

SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF THREE TIBETAN LAMAS  
AND THEIR ACTIVITIES IN SIKKIM<sup>1</sup>

THE 14<sup>TH</sup> DALAI LAMA

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His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama—a human form of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who is the embodiment of the compassion of all of the buddhas—is the spiritual and temporal leader of the people of Tibet. He was born on 6 July 1935 (Buddha era 2479)<sup>2</sup> in a small village called sTag 'tsher<sup>3</sup> near sKu 'bum in the province of A mdo. His father's name was Chos skyong tshe ring and his mother's name was bSod nams mtsho mo. At his birth, there were many auspicious signs.

At the age of four, he was recognised, in accordance with Tibetan tradition, as the reincarnation of his predecessor, the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Thub bstan rgya mtsho (1876-1933), and was invited to come to Lhasa. When he was four and a half years old, he was enthroned at the Potala palace with great ceremony.

From the age of six, he studied the five major and the five minor fields of knowledge, especially Buddhist doctrinal studies. As a result, by the time he was 24 years old, he had become a great scholar.

In 1950, at age 16, he assumed responsibility for both the political and the religious leadership of Tibet.

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<sup>1</sup> This work is based on sources found in the library of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, oral sources, and documents listed in the bibliography. I deeply apologise for any mistake that may be present; all errors remain my own.

<sup>2</sup> Indian and Tibetan scholars, using different systems, give differing dates for the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, but here we follow the system of the Sri Lankan Theravāda school, one of the four main schools of Hinayāna Buddhism, the system that is most commonly accepted in the modern world (624-544 B.C.E.).

<sup>3</sup> In the Tibetan division of three provinces (dBus gtsang, mDo stod, and mDo smad), sTag 'tsher is situated in the mDo smad province, also known as A mdo, in northeastern Tibet.

In 1959, at the time of the Great Prayer Festival in Lhasa, he passed his oral examinations and earned the *dGe bshes lha ram* degree. That same year, the Chinese occupied Tibet, and for the benefit of the Tibetan people, he went into exile on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March. He arrived in the Bomdila district of the state of Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March.

Now we will focus on the relationship between previous Dalai Lamas and Sikkim.

There are two accounts of the enthronement of the first Chos rgyal of Sikkim. According to one, in 1642, when the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682), became the religious and political leader of Tibet, he established the dGa' ldan pho brang government. That same year, mNga' bdag sems dpa'i chen po Phun tshogs rig 'dzin (1592-1656), one of the patron saints of Sikkim, enthroned Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (1604-1669) at Yug sam nor bu khang (in what is now West Sikkim) as Chos rgyal. This is the most popular account among the Sikkimese.

But, according to a different account, in 1646, the three lamas of Sikkim met together at Yug bsam and enthroned the king. Whichever account you accept, the strong relationship between the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and Sikkim remains evident.

As per the collected works of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama<sup>4</sup> and the *Thang lha'i lung bstan* in the *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub*, lHa btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med (1597-1652) went to 'Bras spungs monastery in Central Tibet and there performed for the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama the long-life ceremony based on the *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub*, the Sikkimese visionary text. He made marvelous offerings of earth, stones, wood, etc., from Sikkim as well as the first print of the text of the *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub*. He empowered the Dalai Lama as custodian of the [*Rig 'dzin srog sgrub*] teachings, and, in return, the Great 5<sup>th</sup> empowered him as custodian of these same teachings.

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<sup>4</sup> The following sources have been used while compiling the histories of the Dalai Lamas, from the Great 5<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup>:

mKhan po lha tshe ring 2002: 79-80, 116-117, 143-144, 147 and 151  
 Lha btsun nam mkha' 'jigs med *Rig 'zin srog sgrub*, item Gi, folios, 3-4  
 bKra shis Tshe ring 2003: 27  
 mKhan po chos dbang 2003: 125-27 and 235  
 mKhas btsun bzang po 1973: 619-633, 666  
 Lachung Lama Jigme Namgyal 2000: 10

At the time of the enthronement of the 1<sup>st</sup> Chos rgyal, Phun tshogs rnam rgyal, the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama formally recognised him as Chos rgyal, and sent a decree, stamped with his official seal and accompanied by a ceremonial scarf, commending him as praiseworthy. In addition, he sent as gifts a hat that was a discovered hidden treasure, a statue of Guru Rinpoche, and Guru Rinpoche's highly blessed flaming dagger.

