

**THE RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN BHUTAN AND TIBET  
UNDER THE ENLIGHTENED RULE OF  
SDE-SRID XIII SHES-RAB-DBANG-PHYUG (R.1744-63)**

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*John A. Ardussi*

**Introduction\***

The story is by now well known, of how a dispute over recognition of the legitimate rebirth of Kun-mkhyen Padma-dkar-po led to its split into a Northern and Southern branch, and to the founding of an independent 'Brug-pa state in Bhutan. The struggle, whose seeds were sown during the 15th century, pitted the claimants for supremacy by reincarnation against the supporters of the traditional pattern of "uncle - nephew" succession, and culminated in the flight to Bhutan in 1616 of the man who founded the modern state, Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal (1594-?1651)<sup>1</sup>.

From 1616 until Tibet's intervention in the Bhutanese civil war (1732-35), the dispute and its aftermath poisoned the relationship between the two countries. It is therefore all the more interesting how, out of its defeat in that war (the first ever at the hands of Tibetan troops), there emerged in Bhutan a small group of leaders with the vision and will to heal the rift between the two countries, and within the 'Brug-pa church, through a positive process of reconciliation. The most celebrated of these leaders was the 13th Bhutanese *sDe-srid* (regent) Shes-rab-dbang-phyug (1697-1767), a monk turned civil ruler who, building on the work of predecessors, and through mastery of uniquely Himalayan forms of the

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diplomatic art, guided Bhutan towards the posture of a “responsible” and respected Himalayan state.

### **The 17th Century Background**

On seven occasions between 1616 and 1679, the central Tibetan government launched war against Bhutan, first under the banner of the gTsang-pa kings and, after 1642, under that of the dGe-lugs-pa establishment. On each occasion the Tibetans came out the worst. As the new Tibetan and Bhutanese political entities grew in strength, the struggle evolved from its purely sectarian origin into a series of conflicts over territory and national prestige, along their common Himalayan border and beyond.

Even after Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's flight to Bhutan in 1616, the two 'Brug-pa factions continued to struggle for control of the Tibetan properties, particularly the home monastery of Rwa-lung. In the dispute over recognition of the rebirth of Padma-dkar-po, the Tibetan political authorities sided with Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's rival dPag-bsam-dbang-po (1592-1641). However it was not until the new year's festival of 1647<sup>2</sup>, following their humiliating defeat in Bhutan in 1646, that the Dalai Lama's regents formally confirmed Mi-pham-dbang-po (1642-17), the child incarnation of dPag-bsam-dbang-po, as head of the 'Brug-pa church and all of its Tibetan properties<sup>3</sup>. Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's agents were forcibly expelled from Rwa-lung, and for more than eighty years following this event, Rwa-lung monastery became off limits to Bhutanese pilgrims and officials<sup>4</sup>.

The struggle between Tibet and Bhutan during these decades is noted for both its ferocity and macabre tactics. One of the earliest recorded uses of gun powder and firearms in Himalayan warfare occurred during the sack of the Bhutanese monastery of gSang-sngags-zab-don in 1634, which exploded in a fireball and killed the Tibetan invaders to a man<sup>5</sup>. Sorcery was another weapon widely used. One of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's epithets was mThu-chen (“Great

Sorcerer”), and through this means he claimed to have caused the deaths of the *sDe-pa gTsang-pa* Phun-tshogs-rnam-rgyal and his wife in 1621<sup>6</sup>. He also allegedly prophesied the death in 1641 of his Tibetan incarnate rival dPag-bsam-dbang-po:

“Whichever of us is the true re-embodiment of Padma-dkar-po will remain living and the false one will die, as you shall see!”<sup>7</sup>

Bhutanese sorcery is also cited in connection with the death in 1658 of the 5th Dalai Lama’s controversial regent bSod-nams-chos-’phel, and that of the great Mongol champion of the Yellow Hats, Gushri Khan, in 1655<sup>8</sup>. In a final act of revenge, however, the sickness leading to the “retreat” (and presumed death) of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal in 1651 was attributed by the 5th Dalai Lama to destructive magic sponsored by the Tibetan government<sup>9</sup>.

