

# Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal- ' byor and the Civil War of Eighteenth Century Tibet: A Preliminary Essay on Ye-shes-dpal- ' byor ' s Many Roles in Tibetan Civilization

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# Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor and the Civil War of Eighteenth Century Tibet: A Preliminary Essay on Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's Many Roles in Tibetan Civilization

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## 1. Introduction

One of distinguishing features of the Tibetan literary culture is its abundance of autobiographies and biographies. Since the sixteenth century onward, the number of auto/biographies rapidly increased and, accordingly, a critical literature dedicated to biography and autobiography also emerged in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Despite its abundance, however, most of the literature had been accounts of lives of religious figures, while those devoted to lay members remained very few. This imbalance could cast difficulty to one who attempts to see Tibetan history to the exclusion of its religious characteristics. Religious biographies provide only superficial accounts on mundane affairs such as political events or economic circumstances, in many cases, and lead its readers to overlook the realities which might be more important to broader contours of people.<sup>2</sup>

However, there is always an exception to a rule. For example, the autobiographies of Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor (1704-1788) provide a relatively balanced perspective of both religious and mundane matters. In addition, Ye-shes-

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<sup>1</sup> For charts of statistics on Tibetan auto/biography and a discussion of the critical literature, see Schaeffer, "Charting Tibetan Biography." (draft) 2008: 1.

<sup>2</sup> One can see a striking example by leafing through essays in *Khams pa Histories*. Whereas most essays in the volume give accounts of a turbulent and chaotic society of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Khams area, the last piece, Tsering Thar's "Shar rdza Hermitage: A New Bonpo Center in Khams" depicts the area in a very different way, that is, an area where a Bonpo master visited hermitages and monasteries hither and thither without any fear of disturbances of war. Relying solely on the account of the master, one cannot but overlook more "real" aspect of Khams area of the time. See Lawrence Epstein ed., *Khams pa histories: visions of people, place and authority* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

dpal-'byor not only describes a fair amount of worldly affairs, but also participated in those affairs himself. In that regard, it seems worthy to examine this religious figure as an example of a balanced figure of Tibetan culture. In this essay, I will first outline Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's works with his ethnic identity to shed light on his importance in understanding the culturally Tibetan world. Secondly, I will focus on Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's role in a civil war that took place between two competing factions of Tibetan aristocrats in 1727-1728. In doing so, we can have a better understanding of the issues for a religious figure during the turmoil of the worldly affair.

## 2. Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's ethnic identity

Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's ethnic identity does not seem congruent with his ethnic origin. As for the ethnic origin, an evident way to ascertain it is to look into the first part of his autobiographies.<sup>3</sup> His birthplace is *tho-li* in Tibetan, which is originally a Mongolian name, according to the shorter autobiography.<sup>4</sup> *Tho-li* was roughly located in the southwestern direction of the Kokonor Lake and on the riverside of the *rma-chu*, the Yellow River of China. It was formerly occupied by a right wing of Oirat Mongols, and had tender and fertile soil covered by grass, flowers and fruit trees.<sup>5</sup> Ye-shes-dpal-'byor then moves to a description of his origin of blood:

[My] family (*rus*) is also a lineage (*rgyud pa*) of *tai-ji* from Pa-thud<sup>6</sup> tribe among four groups of the unsullied Oirat and it is also one of *mes*, *zhe*, and *shen* three subgroups. [My] father, who was called Rdo-rje bkra-shis, had a good character, was well versed in Tibetan language, and liked to do good deeds. [My] mother was Bkra shis mtsho who belonged to the Zunghar. She was a woman of a good nature and a

<sup>3</sup> There are two different versions of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's autobiography. The first is titled *Mkhan-po erte-ni paN+Di-tar grags-pa'i spyod-tshul brjod-pa sgra-'dzin bcud-len* (hereafter *rang-rnam Ia*) and included in the eighth volume(nya) of his collected work(gsung 'bum). This version was published in a modern book form by Krung-go'i bod-kyi shes-rig dpe-skrun-khang with a title, *PaN+Di-ta sum-pa ye-shes-dpal-'byor mchog gi spyod tshul brjod pa sgra 'dzin bcud len*(hereafter *rang-rnam Ib*), in 2001. The second is a much shorter version and titled *Sum-pa ye-shes-dpal-'byor-gyi rnam-thar nyid-kyis mdzad-pa*(hereafter *rang-rnam II*). It was published by Kan-su'u mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang in 1997.

<sup>4</sup> *rang-rnam II*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *rang-rnam Ia*, folio 9a.

<sup>6</sup> Pa-thud is Baatud tribe and belongs to the Oirat Mongol. On this see Erdenibayar, "Sumpa Khenpo Ishibaljur," 305, no. 3.

tender voice [...] a maternal uncle descended from a Zunghar chief lineage.<sup>7</sup>

From this passage, it is obvious that Ye-shes-dpal-'byor had a Mongolian background in terms of his ethnic origin. The fact is that his father was from a tribe of the Oirat and mother was a Zunghar. Apart from this, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's ethnic identity can be traced through different ways. His ethnic identity has two dimensions: one is formed by Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's own life experiences; another is constructed by Tibetologists who have been interested in Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's works and his life.

