



Rnying-ma-pa monastic organization in seventeenth-century Tibet: the case of Smin-grol-gling

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To comprehend the complexities of religion, politics, and social life in premodern Tibet it is necessary to have some understanding of the nature, structure, and organization of the Tibetan monastic institution. In this paper I consider the principles of operation, offices and institutions, economy, and early history of the Rnying-ma-pa monastery of Smin-grol-gling (est. 1670) as detailed in various edicts and written documents, including Smin-grol-gling's first monastic constitution (*bca'-yig*) compiled in 1689 by Gter-bdag-gling-pa (1646–1714), the monastery's founder. My main objective is to offer a few insights into the nature of religious life and polity of one of the most influential Rnying-ma-pa monasteries in central Tibet at the dawn of Dge-lugs-pa (Dge-ldan-pa) supremacy. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Smin-grol-gling was one of the principal centers for the preservation of Rnying-ma ritual, arts, and learning in central Tibet and its success was due in part to the close intimacy Gter-bdag-gling-pa and his family cultivated with the fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682). In addition to my focus on the internal structure and monastic polity of Smin-grol-gling during the period under consideration, I also introduce preliminary materials for the study of that institution's family history from roughly the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. The role of family relations, alliances, and conflicts in shaping the history of Tibetan religion and politics remains a significant topic still largely neglected by scholars in Tibetan Studies.