Tracing the *Chol kha gsum*: Reexamining a Sa skya-Yuan Period Administrative Geography

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A common understanding of the geo-political divisions of the *chol kha gsum* (i.e. dBus gtsang, mDo stod, and mDo smad) is that they were geo-administrative units introduced during the Sa skya-Yuan administration of Tibetan areas. The concept of dBus gtsang, mDo stod, and mDo smad as geographic (but not administrative) regions can be found in Tibetan literature prior to the incorporation of those areas into the Mongol Yuan military-administrative system. The geo-administrative term, *chol kha,* on the other hand, was introduced during the Sa skya-Yuan period. However, its precise meaning in the Tibetan context of this period remains unclear: How did it fit into the broader Mongol Yuan administrative system? What other uses and meanings may have developed from it specific to the Tibetan context? By tracing the etymology of this geo-administrative term through a study of Tibetan, Chinese, and Mongol sources from the Yuan and Ming periods, this paper will pose the possibility that the *chol kha gsum* and its donation to 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan was a later creation that can be better understood as part of an aggrandized remembering of Sa skya history rather than a geo-administrative term with concrete administrative applications during its time.

1. Sources and Time Frame of Study

This paper focuses on the meaning of the term *chol kha* in the context of the Sa skya-Yuan administration of Tibet. Mongol contacts with Tibetans, particularly in eastern Tibet, date to the time of Chinggis Qaan (1162?–1227),[2] and actual administration of Tibetan areas can be

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[2] Atwood 2014, Haw 2014.

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seen to begin with the distribution of princely appanages by Mongke Qan (1209–59) in 1251. However, the beginning of Sa skya authority on behalf of the Mongol Yuan can be dated to Qubilai's (1215–94) rise to power and his consolidation of control over Tibetan areas, i.e. the installation of 'Phags pa as National Preceptor (Chi. *guo shi*) in 1260, 'Phags pa's return to Sa skya in 1265, and the first Mongol census of Tibet in 1268/69.[3] The end of Sa skya control of Tibetan areas on behalf of the Yuan court can be dated to 1354, when Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302–73) conquered Sa skya.[4] However, Mongol Yuan control of eastern Tibetan regions may have remained in varying degrees in different areas up to and perhaps even beyond the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368.[5] Thus, for the purpose of analysis, this study will take the period of the 1260s to the mid-14th century as a rough time frame of the Sa skya-Yuan rule in Tibet.

Sources used for this study include Tibetan works that were written in the period just prior to and during the early Sa skya-Yuan administration of Tibet. These include religious histories and royal genealogies such as Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's *Chos 'byung me snying* (late 1100s), Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Bod gyi rgyal rabs* (late 1100s/early 1200s), lDe'u Jo sras' *Chos 'byung chen mo* (mid-13th century), mKhas pa lDe'u's *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* (later than 1261), and Ne'u Paṇḍi ta's *sNgon gyi gtam me tog phreng ba* (1283). Other Tibetan sources studied include the collected works of Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) and 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–80) and the Zha lu documents dating from the late 1200s to the first quarter of the 1300s.[6] Works dating to the late Sa skya-Yuan period include the *Tā si tu byang chub rgyal mtshan gyi bka' chems mthong ba don ldan*, authored by Byang chub rgyal mtshan sometime in the mid-1300s, and 'Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje's (1309–64) *Deb ther dmar po*, written sometime between 1346–63. Other sources examined from the Sa skya-Yuan period were the Sino-Mongolian stone inscriptions from the first half of the 14th century.[7]

Sources dating to just after the Sa skya-Yuan period include Tibetan works such as Yar lung jo bo Śākya rin chen sde's *Yar lung jo*

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3 Petech 1990a: 16–18, 46–48.

4 For a detailed study of the Rlang clan, including the rise and fall of the Phag mo gru pa, see Czaja 2013.

5 Petech 1988.

6 Published in Tucci 1980: 747–55. The Zha lu documents are a set of imperial edicts issued to the Zha lu myriarchy in Central Tibet (dBus gtsang).

7 Published in Cleaves 1952. These include fragments of a stele erected at the order of Emperor Toyon Temür to commemorate the refounding and renaming of the Buddhist temple of Xing Yüan Ge at Qara Qorum. It is one of half a dozen of Sino-Mongolian bilingual monuments documenting written Mongolian of the first half of the 14th century.

bo chos 'byung (1376), and dPal 'byor bzang po's *rGya bod yig tshang chen mo* (1434). For Chinese language sources, the *Yuan shi* (1369–70) was examined.