In the decades that followed 1616, important government institutions in Bhutan originated in commemoration of victory in the wars with Tibet. Indeed, the state seal of the Zhab-drung Rin-po-che bears the text of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal’s remarkable “*Nga bcu drug ma*” declaration, composed to proclaim his validity as the true reincarnation of Padma-dkar-po and to boast of his invincibility over the gTsang-pa army in the battle of 1618<sup>10</sup>. The fortress Dzongs from which the Bhutanese government still administers the country were originally constructed by Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal to defend against Tibetan invasion. The famous Tshechu festival of modern Bhutan was inaugurated by him in celebration of Padmasambhava and of the protective deities who successfully supported Bhutan in the war with Tibet of 1644/46<sup>11</sup>.

## **Conflict Continues Following Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's Death**

Armed hostilities between Bhutan and Tibet continued after Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's disappearance from the scene in 1651. Indeed, superstitious awe surrounding the mystery of his decades-long retreat ("taken to assure the victory of the protective deities in his cause against Tibet") contributed to the potency of his reputation throughout the Tibetan-speaking world. Prophecies began to circulate in Tibet (though rejected by the 5th Dalai Lama as fakes: *zog-po gter rdzus*) foreshadowing the country's conquest by Bhutan<sup>12</sup>. The Tibetan war of 1656-57 against Bhutan ended in defeat, in spite of a prediction of victory by the oracles of bSam-yas and gNas-chung<sup>13</sup>.

Strife between the two countries culminated during the regency of the third *sDe-srid* Mi-'gyur-brtan-pa (r.1667-1680), who vigorously pushed the borders of the Bhutanese state into Sikkim, the Chumbi Valley, and eastwards towards the Mon-yul corridor separating Bhutan from modern NEFA. These actions and other unresolved differences precipitated the war of 1675-79, again won by forces under Mi-'gyur-brtan-pa. Ironically, an expatriate Tibetan monk in service to the Bhutanese state, he was forced from office in 1680 by a *coup d'état* of disgruntled Bhutanese rivals. His death the following year was greeted in Lhasa by a three-day celebration and thanksgiving to the protective deities of the Yellow Hat church<sup>14</sup>.

The peace treaty of 1679 marked the last major Tibetan invasion of Bhutan during the 17th century. From 1682 to 1696, the 5th Dalai Lama's death was also being kept secret by his regent Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho, who was preoccupied for much of that period by political problems with China and Mongolia<sup>15</sup>. Under the reign of the 4th *sDe-srid* bsTan-'dzin-rab-rgyas (r.1680-94), Bhutan consolidated and defended its geographical boundaries with Tibet and Sikkim, while broadening its political connections with neighbouring states.

Diplomatic and monastic ties were cultivated or renewed with sDe-dge, Nepal, Mustang, Ladakh, Sikkim and Cooch Bihar, as described in various sources of the period<sup>16</sup>.

### **The Emergence of Reincarnate Successors: 1694-1728**

The succession problems in Bhutan attending Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's passage from the scene have been discussed briefly by Michael Aris, although more remains to be written<sup>17</sup>. The ostensibly temporary form of the initial successor government saw the appearance in Bhutan of parallel civil administrators or regents (*sDe-srid*) and spiritual heads of state who were the "representatives" (*rGyal-tshab*) of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal. The early *rGyal-tshab*, however, were drawn from Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's extended family, and it was only with the end of all male descent lines that the decision was reluctantly made, in 1695, to select "exalted rebirth" (*mchog-sprul*) heads of state from among his rebirths and those of the early *rGyal-tshab*<sup>18</sup>. These four lineages included the Speech (*gsung-sprul*) and Mind (*thugs-sprul*) incarnations, as well as two "Precious prince" (*rgyal-sras*) lineages deriving from Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's son 'Jam-dpal-rdo-rje (1631-80/81) and from his distant nephew the 4th *sDe-srid*, bsTan-'dzin-rab-rgyas. However, the early failure to establish a universally-accepted hierarchy among the competing incarnation lineages emerged as a new structural weakness of the Bhutanese state, opening the door to a more effective form of Tibetan interference than the warfare and monastic sorcery of the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>19</sup>.