The first dimension is represented by his appointed name Sum-pa and its affiliation to the Dgon-lung monastery. Sum-pa is an old clan name whose base is traced to periods before and during the Tibetan Kingdom.<sup>8</sup> Appropriation of the old Tibetan clan name Sum-pa for a title of a reincarnation lineage of the Dgon-lung monastery in the Amdo area has not been examined fully and requires further investigation. However, it seems obvious that Ye-shes-dpal-'byor could furnish himself as an advocate of the Tibetan culture by using this ancient Tibetan clan name. Erdenibayar points out a similar aspect, saying, "Because of his identification as Sumpa Khenpo and the relevant link to the prestigious Tibetan ancestry, Ishibajur (i.e., Ye-shes-dpal-'byor) has been sometimes mistakenly considered a Tibetan by birth. In fact, Tibetan was the reincarnation he was identified with not his family of origin."<sup>9</sup> Although Erdenibayar's indication is mainly for modern scholars' cognitive error, it can also be said that contemporaries of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor in culturally Tibetan regions would make the same mistake. His "Tibetan-ness" had not been established by his name only, but also by his sojourn around Tibet for his

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<sup>7</sup> On this part, newly published *rang-rnam Ib* misses one whole line of the traditional *par-ma* form of *rang-rnam Ia*. *rang-rnam Ib* only has: rus kyang rigs de ma nyams pa'i o'i rod kyi tsho bzhi'i nang gi pA thun kyi tha'i ji'i rgyud pa yang mes zhe shen gsum gyi gcig yin/ pha rdo rje bkra shis zhes par gleng ba thos/ cho 'brang zhes pa'i cho yang zhang po ju'un gAr dpon rigs kyi khung dang ldan pa'o// Instead, the *par-ma* version of *rang-rnam Ia* has: rus kyang rigs de ma nyams pa'i o'i rod kyi tsho bzhi'i nang gi pA thun kyi tha'i ji'i rgyud pa yang mes zhe shen gsum gyi gcig yin/ pha rdo rje bkra shis zhes **ba rang bzhin bzang la bod yig shes shing kha ton dge spyod la dga' ba dang/ ma ju'un ghar pa bkra shis mtsho zhes pa sems rgyud ngang ngag 'jam pa nye 'gyad kun la phan sems ldan zhing 'jig rten yul lugs la mkhas pas tsho sde de'i don chen skabs su bgros dgri yul zhig yin zhes yul mi dag gis mthun** par gleng ba thos/ cho 'brang zhes pa'i cho yang zhang po ju'un gAr dpon rigs kyi khung dang ldan pa'o//

<sup>8</sup> For more detailed discussion of Sum-pa and its related clans, see Yamaguchi Zuihō, "Haku ran to Sum-pa no rLangs shi (the rLangs clan of Haku-ran and Sum-pa)", *Tōyō gaku*, v.52, n.1, 1962.

<sup>9</sup> Erdenibayar 2007: 306.

studies and pilgrimages. Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's other identity cannot be overlooked for its importance in the Inner Asian arena, because the Dgon-lung monastery lay within the domains of the Monguor people, who have dominated the monk population of the Dgon-lung monastic center and its subordinate monasteries.<sup>10</sup> Together with his ethnic origin, a composition of these three different identities might place Ye-shes-dpal-'byor in a unique position with which he could bridge different ethnic entities around the culturally Tibetan regions in Inner Asia.

The second dimension is a cognitive change of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's ethnic identity by modern scholars of Tibetan studies. One of the first Tibetologists who paid attention to Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's life was Sarat Chandra Das. In an introductory part for his translation of *Re'u-mig* (chronological table) from *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*, a history of Buddhism in India, Tibet, China, and Mongolia by Ye-shes-dpal-'byor, Das mentioned that, "This great Lama was born [...] at a place in the neighborhood of the Dgon-lung monastery of Amdo in ulterior Tibet. He is better known by his family name of Sum-pa, which means one from the country of Sum, a province in Western Tibet."<sup>11</sup> In this way, Das regarded Ye-shes-dpal-'byor as being from an ancient Tibetan clan. It is odd that Das failed to pinpoint Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's ethnic origin, because Das must have consulted Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's autobiography since some details in Das' outline of the lama's life are not seen sources other than the autobiography itself.<sup>12</sup> Das surely lacked his precision in dating and some translations of excerption of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's work,<sup>13</sup> but the imprecision of the ethnic origin could mean more than just a mistake. It is probable that pinpointing ethnicity did not mean too much for Das and it was enough for him to describe Ye-shes-dpal-'byor as merely one from the culturally Tibetan region. Das' account of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's life has maintained its influence even up to today. For example, Luciano Petech followed Das's account in his preface to Lokesh Chandra's reprint of *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang* with a mention that Petech himself was

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<sup>10</sup> Louis M. J. Schram, "The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Border: Part II. Their Religious Life", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 47, vol. 1, New Series (1957): 26-28.

