The life and activities of grub chen U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1230-1309) are extraordinary by any criteria, his significance being stressed both in the Tibetan tradition and in Tibetological studies. He did enough in his life to be worthy of being distantly compared with the great souls of Asia, whose mystical enterprises and wanderings from land to land left a mark of their free spirit, yet his fame did not cross the boundaries of Tibet. He was:

- a yogin and a siddha;¹
- a Tantrist, expert in occult powers including lethal curses;²
- an author of important religious texts;³

¹ I trace here the education of U rgyan pa in a nutshell:
- at the age of seven he learned Ma [mo], Phur pa, bDe [mchog] and dGyes [rdor] from his father Jo 'bar (Si tu pan chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas, Karma Kam tshang gi gser 'phreng p.162 lines 4-5); from the age of seven until the age of sixteen he received Tantric commentaries, grub thabs-s and rituals on the Ma [mo], Phur [pa], bDe [mchog], dGyes [rdor], Phyag rdor and Yoga and learned them in a masterful manner (ibid. p.162 lines 5-6).
- Aged sixteen (wood snake 1245), he went to Bo dong E and learned mNgon pa and Tshad ma under Rin chen rtse mo (ibid. line 6).
- He then proceeded to study under rGod tshang pa, especially Phyag rgya chen po (p.162 line 6-p.163 line 2); he was bestowed the bsnyen rdzogs vow by Bo dong Rin chen rtse mo at the age of twenty in earth bird 1249 (ibid. p.163 lines 3-4).
- He studied Dus 'khor under Rin che rtse mo according to the system of ’Bro lo tsa ba (ibid. p.163 line 4); he received Dus ’khor according to the method of Tsa/rTsa mi lo tsa ba Sangs rgyas grags pa (?-?) and Chag lo tsa ba Chos rje dpal (1197-1264) from his brother Go lung pa (ibid. p.163 lines 4-5); he was also bestowed many additional bKa’ brgyud pa teachings by rGod tshang pa (ibid. p.163 line 6).
- At rDo rje gdan he became a yogin “like a lion” and attained siddhi-s, including medical ones (mKhas pa ‘i dga’ ston p.915 lines 7-10; Si tu pan chen Chos kyi ’byung gnas, Karma Kam tshang gi gser ’phreng p.169 lines 4-7).

² He was accused by religious rivals of having had a hand in eliminating bla ma dBu ma pa, also known as Jo btsun Sras pa, a vainglorious Tshal pa master.

³ For instance, lHo rong chos ’byung (p.735 lines 16-18) says that, inspired by spiritual practice, he wrote a treatise in verses on bsNyen grub kyi rdo rje gsum, at the hermitage of dGon dkar. This is confirmed in bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa ’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.169 line 19-p.170 line 6): “At the ri khrod of sKyid grong Bar sgar, (p.170) namely Kos (spelled as) dkar, a hermitage blessed by the mkha’ ’gro, he wrote Zab lam rDo rje gsum gyi snyen sgrub with the
- a geographer and historian;  
- a master whose behaviour, at least once, was apparently in line with the snyong ba tradition;

blessings of bcom ldan ’das ma rDo rje phag mo. [This is] like a golden necklace of words which are a wish fulfilling gem. He renounced to write it as his own creation”.

The last statement in this passage carries some weight. It refers to the practice, common to Tibetans of earlier periods, of writing a text and attributing it to someone else in order to increase its importance. The matter eventually boils down to whether to consider these works as forgeries, as the sun ‘byin literature and several western Tibetologists do.

4 bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.171 lines 8-11): “[U rgyan pa] wrote the texts entitled Chu bo rab kyi phreng ba (“The Necklace of Rivers”) and rGyal po rabs kyi phreng ba (“The Necklace of the Royal Genealogy”). He [also] composed verses in praise of the emperor and sent them to him as gifts”.

The presently unavailable treatise on the river systems flowing from Tibet to the neighbouring lands concerns the orography of Upper West Tibet feeding the Indian North-West, the river system of Central Tibet flowing to Nepal and Gangetic India; and the orography of eastern Tibet which feeds China. lHo rong chos ‘byung contains what seemingly are parts of this work embedded in the biography of U rgyan pa (see for mNga’ ris p.724 lines 11-16 and p.736 lines 6-22; for dBu gTsang p.739 line 20-p.740 line 4 and for Khams p.745 line 13-p.746 line 1). 

rGyal po rabs kyi phreng ba, too, is unavailable.

5 In 1261 U rgyan pa misbehaved in Ti ra hu ti on the way to rDo rje gdan for his first visit to the heart of the Buddhist world. bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.135 line 3-p.137 line 2) reads: “[Ram shing], the king [of Ti ra hu ti], was invited to a festival by his senior minister. His palanquin could not move because a multitude surrounded it. While the ministers carrying various kinds of weapons in their hands were telling people to move away, the rje grub chen rin po che, grabbing the moment, snatched a stick from the hand of a minister and told him to go away. [U rgyan pa first] jumped (’phyongs sic for mchongs) on the king and [then], upon the king exclaiming: “A madman has come”, jumped on his palanquin. [The procession] moved after the rje grub chen rin po che dropped the stick. The people said: “This is the behaviour of a dzo gi who is bestowing protection”. The king sat on the throne, and the rje grub chen rin po che was asked [to sit] at the corner of the throne. He proclaimed: “I took part in the festival to which the king was invited. I have [achieved] the feats of someone successful in his activities” and sang a song that said: “I led Ram shing rgyal po with a stick”. He then went to a Hindu temple that housed a stone image of the god Shiva. The dkon gnyer ma (“woman keeper”?) said (p.136): “Prostrate to the god”, but he retorted: “I will not prostrate”. As soon as she warned him: “If you do not prostrate, a disease will come to you”, he covered the image with a woollen robe and rode on it saying: “Khyu khyu” and added: “If a disease will come [to me], take this one”. She said: “He is doing this to my image!”, and cried. [U rgyan pa] sang a song which said that he rode on the neck of Ma ha de va sha ra (spelled so).

Then he went to another Hindu temple and halted [there]. He relinquished [there] his stools and urine. This being a behaviour supremely unruly, the next morning one dkon gnyer came and said: “You did such things in the lha khang. The king comes here for his worship, so you must clean it yourself. If you do not do it, the king will come to kill you”. [U rgyan pa] replied: “I am not afraid to be killed. If you are afraid to be killed, clean it yourself”. [The dkon gnyer] said: “There is no one who is not afraid of getting killed”. At that time, [U rgyan pa] urinated in a
an inveterate pilgrim (he traveled to U rgyan, Ma ga dha and China);
- a lineage holder of several important transmissions;
- a builder of temples and promoter of restoration campaigns;\(^6\)
- a political advisor (see below for his allegedly crucial intervention to save Bal po from an invasion by the Mongols of China);
- a lo tsa ba;\(^7\)
- a polyglot; he seemingly knew Sanskrit, various Indian languages including some Pahari ones, Chinese, Mongolian and Uighur (Si tu pan chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas, Karma Kam tshang gi gser 'phreng p.180 lines 6-7);
- a physician;\(^8\)
- a rtsis pa;\(^9\) and
- an alchemist.\(^10\)

leather (ko) bowl he had and poured it on the head of a statue. The dkon gnyer said: “You are someone who is not afraid to be killed, but they will come to kill me. Go away”. [U rgyan pa] said that the [dkon gnyer] was the one who cleaned. He said he sang a song which told that (p.137) he poured urine on the head of the god Shiva”.

\(^6\) [U rgyan pa] is said to have built bDe legs steng just before sBu tra mchod khang (bSod nams 'od zer, U rgyan pa'i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.180 line 14-18): “At Mang yul Kyi (sic for sKyid) grong, at the neck of Shar gangs (the “mountain in the east”), he built a monastery known as bDe legs stengs and stayed there”.

\(^7\) This is what Byams pa 'phrin las (compiler), Gangs ljongs gso rig bstan pa'i nyin byed rim byon gyi rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs (p.746 line 21-p.747 line 3) says about U rgyan pa after his return from the Mongol court in water snake 1293: “Having studied translations from pandi ta Ra hu la shri, Bi tsa tra ki ta and Sra ka ra in a masterful manner (p.747), there was hardly anything he did not know about the internal relations between the linguistic families of U rgyan, rGya [gar and] Bal [po]. So he did not need a translator at all. He also translated gShed dmar”.

\(^8\) Trained in the dbyangs 'char tradition, U rgyan pa was a reputed master of medicine. Proverbial episodes in the rnam thar-s of him are his unfortunate handling of Sa skya upon chen Byang rin’s disease (see below) and his treatment of Se chen rgyal po’s ailments at the Mongol court of China (see below).

\(^9\) Being a master of Dus 'khor, he made a calculation of the Buddha’s nirvana at bSam yas in water horse 1282 (bS tan rtsis kun las btsas pa p.192 lines 18-19; Si tu pan chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas, Karma Kam tshang gi gser 'phreng p.174 lines 2-3). The passing of the Buddha fell, in his view, in 652 BCE.

\(^10\) He transformed tin into silver at the Mongol court of China. On that occasion he said he could also turn iron into gold, fluids into gold and mercury into silver (see below n.50). In dNgul chu grub pa'i bstan bcos there is a reference to his capacity to distill mercury and his method to discontinue the cycle of births (Byams pa 'phrin las (compiler), Gangs ljongs gso rig bstan pa'i nyin byed rim byon gyi rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs p.161 lines 10-12).
Despite ample chances to explore some of the many facets of his personality, in this paper I focus on a study of the political and social background to his activities. I examine some of his life experiences, symptomatic of an existence spent under a power he did not support and with which he did not sympathise.

He was born in iron tiger 1230 in one of the several families which claimed descent from the *lha sras btsan po*-s but would have remained unnoticed by historical records, were it not for the fact that they included important religious masters in their later generations.

Grub chen U rgyan pa’s name at birth was Seng ge dpal (ibid. p.162 line 4), but he was known as Rin chen dpal after he took monastic vows (ibid. p.163 line 4). His belonging to one religious school of Tibetan Buddhism rather than another always was a little undefined. Karma Pakshi (1204 or 1206 or 1210-1283) thought that U rgyan pa was his best disciple; the ’Brug pa tradition includes him among its noblest sons. He was, no doubt, a bKa’ brgyud pa, but he was initiated into monastic life at Bo dong by Rin chen rtse mo (?-?) (see above n.1).

His life spanned a good part of the Sa skya pa period. He was witness to the enforcement of the Mongol law in Tibet and the Hor’s protracted control over the plateau. Like his contemporaries who did not belong to the ruling faction in Tibet, he had to cohabit with the Hor.

U rgyan pa was a child when, in iron rat 1240, the Mongols invaded dBus gTsang. The Tibetan tradition considers the 1240 campaign led by Dor ta as the earliest Hor pa invasion of Tibet; this is a historical stereotype whose validity needs to be investigated, but a treatment of this complex subject goes beyond the scope of the present article.11

U rgyan pa’s monastic career took a turn for the best, as often is the case of mystics, when in fire sheep 1247 he met his main teacher, the great rGod tshang pa mGon po rdo rje (1187-1258), at the old man’s monastery of sBu tra bDe chen gling (*lHo rong chos’ byung* p.718 lines 7-8).

Sometime later, his teacher, tired of the jealousy of his older disciples towards U rgyan pa, decided to disperse them all to several meditation places. As a consequence of his Dus ’khor studies under various teachers—the last one being rGod tshang

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11 I restrict myself to quote here a single, short passage in Che tshang bsTan ’dzin padma’i rgyal mtshan’s *’Bri gung gser phreng* (p.112 lines 3-6), which is a reference to belligerent activities by the Mongols, mentioned in this source before rDor ta’s campaign of iron rat 1240. The passage does not go into any details about the events that it mentions: “At that time an army of the Hor came and all the people were deprived of their lives. When most gtsug lag khang-s were burnt down, [’Bri gung gling pa Shes rab’ byung gnas (1187-1241)] first went to see the Hor commander. The latter developed faith in him. Hence [’Bri gung gling pa] accepted him as supporter”.