### **The Bhutanese Civil War (1729-35) and its Impact on Relations with Tibet**

The Bhutanese civil war was the bitter culmination of factional struggles between district chieftains who supported rival incarnate candidates to become *rGyal-tshab*, in order that they themselves should be promoted to the throne of *sDe-srid*. However, we are less concerned with the

complicated events of this civil war than with the outcome for future relations between Bhutan and Tibet<sup>20</sup>.

Practically, from 1729 until 1735, district chiefs of the Paro valley in western Bhutan had seceded from the central authority, and twice called upon the Tibetan ruler Pho-lha-nas to support them against the Bhutanese central government. Although Pho-lha-nas distrusted the motives for these appeals, by early 1730 events forced him to a decision to invade. Owing much to Bhutan's disunity, the Tibetan campaign was for once successful, earning for Pho-lha-nas promotion and recognition from the Manchu emperor. The treaty required the Bhutanese combatants to send hostages to Tibet and offerings to China<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, a second invasion in 1732 was needed to bring finality to the situation, following which Bhutanese representatives of the two warring sides were escorted to China to formally pay tribute, whence they returned in 1735 with imperial patents (*gser-yig*) and seals of office<sup>22</sup>.

Although one Bhutanese scholar of the time saw in the conclusion of this mission to China "the fulfillment of our hopes,"<sup>23</sup> the reality was perhaps not quite so sanguine. Bhutan was constitutionally at a crossroad, and the prospects for domination by Tibet and China must have seemed daunting. Whereas the peace treaty resulted in the eventual reunification of Bhutan, the terms were dictated by Tibet, and by war's end both of the child incarnations of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal were in Tibetan hands. The Speech incarnation Phyogs-las-rnam-rgyal (b.1708) died during the civil war, and in the confusion of border skirmishes between Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet, his Bhutanese rebirth was taken under Pho-lha-nas' protective custody to Phag-ri<sup>24</sup>. Even more difficult was the situation of the Mind incarnation 'Jigs-med-grags-pa (1725-61), born into a 'Brug-pa family of Grwanang in Central Tibet<sup>25</sup>. Securing Tibetan permission to bring this youth to Bhutan became a critical factor motivating Bhutanese leaders in their rapprochement with Tibet which began to emerge after 1735.

## **The Rapprochement with Tibet**

The normalization of relations between Bhutan and Tibet was made possible by changed political realities in both countries, and by the existence of leaders on each side able to see reconciliation as a policy of mutual political advantage. However, the complex lines of political and religious authority in both countries meant that diplomatic initiatives had to adequately address the sentiments of their conservative monastic establishments and general population. The steps taken by both sides to move this process forward is an interesting study of diplomatic method among the Himalayan countries during the 18th century. These steps included the appointment of ecclesiastic intermediaries, cross-border temple restoration projects, the use of religious exchange students, and participation in mediation activities.

As Petech has observed, Pho-lha-nas' greatest skill as ruler of Tibet was the craft of diplomacy<sup>26</sup>. The civil war in Bhutan presented him with the opportunity to end the border conflicts which had periodically consumed Tibet's resources, and which had the potential, if left unchecked, to attract unwanted attention from China. This apparently could best be accomplished by mediating the rulership dispute in Bhutan, enforcing the annual *lo-phyag* requirement, and by carefully managing the circumstances under which the incarnations of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal should return to Bhutan.

The early Bhutanese leaders in the reconciliation process included the 10th *sDe-srid*, *rGyal-sras* Mi-pham-dbang-po and the 7th *rJe* Mkhan-po (Lord Abbot of the state monastery) Ngag-dbang-'phrin-las (1671-1746). The former was not only the civil head of state, but also the rebirth of *bsTan-'dzin-rab-rgyas*, and was thus one of the four *mchog-sprul* incarnates who could claim the right to be appointed *rGyal-tshab*. But his brother Mi-pham-'jigs-med-nor-bu (1717-35) was the other *rGyal-sras mchog-sprul*, and was in fact the reigning *rGyal-tshab* at the time of his death.