2. *Overview of Yuan Period Administrative Structures in Tibet and* Chol kha *as a Geo-Administrative Unit*

Contemporary Tibetan communities and scholars of Tibet alike often refer to the cultural, linguistic, and geographical regions of Tibet by means of the three *chol kha,* which are commonly understood as dBus gtsang, Khams, and A mdo.[8] The term *chol kha* itself is often attributed to the Mongol period in Tibet. In the collected works of sGo mang mkhan zur Ngag dbang nyi ma, a 20th-century author, we find references to Tibetan sources that identify the term *chol kha* as being a Mongol word brought into the Tibetan lexicon during the time of Qubilai and 'Phags pa. He lists his sources as Dharmabhadra, a 19th-century author, and the *Hor chos 'byung,* written by Tshe 'phel, an 18th-century Mongolian scholar.[9]

Indeed, following the study of Paul Pelliot, the Tibetan word *chol kha* is a transcription of an originally Mongol word *čölgä,* meaning "district."[10] Its correspondence to the Chinese administrative unit *lu* (Ch. 路), often rendered in English as "route,"[11] was first attested only by its transcription in 'Phags pa script in monuments such as the edict of Dharmapala's widow (1309/1321/1333) and a 'Phags pa-Chinese bilingual inscription of 1314.[12] *Čölgä* as an equivalent of *lu* was later also attested in Uighur-Mongolian script in monuments such as the Sino-Mongolian inscription of 1346.[13] Interestingly, in this inscription from the reign of the last emperor of the Yuan Dynasty, To□on Temür (r. 1333–70), both the word *čölgä* and a transcription of its Chinese equivalent, *lu,* appear together: *urida ön čang łu neretü čölge bölege,* which Cleaves translates as "Formerly was the district called Ön-čan-lu, i.e. Yuan-čan-lu." In this way, the Mongol term *čölgä* is used as a general noun while the Chinese term *lu* is a specific noun to which a place name is attached. This is perhaps similar to saying: "There is a mountain called Mount Everest." If so, could this

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8 Khams and A mdo are often assumed to be equivalent to mDo stod and mDo smad, respectively. However, this is an assumption that requires further study.

9 sGo mang mkhan zur Ngag dbang nyi ma 1982: 106–107. Thanks to Tshangs dbang dGe 'dun bstan pa and dGe 'dun rab gsal for pointing me to this source.

10 Pelliot 1930: 21.

11 Hucker 1985: 322.

12 Pelliot 1930: 21.

13 Cleaves 1952: 155, n. 237.

then indicate that *čölgä* conveyed a more abstract sense of place? What did *čölgä* mean in the context of the Mongol Yuan empire?

The *čölgä* or *lu* was a geo-administrative unit based on the Mongol military decimal structure that was in turn determined by population units counted by the Mongol census. The decimal structure, whereby households were grouped by 10s, 100s, 1000s, etc., was a method of administrative and military organization common in Inner Asia.[14] The decimal structure was also used in Tibet from as early as the imperial period, as evidenced by units such as the divisions of a thousand (Tib. *stong sde*) found in Tibetan documents from Dunhuang and other texts attributed to the Tibetan Empire.[15] The early Mongols, possibly influenced by the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234), whose founders were the Jurchens from Manchuria, also adopted a decimal structure.[16]

Later, under Qubilai, the Yuan borrowed its formal administrative structure from the Jin, namely a Central Secretariat (Ch. *zhong shu sheng*, 中书省) and branch secretariats (Ch. *xing zhong shu sheng*, 行中书省) whose jurisdictions were based on the above military-administrative units.[17] Thus the influence of Inner Asian decimal organization on the Chinese provincial structure can be seen to originate with the Jin and develop further during the Yuan.

However, Tibet remained outside of this secretariat system until 1312.[18] Instead, it was ruled as a frontier territory, with military-administrative units that, at least in the case of dBus gtsang and mNga' ris, reported not to the Central Secretariat or branch secretariats, but directly to the Department for Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs (Ch. *xuan zheng yuan*, 宣政院) or its predecessor, the Department of General Regulation (Ch. *zongzhi yuan*, 总制院).[19] The largest of these military-administrative units were the pacification commissions (Ch. *xuanweisi duyuanshuaifu*, 宣慰司都元帥府), whose jurisdictions at least in China proper were over a *dao* (Ch. 道), often rendered in English as "circuit." Each "circuit" was comprised of two or more "routes" (Ch. *lu*).

