

Building up the Dge lugs pa Base in A mdo: The Roles of Lhasa, Beijing and Local Agency*

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Abstract: This paper is a periodization of the history of Amdo's largest monasteries and the rise of the Dge lugs pa in Amdo, paying special attention to the sometimes strong influences of Beijing and Lhasa on these local institutions. The periodization is divided into four periods: 1412–1459, 1596–1652, 1673–1733, 1748–1880, underlining Dge lugs foundations or conversions. The pattern of these periods is that the foundation and funding of major monasteries depended on important regional and external political and cultural leaders for their support, while major Amdo monasteries founded in the last quarter of the eighteenth century up to the present show little direct influence from Central Tibet, and it is in this period that the A mdo pas (whether Mongol or Tibetan) started to assert a strong and innovative A mdo presence in philosophical and geographical texts.

Key words: Amdo, periodization, Dge lugs pa, Beijing, Lhasa

In this paper I will sketch a rough periodization of the history of A mdo's largest (almost exclusively Dge lugs pa) monasteries, paying special attention to the sometimes strong influences of Beijing 北京 and Lhasa on these local institutions. First, a note about my sources: this survey of the largest monasteries in A mdo is based primarily on two books that incorporate two periods of survey work on the local Tibetan Buddhist temples of the region (in the late 1950s and from 1987–1992), which in turn used available written Tibetan and Chinese sources, such as the *Oceanic Book* (*Deb ther rgya mtsho*) as well as

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local archives.^① I also examined more cursorily other local historical sources. These include the well-known *Oceanic Book* (*Deb ther rgya mtsho*), as well as a host of other shorter and lesser known histories of religion in A mdo; monastery histories (*dkar chag*) dedicated to specific monasteries (currently limited to less than a dozen of these monasteries such as Sku'bum, Dgon lung, Rong bo, Bla brang, Bis mdo, Shis tshang, Co ne); another modern three volume survey of Kan lho (Eastern A mdo),^② two surveys of Rnga ba monasteries,^③ Hor gtsang 'jigs med's six volume history of A mdo,^④ as well as Tibetan and Chinese language gazetteers of the region,^⑤ mostly dating back to the Qing dynasty.

Of over 1000 temples and monasteries, I selected those whose peak number of residents reached 500 monks or more at some period in their history. This was an arbitrary figure, and there are some famous monasteries that did not record such high numbers of residents and are therefore neglected in this study. But for the most part, this cut-off captured the most famous A mdo monasteries as well as a host of lesser known monasteries, which were nevertheless obviously important social and economic centers. I should also note that this is a very preliminary study. My goal here is to try to sketch out the broad patterns of foundations and patronage of these major monasteries.

I will consider two major categories of analysis: 1) the foundation as or conversion of these monasteries into Dge lugs pa centers and 2) the external patronage of monasteries by non-Tibetan rulers of China (Mongol, Chinese or Manchu) as well as by the leading Dge

① Pu Wencheng 蒲文成, ed., *Gan-Qing Zangchuan Fojiao siyuan* 甘青藏传佛教寺院, Xining 西宁: Qinghai minzu chubanshe 青海人民出版社, 1990, 3, 566; Nian Zhihai and Bai Gengdeng 年治海, 白更登, eds. *Qinghai Zangchuan Fojiao siyuan ming jian* 青海藏传佛教寺院明鉴, Lanzhou 兰州: Gansu minzu chubanshe 甘肃民族出版社, 1993, 396. My thanks to Gene Smith for starting the process of extracting the data from the former book, to Cameron Warner and Yudru Tsomu who first made the list of these monasteries' names, and to Karl Ryavec and Lex Berman for working with me to add locational data to the list of monasteries.

② Zhongguo ren min zheng zhi xie shang huiyi, Gansu Sheng Gannan Zangzu Zizhizhou wei yuan hui, Wen shi zi liao wei yuan hui 中国人民政治协商会议甘肃省甘南藏族自治州委员会, 文史资料委员会 *Kan lho'i Bod brgyud Nang bstan sde so so'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus / Gannan Zangchuan Fojiao siyuan gaikuang* 甘南藏传佛教寺院概况. 3 vols. Kan lho'i lo rgyus dpyad gzhi'i yig rigs/ Gannan wenshi ziliao 甘南文史资料, vols. 9, 10, 12. 1991, 1993, 1995.

③ Yang Songbo & Quedan 燕松柏, 雀丹, *Aba dichu zongjiao shiyao* 阿坝地区宗教史要, Chengdu: Chengdu ditu chubanshe 成都地图出版社, 1993; Bstan'dzin, ed. *Rnga khul nang bstan grub mtha' ris med dgon sde'i mtshams sbyor snyan pa'i dung sgra* (*Aba zhou Zangchuan fojiao simiao gaikuang*) Sichuan, c. 2000; I have not been able to consult; Rnga ba bod rigs cha'ang rigs rang skyong khul rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad gshi u yon lhan khang/Zh Rnga ba bod rigs cha'ang rigs rang skyong khul gyi rig gnas lo rgyus dbyad yig bdams bsgrigs. *Aba Zangzu Qiangzu Zizhizhou wenshi ziliao xuanji* 阿坝藏族羌族自治州文史资料选辑. Aba zhou yinshua han 阿坝州印刷厂. Vol. 2 in Tibetan language (Vol. 5 in overall series). ND (1986?).