In 1660, the 2<sup>nd</sup> lHa btsun chen po (1656-1675) was, at the request of the lama Chos dbyings lhun grub, given the long-life ceremony by the Great 5<sup>th</sup>. At the haircutting ceremony, he was given the name *Ngag dbang kun bzang 'jigs med*. In addition, he received from the Dalai Lama the long-life initiation of Thang stong rgyal po. In 1661, he received the initiation of the Northern Treasure (*byang gter*) Mind Sādhana and the oral transmissions of the *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub* from the Great 5<sup>th</sup>. In 1674, the Dalai Lama presented him with the monastic seat called Pho brang thar pa gling. The next year, because of the low merit of sentient beings, the 2<sup>nd</sup> lHa btsun chen po passed away. In 1676, the Dalai Lama offered the aspiration prayer at the one-year memorial ritual service, and composed a prayer for the rapid continuation of the lineage by rebirth.

In 1682, the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, just before he passed away, recognised a child of the Zur khang family in the Shangs district of gTsang as the reincarnation of Ngag dbang kun bzang 'jigs med, the 2<sup>nd</sup> lHa btsun. He also issued an order that the boy be sent to rDzogs chen monastery for his continuing training in the teachings of the lHa btsun lineage.

Thus, the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama established extraordinary teacher-disciple relationships with the first three incarnations of the lHa btsun lineage.

In 1697, at the age of 16, the 3<sup>rd</sup> lHa btsun chen po, 'Khrag 'thung 'jigs med dpa' bo (1682-?), received the haircutting ceremony in the presence of the 6<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Rig 'dzin Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho (1683-1706), and was given the name *Blo bzang rdo rje*.

In the eighteenth century, during the reign of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chos rgyal of Sikkim, Phyag rdor rnam rgyal (1686-1717), Sikkim was invaded several times by the neighboring country Bhutan. Finally, the Chos rgyal, along with the royal family, went into exile in Lhasa. At that time, he requested help from the 6<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, as a result of which he completed his studies of accounting at the Tibetan government accounting office as well as other fields of study. His Holiness, out of consideration for the Chos rgyal's renown in education, and thinking him an extraordinary person, appointed him as the chief accountant of the government of Tibet.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, sKal bzang rgya mtsho (1708-1757), conducted the haircutting ceremony for the 4<sup>th</sup> IHa btsun chen po, who was born in 1741, and gave him the name *Kun bzang 'jigs med rgya mtsho*. According to a different account, the name *Kun bzang 'jigs med rgya mtsho* was his novice monk name.

In the 1870s, during the time of the British intervention in Sikkim, the 9<sup>th</sup> Sikkimese Chos rgyal, Mthu stobs rnam rgyal (1860-1914), was staying at Gro mo in Gtsang, intending to take a second wife. At that time, the ministers of Sikkim made repeated requests to the Lieutenant General of Bengal for a few elephants, which they wished to offer to the Dalai Lama.<sup>5</sup> Several high-ranking Sikkimese officers went to Lhasa with the elephants and offered them to the Dalai Lama.

In 1903,<sup>6</sup> during the time of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Thub bstan rgya mtsho,<sup>7</sup> a rNying ma pa master, the treasure-revealer named Zhwa de'u 'Phrul zhig bde chen 'od gsal mdo sngags gling pa (end of nineteenth century to beginning of twentieth century), was sent to Sikkim by the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama for the sake of the religious and secular welfare of Tibet. bSe sgrub gdung 'dzin mKhyen brtse rig pa'i rdo rje (1880-1938) also came to Sikkim as 'Phrul zhig Rinpoche's attendant. He visited all of the corners of Sikkim, including bKra shis lding monastery, and performed rituals, built mchod rten, and conducted other religious activities. In addition, he did extensive renovations to the Mthong ba rang grol mchod rten at bKra shis lding, which had been damaged in an earthquake, and wrote a catalog of that mchod rten. While he was at bKra shis lding, he also revealed the *Kun bzang thugs thig*, a hidden treasure text. On his arrival in Sikkim, he was welcomed by the 9<sup>th</sup> Chos rgyal, Thub bstan rnam rgyal. He also made a religious tour of pilgrimage sites of Sikkim with the Prince and Princess of Sikkim.

