

## Pha bong kha, Shugs ldan and the *ris med* Movement

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### 1 Introduction

The Dge lugs master Pha bong kha Bde chen snying po (1878-1941) was a central figure in the diffusion of the worship of the protector Shugs ldan in Tibet at the beginning of the twentieth century. His worship of Shugs ldan and the practice centred on it have generally been understood as a means to express his sectarianism against the religious pluralism of the *ris med* movement. According to Dreyfus, the sectarian aspect of the protector Shugs ldan is the main reason for the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's ban of its worship, and the outbreak of the Shugs ldan controversy. For Dreyfus, Pha bong kha was only motivated by keeping the Dge lugs tradition pure, and invented a tradition around Shugs ldan in order to undertake a revival of the Dge lugs tradition, against the growing influence of the *ris med* movement.<sup>1</sup>

Dreyfus does not completely reject that this controversy has some political aspects, but he considers them to be mere coincidences. However, this interpretation of Pha bong kha's promotion of the Shugs ldan cult as being only motivated by religious consideration, that is, keeping the Dge lugs tradition pure, seems rather reductive. The *ris med* movement was not promoting syncretism of the various religious traditions of Tibet in order to fuse them in a single one. It was rather promoting tolerance among them, considering that an impartial approach could lead to a better understanding of each of them, and enhance the practice toward liberation.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the Dge lugs tradition's purity, or specificity, was not really in danger.

Most of the scholar who wrote about the Shugs ldan controversy, or about Pha bong kha's relation to the *ris med* movement, adopted the same point of view than Dreyfus.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this lays in the Western, and therefore modern, understanding of religion as a specific sphere separated from the political sphere.<sup>4</sup> The definition of religion in terms of beliefs in supernatural beings, or in anything considered sacred by a given culture led to categorize much of the traditional political institutions in the religious domain.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the institution recognizing the existence of supernatural beings and dealing with them through rituals, all of them were understood in terms of religion.

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<sup>1</sup> Dreyfus 1998, 251–59.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Samuel writes: “Rimed today does not constitute an organized monastic order with its own *gompa*. The lamas who carry the Rimed tradition today continue to come from Sakyapa, Nyingmapa, and Kagyüpa *gompa*, and to continue the specific lineages and practices of their own *gompa* as well as the general Rimed practices.” (Samuel 1993, 537–38).

<sup>3</sup> See: von Brück 1999; Wilson 1999; von Brück 2001; Mills 2003; McCune 2007.

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the Western modern concept of religion, see Asad 1993; Sachot 2003; Mancini 2017.

<sup>5</sup> On some definitions of religion in the Buddhist context, see Spiro 1966; Southwold 1978; Orrù and Wang 1992; Herbrechtsmeier 1993; Kapstein 2007.

In Tibet, politics and religion have always been intertwined, as the priest-donor (*mchod yon*) relationship, and even more so the principle of combining the religious and secular (*chos srid zung 'brel*) express.<sup>6</sup> However, the distinction of the two notions of “secular” (*srid*) and “religious” (*chos*) are clearly made, but what they respectively cover is quite different from the western notion of religious and secular.<sup>7</sup> *Chos* has to do with the supramundane (*'jig rten las das pa*), and *srid* with the mundane (*'jig rten pa*), but in the Buddhist worldview, the supramundane is different from what we understand by supernatural in the Western culture. Buddhas and bodhisattvas are considered supramundane. They belong to the absolute reality (*don dam bden pa*), and can be categorized as religious (*chos*). The mundane deities (*'jig rten pa'i lha*) or protectors (*'jig rten pa'i srung ma*) on the other hand belong to the conventional reality (*kun rdzob bden pa*), wherefore it is more problematic to categorise them as religious. In the Buddhist worldview, they belong to the world (*'jig rten*) or *samsāra*, and pertain to the sphere of the secular (*srid*), even though for the Western modern worldview they are supernatural and belong to the religious sphere.

The function of these worldly deities is to protect institutions, land or people.<sup>8</sup> Some of them were dedicated to the protection of religious institutions, such as monasteries or lineages, but some other were dedicated to the protection of political institutions, like Pe har who is the protector of the Tibetan government.<sup>9</sup> Their function, their place in the Tibetan pantheon, and the relations Tibetans have with them are therefore closely dependent on the socio-political context.

In this regard, the questions I want to raise is: what was Pha bong kha's motivation behind his sectarianism and his dissemination of the Shugs ldan cult? Did the important historical changes that troubled Tibetan politics during the first half of the twentieth century influence Pha bong kha's choice to rely on Shugs ldan, to promote a sectarian ideology, and to oppose the *ris med* movement? Was the *ris med* movement only a religious phenomenon, or could it have inspired a political ideology Pha bong kha was opposed to?

To answer these questions, I will first come back to the context in which the narrative of the origin of Shugs ldan was written, in order to show that the construction of this narrative reflects the political change that happened in Tibet in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. I will then look at how Pha bong kha's biography describes his relation to Shugs ldan, and show that in this case too, the political events of that time were not without influence. I will then show that the non-sectarian ideology was actually related to the kind of political regime fostered by the Fifth and Thirteenth Dalai Lamas, to which the Shugs ldan protector is in opposition.

## 2 The narrative of Shugs ldan's origin

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<sup>6</sup> On *mchod yon* and *chos srid zung 'brel*, see: Seyfort Ruegg 1991 and 1995; and Seyfort Ruegg and Cüppers 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Seyfort Ruegg 2001 and 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel 1993, 165–70.

<sup>9</sup> On Pe har, see: Shen-Yu 2010; Bell 2013.

The narrative of Shugs ldan's origin appears to be a construction based on the narrative of the death of Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1619-1656), as well as a narrative concerning a spirit residing near the White Spring of Dol (*Dol chu mig dkar po*), called the Dol rgyal, that we both find in the biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama. In a previous article, I assumed that there was no apparent link between Grags pa rgyal mtshan and the Dol rgyal in the Fifth Dalai Lama's biography, and that the association between Dol rgyal and Shugs ldan was made later.<sup>10</sup> As I will show below, such link seems to have been made by the Fifth Dalai Lama. What is certain is that the Fifth Dalai Lama does not mention the name Shugs ldan. The idea that Shugs ldan finds its origin in the Fifth Dalai Lama's account of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's death and the spirit of the White Spring of Dol was made in the eighteenth century. It was later transmitted to Pha bong kha who disseminated Shugs ldan's propitiation practice within the Dge lugs tradition after having adopted a sectarian stand.

Grags pa rgyal mtshan was first selected as a potential reincarnation of the Fourth Dalai Lama, and after the choice fell on the young Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, Grags pa rgyal mtshan was recognized as the reincarnation of the Upper Chamber lineage.<sup>11</sup> According to the Fifth Dalai Lama, Grags pa rgyal mtshan became sick and was under the influence of a malevolent spirit, which made it impossible to cure him.<sup>12</sup> The Gnas chung oracle advised the Fifth Dalai Lama not to attend Grags pa rgyal mtshan's funerals,<sup>13</sup> and later, because Grags pa rgyal mtshan's mausoleum seemed to be haunted, the Gnas chung oracle advised the government to move his relics elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> Grags pa

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<sup>10</sup> Richard 2020.

<sup>11</sup> The Upper Chamber (*gzims khang gong ma*) was the residence of Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa (1478-1554), at 'Bras spungs Monastery, while the second and third Dalai Lamas resided at the Lower Chamber (*gzims khang 'og ma*), also known as the Dga' ldan pho brang. See Sparham 1996; Karmay 1998: 507; von Brück 1999: 182. Concerning the reincarnations of Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa, according to Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho: "The Fifth Dga' ldan throne holder was Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa. His reincarnation was Bsod nams ye shes dbang po, born in Stod lung. His reincarnation in turn was Ngag dbang bsod nams dge legs. After him came Nang so gro lhug [Grags pa rgyal mtshan]. At first, it had been hoped he would become the reincarnation of the all-knowing Yon bstan rgya mtsho. However, by later becoming the reincarnation of Ngag dbang dge legs, his rebirth was unfavourable." (*paṅ chen bsod nams grags pa'i sprul sku bsod nams ye shes dbang po/ de'i sprul sku ngag dbang bsod nams dge legs/ de'i sprul sku thog mar thams cad mkhyen pa yon tan rgya mtsho'i sprul sku yong du re yang rjes su ngag dbang bsod nams dge legs kyi sprul sku byas pas mthar skye gnas kyang mi bzang bar gyur to/*) (Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1989: 82). *Nang so gro lhug* seems to be a disparaging nickname given to Grags pa rgyal mtshan, since *gro lhug* means "potbellied." This nickname is found in the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography, where he says: "Nang so dro lhug [sic] of Gad kha sa, who was later proclaimed as the reincarnation of Sprul sku Bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang by Rab 'byams pa Lcag sdig, arrived that day." (*Gad kha sa'i nang so dro lhug kyang star rab 'byams pa lcags sdig sogs kyi sprul pa'i sku bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang gi sku skyer dril bsgrags pa ltar de nyin byon byung*) (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009, 5: 43).

<sup>12</sup> The Fifth Dalai Lama wrote: "I went in the Upper Chamber to give a blessing, but because Grags pa rgyal mtshan was under the influence of a malevolent spirit, he had lost consciousness, and the blessing was ineffective. [Grags pa rgyal mtshan] passed away on the morning of the thirteenth." (*gzims khang gong du phyin mgon po'i rjes gnang bar chad kun sel phul kyang 'byung po zhig gis brlams pa'i thugs dran mi zin 'dugs pas phan thogs med pa'i tshu bcu gsum gyi tsha rting khar zhin brjes snang*) (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009, 5: 367).

<sup>13</sup> "The Gnas chung oracle advised me that because it would not be appropriate to stay in the vicinity during Grags pa rgyal mtshan's funeral, I should go to the Potala." (*chos skyong chen pos sprul pa'i sku'i pur bzhu'i dus nye skor du bsdad pa mi 'gab pas po ta lar song gsung ba*) (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009, 5: 369).

