INTRODUCTION

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The twelve essays included in the present volume underscore common interests that have been emerging within the study of Tibetan history over the last several years. Each essay focuses on a particular figure, institution, or literary corpus, and each makes a specialized contribution to our collective understanding of these respective topics. Yet all are concerned, more or less explicitly, with relationships between the past and the present evoked in Tibetan historiography, ritual literature, and Buddhist esoteric writings. For the most part, in matters of legitimation and power, whether political or religious, Tibetan historians, philosophers, and ritual specialists have always placed critical emphasis on the preservation of tradition and the succession of authentic lines of transmission. Any variation from the unbroken lineages of tradition meant in every case that legitimate authority could never be properly established. Still, there was much room for innovation, but only through creative strategy and the manipulation of the details of history and biography. With few exceptions, the Tibetans studied here in this volume lay claim to the venerable authority of established traditions in order to promote new or significantly re-fashioned practices, doctrines, and ideologies. Most of these Tibetan figures go to great lengths to validate their current practices and perspectives as part of an uninterrupted ancient tradition, very often reaching back to the life of Śākyamuni Buddha and the founding moments of Buddhism in India and Tibet. Yet in the very act of drawing out these connections between tradition and innovation they reveal how necessary it is to actively maintain such practices through deliberate and constant reference to the past.

In this tension between visions of unchanging order and the reality of local contingency we see a good example of what historian Eric Hobsbawm has termed ‘invented tradition,’ or “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”¹ While the contributors to this volume of essays may not have

¹ Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1.
been influenced explicitly by the insights of Hobsbawm, they all focus on a particularly rich era of Tibetan history, the mid-seventeenth through early eighteenth centuries. Hobsbawm acknowledges that “there is probably no time and place with which historians are concerned which has not seen the ‘invention’ of tradition.” Nevertheless, Hobsbawm suggests, “we should expect it to occur more frequently when rapid transformations of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed.” The period of the seventeenth-eighteenth century in Tibet stands as an exemplary case for testing the relevance of the notion of invented tradition. The period is marked by the end of civil war in central Tibet and the rise in 1642 of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) to unprecedented political prominence, resulting in the centralization of institutional authority in Lhasa and the increase of Tibetan involvement in the territorial power struggles between Mongols and Manchus throughout the early Qing empire.