<sup>11</sup> S. C. Das, "The Life of Sum-pa Khan-po, also styled Ye-ses-Dpal- hbyor, the author of the Rehumig (Chronological Table)," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 58(1889), Parti, No. II, 37.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's role in blocking military mobilization from monasteries during the Tibetan civil war in 1728, a subject that will be examined in detail in a later part of this essay, is not seen in Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's other historical works such as *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang* or *Mtsho-sngon-gyi lo-rgus-sogs bkod-pa'i tshang-glu gsar-snyan* (a.k.a the Annals of Kokonor).

<sup>13</sup> Paul Pelliot, "Le Cycle Sexagénnaire dans la Chronologie Tibétaine," *Journal Asiatique* 1, (1913), 633-667; Vostrikov, *Tibetan historical literature*, Soviet Indology series, no. 4 (Calcutta: Indian Studies: Past & Present, 1970): 86-88.

not possible to obtain access to the original text (i.e. the autobiography).<sup>14</sup> Some Chinese scholars still follow suit too.<sup>15</sup>

Some scholars described Ye-shes-dpal-'byor as Monguor, whose territory lies to the east of the Kokonor Lake. A case in point is Louis Schram, whose series of three articles of studies of the Monguor people remains a standard reference to the ethnic group despite being outdated in many ways. In his outline of "Sumpa Hutukhtu," Schram used a term "The Monguor Sumpa" for describing Ye-shes-dpal-'byor. Some Chinese ethnographic works in later times follow Schram's account, in particular when it comes to drawing up accounts solely about the Monguors.<sup>16</sup> Very recently, the seventh Sum-pa was enthroned at Sum-pa's residence in the Dgon-lung monastery and mausoleum *stupas* of former Sum-pas were newly enshrined. According to a managing monk there, all those Sum-pas, including the third Ye-shes-dpal-'byor, have been ethnically Monguor. In this way, the Monguor identity of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor may show the regional sentiment by which the local people attempt to take a preminent personage into their own ethnicity.

The final and empirically correct view on Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's ethnic identity is a claim of his Mongolian background. This assertion was first suggested by Mongolian historian Shagdaryn Bira in 1960,<sup>17</sup> and other Mongolian scholars of later generations followed Bira's claim.<sup>18</sup> This view has been verified by two recent studies on Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's multiethnic role and his modern perspective, which were significant in forming of modern relationships among Tibetan, Mongolian, and Monguor identities.<sup>19</sup> Of the two, Erdenibayar's work extensively uses Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's autobiography to criticize and amend previous discussions of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's ethnic origin and identity. Another work is of Matthew Kapstein's recent work on a geographical work by Ye-shes-dpal-'byor, and he proposes a

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<sup>14</sup> Sumpa Khan-po Yeshe Pal Jor, *dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang*; edited by Lokesh Chandra, Satapitaka, 8 (New Delhi: International Academy of India Culture, 1959): xv.

<sup>15</sup> Chen Qingying and Zhang Ziling 2008: 250.

<sup>16</sup> Chen Qingying and Zhang Ziling 2008: 251.

<sup>17</sup> Bira, Shagdaryn. *Mongolian historical literature of the XVII-XIX centuries Written in Tibetan*. (translation from original in Russian in 1960) (Bloomington: Mongolian Society and Tibet Society, 1970), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Chen Qingying and Zhang Ziling 2008: 249-250.

<sup>19</sup> Erdenibayar 2007: 306; Kapstein 2011. Kapstein, however, once erroneously described Ye-shes-dpal-'byor as "a Monguor tribesman" in his *The Tibetan assimilation of Buddhism: conversion, contestation, and memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 130.

balanced view of the lama's ethnic identity with an accurate account of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's ethnic origin of the Oirat Mongols.

Given better accessibility to primary sources such as Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's autobiographies, the lama's ethnic origin seems to be determined without any other dissenting opinions. However, one can sense that his identity is not a unitary hard fact but an inconstant concept that has mutated according to the receptor's taste. This second dimension of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's ethnic identity, together with the first one, gives a more variegated identity of Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor. His many-hued characteristic is not limited to his ethnicity. Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's academic interests and accomplishments also can well represent a facet of his multiplicity.

### 3. Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's works related to history

Titled as a Pandita, Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor shows a broad spectrum of his academic interests throughout his works. Some of his works have been investigated by scholars in Tibetan and Mongolian studies, but most of them remain to be more fully examined. Here I will review previous works of investigation and suggest promising areas of studies of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's works.<sup>20</sup> Although Ye-shes-dpal-'byor achieved in other academic fields such as medicine and astronomy, in what follows only historically related works will be reviewed.

