

The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation. By Peter Schwieger. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 352 pages. Hardcover: ISBN 978-0-2311-6852-6.

VLADIMIR USPENSKY

Tibetan history in the second millennium CE was largely shaped by contacts with its neighbors—Mongols, Chinese, and Manchus. However, these contacts also resulted in the establishment of Tibetan influence over neighboring and even distant peoples. This circumstance has led to different approaches and assessments of Tibetan history as reflected in historical documents written in different languages in different places. Modern studies are no exception, and historians relying on different kinds of documents provide dissimilar interpretations not only of certain events but of large periods of Tibetan history. Modern historians have no alternative but to reflect in their studies the standpoints of the sources on which their conclusions are based. *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China* by Peter Schwieger offers a view from the inside of Central Tibet mostly based on Tibetan-language documents. The research covers the period of the Qing dynasty (taken sensu lato from 1636 to 1912) with some necessary excursions into prior and later events. This long period witnessed shifts and twists in the international position of Tibet and in the country's internal situation. The main concern of this book is the *trülku* (Tib. *sprul sku*)¹ institution—a Tibetan invention based on rule by incarnation. According to the author, “the dominance of the Qing court over Tibet was based entirely on the Tibetan institution of reincarnation” (p. 220).

Three main kinds of Tibetan documents were used for Schwieger's research: “the documents that were digitalized from 1998 to 2000 in cooperation with the Archives of the Tibet Autonomous Region”; the “high-quality facsimiles of [Tibetan] documents in the PRC”; and the “documents published not as facsimiles but as edited versions” (p. 3). Tibetan documents kept by the Tibetan exile community as well as those which are kept elsewhere were also used. Since these documents follow a certain pattern and are not easily readable even for a Tibetan scholar, a useful explanatory

¹ In order to avoid discrepancies in the present review, I have adopted the same transcription system of Tibetan and Mongolian names and words as in Schwieger's book, except when quoting works by other authors.

outline of their structure is given (pp. 4–6). Several Tibetan versions of the documents issued by the imperial government were also translated in this book. It has long been noticed that they may disagree in content with their Chinese and Manchu originals because the “Tibetan archival material speaks a different language” (p. 201). For modern scholars, the Tibetan understanding and interpretation of Beijing’s Tibetan policy is very important. The longest texts translated from the Tibetan by Schwieger are the “thirteen articles” of the reorganization of the Tibetan government issued in 1751 (pp. 149–57); a decree by the Regent Demo *qutuqtu* issued in 1773 in favor of the Ganden Sumtsenling Monastery (pp. 166–70); and, the inauguration decree by the Regent Takdrak Rinpoché dated 1941 (pp. 210–14). Many other important Tibetan documents of a shorter length were completely or partially translated by Schwieger.

What is a *trülku*? According to Mahayana Buddhist theology, this is one of the three bodies of a Buddha, the “manifest body” or the “transformed body”—“the appearance of a buddha in the same form as those he teaches.”² In Schwieger’s words, “Tibetan saints who are regarded as *trülkus* are the earthly emanations of transcendent bodhisattvas” because “the distinction between transcendent bodhisattvas and buddhas became blurred” (p. 11). “Very high” *trülkus* are the subject of Schwieger’s study (p. 11). He justifiably states that “there has never been anything like a distinct, elaborate canonical theory of the *trülku*”; however, his second assertion that the word *trülku* has never been “a ‘protected name’ regulated by secular or religious law” (p. 11) needs more investigation.

The regulations of the Qing Empire about lamas, including incarnated lamas, were rather elaborate. The term that occurs in connection with incarnate lamas in legal documents (for example, in the “Regulations of the Ministry for the Tributary Territories,” Ch. *Lifanyuan zeli* 理藩院則例; also available in Manchu and Mongolian) is the Mongolian word *qubilyan* (Manchu *hūbilgan*; Ch. *hubilehan* 呼弼勒罕). It corresponds to Tibetan *sku skyes* (e.g., in the trilingual imperial decree to the newly found Eighth Dalai Lama dated 1762). A good example of a simultaneous Tibetan usage of both terms is found in the long title of a prayer for the longevity of the Second Changkya *qutuqtu*, Rolpé Dorje (1717–1786), composed by the Sixth Panchen Lama, Lozang Penden Yeshe (1738–1780), from which the following is a

² Mizuno Kōgen, *Essentials of Buddhism: Basic Terminology and Concepts of Buddhist Philosophy and Practice*, trans. Gaynor Sekimori (Tokyo: Kosei Shuppansha, 1996), p. 60.

