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Binding Buddhas and Demons to Text: The Mongol Invention of the Dorjé Shukden and Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen Literary Corpus (1913–1919)

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Abstract: This article examines previously unstudied historical sources from seventeenth–twentieth century Khalkha, Mongolia concerning the controversial Dorjé Shukden tradition (Tib. *Rdo rje shugs ldan*; Kh. Mong. *Dorjshüg*). In the last quarter-century, the current Dalai Lama has imposed a controversial global ban on the practice that has cleaved Tibetan and Mongolian communities from one another, led to much bloodshed, and the splitting of the institutional base of the transnational Géluk (Tib. *Dge lugs*) tradition. Anti-Shukden polemicists and the small body of contemporary secondary scholarship on the schism attribute the rise of Shukden traditions to a hyper-conservative faction of monks based in Lhasa during the early twentieth century. They are credited with elevating Shukden, a violent regional spirit, to the high position of an enlightened protector of the Dharma. This article troubles that historical position, showing how developed Shukden traditions existed in Khalkha a century before the Lhasa movement. It then advances a new working hypothesis on the origins and enduring appeal of the Shukden tradition, which is that it is a long-running expression of the trans-Asian (and now, transnational) expansion of Géluk scholasticism far beyond the political dominions of the Dalai Lamas over the course of the Qing and Tsarist empires, the rise of nationalist and socialist government in Inner Asia, the exercise of profound socialist state violence, and the experience of global diaspora.

Keywords: Dorjé Shukden, *Rdo rje shugs ldan*, Zava Damdin, Lobsang Tamdrin, Khalkha, Géluk (*Dge lugs*)

Every Inner Asian Buddhist community belonging to the politically dominant and globally dispersed Géluk tradition (Tib. *Dge lugs pa'i chos lugs*) is today cleaved in two. Doubled spheres of power, patronage, lineage, history, territory, and institutionalism know the other across an impassable chasm. In the last

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quarter century, a mirrorwork of monasteries, Dharma centers, patrons, lay devotees, monks, abbots, and incarnate lamas has crystalized. For three centuries before, the Géluk *internationale* was haunted by an otherwise organization of power, transmission, legitimacy, and place. Those bound up in these pleated structures together face the shadow of the socialist state violence that first forced their flight into refugee camps and immigrant communities across Asia, Europe, and North America. They also confront pervading forces of internal displacement within Géluk community structures, strung in and between sites as diverse as Ulaanbaatar and Malibu, Lhasa and London, Toronto and Dharamsala, Kathmandu and São Paulo. Snarled borderlands of community and the holy, of purity and pollution, of “Tibetan-ness” and “Chinese-ness,” of human rights and the Vinaya, of tantric fraternity and citizenship are marked and marked again by raucous picket lines, sputtering oracles, monastic tribunals, digital opinion campaigns, police investigations, and Dharma transmission publicly given or denied. Such is the politics of truth that today attends the naming of evil spirits and buddhas.

This is the “Dorjé Shukden schism.” This is the refusal of demons (Tib. *gdon 'dre*) and supramundane protectors of the teachings (Tib. *bstan bsrung mthun mong ma yin pa*) to occupy their place. This is the funhouse reflection of the Géluk global. This is the specter troubling the circulation of Central Tibetan monastic culture out of its homelands for three-hundred-and-sixty years. This is the return of the repressed, the upwelling of absent histories. This is the dialectic of sacred and profane always required to make the places of “Tibetan Buddhism.” This is the frayed edge of Tibetan Studies and Tibetan societies. This is the sounding and silencing (sounding as silencing?) of scholarly speech.

The deity Dorjé Shukden (Tib. *Rdo rje shugs ldan*; Kh. Mong. *Dorjshüg*; Ch. 多杰雄登 *Duo jie xiong deng*), referred to pejoratively as Dolgyel¹ (Tib. *Dol rgyal*; Kh. Mong. *Doljil*), is a sign that organizes a tangle of permissions and

¹ It is a popular move in anti-Shukden polemics to remind audiences that this deity shares historical roots with a lowly and untrustworthy *gyelpo* spirit of the Dol (*Rdol*) region, often by quoting from the autobiographical writing of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso (Tib. *Ngags dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, 1642–1682). A characteristic example comes from a 1997 public statement given in Dharamsala by the current Dalai Lama, who provided an excerpt on Dolgyel from the Fifth’s works with his clarifications given in parentheses, currently available on his official website in the “Dolgyel (Shugden)” section: “It is well known that at Dol Chumig Karmo (Dol Chumig Karmo is Shugden’s place of origin, where a shrine was constructed to him. He is also referred to as Dolgyal because he is a Gyalpo from Dol Chumig Karmo. Gyalpo is a class of interfering spirit. Since Shugden belongs to this group, he is also called Gyalchen, the great Gyalpo) a very powerful perfidious spirit (dam sri, the spirit of one who has deliberately breached his oath or commitment to his lama out of resentment and

prohibitions.² This ‘deity’ is a sign because he remains ever open to competing interpretation, each setting opposing moral narratives, territories, communities, and practices into time and place in relation to each other. Dorjé Shukden has intervened in human affairs since before the seventeenth century – all parties will agree to this. But whose work has this been? An enlightened being or some vindictive spirit? And why then? And why now? What event unbolted this opaque history, and who is rendered vulnerable and who secure in its capacious vision? The requirement for answers to such questions bind together in unlikely ways debates occurring today in Dharma Center board meetings in Paris, in the resolutions of People’s Congresses in Beijing, in wealth rituals intoned in post-socialist living rooms in Ulaanbaatar, in the smears of YouTube vitriol, in spray-painted murals in Venice Beach back alleys, in complaints heard in Indian courts, in signs posted in Tibetan refugee settlements, and in public admonitions delivered at the site of the Buddha’s nirvāṇa.

This article is one of a series in which I think with such questions about the making and breaking of place, history, and community by means of Dorjé Shukden-related histories, rituals, aesthetic practices, and institutions.³ The scope of my analysis is the historical and territorial space of the schism itself. The memorialization of time and space bound up with the memorialization of

dissension), born due to distorted prayers, has been harming the teaching of the Buddha and sentient beings in general and in particular” (“Concerning Dolgyal or Shugden With Reference to the Views of Past Masters and Other Related Matters (A Talk on Shugden by H.H. the Dalai Lama during the Course of Religious Teachings in Dharamsala, during October 1997),” Gong sa skyabs mgon sku phreng bcu bzhi pa chen po mchog/His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, 1997, <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/dolgyal-shugden/speeches-by-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama/dharamsala-teaching>).

2 The transcription of Tibetan and Mongolian words in this article generally follows the Tibetan and Himalayan Library (THL)’s “Simplified Phonetic Transcription of Standard Tibetan.” For Tibetan, the Wylie transliteration is also provided on first usage, either as a note or in parentheses as appropriate. For Mongolian, I use the classical vertical script spelling for all pre-twentieth century persons, places, and text names, as well as for equivalent Buddhist technical terms alongside Sanskrit, Tibetan, and sometimes Chinese. These are listed as “Mong.” and I use the simplified THL transcription system developed by Prof. Christopher Atwood, except that I keep γ instead of ġ or gh on the old Mostaert and Lessing models and use some prevailing conventions in order to be legible to non-specialists, especially “Khalkha” instead of “Qalqa.” Words, persons, and places spelled using contemporary Cyrillic Mongolian are marked as “Kh. Mong.”

3 Topics in my forthcoming articles in this series include the narrativization of Shukden’s coming to the socio-political body of Khalkha lands in the early eighteenth century accompanied by his possession of the physical body of an unlucky Amban (an official representative of the Qing court), the adaptation of secular discourses of violence and victimhood in the modern schism (“Jew,” “Taliban,” “terrorist,” “martyr,” “human rights,” “self-expression,” etc), and the

Shukden is tied inextricably to the dramatic expansion of Central Tibetan influence across Inner Asia beginning in the seventeenth century, following the conclusion of the Tsang-Mongol wars and the subsequent rise of the Dalai Lama institution (which involved the erasure of competing sources of authority), the eastward and northward spread of the Géluk tradition, the amalgamation of the Inner Asian frontiers into the Qing and Tsarist imperial formations, the collapse of those empires in the early-twentieth century, the nationalist and socialist movements that came in the imperial ruins, and the global refugee diaspora that came in the wake of socialist state violence beginning in Mongolia and Siberia in the late 1930s, and in Tibet during the 1960s.

In all this I am most interested in how inter-Asian histories of Dorjé Shukden traditions might illuminate new social histories of knowledge in late-and post-imperial Inner Asia; ones that better conceptualized the great divergences of intellectual and institutional life of Géluk communities on the move into the globalizing fields of the Tibeto-Mongolian frontiers of the Qing and Tsarist formations. Indeed, the inclusion of Inner Asia within ideologies of security and abundance by both the Dalai Lama's Ganden Potrang government and the Qing Empire was twinned deeply to the migration of Géluk institutions, hierarchs, ritual cosmologies, and scholastic life into eastern Tibetan, Manchu, Mongol, and some Han societies. Such totalizing discourses of sovereignty and liberation had as their protagonists not only incarnate buddhas emanating as trülkus (Tib. *sprul sku*) sat upon thrones in monastic assemblies and as emperors and khayans sat upon thrones in imperial courts or on horseback in steppe grasses. As Max Oidtmann has shown, the authority of Dharma Protectors (Skt. *Dharmapāla*; Tib. *Chos skyong*; Mong. *Nom-un sakiyulsud*) were also a pervasive and contested feature of the turbulent reorganizing of Inner Asia over the course of the Qing (1644–1911).⁴ As we shall see below, in some dispersed networks Dorjé Shukden was very much included within these ranks of enlightened beings who helped fashion the Qing-Géluk world. Specifically, Shukden traditions provided aesthetic, intellectual, and ritual resources for such networks to narrativize and direct the transplantation of mass monasticism and Géluk scholasticism into the eastern Tibetan and Mongol frontiers.⁵

crossed “necro-aesthetics” of display and contact between idealized ascetic bodies, socialist violence, murdered monks, and self-immolation.

⁴ Oidtmann 2018.

⁵ Which is not to say that the so-called “unreformed,” older sects of Tibetan Buddhism did not maintain enduring connections with Mongolian peoples or exert influences on the form and

My larger project on Dorjé Shukden is thus to illuminate understudied sites, practices, forms of writing, and other social and intellectual apparatus that attended the dramatic movement of Géluk scholastic culture out of Central Tibet: first into Amdo and the Mongol frontiers of the Qing Empire (1644–1911), then into courts of the Qing and the person of the Manchu emperor, then into the revolutionary violence that came in the ruins of empire, and then into refugee camps, exiled monasteries and governments, and transnational webs of Dharma centers, new devotee communities, and new patronage networks. Simply put, I wish to look anew at the globally mobile histories of Inner Asian scholastic knowledge and its attendant political and institutional forms of the late-and post-imperium through the much-maligned Dorjé Shukden looking glass. Through its prisms there is much about the making of monasticism, about transregional belonging, about the Qing and its ruins, and about the braiding of global history to local life that is new to see.