Although Mi-pham-dbang-po's position had been upheld by terms of the civil war settlement, his brother's death and continued internal factionalism led him to abdicate and flee to Tibet at the beginning of 1736<sup>27</sup>.

Whether by design or by chance, Mi-pham-dbang-po's self-imposed seven month exile became the turning point in the reconciliation process between Tibet and Bhutan. Coming at the season of the *lo-phyag* mission, his visit offered the opportunity to re-establish personal ties with his Tibetan counterparts. The policy thinking of Bhutanese leaders is never explicitly laid out in any source, but many significant changes appear to date from this visit. The futility of continued sectarian strife, the isolation from the religious shrines of Tibet, the potential threat posed by China, and the need to resolve the constitutional question must have become clarified in Mi-pham-dbang-po's mind at this time.

The Bhutanese entourage was cordially received, and was hosted to numerous state dinners by Pho-lha-nas, the cabinet ministers and the Manchu ambans. Mi-pham-dbang-po had lengthy audiences with the Dalai Lama and other leading church dignitaries, and received an extensive guided tour of the religious sites of Lhasa and nearby districts. In particular, he paid the first ever formal visit to Rwa-lung monastery by a Bhutanese head of state. There he met two of the leading prelates of the Tibetan 'Brug-pa church, namely the 7th rGyal-dbang 'Brug-chen dKar-brgyud-'phrin-las-shing-rta (1718-66) and Grub-dbang Rin-po-che g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje (1721-69), both of whom were to play key roles in the reconciliation process<sup>28</sup>.

From this event onward, there unfolded a warming of relations between the heads of the Tibetan and Bhutanese branches of the 'Brug-pa. As if to symbolize the mutual intent to repair the 120-year old sectarian split, the two sides agreed to jointly sponsor a major restoration of Rwa-lung monastery. Funded largely by the Tibetan government, but with contributions from the Bhutan treasury as well, the 18-year



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restoration project became an important, publicly visible acknowledgment of the intent to mend the old dispute<sup>29</sup>. The restoration of Rwa-lung was the first instance of “temple diplomacy” followed several more times in later decades, by secular rulers wishing to influence the ‘Brug-pa reconciliation.

This process was encouraged by Pho-lha-nas. He also reaffirmed his support for Mi-pham-dbang-po by insisting that, upon the latter’s return to Bhutan, he be installed to succeed his younger brother as *rGyal-tshab*<sup>30</sup>. But Pho-lha-nas did not permit repatriation at this time of the Zhabs-drung *thugs-sprul* ‘Jigs-med-grags-pa, the legitimacy of whose incarnate status Mi-pham-dbang-po confirmed following an examination of the child at the Jo-khang. We must assume that the motivation for this refusal was to retain leverage over the still tense situation in Bhutan.

Mi-pham-dbang-po returned to Bhutan late in 1736 and was installed as *rGyal-tshab*. But his death shortly thereafter could have effectively derailed the warming of relations with Tibet, had not the effort been picked up by the retired rJe Mkhan-po Ngag-dbang-‘phrin-las. Ngag-dbang-‘phrin-las was determined to gain the return of the *thugs-sprul* incarnation, and used as a means the opening of an extended and warm correspondence with g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje, whom Mi-pham-dbang-po had met in Tibet.

The Tibetan lineage of the Grub-dbang Rin-po-che, with their seat at Dre’u-lhas near Mtsho-sna (north of the eastern Bhutanese border with Tibet) were the incarnations of ‘Brug-smyon Kun-dga’-legs-pa (1455-1529), the famed Tibetan “crazy” ‘Brug-pa yogin and libidinous baud, whose most famous descendant in Bhutan was the illustrious 1st *rGyal-tshab* (and simultaneous *sDe-srid*) bsTan-‘dzin-rab-rgyas<sup>31</sup>. g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje was also an eclectic religious master and a favorite at the court of the 7th Dalai Lama, who had blessed him with a name as a child<sup>32</sup>. Thus, because of his personal charisma and the legendary importance of ‘Brug-pa

Kun-legs in both Tibet and Bhutan, g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje was particularly qualified to fill the role of ecclesiastic intermediary<sup>33</sup>.

