of Realization: Echoes from a Seventeenth-century Scholar and Siddha in Amdo* (Leiden: Brill, 2005): 56-59. It is also important to note that Chos ba rin po che was widely recognized as the reincarnation of Mi la ras pa. See Sujata (2005): 48-55.

⁶⁵ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1999), vol. 1: 105.

also already meditating at various places with Tashi Khyil and Gonrong Drakkyia Dzong (*dgon rong brag skya rdzong*)⁶⁶ as his two main retreat sites,⁶⁷ thus contributing to later developments of scholastic and practice lineages initiated by Shar Kalden Gyatso. Like Shar Kalden Gyatso, Chowa Rinpoche was also deeply involved in building monastic institutions and finding ways to sustain them. Besides directing Shar Kalden Gyatso to set up the education system and retreat community center, he was also involved in temple building and was solely responsible for building a large Manjushri temple (*'jam dbayngs lha khang*).⁶⁸ However, except for the Manjusri temple at Rongwo, the assembly hall at Rongwo in addition to a Maitreya temple and an assembly hall at Tashi Khyil, were projects undertaken by both Chowa Rinpoche and Shar Kalden Gyatso. Nowhere was Rongwo *nangso* mentioned as playing a role in these two building projects. Chowa Rinpoche also gave funds toward the crafting of a giant Maitreya image at Dobi Monastery where Kalden Gyatso later served as the main teacher. Not only did Chowa Rinpoche make efforts to fund these institutions and build structures, but he was also concerned with the sustainability and maintenance of these institutions. As recorded by Shar Kalden Gyatso, on one occasion, during his tour in agricultural and herding communities in Rebgong, the butter offerings he received were set aside for the lamps set before the central image at the Maitreya temple in Tashi Khyil. Most offerings he received during his visits to Khagya (*kha gya*)⁶⁹ and Taklung (*stag lung*)⁷⁰ were brought for use as general funds at Rongwo Monastery.⁷¹ During his tour in the herding community of Takring (*stag ring*),⁷² he received many offerings including

⁶⁶ It is located in Khri ka, an area to the north of Reb gong.

⁶⁷ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 305.

⁶⁸ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1999), vol. 1: 108; 'Jigs med lung rigs rgya mtsho (2010), 16.

⁶⁹ It is a clan/a group of six clans with Kha gya being one of the six. See Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 547.

⁷⁰ The location is unclear, but it was likely located in the neighboring region of Rebgong to the south.

⁷¹ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1999), vol. 1: 114.

⁷² Stag ring and Stag lung are probably spelling variants of the same place name.

pieces of felt for seating in the assembly hall at Rongwo Monastery, and horses were set aside as part of the support for the painting project for the assembly hall and Jatsul (*ja tshul*).⁷³ During his visit to Trika (*khri ka*), all offerings he received from herding and farming areas were again earmarked for general support for Rongwo Monastery.⁷⁴

Therefore, in addition to his reputation as a dedicated hermit, Chowa Rinpoche also provided major contributions for Geluk Buddhist development in Rebgong. Although I have not found mention of Shar Kalden Gyatso pledging resources for these institutions, there is no question that he was equally concerned with operating these religious institutions.

Chowa Rinpoche's greater role in the expansion of Rongwo Monastery and its scholastic program might also have been inspired by the fourth Dalai Lama Yonten Gyatso⁷⁵ (*yon tan rgya mtsho*, 1589-1616) and Gyalse Donyo Chokyi Gyatso (*rgyal sras don yod chos kyi rgya mtsho*, b. sixteenth century). In 1603, Chowa Rinpoche was an escort team of the young fourth Dalai Lama during the latter's first visit to Central Tibet.⁷⁶ Chowa Rinpoche stayed on to study mostly tantric teachings in Central Tibet for the next few years. The following year, the fourth Dalai sent Gyalse Donyo Chokyi Gyatso to Amdo to establish Gonlung Monastery with a scholastic program, the first of its kind in Amdo and a role model for scholastic tradition in Amdo for Geluk devotees.⁷⁷

Regarding, Kubum Monastery, Gray Tuttle writes, "Sku 'bum was not said to be a proper Dge lugs pa monastery until 1612, when the forth Ta lai bla ma directed that a philosophical

⁷³ It may refer to offerings made to the monastery involving tea.

⁷⁴ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1999), vol. 1: 116.

⁷⁵ For a very brief biography of Yon tan rgya mtsho, see Karenina Kollmar-Paulenz, "The Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso and The Fourth Dalai Lama Yonten Gyatso," In *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. Martin Brauen (London: Serindia, 2005): 53-59.

⁷⁶ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 304-305.

⁷⁷ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 55-56, 76.

school (mtshan nyid grwa tshang) be established there.”⁷⁸ Besides Kubum Monastery, in 1599, Zhakhyung Monastery was converted from a Kadam to a Geluk school, and in 1623, a scholastic college was established there.⁷⁹ As leader of Rongwo Monastery, Chowa Rinpoche also meditated at places such as Gyalse Donyo Chokyi Gyatso in Gonlung and other sites at Zhyakyung and Kubum. He also received teachings from Dewa Choje and Kowa Chokyi Gyatso, who served as abbot of Kubum Monastery (1617-1624).⁸⁰ Chowa Rinpoche was clearly aware of these Geluk institutional developments at these major monasteries as well as activities of these Geluka patriarchs, which would influence Chowa Rinpoche to follow suit and set up a scholastic system modelled after these major institutions.

It is also possible that Chowa Rinpoche was partly directed and inspired by a Central Tibetan master, the third De mo Lha dbang phyogs las rnam rgyal, to build the scholastic institution at Rongwo.⁸¹ According to Shar Kalden Gyatso, during Chowa Rinpoche’s second visit, Ngakwang Zhokle NamGyal (*ngag dbang phyogs las rnam rgyal*, 1551/1557-1573/1579)⁸² asked him to found a *dratshang* (*grwa tshang*) in his homeland, which probably led to his creation of a scholastic college at Rongwo which he later managed.⁸³ *Dratshang* is a generic term for a monastery or monastic college, but in this particular context, it might refer to a scholastic college.⁸⁴ Therefore, it is possible that Chowa Rinpoche understood setting up a Geluk

⁷⁸ Tuttle (2012), 134.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 134; Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1999), vol. 1: 180-187.

⁸⁰ Mgon po dbang rgyal, *Rgyal rabs lo tshigs shes bya mang 'dus mkhas pa'i spyi nor* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2000): 549.

⁸¹ For a biography of this major religious figure, see ShAkya rin chen, *Ngag dbang phyogs las rnam rgyal gyi nam thar*.

⁸² Ngag dbang phyogs las rnam rgyal: Ngakwang Zhokle NamGyal.

⁸³ Jigs med lung rigs rgya mtsho, *Reb gong chos 'byung*, 16. However, Lha dbang phyogs las rnam rgyal directing Chos pa rin po che to fund *gra tshang* is not mentioned in the biography of Chos ba rin po che by Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho.

⁸⁴ At least in two instances, Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho uses *grwa tshang* to refer to the scholastic college. See Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1994), 200; Byang chub mi la (199), 137. It is the first college established at Rongwo.

scholastic college as a way to build up the monastery, a major task that he relegated to his brother, Shar Kalden Gyatso who had received advanced training in Central Tibet.

Establishing a scholastic program typifies large Geluk monasteries and is indispensable in the Geluk scholastic tradition. In general, Central Tibetan masters are sources of inspiration for native Amdo scholars and monks to found monasteries. When Ngakwang Zhokle NamGyal declared his tutelary deity to be Manjushri, Chowa Rinpoche immediately constructed a Manjushri temple at Rongwo Monastery upon his return from Central Tibet.⁸⁵ With Manjushri being his tutelary deity, he also made three failed attempts to visit Mt. Wutai (*ri bo rtse lnga*), the terrestrial abode of Manjushri in China.⁸⁶ Therefore, the role of Central Tibetan masters in inspiring native Amdo monks to contribute to the growth of the Geluk Buddhism must not be underestimated as Gray Tuttle emphasizes in his survey of Amdo's major Geluk monasteries.⁸⁷

Despite his two stays in Central Tibet, Chowa Rinpoche did not stay long enough to complete the Geluk curriculum and achieve the highest degree expected of a scholar. Instead, his brother Kalden Gyatso received the prestigious Kachu degree at the famed monastery of Sangpu Neutok, hence his persistent request to Shar Kalden Gyatso to found and lead the scholastic program. Considering the success of Shar Kalden Gyatso as a highly learned scholar, the request was predictable, which in no way reduces the influential role Chowa played in building Geluk institutions in Rebgong.

⁸⁵ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1999), 107; Jigs med lung rigs rgya mtsho (2010), 16.

⁸⁶ For the importance of Mt. Wutai within the Tibetan Buddhist community, see Gray Tuttle, "Tibetan Buddhism at Wutai Shan in the Qing: The Chinese-language Register," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, vol. 6 (2011): 163-214. <http://www.thlib.org?tid=T5721>; Paul Nietupski, "Bla brang Monastery and Wutai Shan," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, vol. 6 (2011): 327-348. <http://www.thlib.org?tid=T5718>; and Kurtis Schaeffer, "Tibetan Poetry on Wutai Shan," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, vol. 6 (2011): 215-242. <http://www.thlib.org?tid=T5719>.

⁸⁷ See Tuttle (2012).

Retreat Life

Biographer Zhangchub Mila portrays Shar Kalden Gyatso's childhood so as to portray him as an extraordinary child destined to become a great meditator. Once during his childhood, when his mother took him to the field, he only experienced the vision of a god's realm (*lha'i yul*). Later, at the age of seven, he received lay precepts from Chowa Rinpoche and performed recitation practice (*bsnyen sgrub*) of several transcendent deities (*lhag pa'i lha*). He was able to view all the cycles of existence as an expanse of blazing fire and hence generated firm aversion to the cycle of life.⁸⁸

For the first few years of post-Central Tibet life, his life alternated between receiving teachings and undertaking retreats during which he began composing and singing spiritual songs.⁸⁹ However, his retreat life was disrupted by responsibilities imposed by Chowa Rinpoche to found and run the philosophical college, thus preventing undertaking retreats as a full-time practitioner. Jikmed Damchoe elaborated Shar Kalden Gyatso's resistance against such requests by Chowa Rinpoche as a way to place a particular emphasis on the practice-oriented life of Shar Kalden Gyatso.⁹⁰ When Shar Kalden Gyatso did not accept a request from Chowa Rinpoche, a demi-human appeared and instructed him to found the scholastic college. Otherwise, the being threatened to destroy the Manjushri Image. During this vision, he was asked three times about his thoughts. Shar Kalden Gyatso kept quiet, refusing to give a yes answer. Later, Chowa Rinpoche, also probably aware of the vision, insisted, "You must set up a college at all costs. If

⁸⁸ Byang chub mi la (1999), 3.

⁸⁹ Byang chub mi la (1999), 15-16.

⁹⁰ However, Byang chub mi la simply records that Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho accepted the task of founding and running the philosophical college immediately after Chos pa rin po che suggested it. See Byang chub mi la (1999), 16.

you do not set up a college, gods and demons magical performances may damage the Manjushri temple, which is very undesirable. It took many years for me to build it.”⁹¹ Only then was Shar Kalden Gyatso convinced to found the philosophical college.

Shar Kalden Gyatso had to manage the monastery with his presence or by his appointees when he was in retreat. Afterwards, a series of things such as village conflicts he witnessed and the death of his teacher created an aversion toward worldly life and pushed him towards the life of a retreatant. However, his presence was required to lead the monastery. Reminiscing about the lives of great meditators including Milarepa, he decided to fully commit to meditation practice.⁹² However, at that time, Chowa Rinpoche intervened with, “You should lead the scholastic college. There is no need for hermits. Later, in the woods of Tashi Khyil, there will be a time when rows of fully ordained monks will go back and forth.”⁹³ Nevertheless, Shar Kalden Gyatso left for retreat. Later, after an extended period of retreat he visited Rongwo Monastery and saw the monastery as a sign of impermanence and sang a song to that effect. Without a second thought about his responsibility of leading the monastery, he left for retreat immediately after that visit. Therefore, the responsibility fell on the shoulders of Chowa Rinpoche who managed the monastic community until the return from Central Tibet of the first disciples initially trained at Rongwo.⁹⁴

⁹¹ ‘Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 137: *khod kyis cis kyang grwa tshang tshugs/ ma btsugs na lha ‘dre’i cho ‘phrul gyis ‘jam dbyangs kun gzigs khang ‘di la gnod pa byung na mi rung/ ngas lo man por ‘di la dka’ las byas nas bzhengs pa yin.*

⁹² For a biographical study of Mi la ras pa, see Andrew Quintman *The Yogin & the Madman: Reading the Biographical Corpus of Tibet’s Great Saint Milarepa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). For a translation of the life of Mi la ras pa by Gtsang smyon rus pa’ rgyan can, see Andrew Quintman, trans. *The Life of Milarepa* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

⁹³ Byang chub mi la (1999), 22: *khyod kyis mtshan nyid kyi grwa tshang skyongs dang ri khrod pas lag mi thogs phyis su bkra shis ‘khyil gyi nags ‘di tsho’i nang na dge slong chos gos gyon pa mang pos ser phreng byas nas phar ‘byon tshur ‘byon byed pa’i dus shig yong.*

⁹⁴ Byang chub mi la (1999), 22.

Shar Kalden Gyatso's inclination towards a retreat-orientated life plays a large role in his resistance to leading the scholastic institution. We should also note the burdens imposed on monastic leaders, especially abbots, to seek wealth and other resources that large monastic institutions required may help explain Shar Kalden Gyatso's resistance to leading the monastery. Although we do not see much description of material need that burdened monastic leaders with fundraising trips in most biographical accounts, including the biography of Shar Kalden Gyatso, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's biography is an exception. The responsibilities of the abbots constantly effort to support the monastic institutions and population figure prominently. Only when the monastic community was in good hands did Chowa Rinpoche resign himself to Shar Kalden Gyatso's determination to live a life of retreat.

Chowa Rinpoche instructed Shar Kalden Gyatso to build Tashi Khyil as the main retreat center, which was realized in 1648. He suggested to Shar Kalden Gyatso, "You shall make efforts to install a community of four monks here. You should first attract them by material benefits. Only afterwards, should you instruct them in the dharma and your wish will come true."⁹⁵ Chowa Rinpoche encouraged by saying it was possible that the community could grow to over a hundred members. The retreat community actually grew to over two hundred members, who, Zhangchub Mila specified, were fully ordained with three trainings (*bslab pa gsum ldan dge slong*).⁹⁶ He introduced a set of community rules and a strong regiment of practices: year-long and month-long retreats, and verbal silence while in retreat. He was able to attract many students

⁹⁵ Byang chub mi la (1999), 23.

⁹⁶ Three trainings are concerned with cultivation of morality (*tshul khrims*), concentration (*ting nge 'dzin*), and wisdom (*shes rab*).

from as far as Pari (*dpa' ris*)⁹⁷ in the north and as south as Dzoge (*mdzod dge*).⁹⁸ However, prior to the founding of the retreat community hall, Shar Kalden Gyatso internally resisted the building project. He thought, “What is the point of all the work done for [building] this place? Who will look after the place after me? This place will become a place where nearby villagers tether their donkeys when they come to collect wood.”⁹⁹ However, his doubts were cleared in a vision. It is likely Kalden Gyatso intended his life to be one of solitary retreat, rather than founding and leading a retreat community center. As with the founding of a philosophical college, he was clearly aware of the demands related to teaching and managing the retreat center and its network of hermitages. Although he successfully managed the retreat center, there are hints that the ideal of spiritual practice he aspired to was intensive solitude retreat. It is thus no surprise that he resisted building an assembly hall and running retreat practices on an institutional basis.

With Tashi Khyil founded in 1648, he was still responsible for teaching and leading Rongwo Monastery. However, from 1669 onwards, he was fully committed to meditation practice, residing at Tashi Khyil for the most part, until passing away at the age of 71 in 1677.¹⁰⁰

While in retreat at Tashi Khyil, he gave extensive teachings to the retreat community. Many of his teachings, dealing with a variety of topics, were recorded by his disciples in three

⁹⁷ It is the northern end of Amdo. Most of historical Dpa' ris area is now under present-day Dpa' ris County in Gansu Province and Gro tshang County in Qinghai Province.

⁹⁸ Byang chub mi la (1999), 24; Mdzod dge largely corresponds to the present-day Mdzod dge County in Sichuan Province and a large portion of the traditional Mdzod dge area also fall in present-day The bo County in Gansu Province. However, there is also a support community of Labrang Monastery known as Mdzod dge.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 25: *khang ba 'di la dka' las byas nas ci byed/ nga'i ring ma gtogs 'di la bdag byed mkhan su yod/ khang ba 'di rjes nas nye 'khor gyi grong pa tsho'i nags kyi shing 'thu tsho yong nas bong bu sogs 'dogs sa byed pa yin mod snyam*; The wording changes slightly in the biography by 'Jigs med dam chos rgyas mtsho. See 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 160: *'di la dka' las byas nas ci byed /nga'i ring ma gtogs 'di la bdag byed mkhan su yod/ khang ba 'di rjes nas nye 'khor gyi grong pa tsho nags su shing 'thu la 'ongs nas bong bu sogs 'dogs sa byed rgyu yin mod snyam*.

¹⁰⁰ Byang chub mi la (1999), 50-51.

and half volumes. The brevity of most of his teachings during retreats frustrated his disciple and biographer Zhangchub Mila.¹⁰¹ Shar Kalden Gyatso responded, “Well, for each of these instructions on contemplation, I can cite more quotations and use more reasoning in an extended form, and I know how to do so. [However,] they are not useful for most people. They will understand more slowly by relying on brief ones.”¹⁰² The brevity of philosophical details, but special attention to graded paths in meditation practices are much valued in the contemporary Geluk community, further demonstrating the rare quality of meditative orientation of Shar Kalden Gyatso’s religious practice.

The year he passed away, he instituted rules for the retreat community at Tashi Khyil requiring that all the retreatants undertake retreat for three months a year. He specifically gave instructions to practice strict verbal silence and not to disclose any external and internal signs of their practice.¹⁰³ He appointed Shadrang Rinpoche (*sha brang rin po che*, b. seventeenth century) as the head of the retreat community. Due to the size of this community, Shar Kalden Gyatso felt it necessary to appoint his disciple, Losang Gyatso (*blo bsang rgya mtsho*, b. seventeenth century),¹⁰⁴ as disciplinarian (*grig dpon*).

As an institutional leader in establishing scholastic and retreat traditions in Rebgong, ironically Shar Kalden Gyatso demonstrated that he was a successful yogin, and thus not attached to material possessions. Just prior to his death, he returned all the books he had borrowed from others. Robes and implements previously offered to him were returned to the givers and all his own books were given to the retreat community. He went to an extreme by

¹⁰¹ ‘Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 214: *nyams khrid ‘di tsho ha cang bsdus drags pas ‘di las rgyas pa zhig gnang na yag rgyu red snyam*.

¹⁰² Ibid.: *‘o dmigs skor re re la yang lung dang rigs mang ba bkod nas rgyas pa byas na ngas bshad shes te mi mang la phan mi thogs/nyung nyung la brten nas rim gyis mang po yang go yong ba yin*.

¹⁰³ Byang chub mi la (1999), 88

¹⁰⁴ I have yet to verify whether this person is the same as Sha bran grin po che or Chu dmar blo bzang rgya mtsho.

ordering that all his belongings be given away and not a single item should be left behind. Shar Kalden Gyatso said, “I am satisfied when people say that nothing is left behind after the death of Kachuwa (*bka' bcu ba*, lit. “the master of ten treatises”) of Rongwo to use for a monastic feast.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, there were nothing left to use for his funeral at Tashi Khyil consequently, members of the retreat community contributed to conduct an elaborate funeral. At Rongwo, another elaborate funeral was conducted, most likely through donations as well. Thus, the biographer argues that Shar Kalden Gyatso behaved appropriate for a true yogin who abandons all (*kun spangs mdzad*).

A major source of his inspiration for undertaking his retreat life is the persona of Milarepa, the Tibetan Buddhist yogin par excellence, which is clear in his collected songs. His success in retreat practice conforming to the ideals set by the role model of Milarepa was also clear from the fact that Gyalse Lozang Tendzin addresses him as the second Mila in written form.¹⁰⁶ His previous life being identified as Milarepa might have significantly impacted his identity as a retreat practitioner and influenced his living a life that in some ways reflected the life of Milarepa.

Shar Kalden Gyatso self-identified as Milarepa, for example, during his visit to Nyagong Drakar (*gnya' gong brag dkar*),¹⁰⁷ his disciple and personal attendant Zhangchub Mila wondered about the previous lives of his master. As if reading his mind, Shar Kalden Gyatso sang, “In case you don't know me, I am the great cotton-clad.”¹⁰⁸ This was directly quoted from the songs of Milarepa who, on a few occasions, sang these two lines in conversations with his

¹⁰⁵ Byang chub mi la (1999), 89: *mi tshos rong bo bka' bcu ba 'das song ba'i shul na mang ja zhig skol rgyu yang mi 'dug zer ba zhig byung na nga'i blo kha rdzogs pa yin.*

¹⁰⁶ Byang chub mi la (1999), 54.

¹⁰⁷ It refers to a historic retreat site in Rgan gya.

¹⁰⁸ Byang chub mi la (1999), 40: *mi nga ngo khyod kyis ma shes na/ nga ni mi la ras chen yin.*

audience.¹⁰⁹ Kalden Gyatso experienced many visions including that of Milarepa and Marpa (*mar pa*)¹¹⁰ while there. Later, he built a retreat community at Nyagong Drakar and appointed his disciple Tsheten Gyatso (*tshe brtan rgya mtsho*, b. seventeenth century) as the leader of the retreat community and urged his patrons in the area to support the retreat center.¹¹¹ It is important to note that his teacher, Chowa Rinpoche, was widely recognized as the reincarnation of Milarepa. This was, in turn, largely thanks to Shar Kalden Gyatso's earnest cultivation of Chowa Rinpoche's image as Milarepa.¹¹²

Shar Kalden Gyatso's retreat life is also characterized by his singing practice, as is common in the lives of many retreat masters in Tibet. Kalden Gyatso sang songs composed by his lineage masters.¹¹³ It was not just songs of Milarepa that single-handedly inspired his own singing during retreat life. Biographies and songs of his own Geluk lineage masters were also instrumental in his singing practice during retreats.¹¹⁴ As mentioned previously, in his corpus of work, there is a huge collection of songs. Impressed with his feat as an established yogin, Jamyang Zhepa Ngakwang Tsondru (*'jam dbyangs bzhad pa ngag dbang brtson 'grus*, 1648-1722; henceforth Jamyang Zhepa), the founder of Amdo's premier Geluk learning institute,

¹⁰⁹ Rus pa'i rgyan can, *Rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug chen po mi la ras pa'i rnam mgur* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009), 207, 318.

¹¹⁰ On the life of Mar pa, see Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 141-148.¹¹¹ Byang chub mi la (1999), 41; For a brief history of the site, see Hor gtsang 'jigs med, Hor gtsang 'jigs med, *Mdo smad lo rgyus chen mo*, vol. 6 (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archive, 2009): 431-431.

¹¹¹ Byang chub mi la (1999), 41; For a brief history of the site, see Hor gtsang 'jigs med, Hor gtsang 'jigs med, *Mdo smad lo rgyus chen mo*, vol. 6 (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archive, 2009): 431-431.

¹¹² For extensive discussions of Chos ba rin po che's identification with Mi la ras pa, see Sujata (2005), 48-55. She also discusses Shar Kalden Gyatso's connection with Milarepa, which is, however, inadequate. See *Ibid.*, 56-59.

¹¹³ Byang chub mi la (1999), 66: *bka' brgyud kyi bla ma rnams kyis gsung mgur mang po yang rje rang nyid kyis mgur rta la bskyon nas 'then pa dang gzhan la'ang 'then du 'jug pa gnam*.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68: *khyad par du rje btsun tsong kha ba yab sras kyis gsung rab rnams dang/ bka' gdams brgyud kyis bla ma rnams kyis rnam thar dang mgur ma sogs la dpe gzigs rgyun du gnan*.

Labrang Monastery, and main author of the new Gomang text manuals, highly praised his songs as important instructions in retreat practice.¹¹⁵

Shar Kalden Gyatso was a highly accomplished yogin. Besides his success of instituting retreat centers, his own retreat practices at many sites cover a vast terrain of northeastern Tibet. His feat of considerable meditation practice was dwarfed only by Milarepa and Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (*zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol*, 1781-1851), the saints of the Kagyu and Nyingma schools, respectively.¹¹⁶ Many of the sites Shar Kalden Gyatso visited to undertake extensive retreats were already sacred meditation places sanctified by blessings from highly accomplished Buddhist masters, foremost being the Nyingma School's central figure, Padmasambhava. Later, many of these sites included Shar Kalden Gyatso as an important figure in the spiritual pedigree of the sites. Thus, the symbolic authority of Kalden Gyatso over many of these sacred sites was established due to the correlation between his meditation feats and the sanctity and power of these potent sites previously blessed by generations of Buddhist saints. Quintman's presentation of dialectic relationship between the sacred site and saint as well as institutions associated with one's lineage is apt here as Shar Kalden Gyatso not only appropriated the prestige accruing from his affiliation with the sacred sites blessed by previous saints of historical importance, but he also re-opened certain sites to transfer their principal affiliation to him.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, with his

¹¹⁵ 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa commented, "rgya gar chu bo gang+gA tshun na mkhas pa dang grub pa gnyis ka 'dzoms pa bla ma 'di pa lta bu med byas na'ang chog pas khong gi gsung mgur 'di tsho na bza' bzang bos dril te nga rang gi sngas mgo na bzhag nas skabs skabs la blta gin yod/ mi tsho la g.yar bo byed kyin yang med/ khyed tsho yang bla ma 'di'i gdams ngag 'di tsho nyams su longs dang des chog par 'dugagadams ngag 'di lta bu yod bzhin du nyams su mi len par gzhan du chos 'tshol ba ni/ rje sa paN gyis/ 'gro mgon sangs rgyas bzhugs bzhin du/ ston pa gzhan la gus byed pa/ yan lag brgyad ldan chu 'gram du/ ba tshwa'i khron pa rko ba yin/ zhes gsungs pa ltar 'gyur ba yin. See Byang chub mi la (1999), 56-57.

¹¹⁶ For a biographical study of Shabkar, see Rachel Pang, "The Rimé Activities of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (1781-1851)," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 29 (2014): 5-30; Rachel Pang, *Dissipating Boundaries: The Life, Song-Poems, and Non-Sectarian Paradigm of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (1781-1851)* (PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 2011).

¹¹⁷ Andrew Quintman, "Toward a Geographic Biography: Mi La Ras Pa in the Tibetan Landscape," *Numen* 55, vol. 4 (2008): 363-410.

increasing popularity and prestige, some new sites were created following his meditation retreats. However, as his primary personal seat, Tashi Kyil was made the center of the network of these retreat sites, some of which later grew into independent lineage centers or monastic centers and benefited from affiliation with the famed lineage of Shar Kalden Gyatso.

Integration of Scholarly and Practice Traditions

Although there is no clear divide between scholastic and meditative practices of Tibetan Buddhism, from early on, the Geluk School is criticized for an alleged bias towards scholastic focus, diminishing the role of meditative practice on the spiritual path. The Geluk School faced criticisms that Geluk Buddhists are caught in an intricate web of their own intellectual constructs and thus the enlightenment experience, the goal of the entire Buddhist enterprise, is lost on them.¹¹⁸ Throughout the history of the Geluk School, a few prominent Geluk Buddhist masters displayed the virtue of undertaking extended retreats later in their lives, a feat acknowledged among Geluk followers because it is so rare among Geluk scholars. Even though they won the epithets of scholar-yogin/yogin, they are more commonly defined as philosophically-minded people. Scholar-yogins are a privileged minority within the Geluk community overall when compared with the number of scholars its monastic centers have produced.¹¹⁹ Even though,

¹¹⁸ For example, as a critique of the scholastic tradition, in the majority of songs of Mi la ras pa, meditator (*sgom pa*) is valorized against philosopher (*mtshan nyid pa*), scholar (*mkhas pa*), or explainer (*ston pa*). See Rus pa'i rgyan can (2009).

¹¹⁹ See Georges Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003): 168-169.

Tsongkhapa undertook extensive retreats later in his life, he is still known as a great philosopher outside the Geluk School.¹²⁰

The existing model of spiritual training in Central Tibet comprised three major seats leading as the scholastic schools and two tantric colleges designed for post-scholastic study of related tantric teachings and meditative practices. However, in reality because scholars are highly valued, scholastic training and meditative practices were rarely treated as two equally important wings. A small percentage of learned scholars actually engaged in retreat practices. Overall their scholastic focus dominated their lives. To counter criticisms by non-Geluk followers, the Geluks themselves proposed joining study and practice in two successive phases on the spiritual path.¹²¹ This is, however, mostly a rhetoric strategy on the part of the Geluk School. It is not the case that Geluk followers are concerned with meditative practice as much as with scholastic training. In modern scholarship, debates over scholasticism versus meditation always have Geluk and Nyingma schools representing the two polarized ends. Dreyfus observes that the difference between Buddhist schools in Tibet lies not in practice, but rather whether or not these schools situate their practices in a predominantly tantric world.¹²² However, I argue that the Nyingma School is more concerned with meditative practice because of their focus on tantric teachings. It also has closely to do with the Nyingma School being open to even beginners embarking on tantric study and practice as suggested by Dreyfus.¹²³ Over the past years, during my field work, I have encountered numerous learned geshes teaching at major Geluk monasteries in Amdo and abroad. They readily confide that they lack tantric study, hence their little experience with

¹²⁰ According to many Geluk scholars I met during my fieldwork, it is believed that the writing agenda of Tsongkhapa (*tsong kha pa*)'s short spiritual autobiography is to demonstrate his feats in meditative practice in addition to his fame as one of the best minds of the day in Tibet.

¹²¹ See Dreyfus (2003), 165-170.

¹²² Ibid., 181.

¹²³ Ibid.

meditative practices. Those who did practice any form of meditation rarely performed *mind training* (*blo sbyong*) or *generation of mind* (*sems bskyed*). Even in seventeenth century Tibet, precisely because of the heavy focus on tantric practice by Shar Kalden Gyatso upon his departure from Central Tibet, his career shifted towards intense retreat.

While in Central Tibet, Shar Kalden Gyatso was trained in the heavily philosophical teachings, barely touching on tantric teachings. Biographer Zhangchub Mila mentions at some point that he was enrolled in the Lower Tantric College,¹²⁴ which was probably after completing his Kachu degree. After obtaining this degree, he stayed on in Central Tibet for a year. He was first a scholar trained in the scholastic tradition of the Geluk School as evidenced by his scholarly title, Kachu. However, after his return to Amdo, his training shifted its focus to the learning of tantric Buddhist teachings from his teachers in Amdo. Who and what influenced him to take up an extensive retreat life? The nature of tantric teachings prompted him to an intense retreat life in his post-Central Tibet career. It is also obvious that the teacher-student relationship had an important influence on the young Shar Kalden Gyatso's religious career.¹²⁵ However, this statement needs further justification. Although nearly all his major teachers had extensive retreat experience, the important Geluk teachers in his life were Geluk scholars par excellence with some playing major political roles. It is difficult to paint them as role models for retreat practitioners. However, they were, at least in Shar Kalden Gyatso's eyes.

The non-Geluk schools, except for the scholastic-oriented Sakya School, emphasized the value of meditative practice over scholasticism on the spiritual path to enlightenment, although the situation changed much later.¹²⁶ Even though both Geluk and non-Geluk advocates claimed

¹²⁴ Byang chub mi la (1999), 14.

¹²⁵ Ibid.: *sngags zab mo'i slob gnyer ma byas kyang/ dpal bstan 'dzin blo bzang yab sras kyis/ chos rdo rje theg pa'i sgor bcug nas*.

¹²⁶ See Ronis (2009), 252.

flaws and deficiencies in the other's lineage, a fair reassessment of their relational boundary is that non-Geluk lineages are not entirely practice-oriented and Geluk lineages are not entirely scholastic-minded. What separates them is the degree to which the emphasis placed on practice or scholastic training.

It is remarkable that as a renowned scholar, Shar Kalden Gyatso led a successful retreat life, a departure from a predictable religious career for a scholar of high standard in Buddhist learning. His desire to devote his life to retreat practices is even more heightened by his opposition to the idea of Chowa Rinpoche's attempts to encourage him to found a philosophical college that he should manage. According to Jikme Damchoe Gyatso, Shar Kalden Gyatso refused when Chowa Rinpoche first proposed that he establish a scholastic system. However, partly due to visions around this time, Shar Kalden Gyatso was only convinced when Chowa Rinpoche said that the first step should be the establishment of a scholastic college that would benefit the entire dharma continuity. Given this context, the meaning was probably that the philosophical program should be the first step followed by retreat practices.

The normative Geluk view is that only after grounding in Buddhist philosophical tradition after many years of study and debate, can one move on to actually put these teachings into practice. In fact, retreat practices are taken by only a tiny percentage of mostly senior Geluk monks. Meaningful integration of scholasticism and practice is precisely what makes Shar Kalden Gyatso and his brother Chowa Rinpoche stand out among fellow Geluk masters over the many centuries of Geluk history.

In Central Tibet, the major Geluk monasteries are known for their rigorous curriculum system for scholastic training, hence its success in producing scholars of high caliber to carry on a continuous vibrant scholastic tradition. For the world of Geluk Buddhists, scholastic tradition is

the key to success and it is the most crucial phase actually relegating the role of practice. However, keep in mind that only a fraction of the monastic population in Geluk monasteries trained as text scholars. The majority were tasked with ritual obligations and day-to-day operations of the monastic institutions. That said, in the major monasteries, especially three Geluk seats—Sera, Drepung, and Ganden—scholastic focus is the major trait of monastic life. Theoretically, meditative practice is deemed an important component of one’s Buddhist career on a par with scholastic training. In reality, only an elite minority actually embody such Buddhist values as pairing of scholastic training and meditative practice in their religious life.

It is surely a major goal of Zhangchub Mila’s biographical project to address the Buddhist ideals represented by the religious career of Shar Kalden Gyatso. The subtitles for the three sections lead one to immediately consider the wording of these titles as more or less paraphrases of the following verse:

At the beginning, [I] pursued extensively the vast listening.

In the middle, all theories are understood as instructions.

At the end, [I] took into practice all day and night.¹²⁷

This widely quoted verse from Tsongkhapa’s brief autobiography, *Spiritual Narrative of Excellent Aspiration* (*rtogs brjod ‘dun legs ma*),¹²⁸ explains the Buddhist model of encapsulating the three main aspects of an entire Buddhist career—listening, thinking, and meditating—that can be put again under the general twofold rubrics of scholasticism and practice embodying the religious career of Tsongkhapa, a model to follow for later generations of his lineage

¹²⁷ *dang po rgya chen thos pa mang du btsal/ bar du gzhungs lugs thams cad gdams par shar/ tha mar nyi mtshan kun tu nyams su blang.*

¹²⁸ See Blo bzang grags pa'i dpal, *Rtogs brjod 'dun legs ma*, In *Dge lugs pa'i chos spyod phyogs bsgrigs* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1995): 96-100..

followers.¹²⁹ As outlined in the biography, Shar Kalden Gyatso's career is comprised of two major phases of scholastic training and intensive practice. In the title of the biography, the author strives to create in the choice of wording, an image of Shar Kalden Gyatso as a Buddhist retreat master and the great charioteer of practice tradition (*sgrub brgyud kyi shing rta chen po*). The biography's title, which was usually reserved for the founding fathers of Indian Buddhism such as Nagarjuna, in addressing Shar Kalden Gyatso is evidence of his unusual success as a yogin compared to his fellow Geluk monks. It also emphasizes recognition from among his lineage followers. These contentions are strengthened when we realize that the biographer and his lineage followers address him either with the epithet above or the custodian of the practice tradition of Buddhism in Amdo (*mdo smad sgrub rgyud kyi bstan pa'i bdag po*). Nonetheless, many instances in the biography resist portraying Shar Kalden Gyatso as either a scholar or meditator. He was, instead, recast as a role model representing the ideals of a career meaningfully integrating scholastic and meditative practices beyond the normative Geluk tradition and much of its rhetoric.

Reading his brief history of the Geluk School in Amdo, we learn that Shar Kalden Gyatso's presentation of Geluk history is defined by its chronological focus on the establishment of scholastic and retreat centers.¹³⁰ After listing who was who among important Geluk masters instrumental for Geluk development in Amdo, the bulk of the account is another list of major monasteries founded over time with particular attention to the founding of their scholastic centers and independent retreat sites as well as their founders. In other words, his Geluk history treats scholastic and retreat traditions of Geluk School equally. One can hardly miss his agenda

¹²⁹ For a discussion of the threefold-model in relation to the life of Tsongkhapa, see Dreyfus (2003), 167, 177-179.

¹³⁰ This important short history has recently been translated in Chinese. See Dawalacuo and Laxianjia, "Anduo diqi fofa chuanbo shilue yikao," *Zhongguo zangxue*, vol. 4 (2017): 184-193.

”

of presenting a Geluk history in terms of both scholastic and practice, another indicator of his peculiar orientation of religious career integrating two seemingly polarized aspects of Buddhism.

A quick look at the collection of songs of Shar Kalden Gyatso gives the impression that Shar Kalden Gyatso is a retreat practitioner promoting the ideals of retreat practices. Primarily, he minimizes the role of scholastic training in the Buddhist path towards enlightenment. Echoing his inspirational model Milarepa, Shar Kalden Gyatso goes to an extreme by branding scholasticism and any institutional structures of Buddhism as obstacles in one's religious life.¹³¹

At the hermitage of Tashi Khyil, he sang,

Home villages and monasteries are prisons of demons.

Nephew and monk disciples are obstacles to virtue.¹³²

At the hermitage of Gnya' gong brag dkar, he also sang,

Meditation instructions that do not enjoin [one] with the inner—mind,

and externally-oriented lecture, debate, and composition

are not beneficial for this present life.

Yogin, do not let your mind deviate from the dharma.¹³³

In Tibetan Buddhist auto/biographies, the tension embedded in the lives of the subjects of the auto/biographies as well as transmissions of teachings are conveyed through visions, dreams, and encounters with supernatural beings. Sarah Jacob in studying the life of Sera Khandro, focuses on multivalent conversations with mostly dakinis in visions as reflecting conflicted interests regarding major decisions in the religious career of Sera Khandro, who finds a solution to

¹³¹ Mi la ras pa in the life and songs compiled by Rus pa'i rgyan can consistently stand at the extreme end of practice and preaches total rejection of any scholastic role in one's spiritual path. Mi la ras pa deems scholasticism as a hurdle to one's spiritual progress.

¹³² Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1994), 158: *yul sde dgon bdud kyi btson ra yin/ dbon grwa slob dge ba'i bar chad yin.*

¹³³ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1994), 93: *nang sems la mi sbyor sgom khrid dang/ kha phyi bltas 'chad rtsod rtsom gyis/ tshe 'di phyir phan thabs mi 'dug pas/ blo dred por ma gtong ri khrod pa.*

navigate the complexity of her religious life while facing tremendous hardships and obstacles on her spiritual path. Her conversation within and perhaps with visions themselves inform her choices of religious practice and the direction of the religious career she leads.¹³⁴ Similar conversations take place in the retreat life of Shar Kalden Gyatso, but his internal dialogue was conducted between himself at one end and honeybees and lice on the other. For example, a bee sings a song critical of Shar Kalden Gyatso's practice:

The essence of dharma is about one's mind.

Unless the mind is being tamed, however one lectures the sacred dharma

They are the dharma lectures by owls.

The words do not necessarily translate to action.¹³⁵

Not confined to these peculiar songs, the tension between practice and scholasticism is a major recurring theme and the focus in the majority of his songs. These songs are a discursive site where he weighs the status of dharma practice against the ideals of a model for a religious career. They immediately invoke Milarepa's valorization of yogins over scholars in the collection of his songs. Shar Kalden Gyatso's songs closely conform to the ethos of siddha culture represented in the songs by Milarepa, who is a major role model for all Tibetan Buddhists, regardless of their sectarian affiliation, brought alive by its biographical tradition, especially the work of the fifteenth century Kagyu master Rupe Gyanjen (*rus pa'i rgyan can*, 1452-1507).¹³⁶ There is, however, a major difference separating Shar Kalden Gyatso from the figure of Milarepa and religious persona the latter represented in the songs compiled by

¹³⁴ See Sarah Jacoby, *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 131-187.

¹³⁵ Shar skal Idan rgya mtsho (1994), 64: *chos kyi rtsa ba rang gi sems la thug/ sems nyid ma thul bar du dam pa'i chos/ ji tsam bshad kyang ne tsos chos bshad yin/ kha bshad thog tu khel ba mi gda'o.*

¹³⁶ His actual name is Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan. For a study of his life, see David DiValerio, *The Holy Madmen of Tibet*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 30-38.

Tsangmyon Heruka. While the rhetoric of practice as the ideal religious career dominates the collection of songs by Shar Kalden Gyatsho, upon closer inspection, a major concern is scholastic training. He sings the following as if addressing beginners.

Especially, those bright ones attending dharma institutions,
 Now, please go to Central Tibet, the upper land,
 and immerse yourselves in the listening and thinking of dharma.
 I will go to a solitary place without having a second thought.
 Those youths who cannot afford to travel far because of their youth,
 but aspire to listen and think,
 Go to any dharma institution in Amdo as you like.
 I am going to a faraway, solitary hermitage¹³⁷

At another point, he sings while addressing a disciple:

I myself have engaged in listening and thinking since I was young.
 I worked on lecture, debate, and composition during my youth.
 Now, after listening and thinking,
 I think of devoting my life to practice.
 Son, you are also a son trained by me.
 You have previously engaged in listening for a long time,
 but you shall still undertake listening and thinking of the dharma.
 And devote yourself mainly to meditation practice afterwards.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1994), 161-162: *sgos chos kyi grwar zhugs blo gsal rnams/ stod dbus gtsang phyogs su da song la/ chos thos bsam gnyis la nan tan 'tshal/ nga yid gnyis med par dben par 'gro/ na gzhon pas thag ring mi bgrod pa'i/ lo gzhon nu thos bsam 'dod pa rnams/ yul mdo smad kyi chos grwa gang dgar song/ nga thag ring gi ri khrod dgon par 'gro.*

¹³⁸ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1994), 50: *mi kho bos chung nas thos bsam byas/ na gzhon ring 'chad rtsod rtsom la 'bad/ da thos bsam byas pa'i don 'bras la/ tshe blos btang sgrub pa lhur len snyam/ bu khyod kyang kho bos*

Unlike Milarepa, who advised against any scholastic training or even deems it an obstacle on the spiritual path, Shar Kalden Gyatso holds that scholastic practice is equally important as one's intense meditation as he himself embodies. He instructs his followers to engage in listening and thinking in Central Tibet. For those unable to make a trip because of their youth, training at any learning center in their native region of Amdo should be undertaken. As he first engaged in intellectual training followed by his intensive retreat practices, followers should emulate his own religious career. He emphasizes intellectual education before undertaking retreat practices as typically understood in the Geluk School as indicated in the following song:

Unless you cut off impositions with external listening and thinking,
How do you master the steps of inner practice?¹³⁹

It is clear that integration of study and practice should constitute one's entire religious career, as indicated in the following song:

The meaning of the contents in the three baskets of scriptures
should be practiced by the path of the three trainings.
Without efforts for integrating them as one deed,
How will one escape the cyclic realm?¹⁴⁰

At least in one instance, in his collection of songs, we clearly see great importance attached to the scholastic college and its continued existence:

Due to my very old age,

bskyangs pa'i bu/ sngar thos la ring sbyang da dung yang / chos thos bsam byed la don gnyer gyis/ phyis sgom sgrub gtso bor byed par zhu.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 101-102: *phyi thos bsam gyis sgro 'dogs ma bcad na/ nang nyams len rim pa ji ltar shes.*

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 27: *lung sde snod gsum gyi brjod bya'i don/ lam bslab pa gsum gyi nyams len la/ las gcig dril lta bur ma 'bad na/ gnas 'khor ba 'di las ga la thar.*

I am not able to shoulder the responsibilities imposed by religious and worldly affairs.

[Now that] I am not up to that task,

who shall look after the monastic college?

The cohort of young geshe, my disciples and followers,

Look after the monastic college as best as you can.

How cheerful it would be if it exists for the next few years!

How joyful it would be if it exists for the next few years!¹⁴¹

Here, *dratsang* is a generic term for monastic college, but in this context it refers to the scholastic college. When his teacher advised Chowa Rinpoche to establish a *dratsang*, it might also allude to a scholastic college. Chowa Rinpoche would, however, relegate the task to his brother Shar Kalden Gyatso, who was highly trained in Central Tibet.

Although his biography tries to portray him more as a practitioner, paradox emerges in a few instances. In addition to his place as a yogin, he is also presented as model scholar committed to life-long learning and commitment to study and further training in Buddhist philosophical tradition. Therefore, it is not unusual that he repeatedly exhorted and encouraged his disciples to seriously undertake study. Later, in his life (at the age of either 68 or 69), he was quoted as saying, “For sixty years, beginning at the age of eleven or twelve until the age of seventy, I have never abandoned scholastic training. Only then, have I comprehended the meaning of the words of the victor. The first half of one’s life is not enough for scholastic training. It is necessary to spend the second half of one’s life as well on this. Especially, if one

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 200: *lo lon cing shin tu rgas pa 'dis/ chos 'jig rten gyi khur 'di 'khur ma nus/ de ma nus grwa tshang gang gis skyong/ bu rjes 'jug kha gzhon dge bshes tshogs/ rang gang nus kyis grwa tshang 'dzin skyong gyis/ 'di lo shas gnas na dga' ba la/ 'di lo shas gnas na skyid pa la.*

dies with an accompanying mental imprint from scholastic learning, it can be added to scholastic learning in the next life and so is called add-up.”¹⁴² Immediately afterwards, Shar Kalden Gyatsho recites two verses from Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen (*sa skya paNDi ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan*, 1182-1251),¹⁴³

“Even during very old age,
Learning shall be increasingly accumulated.
Learning is beneficial for the next life.
Generosity will never benefit at all.

One shall learn knowledge even if one is going to die the next morning.
Even if one does not become a scholar in this life
Since knowledge is transferred to your next life
It is like retrieving your treasure.”¹⁴⁴

Shar Kalden Gyatso was thus the typical model of a scholar trained in the Geluk School.

While the dominant voice in the biography and songs advocates the ideals of a meditator, paradoxically, we are also presented with his ideals of a scholar. How do we make sense of the

¹⁴² Byang chub mi la (1999), 68: *ngas lo bcu gcig bcu gnyis nas bdun cu'i bar lo drug cu'i ring la slob gnyer dang ma bral bar byas pas da gzod rgyal ba'i gsung rab kyi don go ba zhig byung/ lags tshe stod la slob gnyer cig byas pa gcig bus mi chog tshe smad la'ang dgos pa yin/ lhag par 'chi khar slob gnyer gi bag chags dang 'grogs nas song na phyi ma'i slob gnyer dang bsre thub pa 'a'abyung bas de la bsre ba zer ba yin.*

¹⁴³For a survey of his life and work, see Jared Rhoton and Victoria Scott, trans, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes: Essential Distinctions among the Individual Liberation, Great Vehicle, and Tantric Systems: the Sdom gsum rab dbye and Six Letters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002): 3-38.

¹⁴⁴ Byang chub mi la (1999), 68: *shin tu rgas par gyur tshe'ang/ thos pa mang du bsag par bya/ phyi mar thos pas phan pa tsam/ sbyin pa yis kyang ga la phan; rig pa nang bar 'chi yang slob/ tshe 'dir mkhas pa mi srid kyang/ skye ba phyi mar bcol ba yi/ nor la rang nyid len pa 'dra.* The two stanzas are from independent sources. See Sa skya paNDi ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan, *Sa skya legs bshad* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2015): 5; Although Byang chub mi la identifies Sa skya paNDi ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan's *Gzhung bshad legs bzhad* as the source for the second stanza, I am unable to locate the stanza in it. See Sa skya paNDi ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan, *Gzhung bshad legs bzhad*, In *Kun dga' rgyal mtshan gyi gsung 'bum dpe bsdur ma*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007).

apparent tension in his presentations of ideals of the scholar on one end and the meditator on the other? Did his songs and biography target one homogenous audience? Are they intended for a variety of audiences? My scrutiny of colophon notes for songs indicate he did not give ambiguous or conflicting messages to his disciples. I argue that they were, instead, teachings given in particular contexts targeting a variety of audiences. In his collected songs, twenty-five songs have colophon notes, indicating they are primarily advice given to individuals or individual groups. They must, therefore, be understood on a case-by-case basis.

The Buddha gave teachings at different levels, depending on the level of understanding of his audience, and Shar Kalden Gyatso does the same here. Among his disciples, he urged those yet to embark on study and debate to undertake training. Those who had completed philosophical training, but had not yet taken up meditative practice, he encouraged them to do so. It is tempting to think that Shar Kalden Gyatso lays out a template of a religious career of scholastic life followed by intense meditation. However, it is not the case that after completing scholastic study, one is entirely devoted to meditative practice. As indicated in the preceding page, even after completing the entire exoteric curriculum, undertaking meditative practice does not mean scholasticism and practice are mutually exclusive. Rather, they should go hand in hand.

Shar Kalden Gyatso does not hold the extreme view of holding ideals requiring engagement in the entire range of both exoteric and esoteric teachings for life. At one point, he sings,

“The hermit who doesn’t know a lot.

As long as the hermit’s mind is with dharma, it is a joyous thing.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1994), 248: *mang po mi shes bya bral de/ sems chos dang mthun na gar yang skyid*.

Thus, he makes do with one's training in select teachings as long as one's practice of the teachings is effective and truthful. And he also sang in many instances to the effect that extensive listening of dharma is not useful, but it is important to tame the mind.¹⁴⁶ While he truly believes in substance over form, this is likely a strategy to attract and turn his disciples towards meaningful practice rather than imposition of requirements for beginners on the spiritual path.

Relationship between Patron and Priest

The Geluk School was a latecomer on the religious landscape of Tibet with the foundation of its first major monasteries only in the early fifteenth century. Though the Geluk School has continued to mint highly learned scholars since its inception, it was not the dominant Buddhist school in Tibet until around the mid-seventeenth century, especially when the fifth Dalai Lama consolidated his political and religious power in the form of the Ganden Government, first housed in Drepung Monastery. The meteoric rise of the Geluk School owes its prominent position in Tibet to support from the Mongols.

The first historic Mongol-Geluk relationship traces to the late sixteenth century when the third Dalai Lama and Altan Khan met in Amdo. Afterwards, due to the strong presence of the Mongols in Amdo, the Geluk School had great success in quickly influencing the region dominated by Ordos and Tumed Mongols. During this period, much patronage from Da'i ching chu khur, a Mongol leader based in Amdo and committed to Rongwo Monastery, marked the monastery's crucial moment of growth as a Geluk institution. Subsequently, when Shar Kalden Gyatso was leading Rongwo Monastery, he had a relationship with the leader of Tumed

¹⁴⁶ For examples, see *Ibid.*, 28, 41, 64, 72-73.

Mongols, Tumed Qolochi. However, the principal Mongol patron of Shar Kalden Gyatso and Rongwo Monastery was Dargyal Pohoktu (*dar gyal po hog thu*, b. seventeenth century),¹⁴⁷ the most powerful contemporary Mongol ruler based to the south of Rebgong.

The *Religious History of Rebgong* and the *Religious History of Amdo* (the latter uses the former as a source) provide few, yet very important details of the first Mongol-Rongwo relationship. According to these sources, *Nangso* Guru established a close relationship with the Mongol leader, Deching Chukhur (*da'i ching chu khur*, b. sixteenth century), who commissioned in gold lettering the collection of teachings designated as the word of the Buddha (*kagyur, bka' gyur*). In 1605, a new assembly hall was also set up under the supervision of Yerwa Choje (*yer ba chos rje*, u.d.). In the same year, Deching Chukhur tasked Arik Choje (*a rig chos rje*, u.d.) to recruit monks from throughout Rebgong. A series of rebuilding projects also took place, including crafting of the Buddhas of the Three Times (*dus gsum sangs rgyas*), a stupa, and more importantly, a thousand *thangka* (*thang kha*) images¹⁴⁸ of Tsongkhapa drawn in gold lettering (*gser thang stong sku*).¹⁴⁹ Therefore, it is very likely that Geluk influence had already reached Rongwo Monastery, whose continued growth was heavily dependent on the support of their Mongol patron. I was unable to locate any source that would help identify this Mongol patron or these two Tibetan masters. However, this Mongol patron was probably the same Chokhur (*cho khur*) of the Khalkha (*hal ha*) Mongol who supported the Geluk School and fought against the Tsang Army in 1617, the year before the fifth Dalai Lama was born.¹⁵⁰ The fact that the Mongols

¹⁴⁷ He is the Mongol lord who moved his Qoshud (*kho sho*) Mongol subjects to settle in his future domain, to the south of Rebgong, whose adjacent area was already inhabited by Tumed (*thu med*) Mongols. See Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 249.

¹⁴⁸ Tibetan Buddhist paintings on fabric, usually depicting deities and mandalas.

¹⁴⁹ 'Jigs med lung rigs rgya mtsho (2010), 7-8.

¹⁵⁰ Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1997): 575. His military assistance was provided when the Geluk patron and ruler of Lhasa Valley Skyid shod sde pa bsod nams rnam gyal previously promised him the most cherished image of Lokeshvara (*lo ke sha ra*). However, it seems he won the war that year, but was defeated the following year when

based in Amdo by the 1630s fully committed to support the Geluk School is probably a major factor causing the Geluk conversion of Rongwo Monastery. This is obvious if the monastery leaders voluntarily chose the Geluk School in the face of Geluk influence sweeping across Amdo under the auspices of the Mongols.

I have been careful with using ‘conversion’ in the context of the Geluk development of the scholastic tradition as initiated by Shar Kalden Gyatso. However, the Geluk conversion of Rongwo Monastery has been solely attributed to Shar Kalden Gyatso with the foundation of his scholastic program in modern scholarship on Buddhist monastic history in Amdo. Western scholarship has some sense of reservation about such claims. Instead, we read careful statements that Shar Kalden Gyatso’s establishment of the scholastic center marks the ‘definitive conversion’ of Rongwo Monastery. This implies that Rongwo Monastery was already partially integrated into the Geluk School prior to the foundation of the scholastic program.¹⁵¹

According to modern scholar Dorje Gyal (*rdo rje rgyal*)¹⁵² and Jikme Samdrup (*jigs med bsam ‘grub*),¹⁵³ the Geluk conversion was, however, attributed to the successful propagation of Geluk teachings, especially institution of the ritual tradition in memory of the passing away of Geluk founder, Tsongkhapa, and strict monastic regulatory system, by Chowa Rinpoche in 1608, the same year he returned to Rebgong from five years of training in Central Tibet. Both scholars interpret relevant vague verse as Chowa Rinpoche establishing anew the ritual tradition.¹⁵⁴

the Gtsang Army attacked in full force. See *Ibid.*, 574; Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 30. The same Khalkha Mongol patron’s name is alternatively spelled Chos khur. See *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Tuttle (1992), 136n 2.

¹⁵² Rdo rje rgyal: Dorje Gyal.

¹⁵³ ‘Jigs med bsam ‘grub: Jikme Samdrup.

¹⁵⁴ Rdo rje rgyal, *Reb-gong gnas skor deb ther* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2011): 133; ‘Jigs med bsam ‘grub, *Mdo smad reb gong lo rgyus chen mo ngo mtshar gtam gyi bang mdzod*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2013): 315; Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1999), vol. 1: 105; ‘Jigs med bsam ‘grub somehow dates 1607 as the year of Chos ba rin po che’s return to Rebgong which is surely an error when calculating and converting the traditional Tibetan calendar year to the common era year.

However, it remains to be understood if Chowa Rinpoche was establishing or simply reviving the monastery's liturgical system. It must be noted, however, that the assumption of Chowa Rinpoche's success in instituting a ritual system does not necessarily amount to the Geluk conversion of the monastery.

The biographies of Shar Kalden Gyatso and Chowa Rinpoche and the two major local histories mentioned above, do not claim that the foundation of the scholastic program indicated conversion of Rongwo Monastery in any sense of the word. In fact, they are silent on the sectarian transition from the Sakya to Geluk School, but not because they are deliberately avoiding mention of the transition of sectarian identity. It is secondary literature that makes the claim that the leadership role of Shar Kalden Gyatso, or Chowa Rinpoche at Rongwo Moanstery, marked its conversion. Consequently, I argue that Rongwo Monastery was more likely already a thorough Geluk Monastery because: 1) The Mongol patron who committed resources to rebuilding and expanding Rongwo Monastery was a major proponent of the Geluk School; 2) The Mongols based in Amdo fully supported the Geluk School from 1578 onwards, with an exception of the period between 1634-1637;¹⁵⁵ 3) A thousand images of Tsongkhapa, the founder of Geluk Buddhism, were crafted in gold lettering; 4) The early resources never mention any sort of conversion Rongwo Monastery experienced during the life of Shar Kalden Gyatso; 5) It is only modern scholarship that makes first assertion that Shar Kalden Gyatso's formulation of the scholastic program ushers in the Geluk conversion of Rongwo Monastery, a claim that secondary literature in English conforms to and repeats without further scrutiny of such statements on the basis of comparison of early and modern sources.