In the present article I identify and examine the first documented effort by Inner Asian monks to locate and systematize a literature related to Dorjé Shukden and Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen (Tib. *Spnul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan*, Kh. Mong. *Tulku Dagvajaltsan*, 1619–1656), a Central Tibetan considered by later devotees to have incarnated as Shukden in 1656. Readers familiar with contemporary Shukden polemics will be surprised to know that this venture to systematize and compile a Shukden textual collection occurred not in Lhasa during the 1930s or 1940s at the behest of a conservative (some would allege fundamentalist and exclusivist) Géluk faction. Rather, what appear to be the first efforts to comprehensively systematize and publish all literary traces of Shukden and Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen came many years earlier, between 1913–1919, in the Mongol monastic capital of Yeke-yin Küriye (by then re-named Neislel Küriye, present day Ulaanbaatar), at the behest of local Mongol abbots, executed by local Mongol scholastics, drawn from centuries' old local Mongol archives, while seeking to standardize a century-old local Mongolian ritual tradition and narrativizing a distinctly local Khalkha Mongol perspective on the Qing-Géluk formation.

Well outside the later Lhasa-based intrigues that have occupied all previous scholarship and polemics on Shukden for a quarter century, I will show that this earlier Mongol entextualization of the Shukden tradition resolved an entirely other set of concerns that seem rather foreign to the current schism: most

content of Buddhism in Mongol lands. The controversial, often radically innovative and contrarian, Noyan Khutukthus of the Khalkha Gobi Desert regions is a paradigmatic case (and in particular the fifth incarnation Danzanravjaa (1803–1853) whose ecumenicalism, artistic pursuits, and charisma loom large even in the post-socialist cultural revivals happening today). See: Sardar 2007.

importantly, these included the need to map competing sources of authority and transmission in the movement of Géluk scholastic culture into Mongol lands between (and beyond) the sovereignties of the *ür*-Géluk monastic colleges of the Lhasa-area and Qing imperial centers. Indeed, the Géluk “Yellow Religion” (Mong. *sira-yin shasin*) scholastic culture of Yeke-yin Küriye – the “Great Encampment,” already renamed Neislel Küriye, the “National Capital” of Inner Asia’s first autonomous nation state by the time these works were compiled⁶ – existed well outside the political dominion of both the Dalai Lamas and the major Géluk monasteries of Central and Eastern Tibet, and was bound much more tightly to an aesthetic, intellectual, and institutional phenomenon that Johan Elverskog has usefully called the Qing-Géluk subject: a Tibeto-centric and synthetic vision of history, power, and Buddhist life spread between Central and Eastern Tibet, northern China, Qing imperial centers, all Mongol societies, and Siberia (Elverskog 2005). In the recovered texts examined below, Dorjé Shukden as being and event organized not opposition to some inclusivist, ecumenical, progressive, or Dalai Lama-centered Géluk tradition, but rather a synthetic history of Mongolia’s saturated scholastic culture and dominion within the Qing. Tellingly, the authors, editors, and patrons of these earlier Mongol texts thought it most notable when writing about Shukden – whom they considered to be a wrathful, uncommon protector of the Géluk tradition – that his previous incarnations included both an ascendant scholastic figure from the early Géluk world and the “enlightened” Manchu Emperor. For these Mongols, in Shukden was the wellspring of the abundances of scholastic and political life itself.

This Dorjé Shukden-based account of the Qing-Géluk formation is quite unlike the Lhasa-based intrigues of the milieu of the Second Pabongkha Rinpoché Déchen Nyingpo (Tib. *Pha bong kha rin po che bde chen snying po*; Kh. Mong. *Pabongkha Renbuuchii Dechin Nyambuu*, 1878–1941) that have

⁶ An autonomous Mongolian nation-state separated from the flailing Qing in 1911. Yeke-yin Küriye, known to Europeans and Russians more commonly as Urga, was transformed into its capital city – Neislel Küriye – in 1911. The eighth Jebtsundamba Khutuytu was enthroned as “Holy Emperor” (Mong. *Boyda Khayan*) and the short-lived theocracy was dated in the years of his reign title, “Elevated by Many” (Mong. *Olana ergügdegsen*). In 1921 Neislel Küriye was the site for Asia’s first experiment in socialist state building, becoming the capital of the Mongolian People’s Republic (*Bugude Nairamdalhu Mongol Arad Ulus*) and renamed Ulayanbayatur (Kh. Mong. *Ulaanbaatar*), or “Red Hero.” Relevant introductory political, economic, cultural, and intellectual histories include: Dindub and Hangin 1977; Bawden 1970; Onon and Pritchatt 1989; Ewing 1980; Purevzhav 1965; Batsaikhan 2009; Amar 1986; Kotkin and Elleman 1999; Uradyn Erden Bulag 1998; King 2019; Sárközi 1992; Humphrey 1994; Kaplonski 2014; Chuluun and Bulag 2013.

attracted nearly all popular and scholarly attention in the “schism” to date. In contrast, the Khalkha scene examined below formed in entirely different socio-political circumstances and with different transmissions than those systematized by Pabongkha Rinpoche (whose Lhasa-area Shukden traditions were associated first with the received protective deity of his maternal lineage and second with lineages received directly from his guru after visionary excursions to Tuṣita Pure Land). At issue for this earlier and apparently separate scene of entextualizing a Shukden tradition in Khalkha was solidifying trans-regional scholastic identities, institutions, and education in local constellations of space, history, and power outside of the political and institutional dominions of Lhasa, the Dalai Lama’s government, and the major Géluk “mother monasteries” in Central Tibet (Tib. *ma dgon*).

Whatever else they may have been or become, these Mongol sources indicate that Shukden traditions helped to make the Géluk from and for its vast frontiers – just as such traditions do today, in whatever contemporary frame of victimhood and aggression (i. e. Shukden devotees as the “Jews” and “Taliban” of Tibetan Buddhism),⁷ displacement and exile, purity and pollution, that have followed the battered, purged, repressed, and globally dispersed Inner Asian Buddhist world.

A final note before proceeding into these sources: I have no interest in engaging, never mind correcting, any of the current polemics that have so tragically affected Tibetan and Mongolian communities recovering from, or continuing to suffer through, many decades of socialist state violence and erasure. Unlike some colleagues in Tibetan Studies who have previously written on this topic, I leave the naming of buddhas and demons to monks and lamas. Still, as noted already, the materials presented below do complicate the usual historical argument by anti-Shukden polemicists today: that the elevation of an exclusivist, fundamentalist, puritan, and violent Dorjé Shukden tradition was the singular and unprecedented invention of Pabongkha Rinpoche and his milieu in 1930s and 1940s Lhasa, which was in turn expanded widely by his influential students in the Tibetan diaspora of the 1950s–1990s and in European and North American convert communities after the 1960s. Acknowledging that today there is no outside this schism, I proceed stubbornly only with an interest in thinking anew about the social history of Géluk scholasticism in the globalizing contexts of the late-and post-Qing periods.⁸

⁷ For examples of the strategic use of this borrowed language of victimhood and fundamentalist aggressions, see: Newsweek Staff 1997; Tsem Rinpoche, Pastor David, and Pastor Niral 2019.

⁸ For a broader survey of Mongol Buddhist life in the ruins of the Qing but beyond the newly invented national subject, see: King 2019. For an analysis of the evolution of socialist state

1 Memorializing Trülku Drakpa Gyeltsen

At the root of the competing narratives that make up the current Shukden schism are open questions about history: about the historical legitimacy of the Dalai Lama institution, for example, or about the history of certain strands of Géluk scholastic culture. Such debates are hardly specific to “the Shukden affair”: the rise of the Ganden Potrang government, the model of rule innovated around the Fifth Dalai Lama, and the geopolitics of the Qing-Géluk formation more broadly were institutionalized on sand and grasses bled by generations of Tibetan, Mongol, and Qing violence. The Mongol-Tsang wars that defeated the major opponents of the Géluk-Qoshuut alliance and elevated the Dalai Lamas are just one example. The spread of Géluk scholastic culture across Inner Asia beginning in the latter half of the seventeenth century was facilitated by, for example, the forced conversion or shuttering of many Bön, Kagyu, and Jonang institutions in Central and Eastern Tibet, the defeat of the King of Béri, the Qing obliteration of the Čaqr by Ligden Khan, the Khalkha-Dzungar wars, and so on.

Yet despite the bloody geopolitical theatre in which the Géluk rose to political dominance and rapidly expanded out of Central Tibet, the authority of the Géluk-Qing formation hardly remained uncontested, both within and outside the Géluk fold.⁹ One historical tradition which voiced (and continues to voice) such unease, and which in time challenged the legitimacy of the Fifth Dalai Lama and the institution he and his milieu innovated, concerns the contested memorialization of Trülku Drakpa Gyeltsen (1619–1656), and specifically, the nature of his death and his post-mortem activities.

Indeed, to understand Shukden traditions today, in 1930s–40s Lhasa, or early twentieth century Mongolia is to understand the conflicting stories of Trülku Drakpa Gyeltsen’s life, lives, and death: it has been in the plural memorialization of this death that the ascending Dalai Lama institution became haunted by an alternative structure of power and history, that the expanding Géluk tradition found alternative networks of exchange across Inner Asia, and

projects to contain and erase Buddhist institutionalism in Mongolia just after the period this article considers, see: Kaplonski 2014 For a study of the relation of Mongolian peoples to Qing imperial ideologies of sovereignty and history that led to nationalist formations, see: Atwood 2002; Elverskog 2006, 2011; Ishihama Yumiko 2004; Charleux 2015.

⁹ Even a bare sketch of the tumultuous religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century, in whose memory we must understand the evolution of the Dorjé Shukden tradition, is beyond the scope of this paper. For relevant surveys, see: Debreczeny and Tuttle 2016; Schwieger 2015; Ahmad 1970; International Association for Tibetan Studies 2006; Elverskog 2006.

that the current Géluk international is cleaved in two. While Shukden and Dolgyel traditions (an older regional protector spirit from the Tsang region of Central Tibet that was later synthesized with Shukden) existed long before within the Sakya tradition (Tib. *Sa skyā*), the origins of the current tradition – according to both the early twentieth century Lhasa group and, as in the materials below, the earlier Khalkha group – have since at least the nineteenth century been traced back to the life and death of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen. As the Mongol materials show, it was the scholastic pedigree of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen, and thus of Shukden, that mattered most in the frontiers of the Qing-Géluk formation. It was also on those Khalkha frontiers in the second decade of the twentieth century that the otherwise censored works of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen were rediscovered, repaired, edited, and published by the same circle that, a few years later, would entextualize the first Shukden teaching cycle (Tib. *chos skor/be 'bum*).