In the *Yuan shi,* we indeed find three different pacification commissions for Tibetan areas named: Tufan Regions Pacification

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[14] See the entry for "Decimal organization" in Atwood 2004: 139.

[15] For example, in dBang rgyal 1980: 36.97. See also the laws attributed to Srong btsan sgam po, "Chos rgyal srong btsan sgam pos gtan la phab pa'i khrims srol tshangs pa'i thig shing," in Tshe ring bde skyid 1987: 1–12.

[16] Atwood 2004: 139.

[17] *Ibid*.: 606.

[18] *Ibid*.: 606.

[19] Petech 1990a: 33–35. For another discussion of the history of these departments, see Franke 1981: 311–12.

Commission (Ch. *tufan deng chu xuanweisi duyuanshuaifu*, 吐蕃等處宣慰司都元帥府), Tufan Routes Pacification Commission (Ch. *tufan deng lu xuanweisi duyuanshuaifu*, 土蕃等路宣慰司都元帥府), and the Three Routes of Wusizang Nalisu Gulusun Pacification Commission (Ch. *wu si zang na li su gu sun deng san lu xuanweisi duyuanshuaifu*, 烏思藏納里速古魯孫等三路宣慰司都元帥府).

According to Chen Qingying, the earliest pacification commission established in Tibetan areas was the Tufan Pacification Commission (Ch. *tufan xuanweisi*, 土蕃宣慰司). He thinks it was created prior to 1269 and that its name was later changed to Tufan Regions Pacification Commission (Ch. *tufan deng chu xuanweisi duyuanshuaifu*) after the other two *xuanweisi* were set up.[20] Petech gives the years 1268/69 for its founding, and thinks it was headquartered at Hezhou (i.e. present-day Linxia, Tib. Ka chu).[21] In the *Yuan Shi*, it seems to have also been called the Duosima Pacification Commission (Ch. *duo si ma xuanweisi*).

Petech and Chen disagree on the year that the Wusizang Pacification Commission (Ch. *wu si zang xuanweisi*) was established. Petech admits the sources are unclear, but suggests that it was likely established in 1268 in connection with the first Mongol census of Central and Western Tibet.[22] Chen Qingying proposes that a pacification commission may have been set up in mNga' ris from earlier campaigns, but that the Wusizang Pacification Commission was not established until 1280. He also puts forth the possibility that it was headquartered in 'Dam gzhung.[23]

The Tufan Routes Pacification Commission (Ch. *tufan deng lu xuanweisi duyuanshuaifu)* was possibly created in 1288, according to Petech.[24] Chen Qingying considers that it may have been headquartered in Yul shul or northern dKar mdzes.[25] In Tibetan and Chinese sources, it is also called the Duogansi xuanweisi (Ch. *duo gan si xuanweisi*; Tib. *mdo khams swon wi si*).

Finally, in 1292, according to Chen Qingying, the mNga' ris Pacification Commission and the Wusizang Pacification Commission were merged at the suggestion of Samgha (d. 1291),[26] a protege of

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20 Chen 2006: 267.
21 Petech 1988: 370.
22 Petech 1990a: 40.
23 Chen 2006: 259.
24 Petech 1988: 375.
25 Chen 2006: 266.
26 In Chinese sources, his name is spelled Seng ge; in Persian sources, it is spelled Sanga; and in Tibetan sources, it is spelled Sam gha along with other variations. According to Petech, these appear to be transcriptions of the Sanskrit word *sangha.* He appears to have been either a Tibetanized Uighur or a border Tibetan

'Phags pa, to create the Three Routes of Wusizang Nalisu Gulusun Pacification Commission (Ch. *wu si zang na li su gu sun deng san lu xuanweisi duyuanshuaifu*).[27]

In these studies, both Petech and Chen Qingying take the three pacification commissions to have had jurisdiction over the three *chol kha* of Tibet: the one of Wusizang Nalisu Gulusun over dBus gtsang and mNga' ris skor gsum, Duosima over mDo smad, and Duogansi over mDo khams (i.e. mDo stod).[28] However, questions arise about whether dBus gtsang, mDo smad, and mDo stod were *chol kha* if we consider that the standard administrative jurisdiction of pacification commissions were not over *chol kha,* but a unit larger than a *chol kha.*

Furthermore, even if we take these three pacification commissions to be our three *chol kha,* their establishment, from 1268 to 1292, would mean that only one, or at most two, of the *chol kha* were in existence during the lifetime of 'Phags pa, who, according to Tibetan narratives, received all three from Qubilai as an offering for the second of three initiations he bestowed on Qubilai.[29]