¹⁵⁵ Tuttle (2012), 134, 136; Ye shes dpal 'byor, *Mtsho sngon gyi lo rgyus* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1982), 9, 11-13.

Shar Kalden Gyatso was a great scholar and yogin, but this does not preclude him from enacting multiple roles such as institution builder, or priest giving teachings and performing rituals to secular rulers. Early in his life after completion of his Kachu degree, Shar Kalden Gyatso was ready to leave his monastery in Central Tibet for Amdo. Early on with the dominance of Tibet by the Mongols after formation of the patron-priest relationship between the third Dalai Lama and Altan Khan,¹⁵⁶ there was a high demand among the Mongols for highly achieved Geluk monks as their priests to give initiations and perform rituals. This was especially so for Lhasa-trained Amdo scholars upon their return to their homeland characterized by a strong presence of Mongol princes, especially in the Kokonor area.

The wide perception of the Mongols at that time was negative. According to Jikme Damchoe Gyatso, serving as a private priest for a Mongol local ruler kept a charismatic scholar and leader from better rendering service to the growth of dharma in northeastern Tibet far from the center of the Geluk School in Central Tibet. For that matter, right before Shar Kalden Gyatso's departure from Central Tibet, his teacher, Gyalrong Tenpa Dargye (*rgyal rong bstan pa dar rgyas*, u.d.), instructed him three times, "Don't go to the Mongol region, go to your own monastery."¹⁵⁷

Zhangchub Mila would record that Shar Kalden Gyatso left directly for Rebgong. However, Jikmed Damchoe's biography adds a twist related to his departure and return to Rebgong to found the philosophical college at Rongwo Monastery. His teacher's advice fell to

¹⁵⁶ See Okada Hidehiro, "The Third Dalai Lama and Altan Khan of the Tumed," In *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Narita 1989*, eds. Ihara Shoren and Yamaguchi Zuiho (Narita: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992): 645-652.

¹⁵⁷ Byang chub mi la (1999), 10; 'Jigs med dam chos rgyas mtsho (1997), 131: *khyed sog yul du ma 'gro bar rang gi dgon par song*.

the wind, at least for a time. Shar Kalden Gyatso was active in the Upper Mongolia (*stod sog*)¹⁵⁸ area and won popularity among his Mongol followers. However, Shar Kalden Gyatso left for Regong after a short stay because of previous advice from his teacher and Chowa Rinpoche insistence.¹⁵⁹

Starting with Shar Kalden Gyatso's role as founder and main teacher of scholastic college at Rongwo Monastery, he began very close relationships with many of the most influential Geluk teachers active in Amdo. With his increasingly high stature, Shar Kalden Gyatso was also priest to a number of Tibetan and Mongol leaders in Amdo. Two prominent Mongol lords—Qoloci and Dargye Pohoktu—appear in his life.

In the biography of Shar Kalden Gyatso written by Zhangchub Mila, there were three meetings between Shar Kalden Gyatso and Qoloci. However, the biography limits us to very few details and tells us little about anything else. During the first meeting, Shar Kalden Gyatso was offered ten gold coins. The biographer quotes the Mongol lord on that occasion as saying, “I wholeheartedly repent that I didn’t revere you as a lama before and that I made you feel irritated or upset.”¹⁶⁰ Their second meeting took place on the occasion of Junang inviting Rgyal sras bstan ‘dzin blo bzang from the Kokonor region. Shar Kalden Gyatso’s primary goal on this trip was to visit Gyalse Lozang Tendzin, who would give him important teachings on Geluk Mahamudra (*dge lugs phyag chen*).¹⁶¹ Their final meeting was when both Dargyal Pohoktu and Qoloci invited him to their domain. The nature of this visit is unknown.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ It refers to the Kokonor region inhabited by the Mongols. See Bod rang ljongs srid gros lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha u yon lhan khang. *Bod kyi rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs*, vol. 20 (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1998), 318.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 132.

¹⁶⁰ Byang chub mi la (1999), 28: *bdag gis sngon chad khyed bla mar ma bzung ba dang/ bka' bcag thugs dkrugs pa snying nas bshag*.

¹⁶¹ Byang chub mi la (1999), 42.

¹⁶² Ibid., 46.

The Tumed Mongols led by Qoloci (*kho li chi*, u.d.) dominated the Kokonor region.¹⁶³ After defeat by Tsogtu Taiji (*chog thu the ji*), they settled in Damkhok (*'dam khog*)¹⁶⁴ and continued communicating with the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama. They then moved and occupied Dzoge Lindul (*mdzod dge gling 'dul*) area in Amdo. After the arrival of Daryge Pohoktu, in the neighboring area of Tsebal (*rtse 'bal*), Qoloci's subjects seem dispersed into many groups.¹⁶⁵ Despite his prominent role in the decades preceding the short-lived rule of the Kokonor area by Tsogtu Taiji, Tumed Qoloci then preserved very limited power in later time such that his status as a Mongol lord was inconsequential to the growth of Rongwo Monastery, at least according to sources now available.

A grandson of Gushi Khan, Dargyal Pohoktu, was the most important Mongol ruler supporting Shar Kalden Gyatso and Rongwo Monastery. After moving to his future domain, he quickly controlled a greater portion of Amdo, including all of Rebgong.¹⁶⁶ He consolidated his base by inheriting power from his own brother, Mkha' 'gro blo bzang bstan skyong, who was once the most powerful Mongol ruler in Kham. While based in Dzchu Kha (*rdza chu kha*) in Kham, Khadro Tenkyong (*mkha' 'gro bstan skyong*) converted to the Nyingma School. As a result, the Mongol princes in the Kokonor Region who were staunch defenders of the Geluk School, attacked and killed him. His brother Dargyal Pohoktu then took over his domain. During the war between Bhutan and the Ganden Government during the reign of the fifth Dalai Lama,

¹⁶³ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 31; Ye shes dpal 'byor (1982), 6; Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan (1990), 65; Ye she dpal 'byor (1990), 102.

¹⁶⁴ It is a Mongol inhabited area in Nag chu kha region.

¹⁶⁵ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 249. Sujata has reservations about Shar Kalden Gyatso's Mongol patron, Qoloci, and this important ruler of Kokonor region being the same person. See Sujata (2005), 374n 31. However, Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas seem to identify them as being the same person. See Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 31, 249.

¹⁶⁶ Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan (1990), 71-72.

Dargyal Pohoktu provided military assistance and thus recognized by the Geluk patriarch.¹⁶⁷ Baso Jedrung Ngakwang Konchok Nyima¹⁶⁸ (*ba so rje drung ngag dbang dkon mchog nyi ma*, 1653-1707) was sent by the fifth Dalai Lama to Dargyal Pohoktu's domain as a priest representing the fifth Dalai Lama.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, as a staunch defender of the Geluk School, Shar Kalden Gyatso launch of a series of efforts to build Buddhist institutions, the Mongol ruler support him and his monastic community. According to Zhangchub Mila, during the funeral service of the deceased mother of the Mongol ruler, Shar Kalden Gyatso administered the primary vow to a hundred monks offered by the Mongol ruler.¹⁷⁰ However, Jikmed Damchoe Gyatso writes that among his major contributions to Rongwo Monastery, "The great *wang* offered several hundred boys to become monks at Rongwo Monastery all together. He also pledged grain tax from farming areas towards the funds for ritual services."¹⁷¹

Given such benefits bestowed on Shar Kalden Gyatso and his monastery, I doubt the validity of Sujata's general assertion that Shar Kalden Gyatso did view the Mongols favorably.¹⁷² Her statement needs to be examined in context. It is true that his songs contain verses expressing his distrust of and frustration with the Mongols, but he is not critical of the Mongols in general. Instead, he was targeting certain Mongol groups. This is because, according to Konchok Tenpa Rapgye, after defeat of Qolochi by Choktsu, some Mongol taijis including

¹⁶⁷ He was give the title Dga' ldan Aer ng+hi bo shog thu ju nang from the fifth Dalai Lama. See Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan (1982), 73.

¹⁶⁸ He was an eminent monk active at the Qing court as well as in Mongol communities in Amdo. See Mi nyag ngon po and et al. *Rta tshag rje drung ngag dbang dkon mchog nyi ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus*, In *Gangs can mkhas dbang rim byon gyi rnam thar mdor bsdus*. vol. 1 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1996-2000): 378-384.

¹⁶⁹ Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan (1982), 73.

¹⁷⁰ Byang chub mi la (1999), 50.

¹⁷¹ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 202: *wang chen mo 'dis snga phyir rong bor Jgrwa rgyun brgya phrag mang po dang/ rong phyogs kyi nas khral rnam chos thog gi 'theb tu sbyar ba sogs*.

¹⁷² See Sujata (2005), 2-5.

Phag thar Qolochi, moved to the south of Yellow River and looted Tibetan farming communities.¹⁷³

Victims of these Mongols probably included supporting communities of Rongwo Monastery, or Tibetans in the neighboring region. This is most likely one of the reasons for his mixed feelings about the Mongols. It is highly likely that the target of his criticism was the Mongols looting Tibetans. His verbal attacks are therefore not directed at his most generous Mongol patron or the Mongols per se. In addition to the funeral service he presided over, Shar Kalden Gyatso also performed the typical role of a priest, e.g., performing ma Ni bum sgrub rituals and giving initiations as requested by the Mongol ruler. His frustration with his Mongol patrons was also probably due to much ritual demand placed on him that may have interrupted his own regime of religious practice, just as his responsibility to lead Rongwo Monastery and its scholastic college had.¹⁷⁴

Thanks to his rise as the most important Mongol ruler in Amdo, Dargyal Pohoktu was eventually promoted to the rank of *qinwang* (*qin wang*)¹⁷⁵ from *junwang* (*jun wang*).¹⁷⁶ However, Shar Kalden Gyatso's biographer was not consistent in addressing this powerful Mongol patron. For the most part, he was addressed as *junang* (*ju nang*),¹⁷⁷ but he was occasionally referred as *qinwang*.¹⁷⁸ His son Tshewang Tendzin (*tshe dbang bstan 'dzin*)¹⁷⁹ also

¹⁷³ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 31.

¹⁷⁴ For an example of bustle and hustle surrounding the patron-priest/social relationship being a hindrance to solitary religious life, see Kurtis Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess: the Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 31-33.

¹⁷⁵ *qinwang* is a Chinese term for the highest rank of office bestowed on the leaders of Mongols in the Kokonor region.

¹⁷⁶ *junwang* is a Chinese term for a political office; it is one rank lower than *qinwang*.

¹⁷⁷ *junang* is the Tibetan rendition of the Chinese term, *junwang*.

¹⁷⁸ For more on these ranks, see Sujata (2005), 374n 32.

¹⁷⁹ His alternative name is Tsha gan bstan 'dzin. Oidtmann confuses this person with his father Dar rgyal po shog thu. See Oidtmann (2014), 288. Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas clearly identifies Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin as one of the many sons of Dar rgyal po shog thu. See Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 248.

received the title *qinwang*, demonstrating his success of retaining a steady and strong power base inherited from his father, largely due to his submission to the Qing.¹⁸⁰ Rongwo retained close relationships with his successor, *Qinwang* Tendzin, who was the principal Mongol lord who supported the founding of the future Labrang monastery by Jamyang Zhepa.

The *nangso* family first founded Rongwo as a Sakya Monastery and has since supposedly been the engine behind the whole institutional development at Rongwo. However, during the time of Shar Kalden Gyatso, at least according to our available sources, Rongwo *nangso* doesn't appear prominently in the institutional history of Geluk School. The only instance where Rongwo *nangso* is mentioned is he was named Jamyang (*'jam dbyangs*), and at Rongwo he commissioned a twelve-volume set of the Perfection of Wisdom sutra written in gold. Along with one monk superintendent, Rongwo *nangso* was put in charge of overseeing the building project of the new assembly hall at Rongwo initiated by Chowa Rinpoche.¹⁸¹

With increasing fame in Amdo as the towering religious figure in the region with the ideal roles of scholar and yogin combined in one person, Shar Kalden Gyatso cemented his close relationships with Mongol patrons and courted relationships with several other local supporters. Shar Kalden Gyatso served as a ritual priest to Zhingkyong (*zhing skyong*)¹⁸² *nangso*, performing rituals on his behalf. Zhingkyong *nangso* provided major supporter to Kubum Monastery since its inception. This also partly explains the series of teachings he gave to the assembly of monks at Kubum Monastery.¹⁸³ However, his whole teaching tour and association with Zhingkyong *nangso* are probably due to his intimate relationship with his teacher, Kowa Chokyi Gyatso, the second abbot of Kubum and a very influential Geluk master in Amdo. He was also relatively

¹⁸⁰ Oidtmann (2014), 278.

¹⁸¹ Byang chub mi la (1999), 18,19.

¹⁸² It is a major clan supporting Sku 'bum Monastery.

¹⁸³ For a study of Sku 'bum Monastery, see Karsten, A Study on the Sku-'bum/T'a-erh Ssu Monastery in Ch'ng-hai.

active in Arik and Khagya areas, as well as in Kacu (*ka cu*, Lingxia).¹⁸⁴ The biography is explicit that he was sponsored by local lay patrons during trips when he performed ritual services.

Shar Kalden Gyatso's Non-Sectarian Approach

Prior to the founding of a scholastic college at Rongwo Monastery, it is likely that there was not a single learning institute on a systematic basis in the Rebgong area. Nyingma and Bon existed alongside each other without an institutional basis. Both Bon and Nyingma Schools probably existed in the form of hermitic traditions until much later in their direct encounter with the Geluk institutions in the region. The existence of the earliest Bon monastery is recorded in the *Religious History of Amdo* specifying it is a monastery of modest size, located close to Musel (*dmu gsal*) Monastery of the Nyingma School. However, contemporary research on Bon history of the region has failed to take note of this important tidbit of information and typically places the beginning of monastic Bon religion in the early twentieth century during the time of Bongya Yangdrung Puntsok (*bon brgya g.yang drung phun tshogs*, 1874-?), the predecessor of Bongya Gelek Lhundrup Gyatso (*bon brgya dge legs lhun grub rgya mtsho*, b. 1936), who is currently leading Bongya (*bon brgya*) Monastery. Additionally, available historical sources suggest the Nyingma School emerged as an important religious force to be reckoned with during the time of Rigdzin Palden Tashi, the active proselytizer of the Nyingma School in Rebgong and adjacent areas. The monastery of modest size he headed seem to exist well before his return from successful training as a Nyingma practitioner. However, sectarian identity of the monastery

¹⁸⁴ It is a historic Muslim trading town bordering Amdo.

remains unknown. I am not sure if the monastery was Nyingma all along or was converted to Nyingma School when he took control. However, it had to wait until the charismatic leader, Palchen Namkha Jikme (*dpal chen nam mkha' jigs med*, 1757-1721), brought Nyingma communities together as a self-conscious movement vis-à-vis the exponential growth of the Geluk School in the form of expansion of its network of monasteries and inter-community rituals.¹⁸⁵

Against the multi-religious context of Rebgong, Shar Kalden Gyatso is locally well known for his religious ecumenism. According to Sujata, there are two aspects of his religious career that identify him as a non-sectarian figure. She believes that Shar Kalden Gyatso considering Milarepa as inspirational in his retreat life is major evidence that Shar Kalden Gyatso was non-sectarian in religious outlook, and even more so considering the conflict between the Geluk and its supporters on the one hand, and Kagyu and its allies on the other. However, since Milarepa as a role model for yogic practices in all Tibetan Buddhist schools regardless of their sectarian affiliation, and the example of Geluk monks, including Shar Kalden Gyatso and Chowa Rinpoche, following the model of Milarepa or practicing Geluk Mahamudra may not be insufficient evidence to defend them as holding a non-sectarian approach towards Kagyu. Sujata rightly argues that Shar Kalden Gyatso's homage to the first Karmapa Dusum Khyenpa (*karmapa dus gsum mkhyen pa*, 1110-1193) in his collection of songs indicated a friendly approach towards the Kagyu School.¹⁸⁶ Other songs of Shar Kalden Gyatso assure us that he was friendly toward with Kagyu School and other Buddhist sects, as discussed later.

¹⁸⁵ Yangdon Dhondup, "Rules and Regulations of the Reb kong Tantric Community." In *Monastic and Lay Traditions in North-Eastern Tibet*, eds. Dhondup et al (Boston: Brill, 2013): 118-121.

¹⁸⁶ Sujata (2005), 47.

Due to lack of sources, it is very challenging to reconstruct the sectarian history of seventeenth century Rebgong. However, at least in the context of Shar Kalden Gyatso, we can turn to his songs, biography, and historical writings in his collected works that undeniably present him as impartial in his view of other religious traditions.

In the collection of his songs, there are three songs that we can treat as good evidence for his non-sectarian approach towards non-Geluk Buddhist schools as he gives instruction:

The Great Perfection, the king of all teachings,
of the sublime Ogyen (*U rgyan*)¹⁸⁷ knowing three times.
Meditation instructions of the path of the Great Seal,
the supreme foundational practices done regularly,
by Lord Milarepa, the father, and his disciples.
They are view instructions, except for a name change.
All sons learned and endowed with vast intelligence,
cut off superimpositions on the path of this view.
Look inward and focus on the mind.
Follow the example externally and practice meditation internally.¹⁸⁸

And he also sings:

The great method of attaining supreme Buddhahood,
is available within all [schools], new and old, and Sakya and Geden (*dge ldan*).¹⁸⁹
Don't slander others and cultivate pure perception towards all.

¹⁸⁷ This refers to Padmasambha, although it is actually the Tibetan rendition of his homeland Oddiyana.

¹⁸⁸ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1994), 258-259: *dpal dus gsum mkhyen pa u rgyan gyi/ chos kun gyi rgyal po rdzogs pa che/ rje mi la ras pa yab sras kyi/ dus rgyun ma'i thugs dan mthil gyi mchog/ lam phyag rgya chen po'i nyams khrid kyang / ming bsgyur tsam ma gtogs lta ba'i khrid/bu mkhas mkhas shes rab che che kun/ lam lta ba 'di la sgro 'dogs chod/ kha nang du bltas nas sems steng skor/ dpe phyi ru ltos la nang du sgoms.*

¹⁸⁹ It is an alternative name for the Geluk School.

The multitude of merits accruing from the verse,
 May I dedicate as the cause for attaining supreme enlightenment from practice of
 profound teachings as in the life of glorious Dusum Khyenpa.¹⁹⁰

From verses in the first song, Shar Kalden Gyatso treated both Great Perfection and Great Seal as equally important instructions on view and exhorting learned ones to take them into personal experience. Given the Geluk Great Seal Lineage branching off from the Kagyu teachings, Shar Kalden Gyatso predictably accept the Great Seal teachings.¹⁹¹ However, it is remarkable that he views the Great Perfection and Great Seal as the same except that they are given different names. The Great Perfection has been a controversial teaching in Tibetan Buddhist history, facing criticisms from non-Nyingma schools in Tibet.¹⁹² In the second song above, he deems all paths, outlined according to various Tibetan Buddhist schools both new and old, equally valid in leading to Buddhahood, the Buddhist ultimate goal of enlightenment. He singles out the Karma Kagyu Patriarch, Dusum Khyenpa as an example of how to lead a religious career.

Lastly, he sings:

It is best if I feel inspired.

By the diverse forms of other schools and religions.

If not, I shall cultivate pure perception.

And I vow not to slander meaninglessly.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1994), 289: *mchog sangs rgyas 'thob pa'i thabs dam pa/ sa dge ldan gsar rnying kun la yod/ gzhan ma smod dag snang kun la sbyongs/ gtam 'di las byung ba'i dge ba'i tshogs/ dpal dus gsum mkhyen pa'i rnam thar ltar chos zab mo nyams su blangs pas mchog sangs rgyas 'thob pa'i rgyu ru sngo.*

¹⁹¹ See Alexander Berzin, *The Great Seal of Voidness: the Root Text for the Ge-Lug/Ka-Gyu Tradition of Mahamudra* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1976).

¹⁹² Sam van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection: Simultaneous and Gradual Approaches to Dzogchen Practice in Jigme Lingpa's Longchen Nyingtig* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004): 15-16, 327-328, 328n 34, 35.

¹⁹³ Shar skal ldan rgya mtso (1994), 125: *gzhan grub mtha' chos lugs sna tshogs la/ yid g.yo ba'i dad pa skyes na rab/ de min na'ang dag snang sbyong ba dang/ don med par mi smod dam bca' yin.*

This is the only verse from a song with a colophon note, indicated in a bracket that demonstrates the influence of Chowa Rinpoche on his sectarian orientation. He says, “I pledge before Chowa Rinpoche”¹⁹⁴ to treat all religions and lineages impartially. In the biography of Chowa Rinpoche by Shar Kalden Gyatso himself, there was a bare mention of Chowa Rinpoche commissioning an image of Padmasambhava, the central figure of the Nyingma School, without giving us much contextual detail surrounding the image.¹⁹⁵

In addition to these songs, in his biography, we can also detect Shar Kalden Gyatso’s favorable outlook toward the Nyingma School as evident in his retreat life at many of retreat sites associated with the Nyingma School. The fact that Shar Kalden Gyatso includes the Nyingma pedigree of spiritual lineages at these important power places in his presentation of Geluk history is already evidence proving to some extent his acceptance of the Nyingma School. For him, the previous identification of the sites of the Nyingma School was not to be avoided, but rather celebrated to demonstrate the spiritual power of these potent sites to be inherited by the Geluk lineages. The arrival of the Geluk School in the region was never a rupture or breakaway from the Buddhist history of the region from early on, albeit with different Buddhist lineages of the Geluk School aspiring to the same salvational goal. It is a non-sectarian apotheosis of Shar Kalden Gyatso and his Geluk lineages that a favorable condition was created for the Geluk School to take off in a new terrain already inhabited by non-Geluk followers. There is no doubt that his friendly interaction with non-Geluk religious communities and efforts to envision and galvanize a religious world with a non-sectarian outlook was major impetus behind widespread acceptance of the Geluk School and its later exponential growth in the region. Chowa Rinpoche’s embrace of the Nyingma School could also have a significant effect on Shar

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 125: *chos pa rin po che'i mdun du rang gis dam bcas pa.*

¹⁹⁵ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1999), vol. 1: 122

Kalden Gyatso's view of the Nyingma School. We are also assured that Shar Kalden Gyatso looked to the places blessed by Padmasambhava and other Nyingma masters as sources of inspiration in his retreat practice.

Fortunately, his *Prayer for Cleansing* is revealing in its complete embrace of Padmasambhava. Unlike many supplication verses, the one in question begins with a short sadhana or deity yoga on Padmasambhava after reciting verses on generation of mind from Taking Refuge.

Blessed by OM A:hUM,
 seated on the mattress of sun and moon on the crown, the abode of OM,
 is Father Guru Awareness-holder Padmasambhava,
 holding vajra skull cups in both the left and right hand,
 sitting cross-legged in blazing resplendence.
 When the body of Guru—Deity—radiates,
 all receptacles turn into inestimable mansions;
 all contents turn into gods and goddesses;
 In particular, I myself become Padmasambhava.¹⁹⁶

Kalden Gyatso's acceptance, rather than mere respect, of the Nyingma School's central figure is evidently clear from the above verse. He prescribes a sadhana on Padmasambhava before supplicating the region's major protector deity as most of the pre-Buddhist deities were bound under oath by Padmasambhava. His non-sectarian stance is also celebrated by and put

¹⁹⁶ Skal Idan rgya mtsho (1999), vol. 3: 441-442: *oM A:hUM gis byin gyis brlabs/ oM gnas spyi gtsug nyi zla'i gdan steng du/ pha bla ma rig 'dzin pad+ma 'byung/ phyag g.yas g.yon rdo rje thod phor bsnams/ zhal dkyil krung gzi brjid 'bar bar bzugs/ lha bla ma'i sku las 'od 'phros pas/ snod thams cad gzhal yas khang pa dang/ bcud thams cad lha dang lha mo dang/ sgos rang yang pad+ma sam+b+har gyur*. Its full title in Tibetan is *dkar phyogs skyong ba'i yul lha gnyan chen po se ku bya khyung la bsang mchod 'bul tshul bzugs so*.

forward as a role model to follow for his Geluk lineage followers in the subsequent centuries, with Nyingma followers increasingly facing the dominant presence of the Geluk School and its sectarian attacks.¹⁹⁷

According to Jikme Damchoe Gyatso, among his many learned disciples is Adron Khetsun Gyatso, a major Nyingma teacher who was initially trained in the Geluk teachings.¹⁹⁸ The reference to this teacher-student relationship probably means that Adron Khetsun received few teachings from Shar Kalden Gyatso as a token of the former's respect for the latter. As the brief biography of Adron Khetsun never mentions Shar Kalden Gyatso as a teacher and his life is instead portrayed as leading a very active Nyingma teaching career, his label as a student of Geluk master Shar Kalden Gyatso simply indicates the cordial relationship between the two local dignitaries, despite their sectarian differences. That he is actively giving teachings at a number of Geluk monasteries suggest his status as an established teacher of both Geluk and Nyingma teachings and his extraordinary skill in dispensing teachings in both traditions.

Although his view of other religious traditions is considerably impartial, I have come across a single instance in his collected songs where Shar Kalden Gyatso's non-sectarian approach seems to be only confined to his fellow Buddhist schools. The following verse reveals

¹⁹⁷ Both Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis and Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol admired Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho as a role model to follow for non-sectarian religious principles. See Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis, *Dpal ldan bkra shis kyi spyod tshul brjod pa'i gtam gyi rgyun ngo mtshar dgyes pa'i glu dbyangs*, In *Rig 'dzin chen po dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002), 92; and *Dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung mgur ji snyed sems kyi 'char sgo ma 'gag sgyu ma'i rol rtsed (smad cha)*, In *Rig 'dzin chen po dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002), 263, 270. See also Pang (2014), 8; Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis's records of teachings indicate that he received the oral transmissions of two varying biographical accounts of Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho. See Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis, *Dpal ldan bkra shis kyi rang nam rin po che'i do shal skal ldan mgul ba'i rgyan phreng*, In *Rig 'dzin chen po dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002.), 25.

¹⁹⁸ See chapter four; At some point, he, together with Shar skal ldan rgya mtso, received teachings from Ko'u ba chos kyi rgya mtso. See Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 306.

to us that despite his widely acclaimed religious ecumenism, he does not view Bon in an equally positive light.

Divination is practiced, (instead of following) words of Lord Buddha.

Divination is evil for all sentient beings in general.

Divination is evil for me, the yogin, in particular.

This is how evil divination can be averted.

You should focus your mind on lamas and the Three Jewels.

You should perform daily recitations.

You should look inward at the mirror of your mind repeatedly.

Doing so would surely avert evil divination.

If you are capable of averting evil divination of Him the Buddha,

who will fear divination from Bon Zhangzhung (*zhang zhung*)?¹⁹⁹

You should not change [places of] Shenrap (*gshen rab*)²⁰⁰ and Buddha.

Consult the words [of the Buddha] and practice holy dharma.²⁰¹

He is dismissive of folk divination rituals in general, regardless of practiced in the Buddhist or Bon tradition. As divination practices are associated with mundane concerns, his advice was to eliminate divination rituals, both Buddhist and Bon, and instead follow the true dharma—the words of the Buddha—achieving the Buddhist ultimate goal of nirvana. The last two lines from the verse reminds us to not wrongly switch the appropriate places of Buddha and Shenrab, his counterpart in Bon religion, in the hearts of his audience. Consequently, the two

¹⁹⁹ It is the mythical land associated with Bon as its place of origin.

²⁰⁰ He is the Bon counterpart of Buddha.

²⁰¹ Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho (1994), 82: *rje sangs rgyas bka' la mo btab pas/ spyir sems can yongs la mo mi bzang/ sgos rnal 'byor bdag la mo mi bzang/ mo ngan pa'i zlog thabs 'di ltar gyis/ blo bla ma dkon mchog gsum la god/ chos kha ton bzlas brjod nyin bzhin sgrubs/ nang sems kyi me long yang yang ltos/ de byas na mo ngan nges par zlog/ khong sangs rgyas kyi mo ngan zlog thub na/ bon zhang zhung gi mo la su zhig 'jigs/ khyed gshen rab dang sangs rgyas ma brjes par/ gros bka' la dris la lha chos gyis.*

Buddhas are not viewed in the same positive light or as equals. He does not seem to endorse any Buddhist follower taking refuge in Shenrab. Or, perhaps he doesn't subscribe to the idea that the teachings of Shenrap would lead anywhere near the Buddhist goal of enlightenment/complete liberation.²⁰²

Conclusion

In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Amdo witnessed a major transformation of its religious landscape. Mongol patronage, Central Tibetan influence, and active roles of Amdo native monks were major factors contributing to this reconfiguration of religious life in the region. This chapter demonstrates that the Rebgong Geluk community as represented by its major Geluk center—Rongwo Monastery—was a great case study fleshing out the forces at work in building up the school and fueling its growth in an institutional context. In this narrative of Geluk growth in Rebgong, Shar Kalden Gyatso was considered the school's most active and influential proponent. He was credited with founding of a philosophical college at Rongwo Monastery and thereby building it up as the major Geluk institutional center in the area. Besides setting up the Geluk education system at the monastery, he had an even better reputation for leading a retreat life and instituting a network of hermitages. His success of joining together scholastic and practice traditions of Tibetan Buddhism is a rarity in Geluk history as the tradition is defined by its focus on philosophical training. Thus, his unrivalled career won him a huge base of followers and made him the central figure around whom a thriving Geluk community was formed.

²⁰² The same unfriendly view towards Bon teachings is shared by Tibet's most acclaimed saint, Mi la ras pa, at least according to Rus pa'i rgyan can (a.k.a. Gtsang smyon he ru ka). See Rus pa'i rgyan can (2 009).

Great Indian and Tibetan Buddhist masters were identified as his early lives, which made him part of a long prestigious reincarnation lineage. However, due to recognition of his larger contribution to the Geluk School in Rebgong and beyond, plus his charisma and wide network of his intellectual and practice lineages in the region, a new reincarnation line started, with Shar Kalden Gyatso being the first in this most important reincarnation line in the area.

As can be seen in the preceding sections, Shar Kalden Gyatso's teachers certainly asserted a major influence, greatly shaping the direction of his religious career. As all these teachers played major roles in development of the Geluk School in the region, Shar Kalden Gyatso was sure to emulate them in galvanizing Geluk institutions. However, he stood out for being a highly accomplished meditation master in addition to his intellectual feats. His retreat life cuts a wide swath in Amdo. He undertook retreat at many sites including the eight retreat places of Rebgong and beyond in Amdo. In boasting about his master's extensive retreats, Zhangchub Mila would claim an estimate of over a hundred meditation sites where Shar Kalden Gyatso meditated.

In addition to the local persona of Shar Kalden Gyatso representing ideals of both scholar and yogin, his intimate relationships with local patrons, especially the Mongol rulers, were great sources of wealth that greatly assisted in the building process of Geluk institutions and monasticism in the region. With the support of the local elites, his non-sectarian approach even made more acceptable and adaptive his Geluk lineage to inhabitants of the valley and beyond, a home to followers of Bon and the Nyingma School.

Chapter Two

Post-Kalden Gyatso Rongwo Monastery and Geluk School in Rebgong

Introduction

The early history of the Geluk School, Rongwo Monastery as a Geluk institution, and religious history of Rebgong in general are central issues in this study. The biography and collection of works by Shar Kalden Gyatso are practically the only available sources that address these concerns, other than the brief biography of his contemporary Nyingma master, Adron Khetsun. Meanwhile, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's biography²⁰³ written by his close disciple, Ngakwang Jamyang Palden (*ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan*, u.d.), offers the clearest window into the history of Rongwo Monastery in the post-Shar Kalden Gyatso period. The sources on Shar Kalden Gyatso are focused on the foundation of scholastic Geluk Buddhism and the school's hermitic tradition on an institutional basis in Rebgong, as well as his model of a religious career successfully integrating scholasticism and meditation. In contrast, the biography of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, unusually, focuses on the economics of monastic institutions and sheds light on internal dynamics and continued growth of Rongwo Monastery under his leadership.

Khenchen Gedun Gyatso embarked on an institutional campaign to rebuild Rongwo Monastery as the monastery seems to be on the brink of its leadership crisis. At the helm of the monastery, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso intends to be the main teacher of his lineage teachings. However, his position as abbot is burdened by playing multiple roles including fundraiser, priest, and sorcerer as ways of fundraising for the monastery to keep its institutions operative. While

²⁰³ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan. *Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa mkhan chen dge 'dun rgya mtsho dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar ba phyogs tsam brjod pa 'dod 'gu'i 'byung gnas*. Rebgong: Blo bzang lung rigs rgya mtsho, n.d. [repr. 1764].

responsible for maintaining intellectual vitality at the monastery, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was keen on finding the economic means to sustain a thriving monastic community at Rongwo.

Material wealth has been indispensable to monastic institutions throughout Buddhist history. A central concern of monastery leaders is financing the monastic population and institutions. In late twentieth century Rebgong, monks ran a wide range of small businesses and a variety of monastic funds were in place at Rongwo to support the monastic community.²⁰⁴ This change relieved of the abbots a major task which was to seek offerings of material wealth from patron communities to cover yearly expenses, including sponsoring rituals as well as new building and repair projects.²⁰⁵ This mirrors in the life of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso more than two and half centuries earlier, whose efforts to fund and support the monastic community and institutions figure prominently in his biography.

Before delving into an in-depth study of life of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, I want to mention that there is biographical literature on the lives of the second and third Shar. These works are relatively informative on the status of Mongol-Rongwo relationships as well as the Shar lineage and major reincarnation lineages in Amdo.

The first section in this chapter examines these relevant sources in order to sketch a larger social, political, and religious context where Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was actively leading Rongwo Monastery as its primary head and teacher.

²⁰⁴ Caple (2011), 200-201.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 209.

Shar Lineage After Kalden Gyatso

The first section in this chapter consults short biographies of the second Shar and the third Shar compiled by the famous early modern scholar, Jikme Damcho Gyatso. These works are revealing in terms of the Mongol-Rongwo relationship as well as a later shift to Rongwo's close relationship with major reincarnation lineages in Amdo. The biographies are also useful in revealing the rise and fall of the Mongol influence in the Geluk history of Rebgong. They thus complement our reconstruction of post-Shar Kalden Gyatso history of the Geluk School and Rongwo Monastery on the basis of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's biography alone, as much of the two lives of the second and third Shar correspond to the long life of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso.

The religious history of the Geluk community in Rebgong in general and Rongwo Monastery in particular, is strikingly represented by the major Shar lineage at Rongwo Monastery in contemporary scholarship on the region. The first Shar was a charismatic leader and meditator who founded the scholastic program at Rongwo and established his hermitage, Tashi Khyil, creating a unified order within the community of Geluk followers. This reflects the beginning of Rongwo Monastery as a major Geluk institution in Rebgong. Since the first Shar Kalden Gyatso is the most acclaimed charismatic leader, scholar, and yogin of the reincarnation lineage, the dominance of the first Shar leaves his successors in the lineage in his shadow. We may conclude that, after the demise of the first Shar, the Shar lineage serves as a religious and political figurehead. Although lives of his successors in the lineage might accrue prestige and power from association with Shar Kalden Gyatso's lineage, his successors also stand out in their own right for playing important roles in the growth of the Geluk School in the region. However, only the second and third Shar will be dealt here as the biographies of these two successors in the

Shar lineage heavily focus on the Mongol-Rongwo relationship and thus provide contextual background for examining the life of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, thus giving a window into the internal dynamics of Rongwo Monastery. Before delving into a biographical study of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, let me examine the lives of the second and third Shar so we can better understand the growth of Rongwo Monastery and the Geluk School in the post-Shar Kalden Gyatso Rebgong.

Since childhood, the second Shar connected with the patron of his predecessor. He was trained by Tsultrim Gyatso (*tshul khrims rgya mtsho*, b. seventeenth century) and Sherap Drashi (*shes rab bkra shis*, b. 1647-1716),²⁰⁶ who were his root teachers. They were the sources of transmission of the teachings by his predecessor Shar Kalden Gyatso.²⁰⁷ Later, he went to Central Tibet to study with Jamyang Zhepa as a main teacher at Gomang when the latter was newly appointed as the abbot of Gomang College. He also later studied under the second Se Ngakwang Tashi (*bse ngag dbang bkra shis*, 1678-1738; henceforth the second Se).²⁰⁸ After his return from Central Tibet, he studied with Jamyang Lodro (*'jam dbyangs blo gros*, 1651-1733), a major teacher, especially known for his tantric transmissions, and who was also the reincarnation of Chowa Rinpoche.²⁰⁹ The second Shar's teacher Sherab Tashi once served as the abbot of Rongwo Monastery.²¹⁰ As it can be seen, the first Shar's disciples were instrumental in educating

²⁰⁶ For a short biography of Shes rab bkra shis, see Ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho, *Rje btsun dam pa shes rab bkra shis pa'i rnam par thar pa lhag bsam sprin gyi sgra dbyangs rna ba'i dga' ston byin rlabs myur 'jug*, In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho 'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 4 (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999): 181-197.

²⁰⁷ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 264.

²⁰⁸ For a biography of Bse ngag dbang bkra shis, see Blo bzang bkra shis 'phrin las rgya mtsho, *Ngag dbang bkra shis kyi rnam par thar zung 'jug grub pa'i rnga chen* (Kan lho: Gter lung yid dga' chos 'dzin, n.d); Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan, *Bla brang bkra shi 'khyil gyi gdan rabs lha'i rng chen* (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1989): 283-309; Zhoutai and Chen Xiaoqiang, *De' erlong si yu libei saicang hufo* (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe, 1994): 15-41, 105-317.

²⁰⁹ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 270. For biographical information on 'Jam dbyangs blo gros, see Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 333.

²¹⁰ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 271.

the reincarnation of their teacher as well as keeping and building the institutional legacy of their master.

Qinwang Tshewang Tendzin was better known for his role as the principal patron of Jamyang Zhepa when the latter founded Labrang Monastery in 1709/10, which soon grew into the premier Geluk learning institute in Amdo. However, he also retained a close relationship with Rongwo Monastery by having the second Shar as one of his preceptors.

The second Shar expanded Rongwo Monastery. He was responsible for establishing a tantric college as well as instituting the great prayer festival at Rongwo, further consolidating the central role of Rongwo Monastery in the network of Geluk institutions in Rebgong. This second feat was accomplished with the assistance of *nangso* Ngakwang Lozang (*ngag dbang blo bzang*, u.d.). This was made possible because as was the case with the first Shar, the second Shar was also born to Rongwo *nangso*'s own family.

The only instance in the biography of the first Shar of *Nangso* Jamyang contributing to the growth of Rongwo Monastery was when he commissioned a 12-volume Perfection of Wisdom sutra written in gold. Thanks to the lack of sources, we lack other information regarding the role the *nangso*s played in the growth of Rongwo Monastery and the Geluk School in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, patronage of the *nangso* during the time of the second Shar greatly impacted the institutional history of the Geluk School and elevation of Rongwo Monastery as the center of Geluk institutions in the region. For the first time, the eighteen retreat places (*sgrub sde bco brgyad*) gathered at Rongwo to participate in the great prayer festival in 1732,²¹¹ a tradition that would continue over centuries. This major ritual tradition instituted by the second Shar for further consolidation of Geluk community in Rebgong

²¹¹ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 308. For the list of these eighteen retreats, see *Ibid.*, 341-342.

caps another central moment in history of Rongwo Monastery and the Geluk School in Rebgong. The second Shar records that his own teacher, Sherap Tashi, gave teachings to a crowd of over 3,000 monks at Rongwo on the day of the latter's enthronement as the seventh abbot in 1707.²¹²

The next *qinwang*, Tendzin Wangshuk (*bstan 'dzin dbang phyug*, 1736-1752), turned out to be even closer to the second Shar and committed additional support to the second Shar and Rongwo Monastery. He did not, however, inherit the title by being of the direct bloodline of Tshewang Tendzin, but by being an adopted son. He was a son of Mergen Taching (*mer rgan te ching*, u.d.), who was in turn a nephew of Tshewang Tendzin. Mergen Taching was a devout follower of the second Shar. He so fervently revered the second Shar that he offered his own son Tendzin Wangshuk as a personal attendant to the second Shar, who treated young Tendzin Wangshuk as his own nephew. Later, since *Qinwang* Tshewang Tendzin had no offspring, he adopted Tendzin Wangshuk as his son who inherited the title of *qinwang* after the former's death.²¹³ Since he was previously the personal attendant of the second Shar, the Mongol-Rongwo relation was even more intimate. When the second Shar passed way, after consultation with senior monks at Rongwo, the *qinwang* built a silver reliquary stupa for the deceased second Shar. Probably on the deceased Shar's behalf, the *qinwang* also made offerings to the Geluk monastic community in Central Tibet.²¹⁴

While the second Shar was alive, *Qinwang* Tendzin Wangshuk offered a large group of Tibetan and Mongol households as a supporting community of Rongwo Monastery. A big area of pasture was offered with accompanying official decree issued to certify the endowment. The *qinwang* later issued decrees allowing the supporting communities of Rongwo to graze in the

²¹² Ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho (1999), 355.

²¹³ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 281.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 282.

pasture area of Shabi Nar (*sha bi nar*).²¹⁵ As the biographer reasonably claims, Tshewang Wanchuk was probably the most beneficial patron of the Shar lineage. The second Shar also received the title of Dharma King of Great Bliss (*bde chen chos kyi rgyal po*) from the Mongol lord of the Yeru (*g.yas ru*) clan in the Kokonor region.²¹⁶ What this title meant in substance is unclear due to a lack of sources.

The third Shar Gedun Trinle Rapgye continued his close relationship with the patron of his predecessor *Qinwang* Tendzin Wangshuk, who took the young third Shar to Urge (*u rge*)²¹⁷ for a year-long stay. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso administered novice and full ordination precepts to him.²¹⁸ The third Shar was also close to his teacher, Changkya Rolpe Dorje²¹⁹ (*lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje*, 1717-1786), and disciple, the second Se. This aptly explains why the second Se was welcome and received support from Rongwo after he was banished from Labrang. The third Shar also had contact with the fifth Kirti Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen (*kirti blo zhang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*, 1712-1771) and the fourth Zhabdrung Lozang Tupten Gelek Gyatso (*zhabs drung blo bzang thub bstan dge legs*, 1729-1796),²²⁰ but it is his close association with Changkya Rolpe Dorje that impacted the Shar lineage. On behalf of the third Shar, Changkya Rolpe Dorje

²¹⁵ It is a herding area which was later included as part of Rebgong.

²¹⁶ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (199), 278.

²¹⁷ It is a loan word from Mongolian referring to an administrative office or encampment. See Oidtmann (2014), 357-358.

²¹⁸ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 287.

²¹⁹ He was the famed Dge lugs preceptor to the Qianlong Emperor. For the life and activities of Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje, see *Elisabeth Bernard*, "The Qianlong Emperor and Tibetan Buddhism," In *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde*, eds. James Millward et al (London: Routledge, 2004), 124-135; *Marina Illich*, "Imperial Stooge or Emissary to the Dge lugs Throne? Rethinking the Biographies of Chankya Rolpe Dorjé," In *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition: Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. Bryan Cuevas and Kurtis Schaeffer (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 17-32; *Gene Smith*, "The Life of Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje," In *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 133-146; Wang Xiangyun, "The Qing Court's Tibet Connection: Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje and the Qianlong Emperor," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 60 (2000), 125-163.

²²⁰ For a short biography, see: <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Fourth-Zhabdrung-Karpo-Lobzang-Tubten-Gelek-Gyeltsen/3061> accessed on July 21, 2018.

appealed to the court, bestowing on the third Shar the title Rongwo Kūtuktu (*ho thog thu*)²²¹ Pandita (*paN+Ti ta*) and its seal.²²² When *Qinwang* Tendzin Wangshuk's son Wangden Dorje Palam (*dbang ldan rdo rje pha lam*, 1753-1771) inherited his father's position, Wangden Dorje Palam visited the third Shar with elaborate gifts, including 500 silver coins. The third Shar also visited Urge. Later, when the *qinwang* and his queen passed away, the third Shar performed funereal rituals on their behalf at Urge.²²³

Overall, the third Shar had close relationships with two successive *qinwangs* as well as some of the most influential Buddhist lamas of the day. Besides leading Rongwo Monastery, he also founded Dzungmar Tashi Choling Monastery (*rdzong dmar bkra shsi chos gling*). However, when Ngakwang Dargye (*ngag dbang dar rgyas*, 1770-1807) was enthroned as *qinwang*, the third Shar had a major falling out with the new *qinwang*. The third Shar's biography does not specify the reasons, except stating that the *qinwang* was influenced by people close to him such as Lozang Rikdrol (*blo bzang rig grol*). It seems the third Shar was supposed to have obtained permission from the *qinwang* for his travel to Central Tibet. Because of their deteriorated relationship, the third Shar did not bother to do so. After transferring his abbatial office, he went straight to Central Tibet, even bypassing the permission of the Amban (*am ban*)²²⁴ in Xining. When he arrived in Lhasa, he met the Amban in Lhasa who reported his travel to the court. However, the court made an exception, probably due to the influence of Changkya Rolpe Dorje, arguably the most influential Tibetan Buddhist monk resident at the Qing court. The decree, possibly, from the court says, "This time, Rongwo Nomon Han (*no mon han*)²²⁵ did not receive an

²²¹ It is a Manchu term rendered from the Mongolian *qutughtu* for reincarnation lama. *Qutughtu* literally means a holy one. It is rendered in Tibetan as *ho thog thu*. See Oitdmann (2014), xii.

²²² 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 290.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 292.

²²⁴ It refers to the highest office of Qing officials in Tibet.

²²⁵ The Tibetan term here traces its origin in a Mongol term referring to a prestigious title given to Tibetan Buddhist lamas.

official reply. He also didn't refer to his Wang²²⁶ and left immediately as he liked. There was a petition regarding this matter. Rongwo Nomon Han is a lama who completely left home as a monk. Any ordinary *dzasak* (*dza sag*),²²⁷ *wang* (*wang*),²²⁸ *beli* (*be li*),²²⁹ *besi* (*be si*),²³⁰ and *gong* (*gung*)²³¹ can't be compared to him....Rongwo Nomon Han left for Tibet as he liked. This contradicts the rule and he disobeyed the law. This is simply a mistake. However, it is not advisable to compare him with Mongol Wang and Gung. This is also to be issued to Rongwo Nomon Han."²³²

Later, the Amban in Xining concluded a peace accord between the third Shar and *Qinwang* Ngawang Dargye, who later received life empowerments from the third Shar.²³³ This probably meant that the third Shar still commanded enough clout that he identified the reincarnation of the first Detri Lozang Dondrup (*Sde tri blo bzang don grub*, 1673-1746; henceforth the first Detri)²³⁴ and gave the name Jamyang Tupten Nyima (*'jam dbyangs thub bstan nyi ma*).²³⁵ And the third Shar's own nephew was identified as the reincarnation of Jikme Wangpo.²³⁶ The third Shar travelled widely in Amdo and established links with numerous local rulers.²³⁷

²²⁶ It is a loan word from Chinese referring to the highest rank given to the Mongol lords in the Kokonor region.

²²⁷ It is a loan word from Mongolian referring to a rank.

²²⁸ It is a loan word from Chinese referring to a high rank.

²²⁹ It is a loan word either from Mongolian or Chinese referring to a rank.

²³⁰ It is a loan word either from Mongolian or Chinese referring to a rank.

²³¹ It is a loan word from Chinese referring to a high rank.

²³² 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 295-296: *da lam rong bo no min han nas bka' lan ma byung ba'I thog rng gi wang la'ng ma lab par rang 'dod kyis 'phral du phyin p'i skor l zhu yig phul byung ba 'dug/ rong bo no min han mtha' gcig tu khim nas khyim par rab tu byung ba'i bla ma yin/ spyir btang gi dza sag/ wang/ be li/ be si/ gung rnams dang dpe byas mi yong..... rong bo no min han rang 'dod kis bod du phyin pa 'di tsam kyis lugs srol la khyad du bsad ns khrims kyi rjes 'bras mi byed pa dang/ lam yig kyang ma blangs par rang 'dod kyis 'phrl du phyin pa ni ma byung ba yin rung/ khong la sog po'i wang gung rnams dang dpe bys na mi yong/ des na rong bo no min han la yang stsal byas pa yin.*

²³³ Ibid., 299.

²³⁴ He is a close disciple of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and served as the treasurer at Labrang Monastery.

²³⁵ Ibid., 294.

²³⁶ Ibid., 299; For a detailed study of the Qing use of the golden urn in the identification process of the third Jamyang Zhepa, see Oidtmann (2014), 200-260.

²³⁷ 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho (1997), 300.

The biographical literature on the second and third Shar tell us some major aspects of the Mongol-Rongwo relationship and increasingly close relationships with major reincarnation lineage masters in Amdo. The shift from Mongol patrons towards main reincarnation lineages of Amdo, with a few serving in the capacity of preceptors at the Qing court, is indicative of the waning power of the local Mongols to the south of Rebgong. It also represents the beginning of much friction and strife between the Mongols and Labrang, on the one hand, and Rongwo and Rebgong's secular power on the other.

Returning to the topic of this chapter, we still have no clue about the internal growth of Rongwo Monastery or who were actually leading Rongwo Monastery and initiating its institutional developments, especially given the fact that the second Shar seems to be residing in the Mongol domain as a priest to the *qinwang* for extended periods - he died in Urge. Therefore, the biographical study of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso in this chapter offers a much-needed look into the major institutional concerns of Rongwo Monastery. This chapter will illustrate the difficulties of running a major religious institution such as Rongwo Monastery and also the central role Khenchen Gedun Gyatso played and major responsibilities he assumed in leading Rongwo Monastery as a thriving community in both intellectual and economic spheres.

Post-Kalden Gyatso Rongwo Monastery and Geluk School in Rebgong: the case of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso at the Helm of Rongwo Monastery

Jikme Tekchok (*jigs med theg mchog*), the early twentieth century scholar and composer of *History of The Succession of Abbots at Rongwo (rong bo gdan rabs)*, praises Khenchen Gedun Gyatso for his leadership role and success in leading Rongwo Monastery. However, this was a

short note with explicit indication in a brief biographical account of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, probably based on the *Religious History of Rebgong* and *Religious History of Amdo*. He might have been aware of the manuscript version of the biography of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, but this is unlikely as he makes no mention of a biographical work of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. If he ever had access to the manuscript, it is puzzling why he did not so indicate, especially as he lists other biographical sources. With the availability of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's biography written by Ngakwang Jamyang Palden (*ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs pdal ldan*, u.d.), and recently published by the Deche (*bde chen*) monastery headed by the lineage of Ngakwang Jamyang Palden, we have an opportunity to work with the modern published version of the biography. This helps us learn more about the life of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, especially with regard to his leadership at Rongwo. It is revealing to investigate challenges he faced and how he coped with leading the monastery during his two terms of abbatial office, an indication that he was extremely favored as a great leader of the institution. I examine his life in the following pages with a focus on institutional leadership that provides us insights into Geluk development at Rongwo in particular and Rebgong in general.

Continued Growth of Scholastic Tradition led by Khenchen Gedun Gyatso at Rongwo

I briefly explain his scholastic career in Central Tibet and then move on to deal with his later life as an abbot, teacher, and leader of Rongwo Monastery. His training in the premium learning institute of Gomang College nurtured his eventual growth as an eminent scholar who achieved

great fame among the scholarly community of his school and subsequent appointment as the abbot of the famed Pelkhor Chode (*dpal 'khor chos sde*) Monastery.²³⁸

When Khenchen Gedun Gyatso went to study at Gomang College, Jamyang Zhepa had been the abbot of the college for three years.²³⁹ After rigorous training under several eminent scholars, including Jamyang Zhepa, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso received the highest degree and landed first place during the debate examination attended by peer scholars from Drepung, Sera (*se ra*), Ganden, Upper Tantric College (*rgyud stod grwa tshang*), and Lower Tantric College (*rgyud smad grwa tshang*).²⁴⁰ In recognition of his great learning, he was immediately appointed as the abbot of the famed monastery of Pelkhor Chode. He was also responsible for leading the lesser known monastery of Tsechen (*rtse chen*). Besides leading these two monasteries, his additional responsibility included overseeing debate sessions held at Palkhor Chode Monastery beginning every fourth Tibetan month. The debate sessions were attended by monks from a number of regional monasteries in Central Tibet.²⁴¹ It is important to note that, appropriate for his stature, Palkhor Chode Monastery, which he led for a number of years, is one of largest monasteries in the Tsang region of Central Tibet and consisted of seventeen colleges of which eight belonged to the Geluk School. The remaining colleges followed the Sakya School. It is reasonable to assume at this point that leading such a monastery with colleges following traditions of both Geluk and Sakya required great skills for successful management of the monastery in both scholastic and ritual traditions. Therefore, his abbatial office at Palkhor Chode

²³⁸ For a brief history of the Monastery, see Chos kyi rgya mtsho, *Dbus gtsang gnas yig* (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 382-391.

²³⁹ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 39.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 57. The debate was organized by Zungar ruler Tse ring don drup. See *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 68. Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan records that these monasteries are: Bkra shi lhun po, Gser mdog can, Rta nang thub bstan, and Bya rgod gshong in the Gtsang region, and Mnga' ris grwa tshang, Dwags po grwa tshang, Gong dkar thod pa ri, and Chos 'khor yang rtse in the Dbus region. He also writes that these debate sessions last for three to four months.

Monastery was a formative period in terms of his leadership skills and leading the Monastery as the abbot help fashion young Khenchen Geun Gyatso into a great leader.

After the conclusion of his term as the abbot at Palkhor Chode Monastery, leaders at Rongwo invited Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to lead the monastery. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was able to leave for Amdo only after he secured a permission from Polhane (*pho lha nas*, 1689-1747), the then king of Tibet. Rongwo had already sent an envoy twice to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and beseeched him to take up residence at Rongwo, but Khenchen Gedun Gyatso refused on both occasions on the grounds that the invitation was too early, i.e., prior to the completion of his highest monastic degree. A second reason was that the oracle advised against his departure for Amdo. On a third occasion, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso realized that his leadership responsibilities were fulfilled by serving as an abbot of Palkhor Chode Monastery for a number of years and his scholastic learning was complete. His decision to leave Central Tibet for Amdo was also previously approved by a prophecy consequently, this invitation was gladly accepted, though he had to go to great lengths to secure permission of leave from the king.²⁴²

Shortly after his arrival in Rebgong, the second Se sent greetings to him through his two nephews. A letter brought by the two men also states that since Labrang Monastery was the personal seat of his own teacher, Jamyang Zhepa, he should visit Labrang Monastery. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's refusal on this occasion did not signify disrespect to the second Se. Instead, he had just arrived and thus needed to postpone his visit.

Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's arrival in Rebgong coincided with the death of Tendzin Ngakwang Trinle (*bstan 'dzin ngag dbang 'phrin las*, 1695-1732)²⁴³ who was serving as the seventh

²⁴² Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 168-169.

²⁴³ For a very short biography of Bstan 'dzin ngag dbang 'phrin las, see 'Jigs med lung rigs rgya mtsho (2010), 140-145.

abbot of Rongwo Monastery at this time. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, therefore, performed funeral services for the late abbot. At the conclusion of the funeral service, the senior monks at Rongwo Monastery seized this opportunity and invited Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to lead the monastery as its abbot. Since they were already in the process of looking for a suitable leader to manage the monastery, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's arrival at Rongwo was much welcomed. As a matter of fact, the senior monks of Rongwo had already made repeated requests for Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's return to Rongwo.

