

On the Historical Background of a Buddhist Polemical Exchange between Tibetan and Mongolian Scholars in the 19th Century

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This study attempts to shed a light on the historical background of a particular series of Buddhist textual polemical exchanges that took place in the nineteenth century among some Amdo-Tibetan and Mongolian dGe lugs scholars. Keeping in mind the focus of my larger project, I intend elsewhere to explore the importance of philosophical aspects of this polemical exchange.¹ Here, discussing the historical background and sociopolitical context of the time during which the polemicists were writing their works, I attempt to explore the mundane motivations of the authors involved and the shared characteristics of the ways in which they exchanged their works. I find such an attempt to be intrinsically a fascinating project for many reasons related to the historical time frame in connection with the geographical framework. The scholars involved in this polemical debate represented Yeke Kūriy-e,² a.k.a. Uрга, the largest central monastic seat in Qalq-a (Khalkha) Mongolia, on the one hand, and Bla brang Monastery, the biggest dGe lugs monastery in Tibetan Amdo region, on the other, whereas the textual basis of the dispute was a Buddhist commentarial exegesis composed by a Central Tibetan dGe lugs writer.

¹ In the current work, I have intentionally avoided discussions of the philosophical and/or Buddhist theological aspects of the polemics, since I am planning to discuss these aspects extensively and in more depth in a future work.

² “Yeke Kūriy-e” is the transliteration of the classical Mongolian spelling for “Th Hüree,” or “Ikh Khüree.” “Yeke Kūriy-e” is nowadays probably more frequently used following the modern Mongolian Romanisation system of the Khalkha dialect. In this article, due to the phonetic varieties of different Mongol dialects, I mostly use the transliterations of the classical Mongolian spellings for names of Mongolian institutions and individuals, providing their alternative transliteration in parentheses at their first occurrences. This practice excludes few instances such as “Chinggis Khaan” and “Zanabazar,” whose classical Mongolian transliterations otherwise would look exceptionally awkward against the more wide-spread and common spelling of these names.

1. Introduction to the Polemics

ICang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717–1786), a Tibetanised ethnic Mongolian or Monguor well-educated Buddhist teacher, who served the Qianlong Emperor (1711–1799) of the Manchu Qing Dynasty in China as a chief administrative lama in Beijing, was evidently one of the most important Buddhist leaders of his time. This was due to his religious and even political influences in the court, especially its policies toward Mongolian and Tibetan affairs.³ It is noteworthy that Rol pa'i rdo rje, in addition to his tremendous intellectual training in the Qing court, was recognised as the third emanation of the ICang skya Qutuγtu (Khutugtu)⁴ lineage, a reincarnation lineage that may have been used by the Manchu rulers in Inner Mongolia to mirror the Qalq-a Mongolian Jebtsundamba (rJe btsun dam pa) institution. He composed a short but influential work in the genre of spiritual songs (*mgur*), namely *A Song on the Profound View, Recognising the Mother* (*lTa ba'i gsung mgur zab mo a ma ngos 'dzin*).⁵

Among a number of commentaries on this text, the one by the Second 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po (1728–1791) is significant for a historical analysis of this polemic,⁶ because of his close association to Bla brang Monastery which is the home institution of polemicists who represent the first instigators of the debate. dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po was recognised as the subsequent reincarnation of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje Ngag dbang brtson grus (1648–1721/2) or simply the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, who is none other than the founder of Bla brang Monastery.⁷ He composed the commentarial exegesis from a *sūtra* point of view in accordance with an exoteric Madhyamaka interpretation.

Later, his younger contemporary Blo bzang bstan pa rab rgyas (1759–1815), the Second Rwa sgreng sprul sku, composed another commentarial exegesis, titled *A Commentary of the Song on the View, the Sun Which Makes the Fortunate Lotus Blossom* (*lTa ba'i nyams mgur 'grel ba skal ldan padmo bzhad pa'i nyin byed*).⁸ This latter text (henceforth, *The Sun*) was written from a *tantric* perspective in

³ For details of his biography, see Thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma 1989.

⁴ *Qutuγtu* in Mongolian literally means *ārya* or noble one, but a *qutuγtu* commonly refers to a high ranking reincarnated lama, in much the same way as *rin po che* in Tibetan.

⁵ See Rol pa'i rdo rje 2003: 385–90.

⁶ The title of the text is *A Commentary of the Song on the View, the Lamp of Words* (*lTa ba'i gsungs mgur gyi 'grel pa tshig gi sgron me*); dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po 1999: 1a–11b.