#### 3.1 Historical Works

As J.W. de Jong indicates, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor has become known mainly by his historical work, *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*. This voluminous work has drawn the attention of many scholars, and de Jong provides some such cases as V. P. Vasilyev, S. C. Das, and A. I. Vostrikov in his bibliographical work.<sup>21</sup> While de Jong points out that some Japanese scholars paid attention to the work, the first Japanese scholar who investigated the work was Satō Hisashi, whose work was missed in de Jong's list.<sup>22</sup> A new attention to historiography of investigation of *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*

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<sup>20</sup> A catalogue of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's *gsung-'bum* is published five times. Four of them are outlined in J. W. de Jong, "Sum-pa mkhan-po (1704-1788) and His Works," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 27 (1967): 212. The fifth is in Minzu tushuguan, *Bod Gangs-can gyi grub mtha' ris med kyi mkhas dbang brgya dang brgyad cu lhag gi gsung 'bum so so'i dkar chag phyogs gcig tu bsgrigs pa Shes bya'i gter mdzod ces bya ba bzhugs so*, smad cha vol. 3. (Beijing: Mi-rigs Dpe-skrun-khang, 1997): 478-482. Both works provide a short biography of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor.

<sup>21</sup> de Jong, "Sum-pa mkhan-po (1704-1788) and His Works."

<sup>22</sup> Although de Jong mentioned Satō's work at the end of his bibliography and he mentioned he had not been able to consult it, Satō had not written such a work as far as I know. Instead, Satō provided

has been recently paid by Chen Qingying and Zhang Ziling, and their co-work, “Dui Songba Kanbu ji qi ‘Ruyi Baoshushi’ de yanjiu (Study on Sum-pa Khenpo and his *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*),” well outlined scholarly interests in the work up to the mid-2000s. According to Chen and Zhang, among the investigations, R.E. Pubaev’s work “*Pagsam-chzhonsan*” --*pamiatnik tibetskoï istoriografii XVIII veka* remains as the most extensive survey of the work ever published. In addition, Pubaev also published a number of articles about Ye-shes-dpal-’byor and his *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*.<sup>23</sup> Besides some partial English translations by S.C. Das, *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang* has been translated to Chinese and Mongolian languages recently.<sup>24</sup>

Ye-shes-dpal-’byor also composed a short history of the Kokonor area under the title *Mtsho-sngon-gyi lo-rgus-sogs bkod-pa’i tshang-glu gsar-snyan*, which is also known as the Annals of Kokonor by Yang Hochin’s annotated English translation of the work. Compared to *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*, this work is a very short piece, but it has its own significance in the respect that Ye-shes-dpal-’byor finished this work just one year before his death, a time when almost 40 years had passed from his completion of *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*.

### 3.2 Work on the Apocrypha

Another of Ye-shes-dpal-’byor’s works which has drawn the attention of scholars is his work on the apocrypha, by which he attempted to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic scripture. It has a title *Gsung-rab rnam-dag chu’i dri-ma sel-byed nor-bu ke-ta-ka* and appears in the last part of the fourth volume (nga) of his collected works. A.I. Vostrikov once described it a “small but highly interesting critical and bibliographical work.”<sup>25</sup> Matthew Kapstein took this work for detailed examination and, according to Kapstein, this work is significant for understanding a perspective of the eighteenth-century Dge-lungs-pa school on the Rnying-ma and Bon-po traditions with a focus on the problem of authenticity of “treasure literature” (*gter-ma*).<sup>26</sup> This work is worthy of more careful study especially in

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detailed investigation of *dpag-bsam ljon-bzang* in his “An Examination of Tibetan Writings as Historical Sources,” *Tōyōshi-kenkyū*, v. 10, n. 6, 1950.

<sup>23</sup> Chen Qingying and Zhang Ziling 2008: 256-257.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 257-258. Chinese translation was done by Pu Wencheng under the title “Ruyi Baoshushi” in 1994. There are purportedly three different versions of Mongolian translations but these remain to be examined.

<sup>25</sup> Vostrikov, *Tibetan historical literature*, Soviet Indology series, no. 4 (Calcutta: Indian Studies: Past & Present, 1970): 56.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan assimilation of Buddhism: conversion, contestation, and memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 121-137.



connection with Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's position in a sectarian disputation which could have been under an influence not only of his religious learning but also of his ethnic identity and personal experiences from worldly affairs.

### 3.3 Geographical Works

Another of Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's interests was an understanding of geography. *'Dzam-gling spyi-bshad* is a little work of 14 folios on world geography, and it has been briefly discussed in Vostrikov and Bira.<sup>27</sup> Matthew Kapstein recently examined this work and attempted to put it in the progress of the burgeoning modernism in the eighteenth-century Tibetan intellectual scene.<sup>28</sup> Although Kapstein's teleological approach to Asian "modernism" is not above criticism, his translation of a portion from the original work and meticulous annotations on it contribute to understanding of geographical conception of eighteenth-century Tibetan intellectuals. Together with Kapstein's macro-perspective on this geographical work, an analysis with a micro-perspective which reflects Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's personal background and experience, and cross-references his other works, will shed new light on a meaning of the work.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.4 Expositions on Gesar

According to de Jong, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor wrote several letters to the sixth Panchen Lama Dpal-Idan Ye-shes and two of these letters were about Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's answers for questions relating to Gesar. Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's mention of Gesar also appears in his autobiography in which he puts the land of Khrom Ge-sar in a northern part of Jambudvīpa.<sup>30</sup> More studies are needed to illuminate a thorough aspect of the Gesar legend in Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's intellectual arena, but Gesar

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<sup>27</sup> de Jong, "Sum-pa mkhan-po (1704-1788) and His Works": 214.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew T. Kapstein, "Just where on Jambudvīpa are we?: new geographical knowledge and old cosmological schemes in eighteenth-century Tibet," in S. Pollock ed., *Forms of knowledge in early modern Asia: explorations in the intellectual history of India and Tibet, 1500-1800* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2011): 336-364.