Who was Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen? A gifted scholar? A realized yogi? A charismatic teacher? The overlooked incarnation of the Dalai Lama? A charlatan? Such questions underlie the Shukden schism to this day and obscure clear historical investigation, whether today or in early 20th Khalkha.¹⁰ We know that the Fourth Pañchen Lama Lozang Chökyi Gyeltsen (*Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, 1570–1662) recognized the young Drakpa Gyeltsen as the incarnation of the Fifteenth Throne Holder of the Géluk Tradition, Pañchen Sönam Drakpa (Tib. *Pañ chen sod nams grags pa*; Kh. Mong. *Banchin Sodnomdagwa*, 1478–1554). Pañchen Sönam Drakpa was in turn a recognized incarnation of Düldzin Drakpa Gyeltsen (Tib. *'Dul 'dzin grags pa rgyal mtshan*; Kh. Mong. *Dülzen Dagwajaltsan*, 1374–1434), a scholastic luminary and close disciple of the founder of the Géluk tradition, Jé Tsongkhapa Lozang Drakpa (Tib. *Rje tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa*; Kh. Mong. *Bogd Zonkhow Luwsandagwa*, 1357–1419).

In the histories of Dorjé Shukden devotees from at least the last two hundred years, Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen is remembered as one of the final candidates for the incarnation of the Fourth Dalai Lama Yonten Gyatso (Tib. *Yon tan rgya mtsho*, 1589–1617, the only Mongol Dalai Lama). However, the child was passed over for political reasons. The Pañchen Lama chose instead to identify him as the incarnation of Panchen Sönam Drakpa, and Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen was duly enthroned at Drépung Monastery (Tib. *'Bras spungs dgon pa*) in the “Upper

¹⁰ For a survey of the most recognizable version of events from anti-and pro-Shukden groups today, see: Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang 1967; “Concerning Dolgyal or Shugden With Reference to the Views of Past Masters and Other Related Matters (A Talk on Shugden by H.H. the Dalai Lama during the Course of Religious Teachings in Dharamsala, during October 1997)” 1997; Kilty 2019.

House,” or Zimkhang Gongma (Tib. *Gzims khang gong ma*), from which he acquired a moniker used by the Fifth Dalai Lama in his autobiography and still used today: the “Zimkhang incarnation” (Tib. *Gzims khang sprul sku*). The person identified as the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso (Tib. *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*; Kh. Mong. *Nawaan Luwsanjamts*, 1617–1682) was enthroned in the Ganden Potrang residence (Tib. *Dga’ ldan pho brang*) at Drépung. He and Trülkü Drakpa Gyaltsen were trained alongside one another by the Fourth Panchen Lama, and in time both became well-known, young Géluk leaders who attracted not only monastic pupils and local sponsors, but also the all-important patronage and devotion of Mongol military and political leaders, especially among the Qoshuut elite.

In his youth, we must remember, the Fifth Dalai Lama was just one incarnate lama among many at Drépung Monastery. This was all before the 1642 conclusion of the Tsang-Mongol wars that elevated the Géluk tradition and the Dalai Lama institution to a dominant religious and political position across Inner Asia. Even after the establishment of a Ganden Potrang regime under the increasingly centralized religious authority of the “Great Fifth” (Tib. *Lnga pa chen po*) and the secular authority of his Qoshuut Mongol warlord patron, Güüshri Khan, and even after the former’s invitation to the Qing court by Emperor Shunzhi (順治; Tib. *Thog gnam gyi lha shun tsi rgyal po*, r. 1644–1661) in 1653, it is said by Shukden devotees that the brilliant and charismatic Trülkü Drakpa Gyaltsen continued to enjoy more popularity than the Dalai Lama. Even at the annual Great Prayer Festival in Lhasa (Tib. *Smon lam chen mo*), they presided together over the proceedings on thrones set side by side, causing jealousy and competition amongst the latter’s officials.¹¹

As Pabongkha Rinpoche’s student Trijang Rinpoche (the Junior Tutor of the present Dalai Lama) famously put it in a 1967 history of Dorjé Shukden – written as a commentary to a praise poem attributed to Pabongkha’s teacher Takpu Pémavajra and commonly recited today as part of the monthly *kangso* fulfilment ritual (Tib. *bskang gso*) to Dorjé Shukden¹² – the previous incarnations of Trülkü

¹¹ For a contemporary account from Mongolia, see: Tüshikhbayar 2014: 53–60.

¹² The historical vision of this poem remains the standard historical narrative of most Shukden communities today, though in ways that depart significantly from the Khalkha version described below. Takpu Pémavajra was Jampél Tenpé Ngodrup (*’Jam dpal bstan pa’i dngos grub*, 1876–1935), the fourth incarnation of the Takpu Pemavajra line (*Stag phu padma ba dzra*). In the Central Tibetan version of events recorded by Pabongkha and, in more elaborate fashion, his heart disciple Trijang Rinpoche, Jampél Tenpé Ngodrup traveled to Tuṣita Pure Land sometime in the early twentieth century. There he received transmissions of the Dorjé Shukden and Five Families (Tib. *Rdo rje shugs ldan rigs lnga*) teaching cycle, the now standard form of Shukden practice today, which includes the “life entrustment” (Tib. *srog gtad*) initiation. As we

Drakpa Gyaltsen had promised the Dharma Protector Néchung (Tib. *Gnas chung*) to manifest as a wrathful, uncommon protector of the Géluk tradition. Seeing that the circumstances were right, according to Trijang Rinpoche's version of events (via Takpu Pémavajra's poem) Trülku Drakpa Gyaltsen then requested Néchung's help to set into play what would become an enlightened drama of jealousy and murder that split the Géluk in two:

Soon after that, emanations of the Dharma King Nechung,¹³ hosts of travelers from all over, including many from Kham, eastern Tibet, came to Lhasa and sought an audience and made offerings to Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen at the upper residence, in numbers that seemed to eclipse even those seeking audience with the Great Fifth Dalai Lama [...] people were talking as if the upper and lower residence [i. e. the Dalai Lama's residence] of Drepung were practically equal in stature. Moreover, in the center of the rows of monks attending the great offering and prayer festival of Lhasa they made Dragpa Gyaltsen's throne higher than the Dalai Lama's. By this and other various means, Desi Sonam Chöpel and other attendants at the Ganden Palace [i. e. the Dalai Lama's residence] were made unbearably jealous and sought a chance to kill Dragpa Gyaltsen. The auspicious time for Dragpa Gyaltsen's promise to be fulfilled had also arrived so, when he was thirty-eight, on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month of the fire monkey year, he pretended a sudden illness which he said was due to 'nyen' spirits and made his preparations. On the thirteenth of the fifth month, Desi Sonam Chöpel brother named Depa Norbu or Nagso Norbu, in league with the evil Desi, under pretext of illness, came secretly to where Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen was staying in the large bedroom of the house where he was born, call 'ga kha sa pa,' with the intention of killing him. No matter how hard he tried to stab him with his weapon, however, it would not penetrate the skin, so he stuffed a silk scarf down his throat until he died.¹⁴

In recent decades, the oracles of Dorjé Shukden hold silk offerings scarves to their faces as the deity uses his host to speak, memorializing in each performance the killing of Trülku Drakpa Gyaltsen.

Both the anti-and pro-Shukden historical arguments on this contested account of Trülku Drakpa Gyaltsen's murder turn to the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama for evidence, where no such murder is recorded. There we read the Dalai Lama on the death Trülku Drakpa Gyaltsen as follows: "On the 25th day of the fourth month, the trülku of the Upper Residence took sick with a

shall see, there are no connections between this and the Shukden traditions known in Khalkha Mongolia, which seems to have possessed another transmission lineage entirely.

13 Néchung is the state oracle of the Tibetan Government in Exile. The twinned histories of Shukden and Néchung and their association with the Dalai Lama institution from the seventeenth century to the 1950s remains to be written (there is, for example, competing memories about whether it was Néchung or Dorjé Shukden, via oracles, who advised the Dalai Lama when and how to flee Lhasa and the Chinese People's Army in 1959).

14 Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang 1967: 94–95.



Contemporary illustration of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's murder from a graphic novel widely circulated online and available in English, Tibetan, Chinese, Mongolian, Indonesian, Italian, Korean, Spanish, Thai, and Nepali.

Dorje Shugden: The Protector of Our Time 2011: 67.

combination illness caused by *nyen* spirits and heat (Tib. *gnyan tshad*). For this reason, I sought to give him a blessing-initiation to dispel his illness ..."¹⁵ In the Dalai Lama's autobiography and in the many exegetical traditions it has engendered, a series of disturbances in the Potala Palace and around Lhasa followed Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's death. For example, after his relics were installed in a silver stupa at the Upper Residence, terrible sounds bellowed from within its casing, chasing away the devoted who had come to mourn and honor the deceased lama. Additionally, the Fifth Dalai Lama experienced unsettling visions of demonic black monkeys with orange eyes. The Potala Palace felt as if it was shaking. Associates of the Fifth began to convulse and die. Néchung and others advised re-locating the mortal remains of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen, shutting the Upper Residence, forbidding a search for an incarnation, and employing tantric masters from either the Sakya or Nyingma schools (depending on the version) to ritually kill the offending spirit.

¹⁵ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009: 366.

When all else failed, goes the later Tibetan and Mongol Shukden historiography, the Fifth Dalai Lama composed a short praise assigning the offending spirit to protect the Géluk tradition and commissioned the construction of a temple in central Lhasa, to the south of the Barkhor, which has been known since at least the eighteenth century as Trodé Khangsar (Tib. *Spro bde khang gsar*) and is referenced in the ritual evocations of not only Géluk Shukden texts but even in the little-acknowledged Drukpa Kagyü Shukden rituals from nineteenth century Bhutan, such as those of the Fourth Zhabdrüng Tuktrül, Jigmé Norbu (Tib. *Zhabs drung bzhi pa 'jigs med nor bu*, 1931–1861). Following the installation of Shukden in Trodé Khangsar, the Upper Residence incarnation lineage of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen and the Géluk scholastic luminaries who had preceded him was discontinued (an interesting corollary to the contemporaneous transmutation of Tāranātha's incarnation into the Mongol princely body of Zanabazar, the First Jebtsundamba of Khalkha, as part of the Ganden Potrang policy of erasing Tāranātha's Jonang school).¹⁶ The works of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen were also apparently censored in Central Tibet, much like the works of other rivals of the ascendant Géluk in the Kagyu and Jonang traditions.¹⁷

Just like the Jonang tradition, which survived Central Tibetan persecution in Amdo to the present day, the written records of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen were taken eastward and northward prior to the latter's death and erasure, far outside of the sovereignty of the Ganden Potrang government and the major Géluk monasteries of Central Tibet. This migration occurred in the hands of Khalkha Mongolia's earliest and most pre-eminent Géluk scholastic, a personal disciple of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen, the Pañchen Lama, and the Fifth Dalai Lama: Dzaya Panḍita Lubsangperlei (Tib. *Dza ya paṇḍita blo bzang 'phrin las*, 1642–1715), considered to this day as the wellspring of scholastic culture among the eastern Mongols.