<sup>14</sup> The Fifth Dalai Lama wrote: "The Great Dharma Protector said "last year when we were at the hot spring of Stod lung, I told the Regent through the two disciplinarian monks that the stupa of the Upper Chamber, which had been affected by malevolent spirits, should be moved elsewhere. But instead of simply taking the silver pieces out and placing them [somewhere], they were left unmoved. This caused illnesses to occur. Now the disturbance is much greater, so the

rgyal mtshan's mausoleum was finally dismantled, and his relics were moved near to his family estate, in Stod lung.<sup>15</sup> The Upper Chamber residence at 'Bras spungs was destroyed and a new temple was built on the ruins.<sup>16</sup>

As Georges Dreyfus notes, this narrative of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's death by the Fifth Dalai Lama is an attempt to disparage Grags pa rgyal mtshan.<sup>17</sup> We find in another of the Fifth Dalai Lama's writings that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was not the genuine reincarnation of the Upper Chamber lineage, and became a *dam sri* spirit after his death.<sup>18</sup> According to Samten Karmay, the Fifth Dalai Lama forbade the search of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's reincarnation.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the Fifth Dalai Lama's narrative can be understood as a means to justify the end of the Upper Chamber lineage, and the destruction of its residence.

Nicolay Tsirempilov writes that the rivalry between Grags pa rgyal mtshan and the Fifth Dalai Lama could have been the result of an opposition between two different groups among the Dge lugs tradition. He considers these groups to have been in disagreement about what kind of political regime should be established in Tibet. One of these groups, which he calls "Dge lugs pa sectarians", was actually opposed to the kind of state the Fifth Dalai Lama was establishing, which was not only relying on Dge lugs elements, but also on Rnying ma ones.<sup>20</sup> Georges Dreyfus also writes that Grags

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Upper Chamber has to be moved." (*chos skyong chen pos sde par 'dre sna zug pa'i gzims khang gong gi mchod rten nmams gzhan du spo dgos tshul lo snag ma stod lung chu tshan la byon skabs dge skos gnyis brgyud de labs pas yin kyang dngul dgung tsho phral nas 'jog pa tsam las ma spos pa'i skyon gyis nad gzhi chug pa yin/ da cha 'tshub cher song bas gzims khang gong spo dgos gsung bar*) (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009, 5: 390).

<sup>15</sup> The Fifth Dalai Lama wrote: "There was much discussion about whether something like an exorcism ritual would suffice or whether the house needed to be destroyed. True or not, some said that when the eight stupas were not yet dismantled, voices and sounds came out of the [main] stupa. Because such superstitions gave rise to demons, the rumors did not cease. The personal belongings [of Grags pa rgyal mtshan] were carried down the valley of Stod lung and the woodwork [of the house] brought to the canyon of the Shar chu river." (*rgyal rdzongs lta bus go chod pa'i khang pa bshig ma dgos pa yong mi yong gi gleng gzhi mang du byung rung bden mi bden ji ltar yang mchod rten brgyad po ma phral ba'i skabs mchod rten nang nas skad dang tsi ra brgyab zer bas mtshon pa'i rnam rtog 'drer langs kyis kha mtshon ma chod pa'i sku chas tsho stod lung mda' dang shing cha nmams shar chu sbug tu bskyal*) (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009, 5: 390).

<sup>16</sup> The Fifth Dalai Lama notes in 1662: "Last year, a new temple was built on the ruins of the Upper Chamber." (*gzims khang gong bshig shul du lo snga ma'i nang lha khang gsar du bzhengs par.*) (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009, 5: 471).

<sup>17</sup> Dreyfus 1998, 238.

<sup>18</sup> "The one who was wrongly recognized as the reincarnation of Bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang, through the manipulation of Lags a rgyal of Gad kha sa, became a *dam sri* spirit of perverted aspiration." (*gad kha sa'i lags a rgyal gyi 'phrul la rten sprul sku bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang po gi sku skye brdzus ma lam du song ba mon lam log pa'i dam sri gyur te.*) (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009, 14: 298). Bsod nams dge legs dpal bzang (1594-1615) is the former incarnation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan. Gad kha sa is the family name of Grags pa rgyal mtshan. Lags a rgyal is the name of his mother. On the Gad kha sa family, see McCune 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Goldstein 1991, 89.

<sup>20</sup> Tsirempilov writes: "Many followers of the Dge lugs pa tradition thought their sect's interests more important than Tibetan state interests, which is why they could consider the course pursued by the Fifth Dalai Lama, of rapprochement to the other Tibetan Buddhist sects, if not as a betrayal of the Yellow church, then at least as an adverse situation for the sect. They had to watch the establishment of a kind of state, in which the Dge lugs pa occupied a key position but would share it with the aristocratic clans and representatives of other Buddhist sects, that is, a country ruled by a coalition of the yesterday's rivals. This explains the strained relations between the Fifth Dalai Lama and some other authoritative Dge lugs pa lamas who resented being obliged to share their dominating position in Tibet, which had been so difficult to obtain." (Tsirempilov 2003, 56).

pa rgyal mtshan could have become the symbol of the opposition to the Fifth Dalai Lama, and that some elements of the Dge lugs tradition wished to settle a “purely Dge lugs rule”.<sup>21</sup> This opposition actually reflect the one between sectarianism and religious pluralism, which we find between Shugs ldan’s followers and the *ris med* movement.

The Fifth Dalai Lama’s inclination towards the Rnying ma tradition is well known, and he has often been depicted as a promoter of the non-sectarian approach.<sup>22</sup> However, the Fifth Dalai Lama was much less tolerant with other Tibetan Buddhist and Bön traditions. As a consequence of the Tibetan civil war that preceded Gushri Khan’s victory, many monasteries were converted to the Dge lugs tradition, and scriptures considered unorthodox were confiscated and sealed.<sup>23</sup> While justified in religious terms, this repression was also motivated by political considerations.<sup>24</sup>

The Fifth Dalai Lama’s interest for the Rnying ma tradition was not only for a personal religious purpose, but also for a political one. The political regime he established in Tibet was relying on many Rnying ma elements, such as Padmasambhava and the Gnas chung oracle or the deity Pe har rgyal po. The Fifth also used many rituals based on Rdo rje gro lod, the wrathful manifestation of Padmasambhava, in order to protect Tibet and his government from evil spirits. Padmasambhava is known for having tamed the worldly spirits of Tibet, and to have designated Pe har as the chief of these worldly spirits. As I have mentioned in the introduction, these spirits are often linked to a specific place, a specific clan or a specific institution. Therefore, the narrative of Padmasambhava taming these spirits is not only a narrative of introducing Buddhism in Tibet, but also a narrative of imposing the imperial rule of Khri srong lde btsan over the Tibetan clans and regional identities.<sup>25</sup> The cult of Padmasambhava and the use of Pe har through the Gnas chung oracle by the Fifth Dalai Lama fulfils the same purpose of establishing a Tibetan centralized state over the Tibetan regional and religious identities.

During the first twenty years of his rule, the Fifth Dalai Lama could settle his institution at the head of the new centralized Tibetan state by elaborating a mythico-ritual system that included important elements of the Rnying ma tradition. We can actually consider that the Fifth Dalai Lama gradually emancipated himself from the Dge lugs tradition. This is mainly illustrated by the

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<sup>21</sup> Dreyfus writes: “The resentment against the power of the Fifth Dalai Lama was primarily connected to a broad and far-reaching issue, the desire of some of the more sectarian Ge-luk hierarchs to set up a purely Ge-luk rule. Some even seem to have argued for the suppression of the schools against which they had fought for more than a century, particularly the Kar-ma Ka-gyu tradition. The Fifth seems to have realized that such a rule would have had little support and would have exacerbated the inter-sectarian violence that had marred the last two centuries of Tibetan history. To avoid this, he attempted to build a state with a broader power base, state that he presented as the re-establishment of the early Tibetan empire. His rule was to be supported by the Ge-luk tradition, but would also include groups affiliated with other religious traditions.” (Dreyfus 1998, 234).

<sup>22</sup> See: Samuel 1993, 528–29.

<sup>23</sup> The Bon and Jo nang traditions suffered the most, the latter having been suppressed from central Tibet. This repression was less dramatic for the Karma Bka’ brgyud tradition, as the important Karma Bka’ brgyud monasteries were later restored to their former owner (Richardson 1976, 171), and in 1674, the Dalai Lama received the Karma pa at the Potala where a reconciliation took place (Karmay 1998, 513). The Sa skya tradition suffered less from this policy (Richardson 2003, 559).

<sup>24</sup> See: Samuel 1993, 528–29; Gruschke 2008, 70–71.

<sup>25</sup> On Padmasambhava and the taming of the spirits, see: Samuel 1993, 167–70.

dissemination of the idea that the Dalai Lamas are emanations of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.<sup>26</sup> The myth of the Dalai Lamas as emanation of Avalokiteśvara is important since it confers to the Dalai Lamas the legitimacy to rule Tibet, making them not only the emanation of the holy protector of Tibet, but also the reincarnation of the founder of the Tibetan empire, Srong btsan sgam po.<sup>27</sup>

Thanks to this myth, the Dalai Lamas do not gain their legitimacy from being members of a Dge lugs lineage starting with one of Tsong kha pa's disciples, but from being emanations of the bodhisattva who is considered as the genitor and protector of the Tibetan people. Therefore, this myth of the Dalai Lamas as emanations of Avalokiteśvara not only conferred more prestige and charisma to their lineage than any other lineages could expect, but it also linked their lineage to the *chos rgyal* of the imperial times. This helped the Fifth Dalai Lama to present his regime as a restoration of the ancient empire. In this regard, his interest for Rnying ma rituals, and for Rnying ma figures and protectors such as Padmasambhava and Pe har, was also motivated by the wish to link his rule with those of the imperial *chos rgyal*. Therefore, the Fifth Dalai Lama's non-sectarianism was as much politically as spiritually motivated.