The biographer does not reveal the monastery's motives for sending envoys to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. However, we can imagine that Tendzin Ngakwang Trinle's advanced age must have led senior monks at Rongwo Monastery to anticipate his death and were planning to invite Khenchen Gedun Gyatso back to Rongwo and appoint him abbot. Given his stature as a highly trained scholar and abbot of the great Palkhor Chode Monastery in the Tsang region convinced the senior monks at Rongwo Monastery that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a natural fit and the best choice for the abbatial office of their beloved monastery. As recorded by Ngakwang Jamyang Palden in his biography of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, the second Shar, *nangso*, monastic officials, and monk scholars together pleaded:

Khri rgan rin po che, the only person we can place our hope in and backbone of all monastic colleges, stopped looking after us all with compassion and left for a different field. Now, we have not a single lama that we can place our hope in. As the saying goes, we are only left with the sky above us and the ground below us. During such a critical time, you Rinpoche, holy lama, came that we now all have a sun shining again. Lama Rinpoche's career success also initially took off at the monastic college and monastery here before earnestly leading the great

monastery in the U region to achieve great deeds and great dharma activities benefiting sentient beings. You must take the role of the abbot of the monastery and give thoughts about upholding, preserving, and spreading dharma by keeping rules intact for monasteries and individuals, especially this monastery. May you not abandon all of us, teachers and monastic members, from your mind.”²⁴⁴

Despite this urgent need for a talented monk scholar and leader to take up the responsibility of managing a great monastery such as Rongwo both academically and logistically, this request came as a burden to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso who had just relieved himself from many years of running a large monastery in Tsang. Consequently, he did not agree until one or two days later when all present on the first occasion repeated their request him again for the abbot office. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso thought to himself that since this monastery was where he completed his early scholastic training, he had no choice but to agree to assume the abbatial office. It was clear that he was under great pressure from the senior Rongwo Monastery monks to lead it as its abbot. It was forced upon him.

Nevertheless, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso made it clear that a scholastic program was to be his

²⁴⁴ Ngag dbang ‘jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 203: *‘dir bdag cag ltos bcas thams cad kyi re ltos kyi gnas gcig pu/ grwa sa grwa tshang thams cad kyi srog shing khri rgan rin po che nas nged thams cad la thugs rjes spyen gyis gzigs pa dor nas zhing khams gzhan dus gshegs song nas nged thams cad la re ltos ‘cha’ sa’i bla ma gzhan su yang med cing/ ‘jig rten gyi kha mngags la yar bltas gnam dang mar bltas sa las med zer ba lta bur song ba’i skabs ‘di ‘dra shig tu gyur ba’i dus su bla ma dam pa rin po che khyed phebs byung bas/ nged cag thams cad la slar yang nyi ma shar ba lta bur gyur/ da char sngar bla ma rin po che yang grwa sa grwa tshang ‘di la brten nas sku yon chen po ‘di lta bu dang dbus su yang gdan sa chen po de lta bur phebs nas ‘phrin las dang ‘gro phan bstan pa’i bya ba rgya chen pos nye bar bzung nas dgon gnas ‘di’i gdan sa mdzad nas grwa tshang ‘di’i gtsos pa’i dgadon sde spyi sger thams cad kyi sgrigs lam gyis mtshon bstan pa ‘dzin skyong spel ba’i thugs khur cis kyang bzhes dgos pas/ nged dpon slob dge ‘dun gyi sde thams cad thugs nas mi ‘dor ba mkhyane mkhyen.*

chief responsibility:

“Well, since all of you have repeatedly requested, I will teach for one or two years to help in the religious sphere. You all, please be responsible for material things.”²⁴⁵

It is clear that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was less worried about running the scholastic and ritual programs. Instead, he was mainly concerned with being responsible for logistical issues, especially procuring foods and donations to support monks' livelihood and also fund rituals and building and repairing temple and image projects. As we will see later in his life, his teaching career was periodically interrupted by his tours to collect donations towards living allowances of monks and other financial concerns of the institution, despite his desire to focus on monastic education.

Soon after assuming the office of abbot office, he began teaching and led the prayer festival attended by monks from Rongwo Monastery and other Geluk monasteries from all over Rebgong, whose number totaled over 1,300 monks.²⁴⁶ Considering the fact that Rongwo only housed 180 monks at some point,²⁴⁷ this huge turnout of monk attendees testifies to the popularity of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso as the abbot and main teacher at Rongwo, as well as the growth of the monastic population and by extension of rise of the Geluk School in the region. Because of his fame as an eminent scholar and many years as the abbot and main teacher at the monastery of Palkhor Chode in Tsang, his teaching was sought after even on the occasion of the

²⁴⁵ Ibid.: *o na khyed rnams kyis yang dang yang du nan chen po mdzad par 'dug pas lo re gnyis tsam la nged kyi brtsi bzahag 'dra gtong ba sogs chos kyi ngos nas phan gang thogs byed/ zang zing gi sgo nas khyed rang rnams khur 'khur ba mdzod.*

²⁴⁶ Sujata (2005), 24; Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 203.

²⁴⁷ At one point, the number of monks at Rongwo was 180. I am able to establish this figure as it is recorded in the biography of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso that during a trip, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso obtained a total of 180 pieces of lambskin as donations, just enough to give one piece to each of the monks at Rongwo. See Ibid., 296.

great prayer festival. Because of unanimous requests from senior masters from Rongwo and other monastic centers, he gave teachings on Lamrim for a four-month period.²⁴⁸

Khenchen Gedun Gyatso adopted the same teaching method he used in Central Tibet allowing questions and discussions in the middle of his lectures. One of his main commentarial texts to use for the basis of his stage of path teaching was composed by Jamyang Zhepa. As part of his stage of path teaching, he also started the tradition of feasting of generation of mind (*sems bskyed ston mo*)²⁴⁹ following his own master, Donyo Khedrup (*don yod mkhas grub*, 1671-1736).²⁵⁰ He also managed and created this tradition with co-sponsorship from Nangso and other senior monks.²⁵¹

Early in his term as an abbot, a strong curricular program was nonexistent. Consequently, one of major concerns was to foster a training program of monks on the basis of a rigorous scholastic system. The previous curriculum had consisted of lecturing and discussions on only few subjects from a collection of topics (*bsdus grwa*),²⁵² all the four chapters of *Commentary on Compendium of Valid Cognition* (*tshad ma rnam 'grel*),²⁵³ and the first chapter of the Perfection of Wisdom (*phar phyin skabs dang po*). After assuming the abbot office, without a textbook on collection of topics, he lectured on every section from memory of other teaching texts on the subjects. He also used a text composed by Khyungtruk Jampa Tashi (Khyung phrug byams pa bkra

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 205.

²⁴⁹ It is a several-day-long mass teaching focused on generation of mind, while also involving a huge display of offerings.

²⁵⁰ Don yod mkhas grub started the same teaching with the sponsorship of the Tibetan government following an earlier tradition. For his short biography, see Mi nyag mgon po and et al, *Zhog don yod mkhas grub kyi rnam thar mdor bsdus*. In *Gangs can mkhas dbang rim byon gyi rnam thar mdor bsdus*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1996-2000), 430-432.

²⁵¹ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 206.

²⁵² See Shunzo Onoda, 'bsDus grwa Literature,' In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, eds. José Cabezón and Roger Jackson (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996.), 187-201.

²⁵³ It is a foundational Buddhist philosophical work composed by the seventh century master Dharmakirti.

shis, 1469-1544/1546)²⁵⁴ to lecture on all eight chapters of the Perfection of Wisdom and its four supplementary texts. The Middle Way philosophy was also included in the monastic curriculum involving debate sessions.²⁵⁵ These contributions give pause and encourage us to rethink the nature of the scholastic program previously put in place by Shar Kalden Gyatso. Shar Kalden Gyatso, as a highly trained scholar was credited with foundation of the scholastic program, we might assume that the scholastic college he set up offered a comprehensive education, at least in exoteric teachings. However, it is not the case here. If it was the case, then it was in decline when Khenchen Gedun Gyatso led the monastery as its abbot, hence the need to build up the scholastic college.

Not only did Khenchen Gedun Gyatso make the curriculum more comprehensive by adding subjects, he also made strict schedules for training on those subjects. Lectures were given in two or three sessions in a day. He was so concerned with the rigorousness of the curricular training that he asked students about progress in their learning and personally attended as monks debated in the debate courtyard as his residence was attached to the major assembly hall earlier in his term as the abbot. He instructed the proper way of reasoning, such as making and defending an argument, and initiating a debate. He took much care over details such as the proper way of clapping hands during a debate.²⁵⁶ A debate examination system was also created for awarding the Monlam Rapjam (*smon lam rab 'byams*)²⁵⁷ degrees following the curricular program at the main Geluk seats in Central Tibet.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ He is a major scholar and author of Geluk text manuals.

²⁵⁵ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 212.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ It is a high degree in scholastic training awarded after debate examination at the great prayer festival.

²⁵⁸ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 218.

Towards the end of his life, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso completed his work on a collection of topics, a text manual he composed especially for instructing the young Shar and his disciples at Rongwo Monastery.²⁵⁹ Rongwo Monastery used the text manual composed by the well-known Geluk scholar Sera Chokyi Gyeltsen (*se ra chos kyī rgyal mtshan*, 1469-1544/46). However, it is interesting to note that Rongwo Monastery had Khenchen Gedun Gyatso (who was trained in the Jamyang Zhepe lineage) as the main teacher and actually had him compose a textbook following that intellectual lineage given the fact that Jamyang Zhepa was a well-known critic of Chokyi Gyeltsen.

Keeper of Lineage Transmissions

A great scholar and charismatic leader, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was instrumental in reviving/reestablishing the intellectual tradition at Rongwo Monastery. Not only was he sought after at Rongwo for his teachings, he was also sought after as a great teacher from beyond Rebgong. We can conclude that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a keeper of a treasury of teachings and especially keeper of esoteric teachings and transmitter of teachings by major Geluk masters, including Jamyang Zhepa, making him a sought-after teacher by monks from Amdo as well as Central Tibet. His important role as a tutor to Jigmed Wangpo, the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa, will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

When Khenchen Gedun Gyatso first came to lead Palkhor Chode Monastery, he realized his limited qualifications that were needed as a scholar to lead the monastery, which included several tantric colleges. This required a command of tantric teachings on his part. This

²⁵⁹ See Mkhān chen dge 'dun rgya mtsho, *Mkhān chen bsdus grwa* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1988)

encouraged him to undertake serious training in tantric teachings as opposed to his nearly exclusive exoteric-focused training at Gomang College. From then onwards, he sought major esoteric teachings from well-known tantric masters active in Central Tibet,²⁶⁰ making him a major transmitter of these mostly esoteric teachings back in Amdo.

As the Mitra (*mi tra*)²⁶¹ transmission was rare in both Geluk and Sakya schools throughout Tibet, Lozang Sherap (*blo bzang shes rab*, b. 1707),²⁶² together with Jamyang Shadpa and Nyitang Zhapdrung Rinpoche (*nyi thang zhabs drung rin po che*, u.d.), received the Mitra transmission from well-known master, Lozang Khetsun (*blo bzang mkhas btsun*, u.d.).²⁶³ When Lozang Sherap replaced Jamyang Zhepa as the abbot of Gomang College after a six-year term, he passed the same transmission to select few, including Jampel Gyatso (*'jam dpal rgya mtsho*, u.d.), from whom Khenchen Gedun Gyatso received the very transmission. A few years later, Lozang Sherap passed away.²⁶⁴ It seems Khenchen Gedun Gyatso did not have a chance to receive it directly from the master. And it is not clear whether he received it directly from Jamyang Zhepa. Probably not, given that Jamyang Zhepa left Gomang College four years later to reside at Pha bong kha, which was his main base.²⁶⁵ Therefore, it is likely he received Jamyang Zhepa's teachings via the latter's disciples, Yonden Dargye (*yon dan dar rgyas*, u.d.) and Lozang Rinchen (*blo bzang rin chen*, u.d.).²⁶⁶ The latter was considered one of the best two disciples of Jamyang Zhepa, the other being Gedun Puntsok (*dge 'dun phun tshogs*, 1648-1724), the future fifth

²⁶⁰ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 74.

²⁶¹ It is a Sanskrit term and refers to a great Indian yogi as well as ritual transmissions originating from him.

²⁶² He is the thirty-third abbot of Gomang College. See Bstan pa bstan 'dzin, *Chos sde chen po dpal ldan 'bras spungs bkra shis sgo mang grwa tshang gi chos 'byung dung g.yas su 'khyil ba'i sgra dbyangs*, vol.1 (Mundgod: Dpal ldan 'bras spungs bkra shis sgo mang dpe mdzod khang, 2003), 86-87.

²⁶³ For a very brief account of him, see Mkhas btsun bzang po, *Rgya bod mkhas grub rim byon gyi rnam thar phyogs bsgribs* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1973-1990), vol. 11, 301.

²⁶⁴ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 44.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.,39.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 62, 92.

golden throne holder of Ganden Monastery. Lozang Rinchen had requested permission to transcribe the teachings by Jamyang Zhepa. However, his Nyingma training at Mindrol Ling and Dorje Drak monasteries angered Jamyang Zhepa, who did not allow him to take notes of his teachings. However, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso received teachings from Lozang Rinchen anyway.²⁶⁷

Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was fortunate to receive extensive teachings from Jamyang Zhepa while the latter was residing at Pabong Kha (*pha bong kha*).²⁶⁸ On one occasion at Pabong Kha, Jamyang Zhepa gave major transmissions including teachings of his own works:²⁶⁹ *Generation Stage of Guhayasamaja* (*gsang 'dus kyi bskyed rim*), *Recitation Manual for Guhayasamaja* (*gsang 'dus kyi bsnyen yig*), *Generation and Completion Stages of Vajrabhairava* (*dpal rdo rje 'jigs byed kyi bskyed rdzogs gnyis*), and *Recitation Manual for Vajrabhairava* (*rdo rje 'jigs byed kyi bsnyen yig*). Jamyang Zhepa had a particular interest in retaining future transmission of these major teachings. He said, “although these teachings are secret teachings. However, now I am old, there is also possibility that these transmissions may be broken.”²⁷⁰

While in Pabong Kha, Jamyang Zhepa also imparted the transmission of *the Essence of Eloquence* (*legs bshad snying po*)²⁷¹ to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso.²⁷² The same transmission was later requested by the reincarnation of Khri chen dge 'dun phun tshogs at Labrang. Since Jikme Wangpo was absent on that occasion. He was busy collecting donations to prepare for a trip to Central Tibet the

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 61-62. Pha bong kha is located just outside Lhasa, it is a major Geluk retreat site affiliated with Sera Monastery.

²⁶⁸ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 62.

²⁶⁹ See 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje. *Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*. 16 vols (Mundgod: 'Dras spung bkra shis sgo mang dpe mdzod khang, 2015).

²⁷⁰ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 85: *yang de skabs tshod 'di dag bka' gnyan po yin kyang/ da nga yang lo lon pa dang/ 'di tsho'i lung rgyun yang chad mi 'gro ba'i nges pa med pas de res 'di rnam kyilung byed*.

²⁷¹ It is a major work composed by Tsongkhapa on definitive and provisional teachings.

²⁷² Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 59.

following year,²⁷³ he only received the transmission upon his return from Central Tibet.²⁷⁴ According to Jikme Wangpo's *Records of Teachings Received (gsan yig)*, this is Jikmed Wangpo's only transmission of this particular teaching based on this core text from the collection of works composed by the Geluk founder, Tsongkhapa.²⁷⁵

Later, while leading Palkhor Chode Monastery, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was compelled to undertake intense training in tantric teachings as there were several tantric colleges among the seventeen subsidiary colleges at the monastery. He earnestly sought teachings from some of the most well-known tantric masters in Central Tibet and quickly established himself as one of the eminent tantric teachers and much sought after in Amdo. One major teacher during his formative period as a tantric master was the famed master, Jampel Gyatso.²⁷⁶ Among teachings identified and given to Jikmed Wangpo or his followers in Amdo in general, the teaching transmissions Khenchen Gedun Gyatso received from Jampel Gyatso figure prominently. It was only after earnestly repeated requests that the master then gave major transmissions of Vajramala (*rdo rje phreng ba*)²⁷⁷ and Mitra Zoki (*mi tra dzo gi*)²⁷⁸ to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso.²⁷⁹ It should also be noted that the master reveals two reasons for not readily giving the two transmissions. One was the frequency of misfortunes that befell the transmitters. Jampel Gyatso said there were fewer obstacles in the case of transmitting the teachings of Mitra, however, there was greater danger in giving the transmission of Vajramala. According to Jampel Gyatso, in the past, famed master, Lozang Tsultrim (*blo bzang tshul khrims*, u.d.), contracted a serious illness during the teaching and only

²⁷³ Ibid., 277.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 310.

²⁷⁵ Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po'i gsan yig (stod cha)*. In *Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po'i' gsung 'bum*, vol. 11 (Bla brang: Bla brang dgon pa, 1999), 114b.5.

²⁷⁶ For a list of teachings Khenchen Gedun Gyatso received from 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho, see Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 90-92.

²⁷⁷ It refers to a major tantric deity. Major teachings associated with Guhayasamaja Tantra are also known by this deity's name.

²⁷⁸ This Indian yogi is commonly known as Mi tra. It seems his ritual transmissions were highly valued, at least in the Geluk community in the eighteenth century.

²⁷⁹ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 85, 87-89.

after a series of longevity rituals performed by the attendees for days as advised by dharma protector, did he recovered and resume teaching.²⁸⁰ He also recounts that one master known as Sanggye from Drepung, later while serving as the abbot of Litang Monastery (*li thang dgon pa*)²⁸¹ in Kham, became gravely ill during the teaching of this transmission and succumbed to his illness before completing the transmission. The memory of these unfortunate incidents held Jampel Gyatso back from giving the transmission. He said, “I am also afraid upon hearing these misfortunes.”²⁸² The second reason was his busy teaching schedule interfered with giving the teaching.²⁸³

Later back in Rebgong, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso gave the transmission of Mitra Dzoki during a great prayer festival after being especially requested to do so by high ranking lamas at Rongwo.²⁸⁴ It seems Khenchen Gedun Gyatso received the transmission of Mitra from both Jampal Gyatso and Jamyang Zhepa. Records indicate that when he gave this transmission, he first performed certain rituals as a preliminary stage following the Mitra transmission of Jamyang Zhepa, however, during this teaching, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso subsequently followed the lineage transmission passed down by Jampel Gyatso.²⁸⁵

Even earlier in his career, while in Centra Tibet, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s fame as a transmitter of teaching transmissions was well-established. For example, a famous geshe in Lhasa requested and received from Khenchen Gedun Gaytso his transmission of teachings on the collection of works by the second Changkya Ngakwang Lozang Choden (*lcang skya ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan*, 1642-1714).²⁸⁶ And during his extended stay at Tashi Lhunpo²⁸⁷ before leaving permanently for Amdo, he gave a series

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 86.

²⁸¹ It is the major Geluk monastery in Li thang area, Kham.

²⁸² Ngag dbang ‘jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 86-87.

²⁸³ Ibid., 87.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 274.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 278.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 105.

²⁸⁷ It is the major Geluk monastery in the Gtsang region founded in 1447 by the first Dalai Lama Dge ‘dun grub (1391-1474).

of teachings including especially *Generation Stage of Bhairava* (*'jigs byed skyid rim*) composed by Jamyang Zhepa.²⁸⁸ Back in Amdo, he was widely sought after to give major teaching transmissions at Rongwo, Labrang, and beyond as he had directly received them from the most well-known Geluk masters in Central Tibet. Khanpo Pandita (*mkhan po paN+Ti ta*),²⁸⁹ a nephew of Sertri Lozang Tenpe Nyima (*gser khri blo bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma*, 1689-1772), a major reincarnation lama at Lamo Dechen Monastery (*la mo bde chen dgon pa*) in Rebong's northern neighboring area, Chentsa (*gcan tsha*), came seeking Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's teaching on the *Collection of Mantras of Cakrasamvara* (*bde mchog sngags btus*).²⁹⁰ This same man also received his teaching on commentaries on *Guhayasamaja*, *Cakrasamvara*, and *Bhairava*, all composed by Jampel Gyatso.²⁹¹ Unable to receive the Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's transmission of the *Wheel of Vajrapani* (*phyag na rdo rje'i 'khor lo*) in person, Tongkor Sonam Gyatso, uncle of Jikmed Wangpo, sent Jamyang (*'jam dbyangs*, u.d.) to seek the transmission from Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and then have Jamyang transmit it to himself.²⁹²

As he grew older, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was aware of maintain a need to keep the continuity of the teaching transmissions as indicating by the sadness he felt when no one sought the transmission of the *Body Mandala of Cakrasamvara* (*bde mchog lus dkyil*). According to Ngakwang Jamyang Palden, "thinking of spreading this very transmission in the future as well," Khenchen Gedun Gyatso gave this transmission, possibly at Rongwo.²⁹³

²⁸⁸ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 138.

²⁸⁹ He was possibly a resident lama at the Qing court.

²⁹⁰ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 254.

²⁹¹ Ibid, 305. I have yet to identify the collection of works by 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho.

²⁹² Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 273: *khyed kyi bla ma mkhan chen rin po che'i sku mdun nas phyag na rdo rje 'khor lo chen po'i dbang zhig cis kyang gsan thub pa gyis la rjes nas 'dir nged la yang dbang de 'bul dgos.*

²⁹³ Ibid., 317.

Supporting the Livelihood of Monastic Community

At outset of his term as the abbot, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso reached an agreement that that he would be in charge of curricular training as the monastery's main teacher. However, immediately after assuming his role as the abbot, he had to shoulder the monastery's financial responsibilities for growth and sustainability. In fact, the survival of a large institution such as Rongwo entirely depended on economic means. That Khenchen Gedun Gyatso had to maintain a busy schedule in his later life teaching and then trying every means to obtain funds to run the monastery as required of an abbot in his time and, in fact, throughout Buddhist institutional history. Given his previous experience as the abbot of Palkhor Chode Monastery, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso probably also knew what was required to maintain operation of this large institution. In the biography, after becoming the abbot, we see no indication that he made complaints regarding the necessity of searching for financial resources and the weight of such duties on him. On the contrary, he eagerly took up the task of finding wealth and funds, and he was keen to ensure that he had obtained enough funds to last longer and that his tours to collect donations and funds were uninterrupted. Consequently, he was able to build an extensive network of campaigns and patron communities.

Soon after assuming the role of the abbot, he was invited to Khargong where he sought grain donations (*'bru bsod*) for the first time. When *Nangso* Thokme (*nang so thogs med*, u.d.) in Rongwo Marang asked him to perform a funeral ritual on behalf of his deceased relative, he undertook an extended period visiting numerous places including monasteries and villages in the area-the domain of Rongwo Marnang. During this tour, he gave numerous teachings and in return he received abundant offerings. The biographer records, "at that time, feasting foods

offered from all directions are given back to monastic communities of these retreat centers. The majority of horses and yaks are given as common gifts to these retreat centers. The remainder of offerings, a few horses and yaks, and the remainder of foods were transported back to Sergye Gang (*ser rgya'i sgang*) by many people from villages in the area along with a few personal attendants. From there, the villages transported [those donations] to Rongwo out of devotion (*dad pa*).²⁹⁴

His next destination to collect donations as dharma funds for the monastery (*grwa tshang gi chos thebs*) was Bido area where the local ruler of Bido and Chumar Rinpoche, the head of the historic Bido Monastery, provided important assistance in collecting a large amount of donations from both villages and monasteries in the area. At the conclusion of his fundraising campaign, there were over four hundred skin sacks of grain, which, the biographer claims, was a major success in collecting offerings. As ordered by Chumar Rinpoche, people from Chikhor (*spyi 'khor*)²⁹⁵ and Bido transported the offerings to Bido Monastery. From there, monks led by Chumar Rinpoche escorted Khenchen Gedun Gyato and his entourage and helped transport offerings received during the tour to Rongwo.²⁹⁶

During his early years of abbatial office, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was trying to ensure that the scholastic program was fully functioning and kept intact. To that end, he made attempts to adapt himself to a strict routine of giving teachings at Rongwo. However, he had to make exceptions when he was invited for occasions of special importance by loyal patrons. During

²⁹⁴ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 217: *de skabs phyogs thams cad nas phul ba'i gsol ston gyi kha bzas 'khur ba'i rigs rang rang phyogs kyi sgrub sde'i dge 'dun gyi tshogs su btang/ rta nor gyi 'bul dngos rnams kyang phal cher phyogs de'i sgrub sde rnams la spyi 'bul mdzad/ 'bul dngos lhag ma rnams dang rta nor kha shas gsol ras lhag ma rnams de phyogs kyi sde grong gi mi mang po dang zhabs phyi re gnyis bcas kyis ser rgya'i sgang du bskyal/ de nas rim par sde grong rnams kyis dad pa'i sgo nang rong bor bskyal.*

²⁹⁵ The name of this village is alternatively spelled as Gcu 'khor.

²⁹⁶ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 218.

breaks between dharma assemblies and teaching sessions (*tshogs and chos grwa*), he stayed at the monastery unless major patrons requested his presence.²⁹⁷ As we will see throughout the years he spent in Rebgong, his career in Rebgong alternates between giving teachings mostly at Rongwo and fundraising trips in the area. The number of instances when he embarks on trips solely to collect donations to support Rongwo Monastery as recorded in his biography was an obvious anomaly vis-à-vis any biographical work that I have come across. His commitment as a fundraiser in addition to leading the monastery as its main teacher makes him stand out among the main reincarnation lineage masters leading monasteries, at least, as recorded in Tibetan Buddhist biographical literature.

During his early years as the abbot of Rongwo Monastery, he goes to seek donations in Tibetan communities in Rebgong and adjacent areas. However, when he was seeking butter donations in Tibetan herding communities closer to the Mongol domain where the second Shar was residing, he visited the second Shar. The biographer records, “donations were rarely collected in the Mongol domain”.²⁹⁸ This suggests the secure border was established between Tibetan and Mongol territories since 1734. However, as his fame and stature increased in the region, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso established close relationships with Mongol nobles and then periodically visited the Mongol area to collect donations.

In one year, there were poor harvests. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso worried that he would have a difficult time supporting rituals held at Rongwo. Though in despair, he still made efforts to collect grain donations by visiting most places in Rebgong. However, they were only able to obtain very little. Therefore, at some point, during the tour, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso felt compelled consult a fortuneteller about prospects for collecting donations. He asked, “Dream

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 218.

²⁹⁸ Ngag dbang ‘jam dbyang dpal ldan, 223: *de skabs tshor sog sde mang po la bsod snyoms cher mi mdzad*.

master, we put much effort in seeking donations, however, we did not obtain much. Now, there are few villages in Upper Rebgong from which we did not seek donations. Do you know if it would be worth going to these villages?”²⁹⁹ The fortuneteller indicated that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso should instead visit Dobi area where he, the fortune teller says, “would be offered a granary.”³⁰⁰

On his way to Dobi, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso stopped in Sechang (*se chang*)³⁰¹ to seek donations. He and his entourage stayed with two local Geluk monk scholars in the village. With their help in mobilizing the villagers to contribute donations, a good amount of donations was obtained from Sechang, even more so given the fact that the harvest season had yet to come.³⁰² In Dobi, he was very welcomed by Dobi *nangso*, who arranged their stay during the visit. He received a huge amount of donations due to urging from Dobi *nangso* and other nobles in the area for contributions.³⁰³ His tour was concluded with Khenchen Gedun Gyatso consecrating a set of handwritten Kagyur canon at the request of the local ruler and senior monks in Dobi.³⁰⁴ On that occasion, Dobi *nangso* praised his subjects in making donations to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. However, he ordered, “grain donations should be transported to the retreat area in Sechang, which would take a day so everyone should take this responsibility. If there is any negligence by

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 226: *mri lam pa nged chos grwa mang gi don du bsod snyoms la dka' las mang po byas kyang shog thon ma byung bas da char re song stod phyogs 'di na bsod snyoms ma byas pa'i sde grong kha shas yod pas de tsho la phyin pa drag gam/ khyod kyis cang shes sam.*

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 226: *'bru mdzod cig 'bul bar 'dug.* This Tibetan idiom simply means he would be offered a huge amount of grain.

³⁰¹ It is a community comprised of a few villages near Bido.

³⁰² Ngag dbang 'jam dbyang dpal ldan, 227.

³⁰³ Ibid., 227-228.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 230.

not showing up on that day at the retreat place, we will investigate and take measures so, everyone, be aware.”³⁰⁵

When villagers in Sechang learned of the greater amount of offerings made in Dobi, they invited Khenchen Gedun Gyatso back to their community to make a second round of offerings, not to be surpassed by their neighboring Tibetan community. The donations on this tour in Dobi and Sechang accumulated to nearly five hundred skin sacks of grain that was, as the biographer claims, enough to last the entire monastic community at Rongwo for a year.³⁰⁶ We can read between the lines that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was calculating to see if he should seek more when he already had enough donations, or if he should visit more places and communities until he made the next round of trips seeking donations.

The anecdotal account of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s sorcery practice is also revealing. His occasional sorcery practice resembling that of a village monk or lay tantric ritual specialist was useful in persuading villagers to give more donations, highlighting the mutually dependent relationship between the monastic and lay community. The best way to explain his role here is through the tantric model explained by Samuel. In addition to lofty goals of elite Buddhism, tantric masters also perform tantric rituals for worldly concerns.³⁰⁷ The biographer was clear in his presentation of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s sorcery practices as success stories. For example, in the village of Hor Ponpo (*hor dpon po*), there were multiple deaths caused by a ghost, so he was approached to perform rituals to drive away those evil spirits. He stayed in one of the houses believed to be haunted by ghosts and performed exorcist rituals involving recitation of mantras

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 229-230: *bsod snyoms kyi 'bru rang rang so so'i mi rnams kyis se ching gi sgrub sder nyi ma gcig la skyel dgos pas thams cad kyis khur len dgos shing gal srid su'i thad nas gal chung byas te nyi ma der sgrub sder ma 'byor tshes nged tshos rtsar gcod tshod 'dzin byed nges yin pas thabs cad kyi nges par gyis.*

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 230.

³⁰⁷ For extensive discussions, see Samuel (1993), 244-269.

devoted to and visualization of Hayagriva and the ghost was finally expelled. He performed similar rituals devoted to Vajrabhairava and other dharma protectors. His performance of the ritual devoted to Playful Fine Horse (*rta mchog rol ba*)³⁰⁸ was extremely efficacious in eliminating demonic obstacles. Soon afterwards, he performed a funeral service for a man who died from harm caused by a ghost in the next village.³⁰⁹

Khenchen Gedun Gyatso also visited a few villages near Sechang where there was a mix of Tibetan and Muslim people and obtained a huge amount of offerings. The villagers were so glad that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso actually visited because lamas refused to come on the grounds that the villages were Muslim. His visit to these Tibetan communities living with Muslims in the same villages was the first of such kind in the area.³¹⁰ This may also be read as a proof that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso seized any chance to seek donations as support for the monastic population and ritual performance. This was a major concern throughout the rest of his life in Rebgong.

During the entire period of his position as abbot at Rongwo Monastery, seeking donations was a primary activity. For example, in one year, after receiving a good amount of grain donations in many places in Rebgong, he came to seek donations in Senge Shong (*seng ge gshong*) near Rongwo Monastery. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was so glad that there was a good harvest because it meant good prospects for receiving larger donations. His trip seeking donation on this occasion was only to be interrupted by the request of his ritual service on the occasion of a serious illness contracted by the second Shar, who was resident at Urge. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso didn't stop immediately to leave for Rongwo, instead he refused to visit the second Shar.

³⁰⁸ This is possibly a form of Rta mgrin (Hayagriva).

³⁰⁹ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyang dpal ldan, 228-229.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 229.

Khenchen Gedun Gyatso thought that he had been unable to collect much in the way of donations from the same region in the previous year. Therefore, the current year had good harvests so he hoped to stay on and collect a satisfactory amount of donations. He reasoned that if it was not for his successful tour to seek donations from Dobi from the previous year, monks from Rongwo could have gone hungry:

Last year, due to bad harvest, only a small amount of grain was obtained in offerings from this area. In the face of hardship, I visited the Dobi area and it turned out to be good. Otherwise, there would not be enough supplies for the monastery. This year, during such good harvests, for supplies of the monastery, I shall ask for offerings as much as I can—and it would be a loyal service to the monastery in general. Since half of the village was yet to be covered for donations, it is better to invite another important lama residing in the Mongol domain (*sog phyogs*).³¹¹

The above statement is clear with respect to his goal of putting the welfare of the monastery ahead of the second Shar's illness. He thought it was not a significant issue and suggested that some high ranking lamas resident in the Mongol area should be invited for ritual service instead. Usually, at Urge, many high ranking lamas from Amdo and a few from Central Tibet were always resident for extended periods or short visits as both preceptors and priests to the Mongol rulers, who were patrons of major Buddhist masters and reincarnation lineages. Even after the decline of power, the Mongols who once ruled the greater part of Amdo in 1734, the Mongol ruler nevertheless retained a strong presence in Amdo political and religious spheres.

³¹¹ Ngag dbang 'jam dbayng dpal ldan, 236: *lo snga mar yul phyogs 'dir lo ngan pa'i stabs kyis phyogs 'dir bsod snyoms la 'bru nyung zad las ma byung/ nged kyis dka' las la ma 'dzem par rdo sbis phyogs su phyin pas dga' mo byung na ma gtogs grwa tshang gi mthun rkyen dka' bar byung/ da lor lo legs 'di lta bu'i dus su grwa mang gi mthun rkyen du bsod snyoms gang zhib cig byas na dgon gnas 'di nyid kyi spyi'i la rgya yin 'dug cing/ da dung sde ba'i phyed la bsod snyoms gnang ma tshar bas sog phyogs su bzhugs pa'i bla ma 'gangs can zhib gdan 'dren zhus nas yag pa 'dra*. Sog phyogs refers to the domain of the *qinwangs*.

Khenchen Gedun Gyatso suggested Rongwo invite Zhabdrung Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen (*zhabs drung blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*, 1660-1728), the main reincarnation at Lamo Dechen Monastery, then probably resident at the Urge. Therefore, Zhabdrung Rinpoche was sent an invitation from Rongwo, but unfortunately, he couldn't come. However, later, the second Shar particularly requested Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's presence for ritual service. Only then did Khenchen Gedun Gyatso discontinue his tour and leave to visit the second Shar, who passed away not long after.

Gyel Khenchen Lozang Nyima (*rgyal mkhan chen blo bzang nyi ma*, d. 1757) returned to Rongwo seven years passed after Khenchen Gedun Gyatso had become the abbot of the monastery. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso then immediately appointed as abbot, Gyal Khenchen Lozang Nyima, who was an illustrious scholar trained in Central Tibet. This explains why he was chosen to serve as the abbot of the prestigious monastery of Gyel Metok Tang (*rgyal me tog thang*) in Central Tibet. He later served as a preceptor and priest for a short period to Konchok Bang (*dkon mchog 'bangs*, u.d.), the ruler of Yeru in the Koknor region at the time, when the latter requested a priest from the Central Tibetan Government. Hence, his fame and stature were comparable to that of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso.

Gyel Khenchen Lozang Nyima was reluctant at first to agree to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's proposal but gave in when Khenchen Gedun Gyatso insisted that he do so. Before Gyel Khenchen Lozang Nyima acquiesced to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's request, his concern was that since fall harvest season was long gone that year, there was no chance for him to seek donations and support the monastic community at Rongwo. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso reassured Gyel

Khenchen Lozang Nyima of a steady flow of donations to the monastery due to the latter's stature and charisma.³¹²

During the time Gyel Khenchen Lozang Nyima was abbot, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's responsibility to secure donations continued as though he were still the abbot. While on the tour collecting donations from some Mongol communities, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso visited Urge. The queen assumed that since Khenchen Gedun Gyatso no longer had abbatial responsibilities, he could have a short residence there, but Khenchen refused. Although he was no longer the abbot, his teachings were required at monastic centers in Rebong. He only agreed to stay for a few days, which was enough time enough to perform longevity rituals.

A few instances in the biography recording him sponsoring the great prayer festival, the largest monastic ritual that takes about three weeks at major Geluk monasteries. One year during the great prayer festival at Rongwo, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso offered a day's communal feasting (*mang ja*) to the entire monastic community of over 1,300 monks from some twenty monasteries with Rongwo as the main seat of this monastery network. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a charismatic leader and, on that occasion, he doled out significant amounts of gifts to the monastic community. Senior monks and monastic officials from monasteries within the network led by Rongwo Monastery were given gifts that fit their position, e.g., a horse with a saddle was granted to Gyel Khenchen Lozang Nyima as an abbot. Other reincarnation lamas each granted a fine horse. Rongwo *Nangso* Ngakwang Lozang was offered a *chipchen chinkhel tar* (*chibs chen chin khal thar*).³¹³ Khenchen Gedun Gyatso offered long drapes over pillars to both the Major Assembly Hall and the Manjushri Temple.³¹⁴

³¹² Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 245.

³¹³ The term is obscure. I assume it refers to a fine horse for lamas to use as a mount animal as its first part, *chibs chen*, literally translates as a great mount.

³¹⁴ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 245.

Building the Maitreya Image Required Gold and More.

Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's success in obtaining donations was also important in terms of his capability in commissioning temple building projects at Rongwo. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso asked if Rongwo *nangso* would allow him to use an old monastic building and then convert it to a temple for housing a Maitreya statue he was planning to commission. The *nangso* was extremely pleased with this request and instead, granted the old assembly hall. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso thought it was appropriate and even necessary to build a Maitreya image for Rongwo as the monastery increasingly established itself as a major regional center. The *nangso* completely agreed when the former said that only having a Manjushri temple was inadequate and that there should have been a Maitreya temple in the first place.³¹⁵ However, his challenge was that there were never sufficient resources to commit to such a building project. The only request from the *nangso* was that Khenchen sponsor a Maitreya image to be built at a size that would match Khenchen's prestige and wealth. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was keen on building an image bigger than the Manjushri image so they carefully measured the Manjushri image and concluded that the old assembly hall was spacious, but the ceiling was too low to install such a large image. The solution was to raise the ceiling. Due to his stature, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was able to mobilize villagers to prepare and transporting the logs. Logs were offered by the communities of Yarnang, Dowa (*mdo ba*) and Gonshul (*mgon shul*). Logs offered in Karing (*kar ring*) were transported on the frozen river to Rongwo to build a Maitreya temple.³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Large Geluk monasteries tend to have two grand temples, one housing a large Manjushri image and the other a large Maitreya image. Funds and resources required to build and then maintain these large temple as permanent essential fixtures represented great wealth and growth.

³¹⁶ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 248.

Next, when both the temple and clay image of Maitreya were complete, it was time for Khenchen Gedun Gyatso pay a handsome amount to the artisans. In addition to a large banquet, the main artisan crafting the sculpture was paid a total of ten animals including horses and yaks as well as a fine riding horse with a saddle, riding cushion, and a bridle, along with religious implements, several types of silk, and a pair of shoes. Monks were each paid six or seven animals including horses and yaks, and some silk. The carpenters were each paid a total of five horses and *nor (nor)*³¹⁷ and some silk. The main blacksmith was paid four animals horses and *nor*. The two lesser blacksmiths were each paid a yak. The masons were each paid three animals, a combination of horse and *nor*.³¹⁸

A huge amount of gold was required for gilding the Maitreya image, so Khenchen Gedun Gyatso set out to collect gold donations in Yarnang. Afterwards, he went to collect gold donations in Serkha (*gser kha*), where a large quantity of gold was obtained to use for gilding the face of the Maitreya image. Gold was expensive and hard to obtain through donations from the supporting communities, therefore a local artisan was dispatched to Lanzhou (*lan jo 'u*) where more fine gold was obtained than was possible in Linxia (*ka ju*), where poorer quality gold was sold in smaller quantities for the same price. Since gold was expensive and never enough, r, after collecting donations in the Mongol domain, he again visited Serkha to solicit gold donations where more gold was offered.³¹⁹

After gilding the Maitreya image and painting murals on the temple walls, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso hosted a banquet celebrating the completion of the project. On that occasion, the leading artisans were paid in the following amount: three fine horses, one *dzomo (mdzo mo)*,³²⁰

³¹⁷ *nor* is a generic term referring all the likes of yaks, bulls, *dzo*, and *dzomo*.

³¹⁸ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 251.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 251.

³²⁰ It is a female hybrid between a bull and a female yak.

three yaks, and several kinds of silk and cloth, and a ceremonial scarf. The monks were each given three animals (horses and yaks), silk, and cloth. Gomar Trinle (*sgo dmar 'phrin las*, u.d.) was responsible for preparing fine gold powder and was given a horse and a yak, a piece of the three items: silk, cloth, and ceremonial scarf. The two monk artisans responsible for drawing wall murals, were each given a pair of *pula (pu la)*³²¹ shoes and a silk scarf. Cooks and people fetching water were together given a horse. The workers responsible for making mud were given a *toru (tho ru)*.³²² Two artisans responsible for preparing paint were collectively given a *dzō (mdzo)*.³²³ The superintendent and his crew were given two horses and two yaks. Thus, everyone involved in the Maitreya project were paid.³²⁴

Later, senior monks including abbots of scholastic and tantric colleges, led by Khenchen Geun Gyatso and Gyel Khenchen Lozang Nyima, performed a seven-day long consecration and fire offering rite for the Maitreya image and temple wall murals. After this concluded, a banquet was held for them and they were paid for their ritual service. Gyal Khenchen Lozang Nyima, who led the consecration ritual, was offered a generous amount of gifts including a vajra and bell, a pair of large cymbals, a pair of small cymbals, a vase of flowers, a chest of ritual objects, a bowl, a brass tea tray, a tea kettle, a barley bowl, a copper plate, a pair of silk boots, a fine horse,³²⁵ a spotted horse, a colt, an ordinary horse, two mares and a foal, a *dzōmo*, a female yak and her calf, five pieces of different silk and cloth, and a large piece of ceremonial scarf. The abbot of the tantric college was offered three horses, one *dzōmo*, and three *nor*, and a piece of silk, Horgya Tsang (*hor rgya tshang*)³²⁶ was offered two male adult horses, unspecified number of

³²¹ The term is obscure.

³²² It specifically refers to a two-year-old colt.

³²³ It is a male offspring of a bull and female yak.

³²⁴ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 252.

³²⁵ The horse is referred to as *mgon rta*.

³²⁶ He seems to be a reincarnation lama.

nor, and five other, different items. Finally, four horses, one *dzomo*, a female yak, four male yaks of different ages were given to some twenty monk scholars, three cooks, and *chabril* (*chabril*).³²⁷ Chant leader and ritual assistants were also given generous gifts, that were, however, not listed in the biography.³²⁸

The following is an example of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso performing rituals to raise wealth to sustain his monastic institution as funds at the disposal of a monastic leader such as Khenchen Gedun Gyatso were forever inadequate. He was constantly requested to perform funeral and consecration rituals. Once, when Khenchen Gedun Gyatso went to Dechen Monastery to perform a five-day long ritual empowerment for the terminally ill lama, Dampa Norbu Gyatso (*dam pa nor bu rgya mtsho*, u.d.), he was paid with a total of thirty horses and *nor* including a white horse with a saddle and a horse with a good gait, thirty sheep, a fine tea kettle, silk, and cloth, totaling eighty different items.³²⁹ Later, when this master died, he was invited to supervise the funeral service. Again, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was paid generously, i.e., a combination of twenty-five horses and *nor*, fifty sheep, a robe, a bell, a pair of small cymbals, a tent, silk, and cloth.³³⁰

After a number of years of service as the abbot, Gyel Khenchen Lozang Nyima was succeeded by Tshodu Lozang Trinle (*tsho 'du blo bzang 'phrin las*, b.1672), another major native monk of Rebgong. When Tshodu Rinpoche passed away after serving as the abbot for a few years, senior monks at Rongwo Monastery were anxious to appoint a new abbot at Rongwo. They worried that a lack of a charismatic leader as abbot would diminish the scholarly strength

³²⁷ A monk assistant who serves water to monks to rinse their mouths before and after being served a meal.

³²⁸ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 253.

³²⁹ Ibid., 254.

³³⁰ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 256.

of the monastery and impact monastic enrollment.³³¹ As this was considered a crisis, Gyal Khenchen Lozang Nyima, a former abbot, assembled all the senior monks, including the young third Shar, and discussed the need for appointing a charismatic leader and that it should be none other than Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. Gyal Khenchen Lozang Nyima asked Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to consider the abbatial office for at least two or three years. The young third Shar also pleaded and expressed his keen desire to benefit from receiving teachings from Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, perhaps in fear Khenchen Gedun Gyatso might move to Urge or to Labrang Monastery as tutor to Jikmed Wangpo as his presence was constantly requested there. When the third Shar, Gyal Khenchen Lozang Nyima, and all the other senior monks pleaded, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso had to accept the office, but he made his own request that Rongwo *nangso* should sponsor the monastery, which Rongwo *nangso* gladly accepted, as he knew from many years of his leadership role at Rongwo, that the financial needs of the monastery placed a heavy burden on the abbot.³³²

The same year when he started his second term as the abbot, seeking financial support to the monastery was still his major concern. He visited both Tibetan and Mongolian communities in the area collecting donations. His major goal that year was to collect donations of lamb skins so monks could use them in winter to keep warm. In Shabar Ni, he was offered lamb skins as donations since local people had heard beforehand that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was planning to collect and distribute lamb skins to monks at Rongwo Monastery. On his way back to Rongwo, he collected donations of lamb skins in Tharshul (*thar shul*). He also purchased lamb skins in the two abovementioned places so that he had enough to give to the entire monastic community at Rongwo. After concluding his tour, each monk was given a piece of lamb skin. A

³³¹ Ibid., 291.

³³² Ibid., 292-293.

total of over 180 pieces of felts were distributed.³³³ The number of monk recipients is hard evidence in the biography for estimating the contemporary enrollment at Rongwo.

Bringing Home the Buddhist Canon and Printing a Text Manual

To obtain a set of the Derge (*sde dge*) edition of the Tengyur³³⁴ and print his text manual on the collection of topics also was a motivation for going on trips to collect donations for Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. There were some instances where Khenchen Gedun Gyatso offered generous gifts to the *qinwang* and queen. After seeking donations in Tamuk (*mtha' smug*) and communities of other Tibetan and Mongolian tribes, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso went over to Urge where he met Tendzin Wangshuk, who succeeded *Qinwang* Tshewang Tendzin as the latter's adopted son. On behalf of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, the Mongol official, Pelshul Rakhe Jesang (*dpal shul Er khe ja'i sang*), offered the Mongol lord an array of gifts including horses, yaks, silk, and cloth.³³⁵ The *qinwang* and queen were in return asked to provide Khenchen Gedun Gyatso a set of the Derge edition of Tengyur and a set of collected works by the Sakya masters (*sa skya bka' 'bum*). The *qinwang* consented, commenting that this exchange was precisely the means to maintain the patron and priest relationship first started between Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and his predecessor.³³⁶

Khenchen Gedun Gyatso later also offered many gifts to the queen, Erkhe Shar,³³⁷ when she travelled to Central Tibet as partial payment for obtaining a copy of the Derge Tengyur. The

³³³ Ibid., 296.

³³⁴ It refers to the multi-volumed translation of Indian commentaries on the Word of the Buddha.

³³⁵ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 258.

³³⁶ Ibid., 258.

³³⁷ She is the queen of *Qinwang* Bstan 'dzin dbang phyug.

gifts included a hundred horses, two hundred sheep, twenty silver coins, twenty pieces of different silk, and a large number of ceremonial scarves, totaling five hundred items.³³⁸ Upon their return from Central Tibet, as greeting gifts, but more precisely intended as partial payment for the Tengyur, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso sent a total of fifty horses and mules combined, and two hundred sheep. Later, after going a tour to collect donations of horses and yaks from Dani Suruk (*da na'i su rug*), he visited Urge. During this visit, Khenchen Gedun offered the *qinwang* and queen one hundred fifty gifts including sixty horses, fifty grams of gold, and a great variety of silk and cloth.³³⁹ When the Tengyur cannon was finally brought to Urge, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso dispatched a crew of monks to take it with a variety of silk and cloth as gifts.³⁴⁰ Later, he personally visited the Mongol lord to present gifts to repay his kindness in bringing the Tengyur back from Derge. On this occasion, he was in turn given a large number of material offerings,³⁴¹ followed by a second round of unidentified gifts which he returned.³⁴²

When the printing of the collection of topics was initiated at Yershong Monastery, a workshop was set there. At the very beginning of the workshop, nineteen ceremonial scarves and nineteen pieces of cloth are offered to the craftsmen from Khechen Gedun Gyatso. Later, upon completion of carving of woodblocks, the craftsmen were offered ten different pieces of fine silk and cloth, ten large ceremonial scarves, ten pieces of cloth in long length, twenty pieces of cloth in short length, and fine ceremonial scarves totaling fifty-one items. When the final printed work was presented to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, he then bestowed the following amounts of gifts: ten different pieces of fine silk, ten silver coins, ten large ceremonial scarves, eleven small

³³⁸ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 261.

³³⁹ Ibid., 266.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 272-273.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 268.

³⁴² Ibid., 277.

ceremonial scarves, twenty-three different pieces of cloth in long length, thirty-seven different pieces of cloth in short length, a Bi la, a box of tea, a total of eleven horses and mares, nine *nor* (mostly *dzo* and *dzomo*), fifty sheep, and fine ceremonial scarves amounting to 173 items in total. Thus, they were given gifts in varying amounts throughout the workshop.³⁴³

Patron and Priest

Due to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's stature as an eminent scholar, it was fitting that he led Rongwo Monastery (and previously, two monasteries in Central Tibet). However, he was also a highly accomplished tantric master being trained under some of the most prominent tantric teachers while serving as the abbots of two monasteries in Central Tibet. Thus, his status as both a scholar and tantric master easily made him a natural fit to serve as a priest to the Mongol royal family.

Shortly after his return to Rongwo, when Taiji Gaden Samdrup (*dga' ldan bsam 'grub*), a nephew of Queen Namgyal Drolma,³⁴⁴ died very young, creating fear that the spirit of this youth would be disturbed by *singan* (*sri ngan*),³⁴⁵ Queen Namgyal Drolma invited Khenchen Gedun Gyatso perform funeral services, as well as conduct rituals to dispel evil from *singan*. This was the first contact between Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and the queen, and she feared that he might refuse her invitation on the basis of her having never met him. Therefore, she asked the second Shar Gedun Ngakwang Trinle to persuade Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to participate in the funeral. The second Shar then sent a message requesting his presence during the funeral. Even the second

³⁴³ Ibid., 333-334.

³⁴⁴ She was a queen of *Qinwang* Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin.

³⁴⁵ It is a malicious spirit.

Shar had to plead for his participation in the funeral on account of his relationship with Khenchen Gedun Gyatso being his main teacher. After the Shar persuaded Khenchen Gedun Gyatso into participating in the funeral, the Mongol lord sent an official invitation emphasizing the importance of his presence on this occasion.³⁴⁶ Given the high stature of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and his well-placed connections in Central Tibet, it is not an exaggeration for his disciple biographer to claim that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's status dwarfed the most powerful regional Mongol lord and the most important lineage holder at Rongwo. However, it should also be noted that such rhetoric commonly in use in hagiographical Tibetan literature to glorify the revered subject of the biography.

When messengers with official invitation from the Mongol lord finally came to Rongwo, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was collecting donations in Dobi and was somewhat perturbed at this interruption. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso would cancel or postpone his trip to Urge due to the cold weather, but since *Qinwang* Tshewang Tendzin stated that it was critical that he visit, plus the insistence from the second Shar, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso left at once with his entourage.³⁴⁷

When Khenchen Gedun Gyatso met the queen in person, the latter communicated how fortunate she was to meet Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and actually receive him for the funeral service. The queen was clearly aware of his fame and popularity in Central Tibet as the biographer has her recounting Khenchen's success as a great scholar and monastic leader in the presence of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. The queen detailed a series of misfortunes that had befallen the Mongol ruler's family and kin, despite ritual protections rendered by great dharma protectors and lamas from both Central Tibet and Amdo. All these efforts were in vain.

³⁴⁶ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 231.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 231.

Eventually, one young Taiji succumbed to his illness.³⁴⁸ As requested by the queen, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso performed a longevity ritual for the *qinwang* and also gave life empowerments to the queen herself.³⁴⁹

During the visit, the queen delivered a secret message to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso via Darhen Rapjampa (*dar han rab 'byams pa*, u.d.) about identifying the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa. Given a long simmering dispute over identification of the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa, the queen urged Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to preside over the event and do a divination ritual to identify the proper candidate. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso refused on account of his having no experience with divination and expressed his unease at lying in violation of his monastic precepts in case the divination results indicate one other than the true candidate. However, it is clear that he was aware of the queen's preference among the candidate but cited his monastic precept not to perform divination as well as intentionally indicating her chosen candidate.³⁵⁰ He thus maintained his position of non-intervention regarding the event even after the queen's repeated request. In the end, the queen was advised by Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to recite the prayer *Offering to Guru (bla ma mchod pa)*³⁵¹ in hopes of receiving aid in finding the right reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa.

The queen's persistent persuasion in secret and her familiarity with his scholastic career and fame in Central Tibet leads to the conclusion that the funeral service was partly an occasion she carefully planned in order to her establish a close relationship with him and that this might influence the identification process of the second Jamyang Zhepa and tip the intense situation in

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 231.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 232.

³⁵⁰ Ironically, there are few instances in the biography where Mkhan chen dge 'dun rgya mtsho was recorded as identifying some reincarnations as well as advising against the search for a major lama in one instance.

³⁵¹ This verse in question is composed by Panchen Blo zhang chos rgyam.

favor of her faction. However, there was a genuine religious purpose of ritual cleansing of Singan and conducting a longevity ritual for the Mongol lord in Urge.

During the visit, there was an outbreak an epidemic in the area surrounding Urge so Khenchen Gedun Gyatso concluded his visit with a ritual to help pacify the epidemic (*rims tshad*). A final act of this visit also included giving ordination precepts to two sons of low ranking Mongol officials, who recovered from the epidemic.³⁵² This shows the great honor bestowed by the Mongol royal family to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso lofty status and importance of as a tantric master meant that the Mongol royal family was eager to court him and show their allegiance by having him give precepts to boys in the inner circle of the Mongol royal family.

When *Qinwang* Tshewang Tendzin was seriously ill, monks were first summoned from Labrang to perform rituals. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was also invited to perform rituals. He was well received by the queen and other senior officials Urge. The biographer claims that the recovery of the Mongol lord was solely attributed to ritual empowerments performed by Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. despite monks from Labrang and elsewhere performing rituals simultaneously. Later, as requested by the queen, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso had speny three weeks performing necessary funeral rituals on behalf of the deceased Mongol lord.

When the queen herself passed away, a select group of highest ranking lamas of Geluk School in Amdo, including Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, attended the funeral.³⁵³ The Mongol lord's successors maintained a close relationship with Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and Rongwo Monastery. When Mergan Deching, along with his queen and prince, visited Rongwo Monastery

³⁵² Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 233.

³⁵³ From the group, Nag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal dlan identifies abbots of Mi nyak, Stong 'khor, and Bya khyung monasteries. See Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 248.

on pilgrimage, they made sure to visit Khenchen Gedun Gyatso at Tashi Khyil, where the latter hosted a banquet for the visitors and gave a series of teachings as requested.³⁵⁴

The prince here is identified as *Dzasak* Wangshuk Rapten, the future *Qinwang* Tendzin Wangshuk. He continued to maintain patron and priest relationship with Rongwo Monastery and once sponsored the great prayer festival at Rongwo and sought some a particular esoteric teaching on Vajrapani from Khenchen Gedun Gyatso.³⁵⁵ It is important to note that since the deceased *Qinwang* Tswewang Tendzin had no children so he adopted his nephew, Tendzin Wangshuk.³⁵⁶ After the passing away of the Mongol lord, Tendzin Wangshuk was to inherit the title of Junang. In the biography, he was simply mentioned at the rank of *dzasak*, which probably indicates that he waited some time before actually receiving the title of *qinwang*. The Mongol-Rongwo relationship was cemented and then consolidated from the first through third Shar. However, the status of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso as a revered priest to the Mongol royal family no doubt brought the Mongol rulers closer to Rongwo than before.

Conclusion

The rise of the Geluk School in Rebgong was deeply tied to the support and patronage the Geluk Buddhists enjoyed from their Mongol allies. The same story can also be told in the context of building the Geluk School in Tibet, especially since the late sixteenth century through much of the two succeeding centuries this dissertation is focused on. However, at least in Amdo, we also see an increasing role the local monks and secular leaders played over the course of Geluk

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 256-257.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 330. This teaching is identified as *phyag rdo gtum po khyung lnga*.

³⁵⁶ He is alternatively known as Dbang phyug rab brtan.

development.

The biographical study of Khenchen Gedun Gyatsho's scholastic and charismatic career provides a window into the greater influence of local Geluk monks and lay communities participating in the sustained success of Rongwo Monastery and the Geluk School in the post-Kalden Gyatso period in Rebgong. An eminent scholar who won intellectual fame and abbotship of Palkhor Chode Monastery in Central Tibet, Khenchen Gedun Gyatsho was highly esteemed by his Geluk followers in Rebgong and beyond. This helps explain his charismatic power and religious authority becoming well established in religious communities in Amdo, especially his role as a major keeper of lineage transmissions much sought after in Rongwo and Labrang. His impressive success as a scholar and teacher translated into further growth of the Geluk scholarly community bounded by not just a much enhanced scholastic system, but also a continuity of unbroken teaching transmissions.

