

Reflection on the Dzungar Persecution of the rNying ma School of Tibetan Buddhism in the 18th Century, Focusing on Its Causes and the Scale of the Destruction

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Introduction

After the dissolution of Imperial Tibet² in the middle of the 9th century, unlike the Sa skya and bKa' brgyud schools, the rNying ma school did not play any dominant role in the consecutive political hegemonies of the Sa skya pa (r. 1253–1358),³ Phag mo gru pa (r. 1358–1538),⁴ sDe pa Rin spungs pa,⁵ and sDe pa gTsang pa (r. 1618–1642)⁶ regimes. Apart from “Mongol-Repelling” (*sog zlog*) war magic, rituals performed by some rNying ma *gter ston*⁷ for the governments mentioned above or their protectorate princely states, for the most part, the rNying ma tradition and its lineage holders were either apolitical or sidelined by these respective

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² In this article, I will use the phrase “Imperial Tibet” to refer to what is known as *Bod chen po* (“Greater Tibet”), which existed between A.D. 627 and 842. During this period, ten Tibetan kings, also known as *btsan po*, starting with Srong btsan sgam po (617–650) and ending with Glang Dar ma (803–842), ruled the entirety of Tibet and many of its neighboring regions. For more information, see Beckwith 1988, pp. 19-37 and 143-172. See also Shakabpa 2010, pp. 161-164.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-239.

⁴ For more information regarding the Phag mo gru pa reign, see Petech 2013, pp. 249-261 and also see Cha spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs and Nor brang O rgyan 2016, pp. 159-243.

⁵ The Rin spungs pa-s were an inner circle of the Phag mo gru pa government and ruled the dBus gtsang regions in the shadow of the Phag mo gru pa dynasty (*Ibid.*, pp. 275-280). Also see Cha spel and Nor brang, pp. 525-535.

⁶ Shakabpa 2010, pp. 161-164.

⁷ bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1537) and mChog ldan mgon po (1497–1531) performed “Mongol Repelling” war magic rituals at the court of Mang yul gung thang. Similarly, Zhig po Gling pa (1524–1583) and his disciple Sog zlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624) performed similar rituals against the Mongols at the court of gTsang kings. For more, see Cuevas 2019, pp. 177-182.

governments. However, things changed for some branches of the rNying ma school with the founding of the dGa' ldan pho brang⁸ government of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682) by the Khoshot (Qoshot) Mongol king Gushri Khan⁹ (1582–1655) in 1642. The Fifth Dalai Lama exercised tolerant religious policy towards most branches of Tibetan Buddhism. The majority of the rNying ma traditions received great support from the hegemony of the dGe lugs dGa' ldan pho brang and its leadership. The Fifth Dalai Lama institutionalized rNying ma rituals in the dGa' ldan pho brang state ritual practices.¹⁰ During his reign, major transformations, a “renaissance” of sorts, occurred within the rNying ma tradition in Tibet—many monasteries, including rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling, were built directly or indirectly funded by the dGa' ldan pho brang government. He established a priest-patron (*mchod yon*) relationship with rNying masters Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las (1641–1717)¹¹ and gTer bdag gling pa 'Gyur me rdo rje, (1646–1714)¹² and employed them as prestigious masters for elaborative dGa' ldan pho brang state rituals. Even after the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1682, they carried the

⁸ According to Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (2002, p. 596), the dGa' ldan pho brang (the “Palace of dGa' ldan”) was formerly known as rDo Khang sngon mo (the “Blue Stone Building”) or 'Bras spungs dpon khang (residence of officials in 'Bras spungs). It was used as residence when sNe gdong officials of the Phag mo gru pa government visited 'Bras spungs monastery. Later, the Eleventh Phag mo gru pa throne-holder Ngag dbang bkra shis grags pa (1499–1560) offered it to the second Dalai Lama dGe 'dun rgya mtsho in 1518 and the name was changed to dGa' ldan Pho brang. Since then, it became the estate (*bla brang*) of the successive Dalai Lamas when they visited 'Bras spung monastery. In 1642, the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho became sovereign of Tibet and the government he formed came to be named after the estate. The dGa' ldan pho brang regime ruled Tibet from 1642–1959. For more about dGa' ldan pho brang, see Robert Buswell and Donald Lopez 2002, p. 997.

⁹ He was a Mongol prince from the Khoshot tribe who migrated from Mongolia to Kokonor along with his tribesmen. He helped the Fifth Dalai Lama's former treasurer and future sDe srid, bSod nams chos 'phel (1595–1658) to establish dGa' ldan pho brang for the Dalai Lama in 1642 after defeating the gTsang pa king. See Samten G. Karmay 2014, p. 4. For more about Gushri Khan and the patron-priest relationship between him and the Fifth Dalai Lama, see Shakabpa 2010, pp. 161–164.

¹⁰ See Karmay 2014, p. 8.

¹¹ Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las was the Fourth Rig 'dzin Chen mo of the Northern Treasure lineage started by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. He was born to the influential gNam sras gling family and became the second throne holder of rDo rje brag monastery. For more, see Valentine 2013, pp. 247–305. Also see Samten Chhosphel, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Fourth-Dorje-Drak-Rigdzin,-Pema-Trinle/TBRC_P657.

¹² For more about this figure, see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, pp. 823–834.

role under sDe srid¹³ (regent) Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705),¹⁴ who continued the legacies of the Fifth Dalai Lama, including the inclusive and tolerant religious policy. However, due to sectarianism, the priest-patron relationship between rNying ma lamas and the dGa' ldan pho brang leadership set up by the Fifth Dalai Lama failed under sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. The ensuing period was marked with the murder of the sDe srid and the expulsion of the Sixth Dalai Lama Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho. Because of the turbulent political situation in Tibet during the reign of King Lha bzang Khan and because of the influence of the Qing emperor Kangxi in Tibetan politics, the Dzungar King Tshe dbang rab brtan¹⁵ sent a cavalry of 6000 men to Tibet under General Tshe ring don grub.¹⁶ They reached 'Dam gzung in the north of Lhasa in August 1717 and toppled Khoshot Mongol rule in Tibet with the elimination of the King Lha bzang Khan on December 3, 1717. The Dzungar's short occupation of Tibet between 1717 and 1720 did not bring any positive changes to Tibet and its society other than ransacking Lhasa city, looting valuable religious objects and persecuting non-dGe lugs (notably rNying ma) schools.

Although the Dzungar's sectarian-driven persecution of the rNying ma school was historic and massive in its scale of destruction of human lives, monasteries and religious objects, including scriptures and artifacts, the research articles, books, and monographs written by Tibetologists over the years on the subject of the Dzungar's invasion of Tibet have failed to give sufficient insight into the persecution of the rNying ma school and the extensive destruction it endured. This paper is therefore an attempt to present a detailed background of this

¹³ In *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (1985, pp. 1474-1475), the term "sDe srid" is defined as the highest political authority (prime minister) of the Tibetan government.

¹⁴ Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1643–1705) was from the influential Drong smad noble family. When he was young, he lived with his maternal uncle Grong smad 'Phrin las rgya mtsho who served as sDe srid for the dGa' ldan pho brang between 1660–1668. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho became the Fifth sDe srid of the dGa' ldan pho brang and held the post from 1679 to 1702. He is credited for the construction of the Red Palace (Pho brang dmar po), a section of the Potala palace complex and the Golden Reliquary (gSer gdung 'dzam gling rgyan gcig) of the Fifth Dalai Lama. For more about his contributions to literary works including Tibetan medicines, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, pp. 1183-1185.

¹⁵ Tshe dbang rab brtan (1663–1727) was a son of Sengge, the elder brother of dGa' ldan Bogshutu Khan. He ruled the Dzungar empire from 1697 to 1727 and invaded Tibet for three years (1717–1720). Pretexting the protection of dGe lugs order and the purification of the Buddha's teachings, he persecuted the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism. For more about this figure, see Seng chen Blo bzang bstan 'dzin dpal 'byor 1977, pp. 2-4. Also, see Hummel 2010, p. 759.

¹⁶ He was a cousin of Tshe dbang rab brtan and a former monk from bKra shis lhun po monastery. For more about Tshe ring don grub, see Perdue 2005, pp. 234.

persecution, by whom it was instigated, its motives, and the scale of the persecution.

The assessment of the Tibetan literature sources

Since the root cause of the Dzungar persecution of the rNying ma school is to be found in the latter half of the seventeenth century, the sources for the first three parts of this paper—which discusses the Fifth Dalai Lama’s relationship with rNying ma masters and their role in dGa’ ldan pho brang government and ensuing sectarianism—are mainly the autobiographies of the Fifth Dalai Lama and *Rig ’dzin Pad ma ’phrin las*, the “outer” and “inner” biographies of gTer bdag gling pa (written by Lo chen Dharmaśrī at the turn of 18th century) and the two biographies of ’Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson ’grus (written in the 18th century). Regarding the sources for the last two parts (which present the actual persecution of the rNying ma school), apart from Sum pa mKhan po’s works such as *mTsho sngon lo rgyus* and *Chos ’byung dpag bsam ljon bzang*, the majority of the dGe lugs sources that I referred to are clearly biased. For example, Paṅ chen Blo bzang ye shes (1663–1737), who was the most important dGe lugs figure of the century and a witness to the historic and far-reaching Dzungar persecution of rNying ma, does not mention the destruction of rNying ma monasteries and the killing of rNying ma luminaries of the century in his autobiography, *Śākya’i dge slong blo bzang ye shes kyi spyod tshul gsal bar byed pa ’od dkar can gyi phreng ba*. On the contrary, the same autobiography gives a detailed account of Dzungar activity, including the expulsion of people living nearby bKra shis lhun po monastery.

On the other hand, I suppose the earliest rNying ma sources regarding this persecution are: *Chos ’byung bstan pa’i nyi ma*¹⁷ by Rab ’byams pa O rgyan chos grags (b.1676–?).¹⁸ Khri chen Rin chen rnam rgyal’s (1694–1758) biography known as *sKal bzang gdung sel*¹⁹ written by ’Bar bla bKra shis rgya mtsho (b.1714–?) in the year of Wood Monkey [1764]; followed by Khyung po *ras pa* ’Gyur med ’od gsal’s (b. 1715–?) biography of *rJe btsun Mi ’gyur dpal sgron* (1699–1769) entitled as *Dad pa’i gdung sel*.²⁰ According to Alison Melnick Dyer,²¹ It was completed around 1799. Despite the fact that these figures surely knew many of the details regarding the persecution, few of them ended up

¹⁷ O rgyan chos grags 2013, p. 266.

¹⁸ According to the colophon of this text, it was finished in the year of Iron Pig, [1731].

¹⁹ sPrang btsun mang ga la 2013, p. 199.

²⁰ Khyung po *ras pa* ’Gyur med ’od gsal 2013, p. 202.

²¹ See Alison Melnick Dyer 2022, p. 4.

in these sources.

Nevertheless, as far as I know, *Mi dbang rtogs brjod* (written by mDo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal in 1733) and *Rig pa 'dzin pa blo bzang 'phrin las kyi rtogs pa brjod pa skal bzang dga' ston*, the autobiography of Sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1697–1740), written in 1725, are the most informative and earliest sources on this subject. Reading these two works comparatively gave me a clear picture of the Dzungar campaign against the rNying ma school and its impact, detailing the key Dzungar generals, and what roles they played in the campaign.

Every action depends on causes and conditions, and the root cause of this sectarian persecution of the rNying ma school lies in the relationship between the Fifth Dalai Lama and rNying ma lamas. I present this paper through five sub-topics that show the sequence of events that led to the persecution:

1. The Rise of rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling: 17th-Century rNying ma reformation under the auspices of the Fifth Dalai Lama;
2. The pivotal role of rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling masters in the protection of the dGa' ldan pho brang and its leaders from the menace of gods and demons, and other obstacles;
3. rNying ma and dGe lugs sectarianism amidst intense power struggles between sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and Lha bzang Khan;
4. The Dzungar King Tshe dbang rab brtan's conquest of Tibet and the sGo mang²² abbot Blo bzang phun tshogs' role in the systematic campaign of rNying ma persecution; and
5. How the campaign of rNying ma persecution unfolded and the scale of its destruction.