We can easily understand that the Fifth Dalai Lama's regime was disapproved by the Dge lugs hierarchs who wanted to settle a Dge lugs clerical state. It is not sure that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was really the leader of this group, neither if he was seen by this group as a figure of their opposition. However, it appears that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was seen as such later, when the Dge lugs clergy took the upper hand on Tibetan politics, with the help of the Manchus.<sup>28</sup>

Nicolay Tsyrempilov has shown that during the first half of the eighteenth century, the Dge lugs pa were divided on the issue whether they should support the Manchu emperor in his wish to establish a protectorate in Tibet. Those advocating for a Manchu protectorate in Tibet were actually in favour of a political model based on the *mchod yon* alliance between one or several high lamas of the Dge lugs tradition, and a powerful secular ruler.<sup>29</sup> This model favoured only one tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, and was actually the antithesis of the Fifth Dalai Lama's regime that Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1753-1705) tried to perpetuate.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the main opponent of Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and the Fifth Dalai Lama's regime was the first 'Jam dbangs bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson 'grus, who supported the Qoshot prince Lha bzang Khan, and then the Manchu emperor Kangxi. 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's disciples were also in favour of a *mchod yon* alliance with the Manchus. Among them, we find Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor (1704-1788), who actually wrote in his Re'u mig that Grags pa rgyal mtshan did not become a demon, and suggests that this demon was the Sde srid Bsod noms chos 'phel.<sup>30</sup> A few lines before, Sum pa mkhan po wrote that Grags pa rgyal mtshan had

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<sup>26</sup> Ishihama 1993; 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Kapstein 1992; Ishihama 1993; 2015; Samuel 1993, 168.

<sup>28</sup> On these historical events between the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama and the establishment of the Manchu protectorate, see: Luciano Petech 1966; L. Petech 1972; Shakabpa and Maher 2010, 435-81; Grupper 1984.

<sup>29</sup> Tsyrempilov 2003, 56-57.

<sup>30</sup> Sum pa mkhan po wrote: "Saying that the Tibetan demon is Grags pa rgyal mtshan of the Upper Chamber is just an expression of attachment and aversion. Actually, I wonder if it is not [the Regent] Bsod noms chos 'phel, who, after passing away this year, increased his commitment to the Dge lugs tradition, clung to the protection of the Dharma, and

been reborn as the Manchu emperor Kangxi.<sup>31</sup> This is an interesting attempt to rehabilitate Grags pa rgyal mtshan, and to promote the political model of the *mchod yon* alliance with the Manchu. This also shows that at that time, Grags pa rgyal mtshan was seen as the main opposition figure to the Fifth Dalai Lama's regime.

The Fifth Dalai Lama's narrative of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's death does not mention the name of Shugs ldan at all, but the Dge lugs pa usually call Shugs ldan by the name Dol rgyal, in reference of the spirit of the White Spring of Dol (*dol chu mig dkar po*). The Fifth Dalai Lama wrote about this spirit and its malevolent activities in his autobiography for the year 1669.<sup>32</sup> Before that, he wrote that in October 1659, because the estate of the Gad kha sa family of Grags pa rgyal mtshan was too close to the Potala, it was decided to move it to the Lho kha region, between the Yar lung river and Bhutan.<sup>33</sup> The White Spring of Dol actually stands there. Since the remains of Grags pa rgyal mtshan were previously moved to his family estate in Stod lung, this could mean that they were finally moved to the White Spring of Dol in Lho kha. Therefore, it seems possible that, for the Fifth Dalai Lama, the spirit of the White Spring of Dol was the spirit of Grags pa rgyal mtshan. However, there is no mention of the name Shugs ldan.

The first text to identify Grags pa rgyal mtshan with Shugs ldan was written by a so-called Mchog sprul Ma ti mtshan can, the "supreme emanation bearing the name Ma ti". This text, titled: *Rgyal ba'i bstan bsrung chen po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi byung tshul mdo tsam brjod pa pad dkar chun po* "The bunch of white lotus, a short narrative of the manifestation of the great protector, the mighty Rdo rje Shugs ldan", starts with what the author had heard from his masters in order to give a different version of that, namely of Grags pa rgyal mtshan becoming an evil spirit.<sup>34</sup> He then tells a story of the

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then came to be known as a guardian of the Dge lugs tradition." (*bod de'i rgyal po ni gzim khang gong ma sprul sku grags rgyan zer ba ni chag[s] sdang gi gtam kho nar zad do/ des na bsod nams chos 'phel ni lo 'dir 'das nas khong dge lugs la thugs zhen ches pas chos bsrung ba'i tshul bzungs nas dge lugs pa skyong zhes grags pa bden nam snyam mo/*) (Sum pa mkhan po 1959, 3: 70–71).

<sup>31</sup> *Sprul sku grags rgyan skye bar grags pa'i khang zhi bde skyid rgyal po* (Sum pa mkhan po 1959, 3: 70).

<sup>32</sup> "In Dol chu mig dkar mo, a very powerful spirit of perverted aspiration was known for having harmed the doctrine and beings. This spirit had been growing stronger since the Fire Bird year [1657], and despite having performed many rituals, it was as if I could not catch it. I performed [these rituals] often. A new temple was built at Dol chu mig dkar mo at the end of the Earth Bird year (1669), and the furniture [of the former temple] had been moved in. Although we had hoped that the spirit would come to settle in this temple, the harm increased. Recently an epidemic affected many monks and lay people, and a couple of monks died. Therefore, the monks of the monastery unanimously decided to perform rituals." (*dol chu mig dkar mor smon lam log pa'i dam sri mthu rtsal shin tu che ba zhig gis bstan 'gro spyi bye brag la gnod pa'i grags pa me bya nas je cher song ba'i don thog tu'ang khel ba mang rung nga la ma rag lta bu'i byed mi dkon zhing dol chu mig dkar mor sa bya'i mjug khang pa gsar brtsigs dang ka ca sogs spos pa'i rgyal po chags rten yong la re byas na'ng gnod pa je 'phel byung zhing nye char skya ser du mar nad yams dang gra pa re gnyis shi chad byung bas rkyen byas gra tshang gi gra pa rnam mgrin gcig pa lta bu'i las sbyor byed zer bar*) (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009, 6: 357).

<sup>33</sup> "Since troubles were generated by the proximity of the Gad kha sa [estate] with the Potala, it was agreed to exchange it with an estate in the Lho kha region, and that the transaction had to take place on the full moon day [of the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1659]. Still, it seemed that at that time all [the Gad kha sa family], such as the son of Sgo sna shag and Bkras sgang tshes ring were planning a plot." (*Gad kha sa po ta la dang thag nyes pa'i skyon gyis lho kha phyogs nas sa cha dod snyoms brje ba dang zla ba dkar bstun phyag 'bul 'grub pa'i sa bcad byas rung de skabs sgo sna shag sras po dang bkras sgang tshes ring sogs tshang ma sa 'og dar 'thag grub tshod du 'dug/*) (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009a, 5:410).

<sup>34</sup> Ma ti mtshan can writes: "Here, concerning the short narrative of the origin of the mighty Shugs ldan, this great Dharma protector is in fact a deliberate wrathful manifestation intent on destroying all those harmful and evil who turn their anger toward the teachings of the second Buddha [Tsong kha pa] and those who practice it. Related to this

protector Pe har appearing in front of Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa, a previous incarnation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan, in order to ask him to become a protector of the Dge lugs tradition, and how Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa emanated Shugs ldan.<sup>35</sup> Ma ti mtshan can then quotes Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's mention of Grags pa rgyal mtshan in the *Vai dū rya Ser po*, and rejects it claiming that Grags pa rgyal mtshan was a reincarnation of Bu ston rin chen grub (1290-1364) and Paṅ chen Bsod

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narrative, as it is well known these days, it is also said that the subsequent rebirth of Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa, called Grags pa rgyal mtshan, was in trouble with the reincarnation of the all-knowing Yon tan rgya mtsho, and took the form of a malevolent spirit. Here is what I heard from some important lamas." (*'dir rgyal ba'i bstan srung chen po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi byung ba'i tshul mdo tsam brjod pa la/ de yang bstan bsrung chen po 'di ni 'jam mgon rgyal ba gnyis pa'i bstan bstan 'dzin dang bcas pa la log par 'khu ba'i gnod byed gdug pa can mtha' dag tshar gcad pa'i phyir bsam bzhin du drag po'i skur bstan pa zhig ste/ de'i tshul yang deng sang yongs su grags par paṅ chen bsod nams grags pa'i sku skye phyi ma'i yang phyi ma sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan zhes bya ba thams cad mkhyen pa yon tan rgya mtsho'i sprul sku dang nor 'khrul byung ba de dregs pa'i gzugs bzung ba yin par smra zhing/ bla ma gong ma 'ga' zhig gi gzhal las 'di skad thos te/*) (Ma ti 1983: 178).