⁷ For detailed accounts of the First 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's biography, see [Kun mkhyen] dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po 1991.

⁸ See Blo bzang ye shes bstan pa rab rgyas 1985: 121–44.

accordance with an esoteric Buddhist interpretation, and it became the basis for the polemical exchanges that I would like to explore. Involvement of the Rwa sgreng sprul sku in the debate is also politically important because he was believed to be the subsequent reincarnation of the famous Rwa sgreng Ngag dbang mchog ldan (1677–1751), who was reportedly a direct disciple of the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and was the Fifty-fourth dGa' ldan khri pa as well as a tutor to the Seventh Dalai Lama sKal bzang rgya mtsho (1708–1757). The Qing court also recognised Blo bzang bstan pa rab rgyas's reputation, and the Qianlong Emperor bestowed upon him an honorary title, *Achi-tu Nom-un Qan (Khan)*.⁹ Moreover, Blo bzang bstan pa rab rgyas became an influential religious figure in Central Tibet in his own right and was appointed by the Eighth Dalai Lama 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho (1758–1804) to be a tutor to the next lCang skya Qutuγtu, Ye shes bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1787–1846).

A textual critique of the Rwa sgreng sprul sku's commentary is said to have come out of Bla brang, initiating the polemics, but this text, whose author(s) perhaps had purposely hid his (or their) name(s), has not been located. We are only able to infer its existence from later works that mention and quote it: for example, a rebuttal to it titled *A Reply to the Refutation, the Magical Wheel of Fire (dGag lan me'i 'khrul 'khor)*.¹⁰ This latter text was composed by Ayvangqayidub, a.k.a. Ngag dbang mkhas grub (1779–1838), a well-known Qalq-a Mongolian scholar and an abbot of Yeke Kūriy-e. In response to this, dBal mang dKon mchog rgyal mtshan (1764–1853), a famous A mdo-Tibetan scholar and an abbot of Bla brang, attacked Ayvangqayidub with his polemical work, *A Reply to the Refutation, the Enjoyment Ocean of Compassion (dGag lan snying rje'i rol mtsho)*.¹¹ With his *Further Objection to the Reply, a Roar of the Elephant that Guards the Quarter (Yang lan phyogs kyi glang po'i ngar skad)*,¹² Ayvangqayidub also responded to dBal mang's reply. An oral tradition claims that later scholars continued this debate throughout subsequent generations, exchanging further polemical writings.

Religious Studies scholars tend to seek a sociopolitical underpinning to philosophical/theological debates, especially those which took place between religious institutions. As a student of religion, I also implement this approach in the current study. Were

⁹ Mi nyag mgon po 1996–2000: 575. *Achi-tu Nom-un Qan* is a religious title in Mongolian language, meaning *A Kind Dharma-king*. A detailed hagiography of Blo bzang bstan pa rab rgyas was composed by Blo bzang 'phrin las nram rgyal (18th–19th century) in 1818/9; see the entry under this name in the bibliography.

¹⁰ See Ngag dbang mkhas grub 1972–1974b: 423–504.

¹¹ See dKon mchog rgyal mtshan 1974a: 1–215.

¹² See Ngag dbang mkhas grub 19th or 20th century.

there any political motivations, perhaps based on ethnic identities, to carry out such debates between the two monastic centres? Before I present my hypothesis, I would like to elucidate briefly the political conditions in Tibet and its neighbouring nations at the time of the debate.

By the late seventeenth century, the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682), a.k.a. the Great Fifth, had gained victory over other political powers in Tibet, with some Mongol support. The dGe lugs tradition of Tibetan Buddhism then successfully dominated in Central Tibet, as well as most other Tibetan cultural areas conquered by its Mongol benefactors. Tāranātha Kun dga' snying po (1575–1634), of whom the Great Fifth had become a political opponent, was prosecuted and exiled to the north—specifically to A mdo. At the same time, the dGe lugs school also pursued its expansionist policy towards the north by successfully converting Mongol lords as well as cultivating Manchu political allies. The Great Fifth was destined to have two remarkable younger associates, among many others, to take up once again the expansion of the dGe lugs church: (1) Zanabazar Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1635–1723), who was born in an important Mongolian royal family among the “golden-lineage” descendants of Chinggis Khaan (Genghis Khan, Činggis Qayan; c.1162–1227) and was recognised as the Jebtsundamba Lama, and (2) 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje Ngag dbang brtson grus, who was a great A mdo-born scholar, later recognised as the first of the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa incarnations. These two men shared similar personal histories. Both came from relatively isolated areas far from Central Tibet, which was the intellectual centre of the dGe lugs scholastic tradition; both spent time studying in lHa sa close to the Dalai Lama, who gave them special teachings, instructions, and empowerments and who, thereby, became their spiritual and intellectual guide. Both were awarded distinctive high-ranking titles from the Dalai Lama's institution, and finally returned, or were sent back, to their respective native regions in order to propagate the Buddhist dharma in its “dGe lugs” dispensation. Their individual biographies also suggest that each of them was exceptionally charismatic, smart, and a naturally talented leader. In addition to these shared “this-worldly” qualities, some traditional Tibetan sources also mention that they were considered to be two of the three prophesised immediate “emanations” of the famous Tāranātha. The third emanation, interestingly enough, was the Great Fifth's own regent sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–