small excerpt: *ICang skya mchog gi sprul pa'i sku rin po che gang 'di nyid kyi sku skyes pa'i rabs las gtso bor brtsams te* (“the foremost of any incarnations in the lineage of the supreme Changkya *trülku rinpoche*”).³

The term *trülku* is implied in the title *qutuqtu*, which was used to distinguish the highest officially recognized incarnated lamas. The term *qutuqtu* is given as an equivalent of the Tibetan *trulku* in the well-known Tibetan-Mongolian dictionary *Bod kyi brda yig rtogs pas sla ba*.⁴ Though this dictionary is not an official document, it was printed in Beijing at the personal initiative of the Lifanyuan prince Yunli 允禮 (1697–1738). The titles of the *qutuqtus* were created in different ways and fashions and could signify an honorary title (the Dalai Lama), place of origin of the incarnation lineage (Changkya *qutuqtu*), monastery name (Mindröl *qutuqtu*), etc.

The *trülkus* are manifest bodies of bodhisattvas that appear in the human world through successive incarnations. According to Qing legislation, only after the death of a *trülku* was his newly discovered successor officially recognized as the incarnation (*sku skyes*, *qubilyan*) of his predecessor. After receiving the seal and certificate, or after being introduced to the emperor, he was proclaimed the corresponding *qutuqtu*, that is, the *trülku* proper.

The first *trülku* “dynasty” appeared within the Karma-Kagyü tradition as early as the thirteenth century. Schwieger translated from Tibetan official documents pertaining to the relations between the Karmapa hierarchs and the emperors of the Yuan and Ming dynasties (pp. 18–22). However, the Mongol involvement in Tibetan affairs—which started at the end of the sixteenth century—was a decisive factor in configuring the country’s religious and political framework. The result of Mongol intervention was Gelukpa domination, with the Dalai Lama as the indisputable leader of Tibet. The available evidence concerning the events that brought the Gelukpa into power is analyzed in Schwieger’s book (pp. 36–49).

³ *Dad pa'i padmo kha yongs su 'byed pa'i gru char zhes bya ba* (The Rain [of Dharma] Which Nourishes the Faithful), Beijing woodblock. Eighteenth century (Saint Petersburg University Library, Plg. 69), fol. 17b–18b. About this text see Walther Heissig, *Die pekinger lamaistischen Blockdrucke in mongolischer Sprache: Materialien zur mongolischen Literaturgeschichte* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1954), pp. 144–45, nn. 153–54.

⁴ *Bod kyi brda yig rtogs par sla ba* (The [Dictionary Which Makes It] Easy to Understand Tibetan Words). Beijing woodblock. Eighteenth century (Saint Petersburg University Library, Plg. 106), fol. 89b:2. About this dictionary, see Walther von Heissig, *Die Pekinger lamaistischen Blockdrucke in mongolischer Sprache: Materialien zur mongolischen Literaturgeschichte* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1954), pp. 74–75, n. 88.

Concerning the question of the status of Tibet and of the Dalai Lama after Gushri Qan established complete control over the country in 1642, Schwieger is of the opinion that the position of the Dalai Lama and his newly-established Ganden Podrang government was dominant. He supports his view with evidence from the historical works written by the Fifth Dalai Lama and the regent Sanggyé Gyatso, contemporary Tibetan documents, and also by the fact of the almost total absence of documents issued by Gushri Qan and his successors (pp. 52–61). In Schwieger's own words, "the Qoshots did not keep the sovereignty over Tibet for themselves but surrendered it to the Dalai Lama" (p. 58). However, he has to admit that "the Qoshots nevertheless did participate in the administration of Tibet" (p. 60). Tibetan history of this period will always be a subject of discussion. As Elliot Sperling justly put it, "One can write a history of Tibet from the mid-17th to the mid-18th centuries from the standpoint of the Potala that would be valid; and compose another one from the standpoint of the 'Dam encampments of the Qošot that would be equally valid. One would be a history of Dga'-ldan pho-brang, the other a history of the Qanate of Tibet."⁵ Needless to say, Tibetan lamas were by far more prolific writers than unsophisticated Qoshot horsemen. What usually escapes scholars' attention is that Gushri Qan created, through his military power, a vast state of which Tibet was only a part, however important.⁶ The borders of Gushri Qan's state roughly coincided with the borders of the ancient Tibetan Empire—hence giving rise to the Fifth Dalai Lama likening Gushri Qan to Songtsen Gampo. According to Mongol tradition, the Qoshot State was the property of Gushri Qan's descendants. Lhapzang Qan, who created a kind of separate "Qanate of Tibet," was overthrown in 1717 and killed by the Dsungars with the tacit consent of his kinsmen. Schwieger admits that "Tibetan history was rewritten" and the role of Gushri Qan had already been minimised by the end of the eighteenth century, as demonstrated in imperial documents (pp. 170–71).