The troubled relations between Tibet and the Hor need an in-depth treatment, in particular the several—less well known—raids undertaken by the Mongols in different regions of the plateau and the reasons for these campaigns.
pa—after his father Jo’ phan’s death in water rat 1252, U rgyan pa developed the idea of going to Sham bha la (bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa p.719 lines 13-14). rGod tshang pa dissuaded him. He told him that his destiny was to go to U rgyan (Si tu pan chen Chos kyi ’byung gnas, Karma Kam tshang gi gser ’phreng p.174 lines 6-7). He thus decided to go to Udiyana—the lands of the mkha ’gro ma-s and of the lotus-born Guru Rin po che—where the Tantra-s popular among the Tibetans had originated. Although the bKa’ brgyud pa masters held in great esteem this pilgrimage, rGod tshang pa did not venture that far and stopped at Dza lan dha ra, nonetheless, a place of great Buddhist significance. The journey to Udiyana was, indeed, perilous beyond imagination.

In the next year, water ox 1253, U rgyan pa set out to the west, and proceeded to southern Byang thang for a first meditation period (bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa p.719 lines 14-15 and p.720 lines 17-21). He continued his meditation practice at Gangs Ti se, where he faced the hostility of other hermits who claimed control of the mountain. Undeterred, U rgyan pa had his practice at Ti se and Ma pham g.yu mtsho. After an important diversion, he negotiated the Himalayan range on the way to Lahul. From Ri bo Gandhola, the centre of the bKa’ brgyud pa in the Western Himalaya, he proceeded across the mountaineous terrain of the Indian North-West.

U rgyan pa first met the Mongols in his twenties, when he was in U rgyan (see bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa p.60 line 10-p.104 line 16), a journey that obviously accounts for his name. His encounter with the Mongols was not a happy one. The lands he crossed to reach Udiyana were troubled by the Hor pa invasion and the counter-activity of the Delhi Sultanate. The Muslim historiographers of the Mongols and some Tibetan sources document that the Hor had taken Kashmir, a turn of events not recorded in any local document.

Those Hor were the avantgarde of the hordes of Se chen rgyal po (Khubilai Khan)’s younger brother, Hu-la-hu, that had taken Kashmir before advancing towards Baghdad. The Tibetan sources compare the deadly effect of his advance with the thunder-like roar of the sky dragon.12 The biographies of U rgyan pa, for their part,

12 Pad ma dkar po chos ’byung (Gangs can rig mdzod ed. p.422 lines 6-13) inserts this account in the biography of rGyal ba rin po che (1203-1267, in office 1236-1267): “His fame having spread, the eldest son (sic) of the Mongol ruler Jing gir gan, Hu la, the incarnation of gNam the (spelled so), whose dragon voice caused unceivable panic [just] upon hearing it, could not occupy the throne of China, so he was sent [on a military campaign] against Sog yul (the “land of the Muslims”). By virtue of his great merit [previously accumulated by him], he became the lord of the entire land of the sTod Hor. He also subjugated Kha che. Hearing about [rGyal ba rin po che’s] fame, this one (i.e. Hu la hu) appointed him as his supreme officiating bla ma. He made great offerings to him thrice. He summoned Kashmiri artists to the land of the sTod Hor to make all types of holy images, and great respect was paid to the Buddhist teachings during his time”.

Hu la hu founded the Il-Khanate of Baghdad in the years 1256-1258, which is indirect evidence that those met by U rgyan pa in Udiyana were his hordes.
offer an extraordinary insight into Hu-la-hu’s campaign in the Indian North-West (see my paper “Accounts of the journey to the “Western Regions” with particular reference to Khyung-grod-rtsal and his ‘das-log experience. A historical view” I presented at the 8th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Bloomington July 1998).

Along the way, he had to bear the violence inflicted upon him by the Muslims and, after crossing the Indus in the territory of U rgyan, due to the constant risk of being apprehended by the Hor, he was obliged to hide and travel at night. He witnessed much death and devastation. U rgyan pa had to bear dire consequences to fulfill his plan to reach Udiyana. He was taken for a Hor, and his ragged appearance as a wandering sadhu encouraged the natives to take revenge upon him for the excesses that the Mongols had perpetrated upon the local population. He was beaten almost to death, was betrayed and forced to flee in order not to be imprisoned.

Aversion toward the Mongols took on a collective dimension among the sTod ’Brug masters. sTod ’Brug co-disciples of U rgyan pa, active in the south-western stretches of the plateau, such as Yang dgon pa rGyal mtshan dpal (1213-1258), shared unfriendly sentiments for the Mongols, first nurtured by their teacher rGod tshang pa.

U rgyan pa was in the lands of the North-West during the years 1254-1258 (his encounter with the Mongols falling around 1255-1256). Hence he got acquainted with the Hor before those of Khubilai Khan became the Yuan dynasty and held sway in Tibet. This also was before the Sa skya pa became the family implementing their control over the plateau.

On every occasion of their interaction which spanned more than half a century, the Mongols were those who took an interest in him. For his part he did not care to ingratiate himself to the mighty sovereigns of Tibet. Evidence of this attitude is a statement of Se chen rgyal po recorded in the biographies of U rgyan pa. The emperor expressed the desire to invite him to the court because, unlike other Tibetan bla ma-s who insistently urged to be summoned to the imperial court, U rgyan pa never expressed this wish. Paradoxically, this reason prompted Se chen rgyal po to invite him repeatedly rather than leaving him alone, as U rgyan pa hoped.

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13 That the grub chen was out of the Indian North-West sometime during 1258 is confirmed by his being appraised of the death of rGod tshan pa when he was in Mar yul, whose passing occurred in that year. bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa ’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.78 line 5): “[U rgyan pa] told the jo bo (De khyim) about the slightly bad dream he had the previous night: “I have the impression that the chos rje rin po che (i.e. rGod tshang pa) is no more”.”

Ibid. (p.78 line 7): “Then, when they (U rgyan pa and De khyim) reached gSer kha together, [U rgyan pa] received the news that the chos rje rin po che had passed away”.

14 bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa ’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.170 line 21-p.171 line 3): “At that time, the lord of the land, called Seng ge rgyal po (i.e. Se chen rgyal po), (p.171) having heard the fame of the rje grub chen rin po che like the dragon’s voice, said: “Although he did not request so, rje U rgyan pa must be invited”.”
Soon after, U rgyan pa decided to go on a pilgrimage to the places in Gangetic India, blessed by Shakyamuni’s frequentation, in order to fulfil a prophecy of rGod tshang pa (Si tu pan chen Chos kyi ’byung gnas, *Karma Kam tshang gi gser ’phreng* p.168 lines 3-4), and left for the Kathmandu Valley.

Iron bird 1261—when U rgyan pa reached Bal po on the way to his first pilgrimage to rDo rje gdan—was marked by significant political developments. The Sa skya pa had extended their secular influence over the Kathmandu Valley in that year. As is well known, an outcome of this new scenario was that eighty Newar artists, headed by young Aniko, left for Sa skya in 1261 to contribute to the expansion of its monastery. Aniko worked at gSer thog of dBu rtse rnying ma from its foundation in water dog 1262 until its completion in water pig 1263,15 before leaving for the Mongol dominions in the east.16 While transiting Bal po in coincidence with the departure of the group of Newar artists for Sa skya, U rgyan pa may have been witness to these events. He must have been aware of the prevailing situation, whereby a strong Mongol/Sa skya/Bal po alliance, despite its conspicuous unbalance, had been taking shape.

Another sign of these new political links was that Se chen rgyal po had given a grant to the Sa skya pa in the previous year, iron mokey 1260, which resulted in the above mentioned expansion of their main monastery and the summons of the Newar artists. Se chen rgyal po’s endowment to the Sa skya pa has the appearance of a reward given upon his taking the Mongol throne for himself for their loyalty to him during the ongoing struggle, which ended up in the rout of A ri bo gha a few years

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15 *Sa skya gdung rabs* (p.173 lines 6-8): “Then when [’gro mgon ’Phags pa] was twenty-eight years old (i.e. in water dog 1262), a great deal of funds were allocated upwards (i.e. to Tibet), and dpon chen Shakya bzang po built gSer thog chen mo, [located] to the west of dBu rtse rnying ma”.

16 *rGya Bod yig thshang* is supremely brief in its assessment of the activities of Aniko at the court of the Mongol emperor of China. I include here the passage concerning them, because I did not mention it in my *Early Temples of Central Tibet*. The passage (p.281 lines 15-17) reads: “[The emperor] gave instructions to Bal po A ner dga’, who was like an emanation of the divine artist. [The Newar master] made Dzu chur lha khang including statues of chos skyong Mahākāla and his retinue”. Aniko’s making of this statue of mGon po reminds one of the cultural milieu shared, in the name of this deity, by the Tangut kingdom as well as sGa A-gnyan dam pa and a stone sculpture of Mahākāla with an inscription mentioning the name of this great Sa skya pa master from Khams (see Stoddard “A Stone Sculpture of Gur mGon.pō, Mahakala of the Tent, Dated 1292”; Sperling “Some Remarks on sGa A-gnyan Dam-pa and the Origins of the Hor.pā Lineage of the dKar-mdzes Region”; Sperling, “Rtsa-mi lo-tsa-ba Sangs-rgyas grags-pa and the Tangut Background of Early Mongol-Tibetan Relations”; and Vitali, “Sa skya and the mNga’ ris skor gsum legacy: the case of Rin chen bzang po’s flying mask”).
later in wood rat 1264. Further funds were assigned in 1262 to build Sa skya gSer thog (see above n.14).

The ruler of Bal po in that eventful iron bird 1261 was Jayabhīmadeva. Gopalarajavamshavali (f.26, p.129) credits him with a reign of thirteen years and three months, which fell from sometime around 1257 to circa 1269.

What is not explicitated in the sources is the status of the relationship between U rgyan pa and the Sa skya pa during the years preceding the official extension of the Mongol power over the central provinces of the plateau. I would suggest that it was already quite tense, given the political divide in Tibet between the Sa skya pa supporters of Go pe la (Khubilai, the future Se chen rgyal po), the undesignated successor to Mong gor rgyal po, and the bKa’ brgyud pa supporters of A ri bo gha, the official heir apparent who had been chosen by his father, the emperor.

The event that caused long-term trouble for U rgyan pa is linked to the poisoning of ’Phags pa’s brother, Phyag na rdo rje, in fire hare 1267 (van der Kuijp, “U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1230-1309) Part II: For Emperor Qubilai? The Garland of Tales about Rivers” p.314), probably in view of the official enforcement of the Mongol law in Central Tibet, marked by the earth dragon 1268 promulgation of the khri skor bcu gsum.17

As noted by Leonard van der Kuijp in his brilliant paper, Si tu Chos kyi ’byung gnas says in Karma kam tshang gi gsar ’phreng that U rgyan pa came to know who was responsible for the assassination of Phyag na rdo rje.18 Whether or not this was true, U rgyan pa thought he had evidence that Sa skya dpon chen Kun dga’ bzang po had poisoned ’Phags pa’s brother.

In the realm of conjecture, I prefer a suggestion different from the several hypotheses proposed by van der Kuijp (ibid. p.315-316). All actors in the play were Sa skya pa, thus being in charge of the affairs of Tibet rather than antagonistic to the new status quo. The political situation had nuances within the rulers’ ranks. I think of an internecine

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17 On the khri skor bcu gsum system introduced in 1268 see rGya Bod yig tshang (p.298 lines 7-9: “In the earth male dragon year (1268), the envoys A kon and Mi gling, altogether two, who had been directly sent by the imperial court, came. All the human communities and lands [of Tibet] took the name of the great Hor”). Ngor chos ’byung (p.326 line 7) says: “When [’gro mgon ’Phags pa] was thirty-four years old, in the earth male dragon year (1268) dpon chen Shakya bzang po established the khri skor bcu gsum”).

Also see Wylie, “The First Mongol Conquest of Tibet Reinterpreted” (p.125), where the establishment of the khri skor system is connected with the Mongol census of Tibet in the same year.