Here we may finally come to these remarkable sources from early twentieth-century Khalkha, which record in the first place a breathless discovery in 1913 of a lost cache of works by Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen within the old, dilapidated library of Dzaya Panḍita. This led to a large-scale and well-funded Khalkha restoration and renaissance of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's censored and little-known works and, a few years later among the same group of Khalkha

¹⁶ On the troubled history of the Jonang and its recent revival, see: Sheehy and Dieter-Mathes 2019; Sheehy 2010, forthcoming.

¹⁷ For a fascinating study of how this double-movement of erasure and representation played out between Kagyu and Géluk institutions related to medical scholastic culture, see: Van Vleet (2016).

scholastics, the earliest known project to standardize the Dorjé Shukden corpus and the vast global histories of scholastic transmission and Qing authority it organized.

2 “As if out of emptiness ...”: The 1913 Discovery of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen’s Oeuvre in Mongolia

Nowadays the Choijin Lam Temple (Kh. Mong. *Choijin Lamîn Süüm*) in central Ulaanbaatar is a tumbledown complex. As if from blown sand or rising tides it has been overcome in recent years by skyscrapers, upscale restaurants, and car-choked roads. It was erected in 1908 and named “The Land of Increasing Loving-Compassion” (Tib. *Brte ‘phel gling*) by the Qing Emperor Guangxu (光緒; Tib. Kwong shu'i ye, r. 1875–1908), one of only a handful of Qing-era temples to have survived the socialist purges that began in the 1930s. In its dusty chambers hangs a curious artifact, locked and hidden away from tourists who trickle by in summer. For another kind of visitor, however, those with clout and claims on its holy objects like high Mongol *lams* and Tibetan incarnates, a key is produced by reverent museum workers. It opens a cabinet fixed inconspicuously to the walls of one of the wondrously fashioned temple facades. Inside is statue of Dorjé Shukden, kept in the stringently guarded worlds of the Shukden international. Today there are always extraordinary risks when Shukden-affiliated images, spaces, melodies, or bodies are opened to unvetted eyes. The statue at the Choijin Lam Temple is a node in a necessarily clandestine global topography, one that connects the aesthetics and practices of back-alley temples in Mongolia with such unlikely sites as Dharma centers in New York and Malaysia, monasteries in Kathmandu and Chengdu, and living room shrine cabinets in Delhi and Moscow. In Ulaanbaatar today, hidden Shukden statues and paintings (and, occasionally, oracles) are consigned to private Ulaanbaatar apartment temples and to one extremely busy public Ulaanbaatar temple that will go unnamed here.

Whose histories are sustained in these globalized scenes to of guarded access to the sight of Dorjé Shukden?¹⁸ For the Shukden international, it is those that came before the contemporary expulsion of Shukden communities from Géluk monasteries, Tibetan refugee and diaspora communities, and

¹⁸ In a forthcoming article I explore the juxtaposition of this private world of Shukden community life with the politicized and active imposition of Dorjé Shukden imagery and communities into the public sphere via the internet, in protests, in legal battles, and everyday life.

convert Dharma centers the world over. Yet, who put that statue on the dusty wall of the Chojin Wall Temple? When came the lock?

Run today as a museum, the Chojin Lam Temple preserves the visually complex sanctuary of the 8th Jebtsundamba's younger brother Lubsangkhaidub (Tib. *Blo bzang mkhas grub*; Kh. Mong. *Luwsankhaidiüw*, 1872–1918). Lubsangkhaidub was state oracle during the perilous years of the Bogd Khaanate (1911–1919). According to the memories of contemporary Tibetan and Mongolian Shukden commentators, he was entrusted by his brother with extending a long history of protecting the monastic institutions of Khalkha under the Qing into the fraught project of preserving the autonomy of the new Mongolian nation-state.¹⁹ Lubsangkhaidub's body is said to have been inhabited on occasion by Dorjé Shukden, among other protectors. Like the now closeted statue of Shukden, Lubsangkhaidub's mummified corpse reposes amid statuary on the altar as a materialized memory that Shukden was present in early twentieth century Khalkha. But how? For whom?

It is well known, though to my knowledge not elaborately researched, among the Tibetan and Mongolian monastic historians of the Shukden community today that the life and literary legacy of Trülkü Drakpa Gyaltsen escaped the Fifth Dalai Lama's censure in the famous *Clear Mirror: A Records of Teachings Received* (Tib. *Thob yig gsal ba'i me long*). The *Clear Mirror* was penned by the aforementioned Khalkha disciple of Trülkü Drakpa Gyaltsen, Dzaya Panḍita Lubsangperlei (1642–1715).²⁰ Given the Ganden Potrang's erasure of the Zimgön trülkü institution after Trülkü Drakpa Gyaltsen's death, the dismantling of his memorial stūpa at Drépung, and the ban on his writing, Dzaya Panḍita's *Clear Mirror* became a sought-after witness to this lama's life, lives, and previously lost literary heritage.²¹ Yet, to my knowledge none of the scholarship on the Shukden issue to date has examined the circulatory histories of the relevant sections of Dzaya Panḍita's *Record*.²² Most has focused instead on twentieth century Tibetan sources such as the immensely controversial 1974 *Yellow Book* (Tib. *Gser kyi deb ther*) by Dzémé Rinpoche (Dze smad rin po che blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas, 1927–1996), the works of Pabongka

¹⁹ For example, see the long, illustrated essays posted on the public Facebook site *Nomîn Ikh Sakhius Dorj Shügden* (*The Great Protector of the Dharma Dorjé Shukden*) whose content is replicated in dozens of other Mongolian blogs, wiki sites, and social media platforms.

²⁰ Bareja-Starzyńska 2015; Ujeed 2017.

²¹ Nowadays Trülkü Drakpa Gyaltsen's writings, including his prophetic works, have been recovered and circulate widely in the current Shukden corpus.

²² Lyndsey McClune's Master's thesis on memorializations of Trülkü Drakpa Gyaltsen's death notes in passing that Gene Smith urged her to explore Dzaya Panḍita's work, but that she was unable to do so in the limited space of a Master's thesis. See: McCune 2007.

Déchen Nyingpo and his disciples, earlier Central Tibetan sources such as the writing of the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent Sanggyé Gyatso, as well as the works of seventeenth century Amdo luminaries like Sumpa Khenpo Yéshé Peljor (Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'jor, 1704–1788).

Beyond the rather minor historical interest in Dzaya Paṇḍita's entry on Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen – it provides a brief biography and a list of works authored – is a question relevant to this study: beginning at latest in the early nineteenth century, how did Shukden traditions that were brought into Dzaya Paṇḍita's Khalkha homeland understand narratives about Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen gleaned from Dzaya Paṇḍita's works? Did Lubsangkhaidub and those who brought Shukden into his body in order to hiss prophecies think that they were also in the presence of this figure? How where Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen, Dorjé Shukden, and Khalkha thought of in relation to one another and in relation to the Qing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, before the Choijin Lama Temple became a socialist storehouse and, later, a museum?

The only known Khalkha compiler of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's *Collected Works* and the Dorjé Shukden *bé-bum* was the polymath Zava Damdin Lubsangdamdin (Kh. Mong. *Luwsandamdin*; Tib. *Blo bzang rta mgrün*, 1867–1937).²³ Born in the Uijing Güng region of the Gobi Desert, then part of Tüsiyetü Khan Ayimay, Zava Damdin rose to prominence in the cosmopolitan monastic world of late imperial Yeke-yin Küriye (Kh. Mong. Ikh Khüree, today's Ulaanbaatar). In addition to his widely recognized abilities in memorization and dialectics in relation to the “five texts” (Tib. *gzhung lnga*) – five Indian śāstras (commentaries) whose mastery lies at the center of scholastic education in the Géluk school to this day – Zava Damdin deeply engaged ancillary scholastic subjects such as poetics, medicine, history, and astrology.²⁴ In the late nineteenth century, he left Khalkha to pursue those interests as a pilgrim to major Géluk centers in Inner Mongolia (in Alaša Ayimay) and, especially, in eastern Tibetan (Amdo) monasteries such as Kumbum Jampa Ling (Tib. *Sku 'bum byams pa gling*) near Xining. There he studied Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa* (Tib. *Snyan ngag me long*), a famous Sanskrit treatise on poetics, undertook meditation retreats, and came into “worshipful contact” (Tib. *mjal*) with holy sites and high Tibetan

²³ On Zava Damdin's life and career, as well as on the content of Buddhist imagination during the Qing-socialist transition more broadly, see: King 2019.

²⁴ These five Indian commentaries are Maitreya's *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (*Ornament of Realization*), Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* (*Entrance to the Middle Way*), Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (*A Treasury of Abhidharma, with Commentary*), Guṇaprabha's *Vinayasūtra* (*Discourses on Discipline*), and Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* (*Commentary on Valid Knowledge*).

lamas. There he also came into contact with Amdo abbots who had developed prolonged relationships with the British Protestant missionary Cecil Polhill.²⁵

Returning to Yeke-yin Küriye at the close of the nineteenth century, evidence for Zava Damdin's subsequent rise as a scholastic leader is clear by his close association with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama Tupten Gyatso (Tib. *Thub bstan rgya mtsho*, 1876–1933). The thirteen Dalai Lama resided in and around Yeke-yin Küriye between 1904 and 1906 while on the run from the British invasion of Lhasa led by Colonel Francis Younghusband.²⁶ During that time Zava Damdin took many teachings from the Dalai Lama, moved about within his entourage, led liturgies during rituals presided over by the Tibetan hierarch, and often engaged in debate contests staged between local Mongols and the elite Tibetan *géshés* (Tib. *dge shes*) traveling in the Dalai Lama's company. After the Dalai Lama's departure in 1906, Zava Damdin set out on pilgrimage to Mt Wutai and the Qing imperial capital, Beijing. His records of that journey feature prominently in his latter autobiographical and historical writing, much of it from as late as 1936, and describe visionary encounters with enlightened beings and transformative meditative experiences.²⁷ These accounts represent the last written impressions of a Mongolian monk wandering devotedly in the heartland of the Qing just a few years before the imperial collapse in 1911/1912, all written just months before the devastating state violence of 1937.

As revolutionary events reshaped Khalkha society from the declaration of autonomy under the Bogd Khan in 1911 until the terrible purges of the late 1930s, Zava Damdin entered into his maturity as a major scholastic teacher, tantric master, abbot, and globally engaged intellectual. His prolific writing during the course of the nationalist and then socialist revolutions is preserved today in 417 texts compiled in seventeen volumes. These were collected and published in the Mongolian diaspora in Nepal and India during the 1970s, led by that critical figure in the preservation and revival of Mongolian Buddhism, Guru Deva Rinpoche (who had been a student of Pabongkha Rinpoche and was a very senior hierarch among Shukden communities until his passing in 2009).²⁸ Zava Damdin's works represent the only monastic writing of similar purpose and breadth to have survived the revolutionary period, and as such uniquely

25 For a comparative study of the British, Tibetan, and Mongolian accounts of this monk-missionary relationship, and of the failed conversion by the Christians that ended it, see: King and Klassen 2015.