Schwieger proposes the following view of relations established with the Qing Empire as the result of the visit of the Fifth Dalai Lama to Beijing in 1653: "The Fifth Dalai Lama's acknowledgment of the emperor as a source of authority never implied a concession to a right of the emperor to interfere in Tibetan affairs" (p. 64). This seems to be an exaggeration because the

⁵ Elliot Sperling, "Pho-lha-nas, Khang-chen-nas, and the Last Era of Mongol Domination in Tibet," *Rocznik orientalistyczny* 65, no. 1 (2012), pp. 196–97.

⁶ For this reason, Gushri Qan was proclaimed an incarnation of the wrathful bodhisattva Vajrapani.

visit took place in the first years of the Qing dynasty rule, when any sort of interference into Tibetan affairs was out of the question. At that time relations with different groups of the Mongols were the most important consideration for the new dynasty, and the Fifth Dalai Lama profited from his advantageous position of being the chief spiritual authority. It was after having “pacified” the majority of the Mongols that the emperors found it appropriate to get involved in settling Tibetan domestic matters.

The concealment of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s passing and the wars led by Galdan Boshugtu Qan of the Dsungars, as well as the lamas’ mediation between the Kangxi Emperor and Galdan, are described in detail by Schwieger (pp. 71–103). Especially valuable is the evidence concerning the religious dimension of Galdan’s war against Qalqa Mongolia, a war that led to his invasion into Inner Mongolia (i.e., a part of the Qing Empire) in 1690. Galdan was recognized as a *trülku* in his childhood. He belonged to an important incarnation lineage of Ensa (dBen sa) *qutuqtus* (pp. 72–74, 224). In Schwieger’s opinion, Galdan’s “blind faith in a Dalai Lama who had long been dead” made him an easy tool for Tibetan manipulators and finally led him to catastrophe (pp. 79–80).

That the Kangxi Emperor learned about the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death from the Dsungar prisoners of war captured after Galdan was defeated in 1696 is regarded as established fact. However, evidence presented in *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China* shows that, unlike his warriors, Galdan himself did not know about this important fact. How this is possible remains a mystery, as do many other circumstances related to the concealment of the Dalai Lama’s demise. An interesting Tibetan document written by a certain *oronci*⁷ was translated by Schwieger (pp. 97–102). This document contains justification of the regent Sanggyé Gyatso’s actions and refutations of accusations of conspiracy against the emperor.

Describing the basic doctrine laid down in the relations between secular and spiritual power known as the “two principles” (Tib. *lugs gnyis*; Mongolian *qoyar yosun*), Schwieger uses the expression “Buddhist government” originally set forth by Ishihama Yumiko. Quite naturally, Schwieger identifies the roots of the “union between religion and politics” in the relations between the emperors of the Mongol Yuan dynasty and the Sakyapa hierarchs. According to him, “the goal of the ‘union of religion and politics’ was the total subordination of the secular sphere to the religious sphere” (p. 60).

⁷ The Mongolian word *oronči* can be translated as “a local resident.”

Such a view is true in relation to Tibet and Mongolia in the days of the Qing dynasty but not the Yuan dynasty. During the Qing, Buddhism dominated all spheres of life, and the Buddhist clergy constituted a considerable part of the population in Tibet and Mongolia. However, in the Chinese tradition, the emperor was a universal ruler, and Manchu emperors inherited this world-view regarding themselves as having power over “all religious and secular affairs” (p. 130). After the incorporation of Tibet into the Qing Empire in 1720 by military force, imperial control became stronger. As Schwieger justly concludes, “Both in the Chinese empire and in the modern Chinese state, it never was . . . tolerated when a spiritual leader [claimed] any kind of authority independent of the head of the state” (p. 215).

