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**Concerning the Lingering Question of Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas
rgya-mtsho's Paternity***

Abstract

For some time the idea has circulated that Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, the Fifth Dalai Lama's regent, was also the latter's son. While a number of Western historians have accepted this story, recent scholarship, mostly from Tibet and China, has rejected it, based most conclusively on a sound analysis of the chronology of the Fifth Dalai Lama's absence from Tibet and the time of birth of the regent. Almost all modern scholars have agreed that the rumor is unmentioned in contemporaneous Tibetan sources. However, with the publication of Sle-lung Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje's autobiography a source from the period in question that mentions the rumor has finally become accessible. Nevertheless, the context in which the story appears anchors it in the hostility and resentment over the recognition of Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho as the Fifth Dalai Lama and places it with other allegations meant to impugn the hierarch's legitimacy. As such, it doesn't trump the solid chronological case for rejecting the rumor of the regent's blood tie to the Dalai Lama.

Keywords: Tibet, Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, the Fifth Dalai Lama, Sle-lung Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje

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*In memoriam Luciano Petech.***

In the study of many aspects of Sino-Tibetan relations, the starting point is often something Prof. Petech wrote. Let me therefore start by citing a note from his well-known article, "The Dalai-Lamas and Regents of Tibet: A Chronological Study," which touches directly on the subject of this paper. In that note he related, with regard to Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho that:

A. Csoma de Kőrös, *A grammar of the Tibetan Language*, Calcutta 1834, p. 191, says that "he is generally believed, in Tibet, to have been the natural son of" the 5th Dalai-Lama. This statement has been often repeated by modern authors, but seems to be due to a misunderstanding (spiritual son ?); no Chinese or Tibetan text, and not even the contemporary accounts of the Italian missionaries, so full of gossip, know anything about it.¹

This story, asserting a dark secret concerning the links between the Fifth Dalai Lama and the regent, comes down to us from the turbulence of Tibet's second Mongol Century, the period from the mid-17th to the mid-18th centuries, which brought in its wake episodes of great uncertainty. The train of events included the assassination of the regent (*sde-srid*), Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, in 1705 and the reassertion of Qośot (Modern Mong. Khoshuud) Mongol authority, followed later by the removal and reported death of the Sixth Dalai Lama in 1706. The uncertainty of the period can be felt in the way the lives of these two figures were perceived, at the time and then subsequently: perhaps the Sixth Dalai Lama did not die as reported; and perhaps the Dalai Lama's regent was none other than the Dalai Lama's own son. There is much to disentangle in all this and we are

** A portion of the information contained in this paper was presented as part of a panel organized by Dr. Christina Scherrer-Schaub at the XIIIth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies in memory of Prof. Luciano Petech, a true pioneer and grand master in the study of Sino-Tibetan relations. I noted then that I had been fortunate enough to have been in Rome in the fall of 2004, when the University of Rome "La Sapienza" held a ceremony to celebrate the career of Prof. Petech, then 90 years old. In very brief comments on that occasion I remarked that those who have ventured into the field of Sino-Tibetan relations are all in Prof. Petech's debt, for it was he who had truly opened up this realm of study and research by bringing out, in 1950, one of the seminal works dedicated to it, *China and Tibet in the Early XVIIIth Century* (revised in 1972), and following it with numerous other writings that cast light on many poorly known or poorly understood topics in Sino-Tibetan relations. *China and Tibet in the Early XVIIIth Century* was a major step forward, not simply replacing Rockhill's very dated "The Dalai Lama's of Lhasa and Their Relations with the Manchu Emperors of China. 1644-1908", but bringing a level of maturity and scholarship to the study of Sino-Tibetan relations that it had lacked until that moment.

¹ Luciano Petech, "The Dalai-Lamas and Regents of Tibet: A Chronological Study," *T'oung Pao* 47 (1959), p. 380.

fortunate (as will be seen below) that an early text relating to the question of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's paternity is now available.

The idea that the Sixth Dalai Lama did not die in 1706 periodically surfaces as plausible fact in the writings of some,² based on acceptance of what is held to be the Dalai Lama's secret biography – his *gsang-ba'i rnam-thar* – as a reliable historical document. Nevertheless, it must be said that the story as recounted in the *gsang-ba'i rnam-thar* is difficult to credit for a number of reasons (the most obvious one being the fact that although several well-known and well-documented figures appear in the book, meeting and venerating the purported Sixth Dalai Lama, there are no other records of such meetings in any other sources). The idea that the Sixth Dalai Lama had not died and continued to travel widely implies that a massive fraud had been perpetrated on the Qing court. The significance of that fact alone, something which, if true, would have been of enormous import for Qing politics and Qing history, reminds us that Tibetan history cannot be treated as if it exists in a vacuum separate from other history.³

But this era of turbulence, starting with the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1682 and culminating in the expulsion from Lhasa of the occupying Jungar (Class. Mong. Jegün γar, Modern Mong. Züün gar) Mongols by the forces of Pho-lha-nas and Khang-chen-nas – in conjunction with Qing forces – in 1720 and finally the “Civil War” of 1727–1728 is perhaps not unlike such times of turbulence elsewhere in constituting an era when uncertainty favors the adoption of alternative and even esoteric explanations, explanations that may reveal the hidden avenues by which events have unfolded in unexpected and tragic ways.

The Jungar occupation of Lhasa between 1717 and 1720 is one such event. And it was clearly a traumatic event. We can find in the *Mi-dbang rtogs-brjod*, one of the most oft-cited sources for the history of the period, the following short description of how it was experienced in Lhasa:

At that time the Lord *Taiji* [e.g. Mi-dbang Pho-lha] exerted his intellectual acumen. He said: “Here in Tibet the Dzungar forces sorely wounded the doctrine. Even the many *kalyāṇamitra* were all reduced to nominal remnants. Many innocent beings born of lordly lineages in the land of Dbus and the region of Gtsang were put to death. Their food, their drink – in brief, new taxes on everything from the soft grasses collected for horse fodder on up were crippling. Ordinary people were bereft of the possibility of even a minute's peace and repose.”⁴

² E.g., Piotr Klafkowski, *The Secret Deliverance of the Sixth Dalai Lama, as narrated by Dharmatāla* (Vienna, 1979); and Simon Wickham-Smith, trans., Ngawang Lhundrup Dargyé, *The Hidden Life of the Sixth Dalai Lama* (Lanham, MD, 2011).

³ I have discussed why the account of the Sixth Dalai Lama surviving and living beyond 1706 cannot be counted as factual history in my review of Wickham-Smith, op. cit., *Journal of Asian Studies* 71.3 (2012), pp. 794–797.

⁴ Zhabs-drung Tshe-ring dbang-rgyal, *Mi-dbang rtogs-brjod* (Chengdu, 1981), p. 379: *de'i tshe-na Rje-bo dam-pa Tha'i-jis blo-gros-kyi rtsal bton-te 'di skad ces/ Bod-yul 'dir Jun-gar pa'i dpung-tshogs kyis bstan-pa-la rma-'byin par byas-shing/ yongs-kyi dge-ba'i bshe-gnyan du-ma'ang ming-gi lhag-mar byas/ yul-Dbus dang Gtsang-ljongs*

The sense of outrage at Jungar depredations manifest in the comment attributed to Mi-dbang Pho-lha was shared in Lhasa. The reference to taxes being imposed even on fodder appears elsewhere, in a source that is of particular importance for the question of Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's parentage:

In the Spro-bde *khang-gsar* Nga-phod Blo-bzang-lags made [the protector] content through propitiation. And though in Lhasa at that time there were none among all the people who did not lose [even] wild fodder to the Mongols, there was not the slightest harm to the shrine images in the Spro-bde *khang-sar*.⁵

This one sentence summary of the situation from the contemporaneous autobiography of 'Ol-dga' rje-drung Sle-lung Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje, a prominent Dge-lugs pa cleric of the period, is consonant with the tenor of the *Mi-dbangs rtogs-brjod* as well as almost all later descriptions, which paint the period as a time of looting and oppression. But this passage is of obvious added interest because of its reference to the propitiation of the "protector" at the Spro-bde *khang-gsar*. This temple was erected by the Fifth Dalai Lama as a *btsan-khang*, and in it the murdered Gzim-khang-gong incarnation from 'Bras-spungs, Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan, came to be propitiated as Rdo-rje shugs-ldan. The Spro-bde *khang-gsar* became the most important site in Lhasa associated with Rdo-rje shugs-ldan.⁶