3. The Question of the Chol kha *in Tibet*

We may consider for a moment the possibility proposed by Chen and Petech, namely that the three pacification commissions discussed above are indeed our *chol kha gsum.* In this case, each *chol kha* would be equivalent not to a "route" as it was in other regions held by the Mongol Yuan dynasty, but rather to a "circuit" (Ch. *dao*), as Petech has suggested.[30]

Because the Mongol system of administration was sometimes adapted to the local conditions of its territories, variations such as these are a possibility. So what did the Mongol decimal organization look like in Tibet? According to the *rGya bod yig tshang* (*GBYT*),

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belonging to a Uighurized family. Under 'Phags pa, he rose to high levels within the Yuan bureaucracy, but the two eventually became alienated and his abuse of power led to his downfall. For a detailed study of Samgha, see Petech 1980b. See also Franke 1981.

27 Chen 2006: 259.

28 The term *mdo stod* does not seem to enter Tibetan sources as a replacement for *mdo khams* until the late Yuan period. For a discussion of these terms, see my forthcoming article "Geographies of Tibet in the Pre-Mongol Period: Literary Mappings in Tibetan Literature."

29 To give a few prominent examples, see mentions of this narrative in Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1980: 96, gZhon nu dpal 1984: 268, dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba 1986: 1421, Shakabpa 2010 [1976]: 218, and sGo mang mkhan zur Ngag dbang nyi ma 1982: 107.

30 Petech 1990a: 39.

written in 1434,[31] the basic population unit under the Mongols was the *hor dud*,[32] also spelled *hor dus*.[33] One complete *hor dud* was comprised of: a house the size of six pillars; fields with land to grow twelve bushels (Tib. *khal*) of Mongol seed; six people consisting of husband and wife, children, and attendants; three domesticated work animals for carrying loads, plowing, and riding; and two *mgo chen* of sheep and goats consisting of twenty-four *mgo swe*.[34] Fifty *hor dud* comprised one *rta mgo;* two *rta mgo* made for one centurion (Tib. *brgya skor*); ten centurions comprised a chiliarchy (Tib. *stong skor*); ten chiliarchies made for one myriarchy (Tib. *khri skor*); ten myriarchies made for one route (Tib. *glu*); and finally, ten routes made for one province (Tib. *zhing*). Of note is that the *GBYT* states here that although the three *chol kha* of Tibet did not form a complete province (Tib. *zhing*), because it was the residence of lamas and the place from which Buddhism disseminated, it was elevated to the level of a province.[35]

Here in our Tibetan source, *chol kha* in Tibet was quite possibly being equated with a "route" (Ch. *lu*): because there were only three *chol kha*/"routes" and not ten, it did not form a complete province. The passage does not explicitly equate *chol kha* and "route," but this interpretation is a strong possibility. Following this, if the *chol kha* in Tibet was truly equivalent to the "route" (Ch. *lu*) in China proper, then that would mean the *chol kha gsum* referred to a smaller region than what in later works has been identified as dBus gtsang, mDo smad, and mDo stod.

As discussed above, the three main regional administrative structures in Tibetan areas were the pacification commissions (Ch. *xuanweisi duyuanshuaifu*), which scholars have identified with dBus

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[31] I mainly follow the 'Bras spungs edition for this passage as it seems to be less corrupt than the other two editions; see dPal 'byor bzang po 2007: 137. On the dating of the *rGya bod yig tshang,* see MacDonald 1963.

[32] In the 'Bras spungs edition, it is spelled *hor dud*; see dPal 'byor bzang po 2007: 137. According to Laufer, this was likely not a term derived from its literal meaning as argued by Chandra Das, who defines it as (Laufer 1916: 499): "A Mongolian encampment, from *Hor* 'Tartar or Mongolian' and *du* 'smoke.' Each nomad's tent represents a fire-place and chimney, i.e. a family." Instead, Laufer believes *hor dud* was a Tibetanized rendering of the Mongol *ordu,* which meant "camp, encampment, tent of the Khan."

[33] It is spelled *hor dus* in the Chengdu and Thimphu editions; see dPal 'byor bzang po 1979: 386, dPal 'byor bzang po 1985: 270–71.

[34] In the 'Bras spungs edition, it is spelled *mgo swe* while in the other two editions, it is spelled *mgo se.* In the context of this passage, it appears to be a unit of measurement. See dPal 'byor bzang po 1979: 386, dPal 'byor bzang po 1985: 271, dPal 'byor bzang po 2007: 137.