18 See van der Kuijp, “U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1230-1309) Part II: For Emperor Qubilai? The Garland of Tales about Rivers” (p.315). The passage in Si tu Chos kyi ’byung gnas, Karma Kam tshang gi gser ’phreng (p.173 line 5) reads as follows in my own reading: “Kun [dga’] bzang [po] himself heard rumours about [U rgyan pa] having come to know that Sa skya’i dpon chen Kun [dga’] bzang [po] had served poison to Phyag na [rdo rje]. Hence he brought troops to sBung tra (spelled so). [U rgyan pa’s] gzims khang was destroyed. This is why many bad omens manifested”.

struggle for power on the verge of the formal submission of Tibet to the Mongols of China. Phyag na rdo rje was bound to become the viceroy of Tibet. His murder was, in my understanding, a move by the Sa skya pa authorities posted in Tibet to preclude the imposition of an administration run from the Mongol court of China. With the assassination of Phyag na rdo rje, the day-by-day management of Tibet passed to the Sa skya pa officers, to whose ranks Kun dga’ bzang po belonged.

It seems that, from this time, Kun dga’ bzang po nurtured hatred for U rgyan pa. The religious master was the holder of allegations too uncomfortable for the Sa skya pa officer. If one looks at the sequence of activities in the life of U rgyan pa, some of his exertions were influenced by Kun dga’ bzang po’s burdensome aversion. In those years U rgyan pa returned to rDo rje gdan a second time (IHo rong chos ’byung p.736 lines 2-6 and ibid. lines 22-25; mKhas pa ’i dga’ ston p.915 lines 7-10). It would seem that he left for Bodhgayā in temporary exile to avoid the hostility of the dpon chen, when that tension became intolerable.

On the way back, he took charge of the dissidence of the Tibetans in exile in the Kathmandu Valley owing to their harassment by the Sa skya pa authorities (see my “In the presence of the “diamond throne”: Tibetans at rDo rje gdan (last quarter of the 12th century to year 1300”)”). When the Tibetans—numbering in the thousands—fled the plateau owing to their unwillingness to accept the situation prevailing in Tibet, the Newar ruler of the Kathmandu Valley was probably Jayashimadeva. He succeeded Jayabhīmadeva in 1270 and reigned for two years and seven months (Gopalarajavamshavali f.26, p.129).

None of his ’bha ro-s (i.e. Newar noblemen) took the issue of the displaced Tibetans to heart. Some eleven years after the Newar artists had gone to work at Sa skya, the local political sentiments had not changed much. The Kathmandu Valley remained a hotspot of loyalists to the Mongol alliance of Tibet.

Typically, U rgyan pa disregarded the warnings of the local pro-Sa skya establishment not to lead the movement, which could count on such a conspicuous number of Tibetans.

Using the stereotype of Tibetan exposure to tropical diseases and the reason of the chronic vexation imposed upon them in Bal po as a pretext, he organised a march back to the plateau. He thus transferred dissidence against the Mongol rule from exile to Tibet.

Upon his return to his monastery of sBu tra, held by his teacher rGod tshang pa before him, he built a structure defined in his biographies as a pho brang (“palace”)

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19 bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.176 line 18-p-178 line 3): “At that time, there was a crop failure in Tibet, hence, that winter, in the land of Bal po there were many thousands of Tibetans. Remembering all the kinds of misdeeds [they had to bear], the Tibetans requested the rje grub chen rin po che, Bho ta pandi ta and a Sa skya pa dge bshes, (p.177) altogether three, to intercede with the Bal po’i bha ro-s. It said that Bho ta pandi ta exclaimed: “This crazy U rgyan pa will not be useful to us”. The rje grub chen rin po che retorted: “It is excellent (go bcad) that you are not crazy, so you should prevent them from catching fever
ROBERTO VITALI

At the time when the construction work at sBu tra was in progress (i.e. soon after iron horse 1270), U rgyan pa is credited with having saved the Kathmandu Valley from an invasion by the Mongols of China. This acknowledgement is perhaps a mere apology; however, U rgyan pa—his biographers say—convinced the Mongols of China to desist from their plan by means of written arguments. *IHo rong chos 'byung* says that, among the three texts U rgyan pa wrote at the time, a praise of Se chen rgyal po was the one that helped avoid the invasion of Bal po.22 This praise along the way”. It is said that the Sa skya pa *dge bshes* exclaimed: “These bad Tibetans came here to evade the taxation by the Sa skya pa. Now, when they will go back to Tibet, each of them will stand [responsible] for this crime”. The Tibetans went to see the *rje btsun rin po che*, and pleaded with him: “Those two will not help us to plead [the Bal po *bha ro-s*]. We beg [you], the *bla ma*, to help us with [our] appeal to [the *bha ro-s*]”. He pleaded the *bha ro-s*, but [the problem] was not sorted out because the various [bha ro] denigrated one another (*phar skur tshur skur*). Hence the *grub chen rin po che* said: “All of you, Tibetans, must gather at Bod thang (i.e. Thundikel in Kathmandu), and carry a [walking] stick (*rgyug pa*) one ’dom (the length of two outspread arms) long [for the journey to Tibet]. If you stay here for the next season, you will catch a fever and die. Whoever will be holding up [*skyil ba*] here will be killed”. The Tibetans did so. The Bal po [authorities] requested the *rje grub chen rin po che*: “*Bla ma*, do not be the head of these Tibetans”. He replied: “I am not the head of these Tibetans. All these Tibetans will leave during the hot season. [Otherwise,] catching fever, they will die, which is not commendable. The locals say that, if they hold them up, they will beat them”. Provisions for the journey were given to the Tibetans, amounting to fourteen *pham* of rice for each. (p.178) Rice was sent along with the 200 attendants of the *rje grub chen rin po che* as much as they could carry”.  

20 bSod nams ’od zer, *U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa* (p.170 lines 11-19): “When the “palace” at dpal ldan sBud skra (spelled so) was under construction, he prophesied that it would be destroyed and the troops of the sMad kyi Hor (“from the lower side”, i.e. China), coming to destroy the holy places of Bal yul, will be repulsed. Having [indeed] gone to dpal ldan sBud skra (spelled so) when the palace was under construction, the *rje grub chen rin po che* said: “Other people will come to destroy this building in the future. At that time, people will have to say that this building was [re-]constructed by a donor. Make it big and make it with big walls”.  

21 Si tu pan chen Chos kyi ‘byung gnas, *Karma Kam tshang gi gser ’phreng* (p.172 line 4) adds rGya gar to Bal po, but the earlier biographers of U rgyan pa do not do so.  

22 bSod nams ’od zer, *U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa* (p.171 lines 4-12): “At the same time, [U rgyan pa] performed a binding ritual (*shyor ba*) against troops attacking the holy places of Bal yul, and gave many speeches to the *gser yig pa*, who had come with his horsemen, [saying] that they should neither conquer Bal yul nor that there was any use to conquer it. He wrote the texts entitled *Chu bo rabs kyi phreng ba* (“The Necklace of Rivers”) and *rGyal po rabs kyi phreng ba* (“The Necklace of the Royal Genealogy”). He composed verses in praise of the emperor and sent them as presents. Moreover, it is said that, since he created obstructions by all kinds of means, the troops gave up [the military campaign]”.  

*IHo rong chos ’byung* (p.735 lines 16-18) records different means used by U rgyan pa to dissuade the Mongols of China: “After composing the words of the “adamantine poetical
seems to have been rather expedient owing to an emergency rather than a heartfelt profession of esteem for the emperor (see below for U rgyan pa’s stormy interaction with Se chen at his court).

At the peak of his troubled relationship with the Sa skya pa authorities, the protection extended by U rgyan pa to pro-Sa skya Bal po in order to prevent its takeover by the Mongols of China proves his equanimous and unselfish attitude. He adopted an evenhanded approach that transcended negative experiences in his own life. It also indicates that U rgyan pa’s adventures in the North-West had made him enough aware of the damage done by the Mongol invasions not to be unconcerned.

The next event was Kun dga’ bzang po’s destruction of the “palace” at sBu tra. According to his biographers, U rgyan pa journeyed to rDo rje gdan after 1270, an event followed by his construction of the palace at sBu tra, subsequently burned down by Kun dga’ bzang po.

sBu tra was rebuilt five years later by means of funds provided by A rog che,23 the seventh son of Se chen rgyal po, borne by Zhwa gon ma, the emperor’s youngest wife.24 He was in charge of Tibetan affairs and accompanied ’gro mgon ’Phags pa back to Tibet in 1275-1276. ’Phags pa and A rog che, in fire rat 1276, dismissed Kun dga’ bzang po from his role of dpon chen.25 This may explain why the Mongol prince financed the reconstruction of U rgyan pa’s sBu tra in the same year. Ho rong chos ’byung says that sBu tra was rebuilt five years before iron snake 1281. Hence the years water monkey 1272 for the destruction of sBu tra and 1276 for its restoration are confirmed.26

verses”, the text on the wish-fulfilling attainments (bsnyen grub, i.e. the attainments achieved by the training of body, speech and mind, this being a paraphrase of his work on bsNyen grub kyi rdo rje gsun) at ri khrod dGon dkar, he went to sBu tra. Here he founded a gzims khang. At that time, the troops of Se chen came to conquer the land of Bal yul, but he recited a hymn of praise [of the emperor] in metrical form, and the troops gave up [the invasion of Bal po]”.

23 Si tu Chos kyi ’byung gnas, Karma Kam tshang gi gser ’phreng (p.173 lines 5-6): “On account of the punishment [inflicted upon it by Kun dga’ bzang po], [sBu tra] remained destroyed for five years without trace. rGyal bu A rog che being the sponsor, the monastery of sPung tra (spelled so) was restored”.

24 rGya Bod yig tshang (p.256 lines 10-11): “bTsun mo Zhwa sgon ma’s eight sons were the eldest Hu kar cha, the second A rog che ….”.

Ibid. (p.266 lines 11-14): “The son of the youngest wife of Se chen rgyal po was A rog che. He was entrusted with [the land] known as the “sun in the west” (i.e. Tibet). He resided at the border between China and Tibet [and] also went to dBus gTsang. He suppressed many rebellions”.

25 rGya Bod yig tshang (p.359 line 9): “The bla ma (i.e. ’gro mgon ’Phags pa) was not happy with Kun dga’ bzang po”.

Ibid. (p.359 lines 15-17): “As earlier requested [by ’Phags pa], nye gnas gZhon dbang was sent and, by order of Se chen, Byang rin was appointed dpon chen [at the place of Kun dga’ bzang po]”.

26 Ho rong chos ’byung (p.737 lines 18-21): “Having listened to the calumny of others, dpon chen Kun dga’ bzang po destroyed sBu tra’ (spelled so) mchod khang. Then [U rgyan pa] went to
A combined reading of his biographies and \textit{IHo rong chos 'byung} allows the reconstruction of the following sequence of events:

- U rgyan pa journeyed to rDo rje gdan soon after iron horse 1270 and built the palace at dBu tra in 1272;
- Kun dga’ bzang po destroyed it almost immediately;
- U rgyan pa restored it in 1276 with funds provided by A rog che.

In iron dragon 1280 Kun dga’ bzang po was found guilty of ’gro mgon ‘Phags pa’s poisoning. The first phase of interaction with the Mongols of China in the life of U rgyan pa ended with the execution of Kun dga’ bzang po.

Dialogues between U rgyan pa and a loyalist of Kun dga’ bzang po are symptomatic of the \textit{grub chen}’s uncompromising style. On the verge of putting Kun dga’ bzang po to death, this loyalist (sTod btsan) made a desperate plea to U rgyan pa that he should do something to spare his enemy’s life. Unmoved by Kun dga’ bzang po’s fate, U rgyan pa replied with a sarcastic statement. This provoked a quarrel with the officer. Subsequently, in order to make him feel responsible, the officer showed him the severed head of the late dpon chen. U rgyan pa was unfazed, saying simply: “What a pity! Kun dga’ bzang po is dead!”, and went on with the prescribed \textit{bla ma}’s routine of performing rites for him.\(^{27}\)

U rgyan pa had a part in the obscure circumstances surrounding the demise of Shangs mKhar po che ba Byang [chub] rin [chen], one of the \textit{dpon chen}-s appointed after the dismissal of Kun dga’ bzang po from this post in 1276. His tenure of the \textit{dpon chen} rank, begun at an unspecified time after those of Zang btsun and Phyug po sGang dkra ba (see van der Kuijp, “U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1230-1309) Part II: For Emperor Qubilai? The Garland of Tales about Rivers” n.35), was short lived.