<sup>29</sup> For example, his historical work *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang* also has a geographical exposition at its beginning part. His autobiography also, albeit very short, has a relevant account when he describes his birthplace. In addition, one of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's letters to the sixth Panchen Lama Dpal-Idan Ye-shes deals with geographical questions (de Jong 214). These other geographical accounts by Ye-shes-dpal-'byor have not dealt with by Kapstein in his work.

<sup>30</sup> de'i lho ngos su bod gnas pa'i shar du rgya nag kgri brtan dang lhor rgya gar kha che dang nub tu stag sde gzig yan dang **byang du khrom ge sar gyi yul brgyad yod par grags**// (*rang-rnam Ia, 8b*); Erdenibayar regards the first pronoun *de* as Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's hometown and asserts that "Ishibaljur links his homeland with the epic hero Gesar." (Erdenibayar 2007: 304) However, it means Jambudvīpa rather than his hometown when examined from the context.

might have meant not a trivial element in his forming of ethnic and geographical identities.

Full coverage of Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's intellectual interest is much larger than the few fields enumerated above. He was a prolific writer on a variety of subjects such as medical science, linguistics, literature, mathematics, and astronomy as well.<sup>31</sup> Future studies on the lama's works on these various subjects will shed light on Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's intellectual and cultural role and position in the eighteenth-century Tibetan civilization.

In a following section, I will illuminate another aspect of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor by looking into his role in the civil war based on his multi-cultured background.

#### 4. Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's role in the civil war of eighteenth-century Tibet

The civil war of eighteenth-century Tibet refers to a military conflict between *dbus* and *gtsang* aristocratic factions that had taken place from the sixth month in 1727 to the fifth month in 1728.<sup>32</sup> The outbreak of the war originated from the *dbus* faction's murder of Khang-chen-nas, a leading *bka'*-blon (minister) in Tibetan government and a head of the *gtsang* faction as well. After the murder, Pho-lha-nas, a second man in the *gtsang* faction, fled to western Tibet and mobilized retaliatory troops in a short time. After several occasions of fierce battles and some prominent lamas' attempts to mediate, Pho-lha-nas finally gained ascendancy over the *dbus* faction and held control of the capital Lhasa. With the submission of three leaders of the *dbus* faction, the war came to an end, and the defeated leaders were executed after Qing commissioners with his troops arrived in Lhasa.<sup>33</sup>

The civil war was a significant incident in Tibetan history and its aftermath affected not only political spheres but also religious domains as well. For example, the seventh Dalai Lama Skal-bzang rgya-mtsho was forced to leave Lhasa and stay in Mgar-thar in the wake of the civil war because the Qing government suspected his alliance with the *dbus* faction as an anti-Qing act.<sup>34</sup> While the impact of the war on

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<sup>31</sup> Erdenibayar 2007: 309-311.

<sup>32</sup> The murder of Khang-chen-nas occurred on the eighteenth day of the sixth month in fire-sheep year (*Mi-dbang rtogs-brjod* 2002: 381; Petech 1972: 115); the final advance of Pho-lha-nas' troops to Lhasa and his holding control of the capital happened on the twenty-sixth day of the fifth month in earth-monkey year (*Mi-dbang rtogs-brjod* 2002, 456; Petech 1972: 138).

<sup>33</sup> For detailed accounts of the murder incident, the civil war, and execution of the defeated, see *Mi-dbang rtogs-brjod* 2002: 388-491; Petech 1972: 113-157.

<sup>34</sup> Lcang-skya II Rol-pa'i-rdo-rje, *Dpag bsam rin po che'i sne ma*, par thengs 1. (Lhasa: Bod-ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1990): 221-237; Petech 1972: 158-175.

the highest religious figures such as the Dalai Lama has been well known, positions of a general religious sphere in the war has received little called attention until now. It may be, in part, due to a lack of records of mundane affairs in biographies of religious figures, but it also seems due to a lack of careful attention to a large pool of autobiographies and biographies of the time.