In addition to his high status as a transmitter of major lineage teachings, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso also assumed responsibility for managing logistical issues of Rongwo Monastery, especially by procuring donations to support the livelihoods of monks, to fund rituals, and sponsor building and repairing temples and images. As we saw later in his life, the financial threat to the institutional existential situation was a concern to the point that his teaching career was periodically interrupted by travel to collect donations. While Mongol support was still essential to the continued growth of Rongwo, the active teaching career and extensive network of campaigns and patron communities the Rongwo leader cultivated were even more significant than the Mongol influence.

Chapter Three

Establishing Labrang as the Source of Dharma: Transmitting Teachings Back to Labrang Monastery and Jikme Wangpo's Successful Scholastic Career

Introduction

Ironically, rather than addressing important personages and institutions associated with Rongwo Monastery, this section is, instead, a detailed study of the life of Jamyang Zhepa's reincarnation, Jikmed Wangpo, who is equally famous for being an eminent scholar as his predecessor.³⁵⁷ Moreover, as modern native Tibetan scholars would give him the epithet of the "custodian of dharma in Amdo" (*mdo smad kyi bstan pa'i bdag po*), however exaggerated this epithet is, at least, this title demonstrates that the modern scholarship at least rightly acknowledges the outsized role Jikmed Wangpo played in reorganizing the religious landscape and changing the direction of the course of the Geluk influence in Amdo. This section is mainly concerned with documenting the life of Jikmed Wangpo, his success in building up the Geluk base in Amdo, his interactions with the main figures at Rongwo Monastery, and his dealings with Geluk institutions in the domain of Rongwo Monastery and its main reincarnation lineages. His life as a successful Geluk scholar and leader, therefore, would shed much light on the growth of Labrang Monastery and its influence in Amdo. Nonetheless, his towering figure and successful career also offer us a glimpse into the development of Geluk School and its main institutions in Rebgong, thanks to the geographical proximity between Labrang and Rongwo. The growth of Labrang Monastery and the increasing power of its main lineages had major implications in the religious terrain of Rebgong. The unusual choice of the biographical literature on Jikmed Wangpo as the main

³⁵⁷ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me, *Kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa sku 'phreng gnyis pa rje 'jigs med dbang po'i rnam thar* (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1990).

source is also precisely because of the grave dearth of source materials directly dealing religious history of Rebgong during that period.

As discussed in the previous chapter with its section on the life of Kechen Gedun Gyatso, we have quite a good grasp of internal dynamics of Rongwo Monastery, especially how Rongwo Monastery coped with the financial burdens the operation of its institutions and monastic community required. We are fortunate to have much needed insight into the historical realities of this major monastery and its interactions with local lay society –essential for the growth of institutions– on the basis of the study of the biography of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. However, our understanding of this period is very limited given that we are blind to exactly how Rongwo and its main lineages interacted and competed with neighboring Geluk institutions and communities during this time. The sources produced at Rongwo or historical sources on institutions and reincarnation lineages in Rebgong provide little if any detail regarding the relationships between these major institutions in Rebgong on one hand and their non-Geluk counterparts on the other hand. That said, biographical literature on Jikmed Wangpo, the main lineage figure at Labrang, is extremely helpful for my project of fleshing out the level of engagements between institutions. It is important to examine the multifaceted relationship between Labrang and Rongwo monasteries for several reasons, including the fact that Rongwo is the geographically closest major Geluk center, as well as the fact that the unusual expansion of influence of Labrang and Jikmed Wangpo's lineage in the region by definition means that the status quo of the religious climate had been contested, renegotiated, and reshaped. However, conducting research in such fashion requires going through a vast amount of literature, biographical accounts of several dozen important figures and histories of equally numerous monastic institutions that dotted the region, to sift through and reconstruct any level of

relationship these two major monastic centers had either directly or indirectly. While I go closely through independent biographical works, I also heavily rely on *Religious History of Amdo* for identifying persons and institutions and to draw out their affiliations and the maintenance or changes in their relationships while also paying special attention to historical contexts where these events transpired and the significance of their implications if any.

First, this section will look at the importance of intellectual lineages for mapping out the religious history of Geluk School in Amdo. I will have a particular focus on the life of Jikmed Wangpo and what role intellectual lineage plays in his upbringing as the true successor of Jamyang Zhepa and building his successful career as a model for Buddhist scholarly community. As Jikmed Wangpo's legitimacy is largely dependent on his role as the keeper of the transmission of teachings from Jamyang Zhepa in addition to being a scholar in general as formidable as his predecessor. Therefore, I will devote this section to map out a network of Buddhist masters who are sources of these teachings passed down from Jamyang Zhepa. I will also consult relevant sources to reconstruct historical contexts where the transmissions of Jamyang Zhepa are invaluable in the sense that Jikmed Wangpo had to go to great lengths to seek these teachings from the sources—from learned masters who were mostly direct disciples of Jamyang Zhepa. In addition to his legitimacy as the true reincarnation, built upon being the main keeper and future transmitter of teachings of Jamyang Zhepa, Jikmed Wangpo embarked on a campaign to seek both textual and oral transmissions widely in Central Tibet. The teachings he sought were believed to be rare in Central Tibet, but even more so in Amdo. His keen interest in collection of rare texts and transmissions and his growth in the process as an unrivalled scholar in his own right convinced his peers that not only he was the true reincarnation, but that he was also in any case a scholar equally established as his predecessor. His intellectual life and career

exemplified a model scholar for the future scholarly community as he successfully built Labrang as “the source of dharma” (*chos kyi 'byun gkhungs*). Comparatively, in adequate detail, I therefore describe Jikmed Wangpo's intellectual life in this chapter based on hitherto unavailable sources. However, this section is also intended to provide a historical context to situate the role of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso in the intellectual history of the Geluk School in Amdo with a special focus on how significant his role was in the scholastic career of Jikmed Wangpo as the latter built up his legitimacy and place as the true reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa and his vision of establishing Labrang as a premium learning institute.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ There are a number of publications on Buddhist lineage transmission history as mostly recorded in works of *gsan yig* genre in Tibet, but the majority of them are useful only in terms of introducing a general audience to the formulaic text structures, genre requirements, and technical language as well as the outlines of contents of well-known works of the genre. See Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, *Life, Transmissions, and Works of A-mes-zhabs Ngag-dbang-kun-dga'-bsod-nams, the Great 17th Century Sa-skya-pa Bibliophile*. Handbuch der Orientalistik Supplementband, vol. 38 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007); and “The ‘Records of Teachings Received’ in the Collected Works of A mess Zhabs: an Untapped Source for the Study of Sa sky pa Biographies”, in *Tibet, Past and Present. Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, ed. Henk Blezer, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 161-181. See also Jowita Kramer, “The Gsan yig of A mes zhabs: Observations Regarding Its Stylistic and Formal Features,” In *Contributions to Tibetan Literature. PIATS 313 2006: Tibetan Studies (Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Königswinter)*, ed. Orna Almogi (Halle: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2008), 489-510. See also Sam van Schaik, “Sun and Moon Earrings: The Teachings Received by ‘Jigs med gling pa,” *Tibet Journal*, vol. 25 (2000): 3-32; Franz-Karl Ehrhard, “Flow of the River Ganga’: The Gsan-yig of the Fifth Dalai Lama and Its Literary Sources” in *Studies on the History and Literature of Tibet and the Himalaya*, ed. Roberto Vitali (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2012), 79-96; There are also a few works carrying out painstaking research on textual transmission of a single text. See Leonard van der Kuijp, “Some Remarks on the Textual Transmission and Text of Bu ston Rin chen grub's Chos 'byung, a Chronicle of Buddhism in India and Tibet,” *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 25 (2013): 115-193; and “Fourteenth Century Tibetan Cultural History VI: the Transmission of Indian Buddhist Pramanavada according to Early Tibetan Gsan yig-s.” *Asiatische Studien*, no. 49 (1995): 919-41. See also Martin, Dan. Grey Traces: Tracing the Tibetan Teaching Transmission of the *Mngon pa kun btus (Abhidharmasamuccaya)* through the Early Period of Disunity in *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism. PIATS2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000*, eds. Helmut Eimer and David Gelmano (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 335-57. David Germano proposes that the creation of lineage accounts is for the purpose of legitimizing traditions within Nyingma School facing challenge over the authenticity of their transmissions from the new translation schools. See David Germano, “The Seven Descents and the Nature of sNga' 'gyur: The “History” of rNying ma Tantras,” in *the same volume*, 225-291. It is worth noting that Ujeed's dissertation identifies multiple media for establishing religious authority, i.e., ancestral lineage, reincarnation lineage, transmission lineage, and master-teacher lineage, while also pointing out there is obvious overlap in the latter two, and occasionally in the latter three as well. I also appreciate her use of *gsan yig* as a source of biographical information to establish the identity of important masters in a single lineage transmission. See Sangseraima Ujeed, *The 'Thob yig gsal ba'i me long' by Dza-ya Paṇḍita Blo-bzang 'phrin-las (1642-1715): an Enquiry into Biographies as Lineage History* (PhD. diss., University of Oxford, 2017). Despite all the scholarship above, we still do not know the historical contexts nor social implications in adequate terms.

The second half of this chapter is devoted to the development of Geluk institutions under the leadership of Jikmed Wangpo. He was a Buddhist visionary who was credited with initiating major developments at his main seat Labrang Monastery, but was also instrumental in Geluk institutional developments in the larger Geluk community in Amdo. Although the factionalism at Labrang was disruptive to the monastic community at Labrang, ironically, Jikmed Wangpo's taking the helm at Labrang Monastery may have inaugurated the heyday of that same monastic community that initially resisted him. His success as both a scholar and institutional leader fueled major developments of Geluk School in Amdo. Again, thanks to the fact that Rongwo Monastery and its main lineages as well as their supporting communities are in the adjacent area, the expansion of domain of Labrang and its branch monasteries, coupled by increase in influence of their main lineages meant a threat to and encroachment on the religious power of Rongwo Monastery and its main lineages. However, it is important to keep in mind that relationships between the main seat and its branch monasteries are never stable, as monasteries tend to entertain multiple relationships with major monasteries and reincarnation lineages with conflicting interests over the course of time.

Controversy Surrounding Lineage Identification

The question of his legitimacy as the true reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa seems to resurface in a number of instances in the biography. Given the frequency of the question of his legitimacy being raised in his life, we can perhaps conclude that the many efforts and constant insistence by Jikmed Wangpo to receive the transmission of teachings that originated from Jamyang Zhepa can be better understood in terms of their significance in building up his status as the true

successor of Jamyang Zhepa. Therefore, I will describe numerous historical contexts where his legitimacy appears to be contested as it is extremely important for justifying his receipt of transmissions of teachings passed down from Jamyang Zhepa.

After the death of Jamyang Zhepa, there were disagreements over the identification of the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa between two factions respectively led by the first Se Ngakwang Tashi (*bse ngag dbang bkra shis*, 1678-1734; henceforth the first Se)³⁵⁹ and the first Detri Lozang Dondrup (*sde khri blo bzang don grub*, 1673-1746),³⁶⁰ both close disciples of Jamyang Zhepa. While Ngakwang Tashi served as abbot and main teacher for thirty-two years after a short stint as a monastic disciplinarian, Lozang Dondrup was the treasurer. Whereas Lozang Dondrup along with Queen Namgyel Drolma supported Jikmed Wangpo as the reincarnation, the first Se Ngawang Tashi and *Qinwang* Tshewang Tendzin advocated for the prince to be the successor.³⁶¹ The result was such that due to intense conflict, the place of successor has been vacant without the candidate from either side enthroned. Only after the death of Ngakwang Tashi, Lozang Dondrup prevailed by having Jikmed Wangpo enthroned at Labrang. The queen was instrumental in identification process of Jikmed Wangpo. A major sign of Jikmed Wangpo's legitimacy being called into question is the rebellious nature of the factionalist monks when the mature Jikmed Wangpo was taking the helm of Labrang Monastery. And the increasingly intense conflict led to the permanent departure of the second Se Ngakwang Jamyang Tashi³⁶² (1738/39-

³⁵⁹ For a biography of Bse ngag dbang bkra shis, see Blo bzang bkra shis 'phrin las rgya mtsho, *Ngag dbang bkra shis kyi rnam thar zung 'jug grub pa'i rnga chen* (Kan lho: Gter lung yid dga' chos 'dzin, n.d.).

³⁶⁰ He is commonly known as Sde khri rin po che. For a short biography of Sde khri blo bzang don grub, see Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me, *Blo bzang don grub pa'i zhal snga nas kyi rnam par thar pa gsang chen chos kyi bsngags pa'i rol mo*, In *Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 5 (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2003): 485-517.

³⁶¹ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab ragys (1982), 368-369.

³⁶² For a short biography of the second Se Bse ngag dbang bkra shis, see Blo bzang bkra shis rab rgyas, *Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs bkra shis kyi rnam thar*. (n.d.).

1813) from Labrang. For now, I will present numerous occasions where his status as the successor of Jamyang Zhepa was at stake.

Stong skor rin po che consulted dharma protectors in Central Tibet about whether he should have kept identification of his young nephew Jikmed Wangpo secret. The consultation said it was fine in the short term, but did not look good in the long term. This word eventually reached the ears of Queen Namgyal Drolma. When Jamyang Drakpa (*'jam dbyangs grags pa*, u.d.), a main disciple of Yershong Jamyang Lodro (*g.yer gshong 'jam dbyangs blo gros*, 1651-1733),³⁶³ visited Urge, the queen said she often prayed that the reincarnation be born immediately. She also said she had many lamas including Khenchen Gedun Gyatso perform rituals for the purpose of swift reincarnation of the second Jamyang Zhepa. She also performed a series of recitation rituals for that matter. Yet there was no sign of rebirth of his successor. Jamyang Drakpa tried to console her and told the queen about Tongkor Sonam Gyatso (*stong skor bsod nams rgya mtsho*, 1684-1752)'s visit to Yershong Monastery. During that visit, Stong skor rin po che mentioned about a candidate being born to a brother of his. When Jamyang Dragpa said he was confident that the candidate was the true successor based on descriptions of the signs by Stong skor Rinpoche, the queen was as "delighted as a peacock who heard thunder."³⁶⁴

Following this lead, the queen herself secretly investigated the possible candidate by actually having an extended stay in secret near Nangra, the birth place of Jikmed Wangpo.³⁶⁵

Although the queen and Detri Lobsang Donrup supported identification of Jikme Wangpo, in the

³⁶³ For some biographical information on G.yer gshong 'jam dbyangs blo gros, see 'Brug thar and Sangs rgyas tshe ring, *Mdo smad rma khug tsha 'gram yul gru'i lo rgyus deb ther chen mo* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2005), 595.

³⁶⁴ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 27.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 28-29.

face of intense opposition, the latter was not able to be brought over to Labrang until he reached the age of sixteen. Although the queen actively supported Jikmed Wangpo, she passed away the year before his arrival, and did not live to witness the enthronement of Jikmed Wangpo at Labrang Monastery.³⁶⁶

When Jikmed Wangpo was eventually travelling to Labrang for his enthronement, Detri Lozang Dondrup issued an official decree mandating the presence at Labrang of students of Jamyang Zhepa who were not residing at Labrang at the moment.³⁶⁷ At Labrang, one Ngakwang Tenzin (*ngag dbang bstan 'dzin*, u.d.), perhaps a disciple of Jamyang Zhepa, was appointed as his tutor.³⁶⁸ He was later put to occasional tests. When Detri Lozang Dondrup and his tutor asked him to recognize his predecessor's personal copies of treatises, he picked up many without a mistake.³⁶⁹ Later, when Jikmed Wangpo was asked to compose a poem praising Tsongkhapa, as befitting a reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa, he pulled it off.³⁷⁰

At the age of eighteen, he was taught poetry and language arts under one Ngakwang Jamyang (*ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs*, u.d.). Given his unusual progress, the tutor could not help, but praise him as “the true reincarnation of the all-knowing predecessor” (*kun mkyen gong ma'i yang sprul dngos*).³⁷¹ Here, his identification as Jamyang Zhepa was not actually in question, yet the fact that his tutor uttered such a remark two years after his enthronement at Labrang could be read as a suggestion that his reaffirmation of Jikmed Wangpo as the true successor of Jamyang Zhepa may well have been pertinent. Later, when he returned home for his deceased father's funeral, one Jamyang Gyatso (*'jam dbyangs rgya mtsho*), probably from Lamo Dechen

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 43.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 45.

³⁶⁸ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 51.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 52.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 53.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 59.

Monastery, advised Jikmed Wangpo that “as one like you is born as the reincarnation of All-knowing Jamyang Zhepa, if there is not a chance to undertake thorough training in sutra and tantra in the Central Land, it is a misfortune for Buddhism. Therefore, you must go at all costs.”³⁷² Possibly taking such requests to heart as well as feeling the high expectations on him to become as well-established a scholar as his predecessor, for the rest of that year Jikmed Wangpo studied intensively in retreat. When he took his examination on the perfection of wisdom teachings, he narrowly passed it, hence he thought he must go to study in Central Tibet for intellectual refinement.

As a grown-up monk, when Jikmed Wangpo prepared to visit for an extended training in Central Tibet, many at Labrang opposed his plan and as a result there ensued serious discussions about whether he should travel to Central Tibet that year or in general. Some senior monks pointed to the factionism that may still prevail dating back to its origin during the time of Jamyang Zhepa and voted against it. Some thought he should go, but cited political chaos in Central Tibet as the main reason for aborting his plan.³⁷³ And Puntshok Tendzin (*phun thogs bstan 'dzin*, u.d.), a disciple of Jamyang Zhepa, warned that he should take great care over his diet as poisoning was not an uncommon practice for selective assassinations in Central Tibet. Jikmed Wangpo explicitly connected his journey to the legitimacy of his reincarnation, dismissing their fears by saying, “if I am the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa, I won't be burnt by poisoning.”³⁷⁴ As he faced challenges to his legitimacy in many instances, his planned extended stay and training in a major monastic learning center seems to have been an ordeal that he had to

³⁷² Ibid., 64: *kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rke la khyed lta bu'i sprul sku zhig 'khrungs bzhin du/ yul dbus su byon nas mdo sngags kyi gsan sbyong mthar phyin pa zhig gnang rgyu ma byung na bstan pa'i chag sgo yin pas cis kyang 'byon dgos.*

³⁷³ Ibid., 75.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 76: *nga 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i sprul sku yin na dug gis tshugs mi yong.*

go through to establish himself as the true successor of Jamyang Zhepa, and, even more importantly, to establish his own independent status as an intellectual genius on a par with his predecessor.

One year after his return from Central Tibet, Jikmed Wangpo served as the abbot of Labrang. Two years later, there was an eruption of a major conflict at Labrang, which also perhaps points to ongoing factionalism and the contested nature of Jikmed Wangpo's legitimacy as the successor of Jamyang Zhepa and therefore of his leadership at Labrang. Many of my source texts indicate that there was a faction of monks skipping classes as well as disputes occurring in the classroom and debate courtyard. At one point, the faction of monks gathered and their names were recorded. The leaders of this monastic faction including Arik Kukye (*a rig sku skye*, u.d.), Hortsang Rikma (*hor gtsang rig ma*, u.d.), and Gyazai Lama (*rgya bza'i bla ma*, u.d.) were captured. The same night, three hundred factionalist monks fled capture at Labrang. When Arik Kukye was punished by *latik* (*la thigs*),³⁷⁵ these monks returned and attempted to break him out of imprisonment by force. They failed on all three attempts and were captured. Arik Kukye was later released and left for Rongwo Monastery. The majority of the factionalist monks appealed to Urge for pardon.³⁷⁶ However, the outcome of the appeal was not clear, but Konchok Tenpa Ragye would conclude that conflict between the two factions was successfully resolved.³⁷⁷

Circumstances surrounding the foundation of Mokri Monastery (*rmog ri dgon*) is a major indicator that Jikmed Wangpo's legitimacy was still in question after his success building a large network of monasteries around Labrang Monastery. Mokri Monastery was built by Lozang

³⁷⁵ This is a type of punishment by having wax from burning candle drip on a human body.

³⁷⁶ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 371.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 372.

Tenzin (*blo bzang bstan 'dzin*, u.d.) on a site chosen by Jikme Wangpo.³⁷⁸ Its foundation was traced to a prophecy that third Panchen Palden Yeshe (*pdal ldan ye shes*, 1738-1780) had revealed to Jikmed Wangpo about the future monastery during his first visit to Central Tibet. When Jikmed Wangpo resided at one location known as Khyungtse (*khyung rtse*), he was visited by Ngago Ponpo (*rnga rgod dpon po*, u.d.)³⁷⁹ and and Zhakdor Bum (*phyag rdor 'bum*, u.d.).³⁸⁰ When Jikmed Wangpo brought up the prophecy and his plan of building a monastery, Zhakdor Bum walked out during the meeting.³⁸¹ Later, at Labrang, when Jikmed Wangpo sent for people including Mutu Ponlop (*mu to dpon slob*, u.d.),³⁸² Ngago Ponlop (*rnga rgod dpon slob*, u.d.),³⁸³ and Zhakdor Bum.³⁸⁴ Before their meeting with Jikmed Wangpo, Zhakdor Bum suggested to his fellow companions that they would prostrate only once. During the meeting, soon Jikmed Wangpo started discussing the issue of founding a new monastery, Zhyakdor Bum objected, “For us, each of the clan has a small monastery, therefore, there is no need for founding a new one. There is also no point for you to exert your power.”³⁸⁵ Jikmed Wangpo rebuked, “Up to Oka (*'ob kha*) in Chone (*co ne*) is my [domain], therefore, your [domain] is of course mine.”³⁸⁶ Zhakdor Bum walked out abruptly without giving a definitive answer. Two lamas also followed him. It seems Zhakdor Bum was a local secular leader powerful enough to swing the decision not in favor of Jikmed Wangpo. The two lamas were, however, later successfully convinced to comply with the request from Jikmed Wangpo as the latter claimed that the creation of a new monastery

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 590.

³⁷⁹ His name suggests that he is probably a local ruler of an area known as Rnga rgod.

³⁸⁰ He seems to be an influential local ruler.

³⁸¹ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 597: *phyag rdor 'bum gyis 'char ston gseng grol nas zhus*.

³⁸² As a Dpon slob, he is probably a high ranking monk.

³⁸³ His name suggests he is probably a high ranking monk from Rnga rgod.

³⁸⁴ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 597.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 598: *nged tshor tsho ba re'i grangs kyi dgon chung re dang/ bla ma gnyis la yang dgon pa re yod pas gsar 'debs mi dgos shing/ nyid nas dbang yod gngang don kyang med*.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 598: *co ne'i 'ob kha tshun chad nga'i yin na khyed tsho nga'i los yin*

is purely for the sake of dharma. He also threatened that to do otherwise will make them subjects of criticism. However, right before the deal was reached, Konchok Tenpa Rabgye (*dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgya*, 1801-1866) records a dialogue between Zhakdor Bum and the fifth Kirti Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen (*kirti blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*, 1712-1777),³⁸⁷ significantly relevant for our discussion here. Zhakdor Bum defended his decision by saying, “It is also said that the middle in the All-knowing [lineage] is the reincarnation of the [first] Detri. If not Jamyang Zhepa, founding [the monastery] is not allowed.”³⁸⁸ Kirti Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen responded, “There are three reincarnations of Jamyang Zhepa. There is a fully ordained one. It is Sir (*zku zhabs*) Jikmed Wangpo. There is a king. It is Emperor Qianlong. Lastly, there is one who is neither lama nor lay tantric Buddhist.”³⁸⁹ When Zhakdor Bum became excited and anxious to learn identity of the third one, Kirti Rinpoche said, “That one may be biting the chest meat of a pig at this very moment.”³⁹⁰ As Konchok Tenpa Rabgye rhetorically suggests, the humor here is intended to clarify that Jikmed Wangpo is the indisputable reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa.³⁹¹ Since this meeting took place in the home of Zhakdor Bum, therefore, the visit of Kirti Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen to Zhador Bum to the local secular leader’s home might partially indicate that this visit was probably orchestrated by Jikmed Wangpo to obtain the consent and support from Zhyakdor Bum. It is evident here that Zhakdor Bum held reservations against Jikmed Wangpo being the true reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa. However, Kirti Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen insisted and, as it turns out, convinced him of Jikmed Wangpo as the successor

³⁸⁷ His lineage lineage is traced back to Rong chen dge ‘dun rgyal mtshan (1374-1450) who is a disciple of Tsong kha pa.

³⁸⁸ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 598: *kun mkhyen bar ma sde srid kyi sprul sku yin zer mkhan kyang snang/ ‘jam dbyangs bzhad pa’i sprul sku min na ‘debs gi mi ‘jug.*

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 598: *‘jam dbyangs bzhad pa sprul sku gsum yod/ dge slong zhig yod pa sku zhabs ‘jigs med dbang po khong yin/ rgyal po zhig yod pa gong ma chan lung yin/ gzhan bla ma ‘dra ‘dra sngags pa ‘dra ‘dra zhig kyang yod.*

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 598: *des phag sha brang zhig la so ‘deb gi yod na thang*

³⁹¹ Ibid., 598.

of Jamyang Zhepa. Consequently, the monastery was founded towards the end of the same year as a result of merge of several small local monasteries. The success of this monastery is indicated by its monk enrollment when it reached over six hundred.³⁹² Jikmed Wangpo also built a scholastic program there, adding to the curricula of the two colleges that existed previously. It is notable that Zhakdor Bum had particularly asked for a scholastic college, rejecting the proposal of Jikmed Wangpo to establish a Kalachakra college as inspired by the Panchen Lama.³⁹³

Another major place to look for evidence of Jikmed Wangpo's legitimacy being questioned is events surrounding the hostile relationship between factions of Jikmed Wangpo and the second Se Ngakwang Jamyang Tashi. When the second Se was mature, Jikmed Wangpo appointed the second Se as the abbot of Labrang Monastery, a position he held temporarily before leaving Labrang permanently. Soon the tension rose at Labrang between the factions. Facing brewing tension within the monastic community, the second Se forced himself to step down from the abbot office. He was then punished by tasking him to perform certain ritual services. Aware of such treatment of the second Se, the Se clan ruler based in Rebgong where the first Se originally hailed from appealed to *Qinwang* Ngakwang (*ngag dbang*)'s³⁹⁴ father Besu (*be su*)³⁹⁵ about the mistreatment of the second Se at Labrang. The *qinwang* summoned both the Jikmed Wangpo and the second Se. According to the biography of the second Se, the reasons justifying punishment of the second Se at Labrang lists: the second Se's lack of courtesy for messengers from Central Tibet and China on certain occasions, expelling certain monk against the will of Jikmed Wangpo, the second Se's predecessor's refusal to recognize Jikmed Wangpo as the true reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa, leaving abbatial office at his will, and instructing the

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid., 599.

³⁹⁴ He is probably *Qinwang* Ngag dbang dar rgyas.

³⁹⁵ He is probably *Qinwang* Rdo rje pha lam.

Khagya clan ruler to worship certain protectors. As expected, Jikmed Wangpo's influence dominated the mediation process, so it turns out that the meeting was a total failure.³⁹⁶ Later, the opposing factionalist monks defiled the residence of the second Se. The second Se and several monks in his entourage had to flee out of his residence. After their escape, monks broke into the residence and used knives to tear shoes previously worn by the second Se. The important images of sixteen sthaviras and others were taken away and then dumped in a nearby river. The fact that the factionalists even went to the extreme of destroying the second Se's chamber and his personal implements angered the supporting communities of Namla (*gnam lha*),³⁹⁷ Rongar (*rong ngar*), and Khagya who supported the second Se and helped him set up at Terlung Monastery (*gter lung dgon pa*), then a monastery of a modest-size with an assembly hall and few monk residential quarters. It was later expanded as the second Se made it his main seat. Since then, Jikmed Wangpo and the second Se had never met each other in person.

Jikmed Wangpo as the Keeper of Transmissions of Teachings originating from Jamyang Zhepa

As mentioned earlier, Queen Namgyal Drolma had identified Jikmed Wangpo in 1735.³⁹⁸ Her candidate was disputed by the first Se Ngawang Tashi and *Qinwang* Tshewang Tendzin instead supporting the latter's son, Gaden Samdrup (*dga' ldan bsam 'grub*), as the true successor.³⁹⁹ The death of these two powerful supporters made the way for Detri Lozang Dondrup to bring over his own candidate-Jikme Wangpo. When an envoy sent to Central Tibet to consult dharma

³⁹⁶ See Blo bzang bkra shis rab rgyas, 25.

³⁹⁷ There are three clans under the name *gnam lha*: *gnam la kha gsum*

³⁹⁸ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgays (1982), 368.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 369.

protectors over the identification of the successor returned confirming the candidate chosen by Queen Namgyal Drolma and Detri Lozang Dondrup, it, was, however, met with objection from the segment of the monastic population loyal to the late Se Ngawang Tashi.⁴⁰⁰

One of the main monastics opposing the enthronement of Jikmed Wangpo, after the death of the first Se and *qinwang*, was Serkha Sonam Gyatso (*gser kha bsod nams rgya mtsho*, u.d.), who attempted to appeal to Urge and block the entry of Jikmed Wangpo to Labrang. Serkha Sonam Gyatso was, however, contained and then expelled from Labrang together with few other monks including Kangtsa Khyenrap (*rkang tsha mkhyen rab*, u.d.) and Ngawa Kharil (*rnga ba mkhar ril*, u.d.).⁴⁰¹ Among students of Jamyang Zhepa and the first Se Ngakwang Tashi, as Konchok Tenpa Reabye records, Serkha Sonam Gyatso and Kangtsa Khyenrap are the most learned ones with expectation of them serving as abbots succeeding Se Ngawang Tashi at Labrang Monastery. Serkha Sonam Gyatso was famous for being the main keeper of transmissions of teachings passed down from Jamyang Zhepa and his notes thereof, probably via Se Ngawang Tashi for the most part. However, due to the conflict at Labrang, he left Labrang permanently and his future lineage was therefore based at Bido Monastery in Rongwo Marnang area. Ngawa Chokyong (*rnga ba chos kyong*, u.d.) was known for taking notes of major teachings by Se Ngakwang Tashi, which were later compiled into the latter's collection of works.⁴⁰² According to Konchok Tenpra Rabgye, they were both considered as among the leaders of the rival faction at Labrang. Palmang Lozang Dondrub (*dbal mang blo bzang don grub*, 1696-1756)⁴⁰³ was also expelled, but brought back to Labrang by Detri Rinpoche who

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 379.

⁴⁰³ For a short biography of Dbal mang blo bzang don grub, see Blo bzang dpal ldan chos kyi rdo rje. *Blo bzang dpal ldan chos kyi rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*. vol. 6 (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 421-430.

treated the former as his heart disciple. Konchok Tenpa Rabgye would also identify *Ngawa Rabten* (*rnga ba rab brtan*, u.d.) and Ngawa Chokyong who are also famed scholars at Labrang as rival enemies (*dgra log*) to Jikmed Wangpo and his factition, who also left Labrang.⁴⁰⁴ Thus, exodus of major scholars trained under Jamyang Zhepa and Se Ngakwang Tashi was a major blow to the vibrant intellectual climate at Labrang. Reasonably enough, as expected, seeking transmissions of teachings given by Jamyang Zhepa was at the heart of Jikmed Wangpo's campaign for rebuilding its scholastic lineage in context of his vision of Geluk expansion in Amdo. As discussed in the preceding section, his status as the custodian of transmissions of teachings from his predecessor is of major significance in legitimizing his reincarnation authority as the successor of Jamyang Zhepa.

Due to awareness of this major concern related to the lineage authority, soon after his enthronement at Labrang there were discussions regarding the search for a tutor who could pass down teachings from his predecessor Jamyang Zhepa.⁴⁰⁵ It was concluded that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, a direct disciple of Jamyang Zhepa, be the tutor. Ling Dondrub Gyatso (*gling don grub rgya mtsho*, u.d.) was dispatched to invite over Khenchen Gedun Gyatso who served as a tutor until he passed away.⁴⁰⁶ For now, I will leave off here to highlight many efforts and means taken by Jikme Wangpo to receive transmissions of teachings from his predecessor from other masters. The relationship between Jikmed Wangpo and Khenchen Gedun Gyatso will be explored in much detail as possible in accordance with the hitherto available sources at hand in the section immediately following this one in the chapter.

⁴⁰⁴ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab ragys (1982), 369.

⁴⁰⁵ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 61-62: *kun mkhyen gong ma'i chos rgyun gyis mtshon pa'i bka' chos gsan yul gyi bla ma mkhas btsun bzang gsum 'dzoms shing gsan rgya che ba zhig dgos 'dug ces gros bsdur*.

⁴⁰⁶ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 62.

Besides Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, Jikmed Wangpo studied under Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso (*stobs ldan sngags rams pa*, u.d.) through whom he received transmissions of teachings from Jamyang Zhepa. According to Gungtang Tenpe Dronme (*gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me*, 1762-1823),⁴⁰⁷ Jikmed Wangpo received teachings from this master, but only transmissions of exposition and practice on the *Magical Wheel of Complete Victory over the Three Realms* (*khrol 'khor khams gsum rnam rgyal gyi khrid leg len*) were identified among them.⁴⁰⁸ Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso received teachings directly from Jamyang Zhepa, yet he had also studied extensively under Tarshul Chokyong Gyatso (*thar shul chos skyong rgya mtsho*, b. 1716)⁴⁰⁹ and Drakar Ngakrampa Lozang Tenpa Dargye (*brag dkar sngags rams pa blo bzang bzang pa rab rgyas*, b. seventeenth century).⁴¹⁰ Tharshul Chokyong Gyatso is a learned scholar who studied under Jamyang Zhepa at Labrang, therefore, it is fitting that Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso was trained under Tharshul Chokyong Gyatso receiving teachings transmitted from Jamyang Zhepa. However, According to Jikmed Wangpo's *Records of Teachings Received* (*gsan yig*),⁴¹¹ among numerous transmissions he received from Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso, he received three different transmissions of exposition on *Four Yogas of Generation and Completion Stages of Bhairava* (*'jigs byed bskyed rim dang rdzogs rim rna'i dbyor bzhi*).⁴¹² Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso in turn

⁴⁰⁷ He is the biographer and major disciple of 'Jigs med dbang po. He also served as an abbot of Labrang Monastery.

⁴⁰⁸ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 63.

⁴⁰⁹ For a very brief biography of Thar shul chos skyong rgya mtsho, see Blo bzang bstan pa rgya mtsho and Dge 'dun bstan pa dar rgyas, *Rje thar shul dge 'dun chos skyong rgya mtsho'i rnam thar* (Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1994), 6-9.

⁴¹⁰ For a study of his life, see Bryan Cuevas, Bryan J. Cuevas, "Sorcerer of the Iron Castle: The Life of Blo bzang bstan pa rab rgyas, the First Brag dkar sngags rams pa of A mdo (c. 1647-1726)," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 39 (2017): 5-59.

⁴¹¹ This work was composed by Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan (1762-1837). See Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po'i gsan yig*. In *Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po'i' gsung 'bum*, vol. 11, 12 (Bla brang: Bla brang dgon pa, 1999).

⁴¹² See Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan, vol. 2, 35b; 36a.1.

received one transmission from Palden Yeshe (Dpal ldan ye shes, u.d.), who is probably a main teacher at Labrang,⁴¹³ and whose transmission was bestowed by Jamyang Zhepa.⁴¹⁴

Even more valued than his important role as transmitter of teachings from Jamyang Zhepa to Jikmed Wangpo, Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso had also received teachings on the *Thirteen Golden Teachings* (*gser chos bcu gsum*)⁴¹⁵ and *Ritual Cycle of Mahakala* (*zhal gyi chos skor*)⁴¹⁶ from the great Sakya master Kunga Lhundrup (*kun dga' lhun grub*, 1654-1726),⁴¹⁷ which he then passed down to Ganden throne-holder Gedun Phuntsok (*dge 'dun phun tshogs*, 1648-1724). The Ganden throne-holder reciprocated him with other teachings. A well-established tantric master trained under the famous Drakar Lozang Tenpa Rabgye, Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso earned Ngakrampa, the highest Geluk degree in tantric learning, at the Tantric College of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, hence he was commonly known as Ngakrampa as part of his name. The second Panchen Lama Lobsang Yeshe (*blo zhang ye shes*, 1663-1737) also particularly instructed him to teach and spread tantric teachings in Amdo. As a result, he was revered by most secular leaders in Amdo. He served as a preceptor to Tenkyong (*bstan skyong*, u.d.), a prince of *Qinwang* Gaden Dargye Poshok Tu and was also close with the ruler of the Ruto Ma (*ru stod ma*) clan.⁴¹⁸ He taught extensively at Labrang where Jikmed Wangpo was a recipient of his many teachings.⁴¹⁹

According to the biography of Jikmed Wangpo, the Gaden golden-throne holder Gyaltsen Senge was invited over to Urge, but the biographer does not reveal to us that the main agenda was to keep Gyaltsen Senge as a tutor to Jikmed Wangpo. There is a simple reference to his visit

⁴¹³ He is referred to as a Dpon slob of Thos bsam gling at Lba brang.

⁴¹⁴ Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan, volume 2, p.35,b,6-p.36,a,1

⁴¹⁵ This refers to a set of thirteen ritual practices closely associated with the Sakya School.

⁴¹⁶ This is a ritual cycle of Mahakala.

⁴¹⁷ Kun dga' lhun grub is the main source of Sakya teachings transmitted to 'Jigs med dbang po.

⁴¹⁸ This is a supporting community of Labrang.

⁴¹⁹ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 564.

to Labrang and nothing else.⁴²⁰ However, Konchok Tenpa Rabgye provides more details surrounding Gyaltzen Sengge's meeting with Jikmed Wangpo. It is stated that Jikmed Wangpo and Detri Lozang Dondruo asked Qingwan Tendzin Wangchuk, Queen Erkhe Shar to bring Gyaltzen Sengge over to Labrang because he was one of the most prestigious close disciples of Jamyang Zhepa. He also reveals that Jikmed Wangpo had intention of seeking him as a tutor, but when Gyaltzen Sengge was not allowed to take a seat on the throne of Jikmed Wangpo's predecessor, the former was offended. Although the specifics of their meeting and precise cause of the souring of their relationship are unknown, the seating arrangement anecdote is an indicator of some sort of fallout between the two major Geluk reincarnation lamas.⁴²¹

Later, before his departure for Central Tibet, when he heard of Changkya Rolpe Dorje's return to Gonlung, Jikmed Wangpo left immediately for Gonlung where he received teachings from Changkya Rolpe Dorje, who previously studied under Jikmed Wangpo's predecessor. Jikmed Wangpo had previously received his full ordination precepts and his full ordination name of Konchok Jikmed Wangpo from Changkya Rolpe Dorje.⁴²² On this occasion however, it seems that perhaps a more substantial exchange was established and some teachings from Jamyang Zhepa were probably transmitted to him.

In Central Tibet, from Takpu Lozang Tenpe Gyeltsen (*stag phub lo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*, 1714-1762),⁴²³ Jikmed Wangpo received extensive teachings. Among them were teachings on the collection of works by Panchen Lozang Chogyam, but most significant for our discussion is his receipt of some teachings from Jamyang Zhepa.⁴²⁴ Around that time, at the

⁴²⁰ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 64.

⁴²¹ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 555-556.

⁴²² Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 68-69.

⁴²³ See Bod rang skyong ljongs rig dngos do dam u yon lhan khang gi po ta la rig dngos srung skyob do dam so'o. *stag phu blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan nam blo gros rgya mtsho'i rnam thar mdor bsdus*.

⁴²⁴ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 106.

request of Ngakwang Jampa (*ngag dbang byams pa*, 1682-1762),⁴²⁵ Jikmed Wangpo composed the biography of his predecessor Jamyang Zhepa.⁴²⁶ At this time, Jikmed Wangpo even taught teachings passed down from his predecessor to monks at Drepung Monastery.⁴²⁷ Now, not only was he seeking teachings from his predecessor from various sources but beginning to act as a confident authority on his predecessor by composing a biographical account of his early existence and giving teachings originating from his predecessor to the monastic community at Drepung where at least in Gomang College his lineage authority was revered. These series of activities increasingly consolidated his place as the true successor of Jamyang Zhepa in meaningful ways.

Back in Amdo, when he received word that Lozang Tenpe Nyima (*blo bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma*, 1689-1762), returned from China to Lamo Dechen Monastery. He sent his greetings via a messenger. Meanwhile, since Lozang Tenpe Nyima had studied under Jamyang Zhepa and received the transmission of Mitra from him, and was well-established as a reputable source of transmission, Jikmed Wangpo sent Donyo Tshultrim (*don yod tshul khrims*, u.d.) on his behalf to make an arrangement for Jikmed Wangpo himself to receive the teaching on Mitra. At this point, already in his old age, Lozang Tenpe Nyima himself was not sure that he would be capable of transmitting the teaching to Jikmed Wangpo. However, he realized that he was transmitting the teaching to none other than Jamyang Zhepa's reincarnation. In other words, he thought he was simply transmitting the teaching back to its source or keeper. Hence, he decided to try his best in giving the teaching. When he got started on transmitting the teaching, he had to stop at some point due to his bad health. At that point, Jikmed Wangpo performed a longevity ritual on behalf

⁴²⁵ He is commonly known as Dpon slob byams pa rin po che.

⁴²⁶ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 107.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 109.

of the master, but the latter passed away not long after.⁴²⁸ The importance of this transmission of Mitra by Jamyang Zhepa was demonstrated by the fact while in Central Tibet, Jamyang Zhepa received the transmission of Mitra from Lozang Khetsun (*blo bzang mkhas btsun*, u.d.) from the Jonang (*jo nang*) School.⁴²⁹ The transmission of Mitra was treated as the most important one as it was near extinction in Central Tibet, let alone in Amdo. Konchok Tenpa Rabgye rightly acknowledges the legacy of Jamyang Zhepa as he informs us of Jamyang Zhepa as “reviving the transmission when it is near extinction.”⁴³⁰ Konchok Tenpa Rabgye further points out that the revival of this transmission was solely credited with legacy of Jamyang Zhepa, therefore, the transmission of Mitra from Jamyang Zhepa was technically the source of all later varying transmissions.

As Changkya Rolpe Dorje was a reputable source of this transmission, possibly received directly from Jamyang Zhepa, Jikmed Wangpo also waited for several years for Changkya Rolpe Dorje to give him the transmission of Mitra. Changkya Rolpe Dorje, however, suggested Jikmed Wangpo receive the transmission from one major Rongwo lama known as Lozang Dargye (*blo bzang dar rgyas*, u.d.) who in turn previously received from Lozang Tenpe Nyinma. Jikmed Wangpo was also interested in obtaining the transmission of *The Lamp Illuminating the Five Stages* (*rim lnga gsal sgrom*) as well.⁴³¹ He travelled to receive the transmissions from Lozang Dargye while the latter was resident in Yehor (*ye hor*, Chengde).⁴³² Lozang Dargye was a scholar well trained in Central Tibet under whom Jikmed Wangpo had initially studied in Central Tibet. Later, when Lozang Dargye passed away, Changja Rolpe Dorje and Jikmed Wangpo were

⁴²⁸ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 140-141.

⁴²⁹ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab ragys (1982), 363.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 363: *rgyun nub par nye ba gsos*.

⁴³¹ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 372.

⁴³² Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 178.

also involved in the identification of his successor. When Changja Rolpe Dorje thought there was certain inconvenience of petitioning a letter directly to the court reporting on the successful identification of the reincarnation, in consultation with Changja Rinpoche, Jikmed Wangpo sent the petition to the court via the Amban's office.⁴³³

Jamyang Lodro, the reincarnation of Chowa Rinpoche, one of the main reincarnation lineages at Rongwo Monastery, was a famous tantric master trained at Lower Tantric College in Lhasa and then at Tantric College at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. While studying under Jamyang Zhepa, teachings he received included the important transmission of Mitra. This very transmission was scribed and compiled into the collection of works by Jamyang Lodro himself. The oral transmission transmitted by and written treatise composed by Jamyang Lodro were so highly valued for the simple fact that during the transmission, when he took down the notes of the teaching, all difficult major points therein were thoroughly examined via consultation with Jamyang Zhepa in person. Hence, his transmission was regarded as an authentic teaching by even the Seventh Dalai Lama Kalsang Gyatso (1707-1758).⁴³⁴ However, at this stage, there are no clues whatsoever indicating whether or not Jikmed Wangpo received the teaching from Jamyang Lodro. Sherab Tashi, a close disciple of the first Shar Kalden Gyatso, also studied under Jamyang Zhepa, and Konchok Tenpa Rabgye specifically indicates that Sherab Tashi received the complete transmission of Mitra from Jamyang Zhepa.⁴³⁵ In addition, Sherab Tashi also studied under Jamyang Lodro. Hence, given Jikmed Wangpo's interest in this transmission, it could easily be the case that Jikmed Wangpo received the transmission from this master as well.

⁴³³ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 321.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 333.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 329.

As with the transmission of Mitra, according to Konchok Tenpa Rabgye, the transmission of *History of Vajrabhairava* (*'jigs byed chos 'byung*) from Jamyang Zhepa was also in danger of extinction. Realizing the urgency of rescuing the transmission and more importantly retaining the transmission from his previous existence, when Jikmed Wangpo heard that Lozang Jamyang (*blo bzang 'jam dbyangs*, u.d.) was a keeper of the same transmission, he sent four monks to obtain the transmission on his behalf.⁴³⁶ According to Konchok Tenpa Rabgye, even a generation earlier the same sense of urgency was implied by Lozang Tenpa Rabgye, the famed tantric master from Rebgong, who felt regarding perpetuating intact the transmission of *History of Vajrabhairava*.⁴³⁷ Lozang Tenpa Rabgye and Jamyang Zhepa were contemporary and both famous tantric masters. However, in terms of tantric feats, Lozang Tenpa Rabgye was famous for being chosen over Jamyang Zhepa and two other equally accomplished masters in performing tantric rituals for the purpose of military success against the Bhutanese force. He was also equally famous for repelling *singan* afflicting deaths on the succession of abbots at Zhyakhyung Monastery.⁴³⁸ Lozang Tenpa Rabgye himself was unable to record intact the transmission of *'Jigs byed chos 'byung* in the form of a written treatise. On the other hand, Jamyang Zhepa was able to execute his own plan of committing the transmission into written form, but passed away before seeing the end of his writing project. Thus, the completion of this transmission in written form naturally fell to Jikmed Wangpo. Finishing up what was left incomplete by Jamyang Zhepa was a major feat undertaken by Jikmed Wangpo further enhancing his legitimacy as the successor in the lineage. What better than continuing the spirit of the lineage co-authoring the same major treatise especially when its transmission faced extinction?

⁴³⁶ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 260.

⁴³⁷ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 320.

⁴³⁸ See Cuevas (2017).

Ngakwang Drakpa (*ngag dbang grags pa*, u.d.) was a major keeper of transmissions and was also the main reincarnation lineage master at Drakar Phuntshok Ling (*brag dkar phun tshogs gling*) Monastery in Gengya area. As a disciple, his close relationship with Serkha Sonam Gyatso was a watershed in his life as the most complete teachings passed down from Jamyang Zhepa were maintained for further transmission primarily via this learned master. Serkha Sonam Gyatso's status as his teacher was also important because he was also a main custodian of teachings from Se Ngawang Tashi. Not only did he hold transmissions of teachings from such masters as two of the most learned scholars of the Geluk School—Jamyang Zhepa and Se Ngakwang Tashi, but on numerous occasions he also received transmissions of teachings on stages of path as well as generation and completion stages of Cakrasamvara, Guhayasamaja, and Bhairava from the famed master Ngakwang Jampa, another best mind of the day in Tibet. Konchok Tenpa Rabgy takes note of Ngakwang Drakpa's exceptional abilities not only to commit these transmissions to his memory but also to transmit these teachings to his audience nearly verbatim and even imitating the gestures used by his teachers.⁴³⁹

Several years senior to Jikmed Wangpo, Ngakwang Drakpa nevertheless enrolled in the same class with him in Central Tibet to study chapter one of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras.⁴⁴⁰ When Ngakwang Drakpa, together with Jikmed Wangpo, received teachings including *the Source of Jewels of Sadhanas* (*sgrub thabs rin 'byung*)⁴⁴¹ and *Magical Wheel* from one famed master Yangon Ngakrampa (*yang dgon sngags rams pa*, u.d.), he and one Sonam Dawa (*bsod nams zla ba*) from the Kokonor region were responsible for many things including displaying an array of offerings as well as drawing ritual diagrams. Upon return from his training in Central

⁴³⁹ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 348-349.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁴⁴¹ This is a collection of sadhanas devoted to various deities. Ta ra na tha is considered a major transmitter of this collection.

Tibet, Ngakwang Drakpa secured from Jikmed Wangpo permission of leave Labrang for further training under Serkha Sonam Gyatso who was expelled from Labrang earlier. When essential instructions Ngakwang Drakpa received from the master were thoroughly examined and discussed with the master himself, the latter was so pleased that he particularly asked his disciple that these teachings must be transmitted back to Labrang which was carried out in accordance with his wish. When Serkha Sonam Gyatso reached the age of 86, Jikmed Wangpo did meet him in person away from Labrang. Having sensed the urgency of getting the transmissions back to Labrang and probably to Jikmed Wangpo in particular, Serkha Sonam confided to his disciple Ngakwang Drakpa about this visit: “This year, I had a good opportunity to meet Sir. There is no use for you of these meager instructions transmitted down from the vajradhara of the *Sad* tradition (*srad rgyud*).⁴⁴² Please, be quick in transmitting back to Tashi Khyil.”⁴⁴³ Therefore, it is perhaps the case that at this point, Serkha Sonam Gyatso had a change of his heart and accepted Jikmed Wangpo who had already established himself as an exceptionally talented leader building up the institutional and intellectual legacy of Labrang Monastery to an unprecedented level. Regarded as the treasury of vast teachings, as perhaps requested by Jikmed Wangpo, Ngakwang Drakpa travelled regularly to Labrang where he gave teachings extensively.⁴⁴⁴

Another master known as Sangye Dorje was first trained at Labrang Monastery and then went for further study at Gomang College eventually achieving the Lharam degree and serving as the abbot of Gomang College for a term spanning twelve years.⁴⁴⁵ When young Jikmed Wangpo first went to study in Central Tibet, he received teachings from him. In *Religious*

⁴⁴² This tradition is one of the two major tantric lineages within the Geluk School. ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa was considered a major transmitter of this lineage.

⁴⁴³ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 369: *da lo sku zhabs la mja' rgyu byung bas skal ba bzang/ srad rgyud rdo rje 'chang nas brgyud pa'i man ngag phran tsheds khyod la byin yod pa 'di gzhan la dgos pa med/ slar bkra shis 'khyil la 'phrod thabs re rem.*

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 398.

History of Amdo, only the initiation into Bhairava was identified among the teachings received. Jikmed Wangpo was keenly interested in seeking more teachings from this master, however, given the old age of the master, Jikmed Wangpo had to give up on receiving further teachings.⁴⁴⁶ Although it is not explicitly clear whether teachings Jikmed Wangpo received from the master includes transmission of any teachings from Jamyang Zhepa, given his early training at Labrang (before further training in Central Tibet) and seniority, it is almost for sure that he studied directly under Jamyang Zhepa and Se Ngakwang Tashi. The importance of his role as teacher to Jikmed Wangpo is further evident from the fact that Jikmed Wangpo looked after the young reincarnation Drakpa Gyaltzen (*grags pa rgyal mtshan*, 1762-1837) at Labrang and gave him full ordination precepts.⁴⁴⁷ Jikmed Wangpo would also entrust him with major obligations such as leading Shingle Kha (*shing le kha*) monastery as its abbot which will be detailed in the final section in this chapter.

Tharmichi Lozang Dondrup (*thar mi chi blo bzang don grub*, 1640-1717),⁴⁴⁸ co-founder of Ngonpo Tang (*sngon po thang*) Monastery with Jikmed Wangpo, was fully ordained by Jamyang Zhepa who transmitted him major teachings including Mitra.⁴⁴⁹ Not only was he trained extensively under Se Ngakwang Tashi, according to *Religious History of Amdo*, Lodro Gyatso⁴⁵⁰ (1664-1740), Ngawa Chokyong Gyatso, and Gyaltzen Senge were listed among his major teachers.⁴⁵¹ All the three teachers are disciples of Jamyang Zhepa. The latter two are especially famous for having the transmission of teachings from Jamyang Zhepa and due to falling out with Jikmed Wangpo, they both were based away from Labrang. When Jikmed Wangpo reached

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 399.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ He was a close disciple of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and Bse ngag dbang bkra shis. He was also extremely close to Sde khri blo bzang don grub, the first treasurer at Labrang.

⁴⁴⁹ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 609s.

⁴⁵⁰ He is commonly known as Khya dge dpon slob.

⁴⁵¹ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 610.

maturity, there was high demand on him to seek transmission of teachings from his predecessor Jamyang Zhepa. When the Second Se Ngwakwang Jamyang Tashi left Labrang Monastery, most major learned disciples with transmissions of Jamyang Zhepa trained under the first Se left Labrang as well. However, at Labrang, there were still a few learned masters in possession of transmissions of teachings from Jamyang Zhepa. Nevertheless, some of the most reputable sources of transmissions of Jamyang Zhepa like Serkha Sonam Gyatso were exiled from Labrang or based elsewhere. Therefore, Jikmed Wangpo had to exhaust his means to seek transmissions both at home and outside Labrang. At Labrang itself, following the eruption of the major conflict, Tharmichi Lozang Dondrup was considered as the first and foremost transmitter of teachings from Jamyang Zhepa, but comparatively lacked the stellar fame and reputation of Serkha Sonam Gyatso and other learned masters well trained previously at Labrang. In order to build up the fame of Tharmichi Lozang Dondrup as a reputable source of transmission even more qualified than the likes of Serkha Sonam Gyatso, in *Religious History of Amdo*, Jikme Wangpo was once quoted as saying, “Although you all claim that Gotob (*go thob*, u.d.)⁴⁵² and Serkha are good, I think they are not as good as Tharmichi.”⁴⁵³ That said, Lozang Dondrup in fact sought teachings from Serkha Sonam Gyatso.⁴⁵⁴

Khyage Lodro Gyatso (*khya dge blo gros rgya mtsho*, 1664-1740) and his disciple Lozang Tashi (*blo bzang bkra shis*, u.d.) also figure prominently in the intellectual life of Labrang. While being trained under Jamyang Zhepa, Lodro Gyatso scribed down sections on generation stages of Bhairava and Cakrasamvara from the lectures of Jamyang Zhepa.⁴⁵⁵ Later at

⁴⁵² His full name is Rnga ba go thob.

⁴⁵³ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 610: *khyed tsho go thob gser kha sogs bzang zer gi 'dug kyang ngas bltas na thar mi chi'i bzang mi 'dug/khong gi shes rab lhag pa'i lhas byin gyis brlabs pa'i shes rab yin pa red.*

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 611.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 610.

Labrang Monastery, he received transmission of Mitra from Jamyang Zhepa. Finally, he gave a series of major tantric teachings to a crowd of over 2,000 monks at Labrang attended by Se Ngakwang Tashi as well. Thus, understandably, his first and foremost disciple Lozang Tashi also played an important role in spreading teachings of major transmissions. While based away from Labrang (at his own monastic seat), Lozang Tashi visited Labrang on numerous occasions to give extensive teachings. Konchok Tenpa Rabgye identifies a collection of teachings by Lodro Gyatso among the teachings Lozang Tashi taught at Labrang, which was clearly recorded in Jikmed Wangpo's *Records of Teachings Received*.⁴⁵⁶ The transmission of Bhairava was identified among the collection of teachings by his master.⁴⁵⁷ Although Jikmed Wangpo probably did not receive teachings from Lodro Gyatso as nowhere was it recorded as such in Jikmed Wangpo's *Records of Teachings Received*. Of course, it makes sense that Jikmed Wangpo received transmissions of Jamyang Zhepa from this master's disciple Lozang Tashi considering the latter's active teaching career at Labrang emphasizing the teaching on transmissions from his own master. In fact, Lozang Tashi as a transmitter of teachings of Lodro Gyatso, who in turn received transmissions of Jamyang Zhepa, to Jikmed Wangpo was identified in Jikmed Wangpo's *Record of Teachings Received*. Lastly, it is interesting to note that Jamyang Zhepa's nephew Jamyang Khechok (*'jam dbyangs mkhas mchog*, u.d.) was also a source of few individual transmissions for Jikmed Wangpo.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan (1999), vol. 1, 177a.3.

⁴⁵⁷ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 692.

⁴⁵⁸ Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan (1999), vol. 1, 110a.6, 110b.3; Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan (1999), vol. 2, 37a.5.

**Intimate Teacher and Student Relationship
between Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and Jikmed Wangpo**

Throughout his teaching career, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was frequently sought after for his teachings in Rebgong and beyond, some of which were rare transmissions. There is no question that his leadership and teaching career made an indelible imprint on the intellectual history of Geluk, particularly Rebgong and beyond in Amdo. There were several other teachers from Rongwo and Rebgong who were important transmitters of teachings to Jikmed Wangpo as mentioned above. However, as we face a grave lack of sources to study any of these roles in detail, we turn to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, as the only one for whom there is a complete biography. Our focus on him makes even more sense perhaps as this major Rongwo abbot and leader was also a designated tutor to Jikmed Wangpo. Therefore, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's role in transmitting teachings to Labrang and especially to Jikmed Wangpo merits a special mention as their teacher-student relationship plays a significant role in legitimizing his lineal authority and status as an indisputable reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa.