Assigned to the year of the horse 1282 (see bSod nams ’od zer, \textit{U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa} p.192 line 20), the death of dpon chen Byang rin occurred soon after

\(^{27}\) bSod nams ’od zer, \textit{U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa} (p.186 line 12-p.187 line 3): “Then, after completing the stages of the ritual, the following morning the \textit{drung} ("secretary") (i.e. sTod btsan) wondered: “The disagreement [between] the \textit{bla ma} and \textit{dpon chen}, altogether two, has proved to be a loss for the latter”. [U rgyan pa] replied: “What a pity (snying rje)!”. [The officer] having pleaded: “What can one do (ci), rje lags? It is not possible that [they want to] kill him”. [U rgyan pa said]: “Would it be binding to perform \textit{rlung sbyor} ("pranayama")?”. He replied: “It will help very little”, and the two had an argument.

Subsequently (\textit{sang dus}), jo bo sTod btsan having shown signs of being upset, for he did not even look [at him], [U rgyan pa] asked: “What is going on?”’ , he showed him the severed head of dpon chen Kun dga’ bzang po and left. Having said at the time: “Kun dga’ bzang po is dead. What a pity!” , [U rgyan pa] performed rites for twenty days. (p.187) He said: “Disputes with me do not bring any benefit. However, he will have a human rebirth”, and added: “I had a vision that he will be reborn as a \textit{ras pa} who remembers his births and, next, will be a minor \textit{’brog pa} chieftain”.”.
the execution of Kun dga’ bzang po. The circumstances of his passing are somewhat obscure, but not because U rgyan pa was instrumental in causing his death,28 as Leonard van der Kuijp suggests—with several reservations, though, on account of the difficult passages describing it (ibid. p.311-312).

There are several acts in the drama of Byang rin’s demise. This is my reconstruction of its unfolding:

- the bSam yas rgyal po had a curse made against Byang rin because the latter had taken away from the chos skor a turquoise which must have been of great importance for the monastery. The passage in question does not explain whether this was an emblematic appropriation of a symbol of local power, or sheer theft.
- Byang rin fell sick with a serious disease. His life was in danger. He tried to use other physicians before U rgyan pa, and then summoned him for treatment.
- U rgyan pa became acquainted with the complaint of the bSam yas rgyal po. He asked Byang rin to follow his own instructions exclusively. This upset one gSal ba

28 bSod nams ’od zer in his U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa recounts this episode assigned to the horse year 1282 (ibid. p.192 line 20). He introduces the events by saying that dpon chen Byang rin fell ill with a serious disease and that [U rgyan pa] was asked to go and give him blessings. The biography then gets into the heart of the matter (p.193 line 6-p.194 line 20): “A few days after, the bSam yas rgyal po showed up and [U rgyan pa] said that [the ruler] told him: “dPon chen Byang rin has stolen (brkus) and taken away a turquoise from the go rdung (?) of bSam yas gtsug lag khang. This being a huge offense, it is a fact that I did a little harm to him. I ask you to intervene [to sort out the matter] between the two of us”. A few days after, the dpon chen sent four horsemen to escort [U rgyan pa] and [the latter] arrived [to see him]. [Byang rin] stood up from his seat upon [U rgyan pa’s] arrival at ‘Jad Dar sdings where the dpon chen was camped. The dpon chen prostrated. Having said: “[I am] the offspring in the paternal family who [benefited of your] empowerment. My hope is that the bla ma has an empowerment [for me] because I am afflicted by a serious disease”, the grub chen replied: “The dpon chen should focus his attention [only] upon me. It may be possible that I have effective counsel and remedy”. Bha ma gSal ba sgang pa objected: “You have my services, you do not need the services of U rgyan pa”. U rgyan pa said: “The bSam yas rgyal po showed up to see me (p.194) and said: “My stolen turquoise was taken away by the dpon chen. [I think that] the stolen turquoise should be brought back to bSam yas”. [The dpon chen] packed a substitute brocade and a substitute turquoise on a white horse and sent them on the trunk route to the east (i.e. to bSam yas), but the horse with its load was returned to the door [of the dpon chen’s residence]. In the course of that night, [U rgyan pa], standing at the door of their residential tent, told slob dpon Pha jo and dge slong Gyen rdor to wake up. Having joined him, he told them: “The bSam yas rgyal po has created a major obstruction. The dpon chen is running a huge risk. We must surround him with a protective ring. [You] should stick a phur pa each in the four directions of his tent”. Then dbon po Rin chen rgyal mtshan and jo btsun bZang nga, two in all, came together to see [U rgyan pa to tell him] that the dpon chen had fallen into a state of coma. Bha ma gSal ba [sgang pa] said: “You must be having some kan ci camphor [with you]. You should say [now] that [you] should rely on [this] expedient”, but U rgyan pa retorted: “Your dpon chen will come out of the disease by himself. Camphor is not effective in lung failure”. [gSal ba sgang pa] burst out, maintaining: “He dies because of U rgyan pa’s treatment”, but [the grub chen] retorted: “I do not keep camphor (i.e I do not make use of it)”. Then the dpon chen died”.
sgang pa who, before U rgyan pa, had tried to treat the dpon chen, to no avail. gSal ba sgang pa said that U rgyan pa was not going to succeed in helping him.

- U rgyan pa told Byang rin that the first thing he should do was to return the turquoise to bSam yas. Byang rin complied but in a tricky way. He sent a substitute turquoise in a substitute brocade. The text does not talk about the reaction of the bSam yas rgyal po upon their receipt. But it indeed says that the duplicates were returned to Byang rin.

- This subterfuge angered the bSam yas rgyal po even more. He had a heavier curse made against Byang rin. The dpon chen’s health deteriorated further.

- U rgyan pa tried a protective technique and a treatment. However what he did was ineffectual, and the dpon chen died.

- gSal ba sgang pa, the rival doctor who had been sidelined so that the task of saving the dpon chen’s life was left to U rgyan pa, attacked the grub chen verbally, accusing him of having killed Byang rin due to his ineffective treatment. The bone of contention concerned the use of camphor, recommended by gSal ba sgang pa, but not used by U rgyan pa, who denied its usefulness in the case of the dpon chen’s disease.

The account does not indicate, in my interpretation, that U rgyan pa had a willing part in the death of Byang rin. It documents that he was called to exercise his profession of physician, but failed in healing the patient. The reasons that caused the dpon chen’s demise went back to the sour relations between the dpon chen and the bSam yas rgyal po, which may indicate a hostility wider than a personal one. Is the demise of Byang rin a sign of enmity nurtured by the dBus pa establishment towards the predominance of the new political order, implemented by the Mongols, over every other power in Tibet? The situation precipitated a few years later in wood bird 1285, when the first indications of a violent confrontation between Sa skya and ’Bri gung materialised.

Before ’gro mgon ’Phags pa’s death, U rgyan pa had an exchange of views with him, denoting his position on the issue of a bla ma living a court life. U rgyan pa openly told him, using no diplomatic words, how much he disapproved of the existence in the shadow of the emperor.29

29 bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.185 line 15-p.186 line 1): “[U rgyan pa] went to see the ’gro mgon chos kyi rgyal po at the great seat dpal ldan Sa skya. He received teachings on Theg pa chen po mDo sde and they exchanged religious discussions to their mutual (phan tshun) satisfaction. Then the rje grub chen rin po che said: “Earlier a white man (i.e. sPyan ras gzigs) told me: “If you go to [the land of] the Hor, your benefit for sentient beings will reach (nub tsam) the neck of the foot (bol); if you stay in Las stod, it will reach the knee; if you go to mNga’ ris, it will reach the neck; if you go to dBus gTsang (p.186), it will reach the crown [of the head]”.

Views such as these by U rgyan pa were not only based on political rivalry. Indeed, bcom ldan Rig pa’i ral gri (1228-1305), a sNar thang pa close to the positions of the Sa skya pa, was critical of ’gro mgon ’Phags pa’s presence at the Mongol court of China in the capacity of ti shri to the emperor. He thought that this role went beyond the spiritual domain of a Buddhist master.
On the same occasion, the biographies record a dialogue between U rgyan pa and Sam gha. The Tibetan officer at the service of the Mongols sarcastically questioned the grub chen about his knowledge and, in exchange, received sarcastic answers from U rgyan pa.30

This exchange of views is anachronistically placed in the rnam thar-s after the death of Kun dga’ bzang po, when ’Phags pa had already been assassinated. The episode must have preceded both the latter events. A further point in need of investigation is whether Sam gha was already in Tibet before the murder of ’Phags pa. Van der Kujip (“U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1230-1309) Part II: For Emperor Qubilai? The Garland of Tales about Rivers” p.322) contributes evidence to prove that ’Phags pa and Sam gha were in ’Dam in 1267 when U rgyan pa met them and they had an exchange of views.

U rgyan pa’s outburst with ’gro mgon ’Phags pa against the bla ma-s’ custom of spending long periods at the Mongol court of China is indicative of the reasons that led U rgyan pa to refuse a plethora of invitations sent by Se chen rgyal po to summon him to his capital. These included his discontent at being a subject of the Hor.

These summonses characterise another side in U rgyan pa’s interaction with the Mongols of China. Although lHo rongchos ’byung and mKhas pa’i dga’ston say that he was invited three times (respectively ibid. p.741 line 20-21 and p.916 line 11),

30 The reason why Sam gha, whose life and activity never leaned towards mysticism, ventured a conversation on religion with a well established master, such as U rgyan pa, is not given in the literature. bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.187 lines 4-21) says: “When [U rgyan pa] went to gdan sa dpal ldan Sa skya to see the bla ma chos kyi rgyal po (i.e. ’Phags pa) upon the latter’s return from China, on that occasion, he imparted Mahayana teachings to many thousands of monks who had faith in him. When this person who made the purely perfect teachings of Sangs rgyas shine like the day went to see the chos kyi rgyal po (i.e. ’Phags pa), he exchanged many pleasant conversations [with him]. On that occasion mi chen Sang gha (spelled so) having said: “Bla ma U rgyan pa, which teachings do you know?”, the grub chen rin po che answered: “I do not know anything. Anyway, I know a little of rigs pa’i gnas lnga (the “five sciences”)”. Since [Sam gha] asked: “If so, do you know grammar?”, the rje grub chen rin po che answered: “I know grammar”. [Sam gha] exclaimed: “If so, show [that you know it]”. The grub chen rin po che showed it [to him] by melodiously reciting Ka la’ imDo from the beginning, and it is said that mi chen Sang gha exclaimed: “There is no way [for me] to understand (go rgyu) [what you recite]”, hence the grub chen rin po che retorted: “How would you understand grammar? If you wish to understand, come to listen (nga’ rtsa ru) [to me]”. It is said that ’gro mgon chos kyi rgyal po (’Phags pa) told [Sam gha]: “You should hasten to [learn from this] other dge bshes”.

lHo rongchos ’byung (p.738 lines 3-8): “Then, when bla ma ’Phags pa came from gong (the capital of China), [U rgyan pa] went to Sa skya to see him. The bla ma was pleased. He gave him offerings. In his presence there was mi chen Zam ka (sic for Sam gha) who asked him: “What do you know?”. [U rgyan pa] replied: “I know the five sciences”, hence [the other one] added: “Can you prove that you know grammar?”. [U rgyan pa] recited it beginning with Ka la pa. [Sam gha] said: “I cannot understand”. [U rgyan pa] retorted: “How is it that you do not understand? If you wish to understand, you should study, so that, in the process, you will [be able to] tease some other dge bshes”.”.
his biographies state that this happened five times. On four occasions he refused. On the first two occasions, respectively occurring quite a long time before the death of Karma Pakshi in water sheep 1283 and soon after it, the emissary sent to invite him was the dignitary called Li ji lag; I byi lar and In byi lag (bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa p.228 lines 2-p.230 line 9; see below n.37).31

In the course of his decades-long acquaintance with U rgyan pa, when they first got together around 1270, Li ji lag/I phyi lag was the head of the ‘jam mo (“postal relay”) network in Tibet.32 During his first meeting with U rgyan pa, he was the recipient of political arguments, communicated to him by the grub chen in order to avoid an invasion of Bal po by the Mongols of China (see above). The second meeting was about a decade later when, apparently, the dignitary had no other reason to meet him than to try again to summon U rgyan pa to the Mongol court of China.33

Li ji lag/I phyi lag had a remarkable respect and esteem for U rgyan pa. He was present at the gathering in lHa sa upon U rgyan pa’s departure for China in water dragon 1292, when the grub chen had to collect miraculous remedies for Se chen rgyal po (see below). During the meeting Li ji lag/I phyi lag was apologetic for the harassments by The mur bho ga and Tshal pa dGa’ bde dpal (see below).