The work from which this passage is taken, Sle-lung Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje's autobiography, was published in India only a few years ago and generously brought to my attention by Be-ri 'Jigs-med dbang-rgyal (who was instrumental in bringing it out) and by Tashi Tsering of the Amnye Machen Institute. The passage just quoted sets the scene, helping us to understand a period of violence and even despair in Lhasa, one in which it is not hard, perhaps, to conceive of such chaos and hardship fostering a sense that there must be extraordinary explanations for what the world had become. In any event, it is in this milieu that written evidence of doubts about Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's paternity

kyi rje-bo'i rig- las byung-ba'i skye-bo nyes-med du-ma srog dang phral/ de-dag gi bza'-ba dang btung-ba dang mdor na bzhon-pa'i zas rtsa-'jam bsdu-ba yan-chad kyi dpya-khral gsar-bu du-mas gtse-te 'bangs-mi-rnams skad-gcig-kyang bde-ba'i go-skabs bral-bar byas...

⁵ Sle-lung Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje, *Rig-pa dzin-pa Blo-bzang' phrin-las-kyi rtogs pa brjod-pa skal-bzang dga'-ston*, (Dharamsala, 2009), p. 272: *Spro-bde khang-gsar-du Nga-phod Blo-bzang-lags-kyis bsnyan-bkur-gyis tshim-par mdzad-jing! de dus Lha-sa'i nang thams-cad-la Sog-po shor-ba'i bzan god ma-byung-ba mi-'dug-kyang Spro-bde khang-gsar-gyi rten mchod tshang-mar skyon-gcig-kyang ma byung-ba 'dug!* Nga-phod Blo-bzang is undoubtedly Nga-phod gong-pa Blo-bzang nor-bu, a member of the upper branch of the Nga-phod family. The family, as then constituted, was destroyed in the aftermath of the assassination of Khang-chen-nas Bsod-nams rgyal-po in 1727. See Luciano Petech, *Aristocracy and Government in Tibet. 1728–1959* (Rome, 1973), pp. 99–100.

⁶ See Glang-ru Nor-bu tshes-ring, *Bod-ljongs-kyi dgon-sde'i dkar-chag mu-tig phreng-ba – Lha-sa grong-mthil-gyi dgon-sde'i skor* (Beijing, 2012), p. 43: "As the Great Fifth erected an image of the 'Bras-spungs Gzim-khang-gong incarnation Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan as *dregs-pa*, [Spro-bde *khang-gsar*] became the residence of Rdo-rje shugs-ldan": *Rgyal-ba lnga-pa chen-pos 'Bras-spungs Gzim-khang-gong-gi sprul-sku Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan dregs-par bzhangs pas Rdo-rje shugs-ldan-gyi bzhangs-gnas-su gyur!* On Shugs-ldan in general, see René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (Graz, 1975), pp. 134–144. On the *dregs-pa*, see *ibid.*, pp. 253–317.

seems to first appear. And Sle-lung Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje's autobiography is where they are found.

* * *

The issue of whether Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho was the Fifth Dalai Lama's son is one that has been frequently taken for granted by Western writers on Tibetan history in our own day. This is often done with seemingly little interest in arguing the point, but rather as a general nod to a rumor which was circulated orally at its inception and subsequently attained the status of received wisdom. Curiously, modern Tibetan writers (and one or two others) seem to be rather less credulous about it. Whereas it is almost a given among some Westerners that the notion of the Fifth Dalai Lama having fathered Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho is likely true, or out-and-out true,⁷ modern Tibetan writers – those who write in Tibetan – generally dismiss the suggestion, in spite of their awareness of the story.

The position of several – mostly Western – Tibetologists on the question was described by Yamaguchi Zuiho in a broad account of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's rise. Taking note of Csoma's remarks,⁸ from which most of the assumptions about the regent's relationship to the Fifth Dalai Lama seem to have sprung, he mentions Tucci's acknowledgement of Csoma as the source of the story in a note in *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* that states: "That Sañs rgyas rgya mts'o was the fifth Dalai Lama's son is stated by Csoma de Kőrös, but I have found no explicit information in the Tibetan sources."⁹ Nevertheless, as is clear from the main body of the text, Tucci did accept as fact that Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho was the Dalai Lama's actual son.¹⁰ Others whom Yamaguchi cites as having weighed in on the matter include Hugh Richardson ("[Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho was] widely believed to have been his natural son..."),¹¹ Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa, and E. Gene Smith. Yamaguchi mentions that Gene Smith accepted the Fifth Dalai Lama's parentage of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho in a comment in his catalogue of the University of Washington's Tibetan

⁷ In addition to the works mentioned in note 2, Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road* (Princeton, 2009), p. 237 refers to Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho as the Dalai Lama's son without further qualification.

⁸ Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, *Grammar of the Tibetan Language* (Budapest, 1984), p. 191. These remarks are quoted by Petech in the citation at the beginning of this paper.

⁹ Yamaguchi Zuiho, "The Emergence of the Regent Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho and the Denouement of the Dalai Lamas' First Administration," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 59 (1999), p. 132, citing Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Rome, 1949), p. 257.

¹⁰ See, for example, Tucci, *op. cit.*, pp. 74 ("There is no doubt that [Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's appointment as regent] took place according to a plan previously arranged by Blo bzañ rgya mts'o's crafty son. Fearing that his father's death was drawing near, he wished to become the actual master of the State, emerge from the shadow and assume an office which up to that time may have implied scanty authority, but in his hands, due to his particular position and his relationship with the Dalai Lama, it might transform the Tibetan State into a really absolute government."); and 76 ("The reins of Tibetan politics were now in the hands of the *sde rid* [*sic*] Sañs rgyas rgya mts'o, the fifth Dalai Lama's natural son.")

¹¹ *Ibid.*, citing Hugh Richardson, *A Short History of Tibet [=Tibet and its History]* (New York, 1962), p. 46.

collection in 1969.¹² For Yamaguchi, however, these mentions of the rumor are, Gene Smith apart, not indicative that the authors whom he names accepted it as fact. Indeed, he emphasizes Petech's comment about the rumor's invisibility in Tibetan and Chinese sources. Finally he cites the modern work, the *Deb-ther kun-gsal me-long* by Phun-tshogs tshe-ring, but asserts that Phun-tshogs tshe-ring's rebuttal of the rumor is marred by the absence of a firm date for the birth of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho.¹³

This gives us a lot to unravel. But first I should note that many of those cited here, e.g., Prof. Petech, attribute the idea of the Fifth Dalai Lama's parentage to confusion over the concept of a "spiritual son" (*thugs-sras*, etc.), conflating it with that of a natural son. This assumption is understandable because the Fifth Dalai Lama's affection for Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho was clear. And that affection was returned. In the *Baidūrya ser-po* Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho makes note of the Dalai Lama's acceptance of the prophecy that attended his birth (and the first name he was given, Dkon-cog don-grub), and terms himself "the last of his spiritual-son-followers" (*bka'-'bangs slob-bu tha-chung*).¹⁴ In his famous medical history, the *Khog-'bugs*, he states "...I was treated from an early age like a son by my master and father figure, the all-powerful, all-knowing Great Fifth..."¹⁵ The Dalai Lama, in appointing Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho as regent, held him to be the equal of himself in the "two systems" (*lugs-gnyis* [Class. Mong. *qoyar yosun*]).¹⁶ In addition, the Dalai Lama's autobiography contains references to the bestowal of favors (and gifts) on Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho and his family (as is noted by Yamaguchi).¹⁷ But this closeness is hardly inexplicable: Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's family was close to the Dalai Lama: his grandfather had served as *sde-pa* himself. As the Dalai Lama notes in his autobiography:

...The *sde-pa* 'Phrin-las rgya-mtsho was consistent in how he held himself, not differentiating between the summer heat and the winter cold. He shouldered great responsibilities, especially caring for Sangs-rgyas-pa [i.e., Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho] and protecting him as a child from the time of his infancy: thus [the child] was thoroughly sharp and strong in his letters and numbers.¹⁸

¹² Yamaguchi, op.cit., p. 132, citing E. Gene Smith, *University of Washington Tibetan Catalogue* (unpublished typescript: Seattle, 1969), p. 107. The reference comes from the entry on the *Dukāla*, the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography, as supplemented by Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho: "This great politician and author was the son of the 5th Dalai Lama..." Yamaguchi also pointed out, at the same time, an unrelated misinterpretation of the family lineage of the regent on Gene Smith's part.