A brief summary of the chapters provides some sense of the overarching themes that characterize this pivotal period in Tibetan history. Benjamin Bogin (Chapter 1) introduces the Memoirs of the third Yol mo sprul sku Bstan ‘dzin nor bu (1598-1644), paying particular attention to the issue of sectarian identity. Significantly, he shows that the common distinctions drawn by contemporary scholarship between Buddhist sectarian groups, such as the Dge lugs pa and the Bka’ brgyud pa, are less important for the Tibetans actually affiliated with these ‘schools.’ More significant, Bogin argues, are the relationships defined by family ties, geographical proximity, ordination lineage, and other similar social-religious group associations. Marina Illich (Chapter 2) discusses the biographical literature dedicated to Lcang skya Rol pa’i rdo rje (Chankya Rolpé Dorjé, 1717-1786). Of particular interest to Illich is the focus of Lcang skya’s biographers on the details of Qing ritual protocol when describing the formal meetings between Tibetan Buddhist leader and Manchu imperial leader. Illich suggests that this deliberate appropriation of the logic of imperial ritual was an attempt by the Tibetan authors to “deflect the hegemonizing strategies of the Qing by asserting a narrative of Dge lugs indispensability to the realization of Qing ambition.” Trent Pomplun (Chapter 3) analyses the writings of the Jesuit missionary Ippolito Desideri (1684-1733) on the prophecies of Padmasambhava. Pomplun shows that this eighth-century visionary from Orgyan loomed large in Desideri’s interpretations of Tibetan Buddhism.
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and that for this Jesuit missionary the prophecies of Padmasambhava provided the most credible narrative framework for making sense of the Dzungar persecutions of the Rnying ma pa during the political chaos in central Tibet in the years 1717-1720. Nikolay Tsyrempilov (Chapter 4) explores the political role of Dge lugs pa figures in the expansion of the Qing dynasty. He argues that insufficient attention has been paid to the relations between the Qing emperors and the religious leaders of Tibet who, more often than previously described, were active in supporting and promoting Qing policies in Tibet and throughout Inner Asia. Gray Tuttle (Chapter 5) chronicles the Fifth Dalai Lama’s trip to Beijing during the years 1652-1653. On close reading of the accounts of this journey, Tuttle is able to highlight the missionary impulse in Tibetan society of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, leading to the broad expansion of Tibetan Buddhism into Inner and East Asia. Jake Dalton (Chapter 6) looks at how, at the turn of the eighteenth century, the two brothers of Smin grol gling, Gter bdag gling pa (1646-1714) and Lo chen Dharmashri (1654-1717), worked to recreate the Rnying ma school, and how the Sūtra Empowerment (Mdo dbang) literature and ritual practices played a key role in this recreation. Dalton points out that “the identity of the Rnying ma school is still defined in large part by the regular observance” of the full ritual program originally conceived and initiated by the Smin gling brothers. Georgios Halkias (Chapter 7) draws attention to the understudied Pure Land tradition in Tibet by focusing on the important Sukhāvatī sādhana of the young gter ston Gnam chos Mi ‘gyur rdo rje (1645-1667). Halkias demonstrates that Mi ‘gyur rdo rje’s sādhana is a remarkable example of Tibetan syncretic liturgy, drawing from diverse sectarian ritual sources and integrating multiple elements into a single and effective Pure Land ritual program. Derek Maher (Chapter 8) examines the successive incarnation lineage of ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa’i rdo rje (1648-1722) and the ‘biographical strategies’ used by Dge lugs pa writers in early eighteenth-century Amdo. Maher argues that “through the construction of such a lineage, the doctrinal legitimacy and personal charisma of some particular current figure can be created or fortified by appealing to the luster of previous personalities.” Guilaine Mala (Chapter 9) takes up the important eighteenth-century “History of Buddhism in China,” the Rgya nag chos ‘byung, completed in 1736 by the Mongol scholar Mgon po skyabs (Mong. Gombojab). Mala argues that this unique Tibetan historical work uses Indian Mahāyāna literature and tantric prophecies to recast the complex history of Buddhism in China.
through the lense of Tibetan Buddhism from a decidedly Dge lugs pa perspective. Jann Ronis (Chapter 10) surveys the biography of Bdud ‘dul rdo rje (1615-1672), an important Rnying ma pa figure active in Sde dge. Ronis emphasizes Bdud ‘dul rdo rje’s attempts to adapt to the changing political landscape of late seventeenth-century Tibet through the revelation of texts (gter ma) and the opening of hidden lands (sbas yul). His efforts, Ronis concludes, were somewhat less-than-successful. Kurtis R. Schaeffer (Chapter 11) discusses the extensive innovations in the annual ritual and festival cycle undertaken by Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (Sangyé Gyatso, 1653-1705) during the 1690s, and uses two of his works, *Tales of the New Year* (Lo gsar ‘bel gtam) and the *Lhasa Circumambulation Survey* (Lha sa skor tshad) as entry points to the larger project of assessing his role in and contribution to the development of Tibetan and Buddhist culture after the founding of the Dga’ ldan Government in 1642. Finally, Simon Wikham-Smith (Chapter 12) analyses the songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706) in an effort to understand the relationship with his much older mentor and regent, Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho.

The essays in this volume offer diverse perspectives on a critical period in Tibet’s history when Tibetans found themselves caught up in the tides of political turmoil and forced into the center of a much larger Central Eurasian struggle for power and territorial control between the Manchu rulers of the Qing empire and the Mongols of the north. The Tibetans, speaking with multiple voices and with allegiances to varied local religious and social groups, were compelled to make sense of their changing world and their place within it while still maintaining their ties to the great traditions of Tibet’s past. This collection focuses on the various ways Tibetan historians, biographers, and scholars of all sorts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries succeeded in this task of reinventing and reinforcing their respective traditions.

References