<sup>35</sup> Ma ti mtshan can writes: "During the time of Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa, Pe har, the leader of the haughty spirits, wondered which in the world is the immaculate teaching of the Buddha, and also what is the most eminent being holding this teaching and collecting the qualities of the scriptures and realization. [He] then wandered and searched the whole world and saw that there is no other purer doctrine than the doctrine of the venerable master [Tsong kha pa]. [He] then did not find, among the community of those holding this teaching, a community with a greater accumulation of the qualities of scriptures and realization than the "Sublime Community" of the great all-knowing Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa. Understanding that this Paṅ chen is a bodhisattva who has reached the highest stage of realization, [Pe har] came in front of him and said: "I have wandered the whole world and found no doctrine purer and more immaculate than the venerable master [Tsong kha pa]'s, and I did not find a more realized practitioner holding this doctrine than you. Therefore, I request that you unleash your pacifying, increasing, magnetizing, and destroying activities in order to eliminate all those who harm and hurt both the doctrine and practitioners of Tsong kha pa's teaching, and to hold, protect, and disseminate this [teaching]. I will do whatever is in my power to help you in this [task]. Myself, I am already entrusted by the great master Padmasambhava with the protection of his doctrine. I promised [to do so] and I am bound by oath [to this]. Because of that, I do not have the power to develop Tsong kha pa's doctrine in particular. Please contemplate this". Because of this request [Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa] deliberately manifested himself in the bodily form of the powerful protector Shugs ldan holding an obstacle-removing-vajra in order to boost the force and increase the ferocity of his enlightened activities to defend and protect Tsong kha pa's teachings and practitioners, as well as eliminate all maleficent beings with his wrathful activity, immediately crush to dust all enemies of the doctrine, and subdue the hordes of demons." (*paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa'i sku dus su dregs pa'i sde dpon pe har gyis deng sang 'jig rten gyi khams na rgyal ba'i bstan pa dri ma me dpa ji 'dra zhig/ bstan pa de 'dzin gyi skyes bu lung rtogs yon tan gyi tshogs kyi mngon par mtho ba yang ji zhig snyam du 'dzam bu gling kun tu myul te btsal pas rgyal ba'i bstan pa rnam par dag pa yang rje bla ma'i bstan pa las gzhan med par mthong zhing/ bstan 'dzin gyi skyes bu'i tshogs kyi dbus na yang paṅ chen thams cad mkhyen pa chen po bsod nams grags pa'i dpal rnam dpyod mchog gi sde zhes bya ba nyid las lung tang rtogs pa'i yon tan gyi tshogs kyi mngon par mtho ba gzhan ma rnyed cing paṅ chen nyid sa la gnas pa'i sems dpa' chen po rtogs pa mthon por byon pa zhig yin par shes nas paṅ chen gyi drung du song ste zhus pa/ ngas 'dzam bu'i gling kun tu myul yang bstan pa rnam par dag pa bsre bsal ma zhugs pa'ng rje bla ma'i bstan pa las gzhan du mi 'dugs cing bstan 'dzin gyi skyes bu khyed las rtogs pa mtho ba gzhan ma rnyed pas sems dpa' chen po khyed kyis rje bla ma'i bstan pa bstan 'dzin dang bcas pa la gnod cing 'tse ba mtha' dag tshar gcad pa dang/ de nyid 'dzin skyong spel ba'i phyir du zhi rgyas dbang drag gi thabs mkhas kyi mdzad pa bstan du gsol/ bdag gis de'i grogs ci nus so bgyi'o/ Zhes khas blangs shing/ nga ni sngon slob dpon chen po mtsho skyes rdo rje'i spyen sngar de nyid kyi bstan pa bsrung zhing skyong bar sgos/ gnyer du gtad/ khas blang/ dam bca' ba yin pas de'i dbang gis dngos su rje bla ma'i bstan pa la ches cher byed nus pa min 'dug pas khyed kyis don de thugs la dgongs shig/ ces bskul ba'I rkyen gyis bsam bzhin du rje rgyal ba gnyis pa'i bstan pa bstan 'dzin dang bcas pa bsrung zhing skyong ba dang/ gnod byed ma rungs pa mtha' dag drag po'i las kyis tshar bcad pa'i phyir 'phrin las kyi shugs shin tu myur zhing/ drag shul shin tu che ba/ bstan dgra mtha' dag skad cig nyid la thal bar rlog pa/ bdud kyi sde 'joms pa la thogs pa med pa'i rdo rje'i shugs 'chang ba bstan bsrung chen po rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi sku'i rnam par bstan to/*) (Ma ti 1983, 178–80).

nams grags pa. He then tells the life of Paṅ chen Bsod nams grags pa as well as the marvellous signs that appeared during his funerals.<sup>36</sup>

The author of this texts, “Mchog sprul Ma ti mtshan can”, is very likely Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1714-1762), who was also called the Stag phu Ma ti. He was the fourth incarnation of the Stag phu lineage, but the first one to have been recognized as such during his lifetime, the previous ones having been retrospectively designated as such. This would explain the title *mchog sprul*. He probably wrote the text on Shugs ldan's origin around the middle of the eighteenth century.

Sum pa mkhan po and Stag phu Ma ti's versions are different attempts to rehabilitate Grags pa rgyal mtshan, rejecting the idea that he became a malevolent spirit, but they may have another purpose. Indeed Stag phu Ma ti's text mentions that Shugs ldan disturbed the Fifth Dalai Lama because the latter did not allow sectarianism, but was protecting, practicing and spreading all old and new tenet systems.<sup>37</sup> This can be understood as a stand against the Fifth Dalai Lama's eclectic practice, but it can also be understood as a stand against the foundations of the Fifth Dalai Lama's political regime. Since the Dge lugs sectarians were in favour of a *mchod yon* alliance with the Manchus, as Tsyrempilov argues, we can assume that Sum pa mkhan po and Stag phu Ma ti's narratives both belong to this side of the Dge lugs tradition.

Thus, we have seen that the connection between Shugs ldan and Grags pa rgyal mtshan was not a late invention by Pha bong kha, but appeared in the middle of the eighteenth century, precisely when the Dge lugs clergy established a *mchod yon* alliance with the Manchu, and when the Dalai Lama institution was reconfigured. We are then allowed to look at Pha bong kha's propagation of the Shugs ldan cult, as well as his opposition to the *ris med* movement, not only in terms of religious sectarianism – for the sake of the Dge lugs tradition's purity – but also, or maybe mainly, in terms of political concern for the preservation of the Dge lugs tradition's political hegemony. Indeed, as I will show, Pha bong kha “inherited” so to say, the practice of Shugs ldan from his master Stag phu 'Jam dpal bstan pa'i dngos grub (1876-1935), the third reincarnation of Stag phu Ma ti. Moreover, the political troubles that shook Tibet during Pha bong kha's life could have raised the fear, among elements of the Dge lugs tradition, that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama could establish a political regime

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<sup>36</sup> Ma ti 1983, 180–93.

<sup>37</sup> “Because the Fifth Dalai Lama did not approve of sectarianism, but was holding, protecting, and spreading all the new and old tenet systems, this great protector [Shugs ldan], in consequence of his previous aspiration and in order to increase the respect for Tsong kha pa's tradition, displayed various frightening manifestations toward the Fifth Dalai Lama. When these visions appeared, [the Dalai Lama] applied different methods [to make them disappear], but it was not very effective. Then, he ordered Sa skya Rinpoche to make them cease. Monks from Sa skya threw a *gtor ma*, but it was thrown back, and the harm increased. Therefore, they composed a new ritual for *gtor ma* offering and performed it. There are a lot of such stories, but I will not elaborate further. The Fifth Dalai Lama offered [Shugs ldan] a dwelling place in the region of Dol, and [Shugs ldan's] palace is still there.” (*kun gzigs lnga pa chen pos/ grub mtha' gсар rnying thams cad la phyogs ris ma gñang bar 'dzin skyong spel bar mdzad pas/ chos skyong chen po 'dis sngon gyi thugs smon gyi dbang gis 'jam mgon bla ma'i ring lugs la gces spras cher mdtad phyir/ rgyal dbang mchog la shin tu 'jigs su rung ba'i rnam 'gyur sna tshogs ston pa'i gzigs snang byung ba na/ rje nyid nas thabs sna tshogs gñang yang phan pa cher ma byung tshes/ sa skya rin po cher 'di'i zlog thabs byed dgos kyi bka' phebs pas/ sa skya pa rnams kyis gtor rgyag thongs pa'i gtor ma tshur log mthong ba dang/ gñod pa cher byung bas bstan bsrung chen po 'di la gtor chog gсар du rtsom te mchod pa byed pa sogs lo rgyus mang du gsung ba yod kyang/ 'di tsam las ma spros/ 'di'i bzhugs gñas skyabs mgon lnga pa chen pos dol gyi sa'i cha phul bas de phyogs su 'di'i pho brang yod cing/*) (Ma ti 1983: 193–94).

similar to that of the Fifth Dalai Lama. In this context, the *ris med* movement could have been seen as providing an ideological basis for this regime.

### 3 Pha bong kha, Shugs ldan, and the *ris med* ideology

After the death of his main teacher Brag ri Blo bzang thub bstan rnam rgyal in 1902, Pha bong kha became close to Stag phu 'Jam dpal bstan pa'i dngos grub (1876-1935), the third incarnation of Stag phu Ma ti, from whom he will receive the final version of the life enthronement ritual to Shugs ldan. Pha bong kha's biography suggests that the connection between Pha bong kha and Stag phu 'Jam dpal bstan pa'i dngos grub goes back to their earlier lives, as this passage shows:

When [Pha bong kha] went with his parents to visit a religious monument, maybe in Chos 'khor rgyal, the son grasped a piece of rolled cloth and said: "this is mine". As he did not release it, the mother asked the caretaker "whose cloth is it?" "It is Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje's cloth" he answered. His mother was always telling this story. Also, one time, [the parents] met the people in charge to find the reincarnation of Kong po Rgyal dbang chos rje. As they were wondering and hoping that their son was a reincarnation, the mother said: "the people in charge of the research and the boy should talk together". [When doing so] the boy said to the search team: "I have a yellow palanquin, does your lama have one? On my monastery, there is a Chinese-style ornament, does your lama have a similar one?" "There is no such [palanquin and ornament]" they said. "Therefore, I cannot be the reincarnation of your lama" he asserted. Therefore, they went back as there was no use of further research. So then, later, when [Pha bong kha] was residing in [Se ra smad monastic] college with scarce financial resources, living a life of austerity, listening and practicing vigorously the great gradual path, his mother told him: "Adopt the Lha mo tradition. You are a prince. A prince encounters ups and downs. Although you are Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje, it is not officially recognized. Therefore, you have to constantly be reminiscent of the way to become like [Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje]. Pha bong kha uses to say [about this]: "Not a single aspect of Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje's skills and accomplishment appeared in me at all. However, my faith and devotion to the venerable Rol pa'i rdo rje was increasing. Also, when I was reading [Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje's] scriptures, I understood them more easily than other scriptures. When I was young, in my cradle, the karmic imprints of my previous lives were clear, and further, the extensive karmic imprint were more and more clear. Because my mother repeated [what was said above], I was wondering if I am Rol pa'i rdo rje, and the belief of having been Rol pa'i rdo rje slightly arose. Brag g.yab Rtogs ldan 'jam dbyangs blo gros constantly insisted that I need to say clearly whatever previous incarnation I can remember. I heard a lot about my previous lives from Stag phu 'Jam dpal bstan pa'i dngos grub, but the other karmic imprints are not very clear. The belief of having been the religious minister of Mgrin sngon zla ba, Ye shes 'dzing, is very firm. It sometimes arises in a corner of my mind that during the time of Ge sar, [I was] Sras gra lha rtse rgyal, and during the time of the great

Tsong kha pa, [I was] Tsha kho ngag dbang grags pa, then Rol pa'i rdo rje, and then Ngag dbang bstan dar.<sup>38</sup>