¹³ Yamaguchi, op. cit., p. 132.

¹⁴ Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, *Dga'-ldan chos-'byung Baidūrya ser-po* (Beijing, 1989), pp. 442–443.

¹⁵ Gavin Kilty, *Mirror of Beryl* (Somerville, MA, 2010), p. 329 (= Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, *Gso-rig sman-gyi khog-'bugs* [Lanzhou, 1982], p. 373: *yab-rje rgyal-ba'i dbang-po thams-cad mkhyen-pa Nga-ba chen-pos chung-ngu-nas sre'u gso-ba lta-bu...*).

¹⁶ Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho, *Za-hor-gyi ban-de Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho'i 'di snang'khrul-ba'i rol-rtsed rtogs-brjod-kyi tshul-du bkod-pa du-kū-la'i gos-bzang*, vol. 3 (Lhasa, 1989–1991), p. 239.

¹⁷ See Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 433 (cf. Yamaguchi, op. cit., p. 119) on the presentation of a pearl rosary to Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's father; and vol. 2, p. 157.

¹⁸ Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 157: *...sde-pa 'Phrin-las rgya-mtsho dbyar tsha-ba dang dgung grang-ba'i dbye-ba med-pa'i gzhogs-su sdod rtag-cing khur-bsam che-ba dang lhag-tu Sangs-rgyas-pa*

But Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho himself, as we can see, was very clear in asserting who his physical parents were. There is a short autobiographical note (which Yamaguchi partially translates and which I amend and expand here) in the regent's famous *Dzam-gling rgyan-gcig* that covers the subject (and mentions the prophecy just referred to, above). In it he writes:

It was in the taxpaying village of Grong-smad – that banner of victory, victorious in all directions; with the three most important of the auspicious symbols, the high rear mountains and its subordinate streams, bright like the natural autumn moon, flowing down rightwards, with dense thickets of trees, ponds and an assortment of flowers – that my father A-sug, of the lineage of Mtshur-ston Dbang-gi rdo-rje, one of the four great disciples of Mar-pa Lo-tsā-ba, and my mother, Bu-khrid rgyal-mo, who yearned greatly after virtue and who turned signs of death, etc., into things of virtue, came to love each other in the most natural way. Because of that my grandfather, the regent 'Phrin-las rgya-mtsho, banished her to Rgya-la-sa¹⁹ and [so] tormented [her]. And when he chose a woman of Rnam-rgyal-gling as a spouse for my father, my mother's uncle, Dgon-shar Chos-mdzad requested a prophesy of Ging-chen-tshang-pa, he of the conch-ornamented top-knot. The response was that “the sun of happiness rises in the sky and a son will come; the *yi-dam* Hayagriva will accept him. Name him Dkon-cog don-grub.” Thus was it received, and followed up. As instructed, my father accepted the bride and she suddenly died of a tooth illness. My old mother was allowed to come back from Rgya-la-sa to Grong-smad and accordingly I was conceived. In the seventh month of the Water-Female-Snake Year [August 24–September 21, 1653], which is called the Rnam-rgyal Year, I was born close to the time when the Lord [Dalai] Lama, having visited China, was riding back.²⁰

'di chung-ngu nas sri'u'i tshul-gyis gsos-shing srung-mar gnyer-bcol byas-pa zhig yin-pas sa-ris mtha'-dag 'dzin-bde'i yang-btsan!

¹⁹ Likely an area attached to the estates of Kun-bde-gling. See <http://www.dtab.uni-bonn.de/php/dbase3.php>.

²⁰ Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, *Mchod-sdong 'dzam-gling rgyan-gcig rten gtsug-lag-khang dang-bcas-pa'i dkar-chag thar-gling rgya-mtshor bgrod-pa'i gru-rdzing byin-rlabs-kyi bang-mdzod* (Lhasa, 1990), pp. 818-819: *phyogs-las rnam-par rgyal-ba'i rgyal-mtshan te bkra-shis rtags-kyi nang-tshan gtso-che-ba gsum-gyi rang-byon ston-zla ltar gsal-ba'i rgyab-ri mtho-ba chu-bo bran dang bcas g.yas-su 'bab-ba ljon-shing-gi tshang-tshing 'khrigs-shing rdzang-bu me-tog sna-tshogs dang-ldan-pa Grong-smad ces dpya-khral bsdu-rgyu yod-tsam-par Mar-pa lo-tsā-ba'i bu-chen gzhi'i nang-gi Mtshur-ston Dbang-gi rdo-rje las chad-pa'i rigs yin ces-pa'i pha A-sug dang/ ma rnam-par dkar-ba la ches 'dun-jing grongs-rtags sogs dge-bar gyur ba Bu-khrid rgyal-mo gnyis rang-bzhin-gyi mdza'-ba-la bren-te kho-bo'i mes Sa-skyong 'Phrin-las rgya-mtshos ma-rgan Rgya-la-sar spyugs-pa sogs nyam-thag-cing pha'i mdun mar rtses dang Rnam-rgyal-gling-pa'i bu-mo blangs-pa'i skabs ma'i khu Dgon-shar Chos-mdzad-kyis Ging-chen-tshangs-pa dung-gi thor-tshugs-can-la lung-bstan zhus-par/ bde-skyid-kyi nyi-ma dgung-nas 'char bu-zhig 'byung-ba yi-dam Rta-mgrin-gyis rjes-su bzung-ba yin ming Dkon-cog don-grub-tu thogs zhes phyag krad bzhes 'phro dang bcas/ stsal ba ltar bag-ma rtses pa dang pa glo-bur so-nad-kyis 'das-te ma-rgan Rgya-la-sa-nas Gron-smad-du byon chog-pa byung-ba bzhin kho-[819] bo mnga'-du chags/ rab-byung bcu-gcig-pa'i Rnam-rgyal zhes Chu-Mo-Sprul-gyi lo rje bla-ma Tsi-na'i rgyal-khab-tu phebs-nas chihs-kyi kha-lo tshur bsgyur-gyi nye-bar phebs-pa'i zla-ba bdun-par skyes/. Cf. Yamaguchi, op. cit., p. 117.*

This passage removes questions about the specific date of *Sde-srid* Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's birth by locating it in the seventh month of the Water-Snake Year. When placed in the context of Phun-tshog tshe-ring's work this birth month – as Yamaguchi noted²¹ – makes it effectively impossible for the *sde-srid* to have been the son of the Dalai Lama.

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We may provide a few examples to support the view that the received, “official” account of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's “secular” paternity is not questioned in any way by major modern Tibetan scholars and writers. Dung-dkar Blo-bzang 'phrin-las, in the relatively long four-page biographical entry in his dictionary of Tibetan history is typical. Therein he notes matter-of-factly that Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho

was born in Grong-smad village in Nyang-bran in the northern part of Lhasa City (Nyang-bran or Nyang-ral, which is under the jurisdiction of the Spa-ri-khug administrative office in modern Lhasa City) to the father A-sug and the mother Bu-khrid rgyal-mo.²²

Other modern writers are similarly straightforward. Nor-brang O-rgyan, in a long article on the regent writes:

As for Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, he was from the lineage of Mtshur-ston Dbang-gi rdo-rje, a disciple of Mar-pa lo-tsa-ba, born in the Water-Snake Year of the 11th Tibetan *rab-byung* (1653) to the father A-sug and the mother Bu-khrid rgyal-mo in Grong-smad in Skyid-shod Nyang-bran.²³

This is repeated almost word-for-word in the three-volume Tibetan history co-authored by him and Chab-spel Tshe-brtan phun-tshogs.²⁴ Rin-chen nor-bu, for his part, provides the same information, minus the reference to his lineage.²⁵ This is the case too with the

²¹ Yamaguchi, op. cit., p. 117.