④ Hor gtsang'jigs med. *Mdo smad lo rgyus chen mo las sde tsho'i skor glegs bam dang bo*. 6 vols. Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 2009.

⑤ Such as: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Tianzhu Zangzu Zizhixian weiyuanhui 中国人民政治协商会议天祝藏族自治县委员会. *Tianzhu Zangchuan fojiao siyuan gaikuang* 天祝藏传佛教寺院概况. Tianzhu Xian 天祝县: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Tianzhu Zangzu Zizhixian weiyuanhui 中国人民政治协商会议天祝藏族自治县委员会, 2000.

lugs pa leaders of Central Tibet (the Tā la'i bla ma and Paṇ chen bla ma). This is not an exhaustive list of all the interactions between these A mdo monasteries and their supporters in Lhasa and Beijing, but instead simply aims to document some of the general patterns with specific examples. While I deal with most of the massive monasteries in A mdo, within Rnga ba prefecture, which includes part of the Rgyal rong region, there are a number of massive monasteries that do not belong to Dge lugs pa tradition that, with one exception, I do not include in this study: two Jo nang, one Bka' brgyud, one Rnying ma, and two Bon massive monasteries. Outside of Rnga ba prefecture, only two of A mdo's historically large monasteries were not Dge lugs in orientation. The first such monastery to reach massive size prior to being converted to a Dge lugs pa monastery was Tā ban monastery in Dpa' ris. Founded in 1202, this monastery had been home to each of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, from the Rnying ma to the Sa skya to the Bka' brgyud. Sometime in the Ming dynasty, while still a Bka' brgyud monastery, its resident population reached 500 monks, but we know very little about this site at that time. The second such non-Dge lugs massive monastery was Lung skya dgon, a formerly Rnying ma monastery converted to the Jo nang tradition in 1717 (and currently home to Rnying ma and Dge lugs pa practitioners as well). This monastery, like the newly established monastery of Bla rung sgar, reached its peak number of residents (2000) in recent years and is thus exceptional in this way. This may mark a shift away from the dominance of large Dge lugs pa monasteries in the present era, but that remains to be seen. In the long term however, the pattern has been decidedly toward an almost complete Dge lugs pa dominance of massive monastic institutions in the A mdo region.

First, by way of background, I introduce here the major monasteries in the region prior to the rise and dominance of the Dge lugs pa. In this earliest period, from the late 13th to the 15th century, the Dge lugs pa did not dominate the area. Instead, the major monasteries were dependent on the power and patronage of the Sa skya and Bka' brgyud traditions as well as their Yuan and Ming imperial sponsors. Thus, the external support of this first period was divided fairly equally between the religious leaders of Central Tibet and the political leaders of China. To illustrate this with some examples: some of the historically most prominent monasteries in A mdo were founded by or converted to the Sa skya tradition during the period of Yuan 元 dynasty in the 13th–14th centuries: Rong bo, Co ne, Bis mdo, Mchod rten thang, Tā ban, Te thung dgon chen. With the fall of the Yuan dynasty and the rise in the prominence of the Bka' brgyud tradition in the area through the frequent visits of the Karma pa incarnations to the Ming court, two of these monasteries were brought into Bka' brgyud tradition (Tā ban and Te thung dgon chen), while several other new Bka' brgyud monasteries were founded: Stag lung, Yar lung thur chen, and Gro tshang. In the surveys I used, no mention of Ming 明 influence is made in this region throughout the 14th century.

However, by the 15th century, the Ming influence on the monasteries of this region

was growing. Starting in 1419 the Ming granted titles and seals to lamas at many of these important monasteries, including Yar lung thur chen, Gro tshang, Co ne, and the Jo nang Chos rje monastery. There were also Ming *tusi* 土司 (local leaders) active in monastic life at Kirti'i ka' la ri, which was the first major Dge lugs pa monastery founded in A mdo, and at Co ne, which was early in converting to the Dge lugs pa tradition. Maybe the Ming encouraged the support of the Dge lugs pa tradition in A mdo, as they did at the fortified monastery (part of the Ming border defenses) called Mdzo mo mkhar (or Honghua si 弘化寺), which housed the remains of Byams chen chos rje Shakyā Ye shes (1354–1435). Throughout this period, we see a fairly equal divide between the external influence of the Central Tibetan religious leaders and traditions (for the Sa skya: Sa pāṇ and 'Phags pa among others; for the Bka' brgyud: Karma pa Rol pa'i rdo rje among others; for the Dge lugs: Shakyā Ye shes and 'Jam dbyangs chos rje Bkra shis dpal ldan (1379–1449) who founded a teaching monastery at Minzhou) and the more indirect influence of the Yuan and Ming courts, whose local appointees (both political and religious) were critical to the foundations of several of these monasteries.