1705), one of the most famous figures in Tibetan history.¹³ It is also not impossible that the “other-worldly” belief in these figures as emanations of Tāranātha was propagated by, or at least known to, the then dGe lugs administrators. If that is the case, the dGa’ ldan pho brang, perhaps considering Tāranātha’s enduring posthumous fame among Tibetans and Mongols, may have assured that all his “emanations” become contained within the dGe lugs system, particularly in the most inner circle of the Dalai Lama.

2. *Yeke Kūriy-e Monastic Seat*

The transformation of Qalq-a Mongolians from “horse-riding ferocious warriors” to devoted dGe lugs pa supporters began when the Third Dalai Lama bSod nams rgya mtsho (1543–1588) converted the leading Qalq-a prince Abatai Qan (Abtai Khan; 1534–1589) to his order. Then in 1639, Abatai Qan’s four year old grandson, Zanabazar, was recognised by both the Great Fifth and the Panchen Lama Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1570–1662) as the Jebtsundamba Lama, which later became the reincarnation lineage of the most important Mongolian *qutuytu* lama.¹⁴ Zanabazar was then enthroned as an incarnation of the dGe lugs tradition in Mongolia. Subsequently, Qalq-a aristocrats built a portable seat for their new religious leader, initiating the establishment of the future Yeke Kūriy-e, the monastic residence of the Jebtsundambas. In its early years, this seat was named “Örgüge,” better known as Urga.¹⁵ The young Zanabazar was sent to Central Tibet to meet the Dalai and Panchen Lamas and ultimately to study the dharma as a Buddhist leader. Later, he was recognised to be the subsequent reincarnation of Tāranātha by the dGe lugs administrators. Perhaps taking the fame of the late Tāranātha among believers into account, the dGe lugs church may have intended to control the reincarnation lineage of its political opponent within its frame.

Zanabazar returned from Tibet with a number of experts who specialised in various traditional sciences and technologies. With their help, he dedicated his life to establishing Buddhism in general, and dGe lugs monasticism in particular, on Mongolian soil. Within a few years, he and his followers successfully founded several

¹³ This account is mentioned in a contemporary Jonang booklet on Tāranātha’s reincarnation lineage published by the Jonang Monastery Takten Puntsokling in India. Yet, the actual source needs to be located (presumably in Tāranātha’s prophecies in Takten Damchöling).

¹⁴ For details of Zanabazar’s biography, see Bareja-Starzynska 2015.

¹⁵ For details of Urga’s establishment and its development, see Teleki 2011.