[35] dPal 'byor bzang po 1979: 386–87, dPal 'byor bzang po 1985: 270–71, dPal 'byor bzang po 2007: 137.

gtsang and mNga' ris, mDo stod, and mDo smad. During the Yuan period, the jurisdiction of a pacification commission, at least in China proper, was over a "circuit" (Ch. *dao*). Each "circuit" was made up of two more "routes" (Ch. *lu*).[36] Thus the pacification commissions of dBus gtsang and mNga' ris, mDo stod, and mDo smad would have each been comprised of several *chol kha,* i.e. "routes." Perhaps then, the *chol kha gsum* during the Sa skya-Yuan period were not dBus gtsang, mDo stod, and mDo smad, but much smaller areas like dBus, gTsang, and mNga' ris.

These administrative units were in theory calculated by census. In the *GBYT*, we have detailed figures from the Mongol census only for mNga' ris, gTsang, and dBus.[37] Thus some scholars have argued that on the basis of the census records in Tibetan sources the three *chol kha* of the Sa skya-Yuan period were indeed restricted to mNga' ris and dBus gtsang, and Sa skya rule of Tibetan areas on behalf of the Mongol Yuan did not encompass the eastern regions known in later periods as Khams and A mdo.[38]

While Sa skya control may not have extended to the eastern areas of Khams and A mdo (except for some feudal estates), there is little doubt that these areas were under Mongol Yuan rule. In fact, in another passage of the *GBYT*, we find a reference to a Mongol census of Greater Tibet (Tib. *bod khams chen po*) carried out during the time of Qubilai; and from the census of mDo smad, an estate was granted to 'Phags pa.[39] Furthermore, the Mongol rule of its frontier territories was based not only on the census but on several additional administrative measures: the postal routes, tribute, and militia.[40] On the basis of the census, the postal routes were set up. The *GBYT* further records the 27 postal routes, which included seven in mDo smad, nine in mDo stod, and eleven in dBus and gTsang.[41] Thus, even if detailed census figures are lacking, we still have records in Tibetan sources that indicate the census took place in these eastern regions.

Nevertheless, I believe the question of whether or not the three *chol kha* of the Sa skya-Yuan period included the eastern regions of Tibet is a valid one; not in terms of whether the eastern Tibetan areas were under Mongol administration, but whether the *chol kha gsum* during the Sa skya-Yuan period meant something different from

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36 Hucker 1985: 251, 487–88.
37 dPal 'byor bzang po 1979: 426–32, dPal 'byor bzang po 1985: 298–301.
38 For instance, this is argued in the editorial introduction to Petech's "The Mongol Census in Tibet;" see Tuttle and Schaeffer 2013: 233.
39 dPal 'byor bzang po 1979: 395, dPal 'byor bzang po 1985: 277.
40 Petech 1980a.
41 dPal 'byor bzang po 1979: 393, dPal 'byor bzang po 1985: 275.

what we see in later sources.

4. Assessing the Historicity of the Chol kha gsum

Since the term *chol kha* originates from the Mongol *čölge,* and is supposed to be from the time of 'Phags pa and Qubilai's priest-patron relationship, it would seem that the Tibetan *chol kha* would be found in Sa skya-Yuan period texts. In an attempt to identify when the term *chol kha* entered the Tibetan literature and its meanings within specific historical contexts, I consulted sources from around this period, roughly from the 12th century to the first half of the 15th century. Even though the content of many of these sources are not directly concerned with the administrative history of Tibetan areas under the Mongols, one would think that the common geographical concepts of the period would be reflected in these works.

Surprisingly, this study is marked by the absence of the term *chol kha* in Tibetan sources until quite late in the Sa skya-Yuan period, i.e. well after the lifetimes of 'Phags pa (1235–80) and Qubilai (1215–94). It does not appear in works written just prior to or in the early period of the Sa skya-Yuan such as Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's *Chos 'byung me snying,* Grags pa rgyal mtshan's *Bod gyi rgyal rabs,* mKhas pa lDe'u's *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa,* lDe'u Jo sras' *Chos 'byung chen mo,* and in the collected works of Sa skya Paṇḍita. It is notably absent from the collected works of 'Phags pa himself. Neither Ne'u Pandi ta's *sNgon gyi gtam me tog phreng ba* nor the Zha lu documents contain the term. *Chol kha* is also absent from texts dating to the late Yuan period such as the chapters relevant to the Sa skya-Yuan period in the *Deb ther dmar po.*

Of interest is that within the Zha lu documents we do find the term *swon wi si*,[42] a Tibetan rendering of pacification commission (Ch. *xuanweisi).* Thus we have imperial edicts and other documents addressed to the dBus gtsang mNga' ris skor gsum Pacification Commission, as well as to the mDo khams Pacification Commission. But we do not have any mention of the term *chol kha* in these official imperial documents.[43]

Among the works examined for this study, the earliest instance in which *chol kha* appears is in Byang chub rgyal mtshan's *Si tu bka' chems mthong ba don ldan.* Dated to the end of 1361 at the earliest,[44] the work is an autobiography of the very figure who brought about the downfall of Sa skya rulership on behalf of the Yuan in dBus gtsang and mNga' ris.