During his study at Pal mo che monastery, Pha bong kha studied a text written by Stag phu Ma ti, the *Bya mgrin sngon zla ba'i rtogs brjod* with the teacher 'Bras nyag re mchog sprul rin po che Blo bzang thub bstan snyan grags rgya mtsho dpal bzang po.<sup>39</sup> He also received from the same teacher the empowerment (*rjes gnang*) to the thirteen golden doctrines of the Sa skya from the teaching of Stag phu Gar gyi dbang po (1765-1792), the reincarnation of Stag phu Ma ti.<sup>40</sup>

The first text is a fable written by Stag phu Ma ti, telling the story of the king Bya mgrin zla ba, which is presented as a previous incarnation of him. In the passage above, Pha bong kha states that he firmly believes to have been the religious minister of this king. This would mean that Pha bong kha considered to have been connected with the Stag phu lineage since many lives. The belief of Pha bong kha as having been Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje would also attest such connection between the two lineages. Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje was a contemporary of Stag phu Ma ti, and they both had the second 'Jam dbyang bzhad pa Dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po (1728-1791) as their student.<sup>41</sup>

Pha bong kha had a connection with Shugs ldan since his early age, as it is stated in his biography:

Also, when [Pha bong kha] was young, a deity suddenly possessed one of his aunts. Many people, including his father and mother, made lots of tumult about

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<sup>38</sup> *yab yum bcas kyis chos 'khor rgyal yin nam dgon pa zhid gi nang rten mjal ba'i tshe sras kyis na bza' sgril ka gcig la 'di nga'i yin zhes phyag gis dam du bzung ste mi gtong bar ma yum nas 'di su'i na bza' red ces dkon gnyer la dris bar/ lchang skya rol pa'i rdo rje'i na bza' yin zhes zhus pas ma yum gyis rtag tu gsung ba dang/ yang skabs shig tu kong po rgyal dbang chos rje'i yang srid rtsad gcod byed mkhan gyi mi 'byor te der sras la yang srid du re che'i 'dri zhib mang du byas bar/ ma yum nas rtsad gcod zhu mi dang sras khe'u gnyis skad cha gyis zhes gsungs par/ sras kyis yang srid rtsad gcog pa'i mi de la/ nged la phebs byam ser po yod pas/ de khyed tsho'i bla ma la yod dam/ nged rang gi dgon pa la rgya phibs yod pas khyod tsho'i bla ma la de 'dra yod dam zhes gsungs par/ khong tshos de 'dra med zer/ de ltar na nga khyod tsho'i bla ma de'i yang srid yin rgyu ma red ces thugs thag bcad pas khong tshos ci bya ma 'tshal par log dgos pa byung/ de bas na rjes su grwa sar bzhugs te 'byor tshogs kyi mthun rkyen dkon se ba'i ngang nas dka' thub kyi brtul zhugs bskyangs te gzhung chen mor gsan sbyong chig dril du gnang ba'i skabs kyang ma yum nas lha mo'i lugs blangs te/ yin pa rang ta rgyal po'i sras yin te/ rgyal po'i sras la dar gud byung ba yin/ zer ba ltar khyed rang lchang skya rol pa'i rdo rje yin yang ngos 'dzin byed pa ma byung bas 'di ltar gyur pa yin tshul gyi gsal 'debs yang yang mdzad kyin yod 'dug kyang/ zhal nas/ rang la ni lchang skya rol pa'i rdo rje'i mkhas pa dang grub pa'i yon tan gyi cha shas tsam yang ga la snang/ 'on kyang rje rol pa'i rdo rje la dad pa dang mos pa che zhing/ gsung rab rnam kyang bkags pa na/ dpe cha gzhan las nges sla ba zhid ni yod/ gang ltar chung dus byam nang du 'gro ba'i bag chags gsal po dang/ lhang par rgya'i bag chags ches cher gsal ba yod/ ma yum de nyid kyis yin tshul yang yang gsungs pas/ rol pa'i rdo rje yin nam snyam rol rdor gyi nga rgyal yang cung zad 'char/ brag g.yab rtogs ldan 'jam dbyangs blo gros pas ngos kyi skye phreng snga ma gang dang gang dran kyang gsal por brjod dgos zhes u tshugs kyis dri ba nan tan mdzad byung bar/ stag phu rdo rje 'chang nas nged kyi skyes rabs mang du gsungs kyang gzhan ma rnam kyi bag chags ha cang gsal ba rang ni mi 'dug/ mgrin sngon zla ba'i chos blon ye shes 'dzin yin snyam pa'i nga rgyal ni shin tu brtan/ ge sar gyi dus sras dgra lha rtse rgyal dang/ 'jam mgon tsong kha pa chen po'i sku dus su tsha kho dbon po ngag dbang grags pa/ gzhan yang rol rdor dang/ e bla ma mkha' sbyong ngag dbang bstan dar sogs yin snyam skabs skabs blo'i zur la 'char gsungs/ (Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje 1981, 1:220-22)*

<sup>39</sup> Probably Blo bzang snyan grags rgya mtsho who will later be the eighty-ninth Dga' ldan khri pa.

<sup>40</sup> 'bras nyag re mchog sprul rin po che blo bzang thub bstan snyan grags rgya mtsho dpal bzang po'i drung nas stag phu bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan gyi gsung bya mgrin sngon zla ba'i rtogs brjod/ stag phu gar dbang rin po che'i gsung sa skya'i gser chos bcu gsum gyi rjes gnang bskur ba'i cho ga/ (Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje 1981, 1:399-340). Stag phu Gar dbang could also be Stag phu Gar dbang chos kyi dbang 'phyug, whose date are unknown, but who seems to be the sixth Stag phu.

<sup>41</sup> On the connection between the Stag phu lineage, the Lcang skya lineage and Pha bong kha, see Repo 2015.

this. His mother asked the deity: “Who are you?” “You don’t know me” answered the deity while beating her head many times. Because the young boy was small, he could not thread his way among the grown people and climbed on the back of one of them. The deity pulled the young boy from [that person’s] back and showed many gestures of contentment such as touching his head with hers. When [Pha bong kha] investigated [about this] later, he concluded that [the deity] was Shugs ldan. Then, [the deity] made lots of thunder fall on the surrounding people. From then on, until the young [Pha bong kha] reached around twenty years, [the deity] came again and again through entering other people, and gave many prophecies.<sup>42</sup>

This connection with Shugs ldan seems to have influenced Pha bong kha in his practice, turning from a non-sectarian to a sectarian approach:

In the very beginning, Pha bong kha listened to many religious teachings from many learned scholars of the Sa skya, Rnying ma and Bka’ brgyud traditions. He was also spoiled by having been sometimes introduced to the [Rnying ma] early translation by Brag ri gong ma and Lama Ri sku Rin po che. Therefore, he practiced extensively many non-sectarian teachings. Since his youth, mighty Shugs ldan, the specific protector of Tsong kha pa’s teachings, through whatever was appropriate, various visions or taking possession of people, carefully supervised him and told him: “if you practice a philosophical view which is not mixed with other philosophical tenets and keep it pure, then I will accomplish, according to your wish, whatever activities you need”. [Shugs ldan] constantly exhorted him through such requests and various symbolic methods, and [Pha bong kha] accepted.<sup>43</sup>

Pha bong kha’s connection to Shugs ldan intensified around 1914 under the advice of the Dwags po lama ‘Jam dpal lhun grub rgya mtsho (1845-1919), as Pha bong kha’s biography continues:

Moreover, Dwags po Lama Rinpoche told Pha bong kha: “even though I do not rely on Shugs ldan personally, he remains in the manner of a doorkeeper,

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<sup>42</sup> yang sras gzhon nu nyid kyi sru mo zhig la glo bur du lha zhig khog tu brlams te yab yum sogs mi mang pos bskor nas ‘ur zing chen po byed pa’i skabs/ my yum gyis lha de la khyed su yin dris par/ khyod kyis nga ngo mi shes pa zer te mgo lcag mang du brab/ sras gzhon nu nyid sku gzugs chung bas mi chen po’i gseb tu ‘chang ma thub par rgyab cig tu bzhengs nas yod pa la lha des mi’i rgyab nas sras chung ngu tshur ‘then te dbu la dbu gtugs pa sogs dga’ ba’i rnam ‘gyur mang po mdzad pa zhig byung ba/ rje su zhib par gzigs skabs lha de rgyal chen shugs ldan yin par gsungs la/ de rjes su yang nye ‘gram gyi mi rigs la thog ‘beb byed pa mang du byung zhing/ de nas bzung gzhon nu nyid dgung grangs nyi shu’i skor du ma phebs pa’i bar la yang yang mi gzhan gyi khog tu zhugs nas lung bstan mang po gnang gin yod gsungs/ (Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje 1981, 1:222–23).

<sup>43</sup> rdo rje ‘chang chen po mchog nas dang thogs sa rnying bka’ brgyud kyi mkhas pa du ma las chos mang du gsan cing/ brag ri gong ma dang bla ma ri sku rin po che sogs las kyang snga ‘gyur phyogs kyi bag zhad cung zad re ‘go bar brten ris su ma mchis pa’i chos tshul du mar nyams bzhes rgya cher mdzad kyang/ sku gzhon nu’i gnas skabs nas ‘jam mgon bstan srung thun mong min par do rje shugs ldan rtsal gyis dngos nyams dang mi’i khog brloms ci rigs pas mel thse g.yel med du mdzad de rje nyid nas grub mtha’ gzhan sel ma ‘dres pa’i lta grub gtsang mar bdag gir bzhes na/ ji ltar dgos pa’i ‘phrin las rnam thugs kyi bzhed don je bzhin bdag gis sgrub bo zhes yang yang zhu zhing brda thabs sna tshogs pas bskul ba bzhin zhal gyis bzhes pa dang/ (Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje 1981, 1:408).

accomplishing activities”. And [Dwags po Rin po che] adds: “if you rely personally on this lord, it will be good”.<sup>44</sup>

The passage concludes as follow:

Since the great master [Pha bong kha] had previously listened and practiced without sectarianism innumerable old and new textual and oral traditions, he had gained mastery in all the views, meditations, conducts and results of each tenet system without confusing them. Now, a firm conviction is born in him, out of a process of hundreds logical analyses through fine discernment of the unique, subtle and wise unstained tradition of the great conqueror Tsong kha pa – the topmost, like the top point of a banner, and unmistakable sutric and tantric teaching of the Buddha, superior to all [other traditions] in many aspects. Therefore, it happened that the power of the strong resolve [Pha bong kha made] previously increased, and by understanding the reason gradually, he followed exclusively the example of the pure Dga’ ldan tradition, and all activities of the master [Pha bong kha’s] wishes were accomplished by means of the fierce protector [Shugs ldan].<sup>45</sup>

Pha bong kha's sectarianism, or his exclusive practice of Dge lugs teachings appears at this time, in 1914, and is closely connected to his relation with Shugs ldan, as his biography clearly states. Few years later Pha bong kha travelled to the White Spring of Dol:

The tenth day of the tenth month,<sup>46</sup> [Pha bong kha] went to the so-called White Spring of Dol, the place where the precious body of Grags pa rgyal mtshan actually remains. Nowadays, only his left hand remains. [Pha bong kha] composed the main part of an offering ritual<sup>47</sup> for the fierce emanated protector, the mighty Shugs ldan, in order to make a great accumulation of offering as well as to give a banquet in the presence of the relic.<sup>48</sup>

This passage shows that Pha bong kha considered Shugs ldan as an emanation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan, as the mention of Shugs ldan, the fierce emanated protector (*sprul pa'i bstan srung gnyan*

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<sup>44</sup> *lhag par dwags po bla ma rin po ches rgyal chen dngos su bsten pa mi mdzad kyang/ sgo srung gi tshul du bzhugs te 'phrin las sgrub cing/ rje nyid la dngos su bsten na legs par gsungs pa'i thog/* (Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje 1981, 1:408–9).