In an event of enormous symbolic importance, g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje was invited to visit Bhutan in 1739 to officiate at two important events, the coronation of Mi-pham-dbang-po's successor as *rGyal-tshab* and the consecration of a new golden Spyan-ras-gzigs image at Punakha. Yet so high was the level of residual public distrust of Tibet's motives that his journey to Punakha was marked by bands of protesters taunting him as a false incarnation and Tibetan spy. By the time of his departure, however, the public attitude had shifted to the point that his passage was marked only by groups of adulating women, praying to this reincarnation of the libidinous 'Brug-pa baud for the blessing of pregnancy<sup>34</sup>.

Another important element of the diplomatic reconciliation process was government sponsorship of religious "exchange students". When g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje returned to Tibet in 1740, the Bhutanese government selected a group of students to travel with him to undertake higher studies in Tibet. This group included two of Bhutan's brightest young monks, who were later to become rJe Mkhan-po and important authors of books on religion and history. The personal accounts of these youths' experiences in Tibet, preserved in their *rnam-thar*, form a remarkably vivid perspective on the awkward reopening of ties between the two countries. During 1740 - 48, we find them entered into 'Bras-spungs, as candidates for the Geshe degree. The presence of Bhutanese 'Brug-pa theology students at a leading dGe-lugs-pa monastery in Lhasa was so startling as to attract enormous attention throughout their sojourn. They had numerous audiences with leading Tibetan scholars, and at the conclusion of their studies were personally tested in logical debate by the 7th Dalai Lama himself<sup>35</sup>.

**The Career of the 13th *sDe-srid* Shes-rab-dbang-phyug (r.1744 - 63)**

In 1744, while the above events were under way, the 13th *sDe-srid* Shes-rab-dbang-phyug was installed in Bhutan. His 19-year reign may fairly be called the high point in the history of secular rule during this era. Shes-rab-dbang-phyug was an energetic, creative diplomat who, even more than his near-contemporary Pho-lha-nas, was a master politician and initiator on many fronts<sup>36</sup>. Youngest of eight children from an obscure family of western Bhutan, he spent his early career in the state monastery. During the civil war years, however, he was recruited out of the monastery by *sDe-srid* Mi-pham-dbang-po to serve as *mgron-gnyer* (chief steward) at several government dzongs. His success in this role got him appointed as the governor of Paro dzong, a commission in which he brilliantly led the military campaign against the secessionists who had taken that district, but then, unlike most earlier *sDe-srid*, treated the rebels with sensitivity and leniency during their repatriation. During his second term in this post, at the war's conclusion, he continued to nurture local support for the central Bhutan government by sponsoring extensive restorations at Paro, a gilt dome for its central keep, and the construction of many new images. For *sDe-srid* Mi-pham-dbang-po's funeral ceremonies in 1739, Shes-rab-dbang-phyug personally paid for a mass distribution of coins (*mang 'gyed*) to the more than 300 attending monks, an act of personal charity he was to repeat seven more times during his career<sup>37</sup>.

Shes-rab-dbang-phyug, more than any other civil ruler of this era in either Bhutan or Tibet, demonstrated the leadership qualities of valor, diplomacy, honesty, and dedication. Here, however, we can only briefly review how he drew upon these traits to continue the reconciliation activities of his predecessors.

The first requirement was to settle the confusing question of legitimacy and hierarchy among the Bhutanese *mchog-sprul*

incarnation lineages. While the details are complex, he basically accomplished this by conciliatory tactics similar to those which had worked in achieving the post-war reunification of the Paro valley. All of the incarnations were declared to be legitimate, although not of the same rank<sup>38</sup>. All of the incarnations were to receive generous government support. Competition among them was further minimized by an orchestrated program of teaching assignments and spiritual retreats which kept them fully occupied in separate activities. The *Lho'i chos 'byung*, Bhutan's first national history, was published at Shes-rab-dbang-phyug's behest in part to declare the government's official position on the question, and early prints were distributed in Tibet<sup>39</sup>.