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[42] As well as other variant spellings such as *swon we se* and *son hu si.*
[43] Tucci 1980: 747–755.
[44] Van der Kuijp 1991: 439, n. 2.

In this work, we find the phrase *bod chol kha gsum,* but the actual area it refers to is unclear. The passage in which it appears describes the visit in the female wood-bird year (Tib. *shing mo bya lo*; i.e. 1345) of Si tu Dar ma rgyal mtshan, rDo rje lcam hu shri, and A san bho kha tshe dben,[45] with their court officials[46] to fix the postal routes of Shag,[47] settle troubles in mNga' ris, and conduct a *phye gsal* of the *bod chol kha gsum*.[48] In short, the delegation arrived in 'Dam, where its investigation of a claim favored gTsang over dBus. Then it arrived in Tshong 'dus 'gur mo,[49] where it decided a claim in favor of mNga' ris over dBus.[50] After that, the Si tu and the mNga' ris retinue were invited to Yar lungs, where the Si tu was presented with many imperial documents, presumably regarding the dispute over territory between the myriarchs of g.Ya' bzang and Phag mo gru.[51]

In this passage, it is unclear as to what the term *bod chol kha gsum* refers. The author does not explicitly tell us, the way the *GBYT* does, that the *bod chol kha gsum* is dBus gtsang, mDo stod, and mDo smad. Instead it is curious that after mentioning that the delegation arrived to conduct the *phye gsal* of the *bod chol kha gsum,* only matters concerning dBus, gTsang, and mNga' ris are discussed.

At the same time, the context that Byang chub rgyal mtshan was writing in, namely the intrigues between the myriarchs under Sa skya control, was limited to the affairs of these areas. However, combined with the possibility that *chol kha* could be the equivalent of

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45 Esen Boqa. Here *tshe dben* may be a rendering of president (Ch. *zhiyuan*), perhaps of the Bureau of Military Affairs; see van der Kuijp 1991: 432.

46 According to Petech 1990b: 258, while the term *khrim ra* could mean "court" or "office," in the context of this work, it often means an official attached to a court or department.

47 Located in dBus. Shag is listed among the seven postal routes in dBus established by Das sman at the orders of Qubilai Qan; see dPal 'byor bzang po 1985: 275.

48 The term *phye gsal* also appears in the *Deb ther dmar po.* According to gDung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las, the *phye gsal chen mo* during the time of the second Sa skya dpon chen, Kun dga' bzang po, was an evaluation of postal relay stations, quality of lands, and population counts in order to establish the amount of military and government taxes to be levied; see Kun dga' rdo rje 1981: 358, n. 296.

49 Located in gTsang. Tshong 'dus is listed among the four postal routes in gTsang established by Das sman at the orders of Qubilai Qan; see dPal 'byor bzang po 1985: 276.

50 Byang chub rgyal mtshan 1986: 165.19–166.6: *shing mo bya lo la si tu dar ma rgyal mtshan/ rdo rje lcam hu shri/ a san bho kha tshe dben rnams khrims ra dang bcas pa/ shag 'jam mo 'dzugs pa dang/ mnga' ris phyin gyi 'jags byed pa/ bod chol kha gsum gyi phye gsal byed pa la byon dus/ 'dam du gtugs bsher byed rtsis byas pa la/ dbus pa'i rta ro dmar po kha 'byed pa la mi 'thad/ gtsang 'khor ba dang 'thad zer nas/ dbus pa rnams kyis dbang ma byung/ de rting/ tshong 'dus 'gur mor gtugs bsher byed byas pas/ gtsang du dbus pa'i bla 'tshong don med/ mnga' ris 'khor ba dang 'thad zer/ yang dbus pa rnams kyis dbang ma byung/.*

51 For more on this, see Shakabpa 2010: 254–63. See also Petech 1990a: 102–103.

a "route" (Ch. *lu*), and that there were indeed three "routes" consisting of dBus, gTsang, and mNga' ris skor gsum under one pacification commission, then perhaps we need to consider the possibility that the *chol kha gsum* during the later Sa skya-Yuan period could simply have meant dBus, gTsang, and mNga' ris skor gsum.