Due to the controversy surrounding the identification of the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa, there was a delay of more than 15 years before Jigme Wangpo was successfully enthroned at Labrang. A few years after his enthronement, there were discussions of seeking a tutor who would, as it is hoped, transmit teachings from his predecessor Jamyang Zhepa. As Jamyang Zhepa was a well-established scholar, it was probably naturally assumed that a lineage successor of his must meet expectations set up by his model of scholarship. It is even more so or in fact required to match his predecessor given Jikmed Wangpo's lineage legitimacy being in question. It was easily concluded that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso serve as his tutor. As discussed

in Chapter One, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a natural fit to serve in the role of a tutor for he lived an illustrious life as one of the most learned Geluk scholars of the day serving the abbot of the historic Pakhor Chode Monastery in Central Tibet, plus his intense training directly under Jamyang Zhepa while in Gomang College.

Ling Dondrup Gyatso, the then abbot of Labrang Monastery, travelled in person with a letter from Jikmed Wangpo to Rongwo inviting Khenchen Gedun Gyatso over to Labrang to serve as tutor to Jikmed Wangpo. The choice of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a result of deliberate thought at Labrang, at least on the part of Jikmed Wangpo. Previously, during the enthronement of the second Se Ngakwang Jamyang Tashi, the senior Rongwo *nangso*⁴⁵⁹ was present at Labrang. Jigme Wangpo not only expressed his interest to him in seeking Khenchen Gedun Gyatso as his tutor, but particularly asked the *nangso* to help make the arrangements. At that time, the *nangso* thought this was an auspicious occasion to establish the teacher and student relationship between them. When Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was visited by the abbot of Labrang Monastery requesting his tutoring service to Jikmed Wangpo, he gladly accepted the invite and set off to Labrang.⁴⁶⁰

At Labrang, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was seated at a higher throne on the left side of Jikmed Wangpo. Their conversations started with Jikmed Wangpo asking questions and for clarification regarding authorship of some major, both exoteric and esoteric, scriptures and important intellectual points therein.⁴⁶¹ In written form, he also made a query on availability of a certain Buddhist treatise.⁴⁶² It clearly shows that Jikmed Wangpo was genuinely interested in seeking Khenchen Gedun Gyatso as his tutor. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso himself was also pleased

⁴⁵⁹ His name is unidentified.

⁴⁶⁰ Ngag dbang 'jam dbayngs dpal ldan, 261.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 262.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 264. He asked about 'Jam dbyangs dga' blo's commentary on *Sutralamkara*.

with the opportunity to be tutor to Jikmed Wangpo, for the former was trained as a scholar by Jikmed Wangpo in his previous existence.

Well before his meeting with Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, Jikmed Wangpo was keenly aware of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's exceptional scholarly career. He consulted one lesser known Rongwo scholar known as Mergan Choje (*mer rgan chos rje*, u.d.),⁴⁶³ who was at that point a tutor to Jigme Wangpo in his training on Indic inspired poetry, over the prestige and success of lamas based at Rongwo. He especially asked Mergan Choje about the scholarly career—lecturing, debate, and composition—of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. For that matter, Mergan Choje addresses Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's expertise in each of these three areas point by point. He reminisced about his witness of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso presiding at the great prayer festival and lecturing in an elegant and precise way on *Life Stories of Buddha* (*ston pa'i mdzad rnam*) at Rongwo Monastery. Mergan Choje acknowledged that he was impressed with precise quotations Khenchen Gedun Gyatso cited to facilitate his presentations. In terms of debating skills, Mergan Choje simply pointed to the well-known fact that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso achieved his fame by establishing himself as a famous debate scholar which was proven when he landed first place after defeating all his opponents during the debate examination organized by the Zungar Mongols. As for his skills of composition, Mergan Choje admits that he had no intimate knowledge of his skills as a writer or was not really familiar with his entire written corpus.⁴⁶⁴ However, Mergan Choje said that he, however, got a chance to look at only some of his poems addressed to some lamas. It happened that he had also read some of the non-fictional writings among works by Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. His conclusion was that he was convinced that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a great writer as well. According to the Tibetan scholarly tradition,

⁴⁶³ His full name is Mer rgan chos rje ngag dbang rgya mtsho.

⁴⁶⁴ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 263.

a scholar must excel in three areas—lecture, debate, and composition, and in Mergan Choje’s opinion, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a well rounded scholar based on these traditional criterion. Later, during Mergan Choje’s visit to Rongwo Monastery, he revealed to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso the intention of Jigme Wangpo to seek him as a tutor and appealed to him that he should travel to Labrang and serve as a tutor to Jikmed Wangpo. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was pleased with such an honor as a tutor, but he was also worried whether or not it was appropriate that a teacher at Rongwo Monastery should travel to Labrang and serve in the same capacity there. Nevertheless, during his first visit to Labrang, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso had a residence of two months, initiating Jikme Wangpo into a series of teachings. Meanwhile, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso also sought donations from Dani Suruk, i.e., horses and yaks, which enabled him sponsor feasting and offered gifts to monastic community at Labrang.⁴⁶⁵

As appropriate for a tutor to Jikmed Wangpo, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso also performed the funeral ritual for the deceased father of his disciple. During that time, Jikmed Wangpo visited Rongwo, Tashi Khyil, and Nyanthok monasteries. This visit to Rongwo was also significant in that during that visit Jikmed Wangpo identified a nephew of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso as the reincarnation of Detri Lozang Dondrup, the most powerful treasurer at Labrang.⁴⁶⁶ Later, a delegation from Labrang Monastery came to confirm the identification endorsed by Jikmed Wangpo. One year after the delegation’s visit, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s nephew was escorted to his predecessor’s residence at Labrang along with a large retinue including Rongwo *nangso* as well as many lay and monastic officials from Rebgong.⁴⁶⁷ Thus, it is clear that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and Jikme Wangpo’s relationship runs deeper than simply that of teacher and student.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 264.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 267.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 281-282.

The deceased Detri Lozang Dondrup was one of the main figures in the early history of Labrang. He was also responsible for identifying Jikmed Wangpo as the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa over the candidate supported by Se Ngawang Tashi and then actually having him enthroned right before his death.

Jikmed Wangpo seems to have had a particular preference for Khenchen Gedun Gyatso as his tutor. During the visit to Chentsa for the purpose of the funeral for his deceased father, he praised Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and gushed in public about how he was pleased with the master as his tutor.⁴⁶⁸ Jikmed Wangpo's high esteem and reverence for Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was also proven with the minute details of his action in the presence of the master. When Jikme Wangpo was about to leave Urge to meet with Changja Rinpoche, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso came to see him off. When Khenchen Gedun Gyatso came in his sight approaching him, Jikmed Wangpo immediately dismounted his horse purely out of respect for his tutor to greet him. The biographer records that such high respect shown towards Khenchen Gedun Gyatso by Jikmed Wangpo was witnessed by all those present on those occasions that at one point, onlookers suspected and started a swirl of rumors that Jikmed Wangpo's lineage status was in fact inferior to that of his tutor.⁴⁶⁹

When Jikmed Wangpo met with Changkya Rolpe Dorje prior to the former's journey to Central Tibet, the latter particularly instructed that Jikme Wangpo receive from his tutor the transmission of Jamyang Shepa's teaching on Tsongkhapa's *Essense of True Eloquence*. Changky Rolpe Dorje held the firm conviction that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was the best scholar to lecture on the treatise partly perhaps because Khenchen Gedun Gyatso had received first place

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 268.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 270.

during the debate examination earning the highest Lharam degree.⁴⁷⁰ However, the main reason would be that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was probably one of the most learned disciples who directly received teachings from Jamgyang Zhepa himself and who was serving in the capacity of a tutor to Jikmed Wangpo. Besides, since most learned scholars such as Serkha Sonam Gyatso who were famous as keepers of transmissions of teachings originating from Jamyang Zhepa had been expelled from Labrang, who better than Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to serve in the capacity of a tutor? Even though Serkha Sonam Gyatso was highly valued as the main source of transmission of teachings of Jamyang Shepa, he was probably trained under Se Ngawang Tashi for the most part. The biographer also states that Changkya Rolpe Dorje himself admitted to Jikmed Wangpo of his regret for not being able to meet with Khenchen Gedun Gyatso in person and actually receive the transmission of the *Essence of True Eloquence*. Since Jikmed Wangpo was soon to leave for Central Tibet and Changkya Rinpoche was preparing his trip to China, both had to resign to a future arrangement for receiving the teaching from Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. In wide recognition of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's excellence in learning as well as his status as a highly reputable source of transmissions, both Changkya Rolpe Dorje and Jikmed Wangpo penned poems praising his quality as a model scholar.⁴⁷¹ The transmission of *Essence of True Eloquence* is an example of, as Jikmed Wangpo's *Record of Teachings Received* indicates, very few central teaching transmissions that Jikmed Wangpo received from no one other than Khenchen Gedun Gyatso.⁴⁷²

Later, during an extended stay at Labrang, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso gave as many teachings to Jikmed Wangpo as the latter requested. He also lectured on the four tantras

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 270-271.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 271-272.

⁴⁷² Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan (1999), vol. 1, 114b.5.

following the commentarial tradition of Jamyang Zhepa, however, it seems this teaching was given in absence of Jikmed Wangpo.⁴⁷³ When Jikmed Wangpo planned on his first trip to Central Tibet, senior monks tried to hold him back in vain. They also attempted to make him at least postpone his trip until the following year. Their efforts were in vain so they approached Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to dissuade Jikmed Wangpo and postpone his journey, a sign of his influence as a respected tutor at Labrang. Senior monks at Labrang thought that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a well-known Buddhist master with high stature in both Central Tibet and Amdo, and, more importantly, was tutor to Jikmed Wangpo himself so he could be the one if anyone could influence Jikmed Wangpo to postpone his trip. However, Jikmed Wangpo was determined to visit Central Tibet and set off to Central Tibet despite Khenchen Gedun Gyatso's pleas to at least postpone his trip.⁴⁷⁴

Upon return from his extended stay in Central Tibet, Jikmed Wangpo was greeted by Khenchen Gedun Gyatso at Urge before going to Labrang. The biographer hyperbolically states that at some point during the conversation between the master and disciple, Jikmed Wangpo told that his main reason for his return was solely to see his tutor.⁴⁷⁵ Jikmed Wangpo received a series of unidentified teachings from Khenchen Gedun Gyatso on that occasion. The following year, he visited Labrang as requested by Jikmed Wangpo and was given an elaborate welcome at Labrang. Finally, at Labrang, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso gave on teaching on the *Essence of True Eloquence* based on various commentarial works.⁴⁷⁶ This is the same teaching Changkya Rolpe Dorje particularly asked Jigme Wangpo to receive from his tutor right before his trip to Central Tibet. Even at this old age, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was still actively giving teachings as he was

⁴⁷³ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 278.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 283-284.

⁴⁷⁵ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyang dpal ldan, 307.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 310.

a renowned teacher with transmissions directly from great minds of Geluk School when he was studying in Central Tibet. His teaching during this visit was disrupted when the young third Shar requested Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to administer full ordination precepts to him at Rongwo.⁴⁷⁷ However, shortly after the full ordination was complete, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso left immediately again for Labrang where he gave teachings on Guhayasamaja and stages of path. At some point, now a well-established scholar himself due to his training in Central Tibet, Jikmed Wangpo also reciprocated his tutor by giving few esoteric teachings as earnestly requested by his tutor.⁴⁷⁸

According to the biography, the last meeting between Jikmed Wangpo and Khenchen Gedun Gyatso took place in Dani Suruk, a place midway between Labrang and Rongwo monasteries. For the occasion, Jikmed Wangpo sent his own palanquin from Labrang to Rongwo to pick up his tutor.⁴⁷⁹ Jikmed Wangpo also requested Changkya Rolpe Dorje to compose a longevity prayer for the sake of his tutor.⁴⁸⁰ It was also Jikmed Wangpo who was the main person to initiate the biographical writing of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and made sure that a complete biography was written.⁴⁸¹ All these details of their interactions above suggest that an intimate relationship was cemented between Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and Jikmed Wangpo beyond a simple teacher-student relationship, even more so when the latter was of significant importance for his rising career as a major Geluk scholar and leader in Amdo.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 310.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 311.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 337.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 339.

⁴⁸¹ Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan, 350-351.

Building Labrang as the “Source of Dharma”

Besides his biography and bits and pieces of biographical information of his teachers interspersed throughout the massive manuscript of *Religious History of Amdo*, Jikmed Wangpo's *Records of Teachings Received* is an extremely useful source for mapping out all the sources of his teaching transmissions. However, it is important to note that its author Drakpa Gyaltzen readily admits that there are many teaching transmissions Jikmed Wangpo received but it is not the case that each and every teaching transmission is recorded there. Therefore the work does not represent an intact lineage record.⁴⁸² Given the fact that there is very little contextual information on transmission history in the *Record of Teachings Received*, biographical information and lineage accounts in sporadic fashion embedded in the biographies of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and Jikmed Wangpo as well as *Religious History of Amdo* as extensively discussed in the above two sections in this chapter are the most important sources to rely for contextual analysis of lineage transmissions and their implications in larger intellectual history of the school in Amdo.

Reading through the *Record of Teachings Received*, we can easily realize that there is a systematic traditional classification of teaching transmissions laying out an outline structuring the entire two-part work. For the purpose of analysis in this chapter, we can treat the whole work in terms of three parts. The first part is the group of transmissions of teachings composed and compiled in the collection of works originating from Jamyang Zhepa. The second part is the corpus of transmissions passed down via Jamyang Zhepa. The third part is the majority of teaching transmissions that exclude Jamyang Zhepa as a central link or any intermediate place

⁴⁸² Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgya mtshan (1999), vol. 2, 240a.4, 240b.3.

whatsoever in lineage records. In this work, the collection of teachings composed by Jamyang Zhepa are transmitted to Jikmed Wangpo entirely through two reputable sources—Lozang Jamyang and Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. Out of the multi-volume collection of works by Jamyang Zhepa, only transmissions of twenty-nine teachings are passed down from Khenchen Gedun Gyatso.⁴⁸³ However, great many teaching transmissions outside his collected works are also equally valued for the fact that Jamyang Zhepa was a key transmitter of a series of major teachings as an important interlinking master in an unbroken transmission lineage. In addition to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, it is evident from *Record of Teachings Received* that Changkya Rolpe Dorje, Lozang Tenpe Gyaltsen, Ngakwang Lozang (*ngag dbang blo bzang*, 1719-1794),⁴⁸⁴ Ngakrampa Tobten Gyatso, Tongkhor Sonam Gyatso, and the Seventh Dalai Lama Kalsang Gyatso are major sources of transmissions apart from those transmissions originating from Jamyang Zhepa. For example, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and the Seventh Dalai Lama dominate transmissions of Indian treatises received by Jikmed Wangpo. However, there are only a few among the transmissions of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso which have Jamyang Zhepa as an interlinking master in the lineage, which was particularly of significant importance for legitimizing the authority of Jikmed Wangpo as the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa. Hence, the fact that majority of his teaching transmissions fall outside Jamyang Zhepa's lineage begs the central question: What is the significance of these transmissions that did not pass down from Jamyang Zhepa?

Given Jikmed Wangpo's campaign to widely seek any textual and oral transmission rare in Tibet, I further argue that seeking transmissions of teachings by Jamyang Zhepa can be also

⁴⁸³ Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgya mtshan (1999), vol. 1, 171b.3-5.

⁴⁸⁴ He is alternatively known as Klong rdo bla ma. For a short biography of Ngag dbang blo bzang, see <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Longdol-Lama-Ngawang-Lobzang/3877> accessed on July 23, 2018.

simultaneously understood in context of the ambition to rebuild scholastic lineage in general to establish at Labrang as “the source of dharma” in the context of his vision of Geluk expansion in Amdo. Besides seeking transmissions of teachings first taught by Jamyang Zhepa, Jikmed Wangpo initiated a global campaign for seeking both textual and oral transmissions of teachings in Central Tibet. For the most part, these teachings were also rarely circulated even in Central Tibet. When Jikmed Wangpo sent his chef Kunga (*kun dga'*, u.d.) and one Kacu known as Konchok Gyatso (*dkon mchog rgya mtsho*, u.d.) was sent to Central Tibet for obtaining rare manuscripts composed by early Tibetan scholars, he sent an appeal to the Dalai Lama, Panchen Lama, and the heads of the Sakya School and other prominent scholars for their assistance in searching for rare manuscripts. The Panchen Lama’s Palace, known as Gyaltzen Tonpo (*rgyal mtshan mthon po*),⁴⁸⁵ issued a decree to his branch monasteries that in case there is any book that Jikmed Wangpo may need, he can take as he likes.⁴⁸⁶ The two monks spent three years in search of manuscripts, only to find about half of the manuscripts from the inventory they brought with them in the first place--and their original copies were not available then.⁴⁸⁷ Many scholars were surprised that they had not even heard the names of these manuscripts.⁴⁸⁸

Amid his search for transmission of teachings in the manuscript form, Jikmed Wangpo also valued unbroken oral transmissions of teachings. Once, at the end of his teaching on the *Essence of Eloquence*, he said, “In the past, oral commentarial transmissions were kept intact of the majority of sutra and tantra teachings as well as Indian treatises. However, today, even names of [these transmissions] are gone. Later, even when I heard that Kachen Yeshe Gyaltzen (*dka'*

⁴⁸⁵ For a very brief introduction to the palace, see Sle zur 'jigs med dbang phyug and Bde zur rin chen dbang 'dus, *De snga'i bla brang rgyal mtshan mthon po'i srid 'dzin sgrig gzhi'i spyi'i gnas tshul*, In *Bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs*, vol. 5 (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009): 286-338.

⁴⁸⁶ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 344.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 267-268.

chen ye shes rgyal mtshan, 1713-1793)⁴⁸⁹ gave the oral commentarial transmission of *The Eight Thousand One (brgyad stong pa)*,⁴⁹⁰ that was beneficial for my heart.”⁴⁹¹ His brief remark brings insight into the status of oral transmissions in general being in danger of extinction.

During Jikmed Wangpo’s second visit to Central Tibet, when he was seeking copies of a massive number of rare manuscripts, at one point, Konchok Tutop Wangpo (*dkon mchog mthubstobs dbang po*, u.d.) visited him to seek teachings and in return was obligated by Jikmed Wangpo to search and obtain a copy of collection of works by Karma Chakme (*karma chags med*, 1613-1678).⁴⁹² As expected, when he visited Shangtse College, he had a chance to look through their holdings of manuscripts of nearly 300 works and catalogued them by their authorship. When he was able to identify a work on the subject of thought and form (*bsam gzugs*) by his predecessor, those present on the occasion were impressed with his vast knowledge of Buddhist treatises.⁴⁹³ However, it is not so surprising given his every effort he made in seeking transmissions of teachings by Jamyang Zhepa. At the same time, it is a sure sign of his eventual growth as an established scholar.

When Jikmed Wangpo met Longdol Lama at Rinchen Sgang (*rin chen sgang*), the latter would offer all the books but a few to Jikmed Wangpo. Jikmed Wangpo was really grateful to the master’s generosity, however, he would only take away copies of ten manuscripts.⁴⁹⁴ Jikmed Wangpo would never miss out on any chance when it presented itself to him in terms of seeking

⁴⁸⁹ He is a tutor to many high ranking lamas including especially the Eighth Dalai Lama ‘Jam dpal rgya mtsho (1758-1804). For a biography of Dka’ chen ye shes rgyal mtshan, see ‘Jam dpal rgya mtsho, *Jam dpal rgya mtsho, Yongs ‘dzin paN+Di ta ye shes rgyal mtshan gyi rtogs brjod* (‘Bar khams: Si khron rnga ba khul par skrun khang, 1990).

⁴⁹⁰ This is the short for the version of Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in eight thousand lines.

⁴⁹¹ Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me (1990), 304: *snga mo bod na mdo rgyud dang/ rgya gzhuung chen mo phal che ba’i bshad pa’i rgyun yod ‘dug kyang/ da lta ming tsam yang grags rgyu mi snang/ phyis su dka’ chen ye shes rgyal mtshan gyis brgyad stong pa’i bshad lung gnang song zer ba’i gtam tshor pa tsam yang sems la phan pa zhig byung.*

⁴⁹² Ibid., 325.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 333.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 336.

copies of manuscripts. This occasion also made possible the exchange of teachings between the master and Jikmed Wangpo.⁴⁹⁵ During his previous meeting with Longdol Lama, he even asked and borrowed a copy of manuscript from a member in the entourage of the master when it was precisely what he was seeking. Copies of manuscripts were also borrowed from the collection at Purwu Chok (*phur bu lcog*), a retreat site near Sera Monastery.⁴⁹⁶ His second visit to Central Tibet was an extended stay with much time spent together with Longdol Lama who was, as Jikmed Wango's *Record of Teachings Received* indicates, a major source of transmissions outside the Jamyang Zhepa transmission lineage, only a very few transmissions from him list Jamyang Zhepa as a linking point in the transmission lineage though, a good indicator of Jikmed Wangpo's wide pursuit of teaching transmissions in general.

Jikmed Wangpo's efforts to preserve both textual and oral transmissions was not only confined to his own sect. He himself travelled to visit Sakya Monastery where he had intimate conversations with the head of the Sakya School Dakchen Ngakwang Kunga Lodro as well as exchange of rare teachings with the Sakya master. In addition to his receipt of numerous transmissions directly from this major Sakya source, his other major source of Sakya transmissions was none other than his teacher Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen who also dominated as a main transmitter of his own Geluk teachings.⁴⁹⁷ Exchange of rare teachings also took place at other Sakya Monasteries including Zhalu. During the trip, Jikmed Wangpo particularly valued receiving blessing of initiation into *Integration of Amitayus and Hayagriva* (*tshe rta zung 'brel*) as this is traced back to the very transmission Milarepa's close disciple Rechungwa (*ras chung ba*), a major disciple of Milarepa, brought from India.⁴⁹⁸ After visiting the Sakya and other

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 334.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 335.

⁴⁹⁷ See Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan (1999), 2 vols.

⁴⁹⁸ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 342-343.

regional monasteries, he came to Cholung Shangtse (*chos lung byang rtse*), the seat of the famed Jonang master Kunga Drolchok (1505-1565).⁴⁹⁹ Therefore, his expedition to collect manuscripts at these Sakya monasteries were very successful that he was able to obtain many books that are rare and original manuscript copies.⁵⁰⁰ As instructed by Jikmed Wangpo, his disciple Drakpa Gyaltzen proceeded to seek transmission of one healing ritual practice known as *Healing Za* (*gza' bcos*) in the Yazang (*g.ya' bzang*) branch of Kagyu School from an elderly monk at that point was residing at the Geluk Monastery of Pakde Monastery (*'phags sde dgon*)⁵⁰¹ in Central Tibet.⁵⁰²

After the conclusion of his expedition for collecting manuscripts, he possessed an estimated 3,000 volumes of manuscripts that had been either purchased or offered as gifts. Then also there were an estimated 10,000 volumes of manuscripts were being copied at a rate of eighteen silver coins per volume. In the process, Jikmed Wangpo's growth as a scholar and familiarity with manuscripts was so exceptional that at one time in Central Tibet when one Dargye (*dar rgyas*, u.d.) was sent to search for manuscripts at an unspecified monastery, he brought back an old handwritten copy of manuscript without a title or colophon. Jikmed Wangpo randomly turned to a page and instantly identified the obscure manuscript, and also briefly lectured on the history of its textual transmission.⁵⁰³

Inevitably, as his fame grew, Jikmed Wangpo was asked to give more and more teachings. Once he was conducting an extended teaching session to a large crowd of monks hailing from Sera, Drepung, Gandan, Tashi Lkunpo, Upper and Lower Tantric Colleges, and

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 343.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 344.

⁵⁰¹ This is a monastery in the Gnyal area of Dbus region. See Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. *Dga' ldan chos 'byung baiDU r+ya ser po* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 1989), 237-238.

⁵⁰² Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 401.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 374.

Namgyel College (*rnam rgyal grwa tshang*)⁵⁰⁴ as well as several unidentified regional monasteries. The teachings he gave were based on those of his predecessor, his teacher Changkya Rolpe Dorje, as well as providing his own instructions.⁵⁰⁵ The central role of Jikmed Wangpo as a key transmitter of teachings was highlighted when Yeshe Gyaltzen confided to Gungtang Tenpe Dronme (*gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me*, 1762-1823), the disciple and biographer of Jikmed Wangpo, “In the past, Central Tibet is like the source of dharma so one can obtain any dharma transmission as one likes. However, today, in general the dharma transmission is weak. It is rare that there will be the master of all teachings like him in the future. Therefore, it is important to spread teachings received on this occasion. This is my wish.”⁵⁰⁶

However, Jikmed Wangpo’s successful campaign for preserving authentic teaching transmission was not without few critics who question the credibility and authenticity of the transmissions he received on teachings on Vajaramala (*rdo rje phreng ba*)⁵⁰⁷ and Mitra. To defend the authenticity of these particular transmissions of Jikmed Wangpo, Gungtang Tenpe Dronme rebukes these critics by referring to quotes as well as biographies and records of teachings of early Geluk masters including the First Panchen Lama Lozang Chogyam and the Seventh Dalai Lama Kalsang Gyatso.⁵⁰⁸

As expected with the increasing growth of his stature, Jikmed Wangpo successfully developed intimate relationships with Geluk patriarchs in Lhasa. At some point, he gave some teachings to the Dalai Lama. During his stay at the Potala Palace, he received the teaching on

⁵⁰⁴ This is a ritual college attached to the Potala Palace.

⁵⁰⁵ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 357.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 358: *sngon yin na dbus gtsang 'di chos kyi 'byung khungs lta bu yin pas chos rgyun gyi rigs gang 'dod du blang chog pa yod kyang/ da lta chos rgyun phal cher nyag phra bar song 'dugaslar bstan pa yongs rdzogs kyi bdag po khong 'dra ba yang yang 'byon dka' bas da res kyi bka' chos rnams khyab gdal du spel rgyu zhig byung na legs/ nged kyis 'di 'dra zhu gi 'dug.*

⁵⁰⁷ This is a tantric teaching associated with Guhayasamaja.

⁵⁰⁸ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 358.

Great Seal from the Dalai Lama's tutor Yeshe Gyaltsen. The intimate conversation between these two great minds of the Geluk School was much revealing in terms of their take on the status of intellectual tradition of Geluk School. Jikmed Wangpo said, "Especially, your highness, the dharma source of the Geluk School is the trio of Sedrege (*se 'bras dge gsum*).⁵⁰⁹ Their scholastic programs depend on the actions of the Dalai Lama. Previously, during the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama and his predecessors, geshe were given great care/attention, therefore, there were obvious benefits. Today, to the government, instead of a geshe from a great monastery, a wealthy old man is more valuable. However, the political and religious wellbeing of the government and lecturing and listening at a great monastery are interdependent like naga and sea. However, the sectaries of the Potala Palace don't listen even they are told so. It will be none other than your words that will ever enable the Dalai Lama actually work for the affairs of political and religious wellbeing of the government. Please keep in mind.⁵¹⁰ Yeshe Gyaltsen completely agreed with him and responded, "In the current age, since you are truly the master of dharma, you must live long and take to heart of spreading in a hundred directions the dharma in general and the great tradition of Lama Manjushri, the Savior,⁵¹¹ in particular.⁵¹²

At Nonglingka (*nor bu gling ga*),⁵¹³ Jikmed Wangpo gave a series of teachings attended by Longdol Lama as well. On that occasion, Longdol Lama and all present there particularly

⁵⁰⁹ The trio refers to Se ra, 'Bras spung, and Dga' ldan monasteries.

⁵¹⁰ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 362-363: *khyad par rje nyid nas zhwa ser gyi bstan pa'i 'byung khungs se 'bras dge gsum yin zhing/ de'i 'chad nyan gyi 'phel rgyas rgyal dbang mchog gi mdzad par rag las tshul dang/ sngar kun gzigs lnga ba chen po dang rgyal dbang gong ma sogs kyi skabs su dge bshes rnams la spyang bskyangs shin tu che bas/ mig ltos la phan pa byung 'dug/ da lta gzhung la grwa sa'i dge bshes cig las 'byor ldan gyi rgan po zhig ngo so mtho ba lta bur 'dug na'ang gzhung gi bstan srid dang grwa sa'i 'chad nyan gnyis klu dang mtsho'i dpe ltar phar brten tshur brten yin mod/ 'on kyang rtse drung rnams la bshad kyang rna bar mi 'groslar rgyal dbang mchog nas gzhung gi bstan srid kyi las don rnams dngos gnas la mdzad rgyu zhig tu song na khyed kyi gsung las mi 'da' bas/ thugs la 'jog dgos.*

⁵¹¹ This refers to Tsongkhapa.

⁵¹² Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 363: *deng sang gi dus 'dir khyed nges pa don gyi bstan pa'i bdag po yin pas bstan pa spyi dang bye brag 'jam mgon bla ma'i lugs bzang phyogs brgyar spel ba'i thugs khur bzhes te zhabs pad yun ring brtan dgos.*

⁵¹³ This is the summer retreat place for the Dalai Lamas.

requested for Jikmed Wangpo's teaching on provisional and definitive meanings. Guntang Tenpe Drome praises his teacher Jikmed Wangpo for delivering an extended version of the teaching with such clarity, as if the two charioteer leaders were doing so. He records highest compliments bestowed on Jikmed Wangpo by Longdol Lama and one Ngakwang Tashi of Upper Tantric Colelge in Lhasa.⁵¹⁴ For example, Longdol Lama praises in strongest terms: there is no better authority than Yeshe Gyaltzen on Bodhi-Mind and no better authority than Jamyang Zhepa on the view of middle-way philosophy.⁵¹⁵ Thus, at least, this major Geluk teacher and leader in Central Tibet sees Jikmed Wangpo's success as an unrivalled scholar as his predecessor and simply addresses him as Jamyang Zhepa.

Not only did Jikmed Wangpo teach extensively at Labrang, training a vast number of students, he also made sure that major transmissions were introduced back to Labrang, establishing it as "the source of dharma". For example, during his leadership at Labrang, he had plans of seeking transmission of the complete Kajur set, however, despite his many efforts to search for an authentic transmission, he was successful in locating one Chahar Kajurwa (*cha har bka' gyur ba*, u.d.) as a reliable source of the transmission only at the age of 60. Jikmed Wangpo made sure that Chahar Kajurwa came to Labrang and passed down the transmission of Kajur. Jikmed Wangpo was particular that the very transmission was passed along to the core group of elite monks. Among them were the second Palmang Konchok Gyaltzen (*dpa mang dkon mchog rgyal mtshan*, 1764-1853),⁵¹⁶ Geshe Konchok Dargye (*dkon mchog dar rgyas*, 1742-1798),⁵¹⁷ Lozang Jikmed (*blo bzang 'jigs med*, 1745-1792),⁵¹⁸ and Jikmed Rabgye. The Second Palmang

⁵¹⁴ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 364.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 364-365.

⁵¹⁶ He is a major historian from Labrang.

⁵¹⁷ He once served as an abbot of Kalachakra Collge at Labrang.

⁵¹⁸ He once served as an abbot of Medical College at Labrang.

then made possible further transmission of Kajur by transmitting to the monastic community at Labrang, mainly consisting of upper level classes in the scholastic college as well as monk students visiting Labrang. Jikmed Rabgye gave the transmission five or six times at Kubum Monastery. Thanks to his successful propagation of the transmission, he was known as the Great Kajur Master (*bka' gyur ba chen po*). From Labrang and Kubum, it soon spread to major monasteries in Amdo including Zhakyung, Serkhok (*gser khog*),⁵¹⁹ and Gonlung. The transmission of Kajur was thus rescued from its near extinction status and kept alive.⁵²⁰

At the behest of Jikmed Wangpo, the famed Drakar Ngakwang Drakpa gave the transmission of teachings in the *Sad* tradition passed down from Jamyang Zhepa and taught until the age of 90 at Labrang. When Jikmed Wangpo himself was giving the transmission of the *Kadam Book* (*bka' gdams glengs bam*),⁵²¹ he confided, “And I myself wanted to teach to ordinary monks without partiality, however, it did not go as I wished.”⁵²² Obviously, Jikmed Wangpo was keenly aware of his important role in fostering intellectual vitality at Labrang. This is made more obvious when we take into consideration, in addition to his long efforts in seeking of the transmissions from his predecessor, his global search of rare, mostly textual, transmissions in both Geluk and Sakya schools amid what he and other Geluk patriarchs perceived as the decline of the Geluk scholastic tradition. His extraordinary success of preserving and propagating both textual and oral transmissions including numerous major transmissions in the face of their endangerment deserves much credit for supporting the vitality and flourishing of Buddhism in general and the Geluk School in particular, well beyond the confines of the Amdo

⁵¹⁹ This was once a major monastery located northern Amdo.

⁵²⁰ Rgyak mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan (1999), vol. 2, 239 a.3, 240a.3. See also Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 375.

⁵²¹ This is a collection of biographical teachings given by Atisha at the request of his disciples.

⁵²² Dkon mchog bstan pa rab ragys (1982), 375: *nged kyis 'di bzhin grwa rkyang kha nyams la re ba'i 'chad nyan zhig byed 'dod kyang go sa 'dis bsam thog tu ma khel/*

region. Despite his initial setback due to internal strife and division in Labrang community, Jikmed Wangpo brilliantly turned it around and made Labrang into the “source of dharma”. Hence, he deserves much recognition and indeed was honored with three different epithets towards the end of his *Record of Teachings Received*: “the king of initiations of precious instructions (*gdams pa rin po che dbang gi rgyal po*), “the great ocean that completely holds Indian and Tibetan treatises together” (*rgya bod kyī gzhung lugs mtha' dag gcig tu 'dus pa'i rgya mtsho chen po*), “the king of initiations of precious instructions that completely satisfy the desires of all beings of the three vehicles” (*theg pa gsum gyi rigs can mtha' dag gi 'dod pa yongs su skong ba'i gdams pa rin po che dbang gi rgyal po*).⁵²³

Looking back on the early life of Jikmed Wangpo, his success begins to seem almost inevitable or predictable given his diligence and strong determination during his extended training at Gomang College. A passage from his biography aptly describes Jikmed Wangpo as a hard working student: When he studies treatises, he would often study the vast aspects of treatises thoroughly until midnight. Familiarity from a single reading would make him remember the whole thing. However, [he] is not satisfied and examines thoroughly over and over by relying on hundreds of citations and reasons. Even when he returns from dharma classes, he forgets to drink tea and has his mind focused on treatises. When his robe is tugged and [tea cup] is placed in his hands, he would take two or three mouthfuls, only to leave tea and run to the next dharma class. This happens regularly”⁵²⁴

⁵²³ Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan (1999), vol. 2, 4b.1-2.

⁵²⁴ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 88: *phyag dpe gzigs pa la byed pas rgyun par nam phyed bar du gzhung lugs rab 'byams la zhib gzigs mdzad cing/ ngos zin tsam zhig shar gyis bklags pas kyang cha tshang bar 'char na yang/ de tsam gyis mi ngoms par lung rigs brgya phrag gi sgo nas yang dang yang du dpyad pa 'ba' zhig lhur mdzad de tha na chos grwa nas phyir phebs ma thag kyang gsol ja bzhes rgyu mi dran par phyag dpe'i steng du thugs 'byams te 'gro/ na bza' nas 'then te phyag tu phul yang hub do gsum tsam bzhes nas slar yang 'phro lus te chos grwa rjes mar phebs dgos pa yang yang byung.*

Leadership of Jikmed Wangpo and Extension of Influence from his Lineage and Labrang Monastery

This section explores developments of Geluk institutions under the leadership of Jikmed Wangpo. As said earlier, due to the lack of sources on this period directly dealing with Rebgong or Rongwo Monastery, Jikmed Wangpo's life and successful career is, instead, a window into the religious life of Amdo, and for understanding the historical realities of Rebgong and Labrang, as well as their adjacent areas, as the increase in Jikmed Wangpo's influence hugely impacts the neighboring Rongwo Monastery and its network of monastic centers. The expansion of influence of Jikmed Wangpo's lineage and Labrang Monastery means reorganization of religious terrain and social reorganization of local Tibetan communities in relation to monastic centers they support. As will be explained below, his religious career is a rare example of tremendous amount of success accomplished in a single life in Tibetan Buddhist history. As discussed earlier, in addition to building Labrang as the "source of dharma", he was also credited with the foundations of numerous monasteries, as well as creation of various institutions fostering already existing monasteries in the region. It makes more sense that we learn that modern scholars from the region honor him with the epithet of the "custodian of dharma in Amdo". Although it is a biased evaluation of Jikmed Wangpo, there is some truthful basis for acknowledging his successful career playing an influential role in growth of Geluk institutions in general. Below, I will be mapping the network of monastic institutions either being created or fostered by leadership of Jikmed Wangpo.

Jikmed Wangpo's return from an extended training in Central Tibet marks a turning point in his life when he began his role as a major institutional builder in Amdo. From then on, for the

rest of his life, he kept an eventful life greatly shaping religious climate of Amdo. Soon after his arrival in Amdo, he was busy establishing Achok Demotang (*a mchog bde mo thang*) Monastery which was created as a result of a merge of surrounding monasteries. He set up three colleges there: scholastic, tantric, and stages of path colleges. He personally appointed all monastic officials including disciplinarians and chant leaders. He also instituted the great prayer festival and presided it. He also gave specific instructions for building an assembly hall and residential quarters for monks.⁵²⁵

Jikmed Wangpo's influence also reached Gartse (*mgar rtse*) Monastery. When it was relocated twice before it was permanently established at the current location, the monastery was renamed by him who also instituted the curricular system following the Gomang lineage.⁵²⁶ At that point, the monastery was controlled by Gartse family lineage.⁵²⁷ However, after departure from Labrang, the second Se Ngakwang Jamyang Tashi seems to have asserted his power prevailing there as he did not only build a major Manjushri temple there, but also appointed Arol Drakpa Gyatso (*a rol grags pa rgya mthso*, 1740-1794) as its abbot.⁵²⁸

Situated in Rongwo Marnang, Shingle Kha Monastery was a thorny issue between relationship between Rongwo and Labrang monasteries. The monastery was founded by Samten Rinchen, the same person who founded Rongwo Monastery. As unexpected on the part of Rongwo Monastery, Marnang Nagso, known as Gyadang Lozang (*rgya ldang blo bzang*, u.d.), expressed his interest in seeking Gyal Khenpo Drakpa Gyaltzen to lead the monastery which incensed the third Shar Gedun Trinle Rabgye at Rongwo. Nevertheless, Marnang *nangso* and the monastic community entirely agreed and offered the monastery to Jikmed Wangpo who at that

⁵²⁵ Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me (1990), 128.

⁵²⁶ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 339.

⁵²⁷ For a brief history of the Mgar rtse family, see Ibid., 340.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 338.

time was residing in Kado. Jikmed Wangpo, however, postponed discussion of transfer of the monastery to his custody, probably already aware of its implications in the politics of religious institutions in the region. Later, during a meeting with Panchen Lama at Kubum Monastery, the third Shar and his treasurer were also present there. The occasion presented itself as a suitable venue for Jikmed Wangpo to redeem himself by bringing up the issue of Shingle Kha Monastery being handed over to him and how he held back from accepting the custody of the monastery. On that occasion, the third Shar admitted how hard it had been for him and Rongwo Monastery to appoint an abbot as desired by them and acquiesced to the request of the monastery that Jikmed Wangpo would appoint abbots, which was then concluded in a written deal by Panchen Lama. Jikmed Wangpo then pledged funds to rebuild the assembly hall. He also sent carpenters and artisans to the monastery. Jikmed Wangpo also had one former abbot of Kalachakara College at Labrang Monastery appointed as the abbot there. By the time Jikmed Wangpo's disciple Gyal Khenchen Drakpa Gyaltzen was serving as its abbot following terms of office by a few abbots, monk enrollment went so low that Jikmed Wangpo turned the monastery entirely into a tantric college, basically a monastery focused on ritual practices.⁵²⁹ Nevertheless, it is important to learn the fact that the monastery was firmly under the control of Labrang ever since.

Drakar Phuntsok Ling Monastery (*brag dkar phun tshogs gling*) was closely aligned with Rongwo Monastery as it was considered as one of the three main seats of Shar Kalden Gyatso. During the extended stay of Shar Kalden Gyatso, there was a gathering of more than a hundred retreat practitioners. Due to its close affiliation with Rongwo Monastery, Konchok Tenpa Rabgye says there is an alternative set of eighteen retreat places with this retreat site listed among them. The eighteen retreat places are the core group of institutions which take part in the

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 347

great prayer festival at Rongwo Monastery, thereby consolidating the central authority of Rongwo Monastery and its main reincarnation lineage in the region. According to Konchok Tenpa Rabgye, Kacu Phuntsok (*bka' bcu phun thogs*, u.d.) built the scholastic and practice systems, transforming this retreat site into a fully equipped monastic center. Konchok Tenpa Rabgye suggests he is perhaps one of brothers of Chowa Rinpoche and Shar Kalden Gyatso, thereby explaining its strong affiliation with Rongwo. His reincarnation was a geshe trained in Central Tibet who resided nearly on a permanent basis at this monastery and was thus known as Drakar Tshang, named after his monastic seat. However, his reincarnation known as Kado Zhabdrung Konchok Chojor (*ka mdo zhabs drung dkon mchog chos 'byor*, u.d.) attended Labrang Monastery achieving first rank among the first batch of geshe and then served as an abbot. Since then, it seems the monastery was firmly under the control of Labrang Monastery.⁵³⁰

The next in the reincarnation line is the famed Ngawang Drapa who is a close associate of Jikmed Wangpo. More importantly and interestingly, he was also a close disciple of Serkha Sonam Gyatso, who was exiled from Labrang by Jikmed Wangpo. As mentioned earlier, Serkha Sonam Gyatso particularly asked his disciple Ngawang Drakpa to transmit teachings back to Labrang and his disciple was famous for being a transmitter of his teachings and travelled to teach at Labrang on a regular basis. The reincarnation of Ngawang Drakpa also attended Labrang Monastery, but due to his predecessor's close relationship with Serkha Sonam Gyatso and his reincarnation lineage, this successor left Labrang to study under the reincarnation of Serkha Sonam Gyatso, implying a possible rift with Labrang Monastery.⁵³¹

⁵³⁰ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 348.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 349.

Karing Hermitage was founded by Donyod Gyamtsho (*don yod rgya mtsho*, u.d.) who studied under Chowa Rinpoche and Shar Kalden Gyatso.⁵³² His reincarnation Ngakwang Gedun Tendzin (*ngag dbang dge 'dun bstan 'dzin*, u.d.) was also trained at Rongwo Monastery. Probabaly, he also studied under Khenchen Gedun Gyatso as he was an assistant to the latter. His service as an assistant to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso brought him closer to Jikmed Wangpo. Donyo Gyatsho was also a recipient of teachings from Jikmed Wangpo. Later, he served as the abbot of tantric college at Rongwo Monastery and held a very active teaching career. However, the lineage sucession was disputed when Rongwo and Labrang each identified a reincarnation. The candidate from Rongwo mainly resided at Rongwo and Lewo (*le bo*), a seat founded by his immediate predecessor.⁵³³ The other reincarnation chosen by Jikmed Wangpo was trained at Labrang Monastery and later served as abbots of numerous monasteries including Gengya Drakar and Kado.⁵³⁴ Although it is not clear which side controlled Karing Hermitage at that moment, this incident is an indicator of Jikmed Wangpo's increasing influence that interfered with local institutional hierarchy headed by Rongwo Monastery. Nevertheless, since at least about a century before that point, it is apparent that the area of the hermitage was under the religious influence of Rongwo Monastery.

The historic Bido Monastery was in the custody of the main lineages affiliated with Rongwo since it was entrusted in the hands of Yershong Jamyang Lodro who then appointed an abbot of his choice.⁵³⁵ It seems the lineage has a firm hand on the control of the monastery. His reincarnation Gedun Dattrak (*dge 'dun zla grags*, 1734-1811), due to his close relationship with

⁵³² According to another account, this site was attributed to one A krong dka' bcu. Konchok Tenpa Rabgye suggests it is a spelling error and the name should be A 'gron, instead. See *Ibid.*, 349. In that case, he would be A 'gron mkhas btsun rgya mtsho, a major Nyingma teacher who was comtemporary with Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho and active in Rebgong. See chapter four.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 351

Jikme Wangpo, however, asked and had Jikmed Wangpo appoint one Lhazhi Lozang Nyima (*lha zhis blo bzang nyi ma*, u.d.) as an abbot. That said, the monastery was controlled by almost entirely by reincarnation lineages closely aligned with Rongwo Monastery.⁵³⁶

When Chukhor Monastery (*gcu 'khor dgon*), along with its nearby retreat site, were offered to Jikmed Wangpo by one Rakho Wa (*rwa kho ba*, u.d.), Jikmed Wangpo would appoint him as its abbot. Jikmed Wangpo would later sponsor building projects for an assembly hall and a private residence of his. A ritual calendar was also instituted following the tradition at Lower Tantric College in Lhasa. The lineage authority of Jikmed Wangpo over this monastery was further strengthened when his two major disciples committed generous support to the monastery. Thukan Lozang Chokyi Nyima (*thu'u bkan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma*, 1737-1803) offered funds and religious implements generously towards ritual services more than once. Gyal Khenchen Drakpa Gyatsen also committed funds and other necessities towards the new assembly hall building project as well as a whole set of Tenjur offered to the monastery.⁵³⁷

When an unidentified old monastery in Sechang was offered to Jikmed Wangpo by Dobi nangso, one of three nangsos of Rebgong. Jikmed Wangpo relocated it to a new site and supported building projects there. Jikmed Wangpo particularly instructed that the monastery should be a pure monastery (*gtsang dgon*).⁵³⁸ And Amtso (*am tsho*) Monastery and its hermitages were also offered to Jikmed Wangpo who was responsible for appointing abbots there.⁵³⁹

Ngonpo Tang (*sngon po thang*) Monastery, founded by one Ngakwang Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen and Tharmichi Lozang Dondrup, was offered to Jikmed Wangpo. The former was

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 352.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 353.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 354.

trained at Labrang and studied under Jikmed Wangpo while the latter is, as mentioned earlier, a famous transmitter of teachings from Jamyang Zhepa to Jikmed Wangpo and a close disciple of the First Detsi Lozang Dondrup at Labrang. However, the successors in the lineage of Ngakwang Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen were residing at Rongwo Monastery,⁵⁴⁰ which could suggest that Rongwo asserted some influence in the monastic community at Ngonpo Tang.

Tso Monastery was founded by Be Sherap Chokden (*'be shes rab mchog ldan*, u.d.), who successor was Ngakwang Techok Wangchuk (*ngag dbang theg mchog dbang phyug*, u.d.). Ngakwang Techok Wangchuk, along with his fellow monks, once travelled to Central Tibet to seek Jamyang Zhepa to found a monastery and pledged his support in case one was built. However, instead of having Jamyang Zhepa found a monastery, he and his fellow monks brought Jamyang Zhepa over from the newly founded Labrang Monastery to Tso Monastery and offered it to him. Jamyang Zhepa's Mongol patron *Qinwang* Tshewang Tendzin offered fifty monks to the monastery to mark the occasion.⁵⁴¹ Tsayu Phuntshok (*tsa yus phun tshogs*, u.d.), who was among his fellow monks, offered his monastery of Tsayu to Jamyang Zhepa as well.⁵⁴²

After his fallout with Jikmed Wangpo at Labrang, the famed golden throne-holder Gyaltzen Senge went on to establish the scholastic system at Tso Monastery as requested by the leaders at the monastery. Urgen appointed one Beri Tutop Gyatso as the first teacher leading the scholastic college there. The new teacher was formerly trained at Labrang and then went over for extensive training in Central Tibet. He finally returned to Amdo as part of Gyaltzen Senge's entourage after achieving geshe degree. After him, the main teachers in a successive order are: Serkha Sonam Gyatso, Ngawa Chokiyong Gyatso, Rajampa Ngakwang Tendzin (*rab 'byams pa*

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 354.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 555.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 550.

ngag dbang bstan 'dzin), Lozang Tashi, and Ngawa Gotop. As it can be seen, four of these five teachers were learned scholars and staunch supporters of the second Se and left Labrang with the latter. Labrang Monastery interfered by sending monks from its tantric college to visit Tso Monastery where they participated in scholarly debates. There was eruption of a major conflict when a private residence of Jikme Wangpo previously built there was vandalized and abbots were appointed by Tso Monastery itself. Later, Labrang and Urge regained control of Tso Monastery and resumed appointing abbots from the pool of learned monks who achieved Doram degrees at Labrang.⁵⁴³ This conflict over the succession of abbots at Tso Monastery would evolve into series of disputes and lawsuits between the two monasteries.

Jikmed Wangpo made every effort to reestablish relationship with and in fact control of Tso Monastery. He visited the monastery on numerous occasions, giving teachings and donating funds. He set up a major fund for the assembly hall. Not only did he pacify a dispute between Tso ruler and his subjects, he also supported Lozang Gyatsen Senge, the choice of the candidate from Tso Monastery, to be identified as reincarnation of late Gyaltzen Senge.⁵⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it turns out that Tso Monastery maintained its independence from Labrang and moved even closer to Rongwo Monastery and its main lineages as well as the Se lineage exiled from Labrang since the young second Se's fallout with Jikmed Wangpo at Labrang.

Another accomplishment of Gyaltzen Senge was his founding of Lhamo Serti Monastery.⁵⁴⁵ Ngawa Chokyong Gyatso was appointed as the main teacher to teach the monks there.⁵⁴⁶ Gyaltzen Senge's reincarnation Lozang Gyatsen Senge was enthroned at Lhamo Sertri Monastery. Lozang Gyatsen Senge was first trained there, but later enrolled at Gomang College

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 557-558.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 557.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 724-725.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 725.

eventually establishing himself as a learned scholar. Back in Amdo, he founded a monastery known as Chumik Karmo (*chu mig dkar mo*). After a dispute with a local ruler in Lhamo Serti area, Gyaltzen Sengge left to make Tso Monastery as his main seat (*gdan sa'i mthil*).⁵⁴⁷ He taught widely including at Chuzang (*chu bzang*), Ragya (*ra rgya*), and both Lhamo monasteries. However, it is important to take note of two aspects of his life that were most relevant for our discussion here. He received his novice vow from Ngawa Chokyong Gyatso who was a close disciple of the First Se Ngakwang Tashi and was forced to leave Labrang and then served as a teacher at Tso Monastery.

We can judge that fallout between Jikmed Wangpo and Gyaltzen Sengge probably marked the beginning of deteriorating relationship between Labrang on the one end and Tso and Lhamo Sertri monasteries, on the other end. The second Se and his major supporters and teachers (who are in turn disciples of his predecessor) were active as teachers at Tso Monastery while Gyaltzen Sengge was sought there to take charge of creating a curricular system. Ngawa Chokyong Gyatso among these teachers supporting the second Se was also active at Lhamo Sertri Monastery to serve as its main teacher when Gyaltzen founded the monastery. Thus, we witness Gyaltzen Sengge and his lineage's increasingly closer relationship with the Se lineage and its supporters. Both these major lineages and their monasteries were also drawn closer to Rongwo where multiple persons in the two lineages served as abbots of Rongwo Monastery.

We do not know much about Samten Dargye Ling (*bsam gtan dar rgyas gling*) except for the fact that it was also offered to Jikme Wanpo further adding to his increasing influence. However, we do know that two obscure lineages ran the monastery and that they eventually fell into dispute over control of the monastery, resulting in a leadership crisis.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 558.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

Gomang Collge used to control Choten Shar (*mchod rten shar*) as it was offered along with its land and subjects by Rajampa Tenkyong (*rab 'byams bstan skyong*, u.d.), certified by a decree issued by Panchen Lozang Yeshe. Therefore, for a while, Gomang College ran the monastery by appointing its abbots. When Jikmed Wangpo visited Central Tibet, he transferred it to Labrang Monastery who then started appointing teachers and stewards (*bla gnyer*) there.⁵⁴⁹

Dzoge Monastery was founded by Khyage Lodro Gyatso, a close disiple of Jamyang Zhepa. Shortly after its founding, the monastery was offered to Jamyang Zhepa. His successor Jikmed Wangpo taught and was instrumental in establishing the tantric college there. He also composed a monastic customary.⁵⁵⁰ There was then one Tawon Donyo Senge (*ta dbon don yod seng ge*, u.d.) who studied under Jamyang Zhepa at Labrang and worked closely with Jikmed Wangpo to create the tantric college at Dzoge Monastery and had also personally asked for Jimked Wangpo to compose ritual texts. However, when their relationship took a sudden change, the five clans supporting the monastery disbanded with Mewo (*dme bo*) and Rutoma (*ru stod ma*) continuing their allegiance towards Jikmed Wangpo and breaking away to set up their own monastery, known the New Dzoge Monastery (*mdzod dge sgar gsar*) as opposed to the original monastery now known as the Old Dzoge Monastery (*mdzod dge sgar rnying*), to be led by Jikmed Wangpo.⁵⁵¹ Their rival faction went to the extreme of undoing achievements of Jikmed Wangpo by closing the tantric college at the Old Dzoge Monastery. I suspect that the eruption of conflict had much to do with one Tawon (*tA dbon*) lineage who had for long maintained the dominant presence with its long illustrious ancestral family lineage in the region as well as previously being the religious leader of the five clans. It is evident from all of this that the

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 559.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 562.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 562-563.

increasing lineage authority of Jikmed Wangpo and his role in fueling institutional developments of Geluk Buddhism must have come as a threat and intrusion to the status quo maintained by the religious power of the Tawon lineage in the local community. However, during this fallout, the second Se also had an influential role to play with support of Tawon Donyo Senge and Trinle Gyatso (*'phrin las rgya mtsho*, u.d.), the main reincarnation lineage master and local ruler, respectively. The second Se Ngakwang Jamyang Tashi was present on that very occasion to reestablish monastic rules and taught ritual singing at the Old Dzoge Monastery.⁵⁵²

At the New Dzoge Monastery, senior monks who were from the now dysfunctional tantric college at the Old Dzoge Monastery and who were proponents of Jikmed Wango were there to manage when its enrollment reached 250. Within three years of its foundation, the building project for an assembly hall and residential quarters for monks was complete. However, this project had to wait until Jikmed Wangpo's successor established ritual, curricular, and regulation systems at the monastery.⁵⁵³

During the escalation of the conflict, as expected of a close associate of Jikmed Wangpo, Khedrup Tendzin (*mkhas grub bstan 'dzin*, u.d.) had to leave his own retreat site due to the hostile force.⁵⁵⁴ Soon as requested by the ruler of Rutoma, he founded Geden Tenpe Pelgye Ling (*dge ldan bstan pa 'phel rgyas gling*) Monastery in the area. Due to his intimate relationship with Jikmed Wangpo, he would later offer the monastery to the young reincarnation of Jikmed Wangpo, a deal sealed in a signed letter, and the succession of abbots were appointed from Labrang since then.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵² Blo bzang bkra shis rab rgyas (n.d.), 50.

⁵⁵³ Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 570.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 567-569.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 565-566.