26 Bell 1987; Chuluun and Bulag 2013.

27 All of Zava Damdin's major and minor (auto)biographical and historical works are examined in context in: King 2019.

28 Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975d.

illuminate Buddhist life from this dark period beyond what is recorded in People's Congresses, trial proceedings, and interrogation records.

While Dzaya Paṇḍita's *Record* was long available to the major lineage holders of Shukden transmissions and affiliated institutions in Khalkha, in the early twentieth century the actual texts listed as well as a longer biography of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen remained unknown, even to scholastics at Zava Damdin's Dashchoijurlin (Tib. *Bkra shis chos 'byor gling*) monastic college whose textbooks (*yig cha*) followed the works of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's prior incarnation, Panchen Sönam Drakpa. This lacuna was rectified in 1913, when Zava Damdin discovered a damaged manuscript copy of one of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's compositions. This caused a sensation, and he left a delightfully evocative short record of events. The only version I have found is in Tibetan and published in Volume Fourteen (*Pa*) of all the currently available editions of Zava Damdin's *Collected Works*. It is entitled *The Collected Writings of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen, Discovered in the Innermost Recesses of Dzaya [Paṇḍita's] Library and Newly Compiled Under the Title 'Flower Earrings'* (Tib. *Sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi bka' 'bum dza ya'i dpe mdzod kyi phugs nas myed de gsar bzhengs pa'i zhal byang snyan gong me tog bzhugs*).²⁹

After an opening homage praising Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen and beseeching him to act on behalf of the Buddha's teachings and sentient beings in his current form of Dorjé Shukden, Zava Damdin informs his readers that though biographical details about Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen and his incarnation lineage do exist in sundry oral and textual accounts, and while these provide sketches of his exploits across Central and Eastern Tibet, in China, and Mongol regions, "references to the existence of a *Collected Works* are never to be found"³⁰.

While attending a large tantric empowerment cycle in Khalkha's Right District (Tib. *g.ya ru*), Zava Damdin "came into worshipful contact with a single volume of this holy being's works [i. e. Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen] that had been carried from Tibet long ago by Dzaya Paṇḍita Lubsangperlei and kept in the manuscript collection (*phyag dpe'i khrod na*) of his excellency Nomon Han"³¹. Breathlessly, Zava Damdin had immediately scanned through

²⁹ Listed erroneously in the BDRC as *Sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi/ /bka' 'bum dza la'i dpe mdzod kyi/ /phugs nas myed de gsar bzhengs pa'i/ /zhal bayang snyan gong me tog bzhugs*. "Dza la" should be dza ya, as in that this work is extracted from within the innermost sanctum of Dza Paṇḍita's library.

³⁰ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975c: 431.

³¹ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975c: 431.

the manuscript looking for a biography or this lama's famed cycle of prophecies (*lung bstan skor*). Neither were to be found and he did not have the time to make a hand copy of the manuscript's contents. Still, news of the discovery spread fast. Zava Damdin's friend and teacher (and early Buddhist socialist reformer) Darva Paṇḍita Agwangchoijurdondubbalsang (Tib. *Dar ba paṇḍita ngag dbang chos 'byor don grub dpal bzang*, d. 1924) determined that this manuscript might be all that remained of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's *Collected Works*. We read that Darva Paṇḍita hastily sent funds and tasked Zava Damdin with deciphering and copying the manuscript. Damdin's return to the library coincided with a long oral transmission of the Tengyur (*Bstan 'gyur*) being given by an otherwise unnamed incarnate lama visiting from Drépung Monastery in Lhasa. He dully prepared an index for Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's *Collected Works* from the fragments extracted from Nomon Han's library. With "the benefit of scholastic companions (*groggs mched rnams*) in mind" he offered the preliminary results to his lama Minjüür Dorj (Tib. *Mi 'gyur rdo rje*, 1820–1919).

Regrettably, the tattered state of the original text considerably hampered the project of publishing a new edition. The centuries' old manuscript was full of incorrect spellings and so editing was painfully slow. Burdened by his many scholastic duties in Yeke-yin Küriye – where Zava Damdin was already a sought-after teacher, historian, and tantric master – the pace of his critical edition became glacial. The fact was not lost on Minjüür Dorj, who furiously "made the appearance of holding an endless knot in his heart!"³². Enlisting the help of other scholars who could better scrutinize the difficult-to-read Tibetan script, and turning to Dzaya Paṇḍita's *Record* to compare text titles and the like, Zava Damdin and company identified some of the manuscripts in their possession. Though they now had a collection of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's texts, Zava Damdin laments that "the reading transmission of this *Collected Works*, knowledge of who studied with the Holy One himself, and who requested which teachings all remain unknown to us. As such, although the reading transmission lineage was equally severed in both Tibetan and Mongolian regions, and while the continuum of the texts contained in the *Collected Works* were severed for a very long period of time, nowadays we can once again repair the transmission. This is certainly due only to that Lord's [Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's] great kindness!"³³.

³² Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975c: 431.

³³ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975c: 432.

And so ends this note on the rediscovered *Collected Works* of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen, which “had appeared out of emptiness after more than two hundred and fifty years had passed”³⁴. The whereabouts of the 1913 *Collected Works* of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen they produced, however, is today unknown. All that remains to my knowledge is the index (Tib. *dkar chag*) included in Zava Damdin’s *Collected Works* and reproduced at the end of this article as an appendix. In the five volumes of the standard Dorjé Shukden corpus (*Rdor rje shugs ldan bé-bum*) that circulates today, several works by Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen are included. To my knowledge, none of these editions are based on the manuscripts discovered and repaired by Zava Damdin and company from the dusty library of Nomon Han.³⁵

The rediscovery of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen’s works by Zava Damdin, his exemplary (if delayed) labor to decipher and reproduce them in a new edition and his offering of them to Minjüür Dorj in 1913 inspired this later master to request his skilled disciple to undertake a larger literary project related to Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen and Dashchoijurlin, their shared college: to standardize a Shukden literary corpus (*chos skor*) in 1919. I now turn to that collection, the conditions of its creation, its contents, and how its relatively long narrative introduction illuminates the role of Shukden traditions in fixing frontier Géluk scholastic culture to a constellation of relations across the late-and post-imperial Qing-Géluk formation.

3 The 1919 Invention of the Dorjé Shukden Teaching Cycle (*Rdo rje shugs ldan chos skor*) and Géluk Scholastic Culture in “the Second Lhasa”

In 1919, a few years after the reconstruction of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen’s *Collected Works* and amidst the tumultuous final months of the Bogd Khaanate period, Zava Damdin and the same milieu of Dashchoijurlin scholastic leaders sought to formalize a Dorjé Shukden “teaching cycle” (Tib. *chos skor*), called in

³⁴ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975c: 432.

³⁵ Some of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen’s recovered writing, considered to be demonstrative of poor scholarship, has been weaponized by the anti-Shukden polemicists. See: Kilty/Rgyal-spyi’i Dge-ldan Lhan-tshogs 2019: 33–42.

places a “ritual collection” (Tib. *be ‘bum*). This was one rather small but fascinating project amidst a decades’ long effort on the part of Mongol scholastic communities to turn to the authority of the past to make sense of the post-Qing ruins.³⁶ As before Zava Damdin was asked to undertake the research and writing of a Shukden “teaching cycle” at the behest of his guru Minjüür Dorj. As the colophon to the resulting text puts it:

In the presence of He who is the confluence of an ocean of sūtra, tantra, and quintessential instructions, endowed with the three kindnesses, my root lama the great Vajradhara Minjüür Dorj instructed: ‘You should collect together in one place the scattered sādhana cycle of this uncommon protector of our monastic college. From being compiled into a *bé-bum*, all of the reading transmissions will increase!’ He would repeat the intended meaning of this command again and again: ‘Don’t forget and keep this [instruction] in your heart!’³⁷

While the date of the request and the composition of the text is withheld, more details about the circumstances of this Khalkha project to catalogue Shukden narratives and rituals are to be found in Zava Damdin’s 1936 autobiography, written just before his death and the mass erasure of Mongolia’s monastic worlds by state violence in 1937. According to this work, entitled *A Summary of My Activities and Behaviour in this Life, A Pursuit of Food and Other Life Necessities* (Tib. *Rang gi byed spyod rags bsdoms ‘di snang za zi’i rjes gco*), it was Minjüür Dorj’s final testament (Tib. *bka’ chems*) to Zava Damdin that the latter complete a *bé-bum* for Shukden, as this was the protector of Dashchoijurlin monastic college.³⁸

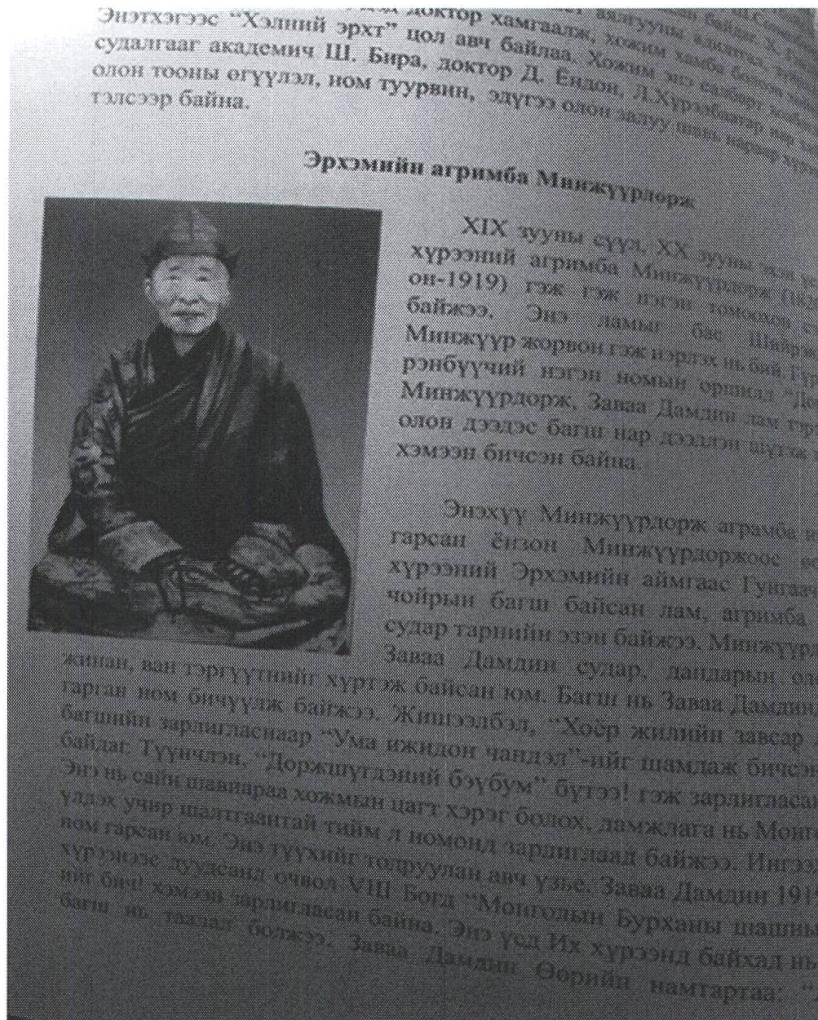
While the request to organize the contents of a Shukden *bé-bum* came from Minjüür Dorj, Zava Damdin’s autobiography tells us he received the transmission of the Shukden ritual manuals (*grub skor*) not from his root guru but from Nyongné Trülkü (Tib. *Smyong gnas sprul sku*).³⁹ Given that Zava Damdin’s index and introduction to the resulting teaching cycle/*bé-bum* is relatively short (fifteen folios) and that we find no other mention of it in any of his autobiographies, we

36 See: King 2019, 2016a, 2016b; forthcoming.

37 Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a: 406.