The Rise of rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling: 17th-Century rNying ma reformation under the auspices of the Fifth Dalai Lama

In defense of the dGe lugs pa, Gushri Khan overthrew in 1642 the gTsang pa sDe srid Karma bsTan skyong dbang po (r. 1621–1642),²³ the last king of the gTsang pa dynasty, after a prolonged and difficult

²² 'Bras spungs monastery has two colleges (*grwa tshang*), sGo mang and Blo gsal gling.

²³ He was the son of Karma Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (r. 1611–1620) and the great-grandson of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje, the founding father of the gTsang pa dynasty. He ruled the entirety of dBus gtsang from 1621 to 1642. For more about the gTsang pa dynasty, its allegiance to Karma bka' brgyud branch of the bKa' brgyud school, and Karma bsTan skyong dbang po's reign, See Cha spel tshe brtan Phun tshogs and Nor brang O rgyan 2016, vol. 2, pp. 535–548.

battle.²⁴ Afterwards, he invited the Fifth Dalai Lama to gZhis ka rtse and proclaimed him sovereign of the whole of Tibet, from Dar rtse mdo in the east to the borders of Ladakh in the west.²⁵ We see here how the dGe lugs hegemony of the dGa' ldan pho brang government was founded on the backbone of the Priest-Patron (*mchod gnas dang yon bdag*) relationship between the Fifth Dalai Lama and Gushri Khan. In post-imperial Tibet, the Fifth Dalai Lama was the only ruler able to reign over the entirety of Tibet,²⁶ and he was only able to accomplish this feat with the help of Gushri Khan's army. He claims that his intention to become a temporal leader of Tibet was to protect the Sa skya, bKa' brgyud and rNying ma schools from completely disappearing.²⁷

Having witnessed the ills of sectarianism, religious fanaticism, and regionalism during the reign of the gTsang pa kings, the Fifth Dalai Lama adopted a more tolerant and inclusive religious policy,²⁸ which later proved to be a great problem for dGa' ldan pho brang leadership. In his effort to bring dGa' ldan pho brang closer to Imperial Tibet, he solidified his power base by building the White Palace (Pho drang dkar po), a section of the Potala Palace on the ruins of Khri rtse dmar po²⁹ and reintroduced imperial costumes.³⁰ Most importantly, as a grand strategist and great believer in symbolism, he favored the rNying ma school over all other non-dGe lugs sects. Perhaps in response to the Fifth Dalai Lama's affections, many rNying ma treasure teachings (*gter ma*) predicted³¹ him to be an emanation of the enlightened activities (*'phrin las*) of King Khri srong lde' btsan (742–797). Most of his inner circles, including his tutors (*yongs 'dzin*), were

²⁴ Shakabpa 2010, p. 340-346.

²⁵ For more about the Fifth Dalai Lama's enthronement as the sovereign of Tibet, see K. Dhundup, pp. 23-24.

²⁶ See Karmay 2006, https://info-buddhism.com/The_Great_5th-Dalai_Lama_Ngagwang_Lobzang_Gyatso_Samten_Karmay.html

²⁷ Karmay 2014, pp. 167.

²⁸ Karmay 2014, pp. 6-9. For more about the Fifth Dalai Lama's treatment of Lamas from other traditions, see 'Jigs med bsam grub 2000, pp. 237-239.

²⁹ According to Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (2002, pp. 1034, 1331–1332), with the help of his Nepali queen, King Srong btsan sgam po built the Potala palace known then as Khri rtse dmar po, but it is said that it was destroyed by the Chinese troops at the time of the Tibetan King Mang srong mang btsan (r.655–676). For more about the evolution of the Potala palace and its significance for the dGa' ldan pho brang regime, see Anne Chayet 2003, pp. 39-52.

³⁰ 'Jigs med bsam grub 2000, pp. 229–232.

³¹ On the predictions of the Fifth Dalai Lama by different rNying ma treasure revealers, see *Compilation of Northern Treasures Texts (sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs)* 2015, vol. 62, pp. 507-512.

reincarnations of imperial era figures.³²

The Fifth Dalai Lama's connection with the rNying ma school started with his family members, who were rNying ma adherents and patrons of the Northern Treasure master Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (ca.1550–1603).³³ When he was an infant, he was given a blessing and a rNying ma empowerment by the scions of the Northern Treasure lineage. As his regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho recounted:

Wön Trashi Namgyel, the lord of Northern Latö, formed the protective circle and [offered] service and blessings. The Master of the Northern Treasure, the Knowledge-Holder Ngakgi Wangpo offered first of all the empowerment of long life “at the iron sacrificial post,” the empowerment of the fierce and red gods of death according to the school of [the teacher] Nyangrel and other empowerments and precepts which remove impediments.³⁴

When he was nineteen years old, he secretly began to receive Dzogchen teachings from 'Khon ston dPal 'byor lhun grub (1561–1637)³⁵ and later received many rNying ma teachings, particularly rituals of the Northern Treasure teachings, from Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669). According to Samten Karmay,³⁶ the aforementioned rNying ma masters opened the Fifth Dalai Lama's eyes on a more tolerant and inclusive position towards other schools of Tibetan Buddhism. He took particular interest in the Northern Treasure teachings and their rituals, which he found very efficacious for the protection of the dGa' ldan pho brang and its leaders, and beneficial for the welfare of Tibet. Therefore, he instituted the Northern Treasure rituals in the core of the grand program of state liturgy.³⁷ He was convinced by their effectiveness during Asarlang's³⁸ expedition to Tibet and Gushri Khan's campaign against the gTsang

³² See Townsend 2012, pp. 71-72.

³³ For more information regarding this figure, see Jay Valentine, *The Lords of the Northern Treasures*, pp. 154-158.

³⁴ Kurtis R. Schaeffer *et al.* 2013, p. 536. *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum* (2015), Vol. 8, p. 240: *byang bdag dbon bkra shis rnam rgyal gyis srung 'khor sku rim byin rlabs dang l byang pa rig 'dzin ngag gi dbang pos tshe dbang lcags sdong ma dang nyang lugs drag dmar gyi dbang sogs bar chad sel ba'i dbang bka' thog mar phul l.*

³⁵ For more about the Fifth Dalai Lama's connection with 'Khon ston dPal 'byor lhun grub, see Karmay, 2014, pp. 119-120.

³⁶ See Karmay 2014, pp. 7-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁸ According to the Fifth Dalai Lama, Asarlang's troops were stopped when they reached the Yam 'brog region due to the war magic ritual performed by Rigs 'dzin Yol mo sprul sku (1589–1644). See *Rgyal dbang lnga pa ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 12, p. 37.

pa kings, as mentioned before.

Although some called the Fifth Dalai Lama a crypto-rNying ma pa (Hugh Richardson and Snellgrove 1968: 196), his connections to rNying ma school can best be summarized by the following words of the 18th century dGe lugs master Klong rdol Ngag dbang blo bzang (1719–1794):

The great omniscient Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobzang was the leader and the teacher of Tibet. Therefore, he received all of the teachings of the Nyingma school and composed a volume on these. He received all the teachings of the Sakya and the Gelukpa schools, combined them, and wrote three volumes. In general, outwardly, he acted as the caretaker of Gelukpas. Internally, he did practices relating to the Sakyapa tutelary deities. Secretly from the depth of his heart, he respected the secret Nyingma tantras. Consequently, he was skilled in guiding innumerable monks and lay people.³⁹

Thanks to the patronage of the Fifth Dalai Lama, a “renaissance” of sorts began with the founding of four major monasteries during his reign (these were the first of what came to be known as the “Six Mother Monasteries”).⁴⁰

In 1666, in the year of the Fire-Horse, thanks to the support⁴¹ of the Fifth Dalai Lama, *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las restored and expanded rDo rje brag Monastery to become a major center of Buddhist studies, specializing in the Northern Treasure (*Byang gter*) teaching and its rituals. Similarly, with direct funding from the dGa' ldan pho brang government, gTer bdag gling pa⁴² established sMin grol gling monastery in 1676. Concerning the support for sMin grol gling and gTer bdag ling pa's family, the Fifth Dalai Lama himself stated:

For the great Awareness Holder *gTer ston*, moderate [offerings], which include Thar pa gling monastery and subjects of Gra phyi [region] were already given as religious estate (*chos gzhis*) for sMin

³⁹ Quoted in Shakabpa 2010, p. 372.

⁴⁰ The six mother monasteries (*ma dgon drug*) are: rDo rje brag, sMin grol gling, Kaḥ thog, dPal yul, rDzogs chen, and Zhe chen. According to Samuel Geoffrey (1993, pp. 529-533), sMin grol gling, Kaḥ thog, dPal yul, and rDzogs chen were established between 1656 and 1685 thanks to the Fifth Dalai Lama's assistance.

⁴¹ See Kun bzang 'gro 'dul rdo rje 2004, p. 9.

⁴² Although he is not regarded as a *Byang gter* lineage master, he had a deep connection with the tradition. In his *gSan yig* (record of teaching received), over 24 pages have been dedicated to the *Byang gter* treasure circles that he had received from 'Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las, Fifth Dalai Lama, Zur chen Chos dbyangs rang grol and others. For further details, see 'Gyur med rdo rje 1974, pp. 284-307.

grol gling monastery. However, *The Chronicles of Padma* prophesied him as the [treasure revealer] 'Gro 'dul gTer bdag gling pa, and also the Great Awareness Holder, (gTer bdag ling pa), an emanation of the great translator Vairocana had revealed a few profound treasure teachings. Through these [revelations of treasures], he became a teacher for the Tibetans, [teaching them] correctly which negatives to abandon and which positives to adopt. [Therefore], he is worthy of [these offerings].

Furthermore, in general, all the treasure revealers have to rely on *vidyādhara* family lineage for immediate benefit and ultimate benefits, including efficacy to overcome the obstacle on the generation phase (mahāyoga) and completion phase (anuyoga) and the Great Perfection (rdzogs' chen). Regarding the future *vidyādhara* family [of gTer bdag gling pa], *The Chronicles of Padma* extensively addressed Sangs rgyas ling pa in such [phrases] as "from you, through hundred or twenty-one generations" and so forth. In particular, as mentioned before, for the sake of the unpolluted divine lineage and teachings [of gTer bdag gling pa], Dar rgyas khang gsar [estate], rGyal po nag ga'i chu skor [estate], ownership of surrounding mountains, valleys, twenty-seven households, and 2400 tael of grains were offered for the expanses of his wife and family.⁴³

The above statement lucidly shows that the Fifth Dalai Lama funded the establishment of sMin grol gling monastery and allotted further estates and funds for gTer bdag gling pa's family. He was also deeply involved in the creation of curricula and enrolment of monks at the two monasteries.⁴⁴ At that time, rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling became major hubs for those seeking rNying ma studies from all over Tibet, and their branches spread to Ladakh in the northwest, neighboring trans-Himalayan regions such as Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and to Dar rtse mdo to the east. It is evident that the Fifth Dalai Lama's

⁴³ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum (2015), Vol. 7, p. 288: *gter ston rigs 'dzin chen por grwa tshang smin grol gling gi mchod gzhis sogs la gra phyi thar pa gling dgon gnas mi ser dang bcas tshang ma rgya khyon mi chung tsam snga sor nas song yang | thang yig nas 'gro 'dul gter bdag gling par lung bstan pa dang | lo chen bee ro ro tsa na'i rnam sprul rigs 'dzin chen pos zab gter kha shas kyi sgo 'byed par mdzad de bod 'bangs skye 'gro'i 'gal spong mthun grub kyi blang dor ji bzhin ston pa po 'bul 'os kyi yul dam pa yin par ma zad | spyir gter ston thams cad bskyed rdzogs rdzogs pa chen chen po'i gegs sel bogs 'don gyis mtshon gnas skabs mthar thug gi sman yon yin phyir bsten dgos pa rigs 'dzin gyi gdung brgyud sogs 'byung ba thang yig tu 'ang sangs rgyas gling par khyod nas mi rabs brgya'am nyer gcig par sogs rgya cher gsungs pa dang | bye brag gong smros ltar phugs rigs smin grol gling gi lha chos dang 'brel ba bslad med par gdung brgyud gsang yum bcas pa'i skal skyil ru | dar rgyas khang gsar | rgyal po na ga'i chu skor sogs ri rlungs kyi bdag thob dud che chung nyer bdun | 'bab 'bru khal gnyis stong bzhi brgya skor |.*

⁴⁴ Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las (2017, vol. 1 p. 153, p. 131), and Dharmaśrī (1999, vol. ka, p. 66.).

unprecedented support for these rNying ma monasteries and their leaders was not purely out of personal interest, but rather partly due to a political purpose. Indeed, he employed these monasteries and their leaders—*Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las and gTer bdag gling pa—as sophisticated and elaborative state ritual performers for the dGa' ldan pho brang.