Gengya Pandita (*rgan rga'i paN+Ti ta*, u.d.) founded a monastery which is entirely a tantric college in the Gengya area after consulting Jamyang Zhepa. It seems he did not like influence of Labrang being intrusive at his monastery. However, a generation later, its then leader Gungtang Ngakwang Tenpe Gyaltzen (*gung thang ngag dbang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*, 1727-1759) offered it to Jikmed Wangpo. Furthermore, the former's reincarnation, Gungtang Tenpe Dronme, became a famed disciple of Jikmed Wangpo.⁵⁵⁶

The second Detri Jikmed Lungrik Gyatso (*jigs med lung rigs rgya mtsho*, 1748-1778) founded Chokhor Monastery for the twelve clans of Chokhor and appointed its abbots. In order to strengthen the monastery, later, Jikmed Wangpo did not only offer funds to the monastery for building projects and feasting for monastic community there, but also proceeded to establish the system of appointing its abbots, chant leaders, disciplinarians, and teachers.⁵⁵⁷

Ngono Demo Tang (*sngon po thang*) Monastery, founded as a merger of few monasteries in the area, was offered to Jikmed Wangpo by Dan Khenpo (*'dan mkhan po*, u.d.), along with its supporting communities and land. Jikmed Wangpo offered generous funds to the monastery where he also appointed teachers and established scholarly advancement system based on examination.⁵⁵⁸ His successor the third Jamyang Zhepa relocated the monastery. Appointments of abbots, representatives (*sku tshab*), and monastic disciplinarians were assigned by his lineage.⁵⁵⁹

According to Konchok Tenpa Rabgye, Jikmed Wangpo always had a plan of building a monastery in Ngawa area. Konchok Dechen (*dkon mchog bde chen*, 1737-1796) established a scholastic college in the area, it flourished at the start, but then due to oppositional force, the

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 581-582.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 587.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 611.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 612.

monastery was looted, as a result it did not last. Later, when Jikmed Wangpo visited the area, Dorzhar (*rdor zor*, u.d.), a local ruler who had lost nearly all his domain to the neighboring powerful Me king (*dme rgyal po*), came to Jikmed Wangpo for help. Jikmed Wangpo negotiated a deal with the queen of Me (*dme rgyal mo*) Abo Za (*a 'bos bza'*) detailing that she can keep Ngoshul (*sngo shul*) and Zito (*zi stod*), but the rest of the domain should be returned to Dorzhar. Not surprisingly, the queen did not accept the terms. Somehow, with diplomatic success of an envoy, Jikmed Wangpo was able to retrieve the eight tribes of Aran (*a ran*) from the control under the Me power and made his supporting communities, at whose request, he dispatched the third Gunthang Tenpe Dronme and Tazhing Ongwa (*ta zhin 'ong ba*) to establish the Amchok Gomang (*A mchog sgo mang*) Monastery as a tantric college. Jikmed Wangpo himself served as its abbot.⁵⁶⁰

As thoroughly discussed earlier in the first section in the chapter, Mokri Monastery was founded as directed by Jikmed Wangpo who was in turn inspired by a prophecy by Panchen Lama. Jikmed Wangpo was also credited with the foundation of a scholastic college at the monastery. It is clear that this monastery is an example that illustrates the fact that Jikmed Wangpo's ambitious expansion of the Geluk School and his lineage and the influence of Labrang was not received without any setbacks or opposition. It also shows how Jikmed Wangpo also had to negotiate with the local secular and religious hierarchy in a much contested religious climate in Amdo. His eventual success of taking the helm at the monastery is evident from the fact that he also composed a brief monastic customary, taught at all the three colleges, and appointed a learned disciple of his as the abbot.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 755.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 599.

At one point, Jikmed Wangpo was able to establish close connection with the Chone king when he travelled to give tantric teaching as well as consecrate the print of Tenjur commissioned by the royal house. He also composed a catalogue for the Tenjur print.⁵⁶² In 1748, Lhamo Kirti Monastery was founded by Kirti Lozang Tenpe Gyaltzen. He later appointed one Sonam Lodro from Kubum Monastery as its main teacher and put together a tantric college with nearly all monks from the tantric college at Chone Monastery.⁵⁶³ The monastery was managed by a succession of leaders including several learned monks from Labrang. Among them was Labrang's main teacher and leader Tharmichi Lozang Dondrub.⁵⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the monastery was able to stay independent from Labrang Monastery.

Conclusion

This chapter uncovers Rongwo's relationship with other Geluk institutions in the region, in hopes of embedding the monastic center and its lineage masters in a social matrix of Geluk growth in the eighteenth-century Amdo. However, due to the grave dearth of sources produced at Rongwo directly covering any level of Rongwo's engagement with Geluk institutions, I looked away from Rongwo to discover Rongwo's relational place in Amdo through a focus on written sources produced at Labrang, especially focusing on the mega-monastery of Labrang and its main lineage master Jikmed Wangpo, in order to draw out Labrang's and Jikmed Wangpo's multifaceted interactions with and indirect influences upon Rongwo Monastery. One major benefit of using these sources is that they allowed me to step back and provide a macro-level

⁵⁶² Ibid., 664.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 720.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 721.

viewpoint from which to evaluate the history of Geluk expansion in Amdo more generally. The significance of this conceptual strategy is such that we have been able to look at developments of these two major regional monasteries comparatively.

Besides being a comparative study of these Geluk institutions, this chapter also helped situate growth of Rongwo Monastery and influence of its main figure Khenchen Gedun Gyatso in a much wider context to appreciate and define their roles in the formation of networks of monasteries and reshaping of the religious terrain in Amdo. Due to the successful careers of two high profile religious leaders, under their leadership, both these major monasteries underwent dramatic institutional developments. Ironically, while this chapter is mainly focused on the career of Jikmed Wangpo as an exceptionally successful institutional builder, at the same time, it also builds contextual ground for better understanding of place of Rongwo Monastery and its charismatic leader Khenchen Gedun Gyatso in Geluk history in Amdo. Further, by setting Rongwo and Labrang monasteries side by side, we are presented with a good case of comparison detailing relationships between religious institutions. The final aim is that after reading the first two chapters, this third chapter will have helped us reconstruct some of the historical realities of Rongwo Monastery and its lineage masters in relation to developments of the Geluk School in larger Amdo society.

Chapter Four

Nyingma School and its “Co-existence” with the Geluk School

Introduction

Rebgong has gained popularity in academic fields as it is home to the well-known Rongwo Monastery and its equally famous tantric community known as the Rebgong Tantric Community (*reb gong sngags mang*). Both the Geluk and Nyingma communities have produced their distinctive corpora of Buddhist literature that have been gaining attention both at home and abroad. In Rebgong, against the backdrop of the Geluk and Nyingma dominance, there is also a sizable community of Bon practitioners for whom we lack sources to provide details on the period covered in this study. Therefore, it is the aim of this chapter to examine in detail Nyingma history of the region during the same time period as Geluk Buddhism was flourishing with Rongwo Monastery as its main institutional center and its attendant network of monasteries. This will allow us to better understand the religious history of the region as not just Geluk history, but rather as a history of plural religions. The relationships between these religions were dynamic processes in dialogue that involved levels of engagement ranging from ritual and iconographic representations to intellectual philosophies. Rather than studying history of an individual tradition or institution, this chapter focuses on relationships between religious traditions, or various levels of interactions between major figures and religious communities in the region, emphasizing their embeddedness in a shared, but very contested terrain.

We know little about the Nyingma figure, Adron Khetsun (*a 'gron mkhas btsun* 1604-1679), who was a contemporary of Shar Kalden Gyatso, other than a brief biography published

in as part of the Compiled History of Rebgong Tantric Community in Xining in 2004.⁵⁶⁵ However brief this biography, a thorough examination of his life sheds light on important aspects of the Nyingma School in the seventeenth century. I flesh out details about the Geluk background of his family one generation before him. There appears to be little tension in his religious career as he embraced both Geluk and Nyingma teachings. Like the better known later figure Rigdzin Palden Tashi (1688-1742/3),⁵⁶⁶ Adron Khetsun was trained in the Geluk education tradition following his initial study with a local lay tantric Buddhist master, only to undertake extensive training in Nyingma teachings in Kham and eventually, teachings of all schools in Central Tibet.

Whereas Adron Khetsun's teaching career included him dispensing both Geluk and Nyingma teachings depending on the sectarian identity of his audiences, Rigdzin Palden Tashi's teachings are entirely grounded in Nyingma teachings. The latter's dedication to Nyingma teachings infuriated Geluk critics, who accused him of disbelief in the Geluk founder in a heavily Geluk dominated region. However, due to the non-sectarian focus of his teachings, Adron Khetsun taught at numerous Geluk monasteries. Hence, his teaching career perhaps received much less opposition from the local religious communities as compared to that of Rigdzin Palden Tashi. This is understandable as the latter embarked on an exceptionally active teaching career amid the ever-increasing expansion of the Geluk School in Rebgong.

⁵⁶⁵ Lce nag tshang hUM chen and Ye shes 'od zer sgrol ma. *Reb kong sngags mang gi lo rgyus phyogs bsgrigs* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002).

⁵⁶⁶ For the life and work of Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis, see Yangdon Dhondup, "Reb kong: Religion, History and Identity of a Sino-Tibetan borderland town." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 20 (2011): 33–59; and "Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (1688–1743) and The Emergence of a Tantric Practitioners Community in Reb kong, A mdo (Qinghai)," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, no. 34 (2012): 3–30. See also Heather Stoddard, "Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (1688–1743): The '1900 Dagger-wielding, White-robed, Long-haired Yogins' (sngag mang phur thog gos dkar lcang lo can stong dang dgu brgya) & the Eight Places of Practice of Reb kong (Reb kong gi sgrub gnas brgyad)," In *Monastic and Lay Traditions in North-Eastern Tibet*, eds. Dhondup et al (Boston: Brill, 2013), 89-116.

For most of this chapter, I take as the main source the written corpus of Rigdzin Palden Tashi in order to explore the historical context of the Nyingma School's survival against all odds.⁵⁶⁷ Specifically, I examine the life of Rigdzin Palden Tashi to understand how he preached Nyingma teachings and how he established a successful teaching career. I also scrutinize challenges he dealt with in creating further growth of the Nyingma School in the region. Close examination of Geluk-Nyingma debates embedded in the writings of Rigdzin Palden Tashi offers valuable insight into the nitty-gritty details of tension between the traditions as well as a series of arguments from both sides on different religious philosophies. Consequently, this chapter is structured around the major themes of multi-religious context, orthodoxy of religious practices, textual lineages, final decline of the dharma, and religious ecumenism.

The Major Nyingma Figure during the era of Shar Kalden Gyatso

Adron Khetsun is cited as a major figure of Nyingma School in the seventeenth century Rebgong. However, we only know certain minor aspects of his life from a brief biographical account as mentioned above. It seems he initially studied under Sangchen Sherap Tashi, a locally established lay Nyingma tantric Buddhist in Rebgong. Shortly afterwards, he studied under Kowa Chokyi Gyatso, the eminent Geluk monk, who once served as abbot of Kubum Monastery, for a period of seven years. For the next five years, he found himself in Kham studying Nyingma teachings. He also reached Central Tibet where he studied under various teachers regardless of their sectarian affiliation.⁵⁶⁸ One major influential teacher during this period was the famous

⁵⁶⁷ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis, *Rig 'dzin chen po dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002).

⁵⁶⁸ HUM chen and Ye shes sgrol ma (2002), 57.

Jonang scholar, Taranatha (1575-1635), under whom he went through rigorous training in a series of major teachings.⁵⁶⁹ In 1636, during a conflict along mainly sectarian lines in Central Tibet, he was compelled to return to Rebgong. For the next few years, he visited numerous holy sites in Amdo, and Mt. Wutai, where he undertook a period of retreat practice, and Chengde, the site of Samantabhadra.⁵⁷⁰ Afterwards, he returned to Kham to train under the major Nyingma teacher, Sur Choying Rangdrol (1604-1669), until the latter passed away.⁵⁷¹ The rest of his life was entirely devoted to meditation at retreat sites in Amdo and his charismatic teaching career in the region.⁵⁷²

His charisma and popularity were well demonstrated by his mass teachings attended by his followers from Tibetan communities in Rebgong and beyond. For example, his teaching transmission of Mitra's One Hundred was attended by Geluk and Nyingma Buddhists as well as the laity, reaching nearly a population of five thousand. The extended teaching was sponsored by a few local clans located in a herding area to the south of Rongwo Monastery: Hor Tsozhi (*hor tsho bzhi*) Rongwo Mikya Pongsang (*rong bo mi skya dpon tshang*), Gon Gongok (*dgon gong 'og*), and Tashul Khasum (*mtha' shul kha gsum*). The diversity of participants and large network of the aforementioned patrons are good indicators of how farther to the south of Rebgong his religious influence reached. Also, in the biography, nearly two dozen of his major students were identified on this occasion. The first parts of their names indicate the origin of their home, which helps us verify his huge following in the region to the north of Rebgong.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 57-59. For a brief biographical account of Taranatha, see Jeffrey Hopkins, trans., *The Essence of Other-Emptiness* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2007), 9-12.

⁵⁷⁰ HUM chen and Ye shes sgrol ma (2002), 59.

⁵⁷¹ He was more commonly known as Zur chen chos dbyings rang grol and served as a major Nyingma teacher to the Fifth Dalai Lama.

⁵⁷² HUM chen and Ye shes sgrol ma (2002), 60.

His charismatic teaching had significant impact, though it took place in a herding area in the Upper Region (*stod phyogs*), perhaps in Rebgong. This mass teaching attracted devoted followers from faraway places such as Chentsa and Shonhwa (*zhon hwa*).⁵⁷³ Later, at one point, when he visited the community of Hormo Khasum (*hor mo kha gsum*), a clan in the Chentsa area, his biographical account specifies that his audience consisted of three groups—the laity, lay tantric Nyingma Buddhists, and Geluk monastics. Each group was given an appropriate, specific teaching. After an indication from a dream, he also gave some Sakya teachings devoted to the eight Mahakalas (*gur lha brgyad*).⁵⁷⁴ During his teaching in Chentsa Thang, the herding area in Chentsa, he gave teachings that are generally acceptable for Buddhists, regardless of sectarian affiliation. However, on that occasion, to lay tantric Nyingma Buddhists in Lokang (*blos rkang*), he gave all-Nyingma teachings.⁵⁷⁵ As evident on these occasions, his training in both Geluk and Nyingma education was the key to his success as a charismatic teacher. He excelled in interactions with both Geluk and Nyingma followers. This is also somewhat mirrored in the life of the future Nyingma master, Rigdzin Palden Tashi, who gave strictly Nyingma teachings.

Late in his life in his home village of Adron, a private residence was built for him, later known as the Residential Mansion of Adron (*a 'gron nang chen*). Though not credited with founding any monasteries, his private residence is home to a huge collection of Buddhist images and scriptures. In addition to images of Buddha and his disciples, bodhisattvas, he also had *thangka* images of Marpa, Milarepa, and Rechungwa (*ras chung ba*, 1083-1161), three patriarchs of the Kagyu School. He also had a *thangka* image of the eight Mahakalas of the Sakya School. As expected, he had a *thangka* image of Kowa Chokyi Gyatso, one of his

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 61-62; Gur lha rgyad is a set of eight forms of Mahakala mainly associated with the Sakya School.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 62.

teachers. There is also a *thangkha* image of Chowa Rinpoche, for reasons unspecified in the compiled biography.⁵⁷⁶ However, it is recorded in *Religious History of Amdo* that Adron Khetsun also studied under Chowa Rinpoche. According to the biography of Shar Kalden Gyatso, A ‘gron mkhas btsun also studied under Shar Kalden Gyatso, though there is no mention of Shar Kalden Gyatso in the biography of Adron Khetsun compiled by HUM chen and Ye shes sgrol ma. This encourages us to directly consult the sources the compilation is based on, which was not possible during the time of write-up of this dissertation at its final stage.

His biographical account also records his Kalachakra teachings on three occasions attended by masses in Dobi, Dzoge, and the Kokonor region, successively. It is important to note that in Dzoge, on the same occasion that he gave Kalachakra teachings, his biography also details a series of teachings to over a group of over two hundred monks, lay Nyingma tantric Buddhists, and Bon followers.⁵⁷⁷ These mainstream Buddhist teachings acceptable for both Geluk and Nyingma Buddhists teachings are identified in the biography. Although his biography indicates nothing about training in Bon teachings, it is likely that his Bon followers were accepting of Buddhist teachings.

His reincarnation was identified in Dokya (*do kyA*) in Chentsa and was trained until well into his adulthood in the Nyingma teachings. However, he converted to the Geluk School after later training in the Geluk School in Central Tibet, receiving full ordination precepts from Panchen Blo bzang ye shes, later to found his own Geluk monastic seat, Lhari Samten Ling (*lha ri bsam gtan gling*), in Chentsa⁵⁷⁸ It seems his lineage influence pales in comparison with the charisma of his predecessor, partly due to his Geluk conversion as well as his permanent base

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 62-63.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 63-64.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 64.

being located in Gcan tsha outside Rebgong, the heart of the Nyingma School in the region. However, the religious climate of Rigdzin Palden Tashi transformed the Geluk School as it increasingly dominated the region with Rongwo Monastery as a center of branch monasteries supported by reincarnation lineage systems. As this chapter explores, partly due to the availability of numerous writings by Rigdzin Palden Tashi, we are introduced to a rather heavily sectarian eighteenth century Rebgong. We also learn how Rigdzin Palden Tasho dealt with communities of his followers and his mostly Geluk critics. Given the nature of his writings that I study for this chapter, I focus on a series of his arguments refuting his Geluk critics and what the ideal religious path that he envisioned. I will also present aspects of Geluk critiques embedded in his written corpus amid his increasing fame and charisma in the region, however limited that might have been.

The Time of Rigdzin Palden Palden Tashi within His Written Corpus

In the early eighteenth century, Gomang College achieved notoriety for being hostile toward non-Geluk schools, especially the Nyingma School during the time the Mongols closely collaborated with Gomang College monks and sacked major Nyingma institutions in Central Tibet. This tragedy befell Dorje Drak Monastery (*ddo rje brag*)⁵⁷⁹ during Rigdzin Palden Tashi's training there. As a result, he had to travel to Kham for further training. Not surprisingly, Rigdzin Palden Tashi thought that there were only a few Geluk lamas who were worthy of giving teachings. His position was that the majority of Geluk elite monks indulged in worldly concerns and did not qualify as real teachers.⁵⁸⁰ However, even those lamas criticize him, Rigdzin Palden

⁵⁷⁹ It is a major Nyingma Monastery founded in 1632.

⁵⁸⁰ Rigdzin Palden Tashi, 115.

Tashi advised his followers not to retaliate and even urged his followers to forgive. He said, “they are hesitant and worried that people like me may do harm to the dharma.”⁵⁸¹

It is worth noting how Rigdzin Palden Tashi ranks very influential Buddhists in Tibet. Placed at the first rank of superior people (*skyes bu mchog*) are lineage founders such as Padmasambhava, Atisha, and Tsongkhapa who he thought worked for the welfare of the dharma in general and had no regard for their own homeland and kinsmen.⁵⁸² Extraordinary people (*skyes bu khyad par can*) of the middle rank included the likes of the Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas as well as Tongkor Rinpoche, Chamdo Pakpa Lha, and Lamo Zhapdrung Karpo.⁵⁸³ It is important to note that all the figures he identified in the middle rank were major Geluk masters. Finally, there were ordinary people (*skyes bu phal ba*) who were reincarnation lineage masters. He argued that those in this category who lived during his time were not ordinary because of their narrow views and actions, but because they were entirely obsessed with their monastic seats and kinsmen.⁵⁸⁴

Due to the non-sectarian ethos of the first Panchen Lama and fifth Dalai Lama, he often took them as inspirations of a model religious career.⁵⁸⁵ He also cited them in order to refute sectarian claims of the Geluk critics and others. At one point he said that after Tsongkhapa and his two chief disciples, there were none better than the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama close to his time for their impartial view of religious traditions and therefore, he worshipped them. It is

⁵⁸¹ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis, *Dpal ldan bkra shis kyi spyod tshul brjod pa'i gtam gyi rgyun ngo mtshar dgyes pa'i glu dbyangs*, In *Rig 'dzin chen po dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002), 115: *kho tsho nga 'dra bas kyang bstan pa la phan gnod gang 'dra'am snyam ste thugs 'phyang mo nyug byas pa yin*.

⁵⁸² Ibid., 115-116.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁸⁵ See Gene Smith, “The Autobiography of the First Panchen Lama,” In *Among Tibetan Texts*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 119-131. See also Samten, Karmay. *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama: the Gold Manuscript in the Fournier Collection*. London: Serindia, 1998.

also important to note that he also included a few major Geluk elites from Amdo among the role models to follow, demonstrating that there was also a minority group of local Geluk elites that inspired the non-sectarian outlook of Rigdzin Palden Tashi as well as engendering a cultural ethos of non-partisanship among religious traditions.

Rigdzin Palden Tashi contrasts three periods of Buddhism in Rebgong and places his time in the final age of decline where lamas and rulers are hypocrites. He further adds that the majority of Geluk followers in Rebgong are jealous and the Rongwo rulers are evil.⁵⁸⁶ He says local rulers and lamas are deceitful and indulge in eating animal flesh, adding that monks also held perverse views that they even regard teachings of the Buddha as false words of fortune tellers (*mo ba*) and spirit mediums (*lha ba*). He felt all lay people were evil-natured, posing a great challenge to his preaching. However, without resigning to despair, he urged his followers including monks, Bon followers, and lay Nyingma tantric Buddhists to uphold the Tenth-Day ritual (*tshes bcu*).⁵⁸⁷ He further emphasized that except for Skal Idan rgya mtsho, who was impartial towards all religious traditions, all of the lamas and rulers in Rebgong were unreliable.⁵⁸⁸

In a few instances, he recounted his major fallout with Khenchen Gedun Gyatso that probably took place in 1731. In his songs, there are a very few details of this conflict where the abbot of malicious tantric power refers to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, who proceeded to perform sorcery against him. Rigdzin Palden Tashi admitted that he performed recitation rituals in return, but nothing significant beyond that.⁵⁸⁹ The incident of this conflict, which was recorded in a few

⁵⁸⁶ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 182.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 183: *nga la dad pa yod pa'i ban bon dang/ sngags 'chang a mchod rnams ni tshes bcu zungs/snyigs ma'i dus 'dir tshes bcu phan yon che*. The Tenth Day ritual is a major lay Nyingma ritual.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 183.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 50-51.

details in a contest of ritual magic in *Religious History of Amdo*, further enhanced his view of the decaying state of Buddhism.⁵⁹⁰

At a great prayer festival at Rongwo, the abbot of the monastery, referring to Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, proclaimed, “Padma of Oddiyana is a fraud. The tantra of the early translation period is false dharma. Lay tantric Buddhists wearing red hats are non-Buddhists.”⁵⁹¹ He made it clear that at least what the abbot intended violated fundamental Buddhist principles of compassion. He commented further, “the object of generation of mind knows no kinsmen and enemies.”⁵⁹² At a great prayer festival at Rongwo one year, the Shar⁵⁹³ even warned, “Do not perform too many sorcery rituals of any initiation or transmission.”⁵⁹⁴ He listed several tragic events that transpired in Rebgong. Because of all these events that befell both Geluk and Nyingma communities, Rigdzin Palden Tashi said, “therefore, on occasions, both large and small, whenever the Rongwo Royal House makes any speech, they are all made about the dharma. However, they mean otherwise, they are, therefore, never trustworthy and reliable.”⁵⁹⁵ Facing such entrenched Geluk bias, all these unfortunate events that transpired in Central Tibet and Amdo, and especially Rebgong were, for Rigdzin Palden Tashi, indisputable signs confirming his deep conviction in the age of the final decline of dharma.

However, in one instance, although Rigdzin Palden Tashi did not agree to the much elevated status of Rebgong dearly held by local Tibetan communities, he presented his favorable view of Rebgong, emphasizing Nyingma heritage sites dotting the land of the current sectarian

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 53-54.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 152: *o rgyan pad+M brdzun ma/ gsnang sngags rnying ma chos log yin/ sngags pa zhwa dmar ba rnam phyi rol ba yin.*

⁵⁹² Ibid., 153: *sems bskyed yul la dgra gnyen me.*

⁵⁹³ It is hard to verify whether the Shar here refers to the second Shar Ngag dbang ‘phrin las rgya mtsho or the third Shar Dge ‘dun ‘phrin las rab rgyas.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 152: *gsang sngags rnying ma'i dbang lung cis mthu sgrub sogs byed kyi ma mang.*

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 189: *de'i phyir na rong bo tshang gi che sa chung sa nas gtam smra dus bstan pa'i la rgya zer zhing phan phan 'dra ba'i tshig a na ma na bshad pa la 'gro ba gzhan zhig 'dug pas yid ches pa dang blo khel ba mi snang ngo.*

hostility and strife. When describing his homeland of Rebgong, Rigzin Palden Tashi reiterated elders' sayings that Rebgong was the inner land of Jambudvīpa. While admitting that although India, the land of arya, was the center of Jambudvīpa, Rebgong residents believed Rebgong was the center, surrounded by China with its magnificent palaces and large cities in the east; Jang (*'jang*), Gyelrong (*rgyal rong*), and Tibetan communities of Kham area in the south; Central Tibet as the source of dharma in the west; and the Mongols in the north.⁵⁹⁶ He disagreed with the local conception of Rebgong as the central land, and instead asserted that it was not just borderland (*mtha' 'khob*), but a further borderland (*yang 'khob*).⁵⁹⁷ He also implied that Rebgong once had a glorious past, as it was home to eight Nyingma retreat sites and one Bon retreat site whose potent power were first transplanted during the imperial period.⁵⁹⁸ Rigdzin Palden Tashi mentioned Shar Kalden Gyatso as initiating a period of prosperity for diverse religious traditions that was justifiable considering the towering non-sectarian figure, Shar Kalden Gyatso, as discussed in Chapter One. However, as Rigdzin Palden Tashi noted, during his life, the age of degeneration ensued, further highlighting the sectarian strife in eighteenth century Rebgong.⁵⁹⁹

Prior to the rise of the Nyingma School in Rebgong, thanks to active teaching tours by Rigdzin Palden Tashi, his ancestors controlled a part of the Rebgong area by appointing abbots of the local monastery and local secular rulers. During the time of his ancestor, Lama Namkha Gyeltsen (*bla ma nam mkha' rgyal mtshan*, u.d.), the third Dalai Lama visited the monastery en

⁵⁹⁶ 'Jang and Rga rong are Tibetan borderland regions that enjoyed a long period of semi-autonomous status from outside powers. Rgya rong was misspelled. It should be Rgyal rong.

⁵⁹⁷ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 9: *dper na lho 'dzam bu gling gi dbus 'phags yul rgya gar la byed kyang kho bo'i phyogs de'i shar na gong ma rgya nag chen po'i pho brang sogs rgya yul gyi grong khyer stobs che zhing/ lho na 'jang dang rgya rong sde dge sogs khams sde mang pa dang/ nub na dbus gtsang bstan pa'i 'byung khungs yod pa dang/ byang na o rod khar kha su ru su sogs dpa' bo hor sog gi ru sde mang ba'i de dag gi dbus lta bur yod pas na de skad brjod par snang yang don la mtha' 'khob kyi nang nas yang 'khob rgya min bod min rgya hor la sogs pa sna tshogs 'dres pa'i sa cha zhig tu yod do.*

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 9: *'on yul khams de dag gi lo rgyus rten 'brel bzang phyogs su bsgyur nas cha tsam brjod na ni.* See also Ibid., 10.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 263.

route to Dentik (*dan tig*)⁶⁰⁰ Monastery. At this time, people from the Gyalpo (*rgyal po*) area, the future birth place of Rigdzin Palden Tashi, came seek the Dalai Lama's blessing.⁶⁰¹ While we have no clear indication of the monastery's sectarian identity at the time of this visit, it is likely that the monastery had undergone Geluk conversion. The third Dalai Lama is a major figure in the history of Geluk Buddhism, whose activities in Amdo mark a turning point in religious history, with Geluk influence sweeping the region from the Dalai's campaign, aided by Mongol patronage. For these reasons, we can reasonably entertain the possibility that either the monastery was a Geluk institution or one in transition to lean more towards the Geluk School. During the lives of the local religious leader, Blo bzang rgyal mtshan and his successors, there was an exchange of teachings with Gyasa Gartse (*gya sa'i mgar tshe*), which was a Geluk Monastery by this time.⁶⁰²

We are certain that one generation before Rigdzin Palden Tashi, nearly corresponding to the time of his teacher Sherab Tashi, who once served as an abbot of Rongwo Monastery, the family was under the strong influence of the Geluk School. Two of his uncles first enrolled in Rongwo Monastery, eventually achieving scholarly ranks from their extensive training in Geluk education in Central Tibet. They both returned to Rebgong. One undertook retreat at the retreat site of Tshagyel and the other residing at Dechen Dargye Ling Monastery, both Geluk institutions.⁶⁰³ This was predictable, given the flowering of Geluk Buddhism fueled by the unrivalled charisma and success of Shar Kalden Gyatso integrating both scholarly and practice traditions, his close relationship with the secular leaders, and his impartial treatment of other

⁶⁰⁰ Located in the modern day Dpak' lung County in Qinghai, Dan tig Monastery is a historic monastery founded during the Tibetan imperial period. It survives today.

⁶⁰¹ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 4.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 5; Gya sa'i mgar tshes should be spelled as Gya sa mgar rtse.

⁶⁰³ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 5.

non-Geluk religious schools in the region. His legacy is further strengthened by the lineage authority of his successors in addition to a network of monasteries and retreat sites founded by his disciples who continued his scholastic and retreat lineages.

Rigdzin Palden Tashi himself also first enrolled in the Geluk monastery of Dechen (*bde chen*) and received novice precepts from Sherab Tashi. He would later attend the scholastic program at Rongwo Monastery.⁶⁰⁴ During his visit to sacred sites in Central Tibet, he was convinced by a fellow monk to enroll in Gomang College. During his four to five years of training at Gomang, he felt a strong urge to shift from scholastic mode to one of practice.⁶⁰⁵ He admired great sages before him such as Tsongkhapa and wishes to imitate their religious life. However, he thought he was unfit to accomplish any level of success as a scholar or even as a practitioner because this required intense learning beforehand. At the same time, thanks to contracting measles, inappropriate actions of a few monks at the monastery further enhanced his desire to leave the monastic community. When he consulted such major oracle deities as Nechung (*gnas chung*)⁶⁰⁶ and Gadong (*dga' gdong*), he was advised to follow his heart and especially instructed to receive esoteric instructions from Surchen Choying Rangdrol.⁶⁰⁷ From then on, his training began earnestly in Nyingma teachings.

In 1717/18, the Zungar Mongols took control of Lhasa and reshuffled the political organization of the Lhasa Government. The Mongols, directed by a few senior Geluk monks, wrecked major Nyingma institutions including Dorje Drak, where he was being trained at that moment.⁶⁰⁸ All these factors above contributed to his strong determination to leave. In fact,

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁰⁶ For a detailed study of Gnas chung, see Christopher Bell. *Nechung: The Ritual History and Institutionalization of a Tibetan Buddhist Protector Deity* (PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 2013).

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 14.

however, he was forced to leave Central Tibet and travel to Kham. Ironically, he was grateful that the unfortunate turn of events in Central Tibet made him leave Central Tibet and travel to Nyingma institutional centers in Kham to again undertake an extensive training in major Nyingma teachings. He lived a modest life barely living on earnings by performing such works as recitation and copying scriptures, however, he was content with his successful training in Nyingma teachings.⁶⁰⁹ He returned to Rebgong in 1726 and the following year, started a busy teaching career in Rebgong and its adjacent areas for the remainder of his life.⁶¹⁰

He took pride in and as inspiration from the long pedigree and glorious past of the Nyingma School. Terdak Lingpa (Gter bdag gling pa 1646 – 1714)⁶¹¹ and Nyima Drakpa (*nyi ma grags pa*, 1647-1710)⁶¹² were two major figures of the Nyingma treasure tradition during his lifetime. He admired them as immediate inspirational models, having met them in person and perhaps having received teachings from them.⁶¹³ His brief autobiography lists places he visited, teachings he gave, and audiences he interacted with. Despite its brevity, it is useful in terms of revealing that he was widely active in Rebgong and beyond. With Rebgong as the center of his religious activities, he travelled widely, attracting students in the Chentsa area. His teaching trips also included the Mongol domain as well as parts of the Khagya Tsodruk area, a terrain contested by major Geluk institutional centers in the region including Labrang, Rongwo, and Tso monasteries. His religious influence covered a great portion of Amdo where Geluk institutions already prevailed, with Rongwo and Labrang the two major centers of the network of Geluk

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁶¹¹ Gter bdag gling pa was the founder of the major Nyingma monastery, Smin grol gling, in Central Tibet.

⁶¹² Like Gter bdag gling pa, Nyi ma grags pa is a major Nyingma teacher to many illustrious disciples, including the Fifth Dalai Lama.

⁶¹³ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 16.

institutions. His collision with the Geluk community in Rebgong was an inevitable outcome, given his increasing fame and active teaching career in the Geluk dominant region.

In terms of demographic profile, his teachings reached various segments of local religious and lay society. There were both Buddhist and Bon monks as well as lay tantric practitioners and lay people in his audience. The teachings ranged from tantric empowerments to seminal essence (*snying thig*), the inner most teachings of the great perfection tradition. It is important to take note of the fact that in the Bon Village of Khyungpo (*Khyung bo*) in Rebgong, he gave the ritual transmission of the Tenth Day, a regular lay Nyingma ritual, to over forty Bon followers. However, in this context, this transmission is one he called Three Bodies of Bon Lama (*bon gyi bla ma sku gsum*) and this particular transmission, as he specified, was commonly shared by both Bon and Buddhism.⁶¹⁴ At his own seat, Rigdzin Rebpel Ling (*rig 'dzin rab 'phel gling*) Monastery, he gave teachings to various groups of audiences including Bon followers, on numerous occasions,⁶¹⁵ It is also of value to note that at least his teachings identified in the biography are entirely grounded in the Nyingma tradition.⁶¹⁶ At the Geluk Monastery of Nangre Serkhang (*snang ra'i gser khang*)⁶¹⁷ in Chentsa, the neighboring region to the north of Rebgong, recipients of his Nyingma teachings also included Bon followers.⁶¹⁸

During his active teaching career in Rebgong and the neighboring area, his teachings probably took place mostly in the villages or Nyingma sites. However, there are some venues for

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 17: *khyung bo bon gyi sde chen der/ bon po bzhi bcu'i rtsa grangs la//bon gyi bla ma sku gsum zhes/ ban bon dbyer med tshes bcu'i lung.*

⁶¹⁵ In Rebgong, Bon po is a generic term for followers of Bon Religion, whether they be laypersons, lay Bon tantric practitioners, or monastic members of Bon. On the contrary, bon sngags specifically refers to lay Bon tantric practitioners.

⁶¹⁶ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 18, 21.

⁶¹⁷ It is the first Geluk establishment in Gcan tsha area attributed to Chos rje don drub rin chen in the fourteenth century.

⁶¹⁸ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 21: *snang ra gser gyi lha khang du/ snang ri'i ban sngags bon gsum gyi/ gtso byas yang byung man chad dang/ shAkya bu bryud tshun chad kyi/ dam chos don gnyer sum cu la/ rdzogs pa chen po'i khrid bka' phog/rdo rje sems dpa'i dbang yang bskur.*

his teachings were sites of regional Geluk institutions. For example, at the Geluk monastery of Cukhor in Bido, he gave teachings including the Nyingma teaching of eight commandments (*bka' brgyad*),⁶¹⁹ to a group of over twenty lay tantric practitioners of the Cutting practice (*gcod sngags*).⁶²⁰ At Ngagar Jangchup Ling (*rnga sgar byang chub gling*), another Geluk monastery in Chentsa, he gave a series of teachings, including *bka' brgyad* to an unidentified audience. Again, at Nangre Serkhang, he gave teachings to five monastic and lay people.⁶²¹ He also included numerous learned Geluk scholars, mostly from Rebgong, among the recipients of his Nyingma teachings.⁶²² Among those who received his teachings on other occasions, were local rulers, whose patronage greatly aided the financing of his frequent teaching tours. However, his autobiography as well as numerous details surrounding his teaching tours interspersed throughout his collection of songs suggested that the audience number was rather small, unlike what secondary literature in Tibetan and English might have you imagine.

Rigdzin Palden Tashi admitted his early training was almost entirely grounded in Geluk education as shown in the records of the teachings he received.⁶²³ After leaving Drepung Monastery, he studied under Surchen Choying Rangdrol in Gungtang (*gung thang*).⁶²⁴ He then travelled for further training at Mindrol Ling. Afterwards, he was trained at Dorje Drak under Terdak Lingpa and Nyim Drakpa.⁶²⁵ During his residence at Dorje Drak, the monastery was sacked by the Mongols with the Nyingma School facing hostility and suppressions by the Mongol force in Central Tibet. This tragic experience of the Nyingma School in Central Tibet

⁶¹⁹ *Bka' brgyad* are a set of eight sadhana teachings taught by Padmasambhava who, in turn, received from eight Heruka deities.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 19, 21.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁶²⁴ It is traditionally a political region in Central Tibet.

⁶²⁵ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 27-28.

made him turn to Kham, where he again went through extensive training. Later he was back in Smin grol gling, receiving further teachings.⁶²⁶

Back in Amdo, he also received teachings from two major Nyingma masters in Tso and Gurong (*dgu rong*).⁶²⁷ It is important to note that prior to the advent of Rigdzin Palden Tashi as a towering figure of the Nyingma School in the region, there were already tantric communities of the Nyingma School in Amdo. Some were highly accomplished tantric masters who Rigdzin Palden Tashi personally studied under after extensive training that he underwent in Central Tibet and Kham, and even after his enlightenment experience marking his success of practice in Kham. Therefore, we must accept the possibility that the Nyingma School had a strong presence in the pre-Rigdzin Palden Tashi period. An example of this is the figure of Adron Khetsun in the preceding section.

The above is what may be gleaned from going through his autobiography, as well as two records of received teachings. Fortunately, within his single volume collection of works made available in modern book print, there is a large compilation of songs over the course of his teaching career in Amdo. As mentioned earlier, Dhondup published an article on the life of Rigzin Palden Tashi, with a follow-up article on the same person from Heather Stoddard.⁶²⁸ In Dhondup's article, we are introduced to a sketchy biographical account of Rigdzin Palden Tashi, however, his research barely used the collection of songs or non-biographical writings in the written corpus by Rigdzin Palden Tashi. Therefore, Stoddard's research is a much-welcomed addition as it gives us a general survey of Rigdzin Palden Tashi's corpus, while also highlighting the sectarian nature of the period when Rigdzin Palden Tashi lived and his anti-

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 28-29.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 30; Dgu rong is the southern portion of Gcan tsha bordering Reb gong.

⁶²⁸ See Dhondup (2012), Stoddard (2013).

partisan approach amid the Geluk dominance of religious terrain in Amdo. However, as Stoddard advises, for a further in-depth study of the life of Rigdzin Palden Tashi building on the previous general overview of his life and textual corpus done by herself and Dhondup, my research takes up where they left off. A careful examination of his autobiography also reveals a few important details surrounding the religious background of the Rgyal po area and Rigdzin Palden Tashi's family background in terms of their sectarian affiliation as well and demographic profile of his audience during his teaching career. These issues, as discussed in more detail in the preceding pages, are not as apparent as in the secondary literature. Looking through his collection of songs further reveals historical realities of the sectarian period in Rebgong plus details of apologetic arguments from Rigdzin Palden Tashi facing increasing Geluk hegemony in the region. As Stoddard claims, "A strong plea against partisan violence and bigoted sectarianism runs right through the text, and indeed appears as a leitmotif throughout his writings, underlining the richness of the different traditions in Tibet, amongst which he sees no contradiction."⁶²⁹

For these reasons, this chapter focuses on thoroughly examining and fleshing out his criticism of Geluk sectarianism and conciliatory defense of the Nyingma School. Despite the focus of this chapter on his defense of the Nyingma School and promotion of non-sectarian approach to navigate the complexity of multi-religious life in Amdo, we can still read and reconstruct lines of the Geluk arguments that are critical of the Nyingma teachings. I fully realize the limitation of such an approach presenting the sectarian life of the period, especially when looking through the lens of Rigdzin Palden Tashi himself. However inadequate this approach, a detailed examination of this sectarian period in any fashion is invaluable as we face a grave lack of sources and only turn to his written corpus-his autobiography and collections of songs.

⁶²⁹ See Stoddard (2013).

Teaching Activities and Resistance from Within and Without

One year after his return from extensive training in Kham, Rigdzin Palden Tashi embarked on exceptionally active teaching tours, while also establishing ritual traditions in numerous locations. His Nyingma proselytizing mission elicited much opposition from local society as he was a game changer, bringing transformational alterations to the status quo preserved in local religious communities. Rigdzin Palden Tashi comments on the despairing status of Nyingma lay tantric Buddhism vis-à-vis flourishing monastic Geluk Buddhism in Rebgong: “In the present age, in the land of Rebgong, for monks practicing monastic Buddhism, there are numerous teachers giving dharma instructions. Everybody has a just good enough command [of practice] on their own. For lay tantric practitioners, keepers of transmission of tantra from the old translation, [teachers who] introduce [them] to meditational deities are as rare as yellow flowers. Therefore, I sought a prophecy from dharma protectors. I listened to the dharma of initiation, authorization, and explanation. Now, because I instruct them in dharma, everyone admires and respects me. When great meditators of the new translation school witness this, they are jealous in all sorts of ways and spread malicious rumors in ten directions. Everyone accumulates a store of gossip like a mountain.”⁶³⁰ Thus, he justifies his critical role as a Nyingma teacher in creating a revival of Nyingma School and precisely because of his rise as a transformer of the local religious status quo, much criticism was hurled at him.

⁶³⁰ Rig ‘dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 64: *dus deng sang reb gong yul 'di na/ ban chos mdzad btsun pa'i tshogs rnams la/ chos ston pa'i slob dpon du ma yod/ rang mgo thon tsam re sus kyang shes/ sngags rnying ma'i rgyud 'dzin sngags pa la/ lha yi dam ngo sprod byed pa yi/ ser me tog tsam yang dkon 'dug pas/ ngas chos skyong rnams la lung bstan zhus/ sngags rnying ma'i dbang khrid lung chos nyan/ deng sang sngags pa rnams la chos bstan pas/ kun nga la dad gus dung dung byas/ de gsar ma'i sgom chen 'gas mthong nas/ mi nga la phrag dog ji snyed byas/ gtam mi snyan du ma phyogs bcur bsgrags/ kun ngag 'khyal ri bo tsam yang bsags.*

A close examination of Rigdzin Palden Tashi's busy teaching career offers us considerable insight into levels of engagements that he conducted with groups of diverse religious traditions and lay society in the region. In multiple instances of his interaction with the local community, his role as a major Nyingma figure in establishing Nyingma ritual tradition in village communities is evident. He credited himself with establishing the eight commandments and the tenth-day ritual practices solely to dispel external military force. As expected, there were, however, many geshes who opposed his religious activities so he sang to ridicule them, "At some point, I established the eight commandments and the tenth-day everywhere, so as to dispel soldiers from the border. However, there are many geshes who, instead of taking delight in this, wish that army from the border would actually come. With this in mind, it is interesting to see geshes dedicate merit and make wishes for the non-occurrence of turbulent times."⁶³¹ Another time, two Geluk scholars from Yershong Monastery lied about him to a ruler in Hor sog yul tsha 'dam, who immediately confirmed it was a lie from his sources.⁶³² Again, at a mani (*ma Ni*)⁶³³ mass gathering, one Geluk monk ridiculed lay tantric practitioners by rhetorically asking, "if [everyone] there should take refuge in lay tantric Buddhists instead of gurus."⁶³⁴

Rigdzin Palden Tashi tells of a few instances when few meditators from Rebgong visited places such as Lamo Ngo (*la mo ngos*)⁶³⁵ and the Mongol domain to the south of Rebgong, to obtain alms and to undertake teaching activities. They spread malicious rumors about Rigdzin Palden Tashi saying the latter even preached a taboo against recitation of chants including

⁶³¹ Ibid., 63: *ngas skabs shig mtha' dmag bzlog thabs kyi/bka' bryad tshes bcu kun la btsugs/ de la rjes su dga' ba 'dra mi sgom yang/ mtha' dmag yong na'o snyam pa'i dge bshes mang/ 'di bsam na dus kyi 'khrugs long mi 'byung bar/ bsngo ba smon lam byed pa'i dge bshes tsho nyams re mtshar.*

⁶³² G.yer gshong is misspelled Gyer chung.

⁶³³ It is a mantra devoted to Avalokiteshvara.

⁶³⁴ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 67. Geluk monks are usually referred to as fully ordained monks (*dge slong*). However, he also referred to them sarcastically as meditator (*sgom pa*).

⁶³⁵ It is the adjacent area of La mo bde chen Monastery in Gcan tsha.

Taking Refuge (Skyabs 'gro), *Confession of Downfalls (ltung bshags)*, *mani*, and *Focus on Kindness (dmigs brtse ma)*.⁶³⁶ Rigdzin Palden Tashi believed, these rumors surely instilled doubts within the people who then wondered, “who is this lama advising against performing virtues?”⁶³⁷

Rigdzin Palden Tashi describes an account of a Geluk monk from Rebgong visiting the Mongol domain. Rigdzin Palden Tashi is harsh. Instead of saying that this monk went to seek alms, he made a biting remark that the monk went looking for wealth. In the Mongol area, after joining a group of monks performing rituals there, the most learned monk in the group questioned the monk from Rebgong, trying to confirm the validity of the rumor that the eighteen retreat places were waging a war against a single Nyingma Lama.⁶³⁸ The monk would immediately say it was not true and in fact, it was the other way around. However, among them was a sympathizer from the major Kathog Monastery in Dege. As a Nyingma monk himself, he rebuffed the monk from Rebgong and reported that there was a deeply entrenched Geluk bias against Nyingma followers in Rebgong. Rigzin Palden Tashi felt he had done nothing wrong and he was instead wrongly accused of doing nothing. He honestly admitted that it was not the eighteen retreat places where rumors about him, but rather a few hermits who were behind these rumors blemishing his career and Nyingma teachings. And those few individuals, Rigdzin Palden Tashi believed, influenced how local elite monks and secular leaders perceived him and the Nyingma teachings.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁶ *Dmigs brtse ma* is a prayer verse devoted to Tsongkhapa.

⁶³⁷ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis, 65: *pha rol po rnams kyis dge ba bye mi nyan zer ba 'i bla ma de ci 'dra zhes the tshom gyi tshigs smras pa sogs.*

⁶³⁸ The eighteen retreat places historically refer to the first network of Geluk institutions, mostly retreat places, whose followers gathered at Rongwo Monastery as affiliates to attend the Great Prayer Festival. From then onwards, at least to Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis, Eighteen retreat places is a term commonly used to refer to the wide Geluk community in Rebgong.

⁶³⁹ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 66.

In another song, he revealed another side of verbally attacks: “Due to some sorts of his relationship with several lay tantric Buddhists, when he gave initiation, authorization, and instruction, lamas and rulers, who are reapers of feasting offerings (*tshogs zan*) of that community, in fear of their shares, made various plots against me both publicly and secretly.”⁶⁴⁰ Rigdzin Palden Tashi claimed that he never thought about generating wealth from his teaching activities and he thought there was, however, rampant moral corruption in Rebgong. He actually advised against seeking alms. And he says, “when you seek, you can obtain foods that are neither offerings for the dead (*shi zas*)⁶⁴¹ nor offerings of devotion (*dad zas*).”⁶⁴² Rigzin Palden Tashi informed us that secular rulers were also jealous of him and spread rumors in fear of him stealing their share of wealth.⁶⁴³ And he esd entirely dismissive of one Bal dag dpon po, a secular ruler of a local community, saying his words of madness were only bubbles nad thus not worthy of commentary.⁶⁴⁴

As his fame and career grew, Rigdzin Palden Tashi’s teaching activities in Lamo Ngo as well as in Rebgong probably met with ever-increasing opposition from Geluk elites. For example, at one time when he addressed his students, Rigdzin Palden Tashi said, “Unlike in the past, perhaps influenced by the Gomang College now, the majority of geshees in Lamo and Rebgong areas are fiercely jealous.”⁶⁴⁵ These geshees, Rigdzin Palden Tashi claimed, spread

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 65: *sngags pa 'ga' la sngag chos kyi/ 'brel ba cung zad yod 'dug pas/ dbang khrid man ngag btab pa'i tshes/ sde de'i tshogs zan bla dpon gyis/ rang skal tsam la gnod dogs nas/ bdag la mngon lkog gnyis ka nas/ mi 'dod sbyor ba sna tshogs byung.*

⁶⁴¹ *shi zas* refers to offerings made to monks by the bereaved family on behalf of the deceased to accumulate merits.
⁶⁴² Ibid., 65: *shi zas dad zas ma yin yang/ za ma btsal na rnyed par 'gyur.* *dad zas* is a generic term for material gifts given to monks on regular occasions.

⁶⁴³ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 69.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., 114: *sngon gyi dus su de ltar min yang deng sang sgo mang tshang gi shan shor ba yin nam/ la mo ngos dang reb kong ngos kyi dge bshes phal cher yang phrag dog rgod par 'dug.*

rumors that Rigdzin Palden Tashi forbade the recitation of Focus on Kindness.⁶⁴⁶ The implication of this is that he had an awkward audience with the Shar when the latter asked, “some geshe said you were preaching not to recite Taking Refuge. Why?”⁶⁴⁷ And later he was not allowed to meet Lozang Tenpe Nyima (*blo bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma*, 1689-1762)⁶⁴⁸ during his visit to Lamo Dechen Monastery.⁶⁴⁹ He felt he was counted among non-Buddhists.⁶⁵⁰

Rigdzin Palden Tashi's many efforts in reaching out to Geluk elites and establishing harmonious relationships between multi-religious traditions are to be commended.

Few details regarding certain segments of the local religious community reveal that monks, including fully ordained ones, were also actively giving teachings in lay communities. There were elite Geluk monks seeking close relationships with local secular leaders. Meanwhile, there were ordinary monks travelling across the region performing rituals or seeking alms. Therefore, the diversity of the religious community in the region reminds that the religious climate of sectarian orthodoxy and authority were being constantly challenged, contested, negotiated, and reaffirmed. Amid the dominance of the Geluk tradition, Nyingma communities faced increasing sectarianism.

There were also lay tantric practitioners within his own tradition who surprisingly denounced his teachings. He wrote: “At some point, I propagated tantric instructions. One of the three tantric communities heavily denounced this teaching. Thinking about this, it is interesting

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 114-115: *ngas o rgyan la gsol ba zhig btap pa yin ye/ khyod dmigs brtse ma 'don mi nyan zer nas gtan ngan zhig bsgrags.*

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 115: *de'i sngon tsam la rong bo'i sprul sku tshang mjal du phyin par khong gi zhal nas dge slong 'ga' res khyod kyis skyabs 'gro 'don mi nyan no zerar byung bas/ de ji ltar yin.*

⁶⁴⁸ Blo bzang bstna pa'i nyi ma is one of the two major lineages at La mo bde chen Monastery.

⁶⁴⁹ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 115: *na ning nga gnas mjal la phyin dus tshur lam bde chen mjal nas gser khri tshang mjal 'dod zhus kyang rgya sgo'i phyi nas nang du ma thar/ ras chung bka'i mgur ma ltar sgo bar du ma btsir ba tsam byung/ de'i rkyen rtsa'ang ri khrod pa zhig gi tshig red.*

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 115

to see some villagers are given the title of lay tantrist.”⁶⁵¹ For example, in Gurong, when Rigdzin Palden Tashi was giving teachings to the tantric community, there were several geshe and, more importantly, lay tantric practitioners whose arrogance and disrespect warranted his biting criticism.⁶⁵² It is obvious that it was not only the Geluk elites who opposed his religious tradition and activities. This unfriendliness within his own Nyingma community probably was partly due to tension of power between local religious leaders and their counterpart from outside—Rigdzin Palden Tashi.

Rigdzin Palden Tashi’s religious influence extended beyond the confines of Rebgong as he taught in numerous locations in areas adjacent to Rebgong. There is no question that his teaching tours demonstrated an extension of his religious influence. However, his outreach to communities beyond Rebgong was as welcomed as the secondary literature or our reading of his brief autobiography would have us believe. Despite resistance from within and without his Nyingma community, his successful religious career left a legacy of significant influence in development of the Nyingma School in Rebgong and beyond. When he established the Tenth Day ritual in some unidentified places, those close to him rhetorically asked, “Are there not any teachings other than the Tenth-Day and Eight Commandments? Or is it all simply like this?”⁶⁵³

He responded, “For the peace and happiness of the world, The Tenth Day of Ogyen (*O rgyan*)⁶⁵⁴ is recommended. Therefore, [I] tried to establish the Tenth Day. And I established it in several places. To dispel the army from the border, The Wrathful Display of Eight Commandments (*bka’ brgyad khro rol*) is recommended. Therefore, I tried to establish the Eight

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 63: *ngas skabs shig sngags kyi gdams pa spel/ sngags sde kha gsum du grags pa’i nang tshan cig/ sngags nyams len byed pa de phar la zhog/ chos lugs ‘di la kha btang ni mang po byas/ ‘di bsam na grong gi skye bo ‘ga’ zhig la/ sngags pa’i ming btags byas pa de nyams re mtshar.*

⁶⁵² Ibid., 81.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., 82: *tshes bcu bka’ brgyad ma yin pa’i/ chos lugs gzhan pa med dam ci/ yang na ‘di ‘dra tsam yin no*

⁶⁵⁴ It refers to Padmasambhava.

Commandments. And I established this in several lay tantric communities. For the quick path of afterlife liberation, instruction and view of great perfection are recommended. Therefore, [I] taught the profound path of the seminal heart to several fortunate ones.’⁶⁵⁵

Despite noticeable resistance implied in the conversation embedded in his song, I read it as rhetoric brilliantly used by Rigdzin Palden Tashi to invite himself to launch into narrating his success story of helping the Nyingma School take firm root in Rebgong. Here he also explained his reasons for his religious career entirely grounded in the Nyingma tradition. In other words, he justified his criticisms of the Geluk community in Rebgong.

The Question of Padmasambhava

As expected due to his increasing fame and active teaching activities in the Geluk dominant region, he received much criticism from learned geshees in Rebgong. While being critical of Rigdzin Palden Tashi, Geluk Buddhists make a series of attempts to discredit the central figure of the Nyingma School, Padmasambhava, as evident from a translated extract from his songs by Heather Stoddard. In her article, the extracted passage below is not translated accurately as she omits much of the last long line in the passage and instead summarizes it. Her translation does not change any meaning of the original passage greatly, however, I attempted my translation on the basis of her translation.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁵ Rigdzin Palden Tashi, 82: 'jig rten bde zhing skyid pa la/ o rgyan tshes bcu bsnags pa yin/ de phyir tshes bcu e tshugs bsam/ yul gru 'ga' la btsugs pa yin/ mtha' dmag 'khrug rtsod bzlog pa la/ bka' bgyad khro rol bsnags pa yin/ de phyir bka' bgyad e tshugs bsam/ sngags sde 'ga' a la btsugs pa yin/ phyi ma'i thar lam myur ba la/ man ngag lta ba rdzogs chen bsnags/ de phyir skal ldan 'ga' zhig la/ zab lam snying thig khrid pa yin/

⁶⁵⁶ See Stoddard (2013), 105.

At one time when I was in Reb kong...a few *dge bshes* were making ironic remarks, doubting whether Padmasambhava ever came to Tibet, wondering whether he really existed or not. So, since some *sngags pa* who are of feeble intellect might begin to doubt, I explained in detail the history of how Padma from Odḍiyāna visited Tibet to build Bsam yas and bind gods and demons under oath as well as the existence of treatises as reliable sources such as *Differentiation of Three Codes* by Sakya Pandita, the Manjushri (*'jam dbyangs sa skya paN+Ti ta 'i sdom gsum dbye ba*),⁶⁵⁷ *Dharma History* by All-knowing Buton Rinpoche (*kun mkhyen bu ston rin po che 'i chos 'byung*),⁶⁵⁸ *Blue Annals* (*deb ther sngon po*),⁶⁵⁹ and *History of Tibet* (*bod kyi deb ther*).⁶⁶⁰

Rigdzin Palden carefully point out while most geshees cultivated pure perception, a few geshees still held an unfavorable view of the Nyingma School. This is indicated in the translation of the passage above, questioning Padmasambhava as a historical figure and denying the visit of the Central Nyingma figure to Tibet. Therefore, it is important to note that only a small segment of Geluk elites verbally attacked the Nyingma School. It is gravely wrong to assume that the entire Geluk community was at war with their Nyingma counterparts in Rebgong.

To refute the Geluk opponents, he quoted from a few sources to establish the indisputable status and authority of Padmasambhava. More importantly, he cited Panchen Lozang Chogyam, the most famous in the lineage, to invoke the great respect the Geluk patriarch had for

⁶⁵⁷ For a translation of this work, see Jared Rhoton and Victoria Scott (2002).

⁶⁵⁸ For a study of this major historical work, see Leonard van der Kuijp, "Some Remarks on the Textual Transmission and Text of Bu ston Rin chen grub's *Chos 'byung*, a Chronicle of Buddhism in India and Tibet", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 25 (2013), 115-193.

⁶⁵⁹ It is a major historical work composed by 'Gos lo tswa ba gzhon nu dpal (1392-1481). For a translation it, see George Roerich. *The Blue Annals* (Delhi: Motilal Banrasidass Publisher, 2016).

⁶⁶⁰ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 36. At this point, I am unable to identify *History of Tibet*.

Padmasambhava.⁶⁶¹ He also cited the second Dalai Lama to establish the fact that

Padmasambhava was none other than Atisha and Tsongkhapa appearing in the later period.