A Periodization of the Rise of the Dge lugs pa in A mdo

The remainder of this article will deal with the major monasteries of A mdo, considered chronologically, as listed in the table below. The divisions of the periodization I will outline below are marked on the chart by the underlining of the Dge lugs foundation or conversion date of the last relevant monastic institution in each period (four periods: 1412–1459, 1596–1652, 1673–1733, 1748–1880). The monasteries marked in bold font exercised joint religio-political rule, while those in italics were the home bases for reincarnate lamas, *qutughtu* (s), who also served as officials to the Qing 清 court in Beijing.

Table: Mass Monasticism in A mdo Tibet *

Massive Monasteries in A mdo (listed by foundation or conversion to final tradition)	prior	sect	year of Dge lugs foundation/	peak number of	period of peak number	number of monks around
<u>monastery name (Tibetan)</u>	<u>sect</u>	<u>now</u>	<u>conversion</u>	<u>monks</u>	<u>of monks</u>	<u>1990</u>
Kirti'i ka' la ri (Rong dgon)		g	1412	330?	present	330
Kha ti ka'i dgon		g	1413	1000	Ming	10
Da tshang		g	1414	673	unknown	300

* b= Bon; n= Rnying ma; kd= Bka' gdams pa; k=Bka' brgyud pa; s= Sa skya pa; g=Dge lugs pa; parenthetical location/name information given when two or more monasteries share similar names or the name is based on Chinese).

续上表

Massive Monasteries in Amdo (listed by foundation or conversion to final tradition)	prior	sect	year of Dge lugs foundation/	peak number of	period of peak number	number of monks around
Chas pa rgya mkhar dgon		g	1424	3000	1600s	130
Chos rje	b	j	1425	2000	c. 1990	2000
Gro tshang	k	g	1452	500	1698	unknown
Co ne dgon chen	n/s	g	<u>1459</u>	3800	1714	200
Hor Stag lung (Kan lho)		g	<u>1542</u>	1000	Kangxi	4
U shi brag		g	1596	500	1698	14
Bya khyung	kd	g	1599	887	unknown	350
<i>Dgon lung</i>		g	1604	7000	Kangxi	197
<i>Sku'bum</i>		g	1612	3600	late Qing	534
Tā ban	n/s/k	g	1600s	500	Ming	unknown
Pā dru/ Bā jo'i dgon (百家寺)		g	1600s	500	late 17 th c	unknown
Te thung dgon chen	s/k	g	1619	1000	1829	10
Thang ring		g	1619	900	1698	26
Sems nyid		g	1623	500	unknown	11
Lcang skya shar		g	c. 1626	500	pre-1722	18
<i>Rong bo</i>	s	g	by 1630	2300	unknown	307
Mchod rten thang	b/s/k	g	1639	800	unknown	27
Tu lan		g	1584/1644	1000	unknown	46
Ta'i thung rdo rje'chang	k	g	1650s	1500	1727	15
Yar lung thur chen	k	g	pre-1652	500	18 th c.	8
Stag lung (Dpa' ri)	k	g	c. 1644	1000	Kangxi	4
Brag dkar (Rgan gya)		g	1644	700	c. 1675	50
Stong'khor		g	1648	1000	Qing	18
Chu bzang		g	1649	843	pre-1866	21
<i>Btsan po/ Gser khog</i>		g	1650	1300	1698	33
Hor zhug cha'i dgon	s	g	<u>1652</u>	800	Qing	unknown
Rtse dbus		g	1673	500	unknown	87
<i>Lā mo bde chen</i>		g	1682	522	unknown	172
Gser lag		g	1692	580	unknown	80
Len hā the (莲花台)		g	1694	1000	Kangxi	4

续上表

Massive Monasteries in A mdo (listed by foundation or conversion to final tradition)	prior	sect	year of Dge lugs foundation/	peak number of	period of peak number	number of monks around
Gong ba grwa tshang	s	g	1703	500	Qing	60
<i>Bla brang</i>		g	<u>1709</u>	3424	1948	500
Lung skya	n	j (n-g)	1717	730	2000	250
Bis mdo	b/n/s	g	<u>1733</u>	700	1911c.	303
Stag tshang lha mo/ Kirti		g	1748	590	pre-1949	300
A mchog bde mo thang		g	1760	600	18th c.	160
Btsang sgar		g	1765	583	unknown	260
Rwa rgya		g	1769	1300	unknown	29
Rta rjes/ Ma' this zi (马蹄寺)		g	1777	1000	Qing	6
Rgyal mo'i dgon		g	late 18 th c.	500	c. 1830s	200
Kun rtogs gling		g	1789	1000	19th. c.	400
Sgo mang sgar	b	g	1791	600	c. 1990	600
A mchog mtshan nyid	b	g	1823	1000	c. 1990	1000
Shis tshang		g	1839	500	pre-1949	152
(Rnga ba) Kirti dgon pa		g	1880	2000	c. 1990	2000
Brag dkar sprel rdzong		g	<u>1880</u>	619	unknown	28
Lde tsha/ Dhî tsha		g	1903	3000	1903	250

