

A Note on the Relationship between the Bka' gdams pa School and Mi nyag/Xixia

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Abstract: One of the recent publications, *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgrenng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od* [A Statement about Rwa sgrenng Monastery, the Hermitage of the Victor: the Light of the Sun] written by 'Brom Shes rab me lce (13th–14thc.) provides us new information about Bka' gdams pa school. According to this text, during the tenure of Zhang 'Od 'jo ba (?–1150), Rwa sgrenng monastery's fifth abbot, his disciples performed a monk-patron relationship (*mchod yon*) with the king of Xixia. In previous studies, I focused on the five manuscripts related to Bka' gdams pa school, which were discovered at the fortress of Xixia kingdom, Khara-khoto. The description of *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgrenng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od* may explain why manuscripts of texts belonging to the Bka' gdams pa school's literary legacy were discovered at Khara-khoto. It also provides evidence of a substantial and very early connection of a monk-patron relationship between the Bka' gdams pa school and the Xixia royal court.

Key words: Bka' gdams pa, Rwa sgrenng, Mi nyag, Xixia, Khara-khoto

So far, many studies of the Bka' gdams pa school have concentrated on its teachings and literatures, but the historical background that gave rise to this school, the social environment at the time of its inception, and its diachronic relationships with political forces have hardly been investigated. Fortunately, due to the publication of several rare texts written by Bka' gdams pa masters that have been made available by Dpal brtsegs Publications,^① it has now become possible to discover new information about this school. In this brief paper I present a new finding that I hope will be of interest to historians of the Tibetan cultural area.

One of these new publications, the substantial *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgrenng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od* [A Statement about Rwa sgrenng Monastery, the Hermitage of the Victor: the Light of the Sun] was included in the first volume of the first installment of the series *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* [Collection of Historical Works and Biographies]. This work provides

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① So far, Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang, which is a private institute in Lhasa has published three collections of scores of rare manuscripts of works by masters of the Bka' gdams pa school such as *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs bsgrigs*, parts 1, 2, 3 (2006, 2007, 2009).

us with information on the school's historical background that was not known before. So far, this text is the only known work that is solely devoted to Rwa sgreng monastery, one of the main monasteries of the Bka' gdams pa school, which is located north of Lhasa in present-day Lhun grub rdzong. It was founded by 'Brom ston Rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas (1005–1064) in 1057 after the death of his master Atiśa (982–1054).^① In fact, until this publication, we knew of this text's existence only through the *Mdo smad chos 'byung* by Brag dkar Zhabs drung Dkon mehog bstan pa rab rgyas (1801–after 1866).^② It is a comparatively early text because most of the large-scale treatises that have to do with the historical and social development of the Bka' gdams pa school, the so-called Bka' gdams chos 'byung, were written towards the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century.^③ According to its colophon, the *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od* was written by a Bka' gdams pa master named 'Brom Shes rab me lce (13th–14th c.) in 1299.^④ The manuscript is written in a cursive *dbu med* script and consists of thirty-two folios; it is rife with spelling mistakes and often has interlinear and marginal notes. It consists of two chapters:

1. An explanation of how Rwa sgreng monastery was constructed (*ji ltar bzhengs pa'i lo rgyus kyi bshad pa*), 1b7–22a8.
2. An explanation of the "supports" that were housed there (*de na bzhugs pa'i rten rnams kyi bshad pa*), 22a8–31b8.

Interestingly enough, in the section on its construction titled "the principal temple with twenty-four pillars" (*dbu rtse ka ba nyi shu rtsa bzhi ma*) that we find in the first chapter, there is a brief description of the relationship of several Bka' gdams pa masters with the king of Mi nyag. Known in Tibetan as Mi nyag and in Chinese as Xixia (西夏), this kingdom was created by a people that are usually called Tangut. It existed as independent state from 1032 to 1227.^⑤

① According to *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od*, 16b1–2, Ston pa [= 'Brom ston] reached the place of Rwa sgreng in the wood-female-sheep year (1055). He built "the upper hermitage" (*dgon pa gong ma*) and "the private chamber" (*gzims khang*) in the fire-female-monkey year (1056). He then built "the precious principal temple" (*dbu rtse rin po che*) in the fire-female-bird year (1057).

② *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, 7, mentions the existence of a text titled *Rwa sgreng dkar chag* by a certain 'Brom Me lce 'phreng ba. Tashi Tsering, a director of Amnye Machen Institute (Dharamsala, India), kindly provided me with this reference.

③ The earliest full-fledged Bka' gdams chos 'byung is *Bka' gdams chos rin po che'i chos 'byung rnam thar nying mor byed pa'i 'od stong* written by Spyian snga rin po che Bsod nams lha'i dbang po (1432–1496) of Lo monastery in 1484; it was published in *Two Histories of the Bka' gdams pa Tradition* (Gangtok, 1977).

④ *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od*, 32a5–8. It was written at the behest of Dge 'dun dbang phyug and others at the see of Rnal 'byor Byang [chub] seng [ge] (12th–13th c., one of disciples of Se Spyil bu pa Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1121–1189), that is, Rwa sgreng. There is nothing said about the author, 'Brom Shes rab me lce, in any of the available *Bka' gdams chos 'byung*. The editor of this collection identified the author as 'Brom Gzhon nu blo gros (1271–?), alias 'Brom Ku mā ra ma ti, who was an important person in the formation and tradition of *Bka' gdams glegs bam*. But this is highly improbable. Further research about this author is required.

