THE DALAI-LAMAS AND REGENTS OF TIBET:  
A CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Modern Tibetan history, and chiefly that of the 19th century, suffers from a general vagueness and uncertainty about dates. The usual accounts 1) rely on second-hand information and on the Chinese texts, whose data after 1750 are meagre and insufficient the nearer one comes to our times: the one vital exception is the Gurkha war of 1791-2. The fact is that the 19th century can be defined as the colonial period of Tibetan history: a time of peace but not of prosperity, drab and uninteresting by all standards. Accordingly, the official lives of the Dalai-Lamas, who always died quite young, give only details of their education, studies, audiences etc. For the Chinese, Tibet had become an uninteresting protectorate, whose affairs were handled directly by the two Manchu residents in Lhasa (amban) with scanty reference to the Peking government, and therefore very little material on Tibet can be found in the enormous collection of the Veritable Documents (Shih-liu) of the late Ch’ing dynasty.

It is my purpose to place on a sounder footing the chronology of the Dalai-Lamas and above all of the regents, who in fact were almost invariably the actual rulers of Tibet in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is not my intention to write a history of Tibet during

the last two centuries, and historical material as such is not to be sought for in this article, although it will be noticed that in some points closely connected with chronological problems I have departed from this rule and allowed myself to expatiate somewhat. This is particularly the case for the late 19th century, a period about which hitherto nothing was known, or nearly so.

A word of caution about dates. It is well known that in Tibetan chronology the so-called Hor months indicate Chinese moons, although the name itself refers to the Uigur calendar. Whenever in a Tibetan text the month is marked as hor-sla, I have treated it as a Chinese month and given its European equivalence accordingly 1). When this is not the case, it may (or may not) mean that the older, purely Tibetan calendar was followed, about which we know almost nothing. In these dates I have given the European equivalent of the Chinese date preceded by the word "about"; this is merely tentative, and the reader is warned that there may be a discrepancy as large as a month or more. A thorough scientific study of the calendar is one of the most urgent desiderata in the field of Tibetan historical studies.

The following abbreviations will be used:


1) In the present article Chinese and Tibetan months are indicated by Roman numerals, while European months are written out in full.