Shes-rab-dbang-phyug next successfully petitioned the Tibetan government for the return of 'Jigs-med-grags-pa. The payback for Bhutan's friendship towards g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje was his active intercession with the 7th Dalai Lama, whose decision to grant the request was apparently the deciding factor. Pho-lha-nas could hardly refuse a request supported by all of the church leaders in both countries. 'Jigs-med-grags-pa arrived in Bhutan in 1746 and was installed as *rGyal-tshab* in the following year<sup>40</sup>.

In the area of church-state relations, Shes-rab-dbang-phyug followed policies which were much more politically astute and liberal than his predecessors. The political options available for purely secular leaders to sway monastic sentiment were always limited, in a system where the highest theoretical authority lay with monks. But one particularly effective activity was the construction and restoration of temples and monasteries. Pho-lha-nas had also used this tactic occasionally<sup>41</sup>. But Shes-rab-dbang-phyug greatly increased the scale of "temple diplomacy" to improve church-state relations, and even began to outshine the Tibetan leaders.

The restoration at Rwa-lung had dragged on for 13 years when, in 1749, Shes-rab-dbang-phyug with characteristic energy dispatched a party of artisans with money and

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supplies to hasten its completion. Perhaps embarrassed by Bhutan's leadership, and in the interest of patching relations with the lesser sects, the Dalai Lama ended up paying most of the costs. But the Tibetan 'Brug-pa hierarch was so appreciative of Shes-rab-dbang-phyug's effort that his portrait was painted on the wall as one of Rwa-lung's leading patrons<sup>42</sup>.

The next major international project was restoration of the ancient frontier chapels of Bum-thang and Paro, associated by revered tradition with kings of the early Tibetan monarchy. The 7th Dalai Lama was an avid sponsor of a massive project to restore all 108 such temples throughout Tibet. In 1751, the first year of his independent rule following Pho-lha-nas' death, he allocated more than 38,000 silver *srang* to the effort, with similar amounts in subsequent years<sup>43</sup>. His antiquarian interests therefore coincided with Shes-rab-dbang-phyug's policies, which resulted in significant sums of Tibetan money flowing into Bhutan. Almost certainly, it was during these years that the custom was begun for Tibet to pay contributions to Bhutan for the regular performance of rituals at its ancient frontier chapels, a custom which continued down to the 20th century<sup>44</sup>.

The grandest project of all was Shes-rab-dbang-phyug's construction of the golden dome of Punakha, and the simultaneous fabrication of an enormous appliqué hanging of Spyan-ras-gzigs. Beginning in 1752, he solicited annual support from the Dalai Lama, until its consecration at the new year's festival of 1756. In addition to more 20,000 silver coins to pay for the construction work, the Tibetan government also sent a large supply of muskets, swords and other weapons for inclusion in the Punakha armory. One can hardly imagine a clearer symbol of the changed political climate<sup>45</sup>.

A final element in Shes-rab-dbang-phyug's external policies represented a diplomatic forward policy characteristic of his growing political maturity and self confidence. We refer here

to his efforts to mediate political disputes in Tibet. For governments intending to play a significant role in regional politics, such missions provided an opportunity to augment national prestige, as well as a training experience for future leaders. The mission which Shes-rab-dbang-phyug dispatched in 1749 to mediate the succession dispute among the sons of Pho-lha-nas has already been reviewed in an earlier publication<sup>46</sup>. It was, as we know, unsuccessful in preventing the bloody tragedy which followed. Yet in mimicking Pho-lha-nas' mediation of Bhutan's own succession crisis twenty years earlier, Shes-rab-dbang-phyug did more than merely repay a favour. The adoption of a posture of interested neutrality, while providing gifts to all of the disputants, served as a clear announcement that Bhutan intended to be counted as a serious political entity in Himalayan politics.