The Early Rise of Dge lugs Massive Monasteries: 1412—1459

The first period of the rise of Dge lugs pa in A mdo is chiefly characterized by locals founding temples; whatever external influence there was fairly equally divided between Central Tibet and the Ming state. In this first period, we have examples of nearly the entire range of a mixture of local and external agency: locals who established temples after studying in Central Tibet, locals who were granted political and religious titles by the Chinese state and had also studied in Central Tibet, locals who were recognized by the Chinese state but had no connection to Central Tibet, and one Central Tibetan establishing a temple (with support from the Ming, but no clear connection to Central Tibetan hierarchies). The only situations we do not see in this period are 1) non-locals being sent for the purpose of establishing temples or 2) locals without any connections to Central Tibet or the Chinese state establishing religious institutions in the region. In other words,

establishing a significant religious institution in A mdo seemed to require some sort of external legitimacy or authority (and probably outside funding as well) in this early period.

As is clear from the table, the successful build up of the Dge lugs pa base started in the early 15th century, with three monasteries at the frontier of southern A mdo and Rgyal mo rong (near the border of today's Rnga ba and Bar kham counties) and three monasteries on the cultural-linguistic border with China Proper. The advent of large Dge lugs pa monasteries in A mdo was marked by the foundation of Kirti'i ka' la ri in 1412. This, the first Kirti monastery, was founded by a direct disciple of Tsong kha pa, originally from Rong bo monastery (which was still a Sa skya monastery at this time). He must have studied in Central Tibet with Tsong kha pa before returning to this region, establishing a monastery far from what might have been rival power bases (such as Rong bo, Co ne, and Sde dge). Although this monastery is claimed as the origin of the current day massive Kirti Monastery in Rnga ba county seat (actually established in 1880), it is not in the same location but is merely connected to the contemporary monastery through the incarnation series of the Kirti Rin po che.^① I count it among the first massive monasteries because of its large size (even if not up to the 500 monk mark) and because of its connection to the later foundation of two other massive A mdo monasteries: (Stag tshang) Lha mo Kirti monastery in 1748 and Rnga ba Kirti monastery in 1880. Another massive monastery, called Da tshang, was founded in 1414 not far away from Kirti. Shortly thereafter, another disciple of a Central Tibetan teacher (Tāranātha) was granted the title of Guoshi 国师 by the Ming dynasty (1419) and established the Jo nang Chos rje monastery (1425) in 'Dzam thang nearby.

Quite far away to the north, four other Dge lugs pa monasteries that were to become massive over time were established in an arc describing the ethnic and cultural Tibetan and Chinese frontiers in the fifteenth century. The first of these was Kha ti ka'i dgon (in present day Minhe 民和县), established in 1413, which eventually functioned as a fortified monastery close to a chain of defensive positions set up by the Ming dynasty. The well-studied example of a nearby prominent Dge lugs pa monastery, Mdzo mo mkhar (Honghua si) illustrates the crucial role that Ming support could play in building up Dge lugs pa institutions on the cultural frontier. Otosaka Tomoka's detailed study of Mdzo mo mkhar outlines the support this monastery garnered from the Ming in the 15th and 16th centuries.^② The second massive Dge lugs pa monastery established in northern A mdo, in 1424, was located in the Chinese city of Lintan 临潭, and was thus called Chas pa rgya

① The original Kirti'i ka' la ri still exists, also called Rong dgon bkra shis lhun grub gling, far south of the county seat of Rnga ba in what might be considered the Rgyal rong region, and is not a small monastery either, with some 330 monks.

② Tomoko Otosaka, "A Study of the Hong-hua-si Temple." *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*. (1994) 52: 69-101.

mkhar dgon. The third, and most important, Dge lugs pa incursion in this region was marked by the 1452 conversion of Gro tshang (originally established in 1392 as a Bka' brgyud monastery by a Central Tibetan) to the Dge lugs pa tradition. Shortly thereafter, in 1459, the second son of the Co ne tusi, having returned from studying in Central Tibet, converted the Sa skya Co ne monastery to the Dge lugs tradition. These were the first major Dge lugs conversions of established monasteries in A mdo, which followed shortly after the successful establishment of the major Dge lugs pa monasteries in Central Tibet and A mdo.