Some of religious figures did participate in or, at least, had something to do with the course of the war. It has been noted that some clerics, including Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor, supported Pho-lha-nas in different ways.<sup>35</sup> As for Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's case, Das was the first scholar who mentioned the lama's role in the civil war, saying, "In the following year, when a dispute arose between the two provinces *dbus* and *gtsang*, he persistently declined to allow the monks of his college to take up arms against their enemies, as it was an act prohibited by the laws of Buddhism. The monks of other colleges followed his example and desisted from fighting."<sup>36</sup> Petech briefly quoted this Das' account in his *China and Tibet in the early 18th century*,<sup>37</sup> but in a biographic preface to Lokesh Chandra's reprint of *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*, he provided a similar but more conclusive remark, saying, "On this occasion (i.e., the civil war) Sum-pa followed rigidly the Buddhist precept against taking of life, which was widely disregarded by the Lamas during those troubled times. We do not know how he fared with the victor, who ruled Tibet from 1728 to 1747 with the approval and support of the Chinese. But Pho-lha-nas was too clever and smooth a politician to seek useless trouble with the Church because of an action that could not be construed as open hostility."<sup>38</sup> Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's involvement in the war was also brought up by E. Gene Smith, and we can find in a compilation of Smith's works, *Among Tibetan Texts*, saying "[Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's] role in Pho-lha-nas's rise to power has yet to be understood fully. It was Sum-pa who, as a youth, prevented the monks of Se-ra and the other great monasteries from resisting Pho-

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<sup>35</sup> Petech 1972: 136-137.

<sup>36</sup> Das, "The Life of Sum-pa Khan-po": 38.

<sup>37</sup> Petech 1972: 136-137; On a note to this quotation, Petech pointed out that "it must be remembered that Sumpa mkhan-po was pro-Zunghar and therefore presumably unfriendly to Pho-lha-nas." However, Petech did not provide any evidence by which Ye-shes-dpal-'byor can be assumed as pro-Zunghar. Kapstein also briefly mentioned Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's probable support for Zunghar's oppression on Rnying-ma sect but failed to provide any evidence (Kapstein 2000: 60). One cannot say that Ye-shes-dpal-'byor was pro-Zunghar merely because his mother was from a Zunghar lineage line. More studies are needed on this matter.

<sup>38</sup> Sumpa Khan-po Yeshe Pal Jor, *dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang; edited by Lokesh Chandra*, Satapitaka, 8 (New Delhi,; International Academy of India Culture, 1959): xiv-xv.

lha-nas. For this favor, Pho-lha-nas made him the abbot of 'Bras yul Skad tsal."<sup>39</sup> Some Tibetologists in China also have alluded to the lama's involvement in the war, but have not elaborated on it further.<sup>40</sup>

In order to understand what Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's fascinating role in Pho-lha-nas' victory in the civil war had been, it is necessary to examine relevant passages from auto/biographies of relevant persons. Most relevant sources should be the biographical works of those two persons and these sources are easily accessible in several different forms.<sup>41</sup> In his autobiography (*rang-rnam Ia*), Ye-shes-dpal-'byor narrates his involvement in the war as follows:

At that time, ministers sent tea offerings to each great monastery [for monks] to curse at Pho-la-tha'i-ji,<sup>42</sup> by turning upside down a cauldron filled with tea, butter and milk as an act of cursing, and throwing Sngags-pa<sup>43</sup> grwa-tshang's malign tormas. To these, monks from the dbus area of 'Bras-spungs monastery asserted that a slander should be thrown at Pho-la-tha'i-ji. At that time, I frankly told them, "you [monks] should take the lead and go upon the destroyers of Buddha's teaching."

Then, it is said, as the dbus troops were losing the war, just before the *gtsang* army arrived in the north [of Lhasa], two Sgo-mang and Rgyud-pa<sup>44</sup> colleges, by ministers who became arrogant by disturbing consequences in which Lus-med-bdag-po<sup>45</sup> turned its helm to a non-auspicious direction, prepared for a battle.

When troops of Gtsang, La-dwags and Nga'-ris approached Lhasa from the northern side, ministers initially sent a messenger to Dga'-ldan

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<sup>39</sup> E. Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan texts: history and literature of the Himalayan Plateau*, Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001): 169.

<sup>40</sup> Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor, *Chos-'byung dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*, (Kan-su'u mi-rigs dpe-skrunkhang, 1992), editor's introduction 2-3; Chen and Zhang 2008: 248.

<sup>41</sup> On different editions of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's autobiographies, see note 3; Pho-lha-nas's biography, *Mi-dbang rtogs-brjod*, written by mdo-mkhar tshe-ring dbang-rgyal in 1733, was first published in Darjeeling in 1974 in dbu-med based on a block print possessed by the Stod Palace, Ladakh. Si-khron mi-rigs dpe-skrunkhang published it in modern book form in 1981 and reprinted it in 2002. These 1981 and 2002 editions have different paginations.

<sup>42</sup> "tha'i-ji" is "taiji," a title bestowed on Pho-lha-nas by the Qing emperor. On this see Petech 1972: 79.

<sup>43</sup> "Sngags-pa" is one of four colleges in 'Bras-spungs monastery. It is in charge of the tantric rituals of the monastic seat. On this see Georges Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 49: 348.

<sup>44</sup> "Rgyud-pa" is probably the same as Sngags-pa, based on its meaning.

<sup>45</sup> A demonic god of desire(?).