²² Dung-dkar blo-bzang 'phrin-las, *Dung-dkar tshig-mdzod chen-mo* (Beijing, 2002), p. 1183: *'khrungs-yul ni Lha-sa grong-khyer-gyi byang-phyogs Nyang-bran Grong-smad gzhis-kar (deng-sang Lha-sa grong-khyer spa-ri khug don-gcod-khang-gi khongs-gtogs Nyang-bran-nam Nyang-ral) yab A-sug dang yum Bu-khrid rgyal-mo'i sras-su 'khrungs-shingl.*

²³ Nor-brang O-rgyan, “Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho'i skor gleng-ba dad-pa'i char 'bebs,” in *Nor-brang O-rgyan-gyi gsung-ritsoms phyogs-btus* (Beijing, 2006), p. 233: *Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho nil Mar-pa lo-tsa-ba'i thugs-sras Mtshur-ston Dbang-gi rdo-rje'i rigs-las byung-ba yab A-sug dangl yum Bu-khrid rgyal-mo gnyis-kyi sras-su Bod rab-byung bcu-gcig-pa'i Chu-Sbrul (1653) lo Skyid-shod Nyang-bran Grong-smad-du 'khrungs-shingl.*

²⁴ Chab-spel Tshe-brtan phun-tshogs and Nor-brang O-rgyan, *Bod-kyi lo-rgyus rags-rim g.yu'i phreng-ba* (Lhasa, 1990), vol. 2, pp. 641–642.

²⁵ Rin-chen nor-bu, *Bod-kyi lo-rgyus spyi-don kun-gsal nor-bu'i me-long* (Beijing, 2006), p. 403: *khong-ni rab-byung bcu-pa'i Chu-Sbrul-Lo 1653-la yab A-sug dang yum Bu-khrid rgyal-mo gnyis-kyi sras-su Skyid-shod Nyang-bran Grong-smad-du sku-'khrungs.*

historian Rgyal-mo 'Brug-pa; we may underline the significance of Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho in the political and cultural history of Tibet with his opinion, one which articulates how close he was to the Fifth Dalai Lama, a fact that constitutes one of the reasons for the persistence of the rumors of his “holy” paternity:

As for him, with regard to the fact that he was cherished by the Victorious Lord, the Great Fifth, from an early age and well nurtured and reared on the basis of the dual system of religion and politics, he was the only *sde-srid* who had an edict proclaiming that in everything he did his actions were [to be regarded as] no different from those of the Victorious Lord himself. As a result, he carried out all of the great work intended by the Victorious Lord, the Excellent Great Fifth, in accord with the system... Because he stood out from the others as a regent who thoroughly and skillfully handled the tasks pertaining to Tibet's dual system of religion and politics, not only is he numbered among the holy ones whose fame blazes across Tibet's history, but within the history of China, Tibet, and Mongolia – the three – he was also one of the most influential and renowned Tibetan figures.²⁶

This statement is copied pretty much verbatim by Rin-chen nor-bu.²⁷ I should add that Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's cultural and intellectual accomplishments are at least equally as important as his political role in Tibetan history. Tibetologists need no introduction to the voluminous corpus of writings on medicine, history, astrology, and grammar that this brilliant polymath produced. This part of his career needs to be emphasized when dealing with the circumstantial case sometimes made for his being the son of the Fifth Dalai Lama. This case sees the favors that the Fifth Dalai Lama bestowed on him, including the famous edict with the Dalai Lama's own handprints, as indicative of his filial tie to the Great Fifth.²⁸ But Dalai Lamas have their favorites and they treat them exceptionally. Even

²⁶ Rgyal-mo 'Brug-pa, *Bod-kyi lo-rgyus gleng-ba'i gnam* (Beijing, 1995), p. 370–371: *khong ni Rgyal-dbang lnga-ba chen-pos sku-chung-dus-nas thugs-brtsets skyangs-shing chos-srid [371] lugs-gnyis-kyi sgo-nas gso-skyong dang skyed-sring legs-par gnang thog/ ci-byed mtha'-dag Rgyal-dbang rang-nas byed-pa dang khyed-med-pa'i bka'-khyab bstsal yod-pa'i sde-srid gcig-kyang yin stabs khong-gis Rgyal-dbang lnga-ba mchog-gi rlabs-chen dgongs-bzhed-kyi mdzad-'phrin thams-cad lugs-bzhin skyangs-par... Bod-kyi chos-srid lugs-gnyis-kyi bya-ba mtha'-dag legs-par skyong-gnang mdzad-pa'i sde-srid g'zhan-las lhag-pa zhig yin stabs/ Bod-kyi lo-rgyus steng grags-snyan 'bar-ba'i skyes-bu dam-pa zhig-tu bgrang-bar ma-zad Rgya Bod Sog gsum-gyi lo-rgyus nang-du'ang shugs-rkyen che-ba'i Bod-kyi lo-rgyus mi-sna grags-can zhig-kyang yin-no/ /.*

²⁷ Rin-chen nor-bu, op. cit., p. 402–403: *khong ni Rgyal-dbang lnga-ba chen-pos sku-chung-dus-nas thugs-brtsets skyangs-shing chos-srid lugs-gnyis-kyi sgo-nas gso-skyong dang skyed-sring legs-par gnang/ ci-byed mtha'-dag Rgyal-dbang rang-nas byed-pa dang khyed-med-pa'i bka'-khyab bstsal yod-pa'i sde-srid gcig-kyang yin stabs/ khong-gis Rgyal-dbang-gi dgongs-bzhed-kyi mdzad-'phrin thams-cad lugs-bzhin skyangs-par... Bod-kyi chos-srid gnyis-kyi bya-ba mtha'-dag skyong-gnang mdzad-stabs/ Bod-kyi lo-rgyus steng grags-snyan 'bar-ba'i skyes-bu dam-pa zhig-tu bgrang-bar ma-zad/ Rgya Bod Sog gsum-gyi lo-rgyus nang-du'ang shugs-rkyen che-ba'i Bod-kyi lo-rgyus mi-sna grags-can zhig-kyang yin-no/ /.*

²⁸ This edict was studied and discussed in 1980 by Hugh Richardson, who transliterated and translated it. See “The Fifth Dalai Lama's Decree Appointing Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho as Regent,” in Hugh Richardson (ed. Michael

given the particularly exceptional treatment shown to Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, it is worth remembering what was just quoted from Rgyal-mo 'Brug-pa: Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho remains a towering intellectual figure in Tibet's history. And we ought to remember that his family lineage included another of the Dalai Lama's regents, 'Phrin-las rgya-mtsho.²⁹ In essence, he was that rare figure favored by both family circumstances and rare intellectual gifts. The attention shown to him by the Dalai Lama can be well understood without recourse to an imagined paternity.

* * *

But the rumor persists, particularly among some Western writers, even though most major modern Tibetan historians decline to give the story enough credence to warrant mentioning it. And now, in spite of the understandable weight Prof. Petech accorded the attentiveness of the Lhasa-based Jesuits to local gossip, the silence of the missionaries on this issue is beside the point. One can no longer deny that the rumor existed during the regent's own lifetime. It would seem that the story was not, in its inception, meant primarily as a disparagement of Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, but rather as a denigration of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Aspects of the earliest reference to it indicate that the rumors of the Fifth Dalai Lama's fathering a child likely have their roots in the controversy that arose decades earlier over the choice of the child who would succeed the Fourth Dalai Lama. In other words, it is related to what developed into the dispute currently referred to as the Shugs-ldan issue, wherein (to sum up very briefly) the claims of one of the rejected children, Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan, remained an unresolved issue for some. When the adult Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan was subsequently murdered he came to be manifested in death as a protector for the Dge-lugs-pa sect, albeit a controversial one.³⁰ The present Dalai Lama has made worship of Shugs-ldan (i.e., Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan) impermissible for his followers. This line of discussion, however, leads us away from the period of the Fifth Dalai Lama and Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho. For our purposes, the primary point in this is that while the Fifth Dalai Lama looms large over 17th century Tibetan history, he was a figure of controversy for many, due to a complex variety of factors (not the least of which were the imperiousness and harshness that often accompany state-building enterprises).