As the Fifth Dalai Lama was considered an emanation of the enlightened activity of King Khri srong lde btsan, his relationship with *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las from rDo rje brag and gTer bdag gling pa from sMin grol gling was mutually beneficial, quite similar to King Khri srong lde btsan's relationship with Śāntarakṣita, and Padmasambhava. It is commonly believed that Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava established Buddhism in the Land of Snows thanks to the royal patronage extended by King Khri srong lde btsan. In return, they performed various rites and prayers for the long life of the king and for the welfare of Tibet. Regarding sitting arrangements at major secular or religious events, the Fifth Dalai Lama observed tension and discord among different Tibetan Buddhist clergy. Therefore, he enacted a protocol⁴⁵ for sitting arrangements in which he gave *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las and gTer bdag gling pa higher seats than the abbots of the Three Great Seats (*gdan sa gsum*) of the dGe lugs school. Spiritually, *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las and gTer bdag gling pa were the primary lineage holders of his secret teaching known as *Sealed Secret Vision* (*gSang ba rgya can*).⁴⁶

Unfortunately, purist dGe lugs partisans, including his first sDe srid (regent) bSod nams chos 'phel,⁴⁷ did not understand the Dalai Lama's broad approach toward other Tibetan religious traditions and thought that the sole purpose of founding dGa' ldan pho brang government was to serve the teachings of Tsong kha pa (1357–1419).⁴⁸ Hence, for them, the goal was for the Three Great Seats to reign supreme. When the Fifth Dalai Lama showed his interest in the rNying ma teachings, they strongly expressed their disagreement, and his

⁴⁵ 'Jigs med bsam grub 2000, pp. 233–237.

⁴⁶ According to *mKhan sprul* dKon mchog bsTan 'dzin (2005, p. 454), Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal prophesied that the Fifth Dalai Lama would reveal twenty-five circles of the *Sealed Secret Vision* Teachings (*gsang ba rgya can gyi chos skor*).

⁴⁷ He was one of the two influential men who helped the Fifth Dalai Lama found the dGa' ldan pho brang government. According to *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las (2017, vol. 1, pp. 89), bSod nams chos 'phel was his (*Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las') relative from his mother's side. For more about this figure, his regentship, and relationship with the Fifth Dalai Lama and Gushri Khan, see Karmay 2014, pp. 3–4 and Jones 2017, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Sonam-Chopel/6874>.

⁴⁸ See Repo 2011: https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Tsongkhapa/TBRC_p64.

request for building a chapel for Vajrakīla was rejected by sDe srid bSod nam chos 'phel on these grounds. As his autobiography recounted:

In the previous year (1643), the construction work of two storeys at the eastern part of the Gaden Palace was incomplete. When the work resumed, I asked Depa to have a chapel built where one could perform rituals for wellbeing, such as the rite of Phurpa. On the excuse of the Nyingma teachings given by Nenyng and Dorje brag po, he resorted to many tactics in order not to have the chapel built. I had to remain quiet without being able to give him any response.⁴⁹

This passage demonstrates that the Fifth Dalai Lama was not free in his choice of religious studies in the early part of his life. He expressed the sensitivity and difficulty of practicing rNying ma teaching in his early life in his *Secret Visions* thus:

Legs ldan rdo rje begins to perform the ceremony, but the Dalai Lama is unable to recognize its deity. dBang-po-sde then performs the empowerment ceremony of the divinity of *Karmaguru* and gives him a ritual dagger (*phur-pa*). At that moment, he feels that the Treasurer bSod-nams rab-brtan and others (*dGe lugs pa*) monks are looking at him through the window at the eastern side of the Chapel of *Mahākāla*, giving the impression that they do not approve of this participating in the ceremony, which is performed by the rNying-ma-lamas. He thinks that they, the *Dge-lugs-pa* monks, criticize him, he will hit them with a ritual dagger and rushes out, but the monks look very subdued. He then awakes feeling totally recovered from his illnesses.⁵⁰

The dGe lugs pa themselves were divided in their approach to the Fifth Dalai Lama, particularly his relationship with *sprul sku* Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1619-1656).⁵¹ Nevertheless, due to his charisma, his contribution to Tsong kha pa's teaching, and, most of all, for keeping the Mongols who were the backbone of dGe lugs pa rise under his reign, the dGe lugs pa purists and partisans, despite their disagreement with the Fifth Dalai Lama, did not pose any significant challenge to his reign during his lifetime. Yet his generous support for the rNying ma school and his interest in practicing rNying ma teachings planted the seed for the future persecution of the rNying ma pa by the Dzungar Mongols.

⁴⁹ Karmay 2002, pp. 226. For Tibetan text, *rGyal dbang lnga pa ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 5, p. 221.

⁵⁰ Karmay 1988, p. 30.

⁵¹ Tsyrempilov 2003, pp. 54-55. For more about the controversy of *sprul sku* Grags pa rgyal mtshan, see Dreyfus 1998. pp. 227-270.

The pivotal role of the rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling masters in the protection of the dGa' ldan pho brag and its leaders from the menace of gods and demons, and other obstacles

Being a government fully dominated by religious concerns, the dGa' ldan pho brag's physical territories were guarded by Gushri Khan and his hordes while rNying ma Lamas protected the realm of other-worldly beings through their sophisticated and efficacious tantric rituals. For the wellbeing and protection of Tibet, the dGa' ldan pho brag and particularly its leadership, many rNying ma-themed rituals of the Northern Treasures were performed at holy places⁵² that had been consecrated as worship sites during Imperial Tibet, such as bSam yas Monastery. For this and other purposes, the Fifth Dalai Lama relied on many rNying ma masters, including Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol,⁵³ who performed war magic rituals for the Fifth Dalai Lama's cause when Gushri Khan was struggling to topple the gTsang pa king. As a personal tutor to the Fifth Dalai Lama and a state ritual performer, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol served the dGa' ldan pho brag until he died in 1669. He was one of the most influential teachers in the early part of the Fifth Dalai Lama's life, and many of the decisions that the Fifth Dalai Lama or the dGa' ldan pho brag carried out were in direct consultation with him. In the post-Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol period, Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las and gTer bdag ling pa were the most prominent ritual masters of the dGa' ldan pho brag state, which employed them as state ritual performers in 1659 and in 1669, respectively.

Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las's first official participation in a dGa' ldan pho brag-related function occurred when he was 18. He was invited as one of the high religious dignitaries participating in the coronation ceremony of bsTan 'dzin Dāyen Khan⁵⁴ as the protector king of Tibet in 1658.

At the request of the Fifth Dalai Lama, his regents, and some influential governors, the two masters performed innumerable rituals of rNying ma treasure teachings in general and the Northern Treasure rituals in particular. Certain sophisticated rituals required the two masters to go on a dark retreat. As for the venue for these rituals, Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las mostly carried out his ritual performance

⁵² See *rJe btsun bla ma dam pa gter chen chos kyi rgyal po'i nang gi rtogs pa brjod pa yon tan mtha' yas rnam par bkod pa'i rol mo* p. 172.

⁵³ For more regarding the rituals of war magic, their significance and applications, see Fitz Herbert 2018, pp. 88-108.

⁵⁴ According to Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (2002, p. 1026), bsTan 'dzin Dāyen Khan, also known by bsTan 'dzin rdo rje (r.1654–1668) was the eldest of the ten sons of Gushri Khan. He succeeded Gushri Khan as the protector king of Tibet.

at Gong dkar, Brag yang rdzong, Bla brang 'og, rDo rje brag, bSam yas, and the Potala palace, while gTer bdag gling pa performed the rituals mostly at bSam yas, Khra 'brug, the Potala palace, and sMin grol ling. Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las did many "repelling [foreign] armies" (*dmag zlog*) rituals in his later life.⁵⁵ Sometimes, they performed the rituals together⁵⁶ in liaison with Phan bde legs bshad gling, the Fifth Dalai Lama's private college.⁵⁷ Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las's career as a prominent state ritual master began when he was 19 years old, the same year he was consecrated as a *bhikṣu* by the Fifth Dalai Lama. The first edict he received from the Fifth Dalai Lama was regarding the revolt staged by sDe pa Nor bu⁵⁸ in 1659. Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las recounts:

I was in an intense sadness over the passing of [my] Supreme Guide, eye of Dharma. At that time, *Grub chen* Rang rig also came. I gave the empowerment of Avalokiteśvara to him and my younger brother rNam gling *paṅ chen* together. While the [empowerment] was going on, [I] received the edict of the Supreme Lord, which said, 'though it may act as an obstacle to [your] strict retreat at Brag yang rdzong, there is a conflict involving sDe pa Nor bu, therefore, [I] instruct that [you] must to go to Gong dkar to be the vajra master of the *sku rim*⁵⁹ [for the Dalai Lama].⁶⁰

⁵⁵ According to Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las (2017, vol. 2. pp. 293-294), at the request of the dGa' ldan pho brang, he performed the "repelling [foreign] armies" rituals for *bstan srid spyi rim*, and also in consideration of the Mongol and Chinese conflict. As it was performed in 1697, it seems that sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho asked Rig 'dzin Pad ma phrin las to carry out the ritual in support of his ally dGa' ldan Boshugtu Khan. For more about the conflict between Dzungar and Qing powers while dGa' ldan Boshugtu Khan was the king of the Dzungars, see Zahiruddin Ahmad 1970, pp. 281-324.

⁵⁶ Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las 2017, vol. 1, pp. 187.

⁵⁷ It is known by different names such as sKu zhabs grwa tshang, rNam rgyal grwa tshang, and Phan bde legs bshad gling. I stick to rNam rgyal grwa tshang in this paper. For more about the origin of rNam rgyal grwa tshang and its function, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, p. 1230.

⁵⁸ See, Venturis YEAR, pp.30-48. For more about sDe pa Nor bu, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, p. 1212.

⁵⁹ A religious service which involves prayers and rituals aimed for the long life and wellbeing of important persons.

⁶⁰ Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las 2017 vol. 1, p. 92. 'dren mchog chos kyi spyan ldan de yang dag pa'i zhing du gshegs pas yid shin tu nges par 'byung ba zhing byung kyang | 'di skabs grub chen rang rig pa yang byon byung bar nu bo rnam gling paṅ chen dang lhan du byang gter spyan ras gzigs kyi dbang zhig phul | dus rim skabs rgyal dbang mchog gi bka' shog spyi bor phebs pa'i don | yang rdzong gi bcad rgya'i gegs su cung zad 'gro ba 'dug kyang nor bu sde gzar gyi gnas tshul 'di ltar 'dug pas gong dkar du sku rim gyi rdo rje slob dpon la du 'gro dgos tshul phebs |.