monasteries throughout Qalq-a. However, there was, for example, no Buddhist philosophy college (*mtshan nyid grwa tshang*) until the time of the Second Jebtsundamba (1724–1757). As a result, with a few exceptions, institutionalised scholastic Buddhism was not a reality in Qalq-a until 1778, the year in which Yeke Kūriy-e changed from a portable monastery into a permanent residential monastic seat. There seem to be good reasons why it took a relatively long time for a mature intellectual centre to be formed in Mongolia. First, because of a lack of educated teachers, it may have required some amount of time for sophisticated philosophical training to flourish there. In the early years of the dGe lugs dissemination in Qalq-a Mongolia, many young talented Mongols were recognised as reincarnated *qutuytu* lamas by the Dalai Lama. These Mongols especially included royal princes from within Chinggis Khaan's "golden lineage," for instance Zanabazar himself and other important figures such as Lama Gegegen Blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan (1639–1704), Zaya Paṇḍita Blo bzang 'phrin las (1642–1708/15) and many more. They studied Buddhist teachings in lHa sa, making master-student relationships with the Dalai and Panchen Lamas and other leading dGe lugs religious figures. When they returned to Qalq-a from Tibet, almost every one of these figures sought to establish his own monastic seat in Qalq-a, with local support. Consequently, within a short period of time, the Mongol *qutuytus* founded several dGe lugs monasteries throughout the Qalq-a territories. However, at this initial stage, the monasteries still lacked sufficient teachers who had thoroughly completed their studies in the dGe lugs curricula of the Central Tibetan large monastic institutions, which normally take decades. Second, at this time, the model of an institutionalised centre of study for monastic training was likely a new phenomenon for the Mongols. They were temporally not very far removed from their traditional ancestors, who worshipped the eternal *tengri* heaven. For them, a more tantric style of Buddhism, rather than "exhaustively" philosophised, exoteric Buddhism, was perhaps easier and more natural to adopt. This is indicated by the fact that early Mongolian dGe lugs scholars mostly wrote various *sādhana*s of different Buddhist tantric deities rather than commentaries—for example, on the Perfection of Wisdom, the Middle Way, or Buddhist logic and epistemology.¹⁶ Among the compositions of the Mongols during this period, there is a noticeably smaller percentage of works dedicated to philosophical training, even those which belong to the genre of the

¹⁶ The list of the titles of many Buddhist works written by Mongolian scholars from the 17th to the early part of the 20th century can be found in Mi rigs dpe mdzod khang 1984–1997. Also, for a partial list, see Ragchaa 2004.

stages of path and mind training, than the percentage of works dedicated to the same subject by subsequent generations up to the early 20th century.

However, at the turn of the nineteenth century Yeke Kūriy-e started to produce well-trained Buddhist scholars on Mongolian soil, in addition to the educated lamas of Mongol origin who studied in Tibetan monastic seats. In fact, this century can be seen as a “golden age” for scholastic Buddhism in Mongolia, since many great Yeke Kūriy-e scholars—such as those known as the five Aṅvangs or Ngag dbangs of Yeke Kūriy-e—composed numerous important works that contributed to dGe lugs scholasticism during this time.¹⁷ For example, a particularly well-known Aṅvang of the five Aṅvangs was the famous Aṅvangbaldan, or Ngag dbang dpal ldan (1797–1864?). He wrote probably the longest Buddhist text within the genre of doxography, titled *An Annotated Commentary of the Great Exposition on Philosophical Tenets* (*Grub mtha' chen mo'i mchan 'grel*). Another well-known scholar of that time was Brayri Damcīydorji, a.k.a. Brag ri Dam tshig rdo rje (1781–1855), whose works remain famous in Tibetan monastic seats even to this day. Early Qalq-a Mongol *qutuytus*, who were mostly born in royal families of Chinggis Khaan's lineage, were educated in Central Tibet under the Dalai and Panchen Lamas and returned primarily to propagate dGe lugs Buddhism in Mongolian soil. Yet, evidently they wrote significantly few philosophical works. In contrast, unlike their predecessor *qutuytus*, the new generation of Qalq-a scholars of the nineteenth century, who were not necessarily from loyal families nor had special privileges, started to produce many highly sophisticated writings on the most profound Buddhist philosophical views, including those of the most specific points of Buddhist epistemology and Madhyamaka doctrine.

It is tempting to speculate that the creation of the stationary Yeke Kūriy-e, and to some extent the foundation of other stable dGe lugs monasteries in Mongolia and A mdo, reveals an intention to imitate the three main monastic seats and two tantric colleges in lHa sa — dGa' ldan, 'Bras spungs, and Se ra, and rGyud smad and rGyud stod—incorporating both exoteric and esoteric studies into one large monastic seat. For example, the main assembly hall or the Tshogs chen Temple of Yeke Kūriy-e was named Gandanśaddubling, or dGa' ldan bshad sgrub gling. This implies that its administrative centre was like dGa' ldan, which could refer to dGa' ldan Monastery, the residence of the dGa' ldan khri pa, the nominal head of the dGe lugs

¹⁷ At least two of the five Aṅvangs—Aṅvangqayidub and Aṅvangdorji—said to be directly involved in the polemics that is being discussed here. The other three Aṅvangs are Aṅvangbaldan, Aṅvangtūbten, and Aṅvangdondub (all 19th century).