Padmasambhava, Vidyadhara, the Master of Siddhi,
 Shridipamkara, the crown of [the age of] five hundred years,
 And Vajradhara, Sublime Blo zbang grags pa,
 Pay homage to the one who emanates in various forms.⁶⁶²

Based on the citations, he concluded that Padmasambhava, Atisha (980-1054), and Tsongkhapa are of “the identical mind” (*thugs rgyud gcig*) and said, “if there is no O rgyan, there are also no Lord Atisha and Lord Tsongkhapa, therefore, those remarks are not reliable.”⁶⁶³

There was also a portion of the Geluk monastic population that treated the two major schools on par. Their impartial view was evident when Rigdzin Palden Tashi cited a few worthy Geluk Buddhists: “Although it is for the sake of those to be tamed at this appropriate time, it is hard to be definitive of the intention of the superior people. Now, you, lay Nyingma tantric Buddhists, pray to Padma of Oddiyana, which is identical to monks praying to Lord Tsongkhapa. The Seven Chapters of Guru (*gu ru le'u bdun ma*)⁶⁶⁴ and Focus on Kindness are identical. Mani and Vajra Guru (*rdo rje gu ru*)⁶⁶⁵ are also identical.”⁶⁶⁶

Rigdzin Palden Tashi Holding's views started a swirl of rumors emanating from Geluk fanatics to the effect that Rdzing Palden Tashi actually advised against recitation of Focus on

⁶⁶¹ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 36-37.

⁶⁶² Ibid., 37: *rigdzin grub pa'i dbang phyug pad+m 'byung/ lnga brgya'i gtsug rgyun dpal ldan mar me mdzad/ rdo rje 'chang dbang blo bzang grags pa'i dpal/ sna tshogs sprul ba'i gar mdzad de la 'dud.*

⁶⁶³ Rigdzin Palden Tashi, 37: *o rgyan med na jo bo rje dang rje tsong kha pa yang med dgos pas gdam de dag la blo gtod mi rung/*

⁶⁶⁴ It is a prayer verse devoted to the Nyingma central figure Padmasambhava.

⁶⁶⁵ Here it is a mantra verse devoted to Padmasambhava.

⁶⁶⁶ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 37-38: *skabs thob kyi gdul bya'i dbang gis yin yang/ skyes bu dam pa'i dgongs gzhi ji ltar yin kha tshon gcod mi nus/ da khyed sngags pa rnams kyis o rgyan pad+ma la gsol ba thob dang/ dper na btsun pa rnams kyis rje tsong pa kha pa la gsol ba 'debs pa dang 'dra/ gu ru le'u bdun dang dmigs brtse ma'ang 'dra/ mi Ni dang badz+ra gu ru'ang 'dra.*

Kindness and rejected the existence of Tsongkhapa.⁶⁶⁷ In one of his songs, Rigdzin Paden Tashi equated Padmasambhava with Atisha and the three Geluk patriarchs—Tsongkhapa, Panchen Lozang Chogyam, and the fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Gyatso. They song said that they are emanations of the Bodhisattva of Compassion.⁶⁶⁸ Sometimes, he mentioned that Losang Drakpa was instead an emanation of Padmasambhava.⁶⁶⁹

He admitted to worshipping Tsongkhapa and that he relied on the Chronicle of Padmasambhava (*padma bka' thang*)⁶⁷⁰ in order to defend the idea that Padmasambhava was the Buddha in tantric form, whereas Shakyamuni was the Buddha in sutra tradition and that they were essentially the same, other than their names.⁶⁷¹ He mentioned one Biography of Ogyen⁶⁷² that stated Padmasambhava would appear in various forms appropriate for those to be tamed. It further stated that his emanations appear as forms of many persons including Atisha, Tsongkhapa, and Dakpo Lhaje (*dwags po lha rje*, 1079-1153)⁶⁷³ in Tibet.⁶⁷⁴ Rigdzin Palden Tashi affirmed that as one can hardly imagine Padmasambhava's countless emanations simultaneously, his activities including visits to Tibet were beyond the comprehension of ordinary people.⁶⁷⁵

There was a time when some Geluk scholars, who believed in the pure tradition of the Geluk School, accused Rigdzin Palden Tashi of not believing in Tsongkhapa for the simple fact

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 41-42.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁷⁰ It is revealed as a treasure text by O rgyan gling pa.

⁶⁷¹ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 53: *gzhan yang pad+ma bka' yi thang yig las/ mdo ltar rgyal ba shAkya thub pa dang/ sngags ltar gu ru pad+ma 'byung gnas zhes/ mtshan gyi rnam grangs tsam las don gcig pa/ lung gis grub pa 'dis kyang rigs 'gre sbyor.*

⁶⁷² *Rat+na'i gter byon O rgyan gyi rnam thar.*

⁶⁷³ Also known as Dwags lha sgam po. He is a close disciple of Milarepa and is in turn teacher to major bka' brgyud masters such as Karma dus gsum khyen pa.

⁶⁷⁴ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 53.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 96: *slob dpon bod du yun ring bzugs ma bzugs kyi lo rgyus kyang du ma snang ba mchog dman gyi blo ngor shar tshul yin.*

that he was a serious practitioner of Nyingma teachings. He was offended that these Geluk critics used Geluk teachings as their benchmark, feeling this was unfair.⁶⁷⁶ He checked and realized he had had strong faith in Tsongkhapa since his childhood. He recounted his experience of reading several different biographies of Tsongkhapa. He also read few a refutations of Tsongkhapa from the non-Geluk schools and responses from the Geluk School. Especially, he read some writings, including those of the fifth Dalai Lama and the *Dharma History of Ganden (dga' ldan chos 'byung)* composed by the fifth Dalai Lama's Regent, Sanggye Gyatso (1653-1705) in which Tsongkhapa was proved to be the Buddha. He was glad that he had irreversible faith (*dad pa mi ldog pa*), one that was firmly built on his deep knowledge of the Geluk founder, which he says was rare.⁶⁷⁷ Identification with the Buddha was, according to Rigdzin Palden Tashi, also made by Panchen Lozang Chogyam. Rigdzin Palden Tashi also informed that Tsogkhapa was chiefly considered to be Manjushri as identified by the fifth Dalai Lama.⁶⁷⁸ Eventually, he claimed that Manjushri along with the rest of the three saviors (*rigs gsum mgon po*),⁶⁷⁹ were none other than the Adi-Buddha Samantabhadra, the central Buddha in the Nyingma School.⁶⁸⁰

In addition to his faith based on reason, Rigzin Palden Tashi also confessed he had blind faith in Tsongkhapa throughout his life.⁶⁸¹ For example, when he was four or five years old and had nightmares, Rigdzin Paden Tashi recited Focus on Kindness to calm his fear. And he admitted he was reciting the same verse in case of nightmares at the time of composition of his songs. Later in his life, when he dreamt something horrifying thing, he immediately recited, Pray to Buddha Shakymune. Pray to Padmasambhava of Oddiyana. Pray to the victor Lozang

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 53-54.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁷⁹ Rigs gsum mgon po are Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, and Vajrapani.

⁶⁸⁰ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 55.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 56: *thag par da lta ni kho bo rje rin po che'i bstan par 'jug lo zhig kyang byas pas rmongs zhen zhig kyang yod do.*

Drakpa.⁶⁸² Regardless of opinionated remarks by others, Rigdzin Palden Tashi declared that Shakyamune, Padmasambhava, and Tsongkhapa were the only three in whom he took his highest refuge.⁶⁸³

At one point, when he was giving teachings to tantric practitioners in few places including Gurong and Kado in the neighboring region to the north of Rebgong, some geshe claimed that Padmasambhava never reached Tibet and would list a few Indian individuals, which, they would claim, were wrongly worshiped as Padmasambhava by Nyingma followers.⁶⁸⁴ Rigdzin Palden Tashi rebuked them on the grounds that these were complete misidentifications. When critics singled out the form of Padmasambhava wearing a hat out of its eight forms⁶⁸⁵ and found fault with his hat—labelling it as a non-Buddhist sign, Rigdzin Palden Tashi instead pointed to the anomaly of physical attributes such as horns and wings of mainstream Buddhist tantric deities and wondered if they should also be subject to criticism. Unsurprisingly, to non-Buddhists, Ushinisha, one of the thirty-two marks of Buddha, appears as a frog. To Rigdzin Palden Tashi, all these biased, both Geluk and non-Buddhist, views are utter misconceptions due to the ignorance of impure beings.⁶⁸⁶ He argued that since Padmasambhava was the king of siddhis, he was capable of appearing in all forms possible including some that humans could not even imagine.⁶⁸⁷ He also wondered why the red hat was a point of debate among Geluk monks.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 55: *ston pa shAkya thub pa la gsol ba 'debs/ o rgyan pad+ma 'byung gnas la gsol ba 'debs/ rgyal ba blo bzang grags pa la gsol ba 'debs so/*

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 55-56: *bdag la ni skyabs kyi dam pa ston pa sangs rgyas dang/ o rgyan pad+ma/ rje tsong kha pa gsum las lhag pa su yang mi gda'o.*

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁸⁵ Padmasambhava usually appears in eight forms.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 93: *ma dag pa'i sems can 'khrul ba'i rang bzhin can.*

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 94: *dpal 'chi med rig 'dzin pad+ma 'byung/ khong grub thob rgyal po yin pa'i phyir/ sku'i nram 'gyur ji snyed ston pa la/ gzan sham thabs gnyis kyi nges pa med/ mi gcig gis dbyar gos dgun gos dang / dgra 'dul dus go khrab gyon pa bzhin/ dpe rdo rje 'chang dang nye sras brgyad/ sa chen por bzhugs pa'i 'phags mchog rnams/ skabs la lar chags bral pul sku'i gzugs/ skabs la lar 'khor los bsgyur ba'i gzugs/ rje 'gran gyi do med pad 'byung de//bod gangs can ljongs su byon pa'i tshe/ lha ma srin sde brgyad 'dul ba'i skabs/ khang za hor rgyal po'i cha byad bzung/ yul rgya gar rdo rje gdan drung du/ phyi mu stegs rgol ba tshar gcod tshe/ mgon shAkya seng ge'i cha lugs bzung/ nub o rgyan rgyal po'i pho brang du/ rje in++ra bo ng+ha'i sras skal mdzad/ dus de tshe lha yi cha byad bzung/*

Like Chinese military emblems, Rigdzin Palden Tashi argued, the hat was simply an external marker of the tradition and brought neither benefit nor harm to Buddhism, plus Buddha did not forbid clothing made of red and yellow fabric. Instead, he ridiculed his critics by saying that the Buddha did not permit robes of spotted fabric, black and white hats, and skin-made outfits, yet Geluk Buddhists worried them. Rigdzin Palden Tashi agreed that monks were always required by vinaya rules to keep clean-shaven: no hair and beards. However, he listed numerous Indian and Nepalese Panditas that appeared in lay tantric form. Given their status as accomplished tantric masters, it was acceptable that they had long hair and beards.⁶⁸⁸ However, the monks upholding the vinaya vow were expected to comply with rules stated in the vinaya that they upheld. He recounted an anecdote from the life of Atisha. When the master visited Tibet, Tibetan monks wearing *pakteb* (*pags thebs*)⁶⁸⁹ came to meet for the first time. Atisha then said, “non-human beings in Tibet.”⁶⁹⁰ While emphasizing how Tibetan monks deviated from the dress code outlined in the vinaya tradition that they advocated, he used this example to make the point that it was important to comply with dress codes for monks as violations of vinaya rules were condemned by the great master, Atisha.⁶⁹¹ He pointed out the absurdity in the logical process of reasoning on the part of monks to criticize Padmasambhava for his outfit and not Pehar,⁶⁹² who appeared in a similar outfit. Rather, Geluk monks revered Pehar as one of their first and foremost

lha'i sras mo 'od 'chang khab tu bzhes/ skabs la lar rgya gar paN+Ti ta/ skabs la lar dur khrod rnam 'byor pa/ skabs la lar sngags 'chang ral ba can/ la lar rgyal po'i cha byad zab ber dang/ ban rab byung cha lugs chos gos sogs/ mtha' gcig tu ma nges ya ma zung/ de grub thob ma gtogs su yis nus/ dpal snang stong dbyer med bde chen sku/ gzugs gang la gang 'dul sku ston na/ dus deng sang bod kyi bla chen tsho'i/ sku'i dbyibs dang ma mthun rtsod pas ci.
⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 94: *grub mtha'i phyogs 'dzin pa'i btsun pa rnams kyis kyang zhwa dmar po rtsod gzhi chen po ci la byed dgos te/ rgya'i dmag rtags bzhin lugs srol gang yin gyi rtags tsam las bstan srid la phan gnod gang yang mi nus so/ lus la gyon rung ba'i snam ras dmar ser gnyis ni ston pas kyang ma bkag mod/ ston pas ma gnang ba'i gos khra khra dang zhwa dkar nag/gcan gzan gyi pags pa rnams la rtsad gcod byas kyang los chogamago la skra 'jog pa dang kha la spu 'jog pa 'di btsun pa rnams kyi lugs ni ga la yin.*

⁶⁸⁹ This term possibly refers to skin robes.

⁶⁹⁰ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 95: *bod kyi mi ma yin.*

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 97.

⁶⁹² Pe har is alternatively known as Gans chung. See Bell (2013).

protector deities.⁶⁹³ Thus, he turned the tables and bitingly criticized his detractors who were, according to Rigdzin Palden Tashi, obsessed with the faults of others, but ignored their own faults that included a comfortable lifestyle, wearing skin hats, and having meat-based meals. Rigdzin Palden Tashi also brilliantly suggested the superiority of Nyingma School by precisely being indifferent to any code due to their samaya to treat everything ranging from any outfit to any meals as equal.⁶⁹⁴

Rigdzin Palden Tashi credited Padmasambhava with his critical role as a tantric master in establishing Buddhism in India, where non-Buddhist traditions prevailed. This was also a prevalent theme in his songs, i.e., that Padmasambhava was credited for Buddhism being introduced and transplanted into Tibet, as well after his defeat of demons inhibiting the landscape of Tibet and binding them under oath.⁶⁹⁵ Therefore, Rigdzin Palden Tashi suggested that Padmasambhava deserved much respect for and recognition for his unsurpassed tantric feats from all Buddhists, including Geluk critics. In addition to his frequent evoking of the Geluk lineage authority of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama to leverage against the Geluk critics, he also evoked the charismatic power of local Geluk dignitaries in Amdo such as Tongkor Rinpoche, Zhapdrung Karpo, and Shar Kalden Gyatso in shaping the perception of Nyingma School among the Geluk followers. He was baffled by later Geluk monks not following such great models of their own school. He confided that criticisms and the swirl of rumors started by these Geluk critics cost him opportunities to meet some well-known Geluk lamas in the northern region of Amdo.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹³ Ibid., 97: *za hor rgyal po'I dbu zhwa zab ber sogs/ sku la gsol ba pad 'byung mi dag na/ pe har rgyal po'I bse thabs gyon pa des/ bla chen 'ga' zhig dag pa ji ltar lags..*

⁶⁹⁴ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 95.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 92.

His evoking the authority of the Geluk patriarchs to defend the Nyingma School against the Geluk critics, utilized especially his close affinity with the fifth Dalai Lama, a major Nyingma practitioner, in addition to being in the role of the religious and temporal leader of Tibet. He informed that the majority of visions from the sealed visions of the fifth Dalai Lama took place precisely due to his successful practice of esoteric Nyingma teachings,⁶⁹⁷ obvious proof that Nyingma teachings were equally valid, if not superior, ones. According to Rigzin Palden Tashi, when the fifth Dalai Lama realized that potential damage might come to the Tibetan Gaden government and the Tibetan people, a lay Nyingma tantric college was established as directed by the fifth Dalai lama, solely to dispel these potential harms. However, many Geluk Buddhists denounced the Nyingma establishment. Precisely for this reason, Rigzin Palden Tashi was baffled by the amount of opposition the fifth Dalai Lama faced from within his own school.⁶⁹⁸ Rigzin Palden Tashi never liked those who criticized the fifth and Sixth Dalai Lamas and their lineage successors. He said the emanations of the victor was beyond our imagination, hence the critics should restrain themselves from denouncing them.⁶⁹⁹ He declared that any Geluk critics of these Geluk patriarchs-- Atisha, Tsongkhapa, Panchen Lozang Chogyam, and fifth Dalai Lama— were bigoted partisans.⁷⁰⁰ And at one point, he made clear that the root cause of decline of the dharma was none other than Geluk monks.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., 61: *de yang rgyal dbang sku na rim gsum tsam gyi ring la ri bo dga' ldan pa'i bstan srid la gnod pa'i phas kyi mthu byad bzlog thabs dang bod 'bangs spyi'i bde skyid la gnod pa'i dus kyi 'khrugs pa bzlog thabs sogs dgos pa du ma zhig la dgongs nas sngags grwa btsugs pa la yang phal zhig kha zer ba snang ngo.*

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 108: *bla ma 'di rnams la bzang ngan mi 'byed cing/ dbyer med du 'dzin pa'i mkhas grub su byung yang skyes bu dam par go zhing/ de rnams la bzang ngan 'dor len byed pa'i mkhas pa'i grub thob kyi ming can du byung yang phyogs re ba'i gang zag tu go ba yin lags.*

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 109: *bstan pa nyams pa'i mgo lho nas brtsams kyang/ don 'jig pa nub dang shar nas 'jiga'ajig mkhan rtsa ba dge lugs kyi chos sgor zhugs pa'i mi ma gtogs zhan gyis mi thub ang.*

When some lay tantric Buddhists from Shadrang (*sha brang*) in Rebgong came to receive teachings from him, they reported that there was a Geluk monk in Shadrang preaching that the true Padma from Oddiyana was Amitabha and the false Padmasambhava revered by Nyingma Buddhists preaches perverted teachings. In response, Rigdzin Palden gave a brief account of the life of Padmasambhava, including his birth place, the founding of Samye Monastery, his close disciples, and his legacy in Tibet. He rhetorically asked for the same details surrounding this false Padma of Oddiyana, including his birth place, major activities, and disciples.⁷⁰² Some geshe, according to Rigdzin Palden Tashi, discredited the authenticity of Padmasambhava by proclaiming that the true Ogyen Padma (*O rgyan pad+ma*)⁷⁰³ was a Pandita from Central India and instead the central figure worshiped by the Nyingma School was an emanation of a demon. Rigdzin Palden Tashi argued that Padmasambhava was no different than any other Indian mahasiddhas such as Telopa, Naropa, and Dombi Heruka, who were crucial for tantric lineages of Tibetan Buddhist schools. He also identified such particular similarities between Shakyamuni and Padmasambhava as adopting a vajradhara form. And he made his argument of Padmasambhava as the equal of Buddha and mahabodhisattvas appearing in multiple forms as appropriate for his audience beyond our imagination. He emphasized the supremacy of Padmasambhava by saying even great Indian siddhas were not comparable to the Nyingma founder, much less lamas from his time in Tibet. He argued that destroying images and scriptures did no harm to Padmasambhava, but rather but rather plunged the perpetrators into hell.⁷⁰⁴

In one song, when he was travelling in the Mongol domain, several monks in the area reported to him about several geshe's visits to the shrines of their patrons. When these geshe

⁷⁰² Ibid., 199.

⁷⁰³ It literally translates as Padma of Oddiyana, an alternative name for Padmasambhava.

⁷⁰⁴ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 200.

saw *thangkha* images of Padmasambhava displayed in the shrines, they would say, “Who is this lama? He has a feather attached to his hair. He wears a religious robe. He has two women at his side.”⁷⁰⁵ Rigdzin Palden Tashi responded, “actions of siddhas and Buddhas are beyond the comprehension of impure beings.”⁷⁰⁶ He asked his audience not to treat the words of these geshes as truth. He even said, “True fully ordained monks on the great ground are never contaminated by any flaw even when they dwell together with a hundred women.”⁷⁰⁷ He cited examples of how sexual union in tantra and ushnisha unfavorably looked upon by non-believers was comparable to criticism of Padmasambhava by critics of the Nyingma School. Like Buddha or mahabodhisattva, the fact that Padmasambhava was capable of appearing in multiple forms including radical ones was, Rigdzin Palden Tashi argued, a reminder of his exceptionally extraordinary tantric feat as a great siddha.⁷⁰⁸

As the physical appearance including that of a lay yogic practitioner of the Nyingma founder was being contested, the lay tantric aspect of Nyingma School in Rebgong in general was very much the target of Geluk critics. There is much at stake in this particular context of Geluk debates negating lay tantric Buddhism as Geluk critics were obsessed with the lay tantric form of the Nyingma founder as an easy subject of fierce criticism. Therefore, any remarks from Geluk Buddhists critical of lay tantric Buddhism meant direct attack on the personae of the tradition’s founder. Therefore, it was extremely important for Rigdzin Palden Tashi to establish the Nyingma lay tantric tradition as a path as valid as any other contemporary Tibetan Buddhist

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 256: *'di 'dra'i bla ma zhig su yod/mgo la bya sgro zhig btsugs/ lus la chos gos shig gyon/zur na bud med gnyis bzhag.*

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., 256: *grub thob dang sangs rgyas kyi mdzad pa ni/ma dag pa'i 'gro ba rnams kyi blo la mi shong.*

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.: *sa chen po la zhugs pa'i don dam pa'i dge slong rnams ni/ bud med brgya dang lhan cig tu gnas kyang 'dul 'khrims la skyon gyis gos pa spu tsam med.*

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 256-258.

lineage in Tibet. However, he would go to the extreme of establishing the superiority of the lay tantric form and its samaya over the monastic form and vinaya-based vow.

Once, when a lay tantric Buddhist visited Shelgon Monastery, an ordinary villager asked, “What are you, Bonpo or lay tantrist? What is your religion?”⁷⁰⁹ The villager confessed that he was told by a Geluk monk at Shelgon Monastery not to slander, but also not to put faith in lay tantric Buddhism. In his song, with this Geluk critic in mind, Rigdzin Palden Tashi rhetorically asked if his remark also meant that we should withhold our faith in lay tantric Buddhists with a profound level of practice of esoteric teachings because that would also mean that early Buddhist yogic masters such as Milarepa and Marpa adopting vajradhara, and yogic masters such as Telopa and Naropa, as well as monks who wore ritual wigs to receive esoteric imitations, were also unworthy of our faith.⁷¹⁰

In another song, he challenges the Geluk focus on the dress code and physical appearance of a monk as the essential mark of a respectable practitioner. He recounts an episode from the life of the Dalai Lama where the latter appeared in lay Buddhist tantric form and Mongol rulers in the Kokonor Region did not pay respect. Only when he adopted the dress code of a monk, did the Mongol rulers pay respect.⁷¹¹ He ridiculed this Geluk obsession with the external form and implied keeping pure precepts was not just about the external form of a monk when he cited *The Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha* (*sa'i snying bo 'khor bcu ba*),⁷¹² “A holy fully ordained

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., 251: *khyed bon sngags gang yin/ khyed kyi chos lugs ci 'dra zhig yin.*

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 251: *da bdag gis bsam na dge slong ri khrod pa'i tshig de ltar na/rdo rje theg pa'i bstan pa la zhugs nas bskyed rdzogs kyi lam zab mo nyams su len pa'i sngags 'chang ral ba can rnams la dad pa byed mi 'os par gda' bas rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug mar ba dang/ mi la yab sras sogs sngon byon gyi skyes bu dam pa rdo rje 'chang gi cha lug su zhugs pa rnams dang/ mdor na rdo rje 'chang nas te lo nA ro sogs grub thob ral ba'i thor cog dngos can mtha' dag dang/ der ma zad rab tu byung ba'i rigs sngags 'chang rnams kyang dbang gi bdag 'jug len dus skra brdzu byas pa'i gtsug tor bcos ma gyon pa rnams lang de dag gi skabs su dad pa byed mi 'os pa 'dra ste/dge slong ri khrod pa'i lugs la sngags 'chang ral ba can la dad pa byed mi nyan pa'i phyir*

⁷¹¹ Ibid., 252.

⁷¹² For a general introduction to the outline of the sutra, see Pad dkar bzang po. *Mdo sde spyi'i rnam bzhas* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2006), 332-335.

monk may be one who is living in a home, not shaving hair and beard, not wearing a religious robe, or even lacking precepts. One who is endowed with qualities of an arya is a true fully ordained monk.”⁷¹³ To enhance this argument, he cited examples of Marpa and Drom Tonpa (*'brom ston pa*, 1008-1064)⁷¹⁴ who were not fully ordained, but whose legacy served as ideals of religious life for Tibetan Buddhists regardless of their sectarian affiliation.

To defend the Nyingma founder and refute his Geluk critics, Rigdzin Palden Tashi took a stab at the authenticity of lineage teachings of the Geluk School. As he identified certain polemic writings of critics in Tibetan history and stated that their claims were unfounded, Rigdzin Palden Tashi asked the critics for logic and scriptural authority to support their false claims about the Nyingma founder. Rigdzin Palden Tashi also realized that similar polemic writings were produced in Amdo. To discredit the Geluk critics as well as the criticism of the Nyingma School in general, Rigdzin Palden Tashi recounted in his song a forgery of a letter by a local Geluk monk. Once when giving a Tenth Day ritual initiation to a lay tantrist from Drapar (*bra par*), a monk from Bido Monastery, forged a letter and sent it directly to this lay tantrist ordering him not to receive any Nyingma initiations and transmissions. The letter further stated that the letter was a decree representing Ngakrampa as well as the abbot and the entire monastic community in Yarnang, referring to the abbot and monks at Rongwo Monastery. The letter also threatened to dispatch monk soldiers in case he refused to follow the order.⁷¹⁵ Although Rigdzin Palden Tashi simply indicated the forgery of the letter and, by extension discredited polemic writings composed by the Geluk critics of Nyingma School. However, it is obvious that the moral

⁷¹³ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 254: *dam pa'i dge slong ni/ khyim na gnas shing kra dang kha spu yang ma breg/ chos gos kyang ma gon/ tshul khrims kyang ma mnos pa yod kyi/ 'phags pa'i chos nyid dang ldan pa ni don dam pa'i dge slong zhes bya'o/*

⁷¹⁴ He is the foremost disciple of Atisha and founder of the Bka' gdam School.

⁷¹⁵ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 201: *sngags pa khyod kyis rnying lugs kyi/ dbang lung nyan na mi 'os 'dug/ yi ge 'di ni yar nang gi/ sngags ram pa dang khri ba dang/ nged tsho grwa ba thams cad kyi/ bka' shog yin pas 'dangs rgyag dgos/ min na khyod la ban dmag yon/*

integrity and reputation of the Geluk Buddhist community was at stake here. In another song in response to the criticism by the same monk at Shelgon Monastery, he laid particular emphasis on pure precepts (in this case not lying) by monastic and lay tantric Buddhists as appropriate for themselves. He even went to an extreme by saying that one should sever contact with all who violated their precepts.⁷¹⁶

Defending the Nyingma Treasure Tradition from Geluk Criticism

As expected in a region like Rebgong heavily dominated by Geluk partisanship, there were many geshes critical of the treasure teachings. Rigdzin Palden Tashi believed that these critics with narrow minds misunderstood the Nyingma founder's intention that teachings be hidden for later retrieval by his followers. Considering the prevailing notion of the decline of dharma or the threat of external and internal force to the Nyingma School, as well as Geluk dominance, the resilience of the Nyingma School is to be commended. The treasure tradition of Nyingma School has long been a point of controversial debate throughout Tibetan Buddhist history, including at the time of Rigdzin Palden Tashi's teaching career in Rebgong. When Geluk critics launched their attack on the new treasure tradition, Rigdzin Palden Tashi reasoned that the time during which he lived in was high time to reveal new treasures. He argued that there were a plenty of treasure finders active in Tibet at that time. Some would argue against this by saying it was not a good thing when treasures are uncovered in new places. In reply, he stated, "esoteric tantra first originated in the land of Oddiyana. It then spread to places including China and Nepal. Finally, it

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 252, 261.

reached Tibet. Please forgive and see if this is wrong.”⁷¹⁷ Clearly, he suggested that his critics were at the end of their wits for their total lack of reason.

When some criticized the treasure tradition in general, saying there was no such thing as a treasure text, Rigdzin Palden Tashi pointed to retrieval by Nagarjuna of perfection of wisdom teachings from the sea and extraction of the fierce mantra (*drag sngags*) of the lion-faced female deity (*seng gdong ma*), a wrathful form of Padmasambhava, from rocks near Vajrasana (*rdo rje gdan*)⁷¹⁸ in India by Lama Dorje Danpa (*bla ma rdo rje gdan pa*).⁷¹⁹ He suggested acceptance of treasure teachings by Shantideva when he cited the Indian master as praying, “May the sound of the dharma also be heard non-stop from the sky as well.”⁷²⁰ He defended the authority of the Nyingma treasure tradition on the grounds that the treasure teachings were not so different from the teachings and mantras of the Geluk School. He cited Dharma History of Nyingma (*rnying ma'i chos 'byung*)⁷²¹ as suggesting the possibility that refutations were at times simply claims based on the authority and rank of critics, rather than sound logical reasoning.⁷²² He rebuked these critics by saying if Nyingma teachings were perverted teachings, then this meant that three baskets from the early translation period, scriptures translated by the three great translators from the imperial period, were also perverted teachings (*chos ma yin pa*) according to the critics of Nyingma School. He defended this position by citing a passage from the same source: “There is no point in making any effort in defending that Nyingma teachings are translated in India. The words of emanations of Padmasambhava themselves are good enough. They may not be

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 45-46: *gsang sngags dang po O rgyan yul du dar/ de nas rgyal bal la sogs kun rgyas/ tha ma bod kyi yul du byung ba la/ skyon du lta'm thugs dgongs mdzad par zhu.*

⁷¹⁸ It is the site of Buddha's enlightenment.

⁷¹⁹ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 98.

⁷²⁰ Ibid., 98-99: *nam mkha' las kyang chos kyi sgra, rgyun mi chad par thos par shog.*

⁷²¹ I am unable to identify this work.

⁷²² Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 99: *'gos dang/ chag dang / pho brang zhi ba 'od dang / bla mas mdzad par grags pa dang rngog gi gze ma ra mgor grags pa rnams las ni/ gang zag 'di zhes pas/ byas pa 'di ni chos log dres ma can no' zhes dbang che'i sgo nas byas pa ma gtogs shes byed dpe dang gtan tshig ma bkod.*

compatible with mantra and language from the later translation. They are valid as they unfailingly accomplish superior and common siddhis. For example, each of those Buddhist treatises, translated by great siddhas in each of the great lands, are also not translated in the land of aryas per se. [The Buddha] says if compilers of his teachings receive authorization from vajrasattvas, then the compilers are allowed to compile in the corresponding languages of their lands.”⁷²³ However, some critics said, “Precisely because mantra and the language of Nyingma are for, the most part, different from words of the later translation, they doubt that they are completely pure.”⁷²⁴ Rigdzin Palden Tashi responded that as the Buddha instructed in all languages appropriate for all the disciples, therefore, despite discordance between Sanskrit and Tibetan, teachings in both languages were equally valid. He argued it is the same case with Nyingma treasure teachings when compared with all other authentic teachings.⁷²⁵ He added that authentic treatises (*bstan bcos rnam dag*) should be based on whether they agree to the intentions of sutra and tantra in terms of both language and meaning.⁷²⁶ However, he thought that various traditions only differed in their use of language, but were all equally valid paths ultimately leading to Buddhahood, in the same way that all rivers in the world eventually empty into the ocean.⁷²⁷

Rigdzin Palden Tashi was baffled by the claims of some translators from the new translation schools that the majority of early translations were simply either corrupt or false

⁷²³ Ibid., 99: *rnying ma'i chos kun 'phags yul nas/ bsgyur bar 'bad pas sgrub mi dgos/ slob dpon sprul ba'i sku nyid kyis/ gsung las grub rang gis mchog/ 'phags pa'i yul nas phyis 'gyur ba'i/ sngags dang brda skad ma mthun yang/ mchog dang thun mong grub pa la/ mi bslu grub phyir de tshad ma/ dper na yul chen so so nas/ grub mchog rnam kyis bsgyur ba yi/ chos kyis glegs bam so so yang/ 'phags pa'i yul nas bsgyur ba min/ rdo rje sems dpas gngang thob pa'i/ bka' yi bsdu ba po nyid kyis/ yul khams so so'i skad nyid du/ bshad pas chog par gsungs pa yin.*

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 99: *rnying ma'i sngags dang brda' skad phal cher phyis 'gyur gyi tshig dang mi mthun par 'dus pas rnam par dag mi dag the tshom mo.*

⁷²⁵ Ibid., 99.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., 101-102.

teachings. He rebuked critics of the Nyingma School by evoking the scholarly authority of Ngok Loden Sherap, believed to be an early predecessor of Tsongkhapa, and cited him as praising the translators of the early period, “Vairocana (*bE ro tsa na*)⁷²⁸ equals the vastness of the sky. Ka⁷²⁹ and Chog (*cog*)⁷³⁰ are the union of sun and moon. Rin chen bzang po is like the bright star at dawn. And I am merely a simple firefly.”⁷³¹ He further reasoned that when these critics said that these translations were non-existent in India, it was probably the case that places they visited were remote corners of India and Nepal (*rgya bal gyi yul gru kha yar*) where the particular teachings that they were interested in never reached or were extinct after previous dissemination.⁷³² He also mentioned that there were teachings in Tibet brought to Tibet by Padmasambhava and Buddhaguhya (*sangs rgyas gsang ba*)⁷³³ from Oddiyana in the west and Zahor (*za hor*)⁷³⁴ in the east, but they were not introduced into Central India. He listed numerous polemic treatises against the Nyingma School. While he considered some of them, such as correction of dharma (*bstan pa'i dag ther*),⁷³⁵ but he contended that they required further examination. He concluded that certain refutations of the Nyingma School were purely driven by vengeance. Despite that he readily admitted that forgery of texts in the Nyingma School was rampant,⁷³⁶ he also pointed to the particular irony in the Geluk criticism of Nyingma teachings while there was considerable Geluk forgery on the basis of Nyingma teachings.⁷³⁷

⁷²⁸ He, along with Ska ba dpal brtsegs and Cog ro klu'i rgyal mtshan, makes the trio of great translators during the reign of King Khri srong lde btsan.

⁷²⁹ His full name is Ska ba pal brtsegs.

⁷³⁰ His full name is Cog ro klu'i rgyal mtshan.

⁷³¹ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis, 71-72: *bE ro tsa na nam mkha'I mtha' dang mnyam/ ska cog gnyis ni nyi zla zung 'brel bzhin/ rin chen bzang po tho rengs skar chen tsam/ kho bo yang ni srin bu me 'khyer tsam.*

⁷³² Ibid., 72.

⁷³³ He is a major Indian master active in transmitting teachings to Tibet during the time of King Khri srong lde btsan.

⁷³⁴ It is a place in India strongly associated with propagation of tantric teachings.

⁷³⁵ It is a type of Buddhist literature mainly composed to discriminate between authentic and forged teaching transmissions.

⁷³⁶ Rig 'dzi dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 72.

⁷³⁷ Ibid., 78-79.

In general, Rigdzin Palden Tashi observed the treasure tradition with a critical eye in deciding what were authentic treasures and what were false treasures. In particular, he cast doubts over the authenticity of handprints and footprints of vajrasattvas. He further questioned the treasure tradition even when it is a central practice in his own Nyingma School. For example, he recounted an instance where a vase full of scrolls of paper were retrieved as treasure in a hole in a rock cliff. An alternative account said that the treasure was found in chest of a Maitreya image. That night, in his dream, a monk asked him to pray for a *siddhi* of barley dough (*zan gyi dngos grub*), not meat from the Maitreya image. When a barley dough (*zan*) is retrieved from a hole, Rigdzin Palden Tashi takes this treasure with a grain of salt and says, “if it is in fact granted by Maitreya, it is a *siddhi*, but it is possible it was placed there by a person.”⁷³⁸ In the case of the latter, he implied it is not a *siddhi* at all. He further wrote, “so-called *grub chu* is even possibly what is placed inside a holy object.”⁷³⁹ His critical remarks made the monk very upset. Following this dream, Rigdzin Palden Tashi made efforts to cultivate pure perception of treasure objects, however, his doubts lingered.⁷⁴⁰

As Geluk monks discredited the authenticity of Nyingma treasure tradition, Rigdzin Palden responded, challenging the authority of textual transmission of the Geluk tradition. One occasion resented an opportunity for Rigdzin Palden Tashi to undermine the Geluk orthodoxy of lineage teachings. Critics alleged that Rigdzin Palden Tashi spreading Bon teachings, which was a bad thing. He admitted that he had no grasp of Bon teachings and declared that he followed a strictly Buddhist path although he was free to choose a different religious path.⁷⁴¹ He then

⁷³⁸ Rig ‘dzi dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 175: *byams pas gnang na dngos grub yin mod/ khung bu'i nang na mi bzhang pa'ang srid.*

⁷³⁹ Ibid., 175: *grub chu zer ba'ang rten gyi nang du rdzas bcug pa srid.*

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., 176.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., 46.

verbally attacked his fellow Buddhists over the same issue. According to Rigdzin Palden Tashi, Buddhist practices, including dedication of offerings during cleansing rites. including that of Kunrik (*kun rig*)⁷⁴² were performed in the Bon tradition. However, unaware of their Bon origin, Buddhists instead criticized Bon as being a religion of heresy. He also singled out Drigung Paldzin (*'bri gung dpal 'dzin*, u.d.) who borrowed heavily from a corpus of activity practices of the Nyingma School, yet he said, “Nyingma is impure.”⁷⁴³ He abhorred those who treated their school as the true path and viewed other schools otherwise no matter what. There were some who said to him that certain Geluk scholars were unhappy with him, which, he found surprising since he was a strict Nyingma practitioner and his strict practice of Nyingma teachings, he believed, did no harm to the Geluk School. And he argued that the actions of his critics would be valid only if he had ever practiced any adulterated teachings.⁷⁴⁴

Advice to Religious Community: Ideals of Religious Practice

Rigdzin Palden Tashi commented on the decline of Buddhism in Tibet in general as being comparable to the time of Sakya Pandita, when the scion of the Sakya family addresses in a series of letters to the religious communities in Tibet, dictating terms of Buddhist orthodoxy regardless of their sectarian affiliation. It is likely that Rigdzin Palden Tashi felt inspired by the Sakya master to do the same, but only targeted religious groups in Rebgong. It is apparent that he did not target the Geluk School per se, but Buddhist communities in Rebgong in general. His advice to Buddhist communities ranged from ritual orthodoxy to deity practice to precepts to

⁷⁴² It refers to rituals devoted to Vairocana Buddha.

⁷⁴³ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 46: *rnying ma mi dag*.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., 46.

right livelihood while also reinterpreting these crucial Buddhist values and practices in light of the age of decline of the dharma.

Although he addressed Buddhist communities in general, he sometimes tended to particularly target his own Nyingma community. Rigdzin Palden Tashi criticized lay tantric Buddhism of the Nyingma School, perhaps in Rebgong, and admitted it was useless to instruct lay tantric practitioners as they would not listen. However, he instructed them in hopes of making sure that their ritual systems were kept intact. He recounted a time when a high-ranking lama said to lay tantric Buddhists, “Whatever has been practiced since the time of your ancestors is good. Do not make new formulations.”⁷⁴⁵ He doesn’t agree with this lama and, when he learned that the rituals some lay tantric practitioners practiced were not intact, he referred them to a complete ritual system. Certain Nyingma critics would then say, “Although [either one of] the beginning, middle, and ending parts of the ritual is missing, this has been practiced since the time of our ancestors. This tames the enemy. This clears obstruction. I don’t envy your teaching even if it is intact.”⁷⁴⁶ Additionally, according to Rigdzin Palden Tashi, lay practitioners simply engaged in rituals subduing enemies and demons without regard for initiation and samaya to undertake deity yogas and recitation of mantras.⁷⁴⁷ There were those who showed off their tantric feats, which, according to Rigzin Palden Tashi, was abominable. Although in general, lay tantric Buddhism was in a state of decline, Rigdzin Palden Tashi observed that there were also many who treated lay tantric practice as being more than dharma for meals (*lto chos*), rather it was

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 44: *khyed tsho pha mes kyi ring nas gang byed pa de ga legs/ gsar du bcos mi rung.*

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 44: *cho ga'i mgo mjug bar gsum tshang yang nged kyi pha mes kyi ring nas 'di ga byed pa yin/ 'dis ni dgra yang thul/ bgegs kyang thul/ khyed kyi chos de tshang mo yin yang nga mi smon.*

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., 44.

beneficial for one's afterlife and hence they undertook empowerments, oral transmissions, and instructions.⁷⁴⁸

His criticism was not specifically targeting Geluk Buddhism, but both lay and monastic Buddhist strands in practice in Tibet. In one instance, while criticizing monastic Buddhism, especially the Buddhist elite community of fully ordained monks, not adhering to their monastic precepts and instead indulging in worldly affairs, he was also critical of his community of lay tantric Buddhists of the Nyingma School. His criticism placed a particular emphasis on lay Nyingma tantric practitioners living up to their vows/samaya. Without keeping vows/samaya, he asserted, deity yogas were pointless and led nowhere.⁷⁴⁹

As on many teaching occasions, Bon followers were among his audience so he also occasionally addressed Bon followers along with Buddhists in terms of what ideally constituted a religious career respectable among all members of religious groups. Rigdzin Palden Tashi had high demands for Geluk monks, Bon followers, and lay Nyingma tantric Buddhists, emphasizing that playing the role of village ritual specialists was never appropriate for any of them. They instead, he argued, should seek instructions from a teacher and undertake intense practice of dharma instructions, eventually embarking on the path to final liberation.⁷⁵⁰ However, he particularly emphasized strict compliance with either sutra-based precepts or tantric samaya as it was a recurring theme in the majority of his songs. He did not endorse any dharma practice without taking pure vows as he thinks these pure vows truly embody all dharma practices.⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., 45.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., 134: *deng sang sngags pa phar chen ni/ dbang zhus dam tshig khas blangs te/ dam tshig mi srung lha sgrub 'dod/ de 'dra'i lha sgrub ci la phan.*

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., 139, 216.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., 225.

Given the Bon practitioners among his followers, it makes sense that he also addressed to them when lay people were critical of Bonpo as performing *tor* (*gtor*)⁷⁵² and eliciting disputes among people. He instructed, “Bonpos with multicolored hats holding drums and plows. If you don’t know to perform multicolored *tor*, how would you know white, black, and multicolored *tor*. Don’t trick your patrons. In the tradition of the White Hat Bon (*zhwa dkar bon*) followers,⁷⁵³ there are *shen* (*gshen*)⁷⁵⁴ seeking ways to the afterlife and other Bonpos who bring in good fortune (*phywa g.yang*).⁷⁵⁵ Be them if you want to practice pure Bon.”⁷⁵⁶ Due to the same criticism faced by lay tantric Buddhists, he also addressed them in his song: “Lay tantric Buddhists, keepers of the old mantra. Do not treat dharmas of sutra and tantra as the same when you do not have a grasp of these teachings. Do not place volumes of scriptures in chaos before you and then recite the true dharma of mantra as Bon. If a lay tantric Buddhist possesses initiations, teachings, and transmissions, intact instructions, and perfect practice of the path of generation and completion, then the purpose of mantra was meaningful. Seeking the help of demons, hungry ghosts, *jungpo* (*’byung po*),⁷⁵⁷ and gods, to destroy enemies to ruin and bring oneself rewards of flesh and blood was no different from non-Buddhists.”⁷⁵⁸ However, Rigdzin Palden Tashi thought that as long as it was for protection of the dharma and people, performance

⁷⁵² It refers to rituals involving offering cakes and magic performance to annihilate demonic force.

⁷⁵³ Practitioners of authentic Bon teachings are labeled as such.

⁷⁵⁴ In this context, it refers to a select group of highly trained ritual specialists in Bon.

⁷⁵⁵ It refers to good fortune (in a general sense).

⁷⁵⁶ Rig ‘dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 184-185: *rnga gshong thog bon po zhwa gra can/ gtam khra bo’i spel thabs mi shes na/ gtam dkar nag khra gsum ci la shes/ da yon bdag gi mgo skor ma byed cig/ bon zhwa dkar can gyi brgyud pa na/ gshen drang srong phyi ma’i lam ’tshol dang / phywa g.yang du ’gugs pa’i bon po yod/ bon rnam dag byed na de ltar mdzod.*

⁷⁵⁷ It refers to a type of malicious spirits.

⁷⁵⁸ Rig ‘dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 185: *gas rnying ma’i brgyud ’dzin sngags pa tsho/chos mdo sngags ma nges ya ma zung/ dpe ’chol ba’i po ti mdun bzhag nas/ sngags chos mthun bon gyer ma byed cigadabang khrid lung thob pa’i sngags pa zhig dpe mgo snga tshang ba’i gdams pa zhigalam bskyed rdzogs ’dzoms pa’i nyams len zhig de yod na sngags kyi don dang ldan/ ’dre yi dwags ’byung bo lhar brten nas/ dmar sha khrag gtor ma’i brngan byas te/ dgra pharna tshegs phung la ’debs pa de/ phyi mu stegs pa dang khyad ci yod.*

of ritual magic was allowed.⁷⁵⁹ At one time, there he was the target of hostile actions. Despite insistence by some masters of mind training teachings that he should not violate the principle of compassion and forego any act of ritual sorcery, he ignored their advice and warnings to proceed with ritual sorcery. He stated that ritual sorcery was in fact precisely what was prescribed by the Nyingma School under the circumstances. He reasoned that even his action violated the dharma, as long as it was beneficial for all beings, the violation was allowed, or even encouraged precisely as a tantric samaya. He wrote that one should discriminate between the vehicles of Shravakas and Tantra in the sense that one should adhere to one's particular vehicle and practice, instead of practicing a hybridity of various practices from different religious traditions, referring to a mix of vows, which he thought was a grave sin.⁷⁶⁰

The notion of the age of decline, however, noticeably shaped the way he envisioned the future of Buddhism, as well as what path he dictated for people living in the age of decline as above. In reinterpreting how one should approach one's teacher he wrote that during the age of degeneration, one would surely have both virtues and faults from one's own side, therefore, it was important to visualize as a lama with all flaws exhausted and all qualities perfected.⁷⁶¹ On numerous occasions, he proclaimed his utmost respect and admiration for Tsongkhapa as master of upholding pure precepts. His admiration and faith in Tsongkhapa, the major proponent of upholding pure vows in Tibetan Buddhism, was further strengthened given the age of decline of dharma when one can even hardly adhere to the external look of a monk, let alone a pure vow. Even though the Geluk School dominated the religious landscape of Amdo in general and

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., 185: *mgon rgyal ba'i bstan pa bsrung ba'I phyir/ dpal dam can srung ma mchod byas na/ zhing bcu tshang cham la 'beb pa de/ khong sngags 'chang rnams kyi khyad chos yin/ 'dis 'phral du bstan srid zin pa dang/ phugs bdag gzhan 'tshengs pa rnam gsum gyi/ mchog thun mong dngos grub thob pa'i phyir/ bkra shis pa'i by aba rnam dag yin.*

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., 222.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 220: *snyigs ma'i dus 'dir rang ngos nas skyon yon 'dres pa sha stag ltar yong srid pas/ skyon kun zad yon tan kun rdzogs kyi bla ma zhig dang dbyer med du sgom pa gal che.*

Rebgong in particular, their dominance was hotly contested and challenged by marginalized groups of the Nyingma School and Bon in the region. Having sensed the criticism of Geluk monks as well, Rigdzin Palden Tashi went on the defense, stressing the need of restraining critics, who are Bon followers and lay Nyingma tantric Buddhists as well as ordinary lay people, of the Geluk School from slandering quasi-monks. He claimed that actions of critics, of even the Geluk bigoted monks, suggested the fact that the critics lacked any realization of truth or simply held wrong views critical of monks with loose precepts. He argued that living in an age of decline made it difficult to do anything that benefited the dharma. Consequently, any preacher who kept the external form of a monk had already exhibited a rare quality that should be respected. Rigdzin Palden Tashi contended that lay Bon and Buddhist practitioners were never a match for even a monk with a relaxed vow. However relaxed a monk had become, the fact that he once received a pure vow made the continuum of his being forever blessed with the vow. Therefore, ordinary people should respect anyone wearing a yellow robe, both good and bad in character. This act alone, he claimed, would help accumulate merit and attain peace of mind.⁷⁶²

Rigdzin Palden Tashi was particular about what actually transpired in one's religious practice. For example, he advised having devotion to one particular meditation deity of one's choice over multiple deities. He suggested Avalokiteshvara as a great fit for all Tibetan Buddhists as Avalokiteshvara is the patron deity of Tibet. He identified Avalokiteshvara as a peaceful form and Hayagriva as its wrathful aspect. Alternatively, he identified Padmasambhava as an outer form whereas Avalokiteshvara and Hayagriva, were inner and esoteric forms, respectively.⁷⁶³ He held that simple recitations of mantra and scriptures were meaningless, reasoning that although elderly people recited mani even a hundred million times, they still

⁷⁶² Ibid., 145.

⁷⁶³ Ibid., 142.

lacked even a faint idea of what constituted virtue, much less profound practice of path and grounds (*sa lam*).

At one point, he advised his disciples that they could sponsor the crafting of Buddhist images, scriptures, and stupas as appropriate for themselves upon their realization of truth. Therefore, it is apparent that he allowed for the role of Buddhist rituals in individual practice. However, he stated that unless one undertook successful practice of esoteric teachings, it was useless to engage in any of dharma practices. He suggested that in case one was incapable of making long distance pilgrimages to major holy sites in Central and Western Tibet, one could still visit the eight retreat places of Rebgong. And he assured that pilgrimage to these eight retreat places should be of abundant power to help generate realization within the pilgrims.⁷⁶⁴ It is apparent that Rigdzin Palden Tashi was much inspired by the glorious past and long pedigree of the Nyingma School, while reaffirming the potent power of sacred geography of Tibet, credited with his school's central figure, Padmasambhava. However, it is hard to escape the notion that his constant emphasis on holy sites, such as the eight retreat places of Rebgong and other sites in Amdo, helped firmly situate Rebgong and Amdo in the sacred geography of Tibet. We should also entertain the possibility that the place of Rebgong, and especially the eight retreat sites, are much elevated through his propagation of Nyingma pilgrimage practices in association with these retreat sites.

When a his dharma friend consulted him over past and future lives, he replied that there was hardly anyone who had knowledge of three times except for Buddhas like Shakyamuni and Padmasambhava. He disliked gods and lamas being the authoritative sources to give prophecies as was especially the case in Kham. He equated most of their prophetic sayings as lies. Beyond

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., 160: *reb gong grub pa thob pa'i gnas brgyad lta bu 'grim thub na/ nyams rtogs skye bar gda' zhes gnas 'grim pa 'ga' re las thos pas khungs btsun par snang ngo.*

the deity of wisdom, he thought that there were no other beings who could benefit one's future lives. All those including spirit mediums of both sexes, bards, and frauds were in fact possessed by demons. Furthermore, *tra (pra)*⁷⁶⁵ and examination of butter lamps (*mar me brtag pa*)⁷⁶⁶ were acceptable only when an extraordinary deity with a samaya descends. He did not trust astrological treatises. He labels these prophetic sayings as simply lies. It was purely luck when one told a lie and got it right. He warned that one will be exposed in the long term.⁷⁶⁷

He lived a modest life in opposition to the luxurious lifestyle of Buddhist elites in Rebgong and beyond. He thought this was the opposite of Buddhist ideals religious practitioners aspired to. At one point, he refused to give teachings in medical astrology: "I have no knowledge of any teaching to seek wealth such as initiation, transmission, and practice of sorcery. I practice yoga of non-leisure. If you want, you should seek instructions in medical astrology and so forth from other lamas, not me."⁷⁶⁸

Rigdzin Palden Tashi also occasionally showed humility, despite his proclamation of tantric feats. For example, at one point, he confessed that he was not in a position to understand his own karmic lot, let alone people's past and future lives as he was unable to keep his samaya intact during his own esoteric practices. However, he did not shy away from dispensing advice laying out a path for a religious career when he addressed practitioners from various religious communities in Rebgong. In summary, he advised that one should be committed to the pursuit of virtue, pure precepts, and meaningful practice of esoteric teachings while being trained under a

⁷⁶⁵ It is a type of divination practice involving a mirror.

⁷⁶⁶ It is a type of divination practice involving examining the lamp flames.

⁷⁶⁷ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 141.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 127: *gsang sngags rnying ma'i dbang lung cis mthu sgrub sogs nor rdzas 'tshol ba'i chos mang ngas mi shes/ bdag ni g.yeng ba zad pa'i rnal 'byor skyong/ khyed rang 'dod na sman rtsis gdams ngag sogs/ nga min bla ma gzhan gyi drung nas zhus/ byed kyi ma mang/*

genuine teacher as laid out in major works such as *Stages of Path to Enlightenment (byang chub lam rim)*.⁷⁶⁹

All Lineage Traditions are Equally Profound

Rigdzin Palden Tashi made a reasonably thoughtful classification of Buddhist teachings, contending that there are no good and bad teachings. While admitting to differences between teachings,⁷⁷⁰ but these differences were only to be understood in terms of what particular teaching was a great fit for a person. There were no differences whatsoever in terms of levels of profundity of teachings. He wrote that there were instances when sutra teachings were more profound while, at other times, tantric teachings were profound. This suggests that the profundity of teachings may be based on whether it is put in practice, or its path is being successfully undertaken.⁷⁷¹

He also switched to an alternative classification of teachings: “the vehicle of listeners are profound in terms of upholding the vinaya teachings. The great vehicle is profound in terms of working on bodhicitta. To undertake either vehicle, the common section of tantra is profound at the beginning whereas sealing with non-reference (*dmigs med*) is profound at the end. For tantric vehicle, both bodhicitta and view are indispensably profound. On that basis of preliminary teachings, whatever one undertakes, being successful in practice of generation and completion

⁷⁶⁹ Atisha and Tsong kha pa are considered as major scholars composing teachings of this genre.

⁷⁷⁰ Rig ‘dzin dpal dlan bkra shis (2002), 59: *chos gang la yang bzang ngan med kyang khyad par yod.*

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 134: *de yang dpe la la na mdo sde zab dang la la na rgyud sde zab zer ba yod de/ de ni gdul bya'i snang 'tshams pa'i zab/ de yang nyams su lon pa de zab/ de yang lam du 'gro ba de zab pa yin.*

stages, union and liberation, and various activities is profound. As for lay men and women, any general practice including mani and one day vow that suits them, are also profound.”⁷⁷²

Tantra is the most controversial teaching in Tibet. Strong focus is on tantric antinomism, located within the Nyingma lineages. He defends this as part of the Buddha’s skillful means to dispense such teachings that are suitable of his disciples. He suggested that Padmasambhava, Atisha, and Tsongkhapa were ultimately identical, though they appear in different forms as appropriate entirely for the sake of disciples. Therefore, Rigdzin Palden Tashi thinks, “[the Buddhas/Bodhisattvas,] as appropriate for disciples, to tame through a tantric vow, appear as Padma of Oddiyana; to tame through a bodhisattva vow, as Lord Atisha; and to tame with an individual liberation vow, as Lord Tsongkhapa. Except for this, who is there to discriminate between Buddhas whose dharmakayas are like the sky.”⁷⁷³ He urged all religious communities not to discriminate between teachings as superior and inferior teachings, but to practice and adhere to any particular teaching that fits the best.