The Fifth Dalai Lama himself acknowledged this ritual service performed by Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las in the following words:

I made the *trulku* of Dorjedrag Rigdzin, with about 30 attendants, to go to Gongkar to perform a ritual for accomplishing the strategic policy. They performed the rite of suppression and the destructive rite of the wind wheel. It was reported that the wind wheel rapidly produced flames. Before they went back, I gave them instructions and paid them for their services, which were a necessity when there was a conflict. At Chonggye the men of Palri also performed destructive rites of suppression for the strategic policy to run smoothly, and I received a letter from the *trulku* (of Dorjedrag Rigdzin) which stated that good signs had occurred.⁶¹

Again, following that year, he received another edict from the Fifth Dalai Lama that urged him to perform rituals for the welfare of the Tibetan people. According to Padma 'phrin las's autobiography, which records 61 years of his life (i.e., up to 1702), he performed peaceful and wrathful rituals for the dGa' ldan pho brang state almost every year, perhaps as late as 1704, as he was killed in 1717. In 1672, together with gTer bdag gling pa, he performed the most crucial *sku rim* ritual for the Fifth Dalai Lama. At that time, the Fifth Dalai Lama was suffering from hand pain:

At that time, [I] received an edict from [my] ultimate refuge, the All-knowing Supreme Lord of the Potala. [...] That night, I reached Drags and then [my] monastery and prepared. Thereafter, I left for the Potala. I offered my prostration to the lotus feet of the Supreme Victor. At that time, he was somewhat in pain in his hands and instructed [us] to repel Yamarāja (the lord of death). Accordingly, we prepared the [rituals]. In the audience hall (*tshoms chen*) of the Potala Palace, [monks] from the sKu zhabs grwa tshang arranged a hundred offering cakes, a hundred amendment materials, and made a long-life ritual as supportive service for the ritual. We, master and disciples (*dpon slob*), performed an effective and extensive *sku rim* for [the Dalai Lama]. He immediately showed signs of recovery. At that time, as a sign of connection, the main beam of the black stūpa of bSam yas [Monastery] shook and cracked. I became a fortunate disciple of rGyal dbang rDo rje 'chang Zil gnon drag rtsal rdo rje (the Fifth Dalai Lama) when he gave his profound teaching of the *Sealed Vision* for the first time.⁶²

⁶¹ Karmay 2002, pp. 6-9.

⁶² Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las 2017 vol. 1, pp. 186-187: *de skabs po ta la nas gtan gyi skyabs mgon rgyal dbang thams cad mkhyen pa chen po'i sku zhabs nas bka' shog spyi bor phebs zhes dang | de nub sgrags dang de nas dgon par sleb nas grabz yul bgyis te po ta lar phyin | rgyal dbang mchog gi zhabs kyi pad mor 'du phyag bgyis | de skabs phyag cung*

In the entire career of *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las* as a state ritual master, the most elaborate ritual⁶³ that he performed was at bSam yas for the general good of the Buddhist teaching and secular affairs (*bstan srid spyi rim*) of the dGa' ldan pho brang, in 1687. It was a colossal rite involving many spectacular cross-threats and other articles. The dGa' ldan pho brang state ordered many districts located around Lhasa to facilitate the liturgical articles and bear its expenses. On the whole, not only *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las*, but his monastery was also deeply involved in protecting dGa' ldan pho brang government and its leaders:

As knowledge of the Byang-gter spread throughout Tibet, it gradually became established as a major religious system with over fifty monasteries propagating its teachings, chief among which was the mother monastery of rDo-rje-brag. Monks of this seminary, properly trained in its rituals, have always been highly prized for their religious expertise. One such monk, for example, was invariably required in the *sku lnga* shrine in Jo-khang in Lhasa, another at the *lHa mo Khang* and eight in the *mGon khang* at the base of the Potala palace engaged in the worship of Mahākāla. Four monks from rDo-rje-brag annually performed the 'Gong po ar gtad ritual for the suppression of demons at the Lhasa *Rigs gsum* shrine and the oracle of dGa'-gdong was regularly consulted to divine the whereabouts of deceased Lamas.⁶⁴

gTer bdag gling pa became one of the most influential masters in the Fifth Dalai Lama's inner circles in the later part of the latter's life. He entered the official ritual service for the dGa' ldan pho brang state in 1669 when he was 23. The Fifth Dalai Lama often consulted him regarding state affairs. In the beginning of 1679, he received the edict from the Dalai Lama seeking his advice on who was suitable for sDe srid candidature, and he recommended Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. Accordingly, the Fifth Dalai Lama appointed Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho as sDe srid in the same year. In 1695, sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho honored gTer bdag gling pa as his *ti shri*, and gave him title, "Great Treasure Revealer, Preceptor, Dharma King (*gter chen ti shri chos kyi*

zad ltem tshul 'dug pas 'chi bdag bzlog pa zhig byed dgos tshul gyi bslab ston byung ba ltar gra sgrig zhus | pho brang chen po po ta la'i tshoms du cho ga gtong ba'i cha lag gi rgyab chos gtor ma brgya rtsa | bskang brgya rtsa | tsho chog sogs grwa gtsang nas gnang | nged dpon slob chabs gcig par sku rim smin rgyas zhus pa'i de 'phral sku khams dwangs tshul bstan | bsam yas kyi mchod rten nag po srog shing g.yo ba dang gas pa'i dus rtags sogs 'grig par brten rgyal dbang rdo rje 'chang zil gnon drag rtsal rdo rje'i thugs dam gzigs snang rgya can skor gyi zab chos thog mar spel ba'i skal ldan gyi slob bur gyur |.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-318.

⁶⁴ Boord 2013, p. 3.

rgyal po) and a seal at the Potala palace.⁶⁵ Concerning some of the most significant rituals and religious services he carried out for the Fifth Dalai Lama and the sDe srid, his outer biography states:

When he returned to Thar pa ling, he received an invitation edict from His Highness (*gong zhabs*, i.e., fifth Dalai lama) and left for the Potala, the great palace via boat at 'Bri'u sna'. As for the *sku rim* for His Highness, he performed [rituals] of demon liberation, curse liberation, death ransom, purification of *dākinīs* and the eight classes of spirits, and exorcist rites of the red wrathful Guru (Padmasambhava). Because of this, soon after, His Highness recovered from his sickness. At that time, Zangs ri sDe srid also came to Lhasa, and [gTer bdag gling pa] gave him empowerment of eliminating obstacles (*rkyen sel*), purification [rituals], and others.⁶⁶

In 1679, gTer bdag gling pa was 34 years old and led the ritual for the coronation of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho as sDe srid. Dharmasri recounted the event as follows:

In the mansion of Khams gsum rnam rgyal, His Supreme Highness sat on [his] throne and let the Lord (gTer bdag ling pa) sit on an unusually high throne arranged there. Then, sDe srid Rin po che sat on a lower seat first, and [gTer bdag ling pa] performed obstacle elimination and ablution rites and others for the sDe srid. After that, the sDe srid sat on the throne and [gTer bdag ling pa coronated] him by giving him empowerment called "the *mNga' dbang rin chen 'bar ba*," which is far superior to the *Royal Vase Coronation* known to Brahmins and others. At the same time, as a token of auspiciousness and positive connection, he offered [the sDe srid] some presents, including a crown jewel of snakes. While his highness, the supreme Lord, together with all victors and his sons [offered] sDe srid auspicious words [as profuse as] rain of flowers. In this way, [Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho] was crowned as sDe srid.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *rJe btsun bla ma dam pa gter chen chos kyi rgyal po'i nang gi rtogs pa brjod pa yon tan mtha' yas rnam par bkod pa'i rol mo*, pp. 149-153.

⁶⁶ See *gTer chen chos kyi rgyal po'i rnam thar dad pa'i shing rta*, p. 93: *de nas thar pa gling du phyir phebs mtshams gong nas spyan 'dren gyi bka' shog 'byor ba ltar 'bri'u sna'i gru brgyud pho brang chen por thebs te | gong zhabs kyi sku rim du | gdon 'grol | byad 'grol | 'chi slu | mkha' 'gro dang sde brgyad grib sel | drag dmar gyi gtor bzlog rnams mdzad pas gong zhabs sku cad ltems pa'ang mi ring bar dangs | zangs ri sde srid kyang lha ldan du phebs pa dang 'grig der yang rkyen sel gyi dbang dang grib sel sogs 'ga' zhig mdzad |*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116: *gzims chung khams gsum rnam rgyal du gong zhabs mchog kyang bzhugs khrir phebs | rje nyid la'ang khri rgyun las ches mtho ba zhig bshams pa la bzhugs su gsol zhing | de nas thog mar sde srid rin po che stan dma' ba la bzhugs par bgegs sprod khros sol sogs mdzad rjes | bzhugs khri'i steng du phebs | de la mnga' dbang rin chen 'bar ba zhes bya rgyal po rgyal rigs spyi bo nas dbang bskur ba'i cho ga bram ze sogs la grags pa*

The above passage shows how much gTer bdag gling pa was involved in the highest level of the dGa' ldan pho brang state affairs. He was a state chaplain carrying out official rituals and religious services for the dGa' ldan pho brang state every year from 1669 to 1704, ahead of the sDe srid's assassination. He even warned⁶⁸ the sDe srid about his behavior and the turbulence of their period of history. After the sDe srid's death, according to Lo chen Dharmaśrī, at the instigation of bKa' bcu Blo bzang phun tshogs,⁶⁹ the king Lha bzang Khan⁷⁰ banned the rNying ma wrathful rituals of "throwing, burning, hitting, and so forth" that had been performed for the dGa' ldan pho brang and the Kokonor Mongol chieftains. A similarly tense situation regarding rNying ma rituals is reported in the autobiography of *Grub thob* Blo bzang Lha mchog⁷¹ (1672–1742):

[Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las told me], "This year, King Lha bzang Khan started reprimanding me [rDo rje brag] and sMin grol Ling. Those [spirits] who had been suppressed [by us] for the wellbeing of Tibet were taken out. He [Lha bzang Khan] expelled the Supreme Victor [Tsangs dbyangs rgya mtsho] to China and murdered sDe srid." [While he said these words], he shed tears and wiped it with his fingers. [He further said], the occasion of the rising up the 'gong po and taking out the *dam sri* [from the suppression ground] has arrived.⁷²

It is clear that some form of rNying ma ritual activities performed for the dGa' ldan pho brang were the subject of argument during the tussle between the sDe srid and Lha bzang Khan. After the elimination

las khyad par du gyur pa'i dbang bka' dang gdengs can gyi gtsug gi nor bu sogs rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i skyes cung zad kyang 'bul bar mdzad cing | sras dang bcas pa'i rgyal ba thams cad dang phyogs gcig par gong ma rgyal ba'i dbang pos kyang shis brjod kyi me tog char du 'bebs pa sogs bkra shis pa'i tshogs mnga' gsol bar mdzad do |.

⁶⁸ See 'Ol kha rje drung 03 bZhad pa'i rdo rje, pp. 40-41.

⁶⁹ There is a slim chance that this figure might be Dzungar *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs who I have covered in detail in the later part of this article.

⁷⁰ *rJe btsun bla ma dam pa gter chen chos kyi rgyal po'i nang gi rtogs pa brjod pa yon tan mtha' yas rnam par bkod pa'i rol mo*, pp. 172–174.

⁷¹ He was a disciple of Ngag dbang nor bu who was appointed by the Fifth Dalai Lama to perform rituals for dGa' ldan pho brang at dGa' ldan bdud 'jom ling monastery. Grub thob Blo bzang lha mchog was also a disciple of Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las, and in the later part of his life, he had a close association with Sle lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje. For more see Ehrhard 2002, pp. 241-243.

⁷² Blo bzang lha mchog 1989, pp. 37-38: '*di lo rgyal po lha bzang khang gis nged dang smin grol gling gnyis la bka' skyon gyi mgo btsugs | bod khams bde thabs kyi mnan pa yang bton | rgyal dbang rgya nag la skyungs | sde srid yang bkrongs song gsung spyang chab gnang ba phyag gis 'thor mdzad cing | 'gong po langs nas dam sri 'don gsung pa'i dus la 'babs song ang gsungs |.*

of the sDe srid, Lha bzang Khan banned some of these ritual activities. It seems that from that date onwards, there were no further rNying ma lamas' ritual activities in the dGa' ldan pho brang. A key instigator behind these bans was *bKa' bcu* Blo bzang phun tshogs, who seems to be none other than the sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs, a protégé of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. Therefore, one can postulate that, during the king Lha bzang Khan's rule, the dGe lug purists had a fair degree of control over his religious policy, such that the proscription of some form of rNying ma rituals already started.

rNying ma and dGe lugs sectarianism in the midst of the intense power struggle between sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and Lha bzang Khan

As mentioned before, sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's relationship with the leaders of rDo rje brag and sMin grol ling was so close that when the Fifth Dalai Lama died in 1682, he informed them,⁷³ while keeping prominent figures such as Paṅ chen Blo bzang ye shes,⁷⁴ the Khoshot king⁷⁵ [bsTan 'dzin Dalai Khan], and even the Qing emperor Khangxi in darkness for 14 years.⁷⁶ According to Che mchog 'dus pa rtsal,⁷⁷ when the Fifth Dalai Lama's double, sDe pa brTas rab pa, who the sDe srid used to cover the Dalai Lama's absence, was complaining and shouting for being kept like a prisoner, his behavior almost exposed the secret. At such a critical period, a solution proposed by gTer bdag gling pa helped the sDe srid to maintain the secrecy of the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama.⁷⁸ At that time, gTer bdag gling pa was the right-hand man of the sDe srid in state affairs and in charge of finding the reincarnation of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Around that period, a charismatic dGe lugs scholar, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson 'grus (1648–1721), was quite famous and became a root teacher⁷⁹ of King bsTan 'dzin Dalai Khan in 1697. In 1700, he became an abbot

⁷³ See 'Ol kha rje drung 03 bZhad pa'i rdo rje, pp. 12-13. Also, see Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las 2017, vol. 2. pp. 323-334.