Furthermore, the absence of the term *chol kha* from works contemporaneous with the time of 'Phags pa and Qubilai lends strength to the possibility that the narrative of Qubilai granting 'Phags pa the *chol kha gsum,* i.e. dBus gtsang, mDo stod, and mDo smad, was a later creation.

5. The Chol kha gsum *in Later Narratives*

At the tail end of the Yuan Dynasty (1206/1271–1368), the term *chol kha* does not turn up in sources like Bla ma dam pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan's *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (1368). In the early post-Yuan period, it is also absent from Śākya rin chen sde's *Yar lung jo bo'i chos 'byung* (1376), although *swon wi si* and other Yuan titles appear.

Among the works consulted for this study, the earliest appearances of the narrative of 'Phags pa, Qubilai, and the *chol kha gsum* are notably found in 15th-century works by Sa skya figures connected to sTag lung Monastery in gTsang: sTag tshang lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen's *Sa skya pa'i gdung rabs 'dod dgu'i rgya mtsho* (1400s) and the aforementioned *rGya bod yig tshang* by dPal 'byor bzang po.

The common narrative found in later texts holds that Qubilai received initiations three times from 'Phags pa. In return, Qubilai offered 'Phags pa first the thirteen myriarchies of dBus gtsang (Tib. *dbus gtsang gi khri skor bcu gsum*); then the *chol kha gsum* of dBus gtsang, mDo stod, and mDo smad; and for the last initiation, he pardoned a large number of Chinese prisoners from execution.

However, in Shes rab rin chen's early *Sa skya pa'i gdung rabs,* we find a different version of this narrative. According to him, three offerings were given in return, not for three initiations, but for the creation of a new Mongol script, which later became known as the 'Phags pa script. In return for this script, first, the title of *bande shed skyed* was given.[52]

[52] The term *bande shed skyed* is a Tibetan rendering of a Mongol ecclesiastical title of sorts, sometimes also rendered as *pagshi.* Thanks to Tshang dbang dGe 'dun bstan pa for pointing this out (personal communication, 29 April 2016). For a discussion of the Sino/Uighur-Mongol term *pagshi* used as an honorific title in Tibetan areas with no well-defined function attached to it, see van der Kuijp 1995. Also of note is that according to the Fifth Dalai Lama's history, an edict for the *bandhe shed skyes* (Tib. *bandhe shes skyes kyi 'ja' sa)* was granted to 'Phags pa by

Then for a middle initiation offering, the *bod chol kha gsum* were given. Lastly, a great pardon was granted to Chinese prisoners.[53]

In this version, the first offering is clearly stated to be in return for the creation of the new Mongol script. The second offering is a bit mysterious, as it refers to a middle initiation (Tib. *dbang yon bar ma),* but we do not see references to other initiations. It should be noted that, as in Byang chub rgyal mtshan's *Si tu bka' chems mthong ba don ldan*, what is meant by the *bod chol kha gsum* here is also left undefined.

Several folios later, the term *sa chol kha gsum* appears in relation to the titles of office granted to 'Phags pa's younger brother, Phyag na rdo rje (1239–67). According to this passage, Qubilai granted him the title and golden seal of the Bailan Prince (Tib. *Pa'a len dbang*; Chi. *Bailan wang*) and vice prefect (Tib. *thong phyi*; Chi. *tong zhi*) of the right and left offices (Tib. *g.yas g.yon gyi khrims ra*), and appointed him magistrate (Tib. *khrims bdag*; Chi. *duan shi guan*; Mon. *jarghuchi*) of the *sa chol kha gsum*.[54] Even with the clues offered by titles and offices mentioned in relation to the *sa chol kha gsum,* because they appear to be more honorary in nature, their actual jurisdictions in practice are unclear.[55] Thus in this early narrative of Qubilai's three offerings in return for 'Phags pa's three initiations, not only do we find a slightly different account, but the *chol kha gsum* are also left undefined.