38 Zava Damdin’s autobiographical writing tells us how central Minjüür Dorj was to the tantric formation of our author; Zava Damdin received hundreds of initiations and transmissions from this lama, including of the seventeen manifestations of the Dharma Protector Glorious Four-Faced Mahākāla (Tib. *Dpal mgon zhal bzhi pa*). In the Shukden *bé-bum*, Zava Damdin notes that high Khalkha lamas had taught since the early nineteenth century that Dorjé Shukden had an intimate relationship with the center of Khalkha monasticism, and that “Most especially, the definitive meaning of this Great King [Shukden] himself is that he shares a singular nature with the bodily aspect of Glorious Four-Face Mahākāla” (Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a: 400).

39 Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975b: 192.



Left: An image and biographical information about Minjüürdorj from *Negen Sakhiusni Gaikhamshigt Tüükh*, a 2014 work on the history and practice of Dorjé Shukden by Tüshikhbayar that is widely distributed among contemporary Mongolian Shukden devotees (Tüshikhbayar, *Negen Sakhiusni Gaikhamshigt Tüükh*, 84).

can assume that Zava Damdin completed this work in or very near to 1919: this was the year of Minjüür Dorj's death and his final testament to his disciple, and of Nyongné Trülkü's transmission of the Shukden *sadhana* cycle to Zava Damdin as preparation for compiling the *bé-bum*. The resulting text was titled: *The Meteoric Wheel Enclosure of Resplendent Buddha Activity: A Catalogue Arranged for the Teaching Cycle Volume of Gyalchen Dorjé Shukden Tsél, the Uncommon Guardian of the Teachings of the Second Victor Mañjunātha [Tsongkhapa]* (Tib. 'Jam mgon rgyal ba gnyis pa'i bstan srung thun mong ma yin pa rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi chos skor be bum du bsgrigs pa'i dkar chag gnam lcags 'khor lo'i mu khyud 'phrin las 'od 'bar).

While the prose introduction to Zava Damdin's catalogue describes the qualities and history of Shukden *qua* Trülku Drakpa Gyeltsen, the actual narrative opens with a turn-of-the-thirteenth century prophetic vision, speaking to the breadth of space and time organized for this Khalkha milieu by Dorjé Shukden traditions. Tropu Lotsāwa Jampé Pél (*Khro phu lo tsā ba chen po byams pa'i dpal*, c. 1172–1236), writes Zava Damdin, provides the earliest historical statement concerning “the ancient origins of this great protector of the Victor's teachings, renowned as Powerful Dorjé Shukden.” Jampé Pél prophesied

According to the teachings of
The Sage of Jakang (*Bya rkang*), Orgyan Zhingkyé (*O rgyan zhing skyed*)
And arhats come from Singha Island [i. e. Śrī Lanka],
After the enlightenment of the third buddha yet to come
He will later go to Tuṣita. I pay homage!⁴⁰

In this version of events, the enlightened being who would one day manifest as Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, Trülku Drakpa Gyeltsen, and then Dorjé Shukden first began intervening in human affairs from his residence in Tuṣita heaven, the godly abode of the future buddha Maitreya and the Géluk founder Tsongkhapa. According to the seventeenth century Dzaya Paṇḍita and his dutiful early twentieth-century reader Zava Damdin, the first known incarnation of this being was “that great one who was a son of the Conqueror abiding at the peak of a cloud of the Dharma of the Tenth [Bodhisattva] Stage named ‘the Kashmiri Mahā Paṇḍita Śākyāśrīdhadra,’ who, like the appearance of the sun and the moon, journeyed in his lifetime to India, Kashmir, Nepal, and Tibet.”⁴¹

After abiding a while again in heavenly Tuṣita, writes Zava Damdin, this enlightened being once more manifested into Inner Asian space “on account of long being connected through profound aspiration to the faithful sentient beings of the Land of Snows [i. e. Tibet].” The incarnations leading to Dorjé Shukden, we read, came in succession “as many scholars, monks, and siddhas, such as that Omniscient One of the Degenerate Age Butön Rinchen Drup (Tib. *Bu ston rin chen grub*, 1290–1364), that prominent heir to the sons of the Mañjunātha Second Conqueror Düldzin Drakpa Gyeltsen (Tib. *Dul 'dzin grags pa rgyal*

⁴⁰ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a: 393.

⁴¹ Blo bzang rta mgrin (1975a, 393) Śākyāśrīdhadra (1127/1154–1225), and was according to most Tibetan accounts the last abbot of the famed Nālandā Monastery before its destruction by invading Muslim forces in circa 1192 (on the many problems with this widely accepted narrative, see: Elverskog 2010: 1–7. Once he arrived in Tibet, Śākyāśrīdhadra became instrumental in a mass movement of political centralization, monastic reform, scholastic renewal, and translation that Ronald Davidson called “the Tibetan Renaissance”; for example, by becoming an important teacher to the luminary Sakya Paṇḍita (Davidson 2005).

mtshan, 1374–1434), and the Fifteenth Throne-holder of Ganden, Pañchen Sönam Drakpé Pel (i. e. Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, Tib. *Pañ chen Bsod nams grags pa'i dpal*, 1478–1554), and so forth.”

And here Zava Damdin’s 1919 teaching cycle arrives at one of the most vexed questions in Inner Asian religious history what, for these Khalkha monks, was the connection between Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen and the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso (Tib. *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, 1617–1682)? Did these Mongol monks, nearly 2500 kilometers away from Lhasa and years before the systematization of Pabongkha Déchen Nyingpo, know Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen as the rightful incarnation of the Dalai Lama? As a murdered rival? How, from the vantage of Yeke-yin Küriye in the ruins of the Qing, were the life and works of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen connected with the “supramundane protector” Dorjé Shukden?

Continuing on from the death of Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, in the first place Zava Damdin’s introduction makes clear that for Khalkha monks of Güngachoilin monastic college in 1919, Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen was indistinguishable with Dorjé Shukden: “[Pañchen Sönam Drakpa] then became known as ‘the Uncommon Protector of the Yellow Hat [i. e. Géluk] Teachings, Gyelchen Dorjé Shukden Tsél,’ by which he is still renowned. As is universally recognized today, in this manner the manifestations of all later incarnations of Pañchen Sönam Drakpa are said [to emanate] from Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen”⁴²

And here things become even more interesting, in light of the historical arguments hurled by all sides in the Dorjé Shukden schism today. Lodged deep in the oral tradition of this scholastic college in Khalkha by 1919, the key event in Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen’s biography and the genesis of Dorjé Shukden concerned the search for the incarnation of the deceased Fourth Dalai Lama Yönten Gyatso (Tib. *Yon tan rgya mtsho*, 1589–1617), who as mentioned above was a Tümed Mongol

It is said that [Drakpa Gyeltsen] was the incarnation of the Omniscient [Fourth Dalai Lama] Yönten Gyatso (Tib. *Yon tan rgya mtsho*, 1589–1617) and that when the faulty incarnation appeared [i. e. Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso, the Fifth Dalai Lama], he [i. e. Drakpa Gyeltsen] took on the form of a haughty spirit (*dregs pa'i gzugs*). As for the source of this fact (*don dngos gnas ni*), it has been pronounced by several of our spiritual forefathers (*bla ma gong ma 'ba' zhig gi zhal nas*). Accordingly, these days [Dorjé Shukden] acts similarly to the haughty chieftain Péhar (i. e. *Pe har rgyal po*), who during the lifetime of Pañchen Sönam Drakpa [protected] the stainless Teachings of the Conqueror [Tsongkhapa] in this world.⁴³

⁴² Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a: 394.

⁴³ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a: 393.

Zava Damdin writes further, though without elaboration, that Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso, the person mistakenly identified as the Fifth Dalai Lama, “upheld, guarded, and increased all of the new and old unbiased tenet systems” and so Dorjé Shukden, “on account of prayers and aspirations made since long ago to greatly respect and care for the tradition of the Mañjunātha Lama [Tsongkhapa] made the appearance of many fearful apparitions to make the Supreme Lord of Conquerors [Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso] afraid”.⁴⁴

Unlike his biographical descriptions of all the previous incarnations, Zava Damdin provides no details whatsoever about the end of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen’s life. From the Khalkha vantage, was this contemporary of the Fifth Dalai Lama understood to have been murdered? Citing descriptions of events from the Dalai Lama’s works and the chronicles of the Sakya school, Zava Damdin writes only that in response to disturbances attributed to Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen already manifested post-mortem as Shukden, the Fifth Dalai Lama undertook retaliatory ritual measures and ordered the Sakya Gongma Rinpoché (Tib. *Sa skyā bdag chen rin po che*) to do likewise.⁴⁵

Zava Damdin does provide interesting commentary upon the iconography of Dorjé Shukden in relation to the context of his wrathful manifestation. In the first place, Shukden abides in Dol, a residence that had been offered to him as a kind of negotiation by the Dalai Lama, whose purported deferential request is cited verbatim in this section. Zava Damdin describes Dol in detail as a *maṇḍala*, including entourage deities that are common in post-nineteenth century Shukden liturgical traditions. The physical appearance and dress of the common, peaceful form of Shukden, as described in this *bé-bum*, further exemplify the mirrorwork that lies at the heart of the Dorjé Shukden tradition. Wearing the three robes of a monk, writes our author, Shukden “took on the manifest appearance of a member of the government entourage from the time of the Great Fifth, along with an officially sanctioned Drip Hat (*sgrib zhwa*, worn by ecclesiastic officials, or *rje drung*, in the Ganden Potrang administration)” (Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a, 397).

From these fascinating but still fragmentary sources at least, it appears that the antagonistic opinion of an exclusivist Géluk tradition about the “polluted” Dalai Lama institution, which from the time of the Fifth incorporated Nyingma tantric traditions and pre-Géluk ideologies of rule, were known in Khalkha by the early twentieth century apart from Pabongkha and his Lhasa milieu. It is worth underscoring, however, that in these Khalkha sources this is only a minor note – amounting to two sentences – in a much larger historical survey of history, power,

⁴⁴ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a: 393.

⁴⁵ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a: 396–97.