Interim Foundations: 1542—1560

It was almost a century before another Dge lugs monastery destined to grow to a massive size was established, and these next two examples were also found on the Sino-Tibetan cultural frontier. The next major foundation in this early period of Dge lugs pa growth was marked by a new development, as Hor Stag lung Monastery (in Jishishan 积石山 county, Gansu 甘肃) was founded in 1542 under the direction of a Central Tibetan monk sent to the region by the 3rd Paṇ chen Bla ma, the first such instance of a Central Tibetan being directed to such a purpose in A mdo. The final, and at this point, truly minor foundation of a retreat hut was in 1560 at the birthplace of Tsong kha pa, later known as Sku'bum monastery, by a monk called Chanshi 禅师 (a title granted by the Ming).^① According to a later source, the Ordos Mongol rulers of A mdo teamed up with local Tibetan leaders to support this first building at the site.^② An actual hall was built at the site in 1577, but the establishment of a proper monastery at this famous site would have to wait until the Dge lugs pa hierarchs teamed up with the Ordos Mongols who would come to dominate this region.

Peak of Central Tibetan Influence: 1596—1653

Although the Dge lugs tradition was becoming established in A mdo by the mid-15th century, the presence and assistance of the third, fourth and fifth Tā la'i bla mas, from 1578 to 1653 was essential for building on this early foundation. The critical growth spurt that established a lasting Dge lugs pa dominance in the northern-most part of A mdo

① Whether this was an actual Ming title is unclear, but it seems likely, as this monk was later directed to work with the local communities that are traditionally associated with supporting Sku'bum. Thus, he was likely a Ming-appointed Chanshi, with some role in overseeing the local communities. See Pu 1990: 141.

② Joachim Karsten, "A Study on the Sku 'bum/T'a erh ssu monastery of Ch'ing-hai," Ph. D. dissertation, Auckland: University of Auckland, NZ, 1996, vol. 1, 82, citing Gser tog Blo bzang tshul khrims rgya mtsho, *Sku 'bum byams pa gling gi gdan rabs don ldan tshangs pa'i dbyangs snyan*. Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang. 1982 [1881], 40.

(north of the Rma/ Huang 黄/ Yellow River) came only when Dge lugs pa hierarchs joined with Ordos Mongols to found religious institutions, from 1596—1623. It was not until after Bsod nams rgya mtsho (1543—1588) came to A mdo and received the title of Tā la'i bla ma from Altan Khan in 1578 that there was a burst of growth in the new foundations and conversions of what would become major Dge lugs pa monasteries. From 1579, Altan Khan's grand nephew and the lord of the Tūmed Mongols, Qoloci, ruled over northern A mdo from the banks of Koko-nor.^① In this period, we see clearly the importance of Central Tibetan visitors to the region as an impetus for establishing monasteries, as most of these monasteries list the third Tā la'i bla ma as the original source of inspiration for their foundation. However, the support of Ordos Mongols was also critical in this period of concentrated Dge lugs pa monastic foundations.

The importance of Mongol support is obvious due to the location of this period's foundations, nearly all to the north and west of the Yellow or Rma River, in a territory that came under the Ordos and Tūmed Mongols (from the east) in the preceding decades, and remained under the control of Qoshud Mongols (from the west) after 1636. In 1582, the third Tā la'i bla ma directed the expansion of Sku 'bum monastery on the site that marked the birthplace of the founder of his tradition, Tsong kha pa. Not long after, in 1599, the Bka' gdams pa monastery Bya khyung, which had been founded by Tsong kha pa's teacher, converted to the Dge lugs pa tradition, a transition which was no doubt a peaceful one given the close relations of these traditions and this monastery with the founder of the Dge lugs pa tradition. After the third Tā la'i bla ma died in 1588, the significance of the fourth Tā la'i bla ma Yon tan rgya mtsho (1589—1616) being reborn in Altan Khan's family far to the east cannot be over-emphasized. This continuity was critical to the growth of the institutions inspired by the third Tā la'i bla ma. For instance, Sku 'bum was not said to be a proper Dge lugs pa monastery until 1612, when the fourth Tā la'i bla ma directed that a philosophical school (*mtshan nyid grwa tshang*^②) be established there.

Also as part of the third Tā la'i bla ma's missionary work among the Mongols of A mdo, the seeds were laid for two new monasteries that would be key monasteries for Mongols and Mongour Tibetan Buddhists for centuries to come: Tu lan and Sems nyid. In 1583, while the third Tā la'i bla ma was at Sku 'bum, another Chanshi, from Tu lan, came Sku 'bum to invite the Tā la'i bla ma to establish a temple in his area. The Tā la'i bla ma agreed, and the next year the Chanshi built a retreat hut in Tu lan (possibly with funds from the Tā la'i bla ma?). It was not until 1644 that this institution is described as becoming a proper Dge lugs pa monastery, but its foundation was inspired by the third Tā

① Victora Sujata, *Tibetan Songs of Realization*, 374 n. 31.

