

BOOK REVIEWS

SHEN WEIRONG: *Leben und historische Bedeutung des ersten Dalai Lama dGe 'dun grub pa dpal bzang po (1391-1474). Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der dGe lugs pa-Schule und der Institution der Dalai Lamas.* Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XLIX. Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica 2002. 476 pp. ISBN 3-8050-0469-9, price 42 EUR (pbk).

The publication under review is devoted to the life and two biographies of dGe 'dun grub dpal bzang po, the youngest of the seven main disciples of Tsong kha pa (1357-1419), who was later – by the end of 16th century – included in the reincarnation line of the Dalai Lamas as its founder. In 1447 he had established the important dGe lugs pa monastery Bkra shis lhun po in gZhis ka rtse. Though, this Tibetan scholar, teacher and prolific author of Buddhist treatises is a well-known personality in Tibetan religious history, his life and activities have so far received only limited interest from Western Tibetology. The author of the present study has focused his interest on two famous biographies (or better to say hagiographies, Tib. *rnam thar*) of the 1st Dalai Lama, namely the work *Nor bu'i phreng ba* ["The rosary of jewels"] written by Ye shes rtse mo (1433-?) in the year 1494 and the text *mDzad pa bcu gnyis pa* ["The twelve deeds"] written by Kun dga' rgyal mthsan and sPong ba pa Phul byung dga' ba in the year 1497. Both of these texts have been translated into English once so far (by Joan Carole Kutcher in 1979 and by Glenn H. Mullin 1985), but the present volume represents a first monograph on dGe 'dun grub dpal bzang po and a critical translation of the two Tibetan works.

The work is divided into two parts. In the first part (pp. 15-122) the author deals with some issues related to the text, historical context and the person of the 1st Dalai Lama. The first chapter of the first part is devoted to the sources used by the author, first of all the two Tibetan *rnam thar* he is analysing and translating. He briefly discusses the issue of the authorship of these two works and the contents of them. The author used the edition of the texts included in *The Collected Works of the First Dalai Lama dGe 'dun grub pa* (Vol. 5 and 6) published by Dodrub Lama Sangye in 1981. However, it would be interesting for the reader to get information on other editions of these two texts, which is not included in the monograph and these other editions are not taken into consideration also in the translation. A brief comparative analysis of the two translated texts would enrich the monograph. The second chapter is devoted to the historical context of dGe 'dun grub dpal bzang po's life. First the author offers a brief but comprehensive picture of the political situation in Central Tibet at the end of the 14th and during the 15th centuries which was till the year 1434 characterized by the dominance of the Phag mo gru ruling house which is relevant as they were supporters of the newly established dGe lugs pa school. The rise of dGe lugs pa is also treated by the author. The author also included a brief analysis of the relations between the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and Central Tibet, which is only of a limited relevance to the issue studied by him as dGe 'dun grub dpal bzang po had no contacts with the then ruling Ming Dynasty (as

far as I can recall there is only one mentioning of unnamed Chinese envoys bringing gifts to him in his biography, p. 281). The first part is concluded by a chapter dealing with the life and historical role of the 1st Dalai Lama. This part represents a modern shortened version of the two classical biographies of this personality. It is somehow striking to see to what extent the author's perspective of the life of dGe 'dun grub dpal bzang po is in accordance with the traditional, schematic and idealized treatment of his life by the two 15th century authors. As a matter of fact, this part mirrors the scope of the available sources on the 1st Dalai Lama. In the title of his book the author promises to make a contribution to the understanding of the institution of the Dalai Lama, but he tackles this issue only very partially.

The second part of the publication under review comprises an annotated critical translation of the two *rnam thar* mentioned above: the longer text *Nor bu'i phreng ba* (pp. 123-191) and the shorter text *mDzad pa bcu gnyis pa* (pp. 293-336). The translations are accompanied by a large number of notes which deal with some philological problems, historical context, explanations of religious termini, identification of place names, and so on. The author presents his wide knowledge in both the historical context of the period and the religious tradition represented by dGe 'dun grub dpal bzang po. The first text deals with the life of the 1st Dalai Lama in greater detail and it represents a typical example of the *rnam thar* genre of classical Tibetan literature which was – as shown by the author – directly influenced by the famous *rnam thar* of Tsong kha pa entitled *Dad pa'i jug ngogs*. The translated *rnam thar* includes a number of *topoi* (the family of the lama, the country he was born in, prophecies related to him, miracles accompanying his birth, bodily marks – *mtshan bzang po sum cu rtsa gnyis*, etc.) typical for a Tibetan hagiography of a famous and influential lama. At the same time one can get a quite detailed idea of the “professional career” of dGe 'dun grub dpal bzang po: his studies, teachings, travels between monasteries, foundations of monasteries and building of stūpas and statues of Buddhist deities. The author of this *rnam thar* often uses quotations to strengthen the authority of the text and unlike the second text, the author Ye shes rtse mo – as one of the close disciples of the 1st Dalai Lama – often appears in the text. The second text entitled *mDzad pa bcu gnyis pa* is modelled upon the well-known structure of the twelve deeds (*Tib. mdzad pa bcu gnyis*) of the life of Buddha Śākyamuni as firstly described by *Lalitavistara* and this structure was later, starting from the 15th century, used by the Tibetan authors for the biographies of Tibetan lamas. Thus the *rnam thar* of the 1st Dalai Lama was one of the first to use this model and according to the author (p. 32) it is the first work with a title directly referring to the twelve deeds. This account of the life of dGe 'dun grub dpal bzang po mentions all the important facts included in the *Nor bu'i phreng ba*, but according to my impression it is a more detached view of him.

The publication includes a facsimile (pp. 339-396) of the two Tibetan texts from the edition used by the author. The bibliography of Tibetan and Chinese sources and secondary literature illustrates the broad variety of materials used by the author. The monograph is concluded by extensive indices (pp. 419-476, prepared by Peter Ramers) of Tibetan, Sanskrit and Chinese personal names, place names and titles of books which are of an immense help for the researcher focused on particular issues. The monograph under review represents an important contribution to our understanding of the life and work of the 1st Dalai Lama dGe 'dun grub dpal bzang po. Especially the critical translations of the two *rnam thar* will be certainly often consulted by anybody dealing with the history of the dGe lugs pa school, the history of Central Tibet in the 15th century or someone interested in the development of the *rnam thar* genre in classical Tibetan literature.

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