tradition, and/or refer to the dGa' ldan pho brang of 'Bras spungs Monastery, the central political institution of the Dalai Lama. The curricula of older two philosophy colleges in Yeke Küriy-e gradually came to resemble those of the two main colleges of 'Bras spungs Monastery of lHa sa, following their respective textbooks, pedagogies, and other regulations. The third and newest philosophy college was later founded in line with the regulations of Byes College at Se ra Monastery. Other institutions within Yeke Küriy-e seem to resemble their lHa sa originals, such as the tantric college, Kālacakra College, medical college, oracle temple, certain shrines, printing houses, and many more.¹⁸ This is also true of many other dGe lugs monasteries in Mongolia and A mdo. In short, by the nineteenth century, the Mongolian Yeke Küriy-e may have had a clear and ambitious vision for its future: to become a second dGe lugs centre of learning, this time in the northern region of the Qing Dynasty, and perhaps competing with lHa sa to some extent. However, I would not argue that such competition, at least its initial stage, had a political motivation in a literal sense. Rather, the intention seems to have been to attract Mongolian students and patrons and ultimately gain the support from the Qing court.

3. *Bla brang Monastery*

Whereas we can see a gradual development of scholastic monasticism at Yeke Küriy-e, it developed very differently at Bla brang. The 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, as a prominently sophisticated scholar in his own right, intended to found Bla brang bKra shis 'khyil in 1709 as a monastic university, at least primarily, and to propagate dGe lugs ideology right at the meeting point of different cultural and political realms—Chinese, Tibetan, Muslim, Mongolian, and many more minor ethnic groups.¹⁹ So, from the time of its establishment, as the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa envisioned, Bla brang has never been short of learned scholars. This includes even during the hardest times of its history, such as its temporary closures due to the early twentieth-century Muslim invasion, and later the Cultural Revolution of the People's Republic of China during the 1960s and 1970s. In Bla brang, the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa possessed a highly educated retinue of disciples originally from A mdo and trained in lHa sa under him and other great scholars. Such disciples include Gung thang dGe 'dun phun tshogs (1648–1724), sDe khri Blo bzang don

¹⁸ A short yet useful illustration of the units of Yeke Küriy-e is found in Ölzii 1999.

¹⁹ For details of Bla brang's establishment and its development, see Nietupski 2011.

grub (1673–1746), and bSe tshang Ngag dbang bkra shis (1678–1738). Bla brang was originally established in imitation of 'Bras spungs Monastery in lHa sa (of course excluding philosophy colleges other than sGo mang). Its curricula and pedagogies especially resemble 'Bras spungs sGo mang College for its exoteric studies and rGyud smad College for its esoteric training, since the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa maintained a special connection with those colleges in lHa sa. In return, sGo mang College adopted many of the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's *yig chas*, or textbook manuals, for its training program.²⁰

Nevertheless, it would be naïve and mistaken to think that the motivation to establish Bla brang was purely religious or scholastic. In fact, Bla brang's establishment seems to have essentially been caused by the concurrent political environment in Central Tibet. So what was happening in Central Tibet at the time of the establishment of Bla brang? The Great Fifth died in 1682, but his regent, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho decided to keep the Dalai Lama's death a secret for fifteen years, probably due to the critical circumstances of Tibet and its powerful neighbours at the time. Over the course of this period, the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa became a moderately influential political figure in the lHa sa area, and eventually served as the abbot of sGo mang College at 'Bras spungs from 1700–1708. So it is hard to believe that, as a close attendant of the Dalai Lama and later as an abbot of one of the most important religious and political institutions of lHa sa, he was not aware of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's deception for this entire time.

In 1697, when the Sixth Dalai Lama Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho (1683–1706) was enthroned by the regent and received novice ordination from the Panchen Lama Blo bzang ye shes (1663–1737) at bKra shis lhun po, the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa formally participated in the ceremony. In 1702, when Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho refused the precepts of a celibate monk along with his position as a Dalai Lama, the Qoshud Mongol prince Lhabsang, or lHa bzang Khan (d. 1717), who was already enraged by the deception, blamed the regent for all the chaos.²¹ sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, learning Lhabsang's strong opposition, attempted to murder the latter at least twice. However, each time the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa managed to stop the sDe srid's plans. Eventually, Lhabsang ended up executing Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (in 1705). He also sent Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho to the imperial court, and became the next ruler through the support of the Manchu Kangxi Emperor (1654–1722). Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho disappeared on the way to China and it is

²⁰ On dGe lugs monastic curricula and pedagogies as well as *yig cha* traditions, see Dreyfus 2003 and Newland 1996: 202–216.