The next two times U rgyan pa was invited to court, the Mongol envoys were Go ron che and Thog mi thi mur.34 The biographies of U rgyan pa record Thog mi thi

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31 Other versions of his name are En ji (Ho rong chos ‘byung p.741 line 21) and E ji lag (Si tu pan chen Chos kyi ‘byung gnas, Karma Kam tshang gi gser ’phreng p.176 line 1). On several of these spellings also see van der Kuijp, “U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1230-1309) Part II: For Emperor Qubilai? The Garland of Tales about Rivers” (n.19).

32 rGya Bod yig tshang (p.276 lines 8-12): “The ‘ja’ (spelled so) mo-s of Tibet having been newly established, a request was made concerning the need of one man to run them. A ‘ja’ sa and the rank of thong ji were awarded to the one known as mi chen I ji lag, and was sent upwards (i.e. to Tibet). He consequently took hold of them”.

Ibid. (p.277 lines 1–2): “Before Thong ji Li ji lag arrived [on the plateau] in order to be in charge of the ‘jam[s] mo-s] of Tibet, the Hor emperor brought troops to lJang yul for the first time”.

33 The circumstances of the second failed attempt to invite U rgyan pa to the Mongol court of China are described by bSod nams ’od zer (U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa p.224 lines 11–16) in the following terms: “Se chen rgyal po, who became the drop (i.e. the ruler) of most of ’Dzam bu gling, the noble lord of the land in the exercise of his might, having heard the inconceivable qualities of body, speech and mind, and the uncountable feats of the rje grub chen rin po che, issued a ‘ja’ sa for his [spiritual] protection (bsrung ba’i) without being requested [to do so by U rgyan pa]. Mi chen In byi lag went to invite him, but [U rgyan pa] did not accept to go [to the court]”.

34 bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.225 lines 4-18): “Subsequently, mi chen Go ron che went to invite him, but again [U rgyan pa] did not go. Mi chen Thi mur went to invite him, but, since he did not go, this mi chen said: “I take you away catching you by force” and added: “The calf being caught, I will take it away”; [U rgyan pa] retorted: “You are the calf, I am a young bull”. He rebuked him lashing a whip, [which made] all the res pa (“bodyguards” in charge of Thi mur’s security) ready to fight with their bow and arrows. [U rgyan pa’s] retinue
mur’s performance with amusement. The Mongol tried to kidnap the master, only raising the wrath of U rgyan pa who, in order not to be deported, scared away the great warrior with his whip and curse.

On the fifth occasion—Ne gu ta being the emissary—he finally accepted the summons to go to the Mongol court of China. He told his disciples that, years earlier, sPyan ras gzigs had appeared to him at Bodhgayā and said he should accept the invitation.35

Things were rather different though. He was forced to leave by Mongol coercion following the crushing of the 1290 gling log and the destruction of 'Bri gung. The defeat inflicted upon the 'Bri gung pa dealt a heavy blow to the fortunes of the bKa’ brgyud pa for some time to come. As is well known, many bKa’ brgyud pa monks and laymen lost their lives. The military campaign also sent a warning. In the aftermath of the gling log, the members belonging to the other bKa’ brgyud pa schools, too, were treated with aversion and mistrust.

were also ready to fight. This having turned into a big confrontation, upon [U rgyan pa] performing a binding ritual (sbyor ba) to expel them, [Thi mur] fled on a horse, exclaiming: “Let’s go away”. He recovered his composure at Gad ser. He said: “The pag shi is really scary. Were he not [busy] yelling [at me], he would have killed me”. People made a proverb: “The meditation belt is miraculous”. It is said that, on the account of the fact that the rje rin po che, being angry, lashed his whip and rebuked him, when [Thi mur] arrived back to the court, he was charged for his wrongdoings”.

IHo rong chos 'byung (p.741 line 20-p.742 line 7): “The first of the three (sic, actually five) times when Se chen rgyal po invited him earlier and later was when mi chen En ji (i.e. I phyi lag) came [to invite him], but he did not go. On the intermediate (sic) occasion, Thog thi (p.742) mur came [to invite him, but U rgyan pa] exclaimed: “I will not go”. It is said that, [the Mongol envoy] being angry, he [tried to] take him along by force. [U rgyan pa] reprimanded him and dashed his whip on the ground. Upon [the Mongol] troops taking out arrow and bows, ready to hit him, he performed a sbyor ba (“binding ritual”) to repel them with a storm. As soon as [this happened, Thog thi mur] jumped on his horse and ran away. Everyone [in his army] left after him. Having recovered his composure above Gad ser, upon arrival [there], he said: “Had not he driven me out, he would have killed me. His meditation belt is miraculous. The pag shi is scary”, and went back”.

bSod nams ‘od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.225 line 18-p.226 line 8): “Again at a later time, mi chen Ni gu ta went to invite [U rgyan pa]. It is said that, when he arrived [at the court], he was punished for his wrong doings. Having been sent [to invite him] by the emperor’s command, an order was issued which said: “You must provide compulsory service. No one else is in charge (’dzin) of providing compulsory service to U rgyan pag shi as much as [you are]”. (p.226) The rje grub chen rin po che said: “Earlier in rDo rje gdan, a white man told me: “In the future, you will be invited by the king of the Hor. Do not go against these words. This ruler has uncountable merits. Innumerable mchod rten at rDo rje gdan have been built by this ruler [in his previous lives]”. This man was sPyan ras gzigs dbang phyug. Although I am old now, I will go [this time]”.”.

IHo rong chos 'byung (p.742 lines 7-10): “The last time, mi chen Mu gu ta came [to invite him]. Because [U rgyan pa] had said earlier at rDo rje gdan: “When the ruler of the east will invite me, I should go without refusing his proposal (lit. “speech”)”, he declared: “I must go this time”.

35 bSod nams ‘od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.225 line 18-p.226 line 8): “Again at a later time, mi chen Ni gu ta went to invite [U rgyan pa]. It is said that, when he arrived [at the court], he was punished for his wrong doings. Having been sent [to invite him] by the emperor’s command, an order was issued which said: “You must provide compulsory service. No one else is in charge (’dzin) of providing compulsory service to U rgyan pag shi as much as [you are]”. (p.226) The rje grub chen rin po che said: “Earlier in rDo rje gdan, a white man told me: “In the future, you will be invited by the king of the Hor. Do not go against these words. This ruler has uncountable merits. Innumerable mchod rten at rDo rje gdan have been built by this ruler [in his previous lives]”. This man was sPyan ras gzigs dbang phyug. Although I am old now, I will go [this time]”.”.
Subsequently, the Mongol patronage extended for the reconstruction of 'Bri gung was not a sign of reconciliation. The Mongol-supported reconstruction of 'Bri gung’s destroyed monuments has the appearance of a concrete step in a policy aimed at patching up relations between antagonistic groups in Tibet to avoid further trouble, rather than a dispassionate wish to help.36

Four times U rgyan pa was able to decline Se chen rgyal po’s summons. It is significant that after 1290, on the fifth occasion, he was forced to consent. In 1292 U rgyan pa left for his journey to China, telling his followers he would return after one year, a sign that he did not plan to live a parasitical life at court.37

In lHa sa, where he was compelled to collect Guru Padma 'byung gnas’s long-life water (tshe chu) and an elixir for the emperor, he was trapped in an uneasy situation. The biographies recount that an attempt to avoid handing over the miraculous remedies to the Mongols. This caused annoyance to the Mongol prince The mur bho ga, A rog che’s son and Se chen rgyal po’s grandson.38 He was at the head of the troops sent to dBus gTsang to crush the gling log.

At a meeting presided over by U rgyan pa, he threatened to deal with the officer who was reluctant to release the remedies into Mongol hands. In denouncing the situation The mur bho ga walked up and down in front of U rgyan pa’s throne using his bow as a walking stick, a histrionic display of ominous might. U rgyan pa was unmoved. He retorted he would not go to the emperor’s court, if the officer were punished.

The Mongol prince was not the only one there who was hostile to U rgyan pa. The mighty Tshal pa chieftain, dGa’ bde dpal, was party to the compulsion of sending him to court.39

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36 *lHo rong chos ’byung* (p.416 lines 12-14): “Then a favourable order having come from Se chen rgyal po, the reconstruction of ['Bri gung] thel was pursued in wood female sheep 1295, when ['Bri gung spyan snga Cu gnyis pa rin po che (b. 1278)] was eighteen years old”.

These statements are not accurate because Se chen rgyal po was dead in 1295. 'Bri gung was rebuilt during the reign of Ol ja du (1294-1307). Judging from the sequence of events summarised in the passage in confused terms, Se chen rgyal po sanctioned the reconstruction that was actually undertaken under his successor.

37 *bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa* (p.226 lines 11-15): “He said, having examined the karmic omens: “In about one year from now I will be back”. In water male dragon (1292), when he was seventy-three (sic for sixty-three; b.1230) years old, .... he left with ninety-seven attendants”.

*lHo rong chos ’byung* (p.742 lines 10-12): “[U rgyan pa said]: “I will return about this time next year”. When [U rgyan pa] was sixty-three years of age in water male dragon (1292), ninety-seven dpon slob [first] left [with him] for Sa skya from their gdan sa”.

38 *rGya Bod yig tshang* (p.266 lines 14-16) employs these few words to identify The mur bho ga: “His (i.e. A rog che’s) son The mur bho kha (spelled so), too, rendered service to the great seat (i.e. the Mongol emperor). He pursued many activities useful to the [Mongol] law [in Tibet]”.

39 *bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa* (p.228 lines 2-p.230 line 9): “When [U rgyan pa] went in front of lHa sa Jo bo Shakya, many people, such as members of royal lineages, bowed [to him]. He extracted without effort the [long-]life water (tshe chu) blessed by the attainments (bsgrubs pa’i) of Padma ’byung gnas, the son of the Victorious One. On the way to lHa sa, before reaching (gong) lHa sa (sic), he arrived at the area of the dam (chu rags
He was a loyalist of Kun dga’ bzang po and probably saw in U rgyan pa an old enemy of his associate.\(^{40}\)
He had reasons for his enduring hostility. In the aftermath of the iron tiger 1290 gling log, dGa’ bde had been made to pay the price for his closeness to Kun dga’ bzang po by Sam gha who had executed the Sa skya dpon chen years before.

Sam gha, too, had been sent to handle the ‘Bri gung pa rebellion. dGa’ bde was deported to China upon Sam gha’s decision. He was rehabilitated and sent back to his dominions only after Sam gha himself was disgraced and put to death in iron hare 1291.

U rgyan pa had to go to the Mongol court of China to treat Se chen rgyal po who could no longer move his limbs owing to rheumatism and gout by using the long-life water of Guru Padma and the elixir. He treated his ailments successfully, but told

dGa’ bde invited him to Tshal Gung thang. No clue is available to confirm whether there was a true rapprochement.

41 mKhas pa’i dga’ ston (p.1420 lines 1-3): “The next year, iron hare 1291, the troops of the Hor intruded up to Dwags [po and] Kong [po], and Tshal pa dGa’ bde was dragged to prison. From then on, it seems that Mongol armies, which were not exclusively large, came. However during the intermediate period the ocean of sorrow over flowed in the whole of Tibet, everywhere”.

42 Gung thang dkar chag (see Soerensen-Hazod, Rulers of the Celestial Plain p.187-189) talks about the animosity between dGa’ bde dpal and Sam gha and attributes to ’Dam ri pa the wicked treatment meted out by the latter to the former. The text says that ’Dam ri pa inflamed the Tibetan officer at the service of the Mongols of China against the Tshal pa nobleman. Given the Tshal pa origin of the text, the account is written in praise of dGa’ bde to the extent that the Tshal pa officer’s deportation for trial in China is described—as Soerensen and Hazod point out—as a journey to the imperial court. Conversely Sam gha is depicted in negative terms. The account stresses that it was dGa’ bde’s presence at court, where he was rehabilitated, that made the situation precipitate for Sam gha, eventually ending with the latter’s disgrace and death punishment.