Early twentieth century image of peaceful Dorjé Shukden from Mongolia, on display in the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts (*G. Zanabazarîn Neremjit Dürslekh Urlagiin Muzei*), Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Also available as item 50,725 in the Himalaya Art Resources database (<https://www.himalayanart.org>).

and transmission. Of far greater importance than the questionable status of the Fifth Dalai Lama (who, I should note, Zava Damdin quotes extensively as a major enlightened authority in all of his major historical works), is the place of Shukden in scholastic transmission and locating Khalkha monastic life within the tangled sovereignties of the Qing-Géluk formation.

Moving on from his description of the aftermath of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's death, Zava Damdin recalls a well-worn prophecy attributed to the Fourth Panchen Lama, who we will recall was the personal guru of Trülkü Drakpa

Gyeltsen and the Fifth Dalai Lama. Relaying a prophetic vision about the future enlightened intervention of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen into the globalized field opened by the Qing, Zava Damdin cites the Panchen Lama as follows:

After this, in the future in an eastern city
The assembly of disciples within Mañjuśrī's buddhafield will increase.
Afterwards, in the dark expanses of the borderlands
The lamp of the Dharma will be fully ignited.
In summary, by means of the unusual attitudes of love and compassion,
The vast altruistic purpose of benefiting transmigrators
Will be thoroughly accomplished!⁴⁶

Zava Damdin is keen to lead readers of his introduction to the Dorjé Shukden teaching cycle through the events foretold by this prophecy. In the first place, he lists one of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen future incarnations as the Manchu emperor of the Qing Empire. Expressing “a singular intention” (Tib. *dgongs gzhi gcig tu babs par snang*), it became “well-known” that Mañjuśrī *qua* Dülzin Drakpa Gyeltsen, Panchen Sönam Drakpa, and Trulku Drakpa Gyeltsen *qua* Dorjé Shukden later incarnated as “the great Lord Mañjughoṣa Emperor Nās ral thu.” The “Mañjuśrī” Manchu ruler referenced here is the Yongzhen Emperor (Ch. 雍正; Tib. *Nā'i ral thu*, Mong. *Nairaltu Töb*, r. 1723–1736), perhaps not coincidentally the emperor responsible for consolidating Qing administrative control in both Tibet (where he installed an *amban* after the 1727–1728 civil war) and the Khalkha Mongolia homelands of Minjüür Dorj and Zava Damdin.

In this way, for Zava Damdin Damdin and his milieu in Dashchoijorlin during 1919, the Qing-Géluk formation to which they were heir had been a product of the enlightened intervention of Mañjuśrī, in sequences arising from Panchen Sönam Drakpa, Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen, and Dorjé Shukden, and in scholastic cultures that had flourished far outside the fold of the political centralization of the Ganden Potrang regime in Central Tibet. But it was not only the Qing-Géluk formation that had coalesced in part through Shukden’s intervention, but also the settlement and centralization of Yeke-yin Küriye (Ulaanbaatar) as a major scholastic and pilgrimage center in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Drawing on the oral traditions of his early twentieth century scholastic college, Zava Damdin writes “It is said that there is evidence that later, [Dorjé Shukden] incarnated in the northerly land of the Mongols and stayed for the purpose of [benefiting the teachings and beings]”.⁴⁷ Zava Damdin

⁴⁶ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a: 399.

⁴⁷ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a: 399. In a forthcoming article I examine the role that Dorjé Shukden is said to have played in the settling of Yeke-yin Küriye in the early nineteenth century, especially in relation to the life of the fourth and fifth Jebtsundambas and the great

continues introducing the catalogue of histories, biographies, and rituals that he has organized into the Shukden teaching cycle by noting how instrumental Shukden's intervention was for Agvangqayidub (Tib. *Ngag dbang mkhas grub*, 1779–1838), a scholastic and abbot who acted as chief architect of the centralization and standardization of Géluk scholastic culture in Yeke-yin Küriye (Ulaanbaatar) in the early nineteenth century, just as Dashchoijorlin was founded.

In this way, for Zava Damdin and his Dashchoijorlin milieu in 1919, Dorjé Shukden organizes the historical and spatial imagination of not only the well-spring of their college's scholastic tradition, and not only of the enlightened imperial patronage of the Qing state, but also the production of the monastic city of Yeke-yin Küriye as the "Second Lhasa," or sometimes even the "Second Bodhgaya," of the Mongols. Dorjé Shukden is here shorthand for another, grander source and form of authority: the enlightened status and scholastic pedigree of Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, whose writings and monastic textbooks (*yig cha*) were central to scholastic life at Dashchoijorlin in 1919, just as they are today in its revived post-socialist curriculum. For this community at the Khalkha crossroads, the figure of Dorjé Shukden represents the extended domain of Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, via his incarnation Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen, bolstered by the Qing but outside the violent erasures and aberrations of the political institution of the Ganden Potrang Government (and thus embodying the acceptable pre-existing forms of authority within the Géluk tradition as embodied in the Zimgön Trülkü line, and the acceptable later forms of authority embodied in the Qing imperial formation and its patronage of the Géluk tradition).

Indeed, as was recognized by Zava Damdin and milieu, Shukden/Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen's previous incarnations had acted as founder or abbots for the great seats of the Géluk tradition – Séra, Drépung, and Ganden monasteries – and had been elected as Holder of the Ganden Throne (Tib. *Dga' ldan khri pa*), an institution of elected leadership that succeeds the authority of Tsongkhapa, who never inaugurated a trülkü lineage and who never knew the Dalai Lama institution. Shukden, a supramundane protector and emanation of Mañjuśrī via Pañchen Sönam Drakpa, is from this Khalkha vantage in 1919 simply the wrathful extension of the authority and influence of Pañchen Sönam Drakpa within the trans-Asian worlds of Géluk scholastic culture. As Zava Damdin writes in the closing lines of his introduction to the teaching cycle of Dorjé Shukden: "this great Protector of the Teachings himself is arisen from the

urban designer of Mongolia's monastic city who is credited with bringing Shukden lineages to Khalkha, the Küriye abbot Ngawang Khédrup (Tib. *Ngag dbang mkhas grub*; Mong. *Agvangqayidub*, 1779–1838).

unthinkable drama of the secrets of the holy body, speech, and mind of the Supreme Panchen. From among the state of affairs (*gna pa'i tshul*) of the meaning of well-known, exceedingly great ferocity and all the swift, very powerful buddha activities, here I have provided just a few illustrative examples".⁴⁸

4 Conclusion

While many Tibetan Studies scholars have gone into print amplifying the evolving Government in Exile position, a few notable studies from the time of the 1996 ban looked critically to history rather than weighing in on the status of buddhas and demons. Donald Lopez, for example, argued that the modern Shukden schism is rooted in a conflict between modernist and clan-based understandings of tradition. In this version, the conflict is between the Dalai Lama's modernist interpretations of what rationalized Buddhist self-cultivation ought to entail and enduring, superstitious traditions and proclivities towards cultish propitiation of invisible, clan-marking deities.⁴⁹ Against this view, Georges Dreyfus insists that the propitiation of Shukden is not ancestral, but "a relatively recent invention of tradition associated with the revival movement within the Geluk spearheaded by Pabongkha (1878–1941)".⁵⁰ For Dreyfus the Dalai Lama's position is hardly derived from an anti-protector modernist rationale, but from competing allegiances to other protective deities, especially Néchung "who is said to resent Shukden".⁵¹ Lindsay McCune, within the limited confines of an (exemplary) Master's thesis, delved deeper into the ample seventeenth century historical evidence to better illuminate the competing interests that brought the milieu of Trülku Drakpa Gyeltsen and the Fifth Dalai Lama into such (allegedly) murderous conflict.⁵² Martin Mills has contributed historical and ethnographic clarity by examining the post-1996 divestments from Shukden in Ladakhi and Zanskari Geluk communities and in the particular contortions of human rights discourse and trans-Himalaya tantric fraternities that accompanies the current schism in the state-less Tibetan exile community.⁵³

⁴⁸ Blo bzang rta mgrin 1975a: 399.

⁴⁹ Lopez 1998.

⁵⁰ Dreyfus 2005: 3.

⁵¹ Dreyfus 2005: 3.

⁵² McCune 2007.

⁵³ Mills 2009.

To my knowledge, all scholarship on the Shukden schism and all contemporary pro-and anti-Shukden polemics trace the history of the Shukden tradition to early twentieth century Lhasa, and specifically, to the life and career of Pabongkha Déchen Nyingpo, his guru Takpu Pémavajra, and to his many influential disciples who took over leadership of Géluk institutions in exile and in Europe and North America. For anti-Shukden polemicists and historians, it was in this Lhasa-derived milieu that Shukden was elevated inappropriately and without precedent from a minor local worldly deity to the personification of enlightenment itself, inaugurating a great coup of protective forces within the Lhasa Géluk establishment that threatened at once the authority of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and his state oracle, Néchung. A characteristic historical summary of this standard historical picture comes from a recent work published by Wisdom Publications that translates the extended arguments of the exiled Géluk leadership in order to persuade English reading audiences about the pitfalls of Shukden-related practice:

For many years, Shukden was propitiated by individuals within the Sakya and Geluk traditions. There was never much ritualistic propitiation in monastic assemblies, and consequently the practice remained low-key. It was only when the charismatic Geluk Lama Phabongkha Rinpoche (1878–1941) enthusiastically adopted Shukden as the exclusive protector and guardian of Tsongkhapa's legacy in the form of the Geluk tradition that his name and practice became widespread. This attracted the criticism of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thupten Gyatso (1876–1933), who attempted to put a stop to it.⁵⁴

Alongside this entrenched historical position is an ontological one: that until the innovations of Pabongkha, Shukden was never considered a “supramundane [enlightened] protector” (Tib. *thun mong ma yin pa'i chos bsrung ma*) of the Géluk school nor a manifestation of Trülkü Drakpa Gyeltsen, who was in any case a rather dull and unimportant monk who died from natural causes while in good standing with the Fifth Dalai Lama.

Without needing to test this polemical version of history by looking at the many examples of ritual traditions focused upon the “supramundane protector” Dorjé Shukden from before Pabongkha that flourished far from Lhasa, this position is troubled by the work of Joona Repo, who has read Pabongkha's works in their religious and social context to fascinating effect and concluded that very little of the traditions promoted in Pabongkha's works were innovative at all, other than in their systematic clarity. He argues persuasively, for example, that “it is clear that Pabongkha himself only wrote the basic texts of the [Shukden] practice, drawing from an already existent tradition.”⁵⁵ He notes as

⁵⁴ Kilty/Rgyal-spyi'i Dge-ldan Lhan-tshogs (2019: xv–xvi).