²¹ For further information about this incident, see Petech 1972: 9–12, 16–18.

commonly believed that he died of illness.²²

During this turmoil, the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa gained great fame and influence in Central Tibet. Nevertheless, with support from different Mongol factions in both Central Tibet and A mdo, as well as the support of the imperial court, he decided to leave the then politically chaotic Central Tibet for his homeland A mdo with his students. This was ostensibly as the result of an invitation from the Köke Nayur (Kökenuur) Qoshud Mongol prince Erdeni Jinong Tsevangdzin, or Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin (d. 1735). Erdeni Jinong, leading eleven other Mongol support groups, sponsored the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's establishment of Bla brang Monastery in 1709.²³ Mongol sponsorship of a monastery in Tibetan cultural areas was not an unusual phenomenon, and was enjoyed by many dGe lugs monasteries throughout Tibet. In fact, almost all major dGe lugs monasteries and institutions in Tibet received plentiful donations from different Mongol princes demonstrating their dGe lugs loyalty, especially after the extensive conversion of the Mongol tribes by the Third Dalai Lama.²⁴

During his early years studying in lHa sa, the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa befriended a man who was half Chinese and half Tibetan, also of A mdo origin. This man was later recognised as the Second lCang skya Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan (1642–1714), and eventually became the throne holder of dGon lung Monastery, another important dGe lugs monastery in A mdo and the primary residence of the famous reincarnation lineages of the lCang skya and Thu'u bkwan Lamas.²⁵ Since their early years at 'Bras spungs, the lCang skya and 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa lamas became lifelong close collaborators. Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan seems to have left lHa sa for A mdo earlier than the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, but was able to establish a special relationship with Kangxi Emperor and spent his later years mostly at the Qing court in Beijing. On one occasion he was even sent to lHa sa to serve as the emperor's representative at the enthronement of Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho.

After this lCang skya's death, his reincarnation (the Third lCang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje) was recognised and installed at dGon lung by none other than the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa in 1720. However, in 1724, due to a rebellion led by some Köke Nayur Mongol princes against the Manchu rulers, the Qing troops destroyed dGon lung

²² See Smith 1997: 122.

²³ See Nietupski 2011: 120–121.

²⁴ See, for example, McCleary and van der Kuijp 2007: 31–32.

²⁵ For details on lCang skya Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan and dGon lung Monastery, see Sullivan 2013.

Monastery and the young Rol pa'i rdo rje was taken to Beijing.²⁶ As a result, he grew up highly educated, well respected, and as probably the most influential Buddhist teacher in the Qing court; dGon lung was rebuilt by an imperial order in 1732. Besides his political activities, which were reflected in the Qing policy toward Buddhism (particularly in the regions of both greater Mongolia and greater Tibet), Rol pa'i rdo rje became famous among Buddhist intellectuals for his leading role in the translation and the publication of Mongolian bsTan 'gyur between 1742 and 1749 and for initiating the translation of the Manchu bKa' 'gyur, which started at some time in 1773 and was published in 1794. lCang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje composed his *A Song on the Profound View* (discussed in section 1 of this article; henceforth, *The Song*), which can be said to be the root text of the polemical exchange, no later than 1769.²⁷

As another sign of the special relationship between the lCang skya and 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa reincarnation lineages, Rol pa'i rdo rje, now an influential religious figure, confirmed dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po as the reincarnation of the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and granted him full ordination. This was done regardless of disputes over the identification of the "true reincarnation" taking place between some political groups among the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's senior disciples and Mongol as well as Tibetan nobles.²⁸ Later, in the summer of 1769, dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po visited Rol pa'i rdo rje at Wutai Shan in China and composed his work titled *A Commentary of the Song on the View, the Lamp of Words* (*ITa ba'i gsungs mgur gyi 'grel pa tshig gi sgron me*), explaining the latter's *Song* from a Buddhist exoteric point of view.

4. Connections between the Polemicists

Rol pa'i rdo rje's subsequent "reincarnation," the Fourth lCang skya Ye shes bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, began to study under the Second Rwa sgreng Blo bzang bstan pa rab rgyas in 1806, presumably assigned the Rwa sgreng as a tutor by the Eighth Dalai Lama 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho. According to the colophon of *the Sun*, the Fourth lCang skya jointly with the Third sGrub khang Blo bzang dge legs rgyal mtshan (1780–1815) requested the Rwa sgreng sprul sku to compose a commentary on the Third lCang skya's *Song* from a Buddhist tantric perspective. There is no explicit sign of criticism in *The Sun* against dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po's *sūtric* exegesis,

²⁶ See, for example, Wang 2000: 126.