In 1912, mKhyen brtse Rig pa'i rdo rje visited Sikkim. In accordance with the wishes and instructions of the government of His

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<sup>5</sup> It is not clear from the date whether this means the 12th Dalai Lama, Phrin las rgya mtsho, or the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Thub bstan rgya mtsho.

<sup>6</sup> This date is as per the biography of 'Phrul zhig rin po che in mKhas btsun bzang po rin po che's *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet & Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. 619-633. According to the biography of bSe sgrub gdung 'dzin rig pa'i rdo rje in the same book, p. 666, they visited in 1906.

<sup>7</sup> During that time, there were disturbances in Lhasa involving the Manchu Ambans. Seeing this, the Dalai Lama sent these masters to Sikkim for the benefit of the Tibetan state.

Holiness, he performed rituals and built a mchod rten in each of the four sacred sites of Sikkim.

Thus, it can be seen that there have been many religious relationships between the Dalai Lamas and the Chos rgyals and religious leaders of Sikkim.

In general, it is known from the many annals of Sikkim that, at the political level, the dGa' ldan pho brang government, under the leadership of successive Dalai Lamas from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup>, has maintained a strong relationship with the government of Sikkim—protecting it from invasions by Nepal, Bhutan, etc., mediating conflicts with other governments, and helping to maintain peaceful relations between countries.

Thus, there had been continuous, unbroken goodwill between the previous Dalai Lamas and Sikkim. Reflecting on this, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, bsTan 'dzin rgya mtsho, visited Sikkim four times in order to maintain that relationship between the two states.

In November of 1956, the Dalai Lama was invited by the Mahabodhi Society of India on the occasion of the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*. At that time, the Prince of Sikkim came to Lhasa especially to invite the Dalai Lama. His Holiness travelled from Lhasa through gZhis ka rtse and Gro mo chu 'bi, then crossed the border at Nathula. He was met there by a delegate of the Indian government as well as by the Prince of Sikkim, and was given a great welcoming reception. That night, he stayed at Tsongo. The next day, he left for Gangtok and arrived at the Royal Palace.

After attending the celebration in Delhi and making a tour of Indian pilgrimage sites, including the four holy sites of the Buddha, he intended to return to Tibet by way of Sikkim, but the pass at Nathula was blocked by snow for almost a month, so he had to remain in Sikkim. He stayed at the Royal Palace as guest of the Indian central government and the government of Sikkim.

During his stay at Gangtok, on 10 February 1957, the Dalai Lama blessed the building site and laid the cornerstone for the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology (now the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology). The idea had originally come from Prince Lama Dpal ldan Don grub nam rgyal of Sikkim (1923-1982), who, in 1953 or 1954, had had the idea of establishing a library and cultural institute for Indian and Tibetan studies. At that time, his father, Chos rgyal bKra shis nam rgyal, had also given his permission for the establishment of such an institute. His Holiness, at the time of the bestowing of the

blessings, also donated a set of valuable books and other religious articles, which were valued at nearly two lakhs rupees.<sup>8</sup>

His Holiness visited Sikkim again in 1981, between 16 October and 26 October. During that time, he gave teachings on the 37 bodhisattva practices, Avalokiteśvara initiations, and a sermon in English at Paljor Namgyal Stadium. On 20 October, he consecrated the site of a monastery (now called dGon byang O rgyan mdo sngags chos 'khor gling) proposed to be constructed by the Venerable Ting nge dgon byang Rinpoche at Phenlong Phatak, a few kilometres from Gangtok. On the same day, he visited Sa ngor monastery at Rongnyi and gave a sermon based on the 8000-verse *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (*brgyad stong pa*). On his way to the monastery, he blessed the ceremonial rice to be sprinkled over the bDe chen gling cremation ground. Then he visited dBen can monastery (gSang sngags rab brtan gling) and the Enchey School. On 21 October, he visited the Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, where he said prayers and praised the role played by the institute in preserving and propagating Buddhist philosophy and culture.