② Chinese: *xianzong xueyuan* 显宗学院, on the equivalence of these two terms see Nian and Bai, 1993: 154.

la'i bla ma.^① In 1584, the third Tā la'i bla ma actively advocated for the establishment of what became the Sems nyid monastery. However, it was not until 1623 that a local monk could attract a Central Tibetan to come and oversee the building of the monastery that the third Tā la'i bla ma had envisioned for the region. But this was not the first or most important A mdo monastery built with the assistance of Central Tibetans.

In 1604, Dgon lung (most famously home to Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal'byor and the Lcang skya and Thu'u bkwan incarnations) was the third major A mdo monastery to be established by an emissary of Central Tibetan Dge lugs pa hierarchs, and this pattern of monastic foundation was especially prominent during the seventeenth century. The headmen from thirteen local clans in the area were inspired by the 1582 visit of the Third Tā la'i bla ma to establish a monastery. When the fourth Tā la'i bla ma passed by in 1603 on his way from his Mongol homeland to Tibet, they invited him to establish the monastery. Once he reached Central Tibet, these local leaders again sent their request. This resulted in the seventh Rgyal sras lama being sent from Central Tibet by the Fourth Paṇ chen Bla ma (Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1570–1662) and the Fourth Tā la'i bla ma, and in 1604 he built a residence for himself as well as a philosophical college (*mtshan nyid grwa tshang*).^② The long-standing importance of this monastery—for a time it was probably the largest in the Tibetan cultural world, with over 7,000 monks in the 17th century—probably owes much to the authority and scholarship that were imported from Central Tibet at this time. The founding of this monastery is remembered as the beginning and fountainhead of the growth of Dge lugs pa philosophical colleges in A mdo. Finally, the 1612 support of the fourth Tā la'i bla ma for the creation of a philosophical college (*mtshan nyid grwa tshang*)^③ at Sku 'bum marks the end of an era in which the third and fourth Tā la'i bla mas played such an important role in monastery growth in A mdo.

The second half of this period of strong Central Tibetan influence saw the greatest expansion of Gelukpa massive monasteries in A mdo's history, with seventeen massive monasteries established or converted from other traditions, from 1619 to 1653, which ended with the return trip (from Beijing) of the 5th Tā la'i bla ma. In particular, this period was characterized by an acceleration of the influence of Central Tibetan figures and the conversion of other traditions' monasteries to the Dge lugs pa tradition. For instance, three major new monasteries were founded by Central Tibetans, one at the behest of the Paṇ chen Bla ma, and the presence of the fifth Tā la'i bla ma in A mdo seems to have had a major impact on the conversions of Bka' brgyud monasteries. Seven major monasteries in the region converted to the Dge lugs pa tradition, with three converting around the time of

① Nian and Bai, 1993: 234.

② Nian and Bai, 1993: 122.

③ Chinese: *xianzong xueyuan*, on the equivalence of these two terms see Nian and Bai, 1993: 154.

the fifth Tā la'i bla ma's visit. The conversion of the Bka' brgyud monastery of Ta'i thung rdo rje'chang in 1619 and Mchod rten thang in 1639 probably indicate the impact of the civil war in Central Tibet between the Dge lugs pa (and their supporters) and the Karma Bka' brgyud (and their supporters), even in the far reaches of the Tibetan plateau.^① Since the Mongols who controlled this territory were firmly on the side of the Dge lugs pa—the one exception being between 1634 and 1637 when the Dge lugs pa were persecuted in this area by the Khalkha Mongol Tsogtu Taiji—it is no surprise that these major monasteries converted at this time.

One other major monastery to convert to the Dge lugs pa tradition at this time seems to have followed a different trajectory. Rong bo monastery was originally a Sa skya temple during the Yuan period, though its leaders apparently paid respect to Tsong kha pa from the fourteenth century. Its definitive conversion to the Dge lugs pa tradition occurred under the leadership of Shar Skal ldan rgya mtsho (1607—1677). He spent ten years in Central Tibet, studying at Dga' ldan and was ordained by the fourth Paṇ chen Bla ma in 1626. The next year he returned to A mdo. In 1630 he built a philosophical school (*mtshan nyid grwa tshang*) called Thos bsam gling at Rong bo, and it is to this event that we trace the conversion of Rong bo monastery to the Dge lugs pa tradition.^②

After the arrival of Gushri Khan in Amdo, five major Bka' brgyud monasteries converted, or were forcibly converted, to the Dge lugs pa tradition. We have little information about Mchod rten thang. Records say that a local lama re-established the monastery in 1639, and following its tradition of adaptation (it had converted from Bon to Sa skya and from Sa skya to Bka' brgyud in the past) it converted again when the Dge lugs pa tradition flourished in the area.^③ Other monasteries to become Dge lugs pa in this period were the former Bka' brgyud monasteries in Dpa' ris called Stag lung and Yar lung thur chen, which seem to have followed the Dge lugs pa tradition around the time the fifth Tā la'i bla ma visited on his way to the Qing capital in 1652. There are no records of fighting between the Bka' brgyud and Dge lugs monasteries in this region, and it possible that the conversion of these last two monasteries might illustrate a calculated decision on the part of the *bla ma* who oversaw them; the Ming had fallen, and the Dge lugs pa's local Mongol supporters were clearly the more important local authorities to please.^④ The last of the Dpa' ris Bka' brgyud monasteries, Tā ban, also converted in the seventeenth

① Possibly the conversion of these first two monasteries was related to the arrival of the Central Tibet Sde pa Chos rje Bstan 'dzin blo bzang ryga mtsho in A mdo in 1618. On his role there, see Victoria Sujata, *Tibetan Songs of Realization: Echoes from a Seventeenth-century Scholar and Siddha in Amdo*, Leiden: Brill, 2005; 13 n. 43, 371 n. 14.