⁵⁵ Repo 2015: 38.

well just how late the now standard Shukden traditions associated with Pabongkha were set into print: “[Pabongkha] never promoted Shugden as the sole protector of Tsongkhapa’s tradition. If he had truly put tremendous importance on the diffusion of the practice, it could be argued that he would have composed far more texts himself over the years, instead of leaving a large amount of the work to his student [...] *The Melodious Drum* was composed in the mid-to late-1920s and the life entrustment ritual text resulted from Phabongkha’s meeting with Tagphu Dorjechang in Nagshoe in 1935. Out of the Shugden works that he himself composed, the middling fulfillment ritual was composed in 1930 and *The Victory Banner Thoroughly Victorious in All Directions*, was composed in 1939, not long before Phabongkha’s death. It is clear that Phabongkha himself only wrote the basic texts of the practice, drawing from an already existent tradition”.⁵⁶

One of those extant traditions seems to have been connected with the eighteenth century Géluk master Nyongné Yéshé Zangpo (Tib. *Smyong gnas ye shes bzang po*, also known by his Sanskrit name *Jñānabhadra*), who lived south of Lhasa and composed several works to the five families of Dorjé Shukden extensively describing the deity’s mandala that are still used in the standard long liturgy. We will recall that Zava Damdin writes that he received the full initiation and transmission of the Shukden cycle in 1919 from a later incarnation of Nyongné: was there any connection between this Nyongné incarnate and the Lhasa milieu of Pabongkha? Further research is required to clarify connections, though it is worth noting the extent to which Nyongné Yéshé Zangpo has influenced the Tibetan Studies literature on Shukden: it is this eighteenth century lama’s Shukden works which are referenced and reproduced by René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz as a primary source in the Shukden chapter of his 1956 *Oracles and Demons of Tibet; the Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*.⁵⁷

The Khalkha materials introduced above add another challenge to the Lhasa-and-Pabongkha-centric version of the genesis of the Dorjé Shukden tradition, which has too often been repeated without critical historical research by those in Tibetan Studies. In this milieu from Dashchoijorling in 1919, the so-called “fundamentalist” “innovations” usually attributed to Pabongkha, his guru, and his immediate disciples by anti-Shukden factions are all on full display some two decades earlier and 2500 kilometers away. For Zava Damdin and company, Shukden was the incarnation of Trülku Drakpa Gyaltsen. He was also considered an “uncommon supramundane protector of the Géluk school.” A

⁵⁶ Repo 2015: 38.

⁵⁷ Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996.

rich ritual tradition associated with Shukden and founded in the memory of Trülku Drakpa Gyeltsen and Pañchen Sönam Drakpa had been practiced in this community since the early nineteenth century re-settlement of Yeke-yin Küriye as the major Géluk monastic site in northern Inner Asia.

What's more, while the allegation that the Fifth Dalai Lama was not the true incarnation is mentioned, and while the latter is briefly characterized negatively for mixing "old and new traditions," the remainder of Zava Damdin's fifteen-folio narrative introduction to the Dorjé Shukden teaching cycle is focused on matters historical quite specific to the making of the Géluk-Qing formation from its Mongol frontier. For Zava Damdin, Minjüür Dorj, and Darva Pañdita, Dorjé Shukden traditions illuminated an historical vision of scholastic transmission tied to Panchen Sönam Drakpa and patronized by the Qing imperial formation. The reason for such an historical interest is clear: in 1919 (as today), Dashchoijurlin used the works of Panchen Sönam Drakpa as their monastic textbook (*yig cha*). By then Dashchoijorling had since its founding a century earlier propitiated Dorjé Shukden, considered by them to be Sönam Drakpa's later incarnation, as one of the uncommon and supramundane protectors of their monastic college (along with Palden Lhamo) as a defining feature of their institution *viz a viz* Yeke-yin Küriye's other two monastic colleges.⁵⁸

With these Khalkha sources in mind, I submit a new historical perspective on the historical roots of the Shukden tradition and its current schism (and by this, on the social and intellectual history of the late-and post-imperial Géluk tradition). Quite beyond Lhasa-based intrigues of the 1930s and 1940s, the Dorjé Shukden tradition developed within (and helped to organize) certain streams in the eastward and northward expansion of Géluk scholastic culture, well beyond the limited sovereignty of even the few long-lived and powerful Dalai Lamas. In these margins (that understood themselves in time as important scholastic centers) Shukden lineages had little to do with open-ended questions concerning gods or ghosts, buddhas or demons, attacking other Inner Asian Buddhist traditions or directing vengeful violence against those departing the Géluk fold. At issue was elevating scholastic authorities such as Pañchen Sönam Drakpa and of solidifying trans-regional scholastic identities, institutions, and education in local constellations of space, history, and power tied intimately to the Qing. Whatever else they may have been or become, Shukden traditions helped make the Géluk from and for its vast late-imperial frontiers. Is it any wonder that they continue to do so today, as either the "Taliban" or "Jews" of the battered, globalized Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist world?

⁵⁸ For surveys of the scholastic scene in Yeke-yin Küriye, see: de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996.

Appendix: List of Texts Compiled in Zava Damdin's Dorjé Shukden *Bé-bum*

[400] -*Kha che pañ chen sha kya srī bha dra'i mam thar gsol bdebs.*

[401]-*Tshigs bcad sum cu rtsa bdun pa khro phu lo tsā pa (sic) byams pa'i dpal gyis mdzad pa 'grel pa mam thar gsal pa'i me long dang bcas pa.*

-*Jam dbyangs bla ma smra ba'i se ng+ge pañ chen bsod nams grags pa'i dpal rnām dpyod mchog gi sde'i mam thar ngo mtshar rmad byung dad pa'i rol rtsed bya bral lha dbang rgya mtshos mdzad pa.*

-*Mkhas shing grub pa'i dbang phyug chen po pañ chen bsod nams grags pa'i rnām thar gsol 'debs dad pa'i rol mtsho rgyas byed ngag gi char sprin tā khu ral gyi mkhan chen ngag dbang mkhas grub kyis mdzad pa.*

-*Pañ chen bsod nams grags pa la bstod pa'i rab tu byed pa mkhas pa'i mgrin rgyan mdo smad kīrti sprul sku blo bzang 'phrin las kyis mdzad pa.*

-*Mchog gi sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan la skyes pa'i rabs kyi sgo nas gsol ba 'debs pa'i rim pa pañ chen kun zigs blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyis mdzad pa.*

-*Sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi sku bstod dang 'brel ba'i zhabs brtan gsol 'debs pañ chen thams cad mkhyen pa blo bzang ye shes kyis mdzad pa.*

-*Sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi 'khrungs rab gsol 'debs blo bzang rgyal kun ma rgyal bstān bsrung byed ba+dzra shugs ldan rtsal gyis gnas mchog chos gling du bka' rtsom gnang ba.*

-*Bstan 'gro'i dpal mgon mnga' ris mchog sprul rin po che'i 'khrungs rabs zhabs brtan gsol 'debs skyor lung mkhan po bskal bzang sprul skus mdzad pa.*

-*Sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan sngon byung 'khrungs rabs dang bcas pa'i rnām thar dza ya pañdita blo bzang 'phrin las kyi gsan yig nag nas du bkod.*

-*Sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi thun mong ma yin pa'i rtogs brjod [402] rin chen za ma tog rje rang nyid kyis chos rje snying stobs rgya mtsho sogs la gnang ba.*

-*Sprul sku grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi ma 'ongs lung bstān gyi rim pa gsang mdzod zur bkod nang gses le tshan bcu yod pa.*

-*Rgyal ba'i bstān bsrung chen po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi byung tshul mdo tsam mrjod pa pad dkar chun po mchog sprul ma ti'i mtshan can gyis dpal ldan 'bras spungs su mdzad pa.*

-*Rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal rta nag can gyi bskang 'phrin log 'dren tshang gcod sa skya bdag chen ngag dbang kun dga' blo gros kyis mdzad pa.*

-*Rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi gsol kha 'phrin las 'dod 'jo mngon rtogs spyan 'dren bskang bshags bstod pa tshogs 'khor gser skyems mnga' gsol cha tshang stod cha rmams dre'u ltas pa dang smad cha rmams rmor chen gyis mdzad pa.*

-Rgyal pa'i (sic) bstan bsrung chen po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal la mchod gtor 'bul tshul dam can dgyes pa'i mchod sprin rgyal sras rdo rje 'chang bskal bzang thub bstan 'jig med bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan gyis mdzad pa.

-Bstan bsrung rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gtso bor byas pa'i spyi'i bsangs mchod 'dod dgur 'khyil ba'i dga' ston rgyal sras rdo rje 'chang gis mdzad pa.

-Rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan gyi gtor 'bul skyabs mgon rje btsun dam pa blo bzang thub bstan dbang phyug 'jig med rgya mtshos mdzad pa.

-Rgyal ba'i bstan bsrung chen po rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi gtor chog rgyas pa mchod bstod bskang bskul mnga' gsol sogs cha tshang ba las bzhi'i dbang mdzod brag ri rdo rje 'chang rgya mtsho mtha' yas kyis mdzad pa.

-Bstan bsrung rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi gtor chog bsdus pa dam can dgyes pa'i mchod sprin las bzhi lhun grub/ de'i cha lag tshogs mchod [403] 'bul tshul rgyal chen dgyes pa'i 'dzum zhal/ gser skyems 'bul tshul/ gtang rag 'bul tshul/ gshegs gtor 'bul tshul/ gtor 'bul ka dag bde chen ma dang bcas pa mkhas dbang rab 'byams smra ba ngag dbang thub bstan gyis mdzad pa.

-Jam mgon rgyal ba'i bstan srung mthu ldan dgra lha'i rgyal chen yongs kyi gtso bo srid gsum skye 'gro kun gyi srog bdag sprul pa'i chos skyong rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan rab 'jigs drag po rtsal sku lnga'i skor bskang rgyas pa dga' ldan bstan srung sdang dgra tshar gcod ma mal 'byor dbang phyug bzhi sde smyung gnas bla ma ye shes bzang pos mdzad pa.

-De'i gsung gras chos skyong chen rdo rje shugs ldan la 'phrin las bcol ba mthu stobs drag rtsal gnas lcags thog 'bebs/ rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan gyi rten mdos kyi cho ga/ rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal gyi 'phrin bcol bstan srung dgyes byed tri bo skyab smgon blo bzang tshul khirms bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan gyis mdzad pa.

-Bstan srung chen po rdo rje shugs ldan 'bar ba rtsal gyi bskang 'phrin mdor bsdus bya tshul las bzhi'i 'phrin las 'gugs pa'i myur mgyogs 'phrul gyi pho nya ser sngags mkhan chen ram mkha' bstan skyong gis mdzad pa.

-Sprul pa'i chos skyong rgyal chen rdo rje shugs ldan rtsal chen po'i bskang 'phrin sbyor dngos cha tshang dge ldan bstan pa'i dbu 'phangs stod byed khams gsum zil gyis gnon pa'i dbyangs rnya lha sdings rgyal sras bskal bzang bstan 'dzin mkhas grub kyis mdzad pa.

-Bstan srung rdo rje shugs ldan gyi rjes gnang bya tshul 'phrin las lhun grub mdo smad kī+rti mchog sprul blo bzang 'phrin las kyis mdzad pa

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