⁷⁴ See Ya Hanzhang 1994, p. 68.

⁷⁵ See Peter Schwieger 2015, p. 157.

⁷⁶ On sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's letters sent to Paṅ chen Rin po che and Khangxi informing them the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama, see Ya Hanzhang 1994, pp. 67-68.

⁷⁷ According to Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (1992, p. 82), he is an 18th-century rNying ma master. His actual name was Blo gsal rgya mtsho. He studied under gTer bdag ling pa at sMin grol ling and served as a Tibetan teacher at rTse slob grwa, a school established by the Seventh Dalai Lama for training and recruiting government officials.

⁷⁸ Shakabpa 2010, p. 384.

⁷⁹ See Darig Thokmay 2023, pp. 510-511.

of sGo mang College, and his religious and political sphere of influence in the dGa' ldan pho brang state expanded. In 1703, Lha bzang Khan was crowned as protector king of Tibet. For the dGe lugs purists, Lha bzang Khan's ascension to power gave them an excellent opportunity to advance their agenda. Soon after, Lha bzang Khan and sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho fell into blame and discord, which further fueled the intensity of their power struggle. The dGe lugs purists led by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa stood by Lha bzang Khan wholeheartedly during these struggles. 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa even targeted the inclusive religious policy of the Fifth Dalai Lama that the sDe srid was continuing as he could not tolerate dGe lugs monastics⁸⁰ practicing rNying ma teachings or mixing rNying ma teachings with Tsong kha pa's teaching. He warned them in the following manner:

You should not think negatively about Tsong kha pa's teachings, [otherwise] you will face self-destruction. Either the high or the low, whoever should not change [Tsong kha pa's teaching] to other traditions or [let] other branches [of Buddhism] adopt it, or mix it with other teachings. My words hold truth as proved⁸¹ earlier.⁸²

According to his biography, even in his first encounter with the Sixth Dalai Lama Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa had a negative view about him:

There occurred a bad apparition during the welcoming event. [He was] asked about the apparition and responded that he saw the reincarnation (*sku skye*) without his head for a long time. Even though he watched him closely again and again, [the head] did not appear for some time. This was, indeed, a sign that [the reincarnation] is a fake one.⁸³

When the king Lha bzang Khan wanted to expel Tshangs dbyangs rgya tsho to China, he was the foremost dGe lugs figure to support the

⁸⁰ There were some dGe lugs teachers such as Sle lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje practicing rNying ma teachings.

⁸¹ It seems he was referring to sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's death.

⁸² dKon mchog 'jig med dbang po 1987, p. 195: *yang nyin gcig rje tsong kha ba'i bstan pa 'di la khyed tsho sus kyang log pa dran mi nyan | rang 'phung yong | 'di la mtho dman sus kyang phar 'gyur tshur 'gyur dang | phar bsre tshur bse byed mi rung | nga'i tshig bden mi bden snga sor mthong ba de yin |*.

⁸³ Darig Thokmay 2023, p. 507. For the Tibetan text, see dKon mchog 'jig med dbang po 1987, pp. 107-108.

idea.⁸⁴ In *The Religious History of Bhairava* (*'Jigs byed chos 'byung*),⁸⁵ he considered Pad dkar 'dzin pa Ye shes rgya mtsho⁸⁶ as the Sixth Dalai Lama. While many of the dGe lugs Lamas were forced to accept Ye shes rgya mtsho as the Sixth Dalai Lama, for 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, he was a true Sixth Dalai Lama. Around that time, he had a weird dream related to sDe srid and Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho as follows:

At one time, he dreamt that a giant yak came to dBus from gTsang. [It] was so huge that it could barely fit in the sKyid Shod valley. It played a lot, and then [at one point] two people were stuck on its horn. [They] were like butter put on the horn. When [he] woke up, [he] thought that as Tshangs dbyangs and the sDe pa did not like dGe lugs. It seemed that the Dharma protectors would destroy them.

His resentment against the rNying ma was so strong that at one point, when *Rab 'byams pa* Ngag dbang, his treasurer, became sick and could not be cured, he thought that the rNying ma pa-s had cursed him and wanted to retaliate by wiping them out entirely by way of violent magic ritual.⁸⁷ 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's disciple Ngag dbang bkra shi's biography clearly mentions the discord between gTer bdag ling pa and 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa over their allegiance to the governing figures (i.e., sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and Lha bzang Khan) of the dGa' ldan pho brang.⁸⁸

According to 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's biography, he blamed the sDe srid for giving excessive favor to the rNying ma pa. He thinks that this became the cause for the persecution of the rNying ma school later. Thus, he asserts:

Basically, he [sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho] should have looked after the dGe lugs [faith] with unlimited kindness. However, what he did was the opposite. He haughtily gave excessive reward and honor to the rNying ma pa. If [one] investigates [the sDe srid's actions], temporarily it appears like leaving a stūpa (which needs to be white washed) in black (i.e., leaving it without whitewash), while offering whitewash to the rock which does not need it. Ultimately, it seemed like [the sDe srid] was very actively bringing about a cause for the

⁸⁴ His disciple sGo mang bla ma Blo bzang phun tshogs also welcomed the expulsion of the sixth Dalai lama Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho to China. See Ngag dbang bkra shis, p. 109a.

⁸⁵ See 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa 2015, p. 338.

⁸⁶ Shakabpa 2010, p. 409. According to Dudjom (2002, p. 516), Pad dkar 'dzin pa Ye shes rgya mtsho was Lha bzang Khan's biological son.

⁸⁷ See Ngag dbang bkra shis, p. 120 a.

⁸⁸ See bSe tshang 05 Blo bzang bkra shis 'phrin las rgya mtsho, p. 16b.

destruction of the old rNying ma monasteries in the future.⁸⁹

By comparing 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's two biographies,⁹⁰ one can notice the level of rNying ma influence at that time both in the general populace and in the dGa' ldan pho brang government as well as 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's frustration with the sDe srid for supporting the rNying ma pa. Even the Italian Jesuit Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733) who befriended King Lha bzung Khan and witnessed the Dzungar invasion of Tibet, observed the high tension of jealousy and hatred that existed between what he calls the “yellow cap” and the “red cap”⁹¹ (referring to dGe lugs and rNying ma and other schools). In short, Lha bzung Khan and the dGe lugs purists had benefited each other. The former achieved his goal of becoming the absolute king of Tibet, and his swift victory over the sDe srid and Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho paved the way for the latter to present their agenda and started taking actions against the rNying ma influence in the dGa' ldan pho brang. These actions are described in the following sections.

*The Dzungar King Tshe dbang rab brtan's conquest of Tibet
and sGo mang bla ma Blo bzang phun tshogs' role
in the systematic campaign of rNying ma persecution*

When Lha bzung Khan became an absolute monarch in Tibet in 1705,

⁸⁹ dKon mchog 'jig med dbang po 1987, p. 85: *lar khong gis ri bo dge ldan pa rnams bka' drin tshad med pas bskyang dgos rgyu yin pa la | blang dor go bzlog nas rnying ma ngos la bdag rkyen gzengs bstod dpal thal ba mdzad pa ni | 'phral du brtag tshe dgos pa'i mchod rten nag por bzhag nas mi dgos pa'i brag la dbu dkar gsol zhes pa'i dper snang yang | phugs rnying dgon gog po rnams mi dmigs pa'i dbyings su rgyas 'debs pa'i rkyen drag shos shig 'bad pa'i sgo nas sgrub pa ltar 'dug go |.*

⁹⁰ As far as the two biographies of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson 'grus are concerned, the first is entitled as 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa yongs su brjod pa'i gtam du bya ba dad pa'i sgo 'byed ke ta ka'i 'phreng ba (also known as rNam thar btsan mo ma), written between 1722 and 1738 by his direct disciple Ngag dbang bkra shis (1678–1738). The second is entitled as Kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rnam thar bskal bzang 'jug ngog, written approximately in 1758 by the second 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa dKon mchog 'jig med dbang po (1728–1791). The narration of the first biography is far more explicit regarding controversial issues including sectarianism compared to the second biography. For more about the two biographies and their differences, see sNyan bzang g. Yung drung tshe ring 2022, <https://bodrigpa.org/archives/2130>.

⁹¹ Desideri 2014, p. 334. He also says: “While there are fewer red-cap monks than yellow caps, they are rather more esteemed and held in greater reverence everywhere in Tibet, perhaps because they are less worldly or because their behavior seems more edifying.”

in Dzungaria,⁹² Tshe dbang rab brtan had already become the king⁹³ in 1698. His connection with the Three Great Seats and with bKra shis lhun po was very close.⁹⁴ He was a conservative dGe lugs idealist who did not like sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and his association with the rNying ma school. Being surrounded by dGe lugs purists, he warned sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho to remove rNying ma practices from the rNam rgyal grwa tshang. As the rNying ma master Che mchog 'dus pa rtsal says:

Hong Taiji from the Dzungar sent a letter with the monk Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan as envoy: "For a lay leader (*mi nag dpon po*) like you [sDe srid], it is not appropriate to offer hand blessing to other Lamas. Do not do this. Do not sit above lamas, do not set up a rNying ma college in the Potala. If you listen to me, we will be on good terms. But if you do not, I will launch a military campaign [against you]. I [Che mchog 'dus pa rtsal] heard that Chos 'phel ja sang said: '[The Dzungars] prepared for a military expedition [to Tibet] and discussed the matter many times because the sDe srid did not listen [to them. However,] due to the excellence of the government's ritual, except on the King [Lha bzang Khang in 1717], they could not wage war [against the sDe srid].'⁹⁵

He was a patron of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and revered him. In 1705, sometime after the sDe srid was murdered and Lha bzang Khan raised the issue of whether or not Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho was a true incarnation of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Tshe dbang rab brtan's envoy came to meet 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and handed him the former's message, which agreed that Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho was not a real incarnation. Through sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs as an interpreter, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa sent many oral messages to King Tshe dbang rab brtan regarding loyalty to and protection of the teachings of Tsong kha pa, maintaining some level of secrecy.⁹⁶ Even ahead of the Dzungar's invasion of Tibet, Tshe dbang rab brtan's messenger came to see him in Amdo. Again, he sent a message to King Tshe dbang rab brtan concerning the allegiance to and safeguard of Tsong kha pa's teachings thus:

⁹² This place is located in today's Xinjiang.

⁹³ He became the King of Dzungars after the death of dGa' ldan Boshugtu Khan in 1698. For more about how Tshe dbang rab brtan became the King of Dzungar, see Perdue 2005, p. 210.

⁹⁴ bsTan 'dzin nyi ma 1977, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Darig Thokmay 2023, pp. 519-520.

⁹⁶ 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa ordered other monks to leave the room and had a secret discussion with the Dzungar messenger through *Bla ma* Blo bzang as his interpreter. See Ngag dbang bkra shis, p. 103a.