② Sujata, 2005: 371—372; Nian and Bai, 1993, 154.

③ Pu 1990, 554.

④ Pu 1990, 556.

century, though the exact date is not known.^①

The growing influence of Central Tibetans in the foundation of A mdo monasteries became common, as noted above, with the foundation of Dgon lung in 1604 and grew steadily throughout the seventeenth century. For instance, another A mdo monk advocated for the construction of a temple in his area while studying at 'Bras spung in Central Tibet in the late sixteenth century (he arrived in 1590, clearly inspired by the third Tā la'i bla ma's visit to A mdo). After he returned home in 1602, the Fourth Paṇ chen Bla ma—honoring his request and the intention of the third Tā la'i bla ma to establish monasteries in A mdo—sent a Central Tibetan to work together with this local monk. Together these two succeeded in building Thang ring Monastery in 1619.^② Though little studied, this monastery had dozens of branch monasteries, and so must have been of great social and economic importance.^③ I have already discussed the foundation of Sems nyid monastery, which (like Thang ring) also traced its inspiration to the third Tā la'i bla ma, but was not completed until 1623. Chu bzang and Bstan po (aka Gser khog) were both established by Central Tibetans sent from 'Bras spung monastery in 1649 and 1650, respectively.

Foundations by Central Tibetan-trained A mdo Bla mas: 1673—1709

By the mid-seventeenth century, a new pattern took hold, one dominated by A mdo-born monks who trained at Central Tibet's 'Bras spung Monastery who returned home to establish major monasteries in A mdo.^④ This period of strong Central Tibetan influence coincided with the last fifty years of the dominance of the ruling Oirat Mongol, called Kings of Tibet (even if they were not always very effective in this capacity), which effectively ended with Lhazang Khan's death in 1717. Three major A mdo monasteries were founded in this period by local monks who had studied in Central Tibet, and at least two of these studied in 'Bras spungs as well. Rtse dbus was founded in 1673, and 'Bras spungs alumni founded Lā mo bde chen in 1682 and Bla brang Bkra shis 'khyil in 1709.

① From 1717 to 1733, a time of civil war and some sectarian strife in Central Tibet, we see the last conversions among major monasteries in A mdo for nearly a century. First, in 1717 the Rnying ma monastery Lung skya became primarily Jo nang pa, though Rnying ma and Dge lugs pa monks still share the monastery with the Jo nang. And the ancient Bis mdo Monastery was finally converted to the Dge lugs pa (from the Sa skya) tradition when it was given to a Reb gong monastery in 1733.

② Nian and Bai, 1993, 102. Citing the *A mdo chos'byung*. This monastery eventually had 35 sub-temples making it one of the most influential monasteries in A mdo.

③ See my discussion of its history in Gray Tuttle, "Local History in A mdo: The Tsong kha Range (*ri rgyud*). " *Asian Highlands Perspectives*. 1: 2 (December, 2010): 23–97. ht

④ This mode of a local monk trained at 'Bras spungs establishing a massive monastery dated back to 1596, when A zhang Manjusri returned to A mdo after training in Lha sa, and requested the third Dalai Lama's assistance in establishing U shi drag. The conversion of Rong po also followed a similar situation, in which a locally born 'Bras spungs-trained monk played the key role.

The first major monastery to be founded in A mdo by a pair of *dge shes* sent from both Central Tibet's Se ra and Bkra shis lhun po monasteries was Gser lag in 1692. In 1703, another alumnus of Bkra shis lhun po converted and consolidated a number of monasteries into the Dge lugs pa institution of Gong ba grwa tshang. Though Gser lag and Gong ba monasteries eventually grew to house five hundred or more inhabitants, they were not located near centers of Tibetan wealth and power in A mdo, indicating the general weakness of all but 'Bras spungs monastery's influence in A mdo major monastic foundations.