In dPal 'byor bzang po's *GBYT*, we finally encounter the familiar narrative found in later works: Because of the patron-priest relationship formed between the Mongols and Sa skya, 'Phags pa went to the Daidu Palace in China three times. Qubilai and the royal family thrice received the initiations for the three *tantra*s (Tib. *rgyud gsum)* specific to the Sa skya pa. For the first initiation offering, the thirteen myriarchies of dBus gtsang were given: the three fortresses of Glo dol under mNga' ris formed one myriarchy; Southern and Northern La stod, Chu zhal, etc. were four myriarchies; sBra, Ber, and

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Qubilai in return for the creation of the new Mongol script. However, this exchange is mentioned separately from the set of three offerings for initiations that immediately follow in this passage. See Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1980: 96.

53 Shes rab rin chen: 21a. Regarding the pardoning of Chinese prisoners from execution (Tib. *rgya'i mi yur chen mo*), during this period, a type of mass execution was performed by casting prisoners into a large aqueduct. A visual representation of this with a written inscription is recorded in a thangka painting dating to the late Ming period (Tshang dbang dGe 'dun bstan pa, personal communication, 29 April 2016).

54 Shes rab rin chen: 23a.

55 For a fuller discussion of the Bai lan and other princedoms connected to Tibet during the Yuan Dynasty, see Petech 1990b.

Khyung were one myriarchy; Yar 'brog and Tshal pa were two myriarchies; rGya, 'Bri, g.Ya', and Phag were four myriarchies; additionally, one thousand households (Tib. *hor dud)* of Bya yul and nine hundred households of 'Brug pa formed one myriarchy. Together these formed thirteen myriarchies.

For the middle initiation, the *bod chol kha gsum* were given: From mNga' ris Gung thang to Sog la skya bo, the *chol kha* of sublime religion; from Sog la skya bo to the bend in the rMa chu, the *chol kha* of the black-headed people; from the bend in the rMa chu to the white Chinese stupa, the *chol kha* of the horse. According to the tradition of giving the three offerings of people, horses, and religion, these were given. Each *chol kha* had a *dpon chen* appointed by mutual agreement of the king and court priest (Tib. *rgyal po yon mchod*).[56]

For the last initiation, according to the orders of the *bla ma* (i.e. 'Phags pa), a great pardon was given, thereby freeing from execution many tens of thousands of Chinese.[57]

Here, the narrative is much more elaborate than that in the abovementioned *Sa skya pa'i gdung rabs.* We also have a clear definition of the *chol kha gsum* as well as delineations of its boundaries. Furthermore, it is directly linked to the priest-patron relationship between Qubilai and 'Phags pa. Yet among the documents examined for this study, one does not find mention of this in 'Phags pa's works or other texts written during his lifetime.

6. Concluding Remarks

As we have seen, the Sa skya-Yuan administration of Tibetan areas was a process that developed, changed, and unfolded in the course of over a century. During this process, the administrative units were perhaps not so clearly defined as they came to be understood in later periods. Additionally, as we have seen, the administrative units governing the areas later called the *chol kha gsum* were likely not even fully established during the lifetime of 'Phags pa.

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[56] Here, *rgyal po yon mchod* could also be rendered as "the king, the patron." However, since the sentence goes on to say that the *dpon chen* were appointed through discussion and agreement, it seems possible that *yon mchod* here may refer to 'Phags pa. For the different contexts in which *yon mchod* appears and its different possible renderings, see Ruegg 1991: 444–45.

[57] Although there are some slight differences in this passage between the 'Bras spungs edition and the Chengdu and Thimphu editions, they are for the most part the same. Some interesting divergences in the 'Bras spungs edition occur in the passage just preceding this one, concerning the postal routes. See dPal 'byor bzang po 1979: 396–97, dPal 'byor bzang po 1985: 277–78, dPal 'byor bzang po 2007: 142.

Instead, what seems more likely is that as an administrative unit, *chol kha* in Tibetan areas was indeed equivalent to the "route" (Ch. *lu*). While the term does not appear in official documents, it begins to emerge in Tibetan texts towards the end of the Sa skya-Yuan period. Its usage in these texts may be interpreted as referring to dBus, gTsang, and mNga' ris, but is ambiguous.

The narrative of 'Phags pa, Qubilai, and the *chol kha gsum* does not emerge until several decades after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty, sometime in the 15th century, and more than a century after the lifetimes of 'Phags pa and Qubilai. In this historical context, the once-dominant seat of Sa skya has lost its power to the Phags mo gru pa. It should be a point of interest that this narrative elevating the role of the Sa skya hierarch is written by two Sa skya figures in the decades after the fall of their sect from political power. It is in this light that we should view the narrative of the *chol kha gsum* as an offering from Qubilai to 'Phags pa: as a rewriting of history by those who were once powerful to secure and elevate their place in historical memory.

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