

The History of Lo dgon pa: The Vicissitudes of an Early bKa' gdams pa Monastery

IUCHI Maho

bKa' gdams pa was founded by 'Brom ston pa rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas (1004/1005-1064) on the basis of the doctrine of Atiśa (Dipaṃkaraśrijñāna, 982-1054) in the eleventh century. Disciples of 'Brom ston pa built a number of monasteries around Lhasa, especially in the 'Phan yul area, and its doctrine gradually spread over a wide range. Among them, Po to pa (1031-1105), Phu chung pa (1031-1103) and sPyan snga pa (1038-1103), who were the three prime disciples of 'Brom ston pa and referred to as *sKu mched gsum* (three brothers), each built a monastery in the 'Phan yul area. Po to pa founded the Po to dgon pa (Po to Monastery), Phu chung pa founded the Phu chung (Phu chung Monastery), and sPyan snga pa founded the Lo dgon pa (Lo Monastery). Po to dgon pa is currently a nunnery and Phu chung is not extant. However, Lo dgon pa remains as one of the few relatively large-scale monasteries among the extant bKa' gdams pa monasteries.

Lo dgon pa, located in present-day Tagtse Dzong, Lhasa Prefecture PRC, was founded by sPyan snga pa tshul khrim 'bar in 1095. Currently, about fifty monks reside there. Like all other bKa' gdams pa monasteries, extraneous pressures have forced a series of constant changes upon this monastery. It was caught up in a power struggle among sects in the thirteenth century. It changed sectarian affiliation (from bKa' gdams pa to dGe lugs pa) between the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Also, it faced near complete destruction during the Cultural Revolution in the twentieth century. Although most of bKa' gdams pa monasteries declined, Lo dgon pa maintained its stability based on two factors, that is the Tulk, or "reincarnate lama," and its branch temples.

Regarding the first factor, Lo sems dpa' sprul sku, a Tulk, has been associated with Lo dgon pa since its change to the dGe lugs pa. This Tulk is said to be one of the *sPrul sku nmams gsum* (great three Tulk). It is rare for a Tulk to be

present in a bKa' gdams pa monastery. Since the end of the sixteenth century, Tulk has dominated Tibetan society not only in religion but also in politics. Through the presence of its Tulk, Lo dgon pa was able to follow the course of history. Regarding the second factor, they have a branch temple, called Byams khang, in Bar skor, the central area of Lhasa. This branch was founded by the first Lo sems dpa' sprul sku (15c.) in about 1430. Many believers visit this temple since it is centrally located even today. The offerings from Byams khang serve as the main source of income for Lo dgon pa, allowing it to maintain economic stability.

The circumstances of Lo dgon pa during its bKa' gdams pa period, however, were quite different. The primary branch temple of Lo dgon pa was Bya yul dgon pa (Bya yul Monastery), which was built by Bya yul ba gzhon nu 'od (1075-1138), a direct disciple of sPyan snga pa. Bya yul dgon pa was not just a branch of Lo dgon pa, but the successive abbots of Lo dgon pa concurrently assumed the position of abbot at Bya yul dgon pa. During its bKa' gdams pa period, Lo dgon pa developed an extensive network of branch temples through lineage connections like the one with Bya yul dgon pa. However, these relationships had gradually disappeared, and Lo sems dpa' sprul sku replaced this network of the bKa' gdams pa lineage with a single branch temple.

This paper surveys the vicissitudes of this unique, early bKa' gdams pa monastery, Lo dgon pa from 1095 to the present, based on Tibetan historical sources and an original history which was written by one present-day monk of Lo dgon pa.