⑤ The Tangut script was "created" by King Li Yuan hao (李元昊, 1003–1048) in 1038 and a number of Chinese and Tibetan scriptures were translated into Tangut. In 1227, Khara-khoto was conquered by Genghis Khan (1206–1227).

According to 'Brom Shes rab me lce, during the tenure of Zhang 'Od 'jo ba (?–1150),^① Rwa sgreng monastery's fifth abbot,^② his disciples enjoyed a monk-patron relationship (*mchod yon*) with the king of Xixia.^③ 'Brom writes:^④

de nas zhang 'od 'jo ba bzhugs pa'i dus de na / me [read: mi] nyag gi [19b7] [gloss: rgyal po mnga' dar ba'i dus de lags par gdugs pas] rgyal po'i bla mchod la zhang 'od 'jo ba'i slob ma dge bshes gdugs phub pa rang la nyi shu rtsa lnga tsam yod par gda' / de dus na me [mi] nyag rgyal pos dbus byas pa mdo smad / tsang [read: gtsang] dbus thams cad kyi chos [19b8] kyi 'bul pa / nor kyi 'bul pa / slob gnyer kyi byed pa / yang dag pa gcig byung / kun kyis bkur ba'i gnas gcig byung / tha na gdan sa der tshong du yang dag pa gcig [editorial correction: yang] byung / de'i dus na dge [20a1] 'dun la longs spyod mnga' thang bsam gyis mi khyab pa yod skad / zhang 'od 'jo ba gdan sar byon ste lo [illegible] bcu tham pa lon / sa pho 'brug gi lo la rmang brtsam par gda' /

Then, during Zhang 'Od 'jo ba's tenure, there were about twenty-five disciples of Zhang 'Od 'jo ba who were a scholar (*dge bshes*) with a keeper of parasol (*gdugs phub pa*) as a court chaplains (*bla mchod*) of the Mi nyag king. [gloss: Because the king's power was spreading.]^⑤ At that time, it occurred a perfect offering which was religious, wealth and cause of learning from all over such as Mdo smad which was centered by the Mi nyag King, Tsang and Dbus. It became a place to which [the offering was] to be sent by all. It also happened a perfect [situation] of making a profit in the monastery. At that time, it is said that monks had inconceivable wealth and power. When ten years had passed since Zhang 'Od 'jo ba had come to Rwa sgreng, the foundation of "the principal temple with twenty-four pillars" (*dbu rtse ka ba nyi shus rtsa bzhi ma*) was built in the earth-male-dragon year (1148).

In previous studies,^⑥ I focused on five manuscripts in the Stein Collection, which are similar to the *Bka' gdams gsung thor bu*, a collection of writings of Bka' gdams pa masters. These manuscripts that are now kept in the British Library^⑦ were discovered at the Khara-khoto site.

① According to *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od*, 19b3-4, Zhang 'Od 'jo ba was also an abbot of 'Od 'jo monastery.

② According to *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od*, Rwa sgreng monastery's abbatial succession looked as follows: 1) 'Brom ston, 2) Rnal byor pa chen po Byang chub rin chen (1015-1078) for thirteen years, 3) Dgon pa ba Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan (1016–1082) for seven years, 4) Po [Pu] to ba Rin chen gsal (1031–1105) for only one year, 5) Zhang 'Od 'jo ba for twelve years. Rwa sgreng monastery seemed to have been on a decline during Po to ba's tenure. 'Brom Shes rab me lce states, on fol. 19b4-5, that there was no abbot for sixty-five years after Po to ba.

③ The recent publication, Gzim sprul Bstan 'dzin ye shes (2012), 8–9, also mentions about this relationship. However, *Deb ther sngon po* states, on ca. fol. 12b3–6, that Po to ba was an abbot for three years. Zhang 'Od 'jo ba was an abbot for not long term and he appointed Mkhan po Gur ston as the next abbot.

④ *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od*, 19b6–20a2.

⑤ It is supposed that it was the time of King Weiming Renzong (嵬名仁宗, reign: 1139–1193).

⑥ Iuchi (2011) is Japanese version of Iuchi (Forthcoming).

⑦ The numbers of manuscripts are K.K.V.b.021.c, K.K.V.b.011.c, K.K.V.b.034.b, K.K.V.b.09.f, and K.K.V.b.09.i. See Iuchi (2011) and (Forthcoming). Also, for the Khara-khoto and Etsin-gol texts in the Stein Collection, see Takeuchi (2002).

Located in A la shan meng E ji na Qi (阿拉善盟额济纳旗) in Inner Mongolia, PRC, the fortress of Khara-khoto flourished as an important transportation and commercial hub during the Xixia kingdom. Because these texts were discovered, together with manuscripts in the Tangut script, in a stūpa located to the northwest of the fortress (site number: K.K.v.b.), they are presumed to be from the period of the kingdom or shortly after its Mongol conquest in 1227. Moreover, another manuscript related to the Bka' gdams pa school, the *Rgyud bla ma'i bsdus don* (K.K.v.b.035.b) written by Rngog Lo tsā ba Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109),^① was discovered at the same site. The translated passage of the *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od* now may explain why manuscripts of texts belonging to the Bka' gdams pa school's literary legacy were discovered at Khara-khoto. It also provides evidence of a substantial and very early connection of a monk-patron relationship between the Bka' gdams pa school and the Xixia royal court. This discovery provides a insight into a different aspect of the Bka' gdams pa school and may enable us to explore and contextualize other aspects of this school through further research into the recently published corpus of the writings of its exponents.

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① See Kano (2008).

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