<sup>45</sup> *sngar nas rje bla ma mchog gis gsar rnying ris su ma chad pa'i gzhun lugs man ngag mtha' yas pa gsan cing nyams su bzhes par brten grub mtha' so so'i lta sgom sbyong 'bras kyi mtha' ngag ma 'dres par thugs su chud nas da kun las khyad par gyi chos du mas lhag pa'i thub pa'i mdo sngags kyi bstan pa tshang la ma nor ba rgyal mtshan gyi tog ltar mtho na ni rgyal ba tsong kha pa chen po'i ring lugs dri ma me dpa 'di nyid nyag gcig tu phra mdzangs zhib pa'i mkhyen rab kyis rnam par dpyad pa'i rigs pa brgya phrag gi lam las thugs nges brtan po gzhan gyis sgyur mi btu bpa 'khrungs la/ sngon gyi thugs bskyed btsan po'i mthu brtas te rim gyis rgyu mtshan mkhyen pa'i sgo nas dge ldan ring lugs gtsang ma'i rnam thar kha na gcig tu skyong bar mdzad cing/ bstan srung gnyan po gang nas kyang rje nyid kyi bzhed dgu'i 'phrin las mtha' dag 'bad med du sgrub par mdzad pa de ltar byung ba yin no/* (Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje 1981, 1:409)

<sup>46</sup> Of the iron-bird year, that is the ninth of November 1921.

<sup>47</sup> This text is a private fulfillment ritual (*sger bskang*) to Shugs ldan (Pha bong kha 1983a).

<sup>48</sup> *hor zla bcu pa'i tshes bcu nyin sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi sku gdung rin po che dngos su bzhugs pa'i gnas dol chu mig dkar mo zhes par ched phebs kyis dus phyis phag g.yas pa tsam bzhugs pa spyang drangs pa'i mdun du mchod pa'i tshogs rgya chen po dang/ tshogs kyi 'khor lob cas 'bul gnang mdzad rgyur/ sprul pa'i bstan srung gnyan po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal la tshogs mchod 'bul tshul gyi cho ga dngos gzhi bka' rtsom mdzad* (Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje 1981, 1:480–81)

*po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal*) suggests. This could mean that Pha bong kha knew, if not Stag phu Ma ti's text itself, at least an oral tradition about the origin of Shugs ldan similar to that of Stag phu Ma ti.

It is shortly after his visit to the White Spring of Dol that Pha bong kha wrote the root text of the life entrustment ritual (*srog gtad*) to Shugs ldan. His biography states that:

Since several months, the venerable master [Pha bong kha] was continuously accompanied by the protector Shugs ldan, like the shadow of his body, carefully accomplishing all his wishes. Occasionally, the fierce protector possessed a medium and insistently expressed the need to compose a new life entrustment ritual to him. Thus, after a while, as [Pha bong kha] did not let aside the request given by the protector Shugs ldan, he composed the life entrustment ritual as it arose in his mind.<sup>49</sup>

The final version of the life entrustment ritual was written in 1935 as it is stated in the colophon. For the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth day of the third month of that year, Pha bong kha's biography mentions:

Having previously requested [Stag phu 'Jam dpal bstan pa'i dngos grub] again and again, at that time [Pha bong kha] received from him the complete transmission of the explanation of the *Lam rim chen mo* with annotations by four scholars until the end of the second volume with a summary of its history, and the reading transmission of a lineage supplication written by Lho sprul Rinpoche, as well as the life entrustment ritual to fierce protector of the Dga' ldan tradition, the great mighty Rdo rje Shugs ldan, which is an uncommon short lineage of pure vision, with a personal transmission.<sup>50</sup>

With the transmission of the life entrustment ritual to Shugs ldan, Pha bong kha probably received Stag phu Ma ti's narrative of Shugs ldan's origin. Indeed, Pha bong kha's narrative of Shugs ldan's origin that appear in his supplement of the life entrustment ritual is almost identical to Stag phu Ma ti's one.<sup>51</sup>

While Pha bong kha's connection with Shugs ldan seems to have been established during his childhood, Pha bong kha's interest for Shugs ldan increased since 1914, when Dwags po Rinpoche told him to rely on Shugs ldan, until 1935, when he received the complete life entrustment ritual from Stag phu's pure vision. Between these dates, Pha bong kha went to Dol chu mig in 1920, and

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<sup>49</sup> *sngon dus rnam nas bstan srung rdo rje shugs ldan pas rje bla ma mchog gi sku lus dang grib ma ji bzhin 'brul med du 'grogs te bzhed dgu'i 'phrin las mtha' dag g.yel med du sgrubs par mdzad la/ skabs 'gar bstan srung gnyan po ngang nyid mi'i rten gzhi'i khog tu zhugs te rdo rje shugs ldan pa rang gi srog gtad kyi cho ga gsar du bka' rtsom gnang dgos pa'i bskul ma yang yang zhus pal tar re zhid chos skyong chen pos gsung bskul gnang ba ras bor ma mdzad par rje nyid kyi thugs nyams su ji ltar shar ba bzhin gyi srog dbang gi cho ga yang bka' rtsom mdzad/ (Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje 1981, 1:484–85)*

<sup>50</sup> *sngar nas snyan gsan yang yang 'bul gnang mdzad bzhin bar skabs rnam su stag phu rdo rje 'chang gi drung nas lam rim chen mo mtshan bzhi sbrag kyi bshad khrid gsan 'phro pod gnyis pa'i mjug yongs su rdzogs pa'i lung khrid/ de'i lo rgyus dkar chag bcas dang/ lho sprul rin po che'i gsung brgyud 'debs bcas kyi ljags lung/ dge ldan bsten srung gnyan po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal chen po'i srog gtad dag snang nye brgyud thun mon ma yin pa'ng rje bla ma nyid nas chig brgyud bcas gsan/ (Ldan ma Blo bzang rdo rje 1981b, 2:226)*

<sup>51</sup> See: Pha bong kha 1983. The colophon mentions that this text was written by the third Khri byang Blo bzang ye shes bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (1901-1981), based on Pha bong kha's oral instructions.

composed the root text of the life entrustment ritual in 1921. He then wrote a fulfilling and amending liturgy (*bskang gso*) in 1925, and his propitiation of Shugs ldan was intense enough to disturb the Gnas chung oracle and to incite the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to ask him in a letter not to propitiate Shugs ldan anymore.<sup>52</sup>

This kind of ban imposed by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama on the propitiation of Shugs ldan, certainly under the advice of the Gnas chung oracle, suggests that the propitiation of Shugs ldan was a political issue, that should be understood within the political context of that time. The political events of the period during which Pha bong kha was active in disseminating the practice of Shugs ldan is well documented by Melvyn Goldstein.<sup>53</sup> I will not go too much into details about it, but just sketch the main events that echo those of the Shugs ldan's origin narrative, and the issue of non-sectarianism.

In 1912, the Manchu Qing dynasty collapsed, and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama proclaimed the Tibetan independence in 1913, when he returned from his exile in Sikkim. These two events brought the *mchod yon* or priest patron alliance between Tibet and Manchu China to an end. In order to protect the Tibetan independence, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama wished to constitute a strong army, with the help of young aristocrats. Melvyn Goldstein notes that during that time, there were three factions in Lhasa, each of them defending their own interest against the others. These three factions were: the military commanders, who were very much inspired by secular ideas,<sup>54</sup> the members of the Dge lugs clergy, who were more loyal to their tradition than to the government,<sup>55</sup> and the government officials, who were more committed to strengthening the government on which they depended.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kilty 2019, 147–49.

<sup>53</sup> Goldstein 1991.

<sup>54</sup> “The first faction, a group of military commanders led by Tsarong, the commander-in-chief, were committed to Tibetan independence from China. They believed that military strength, not the prayers of the monks, had paved the way for the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet in 1912. Relatively young, energetic, and modern in their attitude, they possessed an esprit de corps unique in Tibet. Because they were committed to modernization, others considered them to be a threat to the religious domination of the Gelugpa State. Ostentatious in their adoption of Western (British) uniforms, [...], and generally secular in orientation and demeanour, the commanders appeared to challenge the very essence of the monastery-dominated political system” (Goldstein 1991, 89).

<sup>55</sup> “The second main faction, represented by the Three Seats, was vehemently opposed to the proposed expansion of the army and to most other forms of modernization or change. Their primary loyalty was to Buddhism and the Gelugpa monastic order rather than to any nationalistic entity called Tibet. They were committed to the Tibetan government only so long as it furthered the interests of the Gelugpa sect's version of Tibetan Buddhism. For the monks, Tibet was a uniquely Buddhist country whose religious character had to be maintained at all costs. They also believed that they were the ones most qualified to determine what was in the best interests of religion.” (Goldstein 1991, 91).