Returning more directly to the question of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's relationship to the Fifth Dalai Lama, we are fortunate to have the autobiography of 'Ol-dga' Rje-drung Sle-lung Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje [personal name = Blo-bzang 'phrin-las] (1697–1740), which is the text that was recently made accessible and to which I have already referred several times. And in the existence of this work, we may have a clue as to why Gene

Aris), *High Peaks, Pure Earth* (London, 1998), pp. 440–461 and plates 99 and 100.

²⁹ On 'Phrin-las rgya-mtsho, see Petech, op. cit. (1959), pp. 378–379; and Dung-dkar, op. cit. pp. 1180–1181.

³⁰ See Georges Dreyfus, "The Shuk-den Affair: History and Nature of a Quarrel," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 21.2 (1998), pp. 227–270. Concerning the manner in which Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan came to be identified with Shugs-ldan – and by whom – see pp. 235–238.

Smith, in 1969, accepted the story of the physical father-son link as true. It happens that this work, though only made available in a published Tibetan-script form in 2009, was previously copied in transliteration into Gene Smith's famous notebooks – the “Green Books.”³¹ It was thus known to him at a relatively early stage and may have appeared to render invalid the general consensus about the silence of the literature of the era; this is conjecture, of course, but not unreasonable conjecture.³² Sle-lung Bzhad-pai' rdo-rje, who subsequently came to be one of the principle teachers of the Seventh Dalai Lama, was in Lhasa during the period of the Jungar occupation of the city. It was at that time that the occupiers began interrogating certain figures about the swirl of rumors that existed there. The questioning undertaken by the Jungars is recounted by Sle-lung Bzhad-pai' rdo-rje as follows:

At one time, the officials summoned [us] to the Khrom-gzigs-khang. The officials and Chos-dpal-can who were there were asked very many spontaneous questions: Was [the one from] O-rgyan [-gling] qualified?³³ In general and in particular, with regard to the Omniscient Great Fifth they asked whether or not Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho was the rebirth of The Victorious Yon-tan rgya-mtsho. We said that as far as we knew, concerning his recognition as the unmistakable incarnation by qualified figures such as the previous incarnation of the All-knowing Panchen, etc., and other holy beings, he was His Holiness the Fifth [Dalai Lama]. Because we said this, they said: “It appears as though the Panchen Rinpoche had not thusly recognized him. That it was the Gzims-khang-gong incarnation [i.e., Grag-pa rgyal-mtshan], who was the unmistakable incarnation of Yon-tan rgya-mtsho, caused Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho to trouble his thoughts with something close to a hatred born out of envy. In our country it is said that the Gzims-khang-gong incarnation is called the Bogd Dalai Lama. Moreover, although Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho appeared as the unmistakable incarnation he didn't have the [requisite] vows. Later he had to take a new succession of vows, which is not a good sign.” This was what all the [Dzungar] soldiers were discussing. In particular, the *sde-srid* [the regent] was his son.

³¹ The work, as transliterated by Gene Smith, is catalogued by the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center as W1KG9286, “bzhad pa'i rdo rje, *sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rtogs pa brjod pa skal bzang dga' ston*” (hereafter TBRC bzhad pa'i rdo rje).

³² The digitized files of the Green Books were made publicly available in 2012, but they were produced much earlier, over the course of Gene Smith's 20 years in India, 1965–1985. See <http://about.tbrc.org/support/genesmiths-green-books/>. I have no firm information as to when he transliterated or first saw Sle-lung Bzhad-pai' rdo-rje's text (n.b., it is not included in the University of Washington catalogue), but it cannot be ruled out that a familiarity with the text – rather than simple reliance on the opinion of earlier Tibetologists – informed his view of the link between Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho and the Fifth Dalai Lama.

³³ Likely a reference to the Sixth Dalai Lama, whose lineage is linked to the monastery of O-rgyan-gling in the region of Rta-dbang: see Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, *Thams-cad mkhyen-pa drug-pa Blo-bzang rin-chen tshangs-dbyangs rgya-mtsho'i thun-mong phyi'i nman-par thar-pa Du-kü-la'i 'phro-'thud rab-gsal gser-gyi snye-ma* (Beijing, 2010), p. 155.

When [Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho] went to Pha-bong-kha [the hermitage in the Lhasa area], he stayed for a day in Grong-smad and as he was intimate with the mother of the *sde-srid* he gave her a pearl rosary and a gold bracelet.³⁴

The passage gives us an idea of the state of affairs. The rumors swirling around Lhasa were not simply about Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's paternity but about the legitimacy of the Fifth Dalai Lama. And they are tied not simply to the idea of a sexual moment in the Fifth Dalai Lama's life, but to whether he was indeed the incarnation of the Fourth Dalai Lama; whether he had the requisite vows, and other questions of his legitimacy and integrity. The obvious implication is that there was, in some quarters at least, a strong antipathy to the Dalai Lama, of which his fathering a son is but one item in a list of presumed improprieties. Of course, setting aside the question of the veracity of the story, the fact of its existence underlines the need for a nuanced view of the Fifth Dalai Lama. He was a politically engaged – and controversial – figure who did not refrain from the use of ruthless force in the creation and safeguarding of the *Dga'-ldan pho-brang* state. That deep resentments and antagonism – of the sort that fueled tales of lurid behavior and fraud – attached to his image can hardly be surprising.

Before turning to some of the more detailed comments on the question that modern historians within the People's Republic of China have made, we may reiterate the basic elements of the issue of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's paternity that have been discussed so far. As noted, the first report of the story in Tibetological literature came from Csoma de Kőrös and was subsequently mentioned by Giuseppe Tucci and Luciano Petech, both of whom stated that it is unconfirmed by any Tibetan sources that they had seen. Both Petech and Yamaguchi felt that the story might have originated from confusion over the concept of a “spiritual son” and its attendant terminology, though one may justly wonder why Tibetans (as opposed to Western researchers) would have been confused about such a familiar Tibetan concept. Gene Smith, for his part, described Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho unambiguously as the Dalai Lama's son, and we may conjecture (and this can only be conjecture, as Gene Smith did not cite the text as the source for his comment) that in

³⁴ Sle-lung Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje, op. cit., pp. 273–274: *skabs-shig Khrom-gzigs-khang-du dpon-gyis shog zer-bar/ dpon dang Chos-'phel-can 'dug-par rang-bzhin-gyi dri-ba shin-tu mang-ba dang/ O-rgyan tshad-ldan yin-min/ Kun-mkhyen lnga-pa chen-po'i skor spyi dang khyad-par du Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho Rgyal-ba Yon-tan rgya-mtsho'i skye-ba yin-nam min zer-bar/ nged-rang-tshos ci-shes Pan-chen thams-cad mkhyen-pa sku gong-ma sogs skyes-chen dam-pa tshad-ldan-rnams-kyis 'khrul-med-du ngos-'dzin mdzad-pa ni gong-sa 7 lnga-pa yin-par 'dug byas-pas/ Pan-chen rin-po-ches ngos-'dzin de-ltar mdzad-med-pa 'dral/ Gzims-khang gong sprul-sku Yon-tan rgya-mtsho'i skye-ba 'khrul-med yin-par de-la [274] Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtshos phrag-dog-gi rnam-pas sdang-shugs dang nye-rigs-rnams la yang dgongs-par mi-bde-ba mdzad 'dug/ nged-tsho'i lung-par Gzims-khang gong sprul-sku Bha-ga-ta-la'i bla-ma zer-gyin-yod zer/ yang Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho sku-skye 'khrul-med yin-par shar-yang-la sdom-pa med/ phyis sdom-rgyun gsar-pa len dgos-pa de yang legs-pa'i rtags min/ dmag thams-cad-kyi gros-byas/ lhag-par-du sde-srid-de kho-rang-gi bu-yin-par-'dug lko-rang pha-bong-khar 'gro-ba'i zhor-la Grong-smad-du zhag-sdod byas sde-srid-kyi ma dang mthun-pas mu-tig-gi phreng-ba dang/ gser-gyi gdu-bu sogs-kyang byin/. Cf. TBRC bzhad pa'i rdo rje, pp. 98–99. Gene Smith types the notes “inquiry into the Dalai Lama question” and “The Gzims-gong question” in the margins.*

Sle-lung Bzhad-pai' rdo-rje's text he had access to something that Petech had lacked: a contemporaneous reference to the paternal tie between the Dalai Lama and Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho. But the testimony afforded by Sle-lung Bzhad-pai' rdo-rje is by no means clear, unambiguous, or definitive about Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho being the natural son of the Dalai Lama. Rather, it presents the issue as something that was talked about as one part of a larger list of indictments meant to impugn the Fifth Dalai Lama's legitimacy and integrity. The fact is, the time frame created by the literary accounts of the Dalai Lama's voyage to China and Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's birth, *when placed within the context of the agenda behind the questions that the Jungar asked*, constitutes the decisive element that allows us to reject the notion that Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho was the son of the Dalai Lama. The chronology of events has been elucidated by Yamaguchi³⁵ and quite thoroughly explored by historians within the People's Republic of China. Their comments merit examination.

