CHAPTER ELEVEN

NINTH AND TENTH DALAI LAMAS

TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION

This chapter and the next cover the period of the minor Dalai Lamas, the ninth through the twelfth. Between the end of 1805 and the beginning of 1875, four Dalai Lamas were born, identified, enthroned, and then mourned. These ill-fated youths lived as few as ten and as many as twenty-two years. Since none of them ever became strong and accomplished leaders, they were unable to serve as rallying points for the Tibetan people during a time in which foreign powers were encroaching upon Tibetan lands from all sides. This era also witnessed a series of particularly ineffectual regents and comparatively inconspicuous Panchen Lamas. In that environment, the Manchu ambans endeavored to dominate Tibet by advancing the influence on and control over Tibetan affairs that the Manchu court had realized during the tenure of the seventh and eighth Dalai Lamas.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Emperor Qianlong issued the Twenty-Nine Article Imperial Ordinance in the aftermath of the Second Gurkha War of 1792–1793. This document consisted of a set of reforms that were intended to solidify Manchu control over Tibet and to preclude the necessity of dispatching costly expeditions in its defense. Among these reforms, it was declared that the reincarnations of the Panchen Lamas and the Dalai Lamas should be selected from among the likely candidates by drawing lots from an ornate golden urn supplied by the emperor. This provision was resented by both the common people and the Tibetan elite as an encroachment on a singular Tibetan institution.

Consequently, as he sought the new incarnation after the eighth Dalai Lama died, Regent Tatsak Tenpé Gönpo (1760–1810) hoped to avoid ratifying the entire concept of the golden urn lottery. He managed not to comply with the provisions dictating its use by declaring swiftly that the identification was absolutely unquestionable and inspiring public

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* See p. 487 above.
opinion that the lottery was unneeded. Hence, on the first occasion that the golden urn might have been used, the regent, the previous Dalai Lama’s attendants, and others demonstrated the Manchu court’s inability to control the identification process. Shakabpa sees the question of the use of the golden urn as being of fundamental symbolic importance, and throughout the remainder of the book, he discusses in detail whether and how it was employed with the transition to each new Dalai Lama. In fact, he denies that it was employed in the identification of the tenth Dalai Lama, claiming that the regent only said it had been in order to placate a Tibetan public that had been provoked by the ambans. Shakabpa asserts:

The golden urn lottery had not been used. The pretense of having employed it seems to have satisfied the ambans. In dependence on the false announcement, it is even reported in biographies.

This is in contrast to other sources, which, after all, rely on the very biographies Shakabpa says are in error. Unfortunately, he does not cite the sources that persuaded him that the lottery was not conducted.

In this chapter, Shakabpa is also concerned to convey to the reader that the influence of the Manchu court and the ambans in Tibetan affairs was minimal. He explains:

During this time, there was a patronage relationship between China and Tibet. Beyond this agreeable relationship, a stable situation had emerged in which [the amban] had absolutely no influence in the Tibetan government’s political affairs.

Shakabpa continues, remarking that when the amban was returning to Beijing, the Dalai Lama gave him religious advice, whereupon the amban "fully prostrated on the ground while shedding tears." This representation of the relationship would be anathema to pro-Chinese narratives, such as Ya Hanzhang’s mentioned above, which uniformly depict the Dalai Lamas as subservient to the amban. Elsewhere, Shakabpa asserts that the amban’s main function in Lhasa was “to deliver praises and

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b See p. 569 below.


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d See p. 564 above.