After the death of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho in 1705 a strong Qing influence in the patronage of A mdo monasteries can be observed, and the power of Central Tibetan hierarchs to direct the foundation of monasteries in A mdo was greatly reduced. In the 18th century, many of the most important A mdo pa incarnate monks were awarded with Beijing posts, including lamas from Sku 'bum, Dgon lung, Stong 'khor, Bstan po, Lā mo bde chen, and Bla brang. For instance, the Kangxi 康熙 emperor granted the incarnate lama leader of Lā mo bde chen a title on his court visit in 1705. The Qing influence increased after the uprising of Lubsang Danzin was crushed in 1724, with the Yongzheng 雍正 emperor (and not the Dga' ldan pho drang) rebuilding Dgon lung, Chu bzang and Sems nyid. Qing influence was mostly felt north of the Tsong kha ri rgyud/Laji shan mountain range that divided the Tsong kha (Huang shui 湟水) and Ma (Huang he 黄河/Yellow River) watersheds, but the court's influence also reached south of the Yellow River.

Interim: Conversions Unconnected to Larger Patterns

The conversion of Lung skya monastery from the Rnying ma to the Jo nang tradition in 1717, as well as the conversion of Bis mdo monastery from the Sa skya to the Dge lugs tradition in 1733 do not seem to fit much of a particular pattern. It might be that the attacks on the Rnying ma tradition in Central Tibet in the early eighteenth century weakened their hold on Lung skya monastery. And the conversion of Bis mdo from Sa skya to Dge lugs is similar to its close neighbor Rong bo's 1630 conversion, but the cause of the timing of these conversions is not clear.

Massive Monasteries in the Grasslands: 1748—1880

The last period of massive monastery foundations (1748—1880) was marked by an increasing extension of Dge lugs pa institutions into the nomadic regions of southwest A mdo. One possibility is that the peace created after the end of Lubsang Danzin's uprising in 1724 allowed for greater economic relations between the A mdo grasslands and China Proper, as mediated by Muslim merchants. The presumed generation of wealth might

have fueled the development of massive monasteries on the grasslands of southwestern A mdo. The limited Central Tibetan influence was mostly felt through the foundation of monasteries by locally-born monks who studied for a period in Central Tibet (and not by Central Tibetans being sent, as in the past). For instance, when a local Mongol Prince requested support from the Seventh Tā la'i bla ma to establish the monastery Stag tshang lha mo in 1748, a local lama trained at 'Bras spungs Sgo mang, who had served as the fifty-third throne-holder of Dga' ldan, was sent. The same situation obtained in 1769, when the seventh Tā la'i bla ma sent a local monk (ordained by the Sixth Paṇ chen Bla ma and trained at Se ra Byes), to found Rwa rgya monastery. With the help of a Mongol Prince, Btsang gar Monastery was also founded by a local monk who had studied at Se ra Byes. In 1760 A mchog bde mo thang was founded by the second 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa after he too studied in Central Tibet's 'Bras spungs Sgo mang. We see a clear pattern of association in these foundations: the 'Bras spungs alumni dominated in A mdo's east, while the Se ra alumni were relegated to the southwestern fringes within the bend of the Ma (Yellow River).^① After the work of these men sent by the seventh Tā la'i bla ma was completed, we see no further influence of men who came from Central Tibet on the foundation of massive Dge lugs pa monasteries.

Major A mdo monasteries founded in the last quarter of the eighteenth century up to the present show little direct influence from Central Tibet. The last five major Dge lugs monasteries were founded by local monks and incarnate lamas or at the behest of local clans. One of these monasteries' founders, the third Gung thang incarnation, did study at 'Bras spungs Sgo mang and received his vows from the eighth Tā la'i bla ma. The eighth Tā la'i bla ma also enfiessed the main incarnation at Bis mdo. Another founder (who established Lde tsha/ Dhī tsha monastery in 1903) taught the thirteenth Tā la'i bla ma and thus may have lived in Central Tibet (though the Tā la'i bla ma did cross through this area twice between 1904 and 1908, and so might have been taught by this bla ma only in A mdo). Yet these were minor connections to Central Tibet in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century; the pendulum of influence had swung, albeit weakly, back in the direction of influence from China. Rwa rgya monastery's leader, the Shing bza' Paṇḍita, was entitled by the Guangxu 光緒 emperor (r. 1875–1908) and again by the Nationalist government. Likewise, Bla brang monastery was integrated, albeit ambiguously, into the Nationalist government structure in the area.^②

In conclusion, it is no surprise that the foundation and funding of major monasteries depended on important regional and external political and cultural leaders for their

① Se ra's textbooks were also used at Bya khyung, where Tsong kha pa was first ordained. This monastery had an important influence on Central Tibet by providing teachers for the seventh through tenth Tā la'i bla mas, and the seventh Tā la'i bla ma had the monastery's main stupa covered in gold.

② See Paul Nietupski, *Labrang: A Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands, 1709–1958*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011.

support. What is most interesting to me about this pattern is that the very weakening of external influence, from either Central Tibet or China Proper—from the late 18th to 20th—coincided with the time that A mdo pas (whether Mongol or Tibetan) started to assert a strong and innovative A mdo presence in philosophical and geographical texts. This is a confluence that I hope to explore further in my forthcoming book, *A mdo: Middle Ground between Lhasa and Beijing*.