A second attempt at dispute mediation came in 1751, in connection with the end of the Ladakh civil war<sup>47</sup>. Tibet and Bhutan each had historical interests in Ladakh, and therefore dispatched mediation parties. The Bhutanese contingent was led by bSod-nams-lhun-grub, the Dzongpön of Wangdiphodrang and future *sDe-srid* during the Anglo-Bhutan border war of 1773-74. In the outcome, however, Bhutan's contribution to the final settlement was much overshadowed by that of the principal Tibetan mediator, the revered Lama Kah-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu (1698-1755). Even so, the mission served the intended function of ensuring Bhutan's involvement in shaping events within its sphere of religious and political interests.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we may say that the resolution of Bhutan's long dispute with Tibet required the vision, diplomacy and persistence of leaders able to reach beyond narrow sectarian interests. Circumstances during the early 18<sup>th</sup> century offered an opportunity to break with the past. Shes-rab-dbang-phyug represented the very best of his era, and upon his retirement

in 1763 left Bhutan in a strong position from which capable successors could build. Unfortunately, the political stability and direction which Shes-rab-dbang-phyug brought to Bhutan were severely disrupted by events following his death, particularly by the 1773-74 war with the British, discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Smith (1968): 2 - 4; Aris (1979): 206.

<sup>2</sup> [I have corrected the erroneous date 1747, inadvertently included in the original version of this article].

<sup>3</sup>It is important to distinguish between the 6<sup>th</sup> Rgyal-dbang 'Brug-chen Mi-pham-dbang-po and the 10<sup>th</sup> Bhutanese sDe-srid of the same name. [The latter was born to a family in the village of Bon-sbis, north of Tongsa Dzong in central Bhutan.]

<sup>4</sup> The date and details of these events are found in *RGYAL-DBANG* 6: 53b-55a, and *LKDLG*: 93a-95a. In spite of the peace treaty of 1687, a Bhutanese embassy to sDe-dge in 1688 had to pass through Tibet wearing disguises (*LNDRR*: 81b - 86b). The visit to Rwa-lung in 1736 by the 10<sup>th</sup> sDe-srid Mi-pham-dbang-po seems to have marked the reopening of this shrine to Bhutanese pilgrims (*SDE-SRID* 10: 52b-53b; *SDE-SRID* 10a: 19b-20a).

<sup>5</sup> *LCB*: 34a-b; *NDRR*, Nga: 94a. The gunpowder must have been left by the Portuguese Jesuits.

<sup>6</sup> *LNDRR*, vol. Nga: 29b-31a.

<sup>7</sup> *LNDRR*, vol. Nga: 111a-b.

<sup>8</sup> *LNDRR*, vol. Nga: 145a.

<sup>9</sup> *L5DL*: vol. 1: 154a.

<sup>10</sup> Translations in Aris (1979): 214, and Rahul (1970): 24-25; text at *LNDRR*, vol. Nga: 31a-b.

<sup>11</sup> *LNDRR*, Vol. Nga: 133b; *LCB*: 42b.

<sup>12</sup> *L5DL*, vol. 1: 259b-260b.

<sup>13</sup>*L5DL*, vol. 1: 250b-251b; *LCB*: 51b.

<sup>14</sup> *LNDRM*: 59b-61a; *L5DL*, vol. 3: 197a-b.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmad (1970): 230 - 301.

<sup>16</sup> *LCB*: 54b - 61b; *SDE-SRID* 4: 383a-b.

<sup>17</sup> Aris (1979): 233-62.

<sup>18</sup> The decision was made by bsTan-'dzin-rab-rgyas following his retirement as the 4<sup>th</sup> sDe-srid, as recorded in his biography (*SDE-SRID* 4: 330b).

<sup>19</sup> The disruptive potential of the reincarnation recognition process became evident numerous times during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. To prevent

recurrences of what happened to the 'Brug-pa sect following Padma-dkar-po, the 5th Dalai Lama stepped firmly into the recognition process of both the 6th Rgyal-dbang 'Brug-chen and the 2nd Panchen Lama (*L5DL*: vol. 1: 133a-b; vol. 2: 17a-b). It became common practice for important *sprul-sku* of central Tibet to receive confirmation from the Dalai Lama during the era of the Great 5th.