On 22 October, His Holiness gave a talk at the Tibetan refugee settlement at Ravangla in South Sikkim. He also visited and delivered sermons in West Sikkim, at the southern cave of the four supreme caves of the four cardinal directions, bKra shis lding, which is considered to be the centre of this hidden land, and Gsang chen Padma yangs rtse, the premier monastery of Sikkim. During that time, he also held audiences with the governor of Sikkim, the chief minister, cabinet ministers, and other high-ranking officials of the state government. On the morning of 26 October, he visited Rum btegs monastery, the seat of the 16<sup>th</sup> rGyal dbang Karma pa (1924-1981), in East Sikkim. Then, in the evening, he left Sikkim for Kalimpong, West Bengal.

In March of 1993, he again visited Sikkim on the invitation of the government of Sikkim. Just before he reached the capital, Gangtok, he visited bKra shis lding monastery in West Sikkim, where he led the five-day performance of the *tshogs 'bum* (one-lakh feast offering) ritual based on the *Bla ma rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* of the Northern Treasure tradition. After completion of the ritual at bKra shis lding, on the way Gangtok, he went to South Sikkim, where he paid a special visit to the

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<sup>8</sup> This figure is taken from Tibetan sources. However, according to the pamphlet, 'Establishment of Namgyal Institute of Tibetology: Documents and Speeches' (Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 1961), p. 9, the total value was 40,000 rupees.

Bon monastery called Bon po zhu ri zhing g.yung drung kun grags gling and visited the Tibetan refugee settlement named Kun phan gling in Ravangla, where he gave a teaching and advice to the people. Then, in Gangtok, at Paljor Stadium, he gave the eighteenth Kālacakra initiation—including instructions on the preliminary teachings of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and White Tārā long-life initiations—to hundreds of devotees, monks, and laypeople. During this visit, he met and had discussions with the governor and the chief minister of Sikkim.

On 21 October 1997, at the special invitation of the state government, His Holiness again set foot in South Sikkim at Namtse, and on that same day gave advice to local residents at the grounds at Aletar. On the morning of 22 October, along with his attendants, he left Namtse for Samdruptse, where he blessed the site and laid the foundation for the 130-foot Guru Rinpoche statue that was to be built by the state government. This Guru Rinpoche statue is known as the highest one in the world. After that, he visited and made a detailed inspection of the Tibetan refugee settlement at Ravangla in South Sikkim. On the morning of 23 October, he gave the long-life, Hayagrīva, Vajrapāṇi, and Garuḍa initiations as well as the scriptural transmissions for the Śākyamuni mantra, etc. That evening, he laid the foundation for the Thonmi Sambhota School for Tibetan near Gangtok and gave advice and teachings to the Tibetan people. On the morning of 24 October, he gave special teachings to the high-ranking officers of the state government at Tashi Namgyal Academy auditorium.

At the joint request of the eight Buddhist associations of Sikkim and six Tibetan organisations of Gangtok, His Holiness paid a week-long visit to Sikkim on 20 April 2005. For three days, beginning on 21 April, thousands of devotees thronged the Guards Ground in Gangtok to receive his teachings on the Great Perfection text called *Relaxation of Mind Itself* (*rDzogs pa chen po sems nyid ngal gso*) written by Klong chen rab 'byams, the renowned Tibetan Buddhist master of the rNying ma pa tradition, and gave long-life initiations based on the *Bla ma rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* according to the Northern Treasure tradition. On the morning of 24 April, he visited the Tibetan refugee settlement at Ravangla in South Sikkim and gave advice and teachings to the Tibetan people and local residents. In the afternoon, he proceeded to Samdruptse near Namchi and performed the consecration of the recently constructed Guru Rinpoche statue, for which he had laid the foundation in 1997, and led the performance of the short ritual offering with the head lamas and monks of Mnga' bdag monastery. After that,

he gave a public talk at Bhaichung Stadium. During that visit, he held an audience with and gave teachings to the governor V. Rama Rao, the chief minister Dr. Pawan Kumar Chamling, the cabinet ministers, and high-ranking officials of the state government.