²⁷ Chogkhan Thubten Tandhar 1995: 80.

²⁸ Nietupski 2011: 126.

except that the Rwa sgreng sprul sku says: “although ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa’i rdo rje [the Second] explained [...] it exclusively in accordance with the *sūtra* system, the actual intention of the *Song* in its nature is tantric [...]”²⁹ Nevertheless, *the Sun* can be considered the basis of the polemics because the first known criticism of it emerged most likely from Bla brang, initiating the entire polemics. As I mentioned in section 1, although I have not been able to locate the actual text of this first criticism, we can infer its existence based on a counterargument against it by the abbot of Yeke Kūriy-e, Ayvangqayidub and his respondent dBal mang dKon mchog rgyal mtshan.

Ayvangqayidub was born not far from Yeke Kūriy-e and began his education there at a young age. Eventually he travelled to lHa sa and studied at ‘Bras spungs for fifteen years, during which time he received full ordination from the Eighth Dalai Lama, ‘Jam dpal rgya mtsho.³⁰ After his return from Tibet, he was enthroned first as one of the seven *tsorjis* (*chos rje*) or Dharma Lords of Yeke Kūriy-e in 1812, then as the vice abbot in 1822, and in 1834 as the abbot (*mkhan po*) of Yeke Kūriy-e. It may be worth noting here that, in Yeke Kūriy-e, unlike the large Central Tibetan dGe lugs monastic seats, the *mkhan po* was considered the throne holder of the entire monastic seat and not of a particular college or subsection of the monastery. Based on the works he wrote and the years of his abbacy in association with the history of Yeke Kūriy-e, Ayvangqayidub can be credited for his exceptional service in developing the Jebtsundamba’s monastic seat through both external appearance and internal practices regarding both the conduct of monks and their scholastic training.³¹

Ayvangqayidub received many teachings from Rwa sgreng sprul sku Blo bzang bstan pa rab rgyas when he was studying in lHa sa, and developed faith in him for the rest of his life. This faith could have formed one of his motivations for presenting his polemical counterargument, *The Magical Wheel of Fire*, defending his teacher’s work against those anonymous writer(s) at Bla brang who questioned the validity of interpreting the *Song* from a tantric perspective. Regardless of his motivations, this writing appears to constitute a pronouncement from Yeke Kūriy-e of its scholastic maturity regarding Buddhist philosophical training in both *sūtra* and *tantra*. Mongolian philosophical training was evidently already adequate enough to enter into debate with its intellectual and spiritual preceptors, the Tibetans, at least those at Bla brang.

²⁹ Blo bzang ye shes bstan pa rab rgyas 1985: 124.

³⁰ For a brief account of Ayvangqayidub, see Smith 1972. Detailed accounts of his biography can be found in Ngag dbang thub bstan 1840.

³¹ For details of Ayvangqayidub’s works, see Ngag dbang mkhas grub 1972–1974a.

At the same time, at Bla brang, its twenty-fourth throne holder dBal mang dKon mchog rgyal mtshan also seems to have had an ambitious vision. This was to grow Bla brang as an individual religious as well as sociopolitical institution to attain maximal influence, at least in the surrounding regions.³² In fact, in one of his writings, dKon mchog rgyal mtshan expressed his vision of Bla brang Monastery by likening it to the wonderful Magadha of India, which was a famous historic centre of Buddhist learning, practice, and support for Buddhist institutions.³³ dKon mchog rgyal mtshan was originally recognised as the Second dBal mang by the Second 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and educated at Bla brang under the latter and many other Bla brang scholars. During his abbacy, dBal mang monitored numerous activities in the monastery, in a similar way to Aṅvangqayidub at Yeke Küriy-e. dBal mang is also well known for his polemical writings, surveying the highest views of the other major Tibetan Buddhist schools—Sa skya, rNying ma, bKa' rgyud, bKa' gdams, and Jo nang. His *Enjoyment Ocean of Compassion* further clarifies the original criticisms from Bla brang against the Rwa sgreng sprul sku's commentary, and it reports two separate responses to those criticisms. The first of the two responses, as one can easily discover, is nothing other than Aṅvangqayidub's *Magical Wheel of Fire*. Concerning the second response, dBal mang reports that he had "seen a reply to the refutation, entitled *The Lightning of Thunderbolt* (gNam lcags thog mda'), which is said to be written by someone called Mati, a rab 'byams pa of scripture and reasoning,³⁴ who resides in a place called Ü."³⁵ I have not identified either this particular text or its author. While *mati* ("mind") and "Ü" can refer respectively to anyone who has the syllable *blo* in his or her name, such as Blo bzang or Blo gros, and any place that perhaps starts with the letter *u*, this unidentified polemical reply could have come from Yeke Küriy-e. Indeed, the "Ü" could refer to Urga and "Mati" could refer to someone named "Blo-" in Yeke Küriy-e, leaving aside the coincidence that Aṅvangqayidub's full name is Aṅvanglubsang-qayidub or Ngag dbang *blo* bzang mkhas grub.