The decision of the Qianlong emperor to install the Seventh Dalai Lama as “the lord of Tibet” (p. 146) in 1751 is analyzed at length. The document regulating the new government in thirteen articles is translated from the Tibetan. When the Seventh Dalai Lama died in 1757, the most important task for the emperor was to find his indisputably legitimate incarnation and to administer Tibet during the Dalai Lama’s minority. Thus the institution of regents was reestablished by the emperor. As Schwieger wrote, “The position of regent had been filled by only six reincarnation lines from the middle of the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth century, although they were ruling 94 percent of the time” (p. 182). The information about the regents’ activities found in the book is rather interesting. This administrative position had different meanings throughout Tibetan history. After having defeated Galdan in 1696, the Kangxi emperor, in his proclamation sent to the Oirat nobles of Qinghai, derogatorily described the regent Sanggyé Gyatso as “a little domestic officer of the Dalai Lama.”⁸ However, since the Ninth to Twelfth Dalai Lamas did not live long, the position of regent became de facto the highest administrative office in Tibet. The role developed during the lifetime of the Eighth Dalai Lama who, despite being an adult, did not show much administrative skill. For this reason, an important *trülku* was appointed as the “regent to assist the Dalai Lama in the administration of political affairs” (p. 171).

The immediate consequences of the Gurkha war (1789–1792) are mostly described in connection with the monastery at Yangpachen, which was the seat of the Zhamarpa, the alleged instigator of the invasion into Tibet (pp.

⁸ William Rockhill, “The Dalai Lamas of Lhasa and Their Relations with the Manchu Emperors of China, 1644–1908,” *T’oung Pao* 11, no. 1 (1910), p. 26.

176–82). This monastery was confiscated in favor of the ruling regent but was later given to the new regent of another incarnation lineage.

In the last years of his long reign, the Qianlong emperor decided to tackle “a disastrous development: the common practice of attaching reincarnation lines to a specific noble house” (p. 176). It should be noted that succession based not on consanguinity but on such an elusive matter as the transfer of consciousness is open to wide-ranging manipulations entailing long-lasting conflicts. The emperor decided to exercise governmental control over the election of the incarnated lamas belonging to different religious schools, beginning with the Dalai Lamas. The procedure of drawing lots from the golden urn as well as the related documents are described in detail by Schwieger (pp. 185–98). That this issue has not lost its importance is demonstrated by the case of the election of the present-day Panchen Lama. According to the evidence provided in the book, in the nineteenth century the golden urn procedure was frequently avoided even in relation to the Dalai Lamas.

Upon finishing reading this exceptionally informative book, a question arises: how can a Dalai Lama be defined? In theory he was a spiritual and temporal ruler, a bodhisattva. In reality, as the author concludes, “Essentially none of the Dalai Lamas exercised any political power of his own. But . . . the Qing emperors had fashioned the Dalai Lama into the sacred head of the Ganden Podrang government” (p. 224). At the same time, an authoritative and universally acknowledged leader was much needed in Inner Asia, especially by different Mongol tribes who had formed by the mid-seventeenth century a vast “headless state.”⁹ According to Schwieger, it was the Gelukpa’s project to expand their power over the Mongols and to make them acknowledge the Dalai Lama’s right to confer titles on Mongol rulers (p. 219). However true, this assertion needs to be supplemented by the fact that there has to exist a mutual recognition between the anointing priest and the anointed king. If we trace the Mongol-Gelukpa relations from the late sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, we see that only those Dalai Lamas who were supported by powerful leaders of the Mongols were able to maintain their positions and even survive. Generally speaking, the Dalai Lamas, with a few exceptions (the Great Fifth and the Thirteenth), have been objects of veneration in whose name others could implement their own policies and not history-making rulers.

⁹ David Sneath, *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 5, 181, 203.

However informative, the Tibetan sources on which Schwieger's book is based lack the accuracy and formality of Chinese official documents. Relevant to the subject of the book would have been the corresponding sections of the *Lifanyuan zeli*, which contain detailed information about the tributary relations of the Qing emperors with Tibet, including detailed descriptions of the Tibetan "tribute" and the emperor's reciprocal gifts to the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. Some of Schwieger's assertions relating to Mongol-Tibetan and Mongol-Manchu relations are not very convincing. Much is written in the book about how "the Gelukpa hierarchs had allied themselves closely to the Oirats" (p. 75); however, the fact that it was "Outer" Qalqa Mongolia to which the Thirteenth Dalai Lama fled the British invasion in 1904 is not even mentioned once. In summary, Schwieger's book explores an important and much debated subject of Tibetan studies. The importance of the documents used by the author and the accuracy of their analysis make this book an essential work of scholarship.