In the end of that autumn, [when] Dzungar El chi [Tshe dbang rab brtan's messenger] was returning to [Dzungaria], he [‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa] dispatched *Rab ‘byams pa* Blo bzang mkhas mchog [together] to greet Jo rug thu Hung tha’i thu [Tshe dbang rab brtan] with a message [which said:] “Great Ruler, you should think about the ways to promote the teachings of Lord Tsong kha pa as [you did] before. As an old *śramaṇa* (*dge sbyong*), I am also very eager to see you, the Noble Ruler. However, due to the unfinished works of the new monastery [establishment], I could not come this time. In the future, I will see if I can come as you wished.”⁹⁷

Considering the close connection between ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and Tshe dbang rab brtan, it is likely that ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, despite being a root teacher to Lha bzang Khan, was in the forefront of those monastics who ushered the Dzungar troops to Tibet.⁹⁸

Somehow responding to the new level of Chinese support for Lha bzang Khan and the aforementioned appeals from the dGe lugs clergy and sDe srid loyalists,⁹⁹ Tshe dbang rab brtan initiated a cunning strategy of marriage alliance between his daughter and Lha bzang Khan’s son¹⁰⁰ and then sent 6,000 cavalry under general Tshe ring don grub to Central Tibet and another 300 cavalry to Xining. The idea behind sending two groups of troops to two different locations was that the 300 cavalry men sent to Xining were to bring sKal bzang rgya mtsho, the claimant of the reincarnation of the Sixth Dalai Lama, from Amdo and then get together with the 6,000 troops at ‘Dam gzhung, to the north of Lhasa.

Thereafter, they planned to march to Lhasa with the Dalai Lama under their escort to show that they were the true protectors of the dGe

⁹⁷ Ngag dbang bkra shis, p. 167b: *ston mjug jun gar gyi el chi phyir ‘gro ba dang mnyam du rab ‘byams pa blo bzang mkhas mchog jo rug thu hung tha’i ji’i mdun du ‘tshams ‘dri zhu bar rdzongs sta mdzad de | sa skyong chen po nyid kyis sngar bzhin rje tsong kha pa’i bstan pa ‘phel rgyas kyi thabs thugs la ‘dogs dgos | dge sbyong rgan po bdag kyang sa skyong dam pa pa’i zhal dngos su mjal ‘dod che yang | dgon pa gsar ‘dzin gyi las ‘phro ma grub pas da lam yong ma thub kyang | slad nas thugs bzhed ltar yongs e thub lta zhes pa’i chab shog stsal |.*

⁹⁸ ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa might have lost faith in Lha bzang Khan because, according to Sum pa mkhan po (1982, pp. 45-46), he was secretly practicing rNying ma teachings. Furthermore, the way his biography narrated his regrets when he heard about the death of King Lha bzang Khan and his rejection of the troop support for Lhazang by the Kokonor chieftain Erdini Taiji, it is quite clear that ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa played a significant role in ushering Dzungar troops to Tibet. See dKon mchog ‘jigs med dbang po 1987, pp. 201, 206.

⁹⁹ According to Ha Zhang (1994, p. 88), the Dzungars invaded Tibet in order to take revenge for sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. However, Shakabpa does not agree with that: he points out that the Dzungar King Tshe dbang rab brtan never liked the sDe srid and criticized him many times. See Shakabpa 2010, p. 414.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 414-415.

lugs and its leaders.¹⁰¹ The 6,000 cavalry reached 'Dam gzhung on August 10th 1717, and faced off with Lha bzang Khan's force. At that time Tshe ring don grub heard that the mission sent to Xining was ambushed by the Qing force, but he kept it secret and spread the rumor that 300 troops had rescued the proclaimed reincarnation of the Sixth Dalai Lama.¹⁰²

After failing negotiations and indecisive battles for more than two months, Lha bzang Khan fled to Lhasa. The Dzungar force then marched on Lhasa in November 1717, capturing the city overnight with much destruction.¹⁰³

On December 3, 1717, Lha bzang Khan was killed, and Tshe ring don grub became the new master of the Tibetan people in dBus gtsang. To assert his authority, he commissioned several campaigns of a religious nature,¹⁰⁴ but the most significant was his systematic and nationwide attack on non-dGe lugs schools, primarily the rNying ma school. In communication with Khangxi, Tshe dbang rab brtan himself acknowledged the reason for his actions as follows:

Tsewang Rabdan himself, in letters written to the Qing emperor, claimed to share many of the same ideals. He too favoured peace in Tibet, and he had intervened in order to prevent heretical and immoral activities by the monks who were rivals to the Yellow Sect and to stop the oppressive actions of Lazang Khan. He had "destroyed the Red Sect, which deviated from the Way," and seized Lazang Khan's wife and children.¹⁰⁵

This indicates that it was a sectarian-driven persecution that targeted one particular denomination. But the key figure behind this campaign was a prominent dGe lugs purist and Dzungar ethnic sGo mang *Bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs. Sum pa *mkhan po* Ye shes dpal 'byor gives

¹⁰¹ Petech 1972, p. 35.

¹⁰² See. K. Dhondup 1984, p. 61.

¹⁰³ According to Petech (1972, pp. 35), the Dzungar General Tshe ring Don grub was devastated with the news of the failed mission to sKu 'bum to bring the claimant of the Seventh Dalai Lama to Lhasa. Hence without the Dalai Lama (the pawn they wanted to use as a justification for their invasion of Tibet), he could not count on the dGe lugs clergy and, out of the frustration, subjected Lhasa city to ransacking and fear. For more about the destruction and lootings that took place, see Desideri 2014, pp. 249.

¹⁰⁴ Apart from persecuting the rNying ma school, the Dzungars also destroyed some monasteries belonging to other schools, including Bon. See Petech 1972, p. 54. They also demanded the removal of the villages situated around the major dGe lugs monasteries such as bKra shis lhun po, Se ra, 'Bras spungs and dGa' ldan and proposed a single monastic code (*bca' yig*) for these monasteries. See Pañ chen Blo bzang ye shes 2014, Vol. 2, p. 50.

¹⁰⁵ Perdue 2005, p. 237.

us more details as follows:

Dzungar troops broke into Lhasa and defeated Lha bzang [Khan] and showed him the impermanent nature of life [i.e., they killed him]. The governor of sTag rtse named mTsho skyes rdo rje was appointed as the regent. Thereafter, following the oral order of the Dzungarian *Lha btsun, Bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs, the high rNying ma bla ma rDo rje brag *sprul sku* (*Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las) and others were killed in the year of Earth-Dog (1718) and in the year of Earth-Pig (1719). The Monastic College sKu zhabs grwa tshang rnam rgyal ling, rDo rje brag in the bSam yas Valley, sMin grol ling, and others were destroyed.¹⁰⁶

Relying on the statement of Sum pa *mkhan po*, Luciano Petech says:

He sent out summons to all provinces requesting the whole realm to pay homage to him. dBus seems to have been soon cowed into submission by systematic raids of Dzungar troops starting from Lhasa. The general policy that lay at the background of these raids was inspired by the sGo mang *Bla ma* Blo-bzan pun-tsoqs, it was a clear-cut programme of persecution of the Nying-ma-pa school of Lamaism.¹⁰⁷

These statements point out that the Dzungar general Tshe ring don grub was merely acting on the order of the high-ranking dGe lugs clergy and the sGo mang Seat Holder Blo bzang phun tshogs, whose immediate motive was to drive the influence of rNying ma out of the dGa' ldan pho brang political sphere. Ultimately, in ordering the assassination of important lineage holding rNying ma masters and the destruction of its prominent monasteries, he sought to obliterate the rNying ma.

It was a sectarian-driven persecution in the service of political ambition. In *Chos 'byung dpag bsam ljon bzang*, Sum pa *mkhan po* frankly states that the Dzungars purified and rectified the teachings of the Buddha and uplifted the teachings of Tsong kha pa.¹⁰⁸ Since sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs was a key person concerning the

¹⁰⁶ Ye shes dpal 'byor 1982, pp. 21-22: *jo'un gwar gyi dmag lha sar shor nas lha sar lha bzang pham par bgyis nas rgyal po la mi rtag pa'i rang bzhin bstan te | tag rtse'i sde ba mtsho skye rdo rje sde srid du bskos | de nas jo'un gwar pa lha btsun sgo mang bla ma blo bzang phun tshogs kyi ngag bkod ltar du | sa khyi dang sa phag lor rnying ma'i bla chen rdo rje brag sprul sku sogs bkrongs | dgal ldan pho brang gi sku phyogs grwa tshang rnam rgyal gling dang dang bsam yas gzhung gi rdo rje brag dang | smin grol gling sogs bshig_bstan pa dag ther byas nas dri ma can bsal |.*

¹⁰⁷ Petech 1972, p. 53.

¹⁰⁸ Ye shes dpal 'byor 1992, p. 904.

Dzungar's persecution of the rNying ma school, his actions and views (regarding rNying ma and the Fifth Dalai Lama) were implicated in several works of that century. Therefore, he is a person of interest in the scope of this paper.

According to Lkhagvasuren Dorji¹⁰⁹ and *The History of the sGo mang Seat Holders (sGo mang gdan rabs)*, he was a son of Puntasgraash (Phun tshogs bKra shis), the seventh son of Erdeni Batur Khuntaiji.¹¹⁰ Since he was from a royal family, he was called "Noyon Khamba" in Mongolian and *Lha btsun* (divine monk) in Tibetan. He was sent to Tibet as a young man and studied under 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa at sGo mang College. He became one of what is known as the "six *mktan po* prophesied by the All-knowing 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa."¹¹¹ Throughout his stay in Tibet (until 1719), he was one of the foremost disciples of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa who praised his strict observance of vows. It seems he became radicalized under the tutelage of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa at sGo mang College, becoming the Seat Holder of sGo mang College not long after 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa left for Amdo. In 1716, he represented Lha bzung Khan in a meeting at Kokonor and met again 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa there, ahead of the Dzungar invasion of Tibet. When the Dzungar troops arrived in Lhasa in late 1717, he was holding the sGo mang College seat.

Pho lha nas bSod nam stobs rgyas (1689–1747) referred to him as "sGo mang *bla ma*,"¹¹² the one who helped him to hide from the Dzungars invaders. According to his biography, Pho lha nas had two meetings with the sGo mang *bla ma* during the Dzungar occupation of Tibet. The subject of the conversation and tone of the first and second meetings were quite different. The first meeting took place in late 1717 and was more about personal relations, including friendship and care. However, in the second meeting, which happened in the middle or late 1719, Pho lha nas, perhaps knowing the influence of sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzung phun tshogs in connection to his role in the rNying ma persecution and his influence over the Dzungar generals, repeatedly appealed to him to treat all the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism equally. Pho lha nas enlightened him on the Fifth Dalai Lama's reasons to promote the rNying ma teachings as follows:

¹⁰⁹ Lkhagvasuren Dorji 2020, pp. 57-58.

¹¹⁰ He was a son of Khara Khula (d. 1634) and founder of the Dzungar empire. For more on Erdeni Batur Khuntaiji, see Lkhagvasuren Dorji 2020, pp. 24-37.

¹¹¹ Blo bzung shes rab, Blo bzung phun tshogs, Ngag dbang, Blo bzung dam chos, Blo bzung chos grags and Sangs rgyas rdo rje are known as the *Kun mkhyen 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i lung gis zin pai' mktan po drug*. See bsTan pa bstan 'dzin 2003, p. 86.

¹¹² Mdo mkhar ba Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, p. 303 and 333.

In order not to let the questioner's [i.e., *Bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs] mind fall into meaningless partialism, [Pho lha nas] told him beneficial and meaningful things for the sake of the teaching and for the benefit of migratory beings. Particularly, the Fifth [Dalai Lama], embodiment of the Noble Padmapāṇi who appeared in maroon robe and illuminated the essential teachings of the Great Secret Mantra [of the rNying ma school] for the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings. He understood the importance of this teaching. [He] should not view [him] negatively, or else many past noble [masters] would also be at fault and the All-knowing great scholar Blo bzang Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, who he considered and authentic [teacher] and his [spiritual] activities would also become unreliable.¹¹³

He further told him that if the Dzungars were to destroy the monasteries known as the Gling bcu gsum,¹¹⁴ then it would ruin the name and fame of the Dzungar king Tshe dbang rab brtan because those monasteries were established for the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings and were the ways for sentient beings to enter the stainless teachings of Tsong kha pa.¹¹⁵ Even if sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs was good to Pho lha nas personally, the latter knew, having witnessed the assassination of many rNying ma Lamas and the destruction of many monasteries at his order, that he was against the rNying ma teachings. But Pho lha nas still appealed to him to protect the Gling bcu gsum and remaining rNying ma monasteries if there were any.