* * *

Research by several modern historians in the PRC is consistent with a rejection of the notion that the Dalai Lama was Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's father. The significant analysis by Phun-tshogs tshe-ring, from his history of Tibet, the *Deb-ther kun-gsal me-long* (noted above, and mentioned by Yamaguchi at the end of his article), is very clear on the factual issues surrounding the story. It is worth quoting in full:

As for Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, there has been a bit much of talk about how he was the son of the Fifth Dalai Lama. If we speak about this openly and honestly I doubt that it's true. Addressing the issue, the Great Fifth went to the Motherland's internal regions on the 15th day of the third month of the Water-Dragon Year of the 11th *rab-byung* [= April 23, 1652]. Some say it was on the 7th day of the third month [= April 15th]; some the 27th day [=May 5th]. Essentially, when those who are qualified to do so examine the Chinese and Tibetan materials they all agree that he left Lhasa during the third month. He arrived in the capital, Beijing, on the 17th day of the twelfth month [January 15, 1653]. On the 10th day of the third month of the Water-Snake Year [April 6, 1653] the Fifth Dalai Lama left Beijing for Tibet. He returned to Lhasa for that year's *Dga'-ldan lnga-mchod* [December 14, 1653³⁶].

Concerning Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, Chinese and Tibetan sources agree that he was born in the Water-Snake Year of the 11th *rab-byung* (1653). If, prior to going to the Motherland proper, when travelling to Se-ra and 'Bras-spungs,

³⁵ Yamaguchi, op. cit., pp. 116–117.

³⁶ The *Dga'-ldan lnga-mchod*, the ritual observance of Tsong-kha-pa's death anniversary, is observed on the 25th day of the tenth month, which would have been December 14, 1653, in this instance.

the Fifth Dalai Lama stayed at Grong-smad along the route and a situation of the sort [being discussed] arose, on the basis of that, because Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho was born in the Water-Snake Year (1653) at the very least he would have had to have resided in his mother's womb for at least 12 months. Would that not be something fantastically bizarre?³⁷

Phun-tshogs tshe-ring's reasoning is sound. The Dalai Lama left for China between April 15 and May 5, 1652 and returned to Tibet just prior to December 14, 1653. We can add greater precision to this by referring to Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's own statement about his birth, already noted by Yamaguchi and cited above, which allows us to state that he was born between August 24 and September 21, 1653. Thus, the fantastic twelve-month gestation period that Phun-tshogs tshe-ring postulates as the minimum necessary for the Fifth Dalai Lama to have fathered Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho would now have to be extended to over sixteen months in order for the story to be true; there is surely no reason for anyone to entertain that idea any longer.

But the persistence of the rumor has never been wholly a question of facts. If its origins have much to do with the conditions of the Fifth Dalai Lama's life and rule, its continued credibility into and beyond the early 18th century may in part be ascribed to the phenomenon of a time of great upheaval and uncertainty spawning alternative and counterfactual explanations for events; explanations that incorporate the sensibilities of political and religious insecurities. Indeed, one might well bear in mind that this was a time of deceit, the most significant example of which was perpetrated by Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho himself: the covering up of the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1682 for close to 13 years. During that time the regent orchestrated a political and religious farce, forcing the Pha-bong-kha monk (*dge-slong*) 'Jams-dbyangs grags-pa and the *sde-pa* of the Rnam-rgyal-grwa-tshang, Bkra-shis rab-pa, to stand in for the Dalai Lama in rare audiences. Inevitably, the inability of these substitutes to convey a depth of learning on the level of the deceased Dalai Lama led to growing suspicions that something was

³⁷ Phun-tshogs tshe-ring, *Deb-ther kun-gsal me-long* (Lhasa, 1992), p. 271: *Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho ni Rgyal-dbang lnga-pa'i sras yin-tshul skor mang-tsam brjod/ don-du nga-tshos ma-gsang drang-po'i gnam zhig smras-nal de-ltar ma-yin snyam/ gang-lags she-nal Rgyal-dbang lnga-pa chen-po rab-byung bcu-gcig-pa'i Chu-'Brug* (1652) *lo'i zla 3 tshes 15 nyin/ mes-rgyal nang-khul-du phebs/ la-las zla 3 tshes 7/ yang-na tshes 27 yin zer/ don-du Rgya-Bod yig-tshang tshad-ldan-la gzhigs-nal zla 3 par Lha-sa-nas chibs-kha bskiyur-te mes-rgyal nang-khul-du phebs-pa ni gcig-mthun yin/ lo-'di'i zla 12 tshes 17 nyin rgyal-sa Pe-cing-du 'byor/ Chu-sbrul* (1653) *lo'i zla 3 tshes 10 nyin/ Rgyal-dbang lnga-pa Pe-cing-nas Bod-du chibs-kha bsgyur* (yang la-las zla 2 tshes 17 nyin *Pe-cing-nas Bod-du chibs-kha bsgyur zer*) *lo-'di'i dga'-ldan lnga-mchod skabs Lhas-sar phiyir phebs/*

Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho ni/ rab-byung bcu-gcig-pa'i Chu-Sbrul (1653) *lor sku-bltams-pa de yang Rgya-Bod yig-tshang khag nang gcig-mthun yin/ gal-srid Rgyal-ba lnga-pa mes-rgyal nang-khul-du ma phebs gong Se-'Bras-su chibs-bsgyur skabs lam-bar Grong-smad-pa'i khyim-du bzhuks-nas gnas-tshul de-rigs byung-ba'i dbang-du btang-na'ang Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho ni Chu-Sbrul* (1653) *lor 'khrungs stabs nyung-shos la'ang ma-yi mngal-du zla-ngo bcu-gnyis-tsam bzhuks-pa ni ya-mtshan zhig ma-red-dam/* N.b., I have added in brackets the Western equivalents for the dates given in the original Tibetan.

sorely amiss.³⁸ The persistence of the rumor in more recent times may additionally speak to the presumed difficulty (though in this case it is really not difficult at all) of proving a negative – that Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho was *not* the Dalai Lama’s son – as well as an inbuilt bias on the part of some modern scholars, whose *métier* calls on them to favor revelatory, uncommon knowledge over explanations that are mundane and rooted in obvious common knowledge.