At the Chintan Bhavan, at Namrang in Gangtok, His Holiness gave a talk in English on ‘Compassion and Universal Responsibility’, followed by a short question-and-answer period, and advice to the state administration. In attendance were His Excellency the Governor of Sikkim Shri V. Rama Rao, Honorable Chief Minister Dr. Pawan Chamling, his cabinet colleagues, and a large number of intellectuals and officials of the state government. He also performed the inauguration of Ser byes ‘Gro phan gling monastery,’<sup>9</sup> one of the three premier monasteries of the dGe lugs pa<sup>10</sup> tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which is situated in Chandmari, Bod lha sol sa, near Gangtok. This monastery is the only one in Sikkim belonging to the dGe lugs pa order,<sup>11</sup> the lineage of the great lama Tsong kha pa.

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<sup>9</sup> The Gro phan gling monastery is a branch of the Se ra byes mkhas snyan grwa tshang, which is one of the leading universities of Tibetan Buddhist studies. The monastery was inaugurated, blessed, and consecrated by H.H. the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama on 26 April 2005.

<sup>10</sup> The three great dGe lugs pa monasteries (*gdan sa gsum*) are: (1) ‘Bras spungs, located west of Lhasa, founded in 1416 by ‘Jams dbyangs chos rje bKra shis dpal ldan (1379-1449). Earlier there were seven monastic colleges, but there are presently two principal colleges, Blo gsal gling and sGo mang. In exile, it has been relocated to Mundgod, Karnataka, India. The Dalai Lama is the monastery’s main incarnate lama. (2) Se ra, located north of Lhasa, founded in 1419 by Byams chen chos rje Shākya ye shes (1354-1435). Presently, it is divided into an upper and a lower monastic college, commonly known as Se ra byes and Se ra smad. In exile, it has been relocated to Byalakuppe, Mysore, Karnataka, India. (3) dGa’ ldan, located east of Lhasa, founded in 1409 by Rje Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357-1419), founder of the dGe lugs pa order. dGa’ ldan has two main monastic colleges, Shar rtse and Byang rtse. In exile, it has been relocated to Mundgod, Karnataka, India. The dGa’ ldan khri pa, who is appointed on the basis of ability, not incarnation, is the lineal successor of Tsong kha pa and the head of the dGe lugs pa school.

<sup>11</sup> The dGe lugs pa order was founded by the great master rJe Tsong kha pa bLo bzang brags pa (1357-1419) in the early fifteenth century as a revitalisation of the great Indian paṇḍita Atīśa’s (982-1054) bKa’ gdams pa tradition. The dGe lugs pa sūtra tradition, which is carried on at the three great monasteries of Se ra, ‘Bras spungs, and dGa’ ldan, is based on the study of the five great classes of philosophy texts (*gzhung chen sde lnga*): (1) the perfection of wisdom (*phar phyin*), (2) the middle way (*dbu ma*), (3) logic and epistemology (*tshad ma*), (4) monastic discipline (*‘dul ba*), and (5) metaphysics (*mdzod*). The tantra tradition, which is carried on at the Upper Tantric College (*rgyud stod*)—which is now located in Dharamsala, India—and the Lower Tantric College (*rgyud smad*)—which is now located in Hunsur,



Thus, His Holiness, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, wishing to sustain the accomplishments and goodwill established by his predecessors, and for the spiritual development of his fortunate followers, visited this hidden land four times out of his unlimited kindness. At present, he abides as the nature of Amitāyus, buddha of longevity, expanding the Buddha's teachings in this universe.

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Karnataka, India—is based on three principal cycles of tantric texts and deities: (1) Guhyasamāja (*gsang ba 'dus pa*), (2) Cakrasamvara (*'khor lo bde mchog*), and (3) Vajrabhairava (*rdo rje 'jigs byed*). In India, the dGe lugs pa tradition is continued under the leadership of the dGa' ldan khri pa, the throneholder of rJe Tsong kha pa's lineage.

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