This series of polemics is believed to be further continued by scholars of succeeding generations. These include Aṅvangqayidub's disciple, Aṅvangdorji, a.k.a. Ngag dbang rdo rje (19th century), who was another distinguished scholar of Yeke Küriy-e and a disciple of Aṅvangqayidub, and dKon mchog rgyal mtshan's disciple, dKon

³² For details of dBal mang dKon mchog rgyal mtshan's activities at Bla brang, see Oidtmann 2016.

³³ dKon mchog rgyal mtshan 1974b: 554.

³⁴ *Rab 'byams pa* is a monastic degree title within Buddhist philosophical training.

³⁵ This Ü is not for Ü (*dbus*) of Tibet. It is merely spelled *u* in the Tibetan text.

mchog rgya mtsho (19th century).³⁶ The last reported title of these textual exchanges is said to be *A Melody of the Garuda, Raising Doubts Regarding the Lying Lion's Babble* (Logs smra seng ge'i ca co 'phrogs pa'i dogs slong mkha' lding dbang po'i sgra dbyangs) and is believed to be composed by a Yeke Kūriy-e monk named Mipamdava or Mi pham zla ba (probably in the late 19th century).³⁷

5. Conclusion

Putting aside the Buddhist hermeneutic and theological implications of this debate, in the present paper I have explored its significance within a sociopolitical and historical context. Of particular interest in this intra-dGe lugs polemics is that successive generations of A mdo-Tibetan and Mongolian scholars who took part in this debate attempted to defend the honor of their own teachers and their hermeneutic positions on a single text. In some way, this can be likened to the feuds that develop between families over many generations, except in this case the polemicists were of course not engaged in blood feuds but “spiritual,” perhaps “intellectual feuds.”

Moreover, the background history and the sociopolitical context in which the debates were initiated are no less interesting than the arguments within the debate itself, and are perhaps no less relevant to the debate within these particular polemical writings. For example, one can assume that there may have been some intellectual as well as “this-worldly” competition between Yeke Kūriy-e and Bla brang in the early nineteenth century. However, as far as state level politics driven by ethnic identities is concerned, there seems to have been no evident implication of a power struggle between the two sites. This is despite the appearance that each of them had ambitions to become a larger and more important institution than the other. The competition may have been based on the attempt by both to attract the attention and patronage of the Qing court, which was the supreme power over both regions. The competition, if it ever existed, was perhaps based on more socioeconomic factors. Thus, the two monastic centres were perhaps attempting not only to attract more students but also to gain attention and ultimately potential economic support from the imperial court and local patrons.

Here I have considered the possibilities of any historical tensions between Yeke Kūriy-e and Bla brang. Yet I cannot help but conclude that the debate may have been carried out *primarily* for religious and

³⁶ Lhamsurengyn Khurelbaatar 2002: 104–105.

³⁷ Stories about the polemical exchanges of the consecutive generations are still told among Mongolian lamas today.

scholastic purposes, and concerned with doctrinal interpretations of certain intellectuals, rather than for a state level political purposes and representing the interests of conflicting institutions.

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Already in the early 14th-century, scholars began translating Buddhist texts from Tibetan into Mongolian. By the early 17th-century, Mongolian scholars had completed the translation of the entire Kangyur and, by the mid-18th century, the entire Tengyur. During the first half of the 17th-century, a considerable number of Buddhist texts were also translated from Tibetan into Oirat, the classical language of the Western Mongols, including the Dzungars and later the Kalmyks. Starting with Kublai Khan in the mid-13th century, the Mongols brought Tibetan culture and Buddhism to northern China. From this time onwards, until the fall of the Manchu Qing Dynasty in the early 20th-century, the Tibetan form of Buddhism was the court religion of China for nearly all its emperors.