As proved by the evidence of mKhas pa’i dga’ ston (see the note immediately above), the tiger year of Gung thang dkar chag, during which the hostility between Sam gha and dGa’ bde erupted in the earnest, that led to the former’s arrest, was iron hare 1291, the year after the ’Bri gung gling log. Soerensen and Hazod identify this tiger year as 1278 in the text of their translation (ibid. p.187), but they have a second thought and propose 1290 in the accompanying footnote (ibid. n.452), adding that this assessment is anyway inconclusive, which is not my view.

This ’Dam ri pa who was hostile to dGa’ bde dopal cannot have been the other ’Dam pa ri pa (1200-1263), the associate of lHa Rin chen rgyal po (1201-1270) and a figure of great charisma and authority. These two founded Gye re lha khang and Phag ri Rin chen sgang—the latter in mGos yul stod gsum, the land between Myang stod, Bhutan and the Indian frontier—in water hare 1243 (Kha rag gNyos kyi gdung rabs f.10a lines 4-6).

43 On the way to the imperial court the localities in Tibet, traversed by U rgyan pa were Tshal Gung thang (bSod nams ’Od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa p.230 line 3-p.231 line 9), sTag lung (ibid. p.231 lines 10-13), Ri bo che (ibid. p.231 lines 14-17) and ’Dam (ibid. p.231 line 17-p.232 line 1) before heading towards China.

44 bSod nams ’Od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.235 line 1-p.236 line 5): “[U rgyan pa] met the emperor. After uttering auspicious formulas in Sanskrit, he offered the long-life water to [Se chen rgyal po] who, at that time, moved to a smaller throne from the imperial golden throne where he was previously sitting. No one could sit on a seat without the emperor’s consent [but], during their conversation, upon [the ruler] saying: “I have pain in my waist”, [U rgyan pa]
the emperor he would die within two years because nine of his twelve winds were blocked. He planned to save his life by means of acupuncture. But the courtiers prevented U rgyan pa from treating him, adding a taboo in Mongol culture by

sat on his couch, and the emperor laughed. People said that all the attending mi chen were surprised, and covered their mouth with a hand.

The emperor told [him]: “I have heard the fame of you dpag shi (spelled so for pag shi) a long time ago. Due to this, I have sent [my people] to invite you many times. Why did not you come until now?”.

The emperor had some pain in the right hand; both his feet were contracted (‘khums, lit. “shrunk”) and had pain in the joints (dreg). The emperor added: “I have a big pain in my hands and feet. Previously, although whoever was around, such as ban rde (sic) snags pa Zin shing, tried a variety of remedies, they did not work. I wonder whether you, dpag shi, have an effective cure”. The rje rin po che pa examined him and said: “Emperor! This contraction in your hand (p.236) [is due to] the cakra with thirty petals at the joint of the shoulder blade with the shoulder. Some pus formation is concentrated there. It will be useful to anoint (dbyug pa sic for byug pa) it and drain it out together with blood with a needle”. As soon as he anointed it, [the emperor] was able to move his hand above the crown [of the head]”.

lHo rong chos ’byung (p.742 line 21-p.743 line 12): “When he met the emperor, [U rgyan pa] uttered auspicious words in Sanskrit (p.743) and offered him the [long-]life water. Although no one could sit down without authorisation, upon [the emperor] saying during their conversation: “I have a pain in the waist”, he sat down. The emperor said: “This has not been [properly] prepared”. The mi chen laughed, covering their mouth with a hand.

“I have heard the fame of you, pag shi, for a very long time. Despite having repeatedly sent [messengers] to invite you, why did not you come until this time?”. He said: “I am a bya bral ba (“renunciate”). I go where I wish to go and stay where I wish to stay. I do not need to go there or stay here”.

[The emperor said:] “I do not feel comfortable with my arm which has a feeling of pain (?). Do you have any useful remedy?”. He checked that. Some pus had formed at the thirty-second [acupuncture] point between the shoulder blades. He said it would be useful to remove the pus by smearing ointment. [The emperor] told him: “If so, do it”. Ointment was smeared and, after finishing [to apply] it, he was able to lift the arm above the crown of the head”.

bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.237 lines 2-9): “Then, having realised that the emperor’s life was going to be exhausted, the rje grub chen rin po che told this and that to the mi chen-s: “Normally, in the human body’s navel, along twelve different (’dab) nerves of the astrological mansions (dus sbyor), prana (rlung) circulates in twelve pho ba (“points of transference of the vital energy”). There are no more than three rlung pho ba [working] in the emperor’s body. Nine different nerves of the astrological mansions (dus sbyor) dried up. It is too late for the elixir (ro bcud) of sPyan ras gzigs and the long-life water (tshe chu) of Pad ma ’byung gnas [to be effective]”.

lHo rong chos ’byung (p.743 line 21-p.744 line 5): “[U rgyan pa] told the courtiers (mi chen) separately: “The pulses beating at regular intervals which can be felt (ster ba) (p.744) in all people normally are twelve. The rlung (“prana”) system is composed of twelve ’pho ba. Since the emperor has nine of them blocked, there are no more than only three ’pho ba left now. Were it not for the [long-]life water and the elixir (ro bcud), he would not [be able to] survive for long (ched po) now. And it is already a little too late. Since I wish now to go back quickly, you shoul help me with this request [of mine]”. He also taught others to serve [Se chen] food mixed with the elixir”.

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which no prince of theirs could be pierced by any object. In sheer disappointment, Urgyan pa decided to leave, stating three reasons for doing so:

- the impossibility of treating the emperor, as required by physician deontology;
- his aversion to the Sa skya pa, in remarkable numbers at the capital of China; and
- his disgust for court life.47

Sechen rgyal po told Urgyan pa he thought he would become his officiating bla ma, to which he retorted that his mission was that of a gser yig pa, a simple emissary who forwarded the miraculous remedies. Urgyan pa considered himself a gser yig pa inasmuch as he was on a mission forced upon him by The mur bho ga. He was not acting on his own free enterprise.48

Urgyan pa was defiant against Sechen rgyal po’s attempts to keep him at court. He told him he did not feel intimidated because he took orders only from his guru rGod tshang pa a long time before, when he was alive.

46 bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.236 lines 5-9): “[Urgyan pa] was ready to [drain blood] by pricking it with the needle, but the many attending courtiers (mi chen) all together, kneeling down, said: “Since earlier time, there is no [custom] of inserting the tip of a blade into [the members of] the genealogy of Ji ‘dir Gan (i.e. Jing gir rgyal po, Gengis Khan). Do not perform any needle perforation”.”.

lHo rong chos ’byung (p.743 lines 12-15): “Then having thought of making acupuncture (khab tshag), since he wished to insert a long needle (bsud ring brgyab), the mi chen-s requested [Urgyan pa]: “Do not do this. In the lineage of Ji gin (i.e. Jing gir rgyal po), there is no custom of inserting an instrument [into the bodies of its members]”, [Urgyan pa] added: “You are not going to give [him] a treatment (ster ba) useful for his health. I am going back now”.”.

47 bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.237 lines 9-12): “My conduct has been [forcibly] rough, [and] what the Sa skya pa are doing is [quite] bad. In particular, as for my stay here, the need of having only sinful food and sinful drinks is not suited (mi ran pa) to my inclinations (blo). I am going to plead to go upwards [to Tibet]”.”.

48 bSod nams ’od zer, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.236 lines 8-21): “The rje grub chen rin po che pa, scolding them, said many things, such as: “You all do not let me perform what is beneficial to the health of the emperor. I am leaving to return upwards (i.e. to Tibet)”. The emperor said: “You are not a gser yig pa. I believe I have invited [you] to be a bla mchod. I will award you the crystal seal of a bla ma lord of the teachings. Why do you say that you [wish to] leave when you have just arrived?””. The rje grub chen rin po che retorted: “I am a simple gser yig [pa]. I have been sent to take [to you] the elixir (ro bcud) blessed by sPyan ras gzigs. I have been sent to bring Pad ma ’byung gnas’s long-life water (tshe chu)”. It is said that the emperor did not add anything”.

lHo rong chos ’byung (p.743 lines 16-19): “The emperor said: “You are not a gser yig pa. I have called you to be my bla ma. I will confer the crystal seal of lord of the teachings upon you. You have just arrived, do not say that you are leaving”. He replied: “I am like a gser yig pa. I came to bring the [long-life] water (tshe chu) and the elixir (ro bcud). Being a bya bral ba, I do not wish to accept the tam ka (”seal”) and the las ka (“appointment”)”.”.
Se chen rgyal po then tried to lure him with a donation of carts full of gold and silver, which U rgyan pa indignantly refused. He told him that, had he craved for wealth, he could have used his alchemical knowledge of transforming iron into gold or tin into silver. Se chen rgyal po, overawed, asked for a demonstration, to which he complied after requesting that no courtier should learn the technique and benefit from it.

He left to return to Tibet without asking permission, after he had refused to impart teachings upon the emperor whom he considered unworthy of them. Having stayed a meagre one and a half months at court, a very short time in view of the distance traveled from Tibet to China and back, he returned to his monastery one year after his departure from sBu tra.

The last contact U rgyan pa had with a Mongol emperor of China was with Ol ja du. As I have already said in my paper for the LTWA Seminar in Dharamsala in

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49 bSod nams 'od zer, *Ur gyen pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa* (p.238 lines 8-16): “A chariot filled till its mouth with wealth and chariots filled with a *bre chen* of gold and silver; brocade and silk along with various robes were offered in numbers of three by the king and one each by two princes. It is said that all the *mi chen* (‘notables’) chattered gossiping behind [his back]: ‘This much of wealth cannot be moved by those giving compulsory service. What is the best method [to transport it]?’. The *rje grub chen rin po che* said: ‘I do not need this wealth. I did not come here craving for wealth’. Having said so, he did not accept [the gifts]’.

50 bSod nams ‘od zer, *Ur gyen pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa* (p.239 lines 2-11): “Moreover, if I wish to have wealth, by means of the teachings of *rGyud sde rin po che*, I know the method of transforming fluids into gold, mercury into silver, and making silver from tin. Therefore, I do not need to care for your wealth”. The emperor said: “I request [you] to show [to me] such kind of technique”. He gave him a practical demonstration (*lag len*) how to make silver from white tin. [Se chen] was greatly surprised. [U rgyan pa added]: “Do not show this to the *mi chen*-s otherwise my treasure will be wasted”.

51 bSod nams ‘od zer, *Ur gyen pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa* (p.240 lines 2-5): “Not having stayed more than one and a half months at the imperial palace, he left without taking permission and without even a little of the whole wealth [offered to him]. The emperor sent *mi chen* No go to accompany him”.

Ibid. (p.240 lines 16-20): “[U rgyan pa] having gone to Cha gan na’u for a farewell, the emperor’s mood was not too happy: ‘I invited you, U rgyan dpag shi, from a distant land and, although I asked you to stay, you are leaving immediately without staying here [not even for a while]. You did not give me empowerments, but you gave them to others’.”
September 2009, on that occasion U rgyan pa accepted the emperor’s gold and silver in order to attempt another of his restorations of Bodhgaya.  

What should be stressed, as obvious as it seems, is that Tibet during the time of U rgyan pa was a land under foreign domination. The political sentiments among its various secular and religious groups were far from being united, although the pro-Sa skya literature tends to promote a picture of harmony. Voices of dissent during this phase of Tibetan history marked by the enforcement of the Mongol law do not only arise from a reconstruction of the political developments, but are loud and clear from the statements found in the texts of the Tibetan schools not allied to the Mongols. They go as far as to be found in the prophetic literature, which refers to the catastrophic effects of the state of affairs prevailing on the plateau, and the forthcoming karmic retribution reserved to the Hor.