<sup>56</sup> “A third faction was comprised of conservative government officials. Led by the powerful and stern Drönyerchemmo Temba Dargye [Mg ron gnyer chen mo bsTan pa dar rgyas], and including a number of important monk and lay officials such as Kusantse Shape [Sku bzang rtse Zhabs pad], this faction's interests fell between the other two. While committed to maintaining, if not actually strengthening, the central government, they were also committed to the view of Tibet as a religious state under the Dalai Lama; thus, they too were extremely apprehensive about the pro-Western military faction. They opposed the excessive power of the monastic segment, but they shared the monastic fear that a large and powerful army would create economic hardship and tilt the balance of power toward the hands of the young, radical group officer who fostered Western customs.” (Goldstein 1991, 92–93).

The constitution of this army required more taxes to be collected by the central government, and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama chose to directly tax the monastic estates, and to ask the Bkra shis lhun po monastery to take part in the war expenses. This led to a strong opposition between the Dge lugs hierarchs and the army during the 1920's, and to a deterioration of the relation between the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, forcing the latter to flee to China.<sup>57</sup>

This situation was more or less similar to the one during the Fifth Dalai Lama's reign. Even though the fifth Dalai Lama obtained political power with the help of Gushri Khan's army, he gradually emancipated himself from both the Qoshot rulers and the Dge lugs pa tradition, until becoming a powerful ruler.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the opposition Nicolay Tsyrempilov makes out between Dge lugs sectarians who are more loyal to their tradition than to the Tibetan State on one side, and the Fifth Dalai Lama's partisans who were more loyal to the "proto-national" Tibetan state is very similar to what Goldstein writes about the opposition between the faction represented by the Three Seats and the faction represented by the government officials. What I want to underline here, is that the model of the Tibetan state the Thirteenth Dalai Lama wanted to establish is somehow similar to the Tibetan state established by the Fifth Dalai Lama. The latter is a Tibetan state centralized around the Dalai Lama institution, independent from foreign powers, and to some extent independent from the Dge lugs tradition. Indeed, like the Fifth Dalai Lama, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was interested in Rnying ma practices, and the reason might be similar to that of the Fifth Dalai Lama.<sup>59</sup>

Beside the Fifth Dalai Lama's political regime, the Kingdom of Sde dge could also have been seen as a model for a multiconfessional regime in central Tibet. The hegemony the Gelug tradition acquired through the *mchod yon* alliance with the Manchu was not effective in eastern Tibet and particularly in the kingdom of Sde dge that enjoyed a relative independence.<sup>60</sup> The political context of this kingdom headed by a secular ruler provided a fertile ground for the raise of the *ris med* movement. In return the *ris med* movement provided a means of legitimizing the kingdom.

Lauran Hartley notes that Dil mgo mkhyen brtse (1910-1991) distinguished two kinds of *ris med*. The first one applies for the lamas, monks and practitioners, and consists in studying and practicing teachings from all traditions. The second one is for the laity, and consists in respecting and supporting all traditions.<sup>61</sup> It is this second understanding of *ris med* that applies to the king and therefore to the political sphere. This is clear from the *Rgyal po'i lugs kyi bstan bcos*, the governance treatise that 'Jam mgon mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1912) wrote for the king 'Jam dpal rin chen. In this text it is written that the king should not be partial, and that if someone makes his own religious

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<sup>57</sup> Goldstein 1991, 89–138. Pha bong kha was certainly affected by this situation as he tried to intercede for the return of the Panchen Lama after the thirteenth Dalai Lama's death (Jagou 2004, 239–58).

<sup>58</sup> The Fifth Dalai Lama's rise to power follow the death of Gushri Khan in 1655, of Grags pa rgyal mtshan in 1656, and of Bsod nams chos 'phel in 1658. See: Ishihama 1993; Yamaguchi 1995; Karmay 1998; Richardson 2003; Ishihama 2015.

<sup>59</sup> According to David Kay, the thirteenth Dalai Lama was favourable to the *ris med* movement, and was even considered as a *gter ston* (Kay 1997, 279). Unfortunately, Kay does not quote any source. But Tarthang Tulku notes that the thirteenth Dalai Lama received the Klon chen snying thig cycle from his master Nyag gter Bsod rgyal las rab gling pa (1856-1926)(Tulku and Bradburn 1995, 360).

<sup>60</sup> Hartley 1997, 7–25; 2013. Geoffrey Samuel notes that four of the six main monasteries of the Rnying ma tradition were in the state of Sde dge, outside de area of direct Dge lugs pa influence (Samuel 2003, 721).

<sup>61</sup> Hartley 1997, 86.

system primary, and other sects resent this, this is not the king's fault, but the fault of those around him. However, it is also written that if someone cherishes his own sect while harming other sects, and some resentment arises, this is the fault of the king, not the fault of those around him. The king should then protect all religious traditions.<sup>62</sup>

According to this treatise, the king is responsible for the harmony between different religious traditions. The king of Sde dge was actually supporting the three Rnying ma, Bka' brgyud and Sa skya traditions through offerings, but these traditions were also supporting the king through different rituals.<sup>63</sup> The impartiality of the king prevented the political hegemony of one tradition, based on a specific relation with the ruler, as it was the case in Central Tibet. This system also prevented any struggle between the king's secular power and the clergy's religious authority, as well as a competition between religious traditions for political power.

The success of the *ris med* movement in Eastern Tibet could have given some ideological basis for the reforms of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, in order to re-establish the political model of the Fifth Dalai Lama. This would have definitively put an end to the political hegemony of the Gelug clergy, who was already contesting the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's reforms.

At that time, with the collapse of the Manchu empire and the presence of a strong Dalai Lama, some Dge lugs lamas, including Pha bong kha, could have been scared that with the end of the *mchod yon* alliance, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama would establish a tolerant political regime that would weaken the Dge lugs tradition. With the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1933, the monastic segment restored his political power, but the two previous decades had shown them that without the protection of the Manchu empire, the Dge lugs tradition was left alone. The whole political structure that guaranteed their hegemony was no more, and the only political support they could hope for had to be found in the Tibetan government. Thus, it was imperative for them that this government did not take the Fifth Dalai Lama's regime, or the kingdom of Sde dge, as a model.

#### 4 Shugs ldan's mythico-ritual system

Pha bong kha is known for having fomented sectarian discord in Khams.<sup>64</sup> David Kay writes that when Pha bong kha was the agent of the Tibetan government in Khams, he employed repressive measure against non Dge lugs traditions, breaking Padmasambhava's statues, and attempted to forcibly convert Rnying ma monasteries to the Dge lugs tradition.<sup>65</sup> While this happened after the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's death, it can also be understood as a wish to undermine the *ris med* ideology

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<sup>62</sup> *Phyogs su ma lhung bsnjoms byas na// mtho dman sus kyang bka' la rtsi// rgyal po kun gzi zhun mong phyir// bya ba phyogs su ma lhung zhing// phyogs zhen can gyi ngag mi smra// g tong la'ng phyogs zhen mi bya'o// rang gi chos lugs gtsor bzung ste// bstan la phan 'dogs ci byas kyang// de la grub mtha'Igzhan 'khul// rgyal po'I skyon min 'khor gyi skyon// rang gi grub mtha' gces bung nas// grub mtha' gzhan la gnod byed na// de la 'khu ba ci byung yang// 'khor gyi skyon min rgyal po'i skyon// de phyir phyi rol mu stegs tshun// rgyal po'i yul na gang gnas pa'i// gna' po'i grub mtha' rang rang gi// sngar tshul de bzhin rgyal pos bsrung// (Hartley 1997, 81–82).*

<sup>63</sup> Hartley 1997, 38–50.

<sup>64</sup> Repo 2015, 6–7.

<sup>65</sup> Kay 1997, 280.

of the kingdom of Sde dge, at a time when the central government of Lhasa attempted to gain control over Sde dge.

Pha bong kha's growing interest toward Shugs ldan since the collapse of the Manchu empire and the Tibetan independence, and during the political turmoil of the 1920, as well as after the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama should be understood in the light of politics. The visit he made to the White Spring of Dol, and the reference to Grags pa rgyal mtshan shows that he was aware of the narrative of Stag phu Ma ti. His choice to rely on Shugs ldan was certainly motivated by the fact that the tension between the Dge lugs monastic segment and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama echoed the opposition between Grags pa rgyal mtshan and the Fifth Dalai Lama, which is at the core of the narrative of Shugs ldan's origin. His sectarian activities in Sde dge followed the same political agenda. Sde dge had somehow inherited the Fifth's policy of accommodating other Tibetan religious denominations, and preserved it despite the one and half century of Dge lugs rule in central Tibet.<sup>66</sup> This political model, with a secular ruler under which all religious traditions are subjugated, and equally represented, appeared to be the antithesis of the political model established in central Tibet during the middle of the eighteenth century.

As I have noted above, Nicolay Tsyrempilov defines the Fifth Dalai Lama's regime as "proto-national". The defining characteristic of this regime is the presence of the Dalai Lama institution as the head of state, incarnating the principle of union of politics and religion (*chos srid zung 'brel*). In this regard, this political regime is closer to a sacral kingship, where the king is at the same time a sacred being and a historical ruler. As a matter of fact, the Tibetan national identity was built during the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Dalai lama around this political model, in opposition to the model of a Dge lugs clerical state, which was closely linked to, if not dependent on, a *mchod yon* alliance with a foreign secular power.

The Fifth Dalai Lama's regime is intrinsically linked to the non-sectarian approach, since it aims at uniting all Tibetans, from all religious traditions, under the same centralized state. This regime is in a way secular since it aims at uniting the people who speak Tibetan and live on the Tibetan plateau, under an independent centralized state. On the other side, the Dge lugs clerical state that was established in 1751 is intrinsically linked to a religious tradition, but it is not linked to a specific territory and culture. As Nicolay Tsyrempilov notes, the Dge lugs tradition, at the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama, had already become a phenomenon of international significance.<sup>67</sup> The *ris med* ideology is therefore intrinsically linked to the political model of the Fifth Dalai Lama, since it prevents the state to be defined in terms of religious identity, allowing it to be defined in terms of cultural or political identity.

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<sup>66</sup> What I call the Dge lugs rule in Tibet starts from 1751, when the Seventh Dalai Lama was put in power by the Manchu, until the enthronisation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1898. During that time, the Dalai Lamas did not really rule Tibet, and the political power was in the hands of the Dge lugs clergy through the Regents. See Petech 1959.