Over a decade after Phun-tshogs tshe-ring’s book was published, an article on the specific subject of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho’s parentage appeared in *Krung-go’i Bod rig-pa*, authored by Reb-gong-pa ’Jigs-med bsam-grub.³⁹ The article did not contradict Phun-tshogs tshe-ring’s conclusions, but added a few more details to the history of the question in modern Tibetology. Like Yamaguchi, Petech and Tucci, ’Jigs-med bsam-grub traces the story back to Csoma, but he particularly links its staying power to Tucci’s mention of it. Moreover, he sees in the story a reflection of the deep, residual hatred between the Dge-lugs-pa and the Bka’-brgyud-pa, deriving from the Dge-lugs-pa triumph over the Sde-srid Gtsang-pa and their Bka’-bryud-pa allies. Thus, readers are led to conclude that it was this hatred that gifted history with the story of a licentious Dalai Lama fathering a son to whom he passed on power.⁴⁰ ’Jigs-med bsam-grub makes particular reference to the opinions of Chen Qingying 陈庆英 and Wang Yao 王尧. He takes note of Wang Yao’s earlier opinion that the Dalai Lama was the father of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho but then recounts the crux of a conversation in which he asked Wang Yao further about his position on the issue. In the course of that conversation Wang Yao reconsidered and effectively agreed that indeed, there was no evidence of a family link between the two.⁴¹

³⁸ On the means of deception used by Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, see Dung-dkar, *op. cit.*, p. 1184. Roberto Vitali has pointed out to me an interesting parallel to this deception, one provided by Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho himself in his *Khog-'bugs*. It is a short reference to the actions of Shes-rab dpal-ldan, a *thugs-sras* of the famous *siddha* Thang-ston rgyal-po. Shes-rab dpal-ldan is described by Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho as having concealed his lama’s death while secretly acting in his stead for 32 years. See Sde-srid, *op. cit.* (1982), pp. 323–324; and Kilty, *op. cit.* p. 288. Given that the text states that Shes-rab dpal-ldan brought immeasurable benefits to beings, it is tempting to speculate that this reference was intended as a signal of sorts by Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho, one meant to justify his concealment of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death. I am grateful to Dr. Vitali for this insight.

³⁹ Reb-gong-pa ’Jigs-med bsam-grub, “Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho Tā-la’i bla-ma sku-phreng lnga-pa’i rigs-sras yin-min-la dpyad-pa,” *Krung-go’i Bod rig-pa* (2005.1), pp. 94–100.

⁴⁰ Reb-gong-pa, *ibid.*, p. 95. The author cites Tucci’s opinion on the basis of a partial translation of *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* by Li Youyi 李有义 and Deng Ruiling 邓锐龄: Duqi 杜齐 [= Tucci], *Xizang zhongshiji shi* 西藏中世纪史 [= “Medieval History of Tibet”] (Beijing, 1980).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95, referring to Wang Yao, “Diba Sangjie jiaza kao” 第巴桑结嘉杂考, in *Qingshi yanjiu wenji* 清史研究文集 vol. 1 (Beijing, 1980), pp. 191–192. ’Jigs-med bsam-grub recounts: “Furthermore, in this article, Professor Wang Yao states that ‘When the Fifth went to Beijing to meet the Shunzhi emperor he stayed for a day at a home in Grong-smad, north of Lhasa. The lady of the house waited on his bedchamber. The next year a son was born and this was Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho.’ But there is not a single authentic document in Chinese or Tibetan to substantiate this. When I met him in person and asked him about it he said then that when writing the article he wasn’t able to look at many documentary source materials and thus would seem to have been mistaken.” (*da-dung dge-ran Wang Ya’o-yis rtsom-yig de’i nang-du* “*Sku-phreng lnga-pa Pe-cin-du Gong-ma Hrun-kri mjal-bar phebs-skabs! Lha-sa’i byang-ngos-kyi Grong-smad-pa’i khyim-du zhag-bzhugs gnang-ste Grong-smad-pa’i bdaq-mo’i gzim-g.yog byasl phyi-lo bu-zhig skyes-pa Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho yin*” *zhes bshad-pa ’di-la*

'Jigs-med bsam-grub goes into greater detail about the dates of the Dalai Lama's trip to China as it bears on the date of Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's death. In doing so he reiterates Phun-tshogs tshe-ring's argument, though not his math: he posits a 19 month pregnancy for Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's mother if one were to accept that his father was the Dalai Lama. 'Jigs-med bsam-grub also takes up the issue of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's close relationship with the Fifth Dalai Lama:

In general, earlier in Tibetan history more than a few aristocrats placed their children in service to religious and secular power-holders during their youths: on the one hand so that they would become close to them; and on the other so that while young they would receive excellent educations that would provide for good futures... In more recent times one among the group of several children brought into the presence of the Thirteenth Dalai to be educated was from Snye-mo rdzong. Later, when the Thirteenth grew old, he became a great Tibetan leader: everyone called him Kun-'phel-lags.⁴²

* * *

Chen Qingying, in common with a majority of those scholars already mentioned, held that there was nothing in Tibetan historical sources to support the contention that the Dalai Lama was Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's father and he concurred with the view that the notion derived from Csoma de Kőrös.⁴³ He also ascribed Wang Yao's published opinion to the influence of Tucci in the matter. Given Chen Qingying's erudition and scholarly authority (he is one of the translators of the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography)⁴⁴ it is worth taking note of his thinking on the matter in general:

Regarding the reason for the Fifth Dalai Lama making such special arrangements [for Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho to hold power], previously researchers made all sorts of conjectures. Among them the most influential and seemingly the most plausible

Rgya-yig dang Bod-yig-gi tshad-ldan-gyi yig-cha sna-gcig-gi khungs-lung tsam-yang medl nges khong-la dngos-su ngo-thug-ste bka'-'dri zhus-pa-na khong-gis skabs-der rtsom-yig 'bri-skabs dpyad-gzhi'i yig-cha mang-po bla-thub-med-pas nor-ba 'dra-zhes gsungsl).

⁴² Ibid, p. 99: *spyir Bod-kyi lo-rgyus steng sngon sku-drag mi-nyung-ba zhig-gis rang-gi byis-pa-rnams gzhon-dus-nas phyogs-gcig-nas Bod-kyi chos-srid dbang-'dzin-pa-rnams-la zhabs-zhu sgrub-du bcug-ste kho-la thugs-nye-bo yong-ched dangl phyogs-gnyis-nas gzhon-dus-su rig-gnas slob-gnyer bzang-po zhig byas-te ma-'ongs par mdun-lam yag-po zhig yong-ched bcas yin!... nyes-rabs Tā-la'i sku-phreng bcu-gsum-pa'i sku-mdun-du'ang byis-pa 'ga' bsdus-te slob-gnyer byed-du bcug-pa'i khrod-kyi byis-pa gcig ni Snye-mo rdzong-nas yin-pa dangl phyis-su Sku-phreng bcu-gsum-pa dgung-lo bgres-pa'i dus-su Bod-kyi dbu-'dzin-pa chen-po zhig-tu gyur-te/ tshang-mas khong la Kun-'phel-lags zhes 'bod-bzhin yodl.*

⁴³ Chen Qingying 陳慶英, *Wushi Dalai Lama yu Diba Sangjie jiacuo guanxi tantao* 五世達賴喇嘛與第巴桑結嘉措關係探討 (Taipei, 1996), p. 6.

⁴⁴ Chen Qingying 陳慶英, Ma Lianlong 馬連龍, and Ma Lin 馬林, trs., *Wushi Dalai Lama zhuan* 五世達賴喇嘛傳 (Beijing, 1997).

explanation was to accept that the Fifth Dalai Lama and the *sde-pa* Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho had a kind of special blood tie that could not be made public; with the *sde-pa* Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho actually even being the Fifth Dalai Lama's illegitimate child.⁴⁵

Chen Qingying also meticulously plots out the time frame of the Dalai Lama's travels to China. As we have seen, the chronology itself makes a blood tie impossible and Chen Qingying clearly rebuts the notion that there might be any possibility that the dates of the voyage and the dates of Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's birth have been changed to cover up that tie:

Still, there may be some people who question the validity of the aforementioned account, who suspect that Sde-pa Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho and the Fifth Dalai Lama altered the dates of events in order to conceal their kinship ties and prevent later generations from drawing the correct conclusion. We can analyze this as follows. The Fifth Dalai Lama's arrival in Beijing was a major event at the time and drew the attention of Tibetan monks and lay people from all walks of life. There are also many records of it from the Qing court, while the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography details his route and itinerary by month and day, as well as the Mongol and Tibetan monastic and lay personages whom he received and the large quantities of gifts they presented to him. The Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography was compiled on the basis of the contemporaneous records of those in his retinue. Thus, the Fifth Dalai Lama, in order to conceal such a relationship, could at most only have omitted mention of some of the contents while arranging the work; he could not have altered the date of his departure from Lhasa without it being detected. As a result, if he had wished to alter period and time so as to hide the facts, that could only have been done by Sde-pa Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho changing the year and month of his own birth. But this too would have been very difficult. Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho was the high-born heir to the Grong-smad-pa clan, a high-ranking clan in the period following the Dge-lugs-pa rise to power (in the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography he's often called Grong-smad-pa 'A-bar, which means high-born son of the Grong-smad-pa family). His birth was without doubt a major event for the family and for neighboring areas, one that people noticed. The Tibetan aristocracy took very seriously the practice of sending gifts and celebrating at the time of birth, at the passage of the first hundred days, and at the passing of the first full year of life. Because of this, if someone such as Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho wished to conceal the truth about the time of his birth and not arouse curiosity and talk on the part of others, it would have been