It was the first time in the history of Tibet that the plateau witnessed a social, political and religious transnational tearing apart, the Tibetans being used, from bstan pa phyi dar onwards, to internal disputes of a minor extent. Not even the crashing

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*IlHo rong chos 'byung (p.744 line 17-p.745 line 5):* “Then, since he did not stay longer than one and a half month, on the same day on which the emperor proceeded to Cha gan na gu, he was [ready] to leave Shang to. At the place where he offered his parting prostrations, since the emperor’s expression was not happy, the latter said: “U rgyan pa, despite having invited you for a very long time, you do not stay and are going back. (p.745) You did not give empowerments to me but you gave them to others. You did not accept my wealth but you accepted that of others”. Having said so, [U rgyan pa] replied: “Ever since I have touched the feet of rGod tshang pa until now, I never let others lead me by the nose. Whether I go or stay—being what comes in my behaviour (khams) for the benefit of others—there is no system that a disciple goes against [something of] superior importance. I would not have a thought of fear even if brGya sbyin appears in front of me trying to break my head”.

The biographies nowhere say that he accepted any wealth from anyone at court.

On the way back he stayed at Ri bo rtse lnga and returned to his monastery by way of the 'jam lam (the “postal realy route”) across China and Tibet (ibid. p.745 lines 8-10).

*bSod nams ’od zet, U rgyan pa’i rnam thar rgyas pa (p.254 lines 2-10):* “The one known as Ol bya (i.e. Ol ja du) rgyal po, due to the fame of the rje grub chen rin po che, granted two bre chen of gold, twelve bre chen of silver and extensive offerings to the rje grub chen rin po che in order to restore all the decaying lha khang-s and statues of Ma ga ta (spelled so) rDo rje gdan. Moreover, the dpon mi (“chieftains”), the princes and many mi chen (“dignitaries”) sent, without obstacles on the way, gser yig pa Me dpag shi with an inventory [of the gifts], which were handed over to him. These [gifts] were brought to rDo rje gdan, and many meditators who were ascetics, headed by rDo rje gdan pa mGon po rgyal mtshan, brought to conclusion a great service [by restoring the temples]”.

*IlHo rong chos 'byung (p.746 lines 11-14):* “Then having put together the noble offerings and much gold and silver given to the grub chen pa by Ol ja ru (sic for Ol ja du) for the restoration of rDo rje gdan, which had rDo rje gdan pa mGon po rgyal mtshan at its head, [U rgyan pa] rendered the service of Ma ga ta (spelled so)”.

On the restoration of Bodhgaya, undertaken under the aegis of U rgyan pa and with the funds by Ol ja du, also see my paper “In the presence of the “diamond throne”: Tibetans at rDo rje gdan (last quarter of the 12th century to year 1300).
downfall of the *lha sras btsan po* order had brought control by foreigners over their lands.

A world deeply influenced by Buddhist idealism, Tibet for the first time had to face the reality of the cross-boundary threat posed by the Mongols. The relatively successful solution of coming to terms with them did not prevent the sovereigns’ heavy handed exercise of power. Tibet was not devastated like other countries but neither was it spared a number of blood baths.

In the pursuit of his activity undertaken with this political panorama as a background, U rgyan pa showed, throughout his life, a defiance against the Se chen’s Mongols that went beyond ideological positions. He indeed shared the widespread resentment, especially nurtured by the bKa’ brgyud pa schools—the Tshal pa excepted—as well as the rNying ma pa—with the exception of some individuals—and the Bon po for the Hor pa control of the plateau. However, his defiance was also based on personal reasons, the death and destruction left behind by the Mongols in Udiyana having left an impact upon him.

One should not harbor the impression that U rgyan pa was a cynical, insensitive Tantrist, lacking the compassion of an enlightened Buddhist master. On the contrary, he was a Tibetan moved by great ideals that led him to venture to the land of the *dakini*-s in forbidding conditions and try to save Bodhgayā from iconoclastic ravage when few others dared even to think about this. But when the Mongols of China or their feudatories persecuted him (they burned down his monastery, tried to kidnap him and threatened him in several ways), he never bowed to the rulers of Tibet. U rgyan pa did not attempt to retaliate—he knew he had no alternative—but made zero concessions. He went his way and, in the long run, they could not stop him. His message was simple and clear: do not accept compromise. He would have approved Mahatma Gandhi’s experiment with truth, the one holding that people should stand their ground because those lacking courage are prone to submission.

**ADDENDA**

Dates of interaction of the Mongols—and their Sa skya pa feudatories—with U rgyan pa

- 1254-1258: U rgyan pa in the lands of the North-West;
- 1255-1256: first encounter with the Mongols; he has to care for his life;
- 1261: first journey to rDo rje gdan; on the way he stays in pro-Sa skya Bal po;
- 1267: comes to know that Phyag na rdo rje was poisoned by Sa skya dpon chen Kun dga’ bzang po;
- soon after 1270: second journey to rDo rje gdan; on the way back he leads Tibetans, who had fled Sa skya’s taxation, from Bal po to Tibet;
- 1272: builds his “palace” at his monastery of sBu tra;
- 1272: first summons to go to Khubilai’s court (Mongol emissary: I phyi lag); he refuses to leave;
- 1272: saves the Kathmandu Valley from an invasion of the Mongols of China;
- soon after 1272: Kun dga’ bzang po destroys his “palace” at sBu tra;
- 1276: restores sBu tra with funds provided by A rog che, the seventh son of Khubilai;
- around 1276: tells ’Phags pa he detests Mongol sovereignty and bla ma life at court;
- 1281: his foe Kun dga’ bzang po is put to death by Sam gha for the alleged poisoning of ’Phags pa;
- 1282: he is called to treat the next Sa skya dpon chen, Byang rin, who dies;
- after 1283: second summons to go to Khubilai’s court (Mongol emissary: I phyi lag); he does not comply;
- after 1283 and before 1290: third summons to go to Khubilai’s court (Mongol emissary: Go ron che); he refuses to leave;
- after 1283 and before 1290: fourth summons to go to Khubilai’s court (Mongol emissary: Thog mi thi mur); he whips Thog mi thi mur, who tries to kidnap him, and does not decamp;
- 1291: fifth summons to go Khubilai’s court (Mongol emissary: Ne gu ta); he accepts the invitation;
- 1292: in lHa sa he is harassed by Khubilai’s grandson, The mur bho ga, and Tshal pa dGa’ bde;
- 1292: travels to Khubilai’s court and treats the emperor’s disease; refuses to impart teachings upon him and to remain at court;
- 1293: back from China to his monastery;
- sometime between 1294 and 1307: accepts funds from Ol ja du for a restoration of rDo rje gdan.

Zur Shakya ’od, Se chen rgyal po and a vase of long-life water

U rgyan pa’s mission to the Mongol court of China was not the only case in which a vase of long-life water was brought to Se chen rgyal po. For instance a Sa skya pa text—the copy at my disposal missing the title, colophon and many folios—has an extremely brief account of a mission to Se chen rgyal po’s court, similar to U rgyan pa’s ordeal. The account tells that an ’Ug pa lung pa sngags pa extracted Guru Padma’s tshe chu from an unspecified locality and took it to the emperor.53

53 This unidentified, fragmentary Sa skya pa text (f.52b lines 6-7) reads: “Slob dpon Padma ’byung gnas kyi tshe chu’i gter sbas pa/ ’Ug pa lung pa’i sngags pas bton nas phul bas/ sku tshe lo brgyad bcu risa Inga thub//”; “An ’Ug pa lung pa sngags pa extracted the tshe chu of slob dpon
The aftermath of this endeavour in the Sa skya pa narrative differs remarkably from what is said in U rgyan pa’s biographies. The grub chen’s prognostic that Se chen rgyal po would survive for just two more years after meeting him (he indeed lived until wood horse 1294) was seen by U rgyan pa as a reduction of Se chen rgyal po’s life that he could not overcome owing to the courtiers preventing his medical treatment. The Sa skya pa version untenably credits the ‘Ug pa lung pa sngags pa with success in extending Se chen rgyal po’s life until the age of eighty-five (b.1215)—thus until earth pig 1299, when the emperor was dead since several years.

‘Ug pa lung was the stronghold in Rong of gTsang of the famed Zur family of rNying ma pa practitioners, such as Zur po che Shakya ’byung gnas (1002-1062) and Zur chung Shes rab grags (1014-1074). Members of the Zur interacted with the Mongols of China under the aegis of their Sa skya pa mentors.

The sngags pa from ‘Ug pa lung mentioned in this account was Zur Shakya ’od (ca. 1206-ca. 1268). His birth was facilitated by Kha che pan chen Shaskyashri, who was at ‘Ug pa lung in wood rat 1204 after visiting Khro phu. He prophesied to Zur dBang chen ’od po, who longed for a male offspring, that two sons would be born to him if he would give them Kha che pan chen’s own name. They were duely named after him. Shakya ’od was the younger, the other one being Shakyamgon po.

‘Jigs med gling pa’s text assigns the account of Zur Shakya ’od’s rediscovery of the tshe chu to the aftermath of the struggle between Se chen rgyal po and A ri bo gha, which began soon after the death of Monggor rgyal po (r. 1251-1258). Se chen rgyal po first sought the use of a powerful curse from Tibet. Given that A ri bo gha, who actually had a legitimate right to succeed being the chosen heir apparent, had—the text says, showing a strong bias in favour of Se chen—seized the throne, an unidentified Mi nyag Gha ras pa activated himself by performing rituals against the former. He also recommended Se chen rgyal po to seek the services of Zur Shakya ’od, a sngags pa of Padma ’byung gnas, which was a hidden treasure, and offered it [to Se chen rgyal po], who was able to live until the age of eighty-five”.

54 ‘Jigs med gling pa, rNying rgyud dkar chag (see Pema Tsering, “rNying ma pa Lamas Am Yuan-Kaiserhof” Text I p.518 lines 1-11): “Pakshi Shākya ‘od belonged to the Zur family. Zur dBang chen ’od po, who could remember previous births and [foretell] future ones easily owing to the power of his spiritual attainments, had five daughters. Not having a son, when it was time to perpetuate the family, in wood male rat 1204, after pan chen Shākya shri had been invited to Khro phu, dBang chen ’od po invited him to ‘Ug pa lung. There the pan chen said: “This ‘Ug pa lung is ornamented with many qualities typical of a holy place of gsang sngags. The mountain at the northern edge is as if the rGyal ba Rigs lnga spontaneously appeared [there]. The birds and wild animals, too, are noble transformations. Given that every generation [in the Zur family] voices the religious sound of gsang sngags, it will not be too long before you will have two sons. Give them my name. They will be beneficial to the teachings and sentient beings”. It then happened likewise. The elder son was named Shākya mgon po and the younger Shākya ’od’. Also see bDud ’joms chos ’byung (p.312 line 9-p.313 line 3).
great powers.\textsuperscript{55} Se chen, the contention for the throne having been decided in his favour in iron monkey 1260, sought to obtain a remedy to extend his longevity. This event could not have taken place much after the 1260 turning point and before the tentative death date of Zur Shakya ’od (ca. 1268).

Following an order by the emperor, Zur Shakya ’od was assigned the task of rediscovering a vase of Guru Padma ’byung gnas’s \textit{tshe chu} at gTsang brag rDo rje tshe brtan, on the basis of a \textit{gter yig kha byang} (i.e. prediction in written form that leads to the unearthing of a hidden treasure) of Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer (1124-1192 or 1136-1204). Having obtained a clear prophecy at the place of concealment (\textit{gter sgo}), Zur Shakya ’od held a summit with Gu ru Ye shes khyung grags, dpon chen Shakya bzang po and Se chen’s \textit{gser yig pa}, A ga yan.\textsuperscript{56} What followed is a classical

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Jigs med gling pa, rNying rgyud dkar chag} (see Pema Tsering, “rNying ma pa Lamas Am Yuan-Kaiserhof” Text I p.519 lines 8-20): “At that time in Hor yul, the younger brother A ri bo gha seized the throne, so that rgyal po Se chen gan did not take hold of power and there was an ongoing military conflict. Se chen gan asked Mi nyag Gha ras ra (spelled so for ras pa?): “People say that there is a curse in Tibet. Do you know whether this is so?”. Gha ras replied: “I know about it. [There is a curse by which] one can do anything: kill, drive away to exile or force to submit”. Se chen gan, owing to his \textit{karma}, had a big doubt about killing, [wondering whether] death was appropriate. Being inclined to care for sentient beings, [he deemed] the [other] two ideas, [such as] expelling [his brother], acceptable. He added: “I know that [my] rival [brother] will not accept to be summoned to my encampment, so force him to submit [to me]!” With bla ma ’Phags pa rin po che standing as witness, Gha ras made a binding ritual in the shape of a whirlwind. The younger brother A ri bo gha’s steadfastness was broken. Still [Se chen rgyal po] was not too confident [about the outcome of this]. [Se chen] having said: “May lightnings fall in the midst of this lake and this plain”, Gha ras, with confidence, made lightnings fall there and there. He took great pleasure in contributing on who, among the sngags pa-s, could scare [A ri bo gha]. He said: “This one, a disciple of the Tshal [pa] (bla ma Zhang?), has obtained powers over gShin rje. Moreover there could be another solution. No one can be found better than Zur pa who has brought his performance of binding rituals of harmful Tantric nature to the ultimate degree”.”. Also \textit{bDud ’joms chos ‘byung} (p.314 line 10-p.315 line 5).