<sup>67</sup> Tsyrempilov writes: "The Fifth Dalai Lama's policy did not find support among many members of the Yellow Hats community, since they may have believed that their tradition had already stepped over the borders of the state, having become a phenomenon of international significance." (Tsyrempilov 2003, 58–59).

It is worth noting that the term *chos lugs ris med* later became synonymous of secularism in the Tibetan community in exile. During the first session on the tenth Assembly of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile, in March 1991, Zam gdong Rin po che, the speaker of the parliament, proposed to adopt the principle of *chos lugs ris med* in the Charter of the Tibetans in Exile (*btsan byol bod mi'i bca' khrims*) instead of the principle of *chos srid zung 'brel*.<sup>68</sup> This proposition was presented as a step toward the secularization of the government in exile. The term *chos lugs ris med* is directly inspired by the *ris med* ideology, and the proposition to incorporate it in the Charter of the Tibetans in Exile was also a way to counter the influence of the Shugs ldan cult's sectarianism, that has become central to the newly founded New Kadampa Tradition by Bskal bzang rgya mtsho.<sup>69</sup>

This leaves us with the question what role Shugs ldan played in Pha bong kha's sectarianism and political agenda. As I will show, Pha bong kha placed Shugs ldan at the centre of a mythico-ritual system similar to that of the Fifth Dalai Lama in its structure, but totally different in its function.<sup>70</sup>

Joono Repo underlines that Pha bong kha wrote a life entrustment ritual (*srog gtad*) to Shugs ldan instead of a permission empowerment (*rjes gnang*). He adds that this means that for Pha bong kha, Shugs ldan was considered to be a worldly protector. Repo also notes that for Pe har too, a life entrustment ritual was chosen over a permission empowerment. Moreover, both Shugs ldan and Pe har have an oracle, or medium (*sku rten*), which is the sole apanage of worldly protectors.<sup>71</sup> Joono Repo argues that Pha bong kha had no intent to replace the protectors of the Dge lugs tradition by Shugs ldan, nor was he inclined to present himself, Shugs ldan, and Vajrayoginī as the main guru, protector, and tutelary deity (*yi dam*) of the Dge lugs tradition, contrary to what Dreyfus affirms.<sup>72</sup> The issue seems to have not been a religious, but a political one. From my point of view, Pha bong kha tried to establish a new mythico-ritual system capable of legitimizing a Dge lugs clerical theocracy, and therefore to compete with the Dalai Lama's mythico-ritual system—all that in a context where the *mchod yon* alliance with the Manchu emperor had disappeared.

For Dario Sabbatucci, the theocracy is a political system that is the antithetic to the sacral kingship. A sacral kingship is characterized by the rule of a king who is deified, that is a king who is believed to be a god living on earth. A theocracy is characterized by the rule of a god who is reified, that is a god who is considered to be a king living in heaven.<sup>73</sup> This opposition actually corresponds to the difference between the Fifth Dalai Lama's mythico-ritual system and the one of Pha bong kha.

Shugs ldan was considered by Pha bong kha as an emanation of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, as were the Manchu emperors, as well as Tsong kha pa. At the same time the Manchu emperor Kangxi was considered by Sum pa mkhan po as a reincarnation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan, and Shugs ldan was considered by Stag phu Ma ti to be an emanation of Grags pa rgyal mtshan. Since there was no more Manchu emperor, that is no living incarnation of Mañjuśrī, the focus shifted on Shugs ldan.

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<sup>68</sup> Okada 2016.

<sup>69</sup> On the New Kadampa Tradition, see Kay 1997; 2007, 35–116.

<sup>70</sup> On the mythico-ritual system, see: Mancini 2008.

<sup>71</sup> Repo 2015, 26–27.

<sup>72</sup> Repo 2015, 28–32.

<sup>73</sup> Sabbatucci 2002, 227–42.

Shugs ldan is for Pha bong kha what Pe har was for the Fifth Dalai Lama. Pe har is the worldly protector of the multiconfessional “proto-national” Tibetan government, while Shugs ldan is the worldly protector of the Dge lugs tradition's political interests. Both have an oracle through which they can deliver prophecies. That is why Shugs ldan and Gnas chung were often, if not always, in competition, and each side argues that their oracle can give better advice than the other.<sup>74</sup> With the presence of the Dalai Lama as the living emanation of Avalokiteśvara, this political model is close to a sacral kingship. On the contrary, without a living emanation of Mañjuśrī, the alternative political model shifted from a clerical state allied with the Manchu dynasty, to a theocracy, where the whole Dge lugs clergy rule in the name of Mañjuśrī, with the help of Shugs ldan.

Shugs ldan requires an exclusive loyalty to the Dge lugs tradition, as it is expressed in Dze smad Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan ‘dzin yar rgyas’ “Yellow Book”,<sup>75</sup> which is a commentary of a verse taken from Pha bong kha’s praise to Shugs ldan:

Praise to you, warrior spirit of the Yellow Hat tradition, you destroy like a pile of dust; great adepts, high officials and ordinary people; who defile and corrupt the Gelug tradition.<sup>76</sup>

This text published in 1973 tells how some important Dge lugs masters and Government officials were punished by Shugs ldan because they mixed their Dge lugs practice with some Rnying ma practices. This exclusive loyalty to the Dge lugs tradition discouraged the diffusion of the *ris med* ideology among Dge lugs adepts and government officials, discouraged any loyalty to a multiconfessional political regime, and therefore prevented the restoration of a system similar to that of the Fifth Dalai Lama. While a life entrustment to the protector Pe har bound the adept to the Tibetan state, a life entrustment to Shugs ldan bound the adept to the Dge lugs tradition. The first one is exclusive in terms of an allegiance to a country and its government, but allows other religious affiliations. The second one is exclusive in terms of an allegiance to a religious tradition, but allow other political affiliations.

## 5 Conclusion

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<sup>74</sup> René de Nebesky Wojkowitz writes: “A Tibetan tradition claims that the guardian-deity *rdo rje shugs ldan*, “Powerful Thunderbolt”, will succeed *Pe har* as the head of all *‘jig rten pa’i srung ma* once the latter god advances into the rank of those guardian-deities who stand already outside the worldly spheres.” (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996, 134). This of course reflects the position of Shugs ldan’s followers who found a diplomatic argument to oust *Pe har* from the political decision-making process. Other examples of Shugs ldan followers’ criticism against *Pe har* is found in Western Shugden Society 2009, 103–12. In the Shugs ldan be’u bum, a text titled: “History of the Great protector in question and answer form” (*Chos skyong chen po’i lo rgyus dri pa dris len gyi tshul du bskod pa bzhugs so*), written by the Twelfth Grwa sgom Rinpoche Blo bzang mkhyen rab bstan pa’i dbang phyug (1953-2006), clearly expresses the idea that *Pe har*’s prophecies were mistaken, while Shugs ldan’s ones were correct (Grwa sgom 1983).

<sup>75</sup> The title of the book is: Bstan srung rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi byung ba brjod pa pha rgod bla ma’l zhal gyi bdud rtsi (“Words of the Wild Father: Narrative of the Apparition of the Protector Shugs ldan”).

<sup>76</sup> *dga’ ldan bstan la bsre bslad ‘jug byed pa’i/ bdag nyid che dang phal dang dpon chen sogs/ thal ba’i rdul bzhin rlog par mdzad pa yi/ zhwa ser bstan pa’i dgra lha khyod la bstod/* (Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan ‘dzin yar rgyas 1997, 576).

The fall of the Manchu empire brought to an end the *mchod yon* relationship between the Dge lugs clergy and the Manchu emperor, weakening as it did the Dge lugs political hegemony in Tibet. On the other side, the declaration of the Tibetan independence and the reforms undertaken under the strong leadership of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama would lay the foundations of a Tibetan nation-state, with a similar structure to that of the one established by the Fifth Dalai Lama. These reforms have raised the opposition of the Dge lugs monastic segment, resulting in a striking power struggle between the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the Dge lugs clergy.

In this context, non-sectarianism, or religious pluralism, was an ideology capable of supporting and legitimizing the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's attempt to re-establish a centralized Tibetan state. This structure of power, where the ruler is not only supported by a single religious tradition, but becomes the central node of a network composed of all religious traditions, was also the model of the kingdom of Sde dge in Khams, where the *ris med* movement was spearheaded by Kong sprul, Mkhyen rtse, and Mchog gyur gling pa. It was also the model of the Fifth Dalai Lama's regime, while the mid-eighteenth-century narrative of Shugs ldan's origin shows that Shugs ldan practice could not be reconciled with the Fifth Dalai Lama's non-sectarianism.

To stress its opposition to the Fifth Dalai Lama's regime, the narrative of Shugs ldan's origin was linked to the narrative of Grags pa rgyal mtshan's death. Therefore, the promotion of the protector Shugs ldan and its worship can be understood not only as a religious sectarian reaction to the *ris med* movement but also, if not mainly, as a political reaction to a resurgent power structure in which the *ris med* ideology could play a central role.

Pha bong kha's growing interest toward Shugs ldan just after the collapse of the Manchu empire and the declaration of Tibetan independence, as well as his opposition to the *ris med* movement, should be understood as being mainly politically motivated, in that he tried to neutralize the Dalai Lama's attempt to restore a political regime similar to the Fifth Dalai Lama's one. The end of the *mchod yon* alliance with the Manchu emperor left the Dge lugs tradition without any secular protector who could guarantee its political hegemony. This encouraged Pha bong kha to set up a mythico-ritual system able to legitimize a Dge lugs clerical rule.

Pha bong kha's sectarianism should, therefore, be understood not only in terms of keeping the Dge lugs tradition pure, or in terms of religious sectarianism versus religious tolerance, but also in terms of an opposition between two different political models: One being centred on the exclusive political loyalty to the Tibetan state, the other centred on the exclusive religious loyalty to the Dge lugs tradition. The dissemination of the Shugs ldan cult, which required a lifetime commitment, was a means in Pha bong kha's hand to ensure the loyalty of the members of the Dge lugs clergy, as well as of the government officials, toward the Dge lugs tradition instead of toward a non-sectarian Tibetan nation-state.

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