[monastery] and said, “If Pho-la-pa’s troops come, they will do harm to the master on the peak (i.e., the Dalai Lama in Potala). Therefore, you should participate in the army.” To this, [Dga’-ldan monastery] replied, “If Se-ra and ‘Bras-spungs [monasteries] go, we will go.” In the same way, Se-ra said they would go if ‘Bras-spungs go, and Blo-gsal-gling<sup>46</sup> said they would go if Sgo-mang goes as a conclusion. At the time, at the debating courtyard of Sgo-mang college, people from the government, noble people, a group of officials and people of Sgo-mang arrived and repeated words as before. dge-bshes Chos-grags expressed some reasons why it is not appropriate for monks to participate in the war. Although I was young and foolish, I expressed the following words without fear even though the Tibetan government would throw me into the river:

“We came here from the Amdo area of the north through a long road by measuring white clouds of the direction to Snow Land and estimating dark earth by way of walking. Thus, we met with Dalai and Panchen Lamas, dge-shes degree holders, practice centers, and the extraordinary three supports. We keep the precept vows and do our studies in a thorough manner. Other than arriving here with a conviction that it will surely be good to sow a liberation seed with pure karma, we do not even dream a thought of taking a life of a very small insect, let alone do a battle. If we go to the army now, we will become something like what *Abhidharmakośa* warned, ‘Because their goal is the same as a war and so forth, all possess [the war crime] as much as the one who really commits it.’<sup>47</sup> Secondly, in ancient times when Shakya Buddha lived, an army of a king of Oddiyāna once annihilated all the Shakya clan members. At the time, not even one monk of the Shakya clan went to fight, even though they had physical strength by which they were able to throw an elephant with only one arm. In addition, how is it possible to find, from all the knowable more than hundred thousands of ages, one who would harm the reincarnation Dalai Lama, venerable Avalokiteśvara who obviously became a holy tree on the peaks of three

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<sup>46</sup> “bLo-gsal-gling” is one of four colleges in ‘Bras-spungs monastery. On this see Georges Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, 2003: 49, 347.

<sup>47</sup> dmag la sogs par don gcig phyir/ thams cad byed pa po bzhin ldan//

levels and a crown ornament of a snow mountain in particular? Nevertheless, if that kind of impure ones does really come, it will be appropriate for all to go to the army even though it will lower our lives and spoil our vows. Moreover, if people and troops of China come, nobody knows whether it will be unhappiness or not. Also, it will be a mistake if one regrets later. Now we must think carefully when we have freedom and spare time.

As for a reason why we fear that damage would come: previously, when Amdo people and China were in conflict, monks, who were like greatly flourishing trees of poisonous thorns which grew from now ripening hundreds of crimes produced by non-virtuous seeds of earlier times, gave the doctrine a bad name and participated in the army. Based on this, to Chu-bzang Rin-po-che, who held the mkhan-po position of three great monasteries of Amdo, [a Chinese general] said, ‘Since you did not stop the monks many of them went to the army.’ Then [the Chinese troops] surrounded and put Chu-bzang Rin-po-che, many elder monks and dharma lords of Gser-khog monastery on the second floor of Yamen building, and burnt them alive. This is what I heard. Now it is out of question to appeal for permission for becoming monk soldiers. If fighting as a soldier not only will not pollute Dalai Lama with its crime, but also will become a service to him, and if it is not harmful but beneficial to great monasteries, I myself will go.” Thus, I promised.

The government discussed for three days. Even though they had doubt and delayed a request of mobilizing monk troops, ministers told us, “you Sum-pa zhabs-drung and Se-ra and ’Bras-spungs monks shall smart for it.” Later, they threw severely harsh words pointing out my mistake, so I was frightened. In that case also, many monks and lay people in dbus area, no matter what their religious sectarian views were, later evaluated that it became a big benefit to sangha and lamas of great monasteries and religious and political reputation. With this I became delighted by a thought that it was beneficial to observe a condition of Budhha’s teaching.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *rang-rnam Ia*: folio 54a-55a; *rang-rnam Ib*: 140-143.

Based on this part, a number of points can be discussed about Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's role in preventing the military mobilization. First, it seems that Ye-shes-dpal-'byor did not support Pho-lha-nas at the beginning of the ministers' exorcist attempts. Before a command of mobilization of monk troops from the ministers, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor probably did not have a reason to oppose the attempt to attack a destroyer of Buddha's teachings. Thus he confessed that it was his "true words (bden pa'i tshig)" by which he ordered others to take a destroyer's head and attack him.<sup>49</sup>

Second, an order of the government to mobilize monk troops was first given to Dga'-ldan monastery, but the responsibility for a final decision was passed to Se-ra and then to Blo-gsal-gling of 'Bras-spungs, and finally to Sgo-mang where Ye-shes-dpal-'byor held the seat of abbot. This shifting responsibility to others means a reluctance to participate in the war on the part of the three biggest monasteries in Lhasa even before Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's announcement against it. In other words, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's role was more to clarify a monastic objection to the order of mobilization than to dissuade other monks from going to the army. In addition, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor was not the first person who presented reasons not to go to the army, but dge-bshe Chos-grags was.