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Jigs med gling pa, rNying rgyud dkar chag} (see Pema Tsering, “rNying ma pa Lamas Am Yuan-Kaiserhof” Text I p.519 lines 20-33): “Consequently, pakshi Shākya ’od having sent ston pa Rā hu as emissary, Gha ras met him and offered splendid gifts. He communicated to him that a \textit{tshe chu gter [ma]} (“hidden treasure of long-life water”) was [concealed] at rDo rje tshe brtan, a place in gTsang, according to the \textit{gter yig kha byang} of mnga’ bdag Nyang. [Gha ras] offered [the \textit{kha byang}] to bla ma Shāk (spelled so) ’od by sending it with ston pa Rā hu. Concomitantly, an order of Se chen gan was addressed to Shākya ’od po and Shākya mgon po. [Shākya ’od said:] “On account of the need to make every possible \textit{rim ’gro} [for the emperor], the task of rediscovering the \textit{tshe chu} is entrusted to me. It may be that related merit will arise. I am familiar with the happiness and misery of you people”. A \textit{gser yig pa} assigned to the task came with a \textit{bre} of silver together with a \textit{gtor ma}. On that occasion a great \textit{rim ’gro} was performed [but Shākya ’od] became somewhat weary of the emperor’s oppressive manners and the \textit{gser yig pa}’s rashness. The night he offered prayers, sounds and rays of light manifested thrice, as a succession of miracles, and he received a clear prophecy at the \textit{gter sgo} (“treasure door”). Then Zur Shākya ’od, Gu ru Khyung grags, dpon chen Shāk bzang (i.e. Shakya bzang po) and gser yig pa A ga yan got together. They cumulatively dealt with the \textit{gter ma”}. Also see \textit{bDud ’joms chos ‘byung} (p.315 line 6-p.316 line 1).
case of *gter ma* rediscovery. Inside a box made of two (male and female) conjoining skulls there were thirteen scrolls of religious texts enveloping the *tshes chu* placed inside a lapis vase ("Jigs med gling pa, *rNying rgyud dkar chag*; see Pema Tsering, "rNying ma pa Lamas Am Yuan-Kaiserhof" Text I p.519 line 33-p.520 line 2).

Given the *tshes chu*’s property of extending longevity to 100 years, Zur Shakya ’od experimented it upon himself and found out that it was ineffective. Still, he hurried to bring it to Se chen rgyal po in order to prolong his life, the emperor hoping to live for that amount of time. This obviously did not happen.

An emperor’s edict granted Zur Shakya ’od the title of *pakshi* and a land, the size of fifty-five households inhabiting it. Eventually Zur Shakya ’od built a monastery and established a community of *sngags pa*-s. His passing occurred when he was aged sixty-three.

A few remarkably different versions of the Zur Shakya ’od’s *tshes chu* affair are provided by *Zab khyad gter ma’i lo rgyus gter ston chos* ‘byung nor bu’i ’phreng ba*, an earlier source than the one by ’Jigs med gling pa. This text’s treatment is a good

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57 'Jigs med gling pa, *rNying rgyud dkar chag* (see Pema Tsering, “rNying ma pa Lamas Am Yuan-Kaiserhof” Text I p.520 lines 2-5): “Given that [the *tshes chu*] could bestow [him] a longevity of 100 years if the *bla ma* (i.e. Shākya ’od) would take it as *phud* (i.e. first and best portion of anything to be given out), he put [some of] it with a spoon over his tongue but took it out, [realising] that its use was ineffective (lit. “the karmic link was wrong”). Having rolled it many times into cloths, he strove hard to fight back sleep [on the way] and took it to China. It is well known that [the *tshes chu*] could extend [life] to 100 years, as requested by rgyal po Se chen gan”. Also see *bDud ’joms chos* ‘byung (p.316 lines 12-15).

58 ‘Jigs med gling pa, *rNying rgyud dkar chag* (see Pema Tsering, “rNying ma pa Lamas Am Yuan-Kaiserhof” Text I p.520 lines 5-13): “As a reward for [the *tshes chu*], [the emperor] issued a *ja’ sa* whereby he exempted all the *sngags pa* residing in dBus gTsang from compulsory military service. In order to make [Zur Shākya ’od] equal to the imperial *bla ma*-s, he granted him the title of *pakshi*. In return for the *tshes chu*, he bestowed upon him fifty-five households (Hor dus). [Zur Shākya ’od] planned to build a great dgon pa on the mountain of Mas ’gril (spelled so for Mas sgril) but since there [already] was a great klu town, the klu-s pleaded with him. In exchange they offered him [the land] at the lake in the plain of rGya rgan. He made the klu-s drain it miraculously and founded a great *sngags* [pa] community. After undergoing one-pointed meditation on the navel of khar (i.e. a construction situated high up on a spur) rDo rje brag, [Zur Shākya ’od] passed away when he was sixty-three years old. Touching his relics (pur) healed leprosy”. Also see *bDud ’joms chos* ‘byung (p.316 line 15-p.317 line 5).

59 *Zab khyad gter ma’i lo rgyus gter ston chos* ‘byung nor bu’i ‘phreng ba* (f.73b line 7-p.74a line 4): “At that time, by command of Se chen rgyal po, a compelling order came to Zur pa pakshi Shāg (spelled so) ’od, who was the protector of the life of the emperor of China, which said: “You have power over gsAng sngags rnying ma and the *zab gter* of slob dpon Padma. You must rediscover for me a *tshes chu* hidden as *gter* and bring it over”. Slob dpon Zur pa having extended a request to gter ston Ye shes khyung grags, Gu ru Ye shes khyung grags accepted [to help him]. Having come to know about the order [issued] by Se chen (f.74a), he left together with Zur pakshi Shāg ’od. [Ye shes khyung grags] extracted the *tshes chu* filling a *ka pā la* made of lapis from Shangs mdā’ brag rDo rje tshe brtan and gave it to Zur pa. Zur pa gave it to Se chen
proof of how opinable history can be when events are prone to different interpretations. Its foremost point is that credit for the rediscovery is given to Guru Ye shes khyung grags who appears in the account of 'Jigs med gling pa marginally. The text says that the role of Zur pakshi Shakya 'od was limited to carrying the tshe chu to Se chen rgyal po. This is not always so in all versions of the episode mentioned in Zab khyad gter ma'i lo rgyus gter ston chos 'byung nor bu'i 'phreng ba which cites unidentified Sa skya pa documents that attribute to either 'gro mgon 'Phags pa or some undescribed Sa skya pa the task of taking it to the Mongol court of China. In Zab khyad gter ma'i lo rgyus gter ston chos 'byung nor bu'i 'phreng ba, Zur Shakya 'od is portrayed as a master with no gter ston capacities.

Back to the account of the activities of Zur pakshi Shakya 'od in the treatment of 'Jigs med gling pa, which is the most complete, the length of Zur Shakya 'od’s life and the involvement of dpon chen Shakya bzang po in the rediscovery of the tshe chu confirm that these events took place sensibly before Urgyan pa went to the Mongol court of China.60

The episode of Zur Shakya 'od’s long-life water is a sign of Se chen rgyal po’s obsession with death, as shown by his later interaction with Urgyan pa. It also stresses the ineffectiveness of the tshe chu, a realisation that did not prevent the 'Ug pa lung pa sngags pa to bring it, rather cynically, to the emperor. Indeed Se chen rgyal po lived for eighty years rather than 100.

Urgyan pa’s attitude on the issue of the emperor’s survival was as uncompromising and skeptical as ever in his relations with the Mongols of China. Zur Shakya’od’s attitude was different. His handling of the matter may have exposed him to a major risk, for he—the account says—took advantage of the emperor’s credulity. One needs

who survived until the age of eighty-four (i.e. d. 1298, sic). According to a Sa skya pa document, Gu ru Ye shes khyung grags and Zur pakshi Shāg 'od, together, extracted the tshe chu and passed it to 'gro mgon 'Phags pa. The 'gro mgon rin po che gave it to Se chen. Se chen survived until the age of eighty-four (i.e. d. 1298, sic), and thus his longevity was extended. According to another Sa skya pa document, it is said that an 'Ug pa lung pa sngags pa extracted the tshe chu hidden as gter from brag rDo rje tshe brtan and gave it to the Sa skya pa. The Sa skya pa gave it to Chinese emperor. [But] as for the rediscoverer of the tshe chu, he indeed was Gu ru Ye shes khyung grags alone”.

60 Among all the alternative versions that appropriate the episode—with different nuances—and transfer it into the Sa skya pa milieu, the one that attributes to 'gro mgon 'Phags pa the task of taking the tshe chu to the imperial court is the most extreme. Were it be credited as valid, it would work as a confirmation of the approximate dates of Zur Shakya 'od (ca. 1206-ca. 1268) because 'gro mgon 'Phags pa returned to Tibet the first time in wood ox 1265 and was back in Sog yul in earth snake 1269.

All versions of the episode hint at different degrees of Sa skya pa involvement in the course of events. Beyond the different descriptions of this tshe chu affair and the different attributions of the merit to help Se chen rgyal po live longer, they confirm the links between the Zur family of 'Ug pa lung and the Sa skya pa at the peak of the Mongol authority over Tibet.
to find corroboration on whether Se chen rgyal po’s immoderate desire for miraculous remedies, such as the useless *tshe chu*, was the reason for allegedly procuring material gain to the ‘Ug pa lung pa sngags pa.

The Zur Shakya ’od’s narrative shows, in sharp contrast with U rgyan pa’s defiant style, that pockets of rNying ma pa masters, associates of the Sa skya pa, interacted with of the Mongols of China to benefit of their support. Despite their differences, there is a meeting point between the missions of Zur Shakya ’od and U rgyan pa. Both were promoted by the Sa skya pa who were eager, in the first case, to show their loyalty to Se chen and, in the other, to cope with the concern for his grandfather’s health nurtured by The mur bho ga, the *de facto* ruler of Tibet in the nineties of the 12th century, when U rgyan pa traveled to the imperial court.61

61 Karma pa and rNying ma pa historical works credit the third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339) with a similar activity in favour of Tho gan the mur (r. 1333-1368). For instance, *mKhas pa’i dga’ ston* (p.941 lines 9-15) reads: “By virtue of a true miracle, [Rang byung rdo rje] rediscovered [a vase of] *tshe chu* from upper bSam yas (mChims phu or g.Ya’ ma lung?). He extracted it without his attendants noticing that. Massive offering came from the imperial court to invite him again and again. Having left on the eighth month of the year of the rat 1336, he set out from ’Dam on the fifteenth day. He accomplished uncountable deeds in favour of sentient beings on the way [before] reaching the imperial court. At the residence of minister Tha’i shri and three mentors he gave the empowerment of long life and the *tshe chu* to the emperor, thus prolonging his longevity in order to secure stability to the throne”.

*bDud’joms chos’ byung* holds, possibly elaborating on the notion of upper bSam yas, that the rediscovery of the *tshe chu*-s took place at both bSam yas mChims phu and g.Ya’ ma lung, Guru Padma ’byung gnas’s original place of concealment (ibid p.192 lines 4-6: “[Rang byung rdo rje] rediscovered *tshe chu gter* [ma-s] at bSam yas mChims phu and g.Ya’ ma lung, and thus prolonged the life of the emperor”).

Rang byung rdo rje—recognised in his childhood as the third Karma pa by U rgyan pa—undertook the same mission of his master but his interaction with the Mongol emperor of China was rather more sympathetic. Spiritual care and devoted patronage prevailed in the relationships between his rebirths and the Ming rulers.
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