Another piece of evidence of sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs's radical view of the rNying ma school is found in the statement of Rig 'dzin dPal ldan bkra shis (1688–1743),¹¹⁶ which gives the reason and circumstance under which he left sGo mang College and fled to

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 334: *dri ba pa'i blo'i 'dzin stangs don med pa'i phyogs ma lhung ba | bstan pa dang 'gro ba'i don du sman pa'i snying po can gyi gtam dag gsol zhing | khyad par yang 'phags pa lag na pad mo ngu smig gar gyis rnam par rol pa skyes pa rabs kyi phreng ba lnga par bstan pa de nyid kyis sems can thams cad la phan pa dang | bde legs su bya ba'i phyir gsang chen snying po'i bstan pa gsal bar mdzad cing | bstan pa'i gnad rnams kyang thugs su chud par mdzad pa la log par rtog pa mi rigs te | de ltar na sngon byon dam pa du ma nongs par 'gyur zhing | khyed cag gis tshad mar 'dzin pa'i gtso bo thams cad mkhyen pa mahā paṇḍita blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan de'i rnam par thar pa la'ang yid brton du mi rung bar 'gyur ro |.*

¹¹⁴ The Thirteen Monasteries (Gling bcu gsum), which include ten dGe lugs monasteries and three rNying ma monasteries, were established by the Fifth Dalai Lama between 1654–1682. For more on the Gling bcu gsum, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, p. 580.

¹¹⁵ Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, p. 335.

¹¹⁶ He was one of the disciples of Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las. For more, See Yangdon Dhondup, <https://treasuryoflives.org/bo/biographies/view/Pelden-Tashi/9254>.

Kham from central Tibet:

The external cause was that in the year of Fire-Bird [1717], harmful to both the teaching and the government, armies from the borderland came to [Lhasa] and destroyed the happiness of the entire Tibet. The internal cause was that the sGo mang Seat Holder (*sgo mang khri pa*), the Dzungar Blo bzang phun tshogs and the disciplinarian (*dge skos*) Klu bum bsTan pa yar 'phel not only held me as [their] foe, but they also perceived the supreme victor Padmasambhava and Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, the refuge of the snow land, all-knowing and supreme victor, as their enemy. The secret cause was that [I] had many disturbing dreams and signs. Therefore, in the end of the year of the Fire-Bird and at the beginning of the Earth-Dog year, [I] escaped from dBus to Khams.¹¹⁷

Likewise, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa predicted that sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs would have two dangers in his life. The first would not harm him, but he should flee when the second danger arose. The two dangers described in 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's biography refer to the Chinese expeditions sent to Tibet in 1718 and in 1720 to drive the Dzungars out. sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs said that he stayed in Lhasa during the first Chinese expedition, but fled to Dzungaria in 1719, ahead of the second expedition to Tibet led by Kangxi's son Yunti. Had he stayed in Lhasa then, he could have been one of those ethnic Dzungar monastics who were executed by the Qing force for their involvement in the Dzungar's invasion of Tibet and pillaging monasteries and the destruction of Lhasa city. Considering the above pieces of evidence, one can conclude that sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs was radicalized by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa ahead of Dzungar invasion and that like his master, he played a central role during the Dzungar invasion of Tibet, including instructing the Dzungar generals on what to do to protect Tsong kha pa's teaching.

¹¹⁷ lCe nag tsang Hum chen and Ye shes 'od zer sgrol ma 2002, pp. 13-14: *phyi rkyen me bya'i lor la bstan srid spyi la gnod pa'i mtha' dmag lud cing bod khams yongs kyi bde skyid bcom pa dang | nang rkyen sgo mang khri pa cung gar blo bzang phun tshogs dang dge skos klu 'bum bstan pa yar 'phel gnyis ni | nyams chung gyi na ba bdag gi dgra zlar mthong ba ci smos te rgyal dbang pad ma 'byung gnas dang gangs can mgon po rgyal dbang thams cad mkhyen pa ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho gnyis dgra zlar mthong drags pa dang | gsang rkyen rmi lam gyi 'tshub gyur sogs rkyen du mas lhongs pa la brten nas | gser 'phyang lo yi mjug ma dang | | sa khyi'i lo 'gor dgra byung ste | | dbus nas khams kyi phyogs su bros | | srin mo rdzong gi gnas su slebs | |.*

How the campaign of rNying ma persecution unfolded and the scale of its destruction

According to Sle lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje, on the twenty-first day of the eleventh month of the year of Fire-Bird [1717], Tshe ring don grub sent out a notice calling all Lamas and high-ranking officials to gather in Lhasa to hear Tshe dbang rab brtan's edict.¹¹⁸ Hence, Sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje came to Lhasa and witnessed the activities of the Dzungar generals and their armies, which included their plan to destroy rDo rje brag, sMin grol ling, and rNam rgyal grwa tshang. Many groups of Mongol armies led by generals such Chos 'phel Ja'i sang¹¹⁹ and others left Lhasa¹²⁰ venturing in different directions to bring rNying ma Lamas back to Lhasa. Concerning these dispatches of troops to different places, mDo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal (1697–1763)¹²¹ mentions who were sent to bring back rNying ma Lamas as follows:

Not long after, the Dzungar chieftains (generals) had a discussion and engaged in the action of harming the Essential Teachings (*snying po'i bstan pa*). They sent out Lha bzang Khan's minister Pak shi, together with some Mongols to bring the tutors (*yongs 'dzin*) from sMin grol ling. [At the same time] the noble lord Tha'i ji [Pho lha nas] and a Mongolian called Thos pa dga' were sent to [rDo rje brag] to bring the *vajra* holder [i.e., *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las*]. Likewise, the [Dzungar generals] sent messengers to every rNying ma monastery, wherever they were located.¹²²

¹¹⁸ bZhad pa'i rdo rje 2009, pp. 267-268.

¹¹⁹ According to bsTan pa'i sgron me (1992, pp. 2-6), previously gTer bdag gling pa was said to have given Chos 'phel Ja'i sang a "blessed pill" and told him that one day he will help his small monastery. Hence, though he was assigned to lead the Mongol party to destroy rDo rje brag, he chose to lead the party going to destroy sMin grol ling instead and did not come directly to the monastery. Instead, they put a tent outside the sMin grol ling monastery. At that time, a local chieftain deceived them with bears. This gave enough time for *rJe btsun Mi 'gyur* and others to flee from the monastery. The Mongols destroyed all the complex of the monastery except the gSang sngags pho brang complex.

¹²⁰ bZhad pa'i rdo rje mentions that all the Dzungar generals were in a happy mood for the imminent destruction of rDo rje brag and sMin grol ling. The Mongol parties sent out later proved to be those who brought rNying ma masters from the above monasteries. See bZhad pa'i rdo rje 2009, p. 268.

¹²¹ He was the author of acclaimed works such as *Mi dbang rtogs brjod*, *gZhon nu zla med kyi gtam rgyud* and *bKa' blon rtogs brjod*. As he was from an influential mDo mkhar family, he studied at sMin grol ling under Lo chen Dharmaśrī, and became the governor (*rdzong dpon*) of Zhi ka rtse. He served as a cabinet minister for over thirty-four years in the dGa' ldan pho brang during different regimes. For more about this figure, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, p. 1137.

¹²² Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, pp. 299-300: *ji tsam na jun gar pa'i gtso bo de dag bgros te snying po'i bstan pa la rma 'byin par byed pa'i sbyor ba la zhugs nas | lha bzang khang gi*

Pho lha nas knew that if they took the rDo rje brag *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las* to Lhasa, the Dzungars would harm him. Hence, he bribed the Mongol *Thos pa dga'*, who agreed to tell the General *Tshe ring don grub* that *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las* was sick and too old to come to Lhasa. When they returned to Lhasa without *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las*, *Tshe ring don grub* violently blamed Pho lha nas with harsh words.¹²³ On the sixteenth day of the eleventh month, *gDugs dkar ja'i sang* along with one hundred troops went to the Potala Palace and brought the monks of *rNam rgyal grwa tshang* to the river bank of *sKyid chu*, stripped them from their monastic robes and instructed them to stay at their respective villages. On the twenty-second day of the eleventh month, [the Dzungars] brought the head Lamas of *sMin grol ling*, *rDo rje brag*, many of the ministers of *Lha bzang Khan*, and monastics to Lhasa and imprisoned them at the *Phun tshogs rab brtan dpal 'jor* residence.¹²⁴

Pho lha nas was also imprisoned there and saw the lamas, monks, officials, and Mongols with hands and feet tied with ropes. *Lha bzang Khan* 's puppet, *Pad dkar 'dzin pa Ye she rgya mtsho* was also removed from the Sixth Dalai Lama's throne. Around that time, *Tshe ring don grub* and *Chos 'phel Ja'i sang* summoned *Sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje* and asked him many questions, such as whether *Padmasambhava* was an authentic teacher, and whether *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho* was a true incarnation of the Fourth Dalai Lama *Yon tan rgya mtsho* (1589–1617) or not. They told him that *sPrul sku Grags pa rgyal mtshan* was the true incarnation of the Fourth Dalai Lama in their country. In short, they tested the loyalty of *Sle lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje* to the teachings¹²⁵ of *Tsong kha pa*. Meanwhile Pho lha nas witnessed that the Dzungar prison guards were terrorizing *Lo chen Dharmaśrī* and his nephews¹²⁶ with harsh words and actions. At that time, *mNga' bdag Myang ston Rig 'dzin rgya mtsho*¹²⁷ defended them by stating that he oversaw and executed all those violent rituals

mdun na 'don pak+shi dang | mon gol kha cig 'og min smin grol gling gi yongs 'dzin rnam spyan 'dren par mngags | rje bo dam pa tha'i ji dang | mon gol thos pa dgar grags pa thub bstan rdo rje brag rdzong gi rdo rje 'dzin pa chen po spyan 'dren par mngags | gzhan yang snying po'i bstan pa gang dang gang du gnas pa de dang der mngags gzhus pa dag mngags par byas so | | .

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

¹²⁴ It was the residence of King *Lha bzang Khan*. For more, see *Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las* 2002, p. 1327.

¹²⁵ *Bailey* 2017, p. 51.

¹²⁶ *Pad ma 'gyur med rGya mtsho* and *Zhabs drung Yid bzhin legs grub* who were the eldest and youngest of the three sons of *gTer bdag gling pa*.

¹²⁷ He was one of the disciples of the *gTer bdag ling pa* who later became *ti shri* when Pho lha nas became the ruler of Tibet. See *Tshe ring dbang rgyal* 1981, p. 312.

against those who harmed the teachings and that all the Lamas were innocent because they only gave teaching transmissions and did not participate in the violent rituals.¹²⁸

As mentioned before, Dzungars were wary about the violent rNying ma rituals, and this was the reason or excuse for their persecution of the rNying ma school. At the meeting of all high-ranking Lamas and officials of dBus gtsang at the Potala on December 24, 1717, General Tshe ring don grub and others declared a law of nationwide ban of rNying ma teachings. They gave orders to the monasteries and the public to discard all rNying ma religious objects or symbols. Hence, the systematic persecution of the rNying ma was officially launched. In this campaign, they focused on the expulsion of the rNying ma pa from the dBus gtsang soil by executing the lineage-holding masters who were the backbone of rNying ma teachings, disrobing all the rNying ma monks and destroying the rNying ma monasteries, which were the center of rNying ma studies as shown by the following sequence of actions they took.