Third, even though Ye-shes-dpal-'byor gave his speech in the presence of officials from the government and high lamas from other institutions, his speech seemed to be targeted to the monks of Sgo-mang college, whose population was comprised mainly of Amdo and Mongolian monks. Although his effort to prevent monks from going to the war was later praised by all sorts of people in the dbus area, one can sense from his speech that his examples and appeals seem more locally oriented ones. In this sense, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's act of prevention was not much concerned with the "national-scale" crisis, but had to do with his own local members in Sgo-mang college.

Finally, while he quoted a passage from *Abhidharmakośa* and used an anecdote of ancient India as a general Buddhist argument against the monks' participation in the army, a larger part of Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's concern might have been from his personal experience as a monk from Amdo. According to his *re'u-mig* (chronological table) from *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor just left his homeland when there was a turmoil in the Amdo area in water-hare year (i.e.,

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<sup>49</sup> bdag gis mgo khyer byas nas bstan pa bzhig mkhan kyi steng du song shig ces bden pa'i tshig smras// (*rang-rnam Ia*: folio 54a)

1723).<sup>50</sup> It was a military conflict between Oirat Mongols and the Qing troops, and many monks participated in the war as an opposing army against the Qing military campaign. Consequently, a large number of monk soldiers and even high lamas were slaughtered by the Qing troops led by Nian Geng-yao, a prominent Chinese military commander in Kangxi and Yongzheng eras, and many monastic sites were burnt down as well.<sup>51</sup> Ye-shes-dpal-'byor probably had some firsthand experiences in the conflict and the memory of the experience might have still been fresh, for only five years had passed since the mishap. Above all, he mentioned Chu-bzang Rin-po-che's death both in his *re'u-mig* and autobiography, and this high lama's tragic death might have remained as a distressing memory because Ye-shes-dpal-'byor had taken the *dge-tshul* vow in the presence of none other than Chu-bzang Rin-po-che when he was 13 years old.<sup>52</sup> These experiences as a local Amdo monk might have played a not small role in his opposing any military action by monks.

After his announcement, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor was harmed by an attempt to poison him due to his refusal to support the *dbus* faction.<sup>53</sup> Besides, after the civil war was over, Pho-lha-nas appointed Ye-shes-dpal-'byor as an abbot of 'Bras-yul kyid-tshal monastery in the Gtsang area as a reward for his role in the war.<sup>54</sup> These facts, however, do not definitely tell that Ye-shes-dpal-'byor was a supporter of Pho-lha-nas and prevented the military mobilization for Pho-lha-nas. Ye-shes-dpal-'byor did block ministers' attempt to use monk soldiers to oppose Pho-lha-nas, but his primary concern in the matter might have been a disastrous consequence the monks' participation in the war would entail, a consequence he had experienced in his hometown only a few years prior.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor, *Chos-'byung dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*, (Kan-su'u mi-rigs dpe-skrunkhang, 1992): 904.

<sup>51</sup> This military conflict is usually called "Lobjang Danjin's Rebellion." Satō Hisashi examined an aspect of monks' participation in the warfare and sketched cruelty of Qing troop's annihilation of monks and monasteries in his "On the Revolt of Blo bzang bstan hdsin," *Shirin*, vol.LV, no.6, 1972: 14-16.

<sup>52</sup> Rgyal-ba Blo-bzang-mkhas-grub et al., *Gangs-can mkhas-grub rim-byon ming-mdzod*, (Lanzhou: Kan-su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1992), 1767; Don-rdor and Bstan-'dzin-chos-grags. *Gangs-ljongs lo-rgyus-thog gi grags-can mi-sna*, (Lhasa: Bod-ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1993): 762.

<sup>53</sup> *rang-rnam Ib*: 143-144.

<sup>54</sup> *rang-rnam Ib*: 146; on the establishment and its affiliation of 'Bras-yul skyid-tshal monastery, see Mang-thos klu-sgrub rgya-mtsho, *Bstan-rtsis gsal-ba'i nyin-byed* (Lhasa: Bod-ljongs mi-dmangs dpe-skrunkhang, 1988): 343.

<sup>55</sup> A civil war part from Pho-lha-nas' biography does not give any account on Ye-shes-dpal-'byor role either.



## 5. Conclusion and Postscript

Sum-pa Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's ethnic identities were formed in some separate ways and they represent his multifaceted characteristics formed in his own time and constructed in later generations. For historically related subjects of his studies also, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor showed a variety of his interests and these remain to be investigated in the future. In his participation in a worldly affair, Ye-shes-dpal-'byor also displayed his multidimensional features which combined his religious background and his personal experiences into his role in the political event. By looking into a passage of his intervention in the war we could confirm that Ye-shes-dpal-'byor's motives were highly relevant to his ethnic identity.

This essay is a preliminary attempt to answer and clarify a problem of a religious figure's participation in a mundane affair from a perspective of identity-formation. The overall structure of this essay looks incoherent but I hope that I could further analyze some issues brought up in this essay and develop more plausible arguments from them in the near future.

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