In one instance, he particularly addressed his view of Bon, monastic, and lay tantric Buddhism. He said, “And as for monastic Buddhism, lay tantric Buddhism, and Bon religion, there are differences in use of language. However, if the meaning is understood, there are no differences. The key is about taming the disciples instantly in the most appropriate ways. There are no Buddhists who instruct in teachings that are fabricated, not spoken by the savior, the victor. However, even from sages in the middle to non-Buddhists on the outside, there may be

⁷⁷² Ibid., 59-60: *thar ba don gnyer gyi 'dul 'dzin de nyan thos kyi lugs su zab/ thams cad mkhyen pa don gnyer gyi byang sems la brtson pa de theg chen gyi lugs su zab/ de gnyis ka gang byed kyang thun mong gi rgyud sbyangs pa zab/ mjug tu dmigs med kyi rgyas 'debs zab/ theg chen gsang sngags pa la byang chub kyi sems dang lta ba med mi rung du zab/ gzhi de'i steng nas bskyed rdzogs sbyor sgrol las tshogs rnams gang du byed kyang lam du chud mi 'dza' bar zab/ skye pho mo mang mang la ma Ni dang nyin sdom la sogs par rang gang mos kyi chos thun mong ba de zab par go ba yin.*

⁷⁷³ Ibid., 60: *gdul bya'i dbang gi gtso bor sngags sdom gyis 'dul bar o rgyan pad+ma dang/ byang sdom gyis 'dul bar jo bo rje dang/ so thar gyis 'dul bar rje tsong kha par bstan pa ma gtogs/ chos kyi sku nam mkha' lta bu'i sangs rgyas la bzang ngan sus 'byed.*

paths of liberation.”⁷⁷⁴ And he further cited from numerous sources that slandering other teachings as inferior would incur a root downfall.⁷⁷⁵ He constantly promoted pluralism of religions as well as mastery of various lineage teachings, but not having adulteration of teachings while in practice as he commented figuratively, “Everyone wants to have all kinds of grains, however, without having barley and wheat mixed. When one doesn’t confuse upper and lower vehicles of dharma, but masters all the five fields of knowledge, one is a scholar.”⁷⁷⁶ He boasted about his success in training in various teaching lineages in response to his critics, “To transform into all various forms of methods are within [my] reach, to be closer to practicing supreme Buddhahood.”⁷⁷⁷

Rigdzin Palden Tashi cites an example from the life of the first Dalai Lama to proclaim pure dharma as transcending sectarian partisanship. As he faced constant criticism from his Geluk critics, who better than the Geluk patriarchs whose lineage charisma and authority Rigdzin Palden Tashi evoked to defend his view. When the first Dalai Lama was reading the *Book of Kadam* (*bka' gdams glegs bam*),⁷⁷⁸ a renowned geshe approached and questioned the classic of Kamdam School as pure dharma, indirectly also insulting the integrity of the first Dalai Lama as a Geluk lineage master. The first Dalai Lama also initially wondered credibility of the teaching in question, but he immediately thought it was pure dharma as it was beneficial for his mind. With the use of this example, Rigdzi Palden Tashi warned that one should not judge a book by its cover as he thought was the case with the Geluk scholar critical of the *Book of Kadam* and by

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid., 85: *yang ban sngags bon po'i chos lugs kyang/ tshig mi 'dra'i khyad par yod mod kyi/ don shes na gang yang 'gal ba med/ 'phral gang la gang 'dul gdul bya'i gnad/ mgon rgyal ba'i gsung gis ma gnang ba'i/ chos rang bzo ston pa'i nang ba med/ 'on gyur kyang bar ba drang srong dang/ phyi mu stegs la yang thar lam srid.*

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid. 85: *nas gro dang bsre ba ma yin yang/ 'bru sna tshogs yod na sus kyang 'dod/.....chos theg pa gong 'og mi bsre yang/ gnas lnga rig shes na mkhas pa zer.*

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.: *mchog sangs rgyas sgrub la thag nye ba'i/ thabs sna tshogs sgyur ba lag na yod*

⁷⁷⁸ It is the collection of instructions from Atisha as requested by his major disciples.

extension, all Geluk critics of the Nyingma School in Rebgong. He suggested that one's decision about a teaching or scripture as pure dharma entirely depend entirely on its benefit to one's mind.⁷⁷⁹

While Rigdzin Palden Tashi advised his disciples to stick to the teachings were suited an occasion (*skabs thob kyi chos*); there were no higher and lower teachings. All teachings were equally profound. The hierarchy of teachings were created due to the ignorance of people practicing these teachings.⁷⁸⁰ As stated above, Rigdzin Palden Tashi preached about the importance of harmonious relationships between various religious traditions. However, he often advised that one should maintain one's tradition and have a meaningful pursuit of practicing his own lineage. Time and energy were never enough to excel at everything. based on his own life experience.⁷⁸¹ He addressed lay tantric Buddhists with monks on an occasional basis, therefore it is fitting that he gave teachings entirely grounded in the Nyingma tradition. In line with lay Nyingma tantric Buddhists, urging his followers to strictly adhere to their lay precepts, he instructed, "The cause and welfare of the dharma in general is not your responsibility. Don't debate teachings and lamas of other schools being in the tradition of either gods or human beings. There is no reason for doing so. Just practice one's tradition as it is and there will not be a path deviation."⁷⁸²

Rigdzin Palden Tashi radical concept of impartiality even extended to the Chinese Hashang (*hwa shang*) tradition.⁷⁸³ He held the view that regardless of Bon or Hashang tradition,

⁷⁷⁹ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 112.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., 155.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 143-144, 146, 154-155.

⁷⁸² Ibid., 116: *khyed tsho la bstan srid spyi'i khur dang la rgya ni ma babs/ grub mtha' gzhan gyi chos dang bla ma rnam lha lugs mi lugs ci yin yang rtsad gcod byed mi dgos/ de dag gi rjes su 'jug don ni med pas rang rang gi chos lugs de tshul bzhin zungs dang lam nor mi yong.*

⁷⁸³ It refers to the Chinese Zen tradition that traces to its introduction in Tibet during the reign of King Khri srong lde btsan. Afterwards, it has been a controversial Chinese tradition in Tibet where the Great Perfection within the Nyingma School was compared to its teachings.

when it was a pure religious path, it was good to follow it.⁷⁸⁴ On a few occasions, Rigdzin Palden Tashi said he did not discriminate between religious traditions as long as they were all valid paths achieving ultimate Buddhist truth. He even encouraged his dharma friend at Drepung to follow any particular religious tradition, even if it was labelled as the Hashang tradition.⁷⁸⁵ In another comment, he wrote, “There is no difference in good and bad dharmas between Bon and Buddhism. There is only difference in names of the dharma body of Samantabhadra and Bon body of Samantabhadara....And there is one common base without differentiations. However, in the minds of those to be tamed, Padmapani appears as Bonpo Shenlha Okar (*Bon po shen lha ‘od dkar*).⁷⁸⁶ Maheshvara⁷⁸⁷ for non-Buddhists is known as Mahakarunika⁷⁸⁸ for Buddhists....In the minds of some of those to be tamed, due to the creation of sides and divisions, some followed the dharma of monks. Some followed the dharma of Bonpos....Padmasambhava of Oddiyana and the Victor Lozang Drakpa appear differently for the sake of those to be tamed. In fact, they are the savior Avalokiteshvara....Regardless of being Buddhist, Bon, monk, or layperson, it is good enough if one follows the dharma....See if one’s mind accords with the dharma. It is all about mind being united with dharma.”⁷⁸⁹ At one point, he took this his view of impartiality to an extreme, addressing himself as a Zen practitioner. He argued that all the distinctions between Buddhist traditions were in fact, non-existent as explained earlier. He also addressed him as a

⁷⁸⁴ Rig ‘dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 89: *rnam dag chos la legs zhugs nas/ rng sems chos dang dag zhus na/ gzhan lugs bon dang hwa shang las/ mu stegs zer yang ‘gal ba ci/ gal te rang gi rnam rtog gis/ phyogs ‘dzin che ba’i chos shig la/ zhugs nas log lta ma spang na/ rang lugs zer yang phan pa ci.*

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., 163.

⁷⁸⁶ Bon po shen lha ‘od dkar is a central deity in Bon.

⁷⁸⁷ Maheshvara is one of the central Hindu deities.

⁷⁸⁸ It refers to the Bodhisattva of Compassion in Buddhism.

⁷⁸⁹ 229: ban bon chos la bzung ngan med/ chos sku kun tu bzung po dang/ bon sku kun tu bzung po gnyis/ ming gi 'dogs tshul ma gtogs pa/.....de yang gzhi gcig tha dad med/ 'on kyang gdul bya'i snang ngo las/ phyag na pad dkar 'chang ba la/ bon po gshen lha 'od dkar zhes/ phyi ba dbang phyug chen po ste/ nang ba thugs chen po zer/.....gdul bya 'ga' yi snang ngo naphyogs dang ris su bcad pa yis/ la la ban de'i chos la dad/ la la bon po'i chos la dad/.....o rgyan pad+ma 'byung gnas dang/ rgyal ba blo bzung grags pa gnyis/ gdul bya'i dbang gis so sor bstan/ don la mgon po spyang ras gzigs/.....ban bon skya ser gang yin ang/ chos dang mthun na de kas chog/.....rang sems chos dang e mthun ltos/ sems chos dang 'dres na de ka yin

follower of Drenpa Namkha (*dran pa nam mkha'*, eighth century).⁷⁹⁰ He said that all religions, including Buddhism and Bon, and even including other non-Buddhist religions, despite their difference in methods, were all ways to benefit beings, like all the various grains are used to prepare various foods. He also stated that all teachings from the new and old translation schools were like medicines as cures for various illnesses.⁷⁹¹

Rigdzin Palden Tashi suggested it is important to adhere to one's own teaching lineage, and advised against slandering other traditions as inferior, or discriminating against other lineages. He asserted that regardless of what religion or sect one follows, the key is whether the mind accords with dharma or is united with dharma. While he does not define what the dharma is, but his corpus of songs implies that the dharma is a path of religious ideals or an ideal religious career that promotes compassion as its principle and commitment to the pursuit of virtues as a way of benefiting all beings. The colophon indicates that this advice was requested by some learned Bon lay tantrist from the Hor area, including the villages of Sonag (*so nag*) and Bongya. As his audience was perhaps mainly Bon followers, therefore, his teaching or song on this occasion focused on establishing anti-sectarian view that Buddhism and Bon are not two.

However, he promoted religious ecumenism by treating all teachings as equally profound. When there was an attempt for graded teachings, this was entirely due to the ignorance of those attempting to compartmentalize the teachings. He envisioned that one should only uphold the particular lineage that was appropriate for that person, in which case it was not appropriate to mix teachings from various lineages. All the Buddhist schools placed much

⁷⁹⁰ He is a close disciple of Padmasambhava, hence a major Nyingma master. However, he is also equally revered as a major transmitter of Bon transmissions.

⁷⁹¹ Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (2002), 245-246.

emphasis on purity and authenticity of lineage teachings as a major Buddhist strategy to build the authority and prestige of Buddhist lineages.⁷⁹²

It is remarkable that Rigdzin Palden Tashi brought insights directly from his great perfection practice to bear on how to navigate the complexity of the multi-religious world in Rebgong. Based on his practice of great equality (*manyam pa chen po*) in the great perfection tradition, he suggested establishing all teachings as equals (*chos rnams mnyam pa*) and did not discriminate between relatives and enemies (*dgra gnyen ris su med pa*).⁷⁹³ He stated that all such distinctions and differences in our perceptions were entirely due to our minds being like those of children. Entirely because of our non-realization, we discriminate against one another and think there is separation of us and others, or Buddhists and non-Buddhists, or Bon and Buddhism. He suggested this is how we come to terms with all these so-called distinctions perceived between Bon and Buddhism or various Buddhist schools.⁷⁹⁴

His Nyingma Identity and Religious Ecumenism

In general, in many songs, there were frequent references to the age of perfection when Padmasambhava cleared all hostile forces to make way for the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet. Precisely because the early Buddhist sites were blessed by Padmasambhava, Rigdzin Palden Tashi claimed that those sites associated with Padmasambhava were prime sites for dharma practice where efficacy was much enhanced.⁷⁹⁵ Although Rigdzin Palden Tashi's activity was much inspired by Padmasambhava, however, the fact that new Nyingma sites were opened

⁷⁹² Ibid., 226-227.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 237.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., 238.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 274.

during his life and close to his time was another major incentive in his active teaching career.⁷⁹⁶ His presentation of early history of Buddhism also made reference to the retreat site associated with the Bon lineage of Drenpa Namkha in Rebgong. Instead of rejecting the Bon pedigree of the sacred geography of Rebgong, he, however, embraced potent power of this Bon retreat site as equal to the set of eight Buddhist retreat places.⁷⁹⁷ Or sometimes, instead of the set of eight retreat Buddhist sites, he would regard Rebgong as home to eight Buddhist and one Bon retreat places. He also recounted that the Drigung branch of the Kagyu School was once in practice in Rebgong.⁷⁹⁸ Thus, he acknowledged the Drigung past in the religious history of Rebgong as if trying to present it on a par with other religious traditions in the region.

Living in the age of decline as Rigdzin Palden Tashi, he received criticism and opposition from the Geluk community, and also from segments of lay society, including people of high rank. There are also a few references to a degree of opposition from within the Nyingma lay tantric Buddhist community in the region. However, Rigdzin Palden Tashi took these hardships as opportunities for his insistence on preaching Nyingma teachings. He emphasized to his followers that it was critical to uphold teachings of the Nyingma school.⁷⁹⁹ His devotion as a fully committed Nyingma teacher while facing non-Nyingma followers in his audience helps bring to the front his Nyingma identity that he was deeply connected to.

In a few instances in the collections of songs, his strong Nyingma sectarian identity belies his excessive claims about superiority of Nyingma School when he declared, “Although there are many lamas appearing in this world to benefit dharma and beings, it is just Padma of Oddiyana who accomplishes the supreme and common [siddhis], and abandons birth and death within a

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid., 271, 273.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., 273.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid., 274.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid., 260-261.

single life.”⁸⁰⁰ When some logicians (*rtog ge ba*), referring to Geluk scholars, find faults with Nyingma teachings and say there is not even the slightest bit of benefits from these teachings, Rigdzin Palden Tashi particularly focuses on generating even more interest and faith within the Nyingma followers, as requested by one lay tantric Buddhist from Kode community in Rebgong, he first boasted about his long pedigree of spiritual transmission and his ancestral lineage. He further takes his pride in his mastery of both exoteric and esoteric teachings as well as teachings in both new and old translation schools. He also proclaims his success as a great practitioner of esoteric teachings of the Nyingma School, especially great perfection. His other roles include that of a ritual priest as well as a charismatic teacher of esoteric Nyingma teachings commanding a huge following in the region with Rebgong as its primary site of teaching tours. However, one activity stands out belieing his impartiality towards various religious traditions as he once performed a ritual dispelling the force of a Bon sorcery in Karsho (*dkar shod*) in Kham.⁸⁰¹ He periodizes his adult life into three important phases in terms of his dharma practice after switching from Geluk to Nyingma, emphasizing his proclamation of Nyingma identity: At Mindroling, he unraveled the seal of profound Nyingma esoteric teachings. At Sinmo Dzong (*srin mo rdzong*) in Kham, he achieved his enlightenment-recognizing his own nature of mind. Back in Amdo, he embarked on an exceptionally busy teaching career of great perfection.⁸⁰²

Although he preached about religious ecumenism, his foremost identity as a Nyingma practitioner resurfaced in numerous instances in his collection of songs as he instructed, “From one’s own side, it doesn’t make any difference to practice any guru yoga where one visualizes the lama as the Buddha. However, for the moment, for the Nyingma followers, it is important to

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid., 81: *'dzam bu gling 'dir bstan dang 'gro ba la/ phan thogs mdzad pa'i bla ma mang byon kyang/ sku tshe gcig la mchog thun gnyis grub cing/ skye 'chi gnyis spang o rgyan pad+ma tsam*. See also Ibid., 96.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 209.

⁸⁰² Ibid., 210.

practice guru yoga where one visualizes the guru as Padmsambhava. Therefore, practice that way.....”⁸⁰³ And in one song, he faults people at all levels of society during the age of decline of the dharma and claims that the only solution is upholding the essence of great perfection.⁸⁰⁴

Throughout Tibetan Buddhist history, there has been much tension between two strands of Buddhism—scholasticism and meditation, which has been mainly defined along the sectarian lines. This indigenous category best accounts for major aspects of diversity in Buddhist lineage traditions in Tibet, which are, after all, indigenous stereotypes of Buddhism. Apparently, in a few instances, Rigdzin Palden Tashi equates scholastic tradition with Geluk Buddhism, whereas his own Nyingma lineage was touted as meditative practice of esoteric teachings surpassing the Geluk School’s superficial/intellectual understanding of Buddhist principles of truth. Hence, his critique of the scholarly community mainly addressed the Geluk Buddhists who were vocal in their criticism of their main rival Nyingma School in the region.

Once, Rigdzin Palden Tashi boasted about his scholarly training in monastic education of the Geluk School and his success in practicing esoteric Nyingma teaching as well.

Simultaneously, he criticized his Geluk detractors as mere scholars indulging in fame and wealth, but lacking in meditative practice.⁸⁰⁵ His preference for meditation against scholarly career was evident as a recurring theme throughout his songs.⁸⁰⁶ However, at one point in reply

⁸⁰³ Ibid., 220: *de yang rang ngos nas sangs rgyas dngos su mthong ba'i bla ma gang gi rnal 'byor la bsten kyang khyad ma mchis na'ang/ re zhig sngags rnying ma ba rnam la o rgyan chen po dang dbyer med pa'i bla ma'i rnal 'byor 'di khyad che bar go bas/ de ltar bsgoms...../*

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid., 185-187.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 104-105.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., 122: *khyed tshig la zhen pa'i mtshan nyid la/ don sgom gyi phyogs la ci yang med/ de yin min rang sems dpang tshugs la/ sems skye 'gag gnas gsum dpyod dang shes/ lar bden par grub dang ma grub bcas/ tshig lab lab mang po'i dgos pa med/; 126: dus deng seng chos pa phal cher ni/ mi gzhan la dam chos 'chad 'chad nas/ tshur rang la nyams len med pa 'di/ dpe ne tso'i ma Ni 'don pa dang/ khyad e 'dug soms dang sdom brtson pa pa/ phyi thos pas sgro 'dogs gcod gcod na/ don lag tu len dus thabs rdugs pa/ dpe mdze bos khyung sgrub bshad pa dang/ khyad e 'dug soms dang sdom brtson pa/ chos mang po shes shes zer zer nas/ dan lag len gcig kyang mi shes pa/ dpe 'ug pa'i chos nyan byas pa dang/ khyad e 'dug soms dang sdom brtson pa. See also Ibid., 36.*

to a scholar friend at Drepung, who once challenged him with high expectations of scholarly training, he once again took pride on his success in practice. Nevertheless, he confessed that his scholastic training was incomplete and takes a swipe at monks at Gomang College who interrupted his monastic education. However, he proudly declared his unrivalled success in meditative practice challenging the Geluk scholars for their superficial understanding of Buddhist truth.⁸⁰⁷ He was also critical of scholars, pointing to their lack of practice in profound esoteric teachings.⁸⁰⁸

Conclusion

As the Geluk influence swept Amdo since the time of the Mongol-Geluk alliance cemented in the late sixteenth century, Rebgong in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was no exception within Amdo borders. Precisely due to the vast expansion of the Geluk School in Rebgong under the leadership of native Rebgong Geluk Buddhists or, for that matter, in Amdo generally, the religious history of Rebgong or Amdo is mainly a Geluk history boasting the school's hegemonic power as conceived and presented in early and current scholarship on Amdo. Therefore, this chapter redressed this issue by comparing the two major schools in an attempt to reconstruct Rebgong's multi-religious history. It is hoped that this chapter will inspire further research on the area or similar research on religious diversity, elsewhere in Amdo.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid., 128: *dpal ldan 'bras spungs sgo mang du/ dkor bdag rgyal po dam sri spun dgu yis/ chos la bar chad btang ba'i ban 'khyams bdag/ da lta khams kyi srin po rdzong na yodaphyi rol thos bsam mtha' ru ma 'khyol yang/ nang gi nyams rtogs mtho zhes zob kyi tshig/ smras kyang dkon mchog gsum gyis mi khrel ba'i/ blo gdeng yod de grogs kyi snying la sim.*

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid., 116.

Two main figures studied in this chapter are major points of the Nyingma School's contact with the dominant Geluk School as their Geluk counterparts are initiating a series of Geluk developments in the area. Against the backdrop of Geluk hegemony, the lives of these two Nyingma masters serve as a window into religious diversity defined by "co-existence" of Geluk and Nyingma schools. Adron Khetsun's biography offers important insights about religious life of people in Rebgong where both schools seemingly interact harmoniously as manifesting in his role as a teacher dispensing either Nyingma or Geluk teachings depending on the sectarian identity of his audience. This is partly thanks to the early stage of Rongwo Monastery as a Geluk institution headed by the ecumenic vision of Shar Kalden Gyatso. However, as both schools made strides in their ever-increasing expansion in the succeeding century, many instances of friction and infighting between the two now-rival schools appear. Hence, their tension is explored in numerous areas, including religious orthodoxy and intellectual philosophies as previously discussed as permitted by the sources at my disposal.

Conclusion

In 1578, the third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso met with Altan Khan in the Kokonor Region of Northeastern Tibet, initiating a longstanding Geluk-Mongol alliance that forever changed the political and religious course of Tibet. This relationship was comparable to the patron-priest relationship formed between Kublai Khan and Sakya Patriarch Phakpa three centuries before. The later historic meeting worked favorably for both sides by legitimizing and elevating their respective statuses across the political and religious landscape of Inner Asia. In Amdo, Mongol patronage was one major cause behind an explosion of Geluk institution-building that reoriented the nature of religion in local society and fostered the conditions for the Geluk School's "golden age" of the seventeenth century.

The rise of the Geluk School to a preeminent position in Amdo entailed its creation of an extensive network of affiliated institutions dotting the religious landscape of the region. The monasteries that mushroomed in the wake of these developments had numerous essential features: mass monasticism, celibate practice, succession of abbots on the basis of intellectual merit rather than heredity, programs of intense learning, wide networks among institutions and patrons in their local societies, and alliances with Mongol and Qing powers. Riding this burgeoning Geluk movement was Rongwo Monastery, which witnessed its own incorporation into the Geluk School and, not long after, successfully established itself as an important politico-religious center under its new brand of sectarian leadership.

This dissertation project initially began as a history of Rongwo Monastery, but it soon expanded into a wider religious history centered on Rebgong during the period in question, rather than limited to Rongwo itself. I focused on four lamas, each emblematic of a major

personality type - yogin, fundraiser, networker, and polemicist – and each of whose specific dispositions, orientations, and visions of Buddhism dominated their lives in different ways. One may read this dissertation as the stories of four religious figures reminiscent of the four lamas of Dolpo (*dol po*) studied by David Snellgrove;⁸⁰⁹ however, my added focus on their relationships within their own communities, as well as society at large, made clear their individual legacies implicated across institutional and sectarian boundaries. Hence, the nexus between lamas, institutions, and traditions was used to inform a religious history of the broader region rooted in complex, interdependent relationships.

Shar Kalden Gyatso oversaw unprecedented levels of Geluk growth in Rebgong, as he created new traditions – in both scholasticism and practice – from within a regional, institutional environment. He was closely connected to major Geluk masters of the day, and deepened his ties to several of them through teacher and student relationships, thereby asserting a huge influence on his religious career. His unrivalled charisma as a propagator of Geluk Buddhism, plus his Mongol patronage and religious ecumenism, significantly contributed to establishing the supremacy of Geluk orthodoxy in the region.

The Geluk growth story continued in the succeeding century with the acclaimed Geluk master Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, who served as the abbot of Rongwo Monastery for two terms. He was first and foremost a highly accomplished scholar, and triumphed in debates in Central Tibet attended by major Geluk scholars of the day. He was equally well established as a tantric practitioner, trained under the most famed masters from Central Tibet. Lastly, he was a keeper of multiple lineages, including that of Jamyang Zhepa. Based on these varied accomplishments, he left behind a legacy of enhanced Geluk scholastic tradition at Rongwo and widely-propagated

See David Snellgrove, *Four Lamas of Dolpo: Tibetan Biographies* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1967).

transmissions at Rongwo and elsewhere in Amdo. He was not only a towering intellectual figure but cultivated an extensive network of patrons at all levels of Amdo society. His fundraising activities revealed the close economic entanglement of monastic institutions with lay communities.

This dissertation showed that the career of Jikmed Wangpo was a success story of community leadership in Labrang. However, another side of his life pointed to the politics of reincarnation and how individuals whose recognition was contested (like Jikmed Wangpo) could nonetheless establish themselves in the Geluk community. Jikmed Wangpo prioritized the creation of an extensive network of monasteries affiliated with Labrang Monastery. Additionally, he framed himself in terms of a tireless pursuit of transmissions, manuscripts, and oral traditions, revealing the crucial importance of intellectual credibility for Buddhist institution-building. Ultimately, however, his success and the growth of Labrang came to threaten Rongwo Monastery.

Positioning Rongwo Monastery in this multi-layered grid of power relations, and in dialogue with its close neighbor and rival Labrang Monastery, allows for greater insight into the engagements between these two monasteries, especially in terms of their overlapping networks of monastic institutions and lineage transmissions. While lineage transmissions emanating from Rongwo were highly sought after, Labrang's increasing power created tension between the two, as played out in their contestation for networks of branch monasteries and supporting communities. Despite both being Geluk institutions, Labrang and Rongwo faced differential institutional concerns and were thereby forced to establish and reestablish their prominence in a largely competitive, yet at times cooperative, religious and political climate. In a comparison of

the two, it is therefore essential to track where Rongwo stood at all times vis-à-vis its main neighbor and rival in terms of its size, influence, and network of branch monasteries and patrons.

A dissertation focusing on Geluk hegemony in the region runs the risk of creating an impression or reifying the notion that the history of Rebgong during these two centuries is simply Geluk history, with the Geluk School being the sole religious tradition present. As we have seen, however, diversity in the religious landscape of the region was maintained during this time via Geluk Buddhism's dialogical relationship with the Nyingma School. However tempting it may be to include Bon in a triangular relationship with these two Buddhist schools, there is only scant surviving information on the status of Bon religion in Rebgong during this time. We face an almost complete non-existence of historical literature on this rather marginalized branch of Tibetan religion, a fact that gravely limits our understanding of the historical realities of religious diversity in the region.

Through an examination of our limited extant sources, I have reconstructed a basic history of the Nyingma tradition in Rebgong during the period of focus of this study, affording us new insights into Geluk partisanship. Geluk-Nyingma debates touched on far-ranging topics, including notions of the decline of dharma, religious philosophies, ritual and doctrinal orthodoxy, and the authenticity of lineage transmissions. I also traced the reasoning of Nyingma arguments to reconstruct and uncover important details coming from their Geluk critics. It is incorrect to suggest that the early history of the Geluk School in Rebgong was characterized by the school's exclusive dominance of the area and a correspondingly complete suppression of the Nyingma School. Instead, certain Geluk Buddhists participated in creating a harmonious environment favorable to the flourishing of a variety of religious traditions. Given that accounts of Geluk partisanship and bigotry have here been reconstructed solely from the written corpus of

Rigdzin Palden Tashi, we can also entertain the possibility that much of this “sectarian war” simply took place at the level of rhetoric than than in reality.

Current scholarship has touched upon secular power structures in Amdo only in the sense of having been subservient to large monastic centers. In the majority of cases, monastic centers indeed functioned as local governments and related historical claims thus have some truth to them. Nevertheless, the power of non-monastic Tibetan society has been far too marginalized and inappropriately neglected in scholarship to date. Therefore, I hope future studies will strike a balance between the dynamic forces emanating from local secular society and their bearing on monastic centers, and vice versa. Just as it has proven insightful to understand monastic centers as central authorities that ruled their supporting communities in the economic, religious, political, and legal spheres, it is tempting to pursue the inverse approach, studying the influence of local patronage communities on monastic centers in the same range of topics. That said, perhaps an even truer account would consider religious and political forces not as necessarily competing with each other but as oftentimes coordinating their respective approaches to an ever-changing order.

Nevertheless, because most traditional historical works in Tibet, and especially in Amdo, have been heavily religious in character, we have yet to find substantial historical evidence concerning non-monastic segments of Tibetan society. Since any study with a monastic focus must presume to study all of Tibetan society through only a single slice, urgent efforts should be devoted to mining the massive trove of Tibetan and other-language textual data for hints on the nature and dynamics of non-monastic power in Amdo, and to thereby interrogating the assumed dominance of monastic power. The dependent relationship between monasteries and tribal communities should be a key focus in future research on monasteries. In order to challenge early

scholarship's focus on how monasteries asserted their power among patron communities, it is hoped that future research will rebalance or even reverse this framework to identify how such communities may have responded and negotiated with monastic centers. The concerns that respectively informed monastic and patron communities, and the larger contexts in which these concerns interacted, therefore form a legitimate object of future study.

Appendix 1

Lamas of the Shar Incarnation Lineage

Order in the lineage	Name	Birth and Death Dates	Place of Birth
1	Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho	1607-1677	Rong bo
2	Shar ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho	1678-1739	Rong bo
3	Shar dge 'dun 'phrin las rab rgyas	1704-1794	Gnyan thog
4	Shar blo zbang chos grags rgya mtsho	1795-1843	Chu bzang
5	Shar blo bzang 'phrin las rgya mtsho	1844-1856	Chu bzang
6	Shar blo bzang bstan pa'I rgyal mtshan	1858/59-1915	Chu bzang
7	Shar blo bzang 'phrin las lung rtogs rgya mtsho	1916-1978	Chu bzang
8	Shar bstan 'dzin 'jigs med skal ldan	1989-	Rong bo

Appendix 2

The Eighteen Retreat Places⁸¹⁰

Name	Location by current administrative division (county)
Bkra shis 'khyil	Rebgong
G.yer gshong	Rebgong
Rong bo dgon	Rebgong
Yid dga'	Rebgong
Sa dkar shar	Rebgong
Thul mo	Rebgong
Shel dgon	Rebgong
Sge'u steng	Rebgong
Tshwa rgyal	Rebgong
Dar zhing	Rebgong
Rdo ris kha so	Rebgong
Yar nang bde chen	Rebgong
Rdzong dkar	Rebgong
Rdzong rngon	Rebgong
Rdzong ser	Rebgong
Rdzong dmar	Rtse khog
Chu dmar dgon	Rebgong
Mkhar gong klad steng	Rebgong

⁸¹⁰ The list includes the monasteries that gathered at Rongwo Monastery to participate in the Great Prayer Festival since 1756 as recorded in *Religious History of Amdo*. See Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 341-342. After listing the eighteen retreat places, Dkon mchog bstan pa rab ragys also writes that “there are even more today” (*da lta de las kyang mang bar snang*) suggesting that the network of monasteries headed by Rongwo had grown. See *Ibid.*, 342.

Appendix 3

The Twelve Supporting Communities
known as *shog kha bcu gnyis* of Rongwo Monastery.⁸¹¹

Name	Location by current administrative division (county)
Rong bo sde bdun	Reb gong
Smad pa sde bdun	Reb gong
Khre'u rtse bzhi	Reb gong
Glang gya	Reb gong
Skyi kha gsum	Reb gong
Rgyal po gling tshang	Reb gong
Bse lung pa gsum	Reb gong
Chu khog shog bzhi	Reb gong
Hor tsho chen drug	Rtse khog
Rong bo sha bi nar	Rtse khog
Bse ri chu bar gsum	Rebgong
Hor snyan bzang steng 'og	Rebgong

⁸¹¹ The tabulation is provided based on the list as recorded in *Religious History of Amdo* (composed in 1865). See Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 342.

Appendix 4

Local Rulers ruling the Twelve Supporting Communities (tabulated above)⁸¹²

Name	Location by current administrative division (county)
Rong bo nang so	Rebgong
Gnyan thog be hu	Rebgong
‘Jam be hu	Rebgong
Bse be hu	Rebgong
Chu ma’i bla dpon	Regong
Hor snang be hu	Rebgong
Glang gya’i dpon po	Rebong
Rgyal po be hu	Rebong
Hor dpon po	Rtsekhog
Mdo ba’i dpon po	Rebgong/Tsekhog

⁸¹² See Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1982), 342.

Appendix 5

The Succession of the Mongol Rulers (*wang*)⁸¹³

Name	Years in office
Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin	1699-1735
Bstan 'dzin dbang phyug	1736-1752
Dbang ldan rdo rje pha lam	1753-1770
Ngag dbang dar rgyas	1770-1807
Bkra shis 'byung gnas	1808-1833
Bkra shis dbang rgyal	1834-1850
Bkra shis chos rgyal	1851-1884
Dpal 'byor rab brtan	1887-1916
Kun dga' dpal byor	1917-1940
Bkra shis tshe ring	194-1952

⁸¹³ This original tabulation found in Dkon mchog skyabs, *Rma lho sog shog gi lo rgyus rgyu cha phyogs bsgrigs*. vol. 3 (2009), 52. is slightly altered here. 1870 is corrected as 1770 for the first year that Ngag dbang dar rgyas assumed the office of Wang. Their years in office are listed by Dkon mchog skyabs, but they are not pointed out as years in office so I have clearly designated them as their years of terms in office. These rulers controlled the Mongol domain to the south of the Yellow River. Rebgong seceded following the 1734 Qing territorial segregation of the Tibetans and Mongols in the region.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Tibetan- and Chinese-Language Sources

'Brug thar and Sangs rgyas tshe ring. *Mdo smad rma khug tsha 'gram yul gru'i lo rgyus deb ther chen mo*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2005.

Blo bzang bkra shis rab rgyas. *Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs bkra shis kyi rnam thar*. n.d.

Blo bzang bkra shis 'phrin las rgya mtsho. *Ngag dbang bkra shis kyi rnam thar zung 'jug grub pa'i rnga chen*, Kan lho: Gter lung yid dga' chos 'dzin, n.d. TBRC: W2CZ7939.

Blo bzang dpal ldan chos kyi rdo rje. *Rje blo bzang don grub dpal bzang bo*. In *Blo bzang dpal ldan chos kyi rdo rje 'i gsung 'bum* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2001), vol. 6: 421 - 430.

Blo bzang dpal ldan chos kyi rdo rje. *Blo bzang dpal ldan chos kyi rdo rje 'i gsung 'bum*. vol. 6. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2001.

Blo bzang grags pa'i dpal. *Rtogs brjod 'dun legs ma*. In *Dge lugs pa'i chos spyod phyogs bsgrigs*, 96-100. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1995.

Blo bzang ye shes . *Chos smra ba'i dge slong blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi spyod tshul gsal bar ston pa nor bu'i 'phreng ba*. In *Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi gsung 'bum*, vol. 1: 9-458. [Gzhis ka rtse: Bkra shis lhun po?, n.d.] TBRC: W9848.

Blo bzang bstan pa rgya mtsho and Dge 'dun bstan pa dar rgyas. *Rje thar shul dge 'dun chos skyong rgya mtsho'i rnam thar*. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1994.

Btan pa bstan'dzin. *Chos sde chen po dpal ldan 'bras spungs bkra shis sgo mang grwa tshang gi chos 'byung dung g.yas su 'khyil ba'i sgra dbyangs*. vol. 1. Mundgod: dpal ldan 'bras spungs bkra shis sgo mang dpe mdzod khang, 2003. TBRC: W28810.

Byang chub mi la. *Yab rje bla ma skal ldan rgya mtsho'i rnam par thar pa bsam 'phel dbang gi rgyal bo*. In *Skal ldan rgya mtsho 'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1: 1-99. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999.

Bod rang ljongs srid gros lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha u yon lhan khang. *Bod kyi rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs*, vol. 20. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1998.

Chos kyi rgya mtsho. *Dbus gtsang gnas yig*. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2001.

Dangzengji. "Longwu nangsuo zhengquan de jianli yu longwu si de xingsheng." *Qinghai minzu daxue xuebao*, vol. 22 (2011): 67-70.

- Dawalacuo and Laxianjia. "Anduo diqi fofa chuanbo shilue yikao." *Zhongguo zangxue*, vol. 4 (2017): 184-193.
- Dge 'dun dpal bzang. *Reb gong yul skor zin tho*. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007.
- Dkon mchog skyabs. *Rma lho sog shog gi lo rgyus rgyu cha phyogs bsgrigs*. vol. 3. 2009
- Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po. *'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rnam thar*. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1989.
- _____. *Bkra shis 'khyil gyi mtshan nyid grwa tshang thos bsam gling gi 'dzin gra gtugs rgyu'i skor gyi sgrig lam*. In *Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang poi'i gsung 'bum*. vol. 10: 223-228. New Delhi: Ngawang Gelek Demo, 1971. TBRC: W1KG9560.
- Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas. *Mdo smad chos 'byung*. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi dmangs dpe skrun khang. 1982.
- Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan. *Bla brang bkra shi 'khyil gyi gdan rabs lha'i rng chen*. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1989.
- _____. *Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me'i rnam thar*. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1989.
- _____. *Rgya bod hor sog gi lo rgyus*. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1990.
- Don rdor and Bstan 'dzin chos grags. *Gangs ljongs lo rgyus thog gi grags can mi sna*. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1993.
- Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las. *Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs*. Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1997.
- Gao Li. "Longwu Angsuo suoxia zufeng kaoshu." *Qinghai minzu yanjiu*, vol. 26 (2015):114-148.
- Grags pa 'byung gnas and Rgyal ba blo bzang mkhas grub. *Gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod*. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1992.
- Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me. *Blo bzang don grub pa'i zhal snga nas kyi rnam par thar pa gsang chen chos kyi bsngags pa'i rol mo*. in *Dkon mchog bstan pa'i sgron me'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 5, 485-517. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2003.
- _____. *Kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa sku 'phreng gnyis pa rje 'jigs med dbang po'i rnam thar*. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1990.
- Hor gtsang 'jigs med. *Mdo smad lo rgyus chen mo*. 6 vols. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archive, 2009. TBRC: W2CZ7959.
- 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho. *Yongs 'dzin paN+Di ta ye shes rgyal mtshan gyi rtogs brjod*. 'Bar khams: Si khron rnga ba khul par skrun khang, 1990.

- 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje. *'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*. 16 vols. Mundgod: 'Dras spung bkra shis sgo mang dpe mdzod khang, 2015. TBRC: W1KG24277.
- 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho. *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i skyes rabs rnam thar*. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997.
- . *Sku phreng dang po grub dbang skal ldan rgya mtsho*, In 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho, *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i skyes rabs rnam thar*, 107-261. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997.
- . *Sku phreng gnyis pa ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho*, In 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho, *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i skyes rabs rnam thar*, 262-283. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997.
- . *Sku phreng gsum pa dge 'dun 'phrin las rgya mtsho*, In 'Jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho, *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i skyes rabs rnam thar*, 284-303. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997.
- 'Jigs med rig pa'i blo gros. *Rje btsun 'jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho'i rtogs brjod gdung sel sman gyi ljon pa*. In *'Jigs med rigs pa'i blo gros kyi gsung 'bum*, vol. 2, 21-418. Beijing: mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007.
- 'Jigs med theg mchog. *Rong bo dgon chen gyi gdan rabs rdzogs ldan gtam gyi rang sgra*. Xining: Mtso sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1988.
- 'Jigs med lung rigs rgya mtsho. *Reb gong chos 'byung gdan sa gsum gyi gdan rabs*. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2010.
- 'Jigs med bsam 'grub. *Mdo smad reb gong lo rgyus chen mo ngo mtshar gtam gyi bang mdzod*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2013.
- Kun bzang yon tan bzang po. *Khams sring mo rdzong gi gnas yig dkar chag*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2003.
- Lce nag tshang hUM chen and Ye shes 'od zer sgrol ma. *Reb kong sngags mang gi lo rgyus phyogs bsgrigs*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2004.
- Mgon po dbang rgyal. *Rgyal rabs lo tshigs shes bya mang 'dus mkhas pa'i spyi nor*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2000.
- Mi nyag mgon po and et al. *Rta tshag rje drung ngag dbang dkon mchog nyi ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus*. In *Gangs can mkhas dbang rim byon gyi rnam thar mdor bsdus*. vol. 1, 410-416. Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1996-2000.
- Mkhan chen dge 'dun rgya mtsho. *Mkhan chen bsdus grwa*. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1988.

- Rgyal mkhan chen grags pa rgyal mtshan. *Dkon mchog'jigs med dbang po'i gsan yig (stod cha)*. In *Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po'i' gsung 'bum*, vol. 11. Bla brang: Bla brang dgon pa, 1999. TBRC: W2122.
- _____. *Dkon mchog'jigs med dbang po'i gsan yig (smad cha)*. *Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po'i' gsung 'bum*, vol. 12. Bla brang: Bla brang dgon pa, 1999. TBRC: W2122.
- Mkhas btsun bzang po. *Rgya bod mkhas grub rim byon gyi rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, 12 vols. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1973-1990. TBRC: W1KG10294.
- Ngag dbang 'phrin las rgya mtsho. *Rje btsun dam pa shes rab bkra shis pa'i rnam par thar pa lhag bsam sprin gyi sgra dbyangs rna ba'i dga' ston byin rlabs myur 'jug*. in *Skal ldan rgya mtsho 'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 4, 181-197. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999.
- Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan. *Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa mkhan chen dge 'dun rgya mtsho dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar ba phyogs tsam brjod pa 'dod 'gu'i 'byung gnas*. *Rebgong: Blo bzang lung rigs rgya mtsho*, n.d. [repr. 1764].
- Pad dkar bzang po. *Mdo sde spyi'i rnam bzhag*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2006.
- Phun tshogs. *Rje btsun pra dz+nyA sa ra mchog gi srid zhi'i legs tshogs 'dod rgur 'jo ba'i mdzad 'phrin dang rdo sbis grwa tshang gi gdan rabs dad gsum nor bu'i chun po*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1998.
- Po ta lar bzhugs pa'i dge lugs gsung 'bum gyi dkar chag. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1990.
- Rdo rje rgyal. *Reb-gong gnas skor deb ther*. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang. 2011.
- Ri dbang bstan 'dzin. *Bod ljongs nags shod 'bri ru'i lo rgyus rab rim sa la'i ljon shing*. Lha sa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2002.
- Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis. *Rig 'dzin chen po dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002.
- _____. *Dpal ldan bkra shis kyi rang rnam rin po che'i do shal skal ldan mgul ba'i rgyan phreng*. In *Rig 'dzin chen po dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs*, 1-31. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002.
- _____. *Dpal ldan bkra shis kyi spyod tshul brjod pa'i gtam gyi rgyun ngo mtshar dgyes pa'i glu dbyangs*. In *Rig 'dzin chen po dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs*, 32-118. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002.
- _____. *Dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung mgur ji snyed sems kyi 'char sgo ma 'gag sgyu ma'i rol rised (stod cha)*. In *Rig 'dzin chen po dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs*, 119-197. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002.
- _____. *Dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung mgur ji snyed sems kyi 'char sgo ma 'gag sgyu ma'i rol rised (smad cha)*. In *Rig 'dzin chen po dpal ldan bkra shis kyi gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs*, 198-276. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002.

- Rus pa'i rgyan can. *Rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug chen po mi la ras pa'i rnam mgur*. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009.
- Sa skya paNDi ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan. *Sa skya legs bshad*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2015.
- _____. *Gzhung bshad legs bzhad*. In *Kun dga' rgyal mtshan gyi gsung 'bum dpe bsdur ma*. vol. 1: 260-323. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2007. TBRC: W2DB4570
- Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. *Dga' ldan chos 'byung baiDU r+ya ser po*. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 1989.
- ShAkya rin chen. *Ngag dbang phyogs las rnam rgyal gi rnam thar skal bzang 'jug ngogs*. In *ShAkya rin chen gyi gsung 'bum*, vol. 2, 447-492. Thimphu: Kunzang Topgey, 1976.
- Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho. *A mdor bstan pa dar tshul gyi lo rgyus*. In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1: 180-187. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999.
- _____. *Bsdus grwa'i rtsa tshig*. In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 3, 59-62. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999.
- _____. *Bya khyung bsang mchod*. In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 3, 232-233. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999.
- _____. *Rje btsun blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam thar dad pa'i 'dren byed*. in *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol.1, 100-133. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999.
- _____. *Rje btsun chos kyi rgya mtsho dpal bzang bo'i rnam thar*. In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol.1, 77-84. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999.
- _____. *Sde pa chos rje bstan 'dzin blo bzang rgya mtsho'i rnam thar dad pa'i sgo 'byed*. In *Shar skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 1, 100-137. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999.
- _____. *Shar kal ldan rgya mtsho'i mgur 'bum*. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1994.
- Sle zur 'jigs med dbang phyug and Bde zur rin chen dbang 'dus. *De snga'i bla brang rgyal mtshan mthon po'i srid 'dzin sgrig gzhi'i spyi'i gnas tshul*. In *Bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs*. vol. 5, 286-338. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009.
- Suonanwangjie. "Nangsuo zhidu yu buluo shehui guanxi chutan—yi regong shi'er buluo shehui lishi wei lie." *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao*, vol. 38 (2017), 53-57.
- Ye shes dpal 'byor. *Chos 'byung dpag bsam ljon bzang*. Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1992.
- _____. *Mtsho sngon lo rgyus tshangs glu gsar snyan*. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1982.
- Zhoutai and Chen Xiaoqiang. *De'erlong si yu libei saicang huofu*. Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe, 1994.

Western Language Sources and Translations

- Bell, Christopher. *Nechung: The Ritual History and Institutionalization of a Tibetan Buddhist Protector Deity*. PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 2013.
- Bernard, Elisabeth. "The Qianlong Emperor and Tibetan Buddhism." In *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde*, eds. James Millward et al, 124-135. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Berzin, Alexander. trans., *The Great Seal of Voidness: the Root Text for the Ge-Lug/Ka-Gyu Tradition of Mahamudra*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1976.
- Bryan J. Cuevas, "Sorcerer of the Iron Castle: The Life of Blo bzang bstan pa rab rgyas, the First Brag dkar sngags rams pa of A mdo (c. 1647-1726)." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 39 (2017), 5–59.
- Caple, Jane. "Monastic Economic Reform at Rong-bo Monastery: Towards an Understanding of Contemporary Tibetan Monastic Revival and Development in A-mdo." *Buddhist Studies Review*, vol. 27 (2010), 197-219.
- _____. *Seeing Beyond the State? The Negotiation of Moral Boundaries in the Revival and Development of Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism in Contemporary China*. PhD. diss., University of Leeds, 2011.
- Cech, Krystyna. *Social and Religious Identity of the Tibetan Bonpos with special reference to a North-West Himalayan Settlement*. PhD. diss., University of Oxford, 1987.
- Davidson, Ronald. *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Dhondup, Yangdon. "Reb kong: Religion, History and Identity of a Sino-Tibetan borderland town." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 20 (2011), 33–59.
- _____. "Rig 'dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (1688–1743) and The Emergence of a Tantric Practitioners Community in Reb kong, A mdo (Qinghai)." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 34 (2012), 3–30.
- _____. "Rules and Regulations of the Reb kong Tantric Community." In *Monastic and Lay Traditions in North-Eastern Tibet*, eds. Dhondup et al, 89-116. Boston: Brill, 2013.
- DiValerio, David. *The Holy Madmen of Tibet*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Dreyfus, Georges. *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003.
- Ehrhard, Franz-Karl. "'Flow of the River Ganga': The Gsan-yig of the Fifth Dalai Lama and Its Literary Sources." In *Studies on the History and Literature of Tibet and the Himalaya*, ed. Roberto Vitali, 79-96. Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2012.

- Germano, David. "The Seven Descents and the Nature of sNga' 'gyur: The "History" of rNying ma Tantras." In *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism. PLATS2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000*, eds. Helmut Eimer and David Gelmano, 225-291. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Goldstein, Melvyn and Paljor Tsarong. "Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism: Social, Psychological & Cultural Implications." *The Tibet Journal*, vol. 10 (1985), 14-31.
- _____. "The Revival of Monastic Life in Drepung Monastery." In *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival & Cultural Identity*, eds. Melwyn Goldstein and Matthew Kapstein, 16–52, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- _____. "Bouddhisme tibétain et monachisme de masse [Tibetan Buddhism and Mass Monasticism]," in *Des moines et des moniales dans le monde. La vie monastique dans le miroir de la parenté*, eds. Adeline Herrou and Gisèle Krauskopff, 409-24, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009.
- _____. *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: the Demise of the Lamaist State*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Gyatso, Janet. "Drawn from the Tibetan Treasury: The *gTer ma* Literature." In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, eds. José Cabezón and Roger Jackson, 147-69. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996.
- Hidehiro, Okada. "The Third Dalai Lama and Altan Khan of the Tumed." In *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Narita 1989*, eds. Ihara Shoren and Yamaguchi Zuiho, 645-652. Narita: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992.
- Illich, Marina. "Imperial Stooage or Emissary to the Dge lugs Throne? Rethinking the Biographies of Chankya Rolpé Dorjé." In *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition: Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. Bryan Cuevas and Kurtis Schaeffer, 17-32. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- Iuchi, Maho. *An Early Text on the History of Rwa Sgreng Monastery: The Rgyal Ba'i Dben Gnas Rwa Sgreng Gi Bshad Pa Nyi Ma'i'od Zer of 'brom Shes Rab Me Lce*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.
- Jacoby, Sarah. *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro*, New York: Cambdridge University Press, 2014.
- Karsten, Joachim Günter. *A Study on the Sku- 'bum/T'a-erh Ssu Monastery in Ching-hai*. PhD. diss., University of Auckland, 1996.
- Kollmar-Paulenz, Karenina. "The Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso and The Fourth Dalai Lama Yonten Gyatso." In *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. Martin Brauen, 53-59, London: Serindia, 2005.

- Kramer, Jowita. "The Gsan yig of A mes zhabs: Observations Regarding Its Stylistic and Formal Features." In *Contributions to Tibetan Literature. PIATS 313 2006: Tibetan Studies (Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Königswinter)*, ed. Orna Almogi, 489-510. Halle: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2008.
- Lce nag tshang hum chen. "A Brief Introduction to Ngag dbang dar rgyas and the Origin of Rnying ma Order in Henan County (Sogpo), the Mongolian Region of Amdo." In *The Mongolia-Tibet Interface. Opening New Research Terrain in Inner Asia, vol. 9 of PIATS 2003: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003*, eds. Uradyn Bulag and Hildegard Diemberger, 239-256. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Makley, Charlene. *The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in post-Mao China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Martin, Dan. Grey traces: Tracing the Tibetan Teaching Transmission of the *Mngon pa kun btus (Abhidharmasamuccaya)* through the Early Period of Disunity. In *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism. PIATS2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000*, eds. Helmut Eimer and David Gelmano, 335-57. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Mills, Martin. *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism: The Foundations of Authority in Gelukpa Monasticism*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Newland, Guy. "Debate Manuals (*yig cha*) in dGe lug pa Monastic Colleges." In *Tibetan Literature: Essays in Honor of Geshe Lhund' Sopa*, eds. José Cabezón and Roger Jackson, 217-228. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1995.
- Nietupski, Paul. "Bla brang Monastery and Wutai Shan." *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, vol. 6 (2011), 327-348. <http://www.thlib.org?tid=T5718>.
 _____. *Labrang Monastery: a Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands, 1709-1958*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011.
- Oidtman, Max. *Between Patron and Priest: Amdo Tibet under Qing Rule, 1791-1911*. PhD. diss., Harvard University, 2014.
- Onoda, Shunzo. 'bsDus grwa Literature.' In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, eds. José Cabezón and Roger Jackson, 187-201. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996.
 _____. "Abbatial Successions of the Colleges of gSang phu sNe'u thog Monastery." *The Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology*, vol. 15 (1990), 149-1071.
- Pang, Rachel. "The Rimé Activities of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (1781-1851)." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 29 (2014), 5-30.
 _____. *Dissipating Boundaries: The Life, Song-Poems, and Non-Sectarian Paradigm of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (1781-1851)*. PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 2011.

- Quintman, Andrew. "Toward a Geographic Biography: Mi La Ras Pa in the Tibetan Landscape." *Numen* 55, vol. 4 (2008), 363-410.
- _____. *The Yogin & the Madman: Reading the Biographical Corpus of Tibet's Great Saint Milarepa*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- _____. trans., *The Life of Milarepa*. New York: Penguin Books, 2010.
- Rhoton, Jared and Scott, Victoria. trans., *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes: Essential Distinctions among the Individual Liberation, Great Vehicle, and Tantric Systems: the Sdom gsum rab dbye and Six Letters*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.
- Ricard, Mathieu. trans., *The Life of Shabkar. The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogi*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2001.
- Roerich, George. trans., *The Blue Annals*. Delhi: Motilal Banrasidass Publisher, 2016.
- Ronis, Jann. *Celibacy, Revelations, and Reincarnated Lamas: Contestation and Synthesis in the Growth of Monasticism at Katok Monastery from the 17th through 19th Centuries*. PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 2009.
- Samten, Karmay. *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama: the Gold Manuscript in the Fournier Collection*. London: Serindia, 1998.
- Samuel, Geoffrey. *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.
- Schaeffer, Kurtis. "Ritual, Festival, and Authority under the Fifth Dalai Lama." In *Power, Politics and the Reinvention of Tradition in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Tibet: Proceedings of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Xth Seminar, Oxford University, 2003*, eds. Kurtis Schaeffer and Bryan Cuevas, 187-202. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- _____. "The Fifth Dalai Lama." In *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. Martin Brauen, 64-91. Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2005.
- _____. "Tibetan Poetry on Wutai Shan." *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, vol. 6 (2011), 215-242. <http://www.thlib.org?tid=T5719> (accessed July 12, 2018).
- _____. *Himalayan hermitess: the Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Schram, Louis M. J. *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Border*, ed. Charles Kevin Stuart. Xining: Plateau Publications, 2006.
- Smith, Gene. "The Life of Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje." In *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau, 133-146*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001.
- _____. "The Autobiography of the First Panchen Lama." In *Among Tibetan Texts*, 119-131. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001.
- Snellgrove, David. *Four Lamas of Dolpo: Tibetan Biographies*. Oxford: Cassirer, 1967.

- Stoddard, Heather. “Rig ‘dzin dpal ldan bkra shis (1688–1743): The ‘1900 Dagger-wielding, White-robed, Long-haired Yogins’ (sngag mang phur thog gos dkar lchang lo can stong dang dgu brgya) & the Eight Places of Practice of Reb kong (Reb kong gi sgrub gnas brgyad).” In *Monastic and Lay Traditions in North-Eastern Tibet*, eds. Dhondup et al, 89-116, Boston: Brill, 2013.
- Sobisch, Jan-Ulrich. *Life, Transmissions, and Works of A-mes-zhabs Ngag-dbang-kun-dga’-bsod-nams, the Great 17th Century Sa-skyapa Bibliophile*. Handbuch der Orientalistik Supplementband, vol. 38. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007.
- _____. “The ‘Records of Teachings Received’ in the Collected Works of A mess Zhabs: an Untapped Source for the Study of Sa sky pa Biographies’, In *Tibet, Past and Present. Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, ed. Henk Blezer, 161-181. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Sujata, Victoria. *Songs of Shabkar: The Path of a Tibetan Yogi Inspired by Nature*. Ratna Ling: Dharma Publishing, 2011.
- _____. *Tibetan Songs of Realization: Echoes from a Seventeenth-century Scholar and Siddha in Amdo*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Sullivan, Brenton. *The Mother of All Monasteries: Gönlung Jampa Ling and the Rise of Mega Monasteries in Northeastern Tibet*. PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 2013.
- Hopkins, Jeffrey. trans., *The Essence of Other-Emptiness*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2007.
- Townsend, Dominique. *Materials of Buddhist Culture: Aesthetics and Cosmopolitanism at Mindroling Monastery*. PhD. diss., Columbia University, 2012.
- Tuttle, Gray. “A Tibetan Buddhist Mission to the East: The Fifth Dalai Lama’s Journey to Beijing, 1652–1653.” In *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition: Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. Bryan Cuevas and Kurtis Schaeffer, 65-87. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- _____. “Pattern Recognition: Tracking the Spread of the Incarnation Institution through Time and across Tibetan Territory.” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 38 (2017), 29–64.
- _____. “Tibetan Buddhism at Wutai Shan in the Qing: The Chinese-language Register.” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, vol. 6 (2011), 163-214. <http://www.thlib.org?tid=T5721>.
- _____. “Building up the Dge lugs pa Base in A mdo: The Roles of Lhasa, Beijing and Local Agency.” *Zangxue xuekan*, vol. 7 (2012), 126–40.
- Ujeed, Sangseraima. *The 'Thob yig gsal ba'i me long' by Dza-ya Paṇḍita Blo-bzang 'phrin-las (1642-1715): an Enquiry into Biographies as Lineage History*. PhD. diss., University of Oxford, 2017.
- van der Kuijp, Leonard. “The Monastery of Gsang-phu Ne'u-thog and Its Abbatial Succession from ca. 1073 to 1250.” *Berliner Indologische Studien*, vol. 3 (1987), 103-127.

- _____. “Some Remarks on the Textual Transmission and Text of Bu ston Rin chen grub's Chos 'byung, a Chronicle of Buddhism in India and Tibet.” *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, vol. 25 (2013), 115-193.
- _____. “Fourteenth Century Tibetan Cultural History VI: the Transmission of Indian Buddhist Pramanavada according to Early Tibetan Gsan yig-s.” *Asiatische Studien*, vol. 49 (1995), 919-41.
- van Schaik, Sam. *Approaching the Great Perfection: Simultaneous and Gradual Approaches to Dzogchen Practice in Jigme Lingpa's Longchen Nyintig*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004.
- _____. “Sun and Moon Earrings: The Teachings Received by ‘Jigs med gling pa.’” *Tibet Journal*, vol. 25 (2000), 3-32.
- Wang Xiangyun. “The Qing Court's Tibet Connection: Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje and the Qianlong Emperor.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 60 (2000), 125–163.
- Wayman, Alex. “Outline of the Thob Yig Gsal Bahi Me Loñ.” *Indo-Asian Studies*, vol.1 (1961-62), 109-117.
- Willis, Janice. 1996. *Enlightened Beings: Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1996.

Internet Sources

- <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Fifth-Kirti-Lobzang-Tenpai-Gyeltsen/3049> accessed July 20, 2018
- <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Bipa-Mipam-Dawa/4665> accessed on July 11, 2018.
- <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/First-Karmapa-Dusum-Khyenpa/2683> accessed on July 12, 2018.
- <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Taranata/2712> accessed on July 20, 2018.