<sup>20</sup> Brief descriptions in L. Petech (1972a): 203-13; Aris (1979): 259-61; Aris (1994): 31.

<sup>21</sup> Petech (1972) is the only detailed published study of the civil war period, but much additional information is now available. It was also covered in detail in my PhD dissertation (Australian National University, 1977), which I plan to edit for publication.

<sup>22</sup> For the Chinese accounts, see Anon., *Wei-tsang t'ung-chih* (1896): 15, 9b and Chiao Ying-ch'i (c.1737), *Hsi-tsang-chih*: 3, 11b-12.

<sup>23</sup> *SDE-SRID 10a*: 19a.

<sup>24</sup> *LNDPD*: 31a-b.

<sup>25</sup> *LCB*: 67a.

<sup>26</sup> Petech (1972): 196.

<sup>27</sup> *SDE-SRID 10*: 51b-52a; *SDE-SRID 10a*: 19b-20a; see also Aris (1979): 259-260.

<sup>28</sup> *SDE-SRID 10*: 52b-53b.

<sup>29</sup> *SDE-SRID 10*: 66a; *L7DL*: 439b-440a.

<sup>30</sup> *SDE-SRID 10*: 68b; *RJE MKHAN-PO 9*, part Ja: 18a.

<sup>31</sup> On the life of 'Brug-pa Kun-legs see Stein (1972); also a translation of his Bhutanese biography in K. Dowman & Sonam Paljor (1980), *The Divine Madman: The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley*. London.

<sup>32</sup> *L7DL*: 108b.

<sup>33</sup> Yon-tan-mtha'-yas, the 13th rJe Mkhan-po of Bhutan, lived and studied with g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje during an extended sojourn in Tibet, and provides fascinating insights into his life and activities (*RJE MKHAN-PO 13*: 27a-b).

<sup>34</sup> *RJE MKHAN-PO 9*, part Ja: 14b-15a; part Nya: 4a, 6a-b; *RJE MKHAN-PO 13*: 22a.

<sup>35</sup> *RJE MKHAN-PO 9*, part Nya: 1-24a; *RJE MKHAN-PO 13*: 23a-38b; *L7DL*: 311b, 327b-327a.

<sup>36</sup> The following section is a summary of various parts of the biography of the 13th *sDe-srid* (*SDE-SRID 13*).

<sup>37</sup> *RJE MKHAN-PO 13*: 29.b.

<sup>38</sup> The evidence for this is found in many sections of his biography and other sources. Perhaps the clearest evidence is seen in the protocol for coronation of rGyal-tshab 'Jigs-med-grags-pa in 1747 (*RJE MKHAN-PO 13*: 31a-34a).



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<sup>39</sup> RJE MKHAN-PO 10: 78a. See also M. Aris (1994), *From the Land of the Thunder Dragon*, Peabody-Essex Museum, p. 38-39.

<sup>40</sup> RJE MKHAN-PO 9, part Ja: 12a; L7DL: 329b.

<sup>41</sup> Petech (1972): 122, 158.

<sup>42</sup> RJE MKHAN-PO 13: 49a-b; L7DL: 439b-440a, 513a.

<sup>43</sup> L7DL: 402a-b, 435a, 513a, 545a-546a.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Bell (1906), *Report on the Government of Tibet*. Calcutta (Great Britain Foreign Office Confidential Print \*9735): 14, 41.

<sup>45</sup> SDE-SRID 13: 69a-70b; L7DL: 409b, 429a, 460b.

<sup>46</sup> Aris (1994).

<sup>47</sup> Described in Petech (1977), pp. 103-106, although the Ladakhi sources contain no mention of Bhutanese involvement. See also the forthcoming study of Peter Schwiager, *Teilung und Reintegration des Konigreichs von Ladakh im 18. Jahrhundert*. The Bhutanese account is in RJE MKHAN-PO 13: 53a-b.

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