On the evening of December 24, 2017, they started the execution of rNying ma Lama Lo chen Dharmaśrī, *rDo rje 'dzin pa* Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, sMin grol gling scion Pad ma 'gyur med rgya mtsho,¹²⁹ bKra shis lhun po'i *gDung rgyud rin po che*, and others at the nearby Kyid chu river. Not long after, they executed some of Lha bzang Khan's prominent officials¹³⁰ and rNying ma masters such as rDo rje brag *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las, gNam ling *paṅ chen* dKon mchog chos grags (1646–1717),¹³¹ *gDung sras* Yid bzhin legs grub,¹³² treasurer Kun dga' tshul khrim. Following these executions of rNying ma masters, they kicked out rNying ma monks from their monasteries and destroyed the rNying ma monasteries located in dBus gtsang, starting with rDo rje brag, sMin grol ling,¹³³ dPal ri theg chen ling¹³⁴ Chu shul thar pa ling, and gSang sngags byang chub ling, and they

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹²⁹ He was born in 1686 and killed by Dzungars in 1718. For more information regarding his life and writings, see Thub bstan rgyal mtshan 1992, p. 310.

¹³⁰ Bu chung, dNgos gzhi ba, Pad ma tshe ring, rGyal rtse lchang lo can pa and others.

¹³¹ He was the younger brother of *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las and became a close attendant to the Fifth Dalai Lama. See *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las 2017, vol. 1, p. 212. For more about this figure see, Byams pa 'phrin las 2000, pp. 320–322.

¹³² Youngest son of gTer bdag ling pa.

¹³³ See bsTan pa'i sgron me 1992, pp. 5–6.

¹³⁴ It was established by *gTer ston* Shes rab 'od zer (1518–1584) with the support of 'Phyongs rgyas ruler *Hor bSod* nams stobs rgyal. It used to be the largest rNying ma monastery in central Tibet predating rDo rje brag and sMin grol ling. For more regarding the Dzungar's destruction of this monastery, see Kun mkhyen 'Jigs med ling pa 1970, pp. 268–282.

closed the caves attributed to Padmasambhava.¹³⁵ They tried to destroy bSam yas Monastery and the Gling bcu gsum. mDo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal summarized the Dzungar's action in Tibet in the following words:

In the land of Tibet, the Dzungar military force harmed the teachings of [the Buddha] and killed many masters. They also took the lives of many individuals, who were the descendants of the kings in dBus and gTsang without any fault. Their food and beverage were [snatched]. In short, they levied many extra, new taxes which include horses and good grass [food for horse]; they tormented the public and did not allow them to have a happy [life for] even a moment.¹³⁶

Concerning the persecution of the rNying ma school by the Dzungars, Ippolito Desideri captured the status of this persecution in the followings passage:

They shed the blood of a great number of lamas and monks of the second order together with their richest and more powerful relations, their supporters, and those who had protected their goods. They confiscated all their wealth, seized their manors, sacked their palaces, destroyed many of their monasteries and temples, totally demolishing some of them, converting others into stables, stripping others bare. They broke all of the statues and most assiduously sought and burned all of the images and books of Urgyen and strictly forbade the Tibetans under penalty of death from keeping or preserving any of his statues, books, or image, reciting any prayers to him, or invoking him in any way, or even to merely pronounce his name.¹³⁷

The above passage gives a rough sketch of the scale of the destructions that the Dzungars brought on the rNying ma school, but there are no reliable government statistics or figures indicating how many monks were killed, how many monasteries were destroyed, how many

¹³⁵ According to mDo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal (1981, p. 324), when Pho lha nas left Lhasa and visited Padmasambhava's cave situated at Chu bo ri in Lho kha region, workers were closing the cave.

¹³⁶ Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, pp. 379: *Bod yul 'dir jun gar pa'i dpung tshogs kyis bstan pa la rma 'byin par byas shing | yongs kyi dge ba'i bshes gnyen du ma'ang ming gi lhag mar byas | yul dbus dang gtsang ljongs kyi rje bo'i rigs las byung ba'i skye bo nyes med du ma srog dang phral | de dag gi bza' ba dang btung ba dang mdor na bzhon pa'i rta dang zas rtswa' jam bsdu ba yan chad kyi dpya khral gzar bu du mas gtse te 'bangs rnams skad gcig kyang bde ba'i go skabs bral bar byas |.*

¹³⁷ Ippolito Desideri 2014, p. 337.

religious articles such as scriptures¹³⁸ and artefacts were destroyed, or how much wealth was looted from rNying ma monasteries and transported to Dzungaria or donated to dGe lugs monasteries. As an example indicating the scale of the destruction of rNying ma monasteries, rDo rje brag monastery was said to have over 2500 monks in its heyday. It had many temples¹³⁹ within the monastery compound with lavish murals and many scriptures, including the *bKa' 'gyur* and *bsTan 'gyur* as well as the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* collections and treasure teachings. Similarly, sMin grol ling, at the time of the Dzungar invasion, had over 300 monks¹⁴⁰ residing at the monastery, as well as many temples¹⁴¹ and an 84-column prayer hall.

According to mDo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal, the Dzungars destroyed or disbanded over 550 rNying ma monasteries during their three-year occupation of Tibet.¹⁴² Around the middle of 1719, Pho lha nas and Khang chen nas bSod nams rgyal po¹⁴³ led a resistance movement against the Dzungar occupation of Tibet. They gained full control over the gTsang region up to the Gam pa mountain pass. During this period, over 250 rNying ma monasteries and lay practitioners' communities were restored in gTsang. The monks and lay practitioners could gather at their former monasteries and continue their Dharma activities like before.¹⁴⁴ However, according to *Rab 'byams pa* O rgyan chos grags¹⁴⁵ and *gDung sras* Rin chen nam rgyal,¹⁴⁶ who were the witnesses and the survivors of the persecution, all the rNying ma monasteries of dBus gtsang were destroyed. Similarly, the dGe lugs scholar Sum pa *mkhan po* also mentioned that the Dzungars honored the dGe lugs teachings by destroying all the

¹³⁸ According to Brag mkhar rta so Chos kyi dbang phyugs (2011, Vol. *da*, p. 481), rDo rje brag *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las created a *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. However, it was destroyed during the Dzungar's destruction of rDo rje brag monastery.

¹³⁹ Rig dzin lha khang, Nyi 'od lha khang, Bla ma lha khang, mTshan brgyad lha khang, gZim chung chos dbyings pho brang, Rag sku lha khang, gTsang khang chen mo and mGon khang srid gsum rnam rgyal. See Kun bzang 'gro 'dul rdo rje 2004, p. 11-13.

¹⁴⁰ Rab byams pa O rgyan chos grags 2013, p. 226.

¹⁴¹ gTsug lag khang, gSang sngags pho brang, Bla brang chos 'khor lhun po, rNam rgyal pho brang, dPal chen lha khang, gZhal yas lha khang, Bla ma lha khang and monk's quarters and many stūpas.

¹⁴² Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, p. 400.

¹⁴³ J. Arya Moallem, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Kangchenne-Sonam-Gyelpo/TBRC_P2LS185.

¹⁴⁴ Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, p. 380.

¹⁴⁵ *Rab 'byams pa* O rgyan chos grags 2013, p. 229.

¹⁴⁶ sPrang btsun mang ga la 2013, p. 16.

rNying ma monasteries.¹⁴⁷ Supposing that the figures regarding the Dzungar destruction of rNying ma monasteries, which was given by mDo mkhar Tshering dbang rgyal, is factual, then we can assume that they there were roughly 550 rNying ma monasteries in dBus gtsang at that time. It can therefore be considered that the Dzungar's persecution was an attempt to eradicate rNying ma culture.

The Dzungars also imposed strict laws that restricted monks' gatherings and movement. We can notice the dire situations of rNying ma monastics in the following words of *gDung sras* Rin chen rnam rgyal:

From now onward [you] shall not assemble more than two,
 Except for indulging in non-religious things [such as] women
 and beer,
 If you do anything that is virtuous and for [your] teachings,
 [Your] life will be harmed, [thus they] declared the law.
 Pointing [their] fearsome swords and spears,
 [They] scattered the three-vow-observing monastic communities
 resembling a maroon horizon descended on the earth,
 in all directions.¹⁴⁸

In connection to the above lines, Sle lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje observes:

As soon as the Dzungar troops broke into Lhasa, the lay people cut their hair and took refuge in lay attire. But since the destruction of monastic colleges (*grwa tshang*), even the monastics took refuge in lay attire because monastics who wore good robes were stopped and frisked. Such paradoxical situations occurred.¹⁴⁹

When *gDung sras* Rin chen rnam rgyal fled to Khams through the border regions of Bhutan and Kong po in 1717, he witnessed the high level of restriction in the rNying ma monasteries in the bordering regions. Many of the monks were in lay clothes. The officials from the Lhasa government led by the Dzungars were inspecting rNying ma monasteries. The commoners he met on the way spoke of disowning

¹⁴⁷ Ye shes dpal 'byor 1992, p. 904.

¹⁴⁸ sPrang btsun mang ga la 2013, p. 16: *phyin chad khyod rnams gnyis tshun sdebs mi rung | | chos min bya ba nag chang bag med las | | bstan la dge ba'i bya ba byas srid tshe | | rang rang srog la rgol ba'i lung bsgrags te | | mda' mdung mtshon cha 'jigs pa'i 'phang brteg gis | | ngur smig mtshams sprin sa la lhung 'dra ba'i | | gsum ldan 'dus pa'i tshogs rnams phyogs su gtor | |*

¹⁴⁹ bZhad pa'i rdo rje 2009, p. 273: *sbyong dmag rnams lha sar shor ma thag pa'i skabs su mi nag rnams kyang skra bregs te ban chas la skyabs su re ba dang | grwa tshang gtor dus nas bzung ste zhag shas kyi bar du grwa chas legs pa gang yin la bzung 'chang dang bkag sdom byas par brten grwa pa rnams kyang mi nag gi chas la re dgos pa sogs go ldog gi 'gyur dul shin tu che ba'i skabs su 'dug |*

sMin grol ling for fear of the Dzungar's persecution. Likewise, far-reaching control of rNying ma monasteries and search parties dispatched by the Dzungar-led government in Lhasa are reported in *rJe btsun Mi 'gyur dPal sgron's* biography.¹⁵⁰ Thus, due to the Dzungar's regime and its persecution of the rNying ma school in central Tibet, many prominent rNying ma Lamas from Central Tibet, which include *gDung sras* Rin chen rnam rgyal, *rJe btsun Mi 'gyur dPal sgron*, *Rig 'dzin* Ngag dbang bkra shis, and Chos rje gling pa fled to bordering regions such as Sikkim, Khams, and Pad ma bkod.

Conclusion

The root cause of Dzungar's persecution of the rNying ma school lies in the zealous support for this school by the highest authority of the dGa' ldan pho brang governments—the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. The two figures uplifted the rNying ma school with their material support for the monasteries, notably sMin grol ling and rDo rje brag and their seat holders—gTer bdag ling pa and *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las. However, their personal interest in the rNying ma teachings and support for the monasteries also planted the seed for the future Dzungar's persecution of the entire rNying ma school and its adherents in dBus and gTsang. The Dzungar generals and their king Tshe dbang rab brtan, ostensibly claimed that their mission to Tibet was to rectify the impure teachings (non-dGe lugs schools) and safeguard the teachings of Tsong kha pa. Yet, their real motive and goal was political—conquering new territories and expanding their sphere of influence in Tibet against the ever-expanding Qing empire and its influence in Tibet.

The success of Dzungar's mission to Tibet depended solely on the dGe lugs clergy of the Three Great Seats. Without their assistance, the Dzungars, first of all, would not have come to Tibet, less likely to conquer it. Among this dGe lugs clergy, there were a few fundamentalists who wanted to drive out the rNying ma influence from the dGa' ldan pho brang's political sphere and assert their dominance and authority. Therefore, the imperialist Dzungars and the dGe lugs purists were in mutual dependency in their quest for political gains, which means that the Dzungar generals had no choice but to listen and act on the orders of those purist dGe lugs partisans. In short, the Dzungar's campaign against the rNying ma school was an act of religious sectarianism combined with political ambition.

Even after the Dzungar's exit from Tibet, many rNying ma monasteries such as sMin grol ling and rDo rje brag, though restored

¹⁵⁰ 'Khyung po ras pa 'Gyur med 'od gsal 2013, pp. 229-231.

modestly, could not revive to their former glories due to the continued political repression of this school by Khang chen nas bSod nams rgyal po's (r. 1721–1727) regime.

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