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 4–5: 對五世達賴喇嘛做出這樣的特殊安排的原因，以前研究者做了種種的猜測，其中影響最大而且似乎是最能解釋得通的說法是認為五世達賴喇嘛與第巴桑結嘉措有一種特殊的不能公開的血緣關係，即第巴桑結嘉措實際上是五世達賴喇嘛的私生子。

extremely difficult. Let's go back a step and say that even if Sde-pa Sangs-rgyas rgya-tsho truly had the intention of concealing the time of his birth in order to hide the blood relationship he had with the Fifth Dalai Lama, then he shouldn't have been writing in the same passage that when the Fifth Dalai Lama returned to northern Tibet Grong-smad-pa A-sug immediately reported the fact of his birth to him. If this were the case, wouldn't Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho be on the one hand taking pains to conceal the facts about the time of his birth while on the other hand simultaneously and purposely making people pay attention to the very facts that he was intending to cover up? Given Sde-pa Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's shrewdness and erudition, he should not have been leaving an account in a passage in the *'Dzam-gling rgyan-gcig* that is so riddled with contradiction as to draw people's attention.⁴⁶

Finally, Chen Qingying, basing himself on the available evidence at the time of writing, concludes that there was indeed no Tibetan literary source for the story:

Otherwise, we should see that although Sde-pa Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho made many enemies during the time that he held power, and though his opponents brought up all sorts of criticisms about him, still, regardless of whether it was prior to his birth or after his defeat and murder, nobody ever raised the question of his being an illegitimate child. Neither Sde-pa Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho nor the Fifth Dalai Lama could have foreseen that 200 years later there could be European scholars raising the issue of "the illegitimate child," or that the date of Sde-pa Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's birth would become the pivotal point on which the resolution of the question rested. For that reason they apparently had no need

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 11–12: 不過，也許還會有人對上述的記載的準確性提出質疑，懷疑第巴桑結嘉措和五世達賴喇嘛為了隱瞞他們的親屬關係在事件的年月時間上加以改動，使得後人不能得出正確的判斷。對此我們可以作如下的分析，五世達賴喇嘛進京一事在當時是西藏僧俗各界關注的一件大事，清朝方面也有許多記錄，而且五世達賴喇嘛的自傳詳細記載了途中逐月逐日的行程，在各地會見的蒙藏僧俗人士以及他們向五世達賴喇嘛所贈送的大批禮物，五世達賴喇嘛的自傳是依據其侍從人員當時的記錄編寫而成的，因此五世達賴喇嘛為了隱瞞這種關係至多只能在整理時將某些內容略而不提，而不可能改動其從拉薩啟程的日期而不被察覺。因此，如果他想在年代時間上加以改動以掩蓋事實的話，只可能是第巴桑結嘉措改變他的出生的年月。但是這也是十分困難的，桑結嘉措作為格魯派掌權後的一個顯貴家族仲麥`巴家族繼承家業的公子（五世達賴喇嘛的自傳中就常稱他為仲麥巴阿哇爾（grong-smad-pa-'a-bar），意為仲麥巴家的公子），他的出生無疑在家族中和鄰里間都是一件人們關注的大事，西藏貴族間十分重視在男孩出生、百日、周歲時送禮慶賀，因此像桑結嘉措這樣的人想隱瞞自己的真實出生年月而不引起別人的怪異和議論也是十分困難的。退一步說，即使第巴桑結嘉措真的是有意隱瞞其出生年月以掩蓋自己與五世達賴喇嘛的血緣關係，那他就應該在同一段落中又寫上五世達賴喇嘛返回藏北時仲麥巴·阿蘇克立即向五世達賴喇嘛報告自己出生的事。如果是那樣，桑結嘉措豈不是一方面在出生年月上精心掩蓋事實，同時另一方面又有意讓人注意到自己有意掩蓋的事實嗎？以第巴桑結嘉措的精明和博學，他不應在《五世達賴喇嘛靈塔目錄》中留下這樣一段似乎前後矛盾而又引人注目的記載。

to go to great lengths to painstakingly change the month of Sde-pa Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's birth.⁴⁷

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For Chinese and Tibetan scholars the chronological evidence is clear, even if the estimates of the unnatural time from conception to birth, if the Fifth Dalai Lama were to be Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's father, differ slightly among them.⁴⁸ Ultimately belief in Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's sacred paternity requires either ignorance of the well-attested and fully-explored chronology of the Fifth Dalai Lama's time away from Tibet or a conscious rejection of that chronology, something that is no longer possible, given the studies that have been cited in this paper.

These studies make two suppositions that we may now also reject, thanks to the publication in recent years of Sle-lung Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje's autobiography. The first is the assertion that the idea that the Fifth Dalai Lama was Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's father is unknown in the relevant historical literature. This is the assumption of most of those who cite Csoma de Kőrös's opinion, regardless of whether they reject the idea of the Dalai Lama having been Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's father (e.g., Yamaguchi and scholars in China and Tibet) or accept it (e.g., Tucci). Sle-lung Bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje's account makes the first supposition untenable. It also renders invalid the explanation that the whole notion of a blood-link between Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho and the Fifth Dalai Lama derives from confusion about Tibetan terms such as *thugs-sras* that denote a "spiritual son." Sle-lung bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje's autobiography makes it indisputably clear that the relevant rumors at the time were very specific about the Dalai Lama having actually fathered a son, along with committing other improprieties.

The second proposition that we can reject is that the story is rooted in the hostility between the Dge-lugs-pa and the Bka'-brgyud-pa and the long-lingering resentment over the military campaigns that established the *Dga'-ldan pho-brang* government. Indeed, we can reliably ascribe the origins of the story to internal conflict within the Dge-lugs-pa ranks, a conflict that for some, called into question the fundamental legitimacy of Ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho as the true incarnation of the Fourth Dalai Lama.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 12: 此外，我們還應該看到，儘管第巴桑結嘉措在他掌政時樹敵甚多，他的對手對他提出過種種指責，但是無論是在他生前還是失敗被殺之後，都沒有人提出他是私生子的問題。五世達賴喇嘛和第巴桑結嘉措也不會預見到二百多年後會有歐洲的學者來提出「私生子」的問題而且第巴桑結嘉措的出生年月會成為判定這個問題的關鍵，因此他們似乎也沒有必要煞費苦心地在第巴桑結嘉措的出生月份上做刻意的修改。

⁴⁸ I have already noted that Phun-tshogs tsho-ring, op. cit., p. 271, states that the gestation would have to have been 12 months for the Dalai Lama to have been Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's father. Chen Qingying, op. cit., p. 10, posits 16 months, as does Yamaguchi, op. cit., p. 117. Reb-gong-pa 'Jigs-med bsam-grub, op. cit., p. 97, calculates 19 months. My own count is over 16 months, based on the conversion of Tibetan dates to Western ones according to the tables in Dieter Schuh, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Kalenderrechnung* (Wiesbaden, 1973); all of the others whose calculations I cite appear to have based their figures on the unconverted Tibetan calendar dates.

Although the origins of the rumor are located in factional hostility to the Fifth Dalai Lama, its continued vitality is likely owed to the period of uncertainty and strife that followed his death. In the contemporary period there is some attraction, for those emotionally drawn to counterfactual or even conspiratorial views of history, in the idea that Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's paternity has been purposely kept secret. But that attraction remains an emotional one, perhaps rooted in a preference for a certain historical view of 17th and 18th century Tibetan history or a proclivity for rumor. There is, however, no serious option but to reject the rumor, enticing and even titillating as it might be.